Culiseo: the Roman Colosseum in Early Modern Jest

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Quell'era un Culiseo, sori Cardei.
sti cosi tonni com'er culo, a Rroma
se sò ssempre chiamati Culisei.[1]

[That was a *Culiseo*, o wits manqué.
These things that like an ass are round, in Rome
go always by the name of *Culisei.*][2]

Messer Maco: Il Culiseo che cos'è?
Maestro Andrea: Il thesoro e la consolation di Roma.[3]

[*Mister Maco*: The *Culiseo*—what is it?
Master Andrea: The treasure and consolation of Rome.]

When Giuseppe Gioachino Belli (1791–1863) wrote that the Theater of Marcellus and other such buildings had long been called "Culisei" because they were "tonni com'er culo" ["round like the ass"], the likening of the Roman Colosseum to a human backside had been provoking titters for centuries. First attested in the sonnets of the 15th-century Florentine barber-poet "il Burchiello," the fashion for comic references to the Colosseum as a giant *culo* (ass), with its many sexual and scatological possibilities, reached a climax in the first half of the 16th century in the writings of Burchiello's admirers, above all Tuscan poets, playwrights, novelists, and satirists who spent time in Rome between the pontificates of Leo X (1513–1521) and Paul III (1534–1549). Writers of this ilk were probably poking fun, in part, at the Roman vernacular. By the early Quattrocento, *Culiseo* appears to have been a common local variant of the medieval name for the Flavian Amphitheater (*Coloseum*, *Coliseum*), just as it would be centuries later in Belli's day.[4]

Yet Roman street speech was not the only butt of the joke. In describing the ruined monument as a *derrière* (or, more specifically, as an anus) and, vice versa, by referring to specific backsides (or anuses) as *culisei*, Cinquecento humorists alluded to contemporary uses of the Colosseum as a venue for sexual, and especially sodomitic, trysts and as a makeshift shelter for work animals (with concomitant dung), and at the same time lampooned the increasingly

[1] Giuseppe Gioachino Belli, "Li bbattesimi de l'anticajje" (1834), in Giuseppe Gioachino Belli, *Sonetti*, ed. Pietro Gibellini, with commentary by Giorgio Vigolo (Milan: Mondadori, 1990), 353–54. The "Culiseo" in this poem is the Theater of Marcellus, rather than the Flavian Amphitheater (Belli, *Sonetti*, 353–54 n. 11). Cf. Belli's sonnets on the Flavian Amphitheater, "Er Culiseo" and "Rifressione immorale sur Culiseo," where the building's likeness to a *culo* is not specified (Belli, *Sonetti*, 38, 452).

[2] On "Cardei" (*Caldei*) as "stolidi" see Belli, *Sonetti*, 353 n. 10. David Petrain kindly provided this pentameter translation. Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations are my own.

[3] Pietro Aretino, *La Cortigiana* (1534), Act 1, Scene 22, in Pietro Aretino, *Teatro, tomo I, Cortigiana (1525 e 1534)*, ed. Paolo Trovato and Federico Della Corte (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2010), 252.

[4] Pietro Fedele, *Tabularium S. Mariae Novae ab an. 982 ad an. 1200* (Rome: Reale Società Romana di Storia Patria, 1903), e.g., 36, 104, 204, 226.

extravagant descriptions of the edifice that characterized the *Mirabilia* literature of the later Middle Ages. Fantastic legends about the antiquities of Rome in the tradition of the *Mirabilia* continued to circulate widely in the 1400s and 1500s, even as erudite antiquarians deflated their credibility. Burchiello, meanwhile—and later Antonio Vignali, Pietro Aretino, Benvenuto Cellini, and other Tuscan writers—pitched in with ribald puns and stories that turned a supreme symbol of Rome as *caput mundi* upside down by transposing its longstanding anatomical associations in hilarious and outrageous ways.

Erectio mirabilis

The Colosseum figured frequently in high- and late-medieval writing as a lofty, celestial thing, intimately associated with the sun and sky and with Rome as head of the world. According to Benedict the Canon's *Mirabilia urbis Romae* (early 1140s?), the edifice once stood next to a temple of the sun where ceremonies were performed in honor of a pagan cult image "in fastigio Colisei" ["on the Colosseum's summit"].[5] Subsequent redactors of the *Mirabilia* outdid one another in elaborating on the building's heavenly wonders. The author of the charmingly vernacular *Le Miracole de Roma* (13th century) followed Benedict's account closely but added that the solar "ydolo che stava suso in Coliseo" ["the idol that was on top of the Colosseum"] had once worn a golden crown.[6] The anonymous compiler of the *Graphia Aureae Urbis* (12th–13th centuries) also mentioned the crown, which was "gemmis ornatam" ["adorned with gems"], and noted that the head and hand of the statue were still to be seen in front of the cathedral of St. John Lateran.[7]

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[5] "Ante Coloseum templum Solis, ubi fiebant cerimonie simulacro quod stabat in fastigio Colosei" (Roberto Valentini and Giuseppe Zucchetti, *Codice topografico della città di Roma*, 4 vols. [Rome: Tipografia del Senato, 1940-1953], 3:58). For an electronic version of the text: Claudia Bolgia and Maurizio Campanelli, eds., *Linking Evidence: A Digital Approach to Medieval and Early Modern Rome, c. 1130–1240*, http://www.medievalrome.eca.ed.ac.uk, accessed online November 1, 2016. The literature on Benedict's text, its interpretation, date, and fortunes, is vast. See especially Arturo Graf, *Roma nella memoria e nelle immaginazioni del Medio Evo*, 2 vols. (Turin: Ermanno Loescher, 1882–1883), 1:122; Louis Duchesne, "L'Auteur des *Mirabilia*," *Mélanges d'archéologie e d'histoire de l' École française de Rome* 24 (1904): 479–90; Valentini and Zucchetti, *Codice topografico*, 3:3–16; cf. *The Marvels of Rome = Mirabilia Urbis Romae*, ed. Francis Morgan Nichols and Eileen Gardiner, trans. Francis Morgan Nichols (New York: Italica Press, 1986); Nine Robijntje Miedema, *Die "Mirabilia Romae": Untersuchungen zu ihrer Überlieferung mit Edition der deutschen und niederländischen Texte* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1996); Maria Accame Lanzillotta and Emy Dell'Oro. *I "Mirabilia urbis Romae"* (Tivoli: Tored, 2004), 13–31, 167 n. 177; Dale Kinney, "Fact and Fiction in the *Mirabilia urbis Romae*," in *Roma Felix: Formation and Reflections of Medieval Rome*, ed. Éamonn Ó Carragáin and Carol L. Neuman de Vegvar (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 235–252, at 235–36; Lucia Nuti, *Cartografie senza carte: lo spazio urbano descritto dal Medioevo al Rinascimento* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2008), 44.

[6] "Nanti Coliseo templum Solis, là dove se facea sacrificia ad lo ydolo ke stava suso in Coliseo, et avea una corona de auro in capo" (*Le Miracole de Roma*, 25, in Valentini and Zucchetti, *Codice topografico*, 3:111-136, esp. 122; Bolgia and Campanelli, *Linking Evidence*, http://www.medievalrome.eca.ed.ac.uk/le-miracole-de-roma/de-capitolio#1, accessed online November 1, 2016).

[7] "Ante Coloseum templum Solis, ubi fiebant caerimoniae simulacro, quod stabat in fastigio Colossei, habens in capite coronam auream gemmis ornatam, cuius caput et manus nunc sunt ante Lateranum" (*Graphia Aureae Urbis*, 33, in Valentini and Zucchetti, *Codice topografico*, 3:67–110, esp. 90; Nuti, *Cartografie senza carte*, 44). Cf. Graf, *Roma nella memoria*, 1:122–23; and Lanzillotta and Dell'Oro, *Mirabilia*, 167. The fragments of the statue mentioned in the *Graphia* are now in the Capitoline Museums. On the fragments and their possible relation to the Colossus of Nero, which stood alongside the Colosseum in antiquity and the early Middle Ages, see Serena Ensoli, "I colossi di bronzo in età tardoantica: dal Colosso di Nerone al Colosso di Costantino. A proposito dei tre

The fashion for extravagant descriptions of the ancient amphitheater and its furnishings culminated in the Trecento in accounts that are as amusing as they are far-fetched. According to Armannino da Bologna (ante 1260–post 1325), the Colosseum once contained many altars dedicated to different gods, including an especially great *ara* of Jove at its center.[8] The temple's evil priests, whose enchantments could cause it to rain, snow, or hail at will, asked foreigners who presented themselves there, "Colis eum?" ["Do you worship him?" (meaning Jove)], whence the building's name.[9]

An account in the *De mirabilibus civitatis Romae* (1360–1362), a collection of texts compiled by the Majorcan cardinal and inquisitor Nicolás Rosell, specifies that the Colosseum was formerly a "templum solis" ["temple of the sun"] in its own right, rather than merely *facing* a temple of the Sun, as stated in the earlier *Mirabilia*.[10] Of "marvelous beauty and greatness," the edifice constituted a self-contained cosmos, with its own "bronze and gold sky where thunder and lightning and glittering fire were made," where rain ran down "through slender tubes," and where one could see the "super-celestial signs and the planets Sol and Luna, drawn along in their own four-horse chariots."[11] The central axis of this astronomical marvel was Phoebus himself, "the god of the sun, who, standing on the earth, touched the sky with his head and in his hand held an orb signifying that Rome ruled the entire world."[12]

The author of the *Libro Imperiale* (1377–1383), probably Giovanni Bonsignori of Città di Castello, described the Colosseum in equally fantastic terms, as a temple of all of the divinities: a pantheon, with myriad chapels and innumerable statues of gold and crystal.[13] As in Rosell's

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frammenti bronzei dei Musei Capitolini," in *Aurea Roma: dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, ed. Serena Ensoli and Eugenio La Rocca (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2000), 66–90, esp. 66.

