

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS AND CELEBRATORY POETRY IN THE ROME OF PIUS VI

by Carlo Caruso

*In the second half of the eighteenth century, archaeological activities in Rome intensified considerably under the pontificate of Pius VI (1775–99), and new excavations in the Roman Campagna and the Latium, together with the erection of the Museo Pio Clementino (1776–84), excited considerable interest in Roman learned and literary circles. A young poet who had moved to Rome from Romagna, Vincenzo Monti (1754–1828), obtained his first great success by celebrating the new discoveries in a memorable poem, La prosopopea di Pericle. In it, a newly found herm of Pericles sings of Pius's pontificate as a new golden age for the arts. Monti, who was to become Italy's most authoritative man of letters in the following decades, befriended in those years, and received considerable assistance from, the leading antiquarian of that age, Ennio Quirino Visconti (1751–1818). Their relationship and its legacy provide the subject of this paper, with emphasis on Monti's early poetry, its significance for the literary history of the neoclassical age, and its role in shaping a novel poetic style intended for the praise of ancient art.*

*Nella seconda metà del Settecento, sotto il pontificato di Pio VI (1775–99) si assistette a un considerevole incremento della ricerca archeologica, e i nuovi scavi condotti nella Campagna romana e nel Lazio, insieme con l'allestimento del Museo Pio Clementino (1776–84), suscitarono l'interesse delle cerchie romane di antiquari, dotti e letterati. Un giovane poeta giunto a Roma dalla nativa Romagna, Vincenzo Monti (1754–1828), ottenne il suo primo grande successo con una celebre poesia, La prosopopea di Pericle, nella quale un'erma di Pericle appena ritrovata esalta le nuove scoperte e con esse il pontificato di Pio come una nuova età dell'oro per le arti. Monti, destinato a diventare nei decenni successivi l'uomo di lettere più autorevole d'Italia, entrò in quegli anni in contatto il più grande archeologo allora vivente, Ennio Quirino Visconti (1751–1818), dal quale ricevette amicizia e assistenza. Si tocca qui del loro legame durante gli anni romani e oltre, con accenni all'importanza della prima produzione poetica montiana per la storia letteraria dell'età neoclassica e per l'elaborazione di un nuovo stile poetico adibito all'esaltazione dell'arte antica.*

'To-day my soul clasps Form; but where is my troth  
Of yesternight with Tune: can one cleave to both?'  
— 'Be not perturbed,' said she. 'Though apart in fame,  
As I and my sisters are one, those, too, are the same.'

Thomas Hardy, 'Rome: The Vatican: Sala delle Muse'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Complete Poems*, edited by James Gibson (London, 1981), 104.

## ROMAN ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Adolf Michaelis opened his account of the golden age of classical archaeology, first published in 1903, with a reflection on late eighteenth-century Rome and its enduring primacy in the province of archaeological studies.<sup>2</sup> That situation could still obtain, Michaelis wrote, thanks primarily to three main factors: the continuous relevance of Winckelmann's legacy, the intensification of excavations at several sites around the city and further afield in the Latium, and the erection of the Museo Pio Clementino. Michaelis also observed that other important excavations were taking place elsewhere and that the focus of attention was progressively widening to include other areas relevant for the history of ancient art and architecture. Developments such as the discovery of Herculaneum (1709, 1738–65), the appreciation of the Paestum temples (1758, by the same Winckelmann, amongst others) and the expeditions to Palmyra, Baalbek, Athens and Ionia under the aegis of the Society of Dilettanti (1749–51, 1764–6) were setting new goals for the archaeological discipline, introducing innovative methods of evaluation, and encouraging a different vision of the ancient world.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the transfer of the Farnese collection to Naples, begun in 1787, deprived Rome of a considerable corpus of outstanding art works. Yet the wealth of ancient statuary available in the city remained such that its prestige, virtually unchallenged since the Renaissance, would not be called into question for at least another decade. The fatal blow came with the deposition and captivity of Pope Pius VI (1797–9) and the Napoleonic spoliations. Other factors, such as inevitable comparisons with the Elgin Marbles removed from Athens to London in the early nineteenth century, shook traditional certainties about the nature and quality of ancient sculpture in the Roman collections — so much so that experts felt increasingly compelled to draw a firm dividing line between Greek originals and Roman copies.

An event of major significance during the period in question was the opening of the Museo Pio Clementino. Erected between 1776 and 1784 to complement and absorb the statues in the Belvedere Courtyard and to accommodate the enlarged Vatican collections, it carries its association with Pope Pius VI (1775–99) and his

<sup>2</sup> Adolf Michaelis, *Ein Jahrhundert kunsthistorischer Entdeckungen*. Zweite Auflage (Leipzig, 1908), 11–12.

<sup>3</sup> Michaelis, *Ein Jahrhundert kunsthistorischer Entdeckungen* (above, n. 2), 9–11; John A. Pinto, 'A wider prospect: expanding the repertoire of classicism', in John A. Pinto, *Speaking Ruins: Piranesi, Architects, and Antiquity in Eighteenth-Century Rome* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2012), 217–73. See also Suzanne Lang, 'The early publications of the Temples at Paestum', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13 (1950), 48–64; Paul Breman, *The Society of Dilettanti: Neo-Classical Taste and Greek Revival Architecture* (London, 1968); Bruce Redford, *Dilettanti: The Antic and the Antique in Eighteenth-Century England* (Los Angeles, 2007); Jason M. Kelly, *The Society of Dilettanti: Archaeology and Identity in the British Enlightenment* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2009); Giovanna Ceserani, *Italy's Lost Greece: Magna Graecia and the Making of Modern Archaeology* (Oxford and New York, 2012).

predecessor Clement XIV (1769–74) in its name.<sup>4</sup> The pontificate of Pius VI in particular, while often censured for an excess of extravagant expenses and nepotistic practices, was nevertheless characterized — at least initially — by enterprising dynamism and a lucid awareness of what a resolute cultural policy could accomplish.<sup>5</sup> Before his election, the future pope had shown considerable organizational skills — for example, in his efficient management of the famine crisis of the 1760s in his capacity as civil auditor and secretary to Cardinal Camerlengo.<sup>6</sup> Nor should one underestimate his ability to mediate in the internal conflicts exacerbated by the suppression of the Jesuit order (1773), or his courage in resisting external pressure from those secular powers anxious to review or even rescind their traditional ties with the Holy See, notably the Kingdom of Naples, the Holy Roman Empire and, ultimately (and most dramatically), France. Moreover, even during this unsettled period prior to the crisis that led to the temporary demise of the Papal States, Pius worked ceaselessly to preserve Rome's pre-eminence in the field of the arts. Soon after his election to the pontificate, he confirmed Giambattista Visconti (1722–84) in the position of Commissario delle Antichità, thus sanctioning an appointment made in 1768 by Clement XIV following Winckelmann's advice.<sup>7</sup> And when, in 1781, Visconti's health began to decline, the responsibility for Roman antiquities was gradually transferred to his son, Ennio Quirino (1751–1818), who was to become 'the leading Roman antiquarian, a brilliant man in any age'.<sup>8</sup> Pius's rule could thus be hailed as a new golden age for the study and appreciation of the ancient world, the glory of which was to provide a lasting pedestal for the fame of its benevolent caretaker. This was the aim not only of the new museum dedicated to the noblest remains of antiquity but also of works of poetry and erudition which would, in line with the Horatian dictum, aspire to build a monument more lasting than bronze. This paper aims to

<sup>4</sup> See, in general, Carlo Pietrangeli, *I Musei Vaticani. Cinque secoli di storia* (Rome, 1985); Giandomenico Spinola, *Il Museo Pio Clementino*, 3 vols (Vatican City, 1996); Paolo Liverani, 'Dal Pio-Clementino al Braccio Nuovo', in Andrea Emiliani (ed.), *Il segno di Pio VI Braschi e di Pio VII Chiaramonti nell'arte italiana* (Bologna, 1998), 27–41.

<sup>5</sup> Ludwig, Freiherr von Pastor, *The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages. Vol. XXXIX. Pius VI (1775–1799)*, tr. E.F. Peeler (London, 1952), 45–110; Marina Caffiero, 'Pio VI', in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* [= DBI], vol. 84 (Rome, 2015), 1–11; Mario Rosa, 'Introduzione all'*Aufklärung* cattolica in Italia', in *Cattolicesimo e lumi nel settecento italiano* (Rome, 1981), 1–47; Mario Rosa, 'Clemente XIV', DBI 26 (1982), 343–62; Jeffrey Collins, *Papacy and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Rome: Pius VI and the Arts* (Cambridge, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Franco Venturi, 'Tre terre italiane di fronte alla fame: Napoli, Roma, Firenze', in Franco Venturi, *Settecento riformatore. V. L'Italia dei lumi (1764–1790)* (Turin, 1969–90), 319–20.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Justi, *Winckelmann und seine Zeitgenossen*, 3 vols. Dritte Auflage (Leipzig, 1923), III, 453–4.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald T. Ridley, *The Pope's Archaeologist: The Life and Times of Carlo Fea* (Rome, 2000), 27–31 (esp. 28). For a biographical introduction to father and son see Giovanni Sforza, *Ennio Quirino Visconti e la sua famiglia* (Genoa, 1923); Daniela Gallo, 'I Visconti. Una famiglia romana al servizio dei papi, della Repubblica e di Napoleone', *Roma Moderna e Contemporanea* 2 (1994), 77–90.

address, in particular, the significance of poetic outputs that marked Pius's age as one particularly congenial to the appreciation of the ancient world. Poetry produced in Rome in that period attained success through an unusually intimate connection with antiquarian studies, and its best examples are attempts to forge a poetic language that could give voice to enthusiasm for all things antique by somehow making itself antique too. Among the protagonists of that achievement were the aforementioned Ennio Quirino Visconti and his younger friend and protégé, Vincenzo Monti, who was to become the most authoritative and versatile Italian poet and man of letters of his generation.

## RESUMPTION OF EXCAVATIONS

In 1775 archaeological excavations were being conducted in the Roman Campagna near Tivoli; more specifically, in the areas within and around Hadrian's Villa and in the so-called *Praedium Cassianum*, an estate that had allegedly belonged to the notorious anti-Caesarian conspirator C. Cassius Longinus. A source of much-admired classical statues since the sixteenth century — such as the Capitoline Antinous (Rome, Musei Capitolini), the Townley and Vatican Discoboli (British Museum and Musei Vaticani respectively) and the Crouching Venus (Rome, Museo Nazionale delle Terme), amongst others — in the 1760s and 1770s the site attracted the attention of antiquarians of the calibre of Giovan Battista Piranesi and of foreign, especially British, excavators and collectors.<sup>9</sup> According to the account in the first volume of *Il Museo Pio Clementino* (1782) (Fig. 1), recently assessed by Jeffrey Collins, statues of Apollo Citharoedus, seven Muses, Pallas and other minor deities began to be unearthed from the site in 1775, along with herms of illustrious men mostly with their names inscribed on the column base. Four of these still had their heads attached (Aeschines, Antisthenes, Periander and Bias), six had no head (Pittacus, Solon, Cleobulos, Tales, Anacreon, Chabrias), and of six others only part of the plinth and the inscription survived (Peisistratos, Lycurgus, Pindar, Archytas, Hermarchus of Mytilene, Diogenes). A sample illustration of their various states of conservation is given in a plate in the sixth volume, devoted to the description of busts (Fig. 2). Pius promptly acquired the artefacts as well as the site, after which there sprang from the soil, in due

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Francis Haskell and Nicolas Penny, *Taste and the Antique* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1998 [first edition 1981]), nos. 5, 32 and 86. On Hadrian's Villa in the late eighteenth century see William L. Macdonald and John A. Pinto, *Hadrian's Villa and Its Legacy* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1995), 229–305, 363–71. On the broader picture cf. Ilaria Bignamini, 'British excavations in the Papal States during the eighteenth century: written and visual sources', in Ilaria Bignamini (ed.), *Archives & Excavations* (London, 2004), 91–108; Ilaria Bignamini and Clare Hornsby, with additional research by Irma Della Giovampaola and Jonathan Yarker, *Digging and Dealing in Eighteenth-Century Rome* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2010), 156–75 (on Tivoli) and *passim*.



