

BARON D'HANCARVILLE'S »RECHERCHES« ON THE EVOLUTION OF SCULPTURE

SUBMERGED EMBLEMS AND THE COLLECTIVE SELF

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In the middle to late eighteenth century, the ritual and inhabited space that statues were believed to have held among Romans and Greeks fed into an ever closer and more circumspect work of observation on the form of these statues. In 1760, the French sculptor and academic theorist Étienne-Maurice Falconet opened his discourse on sculpture with the much-quoted observation that »if we have in the statue of Venus the object of an imbecile and dissolute cult, we have in that of Marcus Aurelius a famed monument of homages paid to the benefactor of humanity«.¹ This succinct formulation was nothing but a reading of a space of ritual with minimal attention to the statues, giving the memorial statue the type of vindication we commonly associate with the camp of French *philosophes* and international neoclassical art.² Opposing this was the idol, defined as that ritual understanding of sculpture which had been fed by resistance to all things useful, and driven by superstition, magic and irrational descent into emotional and physical excess. The idol was an overhauled part of the ancient »cult« fit only for ridicule. As the current book shows, however, idolatry continued to give shape to attitudes to antiquity. Winckelmann's introduction to the *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* is strangely silent about idolatrous uses of sculpture, but his methodology, based on exhaustive discussion of figural statuary, clearly involved that statues of gods be studied as closely as the Marcus Aurelius for the benefit of understanding the rational, free-minded state of Greek culture. To achieve this, he looked more closely and wrote more intimately about these figures. One might quote, for instance, the following passage's tribute to the Greek youth:

»The freedom which gave birth to great events, political changes, and jealousy among the Greek, planted, as it were, in the very production of these effects, the germ of noble and elevated sentiments [...]. [The Greeks] employed their intellectual powers at the period when they are brightest and strongest and are sustained by the vigour and sprightliness of the body which among us is ignobly nourished until it decays [...]. The youthful understanding, which, like the tender bark, retains and enlarges the incisions made in it, was not amused by mere sounds without ideas; nor was the brain [...] filled with dreams, to the exclusion of truth.«³

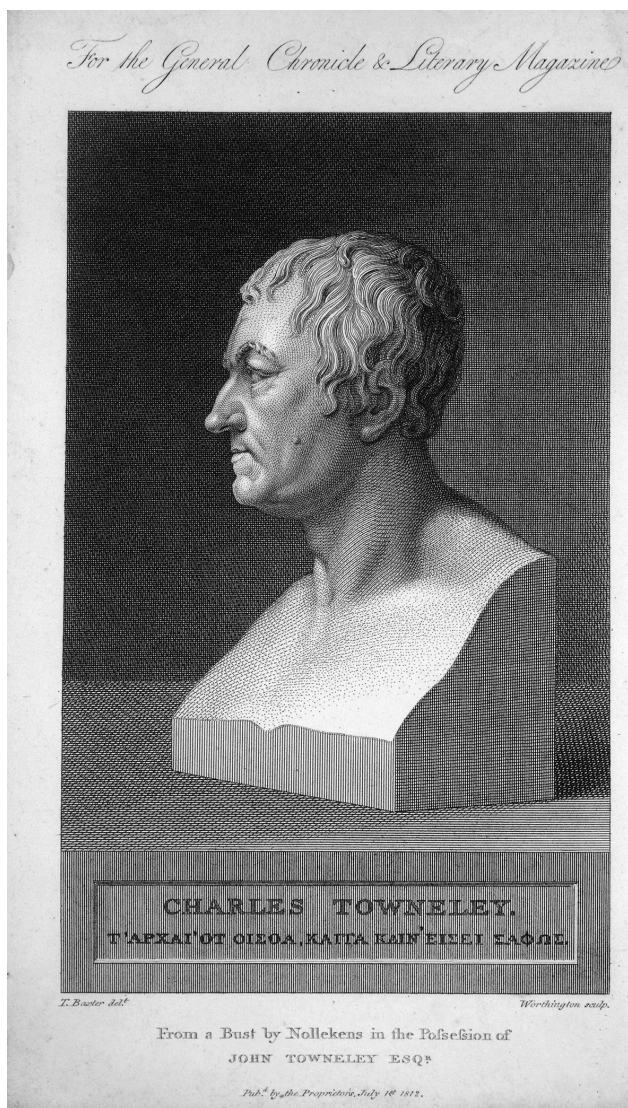
As this passage illustrates, Winckelmann kept his distance from the idol while knitting a new account of the uses of mythological representations of the Laocoon, Apollo and Antinoüs. He created a series of associations about them through metaphors of the beautiful youth often seen in these sculptures, elevated to symbols of Greek noble spirits, equanimity and active corporality: the »tender bark« that absorbs ideas and loves truth, the »vigour and sprightliness of the body« that achieved wisdom far earlier than modern men did. What mattered was the beautiful male body – in the earlier 1755 *Gedanken über die Nachahmung* still simply the healthy, vital *palaestra* gymnasts, but in the introductory chapter to the *Geschichte* those bodies were patriotic young male heroes, the proudest possession of a society enamoured with autonomy, truth-seeking and beauty. In the *Geschichte*, the »tender bark« produced freedom fighters who included Iphicrates at 24, Aratus at 20, or indeed Philopoemen, »a mere boy« who stood out for his bravery at Macedonia's conquest of Sparta over the Lacedaemonians.⁴ Following Winckelmann, the society that perfected the art of sculpting Gods as perfect nude youths was honouring in them the values of agile, rational action, of real youths who moulded themselves physically into beautiful bodies and morally into free subjects. The penchant for the nude youth hinged simultaneously on physical and moral ideals, which lent them enlightened characteristics that were a far cry from the fanaticism that had been the preserve of the idol, always oscillating between devotion and terror.

What had once been suspicious vestiges of »dissolute« rituals were transformed. Had the preventions against pagan cult contextualized the statues primarily by identification with a space of cult (the pantheon of deities they represented), in the *Geschichte* a new argument appeared that forwarded the symbolic power of an idealized youth-poet-hero. The adulation and mythology were but the outer shell of a space filled with truth-loving, health-revering and self-governing citizens.

