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Piranesi's challenge: Rethinking the origins of European architecture[1]

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Abstract
Italian architect, archaeologist, and scholar Giovanni Battista Piranesi was a prolific Enlightenment figure who produced an elaborate series of drawings and etchings to support his following argument on the origins of European architecture: Roman architecture derived not from the Greek but from the Etruscan, which, according to him, derived from Egypt. Based on his meticulous archaeological examinations in excavations, he developed a history of architecture that was not based on the East-West division and the separation of the continents. However, Johann Joachim Winckelmann's approach rooting the origin of Roman architecture in the Greek came to dominate the standard history of architecture, and Piranesi was misinterpreted both in his day and posthumously. The posthumous codification of architectural history excluded Piranesi from the standardized progress of architectural history in the West and resulted in his identification by idiosyncrasy. Therefore, this work is an attempt to restore his argument to architectural history.

Keywords
Egyptian architecture, Eighteenth-century origin debates, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Origins of European architecture, Roman architecture.

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1. Introduction

Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) was an Enlightenment artist and architect who engaged throughout a lifetime in a *Greece* or *Egypt* polemic, in which he asserted that Roman civilization, art, and architecture derived not entirely from Greek roots but predominantly from Etruscan/Tuscan roots which, in turn, found their origins in Egyptian civilization. It may seem an interesting argument, but if the economic, political, geographical, sociological, and, of course, architectural contexts of the eighteenth century from which these Enlightenment polemics derived, are considered extensively, Piranesi's hypothesis appears far from being preposterous.

Understanding Piranesi within his time can be challenging. Though considered the first modern architect (Rykwert, 1980) for his innovative approaches, he defies easy categorization. The eighteenth century birthed both the Enlightenment, emphasizing reason and scientific inquiry, and Romanticism, celebrating imagination and emotion. Piranesi, remarkably, embodies aspects of both (Kruft, 1994). His meticulous archaeological documentation and contributions to the field align him with the Enlightenment's scientific spirit. However, his fantastical architectural visions, like the *Carceri* series, showcase the creative fire of Romanticism. This integrative approach of Piranesi aligning the reason of the Enlightenment with the imagination and emotion of Romanticism can also be pursued in his world vision, which unifies East and West through the architectural aesthetics, proportional dispositions, and prevailing styles of different countries and continental tendencies.

Nevertheless, he has been studied far too little in comparison to his broad intellectual production. When we pit the number of works on Piranesi against the output of Piranesi himself, we find that Piranesi's works are far greater in number than works on him produced not only in Italy but on the international scale. The problem that most works on Piranesi include serious misinterpretations may be attributed to his sophisticated and radical renditions of the origins of European architecture. In the eighteenth century, when the modern discipline of the historiography of architecture was emerging, Piranesi, as one of the avant-garde architects, reached for remoter antiquity by passing over ancient Greece and Rome and claiming that the history of European architecture was rooted in Archaic Egypt (introduction of John Wilton-Ely in Piranesi, 2002), and he expressed his thought neatly as follows:

> "Must the Genius of our artists be so basely enslaved to the Grecian manners, as not to dare to take what is beautiful elsewhere, if it be not of Grecian origin? But let us at last shake of[f] this shameful yoke, and if the Egyptians, and Tuscans present to us, in their monuments, beauty, grace, and elegance, let us borrow from their stock, servilely copying from others, for this would reduce architecture and the noble arts [to] a pitiful mechanism, and would deserve blame instead of praise from the public who seek for novelty, and who would not form the most advantageous idea of an artist, as was perhaps the opinion some years ago, for a good design, if it was only a copy of some ancient work. No, an artist, who would do himself honour, and acquire a name, must not content himself with copying faithfully the ancients, but studying their works he ought to show himself of an inventive, and, I had almost said, of a creating Genius; And by prudently combining the Grecian, the Tuscan, and the Egyptian together, he ought to open himself a road to the finding out of new ornaments and new manners. The human understanding is not so short and limited, as to be unable to add new graces, and embellishments to the works of architecture, if to an attentive and profound study of nature one would likewise join that of the ancient monuments" (Piranesi, 1769).

In other words, he claimed that the architecture and many cultural features of ancient Greece and Rome were not original but *derivative*. Piranesi's oeuvre—including architectural projects, technical drawings, visual and verbal dictionaries, and theoretical and polemical writings—was devoted to a demonstration of this hypothesis. Thus, another statement of him on the same argument in his *Diverse maniere d'adornare I cammini ed ogni altra par-*

te degli edifizi […] (Diverse Manners of Ornamenting Chimneys and All Other Parts of Houses […]) in 1769 is as follows:

> "The Roman and Tuscan were at first one and the same, the Romans learned architecture from the Tuscans, and made use of no other for many ages; they afterwards adopted the Grecian, not on account that the Tuscan was deficient either in parts, ornaments, or beauty; but because novelty and merit rendered agreeable certain elegances and graces peculiar to the Greeks, as each nation has its own; the Tuscan and Grecian were mixed together, the graces and beauties of the one became common to the other, and the Romans found means to unite them both in one and the same work. This is what I likewise have pretended to do in these chimneys [in Diverse Maniere], which are not after the Egyptian manner, to unite the Tuscan, or what is the same, the Roman with the Grecian, and to make the beautiful and elegant of both united subservient to the execution of my design. The connoisseurs will easily distinguish what belongs to the Greeks, and what to the Tuscans" (Piranesi, 1769).

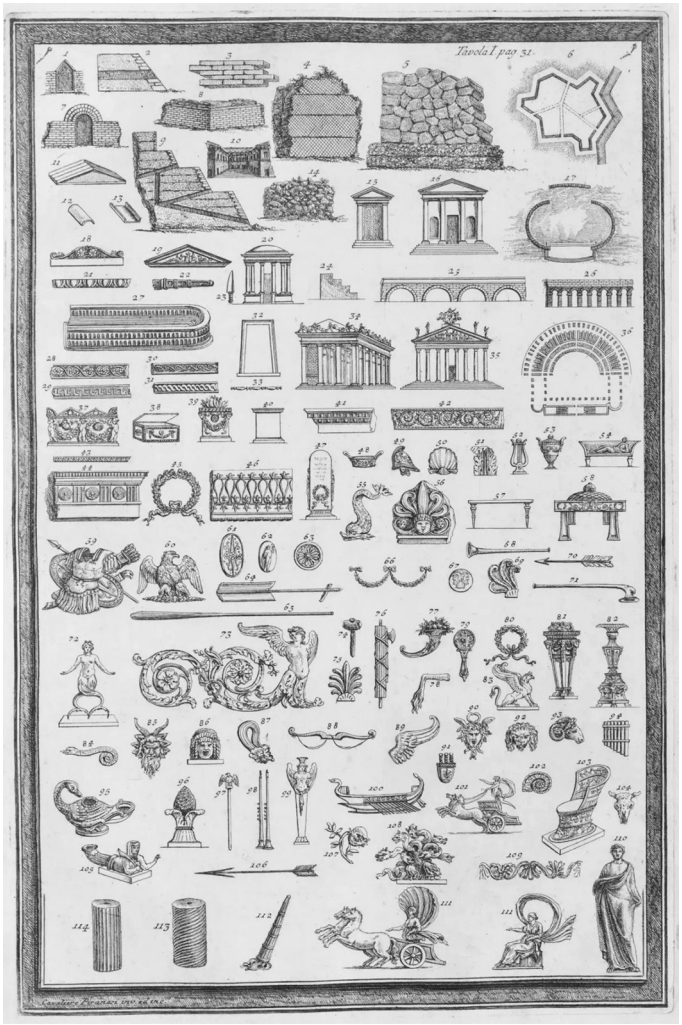

Figure 1. *A type of visual dictionary showing inventions attributed to the Etruscans by Piranesi, Diverse Maniere, 1769.*

In this framework, the primary goal of the current study is to render an interpretation of the works of eighteenth-century Enlightenment figure, Italian architect, archaeologist, and scholar Piranesi who is misunderstood and misinterpreted by numerous scholars and architectural historians today. Hence, it was aimed to reach a clear understanding by examining Piranesi's own words and drawings about his hypothesis on the origins of European architecture: he drew a visual dictionary (Figure 1) in his *Diverse maniere*, and supported it with his words proposing Etruscans as the roots of the occidental architecture. His beliefs concerning "the origins of architecture"—which comprises the aspect that Roman architecture stemmed from the Etruscans' whose architecture, on the other hand, had derived from the Egyptians'—caused him to produce his "aesthetical conception," as well. Therefore, in order to understand Piranesi's argument, the posthumous criticisms and the discourse on and concept of the "continents" current in his time should be examined. Scope-wisely, this paper deals with that content and path of examination.

