

I

INTRODUCTION

ROME IN 1520 WAS the artistic centre of the world. As capital of both the Christian and the ancient Roman worlds, it exercised a double fascination for artists and architects. They were drawn there by the increasing opportunities to study antique art and buildings, examples of which were daily being unearthed. Vasari, the great chronicler of the development of Renaissance art, was to echo a widely held view when he attributed the great achievements of sixteenth-century artists to their greater understanding of classical art, and Rome was without rival in the possibilities for study that she offered. But artists from flourishing artistic traditions elsewhere in Italy, and from northern Europe, did not come solely to copy ancient works. The patronage of Popes Julius II and Leo X over the previous twenty years had begun to transform Rome into a modern city. New areas of the city were developed to house the expanding papal court, above all in the Borgo, close to the Vatican, and long new streets were opened up, such as Via della Lungara and Via Giulia, affording access to the Vatican, and new opportunities to build. The popes were surrounded by a wealthy court. Cardinals and other rich prelates vied with each other to build grander and ever more beautiful palaces and villas, and to decorate them with frescoes, as well as adorning chapels in the major churches of the city in the new High Renaissance style. They competed also with the ancient baronial families, such as the Orsini and Massimi, and with new arrivals, above all the rich bankers, mostly Tuscan, including Bindo Altoviti and Agostino Chigi, who now settled in Rome. The most important artists and architects of the day, among them Bramante, Raphael and Michelangelo, flocked to the Eternal City, attracted by the opportunities these patrons offered, and the balance of power shifted as Rome displaced Florence as the leading force in artistic innovation in Central Italy.¹

On 6 April 1520, six months before the subject of this book was born, Raphael had died amid universal mourning. He had achieved a success hitherto unknown for an artist. He had accumulated an immense fortune and had been offered the hand of a cardinal's niece in marriage. Leo X had even considered offering Raphael himself a red hat, 'for', as Vasari reported, 'the Pope had already decided to create a good number of new cardinals, among whom were several less worthy than Raphael'. This was the beginning of a period when the artist ceased to be regarded as a mere craftsman. The successful artist could now expect to earn large sums, to see his sons given lucrative benefices, and even to be ennobled.²

Raphael owed part of his phenomenal success to the fact that he had organised a vast and efficient workshop, employing many specialised artists, which was able to respond swiftly to the huge new demand for art, and this workshop was to set the pattern for artistic practice for the rest of the century. When he died he left a flourishing school, led by his two closest associates, Giulio Romano and Gianfrancesco Penni, who were able to continue the projects he had left unfinished. Raphael's heirs were to dominate Roman painting for many years after his death, though there were rivals. Michelangelo, dividing his time between Rome and Florence, could stand aloof from this competition. But his closest associates, Sebastiano del Piombo and Daniele da Volterra, offered a keen challenge to the Raphael school. Other talented artists and architects would stay in the city for more or less brief periods, including the young Parmigianino, Rosso Fiorentino, Beccafumi, Antonio da Sangallo the Younger and Baldassare Peruzzi. There was no shortage of patronage.

But Rome was also a city in crisis. It owed its political pre-eminence to its position as centre of the Church, but after the wanderings of the papacy during the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the Church's authority was being challenged on all sides. The growth of Protestantism was a response to serious corruption within the Church's administration and offered the most dangerous threat. But the papacy was also at risk from the unremitting ambition of the Spanish and French monarchies, who had been fighting on Italian soil for most of the early Cinquecento. The disastrous foreign policy of succeeding popes was to bring about the worst catastrophe suffered by Rome since the fall of her empire in AD 410: in 1527 the city was savagely sacked by the troops of Charles V. People were brutally treated, buildings were burned and huge fortunes lost. Most artists fled, after experiencing terrible suffering from which many were never fully to recover.³

It was into this unstable, but artistically exciting world that Alessandro Farnese (frontispiece) was born on 7 October 1520. He was to become the most important patron of the visual arts in mid-sixteenth-century Rome. He was also one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the city. He was fortunate enough to be the grandson of Pope Paul III (pl. 1), one of the most dedicated of nepotists in the history of the papacy. He was, therefore, made a cardinal at the age of fourteen, though he was not to take full holy orders for another thirty years. At fifteen he was further promoted to the life-office of Vice-Chancellor of the Roman Church, which meant that he was second only to the Pope in the Church hierarchy. His grandfather also showered him with lucrative benefices, and he was to devote much of his income to artistic and architectural patronage. Over some fifty years he commissioned buildings and paintings of the highest quality, and on an unprecedented scale, from almost all the major artists active in the city. His virtually limitless wealth enabled him to commission projects that ranged from buildings with extensive fresco decorations, such as the Villa Farnese at Caprarola and the Gesù in Rome, to miniatures and engraved gems. He also increased his family's already notable collection of antique sculpture. Alessandro is important, moreover, thanks to his position at the heart of the Church's administration, because his career spanned the marked shift in patronage patterns and taste associated with the Counter-Reformation.



1. Titian, *Paul III without cap*, 1543, oil on canvas, 106 × 82 cm., Naples, Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte (Photo: Soprintendenza ai beni artistici e storici, Naples).

Given his importance it is somewhat surprising that his patronage has not hitherto been the subject of a detailed study. He has frequently been acknowledged as a magnificent and influential patron, and some of his individual projects have been the subjects of monographs. But otherwise his patronage has received only rather general treatment.⁴ This relative neglect is all the more surprising, since the source material, both visual and documentary, is abundant. All the buildings he commissioned have survived, though some have subsequently undergone radical alterations. So too, the majority of the paintings and sculptures he commissioned and collected may be found in Naples, divided between the Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte and the archaeological museum, though a number of others have strayed, and some have been lost.⁵ The greatest losses are those of the fresco decorations in some churches, which were overlaid during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These can be but partially reconstructed from preparatory drawings and copies.

The written evidence is extensive. Vasari, who spent some time in Alessandro's court, is an invaluable source for works commissioned before the publication of his *Lives of the Artists* in 1568. In addition, there survive numerous letters of the patron himself, and of his familiars. These included Fulvio Orsini, Annibal Caro and Paolo Giovio, whose published writings have frequently been cited in connection with a small number of projects. But most of Alessandro's official correspondence has remained largely unknown in the archives of Parma and Naples. Only a minute fraction has been published, mostly in an invaluable series of articles by the nineteenth-century archivist Amadeo Ronchini. This correspondence is in fact highly informative, not only about hitherto forgotten projects and about the mechanisms of Farnese's patronage, but more generally about his political, religious and cultural attitudes. Sadly, the *carteggio* is incomplete as a result of war damage in Parma and the tragic destruction of much of the Naples archive in 1944.⁶ The distribution of the correspondence is uneven: rather less survives from the period up to about 1550, but fortunately the printed sources for this time are numerous, and such unpublished material as does survive does not greatly alter one's view of Alessandro's early patronage. The archival material is unbalanced in another respect: the majority of the remaining letters referring to works of art date from the summer months, when the Cardinal was living outside Rome. These are mostly reports of a commission's progress or requests for Alessandro's decisions. But many similar issues must have been decided in his presence and therefore never recorded on paper. My last major source has been Alessandro's household account books, which survive complete for the years 1564 to 1570.⁷ These provide minutely detailed information about his income and expenditure on everything from hay and straw, food and wine to buildings and works of art. One can only lament the fact that no more of these books have survived from the rest of his lifetime.

Before we examine the Cardinal's life in detail, it will be as well to consider what we can expect to learn about Cinquecento artistic development from investigating a patron of this kind. The study of patronage has become highly fashionable in recent years for both art historians and social historians. Sixteenth-century Italian society was run on systems of patronage. One could not hope to advance in that society unless one knew, or had friends who knew, the right

people. Similarly, in the artistic sphere most works of art were made to order for specific occasions, and for specific individuals or corporations. The sixteenth-century Italian would have distinguished two separate activities, which are lumped together in the English term 'patronage': one, 'clientelismo', described the promotion of the client, be he artist or otherwise; the other, 'mecenatismo', derived its name from the richest and most powerful patron of Augustan Rome, Gaius Cilnius Maecenas, and referred solely to the act of ordering a work of art and paying for it.⁸ The two areas were bound to overlap. A vast proportion of the correspondence of Cardinal Farnese consists of letters of recommendation of all kinds of individual, among them many artists. But this book will be primarily concerned with 'mecenatismo'.

Patronage has occupied a prominent place in the study of the history of Renaissance and Baroque art in recent years, above all since the publication in 1963 of Francis Haskell's exemplary survey of patrons in Seicento Italy.⁹ Approaches to the subject have generally been of two kinds. One has examined patronage as a general phenomenon and sought to establish a typology of the relationships between patron, artist and any intermediaries. This approach has sometimes gone on to consider 'macrosocial' questions, namely the relationship between artistic patronage and other social institutions, for example the relationship between 'mecenatismo' and 'clientelismo'.¹⁰ The other approach has tended to focus on individual patrons. The present study is of this latter kind, arising from a belief that we do not yet know enough about the individuals concerned, about the mechanisms of their patronage, or about the factors that shaped their taste, to be able usefully to make generalisations about the behaviour of Renaissance or Baroque patrons as a group. Much recent writing, particularly about iconography, has relied on implicit assumptions that there are laws according to which Cinquecento and Seicento patrons behaved; for example, that they had a highly developed aesthetic sense, which was the primary motivation in their employment of a particular artist, and which may even have affected the artist's style, or that there was a consistent type of self-glorying imagery, with which all these patrons wished their palaces and villas to be decorated.¹¹ Other scholars have been less willing to theorise about patrons' behaviour, concurring with the view expressed by Haskell:

I have fought shy of generalisations . . . nothing in my researches has convinced me of the existence of underlying laws which will be valid in all circumstances. At times the connections between economic and political considerations and a certain style have seemed particularly close; at other times I have been unable to detect anything more than the internal logic of artistic development, personal whim or the workings of chance.¹²

Where art historians have tried to explore in more general terms the structures of the relationships between patrons, artists and their advisers, their conclusions have borne out the difficulties of creating a model that works in all cases. The most successful typology of this kind has resulted in a scheme that is extremely flexible: Salvatore Settis has suggested a formula based on the rhetorical analysis of the creative process which was adapted by Renaissance literary and artistic theorists. The traditional division into *inventio*, *dispositio* and *compositio* can now be applied to the input of patron, adviser and artist. This corresponds very well with a number

of known examples. Certainly, the patron was often credited with the creation or ‘invention’ of a work of art or building that he had commissioned, and advisers would often take over parts of the rôle that we might have expected the artist to retain. But what is clear from Settimi’s examples is that this model can work only in a very general way, and that it was constantly altered in practice, with individuals making different contributions according to circumstances.¹³

What then can we learn about artistic creation by studying patrons? Patronage was a fact of life for the Renaissance artist: he created works of art primarily to fulfil the demands of his patron rather than for self-expression, and much of his creative energy was dedicated to solving the artistic problems posed by a patron’s demand for a particular subject for a particular location. In investigating patrons, we shall always be approaching the artist indirectly, but we may thereby increase our understanding of the constraints imposed on him during the process of creation, constraints that a study of the work of art and its preparatory drawings in isolation will not necessarily reveal. The patron may, for example, restrict the cost of the work or the time in which it is to be executed. Very likely he may also dictate its subject-matter or, more debatably, he may make specific demands as to its style.¹⁴ The patron may, moreover, wish to impress his personality on the work of art in various ways, using it to express his social or political aspirations or his cultural interests or pretensions. By isolating such influences the art historian may hope to understand more fully how the work of art is made: through observing the indirect effects of the patron, one may therefore complement knowledge derived from concentration on the single artist and his work. This will help us better to appreciate the artist’s skill in responding to external limitations. Further, investigating the patron provides a background against which to delineate mechanisms of patronage, the contributions of intermediaries in both obtaining commissions and composing iconographic *invenzioni*, the influence of prevailing ideas and cross-fertilisation between artists working in the same ambience. But though studying patrons can help define the problems that the artist faced, it cannot alone enable one to understand how the artist solved these problems. For this we must continue to rely on knowledge of his drawings and stylistic development, which we can then set in the context of the circumstances of the commission.

To describe how patrons behave in any particular case is straightforward, provided sufficient evidence survives. But to interpret their actions raises complex and often elusive questions. A patron may well commission a work of art for more than one reason. His motives need not, for example, be primarily aesthetic, although paintings especially remained costly luxury items, and a patron was not therefore likely to commission them unless he had some enthusiasm for art. But equally he might acquire a picture for its ‘label’, because owning it would increase his prestige.¹⁵ Indeed, at the period with which this book is concerned there was a growing interest in collecting works of art because they were ‘Raphaels’ or ‘Titians’, as opposed to paintings of some specific subject. Still other motives might be involved. A patron might commission a work from a sense that it was his duty as a member of the wealthy ruling class: in particular, charity in the form of endowing religious establishments with buildings or altarpieces provided an important stimulus to artistic patronage during the later sixteenth century.¹⁶ Political motivation, of a more or less overt kind, might also play a part: in the frequent

festival entries organised when important visitors came to a city, triumphal arches were often decorated to convey an explicit propaganda message. More subtly, the patron might commission works of art to enhance his magnificence or *magnificenza*, using art to help project his public image. This is particularly true of architecture and, to a lesser extent, of sculpture, especially for public monuments.

Renaissance patrons were generally much more interested in the execution of their architectural commissions than of commissions for statues or paintings. Here again their reasons would be mixed: to have a building erected was far more costly, but was also a means of making a grandiose statement about the patron's position. The degree to which the Renaissance audience was sensitive to such messages is well illustrated by the fact that Cosimo de' Medici il Vecchio was criticised by contemporaries for incorporating the family coat of arms on the churches he had built, on the grounds that this indicated a greater desire to promote himself than to glorify God.¹⁷

Not only are the patron's motives for commissioning a work of art likely to be ambiguous in any particular case – and the surviving documents are rarely as helpful in these matters as one would wish – but even the reasons for choosing a certain artist are unlikely to be based on straightforward considerations of style and ability. In the Cinquecento the speed with which an artist worked, whom he knew at court, and even his manners might count for as much as his talent.

Moreover, the art historian's difficulties are further complicated by the fact that for a major public figure it is hard to be certain that what we are examining is in fact the patron's taste, as opposed to that of a committee of knowledgeable couriers. The practice of employing a 'humanist adviser' was evidently widespread during the sixteenth century, if not before.¹⁸ The degree of responsibility delegated to an adviser would vary from patron to patron, but it might extend even to the selection of the artist and the choice of subject-matter.

