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1. INTRODUCTION

Heather Hyde Minor and Carolyn Yerkes

Piranesi's basic working method was identical to that employed by other print-makers for centuries. He used copper, acid, ink, wax, varnish, and paper to produce his sheets. A lively workshop of assistants supported his efforts, making it possible for him to produce more than a thousand prints over his career. After developing his ideas in graphite, chalk, and ink drawings, he then set to work on a copperplate. When he was done etching and engraving, Piranesi and his assistants ran the matrix through one of the rolling presses in his shop, which was also his house, his store, and his museum. After Piranesi checked this first impression, or proof, and made his changes to it, a specialist incised the text on the plate.

Yet even this relatively straightforward process became complex in Piranesi's hands. He dug deeply into his copperplates and used unconventional tools, transforming the thin metal sheets into sculpture. He sometimes etched both the front and the back of his plates.¹ Many of his drawings are complex amalgams of pen and ink lines, brushed washes, rubbed chalk, and impressions from his and other printing presses. Finally, Piranesi designed most of his prints to be gathered together with other prints and joined to pages of text. Put simply: Piranesi made books.

Over the course of his career, Piranesi published twelve volumes that combine letterpress text and etched and engraved images. They were his most powerful, complex, and successful art form. Ever since his death in 1778, Piranesi has continued to inspire artists, architects, writers, composers, and scholars. To the extent that Piranesi's books have been studied, however, the tendency has been to detach the images from the texts of which they

are an integral part. We seek to explore new territory by reimagining his artistic production in terms of his books. To do this, we examine each step of the process through which he transformed Rome's densely layered physical remains into monumental volumes. If we consider the essential unit of Piranesi's measure to be not the print but the page—that is, if we take as our starting point that the book was Piranesi's primary medium—then we can begin to rethink his working methods, his artistic ambitions, and the entire scope of his career.

How did Piranesi come to the page as his medium? When he arrived in Rome in 1740 seeking to become an architect, he set out to draw the city's monuments, often in the company of the young students from the French Academy. He sought training and work as a designer. At the same time, from this earliest part of his career, he worked within the genre of the book. Its material, intellectual, commercial, and legal worlds were part of his daily environment, and among his friends and associates he counted scholars, printmakers, book collectors, and booksellers.

In the first years after he came to Rome, Piranesi began to produce printed sheets. He did so in a number of different ways. His first work experiences in the city were with Giovanni Battista Nolli and Giuseppe Vasi when both were crafting elaborate volumes that combined texts and images.² Piranesi contributed to a number of book projects, etching parts of a large print that traced the path of the Tiber from its source to its mouth, and making an illustration for a book to celebrate a royal birth.³ Piranesi's earliest autonomous work making prints was creating *vedute*, or topographical views. Starting in the early 1740s, he made small copperplates of views of Rome and its monuments. He sold these plates to publishers who then used them as illustrations for the guidebooks they produced. Guidebooks were a Roman specialty, and they required constant updates to provide fresh inventory for the Grand Tourists who flocked to the city. From the start, Piranesi designed images to be pages of books, both independently and while working for others.

In 1743, when Piranesi was twenty-three years old, he published his first book, the *Prima parte di architettura e prospettive*.⁴ Printed by the Pagliarini brothers, owners of a well-known press and book dealers with international contacts, the book included a title page and a dedication to a patron, along with a short letterpress text and a series of plates of imaginary architecture inspired by ancient ruins. In the text, Piranesi offered a critical judgment of the contemporary architectural scene and laid out his objectives (see fig. 4.1). He famously cited Rome's "speaking ruins," along with earlier books about architecture, as his inspiration. Although the ratio of image to text is high, according to legal standards in place in Rome in the eighteenth century, the *Prima parte* was a book, with an imprimatur. Not surprisingly, it served as a calling card, one that Piranesi used to secure more work making pages for books. He dispatched copies to Florence in an attempt to be hired as a contributor to a book about local villas and a volume on the frescoed corridors at the Uffizi.⁵ Of established book genres, the *Prima parte* fits best into the category of architectural treatise, a familiar form since the Renaissance, and a fitting one for an aspiring architect trying to squeeze out a living as a maker of pages.

Around 1746, Piranesi began making his own large-format *vedute*, keeping the plates for himself and selling the prints to bookshops and print dealers for resale. The 135 plates that constitute this series of views span Piranesi's career, with the last one issued just before his death in 1778. The *Vedute di Roma* were Piranesi's most commercially successful works during his lifetime, and he sold them as individual sheets. Customers could buy a title sheet or frontispiece to use as cover pages for their collections (figs. 1.2, 1.3). They also could buy



FIG. 1.2. *Vedute di Roma* disegnate ed incise da Giambattista Piranesi Architetto Ve[n]eziano, 1748. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1937, 37.45.3(42).



FIG. 1.3. Frontispiece to the *Vedute di Roma* with a statue of Minerva, 1748. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1937, 37.45.3(43).

a copy of the *Catalogo delle opere*, a print listing his works item by item, to use in a similar way (see fig. 4.4). Piranesi made the *Catalogo* in 1761, when he began publishing his own works out of his premises in the Palazzo Tomati, and continued to update it throughout his career. These sheets were part of a marketing strategy that had existed in Rome since the mid-sixteenth century, when Antonio Lafréry produced an index of prints and a title page to announce the views in his *Speculum Romanae Magnificentiae*. The *Vedute di Roma* cover sheets are the first signs of Piranesi thinking like a bookmaker. We begin with them in part because we intend to leave them behind, in order to focus on the sheets he produced as pages rather than the ones he made to stand alone.

Although he continued to produce prints of these views as single sheets for the rest of his career, Piranesi considered issuing a text to accompany them. This was not normal behavior for a printmaker at the time. On one of the pages of his pocket-sized notebook, above a drawing of the Basilica of Maxentius, Piranesi scribbled, “The ancients did not have printing, and because of this, knowledge of these ancient things was lost, and by means of these [*vedute*] one will see what in the future will be destroyed.”⁶ Piranesi formatted this sketch to signal that he made it with a *veduta* in mind, inscribing it within a rectangle to indicate the plate’s edges. Despite his jagged prose and muddled syntax, Piranesi makes clear that for him printing could safeguard the ancient past. Mario Bevilacqua correctly sees this as the kernel of a text to accompany these prints.⁷ Intertwining words and images would have provided intellectual coherence to a project composed of individual views. It would also have continued to launch the career in print that Piranesi began with the *Prima parte*: that of author.

