Responding to the Antique. A Rediscovered Roman Circus Sarcophagus and its Renaissance Afterlife

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Original Citation
Census of Antique Works of Art
and Architecture Known in the Renaissance
Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

www.census.de/pegasus.htm
Sometime in the mid-to late 1560s, the antiquarian and architectural historian Pirro Ligorio sketched two Roman sarcophagi decorated with scenes of chariots racing in the setting of a circus arena (fig. 1). The theme of chariot racing was of great personal interest to the artist, who was well-known for his reconstructive drawings of the Circus Maximus and for his work on spectacles in ancient Rome. As in those studies, Ligorio’s sketch was created in Rome, where he would have seen the sarcophagi first-hand. His rendering of the circus sarcophagus in the folio’s upper register is of especial value, however, since it is the last of four recorded images documenting this funerary monument. The sarcophagus is depicted in three other sketchbooks, all from the second half of the sixteenth century as well: the Codex Coburgensis,^2^ Codex Pighianus,^3^ and Codex Berolinensis.^4^ While the drawings of the sarcophagus are generally similar to one another, the individual styles of the artists and

1 Codex Ursinianus, fol. 62v; Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 3439
discrepancies in particular details have left open the question of how classical and Renaissance art historians should reconstruct, date and interpret this late imperial Roman work of art, »lost« since the late 16th century.5

The recent rediscovery of the sarcophagus in an American private collection (figs. 2–7) allows us to accomplish far more than the customary, rote task of adding another work of art to the sarcophagus corpus. Rather, the well-preserved condition of this work allows us insight into the processes of the sarcophagus’ manufacture and display in Rome during the imperial period, while a comparison with its representation in the four sketchbooks reanimates its »afterlife« as an object collected, redisplayed and studied there in the Cinquecento.

ROMAN CIRCUS sarcophagi

Among the many forms of spectacles that were staged in ancient Rome, chariot racing is arguably the one most often represented in the visual arts, where it appears in public, domestic and funerary contexts.6 As literary and epigraphic sources inform us, the largest group of sculptural monuments that employ this imagery belonged to charioteers, who commissioned or were honoured by their colleagues, families or fans with portraits, statues and reliefs in great numbers.7 Unfortunately, well-preserved examples are exceptional: most charioteer monuments survive only as fragments or inscriptions now divorced from their contexts. As a result, the largest corpus of preserved monuments with circus-related iconography belongs not to charioteers, but to children.8

So far more than one hundred metropolitan sarcophagi, including both chests and fragments, have been documented, making circus scenes one of the most popular schemes of decoration for children’s sarcophagi in imperial Rome.9 In this type, four teams of winged Erotes race two-horse chariots (»bigae«) left to right in the setting of a circus, probably at Rome.10 Sarcophagi of this kind marry two distinct genres in Roman art: the first is documentary, in which scenes of human charioteers are depicted in races, most often set at the Circus Maximus and seen in bird’s-eye perspective;11 the second genre is mythological, where Erotes or cupids appear in place of child or adult charioteers.12 These sarcophagi, like other art objects (e.g. mosaics), emphasise the action of the narrative, and focus less on its particular actors. In this way, they illustrate how they were commissioned for a different class of individuals than athletes in the games: that is, for their spectators.13
THE BRYN MAWR SARCOPHAGUS

History

Like most sarcophagi, the find context of this chest is unknown.14 The sarcophagus’ reverse panel is unworked and its side panels carved in low-relief, indicating that it stood against a wall, likely within a niche. The size of the chest is appropriate for the commemoration of a child, and we can assume that it stood within an enclosed family tomb of the kind dominant at this time.15 This would explain its fine state of preservation when it was rediscovered, probably at Rome, and displayed there in the mid-16th century.

The earliest sketch of the sarcophagus appears in the Codex Coburgensis (ca. 1549–1555) (fig. 10). Regrettably, there are no didascalia preserved on this or any of the other drawings with which we could identify the location or likely provenance of the sarcophagus. The fact that this work is so well-preserved and that the drawings depict its side panels indicate that it was displayed intact in a highly visible location, and not carved up with its front panel immured, as was then common. Other circus race reliefs or sarcophagi that are depicted in these convolutes, including one with a location identified on the same folio as the sarcophagus, can be safely attributed to the collections of the Farnese, Mattei, and Soderini, among others.16 Based on the available evidence (i.e., the works represented in the convolutes), we can conclude only that the Bryn Mawr sarcophagus belonged in the collection of one or more of Rome’s premier noble families.

There is no record of the chest for the nearly four hundred year period between its recording in the last of the Renaissance sketches (ca. 1564–1569) and

2 Circus sarcophagus, Bryn Mawr, Private collection
its appearance in a photograph dated ca. 1930. At that time, the chest sat inside the outside entranceway to the manor house at »Skylands«, the former family estate of the late Clarence Lewis in New Jersey. In the 1950s, it was moved to Washington D.C., where it was displayed in a garden. In the last decade, the sarcophagus became part of a private collection in Bryn Mawr, to which it was traced by the author in spring 2002.

**Condition**

The level of detail in the sketchbook drawings provides a highly reliable and valuable record of the chest’s relatively well-preserved state of condition when it resurfaced in the Renaissance. The accuracy of the Codex Coburgensis drawing in particular makes it possible to reconstruct certain elements of the decoration that today appear worn and unclear, or are missing entirely.

