

Jelena A. Todorović*

EMERGING FROM THE SHADOWS A CURIOUS HISTORY OF A FORGOTTEN PAINTING BY NICOLAS POUSSIN

ABSTRACT: When Nicolas Poussin created the sensual image inspired by the myth of Venus and Adonis in 1627/28, he produced it in several identical replicas, of which three have been recognised by European scholarship. The most researched, presumably confirmed as the autograph version, is located in the Kimbel Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas. However, an equally interesting and rather accomplished image has become a part of the State Art Collection of the Kingdom, later Republic, of Yugoslavia (acc. no. 48/01) since the 1930s. And it has fallen into oblivion ever since. The aim of this paper is to shed more light on the history of this painting by Nicolas Poussin, delve deeper into the forms of artistic production in Baroque Rome, and trace its journey through Roman collections of the late *Seicento* and early *Settecento*. Through archival documents and sales records of the 19th and 20th centuries, the paper strives to reconstruct its exciting journey from early seventeenth-century Rome to Belgrade in the 1930s. Along this journey, there is a gallery of unique characters who all left a significant mark on its history—from the prosperous dealer of Baroque Rome, Giovanni Stefano Roccatagliata and Poussin's first patron Cassiano Dal Pozzo (1588–1657) to renowned collectors in late 18th- and early 19th-century London. The travel of this painting from Rome to London and through the collections of William Ponsonby, 2nd Earl of Bessborough (1704–1793), a great collector of antiquities and a notable member of the Society of Dilettanti, as well as that of Admiral William Waldegrave, 1st Baron Radstock (1753–1825), who had the Waldegrave islands named after him and possessed one of the finest collections in the London of his time, is discussed. Ultimately, this brings us to Delamere house in Cheshire and the Wilbraham family of the 1830s, in whose collections it remained for almost a century. In the twentieth century, the painting made its final voyage to Belgrade. This introduces another notable figure, a refined connoisseur and collector, Prince Pavle Kradorđević of Yugoslavia (1893–1976), who acquired it for the royal residences. Remaining in the state residences, the painting became a silent witness to the calamitous twentieth century that left it miraculously unscathed but forgotten for almost a century.

KEYWORDS: Nicolas Poussin, Venus and Adonis, provenance research, replicas, Giovanni Stefano Roccatagliata, William Ponsonby, Cassiano dal Pozzo, Lord Radstock, art market, Prince Pavle Karadorđević.

* University of the Arts, Belgrade; jelena.a.todorovic@gmail.com

In recent years, considerable attention has been given to the early mythological paintings of Nicolas Poussin. In 2020, the National Gallery in London organised a show *Poussin and the Dance*,¹ while the Museum of Fine Arts in Lyon prepared an excellent show last year, curated by Nicolas Milovanović (of the Louvre), devoted solely to the theme of *Poussin and Love*.² Both exhibitions put in the limelight a corpus of paintings that young Nicolas Poussin executed in Rome in the late 1620s. They are all inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and sometimes created as a direct illustration of it— from the various depictions of *Bacchus and Ariadne*, *Bacchus and his Retinue*, the myth of *Actis and Galathea*, *Pan and Midas*, *Venus and Mars*, as well as several illustrations of the myth of *Venus and Adonis*. It is the visualisation of the legend of Venus and Adonis that will be the main protagonist of this paper together with the story of a painting that seemed lost for decades.

During his time in Rome, under the influence and commissions of his first patrons, Giambattista Marino, a poet and Cassiano Dal Pozzo, a collector, Nicolas Poussin created several paintings as illustrations of this myth. Some of the notable examples are *Venus and Adonis* in the Musée des Beaux Arts in Caen in France (previously in the French Royal Collection), *Venus and Adonis* in the Museum of Rhode Island School of Design, USA, *Venus and Adonis with the view of Grottaferatta* (of which one half is preserved in the Musée Fabre Montpellier and the other in the Metropolitan Museum of Art), and the picture this paper is dealing with—the love of *Venus and Adonis* whose best known, autograph, version is currently in the collection of the Kimbell Museum at Fort Worth, Texas.

Of all represented sequences from the myth of Venus and Adonis, the scene depicted in the Kimbell Museum canvas (dated according to its stylistic elements into 1627–83)³ is among the most lavish and sensual ones. In the lush landscape, the goddess is resting in the lap of her lover, graciously reclining on a silk red drapery. The bold diagonal of her languid body serves as the main axis of the composition, around which her vivacious retinue of *putti* and animals is artfully displayed. Mischievous *putti* in the background are adorning the golden chariot of Venus with garlands of flowers, while in the foreground they are playing with the swans that pulled the chariot, and with doves, the time-honoured symbol of the goddess. As a premonition for Adonis's impending demise, an extinguished torch is depicted in the lower left-hand corner.

Although the painting, presently in the Kimbell Museum (and previously in the Cook collection), is the most notable version of this scene, at least *three identical versions* circulated through European collections for centuries and are noted by contemporary scholars. The Kimbell version was created as the autograph original, whereas the other two were subsequently painted as autographs of semi-autograph replicas—most probably due to the

¹ For the exhibition “Poussin and the Dance” in the National Gallery London see <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/past/poussin-and-the-dance>, accessed August 15, 2023.

² For the exhibition “Poussin and Love” at MBA Lyon see <https://www.mba-lyon.fr/fr/fiche-programmation/poussin-et-lamour>, accessed August 15, 2023.

³ For the dating of the Kimbell picture see S. Pepper, “Nicolas Poussin's *Venus and Adonis*, an autograph work restored” in *The Burlington Magazine* 127 (1985): 370–375.

high demand of the Roman art market for this particular subject matter, as it will be further elaborated.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these paintings were mostly considered and sold as autograph works by Nicolas Poussin, while in the period after 1914, a succession of Poussin scholars regarded them rather differently. In the famous Poussin catalogue from 1914, Otto Grautoff noted two versions of this scene (one in the Cook collection—presently the Kimbell picture, and the other in the Wilbraham collection) but admitted that he could not confirm the originality of either one, as he did not see them in person.⁴ Another notable Poussin scholar, Walter Friedlander carefully noted in 1953 the existence of them all (the Cook collection image, the ex-Wilbraham or ex-Prince Pavle of Yugoslavia image presumed lost, and the Smith College Collection) but due to their lack of availability, and consequently the possibility for a comparative study, he could not confirm the unwavering authenticity to either of them.⁵ The pivotal change was brought by the text by Anthony Blunt in 1962 who denied Poussin's authorship to them all, derogating them to mere later copies of the *Master of Clumsy Children*.⁶ Another momentous turn was made by the French art historian Jacques Thuillier in 1974 who was the first to presume the painting in the Cook collection to be a genuine autograph.⁷ Alas, he could not have made any claim for the other two—the ex-Smith and ex-Wilbraham or ex-Prince Paul of Yugoslavia paintings were presumed lost in the ravages of the Second World War. In his comprehensive catalogue of Poussin's oeuvre in 1977, Pierre Rosenberg dismissed Poussin's authorship of all three paintings, the opinion he changed considerably almost two decades later in 1995, after the reattribution of the version in the Kimbell collections.⁸

Only in 1984, when Kimbell Museum acquired at Christie's the version from the Cook's collection, there was the first breakthrough in the research of this particular *Venus and Adonis* scene. Following the detailed scholarly, as well as technical analysis, it was unanimously confirmed as a genuine autograph work by Poussin, at the time when the whereabouts of the two other paintings were unknown or forgotten.⁹

In 1936, the second version of *Venus and Adonis* left the Matthiessen collection and became a part of the Smith College collections in Massachusetts. The third version of Poussin's *Venus and Adonis*, following the sale of the entire Wilbraham collection at Christie's in 1930

⁴ O. Grautoff, *Nicolas Poussin Sein Werk un Sein Leben*, vols. 1&II, Leipzig–Munich, 1914.

⁵ W. Friedlander A. Blunt eds., *The Drawings of Nicolas Poussin: Catalogue Raisonné*, vol. 4, London, 1953.

⁶ A. Blunt, 'Poussin Studies XIII: the Early Falsifications of Poussin', *The Burlington Magazine* 716, 1962: 486–498, 494.

A. Blunt, *The Paintings of Nicolas Poussin: A Critical Catalogue*, London, 1966.

⁷ J. Thuillier, *Tout l'oeuvre peint du Poussin*, Paris, 1974, Fig.16.

⁸ In his new catalogue from 1990, Pierre Rosenberg acknowledges the Kimbell version as an autograph and two others as copies P. Rosenberg, R. Verdi, *Nicolas Poussin 1594–1665*, Zwemmer, 1995.

⁹ The Kimbell Art Museum acquired Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* from Cook's trust (it was for the year on a long-term loan at the Manchester Art Museum at Christie's sale on 6th of July 1984 lot. 111). For the whereabouts of the other two paintings at the time of this acquisition see Pepper, 'Nicolas Poussin's *Venus and Adonis*, an autograph work restored', 370–375.



1. Att. to Nicolas Poussin, *Venus and Adonis*, oil on canvas, 1627/8, 100 × 130, © State Art Collection Belgrade

(lot 27),¹⁰ was bought by Max Rothschild of the Sackville Gallery. It was eventually purchased by Prince Pavle of Yugoslavia and from 1936 until the present it adorns the State Art Collection (SAC) of the Royal Compound in Belgrade. This painting is the hero of our story (Fig 1).

As it is often the case with the works of old masters, it is rarely possible to establish the unwavering and uninterrupted path from the creation to the present location. Even for the fully Poussin autograph of *Venus and Adonis* in the Kimbell collection (Fig 2), the incessant path cannot be established. It was traced, possibly through inventories, in the Dal Pozzo collection until 1740, then more than a century later, in 1854, it emerged in the collection of Hugh A. J. Munro in Scotland. In 1864, it passed to his sister Ms. Butler

¹⁰ The entire Wilbraham collection was sold at the “Scarsdale heirloom sale” on July 18th 1930 at Christie’s. Poussin’s painting of *Venus and Adonis*, lot. 27, was bought by Max Rothschild of the Sackville Gallery for 399£. We are still searching for the documents of the purchase of the painting by Prince Pavle in order to determine its exact date and whether he acquired it directly from Max Rothschild or via Sackville Gallery. However, from 1936 (according to photo documentation in the Archives of Yugoslavia, fund 74) it was displayed in Prince Pavle’s official residence, the White Palace in Belgrade.



2. Nicolas Poussin, *Venus and Adonis*, oil on canvas, 1627/28, 98.5 × 134.6, Kimbell Art Museum, © Wikimedia Commons

Johnstone in London through inheritance, while in 1878 it was purchased by Dyer at Christie's at Novar sale (London, June 1, 1878, lot. 77). Finally, it was kept in the collection of Sir Frederick Lucas Cook (1844–1920) at Doughty house Richmond until 1964, after which it was on loan to Manchester Art Gallery.