2. Beyond idiosyncrasy: Resituating Piranesi in the historical context

Piranesi's thoughts were controversial in his day. The debates in which he engaged cut to the heart of a seminal moment when Architectural History was born as a discipline and architectural projects were going to—after Piranesi—open up to new stylistic modes which we have come to term as "Orientalistic," "Egyptomania," etc.[2]. Equally problematic, however, critique after critique, we find today's architectural critics and historians claiming Piranesi to be "eccentric," "idiosyncratic," "utopic," "dystopic," "bizarre," etc.[3]. This special architect, who did not think ancient Greek and Roman as his *precedents*, was thought as the "first modern architect"

(Rykwert, 1980) in the last analysis, as already mentioned, and he was claimed as a reference point to Surrealism generating in the beginnings of the twentieth century. Contrary to general opinion, however, Piranesi emerges in his century's context not as idiosyncratic but as a brilliant figure and pathfinder of his time and geography.

When we read Piranesi through the posthumous interpretations, for example, in his article, "Preliminary Drawings for Piranesi's Early Architectural Fantasies," Andrew Robison (1977) mainly observes Piranesi's preparatory drawings for the series of *Prima parte, Carceri* and *Grotteschi* (1745). The importance of these series is that they have been Piranesi's most controversial series since the eighteenth century until today. Robison described the *Prima parte* as having the tightest compositional relation, *Grotteschi* as a looser compositional relation and *Carceri* as the loosest one[4]. By this definition, Robison (1977) also arranged these drawings in order with respect to Piranesi's freedom in style. Furthermore, in his other article entitled "Piranesi's Ship on Wheels," Robison (1973) mentioned the similarity between Piranesi's drawing of ceremonial gondola or *bissona*[5] and the drawing of a couch *in Veduta della Basilica e di S. Pietro in Vaticano* (1748) from the series of *Vedute di Roma*. The couch figures are, however, seen frequently in Piranesi's drawings like in the Piazza di S. Pietro, Vedute di Roma or the Ponte Salario from Vedute di Roma. The importance of the coach figure in Piranesi's drawings was cited by Robison (1973) as that, in the 1748 plate of S. Pietro, Piranesi must have drawn the gondolas, the transportation vehicle in the canals of his native land Venice, and placed them at the center of Rome by attaching wheels (Robison, 1973).

Furthermore, Joanna Augustyn (2000) claimed Piranesi's style as "capricious." She classified the caprice genre as two kinds: the first depends on the imaginary arrangements of the artist who adds some ornamental parts to a finished and simple work of architecture in a capricious manner, and the second represents the ruined architecture as a vehicle for daydreaming (Augustyn, 2000). Especially according to the second definition Piranesi's all drawings can be included into the caprice genre, because he always drew and re-constructed the ruins of Rome not only by the help of his imagination but also by the archaeological investigations he participated. She also denoted that the caprice and obscurity were general tendencies seen in the eighteenth century[6]. Therefore, to accuse only Piranesi as capricious is preposterous. Besides, all of Piranesi's drawings cannot be labelled as the products of a mere caprice.

Similarly, Paul F. Jamieson's (1956, p. 105) article, "Musset, De Quincey, and Piranesi," published in the *MLN: Modern Language Notes*, considered Piranesi's etchings in the *Carceri* series as the "obscure psychological truths." Jamieson (1956) also indicated *Carceri*'s effects in the field of literature, in story, poem and essay. He used De Quincey's description of the *Carceri* in his *Opium-Eater* which named Piranesi's *Carceri* as *Dreams* (Jamieson, 1956). By this way, apart from determining Piranesi as an artist producing his works by using opium, Jamieson also denoted his imaginative power.

Like Jamieson, Peter Proudfoot (1985) also quoted De Quincey's *Opium-Eater* as the introduction to his article, "Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Neo-Classicism and the Rise of the Free-style in Architecture." Although Proudfoot mainly concerned with the *Carceri* series, he also mentioned the other eminent and seminal series by *Piranesi, like Vedute, Prima parte, Grotteschi,* and *Le antichità romane* (Roman antiquities). He indicated the influences of these series on the designers of the late-eighteenth, nineteenth and even twentieth centuries: Proudfoot (1985) claimed that especially the process of the development of Free-style movement—which was the precursor movement to Post-modernism, according to Proudfoot—were accelerated by the effects of Piranesian style. He also cited the works by Wilton-Ely (*The Mind and Architecture of Piranesi*) and Joseph Rykwert (*The First Moderns*). He, however, made similar interpretations with our contemporary

Piranesi-scholars, and used the same words intensively to define Piranesi's character and works[7].

Rudolf Wittkower (1975, p. 272) approached Piranesi's architectural case from a different point of view which has a crucial importance: "the first creative effusion of eighteenth century Egyptomania had its roots in a typically mid-eighteenth-century conception of sublimity." Wittkower stated that Piranesi was unique architect in the eighteenth century because he was the first one asserting that the bare and colossal impression of the Egyptian—and also Etruscan—architecture denotes only its sublime character. On the other hand, according to Wittkower (1975), Piranesi had also to defend himself to some probable objections in his introduction, the *Apologetical Essay*, to the *Diverse maniere*: Piranesi must have estimated that one of these objections may have been about that if the Egyptian and Etruscan art and architectures are bare, simple and colossal, then he would have been accused to diminish their artistic character because of his demonstration of them as ornamental architectures as in the drawings of the *Diverse manière*[8]. Therefore, Piranesi advocated his Egyptian style especially in his *Diverse maniere* by means of both drawings and text.