Fig. 1. *Il Museo Pio-Clementino* (1782–1807), I, title page. Heidelberg University Library.



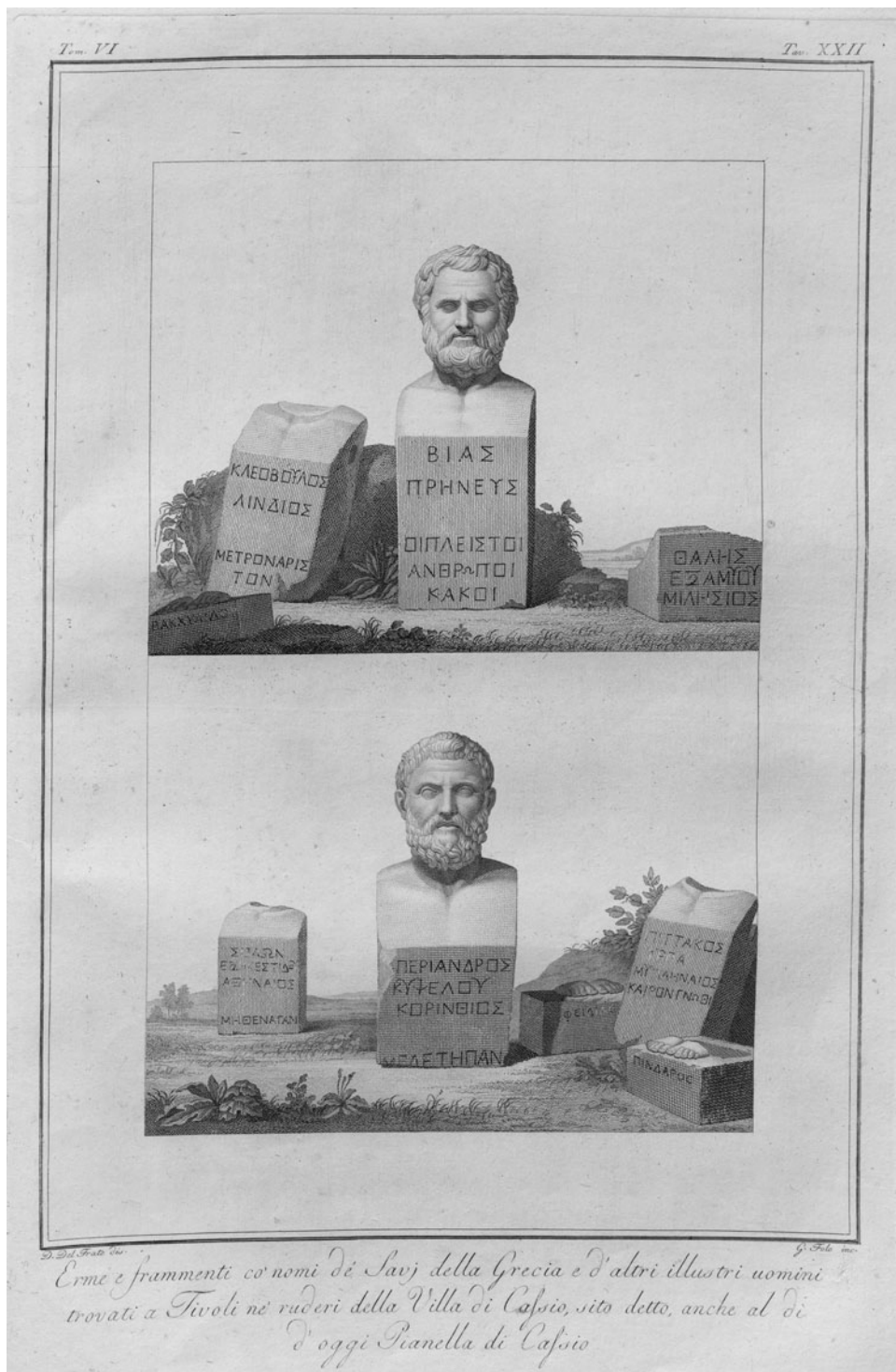


Fig. 2. Il Museo Pio Clementino (1782–1807), VI, table XXII ('Ermete e frammenti').  
Heidelberg University Library.

course, the statue of yet another Muse, two headless herms of Phidias and Bacchylides, two herms of Pericles, and several other items.<sup>10</sup>

The Pope's direct intervention represented in many respects a new departure. It stimulated a number of campaigns with an almost exclusive focus on the retrieval of ancient statuary, and the Tivoli findings marked an important progression in the study of ancient portraiture.<sup>11</sup> The newly discovered statues of the Muses contributed to a revival of the debate on the correct identification of the figures in the Apotheosis of Homer by Archelaos of Priene (London, British Museum; formerly Rome, Palazzo Colonna) and in the Sarcophagus of the Muses (Paris, Louvre; formerly Rome, Capitoline Museum).<sup>12</sup> Moreover, owing to the fragmentary state of so many of the ancient statues and the frequent exchange of parts, notably heads, the task of assigning credible features to persons of the ancient world remained a thorny one: the facial characteristics of many a famous Hellene had remained unidentified or dubious up to that point.<sup>13</sup> Hence the significant advance brought about by the new discoveries, which also allowed the acquisition of important biographical details. The few surviving letters on respective plinths led, for example, to conjecture that the name of Anacreon's father was Scylax and the birthplace of the Athenian general Chabrias was the Attic village of Aexonia, or Aexone.<sup>14</sup> The greatest sensation, however, was caused by the reappearance of the two herms of Pericles; one of which, bearing the inscription 'Pericles the Athenian, [son] of Xanthippos' (Fig. 3), was also reproduced in the frieze adorning the title-page of the first

<sup>10</sup> Giambattista and Ennio Quirino Visconti, *Il Museo Pio-Clementino*, 7 vols [in vols II–VII the title has no hyphen] (Rome, 1782–1807), I (1782), 11–13. Cf. Jeffrey Collins, 'Marshaling the Muses: the Vatican's Pio-Clementino Museum and the Greek ideal', *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 16 (2008–9), 35–63. All volumes give Ennio Quirino Visconti as the author except the first, ascribed to Giambattista (although authored for the greater part by the son). The entire work is now available online, courtesy of the Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg: <http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/visconti1782bd1/0168>. On the genesis and progress of the first edition, from which all quotations are taken, see Sforza, *Ennio Quirino Visconti* (above, n. 8), 85–91.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Carlo Pietrangeli, *Scavi e scoperte di antichità sotto il pontificato di Pio VI* (Rome, 1958); Ronald T. Ridley, *The Eagle and the Spade: Archaeology in Rome during the Napoleonic Era* (Cambridge, 1992), 28–30. Further bibliography in Collins, 'Marshaling the Muses' (above, n. 10), 60, n. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Visconti, *Il Museo Pio-Clementino* (above, n. 10), I (1782), 97–8 and 'Tavola B', 1 and 2.

<sup>13</sup> On the limited number of intact portraits and the combinatory practice affecting, in particular, the herms found at Tivoli in the sixteenth century, see Fulvio Orsini, *Imagines et elogia virorum illustrium et eruditorum ex antiquis lapidibus et nomismatibus expressa, cum annotationibus ex bibliotheca Fulvi Ursini* (Rome, 1570), 6–7. An overview is in Francis Haskell, *History and Its Images* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1993), chs 2 and 5. On the methods of restoring the missing parts of the statues of the Muses, in line with 'eighteenth-century conventions [which] demanded complete statues', see Collins, 'Marshaling the Muses' (above, n. 10), 39.

<sup>14</sup> Visconti, *Il Museo Pio-Clementino* (above, n. 10), I (1782), 14 note. See also Bon-Joseph Dacier, *Rapport historique sur les progrès de l'histoire et de la littérature ancienne depuis 1789 et sur leur état actuel* (Paris, 1810), 59–60, on the discoveries at Tivoli as the seminal idea for Visconti's last great works, *Iconographie grecque*, 3 vols (Paris, 1808), and (with Antoine Mongez) *Iconographie romaine*, 4 vols (Paris, 1817–26).

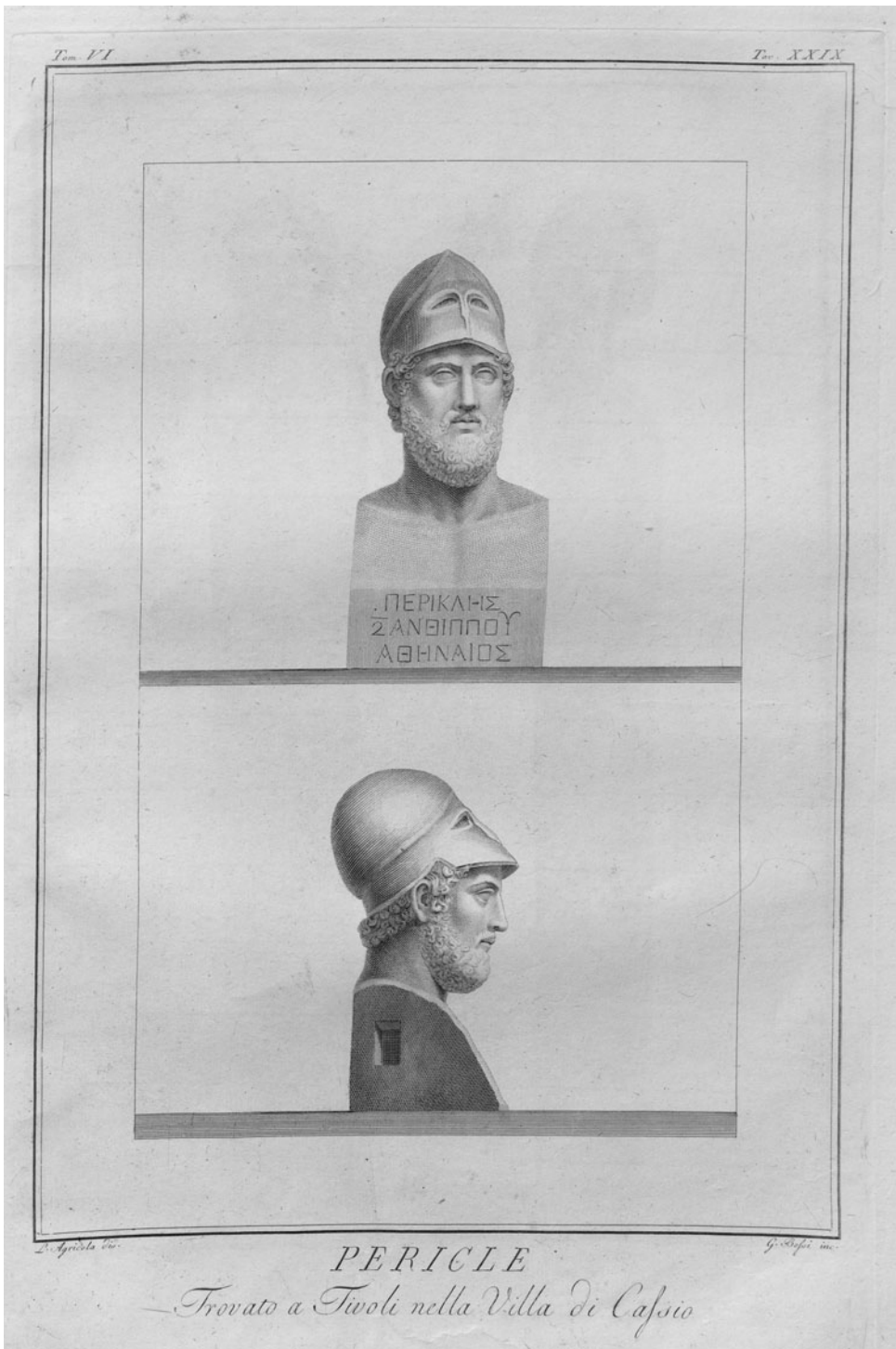


Fig. 3. Il Museo Pio Clementino (1782–1807), VI, table XXIX ('Pericle'). Heidelberg University Library.



volume (Fig. 1) and has imprinted the features of the Athenian ruler in the minds of school pupils around the world ever since. Visconti found further confirmation of the authenticity of Pericles' features in a passage from Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (*Pericles* 3.2), where the Athenian leader is said to have been traditionally portrayed wearing a helmet to cover the unusually oblong shape of his head, the sole imperfection of an otherwise handsome appearance.<sup>15</sup> It was equally remarkable that Pericles' heads should emerge shortly after a herm of his celebrated spouse Aspasia had been excavated in the area around Civitavecchia (Fig. 4). Visconti maintained that the features of this herm, carved in a more archaic style, did insufficient justice to a woman of such legendary beauty and intellectual distinction, unduly maligned by envious rivals and malevolent playwrights; yet the coincidence of the double find was a striking one.<sup>16</sup>

News of the discoveries, amplified by the opening of the Museo Pio Clementino, resonated widely among scholars and the educated public of all nations, and reached its peak when the event was praised in verses of ravishing beauty by a promising young poet, Vincenzo Monti.

