

The Legacy of Antiquity

The Legacy of Antiquity:
New Perspectives in the Reception
of the Classical World

Edited by

Lenia Kouneni

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P U B L I S H I N G

The Legacy of Antiquity:
New Perspectives in the Reception of the Classical World,
Edited by Lenia Kouneni

This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-5249-X, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5249-4

“The art of the Greeks, of the Egyptians,
of the great painters who lived in other times,
is not an art of the past;
perhaps it is more alive today than it ever was.”

—Pablo Picasso, *Two Statements by Picasso*, 1923,
in *Picasso on Art: A Selection of Views*, ed. Dore Ashton (London: 1972)

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FOREWORD

A few years ago, a group of academics and doctoral students came together to share their perspectives and research in the “Legacy of Antiquity” conference at the University of St Andrews (April 2006), organised by the editor. The two-and-a-half day conference was intended to bring together scholars who were working on various aspects of the revival, survival, influence and reception of antiquity in Western art and culture. The conference was sponsored by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Classical Association, and the School of Art History, University of St Andrews, and included papers that covered the Middle Ages to the modern period.

This volume includes a selection of papers from the conference and seeks to present recent developments in the field of classical reception studies combining an interdisciplinary approach with new archival studies. As the gestation period of the project indicates, this is not a replica of the event but the fruit of much subsequent development; the essays have been extended, changed and revised taking into account new perspectives from recent scholarship.

Recent years have seen an increase of interest in classicism and the reception and survival of antiquity. Classical Reception Studies is a rapidly developing field of research and teaching, and a growing number of new scholars investigate issues of reception of classical texts, ideas, performance, and material culture across different cultural contexts and in different media. This volume aims to add new perspectives in this growing field of scholarship. We hope that it will be equally appealing to archaeologists, classicists, historians and art historians and to students and teachers of classical themes, comparative cultural studies, and reception studies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this volume would not have been possible without the help and support of many people. First and foremost, I would like to thank the contributors for their good nature and patience with my requests and delays; their dedication and enthusiasm have been instrumental in bringing this volume to fruition. I would also like to extend my gratitude to all the academic colleagues who attended the conference at St Andrews that first generated the idea for this book; their comments and feedback provided the basis for engaging debates and fruitful discussions. A wholehearted thank you goes to Dr Ruth Macrides, Dr Julian Luxford, Dr Charlotte de Mille, Dr Maria Halkias, Dr Margarita Lianou and Dr Konstantinos Zafeiris, who acted as moderators of the various panels and facilitated the smooth running of the conference. Special thanks go to Professor Elizabeth MacGrath for her keynote lecture that opened the conference and her continuous engagement with and support of all the contributors.

The editor and authors are particularly grateful for the financial support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Classical Association and the School of Art History, University of St Andrews. A number of libraries, archives, institutions in the U.K. and abroad assisted by providing access, expertise, images or funding to individual contributors for this volume. In particular, we would like to thank The Warburg Institute (London); Soprintendenza per i beni architettonici, paesaggistici, storici, artistici ed etnoantropologici (Naples); Biblioteca di Storia dell'arte Bruno Molajoli (Naples); IMT (Lucca); Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center; University of Birmingham Library, Department of Special Collections; Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg; Manchester City Art Galleries; Victoria and Albert Museum; National Liverpool Museums; The Walters Art Gallery; and the Reunion des Musees Nationaux.

Special thanks are due to the staff at Cambridge Scholars Publishing. I am particularly grateful to Amanda Millar for inviting me to publish this volume, to Carol Koulikoyrdis for her help, support and patience in dealing with the manuscript.

INTRODUCTION

LENIA KOUNENI

“The past is everywhere...
Relics, histories, memories suffuse human experience...
Whether it is celebrated or rejected, attended to or ignored,
the past is omnipresent.”¹

The persistence of Greek and Roman antiquity in art and culture of Western Europe is hardly a new area of research. Art historians have studied the influence of antique on later art for a long time. As early as the late nineteenth century, Aby Warburg (1866-1929) engaged in an interdisciplinary pursuit of understanding the history and subsequent fates of the classical tradition. He regarded the recovery of ancient forms as a central factor within the history of European art and thought. Arguing that “every age has the renaissance of antiquity it deserves”,² he set out to examine how non-classical artists used the reservoir of the classical past.

