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JAMES BYRES AND THE ANCIENT STATE OF ITALY:
UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS IN EDINBURGH

James Byres (1734-1817) left his native Scotland after the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, and continued his education in France. He went to Rome in 1758 to study painting and subsequently architecture, and by 1764 had become an antiquarian there¹, successfully combining this profession for the next quarter century with occasional architectural commissions² and more substantial dealings in pictures and antiquities³. Byres left Rome for good in 1790, and spent the remaining twenty-seven years of his long life as laird of Tonley in the parish of Tough, Aberdeenshire⁴.

At an early stage in his antiquarian career, Byres visited Tarquinia, possi-

¹ B. FORD, *James Byres: principal antiquarian for the English visitors to Rome*, in *Apollo*, June 1974, 446-461: with extensive earlier bibliography.

² FORD, *cit.*, 448 ff. List: H. COLVIN, *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840* (1978) 179. Surviving projects have been defined as «old fashioned» and «frozen baroque» rather than Neoclassical: H. HONOUR, *James Byres' designs for rebuilding Henham Hall, Suffolk*, in *The Country Seat (= Studies Summerson)* (1970) 164-169. In fact, only one of Byres' Roman designs is known to have been executed: the signed funerary monument (1768) in Sleat church, Skye to Sir James Macdonald, who died shortly after meeting Byres in Naples in the circumstances described below (note 24). The monument was «elegantly executed at Rome»: J. BOSWELL, *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson 1773, 1785* (Everyman ed., [1958] 94 f.).

³ Byres' most notable coup as a dealer in antiquities was the acquisition c. 1780 of the item then known as the «Barberini Vase» from Donna Cornelia Barberini-Colonna; by 1783 Byres had sold it for £ 1000 to Sir William Hamilton (notes 24, 25 below), who in turn sold it in the following year to the Duchess of Portland. In 1785, the «Portland Vase» was lent to Josiah Wedgwood, whose success in reproducing it is commonly regarded as his most outstanding technical achievement: D. E. L. HAYNES, *The Portland Vase*² (1975); B. FOTHERGILL, *Sir William Hamilton: Envoy Extraordinary* (1969) 192-196; A. DAWSON, *Masterpieces of Wedgwood in the British Museum* (1984) 112-125, 149 f. On the iconography of the vase itself, now in the British Museum, see most recently J. D. SMART, *The Portland Vase again*, in *JHS* 104, 1984, 186.

⁴ A contemporary chronicle notes approvingly that Byres' schemes of agricultural and other improvements on the Tonley estate were being «prosecuted with vigour, spirit and success»: *The Statistical Account of Scotland VIII* (1793) 263 f. The estate was broken up in the early part of the present century: *Third Statistical Account of Scotland VII* (1960) 219.

bly in the company of Piranesi ⁵, and apparently in the wake of his English rival Thomas Jenkins ⁶, who in 1761 had excavated a number of painted and inscribed tombs, including the Tomba del Cardinale, at the request and expense of Mr Joseph Wilcox ⁷. As is well known, Byres intended to write a book about the Etruscans and to illustrate it with engravings of the drawings that he had had made at Tarquinia; it is no less well known that the text, if finished, did not find a publisher ⁸, and that the plates were finally published in 1842, twenty-five years after Byres' death, by the painter Frank Howard under the slightly inaccurate title *Hypogaei or Sepulchral Caverns of Tarquinia, the Capital of Antient Etruria by the late James Byres Esq., of Tonley Aberdeenshire, nearly forty Years Antiquarian resident at Rome prior to 1791* ⁹. The present paper has nothing to add to the important recent contributions of Elaine P. Loeffler, Hans Möbius, Witold Dobrowolski and Alessandro Morandi relating to the tombs illustrated in this remarkable work ¹⁰. I am concerned rather with Byres' attempts to address the

⁵ « Signor Carlo Avvolta assured me that Byres was sent by the British government, and was accompanied by several other artists, among whom was the celebrated Piranesi . . . they were entertained by his father . . . »: DENNIS³, I, 340. It is unlikely that Byres was « sent » to Tarquinia (or indeed anywhere) « by the British government ». It could be that Avvolta was confusing him with another « inglese » (*sic*), Thomas Jenkins, who was known for reasons that are not entirely clear as the « British Agent » in Rome. It has indeed been suggested that Jenkins may have been discreetly employed to spy on the Scottish (Jacobite) circle in Rome, with which Byres was clearly associated: PIERCE, *cit.* (next note), 200 f. It remains true that Piranesi and Byres are known to have been on friendly terms; FORD, *cit.* (note 1), 449; M. CRISTOFANI, *La scoperta degli Etruschi: archeologia e antiquaria nel '700* (1983) 109 f.

⁶ T. ASHBY, *Thomas Jenkins in Rome*, in *PBSR* 6, 1913, 487-511; S. R. PIERCE, *Thomas Jenkins in Rome*, in *Antiquaries Journal* 45, 1965, 200-229; B. FORD, *Thomas Jenkins: banker, dealer and unofficial English agent*, in *Apollo*, June 1974, 416-425.

⁷ PIERCE, *cit.* (note 6), 211; HENCKEN, *Tarquinia* 26 f.; CRISTOFANI, *cit.* (note 5), 104 ff. (Cristofani's reference to « John Byres, un architetto inglese » on p. 108 does not inspire confidence; he also apparently confuses two very different and unrelated Hamiltons, [Sir] William and Gavin, *ibidem* with note 57).

⁸ FORD, *cit.* (note 1), 452 f., quoting Byres *in litt.* to Sir William Hamilton (1766) and the Abbé Grant *in litt.* to James Adam (1767).

⁹ Howard's purpose in publishing *Hypogaei* (1842) was to profit by the commercial success of a popular work, Mrs Hamilton Gray's *Tour to the Sepulchres of Etruria in 1839* (1840). Also in 1842, George Dennis, then a young clerk in the London Excise Office, made the first of the tours in Etruria that resulted in the first edition of his classic *Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* (1848), designed to « put a full stop to [Mrs Hamilton Gray's] erroneous progeny »: D. E. RHODES, *Dennis of Etruria* (1973) 49. See further COLONNA, *cit.* in note 36, below.

¹⁰ E. P. LOEFFLER, *A lost Etruscan painted tomb*, in *Essays Lehmann* (1964) 198-203; H. MÖBIUS, *Zeichnungen etruskischer Kammergräber und Einzelfunde von James Byres*, in *RM* 73-74, 1966-1967, 53-71; W. DOBROWOLSKI, *The drawings of Etruscan tombs by Franciszek Smuglewicz and his co-operation with James Byres*, in *Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie* 19, 1978, 97-119; A. MORANDI, *Le pitture della Tomba del Cardinale. Monumenti della Pittura Antica scoperti in Italia VI* (1983) with an appendix by Dobrowolski on Smuglewicz and Byres, pp. 68-70. In 1978, Dobrowolski showed conclusively that the tombs illustrated in *Hypogaei* were drawn by the Polish artist Franciszek Smuglewicz to whose hand Ford *cit.* (note 1), 455 had previously attributed the Byres family portrait (*tav.* 1) described below in *Appendix I*. Smuglewicz' Tarquinia drawings were engraved by Christopher Norton, who is seen on the far right of this group.

