

The first of the *Lettere di Giustificazione* written by G. B. Piranesi to Lord Charlemont, translated into English

Silvia Gavuzzo-Stewart

Introduction to Piranesi's Letter

In 1757 Giovanni Battista Piranesi published three letters to Lord Charlemont and his agents, with the title (fig. 1):

LETTERE
DI
GIUSTIFICAZIONE
SCRITTE A MILORD
CHARLEMONT
E A' DI LVI AGENTI
DI ROMA
DAL SIGNOR PIRANESI
SOCIO
DELLA REAL SOCIETA'
DEGLI ANTIQUARI
DI LONDRA
INTORNO LA DEDICA
DELLA SUA OPERA
DELLE ANTICHITA' ROM[ANE]
FATTA ALLO STESSO SIGNORE
ED ULTIMAMENTE
SOPPRESSA
IN ROMA MDCCLXXVII.

The first of these letters, by far the longest and the most important, is here translated into English for the first time. The Italian text has been faithfully followed, sometimes at the expense of elegance. For convenience, Piranesi's original paragraphs have been numbered. The original capitalization of words has been kept along with Piranesi's original note numbers, contained in round brackets.

The letters concern Charlemont's patronage of Piranesi's celebrated four-volume *Antichità Romane*, published in 1756. Initially, Piranesi had expected Charlemont's support for this ambitious project and dedicated the four volumes accordingly. However, the promised support failed to materialize, Piranesi's letters went unanswered, and he felt unjustly humiliated. He decided then to publish the letters to vindicate his honour and claim justice. After only 70 copies of the *Antichità Romane* had been printed, Piranesi suppressed the dedications and substituted others denigratory to Charlemont. Piranesi dedicated the *Antichità Romane* instead

to his contemporaries and to posterity AEVO SVO ET POSTERIS (figs. 2 and 3).

Piranesi's fury lasted for years, generating an outpouring of thoughts which, at first glance, appear petulant and polemical, but on closer reading will be found to contain original philosophical, sentimental, artistic and economic reflections which illuminate his character and the times he lived in. Much of the first letter deals with money, for example §4, which centres on the payment of 200 scudi to Piranesi. In reading this it is useful to know that this sum was then equivalent in value to 350 g of gold (or 10000 euro at today's price). For comparison, the *Antichità Romane* was sold by Piranesi to the public for 15 zecchini, containing altogether 50 g of gold.

The principal actors in the first letter are G. B. Piranesi (1720–1778), an energetic and ebullient Venetian who spent most of his life in Rome, now renowned for his etchings of the city and the series known as the *Carceri*, and Lord Charlemont (1728–1799), a cultivated and wealthy Anglo-Irish nobleman who in 1753, at the age of 25 years, met Piranesi in Rome. The two men initially got on well together and Charlemont evidently offered financial support for Piranesi's project to publish a single volume on Roman tombs, soon expanded in scope to become four volumes. The agents referred to in the title of Piranesi's booklet are Charlemont's tutor, the Greek scholar Edward Murphy (1707–1777), the abbé Peter Grant (1708–1784), an affable Scottish Jesuit, and John Parker, (1710–c.1765) an English painter and dealer, the principal object of Piranesi's resentment (fig. 4).

The publication of the *Lettere* caused an uproar. The booklet was banned by the governor of Rome and Piranesi was threatened with jail and corporal punishment. He was ordered to publish an apology. Fifty versions of the so called recantation letter were rejected. The one which was ultimately accepted nevertheless repeats ironically the same accusations.

Piranesi had done something unheard of: the cancellation of a dedication as well as a published justification for it. Here was an artist who dared, under the pretence of excusing himself, to teach a young aristocrat good manners. Piranesi found in ancient Roman history and poetry the ethical models for teaching his aloof correspondent something about heroism, freedom, human respect, and also irony. This last aspect is particularly visible in the satirical vignettes which illustrate the booklet (fig. 4).

For his polemic Piranesi uses elaborate language, makes erudite quotations in Latin and even Greek, and satirical allusions which would have been easily understood by cultivated people of his time such as Lord Charlemont and his agents. In Piranesi's eyes Charlemont had failed the sacred duty of patronage and did not deserve the dedication originally

written on the fourth frontispiece of the *Antichità Romane* (fig. 5): BONARVM · ARTIVM · PROMOTORI · MUNIFICENTISSIMO (to the most generous patron of the fine arts). Piranesi substituted instead (fig. 3) VINDICIBVS · ET · PROTECTORIBVS · BONARUM · ARTIVM (to the defenders and protectors of the fine arts).

Piranesi returns cryptically to the topic of patronage in the last edition of his celebrated *Carceri*, as I have shown in *Nelle Carceri di G. B. Piranesi* (Northern Universities Press, 1999). Indeed, it is only by reference to the *Lettere di Giustificazione* that the important differences between the two editions of the *Carceri* can be understood (fig. 6).

I here wish to express my deep gratitude to Dr A. D. Stewart for his help with the translation and to Dott. Anna Bertolino for her valuable comments on the translation.

Piranesi's Letter

PREFACE

It should not appear strange to those who might have read the present letters at the start of Signor Piranesi's Work [*Le Antichità Romane*], and in the most celebrated libraries in Rome, to see them now reprinted in the following pages. He has been obliged to do so by the charges he received from the Agents of Milord Charlemont, not anticipated in the first edition, and by the fact that they had not been read by many, because they are bound up in the large volumes of the Work. The events, fully revealed in this reprint [of the *Lettere*], will persuade [the reader] of the justice of the motives which Signor Piranesi had in suppressing the dedications of his Work to Milord, despite having been obstructed by the subterfuges of the said Agents.

NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC

The same need, which compels the Author of this Work (1) to have the following letters, written to Lord Charlemont (2), printed, induces him to beg the Public to read them, so that they know the reasons that induced him to remove the original dedications addressed to that Gentleman. Even in the most vivid expressions which the Author has been obliged to use in writing to him, in order not to see his reputation completely and too unjustly trampled on, his deep respect towards Milord appears. However, one cannot say that these following letters are published without full knowledge of

Milord himself, since despite having been warned that the letters would have been published if he had not given to their Author that justice that he hoped to obtain, so far was it from Milord's intention to grant it to him that he did not even deem him worthy the slightest reply. But the Author hopes, indeed does not doubt to find the justice he seeks from the Public, most rightful judge of matters.

