# Not just an environment

## Role and significance of ruins in 17th c. Italian art through the example of Viviano Codazzi

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On 1686 Innocenzo XI enacted a law in order to stop the massive appropriation of ancient objects by local people in Rome, and to prevent a systematic but non-authorized exportation of them abroad by tourists[1]. The Pope's concern can be interpreted as a clear symptom of the tremendous interest aroused by antique objects in the 17th century.

Since the first archaeological discoveries, classical culture was a reference for artists and literates, the goal to be achieved in perfection and grace. Its moral precepts and values were seen by all as guidelines for conduct[2]. However, contrary to what tends to happen with the passage of time, the enthusiastic love for the classical world was also alive almost two centuries later, gradually focusing on something more concrete, like antiquities and ancient ruins. While having a walk through the Roman *Forum*[3] a 17th c. young bourgeois would have seen himself surrounded by witnesses of the world's longest empire, reminding him how important this empire was, and how small he was instead, and in the very moment the desire evoked in him, as precise as deep: to go and grab one of them. The Pontifex therefore felt obliged to pass a law to stop the theft of Roman artefacts over which there was no control. This is why from the late Cinquecento onwards paintings of ruins and ancient buildings were so popular and desired by merchants and artists.

It comes as no surprise the complaint Carlo Cesare Malvasia expressed in 1678[4], while noticing that so many of his contemporary painters had decided to specialise on this specific *genre*: everywhere

[1] This law was approved and then promulgated on 10 February 1686.

[2] See below.

[3] It is worth noting that, from the very beginning of the Seicento period, visiting archaeological areas was so common that it contributed to the emergence of modern tourist guides and "*ciceroni*" – individuals tasked with walking through the city with you and relaying all the historical and cultural details of each site. This specific *genre* had a slow and progressive development from the monuments in background of historical paintings to making them an autonomous theme. Its popularity increased, but we don't have to think it was something completely new. See **L. Ozzola**, *Le rovine romane nella pittura del XVII e XVIII secolo*, „L'Arte" Vol. 16 (1913).

[4] **C. C. Malvasia**, *Felsina Pittrice*, Bologna 1678, Vol. 2.

1. Viviano Codazzi, Domenico Gargiulo, *Constantine's Triumphal Entry in Rome*, 1636–1638, oil on canvas, 155 × 355 cm; Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid. Photo: Courtesy of Museo Nacional del Prado

archaeological sites were visitable (not only Rome, but also Naples and the vicinity of both those cities). Their elements, all or just some of them, where so often demanded as subjects for paintings, that artists who were in need to satisfy customers and art market had no other options: they had to choose to paint antiquities (at that time, that was the only way to secure commissions and earn a daily living[5]). This type of pictures was requested not only by visitors but also by locals, proud of their heritage and culture.

Even in its consistency on themes – monuments built during the Roman period – the depiction of antiquities has always had some internal distinctions[6] according to **how** these elements were represented: wide open landscapes dotted with ruins or huge early **wrecks**[7] had nothing in common with the perspective paintings, where the whole monument was painted – even reconstructed by the artist – in a mathematical way and perfect in its proportions. Such canvases were also intended to convey a very different ambience: on the one hand, a melancholic sense of the unstoppable passage of time, on the other, the grandeur and marvellousness of the Roman period[8].

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Ancient monuments were often depicted with various small figures inside and around them. Even if a certain thematic coherence between these and the architectural elements is expected, they are not always logically interrelated. On the contrary, it is not unusual to notice a wide historical or logical gap. The aim of this article is to search and analyse these inconsistencies within the *oeuvre* of the perspective painter Viviano Codazzi (Bergamo 1611c- Roma 1670)[9] and to try to understand the reasons artists felt the need to use ancient ruins as a background or as elements for a sacred scene, or *vice versa* why painters chose to put a Christian theme as the only narrative element of a ruin painting. Codazzi's artistic education was probably not focused on painting, but on architecture and sculpture, therefore it is not a surprise to discover that he had always represented buildings and monuments on canvases. Like his colleagues *prospettici* he had been training with topographical engravings, especially about ancient Rome and its streets. His precision on reproducing classical buildings made him extremely well known on the art market of

[10] It is well documented that often painters of views or architectures used to look and study topographical representations of cities – Rome in particular – and also maps and engravings. This obviously helped the artists to keep themselves close to reality. Nevertheless, as I have already mentioned, it was common for an artist to invent or recreate with imagination buildings which were real but no longer existent, or even think of some of them *ex novo*, for a specific purpose. Viviano Codazzi was able both to copy (and make) maps and to imagine and create architectures or antique city areas completely on his own.

[11] See below.

