

Myth embedded in culture.  
The murals of Thorvaldsen's Museum, Copenhagen

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*I. The Museum*

THE DANISH architect Gottlieb Bindesbøll visited Athens in 1835/6, and fed what he saw, and saw missing, at the Parthenon into the designs he was preparing for a museum to house the sculpture in Thorvaldsen's collection, together with the great neo-classical sculptor's working library, and his collections of painting, sculpture, and other antiquities. This essay is a response to the bijou museum Bindesbøll dreamed up in Copenhagen, and specifically to the myth with which the outside of the *Museum* is clad.

The building is modest in size, on a spectacular site beside the royal canal around the Christiansborg Palace island, but snug with the Palace Church behind, to the East, and dwarfed by the massive 1920s version of the Palace across the narrow courtyard adjacent to the south side. The *Museum* fronts onto its triangle of open ground, with the canal vista beyond. The façade displays five white-framed 'pylons,' as I shall call them, each enclosing a window-light above large double-doors, loudly set off against the surrounding stucco of orange cement.<sup>1</sup> Above, brazen Victory rides a bronze four-horsed chariot in triumph, and two relief details, originally painted, present similarly triumphal motifs on the 'capitals' on the flanking quasi-columns, like a pair of quotation marks. Behind the 'pylons,' an entrance hall frontally parades the grandest sculptures in the repertoire. These chefs d'œuvre make for a powerful entrée, and the impact will redouble when they recur within the museum in all their (repeated) glories, as clay models, preliminary sketches and early attempts, as plaster casts and marble versions. If the central doors at the back of the hall are opened, a startling inner courtyard is suddenly re-

1 This is the paper delivered at the International Symposium on Myth & Symbol in Athens (2000). An extended, and fully documented, version awaits publication. Many many thanks to Synnøve des Bouvrie for the invitation, and for marvellous hospitality—with the Parthenon at the window. See essays in Melander and Walther 1998 on every aspect of the *Museum* and its contents.

vealed, with bold palm trees and exotic vegetation symmetrically ordered. At centre, a simple white marble rectangle encloses lilies, marking Thorvaldsen's burial chamber below. For all the hinted 'Parthenon' associations, this museum is also a mausoleum, a final resting-place.

Inside, the ground floor surrounds the courtyard with corridors lined with models and versions of Thorvaldsen's sculpture. Both long sides are edged with a suite of diminutive adjoining rooms, each sporting a tableau disposed around a single feature piece. Brash mosaic floors beckon visitors into the row of receding doorways. We are softened up for the grand finale of the comparatively large central room that suddenly opens out to centre at the far end of the museum. Here two rows of ferocious giant *Apostles* flank the centrepiece of Thorvaldsen's world-famous and endlessly replicated figure of *Christ*, looking down on us with arms spread low in welcome. On the first floor, more corridors parade the sculptor's works, increasingly familiar now and showing new angles and subtleties with every fresh incarnation, while rooms off hold the collected paintings on one side, and the antiquities on the other. Display cabinets and lay-out for both was Bindesbøll's doing, and (we are assured) virtually nothing has been altered since his original installation between 1838 and 1848.

But we shall stay outside. The triumph theme continues along the length of the three other exterior walls of the building. The other blunt end has three narrow 'pylons,' whose frames divide up a frieze into seven instalments alternating wide/narrow. The two long sides have their friezes, too, but with broad pylons alternating with little more than 'slits' of linkage. On the north side facing the canal, all eleven pylons plus slits connect together into a single scene, and this culminates in, or is headed by, an extended final episode that coats the side wall of the (built-on) entrance hall. No more windows above, only relief details on the cornerpiece pilasters, this time showing a sun and a moon chariot apiece, more hints of the Parthenon tradition.

Facing the courtyard, the side-entrance occupies the pylon next to its grand extended entrance wall. *Pope Pius VII* sits enthroned in the central pylon, an irresistible force of blessing, and an immovable object of massive frontality. By contrast, we will find the other long side a fluid and sinuous chain of images; and the east end, at the back, is just big enough for a ship to moor alongside, and for unloading to commence.

The friezes occupy the same strip around the building, with the same strongly anti-naturalistic black background, and using the same four chief colours of cement mortar. Burnt sienna, violet, ochre, and brown (*umbra* and *siena*), with white for statues, and thrown-in touches of green. In formal terms, this exterior frieze is neither sculpture in relief nor a tease of intercolumnar masking, so resemblance to the Parthenon before it was stripped can only be broadly generic. There

is something, however, of 'the Greek vase' in the overall effect, reminiscent of a wrap-round panel in the red-figure style.

With the classic repertoire of triumphal sculpture from ancient *Rome* in mind, unmissable allusions and revisions multiply. They are meant to, for that is the axiom of neo-classicism, even in its obsolescence. For comparison in general terms, the *Arch of Titus* provides four-horsed chariot and winged Victory, obviously; but add the waving forest of shafts that crowd the upper plane alongside the statue-like pose of the blessed emperor with his frozen wave of beatification; and the by-play between the foreground figure as he points out to his neighbour what scene they behold, and that they are themselves caught within a scene. On the facing wall of the archway, feel the contrasting seethe and bustle of the procession bearing the spoils of war off to dedication and safekeeping; this crowd of Romans wave their placards, and carry on high their strange haul of captured valuables—holy trumpets and sacrificial table, and the supreme artwork, the candlestick from the Temple at Jerusalem. Keen eyes can pick out that the troop heads under an arch surmounted by a triumphal chariot, reminding us that these panels are themselves mounted on a triumphal arch, and one which in fact served as its hero's mausoleum. For this arch commemorates Titus' triumph *and* his apotheosis—in the *Arch's* vault, we can spot him jetting up to heaven on Jupiter's eagle.<sup>2</sup>

For matters of detail, *Trajan's Arch at Benevento* provides the best comparison, in scenes such as the welcoming line-up to greet the '*adventus*' (*entrée-cum-epiphany*) of victorious Trajan home from adventures in the east. The gods of Rome line up to congratulate him on success, and to congratulate themselves on having someone worth admiration .... These awe-struck scenes of human warmth invested in the Returning Superhuman call for especially subtle realisation in intimately appropriate but appropriately intimate body language. The great man needs to be shown fond affection, but way short of familiarity, even by the gods. Ceremonial queueing, formal protocols of posture and gesture, and the pinning of prestige onto the charismatic focus of the communal gaze are the name of this game. See how Athena pats young Hadrian on the shoulder as he stands deferentially close to his now-divine father, the fitting recipient of Jupiter's thunderbolt.

Thorvaldsen himself had witnessed for real, with his own youthful eyes, just such a stupefying procession of imperial spoliation and staggering art treasures as loot, and even an uncannily surreal replay of it, in a re-wind reversal. When he collected his travel scholarship from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts to study in Rome, he was 25 and it was 1795. Sailing via Malta and Naples, he arrived in spring 1797, just when Napoleon's army was collecting the huge list of world-famous

2 The *Arch*: Henderson 2003. The imagery of ascension from Rome: Beard and Henderson 1998.

works required by the *Treaty of Tolentino*, packing them into 500 wagonloads ready for a spectacular extravaganza on arrival in Paris en route to their destined home in the newly swollen museum, the Louvre. Teams of oxen would pull heavy metal and stone teams of triumphal horses to and fro across the map of Europe for a generation.

So Thorvaldsen landed in the midst of riots, invasion and counter-invasion, sham revolution and sheer panic. The art market collapsed along with the rest of Roman culture, as the geriatric Pope was shocked into his grave, and aristos in panic off-loaded their baubles and collections for a song. In the legend, the connoisseur, artist and traveller through Greece and the Greek east, Thomas Hope forks out an advance—25 years' advance, as it turned out—on a marble realisation of Thorvaldsen's statue of a young man bringing home the bacon: his *Jason with the Golden Fleece*. Hope arrives in the proverbial nick of time to stop the budding genius 'boarding the plane' back to failure and oblivion.

By the time of the Emperor Napoleon's anticipated visit to Rome in 1812, Thorvaldsen had become Canova's rival and obvious successor. His original backer, Crown Prince Frederik, had been de facto head of state from the 1780s and, as Frederik VI, succeeded his schizophrenic father Christian VII in 1808. He was challenged strongly for the sculptor's output by Ludwig the Crown Prince of Bavaria, at the head of a long line of miscellaneous patrons and fans clean across Europe. The 35-metre long *Alexander Frieze* commissioned by the French commandant was swiftly installed around the four walls of a dedicated chamber of the Quirinal Palace, ready for the big day of the Emperor's Triumphal Entry to Rome, but it never came. Instead, in 1815 Canova was off to Paris to mastermind the job of reclaiming the gallery of masterworks from the Louvre. The restitution deserved celebrations fit to match those of Napoleon's hybris. This was a boom time for everybody with a stake in the crating and haulage business.

By now, Thorvaldsen was running a network of ateliers with 30-40 masons and craftsmen. Fêted as a 'Phidias-spirit,' he was treated as a superstar on returning to Denmark in 1819. There to take a share in C.F. Hansen's re-building of central Copenhagen after fires, and bombardment by the British longships under Nelson. There would be busts of the royal family, a copy of the *Alexander Frieze*, and rows of statuary for Christiansborg Slot; the miraculous free-standing *Christ* centre-piece, ordered for the Palace Church but re-negotiated for the *Church of Our Lady* just building across the canal, along with the bodyguard of outsize *Apostles*, a *Baptismal Angel* to kneel in front of Christ and the main altar, and a pediment full of symbolic uplift thrown in; 26 pieces in all. A triumph for probably the best sculptor in the world.

