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An Ardent Patron
Cardinal Camillo Massimo
and his antiquarian and artistic circle

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Giovanni Pietro Bellori
Claude Lorrain
Nicolas Poussin
Diego Velázquez

An Ardent Patron explores the exceptional contribution Cardinal Camillo Massimo (1620–1677) made to the culture of seventeenth-century Rome. A close friend of Nicolas Poussin and Diego Velázquez and an even closer friend of Giovanni Pietro Bellori, Massimo combined a sophisticated intellect with a wide range of cultural interests, which he pursued with determination. He became a highly regarded antiquarian collector and patron of contemporary artists, including, besides Poussin and Velázquez, Claude Lorraine and Carlo Maratti, and he significantly influenced the taste of the following century. This book reconstructs his patronage and collection in the context of the society that produced him, and argues for his role as an active force promoting particular artists, theories and enterprises in Baroque Rome.

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CHAPTER 3

Patronage and Politics: Nicolas Poussin, Claude Lorrain and the Pamphilj, 1640–1653

In 1644 the long Barberini pontificate came to an end, and, with the election of Giovanni Battista Pamphilj as pope, the Barberini nephews fled to France. For Massimo, however, the election provided an important opportunity for him to begin his career. The Pamphilj, who were keen to present themselves as Romans, were neighbours of the Massimo in Piazza Navona. Massimo embarked on his ecclesiastical career, promoted by both Camillo Astalli and Olimpia Maidalchini, and moved swiftly to commission his first important paintings from Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin. This chapter looks at how Massimo's patronage in these years was shaped by his exposure to the circle of artists and scholars based at the Casino Bel Respiro, and their admiration for Hadrian's Villa.

The Vatican Virgil

In 1640, at the age of twenty, Massimo inherited the estate of Roccasecca dei Volsci from his cousin Camillo I Massimo. As we have seen, a condition of this inheritance was that he change his name to Camillo.¹ In December of the same year, Nicolas Poussin left for Paris, where he stayed until 1642, interrupting the drawing lessons that Massimo had been taking from him. In 1641 Massimo was granted permission to borrow the Vatican Virgil from the Vatican for a year,² followed by the Vatican Terence in the following year, as is recorded in the Vatican's book of loans.³ The Vatican Virgil (Vat. Lat. 3225) is a lavishly illustrated manuscript from the late fourth or early fifth century AD containing the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid*.⁴ Seventy-five folios

Fig. 3.1
Alessandro Algardi and
Giovanni Francesco
Grimaldi, façade facing
the Giardino Segreto,
Casino Bel Respiro, Villa
Doria Pamphilj, Rome,
1645–48



therefore seem paradoxical that the election of Innocent coincided with the beginning of Massimo's career as an art patron. Yet it was precisely because of a lull in papal activity that Massimo was able to commission works from well-known artists, hitherto fully occupied working for the pope and his court. One of these artists was Poussin, who, having returned from Paris in 1642, wrote early in the new papacy that "things in Rome have changed much under the present pontificate and we no longer enjoy any special favours at court".¹⁴ Another was Claude Lorrain. Massimo moved swiftly to commission works from both artists in 1644–45, and his career as an art patron began.

Massimo's commissions from Claude and Poussin need to be understood in the light of his intellectual, political and social aspirations. His antiquarian and artistic interests – which had emerged in the 1630s in the company of Angeloni, Bellori, Giustiniani and the artists employed on the *Galleria Giustiniana* – were further developed by his involvement in the building and decoration of the Casino Bel Respiro (fig. 3.1), the Pamphilj villa on the Janiculum. This project brought together, under the direction of Alessandro Algardi and Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi, some of the same artists and scholars who had been involved with the *Galleria Giustiniana*.¹⁵

The Casino was begun in September 1644, immediately after the election of Innocent, and was finished around 1652,¹⁶ though most of the work took place between 1645 to 1648. For its decoration, large numbers of statues and other antiquities were acquired, many from