Some details were already broken off at the time of the drawing’s production while others that were apparently intact in the mid-16th century are now heavily worn or chipped. The most significant damage to the vessel can be seen in the three large breaks on the front face, which were bridged internally with iron inserts. The effects of weathering are clearly visible in the marked level of surface abrasion, seen particularly in the loss of facial detail to the Erotes. This deterioration appears to mostly post-date the Codex Coburgensis drawing, and came about through re-use of the sarcophagus as a fountain trough, seen by the two circular drill holes on the front and one on either of the side panels, both at the level of the Erotes’ faces.

**Dating**

The sarcophagus belongs to a group of more than one hundred »canonical« examples that were manufactured in workshops in the city of Rome or its environs. The production of these chests began in the late Hadrianic era, peaked under the Antonines, and tapered off in the late third century. Until its re-discovery, the sarcophagus had been dated to ca. A.D. 160–180 on the basis of the drawing in the Codex Coburgensis. While this sketch is highly accurate in its detail (see further below), the artist’s style, an exaggerated classicism, impedes any attempt to date the chest accurately. The first-hand examination
of the chest indicates that, on the basis of stylistic criteria, it dates instead to between the end of the second and early third century A.D. In particular, the high polish, deep undercutting to cast shadow, compact proportions of the figures, and their distribution along the picture plane suggest its later date.\textsuperscript{23}

\textit{Manufacture}

The later third century is also the period in which the imperial quarry at Proconnesus was the single-largest producer of the sarcophagi that are now found at Rome.\textsuperscript{24} The marble type of this sarcophagus could be Proconnesian, seen by the thin blue striations that run horizontally across the upper surfaces of the short sides, and by the form of the chest.\textsuperscript{25} The decoration of Roman sarcophagi would have been either completely carved there and then shipped to Rome or, more likely, roughed-out at the quarries with the carving completed at a metropolitan workshop (or one in its surrounding area).\textsuperscript{26} The many unusual details in the decoration of the Bryn Mawr sarcophagus recommend its interpretation as the product of an individual artisan at work in Rome.

\textit{Decoration}

The format of the chariot race scene on the sarcophagus is of the »canonical« type. Stock narratives of this type include several basic ingredients: nude, mostly winged Erotes; four teams racing, one (or sometimes two) of which has fallen; accompanying riders on horseback (›hortatores‹) and race attendants (›sparsores‹), lying beneath the chariots; a victorious charioteer, usually at the far right end; and the conical turning posts (›metae‹) that form the ends of the long central barrier (›spina‹), which is populated with statues and other monuments. The imagery on the Bryn Mawr sarcophagus generally adheres to these norms, but it also contains a number of significant deviations.

The first charioteer, on the far left, stands crouched slightly forward in his chariot and holds a whip in his right hand (fig. 3). He races his ›biga‹ past the ›ovarium‹, the lap counting device with seven ›eggs‹ that stood on the ›euripus‹ and is usually supported on a two-columned plinth.\textsuperscript{27} Beside this is a statue of the goddess Victoria surmounted on a column.\textsuperscript{28} This type of figure is commonly seen resting a palm branch against her left arm and/or a victory
wreath, as here but now unclear, in her outstretched right hand. Beneath the horses of the first team appear a pickaxe and a two-handled (basket?) amphora, implements associated with the maintenance of the racecourse. The outer horse of the first team looks back in the direction of the driver, while the inner horse gazes down at the >naufragium< or >shipwreck< immediately before it. On this sarcophagus like most others, the impending or immediate disaster is echoed by the despaired expression of the fallen team’s winged >hortator<, who is seen either covering his eyes or, as here, holding a hand to his forehead in a gesture of weeping.

The focus of his despair is the second charioteer, fallen on the track (fig. 4). He is seen propped upright, supporting himself with his left arm and grasping his whip in his right hand, while his lower leg is tucked beneath his upper outstretched thigh. The sculptor does not represent the cart of the charioteer, but only his horses rising up from the crash. In the centre of the narrative is an obelisk, its cap obscured by the outstretched wing of the Eros charioteer who stands to the right.

The third driver, who stands upright in his chariot next to the obelisk, grasps both reins with his left hand and gesticulates outward with his right arm, in the direction of his comrade fallen on the track. Slightly in front of him is his team’s >hortator<, the head of whose horse is aligned with the charioteer’s >biga< in a fan-like arrangement. The charioteer’s right hand, now broken off at the elbow, would have held a whip, just as the three other charioteers each hold whips in their right hands. The direction and overreaching extent of this charioteer’s (now lost) whip serves to direct the viewer’s gaze toward the off-centre >naufragium<. This direction is reinforced by the mirrored arrangement of the two >hortatores<: that on the left by his downward-looking expression, that on the right by his backward glance.

Beneath the >bigae< of the third and fourth charioteers appear winged figures crouching in reverse face. These >sparsores< or circus functionaries were responsible for sprinkling the horses with water and raking the track. The articles seen beneath the first >biga<, the pickaxe and amphora, can be associated with these two figures, which are sometimes seen grasping amphorae in scenes on sarcophagi.

In the far right frame, the artist depicts the climactic moment of the race, in which the lead charioteer approaches the finish in full, unquadrated gallop (fig. 5). The tenseness of the race is conveyed by the charioteer’s posture: his knees bent for balance, his arms pulled forward to grip the reins, his head...
3–5 Circus sarcophagus, Bryn Mawr, Private collection

3 Detail of the front face: left

4 Detail of the front face: centre

5 Detail of the front face: right
cocked backward to watch his competitor, who impinges on his flanks. In spite of the tense posturing, this charioteer is marked out as the victor by the jubilant arm gesture of his ›hortator‹, who rides neck-and-neck with the charioteer’s team, and by his position at the far right of the narrative. Only the head of the outermost horse of the charioteer’s ›biga‹ is visible, and it is arranged fan-like with the horse of the ›hortator‹.

