Jacopo Bellini may seem hard to take seriously as a student of antiquity. Applying classical motifs to more-or-less Gothic facades in a seemingly capricious and naive manner, he has earned a reputation in modern scholarship as something of a romantic. Some fifty years ago Fritz Saxl had characterized Bellini as an antiquarian of sorts, fascinated like most educated men of his time by the odd classical fragment that had survived the Middle Ages, but—unlike his son-in-law Mantegna—lacking an archaeologically consistent point of view and a sense of distance from the Roman past. Such observations set the tone for subsequent work on the subject, with Venetian (still medieval) sentimentalism played off against Paduan (Renaissance) rationality in an enduring opposition. While Jacopo’s engagement with classical themes and specific antique motifs was further adumbrated in several illuminating studies, the artist has remained—for the most part—a foil for Mantegna.

But our views about medieval and Renaissance conceptions of antiquity have become more subtle in recent years and less inclined towards sweeping generalizations and sharp dichotomies. Substantial essays have been written, refining and redefining many of the critical issues embodied in our notions about renaissances and renewals. Reexamined within the context of such studies, Jacopo Bellini’s relationship to humanism and to the classical past becomes more complex than it once seemed and may warrant the “second look” offered here.

The artist’s primary artistic legacy consists of two albums—one now in the Louvre, the other in the British Museum—that contain a total of 220 drawings. The intended function of these albums has never been ascertained with certainty. In a number of the drawings the artist’s aim appears to have been exploratory, wherein he tried out different ways in which to present a given theme. The Presentation of the Virgin, for example, appears in the Louvre album in two very different and well-elaborated architectural mise-en-scènes [Figs. 1 and 2]. Such compositions have long intrigued scholars, for they represent something new in the tradition of artists’ drawings. They seem to be neither patterns for reuse nor preparatory sketches nor even presentation drawings to be presented to patrons for larger-scale programs. Indeed, according to the modern consensus—to my mind a correct one—the drawings of Jacopo Bellini must be regarded as completed works of art in themselves and were intended by the artist to be seen in that way. The very fact of their survival is due to the inclusion (and preservation) of each volume in the studiolo of a collector and not the studio of an artist. Indeed, they represent the earliest collections of such drawings to survive and were probably the first to be made in the
Renaissance. As such, these works, which may be the “drawn paintings” (quadros designatos) cited in the testament of Jacopo’s widow, constitute an innovation of no small significance.7

* * *

The first issue to be addressed in this article will concern the causes of Jacopo Bellini’s imaginative leap, in which humble drawings were assembled in a “corpus” to become true and proper works of art in themselves. The second issue grows out of the first and turns upon the broader implications of Jacopo Bellini’s personal discovery of antiquity and his special (perhaps Venetian) sense of the past. For Jacopo’s “drawn paintings,” gathered together into albums, were products of a particular historical moment in which humanism, antiquarianism, and artistic sensibilities conjoined in a personal re-appropriation of the classical world.

His two views of the Presentation offer a way into that moment. Like many other drawings in the albums, they feature elements, only partially assimilated, of the antique. In each example, Jacopo proposed a different way to “historicize” the same
event by setting it into a properly classical past. In one case he employed an antique architectural vocabulary, but assembled the components in a manner that Vitruvius would not have recognized [Fig. 1]. In the other, he established the classical identity of a building of dubious provenance by applying decorative tondi, clearly modelled on antique gems or coins, to the facade [Fig. 2]. As has often been noted, such works evoke a past that speaks the language of the Venetian present.

The synthetic character of these architectural fantasies is striking and is an issue that we will return to, but first let us consider the manner in which they are presented. Complete frontal views of monumental buildings were rare at this time, even in full-scale painting. Jacopo’s initial approach to the built environment was formed in the northern Italian tradition of Altichiero and Pisanello, but his conception of space, as has often been observed, depended upon developments taking place in Tuscany during the 1420s and 1430s. Although one can find superficial analogies to Jacopo’s treatment of the architectural structure in Ghiberti’s Solomon and Sheba panel on the Florence Baptistery and perhaps in Donatello’s bronze reliefs in Padua, the underlying assumptions of the Tuscan artists—particularly the relationship between the architecture, the frame, and the

figures—were intrinsically different. Jacopo’s constructions were surely born of similar impulses to create a three-dimensional space, but many of his monuments—page after page of them—tend to remain disjoined from their surroundings. Indeed, we are looking at a new genre of composition that we might categorize as building portraiture: the single isolated monument rendered in its entirety, often in a frontal view.