Piranesi’s next volume, the *Antichità Romane de’ tempi della Repubblica, e de’ primi imperatori*, arrived in 1748. He eventually recycled the title of this book, adapting it in 1756 for the *Antichità Romane*, making it seem as though this slim earlier volume had been a prototype for the hulking, four-volume set that came later. He took as his subject ancient buildings with texts written on them in the form of inscriptions. The material qualities of inscribed words increasingly drew Piranesi’s attention as he interrogated ancient remains and constructed his own books, as chapter 4 in this book discusses. The *Antichità Romane* opens with a dedication to the scholar Giovanni Gaetano Bottari (fig. 1.4). Its pages include transcriptions of the Latin inscriptions on the triumphal arches and the bridge represented in its illustrations. This text was not set with a letterpress, as would typically have been the case, but rather was etched on a copperplate. Piranesi chose this far more complex method to print words for logistical reasons, above all. No matter how successful he became, Piranesi never owned a letterpress. Printing with movable type set in trays and printing from copperplates were two distinct specialties in eighteenth-century Rome, requiring different presses and teams of skilled laborers. Because of this, no matter how large and well-staffed his workshop became, if he wanted his texts in letterpress, Piranesi always had to pay someone else to print the words for him. Extensive texts, those that make learned arguments, dense with references, were not something that he could produce alone.

Generating those words was not a solo project either. In his biography of Piranesi, which appeared in print months after his death in 1778, Giovanni Ludovico Bianconi claimed that Piranesi “cleverly enrolled some eminent men of letters who, in admiration for his genius and his etchings, were not above working for him, composing texts to fit his beautiful prints, and generously permitting him to publish them under his own name.”⁸ Bianconi further



specified that these scholars eventually parted ways with Piranesi because of his “native intolerance and rudeness or because they were not prepared to adopt his extravagant ideas.”⁹ In his final word on the subject, the biographer claims that Piranesi “could barely read them, although he could explain them in his own way in conversation,” and that he eventually came to see these books, including their learned texts, as being produced solely by him.¹⁰ Although Bianconi’s accounting of the artist’s life has long been recognized as a character assassination masquerading as a biography, later scholars have relied on it, either to disregard it as flawed or to accept discrete parts of it and ignore the rest. Jacques Guillaume Legrand’s biography, which was commissioned by Piranesi’s sons and heirs to his business, forwards the same claim about Piranesi’s books, minus Bianconi’s animosity.¹¹

Working with a group of scholars to create texts about the ancient world, interleaved with figural prints, was common practice in eighteenth-century Europe. For example, the architect Robert Adam’s large folio on the ruins of Diocletian’s palace in Split has a text written by his cousin William Robertson.¹² The scholar Giuseppe Bianchini composed the texts for Giuseppe Vasi’s *Delle magnificenze di Roma antica e moderna*, a ten-volume work published between 1747 and 1761. The book Nolli planned to accompany his map of Rome was prepared by four men, each of whom had different responsibilities based on their expertise and assistants to support them.¹³ Because Piranesi worked for Vasi and Nolli, he was schooled in this method of labor. Collaborative practice was business as usual for eighteenth-century scholars who wrote about the ancient past, with authors as diverse as Winckelmann, Scipione Maffei, and Giovanni Bottari relying on it to craft their books.

FIG. 1.4. Dedication to Giovanni Bottari in *Antichità Romane de’ tempi della Repubblica, e de’ primi imperatori*, 1748. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1937, 37.45.3(68).



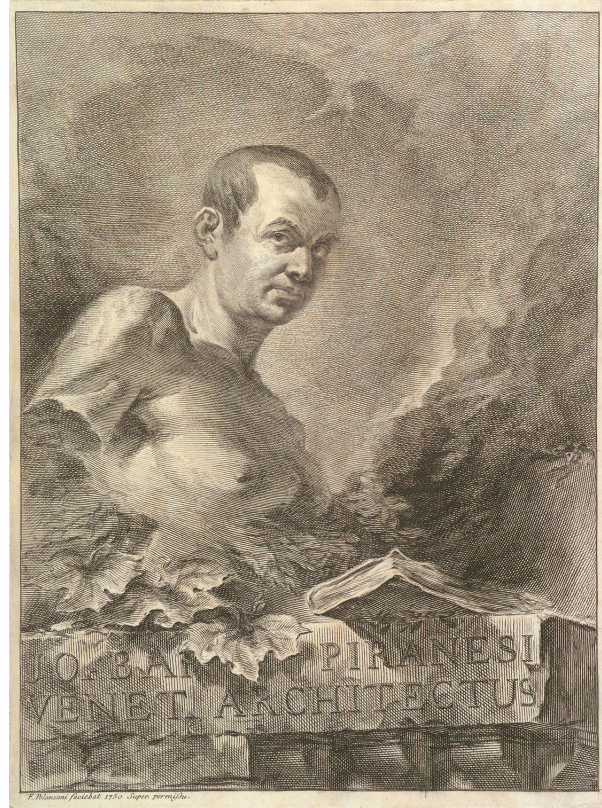
FIG. 1.5. *Chiesa di S. Marcello, e Conventio dei PP. Serviti*, in Giuseppe Vasi, *Delle magnificenze di Roma antica e moderna, i conventi e case dei chierici regolari*, 10 vols. (Rome: Nella Stamperia del Chracas presso S. Marco al Corso, 1747–61), vol. 7, plate 133. Bouchard's shop appears at the lower left. Marquand Library of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University.

Piranesi's notebook jottings make clear that he had strong ideas about a wide range of subjects. With their knotty grammar and mangled diction, these texts also reveal that he had only a basic knowledge of Latin, a language that appears in many of his books. The *Antichità Romane* (1756) is pitted with Tuscanisms, spellings and expressions unlikely to have flowed from a Venetian like Piranesi.

