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A Perfect Ruin: Nineteenth-Century Views of the Colosseum

ANDREW SZEGEDY-MASZAK

> But the gladiators' bloody circus stands,
> A noble wreck in ruinous perfection.
>
> —Byron, *Manfred* III.4

WHEN the renowned physicist François Arago announced Daguerre's invention of photography to the Académie des Sciences in Paris, in January 1839, he made a plea for a government subsidy. To buttress his case, he argued that one of the medium's most valuable applications would be the precise recording of antiquities. A wall of Egyptian hieroglyphs that would take an artist hundreds of hours to transcribe could be seized in an instant by Daguerre's miraculous apparatus. So was launched the long alliance between photography and archaeology, and within a few months of Arago's announcement photographers were busy recording the most important ancient sites and monuments in Europe and the Near East.

Although archaeologists were developing a more methodical approach to excavation, archaeology had not yet become a professional academic discipline. The search for ancient sites and their antiquities was still largely the province of affluent, self-taught amateurs. Similarly, most of the photographs were not intended to document technical matters such as stratigraphy or the distribution of grave goods.[1] The audience for such pictures were travelers for the most part who, like the archaeologists themselves, belonged to the class of amateur enthusiasts. The connection between travel and archaeology is already made explicit in a bill presented to the French Chamber of Deputies in June 1839, urging the government to purchase the patent for Daguerre's invention: "In fact to the traveller, to the archaeologist and also to the naturalist, the apparatus of M. Daguerre will become an object of continual and indispensable use . . . by stopping awhile before the most complicated monument, or the most extensive *coup d'oeil,* he will immediately obtain an exact *facsimile* of them."[2] In this essay, then, my primary concern will not be with the technical photographic documentation of Roman

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archaeological sites but with what might be called the iconography of archaeology.[3]

Rome had long been revered as the unrivaled repository of ancient art and architecture and was the culmination of the eighteenth-century Grand Tour. In his famous guidebook for Grand Tourists (1734) Thomas Nugent declares that, "no place in the universe affords so agreeable a variety of ancient and modern curiosities. . . . In fact, one cannot walk fifty paces without observing some remains of ancient grandeur." Nugent's remark exemplifies the attitudes of foreign visitors to Rome, in that it combines elegiac respect – "the remains of ancient grandeur" – with the slightly patronizing term "curiosities." Moreover, "curiosities" (often shortened to "curios") are objects, almost always from foreign countries, that are available for acquisition and eventual display.[4] To this day, as virtually any guidebook will show, the agreeable blend of cultural edification with the opportunity to shop still motivates tourists around the world.

Much like their Christian counterparts, the ancient monuments were objects of reverence and pilgrimage for travelers. Some of their prestige was doubtless due to the pervasive influence of Classical models in the British and European systems of higher education. Greek and Roman literature and history provided a widely shared store of heroes and episodes and allusions. As the nineteenth century progressed, however, travel to Rome was no longer restricted to the affluent and ostensibly well educated class whose predecessors had taken the Grand Tour. Foreign tourists came increasingly from a middle class that was lured to Rome as much by the climate and the cuisine as by the culture. Even when visitors were fairly well schooled in Roman history, they seem to have made little distinction between religious and secular, Republican and Imperial, monuments. For most visitors, the attraction exerted by the ruins was neither archaeological nor, strictly speaking, historical. They were instead an essential component of a larger phenomenon, that which a late-nineteenth-century writer, Gaston Boissier, called "the genuine sensation of Rome."[5] Boissier's phrase implies novelty and authenticity, an individual's open-minded encounter with the city. Both narratives and photographs, however, show that the "genuine sensation" is fundamentally a mimetic process, in which the visitor's impressions are modeled on and validated by the experiences of earlier travelers.[6] In many nineteenth-

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century memoirs of stays in Rome, one finds snippets from Gibbon, Goethe, and Byron alongside school-text allusions to the Classical authors.

My title is taken from *Six Months in Italy,* published in 1853 by the American traveler and author George Hillard. In his description of the Colosseum, Hillard observes: "If as a building [it] was open to criticism, as a ruin it is perfect. The work of decay has stopped at the exact point required by taste and sentiment."[7] The echo of the passage in Byron's *Manfred* that I have used as an epigraph is certainly no accident. Hillard's remark exemplifies the high elegiac mode that was adopted by most foreign travelers to Rome in the nineteenth century and—I will argue—informs most of the photographs from the period. Despite the remarkable realism of the images and presumed objectivity of the process, photographs are inevitably shaped by preexistent pictorial conventions and larger cultural preoccupations. For Rome, even more than for the lesser known areas of Egypt or Greece, there existed a definite canon not only of sites but of specific ways of depicting them. By the mid-1850s several photographers, both foreign and Italian—such as Gioacchino Altobelli, Tommaso Cuccioni, James Anderson, and Robert Macpherson—had established flourishing studios that produced views of the city.[8] Their principal clientele seems to have been the ever-growing corps of tourists, who had definite ideas about how they wanted to see their ruins. To date, there has been little work done on the actual distribution of photographs through shops or by mail order, so that my comments about the composition of the audience are necessarily somewhat imprecise. Nonetheless, they are supported by all the available evidence, such as the fact that by the mid-1860s the standard English guidebooks to Rome, such as Murray's or Baedeker's, were offering recommendations about the best places to acquire photographs. For example, Murray's 1864 *Handbook of Rome and Its Environs* praises James Anderson's photographs as "the best we have seen . . . extremely faithful and good, and of different sizes to suit all purses and purchasers," and the 1881 edition of the same work advises its readers how to order Anderson's pictures from the book dealer Spithover.[9] By examining the photographs of the Colosseum along with contemporary documents, we shall be able to discern some of the most significant elements of the "genuine sensation of Rome." The travelers—particularly the French

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and English—incorporated the ancient sites into a set of responses that involved a complex and shifting amalgam of historical interest, popular Classical lore, Romantic literary allusion, curiosity, moralizing, and sentiment.