The narrative on the front plate is reinforced by the side panels, where Erotes with upraised wings on horseback are disposed in a manner nearly identical to one another. On the left side panel, an Eros appears to gaze upward and, in his right hand, holds the reins to a horse, its right foreleg upraised (fig. 6). On the right side panel, the Eros holds in his left hand the reins to his horse, whose left foreleg is upraised (fig. 7). Among the circus sarcophagi with side panels extant, the motif of the single rider is the most recurrent theme.

While the decoration exploits the standard composition of the metropolis type, it does contain a number of less usual details, some of which proved problematic for the artists who later copied this piece. First, there are minor details which speak to the individual hand of the artisan, such as the odd, backward turn of the horse of the first ›biga‹ or the implements of the race course shown beneath it. Also, ›metæ‹ or turning posts consistently appear at one or both ends of these types of representations to indicate the finishing line and to frame the narrative, making their absence here highly unusual. Similarly, the sarcophagus is one of only two chests in which the fallen charioteer adopts a semi-recumbent pose. Generally, the decoration seen on these Erotes sarcophagi depicts charioteers in other stages of disaster: from the initial faltering of the team or downturn of the chariot into the ground to
acrobatic mid-air ejections or headlong crash landings. Lastly, the obelisks that appear in other representations on sarcophagi are sometimes obscured to some or even a large part, but their cap is always shown. The concealment of the obelisk here in this way is thus without parallel, and – as we will see – presented an iconographic puzzle for Renaissance copyists.

THE RENAISSANCE AFTERLIFE

The »afterlives« of ancient ruins assumed many forms, from their documentation in drawings to their display in collections or as spolia. As noted above, the circumstances of the Bryn Mawr sarcophagus’ discovery and ownership in the Cinquecento remain obscure. A brief survey of the place of the ancient circus in the Early Modern imagination helps to situate this work within contemporary collecting practices in mid-16th century Rome. The discussion then turns to the sketchbooks which, in their neat constructions of classical antiquity, fuse meticulous, archaeological detail with the muted personalities of their artists. The sketchbooks thus supply an invaluable record for reconstructing not only worn or damaged details of the sarcophagus’ composition, but also aspects of its reception by collectors and artists alike.

THE ROMAN CIRCUS IN EARLY MODERN ITALY

While a subject of considerable antiquarian fascination in the 16th century, the sites of Roman circuses were poorly understood, a fact reflected by the many spurious toponyms. The two great obelisks at the Circus Maximus were not uncovered until 1585, during Domenico Fontana’s excavations along the »spina« there. Other so-called »circuses« were erroneously identified on the basis of a discovered obelisk alone, or on account of their shape: the so-called »Circus Floralia« was instead a hippodrome-shaped garden of the kind found in the Villa Hadriana at Tivoli. While the Early Modern understanding of the sites of circuses remained foggy, its oval form and architectural elements, passed down through visual representations and the literary tradition, offered influential models for imitation in the built environment. The oval design of the circus arena may have served as a model for Piazza S. Pietro, while the circus’ imperial loggia may
have inspired the so-called »Tower of the Winds« (commissioned ca. 1580). Ligorio, for one, envisioned an ideal connection between the Belvedere tower in the Vatican and ancient circuses.

Numerous hippodrome-shaped gardens in metropolitan villas similarly sought to recreate the circus form in miniature. The »Prato« at the Villa Mattei, built ca. 1581–1586 and embellished with an obelisk at its centre, was designed to evoke the Mattei family’s putative connection to the Circus Flamininus. These pretensions were lent support by garden and villa wall displays: the relief of a circus procession (depicted in the Codex Coburgensis) was said by Ligorio to have been found on the villa’s grounds and was subsequently immured in the palazzo there. Numerous other reliefs and sarcophagi are recorded in sketches of urban retreats and their gardens within and outside of Rome.

The widespread growth of antiquities collections at this time witnessed their use as social and political agents in competition amongst nobles, secular and papal. The architectural co-opting of the circus’ oval design, the display of antiquities with its imagery, and their recording in sketchbooks all served to underwrite the claims of their aristocratic owners to their »native« origins and, with it, an ancient Roman pedigree. But these collections might also be designed to facilitate the study of their contents by visiting scholars, such as the antiquario in the Palazzo Farnese which was planned ca. 1566 and functioned as a »scuola publica«.

Antiquities were centrepieces in the humanistic revival of antiquity, and sketchbooks served as visual archives of their diverse forms, especially those in collections. Among all of the surviving ancient sculptures, sarcophagi were the most plentiful. The earliest Renaissance drawings of chariot race scenes were produced in the workshop of Raphael in the 1520s, and depict the reliefs of circus sarcophagi. These drawings, collected in the so-called Fossombrone Sketchbook, also include the decorative frieze from the Teatro Marittimo at the Villa Hadriana (fig. 8). This frieze subsequently entered the collection of the Farnese and is now split between collections in Berlin, London, Paris, and Rome.

Sections of this frieze also appear in the Codex Coburgensis, the contents of which provide a useful sampling of how circus imagery was received. Among all the types of Roman imperial monuments depicted in the 282 drawings in the Codex Coburgensis, reliefs are the largest group. Two of these document sarcophagi decorated with a scene of Erotes racing in the setting
of a circus: a sketch in folio 21 depicts the sarcophagus now in Bryn Mawr (fig. 10), while sketches in folios 110 and 203 illustrate the front panel and right side panel, respectively, of a sarcophagus now in the Villa Albani in Rome. There is also a sketch of the aforementioned relief from the Villa Mattei in Rome.