As an author, Piranesi was neither a pirate nor a plagiarist but instead hewed to everyday eighteenth-century working methods. Words allowed him to join the European scholarly community that specialized in antiquities, to elevate himself socially, and to gain a key credential in securing employment. Texts offered new forms of communication and fame, permitting him to claim a place as an antiquarian, to court controversy, to take up forms of popular fiction, to borrow from the ancient language of satire, and to advertise his wares. He used his words to do all of these things, and more.

For his words to reach ever-larger audiences, Piranesi needed to make and sell books, but he could not do this alone, intellectually or practically. Around 1750, he began working with Giovanni Bouchard, a well-established bookseller. An etching by Giuseppe Vasi from 1751 shows the Bouchard and Gravier bookshop, which was one of the first places in Rome to sell Piranesi's prints (fig. 1.5). In the etching, prints can be seen hanging outside the Palazzo Mellini, next to the church of San Marcello al Corso. Bouchard bought some of Piranesi's small *vedute* plates and then applied for an imprimatur. With it in hand, Bouchard printed a stack of letterpress title pages and started selling the *Opere varie*.

The *Opere varie* was a multipart volume designed to accomplish several tasks. It included the figural prints from the *Prima parte*, along with sets of prints that came to be known as



the *Grotteschi* and the *Carceri*, a plan for a magnificent college, and Francesco Polanzani's portrait of Piranesi. How can we make sense of this mixed buffet? First, the volume served as a new home for the printed images that had appeared in Piranesi's first book, the *Prima parte*. Bouchard could not reprint the letterpress pages from that book because the Pagliarini printing house held the copyright on them, but he could reprint the images. Second, the volume helped organize Piranesi's other disparate print suites into salable form. Both the *Grotteschi* and the *Carceri* are rich ciphers. When the *Opere* appeared for sale in Bouchard's shop, Piranesi's *Grotteschi* and the *Carceri* were new but not ready for independent sale: neither of them could be released as sets. The *Grotteschi* has no title page; the *Carceri* does (fig. 1.6).¹⁴ This circumstance might be explained by the fact that only four prints fit into the *Grotteschi* category, while there are fourteen of the imaginary prisons. Without an imprimatur, the *Grotteschi*, with four sheets and no title page, could be sold as loose sheets but not as a book or even a suite of prints. Although the *Carceri* had a title page, it had not been granted legal permission to be printed until Bouchard applied for permission to print the *Opere*.

Considering the material qualities of this collection of pages within the context of Roman printing practices allows us to draw some speculative conclusions. The volume brings together heterogeneous subjects, assorted thematic groupings of sheets, and various sizes of prints. Piranesi probably began the *Carceri* with the idea that he would offer these prints as a discrete work via Bouchard. Piranesi produced a title page on which the bookseller's name appears. Yet the publisher and the printmaker did not offer it for sale as a suite of prints, at least not in 1750. Why not? Although it is difficult to imagine today, when the imaginary prisons count among Piranesi's most ubiquitous works, the *Carceri* did not

FIG. 1.6. Title page to the *Carceri d'Invenzione*, c. 1749–50. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1937, 37.45.3(21).

FIG. 1.7. Francesco Polanzani, portrait of Piranesi from the *Opere varie di architettura, prospettive, grotteschi, antichità; inventate, ed incise da Giambattista Piranesi Architetto Veneziani* (Rome, 1750). Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1937, 37.45.3(1).

sell well at first. To create the *Opere*, Piranesi and Bouchard took the plates available to them and combined them. All the separate groups of material that were not going to become individual books came together to make this single Frankensteinian volume.

Piranesi himself makes a personal appearance in the *Opere*, in the portrait by Polanzani (fig. 1.7). His stone arm broken at the bicep, his eyes intense and lively, he presides over the pages as both an ancient bust and a modern man. Depicted with a book and an inscription that identifies him as a Venetian architect, Piranesi melds with antiquity, his object of study, while at the same time remaining independent from it. This complex portrait stakes out a number of identities for the artist. After casting about and trying to make pages in a number of different ways, Piranesi signaled with the *Opere* that he had at last chosen his subject: antiquities. The volume marks the turning point in how Piranesi conceived of and organized his work. His portrait labels him an architect, but the form that portrait takes is a page.

After the publication of the *Opere*, Piranesi began to produce books in earnest. As with some of his earlier experiments making pages in the 1740s, he did not always succeed. The *Camere sepolcrali* is an example of this, as chapter 2 in this book makes clear. Surviving in only a few copies from the early 1750s, the *Camere sepolcrali* seems to have functioned at least in part as a prototype for the *Antichità Romane* (1756). Piranesi's *I Trofei di Ottaviano Augusto* (1753) is another case in point. The way he used the prints from this book suggests that Piranesi continued to consider even those pages closely united by theme to be essentially flexible groups of plates: he could reorganize and incorporate their plates into other suites or groups whenever he desired. The *Trofei* opens with a magnificent title page (see fig. 4.2).¹⁵ The letterpress work includes typeface changes in every line, as the fonts alternate in weight, style, size, and color. Piranesi later exported the vignette, “Frammento di uno scudo caduto da Trofei di Ottaviano,” to another book, *Le Rovine del Castello dell'Acqua Giulia* (1761), because its subject fit the topic.¹⁶ Although the year of publication appears on the title page as 1753, this date can be misleading. That was the year Piranesi was granted the imprimatur, the legal right to print this book, not when the book was actually printed. The imprimatur tells the reader that in the legal sense, at least, this set of pages was a book.

Flipping over the title page brings the reader to the first print in the book, a *veduta* of the castellum of the Acqua Giulia, the place where the Trophies of Marius, as the set of ancient sculptures installed on the Capitoline Hill are now known, were displayed in antiquity. This print was also part of Piranesi's *Vedute di Roma* series and could be purchased as a loose sheet or as part of a set of other views. This page floats between two publications, serving as an illustration in the *Trofei* and as one of the *Vedute*. The next two prints in the *Trofei* depict the massive sculptures themselves (fig. 1.8).¹⁷ Like the vignette from the title page, these sculptures also make an appearance in the 1761 book *Le Rovine del Castello dell'Acqua Giulia*. Rather than simply reprinting the plates from the *Trofei* to create new illustrations for a book, in this case Piranesi made a new copperplate instead. He combined the images of the two sculptures from two separate plates onto a single copperplate and reduced their size.¹⁸ The *Rovine* plate seems to have been made by an etcher in Piranesi's workshop who used the earlier *Trofei* plates as a model for his work.¹⁹ Unlike the *Prima parte*, the *Trofei* does not include a letterpress text, but its plates do have long, etched captions that appear with the individual plates.

