

## Chapter 8

### THE PROVINCIAL SCENE

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THE new world had helped to redress the balance of the old; but within Italy itself patronage continued to be extensive. In all the leading cities it was looked upon as the natural concomitant of wealth and power, and local schools of painting flourished vigorously on the support that they received from the great noble families and the religious orders. In Genoa a rich mercantile aristocracy dominated the Republic. Its principal members, the Balbi and the Brignole, the Doria and Durazzo, the Imperiali, Lomellini and Negroni, the Pallavicini, Saluzzi, Sauli and Spinola, filled their palaces with the works of native painters, the occasional contemporary picture brought back from Bologna, where the Legate or Vicelegate was nearly always a Genoese, and a selection of old masters.<sup>1</sup> It was the same in Naples, where the feudal landowners of the South, the Colonnas and the Maddalonis, the Monteleones, the Sonninos and the Tarsia Spinellis, prospered under Spanish rule and gave lavish support to a school of art that was second only to that of Rome in brilliance and diversity.<sup>2</sup> And within the papal states themselves Bologna, the second capital, was ruled by senatorial families who retained some semblance of autonomy—the Albergati and the Aldrovandi, the Ercolani and Ghisilieri, Pepoli and Sampieri—and who built up vast collections of the works of artists still basking in the reflected glory of the Carracci and their followers.<sup>3</sup> And similarly in Florence, Venice and other towns. Moreover, in each one of these cities patrons from the professional classes were also of importance. In Bologna there were the doctors: Paolo Battista Balbi, Beccari and the great Marcello Malpighi all owned pictures. Indeed the latter was a connoisseur of fine and decided tastes ('quel abito gesuitico fa melanconia', he wrote of a *S. Luigi Gonzaga* by Guido Reni), the friend of artists such as Guercino and Cignani and a keen collector.<sup>4</sup> And above all there were the merchants who, at the end of the century especially, played a very influential rôle in the artistic life of the city. Giovanni Antonio Belloni, for instance, who gave splendid hospitality to the exiled 'James III', owned large numbers of pictures by Giovan Giosèffo dal Sole, Felice Torelli, Crespi and Gambarini, and he sent the last artist on a journey to Rome<sup>5</sup>; and another businessman, Giovanni Battista Bellucci, also owned works by Crespi and many more by dal Sole. But the most cultivated and interesting of this little

<sup>1</sup> See Soprani, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> See de Dominicis, *passim*, and Maresca di Serracapriola, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> See Malvasia and Zanotti, *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Ruffo, pp. 122-3.

<sup>5</sup> Zanotti, I, p. 389. The essential source for the collections of Belloni, Bellucci and, indeed, all the Bolognese families is the manuscript B.109 in the Biblioteca Comunale, Bologna—*Descrizione delle Pitture che ornano le Case de' Cittadini della Città di Bologna*—Opera di Marcello Oretti Bolognese.

group of enlightened merchants was certainly Giovanni Ricci.<sup>1</sup> He was a rich and discriminating patron who showed a keen appreciation of many contemporary artists, above all Burrini and the young Crespi. He soon realised that the latter's imaginative gifts were bound to stultify in the provincial atmosphere of Bologna and he sent him on long visits to Venice and Central Italy to absorb a number of widely differing influences which soon made themselves felt in the pictures that Crespi painted for him.<sup>2</sup> Ricci also acted as a dealer for Crespi on unusual and altruistic terms: he agreed to buy any of the painter's work that became available and when he sold a picture he handed over all the profits to him, 'and it is certain', as the artist's biographer observed, 'that such noble and generous treatment which, as far as I know, is not given by anyone else, was of enormous advantage to Crespi'.

In Naples the lawyers who played such a vital rôle in the cultural life of the city were especially prominent in their support of the arts. Above all there was Giuseppe Valletta, poet and arbiter of taste, friend of Shaftesbury and the patron of Luca Giordano and Solimena.<sup>3</sup>

However, all these men—and there were countless more like them—crucial as their support was for the very survival of painting in Italy, could not possibly create the climate that had been established by families like the Barberini and their circle in Rome. With the general collapse of Italy under foreign domination and, ironically enough, with the peace that followed, all these cities with the possible exception of Venice remained essentially provincial. Between about 1600 and 1670 Rome was in fact the only 'capital' of Italy that could compete in prestige with the main towns in the nation states of Europe. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the wars which engulfed Italy, the vast increase in foreign travel, the decline of Spain, and then the reforms of enlightened despots helped to revive the cosmopolitan importance of some of the Italian city states. During most of the seventeenth century, however, the extravagant but somewhat unimaginative nobility and professional classes certainly kept alive local schools of painting of great value, but their isolation and the very vigour of individual traditions inevitably led to a stagnation of taste. Whereas the great Roman collections had included pictures by artists from all over Italy, and even Europe, and had thus stimulated a wide range of appreciation and new combinations of artistic sensibility—such as the classical-Venetian synthesis of Cassiano dal Pozzo and his circle—it was rare in Bologna to find a picture by a contemporary Neapolitan painter, or in Genoa to find one by a Venetian. Rare—but not impossible; for, in fact, stagnation was averted not only by foreign intervention (as has already been pointed out) but also by a few patrons within Italy itself, either expatriates or citizens, who looked beyond their native towns and included within their collections works by foreign artists.

<sup>1</sup> Zanotti, II, p. 35, and L. Crespi, pp. 204 and 244.

<sup>2</sup> See especially *The Marriage at Cana* of about 1686, now in Chicago, which shows the impact of Veronese and Barocci—van der Rohe, pp. 6-9.

<sup>3</sup> De Dominicis, IV, p. 141, and Bologna, pp. 181 and 203. Valletta used to help Luca Giordano with his problems of iconography (de Dominicis, IV, p. 196) and bought from another collector a number of architectural paintings by Codazzi with figures by Cerquozzi and Micco Spadaro (*ibid.*, III, p. 421).

By far the most important and influential of all such patrons was the Flemish merchant Gaspar Roomer.<sup>1</sup> He was born of a good family in Antwerp towards the end of the sixteenth century and by 1634 he had already been long settled in Naples and was the owner of an outstanding picture gallery. Some years later his activities as shipowner and trader had won him a fortune valued at five million ducats. His ships ranged as far afield as Scandinavia and Egypt, but most of his business was carried on with his native Low Countries. He lent money to the viceroys and even to the King of Spain, and in a city where titles and the feudal virtues counted more than anywhere else in Italy this rich foreign upstart entertained half the nobility—at first in his palace in Via Monteliveto and later in the Palazzo della Stella or in one of his many country houses. The strength of his religious convictions and his especial devotion to the Carmelites were shown by spectacular donations to their churches and the entry of his only daughter into one of their convents. During the revolt of Masaniello in 1647 Roomer naturally found himself in some danger—but luckily for him the public memory of his past generosity to some working men living near his palace, combined with his readiness to bribe their present leaders, saved him from the fate which befell others less cautious or less benevolent. He lived on, respected and successful, for another twenty-six years (recovering from the plague in 1656) and died, a very old man, in 1674. He left behind a vast fortune, most of which he bequeathed to charity, over 1500 paintings, which were quickly dispersed, and the proverb 'Do you take me for a Roomer?' with which to counter persistent borrowers.

Like many a Fleming devoted to the pleasures of life Roomer had a taste for the grotesque, the dark and the cruel which the painters of Naples were well able to satisfy. Over the years he collected a grim series of works by Ribera: *The Drunken Silenus*—a gross, dirty, fat-paunched, androgynous travesty of the god of wine lying obscenely across the picture attended by his goat-like fauns and a braying donkey, the very embodiment of harsh stupidity (Plate 32a);<sup>2</sup> there was too *The Flaying of Marsyas*, who lies with his torn, naked limbs outstretched under Apollo's knee like some parody of the crucified body of St Peter while the satyrs gaze in anguish at his torments<sup>3</sup>; and Sandrart recalled seeing a *Cato* 'who lies in his own welling blood after committing suicide and tears his intestines into pieces with his hands'.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, Roomer was especially fond of the Caravaggists: besides his seven Riberas, he owned three paintings each by Caracciolo, the young Massimo Stanzione and Carlo

<sup>1</sup> Except where specifically mentioned, all the information given here about Gaspar Roomer comes from the two excellent articles by Ceci and de Vaes (1925). These include quotations from and references to all the available first-hand sources—Sandrart, Capaccio, Celano, de Dominicis, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Although this painting now at Capodimonte is dated 1626 it is not referred to in Capaccio's list of the pictures in Roomer's house in 1634; but Palomino (III, p. 311) describes it and says that it was painted for him. See Trapier, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> The picture of this subject now in the Museo di S. Martino, on which this description is based, cannot be the actual one owned by Roomer as it is dated 1637 and Capaccio refers to a painting of the subject as being in his house in 1634—Trapier, p. 133, and Ville sur-Yllon, p. 147.

<sup>4</sup> Trapier, p. 230. There is also a print by Sebastiano Marcotti of St Januarius by Ribera, dated 1665 and dedicated to Roomer '... affetti:mo della pittura e divoto del Santo ...'

Saraceni; and he also acquired pictures by the Frenchmen Valentin and Simon Vouet and the Dutch David de Haen. War, too, appealed to him when it could be looked at safely as a picturesque muddle and required no active participation—his narrow escape from Masaniello surely confirmed the advantages of non-commitment—and he was particularly fond of the young Aniello Falcone who painted for him a number of lively ‘battle scenes without a hero’.<sup>1</sup>

But, above all, Roomer liked the small landscapes and storms at sea, the animals and still lives with fruit and game piling up on the table, that were the special subjects of his native Flemish painters, many of whom settled for a time in Rome. He was particularly proud of these—‘as all the pictures are very fine’, he wrote, ‘and as most of them are by foreign artists, unfamiliar to Neapolitan painters, I want foreign painters to be summoned to draw up the inventory; especially the painter Jan Vandeneynede of Brussels and others whom he chooses’—and he owned several hundreds by Paul Brill, Peter de Witte, Velvet Breughel, Leonard Brumer, Jacques Duyvelant, Cornelius Poelenburgh, Corneille Schut, Gioffredo Wals, Gerard van der Bos and many others. Images of plenty and wild fertility, the landscapes and produce of his distant birthplace mingled with the cruelty and lusts of his adopted home. What was missing was just what was most characteristic of Roman painting at the time: the clarity and serenity which classical discipline had imposed on Venetian colour. It is perhaps characteristic of Roomer’s lack of intellectual interests that almost the only old masters in his collection were eight animal pieces by Bassano.

Such was Roomer’s gallery in his early days in Naples—thereafter, although he went on buying hundreds of pictures, we have much less information about their nature, and have to rely on a variety of indirect sources. We know that all this time he was keenly trading in pictures as well as in other goods—sending Neapolitan paintings to the Low Countries (notably those of Ribera’s pupil, Bartolommeo Passante) and, presumably, receiving in exchange works by his fellow-countrymen, though his two Van Dycks—a *Susanna and the Elders* and a *St Sebastian*—were probably acquired locally. In about 1640 one of the most important of all his pictures reached his palace—Rubens’s large *Feast of Herod*, a work of the artist’s full maturity painted probably some half a dozen years earlier (Plate 35b).<sup>2</sup> It caused a great impact in Naples, for it was quite unlike anything that had hitherto been seen in Roomer’s gallery. The feast takes place in a crowded, stifling room full of luxury and extravagance while richly dressed guests, a boy with a monkey and negro servants all look on. In the foreground a tall, blowsy girl holds the severed head of John the Baptist on a silver plate, and the daughter of Herodias, with a strange, flirtatious expression, makes ready to stab the offending tongue with a fork—a touch of cruelty that must have appealed to Roomer. Only Herod, seated at the head of the table, with his chin cupped in his hand, looks anxiously aware that a terrible injustice has been done.

<sup>1</sup> For Falcone’s relations with Roomer, see Saxl, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> For the history of this picture, now in the National Gallery of Scotland, see L. Burchard, pp. 383–387.

The pageantry and colour of Rubens's great picture may either have stimulated or coincided with a certain taste on Roomer's part for paintings less 'realistic' in subject-matter or treatment than those that had hitherto formed the bulk of his collection. It seems probable that through his Flemish agents in Rome and elsewhere he commissioned and bought pictures from Guercino, Giacinto Brandi (who painted an altarpiece for his private chapel dedicated to S. Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi) and Sacchi; he was, however, just as keen to obtain works by the animal specialist Castiglione and by *bamboccianti* and battle painters such as Pieter van Laer, Jan Miel and Borgognone.<sup>1</sup> And during the last ten years of his life he made strenuous efforts to acquire architectural scenes by Viviano Codazzi.

When Mattia Preti returned to Naples in 1656 Roomer commissioned a picture from him and left the subject to the artist, who chose the *Marriage Feast at Cana*: it was a rich, colourful scene set in an open loggia which deliberately looked back to Veronese. The picture attracted attention in Naples, but Roomer himself seems to have acquired further works by Preti only to export them.

Roomer's relations with Luca Giordano, who was some forty years younger than himself, began in the middle 1650s on an uneasy note. The painter resented 'being treated as a beginner', and apparently forged a number of old masters both to prove his virtuosity and to tease the ageing collector. He was forgiven and thereafter Roomer became his staunch supporter in the many envious feuds which the prodigiously successful artist inspired. Unfortunately it is impossible to tell what pictures Giordano painted for him. Were they in the new, light, rich, Venetian manner that the artist was already practising long before Roomer's death in 1674, or did they carry on for him the tradition of violence which he had so fostered in the early years of his collecting?

In fact our scanty knowledge of Roomer's patronage during the last forty years of his life makes it very difficult for us to understand his place in Neapolitan culture. It was unquestionably of great importance. He was held to be the richest man in Naples and his collection of pictures was certainly the largest in the city. Above all it was permanent—for the Spanish viceroys, the only rivals to Roomer in the claims they made on painters, were always changing. 'All picture lovers of the day followed his advice', wrote de Dominicci more than fifty years after Roomer's death.<sup>2</sup> But what was his advice? From the same source—our only one—we hear of him praising Mattia Preti on their first meeting for his '*maniera grande* which was firmly based on drawing, on nature and on chiaroscuro'. Can it be that he was disappointed in the 'Venetian' picture

<sup>1</sup> When Roomer died he left seventy of his pictures to Ferdinand van den Einden, the son of his business associate Jan. Van den Einden, who himself had a fine collection, in turn left a third of his pictures to each of his three daughters. One of these married Don Giuliano Colonna, and in 1688 the inventory of their collection was drawn up by Luca Giordano (Ferdinando Colonna, pp. 29-32). There are good—but not conclusive—grounds for believing that many of these paintings must have come from Van den Einden—and originally from Roomer. Indeed we know that the two pictures by Codazzi with figures by Micco Spadaro of *The Pool of Bethesda* and *The Woman taken in Adultery* did pass through the three collections in just this way (de Dominicci, III, pp. 421-2). Unfortunately evidence as regards other pictures in the Colonna collection is lacking, and I cannot accept Vaes's certainty about their provenance.

<sup>2</sup> De Dominicci, IV, p. 47.

which Preti then painted for him and that because of this he thereafter commissioned nothing for himself from the artist? We know too little to say, but it is interesting that he chided Luca Giordano 'for his new manner which was contrary to those of good artists'.<sup>1</sup> Did this new manner lie in the loose brushstrokes and lighter tonality adopted by the painter which offended other connoisseurs also? Roomer's rebuke was certainly not in the name of classicism—for we hear that he later backed Giordano against Francesco di Maria 'who was a great draughtsman but a weak colourist'. In fact, it was naturalism that seems to have been Roomer's greatest love from his earliest days when his gallery contained little else until the end of his life when he was so keen to acquire works by Codazzi,<sup>2</sup> when Jean-Baptiste de Wael dedicated to him a set of prints showing scenes from peasant life,<sup>3</sup> and when he was in touch with Ruoppolo, whose still lives he sent to Flanders.