Fig. 3.2
Alessandro Algardi and
Giovanni Francesco
Grimaldi, stucco ceiling of
the round garden room,
Casino Bel Respiro, Villa
Doria Pamphilj, Rome,
1645–48



new excavations at sites near Rome, or from Hadrian's Villa.¹⁷ The papal nephew, Camillo Pamphilj, carried out extensive excavations at Nettuno in 1644–45, using agents such as Filippo Abel, and many of the pieces found there made their way to the Casino.¹⁸ Statues were bought from other Roman families, including seventeen from the Savelli in 1655.¹⁹ Poussin, writing in 1645 to Chantelou concerning some antique heads, reported that Camillo Pamphilj had placed a veto on any antiquities leaving Rome, as he wanted them all for his villa.²⁰ These pieces were then restored by Alessandro Algardi and a group of sculptors working under his supervision, including Francesco Fontana, Antonio Raggi, Adamo Claudio Brefort and Baldassare Mari.²¹

The Casino was not only a site for the display of antiquities, but was also decorated with stuccoes and frescos on antique themes based on antique models. Work proceeded rapidly, and by 1646 the plasterers were beginning their work on the round central room on the ground floor (opening on to the Giardino Segreto) (fig. 3.2).²² Carla Benocci has shown that the models for the stuccoes and reliefs found throughout the Casino were taken from three main sources – Angeloni's *Historia Augusta* (1641), François Perrier's *Icones et Segmenta* (1645) and Giacomo Lauro's *Antiquae Urbis Splendor* (1612–28).²³ The use of Angeloni's illustrations of antique coins as sources for the stuccoes underlines his importance in the circle of scholars and artists involved in this project.

Fig. 3.3
Alessandro Algardi and
Giovanni Francesco
Grimaldi, vault of the
Galleria dei Costumi
Romani, Casino Bel
Respiro, Villa
Doria Pamphilj, Rome,
1645–48



Pomponi has suggested that some Carracci drawings he owned might also have been used as inspiration for the decoration of the Sala di Ercole.²⁴ Bellori, too, is indirectly linked to the Casino Bel Respiro project as he provided the commentary for Perrier's *Icones et Segmenta*, which also featured as a model for the stuccoes. As a pupil of Poussin and a close friend of Bellori and Angeloni, Massimo must have formed part of this circle, and may even have contributed directly to the iconography and decoration of the villa.²⁵

One of the most striking features of the casino is the stucco work in the Galleria dei Costumi Romani, designed by Algardi (fig. 3.3). Bellori wrote that in addition to studying the good examples of Raphael and Giulio Romano, Algardi also went to study and draw the ruins at Hadrian's Villa.²⁶ As Benocci has noted, while reference to Raphael was obligatory for any classically inclined artist in the seventeenth century, studying Hadrian's Villa was more unusual.²⁷ A comparison of the stucco decoration in the Galleria dei Costumi Romani (figs. 3.3–4) with the few remaining traces of stucco in the large baths at Hadrian's Villa demonstrates their stylistic similarity (fig. 3.5). The focus brought to bear on Hadrian's Villa by those building the Casino Bel Respiro may have been influenced in part by Pirro Ligorio, whose *Descrittione della superba e magnificentissima Villa Tiburtina* existed in manuscript form and was known to seventeenth-century antiquarians in the Barberini

Fig. 3.6
The Poikile, Hadrian's
Villa, Tivoli



Fig. 3.7
The Doric Tempietto,
Hadrian's Villa, Tivoli



offered a very different model of antiquity to that of the Domus Aurea, which had served as a source of inspiration for Renaissance artists.³² It reflected Hadrian's interest in other countries where he had spent periods of time, notably Greece and Egypt. It was permeated with the culture of both countries, with areas devoted to celebrated Greek monuments or sites such as the Poikile (fig. 3.6), based on the celebrated Stoa Poikile of Athens, and the East Valley with its Doric tempietto (fig. 3.7), based on the temple of Aphrodite in the Vale of Tempe in Thessaly, and a complex based on the Canopus, the site of a villa, canal and temple of Serapis at Alexandria. Throughout the villa were erected



Fig. 3.8
Nicolas Poussin,
*The Infant Moses trampling
on Pharaoh's Crown*,
c. 1645–47
Oil on canvas, 92 × 128 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris

numerous copies of Greek works of the fifth century BC by Pheidias and Polycleitus, as well as Egyptian or Egyptianizing statues.