TO MILORD

1. I am sending Your Grace the four dedications (3) [figs. 2, 7, 8, 5] which are at the beginning of the four volumes of my Work *Le Antichità Romane*, and I beg you at the same time to be willing to read to the end the rightful lamentations for the public offence caused to me by your Agent in Rome. It is proper for noble souls and spirits elevated above the common people to lend eager ears to the truth and not to take offence about it, from whatever quarter it might come. I am confident, therefore, in hoping that Your Grace will not be at all formal about the freedom that I take in asking you for justice against a man, even though one fully honoured with your confidence. If you had not assured me of your protection, if I had little knowledge of the character of the person by whom I have been insulted, I should have some ground for thinking that he had been authorised to treat me in the manner he did. Because, since no answer had been given by Your Grace to the letter which I had the honour of writing to you, I was, by this, meant to understand that whatever was coming from him had to be believed as coming from Your Grace. Nevertheless, I declare to you that I am so convinced of the nobility of your soul and generosity of your heart as to imagine that, on receiving public signs of my devotion, you would want to become my patron and not my master, and regard me as a client and not a vassal. The habit I have of examining the remains of Roman grandeur, and researching in the Books of those proud Republicans their usages, habits, and spirit, has given me this noble idea of freedom which becomes every man of honour and of which your Nation has always been so jealous. Therefore, I should believe myself not to deserve the protection of Your Grace, and diminish myself in your eyes if I continued to show myself insensitive to the injuries done to me and incapable of resenting them. Because I am sure, Milord, that you would not accept a public dedication from a man if you believed him despicable; and I would likewise consider myself the most base of men if, born free, I were to select a Patron who considered me unworthy of his esteem, and who would grant me his benevolence without, however, believing that I deserved it.

2. On the basis of the reputation that Your Grace had acquired, and on the renown of the generous foundations which you intended to establish in Rome (4) for the encouragement of minds devoted to the fine arts, I was advised to dedicate to you the Work which I was undertaking. I discussed it with your Agent Mr John Parker, and I waited for more than a year without being able to obtain from him a positive reply. I had at last the honour to come to pay court to Your Grace and I cannot boast enough of the demonstrations of good will, and of the assertions of protection that You had the goodness to offer me. I beg You to remember that You then allowed me, and indeed fixed the day, to present to you the drawings intended by me to contain the epigraphs of my Work. I was particularly mindful to return, as You had seemed to desire, and I was careful to come at the time You specified for me; but I was not allowed to enter your house, since your Agent had shut me out, as he did later during all the time You were resident in Rome, and despite having called almost every day, and at all hours, I never had the fortune of seeing you. You came to my house, Milord, but since you were in company, I was not so indiscreet as to complain to You in the presence of other people of my continuous rejections, of which you could not have been responsible; because, if you had not thought me worthy to appear before you, still less would you have deemed me worthy of your visits. I had in the meantime the sorrow to see you leave without being able to be informed of your wishes, without being able to receive your orders, and so without knowing what course to take. Meanwhile, your Agent had induced me to give him my drawings on the pretext that he would show them to Your Grace who, he would have me believe, had demanded them. But this was without doubt for no other reason than to keep me away from You. Nevertheless, considering that even after your departure I had no news of You, nor of my drawings, I went therefore to your Agent, who did not deign to say a word to me about either the papers I gave him or your intentions, despite two months having past since your departure. This pretence of forgetfulness is contempt too great for a Professor of some repute, who certainly had reason to expect different treatment. In the end I was obliged to insist on the return of my drawings, which in fact were given back to me after he had kept them for four months. Along with them he gave me the enclosed inscription (5), which he told me had been written indeed by Your Grace, with the order to engrave it as it was [fig. 9]. This order was given to me with a haughtiness to make me think that my project was of trifling interest to you, Milord; and I was rightly confirmed in this idea when two whole years passed without your Agent even deigning to enquire what state the Work had reached. Meanwhile a Gentleman of high rank

made the proposal that I dedicate the Work to him (6), and I can tell you that his offers would have made an impression on someone less slavish to his word than I am. However, a friend, with whom I had the occasion to discuss the matter, advised me to find a way to find out if your Agent's conduct was really due to the indifference of Your Grace, or to his own carelessness about your affairs. I therefore resolved to ask you for a loan of two hundred scudi, thinking to myself that this demand would have provided an answer to clarify the matter, something which I would have deemed much more valuable than the loan itself, of which I had no need whatever. And the truth of this is shown by the fact that I went to Your Grace's banker to give him the same money in the form of the same bill, already given to me by your Agent, and countersigned on the back with his name. And since your banker declined to accept it, I beg Your Grace to arrange for it, and have the receipts requested from me as a guarantee for the loan returned to me.

3. While my letter was on its way to England, a friend of your Agent came by chance to my home (7). I thought it fit to talk about this matter to someone who flattered himself that he knew perfectly your intentions. Regarding this matter he reproached me for having referred to You rather than to your Agent. I felt myself obliged to reply that having understood from the general talk of all Rome that Mr Giovanni Parker had refused to pay for the white marble busts commissioned by you from the sculptor [Giovanni Battista] Maini, as also for the daily maintenance allowance generously assigned by Your Grace to the language teacher you had in Rome, even though he was highly incensed by the treatment and was in such extreme need that it spurred Mr Wood's compassion (8); all this, I told him, made me think that had I spent a considerable amount of time in preparing the plates of my dedications, Mr Parker would have then treated me in the same way as he had the above-mentioned persons. I added that since I was not working for Mr Parker but for Milord, it seemed to me perfectly reasonable that I should act according to Milord's wishes rather than the reports and the opinions of his Agent. Nevertheless I was blamed for having written to Your Grace, as if I had lacked the respect due to you. If this is so, Milord, I beg you a thousand pardons, swearing in truth that I was totally ignorant of modern formalities on this point; on the contrary I supposed (indeed with too much presumption) that since Horace had written letters to Augustus, Catullus to Caesar, the Architect Apollodorus to the emperors Trajan and Hadrian, and received answers; as also was the case with Primaticcio and King Francis I: I supposed, I say, on the basis of these deceptive examples, since I was working for Milord, that I could take the

liberty of writing to him, with the hope of having a reply, and thereby not lack in my duty. It was then given to me as a certainty that Milord would not have replied to me in any other way but through his Agent who would have made me aware of Milord's intentions; *for which I had to refer myself in everything to the directions of Mr Parker, as directions coming from Milord.* I am reporting the precise words used during this conversation. I therefore decided to send a copy of my letter to your Agent who was then in Naples. Without doubt he too must have judged me unworthy of having an answer, since he did not give me any (9). And yet it does not seem to me that the status of a painter, such as Mr Parker's, is so much greater than that of an architect such as Piranesi to be sufficient to justify a distinction between one and the other; indeed I believe, Milord, that the name of the architect is better known than that of the painter; considering that two thousand copies of my Works have been ordered from Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Russia only.

