Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione’s *Temporalis Aeternitas* 1645: early modern prints, time and memory

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The print *Temporalis Aeternitas* (fig. 1), by the Genoese artist Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione (1609–1664), one of his most intriguing inventions in the etching medium, presents an allegorical meditation on time and memory.¹ By combining an obscure subject with technical virtuosity, the artist has lent visual and conceptual complexity to the work. The central theme is that of a group of figures gathered by a tombstone bearing a carved inscription that one of the protagonists is in the act of reading. The presence of a second two-line Latin inscription within the space of the image furthers this complexity, eliciting close scrutiny. By devoting equal attention to the pictorial and verbal modes of expression deployed in the print as well as to their interaction, this contribution sets out to offer a multi-faceted interpretation of the work’s meaning and of its context of creation and reception. While previous interpretations have focused on the issues of transience and time’s destructive power, I will argue that the print’s core theme is that of memory – connected to man’s place within the course of time – specifically within the framework of post-Tridentine Italy. By shifting the centre of attention to the theme of

Fig. 1: Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, *Temporalis Aeternitas*, 1645, etching, 300 x 202 mm. Bellini 1982 14-III. London, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings. © Trustees of the British Museum.
memory, I will aim to suggest that Castiglione’s invention can be convincingly connected to the erudite interest generated by Antonio Bosio’s *Roma Sotterranea* (Rome 1634), published during the artist’s first stay in Rome. The appeal of the hidden subterranean places of the Eternal City, and the emphasis placed on the retrieval of memory from the artefacts and epitaphs discovered in the paleo-Christian catacombs, resonate in *Temporalis Aeternitas*. As will be discussed, both the print’s iconography and the content of the inscriptions evoke the realm of ancient burials, and the motif is used to generate a reflection on the nature of time and the faculty of memory – issues of profound interest to contemporary men of letters, philosophers and scientists alike. Moreover, connecting the print to the realm of epitaphs and moral devices will further our understanding of the obscure motto *Temporalis Aeternitas* and of how the print may have been received by a contemporary audience.

**Temporalis Aeternitas 1645: reading the subject, deciphering the inscriptions**

In the print, four men and a young boy are shown in a ruined cemetery, gathered by a tomb inscribed with the words *TEMPORALIS AETERNITAS* 1645. The scene takes place in a nocturnal setting, lit by a torch held by one of the figures. Two large funerary monuments – one of them topped by the paired statues of, possibly, a warrior father and son – and a monumental column are cracked and overgrown with vegetation. A set of trophies – sword, feathered turban, bow and quiver – hangs from the side of the column. In the right foreground, one of the men rests his left foot on a round column base. The setting and the figures’ exotic attire, as well as their attitudes, suggestive of secrecy, led Adam von Bartsch to title the etching *Four Wise Men (Quatre savants).* Indeed, the men look absorbed in their actions and the scene is pervaded by a solemn mood.

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2 Bartsch 1821. 23 f. no. 25. For an interpretation of the print that centers on the element of mystery see also Salerno 1970, 41. 47.
Moreover, both its iconography and its visual qualities imbue *Temporalis Aeternitas* with a sense of mystery, as the group seem intent on deciphering an obscure inscription on a tombstone. On the white patch of ground between the figures, a second inscription, engraved on the plate probably at the initiative of its Roman publisher, Giovanni Domenico De Rossi (1619–1653), reads “Nec sepulcrum legens vereor / ne perdam memoriam.” As will be discussed, this learned quotation, traceable to a classical source and clearly addressed to the beholder, actively engages with the imagery of Castiglione’s inventive composition while also inviting further speculation on the themes evoked. Finally, the inclusion of the year 1645 within the image partly grounds the work in a specific phase of Castiglione’s career, while also contributing to the print’s multi-layered nature.

The central motif of a group of figures gathered by a tomb with a Latin inscription, at which one of the characters is pointing, is probably derived from Nicolas Poussin’s (1594–1665) *Arcadian Shepherds* – also referred to as *Et in Arcadia Ego* – two distinct versions of which exist, now in Chatsworth (ca. 1629–1630) and the Louvre respectively (ca. 1638–1640 [?]; fig. 2). However, comparison with Poussin’s *Arcadian Shepherds* immediately reveals the distance that the Genoese master was capable of putting between his works and his models. As will emerge from the following analysis, Castiglione’s fascination with Poussin’s antique subjects produced highly original results. Poussin’s elegiac realization of human destiny becomes in Castiglione’s print an obscure and arresting revelation.

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3 Weisbach 1930, esp. 139 f. On Poussin’s *Arcadian Shepherds* and the relationship with Guercino’s *Et in Arcadia Ego* (1618–1622, oil on canvas, 81 x 91 cm, Rome, Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Antica di Palazzo Corsini) see in particular Erwin Panofsky’s two essays (1936: 1955).

4 A further painted version of *Et in Arcadia Ego* by Sebastian Bourdon (ca. 1637–1638, oil on canvas, 56.7 x 43.2 cm, New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery; Clark 1993) may draw from both of Poussin’s versions, while its connection with Castiglione’s etching calls for further investigation. I wish to thank Paul Holberton for mentioning this work to me.

