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Authors	Sloan, Nathaniel
Citation	Sloan, Nathaniel. "Ruinenlust and Monumental Wish Fulfillment:La Basilica di San Paolo rovinata e risorta". Master's Thesis, John Cabot University, Rome, Italy. 2019.
Rights	Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International
Download date	2026-05-08 08:42:25
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Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14490/579



John Cabot University

The Graduate School
Department of Art History and Studio Art

Master of Arts in Art History

*Ruinenlust and Monumental Wish Fulfillment:
La Basilica di San Paolo rovinata e risorta*

Nathaniel Sloan

First Reader

Professor Karen Georgi

Second Reader

Professor Sarah Linford

Fall 2019

Abstract

This paper will focus on printed images of the church of San Paolo fuori le Mura in Rome produced directly following a fire that caused significant damage to the church in July, 1823. These printed depictions of the ruined church, which fit within the canon of representation established by Piranesi, may be interpreted within the context of recent historical events, including the French occupation of Rome in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Various factors, including the recent trauma of French occupation and the sense of *ruinenlust* ubiquitous in the period, contributed to the immense popularity of these images in the popular imagination. Through careful analysis of the reception of these images within the context described above, this paper aims to account for the continued popularity of images of the ruined church, even after the church had been entirely reconstructed. In addition, the thesis posits a typology of viewers that illustrates how various sorts of people alive in the early nineteenth century would have likely seen and related to these images.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the *Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica* in Rome and the *Biblioteca istituzionale della Città metropolitana di Roma Capitale* for graciously allowing me to reproduce photographs of prints in their collection.

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1. Introduction

My initial fascination with the subject of this paper was occasioned by the discovery of a curious fact concerning images of San Paolo fuori le Mura, specifically those produced after a fire had reduced the church to ruins in 1823. Apparently, these images made such an impact on the viewing public that they remained popular throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, even after the church had been rebuilt. The question of what accounted for the popularity of these images would drive my research, and would compel me to examine the interaction of various historical currents that determined the reception of these images. This paper will trace these interactions, and will attempt to answer the question of the continued popularity of the ruin images of San Paolo. While many excellent works have recently been published on the church, the fire, and the history of the church's reconstruction, the reception of San Paolo's ruin images and their continued popularity has not been explored in detail.¹

The paper will begin with a brief accounting of the fire itself, before moving on to discuss written accounts of the fire that were recorded immediately after the event. These accounts demonstrate the emotional connection that Romans and others had to the historic church. Following this appraisal of written reactions to the fire, the paper will

¹ The following works on the church have played a vital role in this paper: Nicola Camerlenghi, *St. Paul's Outside the Walls: a Roman Basilica, from Antiquity to the Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2018); Marina Docci, *San Paolo fuori le Mura: Dalle Origini alla Basilica delle "Origini"* (Rome: Gangemi, 2006); Michael Groblewski, *Thron und Altar: der Wiederaufbau der Basilika St. Paul vor den Mauern (1823 - 1854)* (Freiburg: Herder, 2001); Iliaria Sermattei, ed., *1823. L'Incendio della Basilica di S. Paolo: Leone XII e L'Avvio della Costruzione* (Ancona: Quaderni del Consiglio Regionale delle Marche, 2013); Richard Wittman, "Churches and States," *Places Journal*, September 2019.

move to a discussion of the French occupation of Rome in the years before the destruction of the church. The lingering effects of occupation were still felt at the time of the fire, therefore it is necessary to examine this traumatic period in some detail. So too will it be necessary to briefly sketch the pertinent aspects of the Restoration, the historical period directly following the reinstatement of Papal temporal rule in 1814. After discussing these historical circumstances, the paper will move on to give an accounting of the role the famed *incisore* Giovanni Battista Piranesi played in establishing a canonical mode of representing ruins in the eighteenth century. An appreciation of Piranesi is indispensable given that he was the primary example for the artists who produced the ruin images of San Paolo. The discussion will then move to an analysis of a select number of these images. This representative sample will illustrate the challenges of representation that the newly-made ruins of San Paolo posed for artists of the day. After this section of visual analysis, the discussion will turn to an examination of certain aspects of the images that relate to the larger context explored in earlier sections of the discussion. Finally, the paper will conclude by addressing the ways in which differently conditioned viewing subjects would relate to the images of the ruins, in order to illuminate the potential reasons for the enduring popularity of these images.

In writing this paper, it has been my intention to produce a work that does not sacrifice literary quality for academic over-precision. Rather than divide the text sharply into discrete units, I have allowed recurrent themes to float to the surface at various points in the text where relevant. This decision reflects the interconnectedness of the themes that will be discussed in the following pages. The approach taken in this paper is

one that celebrates interdisciplinarity, drawing on both textual and visual evidence to draw out the relevant thematic content. While clarity and academic rigor are of the utmost importance, they ought not to be the singular focus of art historical writing. If, as Michael Ann Holly believes, melancholy—or a continuous, melancholic mourning over lost objects—is at the heart of our discipline, should not the form of art historical writing accommodate this disposition rather than strive fruitlessly after total objectivity?² Thus, this paper that will consider the mourning of lost objects thematically will also attempt to convey knowledge of its subject stylistically.

² See Michael Ann Holly, “The Melancholy Art,” *The Art Bulletin* 89, no. 1 (2007)

2.

The Fire(s)

On April 15, 2019, the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris caught fire. The ensuing blaze resulted in the destruction of the building's roof and spire. While the damage could have been more widespread, this was nevertheless a significant blow to the church, a potent symbol of French national pride. Images of the fire were everywhere across traditional and social media, even after the fire had been contained. Pictures taken after the blaze depicting the building's ruinous interior had a similar currency. While these images are terrifying and deeply saddening, their captivating and picturesque qualities cannot be ignored. There is, indeed, something of the sublime to them. Bearing witness to the destruction of such a monument brought about by the forces of nature imparts the feeling of sheer terror. Yet, the distance from which the terrifying object is viewed lends the spectacle a kind of perverse pleasure. As Edmund Burke opined in his seminal work on the nature of the Sublime, "When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be...delightful, as we every day experience."³ The case of Notre-Dame presents an important comparandum for the subject of the present discussion.

Unfortunately, this is by no means the first time a church of such importance has been brought to ruin by fire, and in the summer of 1823, just such a fate befell the basilica of San Paolo fuori le Mura in Rome. The church's near total destruction made a

³ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), 36-37.

significant impact on those living at the time, one that would be measured both in the popularity of images of the ruined church and the desire to bring back that which had been lost in the blaze.

Certain parallels between these two events attest to the truth of the oft-cited quotation, supposedly uttered by Mark Twain: “History does not repeat itself, but it rhymes.” In both cases, for example, the damage done to these potent symbols of collective identity was interpreted in the context of perceived societal downfall that is characteristic of these historical periods that are both conditioned by fear of loss, anxiety, and nostalgia. For Romans of the early nineteenth-century, this perceived downfall was closely linked to the recent vicissitudes of Napoleonic occupation. For French observers in 2019, the societal degradation symbolized by the fire of Notre-Dame has to do with perceived threats to French national identity represented by immigration and Islamic extremist terrorism. In both cases, rumors spread that alleged the fire to be the work of terrorists, whereas in fact both fires were entirely accidental.⁴ The parallels between these two shocking events indicate the relevance of the present discussion.

On the night of July 15, 1823, the church of San Paolo fuori le Mura, having stood for close to fifteen centuries, was brought to a state of near-total ruination. The cause of the church’s destruction was a fire, which grew to immense proportions in the span of a few hours in the early morning of July 16.⁵ It was determined that it had been

⁴ For more on the historical parallels between the reactions to the fires, see Wittman, “Churches and States.”

⁵ Nadia Bagnarini, “La Basilica di San Paolo fuori le Mura: Storia di una Committenza Pontificia,” *Annali della Pontificia Accademia di Belle Arti e Lettere dei Virtuosi al Pantheon*, 2015, no. 15: 241; Nicola Camerlenghi, *St. Paul’s Outside the Walls: a Roman Basilica, from Antiquity to the Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2018), 246.

set inadvertently; a lantern left lighted by a laborer had set the roof beams aflame, which in turn caused the church quickly to transform into a “raging Vesuvius,” in the words of a contemporary account.⁶ The fire was not discovered until hours later, and by the time help arrived much of the damage had already been done.⁷ The slow response to the fire had largely to do with there being almost no one present at the church that night. The monks who normally occupied the adjacent monastery had temporarily relocated to their house in the *centro*, so as to avoid the ever-present threat of malaria on the marshy grounds of the church.⁸ Their absence would in part contribute to the full extent of the damage. The basilica of San Paolo fuori le Mura, in existence from the fourth century of the common era, was left a ruin.

The near-total loss of the church was a shocking blow to the Catholic community, and news of the fire spread quickly. Knowledge of the *incendio* was deemed to be so potentially traumatizing that it was withheld from Pope Pius VII.⁹ According to Ercole Consalvi, then Cardinal Secretary of State, the shock of receiving the news might well have been fatal for the pope, who would die roughly one month later due to

⁶ “*Parea però un vesuvio terribile, sorpassando le fiamme superbe del loro fatale dominio e più alte montagne, giacchè lungi quindici, e più miglia si potè vedere cotanta disgrazia, che fece in ogni cuore orrore sacro, e penetrante,*” Giuseppe Marocchi, *Dettaglio del Terribile Incendio Accaduto il dì 15 Luglio 1823 della Famosa Basilica di S. Paolo di Roma fuori di Porta Ostiense* (Rome: 1823), 6; Camerlenghi, *St. Paul’s Outside the Walls*, 246; Docci, *San Paolo fuori le Mura*, 145.

⁷ Ilaria Sermattei, ed., 1823. *L’Incendio della Basilica di S. Paolo*, 16.

⁸ Wittman, “Churches and States,” 2.

⁹ Bagnarini, “La Basilica di San Paolo fuori le Mura: Storia di una Committenza Pontificia,” 241; Laura Biancini, “‘Quest’opera religiosissima’. Giacomo Raffaelli e la ricostruzione della basilica di San Paolo,” in 1823. *L’Incendio della Basilica di S. Paolo*., ed. Ilaria Sermattei, 99.

complications from a broken hip.¹⁰ The reaction to this loss would be further reflected in both contemporary written accounts of the fire, as well as in printed engravings of the ruined church, the latter being the main subject of this paper.

These striking images resonated strongly at the time of their publication and continued to do so throughout the nineteenth century.¹¹ Even after San Paolo had been rebuilt, the vision of its ruins lingered in the public imagination. The continued popularity of this image begs the question: what accounts for the resilience of this tragic sight in the minds of those living in this period? A thorough investigation of these images and the reception thereof will trace the interaction of various historical currents, such as the Romantic obsession with ruins and the continued echoes of the Napoleonic occupation of Rome. Ultimately, this paper will suggest that the existing discourse of ruins and the then recent blows to the Roman Church's identity lent the ruin of San Paolo a particularly weighty symbolic and representational role. However, before investigating what factors contributed to the contemporary reception of the images of the church's ruins, I will first expound briefly on written testimonies of the event.