The artistic patronage of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese offers an ideal opportunity to investigate such problems because of the scale on which he commissioned and the amount of surviving evidence. Here we have a powerful patron, living in the artistic capital of the world, for whom money was no object. He could therefore employ any artist he chose. Furthermore, the length of his career allows us to examine the development of his taste over many years, and his responses to contemporary events and fashions. Before considering how his taste was formed and the beginnings of his career as a patron, it is worth briefly discussing how he came to achieve such an eminent position. To write a full biography of the Cardinal would require another book the length of this one. What follows is therefore intended to provide an outline of the events in Alessandro's career that have a bearing on his artistic patronage. It should not be taken as a complete account of his political, religious and diplomatic activities.¹⁹

* * *

Born on 7 October 1520 at Valentano, Alessandro Farnese was the eldest son of the bellicose Pier Luigi Farnese (pl. 2) and Gerolama Orsini. The Farnese were at that time relatively new arrivals in the Roman aristocracy. A long-established family of Lazio, they possessed much territory in the region of Lake Bolsena.²⁰ From the



2. Workshop of Titian,
Pier Luigi Farnese, 1546,
oil on canvas, 106 × 95
cm., Naples, Gallerie
Nazionali di
Capodimonte (Photo:
Soprintendenza ai beni
artistici e storici,
Naples).

fourteenth century onwards they had chiefly distinguished themselves as *condottieri*, usually in the service of the papacy. They had achieved prominence early in the Quattrocento when Ranuccio Farnese was made a senator in 1417 by Martin V, and eighteen years later was appointed papal *gonfaloniere* or commander of the Pope's army by Eugenius IV. Because of the weakness of the pontifical treasury at this period Ranuccio's service was rewarded with grants of land in Lazio. These areas were later to form the nucleus of the future state of Castro, which was established by Paul III. The family's real entrée into the Roman aristocracy came when Ranuccio's son Pier Luigi married into the Caetani family, one of the oldest of Roman baronial clans. It was from this union that the future Farnese pope was born in 1468.

Alessandro Farnese senior received his early education in Rome under Pomponio Leto, and later moved to Florence to the court of Lorenzo il Magnifico.²¹ On returning to Rome, he was taken up by Rodrigo Borgia, then Vice-Chancellor of the Roman Church. Farnese rose meteorically through the ecclesiastical hierarchy, though his success was often attributed to the beauty of his sister Giulia, who

was Borgia's mistress. In 1493 Borgia, who now reigned as Pope Alexander VI, made Alessandro a cardinal, although he was not actually ordained until 1519, a pattern that was to be repeated by his grandson. The elder Alessandro did not allow his new status to interrupt a worldly lifestyle. He continued to keep a mistress, Silvia Ruffini, and sired four children, the first two of whom were made legitimate by Julius II in 1505, and the other two by Leo X in 1518.²² He also emerged as a highly shrewd politician. It is a tribute to his abilities that he was able to remain in favour with all the popes who succeeded Borgia, so that by the death of Clement VII he was by far the most eminent member of the Sacred College. On 13 October 1534 he was therefore duly elected to the pontificate, taking the name of Paul III. He was the first Roman pope for well over a century, and his election was greeted with rapturous celebration in the city.²³

It was Paul III who established the Farnese as a major power. After his elevation he embarked upon a policy of improving his family's status through nepotism, the scale of which was remarkable even by the standards of the sixteenth century.²⁴ He rightly saw that the family's ascendancy depended on the Church's patronage. Though nepotism was officially frowned upon, it was already customary for popes to appoint close relatives to advise them, on the grounds that they were the people most likely to be loyal. Alessandro, as Paul's eldest grandson, would normally have expected to pursue a secular career. Instead he was made a cardinal almost immediately after his grandfather's election. In the same conclave Paul gave the red hat also to Alessandro's cousin, Guid'Ascanio Sforza, who was later appointed Cardinal *Camerlengo*, or Chamberlain, and some years later, in 1545, Alessandro's younger brother Ranuccio was admitted to the Sacred College. Later, when Paul was offering the Duchy of Castro to another brother, Ottavio, Alessandro was bitterly to regret his enforced clerical career, and he resisted actually becoming a priest for many years, giving in only in 1564.²⁵

The family's position was further consolidated by the acquisition of much territory and by dynastic marriages. In 1537 Paul III created the Duchy of Castro for his son Pier Luigi, and then in 1545, that of Parma and Piacenza. The latter was achieved only after tense and difficult negotiations with Charles V, which at several points threatened to wreck plans for the forthcoming Council of Trent.²⁶ But Paul's priorities were clearly to put family first. His success in this matter meant that in just one generation the Farnese had acquired two states, each of which was comparable to those of the established aristocracy of Italy, such as the d'Este, Gonzaga or della Rovere families. Pier Luigi was not to enjoy his new title for long, since he was assassinated in 1547, probably on the orders of his bitter enemy Ferrante Gonzaga.²⁷ Alessandro's brother Ottavio, who had already taken over Castro, then inherited Parma and Piacenza as well.

Paul also sought to raise the family's status by arranging for his grandsons to marry into the two most important families of Europe: Ottavio married the illegitimate daughter of Charles V, Margaret of Austria, in 1538, a marriage that she resented deeply; while Orazio wed Diane de Valois, the illegitimate daughter of the French king, Henri II, in 1552. Orazio's betrothal had been arranged in 1547, while Paul was still alive, in a desperate attempt to forge an alliance with France, after the Pope had realised the failure of his policy of cultivating Charles V.

At the date of his elevation to the cardinalate Alessandro was only fourteen. His chief qualification for the office was that he had been Bishop of Parma for one month before his promotion. He had also begun studying at the Collegio Ancarano in Bologna.²⁸ There he received a thorough humanist education, learning Latin and Greek, as well as studying theology and law. The classical aspect of his education was to have lasting effect throughout his life and was a significant factor in the predominantly secular, and more specifically antique, orientation of much of his artistic patronage. His teachers at Bologna included the distinguished scholar Romolo Amaseo, and his education continued in Rome under Gian Pietro de' Grassi, then Bishop of Viterbo, and Latino Giovenale Manetti – one of the minor villains of Cellini's autobiography – who was appointed commissary for Rome's antiquities in November 1534, and who also devised the programme for the triumphal entry of Charles V to Rome in 1536.²⁹

In 1535, shortly after his promotion to the cardinalate, Alessandro's career was further enhanced with the convenient death of Ippolito de' Medici, Cardinal of S. Lorenzo in Damaso and Vice-Chancellor of the Roman Church. These offices, together with a number of other benefices, were awarded by Paul to the young Cardinal. The vice-chancellorship was the most important office in the Catholic hierarchy after the papacy itself. It lasted for life and brought with it a considerable revenue, as well as use of the beautiful Palazzo della Cancelleria (pls 38–9). The Chancellery, whose workings are illustrated in idealised form in one of Vasari's frescoes in the palace (pl. 46), controlled the issue of all papal briefs and the disposition of the Church's material benefits, besides more generally communicating the wishes and intentions of the reigning pontiff.³⁰ A Vice-Chancellor was thus in a position of great power.

But Alessandro did not enjoy power only: he was extremely rich. His financial position was established still further by the large number of lucrative benefices that were showered upon him by Paul III. Indeed, he accumulated more benefices than any other cardinal of the sixteenth century.³¹ Paul first attempted to acquire the see of Jaén for him in 1535, but Charles V refused to allow this, because of Alessandro's extreme youth.³² Consolation prizes followed rapidly in the form of the archbishoprics of Avignon, which he held from 1535 to 1551 and again from 1560 to 1566, and Monreale, which he held between 1536 and 1573. These were two of the wealthiest sees in Europe and brought the young cardinal a huge income. Altogether Alessandro held thirteen bishoprics during the course of his career, including Viseu, until 1552, Sabina and Ostia, from 1564, and Velletri, from 1578. In addition, he acquired at least sixty-four lesser benefices, including the abbacies of Farfa, Grottaferrata and the Tre Fontane. He was Archpriest of S. Maria Maggiore from 1537 until 1543,³³ and then Archpriest of St Peter's from 1543. He became First Cardinal Priest in 1564 and Dean of the Sacred College in 1579. He was also the protector of several religious orders and confraternities, including the Compagnia del Gonfalone, the Compagnia del Santissimo Crocefisso, the Ordine dei Servi, and the Religione Hierosolimitana. In 1565, he became legate *in perpetuo* to Viterbo.³⁴ At a time when pluralism of benefice-holding was one of the major abuses criticised by the Protestants, and by those who sought reform from within the Church, Alessandro's acquisitions are outstanding. The cardinalate was to change dramatically during the course of his career, as genuine reformers were

appointed and abuses at least partially stamped out.³⁵ But Alessandro was to continue flagrantly holding multiple benefices and controlling the regress to many others, in spite of his occasional protestations of embarrassment and intent to reform.³⁶

The income derived from all these benefices was enormous. An assessment drawn up in 1571 of the incomes of cardinals from benefices records that he gained 76,750 *scudi* a year from church revenue. He also had other sources of wealth: in 1569 his account books record an income of 95,538 *scudi*, and by the end of his life he was receiving 120,000.³⁷ The total income of all the cardinals amounted to one million *scudi* in 1571, and only one Italian cardinal, Ippolito d'Este, who was a keen rival of Alessandro's as an artistic patron, had an income that came anywhere near that of the Farnese cardinal. The disposable income of the papacy itself is extremely difficult to establish, but has been variously estimated between 900,000 *scudi* in 1569, approximately two thirds of a million *scudi* in 1571, rising to 1,419,000 in about 1590.³⁸ Alessandro therefore had revenues amounting to between 8.5 and 11.5 per cent of those of the papacy.

Paul III was determined that his grandson should learn his political skills. The fascinating *Ricordi* that he wrote for Alessandro, advising him how to conduct himself with the other cardinals after his death, are particularly revealing in this respect.³⁹ At first Alessandro was too young and inexperienced to do more than execute Paul's policies in diplomatic negotiations. He received much help from his first secretary, Marcello Cervini, who was briefly to reign in 1555 as Marcellus II, as well as from other experienced secretaries such as Niccolò Ardinghelli, Girolamo Dandini and Bernardino Maffei. But gradually a more personal policy of cynical self-advancement came to dominate his political conduct. Alessandro was ambitious: if he could not obtain a duchy, he could at least aspire to the papacy – though he was never to achieve it.⁴⁰

During Paul III's pontificate Alessandro was frequently absent from Rome. He was sent on many legations to tackle the urgent problems of rivalry between France and Spain, the spread of Protestantism and the need to set up a universal church council. But in his negotiations he would always put family before the interests of the Church. His attitude to the Church's affairs was never that of a theologian. Rather, it was strictly pragmatic, but continuously influenced by the needs of the Farnese, especially himself. He was soon required to take part in the delicate talks to establish the long-promised council, which was eventually to be held at Trent. Here he showed himself alert to political currents, but not always skilled in judgement. His first mission was to visit Charles V in 1539 to offer papal condolences on the death of the Emperor's wife. The legation had further purposes: firstly, to suggest that Charles might now marry the daughter of the French king, in the hope of achieving peace between the warring rulers, an idea that was rejected; and secondly, to raise the question of establishing a duchy for Alessandro's brother Ottavio. Paul III sent him on an important legation to Francis I and Charles V the following year, in which his efforts were again marred by the confusion of family and state interests, though in his reports to his grandfather he did at least persistently urge the Pope to demonstrate his sincerity by enacting reforms in Rome and by summoning the council as quickly as possible.⁴¹ The extent to which Farnese ambitions were constantly bound up with political affairs

is evident again from Alessandro's trip to France of 1543–4. The Pope was wooing France at this time in the hope of arranging the marriage of Vittoria Farnese to the Duke of Orléans, which would bring the Duchy of Milan to them. Alessandro was politely received in Paris at this time, although his mission was regarded with some suspicion and was doomed to failure from the start. Moreover, this policy risked a serious breach with the Emperor, as the Cardinal discovered in a humiliating interview with Charles at Worms in January 1544.⁴²

Paul sent him on another mission to the Emperor in 1545 at Worms, the outcome of which was that Charles V joined forces with the pontifical army to wage war on the Protestant Schmalkaldic League. The Cardinal, together with his brother Ottavio, then papal *gonfaloniere*, accompanied the army throughout the campaign of 1546.⁴³ Indicative of both his zeal in his mission for the overthrow of the heretics, and a certain lack of judgement, is the anecdote of an incognito visit that he paid to a bookshop in Protestant Ulm. He fell into discussion with the people there, lamenting that they had left the true path, and he became so heated ('riscaldato et infervorato') in his defence of the Catholic Church that his companions feared that his identity might be revealed and were seriously alarmed for his safety. 'We all praised the good Cardinal's actions,' as the *avviso* reports, 'but pray that he will proceed more cautiously in future.'⁴⁴ Such rashness is not typical of Alessandro's later political behaviour, though how skilled a politician he in fact was is open to question. One historian has accused him of showing 'neither interest in nor understanding of the forces at work for a renewal within the Church'.⁴⁵ He developed a considerable ability to be seen to be reforming when it was necessary, but how far this was born of genuine spiritual conviction is highly doubtful.⁴⁶

Paul III had taken every precaution to ensure that his family remained powerful after his death. But unfortunately, the issue of Ottavio's possession of Parma and Piacenza, which had already led to disagreement between the Pope and Alessandro in 1549, caused the Farnese several difficult years after the election of Julius III.⁴⁷ Paul had hoped that the election of one of his *creature* would favour his descendants, but the Del Monte pope was quite unable to reconcile French and imperial interests over the Farnese's rights to the duchy, with the result that Ottavio rebelled against the papacy, allying himself with France in 1551. The Farnese cardinals were forced to flee from Rome, though they were immediately ordered to return. When they did, Julius promptly deprived them of their wealthy benefices. Alessandro did not remain in Rome for long, departing for the court of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici. The war proved disastrous for the Pope, and Julius was forced in 1552 to restore the duchy to Ottavio. He also had to reinstate some of the Farnese cardinals' benefices, though Monreale was not given back until 1556. Alessandro returned briefly to Rome in triumph in June 1552, but he chose to spend most of his time away from the city until well after Julius's death in 1555.⁴⁸ This naturally caused a major interruption in his artistic patronage.

Alessandro visited France in 1552, for the marriage of his brother Orazio, and was reported to have broken many hearts at the French court during the course of his visit.⁴⁹ After his return to Rome, following the death of Julius III, he remained in and around the city for most of his life, apart from a visit to his diocese in Monreale in 1568 and short excursions to his villas in Lazio. He continued to play an important part in ecclesiastical administration, receiving an increasing number

of dignities and benefices and working to maintain his personal prestige.⁵⁰ But his ambitions for the papacy were frustrated, largely through concerted pressure from Spain and the Medici, who felt that one Farnese pope had been quite enough.⁵¹ This disappointment caused him to retire from Rome in 1587 to his villa at Caprarola, where he seems to have devoted the remainder of his life to pious meditation.⁵²

Cardinal Farnese died, probably of a stroke, on 4 March 1589, aged sixty-eight. Public grief was immense. He was buried with great pomp before the high altar of the greatest church he had built, the Gesù. This was adorned with temporary decorations designed by the Cavaliere d'Arpino. The catafalque itself was built in the form of a mausoleum, and was decorated with allegorical figures of the 'eight principal virtues of Cardinal Farnese': Faith, Hope, Charity, Religion, Prudence, Fortitude, Justice and Temperance, together with several lesser virtues such as Liberality and Hospitality.⁵³

Although Alessandro's character is often difficult to disentangle from the public persona, the qualities represented on the catafalque are in fact those on which contemporaries frequently commented. A highly rhetorical passage written by G.A. Gilio in 1564 is typical:

The most illustrious Farnese... has always favoured every *virtuoso* and every rare intellect. If we consider the humanity and affability, which is so greatly praised in princes, whom shall we find to equal, let alone exceed him? If we regard benignity and clemency, we shall find that he has surpassed by a long way the Emperor Titus. As a result he is rightly entitled to the delights of men, with which he was honoured by the entire Roman people, indeed by the whole world.