## POETRY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

A native of the province of Ferrara, from a very young age Vincenzo Monti (1754–1828) showed a marvellous facility for versification both in Latin and Italian, together with an astounding aptitude for drawing on the most disparate sources of inspiration: the Latin elegiacs, Dante, Ariosto, coeval and 'lighter' poets like Carlo Innocenzo Frugoni (1692–1768) and Ludovico Savioli (1729–1804), as well as solemn epic poets like Milton and Klopstock. In 1775 he was still in Ferrara and affiliated under the name of Autonide Saturniano with the local branch — or 'colony' as it was then called — of the Roman Academy of Arcadia. The Arcadians' academic double name ordinarily alluded to mythical lore conveyed through ancient pastoral and idyllic poetry. By adopting the name 'Autonide', Monti styled himself as a descendant of Autonoe, daughter of Harmonia and of Cadmus, the mythical founder of Thebes, and mother to Actaeon. The second name was generally intended to refer to a region, either real or fictitious, over which the name's bearer ideally exercised his or her own poetical jurisdiction; so that 'Saturniano' presumably alluded to the Virgilian *Saturnia tellus* (*Aeneid* 8.314–36; *Georgics* 2.173), that is, Golden Age Latium under the rule of the god Saturnus.

From Romagna Monti moved to Rome in 1778. Like many fellow subjects of the Papal States, he contributed to a tendency that grew significantly during that half-century (1769–1823) in which Peter's throne was successively occupied by

<sup>15</sup> Visconti, *Il Museo Pio Clementino* (above, n. 10), VI (1792), 44. The second herm was given to Gavin Hamilton in exchange for other pieces and eventually bought by Charles Townley (43, note a).

<sup>16</sup> Visconti, *Il Museo Pio Clementino* (above, n. 10), VI (1792), 44–5.

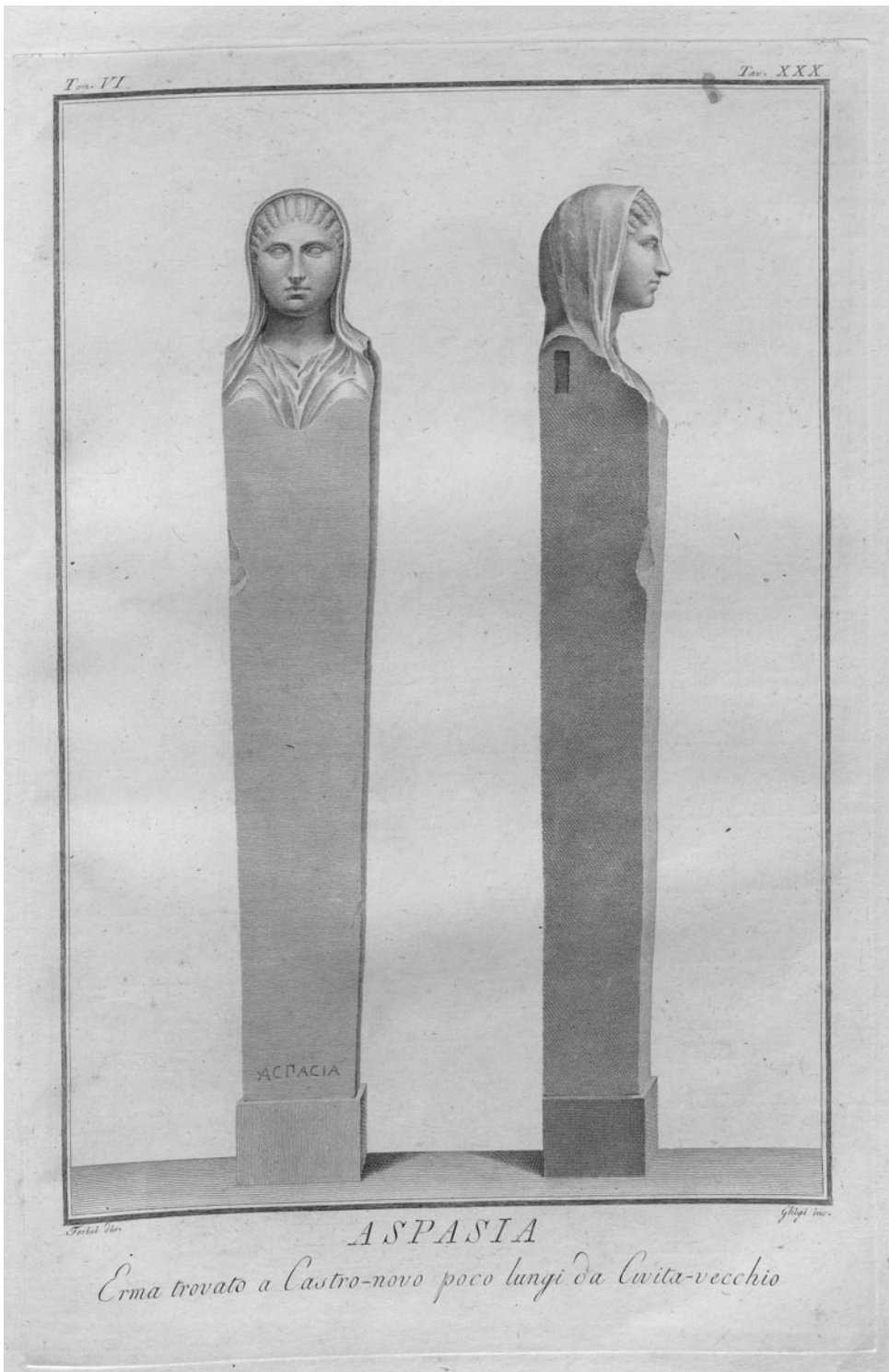


Fig. 4. *Il Museo Pio Clementino* (1782–1807), VI, table XXX ('Aspasia'). Heidelberg University Library.

three prelates from Romagna: Clement XIV (Giovan Vincenzo Ganganelli) from Santarcangelo di Romagna, Pius VI (Giovannangelo Braschi) from Cesena and Pius VII (Niccolò Chiaramonti), also from Cesena. In the summer of 1779 Monti seized his chance. On 16, 20 and 23 August the Academy of Arcadia called three public gatherings to celebrate the restored health of the Pope and to formulate the Quinquennial Vows for the happy continuation of his rule — an ancient Roman tradition revived by the Christian pontiffs. At the third and final gathering, Monti recited *La prosopopea di Pericle*, an ode of 156 agile, swift-running seven-syllable verses where Pericles' herm sings the praises of Pius's enlightened pontificate.<sup>17</sup>

A veritable *furor* followed the performance of the poem, which was hailed as a celebration of the auspicious wedding between ancient art and modern poetry. Monti was surprised at such a reaction: he had hurriedly composed his ode (so he claimed) in only two days and there is no doubt that his declamatory skills, cultivated through the practice of improvisation, must have played a role in inspiring such general admiration.<sup>18</sup> Success, however, continued to accrue well beyond the initial performance. Cardinal Giovanni Carlo Boschi demanded that a copy of the text be printed on a single sheet, framed and placed next to Pericles' herm once this was brought into the museum that was still under construction — an honour seldom conferred on verse that celebrated art works.<sup>19</sup> The ode appeared in print twice that year, in Rome and in Ferrara, and in dozens of subsequent editions. It was Monti's first great success, marking a radical new turn in his production and career.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Leone Vicchi, *Vincenzo Monti. Le lettere e la politica in Italia dal 1750 al 1830 (Triennio 1778–1780)* (Fusignano, 1886), 303–10; Giovanni Mestica, 'La prima ode di Vincenzo Monti', *Nuova Antologia* 24 (1889), 39–62; Vincenzo Monti, *Poesie*, edited by Alfonso Bertoldi (Florence, 1904 [first edition 1891]; facsimile reprint 1978). More recent contributions: Carolyn Springer, *The Marble Wilderness: Ruins and Representation in Italian Romanticism, 1775–1850* (Cambridge, 1987), chs 1 and 2; Collins, *Papacy and Politics* (above, n. 5), 190; Mauro Sarnelli, 'La *Prosopopea di Pericle* in Arcadia e oltre', in Gennaro Barbarisi (ed.), *Vincenzo Monti nella cultura italiana. II. Monti nella Roma di Pio VI* (Milan, 2006), 125–74; and Collins, 'Marshaling the Muses' (above, n. 10), 56–9.

<sup>18</sup> Vincenzo Monti, *Epistolario*, edited by Alfonso Bertoldi, 6 vols (Florence, 1928–31), I, 82–3. Declamation was to remain one of Monti's most admired skills. Particularly revealing is the testimony of Benjamin Constant, expressed at a place and time — Mme de Staël's chateau at Coppet on Lake Geneva in the autumn of 1805 — when Constant perceived Monti as a dangerous rival to his attempts to gain their hostess's affection. From his *Journal intime* of 1805: '19 [October]. Arrivée de Monti. Superbe figure douce et fière, pourtant le caractère d'un poète'. '21 [October]. Superbe déclamation de Monti'. '16 [November]. Pris congé de Monti. C'est un véritable poète, fougueux, emporté, faible, timide et mobile. Le pendant de [Marie-Joseph] Chénier en Italien, quoqu'il vaille mieux que Chénier' (Benjamin Constant, *Œuvres*, edited by Alfred Roulin (Paris, 1957), 554, 556).

<sup>19</sup> Monti, *Epistolario* (above, n. 18), I, 82 and 88.

<sup>20</sup> The poem was first published in *I voti quinquennali celebrati dagli Arcadi nel Bosco Parrasio ad onore della santità di N.ro Signore Papa Pio VI* (Rome, 1779), 55–60. All quotations that follow refer to the text and line numbering of the final version unless otherwise noted. On the changes progressively introduced by Monti in the text see Vicchi, *Vincenzo Monti* (above, n. 17), 306–9;

In the poem, Pericles' speaking herm declares it a propitious time for him to see the light of day again; although not in Greece but in Rome, after the many centuries of neglect caused by the barbarian invasions (*Mi seppelli la barbara / Vandalica ruina*, 11–12; *Ed aspettai benefica / Etade*, 33–4). He sees the familiar features of other illustrious Hellenes re-emerge around him (*Vedi dal suolo emergere / Ancor parlanti e vive ... Le sculte forme argive*, 49–52), while those of his beloved spouse Aspasia await him to seal their love beyond the grave (*Qui la fedele Aspasia ... Al fianco suo m'aspetta*, 69–72). After a sweeping and proud account of his past attainments as ruler of Athens (97–124), he acknowledges their inferiority before those of Pius, whose patronage of the arts has forever settled the issue of Rome's pre-eminence over Greece (*Grecia fu vinta, e videsi / Di Grecia la ruina / Render superba e splendida / La povertà latina*, 129–32). The voice of the herm concludes by formulating the aforementioned quinquennial vows for a long and prosperous pontificate (*Vivi, o signor. Tardissimo / Al mondo il ciel ti furi*, 145–6). Despite being sent from the pagan Erebus these vows are no less genuine or worthy of acceptance (149–56).