The pain and shock that the loss of the church caused is clearly discernible in contemporary writings. The first account of the destruction, published by the daily journal *Diario di Roma* immediately following the fire on Wednesday, July 16, described it as both an “*orribile disastro*” and “*una fatalissima disgrazia*.”¹² Common throughout

¹⁰ Bagnarini, “La Basilica di San Paolo fuori le Mura: Storia di una Committenza Pontificia,” 241; Fabio Sebastianelli, “L’incendio della Basilica di San Paolo fuori le Mura,” *Roma Moderna e Contemporanea*, 12, no. 3 (2004): 540.

¹¹ Sermattei, ed., *1823. L’Incendio della Basilica di S. Paolo*, 20.

¹² *Diario di Roma*, July 16, 1823, 4-5.

the reports of the fire is emotional language such as this, which lends them the semblance of eulogies or laments. This language has the effect of personifying the church. It becomes clear quite quickly that the destruction of the church was perceived as the loss of much more than an inanimate building. In a sense, a life had indeed been lost. For centuries, the church had facilitated the socio-religious interaction of its flock. Like the Catholic Church more generally, San Paolo served as a nexus that brought the faithful together in holy communion. Over its life-span, the socio-religious network that developed within the church was identified with the building itself. Therefore, with the destruction of the church, the confluence of socio-religious connections it facilitated was lost as well.¹³

Following the initial reporting of the event in Rome, news of the fire was subsequently published throughout Italy in papers such as the *Gazzetta di Milano* and the *Gazzetta Piemontese*, with the text taken verbatim from the original article printed in the *Diario di Roma*.¹⁴ The burgeoning media apparatus of the early nineteenth century allowed for the speedy dissemination of this shocking news. Accounts of the church's destruction were not limited, however, to journalistic reports. A more detailed description of the fire was published soon after the event by Giuseppe Marocchi, a contemporary commentator from Imola. This account too makes use of emotional language to describe the church and its ruination, noting that "the pain of its loss [is] certainly universal."¹⁵

¹³ Sebastianelli, "L'incendio della Basilica di San Paolo fuori le Mura," 541.

¹⁴ Sebastianelli, "L'incendio della Basilica di San Paolo fuori le Mura," 540.

¹⁵ "...essendo certamente universale il dolore per la di lei perdita." Marocchi, *Dettaglio del Terribile Incendio*, 3.

Marocchi goes beyond description of the event itself, and asserts that the sight of the burning church “brought about sacred and piercing horror in every heart.”¹⁶ In addition to articulating the pain effected by the loss of the church, Marocchi’s more thorough account includes a brief history of San Paolo, a more in-depth description of the full sequence of events following the start of the conflagration, the likely causes thereof, and a detailed accounting of the extent of the damage.

Two weeks after the event, architect and archaeologist Angelo Uggeri published a pamphlet on the subject.¹⁷ This work also employs a sentimental vocabulary to convey the pain the fire had caused. It was described by Uggeri as deplorable, and the destruction of columns, supposedly taken from the Mausoleum of Hadrian, was a loss worth crying over.¹⁸ It was “an accident so painful,” Uggeri writes, “it excites tears even now.”¹⁹ For Uggeri, this event was incredibly upsetting, as is made clear by the emotional tone of his description. However, unlike other accounts that focus only on lamenting the loss of the church and the painful emotions it had stirred, Uggeri’s offers an antidote to the suffering. In his opinion, relief and comfort are to be found in turning one’s mind to the future, and imagining the church’s reconstruction.²⁰ Accordingly, most of the remainder of the work

¹⁶ “...che fece in ogni cuore orrore sacro, e penetrante.” Marocchi, *Dettaglio del Terribile Incendio*, 6.

¹⁷ Angelo Uggeri, *Della Basilica di S. Paolo sulla Via Ostiense* (Rome: Angelo Uggeri, 1823), 1; See Docci, *San Paolo Fuori Le Mura*, 148.

¹⁸ “Considerava da piangere, sopra ogn’ altro materiale, la perdita di molte fralle ventiquattro colonne tolte dalla Mole di Adriano, le quali formavano il più raro e prezioso ornamento della nave maestra.” Uggeri, *Della Basilica di S Paolo*, 1.

¹⁹ “Eccita tutt’ or le lacrime accidente cosi doloroso!” Uggeri, *Della Basilica di S. Paolo*, 1.

²⁰ “...altro sollievo e conforto non seppi trovare se non volgere in mente il modo d’ adoperare a fin d’ ottenerne il rifacimento e la restaurazione.” Uggeri, *Della Basilica di S. Paolo*, 1.

is dedicated to elaborating Uggeri's plan to rebuild the church as it had once existed in its original, late-antique state. Scientific archaeological expertise would be employed to recapture what Uggeri understood to be the basilica's past essence. Its new form would be shaped to fit the contours of the supreme absence the fire had brought about. Reconstruction, on Uggeri's model, would be a process of reconstituting the past in the present. In the years to come, Uggeri's advice would be followed, and reconstruction according to his vision would soon be the order of the day. There were those, however, who advocated a different response to the loss of the church. The architect Giuseppe Valadier, for instance, submitted plans for a new San Paolo that deviated substantially from the old church.²¹ While this new San Paolo would be rejected in favor of an attempt to restore the church to its antique splendor, it ought to be noted that not everyone shared Uggeri's ideas. The debate over the reconstruction of San Paolo is echoed by the contemporary debate surrounding the rebuilding of Notre-Dame de Paris. Here too one may observe a contentious struggle over whether or not the church ought to be restored to its pre-destruction state.²²

²¹ Sermattei, ed., *1823. L'Incendio della Basilica di S. Paolo*, 33, 38—39; a complete accounting of Valadier's involvement in the reconstruction of San Paolo may be found in Groblewski, *Thron und Altar*.

²² Wittman, "Churches and States," 6-7.

3. The Lingering Trauma of Occupation

Vital to understanding the impact of the fire on the contemporary Roman and Catholic context is an appreciation of recent historical developments in the Eternal City and beyond. Throughout Europe, the final years of the eighteenth century as well as the first years of the nineteenth revolved around the French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic Wars. A full accounting of the effects of the French Revolution lies far beyond the scope of this paper, and indeed the scope of countless books and entire scholarly careers. However, it will serve to briefly discuss the aspects of this period that inform the reception of the loss of San Paolo. Perhaps the aspect of this period most pertinent to the present discussion is the trauma that it inflicted on those who lived through it.

My use of the term trauma will refer not only to “traumatic” events such as the French Revolution or the destruction of San Paolo, but also to the lived experience of these events as trauma. Additionally, the lingering effects of these lived experiences on those who endured them will be of vital importance. I must also address the potentially anachronistic usage of the term “trauma” when dealing with a period prior to the development of the concept in psychoanalytic thought. While our understanding of the mechanisms of trauma and of human responses thereto has developed more recently, starting with Freud’s use of the term, these mechanisms and responses predate our

identifications and understanding.²³ Therefore, the model of trauma and response will serve in this context.

Historian Frank Ankersmit provides a model that can be effectively employed to understand historical trauma.²⁴ The usefulness of this model for the present discussion is underscored by Ankersmit's application thereof to the French Revolution and its socio-psychological effects. While Rome was spared the violence of the Revolution *per se*, it would nevertheless experience its fair share of revolutionary trauma under the French occupation of the Papal States. It has been well established by the fields of history and psychology that one's identity is vitally linked to memory and a conception of the past. Indeed, central to both these fields is the notion that one's identity lies in the past.

However, Ankersmit chooses instead to focus on the importance of *forgetting* as it relates to the construction of identity. Early on in his essay, Ankersmit describes four types of forgetting.²⁵ While all are interesting in their own right, the third and fourth types pertain more to the present discussion. The third type of forgetting is occasioned by a traumatic event that is too painful to be assimilated by the conscious mind of the individual. In this case, the traumatic event is relegated temporarily to the subconscious, while the subject's conscious identity remains intact.²⁶ However, in situations where trauma occasions the

²³ See Erika Naginski, "Canova's Penitent Magdalene: On Trauma's Prehistory" in *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, ed. Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg (Lebanon: Dartmouth College Press, 2006) for an examination of responses to trauma in art that predate our modern use of the term.

²⁴ Frank Ankersmit, "The Sublime Dissociation of the Past: Or How to Be(come) What One is No Longer," *History and Theory* 40, no. 3 (2001): 295-323; On historical responses to trauma see also Dominick LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss," *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 4 (1999): 696-727.

²⁵ Ankersmit, "The Sublime Dissociation of the Past," 299-303.

²⁶ Ankersmit, "The Sublime Dissociation of the Past," 300.

fourth type of forgetting, it is not possible to maintain this identity. Events like the French Revolution are so traumatic to those who live through them, and effect such significant and changes, that it is impossible to relegate the memory of the event to the subconscious. Furthermore, the widespread and collective experience of the trauma precludes the individual from suppressing its memory. This individual response is not enough to suppress the memory of the collective. Instead, the trauma prompts those who have experienced it to “[enter] a new world, something they [can] do only on the condition of forgetting a previous world and of shedding their former identity.”²⁷ This new identity is in large part defined by its difference from the previous one. In other words, it is an identity largely defined by the absence of the previous identity.

For Ankersmit, in the context of post-Revolutionary Europe, this entrance into a new world is responsible for the creation of the reactionary mindset. This way of thinking recognized that the Revolution had instantiated a new world, yet was accompanied by the desire above all to return to the world that had gone forever.²⁸ More than that, it entailed a belief in the notion that this desired world *could* be reclaimed, despite its indisputable past-ness.²⁹ This reactionary way of thinking mirrors that of Angelo Uggeri, the aforementioned architect who proposed rebuilding San Paolo as it had “originally” existed. David Lowenthal, in the new edition of his seminal work *The Past is a Foreign Country*, also picks up on the development of a reactionary pursuit of the past when he

²⁷ Ankersmit, “The Sublime Dissociation of the Past,” 301.

²⁸ Ankersmit cites Joseph de Maistre and Louis de Bonald as proponents of this way of thinking. See Ankersmit, “The Sublime Dissociation of the Past,” 304.

²⁹ Ankersmit, “The Sublime Dissociation of the Past,” 304.

writes: “the French Revolution sundered past from present; after the guillotine and Napoleon, the previous world...seemed irretrievably remote, hence doubly dear.”³⁰ Indeed, it is the newly remote nature of the previous world that prompts the desire to recover it. This sort of reaction to the tribulations of the Revolution and Napoleon was not to be observed only in France. It was also felt quite strongly in Rome, and would inform the reaction to the destruction of San Paolo, as the case of Uggeri demonstrates.

French involvement with Rome in this period lasted roughly eighteen years and took a tremendous toll on the power of the Papacy and the prestige of the Eternal City.³¹ The very foundations of the Church were shaken by a short span of years that saw the temporal powers of the Papacy revoked under occupation, church buildings brought down, and even Pope Pius VI’s death in French captivity.³² This period marked the birth of an entirely new world, “a world that would be the antithesis of everything that Rome represented.”³³ The first major shift in Rome’s government came in 1798, when General Louis-Alexandre Berthier’s army took the city and established the short-lived Roman Republic of 1798-99 in imitation of its ancient predecessor.³⁴ Following the recapture of the city by the European powers allied against Napoleon, the Pope was first restored to his throne in 1800. After this first restoration, Bonaparte would attempt to live in peace

³⁰ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2015), 44.

