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Attributed to Carlo Albacini,
after the antique
The Bust of the Quondam Arminius

Attributed to CARLO ALBACINI, after the antique
(Rome 1734 – 1813)

THE BUST OF THE QUONDAM ARMINIUS

Marble
73 cm; 28 ¾ in.

Provenance

Private collection, Germany.

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Colnaghi is grateful to Alexander Kader FSA for having academically supported the gallery with his studies, research and the present essay on this important discovery; for his attribution to Carlo Albacini (1734 - 1813).

Carlo Albacini was the preeminent restorer-sculptor in Rome during the last quarter of the 18th century (fig. 1). He was a central figure in the Eternal City's international artistic community at the height of the Neo-classical period. Nevertheless, his fame today is restricted to enlightened connoisseurs, because his life and work have been flanked by two other titans of the era: Bartolomeo Cavaceppi (1716-1799) and Antonio Canova (1757-1822). Cavaceppi dominated the Roman sculpture scene at the dawn of neo-classicism, and Albacini trained in his workshop (fig. 2).

Cavaceppi thrived as a restorer, dealer and sculptor in his own right, whereas there are no known original compositions by Albacini. The latter's primary work as a restorer necessitated a level of discretion and anonymity that conspired against his fame in a way that did not fetter the activity of Cavaceppi.

And, by the last decades of the 18th century, Canova's star was firmly in the ascendancy and he became the superstar of the art world who has come to symbolize the entire epoch in the same way that Bernini does for the Baroque or Michelangelo for the High Renaissance.

Side by side comparison of the Colnaghi bust, attributed to Carlo Albacini, *Bust of a Young man*, here called *Bust of the Quondam Arminius,* late 18th century, marble next to *Bust of Arminius*, mid-2nd century AD, marble. Rome, Musei Capitolini.

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To understand Albacini it is necessary to delve into the machinations of the Grand Tour and the dynamics between the wealthy European collectors, many of them British, who descended on Rome for their education, entertainment and the enrichment of their collections, and the dealers and artists who enabled, and exploited, their passions to collect. Concurrently, the pope and other learned Italians, such as Cardinal Alessandro Albani, vied to control the market in ancient sculpture and collect themselves. Therefore, the foremost dealers, such as Thomas Jenkins and Gavin Hamilton, together with their restorers needed to play a subtle and highly discreet game to keep all parties content and trade brisk. It was in this environment that Albacini emerged as the leading restorer from the mid-1770s. His association with Thomas Jenkins was vital to his success and his *modus operandi*.[1]

This study attributes the stunningly beautiful *Bust of the Quondam Arminius* to Carlo Albacini and examines how it epitomises his style and technique. It demonstrates how Albacini was ideally placed to produce such super-refined carvings that proudly showcased their modern perfection of technique in contrast to the aesthetic of the antique fragment and weathered surface. To certain enlightened collectors contemporary copies of the icons of ancient Rome and Greece were highly valued in their own right. To discover such an impressive Antique model from one of the most important Roman collections, one that has been open to the public for nearly 200 years, in a seemingly unique marble version is truly exceptional.[2] For collectors such as Henry Blundell and Reichsgraf Johann Ludwig von Wallmoden-Gimborn, modern copies made by Cavaceppi and Albacini took a prominent position in their important displays of ancient sculpture. This study will examine these two collections to imagine how and why this unique marble of the *Bust of the Quondam Arminius* may have been commissioned.

CARLO ALBACINI: A LIFE DEDICATED TO ANTIQUITY

As a sculptor in the vibrant artistic milieu in Rome during the second half of the 18th century, Carlo Albacini is recognized as a key protagonist, whose contribution to the restoration of antique sculpture, to the copying of ancient models for sale to international collectors and to the creation of a neo-classical style in the decorative arts is increasingly appreciated.[3] The recent acquisition of Albacini's marble *Bust of*

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[1] See Gerard Vaughan, *Albacini and his English Patrons*, pp. 183-197

[2] There are a few plaster copies in existence, for example those in the Museum of Classical Archaeology, Cambridge (no. 533), in the Antikenmuseum der Universität, Abgusssammlung, Leipzig (inv. G 286 - former inv. A1164) there attributed to Leopoldo Malpieri, in the Pushkin Museum, Moscow, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen (inv. KAS713) and one documented in the Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Stuttgart.