Despite all the obstacles, we aim to follow the passage of our painting from early seventeenth-century Rome to Belgrade in the 1930s. Along this journey, we would encounter a gallery of unique characters that all left a significant mark on its history—from Giovanni Stefano Roccatagliata, a prosperous dealer of the Baroque Rome, and Cassiano Dal Pozzo, Poussin's first patron, to great collectors of the late 18th- and early 19th-century London. Our painting brings us from Rome to London through the collection of William Ponsonby, 2nd Earl of Bessborough (1704–1793), a great collector of antiquities and a notable member of the *Society of Dilettanti*, as well as Lord Admiral William Waldgrave, 1st Baron Radstock (1753–1825) who had one of the finest collections in London of his time. Ultimately, it brings us in the 1830s to Delamere house in Cheshire and the Wilbraham family in whose

collections it would remain for almost a century. In the twentieth century, it made its final voyage to Belgrade and introduced us to another notable *persona*, a refined connoisseur and collector, Prince Pavle Karadorđević of Yugoslavia (1893–1976), who acquired it for the royal residences. Remaining in the state residences, the painting became a silent witness of the calamitous twentieth century that left it miraculously unscathed but forgotten for the past seventy years.

At the Mercy of Dealers—The Young Poussin and the Roman Baroque Art Market

In order to better unravel the identity of our painting and its initial audience, it is crucial to understand the place and the circumstances of its creation. When Nicolas Poussin arrived in Rome at the age of thirty in 1624, he encountered one of the most complex and vibrant art markets of his age. Like many of his contemporaries, he came to the eternal city to further develop his career, hoping to find an enlightened and wealthy patron among the ever-growing number of high clergy and court officials who resided in the Papal seat. As Danis Mahon pointed out, the artistic ambience in France, in the second decade of the seventeenth century “was hardly propitious for a young artist.”¹¹ Although Poussin did some notable commissions for Paris Jesuits (now sadly lost),¹² he knew that only in the cultural and artistic climate of Italian states, preferably in Rome, he could fully develop as an artist, which indeed he did, but it was neither straight nor an easy path. As Poussin would understand rather quickly, the life of a young unrecognised artist in early seventeenth-century Rome was far from easy. It often required working for merciless agents and generally living *from hand to mouth*. Still, in the 1620s, it was the right city to be in, a place to forge a new career, develop a new style, and sometimes even a new identity.¹³

In the second decade of the seventeenth century, Rome still retained the prime position of the international artistic centre where production and dealership of the arts were among the most prolific in Europe. Being the capital of the Papal state and the centre of a reformed Catholic church, the position of Rome as the main locus of pilgrimage was more important than ever before.¹⁴ Only in the Holy Year of 1600, more than a million pilgrims visited Rome,¹⁵ filling the coffers of the Papal state but also buying and possibly

¹¹ See D. Mahon, *Nicolas Poussin: Works from His First Years in Rome*, Jerusalem, 1999: 17–18.

¹² In 1622, Poussin produced a series of now-lost paintings for the festivities celebrating the canonisations of St. Ignazio Loyola and St. Frances Xavier. See Mahon, 1999: 16.

¹³ For the Roman art market in the Baroque age see the capital work by F. Haskell, *Patrons and Painters: a study in the Relations between Italian Art and Society in the Age of the Baroque*, London, 1963.

¹⁴ For more detailed accounts concerning Poussin and the Roman art market see P. Cavazzini, “Nicolas Poussin, Cassiano Dal Pozzo and the Roman art market in 1620s” in *The Burlington Magazine* 55, 2013: 808–814 also P. Cavazzini, “Oltre la committenza: Commerci d’arte a Roma nel primo seicento” in *Paragone* 82, 2008: 72–92. For the living conditions and earnings of the artists in *Seicento* Rome see an excellent study by R. E. Spear, “Scrambling for scudi: notes on Painters’ Earnings in Early Baroque Rome” in *The Art Bulletin* 85, 2003: 310–320.

¹⁵ See R. E. Spear, 2003: 312, as well as P. Cavazzini, 2013: 808–814.

ordering new works of art from the great number of artists residing in the *eternal city*. Combined with relative political stability between 1590–1623, this influx of potential buyers meant that both the works of art and the artists were highly sought after. Moreover, the Tridentine reform put an emphasis on visual imagery and the powers of visual communication, which created an unprecedented demand for artistic production. The religious imagery was, like *ecclesia triumphans* that commissioned it, on the rather triumphal ascent. However, not only religious paintings were in demand. Since Rome was a large international capital, all subjects had their audience, particularly scenes of mythological and allegorical nature. In a city of hundreds of palaces and an even greater number of state offices, the number of potential clients and places to be adorned and decorated was greater than in any other metropolis in Europe.¹⁶

It was a city that was dominated not only politically, but economically and artistically by the Papal court. The Baroque Princes of the Church, its cardinals and bishops, equally shaped the ecclesiastical politics and the artistic tastes of the age. They were often incredibly affluent—the famed collector Scipione Borghese earned 405 scudi a month (when a modest annual rent for lodgings was 12 scudi) and was able to accumulate the amount of 6.5 million scudi in the period between 1605 and 1633, thus enabling him to acquire one of the grandest art collections of the Baroque Rome.¹⁷ Even Odoardo Farnese, known proverbially as a *stingy* cardinal, had an annual income of 60,000 scudi in 1593, while more modest members of the high clergy, like “poor” cardinal Cesare Baronio, earned lavish 5,000 scudi a year.¹⁸ The earnings of artists were on a slightly different scale. Their payments depended on their renown, the quality of their work, the materials used, and the most delicate point—the deal and contract they had with their patron. Moreover, it also depended (as it still does) on how successfully they could market themselves.

It is not surprising that with such wealthy residents, early Baroque Rome was a rather expensive place to live. If one was prepared to live frugally, one could rent a place to stay for 12 scudi a year in a poor part of the town, but if one was looking for more decent living quarters (near SS Trinita dei Monti, along Via Babuina, or Via della Croce) rents rose considerably, up to 40 scudi.¹⁹ Neither food (around 70 scudi a year for a modest living) nor artistic material or models were easy to acquire, so earning around 90 to 100 scudi a year was still considered a modest but feasible livelihood.

There are famous instances of Caravaggio selling his *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* for only 1.5 scudi, or Nicolas Poussin who was (at the beginning of his career) often paid meagre seven scudi per painting; while Federico Barocci and Guido Reni were among the highest paid artists in Rome and often received between 1,200 and 1,500 scudi for their works.²⁰ In his excellently presented study, Richard Spear emphasised that even well-established

¹⁶ See Spear, 2003: 312, as well as Cavazzini, 2013: 808–814.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See Spear, 2003: 312.

²⁰ See Spear, 2003: 312 as well as P. Cavazzini, 2008: 72–92.

artists with wealthy patrons, like Peter Paul Rubens, had considerable difficulties to overcome: “In mid-1606 Rubens complained to the Duke of Mantua’s secretary that the yearly stipend he received for his first four months in Rome (25 scudi a month) was meagre and that he could not make a living on 300 scudi a year he was supposed to receive...”²¹

The Roman art market, comprising a large group of international artists and dealers, was very elaborate and operated on many levels of wealth and social status. While artists created works of art that satisfied all these diverse audiences existing in the *eternal city*, dealers facilitated the distribution across different social strata. Research of the archival documents in Archivio di Stato di Roma, as presented by Patrizia Cavazzini in her brilliant studies, eloquently illustrates the complexity of the Roman art market of *primo Seicento*.²²

These documents showed us that the majority of young artists in Rome still worked in the great workshops (*bottege*) that produced artworks on an impressive scale. Alternatively, they worked for some of the big dealers of the day like Stefano Roccatagliata, who will be introduced later in the paper, or Fabrizio Valguarnera, a Sicilian nobleman and a dealer.²³ Other dealers in Rome were often artists themselves like Antiveduto Grammatica, Pietro Paolo Giglio, or Agostino Tassi who sold both their own and the works of other artists to a number of distinguished clients. There was also a notable case of a Flemish tailor Karel Philip Spierincks²⁴ who traded both originals, as well as copies during the 1620s and 1630s. Although it might seem surprising, it was not such an incompatible set of professions—as a tailor of a considerable number of renowned people, Spierincks had close access to clients of high standing like members of Barberini and Pamphilj families, and while supplying them with their clothes he had an ideal opportunity to propose to them some artistic purchases. Roman dealers were not only generally responsible for the distribution of artworks but often commissioned new works of art that answered the current demands of the art market.²⁵ Therefore, they deeply influenced the artistic production of the age, and often created the taste for a certain type of painting, as evident from Poussin’s mythological scenes.

Despite such conditions in the Roman art market, for the sake of their professional prestige and in order to separate themselves from artisans, artists in Rome rarely admitted to working in a *bottega* and even less to creating works to be sold on the Roman art market. They pretended to work independently, from their own studios and exclusively upon their patrons’ commissions.²⁶ It was believed at the time, as Patrizia Cavazzini noted “that a true artist did not work for salary but for gifts, he was working only upon commission,

²¹ Spear, 2003: 311.

²² See Cavazzini, 2013: 808–814.

²³ For the case of Fabrizio Valguarnera see Cavazzini, 2013: 808; also see J. Costello, “The Twelve Pictures ordered by Velasquez and the trial of Valguarnera”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13, 1950: 237–284.

²⁴ See Cavazzini, 2008: 72–92.

²⁵ See Cavazzini, 2013: 808–814.

²⁶ Cavazzini, 2008: 74.

and not out of necessity.²⁷ Of course, it was an almost unattainable ideal, and hardly a reality of artistic existence in Rome in the first half of the 17th century.

Consequently, a young unknown foreign artist, like Nicolas Poussin, arriving in Rome in the mid-1620s, could hope neither for an easy living nor for immediate success.

His first years in Rome were generally associated with the patronage of that illustrious polymath and collector Cassiano Dal Pozzo (1588–1657) and his immediate circle. Dal Pozzo's role, as will be presented further, was crucial for the development of young Poussin's career and the destiny of our painting. However, Dal Pozzo's patronage began properly only in the 1630s, so during his first years in Rome, Poussin was inevitably forced to create for some of the Roman dealers, and that was never a favourable option. Particularly difficult were the late 1620s when Dal Pozzo was out of Rome on a diplomatic mission in Spain and Poussin, burdened with illness and poverty, was forced to sell his works at a very low rate, sometimes even at seven scudi a piece.²⁸

Although Poussin certainly worked for other dealers, Giovanni Stefano Roccatagliata, a merchant of pictures from Genoa, had a pivotal role in procuring and selling Poussin's first works in Rome.²⁹ Roccatagliata was certainly an unusual figure, a very successful and sophisticated art dealer, as well as a high official at the papal court, first during the pontificate of Pope Paul V and then his successor Urban VIII Barberini when he held the post of *aiutante di bussola*. Roccatagliata was not a cleric but in order to blend better with his ecclesiastical surroundings he was known to wear a cassock, in which he was represented on his funerary monument in St. Maria in Aquiro in Rome.³⁰ During his dealing career, Roccatagliata did not have a shop but usually sold paintings from his house to smaller dealers or directly to buyers. Nevertheless, he had an important role in the Roman art market of the early Baroque. Like other figures that defined the early career of Nicolas Poussin, Roccatagliata also belonged to the Dal Pozzo circle. He was certainly a very close friend of Dal Pozzo's family since for years he shared Dal Pozzo's palace in Via della Croce with the family and he bequeathed to Dal Pozzo his entire estate and his collection.³¹ Roccatagliata, not only had a crucial part in dispersing the early works of Poussin, as it will be presented further, but also in creating the taste and subsequently demand for his early sensual pictures, of which the painting of *Venus and Adonis* was a telling example.