How much did Algardi and Camillo Pamphilj understand about Hadrian's conception of his villa? Was it evident to them that Hadrian had intended in the Canopus to represent, in miniature, Egypt itself, its architecture forming a monumental map of the country?³³ Ligorio had identified certain areas of the villa as the "Piazza d'Oro", the "Accademia", the "Lyceum" and the "Canopus", indicating that he at least had understood that particular areas were intended to represent parts of Greece and Egypt. Algardi, Pamphilj and Grimaldi would have relied on Ligorio's description of the Hadrian's Villa, of which at least seven manuscript copies existed in the seventeenth century. Massimo, too, was familiar with Ligorio's account. In a letter to Bellori of 1660 he refers to a Ligorio manuscript, almost certainly the *Descrittione*, which was in his library, and commented that it was very difficult to make sense of the site of Hadrian's Villa without it.³⁴ He also noted that among the ruins of Hadrian's Villa "were epitomized the most celebrated sites of Greece, Asia and Egypt",³⁵ indicating that he was well aware of Hadrian's vision.



Fig. 3.10
 Nicolas Poussin, *The Infant
 Moses trampling on Pharaoh's
 Crown*, 1645
 Oil on canvas, 99 × 141 cm
 Woburn Abbey,
 Bedfordshire

The episode of the infant Moses trampling on Pharaoh's crown is found not in the Old Testament, but in Flavius Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews* (*Antiquitates*).³⁹ The inventory of Massimo's library drawn up in 1677 includes a volume described as "Giuseppe Hebreo Historica in 4.^o verde",⁴⁰ which may have been a copy of the *Antiquitates*.⁴¹ Blunt even suggested that Poussin used Massimo's library as a resource for his paintings.⁴²

Although the dating of the paintings has been disputed, there is consensus concerning which version of *Infant Moses trampling on Pharaoh's Crown* came first. Mahon placed Massimo's Louvre version (fig. 3.8) after Pointel's Woburn Abbey version (fig. 3.10), dating the former to 1643 and the latter to 1644–45, and Blunt also believed the Louvre painting to be the later of the two, on the grounds that an x-ray of *Landscape with a Roman Road* (1648) revealed a version of the Louvre *Infant Moses trampling on Pharaoh's Crown* underneath.⁴³ According to this scenario Massimo may have seen Pointel's version in Poussin's studio, and have been encouraged to commission his own.

The fact that Poussin was known to have painted other scenes from Josephus at this time, and was particularly attracted to subjects taken from the life of Moses,⁴⁴ suggests that he, rather than Massimo

or Pointel, was ultimately responsible for the choice of subject.⁴⁵

The main difference between the two painted versions is that in Massimo's painting the action takes place indoors, while in the version for Pointel it takes place outside, in a courtyard bounded by a wall, beyond which lies a temple with enclosed Ionic columns. Massimo's version is in this respect an improvement, as the effect of bringing the scene inside is to increase the emotional tension of the work, and this supports the view that Pointel's version came first. If so, Massimo may then have requested another painting set in ancient Egypt to match, relying on Poussin to choose a suitable episode. This appears to have been the pattern for Poussin's interaction with Pointel, who requested certain outcomes and allowed Poussin to choose the most appropriate story to express those outcomes.⁴⁶

The story, as Josephus tells it, is as follows. The infant Moses was brought before Pharaoh by his daughter Thermutis, and Pharaoh playfully placed his crown on the head of the child. Moses threw the crown on the ground and trampled on it, arousing the anger of a sacred scribe, who tried to kill him, recognizing in Moses a threat to Egypt as foretold by the Jews. The painting represents the most dramatic moment of the story, when the scribe is poised to stab the infant and the Pharaoh raises his hand to stop him. The composition relies heavily on the deployment of the *affetti* to convey the full spectrum of emotions felt by the participants, ranging from surprise through fear to anger. Poussin is concerned to capture each person's raw emotional response to the situation, but the individual gestures and attitudes are contained within a tight compositional framework.

