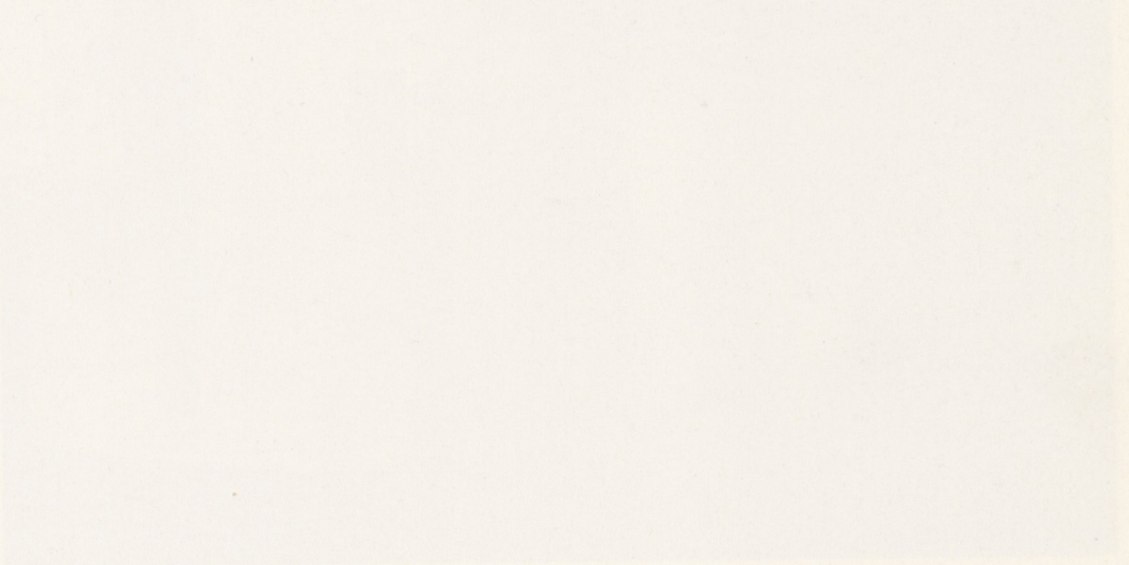


ANTHONY BLUNT

TWO NEGLECTED WORKS BY BORROMINI



1. Rome, Battistero di S. Giovanni in Laterano, backside



Within a stone's throw of the Lateran are two works – both familiar to students of Roman architecture – with which the name of Borromini has been connected, but in one case recent writers on him do not seem to have noticed the reference and in the other the connection has been unanimously rejected.

The first work is the frieze round the outside of the Lateran Baptistery (Fig. 1). The attribution to Borromini is based on a sentence in Fioravante Martinelli's *Roma ornata*: "Il cornicione che ricinge il detto tempio del Battisterio con il suo fregio è stato fatto fare dalla Santità di Nostro Signore Alessandro VII con disegno del Cav. Borromino"¹, and since Martinelli was a close friend and a champion of the architect there is no reason to doubt his word. In the 1658 edition of his *Roma ricercata nel suo sito* (p. 400) the same author states that Borromini had repaired the roof of the Baptistery, but does not men-

tion the frieze, from which we may conclude that it was executed after that date².

Stylistically the frieze fits happily into Borromini's work of the late 1650s or early 1660s. It consists of a repeating pattern with the papal tiara and crossed keys, flanked by the *monti* and oak trees of the arms of Alexander VII. In general pattern this frieze is reminiscent of the one which runs round the base of the dome inside S. Ivo, though there Borromini has only used the *monti* and oak-trees; but there are interesting differences. At S. Ivo the oak trees conform to the normal heraldic convention, but in the Lateran frieze their branches are arranged to form a sort of wheel. Borromini had hinted at this in his treat-

2 This fact is noticed by E. HEMPEL, *Francesco Borromini*, Vienna, 1924, p. 182, but he could not know the *Roma ornata* the manuscript of which was not published at the time he wrote. P. PORTOGHESI (*Borromini*, American translation, London, 1968, p. 430) mentions the frieze but does not reproduce it or refer to Martinelli.

1 C. D'ONOFRIO, *Roma nel Seicento*, Rome, 1969, p. 69.



2. Rome, Casino Massimo from the street

ment of the same theme on the pediment over one of the windows on the Collegio di Propaganda Fide³, but at the Lateran he is more ruthlessly geometrical. Another unusual feature of the Lateran frieze is the fact that he transforms the handles of the crossed keys into rosettes. He had hinted at such a transformation of inanimate into living form in the relief below the monument to Cardinal Baronio in the Vallicelliana Library (Fig. 17) where the crook of the pastoral staff is formed of acanthus leaves, and he does it again with the keys in the panel over the door leading from the cloister of the Lateran palace to the church, dated 1650⁴.

3 PORTOGHESI, *op. cit.*, pls. 164, 165.

4 *Ibid.*, pl. 121. Originally, as can be seen from old photographs (pl. 1) Borromini varied the design of the frieze on at least one face of the Baptistery and put instead of the tiara and keys a Chi-rho surrounded by a laurel wreath. In the recent restoration this feature was removed and now all the faces have exactly the same design. As we see it in the old photograph the Chi-rho in a wreath is very close to similar motifs by Borromini, also

The second work is a small casino (Fig. 2, 3) standing in the corner between the Piazza S. Giovanni in Laterano and the via Merulana and familiar to all students of early 19th century painting as containing the series of frescoes executed in 1817–29 by the Nazarene painters for Prince Massimi illustrating themes from Dante, Ariosto and Tasso. The outside of the building has, however, been little studied except by archaeologists concerned with the ancient Roman reliefs set into its walls. These came from the famous collection of the marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani who was the builder of the casino, in a *vigna* which he bought in 1603.