His gallery crystallised that close relationship which had for so long existed between the cultures of the South and North of Europe. The Flemish still lives must have excited many of the Neapolitan painters in this genre who would otherwise have had little chance to see such work—and they repaid their debt with pictures of superb quality; and Rubens's *Feast of Herod* was certainly a source of inspiration to many artists breaking away from the Caravaggism of the early years of the century, whatever Roomer himself may have felt about the trend. 'The magic of its brilliant colouring laid on with such mastery' profoundly affected Bernardo Cavallino, we learn from De Dominicis, and many other painters also studied this seminal picture.<sup>4</sup>

Closely associated with Roomer as patron were his business partners Jan and Ferdinand van den Einden. Jan van den Einden was also Flemish though, unlike Roomer, his origins seem to have been lowly.<sup>5</sup> After some early struggles his partnership with Roomer which began in the 1630s led to his enrichment, and his fortune was inherited by his son Ferdinand, who was thus able to buy himself the title of Marquis and to acquire a vast collection of pictures. His taste seems to have been largely modelled on that of Gaspar Roomer, seventy of whose pictures he inherited. But, being of a younger generation, it was the later painters, inspired by the Venetians, whom he specially patronised. Thus he was so struck by Mattia Preti's *Marriage at Cana* and the general approval it met with that he ordered several very large pictures by that artist. But the subjects of three of these, *The Crucifixion of St Peter*, *The Beheading of St Paul* and *The Martyrdom of St Bartholomew*, show that Van den Einden must have shared Roomer's taste for brutal realism.<sup>6</sup> He was also a keen admirer of Luca Giordano,<sup>7</sup> but unfortunately we do not know which pictures by that artist he possessed.

<sup>1</sup> De Dominicis, IV, p. 131: 'gli fece una lunga esortazione a lasciar la nuova maniera, la quale dicea esser contra tutte quelle usate da' valantuomini . . .'

<sup>2</sup> Ruffo, p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> Bartsch, V, pp. 5-10. There is a set in the British Museum.

<sup>4</sup> For the influence of this picture see Bologna, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Vaes, 1925, p. 185.

<sup>6</sup> De Dominicis, IV, pp. 48-9.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 140.

There was another exceptionally far-ranging patron living in South Italy at this time. Don Antonio Ruffo was born in Messina in 1610 of one of the great aristocratic families.<sup>1</sup> This did not prevent him engaging in trade, and his income was still further increased by the vast revenues he drew from taxes on grain, silk and other vital goods. He played a limited part in what little political activity was permitted the nobility under Spanish rule, and in 1661 he was outlawed for a short time for supporting the privileges of his native city against the authority of the Viceroy. But most of his life was devoted to patronage of the arts and his palace in Messina became the centre of cultural life there until his death in 1678. At that time it contained more than 350 pictures painted by artists all over Italy and even elsewhere.

Ruffo began collecting in about 1646 shortly after moving into the palace in the Strada Emmanuela which his mother, the Duchess of Bagnara, had built for him. He continued almost without interruption for the next thirty years. A good deal of evidence makes it clear beyond doubt that he took a great personal interest in the works that he ordered, and yet it is an astonishing fact that his acquaintance with any paintings other than his own must have been negligible. He seems never to have travelled beyond Calabria, and he heard about the leading painters in Italy and elsewhere entirely through agents. Everyone was pressed into acting for him in this capacity: his family, his friends, the artists he employed and picture dealers. From them he was informed who were the more talented artists at work—for he was primarily interested in his contemporaries—and what was the state of the market. He then wrote to the artists directly or through his agents to order the pictures he required, sometimes with instructions as to the subject, at others leaving the painter a free hand. He was guided by two considerations: size and expense. His pictures were arranged according to a symmetrical pattern, and he was often anxious to make up pairs—either from the same artist or two different ones, and this concern naturally involved the actual composition. Thus Guercino asked for a rough drawing of Rembrandt's *Aristotle contemplating the Bust of Homer* (now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York) which his own picture was required to match. In general, Ruffo seems to have decided in advance the price he wished to pay for each work, and this too affected the structure of the pictures painted for him. As Guercino, for instance, had a fixed rate of 125 ducats for each figure, when Ruffo offered him a hundred *scudi* for a picture, the artist wrote that he would be prepared to paint 'a little more than half a figure'. Later Ruffo raised the sum to 100 ducats, and Guercino answered that he would 'paint something to your satisfaction proportionate to the amount of money that you are offering me'.

When the first picture by an artist reached Ruffo in Messina he could decide whether he wanted more by the same man; and in the absence of his own letters and instructions, the number of works by each painter in his gallery helps to give us some clues as to his taste. Above all he was obviously trying to amass a representative collection

<sup>1</sup> For all this section see the admirable and fully documented account by Vincenzo Ruffo. For Ruffo's relations with Rembrandt see also Slive, pp. 59 ff.

of works by all the leading contemporaries—‘non si può dire infermità il desiderare quadri di Pittori famosi’, his agent wrote to him—and it was probably this motive that led him to make his most remarkable and magnificent purchases, the three pictures by Rembrandt—*Aristotle contemplating the Bust of Homer* (Plate 35a), *Alexander the Great* and *The Blind Homer*—bought over a period of a dozen years. Rembrandt was fairly well known but not widely appreciated in Italy (except for his etchings), and Ruffo’s Flemish agent in Rome Abram Breughel was probably not being insincere (as has been suggested) when he wrote in 1665 that ‘the pictures of Rembrandt are not very highly thought of here’. Indeed Ruffo himself found the free brush strokes of the great master’s last period unacceptable and sent back *The Blind Homer* ‘to be completed’. Despite this it is obvious that he greatly admired Rembrandt, and that he was comparatively unaffected by the classicist doctrines that gained such force in Rome during the second half of the seventeenth century. He deliberately asked Guercino to paint the picture which was to match Rembrandt’s *Aristotle* in his ‘prima maniera gagliarda’, and although this was for a particular purpose, at other times too he made special efforts to obtain examples of this artist’s early and more robust style. Guercino, indeed, seems to have been among his favourites for he owned seven of his pictures compared to only one each by Sacchi and Maratta. Salvator Rosa, Giacinto Brandi and Michelangelo Cerquozzi were others among those working in Rome who especially appealed to him, but naturally the Neapolitans and South Italians were those best represented in his gallery—seven pictures by Novelli, twelve each by Ribera and Andrea Vaccaro and nine by Stanzione, though most of these were inherited from his brother. Religious subjects have a clear majority over all others, but he also collected flower pictures (more than a dozen painted by his Flemish agent Abram Breughel alone), landscapes and other themes of all kinds. Of old masters Ruffo showed a special interest in Polidoro da Caravaggio; he also owned a collection of prints which included 189 by Rembrandt. The astonishing number of pictures he had assembled was gradually dispersed after his death, and only a few of them can now be traced. But even in its heyday Ruffo’s gallery must have been an isolated one, a stronghold of European culture in the backwater of the crumbling Spanish empire, whose reputation undoubtedly stimulated those artists who worked for him but which was of little significance in any wider context, though Ruffo tried hard to obtain public commissions in Messina for Guercino and Mattia Preti.

But Neapolitan painting spread far beyond the frontiers of the Spanish empire. Indeed, one of the characteristics of this phase in Italian patronage, when the absolute supremacy of Rome was being challenged in various provincial centres, is the international prestige acquired by Neapolitan artists. Even in Florence, a city as far removed as any in Italy from the spirit and traditions of Naples, there existed patrons whose enthusiastic appreciation of Neapolitan art was responsible for vitally important commissions. The principal outpost of this appreciation was to be found in a fine house, set in a beautiful garden with fountains and statues, in the Via Chiara near the church of S. Maria Novella. It was inhabited by three brothers, Andrea, Lorenzo and Ottavio

del Rosso, who were among the most notable collectors of their day.<sup>1</sup> They sprang from a family of rich merchants which throughout the previous century had been laboriously engaged in worming its way up to the centres of power and prestige. Money had opened all the doors: first, Florentine citizenship and admission to the recently founded chivalrous order of the Cavalieri di Santo Stefano; then a series of ingenious marriage alliances with the best families; and, finally, as a logical development, an increasing number of dignities and official posts. Andrea, the eldest of the brothers, who was born in 1640, was at the age of 36 awarded the lucrative flour monopoly which he shared with the slightly younger Lorenzo.<sup>2</sup> Both men later became Senators, and Andrea eventually died in Rome, where he frequently lent pictures to the exhibitions at S. Salvatore in Lauro, as director-general of the papal postal services. Ottavio entered the Church and became Bishop of Volterra, where he lived in 'concetto di straordinaria bontà'.

In their earlier days the brothers clearly travelled a great deal, for among the pictures recorded in their collection are 'two modern ones on glass' from Mainz and two 'by Albert Dürer bought by me in Cologne'. Inevitably, like Gaspar Roomer and so many other businessmen, their trading and patronage were closely connected: we hear of them sending Carlo Dolci's little *Flight into Egypt* to Lord Exeter in England<sup>3</sup> and another picture as far as Poland.

We can best appreciate the novelty of their patronage if we compare it with that of their immediate forebears. In 1642, two years before his death, their grandfather

<sup>1</sup> The main sources for the collection of the del Rosso brothers are the account given of it in 1677 by Cinelli and the complete inventory drawn up twelve years later by Andrea del Rosso himself published in Gualandi, II, pp. 115-28. Both these documents provide a certain amount of incidental biographical information. To supplement these I have drawn heavily on a number of published and manuscript sources in Florentine archives and libraries. I am most grateful to Dottoressa Paola Zambelli of the Archivio di Stato for her help.

General information about the family and genealogies exist in the manuscript collections of Passerini in the Biblioteca Nazionale—in particular, Passerini 19(25): *Informazione sopra la Nobiltà della Famiglia del Rosso di Firenze mandata a i SS:ri Falconieri di Roma, da me Gio:Batta Dei, quest'anno 1747*. There are also a number of references drawn from a variety of sources in the Poligrafo Gargano in the same library.

Very brief accounts of the careers of Andrea and Ottavio are given by Giuseppe Manini and Salvino Salvini.

The wills of Lorenzo and Ottavio are in the Archivio di Stato—*Protocolli del notaio Nicola Taddei*, 24,253, *Testamenti* and *Protocolli del notaio Niccolò Salvetti*, *Testamenti*, 23,516—but they are of no great interest and do not refer to pictures except for a bequest by Lorenzo to 'Priore Coriolano Montemagni Segretario di Stato di S.A.R. di un Quadro di mano del Caravaggio di Larghezza braccia due con l'ornamento, et Altezza braccia uno, e due terzi incirca dipintovi fra l'altro S. Gio. Decollato.'

Andrea's artistic activities in Rome are referred to in Giuseppe Ghezzi's notes (see p. 125, note 1) and in two letters from Sebastiano Resta to Francesco Gabburri published by Bottari, II, pp. 100 and 104.

Ottavio died in 1714, Andrea in 1715 and Lorenzo in 1719. The heirs were the two sons, Antonio and Giovanni Battista, of a fourth brother Nicola who died in 1710.

<sup>2</sup> A copy of the decree conferring the *Appalto Generale della rendita della Farine della Città, e Dominio di Firenze* for nine years as from 1 June 1676 is preserved in the Archivio di Stato—*Miscellanea Medicea* 533, *Uffizio delle Farine*, and some information about its functioning can be found elsewhere in the same collection of documents.

<sup>3</sup> Baldinucci, VI, 1728, p. 500. This picture, which is still at Burghley, was exhibited in London in 1960—*Italian Art and Britain*, p. 24.

Andrea had had built in the Theatine church of S. Gaetano a sumptuous family chapel dedicated to his name-saint. This was decorated with frescoes by Ottavio Vannini, who himself died a year later leaving the altar picture to be completed by a pupil.<sup>1</sup> Vannini was, indeed, the family painter: the four large scenes from the Old Testament—*The Sacrifice of Isaac*, *The Fall of Manna*, *Moses striking the Rock* and *Susanna and the Elders*—which he produced for the house were considered his finest works,<sup>2</sup> and the del Rosso also owned a large number of other pictures by him, mainly of saints. He was a methodical, correct, academic artist in the true tradition of Florentine ‘disegno’—characteristic in every way of the provincial backwater into which one section of that city’s painting had sunk during the first half of the seventeenth century.

It was into this peaceful, somewhat pietistic household—Carlo Dolci also painted for the del Rosso family<sup>3</sup>—that the new generation introduced over a hundred Neapolitan pictures (some acquired from the Roomer collection after its dispersal in 1674), of which more than sixty were by Luca Giordano. Aesthetic taste alone is unlikely to have caused such a spectacular departure from traditional patterns; business connections were probably of greater importance. Indeed, various links with Naples turn up from time to time in the family history. In 1613, for instance, we find the Grand Duke of Tuscany writing to the Spanish Viceroy about some subjects of his, ‘the sons and heirs of Antonio del Rosso, Florentines, but living and trading in Naples’,<sup>4</sup> and it is perfectly possible that Andrea and Lorenzo themselves may have started their careers in that city. But however the connection began, it led to striking results.

Luca Giordano was their principal artistic agent in Naples and their relationship with him was particularly close. Many of their pictures were acquired through him, and when he came to Florence in 1679 he stayed at their house.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, as they already owned a number of his works before then, it may well have been they who arranged for him to be given the commission to paint the Corsini chapel in the Carmine, which in turn led to his great frescoes in the Palazzo Riccardi. Certainly they owned the original *bozzetto* for one of the pendentives in the chapel.

Luca Giordano’s paintings for the brothers were of various kinds and included a large number of erotic works—many versions of the theme of *Venus and Amor*, one

<sup>1</sup> Richa, III, p. 215.

<sup>2</sup> Cinelli, p. 163, and Baldinucci, VI, 1728, p. 145. Two of the pictures—*The Fall of Manna* and *Moses striking the Rock*—are published by R. Longhi, 1956, in an article on the del Rosso collection.

<sup>3</sup> They owned three pictures by Carlo Dolci—including the *Flight into Egypt* sold to Lord Exeter—and four by Giovanni Bilivert. All these were of religious subjects. They also owned altarpieces by Pietro da Cortona and Ciro Ferri. Pietro da Cortona’s *Madonna and Four Saints*—a smaller version of the early picture in S. Agostino, Cortona—was obtained for them in Naples by Luca Giordano—Gualandi, II, p. 122, and *Mostra di Pietro da Cortona*, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence—Poligrafo Gargano.

<sup>5</sup> Baldinucci, VI, 1728, p. 506. Senator Francesco Panciatichi, who from 1682 held the important post of Primo Segretario, was the father-in-law of Nicola del Rosso, the fourth brother. In the Archivio Mediceo (Filza 4123) is a letter to him from Naples, dated 2 April 1686: ‘Molto obbligantemente resto da V.S.Ill.ma favorito nel particolare della lettera del Sig.r V.Re diretta al Pittore Giordani, mentre oltre la briga presasi di fargliela sicuramente recapitare, s’è degnata anche d’assumersi il pensiero d’inviamene la risposta, che già da me è stata presentata à S.E.’

of which showed in the distance an 'ignudo in atto assai lussurioso che si strugge per lui', and sets of fables—*Deianira and Nessus*, *Galatea and Tritons*, *The Rape of Proserpina*. But they also owned religious paintings by him with scenes from the Old and New Testaments, as well as more purely devotional pictures; and they showed a particular fondness for Giordano's *modelli* for altarpieces and other works.

This new appreciation of the sketchy, the unfinished, lively brush stroke, which was to be so important in eighteenth-century art and was to have another great Florentine devotee in the Grand Prince Ferdinand de' Medici, may have led to their collecting (through the intervention of Luca Giordano) the work of another artist of the Neapolitan school who has acquired enormous popularity in our own day. This was the Frenchman François Nomé, generally known as 'Monsù Desiderio', and described in their inventory as 'Lorenese'. They owned eleven of his mannered, visionary ruin pictures 'fatta di colpi', including a *Babylon*, an 'antichità di palazzi', a 'gran Tempio antico', a *Temple of Solomon* and an imaginary view of Venice. And the same taste for the Mannerist is shown in their possession of what was apparently the original plate for Callot's print of *La Fiera dell'Impruneta*.

