

Book Review

Lisa Beaven, *An Ardent Patron. Cardinal Camillo Massimo and his Antiquarian and Artistic Circle*, London, Paul Holberton Publishing with Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, 2010. ISBN 978-19-03470985. 440 pp., 180 col. illus. £40.

In terms of seventeenth-century collecting, this book shines light on one of the most significant, if most neglected, figures of mid seventeenth-century Rome, Cardinal Camillo Massimo (1620–77). Massimo remains most familiar to a British audience through his striking portrait by Velazquez, now at Kingston Lacy, which illustrates the jacket of this book. Massimo's contemporary importance, though highlighted by Francis Haskell in his *Patrons and Painters* of 1963, has not been sufficiently followed up until now, almost fifty years later. Massimo was active as a collector not only at Rome but also in Spain; furthermore his collections, dispersed after his death to pay his vast debts, subsequently formed the basis for those of other collectors such as the Marqués del Carpio, who acquired a number of Massimo's antiquities.

Camillo was, however, not merely a collector of objects both ancient and modern but also, as the title says, 'an ardent patron' – despite his relative poverty – of artists, including three of the most significant of his century, that is Claude, Poussin and Velazquez. As if that was not enough, Massimo also enjoyed a lifelong friendship with Gian Pietro Bellori, perhaps the most significant theoretician of seventeenth-century art. Following a strictly chronological approach to Massimo's life and to his collecting activities, Lisa Beaven successfully restores Massimo to the position he deserves to occupy in the pantheon of seventeenth-century collectors. She also demonstrates that, like Bellori, Massimo displayed throughout his career a consistent and sophisticated taste, for example in his collecting of landscape paintings.

This book also shines light on other neglected or under-emphasized areas of seventeenth-century history. In the author's very first chapter, for example, it becomes evident how the influence of the old Roman noble families, such as the Massimi, did

not necessarily decline in the seventeenth-century. Although the status and wealth of the Massimi were not as great as they had been in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Camillo was still able to make an ecclesiastical career for himself on the back of his family connections. His career also highlights the role played by agents at Rome at this period as, although not possessed of munificent funds himself, Massimo was able to direct the patronage activities of such influential figures as Cardinal Camillo Pamphili and the Altieri family. At the same time the author emphasizes the constant interchange between Rome and Madrid at this period, both political and cultural, although they are still too often seen as being separate entities.

All these new perspectives on the period are supported by years of diligent archival research to form a rounded picture of the man and his collections. At the same time the vicissitudes of Massimo's life are such that the book makes for a highly entertaining read as his career lurches from triumph to disaster and back again. In 1653, at the age of only thirty-three, he was made papal nuncio to the court of Spain, then a plum diplomatic post at the centre of world affairs. Within five years, however, he was recalled in disgrace on account of financial irregularities and exiled to his estates at remote Roccasecca dei Volsci, south of Rome, for a further five years. Nonetheless, in December 1670 he was eventually to be made Cardinal, a dignity that he was not to enjoy for long.

The section on Camillo's exile is perhaps the most fascinating as Beaven skilfully demonstrates how the topography of the area, and Camillo's own antiquarian knowledge, informed the works of the artists he patronized both at that time and later. This chapter in particular is based on entirely new archival research by the author that has turned up the correspondence between Massimo and Bellori, here published in full as an appendix. The author's deep knowledge of Roman topography and of this period in Italian history are also illustrated by her masterly analysis of Claude's *View of Delphi with Procession*, commissioned by Camillo in 1673, and now in Chicago. She

shows convincingly how this painting evidently was informed by Massimo's experiences in Roccasecca.

A more practical and significant advantage of this book also highlighted by the section on Roccasecca is the wealth and quality of the illustrations that enhance and support the argument – not only photographs but also reconstruction diagrams such as that of Massimo's suite at Palazzo Massimo alle Quattro Fontane. In conclusion, it is perhaps appropriate that the publication of this book by a New Zealand author forms a further outcome of the fruitful collaboration

between Paul Holberton and the CEEH in Madrid – an example of the kind of trans-national cosmopolitanism that would have pleased Massimo himself. Most significantly by elucidating the importance of Massimo's patronage, the author not only re-states Massimo's own importance, but also shows how much work remains to be done on contemporary patrons and collectors of the seventeenth century.

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