[3] Albacini studies were greatly advanced by the 1991 publication of the papers from the conference *Plaster and Marble. The Classical and Neo-Classical Portrait Bust* and have been enriched by the publications of Dottssa. Valeria Rotili see bibliography.

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Virgil by the Uffizi gallery in Florence reflects this growing understanding of his importance (fig. 3). The close affinities in the quality of carving and the type of production between this bust and the *Bust of the Quondam Arminius* will be discussed below.

Originally from the town of Fabriano in the Marche, on his arrival in Rome Albacini received support from the Marchese Onofrio del Grillo (1714-1787), a nobleman from his hometown. He lived in the Palazzo del Grillo, and various members of this aristocratic family helped him throughout his career. By 1756, he was active in Cavaceppi's studio, but he is also documented as being apprenticed to the Turinese sculptor, Ignazio Collino. Archival material held in the Accademia di San Luca provides many key details of Albacini's career through correspondence, accounts and descriptions of works that chart his development as a restorer and independent artist.[4] By 1772, he had gained sufficient commissions to open his own studio in the Arco de' Greci. As his activities diversified, his premises expanded to the extent that he was distinguished by a visit from Pope Pius VI in November 1780.

Fig. 1. Attributed to Stefano Tofanelli, *Portrait of Carlo Albacini*, oil on canvas. Rome, Accademia di San Luca.

Albacini's work as a restorer and as a copyist of many famous ancient statues in Rome is better known than his extensive activity as a designer of fireplaces and decorative marble furnishings, but in all these endeavours he was patronised by nobility and Grand Tourists from across Europe.[5] He rarely signed his works, yet his high reputation and strong connections with the leading art dealers, such as Thomas Jenkins, Gavin Hamilton and Johann Friedrich Reiffenstein, and academics, such as Johann Joachim Winckelmann, stimulated great demand. Gerard Vaughan has shown how Jenkins in particular exerted a strong influence on how Albacini worked, providing him with a constant stream of work, insisting on his discretion and developing together a style of restoration that favoured seamless additions and

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[4] See the Rotili in bibliography.

[5] See the Rotili, *L'Idea e Lavoro,* pp. 345-272.

subject of an article by Klaus Fittschen in 1989, which used the Musei Capitolini bust as the starting point for an examination of this phenomenon in Roman portrait busts, which he coined as '*romantischen Eklektizismus*'.[7] Hence, the current title used here: *The Bust of the Quondam Arminius*. When assessed alongside other busts of a similar type, it becomes apparent that the Capitolini bust is significant for its superb quality of carving and intense characterisation. This makes it all the more surprising that it has not had more prominence in the canon of antique sculpture that was admired and copied during the Neo-classical period and beyond, and makes the discovery of the present replica all the more astonishing.

THE CONTEXT FOR A UNIQUE COMMISSION

The voracious appetite of European Grand Tourists for collecting ancient sculpture is well known.[8] The increasing scarcity of important original ancient marbles and the difficulties involved in their export after the former papal Treasurer, Gianangelo Braschi, was elected Pope Pius VI in 1775, encouraged collectors to commission high quality copies after the most renowned antique masterpieces in the great Roman collections. Bartolomeo Cavaceppi's studio was central to this trade and Carlo Albacini would surely have learnt the potential of this line of business when working with him. In many cases these copies were produced without any signature or indication of authorship, but occasionally sculptors did sign exact copies, often because they were exceptional commissions, as is probably the case with the extraordinary *Bust of Sardanapalus* signed by Cavaceppi, which sold in 2018 for over $400,000.[9] Foreign sculptors in Rome were also active in this field with outstanding works by sculptors such as Francis Harwood, Christopher Hewetson and Joseph Claus being but a few notable examples amongst many.

