

## THE FATE OF THE COLUMN OF ANTONINUS PIUS

by Ronald T. Ridley<sup>1</sup>

*One of the most remarkable stories in the history of Roman archaeology, and totally unknown to modern scholars and works of reference, despite the comprehensive documentation, is the story of the extraction of the column of Antoninus Pius in the Campus Martius (1703–5). The work was placed in the hands of the ‘noble’ architects Carlo and Francesco Fontana, instead of competent engineers, and the result was the destruction of the column.*

*La vicenda dell'estrazione della Colonna di Antonino Pio nel Campo Marzio (1703–5) è una delle più straordinarie vicende nella storia dell'archeologia romana, totalmente ignorata dagli studiosi moderni e in bibliografia, nonostante l'esauriente documentazione disponibile. Il lavoro venne affidato alle cure dei ‘nobili’ architetti Carlo e Francesco Fontana, invece che a quelle di ingegneri competenti, e il risultato fu la distruzione della colonna.*

The column raised to the memory of the late Antoninus Pius by his ‘sons’ Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus is now known only by the pedestal in the Vatican Museum, to which, unfortunately, few visitors pay any attention. Pius ruled for over twenty years (138–61) in the golden age of the empire — celebrated famously by Edward Gibbon — but his reign is not well documented. We know much more of his predecessors Trajan and Hadrian and successor Marcus Aurelius, ostensibly because they were all involved in heavy warfare on the frontiers, whereas Pius never left Italy. His major monument is the temple in the Forum, dedicated to his wife Faustina on her death (141?) and then posthumously also to him in 161 (they were both buried in the mausoleum of Hadrian: *CIL* 6.986–7). Trajan and Marcus are famous for the columns decorated in relief celebrating their wars. Pius also once had a column in the centre of Rome, which was fully revealed in 1703, but is now lost, apart from the pedestal.

That a whole column in honour of such an important emperor should be lost at this late date is remarkable. Its story involves many paradoxes. It has never been told, although it is the best-documented archaeological operation of the century; indeed, it was an amazing example of public archaeology, the operations being carried out in front of everyone of importance in the city, creating an interest in these operations not seen since the raising of the Vatican obelisk in 1586. The publications, however, are often biased and deeply deceitful. In truth, the fate of the column is a tale of unrelieved disaster, which need never have happened, had not high-level incompetence been protected. The story throws much light on society in Rome at the time, as a master engineer was pitted against a pair

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<sup>1</sup> For Christopher Smith *con amicizia e stima*.

A lecture on this subject was given at the British School at Rome in November 2016.



Fig. 1. Coin of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (bronze) (RIC 3.1269; <http://numismatics.org/collection/1944.100.48317>, accessed 6 March 2018).

of architects, and the lower class of the former had to give way to the nobility of the latter. If those who do manage to find the pedestal, tucked away in a tiny courtyard in the Vatican Museums, imagine that they are viewing second-century art, they would be seriously mistaken. Despite the wealth of contemporary documentation, current handbooks of archaeology and topography are full of misinformation and contradiction. And although the column is lost, one can still find its remains, if one knows where to look.

No literary source refers to the column. It is, however, shown on coins (Fig. 1), dated no closer than ‘struck under M. Aurelius’ (RIC 3.427 (no. 439), ill. pl. 9, no. 189).<sup>2</sup> It commemorates the divinization of Pius and Faustina, as shown by the relief on the front of the pedestal (Fig. 2), complete with parades by cavalry and infantry around the funerary pyre (*decursiones*) on the two sides (see below). Pius died on 7 March 161. His divinization coincided with his cremation. The column was raised by his two sons, commemorated in the inscription (CIL 6.1004), of whom Verus was dead by January–February 169. These two dates provide the termini for the column, but it was presumably erected very soon after Pius’ death, in the interests of *pietas* and

<sup>2</sup> Hill, 1989: 59 and ill. 94, assigned the date of 164. It is hard now to conceive how much controversy and confusion there had been over the identification of the columns of the three emperors as shown on coins, relying on the fact that some columns were shown as having reliefs and others not, as in the case of Trajan: RIC 2.279 (no. 473). To compound matters, Sixtus V put up a most misleading plaque after his Christianization of the column of Marcus in 1589: ‘Sixtus V pont. max. columnam hanc cochlidem Imp. Antonino dicatam ...’



Fig. 2. The apotheosis, present condition (by courtesy of Direzione dei Musei Vaticani).

given that it was undecorated (see [Figs 1](#) and [11](#)), and ready to hand. It was of one solid piece of red granite, 14.75 m (67 palms in old Roman measurements) high. One may compare the earlier column of Trajan, ‘centenarian’ (that is, 100 Roman feet, 29.77 m), made of nineteen blocks of Parian marble, and the later column of Marcus Aurelius, also centenarian, composed of twenty-six blocks of Luna marble. The column of Antoninus was only half their height. It is shown in Rodolfo Lanciani’s *Forma Urbis Romae* (1893–1901: pl. 15) as north of the Antonine *ustrinum* ([Fig. 3](#)).

## STANDARD REFERENCES

It is amazing how inaccurate the standard references are. Franz Reber’s classic study of the ruins of Rome noted some disagreement over the provenance of the column (although almost everyone agreed on the garden of the Fathers of the Mission). He rang the first alarm bells about the archaeological operation: the pedestal was found very damaged, but suffered further in its raising and transport (Reber, 1863: 266–8). Heinrich Jordan, one of the classic topographers, showed only slight interest in the history of the column (1907: 603–5): it was cleared in 1703, and Francesco Bianchini gave ‘the only exact description of the excavation’ (Bianchini was, in fact, concerned only with the *failed* attempt to raise it in 1704). Otto Richter, author of another classic work on the topography of Rome (1901: 254), was not sure of the date of its erection, knew nothing of its later history in antiquity, but merely that by the Middle Ages, only the top 6 m of the column were visible. It was laid bare, he

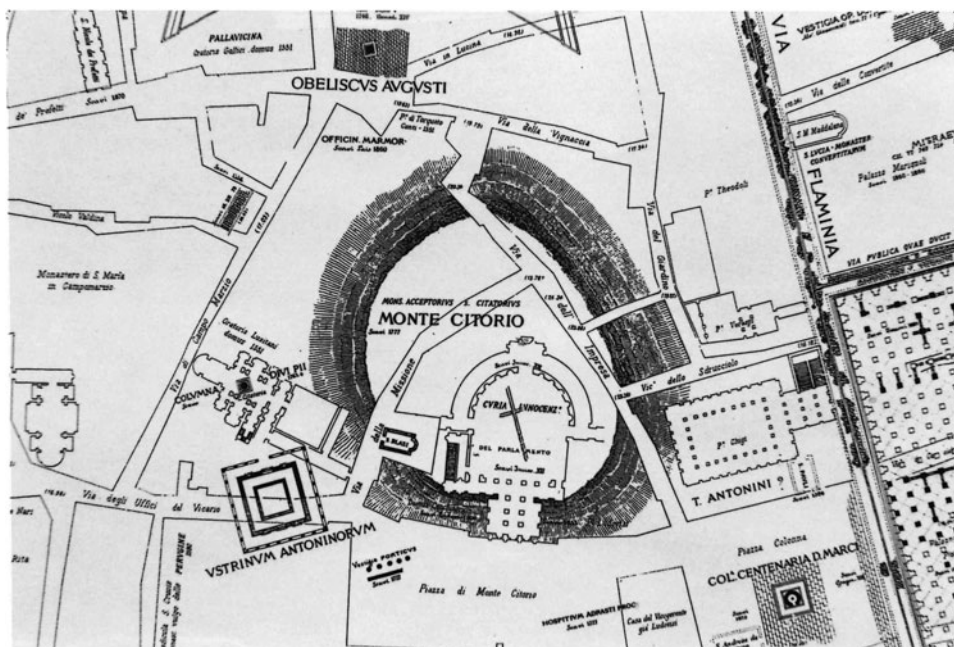


Fig. 3. The position of the column in relation to Montecitorio and the *ustrinum* (Lanciani, *Forma Urbis Romae*, pl. 15, detail).

claimed, in 1703 and 1704, and successfully raised, after a failure, late in 1705. Taken to the piazza Montecitorio, it was destroyed by a fire which he dated to 1764. Emanuel Rodocanachi's history of the monuments from the fall of the empire took up the story, in fact, only in 1700, when Innocent XII gave the church of SS Giovanni e Paolo to the secular priests of the Mission. In return they decided to raise the column, which was in their garden.<sup>3</sup> Rodocanachi then jumped to 24 September 1705, when the work 'began': it was delayed by a violent storm, but was successful the next day. The column was left where it was found, he claimed, but two sculptors restored it: Vincenzo Felice<sup>4</sup> and Giuseppe Napolini.<sup>5</sup> It was originally meant for the Trevi fountain, but from 1792 (three years too late) was used for the repair of many obelisks (Rodocanachi, 1914: 88–9, 91, 93).

<sup>3</sup> Rodocanachi, 1914, quotes here Cancellieri's letter (see below, n. 37).

<sup>4</sup> Vincenzo Felice (c. 1657–1715), sculptor, famous for the figure of S. Giovanni the Martyr on the colonnade of St Peter's and the restoration of the column: *DBI* 46 (1996): 50–2 (M. Guerrieri-Borsoi).

<sup>5</sup> Francesco Giuseppe Napolioni (thus in Thieme and Becker, 1907–50, 25: 342); Napolini (in the archives, Rodocanachi, 1914, and Posterla, 1705); Napolioni (in Nibby, 1838, and Forcella, 1869: 66); Napoleoni (in Vogel, 1973): known otherwise only for his work on the statues of the colonnade of St Peter's. He is to be clearly distinguished from Carlo Alberto Napolioni (1675–1742), the leading sculptor restorer of his age, who worked especially for the Capitoline Museum.