Winckelmann's vision, which soon coalesced into a legacy of Art History and its outlook on Greek statuary, inspired a variety of new inquiries into the drives and circumstances surrounding the emergence and development of ancient art. The *Recherches sur l'origine, l'esprit et le progrès des arts de la Grèce* by d'Hancarville, published just two decades after the *Geschichte*, offered a means of thinking through the problem of the emergence of sculpture in a more remote historical past. Remarkably, it has been taken far less

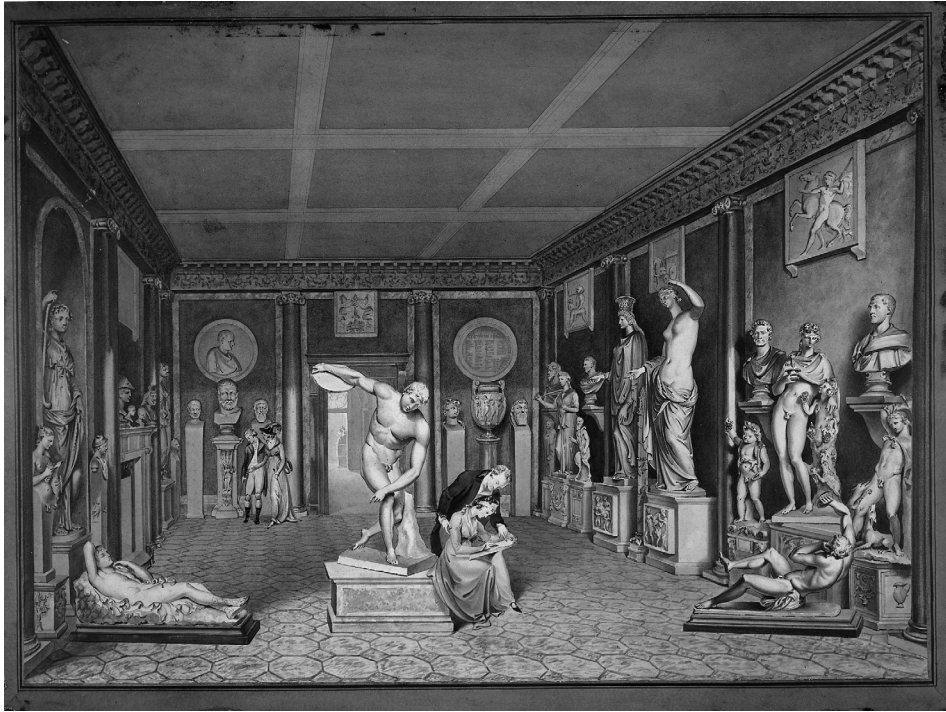
seriously, emerging neither as a historical account capable of commanding the type of attention reserved for the *Geschichte* nor even as an exponent of enquiries that arose in the aftermath of the *Geschichte* as a consequence of its new positioning of the statue and the body in terms of tools for the reinterpretation of the ancient past. I will suggest that the *Recherches* opened two important new pathways: first, it offered an account of the »thinking« behind the ritual space of the ancients that had great consequences for the manner in which the act of observing sculpture, not just ancient Greek sculpture but any sculpture, would have to be accomplished. Secondly, it introduced a new framework to understand the dialogue between irrational cult and culture of reason, between the idol and the legislator's memorial, a dialogue that had been folded into the *Geschichte*'s metaphor of the supple, self-standing youth, object at once of rational ideas of autonomy and the idolatrous element of seduction, of a beholder's wise respect, but also of sensuous adulation.⁵ The overlap thus created between ritual and reason underscored the statue's tendency to be both at once and made it harder to historicize the history of sculpture, imagining instead a sculpture that existed as transhistorical evidence of »primitive« ideas and emotions.

The *Recherches* might be said to have belonged to certain reinterpretations of antiquity burgeoning at the close of the eighteenth century and around 1800, those stirred by Winckelmann yet not content with the pursuit of a professional archaeology or history of art as we know it.⁶ The author of the *Recherches* was Pierre François Hugues, alias Baron d'Hancarville (1719–1805). In 1781, at the time he entered the residence at Park Street, Westminster, which would become a temporary shelter against a swerving, at times bankrupt career, d'Hancarville had earned for himself a reputation that hovered between that of an adventurer, an erudite and a charlatan. In London the French scholar entered the service of Charles Townley (fig. 1), who was by then establishing a reputation as the most highly regarded British collector of his age. Poised to assume the roles of permanent Cicerone, documentalist and curator to the collection, d'Hancarville was portrayed in Zoffany's famous 1782 painting of the Library at Park Street. His is the figure of a seated, circumspect scholar, his face turned to face the beholder rather than shown in the regal stillness and august profile assumed by Townley. D'Hancarville's position in the virtual centre of the picture speaks for the French visitors' foundational presence, suggesting to us a historiographer fully immersed in the process of bringing back to modern understanding the mysteries of antiquity. It was in these years that d'Hancarville undertook to compose an archaeological study that will devote a good measure of its pages to elaborate descriptions of the statues stored at Park Street (fig. 2). Townley's letters reveal that the *Recherches* were finished in some haste:⁷ the resulting text is heavy, erratic, meandering its way forward without clear signposting, with oversize sections and interminable footnotes. It became neither a catalogue of the Townley collection nor an essay on the origins of religious material culture, but balanced uneasily between the two.⁸ Its effectiveness should nevertheless not be underestimated. D'Hancarville's text became a treasure-house of adventurous interpretations, ones that undoubtedly fanned



1 Thomas Baxter: *Charles Townley after a bust by Nollekens*, engraving, 1812. London, British Museum Archives, TY 20/70AN33003001

conversation and speculative thinking among Townley and his consorts, the members of the libertine society known as the Society of Dilettanti. Its ambivalent reception was already apparent in Townley's letters, which describe the treatise as useful but extravagant, speckled with »conjectures, chimaeras and absurdities that may be in them in com-



2 William Chambers: *The Dining Room in Townley's house in Park street*, Watercolour, 1794. London, British Library

mon with all works of this kind».⁹ Such an opinion was expressed, one should note, at a time when British readers using the first English translation of the *Geschichte* were taken aback by Winckelmann's vividly emotional praise for his favourite pieces.

