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Author(s): Andrew Stewart

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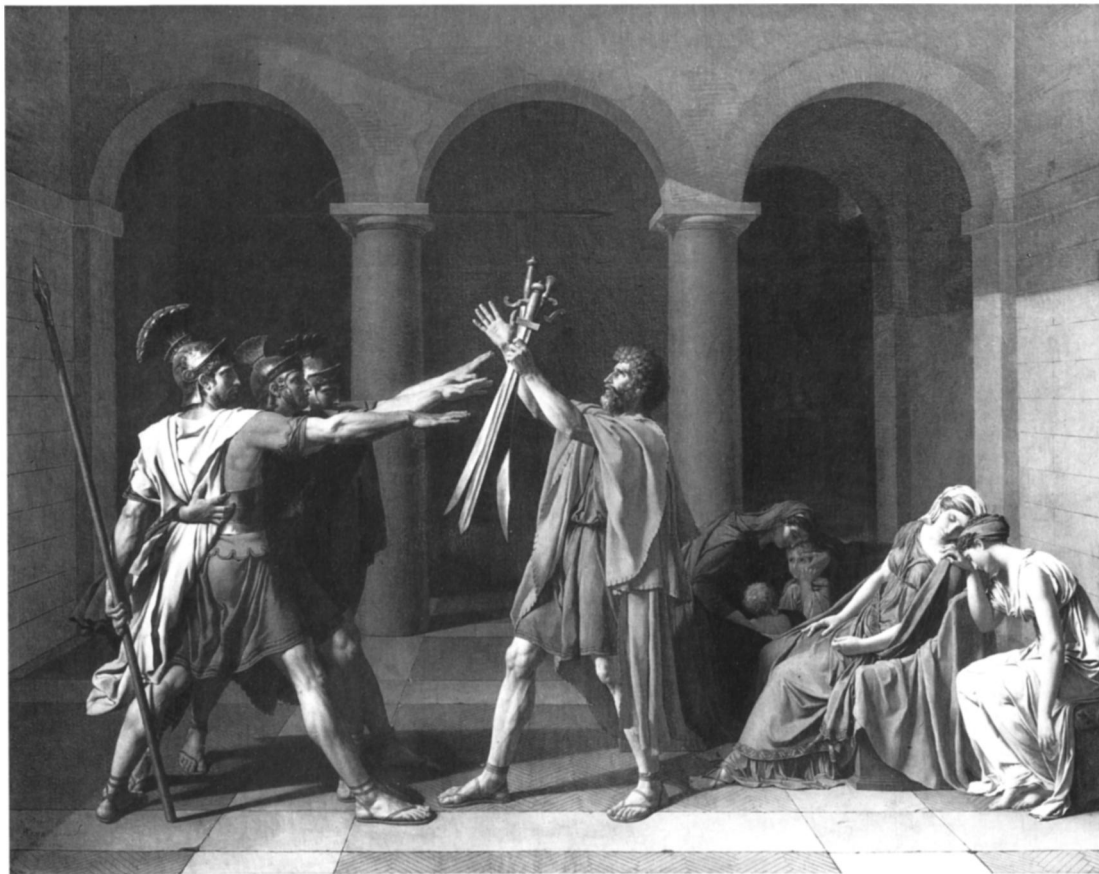
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David's 'Oath of the Horatii' and the Tyrannicides*



21. *The Oath of the Horatii*, by Jacques-Louis David. 1784. 330 by 425 cm. (Musée du Louvre, Paris).

I HAVE been intrigued for some time by the resemblance between David's Horatii (Fig.21) and the Roman copies in Naples of the early fifth-century B.C. statues of the two Athenian tyrannicides Harmodios and Aristogeiton (Figs. 22–24). It is now possible to suggest a connexion through which David may have used the Aristogeiton as a source for his oath-taking triplets, and the Harmodios and another Roman copy, probably of a triumphant Perseus (Fig.25) as a model for their rejoicing father. The missing link is these statues' conversion in the late sixteenth century into a group of the Horatii and Curiatii.

Before considering the history of the group and David's possible use of it, it may be helpful to give a summary of the legend of the Horatii and the Curiatii. Rome under King Tullus Hostilius was fighting for independence from its mother city, Alba Longa. Goaded by their dictator Mettius Fufetius, the Albans had invaded and the two armies were drawn up outside the gates of Rome, ready for battle. Yet with the Etruscans waiting to pounce, no-one really wanted a fight. Fortunately, each side boasted a set of valiant triplets, the Curiatii from Alba and the Horatii from Rome. The cream of Italian manhood, they were also cousins, and to complicate matters further the sister of the Horatii (who is not named in the main ancient sources) was secretly betrothed to one of the Curiatii.

Selected as champions by ancient ritual, all six men resolved to subordinate kinship to country, and proceeded to fight each other between the armies. The Horatii triumphed only by a ruse. After a short time, though all three Curiatii were wounded, two of the Horatii lay dead on the ground. The surviving Horatius, being both unwounded and cool-headed, decided to feign flight. As his enemies followed one by one, slowed by their wounds, he turned on the nearest, killed him, then fled again. Soon only one Curiatius was left; since he was also the most severely wounded and barely able to stand, let alone fight, the outcome was a foregone conclusion.

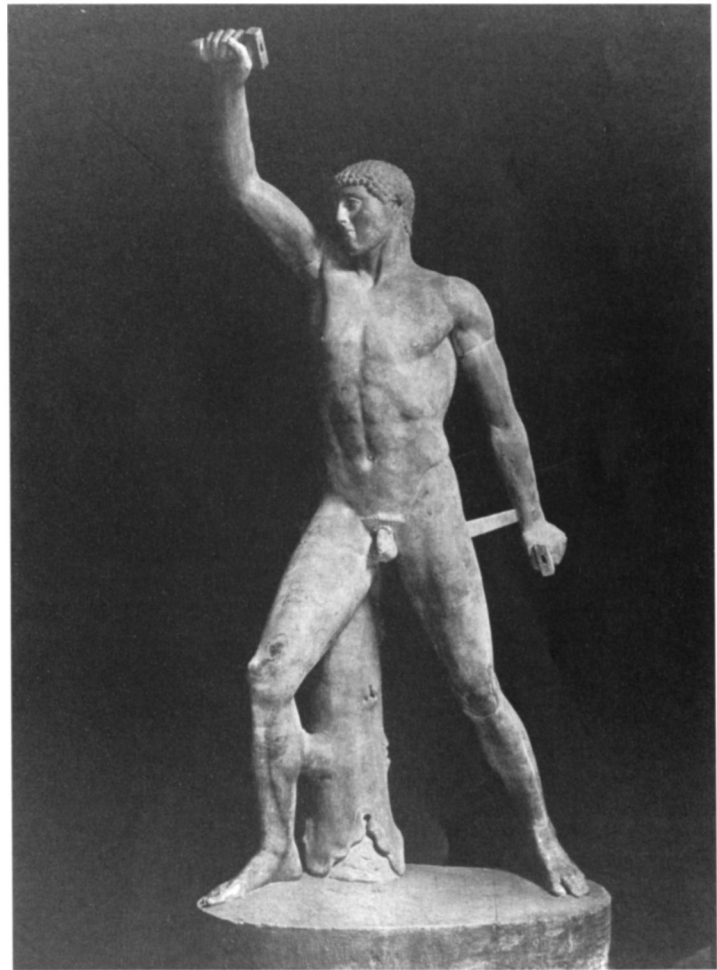
When the victor returned to Rome, however, his sister met him at the city gate. Recognising her fiancé's bloody cloak around her brother's shoulders, she fainted away. Enraged at this display of unpatriotic emotion, Horatius at once ran her through with his sword. Put on trial, he was convicted of murder, but was allowed by King Tullus Hostilius to appeal to the people, who acquitted him. The Romans soon went on to destroy Alba and to incorporate the Albans into the Roman state; Horatius's appeal to the people (*provocatio*) established a venerable precedent in Roman law; and the conflict and its aftermath were associated with many ancient monuments and relics in and around Rome, which were revered as long as ancient Rome endured.¹