Cultured Europeans of the day knew perfectly well that the history of art began, if it did not quite end, with the original model for the mass seizure of classic art, the triumphal conquest of the Ancient Greek world by Rome.<sup>3</sup> As the perils and blockades of the Napoleonic Wars had helped to push travellers and collectors eastwards into Greece, on the trail of pioneers like Thomas Hope, one spin-off was the re-discovery of authentic works of Hellenic art—the Parthenon and Aegina losing their sculpture in more crates packed off in more gun-boats to fetch up in London and Bavaria,<sup>4</sup> in more cargoes of triumphalist loot. Artists, connoisseurs and critics bought and talked their way round to idealization of the newly impacting Hellenic sculpture, imagining the emergence of artistic perfection and consummate artists back in Classical Athens. How best should a Thorvaldsen set about re-animating Phidias and his fellow-paragons? Was it enough to turn out stunning stone, staking everything on actually pulling off the restoration and emulation of battered ancient relics and icons of Antiquity? Or was image, with spin, needed for the *artist*? To invent neo-classicism, did it prove necessary to play up artistic Genius, living out the Romantic role *avant la lettre*? How far would Renaissance myths of Michelangelo and Bernini need to be modified, displaced, jettisoned?

In Thorvaldsen's success story, the myth of the artist hybridized a whole stock of lines: the child from the gutter, risen to conquer the world; the hick from little nowhere, whose natural abilities trounced the doyens of cosmopolis in their own backyard; the blocked melancholy of restless creativity, above mere mundane time and tide. Thus, they say, he hardly ever spoke much, and when he did it was in broken bits of a half dozen languages .... By 1829, re-doubled negotiations with the Palace were proceeding apace to capture 'Thorvaldsen' for the nation, and it was crucial to settle what this blessing would amount to, what it would tell Denmark. The terms good as determined themselves, with strong precedents set, as ever, by Canova, who had created a fantastic tomb and '*Gesamtkunstwerk*' at *his* birthplace, 'the first permanent shrine to celebrate the life and work of a single artist,' though the museum for casts of his works would not be unveiled until 1836.<sup>5</sup>

A permanent home for Thorvaldsen's collections would trade for a pension for daughter Elisa. But the key question proved to be what was to become of his own hoard of sketches, clay prototypes, plaster models, marble versions and out-takes, and even a precious cache of fully-realised marbles which he had not relinquished. This was Thorvaldsen's sticking-point, the concrete tokens and currency of his fame as the most wanted sculptor in the art capital of the western world. On a visit

3 Beard and Henderson 2001:89-105.

4 Thorvaldsen's restored Aegina marbles (1816) were the pride of the display he designed for the new Munich *Glyptothek* (1830).

5 Quote from Hall 1999:50f.

to Munich, to help lay out and open the *Glyptotek* in 1830, Ludwig I went for broke on the whole package; and others—the city of Stuttgart, for instance—were in with a shout, as well. Or, at any rate, this was good leverage in the Copenhagen bargaining. Through the 1830s, a deal was struck. Thorvaldsen would leave his works and collections to the City of Copenhagen, to be housed in *Thorvaldsens Museum*. Was ever a triumphal return so excogitated?

By 17 September 1838 the arrangements for the ‘*aduentus*’ of the World’s Greatest Living Artist had been finalized, and the ceremonies for welcoming the Local Boy made Good, and Coming Home for Good, fully choreographed. Rowed ashore from the frigate *Rota*, Thorvaldsen was received canal-side by a flotilla of rowing-boats full of luminaries, well-wishers, friends, colleagues, and pupils, while a committee awaited him ashore, led by the team who had made it all possible, and heading the people of Copenhagen in full force. Jubilant thousands treated the sculptor, as he said himself, like some visiting Pope.

The triumphant entry extended into a round of festivities and honours. After undignified twists and wrangles behind the scenes, the king came up with an ideal site in January 1839, just months before his death. This grand offer was snapped up instantly, in the shape of the old coach-house on the canal bank beside Christiansborg.

Bindesbøll, who had been toying with grandiosities in the manner of Schinkel in Berlin and von Klenze in Munich, landed the commission, and the tottery old Genius was taken off and taken over into safekeeping by his new adoring admirer and minder, Baroness Christine Stampe. She doted on him and gathered round the rest of Denmark’s stars, including Hans Christian Andersen.

Stampe even shepherded Thorvaldsen safely through Europe, in a continuous triumphal procession with festivities and ovations in nearly every city on the way, back to Italy. There to get on with sorting out the atelier factory-complex, wind up the business, and pack up his winnings. He would be ready for the call in 1842 that said his museum roof was now on. Working on into spring 1844 the maestro collapsed and died in his seat at the Royal Theatre. The funeral in the *Church of Our Lady* was not quite the last time that the people turned out en masse to acclaim Thorvaldsen through the streets of his and their capital city, in triumph.

At this point the *Thorvaldsen Museum* was not yet what we see today. There was no tomb or grave-marker in the courtyard inside, though Thorvaldsen had blessed the plan; no frieze on the walls outside; and no Victory chariot on top. All this belonged to a posthumous supplement to the earlier conception, instigated under Bindesbøll’s direction by one of the artists on the large and extraordinarily young home team which had dreamed up the décor in the rooms within, Jørgen Sonne.<sup>6</sup> Their design for the courtyard side mural, showing the convoy of Thorvaldsen’s

greatest sculptural hits, took a year to get onto its wall, from 1846-7. The canal side's line-up of cheering Danes laying on their hero's welcome was designed by Sonne and laid by the team from 1847, to reach completion, just, for September 1848.

By then, we should remind ourselves, history was erupting, as the 1848 wave of popular unrest, rioting, assassination, and revolution swept through all Europe. Chartists in England; revolt against Austria by Czechs and Hungarians. The demise of the Orleans monarchy in France, overthrown by the Second Republic; matched by Risorgimento in Italy, with Mazzini's *Roman Republic* declared, and then gallantly defended from Président Louis Napoleon's armies by the Garibaldi. In Munich, Ludwig I forced to abdicate; barricades and concessions in Berlin. For a few heady weeks of political spring fever, a glimpsed world without absolutism, even a liberalized society completely shorn of autocracy. In Denmark, the main repercussions were twofold.

On one side, King Christian VIII expired, just in time to present the *Museum* roof with the *Victory* bronze, by Thorvaldsen's chief pupil H.W. Bissen. He also expired just in time to leave the renunciation of rule by divine right to Frederik VII, in the year of unrest. This after alarming mobbing of the Palace, and, in the rapprochement, formal inauguration of the new Assembly in Christiansborg Slot, October 23 1848.

On the other side, revolt in the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein led to ghastly civil war, touched off by dispute over the succession, and fomented by scheming major powers. The new Prussian-led German Confederation worked towards eventual occupation, and the other superpowers wriggled and squirmed their way to one more wishy-washy compromise.

Thorvaldsen's devotees managed to get the coffin re-located into their burial chamber just one week before the *Museum* was officially delivered to the City of Copenhagen, on the 10th anniversary of the Genius' epoch-making return from Italy.

Parliamentary government was taking over the reins of power, and marking the enervation of the power of the crown in the new dispensation by taking over occupation of Christiansborg Palace for its assembly hall and offices. And Sonne was off to the front, there to sketch and paint many a scene of waste and carnage, a theme running through his work for many a year to come. By the time he returned to the *Museum*, to round off the frieze by working with his team on the ship berthed at the east end in 1850, this was a state of Denmark undreamt of by any of Thorvaldsen's generation.

6 See Damsgaard, Helsted, Henschen, and Jørnæs 1988:*passim*, and esp. the timeline, 10.

On the day after the presentation of the *Museum* to the City, it was officially declared open to the public, and populist ambitions on the part of Bindesbøll, Sonne, and friends could begin their mission to improve the cultural horizons of the nation through astounding sculpture.

Bissen had conjured up the *Victory* chariot on the basis of some Thorvaldsen types. He and other epigoni would devote much of the rest of their output to delivering 'Thorvaldsen' bronze casts and fully realised marbles to eager customers, while they took upon themselves the challenge and responsibility of producing full versions of many an original plaster model in the *Museum* collection.

Their legacy is to be found all over Copenhagen, and they played a far from insignificant role in turning the modern city into a mecca for sculpture lovers. Milking their status as satellites touched with the master's genius for all it was worth, they made sure his legacy primed and propagated a cityscape civilised by spectacular art.

While Hansen's Palace Church and *Church of Our Lady* survive, Christiansborg Slot burned down once more, and was replaced in the early C20th, though Bissen's colossal equestrian statues of Frederik VII still patrol the Palace front and back. The *Museum*, too, for all Bindesbøll's commitment to exact preservation of the original conception and his dedicated implementation of it, became the plaything of his acolytes and successors, in a world that was maybe not his style at all.

For, like any mausoleum or whatever funerary monument, the finished article belonged to the representational and ideological régimes of a new cultural moment: thus the *Arch of Titus* is of course a projection from, and of, *Domitian*, and dates from getting on for a decade after Titus' triumph; it is a bold conversion of the arch commemorating imperial victory into an innovative transumption of triumph into a metaphoric of imperial apotheosis.

The governing body of *Thorvaldsens Museum* went on rounding out their treasures, inevitably further adulterating the collection, and progressively diluting the aim of a museum sealed at inauguration. So the *Museum* has evolved in just the way an artist's œuvre does, acquiring a history of its own, and modelling a history of art, a history of culture. This attention-grabbing orange 'fire-station' has itself become, more than a clamorous instance of high culture, a *myth* of high culture. Here is a publicity-seeking semiotic operator of a liberal bourgeois *habitus* which trades icons of enlightenment for imperialist fantasies; an ideological proposition for Danish identities to negotiate, and re-negotiate; and a playground for academic tourists.