The opening of the Capitoline Museum in 1734 by Pope Clement XII and the enriching of its collections throughout the century increased the fame of the sculptures it contained and further augmented the demand for copies. Whilst the opportunity to produce and market copies from the Capitolino was not restricted to any individual sculptor, the workshops of Cavaceppi and Albacini can be considered to have been preeminent in their access to the collection as is documented in some of the most famous collections formed in Europe. Two famous collections created from the 1760s to the 1790s provide compelling evidence for this: the Blundell Collection formerly housed in a reduced replica of the Pantheon at Ince Blundell Hall, near Liverpool and

[7] Fittschen, *'Barbaren-Köpfe',* pp. 108-109.

[8] See the new edition of *Taste and the Antique. The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500-1900.*

[9] https://www.uppsalaauktion.se/auktioner/?query=cavaceppi&estimate_min=1000&estimate_max=100000000&hammer_min=1000&hammer_max=100000000&language_id=1&paging=1&per_page=100&auction_name=20181204&catalog_nr=819&type=filter&restore=819
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the Wallmoden Collection formed by Johann Ludwig von Wallmoden-Gimborn in Hanover (fig. 6).

Albacini's relationships with these collectors will be examined below, however, it is worth first pinpointing the attribution of the *Bust of the Quondam Arminius* by comparison with the above mentioned *Bust of Virgil* recently acquired by the Galleria Uffizi. These two busts show Albacini's skill in supplying outstanding modern copies of less prominent antique models that must have greatly appealed to a certain type of contemporary collector. Significantly, the models for both these busts are in the Capitoline Museum. The busts both represent young, handsome men with luxuriant hair. Whilst each is given a suitably noble guise - Virgil and Cecrops, or Arminius - the real attraction to the collector is just as likely to have been the virtuosic technique Albacini demonstrates in the carving of the hair, with deep under cutting and the superb rendering of textures. Albacini remains faithful to the minutest detail of his antique model, but importantly he gives the busts an outstanding level of polish that could never be mistaken for an ancient surface. These are not made as fakes. Rather they are luxury works of art that were often as expensive as ancient sculptures that could also be mediocre or mutilated. Some collectors, such as Charles Townley, mostly dismissed these modern copies, others like Blundell and Wallmoden viewed them as a way to enhance the interest of their collections.

HENRY BLUNDELL: A DIFFERENT COLLECTING PERSPECTIVE

Henry Blundell was an avid British collector who bought modern copies alongside ancient marbles and who appreciated them in their own right. At its height Blundell's collection was second only to Townley's in size and importance. Blundell acquired four marble busts from Albacini of Lucius Verus, Bacchus, Alexander the Great and Minerva. The first three of these provide illuminating comparisons with the *Bust of the Quondam Arminius.*

Amongst his earliest acquisitions, Blundell purchased the Lucius Verus from Albacini in 1776 (fig. 7), and wrote in his catalogue that 'the hair of the head, and beard are reckoned a fine specimen of modern art.'[10] Indeed, this model, the original then being in the Villa Borghese,[11] has the most extraordinary carving in the hair, and it is worth noting that Antonio Canova recorded in his diary when visiting Albacini's workshop that it could take 19 months to complete a complex bust such as this.[12] The Blundell *Bust of Lucius Verus* provides a valuable comparison with the *Bust of the Quondam*