4. I went to see your Agent on his return, and it was then that he told me he had received letters from you; and then, without mentioning anything to do with me, without giving me any message from Your Grace, and without speaking of the letter which I had written to you, he added that he believed he could give me the two hundred scudi on Your behalf, on receiving my receipt; but that he would trust me with only one hundred at a time, fearing, that following the Italian habit, I would not keep my promise to you. So here I am treated as a suspicious character, and confused with the crowd of riff-raff who might be found anywhere in Italy, by a man, whom, a short while before, they assured me I had to consider as the one who conveys Your Grace's exact plans. But for what reason am I receiving such treatment from your Agent? because I was late with the publication of my Work. But did this delay, Milord, not derive from the necessity of making it worthy of the name under which it had to appear? When Your Grace was in Rome the Work was supposed to be a single Volume in folio; now however, as I wrote to you (10), it has been enlarged to four, for which reason it has grown by three quarters. I therefore had to go to examine the monuments in place, make drawings of them, visit all parts of Rome, read and carefully consult the Historians' texts; and all this I had to do at a cost which I did not stint in order to complete a Work, which would have had the honour to appear under your name. You will examine it, Milord, and find that the large Plate only, which shows the course of the ancient Roman Aqueducts, has required not less than six months; because it is not limited to its own field, but it goes on to analyse and demonstrate the mistakes made by the Gentlemen Poleni,

Fabretti, and many more, with all their rightful reputation, in treating the ruins of ancient Rome; which in order to be known in the manner I thought necessary to make them known accurately, required reflections other than those elaborated in the tranquillity of a study. Here are in my opinion some of the reasons which justify my delay, and which without doubt should have elicited applause rather than attract reproaches. And indeed, Milord, was it more deserving of honour to have your name appear at the head of a mediocre Work but completed promptly, or rather on the frontispiece of a substantial Work though completed with some delay? Posterity will not ask if your Agent was dissatisfied with the few months' delay of my Work; but will only notice if it is good or bad, worthy or unworthy of the name of its Patron; and Critics, without paying attention to the amount of time I employed in compiling it, will doubtless see if I have amended or just copied (as one can see in so many other books dealing with these matters) the opinions of those who have written before me; and to say it all in a word, will judge if my Work is worthy of a Patron who, as you yourself maintained (11) in the Epigraph, *favours men of talent, promotes the arts etc* [fig. 10], and I even dare to add if it is worthy of the reputation of the Author. So far it seems that your Agent, who should have evaluated all these reasons, had no grounds to insult me in the way he has. I want to prove to you, Milord, that he had even less reason to tell me he did not trust me with the trifling amount of money I received from him; because he knew very well that after the completion of the four frontispieces [title pages] of my Work, I thought it unfit to put at the beginning, and so to say, in a banner, an Inscription such as the one sent to me on behalf of Your Grace, and that the title of: NOBILI · VIRO · VTILITATI · PVBLICAE · NATO · PATRITIO · &c required a distinction of a very special nature; I therefore concluded that it would have been poor and mean if I had not done the most lavish thing I could imagine in order to correspond especially to the singular pomp of the words: VTILITATI · PVBLICAE · NATO [fig. 10]. Indeed all the majesty of art is hardly able to match them; and furthermore, these words placed without ornament in a Work, where everything is imbued with Roman magnificence, would become somehow ridiculous, because it would have been like printing on a leaflet what appeared destined to be etched on porphyry or on the hardest bronze. You know better than I, Milord, that in the arts there are conventions from which one cannot exempt oneself, and that deference to these conventions justifies a thousand things which, in another context, would become absurd; and for this reason in the golden days of the Inscriptions, the Caesars did not give themselves the title of DIVVS [divine] or, like Augustus, DIVI · FILIVS [son of the divine], other than on great

monuments, on the frieze of a Temple, or on Obelisks, which by their nature were destined for the most remote posterity; refraining from etching these titles on common or friable stone, in order not to expose, so to say, their divinity to the ravages of time; because they were of the opinion that such titles, deprived of ornaments, were not meant to serve any other purpose than showing their vanity, instead of representing their grandeur. I therefore deemed it right to act according to this principle, and I imagined I could not do anything as magnificent, I do not say that could match, but that could get close to the words: VTILITATI · PVBLICAE · NATO [fig. 10]. I can excuse your Agent for not having considered these conventions, but this did not mean that I should overlook them. Therefore, Milord, this type of dedicatory Inscription has persuaded me to add four frontispieces in addition [figs 2, 7, 8, 5] ; and to justify myself in this extravagance I laboured to assemble in them [the frontispieces] the main Roman monuments, in order to make them even more deserving of the public's attention, and in order that the superfluous and the useless is overlooked for something pleasant and remarkable (12). But it is quite certain that I would have never started even one of these frontispieces for three hundred Roman *scudi*, because everyone knows that an ordinary sheet of my views of Rome costs two and a half *paoli*, and since I usually print four thousand copies, each one therefore gives me ten thousand *paoli*, which are one thousand Roman *scudi*; but [an ordinary sheet] is not comparable with the frontispieces in discussion, which You will find much richer; so that I regard myself as very moderate in thinking of a price of three hundred *scudi* each. And so, at least one thousand two hundred *scudi* just for the etching of these four frontispieces is not included in the price of the Work, and is sacrificed only to honour Your Grace at the same time as your Agent did not dare to trust me with two hundred *scudi*. And as ultimate contradiction, while the Pope now happily reigning, on the basis only of my reputation, in order to encourage me to continue this Work, favoured me with one thousand Roman *scudi* by the remission of the Customs' duty on two hundred bales of paper which are charged 6 *scudi* each at the Customs, is it not strange that at the same time as a Sovereign, to whom I am not dedicating my Work, nevertheless gives me a considerable gift to encourage me to finish it, on the contrary a painter such as your Agent, hesitates to trust me with the sixth part of the expenditure already incurred by me? But there is more; because if you add the cost of sixteen thousand sheets of paper, which the four pages, or the four frontispieces, oblige me to add to the four thousand copies of four volumes, each one of these sheets costing me four *bajocchi*, it means for me a further expenditure of six hundred and forty Roman *scudi*. Here then,

Milord, an expense of one thousand two hundred *scudi* on the one hand, and of six hundred and forty on the other, which I made in an attempt to demonstrate my devotion to Your Grace at the same time as your Agent did not give me other than signs of ingratitude. How could I ever be induced to confuse the way of thinking of Your Grace with that of your Agent, who in the meantime did not dare trust me with your money, the eighteenth part of the expense sustained in your regard, and treated me as a man able to deceive. It is up to Your Grace to judge who was making you appear in a more noble light, if I or your Agent, I, who spent one thousand eight hundred and forty *scudi* for placing Your name decently; or your Agent, who attributed to you the caution which a banker certainly would have not have had in lending the sum of two hundred *scudi* to me, who in Rome could find ten thousand, whenever I needed them, and without confronting the uncivil compliment which he judged fit to pay me. I beg most humbly pardon of Your Grace for the details which I am bound to give you, declaring, that I would have never put them forward if what you are about to read, even more atrocious than the account I gave you up to now, did not force me to vent my resentment, which, too long repressed, could not be silenced any further, and that, being more than justified, must surely be approved by You. I also beg You to do me the justice of believing that having included here these cost accounts has not been done either for ostentation of my zeal, nor for adulation, nor in the hope of exciting your generosity; because I am so far from having any of these feelings that instead of being concerned at this expenditure, my profession has made me wealthy enough, and my own disposition raises me sufficiently above attachment to money that I am able to sustain an expenditure three times greater than the one already incurred to protect myself [financially] from the uncivil treatment received up to now. Therefore I beg you, Milord, to forget the details of this expenditure, and only to recall the protection you promised me, and the insults which I received for it. The loss of time and labour might give me pleasure, but I will not endure the loss of honour (13).