Although he never became an official member of the *Dilettanti*, d'Hancarville was involved with members of the Society for almost two decades. The first ties were sealed with the writer's visits to Rome and his sojourn as a host of William Hamilton in Naples, where he would go to work on the *Antiquités étrusques*, a project fully funded by William Hamilton, initially to publish the latter's collection of antique vases, but later amplified into an ambitious survey on Etruscan and Greek art history.¹⁰ D'Hancarville had had the opportunity to correspond with and befriend Winckelmann, particularly from 1764 on. Francis Haskell memorably retells the meetings between the three men, a frightful expedition to the Vesuvius, and the sense in which Winckelmann »was always to keep a distrustful, even scornful eye on [d'Hancarville], but was also to be much impressed by his talents.«¹¹ After the German scholar's murder, D'Hancarville included into his second volume of the *Antiquités étrusques* a plate showing a memorial urn and mourner, so erecting a memorial to the man who had introduced him to a new form of antiquarian study.



3 Thomas Lawrence: *Portrait of Richard Payne Knight*, oil on canvas, 1794. Manchester, Withworth Gallery, O.1975.2

But as Alain Schnapp has argued, the model set by Winckelmann must be cast in terms of a larger project of systematic collection of observations, ranging from the loving laboratory-style ›biography‹ of the Vesuvius that was William Hamilton's lifelong passion – Susan Sontag portrayed this in her novel on Emma, Lady Hamilton – to the comparative method used by Winckelmann to understand the morphology of Greco-Roman statues.¹²

Alain Schnapp indeed has rescued d'Hancarville from obscurity as a pioneer of methods of visual comparison, which in the *Antiquités étrusques* and in the *Recherches* came into their own as a deductive means for reconstructing complex genealogies of symbols and their possible religious interrelations across a variety of ancient cultures.¹³ Living in London and exposed to the climate of the 1780s Society of Dilettanti, d'Hancarville steered in the direction of a speculation on the role that ancient artefacts had in mir-

roring the origins and early evolution of religious emotion and cult as efforts at reading nature among ancient peoples. Among his more observant readers numbered Richard Payne Knight (fig. 3), who would leverage d'Hancarville's elaborate ideas into a book on the place of sexuality in religious ritual. Knight's investigations had been sparked by a letter from 1781 in which William Hamilton reported on the use of wax votives shaped like phalli and carried traditionally in a religious ceremony in the village of Isernia.¹⁴ In 1786, a year after d'Hancarville had published his *Recherches* in his native French, Knight published a polemic that amassed textual and visual proof of the conjunction of religious practice and sex, with sex petering out of cult as a later development in the broad history of cult that was brought about by the intervention of religious doctrine. Like the *Recherches*, Knight's study, entitled *An Account of the Remains of the Worship of Priapus* pointed to a geographically extended, now extinct religion of nature, the votives in Isernia representing a rare late survival.

While never forgetful of Knight and d'Hancarville's writings, art historians have overall been reluctant to give the antiquarians in the *Society of Dilettante* full considerations as powerful exponents of contemporary ideas. Thus Peter Funnell invoked the image of a naïve d'Hancarville, which he paired up with a mischievous Knight: D'Hancarville as an easily exposed antiquarian fantasm so overtaken by the excitement over his newest conceits that he would simply storm ahead in wild speculation. By contrast, Knight's provocative use of sexual symbolism is believed by Funnell to sustain an earnest argument that registers a host of cults where organs of reproduction become solemn objects of devotion, and then goes on to claim this is as valid a moral order as any, or indeed a superior moral order by grace of its »natural« symbolism. Funnell hastened to add that Knight's ideas »actively exploit« the sexual emblems to satisfy a »raffish« preoccupation with the obscene.¹⁵ This surmise has been widely argued for, particularly in the recent accounts by Jason Kelly and Whitney Davis.¹⁶ A constant among commentaries is the sense that Knight's text exudes a tension between his disinterested pursuit of knowledge and an interested manipulation of religious chronology and ethnographic descriptions to undermine the authority of Christian morality, or at least to insert it into a historical framework.¹⁷ As indicated above, even for Townley, an important client of Knight's *Account* and d'Hancarville's *Recherches*, it was well possible to be of two minds as to the reliability of the ideas forwarded in them. Townley, specifically, seemed thrilled by how the *Recherches* infused his statues with an air of mystery, while the thornier claims contained in them could always be treated as enjoyable indulgences in tune with *Dilettanti* bonhomie. Indeed, Matthew Craske believed the duplicity in these books cast the respectable antiquarian collector in a new role as a hedonist. It was a game, where the author spoke here with a serious purpose, there with uncouth delight, simultaneously resisting and yielding to the overt pleasures of sex as antiquarian object. They thereby exposed »the hypocritical ›curiosity‹ of the antiquarian who pretended to look at art to elevate the spirit while he covertly indulged his baser appetites«.¹⁸

Of the two books, it was the *Recherches*, however, which paved the way for a close observation of sculptural form – an observation that privileges the bodies represented in statues, yet strikes an entirely different note to the «noble» bodies Winckelmann invoked. In order to show this, it will be necessary to take a closer look at the *Recherches*'s deductions and some of its examples. In the next section I will pinpoint in d'Hancarville's text some of its subversive reinterpretations of ancient religious habits, separating idol from symbol, myth from cosmogony. The third section touches on the deceptive function awarded by d'Hancarville to the sculptural figure, where he presses a new fundamental vision on Greco-Roman art that can in hindsight be understood as a way of resisting Winckelmann's humanist, sensuous and heroic subject. Thanks to ideas developed in relationship to religious-philosophical thinking, and thanks to its intricate accounts of monuments and coins, the *Recherches* suggest that Winckelmann's version of Greco-Roman antiquity could be interpreted in more than one way. It could represent, after Winckelmann, the cornerstone of an ideal beauty, the emblem of the Greek people's sense of themselves as free and evolved subjects, but it could also come to support the sense of ancient statues as containers of a submerged, veiled language.