How far Sonne's murals court or risk iconoclasm in splashing bright Hellenizing-cum-Pompeian colours along their walls is, I think, the right question to push, and it is surely impossible to rule out parody: surely the brashly coloured concrete



used for the living figures pictured on the frieze is being positively valorized *above* the pale art works which the toiling workers must manhandle off into the decent obscurity of their museum. Impossible to banish the thought that just such scenes must have repeated themselves on every occasion in history when hauls of artworks have ever been amassed, and shipped off. Impossible to banish the thought, exactly, that here at last ‘the true story’ of art is out in the open—a story of bodily expropriation and re-naturalization. Not something that will easily strike home in the civilized context of a museum display interior.

Greek workers must have beamed out vivid vigour as they invented politics without kings, but within a pioneering culture of proto-capitalism. For Danes, to picture art within the cultural context of Phidias’ Athens must be to play down the tyrannous expansionism, and warm instead to the hustle and bustle of another sea-faring mercantile city-state. Once the *people* of democratic Athens come into view in their own right, however, the chunks of blank stone fetishized from Renaissance to Neoclassicism must risk standing out as dead and dull as any ancien régime dodo. A gap for dialectic opens up between all that unreserved enthusiasm for the Genius of Sculpture shown stepping from the skiff, and the less-than-reverence that his masterpieces are receiving from their hauliers, on the opposite long sides of Sonne’s frieze.

Here, that is to say, there is splashed across these walls a myth, a myth about art, the artist, art history, art theory, art in society, and the culture of art, a cultural myth about myth and myths; together with the postulate that these are irremediably fused, and the speculation that this is always the case with myth, unless and until we repress its embedding within culture.<sup>7</sup>

With the remaining piece of background information supplied, viz. that *nothing*, not a patch, of any of the three murals you can see pre-dates the 1950s, when a team led by Axel Salto produced this totally faithful re-creation, we are now ready to inspect the *Thorvaldsen Museum* frieze, for its take on myth and symbolism embedded in culture.

## II. The murals

Take first the water-borne aduentus on the north side of the Museum (Fig. 1, panels 21 -->1). Here is a strong concatenation of panels that coheres into a rhythmically amplifying crescendo, as we pass along from left to right. How should we try to read it?

7 The burden will be that ‘myth’ names a fantasy passepartout which promises to take us beyond the complexities of the instance, and yet ‘myth’ also denies the necessary unboundedness of any *collection*, as it is constituted by the very work of definition which opens it to on-going discourse: see Stewart 1993:esp. 132-50, 151-66.

We build to the climactic final panel (1) where the object of all the salutations from the swelling throng of well-wishers and fans is ultimately disclosed, beyond the military-style brass from the boys in the band (panels 8-7) amid all the waves of cheering. Literally distinguished (from the rest), the Grand Old Man is safely cordoned off by his 'guard of honour,' the oarsmen with blades aloft and bodies sat at the feet of the charismatic star of the communal stare. At the head of the procession, with all the energy of its bulk fully behind him, the '*triumphator*' confronts the representatives of 'his' city.

Watch the sea-captain gently deliver the Man of the Moment from ship to shore, with all the tact that his supportive arm can bring to bear. See Thorvaldsen steadied and embraced in 'filial' submission by his right-hand man, the aptly-named H.E. Freund. This focal scene concentrates into the micro-level detail of bodily proxemics the sum of the affect which has been loudly externalized, energized, and epicized at the social macro-level by the whole mural.

So here is Denmark in dinghies: all top hats, and buns, and national flags. How Copenhagen would like to see itself and be seen seeing itself, Sonne guessed, come whatever revolution, across whatever ripples might in some future perturb Danish-sized politics.

The men are to the fore (panel 1), but conjugality comes close behind (panel 2). Further back (panel 10) comes a boatful of writers and poets, topped by the unmistakably odd beanpole Hans Christian Andersen clinging to the mast. In the central pylon (panel 12), another group of heavyweight Men of Learning load their vessel low in the water with the gravity of their over-developed brains, striking a pose for Danish seafaring at bow. To their stern, the flotilla shrinks in significance, winding down to more sedate groups from panels (14 to 17), before panel 18 lowers the tone altogether. A complement of sea-dogs wave cap and bottle of grog in place of top hat—jacket half on, half off, and propped up against one another because the worse for a drop or two. This *is* a triumph, after all, and Bacchic festivities are an essential ingredient, no question about it.

Did we notice the brilliant detail back in (1) where the frieze's frame was uniquely broken at the bottom by the business end of the boatswain's boathook, in order to concentrate attention on the all-important moment of crisis? When the personal safety and the collective dignity of Thorvaldsen and the City were in the balance, as the rite de passage sticks, forever half in/half out, caught taking that liminal step back from abroad and onto home territory. A critical moment, but no need for alarm: *this* Conquering Hero takes possession of his land to universal acclaim, and on 'his' people's terms. Copenhagen confers on Thorvaldsen the coach-house adjacent to the scene. This '*triumphator*' returns to his Rome headed for the knacker's yard. This canal-side is the spot he has come home to die in.

Dickensian' touches of social hierarchy enliven the whole frieze. As when panel 2 perches a barefooted urchin on a nautical pole higher than anyone in town or in port; or when the distinctly rough-looking brass section (panels 7-8) seems to collect the plaudits of the great and good for itself. The final suite of panels (20-22) has more to it than the politics of local(ized) wit. The isolated dinghy offers us a saga to weigh up against the glorious finale at the other end: panel 21 shows an oar being put to improvised use in rescuing an underling who has sunk way down beneath the 'picture-frame,' in the canal. Boy overboard!<sup>8</sup>

Copenhagen society is comfortably included between the poignant extremes of the celebrity and the non-entity; the child and the dotard genius. That boy could be the start of the next tale of the next Thorvaldsen who quits the quays of Copenhagen to seek his fortune. All Denmark knows it—the country depends on luring the successful ex-pats back home, bringing with them their riches from rags *Bildungsroman*.

Recall that Sonne masterminded the east end frieze on his return from trauma at the front, two years after the long sides were achieved, and the museum opened (Fig. 2, panels 29-->22). The structural pattern pivots symmetrically around a large central pylon flanked by a pair of smaller pylons; the proportions are inverted, so that the 'slits' provide by far the wider area. On site, it is immediately obvious that clear continuity of image around the corners has not been sought and found. The large ship occupies the half to canal-side, its prow and figurehead sharing the central image (panel 26) with the stern of the first of the two boats that occupy the half to courtyard-side. This is low-impact imagery, though full of tension and strain.

This fine ship has respect. A solemn grandeur, proudly displaying the elaborate systems of sheets, cables, and chains that hold fast a sailing-ship, dropped anchor and all. The workmen unloading and fetching ashore the heavyweight containers of cargo use boathook (panel 25), oars (27), a lever (28), rollers on a ramp, and finally one-horse-power traction (29). More ropes crane down the monster cases, and haul them up the slope for delivery (25, 29). What do we see here?

Easiest thing in the world to suppose right away that this fine study simply displays that frigate named for the Valkyrie *Rota*, from which Thorvaldsen disembarked on his triumphant return in 1838 (confirmed by the figurehead in panel 26). Indeed, this just must be a good half of the effect intended. The mural does affirm that the stuff belongs to Thorvaldsen, for 'AT | N50' on one package (panel 25) emblazons his initials, and, in 27, one player holds up the Greek vase in his

8 Anthony Snodgrass points out that such reminders of fallibility reaffirm the tradition derived from the Parthenon Frieze, not least where the north side cavalcade threatens to run marshals down, and horses buck and rear.

grasp for inspection by his neighbour, whose gesture of pointing indicates to us that he is giving it a good look, so we should, too: for such props are authentic Greek 'spoils,' from Rome (freshly excavated in Etruria). They both join Thorvaldsen's own works of art, and signal that his work is authentically 'classical.'

But remember, again, the sandwiching of the twin occasions celebrated by the *Arch of Titus*: if the shipment conveys (conveys to us) the Thorvaldsen treasures now safe forever on the other side of these walls, then recall that, while shipments of artworks had started back in 1835, and more did arrive along with their creator in 1838, the sculptor only vouchsafed a large quotient of those prize possessions from the ateliers of Rome, once he was good and sure the roof was on, in 1842.

A second version of the haulage theme occupies the remaining, landlubbers,' flank of the *Museum*. This long side starts from a pile of more cased goods, and runs right to left through an elaborate train of 'Thorvaldsens.' These are transported on land, by one shift or another, until (at panel 50) the first in line is seen to left, another 'reclining' rectangular shape in the process of being pulled up by a gang, and their draught horse. The image on that Greek vase (a late C6th BCE Attic hydria) even points to a thematic pun, as a pair of horses drive their chariot away, to right.<sup>9</sup> Shades of triumph about it, as we saw, and these are brought out by the structural parallel with all the cues of (Roman) victory in the course of the procession before us along the courtyard wall. We saw in the parade on the *Arch of Titus* how teams of Roman hauliers carried spoils aloft (usually shoulder-high), on more or less makeshift wooden pallets fitted with poles fore and aft. Sonne's frieze expertly exploits the same sort of opportunity for telling effect.

But I must now clinch the argument about the occasion represented on the frieze. If the east end *does* 'excerpt' the preliminaries to the shifting of the art treasures all the way from quayside and into the *Museum*, then this 'is' 1842, or '1835-42,' as well as 1838, and this is not simply 'the frigate *Rota*,' but, instead, a synthetic composite of the *Rota* with merchantmen, both earlier and later. And we are being given a foretaste of the mimetic entertainment ahead once we turn that corner, and get moving past the piled up baggage—gaffers wielding notebooks, workers putting their backs into it.