Since Warburg’s work, the relationship between antiquity and later cultures has been submitted to more systematic readings. Some of these deal with the phenomenon of appropriation itself, while others examine the transmission and survival of form and ideas.³ In most cases these

¹ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), xv.

² Ernst H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg, An Intellectual Biography* (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1970), 238. For a translation of Warburg’s collected works, see Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, intr. Kurt W. Forster; trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and Humanities, 1999).

³ To name but a few, Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Resuscitations in Western Art* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1960); Roberto Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969); Salvatore Settis, ed., *Memoria del antico nell’ arte italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1984-5); Robert Bolgar, ed., *Classical Influences on European Culture, A.D. 500-1500* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971) are indicative of the first case. Ruth Rubinstein and Phyllis Bober, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture* (London: Harvey Miller, 1985); Cornelius Vermeule, *European Art and the Classical Past* (Harvard:

works examined how antiquity shaped later times and followed a “source and influence” approach, focusing on how different artists used classical antiquity as a model of inspiration for their own works. However, over the last decades the discussion of the relationship between antiquity and post-classical culture has been enriched and has changed focus. The notion of reception has revolutionised the field of Classics and the relationship between past and present. The modern term of reception, which developed from the 1960s in literary criticism, goes beyond the traditional notion of “classicism” and shifts the emphasis away from the creator to the audience, and to his or her perception of art.⁴ Antique works are not seen as possessing one original meaning, but as having the ability to acquire new ones. Their meanings are not fixed, but fluid, according to who looks at them.

The use of the words “legacy” and “reception” in the title of this volume may sound contradictory. According to the Oxford English Dictionary “legacy” is “anything handed down by an ancestor or predecessor”, and as such, has been linked to the more conservative approach of “the classical tradition”, which taken from the Latin verb *tradere*, is interpreted as something that has been handed down from one generation to the next. Thus, both terms, “legacy” and “the classical tradition”, have been associated with studies of the transmission and dissemination of classical culture through the ages, emphasising the influence of classical sources - literary, artistic or otherwise - on subsequent works. On the other hand, reception studies focus on the receiving society and aim to track down how non-classical people (and classical, in certain cases) responded to and adapted them.

These terms, though, need not be contradictory. The recent *Companion to the Classical Tradition* includes a variety of contexts and insights for classical receptions, and it holds the notion of “the classical tradition” at

Harvard and Oxford University Press, 1964); Michael Greenhalgh, *The Classical Tradition in Art* (London: Duckworth, 1978); and Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1981) belong to the type of bibliography that examines the transmission and survival of forms and ideas.

⁴ For a discussion of the theory of reception, see Lorna Hardwick, *Reception Studies* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray, eds, *A Companion to Classical Receptions* (Malden & New York: Blackwell, 2008); and Charles Martindale, “Reception,” in *A Companion to the Classical Tradition*, ed. Craig W. Kallendorf (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007), 297-311.

its very core.⁵ Charles Martindale in his chapter on “Reception” defines it rather accurately as “a two-way process, backward as well as forward, in which the present and the past are in dialogue with each other”.⁶ The authors of this volume address various aspects of this continuous dialogue and the shift between tradition and reception. In doing so, they use a rich and diverse vocabulary that demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between ancient and modern contexts. The term “reception” appears alongside “the classical tradition”, the “legacy of antiquity”, and other relevant terms, such as “appropriation”, “adaptation”, “translation”, “perception”, “interpretation” and “influence”.⁷ The notion of “reuse”, either of materials or of forms and ideas, has also been an integral part of the discussion of the presence of antiquity in subsequent periods.

This collection of essays explores the uses of the past from a wide range of perspectives. The papers are drawn from a spectrum of cultures and chronological periods; from medieval to modern times, from Italian to Byzantine, from French to British. The characters involved in each case study accessed the past through different means, employing varying combinations of texts, oral traditions, iconographic representations, and visible remains of the landscape.

The material is divided into five major sections; perceptions of antiquity through the Ages, antiquity seen through medieval eyes, Renaissance approaches to antiquity, British attitudes to Greek and Roman heritage, and modernism and antiquity.

The first part demonstrates the persistence of antiquity and reveals the long afterlife of antique monuments. Stefano D’Ovidio explores the rich and complex history of reception of the *Crypta Neapolitana*, an ancient Roman tunnel beneath the Posillipo hill on the west side of Naples. He traces literary references to the *Crypta* from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, discussing how the perception of this unusual monument changed throughout history according to contemporary political, social and aesthetic views. The next ten chapters trace instances of classical reception chronologically, from the Middle Ages to the modern period.