5 A related case is the *Rembrandtesque* nocturnal etching *Theseus Finding the Arms of his Father* (Bellini 1982, 80–82 no. 13; Bellini 1985, 37 f. no. 24), published by Giovanni Giacomo De Rossi in 1648 (cf. De Rossi 1689, 48) and inspired by Poussin’s interpretation of the subject (ca. 1636–1638, oil on canvas, 98 x 134 cm, Chantilly, Musée Condé; cf. Blunt 1966a, 129 f. no. 182; Blunt 1966b, plate 100) that Castiglione could have seen.
This shift in tone and meaning is partly due to the nocturnal setting of the etching, which betrays Castiglione’s admiration for the “night pieces” of Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606–1669), such as The Angel appearing to the shepherds of 1634 (fig. 3), which shows the herdsmen and their beasts overcome by utter terror at the sight of the luminescent angel in the sky above them. The Dutch master’s fascination with the expressive power of darkness constitutes a clear
Fig. 3: Rembrandt Harmenszoon Van Rijn, *The Angel Appearing to the Shepherds*, 1634, etching, burin and drypoint, 262 x 220 mm. Hind 120-III. London, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings. © Trustees of the British Museum.
influence for Castiglione’s experiments with dramatic chiaroscuro effects.\(^7\) Technique and subject are thus inextricably intertwined, and Castiglione’s reliance on different models attests to his personal process of making meaning. Stressing Castiglione’s originality in this process serves to highlight the impossibility of reducing his art to the sum of various influences – Rembrandt and Poussin in primis – a point to be kept firmly in mind when analyzing *Temporalis Aeternitas*.

Aside from the investigation of the print’s iconographic and stylistic models, special scholarly attention has also been devoted to the motto *Temporalis Aeternitas*, defined as obscure and paradoxical. Pioneering Castiglione scholar Ann Percy suggested translating it as “eternity is temporal,”\(^8\) or relating it to the concept of time as “moving image of eternity,” derived from Plato’s *Timaeus*.\(^9\) Anthony Blunt focused instead on Aristotle and St Thomas Aquinas’ reflections upon the nature of time.\(^10\) Aristotle’s *Physics* sets eternal and time-bound things in stark opposition to each other. It is worth quoting the relevant passage at some length in order to follow the philosopher’s argument in its entirety:

So we must add that for things to exist in time they must be embraced by time […].
And it will follow that they are in some respect affected by time, just as we are wont to say that time crumbles things, and that everything grows old under the power of time and is forgotten through the lapse of time. But we do not say that we have learnt, or that anything is made new or beautiful, by the mere lapse of time; for we regard time in itself as destroying rather than producing […]. From all this it is clear that things which exist eternally, as such, are not in time, for they are not embraced by time, nor is their duration measured in time.\(^11\)

Time-bound things are thus affected and “crumbled” by time, while eternal ones are untouched by it because they are “not in time.” Similarly, St Thomas Aquinas focused on the fact that “time and eternity

\(^7\) For early references to Castiglione’s imitation of Rembrandt’s etching style see Le Comte 1699–1700, 192 f.; Soprani – Ratti 1768–1769, 313; Ratti 1997, 20. On the topic see in particular: Focillon 1965, 183; Standring 1987a; Jeutter 2004; Esposito Hayter 2007, esp. 42 f.; Standring – Clayton 2013, esp. 43. 73. 81.

\(^8\) Percy 1971, 140.

\(^9\) Plato Tim. 37d; Percy 1971, 140.

\(^10\) Percy 1971, 140.

are not the same thing.\footnote{12} Both authors seem concerned with defining the fundamental difference between time and eternity; the motto Temporalis Aeternitas, on the other hand, brings them into some kind of relationship. Whereas it is possible to contend that some notion of the inexorable passing of time underlies the print’s composition, this does not relate directly to the inscription, but seems to emerge from the interaction of visual and textual elements. Finally, Paolo

\footnote{12 Aquinas ST 1, q. 10, art. 4; Aquinas 1963, 276 f.; quoted in Percy 1971, 140.}
Bellini suggested that the expression “Temporal eternity” could mean: “the destiny of human nature is that, after death [...] it enters a dimension where time becomes eternal.”\(^{13}\) The virtue of Bellini’s reading rests in the fact that it embeds the inscription in a spiritual discourse – a point to which I will return. Lastly, in their analysis of Castiglione’s painting of a related subject now in the J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu (fig. 4), Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey argued that the inscription “presents the viewer with a paradox, for it signifies that eternity itself is temporal, made up of an “infinite” sequence of timebound moments.”\(^{14}\) It will be useful to consider the validity of this reading and ask whether the meaning conveyed by the inscription is to be perceived as paradoxical.

What emerges from this brief excursus is that the meaning of the motto remains open for discussion, but a closer interpretation of its message can be suggested in light of contemporary intellectual and visual culture. Any argument should, in my view, begin with an attentive analysis of the etching’s composition and iconography.

An internal narrative based on each of the five figures’ actions and reciprocal relations can be established. Reading the composition from left to right, the starting point is the young boy holding a lit torch that casts light on the tombstone. This allows the man closer to the tomb to see the carved words \textit{TEMPORALIS AETERNITAS} 1645. He does not simply look at the words but reads them out, as suggested by his finger pointing at the date and his parted lips. If we acknowledge that this figure is reading, it is likely that the second seated figure is recording his words in writing.\(^{15}\) Consequently, the two standing men are gazing downwards to the open book and witnessing this act of writing. An initial exegesis may thus be attempted, in line with St Augustine’s well-known definition of time in his \textit{Confessions} as “three times, a present of things past, a present of things present, a present of things to come.”\(^{16}\) The indication of the year of

\(^{13}\) Bellini 1982, 85; Bellini 2005, 17.
\(^{15}\) This figure could in my view be a woman.
\(^{16}\) Aug. Conf. 11, 26. 33; Hausheer 1937.
execution of the print, 1645, alludes to the present time and to the present lived by the artist. The date evokes present attention (attentio), perhaps also visualized in the attentive gazes of the two standing figures to the right. At the centre, the acts of reading and writing being performed refer to past time and to memory (memoria), while the boy with the torch seen from behind symbolizes the future, that which we cannot yet see, and the expectation (expectatio) of the clear view of past events that is only possible a posteriori.\textsuperscript{17}

While the interpretation offered so far has its merits, closer inspection suggests that the pivotal role of the pair formed by the figures reading and writing requires further attention. The proximity of these two figures, and the harmonious coordination of their actions, brings the theme of memory to the forefront, as shown by a comparison with the personification of Memory in Cesare Ripa’s \textit{Iconologia}:

\par
Woman with two faces, dressed in black, and holding a quill in her right hand, and a book in her left.

