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CHAPTER ONE

The Antiquarian: A Field Guide

Athanasius Kircher at Work: Evidence and Its Uses in Early Modern Antiquarianism

In 1661 Athanasius Kircher discovered a forgotten ancient site. Though born in Fulda in today's Germany, Kircher was one of the most prominent members of the Society of Jesus in baroque Rome. He had won a European reputation with a series of massive, splendidly printed books on natural and human history.¹ His special interests included the language and philosophy of ancient Egypt, and his famed apartment in the Jesuits' Collegio Romano, where he welcomed visitors from every province of the Republic of Letters, was decorated with model obelisks as well as actual antiquities. Kircher believed that God had given him a vocation to decipher Egyptian hieroglyphs—especially those that appeared on some of the obelisks that Augustus and later

1. See, in general, *Athanasius Kircher: The Last Man Who Knew Everything*, ed. Paula Findlen (London, 2003); Giunia Totaro, *L'autobiographie d'Athanasius Kircher* (Bern, 2009).

emperors had floated across the Mediterranean to Rome.² He seems to have advised Gian Lorenzo Bernini on his Fountain of the Four Rivers at the Piazza Navona.³ This spectacular sculptural complex, which dominated one of the most prominent public places in Rome, centered on an obelisk whose inscriptions Kircher explicated in his *Oedipus Pamphilius*.⁴ He was also fascinated by the early history of Italy, and in the later 1650s he began work on a massive survey of the topography and ruins of Lazio, the region around Rome.⁵

Walking in the Prenestini Mountains east of Tivoli, with its villas and baths, a “horrifying” area dominated by towering peaks and vertiginous cliffs, Kircher came across a ruined church on a mountain at Mentorella (see figures 1.1a and 1.1b).⁶ Multiple forms of evidence identified it. As he recalled in his autobiography, an inscription recorded that this was the holy place where St. Eustachius underwent conversion to Christianity in the fourth century CE, and the first Roman emperor to

2. Erik Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt and Its Hieroglyphs* (Copenhagen, 1961), 89–98; Madeleine V.-David, *Le débat sur les écritures et l’hiéroglyphe aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1965), 43–56; Daniel Stolzenberg, *Egyptian Oedipus: Athanasius Kircher and the Secrets of Antiquity* (Chicago, 2013).

3. See Erik Iversen, *Obelisks in Exile*, vol. 1, *The Obelisks of Rome* (Copenhagen, 1968), 84–87, and Ingrid Rowland, “‘Th’ United Sense of th’ Universe’: Athanasius Kircher in Piazza Navona,” *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 46 (2001), 153–81.

4. Iversen, *Obelisks in Exile*, 1:76–92; Giovanni Cipriani, *Gli obelischici egizi: Politica e cultura nella Roma barocca* (Florence, 1993); Brian Curran, Anthony Grafton, Pamela O. Long, and Benjamin Weiss, *Obelisk: A History* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009).

5. Harold Evans, *Exploring the Kingdom of Saturn: Kircher’s Latium and Its Legacy* (Ann Arbor, 2012).

6. Athanasius Kircher, *Historia Eustachio-Mariana* (Rome, 1665), 2: “Inter horridam hanc rerum faciem paulo ulterius progressus nescio cuius vestigia tecti inter arbores & rupes obscure se manifestantis intueor, cui propior factus, Ecclesiam vetustate paene collapsam, obviam apertamque reperi.” The Tivoli baths were restored in the sixteenth century. See Richard Palmer, “‘In This Our Lightye and Learned Tyme’: Italian Baths in the Era of the Renaissance,” *Medical History*, Supplement 10 (1990), 14–22.

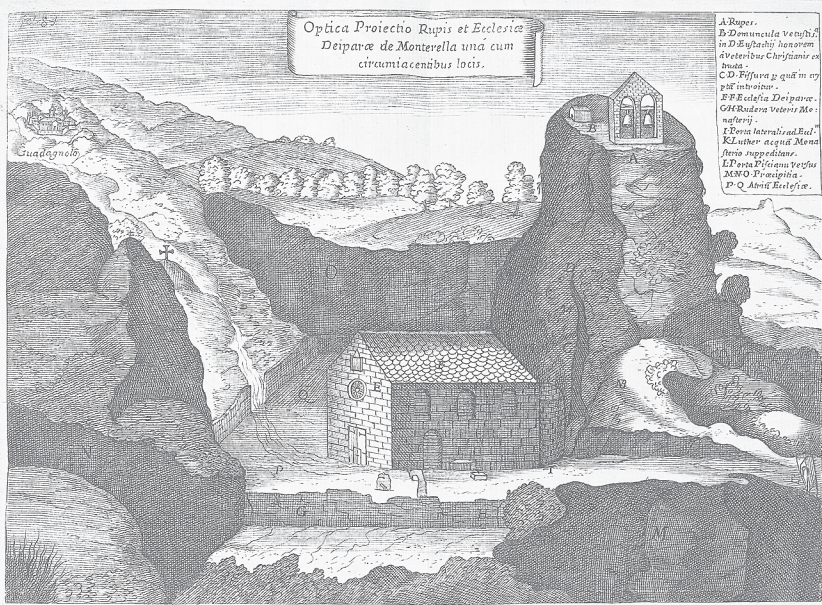


FIGURE 1.1A. The shrine of Mary that Athanasius Kircher discovered at Mentorella, in the mountains east of Rome. Kircher, *Historia Eustachio-Mariana* (Rome, 1665), leaf between pp. 84 and 85. Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel: 39.10 Hist.

embrace Christianity had built a church: “In memory of this the Emperor Constantine the Great founded this church, which the sainted Pope Sylvester the First consecrated with a solemn ritual in honor of the Mother of God and Saint Eustachius.”⁷ Local traditions, preserved by priests in nearby hamlets—especially the parish priest of Guadagnolo—confirmed that the church had been dedicated to St. Eustachius. According to the local stories

7. Athanasius Kircher, *Vita*, in Totaro, *Autobiographie*, 208: “Circuibam tandem omnes Ecclesiae angulos, ut aliquam inscriptionem invenirem, quam Deo ducente reperi, marmoreae tabulae inscriptam, hoc verborum tenore: Iste est locus conversionis S.[anti] Eustachii Sacer, in quo Christus crucifixus inter cornua cervi S.[ancto] Eustachio apparuit, in cuius memoriam Constantinus Magnus Imperator Ecclesiam hanc condidit, quam S.[anctus] Sylvester Papa I in honorem Deiparae et S.[anti] Eustachii solemniter consecravit.”