³¹ Susan Nicassio, *Imperial City: Rome Under Napoleon* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2009), 216; Philippe Boutry, “Une théologie de la visibilité” in *Cérémonial et rituel à Rome (XVIe-XIXe siècle)*, ed. Maria Antonietta Visceglia and Catherine Brice (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1997), 320.

³² Wittman, “Churches and States,” 3.

³³ Nicassio, *Imperial City*, 15.

³⁴ Nicassio, *Imperial City*, 16.

with the Church, and in the following year Pius VII would propose a concordat between Rome and France in an attempt to extinguish any lingering enmity. While the agreement, signed in September 1801, allowed the Church in France to rebuild, in many ways it extended Napoleon's authority over Church affairs.³⁵ By making peace with France largely on its own terms, the concordat solidified the threat posed by French rule to Papal temporal authority.³⁶

However, as time passed, the Pope became less cooperative with the French regime, and in 1808 Napoleon directed General Miollis to occupy the city. Then, from 1809 to 1814, Rome was ruled as an imperial city by the French prefect Count Camille de Tournon.³⁷ These historical developments frequently resulted in the poor treatment of contemporary popes. Pius VI died in captivity following his deportation to France at the onset of the Roman Republic, while Pius VII was exiled to Savona for three years between 1809 and 1812.³⁸ The velocity with which these dramatic governmental changes took place would likely be enough in itself to bring about a traumatizing effect. The fundamental threat to the legitimacy of Papal temporal rule posed by French occupation could not be underestimated, and the post-Restoration period would be characterized by attempts to restore and secure this legitimacy on both a symbolic and political level.³⁹

³⁵ Nicassio, *Imperial City*, 15.

³⁶ Michael Broers, *Politics and Religion in Napoleonic Italy: the War Against God, 1801-1814* (London: Routledge, 2001), 3.

³⁷ Nicassio, *Imperial City*, 16.

³⁸ Nicassio, *Imperial City*, 16-17.

³⁹ Sermattei, ed., 1823. *L'Incendio della Basilica di S. Paolo*, 17.

French occupation also threatened the Papal monopoly on the past. For centuries, the Papacy had made use of antiquity to ground the status quo in eternal tradition. However, the French government of Rome also laid claim to the glorious Roman past and sought to use it for its own ends. On the one hand, this French claim on history manifested itself in the looting of priceless artworks from Italy generally and the Papal collections specifically.⁴⁰ The crown that was Napoleon's Paris would be decorated with the jewels of ancient Roman art, just as Napoleon would clothe himself in the symbols of Roman imperial power.⁴¹ The French-authored Roman Republic of 1798 - 99 was, in the words of Carolyn Springer, "a profoundly and self-consciously archaeological enterprise" that modeled itself wholesale on the ancient democratic government of Rome.⁴² The administration of Rome as an imperial city between the years 1809 and 1814 also saw a revitalization of traditional academic institutions and championed classicism in the arts.⁴³ The ways in which the French made use of antiquity are myriad, though this brief description will suffice for our present purpose. Clearly, the Pope was not the only one who could use the ancient past as justification for the present state of affairs.

⁴⁰ Carolyn Springer, *The Marble Wilderness* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 64, 74.

⁴¹ Napoleon's relationship to Rome must be contextualized in relation to that of his predecessor, Louis XIV. The monarch, who in 1666 founded the French Academy in Rome, was equally concerned with appropriating Rome's prestige for his own ends. For more on the subject, see Carolina Brook, Elisa Camboni, Gian Paolo Consoli, Francesco Moschini, Susanna Pasquali, eds. *Roma-Parigi. Accademie a confronto: L'accademia di San Luca e gli artisti francesi XVII - XIX secolo* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, 2016)

⁴² Springer, *The Marble Wilderness*, 65.

⁴³ Maria Palazzolo, "Tra antico e moderno. La cultura romana nel primo Ottocento," in *Maesta di Roma: da Napoleone all'unità d'Italia*, ed. Stefano Susinno (Milano: Electa, 2003), 54.

Even before the final reinstatement of the Pope's temporal power in 1815, after the fall of Napoleon, Pius VII made restoration the order of the day following his reinstatement in 1800.⁴⁴ The Pope's chirograph of October 2, 1802 is perhaps the clearest indication of his commitment to archeological restoration, and stresses the importance of protecting the antique heritage of Rome.⁴⁵ His emphasizing the importance of Papal authority over archeology was a highly symbolic act that indicated his control of the past more generally, and with this the reinstatement of Church authority.⁴⁶ The aim of the *Restaurazione* to reclaim the Church's hold on the past also manifested in the painting of artists such as Vincenzo Camuccini, Jean-Baptiste Wicar, and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. These painters brought the compositional principles and stylistic criteria of secular Neoclassicism, as in the work of Jacques-Louis David, together with Christian subject matter and genuine religious sentiment.⁴⁷

Following the final defeat of Napoleon, Pius VII made his best attempt to restore the authority and prestige of the Papacy, though this task of restoration would prove to be, in some sense, impossible. The world of Papal Rome prior to occupation had been shattered beyond repair, and a full "restoration" would seem in retrospect to have been a reactionary fantasy. The effects of this loss would be felt beyond the Vatican in the wider

⁴⁴ Springer, *The Marble Wilderness*, 75.

⁴⁵ Springer, *The Marble Wilderness*, 75.

⁴⁶ Valter Curzi, "'L'imperio delle lettere e arti belle': verso una nuova coscienza del patrimonio culturale negli anni della Restaurazione" in *Il Museo Universale: dal Sogno di Napoleone a Canova*, ed. Valter Curzi, Carolina Brook, and Claudio Parisi Presicce (Milano: Skira, 2017), 15.

⁴⁷ Caterina Bon Valsassina, "La Restaurazione cattolica e il rinnovato sentimento religioso" in *Maesta di Roma: da Napoleone all'unità d'Italia*, ed. Stefano Susinno (Milano: Electa, 2003), 169-172.

Roman populace. The collective identity of the citizens of the *urbs aeterna* was closely linked with the universal prestige of *Roma Papale*, therefore the loss of Papal temporal authority effected trauma on a rather large scale. The entrance into this new world was a traumatic process and would have significant repercussions. This post-Restoration climate, infused with a deep nostalgia and awareness of a lost past, was the setting in which the loss of San Paolo would take place.

The Napoleonic occupation of Rome had brought about the demise of the *ancien régime* and the birth of a new world. New calls for democracy and popular sovereignty that had been introduced to Rome by the Napoleonic government were threatening the historical power of the Pope.⁴⁸ While the popes of this period would have liked to return to a prelapsarian state of affairs such as had existed prior to French occupation, the traumatic break effected thereby made this impossible. The pope was not alone in this desire to recapture a lost identity. For many Romans and Catholics whose identities were closely bound up with the unassailable and universal status of Papal authority, occupation also represented a fundamental trauma. Alas, the reactionary desire to recover the past in the present is always futile, as has been noted above. However, despite the fact that occupation had in many ways severed a felt connection to the past, its material remnants continued to litter the Roman landscape much as they always had. The continuing presence of these ancient fragments provided those who lamented the loss of the past with a material form of anchoring. *How can the past truly be gone if it lies all around?*

⁴⁸ Elisabeth Kieven, “Echi europei di San Paolo fuori le mura,” in *Maesta di Roma: da Napoleone all’unità d’Italia*, ed. Stefano Susinno (Milano: Electa, 2003), 502.

This seeming paradox likely contributed to the conception of Rome in the nineteenth century as being “anti-modern” when compared with cities such as Paris.⁴⁹

In 1823, prior to its destruction, San Paolo was a powerful testament to the past’s persistence in the present. Unlike other major Roman basilicas such as San Pietro in Vaticano and San Giovanni in Laterano, San Paolo largely retained its late-antique form, making it a potent visual symbol for the continuity of the Church across the centuries.⁵⁰ Whereas St. Peter’s baroque facade proclaimed the sublime authority of the *ecclesia triumphans*, San Paolo’s testified to the validity of apostolic succession that linked the contemporary papacy by an unbroken chain to its mythic roots in the late-antique period. Its presence belied the current state of affairs and affirmed the continued importance of the Catholic church and the Papacy. Its destruction, then, was felt ever more keenly with this context in mind. The loss of the church could not but serve as a powerful representation of all that was lost during French occupation. This church indeed served as a stand-in for *the Church*; according to Nicola Camerlenghi, “both were in need of rehabilitation.”⁵¹ While much of the damage had already been carried out in previous years, the brutal destruction of San Paolo sharply delineated the end of an era in the history of the Church.⁵² It is in this context that we must understand the contemporary reactions to the fire.

⁴⁹ Palazzolo, *Tra antico e moderno. La cultura romana nel primo Ottocento*, 53.

⁵⁰ Kieven, *Echi europei di San Paolo fuori le mura*, 502; Wittman, “Churches and States,” 2.

⁵¹ Camerlenghi, *St. Paul’s Outside the Walls*, 250.

⁵² Wittman, “Churches and States,” 3; Boutry, “Une théologie de la visibilité,” 343; Monica Calzolari, “Leone XII e la Ricostruzione della Basilica di San Paolo fuori le Mura,” in *Il Pontificato di Leone XII: Restaurazione e Riforme nel governo della Chiesa e dello Stato*, ed. Gilberto Piccinini (Ancona: Quaderni del Consiglio delle Marche, 2012), 89.

The acute sense of loss, both of a physical object and of an intangible *genre de vie*, pervades contemporary written accounts of the fire, and is also conveyed strongly in visual representations of the ruins. These ruin images were imbued by this context with a symbolic potency that was augmented by use of the contemporary artistic vocabulary for depicting ruins. The combination of emotional resonance and the Piranesian aesthetic cemented these images as central to the public imagination of San Paolo, so much so that for many decades following the fire, images of the ruins would continue to be printed and widely distributed, both in Italy and elsewhere.⁵³ The role that these images played in shifting the public conception of San Paolo will be the primary subject of the remainder of this thesis, considering particularly the reception of the prints with respect to both their symbolic potency and their use of a highly developed vocabulary for the depiction of ruins.

⁵³ Sermattei, ed., 1823. *L'Incendio della Basilica di S. Paolo*, 20.

4. Ruins and Representations

Following the fire, local Romans and foreigners alike flocked to see the remains of the church.⁵⁴ Those who swarmed about the scorched fragments were certainly no strangers to ruins, but this particular example represented something of an entirely different kind. The basilica had not decayed slowly over the centuries, but was, instead, devoured in the course of a few short hours. It was, in effect, a ruin *ex novo*. While the abruptness of its transformation from a vital element of the city's religious life to a lifeless object of aesthetic appreciation set it apart from other ruins, the fascination concerning those of San Paolo may also be understood within the greater context of *ruinenlust* that was ubiquitous in the period.⁵⁵

At this point in history, ruins were decidedly *en vogue*. The intense feelings evoked by gazing upon a fragment of a long-vanished past were part and parcel of the contemporary Romantic movement in art and literature. Indeed, Romanticism developed in part as a response to the larger loss of the past that has been described above. These intense feelings were conjured handily by the newly-made ruin of St. Paul's outside-the-walls. The sentiment is summed up neatly by Marie-Henry Beyle, known by his *nom de plume* Stendhal, in his *Promenades dans Rome*:

⁵⁴ Sermattei, ed., 1823. *L'Incendio della Basilica di S. Paolo*, 135.

