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Drawings of Fake Inscriptions by Pirro Ligorio (1513-1583)

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FAKE?

THE ART OF DECEPTION

EDITED BY MARK JONES

WITH PAUL CRADDOCK AND NICOLAS BARKER

University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles

137a

137b

century the principle of restoration was universally accepted, and it was almost unthinkable that a headless or armless torso should not have its missing parts replaced. So long as the restoration of antiquities was undertaken with good taste and skill – whenever possible using similar examples as models – the procedure was welcomed. Eighteenth-century collectors expected their antique marbles to be restored, and if talented Roman sculptor-restorers (such as Cavaceppi, Pacilli, Pacetti, Angelini, Albacini or, indeed, Piranesi) succeeded in disguising modern additions so as not to detract from the overall visual effect, then so much the better.

The problem, of course, was one of degree. While a learned scholar-collector like Charles Townley (1737–1805) might insist on works of high quality in an excellent state of preservation, and was capable of immediately recognising modern additions, other less experienced purchasers could easily be misled; it is also clear from comments made by Townley about his friends that in many cases the collectors themselves were indifferent to the issue of authenticity. The letters of Jenkins and Hamilton prove that they applied different standards to different collectors, and that in most cases they were less than fastidious in describing the degree of restoration.

The marbles from the collection of Charles Townley included here (142–6) demonstrate various degrees of restoration and the problems associated with them. The bas-relief of a Centaur abducting a woman (143) was extensively restored, almost certainly by Cavaceppi, but there is no evidence that his additions were ever passed off as original. As time went on Townley became less tolerant about such alterations. G-B. Piranesi, the engraver turned art dealer and restorer of antiquities, produced in the decade after 1768 a series of decorative and visually impressive vases and candelabra constructed by combining original antique fragments secured from a variety of sources with modern infill. Piranesi was sometimes reticent in distinguishing for his clients ancient from modern work, and we find Thomas Jenkins in his letters to Townley denouncing Piranesi's claims, calling his antiquities *pastici*, sending him up as *il cavaliere composito* and accusing him of trickery and deceit. On his first Grand Tour Townley had purchased a large vase from Piranesi (similar to fig. 5), but he afterwards disposed of it, presumably because he had by then come to recognise that it consisted largely of modern work.

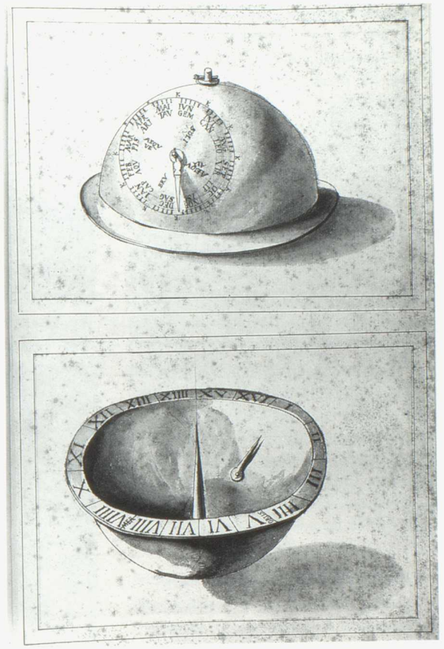
The taste for restored and visually impressive marbles often led to regrettable tampering. In efforts to minimise ostensible damage and to maximise the impression of white, all-over perfection, restorers and dealers often smoothed down the surface of marbles (see for example 145), and we have it from Townley that Francesco Cavaceppi ('an ignorant sculptor') had tried to remove with acid the traces of original red paint still visible on the bust of Jupiter Serapis (142). We know from his letters that Townley was extremely unhappy with the patched up heads of the two figures of Victory sacrificing a bull (146), attributable to Cavaceppi, and that he considered returning the group to Gavin Hamilton.

From around 1800, however, attitudes began to change, and for the first time informed critics like James Dallaway and J. T. Smith began to question the assumptions underlying the tradition of restoration. In his later writings Dallaway identified Thomas Jenkins as being particularly culpable and denounced him for practising deceptions (such as Jenkins's provision of new heads for the Venus and Minerva at Newby Hall in Yorkshire), but some of these criticisms were unfair, and it can be proved that the details of the restoration of the Newby Venus, for example, were publicly discussed in Rome at the time of its purchase in 1765.

