Rubens and the Human Body

Edited by
Cordula van Wyhe

BREPOLS

Stone to Flesh: Rubens' Treatise *De Imitatione Statuarum*[*]

ANDREAS THIELEMANN

Since the Renaissance, the imitation and adaptation of antique sculptures had increasingly come to be seen as essential preparation for any artist's creative practice and, more often than not, also as its enduring underpinning. Initially a purely Italian phenomenon, the idea of studying antique sculptures as part of a young artist's professional training also soon began to attract northern artists. However, standing between them and the cradle of classical art was a formidable obstacle: the Alps. Only a small minority of artists actually made the long and arduous journey to Italy. Once there, those intrepid enthusiasts tended to make the most of the hard-won opportunity, and artists such as Lambert Lombard, Maerten van Heemskerck and Hendrick Goltzius returned north with their sketchbooks full to bursting.

Peter Paul Rubens took such engagement with antique sculpture to new heights, eclipsing everything we know from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. While this assertion may seem a little over-emphatic, the sheer number of studies, adaptations and variations of antiquities by Rubens suggests that it cannot be far off the mark. The difference between his use of antiques and that of his Italian colleagues at the time is ultimately qualitative. It lies in the sense of purpose and ambition, in the diversity of forms and dimensions and, last but by no means least, in the unparalleled vigour of his appropriation.

This also found expression in the draught of a brief treatise on the imitation of sculpture in painting which is the subject of the present study. The re-edited Latin text and a revised translation can be found at the end.[1] As will be shown, the treatise does not merely give voice to general thoughts and recommendations, but was written in response to specific circumstances that prompted Rubens to review the imitation of sculpture in painting and the means by which it might best be achieved.

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* Translated from the German by Carola Kleinstück-Schulman (carolaschulman@yahoo.com). This is an abridged version of Andreas Thielemann, 'Rubens' Traktat De imitatione statuarum', in Ursula Rombach and Peter Seiler (eds), *Imitatio als Transformation. Theorie und Praxis der Antikennachahmung in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2012), pp. 95–146, published with a note of gratitude to 'Anja Dollinger, Ulrich Heinen, Tobias Leuker and Matthias Winner for important advice and corrections'.

1 For problems relating to the original text and translation, please see below. [Janet Fairweather translated Andreas Thielemann's re-edited Latin text into English]. Elipses added by editor.

Animating texts and statues

During his time in Italy (1600–08), Rubens became a great connoisseur of all aspects of classical culture; the breadth of his understanding of classical sculpture in particular was without equal at the time. He combined the eye of a scholarly antiquarian with that of a practising artist and was able to look at a sculpture from different perspectives, focusing not only on its artistic qualities of invention and shape but also on its ability to communicate a moral stance or social values that still had a bearing on his time. To describe Rubens merely as having 'studied antiquities' is therefore wholly inadequate. In this particular field he acted not only as a painter, but also as a connoisseur, collector, practicing humanist and diplomat. Every aspect of his uniquely multifaceted perception of antiquity was rooted in a highly differentiated methodology, and, crucially, each was linked to all the others, giving his appropriation of the antique a depth and dynamic that was all his own.

In 1618 Rubens acquired Sir Dudley Carleton's antiquities, transforming his hitherto modestly-sized collection into one that could have filled a museum. Having a collection of his own allowed the artist to engage even more closely with antique sculptures.[2] His contemporaries rightly recognised it as an aristocratic privilege that was of fundamental significance to Rubens. Although later pictures of the collection in its setting tend to embellish the facts and present rather idealised visions, they do testify to the boundless admiration this unique artist's collection commanded. They also offer a glimpse of the rotunda that housed the sculptures (fig. 1).[3] This rotunda evoked the renaissance of classical antiquity in well-nigh princely splendour.[4] Cast in a distinctly Italianate mould of *all'antica* architecture, Rubens' Antwerp residence was completed by a separate studio building with an exterior fresco decoration that alluded to ancient works of art and by a grand portico that recreated a bit of Italy in Antwerp.

We should not take it as a given that sculptures and images were the primary conduit through which Rubens approached antiquity. His everyday intellectual and emotional engagement with the classical heritage was fuelled by his close reading of classical texts, which in turn inspired his studies of antique marbles. Literature embedded the deracinated and comparatively mute sculptures in a rich contextual framework that fired the imagination and helped bring them to life. It is for this reason that Rubens regularly read the ancient writers and consulted antiquarian secondary literature. He owed his introduction to the world of philologists and antiquaries to his brother Philip (1574–1611), who had studied under Justus Lipsius (1547–1606) in Leuven and who also spent the first decade of the seventeenth century in Italy.

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2 For Rubens' collections of sculpture, see Jeffrey M. Muller, *Rubens: The Artist as Collector* (Princeton/N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 77–87, Appendices A-C. For Rubens' copies after the Antique, see Marjon Van der Meulen, *Rubens's Copies after the Antique.* Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard XXIII, 3 vols (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1994).

3 Zirka Zaremba Filipczak, *Picturing Art in Antwerp 1550–1700* (Princeton/N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 152 and fig. 68 (with an attribution to William van Herp). Compare the largely truthful depiction in Jacobus Harrewijn's engraving and the fantastically sublimated visions in the paintings of Willem van Haecht and Frans Francken: Jeffrey M. Muller, 'Rubens's Museum of Antique Sculpture: An Introduction', *The Art Bulletin* 59 (1977), figs 2 and 7; Jeffrey M. Muller, *The Artist as Collector*, pl. 1, figs 25 and 26.

4 For the reconstruction of the rotunda, see Jeffrey M. Muller, 'Rubens's Museum'.

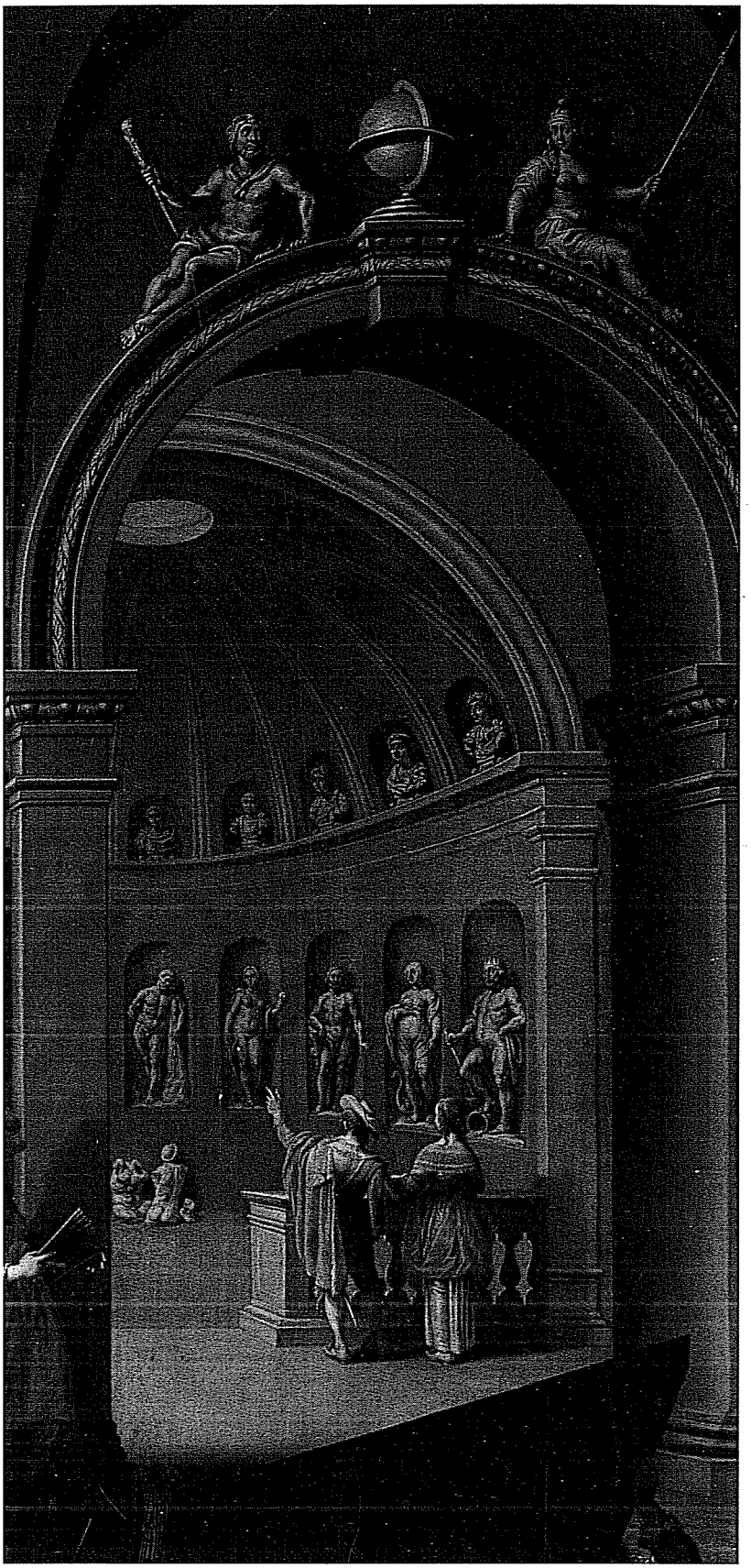

Fig. 1. William van Herp, *Art Cabinet*, Florence, Palazzo Pitti (detail of the rotunda for the display of sculptures).

Symptomatic of the dynamic vitality of Rubens' appropriation of antiquity is the sophisticated linguistic accomplishment of his classical reading. As a boy he had attended a renowned grammar school in Antwerp, where he had acquired an excellent command of Latin.[5] He retained enough of his early fluency to be able not only to pepper his letters and conversations with the occasional Latin snippet but also to compose longer passages himself and to read Roman writers in the original. And he read them out loud! This form of reading had emerged in antiquity at the time of the transition from orality to literacy and often entailed a critique of the intransigence of the written word. Mere writing is a poor substitute for the presence of the speaker and the immediacy of the spoken word, offering no chance of dialogue or feedback and bereft of the possibilities of expression and accentuation that distinguish the spoken word.[6] To compensate for these shortcomings, the Middle Ages developed sophisticated book designs that evoke the fiction of the physical presence of the author and suggest an auditory experience.[7] The practice of reading aloud, widespread in antiquity and the Middle Ages, served the same purpose.[8] In a manner of speaking, reading aloud brings back – as far as this is possible – the absent author and restores an oral reality to the lifeless text. Rubens' practice of having a lector read to him from the books of Roman writers while he was working in his studio[9] was simultaneously both a neo-

5 Nils Büttner, *Herr P. P. Rubens. Von der Kunst, berühmt zu werden* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), p. 28.

6 Platon, *Phaidros*, 274b–277a.

7 Horst Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen, Schrift und Bild: Kultur und Gedächtnis im Mittelalter* (München: C. H. Beck, 1995).

8 Jospeh Balogh, '"Voces Paginorum', Beiträge zur Geschichte des lauten Lesens und Schreibens', *Philologus* 82 (1927), 84–109 and 202–40; Brigitte Schlieben-Lange (ed.), *Lesen – historisch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985); Eric A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write. Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986); Erich Schön, *Der Verlust der Sinnlichkeit oder die Verwandlung des Lesers. Mentalitätswandel um 1800* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987). Dennis Howard Green, *Medieval Listening and Reading* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Brigitte Schlieben-Lange, 'Geschichte der Reflexion über Schrift und Schriftlichkeit', in Hartmut Günther and Otto Ludwig (eds), *Schrift und Schriftlichkeit/Writing and its Use. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch internationaler Forschung* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1994), vol. 1; Roger Chartier and Guglielmo Cavallo (eds), *Storia della lettura nel mondo occidentale* (Rome: Laterza, 1995).

9 Henry Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman* (2nd ed, London: George Stewart Gordon, 1634), p. 111: '[...] while he is at worke, he useth to have some good historian or Poet read to him, which is rare in men of his profession, yet absolutely necessary'. Roger De Piles, *La Vie de Rubens* (Paris: Nicolas Langlois, 1681), p. 30: '[...] aprés quoy il se mettoit à l'Ouvrage, ayant toujours auprés de luy un Lecteur qui estoit à ses gages, & qui lisoit à haute voix quelque bon livre; mais ordinairement Plutarque, Tite-Live, ou Seneque.' – Here De Piles draws on the Latin life of the artist, which Philip Rubens the Younger (the newphew of the painter) had written for him. In this text, not published until 1837, we read 'Solebat Rubens hyeme et aestate semper interesse primo missae sacrificio, nisi podagra (qua vehementer laborabat) eum impediret, post quod appliquabat se operi, assidente semper lectore, qui librum, Plutarchum, vel Senecam praelegeret, ita ut lectioni et picturae suae simul intentus esset.' (Philip Rubens the Younger, 'Vita Petri Pauli Rubenii', *Nouveaux Memoires de l'Academie Royale des Sciences et Belles-Lettres de Bruxelles* 10 (1837), 10) This information is corroborated by a report from the German Otto Sperling (1602–81, personal physician to the Danish king), who visited Rubens in 1621 (Woldemar von Seidlitz, 'Bericht eines Zeitgenossen über einen Besuch bei Rubens', *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* 10 (1887), 111): 'Wir besuchten auch den weitberühmten und kunstreichen Maler Rubbens [*sic*], den wir gerade bei der Arbeit trafen, wobei er sich zugleich aus dem Tacitus vorlesen liess und daneben einen Brief diktierte. Da wir uns nun still verhielten und ihn durch Reden nicht stören wollten, begann er selbst mit uns zu sprechen und fuhr dabei ununterbrochen in seiner Arbeit fort, liess sich weiter vorlesen, hörte nicht auf den Brief zu diktieren und antwortete uns auf unsere Fragen, indem er uns hierdurch sein

antique and an exquisitely aristocratic form of intellectual improvement and entertainment. It gave him a richer, deeper understanding and enjoyment of the text, and it allowed him to appreciate the sensual pleasure of its rhythm which tends to get lost in silent reading. This was serious reading and should not be confused with a seventeenth-century version of literary 'muzak' or some lightweight distraction from the physical rigours of the artist's studio work. Significantly, Rubens also read aloud when he was on his own,[10] although by the early seventeenth century that practice had long fallen out of favour.

Rubens' animation of classical texts parallels his no less singular animation of classical sculptures. In one, his active reading and reception penetrates the literary text to the point of hearing the living word – in the other – he perceives the flesh and blood of a physical reality through the marble of the statue and brings it to new life. In both cases the object of the exercise is materialisation, a bridging of time and a media-specific transformation. Moreover, both are closely related, since the animation of statues requires the artist to imagine words, actions and affects. Being read to while painting actively promoted this synthesis. In his biography of the artist, Rubens' nephew Philip Rubens (1611–78) described it as '*ita ut lectioni et picturae suae simul intentus esset*'.[11]

The transmaterialisation of statues – the selection of suitable works and their physical interpretation – forms the subject of Rubens' treatise *De Imitatione Statuarum*.

The Notebook

De Imitatione Statuarum was part of a notebook in which the artist collected images and texts from different sources and also jotted down his own thoughts.[12] The original notebook was

grosses Ingenium zeigen wollte'. It should not surprise us that the young Sperling perceived this undoubtedly extreme situation of synchronous activities as demonstrative, and Rubens may indeed have intended this; see Nils Büttner, *Herr P. P. Rubens*, p. 101). However, we should be wary of dismissing the performance of reading aloud merely as a means to impress visitors.

10 Jacob Campo Weyerman, *De levens-beschryvingen der Nederlandsche Konst-schilders en Konst-schilderessen I* (Gravenhage: By de wed. E. Boucquet, 1729), p. 258 f.: 'Het gebeurde eenmaal dat *Rubens* onder het schilderen van den Tweestrijde van Turnus en Eneas, zijn gedachten liet speelen op de navolgende vaerzen van den grooten Maro, en die luydskeels pronontieerde in de oorspronklijke Latynsche taal [...]
Ille etiam patriis agmen ciet Ocnus ab oris,
Fatidicae Mantus et Fusci filius amnis;
Qui muros matrisque dedit tibi, Mantua, nomen;
Mantua dives avis.
[Vergil, *Aeneis* 10, 198–201]
Tot daar toe was hy gekomen toen den Hartog, die hem beluysterde, intrat, en hem al lacghende aansprak in de Latynsche raal, denkende dat de Schilders en het Latyn Tegenvoeters waaren; Doch Ruben beandwoorde die Vorstlijke vraag in [...] cierlijk Latyn [...]'. See also: Friedrich Frh. Goeler von Ravensburg, *Rubens und die Antike* (Jena: H. Costenoble, 1882), p. 21; Giancarlo Schizzerotto (ed.), *Rubens a Mantova fra gesuiti, principi e pittori: con spigolature sul suo soggiorno italiano (1600–1608)*, exh. cat. Mantua (Mantua: Grassi, 1979), p. 139 f.

11 See note 10.

12 Michael Jaffé, *Van Dyck's Antwerp Sketchbook* (London: Macdonald, 1966), I, pp. 16–47; Helen Braham, *Rubens: Paintings, Drawings, Prints in the Princes Gate Collection*, exh. cat. London, Courtauld Institute Galleries 1988 (London: Trustees of the Home House Society for the Courtauld Institute of Art, 1988), p. 50 f.; Arnout Balis, 'Rubens und Invention. Der Beitrag seines *theoretischen Studienbuches*', in Ulrich Heinen and Andreas Thielemann, (eds), *Rubens Passioni. Kultur der Leidenschaften im Barock* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und

destroyed in a fire in 1720, but the text of the treatise survived in the form of a manuscript copy (*Ms Johnson*) at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London[13] and in Roger de Piles' textbook *Cours de peinture par principes*, published in Paris in 1708.[14] Roger de Piles supplemented the Latin text with a French translation.[15]

Compared to the text published by Roger de Piles, the London manuscript contains a significantly larger number of grammar and spelling mistakes as well as several omissions.[16] This is not to say that the French publication of 1708 is free from mistakes.[17] The German edition of Roger de Piles' textbook, published in 1760, provides some improvement. Not only does it offer the reader a German translation of the Latin text, it also corrects Rubens' original, leaving only five mistakes (see appendix). What should we make of this? Even if we assume that the writer of the Johnson manuscript distorted the original by introducing reading and spelling mistakes, we should not take it for granted that Rubens left behind a highly polished treatise. The fact that Roger de Piles published a text that is, at least in parts, hard to understand and riddled with mistakes, suggests that there were considerable problems with getting Rubens' manuscript into printable form right from the start. Some but by no means all of these were tackled by the German edition of 1760. To this day, there is no edition that fully resolves the ambiguities and linguistic imprecision that are particularly noticeable in the second and third part of the treatise.

Whether a new critical edition is capable of resolving these difficulties is debatable. Instead of subjecting the text to further intervention, it may well be more useful to remind ourselves of two things. First, Rubens wrote the text without any professional assistance. A great many of the linguistic problems are the result of the artist's manifest penchant for

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Ruprecht, 2001), pp. 11–40; David Jaffé and Amanda Bradley, 'Rubens's "Pocketbook": an Introduction to the Creative Process', in David Jaffé (ed.), *Rubens. A Master in the Making*, exh. cat. London, National Gallery 2005 (London: National Gallery, 2005), pp. 21–27; Tine Meganck, 'Rubens on the Human Figure: Theory, Practice and Metaphysics', in *Rubens: A Genius at Work. The Works of Peter Paul Rubens in the Royal Museums of Fine Art of Belgium Reconsidered*, exh. cat. Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Art (Tielt: Lanoo, 2007), pp. 52–64.

13 *Ms Johnson*, ms. 1978. pg. 1, The Courtauld Gallery, London, fol. 31 recto and verso (hereafter abbreviated as '*Ms Johnson*'). Stephanie Buck kindly authorised two photographs which were taken by Per Rumberg. For this copy of the manuscript, see: Michael Jaffé, *Van Dyck's Antwerp Sketchbook*, I, pp. 19–26; 77–80, n. 3 and 4; Helen Braham, *Rubens: Paintings, Drawings, Prints*, p. 51 f., no. 58; Arnout Balis, 'Rubens und Invention', p. 35, note 13.

14 Roger De Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes* (Paris: Estienne, 1708), pp. 139–48. De Piles bought Rubens' sketch book probably as early as 1676: Arnout Balis, 'Rubens und Invention', pp. 13–16.

15 The Latin text was excised from the new edition of Roger de Piles' *Cours de peinture par principes*, with a preface by Jacques Thuillier (Paris: Gallimard, 1989). Thomas Puttfarken, on the other hand, included a slightly corrected version of the Latin text alongside an English translation in his edition, but it was not his intention to produce a complete, critical edition: Thomas Puttfarken, *Roger de Piles' Theory of Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).

16 Not so, Helen Braham, *Rubens: Paintings, Drawings, Prints*, p. 52, no. 58: 'This earliest source [*Ms Johnson*, A.Th.] corresponds almost word for word with the text as printed for de Piles [...] although there are a few differences in the two readings of the original: in places the Latin of MS Johnson appears to make better sense than does de Piles'; elsewhere, several words appear to have been dropped'.

17 On mistakes of this kind and their *fortuna critica*, see Justus Müller Hofstede, 'Rubens in Italien 1600–1608. Rangstufen der Skulptur in der *Imitatio* von Antike und Florentiner Cinquecento', in Max Seidel (ed.), *L'Europa e l'arte italiana* (Venice: Marsilio, 2000), p. 302 f., n. 22.

brevitas.[18] These are further compounded by his somewhat shaky grasp of grammar. Rubens may not have lost the enjoyment of Latin that had marked his schooldays but he was a little out of practice when it came to composing texts of his own. And indeed, in a part-Flemish, part-Latin letter to Jan-Gaspar Gevaerts of 29 December 1628, he apologised for that very weakness.[19] Second, given that Rubens had a great many humanist friends who could easily have polished the text, we can safely rule out that he ever sought to turn out a printable version.[20] Perhaps he had initially toyed with the idea of a publication, but he signally failed to take any of the steps necessary to bring it about, and so it was not until 1708, when Roger de Piles excerpted Rubens' notebook, that the text was brought to the attention of a wider public. De Piles smoothed over some of the rough edges, but for the rest he appears to have been content to overlook the shortcomings of his precious find and to assist the reader by providing a French translation. His decision to proceed this way was most likely driven by the intense pride he took in having tracked down the notebook and by his plans of using it to further the Rubenist cause in the debate that was splitting the French art world into a Poussinist and a Rubenist camp.[21] That he made no fundamental changes to the original is borne out by the Johnson manuscript copy.

The French and German translations – probably produced in tandem with the editions of 1708 and 1760 – are creditable efforts to tackle the complexity of the Latin original. Where the linguistic ambiguities of the text did not allow for a direct translation, they still succeed in teasing out the meaning correctly. The actual phrasing, however, is a far cry from Rubens' emphatically terse style. This is even more pronounced in the later German translation than in the French one of 1708. The *brevitas* of the original – the root cause of some of its obscurity – made way for baroque prolixity, the fulsomeness of which helped smooth over some of the more ambiguous passages of the original.

In 1840 Gustav Friedrich Waagen published the Latin text of *De Imitatione Statuarum* (in the 1708 version of de Piles) in the expanded English edition of his book on Rubens and accompanied it with a 'free translation' of the first two sections.[22] In 1882 Friedrich Goeler von Ravensburg brought out a new German translation which, so he claimed, followed the original 'as literally as possible'.[23] Neither author made any mention of the difficulties posed by said original. The inconsistencies of the Latin text also have to be borne in mind when reading the revised German and English translations suggested at the end of this study. Parts

18 On this stylistic habitus, see below.

19 Max Rooses and Charles Ruelens, *Correspondance de Rubens et documents épistolaires concernant sa vie et ses œuvres* (Antwerp: J.–E. Buschmann, 1907), V, p. 14 (no. DLXVI): 'Myn antwoorde in duytsche taele zal ghenoech doen blycken dat ick niet en meritere de eere die UE. my aendoet met syne Latynsche brieven. Myn exercitien ende studia bonarum Artium syn soo verre verloopen, dat ick soude moeten veniam praefari soloecismum liceat fecisse. Noli igitur, noli me id aetatis virum iterum cum pueris antiquo includere ludo'.

20 Compare here also Jaffé, who opined that *De imitatione statuarum* was the sole part of the study book 'which the artist had polished sufficiently for publication': Michael Jaffé, *Van Dyck's Antwerp Sketchbook*, I, p. 17.

21 Bernhard Teyssèdre, *Roger de Piles et les débats sur le coloris au siècle de Louis XIV* (Paris: La Bibliothèque des Arts, 1965), pp. 216–19, 319–26; Alexis Merle du Bourg, *Rubens au Grand Siècle: sa réception en France, 1640–1715* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2004), pp. 269–72.

22 Gustav Friedrich Waagen, *Peter Paul Rubens, His Life and Genius*, transl. from the German by Robert R. Noel (London: Saunders and Otley, Conduit Street, 1840), pp. 123–27.

23 Friedrich Frh. Goeler von Ravensburg, *Rubens und die Antike*, pp. 37–39.

of the second and third section draw on the translations of 1760 and 1882, others had to rely on educated guesswork.

