

Spolia and Memory in Post-Revolutionary France

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In the summer of 1796, the French Republic and the Papal States signed an armistice that sparked a pan-European debate about cultural property. Besides reparations in currency, precious stones, land, and other instruments, the Armistice of Bologna stipulated a payment from the Holy See to the French government of 100 paintings, busts, vases, and statues and 500 manuscripts from the Vatican libraries. Reaffirmed the next year by the Treaty of Tolentino, the agreement formalized France's policy of "cultural annexations," an ambitious program of foreign plunder that began with the Revolutionary Wars. A French commission of experts including artists, a natural scientist, and a librarian worked for nearly three years between 1776 and 1779 to select, package, and transport artworks from Italy to Paris.¹ These sanctioned activities were distinct from the unofficial plunder of Italy committed by notoriously undersupplied French troops and unscrupulous officers. Artists, politicians, and intellectuals across the continent passionately protested France's confiscation of objects that were cherished in Italy as national treasures.²

This essay explores the significance of a particularly resonant argument against the confiscations raised by the French cultural critic Antoine Quatremère de Quincy (1755–1849). It proposes that one of Quatremère's key arguments against the plunder of Italy—his insistence on the primacy of beholding artifacts *in situ* in Rome—revealed a vision of cultural property deeply rooted in collective memory shaped

by the French expatriate experience in Rome. While these letters have inspired thoughtful scholarship stimulated by the development of French heritage studies, scholars have yet to assess the role of collective memory in Quatremère's rhetoric. This paper argues that Quatremère envisioned classical and Renaissance artworks as mnemonic objects whose value—educational and cultural—was contingent on their permanent and static placement in the physical landscape of Italy.

Quatremère's position conflicted with the dynamic vision of objects and memory proposed by contemporary artists who represented plundered artifacts in physical and symbolic flux across the continent. Contemporary sketches and etchings of the *Triumphal Quadriga* being lowered from St. Mark's Basilica, of loot-filled convoys lumbering across the countryside, and of a monumental Roman torso passing through a courtyard in the Louvre mediated the overlapping meanings that artists attached to these artifacts as artworks and as mnemonic objects. The images demonstrate the difficulty of reconciling the nature of collective memory captured in Quatremère's letters with dramatic historical rupture.

Debates concerning the annexation of Italian collections took place in Paris long before the conquest of Italy.³ Proponents of state-sanctioned plunder pointed to Revolutionary ideology, not naked avarice, as justification for foreign pillage.⁴ Steeped in Johann Joachim Winckelmann's principle of the *beau idéal*, which asserted that the most beautiful art was produced in classical Athens in the context of Greek democracy, Revolutionaries held France up as the natural successor to the ancient Greek model of freedom and as the world's new cultural capital. The Roman conquest of Greece transferred Athens's patrimony to Rome, which later inspired Italian Renaissance artists to create new objects of universal beauty. Revolutionary logic held that by the late eighteenth century, despotic rule in Catholic Italy had enslaved classical

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- 1 The commission was comprised of mathematician Gaspard Monge, chemist Claude Louis Berthollet, naturalists André Thouin and Jacques de Labillardière, sculptor Jean Guillaume Moitte, and painter Jean-Simon Berthelémy.
- 2 The concept of national treasures has a long tradition in Italy and was verbalized by contemporary Italians in relation to France's cultural conquests. In 1796, for example, a Perugian magistrate implored a French general to reconsider the requisition of paintings made by native son Pietro Perugino on grounds of their importance to regional heritage: "Ils forment le plus grand lustre de la cite, et dont plusieurs nous sont chers en tant que souvenirs d'un de nos glorieux concitoyens." Cited in Eugène Müntz, "Annexations de collections d'art ou de bibliothèques et leur rôle dans les relations internationales, principalement pendant la Révolution française," *Revue d'histoire diplomatique* 8 (1894), 501-502.

3 As early as 1794, the Committee of Public Safety formed agencies to facilitate the French military's "evacuation" of artworks (as well as agricultural products and other items useful to the French population and military forces) from conquered nations. Bénédicte Savoy, *Patrimoine annexé. Les biens culturels saisis par la France en Allemagne autour de 1800* (Paris, FR: Fondation Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2003), 16-17.