Nevertheless, these criticisms represent the first stirrings of a shift in attitudes which resulted in the important decision, in 1816, that the Elgin Marbles should not be restored. After this date, though fake antiquities continued to be produced in substantial numbers, the eighteenth-century problem of the restored 'partial' fake began to lose its relevance. GRV

LITERATURE J. Dallaway, *Anecdotes of the Arts in England*, London 1800; S. Howard, *Bartolomeo Cavaceppi, eighteenth-century restorer*, PhD thesis 1958, Chicago 1980; F. Haskell & N. Penny, *Taste and the Antique: the lure of classical sculpture 1500–1900*, New Haven & London 1981; C. Picon, *Bartolomeo Cavaceppi: Eighteenth-Century Restorations of Ancient Marble Sculpture from English Private Collection*, exhibition catalogue, Clarendon Gallery, London 1983; J. T. Smith, *Nollekens and his Times*, London 1986, facsimile of 1st edition of 1828

138b



139

137 The duc de Berry's medals of Constantine the Great and Heraclius

At the beginning of the fifteenth century the duc de Berry, one of the greatest collectors of his or any age, bought a jewelled gold medal of Constantine the Great from an Italian merchant, Antonio Mancini. In all probability he believed that this medal and its companion piece, of the Emperor Heraclius, to be ancient. Certainly, he paid a high price for them and had them copied in gold. In fact, they were new, probably made for sale to the duc, who was known to be interested in acquiring portraits of the great figures in the history of Christianity.

Published as ancient in the sixteenth century by humanist scholars like Jacopo da Strada and Hubert Goltz, the medals were denounced as forgeries in the seventeenth century. In the nineteenth, however, they were hailed as masterpieces of late medieval art, and though frequently discussed in print were never again described as fakes. MPJ

137a Constantine the Great
Silver. D 89mm
BM CM M0267

137b Heraclius
Bronze. D 98mm
BM CM M0268

138 Drawings of fake inscriptions by Pirro Ligorio (1513–83)

Pirro Ligorio worked as an artist, architect and antiquarian for Cardinal Ippolito II d'Este and Popes Paul IV and Pius IV, for a time as architect of St Peter's, before ending his life as antiquarian to the Duke of Ferrara.

His work as an antiquarian consisted in part of making detailed drawings of antique coins, inscriptions and sculpture. In accordance with the custom of the time, he tended to complete fragmentary inscriptions and sculptures, not to mislead or deceive, but to restore his representations of antiquity to their original or ideal form.

In the seventeenth century, however, scholars like Ezechiel Spanheim and Cardinal Noris denounced him as a fraud and his reputation has never recovered. More recent work has, however, tended to support Muratori's more favourable eighteenth-century judgement that 'they [Spanheim, etc.] were rash to damn and proscribe him indiscriminately. For the fact that a scholar's work contains some spurious or fictitious matter is no reason to condemn everything else he wrote as false'.

The two examples of Ligorio's

inscriptions shown here are copies drawn for the seventeenth-century collector and scholar Cassiano dal Pozzo from the original manuscript, now in Naples. Both illustrate the considerable difficulties in distinguishing the true from the false in Ligorio's work. The first (a) represents the tomb of a freedman of the *gens Iulia* from a columbarium discovered on the Via Appia. Where other witnesses record the inscription as reading simply C. IULIUS DIVI. AUG. L/DIONYSIUS/C. IULIUS/STYRAX, Ligorio has added the words AB. EPIST (ulis). LAT(inis).

The other inscription (b), though published as false in the past, is in fact authentic, as has been shown by examination of the original marble in the Museo Kircherano. It did, however, serve Ligorio as the basis for another, false inscription published alongside it in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinorum* (CIL 930*b). GV

138a BM GR Franks II, f. 12 (CIL VI 864*)

138b BM GR Franks II, f. 25 (CIL VI 930* a)

LITERATURE E. Mandowsky & C. Mitchell, *Pirro Ligorio's Roman Antiquities*, London 1963

139 The Barberini 'clock'

These two drawings, like 138 from the collection of Cassiano dal Pozzo, represent an object, identified as a clock or *scaphio* from the collection of Cardinal Barberini (early seventeenth century). Ostensibly an equinoctial bowl sundial, it is entirely non-functional and may well have been a sixteenth-century concoction.