Current state of research

Although *De Imitatione Statuarum* is invariably cited when the subject of the artist's engagement with classical sculpture comes up, it was not until 1982 that a first in-depth study was published by the American art historian Jeffrey M. Muller.[24] However, unlike the Rubens treatise, Muller did not focus narrowly on the imitation of sculpture, preferring instead to place the text in the wider context of *Rubens's Theory and Practice of the Imitation of Art*. The background to this essay was Muller's comprehensive study of Rubens' art collection. Displayed in the artist's house in Antwerp were a large number of classical sculptures as well as a sizeable collection of paintings, prints and drawings that reflected everything Rubens held dear in art.[25] Muller, who saw the primary motivation behind the artist's activity as a collector as being the assembly of a discursive, carefully selected corpus of inspirational models of past and contemporary art, chose not to focus closely on *De Imitatione Statuarum*, but used the treatise as a starting point for the reconstruction of a more general theory and practice of *imitatio* in Rubens' work, including the imitation of painting in painting. Muller traces the categorical structure of the text back to *topoi* formulated by Aristotle and Quintilian. While this allowed him to identify the categories of *form* and *matter* and the selection principle of *electio*, it did not get to the core of what was new in Rubens' text. Nor did Muller take a position on the different dates suggested for the treatise.[26] He was less interested in placing the treatise in a historical and causal

24 Jeffrey M. Muller, 'Rubens's Theory and Practice of the Imitation of Art', *The Art Bulletin* 64 (1982), 229–47.

25 Jeffrey M. Muller, *Rubens. The Artist as Collector* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989) and idem, 'Rubens: The Artist as Collector', in Fiona Healy and Kristin Lohse Belkin (eds), *A House of Art. Rubens as Collector*, exh. cat. Antwerp, Rubens House (Antwerp: BAI, 2004), pp. 10–85.

26 Basically, here we have a conflict between an early and a late dating. Hans Gerhard Evers, *Peter Paul Rubens* (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1942), p. 434 dealt with the treatise in his chapter on colour and stated: 'Die ersten Teile dieses Aufsatzes [*De imitatione statuarum*, A.Th.] entsprechen Rubens' eigner Malerei, und zwar schon der späteren, während sie zu den Bildern aus der italienischen Zeit noch nicht passen würden'. Martin Warnke, on the other hand, appears to have been put in mind of the painterly, Titian-inspired style rather than the sculptural one and therefore dated it, without conclusive evidence, to 1630–1640': Martin Warnke, *Peter Paul Rubens: Leben und Werk* (Cologne: DuMont, 1977), p. 196; Martin Warnke, *Rubens: Leben und Werk* (Cologne: DuMont, 2006), p. 166. However, this focus on style and colour overlooks the fact that Rubens' intense engagement with sculpture coincided with his Italian years and the first years after his return. Later, when Rubens gradually moved away from motifs derived from classical sculpture (and, in 1626, sold parts of his sculpture collection to the Duke of Buckingham), there was no longer any reason to write a treatise on the correct imitation of sculptures. This insight guided the advocates of an early dating: Werner Kitlitschka suggested 1608–14, 'Rubens und die Bildhauerei: Die Einwirkung der Plastik auf sein Werk und Rubens' Auswirkung auf die Bildhauerei des 17. Jahrhunderts' (unpubl. doctoral thesis, University of Vienna, 1963), p. 52; Justus Müller Hofstede, drawing on Jeffrey M. Muller, 'Rubens's Theory and Practice', p. 229, n. 7, and Marjon Van der Meulen, *Copies After the Antique*, I, p. 78, n. 44, dated it to soon after the return from Italy, 'Rubens und die Kunstlehre des Cinquecento. Zur Deutung eines theoretischen Skizzenblattes im Berliner Kabinett', in *Peter Paul Rubens 1577–1640. Ausstellung zur 400. Wiederkehr seines Geburtstages*, exh. cat. Cologne: Wallraf-Richartz Museum (Cologne: Museen der Stadt Köln, 1977), I, p. 53; Justus Müller Hofstede, 'Rubens in Italien', p. 287: 1608/09; Eveliina Juntunen, *Peter Paul Rubens' bildimplizite Kunsttheorie*

context than in the formulation of a general theory of *imitatio*. It was not until 1996 and 2001 that Ulrich Heinen's important publications on the significance of the treatise for the history of artistic theory and painterly practice refocused attention on the central issue of the imitation of sculptures.[27] The present essay sets out to carry on this more narrowly focused examination of the text, concentrating less on its use of *topoi* than on what was historically new and aiming for a microhistorical explanation. It will be shown that close examination of the content of Rubens' treatise does indeed allow us to establish when and why it was written.

Imitatio and transmaterialisation

Rubens' choice of the phrase *imitatio statuarum* in the title of his treatise posits an analogy to the principle of *imitatio naturae*. It is a phrase that calls for immediate clarification, since the imitation of sculpture in painting can mean two things. First, it can denote the depiction of sculptures as sculptures – for example antique portrait busts as props in portraits – which is to say the representation of sculptures as *realia* of the visible world in a painting. Rubens had a penchant for juxtaposing and complementing his flesh-and-blood sitters with a portrait carved in stone.[28] Capturing the material characteristics of both flesh and stone, he occasionally hinted at the sculptures' potential animated quality and, with it, at the dialogical coexistence with the stone companion.[29] Garden scenes were another genre in which Rubens created charming juxtapositions of sculptures and people. In the *Garden of Love* (see Thøfner, fig. 3)[30] he wittily distinguished between the rigid inflexibility of the stone herm pilasters on the outside of the pavilion, the more animated sculptures of the *Three Graces* inside it and, finally, the figure of *Venus lactans* on the fountain, almost brought to life by the gallantly amorous pursuits of the fashionable people enjoying the garden. Something similar can be seen in *The Discovery of the Infant Erichthonius* (fig. 2),[31] where the head of the satyr on the herm on the left seems to turn towards the attractive and wholly unstatuesque nudes.

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in ausgewählten mythologischen Historien (1611–1618) (Petersberg: M. Imhof, 2005), p. 16 suggested a date of '1608/09'. The early dating will be supported by new evidence in the following.

27 Ulrich Heinen, *Rubens zwischen Predigt und Kunst. Der Hochaltar für die Walburgenkirche in Antwerpen* (Weimar: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften, 1996), pp. 144–49 and 195–200, notes 99–111; Ulrich Heinen, 'Haut und Knochen – Fleisch und Blut. Rubens' Affektmalerei', in Ulrich Heinen and Andreas Thielemann (eds), *Rubens Passioni*, pp. 79–81 and 106, notes 60–64. See also: Marjon Van der Meulen, *Copies After the Antique*, I, p. 77 f.; Justus Müller Hofstede, 'Rubens in Italien 1600–1608', pp. 287–92; Eveliina Juntunen, *Peter Paul Rubens' bildimplizite Kunsttheorie*, p. 16 f.

28 Hans Vlieghe, *Rubens. Portraits of identified Sitters painted in Antwerp*. Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard XIX (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1987), no. 106 (Jan-Gaspar Gevaertius), 117 (The Four Philosophers), 124 (Ludovicus Nonnius).

29 This applies almost without exception to this series of engraved busts from 1638: Marjon Van der Meulen, *Copies after the Antique*, I, pp. 142–52.

30 Peter Sutton (ed.), *The Age of Rubens*, exh. cat. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts in association with Ludion Press, Ghent, 1993), pp. 303–06.

31 Klaus Albrecht Schröder and Heinz Widauer (eds), *Peter Paul Rubens*, exh. cat. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, 2004 (Ostfildern: Ruit, 2004), pp. 130–33, no. 29; Aneta Georgievska-Shine, 'From Ovid's Cecrops to Rubens' City of God in *The Finding of Erichthonius*', *The Art Bulletin* 85 (2004), 58–74.

Fig. 2. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Discovery of the Infant Erichthonius*, *c.* 1616, oil on canvas, 218 × 317 cm, Vienna, Liechtenstein, Princely Collections. © Photo SCALA, Florence

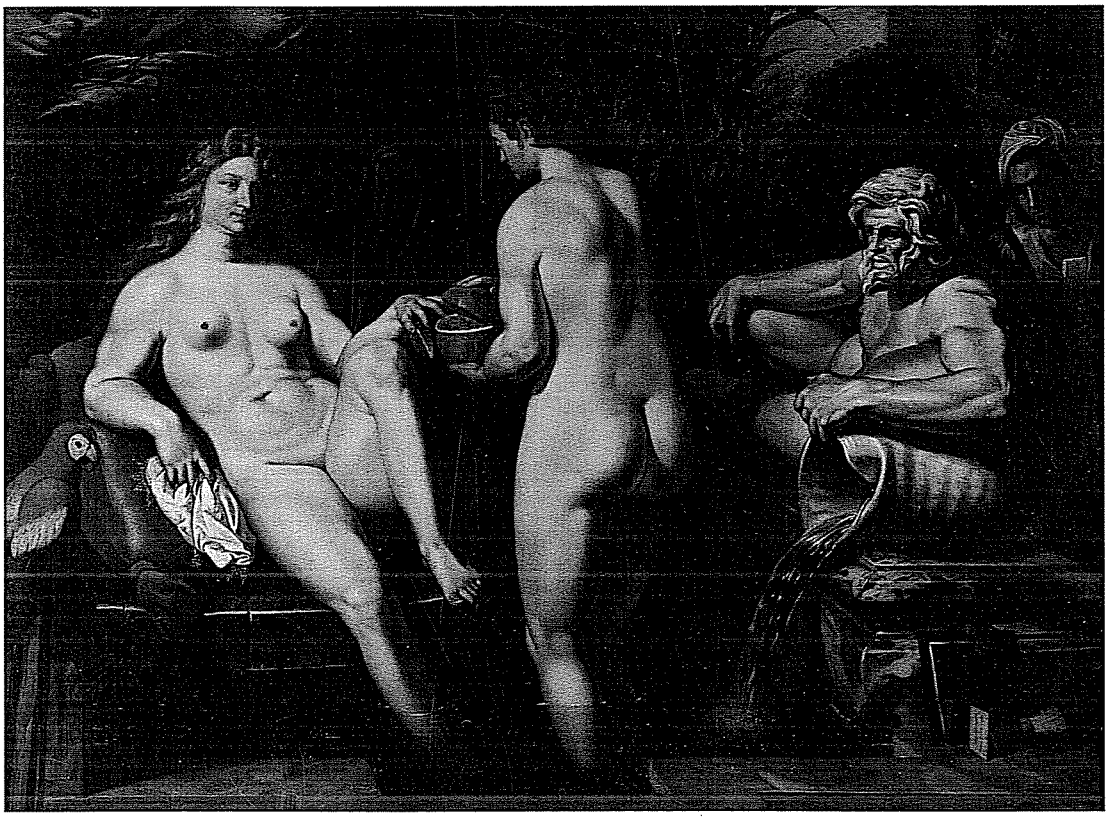

Fig. 3. Louis Finson, *The Toilet of Bathsheba*, 1610, oil on canvas, 149.86 × 220.98 cm, Private Collection

Despite his evident pleasure in playing with different levels of reality, Rubens never once sought to make his flesh-and-blood characters look more like stone sculptures. Not so his colleague, the Bruges-born painter Louis Finson (1580–1617). The frozen poses and unyielding flesh of the statuesque female nudes in his *Toilet of Bathsheba* (fig. 3),[32] painted in Naples in 1610, are not all that different from that of the sculpture of a river god who seems to be looking at them from the right. Finson's picture can be read as a painted introduction to the problems presented by the second kind of *imitatio statuarum* Rubens dealt with in his treatise. By studying exemplary antiquities, Rubens wanted to avoid precisely the kind of petrifaction Finson demonstrates here as a mannered game – and quite possibly also for want of better modes of handling flesh.

Although in his treatise Rubens praised the formal figurative qualities of antique sculpture like few artists before him, he did not elaborate this aspect. Instead he wrote about the specific qualities of medium and material that separate painting and sculpture. Differences of this kind had already been identified in the *paragone* debate of the Renaissance, but Rubens was not interested in the rivalry between painting and sculpture; his focus was solely on the mimetic possibilities and limitations that distinguished them.[33] For him as a painter, any imitation of antique sculpture in painting that was to pass muster as a good *imitatio naturae*, had to be attended by the careful consideration of media and materials and assume the character of a transformation, if not to say transmaterialisation, to create a lifelike impression.[34] Other artists, against whom Rubens polemicised in his treatise, did not feel quite the same need for this carefully considered and consistent transformation of matter. So why was Rubens so interested in using the means of painting to bring antiquity to life?

For an answer we need to turn to the second and third part of the treatise. Here the artist's argument is no longer art-immanent; here he no longer dispenses practical advice to his fellow-painters. Here he looks at antique sculptures as documents of a historical anthropology – and that is the crucial point. As outlined earlier, Rubens approached classical sculptures not only as a painter trying to improve his art, but also as a humanist. What he took from them were not just patterns of art but also patterns of life. And it was through painting that he sought to invest these with a new form of real presence and relevance in contemporary life and experience. This is why Rubens could not and would not content

32 Caterina Limentani Virdis (ed.), *Fiamminghi: arte fiamminga e olandese del Seicento nella Repubblica Veneta*, exh. cat. Padua, Musei Civici di Padova, 1990 (Milan: Electa, 1990), p. 230, no. 122; and most recently, *Old Master Paintings*, London 3 December 2008, Sotheby's, 76, no. 30.

33 Nevertheless, Eileen Reeves makes a connection between Rubens' treatise and Galilei's Paragone letter to Lodovico Cigoli of 1612: Eileen Reeves, *Painting the Heavens. Art and Science in the Age of Galileo* (Princeton/N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 68 f., 103. This is conceivable and based on certain factual commonalities. However, there is no evidence to support her suggestion that Galileo and Rubens may have met in Italy. They could, however, have been in indirect contact in 1612 through their mutual friend Johannes Faber in Rome, who became a member of the Accademia dei Lincei in October 1611. Galileo, who was also a member of the Accademia, had been correspondending with Faber since April 1611. That notwithstanding, it is Muller's approach that remains more convincing. The first to point out the factual overlaps, he did not jump to the conclusion that there must have been direct communication; Jeffrey M. Muller, 'Rubens's Theory and Practice', 231, n. 23.

34 This maxim also applies to post-antique sculptures being adapted in painting. For Rubens, these do not have the same status as antique models (Justus Müller Hofstede, 'Rubens in Italien 1600–1608') and are not discussed independently in the treatise.

himself with lifeless stone, however perfect its form; why he had to add the one thing that classical sculpture is lacking; why his *imitatio* had to take the path of transformation and incarnation, why he had to infuse the stone with the presence of living, breathing flesh and blood.

Within this carefully conceived framework, which transcends the immediate concerns of art, Rubens occupies a unique position in the art and art theory of the early modern period. His special interests and exceptional approach were shaped to no small degree by his contact with Justus Lipsius and his circle of humanists, both in Italy until 1608 and then in Antwerp until roughly 1615, during which time he actively used his art to promote the neo-stoic principles Lipsius sought to advance.[35] The artist's elder brother, Philip Rubens, was Lipsius' favourite disciple, and Peter Paul proclaimed his own adherence to the circle in the painting *The Four Philosophers* (fig. 4, see also Bos fig. 5),[36] portraying himself in the company of Lipsius, Johannes Woverius and Philip Rubens. These fictitious gathering of learned men is devoted to the exegesis of a philosophical text and presided over by a bust of Seneca, whose style and philosophy the neo-stoics sought to emulate.

Unlike Rubens, Lipsius and his students did not focus their studies of antiquity primarily on exemplary art; instead they pursued ethical and anthropological goals. The great minds of antiquity – not least among them Seneca whose Stoic doctrines and terse epigrammatic prose style Lipsius admired – were to serve as models for the comprehensive reform of private and public life. The perception of the great thinkers of the past as relevant to the present brought with it a desire for true-to-life images that conveyed a sense of a tangible flesh-and-blood presence. When Justus Lipsius published his pioneering Seneca edition in 1605, he sought not only to restore the philological integrity of Seneca's writings but also to communicate the author as a presence and the text as the living spoken word. The reader was meant to hear Seneca[37] as he read his words and feel an almost palpable presence.[38]

In 1605 Philip Rubens presented Pope Paul V with a copy of Lipsius' Seneca edition and celebrated the recovery (*restitutio*) of Seneca's writings by Justus Lipsius in a lengthy poem in classical hexameters.[39] Not unlike his brother, who sought to discover the

35 Mark Morford, *Stoics and Neostoics: Rubens and the Circle of Lipsius* (Princeton/N.J., Princeton University Press, 1991).

36 Hans Vlieghe, *Portraits of identified Sitters*, pp. 128–32, no. 117; Mark Morford, *Stoics and Neostoics*, pp. 3–13 and passim; Simone Zurawski, 'Reflections on the Pitti Friendship Portrait of Rubens: In Praise of Lipsius and in Remembrance of Erasmus', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 23 (1992), 727–53; Nico Van Hout, 'A Second Self-Portrait in Rubens's "Four Philosophers"', *The Burlington Magazine* 142 (2000), 694–97; Andreas Thielemann, 'Sprechende Köpfe: Seneca-Bildnisse um 1600', in Henning Wrede and Max Kunze (eds), *300 Jahre 'Thesaurus Brandenburgicus'. Archäologie, Antikensammlungen und antikisierende Residenzausstattungen im Barock, Akten des Internationalen Kolloquiums Schloss Blankensee, 30.9.–2.10.2000* (Munich: Biering & Brinkmann, 2006), pp. 187–91 (with further literature).

37 L. Annaeus Seneca philosophus, *Opera quae exstant omnia a Iusto Lipsio emendata et scholijs illustrata*. Editio secundus, atque ab ultima Lipsi manu (Antwerp, ex officina Plantiniana, apud viduam et filios I. Moreti, 1615), fol. i (*Introductio lectoris*).

38 Seneca philosophus, fol. 4 v (*Invitatio ad Senecam*): 'aude tangere'.

39 *In Senecam a I. Lipsio restitutum*, in Philipp Rubens, *Electorum libri II* (Antwerp: ex officina plantiniana, apud Ioannem Moretum, 1608), pp. 112–15. Frances Huemer printed an English translation by George Angel, but did not engage with the text: Frances Huemer, *Rubens and the Roman Circle. Studies of the First Decade* (New York and London: Garland, 1996), pp. 170–72 (Appendix I).

Fig. 4. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Four Philosophers*, after 1611, oil on canvas, 167 × 143 cm, Florence, Palazzo Pitti

living flesh in classical statues, Philip Rubens laced his poem with metaphors that present Seneca's writings as a living body. Wounded by centuries of disdain and the lances of the critics, it had been healed by Lipsius as though by the medical arts of Apollo. Just as important as the restoration of the physical integrity of the body of Seneca's writings was its restoration to the world at large. In this context, Philip Rubens once again underlines the principle of orality advocated by the followers of Seneca, chief among them Lipsius himself. In verse

28 he proclaims that 'an eternity of fame lives on in men's mouths' ('*Famæque æternum vivit in ore*').[40] Then he proceeds to develop an almost baroque image of Seneca's immortal soul looking down upon the world of mortals from the 'high citadel' of eternity, marvelling at the resurgence of his nearly lost writings that are once again on everybody's lips – or, even more vividly, 'fly about men's voices'.

> If therefore, everything is not mixed into the black ashes,
> If the soul, as is certain survives pyre and tomb,
> And looks down from its high citadel on the mortal realm,
> What do you now feel, seeing such things, Annaeus [Seneca]?
> What is the state of your spirit when you perceive
> the most outstanding monuments of your genius,
> which just now were nearly buried and reduced to ashes by the
> mournful funeral pile,
> preserve their doubted immortality and become mightier than their
> waning adornment. When you see your writings go forth and again fly
> about men's voices testifying to the sacred recesses of your soul, whence
> gold flowed as though from a rich vein.[41]

When Rubens painted the *Four Philosophers* (fig. 4), which brings together his brother Philip who had died in 1611 and Justus Lipsius who had died five years earlier in 1606 in an imaginary gathering presided over by a portrait bust of Seneca, he echoed Philip's vision of an intellectual presence that transcends death. The vase of tulips – two closed, two open – indicates that two of the four friends portrayed were no longer among the living. It is their shared admiration of Seneca, so the vase asserts, that links all four and creates a bond that transcends death. This idea of intellectual affiliation also applies to the painter's place in the painting. Rubens had never met Lipsius in person, but evidently did not see that as sufficient reason not to join this imaginary congregation of scholars. The key to understanding the painting lies in his brother's poem. The artist created a visual image of the *Restitutio Senecae* which his brother had celebrated in hexameters. As in the poem, Seneca himself is on a higher plane; enthroned in a niche, his bust is looking down on the protagonists who are shown not only working on the text but also lending it their voice. The '*volitare per ora*' is the real and central motif of the painting. It is the portrait of a speaker, a picture in which words quite literally hang in the air.

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40 Significant for this idea is Quintus Ennius' epigram as documented by Cicero 'volito vivus per ora virum' (*Tusculanae disputationes* I, 15).

41 Rubens, *Electorum libri II*, 113, v. 40–48: 'Si non ergo nigris miscentur cuncta fauillis, / Si mens, vt certum, cineri bustoque superstes, / Desuper ex alta mortalia despicit arce, / Quis tibi nunc, ANNAEE, videnti talia sensus, / Quidve modo est animi, cum præstantissima cernis / Ingenij monimenta tui, iam pæne sepulta, / Ac tristi cinefacta rogo, dubitata tueri / Astra et succiduo melius splendescere cultu? / Cum prodire iterumque virum volitare per ora / Scripta tui sanctos animi testata recessus / Unde velut diti fluxerunt aurea vena'. The 'virum volitare ora' is a literal quotation from Vergil, *Georgica* III, 9 and is already based on Ennius' epigram, as reminiscences of it in verse 28 show.

Lipsius had very concrete ideas about the power of the spoken word. In his *Manuductio ad stoicam philosophiam* of 1604 he praised Seneca's energetic style (*mira ενέργεια*) that appealed to all senses and evoked the presence of the speaker:

> He infuses everything with such vigour and warmth (*vigor et calor*). Everything is so alive and breathing (*omnia animata et spirantia*) that even idle and sluggish minds cannot but feel energised, and all that is lukewarm and cold becomes hot. We seem not to be reading his writings, but to be hearing his words, and to be dealing not with an image of him in books, but with the man himself through our very eyes and senses.[42]

This desire for a multisensory experience, the wish not only to hear but also to see and perhaps even touch, the philosopher was answered, to a degree, at the Altemps Palazzo in Rome, where in 1601 a classical sculpture (fig. 5) had been installed that was believed to be a truthful representation of Seneca at the hour of his death.[43] Tacitus' account of Seneca slowly bleeding to death in his bath while continuing to pursue his philosophical mission and to employ his formidable rhetorical gifts to instruct his friends until the end was well-known.[44] The statue seemed to capture these final moments with great poignancy. The truth is a little more prosaic – the sculpture shows an old fisherman standing, his knees bent, in or by the water.

With his painting (fig. 6) and the engraving (fig. 18), published in the revised second edition of Lipsius' complete works of Seneca (1615), Rubens created the ideal image of the philosopher for his followers; it showed Seneca facing death with exemplary dignity and fortitude and in the act of speaking. In the painting (fig. 6) this is further emphasised by the figure of the scribe taking down Seneca's last words and by those of the soldiers who are completely absorbed in listening and watching. Rubens' depiction invited the viewer to focus his eyes and ears on the teaching Seneca with the same rapt attention. The two images capture hearing and seeing and the sense of almost physical empathy described in Lipsius' *Manuductio ad Stoicam Philosophiam*. Rubens later reused the only lightly modified 'speaking' arm of the Seneca sculpture for the speaking pose of Lipsius in *The Four Philosophers* (fig. 4), highlighting the chain of transmission that culminated in the *restitutio*.

This is the intellectual context in which *De Imitatione Statuarum* has to be read to be understood. The very fact that Rubens wrote it in Latin suggests a humanist background. The intended audience would thus have consisted of his circle of friends and erudite collectors rather than the growing numbers of studio assistants Rubens began to rely on and train around 1615. Perhaps there was a Flemish version for his apprentices and assistants, but it is more likely that Rubens communicated its principal tenets orally and with the help of practical examples.

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42 Compare here the passage in the collected works: Justus Lipsius, *Opera Omnia* (Wesel: apud A. Ab Hoogenhuysen et Societatum, 1675), IV, p. 677.

43 For the date of the restoration, which was initiated by Giovanni Angelo Altemps and erroneously attributed to Borghese in the older literature, see Amilcare Quirino Gaviglia, 'Il Seneca Altemps-Borghese – il restauro cinquecentesco', in Henning Wrede and Max Kunze (eds), *300 Jahre 'Thesaurus Brandenburgicus'*, pp. 207–12; and Andreas Thielemann, 'Sprechende Köpfe', p. 191.

