



Torre dei Schiavi

Monument and Metaphor

Charles C. Eldredge

When Benjamin West landed on Italy's ancient shores, he was following the path of generations of Grand Tourists. Italy, especially Rome, was, after all, the center of European civilization and from ancient times had drawn visitors from near and far. While but a single pilgrim in the long line to Rome, West was at the same time a pioneer for generations of American artists who would follow in his wake, drawn by the city's special history and character.

The distinctive nature of central Italian light and topography, which had profoundly affected Claude Lorrain and altered the subsequent course of landscape painting, was scarcely the sole attraction of which the area could boast. The art of the Old Masters was a major lure for the Grand Tourists of the eighteenth century, as were the sculpted artifacts and architectural remains of the ancients. These reminiscences of the classical world were everywhere apparent along the Tiber and inescapably molded perceptions and depictions of the Eternal City.

As archaeologists exhumed this storehouse of a storied past, artists delineated the ruins, with exactitude or caprice. Giambattista Piranesi's famed views of the antiquities of Rome excited the imaginations of connoisseurs throughout Europe and even in colonial America, to which his engravings easily and readily traveled. Giovanni Pannini's compositions based upon

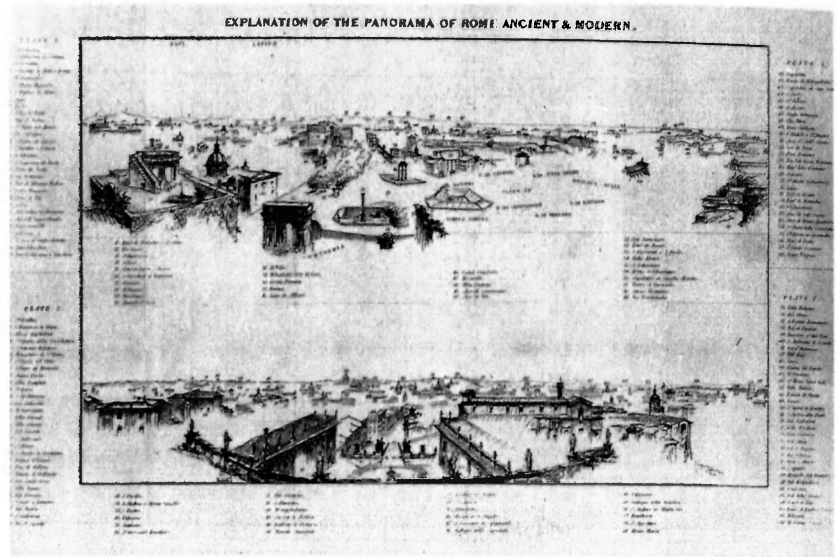
Roman monuments, precisely drawn if fancifully rearranged, similarly enjoyed great vogue among the patrons of his day. Given this widespread enthusiasm for things Roman, it was little wonder that Benjamin West, the New World's first artist-ambassador to Europe, was determined "to visit the fountainhead of the arts" and in 1760 headed to Rome.¹

West, who left Italy for London in 1763, was followed by John Singleton Copley, who arrived in Rome in 1774. The familiar landmarks with which Pannini and colleagues had preoccupied themselves reappeared tellingly in the background of Copley's portrait of the American Italophiles Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Izard, painted in 1775. The couple posed amid their Old World finery before a distant prospect of the Colosseum. That such trappings were significant both to artists and sitters of many nationalities is suggested by J. H. W. Tischbein's renowned portrait *Goethe in the Roman Campagna* (1787), with the Tomb of Caecilia Metella and other favorite sites in the background, or Jean Ingres's equally acclaimed portrayal of his colleague François Granet (1807), posed before the Quirinal.

After the turn of the nineteenth century, the pioneering travels of West and Copley were repeated by increasing numbers of American artists, for whom Italy became a favorite destination during their European sojourns. Between 1796

Thomas Hotchkiss, Torre di Schiavi (detail), 1865. Oil on canvas 22 3/8 × 34 3/4 in. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Museum Purchase

1 Robert Burford, *Explanation of the Panorama of Rome Ancient & Modern*, ca. 1840, *Published in Burford, Description of a View of the City of Rome* (New York: William Osborn, 1840)



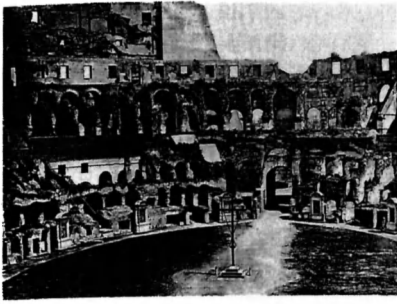
and 1815, John Vanderlyn spent all but two years abroad, dividing his time between Paris and Rome. In Rome in 1807 he composed his acclaimed *Marius Amidst the Ruins of Carthage*, which reflected the artist's mastery of antique history rendered in tight, neoclassical style. The American taste for figures and ruins, as well as for Italy in general, reached its high point in the mid nineteenth century, as seen for instance in the work of the expatriate William Page. In 1860 he painted a romantic image of his wife before the Colosseum, an edifice that she, the quintessential Italophile, impressively dominates. While Vanderlyn and Page and many others worked in Rome, the fascination with the ancient capital extended far beyond the city's boundaries. In his Paris studio in the early 1840s, the fashionable portraitist George P. A. Healy painted Euphemia Van Rensselaer—with Roman ruins in the distance.

Italomania was by then widespread, indeed so much so that Ralph Waldo Emerson worried, "My countrymen are . . . infatuated with the rococo toy of Europe. All America seems on the point of embarking."² The "dream of Arcadia"—as Thomas Cole entitled a key work of 1838—exercised a potent

effect on the imaginations of nineteenth-century Americans and, from about 1825 to 1875, motivated the travels and the productions of many writers and artists. It was James Russell Lowell who perhaps best explained the American fascination. "Italy," he wrote,

was classic ground and this not so much by association with great events as with great men. . . . [T]o the American Italy gave cheaply what gold cannot buy for him at home, a past at once legendary and authentic, and in which he has an equal claim with every other foreigner. In England he is a poor relation . . . in France his notions are purely English . . . but Rome is the mother country of every boy who devoured Plutarch. . . . Italy gives us antiquity with good roads, cheap living, and above all, a sense of freedom from responsibility . . . the sense of permanence, unchangeableness and repose.³

The whole of Italy, from Etna to the northern lakes, was rich in historic associations. But, for the mid-nineteenth-century traveler, as for his predecessors, it was to Rome that attention was particularly directed. Viewed from the Pincian or other Roman hilltops, or from the



2 Lorenzo Suscipj, Interior of the Colosseum, Rome, ca. 1850s. Albumen silver print, 7 1/8 x 9 13/16 in. Centre canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Center for Architecture, Montreal

far reaches of the Campagna, the dome of St. Peter's and the city's fabled ruins inspired hushed reverence in nearly every visitor. Worthington Whittredge's recollections of his first glimpse of the city was typical of most Americans: "To me, born in a log cabin and reared in towns of low flat-roofed houses of pine and hemlock, the picture of Rome at last before my eyes was quite enough to inspire me with feelings of reverence and humility. I could not speak, or did not, and observed that the other passengers [in the carriage] were similarly affected."⁴

Understandably, artists sought to capture the grand sight, on canvases, daguerreotypes, or even in monumental panoramas, such as that by the noted English specialist of the genre Robert Burford, which was first exhibited in New York in 1840 and shown again in Philadelphia two years later—appropriately at the Coliseum (fig. 1). Americans, of course, were not alone in this fascination. Goethe's "discovery" of Rome in the late eighteenth century led to an equivalent migration of German artists, who mingled in Rome with painters and sculptors from the Scandinavian countries, France, Russia, and England, all drawn by the region's peculiar appeal.