[8] On Armannino da Bologna, also called Armannino Giudice: Ghino Ghinassi, "Armannino da Bologna," in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 4 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1962), 224–225; Graf, *Roma nella memoria*, 1:118.

[9] Graf, *Roma nella memoria*, 1:118. Cf. the etymologies reported around 1450 by John Capgrave, including a battle of words between St. Sylvester and a demon who lived in the colossus (John Capgrave, *Ye Solace of Pilgrimes: a description of Rome, circa A.D. 1450*, ed. C. A. Mills [London: Henry Frowde, 1911], 27, 33–36; John Capgrave, *Ye Solace of Pilgrimes: una guida di Roma per i pellegrini del quattrocento*, ed. and trans. Daniela Giosuè, pref. Mirella Billi [Rome: Roma nel Rinascimento, 1995], 67–69).

[10] On the date and manuscript tradition, see Valentini and Zucchetti, *Codice topografico*, 3:175–80; and John Osborne, "The Roman Catacombs in the Middle Ages," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 53 (1985): 278–328, at 291. Cf. also Eugenio La Rocca, "The Rhetoric of Rome and the Reappropriation of the Ancient Monuments," *Fragmenta* 1 (2007): 141–171, esp. 145.

[11] "Coloseum fuit templum Solis mirae magnitudinis et pulchritudinis, diversis camerulis adaptatum, quod totum erat coopertum aereo caelo et deaurato, ubi tonitrua, fulgura et coruscationes fiebant et per subtiles fistulas pluviae mictebantur. Erant praeterea ibi signa supercaelestia et planetae, Sol et Luna, quae quadrigis propriis ducebantur" (Valentini and Zucchetti, *Codice topografico*, 3:195; Bolgia and Campanelli, *Linking Evidence*: http://www.medievalrome.eca.ed.ac.uk/de-mirabilibus-civitatis-romae/de-mirabilibus-civitatis-romae, accessed online November 1, 2016. My English translations are adapted from Nichols and Gardiner, *The Marvels of Rome*, 28.

[12] "In medio vero Phoebus, hoc est deus Solis, manebat, qui pedes tenens in terra cum capite caelum tangebat, qui pilam tenebat in manu, innuens quod Roma totum mundum regebat" (Valentini and Zucchetti, *Codice topografico*, 3:195).

[13] Gianni Ballistreri, "Bonsignori, Giovanni," *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 12 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970), 407–409; Graf, *Roma nella memoria*, 1:126–128, 236–237. Cf. La Rocca, "The Rhetoric of Rome," 145, who tentatively identifies the author as Cambio di Stefano of Città di Castello. See also Jacques Poucet, "Le *Libro imperiale* (XIV^{e}) de Giovanni de' Bonsignori: l'imagination au pouvoir, les statues liées au Panthéon et au Temple de Janus," *FEC – Folia Electronica Classica* (Louvain-la-Neuve) 26 (2013), accessed online at http://bcs.fltr.ucl.ac.be/FE/26/STAT/Ana/Col/05.Appl2.htm, November 1, 2016.

manuscript, the "Culiseo*"* (or "Chuliseo") of the *Libro Imperiale* had an imposing upright element at its center: "una cholonna di metallo tanta alta che passava sopra al tenpio" ["a column of metal so high that it extended above the temple"], culminating in a pinnacle ("ghuia") surmounted by an exceedingly splendid ("sprendidissima") statue of Jove.[14] So high and imposing was this gilded image that everyone who visited Rome saw it and knelt ("si frettava le genua").[15] Pagan pilgrims from all over the world flocked to the *Culiseo*, where they flagellated themselves before the central column, which was covered with countless silver whips ("infinite disciprine d'argento"). Having made due offering to Jove, each pilgrim fasted for three days in the chapel of the god to whom he or she was most devoted and then ascended to the altars at the top of the building ("andavano sopra il giro disopra, dove erano gli altari del sagrificio") to immolate animals and to throw incense, pearls, and pulverized gems on the sacrificial flames.[16]

These and other fanciful variants on the *Mirabilia* continued to be read widely in the Quattrocento. The English Augustinian John Capgrave, who visited Rome between 1449 and 1452, reported a tradition that identified the Colosseum as home to the *salvatio*, an array of statues representing the different peoples of the empire, each one equipped with a bell that rang when the populace in question rebelled against Rome. Other sources located this extraordinary *ingegno* on Capitoline Hill or in the Pantheon. (Capgrave was drawn to the former hypothesis.[17]) Various other late-medieval accounts credit the poet Virgil with the invention of the *salvatio* and with the building of the Colosseum. Virgil was widely regarded in the Middle Ages as a necromancer—such a great building could only have been erected with the help of magic.[18] Capgrave's German contemporary Nikolaus Muffel may have been thinking of the *salvatio* when, after his Roman sojourn of 1452, we wrote that the Colosseum had once contained a mirror "in which one could see all things in the world."[19]

Comic Relief

Shortly before Muffel described this omniscient eye of an omnipotent empire, the Colosseum had been recast in very different anatomical terms by the Florentine barber and comic poet Domenico di Giovanni, nicknamed "il Burchiello," who spent the last years of his short life

[14] Graf, *Roma nella memoria*, 1: 126–128, 236–237; Poucet, "*Le Libro imperiale*."
[15] Graf, *Roma nella memoria*, 1:126.
[16] Ibid., 1:127.
[17] Capgrave was probably drawing upon a reference to the *salvatio* in the *De laudibus divinae sapientiae* of his countryman Alexander Neckam (1157–1217). On Capgrave's account and its sources: Capgrave (Mills), *Ye Solace of Pilgrimes*, xi–xii, 27, 33-34; Capgrave (Giosuè), *Ye Solace of Pilgrimes*, 67–68. On the long and complex textual tradition of the *salvatio* see Graf, *Roma nella memoria*, 1:184–214, esp. 192–93; and Nicola Cilento, "Sulla tradizione della *Salvatio Romae*: la magica tutela della città medievale," in *Roma anno 1300: atti della IV settimana di studi di storia dell'arte medievale dell'Università di Roma "La Sapienza" (19–24 maggio 1980)* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1983), 695–703, at 697–703.
[18] Graf, *Roma nella memoria*, 1:193, 2: 249–52; Domenico Comparetti, *Virgil in the Middle Ages*, trans. Edward Felix Mendelssohn Benecke (London: Sonnenschein, 1895), 327–37; Michela Di Macco, *Il Colosseo: funzione simbolica, storica, urbana* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1971), 36, 68–69, 116–117; Ada Gabucci, ed., *The Colosseum*, trans. Mary Becker (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2000), 207.
[19] Muffel described the Colosseum ("Coliseus") as "die simbel spiegelpurck, darin man alle hubscheit und spil getriben hat und auf den dechern zugesehen" ["the round Castle of Mirrors, in which many entertainments and games were held, which one could watch from the rooftops"] adding that it contained "ein spigel…darin man gesehen alle ding in der werlt" ["a mirror in which they saw all things in the world"] (Nikolaus Muffel, *Descrizione della città di Roma nel 1452: delle indulgenze e dei luoghi sacri di Roma = Der ablas und die heiligen stet zu Rom*, trans. and comm. Gerhard Wiedmann [Bologna: Pàtron, 1999], 14, 106–107).

(1404–1449) in Rome.[20] In the second verse of "Limatura di corna di lumaca," one of Burchiello's many nonsensical medical prescriptions in sonnet form, Rome receives the following cryptic advice.[21]

> O Roma fresca, quando il manto vaca
> faresti bene a metterlo in composta
> e fare al Culiseo una sopposta
> di pastural, non pur di pastinaca.[22]
>
> [O, fresh/cool Rome, when the mantle is empty
> you would do well to make it into a compote
> and to give the *Culiseo* a suppository
> of pastoral staff, rather than of parsnip]

Burchiello's absurd remedy is thick with *doppi sensi*. The first line seems to allude to periods of *sede vacante*, when the papal mantle is unoccupied ("quando il manto vaca"). Newly rid of one pontiff and hopefully awaiting another, Rome finds herself is a state of renewal ("O Roma fresca").[23] At the same time, one possible Latin meaning of *vaca*—to lack, to be missing—suggests a second possible reading: Rome is without her overcoat ("quando il manto vaca") and therefore feeling a bit chilly ("fresca"). This discomfort recommends that she store up the mantle for future use by making it into a compote ("metterlo in composta"), just as one might cook summer fruit down into jam as a safeguard against winter famine.[24]

The next two lines of the sonnet expand and intensify the jest. Given the previous reference to the papal mantle, "pastural" in the last line of the verse most obviously refers to a pastoral staff—that is, to a bishop's crozier, which, like a mantle, is a papal accoutrement. In Burchiello's idiom, however, "pastural" (or "pastorale") was also a synonym for "penis." So was "pastinaca" (parsnip), the pointed root vegetable that the poet recommends replacing with "pastural" for use as a suppository ("una sopposta di pastural, non pur di pastinaca").[25] Predictably, the

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[20] Burchiello, *I sonetti del Burchiello*, ed. Michelangelo Zaccarello (Turin: Einaudi, 2004), v–vi; Giorgio Patrizi, "Domenico di Giovanni," *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 40 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1991), 621–25, at 621–22.