As an isolated phenomenon the del Rosso collection with its great emphasis on Naples and its total neglect of Rome is of outstanding interest.<sup>1</sup> Whatever its motives, their sudden conversion from the Florentine tradition of 'disegno' to the values of 'colore' was symptomatic of the most advanced international taste towards the end of the seventeenth century on the verge of the great Venetian revival. But it is difficult to assess how far the collection represented something more important—a direct and influential contribution to the cultural life of Florence. If it was through del Rosso that Luca Giordano was commissioned to decorate the Corsini chapel in the Carmine and the ceiling of the Palazzo Riccardi, we can certainly claim such an influence for the brothers. These works, though they had disappointingly little effect on Florentine painting, were of crucial importance to central Italy, and in their own right they rank among the masterpieces of the century. Yet there are aspects of the del Rosso brothers' taste which are curiously puzzling. There was, for instance, in Florence only one artist whose freshness and vitality could surely have satisfied the friends and patrons of Luca Giordano. Yet Livio Mehus they largely ignored. In 1677 they owned three pictures by him; twelve years later these had disappeared. Somewhere, at the back of the mind, there persists the disturbing belief that their special patronage of Luca Giordano may have been dictated more by financial interests than by aesthetic taste.

The importance that Neapolitan painting had acquired all over Italy towards the end of the seventeenth century is shown by the collections of other patrons who looked beyond their native cities. Thus in Genoa the Marchese Girolamo Durazzo, a member of one of the leading patrician families which over the centuries had built up an extensive collection of local art, turned not only to Bologna for many of his pictures (as was

<sup>1</sup> Besides those mentioned, they also owned pictures by Ribera, Preti and Paceco de Rosa—the latter are published by R. Longhi, 1956.

usual enough),<sup>1</sup> but also to Naples. Luca Giordano painted four canvases for the family—one scene from Tasso (*Sophronia and Olindo*), one from Roman history (*The Death of Seneca*), one from the Old Testament (*Queen Jezebel torn to pieces by Dogs*) and one from mythology (*Perseus and Andromeda*).<sup>2</sup> And, in about 1704, Francesco Solimena added two further vast histories from the Old Testament—*Judith with the Head of Holofernes* and *Deborah and Barach*.<sup>3</sup> Pictures by the same two artists hung together in one other important collection outside Naples, that of the Baglioni in Venice, a family of rich publishers who early in the eighteenth century bought their way into the nobility. They showed a great interest in Neapolitan art, for besides pictures by Mattia Preti they owned several by Luca Giordano and two by Solimena—*Jacob and Rebecca* and *Rebecca and Eliezer*<sup>4</sup>—whose influence on Pittoni and the young Tiepolo was considerable.

## - ii -

The patrons hitherto considered, though living outside Rome, where artists from all over Italy and indeed Europe had congregated, were able in their own collections to reflect some of the variety which had been the most attractive and influential feature of Roman patronage. But all of them, with the exception of Don Antonio Ruffo, lived in centres of great artistic traditions and achievement characterised by flourishing local schools of painting. In most cases it was these local artists who provided the backbone of their collections which were then reinforced with additions from elsewhere, usually Naples. The difficulties facing a collector living in a city with no such tradition or local school on which to fall back were more complex and led to more interesting results. For in these cities the patron had to commission works of art almost exclusively from outside his province, and this involved a freedom of choice that did not face collectors in Bologna, Genoa or Naples. Thus it came about that some of the most interesting collections of Italian art in the later seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries were to be found in cities quite undistinguished for their native painters. It was in places like Bergamo, Ferrara, Macerata and Lucca, far more even than in Rome, that the enterprising traveller of the time might have found hanging together pictures by the younger painters from all over Italy—those men such as Crespi, Solimena, Sebastiano Ricci and others who had declined to visit or to remain in Rome. Indeed, the most striking

<sup>1</sup> They owned large historical pictures by Giovan Giosetto dal Sole and Francesco Monti (Zanotti, I, p. 299, and II, p. 120) and they summoned Giacomo Antonio Boni to decorate the rooms of their palace with mythological frescoes—Zanotti, II, p. 231, and Soprani, II, pp. 376-80.

<sup>2</sup> De Dominicis, IV, p. 188.

<sup>3</sup> ib d., IV p. 428, and Bologna, pp. 89-90.

<sup>4</sup> De Dominicis, IV, pp. 87, 188 and 428, and Bologna, p. 164. Both Luca Giordano and Solimena had a number of admirers in Venice. Besides the Labia, who are discussed separately in Chapter 9, the Procuratore Canale, Flaminio Corner, the Giovanelli and the Widmann all owned pictures by one or other of them—de Dominicis, IV, p. 428, and the engravings of Pietro Monaco published in 1763, Nos. 42, 51 and 89. Early in the nineteenth century the French traveller Valéry (I, p. 342) said that the Palazzo Contarini contained ‘quatre des meilleurs tableaux de Luc Giordano, parmi lesquels l’Enée emportant son père Anchise.’ For Neapolitan artists in Rome see Mattia Loret.

aspect of these collections lies in their neglect of Roman painting. The classicising doctrines and institutions that paralysed or boycotted so many of those painters who actually went to Rome were not to be found in these out-of-the-way places, and a taste could thus grow up in them based on very different canons of appreciation. It is true that these collections were probably not many—though they obviously must have been far more than the few that are here recorded—but in at least one case they were highly influential. Moreover, the history of their development shows us the mechanism of an unusual type of patronage which is of great intrinsic interest and of some importance in the demolition of Roman values.

Work on the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Bergamo began in 1137, and continued fitfully over the next few centuries.<sup>1</sup> In 1355 Giovanni da Campione erected the delicate but richly ornamented Gothic portico supported on two stone lions which faces the Palazzo della Ragione, and a few years later he also built the rather more restrained entrance to the south. The Renaissance brought further additions to this essentially Romanesque structure. In 1425, after nearly three centuries, the campanile was completed, and towards the end of the century a sacristy in the new Bramantesque style made it still harder to appreciate the original plan. The successive modifications of the interior were far more drastic. Traces of Gothic frescoes still remain, but from the middle of the sixteenth century the whole decoration was changed. Altar paintings by local and Venetian artists began to appear, and rich and heavy stucco ornamentation crept over the interior of the dome which was planned by the Milanese architect Francesco Maria Ricchini in 1612. Two years later the Bergamasque painter Giampaolo Cavagna, helped by two other local artists, completed the decoration of the dome with frescoes of angels and prophets.

Thus by the middle of the seventeenth century the interior must already have presented a confusing spectacle with the spasmodic and incomplete decoration of several very different periods competing for attention. It was in 1653 that the Consiglio del Consorzio, the governors of the church, decided to embark on an extensive programme of decoration, whose main purpose was to provide pictures for the central crossing of the church. A committee was appointed 'to order oil paintings in the manner that should seem most suitable to their considered judgement'.<sup>2</sup>

The task was a vast one, and the problems that faced the committee were difficult. It was clear that there were no longer any Bergamasque artists of the calibre required and that the commission would have to be given to a foreigner. Bergamo had been ruled by Venice since 1430, but it lies only thirty miles from Milan. Its artistic culture reflected those of the two cities with which it was so closely associated and it was natural enough that the committee should once again look to them. Their relative failure led to a complicated series of negotiations in towns all over Italy, and though

<sup>1</sup> Pesenti.

<sup>2</sup> Unless specially indicated, all the documents here are taken from the very full article by Angelo Pinetti, 1916. The interpretation put on these documents is naturally my own, though it will be seen that I have followed Pinetti closely. I am most grateful to Signorina Dora Coggiola of the Biblioteca Civica, Bergamo, for her great help.

these led to no real masterpieces and few pictures of any great value they give the historian an enthralling impression of the difficulties that faced a persistent patron in a small town.

Their first choice fell on a Swiss artist, Cristoforo Storer, a pupil of the Milanese Ercole Proccaccini, who had already had close contacts with leading families in Bergamo. In February 1654 he was commissioned to paint one of the thirteen pictures to be embedded in the stucco of the vault and lunettes above the cornice of the southern transept. The subject given was *The Levites*, and though the picture was eventually produced, the artist's dilatoriness caused the first of the many long delays which the committee had to suffer, so that by April 1655 they were considering changing their original scheme and having the vault frescoed as a quicker alternative. Indeed a few months later they sent two of their members to the country house of a local aristocrat to look at some frescoes he had had painted there and to decide whether or not the artist concerned would prove suitable for the church. However, they soon returned to the original plan, and in 1656 they commissioned a Neapolitan painter, Pietro Magni, who was then working for the Marquis of Mantua, to produce one picture for the site as an experiment, with the possibility, should it prove satisfactory, of being given the whole job. Evidently it did not—for when in January 1657 a Cremonese painter, Ottavio Cocchi, offered on his own initiative to paint one of the pictures, his proposal was accepted and he was subsequently asked to paint four more. It was clear that the commission was an attractive one to comparatively minor artists.

Meanwhile in the same year the committee began looking around for a suitable painter for one of the three very large canvases to be placed above the main doors of the church. After a unanimous vote it was decided that the task should be given to Guercino and a messenger was sent to him in Bologna. The subject chosen was *The Story of Esther*, but a few months later this was changed to the *Marriage at Cana*. Guercino, however, was already overwhelmed with commissions and this one seems to have made no appeal to him.

The committee's one attempt to move outside the limited range of local talent and employ an artist of international fame had thus met with no success. They put as good a face on this as they could and 'to the full satisfaction not just of the Magnifico Consiglio del Consorzio but of the whole city' they commissioned a *Massacre of the Innocents*, to be placed in the right wall of the southern transept, from a Capuchin pupil of the Veronese Brusasorci, Padre Massimo, a man who had already painted a number of altar pictures in the Veneto. So pleased were they with the work—a vigorous and efficient rehash of Paolo Veronese—that, with the promise of lavish alms, they implored the Capuchins to give temporary leave to Padre Massimo and allow him to settle in Bergamo to paint further pictures. But this too came to nothing. Instead, other artists from Milan and its surroundings were commissioned to paint *The Killing of Sisera*, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, *Jacob's Ladder* and the *Murder of Cain*. By 1659 the first stage in the decoration was complete.

The committee now turned to the vault of the northern transept, where thirteen

Plate 33



a. SOLIMENA: Dido and Aeneas



b. The gallery of the Palazzo Buonaccorsi, Macerata

Plate 34

FOREIGN MASTERPIECES IN ITALIAN  
SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY COLLECTIONS (*see Plates 34 and 35*)



VELASQUEZ: Juan de Pareja



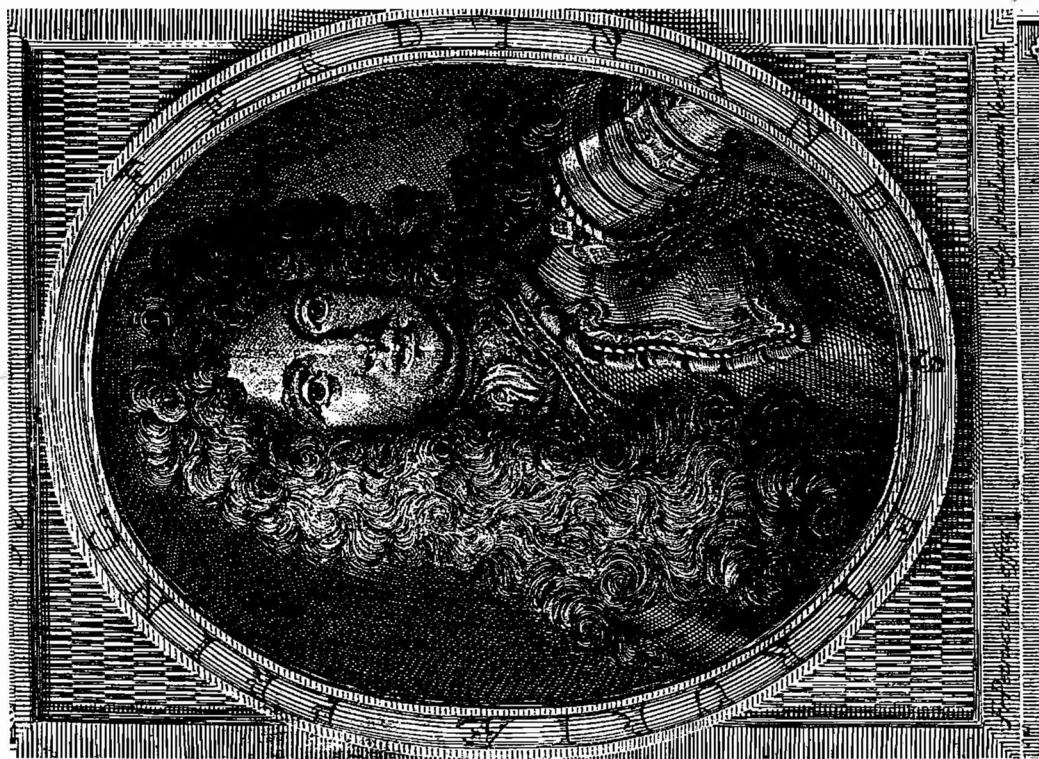
a. REMBRANDT: Aristotle contemplating the Bust of Homer



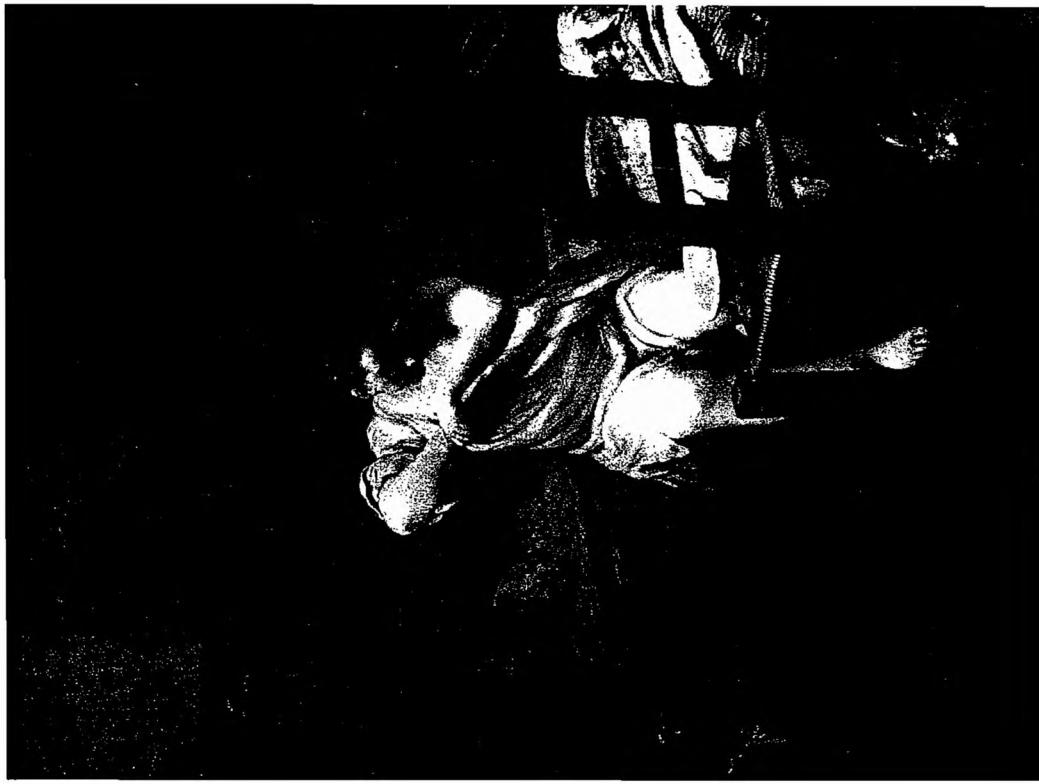
b. RUBENS: The Feast of Herod

Plate 36

GRAND PRINCE FERDINAND AND HIS PATRONAGE (see Plates 36-40)



a. FRANCESCO PETRUCCI: Grand Prince Ferdinand



b. G. M. CRESPI: Girl at her toilet

paintings were required to correspond to those in the south, as well as one on the inner wall and two huge ones to be placed above the main North and South doors, in view of Guercino's reluctance to comply with their request. Whereas in the first stage of the decoration they had looked primarily to Milan for artists they now turned instead to their other traditional source—Venice. In 1660 a contract was signed with Pietro Liberi, at that time the best known artist in the city and already a man with a European reputation. Liberi agreed to paint the entire sixteen pictures for 3800 ducats and was paid the first 500 as an advance guarantee. It must have seemed that Santa Maria Maggiore was at last able to attract a considerable painter. Seven months later, his first canvas—*The Flood*—arrived in Bergamo. But the committee did not like it. A cold letter was sent off to Liberi, complaining 'that it does not satisfy us and in no way corresponds to the promises that you made us, still less to what we expected. And so we require you to re-do it in a praiseworthy manner that satisfies us—meanwhile you must stop work on the other pictures which we commissioned and which you agreed to undertake, just as we will stop the payments in conformity with the contract.' It was a year before Liberi arrived in Bergamo, and after he had repainted the picture as demanded, it was placed above the South door, where it still is. He then returned to Venice to carry on with the commission. This time he was more cautious and instead of completing the second picture, *The Last Judgement*, he sent a sketch. This too was a total failure. The committee found it 'deficient in every respect', and thereafter the contract with Liberi was cancelled.