⁵ Craig W. Kallendorf, ed., *A Companion to the Classical Tradition* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007).

⁶ Martindale, “Reception,” 298.

⁷ For a rather stimulating paper considering the term “appropriation” as an active process, see Robert S. Nelson, “Appropriation,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, 2nd ed.), 160-73.

The second part, “Antiquity Seen through Medieval Eyes”, focuses on the uses and interpretation of the antique during the Middle Ages in Italy and Byzantium. The traditional view that antiquity was only rediscovered during the Renaissance has long been proven inaccurate and attention has shifted to the early discovery of antiquity back in the Middle Ages. Lenia Kouneni draws attention to late medieval Italian texts and their references to antiquity. Her paper explores the attitudes of late medieval Italian authors toward antique art, focusing on the supernatural powers ascribed to pagan remains and juxtaposing these attitudes with an increasing appreciation of the aesthetic values of ancient art. Presenting several cases of superstition and admiration of antique art, this paper aims to discuss the reasons behind these beliefs and to examine any difference in attitudes that occurred in the fourteenth century. Henrike Haug presents a case of appropriation of classical models in twelfth-century Italy. Starting from the architrave of the Pisan church of San Silvestro, which illustrates the story of Constantine and Sylvester, she discusses different modes of the perception of Constantine in the twelfth century and shows the complexity of dealing with the legacy of antiquity, both in terms of aesthetic appreciation and its historical and ideological use. The third paper of this section looks at the appreciation of antique artistic forms within the lay and clerical elites of the Byzantine Empire. Concentrating on the iconography of a number of late antique and medieval ivory and bone caskets, Anthousa Papagiannaki brings forward a selection of antique marine scenes depicted on these works and considers the role such artefacts play in our effort to understand how Byzantine society perceived antiquity and its legacy.

The third section, “Renaissance Approaches to Antiquity”, considers the importance of antiquity in the Renaissance and presents new evidence of the complex relationship between the two cultures. In the first of the two case studies, Laura Rietveld offers new insight into the survival of pagan mythology. She focuses on the popular myth of Orpheus and explores the appearance of the mythical figure in the editions of one of the most frequently read ancient poems, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, produced in Italy between 1325 and 1570. She analyses how the figure of Orpheus changes and develops in these editions, both in terms of the texts and the woodcuts that accompany them. Kristin Arioli takes us to early sixteenth-century Rome; her paper explores a significant moment in sixteenth-century antiquarianism, Jacopo Ripanda’s record of Trajan’s column’s spiral reliefs, and the impact of this achievement on the artist’s success during the first two decades of the 1500s.

The fourth part, “British Attitudes to Greek and Roman Heritage”, turns to the reception of classical culture in Britain during the late

eighteenth and nineteenth century. Benoît Latour's paper draws attention to the popularity of pseudo-Longinus's treatise on aesthetics *Peri Hypsous* (*On the Sublime*) during the second half of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. He demonstrates that passages quoted in the *Peri Hypsous* as exemplars of the sublime appealed to British artists of the Neoclassical and Romantic period as particularly suitable subjects for history painting. He focuses his analysis on a series of Homeric illustrations by Henry Fuseli and discusses their relation to the *Peri Hypsous*. In a wider perspective this study raises questions apropos reassessing an imagery that has often been interpreted as determined by the political turmoil surrounding the French Revolution. In her paper Rosario Rovira-Guardiola approaches Victorian art through an examination of the impact of recent archaeological discoveries in Italy. She examines Alma-Tadema's interest in the archaeology and material culture of ancient Rome, focusing on the artist's use of Roman inscriptions from Pompeii in his paintings as evidence of his rather scientific interest in archaeology.

Finally, the authors in the last part of this volume examine the history of European modernism by exploring the alliance between the avant-garde and the antique. The first paper by Silvia Loreti considers de Chirico's original approach to ancient Greece and Rome and argues that the birth of prehistoric archaeology was an important factor to the artist's reinterpretation of antiquity. Taking into account Apollinaire's writings, Loreti proposes that de Chirico's painting, imbued with a Nietzschean tension, urged the negotiations of classicism and primitivism that led the return of many modern artists to antiquity. The next paper focuses on Andy Warhol and presents an aspect of his work that has attracted little attention, the parallels to Plato's philosophy. This is the theme that Rachel Hooper pursues by illustrating that Plato's *Symposium* and in particular, his description of the ascent to Beauty is a theory that shares many similarities with the repeating forms in Andy Warhol's paintings. The last paper of this section discusses an instance in the afterlife of a famous fifth-century B.C. sculpture, the *Nike* of Paionios. Spyridon Loumakis takes us on a journey through some of the semiological connotations acquired by the iconic statue in modern times and investigates a neglected facet of classical reception, the ties between antiquity, Nationalism and the history of sports in Greece.