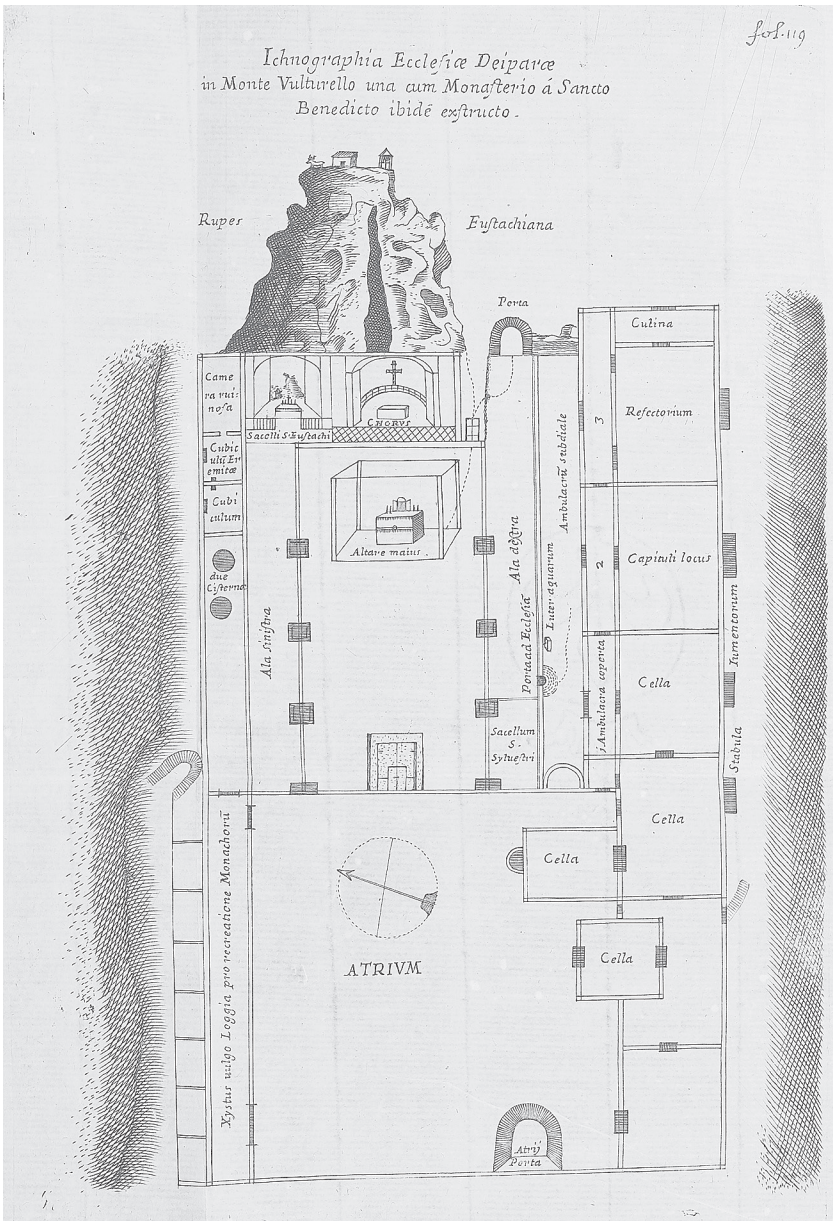


FIGURE 1.1B. Another image of the shrine of Mary that shows the location of the church on the top of the cliffs and unfolds a detailed ground plan. Kircher, *Historia Eustachio-Mariana* (Rome, 1665), leaf between pp. 118 and 119.

Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel: 39.10 Hist.

that the priest, an “excellent gentleman,” told Kircher, Eustachius had originally been a Roman general named Placidus. While hunting he saw a stag that had a crucifix between its antlers.⁸ He converted, and eventually became a martyr. A candelabrum and two crosses, which resembled those still visible at the Lateran Basilica in form and workmanship alike, revealed that Constantine had built this church as well.⁹ The ruins were not inhabited. But they were glorious remains of a crucial time of transition, when Constantine made Christianity the faith of the Roman Empire and consecrated precious monuments to the still older and purer Christianity of Placidus and his fellow martyrs.

More exciting still were two antiquities that Kircher discovered inside the building. A wooden statue of the Virgin, striking for its great age though clothed in poor garments, seemed to address him: “Behold how deserted I am by all in this wilderness.”¹⁰ Deeply moved, Kircher promised that even

8. Ibid.: “Non quievi hic, sed apud vicinos oppidorum parochos, potissimum Quadagnolii, de hujus conditione loci me quam diligentissime informavi, qui ea quae in Ecclesia repereram vera esse confirmarunt”; Kircher, *Historia*, 3: “Rem tamen exactius examinandam ratus, in proximum montis iugo impositum pagum, quem vulgo Guadagnolium vocant, me contuli, ubi a loci parocho Francisco Capitosto vir optimo, de omnibus & singulis quam minutissime instructus, quod suspicabar, verum esse cognovi.”

9. Kircher, *Historia*, 110, 132–35.

10. Kircher, *Vita*, 208: “Accessi deinde ad altare, ubi statuam B.[eatae] V.[irginis] antiquitate insignem deprehendi, cumque adeo neglectam, et vili panno circumdatam aspicerem, ecce Illa, mirabili quodam interioris animi instinctu, me videbatur quasi alloqui, ‘Ecce quam in hoc horrido deserto, ab omnibus deserta, commoror. Nec ullus est qui et mei, et Ecclesiae meae, nec non hujus Sancti loci curam habeat, quae olim tanta hominum devotione hic florebam.’” Cf. his account in the *Historia*, 2–3, which is slightly more prosaic: “In medio Ecclesiae altare clathris ferreis circumdatum spectabatur; in quo ligneum Magnae Deiparae Filiolum brachio stringentis simulachrum, tametsi vetustate erosum, nec non pulveribus telisque araneorum obsitum, spectantes tamen ad devotionem mirum in modum sollicitabat. Certe dixisses, pauperem Dei Matrem de sui in hac solitudinis vastitate, neglectu, incuria, & necessitate quodammodo conqueri, imo nonnullum ad tantae paupertati subveniendum subsidium ab advenis, oculis manibusque efflagitare credidisses.”

though he was a penniless priest, he would restore the church, and he laid down all the money he carried as an offering.¹¹

An oak tablet, which the duke of Poli eventually removed from the church and preserved in his library, bore a carved relief (see figure 1.2).¹² This Kircher analyzed and reproduced (see figure 1.3). The decorative border of ivy at the top, he argued, resembled Christian art of the same period: “I recall,” wrote Kircher, “that I have seen similar ornaments in many very old churches here in Rome, done in mosaic.”¹³ The relief itself represented both Christ, shown exactly as he appeared at “the Lateran Church that Constantine built for the people of Rome,” and Sylvester, dressed as the pope and attended by servants with holy vessels. Though the sculptor had rendered both vestments and vessels with great precision, he had unfortunately failed to enter the year when all this happened. But the carvings were clearly the work of “an untrained hand, as the character of the crude images clearly shows, worked up as the condition of the times allowed.”¹⁴ And their quality established their date: “For, as we have shown, in the time of Constantine and Sylvester,

11. Kircher, *Vita*, 208–9.

12. Kircher, *Historia*, 120–21: “In Sacello S. Eustachij, quod ad laevam Christi e regione rupis constructum cernitur, olim parieti affixa videbatur vetustissima tabula ex querno ligno compacta, in qua rudi, propria istorum temporum, arte insculpta prima huius Ecclesiae dedicatio, a S. Sylvestro facta exprimitur, quam postea Dux Polanus, ne tantae antiquitatis monumentum situ & squalore loci periret, in Polanae Arcis Bibliothecam intulit, ubi & in hunc usque diem, antiquarum rerum studiosis spectanda exponitur: quam, & nos ad attestandam historiae nostrae veritatem, summo studio & diligentia designatam, ea prorsus fide, quam exemplar praefert, depictam, hic Lectori curioso exponendam censuimus.” On the Conti and their role in the restoration of the church, see Totaro, *Autobiographie*, 137, 149–50.

13. Kircher, *Historia*, 123: “Ego certe similia ornamenta me in multis pervertistis Ecclesijs hic Romae, musivo opere elaborata spectasse memini.”

14. *Ibid.*, 120–32, at 121: “Tabulae latera . . . ex ligno quercino seu ilicino elaborata, quam materiam sculptor tanquam contra temporum iniurias duratione constantiorem data opera selegisse videtur, exititij quidem operis arte, quam Itali *baſso rilievo* vocant exsculpta, rudi tamen manu (uti inconditarum imaginum habitus luculenter demonstrat) pro temporum conditione elaborata.”



FIGURE 1.2. The oak relief from the church Kircher discovered. Attilio Rossi, *Santa Maria in Vulturella (Tivoli): Ricerche di Storia e d'Arte* (Rome, 1905), plate VII. Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome.

architects and sculptors were so rare that they had to be brought from Africa and other regions to the churches that he planned to build, as the Triumphal Arch of Constantine, the best preserved of all the arches in Rome, makes completely clear.”¹⁵ Every time Kircher walked through the arch, he noted, he was

15. *Ibid.*, 121–22: “Nam, ut in praecedentibus ostendimus, erant Constantini & Sylvestri temporibus Architecti & Sculptores adeo rari, ut eos ex Africa alijsque partibus ad Ecclesias, quas animo conceperat extruendas, acciri oportuerit, & Arcus Triumphalis Constantini, omnium eorum, qui hic Romae spectentur, adhuc integerrimus, sat superque ostendit.”