It is impossible, unfortunately, to know the reasons why Liberi's canvases met with such a hostile reception. It is perfectly true that he was a bad painter, but then so were many of the other artists employed in S. Maria Maggiore who were none the less greeted 'with complete satisfaction'. It is more likely that there was some precise cause. His free style must have seemed slipshod in the provinces—but stylistic problems of this kind only very rarely troubled seventeenth-century clerical patrons, and in any case the tone of their letter suggests some much greater offence. In fact it seems most probable that Pietro Liberi, who was notorious for the extreme indecency of his highly erotic nudes, had upset Bergamasque susceptibilities, unused as they were to the more sophisticated tastes of Venice. No two subjects could have provided him with more welcome opportunities than *The Flood* and *The Last Judgement*, and (from what we see of the former even after the alterations) we can be sure that Liberi took full advantage of them.

With the failure of their attempts in Venice the committee were now compelled to turn elsewhere. Ciro Ferri, the artist whom they chose to replace Pietro Liberi, was the most faithful follower of Pietro da Cortona and was at this time in Florence completing his master's frescoes in the Palazzo Pitti.<sup>1</sup> He was asked to come at once to Bergamo 'to see where the pictures were to be painted, be given the measurements and the subjects, and arrange the price'. He replied that he was unable to leave Florence for the moment, but asked for all the necessary details to be sent to him so that he could at

<sup>1</sup> See a number of letters published by Bottari, II, pp. 47-56, and III, pp. 352-4.

once begin work on the sketches which he would then submit for the committee's approval. This was agreed and after some months of delay, during which the relations between artist and patrons rather cooled, Ciro Ferri finally arrived in Bergamo in September 1665, and in December signed a contract to paint the sixteen pictures—partly in oil and partly in fresco. Everything at last seemed satisfactory. In private letters Ferri wrote of his pleasure, though he admitted that the sites for the frescoes were rather too small. On the other hand the large picture over the door was to represent the *Crossing of the Red Sea* and this 'is the grandest composition that I have ever done. On one side I am painting the Hebrews who have already crossed and Moses raising his rod above the sea.' The whole task, wrote Ferri, would take some two and a half years. In fact, he worked much quicker than he had expected. By May 1666 he had completed four of the frescoes; and by November a further six—all of subjects taken from the Old Testament. But now the first signs of trouble became apparent: 'I am working day and night to get through quickly; for I'm so bored that I can't stay any longer in this place.' By June 1667, however, eighteen months after his arrival, the business was nearly over. The thirteen frescoed compartments were all complete—little more than mannered and insipid variations on Pietro's style—so was one of the large oil paintings, and he was waiting to finish the other so that they could both be shown to the public together. In September the storm broke. Once again the committee showed how rigorous was their taste. They had doubts about the quality of the picture to be placed above the side door adjoining the Colleoni chapel and they decided to consult expert opinion as to its merits. Ciro Ferri, in a fit of rage at this insult, left Bergamo without completing his contract.

Three pictures remained to be painted—two large ones for the North and West doors and one, slightly smaller, for the inner wall of the North transept. The committee were once again in a dilemma as to whom to choose for them. Various artists proposed themselves, and eventually the young Venetian, Antonio Zanchi, was accepted and required to paint *Moses striking the Rock*.<sup>1</sup> By now the committee were in a much more wary frame of mind than they had been when engaging Ciro Ferri. Zanchi was to get no payment for submitting his drawings; even if they were approved and if the picture itself—which was to be painted in Bergamo—then turned out to be unsatisfactory it would be returned to him without fee. If it was accepted, experts would decide on the price. These terms were exceptionally hard and quite unlike those laid down in a normal contract. Zanchi, however, was still young and only at the outset of his extremely successful career. He agreed to everything, but on a visit to Bergamo to inspect the site he asked, and was given, permission to paint the picture in Venice. There the canvas was sent to him, followed by letters complaining of the delay and asking him to hurry. In fact, it was completed within four months, and it took the cautious committee almost as long again to make up their minds about it. Eventually it was accepted with obvious enthusiasm, for Zanchi was paid the considerable fee of 825 ducats, which he well deserved in view of the outstanding merits of this dramatic and richly

<sup>1</sup> Bottari, III, pp. 355-6.

coloured picture in which the blues, reds and greens of the women's costumes and the muscular backs of the men romantically emerge from a tumultuous background.

For the picture of the *Sacrifice of Noah* to replace Ciro Ferri's unsuccessful effort above the door of the Colleoni chapel the committee decided in 1677, after a delay of some years, to organise a competition. Three artists took part and submitted sketches : Federico Cervelli of Milan, Pietro Negri of Venice, who had followed Zanchi in painting for the Scuola di San Rocco a picture to commemorate the cessation of the plague of 1630, and the Turinese Cavaliere Perugino, a protégé of the King of Savoy. This was won by Cervelli, who, after a visit to Bergamo to make certain alterations, was paid 370 ducats.

The third of the large oil paintings—*The Crossing of the Red Sea*,<sup>1</sup> the subject that had so fascinated Ciro Ferri at the outset of his Bergamasque career—was entrusted in 1682 to the most distinguished painter that the committee were able to employ on their ambitious venture—Luca Giordano. The artist was then at the height of his career in Naples, and the picture which he sent them, with its warm glow of light bathing the faithful who have just emerged from the dark-green tempestuous sea, justified their great hopes. He was given a present of 100 *scudi* in addition to the 700 he had already been promised, and was pressed, unsuccessfully, to undertake all the remaining decoration of the church.

Fourteen more paintings were now required for the central nave and the usual difficult negotiations were soon under way. In 1681 a painter from Como, Cristoforo Tencala, was approached, but nothing was arranged. A year later a local artist Carlo Ceresa submitted a *modello*, which was considered to be 'very beautiful and precious'—flattering words designed to conceal the fact that the committee had now set their target much higher. Unfortunately their funds were unable to stand the strain. Carlo Cignani of Bologna, at this time probably the most famous painter in Italy, asked for exorbitant sums as well as all his expenses. He was obviously anxious to be given the commission, for he arrived in Bergamo to press his claims. The committee were sorely tempted, wavered, and suggested a compromise. But Cignani stuck to his position, and the plan fell through. Luca Giordano, whose *Crossing of the Red Sea* had been such a success, presented difficulties of much the same kind. He had first asked for 6000 ducats to paint the ten frescoes and four oils, but under pressure agreed to reduce this to 5000, provided that he himself, an assistant and a servant were given free board and lodging for as long as they should be required to stay in Bergamo.<sup>2</sup> The committee could just manage these conditions and a contract was signed—only to be ignored by the artist. One of the attractions of asking Giordano in the first place was his legendary speed. Now as year followed year, and letter after letter was met with conciliatory but evasive replies, Giordano's success with all the courts of Italy and Europe was seen to be a real drawback. Moreover, as time went by, his terms became stiffer and stiffer. Perhaps Cignani would

<sup>1</sup> An anonymous article in *Bergomum*, 1947, pp. 60-1, has shown that the subject represented was in fact the Hymn of Liberation after the Crossing.

<sup>2</sup> Tassi, I, p. 265.

prove more satisfactory after all. And so in 1692, when Giordano finally went to Spain, ten years after their original approach, the committee turned to Cignani once again. Much had happened in the meantime. He was now painting the cupola of Forlì Cathedral, a work which he intended should rival Correggio's at Parma. His pre-occupation with vast expanses made him reluctant to engage on a reduced space, the limitations of which had already disconcerted Ciro Ferri a quarter of a century earlier. The smallness of the area available and the height of the bays would, he wrote in August 1692, make it impossible for him to paint the figures on such a scale that they would appear natural when seen from below in view of the crowded scenes he had been required to depict. 'Above all, I find myself unable to undertake the work because the pictures are to hang above a perpendicular wall and this means that the foreshortening would have to be so excessive—especially in view of the not very wide expanse of the church—that it would be impossible to correct the distorted effect.'

So the problem remained unsolved. In Rome meanwhile the Swiss painter Ludovico David heard 'from a colleague and friend of mine' about the fourteen pictures that were needed.<sup>1</sup> Anxious to prove himself in 'such a notable site', he wrote giving details of his career and offered to paint all the pictures within two and a half years at a price of 3500 *scudi*—or alternatively to take a share of the scheme at a price to be agreed with other artists. The committee, whose experiences over the last half-century had understandably made them cautious, proposed instead that painters all over Italy should paint three pictures each, entirely at their own expense, and that if these proved unsatisfactory no payment at all would be made. David was indignant. Hitherto he had always been paid at least a quarter of the agreed price in advance and the remainder immediately on completion of the work. 'I could not without shaming myself allow it to be remembered by posterity that I had degraded my noble profession in this way.' He proposed instead a highly elaborate scheme: three of the subjects required should be chosen and a price of 500 *scudi* offered for each. Then any two other painters and David himself—after being paid a quarter in advance—should begin work and agree to complete the picture within a year. At the end of this time they should submit their canvases to a public exhibition in Rome so that each could see his rival's work and the public could make criticisms. The canvases should then be sent to painters' guilds in Florence, Bologna and Venice 'which are thought to be the best in Italy after Rome, which in this case must be excluded because of the risk of favouritism'. The artist who was considered the best should then be given the remainder of the commission.

All this was much too complicated for the committee, which applied instead to a Bolognese pupil of Cignani, Marcantonio Franceschini. His terms were, however, even more expensive than his master's or Luca Giordano's had been, and though on hearing of a potential rival he hurriedly brought them down, the committee had already turned elsewhere.

To Naples, in fact—where a pupil of Luca Giordano, Niccolò Melanconici agreed to paint an *Abraham* at his own expense as an experiment. The picture arrived quickly

<sup>1</sup> Bottari, III, pp. 361-9.

and met with approval. It was arranged that Melanconici should be given the entire commission for a fee of 4000 ducats, which was to include all his expenses for travel and for board and lodging. The oils were painted in Naples, and then in June 1693 the artist himself arrived in Bergamo to undertake the frescoes. The results were controversial, but criticism, as the committee pointed out, 'is unavoidable'. In any case a willing artist working for a reasonable fee was too rare to be turned down, and Melanconici was given a certain number of other pictures to paint in the church and allowed to append a gigantic signature, easily visible to the naked eye, beneath the colourful, if slightly academic, figure of *David with the Head of Goliath*. And so by 1695, some forty years after the original proposals, the decoration was at last complete.<sup>1</sup>

The long-drawn-out and complicated manœuvres of the Governors of S. Maria Maggiore in Bergamo to commission artists from all the schools of Italy for the decoration of their church form by far the most ambitious (and the best documented) of such ventures in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. No private patron had either the resources or the available time to compete with this body. Yet in other small towns there were men who were helping, on however modest a scale, to break the cultural isolation of the Italian provinces. One such was Cardinal Tommaso Ruffo. He was born in Naples in 1663 of the same great southern family which had given birth to Don Antonio in Messina.<sup>2</sup> He entered the Church and in 1692 was made Vice-Legate in Ravenna by Pope Innocent XII. He then served as Inquisitor in Malta and Nunzio in Tuscany before becoming *maestro de camera* to the Pope. He was made Cardinal in 1706, after which he returned to Ravenna as Legate for a short time before going to Ferrara, with which his connection was particularly close. He remained there from 1710 as Legate and from 1717 as Archbishop until 1738, except for six years in Bologna from 1721 to 1727. As an old man he then lived in Rome in a palace opposite the Trevi Fountain which he bought from the Cibo family. He died there, aged 90, in 1753.

Even this brief outline of his career will show that Ruffo had plenty of opportunities for seeking works by most of the leading Italian artists with the notable exception of those in Venice. And the very varied contents of his gallery testify to the width of his tastes as well as to his enthusiasm. It was in Ferrara that he brought the collection together, though we know that he would commission paintings in most of the towns in which he resided.

The gallery was kept in the new Archbishop's Palace which was built for him in 1710 by the Roman architect Tommaso Mattei. In the centre of this vast palace adjoining the Cathedral a white stone stairway leads up to the *piano nobile* in two great flights of steps which bend back on each other. At the halfway mark on the balustrade stands a statue of *Vigilance* commissioned by Ruffo from the sculptor Andrea Ferrerio,

<sup>1</sup> Another church in Bergamo which, early in the eighteenth century, employed leading painters in several Italian towns was S. Paolo d'Argan. Among those who worked for it were G. M. Crespi in Bologna and Lazzarini, Ricci, Balestra and others in Venice as well as some local artists in Bergamo itself—Angelo Pinetti, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> For the outlines of his career see Moroni, Vol. 69, pp. 215-16.

a pupil of the Bolognese Giuseppe Mazza.<sup>1</sup> The same artist designed the rich stucco decoration of the staircase wall in which were placed medallions of the six popes who had in some way benefited the City of Ferrara or her Legate, culminating in Innocent XII, Ruffo's own patron. On the top floor was another medallion in full relief of the reigning Pope, Clement XI. On the ceiling of the staircase another Bolognese artist Vittorio Bigari, known primarily for his later architectural fantasies, painted a fresco of the Catholic Religion, represented by the Papacy, presiding over the provinces of Ravenna, Bologna and Ferrara shown symbolically in heroic dress—the three cities where Ruffo had principally served. It was in this grandiose setting, carefully designed by the Cardinal in collaboration with his architect and sculptor, that Ruffo kept a collection of paintings which aroused the enthusiasm of his contemporaries and which to us in retrospect still seems remarkably varied and impressive.

Ruffo owned a number of works attributed to the great Italian masters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—Giorgione, Titian, Bassano, Correggio, Raphael, Parmigianino, Caravaggio, the Carracci, Guido Reni and Guercino as well as others by Rubens and Van Dyck less familiar in Italian collections.<sup>2</sup> John Breval on a visit to Ferrara commented on some of these—‘four of the most capital Castigliones I remember to have seen; an incomparable Lucretia by Hannibal Carache; and a very fine Original of the famous Neapolitan Chief of the Mutineers, Masanella [sic]’.<sup>3</sup> But the most remarkable of all Ruffo's seventeenth-century pictures must have been Velasquez's portrait of his servant Juan de Pareja, ‘cosa stupenda’, which in 1704 he sent to an exhibition in Rome (Plate 34).<sup>4</sup>

The bulk of his modern pictures came from Bologna. Crespi was represented by four works, two of which were commissioned during Ruffo's legateship in the city: *Abigail giving Presents to David* and *The Finding of Moses*.<sup>5</sup> Both these religious themes are treated in a spirit of subdued and tender romanticism, and it was perhaps this quality that Ruffo found so congenial in Crespi's more aristocratic counterpart in the depiction of such subjects—Donato Creti. He was so fond of this painter that he used to sit

<sup>1</sup> This account of the Archbishop's palace, which is still today exactly as described, is taken from the most tantalising document I came across during the course of my researches. It is a manuscript in the Biblioteca Ariosteana, Ferrara—Collezione Antonelli MS. 610—*Galleria di Pitture raccolte, ed esposte nel Palazzo Vescovale di Ferrara dall' em.mo e rev.mo Sig.r Card.l Tommaso Ruffo Vescovo di detta Città, e Legato a Latere di Bologna descritta da Girolamo Baffaldì*. After a long account of the palace comes the word *Galleria*, only to be followed by the following sentence: ‘Ma il Card. Ruffo, annoiato, e malcontento dell' Arcivescovado di Ferrara lo rassegnò al Sommo Pontefice, e se ne andò a Roma portando seco le Pitture della sua Galleria, onde levò a me il contento, e l'onore di poterla più descrivere.’

<sup>2</sup> The list of Ruffo's pictures was published with verse commentaries by J. Agnelli.

<sup>3</sup> Breval, 1738, I, p. 193.

<sup>4</sup> The picture ‘Il Ritratto da tre palmi rappresentante un servo che fu serv.re del S.r Diego Velasquez famoso pitt.re e cosa stupenda’ was among those lent to the exhibition in S. Salvatore in Lauro in 1704—see p. 125, note 1. It is the picture now in the Metropolitan Museum which was in the collection of Sir William Hamilton in Naples by 1798.