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[10] See 1997 Ince Blundell catalogue p. 9
[11] The original is today in the Louvre, Paris.
[12] H. Honour, 'Antonio Canova and the Anglo-Romans: Part I', *Connoisseur*, 143, (1959), p. 244
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Arminius in the carving of the eyes, the deep undercutting in the hair and in the broad, smoothly carved, sloping back of the shoulders. These affinities suggest a common *modus operandi* that supports the attribution of the *Bust of the Quondam Arminius* to Albacini. In addition, the Blundell *Bust of Alexander the Great* and *Bust of Bacchus* resonate with our bust, because all three are models in the Musei Capitolini. This demonstrates Albacini's primary, if not exclusive, access to the masterpieces in this museum. These other two Blundell busts also show an interest in and virtuoso handling of exuberant hair with deep undercutting. Whilst the three Blundell busts share a different, smaller cut to the shoulders, which reflects the antique prototypes, they all accord with the *Bust of the Quondam Arminius* in the classical profile of the 'closed-c' slip between the bust and the socle. Albacini demonstrates his respect for the original model of the Arminius in rendering the torso in exact detail from the powerful shoulders to the lower chest.

Henry Blundell's motivation for buying these busts from Albacini was to represent some of his favourite ancient models in his collection. Of the *Bust of Alexander the Great*, he wrote: 'There is something very grand and noble in the character of this bust which denotes a great man. The open countenance and fine flowing head of hair give it a superior elegance to almost any other head'.[13] Blundell valued Albacini's carvings for their exact reproduction of the original, but these are not replicas. Albacini's sublime technique in polishing the marble is certainly not copying the antique, but as Canova observed was a painstaking and long task which identified them to the 18th century connoisseur as modern masterpieces. The *Bust of the Quondam Arminius* is outstanding for the wonderful preservation of the original polish that is best understood with raking light. It is intriguing to reflect on Canova's visit as a young man to Albacini's workshop and his observation of the labour involved in perfecting the immaculate polish, epitomised in the present bust, because it bears a remarkable resemblance to the type of finish that was to be made famous by Canova himself, in which the surface is given a final delicately roughened surface that diffuses the light to give a more life-like appearance.

THE WALLMODEN COLLECTION: A POSSIBLE GERMAN CONNECTION

It is not known if the identification of this bust as Arminius that Emil Braun published in 1854 was the first time this theory was suggested, but if it was not it might open another context for a feasible commission for the *Quondam Arminius Bust*. Whilst British Grand Tourists were the most numerous and most active neo-classical collectors, visitors from across Europe also came in significant numbers. From Germany, General (later Reichsgraf) Johann Ludwig von Wallmoden was a major

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[13] Blundell, no. 102
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patron whose close relationship with his fellow countryman, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, was key to the creation of one of the largest and most diverse collections of ancient sculpture in Germany.[14]

The illegitimate son of King George II, Wallmoden spent his childhood in England before returning to Hanover. He was never officially recognized by his father which instilled in him a need always to aggrandize himself. In 1765 he travelled to Italy and began his collecting spree. During this trip his mother died and Wallmoden's financial position was so enhanced that he was able to indulge his passion to collect. He purchased paintings, furniture and sculpture on this occasion and on a later trip in 1766. His sculpture collection was particularly rich in portrait busts and cinerary urns. Like Henry Blundell, Wallmoden appreciated that contemporary sculptors were highly skilled and that a good modern copy could be superior to a mediocre ancient work. Consequently Wallmoden bought several copies of ancient masterpieces from Bartolomeo Cavaceppi and Carlo Albacini. Some of the 18th century sculptures in his collection were signed, others documented and some unattributed.

The true extent of Wallmoden's collection is unclear for many reasons. On occasion, according to Winckelmann, he bought works he eventually could not afford, other times he might trade or swap works with collectors and dealers. But, the troubled fate of his collection was exacerbated by his precarious financial position in Hanover after his acquisition in 1783 of the county of Gimborn-Neustadt. This elevated him to Reichsgraf, but also burdened him with considerable expenses and debt. This necessitated some sales and revisions to his ambitious plans for his palace and garden in Herrenhausen (fig. 8). In addition, the political upheaval following the rise of Napoleon and the subjugation of Hanover caused Wallmoden considerable hardship. Further severe damage and loss was inflicted during World War II. So, despite the existence of two catalogues of the collection in 1767 and 1781, war and financial ruin meant that some pieces that were in the collection are unknown. This opens a tentative possibility that the *Bust of the Quondam Arminius* might have been the type of work that would have been in the Wallmoden collection.

