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TRAVELING TO ROME FOR ARTISTIC PURPOSES

The Theoretical Background in Eighteenth-Century France and Britain

ELISABETH MARTICHOV

Until Herculaneum and Pompei were discovered, in the middle of the eighteenth century, Rome was the ultimate stage of the Italian journey for British connoisseurs and artists alike. Although they came in smaller numbers whenever England was at war with France, the colony of British artists living in Rome, in the vicinity of the Piazza di Spagna, was always considerable. Prominent painters like Ramsay, Reynolds or West, sculptors like Banks or Flaxman, or architects like Kent, Chambers, or Adam regarded staying a few months or even a few years in Rome as

an indispensable part of their career. French artists also made the journey to Rome, most of them within the institutional framework of the French Academy in Rome, which was established in 1666, to allow the most deserving students of the Paris Academy, those that had won the famous “prix de Rome”, to spend three years (four from 1754) in the Palazzo Mancini, at the King’s expense. Thus the “Académie de France à Rome” permanently hosted four painters, four sculptors, and four architects. Famous pensioners in the eighteenth century included Greuze or Bouchardon. Other artists came either on their own or with patrons of the arts: such was the case of Fragonard or of the engraver Cochin.¹ In fact the French Academy provided some kind of public service, including to foreign artists, as its life-class and collection of casts were accessible to all.

On arriving in Rome in 1755, the Scottish architect Robert Adam, declared: “I hope to have my ideas greatly enlarged and my taste formed upon the solid foundation of genuine antiquity. I already feel a passion for sculpture and painting which I before was ignorant of, and I am convinced that my whole conception of architecture will become much more noble than I could ever have attained by staying in Britain.”² In fact Rome was the ideal place to acquire a multidisciplinary culture; more than any other Italian city, it was a repository of antique statuary and paintings by Italian masters as well as an open air museum of ancient architecture. Copying and collecting antiques were one of the main artistic activities in Rome. Sending copies of famous works for the royal collection was a statutory obligation for the pensioners of the French Academy. British artists, most of whom had to finance their stay, either made copies to be bought on the spot or became providers of more or less genuine ancient statues, which were sent overseas to make up aristocratic collections in Britain. This was one of Nollegen’s activities and certainly a significant source of income for Gavin Hamilton, the history painter.³ Copying was easier in Rome thanks to the availability of private collections such as those of the Medici, Borghese, or Ludovisi families without mentioning the two major museums created on papal initiative, the Capitoline Museum in

¹ For details of Fragonard’s journey see Pierre-Jacques Onésime Bergeret de Grancourt, *Bergeret et Fragonard: Journal inédit d’un voyage en Italie 1773–1774* (Paris, 1895). For British artists traveling with a companion see Jeremy Black, *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth-Century* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 262.

² Quoted by John Fleming, *Robert Adam and His Circle in Edinburgh and Rome* (London: John Murray, 1962), 149.

³ Hamilton’s activities in Rome are described in Jonathan Scott, *The Pleasures of Antiquity: British Collectors of Greece and Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 100, 198.

1733 and the Vatican Museum in 1770. Both of these contributed to defining an international canon of sculpture including such works as the *Laocoon*, the *Apollo* or the *Torso*.⁴

Historical data shows that throughout the eighteenth century Rome remained a constant source of attraction for British and French artists, the former being more numerous—and better accepted, at least after 1745—than the latter. Yet Rome's artistic superiority was frequently questioned in theoretical writings on both sides of the Channel. From the beginning of the century until about 1740, British theorists gave both a moral and an aesthetic value to neo-clacissism while the French "quarrels" (the "querelle du coloris" and the "querelle des Anciens et des Modernes") challenged the Roman models of excellence. Then, from 1750 to 1775, the French Academy in Rome came under critical scrutiny at the very time when British painters gave only a halfhearted approval to the idea of the Roman journey. Simultaneously, both French and British architects heralded the advent of the Greek taste. After 1775, in a spectacular reversal, Rome was eventually viewed as an endangered city, a global museum that had to be protected from plunderers, whatever their origin.



Charles Perrault, the architect and writer, published his *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes* in defense of the Moderns in 1692. He argues that ancient sculpture owes its reputation partly to prejudice: nobody criticizes what has been consecrated by time and the difficulty of traveling to Rome confers unchallenged value to celebrated pieces of statuary. This is as much as saying that the casts in Paris and Versailles make the trip to Rome superfluous and the desire of viewing the original a mere question of snobbishness. Perrault even suggests Versailles could easily rival with Rome, both cities being now built in marble instead of brick.⁵

Roger de Piles, a painter who wrote on his art, was one of the main proponents of the superiority of coloring over drawing in the "querelle du coloris", thus challenging the official academic dogma. In *L'idée du peintre*

⁴ See Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500–1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 28, 62.

