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Lisa Beaven *An Ardent Patron: Cardinal Camillo Massimo and His Antiquarian and Artistic Circle: Giovanni Pietro Bellori, Claude Lorrain, Nicolas Poussin, Diego Velázquez*
London and Madrid: [Paul Holberton Publishing](#) and Centro de Estudios Europa
Hispanica, 2010. 440 pp.; 140 color ills.; 70 b/w ills. Paper \$50.00 (9781903470985)



Lisa Beaven has given us a hefty book with a twenty-one-word title (and subtitle), justifying its bulk and length with her broad reach and impressive research. Although partly a biography of Cardinal Camillo Massimo (1620–1677), this text goes beyond memoir by ably leading us across a wide discursive and geographic landscape. Camillo, of the Massimo family (one thinks immediately of Rome’s famous Palazzo Massimo, with its curved façade), found himself not always an adept player with and among Rome’s political elite.

Remarkable glimpses of Massimo as a person of ambition and passion show up most vividly in an appendix of letters that Beaven has transcribed. Although not part of the main narrative of the book, this correspondence provides ample evidence of his appetite for art and collecting.

What Beaven does with Massimo is not so much give us the man as tell us a great deal about politics, patronage, and *rappresentanza* in the middle decades of the seventeenth century, mostly in Rome, but also in and around Madrid. And that is no small accomplishment. Because of the author’s deep learning and impressive scholarship, *An Ardent Patron* is a “must-have” for anyone studying the Roman Baroque. The book’s seven chapters begin with an overview of the Massimo family then move chronologically through the rest of Massimo’s career. In the early going, Beaven situates and examines Rome’s artistic climate by considering the circle around Nicolas Poussin and Giovan Pietro Bellori. This is familiar territory, and the old warhorses “classic” and “baroque” are trotted out and generally dismissed by Beaven, who nonetheless cites relevant sources, nods to ways in which modern writers such as Jennifer Montagu, Tommaso Montanari, Elizabeth Cropper, and Charles Dempsey deal with the vexed conceptual terms of “classic” and “baroque.” What is somewhat different about Beaven’s approach is that she adds antiquarian culture and the “Greek Ideal” to the usual mix.

Massimo found himself well situated in the art scene in *seicento* Rome, taking drawing lessons from Poussin and becoming a familiar of that great patron and *cognoscento* Vincenzo Giustiniani. He also befriended Francesco Angeloni, who wrote a history of ancient Rome and throughout his life avidly collected coins and medals. Massimo had the status, connections, and influence to check out the *Vatican Virgil* from the Biblioteca Apostolica—he was having a copy made—for a year! How times have changed.

When Beaven takes up one of Massimo’s projects, such as his participation in Alessandro Algardi’s and Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi’s building of the Casino Bel Respiro on the Janiculum Hill for the Pamphilj family, she sedulously and remarkably works through all the details, such as the decoration and paintings done for the villa, following up on themes, execution, patronage, and historical matters of all sorts. She is tireless and perhaps tests the reader’s patience just a little—but very much in a good cause. She is scholar and historian, one who follows every trail, looks under every leaf, and does scrupulous bibliographic work and research. By my quick count she lists a dozen archives and approximately seven hundred books in her bibliography. There are more than a thousand footnotes. In other words, although the story she tells has indeed a thread and a shape, this book also fits into the enlightenment tradition of an encyclopedia.

Beaven notes that Massimo saw in the Villa Bel Respiro echoes of Hadrian’s Villa, along with that emperor’s references to foreign cultural and geographical realms, such as Greece, Asia, and Egypt.

Beaven in turn situates the paintings Massimo purchased from Poussin (*The Infant Moses Trampling on Pharaoh's Crown*, ca. 1645–47, and *Moses and Aaron Before Pharaoh*, ca. 1645–47) in “the context of the antiquarian circles at the Casino Bel Respiro and the frequent trips by its members to Hadrian's Villa” (95), which results in an approximately four thousand-word digression on Poussin in the midst of her chapter on the Villa Pamphilj. I make this observation not to criticize Beaven's approach but to give some idea of the fact-filled and frequently fascinating byways she introduces throughout the text. Next Beaven details Massimo's encounter with Diego Velázquez, whom he will meet again in Madrid. Velázquez was, in effect, on a shopping trip for Philip IV, breezing through Rome, looking for paintings, dashing off the fascinating, brooding portrait of Innocent X (still in the collection of the Pamphilj family). Along the way Velázquez also made a gorgeous portrait of Massimo, rendering the young priest's cope in luxurious ultramarine.