4 Dominique Poulot, "Introduction," in Antoine Quatremère de Quincy, *Letters to Miranda and Canova on the Abduction of Antiquities from Rome and Athens*, trans. Chris Miller and David Gilks (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2012), 19.

and Renaissance art, whereas the birth of republican France had transformed that nation into the natural home of liberty. The transfer of Italian treasures to France would “repatriate” the objects to their spiritual homeland while inspiring a new cultural Renaissance in Paris.⁵

Quatremère contested this convoluted reasoning. His *Lettres à Miranda sur le déplacement des monuments de l’art de l’Italie* (henceforth *Letters to Miranda*) have become emblematic of the polemic over France’s appropriation of Italian collections, and in general of the French plunder of its enemies in the Post-Revolutionary era. Quatremère hailed from a newly aristocratic French family and trained as a sculptor in Paris. A staunch Catholic, he lived in Italy between 1776 and 1780, and again from 1783. Though he no longer aimed to make a living as an artist, Quatremère traveled in artistic circles in Rome, Naples, and Sicily in the decades before and after the Revolution. In Italy, he befriended artists such as Jacques-Louis David and Antonio Canova, to whom Quatremère would write an important series of open letters regarding the Elgin Marbles in 1818. Quatremère moved easily in the same social circles as instructors, *pensionnaires*, and the larger community of the French Academy in Rome.

Quatremère nominally addressed the *Letters to Miranda* to his friend, General Francisco de Miranda, a South American-born commander of the French Army of the North who fought for the young French Republic in the early 1790s.⁶ A sequence of seven epistles, the letters were published serially in *Le Censeur des journaux* beginning in the summer of 1796 and subsequently released as a 74-page volume. The *Letters to Miranda* firmly and passionately criticized the Directory’s cultural policies and the Army of Italy’s predatory practices under General Bonaparte. Deploying a multi-pronged heuristic attack, they cast the spirit of cultural conquest in opposition to heritage preservation, artistic education, and liberty.

Several of Quatremère’s arguments against the seizures contained kernels of collective memory. He declared that the removal of cultural markers from Italy would denature the city: like a book missing pages, Rome’s historical significance would be diminished unless it retained all of its monuments.⁷ Quatremère also maintained that Italian

treasures formed the common heritage of all Europeans, and that to plunder them was a self-defeating undertaking: one could not steal that which already belonged to everyone.⁸ In addition, Quatremère held that the confiscations undermined the didactic value of the objects removed and the artifacts left behind by diminishing the range of possible comparisons between beautiful and less successful artworks. Quatremère characterized this effect on education as an “attack on science and a crime against public instruction.”⁹ While each of these claims merits further discussion, this essay will limit itself to Quatremère’s contextual argument and its basis in pedagogical concerns.

Quatremère’s most compelling line of attack in the context of collective memory was the contention that Rome was a “total museum”—the Italian landscape, colors, architecture, and traditions together provided an immersive experience in which one could understand the cultural products of classical and Renaissance Rome. In no other single location could one find Italy’s “statues, colossal figures, temples, obelisks, triumphal columns, baths, stadia, amphitheatres, triumphal arches, tombs, stucco decorations, frescoes, low reliefs, inscriptions, fragments of ornaments, construction materials, furniture.... But it is equally made up,” Quatremère continued, “of places, sites, mountains, quarries, ancient roads, the respective positions of ruined towns, geographic connections, the inter-relationship of all these objects, memories, local traditions, continued customs, and parallels and comparisons that can only be made of the country itself.”¹⁰ Quatremère’s litany of Italy’s attributes conflated a wide variety of disparate monuments and vistas—the heritage of numerous political entities—in the single city of Rome.

Like his peers in Italy, Quatremère’s vision of Italy was decidedly romantic: “What artist has not experienced in Italy the penetrating harmony between the work of art,” he asked in his fourth letter, “the sky that illuminates it, and the landscape that is its background—that mutual enhancement of beautiful things, the light that each model of the arts naturally reflects upon all the others when a single gaze can embrace them in their native land?”¹¹ Quatremère’s letters revealed a deep longing for an idealized place. They also referred to a larger society of individuals he believed shared his memories of Italy’s cultural landscape, namely a community of artists training, working, and living in Italy. The *Letters to Miranda* presumed to speak on behalf of a collective and in defense of a shared memory.

