

# Francesco Bianchini and Giovanni Battista Piranesi: pictorial strategy for animating the past

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Fifty years after its publication in 1697, Francesco Bianchini's *La istoria universale provata con monumenti, e figurata con simboli de gli antichi* was reissued through the efforts of the printmaker Antonio Giovanni Barbazza. Excluding the new edition's front matter, the text was identical to that of the original book. In one way, however, the second issue was different. Barbazza remade the engraved plates for the illustrations because the originals had been lost. The illustrations were essential to the book; they depicted the antiquities that were proffered as evidence of the historical narrative. In the end, but for one print, Barbazza's illustrations show evidence of close copying and were nearly identical to those of the first issue (Figs. 1, 2). In this singular print, Barbazza created an illustration that he hoped the reader would find »somewhat better [...] than the original.«<sup>1</sup> It was the largest image in the book, inserted as a foldout print.<sup>2</sup> It represented an unusual object group of artifacts referred to as the Ripostiglio Bianchini (Figs. 3, 4).<sup>3</sup>

The original illustration of this group of artifacts defied many conventional graphic norms (Fig. 3). It represents the individual pieces a few times, and in differing sizes. They are placed randomly within the pictorial frame, thus creating a nonsensical assemblage. It appears that Barbazza's later version of the illustration attempted to correct some of the original print's unusual conventions, making the individual objects and their relationships more clear to the viewer (Fig. 4). This article examines the illustration of 1697 with the aim of discovering what Bianchini conveyed by representing the objects in this manner.

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1 Francesco Bianchini: *La istoria universale provata con monumenti, e figurata con simboli de gli antichi*, intro. Antonio G. Barbazza, Rome 1747, unpagged: »Al cortese Lettore. [...] spero che il cortese Lettore li troverà quelli somiglianti: e gli altri, ch'erano d'inferiore maestria, e di non troppo buona maniera, forse alquanto migliorati, e riscontrati sopra gli originali.«

2 There are other foldout pages in the book, but these were maps and charts.

3 The items are also referred to as the »Cista Pinnacchi«, after a subsequent owner; see Giulio Q. Giglioli: »Il Ripostiglio Bianchini,« già detto »Cista Pennacchi« trovato a Roma e ora al Museo Nazionale di Napoli, in *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma* 56 (1928), pp. 5–51.

## Immagine Decimasettima.



- 1 2 Basso rilievo antico appreso Pietro Santi Bartoli .
- 3 Medaglione di Filippo nel Museo Orthobono .
- 4 Medaglione di Lucilla ne' Musei Corraro , e du Camps .
- 5 Giove pluvio , fatto ad imitazione della Colonna Antonina per altro soggetto di castigo .
- 6 Idolo de' Giapponesi , così espresso nel di loro tempio .

### CAPITOLO DECIMOSETTIMO.

Del diluvio .

SECOLO XVII.


- I.  *L Diluvio universale essere stato un solo è tradizione delle Nazioni più antiche ; se bene confusa da' Poeti Greci con quella di qualche allagamento particolare . II. Da' Poeti fu detto di Deucalione . III. E diverso dall'affogamento de' gli Egiziani , riconosciuto da Varrone , come secondo diluvio , e come posteriore per sette , e più secoli a quel primo , che solo fu universale , da lui detto di Oggi . IV. Il diluvio fu espresso nel medaglione di Apamea , coniato in onore dell'Imperatore Filippo .*

Fig. 1 »Immagine Decimasettima...del diluvio«, in: Francesco Bianchini: *La istoria universale provata con monumenti, e figurata con simboli de gli antichi*, Rome 1697, p. 186

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Fig. 2 »Immagine Decimasettima...del diluvio«, in: Francesco Bianchini: *La istoria universale provata con monumenti, e figurata con simboli de gli antichi*, Rome 1747, p. 186



Fig. 3 »Vas fictile ex argilla peregrina nitentibus ramentis aurei coloris ac marmoreis frustulis interspersa, cum inclusis amuletis, nec non sigilliolis hominum figuras 36 atque animalium diversorum paria undeviginti exhibentibus«, in: Francesco Bianchini: *La istoria universale provata con monumenti, e figurata con simboli de gli antichi*, Rome 1697, pl. for p. 178



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Francesco Bianchini (Verona 1662–Rome 1729) was a polymath who made his career in Rome. He is best known for his work in astronomy and in archaeology, much of which was accomplished during his time at the papal court of Clement XI Albani (reigned 1700–1721).<sup>4</sup> The young Bianchini, with exceptional academic training in theology and astronomy, came to Rome in 1689.<sup>5</sup> During his initial employment as librarian in the court of the cardinal-nephew Pietro Ottoboni (Venice 1667–Rome 1740), he sought a position at the papal court by exhibiting his scholarly talents in compiling a universal history.<sup>6</sup>

The universal history was a literary genre that accounted for major historical events and achievements that were deemed predetermined and shared around the globe. As a Christian typology, it held that history abided by a divine plan set in motion at Creation.<sup>7</sup> Bianchini structured his historical narrative in the following way: there were two volumes, the first with 40 chapters, and the second with 80. The first volume accounted for the main achievements of humankind from Creation to the age of Augustus, i.e., with the beginning of the Christian story. The other volume encompassed the years 0–800 and 800–1600, respectively in