From the point of view of Borromini the interesting fact about the building is that the author of the 1763 edition of Titi's *Descrizione delle Pitture, Sculture e Architetture in Roma*, that is to say Giovanni Bottari,

dating from the Pontificate of Alexander VII, on the frieze along the nave of the Lateran and on the façade of S. Ivo facing the cloister (pl. 18).



3. Casino Massimo from the garden

writing of the Vigna Giustiniani (p. 435), says: "Il casino è architettura del Borromino." The few writers who have concerned themselves with the casino have pointed out that this cannot be true because the building appears in Greuter's map of Rome dating from 1618, that is to say at a date when Borromini had probably not even arrived in Rome and many years before he began working as an independent architect⁵. What they did not notice, however, is that though the building existed before 1618, the entire decoration of its walls is later.

This can be proved in two ways. First an engraving of the casino in the second volume of the *Galleria Giustiniana* (Fig. 4), published after, though probably not much after, 1637, shows what is now the street front of the casino without either reliefs or stucco decoration. Secondly the frieze below the windows of the upper storey

5 cf. Rava in the preliminary chapter to K. GERSTENBERG's *Die Wandgemälde der deutschen Romantiker im Casino Massimo zu Rom*, Berlin, 1934.

includes in its decoration not only the eagle of the Giustiniani arms, but the Pamphili dove, and must therefore date from after the marriage of Prince Andrea Giustiniani, the adopted son and heir of Vincenzo, to Maria, daughter of don Camillo and Donna Olympia Pamphili and niece of Cardinal Giovanni Battista Pamphili, later Pope Innocent X, which took place in 1640⁶.

In fact the decoration can be exactly dated to 1649 from a document dated March of that year containing a contract made by a *stuccatore* referred to as "Maestro Francesco" for stucco-work on the casino which included "li festone con l'Aquila" on the garden front and the "Corone ò vero rami di foglie" round the medallions, both features which occur in the existing decoration⁷.

6 G. L. CALLARI, *Le Ville di Roma*, Rome, 1934, p. 194.

7 I am deeply grateful to Professor Wolfgang Lotz for calling my attention to the reference to this document in M. DEL PIAZZO, *Ragguagli Borrominiani*, Rome, 1968, p. 221 (not listed in the index) and to Dr. Klaus Güthlein for transcribing it for me. It is to be found in the Archivio di Stato, Roma, Fondo Ospedale di

Bottari's attribution of the casino to Borromini is confirmed by the rather meagre documentary evidence available, which shows that the architect was working extensively for Andrea Giustiniani in the 1650s. Between 1650 and 1655 he made plans for alterations and additions to the Roman palace, opposite S. Luigi dei Francesi. In the event only the door was carried out, but drawings for the larger scheme survive. In 1655 he is recorded as carrying out work on another Giustiniani villa outside the Porta del Popolo (see below), and there is a single payment in 1657 for work in the garden of the villa at the Lateran⁸.

The external evidence therefore tends to support the statement in the 1763 Titi, and Roberto Battaglia in his article on the villa comes near to accepting the attribution to Borromini and then at the last moment rejects it on stylistic grounds:

"Bisogna però riconoscere che negli ornati non v'è alcuna traccia della personalità del Borromini⁹."

S. Spirito in Sassia, Reg. 48, fol. 4, in a volume of notes on the cost of stucco work probably prepared for Borromini's friend and patron, Virgilio Spada, who was *commendatore* of the Hospital at the relevant time. The purpose of the notes was probably to give Spada some idea of the cost of stucco work in connection with some project that he was planning for S. Spirito. The contract reads as follows:

Stucco

Capitoli e patti da osservarsi da M.ro Fran.co Stuccatore che vanno fatti al Cascino del Ecc.mo Sig.r Prencipe Giustiniano a S. Giovanni Laterano à

Marzo 1649

In Virtù della presente si oblige d.o m.ro Fran.co di lavorare li stuchi che vanno per ornamento delle facciate nel Casino del d.o Sig.r Prencipe nel modo e prezzo che si dira qui sotto cioe Intorno alli medaglioni e fare le Corone ò vero rami di foglie conforme alla mostra che gia si vedono à rag.ne di b 20 il p.mo andante da misurarsi secondo il solito, mandando à monte li suolazzi e legature che escono da d.ti lavori, et per l'Intesso prezzo si oblige di fare ogni ornamento che andasse lavorato in altro luoco di d.e facciate di d.o Cascino dichiarandosi che il freggio che va continuato sotto le tre finestre che guardono nel Giardino segreto poste sopra li tre archi della loggia doveva farsi al sud.o prezzo di b 20, ma pero misurato a p.mi quadri et cosi anche doveranno misurarsi li festoni con l'Aquile sopra che si faranno nel fregio sotto le finestre a i fianchi del Casino.

Li Altri lavori bassi che vanno In forma di cornice intorno alli bassi rilievi et altrove secondo la mostra gia principiata, si oblige farli a rag.ne di b 5 il p.mo andante obligandosi parimente fare il tutto con ogni diligenza a giuditio di periti e continuare il lavoro sino al fine senza Intermissione altrimenti acconsente che sua Ecc.a di(!) possa fare servire ad'ogni danno e suo Interesse.