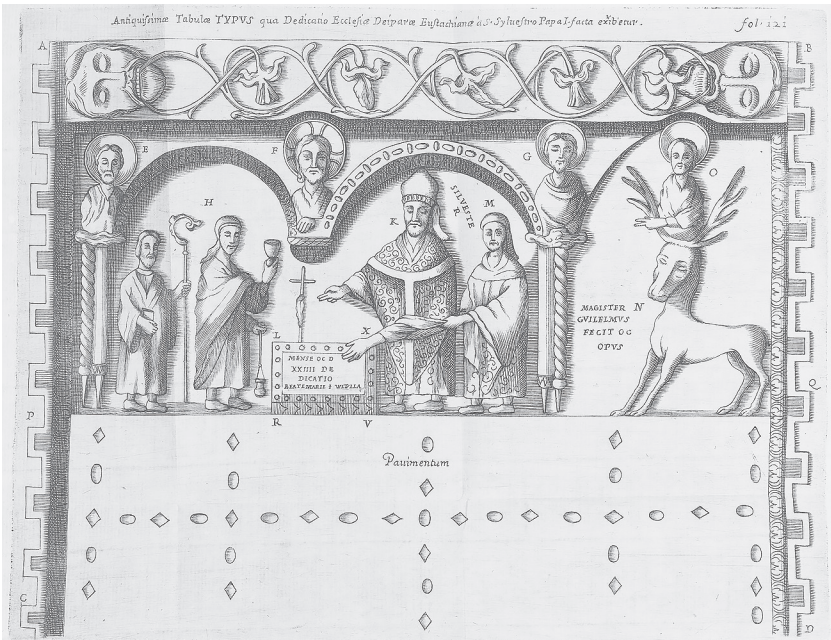


FIGURE 1.3. Kircher's reproduction of the oak relief: note the many divergences from the original, including the added name of Pope Sylvester. Kircher, *Historia Eustachio-Mariana* (Rome, 1665), leaf between pp. 120 and 121. Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel: 39.10 Hist.

struck (as the ecclesiastical historian Cesare Baronio had been before him) by the wildly varying origins and styles of its sculptures. The poor proportions of the carvings on the oak tablet showed beyond doubt that it had been fashioned in the same uncultivated period.¹⁶ So did their iconography. The multiple correlations between the tablet and other datable objects made Kircher's historical assurance doubly sure.

16. *Ibid.*, 122. After quoting Baronio, Kircher writes: "Haec Baronius, quam dissimilitudinem sculpturarum & ego, quoties per dictum arcum transitus datur, sat admirari non possum. Eodem igitur hoc rudi seculo, hanc Tabulam a magistro rudi admodum & enclipticae artis prorsus inexperto, exsculptam fuisse, improporionata imaginum symmetria clare ostendit."

Miraculously, on Kircher's return to Rome he found a letter of exchange from one of his patrons from northern Europe, August of Braunschweig-Lüneburg. With this money and further gifts from the good and the great, he rebuilt the church, which he provided with a shrine and a residence for pilgrims. The Virgin received a new dress, and the church new frescoes. Soon Kircher and his fellow Jesuits were holding apostolic missions there on Michaelmas (29 September). Thousands came to hear sermons, sing hymns, and take communion. Kircher commemorated his discoveries in a detailed little book, which he published in 1665. In fact, as Giunia Totaro has shown, Kircher rearranged and dramatized his account to emphasize how Providence had guided him at every step. The *Historia* was really a fund-raising brochure, and an effective one.¹⁷ But it was also an exercise in scholarship: a detailed analysis, vividly illustrated, of a historical site.

Kircher was wrong on almost every point of fact, and many of his mistakes were not innocent. The inscription that identified Constantine and Sylvester as the founders of the church disappeared without a trace. Though Kircher transcribed it in his autobiography, which he did not publish, in the *Historia* he contented himself with a much more general statement:

Turning to the walls I saw a range of inscriptions and images, from which at length I clearly realized that this is the very place in which the marvelous conversion of Saint Eustachius, which I will soon describe, had occurred, and that alone had provided the reason for founding a church consecrated to the worship of the Mother of God and Saint Eustachius in this place.¹⁸

17. Totaro, *Autobiographie*, 144–53.

18. Kircher, *Historia*, 3: “Hinc ad parietes conversus varia inscriptionum picturarumque schemata deprehendi; ex quibus tandem luculentur cognovi, hunc eundem locum esse, in quo admiranda (quam paulo post descripturus sum) Sancti Eustachij ad Deum conversio accidisset, quae et una fundandae

The inscription that Kircher did not cite in print may never have existed, and no other physical evidence connects the church to Constantine. The first written references to it—which describe it as part of a Benedictine monastery—appear in documents from the tenth century. Though the date of the current structure is uncertain, it was probably raised around three hundred years after that. The fine, stiffly hieratic wooden statue of the Virgin resembles other sculptures made in Lazio in the same period.¹⁹ Unlike the inscription, as we have seen, the oak relief—an altar frontal—survived.²⁰ It too is medieval, and the name of Sylvester does not appear on it, though it does appear on the reproduction that Kircher published. The relief that Kircher treated as a contemporary record of a historical event was in fact created hundreds of years later to perpetuate and support the local traditions about the origins of the church, and his reproduction of it departed in crucial ways from the original.

*From Candlesticks and Ancient
Drawings to Knowledge Making*

Kircher's discovery of the shrine of Eustachius is a late episode in the long epic of early modern antiquarianism, a new form of research that first took shape in Renaissance Italy. This book concentrates on his earlier predecessors: scholars and artists who laid down the precedents that he followed. Many features of Kircher's tale and the way he told it were traditional: he used long-established technical and narrative practices. From the early fifteenth century onward, when toilets were dug or trees were planted, antiquarians found their way into graves and

hoc in loco Ecclesiae in Deiparae & Divi Eustachij cultum consecratae occasionem praebuisset."

19. The fullest account remains Attilio Rossi, *Santa Maria in Vulturella (Tivoli): Ricerche di Storia e d'Arte* (Rome, 1905).

20. *Ibid.*, plate VII.

caves and opened up blocked niches in church walls. They discovered ancient objects of every kind. Their ranks were varied, even motley. Early antiquarianism was not a profession but a pursuit, and it appealed to amateurs of every kind as well as to historians, monks, architects, and artists who had a professional concern with aspects of antiquity. Scholars and artisans, priests and patrons, alchemists and artists organized and took part in excavations—sometimes all of them at once. The work they did was also highly varied in its sources and methods. Digging out a site and understanding its contexts often required the creative interweaving of forms of knowledge and practices of analysis drawn from very different realms.

This book examines a series of enterprises, all of which began with exploration of sites, involved excavation, and yielded discoveries: case studies in secular and sacred antiquarianism, mostly as practiced in the decades just before and after 1500. Our special interest lies in excavations, and the subsequent attempts to analyze and authenticate the objects that emerged from underground. We begin our story in a great monastery in Padua, early in the fifteenth century, where antiquarians discovered and disinterred the bones of the Roman historian Livy. This episode established a number of durable patterns. Then we move to Rome near the end of the century, a place and a period when antiquarians discovered and evaluated spectacular new objects of every kind. We begin with the excavation of the body of a Roman woman, found in miraculously good condition in a sepulcher on the Appian Way. From that we pass to the almost simultaneous rediscovery, as it was then understood, of a major Christian relic: the *Titulus*, or wooden INRI-placard, that had been nailed to the True Cross. From these studies, which reveal some of the commonalities between the hunt for sacred relics and the search for pagan antiquities, we pass to two of the most famous episodes of High Renaissance antiquarianism: the unearthing of the Laocoon and the exploration of Nero's buried Golden House. Finally, we leave Italy to study two contemporary

efforts in northern Europe to find and authenticate holy relics: the emperor Maximilian's uncovering of the Seamless Robe of Jesus in Trier and two formidable English clerics' rediscovery of the bones of Saint Dunstan, in both Canterbury and Glastonbury. Even in these very different cultures, we will see, the search for material remains of the Christian past shared features with Italian antiquarianism.