[21] Burchiello, *I sonetti*, 84; Michelangelo Zaccarello, "Una forma istituzionale della poesia burchiellesca: la ricetta medica, cosmetica, culinaria tra parodia e nonsense," in *"Nominativi fritti e mappamondi": il nonsense nella letteratura italiana: atti del convegno di Cassino, 9–10 ottobre 2007*, ed. Giuseppe Antonelli and Carla Chiummo (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2009), 47–64.

[22] Burchiello, "Limatura di corna di lumaca," lines 5–8, in Burchiello, *I sonetti*, 84; Carlo Alberto Girotto, ed., *Rime del Burchiello commentate dal Doni* (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2013), 73. Cf. the use of "manto" to mean papal power in a pasquinade from the time of Leo X, in Valerio Marucci, Antonio Marzo, and Angelo Romano, *Pasquinate romane del Cinquecento*, 2 vols. (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1983), 1:110.

[23] Burchiello, *I sonetti*, 84; Girotto, *Rime del Burchiello*, 73. According to the commentary of Anton Maria Salvini (1653–1729), "fresca" should be understood to mean in a state of renewal and hope (i.e., after the death of one pope and in expectation of another): "Chiama Roma 'fresca' in tempo di sede vacante, perché allora si ringiovanisce, si rallegra e si rinnuova godendo delle novità e empiendosi di speranze" (Girotto, *Rime del Burchiello*, 73 n. 163).

[24] Burchiello, *I sonetti*, 84 n. 5.

[25] Michelangelo Zaccarello, ed., *Burchiello e dintorni a 550 anni dalla morte (1449–1999): atti del convegno, Firenze, 26 novembre 1999* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1999), 34. Burchiello prescribed "pasturale" with a *doppio senso* in two other comical medical prescriptions (Burchiello, *I sonetti*, 185, 210). On *pastinaca* as "penis" see also Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1984), 12:793. In modern Italian, *pastorale* can also mean "fern," a plant whose unfurling stems resemble

recommended recipient of this treatment, the "Culiseo," also had at least two meanings in Burchiello's idiom: "Colosseum"; and "ass" (British: "arse") or, more specifically, "anus."[26]

Readers of the sonnet are thus invited to imagine the Colosseum as an enormous backside or asshole, a *culo* (cf. Latin *culus*), into which Rome in time of *sede vacante* is advised to administer a solid enema ("una sopposta") of crozier/cock.[27] Burchiello reinforced the pun by calling the building "Culiseo," rather than referring to it with the older, more Latinate spelling "Coliseo" attested, for example, in *Le Miracole de Roma*.[28] This orthographic choice may have drawn inspiration simultaneously from non-Florentine vernacular writings such as the *Libro Imperiale*, where "Culiseo" appears without any apparent comic intent, and, as suggested above, from its counterpart in Roman street speech, which one can imagine witty newcomers to the city finding an irresistible target.[29] The *-eo* at the end of "Culiseo" may have provided Latin-literate readers with further chuckles, given its principal Latin meaning ("I go") and one possible secondary connotation ("to come" in a sexual sense), as well as its position right after *culis-*, which looks like a Latin dative or ablative meaning "to asses" or "for asses."[30] In this mock-learned reading, "Culiseo" could be construed as "Culis eo," meaning "I go for anuses," or perhaps "I come in anuses."

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the spiral finial of a crozier (Battaglia, *Grande dizionario*, 799). On long, conical vegetables as burlesque anatomical references in Florentine poetry see also Agnolo Bronzino's "Del Ravanello," in Agnolo Bronzino, *Rime in burla*, ed. Franca Patrucci Nardelli (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1988), 395–98, e.g., at lines 40–43: "Ma le regine e l'altre gran madonne / alor se tengon esser più felici / quand'hanno il ravanel sotto le gonne" ["But queens and other great ladies / consider themselves happier (luckier?) / when they have a radish under their skirts"].

[26] Cf. Burchiello's poem "Lampane rotte e staffe sgangherate," lines 7-8: "…fanno del Culiseo surger l'ortiche, / cagion delle fagiane spampanate" (Girotto, *Rime del Burchiello*, 71).

[27] On the monuments of Rome conceived as human body parts, including bowels, in ancient literature: Emily Gowers, "The Anatomy of Rome from Capitol to Cloaca," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 85 (1995): 23–32. Cf. also Lorenzo de' Medici's "Canto de' votacessi" ["Song of the latrine cleaners"], which plays on the workers' tools, (allusions to the penis), the latrines (the lower apertures of the human body), and the act of cleaning (sexual intercourse). See Douglas Biow, *The Culture of Cleanliness in Renaissance Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 177–181.

[28] When the word *Coloseum* and its variants first started to appear regularly in Latin sources in the 11th and 12th centuries, complementing and eventually superseding the ancient designation *amphitheatrum*, it was spelled beginning with the syllable *co-*, as in a diploma of 1038 from Santa Maria Nova, which refers to a property located "in ampiteatrum quod nuncupatur Coloseum." For this example and others, and on the etymology in general, see Fedele, *Tabularium S. Mariae Novae*, 36–37, 48–49, 163–64; Valentini and Zucchetti, *Codice topografico*, 3: 32, 58, 90, 122, 132, 149, 166, 184, 195–196, 218, 220; Ensoli, "I colossi di bronzo," 67; Charles du Fresne du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis* (Niort: L. Favre, 1883), 401; Graf, *Roma nella memoria*, 1:116–117.

[29] Cf. the *Riccordi* of Marcello Alberini of 1521–1536: "l'amphiteatro che oggi se dice il Culiseo, et il Tempio del Sole nelli orti de Santa Maria Nova" (Domenico Orano, *Il Sacco di Roma del m.d.xxvij, Studi e documenti,* vol. 1: I *Ricordi di Marcello Alberini* [Rome: Forzani, 1901], 187, 470–71). The spelling *Culiseo* appears in some other sources of the period, including Tuscan ones, with no apparent punning intent, for example, in the *zibaldone* of Giovanni Rucellai, who called any theater or amphitheater in Rome a *culiseo*, as Belli would four centuries later. Rucellai had visited Rome for the Jubilee of 1450 and may have adopted the local Roman usage. On his *zibaldone* and sojourn see Herbert P. Horne, "An Account of Rome in 1450," *Revue Archéologique*, 4, no. 10 [1907]: 82–97, esp. 92. See also the label "chuliseo" on a late 15th-century ground plan of the Colosseum: Vienna, Albertina, inv. Egger, n. 22r, reproduced in Francesco Paolo Fiore, ed., *La Roma di Leon Battista Alberti. Umanisti, architetti e artisti alla scoperta dell'antico nella città del Quattrocento* (Milan: Skira, 2005), 208.

[30] On the use of the Latin verb *eo* to signify having an orgasm (e.g., "ibo" in Martial 1.46.3) see James Noel Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London: Duckworth, 1982), 144. For other, similar alternative spellings in service of sexual word play: Jean Toscan, *Le carnaval du langage. Le lexique érotique des poètes de l'équivoque de Burchiello à Marino (XV^e–XVII^e siècle)*, 4 vols. (Lille: Diff. Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1981), 1:145–172, esp. 157.

The sonnet begins by calling for a mixture of "filings of snail horn" and "blacksmith's wind," a send-up—enriched farther along by the stewed mantle and crozier suppository—of the bogus medical propositions of real-life charlatans, including a certain Mastro Marian da Pisa referred to in the sonnet's opening verse.[31] At the same time, the image of a staff/penis stuck into, or up through, the ancient arena may also have reminded Burchiello and his readers of the tall, vertical object at the Colosseum's center in the tradition of the *Mirabilia*: the "ydolo ke stava suso in Coliseo" of *Le Miracole de Roma*; Rosell's "Phoebus," rising in the middle of the building, his head touching the sky; or the towering "cholonna di metallo" of the *Libro Imperiale*, with its spire and colossal, crowning, *sprendidissimo* Jove. Burchiello's recipe converts the skyward momentum of these soaring pagan cult images into the earthy thrust of anal coitus and of a physician's instrument aimed at releasing feces.