The author continues his comparisons with Roman emperors, singling out Alessandro's *familiarità*, his justice, his courtesy, his liberality and his 'rare and gentle spirit'.⁵⁴ Other sources also testify to his generosity, his erudition and his charm. A certain possessiveness about both objects and people is revealed in his favourite boast that he owned the three most beautiful things in Rome – his church of the Gesù, his palace and his daughter, Clelia.⁵⁵

Certainly, he collected around himself a splendid court in the Cancelleria, where he still lived even after he had inherited Palazzo Farnese.⁵⁶ Cardinals during the earlier part of the sixteenth century were expected to enjoy a lavish lifestyle, building huge palaces, which they would fill with extensive collections of antiquities, and maintaining large households.⁵⁷ Paolo Cortesi, who wrote a treatise on the cardinalate in 1510, recommended the maintenance of an impressive palace on the improbable grounds of prudence, writing that,

in choosing the manner of exterior decoration of the cardinals' palaces that type should be chosen which will dazzle the eyes of the people by its dignified splendour, rather than one that will tend to inspire contempt by its modest appearance.⁵⁸

Alessandro continued to live in a manner of which Cortesi would have approved long after notions of austerity and spirituality had come to dominate the Roman Curia.⁵⁹ His household in 1554 numbered over three hundred mouths, which

seems enormous when compared with that of a relatively rich cardinal like Bernardo Salviati, who could muster a *familia* of only 110 in 1563–5.⁶⁰ Alessandro frequently put on lavish entertainments, such as the Carnival ball of 1541, for which Giulio Clovio designed the costumes, or the ‘comedia’ with scenery designed by Aristotile da Sangallo around 1546, which Alessandro had wanted made in imitation of a stage-set he had seen at a banquet given by Roberto Strozzi.⁶¹

The household at all times included a number of men of letters (*letterati*), among them Annibal Caro, Bernardino Maffei, Paolo Giovio, Claudio Tolomei and Fulvio Orsini, most of whom were employed as secretaries, as well as several artists who lived permanently in the palace. The Cardinal always encouraged writers and antiquarian scholars: Onofrio Panvinio, for example, was given a monthly stipend for himself, with an artist and servants to continue his archaeological work.⁶² Alessandro also arranged for the posthumous publication of the poetry of Francesco Maria Molza and of Pietro Bembo.⁶³ Numerous works were dedicated to him, ranging from Panvinio’s *Fasti consulares* and Gilio’s treatise on sacred images to Giovio’s *Descriptiones Britanniae, Scotiae et Orchadum* (Venice, 1548) and Hieronimo Mercuriale’s *De arte gymnastica* (Venice, 1569).⁶⁴ Ever eager to promote learning, towards the end of his life the Cardinal established a *studiolo* with the assistance of Fulvio Orsini, so that the Farnese library, which included many valuable and rare manuscripts, and the antique collection could be available to all scholars.⁶⁵ The Cardinal was at one point a patron of the composer Palestrina, and his household included also a dwarf and a fool, who were portrayed after Alessandro’s death by Agostino Carracci.⁶⁶

In this lavish lifestyle Alessandro conforms entirely to the prescriptions of Cortesi’s treatise.⁶⁷ This had been written in the luxurious, almost hedonistic, atmosphere of early Cinquecento Rome. Over the course of Alessandro’s career the religious climate was to change dramatically in response to Counter-Reformation pressures. The new stricter and more austere attitudes are reflected clearly in a number of later treatises on the cardinalate, which are concerned entirely with cardinals’ religious and pastoral duties and refrain from all discussion of splendour.⁶⁸ In these circumstances Alessandro’s continuing to maintain a mode of living that belonged to the pre-Sack era was all the more remarkable, although he was not entirely isolated in this respect among the cardinals.

The magnificence of his way of life is apparent in a passage comparing him with Ippolito d’Este:

... since only those men are esteemed and honoured now who, under guise of continence and humility, advance the greater part of their income, not only without spending it on anything, but not even entertaining people of worth and intellect like him [Pirro Ligorio]. Leaving aside our cardinal [Ippolito d’Este] and Cardinal Farnese, he could very well understand that there was no one who had the means, still less wanted to spend. To such extremity was this court reduced, that men like him were forced to pursue their living and their fortune elsewhere.⁶⁹

It was the spectacular scale of Alessandro’s court patronage, attested to by many sources such as this, together with the commissions that we shall examine in subsequent chapters, that made him worthy of the title by which he was generally known, ‘il Gran Cardinale’.

II

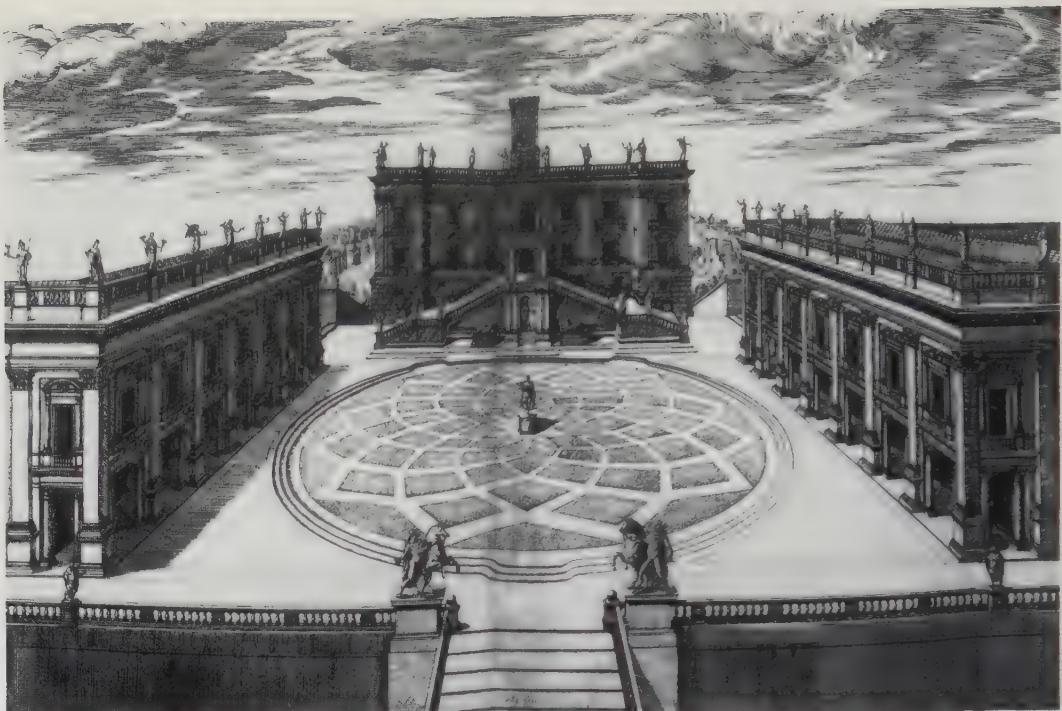
ARTISTIC EDUCATION AND FIRST COMMISSIONS: THE DECORATIVE ARTS

Early experience of the visual arts

LONG BEFORE CARDINAL ALESSANDRO FARNESE emerged as an artistic patron in his own right, he was able to acquire extensive knowledge of the visual arts, since both his grandfather and father were themselves patrons of art and architecture on a notable scale. The young man could observe Paul III and Pier Luigi commissioning a range of grand buildings, paintings, tapestries, metalwork and miniatures, choosing artists and discussing the progress of projects. On occasion the Cardinal was even required to act as an intermediary in the running of a commission. Indeed, for some schemes, such as the building of the family palace in Rome and the series of portraits by Titian, the Farnese clan as a whole acted as patron. Through this kind of involvement in artistic negotiations, by the time he came to take responsibility for his own projects Alessandro had not only gained considerable experience, but had been greatly influenced by the manner in which his family dealt with artists. So in this chapter it will be useful briefly to outline the patronage of Paul III and Pier Luigi, concentrating on those schemes to which Alessandro is known to have contributed, before turning to the earliest of his own individual commissions.

Paul III's accession in 1534 was hailed as a new Golden Age for artistic patronage, in sharp contrast to the dismal years following the Sack of Rome.¹ The scale of Paul's programme for building and decorative projects is remarkable, the more so given his other pressing political and religious concerns – reform of the Church and the quelling of Protestant revolt, the negotiation of a precarious peace between Charles V and Francis I, and the recurrent threat of Turkish invasion.² Yet at no point during his fifteen years as Pope did Paul allow the pace of artistic activity to slacken.

Much of his early papal patronage was determined by the circumstances he inherited, and this to a large extent explains the emphasis on architecture, somewhat at the expense of painting. But it seems also to be the result of his personal artistic interests, and it set an influential pattern for his grandson. One of the most urgent tasks, dictated by both the grim memory of 1527 and the Turkish menace,



3. E. Duperac, *View of the Campidoglio*, 1569, engraving (Photo: The Conway Library, Courtauld Institute).

was the enormously costly fortification of Rome and the Papal States.³ This did not, however, prevent Paul from simultaneously undertaking a large number of other projects to reassert the prestige of Rome, concentrating on sites with particular political and symbolic associations. These included restarting the construction of the new basilica of St Peter's under Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, together with Peruzzi, and later under Michelangelo,⁴ as well as Michelangelo's magnificent reorganisation of the Campidoglio around the bronze equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius (pl. 3).⁵ The idea of impressing visitors with Rome's importance also motivated Paul's additions to the Vatican palaces. His most notable contributions were the commission to Michelangelo to paint the *Last Judgement* on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel, and the complex, designed by Sangallo, comprising the Scala Regia, the Sala Regia, a grand reception room for foreign ambassadors, whose decoration was begun under Perino del Vaga and Daniele da Volterra (pl. 4), and the Cappella Paolina, later frescoed by a reluctant Michelangelo.⁶ In addition, Paul had Perino make minor additions to Raphael's Logge, as part of an impressive route guiding the visitor through the Vatican complex, and had Peruzzi, and later Sangallo, reconstruct the Belvedere corridor, leading to the statue court, to which he presented several sculptures.⁷

Whilst commissioning these public projects, the Farnese pope did not neglect to build himself a number of sumptuous residences around Rome. One of the first such schemes was the restoration of Castel Sant'Angelo, which was part of Sangallo's fortification plan for Rome. While the defences were being reconstructed, Paul had part of the interior transformed into a splendid papal apartment under the direction of Raffaello da Montelupo, who also sculpted the angel that formerly surmounted the castle (pl. 5). The new apartment was decorated with an extensive



4 (above). The Sala Regia (Photo: Musei Vaticani, Archivio Fotografico).



5. Raffaello da Montelupo, *Angel*, 1544, marble and bronze, Rome, Castel Sant'Angelo (Photo: Author).



6. Perino del Vaga and workshop, the Sala Paolina, 1545–7, fresco, Rome, Castel Sant'Angelo (Photo: I.C.C.D.).

series of secular frescoes, based largely on classical mythology and ancient history, by teams under Perino and Luzio Romano (pl. 6).⁸ The combination of fortification with a comfortable dwelling continued not only Paul's practice in Lazio before his accession, but more generally, a trend of earlier sixteenth-century popes. In some respects it anticipates Alessandro's development at Caprarola.⁹ It had the combined advantage of insuring against a repetition of the events of 1527 and allowing the Pope to benefit from the healthy air, as a letter from his doctor stressed.¹⁰ Paul shared the passion of his contemporaries for *villeggiatura*, the practice of withdrawing to the country in the summer months to escape the heat and risk of disease in the city. He therefore built extensively to ensure sufficient variety in his summer lodgings. He had already, before becoming pope, had Sangallo build him palaces at Gradoli and Capodimonte, and he frequently visited other Farnese residences at Valentano and Isola Bisentina, as well as the papal hunting lodge at La Magliana.¹¹ But he also revived Palazzo Venezia as a summer residence, since the air there was considered particularly wholesome, and commissioned a covered walkway to be built from the palace to the church of the Aracoeli, and a private



7. Anon., medal of Paul III with reverse showing Frascati, 1549, bronze, diameter 3.5 cm., British Museum (Photo: Warburg Institute).

villa next door, which was eventually demolished to make way for the Vittorio Emanuele monument. The work here was designed and probably directed by Jacopo Meleghino and decorated with stucchi and frescoes by Battista Franco and Michele Grechi da Lucca.¹² After 1545 Paul often stayed at the Villa Carafa on the Quirinal, which Cardinal Alessandro had rented. Indeed, it was there that he died. Some building work was carried out at the villa, again under the supervision and, perhaps, the design of Meleghino.¹³

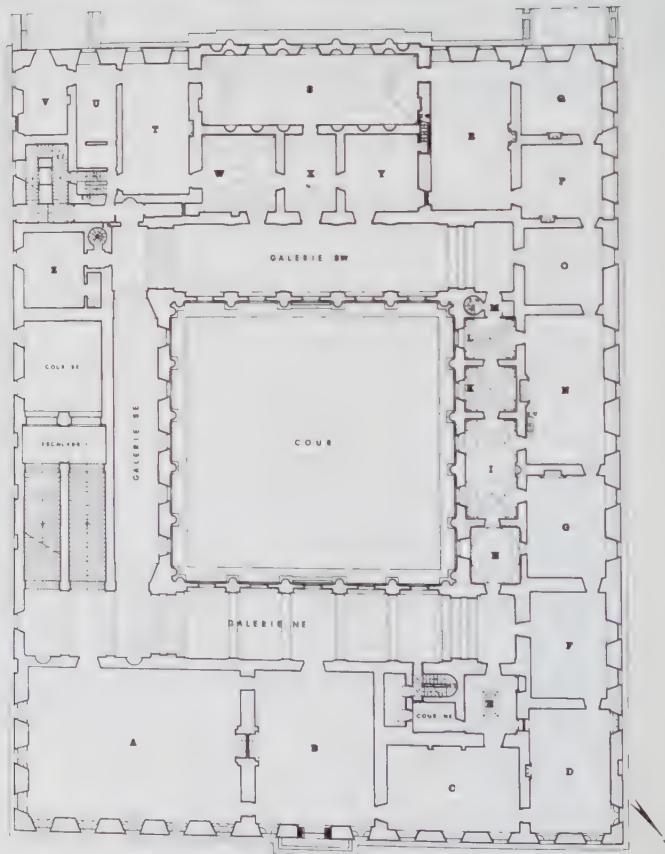
Paul also had the town of Frascati substantially transformed by Meleghino. The town was reorganised and new streets made, and Paul encouraged the building of villas in the area. Frascati continued to be developed for some years by the Farnese and their associates, beginning with Alessandro Rufino, a relative of Paul's mistress, and later Cardinal Alessandro's majordomo. His Villa Rufina was singled out on a medal issued by Paul in 1549, bearing the inscription TUSCOLO REST[ITUTO] (pl. 7).¹⁴

One of Paul III's most significant monumental commissions was for the magnificent family palace (pls 8–9), which had been begun by Sangallo while Paul was still a cardinal. The project was dramatically expanded on his election to the papacy but was not finished until the very end of Cardinal Alessandro's life. In the meantime several architects put forward ever more grandiose schemes for its completion. These included Michelangelo's plan to have the *Farnese Bull* (pl. 10) restored as a fountain on axis with a wooden bridge across the Tiber leading to Paul's villa in Trastevere, adjoining the Villa Farnesina.¹⁵ The project would have been extremely costly, and was hardly necessary, since the Ponte Sisto was very close. It would really have been built solely as a monument to Farnese power, and it is significant that Cardinal Alessandro was later to revive the plan.¹⁶

The young Cardinal was frequently called upon to act on Paul's behalf in supervising commissions while the Pope was engaged with pressing matters of state. For example, Alessandro gained some of his earliest architectural experience through Paul's fortification projects, often working as intermediary between Pope and architect, conveying Paul's instructions and receiving reports from Sangallo and Meleghino.¹⁷ He was to play a similar rôle in discussions about the extensions to the Vatican palaces¹⁸ and must have begun to learn much about architectural principles from his active involvement in such schemes. He would also have witnessed Paul's habit of consulting a second architect before embarking on a major project, a practice that his grandson subsequently followed regularly. More-



8 (above). Antonio da Sangallo the Younger and Michelangelo, Façade of Palazzo Farnese (Photo: Author).



