Barberini Rome: Patronage and Politics in the High Baroque

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ABSTRACT:

This project consists of a research trip to Rome and library work in the United State. It continues research completed on the architectural patronage of Pope Urban VIII Barberini within the framework of the urban development of Rome in the seventeenth century. Specifically, it considers the political context and social ramifications of displays of Barberini munificence at the Piazza Barberini in Rome. By exploring the social functions and permutations of papal patronage, propaganda, and competition in early modern Rome, this project consider the ways in which the Barberini family maintained a competitive dialogue with rival Roman families and other European princes, while at the same time promoting their political and social agendas to the people of Rome. Through a contextual examination of art historical, literary, and political data within the framework of urban studies, the project contributes to the ongoing assessment of the social functions of patronage in early modern Rome. Fieldwork will be conducted over a three-week period at important museums, libraries, and archives in Rome, including the American Academy in Rome, the Palazzo Barberini, and the Vatican Library. The subsequent work of contextualizing fieldwork finds within the larger body of recent scholarship on artistic patronage will be conducted over a seven week period in Omaha. The product of this research will be an article on the social and political aspects of Barberini family patronage at the Piazza Barberini. This article will appear in 2009, and eventually contribute to a larger monograph on the patronage of the Barberini in the era of the High baroque.
I. Statement of Purpose

This project is a research trip to Rome that will garner information for an article on the Piazza Barberini and the urban development of Rome in the seventeenth century. I will submit this article for publication in Fall 2008. Additionally, the work done for this article will contribute to a monograph on Barberini patronage in the seventeenth century that I have been working on for a number of years and will be completed within the next 3 years. Travel is essential in most art historical research, and in particular for this project. The successful completion my larger research goals depends on in-depth analysis of two main bodies of evidence: archive materials found only in Rome such as contemporary letters and diaries, business contracts, period views and maps, and guidebook descriptions; and thorough examination of the site of the Piazza Barberini and the urban fabric of Rome.

My larger research questions focus on the context of Barberini patronage in the seventeenth century. I began this work by offering in my dissertation a new interpretation of Gianlorenzo Bernini’s famed Triton Fountain (see appendix C) arguing that the piazza and the adjacent Palazzo Barberini are conceptually and formally unified into a greater complex by Ovid’s account of the flood in Metamorphoses, with the results glorifying the Barberini family and contributing to their international political agenda. I am completing an article on this new reading of the fountain, and will submit it for publication by the end of the year.

Using this as a basis, I will expand my inquiry into the political and social context of Barberini patronage by examining the role the Piazza Barberini played in the urban development of Rome in the seventeenth century. My hypothesis is that the piazza and its fountains were gifts to the Roman people, given after the disastrous and unpopular War of Castro of the early 1640s. Evidence for this will come from two sources: first, from my efforts to reconstruct the appearance of the piazza in the mid-seventeenth century, and second from an analysis of the Barberini documents held at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, municipal document held at the Archivo di Stato di Roma, and contemporary guidebooks held at the Library of the British School at Rome. I worked on both these bodies of evidence during a research trip in 2002; however, since my current research questions are different, it is vital that I reassess this evidence in my return trip to Rome. The information gathered during my research in Rome will form an article on the urban development of Rome that will be submitted for publication in the Fall of 2008.

II. Significance of the Problem

The conclusions drawn from this proposed research trip to Rome will be the foundation for a re-evaluation of the art and architecture of the High Baroque, the political role of papal and familial patronage of the arts, and the urban development of Rome in the early modern period. The advent of the Barberini papacy ushered in one of the single most important eras of patronage both in the history of Rome and in the history of Western art. For over twenty years, Pope Urban VIII, his nephews, extended family, and court sponsored artists, architects, musicians, poets, authors, historians, and scientists. Barberini patronage created the High Baroque, and was in part responsible for the careers of such illustrious artists as Gianlorenzo Bernini and produced such projects as the completion of the Basilica San Pietro. Moreover, the Barberini papacy reigned over the apogee of the Counter-Reformation Church, the expansion of the missionary activity throughout the world, and the growth of the Jesuit order. All of these activities found visual expression in the art and architecture of Rome sponsored by the Barberini. Despite the incredible patronage of Urban VIII and his family, and the monumental achievements in the arts during the High Baroque, there is not yet a comprehensive study on the family’s patronage. My
research will fill this lacuna with the production of a monograph that will systematically analyze the art and architecture sponsored by the Barberini. Such a monograph will contribute significantly to our understanding of artistic production at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the goals of the papacy in the wake of the Council of Trent, and the origins of absolutism at the dawn of the Enlightenment.