The subject of the *Trofei* signals a crucial change in Piranesi's working method. His pages would no longer be protean. He had chosen the path he would follow for the next

FIG. 1.8. *Trofeo di Ottaviano Augusto*, from *I Trofei di Ottaviano Augusto innalzati per la vittoria ad Actium e conquista dell'Egitto* (Rome: Nella stamperia di Giovanni Generoso Salomonj alla Piazza di S. Ignazio, 1753). Getty Research Institute.

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two decades. By 1753, Piranesi gave himself over to the “speaking ruins” that he invoked in the *Prima parte*: he decided to make pages about ancient Rome. In the eighteenth century, there were only two ways to pursue such a project, either by making loose-leaf prints or by making pages of books. By this point, the physical form of Piranesi’s pages was beginning to move toward the category that his contemporary readers recognized as antiquarian folios. The argument Piranesi made in the *Trofei* captions—that these sculptures were created by Octavian after the battle of Actium and his victory over Mark Antony—is folly (i.e., incorrect), but it is a learned argument all the same.

After the *Prima parte* and the *Trofei*, Piranesi published a dozen books that combined letterpress texts with etched and engraved images. These were the *Antichità Romane* (1756); *Lettere di giustificazione scritte a Milord Charlemont* (1757); *Della Magnificenza ed Architettura de’ Romani* (1761); *Le Rovine del Castello dell’Acqua Giulia* (1761); *Lapides Capitolini* (1762); *Descrizione e Disegno dell’Emissario del Lago Albano* (1762); *Di due spelonche ornate dagli antichi alla riva del Lago Albano* (1762); *Il Campo Marzio dell’Antica Roma* (1762); *Antichità d’Albano e di Castel Gandolfo* (1764); *Antichità di Cora* (1764); *Osservazioni di Gio. Battista Piranesi sopra la Lettre de M. Mariette*, together with *Parere su l’architettura* and *Della introduzione e del progresso delle belle arti in Europa de’ tempi antichi* (1765); and *Diverse maniere d’adornare i cammini* (1769). Other than the suite of etchings after drawings by Guercino that he published in 1764 under the title *Raccolta di Alcuni Disegni del . . . Guercino*, Piranesi did not return to the model that he had followed in the *Trofei* until late in his career. With extensive help from his son Francesco and his assistants, Piranesi published the *Trofeo o sia Magnifica Colonna Coclide* (1774–79), *Vasi, candelabri, cippi, sarcofagi* (1778), and *Différentes vues de quelques restes de trois grands édifices qui subsistent encore dans le milieu de l’ancienne ville de Pesto* (1778) as sets of prints with captions, and without letterpress texts.²⁰ A text was planned for the Paestum book, but it was unfinished at the time of Piranesi’s death. Traces of a text for a volume on the antiquities of Tivoli also remain.

By the end of his career, books would come to define Piranesi: they were the essential feature of his artistic identity. In Angelica Kauffman’s sketched portrait of Piranesi, the artist leans over a book, his gaze drifting to the side (fig. 1.9).²¹ Piranesi sags against the massive folio, his left elbow pushing it down while his right hand rests on its pages. Making books was not only intellectual work but physical labor, a circumstance his pose communicates. One finger pressed to his temple, his head hangs as heavy as the volume underneath him. In his pose we see the intimate connection between reading and thinking, a connection expressed in physical weight. The drawing evokes the dual nature of books as insistently tangible objects with the potential to transport their readers. Our book examines how Piranesi made his own books, and considers this complex process as a series of steps whose individual effects can be seen and felt in the final products.

Piranesi’s books came together in stages. Other portraits of him emphasize how vital the first of those stages—drawing—was to his process. Pietro Labruzzi’s posthumous portrait of Piranesi depicts him holding a porte-crayon and a drawing: the sheet unfurls across his body as he points to it, open-palmed.²² Biographical anecdotes, too, suggest that Piranesi thought of drawing as the first means to put his mind down on paper. His biographer Jacques Guillaume Legrand describes an exchange between Piranesi and Hubert Robert while they sketched together among the ruins. The French artist expressed amazement at the rapid sketches produced by his companion. Piranesi reportedly replied that his designs existed

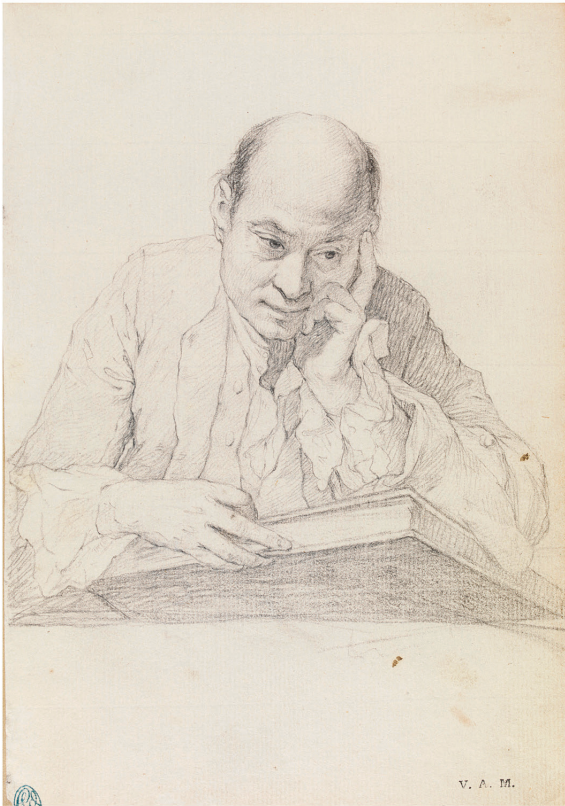


FIG. 1.9. Angelica Kauffman (1741–1807), *Portrait of Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, c. 1764. Pencil, chalk, ink, and wash on paper (293 × 388 mm, closed album). Victoria and Albert Museum, E.382–1927.

not so much on paper as in his head, where every detail was faithfully recorded.²³ As proof, Piranesi invited Robert to examine his etched plates, where nothing could be found missing.