5. As soon as the first proofs of the Work came out from the press I took two copies to your Agent, and I asked him how I should behave towards Your Grace and how many copies I should send you. I also said to him I had commissioned two copies to be bound in morocco, and that I had had Your arms engraved in order to emboss them on their covers. Whatever more could I have done, Milord, in order to make a man benevolent towards me who should have cared for your affairs, after having committed myself to satisfy him? Nevertheless he answered me that he did not want to give me

any advice, but that the first thing I had to do was to give him, for Your Grace, some copies of the Work equivalent in value to a hundred *scudi*, half of the two hundred *scudi* lent to me on your behalf. I answered that I would rather be ready to return to him the two hundred *scudi* received from him than to give him three copies of my Work together with a hundred *scudi* to equal such an account; something that he refused to accept (14). He repeated in this occasion that *Milord did not need my dedication*, meaning with that to infer that Your Grace despises it. Why then let me spend a great deal of money and undertake a lot of work on the assumption of meeting your approval? Why dissuade me from dedicating my Work to another person already known to you? And finally, why let me write the title of Patron of the Arts, if, as Parker now says, Milord is not naturally inclined to the Arts? And let me distribute to the public some seventy copies with Milord's name?

6. After some time I went back to your Agent and asked him what was his opinion of my Work; but he had the incivility to answer that he had not even opened it. He, Milord, who claims to be an Antiquarian; who without doubt had been ordered by Your Grace to look at these volumes; who, out of respect for Your name and out of gratitude ought to take an interest in everything which concerns you, does not even condescend to open the volumes which are dedicated to you! And a Work such as this does not even deserve for any of these reasons to be honoured by a glance from Mr Parker! Nevertheless a Lord of your Nation, who was indeed the first to purchase this Work, perhaps a Gentleman as great as Parker, and well known to him, has taken the trouble to come to search for it at my house; and this makes me believe that if he had had it earlier at home he would at least have glanced at it. But there is more, that I had an order from Paris for two hundred copies which I have held in suspense until I receive a reply to this letter from Your Grace; and lastly I am sending to you the *imprimatur* which this Work merited in Rome. You will see from the manner with which the Censor expresses himself whether my Work is here considered with the disparaging lack of attention displayed by Mr Parker. I will say nothing about the endless insults of this kind, as when, having sent some days ago a friend of mine to his house, he [Parker] asked him to tell me that he wanted nothing whatever to do with me any more; and by that, despite treating me in an infamous kind of way, he nevertheless did me a favour without being aware of it, because to have dealings with him did not do me honour, and I could not carry them on, if only in so far as I hoped to free myself from uncertainty by understanding at least once positively if Your Grace had any

longer the same feelings that I had seen formerly in you; because, since You once told me that you liked my Work, today instead your Agent tells me, that you no longer like it. If things are so, I am ready to cancel my Dedication, and the deep respect which I have for Your Grace will prevent me from doing something which may cause you displeasure (15). I will do even more, Milord; I will show the Public that it was You who had refused my Work, so that they will not be surprised to see it appear with another name instead. To this effect I will have this same Letter, which I now send you, printed before the Preface, so that on the one hand they can be informed of the singularity of the fact that some copies of my Work have appeared with a dedication in your name, while all the other copies are dedicated to a great Prince whom Europe considers a Patron of the fine Arts, and so that they will not believe that I was induced by self-interest to dedicate my Work to someone else as the best bidder; because the World is so evil that it would not fail to suspect that I had received from Your Grace some substantial present and that then I had had the vileness to prefer a richer or more powerful Patron to you. Therefore, I do not doubt that Your Grace will do me the justice which I ask. If you deny it to me, I am asking you to allow me to appeal to my contemporaries and to the future, which is the natural judge of man's reputation. I say, Milord, that I will appeal to the future, because I dare believe, as Horace did, to have completed a Work that will pass on to posterity, and that will last while there are still people interested to know what remained in our century of the ruins of the most famous City in the universe. Because you must consider, as I beg you, that this Work does not belong to the kind that can be confused within the mass of books in a Library, but that it consists of four Volumes in folio; that embraces a new system concerning the monuments of ancient Rome; that it will be deposited in many European public Libraries, especially in the one of the most Christian King; so that it seems to me reasonable to hope that the name of the Author will pass on to posterity with his Work; and since, by having this Letter printed for the instruction of my Readers and for my justification, the justice which I am asking from you will become a noteworthy anecdote, I am therefore determined to deposit its handwritten original beside the printed Letter in the Copy destined by me for the Vatican Library (16), because I believe I cannot otherwise render my justification authentic enough, and Your Grace can appreciate this as well as I. For is it not a very unpleasant matter, Milord, that after having employed thought, talent, effort, and purse, after having laboured for the uninterrupted space of eight years to render my Work worthy of You, I then have to see myself outraged by a man, who in order to attack me more vehemently, covers

himself with the credit that he enjoys with Your Grace? But the matter does not end here, Milord: the abuses have become public, and all my friends, all the lovers of the fine Arts, all Rome was complaining for me while I, out of respect towards Your Grace, was trying to bury in oblivion the evil actions of your Agent. The outrage done to me reveals at last what I always tried to keep hidden; and so many Artists, who, certainly without Your Grace's knowledge, have been kept away from Your home door, those who were left with works in their hands which had been expressly ordered from them; others for whom at the moment of delivery of their commissions a good portion of the agreed sum was cut down, as it happened, among others, to the Ebonist [cabinet maker], who made the model of the Falconieri door, already sent to Your Grace, after your Agent, who still owed him six *zecchini*, had the meanness to cut him down by one and a half *scudo*; the insulting rumours, where one could also hear your name; the payment cut down for your language Teacher; and even the woman in charge of your linen, to whom Your Grace had promised a certain recompense (17); all matters that very likely did not reach your ears due to the distance which prevents you, for this cause, knowing about all the infamous deeds committed; I am saying that all this number of Artists is the one complaining and urging me today against the abuses I suffered. It is to no purpose to keep telling them that Your Grace, if he knew about these matters, would be incensed; but they laugh at what I am saying because they have an interest in not believing me. It is therefore time that I think of saving my honour. Meanwhile, if I am forced to cancel the Dedications which now exist, I beg you, Milord, to consider that I am not doing any wrong to the name of your Ancestors, but that this is a reparation due to my name, because I do not want, when my life is written along with those of the Professors, that I could be accused in the future, and that my children could be reproached that their Father was a flatterer who secretly was not esteemed even by those who he was extolling with the most lavish praise. So if Your Grace does not start to speak to me, if he does not grant me justice, if, in short, he does not protect me from the calumny spread about me, by being perhaps represented to your eyes as a man unworthy of Your consideration; then it is certain, Milord, that I, neither as an honorable man nor without making myself an object of derision with the Public, can call you the Patron of the Arts, and declare myself your Protégé; and if I have maintained this in about seventy published copies [of the *Antichità Romane*], I am in the painful necessity of blaming it on my indolence, and to justify myself to the World; because, as I beg you to reflect, if a grand Gentleman must have at heart the name of his Ancestors, a Professor who

leaves his name to posterity must have at heart his reputation and that of his descendants. A grand Gentleman is for the time being the last of his name; while a Professor is for now the first; and each of them must use the same delicacy. If this letter is ever published (something I shall do with the utmost regret in the world) I shall beg those who read it, Posterity and You too, Milord, not to believe that I am lacking the deep respect that I owe towards Your Grace, declaring that I do not mean here to compare name with name, but only reputation with reputation; something which must be equally precious to all men of whatever profession, and that one must have at heart so much more as one's name is more recent, and neither a long line of ancestors, nor the most illustrious titles, nor wealth can restore our reputation once it is lost.