9. Ground plan of the *piano nobile* of Palazzo Farnese, from *Le Palais Farnèse*, 1981, II, p. 405 (Photo by permission of the École française de Rome).



10. *Farnese Bull*, 3rd century AD, Naples, Museo Nazionale (Photo: Soprintendenza Archeologica delle Province di Napoli e Caserta, Naples).

over, it is clear that architecture was frequently discussed, and on a highly sophisticated level, in Alessandro's immediate circle during the 1530s and 1540s. Quite apart from what he would have learned from consultation with Paul III and Pier Luigi, Marcello Cervini must also have been an influence. Cervini was himself a keen amateur architect and a member of the Accademia del Virtù, founded by Claudio Tolomei, then secretary to Pier Luigi.¹⁹ One of the Academy's projects was to produce a new edition of Vitruvius. Others who belonged were Alessandro's secretary Bernardino Maffei, and Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola, his future architect. The young Cardinal may have met Vignola during the 1530s or early 1540s either in this circle or through Meleghino, for whom Vignola was working at this time. Tolomei wrote in 1542 of the need for a patron 'of noble and skilled [*virtuoso*] mind' for the Academy, and continued in what must surely be an allusion to Alessandro, 'I do not know if some new Alexander the Great will be re-awakened'.²⁰ Alessandro did not in fact become their patron, but he was surely present at conversations about architecture between members of this group. Such contacts must have ensured that he rapidly became sufficiently acquainted with the latest ideas about architecture to be able to fulfil his rôle as Paul's intermediary with substantial competence. Certainly, in later life he was a discerning patron of architecture.

Alessandro had soon become involved in the building of the family palace. Unlike most of Paul's artistic projects, this was not financed to any great degree by



11. Guglielmo della Porta,
tomb of Paul III, 1544–74,
bronze and marble,
Vatican, St Peter's (Photo:
Reverendia Fabbrica di S.
Pietro).

the papal treasury. Much research remains to be done on the complex payments for works of art by Paul III, for which the documents survive only partially. But from those we have, it seems that the sums disbursed from papal funds towards the palace were quite small in comparison with what was being asked of members of the family, and in particular of Cardinal Alessandro, up to 1546, when Paul took over entire financial responsibility.²¹ A letter of 1542 from the papal Treasurer General vividly suggests why the papacy could not afford to contribute much at that date, since resources were being stretched to cover so many simultaneous projects.²² All Paul's descendants were required to pay for the palace, although they did not always do so with a good grace: a serious quarrel broke out in 1542, when Pier Luigi refused to pay the 400 ducats a month demanded by his father, and it was not resolved until Alessandro and others agreed to pay the sum for him.²³ Pier Luigi's reluctance is understandable, since at this very time he was commissioning extensive building works at Castro, the centre of his new duchy. Presumably the fortifications were subsidised by the papacy, but the Farnese duke may well have had to pay for the other buildings there, such as the ducal palace.²⁴ The extra burden on Alessandro's resources must be a major reason for his commissioning relatively little in his own right during the early 1540s.



12. Guglielmo della Porta, *Paul III*, 1546–7, marble, 75 cm. high, Naples, Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte (Photo: Soprintendenza ai beni artistici e storici, Naples).

There is little evidence to suggest that Alessandro ever intervened to any great degree in Paul III's programmes of fresco decoration, although he did introduce Paul's chief painter, Perino del Vaga, to him.²⁵ This may partly explain a relative indifference to painting, which can be observed in his later patronage. But, together with his secretary and artistic adviser, Annibal Caro, the Cardinal did play an important part in the execution of Paul's most important sculptural project, that for his tomb (pl. 11). The tomb was begun before Paul's death but was not installed in St Peter's until 1574, after a long dispute over its site and form.²⁶ The sculptor was Guglielmo della Porta, who had executed two marble busts of Paul, as well as a bronze one (pl. 12).²⁷ Guglielmo first planned a large free-standing tomb, which evidently owed much to Michelangelo's plans for the tomb of Julius II. It was originally meant to have occupied a site in the Cappella Gregoriana, but after Paul's death Michelangelo, as architect of St Peter's, objected to the free-standing monument on the ground that it would obstruct the lines of the basilica. He proposed instead a tomb with fewer statues set in a niche in the south-east pier of the crossing, opposite the site projected for the tomb of Julius III. The Farnese apparently accepted the proposal concerning the site, but continued to insist on a more prominent monument set against the wall, rather than in the niche. The issue was not settled until 1574, when Cardinal Alessandro, anxious to have the tomb finished in time for the Jubilee of 1575, gave in and allowed the reduced tomb to be installed according to Michelangelo's proposals.²⁸ Alessandro would naturally have been involved in the planning from an early stage, though no documents record his intervention before Paul's death. From 1549 he took responsibility for the commission, though delegating much to Caro and to his majordomo, Bishop



13. Perino del Vaga, *St Paul let down in a basket*, 1540–7, pen and brown ink with brown wash and white heightening, 25.4 × 15.2 cm., Devonshire Collection (Reproduced by permission of the Chatsworth Settlement Trustees).

Alessandro Rufino. Throughout the lengthy negotiations, characteristically, his chief preoccupation was to ensure that the tomb was suitably grand for the Farnese pope.

One further area of Paul's patronage is important, since it seems to have been particularly influential on the formation of Alessandro's taste, namely, his various commissions for works of decorative art. Many of these were designed by Perino del Vaga, who, Vasari suggests, was greatly overworked by the demands of his Farnese patrons, and above all by their requiring him to execute even the most menial tasks.²⁹ These included designs for one, or possibly two copies, decorated with the deeds of St Peter and St Paul, for which several drawings survive (pl. 13).³⁰ Among other artists who worked for Paul were the gem-engravers Valerio

Belli and Alessandro Cesati.³¹ Benvenuto Cellini, characteristically, had a somewhat stormy relationship with the Pope, culminating in Paul's imprisoning the goldsmith in Castel Sant'Angelo for alleged embezzlement. Before that he had commissioned him to make the binding for an *uffiziolo*, which had probably been illuminated by Giulio Clovio, later Alessandro's miniaturist, as a present for Charles V.³² Cellini was also briefly in charge of the papal mint, and designed a gold *scudo* with a half-length figure of St Paul on the reverse, and the motto 'vas electionis'.³³

Pier Luigi Farnese, whose notorious violence of character has tended to obscure his activities as a patron of the visual arts, shared the family taste for the minor arts. He employed Alessandro Cesati as his *guardarobba* at some point before 1546, presumably as curator of his collection, and he commissioned an elaborate casket with engraved rock-crystal reliefs of a type similar to Alessandro's famous *Cassetta Farnese*.³⁴ He also apparently commissioned a number of distinctive bindings for books.³⁵

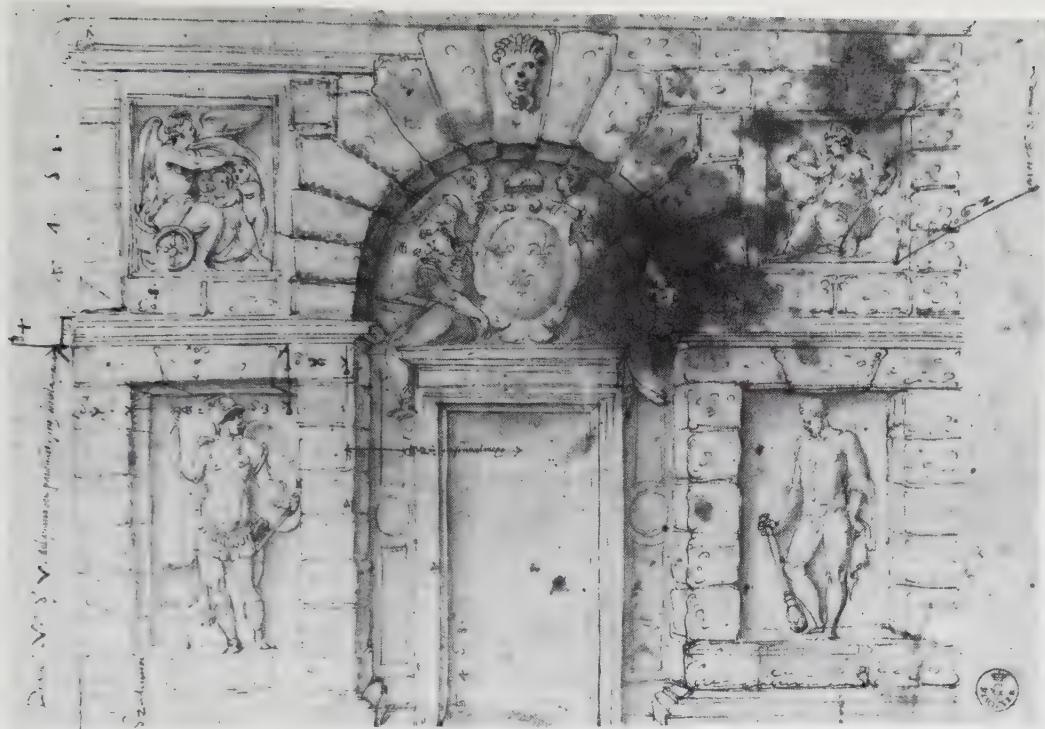
Although, as we have seen, Alessandro was often involved in the running of his grandfather's commissions, there is little evidence to suggest that he played a similar rôle in his father's, such as those for Castro. But he may well have been influenced by Pier Luigi's choice of chief court painter during the 1530s and early 1540s, Francesco (or Cecchino, as he was often affectionately called) Salviati, an artist whom Alessandro was later to support frequently.³⁶ Pier Luigi commissioned from him decorative work for the castle at Nepi, which included a series of tapestries of events from the life of Alexander the Great. These may be the ones to which the Duke referred in a letter of February 1540 to his agent in Brussels.³⁷ One of them, *Alexander sacrificing*, is now in Naples (pl. 14).³⁸ Among Salviati's other lost works for Pier Luigi were the decoration of a *stufa*, or bathroom, at Nepi, and the *apparato* for the Duke's entry into Castro in 1543.³⁹ He also on occasion designed stage-sets for him.⁴⁰ A drawing in Florence, perhaps from Salviati's workshop, which depicts the lower half of a façade, decorated with the ducal arms and figures that include Mars, Hercules, Minerva, Fortune and Eternity, must also date from this period (pl. 15).⁴¹

In 1544, Salviati's career as Pier Luigi's painter came to an abrupt, if characteristic, end after the Duke had tried to imprison him, and the artist fled to Florence. From a letter of Annibal Caro, who tried to intercede for the unfortunate Cecchino, we gather that, dissatisfied with his remuneration, he had refused to go to Nepi, and that Pier Luigi's anger had been stirred up by the painter's enemies.⁴² But Caro evidently failed to effect a reconciliation, since Salviati meanwhile found work in the Medici court and did not return to Rome until after Pier Luigi's death. He clearly, however, had not given up hope of receiving patronage from other members of the family, since he rushed back to Rome in 1547 'at the scent of Perino's death', in the hope of gaining the Sala Regia commission, and was taken up by Cardinal Alessandro shortly after.⁴³

It was in this context, under strong influence from his grandfather, that the Cardinal began to make his first independent commissions for works of art. He had as yet little need for new buildings, having access to many splendid palaces and villas, and showing little interest at this stage in ecclesiastical projects. Instead, as we shall now see, he developed a taste for the decorative arts.



14. Brussels manufacture, after a design by Salviati, *Alexander the Great sacrificing*, 1540, tapestry, 385 × 315 cm., Naples, Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte (Photo: Soprintendenza ai beni artistici e storici, Naples).



15. Workshop of Francesco Salviati(?), design for a façade with the arms of Pier Luigi Farnese, before 1543, pen, brown ink and brown wash, 20.3 × 30.1 cm., Florence, Uffizi, 956 Orn.

First commissions

Throughout his life Alessandro Farnese was a keen collector of medals – both antique and modern – engraved gems, miniatures, maiolica⁴⁴ and metal-work. His enthusiasm for this type of art is conspicuous in comparison with his attitude to painting and sculpture. Artists of all kinds were always welcomed in Alessandro's court,⁴⁵ but, significantly, his closest artistic friendships were formed with such men as the miniaturist Giulio Clovio and the gem-engraver Giovanni Bernardi. A taste for exquisite and costly works of decorative art was not uncommon among princely patrons of this period: Alessandro shared it with notable collectors such as Ippolito d'Este, Cardinal Giovanni Salviati and, above all, Duke Cosimo de' Medici, with whom he likewise shared many artists.⁴⁶ Closer to hand was the example of his grandfather and father. One might indeed regard Alessandro's patronage in this area as merely conventional, distinguished only by the remarkable amounts spent on these works, by the 'nouveau-riche' aspect of his taste which is particularly evident here but which, arguably, also influenced later commissions for architecture and painting. Nevertheless, he commissioned some of the most important surviving examples of Cinquecento goldsmiths' work: the superb *Cassetta Farnese* and Antonio Gentile's magnificent altarservice, not to mention such outstanding miniatures as Giulio Clovio's *Farnese Hours*.

