

**Nicolas Cordier's *Il Moro*
The African as "Christian Antiquity" in Early Modern Rome**

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Introduction

Between the years 1607 and 1612 the artist Nicolas Cordier created a most unusual sculpture, entitled *Il Moro* (Figure 1), for the antiquities collection of Scipione Borghese, the Cardinal Nephew of Pope Paul V. The motivation behind this life-sized, polychrome figure of an African man is steeped in mystery, its ultimate use and significance as obscure as the circumstances surrounding the sculpture's commission and construction. This thesis seeks to investigate the meaning behind Cordier's African figure and the environment that sparked its creation.

To better understand the message behind this Borghese commission, the materials, presentation, and larger political message of Cordier's sculpture must be brought to light. *Il Moro* is more than just an opulent object or possession of the papal family: the sculpture reflects the larger political preoccupation of the Papacy with the Christian nations of Africa and their perceived connections to, or division from, the Borghese Pope. By analyzing first the antique elements of the physical sculpture, and then expanding progressively outward through the Borghese antiquities collection and the larger diplomatic scene in Rome, I will piece together the various reasons behind this unusual commission. *Il Moro*, as a classicizing representation of an African man, projects the Borghese message of international religious unity through the guise of the city's ancient Roman past.

Three avenues of research have been utilized to better interpret the significance of Cordier's African figure. The first approach centers upon Cordier's original composition: the alabaster torso, black marble appendages and the decorative details. How these materials have been used in concert dictate the ultimate interpretation of Cordier's polychrome assembly. The

similarities between *Il Moro* and a select group of ancient Roman statues, most notably the ancient Roman *Camillus* sculpture type, will set the foundations for our ultimate understanding of Cordier's work as a "modern antiquity." The reasons behind this strategic message will be addressed in the first chapter of this thesis.

With a connection to antiquity established, the argument will then progress into the period perception of the African figure within the Borghese collection. In Chapter Two, a pair of seventeenth-century texts will help shape our understanding of this enigmatic African figure. The first text, a mid-century travel guide by the author Giacomo Manilli,¹ offers a schematic layout of the collection at the Villa Borghese on the Pincian Hill, which was the long-standing abode of the family's ancient and modern art collection.² The second text offers a contrasting arrangement with alternate relationships forged between works of art. Scipione Francucci's epic poem on the Borghese art collection, written in 1613, predates the Manilli travel guide and provides a rare glimpse into the Borghese collection while it was still within the home of Cardinal Scipione Borghese in the Borgo.³ Though these two texts diverge in their description of the layout of the collection, they do not necessarily negate one another in terms of overall significance. By the relationships they establish between *Il Moro* with adjacent artwork, Manilli and Francucci both offer an ultimately Christian connotation to the African figure.

The next question to arise is the choice of the Borghese family to commission a neo-antique, Christian African for their private collection of art. The answer lies in the larger political developments revolving around the Borghese papacy. Chapter Three expands outward to

¹ Giacomo Manilli, *Villa Borghese fuori di Porta Pinciana* (Roma: Per Lodovico Grignani, M. DC. L., 1650).

² The complete collection was in residence and largely undisturbed from 1625 until a portion was sold to Napoleon in the early nineteenth century.

³ Scipione Francucci, *La Galleria dell'Illustris. E Reverendis. Signor Scipione Cardinale Borghese, Cantata da Scipione Francucci* (1613). Vatican Secret Archives, Rome, Italy.

investigate the cultural ties established between the Catholic Church and various African nations. Such political connections between the African continent and the city of Rome can be mapped in a significant group of publicly-commissioned works of art throughout the city. In conjunction with *Il Moro*, two societies emerge as particularly pertinent; the Ethiopians and the Congolese. The date of creation of Cordier's African figure, together with the Borghese investment in an alliance with the Kingdom of the Congo, marks *Il Moro* with a decidedly political message. This propagandistic statement benefited both the Borghese and the Congolese, asserting the international spiritual dominance of the papacy and validating the pursuit of governmental independence from Portugal for the Congo.

The efficacy of the visual agenda outlined above will be the subject of the fourth and final chapter of this thesis. *Il Moro* is a foreign object on multiple levels within the early modern era. The African's ancient status, a fact which is addressed in the first and second chapters, fosters a foreign element that is more intimately connected to contemporary Roman society than the black African figure in and of itself. The dual nature of this foreign body thus heightens the "otherness" of Cordier's *Il Moro*. Even while drawing the African man into the legible visual parameters of Roman antiquity, the classicizing character of the figure simultaneously places the subject at arm's length. The African man, portrayed as a member of ancient society — a participant within the Roman collective past — is still not a protagonist in seventeenth-century Rome. The creation of *Il Moro* by the Borghese via Nicolas Cordier negotiates a fine balance between visual assimilation and division. The sculpture is as much a recreation of antiquity as it is a historical and contemporary validation of international connections.