This collection of essays is a snapshot of a field in movement, illustrative of current directions and hopeful of producing new ones. The legacy of antiquity is omnipresent, and as multifaceted as suggested by the wide range of the papers. The authors hope that this volume will present new perspectives, deal with the ever elusive enigmas and open the way for

future research and investigation to all those who seek to explore the constant fascination with the antique.

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PART I:
PERCEPTIONS OF ANTIQUITY
THROUGH THE AGES

CHAPTER ONE

THE CRYPTA NEAPOLITANA: PERCEPTION OF A ROMAN TUNNEL THROUGHOUT HISTORY

STEFANO D'OVIDIO

In this paper I will examine how the perception of a single Roman monument has changed throughout history. The monument I will deal with is the Crypta Neapolitana, a 711 metres long tunnel excavated through the hill of Posillipo, on the west side of the Bay of Naples. The Crypta, also known as the “Grotta di Pozzuoli” or “di Posillipo”, was built by the Roman architect Cocceius during the early Augustan age in order to connect Naples with the coastal cities of Pozzuoli, Baiae and Cumae. It made an alternative route, faster and easier, for travellers to and from Naples, which would allow them to avoid the longer Via Antiniana, a difficult road running over the low range of hills west of the city.¹

The Crypta Neapolitana is one of the few underground tunnels of such dimensions surviving from the Roman age and it is notably the one that has remained in use the longest, since it served as a public road until 1885, when the present “Grotta Nuova” was opened.² The tunnel’s impressive structure and gloomy appearance have struck the imagination of local inhabitants and foreign travellers ever since it was built. For almost twenty centuries visitors to Naples have recorded their impressions on the Crypta and conjectured about its origin and function. It is by analysing their

¹ Werner Johannowsky, “Contributi alla topografia della Campania antica,” *Rendiconti dell’Accademia di Archeologia, Lettere e Belle Arti di Napoli* 27 (1952): 114-18, 133-35. See also: Martin Frederiksen, *Campania*, ed. with additions Nicholas Purcell (London: British School at Rome, 1984), 334.

² On Roman tunnels see, Maria Stella Busana, *Via per montes excisa. Strade in galleria e passaggi sotterranei nell’Italia romana* (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 1997).

perception of such an unusual monument, that we will be able to see how the attitude towards antiquity changed throughout history.

1. The Crypta's Structure

Although a large number of literary and visual sources make the Crypta Neapolitana one of the best documented Roman monuments in Naples, its original structure and present condition are almost unknown. The tunnel is entirely carved into the soft tufa rock of the hill. The main entrance (Fig. 1-1) was originally located on the western side, on the way from Pozzuoli. The entrance has preserved its original appearance, although the chaotic urban development of the last few decades has disfigured its magnificence, clearly visible in an eighteenth-century engraving by the Spanish engraver Francisco Cassiano de Silva (Fig. 1-2).³

The Crypta's interior (Fig. 1-3) is only 4.5 metres wide and looks exactly as ancient authors used to present it: a dark and narrow passage beneath the mountain, which can barely allow two carts to travel in opposite directions. At about 100 metres from the western entrance, the tunnel's height dramatically decreases from 16 to 5 metres and for the following 500 metres the road runs into the deep obscurity of the hill. Height re-increases more gradually at about 100 metres before the exit on the opposite side. Two ventilation shafts, or *spiracula*, brought some light into the cavern, but they were almost completely occluded over the centuries. The *spiracula* were first restored in 1455-56 by Alphonse I of Aragon, king of Naples, who also ordered the lowering of the floor at the tunnel's eastern section to bring more light into the Crypta.⁴

As a result of this substantial alteration, a new monumental entrance was built at the eastern side of the Crypta on the way from Naples (Fig. 1-4). Alterations and the tricky geological conditions of the hill affected the stability of the tunnel and reinforcements became necessary in 1548 and several more times during the following centuries, as testified by the complex system of pointed arches and pillars still surviving (Fig. 1-5). Finally, in 1917 a rockslide blocked the tunnel, which has been inaccessible to the public ever since. A difficult restoration is now ongoing after decades of abandonment, but the full re-opening of the Crypta may still be a long time away.