44 Tacitus, *Annales* XV, 60–64.

Fig. 5. *Old Fisherman*, also known as the 'Dying Seneca', black marble and alabaster, (modern) basin: purple breccia, Roman copy of the 2nd century after a Hellenistic original, Paris, Louvre

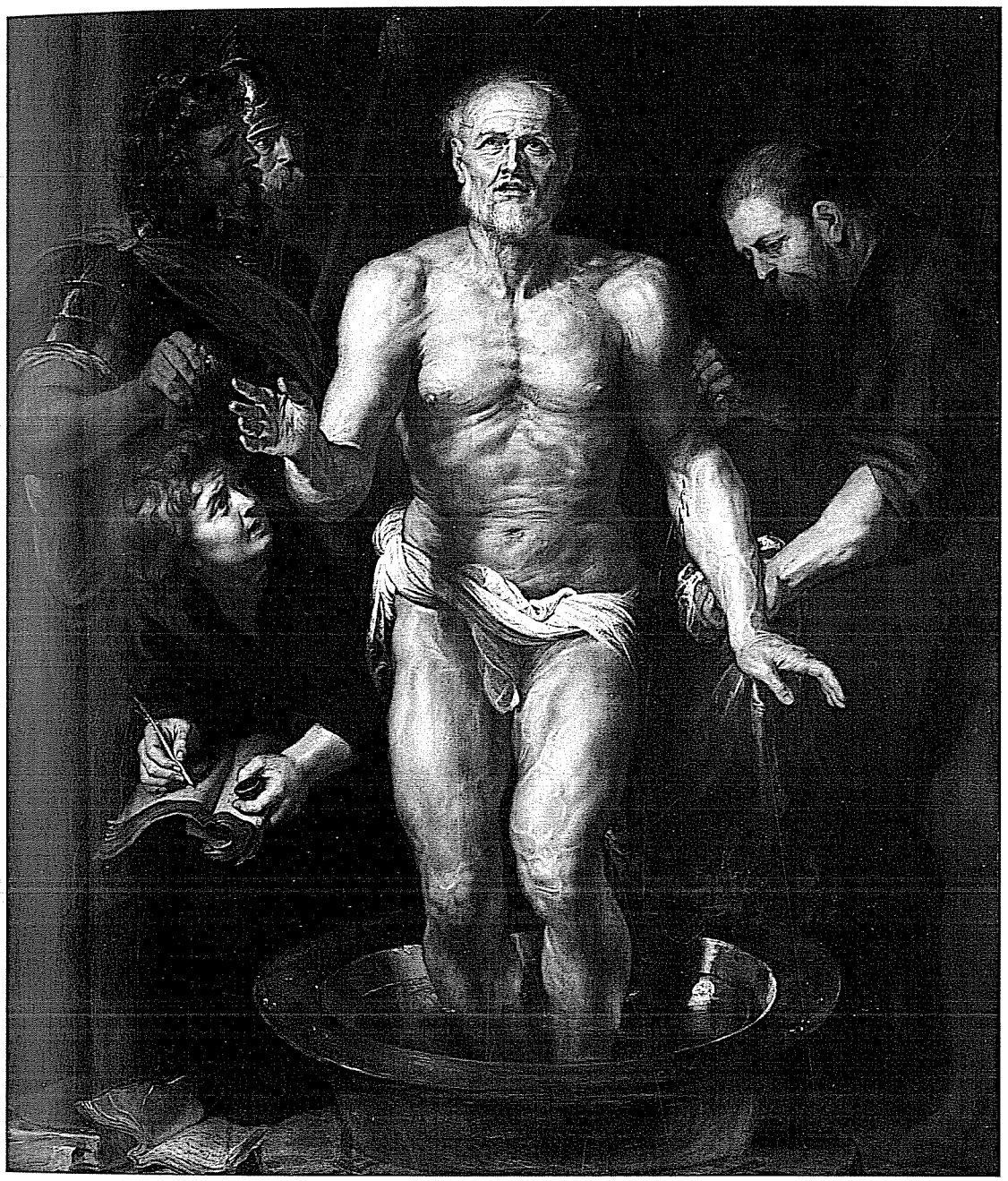

Fig. 6. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Dying Seneca*, 1612/13, oil on panel, 185 × 154.7 cm, Munich, Alte Pinakothek

Prose style

The first thing to note is the title phrase *De Imitatione*. There is no other occurrence of it anywhere in the art literature of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Using it, Rubens drew on a genre of literary treatise cultivated by the intellectual community of the sixteenth-century *Res publica literaria*[45] to debate the correct *imitatio veterum*. Like the authors of those literary treatises, Rubens was concerned to present his position and to criticise the mistakes made by certain colleagues. But this is where the similarities end. Rubens dispensed with the affectations of erudition and convoluted references to greater authorities that tended to pepper, if not overburden, the literary *imitatio* treatises. Instead he wrote a clipped and pithy account of his own observations, thoughts and recommendations. The text is therefore quite short and concentrated. Moreover, its *brevitas* also extends to the individual sentences. Occasionally the turns of phrase for subjects and objects are shortened to the very limit of what is grammatically and semantically feasible, forcing the reader to figure out for himself who or what is meant.

This style of writing has to be seen as a deliberate demonstration of his affiliation with the Lipsius circle (see fig. 4). Drawing on Tacitus and Seneca, Lipsius favoured a terse, emphatic style that could occasionally seem antiquated and that clearly set his circle apart.[46] Critics, and there were a great many, complained that the pointed Lipsian style lacked the harmony and balance admired in Ciceronian prose, that it seemed excessively clipped and that it spoiled the beauty of classical Latin with its penchant for jarring archaisms. Writing in Paris, the celebrated scholar Henricus Stephanus (Henri Estienne, 1528–98) criticised the Lipsian group style as early as 1595. On the title page of his polemic pamphlet, he ironically described himself as '*nec Lipsiomimi, nec Lipsiomomi, nec Lipsiocolacis: multoque minus Lipsiomastigis*'.[47] One of the linguistic extremists Stephanus mockingly referred to as *Lipsiomimi* was Philip Rubens. Since he had died in 1611 and the period of emphatic

45 In the Quattrocento, the letters *De imitatione* by Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola, Pietro Bembo and Giorgio Santagelo and in the Cinquecento, among others, Vincenzo Borghini, *De imitatione commentariolum*; Johannes Sambucus, *De imitatione Ciceroniana*; Kaspar Schoppe, *De rhetoricarum exercitationum generibus, praecipueque de recta Ciceronis imitatione, deque orationis Latinae vitiis ac virtutibus dissertatio.*

46 Christian Mouchel, *Cicéron et Sénèque dans la rhétorique de la Renaissance* (Marburg: Hitzeroth, 1990), index s.v. 'Lipsius'; Jeroen Jansen, *Brevitas. Beschouwingen over de beknoptheid van vorm en stijl in de renaissance* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1995), Index s.v. 'Lipsius'; *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik* (2007), VIII, pp. 826–41, s.v. 'Senecanismus' (J. Kraye), here p. 835 f. For the tradition of the Stoic style, its formulation within the circle of Lipsius and its influence on the so-called classicist phase of Rubens, see the paper the author presented at the 'Kölner Rubens-Kolloquium' in 1999. This paper has not yet been published, but it was favourably received, not least because of the reviews by Michael Rohlmann, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7 July 1999, 6; Nils Büttner, *Kunstchronik* 53 (2000), 9–13. Wolfgang Brassat and Nils Büttner, *Frühneuzeit-Info* 10 (1999), 329–36, 334. Warnke updated the new edition of his little Rubens monograph of 1977 by inserting a chapter entitled 'Laconic Brevity': Martin Warnke, *Rubens: Leben und Werk* (2006), pp. 90–92.

47 Here the transcription of the programmatic titlepage: 'De Lipsii latinitate (vt ipsimet antiquarii antiquarium Lipsii stylum indigitant) Palaestra I, Henr. Stephani, Parisiensis: nec Lipsiomimi, nec Lipsiomomis, nec Lipsiocolacis: multoque minus Lipsiomastigis. Libertas volo sit Latinitati, sed licentia nolo detur illi. Hic multa non vulgaria vulgi literatorum linguis de Latinitate illa antiquaria tantum non digladiantibus opponuntur. Molestia huius litis est sermonibus implicita multis, auferunt qui taedium, et liticulas tibi ad alias qui conferunt. Francofordii [Stephanus], Anno M.C.XCV'. See Gilbert Tournoy, Jan Papy and Jeanine de Landtsheer (eds), *Lipsius en Leuven*, exh.cat. Central Library Leuven, 1997 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), pp. 175–77, no. 52.

Lipsianism, which Paul Rubens had captured in his programmatic commemorative painting of the *Four Philosophers* (fig. 4), persisted until the middle of the decade,[48] the prose style of *De Imitatione Statuarum* provides a first clue that may help date the treatise.

'Imbibing' statues, but avoiding the taint of stone'

The treatise begins in the clipped Lipsian style: *Aliis utilissima, aliis damnosa usque ad exterminium artis.* The subject of the sentence is missing; the reader has to supply it for himself. It is, of course, the *imitatio statuarum* mentioned in the title. Useful to some, pernicious to others, even to the point of ruining their art. This remarkably pointed warning suggests a virulent polemical background, a situation in which Rubens found it expedient to distinguish his practice of *imitatio statuarum* from that of colleagues or competitors. The second sentence lists prerequisites for the *utilissima imitatio*. Rubens professes his conviction that the highest form of perfection in painting cannot be attained without deep knowledge and understanding of classical sculptures. To achieve the requisite depth of knowledge the artist had to perform an act of *imbibitio*.

Classical Latin appears to have known only the verb *imbibere*, i.e. to imbibe, but not the noun *imbibitio*. It seems to have been coined in the Middle Ages, when it began to appear in alchemical and pharmaceutical texts to describe the act of soaking, steeping or moistening.[49] Rubens used the term to describe a particularly intense absorption of models, which the artist 'imbibes' to the point of saturation. The choice of phrase draws on the food and drink metaphors that were the stock in trade of literary *imitatio* theory.[50] The use of the models thus 'imbibed', so Rubens in the next step, had to be *iudiciose*, i.e. guided by good judgement. And to elaborate on what he meant by that, he added *et omnino citra saxum*, i.e. and wholly without stone. Another one of his extremely clipped phrases. What it means is that the translation into paint should leave no trace of the stone. Rubens goes on to explain that many painters – inexperienced and experienced alike – made no distinction between matter and form. They did not distinguish the stone from the figure nor the constraints imposed by the marble from the actual work of art: *non distinguunt materiam a forma, saxum a figura, nec necessitatem marmoris ab artificio*. This is the passage that seems *logical*. With great acuity Rubens contrasts the terms matter and form[51] as well as *necessitas* and *artifice*, i.e. constraints

48 Rubens painted his *Dying Seneca* sometime between 1610 and 1615. Lipsius' second Seneca edition appeared in 1615 furnished with engravings by Rubens. After this, roughly ten years after Lipsius' death in 1606, the core of this movement slowly started to dissolve and the influence of Stoicism on Rubens' work began to wane.

49 Two key texts to bracket the time period in question are an alchemical treatise attributed to Albertus Magnus (Pearl Kibre, 'An Alchemical Tract Attributed to Albertus Magnus', *Isis* 35 (1944), 312 [fol. 45 r], 314 [fol. 48 r], 315 [fol. 48 v], and a passage in Francis Bacon's *Novum Organon*, in *The Works*, coll. and ed. by James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis and Douglas Denon Heath (London: Longman & Co, 1858), I, p. 329 (Aphorismorum XLVII).

50 Horst Wenzel, 'Die "fließende" Rede und der "gefrorene" Text. Metaphern der Medialität', in Gerhard Neumann (ed.), *Poststrukturalismus. Herausforderung an die Literaturwissenschaft* (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 1997).

51 Jeffrey Muller traced this pair of terms directly to the ur-text of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: Jeffrey M. Muller,

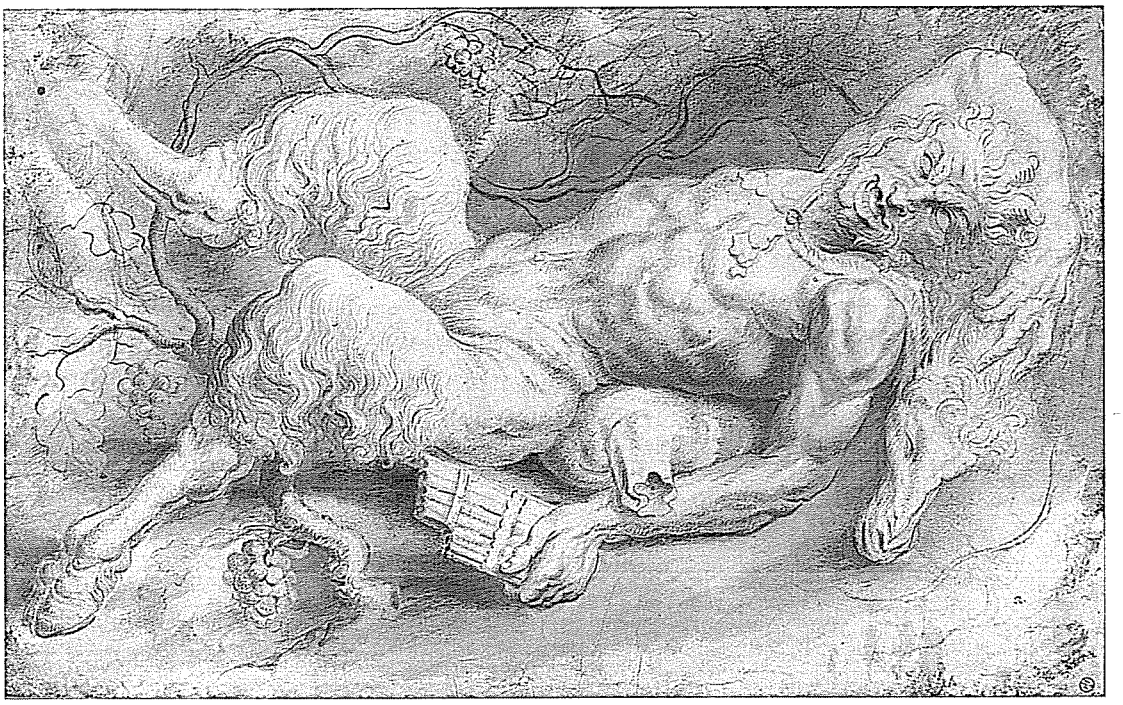

Fig. 7. Peter Paul Rubens, *Pan Reclining*, possibly *c.* 1610, red and black chalk with red wash and gouache 30.9 × 49.3 cm, Washington, The National Gallery of Art, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

imposed by the material and the art of forming it, to separate the different possibilities and limitations that characterise sculpture and painting.

In the next step he looks more closely at sculpture to distinguish good models from bad ones: 'The most important axiom is that, among statues, the best are the most useful, and the bad, correspondingly, are useless'. We may conclude that Rubens counted among the useful models primarily those that belie the *necessitas marmoris* and offer a painterly approach to the depiction of flesh, suggesting its softness and subtle surface characteristics that a more rigorist contour style would suppress. It is little wonder then that Rubens kept drawing the Barberini Faun, which at the time was thought to be a Greek original (fig. 7).[52] Working in red chalk in a soft yet precise technique, he elaborated the details of the body hair and the transition to the goatskin, embedding the reclining figure in a landscape setting. The statue that so fired Rubens' enthusiasm does indeed belie the *necessitas marmoris* and taps into the potential of sculpture to convey painterly effects. His drawing precisely highlights and interprets these qualities.

'Rubens's Theory and Practice', 230: *Metaphysica* 1034b–1036b. One could object that the terms 'matter' and 'form' had long since become common philosophical principles handed down via the scholastic tradition; see Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer (eds), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Basel, Switzerland: Schwabe, 1972), II, pp. 977–1030 s.v. "Form und Materie"; *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (Munich and Zurich: Artemis, 1989), IV, pp. 636–45 s.v. 'Form/Materie'. However, one has to remember that Rubens, brother Philip engaged with late Aristotelianism at the University of Padua during his studies there.

52 Rubens saw the figure, which had been restored by Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli, at the Palazzo Barberini and, like most of his contemporaries, took it to be an antique artefact. However, this question is irrelevant in the current context, because the title of the treatise explicitly includes modern sculpture as well as restored and altered antique works. See most recently: Klaus Albrecht Schröder and Heinz Widauer (eds), *Peter Paul Rubens*, exh. cat. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum (Vienna: Albertina, 2004), p. 148 f., no. 8.

Competition with Abraham Janssens

As the next sentence shows, Rubens discerned mistakes in the choice of suitable models not only among painters with poor judgement, but particularly among beginners who were looking for the wrong qualities in sculpture right from the start because they were aiming for a hard, sculptural style in painting:

> For novices, while deriving from statues a certain indefinable quality consisting of crudity and sharp outlining and laboured and awkward anatomy, seem to make progress, but [sc. they do so] in defiance of nature, as what they are representing in colours is, instead of flesh, merely marble. [see notes 135–37]

Jeffrey M. Muller noted that this passage brought to mind the criticism of Mantegna's unnaturally hard figures in the Ovetari Chapel recorded by Vasari.[53] Justus Müller Hofstede pointed to Dominicus Lampsonius' biography of Lambert Lombard (1505–66) published in 1565, in which the author tempers his praise of the painter with a critique of his treatment of human flesh that made his figures look like painted statues made of wood or stone. The colouring of human skin, Lampsonius explains, was infinitely varied on account of the blood coursing beneath it.[54] Given Lombard's invariably dull and opaque handling of skin, it must be doubted that he had the discernment to follow this counsel in his creative practice.

What Rubens responded to was the Mannerist style of artists such as Maerten van Heemskerck, Marten de Vos and Hendrick Goltzius, whose preposterously bulging muscles, prominent tendons and ostentatious abundance of crisply outlined, near-sculptural details were held in high regard in the Netherlands in the second half of the sixteenth century. Rubens thus criticised the showy style favoured by the previous generation of artists that still commanded the admiration of inexperienced painters and the wider public.

53 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori, nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. by Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi (Florence: Sansoni, 1971), III (1971), p. 549 (1568): 'E sopra tutto biasimò [Squarcione, Mantegnas Lehrer] senza rispetto le pitture che Andrea aveva fatte nella detta cappella di S. Cristofano, dicendo che non erano cosa buona perché aveva nel farle imitato le cose di marmo antiche, dalle quali non si può imparare la pittura perfettamente, perciò che i sassi hanno sempre la durezza con esso loro e non mai quella tenera dolcezza che hanno le carni e le cose naturali, che si piegano e fanno diversi movimenti; aggiugnendo che Andrea arebbe fatto molto meglio quelle figure e sarebbono state più perfette se avesse fattole di color di marmo e non di que' tanti colori, perciò che non avevano quelle pitture somiglianze di vivi ma di statue antiche di marmo o d'altre cose simili'.

54 Domenicus Lampsonius, *Lamberti Lombardi apud Eburones pictoris celeberrimi vita* (Bruges: ex officina Huberti Goltzig, 1565), p. 22: 'Atque haec quidem, quam aiebam, Lombardi ratio operose harmoges in diversicolore pictura adhibendae est eiusmodi, ut nisi eam in exprimenda carne humana, maximeque, ut dixi, iuvenili, formosa, et pinguicula, omnibusque asperitatibus lacunulis et sinibus quam maxime carente sequaris, non carnem humanam, sed ligneam aut saxeam statuam pigmentis illitam representasse videare, nulla est enim caro humana, quantumvis etiam formosorum, ac delicatorum corporum, quin ob sanguinem non uno ubique, atque eodem modo sub cute diffusum, hac ad pallorem, illic ad ruborem, nonnusquam etiam ad livorem aliquem inclinet, quam colorum ludibundam varietatem in ipsis etiam umbris eiusdem carnis deprehendas, nunc ad luteum, nunc ad roseum, modo ad cyaneum aut celestem colorem nonnihil vergentibus'. Müller Hofstede, 'Rubens und die Kunstlehre des Cinquecento', p. 24; Jeffrey M. Muller, 'Rubens's Theory and Practice', 241; Thomas Noll, '"Der sterbende Seneca" des Peter Paul Rubens', 105.

Upon his return to Antwerp from Italy in 1608 Rubens found himself in direct competition with the well-established painter Abraham Janssens (*c.* 1575–1632) who was still working in the highly detailed anatomical style, pushing its plasticity to new extremes. A fine example of his manner is his *Scaldis and Antverpia* of 1608/09, a large allegory of the river Scheldt and the city of Antwerp commissioned for Antwerp's town hall (fig. 8).[55]

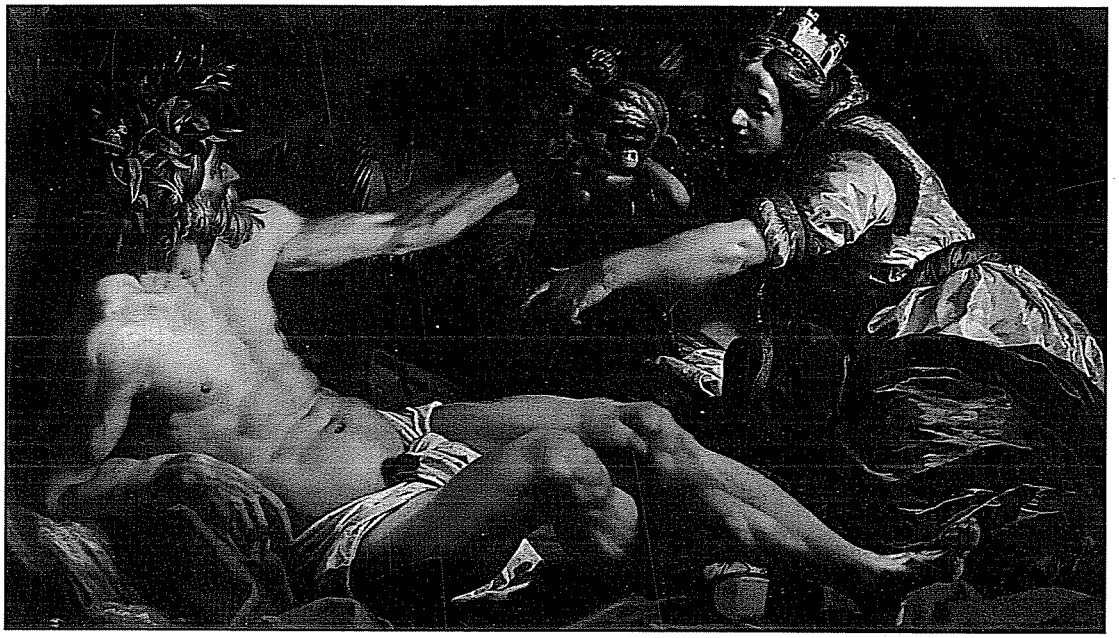

Fig. 8. Abraham Janssens, *Scaldis und Antwerpia*, 1609, oil on panel, 174 × 308 cm, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp

The painting shows the river god Scaldis presenting Antverpia, who is wearing the crown of the city of Antwerp, with a cornucopia filled with the wealth springing from trade and shipping. Scaldis, based on the antique figure of Tiberinus on the Campidoglio, dominates the composition. Stretching across its entire width, the large nude was designed to impress the city fathers with the artist's command of *all'antica* anatomy. Similarly calculated and politically astute was Janssens' choice of model, a monumental antique sculpture displayed in the political heart of Rome in front of the senatorial palace.

In his groundbreaking essay on Janssens, Justus Müller Hofstede analysed the different styles of Rubens and Janssens and suggested that Rubens had Janssens in mind when he wrote *De Imitatione Statuarum*.[56] The suggestion is compelling, since in the period between 1608 and 1615 Janssens was a serious rival. He had spent time in Italy and upon his return made his mark with ambitious history paintings based on well-known antiquities. What is more, he had the distinct advantage of being able to draw on the entrenched preference for quasi-sculptural precision and bold Mannerist compositions. If the treatise was indeed aimed at Janssens, this would suggest a date between 1608 and 1615.[57] Janssens, in turn, responded

55 Justus Müller Hofstede, 'Abraham Janssens. Zur Problematik des flämischen Caravaggismus', in *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 13 (1971), 247–50; Martina Dlugaiczyk, *Der Waffenstillstand (1609–1621) als Medienereignis: Politische Bildpropaganda in den Niederlanden* (Münster: Waxmann, 2005), pp. 184–90.

56 Justus Müller Hofstede, 'Abraham Janssens', p. 253.

57 Müller Hofstede dated it to 1608–12, but did not suggest the competition with Janssens as a reason for this

painted stone

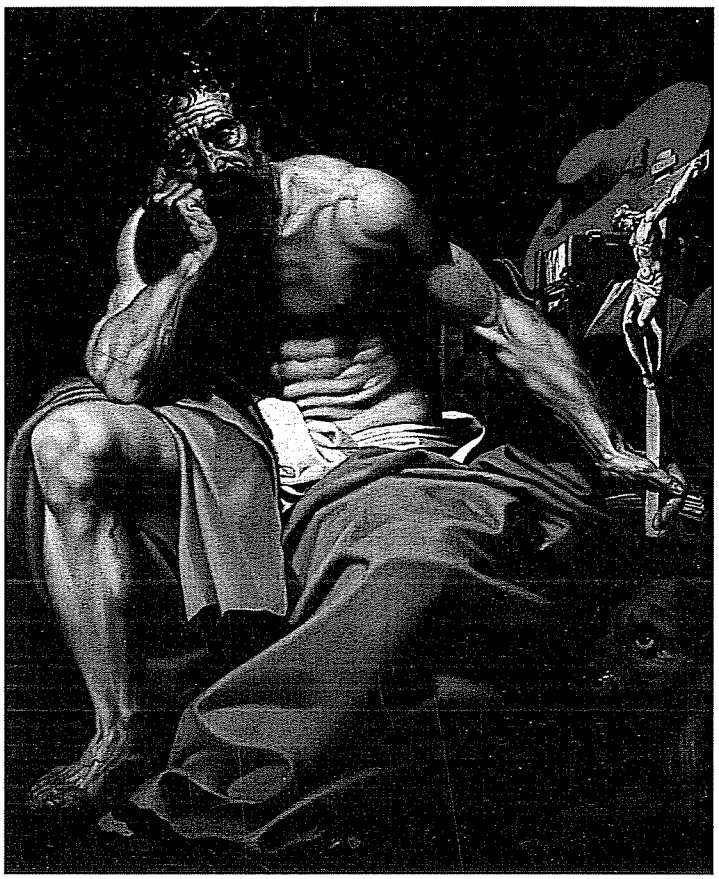

Fig. 9. Abraham Janssens, *Saint Jerome*, 1610–12, oil on canvas, 135.9 × 111.8 cm, Gift of Walter P. Chrysler, Jr, Chrysler-Museum of Art Norfolk

to the arrival of Rubens by emphasising his experience and his *Italianità*. His *Saint Jerome* (fig. 9) exemplifies his return to Italian models.[58]

Here the contrast between the lit passages and the dark ground is even more dryly delineated than in the painting of *Scaldis and Antverpia*. The saint's naked body and the drapery are treated in exactly the same fashion: plastic masses rendered in unbroken tints that epitomise everything that Rubens denounced as nothing more than painted stone.[59] The shadows are particularly deep and a highlight brightens every raised passage. The whole thing was, as Rubens put it, an affront to nature:

(which he understood merely as a 'side glance' – 'Seitenblick'). Instead, he posited an internal development of these years, in which Rubens was occupied 'with an initial synthesis of his Italian impressions' and specifically with 'the fusion of "disegno", "rilievo" and "colorito"': Müller Hofstede, 'Abraham Janssens', p. 253, n. 141; idem, 'Rubens in Italien 1600–1608', p. 287: 'um 1608' ('around 1608').

