

RESTAURO OF ANCIENT ARCHITECTURE AND THEORY FOR THE INSTAURATION OF A NEW ONE:
THE PROJECT OF THE ACCADEMIA DELLA VIRTÙ, ITS AIMS AND RESULTS

The Roman *Accademia della Virtù* (sometimes shortly – and erroneously – called *Accademia Vitruviana*) was a circle of churchmen, antiquarians, architects, doctors and others with a strong interest in Latin and Italian philology. The foundation of the *Accademia* took place sometime around or before 1537. Though it did not exist as a firmly established institutional academy – as they could be found in Italy at least in the second half of the 16th century –, many of the most prominent members of this circle have been living in Rome or standing in close contact up to around 1555, when one of its founders, cardinal Marcello Cervini, died as pope Marcellus II after a short papacy of only three weeks.

In 1547 the Siennese humanist, philologist and churchman Claudio Tolomei published a letter he wrote to count Agostino de' Landi in 1542 in which he describes a very ambitious program to undertake a wide range of philological as well as archaeological researches and publish the results: in 23 volumes and in less than three years! Unfortunately, historical sources like this rather famous letter, are seldom read carefully: Therefore, it is usually reduced to a program of just 20 volumes regarding the *Ten Books on Architecture* by Vitruvius – and this led some modern historians to call the circle *Accademia Vitruviana* and to think of the circle in question as of one dealing only with philological studies. But that would not even be half of the truth. In addition, this misinterpretation also led to a somewhat wilful ignorance of the rest of the program and its purpose – even though this purpose is clearly stated in the beginning:

How much desirable, how useful and honored Architecture is, has already been largely demonstrated other times with beautiful and true reasons. Its study is worth to be favored by the grand Princes, because in the end they are those who put into work (being) the wonders that stem from this art – this is true in the different parts of the world, but above all [it was] in Rome, as the remains [*reliquie*] of so many superb buildings make us believe. And inflamed by these, several pilgrim spirits are disposed to wake up anew this noble studies, and according to their forces, to bring it back from the darkness, in which it resides, and lead it to a much brighter light, hoping to open up the road for many others to add even more clarity and splendour. And because quasi all of the arts, and especially the Architecture, are composed of theory and praxis / practice, it is inevitable – to achieve some excellence – not only to speculate [about something] but also to put [it] into practice. But because they [i. e. the spirits] cannot fabricate [something] now, they turned their studies at the contemplation of the ancient things that have [already] been fabricated, to unite the instructions of the writers with the examples and evidence that [can be] drawn / deduced from the works, endeavoring even more [if] one can turn the eyes to one side and the other.

This program is usually thought to have been that of the *Accademia*. But based on my ongoing research I would now doubt – at least: slightly – that the group Tolomei mentions can be really identified with the *Accademia della Virtù*. But for the time being we may still use this name for the circle and its project, because it can be said at least, that members of the original *Accademia* also have been members of this presumably larger circle.

In his letter, Tolomei gives short, but astonishingly precise explanations why every point of this program – which may be regarded as the program of a scientific Classical Archaeology of Rome *avant la lettre* – has to be part of it. In my opinion, this reasoning could be accepted even nowadays – if someone would like to reinvent Classical Roman Archaeology (at all).

But – as the just cited passage may hint to – it is obvious that Tolomei's program was not intended to invent Classical Archaeology just for the case of it or to study Vitruvius and the remains of ancient Roman

architecture and almost all other kinds of artifacts just because of interest, but to serve a very practical purpose: To create some sort of handbook about how to build – a guideline for a new architecture: It would have to be based on the best surviving theoretical source, i.e. Vitruvius, and not only the best but all examples of ancient architecture. And to understand the architecture and its meaning as good as possible, all the other sources would have to be documented and interpreted as well: tombstones and inscriptions, coins and medals and any kind of decoration etc.

So, in my opinion, this program could serve as a very excellent example (if not: the best) of Renaissance endeavors for *restauro* – i.e. that of ancient architecture (at least: on paper) and its theory – and *instauro* – i.e. that of the best modern architecture one could have based on this theoretical and practical knowledge.