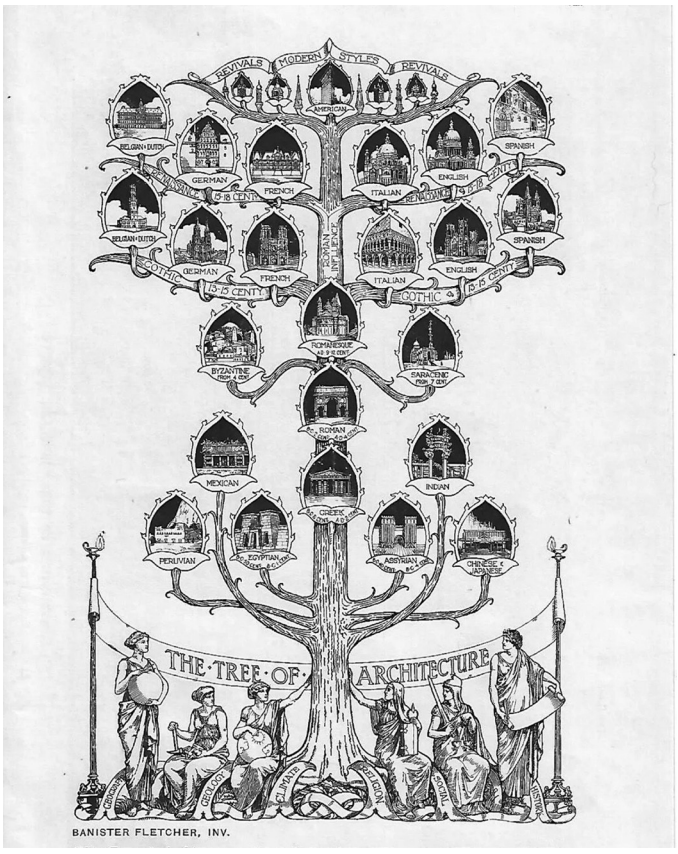

Figure 2. *Sir Bannister Fletcher, "The Tree of Architecture" (Fletcher, 1943).*

Irrationality is, actually, in interpreting the sublime spirit as "obscure" and "perverse" (Tafuri, 1978, pp. 41, 47; Rykwert, 1980, p. 389; Penny, 1978, pp. 29, 80) it lays in the attempt of bounding Piranesi and his style compulsorily to certain limits, and "absurdity"[9] is in rejecting Piranesi's arguments replete with relevant archaeological proofs. He also defined by Rykwert (1980, p. 370) as having "necrophilia" that can be refuted easily when his works are examined. He just, however, tried to reach to more accurate clues about the origins of architecture by investigating Roman ruins archeologically. Then he achieved to establish his own roots to a specific place in "the Tree of Architecture," but because his and our contemporaries could not place the roots of Roman architecture reflected in Piranesi's drawings and arguments, they explained his style, this time, as unclassifiable. The most important cause of these misinterpretations on Piranesi is because of his radical view regarding Egypt of Orient as the root of his own—both Roman/Italian and the whole European—architecture and civilization, while the other contemporaries were decrying it. Considering this, he is interpreted even as Orientalist, though he was not. However, it is very important to examine his *diverse manners* or *plethora of styles* in designs much closer, instead of calling him an Orientalist.

Far from being anything like bizarre, idiosyncratic, etc., Piranesi was perhaps the most "typical" architect of eighteenth-century culture. This becomes evident when one looks at him in the interdisciplinary and international context in which he lived, thought, wrote, and worked. He was as much in fond of British culture and architecture, French culture and architecture, as he was of Italian culture and architecture. He was as philosophical as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), his contemporary, and as learned in classical antiquity as his Jesuit friends, and he was a prolific architect. Like Pirane-

si, Italian Enlightenment writers also thought, argued, and researched that it was Archaic Egypt and Crete Civilization, which had also been created by Egypt, in the background of ancient Greeks and Romans. They believed that the roots of Italian culture reached to Etruscan Civilization, which was omitted by Romans, and connected Etruscans to Egyptians. Historical context, however, was not ready to accept such a privileged position of the East (that is, Egypt under the realm of Ottomans). Piranesi looks unclassifiable to, for example, Sir Bannister Fletcher (1866-1953), who produced the "Tree of Architecture" (Figure 2). Therefore, the historical comprehension of Piranesi and his milieu was omitted in a political context in which alliances appeared to get Egypt.

3. A stylistic discourse: On Piranesi's integrative worldview

The perception of continental divisions and differentiations and the maps having geographical labels and boundaries have been shaped by the world-visions transforming through centuries. When we look at the ancient texts, we may see that the geographical information was limited to the symbolic and religious depictions of the world before the fifth century BC (Brotton, 2013). The Greek and Roman periods (between the fifth century BC and the fifth century AD) focused on recording geographical information and mapmaking (Merrills, 2005). In the Age of Exploration (between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries), on the other hand, accurate maps were driven by explorations, which led to technological advancements in cartography (Edney, 1993). However, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, fueled by the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason and scientific inquiry, mapmakers began to employ mathematical calculations and more sophisticated surveying methods (Barber, 2020). This resulted in the creation of standardized and highly accurate maps, forming the foundation for the detailed maps we rely on today. Therefore, the transfer of the geographical information in ancient texts occurred gradually, and also helped manifest visually and document the changing perception of the world throughout the time.

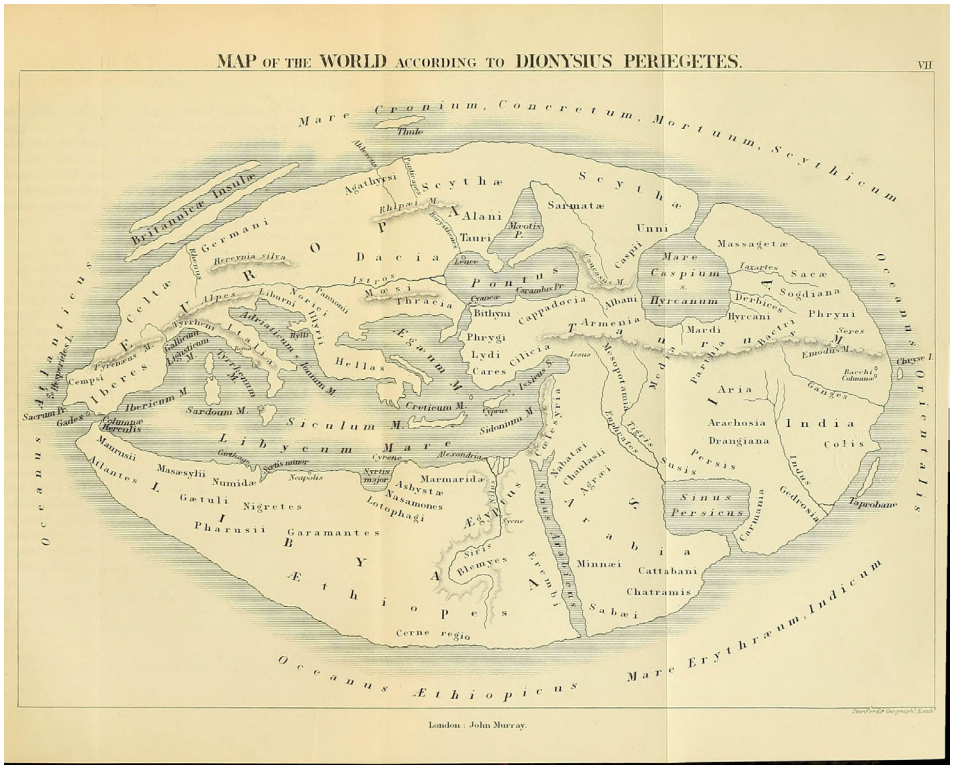

Figure 3. *World map according to Dionysius (124 AD), as demonstrated by Edward Herbert Bunbury (1879).*

In this respect, the distinction between *Greece* and *Egypt* was going to derive from a discourse on the separation of continents which had its own ancient roots. Throughout antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, there had been diversities of opinion and debates about East-West distinctions, continental divisions, and their effects on human societies, styles, and cultures. These lasted until the Enlightenment period and comprised the foundation of Enlightenment discourse. They also continued after the eighteenth century and became increasingly marked by negative understanding and national binary. One may attribute the emergence of the racial dimension in the Renaissance to the discovery of radically new cultures. It is against the background of these developments, which started with the Renaissance and which we inherited, that Piranesi's vision of origins appears idiosyncratic.

Piranesi was familiar, however, with the more ancient world perspective of the second century AD, which did not distinguish between East and West. Their maps alluded to the world, which included only one continent encompassed by oceans, as may be readily observed in Dionysius's map of 124 AD (Figure 3). A model of the world according to Homer (Figure 4) indicates that little had changed in the millennium between Homer and Dionysius. Indeed, early maps, such as Dionysius's map from 124 AD, offered a simplified view of the world. These maps typically depicted a single, large landmass surrounded by a vast ocean, reflecting the time's limitations of exploration and knowledge. Interestingly, this portrayal aligns with the worldview presented in Homer's epic poems from around the eighth or ninth century BC. Both Homer's works and Dionysius's map depict a circular landmass, possibly reflecting a belief in a flat Earth encircled by a giant ocean. This similarity suggests a persistence in geographical understanding or perhaps a reliance on earlier literary sources like Homer's works for portraying the world.