The classic handbook for Roman topography in the twentieth century was Samuel Platner's and Thomas Ashby's dictionary (1927). They made the remarkable statements that the 'lower part [!] of the shaft projected about six metres above the ground', and that 'in 1703 the base was excavated, but the shaft lay in the piazza Colonna [*sic*] until 1764 when unsuccessful attempts were made to restore it' (Platner and Ashby, 1929: 131). Giuseppe Lugli (1938: 236) located the column, originally called the 'colonna citatoria', in the garden of the Cecchini (but that was in the sixteenth century). The pedestal when found was 'fairly well preserved'. Carlo Pietrangeli (1958: 61–2), in his most useful guide to archaeology in Rome under Pius VI, relying much on Ridolfino Venuti (see below), noted that it had been found in the garden of the Mission. Benedict XIV moved it back here from the piazza, but it was damaged by fire in 1759. Pietrangeli uncovered a letter to the treasurer in March 1804, revealing that one Alessandro dell'Osta owned 'half a column' of red granite, and many large pieces, which he was ordered to surrender to the Camera Apostolica. In his excellent rional guide, Pietrangeli also noted (1978: 96–8) that the column was first mentioned in 1555 in the garden of C. Cecchini, that the pedestal was restored under Benedict XIV (1740–58) by Ferdinando Fuga and that the shaft was damaged by fire in 1759; the pedestal was removed from the piazza to the Vatican in 1789. In his otherwise most useful dictionary of Roman streets, Sergio Delli (1975: 622) made the remarkable assertion that the column was that still to be seen near the piazza di Spagna: the column of the Immaculate Conception — but that was found in Campo Marzio in 1778 (Pietrangeli, 1958: 62–6). In what is now the standard topographical reference work, the *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*, Sonia Maffei (1993: 298–300) noted the clearing of the column in 1703, then jumped to its transfer to the piazza di Montecitorio in 1705, completely ignoring the disaster of 1704. Lawrence Richardson (1994: 94) gave only one date, 1703, which he implied was the year of extraction. The biographer of Antoninus, Willy Hüttl (1936, I: 350–1), offered a description of the column, but nothing on its history (Birley, 1966: 155–6). Works on Rome in the eighteenth century are most remiss.<sup>6</sup> And a huge volume on the Fontana family (Fagiolo and Bonaccorso, 2008) barely mentions the column: it was hardly one of their glorious achievements.

A most competent summary of the column's history was given, on the other hand, by Cesare d'Onofrio (1992: 327–38) in his study of the obelisks of Rome. Special mention must be made of what is now the classic reference, Lise Vogel's excellent monograph (1973: 5–8).<sup>7</sup> She did pay some attention to the 'modern history', but had no idea of the sensational story under her hand. A most honourable mention is due to John Ward-Perkins, director of the British

<sup>6</sup> Giuntella, 1971: 218, lists under 1703 the 'discovery' of a 'monument' of Pius. Gross, 1990, is silent, as is lo Bianco and Negro, 2005. The earlier exhibition, *Il Settecento a Roma*, 1959, however, exhibited both Carlo Fontana's *Discorso* (item 2335) and the edict of del Giudice (2347).

<sup>7</sup> She unfortunately did not have access to the two most important accounts, Bianchini and Crescimbeni.

School at Rome 1946–74, who was especially interested in ancient quarries. He alone took up the Trajanic prehistory of the column. He stressed that it had ‘never wholly vanished from sight’, but thought that Carlo Fontana suggested its excavation to Innocent XII in 1694. This is contradicted by Carlo’s own account (see below). The column, in fact, bore a Greek inscription on its base (IG 14.2421, IGRRP 1.529),<sup>8</sup> giving the name of Dioskourides, specifying Trajan’s ninth year (105/6), stating that the column was one of a pair, and naming [...]eides as ‘architect’. This last name is supplemented by René Cagnat as Aristeides, and by Ward-Perkins as Herakleides, known also at Mons Claudianus (IGRRP 1.1260). The column had been quarried 56 years before it was used. It was originally meant, Ward-Perkins suggested (1976: 345), for the temple of Divus Traianus at the northern end of the Forum of Trajan.

### FROM ANTIQUITY TO 1703

The column was not listed by the Constantinian regionaries: in connection with the *templum Antonini*, they listed a column (Valentini and Zucchetti, 1940–53, vol. I, 1940: 63–192, at 125), by implication also Antoninus’, but it had a spiral decoration, and was 175.5 feet high, with an interior staircase of 203 steps, and 56 windows — so obviously that of Marcus Aurelius.<sup>9</sup> This began an incredible confusion which lasted until 1703, mistaking the column of Marcus as that of his adoptive father. The eighth-century Einsiedlensis manuscript, which contains itineraries for pilgrims, mentioned only the ‘Columna Antonini’, in its second and fourth itineraries. Gerold Walser (1987: 171) commented, however, that Antoninus’ column ‘must certainly have been visible to the pilgrim of the eighth century’. The twelfth-century *Mirabilia Urbis Romae* 14 mentions the two columns of Trajan and ‘Antoninus’ (Valentini and Zucchetti, 1940–53, vol. III, 1946: 31). The famous contemporaries Poggio Bracciolini (1448: 19) and Flavio Biondo (1471, II: 76) in the fifteenth century identified the column of Marcus Aurelius as that of Antoninus. Bartolomeo Marliani (1544: 95) and Andrea Palladio (Hart and Hicks, 2006: 47) in the sixteenth followed suit.<sup>10</sup> The very last scholar of any importance to visit Rome immediately before the extraction of the column, Bernard Montfaucon, in September 1698, did not so much as mention the column of Marcus (Montfaucon, 1702).

The indispensable *Storia degli scavi* of Rodolfo Lanciani made only one mention of the column, but it was of fundamental importance (repr. 1998, III: 155). He found a document of 1555 listing it in the garden of Giovanni Battista de Cechinio, and was also able to detect the column in the map of Antonio Tempesta of 1593 (Fig. 4, slightly left of centre).<sup>11</sup> Important topographical

<sup>8</sup> The abbreviations system used herein follows the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (fourth edition).

<sup>9</sup> The column is described as *cochlix*, which might conceivably refer to the spiral staircase inside, but since that was noted separately, this must refer to the bands of relief.

<sup>10</sup> *Antiquitates Romae*, Rome 1554, now conveniently Hart and Hicks, 2006: 47.

<sup>11</sup> Lanciani, *Storia degli scavi* (4 vols, Rome, 1902–13), reprinted with additions (7 vols, 1989–2002). Piranesi’s *Trofeo o sia colonna cochlide* (1774–5) is mainly devoted to the column of Trajan,



Fig. 4. Antonio Tempesta, map of Rome (1593), showing the upper part of the column beside the Curia Innocenziana (later palazzo Montecitorio).

research was also conducted by Christian Hülsen (1889: 42–6, ‘Colonna di Divo Pio’).<sup>12</sup> He found a Chigi manuscript (P.VI.10.f16) showing the topography of the area in the 1660s under Pope Alexander VII. The map published by Hülsen shows the column at this time in the garden of cav. Eustachio, next to the Fathers of the Mission (Fig. 5). The owners of the land where the column stood changed — not unexpectedly — over the centuries. By the time of its excavation, however, it was located in the garden of the Fathers of the Mission.

### 1703–1704

At least six monographs and many articles appeared within four years of the raising of the column. They will be discussed here not in order of publication,

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but with supplements on those of Antoninus and Marcus. In notes on pl. 39, however, Piranesi stated that the column had been found in the house of Carlo Eustachio, which was demolished to remove it. This house is not shown on Nolli’s map, but Piranesi’s plate located it in the large block southwest of palazzo Montecitorio (containing Nolli’s numbers 332–4) (Fig. 9). Where Piranesi found this location is a mystery.

<sup>12</sup> Hülsen made good use of Valesio’s diary (1977–9) and the account published by Cancellieri (1821), and showed that they could not have been written by the same author. He understood the fundamental dates: the failures to lift the column of 15, 18 October 1704; the success of 24–25 September 1705; and the raising of the pedestal on 17 October 1705. He misdated the clearing of the column, however, to 1703–4, and the fire to 1764.

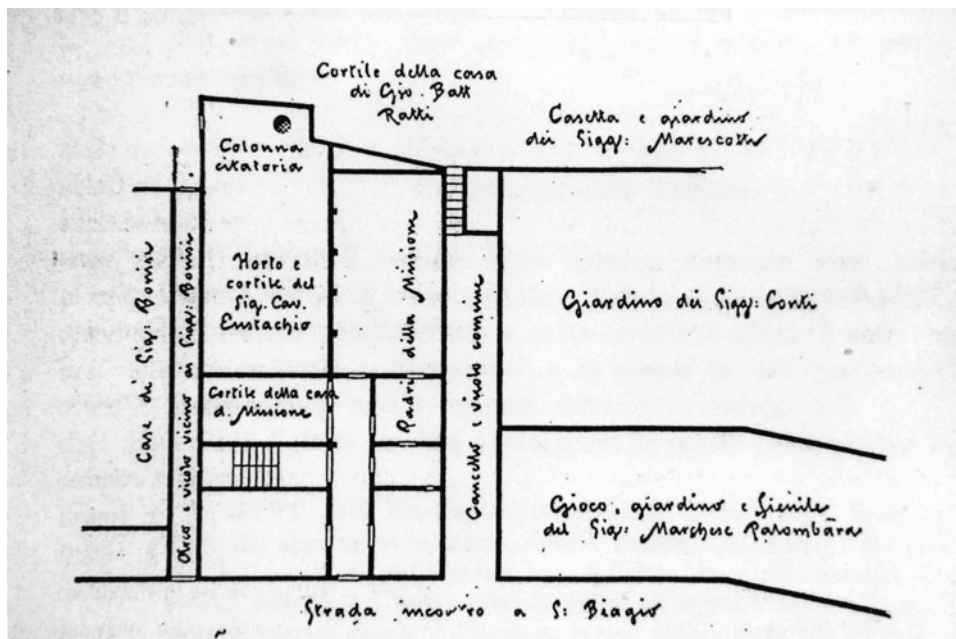


Fig. 5. The location of the column in the time of Pope Alexander VII (1655–7) (Hülsem, 1889), Strada incontro a S. Biagio = via della Missione.

but in the best order to reconstruct the history. The earliest concentrated, in fact, on the newly revealed reliefs of the pedestal, the meaning of which does not concern us here.<sup>13</sup>

To begin at the beginning, Carlo Fontana in 1708 described a conversation which he had had with Nicola del Giudice, *presidente delle strade*,<sup>14</sup> at Ripetta in August 1703, when the prelate discussed ‘various learned discourses’ about the classical monuments of the Campus Martius and especially about ‘a column of enormous size inside the Fathers of the Mission’. On 21 August he visited the Mission, saw the column, and, impressed by its size, determined to inform Clement XI. On 21 September Clement ordered its clearance.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> First, in fact, was a reference in Bianchini, 1703: 71–90. By examination of the astrological symbolism of the ‘apotheosis’ relief, he determined the date of this ceremony as eight days after Antoninus’ death. Bianchini (1662–1729), Veronese, astronomer, lawyer, librarian to the Ottoboni, wrote a universal history, built the meridian in S. Maria degli Angeli, and was secretary to the commission for the reform of the calendar (1701). Then appeared the two ‘letters’ of Michelange de la Chausse to an anonymous friend (March 1704 and March 1705), re-emphasizing the numismatic evidence. His scholarship and sense are commendable.

<sup>14</sup> Nicola del Giudice (1660–1743), a noble Neapolitan, *presidente della strade* 1701–6, prefect of the Apostolic Palace from 1715, cardinal 1725; pro-Austrian. Nicolai, 1829, II: 145; *DHGE* 21: 50 (R. Aubert); not in *DBI*.

