Alexandre Cioranescu

RUINS: PRIVILEGED CORPSES

Fundamentally, a ruin is a utilitarian structure which through the ravages of time or through some other circumstance has lost its utility and its function. When a useful object becomes useless, it continues to be present without a true existence, exactly as if it were dead. A torn glove, a bicycle without wheels, do not deserve to be called by their original names. It is difficult, of course, for us to resign ourselves to the fact that objects we have always thought of as useful are no longer useful; we hold on to the illusion of profiting from them as long as possible. We still make use of an abandoned automobile by stripping it of its accessories; we make use of a dilapidated house by salvaging some of its building material. However, the time comes when we must accept the evidence and admit that the object has become a burden.

Here we may see a first analogy with a corpse. In both cases, we end up by getting rid of the encumbering presence and try hard to forget it. I am oblivious of the dead, just as I am oblivious of the shape and color of the house which preceded mine and which perhaps did not even have time to fall into ruins. Other structures fall by themselves or seem to be waiting for the wrecker. Most ancient churches are built on the ruins of other churches, and these in their turn sometimes rose above ancient temples, much as flowers are nourished by the humus of plants which have preceded them. It would be idle to dwell upon this ines-

Translated by Jeanne Ferguson.

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219217802610305 Published online by Cambridge University Press

capable dialectic of life and death, if it were not for the existence of certain privileged ruins.

The old buildings which die and disappear do not preoccupy us: it is those fragments of walls which refuse to die, those shafts of columns which we struggle to put back on their plinths, as if it were really important that we do so. It is this debris which is the object of a strange cult, often reserved to an elite of the initiated but undeniably vigorous and modern, whether it be a harmless mania, a superstition or a true religion. In our cities, we frequently see fine modern houses evacuated and demolished so that perfectly useless ancient ruins may be freed: not so long ago, on the contrary, ancient buildings, temples and abandoned palaces were demolished to make use of their already-quarried marble or, even worse, of the lime which could be extracted from it at so little expense. Here are two obviously incompatible attitudes which must, however, be recognized as possible and coexisting. At any rate, there is a spectacular difference between the two which we might be tempted to explain by current fashion, difference in cultural level or the evolution of history. In reality, this change in attitude came about with such violence that its phases may be recognized and followed, from the moment of its apparition. Those who have studied its history agree that the cult of ruins installed itself in the mind of man during the Renaissance. This fact is easy to prove, and there is no need to dwell upon it here after so many studies have been devoted to this curious subject. The latest, by Roland Mortier, summarizes what we know and furnishes us all the documentation we need.[1]

We thus know that our image of ruins has first of all a great emotional content, which changes with the times but which is already a historical fact. Two observations may be kept in mind from this inquiry: they will permit us to follow the thread of our own reflections. One is that the modern interest in ruins was confirmed at the same time as the Renaissance and was

[1] Roland Mortier, *La poétique des ruines en France*, Geneva, 1974. See also R. Michéa, "La poésie des ruines au XIII[e] siècle et la contribution de l'Italie à la sensibilité préromantique," in *Études Italiennes*, 1935, pp. 117-32, 337-50; Wilhelm S. Heckscher, *Die Romruinen. Die geistigen Voraussetzungen ihrer Wertung im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance*, Würzburg, 1936; Ingrid G. Daemmrich, "The Ruins Motif as Artistic Device in French Literature," in *Journal of Aesthetics*, 1972.

first awakened in Rome; in the beginning it was only centered on Roman ruins, which remained for a long time The Ruins. The second observation is that our definition of a ruin as proposed above is not entirely exact: a ruin is not a useless structure; its function has merely changed. The new function had a moral connotation in the Renaissance, when ruins were an automatic and exemplary incitement to meditation on the great problems of Life, Time and Death: it took on an artistic and picturesque connotation in the 18th century.

All these truths, which will be of no small help to us, have been well pointed out and illustrated by Roland Mortier. There will be little need for us to return to them. An abundant harvest of texts proves the coincidence in time of the Renaissance and the cult of ruins. The first of those to contemplate the ruins of Rome as a spectacle inviting meditation was Petrarch, who is also, for us, the first to evoke the idea of a Renaissance in its beginning stages. In addition, the semiotic evolution of the image is easily definable.