³ Giancarlo Alisio, *Napoli nel Seicento: le vedute di Francesco Cassiano de Silva* (Naples: Electa, 1984).

⁴ Camillo Minieri Riccio, "Alcuni fatti di Alfonso I di Aragona," *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane* 6 (1881): 249, 447. See also, Mario Capasso, *Il sepolcro di Virgilio* (Naples: Giannini, 1983), 43-46, 57-59.

2. The Crypta Neapolitana in the Earliest Sources

The Crypta Neapolitana was built to serve the Phlegraean Fields, a region which played a strategic role in Roman politics, economy and culture under Augustus and his successors. According to Martin Frederikssen, the tunnel, as well as other works patronised in the area by Octavian and his son-in-law Agrippa, “were designed to impress the beholder with the colossal power and awesome *magnitudo animi* of their creators”.⁵ This is the main reason why the Crypta is duly recorded in the pages of loyal writers of the period. The Greek geographer Strabo presented the tunnel as a spectacular alteration of natural environment. In the fifth book of his *Geography*, he wrote the Crypta was a work by Cocceius, the same architect who had also built the Crypta Cumana, a two branched tunnel connecting the Acropolis of Cumae with the Lake of Avernus and the sea.⁶

Strabo is not only a primary source for the Crypta’s history, but also the source of its first legendary interpretation. He referred to the Cimmerians, mythical inhabitants of the area that, according to Homer, used to live in artificial grottoes and underground tunnels.⁷ That was just a legend, Strabo says, but maybe Cocceius was inspired by such a story when he built the cryptas in both Cumae and Naples. This is the reason why, after the rediscovery of Strabo’s *Geography* in the fifteenth century, the Crypta was often believed the work of legendary Cimmerians.

From the beginning, the Crypta’s disadvantages of dust and darkness are mentioned at least as often as its advantages. Seneca’s letter to Lucilius gives a vivid description of the discomfort of travelling through the tunnel:

No place could be longer than that prison; nothing could be dimmer than those torches, which enabled us, not to see amid the darkness, but to see the darkness. But, even supposing that there was light in the place, the dust, which is an oppressive and disagreeable thing even in the open air, would destroy the light.⁸

⁵ Frederikssen, *Campania*, 319-58.

⁶ Strabo, *Geography* (5, 4), Loeb Classical Library, ed. and trans. Horace Leonard Jones (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press; William Heinemann LTD, 1923), 445, 451.

⁷ Homer, *Odyssey* (11, 15); see, Nicola Biffi, *L’Italia di Strabone. Testo traduzione e commento dei Libri V e VI della Geografia* (Genoa: Università di Genova, 1988), 290, notes 427-30.

⁸ Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* (LVII), trans. Richard M. Gummere (London: W. Heinemann-New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1917), 382-87.

Travelling to Naples via mainland was even worse than taking the route of a rough sea. In Seneca's Stoic opinion the Crypta was as disagreeable as the lavish life led by high-class Romans in the Phlegraean Fields.⁹

Despite Seneca's bad impression, the Crypta remained a useful route for travellers to and from Naples and Pozzuoli during the following centuries, as is also attested by the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, a twelfth or thirteenth-century copy of a fourth century Roman road map.¹⁰ On the section of the map that illustrates the roads and towns of Campania is depicted the tunnel, tiny and schematic (Fig. 1-6). The Crypta is the only underground passage indicated in the *Tabula*, which clearly testifies to its importance within the local road system.

3. The Perception of the Crypta in Medieval Times

In medieval times the impressive structure and dark appearance of the Crypta became something to wonder at. According to the Jewish traveller Benjamin of Tudela, who was in Naples around 1167, such an alteration of the natural environment had a military function.¹¹ He knew from the so called *Book of Josippon*—a tenth century Jewish history written in Southern Italy¹²—that Romulus was so frightened by David's army that he built defensive structures all over his kingdom. Benjamin, therefore, assumed the Crypta was part of the defensive system planned by the mythical founder of Rome to prevent an attack from the powerful king of Israel.