Memory is a special gift of nature, and since through her all past things, by rule of Prudence, embrace all those that will come to pass in the future, she is represented with two faces. The book and the quill show, as they say, that memory is perfected through use, and such use consists primarily in either reading or writing.\textsuperscript{18}

The affinities between Ripa’s and Castiglione’s images are significant. The two-faced personification, found in illustrated editions of the \textit{Iconologia},\textsuperscript{19} is replaced in the etching by two figures, with very similar hairstyles, one in full view and the other shown only by his face and arm. Both the quill and the book refer to writing intended as the act of recording the past, and the left figure’s open mouth refers to reading. In this case what is being read is the inscription on the tomb.

\textsuperscript{17} For an analysis of these concepts in St Augustine’s philosophy see Jackelen 2005, esp. 91; De la Pienda 2006, 153–168.

\textsuperscript{18} Ripa 1630, 464: “Donna con due facce, vestita di nero, & che tenga nella mano destra una penna, & nella sinistra un libro. La memoria è un dono particolare della natura, & abbracciandosi con essa tutte le cose passate per regola di Prudenza in quelle che hanno à succedere per lo avvenire, si fa con due facce. Il libro, & la penna dimostrano, come si suo dire, che la memoria con l’uso si perfetta, il quale uso principalmente consiste, ò nel leggere, ò nello scrivere.” Unless otherwise stated all translations are mine.

\textsuperscript{19} See for instance: Ripa 1643, 107 fig. XCVI.
The content of the inscription is presumably what the second figure is writing down. This results in a strengthened link between the two figures and their significance; more precisely, they are enacting what is only named in the *Iconologia* – reading and writing. In addition, the theme of writing stands out as central to the print as a whole; not only is it being performed by one of the figures, but it also resonates in the inscriptions and in their materiality: one has been etched on the surface of the tombstone, to recall a carved epitaph, and the other engraved. It is worth noting here that in the *Iconologia* the act of writing is more strongly associated with the personification of History, while Prudence is described as a two-faced woman, like Memory. This suggests that Castiglione borrowed ideas and reworked them to create a unique composition. Such a practice was common amongst his contemporaries and can be identified in a number of other works by Castiglione himself, such as the famous etching *The Genius of G. B. Castiglione* (dated 1648), where the inclusion of a basket of poultry and a rabbit in the very foreground may refer to Fertility as described by Ripa, in this case intended as fertility of the artist’s imagination.

The association of memory with writing is part of a long tradition. St Thomas Aquinas, commenting on Psalm 69:28, “Let them be blotted from the book of life,” wrote:

*A thing is said metaphorically to be written on the mind of anyone when it is firmly held in the memory [...] For things are written down in material books to help the memory.*

In Castiglione’s print, the central idea of the training of human memory through reading and writing is expanded upon with the inclusion of the remaining three figures. The young boy holding the torch hints at the hope brought by younger generations and at the perpetuation of memory in the future. It is his very act of bringing light into the scene that makes the deciphering of the inscription possible and thus the learning that follows. Moreover, a young boy is also part of the funerary monument above. Because of the presence

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20 Ripa 1630, 324 f. (History); 597 (Prudence).
21 Ripa 1630, 239–241 (Fecundity); Percy 1971, 143; Bellini 1985, 35–37 no. 23.
22 Aquinas ST 1, Q. 24, art. 1, resp., quoted in Carruthers 1990, 8.
of the two sculpted figures accompanied by a helmet and weapons, the monument has been understood as the tomb of a hero.\textsuperscript{23} If this is the case, the pairing of father and son in the tomb monument may hint at the succession of generation after generation, and thus at the cyclical nature of history. Finally, the two standing figures to the right are gazing downwards to the open book and seem to take on the role of witnesses to the recording of history, while also reinforcing the concept of learning from the past, through the act of reading and internalizing memory. This last concept also finds a parallel in Ripa’s definition of the power of memory, which, through prudence, makes past and future things “embrace.”

