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*Burning for Rome. The fortunes of Mucius Scaevola*<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract**

In my paper I pursue the reception of Mucius Scaevola, famous for his courageous behavior in front of the Etruscan king, Porsenna. Mucius displays extraordinary patience (*patientia*) when he holds his hand in the flame burning on the altar. Once established as a specimen of Roman virtue – this already occurs when Mucius Scaevola's deed becomes a rhetorical example – the interpretation of his heroic act gains a life of its own. Virtue and decoration, allegory and exemplarity form an amalgam that is characteristic for each period's, and each context's, interpretation of Romanness. A specifically telling case is the decorative frieze in Schwerin castle – a remake of the decorations in the Neues Museum in Berlin. In this case, we observe the re-functionalization of a moral example as a piece of decoration.

Nel presente contributo viene indagata la ricezione di Muzio Scevola, il personaggio divenuto celebre per il valoroso gesto compiuto di fronte al re etrusco Porsenna. Scevola mostra una capacità di sopportare (*patientia*) straordinaria, quando tiene ferma la sua mano sul fuoco che arde sull'altare. Una volta assunto a paradigma di virtù romana – ciò avviene quando le gesta di Muzio Scevola diventano un esempio retorico – l'interpretazione del suo eroico atto conquista una sua autonoma esistenza. Virtù e decorazione, allegoria e valenza esemplare creano un'unica entità che diviene caratteristica per l'interpretazione della romanità di ciascun periodo e di ciascun contesto. Un caso particolare è rappresentato dal fregio del castello di Schwerin – una copia delle decorazioni del Neues Museum di Berlino, nel qual caso si può osservare come un esempio morale assolve una funzione decorativa.

The Roman examples of virtuous and courageous behavior are well known from Livy and form an essential part of the rhetorical repertoire. The examples have lived on in European art, literature and music, and even in film, and have served different purposes. It is astonishing that the same characters, and the same acts appear in so diverse surroundings. The pictorial cycles, for example, of the Sienese republican town hall<sup>2</sup>, offer a canon of more or less the same deeds and heroes as the ducal palace's decoration of Medicean Florence<sup>3</sup>, or of the rich *palazzi* in Venice and the Venetian territory<sup>4</sup>. I have found it use-

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the audiences in Innsbruck and Utrecht for their questions and suggestions, and for the fruitful discussions with my colleagues in Rostock. I thank the unknown referee of «ClassicoContemporaneo» for valuable suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> FUCHS (2005).

<sup>3</sup> On Domenico Ghirlandaio and his paintings in the “Sala dei Gigli”, see most recently O'MALLEY (2013, 34-41 and 58f).

<sup>4</sup> A striking example is the so-called “Sala dei Giganti” in Padova. The petrarchan programme, though no longer extant *sur place*, can be reconstructed through a manuscript of his *De Viris illustribus* (Darmstadt, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, MS 101, ca. 1400). See MOMMSEN (1952, 95-116). The 16th century

ful to describe this phenomenon as the polyfunctionality of examples. This research area is currently receiving a lot of attention; Matthew Roller has published a brilliant article on Cloelia<sup>5</sup> and is preparing a book on exemplarity; Rebecca Langlands has written on role models<sup>6</sup> and Michèle Lowrie has made valuable suggestions on specific episodes as well as on the general debate<sup>7</sup>. Also an author who, for quite some time, has stood very much in the shadow, has become the object of some fine scholarship recently: Valerius Maximus. He is a most important source for many of the learned humanists and the artists who from the early Renaissance onward have developed the programmes of interior decorations such as the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena<sup>8</sup>. Why should an aristocratic regime, or a monarch, offer the republican values such a stage? Are the Bruti, both the avenger against the Etruscan kings and the murderer of Caesar, the apt decoration for their palaces<sup>9</sup>? The functioning of ethical and rhetorical discourse in Rome through these examples has a most disturbing and confusing afterlife, or so it seems.