<sup>5</sup> Both of these, together with other pictures from Ruffo's collection, are now in the Museo di Palazzo Venezia in Rome. They are referred to by Zanotti, II, p. 56, and L. Crespi, p. 214. See also Santangelo, pp. 2 and 23.

watching him at work for hours and had him created *Cavaliere dello speron d'oro*.<sup>1</sup> He owned at least two paintings by him of scenes from the life of Solomon and a *Dance of Nymphs* described by the artist's biographer as a *capriccio pittoresco* with twenty-four figures. Ruffo commissioned religious paintings and histories by most of the other leading Bolognese artists such as Carlo Cignani, Marcantonio Franceschini (after 1720) and Giovan Giosèffo dal Sole and also two *bambocciate* by Giuseppe Gambarini.<sup>2</sup>

Despite a life spent almost entirely in the North, Ruffo remained closely attached to his Neapolitan background. Luca Giordano sent him four pictures, of which one, representing *Hebrew Women singing after crossing the Red Sea*, may well have been connected with his work for S. Maria Maggiore in Bergamo; Solimena painted for him a *Nativity* and a *Presentation*; and when he retired to Rome it was once again to his compatriots that he turned. The rich chapel which Nicola Salvi built for him in S. Lorenzo in Damaso was decorated by Sebastiano Conca and Corrado Giaquinto, the former of whom also painted other pictures for him.<sup>3</sup> Roman artists he found to be of little interest and his gallery in the Palazzo Cibo must have retained its exotic and delicate flavour until his death.

Another patron who during these years was ranging freely over Italy for his pictures was Raimondo Buonaccorsi, who lived in the little Marchigian town of Macerata. This provincial nobleman was born in 1669 of an old and important family with extensive ramifications throughout the peninsula and a particularly close relationship with the Church.<sup>4</sup> In 1699 he married Francesca Bussi, who by 1726 had brought eighteen children into the world, one of whom, Simone, was to become a Cardinal. He died in 1743. Of his personality and achievements we know next to nothing. The less than a handful of letters to and from him that can be traced suggest almost too characteristic an image of the early eighteenth-century gentleman as transmitted to us by subsequent writers—elaborately courteous, proud, and deeply attached to the established powers. But also ambitious with more than a touch of arrogance.<sup>5</sup> Until further evidence comes to light we must be content with this shadowy sketch: meanwhile we can see from the splendid decoration of his palace that he was also a patron of great enterprise and interest. The palace—the finest in this little hill town in the

<sup>1</sup> Zanotti, II, p. 115, and L. Crespi, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> Zanotti, I, p. 239.

<sup>3</sup> De Dominicis, IV, p. 538, and Moroni, XII, p. 71. He also commissioned his portrait from Andrea Pozzo—Pascoli, II, p. 265.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Count Orlando Buonaccorsi for making available to me what little material survives about his ancestor and to Mr Dwight Miller for letting me have copies of the photographs he had taken of the gallery and for suggesting many of the attributions. Some information about the family can be found in Silvio Ubaldi, and there are a few details about Raimondo himself in a small manuscript *Memoria* which was written by his wife in 1726 and still belongs to the family.

<sup>5</sup> The letters, which are of little interest, are in the Vatican Library—(i) From Raimondo Buonaccorsi to Tiberio Cenci, dated 23 February 1705—Vat. Lat. 9041, c. 39; (ii) from Alessandro Borgia, Arcivescovo e principe di Fermo, to Raimondo Buonaccorsi, dated 15 September 1737—Borg. Lat. 236, c. 87; (iii) as (ii)—dated 7 December 1742, Borg. Lat. 236, c. 125.

States of the Church—was being built for Raimondo during the first two decades of the eighteenth century on the site of an earlier one which had been acquired in 1701 by his father.<sup>1</sup> The architect was the Roman Giovanni Battista Contini, and although work continued for many years, by 1707 enough progress had been made for Raimondo Buonaccorsi to begin the decoration of the long gallery. This survives intact today (Plate 33b). The low barrel-vault is covered from end to end with a single fresco and this alone gives some unity to the very varied decorative scheme that faces the visitor. On each side of the gallery three windows open on to a courtyard and on to the front of the palace, and the light which streams in reveals the general richness—a profusion of coloured marbles with elaborate wood and stucco ornamentation. Overriding everything are the paintings. The whole surface is covered with huge square and rectangular canvases which fit into all the wall space available between and above the doors and windows. Each one is painted in a wholly different style: we find the blond, carefully drawn figures of a Bolognese next to the darkly dramatic and rich swirling movement of a Neapolitan or the confusion of a late Venetian. Yet it soon becomes clear that each represents an episode taken from a single story—the *Aeneid*. It is such iconographic unity combined with extreme stylistic diversity, rather than any intrinsic merit in the canvases, which makes this decoration so exceptional in the Italy of its day.

In 1707 Raimondo Buonaccorsi summoned two Bolognese artists, Carlo Antonio Rambaldi and Antonio Dardani, to paint the fresco of the *Apotheosis of Aeneas* on the vault of his gallery,<sup>2</sup> and soon afterwards he began to commission the pictures of single episodes from the epic to be fitted into the walls. Rome, capital of the papal states in which he lived, was the obvious place to which to turn, but for him, as for so many of the livelier provincial patrons, Roman painting seems to have had little appeal and he chose only one example for his gallery: a picture of *Venus in the Forge of Vulcan*, painted apparently by Luigi Garzi.<sup>3</sup> For the rest his attention was firmly concentrated on Naples, Bologna and Venice.

The masterpiece of the whole series, Francesco Solimena's *Dido welcoming Aeneas to the Royal Hunt*, was among the first to arrive (Plate 33a).<sup>4</sup> The tremendous implications of the theme—'Ille dies primus leti primusque malorum/Causa fuit'—were realised by the artist in a picture of the utmost romantic splendour. Dark clouds lower over the landscape and, on the instructions of Juno, the winds prepare to pound the earth with driving rain as the young Trojan hero, oblivious of Cupid's arrow aimed at his breast, hurries forward to accept the guiding hand of Dido, who looks back at him with eyes full of tender passion. The picture aroused the greatest enthusiasm and

<sup>1</sup> Amico Ricci, II, p. 436.

<sup>2</sup> Zanotti, I, pp. 396 and 418.

<sup>3</sup> D. Miller, 1963 and 1964.

<sup>4</sup> De Dominicis, IV, p. 428, who also mentions three other pictures painted by Solimena for the Buonaccorsi. Its arrival is recorded in a letter from Raimondo of 6 July 1714 in the family archives. Bologna (Plate 209) publishes a replica in the Scholz-Forni collection, Hamburg.

interest. In Bologna Giovan Giosèffo dal Sole, who was working on his own canvas of *Andromache weeping before Aeneas*, heard of its arrival and insisted on coming to the Buonaccorsi palace to see it.<sup>1</sup> A Bolognese painter travelling across the hills to Macerata to examine the latest masterpiece by his Neapolitan rival—here indeed was proof that Rome was no longer the great centre of cultural exchange that it had once been!

Yet we must not claim too much for the gallery. Giuseppe Gambarini<sup>2</sup> and Marcantonio Franceschini in Bologna,<sup>3</sup> Gregorio Lazzarini<sup>4</sup> and Antonio Balestra in Venice,<sup>5</sup> all of whom turned out further scenes from the poem were not men from whom anything very new could be expected. Their works have a clumsiness and a lack of conviction which suggests that the tradition of large-scale romantic history painting to which they harked back had been drained of vitality and was now little more than an empty academic exercise.

Indeed it was in some of the other rooms in Raimondo's palace that works by the more interesting and 'modern' painters of the day were to be found, and the striking contrast between these and the men who painted the scenes from the *Aeneid* shows that Raimondo must have had a genuine awareness of their essential qualities. Thus Crespi, who was quite unsuited to heroic melodrama, was required to paint four fables,<sup>6</sup> and the one that has survived—*Leto turning the Shepherds into Frogs*—shows with what engaging irony he could interpret the stories of classical mythology.<sup>7</sup> The attitude of Giuseppe Gambarini, who was also commissioned to paint pagan scenes, was rather different: more placid and more sensual and with none of Crespi's humour.<sup>8</sup> But he too was engaged in the characteristically eighteenth-century revolution of turning the great themes of antiquity, and even Christianity, into pretexts for genre.

Apart from the works of these masters we have few records of the collection. Little or no trace can be found of Corrado Giaquinto, who is reported to have worked for the Buonaccorsi,<sup>9</sup> for the pictures were repeatedly split up among members of the family and no inventory has survived. It is, however, possible to suggest that Raimondo may have been among those many patrons of the dawning Age of the Enlightenment whose great public galleries looked back resolutely to the past, but whose private

<sup>1</sup> Zanotti, I, p. 305.

<sup>2</sup> D. Miller, 1963 and 1964.

<sup>3</sup> Franceschini painted *Mercury awaking Aeneas*—Zanotti, I, p. 236, and an entry in the artist's *Libro dei Conti* (Biblioteca Comunale, Bologna—MS. B.4067) which shows that he was paid 1000 lire.

<sup>4</sup> Lazzarini painted *The Death of Dido* and *The Battle of Aeneas and Mezentius* as well as other pictures for the family—da Canal, p. 38.

<sup>5</sup> Balestra's painting of 'una favola d'Enea' for the Buonaccorsi is noted in the unpublished life of the artist by Pascoli (Biblioteca Augusta, Perugia—MS. 1383).

<sup>6</sup> Zanotti, II, p. 52.

<sup>7</sup> This picture is now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna.

<sup>8</sup> D. Miller, 1958.

<sup>9</sup> Amico Ricci, II, p. 436. When I visited the collection a few years ago, none of the pictures there could be attributed to Giaquinto, and d'Orsi (pp. 31-2) limits his work in Macerata to some very minor decoration in the window niches.

apartments were filled with smaller and more intimate pictures betraying a wholly new range of sensibility.

On a much more modest scale we can notice a somewhat similar conflict in the contemporary collection of Stefano Conti, a business man of Lucca.<sup>1</sup> Though he owned only ninety-seven pictures, mostly of small dimensions, he too was forced by the very nature of his birthplace to look far outside his native province for talented artists. He confined himself to Bologna and Venice, and—partly by accident and partly by design—he managed in the process to acquire pictures by Crespi, Sebastiano Ricci, Canaletto and other leading eighteenth-century painters.

Conti was born in 1654 of a father who had been accepted into the Lucchese nobility some quarter of a century earlier. He himself carried on a flourishing trade in silks and cloth, and we can see from his will and other documents that he was an acute man of business. He married in 1685, but outlived both his wife and only son and died in 1739 at the age of 85. He began collecting quite suddenly at the end of 1704 after a journey which had taken him to Venice and Bologna, and for the next three years he methodically acquired a number of pictures in both cities in a spirit that suggests that he knew exactly what he wanted and had no intention of letting himself be carried away by any undue enthusiasm. He employed a local architect to construct a well-lit gallery, filled it with the right number of pictures, refused to sell them when pressed, and in his will tried to make sure that the collection should be preserved as a whole.

His dealings with the painters themselves were equally precise. He was a generous patron, but refused ever to pay more than he thought a picture was worth. He insisted that each work should be an original, painted for him alone and not copied. Though he allowed his artists complete freedom of choice as regards subject-matter, their pictures had to conform to certain specified sizes. And every artist was required to send him a written guarantee certifying the exact subject and date of his works.

When in Venice and Bologna—to which he subsequently returned on a number of occasions—Stefano Conti went to the studios of some of the leading artists and drew up his first commissions. At the same time he got in touch with a Veronese painter, Alessandro Marchesini, from whom he at once ordered a number of pictures and whom he appointed his agent. For this post Marchesini was ideally suitable despite his very limited gifts. He lived in Venice, but had studied in the school of Carlo Cignani in Bologna, from which sprung all the leading artists in the city. He was thus in close contact with everybody, and he carried out his job with keenness and efficiency—pressing on those who showed signs of delay, writing regularly to his patron to keep him informed, handing out the advance payments, suggesting new artists, and even proposing alterations in the work of established masters.

Conti was apt to pay his artists according to the number of figures in each picture,

<sup>1</sup> For this whole section see Haskell, 1956. This gives full references to the various manuscript sources in the libraries and archives of Lucca from which the material is taken.

and this sometimes led to problems. 'It is a little difficult', wrote Marcantonio Franceschini from Bologna,<sup>1</sup> 'to find a history or fable with two figures and putti, and I would like the gentleman himself to choose what he wants.' However, he went on to propose various subjects—sacred and profane at random: *Adam and Eve*, *Bacchus and Ariadne* and so on, ending up that 'what I would really like to do would be a fanciful pastoral with a shepherd, a nymph and two or three putti *in atto bizzarro e curioso*'. And the suggestion was accepted. Other artists had more ambitious ideas. Also in Bologna, Felice Torelli wanted to paint a scene from Trojan history<sup>2</sup>—'Pyrrhus killing Polyxena in the temple and there will be Chalchas, the soothsayer, and other half-length figures or heads depicting Aeneas and Antenor—in fact everything that is needed for the history, and also the tomb of Achilles, the father of Pyrrhus.' Conti was equally ready to accept a picture of this kind, but when it eventually arrived he wrote to ask once more what exactly it represented.

The Venetian artists were on the whole less imaginative in their choice of subject—stock scenes from the Bible and mythology were their usual standby; there is a definite preponderance of religious painting, and even Lazzarini, who was so much admired for his nudes, painted six subjects from the Old and New Testaments of impeccable morality.<sup>3</sup>

Conti's gallery, when completed by about 1707, must have presented a notably 'academic' appearance. The artists he had chosen—Marchesini himself, Lazzarini, Balestra, Fumiani, Bellucci, Angiolo Trevisani, Segala, Dal Sole and Franceschini—were all of his own generation and mostly adhered to 'correct' drawing and blond tonality in opposition to the violent *tenebrosi* who had enjoyed such a success in Venice. But his interests were not confined only to history painters. He had the portraits of his wife, his son and himself painted by Sebastiano Bombelli, the leading portraitist in the city—a local artist, Antonio Franchi, was considered good enough for his three daughters—and he also commissioned seven pictures of fruit and animals from Giovanni Agostino Cassana, a number of landscapes by other artists and three views of Venice by Luca Carlevarijs. Busts of Diana and Endymion by the Bolognese Giuseppe Mazza completed the gallery.

With all this Stefano Conti was satisfied for nearly twenty years, during which he bought only three pictures—a 'Correggio' *Christ in the Garden of Olives*, a Guercino *Flight into Egypt* and a *Cain and Abel* by the local artist Domenico Brugiori. Then in 1725, as suddenly as ever, he began to resume collecting. To Alessandro Marchesini's great delight, Conti turned once more to him for advice. Evidently some spare room had been found, because Conti was trying to get two further views by Carlevarijs to add to the three that he already owned, and one landscape by Francesco Bassi, il Cremonese, to make a complete set of four. But in the previous twenty years the artistic situation in Venice had been completely transformed. Carlevarijs, wrote Marchesini, was

<sup>1</sup> In a letter of 17 February 1705 in the Biblioteca Governativa, Lucca—MS. 3299. For the full text of the relevant section see Appendix 3.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter of 24 February 1705 in the Biblioteca Governativa, Lucca—MS. 3299. For the full text of the relevant section see Appendix 3.

<sup>3</sup> Da Canal, pp. 40, 58, 59.

old and il Cremonese was blind. Instead there was a 'Sigr. Antonio Canale, who astounds everyone who sees his work in this city—it is like that of Carlevarijs, but you can see the sun shining in it', and also 'a remarkable landscape painter, whose works are in great demand here and in London . . . with a style very much of his own and a very perfected manner. . . . Ricci is a marvellous painter at producing views and strange landscapes with buildings in the style of Poussin, all in lively and brilliant colour, which enchant those who look at them.' And so, under constant pressure from Marchesini, Conti commissioned his first two paintings by Canaletto and then, so pleased was he with the result, another two, despite the artist's difficult behaviour over money, and eventually five little landscapes with ruins and figures by Marco Ricci. Marco's uncle, Sebastiano, inserted the figures in these, but when he was asked to paint on his own 'two history pictures with full-length figures of half natural size . . . which must represent Alexander the Great and must hang opposite two others by good Bolognese artists', Ricci asked a price which the cautious Conti found exorbitant, and the proposal came to nothing. He did, however, buy a portrait by Rosalba Carriera of his daughter-in-law Emmanuel, and three years later, in 1728, he commissioned his last picture which was to be by Crespi.<sup>1</sup> Negotiations took place directly between the two men and began with some difficulty when Crespi haughtily explained that he had always had correct written contracts 'from His Highness the late Grand Prince Ferdinand, from the late Pope, and from Prince Eugene of Savoy in whose service I now am'. After this had been satisfactorily settled he wrote at great length to describe the subject he had chosen, *The Infant Jupiter handed over by Cybele to the Corybantes to be fed* (Plate 67), and enclosed a sketch which was 'to serve as an embryo'. However, when sending the painting itself in April 1729, he changed the title to *The Finding of Moses*, as sacred pictures paid lower customs duty than profane ones!