But this is still to miss the trick of such commemorations. The symbolic point is to grip together the two moments of the long murals, like the two sides of the passage-way of the *Arch of Titus*: when the Sculptor himself quit the ship; and when his collection(s) did. Bag and tag them as one and the same instant: that is

9 The tiny painting of the fine painting on the prize pot speaks up for miniature detail, against the megalographic design of the wrap-around mural, which must stand in for the *lost* tradition of monumental Classical painting.

the narrative function of the 'supplementary' third wall, which cements the visual mytho-logic of the representation. And this *is* myth, for several of the portraits belong to persons absent abroad in 1838, and, for example, Thorvaldsen had not yet *met* the family Stampe at the time, so their cameo (panel 4) is really a gift planted by hindsight.

In terms of visual modality, the east end stands out from the major statements to right and to left. Here virtually nothing is (yet) revealed for sure—and while the foremen keep notes, their squads have too fraught a task, too much on their hands that can snap or crash any second, to take the slightest bit of interest (panels 29, 27). For sure, the point of the museum-cum-mausoleum is to bring the *œuvre* home in one piece. 'Danishness' on the east end is virtually limited to *implicit* ideological self-approbation: the featured dream boat, shipshape and Baltic fashion, plus the disarming vaunt of teamwork from the expert dockers, who never seem to have to try too hard.

The south, courtyard or Palace, side of the Museum was the first instalment of the frieze, always the most inspected and inspectable section (Fig. 3, panels 50-->30). It was designed to engage us in a lingering, wondering, drooling, gaze. The snail's pace of this laboriously ponderous procession certifies the pricelessness of these removals, and representative bystanders on, and in, the scene model for us the response required from us. They underline the fundamental structural design of this mural as a whole, centred around the overbearing frontality of the massive Pope who dominates the central pylon. The onward crawl of the procession of images leftwards, away from the wharf, leads on towards the main museum entrance around the south-west corner, and their destination inside. But difficulties obstruct the operations planned and overseen by Bindesbøll, the elevated and courted authority-figure and Man in a Hurry who stands second left on panel 50. He exudes commanding authority, plus a certain irritation at the precious time it is taking for the middle-management bosses and their gangs to struggle with so simple a task as bringing it all back home.

But the frieze is more than a match for its architect's will. In exchange for the march-past triumphal parade of spectacular 'spoils' of culture captured for the City, he gets, and gives us, this tableau on permanent hold. The 'step inside, this way' arrow-function of the frieze is a primary objective, however split the message is between the 'symbolic/ceremonial/grand' entrance around the corner, past the horses and lion, and up those steps already in view, by artistic license, on panel 50 beneath Bindesbøll, and the 'actual/working/tradesmen and tourists' entrance that occupies the first 'pylon' in the line (at panel '49A'). As I shall propose, the discrimination between exhibit 1, his Majesty King Lion Recumbent, and the rest of his train, does, besides, just happen to ground the fundamental proposition of the whole frieze as the authorized Founding Myth of *Thorvaldsens Museum*. But I am

sure that the piquant semiotics of the museum whose contents are most effectively displayed to the public *on its exterior* have played the key role in establishing this quirky orange coachhouse high in Copenhagen's charts of tourist sights and sites.

Viewers are manipulated to stand and stare as if at a temple with all the sculpture thoughtfully brought down close at ground-level. On panel (40), meet *Pope Pius VII*, the only thing in St Peter's carved by a non-Catholic, now holy and menacing symbolic Keeper of the *Museum*.<sup>10</sup> Not for nothing is the brag attributed to Thorvaldsen about the *papal* dimensions of his reception in 1838; and his legendary quip that the *Pius* was a failure because he looks much too *Danish* is only a pointer to his obvious resemblance to Thorvaldsen himself ....

See how two lads hug each other and whisper, stood in our place in front of that stern benediction, as over-awed as we are. Surely they feel, rather than comprehend, the power to penetrate the soul which is packed into this looming mass of plaster and paint. To the right (panel 39), see the dog bark: is it frisson at the Pope's mana, or at the heaving ropes, rumbling rollers, and screeching levers that drag him sidelong (into panel 41)? The second pair of boys here have a parenting supervisor at hand, to make sure they read it right, and to make sure that, *through* their reading, *we* read right, from where we stand. If we could see through a child's eyes, we would see the jaundice that loss of innocence has inflicted on our response to the image.

Continuing to right, (panel 37) mum and friend point baby toward the symbolic Christian Mother coming their way on her sedan chair, figuring matronal Chastity, and challenging the eye to react (im)properly to the innocence of *her* overgrown baby, the only genital nudity on display to us in the whole of Bindesbøll and Sonne's frieze. And (panel 35) Mrs and Mr Mid Nineteenth-Century stop a strapping worker who manhandles a relief, for a peek and a peer at *Hector with Paris and Helen*. The very best marriage guidance that neo-classicism could plunder from its supplier of schemata and legitimating ancestor in Classical art, text, and myth: sublime Homer.

To left of *Pius VII*, two further 'slits' hive off a pair of spectators apiece. In panel 49, Mr Well-To-Do insists on pointing out, and explaining interminably, for the benefit of Mrs Well-To-Do on his arm, just what the *Angel Kneeling with a Baptismal Font* before them means for her. *Angel* has just stopped for a slight, but eternalized, pause to adjust her balance on her trolley, and we are meant to look at her counterpart, and speculate whether, for example, they are contemplating a christening in the *Church of Our Lady* font across the canal?

10 Thorvaldsen generally kept people guessing about his religious attitudes, and was blessed with commissions ranging from the papal to the frankly pagan: neo-classicism had the advantage of interposing a screen between artist and creation.

Finally, and in complete contrast, one pair of jolly jack tar porters take a moment off to step into our leisured classes' role of spectator (panel 43). It seems that they have come along to enjoy watching others sweat, lounging back against the painted frame of the pylon, and pointing out for their (o-so-significantly) hooded girl the finer points of the intellectual break-through which founds modernity in its grasp of the natural world and in its self-identification with the worship of Science. For the haulage gang (on 43) is sweating buckets, stumped with their problem of how to get *Copernicus* moving, now he and his cartwheels have ground to a halt.

I don't think that *they* actually get his contraption's demonstration that the sun and stars don't move round the earth, and as they call time out, and squat for a breather, it doesn't seem that art helps show anyone how we really are hurtling round the solar system at fantastic velocity. This doesn't stop the master mariner from launching into his theoretical explanation of Copernicus' orrery—it's only a glorified ship's compass, I bet—and what he comes up with is good enough for his younger mate, too, with his hands-in-pockets 'shucks-sure-beats-me' attitude ....

A whole education in Art History, advertising the *Museum* as a shrine to cultural power. This train of imagery adds up to a view and a theory, a recommendation and a protreptic, for how Art *should* convey and communicate the essential myths valorized by society. Join in the effort, to create, collect, ship, house, parade, and access the icons enshrined in the city's portfolio of approved cultural capital: see the 'Thorvaldsens' open eyes, ears, and minds. Isn't it 'nice' being so European, where wars, revolutions, and massacres are so lovingly mediated to us through art about art about art about the ugliness of history! What a perfect way (stop, look, think!) to ponder in decency 1848, Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein, Prussia and Poland, Italy ... and Greece, from Homer to Missolonghi and modern Athens ....

This Christiansborg courtyard is a good place to reflect on culture *as* reflection on itself. The parade of spoils insists on both the status of the collection *as* 'combinatoire' and the status of each piece as a unit of the collection.<sup>11</sup> Each piece brings its own separate history to the conglomerate, and receives new significance from the association; they stay partially detached one from another, for the collocations are a temporary happenstance that is already disassembled inside the museum, for all that the frieze ties them into its symbolic 'narrative.' The procession of 'spoils' provokes a reading of each artwork, and reads them together into a paradigmatic myth of culture, mediated through sculpture, mediated through culture ....

I leave the lion for last (Section IV below).

11 Cf. Henderson 1996 for this approach to the megalographic frieze.

The *Baptismal Angel* (panel 48) in the *Museum* was presented by the artist to the *Church of Our Lady* soon after his return. A baptism makes an ideal story-opener; an angel makes an ideal figurehead for a triumphal parade. A post-Classical 'Victoria,' a Roman statuette type with a nymph's nudity, she looks where she is headed. Her bearers paw a wing-tip and use a lever to steady her as she goes, in delicate parody of the heavyweight oarage and leverage to be found all around the *Museum's* other murals.

Next we find one worker backpacking another relief, in such a way that *we* must miss its image (panel 47). For us, this is just a slab of rock. Head down, *he* too must miss everything: reduced to blockhead. His companion embraces a bust, identified as *Rosa Taddei* an Italian *improvisatrice* artiste, and artist, big in Rome in the 1820s, and so here she must symbolize art's preservation of beauty against time, the precious memory as portable memento; and she betokens Thorvaldsen's real-life zest for animated sensuality, in taverna and theatre alike, the non-academic streak in his 'modernity.'

*Rosa* is not a staggeringly over-weight armful, but her bust does need *careful* handling, by an 1848 lad as easy on the eye as she ever was. In tune with one another, these figures both double as extra spectators and turn a twin gaze back toward the statue which looks down upon them from the next trolley.