MYTH AND COSMOGONY

The *Recherches* had a conspiratorial tone that separated it from Winckelmann's more conciliatory idea of recovering Greek individual autonomy: the intent was to bring to the surface symbols so forceful that they had to be hidden and encoded, even in antiquity itself. The ancient *fable*, that is to say, the mythological, anecdotal text, had to be distinguished from the ideology that produced it in the first place: «c'est dans les idées qu'on avoit de ces Dieux, plutôt que dans la Mythologie, qu'il faut chercher l'origine de la fable».¹⁹ If fables depend on representations of gods and the *beau idéal* to perpetuate themselves, their origins are found in ideas, rather than in these merely humanized, personalized tales. A process of corruption made cult decay from something that invited thinking among the participants to cult into a series of absurd stories. There was always overlap: as he explains in a passage on the idea of the *Être Générateur*, the corrupted notion of gods that evolved in a later stage still preserved in its core the original idea of divinity as regeneration, but this was subject to a «bizarre travesty» found in the tale of the humanoid Bacchus:

»L'impossibilité de concilier d'une manière raisonnable, l'histoire et la généalogie de ces Dieux imaginaires, avec le sens des emblèmes dont ils prirent la place, et la nécessité où l'on se trouva d'assimiler des choses de nature si différente, produisirent les absurdités de la Mythologie. Le nom du *Tho* ou du *Théo*, devint le nom *Générique* de tous ces Dieux, qui pour la plupart gardèrent celui qu'ils portoient avant leur Deïfication. Cette nouvelle Théologie, mal assemblée avec l'ancienne, renversa l'ordre des

idées de celle-ci: l'Être *Générateur*, sous le nom de Bacchus, devint le fils de Jupiter et Pan [...] Jamais l'imbécillité de l'esprit humain ne fut portée plus loin, que dans la bizâre croyance du peuple le plus ingénieux de l'univers.»²⁰

The best way of distilling the underlying thoughts behind an absurd system of stories was to compare religions. D'Hancarville's recovery of a remote past, one that must be reconstructed by careful comparison of ancient religious tales (ranging from the ancient tale of Biblical Genesis to the Indian Puranas), relies on a type of ›demonstration‹ about religious imagination that operates in a double movement of denigration and validation. On one hand, it exposes the deception caused by doctrinal religion, exposing and mocking the precociousness of myth and superstition. On the other hand, it pretends to rescue the mystic thinking of the ancients, which d'Hancarville achieves by a reconstruction, in his first tome, of a host of images, symbols and half-images that to him represent depositaries of a hidden system of ideas. This derivation of a lost thought-world by examination of later manifestations is what shapes the ›method of geometricians‹, peeling away at the most proximate phenomena and epochs to reveal the remoter, imperceptible hidden layers of history.²¹ These significations hide underneath the skins of sculptural idols, but their deeper foundation lies elsewhere: in a cosmogony. The denigration of myth constitutes the least original part in the argument: indeed, there is an echo here of the deist studies of John Toland and his followers – Toland's 1696 *Christianity not mysterious* blamed priests for corrupting a more pure religion, a primitive monotheism, by allowing it to descend into paganism.²² But in spite of his unconditional refusal of all ›superstitious‹ idolatries, d'Hancarville undertakes a comparison of texts of different religious traditions, with the aim of reconstructing a foundational *cosmogony*. By this comparative mythology (and this likely reveals his debt to French materialism), he implies that it may be necessary to understand, anthropologically speaking, the dogma of Christian theology of sacrifice and redemption to a contradictory and arbitrary development of cults over the course of history. Thus, unveiling the deeper mystique of idols is another way of exposing the fictions of Christianity. This critical approach to Christian dogma had been propagated by Nicolas Antoine Boulanger, a leading figure in the effort to explain religious emotion and cult by way of human nature, and a likely source of ideas for d'Hancarville. Boulangers posthumously published *Christianisme dévoilé* strived to effect a separation of what he thought was a rational piety for a symbolic *être suprême* from the fictions of Christian theology:

»Les attributs dont ils se sont servis pour orner, ou plutôt pour défigurer la Divinité, au lieu de la faire connoître, n'ont fait que l'anéantir, ou du moins la rendre méconnoissable. C'est ainsi, qu'à force des fables et des mystères, la révélation n'a fait que troubler la raison des hommes, et rendre incertaines les notions simples qu'ils peuvent se former de l'être nécessaire, qui gouverne la Nature par des loix immuables. Si l'on ne peut nier l'existence d'un Dieu, il est au moins certain que l'on ne peut admettre

celui que les chrétiens adorent, et dont leur religion prétend leur révéler la conduite, les ordres et les qualités. Si c'est être athée, que de n'avoir aucune idée de la Divinité, la théologie chrétienne ne peut être regardée que comme un projet d'anéantir l'existence de l'être suprême.»²³

It is perhaps helpful to introduce an example of this type of provocative unwinding of a Christian theology that occurs in d'Hancarville's analysis of the *Antiquités de Persepolis et la religion des anciens Perses*, the concluding essay in the *Supplément aux Recherches*.²⁴ Here, the writer sets a trap for Christian cult with the figure of Mithras, the centre-piece of mithraic cult as it emerged in Persia and spread westwards to the Mediterranean. As elsewhere in his speculations on the parallels between the myths of the most ancient religions, he fills Mithras with wider emblematic significance simply by reuniting him with other religious figurations until he creates a chain pointing back to a cosmogonical symbolization. Mithras is described in the *Recherches* in tandem with Bacchus as the embodiment of the generative principle (*principe générateur*), a cosmological association it shares with a host of deities (the Persian Mihir, the Indian Ruder, the Egyptian Isis, and the Roman Bacchus Lasius, a cult of fertility that adopted the name of Bacchus) that inspired religious beliefs around phenomena of seasonal change, and resulted in a recognizable cult.²⁵ Mihir-Bacchus is even closer to Christ, in that like the latter, he is an emblem of ceremonies celebrating the mysteries of death and resurrection, symbolized in both instances by wine and fish. It follows, then, that Mithras is easy to assimilate to Christ. Again, there is potential for provocation: arguing that ancient Gods had many of the qualities of Christ's death and resurrection leads to a thorough identification of Christ with the rest of the chain in a way that was likely to scandalize: Mihir-Mithra was androgynous, and he was usually shown holding the Tau, which, d'Hancarville assures us, is nothing but an abridged form of the phallus. Thus one of the enigmatic pieces in the Townley bequest today at the British Museum was involved in a thorny iconographical elucidation (fig. 4).²⁶