But, we may and should ask then: Did anything ever come out of this enormous and ambitious program? The typical and common answer by modern scholarship to this question is: No . . . or: almost nothing.

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The only surviving book that is regularly seen as being the result of the *Accademia's* work are Guillaume Philandrier's *In decem Libros M. Vitruvii Pollionis de Architectura Annotationes* from 1544. And it surely is no coincidence that Tolomei's list starts with a book like this – in fact, I guess, that he changed his list between 1542 and 1547 to place it here, because it represents some irregularity in the logical argumentation of the letter.

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These *Annotationes* – that I like to describe as ‘comments on dark passages in Vitruvius explained with even darker passages by other authors’ – have been republished a few times and are still today invaluable as source for ancient textual parallels as well as for our understanding on how philologists and architects of the Renaissance understood Vitruvius. One deficit of the *Annotationes* obviously is the lack of the full original Vitruvian text. So it is no wonder that they were republished in 1550 together with the *Ten Books*. But a closer look on the title page of this edition could convince us that this publication even is something more than just a compilation of both texts. In fact, the subtitle states that the original Vitruvian text would have been edited by comparing and emendating all editions and old *exemplis* – which, in my opinion, can only mean that all available manuscripts were also consulted. And these are the characteristics Tolomei mentions for the second volume in his list. As far as I know, no one has ever tried to identify the sources that Philandrier (and / or his publisher) here claims to have used . . .

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So, we may add this volume to Tolomei's list and even expect that some sort of vocabulary also existed in preparation of these two books.

„And that's all, folks . . . or isn't?“ — Well: No.

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What disturbs the reader (or should disturb at least modern readers) is Tolomei's claim at the end of the letter, that the entire project could be accomplished – and by speaking thoroughly about books (*libri*) that will be printed, he clearly means: published – in less than three years. Again, this claim has only caused disapproval by modern scholarship, even though Tolomei himself says that the program could and would be realised by many learned men and practitioners – most of all: architects – by dividing the workload among them according to their specialization:

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Maybe to someone it may appear that this would be a too big and far too troublesome undertaking, and that it would include too many things which may never be possible to be brought to an end: besides that there are some obscure things that may never be illustrated in any way. But if he knew how non only one but many good spirits have turned towards this noble undertaking, and how to everyone of them his particular work was assigned, one will not wonder more, I believe, than one wonders to see one hundred or more crafts working at the same time in a big city. Be it divided, as every heavy weight becomes light[ly] if it is divided

in many parts. And dividing this work among many learned men, there is no doubt that in less than three years all will be brought to an end.

If we do not simply insinuate that Tolomei here shamelessly lied to his addressee or that he by far overestimated the possibilities and energies of the learned men he mentioned – as modern research has done – but if we instead take Tolomei's word and especially keep in mind that he never speaks of an incredible large amount of *research* to be done but of *books to be published* – we may conclude, that at least part of the work already had been done or was underway. And this may and should be reason enough for us to look for any traces of this project in published and – maybe even more: – unpublished sources from the Renaissance.

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The first yet (more or less) unpublished corpus of sources that has been attributed in 1986 to the *Accademia's* project is the so-called Codex Coburgensis at the Castle (*Veste*) Coburg in Germany and it's accompanying parallel source, the Codex Pighianus at the Staatsbibliothek Berlin – named after its owner Stephanus Pighius who is thought to have commissioned the very precise drawings mostly of ancient tombstones and sarcophagi. These drawings are ordered so accurately according to the historical sequence of ancient *theogonies* and related myths, that the authors of the first exhibition in 1986, the art historian Richard Harprath and the archaeologist Henning Wrede called them „the first systematic archaeological book(s)“.

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Because Stephanus Pighius was secretary to Marcello Cervini and – after Cervini's death – of cardinal Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle: both supporters of the *Accademia's* work – and therefore we may add these codices to Tolomei's list. After the death of Richard Harprath, Henning Wrede is now working on a complete scientific catalogue of the Codex Coburgensis, while his former student, Kathrin Schade hopefully will find the time to go on with her cataloguing work on the Codex Pighianus.

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But Pighius is also mentioned in another large set of sources regarding Roman Antiquity: the collections of ancient inscriptions compiled in Rome between 1545 and 1550 by the French secretary of the Spanish Bishop Antonio Agustín and since 1550 in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana – whose cardinal librarian since 1548 was Marcello Cervini.