Massimo was sent to Madrid as Apostolic Nuncio to Philip IV of Spain; he cooled his heels, however, for about a year in Campillo de Altobuey, well outside of Madrid. The current legate had no intention of giving up his office and the Spanish were suspicious of anyone (such as Massimo) closely associated with the Barberini (noted Francophiles and therefore no great friends of the Spanish crown). So there was stalemate. Innocent did his best to get Gianfrancesco Gaetano, the current legate, out of town, but the Spanish monarchy, knowing of the pope's illness, decided to wait him out.

After Innocent's death, Pope Alexander VII kept Massimo as Nuncio, finally dislodging Gaetano. Beaven offers vivid descriptions of Massimo's time in Madrid, Velázquez and his wife living in the Royal Palace, and the excellent relationship that grew up between the painter and the papal Nuncio. She also writes in considerable detail about the Royal Collections and Philip's palaces, the Alcázar, Buen Retiro, and the most fabulous of them all, El Escorial.

Eventually Pope Alexander VII maneuvered Massimo out of his appointment, sending him into a five-year exile at Roccasecca del Volsci, a sparsely populated hamlet miles from nowhere in the hinterlands of Lazio, one owned by the Massimo family from the late sixteenth century. We learn that some irregularities in Massimo's bookkeeping during the time of his Apostolic Nunciature led to his banishment. A disgraced and nearly impoverished Massimo made the best of an unhappy situation, kept in touch with Bellori, and built two churches there, S. Maria della Pace and S. Raffaele; one is round, the other quadrilateral. Beaven provides good photos and clear descriptions of these two modest projects. He had hoped for drawings from his old friend Poussin, which would have illustrated a complex iconographic program Massimo had devised. Alas, Poussin was old and sick, and never sent any sketches. The resulting frescoes, made from Massimo's instruction, are mostly in a state of ruin. Pope Alexander VII relented and permitted Massimo back into Rome in 1663, before the works in Roccasecca del Volsci were completed. The still young prelate once again had access to his family's money and so launched himself on a new project, the procuring and rebuilding of a noble palace. Beaven provides a remarkable account of the Palazzo Massimo alle Quattro Fontane (later known as Palazzo Albani del Drago).

We can imagine Massimo's alacrity and enthusiasm at this point in his life. For any number of reasons, he chose not to return to the family palace in Piazza Sciarra. This chapter takes on complex issues: the difficult history of the palace and the negotiations with wily and demanding Carmelite nuns who then controlled the property, Massimo's need to create an image of himself as antiquarian, collector, and *cognoscento*. Here Beaven offers a wealth of information (some two hundred footnotes—many lengthy—in this chapter alone), documentation, and superb analysis of *rappresentanza* in a Roman palace, drawing on the indispensable work of Patricia Waddy. Beaven relies on Massimo's posthumous inventory, a number of prints by Giovanni Battista Falda from his *Palazzi di Roma*, a sketchbook by Raymond Lafage, and a manuscript copy of an evaluation of the palace that dates to the late 1660s. Beaven describes each and every *sala*, the iconographical program, while discussing a number of important paintings by Claude Lorrain and Poussin. This must have been a marvelous place to visit when Massimo was alive.

The last phase of Massimo's life may have been his best. When Emilio Altieri became pope as Clement X in April of 1670, he already was an octogenarian, clearly chosen because his remaining days promised to be few (he eked out six more years, just the same). Like Massimo, Clement was from an ancient and noble Roman family. Before the year was out, he named three cardinals; Massimo was one of them. Massimo also served as Clement's *Maestro di Camera*, with duties as an “art agent” or “art adviser.” As Beaven points out, these are modern designations not quite up to the job of describing Massimo's many activities as a cultural touchstone for the papacy of Clement X. She writes: “With greatly increased authority and the backing of the papal nephew, Cardinal Paluzzo Altieri, Bellori and Massimo embarked

on an ambitious exercise to extend their intellectual hegemony over the Roman art and antiquarian world" (327). Here, Beaven concisely encapsulates Massimo's ultimate ambitions, *dall'alba al tramonto*—from sunrise to sunset—of his life and of Rome's greatest century of art.