This said, d'Hancarville never ventures to say that Christ was in origin a god of fertility, or that the Tau-like Christian Cross actually is a phallus. In his *Account of the Remains of the Worship of Priapus*, a text that, as opposed to the prurience and discretion exercised by d'Hancarville, engages polemically in blasphemous opinion, Knight hailed the phallic symbol as »a very natural symbol of a very natural and philosophical system of religion«. This is not a point made in the *Recherches*, which curtails the grotesque inversion of Christ's sacrifice into a phallic symbol. Here, as elsewhere, d'Hancarville carefully circumvented the question whether we should see ancient emblems as natural; he uses more subtle language than Knight, suggesting simply that such *formes emblématiques* as the fish or the tau were more widespread than the divine impersonators used to represent them. Emblems expressed, moreover, a cosmogony springing from the most ancient civilizations. Only later would mythic, personified gods supersede them, stifling



4 *Mithras slaying the Bull*, Roman, 2nd century AD. London, British Museum, Townley collection, GR 1825.6-13.1

in idolatrous worship a primitive longing to synthesize the world in symbols and languages.

This is perhaps a good place to return to the problem of history. Although the coins, statues and monuments discussed by d'Hancarville tend to belong to cultures that thrived beyond the Bosphorus, and a period so remote that it fell outside the scope of Winckelmann's *Geschichte*, the basis upon which d'Hancarville's model of sculptural evolution rested is an analysis of cult, not a historicist vision of sculptural evolution. The *fable* carries its particular set of sites of cult, its own religious feelings, its own psychological responses to the sculptural object, regardless of where and when we find it. A manner of presenting gods amenable to the *fable* came later in history, yet it could not erase the continuing modality of sculptural expression contained in the ancient emblem. As a result, in the *Recherches* irrational cult and culture of symbols remain in dialogue.

Moreover, as d'Hancarville explains in his account of the monuments to Mithras, the symbolic cults are vague. Zoroaster, who banned idols and reintroduced notions of fire and the sun as the symbolic language of the divine, created the conditions for a renewed descent into mythological cult in Mithras. This is because »a cult that is uncertain in its object [could be] abused by the spirit of the people«.²⁷ The materialism in this position needs to be remarked upon: cults are not anterior to the sculptures and artefacts they use, but are able to evolve in response to the artefacts themselves, and the type of appropriations to which they lend themselves. Before history, then, comes a basic law of responsiveness to sculpture. History therefore is not linear: just like symbols survived, as masked meaning, the arrival of Christian imagery, so one can never completely disentangle the associations of the cross with the phallus.

THE LANGUAGE OF IMAGES

Why, according to d'Hancarville, did subsequent cults find a use for idols? Why this transition towards a culture of pedestrian representation designed to describe, and not symbolize, imaginary gods? In order to answer such questions, d'Hancarville develops a language about the visual that helps him to bring into focus the relevance of a phenomenon that is hardly mentioned in Winckelmann: the hybrid, sexually blunt, composite nature of Greco-Roman, and above all Roman statues of deities. D'Hancarville argues that many statues and reliefs are shaped on one hand by mythical *fables*, and on the other hand by cosmogonical symbolism. If the myth presents us with the imaginary god in his or her carnal reality, the cosmic being manifests itself always as a mask. It acts like a mirror that throws the viewer back to his natural world and social realities. This is why the figures of life, of genesis and creation manifest themselves on Japanese, Greek and Indian monuments as serpents, bulls, rams or eggs. The *Recherches* suggests that in the most ancient of times, emblems formed themselves by perceptual confusion and conceptual compression, which is to say that in them things that have simple forms replaced abstract ideas. D'Hancarville suggests, for example, that the most ancient Herms (those personifying Pan and Silenus) stemmed from the Scyths, who are presented in the *Recherches* as the Lords of the world's first great culture, both the origin of all religious culture and a military and administrative colossus whose rulers were simultaneously its priests. Scyths are said to have ruled over ancestors of the Indian Subcontinent and Scotland, of Greek and Japanese tribes, their imperial mastery over vast expanses of land between Europe and the Himalayas predating the Deluge and lasting some fifteen hundred years.²⁸ Herms originated, according to d'Hancarville, in mystical beings belonging to ancient Scythic cosmogony, but they were not pure representations in the sense that later Greek gods would be. Their bearded faces repeated actual features of a Scythic race of priest-warrior-governors as observed by those paying tributaries to that first Asian empire.

Ancient emblems, including numerous symbols, had an arbitrary capacity for signification that contrasts strongly with the system of personal identification in the idols of personified, mythic gods.

This is an essential distinction, I believe, both because it points to the speculative process at evidence in the *Recherches*, and because it allows us to obtain a firmer grasp of d'Hancarville's imaginary world.²⁹ Let us now return to d'Hancarville's account of sculptural evolution, which is an account of image-use in decline in the ancient world. The last volume of the *Antiquités Étrusques* compendium embarked on this issue by an account of the *Three Graces* and the *Castor and Pollux* groups.³⁰ These groups are said to have assumed the forms and attributes of the deities and heroes they show by way of a focus on the body represented. However, these statues veiled a more deeply impressed image, which survives in them: the monolithic image of stone slabs and boulders that once functioned as commemorative landmarks. Following a similar argument in Abbé Guasco's *De l'usage des statues chez les anciens*,³¹ D'Hancarville claims that *les images ressemblantes* came to be a part of religious use only after deification, that is, as the outcome of a cultural decline where idols entered the sanctuaries to astonish the masses of the uninitiated and superstitious. The primeval form for the worship of Hercules in Greece was a hero cult, for which the Greeks erected monoliths of aniconic stones.³²