Petrarch's view of Rome was typical. Actually, he hardly looked at the dilapidated walls and still-standing columns. He did not see the buildings; he saw the history of Rome and, we may say, history itself. Throughout the following centuries all the poets made use of these same vestiges in the same way, as a reference point or a model evoking the problems of humanity or perhaps those of the poet himself. When 400 years later Diderot laid the groundwork for a poetics of ruins, he did not turn his back on the meanings discovered by the Renaissance: he only added to them a dimension which was suggested to him by his experience with art. Since his time, we have viewed the spectacle of ruins with in our minds the criteria which are perceptibly equivalent to those which are current for the examination of works of art. It would seem that the image has become pure form and that its content tends to become immaterial, but that may not be the case. The two aspects of the object are too intimately connected for us to separate them; a ruin is poor indeed if we see only its configuration and it does not have the power to recall the idea of the passage and menace of time.

Whatever the case, the form as well as the content of the image are addressed to feelings. From that fact undoubtedly

arises the growing confusion with purely artistic functions. We know however that the implication of art with morality is constant in history: after all, it would not be impossible to identify this implication with form and content.

The fact is that the content of the image corresponds to a moralizing intention or incitement. It has been said that for the men of the Renaissance a ruin offered a perspective and a reason for meditating on the great themes of existence. From this point of view we might believe that a ruin's function is close to that of nature. The hermit who seeks the solitude of the forest or the desert also stands back so that he has a perspective to aid him in his meditating: the contemplation of nature never fails as an incitement and, up to a point, a sort of guide. However, the direction which the mind takes is quite different. The contemplation of a visitor of ruins is like a secularization of the hermit's thoughts. In other words, the latter finds a sign of divine transcendence in the landscape, while the thoughtful tourist and the lover of antiquities see the destiny of human society, a concern which is purely earthbound. Whether they know it or not they make history. It is not by chance that the vocation for history of Giovanni Villani and Gibbon was decided in the ruins of Rome.

That does not mean that the Renaissance man cut the umbilical cord of transcendance. Undoubtedly he did not realize that he was in the process of trying to do just that. The theme he poetically treated, *Deploratio Romae*, appeared to him as the repetition of other themes known since the Middle Ages and strongly imbued with a religious sentiment: the *Ubi Sunt* so well illustrated by François Villon, the *Fortuna labilis* which deplored the fall or the disappearance of men as well as of their works. In any case, Petrarch did not think to do otherwise. In a way he repeated himself and his *Triumphs*, where Glory is more powerful than Death, Time more powerful than Glory, and Eternity, which is in God, most powerful of all.

All these aspects, which belong to a long literary and religious tradition, were assimilated by the poetry and sentiment of ruins, as they developed during the Renaissance. What was new in that was the referrant. The themes developed and used by the Middle Ages were pure speculations: lamenting the ruins of

Troy or the death of the beautiful women of yesteryear was a simple exercise in rhetoric. For example, it is obvious that the names of the beautiful women are easily interchangeable, and their names were suggested with an intention to moralize. The *primum movens* is not the woman but the subject of Christian remonstrance. It was not the same with Du Bellay, for example. His thought followed the same road but went in the opposite direction: it is contemplation which engenders thought, and the moralizing intention is not inspired by the spectacle but is its spontaneous product. Lamentation follows the direct observation: during the heroic phase of the Renaissance, before it fell into Academism, ruins were first of all a presence. Death was no longer an obscure terror but a palpable effect of decomposition.

* * *

In fact, the poetry of ruins begins with the contemplation of a corpse. This image, naturally provoked by the idea of death, is omnipresent in the poets, and Volney, who described Palmyra as a "lugubrious skeleton" invented nothing. Ruins are a corpse (Janus Vitalis, Baïf, Jacques Grévin), a carrion (Jean Doublet); piles of bones (Quevedo); ashes (Castiglione, Du Bellay, Arguijo, Lope de Vega); a sepulture (Du Bellay, Grévin, Arguijo). A sonnet from Du Bellay's *Antiquités*, which is like an epitaph to be engraved on the tomb of Rome, is taken word for word from an actual epitaph dedicated to an actual corpse by Pietro Bembo.