Because they were mechanical productions, photographs were thought to offer direct and unmediated contact with their subject matter. Therefore, they were uniquely able to gratify, albeit vicariously, the urge to acquire what one had seen. When Daguerre's photographic process was first described in public, the *Gazette de France* promised its readers: "Travelers, you will soon be able... to acquire the apparatus invented by M. Daguerre, and be able to bring back to France the most beautiful monuments and scenes of the whole world."[10] By late summer of 1839, a Parisian optician, publisher, and entrepreneur named Lerebours had dispatched daguerreotypists to sites as far flung as Beirut, Moscow, Niagara Falls, and, of course, Cairo, Athens, and Rome. Their plates were used as the basis for aquatints, which were published two years later in a volume called *Excursions Daguerriennes,* whose subtitle—echoing the claims of the *Gazette de France*—announced "the most remarkable views and monuments in the world." Lerebours had a sure sense of his market, and *Excursions Daguerriennes* rapidly became an international best-seller that went into multiple printings in several languages. It may be a gauge of public expectations, of a preference for familiarity over novelty, that while Athens is represented by three plates, Rome is depicted in eleven, and in terms of subject matter these eleven pictures are completely predictable.[11] On the civic and religious side we find the Piazza del Popolo, Santa Maria Maggiore, Saint Peter's, Castel Sant'Angelo, and the Porta Ripetta. The ancient sites and monuments include the Colosseum (fig. 1), the arches of Constantine and Titus, Trajan's Column, and the Temple of Vesta. Lerebours's daguerreotypist also ventured a short distance outside the city to photograph the renowned cascades near the Roman ruins at Tivoli. In the eighteenth century all these sites had been subjects for etchings by Piranesi and other makers of picturesque *vedute*. Such prints had been widely distributed among foreign travelers and played a major role in shaping the expectations of the nineteenth-century audience as to how Rome should look. In fact, the Roman plates from *Excursions Daguerriennes* are important precisely because they *are* so con-

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ventional. They illustrate the points on the standard itinerary for a tourist in Rome.[12]

The Roman pictures in *Excursions Daguerriennes* are innovative only in their employment of Daguerre's new technology. To use a semi-archaeological metaphor, they break no new ground in vision or imaginative reinterpretation. In fairness to the photographers, however, the impression of *déjà vu* may be partially due to the daguerreotypes' having been transcribed by engravers, who seem to have been unable to resist the temptation to romanticize the images and bring them into conformity with older engravings and lithographs; so, for instance, they insert figures, clouds, and even birds in flight, none of which the original daguerreotypes could have shown. Daguerreotypes required such a long exposure time that they could never catch scenes of vigorous action. Typically enough, however, the picture of the Colosseum includes a group of children playing in front of the ruin. In the right foreground there is also a pastoral vignette, with a herdsman, a young woman balancing a jug on her head, and a few goats.

The rustic motif, featuring picturesque members of the urban peasantry, is a common element in both photographs and travel narratives and one to which we shall return. Despite the daguerreotype's technical limitations, which made the depiction of such scenes impossible, there was some warrant in fact for the engraver's fancy. By the time Thomas Nugent was writing his aforementioned guidebook for Grand Tourists, many of the remains of ancient Roman grandeur had suffered badly from neglect or outright abuse. For example, from the seventeenth century on, the Roman Forum had been called and used as the Campo Vaccino, the Cow Pasture. At some point the city fathers had installed a watering trough for cattle and horses. Prints by Piranesi show the tops of columns barely projecting above the surface of the field, with animals peacefully grazing around them. Although the archaeologist Rodolfo Lanciani disputes the claim that the Forum had been officially declared a rubbish dump, he estimates that its monuments had been buried under no less than twenty-four feet of earth and debris.[13] In the early nineteenth century, under the aegis of Pope Pius VII, major excavations began there with the recovery of the Arch of Septimus Severus in 1803. A decade later, during the Napoleonic occupation of Rome (1809–14), the emperor sponsored a num-

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ber of significant archaeological projects, climaxed in 1813 by the spectacular discovery of the Column of Phocas in the Forum. Excavation and restoration would continue there, with only a few interruptions, for the rest of the century, and the Popes persisted in their determination that the Vatican not be left out of the quest. In the 1830s and early 1840s Pope Gregory XVI founded three new archaeologically oriented museums: the Museo Etrusco, the Museo Egizio, and the Museo Gregoriano Profano Laterense, the last dedicated to antiquities from the immediate area around Rome.[14] As we shall see, from the seventeenth century on the Papacy had also evinced a strong concern for the preservation and restoration of the Colosseum.

One of the many ironies attending this surge of interest in ancient art is that it occurred at a time when Rome was otherwise losing its place as "the center of the art world, which was gradually moving to Paris. . . . Yet if Rome was no longer the art center it had formerly been, interest in its classical monuments and early Christian art was now [mid-1800s] more intense than ever. For this the archaeologists Luigi Canina and G. B. de Rossi were largely responsible, Canina by his excavations of the Appian Way and his etchings of reconstructions of hundreds of Roman antiquities, de Rossi by his digs in the Colosseum, the Forum and the early churches of Rome."[15] It is also worth noting that the exalted status of the ancient artifacts was extended to those who discovered them, so that archaeologists were lionized as the preservers of past glories. Although, as I have mentioned, archaeologists were still self-taught and usually self-supporting, they could expect to receive government support for important projects, especially when those projects would yield treasures for national museums. "Set apart not only by the arcane nature of their craft but by their access to public money and official honours, they were the *crême de la crême* among students in the Mediterranean."[16]