Since most of Alessandro's earliest commissions were for works of decorative art, they are highly instructive about the formation of his taste. For such commissions he rarely worked through his advisers, as he did for fresco cycles or when acquiring antique sculpture. He would, rather, communicate directly with the artist. These commissions are important also because they were often executed on the designs of artists, such as Perino del Vaga and Francesco Salviati, who were contemporaneously painting frescoes for Alessandro and his family. We can thus examine the ways in which artists influenced each other under the stimulus of the Cardinal's patronage, since the freedom from patronal interference suggests that the distinct similarities in ornament that occur derive more from communication between the artists themselves than from an imposed 'stile farnesiano'.⁴⁷

Many of Alessandro's first artistic contacts outside the immediate sphere of his grandfather's patronage were apparently made through the circle of Giovanni Gaddi, a clerk of the Camera Apostolica. Gaddi's role as a patron and artistic entrepreneur has never been studied in detail, although he evidently gathered around him a lively group of artists, mostly Florentine, including Salviati, Niccolò Tribolo, Benvenuto Cellini and Raffaello da Montelupo. His reputation was sufficiently high for him to be entrusted with the organisation of the 1536 *entrata* for Charles V, together with Latino Giovenale Manetti. This was an important opportunity for Paul III to show the man who had so recently sacked the city the evidence of its recovery, and the temporary decorations, with their programme drawn from ancient and recent history, conveyed a political message celebrating the power of Rome as both ecclesiastical and imperial centre of the world.⁴⁸ Interestingly, Gaddi's secretary during the 1530s and early 1540s, at precisely the period when Alessandro was making his first independent commissions, was Annibal Caro (pl. 194), who was later to become the Cardinal's chief artistic adviser.⁴⁹ Caro's precise role at this time in introducing artists to Alessandro cannot be determined, but he was friendly with many artists who would later work for Alessandro.

Vasari implies that it was through Gaddi that Giulio Clovio was first introduced to the Cardinal.⁵⁰ Caro and Clovio became close associates: Giulio exploited his friend's literary talents on several occasions and even had him compose a love letter to an unknown female miniaturist for him.⁵¹ Other contacts with artists in Gaddi's circle were also to prove important for Alessandro's subsequent patronage. Manno Sbarri, the goldsmith who made the framework of the *Cassetta Farnese*, was known to Caro by 1538, when the writer commissioned him to set a cameo.⁵² Francesco Salviati presumably met Gaddi when he worked on the 1536 entry for Charles V, and in 1541 he painted portraits of both Gaddi and Caro, 'suoi amicissimi'.⁵³ But, as pointed out above, Salviati may have first become known to the Cardinal through Pier Luigi during the 1530s.

Another Farnese artist who was one of Gaddi's *familiari* was the gem-engraver and medallist Alessandro Cesati, sometimes known as 'Il Grecetto'.⁵⁴ Conceivably he was introduced by Caro to the Cardinal. He and Caro were doubtless drawn together by their shared passion for antique medals.⁵⁵ Cesati was, however, a prominent figure in Farnese circles: in 1540 he was in charge of the papal mint and produced new coins for Ottavio Farnese's Duchy of Camerino.⁵⁶ He also, as we have seen, worked for Pier Luigi.⁵⁷ By 1540, evidently now an intimate of the

Farnese family and familiar with Alessandro's current commissions, Cesati could instruct Caro, who was visiting Giovanni Bernardi at Faenza, to try to acquire some drawings by Perino del Vaga; these were designs for crystals, which Bernardi was engraving for the Cardinal.⁵⁸ Despite working for several members of the family, Cesati apparently regarded Alessandro as his particular patron.⁵⁹ For him he made a portrait medal with the head in gold and the rest in silver. This was described as 'cosa rarissima' by Vasari, but has unfortunately not survived.⁶⁰ The Cardinal also commissioned from him a portrait head of Henri II, engraved on a cornelian, which is now in St Petersburg,⁶¹ and in 1550, a small cross, which was intended as a gift.⁶²

Giulio Clovio

The Croatian miniaturist Giulio Clovio (pl. 16) worked continuously for Alessandro Farnese for some forty years, not only producing miniatures, but also acting as an artistic adviser. Precisely when he entered the Cardinal's service is not certain: Vasari implies a date of 1537, but the Portuguese miniaturist Francisco de Holanda states that when he visited him the following year, Clovio was still a *familiare* of Cardinal Grimani. He must, however, have joined Alessandro's house-

16. El Greco, *Giulio Clovio*, 1570–2, oil on canvas, 58 × 86 cm., Naples, Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte (Photo: Soprintendenza ai beni artistici e storici, Naples).

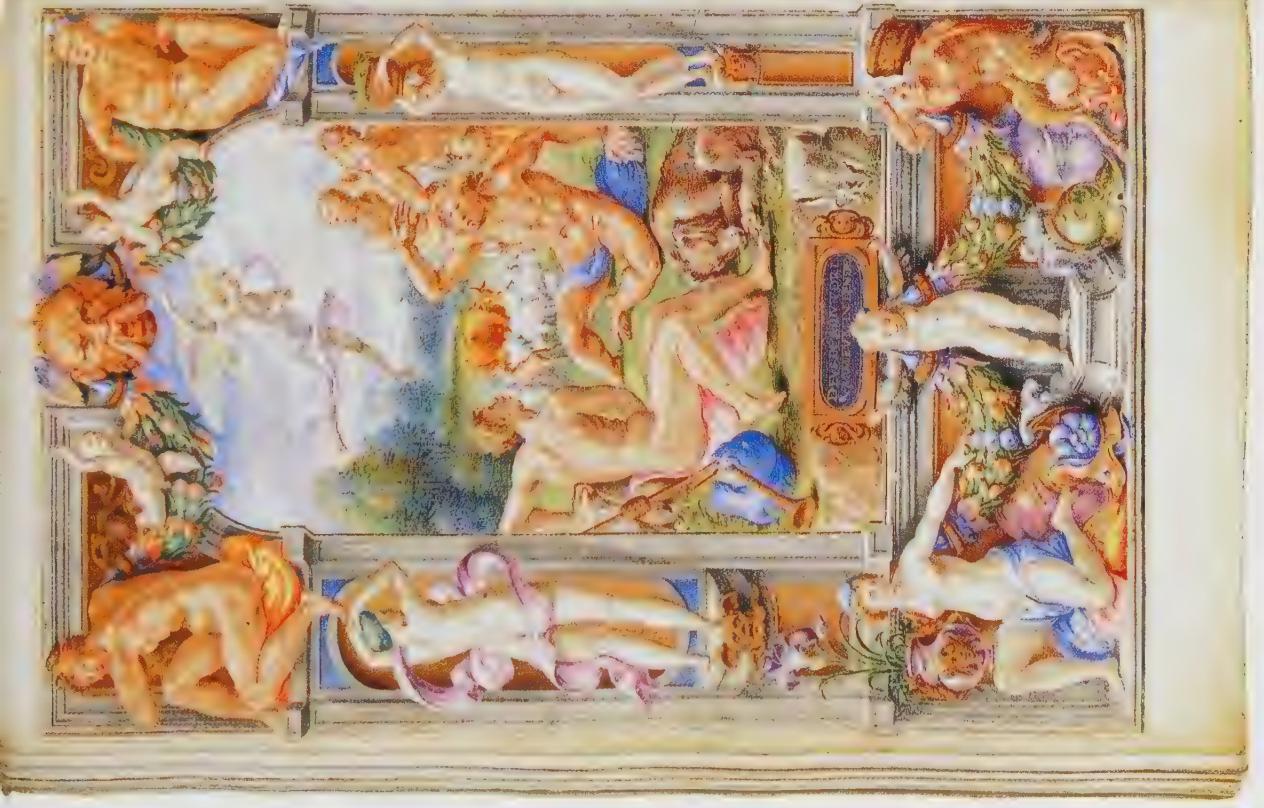
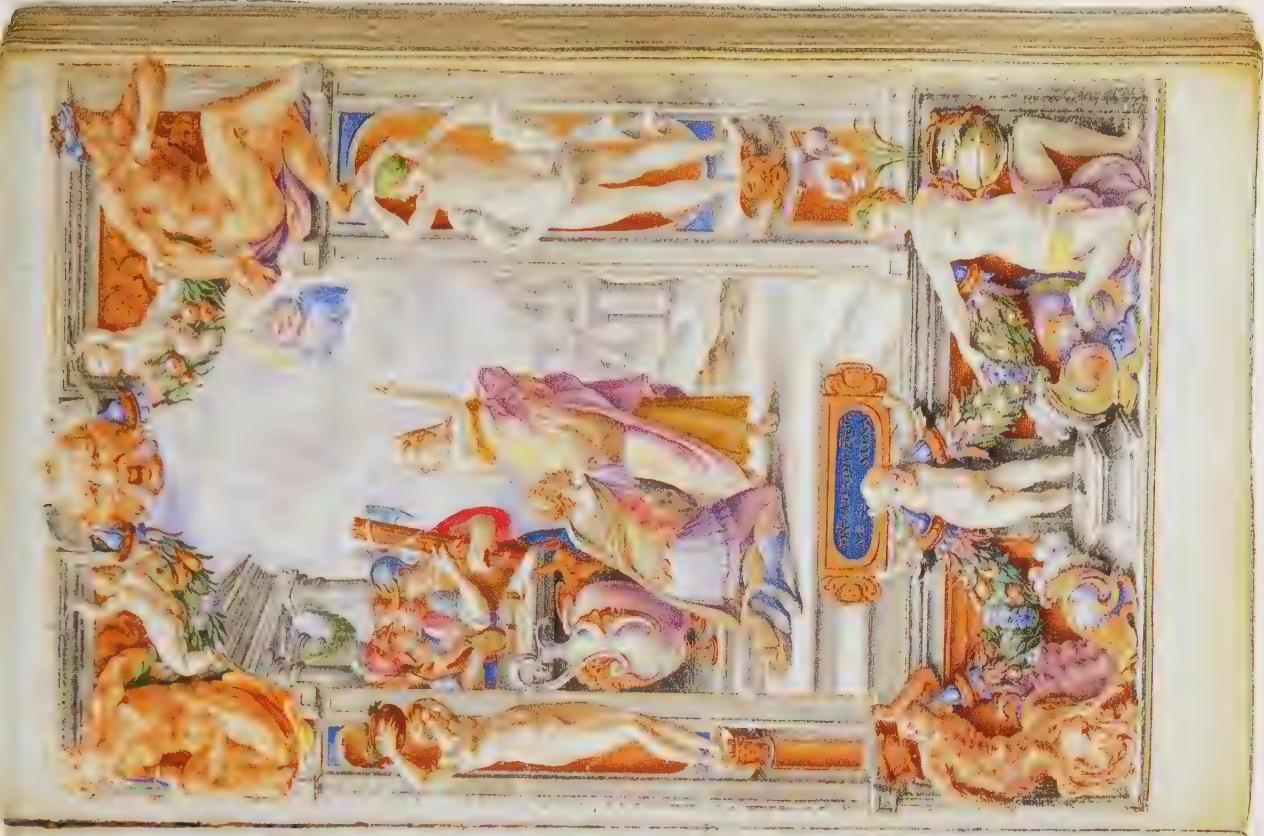


hold shortly after this.⁶³ His new patron provided him with rooms, presumably in the Cancelleria, although he later lived in Palazzo Farnese, after Alessandro had inherited it in 1565. He was paid ten *scudi* per month, as well as his own expenses and those for two servants and a horse.⁶⁴ By 1543, however, Clovio was discontented with his conditions. He wrote to Alessandro to ask for an increase in his allowance.⁶⁵ He was, indeed, sufficiently unhappy to be seeking another patron in Cosimo I de' Medici. A letter from a Florentine agent in Rome to the Duke's majordomo, Pierfrancesco Riccio, reveals that, according to Clovio, the Cardinal had promised to pay a separate sum for the works he produced in addition to his stipend, but that he had failed to do so. The artist, who reckoned he was owed about 200 *scudi*, had been slightly mollified by assurances from Vittoria Colonna, Marchioness of Pescara, that Alessandro was about to grant him a benefice worth this amount, but none the less he had clearly expressed that he was willing to move to Florence. As it turned out, Clovio's conditions seemed excessive to the Medici duke, and so on this occasion he remained in Rome.⁶⁶

Clovio did spend some time in Florence somewhat later, from 1551 to at least 1553, while Alessandro was in exile at Cosimo's court. He executed a number of works, including a *Pietà* and a *Crucifixion with Mary Magdalen*, both now in the Uffizi, and proved so successful that Cosimo attempted to prevent him from returning to Rome.⁶⁷ Otherwise, apart from a visit to Parma and Piacenza, presumably on loan to Ottavio Farnese, Clovio lived in the Cardinal's household and worked almost exclusively for him from the late 1530s until his death in 1578, making 'infinite most rare miniatures' during this time.⁶⁸

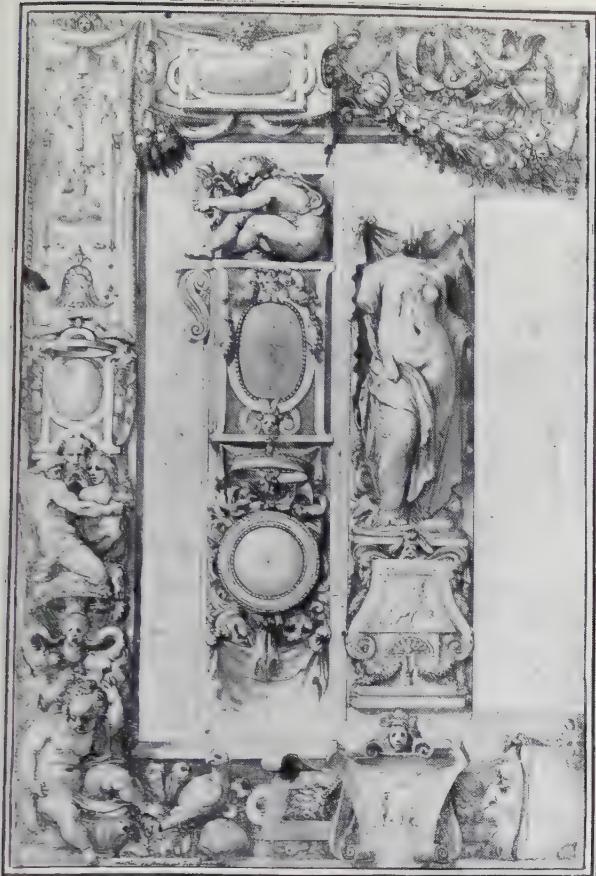
The *Farnese Hours*, now in the Pierpont Morgan Library, was immediately hailed as Clovio's masterpiece.⁶⁹ The work of many years, the artist himself was later to describe it as 'such a labour of love'.⁷⁰ Vasari, who doubtless saw it while he was working for Alessandro in 1546, the year it was completed, singled it out in the 1550 edition of the *Lives*. By 1577 it was being recommended as one of the great sights of Rome, in the same breath as the city's antiquities.⁷¹ Its fame at that time surely owed much to Vasari's long eulogy in the 1568 edition of the *Lives*.⁷² He regarded it as 'something divine, not human', as outstanding for the *varietà* of its ornament, its *disegno* and its *ordine*, as well as its *bella grazia e maniera*, all key qualities in Vasari's critical vocabulary; indeed, Clovio earned Vasari's ultimate accolade, when he was described as the 'new little Michelangelo'.⁷³

The *Farnese Hours* contains twenty-six paired miniatures, set in richly ornamented borders, the subjects illustrated being appropriate to the devotion they introduce. However, neither the choice of texts, nor the iconography is entirely conventional.⁷⁴ Most of the miniatures are arranged typologically, with an Old Testament prefiguration placed opposite its traditional New Testament antitype; for example, Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah's birth faces the Annunciation to the Virgin,⁷⁵ and the Visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon accompanies the Adoration of the Magi.⁷⁶ Unexpectedly, however, the types chosen are not always biblical: thus the Annunciation to the Shepherds is juxtaposed with the classical legend of Augustus and the Sybil (col. pl. I).⁷⁷ Such intermingling of pagan and religious imagery in a sacred context has parallels elsewhere in Alessandro's commissions of this period, and indicates a more secular outlook than might be expected of a cardinal and grandson of the reigning pontiff.⁷⁸





17 and 18. Giulio Clovio, the *Farnese Hours*, 1538–46, each sheet 17.2 × 11.0 cm.: (top) *Circumcision* and *Baptism*, fols. 34v–35r; (bottom) *Visitation* and *Justice and Peace embracing*, fols. 17v–18r. New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 69 (© The Pierpont Morgan Library 1991).