Anecdotes like this one point toward a classic trope about drawing, that it is in some ineffable way a direct manifestation of thought. Yet whatever Piranesi might have said about his own process, his work tells another story. Piranesi's drawings are not all quick sketches, issued in one go, on the spot. To the contrary, drawings executed on-site were only the starting point of a process that extended into the studio where, with other drawings and prints to aid his memory, he translated them into etchings, which then became part of his books. Single sheets of paper can demonstrate how, to Piranesi, drawing was a multifarious activity, both spontaneous and methodical. Even the first thoughts he put down on paper could have traces of their eventual development in pages.

Piranesi worked in dual modes on a sheet now among the large group of Piranesi drawings at the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts.²⁴ On one side, he drew six men in various poses: crouching, leaning, and bending (fig. 1.10). Made in fast strokes with pen and brown ink, with faces and other small details barely indicated, the drawings are arranged haphazardly on the paper, placed in close proximity though the figures do not interact with each other. Piranesi used sketches like these to study the human body, working quickly through each one to capture the range of human motion. The other side of the sheet is a world apart in medium, method, and subject. There, Piranesi drew in red and black chalk a view of the Pecile at Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli (fig. 1.11). Although Piranesi studied the ruins of Hadrian's Villa in person with his friends Robert Adam, Charles Louis

Clérisseau, and Allan Ramsay, this drawing almost certainly was not made on-site. It is a fragment of what was once a much larger drawing, a folio sheet squared off in the studio in preparation to make a print (fig. 1.12). The signs of the eventual etching are present already in the drawing, which has a border indicated at its sides and blank space left at the bottom of the paper for the text caption to come. Unlike its verso, this side of the sheet has hard lines made against a straightedge, the tool rotated in increments across the paper to construct each line that recedes toward a vanishing point. The diagonal hatches added for shading were also mechanically constructed, designed to simulate the effects that would need to be reproduced carefully in the etching. The view of the Pecile shows a technical side of Piranesi's drawing practice, which involved more instruments, sites, and possibly even collaborators than Legrand's deceptively simple story about sketching would suggest.

The view of the Pecile and its verso are only one example of how Piranesi could work in several modes across a single sheet. His dense repertoire of drawing techniques mirrored the complexity of his etching and engraving process. Piranesi repeatedly returned to his copperplates, reworking them to produce multiple states of his prints. These revisits involved much more than merely sharpening lines that had become worn and indistinct after hundreds of impressions had been produced. The title page of the *Carceri*, for example, went through eight different states during Piranesi's lifetime. Technical examination of Piranesi's copperplates has underscored the degree to which Piranesi combined the techniques of engraving and etching, using a burin to heighten contrasts and provide dramatic intensity.²⁵

Etching entails an exacting and time-consuming process of exposing the copperplates to multiple acid baths. The intensity and rich tonal contrast of Piranesi's prints depend, in large measure, on the depth to which the lines have been bitten into the plate. Piranesi exercised total control of this process, using a brush loaded with varnish to stop out certain lines and passages, thus preventing the acid from acting on them, while leaving others exposed to its effects. Legrand reports that Piranesi immersed some of his plates as many as twelve times, reportedly remarking as he worked, "Take it easy, we're making three thousand drawings in one go!"²⁶ If Legrand's anecdote underscores the intimate link between drawing and the reproductive medium of printmaking, it also reminds us of the degree to which the mechanical process of printing was an extension of the hand.

After he etched a plate, Piranesi made a proof. Printmakers have always made proofs, but Piranesi's are truly rare—at least complete ones are. Most of his proofs that survive do so as fragments used for drawings, a phenomenon that we explore in the next two chapters. An uncommon exception is a proof of Piranesi's view of the Roman Forum, from the *Vedute di Roma*, now in a private collection (fig. 1.13).²⁷ Piranesi's proof of the Roman Forum view shows what his prints looked like before he had finalized their finishing touches. The title and signature have not yet been inscribed at the bottom of the plate, and no embedded numbers help connect the monuments represented with an identifying legend or caption. Piranesi typically made a proof before letters, as such prints without texts are commonly called, and then made further changes to the plate itself before assistants and specialists added these details. Once he had finished checking his proofs, he almost never saved them, preferring instead to recycle them as scrap paper. Had he not done so, hardly any evidence of Piranesi's proofs would exist at all.

In making proofs before letters, Piranesi acted like most other printmakers. After this stage, however, he skipped a typical step in the process. Printmakers often use their proofs



FIG. 1.10. *Six Studies of Men in Different Poses*. Pen and brown ink, over black chalk, on paper (416 × 340 mm). École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, EBA 264 verso.



to make counterproofs, which are prints made from other prints. By using a proof impression as if it is a matrix, running it back through the press against another sheet of paper, a printer creates an image of the plate itself, reversed twice from the original. Printmakers can use counterproofs to check their plates, but Piranesi appears not to have done so. Only one complete counterproof by him survives, a view of the Pantheon from the *Vedute*, now in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (fig. 1.14). Printed on paper that is like thin cardboard, the counterproof once belonged to Thomas Ashby (1874–1931), the archaeologist and topographer of ancient Rome. In the lower left-hand corner of the print, the Palazzo Tomati address appears, which suggests that Piranesi edited this plate sometime after 1761. Earlier impressions of the plate exist with the address of his previous publisher Bouchard, so when Piranesi updated the plate with his new information, he may have decided to take advantage of that moment to edit the entire plate, producing the counterproof at that time to check the new text.²⁸

Made relatively early in the *Vedute di Roma* series, Piranesi's proof of the Roman Forum view and the counterproof of the Pantheon view document a working process that fits within the norms of established printmaker behavior. Although it was made a century before Piranesi produced his first book, Abraham Bosse's view of a printer's workshop captures his world, one that remained relatively unchanged from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century (fig. 1.15). A few aspects of the view stand out as particularly relevant: the collaborative nature of the depicted workplace, where three men are simultaneously engaged in separate tasks; the specificity of each worker's pose as he goes about his specialized assignment; and the distinct features of the place, including its equipment, furniture, and layout. All these aspects of the workshop conditioned the way that Piranesi produced prints, and, as this book discusses, certain of these tasks even appear within the works themselves.