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Both groups – the codices as well as the inscriptions – show some remarkable common characteristics: Most prominent is the careful separation between the documentation of the ancient remains with all damages and – in the case of the inscriptions – the graphically different conjectures about the missing parts. It is even possible, I think, that many of the inscriptions in the Codices Coburgensis and Pighianus were written by the same hand or hands.

Jean Matal also always notes who described the inscription, who proofread it and what other modern sources for it existed in case he could not check the original one himself. Beside(s) many others like Guillaume Budé, Pirro Ligorio or Martin de Smet, we find among his collaborators also Guillaume Philandrier.

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While the Codices Coburgensis and Pighianus constitute the largest – and by far: most accurate – Renaissance source of ancient reliefs (many of them lost today) –, the Matal codices in the Vaticana have been the starting point and most important single group of sources for the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. But unfortunately, as far as I know, they only have been used by the CIL researchers as sources for ancient inscriptions and never studied with due diligence as sources for the Renaissance study of antiquity themselves. This is a work that still has to be done and be it only for the purpose to reconstruct the network of persons involved in their formation.

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Because Matal's friend and employer, Antonio Agustín has already been mentioned – this name leads us to another important corpus of sources (before I finally will come to the study of ancient architecture): In 1553 Jacopo Strada published his history of the Roman Emperors based on ancient medals and coins.

His main source was the collection of about 1.000 coins owned by Agustín. In fact, this collection and Agostín's contribution to numismatics is so important that the Spanish institute for numismatics until today bears his name. 21

Jacopo Strada from Mantova himself is rather known as a trader of ancient sculpture travelling between Vienna, Bavaria, Venice, Rome and Lyon – and, of course for the famous portrait of him by Tizian. What is less known is that Strada spent almost all of his wealth – and he was a very wealthy man, owning two houses in Vienna, for instance – for a collection of drawings after ancient coins he had made by draftsmen for over more than twenty years. This collection survived and is still unpublished, not even catalogued – which is no wonder because it consists of more than 6.000 large scale drawings and 3.000 pages of commentaries. The German archaeologist Volker Heenes, a student of Henning Wrede, and the Dutch historian Dirk Jansen finally will be able to work on this immense corpus for the next three years at Gotha (in Germany) and Vienna, where the largest part of it are preserved. 22

Finally, I would like to draw your attention back to the study of (ancient) Architecture in Rome executed around 1550 and (in my opinion) related to the *Accademia's* project: This is my own research project that brought me here, after all: 23

It all started with a corpus of drawings named after its last (and first) known owner Codex Destailleur. Since Hippolyte Destailleur, a French architect of the 19th century, built up three very large collections of architectural drawings and prints and sold two of them to Berlin and to St. Petersburg (in Russia), this particular Berlin Codex is named „D“. There are three others in the St. Peterburg *Eremitage*, named A, B and C – but also another one in Berlin named „A“ ... so, it can be a little bit confusing. 24

The Berlin Codex Destailleur D contains 120 sheets with more than 1'000 single drawings, some of them *very* large, two thirds showing ancient buildings while the rest is dedicated to modern buildings from the first half of the sixteenth century. Among them is the most comprehensive surviving representation of the last project by Antonio da Sangallo the Younger for Saint-Peter's in Rome. In fact, the building would have been so large that Saint-Peter's as we see it today would fit completely into it – and the drawings would allow to build the project even today. I don't know of any other building or project documented so precisely before the late 19th century. But that's another story – that of my PhD dissertation.

The drawings of ancient monuments are equally precise – going down to measurements smaller than 1 mm and documenting many parts of the buildings that have never been documented before. And many of them could not have been documented later with the same precision (which, in my opinion was not reached before the end of the 19th century again) because they were destroyed since about 1550 – mostly to acquire building material for the new Rome of the Renaissance and Baroque. So, from both points of view – precision as well as completeness – these drawings are invaluable sources for our knowledge about ancient monuments ... sources that still wait for their exploitation by modern archaeologists and architectural historians, but also should be of interest for historians of science!