It has been argued that the motivating force behind such innovations was Jacopo’s passion for exploring the possibilities of linear perspective, and this is surely true in part, but it does not explain the other concerns of the albums that include: mythological vignettes; a single iris, exquisitely rendered in colored inks; a group of lions; a knight on horseback; a standing Madonna. What was the principle of selection that brought these disparate studies together to be bound in two large volumes? A clue may be found in another category of drawings in the Louvre album.

It consists of just two pages, each depicting a row of Roman tombstones complete with antique inscriptions and embellished with classicizing motifs [Figs. 3 and 4]. The coin in the center of one page with the inscription “Germania Capta,” records the reverse of a coin of Domitian. It would find a new identity as a monumental tondo on the temple facade in one of the drawings.

of the Presentation of the Virgin [Fig. 2]. There were originally ten pages of empty tondi in the two albums that were intended to hold similar drawings of antique gems and coins [Fig. 5].

It is tempting to look upon such pages as updated remnants of the late medieval pattern-book tradition whereby drawings of motifs were preserved for later recycling by the artist's workshop into painted istorie and altarpieces. But a look at the wider context in which Jacopo Bellini lived and worked will suggest that in his case they were probably also of intrinsic interest in themselves, for they were related to a newly popular antiquarian activity: the personal recording of antiquities.

Throughout Italy during this period, and especially in the north in and around Padua, the collecting of antiquities, in particular coins and gems, was the preoccupation—one might say the passion—of the educated man, even one with the most modest pretensions of humanist erudition. Less affluent persons acquired what artifacts they could come by and could afford, but they also collected what came free: inscriptions. These were carefully recorded along with drawings of the more interesting monuments in bound manuscript volumes known as sylloges. It will be argued here that Jacopo Bellini's drawing books were directly inspired by the humanist sylloge and may even be viewed as pictorial versions of the genre.

To make the case, it will be necessary to leave Jacopo for a moment to consider one of the most colorful figures of the early Renaissance: Ciriaco d’Ancona. Often called the father of antiquarian studies, he was part of Jacopo Bellini’s geophysical, as well as cultural, universe. His presence was recorded in northern Italy—Venice, Verona, Padua, and Ferrara—upon a number of occasions between 1400 and 1449. Since the age of nine, at first in company with his uncle and later on his own as merchant and papal emissary, Ciriaco had travelled through Italy and the Aegean area in search of the monuments and inscriptions of the ancient world. He called them relics of sacrosanct antiquity and sigilla historiarum—the validating seals of history—that should, he affirmed, be given “more faith and notice than books themselves.”

Ciriaco made detailed records of his finds in diaries that he called commentaria: drawings and descriptions of monuments, ruins, bits and pieces of architecture, coins, gems, sculpture, and even exotic animals, as well as numerous inscriptions in Latin and Greek [Fig. 6]. By the time of his death around 1452, the commentaria had grown to six large volumes. Although the original commentaria seem to have been destroyed by fire in 1514, Ciriaco had often copied out excerpts from them for his patrons and friends, and many of these found their way into other sylloges that were then recopied at second and third hand. More than 140 such manuscripts survive today. Although Ciriaco did not invent the sylloge—some are known from the Trecento—he did more than any other figure to disseminate and to popularize the genre.