19. Francesco Salviati, study for a tapestry, 1539–49, pen and brown wash, 42.0 × 28.0 cm., Oxford, Christ Church (By permission of the Governing Body, Christ Church).



20. Francesco Salviati, study for a tapestry, 1539–49, black chalk and brown wash, 37.5 × 26.5 cm., Oxford, Christ Church (By permission of the Governing Body, Christ Church).

Clovio delighted in filling his borders with *all'antica* figures,⁷⁹ landscapes,⁸⁰ and animals.⁸¹ A number of contemporary events were also depicted, such as the festival of Testaccio,⁸² and the spectacular Corpus Christi procession to the Aracoeli.⁸³ Several portraits of the Farnese were included: Alessandro, for example, was depicted in an *all'antica* helmet, opposite a medallion of Alexander the Great, the implied parallel being intended as a compliment to the patron.⁸⁴ In the miniature of the *Circumcision* (pl. 17) Paul III was portrayed as Simeon. It was not uncommon for the pope's features to be given to biblical figures at this time.⁸⁵ One example within the Farnese ambit occurs in the Cappella del Pallio, in the Cancelleria, which was painted for Alessandro by Salviati.⁸⁶ Paul was also depicted as St Joseph in Giulio Mazzoni's slightly later altarpiece of *The Flight into Egypt* for Palazzo Spada, the patron Girolamo Capodiferro being a distant relative of the Farnese pope,⁸⁷ and as St Peter in Marcello Venusti's copy of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, (col. pl. X), another Farnese commission. Evidently it was not considered indecorous to depict the Vicar of Christ as a sacred character. Two further portraits were included in Clovio's *Circumcision*: according to Vasari, the two women standing behind Paul III were 'roman gentlewomen', called Faustina Mancina and Settimia. Faustina was a noblewoman celebrated for her beauty. She

and Settimia were apparently particular favourites of Cardinal Alessandro: their portraits recur in a fresco at Caprarola, and Clovio at one point made a drawing of Faustina, later acquired by Fulvio Orsini.⁸⁸

Vasari's description of Clovio as the miniature Michelangelo was well deserved: that Michelangelo was a major inspiration is apparent from almost every page of the *Hours*, not to mention from the numerous copies after Michelangelo, which are listed in the inventory of Clovio's possessions taken at his death.⁸⁹ Besides Michelangelo, Salviati was clearly an important source for figures and even entire compositions, but above all for decorative motifs. Thus Clovio's miniature of the *Visitation* (pl. 18) was closely adapted from Salviati's version of 1538 for the oratory of S. Giovanni Decollato (pl. 167).⁹⁰

The most striking similarities, however, are to be found between Clovio's borders in the *Hours* and those in Salviati's tapestry designs for the *Alexander the Great* series, which he made for Pier Luigi Farnese in 1540.⁹¹ For example, Salviati's treatment of the *Virgin and the Unicorn*, a Farnese emblem, in the one surviving tapestry (pl. 14) closely resembles that in Clovio's border to the *Visitation*.⁹² Also alike are the lively female figures who stand on pedestals, with masks beneath in both. The two artists likewise make use of small *storie* set into the borders like cameos. Many further similarities can be found in drawings for other tapestries in this series (pls 19–20).⁹³

Evidently Salviati and Clovio were aware of each other's work: both projects were being executed around the same time, but we cannot be sure which came first. It has been suggested that Clovio's work provided the original inspiration.⁹⁴ Some support for this view might be found in Baglione's statement that the miniaturist helped Salviati to paint the Cappella del Pallio, but this is more likely to be a garbled recollection of Vasari's statement that Clovio assisted Salviati in obtaining this commission.⁹⁵ There is certainly no other evidence that Clovio had any experience in painting fresco; on the contrary, Vasari stresses that from the outset his talent was painting on a tiny scale: 'Having seen that he was helped by nature more in small things than in big ones, he resolved, and wisely, to concentrate on miniature painting'.⁹⁶ Clovio's art seems essentially derivative; his distinctive ability lay in assimilating monumental images from many artists and in reducing them to a minute scale.⁹⁷ Salviati, on the other hand, was an artist of great originality, especially in ornamental designs, and it seems far more likely that it was he who inspired the rich borders of the *Farnese Hours*.

Cardinal Alessandro placed great value on Clovio's works, especially on the *Hours* and on the Towneley *Lectionary* (New York, Public Library), in fact an evangelistary, which was executed in the late 1560s.⁹⁸ The esteem in which Alessandro held these works is demonstrated by the fact that the *Hours* and the *Lectionary* were the only two pieces from his entire collection that he singled out in his will of 1587: he decreed that the *Hours* should be kept in Palazzo Farnese in perpetuity, while the *Lectionary* was left to the College of Cardinals, to be housed in the Sistine Chapel.⁹⁹ The *Farnese Hours* was regarded as so precious that in 1577 Bishop Rufino recommended to his patron that it should be removed from the miniaturist himself, since he was now aged and unreliable, and Rufino feared for the book's safety.¹⁰⁰

Clovio executed numerous other miniatures for Alessandro during his forty

years of Farnese service. A late sixteenth-century inventory of the *studiolo* of Palazzo Farnese reveals that many were kept there.¹⁰¹ Many more, however, were commissioned as gifts. Thus a miniature of *St John the Baptist in the Desert*, now lost, was sent to Philip II, who later gave it to the Escorial,¹⁰² and a *Pietà* was given to Pope Paul IV. Margaret of Austria received a *David and Goliath*, which owes much to Michelangelo's spandrel with this subject on the Sistine Ceiling, and which is now in the Wildenstein Collection in the Musée Marmottan.¹⁰³ She commissioned a companion piece, depicting *Judith and Holofernes*, for which a drawing survives in Zagreb.¹⁰⁴ Both pictures were sent by Margaret to Philip II, who gave these too to the Escorial.¹⁰⁵ Other similar gifts are recorded by Vasari, but none has been traced. The practice of giving works of art as presents in the hope of obtaining political favours was evidently widespread, especially among the cardinals, at this period.¹⁰⁶ Miniatures in particular made ideal diplomatic presents: they were small and easily transported, and they were obviously greatly prized by the recipients. The reaction of Ruy Gómez da Silva, a powerful minister of Philip II, when he was given a *Holy Family* by Clovio in 1556 was reported to the Cardinal by the Farnese agent in the Spanish court: '[Gómez] accepted it with a delighted expression, and indicated that he held it most dear; and in my presence he called many gentlemen of the King's Chamber, whereupon there was great excitement, and it was praised in the extreme.'¹⁰⁷ Alessandro's motive in giving this picture, which may be the *Holy Family* in the Musée Marmottan, was apparently to enhance his standing in the Spanish court.¹⁰⁸ A similar motive may have dictated his request to Clovio of 1570 for a *quadretto* for the Spanish ambassador's wife.¹⁰⁹

But Clovio's work for the Cardinal was not confined to painting miniatures. For a ball in the Cancelleria during the Carnival of 1541, he designed Alessandro's livery.¹¹⁰ He also on occasion acted as an artistic adviser, often introducing artists to the Cardinal. A well-known example is Clovio's introduction of El Greco, newly arrived in Rome in 1570, to Alessandro.¹¹¹ As a result, two pictures in the Farnese collection, the *Christ healing the blind man* (pl. 191) and the *Boy lighting a candle* (Naples, Capodimonte), were probably commissioned. So too, immediately after Taddeo Zuccaro's death in 1566, Clovio wrote to recommend that Taddeo's brother Federico should take over work at Caprarola.¹¹² He was also apparently arranging for a *St Francis* to be painted in 1573, together with a *St Jerome* and a *Charity* – by whom is not known, though Clovio was vocal on how difficult he was to deal with – and in 1575 he reported to his patron that two pictures by an unnamed Genoese artist had arrived.¹¹³ Alessandro was away from Rome frequently at Caprarola, and Clovio, living in Palazzo Farnese, must, like Fulvio Orsini, have arranged many similar commissions.

Clovio eventually died in Palazzo Farnese, aged almost 100, on 3 January 1578. He bequeathed his drawings to his patron of forty years' standing.¹¹⁴

Giovanni Bernardi

Besides miniatures, Alessandro was an enthusiastic collector of engraved rock crystals. He apparently inherited several such works by one of Paul III's favourite

artists, Valerio Belli, who had completed a cross and two candlesticks in crystal for him. These were engraved with scenes from Christ's passion, and had been begun for Clement VII. According to Vasari, he also made an 'infinite number of stones small and large' for Paul.¹¹⁵ The author goes on to mention that many of Belli's works could be found in Alessandro's collection. These were presumably inherited from his grandfather, since there is no record that Alessandro ever commissioned work from him. Vasari was not, unfortunately, more specific, but an inventory of the 1560s which lists the gems and medals at Caprarola includes medals of Cleopatra and Cicero by Belli.¹¹⁶ The Cleopatra, which has a personification of 'ARÉTH 'EUTUXÍS (fortunate virtue) on the reverse, is now in Vienna.¹¹⁷

Alessandro's enthusiasm for this kind of work is best illustrated by his patronage of Giovanni Bernardi da Castel Bolognese, with whom he was on very friendly terms. The engraver came to Farnese's attention some time before June 1536. He was by this date well established in Rome: he had already executed commissions for Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici and for Clement VII, and had worked for the Roman mint.¹¹⁸ Very probably Bernardi was introduced to Alessandro by Paolo Giovio. This is not documented before the eighteenth century, but circumstantial evidence makes Giovio's responsibility for the introduction highly plausible.¹¹⁹ The two men had long been friends: indeed, it was Giovio who first persuaded the artist to move to Rome to work for Ippolito de' Medici.¹²⁰ According to Vasari, it was a cameo made for the Medici cardinal that first made Alessandro aware of Bernardi's talents, and it is tempting to suggest that Giovio showed it to him.¹²¹

Like Clovio, Bernardi entered Alessandro's service while his patron was still very young, but the Cardinal clearly became very enthusiastic about his work and was to employ him constantly until the artist's death in 1553. Shortly after his introduction to Alessandro, Bernardi decided to leave Rome and settle permanently in Faenza, 'to be soothed, after being much afflicted by the world'.¹²² There he built a large house, with considerable assistance from Alessandro. This contained what must have been an interesting collection, since Bernardi had inherited from his father-in-law a version of Titian's *Three Ages of Man* and a portrait by Giorgione.¹²³ Alessandro would always stay in this house when he was passing Faenza.¹²⁴ The tone of the letters between the two men further confirms how close their friendship was. Distance in no way prevented Bernardi from executing works for Alessandro: in fact, he did not always wait to receive commissions, but would, on occasion, suggest works that he wished to make. Thus in 1546 he wrote that he intended to go to Venice to buy a crystal *tazza*, which he would engrave with Noah's Ark, as a memorial to himself and to Alessandro: 'I desire, before I die, to make a work from my hand in your memory and my own . . . I have made up my mind to make you a *tazza*, which will be a grand thing to see.' The dish, which was to be executed on a design by Perino del Vaga, may be that now in the Museo degli Argenti in Florence.¹²⁵

Some of the very numerous works Bernardi executed for his patron are described in the artist's letters, and by Vasari.¹²⁶ Quite apart from what they tell us about Alessandro's taste, Bernardi's works are particularly interesting because they result from constant collaboration with Perino del Vaga, of which the *Noah's Ark* is but one example.

It was common practice at this time for goldsmiths and gem-engravers to be

provided with designs by other artists. Benvenuto Cellini was regarded as exceptional in always working to his own drawings.¹²⁷ Caro suggests vividly how poor Bernardi's draughtsmanship was in a letter to Cesati, reporting that he had asked him to make a sketch for a medal reverse:

and it is such that I am embarrassed to send it to you; however, I shall enclose it, since I desire to have one by someone good, and I beg you to send me as soon as possible one from your hand or from that of Perino del Vaga.¹²⁸

Vasari described how Perino, even at the height of his success, would accept commissions for all kinds of minor art.¹²⁹ Certainly he supplied drawings for Bernardi on a number of occasions.

Perino's first work for Alessandro was a series of designs adapted from the Massimi chapel frescoes, his first major success after his return to Rome in 1537–8. Vasari reports that the painter, who had fled after the Sack of Rome, suddenly dropped his work in Pisa as the result of a 'capriccio' to see Rome again, as well as the entreaties of his friends. But despite having an introduction to the best potential patrons, including Alessandro, he had no firm offers of work on his return and suffered months of despair without employment.¹³⁰ His commission from the Cardinal was for designs for six crystals to decorate candlesticks, which were engraved by Bernardi in 1539.¹³¹ Perino's drawings for all six are known. Four were published by Gere: the *Feeding of the Five Thousand* and the *Pool of Bethesda* are in the Pierpont Morgan Museum, the *Expulsion of the Moneychangers* in Munich, and the *Raising of Lazarus* in the Louvre.¹³² Three more have hitherto remained unpublished: two are for *Christ and the Centurion*. In the earlier study, now in Prague, Perino sketched the outlines roughly in red chalk, before drawing them more carefully in pen. The later drawing (pl. 21), sold in Milan in 1964, is

21. Perino del Vaga, *Christ and the Centurion*, 1539, pen and wash, diameter 20.5 cm., Milan, Finarte, auction no. 13, 1964, no. 92 (Photo: Mario Perotti, Milan).



22. Perino del Vaga, *Transfiguration*, 1539, pen and wash, diameter 21.2 cm., Milan, Finarte, auction no. 13, 1964, no. 93 (Photo: Mario Perotti, Milan).



much more highly finished and may be the *modello* actually given to Bernardi to work from. The third drawing (pl. 22) shows the *Transfiguration*, and is clearly indebted to Raphael.¹³³ Five of Bernardi's crystals have survived, but they are no longer mounted in the original candlesticks: the *Transfiguration* and the *Expulsion* are now in Copenhagen, set into a silver casket.¹³⁴ Three others, *The Raising of Lazarus*, *The Pool of Bethesda* and *Christ and the Centurion*, are in the Vatican. Together with another set of 'Istoric della Croce', finished by Bernardi in 1546, these were mounted in the magnificent pair of candlesticks by Antonio Gentile which Alessandro presented to St Peter's in 1582.¹³⁵ The only crystal from the 1539 series which has not apparently survived is *The Feeding of the Five Thousand*.