The interest in circus spectacles was not confined to noble patrons or the artists and scholars who were in their employ. The medium of the architectural print enabled those of lesser means and privilege a way to harness the glory of the circus in miniature: the humanist secretary Antonio Giganti, for instance, records in his collection a print with a «Disegno del Circo maximo stampato». Ligorio’s individual reconstructions of these arenas, especially of the Circus Maximus and Circus Flamininus, proved some of the most widely disseminated and influential (fig. 9). He relied on such primary sources as imperial coins in producing the first-ever reconstructions of imperial Rome, printed in 1553 and 1561, which included the sites of circuses. Guillaume Philander, who carried out detailed research on the circus games, wrote in his «Annotationes» to Vitruvius that he received ancient coins with images of circus scenes from »Pirro Ligorio, commendable painter and student of antiquity«.

The culmination of this antiquarian interest in circuses during the 16th century is seen in the posthumously published work of one of Ligorio’s followers, Onofrio Panvinio. In his »De ludis circensibus libri ii« (1600), Panvinio used late antique literary sources to interpret the circus and its races as a cosmic simile: the twelve starting gates representing the months, the number of
laps equivalent to the cycle of the seasons, etc.\textsuperscript{67} Panvinio’s study includes not only reconstructions of circuses, peopled with races and ‘venationes’, but also reproduces reliefs illustrated in the sketchbooks, including a section of the frieze from Hadrian’s Villa at Tivoli and the Mattei relief (see above).\textsuperscript{68} Active in Rome in the 1550s and 1560s, Panvinio was thus roughly a contemporary of the draftsmen of the Bryn Mawr sarcophagus.\textsuperscript{69}

**THE SKETCHBOOKS**

As we have seen, the period from which these sketchbooks date was one marked by a drive for the collection as well as systematic study of antiquities. Some collectors, for instance, sought to amass complete imperial portrait groups or coin collections.\textsuperscript{70} The criteria employed by patrons in the display of their collections were analogous to those guiding artists and antiquarians in the organisation of their sketchbooks: through their comprehensive scope and taxonomic organisation, the sketchbooks emphasised the study of Roman

\textsuperscript{67} Reconstruction of the Circus Maximus, Pirro Ligorio; Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Riserva Stragrande 6
material culture through its systematic visual documentation and categorisation. While studies after the antique were clearly not an invention of this era, a formal, objective style to their representation only developed after 1550. In the organisation of the sketchbooks and the style of their drawings, we can thus trace the progress that was being made in the scientific documentation and interpretation of ancient remains.

While the Bryn Mawr sarcophagus lacks a known provenance, it can be viewed in the context of these early archaeological activities in Rome because of its documentation in the four sketchbooks: the Codices Coburgensis, Pighianus, Berolinensis, and Ursinianus. The earliest of the drawings appears in the Codex Coburgensis (fig. 10). In addition to sarcophagi, altars, urns, state reliefs and architectural ornament are also recorded in the 282 drawings in this codex. All are thought to have been sketched first-hand on site, rather than made in the studio. The sketches have been attributed to the hand of a single unnamed artist, the so-called »Master of the Codex Coburgensis«, who Richard Harprath speculates was of Roman or possibly Mantuan extraction. A mid-16th century Roman context for the convolute’s production is confirmed by the attested locations of many of the antiquities depicted as well as the watermarks on its Italian paper.

The earliest recorded example of the so-called »archaeological« sketchbooks, the Codex Coburgensis likely has its origins in an ambitious survey project conceived in the late 1530s under the auspices of the »Accademia della Virtù«, one of the earliest antiquarian societies. Also known as the »Accademia Vitruviana«, this institution counted various humanists, noblemen and church officials among its founders, including Cardinal Marcello Cervini.
(later pope Marcellus II) and Claudio Tolomei. An avid scholar of antiquity, Cervini commissioned compendia of antique inscriptions and sculptures in association with the Academy’s establishment.

In Tolomei’s well-known letter of 14 November 1542, he outlined the Academy’s ambitious publication programme to this end: a twenty-volume project that included an emphasis on the ancient built environment (including a new critical edition of Vitruvius) as well as the documentation of ancient architectural ornament, reliefs, statues, vases, instrumentaria, inscriptions in stone, and coins. Tolomei’s program encouraged artists to capture both the artistic quality and aesthetic individuality of these monuments, making this era witness to one of the first real attempts at the formal analysis of ancient sculpture. This development, as Margaret Daly Davis has proposed, came about through the close collaboration between artists (and architects) and antiquarian scholars at the Vitruvian Academy.

Daly Davis has shown how Tolomei’s call laid the groundwork for such projects as a second edition to Bartolomeo Marliani’s »Topographia« (1544), Girolamo Gariberti’s »De regimienti publici« of Rome (1544), Guillaume Philander’s commentaries on Vitruvian terminology (1544), and Stefanus Vinandus Pighius’ iconographical and epigraphical studies, the Codex Pighianus (ca. 1548–1555). Davis has also suggested that the projected publication of sarcophagus drawings (»opera de’pili«), known to a wide public through the publication of Tolomei’s letters in 1547, is realised in the drawings of the Codex Coburgensis. In particular, she outlines six characteristics of the Coburg convolute which correspond to those of the Accademia’s project, including their parallel subject matter and thematic organisation.