You may already guess what is another significant characteristic of these drawings: Like the Codices Coburgensis and Pighianus as well as the inscription collections by Matal, the Berlin drawings show clear distinctions between what was there to be seen and what had to or could be reconstructed. And, if you remember Tolomei's words about the separation of the workload among specialists, you should not be surprised to hear that the drawings contain no reliefs and no inscriptions (only some letters to record their measurement) while every 'architectural' detail in a strict sense is measured with incredible accuracy. 25

One of the very rare cases that a full inscription is recorded is that of the Pantheon – a group of drawings now in the *Goldschmidt* sketchbook in the New York Metropolitan Museum that may have stood at the beginning of the whole project. But here, not the inscription itself is of interest, but the form and size of the letters: The draftsman even shows the slight inclination of the ancient letters – a feature that

was ‘corrected’ during a restauration in the 19th century!

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But the Codex Destailleur D is only the biggest surviving (and therefore, we may say today: central) part of a far larger corpus of drawings now scattered all over the western world. Besides a parallel group at the Albertina in Vienna, other groups or single sheets in other collections could be identified as belonging to the same group of hands and the same circumstances of origin in Rome between ca. 1540 and 1550.

Website

What makes me think that these drawings were made for the *Accademia*? First of all, the draftsmen are almost all of French origin and – as far as I could identify at least one ‘sub-group’ – have *not* been architects but carpenters, stonemasons and other craftsmen. How should they be able to develop such a measuring methodology and be able to execute it over several years in changing constellations?

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But one characteristic that is even more remarkable and first brought me to think about possible ‘masterminds’ behind the whole group of drawings are the annotations, mostly written in French: If you would work very carefully and over a long time on any sort of material – and measuring large ancient monuments takes quite some time! – and then wanted to record some remarkable feature to prevent you from forgetting it: Wouldn’t you do it in your *own* language and not in a foreign one that you don’t even fully master? And if one reads these annotations carefully, they always seem to address someone else and saying more or less explicitly: „This is how I found it and the measurements lacking are not my mistake!“ like in the case of the missing base of the Doric order from the Theatre of Marcellus.

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Another very remarkable feature is the obvious attempt to measure buildings *as they are* and not *as they should be*. Look for instance at this partial ground plan from the Colosseum: It does not reconstruct and oval or an ellipse with geometrical methods and then simply add the measurements, but instead the draftsmen (or their advisor) realised that the building *is not* an oval or ellipse – as it is shown in almost all drawings and prints up to the 20th century. In fact, if it was a geometrically correct oval or ellipse, it would have been impossible to mark the starting points of several lines of view through the building like this drawing shows. So, I’m sure we can attribute this large and mostly unexplored group of anonymous architectural drawings to the preparatory work done for the *Accademia*.

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In addition, there are dozens if not hundreds of single sheets with architectural drawings – many of them by anonymous French draftsmen – that show single architectural elements like basis, capitels, cornices ... and have usually been seen as separated samples, models or prototypes for ‘nice’ parts of ancient architecture. But in contradiction to this supposition about their purpose, there are hardly any examples in the architecture of the Renaissance and Baroque that are clearly based on such ancient examples. In my opinion, it would make much more sense to regard them as parts of the collection in preparation of Tolomei’s volume 17 ...

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But, of course, there may have been a project to measure ancient monuments going on in Rome at the time of the *Accademia* without any personal or methodological relationship to the *Accademia*’s project. So: Is there a ‘missing link’? — Just recently Henning Wrede, working on the Codex Coburgensis asked Volker Heenes if two drawing the latter had written an article about might be from the same draftsman as is codex. Volker asked me about my opinion, and because I had for the first time the chance to see the original codex myself at Coburg, I carefully looked for parallels and could agree with Wrede that the hands are the same. But in doing so I recognised that I had seen the same hand in one of the *very few* examples of sculptural elements in the architectural drawings I am working on. And I am quite sure now, that this draftsman – working in the ‘sculptural’ group that generated the Codex Coburgensis als was – at least for some time – a member of the ‘architectural’ group.