Painters particularly delighted in the scenic possibilities of decaying monuments (fig. 2). For Thomas Cole, it was the Colosseum, "beautiful in its destruction," which, he said, "affected me most." "From the broad arena within," he recalled,

it rises around you, arch above arch, broken and desolate, and mantled in many parts with . . . plants and flowers, exquisite both for their color and fragrance. It looks more like a work of nature than of man, for the regularity of art is lost, in a great measure, in dilapidation, and the luxuriant

herbage, clinging to its ruins as if to "mouth its distress" completes the illusion. Crag rises over crag, green and breezy summits mount into the sky.⁵

The overgrown arcades attracted as well the admiration of Rembrandt Peale, who, like most of the artists, regretted the program of cleaning up the monuments that was begun in the early nineteenth century. Inspired by recollections of a "beautiful wilderness of ruins, vines and shrubbery," he suggested that "some spots [be] left neglected and covered with plants and shrubs, as a sample of its former guise." Peale's advice, however, went unheeded, leaving later artists, like Elihu Vedder, to lament that "the ruins were wonderfully beautiful before they were 'slicked up.'" "Slicked up" or not, the monuments cast their spell over visitors for most of the century. The "romance of ruins" was described as "one of the most innocent and instructive pleasures in which one may indulge," and thousands succumbed.⁶

The fascination with decay was more sentimental than morbid. Although most American artists did not wind up in Rome's Protestant Cemetery, many visitors would have understood the poetic sentiment of Shelley (who is interred in Rome): "It could make one in love with death to think of being buried in so sweet a place."⁷

If Rome inspired sweet thoughts of mortality, the unsettled Campagna outside its ancient walls did not always do likewise. To many early travelers, it was a bleak land of "solitude, dust and tombs."⁸ The wild and hilly Campagna was the domain of malaria and *banditti*, a dangerous "desert" whose traverse was required to achieve the art-pilgrim's goal. Hippolyte Taine thought it like "an abandoned cemetery . . . the sepulchre of

Rome, and of all the nations she destroyed. . . . All antiquity, indiscriminately, lies buried here under the monstrous city which devoured them, and which died of its surfeit." Wrote another visitor in 1820, "Rome . . . stood alone in the wilderness, as in the world, surrounded by a desert of her own creation . . . pestilent with disease and death. . . . [L]ike a devouring grave, it annually engulphs [*sic*] all of human kind that toil upon its surface."⁹

During the nineteenth century, as highway safety improved and as methods to deal with the threats of malaria developed, travelers pushed farther beyond the limits of the city. The Campagna had to be crossed to reach the picturesque towns of Tivoli, Albano, and their neighbors in the Sabine Hills, which drew increasing numbers of travelers. As familiarity grew and security improved, the reactions of travelers to the Campagna's wastes changed. Instead of the "fearsome loneliness" experienced by an earlier traveler, William Wetmore Story, one of Rome's greatest propagandists, found the Campagna air "filled with a tender sentiment of sadness which makes the beauty of the world about you touching."¹⁰ To his many readers Bayard Taylor recommended the view from the Campagna. While "there was nothing particularly beautiful or sublime in the landscape," he noted, "few other scenes on earth combine in one glance such a myriad of mighty associations, or bewilder the mind with such a crowd of confused emotions." In time, the region came to seem almost homey. Charles Dickens, visiting in the early 1860s, noted that one Campagna view, "where it was most level, reminded me of an American prairie." Indeed one American tourist, familiar with the Midwest, wrote that the Campagna's "wheat-fields, extending far and wide, are

like those of Illinois."¹¹

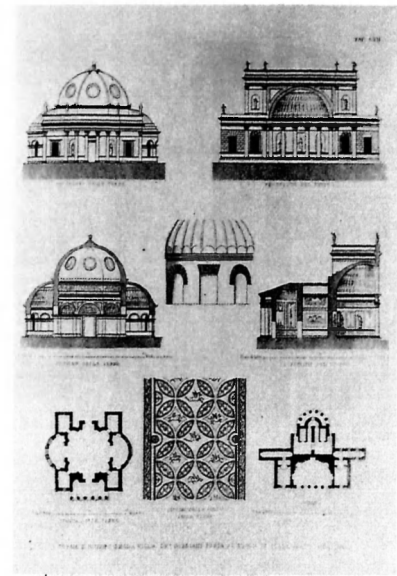
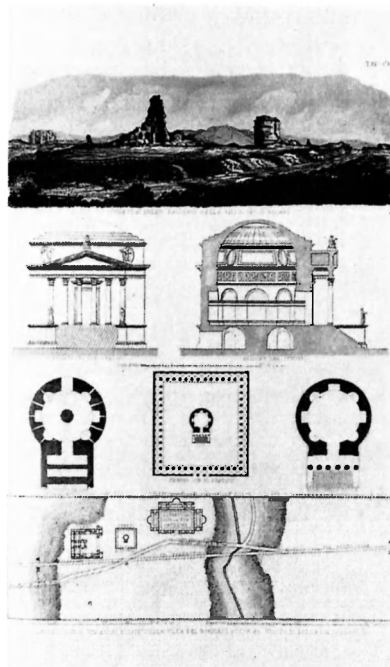
Along with the tourists, painters extended their rambles through the historic landscape, searching for the perfect fragment of broken aqueduct, the artistic effect of sunset across verdant land, the colorful herdsman tending his flock amid the ruins. Van Wyck Brooks created a memorable word picture of these artists, who, "with Claude on the brain,"

*haunted the Campagna, painting all day until twilight, willing to run the risks of the chill and the night mist, hoping to catch a little of the wonder of the sunset; and then hurrying in to pass the gates before these were closed in the evening, marvelling over the purple clouds behind the purpler Alban Hills and the mellow golden glow in the sky at the west.*¹²

Ruined aqueducts, the "camels of the Campagna" that had brought precious water to ancient Rome from the distant hills, provided a favorite motif for nineteenth-century painters, as did the picturesque ruins along the old Appian Way. Another favored destination, to the east of the city along the Via Praenestina, was the remains of the villa of the Gordian emperors (fig. 3), who reigned from A.D. 237 to 244. The site, which was known as the Torre dei Schiavi, lay about two and one-half miles beyond the Porta Maggiore, crowning a rise in the landscape above the flow of the Acqua Bollicante. It was praised in guidebooks as "one of the most picturesque and interesting points in the Campagna."¹³

The complex was constructed amid and over the remains of earlier Antonine cisterns and buildings. The new imperial country house was remarkable for its size; the ruins stretched along nearly a mile of the roadway. Begun by Gordian *père*, a cultivated man of letters, the villa was subsequently

- 3 Veduta delle Reliquie della Villa dei Gordiani. *Engraving in Luigi Canina, Gli edifizij antichi dei contorni di Roma, vol. 6 (Rome, 1856), plate 106*
- 4 Terme e Ninfeo della Villa dei Gordiani (elevations, sections, and plans). *Engraving in Luigi Canina, Gli edifizij antichi dei contorni di Roma, vol. 6 (Rome, 1856), plate 107*



occupied by Gordian III, who shared his father's passion for books, amassing a library of sixty thousand volumes. But the epicurean son also collected in other areas, boasting twenty-two concubines, by each of whom he sired three or four children—perhaps accounting for the size of the suburban spread.