[12] To take a deeper look about these themes, see **J. Burkhardt**, *Geschichte der Renaissance in Italien*, Stuttgart 1878; *idem*, *La civiltà del Rinascimento in Italia*, Transl. F. Tarquini, Roma 1967; **L. Barkan**, *The Classical Undead: Renaissance and Antiquity Face to Face*, "RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics" 1998, No. 34.

[13] Actually, watching a representation of classical elements was (and still is) an immediate way to remember a historical episode, mostly educative and with a moral message within. Even without a narration of the whole fact, the suggestion of its environment or of some elements makes it easy to recall and tells everyone that the owner of the representation is comfortable with ancient history.

[14] See **G. Galli**, *La teoria estetica di Leon Battista Alberti e la retorica ciceroniana*, [in:] *Macchine nascoste. Discipline e tecniche di rappresentazione nella composizione architettonica*, Ed. **R. Palma**, **C. Ravagnatti**, Torino 2004.

[15] The scene is really unmistakable: Gargiulo painted in the sky a group of angels carrying a cross, which is an explicit reference about the vision Costantino had just before the battle against Massenzio, which predicted his victory in the name of the new Christian religion.

[16] While writing this essay and having a much attentive look at this element and those nearby, it seems more uncompleted than represented as damaged. Quite irrelevant for the present purpose, but I reserve the right to have a deeper inquiry on this point.

[17] The position of this element (or this group of elements) right behind the modern Palazzo dei Conservatori could make someone thinking about a representation of the *tabularium*. It is, however, impossible, due to the altitude of its ground (much lower in the real *tabularium*), and to the presence of a round-base temple. The monument is probably a product of the creativity of Viviano Codazzi, so confident with classical motifs and structures to combine Greek and Roman ones.

collectors who wished to gain a faithful image of the *Urbe* as it can be seen during a cultural tour, or as it could have been during the Roman Empire[10]. Nevertheless, Codazzi often did not work alone: he cooperated with some figure painters who were in charge to fill his open and ancient spaces with little scenes. What is known about the relationship of these specialised painters is that they were so close to each other – both in front of the easel and often during the preliminary phases of projecting the final scene – and that they were actually struggling to hide all the distinctions between their own hands. The compresence of **those** monuments and **those** scenes was on purpose, even when nowadays could be seen as incredible. This shows a lot about how long-lasting an ancient theme for a painting can be, how much the collectors were in need of pictures of this kind and the entity of the compromise between the classic profane world and the Christian one, to make someone decide to paint the paralytic of Bethesda inside the Baths of Caracalla[11].

The humanistic thought saw ancient world as a goal to achieve in its moral and didactic precepts[12], so it was natural to look for and try to get artworks with punctual and easy to recognise references to antiquity, especially for who belonged to a social reality without the educational tools to access the Roman literature. Pictures were essentials to both get closer to a *milieu* otherwise hard to acquaint, and to make this proximity seen[13]. Moreover, theoretical considerations about beauty and art had always considered the classical world as a model to imitate, not only because of the immortal grace of ancient sculptures, but also in a broader sense: the whole ancient literature, especially the structure of the rhetorical one, were considered a guideline to follow to learn how best to arrange elements in art[14].

It should be remembered, however, that classical culture and representations with classical themes do not always go together: in the 17th c., the possession of a painting of ruins or a representation of an ancient event was common even among the middle and low classes, without any cultural motives but only aesthetic and symbolic ones. In view of such separated pictorial and cultural significations, it would be easy to suppose that the criteria for choosing to combine worlds or situations that were distant from each other might have been based on personal considerations. Or even conditioned by latest trends. This makes clear that regardless on what someone had commissioned Codazzi or a figurist to paint, ancient architectures were present.

In order to realise the extent to which classical motifs migrated between different genres of painting, it is worth examining first two "typical" representations of antiquity in the 17th century. The first depiction, *Constantine's Triumphal Entry in Rome*, represents an event from the history of the Roman Empire: the victory of Costantino over Massenzio in the Ponte Milvio battle (312 AD) and the triumphal return of the new emperor to the *Urbe* [Fig. 1][15]. To give

the scene a certain historical coherence, Viviano Codazzi chose to depict ancient monuments in the background on the right, making the city, the historical moment and its antiquity instantly recognisable. The Colosseum is easy to locate, still standing in the same place without any loss – and the Arch of Constantine, which could not be seen in 312 AD because it was built and opened three years later to commemorate the exact moment of the emperor's ascension to the throne, but Codazzi probably thought it would be useful to make this moment and its context more easily clear to the viewer. In addition to these world-famous monuments, several other elements of ancient origin can be seen in the background: on the right a rather dilapidated piece of architecture[16] and on the left a religious building, proba-

2. Viviano Codazzi, Domenico Gargiulo, *Battle of Gladiators in an Amphitheatre*, 1630–1640, oil on canvas, 99,4 × 137 cm; Palazzo Butera in Palermo. Photo: Courtesy of Palazzo Butera