8 cf. I. TOESCA, "Note sulla Storia del Palazzo Giustiniani, a S. Luigi dei Francesi", *Bollettino d'Arte*, XLII, 1957, p. 296, and M. del Piazzo, *Ragguagli Borrominiani*, Rome, 1968, p. 116 ff.

9 R. BATTAGLIA, "Le Ville Giustiniane a Roma e l'opera di Carlo Lambardi", *L'Urbe*, V, 1940, 12, p. 2. Hempel (*op. cit.*, p. 178) notes the sentence in the 1763 Titi but rejects the attribution out of hand. Bottari (Titi, *loc. cit.*) also states that the gate to the

I hope to show that this view is unfounded and that it is possible to find close parallels for almost every decorative motif on the casino in works certainly by the architect.

The villa consists of a simple rectangular block of two storeys. The front (Fig. 2) has five bays with the entrance door in the middle, the sides are of three bays each, and the garden front (Fig. 3) contains seven bays, with a three-bay arcaded loggia in the middle of the ground floor now closed¹⁰. The main features of the decoration are the ancient Roman reliefs and busts from the collection of the marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani¹¹. They are set in stucco frames or, in the case of those below the first floor windows, set between panels of a continuous frieze. On the street and side façades are three rows of reliefs (or on the street front reliefs and busts) above and below the first floor windows and above those on the ground floor. The decoration of the garden front is now much simpler but as we know from the contract of 1649 and from an engraving in Letarouilly (Fig. 5)¹² it originally had a frieze below the first floor windows, as on the other façades. At present it only has panels enclosing colossal heads in the upper floor, two small reliefs below the windows of the same floor and four above the windows of the ground floor; but the central feature, over the middle window of the first floor is a magnificent crowned eagle with its wings spread and partly covered by a laurel wreath (Fig. 6). The whole design is completed by a richly decorated cornice (Fig. 7) which runs round all four sides of the building.

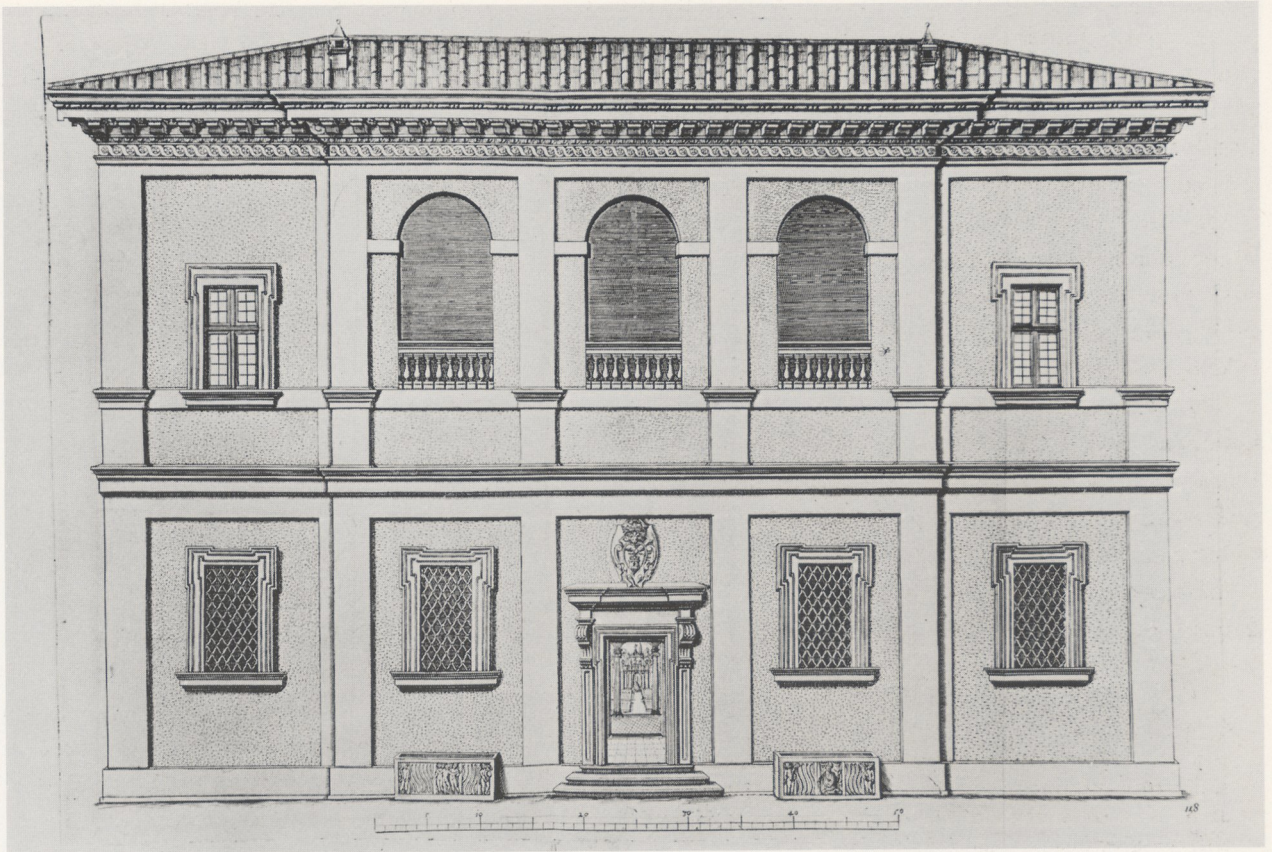
The individual panels of the decoration are remarkable for the variety and originality of their motifs and for the quality of their execution. The busts and reliefs on the upper storey of the street front (Fig. 8) are enclosed in richly carved laurel wreaths and those on the ground floor (Fig. 9) are in thinner wreaths, more austere in their pattern. Those on the upper floor of the sides and the

villa was designed by Carlo Lombardo (or Lambardi). It was taken down when the *vigna* round the casino was sold for building plots in the 1880s but was later re-erected on the entrance to the Villa Mattei (Celimontana).