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4 Biographies of Bianchini include John L. Heilbron: *The Incomparable Monsignore: Francesco Bianchini's world of science, history and court intrigue*, Oxford 2022; Brigitte Sölch: *Francesco Bianchini (1662–1729) und die Anfänge öffentlicher Museen in Rom*, Munich 2007; Francesco Uglietti: *Un erudite veronese alle soglie del settecento: Mons. Francesco Bianchini 1662–1729*, Verona 1986. For his scholarly work in astronomy, see Paolo Casini: Bianchini e la questione copernicana: tra Leibnitz e Newton, in Luca Ciano and Gian Paolo Romagnani (eds.): *Unità del sapere, molteplicità dei saperi: Francesco Bianchini (1662–1729) tra natura, storia e religione*, Verona 2010, pp. 9–32 and John L. Heilbron: Bianchini as an Astronomer, in Valentin Kockel and Brigitte Sölch (eds.): *Francesco Bianchini (1662–1729) und die europäische gelehrte Welt um 1700*, Berlin 2005, pp. 57–82; in archaeology, Giuseppe Pucci: L'archeologia di Francesco Bianchini, in Luca Ciano and Gian Paolo Romagnani (eds.): *Unità del sapere, molteplicità dei saperi: Francesco Bianchini (1662–1729) tra natura, storia e religione*, Verona 2010, pp. 259–270.

5 For Bianchini's scholarly training, see Heilbron 2022 (see note 4), pp. 7–41; Sölch 2007 (see note 4), pp. 24–27; Giuseppe Ricuperati: Francesco Bianchini e l'idea di storia universale «figurata», in *Rivista storica italiana* 117 (2005), pp. 872–943, esp. pp. 872–878; Irene Favaretto: Ogni genera d'erudite anticaglie. Francesco Bianchini e l'ambiente veronese, in Valentin Kockel and Brigitte Sölch (eds.): *Francesco Bianchini (1662–1729) und die europäische gelehrte Welt um 1700*, Berlin 2005, pp. 27–40.

6 Heilbron 2022 (see note 4), p. 42f.; Sölch 2007 (see note 4), p. 30; Ricuperati 2005 (see note 5), p. 894.

7 On the history and intellectual scope of the universal history as a literary type, see Tamara Griggs: Universal History from Counter-Reformation to Enlightenment, in *Modern Intellectual History* 4 (2007), pp. 219–247; Ricuperati 2005 (see note 5), pp. 878–881.

two sections, to relate history from the birth of Christ to Bianchini's own age. When other intellectual obligations filled Bianchini's days, he left the project unfinished after issuing only the first 32 chapters of volume one, thus ending his history with the dissolution of the Assyrian empire and the rise of new types of governance, including those of rule by law.<sup>8</sup>

The regard for the universal history as a literary type had run its course by the dawn of the 18th century.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, Bianchini's *istoria universale* was well received in large part because of its singular focus on ancient artifacts as convincing evidence of the historical past. In 1697, Bianchini was not alone in commandeering the visual evidence from the past to explain history, nor even, as he did, in incorporating the history of Asia and other exotic non-Western parts of the globe as part of the narrative.<sup>10</sup> However, he was unusual in providing an understanding of how the artifacts were able to convey history in a more truthful and powerful way than texts. Furthermore, he described his method of assembling illustrations of the artifacts. They were presented as pastiches or compendia which through the compilation of parts indicated the universal nature of the history.<sup>11</sup>

These pastiches are Bianchini's own design (Fig. 1).<sup>12</sup> He was a good draftsman and his notebooks are filled with drawings of all types of antique objects.<sup>13</sup>

8 Francesco Bianchini: *La istoria universale provata con monumenti, e figurata con simboli de gli antichi*, Rome 1697, p. 43; pp. 538–572.

9 Heilbron 2022 (see note 4), p. 43; Griggs 2007 (see note 7).

10 Arnaldo Momigliano: Ancient History and the Antiquarian, in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13, 3/4 (1950), pp. 285–315, esp. pp. 299–307.

11 Carlo R. Chiarlo: Considerazioni sull'apparato illustrative de »La Istoria Universale«: le immagini relative ai monumenti classici, in Luca Ciano and Gian Paolo Romagnani (eds.): *Unità del sapere, molteplicità dei saperi: Francesco Bianchini (1662–1729) tra natura, storia e religione*, Verona 2010, pp. 245–258, here pp. 247–248.

12 Uglietti 1986 (see note 4), p. 46 notes that Bianchini's images were engraved by A. Zuliani. Barbazza (Bianchini 1747 [see note 1], unpagged: »Al discreto Lettore« claims that the plates for the 1697 version were by Pietro Santi Bartoli; see Cristiano Giometti: Francesco Bianchini (1662–1729) e Pietro di Bartoli (1635–1700). *La istoria universale provata con monumenti figurate con simboli degli antichi*, in Ulrich Pfisterer and Cristina Ruggero (eds.): *Phönix aus der Asche: Bildwerdung der Antike: Druckgrafiken bis 1869*, Petersberg 2019, pp. 309–310. Heilbron 2020, p. 50, believes that Bianchini may have engraved his own small images, including the pastiches under consideration in this article, while Bartoli designed and engraved the more complex book illustrations, such as the frontispiece.