Dominique Poulot notes aptly that Quatremère’s vision of Rome reflected eighteenth-century French artistic training traditions, which had been promulgated over many generations through elite institutional structures such as the Royal

5 For discussions of French Revolutionary logic applied to the French plunder of Europe, see especially Édouard Pommier, *L’art de la liberté. Doctrines et débats de la Révolution française* (Paris, FR: Gallimard, 1991) and Poulot, “Introduction.”

6 There are no corresponding *Lettres à Quatremère*, though Édouard Pommier suspects they exist: see “La Révolution et le destin des oeuvres d’art,” in Antoine Quatremère de Quincy, *Lettres à Miranda sur le déplacement des monuments de l’art de l’Italie (1796)* (Paris: Éditions Macula, 1989), 15.

7 “What is the antique in Rome if not a great book whose pages have been destroyed and dispersed by time, and whose voids and lacunae modern research continually fills and repairs? The sovereign power that chose, exported, and appropriated a selection of the most curious of these monuments would be doing no other than an ignoramus tearing out of a book all those pages on which he found vignettes.” Quatremère de Quincy, *Letters to Miranda*, 100.

8 *Ibid.*, 115-120.

9 *Ibid.*, 102.

10 *Ibid.*, 101.

11 *Ibid.*, 107.

Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris.¹² The *ancien régime* art academy sought to preserve artistic tradition by elevating and promoting designated styles.¹³ In particular, Quatremère's letters unmistakably represented the traditions of the French Academy in Rome, which was founded under King Louis XIV and given a mandate to preserve artistic tradition. It was an archetypal collective-memory-forming institution in accordance with the formulation of the pioneering memory scholar Maurice Halbwachs.¹⁴ In Rome, the perpetuation of tradition manifested itself in the practice of requiring students to copy classical and Renaissance art and architecture, exercises that immersed *pensionnaires* in daily Italian life and culture over a number of years. The shared goal of preserving and propagating Italy's past through art created a sense of community, exchange, and social cohesion among French artists and the cultural élite orbiting the Academy, which in turn fostered the construction of shared attitudes and memories.

Quatremère's concern for the pedagogical role of Rome's artworks underscores the Academy's role in structuring his memory of Italy. He returned repeatedly to the educational value of preserving art in its physical context, notably in his sixth letter, which cynically imagined the poor attempts of foreign powers to recreate Rome's collections abroad by gathering small numbers of stolen objects in "storerooms" across Europe.¹⁵ He maintained that any attempt to isolate fine examples of Italian art from their country of origin—and here Quatremère directed his venom at England's Italian collections—only resulted in the deplorable loss of "discoveries, comparisons, and connections." Quatremère deemed that such evaluations were only possible in relation to a larger and proximate body of art representing individual masters, their schools, and their contemporaries, and within a long-established exhibition space such as the Sistine chapel and the Villa Farnesia. "It is only amid all these connections and with the help of all these comparisons and observations," Quatremère wrote, "that these masters still have lessons to teach us."¹⁶

Quatremère's use of the collective pronoun in his pedagogical argument is significant. The evocation of community relates his reasoning to foundational memory, a form of collective memory that attaches to groups, according to anthropologist Jan Assmann, "through [shared] fixed objectifications...such as dances, myths, patterns, dress, jewelry, tattoos, paintings, landscapes."¹⁷ Assmann ties the notion of

"memory landscapes" to Italy in particular, suggesting that ancient Rome created distinct memory landscape marked by recognizable monuments and topography. Assmann's view of the role of monuments in the construction of memory echoes Quatremère's understanding of cultural objects in Italy as mnemonic devices connected directly to the landscape.¹⁸ Quatremère believed both the landscape and its artifacts became meaningless when separated, such that France's proposed removal of monuments threatened his foundational memory of Rome.