*I am most grateful to Kevin Chua, Darcy Grigsby and Loren Partridge for reading and commenting on the drafts of this paper; and to Erin Dintino for producing the splendid computer-generated reconstruction in Fig.32 (*se non è vero, è ben trovato!*). All omissions, mistakes, and indiscretions remain my own.

¹LIVY: *Ab urbe condita*, I.24–28; DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS: *Antiquitates Romanae*, III.12–22. For a convenient summary of the puzzle of the sources of David's painting and the ongoing efforts to resolve it, see D. CARRIER: *Principles of Art History Writing*, University Park, PA [1991], pp.139–58, and references cited at note 16 below.



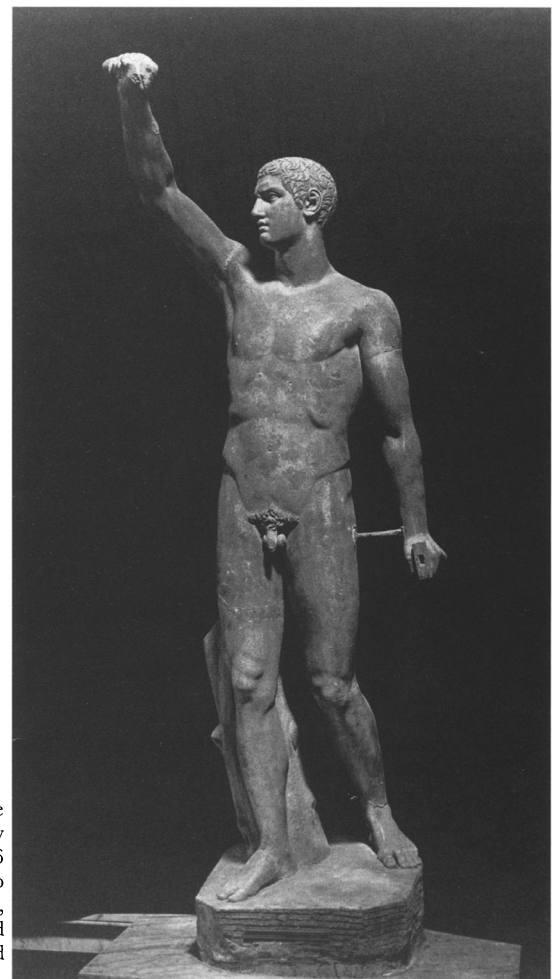
22. *The Tyrannicides Harmodios and Aristogeiton*, Roman copies after original bronzes of 477/76 B.C. by Kritios and Nesiotes. Marble (Museo Nazionale, Naples 6009–10).



23. *Harmodios*, in its late nineteenth-century state. Marble, ht. 203 cm. (Museo Nazionale, Naples, 6010, reproduced from BRUNN and BRUCKMANN, no.327).



24. *Aristogeiton*, in its late nineteenth-century state, with head from a statue of Meleager. Marble, ht. 195 cm. (Museo Nazionale, Naples, 6009, reproduced from H. BRUNN and A. BRUCKMANN: *Denkmäler griechischer und römischer Sculptur*, Munich [1893], no.326).



25. '*Perseus*', in its late nineteenth-century state. Marble, ht. 216 cm. (Museo Nazionale, Naples, 6408, reproduced from BRUNN and BRUCKMANN, no.331).



26. Interior of the Salone of the Palazzo Farnese, Rome.

The statues now known as the Tyrannicides and the possible 'Perseus' were all found in Rome in the early sixteenth century and were on display there until taken to Naples in the late 1780s. The two fighters of Figs. 22–24 were identified as the Tyrannicides only in 1859, by Carl Friederichs. He found that they were copies of a lost bronze group by Kritios and Nesiotes of Athens, erected in 477/76 B.C. in the Athenian Agora; it replaced one by Antenor which had been commissioned in 510/09 by Athens's new democracy to memorialise the assassination in 514 of the tyrant Hipparchos by two patriots, Harmodios and Aristogeiton. Seized by the invading Persians in 480 but returned to Athens after Alexander the Great conquered the Persian empire, the original group by Antenor is now lost also. The 'Perseus', on the other hand, remains an enigma, though stylistically it looks slightly more advanced than the Tyrannicides.²

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, the three statues (Figs. 22–25) were displayed together in the great Salone of the Palazzo Farnese in Rome (Fig. 26) and had quite another identity. Together with three other ancient marbles (Figs. 27–29) they formed a group of the battling Horatii and

Curiatii that had been created by the sculptor-restorer Giambattista de' Bianchi for Cardinal Alessandro Farnese in 1587.³ At the Cardinal's behest, Giambattista was at that time converting the famous Farnese Bull into a fountain and needed a pendant for it; these six statues served his purpose. His patron's sudden death in 1589 interrupted the project, however, and the two fountains were never built. Instead, Alessandro's heir Odoardo Farnese set up the six fighters in the Salone, where they are duly recorded as Horatii and Curiatii in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century palace inventories. David would have seen this group when he visited and drew the Farnese collection during his two visits to Rome in 1775–80 and 1784–85.

Alessandro had acquired the three warriors and another wounded one (Fig. 29) in a bequest of twenty ancient sculptures from Donna Margherita ('Madama') of Austria, who died early in 1587. An inventory of 10th February that year states that the entire ensemble was sent immediately to Giambattista for restoration. The two Tyrannicides (Figs. 22–24) are listed as 'gladiators' and the wounded warrior (the so-called Farnese Gladiator, Fig. 29) simply as a 'nude man'; they are identifiable by their heights, their descriptions, and the Aristogeiton's appearance in two drawings of the Medici-Madama collection made by Maarten van Heemskerck in the 1530s (Fig. 30; Aristogeiton stands against the last complete column on the right).⁴ All the sculptures had limbs missing and two were headless. They are listed in the inventory as follows:

5. *Un torso d'un Gladiatore che va per investir, ignudo, senza braccia et testa di 9 palmi col suo posamento* [Aristogeiton; Fig. 24].