13 For an example of some of his sketches, see Brigitte Sölch: Bianchini e l'inizio dei musei pubblici a Roma, in Brigitte Sölch, »Bianchini e l'inizio dei musei pubblici a Roma«, in Luca Ciano and Gian Paolo Romagnani (eds.): *Unità del sapere, molteplicità dei saperi: Francesco Bianchini (1662–1729) tra natura, storia e religione*, Verona 2010, pp. 309–321, figs. 23–25, 27, 31. For

However, for *La istoria universale*, Bianchini copied the component parts of his pastiches from other sources, from illustrated publications by antiquarians and collectors.<sup>14</sup> Within Bianchini's most elaborate assemblages, most of the rules of composition regarding the naturalistic renderings of objects are suspended. The individual artifacts in the pastiche are rendered in a manner that do not account for their true size in relation to each other. They are sometimes seen as fragmented even if the original objects were not broken. Furthermore, the assemblage is shown as if all its parts exist in the one shallow space. As fascinating as Bianchini's pastiches are, his print of the so-called Ripostiglio surpasses them in terms of imaginative representation.

### The Unusual Print

»An earthenware vessel made of foreign clay, flecked with shiny filaments of a golden color and scattered with marble flakes, containing amulets and seals, 36 figures of men and 19 different animals, [was] found in the Roman campagna among the ancient ruins in 1696. They all seem to belong to the history of the Deluge, used in ethnic worship according to the sacred annuals instituted by Deucalion [...].«<sup>15</sup>

The print illustrates a broken vase filled with small objects (**Fig. 3**). The vase was found in 1696, just outside Rome, and was brought to Bianchini's attention by fellow antiquarian Francesco Ficoroni.<sup>16</sup> Its unusual clay body suggested it was manufactured beyond Rome. No more information about its provenance is known.

The vase was filled with figurines, amulets and other objects. Given the nature of most of these objects – e.g., the pairs of animals, as well as a wooden

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Bianchini's drawings in the Archivio Capitolare in Verona, see Massimo Tinazzi: Un approccio archeoastronomico ante litteram. Francesco Bianchini e il suo metodo per fondere archeologia, storia e astronomia, in: Maria T. Fulco (ed.): *III Congresso Nazionale di Archeoastronomia, Astronomia antica e culturale e Astronomia storica*, Naples 2005, pp. 73–85.

14 Chiarlo 2010 (see note 11), pp. 248–258; Ricuperati 2005 (see note 5), pp. 926–935.

15 Bianchini 1697 (see note 8), p. 258. This is the first half of the inscription on the print. Translation is by author.

16 Bianchini 1697 (see note 8), pp. 178–179. On Ficoroni as antiquarian, see Ronald T. Ridley: *The Prince of Antiquarians: Francesco de Ficoroni*, Rome 2017; Tamara Griggs: The Local Antiquary in Eighteenth-Century Rome, in *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 69/2 (2008), pp. 280–314.

box with rivets that resembled an ark –, Bianchini surmised that together they represented the Great Flood, a fundamental moment in the universal history. More specifically, he thought it represented the myth of Deucalion, which was itself indirect evidence of the Biblical Flood.<sup>17</sup> What seems clear is that Bianchini was fascinated with the vase and its contents, and at the last moment, he added its illustration to what had been a very well-planned book structure. This hasty decision suggests that he believed that it was of great value as an artifact that proved a significant historical moment, one associated with a seismic leap in human achievement. To Bianchini, that moment was the shift in how man worshipped his god. After the Great Flood, humans abandoned mystical reenactments of important events of divine intervention as central to their rituals and instead embraced worship in front of simulacra of omniscient gods.<sup>18</sup> Whereas a ritual reenactment celebrated a timely transaction between humankind and its gods, worship in front of a statue of a god indicated an enduring and more abstract relationship between humans and deities. The vase, as Bianchini described it, was an object used in a ritualized remembrance of the Flood, and thus belonged to an archaic and obsolete age, one that would eventually be eclipsed.

According to Bianchini, the vase functioned like this.<sup>19</sup> There were two sections of the biconic vase. A tilted brass plate separated the two chambers, one above and one below. There were locking mechanisms to keep it in position. The lower chamber, hidden from view, held the rivetted wooden box representing the ark. In addition, there were 38 small bronze figurines, male and female, all nude, and maintaining various postures. The postures, he argued, were responses to threats of dying by drowning. Some covered their mouths and a few their anuses, presumably to stop the flow of water into their bodies. In search of escape from rising waters, some figures were perched atop others' shoulders. Additionally, there were 19 pairs of animals of all types. In the upper chamber above were large stone amulets of five different designs.

Bianchini surmised how the object was used during the ritual. The vase was filled with water during a mystical ceremony. That water seeped into the lower chamber, which would then activate the figures beneath as they floated upwards. They dislocated the plate, and all objects moved to the rim of the vase. A modern

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<sup>17</sup> Griggs 2007 (see note 7), pp. 224–226.

<sup>18</sup> Bianchini 1697 (see note 8), pp. 216–218.

<sup>19</sup> Bianchini 1697 (see note 8), pp. 180–183.



reader might note that this account of the ritual stretches the limits of the credible. Was it possible for the bronze figurines to rise upward so forcefully? To add credence to his interpretation, Bianchini notes some historical prototypes. These include passages in classical literature that identify the use of boxes or vases in rituals to a specific god or goddess. These also includes some Egyptian images, specifically, from a frieze found at the base of an obelisk in Rome. Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680), the German Jesuit polymath known for his work on the Egyptian language, recorded the frieze in 1654 (Fig. 5).<sup>20</sup> He believed it represented figures engaged in a ritual dedicated to Isis as described by the second-century author Apuleius. Jacob Spon and Gisbert Cuper, in 1679 and 1687 respectively, isolated and published the figure in the lower level and third from left.<sup>21</sup> It depicts a woman in long garb who is holding a vase from which emerges a figurine. Bianchini believed it depicted a ceremony comparable to the one in which the Ripostiglio was used.