⁵ Charles Perrault, *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes en ce qui concerne les arts et les sciences: Dialogues*, 2nd ed. (1688; Geneva: Slatkin Reprints, 1979), 77.

parfait, he states that young painters spend too much time studying in Rome. When they finally reach Venice, most of the time for a short stay, their minds and eyes are so prejudiced that they are unable to appreciate the Venetian School, the first and only school when it comes to learning coloring. Rome cannot cater for all the needs of a painter's training; the city, as the major seat of ancient sculpture and of the works of Raphaël is indispensable to learn drawing but Venice is its necessary complement.⁶

Skepticism takes a more virulent form in the letters of Charles Poerson, the director of the French Academy in Rome. In 1707 he expatiates on the poor condition of Roman monuments and deplores the fact that, at least temporarily, the students cannot visit the most prestigious collections of paintings. Indeed there seems to have been real material difficulties, one of them being the irregular funding of the Academy, which justified some caution when advising the trip to Rome. Besides, like Perrault, Poerson points out the uselessness of copying from the original statuary when there are so many good casts in France.⁷

A few years later, in 1719, Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, in his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture*, takes up the "querelle des Anciens et des Modernes." He argues that the Moderns owe their so-called superiority to the cumulative effect of time and adopts a comparative and analytical perspective, which is, however, impossible for painting, as most ancient frescoes are in a ruinous state. As regards sculpture, Du Bos maintains that the Ancients' superiority is indisputable while insisting on the Romans' debt to Greece; in the days of Augustus the Romans could pretend to rival with the Greeks in the science of government but had to acknowledge Greek superiority in the arts, in particular in the art of sculpture.⁸ When theorists argued in favor of the Ancients, most of the time, they had in mind Greek art rather than Roman art.

In Britain, in the first half of the eighteenth century, the aesthetic interest of the Roman journey was gradually asserted, as can be traced in the writings of Addison, Shaftesbury, and Richardson. In his *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy*, published in 1705, Addison regards Roman statues as a source of pleasure only in so far as they remind the viewer of Latin authors: "A man

⁶ Roger de Piles, *L'idée du peintre parfait* (1699; Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 50.

⁷ Albert Lecoy de la Marche, ed., *L'Académie de France à Rome: Correspondance inédite de ses directeurs, précédée d'une étude historique* (Paris: Didier, 1874), 137.

⁸ Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, 3 vols. (1719; Geneva: Slatkin Reprints, 1993), 1: 385.

who is in Rome can scarce see an object that does not call to mind a piece of a Latin poet or historian.”⁹ Addison does not give any particular significance to the individual artistic value of ancient statues, which are “made after the same design,” identical copies of lost originals: “[I] question not but they were famous originals that gave rise to the several statues that we see with the same air, posture and attitudes.”¹⁰

Addison’s views are essentially those of an antiquarian, a collector of old medals. Shaftesbury’s views are more those of a virtuoso. Like Du Bos and in anticipation of Winckelmann, the philosopher argues in favor of the aesthetic superiority of Greek art over Roman art. In his defense of the Ancients (“that a Modern may be honoured, some Ancient must be sacrificed”) Greece appears as the original font of all artistic forms, owing nothing but to itself and “Attic elegance” is extolled.¹¹ However, the true gentleman, the “man of breeding and politeness” has to go abroad and in particular to Rome: “If he travels to Rome, he inquires which are the truest pieces of architecture, the best remains of statues, the best paintings of a Raphaël or a Caracci. However antiquated, rough or dismal they may appear to him at first sight, he resolves to view them over and over till he has brought himself to relish them and finds their hidden graces and perfections.”¹² As a museum of ancient sculpture, Rome is essential to the formation of true taste, which requires time and patience. It is part and parcel of the gentleman’s spiritual itinerary, in which moral virtue cannot be dissociated from the contemplation of objects of virtue.