Another important question is the pictorial tradition of the images of ancient heroes. This cannot be discussed here in any detail, but we should take into consideration that the development of a scholarly debate on the Roman (and Greek) portrait starts, hesitatingly, in the Renaissance and gains ground only in the 18th century. The much used compilations of *Viri illustres* by Guillaume Rouillée (1553) and Fulvio Orsini (1570), and later by Giovanni Bellori (1685) present the famous men (and few women) by a portrait and a short eulogium, sometimes mentioning the most important sources<sup>10</sup>. According to the archaeological findings, especially of named portraits, the illustrations tend to become less arbitrary and to take the results of archaeological research into consideration. Astonishingly, this formation of a serious occupation with the question of authenticity of a likeness takes quite a long time. Even in the collections of gems of famous men and women which around 1800 are very fashionable – one such collection is preserved in the Heinrich Schliemann-Institut in Rostock – different types of portraits can be made out. Purely fictional ones, likenesses leaning on the late antique *contornianti*, and images that show knowledge of archaeological activity in the field stand side by side. This is a field which deserves more attention, and which we hope to take in hand in an interdisciplinary project the near future<sup>11</sup>. So, the study of images and cycles of *Viri illustres*, *uomini famosi*, forms a multifaceted problem and offers plenty of approaches to the interested scholar.

cycle now visible (and splendidly restored) is discussed in detail in BODON (2009).

<sup>5</sup> ROLLER (2004, 1-56).

<sup>6</sup> Langlands pursues a project on “Heroes and Leaders: How Role Models Shape Lives”: see, among other articles, LANGLANDS (2011).

<sup>7</sup> LOWRIE (2010, 171-86). A volume on exemplarity and singularity, co-edited with Susanne Lüdemann, is in preparation.

<sup>8</sup> See the important research by GUERRINI, starting with GUERRINI (1981) and followed by many profound studies. Especially informative is GUERRINI (1985, 45-73). On Valerius Maximus and the contemporary discourse of values, see recently WIEGAND (2013).

<sup>9</sup> On the reception of Roman history in art, see the seminal study of DE JONG (1987).

<sup>10</sup> ROUILLÉ (1553), ORSINI (1570), BELLORI (1685).

<sup>11</sup> I thank Detlev Wannagat and Wytse Keulen (both Rostock) for their help and the possibility to cooperate.

Unfortunately, though, much of the scholarship is still lacking in interdisciplinarity. Art historians, at least sometimes, take the ancient sources only into consideration if it seems absolutely necessary, and classicists too often tend to treat art history as a compendium of illustrations, literally illustrating the reception of their own subject matter. So mistakes and misunderstandings still exist in the interpretations of these images<sup>12</sup>.

In my article I will concentrate on a famous personality, known mainly from Livy, and used as an example for the virtue of *patientia*. No lesser scholar and thinker than Egon Friedell names him, among some other examples, to illustrate how much the beginnings of historical tradition are shaped by these stories of famous personalities:

Im übrigen liegen alle Ereignisse noch immer im gespenstischen Nebel der Sage. Aber die Figuren, von denen die dunkle Kunde raunt, haben doch alle etwas Einprägsames und Suggestives: Mucius Scaevola mit der Hand im Feuer, Cloelia zu Pferd über den Tiber, Horatius Cocles, der allein die Brücke verteidigt, Cincinnatus, der als Diktator vom Pflug geholt wird, Lucretia, die sich geschändet den Tod gibt; das sind lauter Gestalten wie alte Heiligenbilder, roh und dürftig geschnitzt und doch von Magie umwittert<sup>13</sup>.