Although most of Ciriaco’s autograph works are lost to us, two codices that derive from them bring us directly into the ambient of Jacopo Bellini. They were made for Giovanni Marcanova, a doctor of medicine and student of antiquities from Verona, who was a close friend of Jacopo’s son-in-law Andrea Mantegna. They consist of two redactions of the same Collectio Antiquitatem, both dated 1465. The original is now in Modena; the later was copied from it at first or second hand and is in the Princeton University Library. A man of means, Marcanova...
was an assiduous and learned collector of inscriptions, but he entrusted the final execution of his *sylloges* to others in his *scriptorium* in Bologna. The calligraphy of the Modena manuscript has been ascribed to Felice Feliciano. Another Veronese friend of Mantegna’s and one of Ciriaco’s earliest and most devout disciples, he called himself *Antiquarius*. 18

A number of analogies, as well as distinctions, can be demonstrated between Marcanova’s codices and Jacopo Bellini’s albums. In the first place, some of the same artifacts are recorded in each; the funerary plaque of Metellia Prima, for example, can be had in three redactions [Figs. 4, 7, and 8]. It is probable that Jacopo’s drawing predated the other two and may have been made from direct observation of the tombstone, but all three may well depend on a common model taken from yet another *sylloges*. 19

Unlike the *sylloges*, Jacopo’s collection of monuments is resolutely pictorial. His two pages of antiquities are not inter-
spersed like those of the sylloges within other purely textual transcriptions. His own epigraphical interests were confined to the inscription in situ on the monument. In contrast to Marcanova’s scribes, he did not find it necessary to note the original location of Metellia Prima’s epitaph: “on the wall of the Church of San Salvatore, outside Brescia.”

The obvious disparities between the three examples indicates the degree of license allowed and taken in such transcriptions. Each time such a monument was copied it was altered—improved upon, if you will—according to the historical and aesthetic sensibility of the artist. Jacopo’s “romantic” approach to the visual truth of an antique object should thus be viewed within this context. Indeed, if we accept the Modena codex of Feliciano, a noted epigrapher, as the most accurate in regard to the form of the lettering and word breaks of the Latin text, we will see that Jacopo was even more faithful to the

7) «Monument of Metellia Prima», from Collectio Antiquitatis of Marcanova, 1465, Cod. x L. 15 (Lat. 992), Biblioteca Estense, Modena.

8) «Monument of Metellia Prima», from Collectio Antiquitatis of Marcanova, 1465, MS Garrett 158, fol. 127, Princeton University Library Rare Books Collection, Princeton.
original model than was the professional scribe of the Princeton version.

As many have observed, however, Jacopo was not beyond forming his own perfected assemblages from antiquarian debris. The inscriptions on Jacopo’s two pages of monuments can all be found (save one from Rome) in the pages of Marcanova’s codices. In addition to the stone in Brescia and another in Verona, the rest of the other items had been found in Padua and towns in its surrounding territory. None, however, were described in the sylloges on their monuments with the exception of the epitaph of Metellia Prima; only the inscriptions were given.22 In these instances, it is likely that Jacopo was dealing with inscribed stones of little artistic interest. It would have been incumbent upon him to invent appropriate monuments to display them. In two further instances his pictorial sources have been identified. The dancing nymphs or maenads on the monument of fol. 44 [Fig. 3: right-hand side] come from a Roman altar now in the Museo Civico in Padua, while their base carries an inscription located in the fifteenth century in a garden in Padua belonging to an attorney from Bassano named Alexander.23 Jacopo went further afield for the corresponding monument in fol. 45 [Fig. 4]. The inscription on top, taken from the base of the Vatican obelisk in Rome, was paired with another taken from the Arco dei Gavi in Verona, along with a pictorial motif from its frieze.24 Whether Jacopo copied the inscriptions from the stones themselves or whether he took

9) Ciriaco d’Ancona, «The Trojan Horse Before the Walls of Troy», first half of the 15th century, MS Ottoboniano Lat. 1586, fols. 94v-95r, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome.
them from the pages of a *sylloge* is unknown, but all with the probable exception of the Roman epitaph were well within his range of personal access.

In another *sylloge* relating to Ciriaco’s *commentaria*, we come upon a further element that will be taken up in Jacopo’s albums: the double-page scene. Ciriaco himself, or a copyist following his example, drew the Trojan horse on one page, the walls of Troy on the other [Fig. 9]. The structural similarity to Jacopo’s *St. George and the Dragon* and several other paired drawings is close enough to suggest a connection or some degree of formal dependence [Fig. 10].