Most of the objects found in the vase are still extant and now form part of the Etruscan collections of the Museo Archaeologico Nazionale di Napoli.<sup>22</sup> However, the vase, which was broken during its retrieval in 1696, has not survived, nor has much of the wooden structure beyond the metal hinges and rivets. Most of the figurines and amulets still exist; the reader should be aware that some are not deemed authentically prehistoric.<sup>23</sup>

## The Unusual Graphic Conventions

»We present the size of the original in figure 2 [in the lower right of the print]. In figure 3 [in the center of the print], the box [that resembles an ark] and the brass plate [that separates the two chambers] are reduced a third of the true size, but the proportion of the parts is retained [...].«<sup>24</sup>

20 Athanasius Kircher: *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, Rome 1654, vol. 3, p. 426.

21 Jacob Spon: *Miscellanea eruditae antiquitatis*, Frankfurt a. M./Venice 1679, p. 306; Gisbert Cuper: *Harpocrates, sive explicatio imagunculae argenteae perantiquae*, Utrecht 1687, p. 165.

22 Maria Morisco: II.3. Il Ripostiglio Bianchini nella Collezione Borgia, in Valentino Nizzi (ed.): *Gli Etruschi e il MANN*, Naples 2020, pp. 282–287; Floriana Miele: II.2. La Collezione Borgia nel Real Museo Borbonico, in Valentino Nizzi (ed.): *Gli Etruschi e il MANN*, Naples 2020, pp. 258–259; Loredana Mancini: Il Ripostiglio Bianchini, in Marco Nocca (ed.): *Le quattro voci del mondo: arte, cultura e saperi nella collezione di Stefano Borgia, 1731–1804*, Naples 2001, pp. 132–135.

23 Morisco 2020 (see note 22).

24 Bianchini 1697 (see note 8), pp. 178–179. This is the second half of the inscription on the print. Translation is by author.



*Proceditque illis stipatum examine longo  
Vas Arabum Cilicumque fluit, floresque Sabai,  
Indorumque arsuræ seges.*

*Pompa Isiaca iuxta Apuleij descriptionem, ex hortis Mediceis.  
Pars Prior.*



*Pars Posterior.*



Odo.

Fig. 5 »Pompa Isiaca iuxta Apuleij descriptionem«, in: Athanasius Kircher: *Oedipus aegyptiacus: hoc est Uniuersalis hieroglyphicae veterum doctrinae temporis iniuria abolitae instauration*, vol. 3, *Theatrum Hieroglyphicum*, Rome 1654, p. 426

The vase and its contents are illustrated in at least three locations in the print: in the lower left of the print, in its center, and in the lower right. The vase is shown in its smallest scale at the lower left (indicated as »A« on the print). It is represented with a portion at the top broken, i.e., as it had been found. It was also spliced to reveal a scenographic section, i.e., one that displays the objects within as if in a perspectival construction like a stage set. Inside the vase are the ark (»G«), the figures and other items in the two levels. Some of those figures and items spill out of the interior and present themselves in the space in front of the vase, in the space equivalent to a proscenium.

In the center of the print, there is a larger version of the vase, also seen in a scenographic section. Given its dominant presence in the illustration's frame, the vase's upper portion is cut off. Again, the objects are displayed both within the interior of the vase and immediately outside it. In the lower right of the print is another and slightly bigger iteration of the vase with some human and animal figures, including some of the vase's interior mechanical workings (»H«, »L«). Additionally, some of the objects appear in the top margins of the print, both right and left of the central vase, some seeming overly large amulets.

At first inspection it seems there are three presentations of the same things, in three different scales. But this is not wholly the case. There is significant variance in the size of objects in all parts of the image. A comparison to the original objects now in Naples makes this clear. In reality, the human figurines are nearly the same size, about 3.7 cm high.<sup>25</sup> Despite this, Bianchini has varied their sizes randomly throughout the image. For example, there are two outsized figures, male and female (»19«, »20«), behind the ladder located to the left of the large vase, while smaller figures cluster both at the base of the ladder and beside it, atop the ark structure. Furthermore, the figures in the lower right margin of the image – a woman on the shoulders of a man whose eyes she covers (»10«), a woman on the shoulders of two men whose mouths she covers, and a trio of people standing on the back of a prone figure – are just slightly bigger than the figures at the base of the ladder but slightly smaller than the figures behind it.

In addition, the amulets vary in size tremendously. In the small vase, their size in relationship to the figurines seems correct, as per the surviving amulets in Naples. But in the large vase, in the upper chamber, they are diminutive relative to the vase, and strung together into a necklace. The amulets appear again in the upper margins and are very large, in a size that in fact more correctly

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25 Mancini 2001 (see note 22), p. 133, fig. 41.

captured its true size in relation to the vase. Thus, the juxtaposition of the different versions of the amulets is jarring. Moreover, in the upper right corner of the illustration, the amulets are overlapped with one another in a way that creates alarming compositions. The leaf amulet appears near the bull's head and suggests that the viewer is looking at the head of a winged bull. The cylinder amulet appears just above the fist and creates the sense of a giant forearm seemingly pressing down on the tilted plate in the vase, which in turn looks as if it is about to flatten the human figures below it.