10. *Un torso di Gladiatore con la testa, senza gambe et braccia, di 9 palmi ignudo* [Harmodios; Fig. 23].

12. *Un torso d'huomo ignudo di 9 palmi ferito, senza braccia, gambe et testa* ['Farnese Gladiator'; Fig. 29].⁵

To these the inventory adds the 'Perseus' (Fig. 25) and a fifth warrior, also wounded. Two of the three extant versions list under no. 16 the torso of a 'nude man' of the same size and state of preservation as no. 12; he ought to be the 'Perseus' (Fig. 25). The third version, however, substitutes the following:

16. *Un torso d'huomo ignudo di 8 palmi ferito, senza gambe, braccia et testa, con un pezzo di panno, et spalle e braccia vestito d'un panno che suon avra, che dopo vi e stato commesso.*

This description (though the transcription of the last nine words seems a little uncertain) fits a cloaked, wounded warrior in the Farnese collection (Fig. 27). Both statues were together in Giambattista's workshop at the time, and the inventory's compilers evidently got confused as to which had come from the Palazzo Madama.⁶

A report of 1627 by Cardinal Odoardo's *majordomo*, Tiburtio Burtio, informs us of Alessandro Farnese's interrupted

²C. FRIEDERICHS: 'Harmodios und Aristogeiton', *Archäologische Zeitung*, XVII [1859], cols. 65–72; see most recently s. BRUNNÄKER: *The Tyrant-Slayers of Kritios and Nesiotes*, Stockholm [1971]; B. FEHR: *Die Tyrannentöter*, Frankfurt-am-Main [1984]; A. STEWART: *Greek Sculpture: An Exploration*, New Haven [1990], pp. 135–36, 251–52, figs. 227–31; *idem*: *Art, Desire, and the Body in Ancient Greece*, Cambridge [1997], pp. 70–75.

³For the sculptures in the Farnese collection, see C. RIEBESELL: *Die Sammlung des Kardinal Alessandro Farnese: Ein 'Studio' für Künstler und Gelehrte*, Weinheim [1989], pp. 45–46, 48–49, 51, 60–61 and 197, no. 29 (1587 inventory), figs. 40, 46 and 47. On Giovanni Battista de' Bianchi see also Saur Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon, X [1995], pp. 416–17; L. W. PARTRIDGE: 'The Sala d'Ercole in the Villa Farnese at Caprarola', *Art Bulletin*, LIII [1971], pp. 467–86, esp. pp. 485–86; and C. KUNZE: *Der*

farnesische Stier und die Dirkegruppe des Apollonios und Tauriskos, Berlin [1998], p. 11, who, however, misidentifies the statues of the 'pugna'.

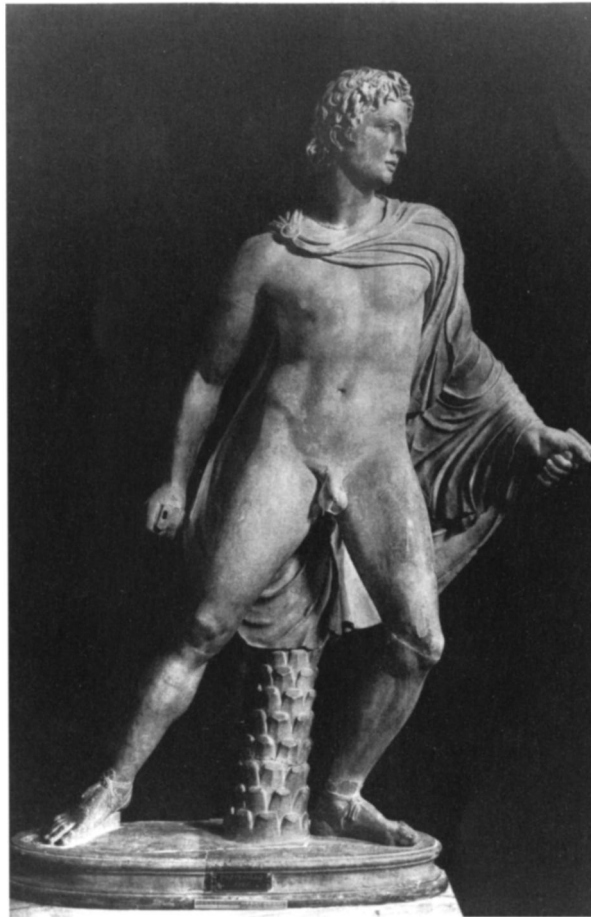
⁴For Heemskerck's drawings including the Aristogeiton, see C. HUELSEN and H. EGGER: *Die römischen Skizzenbücher von Maarten van Heemskerck im Königlichen Kupferstichkabinett zu Berlin*, I, Berlin [1913], pl. 6; II, Berlin [1916], pl. 61; three painstaking drawings of c. 1550 by the so-called Cambridge Anonymous verify its state of preservation: BRUNNÄKER, *op. cit.* at note 2 above, pp. 48–51, figs. 1–3.

⁵RIEBESELL, *op. cit.* at note 3 above, pp. 197–98. I have taken the liberty of emending the meaningless 'finito' in her no. 12 and in the entry below, no. 16, to 'ferito'.

⁶RIEBESELL (*ibid.*, p. 51) notes the discrepancy without explaining it, opting for the totally nude figure, and on p. 197 seems to print the wrong version of the inventory.



27. Wounded warrior, in its late nineteenth-century state. Marble, ht. 195 cm. (Museo Nazionale, Naples, 6410, reproduced from BRUNN and BRUCKMANN, no.333).



28. Wounded warrior ('Protesilaos'), in its late nineteenth-century state. Marble, ht. 195 cm. (Museo Nazionale, Naples, 6411, reproduced from BRUNN and BRUCKMANN, no.334).



29. Wounded warrior ('Farnese Gladiator'), in its late nineteenth-century state, with head ?by Giambattista de' Bianchi. Marble, ht. 191 cm. (Museo Nazionale, Naples, 6416, reproduced from BRUNN and BRUCKMANN, no.332).

plans for the fountain groups:

Lasciò numero infinito di frammenti di varie statue per il quale teneva un scultore stipendiato di scudi 20 il mese, con spesa per esso et un servitore, il quale ha ristaurato numero grande di statue, delle quali molte ne apañono nello sopranominato Palazzo Farnese, oltra la superbissima Mole di Toro posto nella parte ultima di quello, serrato di mura per conservazione di esso, che secondo il disegno deve servire per nobile fontana accompagnata da altra non inferiore della pugna antica delli Horatii et Curiatii conservata in casa per ornare con queste due nobilissime fontane un nobile giardino da semplici confinate in strada Giulia, et serrato da ogni parte.⁷

Here the 'casa' has been interpreted as Giambattista's workshop, situated behind the Palazzo, but is more likely to be the palace itself. To complete the six-man 'pugna' Giambattista added two wounded figures already in the Farnese collection, one of whom we have already encountered under item no.16 in the alternate version of the 1587 inventory (Fig.27); by