Etruscans themselves, and to understand their place in the ancient Italian scheme of things. Byres' view of the ancient state of Italy is particularly interesting, for he was clearly at home in the intellectual circles not only of his adopted city but also of his native land, abundantly represented in the Rome of his time by political exiles and other long term visitors. And in Scotland as in Italy, the later eighteenth century was a crucial period in the history of archaeology¹¹.

Mrs E. B. Gammell, a collateral descendant of James Byres, has recently and most generously deposited a collection of his papers in the Department of Manuscripts, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh¹². In addition to an inventory of the pictures and furniture in Byres' house in the Strada Paolina¹³, a summary catalogue of his Rome library (around 200 volumes), his will and a number of letters, the deposit includes a few incomplete drafts relating to one of the main themes that Byres intended to treat in his book, here called simply *History of the Etruscians*. The « thoughts relative to the plan of this work » go no further than the first section, which is entitled « The ancient state of Italy »:

To give a concise account of what the ancients have said relative to the first inhabitants of Italy;

and

To propose my own ideas relative to the Mediterranean Sea . . . that the many changes of people migrating and colonies settling here was a consequence of that deluge by which the multitudes that had saved themselves on high ground, being straitened for room and provisions, were obliged to seek about for new settlements; that this great catastrophe and the necessities of mankind for several ages after must have interrupted all arts and sciences, and occasioned the loss of records which may have existed before.

Certain associated « conjectures relative to the Mediterranean » are brief and to the point:

Various motives induce me to think that Europe and Africa were originally

¹¹ For the Scottish reaction to the 18th century Italian connection, see: J. FLEMING, *Robert Adam and his circle in Edinburgh and Rome* (1962); B. SKINNER, *Scots in Italy in the 18th century* (1966); S. FIGGOTT, *Ruins in a landscape: essays in antiquarianism* (1976); IDEM and M. ROBERTSON, *Three centuries of Scottish archaeology* (1977); I. G. BROWN, *The hobby-horsical antiquary: a Scottish character 1640-1830* (1980); IDEM, *Poet and Painter: Allan Ramsay, father and son 1684-1784* (1984). More generally: W. ERNST, *Archäologie als Stil: Drei Jahrhunderte britischer Antikenrezeption*, in P. BERGHAUS, ed., *Der Archäologe: Graphische Bildnisse aus dem Porträtarchiv Diepenbroick* (1983) 47-54.

¹² Deposit 184, from which the unattributed extracts in the following paragraphs are taken; I have modernized Byres' spelling, punctuation and (occasionally) language throughout. I am most grateful to Dr Iain Brown of the National Library of Scotland for introducing me to the Byres papers in his care, and for helpful discussion.

¹³ FORD, *cit.* (note 1), 456 f.

united, forming one great continent, and that the Mediterranean Sea as it now appears is an effect of time and not coeval with the land which surrounds it.

I not only believe that Europe and Africa were joined by an isthmus, which at the Straits of Gibraltar¹⁴ united Spain and Mauretania, but also that the greatest part of that space now occupied by the Mediterranean, Adriatic and Aegean was formerly land.

If we suppose the Mediterranean Sea an effect of time greatly posterior to the land that surrounds it, this supposition – if admitted – might perhaps throw some light on the present subject and might in some measure not only contribute to reconcile and account for the apparent inconsistencies which occur in the reports left us by the ancients, but likewise coincide with the more modern system of the Italians and Celts being originally the same nation.

Byres felt that « some account of the ancient state of Italy seems necessary as an introduction to what little we know of the Etruscans' history ». He shared the preoccupation of Mario Guarnacci with the « primi abitatori d'Italia » – and, as we shall see, with the « varie reticenze dei vecchi autori di cose importantissime dell'Italia antica »¹⁵. All told, it comes as no surprise to find that the Byres papers contain a précis, in Italian and not in Byres' hand, of part of Guarnacci's *Origini italiche*: it is headed « Ragioni ed autorità che provano che prima della Romana Repubblica l'impero degli Etruschi si estendeva per tutta l'Italia, ed anche fuori di essa ». Meanwhile, two important notes afford startling evidence of Byres' own capacity for navigating what he probably realized were very deep waters indeed:

At Albe in the country of the Marsi . . . was found about four years ago a tomb, in which, in a sarcophagus well formed of six flat stones, were found seven flint heads of arrows and three heads of spears. These last were likewise of flint, with a kind of wedge, flat and sharp, at one end (like a hatchet) and pointed at the other, which may have served as a kind of battle axe. All of which I purchased, and saw the tomb. The inhabitants of this country when this tomb was made seem to have been rather opulent and acquainted with the arts; they were consequently civilized, but they certainly had not the use of iron, all these arms being made of flint – as the Americans¹⁶ had

¹⁴ FORD (*l.c.*) remarks that « the visitor must have been surprised to find amid this pompous furniture [in the dining-room of the Strada Paolina house] two large shells and a model of Gibraltar ». It is interesting to note that Byres' younger brother John (1745-1788), a captain in the Royal Engineers, « made a fine model of Gibraltar »: A. J. M. GILL, *The Families of Moir and Byres* (1885) 125.

¹⁵ M. GUARNACCI, *Origini italiche, o siano memorie istorico-etrusche sopra l'antichissimo regno d'Italia e sopra i di lei primi abitatori* (1767-1772) (three vols.); (1785-1787²) (four vols.). CRISTOFANI, *cit.* (note 5), 98 ff.

¹⁶ American ethnographic parallels for flint arrow-heads and hatchets were cited by Ulisse Aldrovandi in his posthumously published *Musaeum metallicum* (1648): A. M. RADMILLI, in *PCIA* I (1974) 72; see also M. DESITTERE, *Contributo alla storia della paleontologia italiana*,

them before the Europeans settled in their country. As a consequence, if this was a colony of Greeks, they must have settled in Italy before the use of iron was known in Greece: that is, before the birth of Jupiter.