Three main elements composed the villa: sumptuous baths; the “heroon” or mausoleum, a circular building oriented toward the highway in the best Vitruvian fashion; and a large colonnaded structure incorporating three basilicas. Of these, only ruins remained in the nineteenth century, although the form of the mausoleum was still readily apparent, as was a corner of an octagonal bath.

Contemporary descriptions by the Roman chronicler Julius Capitolinus suggest the elaborate scale and decoration of this majestic home. The Gordian villa, he wrote, “was remarkable for the magnificence of a portico with four ranges of columns, fifty of which were of Carystian, fifty of Claudian, fifty of Synnadon [or Phrygian], and

fifty of Nubian marble.” Remnants of these colorful, imported stones were recovered in archaeological excavations which began in earnest in the early nineteenth century.

“There were also three basilicas of corresponding size, particularly some *thermae*, more magnificent than any others in the world, except those in Rome” (fig. 4).¹⁴

The circular mausoleum was likened by a number of nineteenth-century travel writers to the Pantheon, but its modest scale—fifty-six feet interior diameter—and method of construction are more analogous to the Temple of Romulus on the Appian Way. The brickwork of the Gordian villa and the engineering of the vaults were characteristically late Roman; the pioneering archaeologist Antonio Nibby even claimed that the Gordian mausoleum was “the most ancient of this type of construction” and served as the model for the more familiar landmark near the Circus of Romulus on the Via Appia. Four large round windows, of which two remain intact, permitted light into the upper story; there, a series of niches, alternating square

and round, presumably contained sculpture. Augustus Hare noted that the splendid statue of Livia in the Torlonia Museum was found at the site and that works of that type originally embellished the entire complex.¹⁵ A subterranean room similarly contained straight and arched niches and was supported at its center by a large round pillar. Adjacent to the circular structure were the vast basilican building and the baths, of which little remains.

Long after the dissipated Gordian III was murdered by his troops, his Campagna homesite was put to very different purposes. Remains of frescoes, which in the nineteenth century were still evident in the mausoleum's vault, suggest that the structure served as a medieval church. A frieze of saints and other Christian subjects was painted beneath the oculi in what was probably the church of San Andrea, razed in A.D. 984.¹⁶ The ruins served military as well as religious purposes. The octagonal room remaining from the ornate baths was transformed into a watchtower in the late Roman Empire by building walls over the apselike vault, strengthening it at the center with a thick Saracenic column, and topping it with a newly constructed tower. To Karl Baedeker, writing in 1867, this curious pastiche "impart[ed] a grotesque aspect to the place"—and doubtless enhanced its allure.¹⁷

Eventually the Gordian villa site came to be known as the Torre dei Schiavi, a designation originally occasioned by the curious, broken watchtower but later applied to the distinctive mausoleum and ultimately to the entire region. The origins of the name are uncertain. In the nineteenth century it was often referred to by English-speaking visitors as the "Tower of Slaves," although at least one travel guide specifically cautioned against such

a literal translation with its allusion to Roman slavery. Instead, Bruno Schrader traced the name to the wealthy Schiavi family of the fifteenth century, one of whose members, Vincenzo dello Schiavo, was prominent in Rome as late as 1562.¹⁸

The ruins along the Via Praenestina lay largely ignored for centuries following the construction of the watchtower and the razing of San Andrea. Few travelers and fewer artists were drawn to the site until, in the seventeenth century, Piranesi turned to the ruins for inspiration. Among his celebrated views of the Roman antiquities are several plates featuring the ruined villa and its environs (fig. 5).¹⁹ He drew the stucco ornaments of foliation and animals in the octagonal bath, which he mistook for a tomb, and in his engravings of the mausoleum he made the common misidentification of the site as a temple.

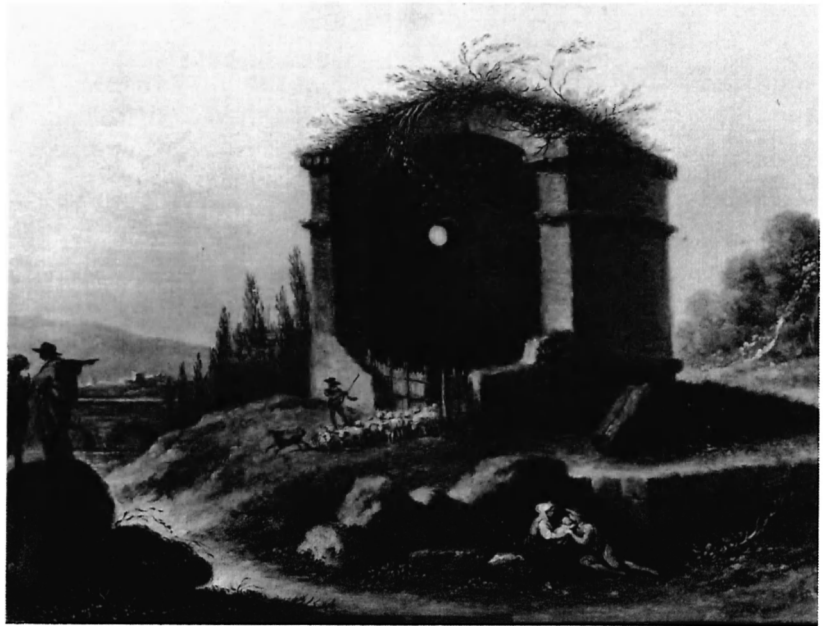
In the following century, tourism outside the walls of Rome remained scarce. François Joullain was among the apparent few who made the pilgrimage to the Torre, perhaps attracted to it by Piranesi's prints, which remained popular among Rome's visitors and cognoscenti. Joullain's small panel is characteristic of the views of Roman monuments popular with collectors of the period (fig. 6). He has anticipated the later "slickening up" of the ruins by transforming the broken and irregular form of the mausoleum into a tidy sheepfold. The rustic, mangerlike setting, the multiple lamb references, the gesturing, Magus-like figure at the left, and the mother and child with father, combine in an unexpected suggestion of a Nativity on the Campagna. The villa of a degenerate emperor would surely be an unlikely setting for such an extraordinary event—if that indeed was what the artist intended—and

- 5 Veduta degli Avanzi di Fabbrica magnifica sepolcrale . . . vicina a Torre de' Schiavi . . .
Published in Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Le antichità romane (Rome: Stamperia di Angelo Rotilj, 1756), plate 60



Veduta degli Avanzi di Fabbrica magnifica sepolcrale . . . vicina a Torre de' Schiavi . . .

- 6 François Joullain, Torre dei Schiavi, n.d.
Oil on wood, 9 7/16 × 12 3/4 in.
Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine, Bequest of The Hon. James Bowdoin III.