This interpretation, however, has been questioned by Ingo Herklotz, who argues that a key constituent of the Accademia’s programme was not executed by the Coburgensis draftsman: namely, that it lacks a commentary on the form of the reliefs. However, Davis notes that the cut-down drawings of the Codex Coburgensis in some cases preserve the written identification of the persons and scenes represented, and thus that one might assume that other explanations, akin to the »esposizioni« planned by the Accademia Vitruviana, existed. Herklotz also argues there that the Vitruvian Academy did not foresee »eine spezialisierte Sammlung mythologischer Sarkophagreliefs, wie der Coburgensis sie verkörpert«. But the Accademia project foresaw »opera de’pili« which embraced both mythological and historical scenes. In any event, the Accademia was no longer in existence at the period to which the
rediscovered Roman circus sarcophagus, the drawings date, and thus we can only securely say that one part of Tolomei’s archaeological program, the sarcophagus reliefs, was realised with the Coburg convolute’s execution.

Current scholarship continues to piece together the Accademia’s collaborative researches. Most recently, Bernd Kulawik has suggested that the Codex Destailleur (ca. 1537–1546) and other sketches, now dispersed, can be identified as the Accademia’s planned collection of architectural drawings. Even if the programme bore little of its intended fruit, Tolomei’s idea proved influential, even outside the Accademia itself. For instance, the amendments made to Mazzocchio’s »Epigrammata urbis« from the circle of antiquarians at the court of Rodolfo Pio, correspond to the archaeological criteria laid out by the »Accademia Vitruviana«. The influence of this project can also be seen in the work of the three other draftsmen of the Bryn Mawr sarcophagus under discussion here, all of whom had direct contacts to the Academy: Pighius, Giovanni Antonio Dosio, and Pirro Ligorio.

During his stay in Rome under the patronage of Cervini, the Netherlandish antiquary Pighius assembled the Codex Pighianus, a collection of nearly 400 sketches of ancient reliefs rooted in the study of epigraphic collections. Among the sketches by various anonymous hands in the Codex Pighianus are 171 copies after the Codex Coburgensis, including folio 361r, in which both the front and, in a second register, the side panels of the circus sarcophagus now in Bryn Mawr are depicted (fig. 11). As the template for the Pighianus folio, the sketch in the Codex Coburgensis would also originally have depicted the side panels.

A similar approach can be seen in the Codex Berolinensis (ca. 1559–65), the sketchbook of the Florentine sculptor, architect and antiquarian Giovanni Antonio Dosio (ca. 1533–1609). Dosio was not a member of the Accademia della Virtù, but he was closely acquainted with some of its members, notably Tolomei. His sketches include many of the same monuments in the Codex Pighianus, but he was not directly influenced by that work. His approach, however, does agree with that of the »Accademia’s« project – not least for the relative precision with which he quotes ancient monuments. His œuvre includes a series of archaeological-epigraphical sketches, among them a drawing of the Bryn Mawr sarcophagus (fig. 12) and the fragment of another.

Tolomei’s plan also influenced the Neapolitan Pirro Ligorio (ca. 1513–1583), whose drawings were copied, annotated and supplemented by Onofrio Panvinio and assembled by Fulvio Orsini, successive advisers to Cardinal Ales-
11 Codex Pighianus, fol. 361r; Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. lat. fol. 61

12 Codex Berolinensis, fol. 40v; Berlin, Staatliches Kupferstichkabinett, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. 79 D 1
sandro Farnese, into a collection known as the Codex Ursinianus (ca. 1564–1569). As previously mentioned, Ligorio was well-known for his interest in chariot race scenes: in his reconstructive drawings of circuses in his work on spectacles, in his engravings to Faerno’s 1563 edition of Aesop’s fables, and in his documentation and description of particular works of ancient art. The sketch in folio 62v of the codex depicts the Bryn Mawr sarcophagus’ front and side panels unrolled into a single continuous narrative (fig. 1).

RECEPTION AND RESPONSE

We turn now to the details of the drawings themselves, and in particular several stylistic aspects of folio 21 in the Codex Coburgensis (fig. 10). We have already seen how the technique of his drawing allows us to recover lost figural details of the ancient monuments, including the Bryn Mawr sarcophagus. The pen strokes are highly exact, the fractures recorded without restoration and, in some drawings, features not directly visible to the viewer are unfolded. This scientific description is set against a background of parallel brush strokes. The detailed and sober style of the drawings together reflect a precision born from the artist’s apparent intention to capture the «documentary truth» of ancient monuments through direct observation. In comparison with the three other representations, the sketch in the Codex Coburgensis is unquestionably the most faithful reproduction.

But despite its objective character and thus archaeological value, the Codex Coburgensis folio is characterised by some minor slips in detail. More significantly, the artist has subtly reworked certain aspects of the sarcophagus’ composition, seen in his depiction of anatomy, movement and perspective. These aspects are worth examining in further detail here, as they each reflect how the mechanical act of copying was coloured by the artist’s stylistic biases, however slightly embodied. Cumulatively they offer us a window onto the individual artisan at work in the Cinquecento.

As far as perspective is concerned it is striking that on the decoration of the actual sarcophagus, the narrative’s ceiling is low, so that the figures’ heads appear to push up against it, while the cap of the obelisk is obscured by the outstretched right wing of the third charioteer. By contrast, on the drawing the upper frame is heightened over the race scene, and the obelisk made complete with a block-like cap and decoration. As a result, this lone obelisk...
appears to loom over the ›ovarium‹ and the heads of the figures and horses, as it does in the Codex Pighianus drawing as well.\textsuperscript{106} In the other two sketches, the obelisk’s height is less imposing, made equal to the other figures and/or monuments. Its representation in the Codex Ursinianus is particularly unique, however, since it stands alone and its decoration does not overlap with the third charioteer’s wings.