At Montalto, which lies on the Mediterranean coast of Italy between Civitavecchia and Orbetello, were found about six years ago the bones of men and other animals of an uncommonly great size. The bones of man I did not see, but saw the skeleton of an ox's head and got part of an elephant's head: part of a great tusk, half petrified, broken short above the hollow part filled with the core and about two feet long . . . These remains of animals were found in a stratum of sea sand about 22 feet from the surface, which is a stratum of vegetable matter about two and a half feet thick. Under this is a stratum of pozzolana earth (or gravel burnt with volcanic fire), about 18 feet thick and resting upon the stratum of sea sand in which the bones were found: so that they must have been there before the eruption which occasioned the stratum of volcanic substance – which has not happened since we have any account of this country, and consequently before any elephants were brought from Africa against the Romans or to ornament their triumphs.

Of these two sites, situated in the vicinity respectively of Massa d'Albe (AQ) and Montalto di Castro (VT), the flint arrowheads and battle axes at the first suggest a prehistoric burial in a stone cist, probably of what is now known as the Conelle-Ortucchio group of the Copper Age, dated roughly between 3000 and 2000 BC¹⁷. At Montalto, near Etruscan Vulci, it is just possible that Byres saw a Palaeolithic assemblage, although the ox might be recent and the elephant's tusk could be a fossil incorporated into later deposits. More important is the careful observation of stratigraphy, followed by the acceptance that there could have been elephants in Italy before Hannibal – and that early elephants could have had human contemporaries. There is no mention of tools or weapons; even so, Byres' reasoning at Montalto recalls that displayed later – though how much later is unfortunately not clear – by his English contemporary John Frere, whose celebrated letter, read to the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1797, contained the first published conjecture that human activity could be assigned « to a very remote period indeed; even beyond that of the present world »¹⁸.

in C. M. MORIGI GOVI - G. SASSATELLI, *Dalla Stanza delle Antichità al Museo Civico* (1984) 61-85. On the impact of primitive man, as encountered in the Americas, on antiquarian thought in Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries, see PIGGOTT, *cit.* (note 11), index *ss. vv. America, Amerindians*. And it should not be forgotten that Byres numbered Americans among his antiquarian clients in Rome from 1764 onwards: FORD, *cit.* (note 1), 451, 453.

¹⁷ I am most grateful to Dr Ruth Whitehouse for this identification, and for her valuable comments on both these passages. The Conelle-Ortucchio group: C. RENFREW - R. WHITEHOUSE, in *ABSA* 69, 1974, 351 f.; A. M. RADMILLI, *Guida alla preistoria italiana* (1975) tavv. 39-40.

¹⁸ J. FRERE, *Account of flint weapons discovered at Hoxne in Suffolk*, in *Archaeologia* 13 (1800)

Notoriously, it was not until well over half a century after the publication of Frere's letter that the antiquity of man was finally and unequivocally established in an intellectual atmosphere that owed nothing to the universal Deluge and everything to the enquiries that culminated in Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and Charles Lyell's *Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man* (1863). Long before this, it is fascinating to think of Byres in Rome discussing – as he clearly did – closely related matters with anyone who would listen. Few of his clients were as broadminded or patient as Dr John Parkinson, whose notes of a conversation with Byres on 13 March 1784 range over many of the topics that have emerged in the preceding paragraphs, and more besides¹⁹. In sharp contrast, on 27 June 1786 Mrs Hester Lynch Piozzi recorded that

... the universal Deluge ... is wholly out of use now; the modern Philosophy holds the Eternity of the Earth, or at least an Antiquity of 50,000 Years; and Mr Byres gets thirty Zecchines apiece for his Infidel Lectures from all the English who travel thro' Rome; I can get such large Doses of the same course [*sic*] Commodity cheaper, that I disposed my Husband not to purchase any of Scotch Manufacture²⁰.

Turning now to Byres' attempts to draft a history of the Etruscans themselves, we find a notable preoccupation with the nature of the evidence. It amounts to something resembling source criticism:

Nothing can be more uncertain than the accounts left us by the ancients of the first inhabitants. This is principally owing in the first place to the Roman conquests, and to the Romans' ignorant vanity in the early time of the Republic: when, ignorant of better, they despised all arts and sciences except that of war, living principally on the spoils of their neighbours, subduing the Etruscans and other nations who before them possessed this country. Before they had acquired a taste for knowledge themselves, they put a stop to the progress of science; and the vanity of appearing the only great nation probably induced them to destroy the Etruscan records, which perhaps showed the meanness of their own origin, which they probably wanted to conceal. It might have been expected that the Greeks, who had much communication with this country, should have had more certain accounts of it: but we see that, until the time of Herodotus, what they knew of their own antiquities and country was from their poets. These, to make the stronger impression, mixed the marvellous with truth,

204 f.; transcribed with commentary by G. DANIEL, *The Origins and Growth of Archaeology* (1967) 58 ff.

¹⁹ FORD, *cit.* (note 1), 458.

²⁰ K. C. BALDERSTON, *Thraliana*² (1951) II, 647. In her own footnote to this passage, Mrs Piozzi (formerly Mrs Thrall, the confidante of Samuel Johnson) states the theological point at issue with self-righteous clarity: «If we are contented to believe his Word who made the World, 'tis certain that 2348 years before Christ came to redeem it, the Deluge was sent to destroy the impenitent Sinners and baptize by a Flood of Water the Survivors to a new and better Life».

and seem to have been particularly fond of deriving the name of every country from its founder, and by that means locating a new hero or king. This practice seems to have misled even the most judicious of their historians in later times, and to have supported their favourite system of deriving almost all the Italian nations, especially the Latins, from the Greeks.

It appears probable that most of the Greek colonists who settled in Italy came into that country after the Trojan War, about the time that the Greeks were getting the better of their little kings or tyrants and settling their governments according to the republican system. These little kings or their descendants, not being able to brook such equality, probably either from choice or force left their country, and were followed by the favourers of monarchy who established this species of government where they settled. It is not to be imagined that a nation in the barbarous and brutal state that the Greeks were in prior to this period, . . . without laws, letters or arts of any kind, were in a situation to send out colonies or found other states.

The Greek authors in particular seem to have . . . taken all possible pains to convince the Italians that they were originally descended from them, and owed to them their religion, laws and literature – especially the different tribes of Latium, for, as the Romans were descended from these, it flattered the vanity of the Greeks to think that the then masters of the world were descended from themselves. This the Italians could not easily confute, having but few records and having entirely lost their ancient language.

[Dionysius of Halicarnassus], although a most enlightened and excellent author in undertaking the *History of Roman Antiquities*, his principal view was to endear his countrymen to the Romans and to reconcile the Greeks to the Roman yoke by showing them that they were originally descended from the same people: it is probable indeed that they were, but hardly in the manner he accounts for it.