<sup>15</sup> Carlo Fontana (1638–1714) collaborated with Bernini on St Peter’s colonnade and palazzo Chigi, coming therefore under the patronage of the latter family, and was later architect to the Pamphili. He worked, among many other projects, on the Teatro Tordinone, palazzo Bigazzini, the facades of



There are a number of less formal contemporary accounts, by observers and diarists. The most famous and important of these is by Francesco Valesio,<sup>16</sup> whose diary covering 1700–42 and surviving in the Capitoline Archive was published in a splendid edition by Gaetana Scano (Valesio, 1977–9). Valesio paid great attention to the operations with the column. He was in constant attendance, and in fact lived very close by, opposite S. Carlo al Corso. He mentioned the column in the garden of the Fathers of Montecitorio for the first time in September 1703, but noted a supposed intention of Innocent XII (1691–1700) to raise it.<sup>17</sup> It had been found to be 67 palms high (14.7 m), but the base was ruined. He dated the end of the clearance, in fact, to 4 December 1703 (Valesio, *Diario*, II: 701, 739).

Another contemporary witness was the author of the indispensable digest of news (the *avvisi*) of Cardinal Galleazzo Marescotti, preserved in manuscript in the Biblioteca Nazionale (Avvisi Marescotti, Biblioteca Nazionale, Rome, VE 790).<sup>18</sup> On 29 September 1703, this digest recorded the excavation of a large column from the foundations of some houses being built by the Fathers of the Mission. This was, of course, excavation only in the sense of clearing around it to reach its base. On 13 October, he recorded the conclusion of the clearing of the buildings which enclosed the column.

The classic, but highly selective, account is by Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni, *Racconto di tutta l'operazione per l'elevazione e abbassamento della Colonna Antonina*, which did not appear until September 1705.<sup>19</sup> It must be noted that

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S. Marcello al Corso and S. Maria in Trastevere, the enlargement of the Aqua Paola, the tomb of Queen Christina, and the Biblioteca Casanatense. He was *principe* of the Accademia di s. Luca 1694–8. Crescimbeni, 1720, II: 345–9; *DBI* 48 (1997): 624–36 (Helmut Hagen).

<sup>16</sup> Francesco Valesio (1670–1742) was the son of a French doctor and Roman mother. He studied at the Collegio Romano, then languages and law at the Sapienza, but was captured by antiquity. He was sought out by all for his knowledge, especially Philip Stosch, the gem expert. Valesio's enormous diary contains virtually no autobiographical reference. Our major source remains Lami, 1742–7, vol. I, 1742: 296–9, supplemented by the introduction by Scano, 1977–9, to her edition of Valesio, *Diario di Roma*.

<sup>17</sup> This is easily explained. The Curia Innocenziana was previously the palazzo Ludovisi, built by Bernini in 1653–4. In 1694, Innocent bought the palace to turn it into the Curia, and it was completed by Carlo Fontana. See Magnuson, 1982–6, vol. II, 1986: 62–4. That might well have drawn some attention to the column.

<sup>18</sup> This is a weekly digest of events covering the years 1683–1707. It is written in a small and faint hand, but is quite legible. Like the diary of Agostino Chigi in the Vatican, a full transcript would be an invaluable resource. Galleazzo Marescotti (1627–1726), Inquisitor at Malta (1664), nunzio to Vienna, then Poland (1668) and Spain (1670–5), cardinal 1675. *DBI* 70 (2008): 75–8 (Giuseppe Mattei). It is simply another case of the amazing genius of Ludwig von Pastor that in his *History of the Popes* (33.513), he could list fourteen references to the column in this manuscript.

<sup>19</sup> Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni (1663–1728), most famous as founder of the Arcadia (1690), author of *Le vite degli Arcadi illustri*, Rome 1708–27, and *Notizie storiche degli Arcadi morti*, 3 vols, Rome 1720–1. Portrait by Ghezzi: Dorati da Empoli, 2008: 191. *DBI* 30 (1982): 675–8 (Nicola Merola); on the Arcadia: Gross, 1990: 287–97. In the Vatican Library is an anonymous manuscript (Vat. Lat. 9023, cc. 221–31), by an observer, which describes operations down to 1704, which is simply a copy of Crescimbeni's account.

almost all contemporary accounts relating to these operations are uncritical of the presiding architects, the Fontanas. Crescimbeni is a case in point. He stated that the column stood unnoticed (*non accurata*) in a corner of the garden of the Fathers of the Mission, beside Montecitorio, and came to light when they began demolishing some houses. Its clearing was then recommended to Clement XI by Niccola del Giudice. Its true identity was thus established. The question was, what to do. Some proposed lowering the surrounding area to the ancient level, but this was not practicable. A ‘congregation’ (committee) was established (of course!), consisting of del Giudice, Cardinal Bandino Panciatici,<sup>20</sup> Cardinal G.B. Spinola (camerlengo),<sup>21</sup> Lorenzo Corsini (treasurer),<sup>22</sup> Silvio de Cavalieri,<sup>23</sup> the astronomer Francesco Bianchini,<sup>24</sup> three architects — the two Fontanas (father Carlo and son Francesco)<sup>25</sup> and G.B. Contini<sup>26</sup> — and the master mason Pietro Iacopo Patriarca.<sup>27</sup> At the first meeting, division broke out, with Francesco Fontana proposing a tower of scaffolding (*castello*),<sup>28</sup> opposed by Patriarca, who preferred to construct a mountain of *pozzolana*

<sup>20</sup> Bandino Panciatici (1629–1718), born in Florence, educated at Pisa, came to Rome 1657: a famous lawyer, cardinal 1690. A reformist, in touch with many European rulers, and fiscally conservative, he was held in high esteem by a series of popes. Clement XI repeatedly offered him the Secretaryship of State.

<sup>21</sup> Giovanni Battista Spinola (1646–1719), governor of Fano, Ascoli, Rome (1691–5), legate to Bologna, cardinal (1695), camerlengo (1698–1719): Crescimbeni, 1720–1, II: 197–9; portrait by Ghezzi: Dorati da Empoli, 2008: 171.

<sup>22</sup> Lorenzo Corsini (1652–1740), later Clement XII.

<sup>23</sup> Silvio di Cavalieri (1641–1717), archbishop of Athens. Crescimbeni, 1720–1, II: 10–13.

<sup>24</sup> See note 13.

<sup>25</sup> Francesco Fontana (1668–1708), son of Carlo, most famous for the Dogana in the Hadrianeum; much employed in Florence. *DBI* 48 (1997): 633–4 (Helmut Hager). His death is recorded by Valesio, *Diario*, IV: 106.

<sup>26</sup> Giovanni Battista Contini (1642–1723), pupil of Bernini, architect of the Camera Apostolica, succeeded Borromini as architect of the Sapienza, *principe* of the Accademia di S. Luca in 1683. Specialized in chapels and altars (Elci chapel in S. Sabina, de Anglis chapel in S. Maria in Aracoeli). *DBI* 28 (1983): 515–22 (H. Hager), who states that he was ‘chosen’ with the Fontanas in connection with the column. He is following Oechslin, 1972: 48.

<sup>27</sup> Pietro Jacopo Patriarca is not known to *DBI*, *Indice biografico italiano* or Lanciani, 1998. He was chief mason at St Peter’s: Valesio, *Diario*, III: 186, 358.

<sup>28</sup> In all the following there is a welter of technical language. I have tried to translate consistently, as follows:

1. *Argano*: capstan
2. *Candela*: ‘candle’ = the six main upright beams
3. *Carrucola*: pulley
4. *Castello*: ‘tower’ (the scaffolding built around the column, especially the six main upright beams)
5. *Curlo*: roller
6. *Incavalatura* = *capriata*: triangular roof support, a roof truss
7. *Letto*: ‘cradle’ (the frame built around the column itself, to support it during all operations)
8. *T(r)agliioni e traghe*: tackle blocks
9. *Traversone*: cross-beam
10. *Verrocchio*: ‘machine’ (synonym for *argano*)

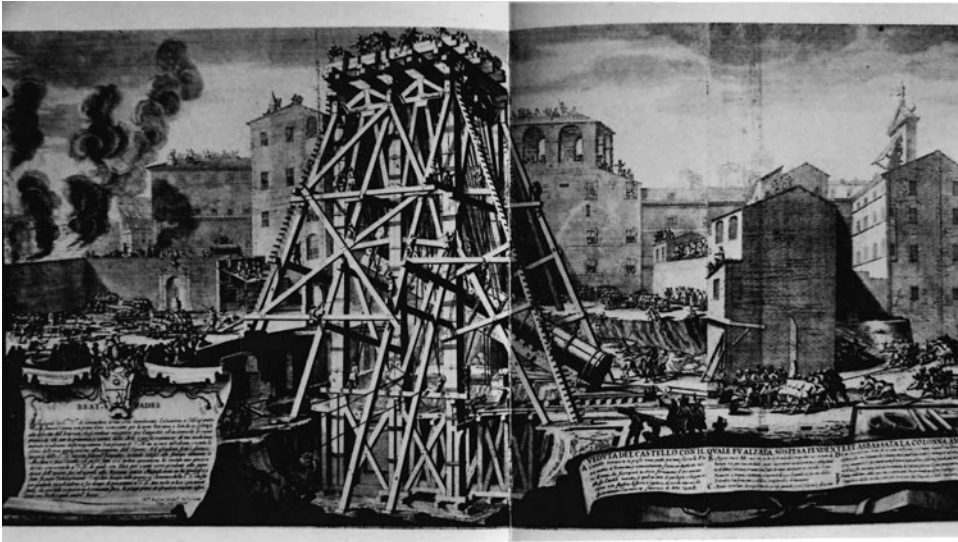


Fig. 6. A. van Westerhout: Piranesi, *Campo Marzio*, pl. 31.

(volcanic earth) next to the column, which would be enclosed in a supporting cradle (*letto*); the *pozzolana* was then to be dug out, allowing the column gently to reach the ground. Despite all the admitted attractions of Patriarca's scheme, which was easier, quicker, cheaper and safer, Fontana's scheme was preferred, because it had been used by his ancestor for the lowering of the Vatican obelisk in 1586 (Fig. 6).<sup>29</sup> The tower (12 m × 8 m, 24 m high) was soon constructed, using six major upright beams supported by twenty others on an angle (in all, 18 m square). There was a major problem with this method: the ground levels varied dramatically: 51 palms (11 m) down to the ancient level at the Mission, but only half of that at the offices of the Notaries of the Vicariate. The column was strengthened by eight bands of iron and supported in a cradle. Crescimbeni stressed the difficulties of the operation: the space was uncomfortably narrow, there were two different levels, and the eight capstans were at different distances from the column. The amazing thing is that even the tackle was the same as had been used by Domenico Fontana.

