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**From the Counter Reformation to the Birth of the Baroque:
Art and Patronage in Rome, c. 1600**

Dorigen Caldwell

Rome 1600: The City and the Visual Arts under Clement VIII, by *Clare Robertson*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2015, 460 pp., 80 col. & 222 b/w illus., hardback, £45

Taking as its focus the pontificate of the Aldobrandini pope, Clement VIII (1592-1605), Clare Robertson's *Rome 1600* is a hugely welcome and useful guide to a period of intense artistic activity that would shape the direction of much of seventeenth-century art, in the papal city and beyond. Indeed, this was a key moment in the transformation of Rome into the most important cultural capital in Europe, where newly-formed academies of art and science would help set the intellectual agenda for generations to come. More than ever Rome was a destination, not just for pilgrims, but for artists and scholars, who led the way for the Grand Tourists who would follow. As the spiritual and political centre of the Catholic Church, moreover, the reach of Rome became increasingly global, with missionaries following merchants along rapidly expanding trade routes, in their pursuit of new recruits.

Together with other important recent studies on Post-Tridentine Rome,¹ Robertson's book contributes immensely to our understanding of a period that once fell through the gaps. No longer 'Renaissance' and not properly 'Baroque', the last decade of the sixteenth century in particular is often overlooked, usually given attention only in studies of the early Roman careers of Annibale Carracci and Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. The presence of these two seminal figures is felt throughout this volume too, but it is one of the strengths of the book that it meticulously fills in the background to their emergence, allowing a better understanding of their place in a wider context. The Jubilee (or Holy Year) of 1600 provides the gravitational centre of the book, acting as a catalyst for papal patronage and also for the embellishment of the city by other key figures. The range of protagonists involved in this flourishing of the arts is reflected in the structure of the volume, arranged into five chapters.

The first of these outlines the patronage of Clement VIII himself and highlights the ongoing papal preoccupation with the restoration of Rome to embody a renewed Catholic Church. Like his recent predecessor, Sixtus V (1585-90), Clement focused on key monuments to papal authority, including St Peter's and the Lateran, and employed large teams of established painters, often under the direction of the Cavalier d'Arpino, leaving more radical talents to be nurtured by others.

He also emulated Pius V (1566-72), with the announcement that he would visit all the churches in the city to ensure they were appropriately furnished, although in the event this proved far too ambitious a plan. His decree requiring all works of art in churches to be approved by the Vicar of Rome likewise appears to have had relatively little impact; and while it is true that there are numerous documented rejections of religious paintings during Clement's reign, there is little evidence that this was the result of any centralised or systematic campaign, as Robertson makes clear. This may still have been a time of sober reform, but it was also a moment of experimentation, of collecting and of an educated appreciation of new types of art.

The second chapter is devoted to the cardinal-nephew Pietro Aldobrandini, whose position of privilege placed him at the cultural heart of the city. An ambitious patron and collector, Pietro was an interesting point of intersection between the pope's relatively austere inner circle and the wider artistic landscape. Apparently uninterested in Caravaggio, he can nonetheless be placed firmly within the milieu of the Lombard painter's more enthusiastic supporters, including Cardinal del Monte, with whom he shared a taste for music and gambling. The decoration of Pietro's hugely influential Villa Belvedere at Frascati demonstrates the contradictions inherent in much patronage at the time. It has a predominantly Counter-Reformation programme of biblical imagery counterbalanced by

the classical iconography of the Sala d'Apollo, which harks back to the great Renaissance villas. Pietro was also the patron of Domenichino's extraordinarily sensual *Hunt of Diana (plate 1)*, which inevitably ended up in the hands of the insatiable Scipione Borghese, who succeeded Pietro as cardinal nephew after the election of Paul V in 1605.

The following chapters, on 'Palaces, Villas and Gardens' and 'Churches and Chapels', further flesh out the projects being commissioned around the turn of the century, a great many of which stemmed from the army of cardinals resident in the city. In a highly sophisticated environment, where the collecting and commissioning of art was an important cultural signifier, prolific patrons, such as Cardinals Del Monte, Montalto, Farnese and Giustiniani, appear to have spent a good deal of time and resources on their pursuit of painting and sculpture. It was in these households, rather than in the papal ambit, that Caravaggio and Carracci were championed. As Robertson notes, this was the audience for a new type of religious painting, exemplified by Caravaggio's *Incredulity of Thomas (plate 2)*, designed for close-up viewing in private galleries. It is also clear, from Robertson's careful itemising of artistic projects in the city's palaces and churches around 1600, that it was the Carracci School, notably Francesco Albani, Guido Reni and Domenichino, that came to dominate painting in Rome as the century drew on.