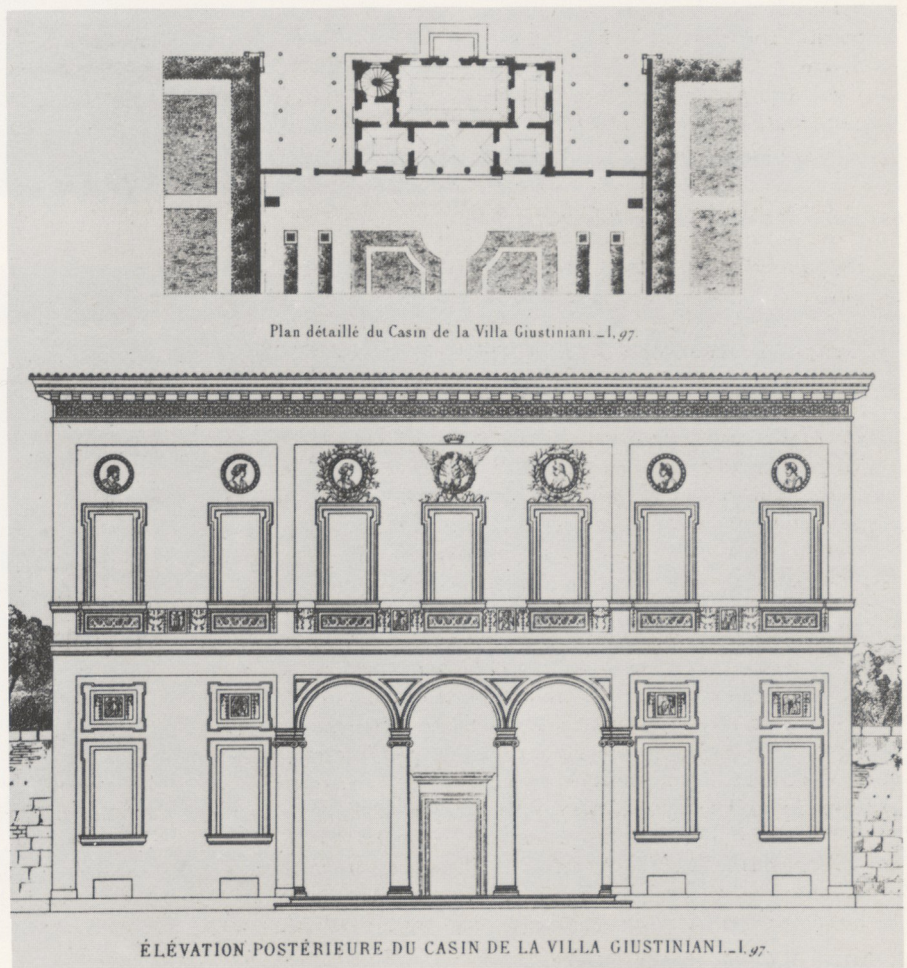
10 The engraving of the front of the villa in the *Galleria Giustiniani* (pl. 5) shows that originally this façade had a three-bay loggia on the first floor, which was presumably blocked up when the decoration was undertaken. The loggia on the ground floor of the garden front was closed in the 19th century to protect the frescoes.

11 Some of them are known to have come from the villa outside the Porta del Popolo which belonged to Vincenzo's brother cardinal Benedetto and was inherited by Vincenzo at the latter's death in 1621 (cf. Battaglia, *op. cit.*, p. 13, note 25).