Du Bellay is a good example. We know that *Les Antiquités de Rome* was coupled in his mind with *Les Regrets*, that they are contemporary and that the two collections of sonnets are the fruit of his Roman experience. We also know that the *Antiquités* proposes to the reader a "general description of its grandeur and a lament for its ruin," which is exact, at least on the surface. Usually we are less attentive to the fact that this collection is presented as a *Premier Livre*, which seems surprising and continues to astonish historians. The explanation that comes to mind and one that Françon has held is that the two books, already coupled because of their content and the period of their composition, were to have formed a single work, *Les Regrets* being intended as the second volume. If we admit this hypothesis it is easy to recognize in this ideally reconstructed collection the

same structure as is found in the *Canzoniere* of Petrarch, which everyone knows is composed of two parts, *In Vita di Madonna Laura* and *In Morte di Laura.* We may imagine that following the same scheme Du Bellay proposed to celebrate a living Rome on the one hand and a Rome reduced to a corpse and memories on the other. This is all the more probable since it would be difficult to find a collection of sonnets in the 16th century which did not bear the mark of Petrarch. But the poet's intention turned out to be complicated and less clear than it should have been, because of the cross-fire which the reality of history introduced into the development of the model.

Indeed, this time things are presented inversely. The death of Rome is its true life and the present city, which seemed to offer a semblance of life, was in fact spiritually dead. *Les Regrets*, a virtual second part, is the long satire of the decadence and decomposition of Rome, with the "sacred mysteries of the holy Roman priests," the vices hidden under the "pride of the triple crown," the ignorance of the men of the Church, the venality of the cardinals, while in the first collection the poet exalts the grandeur and glory of an eternal Rome, against which Death itself is seen to be powerless.

All that is easily understood, and the relative subtlety of the parts in opposition is sound. However, the overall view of the ensemble becomes more confused by it, and evidence of the poet's intention is the first to suffer. What was with Petrarch a contrast between life and death is here a sophisticated and already slightly baroque game which makes life out of death and death out of life. Moreover, the original design for *Les Regrets* is charged with a melancholy which is not in direct rapport with the image of the ruins and is the result of the obsession with a wasted career and life, of homesickness, of disgust for a society in which finery cannot hide emptiness and ugliness. All that introduces a lack of balance between the two collections that must have appeared *a posteriori* to their author; and I assume that is the reason he abandoned at mid point the dichotomist structure he had envisaged. Nevertheless, the game of life and death is the fundamental theme and uniting factor of the two small volumes.

Let us add that if Rome remained the favorite object of attention its ruins were not the only ones which brought the memory

of antiquity to the surface. We also find Troy (Arguijo); Carthage (Bernardo Tasso, Gutierre de Cetina, Fernando de Herrera, Arguijo); Italica (Rodrigo Caro, Francisco de Rioja, Francisco de Medrano); Sagonte (Lope de Vega); and others as well. But that does not change anything. This diversifying of inspiration is characteristic of a 16th century in which an Academism of limited effect droned and at times literally repeated all that had been previously discovered in Rome.

* * *

It is now time to sum up briefly our discoveries. First of all, ruins are a tangible message of death, a message which concerns all of us. It is not even a threat; it is a simple reminder, which Quevedo compares to the deep feelings aroused by late evening or old age. Ruins are like cemeteries, where it most often happens that we think of ourselves rather than of the departed. But in spite of everything the contemplation of ruins gives to the idea of death proportions that rapidly go beyond the individual. These remains of history prove that even inanimate objects of bronze or marble which we take for symbols of eternity cannot escape death (Pietro Aretino, Quevedo), and that Time brings about the disappearance of man and all his works, not excluding those which seem the most immortal (Francisco de Rioja). Paul Valéry wrote that we now know that civilizations can die: this is not a present day discovery. The Renaissance had already understood it. It was undoubtedly not for his own destiny but for that of Roman grandeur and all humanity that Pomponio Leto wept during his long contemplation of the Roman ruins. The falling stones, the dilapidated temples, the empty sarcophagi, all represent more than a memory—they are the bitter refusal of an illusion. "They are the compendium and the soul of history," wrote Annibal de Lortigue, a mediocre poet, but an assiduous visitor to the Capitol and the Forum. At least, at the same time as they deny the future these vestiges permit us to remount the slopes of Time and find again, effectively and emotionally, the amniotic liquid of the origins of our civilization. Speaking of the ruins of Pompeii Goethe said that never had a catastrophe been the source of greater satisfaction for humanity.