One can appreciate how the ode struck a sensitive chord with so many listeners and readers. Firstly, it presents a sequence of salient images. Particularly memorable are the stanzas evoking the lamentable condition of classical art during the barbaric age, as well as those vividly picturing the faces of the ancient sages re-emerging from the soil, or those hailing the golden age of Athens under Periclean rule:

Eppur d'Atene i portici,  
I templi e l'ardue mura  
Non mai più belli apparvero  
Che quando io gli ebbi in cura.  
(97–100)

(Yet the Athenian arcades, its temples and high walls never did look so comely as when I had them in my care.)

Secondly, the imagery employed is made memorable by the use of frequent but perfectly, almost unassumingly, embedded classical reminiscences, mainly derived from Horace, Virgil and Ovid. The few passages transcribed above show Monti's subtle art of quotation. *Grecia fu vinta ...* (129) is a topical allusion — one of the many interspersed in Italian verse from all ages — to the Horatian dictum *Graecia capta ferum victorem coepit et artes / Intulit agresti Latium* ('Captive Greece conquered her savage victor, and introduced the arts into rural Latium', *Ep.* 2.1.156–7); yet one could also perceive in it an echo of 1750s and 1760s polemics, when the old controversy had been revived among

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Mestica, 'La prima ode' (above, n. 17), 47–53; Monti, *Poesie* (above, n. 17), 4–12; Ivanos Ciani, 'Le prime raccolte poetiche di Vincenzo Monti', *Studi di Filologia Italiana* 37 (1979), 413–95; Sarnelli, 'La *Prosopopea di Pericle*' (above, n. 17), 159–72, as well as the concluding pages of this article.

artists and antiquarians.<sup>21</sup> *Vivi, o signor. Tardissimo / Al mondo il ciel ti furi* (145–6) is an equally patent allusion to Horace (*Serus in coelum redeas, diuque / Laetus intersis populo Quirini*, ‘Late may you return to heaven, and long may you remain among the Quirites’, *Carmina* 1.2.45), by which the Christian appropriation of the pagan quinquennial vows is underlined. Even minimal junctures, for example *l’ardue mura* (98), harking back to the Virgilian *ardua moenia* (‘high walls’, *Aeneid* 12.45), contribute to the sustained tone of the whole.<sup>22</sup> Thirdly, and finally, a vibrant enthusiasm, tempered with affection, permeates the entire poem and reaches emotional intensity in Pericles’ recollection of Aspasia — a stanza that Monti polished to perfection in subsequent versions of the poem:

immemore  
Non son del prisco ardore:  
Amor lo desta, e serbalo  
Dopo la tomba Amore.  
(77–80)<sup>23</sup>

(I am not oblivious to my former ardour — Love excites it, and nurtures it beyond the grave.)

## MONTI AND VISCONTI

The Roman context in which this singular feat took place has been meticulously investigated since the general resurgence of interest in neoclassical arts and letters. Recent contributions in particular have shed new light on Monti’s early Roman years.<sup>24</sup> Still, it is surprising to note that, amid many stimulating

<sup>21</sup> John Wilton-Ely, ‘Vision and design: Piranesi’s *fantasia* and the Graeco-Roman controversy’, in G. Brun (ed.), *Piranèse et les Français: Actes du Colloque tenu à la Villa Médicis* (Rome, 1978), 529–52; John Wilton-Ely, ‘The art of polemic: Piranesi and the Graeco-Roman controversy’, in Philippe Boutry et al. (eds), *La Grecia antica: mito e simbolo per l’età della Grande Rivoluzione* (Milan, 1991), 121–30; Miranda Marvin, *The Language of the Muses: The Dialogue between Roman and Greek Sculpture* (Los Angeles, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Equally significant are the echoes of early modern and coeval poets, such as Baldassarre Castiglione (1478–1529), Jacopo Sadoletto (1477–1547), Agostino Favoriti (1624–82) and Agostino Paradisi (1736–83), thoroughly investigated in Sarnelli, ‘La *Prosopopea di Pericle*’ (above, n. 17), 144–59.

<sup>23</sup> The original text read *Ancor lo nutre, e serbalo / Dopo la tomba Amore*. Monti inserted the chiasmus in the days immediately following his recital when he was asked to revise the text for publication, but not so promptly that the new reading could feature in the Roman first edition. Cf. Mestica, ‘La prima ode’ (above, n. 17), 50; Monti, *Poesie* (above, n. 17), 9. This brief summary and analysis, conducted from the viewpoint of the literary historian, aims to complement the illustration offered by Springer, *The Marble Wilderness* (above, n. 17), ch. 1, and especially the excellent one provided by Collins, ‘Marshaling the Muses’ (above, n. 10), 56–9.

<sup>24</sup> Over and above the titles already mentioned, cf. Gennaro Barbarisi’s seminal ‘Vincenzo Monti e la cultura neoclassica’, in Emilio Cecchi and Natalino Sapegno (eds), *Storia della letteratura italiana. L’Ottocento* (Milan, 2001 [first edition 1969]), 7–104; Angelo Romano, *Vincenzo Monti*



insights into Monti's relationships with a number of individuals, the association with Ennio Quirino Visconti should not yet have received a dedicated contribution commensurate with its importance. Two fortunate partial exceptions are the essays of Francesca Fedi and Mauro Sarnelli on Monti's early years in Rome, where Visconti features prominently.<sup>25</sup> As Fedi rightly states in the opening pages of her contribution on Monti's encounter with Roman neoclassicism, the friendship with Visconti was a defining moment in the young Ferrarese poet's career.<sup>26</sup> This circumstance entails a number of considerations, which aim to give Visconti's role a greater prominence than it has hitherto received.<sup>27</sup>

At the time when the two first met, Visconti was already set to become a distinguished scholar, albeit in the shadow of his still-active father. On the other hand, he had not yet abandoned the cultivation of poetry. He was thus fostering ambitions that went beyond the customary discharge of such obligations as the production of occasional verse. This clearly transpires from Monti's *Saggio di poesie*, published in the late spring or early summer of 1779. This is introduced by a 'Discorso preliminare', in which Visconti is addressed as an older and more learned friend, as well as a mentor and a severe arbiter on matters of classically inspired poetry — he is, in effect, presented as a new Tibullus, by way of the Horace-inspired address *Enni, Pieridum nostrarum candido Iudex* ('Ennius, candid judge of my Muse').<sup>28</sup> It is worth noting here that Visconti took the assignment very seriously. In his 'Discorso preliminare', Monti reserved for himself a broader and somewhat garrulous prerogative to pursue eclectic imitation, with a declared preference for the Hebrew poetry of the Psalms, a fashionable literary trend at the time.<sup>29</sup> This is probably why Visconti, when asked later to write about the *Stato attuale della romana*

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*a Roma* (Manziana, 2001); Arnaldo Bruni, 'Monti nella Roma neoclassica', *Rassegna Europea di Letteratura Italiana* 23 (2004), 23–42. Vicchi's *Vincenzo Monti* (above, n. 17) retains considerable importance.

<sup>25</sup> Francesca Fedi, "Il midollo dell'immagine": Monti e le prospettive teoriche del neoclassicismo "romano", in Barbarisi (ed.), *Monti nella Roma di Pio VI* (above, n. 17), 57–79, and Sarnelli, 'La *Prosopopea di Pericle*' (above, n. 17).

<sup>26</sup> Fedi, "Il midollo dell'immagine" (above, n. 25), 57–8.

<sup>27</sup> On the somewhat inexplicable and certainly unforgivable oblivion that has affected the legacy of Visconti's work, see Piero Treves (ed.), *Lo studio dell'antichità classica nell'Ottocento* (Milan and Naples, 1962), 3–16; Ridley, *The Pope's Archaeologist* (above, n. 8), 27.

<sup>28</sup> Vincenzo Monti, *Saggio di poesie* (Livorno, 1779), xiii, with an allusive reference to Horace's apostrophe to Tibullus, *Albi, nostrorum sermonum candido iudex* (Horace, *Epodes* 1.4.1). A modern, annotated edition of the 'Discorso preliminare' can be read in Vincenzo Monti, *Opere*, edited by Manara Valgimigli and Carlo Muscetta (Milan and Naples, 1953), 999–1009.

<sup>29</sup> Monti, *Saggio di poesie* (above, n. 28), xiv–xv; Monti, *Opere* (above, n. 28), 1003–4. Saverio Mattei's *I libri poetici della Bibbia tradotti dall'ebraico originale, ed adattati al gusto della poesia italiana*, 3 vols (Naples, 1766–8), frequently reprinted, was enjoying enormous success in those years (cf. Anna Maria Rao, 'Mattei, Saverio', *DBI* 72 (2008), 177–82), while raising the admiration of such readers as Ferdinando Galiani, Bernardo Tanucci and Pietro Metastasio.

*letteratura* (1785), did not let friendship soften his lucid verdict on the young Monti's vagaries.<sup>30</sup>

Back in 1779, however, Monti's 'Discorso preliminare' voiced a fear that Visconti's preoccupation with ancient statues and coins might become too exclusive, thus preventing him from completing his translation of Pindar into Italian verse. If Visconti feared that his affection for his Greeks was unrequited, Pericles' recent reappearance was there to prove the contrary, as Monti wrote to reassure his friend.

Ma se fosse lecito indovinare i pensieri dei morti, si potrebbe credere che anche i Greci siano innamorati di Voi, o che almeno abbiano la smania, dirò così, di vedervi, e di essere veduti. Ne avete una prova in Pericle, il quale dopo di essere stato nascosto per tanti secoli agli occhi diligenti della curiosa posterità, dalle campagne di Tivoli di dove è stato disotterato, è venuto ultimamente a trovarvi, e a farsi da voi riconoscere in persona con un bel volto degno veramente d'Aspasia, e con un grand'elmo in testa scolpito dal bravo artefice forse sulla forma di quello che portava quel giorno che vinse i Sicioni. Ma io non vorrei che in grazia di Pericle vi dimenticaste di Pindaro. ... In vece di contemplare la testa di Pericle, o di esaminar qualche medaglia non ben conosciuta, giacché di medaglie e di antiquaria ne sapete abbastanza, date di piglio alla lira di Pindaro, e arricchitela d'auree corde toscane.<sup>31</sup>

Were one permitted to guess the thoughts of the dead, it would seem the Greeks are returning your affection for them, or are at least fostering a yearning, as it were, to see you, as well as to be seen. You have proof of this in Pericles. After remaining hidden from the searching eye of curious posterity for so many centuries, he has recently come to visit you from that Tivoli countryside where he was dug up, and he has let himself be recognized by his handsome face, truly worthy of Aspasia, and by that impressive helmet — the work of a valiant artist — he was perhaps wearing the day he defeated the Sikyones. Yet I would not wish that Pericles made you forget your Pindar ... Instead of gazing at Pericles' head or examining some obscure medal (for you know enough already about medals and other antiquarian matters), do seize Pindar's lyre, and add to it a set of golden Tuscan strings.

Most of the constituent parts of Monti's *Prosopopea di Pericle* are already apparent in this passage. One can easily recognize the animated traits of Pericles, as well as the other heads'; their 'yearning ... to see you, as well as to be seen', which was to be translated into the poem's vivid ekphrases; the herm's amorous affection towards the scholar that had elucidated its features, which in the poem will be directed to Pius and echoed in Pericles' pledge to Aspasia.