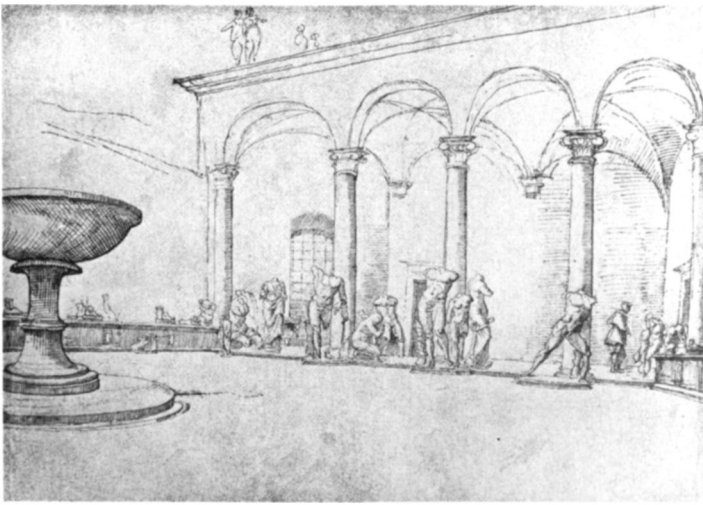
process of elimination the other can be identified as that in Fig.28.⁸ Only the Harmodios (Fig.23) had come with his head intact; all of the statues were at this stage armless; and all except the Aristogeiton and the charging warrior (Figs.24 and 28) had lost most or all of their legs, together with their plinths.

Guided by what remained, Giambattista must have supplied new heads, limbs and plinths in an attempt to make the group an aesthetically satisfying pendant to the 'superbissima Mole di Toro', which had already been restored in this way some years before. Unfortunately, no drawings document either Giambattista's original conception or the group's later appearance in the palace Salone, and several of the statues were restored a second time in the early nineteenth century, after their arrival in Naples. To complicate matters further, the alien heads of the 'Perseus' and the Farnese Gladiator (Figs.25 and 29) have now been removed, and Aristogeiton's (Fig.24) has been replaced by a cast of another copy of the

⁷*Ibid.*, pp.202–03, no.35; on the Bull, see most recently KUNZE, *op. cit.* at note 3 above. Giambattista chose his six statues (two of which must already have been in the Farnese collection) in preference to three others formerly identified as 'Curiatii' and also willed by Margaret for two simple reasons: first, the latter were only half life-size, and so could hardly stand as pendants to the 'superbissima mole di Toro' and secondly, the collection had no similarly-sized counterparts to them that could complete the composition. For these half life-size figures, see RIEBESELL, *op. cit.* at note 3 above, pp.47–50, 197, no.29: 7–9 and 15, figs.42–45; STEWART [1990], *op. cit.* at note 2 above, figs.685–91; A. STEWART: *Little Barbarians: A Tale of Ten Statues* (forthcoming).

⁸So Giambattista's group consisted of the following statues: (1) *Aristogeiton*, Naples MN 6009 (Figs.22 and 24); (2) *Harmodios*, Naples MN 6010 (Figs.22–23); (3) 'Perseus', Naples MN 6408 (Fig.25); (4) Wounded warrior ('Farnese Gladiator'),

Naples MN 6416 (Fig.29); (5) Wounded warrior, Naples MN 6410 (Fig.27); (6) Wounded warrior ('Protesilaos'), Naples MN 6411 (Fig.28). For brief descriptions of them, see A. RUESCH: *Guida illustrata del Museo Nazionale di Napoli*, Naples [1911], nos.103–04, 107, 112, 220 and 218 respectively; for illustrations, see H. BRUNN and A. BRUCKMANN: *Denkmäler griechischer und römischer Sculptur*, Munich [1893], nos.326 (with an alien head of Meleager, now removed), 327–28, 332, 331, 333 and 334 respectively, whence my Figs.23–25, 27 and 28; and most recently, E. POZZI, ed.: *Le Collezioni del Museo Nazionale di Napoli*, II, Rome and Milan [1989], p.156, no.13 (Tyrannicides) and pp.178–80, nos.171 ('Perseus', MN 6408), 173 (wounded warrior, MN 6410), 174 ('Protesilaos', MN 6411), and 177 ('Farnese Gladiator', MN 6416). For the traditional positions of the last four within the canon of ancient sculpture, see G. LIPPOLD: *Die griechische Plastik*, Munich [1950], pp.131 and 270.



30. *The garden and loggia of the Palazzo Madama*, by Maarten van Heemskerck. c.1532–36. Pen and ink, 21.4 by 29.3 cm. (Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Preussische Kunstsammlungen, Berlin). The headless Aristogeiton stands in front of the last complete column on the right.

Tyrannicide in the Vatican (cf. Fig.22).⁹

Figs.22–25 and 27–29 show the marbles in their restored late nineteenth-century state, before this latest intervention. In contrast to the elaborately-profiled plinths of the Aristogeiton and charging warrior, Giambattista's plinths were simple, presumably because all of them would eventually be sunk into a naturalistic, *Toro*-like base. At least one head, the Farnese Gladiator's (Fig.29), looks convincingly late Cinquecento in style and is presumably Giambattista's work. He may also have added Aristogeiton's head, which is however ancient, and comes from a statue of the hero Meleager. The limbs could have been carved at any time, except for Aristogeiton's horizontally outstretched left arm (Figs.22 and 24) and distinctive hanging cloak. These must be ancient, for they reappear on ancient reliefs and vase-paintings of the Tyrannicides, are made of the same marble as Aristogeiton's body, and were definitely in place in 1805, well before Friederichs identified the group as such.¹⁰ So they must have been found together with the statue but were not re-attached before it entered the Farnese collection (when, as we have seen, the statue is still described as armless). In fact, an appendix to the 1587 inventory actually lists several such fragments, among which is a suggestive-sounding '*pezzo di panno con un braccio di naturale*'. Giambattista evidently saw that it belonged to the Aristogeiton and re-attached it, adding the hand, which is of different marble and so clearly not ancient.

It is not clear how long the '*pugna*' sat in Giambattista's

workshop after the Cardinal's death. At some point, however, it was moved into the palazzo, where we have already encountered it in Burtio's memoir of 1627, and an inventory of 1644 lists it as '*Sei gladiatori, cioè tre Horatii e tre Curiatii*' in the Salone (Fig.26) after Simone Moschino's allegorical statue of Duke Alessandro Farnese, conqueror of the Netherlands.¹¹ The subsequent Farnese inventories, sometimes repeating the 1644 wording almost verbatim, show that the '*pugna*' stayed there for at least the next 130 years.¹²

The group cannot have been set in the middle of the Salone, which was occupied by Simone Moschino's statue of the triumphant Duke Alessandro, now in Caserta, but must rather have been against a wall.¹³ Since two of the room's four walls are pierced by large windows and the third by a fireplace flanked by Guglielmo della Porta's reclining statues of Peace and Abundance (from the dismantled tomb of Paul III) and two doors (Fig.26, right rear), the only available space would have been against its fourteen-metre long south-western wall. The inventories suggest that this was indeed its location, for after noting Duke Alessandro's statue they appear to proceed clockwise from the main door at the south west, situated just beyond the left-hand edge of Fig.26. They list the marbles against the south-west wall (the '*pugna*', a woman and two Apollos); and then move to the wall with the fireplace and the reclining Peace and Abundance (Fig.26). So we can conclude that the '*pugna*' stood against the left wall, approximately where the left-hand table now stands. The inventories never mention its author, as they sometimes do for the Duke Alessandro and the Peace and Abundance; it was of course intended to look Roman and to be Roman, and Giambattista would have been seen as its restorer, not its originator. Its general appearance can be inferred from the subject itself and the setting, which would require a symmetrical, compact, relief-like composition. Fig.32 shows a hypothetical, computer-generated reconstruction, using the photographs of Figs.22–25 and 27–29 with nothing added or removed. Placed on the elaborate wooden bases listed in the inventories, the statues would have taken up almost five metres of wall space and would have projected around one and a half metres from the wall.