Furthermore, it is disarming to the viewer that there is no indication within the image that such changes of size or spatial relationship has been enacted. There is no pictorial indicator that alerts the viewer to the fact that these are big or small versions of the objects. Also, there is nothing that provides a rationale for the changes in object placement. In other words, the image does not abide by the rules of a linear perspective construction, where changes in the size and placement of figures signal a change in the illusionistic depth of an image, a depth that is achieved using the rules of geometry. Even the shadowing, which for the most part is consistent, fails in places, as in the figure in the foreground with her back to the viewer («17»). In short, the conventions of rendering the pictorial world in a naturalistic way do not always abide here. In this, Bianchini denied the viewer a fixed viewing point, which unsettles the viewer, who is left untethered. The center does not hold; things appear to shift, to move, as they would, perhaps, during a prehistoric mystical ritual.<sup>26</sup>

There is one last indicator that the image does not just unsettle the viewer, but that it employs methods to animate the objects within. In the front and center of the image, Bianchini depicted a female lion who paces behind her partner. She turns her head to snarl at the viewer. Bianchini had noted with some chagrin that although the figurines in the vase included pairs of animals, they were not indicated as being male or female. Nonetheless, in the pictorial version, he identified one of the animals by its sex in the lactating lioness who comes to life for the viewer.

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<sup>26</sup> The suspension of some rules of naturalistic rendering reminds of a 18th-century Venetian pictorial tradition, as seen in works by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696–1770). See Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall: *Tiepolo and the Pictorial Intelligence*, New Haven 1994, pp. 1–17, who explore the descriptive quality of the painter's imagery.

## Barbazza's New Print

The redesign of the print of the Ripostiglio, undertaken for the issue of 1747, clearly eradicates some of the problematic graphic conventions of the original (Fig. 4). Given that Barbazza's preface makes clear that he believes this is a better version of the original, it insinuates that the print of 1697 was deemed unacceptable in some way.

Barbazza's version adheres to more traditional graphic conventions and thus mitigates the sense of unease in the viewer. He corrected the figurines so that in the main there are three sizes. The largest are in the right of the print and in the foreground; the medium-sized are in the large vase in the center; and the smallest are in the left. The amulets within the large vase are still too small relative to their real size. However, the larger amulets at the upper margin are not overlapped in a manner that created unusual composite forms. Lastly, Barbazza added some gradation in the shading of the background that helped create the illusion of separate spaces for clusters of related objects.

Today little is known about the career and oeuvre of Antonio Giuseppe Barbazza.<sup>27</sup> Born in Rome in 1720 or 1722, the young artist obtained permission to reissue Bianchini's book in 1745. The project required the skills of a faithful reproductive printmaker. Barbazza was savvy to pursue and secure a dedication to King Louis XV of France, an avid patron of the sciences, and whose predecessor Louis XIV was Bianchini's dedicated supporter. In some ways, the project was a success for Barbazza, who soon thereafter worked with Giuseppe Bianchini, Francesco's nephew, engraving plates for one of the uncle's unfinished projects. Barbazza thereafter had opportunities for work in France and in Spain, where he spent the last years of his life.<sup>28</sup>

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27 Born in Rome in 1720 or 1722, he was a printmaker and a painter. He lived for a time in Bologna, travelled to France for a short time, and by 1771, had emigrated to Spain; see Emmanuel Bénézit: *Bénézit Dictionary of Artists: English edition* (1911), vol. 1, Paris 2006, pp. 1110–1111.

28 Brigitte Sölch: Das »Museo Ecclesiastico«: Beginn einer neuen Sammlungsära im Vatikan, in Valentin Kockel and Brigitte Sölch (eds.): *Francesco Bianchini (1662–1729) und die europäische gelehrte Welt um 1700*, Berlin 2005, pp. 179–205, esp. p. 187, n. 30.

The Venetian printmaker Giovanni Battista Piranesi (Venice 1720–Rome 1778) arrived in Rome in 1740. Like his contemporary Barbazza, Piranesi actively sought work in the 1740s, but he was not always successful.<sup>29</sup> I have argued elsewhere that Piranesi's *Grotteschi*, a set of four prints created in 1748, might have been his attempt to illustrate major themes of Bianchini's universal history. The images are in the capricci tradition, and each of the four contains a motif that corresponds to categories Bianchini established to distinguish the major historical eras: fragments, water, stars, and authors or herms.<sup>30</sup>

Piranesi had access to Bianchini's publications in the library of his early patron Nicola Giobbe.<sup>31</sup> In the 1750s, Piranesi used some illustrations from Bianchini's *Camera ed iscrizioni sepolcrali de' liberti, servi, ed ufficiali della casa di Livia*, 1727, for his publication of a similar title, c. 1750, and then reused them in volume two of his *Antichità Romane*, 1756.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Bianchini's essay calculating the depth of the Lago Albano appears in Piranesi's exploration of the famous emissary of that lake, published in 1764.<sup>33</sup>

*Antichità Romane* is Piranesi's largest work in terms of number of bound prints, and one of his first to treat Rome's ancient monuments as products of

29 Marco Bevilacqua: The Young Piranesi: the Itineraries of his Formation, in Mario Bevilacqua, Heather Hyde Minor and Fabio Barry (eds.): *The Serpent and the Stylus: Essays on G.B. Piranesi*, Ann Arbor 2006, pp. 13–53, esp. p. 32–33; Susan M. Dixon: Vasi, Piranesi and the Accademia degli Arcadi: towards a definition of Arcadianism in the arts, in *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 61 (2016), pp. 219–262.