A glance at the dates should help establish the time limits within which one ought to set the composition of Monti's *Prosopopea di Pericle*. The 'Discorso preliminare' must date to the late spring of 1779, if one assumes it to be

<sup>30</sup> 'Si lascia trasportare troppo o dalla sua fantasia o dall'imitazione di qualche nuovo scrittore oltremontano che gli capita alle mani. La sua dizione non è esente da difetti. Fu sul principio entusiasta per Davide e per Isaia. Poi lo è divenuto pel tedesco Goethe' (Ennio Quirino Visconti, *Due discorsi inediti ... con alcune sue lettere e con altre a lui scritte* (Milan, 1841), 35), quoted in Treves (ed.), *Lo studio dell'antichità classica* (above, n. 27), 8.

<sup>31</sup> Monti, *Saggio di poesie* (above, n. 28), xxviii–xxix, also anthologized in Treves (ed.), *Lo studio dell'antichità classica* (above, n. 27), 7–8. The citizens of Sikyon in the Peloponnesus were defeated by Pericles in 453 BC.

broadly coeval with, if not slightly earlier than, the dedicatory epistle dated 8 June 1779.<sup>32</sup> In a letter of 30 July, Monti said he had promised to ‘complete’, amongst other things, a ‘canzonetta for the Pope’, which is without doubt the text under consideration here.<sup>33</sup> The *Prosopoea di Pericle*, recited in Arcadia on 23 August of the same year, was soon afterwards declared by Monti to have been composed — as has been observed — in ‘only two days’.<sup>34</sup> Be that as it may, Visconti’s influence over Monti’s early Roman production cannot be confined within these dates and demands to be examined at greater length.

Presumably aware, despite possible misgivings, of his friend’s greater poetic gifts, Visconti urged Monti to write a poem himself on the reappearance of Pericles’ herm; but he did not stay idle either. Visconti wrote in friendly competition an ode entitled *Le Muse* to celebrate the statues found on the same site in Tivoli, and by recalling the wedding of Cadmus and Harmonia in the opening lines paid homage to his friend ‘Autonide’.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the metre in which both poems are written consists of quatrains of alternate unrhymed proparoxytone (stress on the antepenultimate syllable) and rhymed paroxytone (stress on the penultimate) seven-syllable lines. This distinctive prosodic structure was intended to imitate the pattern of the Latin distich; it had been adopted and promoted by Ludovico Savioli — one of young Monti’s favourite authors — with the deliberate purpose of ennobling the by then largely discredited genre of the canzonetta.<sup>36</sup> However, Visconti had also elected to use the same metrical form for his celebration of Pius VI’s election to the pontificate as far back as 1775, as well as for his ongoing attempts at translating Pindar. On balance, as Mauro Sarnelli has observed, Monti’s *Prosopoea* appears to show greater similarity to Visconti’s poem on

<sup>32</sup> Monti, *Saggio di poesie*, xij (above, n. 28).

<sup>33</sup> Monti, *Epistolario* (above, n. 18), I, 77 (‘Il dovere esige da me che io termini ... una canzonetta per il Papa’). In eighteenth-century Italian, ‘canzonetta’ is often synonymous with ‘ode’, although only when referred to select metrical varieties: cf. Rodolfo Zucco, *Istituti metrici del Settecento. L’ode e la canzonetta* (Genoa, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> Monti, *Epistolario* (above, n. 18), I, 83: ‘nel termine di due soli giorni’.

<sup>35</sup> Ennio Quirino Visconti, *Le Muse — Per nozze Braschi*, 1–4: *Quando la bionda Ermione / Cinta il bel crin di rose / Giove all’eroe fenicio / In nodo aureo compose ...*, in *Opere varie, italiane e francesi*, edited by Giovanni Labus, 4 vols (Milan, 1831), IV, 615–17. As Harmonia was mother to Autonoe and Monti had adopted the academic name of Autonide (‘son of Autonoe’), Ermione (= Harmonia) may be said to feature there as Monti’s academic grandmother. Almost 45 years later, Monti returned to that mythical episode for the subject of a wedding idyll, *Le nozze di Cadmo ed Ermione* (1825).

<sup>36</sup> Giosuè Carducci, ‘Della poesia melica italiana e di alcuni poeti erotici del secolo XVIII’ (1868) and ‘Dello svolgimento dell’ode in Italia’ (1901), in Giosuè Carducci, *Opere*. Edizione nazionale, 30 vols (Bologna, 1935–61), XV, 83–144 (esp. 114) and 1–81 (esp. 78) respectively; Antonio Pinchera, ‘La quartina settenaria “elegiaca” negli *Amori* di Ludovico Savioli’, in Paola Montefoschi, Corrado Bologna and Massimo Vetta (eds), *Chi l’avrebbe detto: arte, poesia e letteratura per Alfredo Giuliani* (Milan, 1994), 260–81. Cf. Monti’s ‘Saviolian canzonetta’ *Alla fanciulla inferma*, in *Saggio di poesie* (above, n. 28), 94–7. For further relevant examples from the same collection, see Sarnelli, ‘*La Prosopoea di Pericle*’ (above, n. 17), 158–9.

the Muses than to any other, in consideration of the subject — the praises of the pontiff — and the perceptibly loftier style the subject required.<sup>37</sup>

All this is encapsulated in one of the rooms of the Museo Pio Clementino — the Sala delle Muse. Of the herms on display there, together with those of Pericles and Aspasia (69), the poem mentions only those returned from the excavations with their heads intact. This means that only ‘Periandro’ (51) (Fig. 5), ‘Antistene’ (51) (Fig. 6), ‘Biante’ (54) (Fig. 7) and ‘Eschine’ (57) (Fig. 8) are evoked, the last paired with his rival Demosthenes, whose head (with no indication of provenance) is discussed and reproduced immediately after Aeschines’ in the relevant volume of Visconti’s *Museo Pio Clementino*.<sup>38</sup> As Jeffrey Collins has shown in his masterful article ‘Marshaling the Muses’, the housing together of the Apollo Citharoedus, the Muses and the herms from Tivoli, with Monti’s poem placed next to Pericles’ herm, aimed to be a tangible and perpetual memento of the bond between poetry and antiquarian science. The bond was constructed according to the Hellenic ideal that had also been Winckelmann’s, and received further authority from the selection of the statues on display, the carefully orchestrated parietal decoration, the frescoed vault by Tommaso Maria Conca with Apollo as the victorious god of poetry, and the series of four epic poets — Homer, Virgil, Ariosto and Tasso — painted by Conca in the lower section.<sup>39</sup> For the modern visitor the significance of the arrangement is partly obscured by the presence of the Belvedere Torso, positioned quite ‘out of context’ — as Collins rightly observes — in the middle of the room.<sup>40</sup> To Thomas Hardy, however, who visited the Sala delle Muse when the Torso was located elsewhere, the joint celebration of the cognate arts of sculpture and poetry was evident. Hardy’s verses, the epigraph to this paper, bear witness to

<sup>37</sup> Ennio Quirino Visconti, *Per l’esaltazione al Pontificato di Papa Pio VI. — La gara delle Virtù*, in *Opere varie* (above, n. 35), IV, 620–2. See Sarnelli, ‘La Prosopopea di Pericle’ (above, n. 17), 154–6. Although written in the narrative metre of *ottava rima*, Visconti’s *Ottave sul possesso di Nostro Signore Pio Sesto P. M.* (Rome, 1775) also appear to have been inspirational in suggesting the topical encomium of Christian Rome as opposed to the ancient pagan city: cf. Collins, *Papacy and Politics* (above, n. 5), 38–9.

<sup>38</sup> Visconti, *Il Museo Pio Clementino* (above, n. 10), VI (1792), 53 and ‘Tavola XXXVII’; Collins, ‘Marshaling the Muses’ (above, n. 10), 39. Sarnelli, ‘La Prosopopea di Pericle’ (above, n. 17), 147, note 45, observes about Demosthenes’ head that its provenance was subsequently given in Visconti’s *Iconografia greca* as ‘Villa Albani’.

<sup>39</sup> Collins’s hypothesis, that the presence of Ariosto in the fresco may have been prompted in part by the Pope’s (and Monti’s) reaction to the criticism of the Ferrarese poet in Martin Sherlock’s *Consiglio ad un giovane poeta* (1778), is ingenious and deserves credit (Collins, ‘Marshaling the Muses’ (above, n. 10), 56, 62). Both Pius VI and Monti were from Romagna, and Monti had engaged polemically with Sherlock in the summer of 1779: cf. Annalisa Nacinovich, ‘Il *Consiglio ad un giovane poeta* di Martin Sherlock e l’inizio di una nuova polemica’, in *Il sogno incantatore della filosofia: l’Arcadia di Gioacchino Pizzi, 1772–1790* (Florence, 2003), 117–28.

<sup>40</sup> Collins, *Papacy and Politics* (above, n. 5), 315, note 31. Giovanni Volpato and Louis Ducros’s etching (c. 1788–9) and a photograph (c. 1880), both showing the original layout and mosaic floor of the Sala delle Muse, are reproduced in Collins, ‘Marshaling the Muses’ (above, n. 10), 45 and 37 respectively.

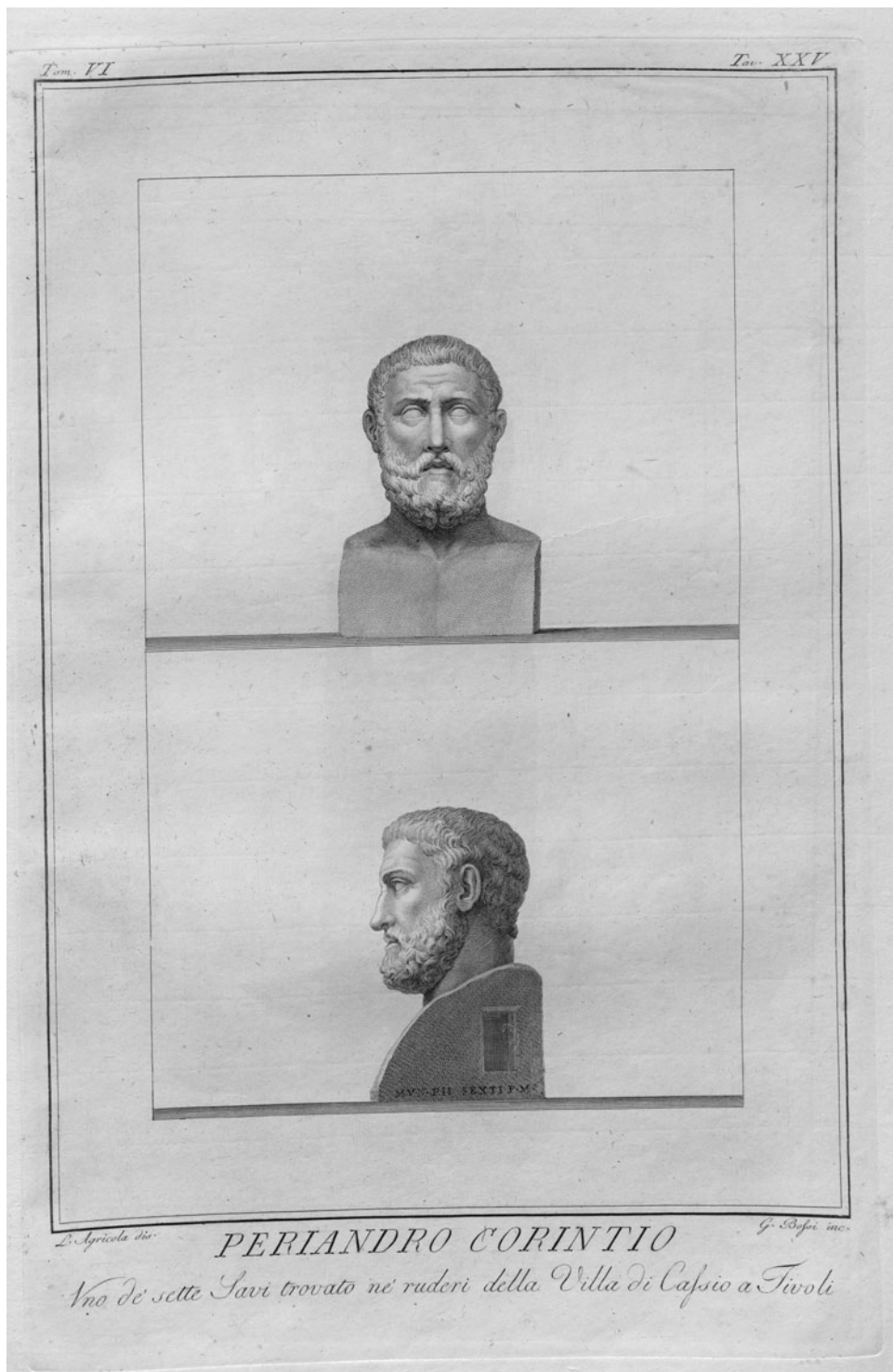


Fig. 5. *Il Museo Pio Clementino* (1782–1807), VI, table XXV ('Periandro Corintio').  
Heidelberg University Library