Jonathan Richardson, the painter, was the author of one of the first treatises on painting, in which, in a now traditional manner, he ranks Greece above Rome as the seat of artistic grace and grandeur. He did not make the journey to Italy but his son did and father and son wrote together an account of the son’s journey. In the preface, Jonathan Richardson the elder insists that they are not compiling a mere catalog of works of art and that this text is breaking new ground. Indeed the description is meant to convey the viewer’s impressions, the *ekphrasis* takes on an aesthetic dimension: “As every picture, statue, or bas-relief, besides what it was intended to exhibit, leaves upon the mind of him that sees it an idea of itself, distinguish’d from every other of its

⁹ Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, etc in the Years 1701, 1702, 1703* (London, 1705), 301.

¹⁰ Addison, *Remarks*, 339–40.

¹¹ Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, *Soliloquy or Advice to an Author, in Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 119, 105.

¹² Shaftesbury, *Soliloquy*, 150–51.

kind; he that would describe them should endeavour to communicate such distinct ideas.”¹³ Unlike Addison, Richardson is eager to perceive the singularity of each work of art, including statues. Together with Florence, Rome is essential to get a knowledge of antique statuary, which cannot be dissociated from a moral appraisal: when it comes to passing a judgment, the expression of virtue and innocence in ancient statuary ought to be preferred to gracefulness or the imitation of life. In the same manner, history paintings should depict edifying stories. The painter is reminiscent of Shaftesbury when he insists that traveling to Italy may be profitable only to the truly virtuous gentleman.

Thus Rome seems to hold a pivotal place in what is both an aesthetic and a moral experience and the first contact becomes a sort of epiphany: “When I enter’d the gates of Rome I found myself at the utmost of my wishes, as to the places I was to see in this world; the Vatican is that to Rome, which Rome is to all the world besides.”¹⁴ Yet the initial enthusiasm is later tempered by a measure of disappointment: the rooms of the Vatican are crammed with badly lit and badly hung paintings and the talent of Raphaël himself can be more fully appreciated in Hampton Court. Moreover the Sistine Chapel gives an overall impression of melancholy and Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment* is not up to its reputation so that the visitor is left with mixed impressions.

Contrasting with this theoretical interest in Rome, we find the views of some British antiquarians such as William Stukeley, one of the founders of the “Society of Antiquarians.” He published an *Itinerarium Curiosum* in which he hoped to encourage young aristocrats to take a closer look at the Roman remains in Britain instead of hurrying off to Italy: “Tis not impossible to make a classic journey on this side of the straits of Dover.”¹⁵ Rediscovering Roman Britain would save young people the perils of traveling abroad and would also be an act of patriotism, of allegiance to “our own mother.”¹⁶

Stukeley’s view that staying at home was a patriotic gesture went against the ideological consensus that dominated the postrevolutionary settlement. After 1688, frequent parallels were made between Rome and Britain, the former having anticipated the latter as the seat of liberty.¹⁷ John

¹³ Jonathan Richardson, *An Account of Some of the Statues, Bas-Reliefs, Drawings and Pictures in Italy, etc with Remarks by Mr Richardson, Sen. and Jun.* (London, 1722), preface.

¹⁴ Richardson, *An Account*, 193.

¹⁵ William Stukeley, *Itinerarium Curiosum or an Account of the Antiquities and Remarkable Curiosities in Nature or Arts, Observ’d in Travels thro’ Great Britain* (London, 1724), 3.

¹⁶ Stukeley, *Itinerarium Curiosum*, 2.

¹⁷ See Philip Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 6–14.

Dyer's poem, *The Ruins of Rome*, published in 1740, sums University Press what can be called "the Roman myth" in the first half of the century. Rome is described as attracting both artists, for example, architects who should draw their inspiration from the Pantheon, and antiquarians, because it is the very epitome of antiquity. Even though, in typical pre-romantic mood, Roman ruins can be a source of terror, more classically or rather neoclassically, they are also an incitement to virtue, of which patriotism is a key component. While walking among the ruins, the poet's persona exclaims: "Me now . . . high ambitious thoughts inflame / Greatly to serve my country, distant land, / and Build virtuous fame."¹⁸ Dyer also states that Roman history should act as a warning and Britain must be careful to avoid the traps of luxury and decadence.



After 1750 the general debate, previously focused on the classical inheritance and its moral and cultural value, gave way to a more specialized discussion of painting and architecture. In France, the years between 1750 and 1775 saw the publishing of several essays on the usefulness of the French Academy in Rome, yet another "querelle" in the French style. As early as 1739–1740, Charles de Brosses in his *Journal du voyage en Italie* considered Rome as the most beautiful city in the world, a city which should be restored more respectfully. However he was disappointed with the young painters studying at the French Academy: they lacked original talent and were bad copyists, unable to give life to a reproduction of one of Raphaël's works. Yet there were promising young sculptors.¹⁹ Clearly, sculptors could take advantage of the collection of casts at the academy: if they were not as instructive as the originals, they were at least easily available. De Brosses eventually suggests making mosaic duplicates of the most famous pictures in Rome to be sent to France, together with the most famous casts of ancient statues.