This little group of pictures by Crespi, Canaletto, Marco and Sebastiano Ricci, with their nervous brush strokes and dramatic contrasts of light and shade, must have looked strangely isolated in Conti's collection of essentially old-fashioned paintings, and he did nothing to increase their number. His taste was never very adventurous and his greatest interest was apparently to fill his gallery with accredited works. Like many of the other patrons who lived in small towns and ordered pictures from elsewhere, he had no chance to see the paintings he had commissioned until they reached him in Lucca. This was, indeed, the limitation of most of these provincial collections. Pictures from Bologna, Venice, Naples and even Rome might hang together and enrich local taste, but the artists themselves remained isolated both from each other and from the guidance of a cultivated patron. There was, however, one very significant exception to this general state of affairs.

- iii -

The most important figure in this strange interregnum of Italian art when any overriding sense of direction seemed to have been lost was, appropriately enough, a Medici.

<sup>1</sup> Biblioteca Governativa, Lucca—MS. 3299 and Zanotti, II, p. 62.

For a few years Florence once more became the most interesting city in Italy before sinking into utter provincialism. In the Grand Prince Ferdinand who was responsible for this short-lived but profoundly important revival we can see, as in no other single figure, the tastes of the seventeenth century changing into those of the eighteenth, and this alone makes him worthy of the closest study (Plate 36a). But his significance is greater than that. As a Medici he bore a name that still carries its own magic. And he was a munificent patron when the race seemed to have died out—‘the only support of all the fine arts in Italy’, wrote a contemporary.<sup>1</sup> His individual tastes were thus of considerable importance for the development of painting.

He was born in 1663, the son of Cosimo III and Marguerite d’Orléans.<sup>2</sup> The tempestuous relationship between his parents—his mother, unable to stand the suffocating atmosphere of Florence, left in 1675 for the freedom of a convent in Montmartre which placed few obstacles in the way of her volatile appetites—and the bigoted pomposity of Cosimo himself left its mark on the two sons of the marriage: Ferdinand, who died at 50 before ruling, and Gian Gastone, the last of the Medici princes. Both were highly intelligent, but both had a streak of instability which in Gian Gastone eventually led to paralysing debauchery. Ferdinand was educated by all the most remarkable personalities in a city that was still notable in the intellectual Europe of the day—Viviani, Lorenzini, Redi. He became a highly cultivated and accomplished figure, handsome, good humoured, an excellent horseman and the great hope of all those who longed for a change from the extravagant, yet mean-spirited rule, of his father. This is the side of him that most of his contemporaries saw. But we have at our disposal letters, private memoirs and other records, and as we look back we can detect also another aspect of his character, and one that was to be profoundly reflected in his artistic tastes: a sort of *fin-de-siècle* preciosity in reaction against the stuffiness of his ‘Victorian’ surroundings, a love of *frisson*, an inclination for somewhat equivocal pleasures. All his biographers stress that Ferdinand’s reaction against his father was one of the dominating emotions of his life. With his uncle Francesco Maria, only three years older than himself, he led the opposition, and, as so often where political activity is out of the question, this took the form of licence and wild behaviour. Accompanied everywhere by troops of followers in search of pleasure, the two young men outraged the solemn decorum of the court much as Marguerite d’Orléans had done already. Eventually marriage was insisted on and agreed to in return for permission to visit Venice at carnival time. After some futile negotiations with Portugal, a rather plain Bavarian princess, Violante, was discovered and wedded with spectacular ceremonies but little love. Year after year the court, and Europe, waited in vain for an heir to ensure the survival of the Medici line. A second reckless—and bachelor—visit to Venice in 1696 was scarcely calculated to promote this end, and during the early years of the eighteenth century other members of the family were called upon to try where the Grand Prince

<sup>1</sup> Zanotti, II, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> See Galluzzi and, for more intimate details of the private lives of these last members of the family, Pieraccini, G. Conti and Acton.

had failed. Their efforts too came to nothing. Meanwhile Ferdinand gave up the struggle and retired to his country houses, especially Poggio a Caiano and Pratolino, there to enjoy himself and to organise his brilliant theatrical displays and picture collections. He was passionately fond of music and for many years he employed Alessandro Scarlatti to write operas for him and himself played a notable part in their composition.<sup>1</sup> His theatre at Pratolino was famous throughout Italy and for it he employed leading stage designers such as members of the Bibbiena family.<sup>2</sup> He corresponded with artists and musicians and his great sensibilities made him the most discriminating patron of many of the most interesting painters of the day. He welcomed foreign scholars and delighted to show them his great collections. He supported writers such as Apostolo Zeno, Benedetto Menzini and Scipione Maffei, and he financed the publication of sumptuous editions of Francesco Redi and other poets.<sup>3</sup> But now ill-health began to strike: epileptic fits and, apparently, the inevitable consequences of his earlier dissipation. His last years were more and more clouded by sickness, and he died in 1713 at the age of 50. His tyrannical old father was still on the throne after forty-three years. It was as if the Régent had died before Louis XIV. 'With his death,' wrote a contemporary admirer,<sup>4</sup> 'there died too all signs of brio and joyfulness in Florence and Tuscany. With his death there was lost the protector of painting, sculpture, letters and all the other liberal arts—for other princes did not share his magnanimous tastes.'

The most important events in Ferdinand's life were his two visits to Venice. The city already had the reputation it long retained of allowing and encouraging every pleasure known to man except that of political unorthodoxy, and the Grand Prince took full advantage of most of them. We can follow him throughout February and March 1696, 'delighted' from the very first day 'with the freedom of this country—especially the convenience of the mask which allows him to go anywhere without drawing attention to himself...'.<sup>5</sup> Night after night he goes to the opera and the *ridotto*; he visits all the specialities of Venetian carnival entertainment which we know so well from the paintings just then beginning to record them for tourists—the *forze d'Ercole*, the fight between the Castellani and the Nicolotti, the masked balls. The Republic gave him lavish presents and he reciprocated. It was all very different from Florence; no wonder that when he left he announced his intention of returning to Venice for the next carnival. He never did: but the memory haunted him for the rest of his life and he was able to put it to good use. For besides more spectacular pleasures, so diligently recorded by the Florentine agents, he had also been carefully admiring and studying

<sup>1</sup> The remarkable series of letters from Alessandro Scarlatti to Ferdinand are in the Archivio Mediceo. See also Fabbri and, for a full account of his musical activities, Puliti.

<sup>2</sup> Sgrilli.

<sup>3</sup> For all this see *Elogio del fu Serenissimo Ferdinando de' Medici Principe di Toscana* in Vol. XVII, 1714, of the *Giornale de' Letterati Italiani* of which he himself had been patron; and also the letter from Scipione Maffei, dated 14 April 1710, No. 370, Filza 5905 of the Archivio Mediceo.

<sup>4</sup> Probably the lawyer Luca Ombrosi, writing in the middle of the eighteenth century—see *Vita del Gran Principe Ferdinando di Toscana* in the Biblioteca Grassoccia, Firenze 1887, p. 96.

<sup>5</sup> Archivio Mediceo, Filza 3050<sup>D</sup>: Matteo del Teglia—*Carteggio e Avvisi da Venezia*, 1695-7.

the great pictures which still made Venetian collections and churches the richest in Europe. Years later he could recall some of them which he hoped to acquire for himself. In the masterpieces of Titian, Veronese and Bassano which filled the palaces of his hosts he saw a tradition of painting which had long been considered the antithesis to the great Florentine Renaissance. Ferdinand, like many other lively spirits of the early years of the eighteenth century, was seduced by this tradition and longed to make it live again.

Although Ferdinand had always been a keen collector and patron, his forcible personality could not find much scope for expression in Florentine art of the late seventeenth century. His early acquired pictures differed little from those that were regularly to be seen in the average noble collection of the day. They included, for instance, a number of religious works painted for him by Baldassare Franceschini, a late follower of Pietro da Cortona who died in 1689.<sup>1</sup> Yet quite soon he relied on his unerring instinct to pick out the one picture by this artist which could satisfy his love of novelty. Some time before 1693 he bought *La Burla del Pievano Arlotto* which Franceschini had painted in tempera many years earlier for a private citizen (Plate 37c).<sup>2</sup> Its homely and archaic simplicity owed more both in style and in the inspiration of its subject to Tuscan narrative of the fifteenth century than to experiments in naturalism being made elsewhere in Italy at this time. It was, however, not very long before Ferdinand had the opportunity of encouraging a comparable type of intimacy in the works of Crespi.

Meanwhile he showed his appreciation of the great tradition of Florentine painting by purchasing Fra Bartolommeo's *S. Marco* from the church dedicated to that saint and having it replaced by a copy in 1692.<sup>3</sup> This was, indeed, a habit to which Ferdinand was much addicted. During the 1690s he bought from various churches in Florence and elsewhere Raphael's *Madonna del Baldacchino*, Andrea del Sarto's *Madonna delle Arpie*, Cigoli's *Deposition* and Orazio Riminaldi's *Martyrdom of St Cecilia*.<sup>4</sup> Of his contemporaries he showed an interest chiefly in Anton Domenico Gabbiani, a painter faithful, as far as his talents lay, to the classical, Marattesque canons of art<sup>5</sup> to whom Ferdinand remained loyal long after his own horizons had been immeasurably widened.

This widening was clearly brought about by his visits to Venice, though a taste for Venetian art had already appeared at the Medici court through the activities of his great uncle Cardinal Leopold, who had amassed a very large collection of works by masters of the Renaissance.<sup>6</sup> Ferdinand now set out to amplify this collection. The names of Titian, Veronese, Bassano, Palma Giovane and many other painters of the Venetian sixteenth century constantly recur in the letters which he wrote over the next few

<sup>1</sup> Baldinucci, VI, 1728, p. 411.

<sup>2</sup> Now in the Pitti, No. 582. For its history see Giglioli, 1908, and Steinbart, 1936.

<sup>3</sup> Now in the Pitti, No. 125. The copy was painted by Antonio Franchi—see Bartolozzi.

<sup>4</sup> There is a certain amount of confusion about these pictures from Florentine and other churches—see Bencivenni and Jahn-Rusconi—but though slight discrepancies exist in the various accounts and in the sources, the general outline is clear enough.

<sup>5</sup> See especially Hugford and Bartarelli.

<sup>6</sup> For some general information on Cardinal Leopold's collecting see [Bencivenni], I, pp. 248–61, and II, pp. 181–7.

years to Niccolò Cassana, the Genoese artist who acted as his agent in Venice as from 1698.<sup>1</sup> From these letters it is possible to see just what he admired in the Venetians. The expressions which he uses most frequently to show approval are *gran gusto* or *buon gusto*—vague terms, perhaps, but ones that suggest his relish for painting. When used, as they so often are, about particular pictures, they give us a close insight into the nature of his feelings: a Veronese is admired because it is ‘di un gran gusto di colore, bizzarro per l’invenzione, e pare uscito adesso dal penello dell’Autore’; an engraving is ‘molto bizzarro, e di buon gusto’; an artist working for him is required to paint ‘qualche cosa di bizzarro’; another is told to be ‘meno flemmatico’. He sees a Maffei for the first time and is delighted with its ‘bellissimo impasto’; in Livorno there is a *Rape of the Sabines* by Virgilio Bassanino which looks like a Strozzi and ‘vi è un brio di pennello grande’; a Van Dyck *bozzetto* is ‘spiritoso’. From these expressions and from many more we can gauge an entirely coherent taste based on an appreciation of the liveliness of the individual brushstroke and of colour—for him of very much greater importance than the correct drawing which played such a vital part in Roman art theory at the time. He showed an acute sensitivity to the actual quality of the paint, to that *belle matière* which was to be so very attractive to eighteenth-century connoisseurs. Like many of these connoisseurs, but unlike most of the great aristocratic collectors to whom by origin and status he belonged, Ferdinand combined this sensitivity with a very real understanding of artistic quality, and hence was able to show great discrimination in his appreciation of pictures. In a Rubens he suspects that one of the satyrs was added rather later than the others, and that there is a certain difference of touch in the foliage of the trees; he gives detailed practical instructions on how to pack a picture; he reads through Lives of the Painters; he jokes about those who cannot distinguish the work of one artist from another.

Such knowledge and refinement not only began to affect his collecting—in 1698 he bought Parmigianino’s *Madonna del Collo Lungo* ‘disegnata come da Raffaello, finita con l’anima’<sup>2</sup>—but were vital in his patronage of contemporary artists. Yet with two conspicuous exceptions he was not as successful in this field as his talents entitled him to be, for the whole trend of art theory conflicted with his personal tastes and it was not easy to find painters unaffected by the classicising doctrines of this phase of the Baroque.

For Ferdinand art patronage involved a greater degree of collaboration than was usual between prince and painter. This might range from sending his court painter an eagle to help with a Ganymede to discussing the figures of a composition.<sup>3</sup> His attitude is clearly shown in a significant remark he lets slip in a letter to Cassana<sup>4</sup>: ‘Tell Fumiani that the only figure I want is that of David; it will then be easy enough to remove it and do it in *our way*.’ He insisted on always seeing *modelli* of the pictures he ordered, as

<sup>1</sup> See Fogolari, 1937—with special reference to Letters 22, 23, 26, 49, 59, 71, 74, 81, 91, 93 and 124.

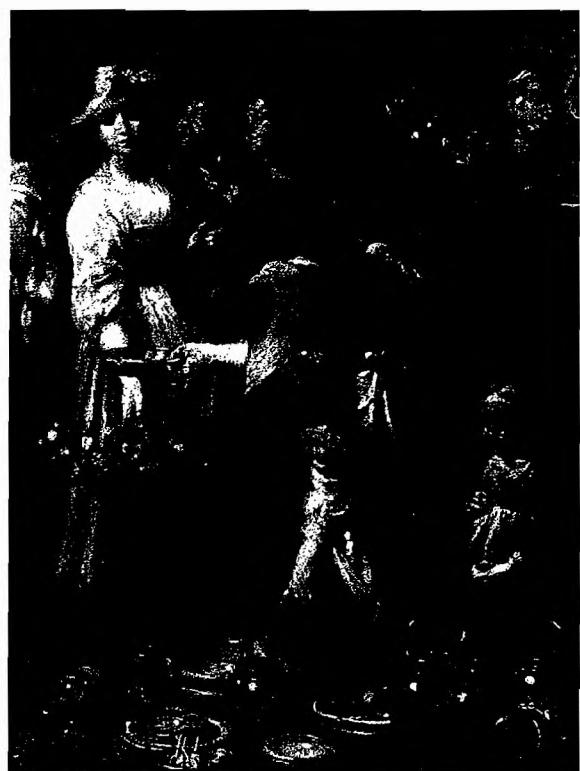
<sup>2</sup> See the letters from Ferdinand, dated 11 October and 1 December 1698 to the Duke of Parma, published by Emilio Robiony, and also Fogolari, 1937, Letter 28 of 9 January 1699.

<sup>3</sup> Hugford, Bartolozzi and the *Elogio* as well as Fogolari, 1937, Letter 45 of 16 May 1699.