Moreover, when we speak of the dead it is natural for us to inquire into the causes of their disappearance. All things considered, this curiosity is idle, since it neither repairs nor changes anything. But once more the corpse is less interesting than its history, which will inevitably be ours also. We look for the symptoms and the telltale signs, because in reality we are studying our own cases. From a certain point of view the death of others reassures us, since it is not our own; but it troubles us also, like a hidden warning which, not urgent, suggests to us, in spite of everything, universally-known considerations (which we seek to avoid) on the human condition. The effect ruins have on us in this sense is perhaps not so spectacular, but it is of the same nature. During the Renaissance those who contemplated the Roman ruins did not devote their meditation solely to the memory of Roman power and its destruction; they also pondered on the causes of the fall of that empire and civilization.

The diagnosis proposed to us is always the same. It was not discovered by the poets but by the humanists; the poets only adopted and popularized it. It would not be useful here to analyze all the aspects of this problem which modern historiography has inherited and which we have all learned in school, namely, that the fall was caused by the barbarians who invaded Europe and sacked Italy, bringing a thousand-year slumber to European and Roman civilization. Petrarch was the first to uphold this thesis, which the Renaissance repeated, Voltaire made his own and our history books have not forgotten. Poets have often taken up this diagnosis: Du Bellay for example wrote that the darkness of the Middle Ages was due to "Gothic cold," to the storms which came from the North and to the "German crow" which mortally wounded the Roman eagle.

But invasions were not the only cause of the fall of Rome. This single explanation would not be sufficient, because a doctrine constant in humanist philosophy has it that chance alone is powerless against virtue. The Florentine humanists, Coluccio Salutati and Leonardo Bruni for the first, discovered that the barbarians would have been powerless if they had not been aided from within by imperial tyranny and the absence of civil liberties. The accusation of the Empire thus became one of the most characteristic signs of the Renaissance. As always, Petrarch

was the first to have intuition, to the point that we may consider the period of change operating in men's minds between the moment when Dante enthusiastically praised Caesar and the Empire and the one in which Petrarch made of Caesar the first among the tyrants as one of the links between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Poets did not hesitate to profit from these new conclusions, which are found again in Du Bellay and Quevedo. We can only be astonished to see the statements of Volney considered as innovations; he saw a lesson in liberty in the ruins of Palmyra and counselled tyrants to reflect more carefully on Time and Death. The relationship which he established between ruins, tyranny and the decomposition of empires is not original but a clever presentation of old ideas which it would be easy to find in Leonardo Bruni or in Machiavelli before he wrote *The Prince*.

It might be more interesting to observe that the diagnosis founded on these two circumstances has not convinced everyone in our day, nor did it convince everyone in the Renaissance. Flavio Biondo, passionate admirer of Rome, did believe these opinions well-founded. The Goths, he said, were not the barbarians they are thought to be; on the contrary, Theodoric, who was a Goth and ruled Italy for 38 years, took particular pains with the restoration, preservation and prosperity of the Eternal City. Rome was destroyed neither by the emperors nor by the Goths: the principal cause of its ruin was the conduct of those "miserable Romans" who used the old stones in other buildings or made lime from them. However it may respond to the sad truth, Flavio Biondo's explanation has litttle value. Certainly, for more than a thousand years people sacked the Roman ruins, but our author forgets that they were already ruins and that such pillage would have been impossible at the time of the Republic or the Empire.[2]

In addition to the sense of death and the drama of liberty, a third meaning shows through when we contemplate the Roman ruins. Imagination, perhaps as a defensive measure, refuses to accept the reality of total death. It has always been

[2] Flavio Biondo admits however that the Empire was a period of decadence: good Republican manners were lost to the point that the corrupt Romans took a bath "almost every day."

thought—ever since thought existed—that death is only a brief respite between two metamorphoses of which the true nature remains to be determined: we die in order to be reborn, like the phoenix or the butterfly. When this is too difficult for us to believe, we try at least to save the best of ourselves, our souls; in the most desperate cases we are resigned to assuring our survival through intermediaries, preferably through our direct descendants. Even if there is no hereafter, the illusion remains of something which comes afterward. The question presents itself to our imaginations to know whether Rome had also a chance of survival or if its ashes and ruins had no transcendent significance whatsoever. In other words, once more the imagination has reacted in the presence of the ruins in a manner parallel to the reactions which the presence of a corpse spontaneously produces.