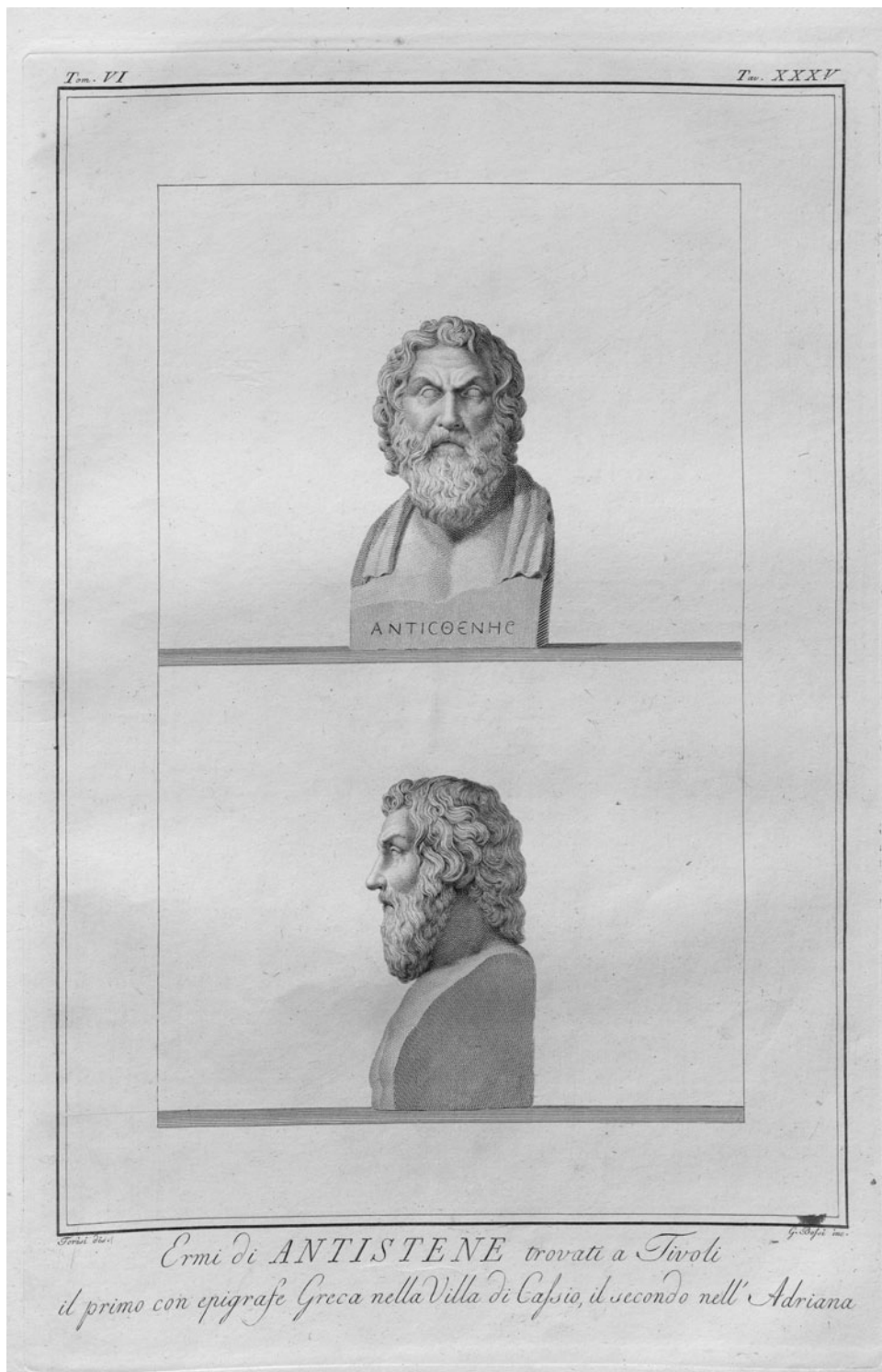


Fig. 6. *Il Museo Pio Clementino* (1782–1807), VI, table XXXV ('Antistene').  
Heidelberg University Library.

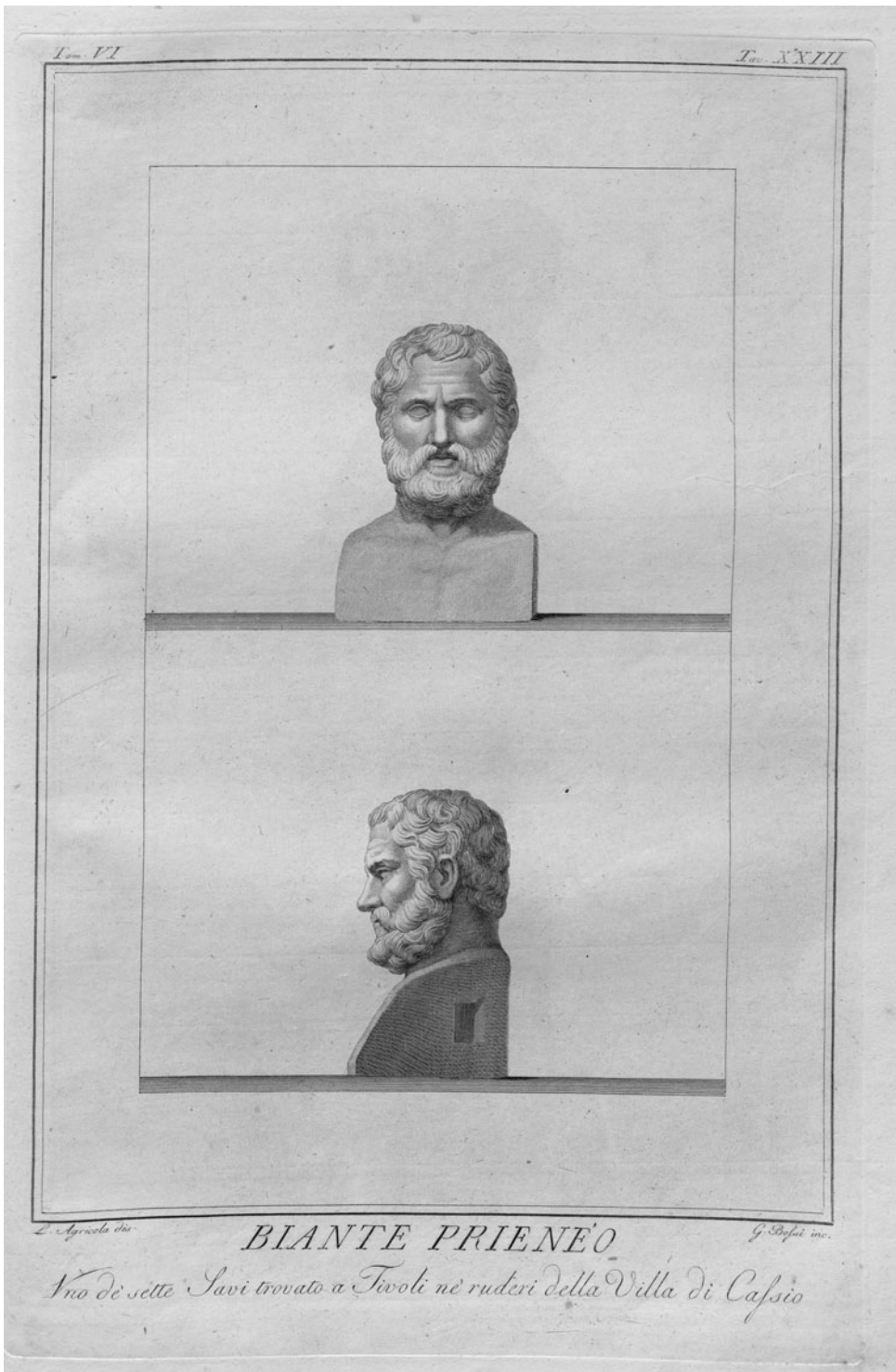


Fig. 7. *Il Museo Pio Clementino* (1782–1807), VI, table XXIII ('Biante Prieneo').  
Heidelberg University Library.

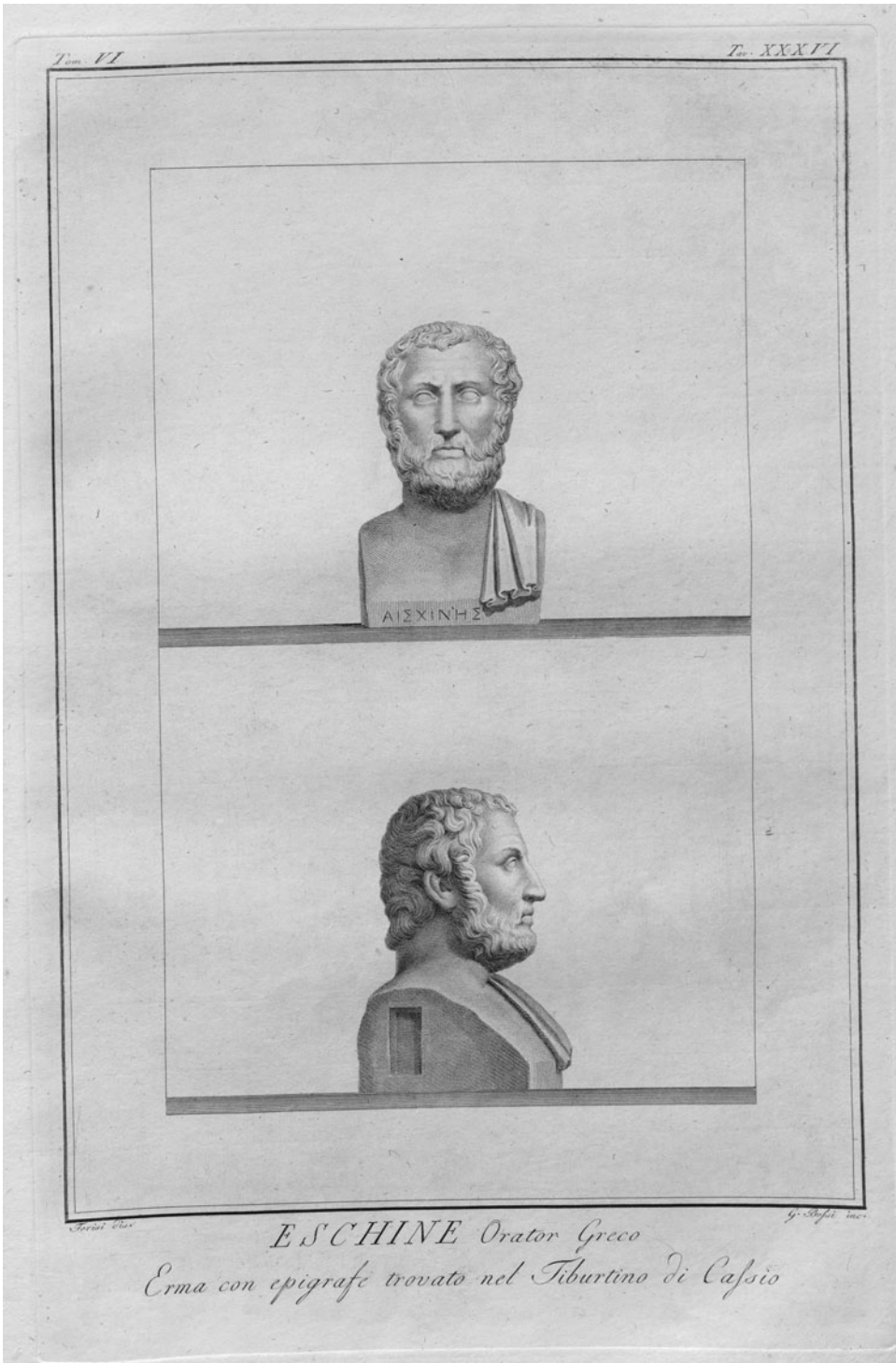


Fig. 8. *Il Museo Pio Clementino* (1782–1807), VI, table XXXVI ('Eschine').  
Heidelberg University Library.

the vertiginous message conveyed by the layout of the hall: how could one simultaneously capture both Form and Tune? And yet the beholder's anxiety is soothed by the Muse's softly spoken reassurance that the two ideals are, in fact, one and the same.