Arts, sciences and literature in general seem to have been cultivated in Italy long before Rome began to make any figure, probably ages before the Argonautic expedition or the Trojan War: but that they flourished among the Etrurians in the earliest times of Rome is beyond all doubt. The Romans and Greeks universally allow it, and the monuments of Etruscan art still existing are sufficient to convince us of it. Notwithstanding this, none of their books have reached us; and it is almost certain that none of them were existing in the time of Augustus. We cannot attribute this to their want of records or historians: it is probable that the Romans, as they conquered the different states of Italy, especially the Etruscans, destroyed their books and records as they afterwards did those of the Carthaginians. Fearing that posterity should receive any account of their actions other than the one they chose to give themselves, or envious of the high antiquity of some of these nations in comparison with their own, they endeavoured to bury them in oblivion. Such maxims are not uncommon among illiterate and barbarous nations, such as the Romans were at that time.

Did Byres, one wonders, discuss his essentially negative judgement of the Etruscans' successors in Italy with his friend Piranesi? We would surely heard

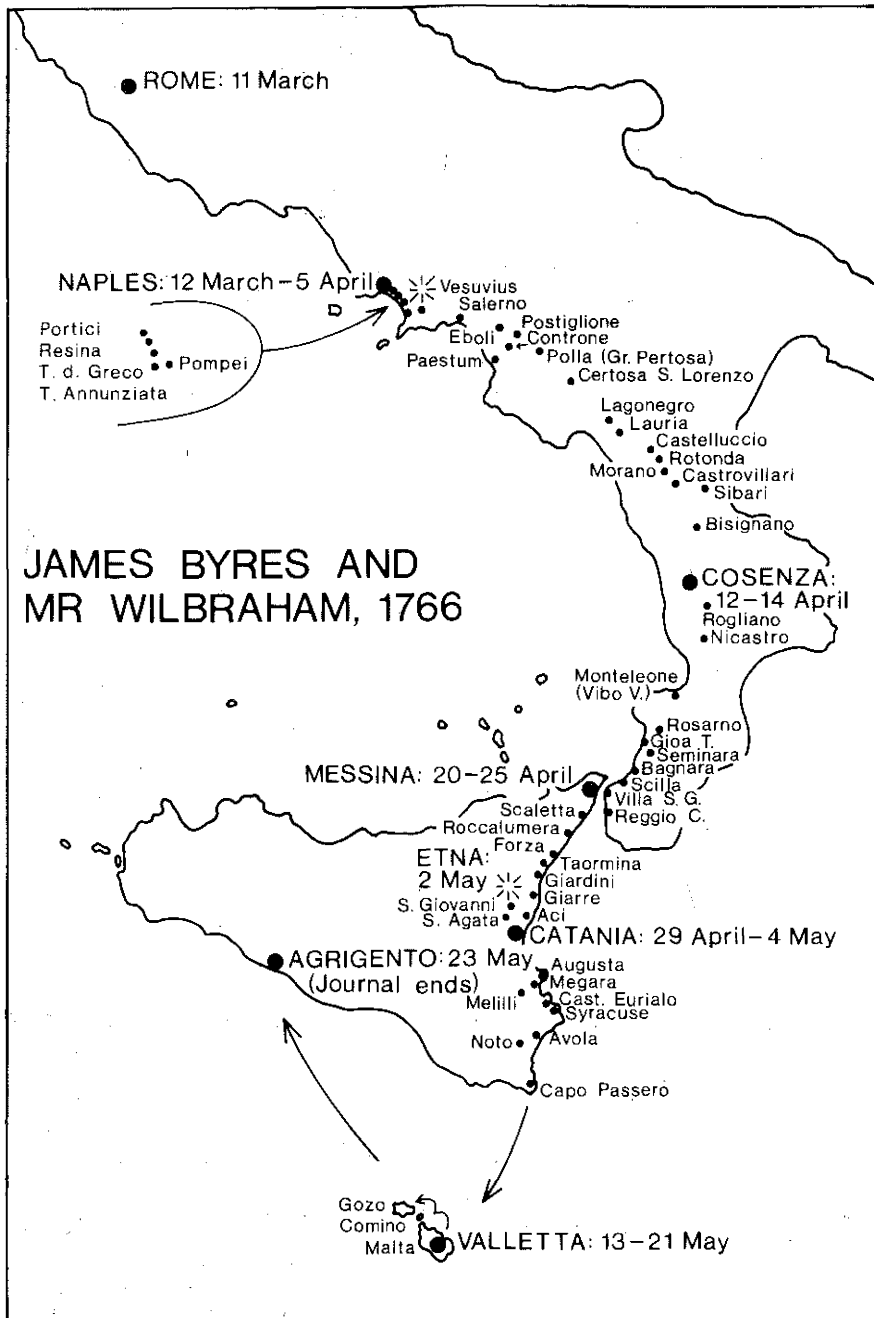


fig. 1 - The route taken by James Byres and Mr Wilbraham in South Italy, Sicily and Malta, March - May 1766 (drawing: Jane Blair).

about it if he had. A few years before Byres visited Tarquinia, similar disparagement of the ancient Romans had been expressed in print by a fellow Scot, Allan Ramsay, whose *Dialogue on Taste* (1755; re-issued 1762) describes them *inter alia* as « profoundly ignorant of all the arts of peace » and « a gang of mere plunderers »: definitions that earned massive verbal and visual refutation in *Della Magnificenza ed Architettura de' Romani* (1761), wherein Piranesi exhorted Ramsay to keep silent on matters he did not understand or run the risk of seeming « ridicolo, e insieme stomachevole »²¹.

Another unpublished document in the National Library of Scotland sheds further light on Byres' approach to ancient Italy. Unlike the notes excerpted above, it has a firm date on the first page:

Journal of my jaunt to Sicily in company with Mr Wilbraham. We set out from Rome the 11th of March 1766 at 7 o'clock of the morning on post-horses²².

The route taken by Byres and Mr Wilbraham is shown on *fig. 1*. Although the ostensible purpose of the « jaunt » was doubtless to show young Mr Wilbraham²³ the classical antiquities of southern Italy and Sicily, Byres' own account devotes much more space to natural phenomena and to speculations on their causes. Thus, shortly after leaving Naples, he describes and identifies the different kinds of marble visible in the Carthusian church and convent of S. Lorenzo (Padula, SA), subsequently identifying their sources in the mountains to the south – where he also

... took pains ... to observe if there were early petrifications or sea shells, but could find none. Nor did I see any vestiges of the Deluge here; probably these mountains have not been altered by it. (p. 25)

Later on, similar geological observations in the Taormina area lead him to conclude that

... the old opinion of Italy and Sicily having been joined is very probable; but I should imagine they had been separated at the universal Deluge or at some particular

²¹ On this highly significant exchange of views, see most recently BROWN, *Poet and Painter*, *cit.* (note 11), 40 f.

²² National Library of Scotland, Department of Manuscripts inv. n. MS 10339.