Friedell takes up a version of the story of Scaevola which puts more stress on sensation than the plainer tale used by Cicero in *Pro Sest.* 48, and by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant.* V 24, 4f. All sources agree that the young man, Gaius Mucius, persuades the Roman senate to let him try a single handed attack on the Etruscan king and general Lars Porsenna. Rome is in serious difficulties through the siege of the Etruscans. But the attack fails; instead of killing the king, Mucius kills the scribe instead and, caught red handed and brought before the king, shows considerable coolness. Instead of asking for mercy he proudly claims that in Rome there are hundreds of young men as eager for heroic deeds as he is. The king is profoundly impressed by this and Mucius is released. After that, the siege is at an end. The more sensational versions add a gruesome detail: to show how useless a threat of torture might be, the young man puts his right hand into the fire burning on a nearby altar. This we can read in Livy, II 12, Plutarch, *Publicola* 17 and in Florus, *Epit.* 1, p.17.

Mucius has a successful career in rhetorical contexts: Valerius Maximus uses him as an example for *patientia* (III 3, 1) and Seneca alludes to the story in *Ep.* 24, 5. How well established Mucius as part of a moralizing repertoire for the skillful orator has become in the 150 years of the tradition which we can observe is evident from the enumeration Quintilian gives in *Inst.* XII 2, 30. At this time, the exemplarity of the Fabricii, Curii, Reguli, Decii, Mucii and innumerable others (*aliquae innumerabiles*) form the stock from which to choose when courage, justice and other virtues need a strong, culturally and historically standardized imagery. The *paradeigmata* or examples are taken from the heroic tradition of Roman republican history, also in times of the firmly established principate under a single ruler and a professional bureaucracy and administration. The recognizability

<sup>12</sup> For Mucius Scaevola and some misinterpretations, see *infra* p. 5, n. 20 and 21, and my short article *Scaevola* in REITZ (2013).

<sup>13</sup> FRIEDEL (1981, 446).

of Mucius' heroic deed even led to the practice, mentioned by Martial (*Ep.* VIII 30 and X 25), that gladiators had to impersonate the heroic deed of burning one's hand – probably with a less fortunate outcome<sup>14</sup>. Also in late antiquity, e.g. in the byzantine chronics, Mucius Scaevola – his *cognomen* referring to the fact that he had from then on to use his left hand – is a *paradeigma* of heroic patience<sup>15</sup>. He belongs with Horatius Cocles and Cloelia, to a canon of Romanness which Florus defines as *illa tria Romani nominis prodigia atque miracula* (*Ep.* 1, p.17).

Astonishingly enough, practically no ancient representations of Mucius Scaevola are preserved. The only known object is a 2nd century AD relief, now in the National Museum in Budapest, where a person in military clothing puts his right hand into a flame burning on an altar<sup>16</sup>. But this might be an unfortunate coincidence: monuments of other Roman heroes were present in Rome. Hölscher convincingly argued that statues of historic personalities from early Roman history were erected not earlier than in the late 4th century BCE<sup>17</sup>. But in republican times exemplary honorary statues of personalities like the *tria Romani nominis prodigia atque miracula* (Horatius Cocles, Cloelia and Mucius Scaevola) were displayed on the Forum Romanum<sup>18</sup>, and were still visible in Augustan and early imperial Rome<sup>19</sup>.

Our lack of monuments undergoes a dramatic change in the late middle ages and in the Renaissance. *Uomini famosi, viri illustres* become a topic for pictorial cycles. These pictorial examples fulfill both a memorial and an educational purpose. Often the names of the personalities accompany the ensemble. In printed encyclopedic works like that of Fulvio Orsini (see *supra*, n. 9) these *epigrammata* are completed with a short *elogium*, sometimes even mentioning the main source or sources. At first, pagan and biblical heroes appear together, in pairs<sup>20</sup>. A bit later, the republican heroes become the center of interest. Scaevola, Horatius Cocles and Cloelia, as in the dramaturgically brilliant narrative in Livy, form a trias which serves to glorify the Roman fight against the Etruscan kings and its protagonists. Scaevola becomes a symbol of opposition against tyranny. So we can easily understand that the Florentine republic chose him, among other Roman politicians and military leaders, to emblemize true republican spirit and patriotism. No lesser spirit than Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406), chancellor of the republic and one of the leading intellectuals of his era, forged the epigrams which accompanied the pictures in the “Sala

<sup>14</sup> As a matter of fact, physiologists have argued that Mucius suffered from a physical condition called congenital analgesia. I thank my colleague Rüdiger Köhling (Rostock) for pointing that out to me.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. Zon. 7, 12; Tzetzes, chil. 6, 201-23.