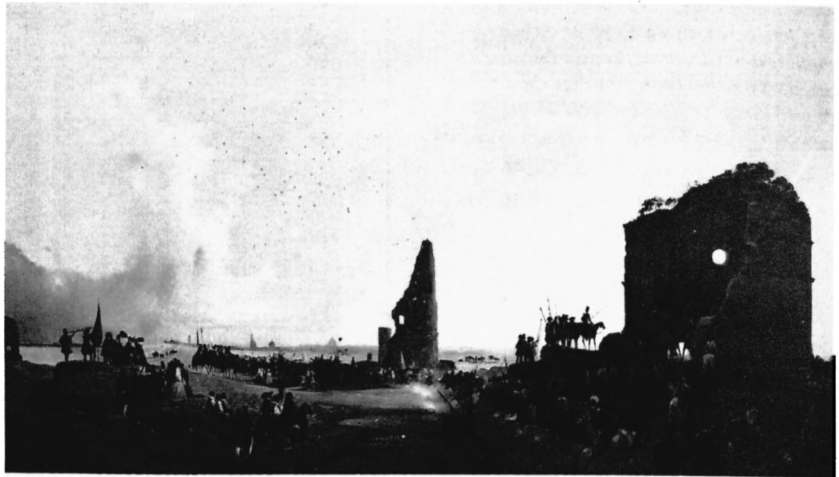
Joullain's rare choice of the Torre setting suggests that in his time there was little understanding of the site's historical importance.

That appreciation did not come until the early years of the nineteenth century, when the ruins attracted the attention of archaeologists. The recovery of precious decorative materials and of such treasures as the Torlonia *Livia* lent new interest to the Torre dei Schiavi, and excavations were con-

ducted nearly continuously from the 1830s to the 1870s.

The site simultaneously attracted attention for a very different reason—it was there that Rome's large community of German artists assembled for their annual *Walpurgisnacht* festivals, events which grew in popularity through the middle decades of the century (fig. 7). The German revels quickly became a popular attraction for Roman visitors of many nationalities,

- 7 *Ippolito Caffi, The Artists' Party near Torre dei Schiavi, 1839. Oil on canvas, 32 1/4 x 58 11/16 in. Museo di Roma*



whose carriages followed the artists' procession across the Campagna to the Torre dei Schiavi. Many of the era's travel accounts took note of the colorful event. "I do not think a foreign colony ever organized abroad a national festival with spirit and originality to compare with this," wrote Francis Wey; "the enormity of the farce in it represents the old German gaiety, while the picturesque display of the spectacle could only have been imagined by artists."²⁰ The artists' follies inevitably attracted other painters from Rome's international community, such as Henri Regnault, who made illustrations of the *Walpurgisnacht* festivities, and Walter Crane, who later recounted one such May Day spectacle:

The central feature of the one I remember was a gorgeous domed Moorish divan on wheels, with an Emperor of Morocco and his harem sitting inside; behind and before went a great company of artists of all nationalities in all sorts of costumes—some as seventeenth-century Spanish cavaliers on horseback, some as burlesque field marshals with enormous cocked hats, jackboots, and sabres riding on donkeys. The caterer of the picnic (a well-known artist's colorman) was attired as a sort of white liz-

ard, with a tall conical hat, and a long robe on which were painted lobsters, salads and other suggestions of luncheon.²¹

The crowd of artists and followers assembled at the Torre dei Schiavi and from there proceeded across the Campagna for several miles to the grotto of Cervara (fig. 8). "At the moment of departure," wrote Wey,

on a car festooned with garlands and drawn by four great oxen whose ample horns have been gilded, appears the President in the midst of his court of chamberlains, of madmen, and poets; he passes his countrymen in review, makes them a solemn and grotesque discourse, and distributes to the worthiest the knightly order of the Baiocco; then the procession proceeds on its way, escorted by its fourgon of wines, its cooking battery, and its cup bearers, towards the grottos, chosen for a monster festival on account of their freshness and their darkness, which is favorable to the effects of illumination.

Upon arriving at the caves of Cervara, the artists entered: "At the bottom of the grotto a high priest calls up the Sibyl who, appearing in the midst of Bengal fires, recites