This seated matron (panel 46) is a Russian Countess of yore, Yelizaveta Alexeyevna Osterman-Tolstoy, from 1815. Her gang have got her transportation completely under control, hoist on sling-poles fore and aft, though something isn't to the liking of the principal bearer, and she needs a steadying hand to rear, looks as pensive as ever. This paragon is surely represented as untouchable. She is the right type to represent Classical womanhood, the 'Penelope' figure sitting harmlessly/aimlessly waiting for *her* man to return; just a step away from that baby-processing machine in front. The schema has traded everywhere sculpture has reached: this is the *Seated Agrippina*, one of the most reproduced of Classical matrones.

Here comes trouble (panel 44). *Lord Byron*, no less, in the common Roman imperial pose of, e.g., the 'Augustus from Cumae' in the Hermitage. Commissioned from Thorvaldsen to commemorate the dead poet, this is the lame English Lord playing his abstractedly Romantic genius persona of *Childe Harold* (the book that he clutches). Lost in thought, he is oblivious to the mundane fact that the wheels have just come off his wagon. Somehow a sheet or a shirt has tangled itself up in the spokes, so the thing won't budge. It's a pity that the bearer who points this out to all of us mates blanks out the broken column prop where the Poet rests his good foot. The two other symbolic supports project mythical death, heroic activism. The skull and the owl of Athena factor in melancholy Hellenizing *memento mori* poetics; but they link the Byronic *Bildungsroman* with a freedom-fighter's



martyrdom for Greek autonomy: amazing what the grammar grind of a classical education implanted into *this* unlikely-looking Anglo-Saxon adventurer. *He* won't notice if there is ever any more progress, he's getting somewhere as it is, wrapped up in thought.

Danish Christian Angel; Russian Roman Matron; Hellenist English Poet. Next, essentially a blown-up pair with *Byron*, only closer to, e.g., the Vatican Hellenistic *Urania*, comes the Polish Man of Science, *Copernicus* (panel 42). The playful point is a mind-over-matter conundrum. The Genius fails to defy plain terrestrial gravity, and becomes instead a heart-breaking backache for his unmoving movers. In Copenhagen, however, *Copernicus* following *Byron* also speaks to nationalist fundamentalism, this time unsignalled and implicit—but Denmark even consisted of resistance to German subsumption, and Polish autonomy has rarely been a dead issue there.

So to panel 40 and the *Pope*, 1831. Massive and moving imperceptibly if at all, the Catholic Church claims imperial conquest of another world. Not verse or space but the psyche, the soul. This commemorative statue, however, emphatically belonged, like *Byron*, to the turbulence of Thorvaldsen's life and times. For Pius VII was the Pope who had had to parley with and crown Napoleon, then play a waiting game until ejected into exile, before returning to Rome in a triumph of his own. In Copenhagen, this *Pope* signifies the capture of 'Rome' for Denmark, courtesy of Art; and patriarchal authority serves to image the local *papa* acclaimed beside the Slotsholm canal. A Nordic 'Pope's' commemoration, at his tomb.

Our last Hero supplies the steel, the militarism, in this courtyard (panel 38). This is more Napoleonic history, Poland again; suicidal self-devotion is the game. *Prince Józef Poniatowski* led the Polish contingents fighting for Napoleon, against Austria and Russia, until in 1813 he was caught the wrong side of a river when the bridge was blown in the retreat. Rather than be captured, this hunk of nobility charged into the torrent, and ... drowned. In the realm of Classical sculpture, the Man Mounted on Horse means only one thing: the gilded bronze *Marcus Aurelius* in Rome, apparently crushing all resistance by stretching out a right hand: the *Count*, however, is the only sword-pointing rider in the range of ancient equestrian statues. In mythological terms, this is another *Marcus Curtius*, that hero who saved Rome by charging straight into the yawning chasm that would swallow the city unless a sacrificial life was forthcoming. These young officers exchanged the chance to win triumphs for undying fame. They were famous for neither killing, nor being killed by, anyone. 'On into the breach ...!'

In context, the *joke* played by the statue could be that, given half a chance, he will charge straight into the river next door. Or, better, let the frieze make agreeable sport with the commanding gesture of this cavalry officer's sword-point. He has a

horse, so out of the way, everyone in the procession, and he'll trot triumphantly into these glorified (orange) royal stables under his own steam! After the haulage struggles we have witnessed ahead, this is nice work if you can get it, as the Prince rides off on his sledge, to glory in a watery grave. Just try stopping him!

We now wind down (in terms of size) with a set of non-threatening women (panels 36, 34, 32), before the finale of a stripped toy-boy (panel 30). First comes the baby's diversion, the *Seated Mother, and Child*, to be joined by her book-end match, *Kneeling Mother, and Child*. These two make up a sort of 'mini-pediment' between them, to underline that they are pendants on the gable of the Church of Our Lady.

The first group, we saw, is carted along by a team in good shape. The two main bearers are properly harnessed, and a vigilant aide is on hand to give *Mother* a steadying hand on her available forearm, while one arm goes round the *Child* to keep him on board, and one finger tickles him calm. Swell. But too good to last: her companion *Mum* is forced to face the wrong way, *her Child* stood behind her, without proper control and only her neck for purchase. Precariously balanced on her right knee, she has come to grief, and come to earth with a bump.

This, then, is a fallen woman, not because anyone has laid a finger on her, but because of bad luck. The rope of her rear porter has snapped. There is nothing heavy about this set-back, and Our Lady still watches over her kind, so neo-classical eyes must see, just the way that Venuses once cuddled nude Cupids in their laps (36), and *Crouching Venuses* often felt Cupids' clammy hands on their backs (34). Only, these modern matrons ooze, not pure sexiness on stands of salacious sensuality and seduction, but domesticated bliss—straight from the Attic gravestones of the Classical tradition. Neo-classical Love.

Third and last in the row of virtuous women comes another practical and logistical problem, this time arising from a standing pose (panel 32). Historicists introduce another *Princess: Fjódorovna Baryatinskaya*, a German immortalized in her mid-twenties, and married to a Russian Prince. Frontally statuesque and above life-size, she has stopped her gang in their tracks. She is, again, not a weight problem, but the danger of instability.

She needs only a mini-cart, but how can she be secured? One of the hands carefully steps up alongside her, fixing some protective sheeting (wrapping or unwrapping?). Another proffers some rope. Their mates gesture in perplexity. The schema shows this beauty off top to toe, and the attentions of her boys are nothing less than suggestive. In keeping her safe, they already get over-familiar, one hand resting on a shoulder-strap, the other virtually interfering with the folds of her dress; and what are they to do with that rope, without overstepping the mark? Anyone who thinks she's enjoying the tease, and wonders how her Russian Prince would take it, needs to take on board that she is completely cleared of all suspicion

by her classical typology. This is *Pudicity*, personification of wifeliness, so that finger on chin pledges. So what historicism gives with one hand, neoclassicism guarantees with the other, for portrait and type fuse together in perfect recycling of Graeco-Roman glyptics.

Alternating with these 'pylon' panels are three 'slits' in a row (panels 35, 33, 31), all showing workmen carrying a piece, precisely, apiece. We looked at the first case already, where the bearer was held up, in front of the *Kneeling Mother, and Child* breakdown, so that a couple can pore over his relief with *Helen, Paris, and Hector*. The remaining two 'slits' both have a pair of carriers busy manhandling their burden without interference. One shoulders a relief panel, the other an armful of art; and we are shown two 'Thorvaldsens' per 'slit.'

In panel 33, we can see neither the relief nor its head-down Sisyphus: Classical art is dead weight loaded on a beast of burden. Will his mate stop him going into the back of the crash ahead? Two extra pairs of eyes reinforce this mate's own steady stare: they come from a bust and a head, the quintessential forms of *Roman* portraiture. A he and a she who ought to belong together; and we ought to recognize them from those dinghies canal-side. *Baroness Stampe* is having her bust grabbed tight, mauled, cuddled, and held safe, and she is paired off with her protégé, the eccentric poet *Adam Oehlenschläger*. A classic Classical parody, of the famous *Barberini togatus*, where a man carries an ancestor's bust in either hand, the perfect Republican Roman.

In panel 31, to the contrary, we can see both images: one held flat to the wall surface, the other just one side of a three-dimensional *objet*. Another relief panel and, this time, a pot are grasped two-handed, and in parallel. The close rhyme in body posture between the porters tells us to link the works close as we dare.

This is important since we can see that it minimizes a distinction between authentic ancient art—the Greek Vase is the quintessential token of *Hellenism*, and this is a prize exhibit from Thorvaldsen's own collection of antiquities—and neo-classical emulation of Hellenizing art—the relief panel shows his *Cupid received by Anacreon*, specially carved in Parian stone, not the usual Carrara, so 'Greek,' not 'Roman.'

The workers are blind to it all, but the images show us, first, Greeks locked in a duel on some epic battlefield, on an Attic black-figure amphora from the end of the 6th BCE, and second, a specially gruesome stabbing (with an arrowhead) by the naughty sex-godlet, in a scene staging a poem included in the ancient Greek collection of erotic whimsy called the *Anacreontea*. In Andersen's fetid mind, this turned into a dodgy, even fetid, 'short story' warning to children, to keep childhood a sex-free area: 'The naughty boy.'

Panel 30 is an end and a beginning. The first work we see taken out of the packing cases (panel '30A') is the kneeling and perching *Ganymede with Jupiter's Eagle*. Relatively diminutive and light-weight, it needs some tricky manoeuvring from the team, all the same. They lower the delicate group gingerly onto its cart, while the foreman frets, and gets his legs mixed up with the poles.