We come across the representation of the idea of *Oriental cultures* in Piranesi's latest drawing series, which comprised different views taken from the Paestum in Naples, Italy. Piranesi

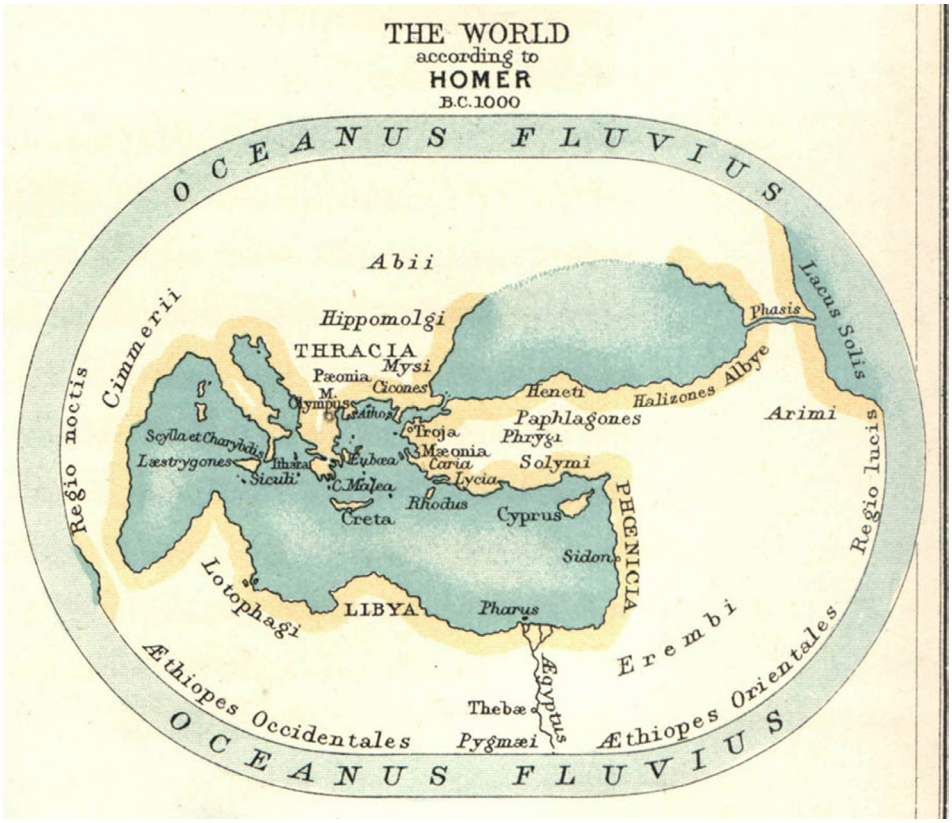

Figure 4. *Homer's view of the earth (8th/9th century BC), as given in the Voyage of HMS Challenger (Murray, 1895).*

engraved these in 1778, shortly before his death (Wilton-Ely, 1993). The Doric temples at Paestum were accepted as one of the best-preserved antiquities of the time, and had a crucial importance in the eighteenth century not only for artists, architects and collectors, but also for sailors and travelers as a landmark in the dangerous voyages by sea (Rykwert, 1980). Architectural pieces found at Paestum also provided a speculative base for Piranesi's argument asserting that European architecture roots mainly in Roman, Etruscan, and Egyptian architecture by omitting Grecian origin, as also underlined by Hanno-Walter Kruft (1994): Piranesi was claiming about the stylistically uncertain origins of the columns of Paestum that they represent the Roman aesthetic ideals manifested in the proportional relationships leading us to a conclusion of monumentality which can be encountered in Etruscan and Egyptian architectural styles.

Although the date of rediscovery of the ruins at Paestum is not clear, after 1750 travel to the site increased in spite of the difficulties posed by land morphology and pirates at sea. During these travels many scholars began to argue about the origin of these temples. One of them was Father Antonio Paoli (1720-1790): he thought that these fragments of buildings were too squat to be the work of "ingenious Greeks"[10]. He surmised that these buildings were stylistically Oriental, namely Etruscan, because of their squat proportions, which were even squatter than the canons of Vitruvius[11]. To the contrary, Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768) thought that the temples at Paestum were in Greek manner, and that they should be held in great esteem (Winckelmann, 1880). They could not be defined, however, as "beautiful" (Rykwert, 1980). Winckelmann (1880) thought them rather evocative of the "sublime." The debate concerning the historical and geographic origins of the Paestum thus quickly became identified with the emerging debate concerning the aesthetic difference between the "beautiful" and the "sublime," as best known to us Kant's work, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764).

The "beautiful" and "sublime" debate is crucial for us to comprehend the "Origin" and "East-West" discourses of the eighteenth century. So, it will be useful to mention the emergence of the "beautiful" and "sublime" distinction, briefly: Between the years 1801 and 1804, the English ambassador to the Ottoman Empire Lord Elgin wanted to offer specimen from the Acropolis for viewing by his countrymen. Thus, he requested, and obtained, permission from Sultan Mahmut II (Gurstein, 2002). Elgin, however, abused this permission and took away important and great parts of the building. These parts came to be called "Elgin Marbles." According to Elgin, the fragments he had smuggled from the Ottomans were to serve as models to artists, architects and scholars of England as the ruins in Herculaneum and Pompeii had influenced Italian artists like Michelangelo and Raffaello. The effect of the marbles was great but not in the way Elgin had supposed. The extravagant details on the statues as the imitation of empirical nature revealed a paradox to the English Neoclassicists for whom the "ideal beauty" imitated not "empirical nature," but "general nature," since the representation of the "ideal beauty" produced images that were austere and pure in shape (Reynolds, 1981). Joshua Reynolds' (1723-1792) "Inaugural Speech," as is known, is the primary English work in which this Neoclassical view was codified in architectural terms. The empirical details and exaggerations of the Elgin Marbles, on the other hand, paved the way for the rapid development of the Romanticist style in all arts and architecture (Gurstein, 2002). Between the Paestum debate and the Elgin debate, there was Kant's *Beautiful and Sublime*, which supported the argument that the "Elgin Marbles" could only represent the "sublime," but not the "beauty."

In this context, "Greece" became identified with the "East" and the "sublime." The Roman became, of course, the source for the Neoclassical concept of "beauty." This was a reversal of the traditional view that identified Greece with "ideal beauty" and Rome with "decadence"[12]. If we return to the topic of the continental divisions, here, we

see that starting with the eighteenth century, the negative conceptions of the East began to increase as did the views of the separation of the world precisely into two parts as East-West. The lines, however, are not clear-cut. The increasing distinction between East and West, and the increasingly negative views of the "East," came hand in hand with a valuation of the "East" identified with artistic creativity and the sublime, with Greece, etc. The scene looks confusing. To analyze it, one needs to look further back, at the origins of East-West divisions in western culture, as we must surmise Piranesi did. Once we do that, it becomes clear that what looks confusing to us is the coexistence, in the eighteenth century, of an ancient tradition of East-West notions with new, modern ones. Examining the Enlightenment understanding of the East-West separation of the world, one can see that their contemplation of the world demonstrated that the European lands lying to the east of Germany determined a transitional buffer zone between East and West—Asia and West—that is, barbarism and civilization: respecting this determination, Latin Christian Italy was always placed at the Western core, which had been expressed and accepted as "West" because of the existence of the "West Roman Empire."

Ancient Romans also used the terms of "Europe" and "Asia" to define their empire's lands lying West and East. The term served military and strategic purposes. While the term "europeenses" referred particularly to the western zone, Asia was defined with reference to the political division of that counterpart of the Roman Empire which lay in western Anatolia—which was going to become the "East Roman Empire." The term "oriens"—which meant the place where the sun rises—had already originated in the Roman Empire and was used throughout the Hellenistic period and beyond. It did not carry negative connotation. A passage in Virgil's *Aeneid* of the first century BC, too, cannot be quoted as evidence for the presence of negative perception of the East in Rome, because what is shunned here is adultery and an involvement against Roman military interest:

> "Opposing them was Antony; with him, on board, he had Egyptians and the whole strength of the East even to most distant Bactria; on his side was the wealth of the Orient and arms of varied design, and he came victoriously from the nations of the Dawn and the Red Sea's shore, followed—the shame of it!—by an Egyptian wife" (Virgil, 1991).