Quatremère's letters presumed all his readers shared the collective memory of Rome as the world's museum. He posited Rome as the "eternal city," quite literally: his nostalgic evocations of the city precluded any possibility of cultural alteration or progress. Rome was presented as a city frozen in time since the Renaissance. Quatremère's Rome was inert and inward-looking, and his letters beseeched readers to defend its cultural stasis by opposing actions that could disrupt this state.

A petition against France's plunder of Italy indicates that several cultural figures in Quatremère's peer group shared his nostalgic vision of Rome, at least to some degree. These included the artist and future Musée Napoléon director Dominique-Vivant Denon, the artist Jacques-Louis David, and David's protégé Anne-Louis Girodet—all onetime students at the French Academy in Rome. Girodet expressed especially poignant memories of Rome in the effusive couplets of an epic poem begun in 1807. "The Painter: A Poem in Six Cantos" recalled the painter's excitement as a young man returning to Italy after an absence. "Day and night, whether Vesper or Aurora shines," wrote Girodet, "The painter dreams of Rome."¹⁹ Girodet's memories propelled him down the Rhone and across the Alpine landscape, where he bypassed Milan wistfully to look longingly towards Florence's rich cultural offerings. The ode to an enchanting land revealed memories of Italy steeped in mythology and art, with frequent references to Roman gods, painters, sculpture, architecture, and landscapes. At last, he reached Rome in his mind's eye: "Yes! Rome, Rome at last... It is the painter's Rome, which the god of the arts/Adopted as his country and chose as his sanctuary."²⁰ Girodet's Italy was sun-drenched, art-infused, and filled with memory-objects. It was, in short, Quatremère's Italy. These memories did not, however, prevent Girodet from praising the "glorious trophies of the army of Italy" in 1798.²¹ Despite a generational differ-

12 Poulot, "Introduction," 18.

13 Albert Boime, "The Cultural Politics of the Art Academy," *The Eighteenth Century* 35, no. 5 (Autumn 1994): 207.

14 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

15 Quatremère de Quincy, *Letters to Miranda*, 113.

16 *Ibid.*, 114. Author's italics.

17 Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization. Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 37.

18 *Ibid.*, 44.

19 "Jour et nuit, soit que brille ou Vesper ou l'Aurore,/ Le peintre rêve Rome." Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson, "Le peintre: poème en six chants," *Oeuvres posthumes de Girodet-Trioson, peintre d'histoire*, ed. P.A. Coupin (Paris, FR: J. Renouard, 1829), 58.

20 "Oui! Rome, Rome enfin... C'est la Rome du peintre, et que le dieu des arts/Adopta pour patrie et choisit pour asile." *Ibid.*, 65.

21 Cited in David Gilks, "Art and Politics During the 'First' Directory: Artists' Petitions and the Quarrel over the Confiscation of Works of Art from Italy in 1796," *French History* 26, no. 1 (2012): 65 n65.

ence between Girodet and Quatremère, the young Girodet shared his elder's attachment to a very specific vision of Italy, one rooted in memories informed by his experience at the French Academy in Rome, where he was an ambitious and admired art student from 1789 to 1793.

Nevertheless, collective memory failed to overcome all political, economic, and social disparities between members of the French art community in the debate over the plunder of Italian artifacts. In a recent study of petitions circulated in Paris after the publication of the *Letters to Miranda*, David Gilks asserts that the distribution of signatures on these petitions demonstrated "opportunistic realignments" of cultural figures during the tumultuous Revolutionary decade.²² The desire for status and security trumped ideological consistency.²³ Signatories of the petitions for and against the confiscations fell into two camps: one group of mostly older artists, the "insiders," who had worked and traveled in Rome with the support of *ancien régime* institutions; and a second group of mostly younger artists, the "outsiders," who had failed to win the Prix de Rome or lacked the funds and status for travel, or who came of age after the Revolutionary-era collapse of France's state-funded fine arts system and thus had never visited Italy for extended periods. "Outsiders" supported the transfer of Italy's heritage to France. Few among them had firsthand experience of Rome. They were comprised of individuals whose names are mostly unrecognizable today, except perhaps for David's rival Jean-Baptiste Regnault, his former students François Gérard and Jean-Baptiste Isabey, and the director of the new Musée des monuments français, Alexandre Lenoir.