The chief discoveries on which we focus took place within a short span of time, between 1480 and 1518. Some of them involved the same scholars and artists. Michelangelo, for example, plays a part in three of our stories. By treating them together, we hope to illuminate, primarily, the techniques and practices of the antiquarians: the formal, explicit methods and the informal, tacit skills that they brought to bear as they did their best to authenticate and interpret what they had found. Kircher, who came after our main protagonists and learned from them, gives us an idea of what to look for in the more fragmentary records that his predecessors have left. For he read widely in the texts that earlier antiquarians had written and engaged critically with their methods and conclusions.²¹

Though the results of Kircher's investigations were largely incorrect, the approach that he took—whether he actually carried it out, or claimed in retrospect to have done so—was systematic and coherent, and its coming into being is the subject of this book. When Kircher examined the church, he brought to bear a particular set of skills and practices.²² He measured and drew the structures that he found in Mentorella, read their inscriptions, and examined other objects, above all the oak tablet. In particular, he scrutinized both the texts inscribed on the tablet and the object itself, assessing the quality of its craftsmanship and using that to give it a date. He had learned at Rome, examining

21. See Evans, *Exploring the Kingdom of Saturn*.

22. Victor Plahte Tschudi, *Baroque Antiquity: Archaeological Imagination in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2017).

the Arch of Constantine and other antiquities, to compare ancient objects in order to set them into their chronological contexts. Precise examination and systematic comparison seemingly made it possible to fix undated objects in time. In 1686 Jean Mabillon, the creator of paleography; Emanuel Schelstrate, the Vatican librarian; and Giovanni Pietro Bellori, a painter with expert knowledge of ancient wall paintings, examined the Vatican Virgil (Vat. lat. 3225), a splendidly illustrated manuscript. They discussed everything from the shape and components of its letters, which they scrutinized line by line and curve by curve, to its vivid diagrams of pagan rituals. And they decided, after much thought, that the manuscript must have been created before Constantine made Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire.²³ They were probably wrong, though their errors were much less serious than Kircher's. Most modern scholars hold that the manuscript was written and illustrated in the early fifth century CE: all agree that it came into being, images of pagan rituals and all, well after the time of Constantine. For our purposes, though, the similarity of their methods, and their sophistication, matters more. All these men agreed that objects could

23. The discussion of 1686 is summarized in the first facsimile edition of the manuscript by Giovanni Bottari and Pietro Bartoli, *Antiquissimi Virgiliani codicis fragmenta et picturae ex Bibliotheca Vaticana ad praeas imaginum formas a Petro Sancte Bartholi incisae* (Rome, 1741), iv–vi; on the dating by Mabillon see v–vi: “Hoc praeclarum antiquitatis monumentum non sine admiratione vidit celeberrimus Mabillonius, & de eo sic ait in suo Itinere Italico p. 63 Tom. I. Ex Latinis Virgiliis, quanti vis pretii cum figuris, antiqua sacrificia, & alia id genus reconditae Gentilium eruditionis tam perite, & eleganter experimentibus, ut Constantini M. tempus superare videantur.” On this episode, see Ingo Herklotz, “Late Antique Manuscripts in Early Modern Study: Critics, Antiquaries and the History of Art,” in Amanda Claridge and Ingo Herklotz, *Classical Manuscript Illustrations, The Paper Museum of Cassiano dal Pozzo. Series A—Antiquities and Architecture*, pt. 6 (London, 2012), 60. For the date of the manuscript, see Johannes de Wit, *Die Miniaturen des Vergilius Vaticanus* (Amsterdam, 1959), 151–57; David H. Wright, *The Vatican Vergil: A Masterpiece of Late Antique Art* (Berkeley, 1993), 115–20; Michele R. Salzman, “Vatican Vergil (Vergilius Vaticanus),” in Nancy Thomson de Grummond, *Encyclopedia of the History of Classical Archaeology* (London, 1996), 1151–52.

reveal lost histories. Minute visual clues, easily missed despite being intently sought in reproductions and early attempts at meticulously precise facsimiles, could be the keys that unlocked the dates and meanings of the objects. To their practiced eyes, the style and execution of a relief or a candelabrum, a line of script, or an illustration of a scene in Virgil could reveal as much as any text. Whether antiquarians were comparing candlesticks or scripts, they were taking part in a common enterprise. Serious study of their work, sparked by a classic article that Arnaldo Momigliano published in 1950, has transformed contemporary understanding of the history of scholarly practices and much more.²⁴ Our study engages with this tradition of scholarship both by focusing as intently as our protagonists on minute but revealing clues and by tracing the connections between ways of gathering and assessing information—such as the examination of the ancient manuscript of Virgil and that of the Church of St. Eustachius—that have traditionally been treated in isolation from one another. In particular, we hope to show how the study of secular antiquities was connected, in important ways, with that of sacred relics.

Antiquarianism Sacred and Secular

At Mentorella Kircher applied the techniques of the antiquarians to early Christian rather than to pagan objects and inscriptions. And thereby hangs a tale. Since the late fourteenth century, antiquarians in Italy had been examining ancient sites and buildings; collecting ancient coins, inscriptions, and works of art; and reconstructing ancient ways of life and forms of worship.²⁵ Modern historians of antiquarianism have often treated

24. A. D. Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13, 3–4 (1950), 285–315; see Momigliano and *Antiquarianism: Foundations of the Modern Cultural Sciences*, ed. P. N. Miller (Toronto, 2007).

25. For surveys, see Roberto Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity* (1969; Oxford, 1988); Pirro Ligorio's *Roman Antiquities*; *The*

their work as a fundamentally secular enterprise. They saw it as part, in its origins, of the larger revival of classical antiquity that began in fourteenth-century northern Italy and that included in its objects such notably pagan topics as the dancing of maenads, the worship of Priapus, and the customs of Roman brothels.²⁶ A powerful image from an illustrated fiction, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Venice, 1499), one of the most imaginative products of the fifteenth-century world of antiquarian studies, suggests why this brand of scholarship might seem hard to connect with the study of Christian antiquity (see figure 1.4).

This is not the only case that supports drawing a distinction between pagan and sacred antiquarianism. In 1468, a generation before the *Hypnerotomachia* appeared, twenty associates of the Roman humanist Pomponio Leto were arrested during Carnival on suspicion of plotting to murder Pope Paul II. Pomponio was in Venice, but he too was arrested and tortured. A charismatic teacher, Pomponio had won fame for his expert knowledge of the topography of ancient Rome and the customs of the ancient Romans. He and his friends had created an academy whose members took classical names, conversed in classical Latin, and crept into the catacombs outside the city.²⁷ In those torchlit tunnels they performed elaborate rituals. They also cultivated affection for younger men, celebrating these relationships in their verse.²⁸

Drawings in MS XIII. B 7 in the National Library of Naples, ed. Erna Mandowsky and Charles Mitchell (London, 1963); Patricia Brown, *Venice and Antiquity: The Venetian Sense of the Past* (New Haven, 1996); Maren Elisabeth Schwab, *Antike begreifen: Antiquarische Texte und Praktiken in Rom von Francesco Petrarca bis Bartolomeo Marliano* (Stuttgart, 2019), 261–66.

26. Bette Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture* (Princeton, 1999); Martin Mulsow, *Die unanständige Gelehrtenrepublik: Wissen, Libertinage und Kommunikation in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 2007).

27. For the investigation and use of the catacombs before the late sixteenth century, see Irina Oryshkevich, “The History of the Roman Catacombs from the Age of Constantine to the Renaissance” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2003).

