Victor Plahte Tschudi

Baroque Antiquity: Archaeological Imagination in Early Modern Europe. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. xv + 300. Hb, £64.99.

Tschudi's *Baroque Antiquity: Archaeological Imagination in Early Modern Europe* rivets the reader's attention while covering a broad swathe of ideas and history (from antiquity to the baroque), bristling with ideas and archaeological imaginings which are rich, varied, and at times pleasingly complex; a baroque complexity befitting the author's themes and dazzling critiques as well as straightforward accounts. Tschudi bestows on the reader something deeply considered, and—in the sense that he meditates on how in early modern Rome the past came to be understood in light of the baroque present (mostly seventeenth century) and how it might be retrieved—profound. He arrives at conclusions that are legion and deeply informed, which reflect his career as a professor of architectural history in Oslo's School of Architecture and Design, a member of the Norwegian Institute in Rome, and a member of the Oslo Centre for Critical Architectural Studies (among other commitments). I acknowledge from the beginning that my review provides only partial treatment to the many avenues Tschudi follows in his text. Giving full attention to all his byways, highways, and in-depth readings of numerous prints and Athanasius Kircher's remarkable works would probably result in a book-length review. Instead, in this review I will concentrate on describing what I perceive to be the author's major goals and methods.

A key to understanding Tschudi's approach appears in his title, where he foregrounds an "archaeological imagination," which is, among other things, a profession of *theory*. To theorize is to "see clearly," maintaining control over a broad corpus of texts and analytical approaches. Tschudi's readings of print culture in seventeenth-century Rome cover broad territories of meaning and practice. A reading, as I understand that term, is what the so-called New Critics (the masters of mid-twentieth-century American literary criticism) call "close reading," which is in a sense what Tschudi puts before us and what we as art-historical critics do when critiquing works of art. Tschudi makes clear his intended meaning when he writes that

A theme that reverberates through *Baroque Antiquity* is the idea that printed reconstructions on their deepest level formulate early modern concepts of historical change, albeit not in any systematic fashion. Reconstructions recover the past in a number of ways, and some I shall define, such as "regeneration," "pre-conversion," and "reflection," and others I will have to ignore. For some models of recovery belong to disciplines

that this book has little room to explore, such as the connection that might exist between printed reconstruction and the art of memory (17).

One approach Tschudi does indeed ignore is the psychoanalytic, for reasons that would be immediately clear to most readers: first of all, we might ask what Freud has to do with early modern art history. Well, there is a small but interesting psychoanalytic literature on one of Tschudi's primary figures: Athanasius Kircher. There is something about Kircher and the deep past of the ancient Roman world that harkens unto one's imagination and unconscious mind. But we put the unconscious aside for now, as it is not strictly relevant to this review (despite the obvious appeal Kircher would have had for Freud).

The seventeenth-century reconstruction of antiquity, especially of the Roman Forum, was not by-and-large based on archeological work. It did not spring from the origins of archeology (as we understand that disciplinary term today); rather, the long-hidden past manifested itself by way of early modern prints, accomplished within the purviews of print culture, using engravings for the most part. There may have been, in other words, a lot of overstatement or even misrepresentation in the prints of Giacomo Lauro, one of Tschudi's key figures. Giacomo Lauro (1583–1650), attempted to recreate ancient Rome, an effort resulting in something remarkably (but not surprisingly) baroque in appearance and effect, not to mention affect.

Printmakers were left to their devices of enticement: they did, after all, want to make a living, and if they could do so by showing European tourists what lay in the distant and captivating past, then of course printmakers would provide to their patrons what they wanted. After all, the ancient world is gone, irretrievable, something tantamount to another country; or so they assumed.

Our twenty-first-century notion of archeology, with its specific and carefully measured procedures, had obviously not made an appearance in early modern Rome, at least not in what we think of as “modern” forms of scholarship. Giacomo Lauro would, I imagine, find himself bewildered by an archeological dig carried out in the early twenty-first century. Lauro's “past” and modern archeology's “past” would discover themselves to be, at the very least, strange bedfellows.

We should be hardly surprised to find that printmakers of the baroque period sought to entice their public by rendering both unique and entirely invented representations of what lay hidden in Rome's gardens and beneath her streets. Tschudi proves to be especially deft in telling us an interesting and informative tale about how printmakers created (often enough from whole-cloth) their classical world.

Europe's richest patrons and collectors came to Italy from nearly every corner of the continent to find "authentic" images, ones showing how things (might have) looked once upon a time. Their past, like most earlier times, was unrecoverable and not altogether coherent with their present, which of course made it more desirable or fascinating. And there were vendors aplenty in seventeenth-century Rome, young men for the most part, who were ambitious and inventive. These printmakers delighted in showing Europe's wealthy and often enough crowned travelers just how things might have appeared, whether they had evidence or not (it was nearly always "not").

Giacomo Lauro's first works date from the early seventeenth century, which is the *terminus post quem* for Tschudi's book; in which case, we could see the *ante quem* as Kircher's death in 1680. The representations of ancient Rome were, to a large extent, fantasized, invented, and "pictured," rather than recorded and defined (as archeology was later to do). Tschudi writes that "Lauro's printed reconstructions [in his *Antiquae urbis splendor*] cast their spell on the Baroque visual imagination and offered the seventeenth century its 'official' past: They therefore hold the key to unlocking the secret of the period's reinvention of Roman antiquity" (4).

Tschudi's book is subtle and intricate in its many readings of the baroque, the role of prints in pre-grand-tour Rome, and the manipulation of imagery that may have misled some into thinking they really knew what ancient Rome looked like. Seventeenth-century print culture certainly had its disingenuous aspects, but its sheer inventiveness brings delight to us—even though we are in on the game—just as it brought entertainment and a sense of grandeur to those who made the grand tour of Rome even before there was such a thing as the "grand tour." This weird sense of ancient Rome persisted for a while, aided by printmakers.

We are left with many questions, the largest of which is fairly obvious: What is this all about? Was the misreading of antiquarians and artists an intentional phenomenon? Or was it a matter of indifference? There is of course no easily rendered answer to queries such as these: antiquarians found in the past what they sought. Printmakers knew when to flatter and (as a consequence) mislead their patrons. They reveled in the business of flattery and entertainment for their patrons. Who knew, really, in the seventeenth century what Rome looked like a thousand years earlier? "Non è vero, ma è ben trovato" is a well-known phrase to this day: "It may not be true, but it is a good story" (more or less). We are dealing here not with some concept of archeological or historical "truth;" rather, we are writing fiction and telling stories.

There is of course a great deal more in Tschudi's book than I have mentioned in this review, restricting my comments to a general overview of the

text. Tschudi has more to say about Kircher than I have suggested, for instance, but limits of space and a reader's patience must be taken into consideration. I heartily advise the reader, whom I suppose to be interested in art history of the early modern period in Rome, to get this book and enjoy Tschudi's investigations and his art historical perambulations. Tschudi's enthusiasm for his topic shows through brilliantly and heartens all of us who share his affection for early-modern Rome and all those magnificent artists, theorists, and printmakers who abounded in a time and place that never fails to fascinate us latter-day lovers of Rome.

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