"Insiders" included Quatremère (he is believed to be the petition's anonymous author), David, Girodet, Denon and other successful painters, sculptors, architects, and engravers for whom Italy represented a special place and time in their lives and who deemed the French Academy in Rome to be crucial to the education of young artists.²⁴ Their group identity was rooted in a collective memory of Italy. The acquisition of artistic training in Italy, which contributed to their professional success, seems to have translated to "insider" support for Italy retaining its treasures, so that future generations might in turn be successful.²⁵

Whereas Quatremère's letters and Girodet's poetry demonstrate the wish of "insiders" to preserve the fixed

and eternal qualities of Italy's cultural property, it happened that those treasures—even monumental sculptures, mosaics, and architectural elements such as columns—were indeed moveable. Contemporary prints by French artists from the "outsider" contingent presented visual chronicles of the removal, transport, and reinstallation of spolia. Besides capturing art's mobility, these images portray a remarkably celebratory vision of cultural plunder.

The painter Carle Vernet (1758–1836) created one such image, which was printed in the *Tableaux historiques des campagnes d'Italie*.²⁶ As a young painter, Vernet had won the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1779, but he resided in Italy for only a few months before his father recalled him to France upon learning that his impulsive son was on the verge of taking religious orders.²⁷ Vernet nevertheless found success as a painter and draftsman in France. In 1796 he signed the petition in support of seizing Italy's treasures, which placed him at odds with Quatremère and many other established artists. Vernet's drawing, *Entrée des français à Venise, en floréal, an 5 (French Entry into Venice, in Floréal, Year 5)*, records the French seizure of a *Triumphal Quadriga*—four monumental bronze horses—from Venice (Figure 1). Etched by Jean Duplessis-Bertaux for wide dissemination, the print shows the Piazza San Marco from a southwestern vantage point. St. Mark's Basilica takes up much of the composition. The foreground is dominated by the large piazza, and a row of palazzi and a clock tower frame the scene at left. The square is populated with regiments of soldiers in formation, crowds of curious Venetians, and mounted cavalry. The Venetians gaze at the center of the basilica's façade, riveted by the precarious lowering of a 900-kilogram bronze horse from the basilica's loggia by a rope-and-pulley system. Upon closer inspection, we see that the horse's three companions have already endured the same fate and have been loaded onto flatbed carts, which are pulled by teams of white horses. The movement of all four bronze horses is noteworthy here, for aside from a few children and French soldiers active in the immediate foreground, the human figures populating the print stand transfixed, perhaps stunned by the loss of their patrimony. Nearly everything is still except for the plundered artifacts and the mechanisms employed to deliver them: the forward motion of muscular horses pulling a spolia-laden cart in the center foreground, soldiers guiding the convoy through the crowds, and the sculpture being lowered by ropes. The piazza's viewers, it seems, collectively hold their breaths.

Vernet's illustration of the mobility of these objects contrasts with Quatremère's portrayal of Italy's inalienable cultural patrimony. The image also underscores the *Triumphal Quadriga's* peripatetic past. The monument commonly known as the horses of St. Mark's Basilica had not resided on the Venetian loggia since time immemorial. Rather, the

22 Quatremère's petition against the seizures was printed in the *Journal de Paris*, no. 330 (17 August 1796), 1323; the counter-petition was printed in the *Moniteur universel*, no. 12 (3 October 1796), 45–46.

23 Dominique-Vivant Denon, for example, signed the petition against the seizure of Italy's treasures only to become the individual most heavily involved in the systematic plunder of Egypt, Germany, and the Low Countries in addition to his duties as the director of the Musée Napoleon beginning in 1802.

24 Gilks, "Art and Politics," 66.

25 Gilks warns that signatures on petitions did not signal complete agreement with Quatremère's position. Several artists ostensibly opposed to the confiscations were involved in the business of selecting, removing, packaging, shipping, cataloguing, and exhibiting the very works they claimed they wished to see remain in Italy. *Ibid.*, 70.