Like Charles de Brosses, La Font de Saint-Yenne, the first French art critic, attempts to redefine the role of the institution. Many of his essays hint at a rivalry between Paris and Rome. In *L'ombre du grand Colbert*, dating

¹⁸ John Dyer, *The Ruins of Rome: A Poem* (1740) in *The Poetical Works of John Dyer* (Edinburgh, 1779), 23.

¹⁹ Charles de Brosses, *Journal du voyage en Italie*, 2 vols. (1739–1740; Grenoble: Roissard, 1971), 1: 74.

from 1752, he reminds the reader that it was Colbert's wish that Paris should emulate Rome and describes the Academy in Rome as an institution created to enable French art to rival with Italian art.²⁰ Rather cynically, the academy becomes a means of pilfering Rome and proclaiming French cultural hegemony over Italy. Rome is no longer viewed as a place for artistic education and La Font, when discussing the case of architects, would rather send them further east, to Egypt, Greece, or Syria to learn the basics of primitive architecture.

At the beginning of the 1750s, the marquis d'Argens, a painter and a collector who had traveled to Italy, in his *Réflexions critiques sur les différentes écoles de peinture*, makes a more radical and systematic criticism of the French Academy in Rome. The institution is perfectly useless now and painting can be learned just as well in Paris thanks to the great number of perfect casts.²¹ When staying in Rome, painters may even forget about true taste because coloring is not to be taught properly through the examples of the Roman School. In fact he argues that almost all the best French artists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries never made the journey to Rome and also takes up La Font's idea that the Roman Academy should be mainly a showcase for French artistic talent. Finally d'Argens draws a series of parallels between French and Italian artists, past and present; thus he places both nations on a par by underlining the similarities between their respective artists' lives and achievements.

The strongest reaction to this attack came rather belatedly under the pen of a foreigner, Francesco Algarotti, a Venitian collector and patron of the arts whose *Essai sur l'Académie établie à Rome* was translated into French in 1769. For Algarotti, Rome remains the main dispenser of lessons in art, "classica terra," to take up Press Addison's words.²² If it cannot be denied that some French artists could do without going to Rome, one of the most illustrious of them, Poussin spent most of his life there. Besides, Roman statuary is far superior to whatever can be viewed in France and in Rome works of great masters can be easily admired as they are mostly in public places. However, Algarotti agrees that French painters and architects should also visit Venice,

²⁰ Etienne de Lafont de Saint-Yenne, *L'ombre du grand Colbert, le génie du Louvre et la ville de Paris, dialogue* (1749) in *Lafont de Saint-Yenne: Oeuvre critique*, ed. Etienne Jollet (Paris: Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 2001), 154.

²¹ Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, marquis d'Argens, *Réflexions critiques sur les différentes écoles de peinture* (Paris, 1751–52), 21.

²² Francesco Algarotti, *Essai sur la peinture, et sur l'Académie de France établie à Rome*, trans. M. Pingeron (1769; Geneva: Minkoff Reprints, 1972), 277.

which leads him to conclude that academies similar to the French Academy in Rome ought to be opened in all major Italian cities.

In 1774, in his *Lettres à un jeune artiste peintre, pensionnaire à l'Académie royale de France à Rome*, Charles-Nicolas Cochin, the engraver who had traveled to Rome with Soufflot and the marquis de Marigny in the early 1750s achieves what looks like a compromise. He supports the study of Raphaël and of antique statuary in the name of a European consensus. Yet the student in Rome must have a critical mind and refrain his enthusiasm, he must admire only what conforms with nature and distrust manner.²³ Here "manner" means whatever is excessive. Michelangelo, for one, is an example not to be followed. Cochin also advises against any exclusive imitation of Raphaël and proposes other models such as Guido Reni. Like Algarotti, he also recommends Venitian painters and eventually warns the pensioners against idleness, which is prone to seize young artists in the heat of the Roman summer: their motto must be "nulla dies sine linea."