Whatever the precise grouping of the '*pugna*', David certainly saw it in that form, for the Salone's décor remained untouched when many of the palazzo's other statues were transferred to the Villa Farnesina alla Lungara in 1736; it survived intact until 1786. Two sketchbooks in the Louvre from David's visits to Rome in 1775–80 and 1784–85 both contain drawings of the Palazzo Farnese, its Carracci frescoes, and a

⁹Carlo Albacini restored many of the Farnese statues in Rome between 1786 and 1789 before their shipment south, but apparently not these. s. HOWARD ('Some Eighteenth-Century Restored Boxers', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, LVI [1993], pp.238–55, esp. p.253) is the latest of many scholars to mention Albacini's supposed restoration of the figures, but the inventory of his work published in A. DE FRANCISCIS: 'Ristauri di Carlo Albacini a statue del Museo Nazionale di Napoli', *Samnium*, XIX [1946], pp.96–110, omits them, and the first Neapolitan inventory of 1796 makes it clear that they were shipped directly south (*Documenti inediti per servire alla storia dei Musei d'Italia*, I, Florence and Rome [1878], pp.187–88, nos.174–81). A second inventory of 1805 calls their restorations 'old' and 'mediocre', and in one case explicitly describes them as '*un restauro dei tempi farnesiani*'; it lists the two Tyrannicides as destined '*per restaurarsi meglio nello studio di Calì*'. (*Documenti inediti per servire alla storia dei Musei d'Italia*, IV, Florence and Rome [1880], p.176, nos.59–64).

¹⁰See BRUNNSÄKER, *op. cit.* at note 2 above, pp.49–50, pls.23–24; for the statue with arm and cloak in the 1805 inventory, see *Documenti inediti per servire alla storia dei Musei d'Italia*, IV, Florence and Rome [1880], p.176, no.63 where, however, both arms are described as 'badly restored' and in need of fixing. I thank Loren Partridge for alerting me to the Michelangelesque character of the Gladiator's head.

¹¹'Nel salone: / Una statua di marmo del Ser.mo duca Alessandro con figura della Fama alle spalle, del fiume (S)chelda et Heresia sotto i piedi. / Sei gladiatori, cioè tre Horatii e tre Curatii. / Una statua di marmo d'una Donna. / Una statua d'Apollo a sedere. / Un'altro Apollo in piedi. / Due sta-

tue colche che rappresentano la Carità e l'Abbondanza. / . . . Dodici piedistalli di legno dipinti di chiaro scuro e toccati di profili d'oro' (B. JESTAZ: *Le Palais Farnèse*, III.3: *L'Inventaire du Palais et des propriétés farnèse à Rome en 1644*, Rome [1994], p.184, nos.4486–91; for the statue of Duke Alessandro, see *Le Palais Farnèse*, II, Rome [1980], pl.186c. On the Farnese collection in general, see R. AJELLO, F. HASKELL and C. GASPARRI: *Classicismo d'Età Romana: La Collezione Farnese*, Naples [1988].

¹²*Documenti inediti per servire alla storia dei Musei d'Italia*, II, Florence and Rome [1879], p.380 (1697 inventory, near-identical wording for the sculptures in question). For a complete list of these documents, see RIEBESELL, *op. cit.* at note 3 above, pp.205–08.

¹³On the room's arrangement and history, see R. VINCENT, in *Le Palais Farnèse*, I.2, Rome [1981], pp.340–41; and for excellent photographs and a plan, see *Le Palais Farnèse*, II, Rome [1980], pls.180–91 and 405 (room A). The final inventories of 1767 and 1775 are far more cursory, gathering all the freestanding statues in the room under one item along with their bases: '*dieci statue al naturale di Gladiatori sopra piedistalli di legno*' (*Documenti inediti per servire alla storia dei Musei d'Italia*, III, Florence and Rome [1880], pp.188 and 198). These ten 'gladiators' evidently included the '*Donna*' and two Apollos of the 1644 inventory, quoted above! Yet, as Vincent remarks, there is no evidence that anything had been moved or any labels lost. All the Salone's numerous other statues and busts are still in place; the Peace and Abundance are similarly nameless ('*due gran statue giacenti*'); and the other rooms are treated just as sloppily.

few of its antiquities. The frescoes and marbles that he selected were located throughout the palazzo, demonstrating that he toured it thoroughly. Indeed, one of his drawings includes a vista into its arcaded courtyard, somewhat recalling the arcaded background to the *Oath*. There are, however, no obvious reminiscences of the 'pugna', though some of the anatomical drawings currently seen as studies of the Borghese Warrior could just as well be of the Tyrannicides.¹⁴

As is well known from a detailed if somewhat sensationalising memoir by his pupil Alexandre Péron, David used to say: 'Si c'est à Corneille que je dois mon sujet, c'est au Poussin que je dois mon tableau.' The first part of this remark, Péron tells us, refers to a revival of Corneille's play *Horaces* in late 1782, which left a deep impression on David. We shall return to it below. The second part alludes, *inter alia*, to his encounter with Poussin's *Rape of the Sabine Women* (Fig.31) in Paris in 1783; struck by the lictor at far left, he based his oath-taking triplets on that figure. Twentieth-century scholars have proposed yet more sources, the most interesting of which is Gavin Hamilton's *Oath of Brutus* of 1770. Here the hero's decisive turn away from the dying Lucretia introduces the theme of conflict between civic and domestic duties that was soon to preoccupy David.¹⁵

Again according to Péron, shortly after seeing Corneille's play and the Poussin, David declared, 'c'est à Rome que je veux aller faire mes Horaces'. At this point Péron's memoir becomes sketchy, but he stresses that when David at last arrived there in mid-1784 he promptly set about composing his picture, using draped mannequins for the purpose. Tischbein's newspaper review of the *Oath* written on 16th August 1785 asserts that David went back to Rome 'to execute his sketch [sc. of the *Oath*] that he had traced there seven years ago'.¹⁶ He would already have seen the 'pugna' on his first trip; but since he also revisited the Palazzo Farnese and actually composed and painted the *Oath* during this second trip, and since the finished painting is quite different from his earlier sketches, we may wonder whether the potential of Giambattista's group struck him with particular force on that occasion.