Before delving into the multitude of questions surrounding the African figure, the state of the field regarding modern research on Cordier's *Il Moro* should be explained. Together with a

few grounding facts on the artist and commissioning family, this information will prepare the reader for the arguments developed in the following chapters.

The Field

Given the rare quality of Cordier's *Il Moro*, it is surprising that the sculpture has not garnered more attention before now. Sylvia Pressouyre, a twentieth-century scholar of Cordier, has been one of the few historians to delve into the mystery of the Moor.⁴ Her catalogue raisonné on the artist and brief article on this sculpted figure are some of the few detailed explorations of Cordier's polychrome work.⁵ Since these early publications, the Cordier sculpture has been discussed only tangentially in overviews of the Borghese commissions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In this respect the most vital of such texts to the research presented here is Katrin Kalveram's reconstruction of the Borghese antiquities collection in *Die Antikensammlung des Kardinals Scipione Borghese*.⁶ Kalveram meticulously identifies those works known today as original components of the Villa Borghese collection with the aid of extant literature on the gallery space (utilizing such materials as Manilli's travel guide). Her work does not elaborate upon the significant organization of the various spaces in the Borghese collection, however, but leaves such interpretations to her reader.

⁴ It is interesting to note the ambiguity of the title *Il Moro*. In the early modern period, the term 'moor' referred to north African and near-eastern Muslims, as well as sub-Saharan Africans of any religion. The term seems interchangeable with regional and cultural titles such as Ethiopian, Abyssinian, Egyptian, Ottoman, Coptic, etc. For more information, see Philine Helas' chapter "Schwarz unter Weißen. Zur Repräsentation von Afrikanern in der italienischen Kunst des 15. Jahrhunderts" in Peter Bell et al., *Fremde in der Stadt: Ordnungen, Repräsentationen und soziale Praktiken (13.-15. Jahrhundert)*, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH), 2010; 304.

⁵ Sylvia Pressouyre, *Nicolas Cordier: recherches sur la sculpture a Rome autour de 1600*, Volumes I and II (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, Palais Farnese), 1984; Sylvia Pressouyre, "Le "moro" de l'ancienne collection Borghèse: une sculpture de Nicolas Cordier retrouvée à Versailles," *Monuments et Mémoires de la Fondation Eugène Piot* (1969): 77-91.

⁶ Katrin Kalveram, *Die Antikensammlung des Kardinals Scipione Borghese* (Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1995).

As for the subject matter chosen for Cordier's composition, modern texts on the Borghese collection do not illuminate the rationale for a classicizing African figure in the early seventeenth century. One of the scholars at the forefront of the issue of the image of the African in early modern Europe is Paul Kaplan. In his book, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art*, Kaplan delves into the evolution of the incorporation of the noble African into religious scenes such as the *Adoration of the Magi* throughout Europe.⁷ Though groundbreaking, this text does not focus upon the situation in Italy; Kaplan claims that Italian artists were slow to accept the African Magus. Since this initial publication, Kaplan has revised his relatively skeptical perspective on the Italian use of the African visage in his recently published chapter in *The Image of the Black in Western Art*.⁸ In a discussion on the African presence in early modern Italy, the author examines more closely the political situation unfolding on the Italian peninsula in the years surrounding Cordier's *Il Moro*. Even so, Cordier's African, as a politically motivated commission, is still overlooked.

Other current scholars investigating the situation and representation of Africans in early modern Italy include Kate Lowe and Elizabeth McGrath.⁹ Both scholars have collected an extensive corpus of imagery summarily underappreciated in general renaissance scholarship. Though their theories, oriented largely around the slave trade, do not necessarily coincide with my own personal interpretation of the situation in Rome, the conclusions drawn by Lowe and McGrath have played a significant role in the formation of the argument proposed in this thesis.

⁷ Paul D.H. Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985).

⁸ Paul D.H. Kaplan, "Italy, 1490-1700" in David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates, Jr, eds., *Image of the Black in Western Art: From the "Age of Discovery" to the Age of Abolition: Artists of the Renaissance and Baroque*, vol. III (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 93-190.

⁹ Kate Lowe, "The Stereotyping of Black Africans in Renaissance Europe," in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, ed. T.F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 17-47; Elizabeth McGrath, "The Black Andromeda," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 55 (1992), 1-18; McGrath, "Ludovico il Moro and His Moors," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 65 (2002), 67-94.