²³ Byres mentions Mr Wilbraham in his journal only once after the first day: between Nicastro and Monteleone (now Vibo Valentia, CZ), « Mr Wilbraham's horse ... fell in the middle of the river with him so that he was entirely wet and in some danger » (p. 29). He is identified by COLVIN, *loc. cit.* (note 2) as Roger Wilbraham (1743-1829) of Nantwich, Cheshire, later Member of Parliament for Helston and Bodmin, Cornwall. My Edinburgh colleague Patricia Storey kindly informs me that in due course he also became a member of the Society of Antiquaries of London, the Society of Dilettanti and the Royal Society.

one, for in the vales and many places you see where the sea has been, and others seem undisturbed since the Creation. (p. 39)

At S. Agata, outside Catania, Byres provides a minute description, accompanied by measured drawings, of certain immense chestnut trees (p. 51), after which comes what was evidently – for him – the high point of the whole trip: a visit to Mount Etna on 2 May, shortly after an eruption (pp. 59-66). The extensive descriptions and measurements of the «gerandolos» of lava and stones are of a high order:

[they] changed form in the air, and flattened in falling; every ninth or tenth stroke was greater than the others. I believe they may have risen about 400 feet high, for I observed several of the stones or lava 28 seconds in the air before they began to fall. [The process] was attended with a great noise, like that of a number of iron mills turned by a great cascade of water. (p. 59)

No archaeological site or monument in south Italy or Sicily engages Byres' enthusiasm to the extent that Etna does. We may be sure that he reported on what he had seen there to Sir William Hamilton, whom he had met (perhaps for the first time) during the weeks he and Mr Wilbraham spent in Naples on their way south²⁴. Hamilton climbed Etna himself in 1769, and later communicated his volcanic observations to the Royal Society of London²⁵.

Compared to the attention paid to natural history, Byres' notes on the classical sites are positively scanty. At Paestum²⁶, his comments are perfunctory (p. 14), his sketch-plans indifferent (pp. 15-17) and his mood black – not least because «we slept at Pesto in a most miserable cottage» (p. 18). Predictably, spirits were restored by the opportunity of speculating on the geology that had given rise to the underground watercourse near Polla (the Grotta Pertosa: pp. 19-20); the «Etruscan vases, ancient bronzes and medals» of the Carthians at S. Lorenzo are only briefly mentioned (p. 21). Indeed, the only collection of antiquities to which Byres devotes more than a few lines is that

²⁴ In Naples, «we met with a most agreeable set of travelling gentlemen, which made our stay here most agreeable» (p. 4). The gentlemen listed include Sir James Macdonald (1742-1766: see note 2, above) and «Mr Hamilton, British Minister at this Court», to which he had been appointed in 1764 (FOTHERGILL, *cit.* [note 3], 35).

²⁵ Hamilton's 1769 visit to Sicily is described by FOTHERGILL, *cit.*, 94 ff.: in addition to the ascent of Etna, it has the chestnut trees at S. Agata and an excursion to Malta in common with Byres' itinerary. The inventory of Byres' property in Rome (note 13, above) refers to «Sir William Hamilton's letters on the earthquakes of Calabria, tied up with several physical pamphlets». Shortly after the Portland Vase transaction (note 3, above), Byres permitted himself a dry comment on Hamilton's liaison with Emma Lyon, who later became the second Lady Hamilton – and «Nelson's Emma»: «He has lately got a piece of modernity from England, which I am afraid will fatigue and exhaust him more than all the volcanoes and antiquities in the Kingdom of Naples» (FORD, *cit.* [note 1], 456).

²⁶ T. A. CHERRY - I. G. BROWN, *Scottish architects at home and abroad* (1978) 59 f.

of the Principe di Biscari at Catania²⁷, who was clearly a man after Byres' own heart:

... an excellent collection of Etruscan vases – some very ancient – found at Camarina, some with Etruscan, some with Egyptian and some with Greek figures on them, and with Greek and Etruscan inscriptions, which I think shows that these nations had great communication together and borrowed their arts from one another; he has likewise a considerable collection of natural history, particularly corals, sea plants, petrifications and shells. (p. 54)

Of the Greek architectural monuments in Sicily, only the temples at Agrigento are described at any length, with a detailed comparison between the dimensions indicated by Diodorus Siculus and those meticulously recorded by Byres *in situ* (pp. 89-94). And here his journal breaks off, in mid-sentence with a few blank pages still left, on 23 May. It is natural to suppose that the travellers continued their « jaunt » at least to Selinunte and Palermo before returning to Rome – perhaps by sea, and certainly arriving before 16 July, when Winckelmann mentioned their Sicilian exploits in a letter to his friend Desmaret²⁸.

It will be apparent by now that Byres' manuscript notes and journal, now in Edinburgh, are uninformative on the subject with which his name has been indissolubly linked for two centuries and more: the painted Etruscan tombs at Tarquinia. On the other hand, they afford a more detailed insight than has hitherto been available into the attitudes and priorities of a man who exercised considerable influence on the taste of innumerable English families and – no less significantly – on figures of the intellectual stature of Edward Gibbon²⁹ and Sir William Hamilton³⁰. Given his position as the leading antiquarian in Rome, the quality and quantity of his contacts and his undoubtedly comfortable personal finances, it is strange indeed that his Etruscan book could not be published. At the stage represented by the manuscript material reviewed in the present paper, the text was clearly far from completion; and the vast range – vaster than we realized – of Byres' scholarly interests did not augur well for finalization. His attempts, drafted and re-drafted, to relate the Etruscans he had found in the ancient written sources to what he had seen on the ground, in Etruria and elsewhere, strongly indicate that he was still groping for a chronological perspec-

²⁷ I. Paternò, Principe di Biscari; author of *Viaggio per tutte le antichità della Sicilia*, Naples 1781; Catania 1784²; Palermo 1817³. On the man and his collection, also visited by Goethe, see BERGHAUS, *cit.* (note 11), *s.v.*

²⁸ Quoted by FORD, *cit.* (note 1), 452.

²⁹ In addition to conducting Gibbon on the tour of Rome in 1764 (FORD, *cit.*, 450), Byres probably introduced him to Andrew Lumisden - who was able to furnish him with a copy of the Abbé Gravina's unpublished manuscript *Del governo civile a Roma*: G. GIARRIZZO, *Edward Gibbon e la cultura europea del Settecento* (1954) 195 f.

³⁰ Notes 3, 24 and 25, above.

tive. But this had still to be delineated; meanwhile, the unthinkable consequences of following some lines of enquiry to their logical conclusion were probably as apparent to Byres as they were to Mrs Piozzi³¹. Professionally, too (and also politically and socially), it is unlikely that he would care to be branded publicly as an Infidel.