7. After having related to you matters which I am ready to prove to you with witnesses, I dare at this point to hazard a guess that You can judge better than anybody else. I do not doubt, from the words spread through Rome by your Agent against me, that I have been depicted to Your Grace as a strange man on whom You could not rely at all. What mostly makes me believe this is the fact that when You ordered him to send You the design of a door which You wanted made, it seems to me that he, knowing my devotion towards Your Grace, could have given the commission to me; but he instead thought fit to choose one of the worst designs, almost as if Your Grace was looking for something cheap rather than the perfection of things. As far as I am concerned, Milord, I would have consoled myself more in rendering you this small service than by all the money that You could have offered me, and that I would have never accepted. But what was the result of all this? That this design has not found in Ireland anyone who could understand it, and when Your Grace sent it back to Rome, then your Agent came to me and told me that in your country it had not been understood because the Irish are barbarians. The design was barbarous not the Irish, because I can assure you that in Rome it could not be understood better than in Ireland. I took the liberty to make him see and consider all its defects, and if he is a sincere man, he will confess to Your Grace that he had to share my sentiments. This seems to authorize me to think that up to now you have been given a bad opinion either of my demeanor or of my talents because, if it were otherwise, it seems to me that your Agent would have been ordered, rather, to give the commission to me. As for my conduct, I defy anybody to convince me of the least defect; as for my talent, it is up to the Public to judge, and You, Milord, can consult it, since neither my name nor my Works are unknown in England. I would have a thousand things to add, but the

weariness of repeating such tedious stories causes my pen to drop from my hand. Nothing more is left to me than to beg pardon to Your Grace for having so often mingled Your name with the one of Parker, beseeching you to send your reply directly to me, because from now on my door will be absolutely closed to him. I am waiting for your commands and I beseech you to believe that nobody holds you in greater and more sincere veneration than me. The proofs of this truth shine all through this letter, and mostly by the demonstration that I did not remain silent at the words of your Agent when he told me that you did not care for my dedication; because anybody else who had not a particular esteem and a deep respect for Your Grace would have abandoned the idea, instead of keeping suspending with such great inconvenience and loss a huge project, just in order not to displease you; neither would anybody else have laboured so anxiously in order to explain your original intentions.

And with this I profess myself, MILORD, to belong forever to Your Grace

Rome 25 August 1756.

Your most Humble, Obedient and Devoted Servant
G. B. Piranesi

Piranesi's Notes to the First Letter

- (1) The Work referred to is the four volume *Antichità Romane*, at the beginning of which will be found the first edition of these letters.
- (2) These are the following two letters, since the third one has not yet been published.
- (3) These dedications are the first four of the Plates put at the end [of these *Lettere*] which the Author has now reproduced in a small format from the originals in the Work [the *Antichità Romane*], in large sheets of the most expensive paper, shown as they appeared before the suppression of the dedications to Milord. The first Plate, which comes at the front of the first Volume, represents a marble slab found among the ruins, showing an Inscription with the name of the Subject to whom the Work was dedicated. Among the ancient battle trophies beside the marble are the arms and the attributes of Milord's House, shown on a Shield to indicate their antiquity and nobility. In the distance is a triumphal arch, a bridge, a tomb, and some public buildings; all these allude to the glory that one acquires by weapons, and by the monuments that one raises for the public good. The bas-reliefs, copied from antique originals, show by their magnificence the protection which nobility and

opulence grant to the fine arts. If then, on one hand all this was in accord with the words of the inscription, on the other it refers to the subject of the four Volumes, one of which deals with the ruins of Rome, two deal with the ancient tombs, and the last one with the porticos and bridges which have survived to the present.

The second Plate, placed at the head of the second Volume, which deals with ancient Tombs, represents the Appian way near Rome at the junction with the Ardeatina road. Cicero tells us that here the magnificence and the desire of the Romans to have their names passed down to posterity induced them to build these huge Tombs, some of which resembled temples or palaces rather than places consecrated to death. The Author has tried to give an idea of the confusion, that Cicero says was everywhere, because all the dependents of a Family took pride in having their ashes placed beside those of their patrons. An inscription to Milord is on a Tomb the present ruins of which are thought to be the Tomb of the Scipios, and above an Urn representing that which contained the ashes of Tullia, Cicero's daughter, is situated Milord's bust figured as a Meleager, to indicate thus the supporters of his arms. By putting his name on the tomb of the Scipios, who were the wisest among the Romans and gained the merit of protecting and cultivating the arts to such an extent that the plays by Terentius were ascribed to the last Africanus [P. Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus Africanus minor] who was furthermore thought to have composed with Laelius the first Satires seen in Rome, the intention was to express the character bestowed on Milord by the Epigraph of the first Volume; and by putting his Bust on the tomb of the beloved daughter of the greatest Orator of ancient Rome, the intention was to express the eloquence necessary for a Nobleman of a Kingdom where the art of speaking is especially cultivated, an art which, as for the Romans at the time of Cicero, has been used by politicians in affairs of State to sustain the People's rights.

Since also the third Volume deals with Tombs, the Author, in the third Plate, has continued by showing the Appian way at the point where there is the supposed Circus of Caracalla, and at a distance the Ustrinum [a place for burning corpses], and some other Tombs. This place was chosen in order to hint at the famous horse races which take place in England, and seem to imitate those of the ancient Circuses. The name of Milord on a rostral column expressed the glory and the power which the English Nation acquired on the seas.

Finally, on the fourth Plate placed at the start of the fourth Volume, which deals with bridges, theaters, and ancient porticos, an ornamented Bridge is represented which because of its design could be used in a harbour, subject to the ebb and flow of the sea; and this is a monument

allusive to the magnificence of maritime Nations, the frieze of which carried Milord's name together with the title *Bonarum artium promotori munificentissimo* [to the most generous promoter of the fine arts]. The reduced size of these four Plates does not allow distinction of all the subtleties, details and ornaments which adorn the larger originals from which they derive.