III. Summary of Pertinent Literature

The argument for an expanded reading of the Bernini’s *Triton Fountain* at Piazza Barberini begins with John Beldon Scott’s *Images of Nepotism: The Painted Ceilings of Palazzo Barberini* (1991), which sheds light on the goals of the Barberini’s innovative iconography. Coupled with this is Howard Hibbard’s and Irma Jaffe’s “Bernini’s *Barcaccia*” in *The Burlington Magazine* (1964). In it, the authors argue that the fountain, placed as it is in a piazza dominated by Spanish interests, and at the foot Santa Trinitá dei Monti, a French church, is a symbol of Urban’s political mediation between France and Spain. Joseph Connors’ article “Alliance and Enmity in Roman Baroque Urbanism” in the *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* (1989), considers the expression of Barberini politics at the Pizza Trevi. Similarly, Dorothy Metzger Habel’s *The Urban Development of Rome in the Age of Alexander VII* (2002) discusses how small private urban projects in Rome simultaneously expanded the city and celebrated the patronizing family. The iconography of the fountains at Piazza Barberini is a first step, but the piazza’s integration into its surroundings must also be considered. Marvin Trachtenberg’s *Dominion of the Eye* (1997), which focuses on trecento Florentine piazzas, demonstrates how such public spaces were cut out of the urban fabric, and how they then related to surrounding buildings. Perhaps most importantly, Trachtenberg demonstrates that since at least the fourteenth century, piazzes were also considered parts of larger architectural wholes. Richard Krautheimer’s *Rome in the Age of Alexander VII, 1655-1667* (1985), contains a thorough discussion of Baroque piazzas, and many of the concepts of piazzes that Krautheimer document find their origins in the cityscape architecture of Gianlorenzo Bernini as practiced at the Piazza Barberini.

All of these sources help us understand how artistic production, including painting but focusing on architecture, can be put to use in the service of political expression. Sarah McPhee’s *Bernini and the Bell Towers: Architecture and Politics at the Vatican* (2002) is a tour de force in this regard. The close relationship of politics and artistic patronage is a new and growing field and has some particularly noteworthy achievements, including the Hillary Ballon’s outstanding study of Paris at the beginning of the seventeenth century, *The Paris of Henri IV: Architecture and Urbanism* (1991), which lays the groundwork for an understanding of the close connection between architectural and urban patronage and the rise of political absolutism, a key concept for my research project. Indeed, it was in the Paris of Henri IV that Urban VIII (then Cardinal Maffeo Barberini) witnessed the French monarch’s masterful use of artistic patronage as a weapon in his political conquest of France.

Primary sources include the vast holdings of contemporary guidebooks at the British School at Rome, as well as prints of views of Rome held at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Also, the Barberini manuscripts also held at the B.A.V. are essential in documenting the creation of the Piazza Barberini. The Archivo di Stato di Roma at the Universita di Roma “La Sapienza” houses extensive holdings that document the political relationship between the papacy and the municipal government of Rome, a key element in reconstructing the social context of Barberini displays of largesse and munificence at the Piazza Barberini.
IV. Research Question

Situated on the ruins of the ancient Gardens of Salust, the Piazza Barberini was carved out of the medieval street network to become a home to Renaissance palaces and gardens. Under the guidance of the Baroque master Gianlorenzo Bernini, the piazza was adorned with two important fountains, and the space became an exemplar of Baroque glorification and renovation programs. As such, it is rightfully discussed as an important work of Baroque art, and an essential element of the Roman cityscape. The piazza, however, is also an important swath of the urban fabric of the city, and in this regard, the space possesses several vital utilitarian functions. Located on the busy Via Sistina/Via Quattro Fontane conduit, the piazza served as an important way station on the heavily trafficked pilgrimage route connecting Santa Trinità dei Monti with Santa Maria Maggiore. As a public space, the piazza was used by the city’s residents and visitors for markets, spectacles, and other outdoor activities. Finally, the piazza and its water supply encouraged new building projects in the uninhabited areas of intramural Rome on the Quirinale and Pincio hills, a key element in the revitalization of the city that had been underway since the fifteenth century. These twin aspects of the Piazza Barberini (a space glorifying the Barberini family and an essential stitch in the urban fabric of the city) are clear to scholars today, and certainly would have been understandable to Romans of the seventeenth century.