3. Viviano Codazzi, Adriaen van der Cabel, *Landscape with ruins and figures*, 1667, oil on canvas, 61 × 74 cm; Galleria Palatina di Palazzo Pitti in Florence. Photo: Courtesy of Palazzo Pitti

[18] The painting of the Prado Museum is one of the very first examples of coop-eration between Codazzi and Gargiulo, which would last for a long time and pro-duce lots of successful results (see **X. De Sales**, *Museo del Prado. Catàlogo de las pinturas*, Madrid 1972). The figure paint-er here is not so impressive and realistic, bus his intention to reproduce the Roman context as closely as possible is evident, especially in the costumes.

bly a temple[17]. Interestingly, what occupies most of the left part of the foreground is undoubtedly *Palazzo Dei Conservatori*. The painter had chosen to combine elements from different areas of Rome and from different moments of its history and to use them to set an event that actually took place in the city. Nevertheless, it is easy to see that in this case he has used ancient buildings to depict an ancient event: de-spite the inconsistency, the painting is an example of the "usual" com-bination of classical architecture and figures from classical history[18].

The same combination of buildings and scenes taking place in-side them can be seen in *Battle of Gladiators in an Amphitheatre* [Fig. 2], but this time Codazzi and Gargiulo did not paint a historical event, but simply an everyday scene from Roman life. There is a sort

of amphitheatre in whose centre some gladiators are gathered in couples and small groups, fighting each other with cruelty and tension; few of them, passed out or died, are laying on the floor, in front of the viewer. On both sides of the upper level there are plenty of people watching the fights, shouting, talking to each other and enjoying the show. A scene like this had to be common during the middle-late Roman period, it is known a lot of coeval sources describing these kinds of entertainment, and, at a first sight, the painting seems to reproduce them faithfully. If we take a closer look to the architectures, both in the foreground and in the background, it is quite hard to recognise something we know had existed. Moreover, it is difficult for the author of these words to imagine that amphitheatres – even the lesser-known ones – could have had the structure that the one painted by Codazzi appears to have[19]. Nevertheless, the clear intention of the artist was to recreate an architecture which could have been identified as undoubtedly classical by one of his contemporaries: for this purpose he had mixed, e.g. the circular form of the building with a pediment (apparently without any static utility), Ionic columns with Corinthian capitals. This painting is nothing else but a Roman daily scene within an architecture composed with classical and well-known elements. This time the aim of antiquities was not to recreate an appropriate context for a representation of a real ancient event, but was still coherent and coincident with what figures and scenes were suggesting.

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As already mentioned, classical elements and ruins were not only depicted in paintings intended to have an antique flavour, but were present throughout the history of art – especially in *pittura di genere* – conforming to the personal wishes of their owners, conditioned in turn by a current *Weltanschauung*. According to many scholars and art historians[20], the 17th c. was the period when painting genres referring to everyday reality were most popular. It was at that time that still lifes and the Flemish school of easel painting began to become widespread in middle-class tastes. And it was at that time when forms of art like the *Bambocciate*[21] began to catch the interest of the upper classes. Classical motifs have found a prominent role also in this *temperie* far from the Arcadia philosophical context, and also from the major contemporary painters of *vedute*: Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa[22]. So, many examples of pictures hosting various episodes of rural life – such as popular festivals, the relax of peasants in the sunset after a long day at work, the death of a donkey, a prank between two farmers, etc. – set them significantly in a Roman countryside plenty of ruins. In the same way, scenes of middle-classes life were often represented too, but this time inside an antique building or near an archaeological site.

[19] I am not so familiar with classical architecture to venture more than a supposition, but – as a regular visitor to archaeological sites – I can say with certainty that I have never seen a monument with multiple levels of elevation built in the way Codazzi evokes.

[20] For a deeper look into these topics, see *I Bamboccianti. Pittori della vita popolare del Seicento* [exhibition cat.], May 1950, Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne in Rome, Ed. **G. Briganti**, Roma 1950; **R. Causa**, *Pittura napoletana dal XV al XIX secolo*, Bergamo 1957; **L. Salerno**, *Pittori di paesaggio del Seicento a Roma*, Roma 1977.

[21] Giuliano Briganti was the first to study in a systematic way the so-called *Bambocciani*, see *I Bambocciani…*; **G. Briganti**, **L. Trezzani**, **L. Laureati**, *I Bambocciani. Pittori della vita quotidiana a Roma nel Seicento*, Roma 1983.

[22] It is well known that Salvator Rosa considered himself the opposite of a painter of landscapes or *vedute*, which he has always thought to be more superficial than his own way of painting and his philosophy. The opinion of Rosa about the *Bambocciani* is effectively expressed – as usual for him – in the sixth of the *Satyres* he wrote.