<sup>4</sup> Fogolari, 1937, Letter 45 of 16 May 1699.



a. G. M. CRESPI: The Painter's family



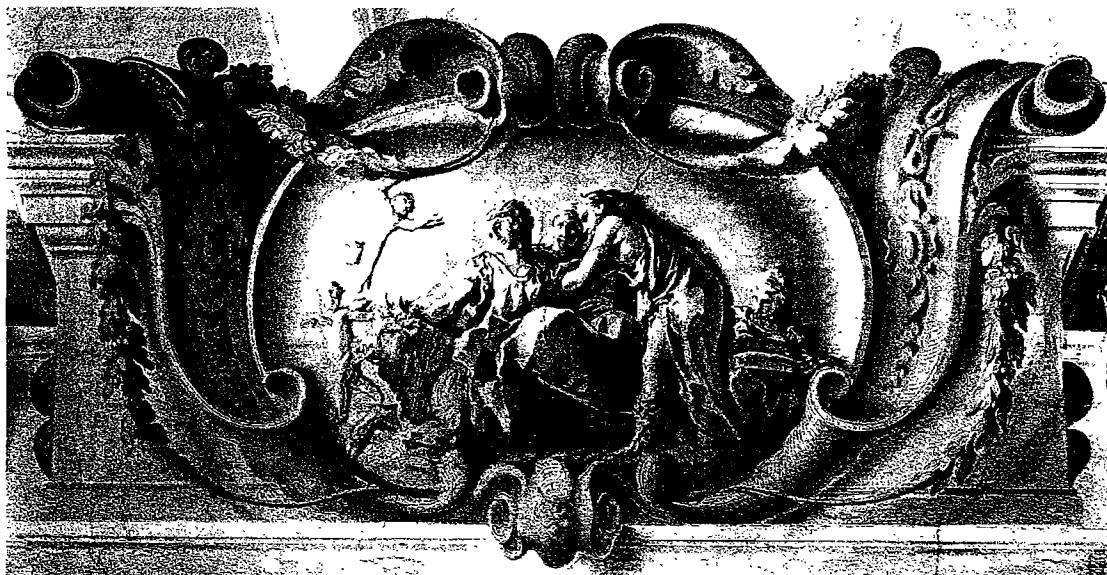
b. G. M. CRESPI: The Fair at Poggio a Caiano  
(detail)



c. RAFFAELLO FRANCIABIGIO: 'La Burla del Diavolo Arlotto'

Plate 38

FRESCOES BY SEBASTIANO RICCI  
IN PITTI PALACE, FLORENCE (*see Plates 38 and 39*)



a. Rape of Europa



b. Pan and Syrinx

Plate 39



Plate 40



a. A. D. GABBIANI: A group of musicians



much for purely aesthetic reasons as for checking the accuracy of the content. Indeed he collected *modelli* of pictures painted for other patrons before this was as common as it later became.<sup>1</sup> He enjoyed watching artists at work and discussing with them the actual procedure of painting—the colours to be used, the thickness of the canvas and so on. All these traits can be seen in his relations with Gabbiani (Plate 40a). The reasons why he employed for so long this rather mediocre, Marattesque painter while ignoring other Florentine artists such as Gherardini, Sagrestani or Galeotti whose styles corresponded far more to his tastes are impossible to fathom.<sup>2</sup> It may have been that same feeling of loyalty that made him take particular trouble not to hurt the ageing landscape painter Francesco Bassi despite the doubts he had about the value of his work.<sup>3</sup> More likely it was the feeling that Gabbiani (who always professed a passionate attachment to Venetian painting) was directly under his control and so could be used to express some of his own artistic ambitions. Whatever the reasons, the outcome was hardly very successful despite a special visit to Venice which Gabbiani paid in 1699 at the age of 47 to oblige his patron by improving his colour. Nor does Ferdinand's particular protégé Sacconi appear to have lived up to his hopes, though he too was sent to Venice.<sup>4</sup> The Grand Prince took the deepest interest in his career. He provided for him financially when his father died and kept him working under Niccolò Cassana. Constant exhortations and orders followed him there: for a St Sebastian ‘as he must learn to paint full length figures’, a St Giustina, a Bacchanal. Ferdinand notes that his colour is improving under Cassana’s guidance, but warns him to be ‘meno flemmatico’. He arranges for his pictures to be exhibited on Corpus Domini and is delighted with their humour. But it seems that not even Venice and the most encouraging of patrons could make much of the artist.

More fruitful were Ferdinand’s contacts with some of the other painters living in Venice, among them Karl Loth with whom he must have got in touch on his first visit, for this German artist was already painting for him by 1691 and continued to do so until his death some seven years later.<sup>5</sup> But by then, although he made particular efforts to get hold of some half-length figures by Loth ‘as that is what he was best at’, Ferdinand had already paid his second visit to the city and found there an artist who, despite his mediocre abilities, was ideally responsive to the sort of pressure he liked to exert. The

<sup>1</sup> Francesco Trevisani sent him the *modello* of his *Banquet of Anthony and Cleopatra* painted for Cardinal Fabrizio Spada-Varallo—see MS. life of this artist by Pascoli in the Biblioteca Augusta, Perugia, MS. 1383.

<sup>2</sup> Payments to other painters and sculptors in Florence are recorded in the Archivio Mediceo, Guardaroba 1055. The most interesting of these are Pietro Dandini and Giovanni Battista Foggini. Other very minor Tuscan artists also worked for him: Antonio Franchi has already been mentioned; for Francesco Botti, Giuseppe Pinacci, Romolo Panfi, Cristofano Monari, etc., see Abate Orazio Marrini.

<sup>3</sup> Fogolari, 1937, Letter 83 of 17 March 1703.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, with special reference to Letters 6, 12, 28, 60 and 71.

<sup>5</sup> Fogolari, 1937, publishes a letter from Loth of 14 August 1691 thanking the Prince for a present of oil and wine and telling him that he is about to embark on a copy of Titian’s *St Peter Martyr*. In 1693 he sent his self portrait to Florence. The Pitti contains a *Death of Abel* by him and six of his pictures are recorded in Ferdinand’s collection in the 1716 inventory—see p. 239, note 5, and also Fogolari, 1937, Letters 22 and 77. See catalogue entries in Ewald, 1965.

relations between Giannanfonio Fumiani and the Grand Prince can tell us much about the fantasies which he was so eager to have expressed by the artists who worked for him.<sup>1</sup> He wanted a picture to match one by Domenichino and he proceeded to give Fumiani its dimensions and a very elaborate programme. It must show, he wrote to his agent Cassanà, an architectural background into which must be inserted guards; in the foreground David must be seen at prayer. Cassana himself is to paint the figure of David, though if Fumiani insists he may do so and it can be changed later. He must send the *modello* to Ferdinand for inspection. It duly arrived and proved satisfactory, but David, commented the Prince, should display more movement. Perhaps it would be improved by an angel flying through the sky with a flaming sword and offering the king the choice of the three punishments.<sup>2</sup> David must show great surprise—here would be a good chance for expressing movement. Besides, the composition could be enriched by placing at his side his harp, his sceptre and his diadem. And then Ferdinand changed his mind. He wanted another subject from the Old Testament which would be the most *bizzarra* of all. The instructions have been lost, but this was evidently to be *The Stoning of Zechariah*, a picture which was recorded in Ferdinand's inventory and which is now in the Uffizi (Plate 40b).<sup>3</sup> It seems clear that these subjects, though unusual in art, held no special significance for him other than as pretexts for fanciful composition.

Niccolò Cassana also worked a good deal for Ferdinand as painter as well as artistic adviser. He visited Florence on various occasions chiefly so as to paint portraits of the Prince and his household, and from time to time he would send pictures from Venice.<sup>4</sup> In September 1707 his *Portrait of a Cook* reached Florence to the delight of the Prince, who commented on its realistic details (he particularly wanted to know who the sitter was) and above all on its bold, Venetian, 'painterly' quality, so different, as he pointed out, from the timid efforts of native Florentine artists. Cassana also painted history pictures for the Grand Prince, mostly in a light vein—a *Bacchanal*, a *Venus playing with Cupid* and so on, though there was also a *Conspiracy of Catiline*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fogolari, 1937, Letters 45, 47, 48, 49, 50, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61 and 63 between May and November 1699.

<sup>2</sup> This rather unusual subject is taken from II Samuel xxiv, 12.

<sup>3</sup> The picture is recorded in the 1716 inventory—see p. 239, note 5. The subject, which is taken from II Chronicles xxiv, 21, is wrongly described as *The Punishment of the Prophet Ananias* in the catalogue of *La Pittura del Seicento a Venezia*, 1959, p. 106. For another example of Ferdinand's patronage of Fumiani see the curious letter written by him directly to the artist and published in Note 34 of Fogolari, 1937.

<sup>4</sup> Ratti (see Soprani/Ratti, II, 14) refers to portraits by Cassana of the Grand Prince himself, his wife, his *gentiluomo di camera* and other courtiers including jesters, as well as his self-portrait and various history pictures. See also Fogolari, 1937, Letter 120 of 3 September 1707.

<sup>5</sup> *The Conspiracy of Catiline* is probably a copy from Rosa and is now in the Pitti (No. 111)—see Jahn-Rusconi, p. 238.

Giovanni Battista Langetti, another Genoese artist who worked in Venice, was also admired by Ferdinand. Ratti (Soprani/Ratti, II, 26), who reports seeing a portrait and a picture of card players by him in the Medici collection, says that Langetti was actually employed by Ferdinand in Florence. But this is impossible as Langetti died in 1676 when the Prince was only aged 11. See also Fogolari, 1937, Letter 92 of 25 January 1704.

Much more valuable were the pictures on glass of *The Flight into Egypt* painted for Ferdinand by Luca Giordano. The great Neapolitan painter called on the Grand Prince at Livorno in May 1702 on his return from Spain and is known to have worked for him for a time before setting out for home.<sup>1</sup>

The history of Ferdinand's patronage given so far suggests that with this one exception he was a very much more interesting figure than any of the painters who worked for him. And indeed he would be remembered merely as a remarkable personality in an artistic backwater were it not for the fact that towards the very end of his life he found two artists whose talents were at last equal to the demands he made on them and who consequently painted for him some of their most striking work.

It is not clear how Ferdinand first got into touch with Sebastiano Ricci, for the artist was not in Venice during either of the Grand Prince's two visits there. However that may be, in 1704 Ferdinand commissioned from him a *Crucifixion with the Madonna, St John and St Charles Borromeo* to replace Andrea del Sarto's *Madonna delle Arpie* which he had bought from the nuns of S. Francesco de' Macci for his own gallery.<sup>2</sup> Ricci seems to have paid a short visit to Florence in order to paint the picture on the spot and thereafter to have assisted Cassana in his duties of keeping the Prince informed as to what pictures were available on the Venetian market.<sup>3</sup> Within a year or two Ricci had already found other patrons in Florence among the Grand Prince's circle of friends, for the brothers Marucelli, of whom Francesco, the most distinguished, had died in Rome in 1703, were employing him to decorate several rooms in their palace. In May 1706 he enclosed some paintings for them in the two crates he sent to the Grand Prince—which included a couple of small landscapes by his nephew Marco.<sup>4</sup> At the same time he made his first allusion to a forthcoming visit to Florence to paint a room in Ferdinand's gallery of Venetian pictures at Poggio a Caiano. Ferdinand's reply a week later was somewhat discouraging: ill-health was causing him to postpone the projected scheme.<sup>5</sup> However, shortly afterwards the situation improved and Ricci arrived to paint an *Allegory of the Arts* in Ferdinand's favourite gallery in his favourite villa. This work has unfortunately been destroyed,<sup>6</sup> but dazzling testimonials to Ricci's Florentine activities survive in the great decorations that he painted for Ferdinand's friends the Marucelli and for the Grand Prince himself in a small room in the Pitti.

<sup>1</sup> A Letter from the Grand Prince, dated 26 May 1702, (*ibid.*, Letter 75) says: 'Mentre che scrivo è qui [Livorno] da me Luca Giordano che ritorna da Napoli.' The Abate Orazio Marrini, Parte I, Vol. I, p. 38, says that on his return from Spain Luca Giordano 'colorì varie pitture' for Ferdinand in Florence.

<sup>2</sup> Fogolari, 1937, Letters 98 and 99 of 30 August and 20 September 1704.

<sup>3</sup> Some of these letters have been published by Fogolari, 1937. They show Ricci writing to Ferdinand of works by Livio Mehus, Ghisolfi, Lyss, Simon Vouet and others.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 1 May 1706 in Archivio Mediceo, Filza 5903, No. 197; published in Appendix 4. In the exhibition of October 1706 (see p. 240, note 5) Orazio Marucelli exhibited a *Flora* by Sebastiano Ricci.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of 8 May 1706—Archivio Mediceo, Filza 5903, No. 500—published in Appendix 4.

<sup>6</sup> At the end of the eighteenth century T. G. Farsetti referred to the ceiling as follows—Fogolari, 1937, p. 186: 'Nella camera de' quadri veneziani, che il Principe Ferdinando ha formato al Poggio, e ch'ora è sfornita per essersi trasportati detti quadri in Galleria, ed in altri luoghi, si vede un soffitto dipinto in figure di due terzi, mirabile per l'invenzione e contrasto, come per il vago colorito, e buon disegno. In questo si rappresentano allegorie convenienti alle Arti sorelle ecc.'

From everything we know of Ferdinand's patronage it is beyond doubt that he himself must have collaborated extensively in the work. Indeed, some forty years later, a writer who knew Ricci personally makes it quite clear that he had followed specific instructions from the Grand Prince in carrying out the decoration.<sup>1</sup> There is, of course, no record of these, but it is easy enough to see that Ricci's delightful frescoes, which represent a new departure in his career, reflect the more lighthearted and 'avant-garde' atmosphere of Ferdinand's court. The Prince's own character, indeed, symbolised the fact that the new century was going to be less harsh, less bigoted and less passionate than the one that was just over, and it is this change that seems to be asserted in Ricci's frescoes. The heavy drama which had marked most Baroque ceiling decoration, the crowds of solidly built figures which had been characteristic of Ricci's previous ventures in the field and even to some extent of his almost contemporary work in the Palazzo Marucelli, here give way at a single bound to delicacy and lightness of touch. The ceiling is a glorification of sun and air—a pale, cool blue sky with delicate pink clouds on which Venus, in brilliant yellow, takes her leave from Adonis dressed in a gay, purple tunic inspired by costumes of the sixteenth century (Plate 39).<sup>2</sup> Putti hover around, and below, on a rocky verge, strain two greyhounds, sleek and slender, the favourite animals of the new century. There is a delicate longing in the look between the two lovers, but no hint of the tragedy to come. Around the walls, and in elaborate cartouches above a painted balustrade, are further scenes from Ovid—*Diana and Callisto*, *Pan and Syrinx*, *Europa and the Bull*, *Diana and Actaeon* (Plates 38a, 38b)—and in the four corners are painted busts of men and women vaguely evoking the antique. Over the main door angels support a shield with the Medici arms while putti with a crown hover above, the whole forming a brilliant asymmetrical composition. Everything is painted with a verve and a nervous, fluent panache that were totally new to Florence and indeed to European art. The frescoes delighted Ferdinand, and yet their intimate, rococo style, which was to become so popular in the boudoirs of Paris, proved to have little future in Italy.

Ricci also painted various pictures for him at this time, particularly of little figures disporting themselves against architectural backgrounds which were usually the work of a collaborator. These especially appealed to his taste—'le figurette mi piacciono assaiissimo, perchè sono graziose, ben distribuite e fatte con poco', he wrote of one pair of such scenes he had been shown,<sup>3</sup> and *macchiette* of this kind were to become enormously popular as the century progressed. Ricci wrote again to Ferdinand in 1708 after

<sup>1</sup> The Abate Gherardi, who in 1749 published an anonymous account of some of Consul Smith's pictures in Venice. Writing of Ricci, he says (p. 73): '... qui vi [Florence] giunto che fu ed accoltovi benignamente intesi chi ebbe i sentimenti di esso Gran Principe intorno la composizion dell'ideato lavoro pittresco da fare: di tutto buon grado vi si appose secondando il genio dell'Altezza sua; ed avendolo con ispeditezza, bravura, e soddisfazion terminato, ebbe dal copioso pagamento e da i regali fattigli dare un manifesto riscontro della pienezza di gradimento di esso Gran Principe ...'.

<sup>2</sup> The sketch for this fresco is now in the Orleans Museum.

<sup>3</sup> Fogolari, 1937, Letter 106 of 3 April 1705. It is not clear whether the pictures in question were by Ricci or not. The 1716 inventory (see p. 239, note 5) describes an architectural painting by Saluzzi with figures by Sebastiano Ricci. This is now in the Pinacoteca at Lucca. It is initialled and dated 1706.

his return to Venice, but a year later he went to England and stayed abroad until 1716.