Producing for the art market at the time meant, and Poussin was hardly an exception, the creation of the original autograph works, authorised replicas, as well as pure copies of lesser and greater refinement depending on the skill of the copyist. Each of these works and each of these levels of authorship had a designated price and place in the Roman art

²⁷ Ibid, 74.

²⁸ See Mahon, 1999: 19.

²⁹ For Poussin's early years in Rome and the Roman art market of the early seventeenth century see Cavazzini, 2013: 808–814, as well as Cavazzini, 2008: 72–92.

³⁰ See Cavazzini, 2013: 809 note 10.

³¹ See C. F. Haskell and S. Rinehart, "The Dal Pozzo Collection some New Evidence, Part I and II" in *The Burlington Magazine* 102/688, 1960: 318–327.

market. Some images were indeed produced in series, particularly miraculous images from the great basilicas of Rome that were very sought after in this city of pilgrims. Moreover, the very concept of copy and copying differed considerably from the one we have nowadays.³²

Primarily, the very act of replication of an artwork was at the very core of artistic education. Copying one's master, as well as the great examples of classical antiquity, and *la grande maniera* constituted the necessary curriculum of an early modern workshop, the process that would also later become the foundation of academic education. On the other hand, it was an established practice that upon the commission of a dealer, the artists made a replica of their existing work, sometimes by themselves and sometimes assisted by a colleague or an assistant if they had the luxury of employing one. Occasionally, artists made copies themselves, particularly of those works that were executed for some of their illustrious clients, which were thus made more desirable to the contemporary audience. Some artists had their official copyists, like Agostino Carosselli who was Poussin's official copyist during his stay in Rome. There were, of course, plain forgeries designated and sold as such. It was a known case of the artist Terenzio Terenzi who produced proper forgeries. In inventory, after he died in 1685, they found "sei altri pezzi di tela...tutti afummicati", the canvases that were intentionally darkened to look old and patinated.³³

Moreover, taking such a complex art market into account, the artists of Baroque Rome often had half-finished or only sketched-out versions of the same composition in their studios to secure as many commissions as possible. Those served as templates subsequently finished according to the detailed instructions of the buyer or the patron.³⁴ This practice was very evident in the famous or better say, infamous case, of Fabrizio Valguarnera, a Sicilian nobleman who acquired various paintings in order to "laundry" the money he received for stolen diamonds.³⁵ In the documents created for this court case, it was stated that Alessandro Turchi, Giovanni Lanfranco, and Nicolas Poussin all had in their houses half-finished works that they swiftly completed upon the commission of Valguarnera.³⁶

Such a situation could easily explain the present existence of Nicola Poussin's several identical versions of this particular scene from the myth of *Venus and Adonis*. Even though we presently record three images of the same topic and iconography, it could easily be possible that initially there were even more replicas in circulation, some created by Poussin himself, some with the help of a colleague. This hypothesis is not unfounded since, as it will be presented later, during the second half of the 18th century, more than three versions (including one later confirmed copy) of this image were appearing at auctions across Europe.³⁷

³² See P. Cavazzini, "Il mercato delle copie nella Roma di primo seicento", *La copia: Connoisseurship, storia del gusto e del conservazione*, a cura di Carla Mazzarelli, San Casciano, 2010: 257–271.

³³ For Terenzio Terenzi see Cavazzini, 2010: 262.

³⁴ For the production of "templates" in early Baroque Rome see T. Standring, "Poussin's Erotica", *Apollo* 2009: 85–86, as well as L. Freeman Bauer, "Oil Sketches, Unfinished Paintings and the Inventories of Artist's Estates" in *Light on Eternal City*, H. Hager and S. Scott Munshover eds., University Park, 1987: 93–101.

³⁵ See Cavazzini, 2010: 257–271.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ See the Getty Provenance Index – the presence of Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* painting at the auctions between 1768 and 1801. <https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/provenance/search.html>

Although it could not be confirmed with absolute certainty for whom this image of *Venus and Adonis* and its replicas were initially destined, they were all most probably created for the dealer Giovanni Stefano Roccatagliata who was known for being one of the most important dealers of Poussin's work in the 1620s. Giovanni Stefano Roccatagliata had a decisive role in Poussin's early years in Rome and it was presumed that he introduced Poussin to the Barberini circle, since many of them subsequently became Poussin's patrons.³⁸ Considering his position as a high-level courtier, Roccatagliata was certainly trusted to recommend the work of the young artist to immediate associates of Pope Urban VIII.

Roccatagliata had been selling and, possibly commissioning a number of Poussin's early works, both the originals and their replicas.³⁹ He was known to order from the artists several versions of the same image if the subject was easily sellable, and Poussin's sensual rendering of the myth of *Venus and Adonis* fulfilled this criterion.

The Journey of *Venus and Adonis* through the 17th- and 18th-Century Collections

Considering the popularity of the subject matter, as well as the established practice of creating multiple versions of the same topic previously discussed, it is possible to presume that our painting was created as an autograph replica at the same time as (or shortly after) the original, namely around 1627/28. However, it is extremely difficult to trace them all through Roman collections in the 17th and 18th centuries. The mostly generic descriptions in the inventories, as well as the lack of any sales records, make it even more complicated. At the time, paintings depicting mythological subjects were fairly often catalogued simply as *Bacanal* (Bacchanalia), leaving their dimensions and some cursory notes as our only guidelines. However, recent discoveries in Roman archives shed more light on the problem and allow us to trace their trajectories with greater certainty.

As previously mentioned, this particular Poussin's depiction of *Venus and Adonis*, and its subsequent replicas, were created quite possibly upon the request of the *mysterious Genoese art dealer* Giovanni Stefano Roccatagliata, as he was the one who traded these paintings in the early 1630s. Roccatagliata famously sold, in March of 1633, to a smaller dealer Francesco Scarlatti, an impressive group of fifty-five paintings of various artists, including five originals and seven copies of works by Nicolas Poussin among which at least one version of *Venus and Adonis* could be identified.⁴⁰

According to the detailed inventory in the Archivio di Stato di Roma (Cavazzini/Roma Archivio Capitolino) the list of the originals reveals *un quadro di Adone e Venere con amorini in tela imperatore*, while another version could be hidden among the five copies. This entry for *Venus and Adonis* was correctly identified as a Kimbell picture by Patrizia Cavazzini.⁴¹

³⁸ See Cavazzini, 2013: 812.

³⁹ See Standring, 2009: 85–86.

⁴⁰ See Cavazzini, 2013: 812.

⁴¹ Before Cavazzini, the first scholar to identify this entry with the Kimbell painting was T. Standring in his 1988 article that Cavazzini duly acknowledges. See T. J. Standring, "Some pictures by Poussin in Dal Pozzo Collection: Three New Inventories" in *The Burlington Magazine*, 130, 1988: 608–626.

It combined the right description and the accurate dating (end of the 1620s) with the correct dimensions of *tela d'imperatore* that roughly measured 100x130, which corresponds to the dimensions of *Venus and Adonis*. Unfortunately, *signore* Scarlatti did not honour his contract with Roccatagliata and, despite many favourable extensions, did not pay the full amount for these paintings until 1634. Therefore, Roccatagliata retrieved the majority of the works he sold, some in 1634 (primarily the originals) and the rest in 1636, among which the originals by Nicolas Poussin could be traced.⁴² This multiple change of hands between Roccatagliata, Scarlatti, and finally Dal Pozzo produced a substantial amount of paperwork and several inventories that are still preserved in the Archivio di Stato di Roma.⁴³ Considering that those inventories were compiled not only by Roccatagliata or Dal Pozzo but also by the Roman police, the level of accuracy and the style of descriptions vary greatly. However, they help us deduce that the majority of Poussin's works from the original sale in 1633 were eventually bought by Cassiano Dal Pozzo, while some other of his paintings (both originals and replicas) that ultimately remained in Roccatagliata's possession, were also integrated within Dal Pozzo collections after dealer's death.⁴⁴ Thus, it is not surprising that our version of *Venus and Adonis* should be traced precisely within their collections. Particularly because after Roccatagliata's death in 1652, his own collection was unified with the works already compiled in what could be appropriately named an *informal museum* of Dal Pozzo brothers in their palazzo on Via delle Croce.⁴⁵

Owning an autograph painting, as well as its replica(s) was not that unusual for the Roman collectors of that time, in particular the Dal Pozzo brothers. Their collections were envisaged to be not only a picture gallery but a veritable microcosm of global world knowledge. Cassino's and Carlo Antonio's collection was, from its onset, comprised of four key components *natrualia*, *artificialia*, *antiquaria*, and *curiosa*, that had a particular museogeographical direction.⁴⁶ As Donatella Sparti lucidly pointed out, Cassiano and Carlo Antonio followed and adopted the classification system utilized by their illustrious predecessors Imperato Ferrante and Ulisse Aldrovandi. They used this taxonomic classification system for organising their collection while at the same time anticipating the typological system that reached its apex in the work of encyclopaedists of the late 18th century.⁴⁷

Consequently, Dal Pozzo's collections were aimed to be distinctly didactic and their unofficial function was to be a form of the *informal academy* of Rome. In such a microcosm, various scholars, artists, and other visitors were meant to use the panoply of available images to better understand the issues of history, philosophy, science, and religion. It was particularly this educative facet of Dal Pozzo collection that young Poussin understood so well, as he proudly noted that he was the disciple of that notable place, *soleva dire essere*

⁴² For more details on the presence of Poussin's works in Dal Pozzo inventories see Cavazzini, 2013: 808–9.

⁴³ See Cavazzini, 2013: 809

⁴⁴ See Haskell and Rinehart, 1960: 319–321.

⁴⁵ For the Dal Pozzo Museum see Haskell and Rinehart, 1960: 319–321; as well as D. Sparti, 1990: 552.

⁴⁶ See Sparti, 1990: 552.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

alievo dall'arte sua Casa e del Museo del Cavalier Dal Pozzo.⁴⁸ Although it was not an academy *in its own right*, the collection of the Dal Pozzo brothers undoubtedly had a strong formative effect on the young Poussin both as a visual and textual resource of the highest order.⁴⁹ The accounts of contemporary visitors⁵⁰ confirm this highly didactic aspect of Dal Pozzo collection where *artificielia* (picture collection) was alternated with *naturalia* (the natural history collection), all symbolically connected to its nucleus—a vast library and the notable *museo cartaceo* (a paper museum).