For the Greeks, the word "barbarian" meant "the inferior who does not speak as we do." Similarly, Hebrews designated Egyptians, the major other culture they know in archaic times, as "stutterers" (Schwab, 1984). Indeed, both references judge the alien as neg-

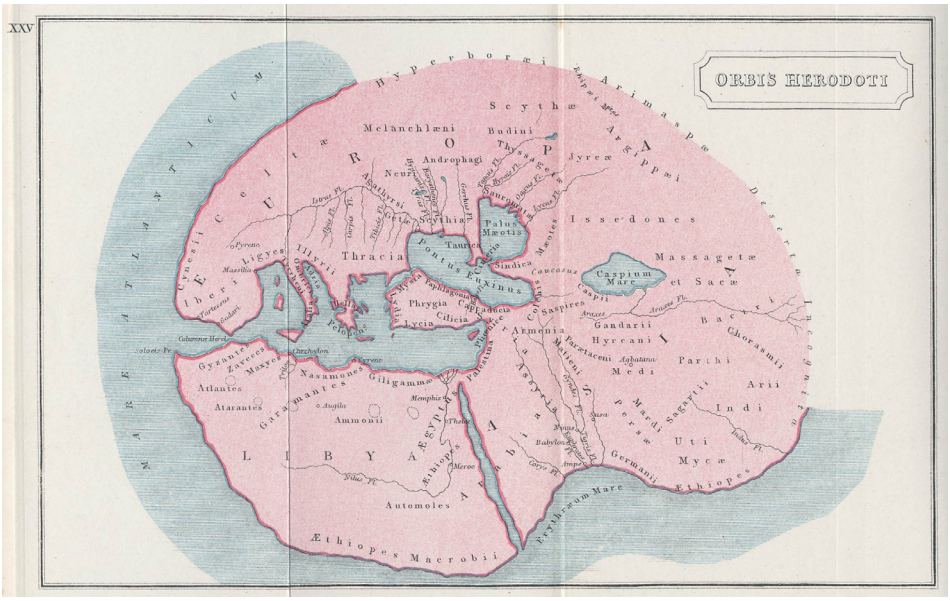

Figure 5. *Herodotus' World Map, 450 BC, as given in The Atlas of Ancient and Classical Geography by Samuel Butler (1860).*

ative and identify it as "low." The context of the identification, however, is linguistic and may be said to be general in archaic period, and to some extent, in antiquity[13]. Thus, Piranesi reached beyond the "Enlightened" Occidental values of his time, to older notions that did not change geography with negative cultural value. In that framework, Egypt was not yet deemed "Barbarian" and could serve to constitute his own roots and his "civilization," while the other "Enlightened" Occidental scholars nothing less than despised the whole "Barbarian" Orient.

Looking at the historical notions of continental division, we see that the geographic location of Egypt bore crucial importance throughout the centuries. As already Herodotus had critically observed, according to the tripartite system of dividing continents, the boundary between Asia and Africa to areas under the unity of Egypt along the Nile River. Located in the northeastern corner of Africa and bordering the Mediterranean and Asia via the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt blurred the lines between continents. This geographical bridge allowed Egypt to trade and interact with cultures in both Africa and Asia. Moreover, its strategic location made this country a target of conquest by empires on both continents, leading to periods of foreign rule. Herodotus, the "Father of History," recognized this complexity when he observed the Nile as a potential boundary between Asia and Africa and emphasized Egypt's unique position within a contiguous system of the continents (Lewis & Wigen, 1997). The following map from *The Atlas of Ancient and Classical Geography* by Samuel Butler (1860) represents Herodotus' view of the world (Figure 5).

Furthermore, the tripartite worldview of the Greeks later became the symbol of theological interpretation: T-O maps (Figure 6) represent the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe segregated as composing the T form. The T was placed like a cross within the circle of the world sphere, and the Nile remained a division line between Asia and Africa. T is shaped by the three continents to define the location of Jerusalem, and it is at the intersection point of the lines of the T in O (Krieger, 1996). Therefore, T-O maps were designed to illustrate Jerusalem as the "center of the world." Furthermore, if another medieval map of the universe and world is drawn, the cruciform, which may have represented the four rivers of heaven (Tigris, Euphrates, Nile, and Ister), can be obtained easily. In the following map, we find the orb of the O replaced by the fundamental architectonic form of Gothic culture, where the form of the universe becomes a stylistic reference for the silhouette of the Gothic cathedral in the later years of the thirteenth century (Figure 7). Indeed, the relevant *Hereford Mappa Mundi* (Hereford World Map) was found on the altar of the English Gothic-style Hereford Cathedral (1079-1250). While the outer contour line reminds us of the silhouette of the Gothic cathedral of the West, it surrounds Jerusalem as an Eastern city in the center of the world:

Figure 6. *A probable T-O map titled "Les propriétés de l'eau" (The Properties of Water) in Bartholomaeus Anglicus' (1203–1272) De Proprietatibus Rerum (The Properties of Things), as illuminated by Evrard d'Espinque in Jean Corbechon's (2021) French translation in 1480.*

Placing the Egypt of "Africa" in the Orient—which consisted largely of Asia—may appear as odd at first glance, but if we look at Edward Said's (1995) explanation of "Orientalism," we can comprehend the matter more easily: "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'." While the term "Asia" defines a continental entity, "Orient" defines a cultural position. Thus, the Orient could be brought to include more than Asia and find its limit in North Africa, south-eastern and south-western Europe.

Piranesi's thought of attributing Roman architecture to Etruscan and Egyptian roots was also developed by the conversations with Carlo Lodoli (1690-1761), a Franciscan monk, whose teachings were current in eighteenth-century Rome (Wilton-Ely, 1993). Lodoli believed in the "Egyptian origin" of the Roman civilization much more firmly than Piranesi and claimed that the Doric order might be called Egyptian order, and also thought that the Etruscan/Tuscan order had been invented by the Egyptians (Memmo, 1973, as cited in Piranesi, 2002, p. 21; also see Rykwert, 1980). Another scholar and one of the disciples of Lodoli, Andrea Memmo (1729-1793) (Italian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in Istanbul), claimed that the Phoenicians, Jews, Etruscans and the Greeks derived their building skills from the Egyptians (Memmo, 1973, as cited in Piranesi, 2002).

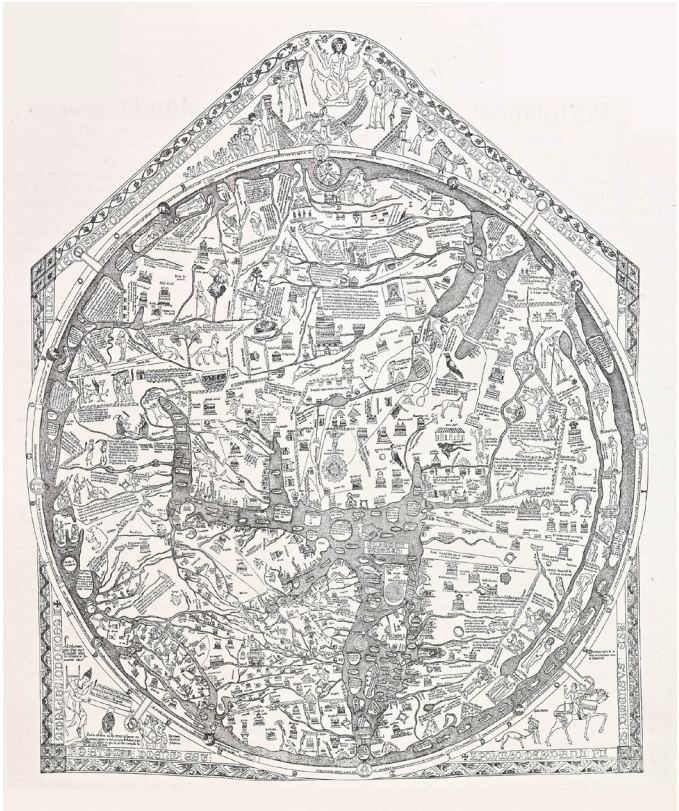

Figure 7. *Hereford Mappa Mundi (Hereford's World Map), 1300 AD: Representation of universe and world in the late medieval period (Nordenskiöld, 1897).*

Piranesi did not, however, only determine Egypt as comprising the roots of Roman civilization, but also explained the richness of Egyptian art and architecture through some of his visual and literary works. One of these polemical works, *Parere su l'Architetture* (Opinions on Architecture), published in 1765, mainly consists of the debate between scholar Didascalo, a name Piranesi invented to represent one of his philosophical friends whose identity remains to be researched, and Protopiro, another invented name designating a person in Piranesi's circle[14]. In the dialogue, Didascalo defends the power of imagination in architecture and Piranesi's conception of design, and Protopiro advocates the Greeks' "austere and noble beauty" in architecture as superior over the Romans', especially over Piranesi's conception of architecture, which was, according to Protopiro, mere "extravagant ornamentation" (Piranesi, 2002, pp. 102-114).