In *Landscape with ruins and figures* [Fig. 3] the juxtaposition of the giant ruins and little contemporary figures seems almost unrealistic. This time, Viviano Codazzi's architectural elements surrenders to the impact of time: three huge arcades (clearly a product of the artist's vivid invention) stand still, filling the whole middle-ground of the composition. On the left, a short staircase leads to a building, probably a Roman temple, whose three columns are little more than suggested. We do not know how many of them have survived, since only these few elements can be seen, but a situation closer chronologically to the artist's years is clearly presented here, when almost all archaeological remains were at the ruin stage. Obviously, the painting could have been completed as it was, becoming a ruin representation – so appreciated those years. Adrien van der Cabel[23], instead, depicted many different scenes with tiny and agile figures, doing the most unexpected things in front of such magnificent decadent monuments: among wild animals and dogs, little groups of people are talking together, someone is working, lifting heavy rocks, grabbing water from a fountain, someone is begging for alms. These characters are spread from the foreground to the deep back, where – along with a barren landscape – a mixture of contemporary buildings and antique monuments can be noticed. How is it possible to see a representation like this one, where components generally apart are put together and dialogue, even if with an evident lack of realism?

The same scenario is shown In *Composite scene with Roman Campagna and Hadrian's Villa* [Fig. 4], but its environment is not resembling imaginary ruins; on the contrary Codazzi had painted real archaeological sites and monuments. In the deep background a mountain landscape surrounds some ruins, invented or unrecognisable because of the aerial perspective; below we can see the *Piramide Cestia*, a worldwide famous Roman funereal monument which which is under construction; then, the foreground is entirely occupied by the remnants of the *Villa Adriana* in Tivoli (RM). The situation depicted here is undoubtedly a case of spatial and chronological *pastiche*. First, we have classical elements from three different sources: the imagination of the artist, the city of Rome and the city of Tivoli. Moreover, the painting shows also chronological inconsistencies, because the *Piramide Cestia* is under construction, which has to be dated more or less between 18 and 12 BC, the *Villa Adriana is* a ruin, but with some elements represented as intact (so, in a time between its construction in 117–138 AD and the contemporary years of the artist) and the figures[24], who are dressed as 17th c. middle class individuals, and who are acting exactly like their contemporaries. This time also, we can see people working, taking a walk or a rest, behaving as in a daily routine, perfectly integrated with the surroundings. They are not treating the place as an archaeological site, on the opposite they are ignoring it, they are in dialogue with it without highlighting its importance.

**4. Viviano Codazzi, *Composite scene with Roman Campagnia and Hadrian's Villa*, 1640–1650, oil on canvas, 74,3 × 102,6 cm; The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford. Photo: Courtesy of The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art**

Some considerations should be made about the needs of the owners of the paintings based on these examples. Similar representations are clearly created to meet the market demand and expectations of potential purchasers of the paintings: as previously mentioned, the most popular tendencies were oriented to classical references and to contemporary life in Roman countryside. The easiest and most effective way was to give the customer the both by creating interesting and particular pastiches of two logically distant dimensions. The final result is hard to describe, because it is not a classical representation, neither a *Bambocciata*, but it is both of them and none of them. The integration of elements is not fully reached, but it does not matter because what is really important is their mere presence, to show them in a clear way and to make them recognisable; Coherence is not such a fundamental need for whole pieces to come together.

5. School of Viviano Codazzi, *Archi-tectures with a scene (Joseph and the wife of Potiphar?)*, 1650-1670, oil on canvas, 90 × 127 cm; Galleria Palati-na di Palazzo Pitti in Florence. Photo: Courtesy of Palazzo Pitti

[25] See **G. Labrot**, *Baroni in città. Residenze e comportamenti dell'aristocrazia napo-letana*, Pref. G. Galasso, Napoli 1979 – for a deep insight to how paintings with different themes were held in aristocratic residencies, and why with a specific col-location.

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The flexibility of classical elements and their capacity to appear suit-able for every room and each circumstance have always made them well appreciated by whoever wanted a painting for a private or public location. The fact that a market or a patron demanded an archaeo-logical view and the need to follow different rules or expectations ended up conditioning the iconography of artworks, often leading to atypical combinations and results never seen before. It could hap-pen that – especially for a particular occasion or a specific part of the house[25] – sacred representations were considered more appropriate: neither in these cases a language inspired by antiquity was put aside. On the contrary, it reached its most high and detailed style, in combi-nation with the most improbable scenes. An artist – or better, a future owner of a painting – even if it would have been without any sense, chose an environment formed by Roman ruins for figures and facts set in Egypt or Jerusalem, just following the will to see satisfied two