On 11 October 1704, the president of the streets issued an edict (quoted in full) specifying conditions for the work. There was to be silence among onlookers (the penalty for infringers was three drops of the inhuman rope torture (*la corda*) or

<sup>29</sup> Giambattista Piranesi, in his *Campus Martius*, 1762, pl. 31 reproducing a drawing by Francesco Fontana, engraved by Arnald van Westerhout (Antwerp 1651–d.1725). This shows the successful operation in September 1705, with three capstans at each of left, rear and right, each turned by sixteen men. The one directly behind the column is explicitly to control the descending column and draw it onto the rollers. On the roof are clearly visible the now heavily reinforced triple cross-beams. There are many men on the roof and all over the tower. This illustration will also serve to show the operation of 1704, which was understandably not illustrated for posterity.

imprisonment), and only workers who had a pass could enter the work area. The operation began on Wednesday 15 October. This was, according to Crescimbeni, simply a ‘trial’ to see if the tower could lift the column a small height. A total of 340 workers were employed: 100 sailors to work the tackle, 140 masons to work the capstans, assisted by 100 carpenters, plus 50 soldiers and 50 Swiss guards to protect the work area. Before the start, all went to confession and communion at the church of the Fathers, presumably to avoid any divine displeasure. Francesco Fontana was assisted by Patriarca, Niccola Michetti (foreman of the workers),<sup>30</sup> Tommaso Madoni called *Il Parmigianino* (master carpenter) and Iacopo Visco (master blacksmith).<sup>31</sup> Fontana stood with the president on a stage to observe and command. By noon all was ready. The column began to rise, but a cross-beam in the roof of the tower ‘moved and clearly showed stress’ (*facesse moto e notabilmente patisse*), and the operation was suspended. The column had risen and iron wedges were inserted. Everyone, including Clement, cardinals and ambassadors, then came to visit the column. Fontana reinforced the beams with other beams, iron and ropes. Some thought that the column should be exorcized — but this was deferred until its new positioning, when, as with Sixtus and the obelisks, it would be rededicated.

On Saturday 18 October, three days later, the ‘real’ operation was observed by the queen of Poland (Maria Sobieska), many cardinals (Toussaint de Fourbin, Panciatichi, Camillo Paolucci, Giuseppe Sacripanti and Antonio Bichi) and the ambassadors of the Empire, Spain, Venice, Malta, Bologna and Ferrara. This soon ended, at noon, because another cross-beam near the earlier one broke. This in turn was braced with two beams, iron and ropes. Operations were resumed at 2 p.m. This time one of the capstans broke. At the third attempt, despite some further signs of stress at one corner of the tower, the column was slightly raised. Fontana understandably fell back on caution.

This account of the first attempt to raise the column may be compared with the diarist Valesio. In May 1704, the commission was established to see to its raising. He mentioned that Clement thought of using the column for the Trevi fountain (Valesio, *Diario*, III: 76). In September, the ‘tower’ was complete and barriers erected to hold back spectators (*Diario*, III: 185). Valesio dated the edict of the president of the streets to 12 October. Work was to start with the trumpet and end with bells (*Diario*, III: 193). For the major operation of 15 October, Valesio counted only 300 workers, including 50 sailors from Civitavecchia. There was a large military guard, consisting of police (*sbirri*) and Swiss Guards. The column had barely been raised an inch when a beam broke and then a capstan (*Diario*, III: 195). Work was resumed on 18 October: it is now that

<sup>30</sup> Nicola Michetti (1677–1758), Roman, attached to Carlo Fontana, architect to Peter the Great, of the Sapienza (1724–55) and of the Camera Apostolica (1730). *DBI* 74 (2010): 294–7 (Filippo Vignato): assisted Fontana with the transport of the column; his drawings of it survive in connection with the Fontana di Trevi (see below, n. 61).

<sup>31</sup> Neither Tommaso Madoni nor Iacopo Visco is known to Valesio, Forcella, *DBI* or *Indice biografico italiano*.

Valesio specifies that Carlo Fontana was in charge, assisted by his son Francesco, alongside del Guidice. Valesio adds an extraordinary revelation: congratulatory publications and poems had already been printed, to be distributed by none other than Crescimbeni and Posterla. Work began at 11 a.m., but one of the eight capstans broke; after a long delay work recommenced, but a *leva* broke, and on the third attempt a master beam broke (*Diario*, III: 197–9).

The digest of Cardinal Marescotti adds further details. In 1704, on 12 April, he mentions plans to raise the column on the Quirinal, and on 10 May, at the Lateran. By 12 July the column had been enclosed in iron bands weighing 30,000 lb. The total cost of excavation and re-erection was calculated at the enormous sum of 45,000 scudi. On 16 August, there was talk of placing the column at piazza Trevi. On 11 October, the machine to raise the column was ready, the work to be accomplished on St Luke's Day (18 October). Despite the first failure, it was recorded in November that the pope wanted the operation carried out at any cost. By 22 November, the tower was being reinforced and the operation was planned for the anniversary of the pope's coronation.

The true situation was revealed in all its starkness by Francesco Bianchini's *Considerazioni teoriche e pratiche intorno al trasporto della Colonna*, dated 19 November 1704. It instantly is clear that something has gone dramatically wrong. The attempt on 18 October to lift the column from its base has failed completely. Bianchini had been ordered to make a technical report to the supervising commission; this was the *Considerazioni*, presented to the commission on 23 November 1704. The column had been removed from its base and had to be raised six palms (1.3 m) before it could be lowered. The raising had failed because two cross-beams in the roof, *one of which held half the tackle*, broke. The six main uprights of the tower, however, had not budged. A major concern, Bianchini admitted, was '*not to reduce (the column) to more pieces*'. Two methods for proceeding had been proposed: one by an architect,<sup>32</sup> the other by a master mason (obviously Patriarcha). Bianchini calculated the total weight of the column as between 350,000 and 400,000 lb (3,200 cubic palms of oriental granite at 84 lb per cubic palm: 280,000 lb, plus the cradle of three beams and iron bands: *c.* 100,000 lb). Ever logical and exhaustive, Bianchini listed the three powers to be tested against this weight: the workers' muscles: 240 men were enough (Domenico Fontana in 1586 for the Vatican obelisk had 650 men and 80 horses to lift one million lb); the six main upright beams (all held); and the ropes. The problem was in the roof of the tower, where *two* of the six cross-beams broke (B, C);<sup>33</sup> the axle of a capstan

<sup>32</sup> Bianchini is infuriatingly vague about the identity of this person: he most frequently mentions simply an architect and a mason (3, 11, 14, 19, 29), or architects (17), cav. Fontana (17, 28), and both Carlo and Francesco Fontana (19).

<sup>33</sup> Across the three main upright beams on each side, a cross-beam was laid, and across the top of these two at right angles, six cross-beams (A–F) were laid. These took the weight.

also broke. These chestnut beams (4.6 m long) had to hold the weight of the column and the eight sets of tackle,<sup>34</sup> supposed to be placed near the junction of the beams, to give extra support. Here Bianchini reveals a terrible fault, namely that the operation did not follow the approved plan. He referred to the principles of Galileo on weights and resistance, and Giannalfonso Borelli on ropes and weights and the need to have them all at the same angle to obtain equal tension. Cross-beam B broke because the middle of it (the weakest point) was supporting two blocks, and beam C broke because it was supporting four blocks (nearly three times the right weight: in other words, half the tackle was suspended over the column in the middle of the roof). Beams D and E, on the other hand, were holding only one small block, while A and F incredibly supported no tackle at all. Bianchini calculated that each beam could hold up to 85,000 lb.

There were now two plans to continue. The architect proposed a roof of five cross-beams, each now in fact a triple beam, each to bear 80,000 lb (what each single beam could carry), but this would put, obviously, much greater pressure on the six great uprights. Again, Bianchini states that the approved plan had not been followed. The master mason agreed on five triple beams, but only three were to bear the load: two outer ones each bearing three blocks, and in between them one bearing two blocks. Bianchini preferred the architect's plan because it now distributed the weight more evenly.

The matter of the ropes was finally examined. The commission had laid down that the blocks were to be equal, but they were not: some had up to twelve pulleys, some only four; the capstans, moreover, pulled at different rates, owing to the different distances from the column and the different levels at which they were placed: to be equal, their axles had to vary in diameter. Bianchini at least agreed that eight blocks with some 52 pulleys were enough to hold the column.

He turned now to the second (and next) operation, turning the column to the horizontal and lowering it. Fontana admitted being very nervous about this: how could 'shock' or 'slippage' be avoided? He exaggerated the dangers, Bianchini asserted, because he did not know the causes (a remarkable public rebuke). The former was caused by inequality of motion, the second by holding the column at its centre of gravity (like a balance), rather than in two or more places equally distant from the centre. The column could be supported by four large blocks, each of twelve pulleys, with two or three small ones at its foot to keep it from the perpendicular. Bianchini suggested supporting it in three equal sections, by attaching the tackle about one-third and two-thirds along its length. The cradle was certainly strong enough to hold it. There was, however, a problem: the column was weakened by a crack around three-quarters of its diameter near the centre of gravity.

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<sup>34</sup> According to Bianchini's figure 1, cross-beams A and B were close to each other at one end of the 'roof', C and D were approximately over the top of the column, and E and F were at the other end, but more widely spaced than A and B.

This is a remarkable document, reacting to disaster, which is fully admitted, as is Fontana's departure from approved plans, incompetence in handling the column's lowering, and, most fundamentally, the damage to the column.<sup>35</sup> In the second part of his *Considerazioni*, Bianchini proposed enormous reinforcement of the tower for the next attempt. His exact proposals do not seem to have been implemented.

Valesio (*Diario*, III: 202) specified that, after the disaster, the commission was immediately summoned to seek a solution, calling in the famous mathematicians Vitale (Giordani: Valesio refers to him only by first name) and (Domenico) Quaterini,<sup>36</sup> and by February 1705 that commission was holding its 22nd meeting, but had still reached no conclusion. In July, Panciatichi insisted on keeping Fontana (father or son is unspecified) in control. Clement threatened him with exile should he fail a second time (*Diario*, III: 415).

In 1821, Francesco Cancellieri published a new eyewitness account of the operations, the author of which he took to be Francesco Valesio (Cancellieri, 1821).<sup>37</sup> He stated that he found it in the *Miscellanea* of his patron, Cardinal Giuseppe Garampi.<sup>38</sup> It was soon recognized that this account could not be by Valesio: it is radically different, in particular, hostile to the Fontanas. This account is by one of their rivals, suggested Hülsen (1889: 42–6).<sup>39</sup> There are further overlooked vital clues. The author is an insider, who knows what happened at meetings of the commission, although it seems he was not a member. Most importantly, he was admitted on 1 October 1705 to read the Greek inscriptions on the base and top of the column. Let us therefore call him 'the hellenist'. One might think of Francesco de Rossi, professor at the Sapienza. The chronology of this account, however, is chaotic: it begins with the discovery of the pedestal (1703), then moves to July 1704, before jumping to 23–25 September [1705], then back to October/November [1704]. No eyewitness could have left things thus. The obvious explanation is that the pages must have been transposed.

<sup>35</sup> Yet the source published by Cancellieri (1821), 8, incomprehensibly calls it an apology for the Fontanas.