58 Justus Müller Hofstede, 'Abraham Janssens', p. 258 f., fig. 27; Dennis P. Weller (ed.), *Sinners and Saints, Darkness and Light: Caravaggio and His Dutch and Flemish Followers* (Raleigh: North Carolina Museum of Art, 1998), pp. 152–54, no. 26.

59 Typical of this kind of handling of materiality is Janssens' painting *The Origin of the Cornucopia* in Seattle (*c.* 1615–20). The contrived, unnatural depiction of human bodies, textiles and other materials is so pronounced that they look like as though they were made of twentieth-century synthetic materials. One is reminded of plastic dolls in nylon clothing, and one could get the impression that the river godess on the right is leaning against an industrial sewage pipe made of red plastic; see the excellent full-colour illustration in Peter Sutton, *The Age of Rubens*, p. 218 f., no. 4.

> For even in the best sculpture, many accidental characteristics, without being the artificer's fault, are to be reproached, and indeed even avoided. Above all, there is the difference of shadows, since flesh, skin and cartilage, with their translucent quality, soften many steep descents into blackness and shadow which stone inexorably presents as twice as strong because of its density. Consider, too, certain blemishes, which vary in response to all movements and are spread or contracted by the flexibility of skin: these are generally avoided by sculptors, though occasionally admitted by the best of them, but they are necessary for painting, though with moderation. In regard to light, as well, statues are completely alien to all that is human, the difference being that, because of the shine and brilliant gleam of the stone, they make surfaces[60] stand out more than they should, or at least exercise fascination on the eyes. [see notes 138–39]

According to Rubens, the harsh, overly deep shadows of sculptures as well as the excessively bright highlights on the projecting surfaces are inevitable physical consequences of the material properties of stone, of its *densitas*. The living human body, its skin, flesh and cartilage, on the other hand, are distinguished by the optical quality of *diaphanitas*. Light can penetrate these layers; it does not simply bounce off the surface. Gian Paolo Lomazzo had already argued much the same point in his treatise on painting (published in 1584), in which he criticised painters for failing to move beyond their beginners' exercises of drawing after plaster casts and for depicting the human body with overly harsh highlights.[61] Rubens is likely to have known this passage, and, indeed, he too denounced the defect as one that smacked of a beginner's style. But he went further than Lomazzo who merely wanted to see glaring highlights and hard shadows avoided. Rubens, on the other hand, added the element

60 I take *superficies* to be accusative plural.

61 Gian Paolo Lomazzo, Gian Paolo, *Scritti sulle arti*, ed. by Roberto Paolo Ciardi (Florence: Marchi & Bertolli, 1974), II, p. 199 f. (after a theoretical explanation of the interdependency between light reflexes and the density of the material, he continues): 'E che sia vero, voglio darne il più chiaro essempio et il più proprio et accommodato che si possa imaginare in tutta l'arte della pittura, col quale si verrà in cognizione d'una certa corruttela nel dipingere, la quale veramente sí come nemica al vero ha da essere fuggita; sí come l'hanno fuggita Leonardo Vinci, Raffaello e gli altri buoni pittori; ancora che in essa siano stati eccellenti Vicenzio Foppa, Bramante e molti altri, de' quali le opere fanno fede di questo. Ora, per la diversità che è tra la carne et il gesso, veggiamo chiaramente riceversi in loro diversi lumi e riflessi; come per essere la carne morbida, si causa ch'essendo percossa dal lume fa un'ombra in essa medesima soav e dolce, non con molto riflesso, e di maniera accompagnato che non disdice; sí che trovandosi un poco lontano si vede quella carne tonda, morbida, senza ombra, e massime quando essa carne è più morbida, come ne i giovani e fanciulli; per incontro resta più cruda di lume et ombra quando è manco morbida, cioè che tiri al vecchio e ruvido. Ma non però tanto sarà, come in un corpo di gesso overo di marmo benché formato come la carne; il quale, essendo al contrario incontro della carne, e d'uno lustro e bianco, ricevendo il lume in sé ne resta più acuto e con certi riflessi di maniera crudi et apparenti, che non lasciano la cosa veder tonda come la carne; anci, combattendo l'uno membro con l'altro per i lumi, fanno strepito, e tanto più quanto il corpo suo è più candido. Non considerando tali diversità, molti pittori, i quali hanno ritratto da giovanetti appresso tali figure di gesso e marmi con que' lumi crudi fieri et acuti, hanno tenuto tal maniera d'allumare, la quale veramente, sí come è causa da tali corpi, a tali anco solamente per fingere s'aspetta. Ma questi tali, estendendolo anco più oltre senza considerazione, anco nelle figure finte di carne lo usano dandovi quella medesima qualità di lumi; onde non le possono appresentare simili al vero, benché siano benissimo intese nel disegno; come è una figura d'Ausonio poeta dipinta da Bramante [...] E questa medesima maniera usano molti pittori di questo tempo i quali sono conosciuti senza ch'io gli nomini [...]'. See also, Ulrich Heinen, *Rubens zwischen Predigt und Kunst*, p. 146.

of *diaphanitas* into the mix, suggesting the depiction of deeper layers of tissue. Leonardo, too, had cautioned against excessively hard shadows that made the living flesh look like stone and exhorted artists to be mindful of the transparent nature of the human tissue,[62] and Lampsonius in his biography of Lambert Lombard had attributed the colour of the skin to the blood coursing beneath it.[63] In theory at least, the course was set to turn the effects of the vessels and tissues beneath the skin into a new subject of art. The practice, however, lagged behind, especially because there were precious few occasions that would have called for the depiction of subcutaneous tissue.[64]

The second reason why painting is fundamentally better suited to the depiction of flesh is that painting can and should render the elasticity and softness of the living flesh and the way it moves when the body does. These accidental aspects of the physical form – Rubens called them *maccaturae* – are all but impossible to capture in sculpture, and only the very best sculptors ever attempt to suggest them.

Maccaturae

In his drawings after antiquities Rubens did indeed show a remarkable interest in the soft, flexible parts of the human or animal anatomy, for example around the throat. With this in mind he selected exemplary classical sculptures such as the *Farnese Bull* with its bulging folds of skin (fig. 10)[65] and antique heads of old men, usually drawn in a foreshortened *sottinsù* view to give full play to the undulating lines of the neck (fig. 11). Even a statue of Venus satisfied his obsession with cartilaginous, flaccid formations of the human neck which he liked to compare with animal necks (fig. 12).[66]

What Rubens took from the combined study of nature and classical sculpture can be seen in *Democritus and Heraclitus*, painted for the Duke of Lerma in Spain in 1603. Significantly, it is a figure from antiquity, namely the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who is given the almost monstrously large – but as far as Rubens was concerned classically legitimated – head of the emperor Galba (fig. 13).[67]

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62 Leonardo da Vinci, *Les Manuscrits de Léonard de Vinci*, ed. by Charles Ravaisson-Mollien (Paris: Edouard Rouveyre, 1891), VI, fol. 31 verso: 'doue. lonbra chonfina cholume abi rispetto dove pivchiara oschura edo vella e piv. omen fumosa inuerso lume. esopra tutto. ti richordo chene giovani tu non facci lonbre termina te chome. fa lapietra perche. lacarne tiene vnpocho deltrasparente chome siuede aguardare invna mano che sia posta fralochio. elsole chessiuede rossegiare ettrasparere luminosa eliparte piv cholorita metterai che pertuto'. Compare also Ulrich Heinen, *Rubens zwischen Predigt und Kunst*, p. 197, n. 103.

63 See above note 56.

64 For the thematic motivation to enliven the dying Seneca, see below.

65 Marjon Van der Meulen, *Copies after the Antique*, II, p. 88 f., no. 71.

66 Rubens' drawing only survives in three copies, *Ms Chatsworth*: David Jaffé and Amanda Bradley, 'Rubens's "Pocketbook"', p. 22, fig. 9; *Ms de Ganey*: Michael Jaffé, *Van Dyck's Antwerp Sketchbook*, I, fig. LIV; *Ms Johnson*: Michael Jaffé, *Van Dyck's Antwerp Sketchbook*, I, fig. LV. – Marjon Van der Meulen sees the *tertium comparationis* in this comparison between Venus and a horse in the elegance of the neck (Marjon Van der Meulen, *Copies after the Antique*, II, p. 72 f.). The articulation and annotation of the anatomical details, however, is not geared towards the elegance of the necks. Instead, it investigates and compares – as in the striking Galba heads – the elements of their anatomy.

67 Caterina Limentani Virdis (ed.), *Fiamminghi*, 56 f., no. 11; Elizabeth McGrath, *Subjects from History*, II, pp. 52–57, no. 8; David Jaffé (ed.), *Rubens. A Master in the Making*, p. 76 f., no. 18 see also Mc Grath's and Bos' essays in this volume.

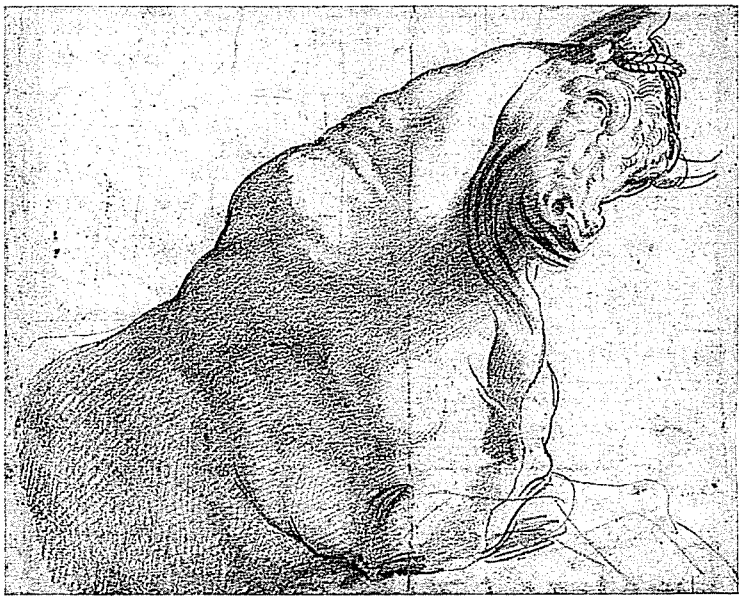

Fig. 10. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Farnese Bull*, 1592–1640, black chalk on paper, 221 × 268 mm London, British Museum, The Trustees of the British Museum

Fig. 11. Peter Paul Rubens, *Heads of Seneca and Galba*, study (detail), chalk drawing, The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. © The State Hermitage Museum. Photo by Vladimir Terebenin, Leonard Kheifets

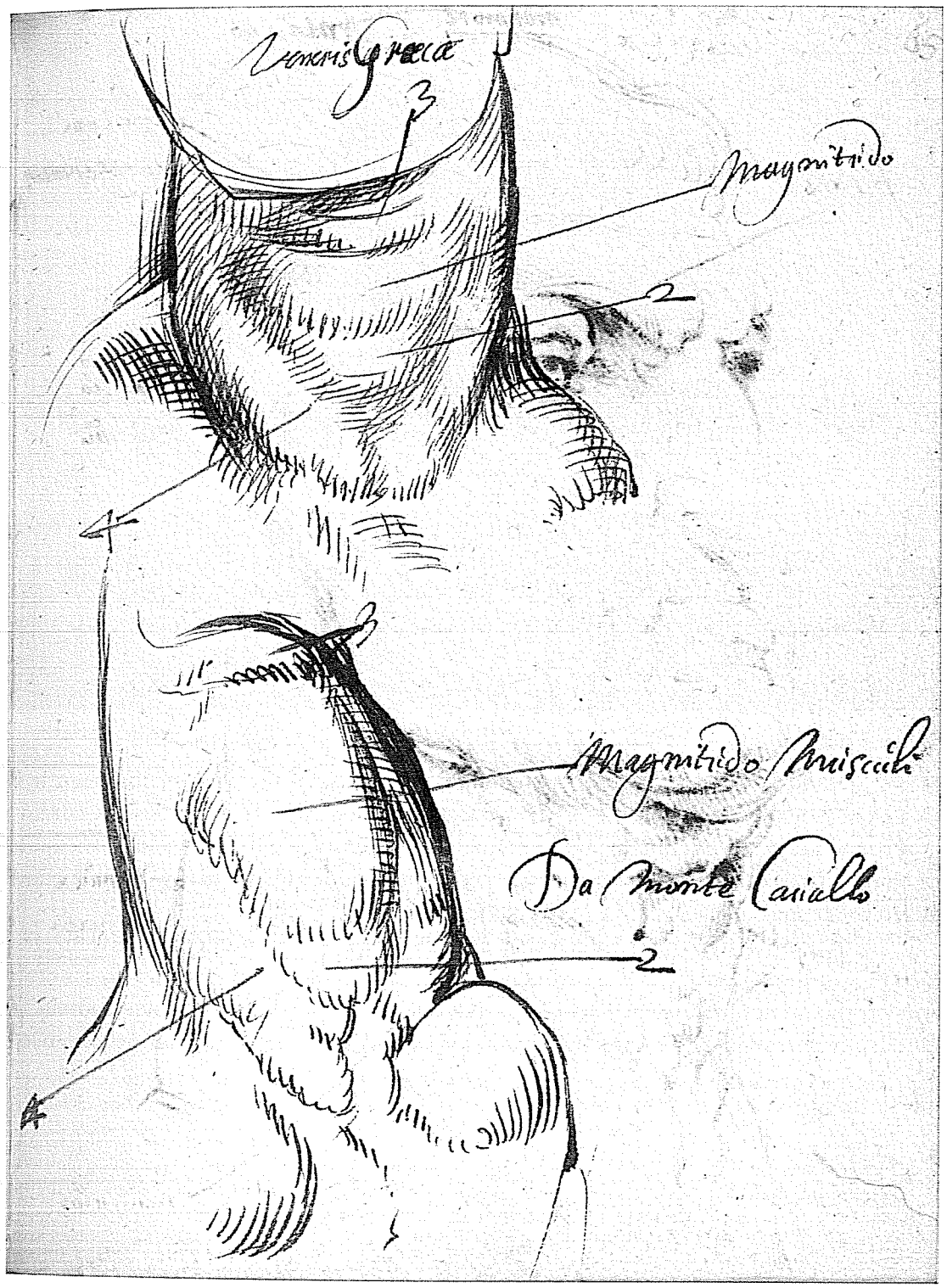

Fig. 12. Anthony van Dyck after Peter Paul Rubens, Necks of a classical statue of Venus and a classical sculpture of a horse from Monte Cavallo in Rome, 'Chatsworth Mansucript', fol. 67r, The Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth

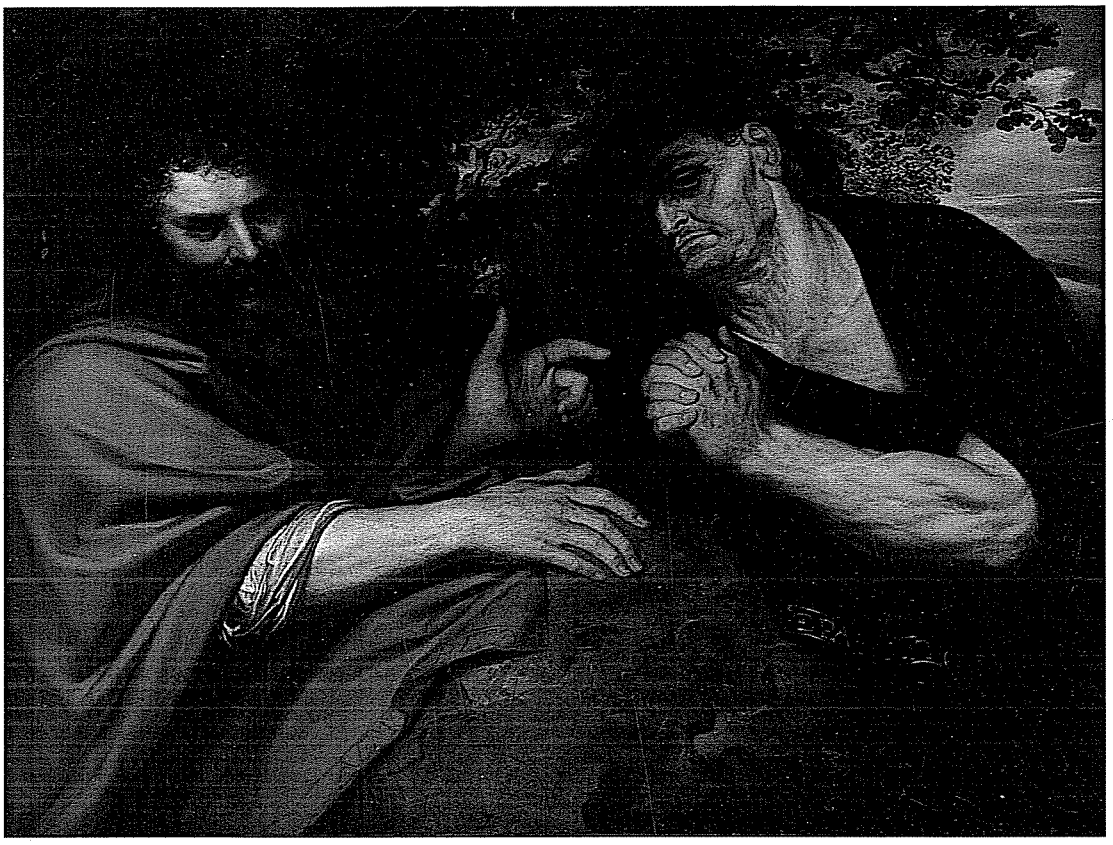

Fig. 13. Peter Paul Rubens, *Democritus and Heraditus*, 1603, oil on canvas, 95 × 125 cm Valladolid, Museo Nacional de Escultura

Almost as striking as the face is the massive neck of the aged philosopher. It is painted as though seen from below, emerging from a black garment that exposes the cording of vein and sinew, the straining muscles and the furrowed, ravaged flesh.[68] Michael Jaffé quite rightly recognised that all these grotesquely jowly necks, painted or drawn, are somehow linked to the idea of *maccaturae* in *De Imitatione Statuarum*.[69]

But what does the term *maccatura* actually mean? There is no evidence to suggest that the word was used in classical Latin, and most translators and commentators have simply avoided the question altogether. Roger de Piles airily translated it as 'certains endroits'.[70] Ulrich Heinen sought to tie it to the Italian word *macchia*, suggesting that Rubens referenced

68 The black garb alludes to the epithetically 'dark' Heraclitus (Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum* II, 15). This raises the question, whether the display of physical decay should also be understood iconographically: the transience of life as part of the eternal cycle of growth and decay, which Heraclitus put at the heart of his philosophy. In the case of Heraclitus, in particular, Rubens may have felt he had a right to render senile decay in dramatic detail. The actual motivation, however, should be seen in a personal obsession, independent of philosophy.

69 Michael Jaffé, 'Rubens Drawings at Antwerp', *The Burlington Magazine*, 98 (1956), 317 f.; Michael Jaffé, 'Rubens in Italy, Part II: Some Rediscovered Works of the First Phase', *The Burlington Magazine* 110 (1968), 184.

70 Roger de Piles, *Cours de peinture*, p. 142. This was also adopted by the German translations: Roger de Piles, *Einleitung in die Malerey aus Grundsätzen* (Leipzig: Dyck, 1760), p. 112: 'gewisse Theile'; Friedrich Frh. Goeler von Ravensburg, *Rubens und die Antike*, p. 38: 'gewisse [...] Theile'.

the mottled application of paint.[71] But Rubens did not speak about the act of painting; he used the word to describe the characteristics of the things depicted.

A first attempt at an etymological explanation can be found in Gustav Friedrich Waagen's English Rubens monograph of 1840. Waagen translated *maccaturae* with 'small folds of the skin' and commented: 'This, I believe, is the meaning of the word maccatura, which doubtless is connected with the Italian word *macca*, superfluity. It is not to be found in the glossary of Duchange [*sic*]'.[72] A more elaborate attempt was made by Robert Peter Vischer in 1904:

> Rubens evidently uses the term *maccaturae* to describe the loose, flabby forms that can be seen around the abdomen, neck, ribs and knees of overly corpulent bodies and that have a specifically painterly character. "Maccatura" is listed in Du Cange's *glossarium ad scriptores mediae et infimae latinitatis* with the meaning "bulge" or "swelling" derived from "macha": haunch/club/cudgel, which in turn did originally mean nothing other than rounded, swollen. It is for this reason that R. Meißner, to whom I owe this piece of information, assumes that Maccus, the doltish buffoon in Atellan farces, was meant to be played by a thickset, stocky actor. The Italian words "macco" and "macca" stand for abundance or a plentiful heap of something, but also for bean purée and carnage. As Friedrich Diez shows in his etymological dictionary of the Romance languages, the basic meaning of the word is "something mashed, crushed, compacted". The Italian "maccare" and the Old French "maquer" for pounding, mashing, the Neapolitan "maccaria" and the Old French "macheure" for butchery, the Walloon "a make" for en masse and the Old French "maquet" for heap.[73]

And indeed, the vernacular *macco* has a related equivalent in several modern German dialects: the adjective 'mackelig', used in the Rhineland and in Hesse, means fat, plump and flabby.[74]

71 Ulrich Heinen, 'Haut und Knochen – Fleich und Blut', p. 106, n. 61.

72 Gustav Friedrich Waagen, *Peter Paul Rubens*, p. 126.

73 'Mit maccaturas meint Rubens hier offenbar die unbestimmten, "quappeligen" Formen, die namentlich an Bauch und Hals, an den Rippen und Knien übervollsäftiger Körper zu sehen sind und spezifisch malerischen Charakter haben. "Maccatura" findet sich in Ducanges glossarium ad scriptores mediae et infimae latinitatis verzeichnet in der Bedeutung: Beule, Anschwellung und abgeleitet von macha: Keule; und unser Keule heißt ursprünglich wiederum nichts anderes als, "Geschwollenes, Gerundetes". R. Meißner, dem ich diese Notiz verdanke, nimmt aus diesem Grund an, daß Maccus, die Dümmlingsfigur in den Atellana, als dicker, untersetzter Kerl gedacht war. – Mit dem italienischen macco und macca wird Überfluß, große Masse bezeichnet, aber auch Bohnenbrei und Gemetzel. Die Grundbedeutung ist, wie Fr. Diez in seinem etym. Wörterbuch der romanischen Sprachen feststellt, "etwas Gestampftes, Zerquetschtes, Zusammengedrängtes": Das italienische maccare und das altfranzösische maquer = quetschen, stampfen; das neapolitanische maccaria und das altfranzösische macheure = Metzelei; das wallonische a make = in menge und das altfranzösische maquet = Haufe.'; Robert Vischer, *Peter Paul Rubens. Ein Büchlein für unzünftige Kunstfreunde* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1904), p. 106.

74 Theodor Heinsius, *Vollständiges Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache mit Bezeichnung der Aussprache und Betonung für die Gesellschafts- und Lesewelt* (Vienna: C. F. Schade, 1830), III, p. 153. – I owe this pointer to the variants of German dialects to Anja Dollinger.

A Google search suggests that the adjective is still in use and that it has come to mean wobbly in addition to the aforementioned fat, plump and flabby.

Familiar with Rubens' ample nudes, Vischer, like Waagen before him, stuck to macco in the sense of plenty and abundance. They were not far off the mark. But to fully understand the artist's use of the word it is necessary to go beyond the Italian word *macco* and to take a closer look at *maccatura/macatura*. As Vischer observed, the word appears to have originated in the Middle Ages. According to Du Cange the connection between the medieval Latin words *macha* and *macatura* does not – contrary to Vischer's source of information – consist of a formal analogy of something round, swollen and bulging. Instead the link is causal. A *macatura* is the result of being hit by a club or cudgel. Du Cange's examples show that it is a physical injury, a lesion – not so much a protruding swelling as a dent. The definition of the subsequent Italian term *ammaccatura* corroborates this interpretation: '*incavo, deformazione prodotta in una superficie da un urto, da un colpo, da una pressione*'.[75] By the same token, the Italian word *macco* should not be traced back to the semantics of plenty and abundance but to that of the mashed and pounded.[76] This leads to pap, to mass, to something soft and amorphous and, ultimately, to something flabby, plump and voluptuous. The German dialect word *mackelig* is a derivative. A related word in modern Italian is *macinato*, which means ground, chopped and pounded. Here too the word denotes the result of a violent physical impact, without even a hint of a reference to luscious roundness or abundance.