Fittschen's catalogue of Wallmoden's collection lists forty-three modern marble and bronze sculptures after the Antique.[15] In some cases the works are not signed and often they are now lost. Many attributions are not certain, but within this group works by Cavaceppi and Albacini predominate. There are some marbles attributed to Algardi and to some later 18th century sculptors such as Giovanni Antonio Berti and Peter Anton von Verschaffelt.

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[14] The information on Wallmorden is taken from the excellent catalogue of the collection by Klaus Fittschen, see bibliography, *Katalog Der Skulpturen Der Sammlung Wallmoden*.
[15] Included amongst these are some copies of works by Giambologna.
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But, there are at least twelve works by or attributed to Cavaceppi and no less than seven by, or attributed to Albacini, and half of those by Albacini are after models in the Capitoline collections. Amongst these are the reduced full-length figures of the *Cesi Juno*, *Capitoline Flora* (fig. 9) and a philosopher. Today, these works are only known from pre-1943 photographs of Herrenhausen, so we can only imagine the quality of his works in reference to surviving examples elsewhere.[16]

It should also be noted that in addition to the marble copies by, or attributed to Albacini and Cavaceppi, many of the antique marbles Wallmoden acquired were restored by both sculptors. In this context it is interesting to observe that the backs of many of the busts were added by them and they show a similar technique to the *Bust of the Quondam Arminius*, in that they are often smoothly polished with broad edges to the shoulders. This is the case, for example, with the *Bust of Vespasian* (cat. 51, fig. 10), the *Bust of Domitian* (cat. 54), the *Bust of a Boy* (cat. 37) and others.[17]

CONCLUSION

The recent fabulous exhibitions at the Fondazione Prada in Milan and Venice curated by Salvatore Settis and Anna Anguissola, *Serial Classic* and *Portable Classic* in 2015 and *Recycling Beauty* in 2022, have demonstrated the range and complexity of the reverence, reproduction and revision of Antique models through the centuries. As a work that to date is unknown in any other marble replica, this stunning *Bust of the Quondam Arminius* is, therefore, an object of immense rarity. With such a handsome subject and fine state of preservation, one would have imagined a healthy demand for marble copies of such an antique model displayed in the first museum in the world to be opened to the public. Why these do not exist must remain a mystery.

Nevertheless, the bust emerges not merely as a remarkable modern copy after the antique, but as a work that encapsulates the artistic ambitions and intellectual climate of late eighteenth-century Rome. Through close comparison with documented commissions for Henry Blundell and works associated with the Wallmoden collection, the bust demonstrates technical and stylistic characteristics that strongly support its attribution to Carlo Albacini: the deeply undercut, luxuriant carving of the hair; the refined modelling of the eyes and facial planes; the broad, smoothly articulated treatment of the shoulders; and, above all, the immaculate, luminous polish that

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[16] There is another autograph version of the *Flora* in the Indianapolis Art Museum and there are full length marbles by or attributed to Albacini of *Minerva, Cupid and Psyche, Standing Amazon*, and *Bacchus and Ariadne* in the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid and of *Orestes and Pylades*, *Castor and Pollux, Isis* and a *Bust of the Apollo Belvedere* in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