- (4) The nature of these foundations is explained by the Author in the first edition of these Letters as follows; *In 1751 Milord founded in Rome an Academy for English residents who exercised the liberal Arts. The conduct of Mr John Parker, who had taken upon himself its management, having caused disagreements among the Academicians, and perhaps other reasons unknown to me, resulted in the suppression of this foundation, which was intended to honour equally its Founder and the English Nation. I will not enter into the details of this particular case, since it is up to those who were concerned, and who complained publicly of Milord's Agent for having thwarted his [Milord's] generous intentions, to justify the Author of such confusion in the eyes of their Fatherland, which has the right to investigate them, according to the maxim that anyone who opposes the public good is responsible to the same Public for the wrong done to it*
- (5) This is the inscription that can be read at the end [of this work] in Plate V [fig. 9]. In the first edition of this letter the inscription is not distinguished from the version in Plate VI [fig. 10], and which was used for the dedication, because both the letter then sent to Milord, as well as the printed edition, were intended only to demonstrate that the dedication in general had been accepted; for such a purpose either inscription would serve; nor had the author foreseen the present case of having to make use of both, for the reasons which will become clear later. One, though, should be aware that the inscription on Plate V [fig. 9] was delivered to the Author by Mr Parker at the time mentioned in the letter; while the other inscription on Plate VI [fig. 10], was delivered at the time mentioned in the following Note 10.
- (6) This is another Lord well known to Milord Charlemont.
- (7) This is Signor Andrea Mercati formerly confidant and correspondent of Mr Parker during his absence from Rome.
- (8) These and other details would have been omitted in the printed versions of the letters had the Author not been obliged to leave them so, by having promised Milord to print the letters exactly as he had sent them to him, and by the thought that if they had been suppressed [Milord] might have suspected that [the Author] had made statements which he had not the courage to repeat in public.
- (9) Here I am referring to the answer that should, out of courtesy, have been given directly to the Author, because, concerning this matter, Mr

Parker gave him an answer through the afore-mentioned Signor Mercati in the way related in the following note.

- (10) Milord, having accepted the dedication of the Work at the time when the Author had intended to publish only one volume containing the *Sepolcri antichi* [Ancient Tombs], meant, therefore, to refer to this Volume only when writing at line 12 of the first of the Epigraphs reproduced in the above-mentioned Plate V: MONVMENTA · SEPVLCRALIA · ANTIQVA [fig. 9]. But afterwards, in the year 1755, since the Author had informed him through his letter of the increase in the size of the Work entitled *Antichità Romane*, and of its division in four volumes, then Milord let me have, through Mr Parker, the second inscription, where instead of *Monumenta Sepulcralia antiqua*, he substituted MONVMENTA · INSIGNIORA · ANTIQVA [fig. 10]; in order to allude to the amplification of the Work. The truth of this fact is proved not only by the originals of these inscriptions, deposited by the Author in the Library of the most excellent Corsini Family, and reproduced in the aforementioned Plates V, and VI [figs. 9 and 10]; but is further evidenced by a letter written from Naples by Mr Parker to the said Mr Mercati in the same year 1755, where one can read: *If you see Mr Piranesi, tell him not to go ahead with the dedication, that is, etching the inscription (which means the first Epigraph) until I am back; because I received from Milord the inscription (the second one), that he wants used, and that seems worded rather differently from that which he [Piranesi] had received, and which I was given by Milord in Rome.* This is the answer I was referring to in the previous note 9 and the original of this letter has also been deposited in the Corsini Library. Therefore the Author does not know with what face the Agents of Milord can now affirm that this Gentleman had accepted only the dedication of the Work when it was projected to be a single volume, and that the four volumes subsequently had been dedicated to him without any approval, in the hope of receiving a handsome gift?
- (11) Here there is a reference to the second Inscription, where instead of the line: SCIENTIA · MERITISQUE · INSIGNI [eminent for his knowledge and merits] [fig. 9], Milord is said to be: VTILITATI · PVBLICAE · NATO [born to be useful for the public good] [fig. 10].
- (12) These frontispieces are, as explained in Note 1, the ones reproduced in small format in the first four Plates placed at the end of this work [figs. 2, 7, 8, 5].
- (13) Nevertheless, the Agents of Milord reproach the Author for these expenses as if they had been made without Milord's approval, with the intention that he should not feel any obligation towards him [Piranesi]. But they do not see that the appreciation of what others do in his

- honour is the natural quality of a Nobleman, and so they continually wrong his generosity by attributing to him this parsimonious refusal.
- (14) This proposal then, coming either on behalf of Milord or from his Agents, was revealed to the Author only after the Work had been published and many copies soon distributed throughout Europe. So what reason do they have for broadcasting publicly that the Author had contracted with Milord the dedication of the Work for a hundred zecchini, of which a half was to be repaid with copies of the same Work? And what reason is left for them to maintain that Milord only wanted the dedication of one volume, when one can see here that the proposal of the one hundred zecchini was made to the Author after all four volumes had been published, and for the copies of all the four of them?
- (15) Since Milord has not answered the Author, and since he had warned him that he would have taken his silence as assent to the project of the suppression of the dedication, what reason have his Agents to complain?
- (16) The Author at the same time as he put at the front of his Work [*Antichità Romane*] this letter and the one which followed it, deposited, to fulfill his promise, in the Vatican Library and in the Libraries kept open to the public by the generosity of the most excellent Corsini and Barberini Families, not only the originals [of these two letters] but also reports of much more serious allegations which took place after the date of the second letter, and which greatly influenced the decision to publish them. But now that the agents of Milord have attempted to prostitute the reputation of the Author by the imputations outlined in the preceding notes, he feels justified in exposing these same allegations to the public by publishing the third, following letter already written by him to Mr A... G..., where it is shown to what excess the attempts to oppress a man who had done nothing but tried to honour Milord, reached.
- (17) This was a daily pension; and the Author regards it his duty towards Milord and his Agents by letting the public know that, after the news of the first edition of these Letters reached Milord, the woman was reimbursed all that had been promised her.

Select Bibliography

Antetomaso, Ebe, 2006.

Lettere, Note e Tavole: Intersezioni tra Testo e Paratesto in due opere di Giovan Battista Piranesi. «Paratesto», 3, 2006, 99-122.

Donati, Lamberto, 1938.

Piranesiana, «Maso Finiguerra», III, 1938, 206-213.

Donati, Lamberto, 1950.

Giovan Battista Piranesi e Lord Charlemont, «English Miscellany», 1, 1950, 231-242.

Gavuzzo [-Stewart], Silvia, 1968.

Problemi Piranesiani. Thesis in Art History, Università 'La Sapienza', Roma. Available on academia.edu.

Gavuzzo-Stewart, Silvia, 1997.

Gli 'errori' di G. B. Piranesi: le citazioni latine nelle stampe d'invenzione, In: «In amicizia, Essays in Honour of Giulio Lepschy», Baranski, Zygmunt G. & Pertile, Lino, eds., «The Italianist», 17 (special supplement), pp. 348-365.

Gavuzzo-Stewart, Silvia, 1999.

Nelle Carceri di G. B. Piranesi. Northern Universities Press, Leeds 1999.

Gavuzzo-Stewart, Silvia, 2015.

Irony in Piranesi's Carceri and in the Lettere di Giustificazione, In: «Vision and Design, Piranesi, his Contemporaries and Successors, Studies in honour of John Wilton-Ely», a cura di Francesco Nevola (in course of publication).

Minor, Heather Hyde, 2006.