The frieze puns some more between the image and *its* images, so that the rest of the gang frame Ganymede and the frontal bearer in the background as if they are on a par, and, thanks to the image's kneeling posture, the design is, uniquely, isocephalic, with all the torsoes matched, too.<sup>12</sup> They all seem to be helping to give the bird its special drink, after the ordeal of being cooped up in the crate in the ship's hold all that time. But *we* know that this is more of a predator than meets the eye, and this sexy painted boy is going to get more than a peck when the 'modest,' quasi-bas-relief, pose for the cameras is dropped, and they resume their sculptural dimensions in the round. Then, in the myth, the Phrygian frivolity will find this represents, or represents the representative of, another 'Emperor caught in New Clothes,' namely Jupiter the King of the Gods. *Ganymede* will fly off aboard *his* eagle to join the Olympian party that never ends. So that foreman had best get a move on, or there will be nothing to carry—the image will have flown itself off, sabotaging the procession with surrealism, and robbing the *Museum!*

*Ganymede and the Eagle* hug the wall surface tighter than the rest of the parade, mimicking relief sculpture, but the fun with iconography here also serves to usher in the continuing ironic commentary on modes and grades of being, and of miming, reality which is embedded in the very form of the mural, where all the paint mimics sculpture in three dimensions.

That final 'slit' of all (not shown) is piled with mute unlabelled case upon case. I shall content myself with exclaiming that it figures the entire frieze, the whole museum, Copenhagen, Denmark, Europe, classicism and neo-classicism, art, myth, culture, symbolism and rhetoric, metonymy and metaphor, meaning and significance!

For the container that envelops its contents always works just this exponential way in visual representation, because its signal of occlusion is an uncashable seal of concealed signification (panels 25, 27, 28, 29, 30A, 38: which statue is in which carton?). This is how the particular bind of two-dimensional painting as index of three-dimensional architecture works. In speaking 'for' the museum inside, the mural outdoes itself. What we must do is 'enter' the orange crate, and unwrap the

12 This is a 'Thorvaldsen' *jeu*, since this *Ganymede* takes the standing *Ganymede Offering the Cup* of 1804, with cup and pitcher in hand, but ourselves for the only eagle on the scene, and re-positions him on his knee(s).

stuff for ourselves. Just the way I am trying to imagine the meaning contained in Thorvaldsen's art.

### *III. Genre and Ideology*

Precisely the kinds of visual thinking I have attributed to Sonne's frieze were already firmly and frankly embedded in the imperial culture of early nineteenth-century Europe. The 'triumphal parade of artworks as spoils' was a graphic genre, with distinctive conventions and an affiliation to the famous archetypes of Classical Antiquity.<sup>13</sup>

This performance genre forever shifts and shunts to-and-fro between reality, mime, and image.<sup>14</sup> Participants in the parade fashion a visual collage and cultural event from posture and gesture, from stereotype and myth. What marks out Sonne's frieze is that 'Dickensian' touch, of sardonic class differentiation and affectionate corporate solidarity—the drowning waifs or barking dogs of the democratised Danish *Museum*. But social hierarchy, class relations, and work *are* on parade in Sonne's world-picture.

That ramp we analysed at the head of the queue of 'spoils' (panel 50) is a stark ladder of social rank, for a start. Bosses on high are on a par with the procession of aristocrats, angels, pontiff and eagle ahead. Foremen come half-way up, half-way down. And low-down labourers heave, stoop and sweat like so many beasts of burden.

If there is dignity, as well as indignity, in the not-so-dirty low-energy work of the boatmen on canal-side, nevertheless strong social stereotyping regulates and organizes Copenhagen society afloat. Not just in terms of dress and headgear, but also in facial physiognomy and, of course, body posture. Most striking of all on quayside, on the east end. Here, the 'lower away, and steady as she goes' scene (panel 25) shows us precision, know-how, teamwork, but we can't help but know we are gawping at highly dangerous, heavy-duty, effort. On both 27 and 28-29, the juxtaposition of intent 'bookmen' in top hats against haggard, staggering 'brutes' in skullcaps gets us ready for the game of leisurely well-to-do spectators and exhausted threadbare manpower in the transportation scenes on the courtyard frieze. This newly bourgeois Copenhagen manages to sketch at least a modicum of more or less double-edged interchange and interdependence between the classes. Not where crew and passengers man the boats. And scarcely where the dockers unload the cargo.<sup>15</sup> Rather, as we saw, in that series of under-accentuated 'slits'

13 Cf., esp., the 1810 sketch for a Sèvres porcelain urn by A.J.E. Valois, *Triumphal Entry of Roman Works of Art into the Musée Napoléon*, reproduced in Bott and Spielmann (1991):364, Catalogue 1.10.

14 This is the subject of work in progress on the Roman Triumph by Mary Beard.

along the courtyard. These chinks provide a splendid marginal site for complex commentary on the business of viewing and the viewing of busyness: panels 31, 33, 41, 45, and 47 house workers, including the vanguard of teams in pylons 40 and 44. Panels 37, 39, 43, 49 are occupied by a social mix of spectators, women and baby, bloke with lads (and dog), workers with hooded lady, and well-heeled Mr and Mrs. Panel 35 is where the worker is intercepted by that enthusiastic couple of art-lovers, who are after a close-up peek at that Thorvaldsen relief of *Paris and Helen*. Mixed in with the rest of the frieze's strategies for inter-relating watchers, workers, and wonders, these intricate angles texture the whole experience of engaging with Sonne's parade of painted signs.

The job in hand must be to explore what we would today call the culture of *access* to works of art. But the specific concern of political ideology here is, palpably, to calibrate works of art against arts of work. In the broadest terms, as I already claimed, the *Museum* plays off the traditions of maritime expertise of a seafaring nation against the entrepreneurship of a capable proto-capitalist trading station. The 'aduentus' of Thorvaldsen is in this sense an ideal occasion, an idealized occasion, for the celebration of nothing less than a nineteenth-century European 'cargo cult.' Pouring out of the ship's hold comes a bonanza of symbolic capital that carries international credit wherever boats dock, shipments are loaded, and merchandise is ferried. Sure, these Zealanders have their stake in high culture and a direct line to Rome, even Athens. But take one more turn around the block and see what you can see. Ship's carpentry and carriage joinery. Tillers and teamwork. All those ropes and cables! When it comes to shifting product, trust the Danes and their post-imperialist arts of peace—navigation and carriage. Prompt delivery and guarantee against breakage on all goods. That is the triumph, Copenhagen-style.

In terms of artistic 'form,' the *Thorvaldsen* frieze resembles nothing so much as a hyper-real wrap-round vase panel in the neo-classical style. The *Museum* portrays itself as at once a product of, and operator on, a discourse of plastic and visual art that bridges between Antiquity, Renaissance, and Modernity. Wherever Rome led in triumph or Rome was led in triumph, the tribute of Classicizing culture was, on each occasion in each era, bestowed on a 'Grecian urn.'

15 The crane lowers the crate in panel 25 onto a team with understated status markers. On 27, a beau lounges hand-on-hip on a crate at bow, jacket-less and hat casually to one side: he masquerades as a worker? The man with the vase nearby wears jacket but no neck-tie, he has 'distinguished'—'refined'—features—and trousers rolled up above bare shins and feet: obviously, an intellectual? On 29, we are prepared for the question of spectatorship within sculpture culture by the combination of idler and urchins who watch, more or less unthinkingly (?), the tonnage hauled up the plank ...

#### IV. Myth of the Artist

I shall end, as I started, at the front of the parade of spoils through Christiansborg Castle courtyard, with the *Lucerne Lion* (panel 50). More properly, this is *Dying Lion Protecting the Royal Arms of France*. We have seen so many affirmations that Sonne's frieze is a triumphal monument to Sculptor and Sculpture. Here are *the horses-and-chariot with regal triumphator* installed.

This is one huge lion, we hope chained up as stoutly as the undercarriage of his wagon is, we hope not going to be roused by the stevedores rattling his cage—those two crouched muscle men 'work horses' pushing him from behind, and the pair of 'gee-up's' and 'whoa's' right in his right ear. But this is no big cat, history says, but Thorvaldsen's *Lucerne Lion*. And he *is* dying, and they must hurry to get him home to his cave, not a second to lose. He incarnates heroic *fides ac uirtus*, naturally (he is a lion, and Denmark has as many lionhearts as anywhere). But the tale, as they say, is passing strange.

Back in 1792 Paris during the Terror, the royal Swiss Guard billeted on the Tuileries went down fighting the French Revolutionaries to the last man. In 1819 Thorvaldsen was approached for a monument, and a colossal version of his idea was duly hacked out of the side of a cliff at Lucerne (1821, by L. Ahorn): hewn from the proverbial 'living rock.'<sup>16</sup>

In 1848, Bingesbøll, Sonne, and associates went ahead anyhow, and put in pride of place this icon of post-royalist propaganda, for Danes to shake their heads over. Viewers could find themselves vowing never to indulge in regicidal theatrics, for example, but rather to clip the monarch's claws. Chain him up in constitutionalist red-tape, and give his cortège a good send-off if he was half as brave and bold a lion as Frederik VI had, for a change, managed to be. Messy myth, all loose ends and no teeth, try as we may (The Swiss Guard? The freedom of Copenhagen? What did these old myths mean? What could they tell us today? ...).

However this may lie in political mythology, this is also the lion that lords it over the frieze. And lions are where sculptors cut *their* teeth in the arena. From Classical lions surviving from Antiquity, such as the *Medici Lions*, to neo-classical lions acclaimed, like Canova's, as at least their match, this icon of power bred into the nature of Kings always ruled the monument jungle. From D.C. Blunck's *Thorvaldsen in his Atelier in Rome with his Statue of a Recumbent Lion*, we can see at once that Thorvaldsen and his portraitist knew perfectly well in Rome 1837 that the sculptor is the lion he must be, and must be the lion he is. There is no other way to be first and foremost; a 'King' he must be.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Hall 1999:178.

