FIG. 1. Workshop of Gianlorenzo Bernini (Italian, 1598–1680), *Design for the Tomb Monument of a Military Officer*, ca. 1669. Pen and brown ink with brush and gray wash, on cream laid paper, 30 x 21 cm. Princeton University Art Museum. Gift of Charles Scribner III, Class of 1973 and Graduate School Class of 1977, in honor of Professor Irving Lavin (2016-85)

Bernini and the *Figura Serpentinata*: A Drawing Given to the Princeton University Art Museum by Charles Scribner III in Honor of Professor Irving Lavin

IRVING LAVIN

In 2016 the Princeton University Art Museum was gifted a drawing by the workshop of Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), a work that had come to light only in the later eighteenth century (fig. 1). It is the subject of an excellent article in the November 2017 issue of the *Burlington Magazine* by Franco Mormando, author of two important biographical books on Bernini.[1] Mormando attributes the drawing to the workshop of Bernini and dates it to about 1669. He makes a persuasive case, despite the absence of any documentary or literary evidence, that the drawing was intended for a tomb of a remarkable scion of the Rospigliosi family, one of the grandest and noblest families of early modern Rome. The son of the brother of Pope Clement IX (1600–1669), Tommaso Rospigliosi, with the pope's help, achieved considerable stature in Rome, above all as a merchant in the silk and wool industries, which greatly benefited the economy of the city. Tragically, Tommaso died of malaria at the age of twenty-seven on August 4, 1667. About two years later, in 1669–70, a statue by Ercole Ferrata (1610–1686; fig. 2), who often worked for Bernini, commemorating Tommaso was erected in the Sala dei Capitani (Hall of Captains) in the Capitoline, Rome's civic capitol. As represented in the sculpture, Tommaso stands in full armor and holds a large pomegranate, a traditional symbol of abundance and also an emblem of the explosive military grenade. An engraving of Tommaso by Albertus Clouwet (1636–1679; fig. 3), after a lost painting, also shows him dressed in military garb, with an elaborate peruke and youthful features.

His qualification for the Capitoline honor of a life-size statue was based on his appointment as *castellano* of the Castel Sant'Angelo, the ancient tomb of the emperor Hadrian, which had become a prison for crimes against the papacy and a refuge for the pope in times of danger. The *castellani* were the pope's and the city's honorary guardians. No tomb was ever built for Tommaso, and in 1748 he was ultimately interred with another member of his family in the floor of the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore. The circumstances of Tommaso's life and death help explain the military garb and ample hair of the figure in the Princeton drawing as well as the distressed pose of the figure of Justice at left, as if she is lamenting the loss of a great hero. (At right are Charity and her babies.)

I want to focus my remarks on an important design feature of the portrayal of the deceased, who is engaged in a sweeping, passionate S-curved act of devotion. I believe Rudolf Wittkower in his magisterial 1955 monograph on Bernini's sculpture was the first to observe that, after a period in the late sixteenth century that favored an all-around view of freestanding sculpture, Bernini returned to a dominant frontal view that greatly enhanced the power and drama of the image.[2] The story begins in Rome in 1506 with the discovery on the Esquiline Hill of the Laocoön, the ancient three-figured sculpture celebrated by Pliny the Elder as having been

FIG. 2. Ercole Ferrata (Italian, 1610–1686), *Tommaso Rospigliosi*, 1669–70. Marble. Musei Capitolini, Sala dei Capitani, Rome

FIG. 3. Albertus Clouwet (Flemish, 1636–1679), after P. Rouns, *Portrait of Tommaso Rospigliosi*, 1646–79. Engraving, 28.8 x 18.6 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Purchase, 1905