In addition, this was a period in which the "pleasure of ruins" was still very strong. In eighteenth-century England it had become the height of fashion among the wealthy owners of elegant estates to have ruins constructed on their properties, and genuine historical sites were often plundered for their architectural elements. Sometimes the aristocrats went so far as to pay people to live in such artificial ruins and impersonate monks or hermits.[17] Although this craze for constructing "follies" had

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subsided by the mid-nineteenth century, the aesthetic appreciation of ruins continued unabated. Its themes do undergo some variation, so that, for example, the writers seem to become increasingly moralistic, equating the ruins of ancient buildings with the ethical collapse of ancient civilizations. It must be emphasized that in Rome such attitudes belong largely to foreigners, particularly the French and English. For the Italians themselves the ruins and the larger related issues of archaeology and restoration were charged with political and ideological connotations that did not affect tourists and travelers. In the writings of most foreign visitors, the basic tone remains one of romantic elegy, whose principal rhetorical device is an emphasis on contrast: between past and present (usually to the advantage of the former) and between the eternal grandeur of nature and the impermanence of human endeavor.

For the nineteenth-century visitor, the Colosseum was by far the most important ancient structure in Rome.[18] A characteristic reaction is that of the American landscape painter Thomas Cole, who proclaims, "From the great multitude of wondrous things, I would select the Colosseum as the object that affected me the most."[19] Charles Dickens was only one of many who were inspired to rhapsody on seeing it: "Its solitude, its awful beauty, and its utter desolation, strike upon the stranger . . . like a softened arrow; and never in his life, perhaps, will he be so moved and overcome by any sight."[20] This massive amphitheater was built during the reign of the Flavian emperors in the late first century A.D. With room for about forty-five thousand spectators, it was the site for games, horse races, gladiatorial combats, and beast shows, and it could be flooded for mock naval battles. It was the archetype of the amphitheaters great and small that adorned the towns of the Roman Empire from Britain to Asia. Like most other ancient structures in Rome, it had sustained severe damage over the centuries, particularly because it served as a quarry for ready-cut stone, especially Travertine limestone and marble. As one of its lesser indignities, it had also been used in 1675 as a warehouse to store tons of nitrate for the manufacture of gunpowder; the remnants of this deposit acted as a potent fertilizer and promoted an extravagant growth of vegetation in the interior. The depredations had been halted in 1744 when Pope Benedict XIV declared it a Christian shrine, dedicating it to the memory of all the martyrs who had died there (this

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despite the fact that there is no evidence whatever that any Christians actually suffered martyrdom in the Colosseum). Stations of the cross were installed around the circumference of the arena, and a tall cross was erected in its center. In the nineteenth century the Colosseum's hugeness, its ruined condition, its trees and flowers, and its Christian icons blended together to make it a perfect ruin, and all these elements are manifest in photographs from the time.

Until the end of the century, two narratives dominate the foreign travelers' accounts of the Colosseum. The first has to do with the visitors' experience of the building itself. Mirroring their approach and entry, there is a standard sequence of responses to the Colosseum that includes, *seriatim,* comments on its size, its ruined condition, and the lush vegetation and Christian monuments in the interior of the arena. The second story, paralleling the first, involves the history of the Colosseum itself and of the Roman Empire. The massive size of the Colosseum, the extravagant and often bloody spectacles it had housed, and its picturesque decay made it the perfect embodiment of the history of the imperial city. Until their removal in the 1870s, even the stations of the cross had their place, symbolizing the victory of Christianity over paganism. As we shall see, the same photographs that recorded the visitor's experience of the building could be used as illustrations for this larger historical narrative.

Again and again travelers report that their first impression of the Colosseum was one of sheer, stupefying size. The ellipse has exterior dimensions of 620 feet in length and 513 feet in width, and the four-storey façade, where it is most fully preserved, rises to a height of over 150 feet. By far the largest ancient structure in Rome, it was often compared to a mountain, as by Dickens: "... it tops the other ruins: standing there, a mountain among graves."[21] Henry James adopts the same metaphor while moving the viewer inside, as he talks about his habit of strolling through the arena and taking a seat in the center, next to the cross: "I always feel, as I do so, as if I were seated in the depths of some Alpine valley.... This roughly mountainous quality of the great ruin is its chief interest."[22] In this subtle modification of the motif of nature versus culture, the Colosseum was incorporated into the realm of the sublime natural landscape, while being all the more formidable for being man-made. A calotype from

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around 1846, in which Calvert Jones posed an elegant group a short distance from the southwest end, shows how photographers strove to convey a sense of the Colosseum's immensity (fig. 2). The man (who may be Jones himself) and women function as traditional figures in a landscape, whose tiny presence accentuates the Colosseum's bulk. Despite their diminutive size, however, the people are the visual anchor for the picture. Their importance is emphasized by their location within the frame, at the base of the strong diagonal formed by the buttressing and silhouetted against the empty space where the paths converge. Their stylish modern dress—particularly the man's imposing silk hat—makes it clear that they are tourists, or at least visitors, not people who live and work in the area. Thus they also embody the theme of pilgrimage, linked to the contrast between past and present. They recall Byron's encomium in *Childe Harold,* "Heroes have trod this spot—'tis on their dust ye tread" (IV.1296). The Colosseum becomes a monumental backdrop for the drama in which the modern world encounters the ancient. The contrast between past and present is underscored by the medium of the calotype itself, which for Jones and his contemporaries was one of the most extraordinary instances of modernity and technological progress.[23]