That this monument is depicted as complete in all four of the drawings demonstrates that the artists were self-conscious ›cognoscenti‹ who wanted its identification as an obelisk – and their knowledge of its proper form – made explicit to the viewer, even if it meant compromising the accuracy of the representation.\textsuperscript{107} In addition, we should note that all four of the drawings depict some form of decoration on the obelisk as well: in the codices Coburgensis, Pighianus, and Ursinianus, this is a brick-like design that accurately reflects the original decoration, traces of which are still visible (fig. 4). In the version from the sketchbook of Giovanni Antonio Dosio, however, the obelisk is embellished with hieroglyphs (fig. 12).\textsuperscript{108} Dosio’s gloss on the Roman original can be explained by the contemporary fascination with ancient Egypt, whose presence was increasingly felt with the excavation and display of obelisks.\textsuperscript{109} The column of hieroglyphs thus may reflect his imitation of an actual design, perhaps that now in the Trinità dei Monti, which laid with one face exposed during Dosio’s lifetime.\textsuperscript{110} However, the motif of the hieroglyph might have strayed in for other reasons, such as a whimsical interest in the allegorical language of these monuments.\textsuperscript{111} This interpretation is suggested by another drawing by Dosio: in folio 88r of the Codex Berolinensis, four togate men stand around an obelisk, three of whom point at its hieroglyphs while the other reads from a text, apparently attempting to decipher its meaning. A lengthy excursus is provided at either side of the obelisk, the title of which reads »Imagini o cifre egitie e loro significanti.«\textsuperscript{112}

A second artistic conceit can be seen in the direction of the gazes of the figures, which are made to appear more frontally-facing. On the sarcophagus, the faces of the second charioteer and ›hortator‹ and of the third charioteer and ›hortator‹ are tilted inward and downward, their collective gaze directed toward the ›naufragium‹. Their focus, the fallen charioteer, is similarly inward-turned. On the drawing, by contrast, the heads of these figures have been tilted outward, their gazes dreamy but their direction suggesting an awareness of the viewer. Rather than involved in his own accident, the fallen charioteer appears theatrical, the frontal turn of his head exposing him di-
rectly to the viewer’s gaze. The third team’s ›hortator‹ deserves particular attention here because his gaze, tilted head and composure closely resemble that of the putto at the base of Raphael’s 1511 work »Galatea« (fig. 13). Raphael’s ›putto antico‹, as seen here, was closely modelled after its ancient exemplar and has been characterised by scholars as representative of a »chilly classicism«, not unlike the style of the draftsman of the Codex Coburgensis.\textsuperscript{113}

We have already seen how scenes of Erotes racing chariots (the frieze from Tivoli) were amongst the antiquities recorded by and thus familiar to those in Raphael’s workshop, as well as by many artists outside it.\textsuperscript{114} In addition, Raphael had an intense knowledge of and respect for sculptured monuments that is clearly visible in his work.\textsuperscript{115} His ›putto‹ in the »Galatea«, for instance, sees the artist taking a classical model and re-inventing it. As Jones and Penny state, »in some respects in fact the Galatea is an archaeological work«, the figure’s drapery »derived from Roman relief sculpture rather than from the observation of how cloth behaves in the wind«.\textsuperscript{116} The draftsman of the Codex Coburgensis was similarly conversant in this figural language: his use of chiaroscuro and emphasis on smooth, hard surfaces heightens the plasticity of the Erotes’ bodies, suggesting marble rather than flesh. In this way, the draftsman’s exaggerated classicism resembles Raphael’s models, but is here restored to an actual sarcophagus.\textsuperscript{117}

Raphael’s style of Roman classicism and in particular his muscled putto are instructive in considering a third aspect of the drawing: the taut, rippling torsos of the Erotes. Here the pectoral and abdominal muscles are expressed as sharply-defined planes with deep ridges, those on the four charioteers and the second team’s ›hortator‹ receiving particular emphasis. In his carefully
controlled play of flesh and geometry, the draftsman of the Codex Coburgensis again communicates a feeling of precision. But examination of the intact figural detail and comparison with other circus sarcophagi suggests that the Erotes, especially the first charioteer, were sculpted with far less musculature than in their representation in the folio. (Compare the similar emphasis on muscular forms in the Codex Pighianus folio as opposed to the supple, even pudgy bodies in the Codices Berolinensis and Ursianus.) The more muscular forms reflect contemporary trends, including the dominance of Raphael’s classical models and the rediscovery of monumental sculptures.\textsuperscript{118} The unearthing of the »Farnese Hercules« (1545),\textsuperscript{119} among other finds, encouraged a »bravura« realism amongst artists at Rome that can be seen in 16th century studies of the torso.\textsuperscript{120}

In summary, the subtle stylistic adaptations discussed here – physiognomic, perspectival and spatial – point to the Codex Coburgensis sketch’s two-fold value as an archaeological aide mémoire: its documentary style makes it possible to reconstruct details on the original chest now lost or worn, while the artist’s own adaptations allow us to recover vestiges of artisanal practice from this formative period of archaeological inquiry.

\textit{»Aurigatio circensis cupidinibus agitantibus …«}

Surveying the landscape of the Valle Murcia on his metaphorical journey through Rome’s past, Petrarch describes how he sees:

»… the castle of Evander, there the temple to Carmenta; here the cave where Cacus dwelt, the She-Wolf nursing her twins and the fig-tree, more properly called the Romularis; here the spot where Remus crossed over, there the site of the circus races and the rape of the Sabine women …«\textsuperscript{121}

While decayed and forlorn, the valley arena still emitted a numenous presence, one bound up with Rome’s legendary foundations. For Petrarch, the circus was alive, and that sentiment was equally — if not more deeply — felt in the Cinquecento. At that time, the enthusiasm for the circus was reflected in the manifold attempts to possess it: by mapping its locations, mimicking its design, mining the ground for its vestiges, and collecting its facsimile in art, whether an ancient work or a contemporary print. The display of circus
imagery at Rome was, after all, a local practice, one begun by the ancients and continued by the (Early) moderns.