Furthermore, the theoretical work of Piranesi in Parere coincides with his only executed architectural work of the same period, Santa Maria del Priorato (1764-1766) (Curl, 1999; Fletcher, 1996; Wilton-Ely, 1978). Because of this coincidence, we may, in other words, surmise that Piranesi's "Opinions on Architecture" were put into practice through the "renovation" of the Priorato. We in fact come across the Egyptian obelisks between the walls enclosing the Priorato's piazza, also designed by Piranesi (Wilton-Ely, 1993). These obelisks may be claimed to belong to the Egyptian type because if we look at the description of the word "obelisk" in the dictionary, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt*, by Manfred Lurker (2006), we see that

Egyptian obelisks were designed as the dwelling place of the sun god, and it was believed initially that the rays of the rising sun were fallen on this stone. Thus, eventually there also appeared a sundial. These obelisks were composed of a monolith tapered with solar and lunar symbolism, and a pyramid on the top. Therefore, we can say that the obelisk with a pyramid and hieroglyphs is an Egyptian one, but if the monolith is like a column shaft with a capital on the top and without hieroglyphs, this type of obelisk may not refer to the Egyptians'.

In his work *A History of Architecture* (1896), Fletcher (1996, p. 919) also mentioned Egyptian influence on Piranesi in Priorato: "The obelisks punctuating the piazza reflect Piranesi's fascination with ancient Egypt." Fletcher drew a line between East and West: The "historical" group representing the western style which never underwent interruption since the antiquity, and the "non-historical" group (Peruvian, Mexican, Egyptian, Assyrian, Indian, Chinese and Japanese architectures) which had not evolved (see Figure 2) (cited from Fletcher, 1943, by Akcan, 2002). In spite of Fletcher's determination of Egyptian architecture as "non-historical," Piranesi placed the Egyptians as the root of Greek, Etruscan, as well as Roman, thus all modern European architecture. Piranesi also illustrated this belief—that the Roman architecture "leans on" Egyptian architecture. He showed this more explicitly in his drawings such as those in *Varie Vedute di Roma Antica e Moderna* (Diverse Views of Ancient and Modern Rome) published in 1750 (Piranesi, 1745; Murray, 1971; Wilton-Ely, 1978). Piranesi designed the drawing "Pyramid of Cestius" of *Varie Vedute* with respect to his beliefs and thoughts that had been expressed in his polemics about the origin of Roman civilization: by placing the Romanesque building not in front of or beside the pyramid figure, but just on the left-hand-side corner of it, he made the dominance of the pyramid perceptible. Romanesque building was not stuck on the pyramid at the "background," only the shade of the Romanesque appeared on the pyramid's surface without "distorting" or "disturbing" its magnificence. Therefore, by putting these two architectures as following one another—this also refers to the chronological order of their appearance—he could easily reveal the conceptual "leaning" of Roman architecture on the Egyptian architecture.

Another important work of Pirane-

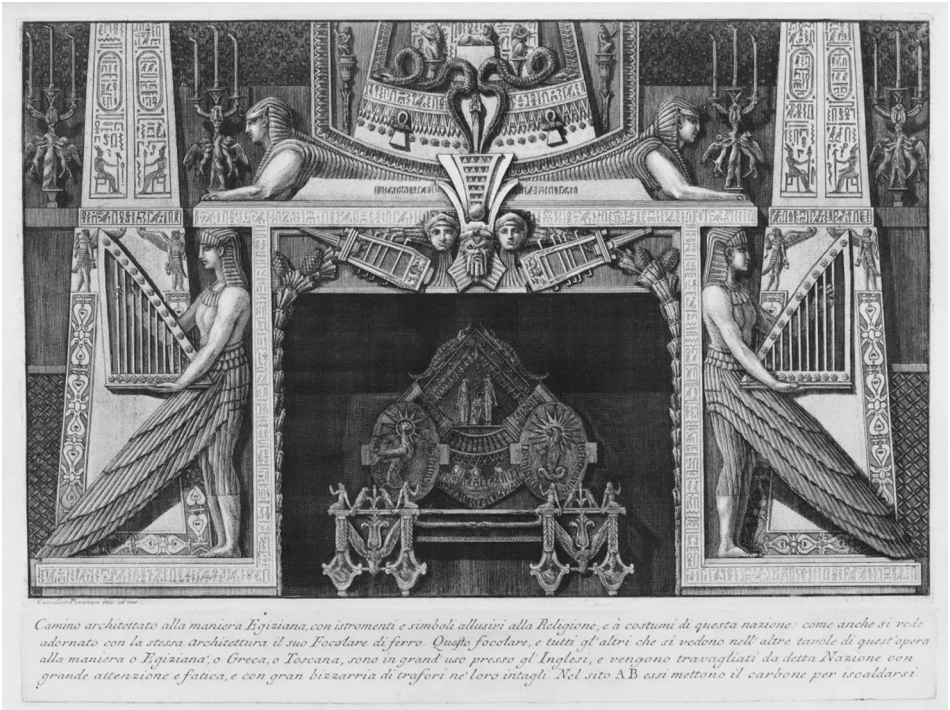

Figure 8. *Design for chimneypiece in the Egyptian taste, figures with harps, Diverse Maniere, 1769.*

si, exemplifying the figures and archetypes of Egyptians is *Diverse maniere* which is composed of his creative interior designs predominantly bearing Egyptian figures (Figure 8), again accompanied by his polemical explanations in the form of a prefatory text written in the three different languages (Italian, French, and English) in order to reach wide masses, and entitled, in Piranesi's original English, *An Apologetical Essay in Defense of the Egyptian and Tuscan Architecture* (Wilton-Ely, 1987). Toward the end of *Apologetical Essay*, he expressed his new system of design based on Egyptian, Etruscan *and* Grecian principles.

Moreover, we can easily feel Piranesi's affection on Egyptians throughout his all works: Another significant illustration demonstrating the main fountain of Aqua Felice, in Rome, from *Vedute di Roma* (Views of Rome) (Piranesi, 1836) (Figure 9), and a text comparing the two types of lions—one type of which belongs to the art of Egyptians' and the other as a mimetic example—at Aqua Felice, from the *Apologetical Essay*, are as follows:

> "I have in view, among other works of theirs [i.e. the Egyptians], the two Lions or Leopards which serve to adorn the fountain of the Felician aqueduct in Rome, together with two others studiously copied, both as to action and design from nature, that is, worked after the Grecian Manner. What majesty in the Egyptian ones, what gravity and wisdom, what union and modification of parts! How artfully are those parts set of which are agreeable to architecture, while those are suppressed which are not advantageous to it! Those other lions on the contrary, which are exactly copied from nature, and to which the artist capriciously gave what attitude he pleased, what have they to there? They only serve to diminish the great effect which the Egyptian ones gave to the architecture of that fountain; which, however, is not one of the most elegant" (Piranesi, 1769, p. 14).

