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In April and May 1764 Edward Gibbon visited Turin. He admired the fertile plains of Piedmont, examined churches and palaces, reviewed the royal guards and was revolted by the servility of the courtiers. A long visit to the new Cabinet of Antiquities gave him the chance to appreciate sculptures and other antiquities, including a Roman shield, a wild boar carved from marble and a "bœuf de fer taillé en zig zag". It also enabled him to savor the qualities of the genial antiquarian Giuseppe Bartoli, who was responsible for the fine design of the Cabinet. Gibbon found him "a bit of a charlatan, but very learned". The most memorable hours of all were spent in the Treasury of the Archives. There Gibbon had the chance to see the *Mensa Isiaca*, the infold bronze tablets whose exotic decorations had obsessed generations of Egyptomaniac humanists. He compared it with the edition and commentary that Lorenzo Pignoria had issued in 1605. Like Bartoli, he found that Giacomo Franco's engravings of the original were faulty. Gibbon also took the opportunity to examine the celebrated 4th-century manuscript of Lactantius, whose distinctive script he described with care. Yet his contact with these charismatic objects left him unimpressed. He concluded that Egypt, "though immensely curious, is too distant, too obscure and too enigmatic to interest me greatly". And though he carefully noted the date of the codex of Lactantius, he misread its subscription.¹

One set of texts, however, both fascinated Gibbon and fully engaged his attention: the thirty folio volumes of Pirro Ligorio's manuscripts. The English traveler came to this dizzyingly rich collection of texts and images well equipped to study it critically. He had read Ezechiel Spanheim's 1664 dissertation on coins, which drew on Ligorian "monuments" that had since passed from the library of Christina of Sweden into the Vatican. His all-seeing eye took in everything: the blue paper, the quality of Ligorio's handwriting, and the distinctiveness of his Italian, written in "un style qui n'est qu'à lui". Gibbon also knew the conventional wisdom about Ligorio. Though not very learned, Ligorio "preserved for us the memory of a great many things that were lost after his time". Yet many reproached him for his lack of "fidélité", and "for inventing monuments that he did not really know".

¹ George Brunsell, ed., *Gibbon's Journey from Geneva to Rome: His Journal from 22 April to 2 October 1764* (London, 1961), pp. 22-24.