[17] See Fittschen, *Katalog Der Skulpturen Der Sammlung Wallmoden.*

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unmistakably proclaims its modernity. Far from attempting to deceive, such works asserted their status as contemporary masterpieces - objects that celebrated antiquity while simultaneously rivalling it in technical accomplishment. In a period when access to great ancient marbles was increasingly restricted, collectors such as Blundell and Wallmoden recognised that sculptors like Albacini could offer not simply substitutes, but elevated reinterpretations that enhanced the prestige and intellectual coherence of their collections. The present bust thus stands as compelling evidence of Albacini's pivotal role in shaping neo-classical taste: a sculptor whose discreet activity as a restorer once obscured his fame, yet whose refined craftsmanship and strategic access to the Capitoline prototypes position him at the very centre of the Grand Tour sculpture market.
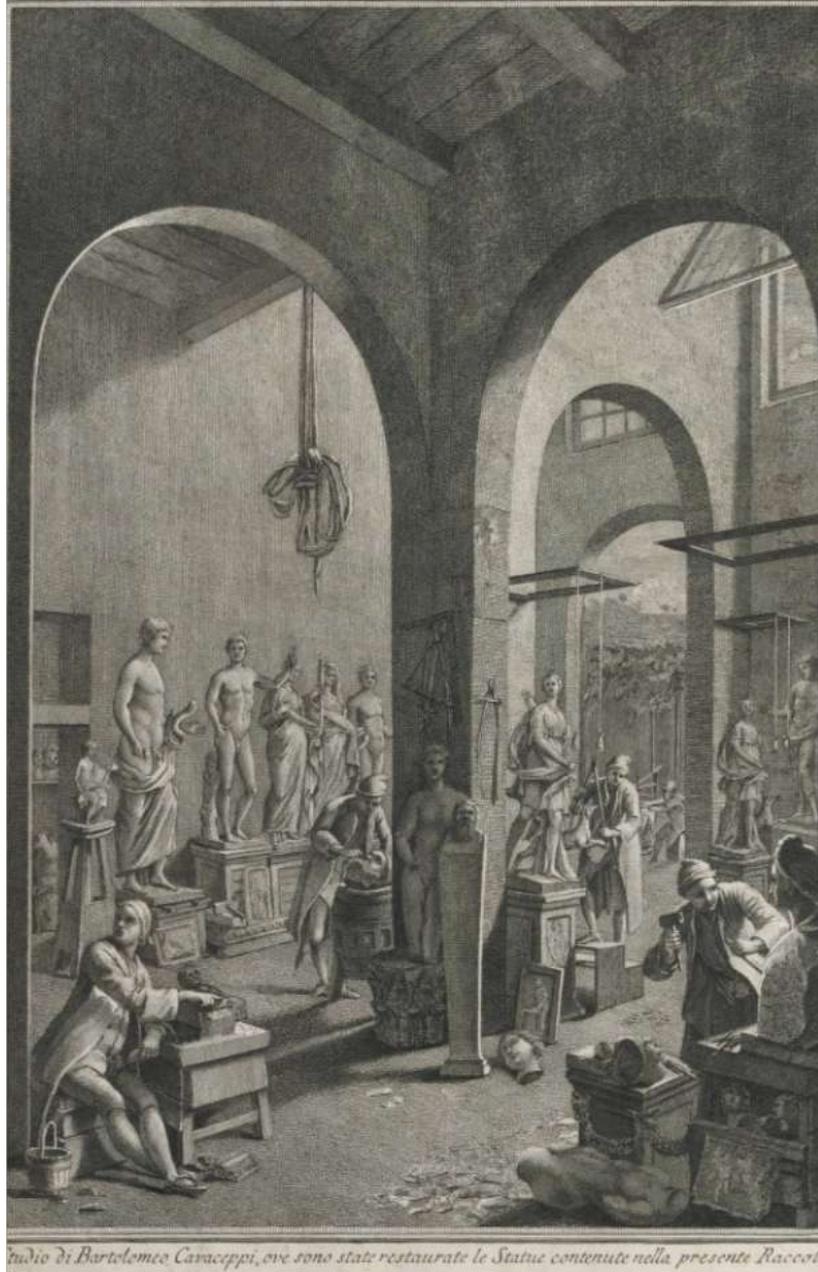
Fig. 2. Bartolomeo Cavaceppi in his studio, engraving from *Raccolta d'Antiche Statue, Busti, Bassirilievi ed Altre Sculture,* 1768.