Any attempt at a unitary reading of Burchiello's sonnet misses the point; his humor depends for effect on semantic instability and multiplicity. His verse on the "Culiseo" evokes at once an act of sexual violence (and defiance?) inflicted upon a supreme symbol of Roma *caput mundi* (the Colosseum) while also promising a recovering patient ("Roma fresca") relief through a purging of the filth of the previous papal administration.[32] Real filth may also have been involved. In Burchiello's day, the Colosseum's perimeter must have smelled of the excrement of the pack animals used to carry away building materials in the ongoing industry of spoliation famously condemned by Poggio Bracciolini and outlawed by Eugenius IV, and yet nevertheless intensified over the course of the Quattrocento.[33] Holes chiseled into the travertine piers for fastening reins and for inserting the beams of haylofts and barns confirm that large quadrupeds were regularly sheltered there.[34]

If the widespread modern association of *cacca* (shit) with good luck and especially with the arrival of money was already current in Italy in the Quattrocento (and whether it was is not clear), the sonnet may also have instructed Rome in a method of ensuring a good outcome to an impending conclave. Ancient Romans honored the goddess Fortuna in toilets and latrines, a practice alluded to by Juvenal, ridiculed by Clement of Alexandria, and widely attested in ancient inscriptions and graffiti.[35] Characters in Renaissance literature sometimes shit money. Examples include the *poavola* (doll) in Gianfrancesco Straparola's *Le piacevoli notti* (1550–1553) and a donkey into whose "forame" (hole) a certain Campriano inserted three lira—a story reported by the prostitute Nanna in Pietro Aretino's *Dialogo nel quale la Nanna insegna la*

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[31] Michelangelo Zaccarello, "Schede esegetiche per l'enigma di Burchiello," in *La fantasia fuor de' confini: Burchiello e dintorni a 550 anni dalla morte (1449–1999): atti del convegno, Firenze, 26 novembre 1999*, ed. Michelangelo Zaccarello (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2001), 1–34, at 29; Burchiello, *I sonetti*, 84 n. 4.

[32] See Claudio Giunta, "A proposito de 'I sonetti del Burchiello', a cura di Michelangelo Zaccarello," *Nuova rivista di letteratura italiana*, 7, no. 1–2 (2004): 451–476. Cf. Girotto, *Rime del Burchiello*, 73 n. 163.

[33] See Stefano Antonetti and Rossella Rea, "Inquadramento cronologico delle tracce di riuso," in *Rota Colisei: la valle del Colosseo attraverso i secoli*, ed. Rossella Rea and Géza Alföldy (Milan: Electa, 2002), 321.

[34] Antonetti and Rea, "Inquadramento cronologico," 320–21, 329; Stefano Antonetti. "Lo stazionamento degli animale: le 'attaccaglie,'" in *Rota Colisei*, 186–217.

[35] Ann Olga Koloski-Ostrow, *The Archaeology of Sanitation in Roman Italy: Toilets, Sewers, and Water Systems* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 113–115; L. Bouke van der Meer, *Ostia Speaks: Inscriptions, buildings and spaces in Rome's main port* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 26. Many prominent families in high-medieval Italy, especially in Milan but also in Rome and other cities, took surnames beginning with the syllables *caca* or *caga*, e.g., Cacapisto (shit pesto), Cagalenti (shit slowly), etc. It bears considering whether such names were *portafortune* (good luck charms) in an apotropaic sense, or in some other sense. On the names: Chris Wickham, *Sleepwalking into a New World: The Emergence of Italian City Communes in the Twelfth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 51.

Pippa sua figliuola a esser puttana [*Dialogue in which Nanna teaches her daughter Pippa to be a whore*] (1536).[36] Campriano proceeded to sell the donkey for a hundred ducats to two Sienese merchants, who were convinced that the animal "cacava moneta" ["shat money"].[37]

Burchiello's only partially decipherable poem constitutes a founding moment in a long line of sexual and scatological jokes involving the *Culiseo* (or *Coliseo*) in early modern vernacular literature. As noted above, these *scherzi* seem to have ridiculed Roman diction—*Culiseo* jokes were a Tuscan specialty, if not a monopoly—while also parodying the many guidebooks and legends that in previous centuries had aggrandized the Colosseum in increasingly fabulous and improbable ways.

These jests also played on the building's appearance: the elliptical ground plan (cf. Belli's "tonni com'er culo"); the dirt-filled central ellipse, where the arena had been in antiquity; and the descending radial walls laid bare by centuries of spoliation, which may have reminded some observers of the ridges and creases around an anus. This last element was made visible in unprecedented ways beginning in the latter half of the Quattrocento by new forms of antiquarian reconstruction, as beautifully exemplified by Giuliano da Sangallo's ground plan of the Colosseum in the Barberini Codex (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barb. lat. 4424, fol. 14v).[38]

The nearly constant allusions to anal sex in *Culiseo* jokes also indicate activities perceived in the 15th and 16th centuries as commonly taking place in the Colosseum. Sexual, and especially homosexual, trysts were a well-known function of the building in the 20th century before it was closed off to the public after dark, and numerous phallic graffiti—line drawings of erect penises, some of them ejaculating little balls accompanied by motion lines—inscribed on the travertine piers and datable to the years between 1485 and 1540 suggest that this modern use revived or continued a Renaissance function.[39] The state of abandonment of the building, its position near but outside of the *abitato* (the inhabited area of the city), and the many discrete, vaulted chambers (*fornices*, whence the word "fornication") beneath the ancient seating, including those outfitted as haylofts and barns, must have worked together to create a serviceable setting for assignations and pickups.[40]

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[36] On Straparola: Ruth B. Bottigheimer, *Fairy Godfather: Straparola, Venice, and the Fairy Tale Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). See also the entry for "Cacca," in Battaglia, *Grande dizionario*, 2:475.

[37] Pietro Aretino, *Sei giornate: Ragionamento della Nanna e della Antonio (1534), Dialogo nel quale la Nanna insegna a la Pippa (1536)*, ed. Angelo Romano (Milan: Mursia, 1991), 165, 182.

[38] Digital Vatican Library: http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Barb.lat.4424/0048 (accessed November 1, 2016).

[39] I owe my information about the Colosseum as a sexual pickup and hookup spot to various friends, especially gay men, who spent time in Rome in the 1960s and 1970s. On the graffiti: Antonetti and Rea, "Inquadramento cronologico," 322–323; Rosella Rea, "Graffiti e targhe," in *Rota Colisei*, 231–39, esp. 233, 235. Of the fifty-five graffiti identified by Rea on the piers, eighteen show phalluses, at least five of which seem to be ejaculating and four have tails. Because Renaissance ground level in the arches was generally higher than it is today, most of the images cannot be observed without use of a ladder. For drawings of the graffiti see Rea, "Graffiti e targhe," 231. Rea suggests that these images may have been apotropaic symbols, for protecting the storage places for animals, animal feed, and other property that riddled the building (Rea, "Graffiti e targhe," 323). It seems likely to me that they attest to a secondary use of those spaces—namely, as a venue for sexual encounters, including possibly sex for pay. Cf. Riccardo Bruscagli, ed., *Trionfi e canti carnascialeschi toscani del Rinascimento*, 2 vols. (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1986), esp. 1:104.

[40] The habitual dumping of architectural refuse in the arches may also have invited sexual uses by further subdividing and screening off the corridors from public view. On the dumping, as well as the lofts, barns, and tethering holes for work animals, see Antonetti and Rea, "Inquadramento cronologico," 321. The phallic graffiti are

Wasteland

By the time Burchiello moved to Rome in the 1440s the Colosseum was nearing its physical nadir.[41] Erected as a venue for blood sports by Vespasian with the sale of booty from the Jewish War and inaugurated by Titus in A.D. 80, in late antiquity the Flavian Amphitheater became a quarry for stone and other materials, and it continued to serve as a major source of building supplies for the city for more than a millennium.[42] Thanks in part to this long-lived industry of spoliation, the structure blossomed into a lively craftsman's quarter in the central and high Middle Ages, with houses and gardens set in and around the arena and the outer perimeter.[43] By 1192 the neighborhood included public baths and the *palatium* of the Frangipane family, built into the arches of the Colosseum's east end.[44] In the 1200s and 1300s the Frangipane sold the palace piecemeal to other families (the Annibaldi, the Orsini). The location was strategically positioned overlooking the route between the Vatican and the papal seat at St. John Lateran.[45] Its value thus declined precipitously during Avignon papacy, when the Lateran went largely abandoned. During the latter half of the Trecento, the village nestled in and around the Colosseum gradually became a ghost town, its depopulation helped along by the bubonic plague

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especially numerous on the north side of the building, facing Oppian Hill and the modern Via Labicana. Farther along, just to the east of the Colosseum, Via Labicana becomes a parallel of Via di San Giovanni in Laterano. In 2007, Via di San Govanni—the segment of the medieval-Renaissance *via papalis* nearest the cathedral—was officially designated "Gay Street," a LGBT-friendly area, in response to a public outcry after two men were arrested for exchanging "un bacio gay" (according to the newspapers) near the Colosseum. The men have since been sentenced and fined for "effusioni contrarie a pubblica decenza," and specifically for having had oral sex out in the open near the ancient amphitheater ("Bacio gay, due giovani fermati al Colosseo," *Corriere della sera*, July 28, 2007, http://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Cronache/2007/07_Luglio/27/bacio_gay_roma.shtml?refresh_ce-cp (accessed November 1, 2016); Maria Novella De Luca, "Apre la strada gay al Colosseo, festa fra le polemiche," *La Repubblica*, July 27, 2007, accessed at http://roma.repubblica.it/dettaglio/apre-la-strada-gay-al-colosseo-festa-fra-le-polemiche/1346168, November 1, 2016; "Fermati per il bacio gay al Colosseo. Il pm: In realtà erano atti osceni," *La Stampa*, September 11, 2007, accessed at http://www.lastampa.it/2007/09/11/italia/cronache/fermati-per-il-bacio-gay-al-colosseo-il-pm-in-realt-erano-atti-osceni-xuVrj8QfqSlj8cyTzvr7zL/pagina.html, November 1, 2016; "Bacio gay al Colosseo: coppia condannata. 'Effusioni contrarie a pubblica decenza,'" *Corriere della sera*, May 4, 2011, accessed at http://roma.corriere.it/roma/notizie/cronaca/11_maggio_4/gay-bacio-colosseo-condannati-190568576173.shtml, November 1, 2016).