In the *Recherches*, d'Hancarville moves to a different speculation about the decay of the uses of images: the emblem. Emblems are forms that d'Hancarville detects in medals and sculptures. They include monolithic landmarks, like the *pierre obélisque* that was kept in Emese to stand in for Bacchus, by mediation of the symbol of the sun.³³ But although discs, crescents and eggs outlined in coins (or shaping their contours) are assumed to have mimicked monoliths and symbols worn on the body, d'Hancarville reserves for sculptures a more intermediary position between the symbol and the idol. This is largely due to the fact that many of them, when observed in a detained and systematic way, play out as both naturalistic representations of the human body and as fantastic creatures. They often involve a hybrid representation where the human body deforms into substances of vegetal, animal and mineral appearance, occupying an intermediary position between the aniconic sign and personified images of gods. The *forme emblématique*, the principal concern of the *Recherches*, is probably the principal reason that d'Hancarville came to abandon his idea of an aniconic hero-cult in the *Antiquités Étrusques*, opposing the »indication« to the »sign«. His chronological understanding of the phenomenon of sculpture, too, becomes more complex. D'Hancarville proposed in the *Recherches* that the Scythian empire introduced a series of emblematic monuments, establishing a visual culture by means of necklaces and other medals and pieces worn on the body. Such pieces reflected the concerns and interrogations that confronted the men who developed agriculture and tried to master the seasons.³⁴ The transition towards the idol could not take place unless it accomplished some type of destruction of emblematic languages:

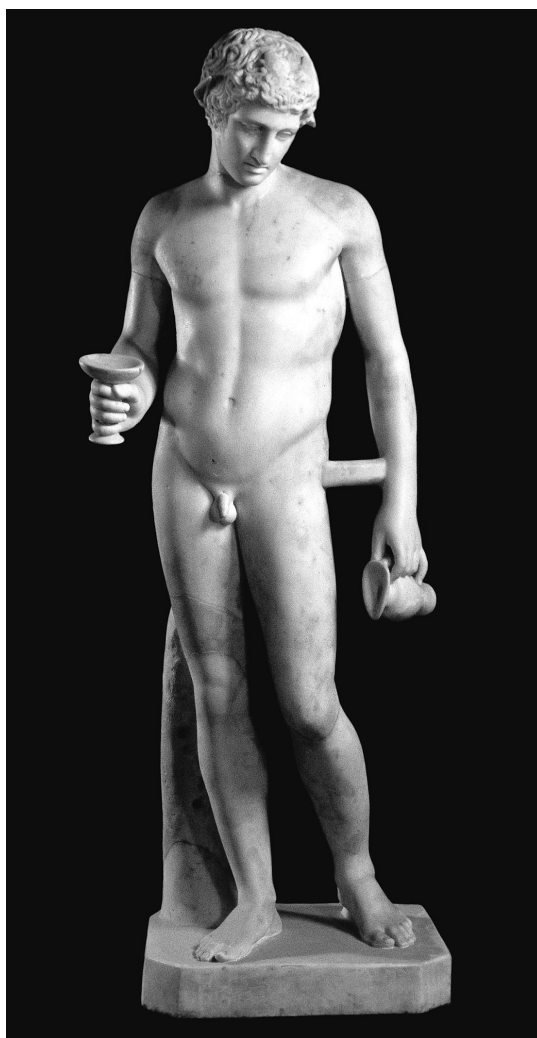
»De même que dans l'histoire des événements de ce monde, les faits arrivés dans un temps sont les causes, & pour ainsi dire les germes des faits qui arrivent dans les temps suivants, ainsi dans l'histoire des arts, les formes emblématiques employés dans les premiers âges, devinrent les principes ou les germes, qui dans les siècles suivants développèrent par des formes plus ingénieuses et plus savantes, les idées rendues primitivement par des formes plus grossières.«

The emblem, sharing in the expressive potential of an aniconic form, transforms itself into a subterranean language. The emblems of Scyths were a kind of seed (*germe*), a unique expression that insinuates itself between the idols, the *simulacres de divinités*, in order to contaminate them, adding attributes that are unlikely given the otherwise anthropomorphic body of the idol, creating appendages of non-human hoofs, horns, crabs, dolphin heads, seaweed and even trees and minerals. By extension, in the historical era that coincides with the rise of mythology, ancient cosmogony submerges itself and continues its educative task as encoded visual vocabulary. While the beautiful body of the god or goddess imprints itself on the eyes of the misguided populace (those who abandon themselves in the worship of personalized deities), d'Hancarville suspects that privately collected reliefs and terracotta busts of Gods, examples of which abounded in the Roman small-scale sculpture amassed by Townley, offered a way of continuing to inscribe a cosmogonical text into a figure that to a untrained eye had the appearance of an idol.³⁵ This is possible by addition of protheses, of details of pose, of the eruption of unhuman furs and extremities – in short, of a thousand formal anomalies that bring to the surface a language of emblems.

How does d'Hancarville detect these *formes emblématiques*? His method consists of identifying roles for the gods, those that are documented in the philological evidence of *epitheta* enumerated in countless ancient hymns. In the effort to prove that a god is in fact a screen for an emblem, d'Hancarville's »demonstration« then becomes visual: it proceeds by comparing statues representing the same god or kindred gods, in order to bring to the surface a basic map of differences and typologies. This double procedure (the philology of the epithet and an analysis based on comparative iconography) will result in the identification of idols as pseudo-human hybrids which lend their body to a reasoned emblem. In this way, d'Hancarville discusses a number of examples of busts of Bacchus that approximate this God to a bull, and others where a ram physiognomy or ram hoof overlap with representations of a Silen, of a Satyr or of Pan (fig. 5).