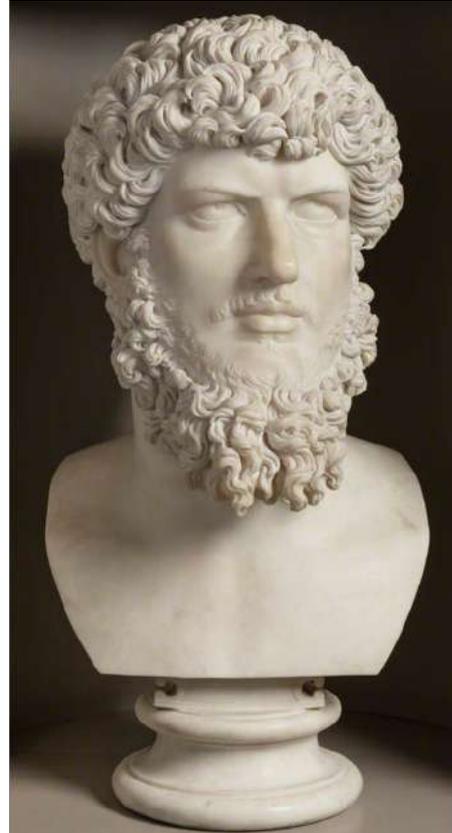Figs. 3 and 7. Carlo Albacini, *Bust of Virgil*, marble, late 18th century. Florence, Gallerie degli Uffizi next to Carlo Albacini, *Bust of Lucius Verus*, marble, 1777. Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery.

Attributed to Carlo Albacini, *Bust of a Young man*, here called *Bust of the Quondam Arminius,* late 18th century, marble.

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Fig. 4. *Bust of Arminius*, mid-2nd century AD, marble, 75cm. Rome, Musei Capitolini.

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Fig. 5. Interior of the Sala dei Filosofi, Musei Capitolini, Rome, photograph, 2025.

Fig. 6. Interior of the Pantheon at Ince Blundell Hall, photograph, c. 1959.

Fig. 8. Interior view of Schloss Herrenhausen, photograph, c. 1943

Fig. 9 Carlo Albacini, *Flora*, marble, after 1770. Indianapolis Art Museum

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Fig. 10. Italian, Roman, *Bust of a Vespasian after the Antique*, marble, before 1760, formerly in the Wallmoden collection, Herrenhausen, Hanover, (Fittschen, cat. 51).
Next to *Bust of Arminius*, mid-2nd century AD, marble. Rome, Musei Capitolini.

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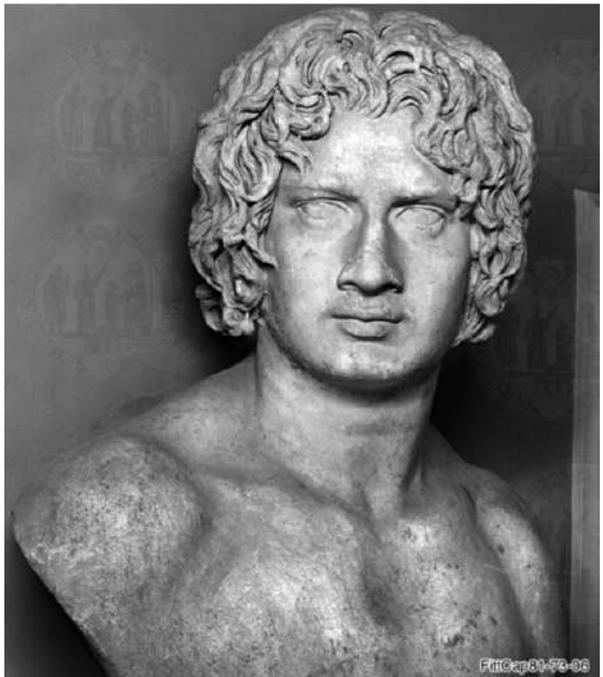Side by side comparison of the Colnaghi bust, attributed to Carlo Albacini, *Bust of a Young man*, here called *Bust of the Quondam Arminius,* late 18th century, marble next to *Bust of Arminius*, mid-2nd century AD, marble. Rome, Musei Capitolini.

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