The painting was discussed by André Félibien in his *Entretiens sur les vies et sur les ouvrages des plus excellents peintres anciens et modernes*, published in 1666–88. Félibien's description and explanation of Poussin's painting (it is not clear which version he is describing) occur after his discussion of Poussin's *Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well*. The *Rebecca and Eliezer*, he writes, is the epitome of beauty, grace and harmony, while the *Moses* represents extreme emotions, particularly rage and fear. Together they contribute to Félibien's claim for Poussin's ability to express every kind of emotion. But it is not simply his brilliance at the *affetti* at stake here, but the way in which Poussin creates a mood in each painting to enhance the particular subject. The whole painting, not simply the figures, is expressive. Félibien writes:

The painting where he painted Moses who tramples underfoot the crown of Pharaoh is completely opposed to that of Rebecca. The flesh tones are of more sensitive colours, the shadows and lights are stronger, the reflections are more marked, and all the parts are more clearly experienced and more distinct, because the viewer supposes that the subject is closed up and near to him.⁴⁷

This emotional intensity is heightened in Massimo's version by the setting. The action takes place in a bare, enclosed and darkened space, which amplifies the tension and emphasizes the gestures. Knotted lengths of cloth hang behind the figures, extending half way across the canvas. The light catches the gleaming gold furniture on which Pharaoh and his daughter are seated.

Compared with Pointel's painting, the participants convey a greater desperation. In Pointel's version the women behind Thermutis seem to react to the shocking sight of the drawn dagger by pulling their garments closer, as if to cover their faces. The female attendant second from the left holds out one hand in protest. Thermutis drops one hand by her side and opens her palm, while holding out the other in front of her. In Massimo's version the response is more urgent and dynamic. The equivalent female attendant second from the left raises both arms high in the air in protest while Pharaoh's daughter also raises both hands. Poussin introduces another female figure who stands between the infant and the scribe with the dagger. She seems to be repulsing him physically and she raises her right hand directly above Moses's head in a protective gesture. The position of her raised right hand echoes the gestures of the other women, creating a powerful rhythm across the canvas. The man on the right in the bulky cloak in Pointel's painting is a static figure with one arm bent and one hand raised. In Massimo's composition he is swathed in bright yellow and actively responds to the crisis by drawing back in surprise or horror, his left hand outstretched. In front of him is a man whose white garment and veil identify him as a priest. He leans forward, regarding the gesture with concern and suspicion, perhaps recognizing the fulfilment of the prophecy. The overall effect of the painting is altered, Massimo's version being more dramatic and confrontational, the composition accented by the repetition of the raised hands, poignant symbols of distress.

Poussin has worked hard to create an appropriate setting for his subject. Both he and Massimo attached great importance to the



Fig. 3.12
 Pietro Sante Bartoli
*Copy after the Aldobrandini
 Wedding, c. 1670s*
 Watercolour drawing,
 13.4 × 43 cm (double page)
 Bartoli Album, ms. Gen.
 1496, University of
 Glasgow Library

to Pharaoh is shown in the action of bending down to rescue his snake. Behind him a young man holds a large vessel with draped hands, while the other priest, shown frontally, extends his right arm horizontally while holding his rod (which he seems to have retained, perhaps indicating his seniority) in his other hand. At the far right are Aaron and Moses, both in profile and both pointing skywards in identical gestures that acknowledge the divine intervention. The scene is described by Bellori:

The other story represents Moses and Aaron who battle the Egyptian charmers: they both raise their right hands towards the sky and point out divine virtue, while the serpent of Aaron bites and presses to the ground the serpent of the sorcerers, one of whom helps it and pulls it back. Pharaoh is seated on the throne; and there one can observe the very ancient Egyptian costumes; there is a youth who with his hands covered by his garment carries the vase of sacred water from the river Nile, and another that on a pole in the form of the letter T raises the sacred bird of Egypt, called the ibis. The sorcerer priests are dressed in white linen, clean-shaven, with their heads crowned with lotus.⁵⁴

Bellori's description provides the key to understanding the painting. Rather than concentrating on the Christian symbolism implicit in the subject,⁵⁵ Bellori is explicitly interested in the archaeological aspects of the painting, and to what extent Poussin has succeeded in providing authentic detail with regard to ancient Egyptian *costume* and religious rites. A letter from Massimo to Bellori written on 30 August 1660 mentions these two paintings in such a way that suggests that Bellori had asked to see them.⁵⁶ Massimo writes that although they are in his cabinet (*gabinetto*) he has the