26 *Historical Paintings of the Italian Campaigns*.

27 Armand Dayod, "The Three Vernets—Joseph, Carle, Horace," *The International Studio* 4, no. 16 (1898): 30.

Quadriga, believed to date to the second or third century, was already a victim of spoliation. Venetian forces removed the horses during their sack of Constantinople in 1204 and carried them triumphantly to Venice, where the city set the sculpture atop its greatest monument to its own patron saint. The *Quadriga*, a landmark for centuries, became conflated with Venice's military past and its long-standing religious traditions. After Bonaparte's 1797 victory in Venice, the *Quadriga* was transported to France and in 1808 it was placed atop the Triumphal Arch of the Carousel between the Musée Napoléon (the current Louvre Museum) and the Tuilleries Palace (since destroyed). This illustration of the removal of monuments would be difficult, it seems, for Quatremère and his memory group to reconcile with a belief in the permanence of cultural objects in the Italian landscape.

Among the contemporary illustrations that challenge Quatremère's static cultural memory is a sketch by Antoine-Jean Gros (1771–1835), made during his brief service with the French arts commission in Italy, from March to June of 1797. Rapidly outlined in black pencil, *Convoy of Seized Art Objects* represents artworks and books changing location, ownership, and significance (Figure 2). Carts transport crated treasures—including the *Apollo Belvedere*, the *Laocoön Group*, and Veronese's *Marriage at Cana*—as they enter a new economy of exchange in which they were valued not only as symbols of supreme artistic production, but also as trophies representing the glory of France under the Revolutionary government and the might of the Army of Italy under General Bonaparte. The drawing conveys movement better than perhaps any other image of the seizures. Led by massive oxen, the carts appear to surge across the landscape. Gros's recurrent diagonal lines, along with the splayed legs of the mounted horse in the foreground, communicate speed and forward progress.

In Italy, Gros assisted with the confiscation of the papal collections. He saw Roman and Renaissance treasures *in situ* for the very first time, as evidenced in his letters home.²⁸ He also accompanied a convoy from Rome to Livorno, an experience he recorded there. The young Gros, whose attempts to train as an artist in Rome were thwarted by the French Revolution, did not share the collective memory of Italy of older peers such as Girodet or his teacher, Jacques-Louis David. Like Vernet, his experience of Rome had been fleeting. The French Academy never exercised the same influence over Gros as it did over Quatremère, a condition that perhaps made it possible for him to sketch the concept of cultural treasures in transit in a way that others steeped in Italian memories could not fathom.

The final phase of the transfer of Italian cultural property was its arrival in Paris and its placement at the Louvre mu-

seum. Several contemporary drawings record the convoy's procession through Paris during the *Fête de la liberté* on July 27–28, 1798. A less studied image from the era depicts six men wheeling a monumental torso across the Louvre courtyard. This pen drawing with ink wash by Charles Norry (1756–1832), *Vue intérieure du Louvre d'après nature l'an 4eme (Interior View of the Louvre, Drawn from Life, Year 4)*, 1799, likely portrays the *Belvedere Torso*, a first-century Roman marble copy of a Greek bronze named for the Belvedere courtyard from which it was removed at the Vatican Palace (Figure 3, and cover image). A close examination of the drawing reveals one additional man holding a portfolio or a canvas—perhaps another “contribution” from Rome. Like the Venetian *Quadriga*, the *Belvedere Torso* recalled another era of plunder. The Roman copy of a Greek statue was presumably lost during the Middle Ages and rediscovered during the Renaissance, when it was acquired by the Vatican Palace. Those collections represented the Church's wealth and power, and after the sculpture's seizure by the French, the *Belvedere Torso* would come to signify republican France's victory over papal despotism.