The Piazza Barberini was completed in 1643. By this date, the space had all the requisite elements of the large familial piazza so common to Rome: a family palace, a large church, a delineated open space, and a monumental artistic display (such as a fountain, column, or larger sculpture). The next year, however, in a rather unusual move, a second monumental fountain the Fountain of the Bees (see Appendix C) was added to the piazza. This gave the space two large fountains, something unprecedented in Rome up to that time. This is all the more remarkable considering the unsettled political climate current in Rome in 1643. Between 1641 and 1644, Pope Urban VIII presided over the calamitous War of Castro. The war saw unexpectedly high death rates, territorial losses on the battlefield, and high taxes back in Rome. Unrest and near riot were the orders of the day on the streets of Rome, and within this context it is a wonder that Urban should choose to spend much needed funds on a fountain that glorified his family. Indeed, a famous pasquinade proclaimed: “We do not want obelisks and fountains, we want bread, bread, and more bread!” It is astounding that Urban should then choose to build a second fountain. Why did he do it?

My current research project is an attempt to answer that question. I propose that the answer can in part be found in the inscription on the Fountain of the Bees, which reads, “Urban VIII Pontifex Maximus, who built this fountain for the public ornamentation of the city, had regard for the profit of all, together and individually, with this benefit.” With this second fountain at the Piazza Barberini, Urban makes clear that he did not commission the piazza complex for the glorification of his family, but rather for each Roman individually, and for the city of Rome as a whole. My research will demonstrate that within this context, the Fountain of the Bees is a gift to the citizens of Rome intended to ameliorate some of the ill will felt towards Urban and his family in the wake of the War of Castro.

The kind of question I am asking in this project is fundamental to historical and art historical inquiry. Works of art, particularly large architectural or urban projects, required vast sums of money to execute. It is vital to know why such monies were spent, particularly when expenditures on art (so often considered frivolous) were undertaken at times of economic difficulty. Knowing why patrons spent money when and how they did informs us greatly as to their larger political or social goals. Specifically for my project, understanding the rationale for the construction of the Fountain of the Bees and the larger piazza complex will illuminate
Urban’s political and social agenda, expand our knowledge of papal politics at the height of the Counter-Reformation, and help provide a clearer understanding of the origins of absolutism at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

V. Design and Methods

Sections A, B, and C: Design and Procedures

In my archival and museum research I will be looking for two kinds of documents, the first straightforwardly historical in nature, and the second art historical. For the first, I will be looking for documents that address the papal response to outrage over the War of Castro. Before the war began, Urban was extremely popular, but this changed almost immediately as the bill for the war came due and was paid in death and taxes. I hope to be able to demonstrate that the Barberini papacy was aware of popular resentment to the war, that they considered this disapproval to be a problem, and that they actively took steps to improve the situation. Related to this, I hope to find documents that indicate the success of failure of these official stratagems.

For the art historical documents, I am looking for responses to the creation of the Piazza Barberini and its fountains. Chiefly this will come in depictions of people engaged in various activities in the piazza. The logic is that the more people used the space and the more often the space was considered worthy of artistic depiction, then the more valuable and perhaps beloved the space became. In theory, this type of approval would then reflect positively on the Barberini family. Similarly, discussions of the piazza in guidebooks are also essential documents of the public response to Barberini largesse.

I have found examples of both of these types of documents during past research, but my body of evidence must be expanded before I can argue for any definite conclusions. Therefore, although I have conducted a cursory examination of the Barberini documents in the Vatican Library, careful re-examination of these materials with an eye towards answering this new question is essential. The same is true for a series of documents at the Archivo di Stato di Roma. Moreover, I hope to make use of the extensive collection of guidebooks at the British School at Rome, as well as the smaller collection at the American Academy. Finally, I will search in a variety of museums and archives for prints and drawings of the piazza. I have a number of leads gained during a research trip conducted in the Fall of 2002, so I will be able to hit the ground running upon my arrival in Rome.

Also in Rome, I will also make use of the library of the American Academy, where I will be base. This will help me contextualize my research for my return to Omaha, where I will begin the second phase of research. In Omaha, I will make sense of my findings by comparing them to the established body of literature on such fields as the urban development of Rome, the Barberini papacy, the political climate of Europe at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and general issues in papal patronage. Seven weeks of library work should allow me to sufficiently synthesize my Roman research and readings in Omaha; writing of the manuscript should begin by the fall of 2008.

Interpretive methodology for a project like this is like a toolbox in which theoretical approaches can be varied depending on the evidence or questions. In
general, most such projects begin with direct art historical formal analysis of the
given object, building, or space. Next, a series of standard iconographic questions
are asked and answered, in the tradition expounded by Erwin Panofsky. Since
Panofsky, however, art history has become more concerned with societal analysis,
historically contextualizing architectural projects. Following the lead of garden,
palace, and villa historians Charles Burroughs, Mirka Benes, Dianne Harris, and
Tracy Ehrlich, I consider the Piazza Barberini as an expression of the social and
political concerns of the Urban VIII and the Barberini. It has been argued, that art
objects are “weapons or toys of the ruling classes.” Patronage of art objects is an
effort by the ruling classes to gain, maintain, or advance power. I recognize that
art can be an expression of power, and this project’s understanding of the
dialectical relationship between Bernini’s aesthetics and Urban’s politics is
indebted to Lauro Martines. The literature on artistic patronage is vast, and each
author provides unique uses of methodological tools.