28. See Anthony D’Elia’s expert account, *A Sudden Terror* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009).



FIGURE 1.4. Blood sacrifice before a priapic statue: ancient ritual, religion, and eroticism all called back to life in a highly imaginative as well as erudite fiction. Francesco Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Venice, 1499), sig. [mvi^r]. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Rar. 515, urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00039006-4.

It was far too easy for a suspicious pope and his Curia to see the games of the Pomponiani as a serious effort to revive paganism and sodomy. The papal master of ceremonies, Agostino Patrizi, wrote to a friend: “Some who had reputations as real little dandies, so to speak, and wanted to seem very learned and in love with antiquity, made a habit of drawing not only their literary culture but also their opinions on the ends of goods and evils and their views on God himself not from our philosophers, as was right, but from those ancient pagans.”²⁹

Under more tolerant pontiffs, Pomponio’s brand of antiquarian scholarship returned to favor. Scholars recorded the tours he conducted through the ruins of the ancient city, which revolved around efforts to work out the locations of Roman political and religious centers. Alessandro d’Alessandro recalled how he and Pomponio Leto had discussed the location of the Curia Hostilia, one of the ancient meeting places of the Senate, as they walked through the Forum. His other guests seem to have included visitors from northern Europe.³⁰ Tours of ancient sites and visits to collections of statues and antiquities remained central to the experience of Rome. Pierio Valeriano, who expended a vast amount of energy on detecting what he thought to be Christian meanings of Egyptian hieroglyphs, described how he and the distinguished cleric Giovanni Grimani had visited the latter’s garden near the Alta Semita, a road that ran down the spine of the Quirinal Hill. Grimani had excavated the buried ruins of an ancient temple, attracting what Valeriano described, with evident approval, as “a great crowd of gentlemen.”³¹

29. Agostino Patrizi to Antonio (?) Monelli, in Gaspare da Verona and Michele Canensi, *Le vite di Paolo II*, ed. Giuseppe Zippel (Città di Castello, 1904), 181–82: “Meminisse debes, mi A., quosdam qui elegantissimi, ut ita dicam, habebantur, ut viderentur doctiores amantioresque vetustatis, non solum linguam ac litteras, sed etiam de finibus bonorum ac malorum opiniones et de ipso summo deo sententias non a nostris philosophis, ut par erat, sed a gentilibus illis priscis sumere consuevisse.”

30. Schwab, *Antike begreifen*, 261–66.

31. *Ibid.*, 257–58 (“magna ingenuorum multitudo”).

When the cold wind of the Catholic reform changed Rome's cultural climate, however, reservations about the study of Roman antiquities revived. Although these concerns did not bring secular antiquarian pursuits to a close or anything like it, a divide between the two endeavors became apparent, one that made the study of classical antiquity and the (scholarly) efforts to help reform the church seem distinct. The Spanish bishop, jurist, and antiquarian Antonio Agustín played a central role in the Roman antiquarian world of the 1550s and 1560s. He regularly worked with and regularly criticized the hyperactive Pirro Ligorio, who dedicated much of his life to re-creating Roman rituals and beliefs. After spending three years at the Council of Trent, Agustín returned to Spain, where he served as a reforming bishop of Tarragona. Writing to a close friend and fellow antiquarian in Rome, Fulvio Orsini, he made clear that the antiquarian scholarship and statue gardens that had flourished in his days in Rome, and still went on—in particular, the uninhibited inquiries practiced by Ligorio—now seemed out of place, at least to tourists from the Protestant north, though he recommended (with much irony) against concealing nude sculptures:

I wonder if all those naked statues need to be buried, lest some reformation [scandal for the Reformers] arise from them. And certainly, those masculine herms in the Cesi and Carpi gardens, that hermaphrodite with the satyr in the chapel, looked bad . . . and the garden of Pope Julius III, with all those Venuses and other wantonnesses. True, they are of use to scholars and artisans, but the northerners are terrifically shocked and “Rumor, the evil, becomes stronger as it moves” [Virgil].³²

32. Antonio Agustín, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 7 (Lucca, 1772), 248: “Io dubito che bisogni sotterrare tutte le Statue ignude, perche non venga fuori qualche riformazione di esse: & certo parevano male quelli termini maschij della vigna di *Cesis* & di *Curpi*, & quel Hermaphrodito col Satiro nella Capella. . . . Et la vigna di Papa Giulio Terzo con tante Veneri & altre lascivie. Che se bene alli studiosi giovano, & alli artefici, li Oltramontani si scandalizzano bestialmente,

Agustín himself received sharp criticism, ten years later, from his friend Latino Latini, to whom he had sent a nostalgic poem about his time as an antiquarian in Rome, reading the newly discovered *Fasti Capitolini* and examining ancient buildings.³³ Latini insisted that the time had come for scholars to concentrate, as he and his associates now did, on defending ancient rituals and mystical observances against the heretics.³⁴ Informed observers, both contemporary and modern, have seen little reason to draw connections between the antiquarians and Christian beliefs—much less between their pursuits and the excavation and study of sacred relics.

Yet Kircher showed no sense of strain or conflict when he applied the most up-to-date methods of antiquarian research to Christian materials. In fact, he made clear that he found his Constantinian church in the course of his systematic investigation of the antiquities of Roman Lazio.³⁵ “While hunting for profane monuments,” he remarked with pleasure, “I found this holy treasure hidden among the inaccessible mountain cliffs.”³⁶ As Momigliano pointed out in his *Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography*, antiquarian interests and research had been part of the tradition of Christian learning for centuries.³⁷ Many

& fama malum vires acquirit eundo [Virgil, *Aeneid* 4.174–75, abbreviated].” For the context, see William Stenhouse, “Visitors, Display and Reception in the Antiquity Collections of Late-Renaissance Rome,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 58, 2 (2005), 397–434. Our thanks to David Quint for his advice on the interpretation of this text.

33. Agustín, *Opera Omnia*, 7:193–94. See Joan Carbonell Manils, “Latini Latini epistulae ad Antonium Augustinum missae cum quibusdam com[m]entariis auctae nunc primum editae,” *Faventia* 19, 2 (1997), 149–74, at 162n35. Our thanks to Mateusz Falkowski for these references.

34. Latini’s description of the activities of Petrus Canisius: “Et veteres ritus, & mystica sacra tuetur / Adversus haereses novas.” Agustín, *Opera Omnia*, 7:194.

35. In *Exploring the Kingdom of Saturn*, Evans follows Kircher step by step.

36. Kircher, *Historia*, 3: “Profana itaque monumenta sectatus, sacrum hunc inter inaccessas montium rupes latentem thesaurum inveni.”

37. Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley, 1990), chap. 6.

a medieval cathedral chapter included a fierce defender of tradition, steeped in knowledge of every corner of the building and every narrative of a local tradition, and ready to fight as soon as a reforming bishop suggested that he might change a bell tower or a ritual. One of the learned papal secretaries of the mid-fifteenth century, Maffeo Vegio, drew up a massively detailed survey of Old Saint Peter's Basilica, toggling back and forth between what he had learned by clambering into disused chapels and copying inscriptions and what he had read in the works of his medieval predecessors.³⁸ It was all part of the same struggle against the destructive power of time.

Others used the same techniques to different, corrosive effect. In Saint Paul's Outside the Walls (S. Paolo fuori le mura), a massive basilica on the site of the saint's burial place, pilgrims were shown by candlelight a sumptuous illuminated manuscript of the Vulgate, written in Reims in the late ninth century.³⁹ Perhaps because its illuminations included scenes from Jerome's life, hush-voiced vergers explained that he himself had written it. Not everyone was completely convinced. Giovanni Rucellai, the patron of the architect and antiquarian Leon Battista Alberti, may have echoed a critical remark from his friend when he recorded his visit: "We saw in the sacristy of this church a very old Bible, written by Saint Jerome with his own hand, and

38. Fabio della Schiava, "'Sicut traditum est a maioribus': Maffeo Vegio antiquario tra fonti classiche e medievali," *Aevum* 84, 3 (2010), 617–39; Christine Smith and Joseph O'Connor, *Eyewitness to Old St. Peter's: Maffeo Vegio's "Remembering the Ancient History of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome"* (Cambridge, 2019).