However this may be, one late attempt seems to have been made to bring the work to the attention of its most likely purchasers: the insertion of the item in the June 1779 issue of the *Gentleman's Magazine* (London) that is reproduced here as *Appendix II*. Although this refers to Byres' book in the past tense (« the work *was* to consist of . . . »), it is hard to see it as anything other than an advertisement. And it is not without interest to note that its appearance coincided with the publication of the second volume of *The Works in Architecture* by Byres' Scottish contemporaries, Robert and James Adam. In the *Preface* to this instalment, Robert Adam described a new mode of interior decoration

. . . which differs from anything hitherto practised in Europe: for although the style of the ornament and the colouring . . . are both evidently imitated from the vases and urns of the Etruscans, yet we have not been able to discover, either in our researches into antiquity or in the works of modern artists, any idea of applying this taste to the decoration of apartments.

Adam designed and executed at least eight « Etruscan rooms » between c. 1773 and c. 1780³², of which only the Etruscan Dressing Room (1775-1777) at Osterley Park, Middlesex³³ has survived to the present day, complete with Etruscan chairs, chimney-board and fire-screen designed *en suite*.

Adam's Etruscan style, it must be said at once, owes nothing to the Etruscan tomb-paintings studied by Jenkins, Wilcox and Byres at Tarquinia in the 1760s; the subjects and perspective of the small figured panels bear no resemblance to their counterparts on the « vases and urns of the Etruscans » (which were in any case mostly Greek); and the purely ornamental features, many of them directly inspired by Piranesi³⁴, are closer to ancient Roman or even Renais-

³¹ Note 20, above. Byres adopted the Roman Catholic faith as a boy in France, and « II has always been understood in the family that [he] was a lay-cardinal at Rome, and a fine oil painting of him, in his cardinal robes, is at Tonley »; GILL, *cit.* (note 14), 128. I have found no corroboration of this family tradition in other published sources.

³² D. STILLMAN, *The decorative work of Robert Adam* (1966) 22 f., 36 f., 52 note 28.

³³ STILLMAN, *cit.*, 75 ff., 81 with pls. 46, 69; G. BEARD, *The work of Robert Adam* (1978) pls. 69-73 and colour pl. 8; M. TOMLIN, *Osterley Park* (1977) 36-39; IDEM, *Victoria and Albert Museum: Catalogue of Adam period furniture* (1982) 77-84.

³⁴ Piranesi advocated the use of antique urns and bases as motifs and sources for wall decoration: *Diverse maniere d'adornare i cammini* (1769) 9 with tavv. 2, 3, 55. See further STILLMAN *cit.* (note 33), 76; IDEM, *Robert Adam and Piranesi*, in *Essays in the History of Architecture presented to Rudolf Wittkower* (1967) 197-206; and, on Piranesi's view of what was (but was not) Etruscan, CRISTOFANI, *cit.* (note 5), 115 ff.

sance conventions than to anything else. This shortlived experiment is « Etruscan » in name only. In christening it, Adam may have had it in mind to profit by the growing vogue for the Etruria of Josiah Wedgwood. This, however, was precisely the comparison that provoked the scorn of Horace Walpole, a shrewd and influential critic, who wrote of Osterley in 1778 that

The last chamber . . . chills you: it is called the Etruscan, and is painted all over like Wedgwood's ware, with black and yellow small grotesques. Even the chairs are of painted wood. It would be a pretty waiting-room in a garden. I never saw such a profound tumble into the bathos. It is going out of a palace into a potter's field. Tapestry, carpets, glass, velvet, satin, are all attributes of winter. There could be no excuse for such a cold termination, but its containing a cold bath next to the bed-chamber: – and it is called taste to join these incongruities³⁵!

Byres was thus disappointed if by any chance he had hoped in 1779 that Wedgwood's products and Robert Adam's new decoration might between them create a fashionable atmosphere in which his Etruscan book could at last attract enough subscriptions to be published. British popular interest in *real* Etruscan antiquities was not awakened until 1837, when the Campanari brothers of Toscanella (Tuscania) opened their memorable exhibition at 121 Pall Mall³⁶, an event that had a profound impact on contemporary taste in London. Another consequence of the Campanari exhibition was the conversion of Mrs Hamilton Gray to Etruscan « studies ». As we have seen³⁷, the commercial success of her enthusiastic but erratic *Tour* (1840) led to the publication not only of Byres' – or rather Howard's – *Hypogaei* (1842) but also of George Dennis' *Cities and Cemeteries* (1848). Before then, and as late as 1805, Byres himself could only answer a correspondent's enquiry with the following sad reference to his work at Tarquinia forty years earlier:

Many cross accidents have prevented my publishing this antiquity, perhaps the earliest existing of European art³⁸.

³⁵ Quoted by TOMLIN, *Osterley cit.* (note 33), 55. Autopsy (1985) by the present writer prompts the observation that the pale ground of Adam's « Etruscan » wall decoration at Osterley is reminiscent, though on a very different scale, of Wedgwood's caneware. The considerable technical problems encountered in the manufacture of this unglazed composition do not seem to have been overcome before 1779: DAWSON, *cit.* (note 3), 44. When they were, both the form and decoration of some examples (*ibidem*, 96 f. with fig. 74 and pl. 13) were – unlike Adam's « Etruscan style » – visibly based on a careful study of Sir William Hamilton's *Greek and Roman Antiquities*.

³⁶ G. COLONNA, *Archeologia dell'età romantica in Etruria*, in *StEtr* 46, 1978, 81-117.

³⁷ Note 9, above.

³⁸ National Library of Scotland, Deposit 184 (note 12, above). The letter, to Lady Powis, is quoted at greater length by DOBROWOLSKI, *cit.* (note 10, above), 113.

As always in the case of primary sources of data that remain *insabbiate*, the author's loss is not greater than that of his readers³⁹.

APPENDIX I (*tav. I*)

In 1983, the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh purchased the conversation piece illustrated in *tav. 1*. The group was first identified as *James Byres and members of his family* in an unsigned note (probably by T. Borenius) in *Burlington Magazine*, February 1943, 46f. and later attributed to the hand of Franciszek Smuglewicz by Ford, *cit.* (note 1), 454f. From left to right: Byres' sister Isabella (Mrs Robert Sandilands); James Byres; his father, Patrick Byres; his mother, Janet Byres (*née* Moir); and Christopher Norton, who married one of Byres' nieces (and engraved Smuglewicz' drawings of the Tarquinia tombs: note 10, above). Byres himself is shown in a presumably characteristic attitude, pointing to a map of Rome. The portrait above Norton's head almost certainly shows Prince Charles Edward Stewart, the Young Pretender, in whose cause Patrick Byres had fought at Culloden in 1745, afterwards escaping (with James, his eldest son) to France. From the «'45» onwards, Byres family gatherings must have been few and far between: it is not surprising that the need for a permanent record of this one was felt. Byres' parents are known to have been in Rome in 1776; his sister, whose husband died in 1775, is still in mourning. Ford (*loc. cit.*) points out that the portrait must have been painted before April 1779, when Byres was preparing to leave Rome to escort his family back to Scotland; this journey doubtless enabled him to arrange for the publication of the item reproduced below in *Appendix II*.