The part that is presently most extensively researched, Cassiano Dal Pozzo's paper museum, was a unique collecting endeavour of its time, a true visual encyclopaedia. He collected, as well as commissioned, more than 7,000 prints, drawings, and watercolours that were meant to illustrate the immense range and the sheer wealth of human knowledge. Documenting such highly disparate subjects as botany and architecture, antiquities and ornithology, tombs and catafalques, ceremonies and processions, portraits and mythological scenes, costumes and military topography, or the history of St. Peter's, Cassiano created a veritable atlas of the world.⁵¹

In this polyphony of collections, the artefacts of the fine and applied arts, together with a renowned *museo cartaceo* and the profuse library, comprised a true mirror of the world, the mirror in whose centre stood its learned founder Cassiano Dal Pozzo. Donatella Sparti perceived that Dal Pozzo collections contained a *solid nucleus of copies*,⁵² particularly in the case of his paper museum (*museo cartaceo*). The copies were understood mainly as visual references and were compiled precisely to denote the vast ingenuity of artistic creation and consequently to serve as didactic and scholarly tools. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that by Cassiano's death in 1657, at least two separate compilations of artworks comprised this collection in Via della Croce. The possibility that several versions of one particular image coexisted was highly probable, as it will be shown further in the analysis of the inventories made from the 1680s to 1760s.

The first comprehensive inventory of Dal Pozzo collections was made after the death of Cassiano's brother Carlo Antonio in 1689,⁵³ at the time when the majority of the paintings created for Cassiano, as well as those (both originals and replicas) made upon the request

⁴⁸ See Baldinucci in Sparti, 1990: 552.

⁴⁹ See Standring, 1988: 609.

⁵⁰ Sparti, 1990: 552–553.

⁵¹ Together with the library, Cosimo Antonio sold the paper museum of Cassiano dal Pozzo to Pope Clement XI Albani. It remained in Albani's collection until 1726 when it was acquired from Cardinal Alessandro Albani by George III of England and it remained in the royal collections. At present, the artefacts of the paper museum are divided among the British Library and the Royal Library at Windsor Castle. For more than 30 years, a complex scholarly project has been underway to create a complete *catalogue raisonné* of Dal Pozzo's paper museum. Since 2003, the project office has been moved from Windsor Castle to the Warburg Institute in London. For more information see <https://warburg.sas.ac.uk/research-projects/archived-research-projects/paper-museum-cassiano-dal-pozzo-1588-1657>

⁵² Sparti, 1990: 551.

⁵³ For secondary sources see Haskell and Rinehart, "1960: 319–321 and for primary sources Rome, Archivio di Stato, 30 Notai Capitolini, Ufficio 25, vol. 419, September 12, 1689, fols. 124r/126v

and demand of Giovanni Stefano Roccatagliata, were compiled into one and the same collection. Although no inventory was made following Cassiano's death in 1657, it is presumed (Sparti, Haskell) that during his brother's lifetime, the collection remained intact as Carlo Antonio acted both as a curator and a prime custodian of his brother's great *speculum mundi*. In this inventory of the joint Dal Pozzo/Roccatagliata collection, it was possible to discern several works (no less than seven) noted as *bacanale* (rarely including their dimensions), each of which could easily hide an image of *Venus and Adonis*.

In 1715, more light was shed on the history of the Dal Pozzo collection and the presence of Poussin's works in it. It was the occasion of a public display in Rome of the masterpieces belonging to the Dal Pozzo brothers which, at that time, were under the custody of Cosimo Antonio, the grandson of Carlo Antonio Dal Pozzo. There are indications that during Cosimo Antonio's life, the collection was already dispersed to some measure. As early as 1703, Cosimo sold Cassiano's collection of engravings, drawings, and his invaluable library (including the bookshelves!)⁵⁴ to Pope Clement XI Albani. Alas, that did not come as a great surprise, since Cosimo Antonio was known as a *bonvivate* and was ultimately the one to begin the process of disintegration of the great Dal Pozzo collection. In addition to his sale of the library in 1703, according to contemporaries' accounts, a part of the collection was transferred to the palace Lancelotti-Ginetti in 1695.⁵⁵ Fortunately, there was still a considerable number of artworks of the highest level to be presented to the Roman audience.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the cloisters of the church of San Salvatore in Lauro in Rome became the venue for the prestigious display of some of the most important aristocratic collections in Rome organised by Academia di San Luca.⁵⁶ On each December 10, the feast day of the translation of the Virgin's house from Nazareth to Loreto, as well as the feast day of the Marchigian community to which the church belonged, the cloisters were transformed for three consecutive days into a grand exhibition space. In 1715, the Dal Pozzo collection was chosen for display, and it was upon Giuseppe Ghezzi, a life secretary of Academia di San Luca, to choose the works and organise the show. Ghezzi was renowned for the organisation of these exhibitions, the duty he performed with skill and delight for nearly three decades (1686–1717). Being an artist himself, and of a notable erudition, Giuseppe Ghezzi was well qualified to organise such shows. He could choose the best artefacts, and as Frances Haskell and Schiella Rinehart pointed out, even when Ghezzi was not sure of the attribution, he did not disguise it with some famous name. The detailed inventory compiled by Giuseppe Ghezzi for the Dal Pozzo exhibition, now preserved in Museo da Roma, was only discovered in the 1960s, enabling the scholars to gain a far better knowledge not only of such exhibitions but also of the contents of Dal Pozzo collection.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See Haskell and Rinehart, 1960: 319.

⁵⁵ It was the occasion of the second marriage of the widow of Gabrielle Dal Pozzo, Ana Teresa Binzoni, who married Marchese Lancelotti in 1695.

⁵⁶ For the annual exhibitions in Rome in San Salvatore in Lauro see Haskell and Rinehart, 1990: 319.

⁵⁷ Ghezzi, *Quadri prestati dalla somma coretisa di Sig. Commendatore dal Pozzo...*, 1715, Museo da Roma MS

According to Ghezzi's notes, no less than 165 works (mostly paintings, with the addition of several statues, drawings, mosaics, pastels, and sketches) were chosen to be displayed in the cloisters of San Salvatore in Lauro.

There was a rather impressive number of paintings by Nicolas Poussin among them—around 35 came not only from the Cassiano and Carlo Antonio's joint collections but this number included those that came from the Roccatagliata endowment. Even though Nicolas Poussin's surname appeared in this inventory in several versions (Poussino, Posino, Pusino, Pusen, Poussin),⁵⁸ some of them denoting his pupil Gaspard Dughet (called Gaspard Poussin), it was probably one of the most complete Poussin collections of its age. Within this wealth of paintings, several are identified by Ghezzi as *Baccanale*, each of whom could be applied to our *Venus and Adonis*. Haskell and Rinehart consider no. 52 in Ghezzi's inventory to be "ex-Cook collection picture"⁵⁹ It must certainly be a typo in the text, since under no. 52 is described an image of St. Caterina. The description of an item fairly close to the *Venus and Adonis* painting could equally be no. 58—*Bacanale da Impe. ale di Pussino*—the succeeding no. 59—*Altro Bacanale di Venere di Imperiale del med.o sopra figura di Ovet*—and finally no. 66—*il Bacanale grande da 9 e 12 di Pusino*.⁶⁰ As evident in the inventories produced around the Roccatagliata/Scarlattini case, the descriptions were often summarised, but some assumptions were possible. Although Haskell and Rinehart allegedly identified "ex-Cook picture", this list might as well conceal not only this version but also possibly one of the two replicas, including the ex-Wilbraham SAC version, as Roccatagliata's paintings were, by that date, certainly a part of the Dal Pozzo collection.

Only seven years after the exhibition of 1715, a great disintegration of Dal Pozzo collection took place. Cosimo Antonio began to disperse the collection even further, offering many of the most valuable paintings as financial guarantees and only accidentally Poussin's *Seven Sacraments* were retained in the family collection. Cosimo Antonio was quite rightfully characterised by the contemporaries, rather diplomatically, as "moins curieux que ses ancêtres et plus attaché a d'autres plaisirs"⁶¹ (alas, gambling).⁶¹

An attempt to save the collection as intact as possible occurred in 1732, when the only heir of Cosimo Antonio, Maria Laura Dal Pozzo, after her marriage to Pietro Paolo Boccapaduli, asked to be (although a woman) the rightful heir and inherit the collection, claiming quite justifiably that her father was unlawfully selling off artefacts belonging to original Dal Pozzo's assets.⁶² For that very reason, a new inventory was made in 1740 to establish what Cosimo Antonio had disposed of, actually what damage he had made to

⁵⁸ I am infinitely grateful to Frances Haskell who made an index to accompany Ghezzi's inventories and noted meticulously all different spellings of Poussin's name!

⁵⁹ Haskell and Rinehart, 1960: 321.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 325.

⁶¹ Ibid. 319.

⁶² Although her father remarried in the meantime, Countess Kavalnir Maria Laura insisted that only she has the full right to inheritance. And she succeeded! See Sparti, 2013: note 4. For the primary sources see Archivio di Stato, notai Capitolini, Fondo Boccapaduli, mazzo X, Stati ereditari... See also Standring, 1988: 610–12.

the collection. An entire team expert evaluators was invited, among them the illustrious Pier Leone Ghezzi (the son of the “curator” of the Dal Pozzo collection from 1715), as well as an art dealer, Antonio Maria Bozzolani (active 1721–1740).⁶³ The appeal for inheritance was successful and Maria Laura transferred the remnants of the collection from Dal Pozzo palace on Via della Croce to her new home, Palazzo Boccapaduli, recently built by her husband in Via Falegname in Rome. Consequently, some of the most important works by Nicolas Poussin could be traced after 1740 in the Boccapaduli collection in Rome.⁶⁴

In 1740, the expert commission compiled as detailed an inventory list as possible, often giving rough dimensions of the frame and sometimes even the condition of the painting and the inscriptions on the back (incredible for that time), thus justifying the claim of previous scholars that this was probably the most complete inventory of Dal Pozzo pictures ever made.⁶⁵

They even indicated if there was a case of the original or a copy/replica in the collection. However, as with previous inventories, it was not always easy to ascertain the definitive presence of all the Poussin’s paintings in the collection. As before, they were often referred to as *Bacchanale* and the expert commission of 1740 determined no less than 15 paintings of this subject attributed to Nicolas Poussin. In his most detailed account of this inventory, T. J. Standring recognised Poussin’s *Venus and Mars*, now in the Boston Museum of the Arts, and his *Landscape with Nymphs and Satyrs*, now in Cleveland Museum of Art. Among them, Standring identified the painting of *Venus and Adonis* (the Kimbell version, assuming it was the painting that was listed under Inv. No. 21 of 1689, and Inv. No. 65 of 1740 when it was mistaken for an image of *Bacchus and Ariadne*). Despite this interesting assumption, in the inventory of 1740, there were several other *Bacchanale* that could have easily represented not only the Kimbell painting but also other replicas of *Venus and Adonis*, possibly the SAC ex-Wilbraham painting.⁶⁶

Despite the efforts of Maria Laura to secure the integrity of the collection after her death, it was sadly not the case. Although she made her sons Giuseppe and Luigi equal co-heirs of the Dal Pozzo collection, they inherited the spirit of their grandfather Cosimo Antonio and did everything to sell off the works from the collection as quickly as possible. Just eight years after their mother died in 1771, both Giuseppe and Luigi Boccapaduli managed to sell many important works from the collection including Poussin’s *Rebecca and Eliezer* and *Christ and the Woman of Samaria* to an English painter and dealer Gavin Hamilton.⁶⁷ Around the same time, Poussin’s famous series of *Seven Sacraments* was sold from the Boccapaduli collection, in the most audacious way, by James Byers to the Duke of Exeter.

