Chapter 4

Reimarus, the Cardinal, and the Remaking of Cassius Dio’s Roman History

In December 1746, a notably exasperated Reimarus wrote a disgruntled letter to his longtime correspondent and benefactor Cardinal Angelo Maria Querini,1 archbishop of Brescia and head of the Vatican Library (Fig. 7). Querini had just informed him that Nicolaus Carminius Falco (1681–1759),2 who was then archbishop of Naples, was planning to publish his new edition of Cassius Dio’s Roman History—a project, Reimarus thought, that Falco had long abandoned:

I admit that nothing has caught me more by surprise than that after twenty-two years of silence this famous man sets out to fulfill his promise […] Surely for the last three years now, if I am not mistaken, you have not only publicly announced my Dio project, but you have even presented yourself thus far as a great supporter of it, if I may not even say eulogist of this cause: why did [Falco] not approach you? Why did he not revive [in public] the nearly already extinguished and buried awareness about his work? Why did he at least not according to the law of postliminy indicate that he wanted to reclaim his right?3


1 On Querini, see Alfred Breithaupt, De Cardinalis Quirini vita et operibus (Paris, 1889); Gino Benzoni, ed., Cultura, religione e politica nell’età di Angelo Maria Querini (Brescia, 1980); Ennio Ferraglio and Daniele Montanari, eds., Angelo Maria Querini a Corfù: mondo greco e latino al tramonto dell’antico regime (Brescia, 2005).

2 On Falco, see Archivio biografico italiano, I 390, 50–60.

3 VQS. Ms. 257, Reimarus to Angelo Maria Querini, 10 December 1746: “Fateor, nihil magis praeter expectationem meam accidisse, quam hoc, quod post duorum et viginti annorum silentium, Vir Clarissimus exequi promissa instituerit […] Quando enim iam ante triennium, ni fallor, Dionis mei non tantum mentionem publice fecisti, sed patronum Te adeo magnum et adiutorem, ne dicam laudatorem, causae praebuisti: cur non scripsit ad Te? cur memoriam suae operae iam prope extinctam et sepultam, non renovavit? cur postliminio saltem ius suum vindicare se velle non significavit?”
Figure 7  Portrait of Angelo Maria Querini (1680–1755) by unknown painter from Brescia, possibly a student of Francesco Paglia (1636–1714) [ca. mid-18th century].
COURTESY OF BIBLIOTECA QUERINIANA, BRESCIA