⁵⁵ *Ruinenlust*, translated as "obsession with ruins," is a German neologism that applies handily to the Romantic period. For more ruin-specific vocabulary, see Robert Ginsberg's discussion of Rose Macauley's compendium of ruin-terminology in Ginsberg, *The Aesthetics of Ruins* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 461-463.

I visited St. Paul's on the day following the fire. I found in it a severe beauty and an impression of calamity such as only the music of Mozart can suggest. The terrible painful traces of the misfortune were still alive; the church was cluttered with smoldering and half-burnt beams; great fragments of columns split from top to bottom threatened to fall at the slightest jar. The Romans who filled the church were thunderstruck. Now nothing is more beautiful, more picturesque, more melancholy than the frightful disorder produced by the fire. Thus perished the most ancient basilica not only of Rome, but of all Christianity. It had lasted fifteen centuries.⁵⁶

Key to understanding the Romantic fascination with ruins is its preoccupation with paradox. For Stendhal it is “beautiful,” “picturesque,” and “melancholy” all at once. Like the sublime images of the Notre-Dame ablaze, the ruin engenders in the viewer complex emotions that seem contradictory. Gazing upon the ruin, the viewer engages in a kind of double-apprehension in which she perceives both its present degraded state and imagines its once-perfect whole that is now forever lost to us.⁵⁷ The vision of the ruins of San Paolo was, and continues to be, deeply affecting. One feels one's own heart break to see the immense edifice brought low by the forces of nature. Yet this melancholy is bittersweet, and this supreme *absence* calls to mind a haunting *presence*. In seeing what remains, one necessarily imagines *that-which-is-no-longer*. Stendhal's lament over the destruction of San Paolo also begs to be interpreted in the context of the effects of the recent French revolution. In bringing about a new world, and a new collective identity, the Revolution had severed a felt connection to and unity with the past. Awareness of this

⁵⁶ Henri Beyle, *Promenades dans Rome* (Paris, 1866), 97. Translation Nicola Camerlenghi, see Camerlenghi, *St. Paul's Outside the Walls*, 246.

⁵⁷ David Lowenthal, “Material Preservation and Its Alternatives,” *Perspecta* 25 (1989): 72; Richard Wendorf, “Piranesi's Double Ruin,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34, no. 2 (2001): 163.

loss seems to color his description. It is as if the ruins of the church have a fundamental connection to the metaphorical ruins of pre-modern society.

Yet the ruins of San Paolo are quite distinct from the countless others that dot the Roman landscape. The immediacy of the building's destruction, its instantaneous transformation from living to dead shades its meaning within the interpretative category of "the Ruin." It is, to be certain, a Romantic ruin, with all the melancholy invocations of a golden age long past. This nostalgic mode of engagement with ruins, reinforced by the shock of Revolution, could be applied with equal success to San Paolo, to the Baths of Caracalla, the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, *et cetera*.⁵⁸ However, the abrupt ruination of San Paolo set it apart, especially for Roman Catholics. For them, San Paolo would more pointedly evoke the recent trauma undergone by the Church prior to *la Restaurazione*. Throughout the remainder of this paper, the categories of the Romantic ruin and the Catholic ruin-as-trauma will be important to bear in mind.

Given that the remainder of this paper will focus on visual representations of ruins rather than the *rovine* themselves, the relationship between ruin and representation must be sketched in some detail before continuing. This relationship centers on the question of what exactly is at stake in the "imaging" of the ruins. What is lost in the translation of reality into visual depiction? One key component at play is the process of objectification that is entailed by visual representation. By reducing the overwhelming experience of the ruin to a two-dimensional image, the experience is made definable and manageable. But

⁵⁸ In no way do I mean to imply that ruin-gazing began only after the French Revolution. A noted early example of this phenomenon is to be found in Petrarch's letter concerning his visit to Rome. See Francesco Petrarca, "Familiares II.14" in *Rerum familiarum*, vol. I-III, trans. A.S. Bernardo (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1975-85), 113.

does this objectification of the ruin rid it completely of its traumatic content? While it is too early to hazard an answer to this question, the degree to which visual representation transforms, delimits, and objectifies the ruin will be examined more thoroughly below. However, before discussing these images themselves, it is important to understand the techniques of visual representation that were employed by those who produced the images of the ruins of San Paolo.

The printed depictions of the ruins of San Paolo employ a visual lexicon established in large part by the work of Giovanni Battista Piranesi. The architect and *vedutista* became famous for his evocative etchings that depicted not only the ruins of ancient Rome, but also the wonders of the *nuova Roma*, and fantastic flights of fancy that showed the ruins as they once were (or, rather, weren't).⁵⁹ For Piranesi, depicting the grandeur of the ruins of the ancient Roman past gave him an opportunity he did not have as an architect. The period in which he was active was largely devoid of the grand architectural commissions that would have given him fulfillment, so he chose instead to display his talents through the medium of print.⁶⁰ In this period, Piranesi played a vital role in establishing the image of Rome as conceived in the minds of contemporaries. The famed German Romantic figure, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, was disappointed by the lack of correspondence between the Rome of Piranesi's prints and the real city.⁶¹ It was

⁵⁹ Reproductions of Piranesi's works may be found in Mario Bevilacqua, Mario Gori Sassoli, Fabio Barry, eds., *The Rome of Piranesi: The Eighteenth-Century City in the Great Vedute* (Rome: Artemide, 2006) and Luigi Ficacci, Bradley Dick, Verena Listl, Isabelle Baraton, eds., *Giovanni Battista Piranesi: Selected Etchings* (Cologne: Taschen, 2001).

⁶⁰ Andreas Huyssen, "Nostalgia for Ruins," *Grey Room*, 2006, no. 23: 15.

⁶¹ Wendorf, "Piranesi's Double Ruin," 162.

difficult, for Goethe and others, to separate the real Rome from the spectacular grandeur of Piranesi's images. By means of visual representation, Piranesi transformed the Roman ruins into something separate from their reality.

In this context, it was inevitable that the *vedutisti* who produced images of the ruins of San Paolo following the fire would engage with Piranesi in one way or another. Aesthetically, these images largely conform to the *gusto Piranesiano*, and make use of techniques frequently employed by the artist.⁶² An image of the ruins produced by Antonio Acquaroni, entitled *Veduta interna della Basilica di S. Paolo presa immediatamente dopo il suo incendio*, illustrates the outsized influence that Piranesi had on the *vedutisti*. (Fig. 1) While the image will be treated in more depth below, it will suffice here to point out its use of Piranesian techniques, such as the inclusion of figures to give a sense of scale, the numbering of various elements of the ruin with corresponding explanatory passages, and delicate linework made possible by the use of etching. However, Piranesi's influence was not limited to artists, but extended also to viewers. As the example of Goethe noted above makes clear, the astounding popularity of Piranesi's images of Rome, and in particular its ruins, established a model for both the depiction of ruins *and* the mode of viewing them. Scholar Andreas Huyssen identifies Piranesi as the creator of an "authentic imaginary of ruins" whose impact continues to be felt today.⁶³

More than codifying a way of engaging with ruins, Piranesi is largely responsible for the conception of Rome *as* ruin. Art Historian Valter Curzi puts this brilliantly when

⁶² Sermattei, ed., 1823. *L'Incendio della Basilica di S. Paolo*, 20.

⁶³ Huyssen, "Nostalgia for Ruins," 14.

he identifies Piranesi as the “*principale artefice di un immaginario collettivo che percepisce Roma, nell’avanzato Settecento, come superbo accumulo di reliquie del passato.*”⁶⁴ This notion of Rome as an “accumulation of relics of the past” would only be strengthened during the period of Restoration, when, as discussed above, papal dedication to archeology and preservation of cultural heritage was linked to the reestablishment of a stable identity. The images of the ruins of San Paolo, along with their reception, therefore, ought to be contextualized within this *immaginario* developed by Piranesi. However, the question remains: how do these images engage with the ideas and forms engendered by the works of Piranesi in the milieu of the 1820s and 1830s?

⁶⁴ Valter Curzi, “Restaurare con l’ ‘occhio del tempo’: i frammenti di Piranesi,” in *La cultura del restauro: Modelli di ricezione per la museologia e la storia dell’arte*, ed. Maria Failla, Susanne Meyer, Chiara Piva, Stefania Ventra (Rome: Campisano, 2013), 133; “[the] principal architect of a collective imaginary that perceives Rome, in the later 1700s, as a splendid accretion of relics of the past.” Author’s translation.

5. San Paolo's Ruin Images

Even as the embers continued to smolder in the days following the fire, artists of all sorts, both Italian and foreign, came to bear witness and preserve the image of the ruins. This list included, among others, Luigi Rossini, Louis Leopold Robert, Bartolomeo Pinelli, Antonio Acquaroni, Jean-Baptiste Lesueur, Wilhelm Gail, Antonio Sarti, Giuseppe Ferrante Perry, and Achille and Pietro Parboni.⁶⁵ For the *vedutisti* active in Rome at the time, the fire at San Paolo presented a unique opportunity. Given that this ruin was created over the span of days rather than centuries, they were to be the first to ever depict this haunting sight. Additionally, there had been a recent precedent for the current circumstances. Just a few years earlier, in 1814, there had been a fire at the Winchester Palace in London that offered a similar opportunity to contemporary artists and view-makers.⁶⁶ The images of the ruins of San Paolo were immensely popular, and continued to be so even *after* the church had been reconstructed.⁶⁷ In order to consider why this was the case, we must first evaluate a few of the images in more detail. These select examples will illustrate the larger themes that have been introduced above.

A particularly striking example of these ruin images is held by the National Institute for Graphic Design in Rome, bearing the inventory number FN 39746 (Fig. 2). While the print is unsigned, it bears a striking similarity to the images of the ruins

⁶⁵ Sermattei, ed., 1823. *L'Incendio della Basilica di S. Paolo*, 20.

⁶⁶ Sermattei, ed., 1823. *L'Incendio della Basilica di S. Paolo*, 20-21.

⁶⁷ Sermattei, ed., 1823. *L'Incendio della Basilica di S. Paolo*, 20.

produced by the brothers Achille and Pietro Parboni, published soon after the fire. The image bears no title, though beneath the image lie two inscriptions on the left and right. (Figs. 3, 4). The inscription on the left, written in ink, denotes the medium of the work as an etching. The inscription on the right records a somewhat grim, yet poetic observation. In pencil, in a different hand than that of the other inscription, is written “*tot seculum labor perdidit una dies.*”⁶⁸ The anonymous author of this line beautifully expressed the Romantic response to the violent loss of San Paolo. Importantly, this line scans as dactylic pentameter, marking it as poetry.⁶⁹ While it does not appear to be a full quotation, the second section of the line appears in Ovid’s *Fasti*, where it likewise occupies the final half of a line of dactylic pentameter.⁷⁰ It seems highly unlikely that this coincidence is accidental. Rather, given the popularity of Ovid’s *opera*, the unknown author had likely read the *Fasti* and introduced this phrase, consciously or not, into his own poetic epigram. It draws a poignant contrast between the centuries of effort that went into the church’s construction and the single day that brought it to ruin. The author’s recourse to poetic Latin marks this as an artistic and romantic response to the sight of the ruin. Even the chosen meter adds to the artistic and emotional resonance of the line; in ancient Greek and Latin poetry, dactylic pentameter was primarily employed as a component part of the poetic form known as the elegiac couplet, which in turn was the

⁶⁸ “So many centuries of toil were lost in one day.” Author’s translation.