What emerges most strongly from the detailed chronicling of this study is the sheer volume of work being commissioned in Rome at this time, from the burgeoning craze for easel paintings, which was replacing the sixteenth-century taste for frescoed walls in palaces, to the rush to endow chapels in the city's newly-built churches. Many of these churches had been constructed for recently established religious orders, including the Jesuits, the Theatines and the Oratorians, and Robertson gives due credit to their continuing role in Rome's spiritual and artistic life. The Oratorians in particular were also the driving force behind the early Christian revival that saw the exploration of the catacombs and the restoration of the earliest basilicas in the city. It was Pius IV in the 1560s who had first called for the cardinals to attend to their *titutli* and this had led to several early restorations by the likes of Carlo Borromeo and Ferdinando de' Medici. But it was under Clement VIII that the trend gained real momentum, with Cesare Baronio (Clement's confessor) enacting the most archeological restorations at SS. Nereo ed Achilleo and S. Cesareo de' Appia. These projects express the very real reverence that Baronio and others felt for the physical remains of early Christianity, which they saw as standing testament to the longevity and authority of the Apostolic Church.

A final chapter on the 'Lives of the Artists' provides a thoughtful account of the experience of artists living and

working in Rome. Many were foreigners, who had flocked to the city in anticipation of the Jubilee, and also to study the store of canonical masterpieces, classical and modern, to be found there. Despite the opportunities afforded by the Holy Year, however, competition was fierce and the climate of cut-throat rivalry and criticism is borne out by the poems written against many of the new altarpieces in St Peter's, not to mention the famous libel trial brought by Giovanni Baglione against Caravaggio. Robertson also reminds us of the unique profile of Rome's large workshops, where education and training were sidelined in favour of hiring artists on a short-term basis to fulfil large-scale projects. While this teaching vacuum would ultimately help foster the new Accademia di San Luca, the rather desperate situation that many artists found themselves in surely contributed to the violence and drunken brawls that seem to have been fairly normal nocturnal occurrences.

The volume is beautifully illustrated throughout, with over 300 images, including maps, drawings and a luxurious number of colour plates. The three appendices are also extremely useful, containing as they do the 1603 inventory of Pietro Aldobrandini's collection of painting and sculpture; an anonymous manuscript of 1601 describing the 'The Palaces of Rome during the reign of Clement VIII'; and a 1610 record of the key 'officiali' employed in Pietro's household, with a detailed outline of their duties. This latter document gives a

fascinating insight into the day-to-day running of a major cardinal's *palazzo* at this time, conveying the complexity and expense of the operation and also its very human and mundane reality. Both this and the contemporary description of palaces underline the importance, for figures such as the cardinal nephew, of establishing a physical presence in Rome, a challenging ambition in an already crowded city.

For Rome was indeed crowded by the beginning of the Seicento, having begun its rise to prominence as an artistic centre already in the fifteenth century, with the return of the popes from self-imposed exile. The subsequent project of *renovatio* transformed the city from provincial backwater into a major cultural capital, with both popes and cardinals playing their part and establishing enduring dynasties in the process. Riding temporary setbacks, notably the Sack of Rome, and evolving to meet the demands of the Post-Tridentine Church, patrons continued to spend money on art, and artists and architects continued to converge on the city. But the Jubilee of 1600 certainly represents a key moment, as Rome became an increasingly international city, and new types of painting, from classical landscape to genre scenes of musicians and card players, began to fill the galleries of the wealthy. These are just some of the many developments charted meticulously in Clare Robertson's book, which gives us a detailed and thoughtful portrait of Rome on the cusp of the Baroque.

Notes

¹ N. Courtright, *The Papacy and the Art of Reform in Sixteenth-Century Rome: Gregory XIII's Tower of the Winds the Vatican*, Cambridge, 2003; S. F. Ostrow, *Art and Spirituality in Counter-Reformation Rome: the Sistine and Pauline Chapels in S. Maria Maggiore*, Cambridge and New York, 1996; J. Freiburg, *The Lateran in 1600: Christian concord in Counter-Reformation Rome*, Cambridge and New York, 1995. See also the hugely useful *Genius of Rome 1592-1623* exhibition catalogue, ed. D. Breuer and B. L. Brown, London, 2001, which covers some of the same timeframe as Robertson but goes further into the seventeenth century.