<sup>36</sup> Vitale Giordani (1633–1711) was a very famous professor at the Sapienza, 1685–1711. Crescimbeni, *Le vite degli Arcadi illustri* 1714, III: 147–98 (by Cesare Bigliotti); Renazzi, 1803–6, vol. III, 1805: 183–4. Domenico Quaterini, a Sicilian, succeeded Giordani as professor 1711–36; Renazzi, 1803–6, vol. IV, 1806: 100–1.

<sup>37</sup> Published separately by de Romanis in the same year (25 pp.). Francesco Cancellieri (1751–1826), educated by the Jesuits, which long harmed his career; librarian to cardinal L. Antonelli; accompanied Pius VII to France 1804–5; wrote on everything!

<sup>38</sup> Giuseppe Garampi (1725–92), nunzio in Poland 1772–6, Vienna 1776–85, cardinal 1785. *DHGE* 19: 1141–2 (L. Chevallier). His vast collection is now in the Archivio Segreto Vaticano, two series of miscellanea, in 36 vols.

<sup>39</sup> He suggested that Garampi had found it in Valesio's papers. The last was, indeed, a compulsive collector of such documents — for which we may be most grateful.

On 26 October 1704, this account for the first time mentions the commission, perhaps because of the addition of the two mathematicians from the Sapienza: Vitale Giordani and Domenico Quaterini.<sup>40</sup> By November [December], various plans were shown (the Fontanas were excluded from the meeting at this point). Giordani's improvements (shortening the distance between the columns, strengthening the cross-beams, making the pull of the capstans more equal) were approved and adopted by the Fontanas. Clement ordered the use of the same tower, to save money! Francesco Fontana was protected by Panciaticchi, both father and son by Spinola, del Giudice and Bianchini. The spirit of Pasquino was alive, as always, and deadly: placards called for the appointment of the master, Nicola Zabaglia.<sup>41</sup> The Fontanas' reputation, the author declared, never recovered, but the one in charge was Francesco, advised by his father.

## 1705

The basic operation could not, in fact, be completed until a year later, on Thursday 24 September 1705. Crescimbeni resumes the story. Everything had been reinforced: 28 sets of tackle, thirteen capstans, 520 workers. The trumpet and bell signals were controlled by an engineer on top of the tower. The column was raised 4 palms (88 cm) and was then to be lowered onto rollers. By this time, however, night had come on, and the work had to be completed next morning: it took three hours. Clement gave 300 scudi (in fact, less than 60 bajocchi each) gratuity to the workers; Fontana gave them more money and refreshments. Crescimbeni's book ends here, before the transport to piazza Montecitorio, and before the excavation of the pedestal.

According to Valesio, 500 workers were employed with thirteen capstans, each worked by 25 men. At 9 a.m. on 24 September, the column was first raised; it was lowered the next day. The workers assembled at the Quirinal for a blessing and a gratuity, and in the evening, at Trajan's column, Fontana gave wine. There is only one problem: 'some say' that the column is now split in three (Valesio, *Diario*, III: 464–6)! By October, it was being dragged to piazza Montecitorio by brawling workers: the operation took nearly a week. It was only on 17 October that the pedestal was also raised (Valesio, *Diario*, III: 480).

<sup>40</sup> See above, n. 36.

<sup>41</sup> Nicola Zabaglia (1674–1750), the greatest engineer of his time (the 'Roman Archimedes'), employed at St Peter's. He moved the urn of Otto II from the Vatican grotto (1696), after Carlo Fontana (note) had broken it into many pieces; in 1703, in three months he raised 50 statues above the portico of St Peter's; in 1718, he lined the cupola with lead; when the stuccos in the vault of the nave, more than 40 m high, threatened to fall, only he could provide the scaffolding, as when one of the four iron bars which holds the cross on the very top of the basilica broke; when cracks appeared in the cupola (1743), he mended it by putting four great iron chains around it; when the largest bell had to be replaced, he installed it. He was most famous for his invention of movable scaffolding. See his *Castelli e ponti* (1743), containing a marvellous portrait by Ghezzi.



Cardinal Marescotti's digest states that after Carlo's failure in 1704, his son was now in charge of the second attempt. On Saturday 26th is recorded the operation of 24–25 September: raising the column four palms (90 cm) and lowering it to the ground. On 17 October it reached the piazza. It was declared 'worthy of being numbered among the greatest marvels of the old emperors'! By 24 October the pedestal had been raised, but nothing is recorded of its condition.

On 23 January 1706, it is recorded that Fontana was given 3,000 scudi by Clement XI for an engraving of his 'machine'. The pope 'will use any means' to have the pedestal in front of the Curia Innocenziana. These notes are obviously very flattering to Fontana.

These accounts are supplemented by that of Cancellieri's 'hellenist'. When Quaterini, the mathematician and member of the commission, went to view the lowered column in September 1705, he was driven off with stones, and Francesco Fontana accused him of anti-papal slander. No one was allowed to come near it: it was under guard. The break was covered with mud, and a platform constructed so that visitors could walk around the column. Among them was Clement. Again placards appeared: 'trinum et unum': three and one!

By 3 October the column was moving, reaching the street from Montecitorio to Campo Marzio on 9 October, and Montecitorio by Sunday 11th. On 17 October the pedestal was raised, and reached the piazza by the end of the month.

Francesco Posterla's *Istorico e perfetto ragguaglio o' sia esatta relazione di quanto si e' operato per l'innalzamento e abbassamento dell'antica Colonna Antonina*, and *Istorico racconto o sia perfetto relazione di quanto si e' operato nel trasporto dell'antico Colonna Antonina* appeared in 1705.<sup>42</sup> This was a blatant eulogy of the Fontanas: Posterla was anxious to praise them at all costs.<sup>43</sup> The account was restricted, of course, to the operation of that year. He described the tower in great detail: basically 11 m long, 8 m wide and 24 m high, more than 4 m higher than the column (obviously including the pedestal). The operation was carried out by 500 men with twelve capstans. Posterla stressed that in the raising and lowering of the column, the tower did not move or make a sound, and no worker was harmed. The pedestal was raised in the same way, on 19 October 1705: 240 men and eight capstans, working to trumpet and drum (no longer a bell, because of possible confusion with those of Campo Marzio). It took three to four hours to raise it 5 m, because pieces of

<sup>42</sup> These can be found most conveniently embedded in Fontana, 1708: 36–51, although he changed the titles. It is from here that I cite them. Vogel, 1973: 97, thought them written 'apparently some time before' Fontana. Francesco Posterla defeats all biographical reference works, including Ferrari. He was a poet (Valesio, *Diario* 2.276, 3.887) and composer (3.132), but was not admitted to the Arcadia. Bonaccorso, 2008: 157–9, lists Posterla's considerable bibliography, but for his dates can offer only the time limits of these publications (1699–1730) (at 150). He states that Posterla described 'the disinterment, transport and raising of the column in the new piazza of Montecitorio', but the column was never raised there.

<sup>43</sup> There is shameless puffing: 'Carlo Fontana can never be sufficiently praised', and Francesco 'had acquired immortal fame'.

a travertine platform underneath were attached by lead clamps. At last we have vital details on the pedestal, and they are disquieting.

In works directly following the column's recovery came finally the account by Carlo Fontana in his *Discorso sopra l'antico Monte Citorio*, (December) 1708.<sup>44</sup> This is in a class of its own. The obvious question is why he waited three years. The answer is simple. To his anguish, his son Francesco died in July that year: the volume was, in large part, a celebration of his work in 1704–5. Fontana's description of the origin of the undertaking is of the highest significance. The base was discovered on 26 November. At the first meeting of the commission on 5 May 1704, Francesco Fontana was appointed to conduct the operations. Models were then prepared, and on 11 July Fontana's was accepted. Carlo Fontana is most concerned to stress that all 'improper and ignorant' proposals were rejected, especially that of a master mason, who was forbidden to interfere. After 'simply reinforcing the approved tower' in 1705, his son raised and lowered the column 'to the stupor of those present and the whole of Rome'. The dishonesty of this account is breathtaking, as is the continuing animus against Patriarca.<sup>45</sup>

As well as the rewards to workers, Clement XI issued a medallion showing on the reverse the machine used to extract the column, with the legend *Deo sacra resurget* ('dedicated to God, it will rise again').<sup>46</sup> The last word was to prove a little optimistic.

In the Archivio di Stato are preserved *chirografi* (manuscripts), which finally mention the *commissario di antichità*, Francesco Bartoli, whom we might well have expected to play some role.<sup>47</sup> On 3 July 1704 he was assigned 1,000 scudi, and another 2,000 on 1 October. Del Giudice was assigned 1,000 scudi on 31 July 1704, and 2,000 scudi on each of 1 October 1704, 22 August and 3 October 1705, and 13,000 on 28 April 1706. These were obviously payments for basic costs in the work, such as wages and equipment. He also received a total of 2,200 scudi on 21 July 1706, 25 February and 21 September 1707 for repairs to the pedestal. And finally Francesco Fontana was granted 3,000 scudi for his 'great care and necessary efforts' — an outrage.<sup>48</sup>

Of major interest are the payments to workers in the Treasury accounts, 1706–8. These were verified by Francesco Fontana.<sup>49</sup> Thousands of scudi were paid to wood merchants (Filippo Biondo, Lazzaro Scaramello) and ironworkers (Giacomo Visco, Francesco Lelmi). The rent for a room to store the fragments

<sup>44</sup> Reprinted conveniently in facsimile in *Palazzo di Montecitorio*, 1967.

<sup>45</sup> A third monograph in 1705 was the most substantial of all, Giovanni Vignoli's *De Columna Imperatoris Antonini Pii Dissertatio*, 168 pages in nine chapters. This was, however, entirely occupied with the author's theories about the column, and paid no attention whatsoever to the excavation. The illustrations were by Gaetano Piccini.

<sup>46</sup> *Serie dei conij di medaglie pontificie da Martino V fino a tutto il pontificato di Pio VII*, Rome 1824: 111, no. 390.

<sup>47</sup> Francesco Bartoli was in office 1700–33; Ridley, 1992: 134–6.

<sup>48</sup> Arch. di Stato, *Chirografi* busta 171, ff. 103, 111, 115, 131–2, 141, 144, 147, 160, 168, 183.

<sup>49</sup> Arch. di Stato, *Giustificazioni di Tesoriera* busta 318, fasc. 15, busta 336, fasc. 6.

(note) of the pedestal cost 30 scudi. Giovanni Hameram (?) was paid 4.80 for making the workers' lead passes. And we identify the restorers of the pedestal: Filippo Baij (90 scudi), Vincenzo Felice/i (spelled variously) (a total of 680 scudi) and Stefano Gucciarelli (100 scudi). Another large group of payments was for workmen who repaired nearby houses damaged during the extraction of the column.

### 1706–1789

By January 1706, Clement approved the plan to erect the column in the piazza. It transpires that the pedestal needed substantial restoration, which was carried out by Vincenzo Felice, and completed only by June 1708 (Valesio, *Diario*, 4.103).