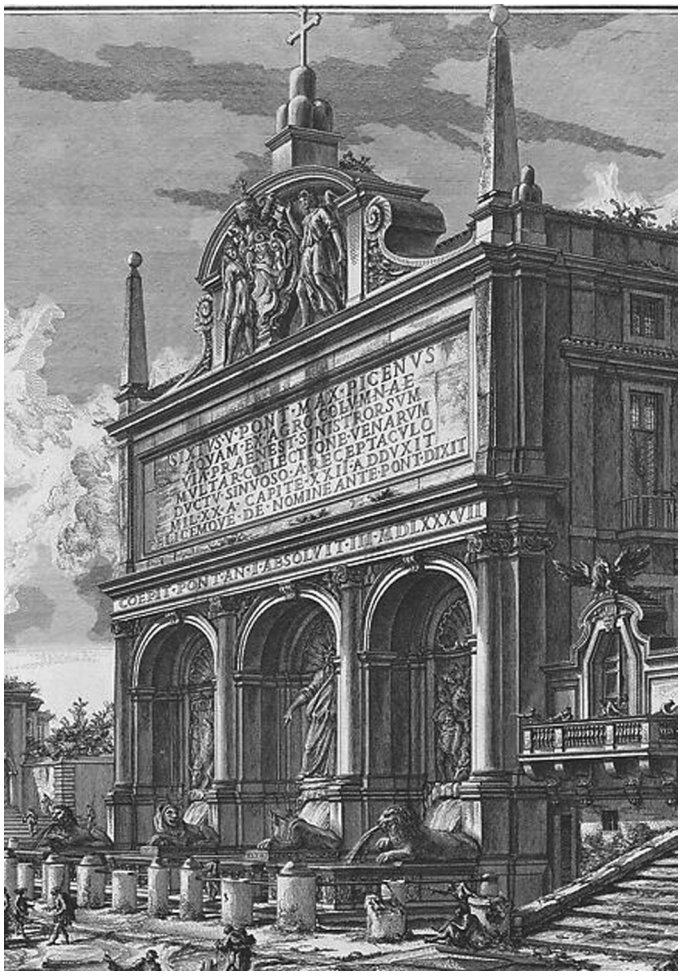

Figure 9. *The main fountain of the Acqua Felice with the Egyptian lions, Vedute di Roma, 1760.*

With respect to all of these words and drawings—especially from *Diverse Maniere*—we may describe Piranesi's art and architecture as a system that was deeply influenced by the Egyptian, namely, by the "Oriental" Egypt of the eighteenth century (Rykwert, 1980). As mentioned, in his article, "Piranesi and Eighteenth Century Egyptomania," Wittkower (1975) attributes Piranesi's tendency to Egypt to an "Egyptomania," which was indeed going to grow toward the end of the eighteenth century and continue into the nineteenth.

4. Three lenses: On staging of Piranesi's argument

Consequently, when the works of Piranesi are examined extensively, the "Oriental influences in Piranesi," as claimed by many critics, can be observed in three different perspectives: Firstly, some of Piranesi's drawing series, such as the *Parere* and *Diverse manière* (see Figure 8), include pure Egyptian figures. His architecture, however, does not reflect the "design approaches" of Egyptians. The Egyptian art and architecture offer an extremely "static system" which did not change during the three thousand years of their dynasties (Rykwert, 1996; also see "Egyptian Art" in Encyclopaedia

Britannica, 1993) whereas Piranesian architecture created itself from a range of diversities both as a means of forms and of orders. He displays and defends "architectural fantasies" shaped by his "active" polemics and design approaches often creating controversy within the context of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. He can, therefore, be claimed to have a "utopic"—even "dystopic"—sense of architecture. Piranesi was accused by the collector and connoisseur Pierre-Jean Mariette (1694-1774) in his letter published in the *Gazette litteraire de l'Europe* in 1764, in which the latter criticized the arguments in one of the Piranesi's etching series, *Della magnificenza ed architettura de'romani* (On the magnificence and architecture of Romans) (1761), and described him as merely a "madman" and not an architect (Piranesi, 2002).

Secondly, one of his masterpieces, *Carceri* (Prisons), first issued with a single plate in *Prima Parte di Architetture e Prospettive* (Part one of architecture and perspectives) in 1743 (Piranesi, 1743), then published as etching series in *Invenzioni capricci di Carceri* (Capricious inventions of prisons) in 1745 (Piranesi, 1745), and finally re-appeared with the title of *Carceri d'invenzione* (Prisons of the imagination) in 1760 (Piranesi, 1760), reflects prison views displaying frustrated human beings under torture mechanisms designed in a "barbaric" manner, which highlights and represents conditions like those experienced in the "barbarian" Oriental countries (Penny, 1978, p. 11). This axiom defining Piranesi's *Carceri*, as a work having "oriental" meaning was asserted by Said (1995, pp. 118-119) in his book, *Orientalism*:

> "Popular Orientalism during the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth attained a vogue of considerable intensity. But even this vogue, easily identifiable in William Beckford, Byron, Thomas Moore, and Goethe, cannot be simply detached from the interest taken in Gothic tales, pseudomedieval idylls, visions of barbaric splendor and cruelty. Thus in some cases the Oriental representation can be associated with Piranesi's prisons, in others with Tiepolo's luxurious ambiences, in still others with the exotic sublimity of late eighteenth-century paintings […] Sensuality, promise, terror, sublimity, idyllic pleasure, intense energy: the Orient as a figure in the pre-Romantic, pretechnical Orientalist imagination of late-eighteenth-century Europe was really a chameleonlike quality called (adjectivally) 'Oriental.'"

Said's (1995) interpretation seems unfounded and improbable, and more indicative of a late twentieth-century Palestinian writer's view of events in Eastern (Middle-Eastern) geography. Piranesi's *Carceri* series are infinitely more complicated than the above cited judgement grasps. Perhaps the last thing that can be said about the *Carceri* is "Orientalist." If the series contained socio-political critique, this was directed at the Europe of Piranesi's day.

Thirdly, the reason of his influence from the "Orient" can be explained in terms of his being of Venetian origin: Piranesi had been trained by Venetian connoisseurs in a Venetian manner. He was *architetto veneziano* (Hind, 1911; Stampfle, 1948; Wilton-Ely, 1993). Venice had long been one of the most important ports of Italy and Europe and it continued being so in the eighteenth century, by which surplus materials and goods of the "Orient," transported across oceans, were brought in disseminated across the whole Italy and Europe. Even though search for a new geography in Europe first appeared in the Middle Ages (Schwab, 1984), it continued through later centuries and gained power especially with the appearance of Colonialism. The Neoclassical traveler of the eighteenth century searched the Picturesque and scenery visions, because of the rise of the tendency to the descriptive style in narrative as well as painting (Kabbani, 1986). Especially architectural painting gained in importance, as in Piranesi's etching series *Vedute di Roma* engraved first in 1748 and continued through all his life (Wittkower, 1958). Representing the antique ruins in landscape paintings was also popular, but artists' opinions on the "Orient" differed from each other. The negative one of them, David Robert (1796-1864), was a landscape artist painting classical ruins like Piranesi: he detested Arabs and their barbarism, which had caused to demolish the great cities (Kabbani, 1986).

Piranesi's view of the "Orient" was clearer, however: in order to confirm the political, economic, as well as architectural importance of the port that Venice was, we may examine what is perhaps Piranesi's most creative and richest design "devised with highly original compositions by extracting and amalgamating widely diverse classical motifs" according to Wilton-Ely (1993): *Parte di ampio magnifico porto* (Magnificent Port) of the *Opere varie di architettura* (Selected architectural works) of 1750 (Figure 10). In *Parte di ampio magnifico*, the richness, diversity and creative power of the imagination in the forms composing an effective architectural fantasy were all invented by Piranesi. Although he took inspiration from antiquity, his juxtapositions of these antique figures and archetypes—generally from Egyptian and Etruscan repertoires—created a novel system described distinctly as "Piranesian" (Wilton-Ely, 1993, pp. 56-60), which would be defined later by Piranesi's own words in *Apologetical Essay* of *Diverse Maniere* in 1769, as already mentioned. By expressing his own design approach in the words "Art, seeking after new inventions, borrowed […] from nature ornaments, changing and adapting them as necessity required" from *Diverse Maniere*, Piranesi (1769) was also giving some clues about the sources of his architectural inventions. Respecting these and similar explanations, it may be claimed that Piranesi had succeeded in combining the forms of "Orientals" with "Catholic Western" architecture in the churches and "Pagan" architecture in the remains and antiquities of the Roman Empire, with the design influences of his great "Catholic and Pagan" predecessors and canons like Borromini, Michelangelo, Palladio, and emperor-architect Hadrian[15].