There was no British equivalent to the French Academy in Rome even if a project in this line briefly came into existence at the beginning of the 1750s. Nevertheless, British painters writing on the principles of their art at that very period also evoked, directly or indirectly, the issue of the journey to Rome. In 1753 Hogarth, in his *Analysis of Beauty*, argues against the journey, considering Rome as a source of aesthetic prejudice likely to prevent the young painter from observing nature and to reduce him to the condition of a mere connoisseur: "This mistake happens chiefly to those who go to Rome for the accomplishments of their studies, as they naturally will, without the utmost care, take the infectious turn of the connoisseur, instead of the painter."²⁴ Rome can make but very poor painters as studying the manner of great masters is tantamount to putting a veil between the painter's eyes and natural objects. In spite of the fact that the plates accompanying the *Analysis* reproduce the canon of sculpture, Hogarth insists that the beauty of real human forms is far superior to that of antique statues: "Who but a bigot, even to the antiques, will say that he has not seen faces and necks, hands and arms in living women that even the Grecian Venus doth but coarsely imitate?"²⁵ The antiquity is the object of a "blind veneration", all the less justified as the many restorations

²³ Charles-Nicolas Cochin, *Lettres à un jeune artiste peintre, pensionnaire à l'Académie royale de France à Rome* (Paris, 1774), 4.

²⁴ William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, ed. Ronald Paulson (1753; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 19.

²⁵ Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, 59.

and "cooked-up copies" make it difficult to know what the originals were truly like.²⁶

Consistently enough, Hogarth never went to Italy. The Scottish painter, Allan Ramsay, on the contrary, stayed several times in Rome where he acquired an extensive knowledge of antique statuary. Yet in his *Dialogue on Taste*, dating from 1762, he makes some reservations on the beauty of ancient statues under the pretext that the sculptors of antiquity invented a form of beauty that was a compromise meant to please everyone. This "cautious principle" explains why the statues all resemble each other, which greatly diminishes their artistic value: "Here then, in the antique, we find a sort of common measure, but which falls mightily in its value when we consider that it is only of a negative kind, from which no excellence, no striking grace can be expected."²⁷ In fact when artists eventually formulate an appreciation, it is more the repetition of traditional views than any genuine praise: "This after-admiration is far from being a proof of their having anything remarkably beautiful in themselves; and is nothing more than the common effect of habit."²⁸ Ramsay's arguments are reminiscent of the ideas that prevailed at the beginning of the century but the tone is more virulent, not to say accusatory. Thus the painter lambasts the Romans' total lack of creativity: they were unable to improve on the findings of Greek architecture, being but a "gang of meer plunderers, sprung from those who had been, but a little while before their conquest of Greece, naked thieves and runaway slaves."²⁹ By questioning antique statuary as the canon of beauty, Ramsay also questioned, though indirectly, the necessity of traveling to Rome, one of the aims of the journey being to learn the principles of ideal beauty, as inherited from the Ancients.

Sir Joshua Reynolds spent two years in Rome during his Italian journey, from 1750 to 1752. A founder member of the Royal Academy, its first director and the author of the famous *Discourses* delivered in front of the students, he couldn't avoid discussing the subject of the journey to Rome, all the more so since the establishment of the English Academy seemed to give young painters, sculptors and architects the opportunity of receiving a classical artistic training at home. Reynolds first deals with the issue in 1769, in a letter to James Barry, who was then in Rome on a four-year stay; the senior painter tells the young artist not to waste his time copying pictures for sale to

²⁶ Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, 74.

²⁷ Allan Ramsay, "A Dialogue on Taste" (1755) in *The Investigator* (London, 1762), 25.

²⁸ Ramsay, "A Dialogue," 25.

²⁹ Ramsay, "A Dialogue," 40.

traveling aristocrats because staying in Rome is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and should be made the most of by whoever has a high conception of his art, which signifies looking at the originals of antique statues and most of all visiting at length the Sistine Chapel: "In other places you will find casts from the antique, and capital pictures of the great painters, but it is *there* only that you can form an idea of the dignity of the art, as it is there only that you can see the works of Michael Angelo and Raphaël."³⁰ Curiously enough, this enthusiasm is not reflected in the early discourses, in which there is no straightforward discussion of the artistic journey to Rome, only allusions in the vein of the letter to Barry or an implicit invitation to travel through a constant praise of the Roman School of painting. The topic of the journey to Italy is broached at last in the twelfth discourse, delivered in 1784. Reynolds refuses to give a uniform method of study and the young artist abroad is left to his own fancy. As in the letter to Barry, Reynolds insists on the dangers inherent in copying, regarded as a means of eschewing the real task, which is an intellectual one: "A provision of endless apparatus, a bustle of infinite enquiry and research, or even the mere mechanical labour of copying, may be employed, to evade and shuffle off real labour, the real labour of thinking."³¹ The sheer abundance of material can be a hindrance to the student's progress and nowhere is the "immensity of the materials" so obvious as in Rome.³² Reynolds's hesitations appear in his choice of subject for the last two discourses: discourse fourteen is devoted to Gainsborough, hailed as a great painter even if he never went to Italy while the last discourse, Reynolds's spiritual testament, as it were, is centered on Michelangelo, whose genius ought to be studied in the papal city and not just through reproductions. In fact, in his *Discourses*, in spite of his own personal doubts, Reynolds could not but defend the orthodox academic viewpoint: the search for ideal beauty as embodied in ancient sculpture and in the Roman School made the journey to Rome an essential part of a student's progress.

