Clare Robertson

Rome 1600: The City and the Visual Arts Under Clement VIII. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015. Pp. 460. Hb, \$75.

This exceptional book focuses on and around the Holy Year of 1600, declared by Pope Clement VIII Aldobrandini (r.1592–1605), and explores the distinctive artistic patronage of a period when donors and artists in Rome must have felt “in the right place at the right time.” Robertson constructs a fascinating web of overlapping points of views: the visual—a systematic analysis of works of art commissioned by Pope Clement VIII, his cardinal nephew Pietro, the principal religious orders, confraternities, cardinals, and nobles; the historical—a profound literary and archival investigation of the papacy, the Aldobrandini family, the lives of the artists, and the history of the city of Rome seen through different social lenses; and the topographical—an analysis of the urban transformations of the *abitato* and *disabitato* through maps and documents. This is a beautifully illustrated book divided into five chapters (“Clement VIII and Aldobrandini Patronage,” “The Cardinal Nephew, Pietro Aldobrandini,” “Palaces, Villas and Gardens,” “Churches and Chapels,” and “Lives of the Artists”) that draws upon exhaustive historical and archival research, ideally synthesized by one of the most distinguished scholars in the field.

With her book on the Farnese family (“*Il gran cardinale*”: *Alessandro Farnese, Patron of the Arts* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992]), Robertson had mastered the patterns of patronage within the family of Pope Paul III and, in particular, of the cardinal nephew Alessandro, with emphasis on Rome and the villa in Caprarola. Because of the impact of that book in the last two decades, specialists have awaited *Rome 1600* with high expectations, given the great importance of evaluating the patronage of the Aldobrandinis in Rome and Frascati. In many ways one detects the scrupulous, incisive methods of the author, yet *Rome 1600* is broader in scope, for it is enriched with different interdisciplinary approaches, and it extends beyond the perimeter of papal patronage into other historical realities within the city of Rome.

While Pope Clement VIII (with his attention to the main centers and axes of Rome: Saint Peter's, Saint John the Lateran, Santa Maria Maggiore, and the Campidoglio) is presented as the official patron of the Counter-Reformation—and he followed, in fact, rigorously the rules of Tridentine decorum and the religious principles of Philip Neri—Cardinal Pietro seems to have had more freedom. The restorations of the churches of Santa Maria in Traspontina, San Nicola in Carcere, Santa Maria in Trastevere, Santa Maria Scala Coeli, the Tre Fontane, and the chapel at Santa Maria sopra Minerva evolved with the construction of private palaces around the via del Corso and the villas in Frascati

and Magnanapoli. The latter must have appeared as veritable jewelry boxes for the cardinal's precious collections, especially with the arrival of the paintings by Titian from Alfonso d'Este's Alabaster Chamber after the conquest of Ferrara. Whereas the pope engaged a small group of painters, with Cavalier d'Arpino as protagonist, the cardinal nephew exhibited more heterogeneous taste. With his preference for the painters Carracci and Domenichino in addition to Cavalier d'Arpino (while apparently excluding Caravaggio), his employment of the architects Carlo Maderno and Giacomo della Porta, and his protection of the poets Tasso and Marino and the musicians Palestrina, Frescobaldi, and de Cavalieri, Cardinal Pietro effectively made Rome the leading center of the arts in Europe. Through building, decoration (especially through the iconographic programs of the frescoes and fountains in Frascati), and the selection of works for his private collection, Robertson discusses the cardinal's self-fashioning while addressing contemporary material culture, the poetics of taste, classical antiquity, Christian devotion, and patronage strategies centered around the model of "the unscrupulousness."

The book expands in scope and method with the study of other families: Farnese, Peretti, del Monte, Mattei, and, above all, Giustiniani, with their palace in Rome and villa in Bassano Romano. While the patronage of Pietro is discussed as more heterogeneous in comparison to the papal commissions, that of the other cardinals is framed as more eclectic due to the employment of a diverse range of artists. Caravaggio moved within this orbit of patrons, and the circumstances that led to his commissions are thoroughly investigated. In this section, the author explores the roles of secretaries, advisors, and servants (*spenditori, dispensieri, maestri di casa, monitorieri, computisti*) in order to shed light on the function and life of the palaces of Rome.

After the papal visits to the most important churches of the city, the pope invited religious orders (especially the Jesuits, Oratorians, and Theatines), confraternities, guilds, and cardinals to initiate major restorations of the architecture of the ecclesiastical patrimony. In this chapter, Robertson analyzes the case of the Oratorians at the Chiesa Nuova, with particular regard to the altarpieces commissioned to Barocci, Caravaggio, and Rubens. In spite of a certain papal emphasis on the Oratorians, the heart of Rome's *abitato* continued to be dominated by the Jesuits. Still under the protection of the Farnese family, their mother church, il Gesù, seems to have been at the center of sporadic commissions both by Cardinal Odoardo Farnese, who commissioned the Casa Professa and the Sacristy in 1599, and private patrons, especially for the decoration of private chapels. The works of Pulzone, Celio, Zuccaro, Ciampelli, and Domenichino around 1600 cannot be compared to the later monumental work of il Baciccio in 1674. The same can be said about the decoration of the

church of the novitiates of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale, partially demolished from the late 1650s to make way to the magnificent projects by Bernini completed in the late 1670s. Robertson interestingly questions the existence of a Jesuit style around 1600 recognizing, however, a preponderance for an iconography of angels and martyrs. From here the narrative flows into a discussion of the important role of early Christian martyrs in old and new churches of Rome. Accordingly, an analysis of works such as the *Santa Cecilia* by Stefano Maderno, the paintings for the Cerasi and Contarelli Chapels by Caravaggio, and several medieval churches (restored in a style that could be defined as deliberately "archaic"), testifies to the fervent early Christian revival in the writings of several theologians and cardinals.

The book concludes with an analysis of artists and advisors. The role of Cardinal Baronio for Pope Clement VIII must have been as important as that of the diplomat-theoretician Giovan Battista Agucchi for Cardinal Pietro. The plethora of patrons and advisers and the Holy See's diplomatic relationships with other Italian cities attracted artists from various regions, especially Emilia, Tuscany, and the Marches. Yet Rome had become such a leading center of culture that the greatest artists of Europe (especially from the Netherlands) descended upon the Catholic capital. The presence of Paul Brill, Adam Elsheimer, and Rubens is pivotal for studying the stylistic influences of the complex transitional style of the Counter-Reformation, which conflates classical antiquity, the Renaissance masters, reformed mannerism, and tenebrism while representing the dawn of the baroque.

Robertson's volume is all-encompassing: from Saint Peter's Dome to the medicine chest of Vincenzo Giustiniani. For this reason, it is at times a bit too encyclopedic at the expense of hermeneutics, though admittedly it seems not to have been the main focus of the author. What is certain, however, is that the book—with its precise information, historical contextualization, and conceptual conclusions—will inspire novel interpretations of the art of the period. In spite of one or two typographical errors (such as on page 19 where "Innocent XI" should have been "IX"), this book is impeccable and faultless. The reader enters at times as a pilgrim and at times as a scholar into the meander (physical and historical) of Rome in 1600 and moves from the visitation of the basilicas to the collections of the cardinals by way of a colossal, meticulous investigation realized with the most elegant *sprezzatura*.

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