This appears by no means exhausted its topic. It primarily sought to establish the ground for viewing Piranesi in relation to the question Orientalism and placed Piranesi in the double current of the eighteenth century between past, traditional conceptions and modern, Colonialist ones. Though Piranesi continued reflection in the traditional vein, he bore an entirely new direction out of it. Much of his work set the tone for future decades. Furthermore, as we may comprehend that he did not have an Orientalistic view, but very radical belief referring Egypt as the root of both Italian and European architectures and civilizations. On the contrary, as we see, interpretations on Piranesi are erroneously focused on the perceptions considering him Oriental or idiosyncratic.

Figure 10. *Parte di ampio magnifico porto, Opere Varie, 1750.*

5. Epilogue: On the possibility for an integrated worldview

Piranesi developed a history of architecture that was not based on the East-West division and the separation of the continents. However, Winckelmann's (1880) approach rooting the origin of Roman architecture in the Greek came to dominate the standard history of architecture, and Piranesi was misinterpreted both in his day and posthumously. In this misinterpretation, the relatively new Colonialist perspective categorizes Eastern architecture as undeveloped styles while seeing Western architecture as those that evolved throughout history, as we find in Fletcher's (1943) "Tree of Architecture" (see Figure 2). Within this understanding, Piranesi's worldview manifests a rule-breaking argument asserting that the origin of European and Roman architecture can be found in Egypt, whose architectural style is reminiscent of those of Etruscans and Romans regarding the stylistic and proportional relationships.

This kind of worldview can be found in ancient texts and maps, which do not support a continental division but perceive the continents within a tripartite form, like a T with three arms, as an integrated structure surrounded by water mass, with Jerusalem at the center symbolically, and placed on the flat and O-shaped world. This shows us that the worldviews regarding the continental divisions have also evolved throughout history via the dynamics of technological developments and the changing geographical information. However, Piranesi's Enlightenment age was not ready to accept continental integration and the relationships that may demonstrate that Western architectural styles were inherited overseas from Eastern lands. This situation would lead to biased readings about his architectural contribution to the origins of Roman and European architecture.

Beyond the misconception of him as an unclassifiable, idiosyncratic, and capricious oddity, Piranesi emerges as a strategically driven architect. His meticulously documented archaeological studies and innovative, imaginative compositions reveal a multifaceted career grounded in both scientific rigor and artistic vision that evolved on copper plates and paper. Indeed, in the eighteenth century, because it was difficult—and accepted as unnecessary—to establish an architectural career based solely on practice, architects preferred to express their talents by means of technical drawings, participating to the archaeological investigations and designing the temporarily constructed theatre stages[16]. Therefore, Piranesi did not establish an architectural career based on building practice. As already mentioned, it is certain that Piranesi selected himself as idols, his great Catholic and Pagan predecessors and canons like Vitruvius, Borromini, Michelangelo, Palladio, and the emperor-architect Hadrian.

As all Piranesi researchers claimed, Piranesi influenced artists and architects, and was influenced from them canonically. He lived an artistic life active and replete with polemics on aesthetics and origins of Roman architecture. Thus, he established himself academic career—rather than architectural. Therefore, Piranesi's career and works must be evaluated by considering his polemics based on his argumentative texts and drawings. Negative definitions are caused because of his aesthetical disposition for sublimity. Therefore, to grasp Piranesi's perspective on the origins of Western architecture, relying solely on contemporary interpretations risks overlooking the historical context. Instead, a deeper examination of ancient texts and maps is crucial. These sources reveal a worldview where continents were not rigidly defined, and cultural exchange fostered the transmission of architectural styles across vast distances. This interconnectedness, evident in historical sources, suggests a shared foundation for Western and Eastern architectures, hinting at the possibility of a future that celebrates our common heritage through architectural styles and expression.

Endnotes

[1] An early version of some parts of this text can be found in the following unpublished source: Fatma İpek Ek, "The Archaeological Sublime: History and Architecture in Piranesi's Draw-

ings," Masters' diss., Izmir Institute of Technology, 2006.

[2] For the definition of "Orientalistic" see Said (1995, pp. 118-119), Rykwert (1980, p. 388). For the definition of "Egyptomania" see Wittkower (1975, pp. 258-273), Wilton-Ely (1993, p. 145).

[3] For the definition of "eccentric" see Rykwert (1980, pp. 348,364,384), Penny (1978, pp. 7,13,16). For the definition of "idiosyncratic" see Rykwert (1980, p. 378), Wilton-Ely (1978, pp. 7,17,19,31,69,73,81,89), Wilton-Ely (1993, pp. 9,46-48,63,109-110,122,159), Piranesi (2002, pp. 5,35,37,55,57), Penny (1978, p. 7). For the definition of "utopic or dystopic" see Tafuri (1978, pp. 28,29,30,33,34,40,41,46,53,54). For the definition of "bizarre" see Rykwert (1980, pp. 348,384); Wilton-Ely (1978, pp. 31,95,103,109,113), Wilton-Ely (1993, pp. 60,73-80,109,122), Piranesi (2002, pp. 37,48,51), Penny (1978, pp. 10,16,29,63,80,86).

[4] For Robison's descriptions on Piranesi's compositions in the series, *Prima parte, Grotteschi,* and *Carceri* see Robison (1977, p. 395; also see pp. 387-401).

[5] *Bissona* and some similar other drawings—which include compositions for wall decorations and vignettes—were named as "untitled group of drawings" and stated in an article published in 1948 by Stampfle who discovered their belonging to Piranesi, at the beginning of the twentieth century when he was searching for Piranesian drawings in the archives of Pierpont Morgan Library. See Stampfle (1948, p. 125).

[6] For Augustyn's interpretation on caprice as a general tendency in the eighteenth century see Augustyn (2000, p. 433); and her interpretation on obscurity as a general tendency in the eighteenth century see p. 449 in the same article.

[7] Proudfoot used the words of "versatile," "complex," "bizarre," "obsessive," "fantasy," "ambiguity," "obscure," "ambivalence," "irrational," "eclectic." For these definitions see Proudfoot (1985, pp. 66-74).

[8] For Wittkower's explanations on the objections against Piranesi's Egyptian view see Wittkower (1975, p. 268).

[9] For the description of Piranesi's character as "obsessive," "chaotic," and "absurd," see Tafuri (1978, pp. 36,49); for "obsessive," see Rykwert (1980, p. 370); for "frenetic," see Penny (1978, p. 30), and Wilton-Ely (1993, p. 12).

[10] For Paoli's identification see Winckelmann (1880, p.30). For a discussion about this subject see Rykwert (1980, pp. 270-271).

[11] For the identification of the Etruscan as Oriental, see Rykwert (1980, pp. 270-71).

[12] One may find this opposition and reversal debated in Piranesi's *Parere su l'Architetture* (Opinions on Architecture). See Piranesi (2002).

[13] A familiar example is in Aristotle's Poetics, Volume XXI. See Aristotle (1982, XXI. 1457b-1458a).

[14] The Parere mainly consists of the debate between scholar Didascalo (literally meaning "teacher") and Protopiro (literally meaning "the first to set fire"). In the Parere, "Didascalo" may have represented the Franciscan monk Lodoli or Piranesi himself. "Protopiro" may have represented one from the opposite side of the debate which included Pierre-Jean Mariette, Marc-Antoine Laugier, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, and Francesco Milizia (1725- 1798). For Rykwert's and Wilton-Ely's different estimates of "Protopiro," see Rykwert (1993, pp. 53-54), and Wilton-Ely (1993, p. 51).

[15] Piranesi might have also been influenced by the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Neapolitan painters like Luca Giordano, as Wilton-Ely (1978, p. 15) claimed.

[16] For importance of practice and theory in the eighteenth-century architecture of Italy see Wittkower (1958), and Wilton-Ely (1993, p. 3).

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