39. Lorenzo Valla, *Discourse on the Forgery of the Alleged Donation of Constantine*, ed. and trans. Christopher B. Coleman (New Haven, 1922), 140–41: "Quia Hieronymum attigi, non patiar hanc contumeliam ipsius tacito praeteriri. Romae ex auctoritate papae ostenditur codex Bibliae. tamquam reliquiae sanctorum luminibus semper accensis, quod dicunt scriptum chirographo Hieronymi." On this manuscript, see Viviana Jemolo and Mirella Morelli, *La Bibbia di S. Paolo fuori le mura: Abbazia di S. Paolo fuori le mura, Roma, 29 giugno–30 settembre 1981* (Rome, 1981).

those monks take it for a relic.”⁴⁰ A decade earlier, Vegio’s irascible colleague Lorenzo Valla had dismissed the attribution to Jerome as an insult to that ascetic, erudite churchman: “Do you seek proof? Why, there is ‘much embroidered cloth and gold,’ as Virgil says, a thing which indicates rather that it was not written by the hand of Jerome. When I inspected it more carefully, I found that it was written by order of a king, Robert, I think, and in the handwriting of an inexperienced man.”⁴¹ Two hundred years before Kircher and Mabillon, Valla used the script and illuminations of a codex to show that it could not come from the context to which tradition assigned it. In one case, the practices apply to the dating of a Bible; in the other, to the dating of a codex with the pagan works of Virgil.

Valla was not the only antiquarian steeped in classical learning to turn his attention to Christian antiquities. Alberti devoted a long section of his *De re aedificatoria* to reconstructing what the old basilica of Saint Peter had looked like in the decades just after its creation. He portrayed it as a simple, austere, and dramatic building, dominated by a single altar, where the bishop performed the mass and preached the sermons—a vision of the early Christian basilica that he drew from Augustine’s account of Ambrose’s practices in Milan.⁴² Biondo, as he explained to Eugenius IV in the dedication of his *Roma instaurata*, devoted a good deal of his survey of the city to the basilicas, churches, and other holy places that popes and other Christians had built or

40. Giovanni Rucellai ed *il suo Zibaldone*, vol. 1, “*Il Zibaldone Quaresimale*,” ed. Alessandro Perosa (London, 1960), 69: “Item, vedemo nella sacrestia di detta chiesa una Bibia molto anthicha, scripta di mano propria di Sancto Girolamo, et tengolla quelli monaci per reliquia.”

41. Valla, *Discourse*, 140–41: “Quaeris argumentum? Quia multum, ut inquit Virgilius, est pictai vestis et auri: res quae magis Hieronymi manu indicat scriptum non esse. Illum ego diligentius inspectum comperi scriptum esse iussu regis, ut opinor, Roberti chirographo hominis imperiti.”

42. Anthony Grafton, “The Winged Eye at Work: Leon Battista Alberti Surveys Old St. Peter’s,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 73, 4 (2019 [published 2020]), 1137–78.

restored.⁴³ Indeed, he held that Christian churches and pagan temples could not be described separately. Following the tradition of the *Mirabilia*, the popular twelfth-century guide to Rome, he explained that many ancient temples had become Christian churches, emphasizing the continuity between antiquity and the present as well as the replacement of paganism by Christianity. When he praised the glorious marbles and mosaics of the fifth-century church of S. Stefano Rotondo, he made clear that “it was built on the temple of Faunus. Pope Simplicius either created the original building—or, as I think more likely, adorned it.”⁴⁴ In describing Rome’s buildings, Pomponio Leto was much less consistent about tracing the way that ancient temples had been later transformed into churches: he even held that many churches had been founded on secular ancient sites.⁴⁵ But as Irina Oryshkevich has argued, it seems likely that in the later years of the Roman Academy, when members used burnt sticks or charcoal to inscribe his and their names on frescoes of Christian love-feasts, they were imagining themselves in the place of the early Christians, celebrating modest banquets while in hiding from those who had persecuted them.⁴⁶ What was the relation, if any, between what look like two traditions of the scholarship of things, one that emphasized classical, secular objects and one that emphasized Christian ones?

These traditions were certainly not identical. In some of the antiquarian disciplines—among them epigraphy, the systematic study of inscriptions—many practitioners excluded Christian

43. Flavio Biondo, *Rome Restaurée/Roma instaurata*, ed. and trans. Anne Raffarin-Dupuis, vol. 1 (Paris, 2005), ep. ded.

44. *Ibid.*, 1:81: “quam tecto nunc carentem, marmoreis columnis et crustatis varij coloris marmore parietibus musiuoque opere, inter primas urbis ecclesias ornatissimam fuisse iudicamus. Eam, quae in Fauni aede prius fundata fuit. Simplicius primus papa aut extruxit aut, quod magis credimus, exornavit.” On the relations between temples and churches in the *Mirabilia*, see Schwab, *Antike begreifen*, 265.

45. Schwab, *Antike begreifen*, 265–66.

46. Oryshkevich, “The History of the Roman Catacombs,” 265–76.

materials from their collections. Early in the sixteenth century, when Pietro Sabino compiled a sylloge—the period’s term for a collection of inscriptions—that included Christian texts, he noted in a letter to his friend Marco Antonio Sabellico that doing so was unusual, and he insisted, rather defensively, on their value. After collecting a vast corpus of classical inscriptions, relying on the work of earlier collectors like Cyriac of Ancona, he explained, “I added to the pagan ones around two hundred from the period of Christianity, which are not, by Hercules, to be treated with contempt.”⁴⁷ Sabino also made clear that other antiquarians’ lack of interest in Christian inscriptions was somewhat paradoxical. He himself had drawn his materials “from marbles and the heavily outlined mosaics in sacred apses as well as from the ancient manuscripts in sacred libraries.”⁴⁸ Though he did not make the point, Sabino certainly knew that his fellow antiquarians had turned up many, perhaps most, of their classical inscriptions in Christian churches. It was all the more striking, then, that they did not copy Christian epitaphs and dedications.

Some observers drew a contrast between the reverence with which prominent Italians viewed classical antiquities and the disrespect that they showed when relics were displayed. In 1529 the prominent Dutch humanist Gerard Geldenhouwer wrote a biography of his former patron, Philip of Burgundy, bishop of Utrecht, who had died in 1524. From fall 1508 through spring 1509, he recalled, Philip headed an embassy to Rome, where he arrived in January 1509. There he commissioned the artist

47. Sabino to Sabellico, in Daniela Gionta, *Epigrafia umanistica a Roma* (Messina, 2005), 144: “addiderimque ethnicis ipsis etiam circiter ducenta temporum christianorum, non, hercule, habenda contemptui.” On Cyriac, see Andreas Grüner, “Archäologie als Kapital, die medialen Strategien des Cyriacus von Ancona (1390–1452),” *Münchener Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst* 63 (2012), 7–35.

48. Sabino to Sabellico, in Gionta, *Epigrafia umanistica*, 144: “et tum in Urbe, tum vero extra Urbem pertinaci acrique studio perscrutatis ac discussis quibuscumque angulis rimati sumus ex marmoribus et vermiculatis apsidum sacrarum operibus, necnon ex vetustissimis sacrarum bibliothecarum codicibus.”