³⁰ Sir Joshua Reynolds, "To James Barry," *The Letters of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, eds. John Ingamells and John Edgcumbe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 30.

³¹ Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert Wark (1769–1790; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 210.

³² Reynolds, *Discourses*, 211.



While on both sides of the Channel the journey of young painters to Rome was an object of debate, the papal city teemed with architects, be they British like Robert Adam, Matthew Brettingham, Stephen Riou, and James Stuart, or French, like Victor Louis or Julien-David Le Roy.³³ Besides, Roman architecture was extolled by no less a talent than that of Piranesi in his *Antichità Romane* dating from 1756. Yet, between 1750 and 1770, a change of taste in favor of Greek architecture hinted at the possibility of sending the students further east.

Marc-Antoine Laugier, though no architect by trade, published in 1753 his *Essai sur l'architecture*, which obtained a lot of public notice and was translated into English the following year. Laugier states that architecture owes its perfection to Greece, a privileged nation which invented the arts.³⁴ The Greeks reached perfection almost immediately because in the architecture of their temples, the columns, entablature and pediment imitated the simplicity of what Laugier calls “la hutte primitive,” the primitive hut.³⁵ The only genuine architectural orders are those that were invented by the Greeks: the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian. The other orders, the Tuscan and the Composite, created by the Romans, show no sign of real inventiveness. In his *Observations sur l'architecture*, published twelve years later, he states that the Romans did nothing more than put into practice the fundamental principles discovered by the Greeks, without any genius of their own.³⁶

Even if Laugier's theory did not remain unchallenged—La Font de Saint-Yenne, for one, was one of its opponents, though not in the name of Roman superiority—it gained ground. In *Les Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce* Julien-David Le Roy, an architect who stayed in Rome from 1751 to 1754 but went to Greece the following year, takes up Laugier's concept of the primitive hut as a model for all Greek temples.³⁷ The Greeks were the founding fathers of architecture and the Romans were unable to improve on the architectural orders that they had invented. In the preface to

³³ See Janine Barrier, *Les architectes européens à Rome: 1740–1765: La naissance du goût à la grecque* (Paris: Editions du patrimoine, 2005), 34–36.

³⁴ Marc-Antoine Laugier, *Essai sur l'architecture* (1753; Brussels: Pierre Mardaga, 1979), 3.

³⁵ Laugier, *Essai*, 8–10.

³⁶ Marc-Antoine Laugier, *Observations sur l'architecture* (1765; Brussels: Pierre Mardaga, 1979), V.

³⁷ Julien-David Le Roy, *Les ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce, considérées du côté de l'histoire et du côté de l'architecture*, 2nd ed. (1758; Paris, 1770), XIII.

the second edition, Le Roy, probably under the influence of Winckelmann, draws a distinction between the monuments erected when the Greeks were a free people and those that were built under Roman yoke, the former being of a much finer quality than the latter.

When publishing his work, Le Roy was in competition with Stuart and Revett who spent ten years in Rome and then traveled to Greece between 1751 and 1753, planning a three-volume work on Greek monuments and sculpture. This rivalry is alluded to in a letter from Jean-Jacques Barthélémy to comte Caylus, a famous antiquarian. Barthélémy advises Caylus against publishing Le Roy's *Ruines* before the printing of Stuart's *Antiquities of Athens* for fear of English superiority in the matter.³⁸ *The Antiquities* eventually came out in 1762, criticizing Roman architecture, Rome being but the disciple of Greece.