30 Susan M. Dixon: Piranesi and Francesco Bianchini's 'L'istoria universale': capricci in the service of pre-scientific archaeology, in *Art History* 22 (1999), pp. 184–214, esp. pp. 196–199; Bianchini 1697 (see note 8), p. 23.

31 Georges Brunel: Recherches sur les début de Piranèse a Rome: les frères Pagliarini et Nicola Giobbe, in Georges Brunel (ed.): *Piranèsè et les français*, Florence 1976, pp. 77–146, esp. p. 110, 392v, p. 118, 407v.

32 Roberta Battaglia: Da Francesco Bianchini a Giovan Battista Piranesi: L'illustrazione delle camere sepolcrali dei liberti di Livia, in *Dialoghi di storia dell'arte* 2 (1996), pp. 58–81, esp. pp. 66–75; see Augusta Monferini: Antichità Romane, in Alessandro Bettagno (ed.): *Piranesi: Incisioni Rami Legature Architetture*, Venice 1978, pp. 33–39, here pp. 34–35 on the dating and the title of the publication.

33 Giovanni Battista Piranesi: *Descrizione e disegno dell'emissario del Lago Albano*, Rome 1762, p. 2, n. a; John L. Heilbron: Bianchini and natural philosophy, in Luca Ciancio and Gian Paolo Romagnani (eds.): *Unità del sapere, molteplicità dei saperi: Francesco Bianchini (1662–1729) tra natura, storia e religione*, Verona 2010, pp. 33–74, esp. pp. 62–63, n. 90.

the past.<sup>34</sup> Its four volumes are comprised of mainly prints and explanatory indexes, with a short preface expounding on Piranesi's intent. The first and fourth volumes contain illustrations of Rome's ancient infrastructure – its walls, gates, bridges and aqueducts – as well as other monuments that are examples of Rome's virtuosity in structural engineering.<sup>35</sup> Volume two and three showcase what was perhaps the most plentiful examples of ancient Roman monuments, its tombs and their contents.

*Antichità Romane* is a tour de force in showcasing Piranesi's diverse methods of representation. It hints at what would become one of Piranesi's unique accomplishments, the spectacular and daring combinations of those methods in one print. The volumes include: *vedute* of ancient monuments taken from a central viewpoint or from a diagonal one; orthogonal drawings such as plans and sections; and objects on display, sometimes floating against a blank page or, in a particular favorite design of Piranesi's, adorning shelves.<sup>36</sup> Piranesi's repertoire of graphic conventions is nearly as diverse as the content of his prints.

This variety reflects something of the growing pains in archaeological texts in the eighteenth century, whose illustrators were searching for the most effective means to convey information. At same time, the discipline of archaeology itself was transforming, from an activity to salvage collectable works of art to one that valued recording, if not necessarily saving, the archaeological context and the historical information it provided. Scholars have noted that artists at first employed methods of illustration from other scientific disciplines. Stephanie Moser has demonstrated that the illustrative methods from the field of the natural sciences were applied to the *vetera monumenta*, a book type dedicated to the display of ancient objects.<sup>37</sup> Single objects are isolated and set as if pinned against a blank background. Often a group of similar objects appear together on the same page. Roberta Battaglia and Valentin Kockel, considering the illustrations in Bianchini's and others' publications of the famous Tomb of the House of Livia, indicate the methods that were borrowed from the architectural profession – perspectival, orthogonal, and scenographic drawings, and

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34 Luigi Ficacci: *Giovanni Battista Piranesi: the Complete Etchings/Gesamtkatalog der Radierungen/Catalogue raisonné des eaux-fortes*, 2 vols., Cologne 2015, vol. 1, pp. 9–17.

35 See Monferini 1978 (see note 32), pp. 36–37 on the topographical arrangement of the prints.

36 For example, see Giovanni Battista Piranesi: *Le Antichità Romane*, 4 vols., Rome 1756, vol. 2, pl. 13–15, 18, 45, 46, 49.

37 Stephanie Moser: Making Expert Knowledge through the Image: Connections between Antiquarian and Early Modern Scientific Illustration, in *Isis*, 105 (2014), pp. 58–99.

some combination of these.<sup>38</sup> François de Polignac notes how artists staged the ancient tombs with visitors who performed different kinds of activities, and thus how this affects the way the viewer of the illustration understands the intent of the archaeological endeavor.<sup>39</sup> All these authors note that these varied approaches to illustration convey certain interpretations of the past. In his day, Piranesi seems to have paid attention to the available repertoire of methods of illustration and their effects, because prints in *Antichità Romane* demonstrate that he borrowed widely from them.