⁶⁹ For more on Latin poetic meter, see Llewelyn Morgan, “Metre,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies*, ed. Alessandro Barchiesi and Walter Scheidel (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), 160-175.

⁷⁰ Ovid, *Fasti* 2. 235-6: “*una dies Fabios ad bellum miserat omnes, | ad bellum missos perdidit una dies.*” The context here is the defeat of the Fabii at the battle of Cremera, surely also a loss worthy of poetic lament.

basic compositional unit for the genre of elegy. Then, as now, elegy implied a kind of lament, a mourning over something lost.⁷¹ This poetic form, therefore, is perfectly suited for the occasion of the loss of San Paolo. This brief composition aims, as does the image above it, to convert tragic reality into an object of aesthetic value by means of artistic representation. In an alternate sense, the image may be understood as a kind of visual elegy.

This image, and the other similar prints by Achille and Pietro Parboni, are distinguished among the views of the ruined church by their nocturnal setting.⁷² The full moon is partially obscured by clouds rendered in a swirling matrix of crosshatching, and the scene is lit by the shockingly bright absence that constitutes the still-raging flames. The image is given a sense of high drama by the intense *chiaroscuro* that splits the viewer's focus between the fire in the foreground and the apse in the background. Many views of the ruins are set during the day, and depict other curious visitors wandering through the scorched remains. The light of day gives these images a matter-of-fact quality that presents the ruin as the subject of observation and aesthetic contemplation. Further, the visitors depicted serve a modeling function for the viewer, mediating the experience of the image and allowing for proper contextualization. The mode in which these images present their subject establishes an aesthetic distance between them and the viewer that blunts the sting of loss. The unsigned print, however, offers significantly less comfort.

⁷¹ Gregory Nagy, "Ancient Greek Elegy" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, ed. Karen Weisman (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), 13.

⁷² Reproductions of these may be found in Sermattei, ed., *1823. L'Incendio della Basilica di S. Paolo*, 136-141.

Here the viewer is alone, bearing witness to the horrible flames that brought this edifice to such a wretched state.

The visceral impact of this image is strengthened by the vibrational quality of the line that lends the image an unsettling quality of movement. The character of the line bears traces of Piranesian influence, but seems to recall perhaps more the chaotic *Carceri d'Invenzione* than Piranesi's more straightforward presentations of Roman ruins. The jagged edges of the flames pierce. The billowing smoke merges seamlessly into the clouds that obscure the moon. The rubble throughout the nave resembles a churning sea stirred by some superhuman force. However, a lone note of hopefulness is provided by the apse, illuminated by light whose source is difficult to determine. The ciborium stands proudly, as do the saintly figures of the apse mosaic. They testify to the enduring resilience of the church in the face of its present circumstances. Furthermore, the lighted apse presents none of the chaotic line-work present in the rest of the image. It is the light in the darkness and the calm in the storm. Additionally, this image demonstrates the tension present in the printed *veduta* between a rhetoric of accuracy and the artificiality of its composition. While the work espouses a relatively high degree of verisimilitude, two factors point to the impossibility of the artist having actually viewed this scene firsthand. The first is that the *vedutisti* did not arrive to San Paolo until July 16. Therefore, the artist was almost certainly *not* present to witness the flames still raging within the church. The scene is rather a horrific fantasy produced by the artist. This presentation of fantasy falsely presented as reality by the artist amply demonstrates this anonymous' *incisore's* indebtedness to Piranesi. The second fantastic element of this view is the illumination of

the apse. While one would suppose that fire to be the source of the light, it seems too perfectly projected and contained for this to be the case. The aesthetic quality of the apse shining in the darkness is given preference over an accurate depiction. In this image, the medium of the printed view uses its pretense to reality to obscure the artifice present in its construction.

A rather different representation of the ruins is provided by Antonio Acquaroni in his print, briefly mentioned above, entitled *Veduta interna della Basilica di S. Paolo presa immediatamente dopo il suo incendio* (Fig. 1). Acquaroni's print takes an oblique view that highlights the remnants of the transverse wall and triumphal arch, with the ciborium standing proudly beneath. In this print, Acquaroni makes excellent use of *chiaroscuro*, drawing the eye to the light streaming through the arches of the transverse wall. Unlike FN 39746, this image of the ruins is populated with figures that both mediate the viewer's engagement with the subject as well as serve a modeling function for the activity of viewing. Their presence delineates the proper response to this sight, tempering the strong emotions that the viewer might otherwise feel. This image presents a rather sharp tension between its informative, documentary character and its emotionally potent subject. On the one hand, Acquaroni's use of numerical labels that correspond to written descriptions below the image—a technique borrowed from Piranesi—tempers the pain of loss by transforming the church's ruins into an opportunity for architectural historiography.⁷³ On the other hand, the emotional impact of this image cannot be ignored. In addition to the dramatic *chiaroscuro* and high artistic quality of execution,

⁷³ Wendorf, "Piranesi's Double Ruin," 177.

particular elements resonate with emotional impact. In the upper right hand corner of the print, the body of a statue is visible, towering above the scene atop a monumental platform (Fig. 5). The head is obscured by architecture, perhaps it has been destroyed by the fire. Yet the identity of this headless figure is nevertheless made clear by the sword held in his left hand: this is none other than Saint Paul himself, watching steadfastly over the ruins of the church that had held his sacred relics for so many centuries. Acquaroni did not give the viewer direct access to the Apostle, but instead presented him obliquely, much in the same way the artist has chosen to depict the church at an indirect angle.

This perspective, in opposition to that which places the viewer at the nave entrance, hinders the conceptualization of the church as such. In other words, while the views down the nave present a badly ruined church, they clearly delineate *a church*, which, although partially destroyed, nevertheless exists *as a church*. Acquaroni's view seems instead to present a scene of ruin *per se*. To be sure, various elements in this print allow for the identification of the ruins as those of San Paolo. However, these do not alter the chaotic and potentially overwhelming visual impact of the composition that resists a single compositional focus. While the image adheres to the representational laws of Cartesian single-point perspective, its composition presents none of the ordered clarity one associates with this mode of viewing. This mode of visibility typically employs a process of objectification to separate the content of the image from the universal viewing subject.⁷⁴ This distance is not readily apparent here. While the lived experience of the ruin has no doubt been reduced by means of visual representation, Acquaroni has

⁷⁴ For more on the limitations of Cartesian perspectivalism see Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity" in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989).

preserved an aspect of this traumatic experience by means of the chaotic composition of this print. Further adding to the emotional weight of this image is a graffito inscribed on the back of the triumphal arch, in the upper left hand portion of the image (Fig. 6).

Recording the year 1812, this graffito would remind viewers of the tumultuous period of French occupation, and would further underscore the symbolic link between the subject of the print and the tribulations of the not-too-distant past.

Acquaroni's intentions in choosing this subject are made clear by accompanying text from another print in his series of views of the ruined church: "*L'orrore della scena*", Acquaroni writes, "*tentò piu volte di paralizzare la mano dell'artista.*"⁷⁵ This statement demonstrates clearly the aspect of the sublime that is present in the ruin. Bearing witness to the scene imparted to Acquaroni a feeling of horror, though evidently not a strong enough feeling to keep him from his task. The viewer may understand Acquaroni's feelings more thoroughly if she sees the ruin as a locus of the sublime that simultaneously terrifies and gives pleasure. In the ruin, the viewer sees a once-grand edifice destroyed by the processes of nature. From this the viewer infers that she too is subject to the same forces. The ruin thus reminds her of her own mortality, and the limits of her existence. However, at the same time, the continued existence of the fragments that she sees in front of her testify to ruin's supreme endurance. In the ruin, the manmade exists with the natural. Neither supersedes the other, constituting what scholar of aesthetics Florence Hetzler identifies as a "spiritual encounter" between the manmade and the natural that is

⁷⁵ Antonio Acquaroni, *Rovine della Basilica di S. Paolo in Roma*, etching, 1823; "The horror of the scene attempted several times to paralyze the hand of the artist." Author's translation.

both “the measure of man and the measure of nature, neither of which measures is accurately measurable.”⁷⁶

Further on in the text, Acquaroni offers more information concerning his motivations in depicting the ruins. It seems that, for Acquaroni, the ruin revealed something that intact buildings simply could not. It was his belief that “*niente meglio giovi a far conoscere la magnificenza di un edificio che la sua propria rovina.*”⁷⁷ The notion that a building’s true magnificence would be revealed by its ruin seems to be a contradiction in terms, though it begins to make sense when we consider the double-apprehension that one engages in when viewing the ruin. While observing the ruin’s fragmentary state, the viewer simultaneously conceives of its unified whole that is now lost. This unified whole is largely a product of the viewer’s imagination, but this does nothing to detract from its perfection. Rather, its perfection stems from the fact of its existence solely in the imagination. Furthermore, this idea of Acquaroni’s speaks to the fact that the ruin has a unique quality that could not be recaptured were the ruin to be restored to its original glory.⁷⁸ It would also seem that the objectification of the ruin through visual representation plays a part in allowing the building’s magnificence to shine through. By reducing the ruins of San Paolo to an image, Acquaroni limits their ability to overwhelm, and allows for their processing by the viewer. This form of objectification, of reduction to static image, aids in the process described above, in which

⁷⁶ Florence Hetzler, “The Aesthetics of Ruins: A New Category of Being,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 16, no. 2 (1982): 107.

⁷⁷ “Nothing may better serve to make known the magnificence of a building than its own ruin.” Author’s translation.

⁷⁸ Hetzler, “The Aesthetics of Ruins,” 107.

the viewer imagines the once-perfect whole while simultaneously observing its ruinous present state. Despite recognizing something unique in the ruins of San Paolo, the trauma of loss has compelled Acquaroni to desire that the church reacquire *la sua esistenza*, as he wrote later in this same passage. This feeling was espoused by many at the time, and in part drove the long process of the church's reconstruction.