The Farnese Casket

Unquestionably the most important of Alessandro's commissions to which Bernardi contributed is the *Cassetta Farnese* (pl. 23).¹³⁶ Scholarly opinion has been divided as to whether Bernardi made crystals for one casket or two for members of the Farnese family. He did, however, quite clearly work on two: one was commissioned in the early 1540s by Pier Luigi and contained crystals after designs by Michelangelo, while the Naples casket was a separate commission for Alessandro.¹³⁷ The confusion arose from the notion that Pier Luigi's project was inherited (and if so, transformed beyond all recognition) by Alessandro, presumably after his father's murder in 1547.¹³⁸ But documentary evidence establishes that two caskets were being planned at about the same time, even though only one has survived.

A letter from one of Pier Luigi's secretaries, Claudio Tolomei, states that the Duke had obtained three crystals after drawings by Michelangelo. One showed the *Fall of Phaethon*.¹³⁹ Tolomei had asked Perino to design more crystals for the casket, but when the painter had realised that Michelangelo was the author of the earlier designs, he had refused. He was not only afraid of offending the 'God of design', but also reluctant to invite comparison with him, lest he too should 'suffer the fate of Phaethon'. Although Tolomei reported that he had eventually persuaded Perino at least to provide sketches, if not finished works, he expressed his doubts that the work would ever be finished. Unfortunately, this letter is not dated. Another letter of May 1543, however, reveals that Bernardi had made some crystals for Pier Luigi.¹⁴⁰ Their subjects are not mentioned, but they may have included three crystals in the Hermitage which correspond in dimension to the Michelangelo crystals and which have appropriate mythological subjects: the *Rape of Deianira*, *Venus and Adonis*, and the *Fall of Icarus*.¹⁴¹

The original drawing for the *Fall of Phaethon* mentioned by Tolomei was one of the celebrated presentation drawings that Michelangelo made for Tommaso de' Cavalieri. All three of Pier Luigi's original crystals were in fact derived from these drawings. Vasari notes that Bernardi engraved a *Tityos*, as well as the *Phaethon* for Ippolito de' Medici, while a letter from Cavalieri to Michelangelo, which describes the Medici cardinal's avaricious interest in the drawings, reveals that the third subject was a *Ganymede*.¹⁴² It was presumably from Ippolito that Pier Luigi obtained the crystals. Two of the original drawings, the *Tityos* and the *Fall of*



23. Manno Sbarri and Giovanni Bernardi da Castel Bolognese, *Cassetta Farnese*, c.1543–61, silver gilt and rock crystal, Naples, Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte (Photo: Soprintendenza ai beni artistici e storici, Naples).

Phaethon are now at Windsor, together with a copy of the *Ganymede*, attributed to Giulio Clovio. Interestingly, all the presentation drawings were acquired in 1587 from Cavalieri by Alessandro Farnese.¹⁴³ The crystals of *Tityos* and *Phaethon* have survived in the British Museum and Walters Art Gallery respectively, but the *Ganymede* is known only from bronze plaquettes. All three correspond closely to Michelangelo's drawings.¹⁴⁴

If the casket in which these crystals were to be set was made at all, it has not survived. But a drawing in the Uffizi by Salviati (pl. 24), which probably dates from the 1540s, may represent a project for its silverwork.¹⁴⁵ Although nothing in the sketch links it specifically to the Farnese, the three ovals on the side do

conform to the shapes of the Michelangelo crystals, and Pier Luigi was Salviati's major patron at the period of this commission. It seems possible, moreover, that the casket might not have been finished because of the abrupt termination of Salviati's service for the duke. Another design by him of the same period (pl. 25) shares general features with the *Cassetta Farnese*, above all in the idea of the lid dominated by a single figure. It also bears an inscription that is very similar to that on one of Salviati's tapestry studies for Pier Luigi. But it cannot be associated with Pier Luigi's casket, since the spaces for crystals here are rectangular.¹⁴⁶

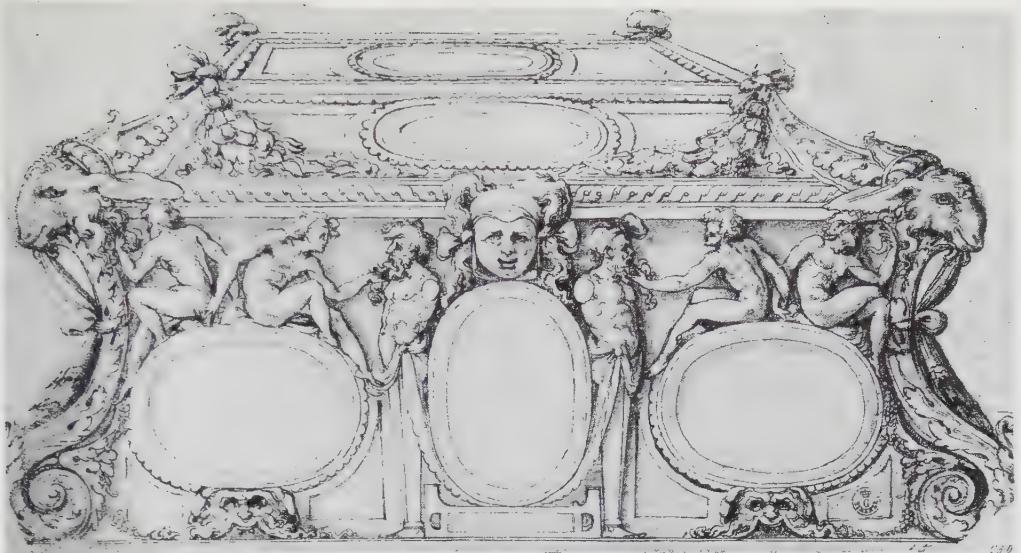
As many as four artists – Bernardi and the goldsmith Manno Sbarri, Perino and perhaps Salviati – may have collaborated on Alessandro's casket. This was planned before November 1543, when Bernardi reported that one crystal, whose subject was a Roman chariot race, was finished, but that the other pieces for the casket were not yet complete.¹⁴⁷ We learn the subjects of these from a letter of the following April in which Bernardi offered to bring to Rome 'the four big pieces for the casket, namely, the Chariot Race, the Triumph of Bacchus and Silenus, a Naval Battle, and a Battle of Tunis, which will amaze you'.¹⁴⁸ The engraver's words imply that other smaller crystals were planned, but if so, they were not executed. A preliminary scheme for the crystals had evidently been fixed, although this was shortly to be altered. The iconography of the casket's framework, however, cannot yet have been determined: a rudimentary 'programme' which, though undated, is probably of February or March 1543, lists the subjects for the crystals in accordance with the scheme described by Bernardi, but the *historie* for the lid and bottom of the casket were left vague.¹⁴⁹

Some time after Bernardi presented the pieces named in the 1544 letter the casket's programme was changed: the *Battle of Tunis* was omitted, probably because it fitted uneasily into a sequence of classical images.¹⁵⁰ The *all'antica Naval battle* was then paired with the *Chariot race*. The other three crystals – an *Amazonomachy*, a *Centauromachy*, and a *Calydonian boar hunt* – were executed in accordance with the original programme. These three are nowhere mentioned in Bernardi's correspondence, but they may have taken up to four years to complete. At any rate, Manno Sbarri apparently started work on the silver-gilt framework of the casket some time before 1548.¹⁵¹

The scheme may well have been devised by Alessandro himself: Vasari speaks of the subjects as 'the Cardinal's most beautiful fantasies', and his authorship is confirmed by the hand in which the early programme is written.¹⁵² If so, it is particularly important, since it is the only known iconographic programme that Alessandro himself devised. For monumental fresco cycles he would rely on his advisers; this would tend to confirm that he was more closely involved with his commissions for works of decorative art.¹⁵³

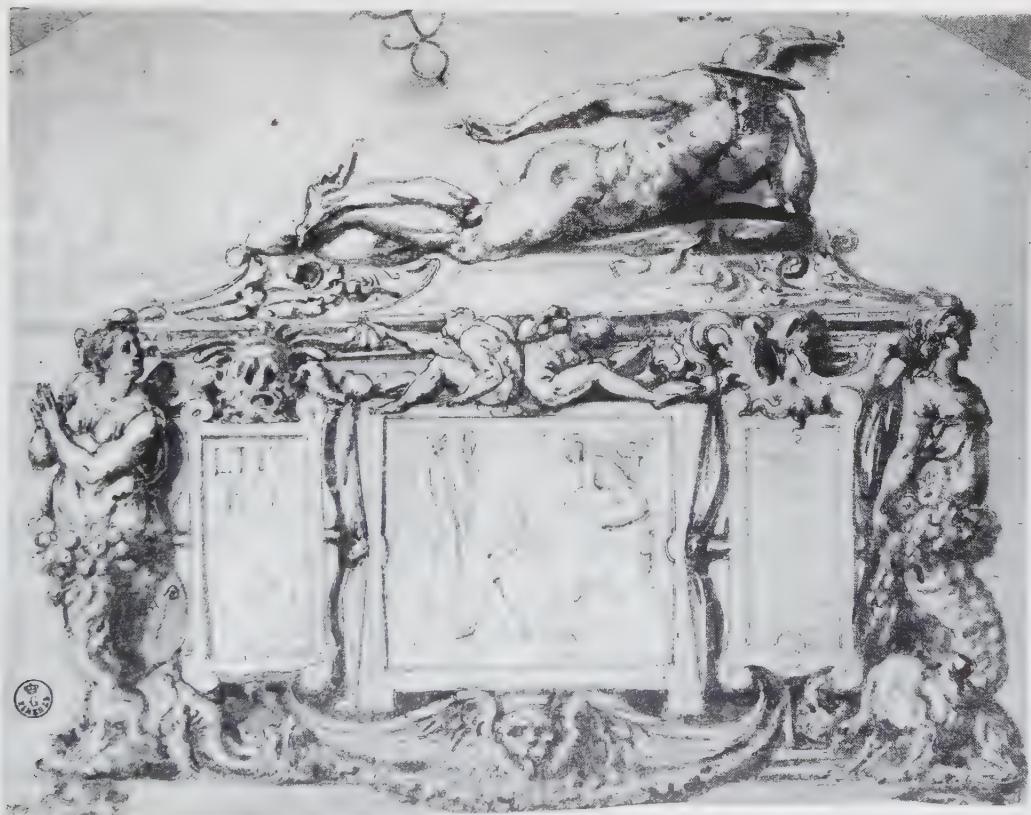
This was not the first time Manno had set crystals by Bernardi for Alessandro: Bernardi referred to the goldsmith in connection with his works of 1539.¹⁵⁴ A letter of 1543 attests to his friendship with Manno, and reveals that the engraver had persuaded Claudio Tolomei to intercede with Pier Luigi – to no avail – to obtain the release of an imprisoned *garzone* of Manno.¹⁵⁵

The execution of the casket dragged on for many years. Manno's letters suggest that the delays were caused by Alessandro's *familiari*, who presumably failed to provide the necessary funds. This is confirmed by a letter of Tommaso del Giglio



24. Francesco Salviati, design for a casket, 1540–50, pen, brown ink and brown wash, 16.2 × 30.3 cm., Florence, Uffizi, 1577E.

25. Francesco Salviati, design for a casket, 1540–50, pen, brown ink and brown wash, 18.0 × 23.0 cm., Florence, Uffizi, 1612E.





26 and 27. Manno Sbarri and Giovanni Bernardi da Castel Bolognese, *Cassetta Farnese*, front and rear views, Naples, Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte (Photo: Soprintendenza ai beni artistici e storici, Naples).

28. Manno Sbarri, *Alexander the Great placing the works of Homer in a casket* (interior of the *Cassetta Farnese*), Naples, Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte (Photo: Soprintendenza ai beni artistici e storici, Naples).





29. Manno Sbarri, *Cassetta Farnese*, top view, Naples, Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte (Photo: Soprintendenza ai beni artistici e storici, Naples).

of January 1559, which makes it clear that economic constraints were causing the delay.¹⁵⁶ Certainly, Alessandro's resources must have been stretched at this time by the new project for Caprarola. The casket must, however, have been finished by June 1561, when the goldsmith was pressing for payment.¹⁵⁷

The frame was designed to enhance the meaning of the crystals. At each corner sits a sculpted figure of a classical god, each one appropriate to the nearest crystal on front and back. On the front Minerva, as a warrior goddess, is next to the *Amazonomachy*, while Mars presides over the *Battle of the centaurs* (pl. 26). At the rear Diana adjoins the *Calydonian boar hunt* and Bacchus sits beside the *Dionysian revels* (pl. 27). The casket's lid is dominated by a seated Hercules (pl. 29).¹⁵⁸ Two adjacent reliefs show events from the beginning and end of the hero's life: his strangling the serpents in his cradle and his death on the pyre. Inside the casket are two more storie in relief: the *Rape of Proserpina* and *Alexander placing the works of Homer in a casket* (pl. 28). This last subject suggests that the casket may itself have been intended to hold a precious volume, besides a possible allusion to the patron's name.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, with its reference to both caskets and another Alexander, this subject perfectly suits the requirements of decorum. The owner's identity is made apparent everywhere: his arms appear in several places, together with the inscription, A.F.-S.R.E.-V.C. (Alexander Farnesius-Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae-Vice Cancellarius), and on the bottom of the casket are two of his imprese.¹⁶⁰ In addition, within several crystals the figures bear shields with the Farnese arms.