All this is a far cry from the semantics of the stain (Latin *macula*). Whereas *ammaccatura* denotes a dent in a given body, *macchia* stands for an extraneous substance such as ink, dirt or paint that is applied to a surface or a body.[77] A modern-day Italian who wants to get rid of the *macchie* on his car takes it to the carwash. An *ammaccatura*, on the other hand, calls for the services of a body shop and possibly those of an insurance claims adjuster. In today's Italian this is the most common use of the word *ammaccatura*, and it still chimes with the medieval Latin *macatura*. In German this corresponds to the word *Macke*, which goes back to the Hebrew word for *hit* and denotes both dents in the bodywork or (in the figurative use of the word) being a bit soft in the head.[78]

This is the kind of *ammaccatura* Gianlorenzo Bernini depicted in his *Rape of Proserpina* of 1622, where he gave prominence to the deep indentation left by Pluto's fingers in the yielding flesh of Proserpina's thigh.[79] Not quite as prominent but equally worthy of attention is Pluto's left hand grasping Proserpina's waist. Here the pressure of his grip digging

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75 Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1961), I, p. 394, s.v. 'Ammaccatura'. – For the consistency of the entire word family see: *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (Florence: appresso Domenico Maria Mani, 1729–38), I (1729), p. 152 f. s.v. 'ammaccamento', 'ammaccare', 'ammaccato', 'ammaccatura'; *Il grande dizionario Garzanti della lingua italiana* (Milan: Garzanti, 1993), p. 78, s.v. 'ammaccamento', 'ammaccare', 'ammaccato', 'ammaccatura'.

76 Ottorino Pianigiani, *Vocabolario etimologico della lingua italiana* (La Spezia: Fratelli Melita Editori, 1991), p. 48, s.v. 'ammaccare'.

77 Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande dizionario* (1975), VIV, p. 349, s.v. 'macchia'. – Also a vigorous paint application (*colpo di pennello*) leads to no more than a *macchia*. An indentation of the paint surface does not enter into the equation.

78 *Duden. Das große Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache in sechs Bänden* (Mannheim/Vienna/Zürich: Bibliographisches Institut, Dudenverlag, 1978), IV, s.v. 'Macke'.

79 Compare the excellent illustration Rudolf Wittkower, *Bernini. The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque* (1955, fourth ed. Princeton/N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), pl. 20.

into Proserpina's body makes her soft flesh bulge out between his fingers. These *ammaccature* are a demonstration of exceptional skill. Bernini placed *carne* between Pluto's fingers just as Michelangelo had placed a fold of drapery between Christ's fingers in his celebrated *Pietà* – a brilliantly ingenious extra touch that provoked emulation and competition. It is one of those evocative motifs, already praised by Pliny,[80] that sculptors use to appeal to the viewer's sense of touch and to invite him to look beyond the limitations of the material and to perceive stone as soft and malleable. It stands to reason that Rubens, writing about painting transcending the stoniness of stone, would take those motifs that feign softness in sculpture as his starting point.

We have to distinguish two kinds of *ammaccature*. Bernini's erotically appealing dimples and bumps tend to be the result of a vehement interaction between two bodies. Rubens, on the other hand, was interested not only in the *maccaturae* caused by pressure or momentary shifts and crushes (in the original sense of the word *macatura*), but also in long-term physical conditions with bumps and dents as a result of obesity, old age or the specific anatomy of certain parts of the body.

To understand this broader concept of *maccatura* better, we need to look at Italian art theory from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Here, under the heading *ammaccature*, the artistic value of the correct depiction of bumps and creases is indeed discussed in some detail. For the artist it is of no consequence whether or not the dents in question are caused by an external impact, all that matters is the difficult task of rendering convincingly the delicate and soft folds and creases of fabrics and flesh, of *panni* and *carni*, described by Giorgio Vasari,[81] Antonio Francesco Doni[82] and Filippo Baldinucci.[83]

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80 Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia* XXXVI, 24.

81 Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori*, I, p. 89 f. (1568): instruction to sculptors for the creation of life-sized models: 'La qual condotta, se se le vuol poi fare panni addosso che siano sottili, si piglia pannolino che sia sottile, e se grosso, grosso, e si bagna; e bagnato, con la terra s'interra, non liquidamente ma di un loto che sia alquanto sodetto, et attorno alla figura si va acconciandolo, che faccia quelle pieghe et amaccature che l'animo gli porge [...]'. Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori*, III, p. 107 f. (1568): 'Masolino da Panicale [...] fu nel fare i panni delle figure era molto dèstro e valente, e nel rinettare ebbe molto buona maniera et intelligenza; onde nel cesellare fece con più destrezza alcune ammaccature morbidamente, così nelle membra umane come ne' panni'. Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori*, IV, p. 277 (1550): Relating to Andrea Sansovino's *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* in Sant' Agostino in Rome: '[...] non può questa opera tanto lodarsi che basti, per vedersi in essa panni, dalla delicata mano di Andrea condotti di sorte che meglio di lui non è chi abbia in tal genere lavorato, con tante belle discrezioni e girar di pieghe e dolcezza di ammaccature'. Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori*, IV, p. 357 f. (1568): Relating to Andrea del Sarto's Madonna of the Harpies: 'Ha questa Madonna da man ritta un San Francesco molto ben fatto, nella testa del quale si conosce la bontà e semplicità che fu veramente in quel santo huomo; oltre ciò sono i piedi bellissimi e così i panni; perché Andrea con un girar di pieghe molto ricco e con alcune ammaccature dolci sempre contornava le figure in modo che si vedeva l'ignudo'.

82 Anton Francesco Doni, *Disegno del Doni, partito in piu ragionamenti, ne quali si tratta della Scoltura et Pittura de'colori, de'getti, de modegli con molte cose appartenenti a quest'arti...* (Venice: appresso Gabriele Giolito De Ferrari, 1549), lib. I, parte 2, fol. 15v: '[...] ma io voglio proporre opera di maggior virtu, con mostrar l'ordine de panni grossi e sottili con infinite ombre, d'intorni, e amaccature; che variatissimamente si causano da gl'habiti sopradetti [...]'.

83 Filippo Baldinucci, *Vocabolario toscano dell'arte del disegno* (Florence: Per Santi Franchi, 1681), sez. I, 9: 'Ammaccatura f. – Termine usato dalli Scultori, e tal ora da' Pittori, per esplicare certe pieghe di panni, e anche delle stesse carni, dolcissimamente piegate in superficie, che non posson dirsi, nè solchi, nè pieghe, nè grinze; perchè a pena appariscono all'occhio di chi bene intende il rilievo, nelle quali bene spesso consiste la grazia della cosa scolpita o dipinta'.

Of particular note in relation to Rubens' treatise is a passage in Ludovico Dolce's *Aretino* of 1557. In this fictitious dialogue, Dolce had the famous connoisseur Pietro Aretino explain that in painting delicate bodies were preferable to muscular ones, justifying his statement with the degree of difficulty. In this context he also used the term *macature*:

> I think myself that a delicate body ought to take precedence over a muscular one. And the reason is that, in art, the flesh areas impose a more strenuous task of imitation than the bones do. For nothing goes into the latter except hardness, whereas only the flesh areas embody softness, the most refractory element in painting – so refractory, indeed, that the number of painters who have had it at their command in the past or give it satisfactory expression in their work today is very small indeed. So the man who practices a detailed elaboration of the muscles is really aiming to give an organised picture of the bone structure, and this is commendable; often, however, he succeeds in making the human figure look flayed or desiccated or ugly. The man who works in the delicate manner, on the other hand, gives an indication of the bones where he needs to do so; but he covers them smoothly with flesh and charges the nude figure with grace. And if you tell me at this point that the way in which the painter elaborates his nudes enables one to recognise whether or not he has a good grasp of anatomy – a field of knowledge which plays a very necessary role with the artist, since without bone structure the human figure cannot be modelled nor clothed in flesh – I will reply that the suggestive indications and the fleshy passages give one the same insight. And above and beyond the fact that a tender and delicate nude is naturally more pleasing to the eye than a robust and muscular one, let me refer you in conclusion to the works produced by the ancients, whose practice it was, by and large, to make their figures extremely delicate.[84]

84 Mark W. Roskill, *Dolce's 'Aretino' and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento* (New York: College Art Association of America by New York University Press, 1968), p. 143. 'Io stimo che un corpo delicato debba anteporsi al muscoloso. E la ragione è questa; ch'è maggior fatica nell'arte a imitar le carni, che l'ossa, perché in quelle non ci va altro che durezza, e in queste solo si contiene la tenerezza, ch'è la più difficil parte della pittura, in tanto che pochissimi pittori l'hanno mai saputa esprimere o la esprimono oggidì nelle cose loro bastevolmente. Chi adunque va ricercando minutamente i muscoli, cerca ben di mostrar l'ossature a' luoghi loro, il che è lodevole, ma spesse volte fa l'uomo scorticato o secco o brutto da vedere; ma chi fa il delicato, accenna gli ossi ove bisogna, ma gli ricopre dolcemente di carne e riempie il nudo di grazia. E se voi qui mi diceste che ne' ricercamenti de' nudi si conosce se il pittore è intendente della notomia, parte molto bisognevole al pittore, perché senza le ossa non si può formar né vestir di carni l'uomo; vi rispondo che '1 medesimo si comprende negli accennamenti e macature. E per conchiudere, oltre che all'occhio naturalmente aggradisce più un nudo gentile e delicato che un robusto e muscoloso, vi rimetto alle cose degli antichi, i quali per lo più hanno usato di far le lor figure delicatissime.'; Ludovico Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura, intitolato L'Aretino* (Venice: appresso G. Giolito de' Ferrari, 1557), p. 142, quoted after Paola Barocchi, *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento fra manierismo e controriforma* (Bari: Giuss. Laterza & Figli, 1960), I, p. 177 f. – Barrocchi does not comment (I, p. 465 f.) on the term *macature*, but analyses commonalities and differences relating to pertinent passages from Alberti and Leonardo. With *accennamenti* (indications or suggesstions) *e macature* Dolce obviously meant, that the tentative rendering of the bony structure within a fleshy complexion in profile view is entirely sufficient to do justice to the anatomy. Mark Roskill translated this passage accordingly, see Mark Roskill, *Dolce's 'Aretino'*, p. 143: 'I will reply that the suggestive indications and the fleshy passages give one the same insight'. Anna Pallucchini's

Dolce used the antiquated form of *macature* which was closer to the medieval *macaturae* than the term *ammaccature* which was already in use in the cinquecento. This alone should make us wonder if Rubens had not been inspired by this particular passage. The conjecture is lent extra weight when we consider that although Rubens did not share Dolce's preference for delicate bodies, both authors roundly rejected the hard, dry depiction of the human body and bolstered their argument by taking recourse to antique models.

The *maccaturae* argument in Rubens' treatise can thus be traced back to educated discussions in Italy and the artist's reading of Italian art theory.[85] What is more, it becomes apparent that the term was central to Italian art criticism, where the ability to render the softness of *carni* and *panni* was seen as a key indicator of an artist's sophistication. It was here that the flaws of the hard, dry manner were most conspicuous, and it was also here that the *disegno*-inspired manner differed most from the more *colorito*-inspired one. Surprisingly, Roger de Piles lacked the key to the translation of the term *maccatura* as well as a sense for the critical significance of the term which he marginalised by translating it as *certains endroits*.

Decadence

The next section of the treatise states that although painters had to be mindful of the abovementioned characteristics of sculpture, they should study classical statues assiduously, as their own era had evidently grown too old and weak to produce bodies as magnificent as those that had come down to them in sculptures from a time in which humanity was still closer to its origins and natural perfection. This thought was obviously the product of a range of considerations and discussions, and Rubens expanded on it with a series of alternative and mutually complementary reasons.

> Anyone who has made these distinctions with wise discernment may embrace the close study of statues. For what can we degenerates do in this age of error, when low-grade talent pins us to the ground, inferior as we are to the heroic intellect of former times <and> to its discrimination? For we are darkened by the fog of our forefathers, or else, by the will of the gods, we have fallen to a worst state, unforgiven after our fall or weakened by irrecoverable loss as the world grows older. Or else in ancient times even an [*sc.* inanimate] object presented <itself> automatically constructed quite close to its natural original and to perfection, whereas

critique of this translation is hence without foundation. Anna Pallucchini, 'Review of Roskill (1968)', *The Art Bulletin*, 54 (1972), 96: 'the phrase 'accennamenti e macature' must be clearly understood as projections and hollows in the body surface'. A few pages later, Dolce allows his interlocutor Fabrini to use the term *maccature*, when he declares his preference for the more striking anatomy of Michelangelo's nudes over that of Raphael's figures: 'Non dimostrò l'ossature, le maccature, e certi nervetti e minutezze, quanto ha fatto Michel'Agnolo' (Mark Roskill, *Dolce's 'Aretino'*, p. 174). Aretino, on the other hand, criticised Michelangelo's nudes as indecent and overdone. It is, of course, correct to observe, that Michelangelo elaborated both the soft and the firm parts of human anatomy with great vehemence – in his sculptures as well. And it is for this reason that his sculptures were among those that Rubens admired and studied.

85 The origin of the optical argument in Rubens treatise will be traced below to its Italian context.

> now, having been corrupted by happenings which have befallen it during the elapse of centuries moving towards old age, it has kept nothing of itself, as perfection slides downward into a worse state with the coming of successive vices. In similar fashion the heights to which human beings grow are considered in the opinion of many to be declining. For authors, sacred and profane, tell of an age of heroes, giants and Cyclopes, much of what they say, indeed, being fanciful, but some things true, without a doubt. [see notes 141–46]

Theorems of decadence and progressive decline do, of course, have a long history, reaching all the way to antiquity.[86] Relevant passages that Rubens may have known can be found in art theoretical texts of the fifteenth and sixteenth century,[87] and Emil Kieser highlighted similar considerations in the artist's immediate circle as early as 1933.[88] Such precedents notwithstanding, we should be wary of simply relegating Rubens' perception to the realm of literary commonplaces. What is truly remarkable is not the theorem as such, but the fact that Rubens seems to have considered classical sculptures as credible witnesses for the physical constitution of man in antiquity. This is an astonishing assumption of naturalism for a practicing artist who knew the profession inside out.

To understand this strange argument, it is necessary to look at the context in which Rubens studied the material heritage of antiquity. In Rome, probably more than anywhere else, the sheer size of the ancient ruins conveyed an overwhelming sense of the greatness and power of the past that the modern era was struggling to measure up to. In view of these monuments it was not too farfetched to imagine the people who had built the Colosseum and conquered the Roman Empire as heroic, powerfully built figures in the image of the surviving statues. The pair of colossal Horse Tamers from the Quirinal Hill, for example, were seen as the epitome of the athletic physique and of heroic vigour.[89]

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86 *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Basel: Schwabe, 1984), VI, pp. 838–46, s.v. Niedergang, Untergang (P. Widmer).

87 Jeffrey Muller, 'Rubens's Theory and Practice', 232, n. 25, quoted after passages by Leon Battista Alberti and Ludovico Dolce. Ulrich Heinen, *Rubens zwischen Kunst und Predigt*, p. 198, n. 104, refers to complementary passages in Alberti and Armenini.

88 Emil Kieser, 'Antikes im Werke des Rubens', *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, 10 (1933), 135, n. 52, refers to the following passages in letters: Rooses and Ruelens, *Correspondance de Rubens*, I (1887), p. 59 (no. XII): Philipp Rubens to Peter Paul Rubens on 15 July 1602: 'Quid veterrimi sanctissimique patres, qui quo propius ab exordio mundi aberant, eo magis ad ejus conditorem et perfectam naturam accedebant?', ibidem, V (1907), 9 (no. DLXIII), Morisot to Rubens on 13 September 1628: 'Sed jam artes senectute saeculorum debilitatae homines non reperiunt qui mereantur aeternitatem'.

89 For Rubens' drawings and adaptations of the Horse Tamers: Marjon Van der Meulen, *Copies after the Antique*, II, pp. 91–93, no. 75. Rubens understood the Horse Tamers as a typical action and movement motif that could also be found in battle scenes: 'figures en action qu'on voit dans les représentations des batailles: celles d'Alexandre domptant le cheval Bucéphale, au mont Quirinal à Rome'; Pierre Paul Rubens, *Théorie de la figure humaine*, ed. by Nadeije Laneyrie-Dagen (Paris: Rue d'Ulm, 2003), p. 62. This observation also demonstrates the artist's archaeologically correct understanding of the motif. This is not surprising; Rubens had studied Michelangelo's relief of the *Battle of the Centaurs*, in which Michelangelo had translated the type of the Horse Tamer into the fray of a battle. Here archaeological understanding was based on the discernment of other artists who had extracted and adapted relevant motifs. For the type of the Horse Tamer, see Andreas Thielemann, 'Schlachten erschauen-Kentauren gebären. Zu Michaelangelos Relief der Kentaurenschlacht', in

The famous dictum *Roma quanta fuit ipsa ruina docet* (How great Rome was, its very ruins tell) was not just an empty phrase in sixteenth and early seventeenth-century Rome. It corresponded to a very real sense of the monumentality of the ancient buildings and sculptures that struck visitors from north of the Alps even more forcefully than the city's everyday residents.[90] It was for this reason that Lipsius studied the great amphitheatres in which the Romans had tested their courage and strength (*De amphitheatris*, 1585), that he alluded to the city's greatness in the title of his book on Rome (*Admiranda, sive de magnitudine Romana*, 1605), and, finally, that Rubens placed the *Four Philosophers* of the Lipsius circle in front of an imagined view of the ruins of the Palatine (fig. 4). This circle of friends who devoted so much of their time to studying Rome were acutely aware of having the greatest period of human history – the era of Seneca and the imperial palaces of Rome – quite literally behind them.

Of particular note in this section is the reference to the 'compactness' that had characterised the things of the natural world – among them the human body – in their original state. Grammatically inconsistent, the Latin original of the sentence cannot be translated literally, but the train of thought is clear in as much as Rubens speaks of a degeneration in which something that was originally perfect and compact disintegrates and loses itself in multiplicity.

That the choice of the word *compactum* in this context is not just a vague metaphor is demonstrated by a page in Rubens' notebook on which he developed concrete ideas for the square build of ancient heroes and athletes. His starting point and test piece was the *Farnese Hercules* whose torso and head he inscribed with *cubi* or *quadrati* to illustrate the build of the ancient *vir robustus*. The inscription[91] on this drawing, which has come down to us in the original, reads *Forma Herculea siue robusti viri supra modum ex cubo fundamentum habet* (fig. 14 , see also Woodall, fig. 3).[92]

This *probatio cubi* shows Rubens as a historical anthropologist, following up on his reading about the powerful build of the athletes and heroes of the past. Entirely in keeping with the spirit of *De Imitatione Statuarum*, it was a statue that stood in for a classical hero as the object of his investigation.

The broader intellectual context of this geometric analysis becomes clearer when

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Michael Rohlmann and Andreas Thielemann (eds), *Michelangelo. Neue Beiträge* (Berlin and Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2000), pp. 17–92.

90 An early example is Hermannus Posthumus, who emphasised the difference in scale between classical remains and modern-day humans in his pictures; see Nicole Dacos, *Roma quanta fuit: tre pittori fiamminghi nella Domus Aurea*, newly revised, edited and introduced edition (Rome: Donzelli, 2001).

91 'Vir *HPAKΔEΣ* [*sic*] /Forma Herculea siue robusti viri supra modum / ex cubo Fundamentum habet (Ut Columnae Tuscum genus / quod Atletis assimilatur) Tum ex Circulo perfecto / et Equilaterali nascitur Triangulo, / Ex Cubo, siue quadrato perfecto Latitudo pectoris / dorsi Scapulorum etc. etc. Et Crassitudo pectoris / et dorsi et lumborum / Item natis alte succinctae / Item in capite Tempora / valde plena, Musculi / oculis imminentes et magni et / Carnosi supra modum ad quadraturam / frontis pertinent ad quadraturam / vero integri capilli Anguli barbae ad maxillarum / latera capellatis Temporibus correspondentes / Probatio Cubi ex Herculis Farnesij facie seu capite / Ex Antiquo'.

92 Michael Jaffé, *Van Dyck's Antwerp Sketchbook*, I, fig. XII and XIII (copy in *Ms Johnson*, fol. 40r); Jeffrey M. Muller, 'Rubens's Theory and Practice', 236 f. with fig. 3; Helen Braham, *Rubens. Paintings, Drawings, Prints*, 1988, p. 52 f., no 59; Marjon Van der Meulen, *Copies after the Antique*, II, pp. 44–46, III, fig. 37 f.; Arnout Balis, 'Rubens und Invention', p. 22 f., figs 5 and 6 (copy in *Ms Johnson*, fol. 40r); David Jaffé (ed.), *Rubens. A Master in the Making*, p. 92 f., no. 27 f.

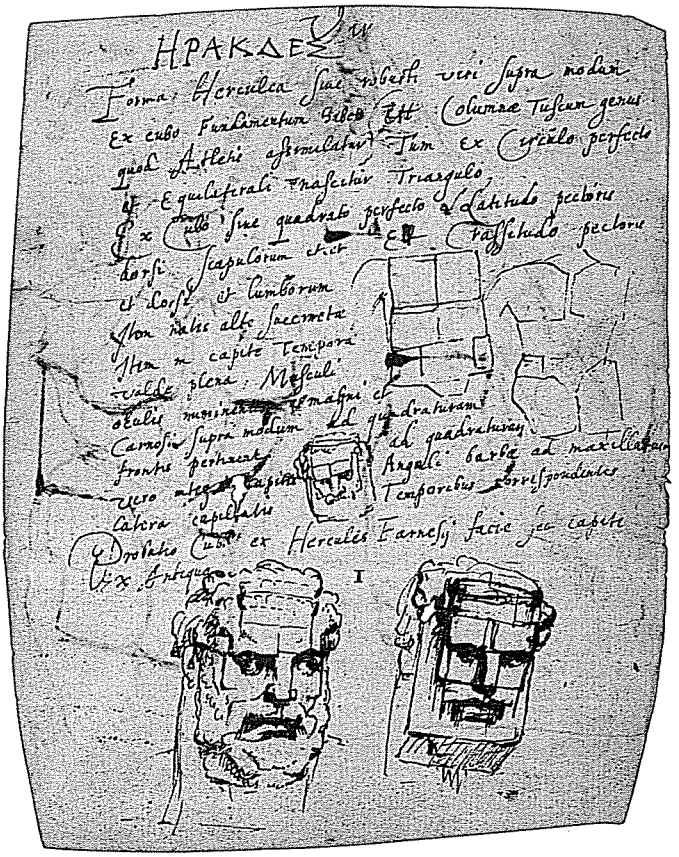

Fig. 14. Peter Paul Rubens, Study of the *Farnese Hercules*, pen and ink on paper, 19.6 × 15.3 cm, Ms Johnson, fol. 40r, London, The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery London

we look at the first sheet of the notebook, copies of which have survived in the *Johnson* and *De Ganay* manuscripts as well as in French paraphrases in *Théorie de la figure humaine*.[93] The latter was published by Charles-Antoine Jombert under Rubens' name in 1773. It contains some material that does not go back to Rubens, but it is based primarily on the *De Ganay* manuscript, which in turn combines authentic copies after Rubens with apocryphal material. Taken together, these three indirect sources offer a reliable idea of the first page of the lost notebook, on which Rubens developed a theory of the basic geometric shapes of the human body: thus the square defines the athletic male, the circle the female form and the triangle the pointed form of human limbs. Rubens' references to a chapter in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* and to a passage in Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* offer only the most general of explanations[94] and cannot hide the fact that the schematisation, elsewhere attributed to

93 Michael Jaffé, *Van Dyck's Antwerp Sketchbook*, I, p. 20, fig. LXXV (*Ms de Ganay*, fol. 4r); Tine Meganck, 'Rubens on the Human Figure', p. 53, fig. 1 (*Ms Johnson*, fol. 1). The respective contents can be found in chapts. 1 and 2 of the *Théorie de la figure humaine*: Rubens, *Théorie de la figure humaine*, pp. 53–60. – The first page of the sketchbook is also thematically linked to the separate text *De forma foemina* which was copied in the middle of *Ms Johnson, de Ganay* and *Chatsworth*: Tine Meganck, 'Rubens on the Human Figure', pp. 53–56. Compare here the text of *Ms de Ganay*, fol. 59r-v: Rubens, *Théorie de la figure humaine*, ed. by Nadeije Laneyrie-Dagen, p. 208 (Appendix 4).

94 Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I, 47: Cicero relativises the Platonic preference for the sphere by contrasting it with his fondness for cylinders, cubes, cones or pyramids: 'qui animantem inmortalem et eundem beatum, rutundum esse velint, quod ea forma neget ullam esse pulchriorem Plato [*Timaios*, 33b]: at mihi vel cylindri vel quadrati vel coni vel pyramidis videtur esse formosior'. Rubens, on the other hand, held that the square-

Pythagoras,[95] is a synthesis of his own making. And it is probably for that reason as well that this analytical extract graced the title page of his notebook. Regarding the cubic building pattern of the athletic male, Rubens noted a characteristic trait that once again contains the key word *compactum*:

> Ex cubo, siue figura ab omni latere quadrata, sit omne Masculum, aut Virile, et quicquid Grave, Forte, Robustum, Compactum, et Athleticum est, et quicquid formae Quadrati detraxeris Amplitudini quoque peribit.[96]

Pythagorean ideas were widespread in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, so much so that the painter and theorist Gian Paolo Lomazzo advanced them in his treatise on painting.[97] Later centuries, of course, have viewed them with suspicion, and it is no wonder that it was not until relatively recently that research reluctantly began to look at this aspect of Rubens' indirect legacy. It confirmed a theory first voiced by Michael Jaffé, who had suggested as early as 1966 that the body shape texts were connected to the unquestionably authentic *De Imitatione Statuarum*.[98] Further corroboration of this assumption can be found in the use of the word *compactum*, which both the French and the German translators of the treatise have deliberately ignored and which forms a direct lexical link between the *probatio cubi* and *De Imitatione Statuarum*.