12 P. LETAROUILLY, *Édifices de Rome Moderne*, Rome, 1868-74, pl. 328.



4. Casino Massimo, engraving in *Galleria Giustiniana*, 2nd. vol.



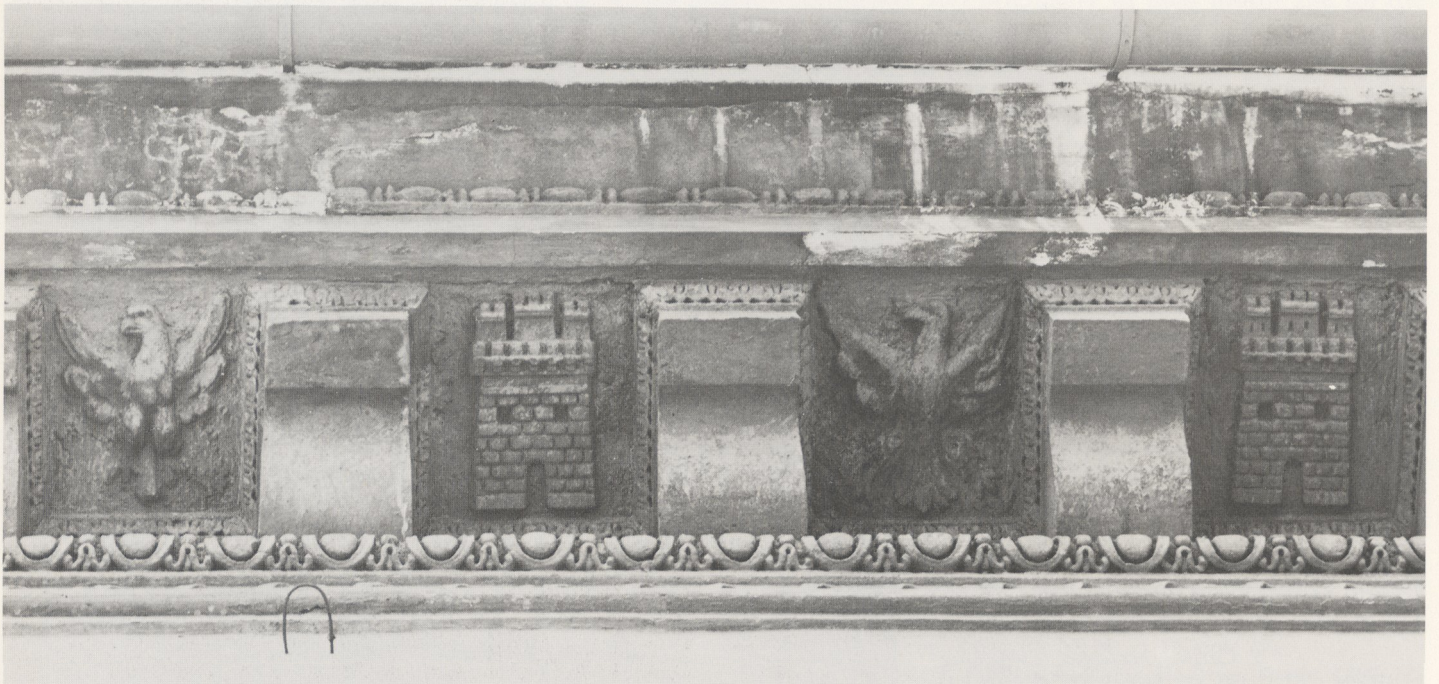
Plan détaillé du Casin de la Villa Giustiniani. 1. 97.

ÉLEVATION POSTÉRIEURE DU CASIN DE LA VILLA GIUSTINIANI. 1. 97.

5. Casino Massimo, engraving of. P. Letarouilly, *Édifices de Rome Moderne*, pl. 328



6. *Casino Massimo, garden facade, 1st floor*



7. *Casino Massimo, cornice, street facade*



8. *Casino Massimo, street facade, 1st floor*



9. *Casino Massimo, street facade, groundfloor and frieze*

garden front (Fig. 10) are framed in light egg-and-dart mouldings, but these are enveloped in a very unusual decorative motif consisting of two branches, tied at the bottom with ribbons which flutter away to right and left, and crossing at the top so that they enclose and support the medallion, as the wings of the cherubim support the medallion over the door to the cloister of S. Carlino. The leaves which are modelled with great precision, curl over as they touch the frame, and press up against the ledge of the slightly projecting cornice above them. The Giustiniani eagles in the frieze (Fig. 11) behave with decorous symmetry, but the Pamphili doves (Fig. 12) are freer in their movement and play engagingly with the olive branches which they carry in their beaks. Even the hanging campanulas (Fig. 15) which flank the smaller reliefs and the ribbons which flutter beside them have a vitality of their own.

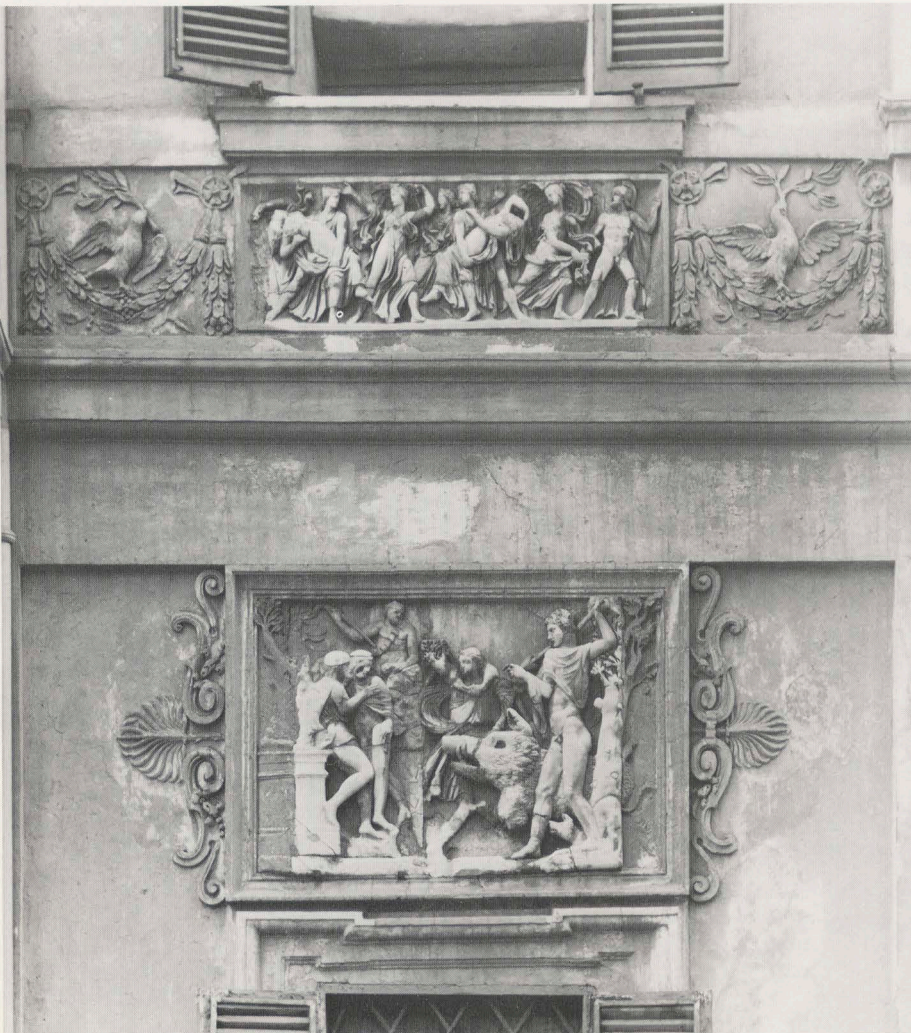
But the most energetic invention of all is the eagle (Fig. 6) standing on and yet carrying a laurel wreath which forms the central feature of the garden front – though we must think away the feeble coronet which now floats over it and must be a later addition. It is, as Wolfgang Lotz pointed out to me, directly based on the ancient eagle in the portico of SS. Apostoli.