When Piranesi began to produce books with texts, his world needed to expand. As an eighteenth-century view of a printing press workshop shows, the environments that produced printed images and printed texts had much in common (fig. 1.16). Both were busy places staffed with skilled laborers and filled with specialized machinery and materials. Yet considered together, the two views' very specificity allows us to see why Piranesi, like all Roman printmakers, did not own both types of press. These were large, expensive machines that required expertise to run. Presses also required considerable amounts of surrounding space to support associated tasks like storing and preparing paper, drying printed sheets, and organizing sets of pages. Combining these two worlds into one shared enterprise would have been spatially, logistically and—perhaps most important—economically unviable.

As a result, Piranesi had a separate role in each world. In the world of the rolling press, he presided. After he began operating his own workshop, he counted his family members among his assistants, and he was responsible for making sure that the entire operation ran smoothly, that projects were completed, and that everyone got paid. In the world of letterpress, he remained an observer. To Piranesi, these printers were his contractors, the ones responsible for executing the work, and their names went into his books too. Every book that Piranesi made was the result of these two worlds colliding.

Paper was the common element in both worlds. Piranesi's creative use of paper informs all aspects of his artistic enterprise and is a recurrent theme throughout this book. Piranesi lived surrounded by paper; the inventory of his house-museum records a storeroom filled with bales of “carta bianca and carta pecora.”²⁹ He kept stacks of scrap paper, sheets that

FIG. 1.11. *The Pecile at Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli*. Red chalk and traces of black chalk on paper (416 × 340 mm). École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, EBA 264 recto.

FIG. 1.12. (overleaf) *Veduta degli avanzi del Castro Pretorio nella Villa Adriana a Tivoli* (View of the Remains of the Praetorian Fort [the Pecile], Hadrian's Villa, Tivoli), for the *Vedute di Roma*, 1770. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Edward W. Root, Elihu Root Jr. and Mrs. Ulysses S. Grant III, 1937, 37.17.2.





FIG. 1.13. *Veduta di Campo Vaccino*, proof impression for the *Vedute di Roma*. Collection of Vincent J. Buonanno.





FIG. 1.14. *Veduta della Piazza della Rotonda*, counterproof impression for the *Vedute di Roma*. Gabinetto della Grafica, Ashby.Stampe.Cartella. Piranesi.14, © 2020 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

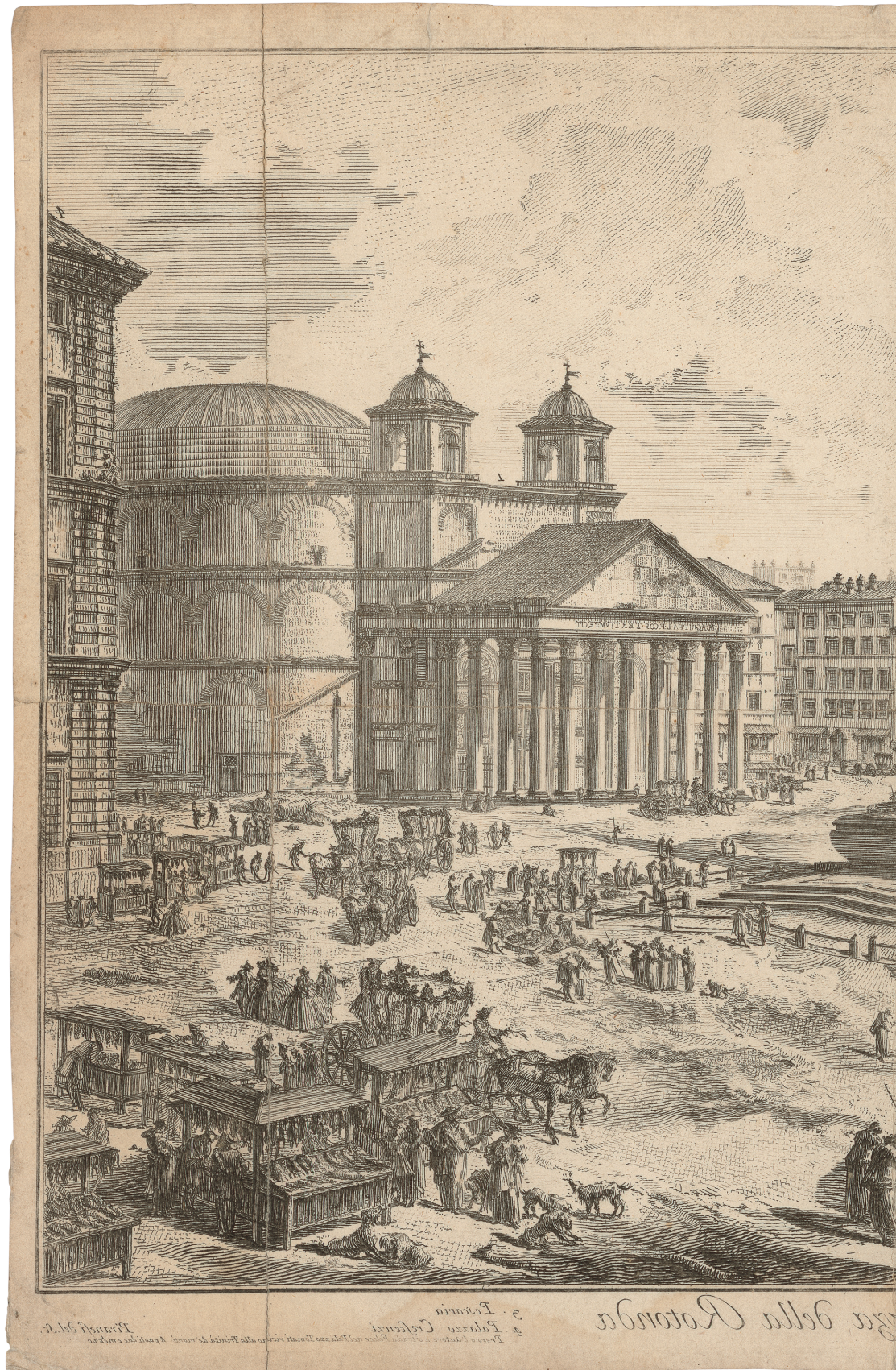






FIG. 1.15. Abraham Bosse,
The Workshop of a Printer,
 1642. Etching (256 × 323 mm).
 British Museum, R,8.15.