The size, composition and style of his Horatii (sons and father) suggest that it did. For not only are David's triplets the same height (180 cm.) as the statues, but they neatly blend the triangular, evenly balanced and rock-steady stance, upright body, and uncompromising back view of Poussin's lictor (Fig.31) with the repeated, abrupt, tense and somewhat primitively-realised 'fencer's lunge' of the fighters of the 'pugna' (Figs.24, 28 and 32).¹⁷ Their father is a similarly intensified amalgam of the forward-stepping 'Perseus' and Harmodios, with their pugnaciously raised arms (Figs.23, 25 and 32). Most of these figures ignore or are innocent of the rules of



31. *Rape of the Sabine Women*, by Nicolas Poussin. 157 by 203 cm. (Musée du Louvre, Paris).

contrapposto, giving them a markedly unsophisticated, primitive appearance. In short, they recall the heroic 'immobility' of Corneille's Horatius that so impressed David when he saw the play.¹⁸

The Tyrannicides could supply other qualities that Poussin's lictor, Hamilton's *Brutus* and Rome's other version of the triplets' battle – the Cavaliere d'Arpino's great fresco of 1612–13 in the Palazzo dei Conservatori – could not: metallic rigidity of posture and form, sharp isolation of parts and ultra-tense muscles. These idiosyncrasies are especially evident in the Aristogeiton's unrestored legs (Fig.24). Today they make the pair the textbook case of the 'severe' style in Greek sculpture, but to David they would have seemed authentically and uncompromisingly Roman. None of these novelties would have required much if any sketching to remember, and they are precisely what made the *Oath* so new, compelling and disturbing – in short, so revolutionary – to contemporaries.¹⁹

This kind of 'deep' borrowing has been eloquently discussed by Richard Wollheim. In the *Oath*, as in the Poussin paintings that he investigates, it was obviously done under a quite precise description, which for convenience one can label 'antiqua romanitas'. For whatever the *Oath* may owe to Hamilton, the picture itself shows that David had to go further back, to Poussin's lictor and perhaps to the 'pugna' to find a specific, early Roman context and a unique bundle of early Roman connotations (political, military, social, moral, physical, environmental and artistic) that he eagerly

¹⁴A. SÉRULLAZ: *Musée du Louvre. Cabinet des Dessins. Dessins de Jacques-Louis David, 1748–1825*, Paris [1991], pp.81–82, nos.46–48; 133, no.174 (courtyard); 150, no.190v; 204, no.224, fol.34r; and 247–49, no. 230, fol.5r; the anatomical drawings are no.224: fols.2r, 2v, 3r, 25r and 44v.

¹⁵See L.D. ETTLINGER: 'Jacques Louis David and Roman Virtue', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, CXV [January 1967], pp.105–23, esp. pp.111–12; R. ROSENBLUM: *Transformations in Late Eighteenth-Century Art*, Princeton [1968], pp.71–72; P. BORDES: *La mort de Brutus de Pierre-Narcisse Guérin*, Vizille [1996], pp.15, fig.4, and 32–33, figs.25–26 (David's studies after Hamilton, now in Versailles). I thank Kevin Chua, who is preparing a study of the *Brutus*, for these references and suggestions.

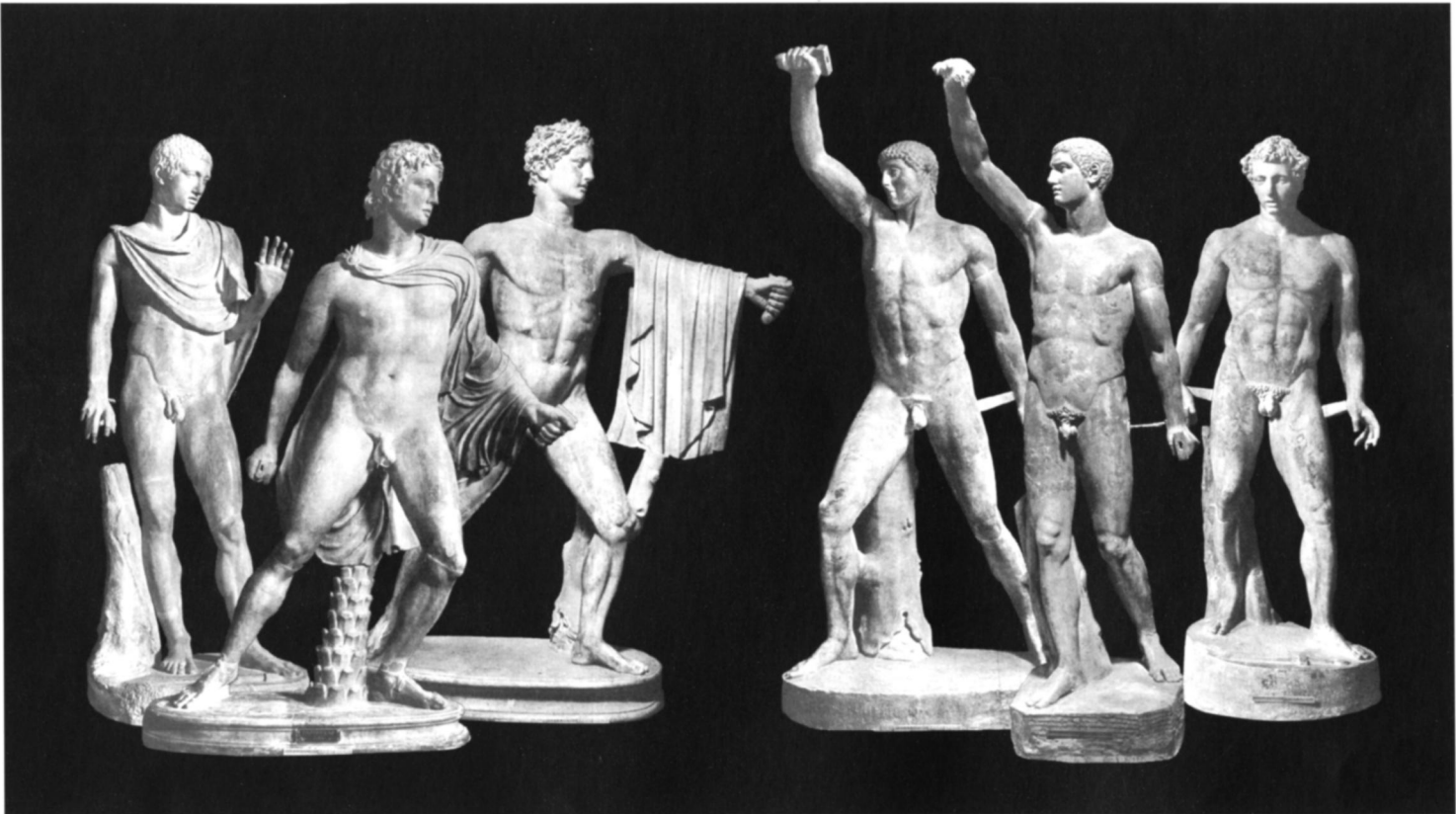
¹⁶A. PÉRON: *Examen du tableau du Serment des Horaces peint par David suivi d'une notice historique du tableau lue à la Société des Beaux-Arts*, Paris [1839], pp.27–32, with quotations at pp.31 and 32. See F. HAMILTON HAZLEHURST: 'The Artistic Evolution of David's *Oath*', *Art Bulletin*, XLII [1960], pp.59–63; A. BROOKNER: *Jacques-Louis David*, New York [1987], pp.70–78; A. SCHNAPPER and A. SÉRULLAZ, eds.: *Jacques-Louis David*, exh. cat., Paris [1989], pp.162–67, no.67; J.H.W. TISCHBEIN: 'V. Briefe aus Rom, über neue Kunstwerke jetztlebenden Künstler. 3. Rom, den 16ten August 1785', *Der teutsche*

Merkur [February 1786], pp.169–86, esp. p.172.