10. *Casino Massimo, street facade, groundfloor and frieze*



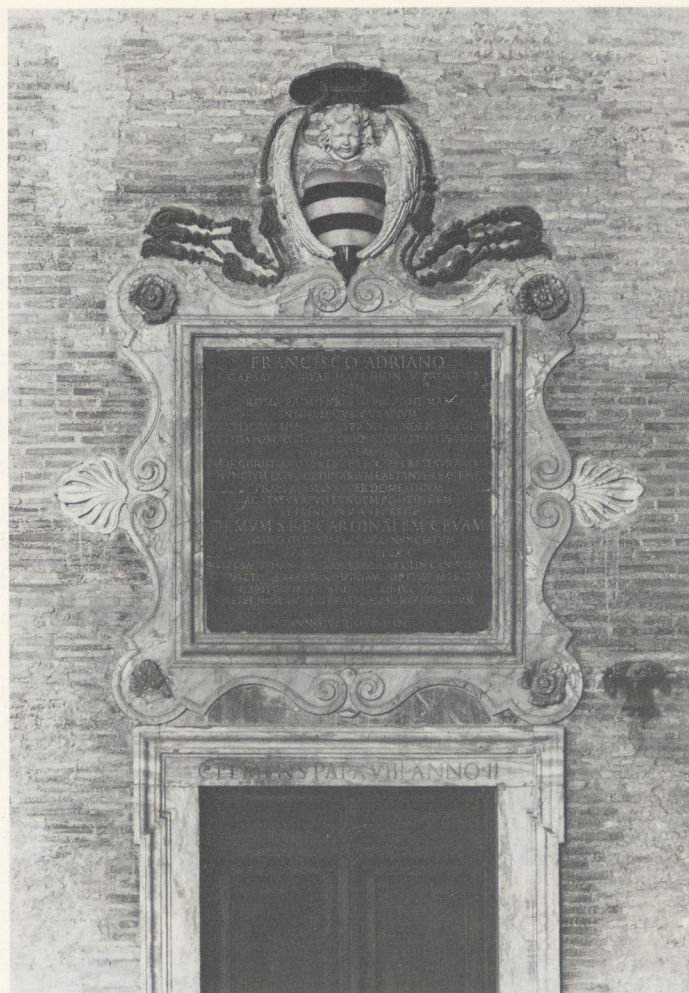
11. Casino Massimo, street facade, 1st floor with frieze



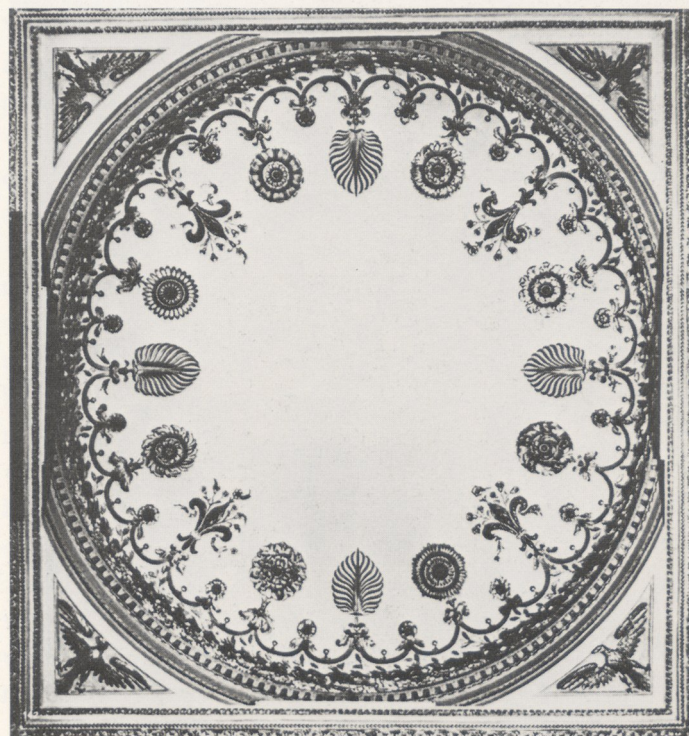
12. Casino Massimo, street facade, ground-floor and frieze

All these motifs are to be found – in some cases over and over again – in the decorative vocabulary of Borromini, which is highly personal and quite unlike those of his great contemporaries Bernini and Pietro da Cortona.