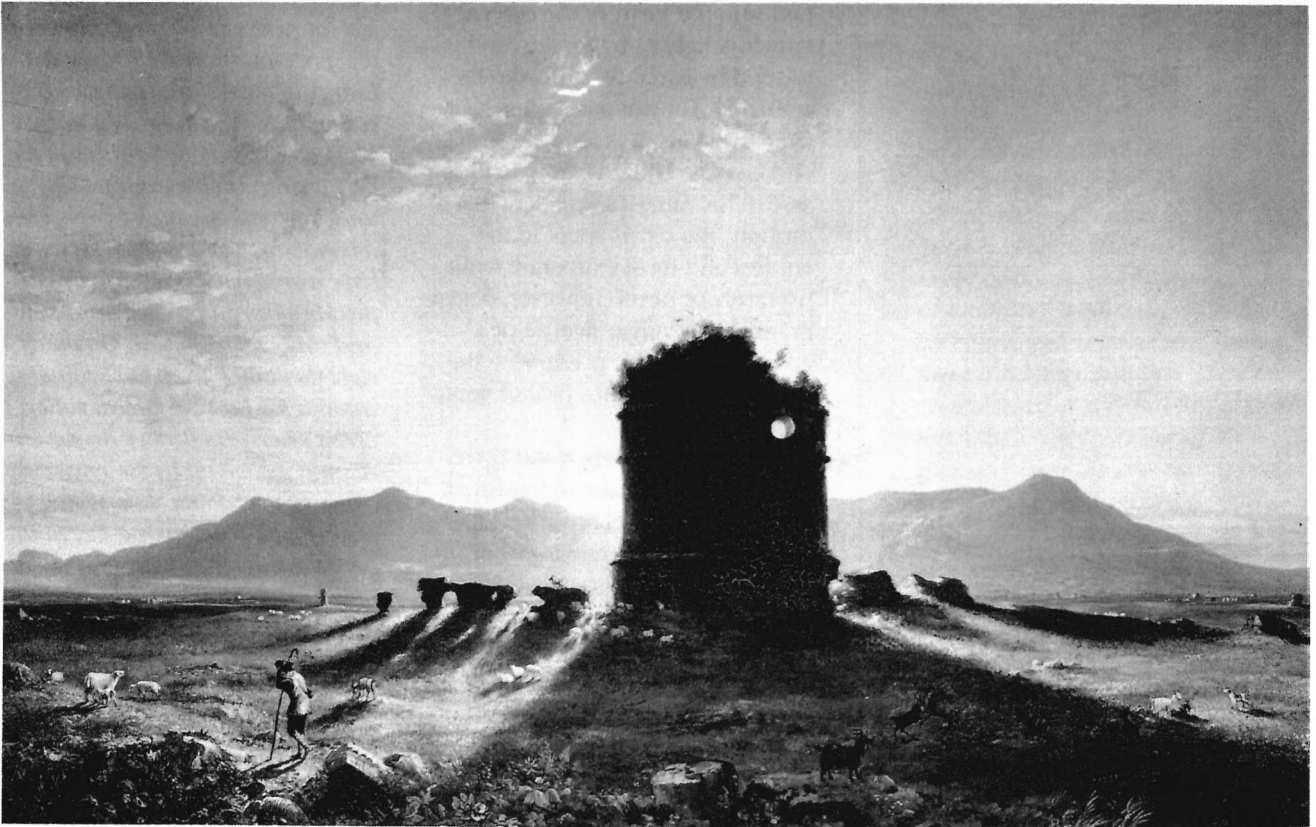
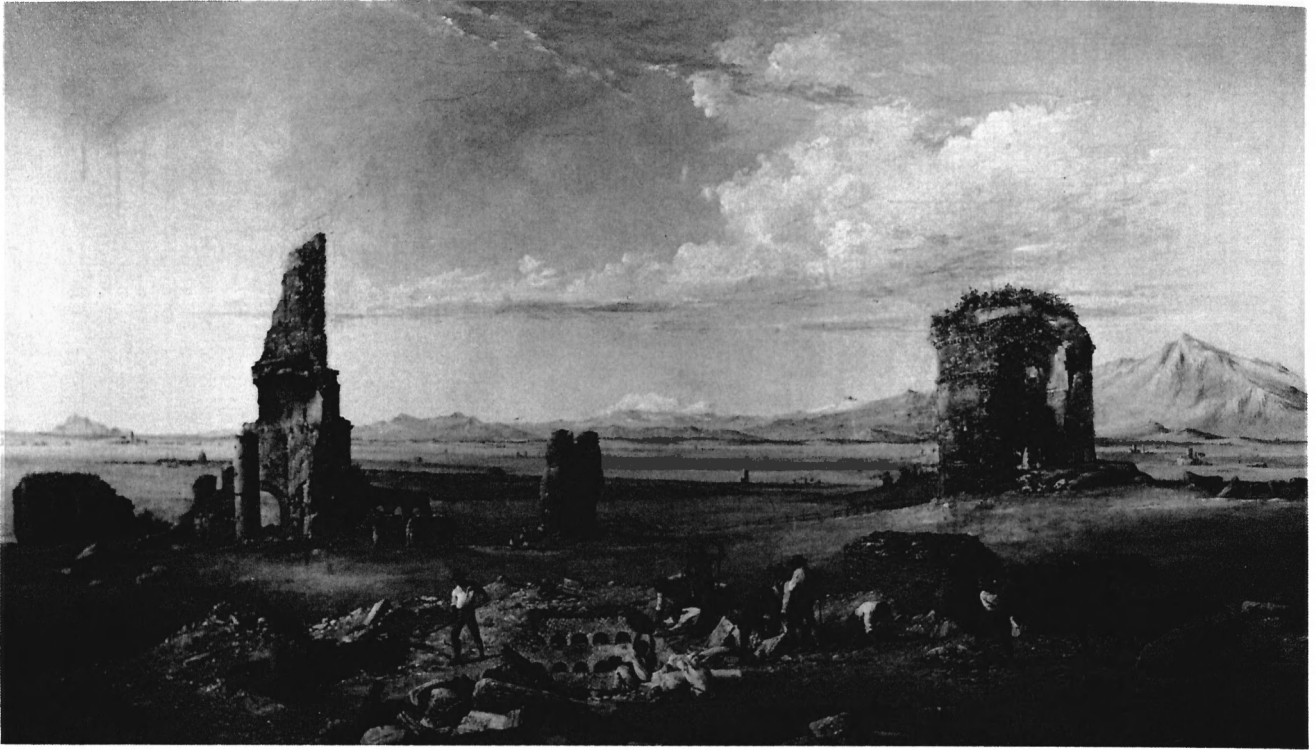
in comic verses the exploits of the school, and prophesies the destinies of its artists for the following year. A Homeric supper prepared and served by our friends on stone tables in the heart of the cavern, which is lighted by torches and festooned by garlands, precedes the return."²² The annual outing, however frivolous, was also decorous, and George Hillard was able to reassure his American readers that although "the day is spent in the wildest and most exuberant frolic, [it] rarely or never, however, degenerate[s] into vulgar license or coarse excess, but preserve[s] the flavor of wit and the spice of genuine enthusiasm."²³

The May Day rites at the Torre dei Schiavi provided an important occasion for artists of various nationalities to celebrate together on common ground. Equally important, the festivities introduced many in the Roman community for the first time to the Gordian ruins and their beautiful views across the Campagna. It was, after all, the scenic splendor of this rise in the countryside that had lured the emperors in the first place, and that beauty remained undiminished after fifteen hundred years. Hillard

recommended the site to his readers, for

though these ruins are not much in themselves, they are so happily placed that they form a favorite subject for artists. [T]he chief charm of the spot consists in the unrivalled beauty of the distant view which it commands; revealing, as it does, all the characteristic features of the Campagna. On the extreme left, towers the solitary bulk of Soracte, a hermit mountain which seems to have wandered away from its kindred heights, and to live in remote and unsocial seclusion. On the right, dividing it from the Sabine chain is the narrow lateral valley of the Tiber; and further on the horizon is walled up by the imposing range of the Sabine Hills, whose peaks, bold, pointed and irregular, have the true grandeur, and claim affinity with the great central chain of the Appenines.²⁴

With the rise of the landscapist's art in the United States, such natural splendors predictably attracted increasing numbers of American painters to the Torre dei Schiavi from the 1840s onward. Almost unfailingly these artists included in their views not only the distant





11 *Edward Lear, The Tor di Schiavi on the Via Labicana, 1842. Oil on canvas, 9 1/4 × 17 1/2 in. Present whereabouts unknown*

Campagna prospect but also the ruined circular mausoleum, a powerfully evocative object within the Campagna's expanse.

The excavations at the Torre figured in several views of the site. In an expansive canvas attributed to John Gadsby Chapman, workers busily retrieve fragments of statuary, urns, and even a human skull from the columbaria (fig. 9). Such recoveries from "the glory that was Rome" inevitably fired the imaginations of visitors from the New World and made a special magnet of the Torre and the entire Campagna. Chapman, a longtime resident of Rome, was so taken with the archaeological activity at the Torre dei Schiavi that he visited the site frequently and his enthusiasm inspired his son, John Linton Chapman, to paint the ruin as well.