Jan Gossaert, who was traveling with him, to draw “the sacred monuments of antiquity.”⁴⁹ His mastery of the arts delighted Pope Julius II:

He took pleasure in paintings, and considered Philip at once a connoisseur and a craftsman in this art, since he had studied painting and goldsmith work in his youth. When the conversation turned to architecture, he knew the measurements, proportions, and symmetries of that art. He discoursed so precisely about bases, columns, epistyles, capitals, and other things of that sort that you would have thought he was reading each passage aloud from Vitruvius. If they discussed fountains, aqueducts, and baths, it became clear that nothing in these matters was unknown to him.⁵⁰

Deeply impressed, Julius offered Philip many gifts, though Philip accepted only two marble statues. But when “sacred relics were shown to the people, and especially to our fellow Germans, for their veneration, certain very prominent cardinals, sticking out their tongues and making obscene gestures with their fingers, mocked the simplicity of our countrymen.”⁵¹ The

49. Gerard Geldenhouwer, “Vita clarissimi principis Philippi a Burgundia,” in his *Collectanea*, ed. J. Prinsen (Amsterdam, 1901), 233: “Nihil magis eum Romae delectabat, quam sacra illa vetustatis monumenta, quae per clarissimum pictorem Joannem Gossardum Malbodium depingenda sibi curavit.” See Marisa Bass, “Jan Gossaert’s ‘Neptune and Amphitrite’ Reconsidered,” *Simiolus* 35 (2011), 61–83, at 63.

50. Geldenhouwer, *Collectanea*, 232: “Delectabatur ille picturis, habebat hunc eius artis iudicem simul et artificem, pictoriam enim et auri fabrillem adolescens didicerat. De architectura erat sermo, noverat hic eius artis dimensiones, proportiones, symmetrias. De basibus, columnis, epistiliis, coronamentis atque id genus reliquis adeo exacte disserebat, ut ex ipso Vitruvio eum singula legere putares. Si de fontibus, aquaeductibus, termis sermo incidisset, nihil harum rerum hunc latere adparebat.”

51. *Ibid.*, 233: “Addebat, se vidente, cardinales quosdam primi nominis, dum sacrae reliquiae populo et praecipue Germanis nostris venerande ostenderentur, exertis linguis ac digitis in turpem modum compositis, nostrorum simplicitati insultasse.”

biography of Philip, as Marisa Bass has pointed out, is not “a straightforward historical document.”⁵² Geldenhouwer, by the time he wrote it, had left the Augustinian order, had married, and would soon become a professor at Lutheran Marburg. Still, it suggests that some learned Romans used an expert, respectful technical language when they discussed antiques, in contrast to the boyish, snarky gestural language that they used when they encountered relics.

In the 1560s and after, the church transformed itself in response to the Protestant threat. Its leaders devised a firm new cultural program that prioritized the defense of the church against revolting Protestants. The ear trumpets of clerical patrons began to gesture invitingly toward those who could inform them about the early history of Christian customs and beliefs, and many antiquarians’ interests slowly changed. Antiques continued to be collected, discussed, and displayed in splendid garden settings.⁵³ More and more, though, leading antiquarians began to concentrate on such confessionally dictated questions as the nature of crucifixion and the other torments inflicted on Christian martyrs by the Roman state. More systematically than their fifteenth-century predecessors, antiquarians began to explore the evidence for the early history of Rome’s basilicas and to map the catacombs where, some of them thought, early Christians had performed clandestine masses. Like the patristic revival of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (a mass of editions, commentaries, and treatises far larger than the strictly classical scholarship of the same period), much of this scholarship was inspired by religious—and, after the outbreak of the Reformation—confessional passions and interests.⁵⁴ Yet, as we have seen, scholars were already pursu-

52. Bass, “Gossaert’s ‘Neptune and Amphitrite,’” 64.

53. Stenhouse, “Visitors, Display, and Reception.”

54. See the studies collected in Ingo Herklotz, *La Roma degli antiquari: Cultura e erudizione tra Cinquecento e Settecento* (Rome, 2012), and *Apes urbanae: Eruditi, mecenati e artisti nella Roma del Seicento* (Città del Castello, 2017).

ing serious inquiries into the history of the church in the fifteenth century. Some of them—Biondo, Valla, Alberti—had a deep interest in both secular and sacred antiquarianism. Even those who specialized in one side or the other, as we will see, took much the same approaches as did their counterparts.⁵⁵ Our stories, in other words, shed new light on the relations between secular and Christian scholarship in a world whose religious climate was undergoing rapid change.

Antiquarian Practices and Emotions

Each of the following episodes has been the object of multiple studies, many of them erudite and insightful. They are the foundations on which our work rests. Our investigation has a different emphasis, however. Taking advantage of the rich narratives provided by our sources, we seek to illuminate not the objects and images that fascinated our antiquarians but the methods and practices they applied in pursuing them: to concentrate not on the products of their research but on their processes. The models for our work include some of the most original recent studies of the history of science, of scholarship, and of knowledge making in early modern Europe—histories that, as our study confirms, were closely connected and reward those who study them together.⁵⁶ Our aim is to show not that the pursuit

55. See the rich case study by Carmelo Occhipinti, *Pirro Ligorio e la storia cristiana di Roma: Da Costantino all'umanesimo* (Pisa, 2007).

56. The methodological inspirations for this enterprise include Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven, 2010); Martin Mulso, *Prekäres Wissen: Eine andere Ideengeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt, 2012); Angus Vine, *Miscellaneous Order: Manuscript Culture and the Early Modern Organization of Knowledge* (Oxford, 2019); Anthony Grafton, *Inky Fingers: The Making of Books in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2020). A tightly focused study of similar themes, closely connected to our enterprise, is Pamela O. Long, *Engineering the Eternal City: Infrastructure, Topography and the Culture of Knowledge in Late Sixteenth-Century Rome* (Chicago, 2018). On the connections between the

of relics and that of antiquities were identical but that they were intimately related in multiple ways. In some respects they resembled one another closely. We take our cue from their shared focus on tangible objects. By some standards, sacred antiquarianism was the more sophisticated of the two fields. Nothing mattered more to ecclesiastical scholars than relics—bones, flesh, hair, and the like from the bodies of Jesus, the members of his family, and later martyrs and saints, or clothing and other objects that had touched their bodies and been imbued with their holiness.⁵⁷ Relics emitted a kind of holy radiation: to see them, and even more to touch them, could fill pious Christians with powerful emotions (see figure 1.5).

In 1495 the Nuremberg medical man and print professional Hieronymus Münzer examined the skull of Mary Magdalene in Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume, a well-known pilgrimage site east of Aix-en-Provence. He mobilized the full resources of a rich vocabulary of words for emotions to make clear how deeply the experience impressed him:

It is fearful to look on this face. On the front of the skull, on the left side, both flesh and skin stick to the bones. That is, at the place where Christ, after the resurrection, his body having been glorified, said, as he touched her, *Noli me tangere*

histories of science and scholarship, see Lorraine Daston and Glenn Most, “History of Science and History of Philology,” *Isis* 106, 2 (2015), 378–90.

57. See, e.g., Patrick Geary, *Furta sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*, rev. ed. (Princeton, 1990); Barbara Abou-El-Haj, *The Medieval Cult of Saints: Formations and Transformations* (Cambridge, 1994); Arnold Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien: die Geschichte ihres Kultes vom frühen Christentum bis zur Gegenwart*, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1997); Henk van Os, *The Way to Heaven: Relic Veneration in the Middle Ages* (Baarn, 2000); *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, ed. Martina Bagnoli, Holger Klein, C. Griffith Mann, and James Robinson (New Haven, 2010); Cynthia Hahn, *The Reliquary Effect* (London, 2017); and, for the period around 1500, Livia Cárdenas, *Friedrich der Weise und das Wittenberger Heiltumsbuch: Mediale Repräsentation zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Berlin, 2002), and Cárdenas, *Die Textur des Bildes: Das Heiltumsbuch im Kontext religiöser Mentalität des Spätmittelalters* (Berlin, 2013).