The most obviously Borrominesque feature is the design with a palmette and scrolls on the lower storey of the street front which has an exact parallel in the Ceva monument in the Oratory of S. Venanzio in the Lateran Baptistery (Fig. 13), although there the scrolls merge into a continuous frame; and the palmette is to be found alone or combined with other vegetable motifs in many other works including the central window of the Oratory, one of the ceilings in the Palazzo Falconieri (Fig. 14), the frieze on the outside of S. Giovanni in Oleo, and a design for a grille in the Albertina¹³. The leafy branches can be seen spread out straight, rather than curved on a flat ceiling over the windows in the bay joining the outer aisle of the Lateran basilica to the palace (Fig. 16), and on the walls of the niches below the Pamphili dove appears standing on a laurel wreath, exactly as on the casino¹⁴. Ribbons are a recurrent theme with Borromini. Compare, for instance, the frame to the bust of Gregory XV in the Propaganda Fide and the tombs of Sergius IV and Boniface VIII¹⁵ in the Lateran, in the latter case possibly in allusion to the same feature in the Gaetani arms. Borromini sometimes makes similar play with the cords and tassels attached to ecclesiastical hats, as in the arms of Innocent X over the entrance to the Lateran basilica from the palace¹⁶. The severe laurel wreaths which frame many of the oval panels on the casino are a frequently recurring theme in Borromini. They enclose crowns and palm leaves at S. Ivo (Fig. 18), the busts of Baronius in the Vallicelliana (Fig. 17), Innocent X in the Lateran (Fig. 16), and Clemente Merlini on his tomb in S. Maria Maggiore; they span the vault of the Spada portico and one of the side chapels in S. Carlino and the arches of the loggia in the Palazzo Carpegna; and they appear in drawings for S. Carlino, the Palazzo Falconieri and the nave of the Lateran¹⁷. Laurel bands hang down, as on the panels in the side and garden façades of the Casino, beside the windows of the Palazzo Barberini and bands of bell-shaped flowers appear below the Ionic capitals under the loggia



13. Rome, Battistero di S. Giovanni in Laterano, Oratorio di S. Venanzio, Ceva monument



14. Rome, Palazzo Falconieri, ceiling

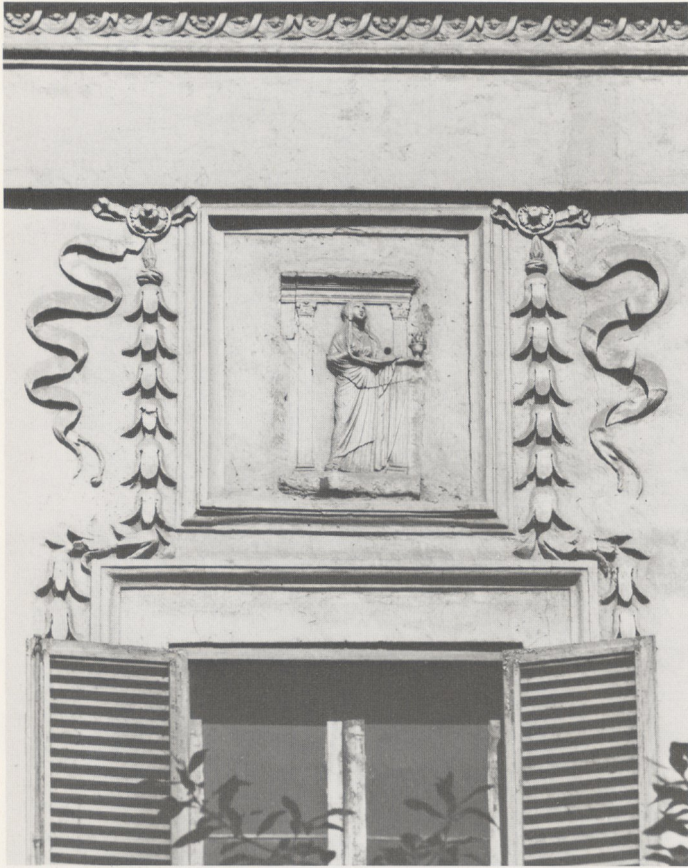
13 Reproduced Portoghesi, *op. cit.*, pls. 40, 196, and Hempel, *op. cit.*, pl. 31. Admittedly the scrolls on the casino frame are coarser than those of the tomb, but this may be due to the clumsiness of Maestro Francesco.

14 A similar motif appears in a ceiling at Palazzo Falconieri (cf. Portoghesi, *op. cit.*, pl. 143).

15 Portoghesi, *op. cit.*, pl. 172, and Hempel, pls. 61, 62.

16 Portoghesi, *op. cit.*, pl. 121.

17 *Ibid.*, pl. 133, 28, 153, V, LXXVII, LXII.



15. *Casino Massimo, street facade, 1st floor*



16. *Rome, S. Giovanni in Laterano, right outer aisle, vault, medallion of Innocent X*



17. *Rome, Biblioteca Vallicelliana, bust of Baronius*



18. *Rome, S. Ivo*

of the Palazzo Falconieri¹⁸. The eagle is not a feature of which Borromini had a monopoly, but the wings of the magnificent bird which dominates the garden front (Fig. 6) have the unusually clear articulation which characterize those of the cherubim which decorate the campanile of S. Andrea delle Fratte, the niche in the façade of S. Carlino or the tomb of Sergius IV in the Lateran¹⁹.

It can therefore be shown that all the themes which appear in the decoration of the casino can be paralleled in works certainly by Borromini, but to clinch the argument it would be necessary to demonstrate that they do not occur in the works of his contemporaries. It is manifestly impossible to demonstrate a negative thesis of this kind, but it is, I believe, in general true. Admittedly laurel bands occur in the work of Cortona and others of Borromini's contemporaries – though rarely in Bernini – but most of the other themes, particularly the palmettes, the ribbons, the leafy branches and the interlacing motif below the cornice seem to be marks of his personal style; and they therefore greatly strengthen the hypothesis that he was responsible for the decoration of the casino.