Some of the most widely circulated images of the ruins of San Paolo were cut by the contemporary *vedutista* Luigi Rossini. Born in Ravenna in the year 1790, the artist worked his way to prominence in Rome, and was well established as an engraver by the time of the fire in 1823.⁷⁹ During the previous four years, Rossini had been hard at work on a series of prints entitled *Le Antichità Romane*, which would go on to be his greatest popular and financial success.⁸⁰ The artist himself attested the “*molte migliaia di scudi*” earned by the work in the autobiographical preface to his later work, *Le Città del Lazio*.⁸¹ The popularity of *Le Antichità Romane* was such that the *Diario di Roma*—the same Catholic daily that issued the first account of the fire—published a brief article announcing the release of its last four prints, which just so happened to be those depicting the ruins of San Paolo.⁸² Rossini's newfound acclaim was in large part due to his expert ability as an etcher and engraver, which marked him in contemporary Rome as the

⁷⁹ Lucia Cavazzi, “Luigi Rossini a Roma” in *Luigi Rossini Incisore. Vedute Di Roma, 1817 - 1850; Roma, Palazzo Braschi, 7 Aprile - 15 Luglio 1982*, ed. Renato Nicolini (Roma: Multigrafica Editrice, 1982), 16-17; Luigi Rossini, *Le Città del Lazio*. (Rome: 1826; Tivoli: Deputazione di Storia Patria, 1943), 5. Citations refer to the 1943 edition.

⁸⁰ Cavazzi, “Luigi Rossini a Roma,” 17-18.

⁸¹ Rossini, *Le Città del Lazio*, 8.

⁸² *Diario di Roma*, October 10, 1823, 10-11.

worthy heir of Piranesi.⁸³ The artist also modeled himself consciously on Piranesi. In the autobiographical preface referred to above, he declared his intention “*incidere e battere la strada segnata dall’immortale Piranesi.*”⁸⁴ While no view-maker worth his salt would deny a strong indebtedness to the famed *incisore*, few would rival his ability to render the Roman *rovine*. According to period scholar Valter Curzi, Rossini was one of these few, displaying in his work not only Piranesi’s penchant for *chiaroscuro* dramatic exaggeration, but also the ability to shape the collective imaginary of ruins.⁸⁵ For this reason, the four images of San Paolo etched by Luigi Rossini will merit in-depth discussion. These images provide illuminating interpretative avenues given their attested popularity and larger context within *Le Antichità Romane*. An examination of this larger collection of prints will establish a representational vocabulary that will characterize Rossini’s conception of Rome and ruins more generally. This vocabulary will then be fruitfully applied to discuss his images of San Paolo.

Rossini’s *Le Antichità Romane* offers telling insight into the artist’s conception of Rome. The magnificent size of the prints encourages careful examination; measuring roughly 540 by 480 millimeters, the images practically surround the viewer, drawing her in to examine every expertly rendered detail. Starting with the frontispiece, Rossini’s Rome is fully on display (Fig. 7). Rather than to depict the ancient buildings of the

⁸³ Curzi, “Luigi Rossini e l’immagine di Pompei tra Settecento e Ottocento,” in *Pompei e l’Europa: atti del convegno: Pompei nell’archeologia e nell’arte dal neoclassico al post-classico*, eds. Massimo Osanna, Rosanna Cioffi, Almerinda Di Benedetto, Luigi Gallo (Milan: Electa, 2016), 76.

⁸⁴ Rossini, *Le Città del Lazio*, 7.

⁸⁵ Rossini, *Le Città del Lazio*, 7.

Eternal City in either their contemporary ruined condition or in the full splendor of some imagined past, Rossini has instead chosen to present the Roman Forum “*come esisteva nella sua prima Rovina.*”⁸⁶ The scene depicts a grand view of the forum, with togate figures dotting the landscape and gesturing towards the immense ruins that are in only *slightly* better condition than their nineteenth-century counterparts. The Palatine here retains most of its antique splendor, while the Basilica Nova and the Colosseum more or less resemble their present condition. Exactly what point in time Rossini here refers to is decidedly vague, but the togas worn by the figures seem to indicate that Rome’s *prima rovina* was to be located in its ancient past. The imagined Rome of Rossini’s frontispiece provided a foil and model for the present, just as had Piranesi’s grand reconstructions of the city’s ancient magnificence. However, the ancient model here invoked is *itself* a city of ruins. It provides an invented precedent for the Rome depicted by Piranesi as a “*superbo accumulato di reliquie del passato.*”⁸⁷ The noblemen who populate the subsequent pages of Rossini’s work, gesturing at the marvels of Rome’s glorious past find their ancient precedent in the toga-clad figures of the frontispiece. The educated reader/viewer of this work, who would himself identify with the contemporary nobles depicted, would also then, by extension, identify with the ancient Romans of the frontispiece. Is not Ancient Rome, then, still accessible in some way? Perhaps. Though this particular conception of Ancient Rome is one that is *already* a shadow of its former self.

⁸⁶ “As it used to exist in its first state of ruination.” Author’s translation.

⁸⁷ Curzi, “Restaurare con l’occhio del tempo”: i frammenti di Piranesi,” 133.

Throughout *Le Antichità*, the figures that populate the city further clarify the artist's relationship to his subject.⁸⁸ Generally, the figures to be observed in the prints can be divided by social class. Differences in clothing allow the viewer to sort these figures into the categories of peasant, worker, artist, noblemen, *et cetera*. The members of the privileged class who wander amidst the decaying remains of Rome's ancient past, dwarfed by mere fragments, gaze upon and gesture towards these venerable relics (Fig. 8). They are to be identified with the viewer, who in his examination of these prints engages along with them in the activity of ruin-gazing. This strategy of depiction interpolates the viewer within the image, and further underscores the magnificence of the monuments that tower over his proxies. Also to be observed in these pages is the figure of the artist (Fig. 9). Sitting with his drawing board, he is perhaps making preliminary sketches for his own contribution to the rich genre of *vedute*. Along with aesthetic appreciation, drawing is also depicted as a noble, learned, and proper response to the ruin. These figures engage with the ruin *per se*. They understand its true significance and appreciate its *difference* from the world that surrounds it. For them, the ruin is an object of aesthetic or intellectual appreciation. This is without doubt the same view of the ruin held by Rossini. The acknowledgement and appreciation of the ruin displayed by the educated figures within these images may be neatly contrasted with the ignorance of their lower-class counterparts. Rather than look upon the ruin with a sense of awe and wonder, Rome's lower-class denizens seem to consider the ruins no more than a part of the

⁸⁸ The figures themselves were etched by Bartolomeo Pinelli, who added scenes of Roman daily life to *Le Antichità*. While not engraved by Rossini himself, they nevertheless function as aspects of the artist's conception of Rome. See Cavazzi, "Luigi Rossini a Roma," 18.

scenery, blending in seamlessly as elements of the landscape (Fig. 10). The *eruditi* viewing these prints would likely consider the depicted peasants to be no more than scenographic accoutrements, whose sole purpose is to add a degree of genre flavor to the work.

Rossini's images of the ruins of San Paolo underscore his conception of the ruin as an object of aesthetic contemplation to be carried out by the erudite reader/viewer. Furthermore, his decision to depict this subject aimed at asserting his particular conception of San-Paolo-as-ruin in the public imaginary. Indeed, it was only after reading a publication on the state of the church put out by a certain Abbot Galeazzi that Rossini conceived of "*l'idea di perpetuare nel pubblico la memoria di così magnifica fabbrica.*"⁸⁹ In other words, his aim in depicting San Paolo's ruinous state was in part to solidify the public's memory of the church *as a ruin*. The continuing popularity of this image type even after the church's eventual reconstruction attests to Rossini's success in this endeavor.

The four prints of the church conform to the vocabulary of representation established in the previous pages of *Le Antichità*. Here, as before, the viewer sees smartly dressed ruin-gazers and workmen dwarfed by the newly-made ruins of the church. The first of these, *tavola* ninety-eight, presents the most common perspective of the church (Fig. 11). This expansive view of the church makes keen use of spatial recession, with the orthogonals provided by the horizontal divisions of the southern nave wall. These converge on the ciborium, which stands proudly in contrast to the rubble that surrounds

⁸⁹ "The idea of immortalizing the memory of such magnificent construction in the public sphere." Author's translation; Luigi Rossini, *Luigi Rossini Incisore*, 56.

it. While this point of view is fairly unimaginative when compared with those chosen by Rossini for his other three images of the church, it serves to maintain the sense of the church *per se*. In other words, the straightforward presentation of the church emphasizes its continued existence as such. This is not a presentation of indeterminate ruins, but instead is primarily that of a church, albeit in a rather ruinous condition. The straightforward character of this view, which preserves the viewer's sense of the church's identity and function, offsets the chaotic and frightening impression given by the pile of rubble on the viewer's left, which itself towers above the ruin-gazers. This view of the church may be contrasted neatly with the etching of Antonio Acquaroni discussed above. While the conformity to the laws of one-point linear perspective here mediate the terror produced by the sight of the ruin, the lack of focus and oblique angling of Acquaroni's image provide no such respite for the viewer. Rossini's first image of the ruins engages in a double-objectification of its subject. As has been noted above, the act of visual representation necessarily entails a kind of objectification. Yet this image's use of a clear, perspectival composition also plays a part in objectifying the ruins, reducing them to an easily comprehensible object of aesthetic observation.

Rossini's second image of San Paolo takes the ciborium as its primary subject, positioning the viewer in the vicinity of the apse (Fig. 12). As in Rossini's first etching of the church, the extant ciborium triumphantly proclaims the continued existence of the church in sharp contrast to its ruinous surroundings. This interpretation is even clearer in this image, which takes the ciborium itself rather than the entire church as its subject. The dark appearance of the ciborium suggests its solidity and continued strength in the face of

potential destruction. Rendered in shadow, it stands in stark contrast to the lighter nave visible in the background. The clarity of composition also helps to mediate the emotional impact of the ruins. Directing the viewer's gaze towards the extant ciborium draws focus away from the detritus that surrounds it.

At times, it appears that the heaps of ruined material, more than the church's upright skeletal remains, are of primary importance. This is perhaps most visible in his *Terza Veduta della rovina della gran Basilica...* (Fig. 13). In this image, the foreground is dominated by a large pile of rubble. The two figures in the lower right hand corner practically disappear, dwarfed by the mountain of crumbled masonry and burnt broken beams. Here a Piranesian flair for exaggeration has shrunk the viewer's proxy within the image to minuscule proportions and enlarged the frightening environment in turn.⁹⁰ This heap of rubble, though consisting of materials worked by man, is a purely natural creation. It has been formed by the entirely natural processes of destruction by fire and gravity. It therefore indicates the unique co-presence of the natural and the manmade that make the ruin of particular interest as an aesthetic form. The fourth and final image of the church presents, in the words of Stendhal, a "*forêt de colonnes magnifiques*," which looms imposing, surrounding the minute figures who walk amongst its sturdy trunks (Fig. 14).⁹¹ The composition of this image does not objectify the ruins to the same extent as does that of Rossini's first image. Instead, much like the image of Acquaroni discussed

⁹⁰ Kelly White, "Vedute di Roma, Volumes 16-17" in *The Art of Exaggeration: Piranesi's Perspectives on Rome*, ed. Eunice Howe (Los Angeles: USC Fisher Gallery, 1995), 62.

⁹¹ Stendhal, *Promenades dans Rome* (Paris, 1866), 92.

above, it overwhelms the viewer. Here one does not see a church *in ruins*, but simply ruins.