<sup>16</sup> From Dunaújváros, Hungary; now in the National Museum Budapest, MNMRR 33.19.

<sup>17</sup> HÖLSCHER (1978, 315-33, esp. 324f).

<sup>18</sup> See the discussion in ROLLER (2004, 20).

<sup>19</sup> The act of commemoration through monuments, and the contextualisation of early Roman exemplary deeds within the Augustan ‘propaganda’ is of great importance, but cannot be treated here. See, again, ROLLER (2004); he also discusses a bronze medallion, depicting Horatius Cocles, from the Antonine era, the only ancient monument surviving, apart from the literary evidence: ROLLER (2004, 17 and fig. 1).

<sup>20</sup> The well known and rather early cycle in the Palazzo Trinci in Foligno, dating from 1415, does not show Scaevola, but, astonishingly, Scaeva. DUNLOP (2009, 197) has that wrong.

dei Gigli” in the Palazzo Vecchio. In the 15th century the decoration was replaced by new paintings of Domenico Ghirlandaio (1482-1484), but the epigrams remained in part preserved. So continuity in the paradigmatic imagery coexists with a change of the political system. Ghirlandaio’s employers were the Medici, and the Florentine republic was, at that time, a thing of the past. But the defenders of freedom and, in Mucius’ case, the potential assassin of a monarch, stayed on the walls as emblematic figures<sup>21</sup>.

So the imagery was, by that time, established and was no longer linked with a republican context. It is therefore no wonder that Scaevola belongs to the canon of heroes who form the decoration in the palaces of the nobility. In Rome the story of the Etruscans’ siege of Rome forms the background for a very political pictorial programme. The villa Lante Turini on the Gianicolo, now the home of the Finnish Institute in Rome, preserves frescoes by Giulio Romano. They date from the years 1518 to 1523. The painter uses the historical events as a parallel for the not always conflict free relation between two important families, the Turini and the Medici. But not always can we decipher the symbolical value of such ensembles<sup>22</sup>. In my opinion, with the Scaevola in the “Stanza della Segnatura” in the Vatican Palace, painted and decorated by Raphael and his successors from 1508 onwards, on behalf of Pope Julius II, Scaevola the historical person has become part of an educational cosmos. Pagan and Christian heroes form an amalgam where, for once, the single act or event stands no longer in the foreground. On the other hand, Pope Paul III used Scaevola as an example how the Romans, *e.g.* the Papal States, defended themselves against eventual usurpation and conquest from outside. In the library of the Castel Sant’Angelo, in 1545, he employed Luzio Romano to use Mucius Scaevola and other Roman heroes as examples for the power and fortitude of his state. It is interesting to contrast this ideological interpretation with the programme of the communal palace in Rome, in the Palazzo dei Conservatori during the 16th century. The struggle between occupant and occupier, between young Roman nobleman and overpowering usurper from outside here points to the conflict between the self confident Roman citizens and the pope. The rooms were painted by Jacopo Ripanda around 1500, and again near the end of the century (by Tommaso Laureti, from 1587 to 1594), but the topics remained similar.

During the 16th century we can witness how the story of Mucius Scaevola becomes part of a decorative repertoire for facades, for cassoni, the wedding chests used in private, but also on the more public occasion of a wedding in rich families, as well as for sword hilts, or on majolica plates. The story is easily recognizable and, gradually, loses its political implications.

This is different in the German speaking area. Garen describes how Scaevola’s example serves as a model for identification for a strong citizenship<sup>23</sup>. She adduces facades (in Lucerne in 1517), windows (in Zurich) and room decorations in important towns like

<sup>21</sup> Art historians do not always deal competently with Roman names: In the Antecapella in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, in a sophisticated programme, the Scaevola who stands on the right hand side of Iustitia should probably be identified as the jurist Publius Mucius Scaevola; he is not the military man of 507 BC, as FUCHS (2005, 309) has suggested.