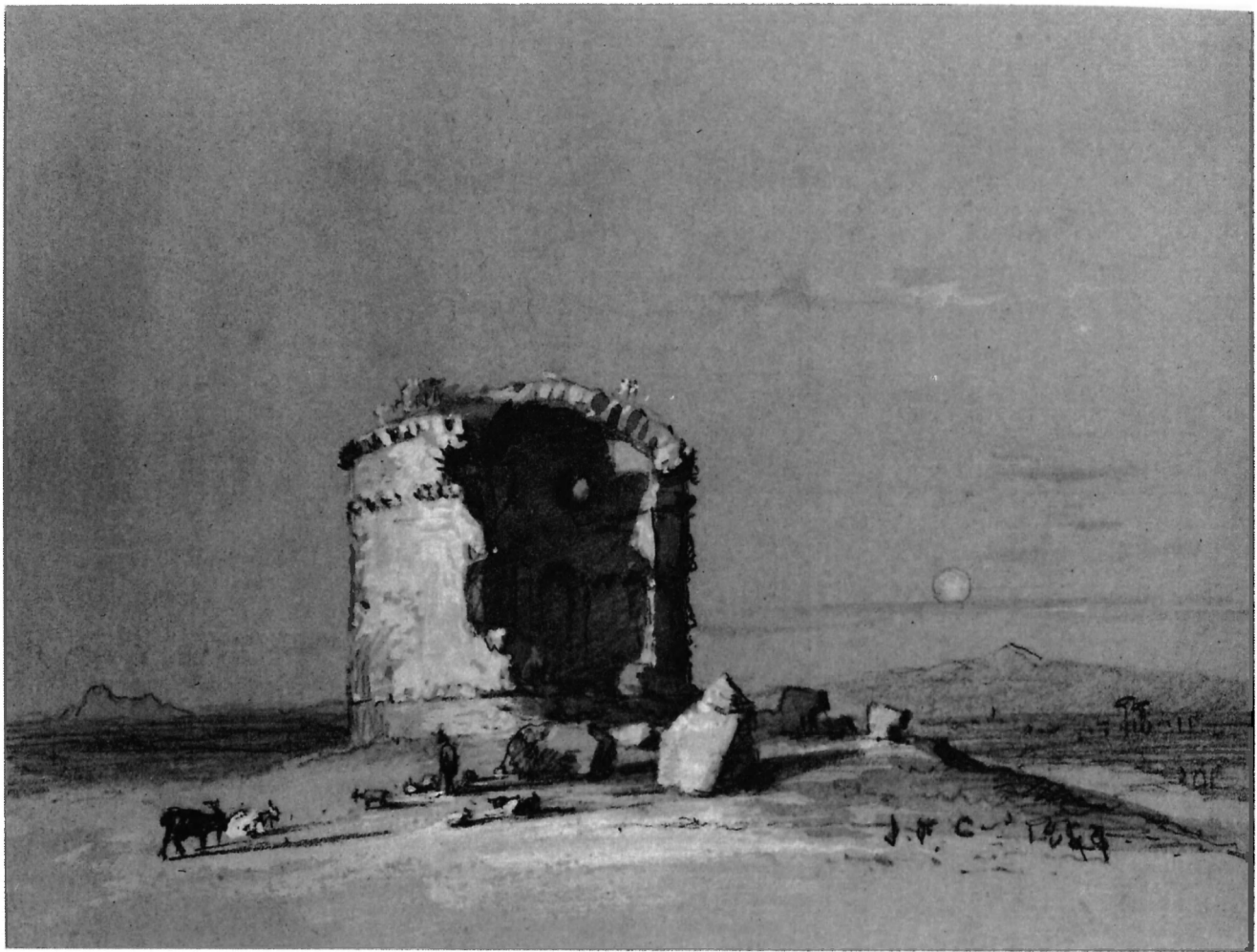
In 1842 Thomas Cole discovered the Torre. His depiction of it (fig. 10) shows a less busy, more contemplative scene than Chapman's. Cole's view of the mausoleum from its unfractured "back" side is unusual, presenting a less

ruinous structure. The fabled golden sun of central Italy rises behind the tower and over the Sabine Hills, accentuating the unbroken oculus and suffusing the landscape with its glow. In both point of view and mood, Cole differs strikingly from the Chapmans and from Edward Lear, who also painted the Torre in the same year (fig. 11). The urbane Englishman depicted the more familiar broken facade, past which peasants amble toward the city in the distance, suggesting the monument's placement in community and in a historical continuum, linking the ancient past to the colorful present. Despite the crowds of peasants, archaeologists, and painters that often attended the site, Cole populates his view with but a lone goatherd, seemingly lost in timeless contemplation of the romantic scene.

Cole's lonely herdsman became a favorite motif for a number of Torre painters at mid century. He reappeared in 1849 in two drawings by Jasper Francis Cropsey (fig. 12), perhaps studies for an unlo-

9 (opposite) *Attributed to John Gadsby Chapman, Excavations in the Campagna, 1837. Oil on canvas, 30 5/8 × 55 5/8 in. Paul Moro, Inc., New York*

10 (opposite) *Thomas Cole, Torre dei Schiavi, Campagna di Roma, 1842. Oil on wood, 14 3/4 × 24 in. Private Collection*



12 Jasper Francis Cropsey, Torre dei Schiavi: The Roman Campagna, 1849. Pencil, brown wash and Chinese white on brown paper, 4 1/8 × 5 11/16 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Charles and Anita Blatt Fund

13 (opposite) Sanford Robinson Gifford, Torre di Schiavi, Campagna di Roma, ca. 1864. Oil on canvas, 8 1/2 × 15 3/4 in. Henry Melville Fuller

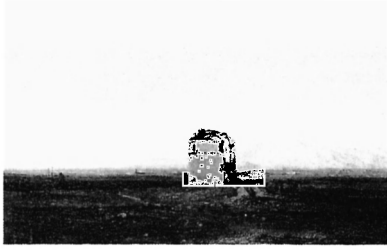
14 (opposite) George Yewell, Torre dei Schiavi, 1860s. Oil on board, 5 1/2 × 8 3/4 in. University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City, Gift of Oscar Coast

cated painting of the scene that the artist exhibited in Buffalo in 1861,²⁵ as well as in views by Sanford Gifford (fig. 13), Thomas Hotchkiss, George Yewell (fig. 14), and David Maitland Armstrong. The herdsman's thatched hut is neighbor to the monument in John Rollin Tilton's version of the Torre (fig. 15). During the middle decades of the century, many other Americans painted at the ruins, among them John F. Kensett, Christopher Cranch, William S. Haseltine, Elihu Vedder, Eugene Benson, Conrad Wise Chapman, and Thomas Hicks.

The frequent appearance of these views at mid century indicates the monument's sudden popularity among American artists and their audiences—surprising in

light of its relative neglect over most of the preceding millennium. One reviewer, for instance, singled out Tilton's painting of the ruins for special praise: "Among the smaller pictures in oil . . . we are inclined to value most the Torre dei Schiavi, on the Campagna, which is distinctly drawn, and has infused into it an impressive sense of solemnity and lonely memories."²⁶ The Torre painters often admired each other's efforts. For instance, his friends particularly valued Vedder's small landscape compositions for their "realism taken directly from nature and studied profoundly, [such as] . . . the Roman Campagna with Tor de Schiavi [*sic*]." And Vedder reciprocated the praise, inscribing his painting of the scene (fig. 16) with the leg-





15 John Rollin Tilton, Torre di Schiavi, n.d. Oil on canvas, 11 × 23 in. Present whereabouts unknown



16 Elibu Vedder, Ruins, Torre di Schiavi, ca. 1868. Oil on panel, 15 1/2 × 5 1/4 in. Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, N.Y., Gift of Robert Palmiter

end: “A good subject—Hotchkiss used to go out there frequently . . . [and] made some good things at the Torre dei Schiavi.”²⁷ That a number of painters repeated the scene of “solemnity and lonely memories” implies a special meaning for the subject, as well as a ready market for the Torre views.

Hotchkiss’s two canvases, painted in 1864 and 1865 (fig. 17), are among the most ambitious and accomplished of the group. In each he opted for a horizontal format, well suited to the expansive sweep of the Campagna landscape and used by nearly all the artists. (The broad vista compelled Haseltine, unique among his colleagues, to paint the view from, rather than of, the mausoleum, looking westward toward Rome and St. Peter’s distant dome [fig. 18].) Hotchkiss’s frequent visits and familiarity with the site yielded the most faithful recordings of archaeological detail. He carefully drew the interior niches, the curious notched bands on the building’s exterior, the fragments of ornately carved architraves and capitals, and the boy-and-dolphin motif of the mosaic pavement, which was also described by Nibby. (His eye for historical detail brought Hotchkiss financial as well as aesthetic rewards, for as Vedder recorded, “’twas here he found a niche in this Columbarium which had not been discovered a beautiful glass vase and sold it for a good sum of money which came in well in those days.”²⁸) A human skull and bones near the columbaria at the lower left serve as the work’s *memento mori*; in the second canvas this mood is completed by a herdsman, lost in reverie on this scene of ruined Roman glory.