Engraved in Porphyry, Printed on Paper, In: «The Serpent and the Stylus, Essays on G. B. Piranesi». Mario Bevilacqua, Heather Hyde Minor & Fabio Barry eds. Ann Arbor 2006.

Morazzoni, Giuseppe, 1921.

Giovan Battista Piranesi architetto ed incisore. Alfieri & Lacroix, Milano, 1921.

Wilton-Ely, John (ed), 1972.

Giovanni Battista Piranesi, The Polemical Works, Rome 1757, 1761, 1765, 1769. Gregg International Publishers, 1972. It contains a facsimile of G. B. Piranesi's *Lettere di Giustificazione*.

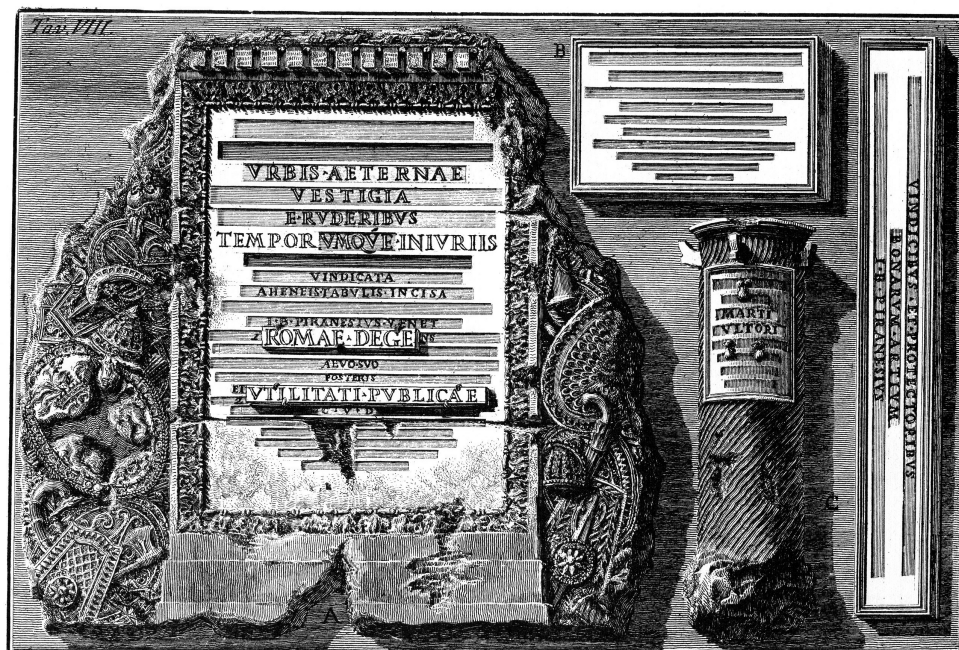


Fig. 1 *Lettere di Giustificazione*, title page, first state 1757; 213 × 151 mm. The title is written on a broken obelisk, a mourning symbol. In this first state of the etching a Latin quotation from the poet Ennius is written on the top left. It can be translated as ‘I am not asking for money and you will not give me a price’ making a clear allusion to one of the principal topics of the letters.



*Primo Frontespizio dell' Opera delle Antichità Romane. * Schemma gentilizio di M^{te} Lord Charlemont, formato sulla maniera dell' Originale datone dagli Agenti di detto Signore, e che si finge in una tavola di marmo incavata fra i trofei antichi che accompagnano l' Iscrizione*

Fig. 2 *Lettere di Giustificazione, Primo Frontespizio*; 140 × 215 mm. This is the original dedication to Lord Charlemont, reproduced by Piranesi in a small format, from the first volume of the *Antichità Romane*.



A. Complimento al Pubblico sostituito nel primo Frontispizio alla Dedicazione di Milord, con lettere che si fingono di metallo incastrate nelle scanzellature della stessa Dedicazione. B. Frammenti della iscrizione di Milord che si fingono tolti dai Canali delle linee II, e VII, della iscrizione medesima per servire al Complimento. C. Lapide del secondo Frontispizio, che resta anonima. C. Mutazioni delle iscrizioni nei Frontispizi terzo e quarto.

Fig. 3 *Lettere di Giustificazione, Tav VIII. Complimento al Pubblico*; 142 × 215 mm. This Plate shows a summary of all the changes made by Piranesi to the original dedications. The revised dedication, the first on the left, is addressed to the public: AEVO · SVO / POSTERIS / ET VTILITATI · PUBLICAE / C · V · D. These last letters can be interpreted to mean CAVSA VOTI DEDICAVIT, signifying that Piranesi, on account of his promise to Lord Charlemont, dedicated his Work to his contemporaries, to posterity and for the benefit of the public. He is ironically using the same words provided to him by Charlemont for the dedication of the *Antichità Romane* (fig. 10). On the extreme right of this Plate one can see the dedication to VINDICIBVS · ET · PROTECTORIBVS · BONARVM · ARTIUM / I · B · PIRANESIVS [to the defenders and protectors of the fine arts] which substitutes the previous dedication to Charlemont, originally written on the fourth frontispiece of the *Antichità Romane* (see fig.5).



Fig. 4 *Lettere di Giustificazione*, final vignette, the *Campus Esquilinus*, 135 × 54 mm. In this state the headstone on the right is shown by Piranesi with the names of Charlemont's three agents erased, except for their initials: I [oannes] P[arker], E[dward] M[urphy] and P[eter] G[rant]. The erasure is a clear reference to their *damnatio memoriae*. In addition there is an obscene ornament at the top of the headstone, and the agents are given a dishonourable burial on the *Campus Esquilinus*, rather than on the Via Appia where Parker's tomb had been originally placed by Piranesi in the second frontispiece delle *Antichità Romane* (fig. 7).



Fig. 5 *Lettere di Giustificazione*, Tav. IV, *Quarto Frontespizio*; 132 × 195 mm. One can see here the original dedication to Charlemont BONARVM · ARTIUM · PROMOTORI · MUNIFICENTISSIMO [to the most generous patron of the fine arts] later substituted (see fig. 3).



Fig. 6 *Carceri d'Invenzione*, Plate XVI; 405 × 550 mm. Detail with the Latin inscriptions. The tomb in the centre of the prison indicates the ultimate punishment Piranesi assigns to those who instead of being the promoters of the fine arts, BONARUM ARTIVM, turn to evil actions (see § 6) or evil arts, MALIS ARTIBVS, as written on the tomb slab in this last Plate of the *Carceri*.



Fig. 7 *Lettere di Giustificazione, Tav. II, Secondo Frontespizio*; 127 × 196 mm. The Appian way at the junction with the Ardeatina road. The triangular slab below the centre of the Plate has Parker's name on it.