Once d'Hancarville has shown that the Gods of the Greco-Roman pantheon are sometimes represented by recourse to the very specific associations that come with their epithets, the work of analysis continues by showing that the attributes contend with the mythic identity of the idol, violating the boundaries of divine identity. For example, d'Hancarville takes representations of the Bacchus Dasyllius, and unveils how its actions, its furs and even head inclinations unite in a single body the animal characteris-

5 Marble statue of Pan, Roman, about 45–25 BC, from a villa at Monte Cagnolo, near Rome. London, British Museum, Townley collection, GR 1805.7-3.28-29



tics of bulls and rams as well as humans. A plate that reproduced a bust of Bacchus Dasyllus makes an unsettling and deeply animal impression, even to a contemporary beholder (fig. 6). After having demonstrated that the logos of the *epitheton* (the descriptive idea of a God that springs from Scythian sources) obeys a principle foreign to the personified mythic *name* arbitrarily given to it by a local intervention, d'Hancarville takes the third and final step in his argument about submerged emblems. His concern is to take down such anecdotic divisions introduced by idolatry in order to return to a system of



6 Bacchus Dasyllius, According to d'Hancarville, a hyprid of human, bull and ram types, from Pierre François Hugues d'Hancarville: *Recherches sur l'origine, l'esprit et le progrès des arts de la Grèce, sur leur connection avec les arts et la religion des plus anciens peuples connus*, B. Appleyard, London 1785, vol. 1, plate XIV

thinking about the origins of the world. The mythical god's emblem is a seed (*germe*), which is to say that it depends on a grammar which allows the pantheon to assume an identity within a cosmogony. It is, for instance, in the system of epithets that lies hidden the secret relationship between Pan and Bacchus, who associate in the Bacchus Dasyllius by a double animalisation. D'Hancarville conjectures that in ancient cosmogony the two gods represented two levels of the activity of generation or creation. Pan symbolizes the *être primitif* or *être générateur*, the *auteur de génération*, and he fathered Bacchus, who originates in the cosmogony as the agent or *moyen de création*. Many identities in mythology collapse into a single cosmogonical family in this way: Pan, the Silen, Priapus, Bacchus, Diana, the fauns, the satyrs. Their place in an account about the origins of

the world gives the lie to the misguided genealogy of Greek mythology, which is regarded by d'Hancarville as an arbitrary and ill-conceived construction meant to nourish the superstitious masses.

Holding together the *Recherches* is a tale of underground plotting: the old cosmogony survived as a counter-culture to official mythographies and Christian dogma, animating a long tradition of nature-worship that extends, according to d'Hancarville's fellow-traveller Knight, to more modern episodes of communal mysticism exemplified by the Knight Templars, medieval Satan worship and renaissance witch Sabbaths, which Knight believed sustained the forms, rites and symbols of Roman orgies and priapic cult.³⁶ One might rightly wonder if this feat of antiquarian observation – to claim that the statues of antique Gods spoke with two voices – would have been possible without Winckelmann's creation of a sensuous yet heroic, youthful yet autonomous body as a site where ancients Greeks and Romans celebrated their enlightened values. At the same time, nothing could be farther from the *Geschichte* than the observation that evidence for the existence of a »thinking« or philosophical cult is to be found in symbols, bulls, eggs, serpents and animal hoofs that strangely dehumanize the beautiful youth or voluptuous goddess. Asking what could lie behind this curious transition from Winckelmann's ideal to d'Hancarville's hybrids is not for this contribution, and clues are few and far between. One may venture to think that it was the product less of a discipline of antiquarian study than of an artistic and philosophical climate. In the 1770s and 1780s, Rome was the centre of a movement of emancipation that included artists like Henry Fuseli and Johann Tobias Sergel, writers like Wilhelm Heinse, and the pornographic writings d'Hancarville himself produced before coming to London.³⁷ French materialism, particularly the work of Helvétius, was turning to themes of heroism in battle and (male) sexual dominion in formulations that, for their recourse to organic power, bear comparison to a »Darwinian« turn of thought. Martin Dönike and Harald Tausch have recently pointed out that the reception of ancient art was alive and well among writers like Aloys Hirt, who did not pretend to antiquarian expertise, yet felt the need to pursue a further debate with Winckelmann's analysis of the Greek sculptural body and the fact that Winckelmann's self-possessed, noble figure was of little use in accounting for phenomena of strong emotion, pain and violence, both in statuary and vases. Hirt was looking again to the antique with a new interest in death, pathos and untamed natural impulses, much as Schiller was doing in his periodical *Die Horen* and in his notion of a freshly violent and unadorned *naive Dichtung*.³⁸

The subject of antiquarian knowledge created in the *Recherches* supersedes a historical project on the arts, because it offers a speculative and psychological account of the space of ritual. It therefore comes surprisingly close to an account of *Nachleben*, underpinned by a theory of states of consciousness (the cultic fictions pitted against the culture of the symbolic) that can co-exist at any given historical moment. It would be interesting to offer, as final conclusion, the thought that modern sculpture in the early-to-mid

nineteenth century offered cohorts of Pans, fauns and bacchantes difficult to legitimize by recourse to Winckelmann. A residue of the idolatric ›context‹ for Greek and Roman sculpture did apparently survive, in spite of the tremendous impact of the *Geschichte*, and one wonders if the *Recherches* might have been, through the intermediary of collectors, a source of ideas. The idol could appear, however, transformed, as can be gleaned in a passage from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun Or, The Romance of Monte Beni*, published in 1860:

»Only a sculptor of the finest imagination, the most delicate taste, the sweetest feeling, and the rarest artistic skill – in a word, a sculptor and a poet too – could have first dreamed of a Faun in this guise, and then have succeeded in imprisoning the sportive and frisky thing in marble. Neither man nor animal, and yet no monster, but a being in whom both races meet on friendly ground. The idea grows coarse as we handle it, and hardens in our grasp. But, if the spectator broods long over the statue, he will be conscious of its spell; all the pleasantness of sylvan life, all the genial and happy characteristics of creatures that dwell in woods and fields, will seem to be mingled and kneaded into one substance, along with the kindred qualities in the human soul. Trees, grass, flowers, woodland streamlets, cattle, deer, and unsophisticated man. The essence of all these was compressed long ago, and still exists, within that discoloured marble surface of the Faun of Praxiteles.«³⁹

Hawthorne's passage is striking particularly when compared to Winckelmann's picture of »young bark«: the healthy and truth-loving minds of Greek youths. The novelty consists in the return to imaginations of an irrational union with nature. The new identification of a Faun with a raw, more immediately carnal beholder experience undermines the idealism of Winckelmann's vision, while it reinstates the idol worshipper *from within*. What had once been a condemnation of idol worshippers who knew little better, who falsely fashioned and venerated nature in a lapse of reason, has given way to a first-hand account of a viewer's sense of succumbing to an irrational attraction, where skin and natural formations are »mingled and kneaded into one substance, along with the kindred qualities in the human soul«. In Hawthorne, the theme of idolatry is not appearing as the representation of a historical backdrop, but as a first-hand re-experiencing of primitiveness, which is recovered as a sphere of consciousness, one more immediately natural than the sensuous heroes of Winckelmann's Greek statues.