If for the Jewish-cultured Benjamin the tunnel was evidence of Israel's supremacy over ancient Rome, to the English diplomat and writer Gervase

⁹ Marcello Gigante, "Civiltà letteraria nei Campi Flegrei," in *Campi Flegrei*, ed. Giancarlo Alisio (Naples: Franco Di Mauro Editore, 1995), 32-33.

¹⁰ Annalina and Mario Levi, *Itineraria picta. Contributo allo studio della Tabula Peutingeriana* (Rome: L'erma di Bretschneider, 1967), 17-23, 131-32; Luciano Bosio, *La Tabula Peutingeriana, una descrizione pittorica del mondo antico* (Rimini: Maggioli, ca 1983), 118-19; and Francesco Prontera, ed., *Tabula Peutingeriana. Le antiche vie del mondo* (Florence: Olschki, 2003).

¹¹ Ezra H. Haddad, trans., *Itinerary of R. Benjamin of Tudela, 1165-1173* (Baghdad: Eastern Press, 1945), 12.

¹² There are no modern English translations of this book; see the Latin version, Jean Gagnier, trans., *Josippon, sive Josephi Ben-Gorionis Historiae Judaicae Libri Sex* (Oxford: Theatro Sheldoniano, 1706), 7. For the critical edition of the Hebrew text see, David Flusser, ed., *Sēfer Yōsipōn* (Jerusalem: The Bailik Institute, 1978-80); see also the article by Shulamit Sela in the *Medieval Jewish Civilization. An Encyclopedia*, ed. Norman Roth (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 377-80.

of Tilbury the Crypta recalled the Latin poet Virgil. Gervase visited Naples in 1180. In the third book of his *Otia Imperialia*, written about 1215, he described Posillipo as “a mountain through which a tunnel has been excavated for such a length that someone standing at its mid-point can scarcely see either end.”¹³ In spite of such a darkness, Gervase noticed, the tunnel was a safe place: no harm could befall any traveller after Virgil had worked a wonder with his “*arte mathematica*”.

Tales presenting Virgil as a wonder worker suddenly appeared in northern Europe during the second half of the twelfth century and Gervase’s book is one of the earliest and most detailed sources for this popular medieval legend about the Latin poet. In Naples and in the rest of Italy there is no evidence of such a legend until the fourteenth century and the only reason why Virgilian magic tales are set mainly in Naples is because Virgil’s most read biographers, Suetonius and Servius, stated that the poet spent a period of his life in a villa in Posillipo, where he was buried after his death in Brindisi in 19 AD.¹⁴ Foreign and cultured travellers to medieval Naples, such as Gervase and the German diplomat Conrad of Querfurt, who was in Naples in 1194, associated the Latin poet with the wonders they saw in the city: impregnable walls, talismans preventing Vesuvius’s eruptions and other natural disasters, the Roman Baths of Pozzuoli, located just outside of the Crypta’s western entrance and still visited for their healthy thermal waters throughout the Middle Ages. No one but Virgil, who was considered as an almost supernatural character, could have been able to work such *mirabilia* for the city where he lived and was buried.

The Crypta’s association with Virgil played a role in the identification of the poet’s grave in a Roman columbarium, which stands just off the eastern entrance (Fig. 1-4).¹⁵ The quest for Virgil’s burial place in Naples was the subject of early Virgilian legends and it is clear from both Gervase and Conrad that no one on earth really knew where exactly it was located.

¹³ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor*, ed. and trans. S.E. Banks and J.W. Binns (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 586-87.

¹⁴ Jan M. Ziolkowsky and Michael C. J. Putnam, eds, *The Virgilian Tradition. The First Fifteen Hundred Years* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 825-1024, with reference to earlier bibliography.

¹⁵ On Virgil’s grave and its fortune in history see, John B. Trapp, “The Grave of Vergil,” *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 47 (1984): 1-31; see also, Stefano D’Ovidio, “Boccaccio, Virgilio e la Madonna di Piedigrotta,” in *Boccaccio Angioino. Materiali per la storia culturale di Napoli nel Trecento*, ed. Giancarlo Alfano, Teresa D’Urso and Alessandra Perriccioli Saggese (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2012), 329-46.