6. Viviano Codazzi, Domenico Gargiulo, *Christ Healing the Paralytic*, 1640–1647, oil on canvas, 141 × 204,5 cm; private collection. Photo: https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.15750368?searchText=codazzi&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3Fccda%3Dey JpZCl6IjEwMDE0NjQ2NyIsInBhZ2VOYW1lIjoiQXJ0cuIsInBhZ2VVcmwiOiJhcnRzdG9yIiwidHlwZSI6InBvcnRhbCJ9%26Query%3Dcoda zzi%26so%3Drel&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqi d=fastly-default%3Ad1d8fd9e1443e728ab42c13b7282 cb11&searchkey=1654625371156 (access date: 9.08.2022)

**7. Viviano Codazzi, Michelangelo Cer-quozzi,** *The Flight to Egypt*, **1650–1660, oil on canvas, 96 × 160 cm. Pinacoteca Nazionale dell'Accademia Albertina in Turin. Photo: Courtesy of Accademia Albertina**

[26] Due to the poor state of preservation of the artwork and the difficulty in figuring out who did the architecture, it cannot be determined who painted the figures. See **P. Prodi**, *Riforma Cattolica e Controriforma*, "Nuove questioni di storia moderna" Vol. 1 (1964); **H. Jedin**, *Geschichte des Konzils von Trient*, Darmstadt 2017.

different but interrelated urges: the need to gain an artwork perfect for a room or merely with an episode with a particular personal value or meaning; and the taste and predilection for classic culture, views, images. Why choosing one of these positions if you can have both satisfied at the same way and in the same canvas?

Taking a closer look to the following examples can highlight the simplicity of the artists to create this kind of double representations, putting the same effort to the antiquities and to the Christian theme. In another painting held in Palazzo Pitti, *Architectures with a scene (Joseph and the wife of Potiphar?)* [Fig. 5] realized by an unknown Roman artist among the disciples of Codazzi[26] – despite of its poor conditions of preservation – we can see how this used to happen. Within a kind of architectonic courtyard, Joseph is being chased out by the wife of Potiphar, according to an episode told in the *Old Testament*; the figures are agile and tiny, but recognisable as dressed as the artists' contemporaries. They are dynamic in moves and expressions: their gestures are emphasized, even for those in the foreground. Every gaze is focused on what is happening is the centre of the canvas.

If we take a look at the environment, it is possible to notice that it is not an archaeological site or a *veduta*, it is instead a *Prospettiva*, probably of an aristocratic residence, with just a few elements which recall antiquity (such as the vases, or the capitals and architectural elements). Nevertheless, such a depiction as that presented here helps to define what the mutual penetration between the dimensions mentioned looks like. The representation constantly jumps from the 17th c. and the years before Christ, underlining at the same time the fundamental inconsistency of this mixture of elements and how they are put together in such a tight way. The final result appears to be strange but does not cause any difficulty to pinpoint the sacred references, nor the contemporary ones. Similar representations were very common and help us to go deeper in some artworks even stranger and more artificial.

At this stage, a clarification is necessary: it is known that the Council of Trent had exerted an influence on the artistic iconography, prescribing a codification of what was accepted and what should not to be painted[27]. Sacred scenes were always preferred, especially which describing the life of Mary or episodes linked to the birth of Christ and his first years of living. Therefore, it is not surprising that during the whole 17th c. these themes were still the most required and popular; in the examples below, this tendency is clearly visible. So, while the art world was divided into two stylistic currents – the classicism with the school of Carracci and the naturalism with Caravaggio[28], the first one more focused on sacred scenes and atmospheres – the *pittura di genere* was free to decline any need or wish in a creative way. This *genre* was, in fact, the only one where it was possible to see in the same representation both attention to nature and the most popular Christian episodes. The compresence of two opposite fields in this kind of artworks was not only due to the popularity of the views and classical landscape paintings, but also because of the possibility to meet completely the most important rules of Counter-reformation art.

Classical elements and scenes from the Christian tradition could be combined even more explicitly, as in *Christ Healing the Paralytic* [Fig. 6], consisting in a depiction of the Healing of the paralytic in Bethesda, an episode from the *New Testament* famous worldwide and often represented in art. Apparently this artworks is following step by step the tradition: in the centre of the foreground, Domenico Gargiulo painted Christ standing in front of the laying paralytic, pointing at him and calling him to stand up; around them small groups of people are witnessing the scene, caught in their shocked reactions and dynamic gestures. Gazing at the two main characters and looking at each other, they attract the viewer's attention and lead him to jump from one place to another and expand the space perceived. In this moment it is possible to notice other small gatherings of people put in the background and in specific places to emphasize

[27] See **P. Prodi**, *Ricerche sulla teoria delle arti figurative nella riforma cattolica*, "Archivio Italiano per la Storia della Pietà" Vol. 4 (1962).

[28] See **F. Scannelli**, *Il microcosmo della pittura* (1657), Ed. **E. Monaca**, Introd. C. Occhipinti, Roma 2015; **G. P. Bellori**, *Vite de' pittori, scultori et architetti moderni* (1672), Torino 2009; **E. Di Stefano**, *Bello e idea nell'estetica del Seicento*, Palermo 2007.