Vedder’s view of the ruins (see fig. 16) differed markedly from all others. In lieu of the usual horizontal format, Vedder’s small oil is emphatically tall and narrow. Like

other Campagna sketches he painted during the 1860s, his view employs the eccentric format of the Macchiaioli artists with whom he was in close association. The painting, which Vedder left unfinished, is more spontaneous, more sketchlike, than most of the American productions. The elongated canvas eliminates most of the rolling landscape and distant hills and focuses closely upon the verdant ground and the broken mausoleum, whose brickwork is warmed by the sun’s slanting rays. The circular building occupies exclusive attention in the upper half of the composition and is set off below by a corner of newly excavated columbarium and broken pottery. These two focal points—the fractured building echoed in the pot shards—are visually and psychologically locked in perfect balance. Absent the herdsman in reverie, without the distant Campagna prospects bathed in warm Italian light, even lacking the archaeological detail that gave resonance to other interpretations, Vedder’s small Torre view nevertheless provides one of the most telling and poignant evocations of past Roman glory.

So popular was the Torre dei Schiavi that figure painters as well as landscapists turned to the monument. In 1867–68 Conrad Wise Chapman painted a suite of *The Four Seasons*, a traditional allegorical subject that the American treated in the colorful costume of Italian peasants much favored by foreign artists in Italy. These models, bedecked in their regional finery, were the subject of many figure studies, their ubiquity suggesting that for foreigners the peasant had come to symbolize the historic land. In Chapman’s depiction of the harvest season, a gleaner in traditional peasant dress of the central region stands before the Torre dei Schiavi (fig. 19). The symbolic authority of the peasant figure is



17 Thomas Hotchkiss, *Torre di Schiavi*, 1865. Oil on canvas, 22 3/8 × 34 3/4 in. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Museum Purchase

augmented by its pairing with the Torre, which had become an equally potent symbol of Italy for Chapman and his compatriots.

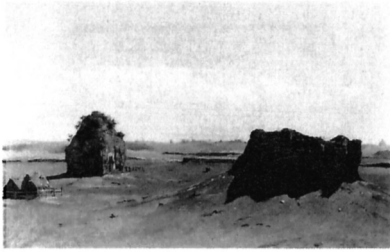
In the same year, Thomas Hicks composed his *Italian Mother and Child* (fig. 20). The association of allusive figures with Roman ruins had by then become a commonplace in many artists' works. Daniel Huntington's *Italy* (fig. 21), for instance, posed the symbol of nationhood between a Tuscan bell tower, which evoked the Catholic piety of modern Italians, and ancient ruins which harkened back to the glory that was Rome. Beyond the parapet in Hicks's painting, the remains of the Torre dei Schiavi are clearly evident—suggesting that the woman is no ordinary Italian mother but, indeed, Mother Italy.

More than their scenic character is required to explain the phenomenal popularity of these particular ruins at mid century. If the Torre dei Schiavi could appropri-

ately accompany *Mater Italia*, if it could embody the fabled grandeur of legendary Rome, might it not have played other roles and prompted other reveries as well?

Despite Bruno Schrader's warning that the Torre dei Schiavi designation had nothing to do with slavery, most commentators persisted in the notion that the monument was somehow—in a way never clearly specified—linked with such Roman practices and to slave insurrections during the late Empire. The discovery of several columbaria adjacent to the Torre, purportedly containing inscriptions of "liberti," further fueled that romantic association.²⁹

Such associations would, of course, have been highly topical in the mid nineteenth century when American artists' pilgrimages to Rome and the Campagna were at their peak. This tourism coincided with the cresting of abolitionist sentiment in the United States and Brit-



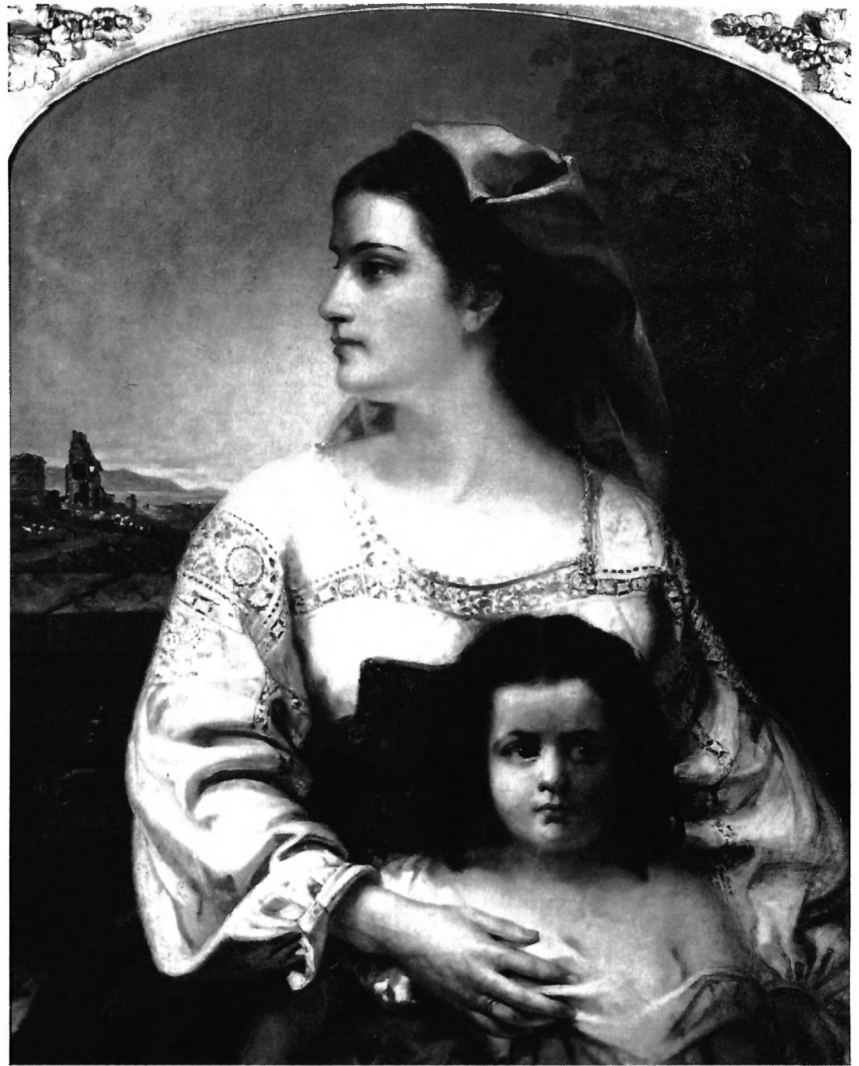
18 William Stanley Haseltine, *Torre degli Schiavi, Campagna Romana, 1856*. Oil on canvas, 13 3/4 × 19 1/2 in. North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, Gift of Helen Haseltine in memory of W. R. Valentiner



19 Conrad Wise Chapman, *The Four Seasons (Harvest), 1867–68*. Oil on canvas, 18 × 24 1/4 in. Present whereabouts unknown

20 Thomas Hicks, *Italian Mother and Child, 1868*. Oil on canvas, 36 3/4 × 29 1/2 in. North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, Gift of John W. Bailey

21 (opposite) Daniel Huntington, *Italy, 1843*. Oil on canvas, 38 5/8 × 29 1/8 in. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Museum Purchase



ain and with America's seemingly inevitable slide toward civil war. It seems scarcely accidental that the "Tower of Slaves" enjoyed such favor among American painters and that depictions of the once obscure ruin became most frequent in the troubled decade of the 1860s.