<sup>17</sup> Lions and Kings: Henderson 2000:esp. 180-86, 191.

Of course Thorvaldsen was always mythologized through his works. 'Thorvaldsen' meant nothing but his œuvre, and, from 1842, that means the Christiansborg coach-house. He had been preparing his own legend by running it through his whole career. In 1814, C.W. Eckersberg's *Portræt af Bertel Thorvaldsen i S. Luca-Akademiets ordensdragt* proposed right away by posing Thorvaldsen before his *Alexander Frieze* that this artist's work was always invested in the *self*-heroization of an *artistic* genius.

It would be the *neo-classical* heroism of *self*-fashioning, as in the *Jason*, whose creation took from the baptism of the artist in 1802-3 through 1828, then more work in the 1830s and, under the supervision of Bissen, a posthumous attempt in 1846-62, before the first marble was bought back in 1917: a synthesis of all the most 'classical' ideal males in all Greek art, the *Apollo Belvedere* and Polyclitus' *Doryphorus*, plus hints of the *Ares Borghese*, the '*Pompey Spada*,' etc.

In mere life, Thorvaldsen waited on royalty. In lasting myth, the great sculptor would be lionized as a hero of Art, defying incorporation in any mundane ruler's orbit.

Baroness Stampe hoped he would hammer home, and chisel in, his mission of self-glorification forever, with the self-portrait of the artist as his own living statue: *Bertel Thorvaldsen Leaning on the Statue of Hope*: it worked, too, as the installation of the *Thorvaldsen Museum* made sure it would.

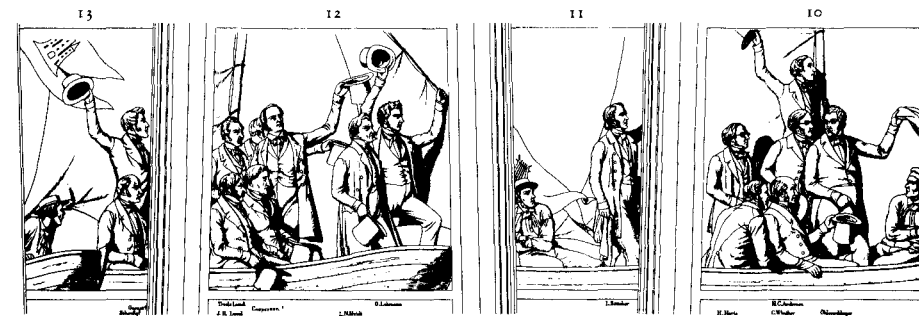
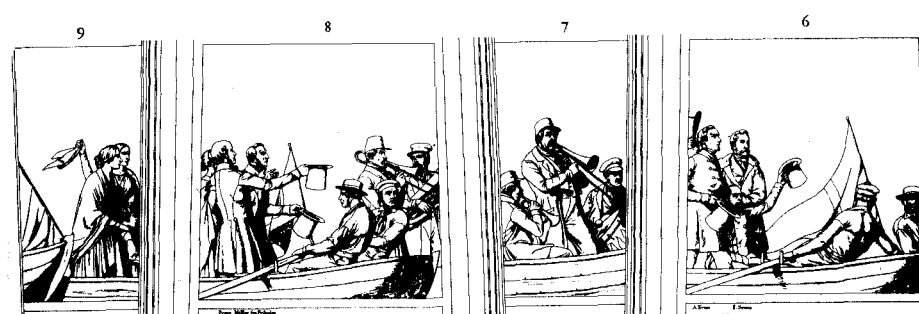
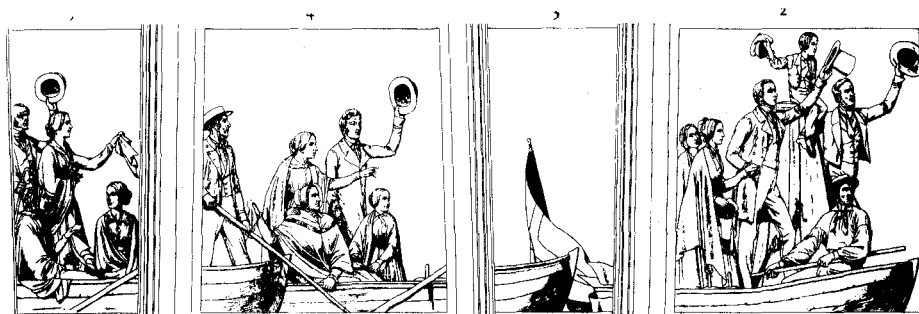
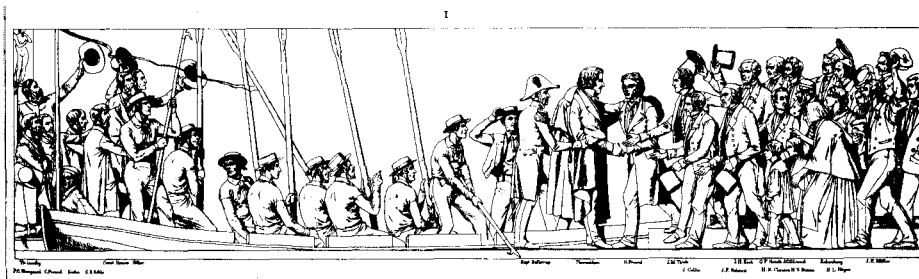
The frieze around *Thorvaldsens Museum* contrives to parallel the '*aduentus*' of the returning *triumphator* with its other face, that *Dying Lion* heading the parade of *triumphal spoils*. Just as the *Arch of Titus* twins its emperor with his most spectacular spoils, capturing in its images of precious art the figural representation which his artistic incarnation in the idiom of Roman beatitude trounces. Trounces, but replicates.

Just so, *Thorvaldsen the Dying Lion* takes pride of place as the *Museum's* ultimate artwork. His public celebrates his apotheosis, pay their last respects. Fêted and fated, the artist heads his own train of spoils, first of the trophies. Captor and captive, captivating and captivated, he symbolizes a liberalist myth of representation embedded in Euro-culture.



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*[Small text labels at the bottom of the page, likely artist names or titles, mostly illegible.]*

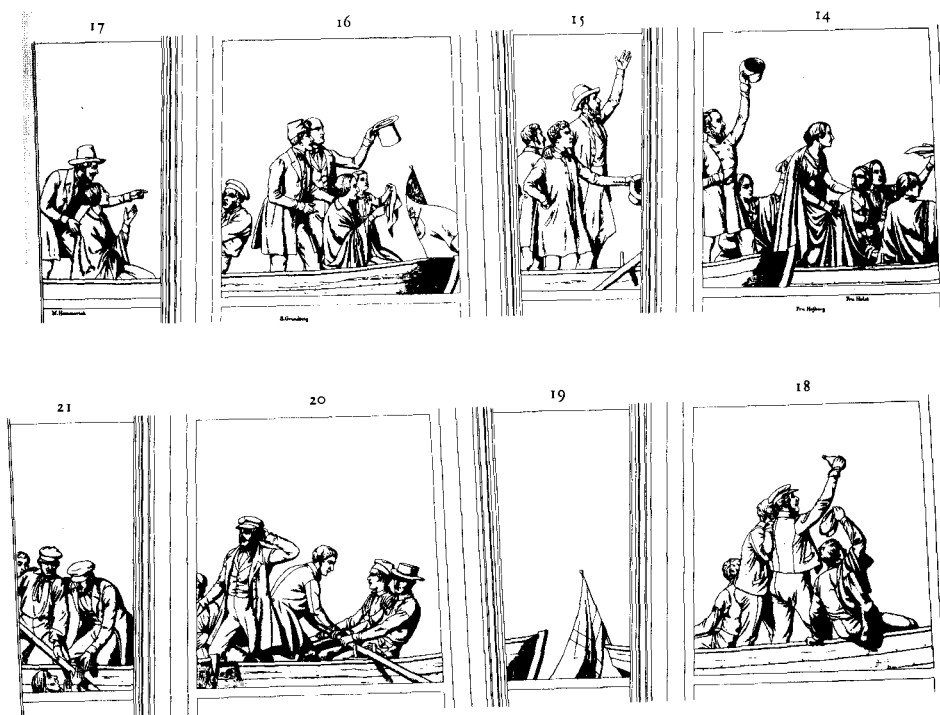
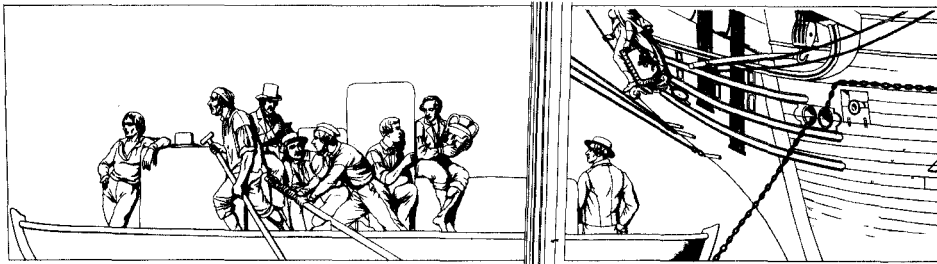
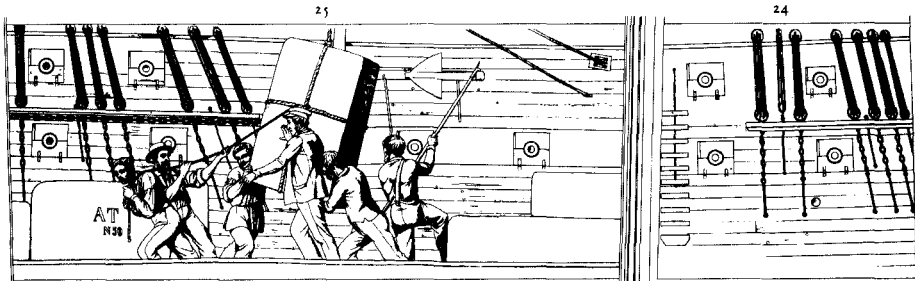
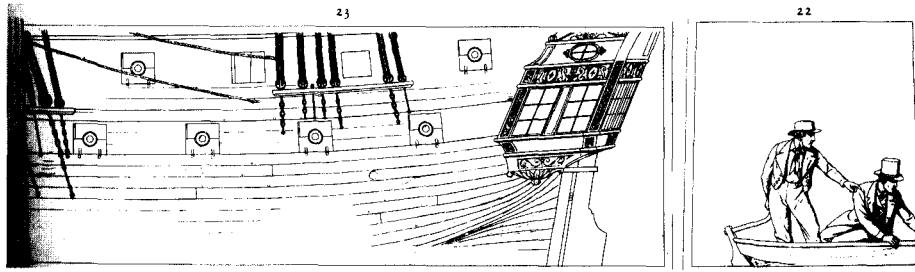
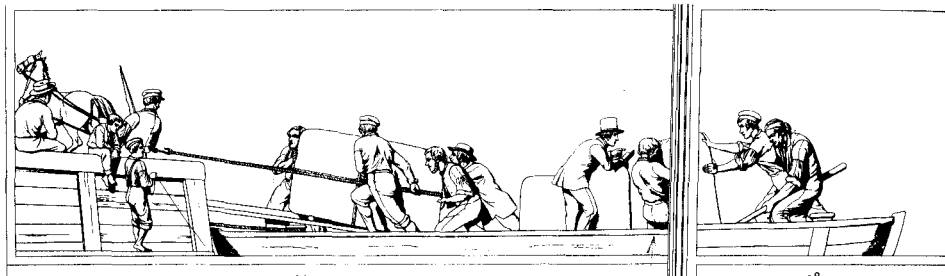