Further evidence of Visconti's and Monti's association during their Roman years is more likely to emerge from scattered private testimonies than from the records of official gatherings. Francesca Fedi has noted that Visconti, unlike Monti, carefully steered clear of the Academy of Arcadia, of which he was never a member. For example, while Monti celebrated the Braschi–Falconieri wedding by publishing *La bellezza dell'Universo* in a miscellaneous book of poems recited at Arcadia, Visconti's *Le Muse*, composed for the same occasion, appeared in a different collection promoted by the more obscure and anti-Arcadic Accademia degli Aborigeni.<sup>41</sup> In fact, Rome provided plentiful contexts for informal gatherings as alternatives to those of the Academy of Arcadia. Prince Sigismondo Chigi's circle, frequented by both Visconti and Monti, was one of them. Another probably less-known testimony, examined by Antonio Giuliano over twenty years ago, points to an even more exclusive situation.<sup>42</sup> In 1806 the antiquarian Francesco Cancellieri published a dissertation by the late Giambattista Visconti on the recovery, in 1781, of the Palombara Discobolus, together with other works on the same and analogous subjects, to which he added his own copious annotations.<sup>43</sup> In one of his anecdotal asides Cancellieri reveals that the text of the dissertation, whereby the Discobolus is brilliantly ascribed to Myron, was read out in the spring of 1781 to a select academy of only eight members; the text, however, was not read by Giambattista, but by Ennio Quirino.<sup>44</sup> Monti was among the attendants, the only poet in a very small company of prelates and antiquarians which included the famous architect Francesco Milizia as well as the theologian Antonio Spedalieri

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Fedi, "Il midollo dell'immagine" (above, n. 25), 68–9, where the label 'anti-arcadic' is used. On the Accademia degli Aborigeni see Michele Maylender, *Storia delle accademie d'Italia*, 5 vols (Bologna, 1926–30), I, 6–23. *La bellezza dell'Universo* was singled out for praise by Visconti in his *Stato attuale della romana letteratura* (Visconti, *Due discorsi inediti* (above, n. 30), 35).

<sup>42</sup> Antonio Giuliano, 'L'identificazione del Discobolo di Mirone', in Marco Bona Castellotti *et al.* (eds), *Scritti in onore di Giuliano Briganti* (Milan, 1990), 11–19; also in *Scritti minori* (Rome, 2001), 163–72, from which all quotations are taken.

<sup>43</sup> 'Lettera, all'E(minentissimi)mo e R(everendissimi)mo Signor Cardinale Guglielmo Pallotta Pro-Tesoriere Generale, del Sig. Abate Gio. Battista Visconti Commissario delle Antichità', in *Dissertazioni epistolari di G. B. Visconti e Filippo Waquier de la Barthe sopra la statua del Discobolo scoperta nella Villa Palombara ... Raccolte ed arricchite con note e con le bizzarre iscrizioni della Villa Palombara da Francesco Cancellieri* (Rome, 1806), 1–7.

<sup>44</sup> Francesco Cancellieri, 'Annotazioni', in *Dissertazioni epistolari* (above, n. 43), 69–71. Cf. Giuliano, 'L'identificazione' (above, n. 42), 166. A manuscript copy of the dissertation in Ennio Quirino's hand, dated 24 March 1781, was discovered by Giuliano in the Roman Archivio di Stato, 113/1-67-6. Camerale II. Antichità e Belle Arti. Fascicolo 142 [4<sup>a</sup> busta]. As was also the case with other writings that appeared under his father's name during those years, there are reasons to believe that the greater part of this was also the work of Ennio Quirino.



(1740–95), Gibbon’s notorious opponent in the quarrel following the publication of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.<sup>45</sup> The facetious name of that academy was ‘Società Cioccolataria’, for its members used to open their sessions by consuming a chocolate drink — a token of the society’s desultory nature, but also of its suitability for more intimate and, despite the jocular name, more scholarly meetings.<sup>46</sup> In modern academic terms, these meetings would resemble seminar sessions as opposed to crowded assemblies at which emphasis is on oratorical skill and performance rather than on substance.

This pattern of friendly competition and mutual encouragement continued unabated in the years that followed. The opening lines of Visconti’s *Le Muse* inspired the opening lines of Monti’s memorable ode *Al Signor di Montgolfier* (1784), a celebration of the ascension in an aerostatic balloon of Joseph-Michel Montgolfier’s followers, Nicolas-Louis Robert and Jacques Charles, and one of the few cases in which verse genuinely manages to tackle a scientific subject without losing either passion or eloquence.<sup>47</sup> Five years later, Visconti also tried his hand at writing verse on scientific topics and produced the ode *Il Triangolo*, a poem on the homonymous Northern constellation characterized by masonic undertones.<sup>48</sup> It is also noteworthy that, with the exception of *La bellezza dell’Universo*, all the poems mentioned so far, including Visconti’s surviving translations from Pindar, are in the same neoclassical Saviolian metre.<sup>49</sup>

Visconti never ceased to lend Monti frank and helpful advice. The *Feroniade*, an aetiological poem conceived (though never completed) by Monti in 1784 to celebrate Pius’s attempt to drain the Pontine Marshes, greatly profited from Visconti’s expertise on sources for the history of ancient Latium.<sup>50</sup> Monti’s tragedy *Aristodemo* (1786), on the other hand, was immediately well received and famously obtained Goethe’s approval;<sup>51</sup> yet after a preliminary reading of the text on private premises, as was then customary before proceeding to a stage performance, Visconti approached Monti and discreetly whispered in his ear that his tragedy had no recognizable catastrophe — a fault which Monti

<sup>45</sup> Cancellieri, ‘Annotazioni’, in *Dissertazioni epistolari* (above, n. 43), 71. Cf. Giuliano, ‘L’identificazione’ (above, n. 42), 166. The presence of both Monti and Milizia confirms Fedi’s surmise about the existence of direct contact between the two (Fedi, “Il midollo dell’immagine” (above, n. 25), 61–4).

<sup>46</sup> Cancellieri, ‘Annotazioni’, in *Dissertazioni epistolari* (above, n. 43), 71.

<sup>47</sup> Monti, *Poesie* (above, n. 17), 48. Compare Visconti’s *Quando la bionda Ermione / Cinta il bel crin di rose ...* with Monti’s *Quando Giason dal Pelio / Spinse nel mar gli abeti ...*

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Fedi, “Il midollo dell’immagine” (above, n. 25), 69. Visconti was in effect a freemason.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Sarnelli, ‘La *Prosopopea di Pericle*’ (above, n. 17), 155–6.

<sup>50</sup> According to Giovanni Antonio Maggi, ‘Intorno alla vita e alle opere del cav. Vincenzo Monti. Cenni’, in Vincenzo Monti, *Opere*, 6 vols (Milan, 1839–42), I, xx; II, 451. Collins, *Papacy and Politics* (above, n. 5), 227–8 and 324–5, has identified in Monti’s extensive ekphrasis of *Feroniade* 2.75–222, a description of the frescoes in the Sala di Diana of Nemi Castle, commissioned in 1784 by Pius VI and executed by the painter Liborio Coccetti.

<sup>51</sup> Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, edited by Christoph Michel and Hans-Georg Dewitz, 2 vols (Frankfurt a. M., 1993), I, 151–3 (23 November 1786) and 171–2 (15 January 1787).



promptly remedied.<sup>52</sup> Authoritative sources maintain that Visconti also gave impetus to the revival of Dante studies and imitation that characterizes the last decade of the eighteenth century in Rome. He offered the Franciscan friar Baldassarre Lombardi competent advice prior to the latter's 1791 publication of an annotated edition of the *Commedia*, the first to appear in Rome after the invention of the printing press.<sup>53</sup> In the absence of further evidence, one can only speculate whether Visconti may have played an analogous role in encouraging Monti to adopt Dantean metre and style for *In morte di Ugo Bassville* (1793), the poem that returned Dante to the altars of literary appreciation after centuries of neglect.<sup>54</sup> Finally, Monti continued availing himself of Visconti's philological expertise even after his friend had moved to Paris in 1799 to become the director of the Musée Napoléon. The translation of Homer's *Iliad*, Monti's crowning masterpiece, was carefully revised by Visconti in notes remarkable for their understanding of the original text and their interpretative accuracy.<sup>55</sup>

## RHETORIC AND LYRIC

'*Prosopopea di Pericle*. Prosopopoeia, a truly lyric genre, despite its rhetorical name'.<sup>56</sup> This is Giosuè Carducci's preliminary comment on Monti's poem in his lecture notes for the course he delivered at the University of Bologna during the academic year 1876–7. Negatively affected by the verdict pronounced by the readers of the Romantic Age (a verdict often motivated by political and ideological dissent), Monti's poetry was being reassessed by Carducci according to its own principles and for its intrinsic poetic values, over and above any celebratory and political motivation that may have been reflected in its themes.

Carducci associated Monti's *Prosopopea* with the tradition of the Roman elegy, where 'shades and [deceased] heroes are made to speak', and pointed to Propertius, 4.2 and 4.11, as well as some of Propertius' Renaissance epigones. Yet Carducci also appreciated that, despite its apparent reverence towards

<sup>52</sup> According to Monti's own testimony: see Vincenzo Monti, 'Esame critico dell'autore sopra l'*Aristodemo*', in *Tragedie, drammi e cantate di Vincenzo Monti, con appendice di versi inediti o rari*, edited by Giosuè Carducci (Florence, 1865), 200–1.

<sup>53</sup> See the testimonies reported in Sforza, *Ennio Quirino Visconti* (above, n. 8), 50–1. The publisher of Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia, col commento del p. Baldassarre Lombardi*, 3 vols (Rome, 1791), also issued the volumes of the *Museo Pio Clementino*. On Lombardi's edition see Roberto Tissoni, *Il commento ai classici italiani nel Sette e nell'Ottocento (Dante e Petrarca)* (Padua, 1993), 88–97.

<sup>54</sup> Vincenzo Monti, *In morte di Ugo Bassville. Cantica*, edited by Stefania Bozzi (Milan, 2013).

<sup>55</sup> Ennio Quirino Visconti and Andrea Mustoxidi, *Osservazioni sulla Iliade del Monti*, edited by Iginio De Luca (Firenze, 1961). Cf. Omero, *Iliade. Traduzione del cav. Vincenzo Monti*, edited by Arnaldo Bruni, 3 vols (Bologna, 2000).