For French and British architects alike, Rome increasingly became a mere stage on their way to the Orient. Robert Wood, in his *Ruins of Palmyra* of 1753, seems to consider a visit to Rome as nothing more than a means of learning about oriental civilizations in what is viewed as a sort of general museum of ancient art and history.³⁹ Sixteen years later, Stephen Riou, yet another British architect who knew both Rome and Athens, in his writings, dedicated to "Athenian Stuart," contends that Rome only offers a distorted not to say a perverted vision of the Greek orders, insisting that even Vitruvius argued in favor of Grecian architecture, "where every part is simple, measured and restrained to a just proportion, and fitted to the intended purposes."⁴⁰ This superiority lies mainly in simplicity; the orders imitate trees as well as the human form. Like Laugier, Riou was in quest of a natural source for architecture, a primitive myth of the origins.



From 1750 to 1775 Rome was often superseded by Grece or Venice as the main artistic reference but this view changed dramatically at the end of the century, mostly because of historical events: once Rome was threatened by Bonaparte's troops, it became a place to be preserved from pilfering. The pillage of Rome, of course, started long before 1796, though unofficially.

³⁸ Jean-Jacques Barthélémy, *Voyage en Italie*, 2nd ed. (1801; Geneva: Minkoff reprints, 1972), 50.

³⁹ Robert Wood, *The Ruins of Palmyra otherwise Tadmor in the Desert* (London, 1753), np.

⁴⁰ Stephen Riou, *The Grecian Orders of Architecture* (London, 1768), 10.

Montesquieu had already expressed his dismay at the sheer number of statues sold to foreigners. In his “Voyage de Gratz à La Haye” he recommends the passing of a law stipulating that statues cannot be sold independently from the buildings they are in and blames contemporary Rome for selling off Ancient Rome.⁴¹ The French never failed to comment, more or less bitterly, on the high purchasing power of English aristocrats. Thus Charles de Brosses insisted on their gullibility but felt bound to add that the King of France could obtain whatever work of art he coveted (de Brosses, *Journal*, 46).

Things, however, took a different turn at the end of the century. The invasion of Italy seemed to give some French artists the right to speak in favor of what they termed the “repatriation” of Roman statuary to France. One of their main arguments was that only a free country could host such artistic treasures which, once in France, would stimulate the whole national artistic community and not just the twelve pensioners of the Academy in Rome. Two petitions were launched on the issue: one for and one against “repatriation.” A key element in the debate was Quatremère de Quincy’s *Lettres à Miranda*, Miranda being a Venezuelan general.⁴² Quatremère, who had been trained as a sculptor and had spent eight years in Italy on his own money, wrote a passionate plea against the French government’s forced exportation of Roman antiquities to France. He underlines that Roman monuments have a significance for the whole of Europe and insists on the unity of the city, this great museum called Rome; removing but one part of this whole would alter it for good and Quatremère insists that context is vital for the understanding of a work of art.⁴³ Moreover this pilfering would discourage Roman citizens from going on with the excavations. Another argument for preserving the city as it is that it is the only indispensable destination for art historians and art students alike: Winckelmann could never have elaborated his theory without the abundant research material gathered in Rome. Quatremère finally stresses the vanity of the attempt: monuments and frescoes cannot be removed, so trying to reproduce Rome in Paris is but an illusion. The journey to Rome becomes something sacred, the equivalent of a moral pilgrimage.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Montesquieu, “Voyage de Gratz à La Haye,” in *Œuvres complètes*, 2 vols., 1: 669, 707.

⁴² For details on Quatremère de Quincy’s contribution to eighteenth-century aesthetics see Baldine Saint Girons, *Esthétiques du XVIII^e siècle: Le modèle français* (Paris: Philippe Sers, 1990), 685–93.

⁴³ Antoine C. Quatremère de Quincy, *Lettres à Miranda sur le déplacement des monuments de l’art de l’Italie* (1796; Paris: Macula, 1989), 117. 34. Edward Wright, *Some Observations Made in Travelling through France and Italy in the Years 1720, 1721 and 1722* (London, 1730), VII.

⁴⁴ Quatremère, *Lettres*, 119–20.

Traveling to Rome is the only obligatory journey, providing the visitor with a compendium of the ancient world.

Quatremère cannot but denounce the exporting of art to England and he argues that the scattering of these riches in various aristocratic seats has always prevented the building up of a major collection in that country.