The present collocation of this interesting family portrait in the Gallery is entirely appropriate to James Byres' Italian interests. Below it, *Lord Fortrose at home in Naples* is the subject of a pair of delightful interiors, a music scene and a fencing scene (both well supplied with classical antiquities) attributed to Pietro Fabris, the illustrator of Sir William Hamilton's volcanic letters to the Royal Society; Lord Fortrose himself accompanied Hamilton on his 1769 visit

³⁹ *Acknowledgements.* In addition to the persons thanked in the previous notes, I am most grateful to the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland for permission to quote extensively from James Byres' papers and *Southern* journal; to the National Galleries of Scotland and Edinburgh University Library for providing the originals of *tav. 1* and *tav. 2* respectively, and for permitting me to reproduce them here; to Miss J. Blair for drawing *fig. 1*; to Dr F. R. Serra Ridgway for much discussion, and especially for her advice on the epigraphic aspects of *Appendix II*; and to the Travel and Research Committee of Edinburgh University for enabling me to read a shorter version of this paper at the Secondo Congresso Internazionale Etrusco in May 1985.

to Sicily (note 25, above). Next to them is a famous beauty, *Lady Charlotte Campbell*, portrayed by Johann Wilhelm Tischbein, Goethe's friend and correspondent, an intimate member of Hamilton's circle in Naples and the illustrator of his archaeological volumes.

APPENDIX II (*tav. II*)

The following unsigned item appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* 49, 1779, 288:

Mr Byres, Architect at Rome, proposing to publish by Subscription *The Etruscan Antiquities of CORNETO, the antient TARQUINII*, sent over to England, 1767, the annexed five inscriptions engraved on copperplates, copied from the sepulchral grots cut in the solid rock, and ornamented with paintings, bas reliefs, and inscriptions. (See the Plate [= our *tav. 2*])

This work was to consist of views of the country, with the situation of the town and monuments, plans, sections, and perspective views of the grottoes, a detail of their painting, inscriptions and ornaments: as also some of the most elegant imitations of the Etruscan style, by the Greek and Roman sculptors, in the collections in Italy; an account of the antient state of this country, and some conjectures on the subjects of the paintings and reliefs, illustrated with 60 plates at least, engraved by Mr Norton at Rome.

These inscriptions are painted on a thin coat of plaister over the sarcophagi cut out of the same rock: in some the plaister is fallen off; in others the letters are effaced. The two first are in one grotto, and the three last in another.

The status of this notice is not entirely clear. In 1767 (note 8, above), Byres had gone to London with the intention of enrolling subscribers – not through the *Gentleman's Magazine* for that year: Dobrowolski, *cit.* (note 10, above), 112 note 64 inadvertently assigns vol. 49 to 1767. At least some subscribers had come forward by 1769; ten years later, their feelings on reading the above can only be imagined. Their restraint is astonishing, for it was not until March 1792 (*sic!*) that the following appeal for information was published over the pseudonym 'Scrutator':

So long ago as 1769, subscriptions were received 'by James Byres, architect at Rome', for a folio volume, to be intituled, 'The Etruscan Antiquities at Corneto, the Tarquinii of the Antients'; in which there were to be 'at least sixty plates, engraved by Mr Norton at Rome'. Can any of your correspondents give any intelligence of Mr Byres, or Mr Norton? One guinea and a half were paid at the time of subscription, and the same sum was to be paid on the delivery of the book. The book has not been delivered, nor the first payment returned. One of these alternatives is surely expedient. (*Gentleman's Magazine* 62, 1792, 201)

By this time, Byres was installed at Tonley, and presumably communicated the reply that soon appeared over the (editorial?) initials 'D. H.':

Mr Byres offered proposals for the antiquities of Tarquinii 1767, and is now, we understand, in Scotland, desirous of returning such subscriptions as he then received, from a consciousness that his materials will not bear him out. (*ibid.*, 317).

I conclude that in the 1779 notice Byres was testing the market again, at what may well have seemed a more propitious time than 1767 for an Etruscan book.

The statement in 1792 that «his materials will not bear him out» is not easy to interpret. Could it mean that he had admitted defeat as far as completion of the text was concerned? Not necessarily, if only because as a Scottish laird he was freer than perhaps he had been (or felt) in Rome to express the «antediluvian» views that had scandalized Mrs Piozzi in 1786 (note 20, above) – always supposing that this was a consideration, as I believe it may have been. On the other hand, in 1792 the indispensable copperplates were still in Italy. But had Byres abandoned hope of ever seeing them again, only two years after his departure from Rome in 1790? It remains true that he had still not recovered them when he wrote to Lady Powis in 1805 (note 38, above) – and that, as Dobrowolski (*cit.* [note 10, above], 112) rightly points out, there is no proof that he ever completed the text.

However this may be, the 1779 notice of Byres' Etruscan book is important for a very different reason. The folding plate (*tav.* 2) of inscriptions that accompanied it was not reproduced in *Hypogaei*, and consequently appears to have escaped the attention of epigraphists.

The first two inscriptions shown were available to the editors of *CIE* II, i, 3 (1936: *Tarquinii*) from other versions which differ slightly from those «sent over to England, 1767» by Byres:

No. I *CIE* 5525. The same inscription is shown *in situ*, in minute letters, on the lower half of *Hypogaei*, Part I, Pl. III; an enlargement of this appears in *CIE loc. cit.*

No. II *CIE* 5526.

Both come from the Tomba dei Ceisnie, illustrated extensively in *Hypogaei* and already lost at the end of the eighteenth century (Loeffler, *cit.* in note 10, above; S. Steingräber, *Etruskische Wandmalerei* [1985], n. 56). Of the three remaining inscriptions, only one seems to be known – again from other sources:

No. V *CIE* 5376; Morandi, *cit.* (note 10, above), 25, *figs.* 21 and 22; 36, *fig.* 43; 65.