In the forthcoming decades (according to the inventories after the death of Giuseppe in 1809 and Luigi in 1810), the dissolution of the glorious Dal Pozzo/Boccapaduli collection

⁶³ See Ibid. 610–12.

⁶⁴ Sparti, 1990: 555–556.

⁶⁵ This claim is made by Standring, 1988: 610.

⁶⁶ Both paintings could be equally described as *Bacchanale*, see the listed inventory in Standring, 1988: 610.

⁶⁷ See Sparti, 1990: 555 and Standring, 1988: 608–626.

was only accelerated—while one small part remained in Rome, a third of it ended up in Venice with the Zorzi, the family of Luigi’s wife Andreana.⁶⁸

Thus, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the majority of the great works that once made the nucleus of Dal Pozzo collections were gone, and we can safely presume that Poussin’s *Venus and Adonis* paintings, like the majority of his other works, left the collection and most probably the city of Rome.

**“Not less distinguished for his exquisite taste,
than for his Liberality in Collecting”—William Ponsonby and the arrival
of *Venus and Adonis* to England**

Even though in the previous section we noted the unfortunate dispersal of the Dal Pozzo/Boccapaduli collection after the 1740s, it is extremely difficult to ascertain the precise location of any of the versions of *Venus and Adonis* after this date, including ours in the State Art Collection. It is not the case that there are no recorded finds of a Poussin’s painting of such description, but that there are quite a number of rather confusing appearances. In the period between the 1760s and 1820s, several paintings of this exact iconography were sold at the European auctions. Despite this inconsistency, it is worth recording the traffic of these paintings since they clearly confirm that initially, *more than three versions* of Poussin’s *Venus and Adonis* were in existence (both replicas and copies). Besides the fact that Poussin might have created a greater number of replicas in the late 1620s, following the demand of the market and Stefano Roccatagliata, in the years after Poussin’s death the forgeries of his works became prolific.

The earliest appearance of this painting on the eighteenth-century art market was in 1775 at the sale in an auction house Joullain C. P Rigaux in Paris, where (as lot no. 0025) one of Poussin’s *Venus and Adonis* was sold from the estate of Caulet d’Hauteville.⁶⁹ Roughly at the same time, confirmed copies of the same scene by Poussin (after M. Poussin) were offered at the French market for a fraction of the price of the autograph. Another original version of *Venus and Adonis* appeared in 1790 in Hamburg at the sale of April 19 (lot no. 0030) in the auction house of Lienau and Schoen, but its further whereabouts could not be traced.⁷⁰ None of these paintings resurfaced on the French market in the nineteenth century or appeared in the British sales records.

However, such interims in the chronology of an old master painting are fairly common, as it is extremely rare that a Renaissance or a Baroque works of art have a smooth

⁶⁸ After Luigi’s death in 1810, the remaining possessions, including the collection, were divided into three parts, one went to Lodovico Galli, the other to Filippo Guerrieri, and the third to his housekeeper Vincenza Scocco. See Sparti, 1990: 555 note 55, see primary sources Archivio di Stato di Roma (ASR) Notai Capitolini, Ufficio 2, vol. 705, March 23, 1809 and vol. 706, February 1, 1810.

⁶⁹ See Getty Provenance Index Database (GPI) <https://piprod.getty.edu/starweb/pi/servlet.starweb#>, accessed July 20, 2023.

⁷⁰ See Getty Provenance Index Database (GPI) <https://piprod.getty.edu/starweb/pi/servlet.starweb#>, accessed July 20, 2023.

path from the date of their creation until its present location. As previously mentioned, not even the confirmed autograph version in the Kimbell collection has an established path between the 1740s and 1854 when it was first recorded in the J. A. Munro collection in Scotland.⁷¹ Despite obvious gaps in our chronological description, we will try to establish as accurate a journey for our picture as presently possible, and for that reason, we need briefly to turn our narration into reverse.

The earliest confirmed presence of our SAC version of Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* in the collection of George Wilbraham (1779–1852) of Delamere house in Cheshire was in 1837. It would remain *in situ* until the sale of the majority of Wilbraham's art collection in Scarsdale sale at Christie's in 1930.⁷² It was recorded in the catalogue composed by John Smith, a dealer and collector, *Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of Most Eminent Flemish and Dutch Masters, The Life and Works of Nicholas Poussin, Claude Lauren and JB Greuze*, 1837, vol. 8, London, under no. 193 and was presented with a detailed catalogue entry closely describing this mythological scene. Although we do not possess the precise date of purchase of Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* for the Wilbraham family, we will propose a way how this painting might have been acquired and in which collections it was residing prior to its arrival in Delamere house.

The most decisive clue in that respect can be found in a very elaborate description of the Wilbraham collection created by the first director of the National Portrait Gallery, Sir George Scharf (1820–1895), a painter and connoisseur. In the period between 1856 and 1857, he compiled a vast survey of old master paintings in private and public collections that began as a preparation for the monumental show of the treasures of British and European early modern art—Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition. Unlike the Great Exhibition of the previous year that displayed national collections, the Manchester Exhibition put emphasis on private collections and even represented for modern scholars a “watershed event in the history of collecting and the public display in the United Kingdom.”⁷³ In the course of his research for this momentous event, Sir George created an impressive number of 223 sketchbooks that meticulously recorded, in word and image, the treasures dispersed in galleries and country houses throughout England, Scotland, and Wales in the mid-nineteenth century.

This “ideal gallery on paper” as he often referred to his sketchbooks, is a unique compendium of thumbnail sketches of artworks, some highly finished drawings, as well as references to provenance or memoranda of thousands of old masters that were dispersed among more than hundred collections.⁷⁴ Presently kept in the archives of the National Portrait Gallery, Sir George Scharf's sketchbooks represent a priceless testimony of the history

⁷¹ For the path of the Kimbell *Venus and Adonis* see the detailed description on the Kimbell Museum website <https://kimbellart.org/collection/ap-198501>, accessed June 10, 2023.

⁷² The entire collection was sold at the Scarsdale sale in London at Christie's and our painting was sold as lot no. 27 for 399£. See Blunt, 1962: 494.

⁷³ For Sir George Scharf's sketchbooks see the sight of the National Portrait Gallery London when they have digitised the entire collection.

⁷⁴ www.npg.gov.uk

of collecting in Britain, often acting as the only preserved evidence for the works that are now lost or destroyed. This corpus of sketchbooks, drawn by a notable connoisseur and a highly erudite researcher of old masters, constitutes a primary source of the first order.

On March 6, 1857, Sir George Scharf visited the collection of George Wilbraham at De-lamere house, and among other treasures belonging to the Sheriff of Cheshire, recorded the presence of Poussin's *Venus and Adonis*.⁷⁵ In the sketchbook no. 46, on pages 19 and 20, the iconography of our *Venus and Adonis* is distinctly recognisable.⁷⁶ Amidst the sketches of *The Landscape* by Le Nain brothers, an unknown portrait by Rembrandt, and *Pygmalion* by Godfried Schalcken, Poussin's sensual scene of two lovers occupied the centre of the page. All important elements of this scene were depicted—the reclining figure of Venus in the lap of Adonis, the swarm of *putti* decorating the golden cart of their goddess, as well as those playing with swans and doves. Underneath and beside this swift pencil drawing, Sir George recorded several important data. He named it *Venus and Adonis* by Poussin and designated it as the painting described in the aforementioned catalogue by John Smith, under no. 193 on page 133. Even more importantly, above this note, Sir George Scharf wrote that the painting was previously in the collection of Lord Radstock. Thus, with the help of the notes of Sir George, it became possible to trace back precisely the journey of our picture from the Wilbraham collection until its arrival to England, possibly in the second half of the eighteenth century.

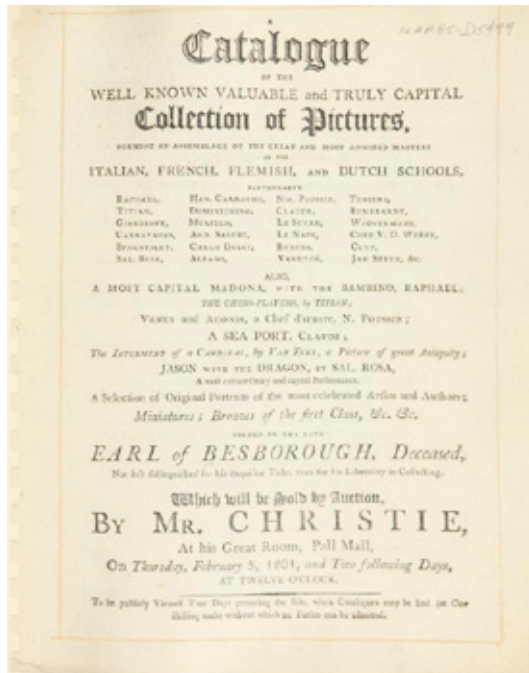
Lord Radstock was William Waldgrave, 1st Baron Radstock (1753–1825), a notable admiral of his time and the Governor of Newfoundland from 1797. Besides his distinguished naval career for which he received a peerage in 1800 and had Waldgrave islands named after him in 1802, William Waldgrave was renowned for his admirable picture collection. As befitted a man of his standing, he created a collection of well-chosen artworks that he proudly displayed in his residence in the fashionable Portland place. According to a publication from 1817 *The Picture of London: Being a Correct Guide to All the Curiosities...* (giving information of treasures in public and private collections that could be visited), Lord Radstock's collection was praised for its Italian pictures stating that "his Guido's and Caracci's are wonderfully fine."⁷⁷ However, as visible in many loans Lord Radstock made to the exhibitions of the British Institution in 1806, 1810, and 1814, besides our Poussin's *Venus and Adonis*, he possessed other masterpieces by Poussin such as his *Landscape with the Calm* presently in the Getty Museum, and his *Apollo and Daphne* nowadays in the Altepinakotek in Munich, as well as Van Dyck's *Portrait of Filippo Spinolla*, now in the collections of the Cincinnati Museum, or Annibale Carracci's *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, and others.⁷⁸ After Lord Radstock's death, his entire collection was offered in 1826 at a sale at Christie's lasting two days (May 12 and 13) (Fig. 3). Our painting of *Venus and Adonis* was

⁷⁵ <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw282534/Scharf-Sketchbook-46-page-19-20>

⁷⁶ <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw282534/Scharf-Sketchbook-46-page-19-20>

⁷⁷ J. Feltham, *The Picture of London: Being a Correct Guide to All the Curiosities, Amusements, Exhibitions, Public Establishments and Remarkable Objects, in and Near London...*, London: W. Lewis, 1817.