We can also find parallels in the *sylloges* to Bellini’s building portraits. The Modena and Princeton codices each contain a section with full-page scenes of life in pagan Rome that are similar in spirit and form (if not in style and artistic quality) to those of Bellini. A scene of pagan sacrifice from the Princeton manuscript also features a building facade, isolated and orientated frontally, and the un-classical application of antique ornament familiar to us from the pages of the Louvre album [Fig. 11]. The point is not that the artist of the manuscript was indebted to Jacopo Bellini or vice versa (this seems most unlikely), but that such scenes were accepted as normal components of a humanist *sylloge*.

The formal sources of Jacopo’s architectural structures, whether taken from an actual monument or from a *sylloge*, can rarely be traced. And when they are, they are hard to recognize.
But there is one instance where we can compare Jacopo's invention with his model. The Arch of the Sergii still stands in Pula, a city on the coast of Istria. Bellini transformed it into the facade of the palace of Pontius Pilate in *Christ before Pilate* [Fig. 12]. It is embellished with a classicizing frieze, and at the end of the central corridor it features a facade familiar to any Venetian, for it is strikingly close to that of the Palazzo Ducale.28 And yet it is not as fanciful as it may seem at first glance. As Ralph Lieberman has pointed out, during the fifteenth century the arch in Pula was flanked by walls on either side, making it more of a portal than a free-standing monument.29 Clearly, both Jacopo and the artist of the Princeton codex took considerable liberties when recreating the Roman past. They were moved by a similar spirit: not simply to record the monuments of classical antiquity but to reclaim them to make them whole and perfect again. Such a spirit, typical of fifteenth-century antiquarianism, has been characterized as one of “archaeological contamination.”30 The notion can stand reexamination, for which it will be necessary to return once more to Ciriaco d’Ancona.

Several of Cirico's few surviving drawings of antiquities can be found in a codex in the Staatsbibliothek Berlin...
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(Hamilton 454), an antiquarian miscellany assembled by him for presentation to Pietro Donato, Bishop of Padua (d. 1447). Among them is the west face of the Parthenon with excerpts from the Panathenaic frieze, drawn earnestly but inaccurately, in silverpoint and ink on vellum. Although Ciriaco describes the facade in detail in the accompanying text, he has drawn it in the wrong proportion, omitting the triglyphs and metopes and abbreviating the pediment sculpture [Fig. 13].


About forty years later, the Roman architect Giuliano da Sangallo copied Ciriaco’s drawing into his sketchbook [Fig. 14]. Upon first glance we may conclude that Sangallo has brought a new archaeological rigor to the task, for his drawing looks so much more accurate. But in fact, his Parthenon is no more true to the original than was Ciriaco’s. It is simply distorted in a different way. While Sangallo corrected the proportions, he also added, gratuitously, an attic storey behind the pediment on which he drew the metope reliefs from the south side of the building. These too were probably copied from a separate Ciriacan source, this one unknown to us, but now they were rationalized and incorporated by the architect into a completely new and fanciful structure. In fact, it resembles the Pantheon more than it does the original model. As Beverly Brown and Diana Kleiner show in a recent study, Sangallo recast the Athenian monument that he had never seen into a familiar Roman paradigm.
Like Jacopo Bellini who “saw” the Arch of the Sergii through a Venetian filter, Sangallo “saw” Greek architecture through a Roman lens. The point was made some years ago by Ernst Gombrich: “that even to describe the visible world in images we need a developed system of schemata... Without some initial starting point, some initial schema, we could never get hold of the flux of experience.” The hiatus between the archaeological and the fanciful spirit, most often used to distinguish Mantegna from his Venetian father-in-law, may thus be narrower than we might suppose.

There is another aspect to the problem. In Saxl’s view, what was new with Jacopo Bellini was not the synthetic character of his “Romano-Gothic” architecture, but rather his use of classical details to place the life of Christ and other Biblical events firmly into the historical past. It is probably fair to say that each artist was just as aggregative in his approach. Bellini’s strategy might be labelled as one of inclusion, wherein the addition of recognizably antique forms — coins, inscriptions, reliefs — was enough to re-situate the whole back in antiquity. Mantegna’s mode, by contrast, was one of exclusion. He sought to pare away the Gothic elements that might contaminate the Roman core of his settings.