There is no trace of No. III or of No. IV in *CIE*, *TLE* or in *ThesLE* I (*Indice Lessicale*, 1978) *ss. vv. naper* (No. III) and *ramba* (No. IV). In view of

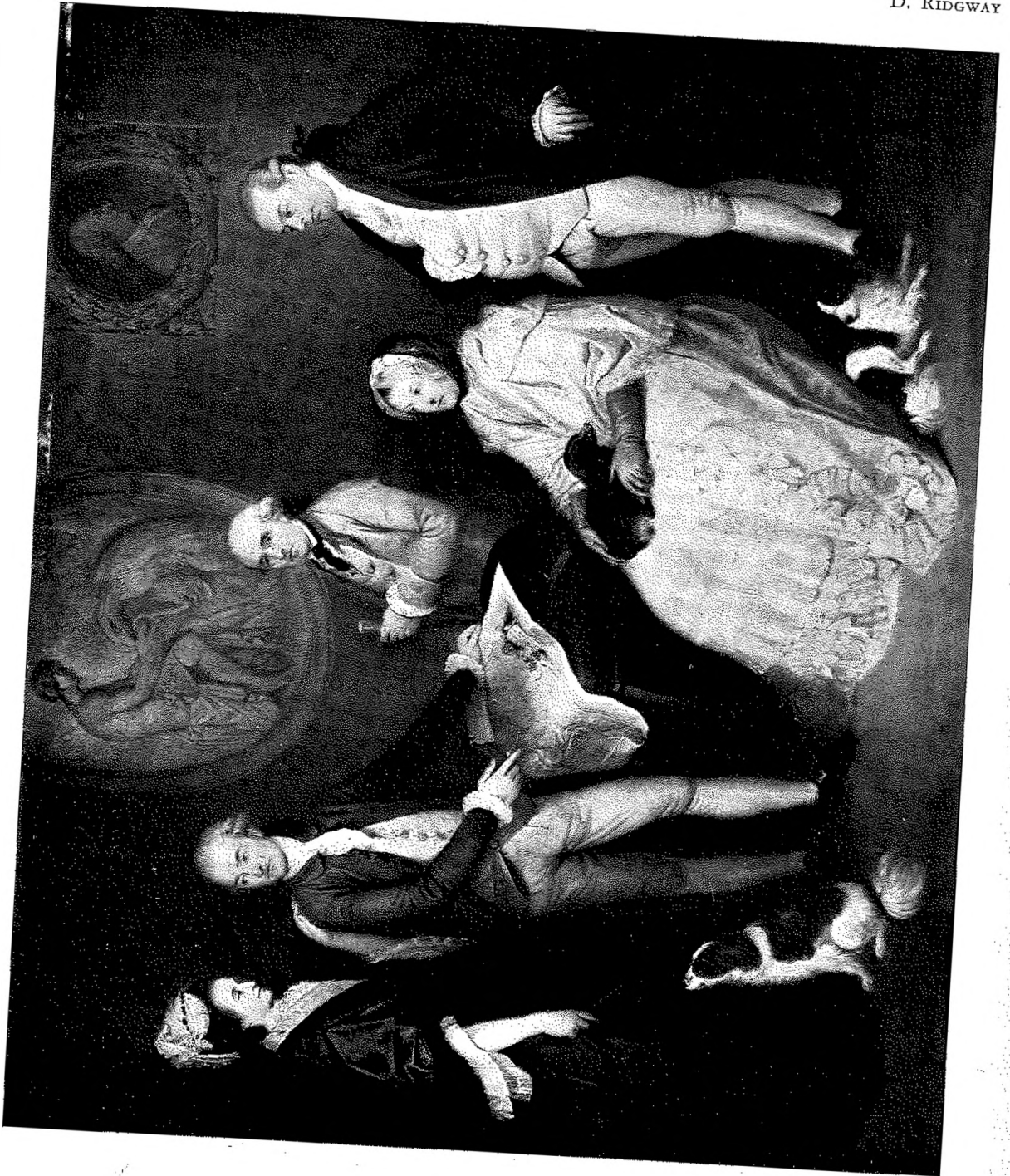
Byres' characteristically precise indication – « The two first are in one grotto [= the Tomba dei Ceisinie], and the three last in another » – I take it that Nos. III and IV may be added to the surprisingly small number of *tituli* surviving from the Tomba del Cardinale, recently studied by Morandi (*cit.*, 65).

This plate of inscriptions adds point to Loeffler's perceptive remarks (*cit.*, 200f.; cfr. Dobrowolski, *cit.*, 119) concerning the « ring of care and authenticity » conferred on the plates in *Hypogaei* by the « painstaking recording of inscriptions in an unknown language ». Notoriously, however, the rendering of the figured scenes presents problems. They were defined by J. B. L. G. Seroux d'Agincourt as early as 1823 on the basis of the illustrations he had had from Byres himself:

... il les a fait dessiner avec soin ... J'en ai vérifié l'exactitude sur les lieux mêmes; elle est entière quant'aux sujets, mais le style du dessin m'a paru amélioré, et n'avoir pas le caractère de celui qui était propre aux Etrusques. (*Histoire de l'Art par les Monuments* III [1823] 9; cf. IV, pls. 10 and 11).

I suggest that the stylistic embellishments are due in the first instance to the artist employed (« ... il les a fait dessiner ... »), now identified as Smuglewicz (note 10, above) and that Byres copied the inscriptions himself, both for the plate he gave to the *Gentleman's Magazine* and for those reproduced in *Hypogaei*, Part I, Pl. III (cf. No. I, above) and Part II, Pl. III (CIE 5377: from the Tomba del Cardinale, but not included on the *Gentleman's Magazine* plate). He almost certainly felt more competent than Smuglewicz in the matter of reconstructing effaced or incomplete letters where « the plaister is fallen off. » It is surely likely, too, that the purely architectural drawings – ground plans, coffered ceilings and the like – were Byres' own work, as Dobrowolski suggests (Dobrowolski, *cit.*, 114 note 81): such measured drawings were well within the range of one who had planned the Baths of Caracalla and the rotonda of St. Peter's (Ford, *cit.*, 448).

It may be noted, finally, that the original of *tav.* 2 is slightly less than half the size of the plates that were eventually published in *Hypogaei*. The copper from which it was printed was thus relatively easy to bring to London for Byres' purposes in 1767; and it may also be one of the « five or six » plates that he hoped to show Sir William Hamilton in the spring of that year (Dobrowolski, *cit.*, 112; cf. note 8, above). The fact that Byres chose a plate of inscriptions – rather than the spectacular interior of a « grotto », or even a general view of the Tarquinian landscape – to advertise his work speaks volumes for his sense of priorities. Clearly, it was not shared by his potential subscribers: and we are all the poorer as a result.



Didascalie:

TAV. I - F. SMUGLEWICZ, *James Byres of Tonley* (second from left) and members of his family in Rome; ca.1779. Edinburgh, Scottish National Portrait Gallery; inv. PG 2601 (photo: National Galleries of Scotland).

TAV. II - Five inscriptions engraved on copperplates, annexed to *Gentleman's Magazine* 49, 1779, 288. Nos. I-II: Tarquinia, Tomba dei Ceisinie. Nos. III-V: Tarquinia, Tomba del Cardinale (photo: Edinburgh University Library).