[41] On the Burchiello's peregrinations: Burchiello, *I sonetti*, vi.

[42] The spoliation was facilitated by the collapse of the outer arches of the amphitheater's south side in late antiquity or the early Middle Ages (Antonetti and Rea, "Inquadramento cronologico," 302–305). Cf. Gabucci, *The Colosseum*, 202, where the collapse is attributed to the earthquake of 1349. On the controversy over the date: David E. Karmon, *The Ruin of the Eternal City: Antiquity and Preservation in Renaissance Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 123–128. On late-ancient and medieval earthquakes and their effects on the Colosseum: Renato Funiciello, Leonardo Lombardi, and Fabrizio Marra, "La geologia della valle dell'anfiteatro" in *Rota Colisei*, 161–167, esp. 162; Rossella Rea and Giovanni Giacomo Pani, "GERONTI V S: la spoliazione teodoriciana, in *Rota Colisei*, 153–159, esp. 159. On the building of the Colosseum *ex manubiis*: Katherine E. Welch, *The Roman Amphitheatre: From Its Origins to the Colosseum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 160.

[43] For the documents attesting the existence of the neighborhood: Fedele, *Tabularium S. Maria Novae*. On the archaeological evidence: Rea, *Rota Colisei*, esp. 336–454; Gabucci, *The Colosseum*, 197–198; Richard Krautheimer, *Rome, Profile of a City, 312–1308* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 314–315.

[44] Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City*, 315–316; Gabucci, *The Colosseum*, 196–199; Antonetti and Rea, "Inquadramento cronologico," 313–317.

[45] Antonetti and Rea, "Inquadramento cronologico," 318; Gabucci, *The Colosseum*, 200; Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City*, 315. On the acquisition of parts of the Colosseum by the Compagnia del Santissimo Salvatore ad Sancta Sanctorum: Karmon, *The Ruin of the Eternal City*, 130–131; Gabucci, *The Colosseum*, 202–204.

and by a powerful earthquake in 1349.[46] After the definitive return of Martin V and the papal court to Rome in 1420, the area continued to grow ever more derelict as the Lateran ceded its millennial status as the seat of the papacy to the Vatican on the far side of town. The activity of spoliation intensified, especially under Nicholas V (1447–1455) and his successors, who removed vast quantities of travertine for use on St. Peter's Basilica and the other great architectural projects of Renaissance Rome.[47] After 1525 the Colosseum's one remaining public function, the Passion plays performed there on Holy Friday by the confraternity of the Gonfalone, became sporadic, and in 1539 Paul III eliminated them entirely after an attack on the Roman Jewish community inspired by the *sacre rappresentazioni*.[48] Thereafter, only a small chapel, S. Maria della Pietà, punctuated the desolation.[49]

Through its metamorphosis from village to wilderness, the Colosseum became an ever more fertile matrix for imaginative elaboration; and the powerful spell that the resulting stories, from Benedict's *Mirabilia* to the *Libro Imperiale*, cast over the popular imagination was by no means suddenly swept away by Flavio Biondo's erudite disquisition on the amphitheater and its authentic original function as a venue for gladiatorial games.[50] By the time Fra Mariano da Firenze visited Rome in 1516–1517, at least four different editions of Flavio Biondo's *De Roma Instaurata* were available—the text had been published in manuscript form in 1446 and in print beginning in 1471. Yet Fra Mariano's own treatment of the Colosseum names both the *salvatio*, whose statues, he wrote, were "arte negromantìae […] dispositae," and the colossal pagan idol holding an orb "signifying that the city was the mistress and queen of all."[51]

Culus mundi

Burchiello's *scherzo* on the *Culiseo* capsized and parodied these grandiose images, to the particular delight of erudite readers of the following century.[52] In his commentary on Burchiello's *Rime*, written between circa 1540 and 1548, Anton Francesco Doni noted with regard to "Limatura di corna di lumaca": "Chi havesse veduto il povero poeta quando ritrovò

[46] Gabucci, *The Colosseum*, 202–04; Karmon, *The Ruin of the Eternal City*, 126.
[47] Karmon, *The Ruin of the Eternal City*, 126–143; Antonetti and Rea, "Inquadramento cronologico," 321–323; Gabucci, *The Colosseum*, 202–204.
[48] The *confratelli* of the Gonfalone continued their flagellant processions to the Colosseum on the eve of Good Friday through 1545. On the plays, their history, and the violence of 1539: Barbara Wisch and Nerida Newbigin, *Acting on Faith: The Confraternity of the Gonfalone in Renaissance Rome* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2013), 2, 263–300, 361–379; Karmon, *The Ruin of the Eternal City*, 136–139; Antonetti e Gabucci, "Inquadramento cronologico," 321–323.
[49] Wisch and Newbigin, *Acting on Faith*, 301.
[50] Flavio Biondo, *Blondi Flauii Forliuiensis De Roma instaurata libri tres ad Eugenium iiii pontificem maximum* (Venice, 1510), 26–27 (bk. 3, ch. i–ii); Fabio Della Schiava and Marc Laureys, "La 'Roma instaurata' di Biondo Flavio: censimento dei manoscritti," *Aevum* 87, no. 3 (2013): 643–665, esp. 643; Gabucci, *The Colosseum*, 203; Mariano da Firenze, *Itinerarium urbis Romae*, ed. Enrico Bulletti (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1931), 170–171; Nuti, *Cartografie senza carte*, 61–66.
[51] "Signans urbem dominam esse et omnium reginam" (Mariano da Firenze, *Itinerarium urbis Romae*, 170–171); Nuti, *Cartografie senza carte*, 61–66. On the editions of Flavio Biondo's text: Della Schiava and Laureys, "La 'Roma instaurata,'" 643.
[52] An awareness of the Colosseum's ancient uses had not been entirely lost in the Middle Ages. 11th-century documents from Santa Maria Nova refer to the Colosseum as "amphiteatrum," and Fazio degli Uberti (died c. 1368) alluded to the building as a place where people had once watched combats (Fedele, *Tabularium S. Mariae Novae*, 36, 48–49; Fazio degli Uberti, *Dittamondo*, bk. II, ch. 31, cited in Graf, *Roma nella memoria*, 1:125; and Di Macco, *Il Colosseo*, 116).

questa cantilena sì fatta sarebbe crepato delle risa" ["Anyone who had seen the poor poet when he invented such a singsong would have cracked up (died?) with laughter"].[53] The fashion for *Culiseo* jokes reached a high water mark in the 1520s and 1530s, shortly before Doni penned this observation, thanks to two interconnected phenomena: the revival of interest in Burchiello and Burchiellesque poetry among members of two learned bodies—the Cenacolo degli Humidi in Florence (soon renamed the Accademia Fiorentina) and the Accademia of the Intronati in Siena; and the raw, free-wheeling humor of Tuscan poets and artists who spent time in Rome during and after the papacy of Leo X, most notably Pietro Aretino, Francesco Berni, and Benvenuto Cellini.[54]

A founding member of the Accademia degli Intronati, Antonio Vignali invoked the *Culiseo* to two different ends in his breathtakingly obscene *La Cazzaria* (1525–1527).[55] In the Platonic dialogue that constitutes the first section of this book-length satire, a character called Arsiccio (Vignali's academic nickname) instructs the young Sodo (a.k.a. Marcantonio Piccolomini) in the pleasures of the anus, whose superiority he extols in myriad ways.[56] One involves a knowingly silly, bombastic etymology.

> E se tu vòi sapere o vedere quanto degna e perfetta cosa sia il culo, porrai mente ch'e Romani, signori di tutto 'l mondo, avendo fatto sì mirabile e stupenda opra, come è quella del loro eccelso teatro, del quale, quantunque gran parte ruinata sia, si meravigliano tutti coloro che lo veggono, affermando che, se tutta la potenza del mondo si volesse unitamente porre a fare una cosa simile, ch'ella non ne saria bastante, e volendoli porre un nome uguale a la sua grandezza e a la sua nobiltà, gli puosero nome Culiseo, cioè, "culi seggio," e quello riputarono nome conveniente a tanta fabrica.[57]
>
> [And if you want to see and understand what a worthy and perfect thing the asshole is, remember that the Romans, the lords of all the world, having made such a marvelous and stupendous work as their excellent theater, at which—even though a great part is ruined—all who come stare in amazement and affirm that, if all the powers of the world came together to make something similar, it would not be enough, wanting to give it a name equal to its grandeur and nobility the Romans called it "Culiseo," that is "Culi Seggio"—"the Seat of the Asses"—and that name is said to be fitting for such a great work[58]]

Inspired by Burchiello's joke on the Colosseum as a *culo* (Vignali mentions Burchiello a few lines later), this fabricated word history, in which the Colosseum becomes a seat for *culi*, inverts the traditional reverence for the edifice as a supreme symbol of Roma as *caput mundi*. The "culi