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But there is one more, and I would say: more important though not fully established connection between the architectural drawings and the *Accademia*: In the second edition of his *Vite* Vasari gives a short biography of Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola integrated in the life of Taddeo Zuccari. There Vasari

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states that the *Accademia* (and he mentions some of its members, among them Cervini) ordered Vignola to measure *all the ancient buildings in Rome = tutti gli anticaglie di Roma*. And Vignola later in his *Regola delli cinque ordini di architettura* from about 1562 himself claims that he knew all the best examples of Roman architectural orders from personal studies. The problem here, that the modern research on Vignola never dealt with in particular, is: There are now drawings by Vignola (or copies of such drawings) that would confirm Vasari's and Vignola's remarks.

Of course, they simply could have been lost. But what, if they are still there, well hidden in front of our eyes? If we consider how such measurement could have been made and, in fact, have been made, it is obvious that no one person can do this alone. And we know from some reports since the end of the 15th century, that architects employed groups of younger architects, craftsmen and helpers to measure the ancient monuments – and that they often were not paid for their work but could take copies of the measured drawings 'home'. So, the French drawings mentioned above may have been copied from those made under Vignolas supervision. But many of them are not copies but originals, made directly during the measurings ... In these we find lots of preparatory drawings in chalk or charcoal made by an expert hand differing clearly from the drawings made by the measuring team on top of them – the latter showing far less experienced draftsmen. I think it is possible that the leader of the group made these preparatory drawings and then supervised the execution of the measurements without leaving any other traces that would allow us to ascribe this supervision and these preparatory drawings to someone like Vignola.

And this leads us to three other groups of possible results from the *Accademia's* project: the already mentioned *Regola* by Vignola, published in or shortly before 1562 in Rome; it's almost parallel by Jean Bullant, his *Reigle generale d'architecture* published in Paris in 1564 (where we find the comparison of Vitruvius' rules with existing examples from Roman antiquity as it was mentioned by Tolomei for volume 11 , and, finally, the commented Italian and Latin Vitruvius editions by Daniele Barbaro, illustrated by Andrea Palladio: Barbaro was in contact with Tolomei and a friend of Palladio's promoter and patron Giangiorgio Trissino, who took Palladio to Rome between 1543 and 1546, where Trissino attended the *Accademia* meetings. And these are the only years Palladio stood long enough in Rome to make all the measurements that must have been the basis for his later drawings, prints and books. Though the surviving drawings by Palladio are almost all executed in the studio in the 1560s, some of them bear remarkable parallels to drawings from the Codex Destailleur group. And if we keep in mind that the young stonemason-becoming-architect Palladio was neither in the economic nor in the methodological situation to start his own measuring project or employ others, we may guess that he was – at least for some time – a member of the group working for the *Accademia*. – So, the two most influential books on Architectur (Vignola's and Palladio's) as well as the most learned edition of Vitruvius may – at least in part – have their roots in the *Accademia's* project.

And finally, as a book representing the urban history and development: Bartolomeo Marliano's *Topographia*: While the first edition from 1534 does not contain illustrations, Marliano's edition of 1544 with a slightly changed title, does. And these rather raw plans of ancient Rome in its different states of development are the first that even today are regarded as scientifically correct – as far as it was possible to do something like this in 1544. One interesting aspect of Marliano's new edition is that he explicitly thanks three collaborators who are known to have been members of the *Accademia*.

To sum up: As I hope to have shown there are good reasons to suppose that the publication project passed down to us by Claudio Tolomei was not the hypertrophic, gigantomaniac idea of a humanist overestimating his and his friends abilities by far with a project that even today is not really finished – but that there are good reasons to believe that many of the books Tolomei planned to publish were already prepared or have been printed without explicit but known personal relation to the *Accademia*. But most

of all, there are vast corpora of anonymous and / or unstudied material from the years between 1537 and 1550, created in Rome by a circle of very productive and methodologically working people – many of whom were French – and still worth scientific investigation. If we should be able to further establish their interconnection and coordinated approach, we may be able to reconstruct the first international, interdisciplinary research network whose aim was not to satisfy the curiosity of some learned men but to give a guidance to a systematically re-establish new architecture. Of course, to do so, would require again an international and interdisciplinary network – but I think it would be worth it, and we might, even after centuries, still discover many: *News from ancient Rome*.

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