In this context it has to be emphasised that Rubens is unlikely to have picked up on the metaphysical teachings on the basic forms of the human body had he not discerned a clear tendency towards the cubic build in the contemporary athlete and the classical sculpture of Heracles. It is not without reason that men of that physique are commonly referred to as square-built or built like a wardrobe.

based form of the male body represented the most perfect articulation of the human form and gave expression to that conviction in the first sentence of the second chapter of his *Théorie de la figure humaine*, ed. by Nadeije Laneyrie-Dagen, p. 59. Cicero's sceptical objection would therefore also apply to Rubens. The artist's reference to Cicero appears to have been no more than a general reinforcement of his observations on geometrical archetypes. By the same token, the reference to Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, I, X. should be read as a similar general underpinning. Here Quintilian merely mentions geometry as part of the canonical subjects, in which the ideal rhetorician should be trained. These references in the two manuscripts are once again picked up in footnote 'a' of the first chapter in the *Théorie de la figure humaine*, in which Rubens refers to Quintillian alone: Rubens, *Théorie de la figure humaine*, ed. by Nadeije Laneyrie-Dagen, p. 53.

95 Thus in the text *Quare Figurae Humanae Elementa tria sunt* (*Ms Johnson*, fol. 2r–3r; *Ms De Ganay*, fol. 5r-v), which – along with its French translation – was published as appendix 2 in: Rubens, *Théorie de la figure humaine*, ed. by Nadeije Laneyrie-Dagen, pp. 196–201. Jombert considered this text as not by Rubens and thus did not include it in the publication of *Théorie de la figure humaine*. Nadeije Laneyrie-Dagen and Tine Meganck accept it and two other texts exluded by Jombert as part of the Rubens oeuvre: Rubens, *Théorie de la figure humaine*, ed. by Nadeije Laneyrie-Dagen, pp. 29–39; Tine Meganck, 'Rubens on the Human Figure'.

96 See note 115. Except for a minor correction to the spelling, this corresponds to footnote 'a' of the first chapter of the *Théorie de la figure humaine*, Nadeije Laneyrie-Dagen, see note 116.

97 Michael Jaffé, *Van Dyck's Antwerp Sketchbook*, I, p. 20, also made the connection with Lomazzo and quoted from the eleventh chapter of Book 1 of Lomazzo's *Trattato dell'arte della pittura* of 1584: 'Pittagora grandissimo filosofo fa ampla fede della verità dei precetti della proporzione de' corpi, poichè per mezzo di quelli scegliendo la proporzione di Ercole da quella degli altri Dei, trovò quanta fasse la grandezza del corpo, e conseguentemente di quanto avanzasse gli altri uomini'. There is, however, no mention of the basic, cubic form of man and Hercules.

98 Michael Jaffé, *Van Dyck's Antwerp Sketchbook*, I, p. 20, on Rubens' analysis of the *Hercules Farnese*: 'Such a learned approach, at once literary and visual, typifies vividly one aspect of Rubens' passionate investigation of antiquity, which must be taken in conjunction with what he wrote in *De Imitatione (Antiquarum) Statuarum*'.

The conjunction of geometry and ideal physique probably also reminded Rubens of some of the more arcane traditions of Pythagorean art training. He may, for example, have thought of Pamphilus, the teacher of Apelles, who maintained that painting could not be brought to perfection without arithmetic and geometry,[99] or Apelles himself, whom Nicoletto da Modena portrayed as the very embodiment of the study of basic geometric shapes in his idealised engraving.[100]

Countering the modern misgivings about Pythagorean ideas is also the fact that at the beginning of the seventeenth century the model of geometrisation was by no means just an archaic relic of a metaphysical mindset, but that it defined the methods of the most forward-thinking natural scientists, among them Galileo Galilei and Johannes Kepler. Rubens' friend Adam Elsheimer combined geometrising tendencies with the empirical depiction of nature.[101] Rubens was not the man to entertain mere *topoi* of any kind; his interest in formulae and archetypes was constructive and geared towards empiricism and direct experience. What is more, Rubens himself identified his searching approach as empirical when he referred to his analysis of the Farnese Hercules as a *probatio cubi*. It is important to keep this idea of the *probatio* in mind. It denotes a much more complex situation than the undifferentiated discussion of *topoi* suggests and is typical of the experience-focused epistemology that characterises the entire treatise.

Physical culture

The term *probatio* could also serve as a subheading for the third part of the treatise which deals solely with the presentation of a physiologically and historically plausible reason for the good physical constitution of the ancients. Drawing on his experience and the state of knowledge of his time, Rubens praised the physical culture of antiquity and admonished his contemporaries for their *inexercitatum vivendi genus*:

> The main respect in which men of our age differ from the ancients is their sloth and their unexercised life-style: that is, their eating and drinking and lack of concern for the exercise of the body. As a consequence, the pressed-down weight of a stomach protrudes, always full because of assiduous gluttony; legs are effeminized and arms, aware of their inactivity. By contrast, in ancient times everyone used to exercise violently every day on wrestling grounds and in gymnasia, and this was, to tell the truth, too much just for working up a sweat: it went all the way to extreme fatigue. See Mercurialis, *On the Gymnastic Art*. How many types of exercises they had, how difficult and how vigorous! In this way, those indolent parts of

99 Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia* XXXV, 76.

100 Peter Lüdemann, 'Der Dichter am Grab des Malers: Randbemerkungen zu Nicoletto da Modenas "Apelles" und Giorgiones "Tempesta"', *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 68 (2007), 255–64.

101 Andreas Thielemann, '"Natur pur?" Literarische Quellen und philosophische Ziele der Naturdarstellung bei Adam Elsheimer', in Andreas Thielemann and Stefan Gronert (eds), *Adam Elsheimer in Rom. Werk – Kontext – Wirkung* (Munich: Hirmer, 2008), p. 127.

> the body were reduced to a great extent. The stomach was pulled back as the abdomen became muscular, as was anything in the human body which is passive in the course of exercise. Moreover, of course, arms, legs, neck, shoulders and all active parts of the body, thanks to nature and to heat that produces an access of fluid, are immensely increased and grow large, as we observe in the case of: the backs of Gaetulians, the arms of gladiators, the legs of dancers and almost the whole bodily physique of oarsmen. [see notes 147–48]

One has to wonder how this third part, which seems to have only the most tenuous of connections with the imitation of sculptures, found its way into the treatise and was allowed to take up a third of its length. But it can be demonstrated that for a particular kind of imitation of sculptures this aspect of exemplary physical exercise was discussed and read into the appearance of the sculpture.

The Seneca statue: the catalyst for the treatise

The Seneca statue is the figure of the African fisherman mentioned earlier which was misidentified in the late sixteenth century as an image of the dying Seneca. After his return from Italy, Rubens brought it to life in his painting of the dying and speaking Seneca (fig. 6). In 1601, while Rubens was still in Rome and the statue was installed at Palazzo Altemps, it was set in a specially commissioned marble basin, complete with a porphyry insert that simulated the bloodied water, to create a strikingly realistic representation of the Stoic philosopher's suicide as described by Tacitus. The physiological verism of the meticulously carved veins, sinews and muscles straining under the skin and the unsparing depiction of an aged but otherwise physically fit body surpassed everything that was known in ancient sculpture. According to the criteria Rubens later defined in *De Imitatione Statuarum* it was an exceptional piece, a *tour de force* of naturalism that depicted the living flesh and its *maccaturae* with utmost sensitivity.

Rubens aimed for a specific rhetorical effect[102] when he translated the sculpture into paint. Out of respect for the precious document-character of the motif he kept it in its entirety – like an icon – and refrained from making any major changes. This translation process had already begun in Rome, where, probably with a view to a future painting, Rubens had made a series of meticulous drawings that captured the statue in all its details from six different angles. This comprehensive and detailed survey corresponds to the close study of the sculptural model that Rubens described as *imbibitio* in the treatise.

There were several reasons for the close attention to the physiological aspects emphasised in the treatise. The most obvious was the exceptional quality of the Seneca statue with its prominent veins, gnarly joints and folds of loose skin where the body is bent. For his Heraclitus of 1603 Rubens had invented a similarly striking physique drawing on an

102 See above.

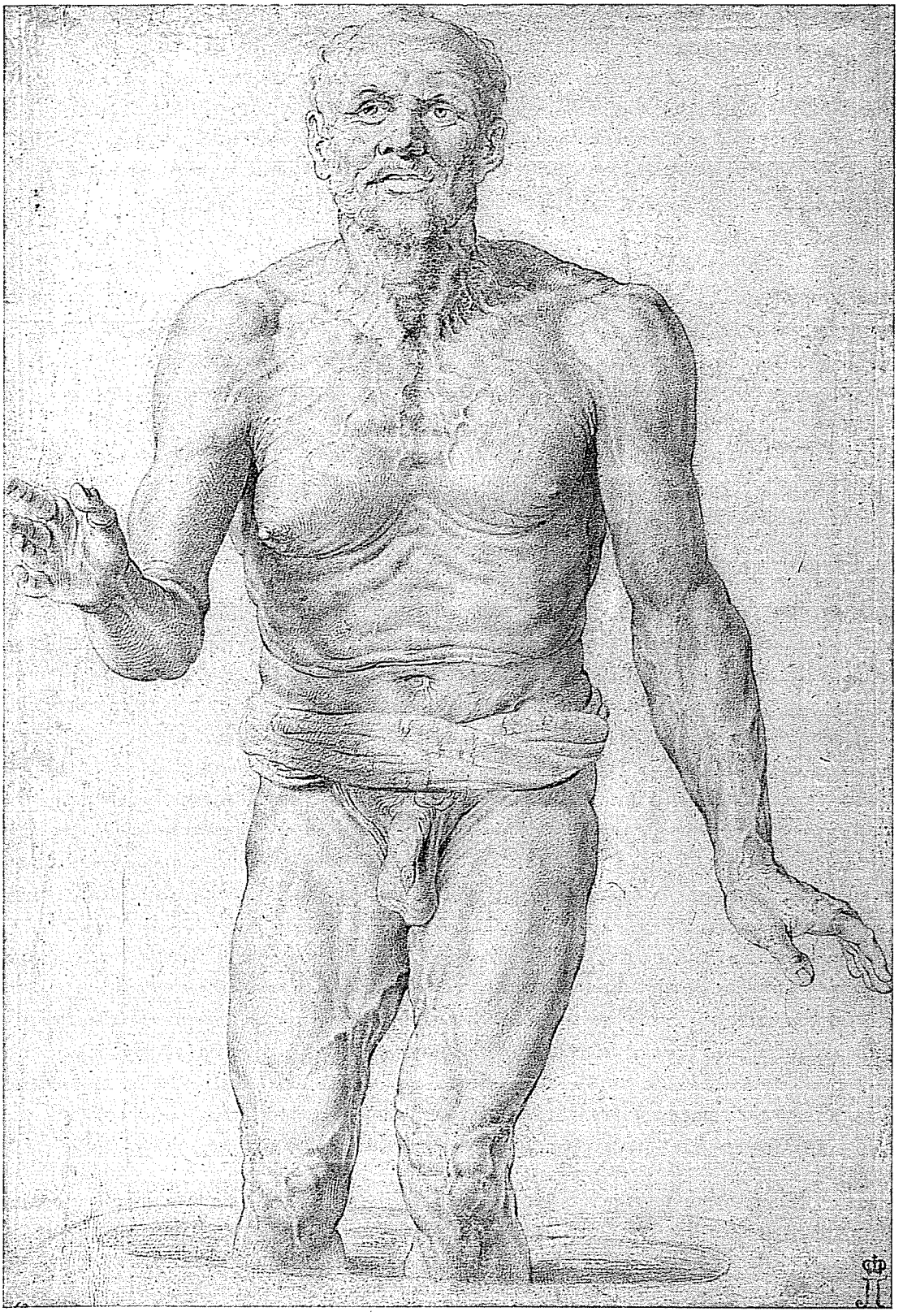

Fig. 15. Peter Paul Rubens, *African Fisherman (Upper Body of the 'Seneca Statue')*, 1600–1602, black chalk on paper, 46 × 32 cm, The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. © The State Hermitage Museum. Photo by Vladimir Terebenin, Leonard Kheifets

antique bust of Galba.[103] In the case of Seneca it came with the model.[104] Rubens' special interest in these elements is already evident in the studies. In the frontal view (fig. 15)[105] he exaggerated the *maccaturae* and gave the old man's flaccid breasts a dynamic asymmetry that cannot be found in the sculpture nor in the later painting (fig. 16). It would seem that Rubens considered this part of the sculpture's physiology too rigid, too unresponsive to the eloquent gesture of the right arm. Improvements on the model are not uncommon in the artist's copies; they echo his conviction that all art could be brought closer to perfection. Here he singled out the *maccaturae*, which are exquisitely rendered in the sculpture, but which could be rendered with even greater sensitivity and differentiation in a medium that was not limited by the properties of stone.[106]

A second reason was his interest in the unfolding physiological process of the philosopher's death, which he sought to render in all its inward and outward manifestations. The bleeding veins invite the viewer to look through the skin to see the underlying tissue, to notice the areas of bluish grey discolouration that are beginning to appear around the mouth as well as on other parts of the body and that herald the coming of death (fig. 6).

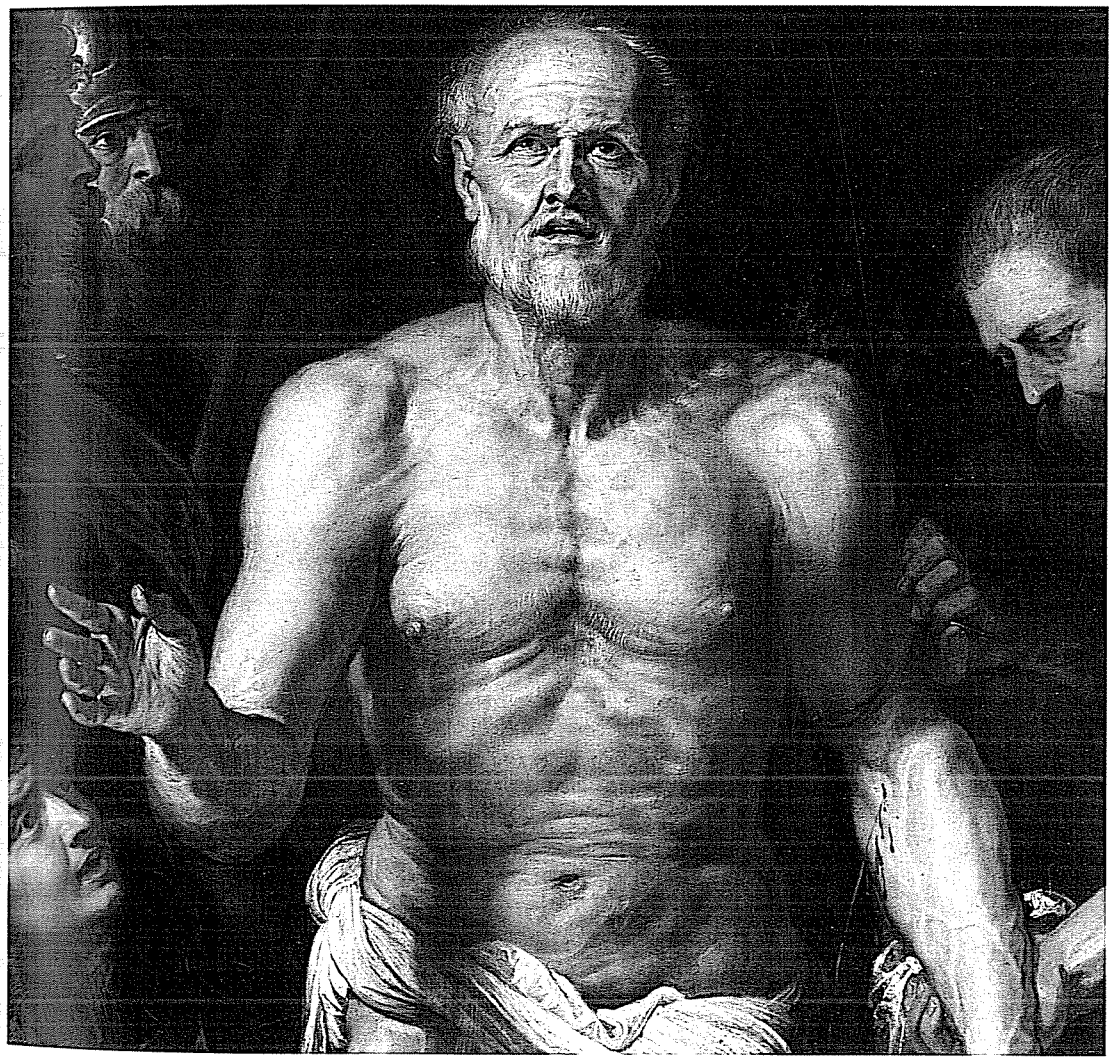

Fig. 16. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Dying Seneca* (detail), Munich, Alte Pinakothek

Third, there was a philosophical and hermeneutic reason to depict the process of dying in such an unsparing, penetrating manner. Seneca himself believed that it was crucial to face death with preparedness and practiced an acutely observed *praemeditatio mortis* in order to dispel any fear of death his students might harbour. If Rubens' painting was to fulfil its function as a lesson in Stoicism, it had to mirror Seneca's philosophical stance on death as well as his piercing insight into the composition of the body. In his 102nd letter to Lucilus Seneca wrote:

> We cannot yet, except at rare intervals, endure the light of heaven; therefore, look forward without fearing to that appointed hour, the last hour of the body but not of the soul. Survey everything that lies about you, as if it were luggage in a guest-chamber: you must travel on. Nature strips you as bare at your departure as at your entrance. You may take away no more than you brought in; what is more, you must throw away the major portion of that which you brought with you into life: you will be stripped of the very skin which covers you – that which has been your last protection; you will be stripped of the flesh, and lose the blood which is suffused and circulated through your body; you will be stripped of bones and sinews, the framework of these transitory and feeble parts. That day, which you fear as being the end of all things, is the birthday of your eternity.[107]

The philosopher's observations are as incisive as an anatomist's scalpel. Like Seneca, who peeled away layer after layer of the human body, naming them as he dug ever deeper, Rubens used the means of painting to expose the physiology of the dying body. The ruthlessness of his vision is shocking and brings Seneca's words to mind.

The piercingly sober observation of all that makes up the material existence of man and his corporeality is a basic trait of Stoic philosophy, and Seneca was occasionally given to push it to extremes of offensiveness (*Ad Marciam* 25, 1)[108] or scholarly ambition (*De tranquilitate animi* 14):

> The tyrant Lysimachus was threatening the philosopher Theodorus with death and even with lack of burial: "You have the right", he replied, "to please yourself, you have within your power only a half pint of my blood; for as to burial, you are a fool if you think it makes any difference to me whether I rot above ground or beneath it."[109]

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107 Seneca, *Epistulae* 102, 24–26, as cited in *Moral letters to Lucilius*, Loeb, translated by Richard Mott Gummere (London: W. Heinemann, 1925), III: 'Nondum caelum nisi ex intervallo pati possumus. Proinde intrepidus horam illam decretoriam prospice: non est animo suprema, sed corpori. Quidquid circa te iacet rerum tamquam hospitalis loci sarcinas specta: transeundum est. Excutit redeuntem natura sicut intrantem. Non licet plus efferre quam intuleris, immo etiam ex eo quod ad vitam adtulisti pars magna ponenda est: detrahetur tibi haec circumiecta, novissimum velamentum tui, cutis; detrahetur caro et suffusus sanguis discurrensque per totum; detrahentur ossa nervique, firmamenta fluidorum ac labentium. Dies iste quem tamquam extremum reformidas aeterni natalis est'.

108 You need not, therefore, hasten to the burial-place of your son: that which lies there is but the worst part of him and that which gave him most trouble, only bones and ashes, which are no more parts of him than clothes or other coverings of his body.

109 Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Moral Essays*, Loeb, translated by John W. Basore (London: W. Heinemann, 1928–35), III.

This was followed by the example of Julius Canus who argued with Emperor Caligula until the latter finally condemned him to death:

> His friends were sad at the thought of losing such a man; but "Why", said he, "are you sorrowful? You are wondering whether our souls are immortal; but I shall soon know". Nor up to the very end did he cease to search for truth and to make his own death a subject for debate. His own teacher of philosophy was accompanying him, and, when they were not far from the low hill on which the daily sacrifice to Caesar, our god, was made, said: "What are you thinking of now, Canus, or what state of mind are you in?". And Canus said: "I have determined to watch whether the spirit will be conscious that it is leaving the body when that fleetest of moments comes", and he promised that, if he discovered anything, he would make the round of his friends, and reveal to them what the state of the soul really is. Here is tranquillity in the very midst of the storm, here is a mind worthy of immortality – a spirit that summons its own fate to the proof of truth, that, in the very act of taking that one last step, questions the departing soul, and learns, not merely up to the point of death, but seeks to learn something even from death itself. No one has ever played the philosopher longer.

Rubens translated this Stoic desire for perception and insight, which included the desire for insight into the physiology of the human body and gave it the permanence art can bestow.

For the second edition of Lipsius' complete works of Seneca, published by Balthasar Moretus in 1615, Rubens produced a detailed engraving after the Seneca statue (fig. 17). Moretus wrote a commentary on the engraving in which he related all that was known from antique sources about Seneca's illness and his strenuous fitness regime to the appearance of the statue. He probably found inspiration for his observations in Lipsius' Seneca biography, which had been part of the 1605 edition and which was republished in 1615. Here, in chapter 9, *Corpus, morbi, forma*, Lipsius describes Seneca as a physically fit old man, a *senex bene exercitatum*. Printed in 1605, this text does not yet contain a response to the Rubens drawing of the statue, which had arrived from Rome in 1604, but it already exhorts the reader to use his mind's eye to envision the Roman philosopher. Couching his appeal in the words '*Vide senem, bene exercitatum!*', he fires the imagination with descriptions of the hard physical labour Seneca performed in his vineyard and his garden, which he had viewed as *artificium suum*.[110] Rubens' drawing of the sculpture provided the perfect illustration for the hitherto purely literature-based visualisation of Seneca. Although, unbeknownst to anyone at the time it actually showed an old, weather-beaten fisherman, it confirmed most admirably everything that Lipsius had reconstructed from the source texts. In the edition of 1615 Moretus combined Lipsius' exhortation with his own observations on the sculpture as he invited readers to contemplate the Rubens engraving (fig. 17).

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110 Justus Lipsius, *De vita et scriptis L. Annaei Senecae*, cap. IX: *Corpus, morbi, forma*, in the 1615 edition: *Seneca philosophus* (1615), fol. Xxxiiii: 'Ceterum, corpus etsi tenue, firmabat exercitiis durioribus: & cultu agri, & fossione vinearum: cuius meminit in Epistola quadam, & Quaestionibus Naturalibus: ubi *diligentem vinearum fossorem* se appellat: itemque universe hortorum. quod *artificium* etiam *suum* dicit'. This kind of abridgement of sources was typical for Lipsius. However, he never failed to provide the references *in margine*: '*ep.* 104; *nat.* II, 7; *ep.*112'.

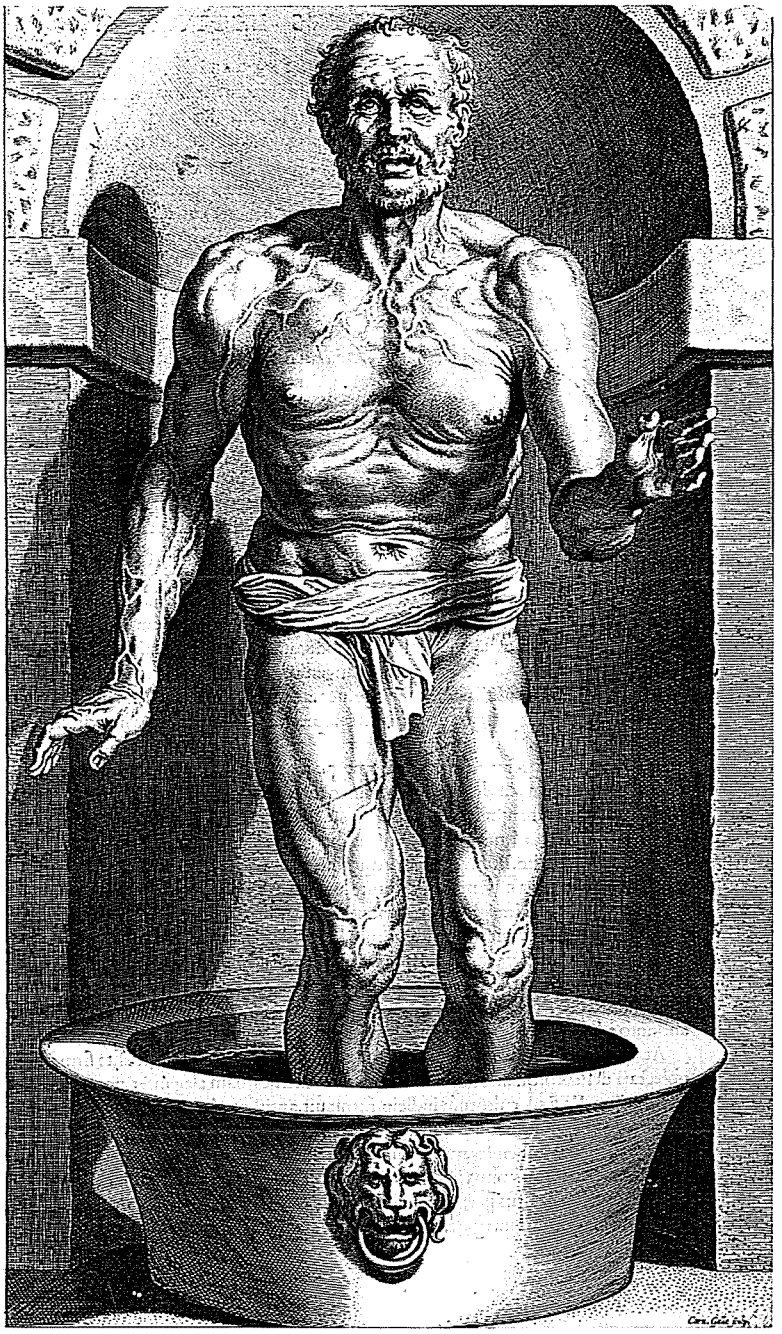

Fig. 17. Cornelius Galle the Elder, *Statue of Seneca after a drawing by Rubens*, engraving, 338 × 197 mm, illustration to the second edition of Justus Lipsius' *L. Annaei Senecae philosophi opera* (Antwerp, 1615), London, British Museum, The Trustees of the British Museum

Look carefully at his body, weakened by protracted illness, indefatigable study and – as Tacitus has it – a frugal diet. It is well-documented that he toughened his body with hard exercise, agricultural labour and digging trenches in his vineyards. The sculptor has rendered the thin skin, withered from the loss of sap and hardened by outdoor work, in the most ingenious and meticulous manner (*ingeniose et diligenter*), giving prominence to the veins and muscles that are much strengthened by physical work.[111]

111 *Balthasar Moretus Lectori S.*, in: Seneca philosophus (1615).

