Book Review

The Marble Wilderness

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Carolyn Springer, *The Marble Wilderness: Ruins and Representation in Italian Romanticism, 1775–1850* (Cambridge/New York/New Rochelle: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 198 pp., 20 ills. $34.50

A British visitor to Rome in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century would most likely have been fascinated by the ruins of ancient Rome as monuments of picturesque decay, evidence of man's inability to transcend time. A French, German, or Italian contemporary might, equally likely, have seen the ruins as manifestations of an ancient order and grandeur, an example that could guide the present, an achievement contemporary society should seek to emulate. Among themselves, the continentals might seek disparate archaeological evidence in the ruins to uphold differing views, as material either to support arguments for a revival of a republican form of government or to bolster notions of an inherited ecclesiastical or temporal empire. Imagine the discussions, sometimes heated, that probably took place in the Caffè Greco on the Via Condotti, as republicans argued with supporters of the papal states, with adherents of a unified Italy under a single sovereign, and with those who had experienced the Cisalpine state of the French Empire. To an Anglo–Saxon overhearing the debate, accustomed to viewing Rome as a pitifully decayed site best seen at night to heighten its effect on romantic sensibilities and the city as peopled by a decadent, mercurial, and ineffectual populace, the issues might well have seemed incomprehensible or too impassioned to be taken seriously.

It is the merit of Carolyn Springer's *The Marble Wilderness* that she addresses these various views—the ways Italian and other continental intellectuals, politicians, and writers used the Roman ruins, artifacts, archaeology, and contemporary art and architecture in Rome to further political goals in the papal states and Italy in the period between the death of Winckelmann in 1768 and the European revolutions of 1848. This short book, a literary and cultural history, considers the works of Roman painters, sculptors, and architects in the service of political goals: Raphael Mengs, Felice Giani, Antonio Canova, Michelangelo Simonetti, Paolo Bargigli, Raffaele Stern. It also discusses the relation of archaeology and political philosophy in the works of Italian *letterati* and social thinkers: Vincenzo Monti, Pietro Ercole Visconti, Angelo Mai, Gioacchino Belli, Ugo Foscolo, Giacomo Leopardi, Ippolito Pindemonte, Giuseppe Mazzini, Massimo D'Azeglio, Vincenzo Gioberti, Giuseppe Garibaldi.

Professor Springer has organized the material in two parts of four and three chapters, respectively. The first includes two chapters that show the attempts of Clement XIV and Pius VI Braschi to use the new Vatican archaeological museum to legitimate their rule as Christian successors to the imperial Caesars (continuing thereby a long tradition of such claims) and the panegyrics that extolled the contemporary achievement of the papacy and, somewhat optimistically, heralded a new golden age. A further pithy chapter in the first part delineates the changed situation after Napoleon's defeat of papal forces in 1796 (with an armistice that stipulated the transport of 100 major works of art from Rome to Paris); the archaeological excavations initiated by Camille de Tournon for France; the exile of Pius VI in 1798; the brief existence of the Roman Republic in 1798–99 (echoes of Cola di Rienzo), complete with liberty trees and with its own exaltation of the rites and remains of republican Rome, ephemeral republican festival monuments designed by Bargigli; the confiscation and sale of works of art from church and private collections that constituted a new sack of Rome; the restoration of the papacy by Ferdinand IV, King of the Two Sicilies, in the person of Pius VII Chiaramonti (elected in Venice after the death of Pius VI in exile); the new archaeological projects of Pius VII in the Forum and on the slopes of the Capitoline to replace the works appropriated by Napoleon and to populate the new Chiaramonti sculpture gallery; the appointment of Antonio Canova as Inspector of the Fine Arts (including control of the market in antiquities); the restoration of the Column of Trajan, the Colosseum, the arches of Constantine, Septimius Severus, and Titus; the repatriation of the remains of Pius VI who died in exile; the preparation of the Braschi tomb in the Confessio at St. Peter's by Canova with a statue of Pius VI kneeling in prayer placed immediately above the tomb of St. Peter (the statue has recently been moved to a new, less prominent location); the reoccupation of Rome by Napoleon in 1809 as one of the French Imperial cities; the exile of Pius VII; the renewed and accelerated excavations by de Tournon in the Forum; the restoration of the papacy after the fall of Napoleon; the rechristianizing of the archaeological sites by Pius VII; the return of the art works from Paris; the construction of the Braccio Nuovo by Pius VII for the rapidly expanding decorative programs for the Chiaramonti Galleries (by Francesco Hayez, Vincenzo Ferri, Philippe Veit, Luigi Durantini, Giuseppe Caponeri, Filippo Agricola, Domenico De Angelis); the panegyrics of Canova, Angelo Mai; and, finally,