Although Americans in Italy were safely removed from the calamities of the Civil War at home, they were scarcely unaware or unaffected by the tragic events, and many of the artists believed strongly in the Union cause. Their liberal sympathies had extended to European struggles as well—including the Greeks' war of independence, the revolutionaries of

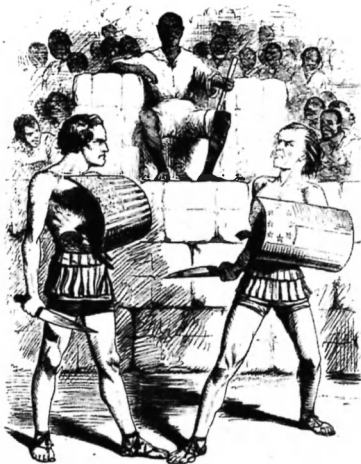
1848, and those involved in the movement for Italian unification. In that matrix of political and social issues, the huge popularity of an image such as Hiram Powers's *Greek Slave* becomes understandable, adding another dimension to its aesthetic appeal. In 1848 in Florence, where the expatriate Powers had carved his slave, he conceived the allegorical figure of *America* (fig. 22), a heroic symbol of Liberty and a prototype for Bartholdi's famous statue in New York Harbor.

Journalists on occasion resorted to ancient precedent to describe the bloody struggle between the Union forces and the Confederacy. In 1861, for instance, the American





22 Hiram Powers, *America*, 1848–50. Plaster, 89 3/16 × 35 3/16 × 16 7/8 in. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Museum purchase in memory of Ralph Cross Johnson



"CAESAR IMPERATOR!"
THE AMERICAN GLADIATORS.

23 "Caesar Imperator!" or, *The American Gladiators*, 1861. Engraving in *Punch*, or the London Charivari, 18 May 1861, p. 203

war was depicted by *Punch* cartoonists in Roman terms, as "*Caesar Imperator!*" or, *The American Gladiators* (fig. 23), reflecting the conjunction of two of the period's major preoccupations, previously distinct—Italomania and national preservation.

Given this predilection for allegory and historicism in Europe and America, the sudden popularity of the "Tower of Slaves" owes as

much to metaphor as to monument. American painters and patrons, untroubled by the lack of corroborating facts, readily tied the Torre dei Schiavi to legendary slave battles of an earlier empire. For them the monument on the Campagna became an architectural surrogate for Liberty, symbolic of their optimistic faith in the American cause.

Notes

- 1 John Galt, *The Life, Studies, and Works of Benjamin West* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1820), p. 84.
- 2 Quoted in Otto Wittmann, "The Italian Experience (American Artists in Italy 1830–1875)," *American Quarterly*, Spring 1952, p. 5.
- 3 Quoted in Otto Wittmann, "The Attraction of Italy for American Painters," *Antiques* 85, no. 5 (May 1964): 553.
- 4 Worthington Whittredge, "Autobiography," *Brooklyn Museum Journal*, 1942, p. 350.
- 5 Quoted in Wittmann, "The Italian Experience," p. 12.
- 6 Peale, *Notes on Italy* (Philadelphia: 1831), p. 105; Vedder quoted in Margaret R. Scherer, *Marvels of Ancient Rome* (New York: Phaidon, 1955), fig. 154; "romance of ruins" quotation from Etienne-Jean Delecluze, *Two Lovers in Rome, Being Extracts from the Journal and Letters of Etienne-Jean Delecluze*, ed. Louis Desternes and trans. Gerard Hopkins (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1958), p. 92.
- 7 Quoted in Wendy M. Watson, *Images of Italy: Photography in the Nineteenth Century* (South Hadley, Mass.: Mount Holyoke College Museum of Art, 1980), p. 48.
- 8 Abbé Dupaty, *Travels through Italy... in the Year 1785* (London, 1788), p. 153.
- 9 Taine, *Italy: Florence and Venice*, trans. J. Durand (New York: Ley, Oldt & Holt, 1869), pp. 1–2; 1820 quote in Charlotte A. Eaton, *Rome in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1 (1820; reprint London: Henry G. Bohn, 1860), p. 13.
- 10 "Fearsome loneliness" in *ibid.*, p. 64; Story, *Roba di Roma* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1875), p. 311.
- 11 Taylor, *Views Afoot* (New York: Putnam, 1859), p. 405; Dickens, *Pictures from Italy, and American Notes* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1862), p. 143; quotation by American tourist in Henry P. Leland, *Americans in Rome* (New York: Charles T. Evans, 1863), p. 198.
- 12 Brooks, *The Dream of Arcadia: American Writers and Artists in Italy, 1760–1915* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958), p. 90.
- 13 George Stillman Hillard, *Six Months in Italy* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1856), p. 315.
- 14 Quoted in Robert Burn, *Rome and the Campagna: An Historical and Topographical Description* (Cambridge and London: 1871), p. 418.
- 15 Nibby, *Analisi Storico—Topografico—Antiquaria della Carta de Dintorno di Roma*, vol. 3 (Rome, 1857), p. 711; Hare, *Walks in Rome* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1923), p. 427.
- 16 The identification of San Andrea was first proposed by Nibby, p. 712. See also Bruno Schrader, *Die Romische Campagna* (Leipzig: E. A. Seeman, 1910), p. 62.
- 17 Baedeker, *Italy: Handbook for Travelers. Part 2: Central Italy and Rome* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1867), p. 312.
- 18 Schrader, p. 62.

- 19 Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Le antichità romane* (Rome: Stamperia di Angelo Rotilja, 1756), e.g., vol. 2, plates 29, 59, 60.
- 20 Wey, *Rome* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1875), p. 269.
- 21 Crane, *An Artist's Reminiscences* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), p. 137.
- 22 Wey, p. 269.
- 23 Hillard, p. 316.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 315.
- 25 The Cropsey painting and a number of other works referred to here are included in the *National Museum of American Art's Index to American Art Exhibition Catalogues from the Beginning through the 1876 Centennial Year*, compiled by the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American Art (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986).
- 26 "Mr. Tilton's Pictures," *Atlantic Monthly* 47, no. 280 (February 1881): 291.
- 27 Quotation on realism from American Academy of Arts and Letters, *Exhibition of the Works of Elibu Vedder* (New York, 1937), p. 20; Vedder quoted in Gwendolyn Owens and John Peters-Campbell, *Golden Day, Silver Night: Perceptions of Nature in American Art, 1850–1910* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, 1983), p. 102.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 For Schrader's warning, see n. 16; late editions of Murray's *Handbook* refer to such a discovery in the spring of 1874; others were possibly found earlier. Neither the accuracy nor the significance of the inscriptions can be determined. See *A Handbook of Rome and the Campagna* (London: John Murray, 1899), p. 398.