<sup>22</sup> A catalogue of the Scaevola-imagery in painting has been compiled by GAREN (2003).

<sup>23</sup> See n. 22.



**Fig. 1 | Frieze in Ambras Castle, Innsbruck, Austria (Photograph by the author).**

Nuremberg and Lüneburg. Important for this part of Scaevola's pictorial career is the publication and circulation of illustrated editions of Livy. The first German translation of Livy appeared in 1518. From then on, Scaevola has become an emblem in graphic reproduction. We know of a wood carving by Hans Holbein (1517). Even Albrecht Dürer seems to have added to this format, though his influence on the decoration of the Nuremberg town hall can be only reconstructed through copies. Scaevola is a model for endurance and suffering without complaint. Certainly, he has become not only a political figure, but, in the German context, the reformation has used him as a role model. This is especially evident in a cycle by Hans Baldung Grien from Strasburg in 1531. Scaevola is a symbol for protestant opposition against the catholic Habsburg emperor. So Scaevola has, especially in the new medium of printed graphic reproduction, again taken on a political implication.

In some parts of Europe, the political and religious conflicts are more or less settled from the late 16th century onward. This does not mean that Scaevola disappears from graphic reproductions and from interior decorations. But the function changes. His virtue and courage stand in the foreground, and he no longer necessarily gives testimony to a certain political attitude. From here, it is only a small step to an allegorical conception. This can develop into a more decorative mode: Scaevola's story is brought into connection with fire and he appears *e.g.* on mantelpieces, like in the Kampen townhall from 1539<sup>24</sup>.

But even more important for the reception is another context: in 1603, Scaevola makes his entrance in the *Iconologia* by Cesare Ripa. This book of emblems forms part of the education of nearly every artist of this and later times, and its influence of early mod-

<sup>24</sup> GAREN (2003, 150).

ern art is immense<sup>25</sup>. Ripa depicts Scaevola as an example for *constantia*. The emblematic approach might then, of course, be reintroduced into a political context. We can observe that in Hernando de Sotos *Emblemas* from 1599, where Scaevola incorporates the ideal of a loyal and uncomplaining soldier. It is this emblematic background which stands behind Scaevola as a topic for historical painting. Unfortunately, the facade painted by Polidoro di Caravaggio between 1520 and 1527 has not survived. But it was certainly influential, as the many preserved examples of Scaevola's story in painting prove. No lesser artists than Peter Paul Rubens and Anthonis van Dyck were commissioned paintings by the Spanish king Philipp IV. The story of the brave young soldier forms part of a canon of culture and learning. In a similar fashion, galleries of the Roman emperors become part of the standard decoration for princely residences, including the good and the bad monarchs as good and bad examples<sup>26</sup>. So Roman history, and especially the examples of early Roman fortitude and virtue as to be read in Livy, form the background for an educated court. The decoration of the main hall in Ambras Castle, near Innsbruck, may serve as an illustration (fig. 1). The frieze runs over the wall of the Spanischer Saal. This was erected between 1569-1572 to serve as a representational hall for Archduke Ferdinand II. 27 large portraits of the Tyrolian dukes form the main decoration of the hall. On the eastern and western sides of the room, we see allegorical paintings of the virtues and the liberal arts, whereas the pedestal displays scenes from Roman history, at the south end, and of the Hercules myth, on the north side<sup>27</sup>. In this context, Mucius Scaevola plays the role of the defender of a just regime, not of an aggressor. By and by, the story can be reinterpreted, according to the circumstances. This is evident, e.g., in the decoration of the Venetian Palazzo Dolfin. At the beginning of the 18th century, the painter Giovanni Battista Tiepolo uses the story of Mucius' burnt hand to allude to a biographical detail in the heroic vita of his employer, the Venetian general Giuseppe Dolfin. Dolfin had lost a finger in his battle against the Turks – Mucius Scaevola's steadfastness is an emblem not only for patience and fortitude, but the parallel extends to the corporal details, too. It is a subtle allusion not only to the prowess of the person who commanded the painting, but also a very close biographical link. The example is re-personalized, the exemplary character is linked to a single historical character.