carved from a single block of marble, *ex uno lapide*.[3] The sculpture shows the Trojan priest Laocoön and his two sons in a titanic struggle with two horrific intertwining snakes sent by the angered goddess Athena to destroy them. Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564) was one of the first to visit the excavation site to see the amazingly complex work that became the single most powerful influence in the history of European art, including on Bernini, who studied it assiduously as a youth. The point of departure for Wittkower's observation was the great achievement of Florentine sculptors of the late sixteenth century, who, in the wake of Michelangelo, were intent on making sculpture "live" in three dimensions. Giambologna (1529–1608) famously said that a sculpture should have forty equally valid viewpoints, and hence arose the so-called *figura serpentinata* (the term itself recalls the Laocoön), most spectacularly represented by his own three-figured *Rape of a Sabine* in the Loggia dei Lanzi in Florence (1583; figs. 4a,b). Bernini began to challenge this isolationist ideal early on, but his alternate solution appears full-blown in the Princeton drawing: the sculpture faces the spectator directly for maximum impact, while also enhancing its effect with a vigorous twisting movement in the frontal plane. This splendid display of grace and high energy appears in heavenly light in a 1657 drawing by Bernini, which

OPPOSITE: FIGS. 4A,B. Giambologna (Flemish, active Italy, 1529–1608), *Rape of a Sabine*, 1583. Marble, h. 410 cm. Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence

222 ppi

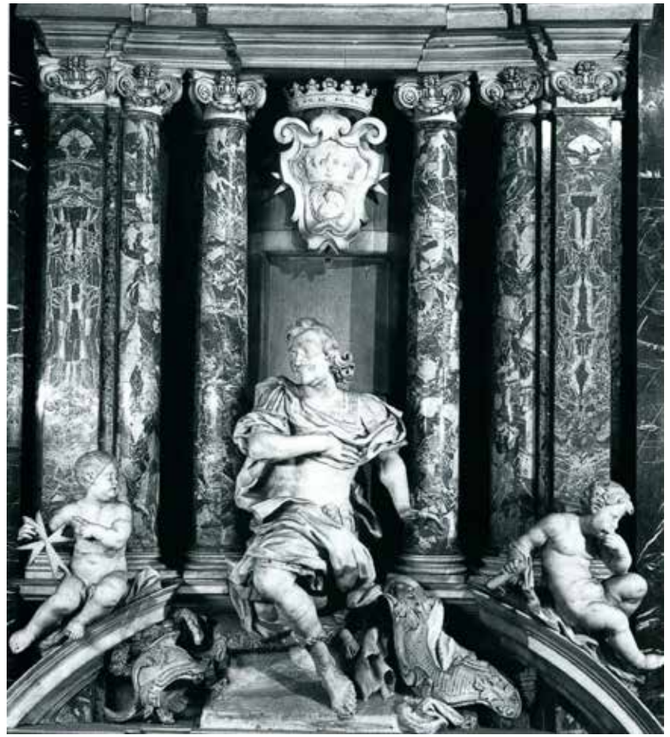
FIG. 5. Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Project for the Cathedra Petri*, 1657. Pen and brown ink over black chalk, 24.1 x 14.5 cm. The Royal Collection Trust (905614)

FIG. 6. Francesco Cavallini (Italian, 1640–1709), Tomb of Mario Bolognetti, 1675–80. Chiesa di Gesù e Maria al Corso, Rome

OPPOSITE:

FIG. 7. William Hogarth (British, 1697–1764), *Analysis of Beauty, Plate 1*, 1753. Etching and engraving; 38.8 x 50.9 cm (plate), 49 x 65.5 cm (sheet). Princeton University Art Museum. Gift of Mrs. William H. Walker II (x1988-73)

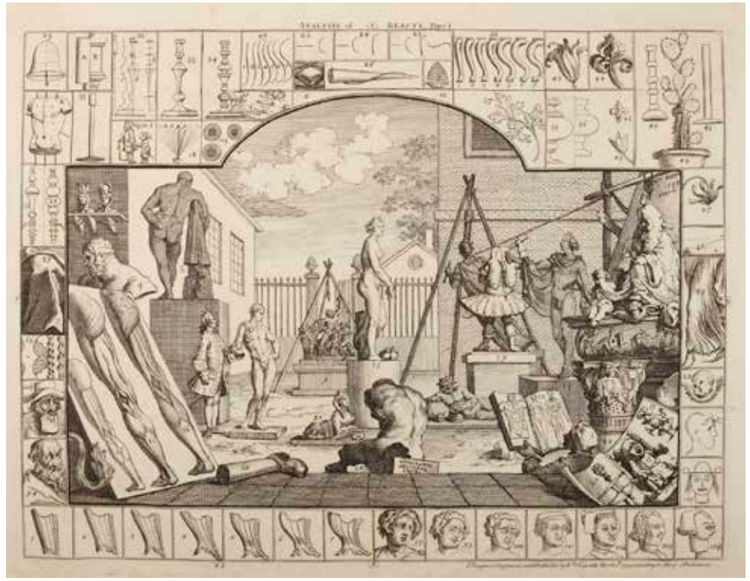
FIG. 8. Detail of fig. 7 showing the "serpentine lines of beauty"