Besides the gods and narrative *storie* the casket is richly decorated with Farnese lilies, masks, swags, putti, embracing couples and terms, ornaments that drew Vasari's praise: '[Manno] made the silver figures and the relief ornaments with such diligence that never was any work made with so much and similar perfection.'¹⁶¹ No drawings for the frame have survived, but it has been observed that its structure shows many Salviantesque features, above all in the *ignudi*, the terms and the swags. Indeed, it has much in common with the Uffizi drawing, which I have suggested may have been a project for Pier Luigi's casket. Some scholars have, however, been reluctant to attribute the design to Salviati himself¹⁶² and have tried to give it to Perino, largely on the strength of resemblances to a drawing for a circular dish in the British Museum.¹⁶³ But these similarities seem to be of a highly general kind, resulting from a common Mannerist background, and the casket appears rather closer to Salviati or perhaps, as I shall argue, to a goldsmith within his circle. Perino's authorship is unlikely firstly on chronological grounds if, as seems probable, the casket was begun around 1548. The painter had died the previous year, but this was the very moment when Salviati returned to Rome to work for Alessandro Farnese.¹⁶⁴ Visual considerations also make Perino's involvement at this stage implausible. The subject of *Alexander placing the works of Homer in a casket* was depicted by him and his workshop in the Sala Paolina in 1545–7. Were Perino the designer of the casket, one would expect closer affinities in the treatment of this *storia*, even given the different shapes of the compositions. The two scenes are, however, conceived in a quite dissimilar manner, while the treatment of the swirling draperies in the casket version particularly recalls Salviati.¹⁶⁵

Salviati has been described as 'the most influential of the Italian goldsmiths in the Mannerist style'.¹⁶⁶ His early training in the workshop of his uncle, who was a goldsmith, gave him a lasting fascination with this art.¹⁶⁷ A very large number of drawings for metalwork can be associated more or less closely with Salviati and his workshop.¹⁶⁸ His experience as a goldsmith is also evident in his paintings, which frequently include all kinds of metalwork, depicted with a loving attention to detail.¹⁶⁹ Salviati would thus have been the ideal artist to design the frame of the casket, but it is difficult to demonstrate that he had anything more than an indirect influence on its appearance. Vasari's evidence is negative: he mentions only drawings made for crystals by Perino and 'altri maestri', but says nothing of the design for their setting. He would surely have mentioned his dearest friend Cecchino had he contributed to the casket. As yet, little progress has been made towards distinguishing the drawing styles of individual goldsmiths of this period, and it still remains to identify the different hands within the *ambiente* of Salviati, some of whom may well turn out to be goldsmiths.¹⁷⁰ In the absence of secure drawings for the casket, we cannot reach firm conclusions, but we should perhaps look to Manno as its author.¹⁷¹ This hypothesis is further strengthened by similarities in the ornament of the Vatican altarservice begun by Manno.¹⁷²

Manno and Salviati had belonged to the same circle in Florence in the late 1520s, and possibly even earlier, while they were both training as goldsmiths.¹⁷³ They remained friends for many years: Vasari, who described Manno as Salviati's 'grandissimo amico', related that the painter would even have given him a large part of his fortune, had he not had to provide for his father.¹⁷⁴ Another life-long friend mentioned by Vasari was Francesco di Girolamo dal Prato, said to be the

best draughtsman among the goldsmiths of his day, and with whom, significantly, Salviati learned to draw.¹⁷⁵ One would expect to find common features in the draughtsmanship of these three artists, and studies by the two goldsmiths may well be among the metalwork designs presently attributed to the Salviati circle.¹⁷⁶

The issue of Salviati's involvement with the *Cassetta Farnese* is further complicated by a number of designs in his own hand, as well as copies of his drawings, for crystals with the same subjects as those engraved by Bernardi. These are an *Amazonomachy* in Hamburg,¹⁷⁷ a school drawing in Windsor of the *Calydonian boar hunt*, a *Bacchanal* in Vienna,¹⁷⁸ and a *Naumachia* at Bayonne.¹⁷⁹ The problem arises because, as we have seen, Vasari attributes the crystals' design to Perino, and there are indeed several finished drawings for them in his hand: an *Amazonomachy* and a *Bacchanal* in the Louvre,¹⁸⁰ a *Boar hunt* at Chatsworth,¹⁸¹ and preparatory studies for the *Centauromacy* in the British Museum.¹⁸² In every case Perino's drawings are closer to the finished crystals. Only one case is known to me of a crystal associated with Alessandro which was executed following a drawing by Salviati, although many such designs of this type by him survive. This is an oval composition in the Woodner collection which seems to be a study for Bernardi's *Resurrection*, now in Copenhagen.¹⁸³

Conceivably there was a competition to produce designs for the crystals, but, quite apart from Vasari's testimony, this seems unlikely. In several cases Salviati's designs appear to draw their inspiration from those of Perino.¹⁸⁴ For example, the highly finished drawing of the *Calydonian boar hunt* at Windsor (pl. 30), which has many Salviatesque mannerisms and is surely by one of his followers, is based on an early sketch by Perino, now at Besançon (pl. 31).¹⁸⁵ Whether Perino made a more finished drawing from which the Windsor drawing was copied, or whether this was worked up from the Besançon sketch is not clear. The crystal itself, however, was executed following a reversed version, now at Chatsworth (pls 32–3), with a slightly different iconography, in which the attendant figures of Juno and (?)Venus and the lovers in the background were eliminated and Atalanta added.

The only crystal for which we have a study by Salviati but none by Perino is the *Naumachia* (pl. 34). But here the composition is not particularly close to the finished crystal and seems to show a slightly different subject.¹⁸⁶ All Perino's known designs, on the other hand, were used—as one would expect, since his reputation as a designer of crystals was well established, and he had worked with Bernardi many times before. Indeed, when in 1546 Bernardi proposed an idea of his own, the *tazza* depicting Noah's Ark, he immediately assumed that Perino would make the designs.¹⁸⁷

If Salviati's designs were not for the casket itself, a number of other drawings after his work suggest their purpose. A copy of his *Bacchanal* in the Louvre has a surrounding ornament, which indicates that it was intended to be set into a plate.¹⁸⁸ Another set of drawings in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which are in a Salviatesque manner, though much further from the master himself, reflect designs for jugs for Alessandro, repeating many motifs from the *Cassetta Farnese*.¹⁸⁹ It therefore seems possible that Salviati was commissioned to produce a set of designs on the same themes for other pieces of goldsmiths' work for the Cardinal.

Manno continued to work for Alessandro for many years, but unfortunately



30. Follower of Francesco Salviati, *Calydonian boar hunt*, after 1544, pen, brown ink and water-colour, 28.7 × 35.4 cm., Windsor Royal Library, 5098 (© 1990 Her Majesty the Queen).



31. Perino del Vaga, *Calydonian boar hunt*, c.1544, pen and ink, max. height 31.6 cm., max. width 47.8 cm., Besançon, Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie, D1398.



32. Giovanni Bernardi da Castel Bolognese, *Calydonian boar hunt* (*Cassetta Farnese*), 1544, rock crystal, Naples, Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte (Photo: Soprintendenza ai beni artistici e storici, Naples).



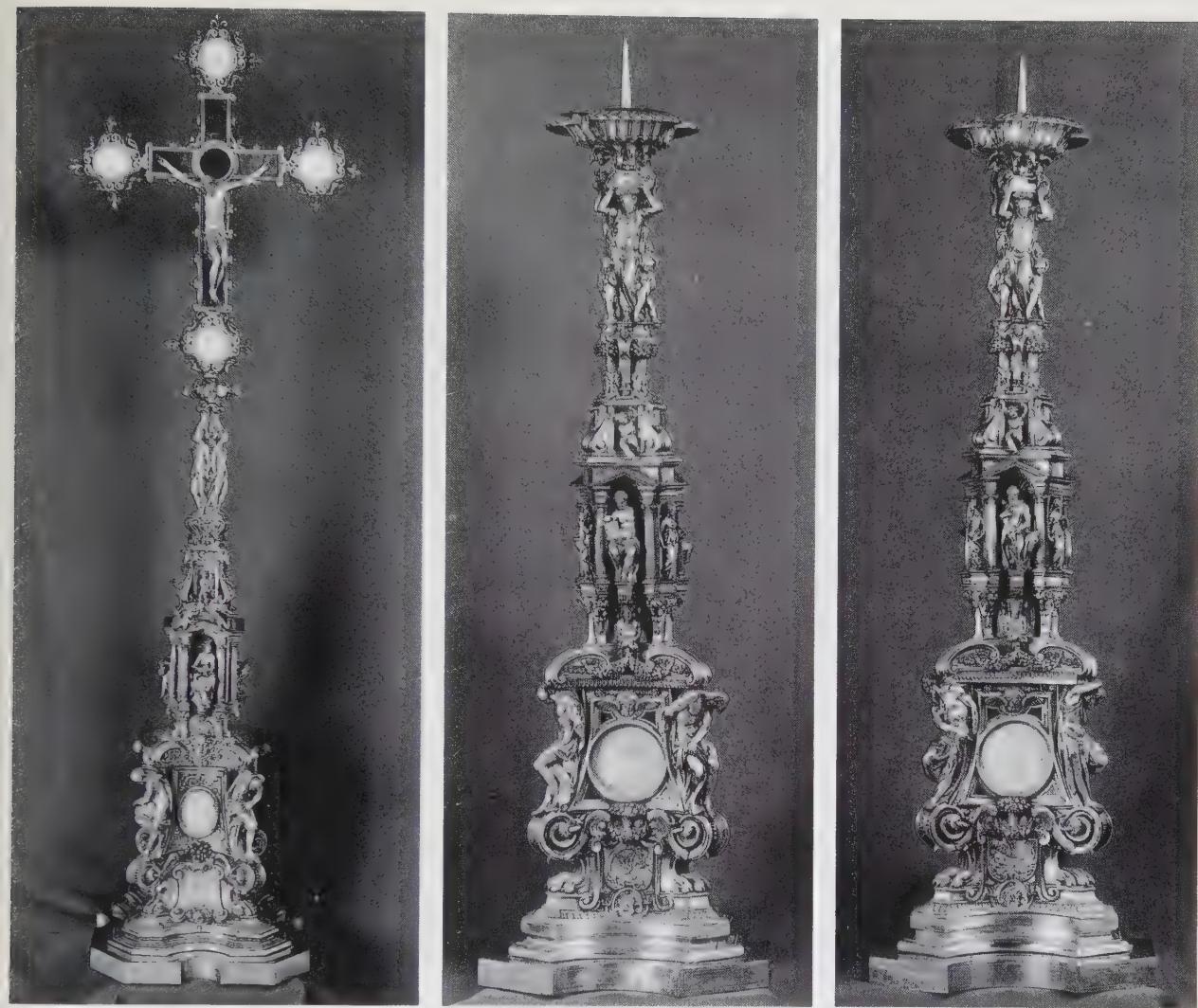
33. Perino del Vaga, *Calydonian boar hunt*, c.1544, pen, brown ink and brown wash with white heightening, 19.8 × 26.0 cm., Chatsworth, Devonshire Collection (Reproduced by permission of the Chatsworth Settlement Trustees).



34. Francesco Salviati, *Naumachia*, c.1544, pen and ink and brown wash, 12.6 × 17 cm., Bayonne, Musée Bonnat, inv. 1225 (Photo: Arch. Phot. Paris/S.P.A.D.E.M.).

none of his other works has survived. Documents relate that in 1556 he made two silver basins and two jugs,¹⁹⁰ and in 1567, a salt-cellar and the cover for a cup, which cost almost 600 *scudi*.¹⁹¹ Another basin and jug were commissioned in 1573,¹⁹² and payments for many other commissions are recorded.¹⁹³

At his death in 1576¹⁹⁴ Manno was still working on an important commission for a cross and two candlesticks, which were eventually to become the splendid altarservice that Alessandro, as High Priest of the Basilica, presented to St Peter's in 1582 (pls 35–6).¹⁹⁵ He may have received the commission in 1561, when a cross and candlesticks are mentioned in a letter. Up to 1568 Manno was paid over 800 *scudi* for these.¹⁹⁶ A recently discovered drawing, with a base very similar to those of the candlesticks and cross, indicates that Manno collaborated with Salviati once again on the design for this work. The project must have been begun before 1549, since an inscription records Paul III, and it should probably be dated around 1548, when Salviati returned to paint the Cappella del Pallio.¹⁹⁷ Two years after Manno died, the commission was given to Antonio Gentile, who had already designed the fountain in Ronciglione for Alessandro.¹⁹⁸ The altarservice was finished four years later and installed in the Basilica in 1582, at an estimated cost of 18,000 *scudi*.¹⁹⁹



35 (above left). Antonio Gentile and Giovanni Bernardi da Castel Bolognese, cross, 1539–46 and 1578–82, silver gilt, rock crystal and lapis lazuli, Rome, Vatican, Reverenda Fabbrica di S. Pietro.

36a and b (above centre and right). Antonio Gentile and Giovanni Bernardi da Castel Bolognese, two candlesticks, 1539–46 and 1578–82, silver gilt, rock crystal and lapis lazuli, Rome, Vatican, Reverenda Fabbrica di S. Pietro.

The studiolo

The motivation for the altarservice commission is perhaps exceptional among Alessandro's patronage of the minor arts: in this case it was evidently an expression of his own *magnificenza* as much as any kind of public religious act. Usually, however, because of the nature of the work of art itself, such projects were for essentially private enjoyment. The Cardinal's enthusiastic patronage of the decorative arts was complemented by the very large number of small antiquities, especially ancient coins and bronzes, that he collected. These are described in two long

inventories, now in Naples. One lists the contents of the *studiolo* in Palazzo Farnese, and was compiled in 1588.²⁰⁰ It includes the ancient coins, small sculptures, drawings by Raphael, Parmigianino and Correggio, the *Farnese Hours*, the *Towneley Lectionary* and many other cabinet miniatures, but not the *Cassetta Farnese*. The other, which dates from the 1560s and is in Caro's hand, enumerates the medals and other antiques kept at Caprarola.²⁰¹

The collection was formed over many years. Alessandro's taste for medals was no doubt encouraged by his advisers, especially Annibal Caro and Fulvio Orsini. Both men were authorities on numismatics, and their correspondence is full of references to the acquisition of such objects.²⁰² Pirro Ligorio too was at one time an agent for the Cardinal. In 1567 he received a monthly salary of ten *scudi*, which was evidently for his skills as an antiquarian, rather than as an architect, and in the same year Alessandro paid the vast sum of 1,500 *scudi* for Pirro's own books and medals.²⁰³

The objects of decorative art, both modern and antique, were kept together in a studio in Palazzo Farnese. Alessandro had apparently planned such a room in the Cancelleria, where he lived, but after Ranuccio's death transferred the scheme to Palazzo Farnese.²⁰⁴ We gain a very vivid idea of how this room would have appeared from a letter written in 1566 by a *familiare* of Alessandro, Girolamo Garimberto, who was much given to proposing ideas for the Cardinal's commissions.²⁰⁵ He wrote to commend Alessandro's plans to have built a *studiolo* in the Cancelleria:

For [both public and private delight and for your own recreation], I think it would greatly enhance your *camerini* in the Cancelleria, if you made a *studiolo* with all your small objects, such as medals, cameos, inkstands and clocks, but of course giving pride of place to that outstanding *Cassetta*, which deserves a tabernacle of emerald. You could have a fine cornice running around the internal wall, with several niches, and you could adorn it above with a fine series of little bronze or marble figurines, such as the two remarkable Fauns that you have, and the unsurpassed little figure that belonged to Corvino,²⁰⁶ the Hercules with the goddess of Nature of Pietro Paolo . . . But above all, you should try and acquire a little Bacchus of Signor Giangiorgio Cesarini,²⁰⁷ to adorn such a place as much because it is in proportion with the above-mentioned figures, as for its unusualness; so by gathering together an ensemble of so many gems and objects of extraordinary beauty and richness, and not omitting to put in their places some little antique vases of agate and other precious stones, you will give pleasure to yourself regularly and to others on occasion, besides its serving as an antidote to your worries.²⁰⁸

As far as one can tell, the appearance of Garimberto's *studiolo* was typical of such rooms at this period.²⁰⁹ Thus the *scrittoio* of Cosimo I, as described by Vasari, was very similar, both in its arrangement, with bronze statuettes above the cornice, and in its contents: Cosimo's room housed boxes of medals, miniatures by Clovio, gems, rock crystals, cameos and other small antiques.²¹⁰ Alessandro's *studiolo* in Palazzo Farnese differed from this room, and from that at Caprarola, the Gabinetto d'Ermatena, in that it apparently never received any frescoed decoration.