Sangallo’s drawings raise a further point. Many consisted of building elevations like the Parthenon facade. It is a short jump from them back to Jacopo Bellini’s architectural settings of about thirty years before: they are similarly isolated and presented frontally in the manner of building portraits. As one scholar proposed, Sangallo, presumably following Ciriaco’s model, often sought “to crystallize the whole in a single view.” We should, of course, keep in mind that we are speaking of two genres, for Jacopo’s aims were rather different from those of Sangallo. Unlike the Roman architect, he was not concerned with the rationalization of architecture or its conformity to structural logic. His primary goal was to create a convincing historical ambient in which he could place the istoria. But behind each genre we may perceive a common ancestor in the illustrated sylloges of antiquities of the early Quattrocento: on the one hand for the collected fantasia of a working artist like Jacopo Bellini; and on the other for the practical compendia of architectural details for the working architect. Each contained a fair share of romance, each a share of archaeology. Each derived from the common notion of a collection, with drawings included both as instruments and as objects of study.

Some sylloges were carefully organized. Marcanova’s devoted separate sections to full sized drawings of Rome, to inscriptions arranged according to geographical location, to quotations from classical writers and concluded with a glossary of Latin abbreviations. Others, however, like the epigraphic collection of Bartholomeus Fontius, did not follow any particular order of classification. As Saxl commented: “Who ever had the book was supposed to read it at random, enjoying one inscription after another.” Betraying a similar tendency toward randomness, Jacopo’s albums fall into the second category. Assuming that the present arrangements follow their original order, it is difficult to discern a consistent organizing principle within them.
Obviously, any dependence of the albums on the humanist *sylloges* does not constitute an exact equivalence. Jacopo’s interest extended beyond the revival of antiquity, and he included objects and subjects that had little to do with the classical world. Once the artist was inspired to make such a connective link he could form his own *collectio* according to his own inclinations.

But we can propose a further analogy; it concerns the ultimate function of the antiquarian *sylloges*. As already noted, Ciriacco copied out extracts from his *commentaria* to present to the Bishop of Padua. Likewise, the dedicatory inscriptions of Marcanova’s manuscripts identifies them as presentation pieces, “Quaedam antiquitatis fragmenta” made as gifts for Novello Malatesta, Lord of Cesena. And Fontius sent his epigraphical compendium to Guillaume de Rochefort, the Chancellor of France, in 1489. Collections of classical inscriptions were objects of value, suitable pawns of exchange for princes and prelates in the elaborate gift-giving and diplomatic protocols of Renaissance society.

Thus, if we regard Jacopo Bellini’s albums as pictorial counterparts to the antiquarian *sylloges*, then Gentile Bellini’s presentation of one of them to the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II in 1479, less than a decade after his father’s death, becomes quite understandable. It must have been at this time that the index—written in a fifteenth-century hand, but not that of Jacopo Bellini—was added. Whether or not these albums were originally intended, as some have suggested, to be just “libri studiorum” or a “set of blueprints” to establish an artistic tradition was no longer an issue. At this point a bound collection of Jacopo’s drawings was considered a suitable gift for an oriental potentate, inspired by and akin to the learned *sylloges* of his humanist contemporaries. The other volume remained in possession of the artist’s family for another generation before it entered the collection of the Venetian patrician Gabriele Vendramin, a less exotic patron of the arts.

We will now turn from humanist models of form behind the drawings of Jacopo Bellini to humanist models of content within them. For what does Bellini’s art reveal about his sense of the past?

Bellini’s response to the challenge of the revival of antiquity—what might be called the “humanist dilemma”—reveals his adherence to a Venetian model of accommodation and his peculiarity within that model. The problem can be summed up with two questions. Was pagan Rome a Golden Age whose decline and fall was a tragedy? Or was it an era of spiritual blindness whose passing away should be celebrated? One pictorial theme crystallizes the paradox: the destruction of the pagan idol.