8. Fig. 3, a fragment
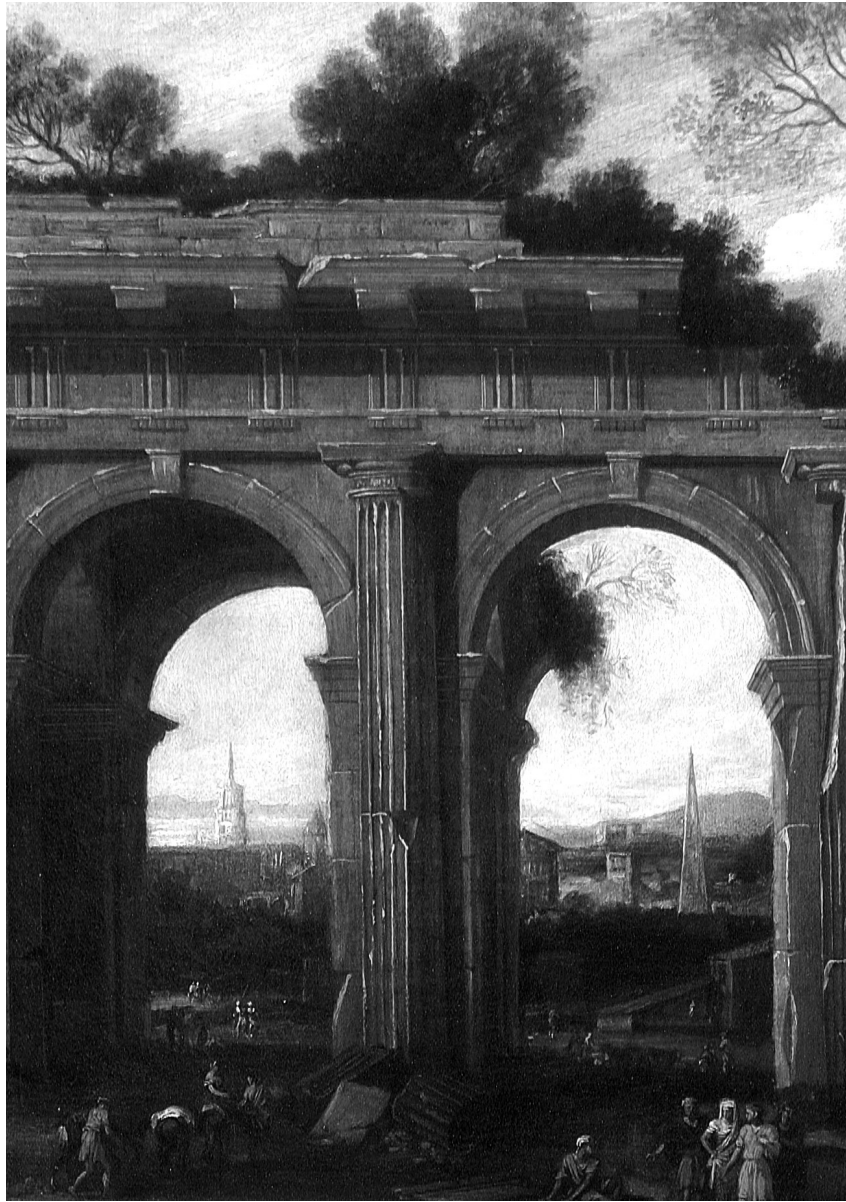
the structure and the dimensions of the environment, which in fact appears something already known, but slightly different from the architecture typical of Jerusalem and the description of the pool written in the *Bible*[29]. From the general shape and layout of the building, and according to its architectural and decorative elements, it is more similar to the Roman *Termae* than to a pool: the space is divided into different ambiances, which could easily be associated to the *frigidarium*, the *calidarium* and the other services *Termae* we know had; moreover, the internal architecture is constituted by Doric columns with capitals invented using elements from the Composite order[30], classic marble statues into niches and close to the ceiling, and high-reliefs describing scenes probably from Greek mythology
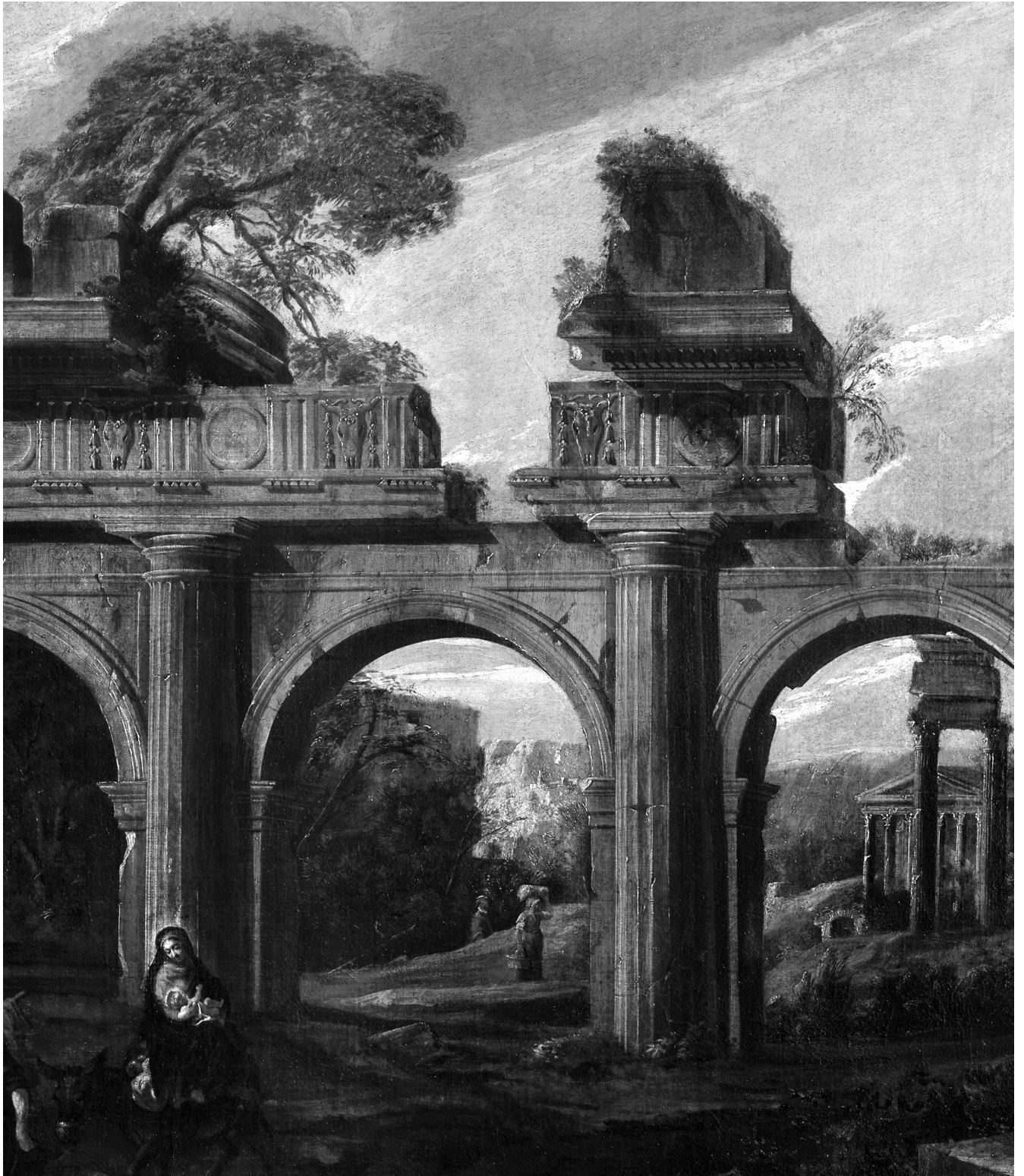
9. Fig. 7, a fragment