Posterla returned to hagiography in 1707 in his *Roma sacra e moderna*. Apart from Francesco Fontana and del Giudice, he also gave credit to Michetti, Madoni and Bariani. Resultant jubilation was described in great detail. A major theme was once again the ancient damage to the column: claims that it was modern were 'jealous, malignant and lying'. The pedestal was then under restoration by Vincenzo Felice and Giuseppe Napolini (Posterla, 1707: 407–15).

Valesio's diary records nothing further after 1708 until 1735, when Clement XII decided to remove the column from the piazza where it had languished under a wooden shed. It was to be taken to the 'Temple of Peace' (Basilica of Maxentius), while the pedestal was to be used as a base for the obelisk at S. Giovanni in Laterano (Valesio, *Diario* V: 804). Six years later, in 1741, Fernando Fuga<sup>50</sup> showed Benedict XIV a plan to use the pedestal, while the column was to be buried as useless (Valesio, *Diario*, 6.460). By November, it was decided by a commission to move the column back to opposite the Mission, while the pedestal would be erected in the piazza. Valesio's last note is of work beginning on that in February 1742 (Valesio, *Diario*, 6.561).

Important visitors to Rome noted the column. Montesquieu, in Rome in 1729, saw it on the ground in the piazza (Montesquieu [1729] 1949: 706). Ten years later, Charles de Brosses also saw the column there, where it was beginning to be thought an obstruction. It was not meant to be seen, being covered, but he made a hole and could make out figures on the pedestal; someone gave him a copy of the inscription (de Brosses [1740] 1931: 49).

Francesco de Ficoroni, leading antiquarian in Rome in the first half of the eighteenth century (Ridley, 2017), noted the column in 1740 encircled with iron and covered with boards in front of the Curia Innocenziana. In his guidebook four years later, he stated that little more than a man's height (6 m(!) according to Richter, 1901: 254) had been visible before its raising and that it had taken

<sup>50</sup> Fernando Fuga (1699–1782), born in Florence, came to Rome in 1730, architect of the Palazzo Apostolico (1740), chief architect in Naples (1759), *principe* of the Accademia di S. Luca 1753–4. Known for the facades of S. Giovanni in Laterano, S. Cecilia, S. Maria Maggiore; the palazzo della Consulta, palazzo Corsini alla Lungara, and the long wing (*manica lunga*) of the Quirinal palace. Kieven, 1996: 813–16; *DBI* 50 (1998): 680–91 (Gaetana Cantone).



Fig. 7. François Legeay: house of the Fathers of the Mission (2), the shed protecting the column (3).

many men more than a year to extract it. Ficoroni was, in fact, bowled over by the inscription of Trajan, and believed that the column was originally erected for him, a view supported by the coin of his showing a column without reliefs (1740: 6–7; 1744: 135). Then in his posthumous work, *Gemmae Antiquae* (1757: 112), Ficoroni's notes on excavations were published, stating that the column was 'found' in 1705 (two years late), without giving any details of the operations. Carlo Fea included this in his edition of Ficoroni's 'notizie' in his famous *Miscellanea* (Fea, 1790: 123, *Notizie* 11), but changed the date to 1704 (still wrong!). All of this inaccuracy is incredible, given that Ficoroni was a leading antiquarian in Rome, aged forty by 1703.

For the history of the column from the 1740s to the 1760s, we have an abundance of illustration. A precious engraving by Jean Laurent Legeay<sup>51</sup> shows the column lying under a somewhat ramshackle shed at the northwestern corner of the piazza (Fig. 7). Giambattista Nolli's map of Rome (1748) is justly famous. It provides essential documentation for the situation at this date. The Fathers of the Mission are no. 341, and a space across the street (no. 340) is where the column was now lying after it had been removed from the piazza by Benedict XIV (1740–58). The

<sup>51</sup> Jean Laurent Legeay (1710–86) won the Prix de Rome 1737, arrived the same year, and returned to Paris 1742. DBF 20.904–6; Saur-Gruyter, *Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon*, vol. 83, Berlin–Leipzig, Saur-Gruyter, 1992–, 496–7.



Fig. 8. Giambattista Nolli, map of Rome (1748).

- 338: pedestal;
- 340: present location of the column;
- 341: house of the Fathers of the Mission;
- 342: palazzo Mariscotti;
- 345: palazzo Palombara.

pedestal was in front of the palazzo (no. 338) (Fig. 8). Not to be overlooked are the splendid views of Giuseppe Vasi, in his *Delle magnificenze di Roma*, 1747–61. Plate 23 in book 2 (*piazze*) shows piazza Montecitorio with the pedestal in the foreground, and no sign of the column (Fig. 9). The pedestal has been restored and set up in front of the Curia by Ferdinand Fuga (Valesio, *Diario*, 6.460, 561; de Fabris, 1846). Piranesi, finally, in his *Campus Martius Antiquae Urbis* (1762), apart from pl. 31, the reproduction of the Westerhout engraving (Fig. 6), showed in a composite engraving, pl. 32, the inscription on the pedestal, the right *decursio*, the column and the inscription on its base (Fig. 10), followed by (pl. 33) the apotheosis and the left *decursio*.

Ridolfino Venuti, writing in 1763 (II: 64; second edition, ed. F.A. Visconti, 1803, II: 104–6), is the invaluable witness for the fire in September 1759, which damaged the column, after it had been moved by Benedict XIV. The pedestal was still in the piazza.

Another French visitor was none other than the Marquis de Sade, in 1776 (1966–7, XVI: 244). The column had been found when the Fathers were laying the foundations for their house. It was now behind the palazzo Montecitorio, in an iron cage, ‘totally broken and beyond ever being restored’. The pedestal was in the piazza, with the apotheosis panel facing towards the palazzo.



Fig. 9. Giuseppe Vasi, *Delle magnificenze di Roma*, book 2 (1752), pl. 23: the pedestal in piazza Montecitorio.

The removal of the pedestal from the piazza Montecitorio was recorded in the very informative news despatches from the agents of Lucca to their government (*Avvisi Luccharesi*). These are further eyewitness accounts. In July 1789 it was reported that the pedestal was destined for the Cortile della Pigna in the Vatican. On it was to be erected the granite obelisk given by the Barberini to Pius VI; that is, the obelisk of Antinous, now on the Pincian. The granite column, on the other hand, was to be used to repair the ‘solar obelisk’ being set up by Pius in the piazza. By August the pedestal had been moved, but had been damaged in the process. In September it was noted that it had reached the Vatican foundry in the Borgo, where it was to be repaired, before being moved through the Belvedere (Sforza, 1887: 432, 433).

At the end of the century, Ennio Quirino Visconti was drawn to the column because by this time the pedestal was in the Pio Clementino Museum. He misdated the finding of the pedestal to 1704. He stated that the column had been found broken, and that the pedestal needed repairs (no sculptor named). These repairs ‘disappeared’ in the move of the pedestal to the Vatican, carried out by Giovanni Antinori, a claim made by no other source, and plainly wrong.<sup>52</sup> The base of the apotheosis scene was also lost then. Given his admission that all the reliefs had been found broken, it is a mystery how he

<sup>52</sup> Giovanni Antinori (1734–92) erected no fewer than three obelisks for Pius VI.

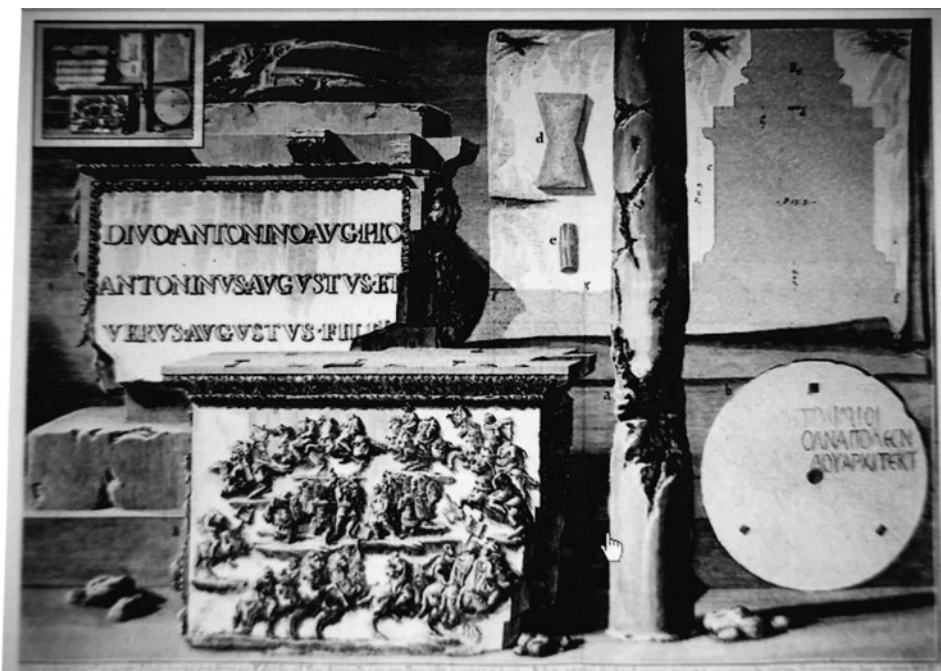


Fig. 10. Giambattista Piranesi, *Campo Marzio* (1762), pl. 32: the pedestal, the *decursio*, the column and the Greek inscription (IGRRP 1.529).

could describe their style as ‘most precious’ (Visconti, 1796: 53–7, with plates 28–30).<sup>53</sup>

There are a number of important contributions in the nineteenth century. Antonio Nibby’s enduring classic *Roma nell’anno 1838* (1838, IV: 584) knew, of course, only the pedestal in the Vatican garden. It had been restored by Vincenzo Felici and Giuseppe Napulioni, and was at that time in the hands of Giuseppe de Fabris.

The pedestal had been moved to the Vatican in 1789 by Pius VI, apparently to the Cortile della Pigna. Gregory XVI (1831–46) ordered its restoration by Giuseppe de Fabris, director of the Vatican Museums.<sup>54</sup> The director described the monument as ‘totally abandoned’ after its move to the Vatican, and as having suffered great damage, especially in modern times. It was ‘ruined and damaged’ in all parts from the excavation and being moved about. More

<sup>53</sup> He is most critical of Vignoli, especially for his view that the column was erected during Pius’ lifetime: he pities learned men proposing frivolous opinions simply to demonstrate their cleverness or novelty!

<sup>54</sup> Giuseppe de Fabris (1790–1860), a Venetian, studied in Milan and Brera, came to Rome in 1813, a student of Canova, director of the Vatican Museum (1837–60). Known for funerary monuments, for example, Leo XII (St Peter’s). Thieme, and Becker (1907–50), XI: 169–70; not in *DBI*.