Such an episode in the life of St. Bartholomew was included on a polyptych painted by Simone da Cusighe in 1394 for a church near Belluno [Fig. 15]. Newly converted by the saint, King Polemius commands his soldiers to pull down an idol from its pedestal. It is a typical example of saintly iconoclastic activity according to the late medieval pictorial tradition. The idol is of secondary interest to the saint, serving primarily as an object by which he can demonstrate his supernatural powers and, by extension, the power of Christianity over paganism.

Moving to a work by a Venetian artist, painted around 1450, however, we see a significant shift in attention. On a small panel, probably once part of a polyptych, Antonio Vivarini depicted St. Apollonia, armed with a hammer, who climbs a ladder with destructive intent [Fig. 16]. But she is dwarfed by a splendid...
column base of exuberant, if unconvincing, classicism and overshadowed by the sensuous nude statue that it supports. Here the pagan idol has become, implicitly, a protagonist equal to the Christian saint. Elevated above the crowd on such a magnificent pedestal, he is surely the primary locus of visual interest in the painting.

Jacopo Bellini represented a similar event in the Louvre album [Fig. 17]. The fifteenth-century index lists the subject of the double-page drawing as “uno tenpio con alcuni Idoli che vien roti da zente d’arme” [a temple with some idols that were being broken by men of arms]. The nude statue that originally stood atop the column is now barely visible. Originally drawn in silverpoint, it appears to be the only figure in the composition that was not later reinforced in pen and ink. Even if the original drawing were completely intact, it might be a puzzling scene for the modern beholder, for the attention is further dispersed. The soldiers’ exertions appear to be gratuitous, or at least undirected, until one notices an elderly bearded man on horseback all but hidden at the
far left side of the verso page. Whether he is a ruler initiating an act of pious demolition, or simply an observer, is by no means clear.\textsuperscript{51} It is the antique monument, and the activity around it, that defines the dramatic core of the composition.

Both Venetian artists displayed an ambivalence toward the seductive attractions of pious antiquity that set them apart from artists of only a generation earlier. The idols are no longer just symbols of heresy and disbelief. They have become objects of aesthetic delight, demanding our interest and even respect. Although some might interpret Bellini’s seemingly casual dismissal of the heroic protagonist to the sidelines as a sign of secularization,\textsuperscript{52} such a view overlooks a strategy of narrative decentralization that became important in Venetian art at this time and that heightened its credibility to the Venetian viewer.\textsuperscript{53} In a sense, the action becomes not less pious, but more so, because it is grounded in the unremarkable activity of ongoing life.

A short excerpt from a travel account of 1483 may help us to interpret such scenes. The young Marin Sanudo, just seventeen at the time, was allowed to accompany three Venetian syndics on an inspection tour through the Terraferma. He painstakingly recorded the notable features of cities and towns through which they passed. One such observation is revealing. It concerns a small church dedicated to the Virgin on the shore of Lago di Garda. Visited nineteen years earlier by Mantegna, Felice Feliciano and other friends of antiquarian inclination on a well-known expedition in search of Roman inscriptions,\textsuperscript{54} it now drew Sanudo’s attention as well. He made special note of some mosaics and a recently discovered inscription with the name of Antoninus Pius, and then added:

And the high altar is in the middle of the church with four columns, and upon one [there is] a capital with an idol, that is Jupiter Ammon in the form of Ariete (the Ram). There is an opening in the cupola, through which the smoke of the sacrifices rose; but above the altar there is a stone, which, it is said, runs with sweat three times a year: on Christmas, on Holy Friday and on the day of Our Lady in February.\textsuperscript{55}

In the margin of his manuscript next to this entry, Sanudo wrote, “Nota mirabilia,” and again “miraculum”; glosses used throughout in his account to call attention to other sites of more conventionally Christian, if equally prodigious, character. We are reminded here of the ease with which even a well-educated man of the late fifteenth century could elide the Christian present with the newly rediscovered Roman past. Most striking is the absence of the necessity to make a moral distinction between the two.\textsuperscript{56}

Of course, continuity between the two eras had been taken for granted through the Middle Ages and was not all that new.