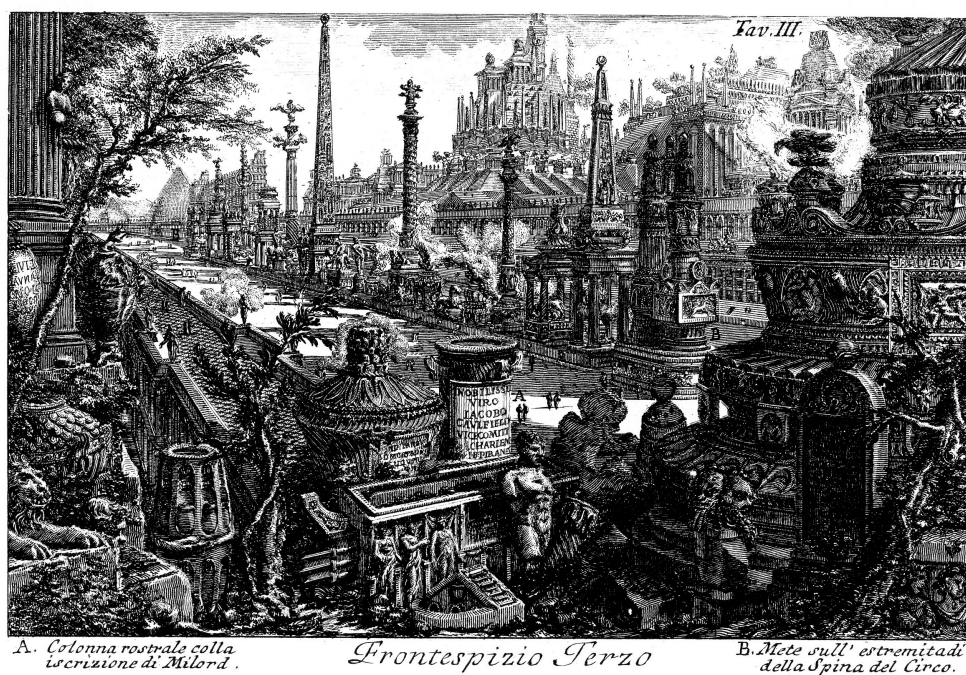


Fig. 8 *Lettere di Giustificazione, Tav. III, Frontespizio Terzo*; 124 × 196 mm.

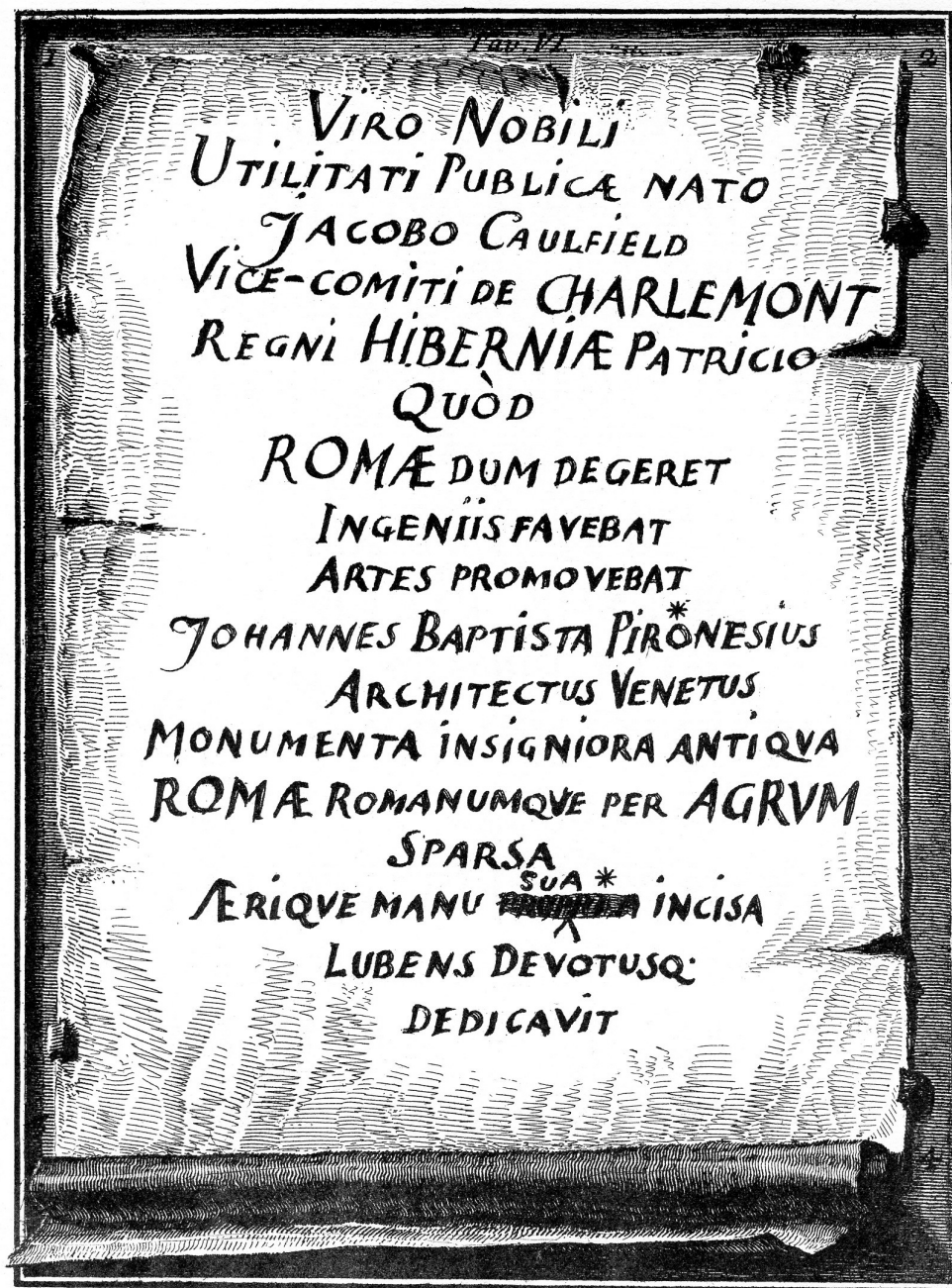


Prima Iscrizione di Milord Charlemont desunta con grandissima esattezza, e nella grandezza e nel carattere, dall'originale, che l'autore ha poi depositato nella Biblioteca dell'Eccellentissima Casa Corsini alla testa del primo Tomo dell'Opera di cui si tratta.

1. 2. 3. 4. Grandezza del foglio della Iscrizione originale.

** Sic.*

Fig. 9 Lettere di Giustificazione, Tav. V, Prima Iscrizione di Milord Charlemont; 335 × 233 mm. In this meticulous copy of the first inscription Piranesi even reproduces the mistakes made in the original.



*Seconda Iscrizione di Milord Charlemont, desunta parimenti con esattissima imitazione, e nella grandezza e nel carattere dall' originale, che l' Autore ha poi depositato nella Biblioteca dell' Eccellentissima Casa Corsini, alla testa del primo Tomo dell' Opera di cui si tratta. 1. 2. 3. 4. Grandezza del foglio della Iscrizione originale. * Sic.*

Fig. 10 Lettere di Giustificazione, Tav. VI, Seconda Iscrizione di Milord Charlemont, 182 × 123 mm. This second inscription, which like the first (fig. 9) faithfully reproduces the original, is provided by Piranesi as proof of Charlemont's acceptance of the four volumes of the *Antichità Romane*.