Furthermore, memory returns as the key concept in the engraved inscription, which reads: “Nor reading the inscription on the tomb, do I fear that I may lose the memory.”\textsuperscript{24} This fragment has been traced to a passage in Cicero’s \textit{Cato Maior De Senectute},\textsuperscript{25} in which Cato refutes “the charge that the memory necessarily grows weak in old age” and adds that “in visiting tombs and reading epitaphs […] he is not afraid of losing his memory […] On the contrary, by reading epitaphs he refreshes his memory in recalling the dead.”\textsuperscript{26} What is being discounted in Cicero’s words is an ancient superstition that reading epitaphs would affect one’s faculty of memory.\textsuperscript{27} The publisher De Rossi may have associated Castiglione’s composition with the issues evoked in Cicero’s passage.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{23} Dempsey 1972, 119.
\textsuperscript{24} Weisbach 1930, 139. The British Museum holds a proof impression (inv. 1985,0713.46) of \textit{Temporalis Aeternitas} that was pulled before the inscription “Nec sepulcra…” was added (cf. Standring 1987b, 70 f.; Turner 1987, 418 f.).
\textsuperscript{25} Cic. Cato 7, 21: “Equidem non modo eos novi, qui sunt, sed eorum patres etiam et avos, nec sepulcra legens vereor, quod aiunt, ne memoriam perdam; his enim ipsis legendis in memoriam redeo mortuorum” (cf. Shuckburgh 1900, 45 f.; Couch 1959, 24); Weisbach 1930, 139; Percy 1971, 140.
\textsuperscript{26} Davis 1958, 169.
\textsuperscript{27} Davis 1958; Weisbach 1930, 140; Percy 1971, 140; Bellini 1982, 85.
\textsuperscript{28} A further question concerns the artist’s involvement in the decision to add the inscription: Bellini (1982, 84) argues that it would have been added with Castiglione’s approval, while a contrary view had been expressed by Dempsey (1972, 119). On the topic see also Percy 1971, 140; Standring 1987b, 72; Welsh Reed – Wallace 1989, 267; Dillon et al. 1990, 200; Consagra 1992, 310 f. The general consensus is that De Rossi, as the owner of the etched plate, would have been free to intervene on it.
The Latin quotation reflects and expands on the overall meaning of Castiglione’s invention, exploiting the generative potential of the dialogue between image and text.\(^{29}\) The appeal of the Ciceronian quotation rests on two sets of issues. First, it associates memory with reading. Second, it refers specifically to the reading of epitaphs, connecting them to the active use of memory. Emphasizing the link between memory and the reading of epitaphs in *Temporalis Aeternitas* can help shed light on the cultural context for both genesis and reception of Castiglione’s invention.

**The Cultural Context: epitaphs and memory**

In the early 1630s, the time of Castiglione’s first long stay in Rome, a vast project came to its long awaited completion with the posthumous publication of the volume *Roma Sotterranea* (Rome 1634) authored by Antonio Bosio (1575–1629).\(^{30}\) Seeking recognition in the Eternal City, the young Genoese artist would have relied on his ties to leading intellectuals who had connections to his native city. These included the Sarzanese historian and writer Agostino Mascardi (1590–1640), whom he immortalized in a vivid etched portrait.\(^{31}\) Often commented upon, Mascardi’s importance for Castiglione’s art must be stressed once more.\(^{32}\) Through Mascardi, there emerges a network of acquaintances and influences capable of corroborating the visual evidence for Castiglione’s interest in Bosio’s book. Most well-known as the author of *Dell’Arte historica*, published in Rome in 1636, Mascardi was active in the Barberini circle, and was named *cameriere d’onore* to Pope Urban VIII (reigned 1623–1644). Mascardi’s prominent position in Barberini’s Rome could have facilitated Castiglione’s introduction to the circle of Cassiano dal Pozzo (1588–

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30 Bosio 1632. The exact date of publication of *Roma Sotterranea* (1634; despite the date of 1632 indicated on the frontispiece) is discussed by Herklots (1992, 38) and Ditchfield (1997, 344).
31 On Mascardi: Mannucci 1908; Bellini 2002. For Castiglione’s etched portrait of Mascardi: Bellini 1982, 56–58 no. 3; Bellini 1985, 62 f. no. 57; Magnani 1990, 260 fig. 313.
1657) and Nicolas Poussin. Both men belonged to the same cultural milieu that contributed and responded to the new interest in Rome’s paleo-Christian spaces, temporalities and narratives – as most eloquently expressed in Poussin’s series of the *Sacraments*. More precisely, Cassiano was directly involved with the realization of *Roma Sotterranea*.

An Oratorian scholar, Bosio was amongst those pioneers of Christian archaeology who, from the late sixteenth century, explored the recently rediscovered catacombs, and studied the paleo-Christian mosaics and medieval frescoes, which needed to be reclaimed as a support for the Roman Church’s propaganda against the arguments of the Protestant iconoclasts.

Bosio’s manuscript of *Roma Sotterranea* was published posthumously, revised in its content and expanded in its visual apparatus by the Oratorian scholar Giovanni Severano (1562–1640), entrusted with this task by Cardinal Francesco Barberini, nephew of Pope Urban VIII. In order to expand on Bosio’s visual material, Severano relied on the valuable collaboration of the scholar and illustrious patron of the arts Cassiano dal Pozzo, secretary of Francesco Barberini. Moreover, dal Pozzo’s prominent position at the Barberini court ensured support for the completion of *Roma Sotterranea*. Cassiano’s involvement with this work of sacred erudition can help shed

light on his extensive commissioning of drawn copies from the antique—primarily connected to the *Museo Cartaceo* (or Paper Museum)—and their place within the broader context of the Counter-Reformation program of cultural reform, encompassing the arts and letters as well as the writing of sacred history. As Genevieve Warrick observed: “The necessity of proving the Catholic Church’s adherence to Early Christianity brought a renewed emphasis on the documentary and philological method pioneered by Renaissance humanists.” This philological method, it may be argued, also emerges from the imagery of *Roma Sotterranea*. Here, an “iconography of early Christian martyrdom” was established. Bosio documented the fragmentary nature and ruined state of his source material, even to the point of using the same word, *reliquie*, to refer to both remains and relics—thus emphasizing both the incomplete state of his findings and their status as valuable evidence of a sacred history. The concept of memory as both intrinsic to the artefacts, and recoverable from them, is evoked throughout *Roma Sotterranea*.