⁷⁸ For these works see RKD entry for Van Dyck <https://rkd.nl/en/explore/images/59128> and the Getty Museum entry of Poussin <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/107VSC#full-artwork-details>



3. Christie's sales art catalogue 1801, the estate of William Ponsonby Earl of Besborough

acquired by the art dealer William Buchanan.⁷⁹ It changed hands rather quickly, since the same painting by Poussin (ex-Radstock) was offered by John Webb to the auction house Philips in 1829, where it was delightfully described as:

“A bacchanalian subject, treated with great freedom and playfulness in the composition, and strongly characteristic of the spirited and correct pencil of the master in the drawing. The lovers are reclining under the shade of trees: the car of Venus, drawn by Swans, and attended by Cupids sportively engaged is in waiting. There is a great poetical effect in this picture, every portion of which is in strict keeping and consistency with the main design, evincing the rare talent in this respect for which the gifted artist was celebrated (companion to lot 197).”⁸⁰

It was sold in 1829 for 132.5 pounds to a certain Mr Todd, who definitely resold it in the next couple of years to George Wilbraham Esq., just in time to be documented

at the Delamere house in 1837 by John Smith in his catalogue of Poussin's works, and subsequently to be recorded in 1857 by Sir George Scharf as the “Lord Radstock picture”.

The evidence of our *Venus and Adonis* in the Lord Radstock's collection, offered us also the possibility of tracing its whereabouts further back in history up to the moment when it was first brought to England. Although it was not possible to precisely date the purchase of *Venus and Adonis* by Lord Radstock, it must have happened in the first years of the nineteenth century. William Waldegrave, Lord Radstock, most probably acquired it from the London colour manufacturer and dealer Mr. John Birch who bought Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* in 1801, at the sale at Christie's (lot no. 0092) from the notable collection of late William Ponsonby, 2nd earl of Bessborough (1704–1793).⁸¹

⁷⁹ See Getty Provenance Index Database (GPI) <https://piprod.getty.edu/starweb/pi/servlet.starweb#>, accessed June 25, 2023.

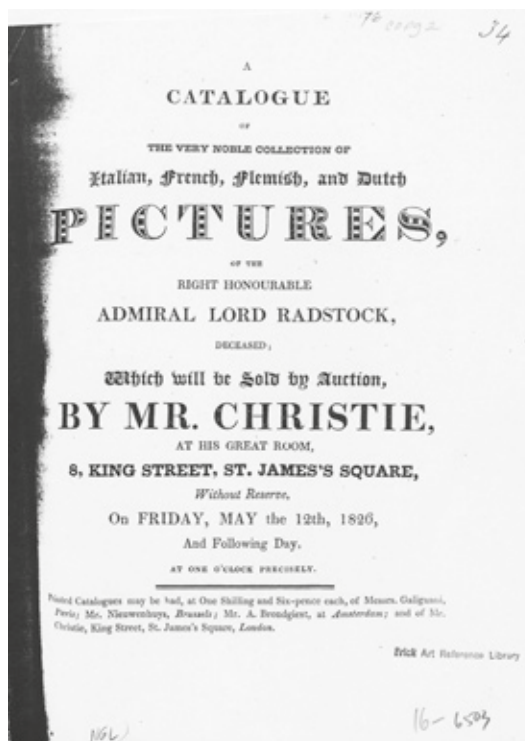
⁸⁰ Catalogue of the Philips's sale 10–12 June 1829, London accessible at the Brill sales catalogues online <https://primarysources.brillonline.com/browse/art-sales-catalogues-online/12086-18290610-webb-john;asc11223012086>, accessed July 27, 2023.

⁸¹ See the sales catalogue of Christie's April 7, 1801, of the collection of the deceased William Ponsonby, 2nd Earl of Bessborough <https://primarysources.brillonline.com/browse/art-sales-catalogues-online/6226-18010407-a-noble-earl>

William Ponsonby, 2nd Earl of Bessborough, was one of the distinguished connoisseurs and collectors of his time. The youngest member in the Society of Dilettanti, he pursued a passion for the classical world throughout his life, leaving an imposing collection of antiquities, including rare gems and cameos, as well as the library of Greek and Roman authors that complemented his interest in the classical world.⁸² Most importantly for our research, William Ponsonby also compiled an impressive art collection where paintings like Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* portrayed classical themes. According to Christie's catalogue from 1801, an impressive variety of the greatest names of early modern art were collected by William Ponsonby—the works of Raphael, Caravaggio, Titian, Salvator Rosa, Murillo, Teniers, Van Dyck, and Rubens were among 92 paintings offered for sale. The true gems of this auction, as singled out by the Christie's at the time, were above all Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* designated as *chef d'oeuvre*, *Madonna with Bambino* by Raphael, *Card players* by Titian, and *Jason with the Dragon* by Salvator Rosa. (Fig. 4) The sale lasted three days and was considered one of the greatest

auctions at Christie's for the year 1801, amounting to a profit of £9,460 17s. Although many of these paintings must have been “good old copies”, as pointed out by William Roberts in his memories of Mr Christie, some of them were autographs and reached three-figure prices, including Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* which was sold for £262.⁸³

For such a distinguished collector, connoisseur, and an important political figure (he was an MP for Newtownards, County Down, from 1725 to 1727, and from 1741 to 1745 he was a Chief Secretary for Island, while in 1756 he was appointed Lord Commissioner of the Treasury) very little is known of his early years and even less about his education but we have sufficient evidence to presume where and how he acquired our *Venus and Adonis*.



4. Christie's sales art catalogue 1801, the estate of Lord Radstock

⁸² For the life of William Ponsonby see R. Finnegan, “The Classical Taste of William Ponsonby, 2nd Earl of Bessborough, 1704-93” in *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies: The Journal of the Irish Georgian Society*, Volume VIII, 1943: 4.

⁸³ For the sale of 1801 see Getty Provenance index <https://piprod.getty.edu/starweb/pi/servlet.starweb>, as well as Christie's sales catalogue digitised at the Metropolitan Museum in New York <https://piprod.getty.edu/starweb/pi/servlet.starweb>

Even though, as we have elaborated previously, some of Poussin's works were offered in the auctions already in the eighteenth century, the most direct and recommended way of creating one's collection was through purchases made on a notable gentlemen's voyage—the Grand Tour. As a particular 18th-century phenomenon, the Grand Tour for the first time offered the concept of the journey for its own sake, the journey as a transformational, as well as an enlightening experience. In the course of voyages through Italy, one was expected not only to venerate the culture of classical antiquity but to broaden one's knowledge of history and the world, and not in the least to acquire artworks to commence or enlarge the family art collection. The Grand Tour thus became the expected formative element in the education of a young nobleman, and William Ponsonby, as we shall see, was no exception. However, he had chosen to go late and had quite an unexpected itinerary in his grand voyage. He went much later than his generation on a Grand Tour, only in 1736 (and stayed until 1738), when he was in his early thirties. However, he was so knowledgeable in classical antiquity that he was at the time admitted to the Society of Dilettanti as one of the youngest members. On his journey, William Ponsonby had two interesting companions—one was John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich,⁸⁴ and Jean Etienne Liotard, a young Swiss artist Ponsonby met in Rome, whose patron he would remain throughout his life.⁸⁵ The itinerary of this Grand Tour went beyond the expected, continuing after Rome to visit Elba, Corsica, Sardinia, Capri, and several ports in Sicily. They extended the journey to Athens to see the Acropolis and ended their voyage in Constantinople. The entire party became fascinated with the Orient and completely embraced Turkish life and customs, and even began learning the language. As a particular memento of his voyage, almost a decade later in 1743/45, William Ponsonby commissioned a rather unusual portrait in a resplendent Turkish costume from Jeremiah Davison (ascribed to).⁸⁶ On this voyage, young Ponsonby not only broadened his knowledge of classical antiquity and met the artist who would execute for him modern visions of the classical world, but he also began his lifelong passion—collecting antiquities and old masters.

During his life, William Ponsonby occupied three splendid houses, a townhouse on Cavendish Square in London, his elegant marital home of Ingress Abbey that he sold after the untimely demise of his wife, and his grand residence “Villa” or Rowhampton house designed by William Chambers, while its park was outlined by Capability Brown.⁸⁷ Each of the residences, according to the testimonies of the contemporaries and William Ponsonby

⁸⁴ Montagu wrote an extensive account of his Levantine voyage, which was posthumously edited and published by Rev J. Cooke, in 1799, under the title: *A Voyage performed by the Late Earl of Sandwich round the Mediterranean in the years 1738 and 1739, written by himself...*

⁸⁵ William Ponsonby supported the work of Liotard, even buying off the entire Liotard's art collection after the artist's death at the auction at Christie's in London in 1774. Over time, Ponsonby commissioned from Liotard a number of his own portraits in the classical guise that were proudly displayed in his library in Rowehampton “Villa”.

⁸⁶ Miraculously, this portrait survived the fire in Bessborough house in 1923 and is presently in Hardwick Hall.

⁸⁷ For more information on William Ponsonby's residences and collections Finnagen, 2006: 149–187.

himself, was filled with priceless antique statues, bronzes, antique gems, as well as works by old masters—all those that graced the sale of 1801.⁸⁸ The particular chapter of his time as a collector, which we will not address for the sake of consistency, was a magnificent library that was considered one of the grandest of his time. When the sale of his collections was organised after Ponsonby's death, each part of his collections had a designated date to it, while a library was sold only 46 years later upon the death of his son Hon. Frederick Ponsonby and it numbered 1,390 lots the majority of which were rare and antique volumes.⁸⁹

The totality of collections of William Ponsonby has been carefully constructed during the decades of dedicated and knowledgeable collecting. Considering the amount of political work that William Ponsonby was involved in the Parliament, it was difficult to expect that he would travel around Italian states and the Ottoman Empire in search of the artefacts for his collection. For that respect, he greatly relied on no less than three of his faithful agents in Rome—a famous dealer Thomas Jenkins, Lord Clanbrasill, and the dealer and artist William Hamilton.⁹⁰ All of them regularly sourced and shipped invaluable reliefs, sculptures, and paintings to his Lordship in England, so there is a great possibility that Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* was acquired through one of these channels. Although we cannot confirm the date of its purchase, it is definite that our painting remained in the collection of the 2nd Earl of Bessborough until he died in 1793, and that it was one of the stars of the auction at Christie's in 1801. It became a part of Lord Radstock's collection, as previously elaborated, and finally reached the collection of George Wilbraham in Delamere house in the 1830s.

From a Gentleman's to a State Art Collection—Poussin's journey from Cheshire to Belgrade

As already mentioned, Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* was first documented in the extensive catalogue by the collector and dealer John Smith in 1837 (John Smith, *Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of Most Eminent Flemish and Dutch Masters, The Life and Works of Nicholas Poussin, Claude Lauren and JB Greuze*, 1837, vol. 8, London). Since then, in a fortunate set of circumstances rather rare for the nineteenth century, our painting remained in the possession of the Wilbraham family for almost a century, until 1930.

For centuries, the Wilbraham family was among the most important noble families of Cheshire. Although their presence in Nantwich Cheshire is noted from the fourteenth century, they became more prominent when Richard Wilbraham received baronetcy from King James I. In the late seventeenth century, in the time of George Wilbraham (1741–1813), the family moved to Delamere house (built by James Wyatt), which remained their

⁸⁸ See also See R. Finnegan, “The Classical Taste of William Ponsonby, 2nd Earl of Bessborough, 1704–93” in *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies: The Journal of the Irish Georgian Society*, Volume VIII, 12.43. 4.