For the perceptive visitor the Colosseum was an awe-inspiring reminder of the grandeur of the imperial state that had sponsored its construction, but mere volume would not be enough to account for its power over the imagination. Ever since the publication of Edward Gibbon's great work, the image of Rome was invariably linked with decline and fall, for which the Colosseum's ruined condition was also a perfect illustration. Like its size, the Colosseum's dilapidation was essential to its dramatic power. Since this is clear from the most cursory survey of writers' reactions, one or two examples will suffice. Stendhal eulogizes, "... this immense edifice, more beautiful perhaps today when it is falling into ruin than it ever was in its full splendor (then it was but a theater, today it is the most beautiful vestige of the Roman people)"; more simply, Thomas Cole states, "It is stupendous, yet beautiful in its destruction," and continues, "It looks more like a work of nature than of man, for the regularity of art is lost, in a great measure, in dilapidation."[24] The writers delight in mournfully sensuous descriptions of the damage the building has suffered. In a representative passage, immediately

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following the remark I just quoted, Cole catalogues some of the injuries: "crumbling walls . . . shattered steps . . . the broken height . . . the ruinous ridge." Such comments exemplify the dominant emotion aroused by the sight, a satisfying melancholy, or, in Cole's words, "a sad, not unpleasing meditation." The photographs reflect the audience's preference for such a mood. The exterior views, whether by Italian photographers like Tommaso Cuccioni (fig. 3) or foreigners like Eugene Constant or Robert Macpherson, are generally taken from the most decrepit side. It is worth emphasizing that there is nothing in the site itself, in its topographic surroundings, or in nineteenth-century photographic technique that would make this viewpoint natural or necessary.[25] Photographs of the relatively intact end are much less common than those of the irregular, ruined side. For the nineteenth-century viewer, the uneven contours of the Colosseum's façade, along with the battered condition of the remaining pillars and arches, were vivid, poignant signs of the corrosive effects of time. In Byron's words, the amphitheater had become a "noble wreck in ruinous perfection," and the photographers were well aware that their clients appreciated the fusion of monumentality and deterioration.

The long views also resemble "cut-away" drawings, for as they depict the exterior, they simultaneously offer a tantalizing glimpse of the interior, where the Romans indulged their taste for cruel sport. While the dominant note in comments about the monumental exterior is awe, the tone changes somewhat when the viewer moves inside the great arena. In addition to the Christian shrines, which we shall consider presently, the interior views depict a confused clutter of myriads of small chambers and passageways – "like the cells of a beehive," in the words of a mid-century guidebook.[26] This once-hidden substructure hints at the more lurid episodes in the building's early history, for it is here that men and beasts and equipment were kept for the spectacles that drew crowds of avid spectators. Once the amphitheater's true function has been revealed, its ruined condition can generate moralistic, or openly censorious, commentary. The grisly entertainments, especially the martyrdoms that were thought to have taken place there, were seen as symptoms of Rome's decline and omens of its eventual fall. Now that the arena had sunk into total disrepair, it would never again harbor such performances, and Dickens, for one, was relieved: "Never,

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in its bloodiest prime, can the sight of the gigantic Coliseum . . . have moved one heart as it must move all who look upon it now, a ruin. God be thanked: a ruin."[27] For Dickens, as for others, the Colosseum became a site of revelation of past savagery, that carried with it a loss of innocence for the modern viewer.[28]

For lovers of the picturesque, the presence of flowers, shrubs, and small trees that had taken root in the stone softened the harsh judgments on the building's interior. In 1855 an English botanist named Richard Deakin published *Flora of the Colosseum,* in which he distinguished and described "no less a number than 420 species," including one variety of asphodel that grew in the upper tiers but nowhere else in the city. He describes his labor in good romantic fashion, explaining that flowers "form a link in the memory and teach us hopeful and soothing lessons, amid the sadness of bygone ages." We might expect to find photographs that show a single plant, like Deakin's asphodel, growing in an improbable crevice or portico. Despite their demonstrable fondness for the significant detail, however, photographers seem generally not to have made close-ups of individual plants against the stone. Instead they were more interested in emphasizing again the vastness of the building, now enhanced by the overall pictorial effect of the plants covering the piers and arches. In views such as one by Cuccioni (fig. 4) the Colosseum resembles a *hortus conclusus,* an enclosed and enchanted garden that is set apart as a refuge from the agitation of daily life. As with the comparison of the Colosseum to a mountain, the proliferation of plants and flowers was also assimilated into the motif of nature triumphing over human enterprise. In a letter to Thomas Love Peacock, Shelley envisions the transformation in a succinct verbal sketch, "It has been changed by time into the image of an amphitheatre of rocky hills overgrown by the wild olive, the myrtle and the fig tree, and threaded by little paths, which wind among its ruined stairs and immeasurable galleries. The arena is covered with grass, and pierces like the skirts of a natural plain, the chasms of the broken arches around."[29]

The other noteworthy features of the Colosseum were the religious monuments that had been installed in the eighteenth century: the stations of the cross around the perimeter of the arena and the large central crucifix. The original purpose of these additions in 1744, was, as I have mentioned, to claim the building for Christianity and thereby to put a halt to its spolia-

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tion by those who were quarrying it away. Along with his ambitious program of excavation in the Forum, Pope Pius VII had also sponsored extensive restoration in the Colosseum. In 1807 his architect, Raffaele Stern, propped up the crumbling southwest arcade with a massive buttress, to which a plaque with the Pope's name was affixed as a reminder of his generosity.[30] The Popes were contributing to the preservation of a beloved monument, and, less altruistically, they were asserting the legitimacy of the Vatican's temporal power, by establishing its place in the continuum from ancient Rome to modern times. The cross, therefore, was both a religious and a territorial symbol, and its importance was accentuated by its location. The Popes' ideological motives, however, were far from the minds of the nineteenth-century visitors; for them the Christian icons symbolized the victory of the meek religion over pagan might, of kindness over cruelty. Thus the cross was not only the visual center of the arena but its moral hub as well. A. J. C. Hare's guidebook puts it prosaically, "The spot where the Christian martyrs suffered is now marked by a tall cross, devoutly kissed by the faithful," while Dickens is more allusive, "The Pit of Fight [is] filled up with earth, and the peaceful Cross planted in the centre."[31] Even the largely Protestant English and Americans admit to being moved by the displays of piety that took place in the great arena. Every week on Friday afternoon friars led a group of the faithful around the *via dolorosa,* and individual pilgrims could often be seen making the circuit on their knees. A photograph from around 1850 by Giacomo Caneva shows the ghost figure of a man, seated at the foot of the central cross (fig. 5). With the stations of the cross behind him and, behind them, the towering, plant-covered walls, the image recalls Henry James's account of stopping to sit in the hollow of the great arena to savor its "roughly mountainous quality." Like the vegetation, the Christian symbols had become an intrinsic part of the Colosseum's atmosphere.