The rediscovery of the Bryn Mawr sarcophagus gives shape and detail to this process. For in mapping its display and re-display, we see how this work was reactivated with new meanings for a contemporary audience. Civic glory allowed aristocrats a special role in the Early Modern world, and sarcophagi, like other antiquities, were a means of sedimenting that glory through the insinuation of an ancient past, one laden with pageantry and cosmic symbolism. At the same time, the »opera de’pili« were prized as clues crucial to the Accademia’s emergent enterprise of translating and assimilating a fragmentary, past culture with its own. At once a commodity and artifact, the Bryn Mawr sarcophagus offers us a window onto the spectacle of imperial Rome and the charged Early Modern response to it.

NOTES

* The research for this article was generously supported by grants from the University of Edinburgh, the American Academy in Rome (Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman, Pre-Doctoral Rome Prize Fellowship in Ancient Studies), and the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), held at the Archäologisches Institut, Universität zu Köln. An earlier version was presented to audiences in Akron, Cologne, Dublin, Iowa City, and Villanova. I am grateful to the following for reading and commenting on the earlier draft: Robert Cohon, Margaret Daly Davis, Glenys Davies, Henner von Hesberg, Gunram Koch, Ingrid Rowland, Konrad Schauenburg, Charlotte Schreiter, Tobias Sperlich and Henning Wrede. Joel Katz produced the excellent photographs. The article is dedicated to Eve D’Ambra, for her assistance and encouragement.

1 Census, RecNo. 66267, with subordinate entries 66268 and 66269.
2 Census, RecNo. 58660.
3 Census, RecNo. 60811, with subordinate entries.
4 Census, RecNo. 58664.


11 Funerary reliefs, like the well-known example of a circus magistrate and his wife now in the Vatican, and mosaics, like the domestic pavement from Carthage, provide familiar examples. Both are illustrated in: The Art of Ancient Spectacle, ed. by Bettina Bergmann and Christine Kondoleon, New Haven 2000 (Studies in the History of Art, 56), p. 24, fig 4; p. 322, fig. 1.


13 There is neither sufficient space nor cause to address here the complex issues involved in the interpretation of this imagery by a Roman imperial audience, a subject that I have discussed elsewhere at length; see (note 6), with full literature.


15 H 0.31 m; L 1.21 m; D. 0.36 m. See Bell 2003 (note 5), fig. 3, for complete dimensions.


17 The discovery of this photograph came about after my earlier report had gone to press: Bell 2003 (note 5), p. 301. The information recorded there – that the sarcophagus was possibly purchased on the art market ca. 1960 – is clearly incorrect. The photograph appears in: [No author]: Country Life in America, No. 3: «Skylands Farm», the New Jersey Estate of Clarence Lewis, Esq., in: Country Life (August 1937), p. 35 (top).

18 I am indebted to the owner for information about the sarcophagus and for granting me permission to publish it here.
See Bell 2003 (note 5), pp. 305; 307, no. 1, for a full description of the work's state of preservation.


25 Susan Walker, pers. comm., 10 April 2003. Similar streaking with parallel grey lines can be seen on a chest with circus scenes now in the Vatican Museums: Schauenburg 1995 (note 5), p. 79, Nr. 86, pl. 1.4–6 and 53.1. I am grateful to Susan Walker for discussing the Bryn Mawr sarcophagus and to Paolo Liverani for access to the Vatican chest.


29 Humphrey 1986 (note 6), p. 198 f. On the infrequent motif of the pickaxe see Schauenburg 1995 (note 5), p. 35, note 193. On images of amphora, which are common on these sarcophagi, see Schauenburg 1995 (note 5), pp. 29; 35 f., 52.


31 Schauenburg 1995 (note 5), pp. 34; 50.

32 Schauenburg 1995 (note 5), pp. 35–6; 52.

33 Schauenburg 1995 (note 5), pp. 32 f.; 35.

34 Schauenburg 1995 (note 5), pp. 33; 36 f.


36 Pickaxes and amphora are rarely represented together: Schauenburg 1995 (note 5), p. 76, no. 71, pl. 7.2; p. 78, no. 84, pl. 25.1–4; p. 79, no. 86, pl. 1.4–6 and 53.1; p. 81 f., no. 98, pl. 4.4; p. 87 f., no. 110, pl. 41.1–4.

37 See Schauenburg 1995 (note 5), p. 65, no. 20, pl. 7.1; p. 69, no. 32, pl. 5.3–4; p. 69, no. 34, pl. 41.2–4.

38 The only parallel in the corpus is provided by a mid-Antonine chest now in Florence, where it is again the second charioteer that appears half-lying on the race track: Schauenburg 1995 (note 5), p. 63, no. 14, pl. 17.1.

39 By comparison, the figure seen lying at the far right of the racetrack on a circus sarcophagus now in the Vatican, is an unknown deity, perhaps the personification of the circus itself: Schauenburg 1995 (note 5), p. 87 ff., no. 110, pl. 41.1–2; 4. Another sarcophagus depicts a recumbent figure at the far right, a sparsor who curiously holds a charioteer’s whip: Schauen-
burg 1995 (note 5), p. 78, no. 84, pl. 25.1.3. See also Schauenburg 1995 (note 5), p. 69, no. 34, pl. 24.1–2; p. 92, no. 127, pl. 39.3.

On the archaeological site of the circus, see the Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae, ed. by Eva Margareta Steinby, Roma 1993, vol. I, s.v. »Circo Massimo« (Paola Gancio Rossetto).