Pen, ink and brown wash. 173 × 245mm and 172 × 245mm
BM GR

Renaissance forgeries of ancient coins

140

The problem of forgeries arose in the Renaissance as soon as antiquities, and in particular coins, began to be collected. A discussion of the problems of forgery was one of the common themes of, and motives for, the various handbooks on coins produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The work of Marco Baldanza (unpublished, *c.* 1640) was written 'to help the understanding of those who like the subject and to teach them how to recognise the ancient from the modern, and to show what is more and what is less rare'. The earliest such handbook, the *Discorsi . . . sopra le medaglie degli antichi* of Enea Vico, first published in 1555, devotes an entire section to the problem. In his chapter 'On the frauds which are perpetrated on modern coins to make them look antique' Vico tells us that there were three principal ways of making forgeries, which he called the 'completely ancient', the 'partly ancient' and the 'completely modern'.

Completely ancient forgeries could be made by 'the false joining together of the two sides of coins of different emperors', using solder and filing the edge to conceal the join, or by re-engraving a genuine coin with an engraving tool or jeweller's wheel.

Partly ancient forgeries were made by 'striking one corroded side of a coin with a new die' or 'striking a genuine coin which was of little value because it was worn or had a common type with new dies on both sides'. The unnatural sharpness of the resulting designs could then be disguised by abrading the coin or rubbing it in ash.

Completely modern forgeries could be made by striking coins from modern dies; in this way 'the forger with a new die like an ancient one would make a rare coin'. A second method was casting. 'An ancient coin would be moulded in the marrow of a cuttle fish or in the dust from burnt bones, or in some other substance reduced to dust; the hot and liquified metal would be poured into the mould, and produce a coin similar in appearance and size [to the original]'.

Vico goes on to discuss the various methods of detecting such forgeries; basically there were (as is still the case today) two approaches, historical plausibility and the examination of the details of the specimens. For instance, one might reject a coin because the titles it gives an emperor are known to be impossible. Or, again, one might be able to detect a thin line where the join between two halves has been made, or observe anomalies in the letter forms in the legend.

One is slightly surprised to read Vico's comment that 'ogni mediocre antiquario' could easily recognise forgeries struck from newly cut dies, as, generally speaking, these have historically been the hardest to detect. Interestingly, Vico goes on to give a list of 'the imitators' who 'have been the best at making new iron dies in my time'. These are Vettor Gambello (Camelio), Giovanni da Cavino of Padua and his young son, Benvenuto Cellini, Alessandro Greco (Cesati), Leone Aretino (Leone Leoni), Jacopo da Trezzo, Federico Bonzagna of Parma and Giovan-Iacopo, Federico's brother, whom he describes as surpassing all others.

This list is both interesting and frustrating. It is frustrating because we know almost nothing of the ancient coins produced by these famous sculptors, gem-engravers and medallists. Some pieces, such as those of Alexander the Great or Mithradates VI (140 e, g), can be attributed to Cesati. Of works by Cellini, Leoni, da Trezzo or the Bonzagna brothers we have no knowledge. The fullest information available concerns Cavino, because his dies have survived and we can be sure of what his products looked like. Compared with ancient pieces, they are most impressive. There are some small technical differences in the thickness of the coins, the lettering (made by punches, not engraved) and the style (compare the ancient emphasis on the female breasts with the Renaissance emphasis on their stomachs), but Cavino's works are excellent copies. This is less true of the pieces

140a,b,c

140f,g (*top*); d,e (*bottom*)

140i,h

attributable to Cesati; other contemporary pieces, by Valerio Belli (h, i), are even less like the originals.

Yet there seems little doubt that these pieces were intended to pass as ancient, and that they probably did so. There is no contemporary evidence to support the modern notion that such pieces were self-declared copies made to fill gaps in people's collections but not intended to deceive: the handbooks all talk of such pieces as forms of forgery or deceit. It is presumably no accident that we cannot ascribe any 'antique' pieces to the medallists named by Vico; the fact that they never added their signatures, as they did on their other works, is a clear indication of their intentions. AB

140a Cavino: self-portrait with Bassiano

Bronze. D 36mm
BM CM Geo. III Ill.Men 189

140b Sestertius of Caligula (AD 37–41) showing his three sisters

Bronze. D 34mm
BM CM *BMC* Caligula 37

140c Cavino: copy of 140b

Bronze. D 35mm
BM CM Geo. III. R11242

140d Gold stater of Alexander the Great (336–323 BC)

D 18mm
BM CM *BMC* Alexander 1568

140e Cesati: bronze copy of 140d

D 32mm
BM CM 1906. 11–3. 1002

140f Silver tetradrachm of Mithradates VI (120–63 BC)

D 29mm
BM CM 1896. 6–1. 56

140g Cesati: gilt copy of 140f

D 32mm
BM CM M0147