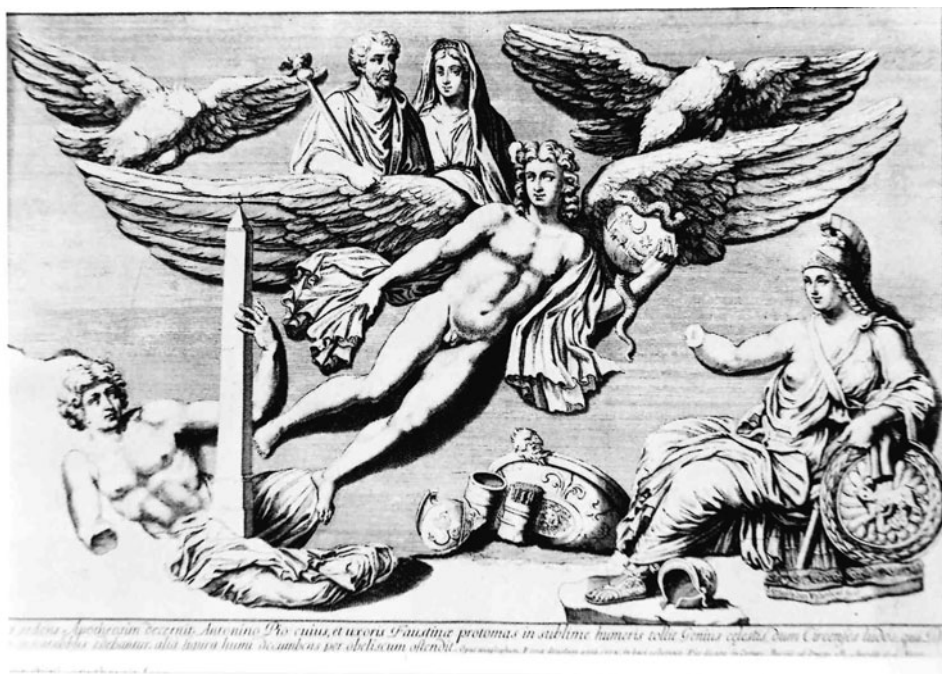


Fig. 11. The apotheosis: Francesco Bianchini, *De Calendario et Cyclo Caesaris* (1703).

damage had been done, as usual, by the restoration under Benedict XIV (1740–58) by the use of iron clamps. The pedestal was also filthied with *terra tarterita*, having been almost buried for 50 years in the above-mentioned garden.<sup>55</sup> De Fabris was very proud of his restorations, which could hardly be detected. Even more intriguing is the fate of the famous Greek inscription of Trajan on the column. De Fabris knew of it, but could not find it. While his essay (1846) was in press, he was talking to the museum's keeper, and remembered seeing a piece of red granite on the 'Stair of Bramante', which was split in two. Gregory ordered that it be set into the base, where it is now found. The reliefs as we see them are therefore the work in large part of de Fabris.<sup>56</sup>

The true chronology is therefore as follows:

**1703:**

August: Nicolò del Giudice, *presidente delle strade*, discusses with Carlo Fontana the monuments of the Campus Martius, and turns his attention to the column; he discusses it with Clement XI (Crescimbeni; Fontana).

21 September: Clement orders the clearing of the column.

29 September: clearing begins (Marescotti).

<sup>55</sup> Vogel, 1973: 7, stated that there were only two restorations: Felici and de Fabris. Erika Simon, 1963, I: 378 (no. 480), noted the substitution now of bronze for iron clamps.

<sup>56</sup> Reber, 1863: 268, is one of the few to credit de Fabris with finding the Greek inscription.



26 November: the base is uncovered, thus finally establishing its identity — and, by exclusion, also the true identity of the column of Marcus Aurelius (Fontana).  
4 December: work ends (Valesio).

**1704:**

5 May: the commission meets; Francesco Fontana is to conduct the work (Fontana).

11 October: del Giudice's edict (Crescimbeni).

Wednesday 15 October: a trial attempt to lift the column: a cross-beam breaks (Crescimbeni).

Saturday 18 October: total failure: another cross-beam and a capstan break (Bianchini). The drop of the column back on to the base cracks the column ('the hellenist').

**1705:**

Thursday 24–Friday 25 September: the column is lifted and laid on the ground. The lowering is shown in an engraving by Westerhout (Piranesi, *Campus Martius*, pl. 31 = Fig. 6).

5–13 October: the column is moved to piazza Montecitorio (cf. 3–13 October: 'the hellenist').

17 October (Valesio), 19 October (Posterla): the pedestal is extracted and moved to the piazza Innocenziana/Montecitorio, where it arrives 29 October ('the hellenist'). Here it is seen by Montesquieu (1729), de Brosses (1739) and Ficoroni (1740), and shown in an engraving by Legeay (Fig. 7).

1706–8: the pedestal is restored by Vincenzo Felice, Stefano Gucciarelli and Filippo Baij (Valesio, *chirografi*, accounts).<sup>57</sup>

1741 (November): the column is to be moved back opposite the Fathers (Valesio): it is shown here by Nolli (1748) (= Fig. 8).

1742–8: Ferdinando Fuga restores the pedestal and places it on a high base in the piazza (Valesio; de Fabris): shown by Vasi (1752) (= Fig. 9).

1759 (September): the shed covering the column opposite the Fathers is burnt (Venuti), not 1764 (Hülsen, Richter).<sup>58</sup>

1789 (July–September): the pedestal is placed in the Cortile della Pigna, after being 'repaired' (*Avvisi Luccharesi*), but lies neglected for half a century. The architect of the move was Antinori, who destroyed the previous restorations in the operation (Visconti).

Pius VI uses the remains of the column to repair the Augustan obelisk.

1841–6: the pedestal is restored by Giuseppe de Fabris, who sets it up in the middle of the court; he also rediscovers the Greek inscription (de Fabris).

1885: the pedestal is moved to behind the Pigna.

1979: the pedestal is moved to the Cortile delle Corazze.

<sup>57</sup> See especially Vogel, 1973: 99, for a selection of the *chirografi* and payments.

<sup>58</sup> Not noted in *Diario di Roma*, the contemporary 'newspaper'. Vogel, 1973: 100 suggested (*recte*) that 1764 is a misunderstanding of Piranesi, *Trofeo*, pl. x.

## CONCLUSIONS

Various matters have finally to be made absolutely clear. Who is to be credited with the entire project to recover the column? There can be no doubt about the answer: Nicola del Giudice. It is none other than Carlo Fontana who gives us in great detail his conversation with the *presidente delle strade* about the Campus Martius, and describes the way del Giudice induced Clement first to clear the column, then to undertake the great operation to extract it.

Which Fontana was in charge of the operations in 1704 and 1705? The question needs clarification, because both father and son are mentioned, and the many sources are ambiguous or contradictory. Bianchini (1704) throughout his *Considerazioni* refers mostly to the rival plans of simply the architect and the *capomaestro* (obviously Patriarca).<sup>59</sup> Valesio (*Diario*, 3.197, 465, 480) specifies that Carlo was in charge in 1704, but that Francesco was responsible by the time of the raising of the pedestal. Marescotti states that after Carlo's failure in 1704, Francesco took over. 'The hellenist' specifies that Francesco was in charge: his father only gave advice (Cancellieri, 1821: 9). Crescimbeni (1705) specifies that the plan was drawn up by Francesco, who built the tower, and who commanded in 1704 at least. A seemingly definitive answer is given by Carlo: 'Because of my advanced age of sixty-six, and finding myself afflicted by gout, and given the ability and understanding of Francesco, the direction was safely bestowed on him' (Fontana, 1708: 34). It is, then, a paradox, that a young man of only 36 should be entrusted with this task, demanding the highest skills and experience, although assisted by his father. Four years later he was dead. It is clear, however, that Carlo is stressing the success of 1705, and determined to honour his dead son. These divergences demonstrate to the historian that reputations are at stake. It is most plausible that old Fontana was in charge in 1704, but then his son took over after the disaster, as Valesio and Marescotti state.

In exactly what state was the column found? Bianchini implied that, after the failure of 1704, it was already not in one piece, since the main problem was not to reduce it to more. Crescimbeni (1705: 15), on the other hand, stated that the column had already been damaged by fire and had a serious fault, namely a transverse vein in the granite (*pelo trasversale*). It therefore had to be supported by eight bands of iron. Posterla (1707: 40, 41) stressed Crescimbeni's points about damage by fire and the defect in the granite, waxing indignant about 'the Lie' that the break was modern. He claimed that this 'spite' was foreseen and drawings were therefore made, and witnesses recorded. Valesio noted that, after the operation in 1705, 'some said' that the column was broken in three. 'The hellenist' provides unique details. He stated that, presumably in October 1704, when the tackle broke, it fell on the column and broke it. When it was finally lowered in 1705 it was in *three* pieces: satirical placards drew attention to this. Fontana attempted to conceal the 'crack' with boards and mud! The truth was

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<sup>59</sup> See n. 27.

revealed by a placard: ‘trinum et unum’(!) (Cancellieri, 1821: 4, 9–11). Piranesi claimed that the column had been injured by fire in antiquity, but admitted that both column and pedestal were badly damaged in raising and transporting them.<sup>60</sup> There could be no more eloquent testimony than his illustration of the column (Fig. 10). Visconti (1796: 53, 57) stated that the column was found broken (*spezzata*),<sup>61</sup> while Amelung (1903: 883–93), quoting ‘the hellenist’, stated that the shaft was broken in its lifting. Erika Simon (1963: 378) agreed.

In what state was the pedestal found? Crescimbeni (1705: 8–9) stated that the scenes on the pedestal were ‘well preserved’. The most revealing information is provided by that great apologist for the Fontanas, Posterla, who admitted that the pedestal was torn from its clamps on a travertine base. We are told much of cradles for the column, but nothing about what was done to protect the much more delicate sculptures on the base. Then came the endless moves. The *Avvisi Luccharesi* (Sforza, 1887: 433) recorded damage in its transfer to the Vatican. Visconti noted that the pedestal had to be repaired, but that these repairs and the base of the apotheosis scene perished in the ‘last move’ (to the Vatican) in 1789. De Fabris (1846) described the pedestal as ‘ruined and damaged’ everywhere from excavation and movement. Amelung, by using the plates in Vignoli, was fully aware of the modern damage done.

We need to distinguish the front (the apotheosis) from the two sides (the *decursiones*). Bianchini provides invaluable illustrations, obviously before the pedestal was removed (Fig. 11). In the apotheosis scene, Rome lacked her right hand; the reclining figure lacked the lower left arm, and right foot; the heads of the two eagles were missing: compare the modern state (Fig. 2). It was the *decursiones*, however, where most of the heads of the figures were missing. Since the right and left *decursiones* are now almost identical, we need consider only one, in this case the right. We may compare Bianchini’s view in 1703 before removal (Fig. 12), Vignoli’s in 1705 after removal (Fig. 13) and Piranesi’s in 1762 after it was moved to the piazza Montecitorio (Fig. 14). In her classic modern account, Lisa Vogel (1973: 12) noted of the *decursio* scenes that they were ‘already very damaged when first seen ... having lost nearly all projecting human and horses’ heads and limbs. In addition, the left side had suffered extensively in the lower third.’ Further damage ‘surely occurred in the excavation and several moves’ (1973: 16). The result is that there are now few original heads. She demonstrated the importance of this: the homogeneous restorations have masked differences in the two sides. In addition, in the failed operation of 1704, ‘the pedestal could have cracked at the lower corners’ (1973: 17) or damage been inflicted when it was being raised and was simply wrenched from its plinth, which was clamped to the travertine foundations. Rather contradicting this, however, she finally states that ‘in the course of the failed 1704 attempt to raise the column the shaft may have fallen back, so that

<sup>60</sup> Piranesi, *Campo Marzio*, pl. 32; *Trofeo*, pl. 39.