¹⁷In the context of Poussin, it is significant to note that there is a drawing by him at Windsor, dateable c.1637, of six naked men in battle, evidently a representation of the battle of the Horatii and the Curiatii, in which the lunging, non-contrapposto poses of two of the figures are quite close to those of the Tyrannicides (see, most recently, M. CLAYTON: *Poussin's Works on Paper*, exh. cat., Dulwich Picture Gallery etc., London [1995], no.47 verso, with further references).

¹⁸PÉRON, *op. cit.* at note 16 above, p.29: '... il lui semblait que l'immobilité même de son héros, naguère combattant et revenu vainqueur, était déjà une beauté originale, en opposition avec la chaleur du père et l'agitation qu'il mettrait dans la multitude'.

¹⁹For the Cavaliere's fresco, see V. FARINELLA: *Archeologia e pittura a Roma tra quattrocento e cinquecento*, Turin [1992], fig.32; and M. ALBERTONI et al.: *Musei Capitolini*, Rome [2000], col. pl. on p.97. On the 'severe' style of the statues, see e.g. STEWART [1990], *op. cit.* at note 2 above, p.135, and of David's figures, e.g. BROOKNER (*op. cit.* at note 16 above, pp.70–78). For contemporary reactions, see especially T. CROW: 'The Oath of the Horatii in 1785', *Art History*, I [1978], pp.424–71; and ROSENBLUM, *op. cit.* at note 15 above, pp.71–72.



32. Hypothetical computer-aided reconstruction by Erin Dintino of the Combat of the Horatii and the Curiatii as displayed in the Palazzo Farnese.

embraced and thoroughly assimilated into his work.²⁰

Yet David's preliminary sketches before seeing the Poussin and revisiting Rome, and his self-described moment of inspiration from a textual source – the revival of Corneille's *Horaces* – all hint that these borrowings are not *per se* constitutive of the picture's meaning. They are necessary but not sufficient conditions for its existence. For, as Wollheim remarks, a borrowing of this kind 'generates fresh meaning, but does so in order to reveal or consolidate existing meaning'.²¹ Which brings us, finally, to Corneille and the texts.

According to Péron, David was actually dissuaded from painting Corneille's climactic scene by his two friends Sedaine and the learned poet Le Brun (appositely called Le Brun-Pindare) because it was too wordy. This initial picture, presaged in his original proposal to the Salon in 1781, was to have shown 'Horatius, condemned for the murder of his sister Camilla, defended by his father and acquitted by the people'. This was a touchy – even seditious – subject, for as indicated above, the right of appeal to the people (*provocatio*) thus established became the cornerstone of a Roman citizen's protection from summary and arbitrary judgment by king or magistrate.

After seeing Corneille's play, David made a fine preliminary sketch (now in the Louvre) for his picture, then went to a salon where he discussed this forthcoming project. Unexpectedly confronted with his friends' objections, he withdrew to think them over. At the next such gathering, he announced that he took their point and instead had settled on '*le moment qui a dû précéder le combat où Horace père, rassemblant ces fils dans son foyer domestique, leur fait prêter serment de vaincre ou de mourir*'. He

then proceeded to title his picture *Le serment des Horaces entre les mains de leur père*, and shortly thereafter encountered the Poussin (Fig.31), with the results already described. Notoriously, though, neither Corneille nor the ancient texts actually mention such an oath, and David's Horatii are not exactly swearing it 'between the hands of their father'. These discrepancies have caused much confusion and a good deal of speculation, as scholars have hunted high and low for answers.²²

Yet David's words '*a dû*' – 'must have' – suggest that their anxieties are misplaced. If any text was involved, then he must have used it purely as a springboard, when he had already made up his mind *what* to paint but perhaps not exactly *how* to paint it. By his own admission he followed much the same procedure vis-à-vis Plutarch's account of Brutus when composing his *Lectors bringing Brutus the bodies of his sons* of 1789.²³

In fact, as Edgar Wind realised sixty years ago, the text that best fits David's picture, as opposed to its title, is to be found in Book Three of Dionysius of Halicarnassus's *Roman Antiquities* – a work apparently better known to eighteenth-century scholars than to their present-day counterparts (an edition of the original Greek had been published in Lyon in 1555 and a handsome French translation in Paris in 1723). The other ancient account of the story in Livy's *Ab urbe condita* and the standard eighteenth-century *lycéen* history of Rome by Charles Rollin both summarise the preliminaries in a single bald sentence, with no mention of any meeting between sons and father. So this translation is the best candidate for David's source of inspiration, if any. Was it suggested to him by that

²⁰R. WOLLHEIM: *Painting as An Art*, Princeton [1987], pp.187–90. For the sketches and Corneille, see e.g. HAZLEHURST, figs.2, 5 and 8; BROOKNER, figs.34–35; SCHNAPPER and SÉRULLAZ, pp.163–66 and nos.52–53 and 69–71 (all cited at note 16 above); CROW, *op. cit.* at note 19 above, figs.21–24; On the *Oath* and Roman virtue see especially ETTLINGER, *op. cit.* at note 15 above, pp.105–15.

²¹WOLLHEIM, *op. cit.* above, p.190.

²²PÉRON, pp.27–29; BROOKNER, pp.70–79; SCHNAPPER and SÉRULLAZ, p.166 (all cited at note 16 above).