One may ask if there are any signs in Bellini’s work of the genuine historical detachment—the feeling of a lost, and thus recapturable antiquity—that we have established as a prerequisite to its rebirth in the Renaissance period. One finds it in his mythological scenes of frolicking satyrs and Bacchic revelry, but such figures are not a convincing proof.\textsuperscript{57} They stood for a mythical realm that could coexist with Christian life without threatening it. However, in a scene listed as “uno tenpio in più faze su molti gradi” (a polygonal temple on many steps),\textsuperscript{58} the practice of paganism appears to be presented objectively without a discernible Christian commentary connected to it [Fig. 18]. The idol,
as far as one can determine, inspires awe rather than confrontation. As in the full-page illustrations in the sylloges of Marcanova, pagan religion had become a subject for portrayal in itself, in a manner that can even be described as sympathetic.

In this reclaiming of the classical past only to make it whole and perfect again, Jacopo and the artists of the sylloges were essentially following a tradition already well established in Tuscany and elsewhere in Italy in the early Quattrocento. But Jacopo took a further step. In several of his drawings, a new element appears, occurring only rarely before that time in finished works of art in Italy: the classical fragment — either as a ruin or as an unintegrated component of an antique building. With it, we find in Bellini a new awareness not just of time past, but of time passing.

A broken column, fallen from its base with the fastening holes clearly visible on the capital, is a prominent feature in the Baptism of Christ [Fig. 19]. Its inclusion in this particular scene can be viewed as an updated version of a traditional symbolic message: paganism gives way to Christianity. Salvatore Settis has called attention to the inevitable tension created by the placement of ruins in a narrative scene: on the one hand there is a sense of necessity, that of the providential and inexorable march of Christian time; on the other hand there is the paradox of ancient glory — something good — now fallen.

In another drawing, however, the message is extended, becoming at once more subtle and complex. On the day that Christ leaves Jerusalem on the way to Calvary, the city is under construction [Fig. 20]. Workers repair a crumbling wall on the left, while in the foreground a sculptor puts the finishing touches on a classical statue. It is to be set upon a column that lies ready on the ground. Now the symbolism is less clear; indeed, the labors of the artisans may only signify the normalcy of ongoing life surrounding momentous events. But this normalcy was cast in terms of transience and implied the passage of time. Great civilizations must be built up before they can fall. And again, the conceptual substructure should not be interpreted as secularizing, but as aiming to convince.

With Jacopo’s rendering of imperfect or incomplete antiquity, or antiquity under construction as it were, temporality — the passage of historical time — has been brought into the istoria. It is in these small details that we can sense the artist’s personal, if ambivalent, recognition of detachment from the past.

Bellini’s priority in the artistic recovery of the ruin cannot be established with certainty. A single surviving example from the Trecento, Maso di Banco’s fresco of St. Sylvester in the Roman forum of the 1330s, seems to have inspired no imitations for the next hundred years. The next undeniably antique ruins seem to have appeared all at once in Italian art in the middle of the Quattrocento. Among the earliest examples known to me are a Florentine tondo depicting the Adoration of the Magi probably begun by Fra Angelico and completed by Filippo Lippi (now in the National Gallery, Washington, D.C.); Mantegna’s fresco of the Execution of St. James in Padua (now destroyed); and five drawings in Jacopo Bellini’s albums. Only Mantegna’s work can be dated with some certainty, to c. 1454–56, but in all likelihood, at least some of Jacopo’s drawings preceded it.

Two sources of formal inspiration for the emergence of the ruin may be proposed. In the first instance, our attention is
drawn to the north. Architectural statements of a new order replacing the old were common enough in Flemish art as early as the fourteenth century. In some instances, a stylistic antithesis between Romanesque and Gothic was set up to distinguish the synagogue from the church. In others, the synagogue was shown as a crumbling ruin, to be contrasted with an unblemished Christian church, but with both structures sharing a common architectural style. As Panofsky has shown, the symbolic ruin was born around 1440 when the two systems were combined: from that time on in Northern painting, a crumbling structure, now invariably Romanesque, became a standard component in scenes of the Nativity and the Adoration of the Magi. It is this tradition that seems to have been passed on with a properly Italianized classical vocabulary in the Washington tondo of Fra Angelico and Lippi.