One can, however, I believe, go one stage further. Several of the decorative features on the casino are so close to those in the bay between the church and the palace of the Lateran – particularly the dove standing on a swag, the spread out leaves and the laurel wreath – that it seems likely that Borromini brought with him to the casino the stucco workers who had worked at the Lateran. This particular section of the church is dated 1650 (on the palace side) but the inscription refers to the Holy Year for which the whole restoration of the church was carried out and it may well have been actually put up a little earlier. At any rate it cannot be far removed in date from the stucco work on the casino. Stylistically the date 1649 fits well with the datable works of Borromini. The Ceva monument was set up in 1650 and the first ceilings in the

Palazzo Falconieri were made in 1649, and the other works which showed analogies (the tombs in the Lateran, Propaganda Fide and S. Giovanni in Oleo) all date from the 1650s.

An objection to the attribution of this work to Borromini that needs to be met is that it is not mentioned in the *Roma ornata* of Martinelli, whose evidence, as we have seen, is crucial for the frieze on the Lateran Baptistery. It is not, however, conclusive because, though Martinelli refers to Borromini's most important buildings, he omits a number of works, including the church of S. Maria dei Sette Dolori, the restoration of S. Giovanni in Oleo, the Ceva monument, the additions and alterations to the Carpegna, Pamphili and Spada palaces and the Casino del Bufalo – that is to say (except for the first) commissions for alteration or decoration of exactly the category to which the work on the Giustiniani Casino belongs.

If the attribution of the casino decoration to Borromini is accepted it would be a unique item in his *œuvre*, but it would not be without parallel in the history of Roman architecture. He would have been doing for the Giustiniani what Nanni Lippi had done at the Villa Medici (Fig. 19), Vasanzio at the Villa Borghese and, more recently, Algardi at the Villa Pamphili, and what Maderno had done for the Mattei at the palace in the centre of Rome (Fig. 20), that is to say, composing a picturesque ensemble out of the fragments of ancient sculpture – and they were distinguished and celebrated – which formed part of their collection, brought together in this case by the marchese Vincenzo. The collection was sold in Napoleonic times and the most famous pieces scattered to various museums all over Europe, so that those so ingeniously set in the walls of the casino have an importance as great as the engravings in the Galleria Giustiniani as visual evidence about the collection.

It is worth noticing – and not altogether irrelevant to the question of attribution – that of the models mentioned above – the three Villas and the Palazzo Mattei – the designer of the Casino Giustiniani chose to follow the last, that is to say a work by Maderno, Borromini's revered master. On the three villas the reliefs are set in the wall separately, with very simple frames. At the Villa Medici some are flanked by decorated pilasters but the only continuous decoration consists of two rows of swags and masks above and below the windows of the top storey and a narrow frieze of figure reliefs – largely made up of ancient fragments – running above the main arch of the loggia²⁰. In the Palazzo Mattei Maderno has inserted a

18 *Ibid.*, pl. 10, Hempel, *op. cit.*, pl. 28.

19 Portoghesi, *op. cit.*, pls. 357–9. MAURIZIO FAGIOLO (“1638: una decorazione inedita”, *Studi sul Borromini*, Rome, 1967, I, p. 201) has attributed to Borromini the decoration on the exterior of the Camera di S. Caterina behind the sacristy of S. Maria sopra Minerva, of which the basic design is due to Andrea Sacchi (cf. ANN SUTHERLAND HARRIS, *Andrea Sacchi*, Oxford, 1977, p. 79). It unquestionably has many features in common with the decoration on the casino and the slight differences between them could be accounted for by a difference of date, since the Minerva scheme must have been designed about a decade earlier than the casino.

It is tempting to ascribe to Borromini the cornice on the casino and the guilloche moulding below it, both of which have similarities to details of the Palazzo Falconieri, but they both appear in the engraving in the Galleria Giustiniani and must therefore belong to the original building.

20 On the Villa Borghese the decoration of the wings originally contained some slightly more continuous decoration, but this



19. Rome, Villa Medici, garden facade

long continuous frieze running round the courtyard below the windows of the piano nobile, in which he has set pairs of busts under the windows themselves linked by stucco panels of acanthus leaves. He has also given elaborate frames to the individual reliefs, some of which include scrolls like those on the ground floor panels on the entrance front of the casino – though without the palmettes. Over the windows of the top storey appear the eagles of the Mattei family, supported on consoles decorated with the checky of their arms. Borromini has followed Maderno's general method but has, characteristically, incorporated the heraldic elements in the frieze.

I said above that the decoration of the Giustiniani Casino was unique in Borromini's work, but it has some analogy with his "restoration" of the tombs in the Late-

ran, in which he encased fragments of the mediaeval monuments, but at the casino he took greater trouble to preserve the originals intact for reasons which are obvious but which must have particularly appealed to him, because its essential theme – the glorification of a series of Roman reliefs – would have been to him the expression of his passionate belief – so frequently affirmed through the mouth of his friend Fioravante Martinelli and so often denied him by his opponents – in the eternal validity of the canons established by the ancients²¹.

was removed during the 19th century. It is, however, recorded in engravings by Falda and others.

21 For a discussion of this point see my *Borromini*, London, 1979, p. 37.



20. Rome, Palazzo Mattei, courtyard