Two answers have been proposed almost simultaneously to this last question. The truth is that a third answer exists which we will briefly mention: it is a negation, a pessimistic solution which comes relatively late and which postulates that the glory of Rome is definitely and irremediably buried. It will not be without interest to observe that this attitude has a strong odor of heresy, the authors who adopted it being more or less openly contrary to the Roman religion. Moreover, it is curious that of the two solutions ordinarily proposed one is based on faith and the other on the illusions of literature.

Faith assures to Peter's throne an eternal existence: Rome is thus in a way condemned never to disappear. The ruins exist, but they belong to ancient times, anterior to the coming of the Savior: what comes afterward bears the seal of eternity. Rome died only to make room for the new Rome. This idea, already found in Petrarch, is that of all Christian humanists, beginning with Flavio Biondo, and of many poets, including Sannazzaro and Jauregui. Even Lortigue, who detests Rome at least as much as Du Bellay or Grévin, recognized that the Eternal City was gained by exchanging Caesar and world domination for the keys which open the gates of Heaven. It is possible that a reflection of this widespread idea is found in the well-known representations in art of the Savior's crib as a ruin or a dilapidated shed. There was no apparent reason to transform the poverty

of the manger into a ruin, but it must have a significance. Perhaps it should be understood that the ruin represents the death of ancient man—an image or sign which we now know—while our interest along with the stream of light is concentrated on the new men, those who know the Messiah. Now, returning to Rome, the ruins are not an end in themselves but the fertile soil where the eternal Cross will be planted. We think we already hear the powerful voice of Bossuet.

Poetry grants another possibility of survival to the Roman ruins, one that wagers on enthusiasm rather than hope but partakes of the nature of both: it is the chimera of Glory which has nursed poets and artists ever since Homer and very probably well before him. Poets have often flaunted the conviction that their works would resist the ravages of Time better than bronze, and they may not be wrong. There has been sufficient work done on this powerful incentive for the collective imagination and its importance in Western literary and social life that we need not dwell on it here.[3] It is only one more Nominalist illusion, but it is exactly about illusions that we are speaking. Moreover, it could not be otherwise, when what is desired is to propose remedies against death. Glory certainly does not eliminate death; at the least it attempts to abolish its silence, and that will appear no less substantial than any other promise of survival. Is not the most complete of glories the one which St. Paul places in God and which continues to haunt the imagination of Christians? In any case, this possibility of an existence beyond death is not refused to ruins.

The poets' imaginations quickly established a double metaphor, making a corpse of the dead city and a soul of its posthumous glory. The result is that the ruins are sanctified and remote, as are all the dead. The "holy ruin" which Bernardo Tasso celebrated is animated by the "powerful and glorious memories" which breathe in its stones and prolong its life. Like eternal salvation, this glory may be obtained in the last moments of life, as happened with Carthage, much more illustrious for its ruins than for the long, forgotten years

[3] See especially Françoise Joukovscy-Nicha, *La gloire dans la poésie française et néo-latine du XVI^e siècle*, Geneva, 1969.

of its prosperity (Arguijo). It must be added, however, that in most cases this glory is not conceived of as eternal, as the soul is considered immortal. The schema outlined by Petrarch in his Triumphs remains valid: memory has a limit, however far-off it may be, and Time ends by winning all. In the spectacle of ruins the image of decomposition is the strongest and the most real, and the presence of the past, as we have said, obliterates the perspectives of the future.

* * *

These few observations will perhaps suffice to substantiate what has been proposed above, namely, that the imagination of the Renaissance proceeding by means of multiple metaphors likened a ruin to a corpse, giving it the same connotations and associated images, which aim at defining its characteristics and destiny. If a difference nevertheless remains, it is that the corpse of ruins does not inspire the horror that is normally evoked by the spectacle of death. It is an appealing corpse: it quickly becomes an art object and a source of pleasure, and Quevedo considered it a more agreeable sight than the spectacle of life. Taking account of this difference, which can be explained by a slower and more discreet decomposition, and perhaps also by the absence of a referrent or of a living witness which would permit a comparison, it seems evident that the fate assigned to ruins by the imagination is a simple metaphor of our own death.