depicts the Archangel Michael descending from heaven to bestow the keys of Saint Peter and the papal tiara on the saint's throne in the apse of Saint Peter's Basilica (fig. 5). Considering this project's central location in the largest church in Christendom, the figure would have been a truly brilliant, gigantic climax.

Also in the mid-1650s the organic principle inhabits Bernini's magnificent image, something between a painting and a sculpture, of Daniel in the Lions' Den in the Chigi Chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome (see p. 16, fig. 2).[4] The heroic figure is a veritable vortex of movement rising in devotion toward the angel descending to save him.

The Princeton drawing must have been known and available to one of the most important sculptors following Bernini in Rome at the end of the seventeenth century, Francesco Cavallini (1640–1709), who created a series of astonishing funerary monuments for the church of Gesù e Maria, located at the center of the city on the Via del Corso.[5] Cavallini's tomb of Mario Bolognetti (fig. 6), who was a cavalier of the Order of Malta and a commander of a papal galley, hence his military garb and accoutrement, is



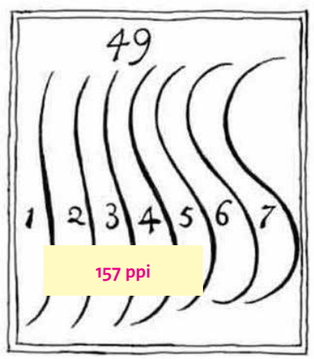


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FIG. 9. Aby Warburg with Hopi tribesman at Oraibi Village, Arizona, 1896

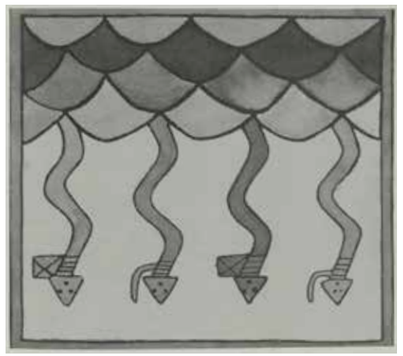

FIG. 10. Hopi, Arizona, *Thunder-Lightning-Rain God*, 1896. Watercolor.

virtually an incarnation of Bernini's unexecuted project for Tommaso Rospigliosi.

The underlying theme we have been tracing had a lasting legacy. In 1753 the British artist William Hogarth (1697–1764) published the *Analysis of Beauty*, a treatise that includes as an illustration a deliberately popular and simple-minded engraving (fig. 7), in which the distant central feature is an image of the Laocoön and the analysis of beauty is represented by variously curving examples of what Hogarth called the "serpentine lines of beauty" (fig. 8).[6]

Finally, the theme appears as far afield as the Hopi tribe in Arizona, which is celebrated for its annual ritual snake dance. A shaman with a live rattlesnake enacts a prayer to the great rain god — that is, to the thunder, lightning, and rain. Aby Warburg (1866–1929) — scion of the great Warburg banking family and founder of the famous Warburg library, the Institut für Kulturwissenschaft in Berlin, and the modern discipline of the study of symbols, iconology — had developed a debilitating psychological problem (in 1921, he retired to a famous Swiss sanatorium in Kreuzlingen). He had heard of the Hopi ritual, and in 1896 he determined to go to the tribe's settlement to see it for himself. After the ceremony, he asked a number of the young tribesmen (fig. 9) to draw a picture of what they had experienced during it.[7] Several of them drew pictures of clouds and rain, while a few others drew abstract compositions that suggested in a diagrammatic way lightning striking from the clouds to the earth in the form of wavy serpentine arrows (fig. 10) — symbols that were traditional in the tribe's self-representation. Grasping the underlying continuity of these forms, Warburg composed a lecture about his experience and his general theory that symbolic thought is deeply embedded, indeed endemic, in human culture.[8] He encapsulated the breadth and depth of his thought in a distich he composed for the occasion: "Es ist ein altes Buch zu blättern, / Athen-Oraibi alles Vettern" (It is a lesson from an old book: / The kinship of Athens and Oraibi). He delivered the paper at the sanatorium, whereupon the presiding physicians declared him fit to go back to his home, his institute, and his life of profound scholarship.