The massive selling of antiques was also satirized in England, as early as 1730, under the pen of Edward Wright, a traveler, who describes Italian virtuosi as follows: "[They] have such a notion of the English ardour, in the acquisition of curiosities of every sort, that they have this expression frequent among them, were our amphitheatre portable, the English would carry it off." James Barry, already mentioned, regards the city as a place of artistic emulation, particularly for a would-be history painter. When back in England, in 1775, in his *Inquiry*, he criticizes the export of old Roman marble to England: "All the obscure corners of Rome are raked for old marble."⁴⁵ He moves on to acknowledge that there is no denying the Romans had pilfered Greece but, unlike the English, they only imported perfect statues. In fact, Barry's main purpose, unlike Quatremère's, was not so much to preserve Rome as a museum as to allow the rise of a British School by limiting the arrival on English shores of competing art from abroad.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, John Flaxman, the sculptor, was more vehement in his lectures delivered to the members of the Royal Academy. He had spent six years in Rome, from 1787 to 1794 and became a professor at the Academy only after the systematic pillage of Italy by Bonaparte's forces, which enables him to expose "the equal injustice and impolicy of removing the works of ancient sculpture from Italy."⁴⁶ Like Barry, Flaxman admits that the Romans were the first plunderers when they conquered Greece but he points out that "as they [the Greek statues] cannot now be restored to their original owners, who can justly and reasonably plead so good a claim to their possession, as those whose intelligence, exertions, and benevolence have rescued these precious remains from their graves, and generously given them to the public?"⁴⁷ These works of art must stay where they are, as Italy is a compulsory finishing school for artists who cannot content themselves with reproductions. At first, Flaxman does not seem to distinguish

⁴⁵ James Barry, *An Inquiry into the Real and Imaginary Obstructions to the Acquisition of the Arts in England* (London, 1775), 75.

⁴⁶ John Flaxman, *Lectures on Sculpture as Delivered before the President and Members of the Royal Academy*, 2nd ed. (London, 1838), 21.

⁴⁷ Flaxman, *Lectures*, 22.

Rome from the other major Italian cities, which all offer the tranquility that can no longer be found in most European capitals. Yet, the professor of sculpture later underlines the inferiority of Roman sculpture in Britain, an indirect way of recommending the journey to Rome.



In the first half of the eighteenth century, French and British men of letters held different views concerning the artistic travel to Rome, the French being more likely to challenge the cultural hegemony of Roman clacissism. In both countries, however, the issue of patriotism and the nation was always in the background: Rome was viewed as an aesthetic and as a civic model for Britain whereas French writings chiefly identified the papal city as a rival for Paris and Versailles, in an attempt to define national identity through the arts. Later, the evolution of ideas was almost similar on both sides of the Channel. In the 1750s the debate centered more closely on artistic education and was connected with the question of the academies. On the pattern of Florence's *Accademia del Disegno*, academic teaching privileged drawing as the basis of all artistic training, which made going to Rome mandatory as the city was the chief provider of material to draw from as well as the seat of the works of the Roman School of painting, of Michelangelo and Raphaël. However essays on painting were far from advocating an exclusively Roman education and Venice became a pole of attraction as coloring was increasingly regarded as a key part of a painter's apprenticeship. During the same period, in Florence, efforts were made to exhibit collections of statuary, thus putting an end to the Roman monopoly over sculpture. Last but not least, Athens became the ultimate destination for young architects eager to learn their art at its fountain-head and embarked in a mythic return to the origins of architecture. Rome came again into the foreground of artistic thought when it was perceived as an endangered site, as a giant museum that had to be saved for artists as well as for art historians, a repository of originals in painting and sculpture, a provider of architectural background, it being increasingly acknowledged, with the birth of art history as a discipline, that a work of art can only be experienced and interpreted in context.

When the Elgin marbles arrived in England in 1808, Greece, partly thanks to the influence of Winckelmann, had replaced Rome as the ideal combination of political freedom and artistic excellence and Greek architectural

forms prevailed in England in the 1790s.⁴⁸ Yet this must be viewed in the wider context of a diversification of aesthetic models: Flaxman, for instance, was not just interested in Greek sculpture but also rediscovered the art of the Trecento and the Quattrocento. In France, the Roman myth lasted a little longer with French neoclassicism and the revival of Roman history in the paintings of Jacques-Louis David and his pupils. Although they stayed in Rome for long periods, these artists were critical of the French Academy in Rome, which was sacrificed on the altar of revolutionary zeal in 1792, in the name of artistic freedom and, more prosaically, because of its director's incompetency. However the link with Rome was renewed three years later, when the Academy was reestablished, which showed that it was something more than, to quote Girodet, one of David's pupils, "one great royal sheepfold for the boarding of a dozen sheep."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ For a study of the change in taste see David Irwin, *English Neoclassical Art: Studies in Inspiration and Taste* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 69–73.

⁴⁹ Quoted by Thomas Crow, *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 121.