Census, RecNo. 157366; MacDougall 1983 (note 47), esp. p. 125 ff., fig. 7.


The literature on this topic is vast; generally see Annegrit Schmitt: Römische Antiken-Nachzeichnung in: Kölner Jahrbuch 26 (1993) p. 11 ff.


A Rediscovered Roman Circus Sarcophagus
Census, RecNo. 58583.

Census, RecNo. 58548.

Census, RecNo. 159737 (with diverging location); CC fol. 110 (Census, RecNo. 58583) = Codex Pighianus fol. 161v (Census, RecNo.38585) = Codex Ursianianus fol. 6cv (Census, RecNo. 66260, with subordinate entries) and 61r (Census, RecNo. 66263, with subordinate entries); Jahn 1868 (note 5), p. 221, no. 198; Matz 1871 (note 5), p. 489, no. 188; Schauenburg (note 5), p. 74f., no. 65, pl. 8.1–3. This is to correct my earlier statement in Bell 2003 (note 5), p. 304: »Foliante 21 ist die einzige Zeichnung, die eine Zirkusszene auf einem Sarkophag darstellt.«


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Census, RecNo. 54920.


77 On the Academia’s programme, see Wrede 1989 (note 53), pp. 376–9; Margaret Daly Davis: Zum Codex Coburgensis. Frühe Archäologie und Humanismus im Kreis des Marcello Cervini, in: Antikenzeichnung und Antikenstudium in Renaissance und Frühbarock 1989 (note 73), pp. 190–5; Daly Davis (note 50), pp. 11–18; Herklotsz (note 53).
79 Census, RecNo. 61289.
80 Census, RecNo. 63951.
81 Census, RecNo. 60431.
82 Daly Davis 1989 (note 77).
85 See Daly Davis 1989 (note 77), p. 195. A text describing the sculpture does not exist, and we do not know if it was ever composed. It may be, as Wrede has suggested, that the task was still too difficult because the language had not yet developed; vgl. Wrede 1989 (note 53), p. 382: »Einmal ist zu unterstellen, daß sich die unzureichenden Methoden der Formanalyse als unbefriedigend erwiesen hatten und daher nicht weiter berücksichtigt wurden«. However, such a text, if it existed, would not have been written by the draftsman of the Codex Coburgensis, but by one of the ›letterati‹ in his circle.
89 Census, RecNo. 61820.
90 Daly Davis 1989 (note 77), p. 197. See also here the discussion of the similarity between the program of the ›Speculum Romanae magnificentiae‹ and that of the Vitruvian Academy: Davis 1994 (note 50), pp. 119–20.

76 Sinclair Bell


»Dieses zweite Register ist im Codex Coburgensis offensichtlich einst abgeschnitten worden und ging verloren« (Henning Wrede, pers. comm., 18.7.2003).


The Codex Pighianus: missing wings on fourth charioteer and Eros on left side panel; the Codex Berolinensis: missing pickaxe, second charioteer and ›hortator‹ missing wings, third charioteer's lower right arm is intact; the Codex Ursinianus: right ›sparso‹ faces wrong direction, third charioteer's lower right arm is intact, and Eros on right side panel overlaps with scene on front panel.

These include the slightly overlong plinth of the ›ovarium‹; the separation (and not overlap) between the back leg of the first team's outer horse and chariot wheel; the different alignment in the ruts of the first two chariot wheels; the absence of reins on the second ›hortator‹'s horse; the absence of the reins that drape over the neck of the second team's fallen lead horse, and the foreshortening of the bar connected to the reins there; the failure of the head of the horse from the second team to extend across the entirety of the obelisk; the indication of toes on the third charioteer; the reduced distance between the charioteer and the obelisk; the horizontally-oriented wings on the third team's ›hortator‹; the fourth charioteer's more upright posture and more angular grasp of the reins; the intersection of the foot of the fourth team's ›sparso‹ with the hindlegs of the outer horse.


Cf. also Schauenburg 1995 (note 5), p. 73, no. 52, pl. 32.5.


A number of possibilities exist. Prior to the pontificate of Sixtus V (1585–90), several obelisks with hieroglyphs would have been visible to Dosio: the obelisk of Ramses II in the Piazza di San Macuto (now in the Pantheon: Census, RecNo. 154926), the toppled section of its mate on the Capitoline hill (now in the Villa Celimontana: Census, RecNo. 153962), the fallen obelisks at the Gardens of Sallust (now on the Trinità dei Monti: Census, RecNo. 154924), Circus Varianus (now in the Pincian gardens), and Circus of Maxentius (now in Piazza Navona: Census, RecNo. 153901).

I am indebted to Brian Curran for his assistance, including his suggestion of the most likely influence, which I follow here. On the Pincio obelisk, see further: Henning Wrede: Der Antikengarten der del Buffalo bei der Fontana Trevi, Trier 1982 (Trierer Winckelmannsprogramme 4), p. 1 ff.

112 Census, RecNo. 47004: Codex Berolinensis, fol. 88r; Hülsen 1912 (note 96), pp. 42 ff., Nr. 194a-b, Taf. 113, where he notes that Dosio’s designs closely resemble and must have been modelled after an Egyptian original, in contrast to the purely fantastic work of other contemporaneous artists.


118 This mimetic style of physiognomic representation finds parallels in the depiction of several Erotes in an early 17th century sketch of a now lost circus sarcophagus plate: Schauenburg 1995 (note 5), p. 81 f., no. 94, pl. 84 (lower image). Generally, see Fredrika H. Jacobs: The Living Image in Renaissance Art, Cambridge 2005.

119 Census, RecNo. 156663.


121 Cited in Jaëks 1993 (note 40), p. 36.
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