NOTES

This essay is based on a talk originally presented at the Princeton University Art Museum on December 13, 2017, at a celebration on the eve of the author's ninetieth birthday. Professor Lavin's remarks began with the following appreciation of Charles Scribner III (which has been lightly edited for publication).

Meditating on this occasion two perfectly unrelated thoughts came to mind. The first was Francis Ford Coppola's great 1972 film The Godfather, *in which Al Pacino prevails, by murdering all competitors, in gaining control and succeeding his father, played by Marlon Brando, as godfather of the greatly expanded and magnificent Corleone family of mafiosi.*

The other was the remark made by Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, later Pope Urban VIII, to Bernini's father, the sculptor Pietro Bernini, when he saw something Pietro's eight-year-old son Gianlorenzo had done, warning him, "Take care, this child will surpass you and will certainly be greater than his master." Pietro replied, somewhat cheekily, "Sire, that doesn't worry me. Your eminence knows that in this game, the one who loses wins."

I first met Charlie Scribner when he was a graduate student at Princeton of Jack Martin, whose classes on Baroque art were by far, year after year, the largest in the University. In the wake of Martin, Charlie subsequently published important work on Rubens — notably on the Eucharist tapestries, which went to three editions (1977, 1982, and 2014) — as well as monographs on Rubens in 1989 and Bernini in 1991. In 1974, Charlie participated in a colloquium of mine on Caravaggio. His subject was the London Supper at Emmaus *(1601; The National Gallery, London). He recognized that the consternation evident in the poses and expressions of the two apostles who failed to recognize Christ by his physiognomy, depended on a passage in the Latin Vulgate. The evangelist Mark reports that Jesus appeared to them in alia effigie (in another visage), and, according to Luke, only revealed himself in the miracle of his institution of the Eucharist at his blessing of the bread and wine. Charlie also found that this passage in Mark was the explanation offered by a number of early commentators on the gospel, and his article became one of the foundation stones of our understanding of Caravaggio as a true intellectual — more, much more than the proletarian, sometime criminal painter of the mysterious dramatic spiritual illumination we call chiaroscuro.*

I am proud and lucky to be able at this stage of my life to thank Charlie for this truly filial act of generosity and dear friendship.

On the *Supper at Emmaus*, see Charles Scribner III, "*In Alia Effigie*: Caravaggio's London *Supper at Emmaus*," *Art Bulletin* 59, no. 3 (September 1977): 375–28, https://www.scribd.com/document/219556651/In-alia-effigie-Caravaggio-s-London-Supper-at-Emmaus-by-Charles-Scribner-III.

1. Franco Mormando, "A Bernini Workshop Drawing for a Tomb Monument," *Burlington Magazine* 159 (November 2017): 886–92.
2. Rudolf Wittkower, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini: The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque* (London: Phaidon, 1955).
3. Wittkower, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini*, 1–7; Irving Lavin, "*Ex Uno Lapide*: The Renaissance Sculptor's Tour de Force," in *Il cortile delle statue: Der Statuenhof des Belvedere im Vatikan*, ed. Matthias Winner, Bernard Andreae, and Carlo Pietrangeli (Mainz am Rhein: P. von Zabern, 1998), 191–210.
4. Wittkower, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini*, pl. 58, cat. 58.
5. Ignazio Barbagallo, *La Chiesa di Gesù e Maria: Storia e arte* (Rome: Convento di Gesù e Maria, 2002).
6. William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, ed. Ronald Paulson (1753; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).
7. Aby Warburg, *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).
8. The lecture is published as "A Lecture on Serpent Ritual," *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2, no. 4 (April 1939): 277–92.