Each of these visual mediations of confiscated collections provides a glimpse into how “outsider” artists accepted the seizure of Italian treasures as the natural course of things. We must ask, then, how “insiders”—those with foundational memories of Italian artifacts—understood these objects *after* their transfer to France. Sociologist Ron Eyerman's concept of cultural trauma, which essentially constitutes a rupture in the continuity of foundational memory, suggests viable responses to this question. Eyerman notes that cultural trauma is an episode that interrupts a group's sense of its identity and stimulates critical reflection, and which “must be understood, explained and made coherent through public reflection and discourse.”²⁹ In the identification of this trauma and the critical discourse that follows, a new, negotiated group identity is created. Collective memory, identity, trauma, mediation, new collective memories and identities: these form the “generational cycle of memory.”³⁰

Quatremère's letters and images of spoliation thus constitute the “public reflection and discourse” phase of this cycle, which we can relate to the psychoanalytical concept of “working through.” Another manifestation of the mediation stage occurred when certain French visitors to the Louvre expressed unexpected tensions upon viewing looted art in Paris. Andrew McClellan writes that “[t]hrough a process of sublimation, the museum became a site of mourning for the passing of elite privileges and modes of aesthetic experience associated with the Grand Tour.”³¹ These observations cor-

28 “I am at the pope's museum, from which we have skimmed the cream... I am seeing Rome like an *amateur*...” Letter from Gros to his mother, 11 June 1797, Fondation Custodia, Paris, inv. no. 1989-A.784. Cited and translated in David O'Brien, *After the Revolution. Antoine-Jean Gros, Painting, and Propaganda Under Napoleon* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 38.

29 Ron Eyerman, “The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory,” *Acta Sociologica* 47, no. 2 (June 2004): 160–167.

30 *Ibid.*, 163.

31 Andrew McClellan, “For and Against the Universal Museum in and after the Age of Napoleon,” in *Napoleon's Legacy: The Rise of National Museums in Europe, 1794–1830*, ed. Ellinoor Bergvedt, Debora J. Meijers, Lieske Tibbe, et al. (Berlin, DE: G+H Verlag, 2009), 93.

respond to Peter Fritzsche's contention that the ruptures precipitated by the French Revolution elicited feelings of melancholy for a vanished epoch.³² The break in collective memory brought on by the spoliation of Italy and the negotiation of a new group identity that ensued, then, were not limited to "insider" artists. However, images of spoliation by "outsider" artists may have been especially helpful to "insiders" working through their trauma, as they presented in visual form the different stages of the transfer of Italy's cultural patrimony to France, making these events "real" in a visual way.

Soon after the defeat of Napoleon and the restitution of many plundered treasures to their original owners after 1814, Quatremère composed a series of open letters to the Italian sculptor Antonio Canova. These concerned the removal of much of the Parthenon's frieze (the so-called "Elgin Marbles") from Ottoman-occupied Athens by Thomas Bruce, the Earl of Elgin, between 1802 and 1812. Remarkably, Quatremère's letters supported the removal of sculptures, friezes, pediments, and other sculptural elements from the Acropolis. Even more astonishing was Quatremère's praise of the relocation of Athenian cultural treasures to England in terms precisely contrary to his contextual and pedagogic arguments concerning Rome's artifacts. "In a finished building," he wrote,

each sculptural object, seen in its place, loses some of its grandeur; considered together with everything that accompanies it, it can be examined only from one side and in one respect; the greater the harmony and proportion of the ensemble, the more the eye and mind tend to generalize and to integrate every part of the whole. One's grasp of details, and with it one's sense of the length and difficulty of the work, simply vanish.³³

Where is Quatremère's former devotion to the "inter-relationship of all these objects"? Why is a British "store-room" fitting for Greek antiquities but not Roman ones? Do these letters belie Quatremère's values, or merely attest to Quatremère's failure to form memories and a group identity connected to Greece's treasures? Do they simply express the real aesthetic pleasure of an art historian rejoicing in his physical proximity to monuments of artistic genius? Quatremère's correspondence with Canova raises questions outside the scope of this article, but there are obvious dissonances between his reasoning in 1796 and in 1816. Two possible causes for this discontinuity are the cultural trauma brought on by the spoliation of Italy, and the subsequent renegotiation of identity facilitated by literary and visual discourses.