D. Schedule for completing the project

1. This project will be conducted in two phases. The first is a three-week research
phase conducted from May 18-June 8, 2008 at the American Academy in Rome.
The second phase, conducted at Creighton over the next seven weeks and
concluding on July 26, will contextualize the information gained in Rome through
library work focused on current scholarship on Renaissance and Baroque artistic
patronage and the larger historical context of the Barberini in Rome during the
High Baroque.

2. With the field and library work concluded by the end of July 2008, completion
of the manuscript will be finished in short order. The article will be submitted for
publication by the end of 2008.

3. External funding is essential for the completion of any project of this type, and
success in gaining that funding is significantly increased by demonstrations of
support from the researcher’s home institution. Support for the completion of this
monograph is available from a variety of sources including the Samuel H. Kress
Foundation, the American Academy in Rome, the National Endowment for the
Humanities, and the Carter Manny Foundation, to name but a few sources of
outside funding. Funding from these sources will be requested as this project
moves forward as a monograph.
VI. References


Appendices

A. Biographical Sketch

Matthew Averett received his Ph.D. at the University of Missouri-Columbia in the department of Art History and Archaeology in 2006 under the direction of Keith Eggener; he also worked with Norman Land, Osmund Overby, Kathleen Slane, John Frymmire, and Charles Nauert. Dr. Averett specialized in Renaissance and Baroque art and architecture, focusing on Gianlorenzo Bernini and the urban development of Rome in the seventeenth century. Other areas of interest include the city of Rome in antiquity, urban and architectural exchange between Spain and the New World in the early modern period, and current issues of urbanism and the modern city.

Dr. Averett’s dissertation, *Bernini at the Piazza Barberini: Patronage and Public Space in the Rome of Urban VII*, explores the social functions and permutations of papal patronage, propaganda, and competition in early modern Rome. The dissertation investigates Gianlorenzo Bernini’s *Triton Fountain* as a work of sculpture, but also as an architectural element of the Piazza Barberini. Dr. Averett consider the ways in which Pope Urban VIII Barberini, through this artistic water display in a public space, maintained a competitive dialogue with rival Roman families and other European princes, while at the same time promoting his political and social agendas to the people of Rome. Through a contextual examination of art historical, literary, and political data within the framework of urban studies, the dissertation contributes to the ongoing assessment of the social functions of patronage in early modern Rome.

Dr. Averett has delivered several papers on Renaissance and Baroque art, architecture, and theater. Currently, he is finishing an article on Baroque Rome, “Urban VIII and the *Ecclesia Militans,*” and is continuing work on his monograph *A Swarm Came from Tuscany: Patronage and Politics in the Rome of Urban VIII.* Dr Averett has taught classes on many periods of art and architecture, from the Renaissance to the present, and is developing classes on Gianlorenzo Bernini, the topography of Rome since the Renaissance, and urban history and historiography.

Before coming to Creighton University, Dr. Averett taught at William Woods University in Fulton, Missouri, and at Central Methodist University in Fayette, Missouri. He also served as the Assistant Curator of European and American Art at the Museum of Art and Archaeology at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Dr. Averett has traveled extensively in North America and Europe, and has studied at the Goethe Institut in Rothenburg, Germany, conducted research at the American Academy in Rome as well as the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, Greece, and has participated in the Athienou Archaeological Project in Cyprus since 2002.
**B. Budget Justification**

The total budget for this project is $6425.80, a sum that exceeds the combined total of the Fellowship’s stipend and direct costs allowance. All award money will go to this project.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Airfare, roundtrip Omaha-Rome</td>
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<td>A search on Travelocity.com found roundtrip flights from Omaha to Rome starting at $1464.80.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lodging, 2 weeks at the American Academy</td>
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<td>Lodging at the Academy is the most economical option for scholars conducting long-term stays in Rome. The current rate for an apartment is €455, which converts to approximately $1935. The lodging request allows for exchange fees, fluctuations in exchange rates, and possible increase in room rates as noted by the Academy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creighton University’s <em>per diem</em> for Rome is $141, or $1974 for a 3-week stay. With this figure I include miscellaneous costs such as transportation in Rome, photocopying expenses, film and film processing, museum entrance fees, etc.</td>
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**Total** $6425.80