This brings us back to *De Imitatione Statuarum*. Moretus' commentary on the Rubens engraving confirms that it was indeed during the artist's engagement with the so-called Seneca statue that the Lipsius circle discussed the themes of the treatise – the benefits of physical work and exercise as well as the advantages of a sculptural style that gave full play to the accidentals of the human body; the latter would have been Rubens' contribution to this discourse. The members of the Lipsius circle celebrated the Seneca statue not only as a true image of the philosopher but also as one of an antique *senex bene exercitatum* (Lipsius), holding it up as a model and corrective to their contemporaries whose deplorable *inexercitatum vivendi genus* (Rubens) had given rise to indolence and obesity. With its folds of papery skin, sagging flesh hanging from the bones and prominent veins the Seneca statue displayed precisely those physiological characteristics that Rubens singled out in his treatise as being very difficult to capture in stone and as being attempted only by the very best sculptors. There can be no doubt that the discourse, which finally gave rise to the treatise, originated in Italy, where Rubens first drew the statue and adopted the concept of *ammacatura* and *maccaturae*.

Rubens' keen interest in optics, which found expression in a number of notes in the artist's theoretical sketchbook, can also be traced back to his time in Italy. It served him well when he came to illustrate François d'Aguilon's *Book of Optics*, published by Balthasar Moretus in Antwerp in 1613, and colours his reflections about shadows, highlights and *diaphanitas* in *De Imitatione Statuarum*. Particularly revealing in this context is the painting *Minerva as Patroness of Arts and Sciences* by his friend Adam Elsheimer. Painted on copper, this very small picture is unfortunately in a poor state of conservation so we shall turn to Wenceslaus Hollar's etching (fig. 18) for some of the finer details.

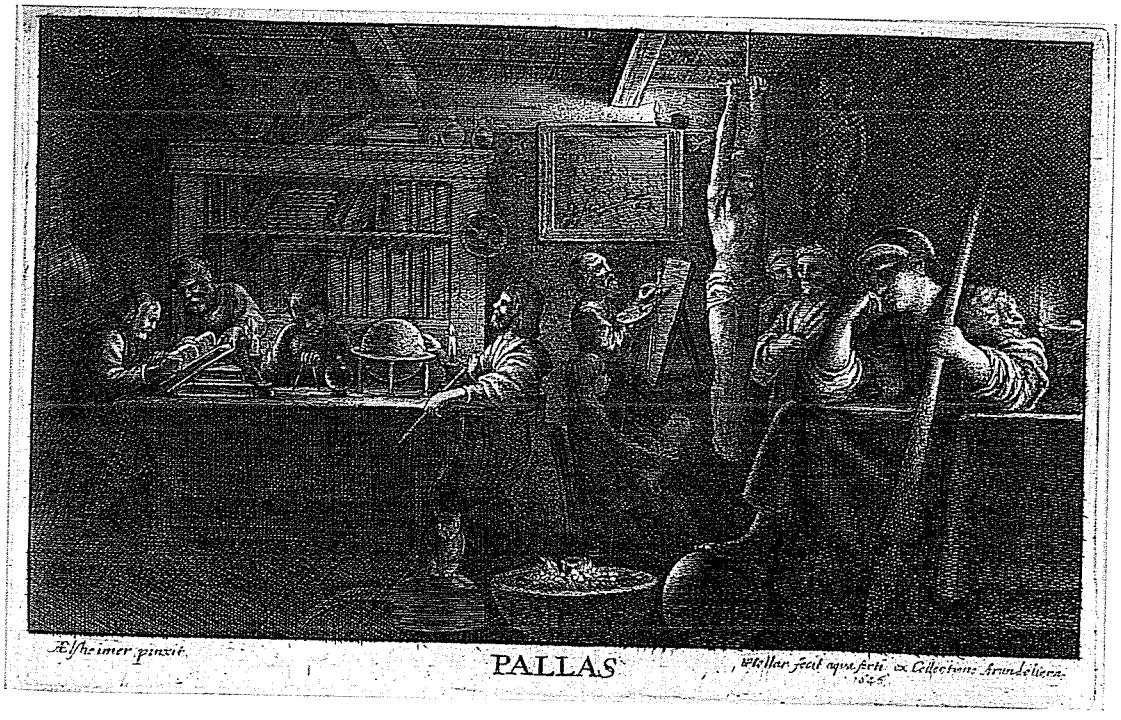

Fig. 18. Wenceslaus Hollar, *Minerva as Patroness of Arts and Sciences*, 1646, etching after a painting by Adam Elsheimer, 93 × 148 cm, London, British Museum, The Trustees of the British Museum

Here, under the aegis of Minerva, a geographer is busying himself with his globe while scholars are poring over their books. In the same room – and this is a remarkable combination – two painters are studying a model. Another scholar is seated at the table, holding a compass and contemplating the refraction of light through a bulbous glass vase filled with water. He evidently represents the field of ray optics. The vase he appears to study is lit by two candles – a common constellation in sixteenth-century optics – one of which also illuminates the geographer, while the other casts light on the readers. The light from each of the two candles passes through the vase and creates a bright focal point on the table. The transparent light-refracting sphere of the glass vase is juxtaposed with the opaque one of the globe. Together they illustrate the difference between diaphaneity and opacity which was discussed in numerous treatises on optics. As is well known, all optics is based on the simultaneous presence of a diaphanous medium – for example air, glass or water – and of an opaque and therefore visible object. Alhazen, the father of modern optics, opened his pioneering seven-volume treatise on optics with a juxtaposition of the fundamental categories of diaphaneity and opacity.[112] The Roman circle of Elsheimer and Rubens, perhaps more than other artistic circles of the time, was much given to the study of optics, the *diaphana* not least among them.[113]

112 The theory of diaphaneity goes back to Aristotele. In the Middle Ages it was transmitted through the optics of the Arab scholar Alhazen; see Alhazen, *The Optics of Ibn Al-Haytham*, transl., intro. and commentary by A. I. Sabra (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1989), I, p. 22 (Sabras' introductory comments) and II, 11 (lib. I, 2, 21). See also the principal Latin edition: *Opticae Thesaurus Alhazeni arabis libri septem nunc primum editi; Eiusdem liber de Crepusculis et nubium ascensionibus; Item Vitellonis Thuringopoloni libri X. Omnes instaurati, figuris illustrati et aucti, adiectis etiam in Alhazenum commentarijs a Federico Risner* (Basel: per Episcopios, 1572), Alhazen 13 (liber I, propositio 22) subsequent chapters. For a detailed treatment of the penetration and refraction of light in diaphanous objects: *Opticae Thesaurus Alhazeni arabis libri septem nun*, Alhazen pp. 231–88 (lib. VII). Ghiberti, for whom an Alhazen manuscript was one of the most important sources for the study of optics, used the Greek term several times in the third of his *Commentarii*. Beyond this, the term '*diaphanes*' was not much used in the art theoretical literature of the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Leonardo employed the originally Latin term of 'transparences' (see note 63). For the definition of *diaphanitas* in the Optics of François d'Aguilon (1613), illustrated by Rubens, see note 114.

113 It was this Roman circle that saw the gestation of the publication, in which the term 'diaphanes' was first used as part of a title, namely Francesco Maurolico's optics, published posthumously in Naples in 1611 (Francesco Maurolico, *Photismi de lumine et umbra, Diaphanorum partes, seu libri tres, Problemata ad perspectivam et iridem pertinentia* (Naples: ex typografia Tarquinij Longi, 1611). Second edition Lyon 1613). The second part contains the *Diaphana*: *Diaphanorum, seu trasparentium partes, seu libri tres*. Maurolico had mentioned his *Diaphana* as early as 22 January 1540 in a letter to Cardinal Pietro Bembo (dedication letter of his *Cosmographia* printed in 1543). In 1574, a year before his death, Maurolico entrusted the *Diaphana* – which he had revised in the 1550s – to the German Jesuit Cristoforo Clavio (Christopher Clavius/Christoph Schlüssel, Bamberg 1538–Rome 1612), who was meant to ensure and expedite the publication of the manuscript. Maurolico's wish for a speedy publication was not granted; instead his text was circulated in numerous manuscripts. It was not until Galileo's pioneering work with the telescope (published in 1610), which invested Maurolico's optics with new significance and currency, that his descendants decided to put an end to the rampant exploitation of Maurolico's work (not least by the Collegio Romano) and to pursue publication with renewed energy. They won the Genoese nobleman Giovanni Battista Airolo as patron, and the text finally saw publication in 1611. The second edition of 1613 was expanded to include the annotations Clavio had made when he revised the manuscripts. They were deemed ennobling because since the publication of the first edition Clavio, who had died in 1612, had become a celebrity in his own right: professor of mathematics, dean of the Collegio Romano, astronomer and one of the masterminds of the Gregorian calendar reform. Like Johann Faber (a mutual friend of Elsheimer and Rubens), Clavio came from Bamberg and belonged to the German community in Rome (another member was Clavio's favourite pupil and successor Christoph Grienberger). Clavio can be identified as one of the cornerstones of the German-Roman environment, in which Rubens

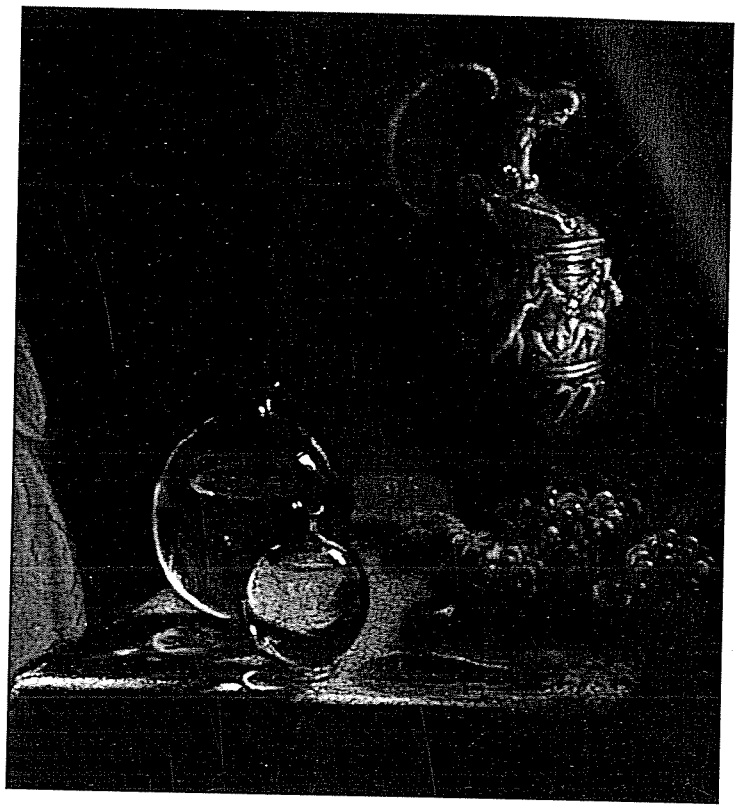

Fig. 19. Adam Elsheimer, *Judith und Holfornes*, 1601–1603, oil on tinned copper, 24.2 × 18.7 cm, London, Apsley House, detail.

That a painter like Elsheimer considered the effects of light and their significance for art is not altogether surprising. In his painting of *Judith and Holofernes* (fig. 19) he made the light of the candle glide over a figurative relief on a ewer before refracting it in a glass vase to demonstrate how the visibility and appearance of a plastic *rilievo* depend on the way it is lit.

Rubens performed a similar experiment drawing on Michelangelo's celebrated marble relief of the *Battle of the Centaurs and Lapiths*. Here Rubens, like no other painter before him, broadened the scope of his investigation into the imitation of sculpture to include the question of illumination and put it to the test in a practical experiment. His drawings in Rotterdam (fig. 20)[114] and Paris (fig. 21)[115] show Michelangelo's relief – an experimental bravura piece in its own right that had challenged the art theory of its time – lit from opposite sides.

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and Elsheimer came into contact with the study of optics. It is perfectly conceivable that Rubens passed this knowledge and these contacts on to François d'Aguilon (Aguilonius) when they prepared the publication of the latter's *Optics* (1613) (see note 114). However, as rector of the Antwerp Jesuit college and designer of the Antwerp Jesuit church, Aguilonius certainly did not depend on Rubens to be in contact with the headquarters and the college of his order in Rome. In his *Optics* Aguilonius repeatedly quotes the writings of Clavio, with whom he was in contact through his colleague Odo van Maelcote: August Ziggelaar, *François de Aguilón S. J. (1567–1617): Scientist and Architect* (Rome: Institutum Historicum S.I., 1983), pp. 45–47, 57–61.

114 Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt (ed.), *Giovinezza di Michelangelo*, exh. cat. Florence, Palazzo Vecchio, 1999 (Florence: Artificio Skira, 1999), pp. 200–02, no. 6b (Raphael Rosenberg and Eike D. Schmidt): only categorised as a copy of a drawing after Rubens; Nils Büttner and Ulrich Heinen (eds), *Peter Paul Rubens. Barocke Leidenschaften*, exh. cat., Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum Braunschweig 2004 (Munich: Hirmer, 2004), pp. 268–69, no. 61 (Ulrich Heinen).

115 Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt (ed.), *Giovinezza di Michelangelo*, pp. 200–02, no. 6a (Raphael Rosenberg and Eike D. Schmidt): only categorised as a copy of a drawing after Rubens; David Jaffé (ed.), *Rubens: A Master in the Making*, p. 98 f., no. 31.

Fig. 20. Peter Paul Rubens (copy after?), Michelangelo's *Battle of the Centaurs and Lapiths*, black chalk, grey wash, heightend with white, on grey paper, 240 × 346 cm, Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen

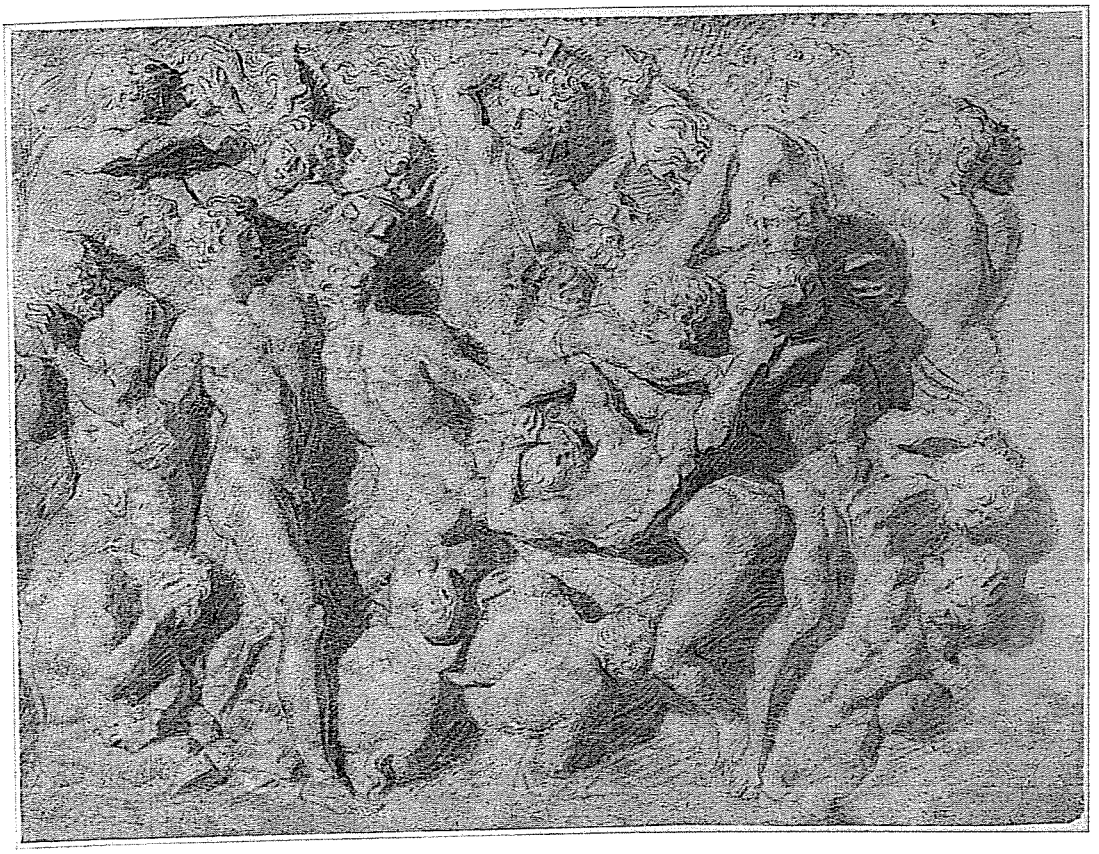

Fig. 21. Peter Paul Rubens (copy after?), Michelangelo's *Battle of the Centaurs and Lapiths*, black chalk, wash, Paris, Collection Fritz Lugt, Institut Néerlandais

This would have required either shifting the heavy marble relief to the other side of the window, redirecting the natural light falling on it by means of mirrors, or lighting it artificially from different directions.[116] Either way, it required the cooperation of the owners[117] who would have needed some convincing of the seriousness and merit of Rubens' endeavour.

The experimental and pedagogical[118] interest shown by Rubens should be seen in the context of the sophisticated optics in Adam Elsheimer's paintings and the equally sophisticated observation of sculptures Rubens describes in his treatise.[119] We have to reconstruct a complex of themes and interests that evidently preoccupied the circle of friends around Rubens and Elsheimer, and that is of great interest for the history of both art and science.

Elsheimer's painting *Minerva as Patroness of Arts and Sciences* visualises this complex by presenting optics and the imitation of antiques in one and the same room as learned pursuits that belong together and enhance each other. The two painters in Elsheimer's picture have asked their model to strike the pose of the classical statue of Marsyas. Not by accident; Elsheimer himself had modelled the pose of one of the tormentors in his painting of the *Stoning of Saint Stephen* on the Marsyas sculpture.[120] It was a pose that every connoisseur would instantly have recognised, which is why it could convey a programmatic message in *Minerva as Patroness of Arts and Sciences*. Elsheimer's erudite artists are not studying antique sculptures, they are studying antique patterns of form brought to life by human models. This method of re-embodying antique poses had been widely

116 The curators of the Florentine Michelangelo exhibition of 1999 experimented with artificial light in order to reconstruct the effects of shadows (Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt (ed.), *Giovinezza di Michelangelo*, p. 200, no. 6a and 6b). The configuration of the Parisan work was achieved at the following light position: *c.* 150 cm above the relief, *c.* 140 cm moved to the left (calculated from the centre of the relief) and 20 cm higher than the stone block. The light position for the Rotterdam work matched the Paris measurements, except for being 140 cm to the right (again calculated from the centre of the relief).

117 The relief remained in the Florentine residence of the Buonarroti family and was integrated into the commemorative ensemble designed by Michelangelo il Giovane in the Cinquecento. Horst W. Janson's suggestion that Rubens might have been unaware of the authorship of the relief and therefore mistaken it for an antiquity is thus absurd ('Rubens and Sculpture – Some Observations', *The Ringling Museum of Art Journal. Papers Presented at the International Rubens Symposium April 14–16, 1982* (1983), p. 155.

118 It is only sensible to assume that Rubens shared his instructive studies with his pupils, assistants and colleagues. This is also borne out by a hitherto overlooked sequence of reception: Inspired to depict the same subject, Jakob Jordaens filled his composition with a heaving fray of intertwined bodies (Roger Adolf d'Hulst, *Jacob Jordaens* [Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 1982], 46, 48, 52, 55, fig. 14; Ekkehard Mai and Hans Vlieghe (eds), *Von Bruegel bis Rubens. Das goldene Jahrhundert der flämischen Malerei*, exh. cat. Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, 1992 (Cologne: Verlag Lochner, 1992), p. 334 f., no. 40.1). Jordaens also adapted the motif of the knee of a fighting Lapith as well as that of the twisted neck of a dead figure, placing them in the centre and the lower edge of his composition. The twisted neck of the dead warrior is longer in Jordaens' composition than in Michelangelo's work, but not as extremely elongated as in the Rotterdam drawing. The latter appears to be a pupil's flawed and rather wooden, mechanical copy after an original drawing by Rubens and was identified as such by Egbert Haverkamp Begemann, Anne-Marie Logan, Raphael Rosenberg and Eike D. Schmidt, Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt (ed.), *Giovinezza di Michelangelo*, p. 200, nos 6a and 6b). Because of a glaring anatomical blunder in the figure seen from behind who is pulling a woman by the hair, the Parisian drawing has also been classified as a copy after Rubens. We are thus in possession of three responses to the original drawing by Rubens.

119 Andreas Thielemann, '"Natur pur?"', pp. 149–55.

120 On the reception of the figure of Marsyas, see Ingrid Jost, 'A Newly Discovered Painting by Adam Elsheimer', *The Burlington Magazine* 108 (1966), 2–7; Keith Andrews, *Adam Elsheimer. Werkverzeichnis der Gemälde, Zeichnungen und Radierungen* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1985), p. 37.

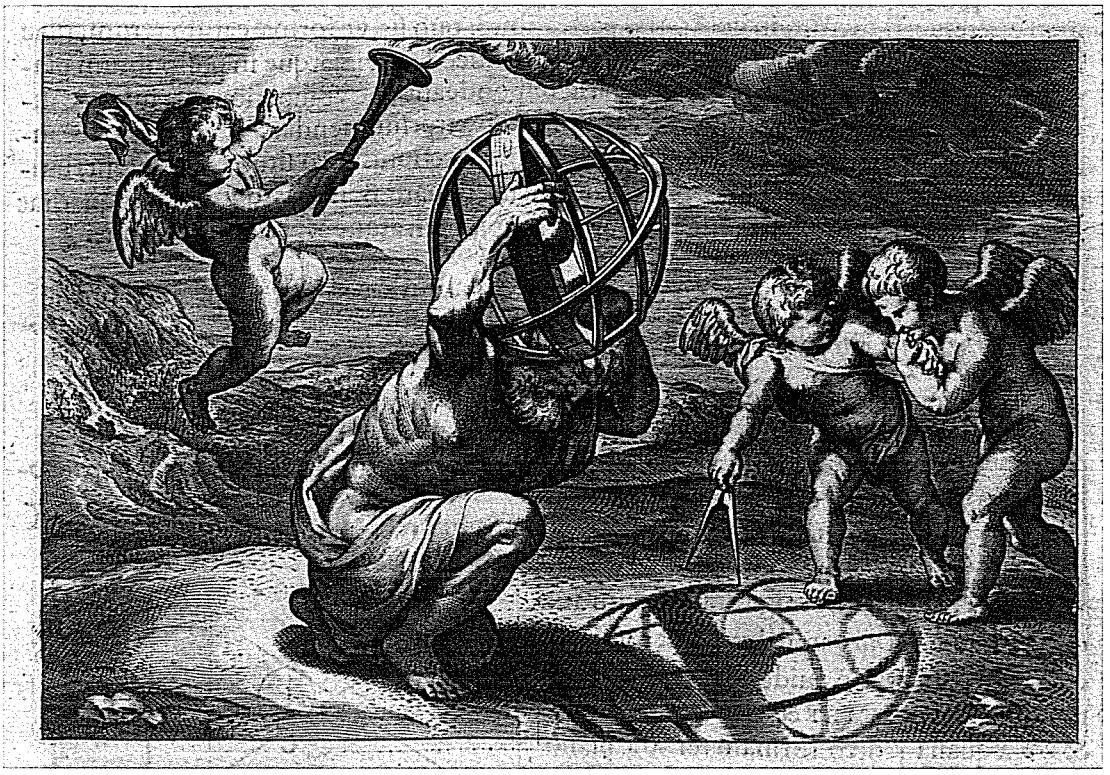

Fig. 22. Theodor Galle, after a drawing by Rubens, *Stereographic Projection of an Armillary Sphere*, engraving, title page to the sixth book of Franciscus Aguilonius, *Opticorum libri sex*, Antwerpen 1613, London, British Library

used since the Renaissance to infuse the ideality of statues with the reality of human life.[121] What is more, the myth of the flaying of Marsyas meant that sculptures of the satyr were almost predestined to be seen as objects of anatomical study, and the detailed modelling of the taut elongated body did indeed offer an unusually deep insight into the bones, muscles, ligaments and connective tissue that make up the human body. Elsheimer's painting therefore bears eloquent witness to the Roman discussions that formed the foundation of Rubens' *De Imitatione Statuarum*. Like Adam Elsheimer in his programmatic academy painting, Rubens linked the study of anatomy with the idea of the reincarnation of antique sculptures and with the optics of diaphaneity and opacity.