Fig. 1.



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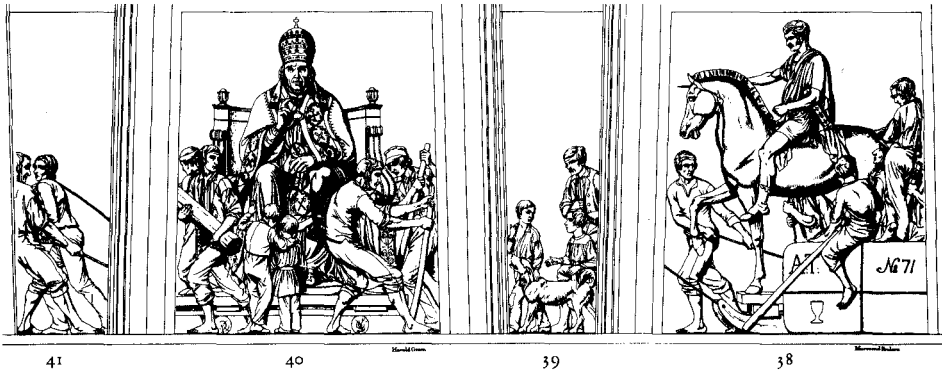
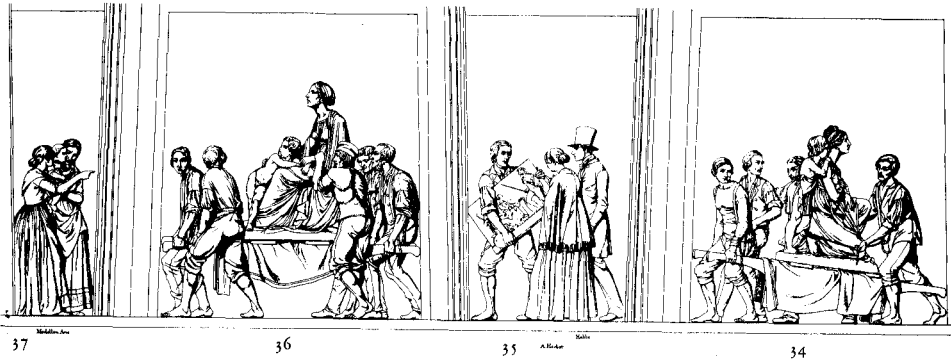
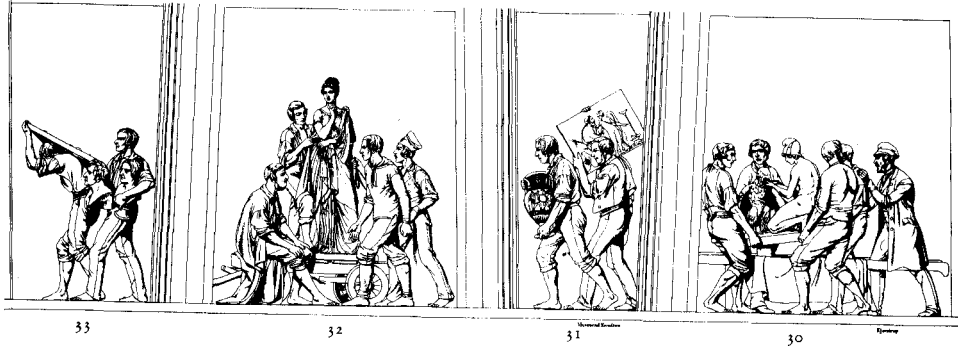
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Fig. 2.



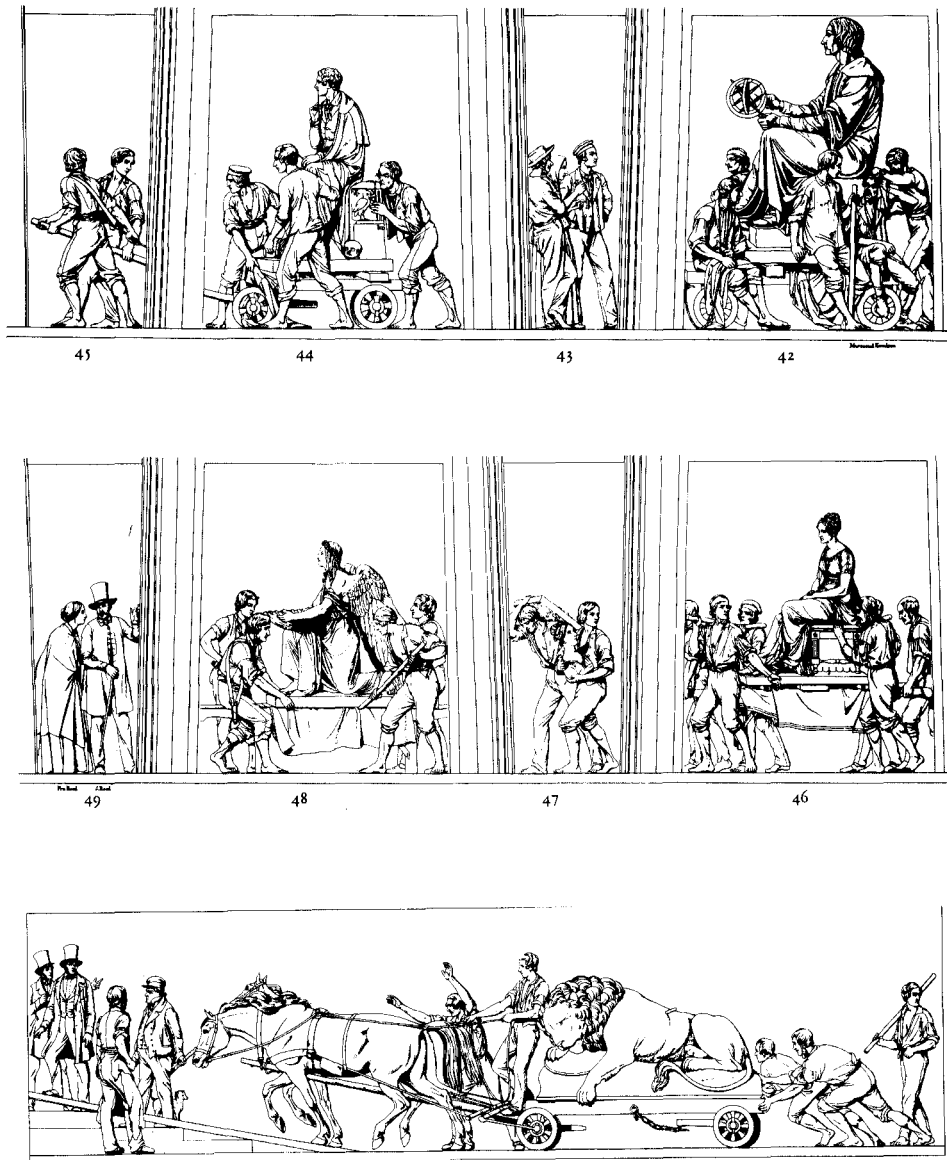


Fig. 3.

## CREDIT FOR FIGS.

*Sonne's friezes at Thorvaldsens Museum, Copenhagen: line-drawings after Damsgaard, Helsted, Henschen, and Jørnæs 1988:142-7, canal side; 148-9, rear end; 142-7, courtyard side*