had been run through another printer's letterpress or trial proofs of prints run through his own rolling press—or both. He often repurposed these sheets for drawings. In this way, the supporting medium of paper serves as a precious link between projects in several media undertaken at different times.

A single sheet in Berlin offers a condensed history of Piranesi's development as a maker of pages. Various actors within Piranesi's densely populated world all left their marks on the paper like geological strata. To make the sheet, Piranesi took two pieces of paper that he had already deemed scrap and joined them together (fig. 1.17).³⁰ The right side of the sheet has a letterpress text with an etching embedded within its lines: this is the title page from the *Raccolte di varie vedute di Roma sì antica che moderna*. Sold by Bouchard out of his premises next to San Marcello, this small volume included prints made by several artists, including Piranesi himself, as the title page trumpets. Because Bouchard owned the plates, he was able to keep reprinting and publishing them in guidebooks and compendia like this one. The title page fragment of the Berlin sheet has a publication date of 1752; it had already been printed in earlier editions. At the bottom of the page, below the date, the final lines indicate that the letterpress text itself had been set by Generoso Salomoni, with the *licenza de' superiori*, or publishing license. The title page demonstrates how Piranesi was one contributor to this book out of many. He, like other artists, made plates that publishers turned into pages, with the help of printers. The left side of the Berlin sheet comes from a later stage in his career, when his situation had changed. The red chalk drawing shows the paving stones of the Appian Way, rotated sideways to be joined with the title page. This drawing, which has visible underdrawn



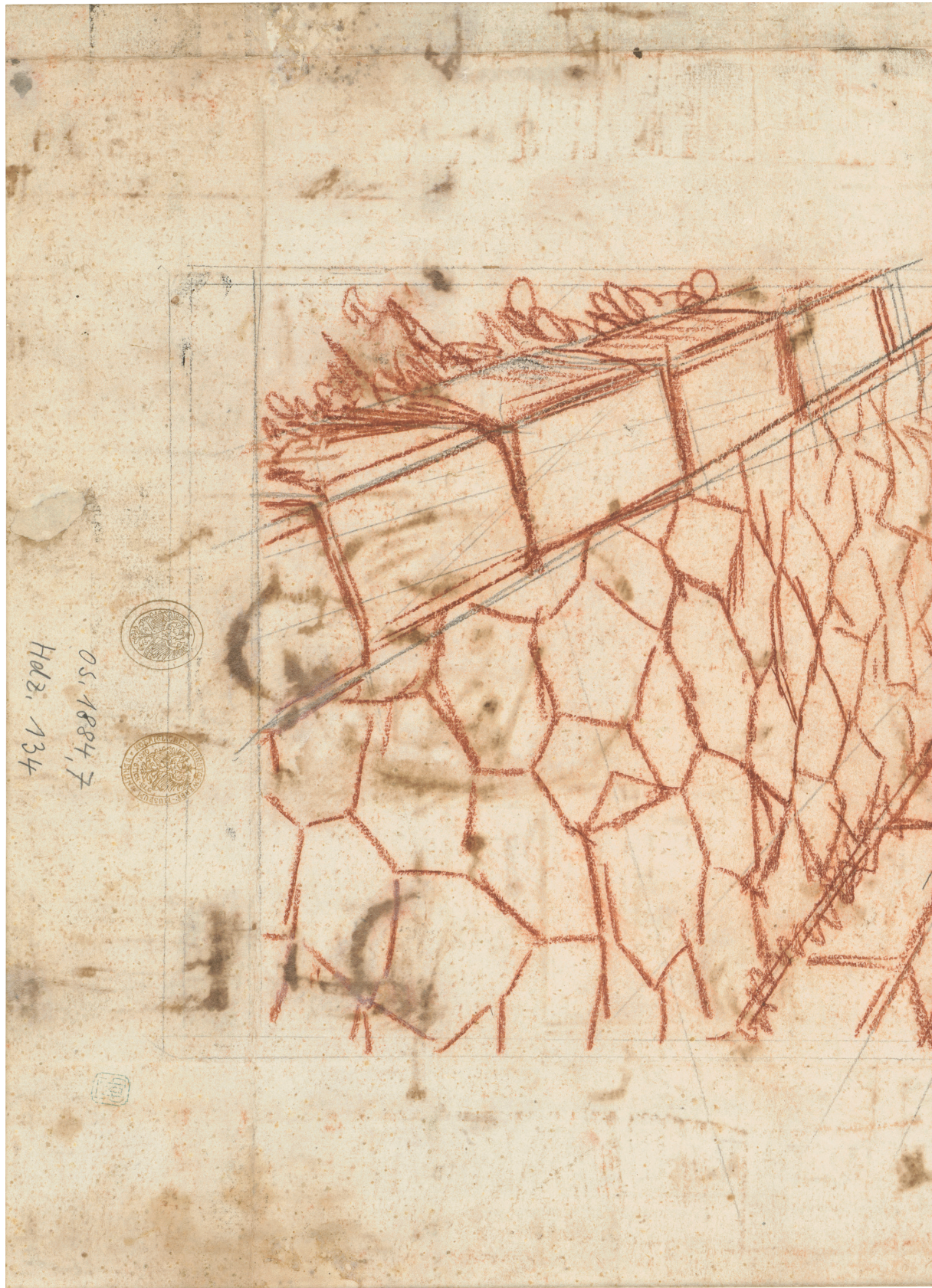
FIG. 1.16. *Interior of a Printing House*, in Johann Heinrich Gottfried Ernesti, *Die Wol-eingerichtete Buchdruckerey* (Nuremberg: Gedruckt und zu finden bey Johann Andreä Endters seel. Sohn und Erben, 1721). Princeton University Libraries, Rare Books and Special Collections.

construction lines and indicates the eventual platemark, was made in preparation for the *Antichità d'Albano e di Castel Gandolfo*.³¹ By the time Piranesi published that book in 1764, he was already operating out of his own premises, no longer selling his plates for others to print.