[53] Girotto, *Rime del Burchiello*, ix, xxxiii, 73–74. On the fortunes of Burchiello see also Giuseppe Crimi, *L'oscura lingua e il parlar sottile: tradizione e fortuna del Burchiello* (Rome: Vecchiarelli, 2005).
[54] On the revival of interest in Burchiello and on Burchiellesque poets in Florence and Siena in the early Cinquecento, see Girotto, *Rime del Burchiello*, xxvii–xxx. Cf. also Antonio Vignali, *La Cazzaria*, ed. Pasquale Stoppelli (Rome: Edizioni dell'Elefante, 1984), 62; Antonio Vignali, *La Cazzaria / The Book of the Prick*, trans. Ian Frederick Moulton (London: Routledge, 2003), 94.
[55] On the date of Vignali's text: Vignali, *La Cazzaria* (Stoppelli), 14; Vignali, *La Cazzaria* (Moulton), 45–46.
[56] On the identities of the characters see Vignali, *La Cazzaria* (Moulton), 4.
[57] Vignali, *La Cazzaria* (Stoppelli), 61.
[58] Vignali, *La Cazzaria* (Moulton), 93.

seggio" is a throne, a royal appurtenance, but it is also intended to be sat upon—to accommodate buttocks. In Vignali's blithely sodomitic world, the anus is the most honored of life's necessities, a body part even worthier and nobler than the head.[59] Given the imaginative late medieval descriptions of the Colosseum, which typically place a tall, hard, upright object at its center, the joke also carries an undertone of anal penetration. If the colossus of Rosell's *De mirabilibus civitatis* or the "cholonna" (column) and "ghuia" (spire) of the *Libro Imperiale* were still in place, as they purportedly had been in antiquity, then anyone sitting on the "culi seggio" would necessarily have been *inculato* (anally penetrated).[60]

A passage in Pietro Aretino's *Ragionamento della Nanna e dell'Antonia* (1534) bolsters the credibility of this last reading.[61] There, "coliseo" [*sic*] appears in a long list of euphemisms enumerated by the prostitute for "cu ca po, e fo" [i.e., *culo*, *cazzo*, *potta*, and *fottere*]—that is, for the lower apertures (*culo* [ass] and *potta* [cunt]) and for what the *cazzo* (prick) does to them (*fottere* [to fuck]). The series begins with figures of speech for the penis and coitus, emphasizing the anal variety: "cordone nello anello" ["cord in the ring"]; "guglia nel coliseo" ["spire in the colosseum"]; "porro nell'orto" ["leek in the garden"]; "chiavistello nell'uscio" ["bolt in the door"]; "chiave nella serratura" ["key in the lock"]; "pestello nel mortaio" ["pestle in the mortar"]; "rossignuolo nel nido" ["nightingale in the nest"]; etc. It then concludes with a litany of euphemisms for cazzo, including "pastorale" and "pastinaca," which sit side by side in the list, a subtle tribute to Burchiello's much admired ur-joke on the *Culiseo*.[62]

Like Vignali's "culi seggio," Aretino's "guglia nel coliseo" brings to mind the tall, upright element at the center of the Colosseum in Trecento variants of the *Mirabilia*, especially the *Libro Imperiale*. [63] For the learned, furthermore, the term may have drawn an additional comic charge from the fashion, inspired by Vitruvius, for regarding the human body, its proportions and parts, as the ideal model for sacred buildings, a category to which the later *Mirabilia* assigned the Colosseum.[64] Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man most famously expresses this idea.[65] There, a nude male stands with outstretched limbs within a superimposed circle and a square, his umbilicus marking the center of the former, his genitals of the latter.[66] Erect, the man's penis would form a *guglia*, of sorts, at the square's geometrical midpoint.

If the first section of Vignali's *Cazzaria* invokes the name of the ancient amphitheater as proof of the magnificence of the anus, the second section of the treatise consists of a fable on Sienese politics in which specific body parts—the "Cazzi," "Palle," "Culi," and "Potte" (Pricks, Balls, Assholes, and Cunts)—represent the political factions (*monti*) of Siena as they existed in Vignali's day. In this portion of the text, "Culiseo" is a sentient being, a wise old asshole who

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[59] Ibid., 94.

[60] Vignali may also have had two other medieval precedents in mind: fanciful medieval etymologies for *Colosseum*, for example that of Armannino Giudice (see notes 8–9 above and pertinent text); and Fazio degli Uberti's reference to the Colosseum as a place for combats, covered with a copper dome "ad alti seggi" (see n. 52 above).

[61] Aretino, *Sei giornate*, 11.

[62] Ibid., 59–60. *Uscio*, like *culiseo* and *anello*, was a synonym for "anus," although starting with Boccaccio it could also refer to the female pudenda (Battaglia, *Grande Dizionario*, 21: 586). On the obscene meanings of *uscio*, *anello*, *porro nell'orto*, and *rossignuolo*: Toscan, *Le carnaval du langage*, 1:174, 666, 676; 3:1453, 1540, 1570–1578.

[63] Graf, *Roma nella memoria*, 1:126–128, 236–237.

[64] Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (London: The Warburg Institute of the University of London, 1949), 1–18.

[65] Leonardo da Vinci, *The Proportions of the Human Figure (The Vitruvian Man)*, Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Gabinetto dei disegni e stampe, No. 228. Reproductions are readily available on the internet under "Leonardo da Vinci Vitruvian Man." For a numismatic version, see the Italian one-euro coin.

[66] Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, 2.

acts as a spokesman for the Culi, delivering a grandiloquent plea for fair treatment from the Cazzi, who are always abusing his kind, and expressing support for the Potte, to whom he vows the Culi will always remain very near.[67] Vignali took Burchiello's joke in a new direction, making Culiseo a grand, old speaking *culo*, as venerable as the Colosseum itself and, one is perhaps to understand, equally ruined.

How many real backsides were ruined in the Colosseum in Vignali's time is anyone's guess, but the structure was clearly stereotyped as a place for sodomitic encounters and sexual tourism in the 16th century, just as it would be in the 20th.[68] In the "Canzona de' lanzi pellegrini," a carnival song written in macaronic, German-accented Tuscan by the Florentine poet Guglielmo, called "il Giuggiola," the "pofer lanzi" (i.e., "poveri lanzi," *lanzi* meaning either peasants or soldiers) cry out for mercy, describing their arduous pilgrimage to Rome for the Jubilee:

> Caritate, amore Dei,
> pofer lanzi sventurate,
> che da Roma siàn tornate
> dalli santi giubilei.[69]
>
> [Mercy, for the love of God,
> poor, unfortunate Lanzi
> who have returned from Rome,
> from the holy jubilees]

Caricatured as sex-hungry drunkards with a taste for *rapporti a tergo* (i.e., coitus from the back, also called sex *alla tedesca* [in the German fashion]) the Lanzi say that they have all seen the Colosseum ("Noi afeme […] Colisee tutt fedute") and, furthermore, that they have received "indulgences," a play, with sexual undertones, on the absolutions granted and sold by the Catholic Church:[70]

> Noi afeme in Rome sante
> Colisee tutt fedute,
> e 'ndulgenzie tutte quante
> a noi state concedute;
> or che star perdon complute,
> caritate, amore Dei.[71]
>
> [In holy Rome, we have
> all seen *Colisee* (Colosseums/backsides)]

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[67] Vignali, *La Cazzaria* (Stoppelli) 113; Vignali, *La Cazzaria* (Moulton), 158–160.

[68] See notes 39–40 above. Cf. Pietro Aretino, *Talanta*, in Pietro Aretino, *Teatro, tomo II*, ed. Giovanna Rabitti, Carmine Boccia, and Enrico Garavelli (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2010), 372 (Act 1, Scene 3): Messer Vergolo: "Come si chiama quello che così, mezzo rovinato, par tutto il mondo? Ponzio: Il Coliseo, e non lo stimano manco i moderni che se lo stimassero gli antichi."

[69] Bruscagli, *Trionfi e canti*, 1:100–101, 104–105.

[70] On Italian stereotypes of Germans as drunkards, as well as German (and Italian) stereotypes of Italians as pederasts and sodomites: Ingrid Rowland, "Revenge of the Regensburg Humanists, 1493," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 25, no. 2 (1994): 307–322, esp. 307–311.

[71] Bruscagli, *Trionfi e canti*, 1:100–101, 104–105.

and indulgences to all
of us have been granted;
now that the jubilee is over,
mercy, for the love of God][72]

In the subsequent verse, the Lanzi are trying to go to "Camaldoli," a toponym that could mean either the monastic hermitage in eastern Tuscany or the Florentine neighborhood of San Frediano in the Oltrarno. In their teutonic pidgin, however, they deform Frediano to "Frignano," which in Tuscan slang meant the female genitals.[73]

In the uproarious dialogues between prostitutes in Aretino's *Sei Giornate* (mid-1530s), *culiseo* and *coliseo* stand in repeatedly for *culo* in phrases that refer to backsides ("stupefatti ne la bellezza del culiseo" ["astonished by the beauty of (her) *culiseo*"]) and to anal penetration ("la fava nel bacello me la avrei spinto nel coliseo" ["I would have shoved the bean-in-the-pod into (my) *culiseo*"]).[74] In Aretino's *Cortigiana* (1534), Messer Maco of Siena asks Mastro Andrea: "What is the *Culiseo*?" Andrea replies: "The treasure and consolation of Rome."[75] When Maco responds with puzzlement ("A che modo?") Andrea promises to explain further the next day. After that, Andrea says, he and Maco will visit "maestro Pasquino," who "ha stoppati dietro signori e monsignori" ["Mr. Pasquino," who "has plugged lords and monsignors (from) behind"].[76] Pasquino was and is a fragmentary ancient statue upon which anonymous satirical poems—pasquinades—began to be posted in the second decade of the 16th century, originally as a game between students and professors of La Sapienza but soon transformed by Antonio Lelio and Aretino into a form of comic political invective aimed at the powerful, especially members of the papal court.[77] Pasquino's "plugging from behind" seems to be, among other things, a metaphorical reference to the satirical diatribes displayed on Pasquino, which made "signori e monsignori" appear ridiculous in the public eye.