Neapolitans, Gervase wrote, did not even know where the precious relics were, and when an Englishman finally found them in a mountain that had no trace of excavation, they decided to secure them in a locked room inside the so-called Egg Castle built by the Norman kings in the twelfth century on a small island overlooking the city.¹⁶

It is only in a later Neapolitan source—the fourteenth-century *Chronicle of Partenope*—that the mountain where Virgil’s relics were finally found is associated with the hill of Posillipo and the original tomb of the poet located in the Roman *columbarium*, which stands on the Crypta’s eastern entrance.¹⁷ The *Chronicle* was written before 1350 and can be considered as the first example of local historiography. In order to reconstruct the ancient history of Naples the author refers to old tales about the city, including those ones about Virgil he knew from Gervase’s *Otia Imperialia* and other sources. But the chronicler went even further when he stated that Virgil was the creator of the Crypta. According to him, the Crypta allowed travellers to get easier access to the Baths of Pozzuoli, where there were also paintings illustrating the healing properties of the Baths, made by no one else but Virgil himself.

The Crypta’s medieval association with Virgil, as well as its perception as a miraculous and almost religious place, is testified by two frescoes, recently rediscovered on the Crypta’s walls. The first one is a fourteenth century fresco portraying the Virgin and Child between St. John the Evangelist and another Saint, maybe St. John the Baptist (Fig. 1-7). The fresco is painted on a marble votive niche, which is now isolated on the southern wall of the tunnel as a result of the fifteenth century alterations to this side of the Crypta. The Virgin’s image had a devotional function and may have offered protection to travellers through the dark and scary way beneath the mountain.¹⁸

On the opposite side there is a chapel excavated through the rock (Fig. 1-8) and decorated with frescoes, few traces of which still survive. A tufa block is carved near the entrance and was maybe used as an altar. On another wall there is a niche with an early fifteenth century fresco portraying a long white-bearded man (Fig. 1-9). The latter has been considered as an image of either Christ or Saint Luke, but another possible

¹⁶ Gervase, *Otia*, 802-05.

¹⁷ Samantha Kelly, ed., *The Cronaca di Partenope: An Introduction to and Critical Edition of the First Vernacular History of Naples (c. 1350)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 195-97.

¹⁸ Stefano D’Ovidio, “La Madonna di Piedigrotta tra storia e leggenda,” *Rendiconti dell’Accademia di Archeologia, Lettere e Belle Arti di Napoli* 75 (2006-2007): 65-74.

identification that I would like to put forward is that of Virgil as a magician. The poet's grave stands at few metres from here and his image in the chapel near the Crypta would have reminded the travellers that the tunnel was held as a work by Virgil himself. The Latin poet was normally portrayed as a young man, but in medieval iconography it is not unusual to find images of Virgil wearing a beard and long hair, as in a fourteenth century statue from his native town of Mantua, now in the Museum of Palazzo San Sebastiano.

The chapel at the eastern entrance of the Crypta is attested by local sources before the fifteenth century and the *Chronicle of Partenope* says that it was dedicated to "Santa Maria dell'Itria". A wider church with a hospital was built before 1207 on the shore not far from the Crypta's eastern entrance. The chapel was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and named "in pede Cryptae" or "Piedigrotta", i.e. at the Crypta's foot.¹⁹ Petrarch, who was in Naples in 1341 and 1343, mentions both the church and the chapel in his 1358 *Itinerary to the Holy Land*.²⁰ The church, he says, was a pilgrimage stop for sailors travelling along the Neapolitan shore and the chapel was very popular in Neapolitans' devotion ("sacellum devotissimum").

Petrarch gives a vivid description of the Crypta. He still seems fascinated by the religious atmosphere one could breathe while travelling through the tunnel, which he described as "an extraordinary path that has nearly a sacred aspect (iter mirum et quasi religioni proximum)". But Petrarch had developed a new perception of the Crypta and presented the tunnel as an evidence of Rome's glorious past. The Crypta, he wrote, is mentioned by Seneca and it served as a road to connect the Phlegraean Fields to Naples. Medieval tales about Virgil no longer appealed to him and he argued that the tunnel was attributed to the poet because his tomb was nearby. "Nowhere had I read that Virgil was a sorcerer," Petrarch answered to Robert of Anjou, king of Naples, when they visited the Crypta Neapolitana in 1341. "On the tunnel's walls", Robert replied, "one could discern the marks of edged tools."²¹

¹⁹ Ibid, 52-54.

²⁰ Theodore J. Cachey, trans., *Petrarch's Guide to the Holy Land, Itinerary to the Sepulchre of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2002), 10.0-10.1.

²¹ Ibid.