⁸⁹ “Messrs Christie & Manson had been commissioned by the 5th Earl to sell a collection of 1,390 lots, which, at the end of a spectacular five-day sale, had fetched the total of £1,495, nineteen shillings and sixpence”. Finnegan, 2006: 149.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 157.

principal residence until its demolishing in 1930. By tradition, all heirs of the Wilbraham family took up the post of the Sheriffs of Cheshire, and some of them left a significant mark in this occupation. One of the most prominent members of the family, an English Whig MP of great erudition, was his son George Wilbraham (1779–1852). He was also a very prominent collector with works by Rembrandt, Titian, Guercino, and Lely on his walls. It was he who added Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* to his art collection (not to be mistaken by his son, also conveniently named George, whose collection was visited by Sir George Scharf in 1857).

During its time in the Wilbraham collection, Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* was recorded several times and even exhibited at the *Exhibition of the British Institution* in 1845 (catalogue number 103). *Exhibitions of the British Institution* were an admirable private endeavour founded in 1805 to “open a public exhibition for the sale of the productions of British artists, to excite the emulation and exertions of younger artists by premiums, and to endeavour to form a public gallery of the works of British artists, with a few select specimens of each of the great schools.”⁹¹ It was held twice a year on Pall Mall (known also as the British Galleries) —one show was for the old-master paintings from the private and public collections, and the other for the representation of contemporary art. It ceased to exist in 1870 and by that time it was taken over by the Royal Academy. Initially, it was meant to function as a show where young artists of the capital could be educated and they were allowed free of charge to enter and copy the great works of old masters. Following 1807, the *Exhibitions of the British Institution* were open to the general public and the entry charge was introduced.⁹² In the subsequent decades, the organisers sometimes purchased an old master painting and presented it to the National Gallery. Exhibiting works from one's collection at these shows was seen as prestigious and as a special recognition, which was also true when the Wilbraham family loaned their Poussin in 1845.

During the 1850s and 1860s, Delamere house in Cheshire, and the Wilbraham collection it contained, were mentioned in several guidebooks and chronicles of Cheshire. In his illustrated overview of the *Mansions of England and Wales Illustrated in a Series of Views of Principal Seats with Historical and Topographical Description* published in London in 1850, Edward Twycross gave a detailed account of the Wilbraham residence:

“The Mansion is a handsome structure of stone in the modern style, and was erected from the designs of Wyatt, by the father of the present proprietor. It is pleasantly situated and is surrounded with rich and extensive plantations.

The house contains a choice collection of paintings, among which may be mentioned:

A Venus and Adonis, Nicholas Poussin

A Portrait of a Lady, Titian

A Christ crowned with Thorns, Correggio

⁹¹ For more information on British Institution see the text on the site of the Royal Academy London <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/organisation/british-institution>, accessed June 10, 2023.

⁹² S. Thomas, *Recollections of the British Institution, for promoting the fine arts in the United Kingdom*, London, 1860.

A Jew Rabbi, *Rembrandt*
A Magdalen, *Guercino*
A Landscape, *Swenevald*
Booth, *Lord Delamere*, and
Lady Radnor, *Sir P. Lely*

And with various other family portraits, and several pictures of Dutch and Flemish school.⁹³

After only seven years, Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* was carefully recorded in the previously discussed detailed inventory of Wilbraham collection by Sir George Scharf. In his sketchbook no. 46 (pages 19 and 20), not only Poussin's mythological scene but all aforementioned *choice collections of paintings* from Twycross's description was carefully depicted.

In 1862, C. G. Smith in his *Rural Rambles in Cheshire: or Walks, Rides and Drives for Manchester and Other People (being a guidebook for scenery, antiquities and Gentleman's seats within walking distance of Manchester)* gave almost identical description to the one in Twycross's volume, and most importantly for us, mentioned in the first place Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* among the most important works in the collection: "Delamere house, situated in the township of Cuddington, in a parish of Weaverham, about four miles west of Nantwich, is the seat of Geo. P. Wilbraham Esq. The Masion is a very neat modern structure of stone. It was erected from the designs by Wyatt by the father of the present owner. Here there is a good collection of paintings **including a Venus and Adonis by Poussin**, Portrait of a Female by Titian, Christ Crowned with Thornes by Correggio, A Jew Rabbi by Rembrandt, a Magdalen by Barbiero who was surnamed Il Guercino, from his squint, a Landscape by Swenevald, Booth Lord Delamere, and Lady Radnor by Sir Peter Lely..."⁹⁴

The next important mention of our painting in the Wilbraham collection is the extensive *catalogue raisonnee* of the opus of Nicholas Poussin written by Otto Grautoff in 1914. It is the first time Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* has been given a critical analysis. The author was also the first to mention two versions of this scene in existence, one in the Wilbraham collection, and *the excellent old copy* in the collection of Mr Cook in Richmond, but he did not give his final opinion on the authorship of either, as he could not see them in person nor compare them. Nevertheless, Grautoff was very impressed by the painting, calling it the "loveliest scene that Poussin created"⁹⁵ and devoted several elegantly written paragraphs to it: "The picture *Venus and Adonis* belongs to the same period, **which is said to be in the possession of Mr. Wilbraham at Northwich (fig. vol. II, no. 33) and of which Sir Frederic Cook has an excellent old copy at Richmond.** A backdrop of trees rising vertically in the left middle ground, together with the empty golden quadriga standing at the

⁹³ E. Twycross, *Mansions of England and Wales Illustrated in a Series of Views of Prinicpal Seats in each County with Historical and Topogographical Description, the county Palatine of Cheshire in two volumes, vol. 1*, London, 1850: 112–113. (bold mine)

⁹⁴ C. G. Smith, *Rural Rambles in Cheshire: or Walks, Rides and Drives for Manchester and Other People...*, Manchester, 1862: 64. (bold mine)

⁹⁵ Grautoff, 1914.

same depth on the right, complete the frontal plan. The picture lacks depth. The colored development shows a kinship with the painting by Mr. Harcourt. Both have large, illuminated areas in the files, connected patches of color with a strong long-distance effect, there in the tent roof and in the cloths, here in the blue cloth that the undressed Adonis has spread over his lap and in the golden yellow dress of Venus. A red velvet cloth stretches under the feet of the lovers, reaching to the middle of the foreground. Even if small putti cover part of it, there remains a significant area of luminosity calculated for a long-distance effect. This is Titian's influence, which is also evident in the beauty's body, which is oriented diagonally into the picture. Her left knee, pointedly and boldly raised, is an idea of Poussin's own. This picture is the loveliest scene that Poussin created.⁹⁶

The last few years that our painting was in the Wilbraham collection passed without official mention. It was only in 1930 that its existence became public since it was sent to auction at Christie's for the first time after 1829.⁹⁷ It was sold with the entire Wilbraham art collection at the Scarsdale heirloom sale on July 18, organised by the heir to the Wilbraham family who subsequently demolished the old Delamere house and built a new residence in its place. Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* was acquired for £399 by Max Rothschild, a famous art critic and dealer and the owner of the Sackville Gallery. The Sackville Gallery at this time was already a gallery of note for the finest old masters, and its owner Max Rothschild successfully sold at least two masterpieces by Nicholas Poussin—*St. John at Patmos* (Art Institute of Chicago) in 1918 and *Landscape during a Thunderstorm with Pyramus and Tysbe* (Stadel Museum Frankfurt).

However, it has not been noted when exactly Rothschild sold the painting in the 1930s since according to the photo documentation in 1936, it was already on display in the White Palace in Belgrade, the official residence of Prince Pavle, the Regent of Yugoslavia. It remained there ever since, being a part of the collection of both a kingdom and a republic of Yugoslavia, always adorning the official edifice of the state.

A Connoisseur and a Statesman—Prince Pavle and the Collecting of Old Masters

It is not a great surprise that Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* ended its journey (at the latest in 1936) precisely in Belgrade and in the residence of Prince Pavle Karađorđević, the Regent of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The role of the statesman and Regent came to Prince Pavle later in his life due to unfortunate circumstances (after the assassination of his cousin, King Aleksandar I in 1934). Primarily and quintessentially, he was a renowned connoisseur and collector, who was responsible both for the creation of the State Art Collection of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia from 1929 onwards and for the founding of the Museum of Modern Art in Belgrade in 1926. His collection contained some outstanding artworks, such

⁹⁶ Grautoff, 1914: 75.

⁹⁷ Christie's auction catalogue Scarsdale heirloom sale July 18th 1930.

as El Greco's *Laocoon*, Piero di Cosimo's *Forest Fire*, and Mantegna's *St. Jerome*.⁹⁸ Despite Prince Pavle's own collection and his subsequent ascent to the level of Regent, he always carefully separated his own purchases from those for the state.⁹⁹

Both with his education at Oxford and his career as a collector, Prince Pavle perfectly fulfilled the role of the main initiator of the State Art Collection. Although he was interested in art history during his studies at Oxford, particularly the collections of the Ashmolean Museum and the National Gallery in London, he found great interest and, one could freely say, his essential vocation, in the research and connoisseurship of early modern European art. Prince Pavle was incredibly well-connected in the art world of the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁰⁰ During his time in Oxford, he made acquaintance that would grow into true friendship with the keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, Kenneth Clark,¹⁰¹ who would later become one of the key directors of the National Gallery in London. At the same time in Oxford, Prince Pavle made another important acquaintance with Bernard Berenson and that would leave a lasting mark both on his career as a collector and as a creator of the State Art Collection.¹⁰² It was upon Berenson's expert advice that some of the key Renaissance works were purveyed for SAC—two tondos by Biaggio D'Antonio (inv. no. 58-01) and Maestro di Tondo Campano (inv. no. 57-01), as well as the masterpieces by Palma Vecchio.¹⁰³

Despite the importance of these two outstanding figures, it was Prince Pavle's friendship and lifelong collaboration with Joseph Duveen that would prove to be the most decisive for the formation of the State Art Collection.¹⁰⁴ Although Prince Pavle worked with a number of other dealers, such as Joseph Bohler, and Marcel von Nemes, Joseph Duveen had a pivotal role as one of the main purveyors and advisors for the acquisitions of early modern art. Prince Pavle had such great confidence in his illustrious advisors that he often

⁹⁸ J. Todorović, "The Pursue of Tradition", in *Catalogue of the State Art Collection of the Royal Compound in Belgrade*, vol. 1, Novi Sad, 2014: 14–41.

⁹⁹ See Todorović, 2014: 14–21.

¹⁰⁰ Archive of Yugoslavia AJ 74, I. Subotić, "Prince Paul Karadorđević—Art Collector", in *The Prince Paul Museum*, Belgrade, 2011: 137–155.

¹⁰¹ About the correspondence between Kenneth Clark and Prince Pavle, see "Kenneth Clark Archives", kept in the Tate Britain in London. It was upon Clark's expert advice that Prince Pavle acquired in 1921 the first important work of art for his own collection—Piero di Cosimo's *Forest Fire*. In another interesting proof of their close friendship, and in a curious twist of faith, when Prince Pavle decided to sell this painting in 1933, he sold it to the Ashmolean Museum and its director—Kenneth Clark. Piero di Cosimo's *The Forest Fire* (Inv. No. WA1933.2) still presents one of the important masterpieces of the Museums's collection.