Finally, the other side of the Berlin sheet reveals why Piranesi joined the two fragments in the first place. There, a massive drawing of a fantastical structure spans the paper's extents (fig. 1.18). Covered in red chalk, brown ink, and wash, the drawing shows a façade whose constituent elements have run riot. Structural elements, bands of relief, and pieces of sculpture are stacked over and around each other, forming a frame around a central element: a single fragment, a disembodied and out-of-scale capital. On this composite sheet, Piranesi composed architecture out of layers of accumulation. Once etched, the image itself could become a component of a massive folio volume: another page in a book.

Piranesi Unbound explores the lives of Piranesi's books. It considers how his drawings and prints became pages, how pages and plates became volumes, how volumes became books, and how books were marketed, sold, and read. The next chapter, "Layers," begins with the first step, taking up the strata of Piranesi's wastepaper pile to illuminate the process he used to make his books. Piranesi liked to use cast-off sheets to draw, fusing printed images and texts. Beyond his working method, these drawings also open a view onto one of his earliest—and most mysterious—projects as well as his subject, the city of Rome. "Lost and Found" then uses graphic analyses to construct an elaborate visual proof about Piranesi's paper. Together, these two chapters show how this book is intended to work at least in part in a Piranesian way, with an argument constructed from both text and image.

FIG. 1.17. *Study of the Paving Stones of the Appian Way* and title page of *Raccolte di varie vedute di Roma si antica che moderna* (Rome: Nella Stamperia di Giovanni Generoso Salomonj, 1752). Red and black chalk on paper; letterpress text and etching (605 × 447 mm). Kunstbibliothek der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin—Preussischer Kulturbesitz, HdZ 134 verso.



RICCOLTE
VARIE VEDUTE
DI ROMA

ANTICA CHE MODERNA

AGLIATE LA MAGGIOR PARTE

DAL CELEBRE

NBATISTA PIRANESI

DA ALTRI INCISORI.

ette sono in numero di novanta tre,
e si vendono in Roma

GIOVANNI BOUCHARD

UO AL CORSO VICINO A SAN MARCELLO.



Tempio di Bacco

IN ROMA, MDCCLII

A STAMPERIA DI GIOVANNI GENEROSO SALOMONJ.

CON LICENZA DE SUPERIORI.



Piranesi designed pages that combine letterpress and intaglio printing. As his subjects and methods of argumentation evolved throughout his career, the ratio of text to image within his books changed, and he developed strategies to integrate the two. Piranesi's books reflect this evolution in their pages. Each of Piranesi's vignettes, the prints he designed for pages of letterpress, links the world of places and objects captured in his prints to an argument about them made in words. Chapter 4, "Pages," takes an expansive view of Piranesi's book production by exploring this defining aspect of its individual units.

Not many authors launched their careers with a ponderous antiquarian folio and an illegal pamphlet, but that is exactly what Piranesi did to thrust himself onto an international stage. Chapter 5, "Dedicated and Sent," unpacks the notorious origins of two of Piranesi's books, vastly different from each other in intent, scope, and scale, though intimately related in conception. These intertwined stories demonstrate why dedications were a crucial component of Piranesi's books. In the case of the *Antichità Romane*, the consequences of a failed dedication reveal how his projects were conceived and then evolved; in the case of the *Lettere di giustificazione*, the dedication of a new book exposes his entire social and professional world.

The moment a book left Piranesi's hands could be a fraught one, as the issue of dedications makes plain, but it was not the end of the object's story. After Piranesi made his pages and arranged them in a sequence, they were secured in place and protected under boards—this last step usually taken outside of his purview. Yet the presence of a binding did not mean that a book was finished or fixed. New pages could be added, sometimes changing the book's valence entirely, and pages could be cut out, irreparably destroying its original form. Chapter 6, "Bound," considers how Piranesi's books came together as objects to be altered, whether by his hand or by others. The chapter charts the changes made to four specific examples from the moment they left his workshop down to the present. In addition to examining the material traces left in Piranesi's books, another way to follow his books from his workshop out into the world is to study the promotional materials and strategies that have shaped the market for them. Piranesi designed his books as objects for purchase, and chapter 7, "Sold," surveys how his works reflect that commercial reality. The market, in turn, lays bare certain ways that Piranesi's books have been understood by readers and owners.

Our consideration of Piranesi's pages as his primary artistic medium has been informed by recent scholarly developments and extends these in some new directions.³² In our effort to recuperate Piranesi's texts, we expand the study of his work as an author taken up by Heather Hyde Minor and by Mario Bevilacqua.³³ In general we take the sociology of texts, a phrase borrowed from Donald F. McKenzie, as an important factor in their interpretation. Nurtured by the last fifty years of book history, the examination of how texts are produced through complex, collaborative processes allows us to understand Piranesi's work in new ways. Studying Piranesi as a bookmaker makes it possible to insert him within the rich field of bibliography, reinvigorated and reimagined in recent decades.³⁴ Our research also follows the closer concentration on aspects of materiality surfacing in art history in recent years. In this, we join others who have explored the physical qualities of Piranesi's printmaking, work that has resulted in the restoration and publication of all of his copperplates, a fundamental project under way at the Istituto Centrale per la Grafica in Rome.³⁵ Finally, in taking up the reception of Piranesi's work, we examine the ways his books were bound, sold, inscribed, traded, and shipped. We follow these books across their long lives, until they become integrated into our own.

FIG. 1.18. *Entrance to a Tomb*. Pen and brown ink with red chalk on paper (605 × 447 mm). Kunstbibliothek der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin—Preußischer Kulturbesitz, HdZ 134 recto.

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