With regard to the question of age addressed here in the first and fourth chapters, I have delved heavily into the reevaluation of the period relationship between image production and the concept of time recently asserted by Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood. In their joint publications over the last few years, Nagel and Wood have argued for a new understanding of the relation between the image and the work's conceptual (rather than literal) age as understood by the Renaissance viewer.¹⁰ Though *Il Moro* is a modern conglomerate of ancient objects and models, the sculpture's projected age is effectively the product of its material and conceptual connections with antiquity. This validation is justified by a referential understanding of time; one must look back in order to comprehend the present. This ancient reference is further supported by the assimilation of the Congolese ambassador to the African Magus and so was consciously stressed by the Borghese.

The Artist

Very little can be said about Nicolas Cordier's association with the Borghese family or the environment in which the concept of *Il Moro* was contrived. No contracts exist from the original commission of Cordier's African figure, and so the parameters of 1607 to 1612 are provided by a series of ambiguous payments to the artist documented in the Borghese archives.¹¹

Nicolas Cordier was a French artist from the region of Lorraine. Shortly after his arrival in Rome, the artist came to the attention of the papal court. In his twenty-year Roman career,

¹⁰ Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, "Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism." *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (2005): 403-415; Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2010).

¹¹ Pressouyre, *Nicolas Cordier*, vol. I, 263-264, 284-287, 316.

spanning from 1592 to 1612, Cordier worked for reigning popes, kings and dignitaries.¹² The artist became known as one of the premier sculptors in the city and was often likened to Michelangelo Buonarroti, considered the Florentine's successor in both style and innovation.¹³ Towards the last years of his life, Cordier turned to polychrome materials that further enlivened his singular representations. Together with the Moor, the artist also created a gypsy figure for the Borghese collection, entitled *La Zingarella* (Fig 7), and a sculptural icon of Saint Agnes for the church of *Sant'Agnese fuori le mura* (Fig 8).¹⁴ The torsos of all three figures, composed of ancient Roman fragments, unite them despite their disparate subject matter, a fact that will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters One and Two.

The African is considered one of Cordier's many "restored" ancient fragments: for example, in addition to *Il Moro* and *La Zingarella*, Cordier is credited with restoring the *Three Graces* in the Borghese collection. Unlike the *Three Graces*, however, Cordier's polychrome compositions are more modern reappropriations of ancient material than faithful restorations of antique works of art.

The Family

The Borghese family competed for political and social supremacy in a city composed of constantly shifting allegiances. Any such family could make strategic use of a collection of art and/or antiquities to project a persona that forged connections with Rome's cultural past. Often this opulent projection of wealth and knowledge also conveniently masked a family's origins in

¹² Ibid, vol. I, 81; the author lists, in addition to Pope Paul V Borghese, patrons such as Clement VIII Aldobrandini, the future Urban VIII Barberini, and Henri IV of France. See also Barry Robert Harwood, "Nicolo Cordieri: His Activity in Rome 1592-1612." (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1979).

¹³ Pressouyre, *Nicolas Cordier*, vol. I, 187-188.

¹⁴ Pressouyre, *Nicolas Cordier*, vol. II, 411-417.

deference to these visual signifiers of *romanitas*. Never had this practice been more necessary than in early modern Rome, where the cosmopolitan society assembled a sea of foreign dignitaries under the ever-shifting arms of the papacy. A fervor for antiquities, coupled with a passion for contemporary artists and artwork, dictated the selection and placement of objects within art collections and cabinets of curiosities. According to a “rhetoric of exemplarity,” these art collections projected the family’s desired role within the greater community.¹⁵

The political and social centers of Rome were in a constant state of flux. At the point of ascension, each pope forged his own particular connections within the city, throughout the Italian peninsula, and in the greater Christian world. Unlike most monarchic societies where court life revolved around a single ruler, the Holy See fostered numerous epicenters around those princes of the faith, the Cardinals. Visiting ambassadors to the papacy held equal rank and promoted their own courtly realms as well.¹⁶ Add to this the established roman secular nobility with their personal retinues and familial ties and the Roman political scene is transformed into a crowded and complex web of power and prestige.

Families whose wealth and influence stemmed from the papacy often found their dominance short-lived. In the lifespan of a family’s control, which lasted on average less than a decade, the secular half of any papal family had to work fast in order to amass the funds and political ties necessary to weather the inevitable shifts to come. Upon the death of the pope, the pedestal from which the papal family dominated the social landscape would crumble beneath them. The more links made with the local Roman community, the better the chance of affording

¹⁵ Kathleen Wren Christian, *Empire Without End: Antiquities Collections in Renaissance Rome, c. 1350-1527* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 16.