I argue here that even among the emergent methods of archaeological illustration at Piranesi's disposal, seven prints in *Antichità Romane* are curiously distinctive. These prints reveal a kinship with the way Bianchini treated the Ripostiglio. For example, one print depicts the sarcophagus of Alexander Severus and his mother Iulia Mammea from the imperial mausoleum near the Via Appia, in multiple ways (Fig. 6). At the left and right sides of the print are the sarcophagus' short elevations, adorned in relief sculpture that narrates uncommon episodes in the story of the Rape of the Sabine women. Featured on the right is a relief of Hersilia imploring her husband Romulus to resolve the conflict with the Sabine tribe with diplomacy. On the left is the celebration of the outcome of the results. The side elevations appear to be suspended in the print without any visible support. Between the two reliefs, and at a much smaller scale, is an orthogonal section of the sarcophagus. The reliefs are visible in this section as well. They are positioned so that in the interstice between the large versions of the reliefs and their smaller counterparts, the figures, which are of vastly different sizes, reach out and interact in a comical way. Additionally, in the upper right of the print is an alternative section of the sarcophagus, in the smaller size. And in the upper left, there is a fragment with a relief of Hersilia's knot, a symbol of marriage, its original position as part of the sarcophagus unexplained.

An onyx vase decorated with cameo relief is rendered in four places throughout the print, always within the empty sarcophagus, presumably where it was found at the time of its discovery. It appears twice at a small size, in situ within

38 Roberta Battaglia: Da Francesco Bianchini a Giovan Battista Piranesi: L'illustrazione delle camere sepolcrali dei liberti di Livia, in: *Dialoghi di storia dell'arte*, 2 (1996), pp. 58–81; Valentin Kockel: Ichnographia – Orthographia – Scenographia. Abbildungsmodi antiker Architektur am Beispiel des »Columbarium der Liberti der Livia«, in Valentin Kockel and Brigitte Sölch (eds.): *Francesco Bianchini (1662–1729) und die europäische gelehrte Welt um 1700*, Berlin 2005, pp. 107–134.

39 François de Polignac: *Field, sites and finds: Images of archaeological investigations and self-representations of antiquarians in Early 18th cent. Rome*, Rome 2002 [<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00177814>].



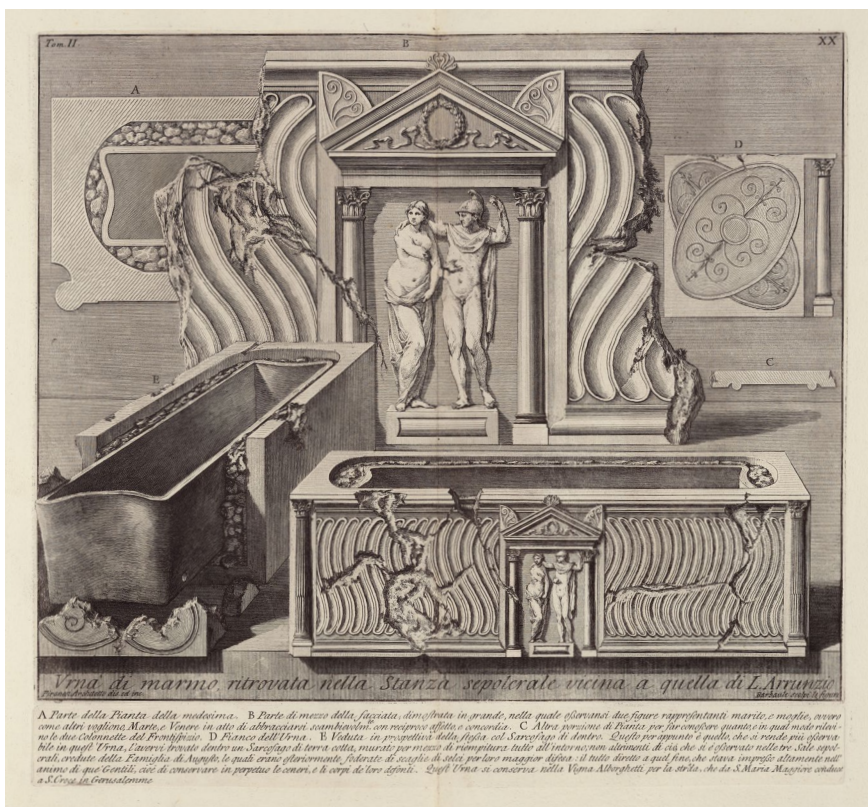


Fig. 6 »Grande Urna di marmo creduta di Alessandro Severo e di Giulia Mamea sua madre«, in: Giovanni Battista Piranesi: *Le Antichità Romane*, vol. 2, Rome 1756, pl. 35

each of the sections of the sarcophagus. Then, at the lower center of the image is a larger version of the vase, with some mythological figures on display.<sup>40</sup> Here the vase is also in situ, but only the crumbling mesh-and-concrete inner walls of the sarcophagus are visible. Additionally, at the upper center of the print, the vase is depicted in yet another size altogether, and seen from below. The base is decorated in relief with a profile portrait bust of a matronly figure, possibly Iulia Mammea.

The composition's affinity to that of the Ripostiglio print is noteworthy. They both represented only one object, albeit an object of many parts. It is presented many times over, in varying sizes and in differing methods of

<sup>40</sup> Piranesi 1756 (see note 36), vol. 2, pls. 31–34 also depict the Tomb of Alexander Severus and his mother. Pl. 31 is a plan of the tomb suspended above a veduta of the landscape in which the tomb is located; pl. 32 is a section through the tomb; pl. 33 is a perspective of the front of the sarcophagus; and pl. 33 depicts two elevations, with figures in outline: the relief from the back of the sarcophagus, and the vase represented as a continuous relief.