But the works of Mantegna and Jacopo Bellini signal are disjoined from this iconographical tradition, for these were not Adorations but a variety of events from baptisms to executions. For them, we may look to a second source. For they express an essentially different tendency, the archaeological
one, which was already well established at Padua. Here, again, the investigations of Ciriaco may have provided the impetus for innovation and change. A copy of his drawing of the Temple of Apollo in Delos shows a jumble of columns and stone blocks with no attempt to redress the ravages of time [Fig. 6]. And it also conscientiously records the fastening holes on the marble pieces, just as Jacopo did in his own drawings. Perceived, acknowledged, and recorded by Ciriaco, the antiquarian explorer, the irretrievability of the antique past was now to be rendered visible in pictorial narrative through the pen of Jacopo Bellini, the antiquarian artist.

The Renaissance collectio antiquitatis—the sylloge filled more or less systematically with inscriptions, renderings of antique monuments, and copies of Roman coins and gems—thus seems to have been for Jacopo Bellini at the very least a point of departure for his own sylloge—the sylloge of an artist. It was his own personal collection of valuable and rare things; a sigillum virtutum or validating testimony of his own creative virtù; and his own highly personal entry point into sacrosanct, because distanced, antiquity.

While the present essay discusses many of the same issues explored by Degenhart and Schmitt, the emphasis is different. The two articles were written independently and may be seen as complementary rather than redundant.


Jacopo’s widow left both albums to her son, Gentile Bellini in her will (see note 7 below). When Gentile visited the court of Sultan Mehmed II in 1479, he presented the Ottoman ruler with the album now in the Louvre. The album in the British Museum was left by Gentile in his own will of 18 February 1507 to his brother, Giovanni Bellini. Marcantonio Michiel observed it in 1530 in the house of Gabriele Vendramin. For a detailed account, including the later peregrinations of the albums, see H. Tietze, E. Tietze-Conrat, The Drawings of the Venetian Painters in the 15th and 16th Centuries, New York, 1944, p. 107.

The term could also be translated as “drawn pictures.” Dated 25 November 1471, the will is transcribed in C. Ricci, Jacopo Bellini e i suoi libri di disegni, Florence, 1908, I, p. 59. See the interpretation of the passage by Degenhart, Schmitt, “Ein Musteblatt...,” pp. 139–41, but also the sceptical response by J. Meyer zur Capellen, Gentile Bellini, Stuttgart, 1985, p. n. 61.


For Jacopo's architectural syntheses, see the general observations of Degenhart, Schmitt (Jacopo Bellini, 1984, pp. 17–21). See also the notion of the "compromise style" and "arte decorativa" of Filarete, developed in the Venetian ambient, as formulated by J. Spencer, Filarete's Treatise on Architecture, New Haven, 1965.


Mitchell, "Ciriaco d'Ancona..." (as in note 31), pp. 111–123.


But see Rothlisberger, "Notes on the Drawing Books of Jacopo Bellini" (as in note 12), pp. 359–64; and idem, "Studi su Jacopo Bellini" (as in note 4), pp. 50 ff., whose arguments for a systematic arrangement, particularly in the case of the Louvre album, are not convincing on the whole. But see now Degenhart, Schmitt, Corpus, II-5, vols. 5–6.

Princeton, Garrett 158.


See note 6 above. As Meyer zur Capellen (as in note 7), p. 18, put it: "Es ist anzunehmen, dass der Künstler nicht mit leeren Händen beim Sultan erschien."

Written in the period 1470–79 in Venetian dialect, according to Degenhart, Schmitt Jacopo Bellini, 1984, p. 27.


See note 6 above. For Vendramini, see O. Logan, Culture and Society in Venice, 1470–1790, London, 1972, pp. 320–21, with further bibliography.


The attribution to Vivarini is not entirely satisfactory, but no better one has been proposed. See F. Shapley, Catalogue of the Italian Paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington D. C., 1979, I, pp. 537–38.


Ibidem, p. 25.


As proposed by Joost-Gaugier, 1975 (as in note 9).

See Fortini Brown (as in note 8), pp. 79–97.


58 Ibidem, p. 382.

59 Ibidem, pp. 378–81. The other examples are not, strictly speaking, ruins.