The Grand Prince was not the only person to be impressed by Ricci's work in Florence. Back in Bologna in February 1708, after a brief visit to the Medici capital, Giuseppe Maria Crespi wrote to Ferdinand that he too had been very struck by the Venetian painter's 'spirit'.<sup>1</sup> And although the two most interesting artists of the period, both of whom were pioneering a decisive break with late Baroque conventions, missed meeting each other by two or three months at Ferdinand's court, the new mood that prevailed there profoundly affected them both. Crespi's own innovations had much in common with Ricci's—a looser brush stroke, a more painterly and spirited manner, a greater display of individual temperament and a devotion to the Venetian tradition; it is therefore hardly surprising that he received all possible encouragement from Ferdinand when he arrived in Florence at the beginning of 1708 to present him his *Massacre of the Innocents*.<sup>2</sup> Crespi's anxiety to work for Ferdinand provides clear evidence of the importance that the Grand Prince's court had by now assumed for artists outside Florence,<sup>3</sup> and when he brought the picture to Ferdinand he was deeply impressed by his discrimination and enthusiasm. The Grand Prince at once commissioned a couple of still lives from Crespi—a curious and significant choice of subject after the dazzling agitation of the history painting which had introduced the artist to him.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Ferdinand is of great importance in Crespi's career partly for this very reason. He seems to have been among the first to appreciate the essentially intimate nature of Crespi's talents. The commissions with which he flooded the artist were all 'd'argomenti piacevoli', and with the support of such a powerful protector Crespi was able to break away from the religious and secular histories which had hitherto formed the bulk of his output. On this first visit to Florence he remained scarcely more than a month<sup>5</sup>; but he

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 26 February 1708—Archivio Mediceo, Filza 5904, No. 22—published in Appendix 4.

<sup>2</sup> Crespi arrived with a letter of introduction—Archivio Mediceo, Filza 5897, No. 183—published in Appendix 4. The full story of how he came to give the *Massacre of the Innocents* to Ferdinand has been told by Zanotti, II, p. 46. It has subsequently been confirmed by documents—see catalogue of *Mostra Celebraiva di Giuseppe M. Crespi*, Bologna 1948, p. 29. The picture had been commissioned by a priest Don Carlo Silva to present to Ferdinand. When it was finished the priest defaulted on his obligations and announced that he had no further intention of giving it to the Grand Prince. It was then that Crespi decided to come in person to Livorno, where his arrival and welcome are colourfully described by Zanotti. Ferdinand himself took a hand in the disputes and litigation from which Crespi emerged victorious. See letters between Ferdinand and Silva in Archivio Mediceo, Filza 5904, Nos. 96, 155, 299 and 607; and also letter from Ferdinand to the Marchesa Eleonora Zambeccari in Archivio Mediceo, Filza 5897, No. 287.

<sup>3</sup> Crespi may possibly have been employed some years before the two men actually met. *The Ecstasy of St Margaret*, originally in S. Maria Nuova in Cortona and now in the Diocesan Museum there, was painted to replace Lanfranco's picture of the same subject which Ferdinand bought for himself. It seems a much earlier work than the group of paintings by Crespi considered here, and it is mentioned earlier by his biographer, Zanotti, II, p. 44. See also the *Mostra di Giuseppe M. Crespi*, p. 29.

Other Bolognese artists in touch with Ferdinand were Ercole Graziani, Giovan Gioseffo Santi (Zanotti, I, pp. 263 and 210) and Giovan Gioseffo dal Sole—see letters of April and May 1708 in Archivio Mediceo, Filza 5904, Nos. 44 and 64.

<sup>4</sup> L. Crespi, p. 211.

<sup>5</sup> He was back in Bologna by February 26, 1708—see above, note 1.

was clearly as anxious to maintain his connection with Ferdinand as was the latter to make use of a painter whose gifts so exactly suited his own temperament. Hardly had he returned to Bologna at the end of February before he began sending pictures to his new patron—a *Nativity* arrived early in March, followed by a *Selfportrait* a month later with assurances of the artist's eternal remembrance of the Prince's kindness and promises of his own 'vasallaggio'. The Prince wrote back to say how delighted he was with the *Selfportrait* that showed the artist's good humour<sup>1</sup> and thereafter the friendship between the two men was sealed. Indeed Ferdinand's interest in Crespi brought him into touch with the artist's patrons in Bologna—particularly Giovanni Ricci, the rich *marchand-amateur* who had financed his early travels throughout Italy and subsequently acquired a very large proportion of his work; and also the Pepoli family in whose palace he had some fifteen years earlier painted the great ceiling frescoes which first established his reputation as a considerable and highly original master. Now in 1708 the Pepoli were considering structural alterations to the palace which would involve destroying the frescoes, and only two urgent letters from Ferdinand stopped this plan being carried out.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile throughout 1708 Crespi continued to work for him. In December he sent a copy of Guercino's *St William of Aquitaine* as well as his own small painting of *The Painter's Family*, the most informal portrait group that had yet appeared in Italian art and a striking testimony to Crespi's confidence in Ferdinand's tastes (Plate 37a).<sup>3</sup> During these months he also sent a satirical picture of the priest who had originally commissioned the *Massacre of the Innocents* as a gift for Ferdinand and had then failed to stick to the agreement between them, as well as two small genre scenes of *Children at Play* and *Women washing their Laundry at a Fountain*—an early treatment of a subject that was to be immensely popular with artists throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

In 1709 Crespi returned to Florence with his family and was given rooms by Ferdinand in his villa at Pratolino, where he stayed for several months. During this visit he painted a large number of pictures for the Grand Prince, who collected his work with increasing enthusiasm and who showed his appreciation with lavish presents and by consenting to become godfather to Crespi's newborn son, called Ferdinando in his honour. At the same time he gave official recognition to Crespi's position at court by naming him his 'pittore attuale'. Crespi responded with a great many genre scenes and one of his masterpieces, the *Fair at Poggio a Caiano*, which included portraits of Ferdinand's courtiers (Plate 37b).<sup>5</sup>

By the beginning of November he was back in Bologna.<sup>6</sup> It is possible that he paid a third visit to Florence, but by this time Ferdinand's final illness was upon him and the

<sup>1</sup> Letters of March and April 1708 in the Archivio Mediceo, Filza 5904, Nos. 26, 38 and 357.

<sup>2</sup> For the correspondence between Ferdinand and Ricci see Archivio Mediceo, Filza 5904, Nos. 167 and 476. For the letters between Ferdinand and the Pepoli, *ibid.*, Nos. 174, 489 and 490.

<sup>3</sup> See the letter from Ferdinand published by Luigi Crespi, p. 203. The original draft is in the Archivio Mediceo, Filza 5904, No. 475. *The Painter's Family* is in the Uffizi, No. 5382.

<sup>4</sup> These pictures are—or were in 1941—in the Gabinetto del R. Intendente di Finanza di Pisa—see Casini, pp. 42–50.

<sup>5</sup> The picture is now in the Uffizi—see Zanotti, II, p. 55, and L. Crespi, p. 211.

<sup>6</sup> A letter of 3 November 1709 (Archivio Mediceo, Filza 5904, No. 272) reports his return to Bologna.

great days of his patronage were over.<sup>1</sup> Crespi is indeed the last artist whom we know to have worked for him.

Both painter and patron had benefited greatly from the close partnership between them. Ferdinand was the most cultivated and sensitive collector that Crespi had yet (or ever was to) come across, and in his gallery the artist was able to study at length those Venetian painters whom they both loved. That he took full advantage of this is proved by a letter in which he speaks of having been shown in the Medici collections a picture attributed to Tintoretto which had in fact been painted by himself.<sup>2</sup> Fully as important was the support that Ferdinand gave him in his attempts to break away from the conventional 'history picture'. Such new ventures were bound to result in some loss of prestige and to meet with derision. The humour with which all his contemporaries approached Crespi in some ways reflects their bewilderment at his unconventional painting, and for many of them (and for many years later) it coloured their appreciation of his art. Genre scenes were expected to be humorous and so they laughed, without realising that Crespi's humour was often tinged with melancholy and was in any case counteracted by a deep, poetic sympathy for the people whom he painted. It is difficult to say how much Ferdinand himself shared these misconceptions about Crespi's art. His recorded opinions and—much more important—his letters suggest that he too saw him primarily as a humourist<sup>3</sup>; on the other hand the very great restraint with which the artist painted for him subjects which lay themselves open to gross or bawdy treatment (Plate 36b) makes clear that he must have relied on Ferdinand's appreciating a side of his temperament that was ignored by many. Indeed, the unique place held by Ferdinand in the history of Italian patronage is shown by the fact that such sober, sympathetic treatment of the poor and simple remained quite exceptional in Italian art. With the backing of a cultivated middle class Crespi might have turned into the Chardin to whom he is sometimes so near; in fact with the removal from the scene of Ferdinand, the most 'modern' prince of the age in Italy—and as yet only princes could be influential patrons—Crespi retired into the provincial backwater of Bologna.<sup>4</sup>

The pictures that Ferdinand amassed were distributed in his apartments in the Pitti Palace and in the various country houses through which he moved during the year. By the end of his life their numbers were very considerable. In the Pitti alone were 300 entirely from his private collection, quite apart from the many which had been assembled by earlier members of the family.<sup>5</sup> The accent was strongly on Venetian pictures,

<sup>1</sup> L. Crespi, p. 211, says that he was in Florence for two years, whereas it has been shown that during 1709 he was there for eight months at most. On the other hand Zanotti, II, p. 54, implies that he went there several times.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 237, note 1. —

<sup>3</sup> Zanotti, II, pp. 52 and 54, and Letter from Ferdinand of 28 April 1708 in Archivio Mediceo, Filza 5904, No. 357.

<sup>4</sup> The restricting effect of this on Crespi's art has been pointed out by R. Longhi in his introduction to the 1948 exhibition catalogue.

<sup>5</sup> *Inventario di Quadri, che si ritrovano negl'appartamenti del gran palazzo de Pitti di S.A.R.*, kept at the Soprintendenza alle Gallerie di Firenze. It can be dated between 1716 and 1723. For the sake of convenience I have referred to it as the 1716 Inventory. All the pictures from Ferdinand's own collection are marked S.P.F.

including about ten attributed to Titian. There were also Flemish works, but only the barest representation of contemporary Roman painting. Of the Florentine school of the day only one artist was present in bulk; the Flemish Livio Mehus, thirty of whose works Ferdinand owned. Such prominence is not surprising, for Mehus was by far the most Venetian of all the artists in his entourage and his tremendous vivacity combined with a slightly troubled eroticism made an obvious appeal to Ferdinand. Only the death of this painter in 1691, before Ferdinand's patronage had reached its fullest extent, can have prevented him working directly for the Grand Prince who sought to make amends for this neglect by assiduously collecting his canvases and giving support to his son.<sup>1</sup>

In Poggio a Caiano Ferdinand had a special room in which he kept small examples of each of his favourite artists, ancient and contemporary, and it was this that Sebastiano Ricci painted for him in 1707. He kept further large collections at Pratolino and the Villa di Castello.

But Ferdinand's activities as patron were not confined to increasing his own collection or supporting those particular artists who took his fancy. He was also anxious to guide the whole direction taken by painters in the Florence of his day. For this purpose he took advantage of the still rudimentary instrument of the art exhibition and used it in an entirely new way. Pictures had been exhibited in Florence, as in many other Italian cities, on the occasion of the Corpus Domini processions, and Ferdinand regularly showed works painted for him by those artists of whom he approved, such as Gabbiani, whose *Flight into Egypt* he put on view to the public in the Piazza del Duomo.<sup>2</sup> He adopted the same policy towards Sacconi<sup>3</sup> and especially Cassana to whom he wrote in 1707, full of admiration for the 'gran gusto' of his *Portrait of a Cook* which he intended to exhibit so that it would be seen 'by our own artists here who paint so timidly'.<sup>4</sup> But Ferdinand probably found such exhibitions too casual to produce the effect he hoped for, and by 1706 he had already organised something far grander. He had probably picked up the idea from the S. Rocco exhibitions in Venice (to be described in a later chapter), though he ran his own one on far more spectacular lines. A printed catalogue was issued—and this in itself was an innovation for Italy.<sup>5</sup> From this catalogue we can reconstruct the event. The exhibition was held on St Luke's day (18 October) in the chapel dedicated to that saint in the cloisters of the Annunziata. About 250 pictures were shown, nearly all of them borrowed from the great collections of Florence, though none came from the Grand Duke's. The pictures were hung in groups of about eight to ten in the lunettes of the cloister. As the visitor entered he turned to the right and, in the first lunette, he at once came across twelve pictures lent by Ferdinand himself, followed (above the door of the chapel) by a portrait of the Grand Prince

<sup>1</sup> Fogolari, 1937, p. 161, note 43, for Ricci acquiring works by Mehus for Ferdinand.

<sup>2</sup> Hugford, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Fogolari, 1937, Letter 12 of 7 June 1698.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, Letter 120 of 3 September 1707.

<sup>5</sup> The catalogue is called *Nota de' Quadri che sono esposti per la festa di S. Luca dagli accademici del disegno nella loro cappella posta nel Chiostro del Monastero de' Padri della SS. Nonziata di Firenze l'Anno 1706. In Firenze 1706.*

who thus unmistakably showed his patronage of the whole venture. No less clear was the orientation of his taste, and hence the general impulse he wished to give to contemporary art. Of the twenty-odd pictures he lent in all, seven were Venetian old masters—a Giorgione, a Titian, a Veronese, a Tintoretto, a Pordenone, a Schiavone and a Paris Bordone; there were also an early Guercino, a Lodovico Carracci and a Schedoni. Besides these he lent his Guido Cagnacci *Magdalene* ('di colore freschissimo'),<sup>1</sup> his Cassana *Portrait of a Hunter* and, almost certainly, four landscapes by Marco Ricci.<sup>2</sup> Not a single work by any of the Florentine artists, old or new, represented in his collection was shown by the Grand Prince. The hint could hardly have been clearer, and it was reinforced by further Venetian paintings lent by Cardinal Medici. In general, the Venetians made an impressive showing in the exhibition, though there was also a strong Neapolitan contingent mainly lent by the del Rosso brothers: thus Luca Giordano was much in evidence.

The Grand Prince himself attended the exhibition which remained open for several days and was evidently a success. But Ferdinand soon fell seriously ill, and thereafter the Accademia del Disegno, under whose auspices it had been organised, returned to the slumbers which had characterised most of its recent existence. Exhibitions, planned on similar lines, took place at haphazard intervals in 1715, 1724, 1729, 1737 and 1767.<sup>3</sup> But Ferdinand died before any of these.

By the time of his death the Venetian school of painting was widely recognised as the most lively in Italy. Though he did not see the triumphs of its greatest masters, he had derived immense satisfaction from his promotion of all that was most vital in contemporary art. For a few years he turned Florence into a centre of the 'painterly', in direct opposition to the classical-academic theories which dictated practice in Rome, and it is not surprising that artists who rightly felt that their talents would have been stifled in the papal city should have been delighted to work for him. It is for this reason that he plays such a notable part in any account of Italian art patronage, and we can at least understand, if not wholly endorse, the opinion of a mid-eighteenth-century writer that he had been a prince 'unrivalled in the world for his magnanimity and generosity'.<sup>4</sup> By that time, as he had anticipated, the most interesting Italian painting was to be found in Venice itself.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fogolari, 1937, Letter 116 of 17 October 1705. The picture is now in the Pitti, No. 75.

<sup>2</sup> The lender is not mentioned by name. But we know (p. 235, note 4, and Appendix 4) that Ferdinand had received two of Marco's landscapes in May 1706, and it seems very likely that these were among those lent.

<sup>3</sup> See the introduction to the 1767 exhibition: *Il trionfo delle Bell'Arti renduto gloriosissimo sotto gli auspicij delle LL.AA.RR. Pietro Leopoldo Arciduca d'Austria . . . e Maria Luisa di Borbone.*

<sup>4</sup> Sgrilli, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ferdinand's patronage of contemporary Venetian art had at least one significant follower in eighteenth-century Florence: the Marchese Andrea Gerini, for whom see F. Haskell in *Boll. dei Musei Civici Veneziani*, 1960. Francesco Gabburri, the connoisseur of drawings, also kept in touch with Venetian artists, as can be seen from the many letters to him which are published by Bottari, Vol. II.