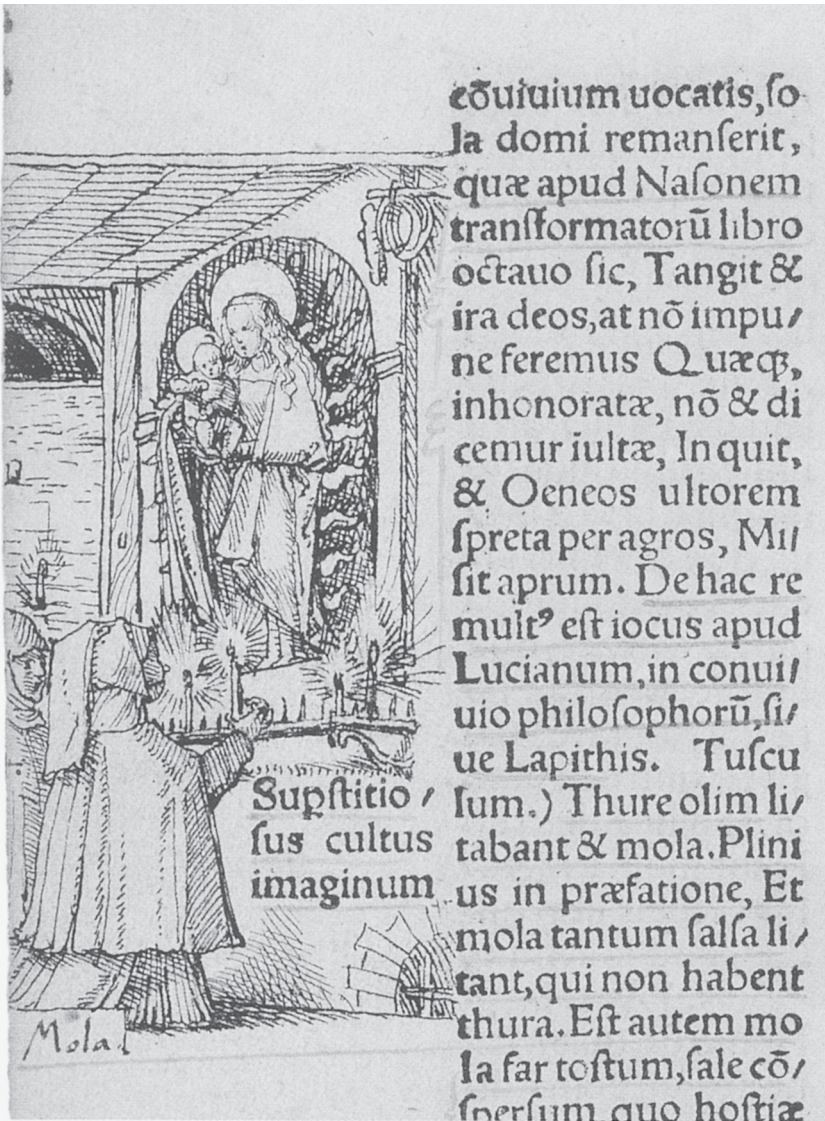


FIGURE 1.5. Two women kneel as they dedicate candles to an image of the Virgin and child: one of the many traditional forms of veneration that were also rendered, in the same period, to sacred relics. Marginal drawing by Hans Holbein in a copy of *The Praise of Folly* by Erasmus of Rotterdam. Kunstmuseum Basel. Wikimedia, Creative Commons License.

[Don't touch me!]. There is also a lower jaw: what a frightening and remarkable spectacle. I believe that in the whole world there is no comparable divine presence of the Catholic religion. The more intensely one looks at it, the more one is inflamed with a fearful spirit.⁵⁸

When secular antiquarians began to describe ancient works of art as charged with an electricity of their own, an aura of inimitable beauty and power, they used a language that the relic collectors had helped create.⁵⁹

In the years around 1500, scholars of the sacred did more than examine individual bones and scraps. They published catalogues of the relic collections in Vienna (1502), Wittenberg (1509), and Halle (1520): *Heiltumsbücher*, illustrated with vivid images of the richly worked reliquaries that contained the origins.⁶⁰ The first comparable catalogue of pagan art, the images

58. Hieronymus Münzer, *Itinerarium*, ed. Klaus Herbers et al. (Wiesbaden, 2020), 21–22: “Terribile est videre hanc faciem: in anteriore parte cranei ad latus sinistrum adheret ossibus et caro et pellis. In ea scilicet parte, in qua Christus post resurrectionem clarificato corpore eam tangens dicit: Noli me tangere. Adest etiam inferior maxilla. O quam stupendum et admirabile insigne. Credo in toto orbe simile religionis catholice numen non esse. Quanto vehemensius quis intuetur, tanto magis terribili quodam spiritu inflammatur.”

59. On the connections between the search for relics and that for antiquities, see the pioneering work of Hester Schadee, “Ancient Texts and Holy Bodies: Humanist Hermeneutics and the Language of Relics,” in *For the Sake of Learning: Essays in Honor of Anthony Grafton*, ed. Ann Blair and Anja Goeing, 2 vols. (Leiden, 2016), 2:675–91.

60. On the genre of the printed *Heiltumsbuch*, see Cárdenas, *Friedrich der Weise und das Wittenberger Heiltumsbuch* and *Die Textur des Bildes*, and Christopher Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (Chicago, 2008). Facsimiles include Lukas Cranach, *Wittenberger Heiltumsbuch* [1509] (Unterschneidheim, 1969), and *Das Hallesche Heiltumbuch von 1520: Nachdruck zum 450. Gründungsjubiläum der Marienbibliothek zu Halle*, ed. Heinrich Nickel (Halle, 2001). The contents of relic collections were as varied as those of later Kunst- und Wunderkammern. For the unicorn horns in the Utrecht collection, see Casper Staal: “Das Bistum Utrecht: Reliquien und Reliquiare,” in *Der Weg zum Himmel: Reliquienverehrung im Mittelalter*, ed. Henk van Os (Regensburg, 2001), 163–98, at 177.

of statues from the Fugger collection and elsewhere included in the *Inscriptiones sacrosanctae vetustatis* of Petrus Apianus and Bartholomaeus Amantius, did not appear until 1534. This was not the only case in which the scholars and artists who pursued and excavated antiquities sometimes enacted scripts that had been created before them by those who searched for relics.

Discovery Scripts

Stories of archaeological discovery are often told as narratives of surprise. Revelations are contingent, their causes banal—even when their consequences seem revolutionary. In 1674, for example, workmen were repairing a stretch of the Via Flaminia, some miles from Rome, in preparation for the pilgrims who would arrive in the impending Holy Year. As they quarried material from the roadside rocks, they suddenly (“d’improvviso”) heard an echo and realized that they had broken into a large, barrel-vaulted chamber, full of lead boxes of bones—and with walls lined with brilliant paintings. In astonishment they looked at this fantastic spectacle, in a place where no one would have expected it (see figure 1.6).⁶¹ An inscription identified this structure as the family vault of the Nasonii. It was the work of a moment for the massed antiquaries of Rome to leap to a conclusion: this must be the tomb of the poet Ovid, whose cognomen was Naso.⁶² Giovanni Pietro Bellori even managed to interpret

61. Pietro Santi Bartoli and Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Le pitture antiche del sepolcro de Nasonii nella via Flaminia disegnate ed intagliate alla similitudine degli Antichi Originali* (Rome, 1680), 8: “gli Operari, non molto lungi, tagliando il fianco di detta rupe, per cavarne sassi, e materiali commode a massciare, & fortificare la strada, d’improvviso sentirono il rimbombo, & aprirono vna buca sù la volta di una Camera, nella quale tosto penetrati, riconobbero l’edificio sotterraneo riccamente adornato di stucchi, e di pitture, restando attoniti in vedere quel novello spettacolo là doue meno haverebbono creduto.”

62. To borrow Ovid’s words, they had found the place where “Naso’s bones may rest softly”—“Nasonis molliter ossa cubent,” Ovid, *Tristia* 3.3.76. It is striking that Bellori did not quote this line.

(continued...)

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