Bosio’s work of sacred erudition is perhaps the most well-known of a group of seminal publications concerned with recovering the spiritual heritage of the Roman catacombs. As Simon Ditchfield has pointed out, Bosio was led by “the conviction that the subterranean corridors and cubicles had been the setting for the suffering and the liturgical life of the early Christians.” Those places could thus provide vital substance, in the form of relics, images and narratives, to the Roman Catholic Church’s claim of being the true legitimate

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38 Warwick 1999, 136. Regarding the influential role of Bosio’s studies and their importance to Cassiano’s *Museo Cartaceo* and to his other scholarly projects see Santucci 1985, 33 f. 63–70; Herklotz 1992; Osborne 1996, 43–52.
42 Bosio 1632, 145. 169.
43 Cf. Ditchfield 1997, 344. The age of catacomb exploration in Rome began in 1578 with the rediscovery of the so-called Catacombs of St Priscilla (Ditchfield 2005, 171).
44 Ditchfield 1997, 350.
Fig. 5: Antonio Bosio, *Roma Sotterranea*, Rome 1632, frontispiece. Source: <gallica.bnf.fr>, Bibliothèque nationale de France.
successor of the early apostolic Church. Bosio’s primary concern with the devotional life of the early Christians is well-illustrated by the central scene of the book’s frontispieces (fig. 5), engraved after a design by Pietro da Cortona, where an act of burial, rather than one of martyrdom, is represented. Two dead bodies are being carried through the catacombs by the light of a torch that one of the figures is holding. That such imagery could have interested Castiglione is further evinced by his other treatments of sepulchral subjects, such as his etching entitled *Tobit burying the Dead*, datable to the mid-to-late 1640s.

*Roma Sotterranea* includes descriptions of mural paintings, and readings of their symbolism, together with narrations of such legends, and transcriptions of epitaphs. Because it presents epitaphs as valuable cultural and historical remains, attesting to a tradition to be rehabilitated and preserved for the future, *Roma Sotterranea* offers a significant reference point for *Temporalis Aeternitas*. Castiglione’s own interest in this context lay primarily in the elements of mystery underlying the narration of the secrets hidden in the catacombs, which offered the opportunity to marry his Rembrandtesque chiaroscuro with images of discovery and revelation.

As his oeuvre amply demonstrates, having been initially inspired by the antique imagery found in Poussin’s works during his first formative period spent in Rome in the 1630s, Castiglione continued to cultivate this interest in antiquarian and erudite themes for the rest of his career and across various media. Indeed, it was not until the second half of the 1640s that he produced his etching entitled *The...*
Finding of the Bodies of Saints Peter and Paul (fig. 6), which may draw directly from the material of *Roma Sotterranea*. Several interpretations have been put forward for the dramatic torch-lit scene represented in the etching. It may refer to the paleo-Christian episode of the temporary placement of the bodies of Saints Peter and Paul in the catacombs of the Via Appia. A more obscure legend, the narration of which is accompanied by two illustrated plates in *Roma Sotterranea*, tells of a group of Orientals who hid the bodies of the two saints in the catacombs, hoping to later recover them and return them to their countries, but were promptly stopped by the Romans. The second plate in *Roma Sotterranea* shows the saints’ bodies being ultimately moved from the catacombs to receive a proper burial.

While it may not be possible to say with certainty whether Castiglione’s print shows the bodies of the two saints being hidden or rediscovered, the scene is clearly set in a subterranean space. The intent gazes and forward postures of the figures may suggest that they were startled by the sight of the two saints.

The role played by darkness in conveying a solemn revelation is also exploited in *Temporalis Aeternitas*, where the sense of mystery is amplified by the presence of the obscure Latin motto, which will now be considered more closely.

**Epitaphs and Moral Emblems: a proposal for *Temporalis Aeternitas***

In the print, the active engagement of the five figures with the carved inscription parallels the response expected from the beholder. As the tombstone is being inspected, so the viewer will attentively study the

50 On the print see Percy 1971, 144 no. E21; Bellini 1982, 152–154 no. 57; Bellini 1985, 26 no. 14; Dillon et al. 1990, 226 no. 87; Standring – Clayton 2013, 72 f. fig. 30.
51 See Bosio 1632, 147; Bellini 1982, 152 f. Bosio’s source was Jacobus de Voragine’s De Sancto Petro Apostolo (Legenda Aurea [Leipzig 1921] 19).
52 Bosio 1632, 181. 183. The engravings in Bosio’s book were executed by Sebastiano Fulcaro (active 1612–1640) after mural paintings once in the old portico of S. Peter’s and destroyed in 1609–1610 (see Bellini 1982, 152, referring only to the second plate).
53 Bambach – Orenstein 1996, 49. For an interpretation of the print that seeks to distance it from the context of *Roma Sotterranea* see Jeutter 2004, 270.
Fig. 6: Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, The Finding of the Bodies of Saints Peter and Paul, ca. 1647–1650, etching, 298 x 208 mm. London, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings. © Trustees of the British Museum.
etching. The viewing experience is enriched by the combination of visual and verbal forms of communication employed. While this is not a *unicum* in Castiglione’s oeuvre, nor an exception in the period, these observations lead to a further area of reference for the print, that of witty conceits.\(^\text{54}\) Emblems and devices (*imprese*), forms of expression with which Castiglione was very familiar, combine text and image, and marry invention and erudition to convey an array of messages.\(^\text{55}\)

Castiglione’s *Temporalis Aeternitas* inscription combines the features of epitaphs with those of moral devices. In formal terms, the inscription resembles an epitaph, for its placement within a carved frame, hinting at the decoration of ancient tombs. In addition, the structure of the tomb itself, with the projecting cornice and the laterally placed “grotesque” heads, is reminiscent of classical examples of Roman sarcophagi and altars, which Castiglione may have seen in Rome as well as perhaps studied from Poussin’s drawings.\(^\text{56}\) In contrast, in its impersonal nature, the inscription recalls the mottos used in moral devices.