The formative process of this image has nothing surprising about it. Frequently, what is new receives its name by metaphor, and the imagination only annexes the unknown through extrapolation. However, the very existence of the metaphor, the fact that the imagination had recourse to the image of a corpse among all those it could have evoked, indicates a certain degree of relationship between the two objects. Since it exists, the analogy must be visible in other aspects common to both. On one hand, the dead were once the living; on the other, reduced to the state of a corpse they normally become the object of a cult and of a certain sanctification. The identity of the living organism and the significance of the cult will perhaps enable us to understand why the interest in ruins could only appear at the historic moment of the Renaissance.

In the case of Rome, the living organism was the *Urbs*, the ancient city of the classical age. But it must not be understood as if it were contained within the perimeter of its ruins, as an ensemble of streets and buildings, however monumental they might have been. Rome should be understood as an exemplary society, a great moment in the history of man; in a word, a civilization. Contemplating the vestiges of the ancient city one person may see the shadow of Caesar or Brutus; another, that of Virgil; a third, the fight between liberty and tyranny, the military glory of the triumphs, the order of the *pax romana*, or better still, all that at once. Everything that has disappeared becomes real thanks to the testimony of the stones, and it is all of that which makes up the soul of the corpse we are contemplating. Thus it is not a question of the death of an individual nor of a city but of a civilization and an entire world. The spectacle of Rome evokes the death of the classical world.

This fact is obvious from all that has been said up to this point. If, for example, the schema of history established by Petrarch shows a thousand years of darkness after the fall of Rome and postulates the beginning of a return to the old and good traditions, it means that the cycle of a thousand years which was just coming to an end could only have begun at the death of antiquity. According to the same schema this death occurred in the fourth century. But we know through Petrarch that the fourth century was not aware of it, nor was the twelfth century, nor were Petrarch's contemporaries, nor was Petrarch himself; he still saw Rome as a decrepit but living old lady. Thus there was a historic moment when the collective consciousness, at first in Italy and later in Europe, discovered or understood that the classical age was dead. I have attempted to prove elsewhere that this moment occurred around 1400, and that this discovery was made by Florentine historians and thinkers.[4] If I am not mistaken it is the first time in history that thought admitted the mortality of civilizations and the existence of history.

[4] A. Cioranescu, "La Renaissance et la mort de l'antiquité," in *Miscellanea Franco Simone* (in press).

If that is true and if the idea of the death of the classical age entered the consciousness of men at the beginning of the fifteenth century, we may deduct that the image of the corpse of Rome which appeared shortly afterward could not have been conceived in a different period. Moreover, it was not a conscious or individual creation; it was simply that the inventory of ideas and common images was enriched so as to permit the invention and acceptance of that which is our subject here. But it would be an error to think that it is a literary invention with no transcendental meaning. It is a collective image which existed even where it did not find expression, as long as cultural circumstances were equivalent. It symbolizes what was commonly believed and as with everything that concerns death, was from then on part of the code which should decipher the mystery of the destiny of man. Proving that the last statement is not just a simple hyperbole will not be easy but it should not be impossible.

Allusion was made above to the cult of which ruins have been the object since the Renaissance. This cult was not implanted all at once. For centuries there were many who continued to profit from the ruins of Rome as had been done during the Middle Ages. Benvenuto Cellini, although he was a representative son of the Renaissance, viewed the ruins of Rome as propitious terrain for hunting doves; and the Colosseum with its vast solitude permitted the undertaking of mysterious necromantic operations, with no witnesses. The ruin itself, especially when it was individualized, had no particular value: it was the ensemble alone which acquired a meaning and imposed respect because of what it represented. Nonetheless, the cult existed and could be likened to the respect due to the dead. It has continued to develop, and we can imagine a future when cities will be invaded by ruins and museums, which we will have to preserve, a just revenge on the period when ruins were invaded by cities.

The problem arises to know if this cult is the automatic result of the metaphor we have mentioned several times. In other words, if we respect and care for ruins in a mechanical way simply because we see in them the corpses of the past, a past which we have on the whole long ceased to respect. This ex-

planation is perhaps valid for us, we who have lost the secret meaning of things and the key to most of our collective images. For the men of the Renaissance the problem was no doubt presented in a different way.