From here it is only a short step to the 19th century statue that Louis-Pierre Deseine sculpted in antique style, now in the Musée du Louvre. Its main aim is a display of classical beauty and of classical education. But still, the story conveyed a meaning, it hadn't lost its emblematic and symbolic background.

I encountered my favorite piece in the reception history in visual art in rather unexpected surroundings. The ducal palace in Schwerin was an attempt by this rather poor and most of the time not very important family to compete with other German states, be they dukedoms, earldoms or even kingdoms. After having lived for centuries in a castle which dated from the middle ages and had been expanded several times, thus resulting in a conglomerate ensemble of buildings and wings, the cousins of the Prussian king de-

<sup>25</sup> See LOGEMANN – THIMANN (2011).

<sup>26</sup> See STUPPERICH (1995, 39-58).

<sup>27</sup> The Hercules frieze owes its completion to a 19th century restoration.



**Fig. 2 | Frieze in Schwerin Castle (the Billiard Room). Photograph by courtesy of Landesamt für Kultur und Denkmalpflege Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Landesdenkmalpflege, Schwerin.**

cided, around the middle of the 19th century, for once to be leaders of fashion. They built a palace on the shore of a picturesque lake within the center of the small residential town of Schwerin. For this, they chose the historicizing style then *en vogue*. From afar, it gives the impression of a fairy palace, resembling the *châteaux de la Loire*, especially Uzès, and other romantic structures of much earlier times. Little towers and turrets, balconies, bow windows, a moat form a fantastic sight for the approaching visitor. So, how about the interior decoration? Luckily, the family in not so far away Berlin was only too willing to give some advice in this respect.

The years 1850-1851 had experienced the rise of yet another important building, the Neues Museum (new museum) on the museum island in Berlin. Friedrich Wilhelm IV, who saw himself as the protector of the liberal arts, called the most sought after artists to Berlin. Among them was Wilhelm von Kaulbach, a famous painter from Munich. The Prussian king aimed at making Berlin into a cultural center, competing with the Bavarian kings. Munich under the reign of Ludwig I had developed into a Mecca of the arts, with museums, valuable collections of antiques and ample spaces with spectacular decorations. A few years later, the Prussian influence in Germany grew stronger and the capital aimed at something similar. So, as an addition to Schinkel's structure (Königliches, later Altes Museum, built under Friedrich's predecessor from 1825 to 1830), a grandiose new museum was erected by F.A. Stüler. The entire decoration followed a programme which is very interesting from a museological point of view. It was the peak time of the plaster cast, and the ambitious goal was to present all the works of art that couldn't be put on display in the already much too small Altes Museum. Therefore, the collection of plaster casts of ancient sculpture, the Egyptian collection, and the collections of prehistory, protohistory and ethnography were all assembled in one large exhibition. The huge rooms and immense staircase became part of the museological concept and were decorated with large scale wall paintings, some of which are preserved. In tune with the exhibited objects, the paintings depicted scenes and myths – Greek and Roman mythology for the plasters from classical antiquity, Nordic scenes (which had partly to be invented for the purpose) for the prehistoric exhibits. Wilhelm von Kaulbach was assigned to paint the grand staircase leading to the first floor halls. He decided for a programmatic cycle: the great moments in the history of mankind. So huge paintings represented the Babylonian

tower, Homer and the Greeks or the apogee of Greece, the destruction of Jerusalem, the battle of the Huns, the crusaders before Jerusalem, the age of the reformation<sup>28</sup>. As a commentary, ironically counterbalancing the huge and somber paintings, Kaulbach designed a small frieze en grisaille which ran over the length of the walls, above the paintings. This frieze followed its own narrative: little putti with round cheeks, nearly naked, performed, or even reenacted important scenes from different historical periods. Starting with the bible, and moving on to Greek myth and the reformation, above the paintings children are the protagonists of various scenes. Roman history is exemplified by Caesar, Scaevola and Brutus<sup>29</sup>.