<sup>56</sup> '*Prosopopea di Pericle*. Prosopopea, genere molto lirico, nonostante il nome retorico', quoted in Alfredo Cottignoli, 'Carducci editore e critico del Monti (con documenti inediti)', in Gennaro Barbarisi (ed.), *Vincenzo Monti nella cultura italiana*, 2 vols (Milan, 2005), I, 389–442 (esp. 412).

tradition, at the same time Monti's *Prosopopea* constituted a refreshingly new take on that ancient topic.

In somma, è la poesia antica che canta l'istituzione del Museo pio-clementino, il risorgimento dell'ellenismo e l'entusiasmo di Winckelmann in bocca d'un italiano che canta come Propertio.<sup>57</sup>

To reiterate, this is ancient poetry celebrating the institution of the Museo Pio-Clementino; it is Hellenism revived, combined with Winckelmann's enthusiasm, in the words of an Italian who sings with the voice of Propertius.

While he stressed the poem's enthusiastic drive, Carducci did not fail to highlight its opposing and equally relevant self-composure. The combination resulted in something akin to Winckelmann's pithy ideal of fiery creation followed (and counterbalanced) by careful honing.<sup>58</sup>

La perfezione classica è la rispondenza esatta della forma al concetto: e in questa poesia del Monti, così giovane, questa corrispondenza c'è: non fa una grinza. ... Placida, calma, vuole ascoltatori che tranquilli si appressino all'entusiasmo sacro del bello. Non contorsioni, non urlì: le strofe pioveano qui come le parole di Ulisse (Omero, *Iliade*, III).<sup>59</sup>

Classical perfection lies in the exact adherence of form to concept, and in this poem by Monti, [written when he was] still so young, that conformity exists, and is faultless ... [As] a placid, calm [sort of poetry], it demands tranquil listeners desirous of being admitted to the sacred enthusiasm for beauty. No contortions or shouting here: the stanzas descend [as naturally] as Odysseus' words in the third book of Homer's *Iliad*.

How should one assess this intriguing mixture of modernly phrased enthusiasm and classical poise? Monti had himself ascribed his poem to the poetics of enthusiasm and emphasized its spiriting effect (as has been seen) by claiming he had drafted it in two days.<sup>60</sup> Yet, a good three weeks before the date of the performance, he declared he was about to 'complete' the canzonetta for the Pope, which he had evidently begun some time before.<sup>61</sup> How should one reconcile those two statements?

A tentative answer might be to assign to the expression 'in two days' the conventional value of a composition conducted in haste, perhaps in an exalted

<sup>57</sup> Cottignoli, 'Carducci editore e critico del Monti' (above, n. 56), 412–13.

<sup>58</sup> 'Entwurf mit Feuer, und führe mit Phlegma aus': cf. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, edited by J. Eiselein, 12 vols (Donauöschingen, 1825–9; facsimile reprint Osnabrück, 1965), VI (1825), 191. Winckelmann's famous pronouncement was inspired by a verse by the seventeenth-century English poet Wentworth Dillon, 4th Earl of Roscommon (*Essay on Translated Verse* (London, 1684), 19: 'And write with fury but correct with Phlegm').

<sup>59</sup> Cottignoli, 'Carducci editore e critico del Monti' (above, n. 56), 413. Reference is here made to Odysseus' speech as reported by Antenor in Homer, *Iliad* 3.223. In 1858 Carducci had already praised Monti's *Prosopopea* as 'mirabile per virile parchezza' (Vincenzo Monti, *Le poesie liriche*, edited by Giosuè Carducci (Florence, 1858), viii.

<sup>60</sup> Monti, *Epistolario* (above, n. 19), I, 82.

<sup>61</sup> Monti, *Epistolario* (above, n. 19), I, 77. See above, note 33.

state, or even in a frenzy, whether real or feigned being of no consequence. In fact, the expression ‘in two days’ enjoys a long and distinctive pedigree and had for a long time represented a hallmark of impromptu composition driven by enthusiasm. Statius declared his *Silvae* to be poems he had composed in the heat of the moment (*subito calore*), and ‘none of them had required longer than two days’ to write (*nullum enim ex illis biduo longius tractum*), if not indeed written in a single day (*quaedam et in singulis diebus effusa*, *Silvae* 1 *praefatio* 3–4). Angelo Poliziano was among the first to revive the cult of Statius in the Renaissance; as such, he similarly declared he had written his play *Orfeo* ‘over a period of two days, in a permanently tumultuous state’ (*in tempo di dua giorni, intra continui tumulti*).<sup>62</sup> The same circumstances would ideally apply to Monti and his poem as well, which incidentally was intended for public recitation just as were Statius’ *Silvae* and Poliziano’s *Orfeo*. A few years later, Alessandro Manzoni jotted down his celebrated ode on the death of Napoleon, *Il cinque maggio*, ‘in less than three days’, struck by the news that had reached him in the countryside near Milan on 17 July 1821.<sup>63</sup> A more recent, and not altogether differing, example might be seen in the ‘original, shorter, version’ of Isaiah Berlin’s *The Hedgehog and the Fox*: ‘based on a lecture delivered in Oxford, [it] was dictated (the author claimed) in two days’.<sup>64</sup>

Yet rapid composition, if aimed at a higher goal than mere effect, must necessarily go through a revision process. *Subitus calor* (to use Statius’ terms) needs to be tempered with an awareness of ‘the lingering triviality of hastily accumulated material’ (*manet in rebus temere congestis quae fuit levitas*), as Quintilian warned when he addressed the problematic nature of *silvae* as impromptu writing (*Institutio Oratoria* 10.3.17). The same issue is evident in Monti’s constant revision of his texts and of *Prosopopea di Pericle* in particular. The changes progressively introduced in the first stanza are both exemplary and revealing in this respect.

The initial version, *Io degli Eroi di Grecia / Fra l’inclita famiglia / D’Atene, a i prischi secoli, / Splendore e meraviglia . . .* (‘I, from the noble family of the heroes of Greece, the splendour and marvel of Athens of old . . .’), was first changed to (bar a few minor adjustments) *Io degli Achei magnanimi / Fra l’inclita famiglia . . .* (‘I, from the noble family of the magnanimous Achaeans . . .’), to read eventually as

Io de’ forti Cecropidi  
Nell’inclita famiglia  
D’Atene un dì non ultimo  
Splendore e meraviglia . . .<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> *L’Orfeo del Poliziano con il testo critico dell’originale e delle sue successive forme teatrali*, edited by Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti (Padua, 2000 [first edition 1986]), 2.

<sup>63</sup> Alessandro Manzoni, *Tutte le poesie, 1797–1872*, edited by Gilberto Lonardi and Paola Azzolini (Venice, 1992 [first edition 1987]), 233.

<sup>64</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*. With a Foreword by Michael Ignatieff. Edited by Henry Hardy (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford, 2013), xiii (‘Editor’s Preface’).

<sup>65</sup> Mestica, ‘La prima ode’ (above, n. 17), 47; Monti, *Poesie* (above, n. 17), 6–7.

(I, from the noble family of the valiant Cecropides, the splendour and marvel of Athens in a far from recent past ...)

The introduction of a recondite periphrasis (Pericles as the descendant of Cecrops, the founder of Athens) and an elative litotes (*un dì non ultimo*, lit. ‘in a non-recent time’, in substitution of the more straightforward *a i prischi secoli*) testifies to a rhetorically enhanced text by way of the increased presence of classical figures of speech.

Similarly, the changes to the second half of the stanza underscore the culturally charged significance of the rescuing of Pericles’ herm, seen as a vindication of the eternal value of classical art against adverse fate. While in the original version Pericles’ words gave a personal and almost intimate account of his unexpected reappearance — *Da i ciechi regni io Pericle / De gli estinti ritorno / L’ingenua luce amabile / A riveder del giorno* (‘From the dark reign of the dead I, Pericles, am now returning to see the free, endearing light of day again’) — the final version is informed by greater solemnity, indeed monumentality, in alignment with the archaeological subject of the poem and the mission of the new Rome.

A riveder io Pericle  
Ritorno il ciel latino,  
Trionfator de’ barbari,  
Del tempo e del destino.<sup>66</sup>

(I, Pericles, am returning to see the Latin sky again, a vanquisher of the barbarians, of time, and of destiny.)

Striving for more complex, almost overloaded, poetic diction in combination with rarer vocabulary and markedly figured speech has its roots in an ideal of poetry that may look hopelessly remote from today’s sensibility. That ideal, however, permeated the age one has learnt to call neoclassical.<sup>67</sup> No one characterized that ideal better than the poet whose work sits on the watershed between the Classical and the Romantic Ages — Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837). In a note drafted on 12 September 1823, Leopardi remarked that the great poets of the previous generation, including Monti, had widened the gulf between the language of poetry and that of prose, thus creating two separate languages and a situation that was singularly analogous to that of ancient Greece.

<sup>66</sup> Mestica, ‘La prima ode’ (above, n. 17), 47; Monti, *Poesie* (above, n. 17), 6–7.

<sup>67</sup> Foundational contributions for this field of study are Mario Praz, *Gusto neoclassico* (Florence, 1940), transl. *On Neoclassicism* (London, 1969); Hugh Honour, *Neo-classicism* (Harmondsworth, 1968), and *The Age of Neo-Classicism* (London, 1972). On the history of the term see Roberto Cardini, ‘Neoclassicismo. Per la storia del termine e della categoria’, *Lettere Italiane* 44 (1992), 365–402; on the linguistic features of neoclassical poetry see Luca Serianni, ‘Per una caratterizzazione linguistica della poesia neoclassica’, in Roberto Cardini and Mariangela Regoliosi (eds), *Neoclassicismo linguistico* (Rome, 1997), 27–64.

Del resto, il linguaggio e lo stile delle poesie di Parini, Alfieri, Monti, Foscolo è molto più propriamente e più perfettamente poetico e distinto dal prosaico, che non è quello di verun altro de' nostri poeti, inclusi nominatamente i più classici e sommi antichi. Di modo che per quelli e per gli altri che li somigliano, e per l'uso de' poeti di questo e dell'ultimo secolo, l'Italia ha oggidì una lingua poetica a parte e distinta affatto dalla prosaica, una doppia lingua, l'una prosaica, l'altra [3419] poetica, non altrimenti che l'avesse la Grecia, e più che i latini.<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, the language and style of the poetry of Parini, Alfieri, Monti and Foscolo are much more properly and perfectly poetic, and distinct from prose, than those of any other of our poets, including specifically the most classical and accomplished of our poets of old. This means that through them and others like them, and through the usage of poets in this and the last century, Italy today has a separate poetic language, which is entirely distinct from that of prose, in effect two languages, one prosaic, the other [3419] poetic, no different from what Greece had, and more so than the Romans.<sup>69</sup>

This revealing comment has a specific bearing on the issue confronted here. An effective revival of the ancient world would not, indeed could not, stop at furnishing some splendid new museum rooms with a few ancient statues and scattered archaeological finds. It not only demanded a different critical language, as the example of Winckelmann shows, but demanded a different poetic language and style as well, which eventually came to resemble, and almost to mimic, the distinct nature of the poetic language of ancient Greece as a markedly separate form of expression from that of prose or of ordinary speech. The Romantic Age would soon reject and ban that ideal, to such an extent as to make it virtually irretrievable and incomprehensible for post-Romantic readers. Yet a language and style it was, that in its time managed to engage with the hearts and minds of readers and viewers, and seemed apt to lead them to that fantastic realm where Form and Tune are one.

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<sup>68</sup> Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone di pensieri*, edited by Giuseppe Pacella, 3 vols (Milan, 1991), 3418–19. References are to the page numbering of Leopardi's autograph manuscript.

<sup>69</sup> Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone: The Notebooks of Leopardi*, edited by Michael Caesar and Franco D'Intino (London, 2013), p. 1399.