[31] **B. de Dominici** *Vite de' pittori, sculto-ri et architetti napoletani* (1742–1744), Ed. **F. Scricchia Santoro**, **A. Zezza**, Napoli 2003–2014.

[32] The construction of the Terme di Caracalla has finished around 216 AD.

[33] What we see here, it is probably *fil rouge* within the invented architectures of Codazzi. It is an iconographical pattern used often by him in different contexts and dimensions.

or tradition. The place where the episode is set – depicted by Codazzi in perfect perspective – is clearly Roman, a probable reference to one which really existed somewhere. Bernardo de Dominici and his followers[31] mentioned with certainty the painting resulting from the collaboration between Codazzi and Gargiulo, depicting the healing of a paralytic inside the Termae di Caracalla in Rome. Viviano may have invented the idea of remodelling the building for this specific purpose, if we suppose that the painting in question were the present one; if not, he could have painted an interior resembling ancient Roman Termae without any real reference. What is really relevant here are his intentions to paint an architecture obviously as similar as possible to an ancient and classical one, and to put inside a sacred scene that happened in a place completely different and far, both in time and space. Without any logical link an episode of the life of Jesus is set in Rome and inside a building which would have been built almost two centuries later than his death[32]. The urge to have a classical-themed painting held at home and to see satisfied his devotional needs obviously made the patron to choose to get combined these two fields together, with a result for us unusual and strange, but quite recurrent at his time. There was no need to make a choice. Different themes and semantic areas could have been painted together, using the classical environments as a new context for another type of representations.