Impressive as the Colosseum was by day, ever since the publication of Byron's *Manfred* in 1817, the preferred way for the English-speaking visitor to see it was by moonlight, or for the especially sensitive observer, by starlight.[32] As Thomas Cole insists, "... he who would see and feel the grandeur of the Colosseum must spend his hour there at night, when the moon is shedding over its magic splendor."[33] The moonlit visit had

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become such a commonplace that in *The Marble Faun* Hawthorne could mock "a party of English or Americans paying the inevitable visit by moonlight, and exalting themselves with raptures that were Byron's, not their own." Current photographic technology would not allow views actually made at night, but, like the engravers who had embellished Lerebours's daguerreotypes, the photographers were ready to accommodate their customers' demands. They combined multiple negatives in a single print to confect images of the Colosseum by moonlight.[34] The foreign visitor's image of the Colosseum owed more to projective fantasy than to concrete reality, and so it is perfectly understandable that, as an imaginary construction, its power to inspire was strongest when its details were least visible.[35]

The texts from this period make it clear that travelers had little interest in, and less contact with, the real life of the Italian people. In the eyes of most foreign visitors, the Romans were little more than a parade of marvelous types, of which A. J. C. Hare provides a representative catalogue: "crimson cardinals; the venerable generals of religious orders with their flowing white beards; the endless monks and nuns; the *pifferari* with their pipes; the peasant women . . . with their great gold earrings, coral necklaces and snowy head-dresses; the *contadini* in their sheepskins and goatskins," and so on.[36] It cannot be denied that urban Rome did have a large population of agricultural workers and was, as it still is, the institutional center of the Catholic Church. The nineteenth-century travel narratives and photographs, however, might convey the impression that, along with the occasional beggar, priests and peasants were almost the sole inhabitants of the city. Such attention to the religious and the rustic makes an interesting counterpoint to the foreigners' vision of the Colosseum, a Christian memorial that was at the same time a scene of "natural" beauty. Most photographs of the Colosseum include either no figures at all or only a very few, usually identifiable as foreigners or as members of one of the groups itemized above. By virtue of its location and the fact that it was completely enclosed, the Colosseum could be depicted as if it were quite separate from contemporary — that is, largely secular and increasingly industrial — Italian society.

Many Italians did not share the romantic enthusiasm for the Colosseum that prevailed among the foreign visitors. In particular they rejected the religious appropriation of the ruin by the

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Vatican. Garibaldi, for example, wrote a novel called *Clelia: Il governo del monaco* in which the Colosseum harbors a group of republican partisans and symbolizes the tradition of secular rule as against Papal authority.[37] After the triumph of the Risorgimento in 1870, Rome became the capital of a united Italy. The new government showed that it fully understood the symbolic prestige of the Colosseum, for one of its first public projects was excavation and restoration there. Lovely and variegated as they might have been, the plants and flowers were doing serious damage to the stonework, and so were completely stripped away. The stations of the cross and the crucifix were likewise removed, not only to allow for the excavation of the arena's substructure but also to indicate that the Church's proprietorship had ended (fig. 6). Not surprisingly, those who had embraced the elegiac view of the building reacted with outrage. Augustus Hare expresses relatively mild criticism in his guidebook; after a wistful description of the vegetation, he says, "The clearing out of the arena, though exhibiting more perfectly the ancient form of the building, is much to be regretted by lovers of the picturesque."[38] In his autobiography, however, he is more aggressive: "The spoliation of Rome continues every day.... Nothing can exceed the tastelessness of all that is being done—the Colosseum, the Baths of Caracalla and the temples are scraped quite clean and look like sham ruins built yesterday."[39] The romantic appreciation of the Colosseum was based on seeing it as a marvelous synthesis, of past and present, pagan and Christian, nature and art. To alter—or worse, to remove—any of the elements was to destroy the harmony of the whole. Moreover, to have the change occur because of what the foreigners saw as an intrusion by domestic politics was the final, insulting blow. The archaeologists were no longer admired as champions of the past but condemned as heartless despoilers. For the most egregious expression of dismay, we have to take a short step into the twentieth century. In his book *Rome* of 1909, Edward Hutton calls the archaeologists "a gang of vandals," and goes on to sneer that their leader, a Jew, was doubtless getting belated revenge for the "whips of Titus" and the Roman army's sack of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.[40]

Hutton's gibe is illustrative of a larger trend. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, archaeology and tourism, which once were so closely allied, had begun to diverge quite sharply.