Seventeenth-century moral devices could encapsulate a message addressed to an anonymous recipient and were therefore “universal in their application.”\(^\text{57}\) This observation could also explain why so much scholarly attention has been devoted to the motto *Et in Arcadia Ego* used by Poussin in his two versions of the *Arcadian Shepherds*. Both phrases are inscribed on stone surfaces referring to funerary monuments. However, in Poussin’s case the presence of the subject,

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55 Castiglione’s access to the book collection of his first master Gio. Battista Paggi (1554–1627; cf. Belloni 1975, 191–197; Newcome 1985) in Genoa gave him the opportunity to become acquainted with a wide range of publications, including collections of emblems and *imprese*. For a recent study of the importance of Paggi’s library for Castiglione’s art see Montanari 2015, 150–169.

56 For some iconographically related examples amongst Poussin’s drawings of antique altars see Rosenberg – Prat 1994a, 450–452 no. 228; 462–465 nos. 235, 236. On Castiglione’s possible access to Poussin’s drawings see Standring – Clayton 2013, 45.

57 Saunders 2000, 21. – In distinguishing between heroic and moral devices Pierre Le Moyne (Devises heroiques et morales [Paris 1649] A2v) defines the latter as “*de leçons abregées, […] des dogmes par extrait, & une philosophie en essences.*”
ego, brings the phrase closer to the expressive modes of epitaphs and elegies, and therefore calls for an explanation (who is speaking? who is the person buried in the tomb?). Conversely, the absence of a specific subject being addressed/invoked in Temporalis Aeternitas allows for it to be read as a more universal message, arguably within a spiritual framework.

Building on these insights, I wish to suggest a so far unexplored reference point for the dialogue between the concepts of time and eternity as presented in Castiglione’s print. This was partly implicit in Cropper and Dempsey’s previously mentioned interpretation of the inscription, which they took to mean that eternity is constituted of an infinite sequence of moments bound in time. In my view, such a definition of eternity should not be read as paradoxical.

The realization that eternity is made up of time-bound instants calls upon the individual’s understanding and appreciation of the duration of human life and of its relationship to eternity, God’s own dimension. What remains to be more closely analyzed is the way in which these concepts are conveyed by both the print’s figurative elements and the inscribed motto. It is by linking Temporalis Aeternitas to the realm of moral emblems, that, I suggest, it becomes possible to cast light on the modes of textual and pictorial expression deployed in the print while also proposing an explanation for the meaning of the motto.

In the print, the crumbling stone of the tombs, funerary monuments and epitaph illustrates the fragility of all things in the face of time’s action. At the same time, the visualization of the act of learning from the past and preserving its memory for the future alludes to the constructive, virtuous relationship between time and eternity. The dialogue between the concepts of time and eternity as developed in the print relates to a broader field of enquiry, partly rooted in the

59 For a related approach to the motto Temporalis Aeternitas, although taken out of context, see Lavagne 2011, 445.
60 See note 14 above.
61 Percy 1971, 140.
Christian meditation on time and eternity as perceived by men. More precisely, the uncertainty about the nature of time derives from the difficulty in reaching a satisfactory definition of it and, even more so, of the present moment. St Augustine already reflected on these questions when he wrote that, although he knew within himself what time was, if asked, he would not be able to provide an explanation of it. Such concerns gained momentum during the seventeenth century, in the midst of an age of scientific discoveries bound to generate uncertainty over man’s place in the universe. The nature of eternity became a matter for debate in both the intellectual and spiritual arenas.

A case in point is offered by two moral devices included in the volume Empresas Morales, by Don Juan de Borja (1533–1606). Partly retracing St Augustine’s words, the two devices project two popular conceptions of time. The first refers to the circular nature of time and to time’s power to devour and destroy all things, a concept visualized with the traditional symbol of the circle formed by a snake biting its tale, and expressed by the motto “Omnia Vorat” (“It devours everything”). The textual component of the second device, “Sic Ex Instantibus Aeternitas,” can instead be translated as “Thus eternity is constituted from present moments” (or “Thus eternity depends on instants”). The figurative part of this device consists of two parallel lines, the one at the top being continuous, and the bottom one made up of an infinite sequence of points. The accompanying text provides an explanation for both the motto and the image:

No other thing is to be esteemed more, or indeed is more ours, than time, although there is nothing that we are more prodigal of; and of this, not the past nor the future, but only the present, which is the one that we enjoy and that we must take advantage of, because the past is no longer ours, and that which is about to come we do not know whether it will happen; and so, we must cling to and embrace the

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62 Aug. Conf. 11, 14.
63 A pivotal role in this debate was played by the astronomical observations of Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), and the philosophical cosmology of Giordano Bruno (1548–1600). On the impact of the scientific revolution on Seicento visual culture see for instance Strinati 2010.
64 De Borja 1581.
65 De Borja 1581, 58 f. In Ripa (1630, 230 f.) the snake biting its own tale is one of the attributes of Eternity, with the meaning that "eternity feeds off itself."
66 De Borja 1581, 140 f.
present, which is so brief that it is not measured but by a moment, which is the briefest space that can be imagined. Because just like a dot, which cannot be divided since it does not have divisible parts, yet with many points lines are formed, in a similar manner, although an instant cannot be divided, it must be greatly valued since Eternity consists of infinite instants.\textsuperscript{67}

Here, the author exhorts his reader to make the most of the time granted to him because it is his only opportunity to achieve eternity. This teaching is combined with a warning concerning the exercise of prudence – the only virtue that allows men to marry the present with past and future.\textsuperscript{68} Thus Borja’s devices drew from a range of traditions including Christian iconography and the early modern interpretation of Egyptian hieroglyphs.