Back in Antwerp, Rubens continued along this trajectory with the illustrations for François d'Aguilon's *Book of Optics*. These illustrations fall into the period in which he was working on the painting of the *Dying Seneca* and on the designs for the engravings that were to accompany the 1615 edition of Seneca's *Opera Omnia*. The latter were, once again, commissioned by Balthasar Moretus, and it should not surprise us that Rubens would have approached them with the same sense for the workings of light and shade that informs the d'Aguilon illustrations. The engraving of the statue (fig. 17) can thus be compared to the engraving for d'Aguilon's sixth book (fig. 22), and, like the latter, it could be titled *De Proiectionibus*.

For the *Dying Seneca*, Rubens chose to visualise the interplay of translucence and reflection not only on the philosopher's body but also in the reflective water-filled copper basin (fig. 23). This virtuoso passage shows light passing through the perfectly diaphanous medium of water and bouncing off the dense smooth surface of the metal. The water and the copper basin mark

121 On the beginnings, which are particularly tangible in Filippino Lippi, see Innis Howe Shoemaker, 'Filippino and His Antique Sources', in George Goldner and Carmen C. Bambach (eds), *The Drawings of Filippino Lippi and His Circle*, exh. cat. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997 (New York: Abrams, 1997), pp. 29–36.

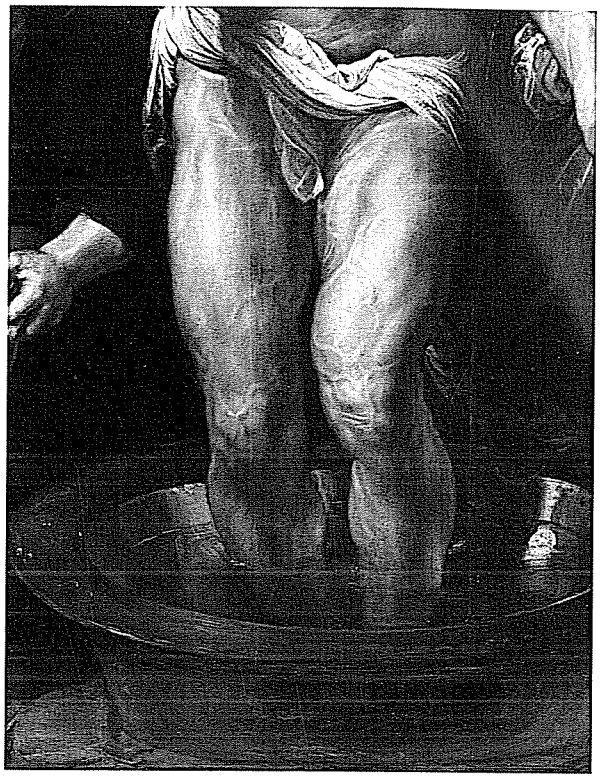

Fig. 23. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Dying Seneca* (detail), Munich, Alte Pinakothek.

the two extremes whose interplay defines the effect of light on human flesh and skin. The eye can penetrate the outermost layer of the human body because it is partly translucent and partly reflective.

Adam Elsheimer had explored this intermediate optical quality of part-diaphanous materials in an experimental still life passage in his painting of *Judith and Holofernes*, where he juxtaposed two translucent, luminous glass carafes and an opaque, reflective ewer with a bowl of grapes (fig. 19). With their shiny skins and largely translucent flesh grapes are a perfect example of that intermediate optical quality that combines reflection and diaphaneity. A notoriously challenging still-life motif, they demand the same degree of skill and sophistication from a painter as empty or full glasses, shiny metal surfaces, glistening fish scales, opened oysters and similar items. Generally speaking, we should probably credit still-life painters with a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the optical characteristics of the objects they depict. Elsheimer's experimental still-life in *Judith and Holofernes* and the theoretical observations of his friend Rubens point in the right direction and offer an introduction to a more informed appreciation of diaphanous materials. D'Aguilon, whose book on optics went into detailed explanations of the phenomenon of diaphaneity, may have had a hand in Rubens' decision to bolster his argument with the correct scientific term of *diaphanitas*.[122] But the readiness to

122 Franciscus Aguilonius, *Opticorum libri*, pp. 31–33, 358 and passim. Heinen referred to Aguilonius' treatment of the diaphanous, Ulrich Heinen, 'Haut und Knochen – Fleich und Blut', p. 106, n. 63. How significant the understanding of optical phenomena on the basis of the differences between *opacitas* or *densitas* on the one hand and *diaphanitas* on the other was to Aguilonius is tellingly illustrated in the chapter, in which he sought to explain the dark spots on the surface of the moon as a function of the moon's surface being covered with matter of differing density and therefore also differing grades of reflexivity (Galileo had identified these spots in 1610 as shadows cast by a mountainous profile). Franciscus Aguilonius, *Opticorum libri*, pp. 419–23.

broach the subject was fully formed by the time Rubens came back from Italy, where he and Elsheimer had already developed an experimental and practice-orientated approach to the issues at hand.

In conclusion, we can say that the text of *De Imitatione Statuarum* pulls together a wide range of interests relating not only to ancient sculpture but also to physiology, dietetics and physical exercise, optics and historiosophy. Key to this collation was the planned painting of the Seneca statue. Intended from the outset as a didactic and rhetorically eloquent picture, it was the result of an innovative and near-experimental process of transformation.

One version of the Seneca painting remained in the artist's studio for several years as a model and teaching tool.[123] This exemplary painting and the theoretical treatise belonged together in the same way that the *Kanon* and the eponymous sculpture had belonged together in the workshop of Polycleitus in ancient Greece. The discourse about the artistic qualities of the Seneca statue, which Rubens had initiated, was later picked up and brought to a highly 'academic' conclusion by Joachim von Sandrart. In the second volume of his *Teutsche Academie* (1679) Sandrart published a full-page engraving of the dying Seneca in his bath. What is more, he placed the Seneca statue at the very beginning of the plates accompanying the second part of the second volume *Von der Scvlptvra oder Bilderey Kvnst.*[124] It is preceded only by the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, which was chosen for the title page of the section. This prominent placement of the Seneca statue in the modern-period canon of Roman sculpture becomes comprehensible when we consider the exemplary status the statue had for Rubens and that Sandrart probably had the opportunity to discuss it further when he met Rubens in the Netherlands is 1637 to gather information for his book.[125]

Practice between theory and invention

The time Rubens spent in Rome had a profound effect on his method of imitating antiques and on his treatment of the living flesh. The changes in his practice were inspired by the discussions among his circle of friends and by the preparatory work for a painting of Seneca based on a much admired Roman sculpture that was believed to represent the Stoic philosopher. The painting was to breathe new life into the statue and to make it speak to an audience steeped in the Senecan tradition of orality. Rubens' adaptation of the sculpture, which can be described as a transmaterialisation, was thus both purposeful and determined by its function. Equally rational and thorough are the physical insights into the depiction of living human flesh tones set down in *De Imitatione Statuarum*. Yet despite this, Rubens had absolutely no compunction about ignoring the laws of optics when it suited him. He

123 For the different versions and later enlargement of the Munich picture, see Elizabeth McGrath, *Subjects from History*, II, pp. 282–97, no. 54.

124 Joachim von Sandrart, *Teutsche Academie der edlen Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste* (Nuremberg: Christoff Riegel, 1675–79), II (1679), II, plate b, commentary p. 6: '[...] durch eine vortreffliche Hand künstlich abgebildet worden: Und ist solche insbesonderheit für eine vollkommene Lehr-Schule der Anatomie eines abgelebten / verlebten Leibs zu halten / ist auch die bewegliche Action des Sterbenden Angesichts vor andern wol zu beobachten'.

125 So Sandrart himself: Joachim Sandrart, *Teutsche Academie*, I (1675), II.3, p. 254.

had a clearer idea than most painters why certain parts of the human body gleam when lit in a certain way, why other areas are plunged into coloured shadows and yet others allow a glimpse of the cool blue of the veins to show through. He did not waste time subjecting these constituent elements of the harmonious rendering of living flesh to detailed rational analysis and the correct application of the laws of physics. Instead he preferred to be guided by artistic criteria and his sensual enjoyment of paint and aimed for a lush, richly varied surface and a compelling sense of drama and animation (fig. 24).

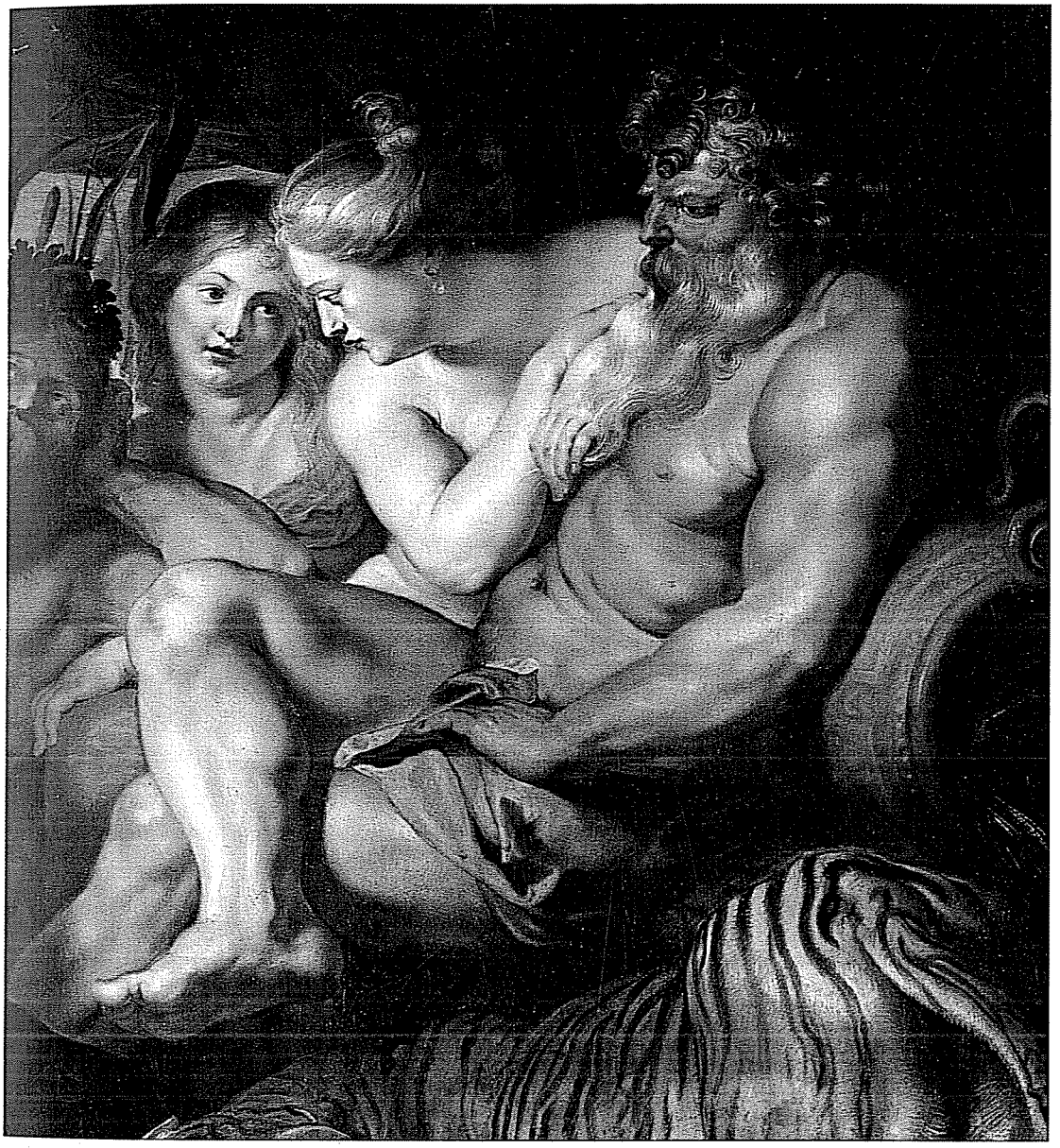

Fig. 24. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Four Continents* (detail), 1615, oil on canvas, 209 × 284 cm, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

Particularly effective in the animation of his figures are areas of red shadow (occasionally positioned right next to dark blue shadows) which impart a glow to his nudes that cannot be justified by anything in the world of physics. The sensual effect, however, is immediate and utterly convincing, as these vibrantly red passages are often placed in such a way as to appear as reflections of adjacent parts of the body. Effects such as these that forcefully suggest the physical presence of living, full-blooded bodies are what distinguish Rubens' anatomically thorough but aesthetically exaggerated bodies from those that a nineteenth-century academic artist with comparable understanding of the optics of flesh tones would have painted. And it is telling that particularly in the nineteenth century critics noticed these differences between Rubens and the 'more correct' contemporary artists. When Goethe noticed the inconsistencies in the projection of shadows in Rubens' landscape *The Return from the Fields* he remarked that the artist had not simply painted from nature, but that he had the poetry and freedom of spirit to stand above nature and to create a fiction.[126] Rubens' drawings after Michelangelo's *Battle of the Centaurs and Lapiths* (fig. 20 and 21) feature similar inconsistencies in the shadows, nor for that matter can all the shadows in the *Dying Seneca* (fig. 6 and 16) be explained by the relief and the fall of the light alone. Here the mottled passages of blueish skin that suggest the layers of tissue beneath seem to have taken on a life of their own.

What should we make of this? Should we censure the artist for these discrepancies between theory and painterly practice? Do they constitute a defect? Hardly. Great artists have always subordinated theory as a supporting element to the primacy of art and their creative practice. Rubens was enriched by his understanding of the optics of flesh tones, which allowed him to heighten certain effects in novel ways, but ultimately it was only one of many tools, wielded as and where needed in the service of a complex visual rhetoric.

Here too he was able to take his cue from classical sculptures. Starkly veristic Hellenistic statues such as the *Laocoön* and the so-called *Dying Seneca* evoke an impression of anatomical correctness whilst at the same time they exaggerate the anatomically possible. Closer observation of the much admired physiognomy of Laocoön, for example, reveals that his skull must be as malleable as rubber. All expression is concentrated in the convulsive movement of the bulging forehead and the anguished spasm of the eyebrows and cheeks that have little relation to the bone structure beneath – in fact the visceral intensity of the pain seems to rip the underlying bone out of its normal alignment. In his *sottinsù* drawing of the head of Laocoön Rubens took the exaggeration even further, transforming it into a physiognomic whirlwind that starts in the curls of the beard and takes hold of the entire head (fig. 25).[127]

126 Goethe owned an engraving by Schelte à Bolswert after this painting in the collection of the Palazzo Pitti and commented on it in the presence of Eckermann and others on 11 and 18 April 1827: Wolfgang Adler, *Landscapes*. Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard XVIII (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1982), I, pp. 151–53, no. 48.

127 The sketch on the sheet in Copenhagen was probably made by Rubens' pupil Willem Panneels, copying an original drawing by Rubens: Copenhagen Statens Museum for Kunst, Kongelige Kobberstiksamling, 'Rubens Cantoor', no. III, 2; Paul Huvenne (ed.), *Rubens Cantoor: een verzameling tekeningen ontstaan in Rubens' atelier*, exh. cat. Antwerp, Rubenshuis (Gent: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1993), p. 123, no. 41; Marjon Van der Meulen, *Copies after the Antique*, II, p. 99, no. 84 (copy); Nils Büttner and Ulrich Heinen (eds), *Barocke Leidenschaften*, p. 293 f., no. 76; Michael Draguet and Joost vander Auwera, et al. (eds), *Rubens. A Genius at*

Fig. 25. Willem Pannels, *The Head of Laocoön*, after a drawing by Rubens, Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst, Kongelige Kobberstiksamling

The same is true for the *African Fisherman* aka *Seneca* (fig. 6); on the one hand, the classical sculptor captured the details of the wizened old man standing on bent knees with such precision that a twentieth-century physician was able to diagnose Bechterew's disease.[128] On the other hand, the tangled web of prominent veins on his chest heightens anatomical conditions to form a striking and evocative graphism.[129] Rubens eagerly adopted all such dramatic devices, and he is more than likely to have been aware – or become aware – of the dialectic of truth by artful exaggeration. In the case of the purported statue of Seneca, the exaggeration was doubly welcome, since the manner of the philosopher's death was likely to direct attention to his veins. Unfortunately, the treatise says nothing about this form of deliberate exaggeration. But then, not everything that characterises the artist's imitation of the antique is also raised in the treatise. By the same token, it does raise a wide range of issues – physical exercise, historical anthropology and the optical properties of the living flesh – whose relevance goes far beyond the reception of antiquity.

Work, exh. cat. Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Art, 2007 (Brussels: Lannoo, 2007), p. 153, no. 42.

128 Dr med. Axel Hoffmann, at the 24th symposium of the 'Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rheumatologie', Hannover 1990.

129 Interestingly, Johann Joachim Winckelmann objected to the high esteem in which the Seneca statue had been held by the previous generation of art lovers. He particularly disliked the statue's prominent web of veins: Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Abhandlungen von der Fähigkeit der Empfindung des Schönen in der Kunst und dem Unterrichte derselben* (Dresden: In der Waltherischen Buchhandlung, 1763), p. 7: 'Durch solche Kenner ist der vorgegebene Seneca im Bade, in der Villa Borghese, in Achtung gekommen. welcher ein Gewebe von strickmäßigen Adern ist, und in meinen Augen der Kunst des Alterthums kaum würdig zu achten. Dieses Urtheil wird den mehresten einer Ketzerey ähnlich sehen, und ich würde dasselbe vor ein paar Jahren noch nicht öffentlich gewaget haben'.

Thus the relevance of *De Imitatione Statuarum* does not lie in any assistance it may offer art historians hoping to analyse the artist's imitation of the antique. It points to certain principles, but for the rest it remains to be studied and discovered as a source that sheds light on a specific period in the artist's development and career: on the competition with Abraham Janssens and on the background of his painting of the *Dying Seneca* in which he combined the specific demands of creating a compelling multisensory experience of the teaching philosopher with a morally and philosophically charged depiction of old age and observations about the optics of the living flesh.

Edition and translation

The following German translation is based on the version of the text published in: Roger de Piles, *Einleitung in die Malerey aus Grundsätzen*, Leipzig 1760, 109–17.[130] A few changes have been made to the punctuation and the use of lower and upper case letters. Necessary explanations and corrected words are in square brackets.

All material deviations from the above - mentioned source text found in the manuscript copy held at the Courtauld Institute in London (*Ms Johnson* fol. 31 recto and verso) – with the exception of the numerous spelling mistakes – are recorded in the notes.

130 On the problems of the text and the translation, see above.

Essen und Trinken, nicht aber um körperliche Übung kümmert. Durch die andauernde Völlerei wird man von der Last des dicken Bauches niedergedrückt, und die Arme und Beine werden infolge des Nichtstuns entkräftet. In den Zeiten des Altertums übten sich die Menschen hingegen täglich auf geradezu gewaltsame Weise in Palaestren und Gymnasien, ja wahrhaftig bis zum Schwitzen und zur Erschöpfung. Man lese die Schrift von Mercurialis über die „Arte gymnastica", in der geschildert wird, welche verschiedenen, ebenso schwierigen wie anstrengenden Methoden man pflegte, um den Körper ordentlich durchzuarbeiten. Daher wurden jene trägen Körperpartien aufgezehrt, der Bauch wieder eingezogen und der Fettwanst in Fleisch verwandelt. Und so geschieht es bei einem trainierten menschlichen Körper mit allen passiven Körperpartien durch die natürliche Beihilfe der Arme, der Beine, des Halses, der Schultern und überhaupt aller arbeitenden Glieder. Und da die Wärme den Saft heranzieht, der diese arbeitenden Glieder unterstützt und nährt, wachsen sie und nehmen außerordentlich zu, wie man an den Rücken der Geten, den Armen der Fechter, den Beinen der Tänzer und am ganzen Körper der Ruderknechte sieht.

Peter Paul Rubens, *On the Imitation of Statues*[1]

To some [*sc.* painters] it [*sc.* the imitation of statues] is extremely useful, to others, pernicious, even to the ruin of their art. I conclude, nonetheless, that an understanding of statues, nay, deep absorption in them, is necessary for the highest perfection of it [*sc.* the painter's art]. But the use of them [*sc.* statues] must be judiciously directed, and entirely kept to this side of stone.[2] For a great many inexperienced painters, and even experienced ones, do not distinguish material from form, stone from figure-drawing, and the constraining effect of marble from artistry.

The most important axiom is that, among statues, the best are the most useful, and the bad, correspondingly, are useless. For novices, while deriving from statues a certain indefinable quality consisting of crudity and sharp outlining and laboured and awkward anatomy,[3] seem to make progress, but [sc. they do so] in defiance of nature, as what they are representing in colours is, instead of flesh, merely[4] marble.[5] For even in the best sculpture, many accidental characteristics, without being the artificer's fault, are to be reproached, and indeed even avoided. Above all, there is the difference of shadows, since flesh, skin and cartilage, with their translucent quality, soften many steep descents into blackness and shadow which stone inexorably presents as twice as strong because of its density. Consider, too, certain[6] uneven soft tissue,[7] which vary in response to all movements

1 Translated from the Latin text, reproduced above, by Janet Fairweather.

2 citra + accusative = to this side of. Here the meaning seems to be 'not to the point of forsaking painterliness for the direct imitation of sculpture'.

3 Here, instead of *difficilis molestique anatomiae*, I have preferred the text printed in Noel & Janson's translation of G. F. Wagen (1811): *difficilis molestaeque anatomiae.*

4 Here *tantum* is perfectly correct and does not require emendation.

5 Here I have kept to the received text: *dum pro carne marmor coloribus tantum repraesentant.*

6 *Quasdam* should be written all in one word.

7 *Maccatúra* is glossed as 'a bruise or battering' in John Florio's *Dictionarie of the Italian and English Tongues* (London: M. Bradwood, for E. Blount and W. Barret, 1611). I suppose *maccaturae* might consist of mere variation in skin colour, but in line with Andreas Thielemann's translation of 'unebenen Weichteile' I arrived at 'uneven soft tissue'. Given that sculptors are generally said to avoid representing them, I arrived at the tentative translation 'blemishes'.

and are spread or contracted by the flexibility of skin: these are generally avoided by sculptors, though occasionally admitted by the best of them, but they are necessary for painting, though with moderation. In regard to light, as well, statues are completely alien to all that is human, the difference being that, because of the shine and brilliant gleam of the stone, they make surfaces[8] stand out more than they should, or at least exercise fascination on the eyes.

Anyone who has made these distinctions with wise discernment may embrace the close study of statues. For what can we degenerates do in this age of error, when low-grade talent pins us to the ground, inferior as we are to the heroic intellect of former times <and> to its discrimination?[9] For we are darkened by the fog of our forefathers, or else, by the will of the gods, we have fallen to a worst state, unforgiven after our fall or weakened[10] by irrecoverable loss as the world grows older. Or else in ancient times even an [*sc.* inanimate] object presented <itself>[11] automatically constructed[12] quite close to its natural original and to perfection, whereas now, having been corrupted by happenings which have befallen it during the elapse of centuries moving towards old age, it has kept nothing of itself, as perfection slides downward into a worse state[13] with the coming of successive vices. In similar fashion the heights to which human beings grow are considered in the opinion of many to be declining.[14] For authors, sacred and profane, tell of an age of heroes, giants and Cyclopes, much of what they say, indeed, being fanciful, but some things true, without a doubt.

The main respect in which men of our age differ from the ancients is their sloth and their unexercised life-style: that is, their eating and drinking and lack of concern for the exercise of the body. As a consequence, the pressed-down weight of a stomach protrudes, always full because of assiduous gluttony; legs are effeminized and arms, aware of their inactivity. By contrast, in ancient times everyone used to exercise violently every day on wrestling grounds and in gymnasia, and this was, to tell the truth, too much just for working up a sweat: it went all the way to extreme fatigue. See Mercurialis, *On the Gymnastic Art*. How many types of exercises they had, how difficult and how vigorous! In this way, those indolent parts of the body were reduced to a great extent. The stomach was pulled back as the abdomen became muscular, as was anything in the human body which is passive in the course of exercise.[15] Moreover, of course, arms, legs, neck, shoulders and all active parts of the body,[16] thanks to nature and to heat that produces an access of fluid, are immensely increased and grow large, as we observe in the case of: the backs of Gaetulians, the arms of gladiators, the legs of dancers and almost the whole bodily physique of oarsmen.

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8 I take *superficies* to be accusative plural.

9 The implication of *quid* in para. 3, line 1 has to be that the whole sentence that makes up the rest of the paragraph is to be construed as a rhetorical question. My translation presupposes a conjectural supplement, *ingenio iudicio<que>* which I have not checked against earlier printings of the text.

10 The form *indebiliti* is not classical. I am guessing its intended meaning. One might also consider a financial interpretation, given that *damnum* can be a financial penalty, and we might be dealing with a derivative of *debitum*. What is clear is that 'we' are perceived as *fusci*, *lapsi* and *indebiliti* in this sentence.

11 Reading at para. 3, line 5: propius <se> offerebat.

12 I think we can keep *compactum*.

13 Reading conjecturally at para. 3, line 7: *delabente in peiora*, cf. para. 3, lines 3–4 *ad peiora lapsi*.

14 Keeping *decrescentes*, which agrees with *staturae*.

15 Here *habet* in the Latin is correct, as *quicquid* takes a singular verb.

16 I think we can keep *agunt*. A distinction is being drawn between the active and passive beneficiaries of exercise.

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