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Archaeology became a highly technical academic discipline, and travel became a standardized commercial enterprise. Two events in England neatly symbolize the changes. It was in the 1880s that Oxford and Cambridge began to offer formal courses in archaeology.[41] In 1841 Thomas Cook had founded his travel agency, which introduced the concept of meticulously organized package tours for the middle class, and by the 1870s thousands of Cook's tourists were making the voyage to the Continent every year.[42] With respect to the ancient monuments, the great tradition of photography in Rome underwent a similar evolution in two directions. One was a more scientific approach to the recording of ancient sites, exemplified by John Henry Parker's *Archaeology of Rome,* which was begun in 1865 and eventually ran to thirteen volumes before Parker's death in 1884. He commissioned a vast number of photographs—the surviving archive contains more than three thousand—hundreds of which were used as archaeological evidence in his history of the major Roman sites. Parker himself describes the photographs as "silent witnesses to the facts stated" and says that, to corroborate analyses of early Roman history, "it appears to me better to refer to a photograph, which is easily to be obtained... than to the objects themselves from which the photograph is taken, as the readers cannot be expected to go to Rome to see each object on which they have any doubt, but may be expected to look at a photograph of it."[43] Parker's statement strikingly anticipates modern practice, in which photographs are often the only evidence for archaeological research.[44] In the words of a contemporary reviewer, Parker used the photographs as "a modern means to accurate knowledge." One of the photographs of the Colosseum in Parker's collection shows, as his caption says, a "view of one of the Vomitoria for ready exit, in an upper corridor of the Flavian Emperors"[45] (fig. 7). Just as the caption employs a technical term to explain the passageway's function, the picture calls attention to the construction of the vaulting, the brickwork, and the masonry. The small, almost invisible figure crouched at the top of the staircase is a reminder of earlier pictorial conventions, but the young man is not identifiably a priest or a peasant or a fashionably dressed tourist. The main purpose of his presence, in line with Parker's scientific intention, is to provide a sense of scale. Although this image is dramatic—almost Piranesian—in composition, especially in its use of shadow and deep perspec-

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tive, it does not conform to, and could not be used to illustrate, the romantic narratives we have outlined. It insists on the historical specificity of the corridor's construction and, by extension, of the Colosseum as a whole.

The development of archaeology, with its emphasis on precise measurement, description, and documentation, introduced a scientific approach to the monuments of antiquity. Archaeological methodology proffered a more precise analysis of the structure of the Colosseum, as well as a more accurate account of its history. It was not able, however, to dispel the traditional Romantic vision. Paralleling the development of the photograph as a scientific document was the mass-produced touristic souvenir, exemplified by the stereo cards whose numberless descendants still occupy postcard racks throughout the world. In 1900 the photographic firm of Underwood and Underwood published a volume called *Italy Through the Stereoscope*. The whole assemblage originally consisted of ten maps, one hundred stereo views, and the learned commentary of the Reverend D. J. Ellison, to which the views were keyed by location and number. The Colosseum, for example, is identified as Map 2, position 30 and 31. Even after all the archaeological labor that had gone into it, Ellison still finds it, nostalgically, "titanic," "mountainous," "transformed by moonlight into a citadel of silver," and haunted by "its dark and troubled past." The caption on one of the stereo cards (position 30, exterior view) reads in its entirety, "A mighty monument to heathen brutality and Christian courage. The Colosseum. Rome. Italy" (fig. 8). The ghosts of the legendary martyrs rise again, and in addition the familiar theme of Christian triumphalism is complemented by the appearance of gaily costumed urban peasants, clustered in the sharp foreground of the photograph. Even though they are now actually recorded on the negative rather than inserted by the engraver's hand, they occupy the same position, literally and metaphorically, as do the peasant couple in the plate from *Excursions Daguerriennes* that was made some sixty years earlier. The later image, in other words, successfully perpetuates several longstanding historical and cultural stereotypes, pristine in their clarity and self-assurance. In the last chapter of the book, Ellison constructs an elaborate argument to the effect that stereographs can inspire, indeed reproduce, the sentiments created by actual travel. "Men are finding that these marvelous representations are capable . . . of

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prompting a genuine experience of being in the place represented."[46] This "genuine experience," so reminiscent of Boissier's "genuine sensation of Rome," is, once again, an elegiac displacement that depends on imagery crafted by earlier travelers. The stereographs are prized for their startling illusion of three-dimensionality. Like the photographs commissioned by Parker, they can serve as "silent witnesses to the facts stated," even though the "facts" recorded in their captions are less historical realities than venerable fictions.

Archaeologists and travelers had devised very different motives and had come to use very different methods in their encounters with the Colosseum and the other Roman ruins. Whereas the comments by Parker and Ellison exemplify the growing divergence between academic archaeologists and enthusiastic tourists, they also have an important element in common: they testify to the extraordinary malleability and persuasive power of the photographic image. As objects of study or inspirations for reverie, photographs have come to equal or surpass their original subjects. Both professional archaeologists and tourists, armchair or on site, now must rely on photographs to give substance to their vision of the ancient world.

NOTES

An earlier, much abbreviated version of this article, containing no discussion of the photographs, was published as "A Perfect Ruin" in *Archaeology*, vol. 43, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 1990), 74–79. My thanks to Elizabeth Bobrick, Herbert Golder, and *Arion*'s anonymous referee for their helpful suggestions, and my thanks also to the individuals and institutions that loaned photographs for reproduction.

1. One of the earliest uses of archaeological photography for truly scientific purposes was C. T. Newton's employment of a photographer, B. Spackman, during his excavations in Halicarnassus in 1856. For information about Newton and Spackman, I am grateful to B. F. Cook, Keeper of Antiquities in the British Museum.

2. Emphasis in the original; reprinted in Vicki Goldberg, ed., *Photography in Print* (New York: 1981), 32.

3. I owe a great deal to Carolyn Springer, *The Marble Wilderness: Ruins and Representation in Italian Romanticism 1775–1850* (Cambridge: 1987). Although Springer does not discuss photography directly, her work is invaluable for its insights into the political and ideological implications of archaeology in nineteenth-century Italy. See also Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clio* (Cambridge: 1984), for a sophisticated theoretical analysis of representational practices in the nineteenth century.

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4. So the *OED* s.v. curio: "An object of art, piece of bric-a-brac, etc., valued as a curiosity or rarity . . . more particularly applied to articles of this kind from China, Japan and the Far East."

5. Gaston Boissier, *Rome and Pompeii: Archaeological Rambles,* trans. H. Fisher (New York: 1896), 5.

6. I owe much of my understanding of this phenomenon to an excellent, as yet unpublished analysis by my colleague William Stowe, in which he constructs a typology of the major genres in travel writing.