¹⁰² Prince Paul's Legacy Archive of Yugoslavia, AJ Fund 74.

¹⁰³ Over the years, Berenson became also a very close friend of Prince Pavle, who became a dear and frequent guest in Berenson's famous house in Florence, the celebrated Villa I Tatti that up to this day serves as a centre for research of Renaissance culture. For more information on the primary sources see Getty papers, Duveen Brothers records, 1925–1940, box 497, roll 352.

¹⁰⁴ For more information on the relationship between Prince Pavle and Joseph Duveen see J. Todorović, "Constructing the Ideal Realm—the Role of the Duveen Brothers in the Creation of the State Art Collection of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia 1928–1939", in *Old Masters Worldwide: Markets, Movements and Museums*, eds. Susanna Avery-Quash, Barbara Pezzini, London, 2022: 211–225.

asked Joseph Duveen, as well as Kenneth Clark, to act in his name at an auction.¹⁰⁵ It is through these connections that Prince Pavle made some of the most important acquisitions for the early modern collection of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, as well as his own private collection.

In the State Art Collection acquired in the 1930s, the emphasis was precisely on the French Baroque Classicism. In 1931, one of the greatest Poussin's symbolic landscapes *Landscape with Three Monks* (inv. no. 241-01) was purchased through Julius Bohler, while in the following years, the works by Nicholas Chaperon *Muses* (acquired as Simon Vouet), Gaspard Dughet *Landscape with Shepherd and his Flock*, Francisque Millet *Landscape with Classical Figures and a Beggar*, and Sebastien Bourdon *Landscape with Ruins* (inv. no. 123-01) were added. In this context, and in the same timeframe, the acquisition of Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* was a very well-calculated addition to the growing early modern collection.

The earliest record of Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* in the Royal residences is the photo of the interior of the newly constructed White Palace from 1936.¹⁰⁶ (Fig. 5) On the walls of one of its main salons, Poussin's painting takes the pride of place. Two years later, in 1938, no less than two important written articles appeared that gave high critical acclaim to *Venus and Adonis*. The first was written by the young curator of the Prince Pavle Museum (later National Museum in Belgrade), Pavle Vasić. Under the title "Nicolas Poussin in our collections" (in the magazine *Umetnicki pregled*), the author not only offered a very refined presentation of two Poussin's works in the Royal Residence but left us a uniquely poetic analysis of the *oeuvre* of Nicolas Poussin in the Serbian art history.¹⁰⁷ Pavle Vasić and Milan Kašanin, an editor of the magazine and director of Prince Pavle Museum, considered Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* so important that they placed its reproduction on the cover of the journal for 1938. (Fig. 6) Another analysis of Poussin's mythological painting was written by Boris Lossky in the periodical of the *Institute Francais* in Zagreb. It was published in the autumn of 1938 and offered an extensive account of all examples of French art kept in public and private collections throughout the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.¹⁰⁸ In the section devoted to the artworks in royal residences, Lossky gave an inspired and detailed overview of the examples of French Baroque art that we mentioned previously. Special emphasis was given to two works by Nicolas Poussin and, very interestingly, for the first time, *Venus and Adonis* was designated as *the school of Poussin*. In his text, Lossky carefully described the painting and connected it both thematically and stylistically to the early *Bacchanalias* that Poussin created inspired by Titian and under Marino's influence. He also made comparisons between *Venus and Adonis* and other notable Poussin's works kept in the

¹⁰⁵ For instance, Joseph Duveen negotiated in the name of Prince Pavle with Julius Bohler for Poussin's *Three Monks* in 1931 (presently at SAC); Kenneth Clark acquired in the name of Prince Pavle (for Prince's private collection) a *Landscape* by Claude le Lorrain at the E. Innes Sale in Christie's (lot 95) on December 13, 1935 (present whereabouts of the painting are unknown).

¹⁰⁶ Archives of Yugoslavia, fund 74, photo documentation.

¹⁰⁷ P. Vasić, "Nikola Pusen kod nas" in *Umetnicki pregled* 8, 1938: 129-134.

¹⁰⁸ B. Lossky, "L'Art Francais en Yugoslavie" in *Annales de Institut Francais de Zagreb* 7, 1938: 370-425.



5. Interior of the White Palace in Belgrade in 1936 (with Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* on the wall),
© Archives of Yugoslavia



6. Frontispiece of *Umetnički pregled* from 1938, with Poussin's *Venus and Adonis*,
© Biblioteka Milutin Bojić, Belgrade

Louvre, the Gallery in Dresden, and Nuneham Park.¹⁰⁹ However, no provenance was given and the only reference he cited was the text by Pavle Vasić. This was the last text published about Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* prior to WWII and the only one published until these pages. The painting and its story were, alas, forgotten, and it had a shadowy existence in the decades to come.

The Epilogue

After WWII, our painting had the great fortune of surviving unscathed in the space of Royal Residences in Belgrade. Both the White Palace (where this painting was displayed) and the Royal Palace in Belgrade were appropriated by the SS troupes for their headquarters in the occupied Belgrade between 1941 and 1944. Consequently, some priceless works from the collections of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, including Rembrandt's *Quint Fabius Maximus* were confiscated and sent to Germany for the notorious Furer's museum in Linz. The works that Nazi officials did not manage to ship in time, still bear the seal of the Third Reich on their frames. Our painting was fortuitously neither taken nor damaged and remained *in situ* until the end of the war.

After the liberation and the proclamation of the Federative National Republic of Yugoslavia, the Royal Residences were kept as one of the main official representative spaces of the new state, and our painting remained as one of the jewels of the State Art Collection of new Yugoslavia in decades to come. However, due to the specific nature of the space it resided in, Poussin's *Venus and Adonis*, like other masterpieces in the collection, was not publicly displayed, it was not the subject of scholarly studies and was never presented to the general audience which is often the case of other government collections in Europe at the time. It was exhibited only once at a grand exhibition *The Treasures of the Royal Residences in Dedinje* organised by the government in the National Museum in 1961, where the most important works of the royal collection were displayed. However, the collection continued to grow and symbolically stood for all the ideals of the Yugoslav state. Poussin's *Venus and Adonis*, together with other works in the collection, was thus available only to a selected audience of dignitaries and ambassadors and slowly disappeared from the attention of scholars worldwide.

Thus, in the field of early modern art history, it is not surprising that after the end of the Second World War, it was erroneously considered lost for decades:

– In 1953, Walter Friedlander in his *The Drawings of Nicolas Poussin: Catalogue Raisonne*, vol. 4, considered it lost and denoted that it belonged to Wilbraham and Prince Pavle of Yugoslavia collections,

– In 1964, Anthony Blunt, although dismissed Poussin's authorship for this and other versions, still considered it in an unknown location,

– In 1974, Jacques Thuillier in his *Tout l'oeuvre peint du Poussin*, for its whereabouts wrote *perdu*,

¹⁰⁹ Lossky, 1938: 377–378.

– In 1977, Pierre Rosenberg in his catalogue on the Poussin exhibition in Villa Medici also dismissed Poussin's authorship and did not even mention the possible location of our painting,

– In 1985, Timothy Standring when writing on the newly discovered autograph work in the Kimbell *Venus and Adonis* mentions ex-Wilbraham, ex-Prince Pavle of Yugoslavia painting but considered its present whereabouts unknown,

– In 1990, Alain Merot mentioned the autograph Kimbel version as the best of several versions but did not discuss them on the grounds of being lost,

– In 1990, Pierre Rosenberg, after the “discovery” of the Kimbel Poussin, changed his opinion but still considered our painting lost,

– Of all major catalogues of Poussin's work from 1990 up to 2008, Keith Kristiensenn in *Poussin and Nature* mentions only the autograph Kimbell version.

The first attempts at a thorough scholarly study of the State Art Collection of the Royal Compound in Serbia were initiated in the 1990s but were sadly halted during the Yugoslav Wars. The work, however, continued more elaborately in the early 2000s. In 2014, the first comprehensive catalogue of the fine arts collection was published, and the entire endeavour was endowed with the Europa Nostra award in 2018.

The aim of this paper is to shed light on the curious history of Poussin's *Venus and Adonis* and help it emerge from the shadows in which it was unjustly hidden for too long. Hopefully, a future detailed technical analysis will help us make final conclusions.

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Јелена А. Тодоровић

ИЗРАЊАЈУЋИ ИЗ СЕНКЕ: ЗАНИМЉИВА ИСТОРИЈА
ЗАБОРАВЉЕНЕ СЛИКЕ НИКОЛА ПУСЕНА

Резиме

Када је Никола Пусен створио сензуалну слику инспирисану митом о Венери и Адонису 1627/28. године, произвео ју је у неколико идентичних реплика, од којих су три признате од стране европске науке. Најистраженија, потврђена као потписана верзија, налази се у Музеју уметности Кимбел, Форт Ворт, Тексас. Међутим, подједнако занимљива и прилично успела слика постала је део Државне уметничке збирке Краљевине, касније Републике Југославије (бр. 48/01) од 1930-их година. И од тада је пала у заборав. Циљ овог рада је да се боље осветли историјат ове слике Николе Пусена, да се дубље продре у форме уметничке продукције у барокном Риму и да се прати њено путовање кроз римске колекције касног сеицента и раног сетечента. Кроз архивске документе и записе о продаји из XIX и XX века, у раду се настоји да се реконструише узбудљиво путовање слике од Рима раног XVII века до Београда 1930-их. На овом путу, сусрећемо галерију јединствених ликова који су сви оставили значајан траг у историји – од просперитетног трговца барокног Рима Ђованија Стефана Рокатаљате и Пусеновог првог мецене Касијана Дал Поца (1588–1657) до реномираних колекционара крајем XVIII и почетком XIX века. Истражено је путовање ове слике од Рима до Лондона и кроз колекције Вилијама Понсонбија, другог грофа од Бесбороа (1704–1793), великог колекционара антиквитета и значајног члана Дилетантског друштва, као и адмирала Вилијама Волдегрејва, првог барона Радстока (1753–1825), по коме је дато име острвима Волдегрејв и који је поседовао једну од најбољих колекција у Лондону свог времена. На крају, слика нас доводи до куће Деламер у Чеширу и до породице Вилбрахам из 1830-их, у чијим збиркама је остала скоро један век. У XX веку, слика је допутовала до Београда. Овде сусрећемо још једну значајну личност, истанчаног познаваоца и колекционара, кнеза Павла Карађорђевића (1893–1976), који је Пусена набавио за краљевске резиденције. Остајући у државним резиденцијама, слика је постала неми сведок катастрофалног XX века који ју је оставио чудесно неоштећеном, али заборављеном скоро цео век.

Кључне речи: Никола Пусен, Венера и Адонис, истраживање провенијенције, реплике, Ђовани Стефано Рокатаљата, Вилијам Понсонби, Касијано дал Поцо, лорд Радсток, уметничка пијаца, кнез Павле Карађорђевић.