In his book, *Aspects du mythe*, (1963) Mircea Eliade pointed out two universal constants in collective imagination that do not seem extraneous to our argument. One is that primitive mentality gives exceptional importance to the exact knowledge of origins, which are always held to be happier than the times which followed. The other, not unrelated to the first, assumes that all myths of the End of the World foresee a possibility of the resurgence of the lost world. In other words, the End of the World is linked with the Eternal Return, which may bring about the Golden Age by means of a particular knowledge of origins by willful recall which is a sort of visceral or collective memory. With these two considerations primitive thought has a good chance to be thought itself, because we have not at all abandoned these principles which are at the same time means of knowledge. In this sense Eliade quotes some convincing parallels; psychoanalysis postulates the existence of a happy primordial state and a means of recovering it by memory: revolutionary Marxism optimistically re-evaluates the myth of the End of the World which will be necessarily replaced by a new Golden Age brought about scientifically. The Renaissance is perhaps only a bipolarization of these same primitive concepts, the universality of which is not at all surprising.

The collective consciousness of the death of antiquity is a historical view defined by the primitive myth of the End of the World. We cannot interpret it as a historical reality, since the death of a civilization is a metaphor rather than a fact. And, if we wish to disregard this difficulty, historical facts do not impose themselves on the collective consciousness after a lapse of one thousand years. It would be instead a panicking, a feeling of dereliction, what is called in psychoanalysis the death of the father. All at once the son feels himself a man and at the same time alone, solicited by the future and abandoned by the support on which he thought he could depend, obliged to take his new destiny in hand. As we have already seen, death does not prevent the renewal of life; quite the contrary, death

reinforces and liberates life. Rome lives less in her old stones or in her glory than in her children, who need her. It is not by chance that the image which the Renaissance had of Rome has some resemblance to that which the ancients had of Troy, for example, in Lucan's poem. In both cases the end of the city is compensated by a glorious event, and in spite of the enormous intermediary gap, continuity seems and must be assured.

Life must continue in fact. Better still, the Eternal Return must again produce the Golden Age. To achieve it and thus to fill the frightful void of a thousand years in which the mind wanders aimlessly there is only one way, which consists of entering into a state of grace. Only a deliberate recall can save these lost children of antiquity and help them to become themselves. From this comes their absolute and total confidence in archaeology as well as in philology. Once the circle of time is joined it is imperative to begin again, not from the place where the circle has just closed but in jumping over the void of the dead cycle in order to reach the point where the other cycle, the correct one, has begun. Only an exact knowledge of origins can save the modern world. It is thus necessary to repeat all the actions of the past, make a complete inventory of traditional wisdom, act as *they* would have acted. It is also necessary to reconstitute the language in order to put it as its purest level, preserve and revere lost antiquity in all the remains which can give back the authenticity of the past to the present. The cult of ruins is not comparable to the cult of the dead in general but rather to the cult of the great dead and, in primitive societies, to the cult of tutelary ancestors and totems. Pope Leo X received and venerated as a relic a certain shoulder blade which he was told was of Titus Livy. Fetishism and the magic of antiquity are by their nature and their intentions comparable to the attitude of the primitive man who carries a collar of his ancestor's bones around his neck, or of the young bride who wears her mother's wedding dress.

Augustin Thierry well understood and described this need of the mind or the imagination, even though he was not able to put it in psychoanalytic terms: "When we have new needs, instead of studying them and becoming aware of them we find

it easier because of our inertia to seize by chance some vague relationship between what we would like to be and what others were before us." Also, "Because we are pulled forward we draw back."[5] This movement is halfway between instinct and reason. More than lassitude or caprice, reassuring oneself that the father is not altogether dead is a source of refuge and comfort, and all in all, knowledge, but it is emotional knowledge acquired by feelings. From this point of view the preservation of ruins is an ineluctable need for the thoughtful individual. It permits this salutary anamnesis, contemplation, which St. Thomas defined as "a simple view of the truth" and which according to him always causes an emotional reaction. Ruins are more than the kingdom of the dead.

[5] Augustin Thierry, *Dix ans d'études historiques*, p. 27.