The diverse moral lessons presented in the \textit{Empresas Morales} could have influenced similar reflections contained in the popular treatise \textit{Diferencia entre lo temporal y eterno} by the Spanish Jesuit and naturalist Juan Eusebio Nieremberg (1595–1658).\textsuperscript{69} Indeed, the \textit{Empresas Morales}, the first distinguishably Spanish emblem book, is likely to have contributed to shaping Nieremberg’s reflections, together with a number of other sources, including St Augustine’s \textit{Confessions}.\textsuperscript{70} Nieremberg’s treatise was translated into Italian by the Jesuit and prominent Genoese intellectual Anton Giulio Brignole Sale (1605–1662).\textsuperscript{71} While a recent analysis of \textit{Temporalis Aeternitas} has proposed a direct influence of Nieremberg’s treatise on Castiglione’s print – via Brignole Sale’s intervention – it seems more pertinent to stress that the concepts that come into play in both the emblems and the treatise are traceable to ancient thought and were at the centre of a variety of seventeenth-century symbolic representations, illustrations and paintings. The concept of eternity as depending on time-bound mo-

\textsuperscript{67} De Borja 1581, 140 f.; quoted in Vives-Ferrándiz Sánchez 2011, 71 f. Fig. 6.
\textsuperscript{68} Vives-Ferrándiz Sánchez 2011, 70. 90 f.
\textsuperscript{69} Nieremberg 1640. Nieremberg’s definition of Eternity is connected to the meaning of Castiglione’s print in Sposato-Friedrich 2013, 34 f.
\textsuperscript{70} “Eternity [...] embraces all time, past, present and future [...] and just as time is an instant, that passes by, since there is nothing else to time than the present moment, which is always passing; in the same way Eternity is nothing but an instant, which continues forever, stable and fixed” (Nieremberg 1653, 63 f.).
\textsuperscript{71} Nieremberg 1653.
ments appears, for example, in José de Barcia y Zambrana’s *Despertador Christiano*, which opens with an illustration enclosed in the Spanish phrase: “*Alma dormida desperta: de un momento está pendiente la eternidad que te espera de eterna gloria, o tormento*” (“Sleeping soul awake: on an instant hangs the eternity awaiting you, of eternal glory, or torment”).\(^2\) Operating a similar blend of expressive modes, early modern *vanitas* paintings often combined figurative and verbal images of time and eternity. For instance, a work attributed to the Flemish artist Peeter Sion (d. 1695) shows a table covered in the conventional symbols of the vanity of human activities—books, jewels, flowers—together with a skull precariously balanced on top of a crumbled sheet of paper inscribed with the warning “*In Hoc Momento Pendet Eternitas*” (“In this moment hangs eternity”).\(^3\)

Although Castiglione did not execute any *vanitas* still-lives, several of his compositions include still-lives of objects and instruments, often occupying the very foreground of the image, as a component of his visual meditations on mortality, the futility of human endeavors and the passing of time.\(^4\) What brings the print *Temporalis Aeternitas* close to these images and emblems is the composite moral message produced by the figurative and verbal components. Thus, the Latin motto could contain a warning concerning the transitory nature of human achievements but this is to be integrated with the meaning underlying the composition. More than a *memento mori* or allegory of death, the print can be perceived as a meditation on such human activities as the recording and cultivation of the memory of the past (including the preservation of the memory of the dead). The warning thus conveyed by the inscription in Borja’s emblem, Zambrana’s plate and Sion’s *Vanitas*, that eternal life of “glory, or torment” de-

\(72\) Barcia y Zambrana 1692, n. p; Vives-Ferrándiz Sánchez 2011, 74 f. fig. 7.

\(73\) Recently sold at Sotheby’s, New York, 22 April 2015, lot 61; illustrated in Veca 1981, 103 fig. 123.

\(74\) For the theme of *vanitas* in Castiglione’s oeuvre see most recently: Stagno 2012, 91–104. Castiglione’s contemporary, Salvator Rosa (1615–1673), also meditated on vanity and the power of time, cf. Salerno 1970, esp. 48 f.; Ebert-Schifferer 2010; Volpi 2014, 529 nos. 227. 228.
pends on the present, which is but a fleeting moment, seems corroborated by the etching’s iconography, evoking memory and prudence as the binding elements between past, present and future temporalities. Perhaps incidentally, the inscription “Nec sepulcra legens vereor / ne perdam memoriam” is aligned with the pair of reading and writing figures, which have been here interpreted as visualizing Memory. The print may therefore present the beholder with an invitation to join in the meditation on these issues and the role they play in human life, on a more individual or universal level.\textsuperscript{75}

Conclusions

The atmosphere of gloom and solemnity that characterizes \textit{Temporalis Aeternitas}, together with the visible signs of time’s destructive power over human artefacts and, by association, human life itself, has led scholars to interpret the print as a non-traditional \textit{memento mori} treated in close connection to the theme of the vanity of human endeavors. The present analysis points towards a different and less negative reading of the print. Moreover, it shows the appropriateness of considering the etching in the context of Castiglione’s career. Around 1645 the artist was involved with important religious commissions and his meditation on human life and the passing of time is appropriately framed, at least in part, within a Christian discourse rather than connected to a fascination with magic and occultism.\textsuperscript{76} By doing so, much of the obscure or negative connotations attached to motifs such as the tomb and the ruined architecture overgrown by vegetation are replaced by the perception of a deeper reflection on the role of man within time and history, as embedded in a spiritual discourse.

\textsuperscript{75} To understand how the written and figurative sources considered here reflect specific religious concerns being debated in the Catholic world in the seventeenth century it is particularly fruitful to turn to the production of contemporary Jesuit scholars such as Daniello Bartoli (1608–1685; cf. Bartoli 1657; Di Grado 1992).