Baron D'Hancarville's »Recherches« on the Evolution of Sculpture (Tomas Macsotay)

- 1 Falconet 1970, vol. 1, pp. 1–2.
- 2 From the considerable bibliography on the rise of the memorial around 1800, I will single out the recent Naginski 2009.
- 3 I have used the nineteenth-century English translation: Winckelmann 1850, vol. 1, p. 15.
- 4 See Winckelmann 1850, vol. 1 p. 16.
- 5 For a development of this theme of a duplicitous and conflicted beholder in the writings of Winckelmann, riven by the desire for the »flesh« yet also aspirations to the »ideal«, see Potts 1994.
- 6 On the drives behind antiquarian collecting (from commodification to self-representation and the quest for *dilettante* virtue) see a growing body of literature on British collecting: Coltman 2009 and 2006, Guilding 2014, and De Bolla 2003, pp. 151–217.
- 7 Funnell 1982, pp. 58–59.
- 8 It was the speculative element that clearly distinguished the *Recherches* from the tradition of dilettante writings offering learned elucidations about pieces in specific collections. An example of the latter are the description of Louis XV's antique coins in Mariette's 1750 *Traité de pierres gravées*, but no longer d'Hancarville's *Collection of Etruscan, Greek and Roman Antiquities*, which refers to Sir William Hamilton's vases, yet takes shape as a fledging investigation into Etruscan and Greek antiquities. See on the development of the antiquarian text between Mariette and Winckelmann Pomian 2003, pp. 213–248. On the reception of the Hamilton vases project in later archaeology see Kalkanis 2012, pp. 487–514 and Schmidt 2004, pp. 8–20.
- 9 Quoted from Townely's letter in Funnell 1982, p. 55.

- 10 See, for instance, the note in John Forbes' s journal from April 4, 1793, commenting on Winckelmann's description of the Belvedere Torso: »I am not connoisseur enough, but I confess that to me, this Rhapsody of Winckelmann on this Mutilated trunk appears to be the very ravings of criticism.« Edinburgh, National Library, Forbes Journal, vol. VI, mss 1544.
- 11 Haskell 1987, p. 33.
- 12 To quote Schapp, the model developed in the work of Hamilton, Winckelmann and d'Hancarville delivered accounts of history, culture and religion that examined them with the same rigour as nature: »observation of natural and cultural phenomena [are] understood as sequences of events to be explained by a single paradigm.« See Schnapp 2007, pp. 154–166: p. 159. I am referring to Susan Sontag's novel *The Volcano Lover* (London: Penguin, 1992).
- 13 See Schnapp 1992 and Schnapp 2007, pp. 154–166.
- 14 There has been sustained interest on the writings of the triumvirate d'Hancarville, Richard Payne Knight and William Hamilton, and above all on the moral problems raised by Knight's work. See Clarke and Penny 1982; Haskell 1987; Griener 2010, pp. 149–167; Davis 2002, pp. 85–11. The idea that these writings were studied by British sculpture collectors was launched in Guiding 2001, pp. 9–14, and developed further in her 2014 book.
- 15 Funnell 1982, pp. 58–59.
- 16 See Davis 2002 and Kelly 2006, 241–266. Kelly argues that Hamilton and Knight's playful interest in sexual ceremonies belonged to a widespread Enlightenment anthropological project focusing on primitive societies and the origins of religion. In part, this movement was inspired by a materialist paradigm according to which religious emotion had once dispensed with conventions, rituals and all prohibitions of later doctrinal religion, answering instead spontaneously to the natural world and dwelling on the natural processes of reproduction and death.
- 17 Funnell 1987, pp. 58–64.
- 18 Craske 1997, pp. 142.
- 19 Hancarville 1785, vol. 1, p. 357.
- 20 Hancarville 1785, vol. 1, p. 362.
- 21 Hancarville 1785, vol. 2, pp. 181–182
- 22 John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious: A Treatise Shewing, That there is nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, Nor Above It: And that no Christian Doctrine can be properly called A Mystery* (1696).
- 23 Boulanger 1766, pp. 69–70. See on the emergence of ethnographic studies relative to the idol Van Eck 2013, pp. 41–56.
- 24 »Antiquités de Persepolis et la religion des anciens Perses avant le tems du premier Zoroaste : sur les monumens de Mithras«, in Hancarville 1785, pp. 113–175.
- 25 Hancarville 1785, pp. 163–168.
- 26 Hancarville 1785, p. 163.
- 27 Hancarville 1785, p. 117.
- 28 For the passages on Scythic history see Hancarville 1785, vol. 1, p. xviii, p. 36–45 and *Supplément*, p. 113–115.
- 29 D'Hancarville's system of primitive emblems, composed of an arbitrary collection of organic, violent and predatory beings, resembles strongly the artistic response to the Homeric epos in Flaxman, as well as the theories on the universal sign developed by Humbert de Superville.

D'Hancarville's *Recherches* may well have reinforced the romantic culture of the autonomous visual sign. See Starobinski 1979, p. 93 ff and Macsotay 2013.

30 Hancarville 1767, vol. IV, pp. 3–4.

31 Guasco 1768.

32 Hancarville 1767, vol. IV, p. 6.

33 Hancarville 1785, vol. 1, p. 45.

34 Hancarville 1785, vol. 1, p. XVIII.

35 Hancarville 1785, vol. 1, pp. XX–XXII.

36 »The vows which the people of antiquity addressed to Priapus, those of the middle ages addressed to Satan. The witches' »Sabbath« was simply the last form which the Priapeia and Liberalia assumed in Western Europe, and in its various details all the incidents of those great and licentious orgies of the Romans were reproduced.« See Payne Knight, *A Discourse*, pp. 206–207.

37 Myrone 2008.

38 See Dönike 2007. See also Tausch 2000 and 2000a.

39 From Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun Or, The Romance of Monte Beni* (originally 1860), chapter 2.