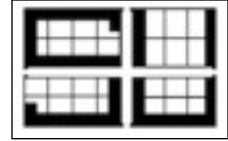


ROMA ROSSINIANA



INTRODUCTION

...mi risolvetti di mettermi ad incidere e battere la strada segnata dall'immortale Piranesi. [...] I resolved to engrave and produce prints following in the steps of the immortal Piranesi]

-from Luigi Rossini's brief autobiography of 1830

G.B. Piranesi's famous views of Rome dominated print sales in that city in the late 18th century. However this ceased in 1799 when Francesco Piranesi (G.B.'s son) moved to Paris with the whole collection of the Piranesi copper plates, from which he produced prints which he sold there. In 1839 the Piranesi plates returned to Rome when they were bought by order of pope Gregory XVI, and placed in the Calcografia Camerale. Thus between 1799 and 1839, Piranesi prints were not available in the city unless they were imported from Paris.

Luigi Rossini's print activity covers a large part of the 40-year period of absence of Piranesi prints in Rome. He was by no means the only artist producing Roman views during that period: Ruga, Franzetti, Amici are a few of the others. But he was the only one turning out prints comparable in size and appearance with the Piranesi views that people on the Grand Tour liked to acquire. In 1817 he published the *Frontespizio dell'antichità di Roma divise in 40 vedute disegnate dal vero dall'architetto Luigi Rossini*. Even the title of that publication pays homage to Piranesi's 4-volume work *Le Antichità Romane*.

Rossini's debt to Piranesi was clearly understood by his contemporaries. In his biography of Bartolomeo Pinelli, who was Rossini's collaborator, C. Falconieri refers to the "vedute pittoresche e architettoniche del Rossini, buon seguace [follower] dell'eccellente Piranesi." The same author refers in that quote to the "molte figure di Bartolomeo Pinelli" appearing in the Rossini prints. This collaboration lasted until Pinelli's death in 1835. Another contemporary was the famous Neoclassic sculptor Antonio Canova who wrote about the prints in Rossini's second major work, *Le Antichità di Roma*, (published in 1823), "disegnati ed incisi in grandi tavole sul stile dell'illustre Piranesi" [drawn and engraved on large sheets in the style of the illustrious Piranesi].

The *Frontespizio* was the first of eleven publications by Rossini, all but two of which dealt with Rome and its vicinity. His subsequent work covered not only the city's antiquities, but also the contemporary streets, piazze and buildings. In this sense he was following the example of Giuseppe Vasi's 10-volume *Magnifenze di Roma Antica e Moderna* in which that prolific printmaker provided a capillary coverage of the city, which the contemporary Piranesi never achieved. Rossini's early 19th century views of the city perfectly complement Vasi's mid-18th century views, and are an essential element in the sequence of urban views following in the tradition of Giovanni Battista Falda.

Rossini's interest in Roman archaeology is readily apparent in his *I sette Colli di Roma antica e moderna* (published in 1829). In the preface to this work he specifically acknowledges Piranesi's leadership in the field: "...di somma lode saranno sempre le fatiche del Piranesi..." [...high praise will always be due to the efforts of Piranesi...]. Like Piranesi in his *Ichnographiam Campi Martii Antiquae Urbis* and *Il Campo Marzio dell'antica Roma*, Rossini tries to reconstruct Rome's antiquities, devoting an outsize print (81 x 56 cm) to the seven hills either singly or in groups. On each of these sheets he depicts reconstructed plans, elevations and sections, as well as some three-dimensional views of the sites.

The items depicted on each sheet are strangely mixed. One sheet is devoted to *I Fori Antichi di Roma Restaurati* with reconstructions of the Imperial Forums as well as what he refers to as the Foro di Pompeo (the porticoed courtyard of the Theater of Pompey). The Roman Forum, on the other hand, is drawn in plan on the sheet entitled *Restauro del Palazzo dei Cesari e del Foro Romano*, but the cross-section of the Palatine hill, which is where the Imperial palaces ("dei Cesari") are located, appears on a different sheet, already mentioned (*I Fori Antichi di Roma Restaurati*). This lack of order suggests that the work evolved over a fairly extended period of time, during which Rossini recorded ancient sites as he worked on them. In fact some of the sheets are labeled with dates as early as 1826, three years before the eventual publication date.

The odd assortment of subjects continues on the sheet entitled *Restauro del Monte Celio e dei Septi Giulii*. The Septi Giulii are nowhere near the Coelian hill, but even more peculiar is the inclusion of the Theater of Marcellus and the Acqua Giulia on the same sheet. A sheet labeled *I principali Monumenti di Roma Restaurati* appears to contain the leftover monuments not covered in the other sheets. These include an assortment of temples as well as the Castro Pretorio and the Isola Tiberina. Another catchall sheet is entitled *Restauro del Monte Esquilino e Viminale e stato attuale del Monte Vaticano e Me. Pincio*.

Rossini's *Pianta di Roma Antica* dated 1829, is the summary of antiquities found on these archaeological sheets. Mentioned in the preface: "Nella pianta generale si conoscerà lo stato attuale di essi colli..." [the general map will reveal the present state of these hills...], the plan also includes a few "modern" (actually Renaissance) streets: Via moderna di Ripetta, Via moderna del Babuino, Via moderna di S. Croce in Gerusalemme o Via Felice. In a corner of the sheet is a small "Pianta di Roma Moderna" which is clearly derived from the 1748 map of Giambattista Nolli. The only variation from the Nolli plan are some updates (eg.: the ovalised Piazza del Popolo), though the city plan had not changed appreciably in the intervening eight decades.

Despite the considerable effort that Rossini must have put into generating his reconstructions of the ancient city, these sheets do not seem to have appealed to his public. In fact they are rarely to be found on the market today. Of far greater interest were his three dimensional views of the city, depicting not only the antiquities, but also contemporary buildings, piazze and streets. These views constitute the bulk of Rossini's work available today, and make up the greater part of the exhibit at the Studium Urbis.