<sup>61</sup> The lost ground-line on the apotheosis scene meant that the argument about its nature between Vignoli (waters of the Tiber) and Piranesi (a pavement) could no longer be settled.



Fig. 12. The right *decursio*: Francesco Bianchini, *De Calendario et Cyclo Caesaris* (1703).

a weight about one and a half times that of the pedestal would have fallen, probably somewhat unevenly, onto the pedestal' (1973: 20).<sup>62</sup> There is, in sum, strong testimony that the column and pedestal were damaged when found, but also undeniable testimony that they suffered much subsequent damage.

The pedestal, of course, attracted the attention of art historians, which has resulted in a great irony (Fig. 15). Antonio Frova (1961: 272–4) was interested only in questions of style and described the reliefs as exhibiting 'a squalid and conventional classicism'. Heinz Kähler (1963: 164) judged that the scenes were 'reminiscent of children's art'. Ranuccio Bianchi-Bandinelli (1970: 286) was one of the few who were complimentary: the style 'breaks the restricting classical moulds'. Richard Brilliant (1974: 253–4) judged that the portraits of Antoninus and Faustina exhibited a 'simplified blandness'. Antonio Bonanno (1983) described the apotheosis scene as 'anachronistic, classicizing', while the *decursio* was 'late antique', with 'a total disregard for the rules of perspective'. Nancy and Andrew Ramage (1991: 205–7) declared that the pedestal was 'intact' and focused on the combination in the *decursio* of a bird's-eye and straight-on view. Diana and Fred Kleiner (1978–80) were most interested in explaining the duplicated *decursiones*: for Antoninus and Faustina, a 'fictional joint apotheosis'. Bernard Andreae (2011: 189) similarly stressed that the pedestal

<sup>62</sup> It is disturbing that substantial fragments of four riders are preserved (Vogel, 1973: figs 19–24), which she defends as antique by a fine analysis (18–22), and are therefore 'left over'.

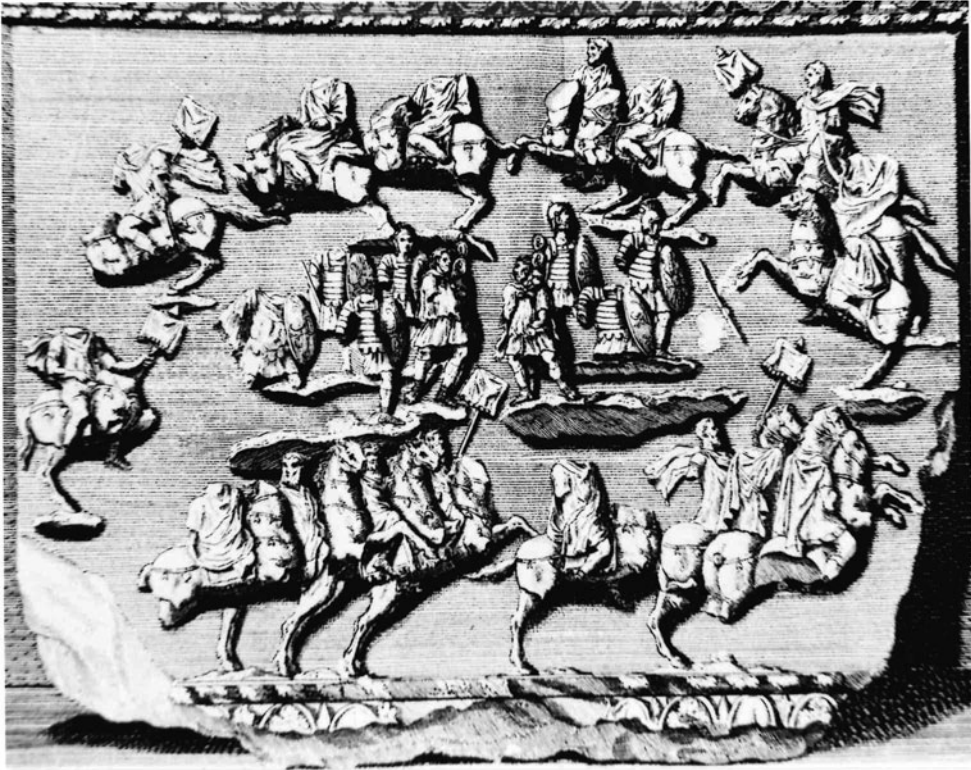


Fig. 13. The right *decursio*: Giovanni Vignoli, *De Columna Imperatoris Antonini Pii Dissertatio* (1705).

was ‘very well preserved’. All this is totally oblivious of the fact that the pedestal as we now have it is in great part the work of Giuseppe de Fabris. An honourable exception was Donald Strong (1976: 107), who, while judging the apotheosis scene as a case of ‘extreme pomposity’ and observing that in the *decursio* the legionaries were in horizontal perspective and the cavalry in vertical, admitted that the pedestal was ‘considerably restored’.

What were the original intentions for the excavated column? Valesio (May 1704) and Marescotti (August 1704) knew of early proposals for its use at the Trevi fountain (Fig. 16). This can be documented. Werner Oechslin (1972: 26, figs 39–40) found in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Torino a drawing by Filippo Juvarra (undated) of this plan, and another by Luigi Vanvitelli in the Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe in Rome (dated 1730). The Trevi fountain as we know it was not constructed until 1732–62, by Nicola Salvi. With the publication of Carlo Fontana’s drawings at Windsor by Allan Braham and Hellmut Hager (1977: 181–2, figs 616–21), three drawings of Nicola Michetti<sup>63</sup> for placing the column at the fountain were published, and two anonymous projects for raising

<sup>63</sup> See n. 30.



Fig. 14. The right *decursio*: Giambattista Piranesi, *Campo Marzio* (1762), pl. 32 (detail).



Fig. 15. The right *decursio*, present condition (by courtesy of Direzione dei Musei Vaticani).

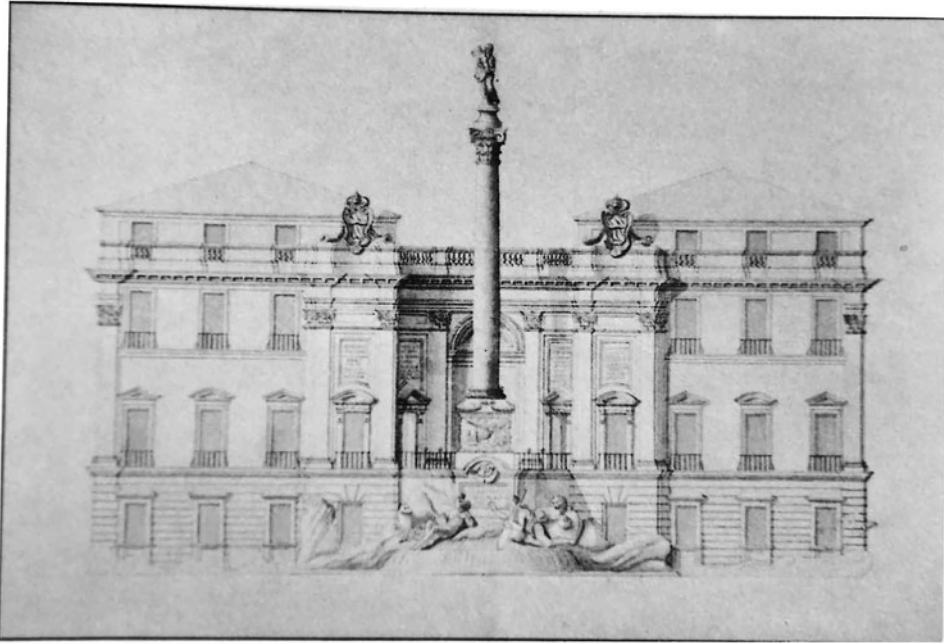


Fig. 16. Luigi Vanvitelli: the plan for the column at the Trevi fountain (1730).

it at the Quirinal, between the ‘Horsetamers’. These are all undated; their tentative assignation, for obvious reasons, to 1703/5 is guesswork. Giovanni Battista Zappi in a poem (*Rime degli Arcadi*, 3.332) suggested the basilica of S. Giovanni, and there were thoughts of piazza Termini (Cancellieri 1821, 15; Crescimbeni, 1720, I: 67). Thanks to Marescotti’s *Avvisi*, we know that all these locations were mooted in 1703–4. By 1706, Clement approved its erection in the piazza Montecitorio. Benedict XIV returned to this original plan; the column was to be crowned with the Vatican pine-cone.

Finally, for what was the granite of the column used? It is widely known that in the Augustan solar obelisk now in piazza Montecitorio one can clearly see large blocks inserted. Rodocanachi (1914: 93) listed no fewer than three obelisks: those at the Quirinal, Trinità dei Monti and Montecitorio. These were all of granite. Pietrangeli (1958: 62), who knew the Vatican archives better than anyone else, stated that, as well as the second and third of these obelisks, pieces were used for the stairs in palazzo Braschi; in 1778 it was suggested that it might be used in the sacristy or the basilica of St Peter’s.

The disastrous events of 1703–5 reveal a confusion between architecture and engineering — not that the two were not closely linked at this time. There were, it must be stressed, most eminent engineers (Zabaglia) and mathematicians (Giordani, Quaterini) who were available to help, but they were explicitly excluded. It is firmly stated by Crescimbeni that the commission admitted that Patriarca’s rival plan was easier, quicker, cheaper and safer. The highest

patronage and favouritism, however, were extended to the Fontanas. They in their turn were carried away with their flaunted connection with the genius of Domenico Fontana. The two branches of the family could not, in fact, have been further apart.<sup>64</sup> What was required was not ancestry, but the highest technical expertise. Cancellieri (1821: 21) spoke of the column's 'deplorable destruction'. Cesare d'Onofrio (1992: 330), in an aside, best and most frankly summed up the whole sorry story: had the commission listened to Patriarca, Rome would now have had another column to show.

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- DBF* *Dictionnaire de biographie française*. Paris, Letouzy et Ané.  
*DBI* *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*. Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana.  
*DHGE* *Dictionnaire de l'histoire et géographie ecclésiastique*. Brepols.  
*RIC* *Roman Imperial Coinage*. London, Spink.

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<sup>64</sup> Fagiolo and Bonaccorso 2008: after 473, for the family tree. Domenico was of the Melide branch, Carlo and Francesco of the Novazzano branch.



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