Another example of this strong but effective association between classical environment and sacred theme could be the artwork made in cooperation by Codazzi and Michelangelo Cerquozzi, *The Flight to Egypt* [Fig. 7]. Unlike the previous one, there are not many figures in this painting, but only three in the foreground and another pair far away, lost in nature behind them. Moreover, Codazzi did not focus here on perspective and architecture, because the scene is set in a natural landscape and the only monuments are the ancient ruins, which – if compared to the tiny figures – occupy almost the whole surface and present themselves huge and astonishing. The light here is set on antiquities and what remains from ancient buildings in this Roman countryside. On the left, there is an arch with the already seen Doric columns and Composite capitals, which could have been imagined by the painter as a triumphal building, a *Porta*, or the entry for a temple. Across the entire background runs another structure, resembling something we have already seen [Figs. 8–9][33], in its antiquity and in its *status* of ruin, separating the main episode from the landscape beyond, a more Other classical buildings are sketched in the nearby. In this ancient and undoubtedly Roman atmosphere – as discussed before – we expect to find characters dialoguing with the environment, maybe ignoring it and keep working or living their life, maybe taking it as a part of their daily places, even staring at the classical elements and studying them. Surprisingly, what we can see is different: A young woman sits on a donkey, holding a new-born baby

in her arms, and a bearded man walks just ahead of them, following someone too similar to the little angel not to be one. That is the typical iconography of the *Rest during the Flight to Egypt*. The sacred scene is again set in Rome and in ancient ruins, for no logical reason, but probably out of the painters' or patron's desire to see something that would satisfy both aspects of the middle-class culture of the 17th c.: Christian and classical.

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In drawing conclusions, one cannot help but notice that, even in isolation from cultural habits, elements of the classical world are always present in the most diverse types of representations. As we have seen, they can provide a suitable environment for a story about antiquity or for an imaginary scene inspired by Roman culture; Or they can appear as ruins in the Italian countryside, where all sorts of people live out their existence, noting the presence of antiquity but treating it as part of the atmosphere of various activities, ignoring its value as a witness to history (and that leaves us with a bittersweet feeling when we realize that someone has forgotten the only thing worth remembering); they can be an incredible but excellent new solution to set episodes from the *Bible* and present them in a different light. This use of the ancient elements tells us a lot about their versatility and their skill to be easily recognized in every different context – which is something way more important that it seems – and about the society and the *milieu* of painters and patrons who chose them. They could have been chosen This use of antique elements tells us much about their universality and capacity to be easily recognizable in any context – which is much more important than it seems – and their adaptability to aesthetic tastes, in order to give a coherent or punctuated historical reference, even according to contemporary art theory, which compares painting and ancient rhetoric, constantly with artists in mind. In complete detachment from classical culture, the images and suggestions of antiquity have been embedded deep in the minds of all since the first archaeological discoveries, and then only more and more: the desire to have them also before the eyes made people buy engravings, topographical views, maps, but also ask painters to paint them, to reproduce their lost parts, to use them as scenery for some episode, even a sacred one.

These paintings prove that it is often not necessary to have a cultural background to capture the feelings that Roman ruins can evoke, and it is not necessary to have a lot of money to ask an artist to put them in a painting, even a small one, even talking about something else. It was these feelings that inspired patrons and purchasers to find Viviano Codazzi and ask him to invent an amphitheatre in which tiny figures could be placed, or to come up with a natural way to place

the Escape to Egypt in Rome. More than from cultural stimuli, these choices were driven by emotional need. But, looking at the matter more in general, that is not a surprise: what makes someone wishing a painting is always something rational, but at the same time also something deeper than rational.

**Słowa kluczowe**

starożytność, Viviano Codazzi, środowisko, liczby, niespójnośći

**Keywords**

Antiquity, Viviano Codazzi, environment, figures, inconsistencies

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**Summary**
**COSTANZA BROLI (University of Naples Federico II) / Not just an environment. Role and significance of ruins in 17th c. Italian art through the example of Viviano Codazzi**
The main purpose of this brief article is to trace some of the paths which classical architectural elements have followed during 17th c. in art, especially within easel paintings. Since their first appearance, ancient monuments have always had an important role as iconographical elements, but, as time went by, their function within the artwork changed, and so their meaning: the 17th c. is probably a period when this phenomenon is the easiest to observe. This review of some of Viviano Codazzi's works provides a glimpse of how artists (and by extension, patrons) chose to incorporate ancient and classical elements into compositions, even with clear inconsistencies, not to give them up. The desire to own a representation of antiquities was stronger than rules of logical and historical coherence, so figures and their environment did not always go along, even until the contamination between Christian and classical sphere. The persistence over time of archaeological motifs is not due to creativity laziness or cultural tradition, it happens because people still wanted to watch them and get caught by them. It is not a rational matter; it is a matter of emotions.