Culiseo jokes run rampant in early pasquinades, usually in reference to the posteriors of prelates. A pasquinade of 1521 describes the arrival of the false news of the death of Pope Adrian VI, renowned for his austerity, and the reaction of the "Academia di Pietro Aretino," which, upon hearing the reports of the pope's demise, "alegramente corse con gran fretta / al culiseo del vescovo d'Aquino" ["ran cheerfully and with great haste / to the *culiseo* of the bishop of Aquino"].[78] The "culiseo*"* in this case may refer to one of the several lavish residences of the

[72] Translated from Bruscagli's reading (Bruscagli, *Trionfi e canti*, 1:104): "Noi in Roma santa abbiamo tutti veduto il Colosseo, e ci sono state concesse tutte quante le indulgenze; ora che è compiuto il Giubileo, carità, per amor di Dio." I have followed Bruscagli's reading of "perdon," but the word could, alternatively, be translated as "pardon" or "penance," each with its own possible double meanings.

[73] Gugliemo detto il Giuggiola, "Canzona dei Lanzi Pellegrini," lines 35–40: "Non sapeme ben le vie, / le Camaldoli cerchiàne, / ché là star bon osterie dalle porte a San Frignane: / date a noi, bone cristiane, / caritate, amore dei" (Bruscagli, *Trionfi e canti*, 1:106). Cf. *frignano* in Burchiello's sonnet "Qualunque al bagno," line 15, in Burchiello, *I sonetti*; and in Vignali's comedy *La Floria* ("o potta di S. Frignano"), in Antonio Vignali, *Floria: comedia dell'Arsiccio Intronato* (Fiorenza: Giunti, 1567), 47.

[74] *Dialogo nel quale la Nanna insegna la Pippa* (1536), Seconda giornata, in Aretino, *Sei giornate*, 264; *Ragionamento della Nanna e della Antonia* (1534), Prima giornata, in Aretino, *Sei giornate*, 32.

[75] See note 3 above.

[76] Aretino, *Cortigiana* (1534), Act I, in Aretino, *Teatro*, 252.

[77] Valerio Marucci, *Pasquinate del Cinque e Seicento* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1988), 71.

[78] Marucci, Marzo, and Romano, *Pasquinate romane*, 1:300.

bishop of Aquino, Mario Maffei, and perhaps also to his (well-trafficked?) backside.[79] A slightly earlier pasquinade on the promises of the cardinals during the conclave of 1521 says that "el Monte" (Antonio Maria Ciocchi del Monte, titular cardinal of San Vitale), together with three other aspirants, "el Culiseo vol far rifare" ["wants to have the (his?) *Culiseo* redone"].[80] Yet another pasquinade of the same period lampoons a cardinal, probably Francesco Soderini, who, it implies has sex indiscriminately and "usa di ripararsi al culiseo" ["customarily takes shelter (protects himself? patches himself up?) in the *culiseo*"].[81] The joke was still alive and well at the time of the death of Pope Paul III (1549), when a pasquinade addressed by "Mastro Pasquino" to "San Pietro" described Miguel Silva, bishop of Viseu, as "devoto sol del santo culiseo" ["votary only of the holy *culiseo*"].[82]

Francesco Berni (1497/98–1535), Francesco D'Ambra (1499–1558), and Agnolo Bronzino (1503–1572) all used *Culiseo* as an anatomical signifier in theatrical or poetic works.[83] A Burchiello enthusiast like Vignali and Aretino, Berni moved from Florence to Rome in 1517 in the service of Cardinal Bibbiena.[84] Francesco D'Ambra belonged to the Accademia Fiorentina, one of the engines of the 16th-century Burchiello revival.[85] Bronzino, a chief exponent of the *prima maniera* in painting, wrote sonnets brimming with sexual double entendre, as did the Florentine goldsmith and sculptor Benvenuto Cellini (1500–1571), whose prose *Vita* harbors some of the most enigmatic and outrageous *Culiseo* jests of all.[86]

Sometime in the early 1530s Cellini went to the Colosseum to conjure up demons. So the artist claimed in his celebrated autobiography, composed between 1558 and 1566.[87] Cellini had

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[79] On Maffei's real estate and his own tendency toward salacious word play: Stefano Benedetti, "Marrei, Mario," in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 67 (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 2006), 245–49, at 247–48. Once at Maffei's *culiseo*, according to the pasquinade, the Academia found Pasquino himself "con litre drite a monsignor Monte / che 'l papa era ito da là con Caronte" ["with letters directed to Monsignor Monte / that the pope had gone away from there with Charon"]. "Monte" refers to Cardinal Ciocchi del Monte, who had become patron of the *festa di Pasquino* in 1515 (Marucci, Marzo, and Romano, *Pasquinate romane*, 1:73 n. 4–5).

[80] Marucci, Marzo, and Romano, *Pasquinate romane,* 1:193 and 73 n. 4–5.

[81] Ibid.*,* 1:168. Cf. Marucci, Marzo, and Romano, *Pasquinate romane,* 1:167 and 167 n. 14.

[82] Marucci, Marzo, and Romano, *Pasquinate romane,* 2:746. See also the similar reference at p. 784, lines 21–23 ("Pasquino al Popolo").

[83] Bronzino, *Rime in burla*, 302; Antonio Maria Salvini, ed., *Opere burlesche di M. Francesco Berni con annotazioni e con un saggio delle sue lettere piacevoli* (Milan: Società Tipografica de' Classici Italiani, 1806), 5:101; Francesco d'Ambra, *Il Furto, Comedia di Francesco d'Ambra, Cittadino, e Accademico Fiorentino* (Florence, 1750), 62. See also Matteo Bandello, *Novelle di Matteo Bandello, parte quarta* (Milan: Per Giovanni Silvestri, 1814), 283–287.

[84] Claudio Mutini, "Berni, Francesco," in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 9 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1967), 343–357, at 343; Patrizia Bettella, *The Ugly Woman: Transgressive Aesthetic Models in Italian Poetry from the Middle Ages to the Baroque* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 215 nn. 32–33; H. F. Woodhouse, *Language and Style in a Renaissance Epic: Berni's Corrections to Boiardo's* Orlando Innamorato (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1982), 982.

[85] *Il Furto* was first performed in 1544 (Vera Lettere, "D'Ambra, Francesco," in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 32 [Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1967], 299–302, at 300).

[86] Bronzino's "La Vergogna" refers to the "Culiseo" and to the "Aguglia" (*guglia*, or spire)—probably the same imagined "guglia," or spire, mentioned in the *Libro Imperiale*, albeit invoked by Bronzino with an obvious anatomical *doppio senso*: "E s'è non fusse d'altro morto Ateo, / o Ateone, sarebbe forse vivo, / quand'è vidde l'Aguglia e 'l Culiseo (Bronzino, *Rime in burla*, 302 [lines 175–177], and 431 n. 18).

[87] Benvenuto Cellini, *La Vita*, ed. Lorenzo Bellotto (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo, 1996), 232–240. On the date of Cellini's necromantic adventures, see Cellini, *Vita* (Bellotto) lxv; Benvenuto Cellini, *Vita di Benvenuto Cellini: orefice e scultore fiorentino*, ed. Francesco Tassi (Florence: G. Piatti, 1829), 284–294; and Benvenuto Cellini, *My Life*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), xxxiii. The

expressed an interest in necromancy to a learned Sicilian priest, who promptly obliged with a nighttime visit to the arena. There, the priest performed ceremonies using special vestments, sweet-smelling perfumes, fire, incantations, a pentacle, and magic circles drawn in the soil into which, at the start of the ritual, he led Cellini, his friend Vincenzio Romoli, and a necromantic adept from Pistoia.[88] According to the *Vita*, legions of demons appeared, eventually filling the cavernous edifice, but Cellini's request that the spirits reunite him with his Sicilian girlfriend, Angelica, met with silence.[89]

A second visit proved more conclusive—and more harrowing. The necromancer promised that Benvenuto would receive everything he asked for if he were to recruit a virgin boy ("un fanciulletto vergine") for the operation.[90] Cellini did as instructed, taking along his twelve-year-old shop hand.[91] Vincenzio came along again, this time accompanied by Cellini's housemate Agnolino Gaddi. Vincenzio and Agnolino were given charge of the incense and fire. Meanwhile, Benvenuto wielded the pentacle, which he held over the boy's head and aimed wherever the necromancer instructed.

This new formula worked all too well. The demons promised that Cellini and Angelica would be reunited within the month, as they briefly were; but the spirits were far more numerous than expected and, according to the necromancer, they were particularly dangerous. The terrified boy claimed to see a million fierce men ("uomini bravissimi"), plus four huge, armed giants marching on the little party of conjurors and a fire that was burning the whole building and rushing toward them.[92]

At the necromancer's command, Benvenuto ordered his friends to deploy what today might be called the nuclear option: the "zaffetica" ["asafetida"], a stinking resin intended to repel the demons.[93] Like the boy, however, Vincenzio and Agnolo were scared witless, and when the latter tried to fetch the *zaffetica* he did it one better, making, as Cellini described it, "una strombazzata di coreggie con tanta abundanzia di merda, la qual potette più che la zaffetica" ["a trumpet-blast of farts and a great abundance of shit, which was more powerful than the asafetida"].[94] This intestinal eruption calls to mind Burchiello's prescription for the *Culiseo*. If the barber-poet's suppository of *pastural* had been administered successfully, the result might have been similar to Agnolo's intestinal accident, albeit many orders of magnitude greater: a Plinian eruption of ordure spewing from the ancient arena.