The etchings described above represent only a fraction of the great number of images that depicted the ruins of the church after its destruction. Beyond the medium of print, the ruins of San Paolo were depicted in painting, as in the works of Léopold Louis Robert and Francesco Diofebi, as well in the newest popular medium of the day, the diorama.⁹² While the length of this paper prohibits an overly long excursus on these many works, the select few treated here demonstrate the thematic and representational vocabulary employed by subsequent depictions of the ruins. Works produced directly following the fire, such as those etched by the brothers Parboni, Antonio Acquaroni, and Luigi Rossini may be said to have established a canonical vocabulary of depiction that would be repeated over the years. While new images would be produced, these would not deviate substantially from the initial images of the fire. Here again we return to the question that has animated this discussion from the very start: what accounts for the immense popularity of these images of ruins, even after the church had been reconstructed? In the previous pages I have elaborated on the historical circumstances that would inform the reception of these images, these being primarily the Romantic ruin aesthetic, popularized by Piranesi, and the lingering effects of the French occupation of Rome, which brought about a violent disruption of Papal Rome's universality. By forging its own links to Ancient Rome, the French occupation threatened the legitimacy of Papal domination over the past. New ideas of what the *urbs aeterna* might symbolize had come

⁹² Camerlenghi, *St. Paul's Outside the Walls*, 247

to threaten the old order. At this point, having analyzed some of the images of San Paolo in detail, it will now serve to discuss how these would have been viewed in the context of the aforementioned historical currents.

6. Objectification and Interpretation

The interpretation and significance of the images of the ruins of San Paolo in part depend on differing conceptions of Rome. For the present discussion, it will serve to distinguish between the generic, Romantic viewer and the Catholic/Roman viewer whose relationship to the San Paolo was decidedly more intimate. For the Romantic European consumer of ruin images, the prints of the ruins of San Paolo provide yet another example worthy of wistful reflection on themes like the invincibility of time and nature, grandeur of the past, and ineluctable decline of all civilization. Rome, for these viewers, has been codified as a “*superbo accumulato di reliquie del passato*.”⁹³ The loss of the church as a vital aspect of contemporary religious life is of less importance for the Romantic viewer like Stendhal, a French visitor in Rome. The ruin is justified in the present as an indication of past greatness that cannot be achieved again. The gap between past and present is understood in the Romantic mindset as unbridgeable, regardless of whether it is measured in days or centuries. However, for those whose identity had been permanently altered by the French occupation, who were driven by traumatic experience to desire the recuperation of the lost past, the ruin images of San Paolo represent visually the recent loss. The loss that Popes Pius VII and Leo XII tried desperately to recoup through their program of restoration.

While the ruin images of San Paolo have much in common, this thesis has sought to identify a few distinguishing criteria that have a significant impact on the interpretation

⁹³ Curzi, “Restaurare con l’ ‘occhio del tempo’: i frammenti di Piranesi,” 133.

of these works. One of these is the time of day at which the scene is set. While the large majority of images take place in the clear light of day, a select few depict the church at night. The nocturnal setting adds dramatic tension that brings an element of terror to the scene. On the other hand, a daytime setting adds a matter-of-fact quality to the images, allowing for a clearer apprehension of the scene depicted. Another criterion of note is the choice of perspective employed by the artist. As discussed above, a highly organized perspective, like that of Rossini's first image of the church, promotes a conceptual clarity that allows the viewer to make sense of this tragedy. An unfocused, irregular choice of perspective, such as that employed by Acquaroni in the image discussed above, has the opposite effect. Presenting an amalgam of ruins, devoid of any central focus, this perspective choice overwhelms the viewer, asserting the chaos of the scene. While the nature of the subject remains the same throughout all these depictions, the criteria defined above greatly color their interpretation. Generally, these distinctions indicate a crisis in the representation of this ruin *ex novo*. When depicting what may rightly be called a traumatic event, does one seek to capture and *re-present* the trauma within the image, or does one seek to mediate the trauma through organizing principles, allowing the viewer to process and distance themselves from the tragedy?

In order to hazard any potential answer to this question, it is first necessary to pin down the exact trauma that these images deal with. Certainly, the loss of the church was a traumatic event in itself that effected a kind of death. However, as has been discussed above, the loss of San Paolo could not but be interpreted as emblematic of the trauma brought about by the French occupation. In Rome and throughout Europe, the turmoil of

the Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars effected the loss of a felt connection to the past, as outlined by Frank Ankersmit. Cultural historian Pierre Nora further defines this loss as a shift from *memory* to *history*. The move into the modern period has brought about a general alienation of people from their own past. In regarding the past increasingly as the domain of history, its existence is no longer contingent upon the individual's relationship to it. It becomes fundamentally separate.⁹⁴ This separation and objectification of history allows for its representation. In a sense, history becomes "picturable." Thus, the ruin, or rather the *image* of the ruin becomes the ideal cipher for objectification and representation of history in this period.

Depending on the unique experience of the viewer, the ruin images of San Paolo would evoke a different emotional response. The Romantic response to the sight of the ruins, typified by Stendhal, would differ greatly from that of a Roman who identified the loss of the church with the loss of a way of life. This sort of reactionary mode of viewing is amply demonstrated by Pope Leo XII. Having ascended the papal throne only weeks after the ruination of the church, he could not but participate in the intense climate of restoration that animated the day.⁹⁵ The della Genga pope was a member of a group referred to somewhat mockingly as "*i zelanti*."⁹⁶ These overzealous individuals may be identified as reactionary according to the schema of Ankersmit discussed above. Seeking to repair the damage wrought by the French occupation, Leo XII endeavored to restore

⁹⁴ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations*, no. 26 (Spring, 1989), 7-9.

⁹⁵ Calzolari, "Leone XII e la Ricostruzione della Basilica di San Paolo fuori le Mura," 89.

⁹⁶ Boutry "Une théologie de la visibilité," 319.

the Christian identity of Rome and assert the visibility of the Church. His attitudes towards restoration are visible even in his choice of papal name; Pope Leo I, who reigned in the fifth century CE, was a key model for the new pope as a restorer.⁹⁷ In his encyclical of 18 May 1824, Leo XII either quotes or cites his esteemed forebear seven times in a text of roughly 3,000 words in length.⁹⁸ This frequency of citation underscores the connection between the two popes, and highlights the motivations of Leo XII's papacy. One quotation in particular stresses the continuing necessity of fighting to restore what had been lost: "In this battle, never is a victory achieved that is so successful that, after the triumph, the need does not also arise to take up new fights."⁹⁹ In the loss of the church, the pope no doubt perceived the trauma of the destruction of the church *per se*. However, given his attitudes towards *la Restaurazione*, he more than likely saw the loss of San Paolo as a symbol of the tribulations of French occupation. For him, the reconstruction of the church would address *both* these sites of trauma.

A chirograph issued by Leo XII in 1825 declared his desire that the church be rebuilt *in pristinum*.¹⁰⁰ For those in charge of the reconstruction, notably the archaeologist Angelo Uggeri, head of the *commissario delle Antichità*, this meant that the church ought to be restored as closely as possible to its *original* state, and that it be stripped of all later additions, "*per avvicinarsi il più possibile ad una, ideale, basilica paleocristiana.*"¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ *Enciclopedia dei Papi* (Treccani: 2000), s.v. "Leone XII."

⁹⁸ Leone XII, *Ubi primum*, encyclical letter, 1824.

⁹⁹ S. Leo the Great, Sermon 5, *De natali ipsius*. Quoted in Leone XII, *Ubi primum*, 1824.

¹⁰⁰ Docci, *San Paolo Fuori Le Mura*, 148.

¹⁰¹ Docci, *San Paolo Fuori Le Mura*, 147.

While alternative plans were proposed, most notably by Giuseppe Valadier, the *eruditi* won the day, and work was soon underway to reconstruct a church that had never existed in the first place. From the beginning, the notion of returning San Paolo to its *original* state was an impossible, historically flawed idea. Throughout its long history, from its humble beginnings as a glorified reliquary for the bones of St. Paul, commissioned by the Emperor Theodosius in 386 CE, the church had been continuously added to and reworked.¹⁰² These additions and changes reflected the active role that the church played in the life of those who worshipped within it. The desire to return the building to a *single* point in its imagined history, stripping it of all subsequent accretions, indicated a fundamental misidentification of the church's essence. This error in judgment may in part be accounted for by consideration of a historicist interpretation of identity, which asserts that one's *identity* is to be found in one's *history*.¹⁰³

In San Paolo, the archaeologists saw a certain historical value, in the sense of Alois Riegl's defined attitudes towards the past. This attitude "singles out one moment in the developmental continuum of the past and places it before our eyes as if it belonged to the present."¹⁰⁴ While Riegl's categorization applies to history more broadly, it readily applies to the motivations of those responsible for the reconstruction of the church. This historicist conception of identity combined with the emotional impact created by the sight

¹⁰² Camerlenghi, "Splitting the Core: The Transverse Wall at the Basilica of San Paolo in Rome," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, Vol. 58 (2013): 115.

¹⁰³ Ankersmit, *The Sublime Dissociation of the Past*, 296-297.

¹⁰⁴ Holly, "The Melancholy Art," 9;
Stephen Bann, "Clio in Part: On Antiquarianism and the Historical Fragment," *Perspecta* 23 (1987): 32.

of the church's ruins created a strong desire to reclaim this lost essence, which those at the time identified with its "original" state. Ultimately, this essence was located in the form of the paleo-Christian, Constantinian basilica, which the architect Luigi Poletti worked desperately to recreate *com'era, dov'era*. Leo XII, and those like him, conflated the loss of the building with the more amorphous trauma of the loss of authority. This line of thinking held that in reconstituting the church, so too would be reconstituted the authority that was the ultimate aim of *Ristorazione*.

Trauma evades identification and location. The precise site of trauma is difficult to pin down for those who have suffered. Often, in attempts to process and move beyond the traumatic event, the traumatized subject will engage with the site of trauma by means of representation. However, the relationship between trauma and representation is by no means a straightforward process. This complexity in the relation of trauma to representation is the subject of the work *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, edited by Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg, which presents a series of essays that attempt to make sense of this pressing issue. In Isabelle Wallace's essay on the links between Edouard Manet and Jasper Johns, the author delineates two modes of traumatic response that will serve here, these being the Freudian and Lacanian. In the Freudian mode, "representation returns us to trauma, at the same time that it facilitates a gradual assimilation of the traumatic event."¹⁰⁵ The Lacanian instead posits trauma as "the very thing about which nothing can be said, written, painted, or performed."¹⁰⁶ In Wallace's model, these modes

¹⁰⁵ Isabelle Wallace, "Trauma as representation: a meditation on Manet and Johns," in *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, eds. Lisa Saltzman, Eric Rosenberg (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2006), 3.

¹⁰⁶ Wallace, "Trauma as representation: a meditation on Manet and Johns," 3.

are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. Yet they nevertheless illuminate the present discussion, and offer possible avenues of interpretation for the ruin images of San Paolo. Do the ruin images allow for the slow assimilation of the traumatic loss of the church, according to the Freudian model or, rather, following a Lacanian approach, are they futile attempts to represent that which *cannot be represented*?