7. *Six Months in Italy* (New York: 1853), vol. 1, 305. For other references to Byron, see pages 123, 124, and 126 and notes 28 and 32 below.

8. For collections of images from this period, see: the Thorvaldsen Museum's publication *Rome in Early Photographs: the Age of Pius IX* (trans. Ann Thornton; Copenhagen: 1977); Piero Becchetti, *Fotografi e fotografia in Italia, 1839–1880* (Rome: 1978); Wendy M. Watson, *Images of Italy: Photography in the Nineteenth Century* (South Hadley, Mass: 1980).

9. Quoted in Richard Pare (ed.) *Photography and Architecture* (Montreal: 1982), 233. Similarly, Baedeker's guide commends Robert Macpherson as having "good photographs, a large stock"; see Marjorie Munsterberg, "A Biographical Sketch of Robert Macpherson," *Art Bulletin* (1986), 142–53.

10. Quoted in Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography,* fifth ed. (New York: 1982), 19.

11. The Italian views are all reproduced in "Excursions Daguerriennes in Italia," *Fotologia* 10 (1988), 6–17.

12. "The tendency of visitors to pay disproportionate attention to a few of the Roman ruins – the Colosseum, the Palatine, the arches in the Forum, the Pantheon – is an old tradition"; Rose Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins* (London: 1953), 199.

13. *The Ruins and Excavations of Ancient Rome* (Boston and New York: 1897), 244–46.

14. Cf. Springer, *The Marble Wilderness,* 57.

15. Christopher Hibbert, *Rome* (New York: 1985), 270.

16. John Pemble, *The Mediterranean Passion* (Oxford: 1987), 83.

17. See Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins,* 23–39.

18. See William L. Vance, *America's Rome* (New Haven: 1989), vol. I, 43–67, and also "The Colosseum: American Uses of an Imperial Image," in A. Patterson (ed.), *Roman Images* (Baltimore: 1984), 105–40; more generally, John Pearson, *Arena: The Story of the Coliseum* (New York: 1973), and Peter Quennell, *The Colosseum* (New York: 1971), from which I have drawn the brief historical sketch that follows.

19. From "Notes at Naples," (1832) in Louis Legrand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole,* edited by Eliot S. Vessell (Cambridge, Mass.: 1964), 115.

20. *Pictures from Italy* (1846; reprinted New York: 1988), 108.

21. *Pictures from Italy,* 108; on the prevalence of this kind of imagery see also Vance, "The Colosseum: American Uses of an Imperial Image," 107–12.

22. *Italian Hours* (1909), reprinted as *Henry James on Italy* (London: 1986), 94; see Elizabeth Block, "The Rome of Henry James," in A. Patterson (ed.) *Roman Images* (Baltimore: 1984), 141–62, esp. 151–52. Compare the description by Shelley, p. 125 and note 29 below.

23. On the latter point, see Bann, *The Clothing of Clio,* 112–37, esp. 133–34.

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24. Stendhal: *A Roman Journal* (1829), edited and translated by Haakon Chevalier (New York: 1961), 32; Cole, "Notes at Naples," 115.

25. I may also illustrate this point by contrast. I have argued elsewhere that the photographers working in Athens were responding to a different set of audience demands, so that most exterior views of the Parthenon are taken of the west end. This is actually the back of the building, but it is both the first side the visitor sees and relatively the *best* preserved. The pediment, though bereft of its statuary, is almost intact in outline, so that one can get some idea of the temple's original appearance. The attributes highlighted by such images are proportion, rationality, order, and clarity—in other words, the vision of Ancient Greece most prized by the nineteenth-century audience. See "True Illusions: Early Photographs of Athens," *J. Paul Getty Museum Journal* 15 (1987), 125–38.

26. Emil Braun, *The Ruins and Museums of Rome* (Brunswick: 1854), 4.

27. *Pictures from Italy,* 108.

28. Similar examples of moralizing are assembled by Vance, *America's Rome,* vol. 1, 52–53. In *Innocents Abroad* (1869) Mark Twain satirizes such Romantic solemnity and, after describing the Colosseum, praises himself: "I . . . never once used the phrase 'butchered to make a Roman holiday.' I am the only free white man of mature age, who has accomplished this since Byron originated the expression" (Chapter 27; Library of America ed., New York: 1984), 225.

29. The letter is dated December [22] 1818, in R. Ingpen and W. E. Peck (eds.), *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Vol. 10, Letters 1818–1822* (New York: 1965), 13.

30. Cf. Springer, *The Marble Wilderness,* 8–10.

31. Hare: *Walks in Rome* (New York: 1882), 138; Dickens: *Pictures from Italy,* 108. Catholics, it may be noted, received an indulgence for kissing the cross.

32. A representative passage from Manfred's speech: "Thou didst shine, thou rolling moon, upon/ all this, and cast a wide and tender light,/ which soften'd down the hoar austerity/ of rugged desolation, and fill'd up,/ as 'twere anew, the gaps of centuries" (*Manfred* III.4).

33. "Notes at Naples," 116.

34. The most skilled creator of such images was Gioachino Altobelli, who worked in Rome in the 1860s. A typical example of his craft, "The Forum by moonlight," is reproduced as plate 37 in the Thorvaldsen Museum's *Rome in Early Photographs: The Age of Pius IX* (n. 8 above). I have seen similarly retouched pictures of the Colosseum but unfortunately was not able to acquire a copy print in time for the publication of this article.

35. So the 1904 Baedeker's guidebook *Central Italy* recommends that visitors see the Colosseum by moonlight precisely because then "the general impression is unimpaired by the ruin of the details."