²³PLUTARCH: *Publicola*, 5; for David's admission to his pupil Wicar, see SCHNAPPER and SÉRULLAZ, *op. cit.* at note 16 above, p.197; see also BORDES, *op. cit.* at note 15 above, p.40.

learned hellenist, Le Brun-Pindare?²⁴

According to Dionysius, after King Tullus Hostilius informed the Horatii that he wanted to choose them for the mission, they first debated the conflict of patriotism and kinship among themselves, then requested permission to consult their father. He asked them what they would do if he were dead and his opinion therefore of no consequence, to which they replied:

Father, we would have accepted this combat for the empire and would have been ready to suffer whatever should be the will of Heaven; for we would rather be dead than live unworthy both of you and of our ancestors. As for the bond of kinship with our cousins, we shall not be the first to break it, but since it has already been broken by Fate, we will bow to that. For since the Curiatii esteem kinship less than honour, the Horatii too will not rate blood-ties higher than valour.' When their father realised their intent, he was overjoyed and lifted up his hands to Heaven, and said that he gave thanks to the gods for having given him such fair and noble sons. Then throwing his arms about each of them in turn, and giving them the tenderest of embraces and kisses, he said, 'You have my opinion also, brave sons. Go then to Tullus and give him the answer that is both dutiful and honourable.'²⁵

While this is not an oath *stricto sensu*, it is certainly a solemn undertaking and statement of intent. And David put it to work, I would argue, in much the same way as I am suggesting that he put the lictor and 'pugna' to work. He took it up as (in Wollheim's words) 'something propositional that has, and is partly identified by reference to, a history'.²⁶ Condensing its narrative of pledge, thanksgiving, embrace and valediction into a single, pregnant moment and an ambiguous title, he used the thoughts and emotions it generated to create his own authoritative version of the scene. Internalised as a proposition about how the exemplary citizen should meet the call of civic duty, it entered his painting as a solemn oath to do so, becoming its *condicio sine qua non*. In his hands, the two kinds of borrowing, textual and visual, co-operate: they complement and reinforce each other. The *Oath* could not exist without them but antedates, subsumes and transcends them both singly and in sum.

Less than two years after the *Oath* was painted and exhibited, the 'pugna' disappeared for ever. For, with the death of Antonio Farnese in 1731, the Farnese line had become extinct, and soon the vast collection's new stewards, the Bourbon Kings of Spain, were threatening to remove it all from Rome.²⁷ In 1786 King Ferdinand IV took the decisive step, and by 1790 most of the collection had reached Naples.

²⁴E. WIND: 'The Sources of David's *Horaces*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, IV [1941], pp.124–38, p.127; also noticed by EITTLINGER, *op. cit.* at note 13 above, pp.114–15; but as far as I know, not directly cited or discussed by any commentator since. The text is DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS: *Antiquitates Romanae*, III.17.4–5; *Les antiquités romaines de Denys d'Halicarnasse* . . ., tr. François Bellenger, Paris [1723], I, p.264. LIVY (I.24.2) chronicles the kings' proposal to the triplets, then laconically remarks: 'No objection was raised, and time and place were agreed on'; C. ROLLIN (*Histoire romaine*, I, Paris [1738], p.158) is marginally more expansive: 'Les uns & les autres acceptèrent avec joie un choix qui leur étoit si honorable, & qui fut envié par beaucoup d'autres'.

²⁵In Bellenger's translation of 1723 cited above, I, p.264, this reads: 'Mon pere, répondit l'aîné, nous prendrions le parti pour combattre pour l'empire, & de souffrir tout ce que les dieux voudroient: car nous aimerions mieux mourir mille fois que de mener une vie indigne de vous & de nos ancêtres. Nous ne serons point les premiers à rompre les liens de la parenté envers nos cousins; mais la fortune les aiant rompus elle-même, nous en sommes ravis; & puis que la gloire & le point d'honneur l'emportent sur la parenté dans l'esprit des Curaces, il ne sera pas dit que les Horaces préféreroient les liaisons du sang à la vertu, ni qu'ils auroient moins de bravoure que leurs cousins. Ravi de les trouver dans ces dispositions, leur pere leva les mains au ciel, il rendait grâces aux dieux de lui avoir donné les enfants si courageux et si braves; puis les aiant embrassés l'un après l'autre avec beau-

Some of it went to the Farnese palace at Capodimonte, some to the Neapolitan Porcelain Factory, and the remainder (including the six fighters, Figs.22–25, 27–29 and 32) to the Nuovo Museo at the Palazzo dei Vecchi Studi. By 1816 virtually the whole collection was reunited in the latter building, which was renamed the Museo Borbonico. It is now the Museo Nazionale di Napoli.²⁸

Of course, no account of origins can ever *explain* a picture any more than (to borrow a favourite positivist metaphor) a 'new brick in the edifice of knowledge' *explains* the building. It merely provides a firmer foundation upon which to *base* an explanation. And in this case the latter should surely be sought in the traditional – albeit currently unfashionable – notion that a man's personal sense of honour, his recognition of civic duty, and his voluntary submission to their dictates is the basis of any successful society, of which ancient Rome was the supreme example.²⁹ But the foregoing exercise in foundation-building has also uncovered ironies aplenty.

First, David never knew the *Tyrannicides*' true identity, and thought their early Greek 'severity' was Roman. How much more might they have figured in his work had he known the truth? For even in the *Oath* as he painted it one senses an implied and not altogether flattering contrast between the then King of Rome, the warlike, courageous, decisive and pragmatic Tullus Hostilius, and the lax, easy-going and pliable Louis XVI. If one is looking for 'subversive' content in this picture, then this is an obvious lead to follow, but how much more might David have exploited it had he realised who the men of Figs.22–24 and 32 really were?

Secondly, though David's treatment of the subject surely owed much to the severe, angular early classicism represented by the warriors of the 'pugna', it is a pity that, given the criticisms his painting provoked, he never had a chance to appeal to ancient authority for his innovations. For even in Roman times connoisseurs such as Cicero, Quintilian and the essayist Lucian (himself once a sculptor) had perceptively described the style of the authors of the *Tyrannicides* and their contemporaries in exactly these terms. Like the work of the ancient orators – men unsurpassed for their blunt eloquence and moral uprightness – the statues of these early sculptors were 'compact, sinewy, hard and precisely articulated by lines'.³⁰ A handy store of ammunition indeed.

And thirdly, if events had moved just a fraction more quickly, David might never have seen the 'pugna' at all. For when the marbles finally reached Naples, the Bourbons split them up and allowed almost no public access to them for most of the next century.

University of California at Berkeley

coup de joie & de tendresse: je vous donne mon consentement, leur dit-il, généreux enfans; & je suis de votre sentiment. Allez rendre réponse à Tullus, mais une réponse digne de votre piété & de votre courage.'

²⁶WOLLHEIM, *op. cit.* at note 20 above, p.187: 'When the way of textuality works, a text enters the content of the painting. The painting gains textual meaning or content. And by a text what I mean is something propositional: furthermore, it is something propositional that has, and is partly identified by reference to, a history. Examples of a text as I think of it would be a religious doctrine, a proverb, a cosmological theory, a moral principle, a metaphor, a world-view.'

²⁷See F. HASKELL and N. PENNY: *Taste and the Antique*, New Haven and London [1981], pp.66, 70 and 74–78.

²⁸*Ibid.*, pp.74–78; also AJELLO *et al.*, *op. cit.* at note 11 above, pp.8–22 and 35–36. For restorations and inventories see note 9 above.

²⁹Cf. PÉRON, *op. cit.* at note 16 above, pp. 5–6, 25 and 29. On the masculinist and, indeed, misogynist bias of David and his contemporaries, clearly manifested in the *Oath*, see especially T. CROW: *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France*, London [1995], p.2.

³⁰LUCIAN: *Rhetorum praeceptor*, 9; cf. CICERO: *Brutus*, 18. 70; QUINTILIAN: *Institutio oratoria*, 12. 7. 9).