**Fig. 7** »Urna di marmo ritrovata nella Stanza vicina a quella di Arrunzio«, in: Giovanni Battista Piranesi: *Le Antichità Romane*, vol. 2, Rome 1756, pl. 20

representation – orthogonal and perspectival, among others. Furthermore, these versions are set against a shallow non-descript background. Indications of spatial depth are apparent throughout, however. For example, the vase in the central lower area appears to sit on a shelf, and there are cast shadows both within the relief sculpture and around the various versions of the sarcophagus. Piranesi repeats this overall scheme for representing a sarcophagus in a few other prints in *Antichità Romane*, including a sarcophagus from the tomb of the Family of Lucius Arruntii, found in 1733 near the Porta Maggiore (**Fig. 7**). It is depicted in plan – note the very small skewed perspectival plan in the right central part of the print –, elevation, perspectival view, and details, in varying sizes and methods of representation. The jumbled mix of images owes much to Bianchini. But what did his pictorial choices achieve for Piranesi?

Bianchini's objective in the print of the Ripostiglio was to evoke the ritualistic use of the object, which he described in his text. Piranesi, however, offered no description of the rituals of ancient Roman burial practice by inhumation to accompany his images. Rather, in *Antichità Romane*, as elsewhere in his oeuvre, Piranesi identifies himself as an architect rather than a historian or antiquarian. In this role, he famously scolded his fellow architects who had overlooked Roman antiquity which proffered examples of optimal design. He then proceeded to illustrate innumerable examples of it for their edification.<sup>41</sup> Thus what he delivered in many of his images of his publication is an abundance of evidence not only about how the ancient structures and objects looked, but also about how they were constructed and how they functioned. They provide vibrant visual testimony of Rome's burial practices, which in turn is linked to the cultural identity of ancient Romans.

Caroline van Eck has considered the designs of Piranesi's candelabra which are excessive in their display of antique forms. She argues that the artist's amassing of visual forms reflects his »ongoing attempt to recreate the material culture of Roman religion,« noting that the physical presence of ancient Rome was showcased in the surviving objects that comprised much of the candelabra designs.<sup>42</sup> Although Piranesi did not himself express this idea, his contemporaries noted that indeed the artist had the ability to recreate and to animate the past. Charles Townley, the British collector of antiquities, for example, stated that Piranesi »was the only one capable of bringing back to life antiquity,« while Legrand, one of Piranesi's biographers, recorded how the artist infused a kind of life spirit into his prints of antiquities.<sup>43</sup> Piranesi's motivations for choosing Bianchini's unusual methods of representation seem similar to Bianchini's: to communicate a sense of how the ancient Romans created, handled, and used their objects.

Today scholars often comment on the spirit of vitality found in many of Piranesi's prints of the ancient world, e.g., that the sculpted figures seem alive, reacting to their surroundings, and that the ruinous marble surfaces abound with propagating vegetation (Fig. 8). By rendering the object in multiple ways in one print, in varying sizes and methods of representation, Piranesi pushes the viewer to constantly shift their gaze and reassess what it is that they see

41 Piranesi 1756 (see note 36), vol. 1, unpaginated: »Prefazione agli studiosi delle antichità romane.«

42 Caroline Van Eck: *Piranesi's Candelabra and the Presence of the Past: Excessive Objects and the Emergence of a Style in the Age of Neoclassicism*, Oxford 2023, p. 73.

43 Van Eck 2023 (see note 42), p. 123. On Legrand's biography, see Bevilacqua 2006 (see note 29), p. 14, n. 5.





Fig. 8 Fantasy View of Via Appia, in: Giovanni Battista Piranesi: *Le Antichità Romane*, vol. 2, Rome 1756, pl. 2

and comprehend. This pictorial strategy, presenting startlingly cluttered views of the antique object, is another way to animate the past. For Bianchini, the experiment in this method of representation went no further. But for Piranesi, it generated other types of archaeological illustrations, wherein a plethora of information about an ancient monument or object appears in one print. In one variation of this method of representation, Piranesi separated the different bits of visual information into compartments by means of the illusionistic framing devices – a tacked piece of parchment, a fragmented stone surface, or a rope – to create some of his most sumptuous imagery, albeit also some of the most challenging prints to understand.<sup>44</sup> However, archaeologists of the nineteenth century did not adopt this type of pictorial strategy. In that sense, Bianchini's *Ripostiglio* and Piranesi's sarcophagus prints signal the end of an attitude that

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Piranesi 1762 (see note 33), pls. 1–4, 7; Susan M. Dixon: The Sources and Fortunes of Piranesi's archaeological illustrations, in Dana Arnold and Stephen Bending (eds.): *Tracing Architecture: Aesthetics of Antiquarianism*, London 2004, pp. 49–67; John A. Pinto: *Speaking Ruins: Piranesi, Architects, and Antiquity in Eighteenth-Century Rome*, Ann Arbor 2012, pp. 169–187.

ancient objects can conjure up the vibrancy of cultures long gone, as archaeological illustrations become more scientific and more standardized.

## Conclusion

Bianchini's unusual image of the Ripostiglio, without precedent in terms of graphic representation, is quirky in its approach to conveying information about an antique object to the viewer. This involved repeating the object, in different sizes, throughout the print, and with various suspended rules of traditional realistic renderings. It required the viewer to focus attention and to synthesize the variety of information presented. Under the viewer's intense scrutiny, the rendered object comes to life in a way that suggests its ritualistic use in ancient times. Only Piranesi, always attentive to the communicative properties of images, borrowed and adapted this type of representation from Bianchini, for a similar purpose. In the busy images of sarcophagi in *Antichità Romane*, he projects the essence of ancient Roman funerary practices.

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