36. Quoted from Hare's journals by Malcolm Barnes, *Augustus Hare: A Victorian Gentleman* (London: 1984), 106–07. For typical "ethnographic" photographs, see *Rome in Early Photographs* (n. 8 above), esp. plates 86–95 (dwarves, beggars, peasants in costume), 108–10 (shepherds and *pifferari*), 131 (drover with oxen), and some of the early pictures by the Fratelli Alinari, reproduced in *Italy: One Hundred Years of Photography* (with texts by Cesare Colombo and Susan Sontag; Florence: 1988) as for example plate 22, showing a goatherd with his flock in the Forum of Trajan.

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37. Cf. Springer, *The Marble Wilderness,* 8–14, 136–57.

38. *Walks in Rome,* 142.

39. *The Story of My Life* (London: 1874), vol. 4., 171; cf. Pemble, *The Mediterranean Passion,* 178–79.

40. *Rome* (New York: 1909), 68.

41. See Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England 1838–1886* (Cambridge: 1986); Levine notes (171), "Oxford inaugurated a chair of Classical Archaeology in 1884."

42. On Cook, see Pemble, *The Mediterranean Passion,* 2–3. Pemble quotes the journalist and novelist George Augustus Sala, who shows that mass travel and archaeology were not completely divorced: "The devout have been able, by means of Cook, to make pilgrimages to the Holy Land; the humbler student of archaeology has had Italy and Egypt thrown open to him; and Cook at present pervades the whole civilized world" (*The Life and Adventures of George Augustus Sala* [3rd ed., 1895], ii.236). See also Paul Fussell (ed.), *The Norton Book of Travel* (New York: 1987), 272–73.

43. Quoted by J. Keller and K. Breisch, *John Henry Parker: A Victorian View of Ancient Rome* (Ann Arbor: 1982), 7. The quotations that follow, from Parker and the anonymous reviewer, are from this same source.

44. See A. Szegedy-Maszak, "Picturing the Past," *Archaeology,* vol. 42, no. 4 (July–August 1989), 38–47.

45. Keller and Breisch, *John Henry Parker* 32 and plate 3.

46. *Italy through the Stereoscope* (New York: 1900), 583.

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Figure 1: From the collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Noel-Marie Paymal Lerebours, *The Colosseum in Rome,* 1842, aquatint, 14.8 × 20.3 cm.

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Figure 2: From the collection of Hans P. Kraus, Jr., New York; Rev. Calvert R. Jones; *Colosseum, Rome, 2nd view;* May 1846; salt print from a calotype negative.

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Figure 3: From the collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum; Tommaso Cuccioni; *Colosseum, Exterior View;* circa 1860; albumen print; 33.2 × 46.2 cm.

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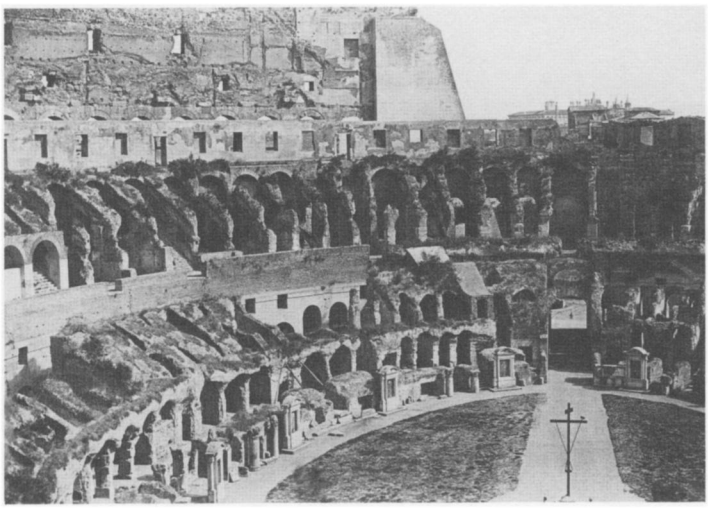

Figure 4: From the collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum; Tommaso Cuccioni; *Colosseum, Interior View;* circa 1860; albumen print; 33.2 × 46.3 cm.

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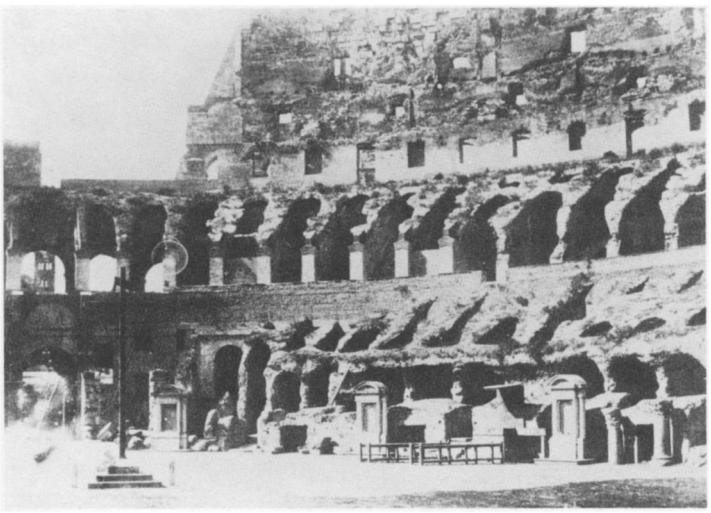

Figure 5: From the collection of Hans P. Kraus, Jr., New York; Giacomo Caneva; *Interno dell' Antiteatro Flavio Detto il Colosseo;* circa 1850; salt print from calotype negative.

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Figure 6: Private collection, Anonymous photographer, *Interno del Colosseo,* circa 1885, albumen print.

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Figure 7: From the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Parker Collection 3270; *Colosseum—View of one of the Vomitoria for ready exit, in an upper Corridor of the Flavian Emperors;* circa 1875; 24 × 17.6 cm.

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Figure 8: Private collection; Underwood and Underwood; *Colosseum, Rome;* circa 1900; stereo card.

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