Vita was composed in 1558–1566 (Margaret A. Gallucci, *Benvenuto Cellini: Sexuality, Masculinity, and Artistic Identity in Renaissance Italy* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003], 2).

[88] Cellini, *Vita* (Bellotto), 232.

[89] Ibid., 232–234.

[90] Ibid., 234, 811.

[91] The boy was Cellini's "fattorino," on the meaning of which see Accademia della Crusca, *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (Venice: Giovanni Alberti, 1612, 334–335). In early modern magic, virgin boys were frequently used as mediums, especially in rites of divination. They alone were able to see the conjured spirits (Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century* [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998], 103–113).

[92] Cellini, *Vita* (Bellotto), 234–236.

[93] Cellini, *Vita* (Bellotto), 236–237. On asafetida: F. N. Howes, "Age-Old Resins of the Mediterranean Region and Their Uses," *Economic Botany* 4, no. 4 (1950): 307–316, at 313–314; John Knott, "Medicine and Witchcraft in the days of Sir Thomas Browne," *The British Medical Journal* 2, no. 1 (1905): 1046–1049, at 1048; Chip Rossetti, "'Devil's Dung': The World's Smelliest Spice," *Saudi Aramco World* 60, no. 4 (2009), http://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/200904/devil.s.dung-the.world.s.smelliest.spice.htm (accessed November 1, 2016).

[94] Cellini, *Vita* (Bellotto), 237.

At the loud noise and terrible stench the boy looked up and reported that the demons were running away "a gran furia" ["in a tremendous hurry"].[95] Only when the matin bells began to ring, however, did the petrified company dare to exit the magic circle and to scurry off in a huddle. All the way back to their homes across town, according to the boy, they were accompanied by two demons, who went hopping along in front of them ("saltabeccando innanzi") on the rooftops and on the ground.[96]

In the context of an early modern autobiography, Cellini's necromantic adventure is as puzzling as it is funny. Readers of a realist bent may well wonder what really happened that evening and, indeed, whether the story is not merely a fish tale concocted to pad the artist's supersize bravado. Most analyses of the narrative sidestep this question by focusing on the construction or literary sources of the story or its efficacy as self-fashioning.[97] For present purposes, the essential elements are orthographic: substitutions of a few letters that unlock additional layers of humor and of Cellini's persona and situation. In the sole surviving manuscript of the *Vita*, the remains of the ancient Roman amphitheater in Florence are called "Colosseum" with an *o*. The word is spelled with a *u* ("Culiseo"), however, when it refers to the amphitheater in Rome.[98]

It goes without saying that this difference was not *a caso*. Obscene puns involving the *Culiseo* had a long history by the time Cellini began to draft the *Vita* in 1558. It seems safe to hypothesize, then, that whatever else his necromantic narrative may be, Cellini's contemporaries would have understood the story as an elaborate sodomitic-scatological joke, a *scherzo* on the two things that *culi* most notably do. First, they fart and shit, sometimes explosively, as the terrified Agnolino's *culo* did, bringing relief as much to his bowels as to his fear-paralyzed companions. Second, they are *fottuti* (fucked), which suggests a second possibility—one which modern readers are likely to find more horrifying than funny: namely, that the boy's feverish screaming and hallucinations were an agonized response to being anally penetrated by Cellini.

In 1557, the year before Cellini began composing the *Vita*, the Florentine criminal court had tried and convicted him for having repeatedly sodomized his young apprentice Fernando; and as Margaret Gallucci and others have observed, even after Cellini was sentenced to four years in prison for the crime, he continued to declare himself a sodomite with pride and defiance.[99] According to the chronology of the *Vita*, the necromantic episodes took place more than twenty years before the trial. Thus, the boy recruited for the conjurings could not have been Fernando. At the same time, the sexual overtones of Cellini's interactions with his "fanciulletto vergine"

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[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid.

[97] See in particular Gallucci, *Benvenuto Cellini: Sexuality*, 96–102, 132–133, 140, 146; Michael Wayne Cole, *Cellini and the Principles of Sculpture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 7; Michael Wayne Cole, "The Demonic Arts and the Origin of the Medium," *The Art Bulletin* 84, no. 4 (2002): 621–640, esp. 621–25, 632–33; Matteo Palumbo, *Un tema narrativo nella "Vita" di Benvenuto Cellini: "L'impresa" del Perseo* (Florence: Olschki, 2011), 308. On masculinity and necromancy, including ritual magic texts as a "performative act of masculine bravado," see Frank Klaassen, "Learning and Masculinity in Manuscripts of Ritual Magic of the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 38, no. 1 (2007): 49–76, esp. 52, 55, 64–69.

[98] Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Med. Pal. 234[2]. The necromancy story appears on fols. 163b-164a of the manuscript and thus in the long portion dictated by Cellini to the fourteen-year-old son of Michele di Goro from Pieve a Groppina. The boy acted as the artist's secretary for the project (John Pope-Hennessy, *Cellini* [New York: Abbeville Press, 1985], 11, 297; Gallucci, *Benvenuto Cellini: Sexuality*, 1–4, 23–39, 153–54).

[99] Gallucci, *Benvenuto Cellini: Sexuality*, 1–2. On apprentices and sodomy in early modern Italy: Marina Baldassari, *Bande giovanili e "vizio nefando": Violenza e sessualità nella Roma barocca* (Rome: Viella, 2005), 33–37.

suggest that the boy should be understood as Fernando's earlier analog (prototype?) and the story as a lightly coded celebration of the goldsmith's publicly condemned pederasty.

Aberrant spellings are the key to unlocking the sodomitic cipher; "Culiseo" is only the most obvious. As Joan and Peter Bondanella note, Cellini gave both "circolo" and "pentacolo" a *u* in the final syllable so that both words end with *-culo*, rendering "circulo" and "pintaculo."[100] "Pintaculo," furthermore, begins with *pinta-*, which in Florentine usage could mean *spinta* (push, shove, thrust).[101] "Pintaculo" can thus be read, at once, as "pentacle," the five-pointed star used in black magic, and "thrust" ["pinta-"] + "ass" ["-culo"]. Throughout the conjuring, Cellini held the boy under the pentacle ("sotto il pintaculo tenevo quel fanciullino mio fattore"), aiming the "pintaculo" wherever the necromancer desired. At the height of the boy's terror, the child bent over and put his head between his knees ("il fanciullo s'era fitto il capo in fra le ginocchia"), thus presenting his backside to the air—and, one is perhaps to understand, to Cellini. Once in that position, the terrorized boy cried that he wanted to die that way, since they were already goners ("Io voglio morire a questo modo, ché morti siàno").[102] Like Cellini's puns ("culiseo"; "pintaculo"; "circulo"), the boy's postures, cries, and physical proximity to the shamelessly sodomitic artist smack loudly and sinisterly of the sorts of acts stereotyped as occurring in the *Culiseo*.

Cellini's story represents a ripe, late elaboration on an early and high Renaissance tradition that made the Colosseum the target of jests and word gags on the human *culo* in its various receptive and excretive capacities. The dawn of the phenomenon in the poetry of Burchiello coincided in time with a low moment in the Colosseum's physical history, a time of maximum desolation and ruin. It also corresponded approximately with the revelation of the building's genuine original function as a venue for blood sports. Burchiellos's *scherzo* and others that followed—those in Vignali's *Cazzaria*, Aretino's *Sei Giornate*, etc.—gaily parodied the *Mirabilia* literature, which in the previous centuries had reach heights of extravagance that remained palatable to some transalpine visitors and credulous churchmen in the Quattrocento and early Cinquecento (Capgrave, Muffel, Fra Mariano) but much less so to an irreverent Florentine barber-poet and his admirers. With the revival of enthusiasm for Burchiello's oeuvre in the early 16th century, the trend took wing, especially among Tuscans, including, but not only, Florentine expatriates in Rome, whose profane humor turned the symbol par excellence of Rome's world hegemony *sotto sopra*, recasting one of the grandest, most eminent and longstanding emblems of *Roma caput mundi* as a *culus* of equal size and symbolic consequence. Mr. Maco's opening line at the start of Aretino's *La Cortigiana* of 1534 sums up the urban and human realities that inspired this comic inversion: "In fine Roma è coda mundi."[103] In the end, Rome is the tail of the world.[104]

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[100] Cellini, *My Life*, 408. For other similar sexual wordplays on the particle *-culo* in 16th–century literature see Laura Giannetti, *Lelia's Kiss: Imagining Gender, Sex, and Marriage in Italian Renaissance Comedy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 170–71.

[101] Accademia della Crusca, *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, 4th ed. (Florence: Domenico Maria Manni, 1733), 628.

[102] Cellini, *Vita* (Bellotto), 237.

[103] Aretino, *Teatro,* 237.

[104] In early modern Italian *coda* could also mean "penis" (*Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* [1612], 189, http://www.lessicografia.it/pagina.jsp?ediz=1&vol=0&pag=189&tipo=1, accessed November 1, 2016).