Now to the transformation the putto-frieze underwent in the hands of the Schwerin sculptor, F.W. Dankberg. Starting with the depiction of defeated hosts, chained to the Roman standard bearing the letters SPQR, we then follow a rapid march through Roman history. Beginning with Brutus who kills his sons for betraying the Roman republic, we then recognize Gaius Mucius who holds his hand a blazing flame, admired, while so doing, by another little putto (fig. 2). The next image shows C. Iulius Caesar, sitting on a triumphal chariot. The frieze, at first glance, seems merely decorative, and it is really attractive, being rich in foliage and intertwined with tendrils. But the topics are nevertheless more or less recognizable. In the main hall of the Neues Museum, the pictures would have been easy to decode by the juxtaposition to the huge main scenes. Here, in the billiard room, the visitor has to concentrate on the few hints given to him. There are no subscriptions, no other illustrations that might help the spectator to grasp the meaning and the linear order he is supposed to follow. The matter is even more complicated through the actual arrangement. Apparently, the motives were not numerous enough to fill the whole space of the rectangular room. So the artists just started again, reiterating the Roman section, especially the Brutus scene. Some scenes are cut out because of the windows getting in the way (fig. 3). Other scenes appear twice, or in unexpected contexts. So Brutus punishing his sons forms part of the Egyptian scenes, the little putto bearing the standard with SPQR takes up the rear of all the scenes. As a sort of intermediary, putti surrounded by reed decorate the segments above the windows. These, of course, purvey no historical



**Fig. 3 | Situation in the Billiard Room (northern wall). Photograph by courtesy of Landesamt für Kultur und Denkmalpflege Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Landesdenkmalpflege, Schwerin.**

<sup>28</sup> Der Babylonische Turm, Homer und die Griechen oder die Blüte Griechenlands, Die Zerstörung von Jerusalem, Die Hunnenschlacht, Die Kreuzfahrer vor Jerusalem und Das Zeitalter der Reformation. See LEPSIUS (1855). For the history and interpretation of the paintings see MINKELS (2012).

<sup>29</sup> MINKELS (2012, 346), *supra* n. 28.

context and might even allude to the situation of the castle on the lakeshore. The attempt to transpose a sophisticated and up to date pictorial programme from Berlin to Schwerin bore a result that was probably not intended. In Berlin, the pretext was founded on a well informed programme and both intellectually and artificially ambitious programme, meant to teach and amuse the visitors of the king's splendid museum. The imitation in Schwerin simplified its model in several ways: first of all, the small grisaille frieze which formed a contrast to the huge dimensions of the colorful paintings were transposed into stucco. The charm of the play between the imagery and the material was thus lost, or at least covered over in plaster. The intellectual programme which spread from the combination of the big and the small paintings, and their interrelation got completely lost in the new surroundings. The context – the room being one in an enfilade, and serving no special purpose but leading to other, more important rooms – has nothing to do with history or myth. So the little putti play along, riding on a chariot, mourning over their fate as victims of the Roman generals, and burning their little fists, accomplish their exemplary deeds just for the aesthetic amusement of a provincial noble family, and today for the summer guests strolling around the castle on a rainy day.

Our way through the fortunes of Mucius Scaevola has shown us an emblematic figure. The hero became famous by one single deed, and henceforth served as one of the many examples for courage and fortitude. His act, the burning of his right hand, is an easily recognizable image. But in due course, the virtuous act became decontextualized. The funny little putto in Schwerin, as well as the depictions on mantelpieces, do not aim at exemplarity and imitation; they provide the viewer with the homely feeling of decorative Romanness.

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