In sum, this paper has tried to argue that Quatremère's *Letters to Miranda* expressed foundational memory, especially through his arguments concerning the value of studying Italian cultural artifacts *in situ*. Collective memory, as posited by Quatremère, was challenged and mediated by dynamic imagery that represented the plunder of artifacts and their physical and symbolic flux across the continent. While this discussion seems restricted to the distant past, aspects of cultural spoliation raised herein remain both current and pressing as museums continue to grapple with the legacy of nineteenth-century plunder, and as today's war-torn and economically disadvantaged nations seek to protect their own cultural patrimony from pillage, dispersal, and decontextualization.

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³² Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present. Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

³³ Quatremère de Quincy, *Letters to Miranda*, 137.



Figure 1. Carle Vernet, etching and detail of *Entrée des français, Venise, en floréal, an 5* (French Entry into Venice, in Floréal, Year 5), 1797-1807, etching by Jean Duplessis-Bertaux after Carl Vernet, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

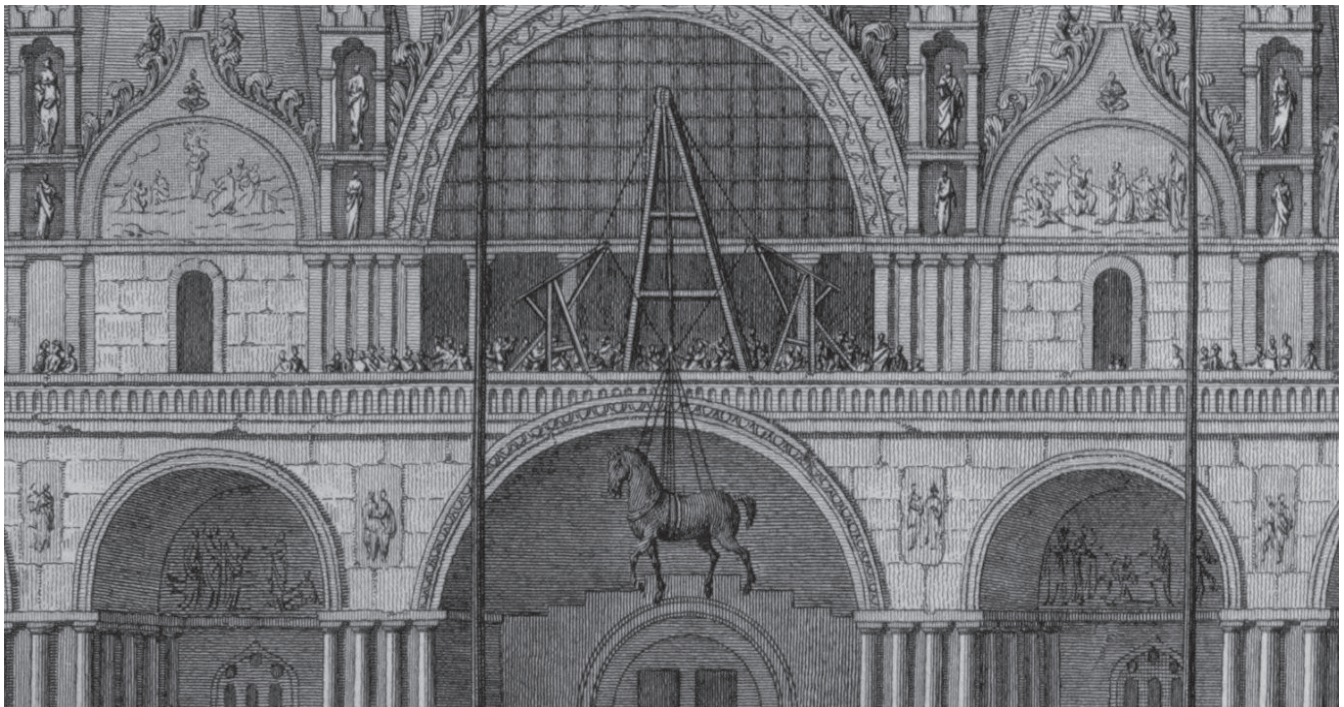




Figure 2. After Antoine-Jean Gros, *Convoy of Seized Art Objects*, 1797, drawing.



Figure 3. Charles Norry, drawing and detail of *Vue intérieure du Louvre*, 1799, pen drawing with ink wash, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