\textsuperscript{76} Castiglione’s first public commission, the altarpiece \textit{The Adoration of the Shepherds}, for the church of San Luca in Genoa, is dated 1645; cf. Dillon et al. 1990, 118–121 no. 14. – For a different interpretation that privileges the connections with occultism and cabalism see Salerno 1970, 41. 47.
Fig. 7: Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, Melancholia, 1645–1646, etching, 218 x 115 mm. Bellini 1982 15-IV. London, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings. © Trustees of the British Museum.
This aspect becomes clearer when comparing *Temporalis Aeternitas* to the roughly contemporary etching *Melancholia*, ca. 1645–1646 (fig. 7). One of Castiglione’s most praised inventions in the etching medium, *Melancholia* can similarly be understood as a meditation upon human life and its transience. However, it includes motifs, which, in their presentation, are more readily associated with the futility of human endeavors. In the print, a seated woman, isolated in the midst of some ruins, holds a skull and a musical score in her lap. Her pose, deep in meditation, recalls that of the eponymous figure in Albrecht Dürer’s famous engraving, *Melancholia I* (1514), but Castiglione has also included more subtle references to the state of the melancholic: the cat and dog with their tense bodies allude to folly, the state of fluctuation between excitement and depression caused by melancholy. Scattered on the ground as if discarded lie the instruments of human activity and ambition, both scientific (celestial globe, compasses, square) and intellectual-artistic (painter’s palette and brushes, scroll, book, music score, lute, pipe). Their mode of presentation, and their combination with the skull, signify the futility of those same human endeavors they stand for. Moreover, as in the case of *Temporalis Aeternitas*, perhaps wishing to complement or elucidate the meaning of the print, the publisher Giovanni Domenico De Rossi added to it the inscription “*Ubi Inletabilitas Ibi Virtus*,” usually interpreted in a Neo-Stoic vein as “Virtue lies where there is imperviousness to joy.” The potentially pessimistic overtones of such a meditation upon the vanity of human ambitions and achievements, partly dependent on the inscribed line, fit well in the context of Castiglione’s production in the decade to follow. In several works from the mid-to-late 1640s and 1650s, such as the etching *Diogenes Searching for an Honest Man* and the painting *Omnia Vanitas*, Castiglione would continue to deal with the themes of transience and

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77 Percy 1971, 142 no. E14; Bellini 1982, 86–89 no. 15; Bellini 1985, 39 f. no. 26; Dillon et al. 1990, 203 no. 62.
78 Percy 1971, 142 (following Bernheimer 1951, 50). For a different interpretation see Larue 1999, 137 note 33.
79 On the *Diogenes* print see Percy 1971, 142 no. E15; Bellini 1982, 89–91 no. 16; Bellini 1985, 32 f. no. 21; Dillon et al. 1990, 205 f. no. 63.
Moreover, in the *Allegory in Honour of the Gonzaga* and its pendant piece *Temporalis Aeternitas* (J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu; see fig. 4), he was to explore further the relationship between time and eternity, now in close dialogue with the critique of man’s pursuit of riches and power, made vain by time’s inexorable passing.\(^8^1\)

As this contribution has discussed, in his etching *Temporalis Aeternitas* dated 1645, Castiglione’s skilful deployment of technical virtuosity and complex subject matter is in line with current concerns, regarding time and memory, to which the artist would have been exposed in the artistic and cultural circles of both Genoa and Rome. By studying *Temporalis Aeternitas* in light of the cultural enterprise from which the volume *Roma Sotterranea* emerged, and in connection with the erudite interests of Cassiano dal Pozzo and Nicolas Poussin, I have tried to offer a historically grounded interpretation of the print’s imagery. The connection with the discourse of early Christian archaeology has allowed me to bring to the forefront the theme of the retrieval of memory from ancient artefacts, inscriptions and epitaphs in particular. As we have seen, the modes of expression of epitaphs and their physical qualities can help to account for the interaction of the pictorial and verbal components in Castiglione’s print. Simultaneously, the delivery of a moralizing message through the deployment of text and image evokes the sphere of moral devices. Seventeenth-century moral devices could be impersonal and general in their application, just like the motto *Temporalis Aeternitas*, capable of eliciting the attention of the five characters as well as that of the beholder. Furthermore, specific examples of Seicento moral devices concerned with the complex themes of time and eternity seem to project comparable meditations on the nature of eternity and on man’s place within time.

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\(^8^0\) *Omnia Vanitas*, ca. 1647–1649, oil on canvas, 99.1 x 144.8 cm, Kansas City, Nelson Atkins Museum; Rowlands 1996, 289–296 no. 33; Standring 1992, 150–152 no. 57.

\(^8^1\) *Allegory in Honour of the Gonzaga*, ca. 1655, oil on canvas, 109 x 109 cm (octagonal), Genoa, private collection (Dillon et al. 1990, 140–142 no. 25). A different treatment of the subject of *Temporalis Aeternitas* is found in another etching by Castiglione, dated 1655 (Percy 1971, 148 no. E27; Bellini 1982, 167–169 no. 63; Bellini 1985, 40–42 no. 27; Dillon et al. 1990, 234 no. 93).
Prints such as *Temporalis Aeternitas* would have catered to the taste of collectors and amateurs for virtuoso etchings prompting close scrutiny, and whose erudite subjects called upon the beholder’s knowledge for their interpretation. Cultivated viewers, buying their prints from the De Rossi shop in Rome, would have enjoyed Castiglione’s complex allegory of time, eternity and memory, evocative of emblematic forms of expression, as well as its broader associations with the importance of memory and prudence as guides to human action.

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