Visual representation offers one way of negotiating the pain of traumatic loss, as is the case with the images of San Paolo. These images crystallize the amorphous loss of identity brought about by French occupation. By identifying the amorphous and traumatic loss of identity with the destroyed church, the images allow the trauma to be understood and known. The traumatic loss is made manageable and recognizable. However, the displacement of the loss of identity onto the loss of the church has another likely side effect. The desire to recover the lost identity now manifests itself in the desire to recover the lost church. By this logic, the precise recovery of the church *in pristinum* ought to result contemporaneously in the recovery of the lost identity. While the ruin images of San Paolo allowed for location and identification of the loss brought about by Napoleonic occupation, they engendered the false hope that the lost identity *could* be recovered.

7.

Conclusion

In an attempt to determine the causes of the immense popularity of these images throughout the nineteenth century, this paper has examined various historical factors. The lingering effects of French occupation, Piranesian aesthetics, and the Romantic disposition are but a few aspects of a complex matrix of intersecting thematic motifs. Perhaps the most salient of these is the extent to which these images objectify their subject. There is a sharp distinction within the corpus of these prints between those that objectify, organize, and delineate their subject, and those that overwhelm the viewer with a chaotic tableau of ruinous columns and piles of debris. Would the extent to which a given image objectifies San Paolo contribute to its popularity? While more research is needed on the subject, it would seem that in the decades after the fire, images that successfully objectified San Paolo were more popular than those that overwhelmed the viewer.¹⁰⁷ Given that Rossini's first image of the ruins appears to have been the blueprint for these later images, research into the relative popularity of this print compared to Rossini's other three images would aid in answering this question.

Perhaps more than any other subject, the ruined church of San Paolo fuori le Mura captured the nineteenth-century imagination, one that was becoming increasingly aware of its separateness from the pre-modern past. The representations of its ruins attempt the impossible. They purport to represent the ruins, to give the viewer access to the nature of the trauma, but they only delineate representation's failure to do so. These representations

¹⁰⁷ See Sermattei, ed., 1823. *L'Incendio della Basilica di S. Paolo*, 170-171, 174-177, 180-181.

facilitated a fundamental error of displacement: the misidentification of San Paolo's loss with the loss of papal authority. The inability of representation to fully articulate trauma impedes progress. They bring about the inevitable return to the images that point to, yet never fully reveal, the nature of the trauma in question.

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Figures



Figure 1: Antonio Acquaroni, *Veduta Interna della Basilica di S. Paolo presa
Immediatamente dopo il suo Incendio*, etching, 1823

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Figure 2: Achille Parboni (?), *Veduta dell'incendio di S. Paolo fuori le Mura*, 1823

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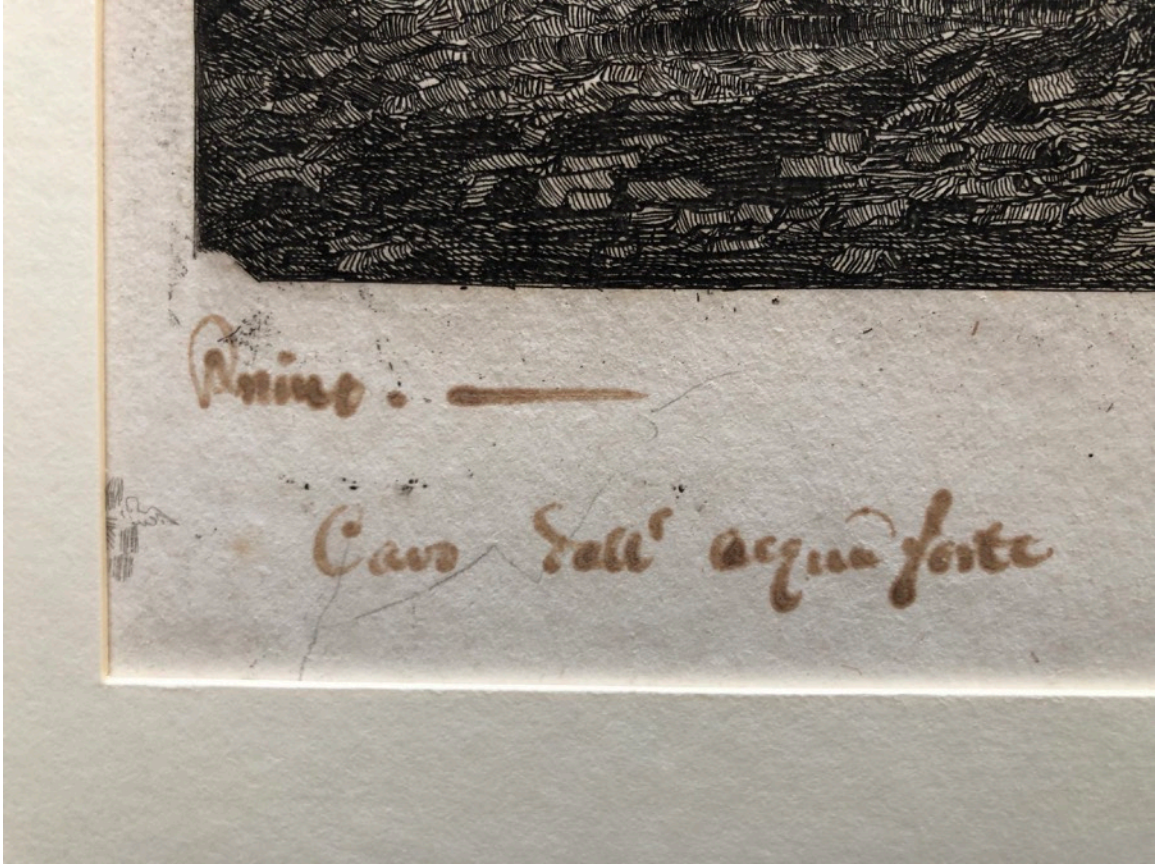


Figure 3: Achille Parboni (?), *Veduta dell'incendio di S. Paolo fuori le Mura*, 1823, Detail

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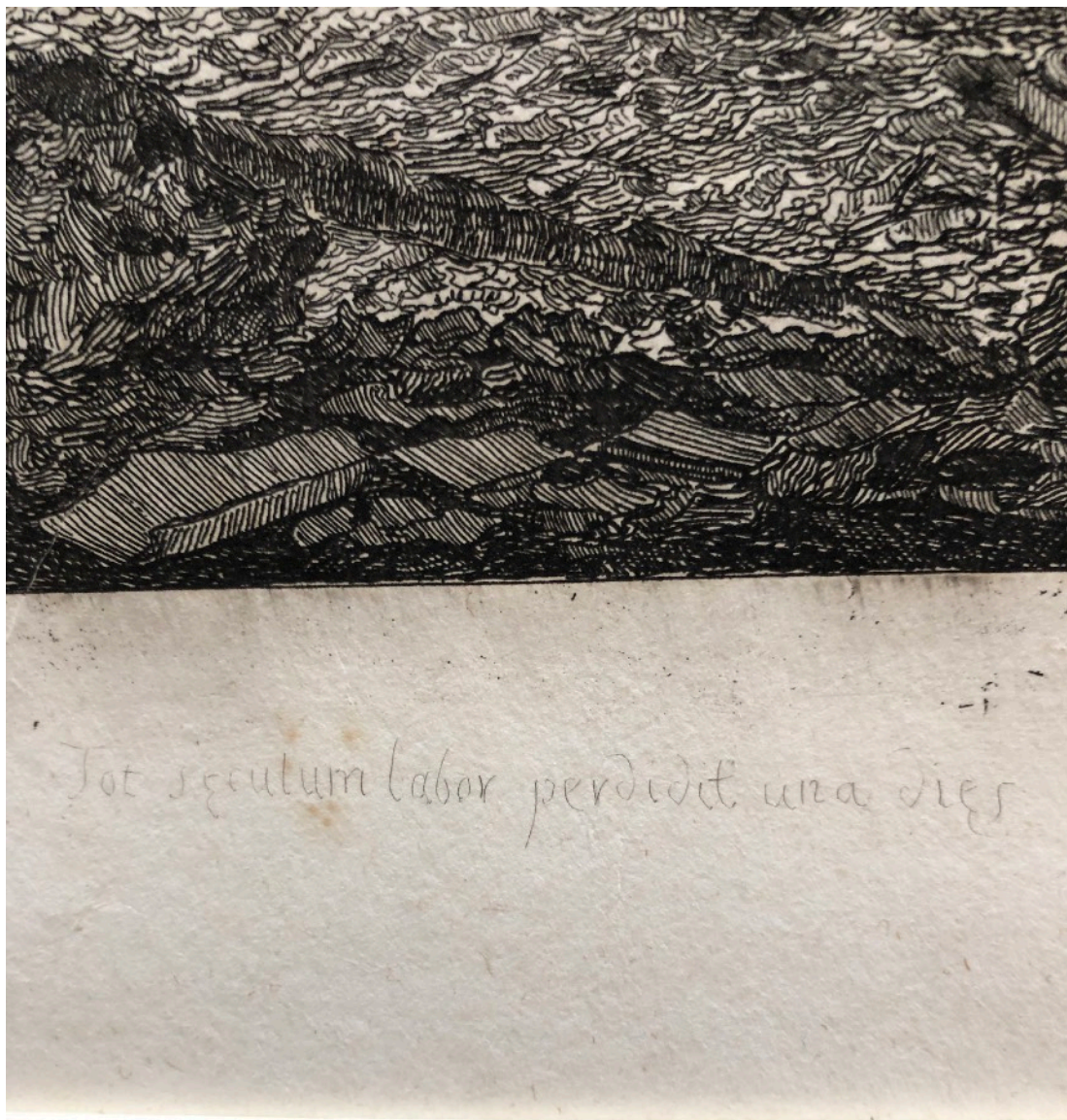


Figure 4: Achille Parboni (?), *Veduta dell'incendio di S. Paolo fuori le Mura*, 1823, Detail

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Figure 5: Antonio Acquaroni, *Veduta Interna della Basilica di S. Paolo presa*

Immediatamente dopo il suo Incendio, etching, 1823, Detail

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Figure 6: Antonio Acquaroni, *Veduta Interna della Basilica di S. Paolo presa*

Immediatamente dopo il suo Incendio, etching, 1823, Detail

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Figure 7: Luigi Rossini, *Le Antichità Romane*, frontispiece, etching, 1823

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¹⁰⁸ See <http://biblioteca-provinciale.cittametropolitanaroma.gov.it/en/content/normativa-sullaccesso-agli-archivi>



Figure 8: Luigi Rossini, *Le Antichità Romane, Tavola 28*, etching, 1823, Detail

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Figure 9: Luigi Rossini, *Le Antichità Romane, Tavola 35*, etching, 1823, Detail

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Figure 10: Luigi Rossini, *Le Antichità Romane*, Tavola 35, etching, 1823, Detail

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Figure 11: Luigi Rossini, *Le Antichità Romane*, Tavola 98, etching, 1823

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Figure 12: Luigi Rossini, *Le Antichità Romane*, Tavola 99, etching, 1823

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Figure 13: Luigi Rossini, *Le Antichità Romane*, *Tavola 100*, etching, 1823

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Figure 14: Luigi Rossini, *Le Antichità Romane*, Tavola 101, etching, 1823

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