the ridicule of the *mania antiquaria* by Massimo D'Azeglio, who first came to Rome in 1814. The fourth and final chapter of the first part is devoted to the private poetry of Gioacchino Belli. Professor Springer has extracted from Belli's sonnets those that reveal his candid and often caustic reactions to the claims of archaeology and the papacy (even though he was for most of his life employed by the Vatican). She provides an exemplary analysis of these pieces—often in difficult *romanaccio*—that expose the Roman popular reaction to the successive waves of interest in Roman archaeology by the papacy, the French, and the Roman Republic.

Part Two examines the uses of archaeology among those who sought Italian unity in the years following Napoleon. The first of three chapters contains a detailed analysis of Ugo Foscolo's *Dei Sepolcri* as a response to Napoleon's Edict of St.-Cloud of 1804 that prohibited burial within cities, and its arousal of patriotic, nationalistic, Italic sentiments. Conceiving the prohibition as an intentional divorcing of the present from the inspirational models of the past, Foscolo invites meditation on tombs of exemplars in Milan, Florence, and the ancient Mediterranean world. Professor Springer states that "probably no single text did more to adapt the archaeological metaphor to the service of Italian nationalism than Foscolo's *Dei Sepolcri*." In 1871, after the unification of Italy, Giuseppe Mazzini recalled that "Foscolo was one of my first enthusiasms in life."

A succeeding chapter looks at Mazzini's dream of a new Italy "buried beneath the edifice of the ancien régime" that would supplant the papacy and other realms in Italy with a new democratic tradition. For Mazzini, the ruins of Rome were "invoked as a setting for revolutionary action." Vincenzo Gioberti, on the other hand, saw the ruins and artifacts as evidence of a prime position once enjoyed by Romans and Italians but lost through foreign domination. Mazzini worked for a democratic, unified Italy, Gioberti for a unified Italian nation with Rome and the Pope at the head of a federation of regional states. The chapter examines Gioberti's *Primato morale e civile degli Italiani*, Mazzini's responses to Gioberti and to Charles Didier's *Rome souterraine*, in his *Giovane Italia*, and concludes with a brief but valuable look at Giuseppe Garibaldi's novel *Clelia*, in which Rome and the Colosseum are seen as the site of a popular revolution.

The final chapter chronicles the election in 1846 of Pius IX, a known liberal cardinal, his amnesty of political prisoners shortly after his election, the granting of a constitution in 1848, the new papal images, the collapse of the government of Pius IX and his flight to Gaeta, the second Roman Republic of five months with Mazzini as one of the triumvirs (together with Carlo Armellini and Aurelio Saffi), the French occupation of Rome after the battle of Porta San Pancrazio, the restoration of Pius IX, the new republican images and inspiration from the defense of Rome, the interruption of archaeological exploration of the Forum and ancient Roman sites and a shift of attention to the catacombs and early Christian sites, the inauguration of the Museo Pio Cristiano at the Lateran (transferred now to the Vatican), the erection of the Column of the Immaculate Conception in the Piazza di Spagna (in 1856) to commemorate the promulgation of that Dogma and, as French support eroded after the defeat of Napoleon III by Germany in 1870, the occupation of all papal territories including Rome by troops of the King of Savoy with the subsequent unification of Italy (though Professor Springer thinks Italy still to be "resolutely fragmentary").

This rich and extensive material has been compiled and thoughtfully discussed by Professor Springer. The volume will be valuable for any who wish to know more about the interrelation of art, archaeology, and politics in a particularly chaotic period in the history of Rome.

The introduction discusses models of archaeological representation in the period and provides an illuminating examination of the use of Rome, ruins, and archaeology by Byron in his *Childe Harold*. A brief chronology accompanies the text as well as eighteen pages of notes that testify to a command of a wide range of literature surrounding the subject. However, there is no bibliography, and the index of names is unaccountably incomplete.