¹⁶ Jill Burke and Michael Bury, *Art and Identity in Early Modern Rome* (Cornwall: MPG Books Ltd, 2008), 138.

the *familia* with an afterlife when their Pope passed on. With no regular hereditary lines of succession, a linear progression of power simply did not exist in this city.

Those families ascending the social stratosphere solidified their position via two simultaneous avenues: in the acquisition of ecclesiastical power, and through the bonds of marriage with the local community. The Borghese excelled in both endeavors. Marcantonio I Borghese, founder of the Roman branch of the family, moved from Siena to Rome in the mid-sixteenth century and gained power as a curial lawyer for the papacy.¹⁷ By 1547, Marcantonio became a consistorial advocate and was considered the most powerful lawyer of the Curia.¹⁸ Through a strategic marriage to Flaminia Astalli, the daughter of a reputable and noble Roman family,¹⁹ he solidified his establishment within the local community. Their son Camillo Borghese, the future Pope Paul V, was the first Borghese to be born Roman.

As Camillo climbed the clerical ladder, his brothers Orazio and Francesco became members of the ruling class; Orazio followed in his father's footsteps, becoming a lawyer to the Curia, and Francesco assumed the role of papal *gonfaloniere* and general of the pontifical army.²⁰ Upon ascension to the throne in 1605, the new Pope Paul V worked diligently to further infuse both the secular and ecclesiastic realms of Roman government with Borghese progeny. Two months after becoming Paul V, the new pope named as Cardinal his nephew Scipione Caffarelli, son of Camillo's sister, Ortensia Borghese Caffarelli. In accepting the position, the

¹⁷ Giorgio Carpaneto, *Villa Borghese: Natura, arte, aneddoti, curiosità* (Rome: Rendina editori, 2003), 10.

¹⁸ Bertrand Forclaz, *La famille Borghese et ses fiefs: Autorité négociée dans l'état pontifical d'ancien régime* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2006), 27.

¹⁹ Tracy L. Ehrlich, *Landscape and Identity in Early Modern Rome: Villa Culture at Frascati in the Borghese Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 28-29.

²⁰ Carpaneto, 13; Forclaz, 27.

young man adopted the family name of Borghese and assumed the requisite role of *Cardinal Padrone*.²¹

In post-Tridentine society, Cardinals were most responsible for negotiating the often conflicting requirements of the spiritual and temporal power of the papal family.²² While the Papal Nephew entertained visiting dignitaries and the local elite with lavish displays of secular power, the Pope could maintain an austere and acceptable distance. In so doing the Pope successfully observed the more stringent restrictions demanded by the Council of Trent.

Cardinals also had the additional advantage of youth; Scipione Borghese was only twenty-eight years old when he received the red hat, and he outlived his illustrious uncle by over a decade. The court of a cardinal, though still not hereditary, afforded an enduring locus of power for competing ecclesiastical families. The Papal Nephew in particular constructed much of the family's public persona and acted on behalf of the secular side of the family to protect their future prospects.

In many ways, the public image promoted by Scipione Borghese followed a trajectory established by previous Papal families. The formulation of an aristocratic persona is exemplified in the rise to power of the Farnese family. Like Camillo Borghese, Alessandro Farnese also emerged from relative obscurity to become Pope Paul III in 1534. Upon ascension to the throne, Paul III immediately began to compile lands, titles and connections for the secular branch of his family. Paul III also prioritized the acquisition of ancient artwork. The Palazzo Farnese, built on the Vitruvian model and constructed from 1514 into the 1540's, was filled with ancient and modern art. In his excavations of the Baths of Caracalla in 1545, Paul III assembled a vast quantity of monumental sculptures and building materials, the most memorable of which are the

²¹ Carpaneto, 21-22.

²² Burke, 2.

Farnese Hercules and *Gladiator*. In addition, Paul III commissioned numerous painters to decorate the interiors of the family palazzo, such artists as Francesco Salviati and the Carracci brothers, who promoted the Farnese name with intricate, classicizing frescoes.

It was during the reign of the Farnese Pope that Marcantonio Borghese established his claim as a powerful “Roman” and founder of the family line. The standards set by the Farnese had an indelible impact upon his successors to the papal throne. Camillo Borghese assumed the name of Paul V in deference for his Farnese predecessor.²³ Like the Borghese, the Buoncompagni, Aldobrandini, Ludovisi, and Barberini families all sought validation of their newly fabricated Roman identity through architectural and artistic commissions as modeled by their famous forbearers.²⁴

The Borghese acquisition of art was fueled by two contemporaneous desires. In the assembly of ancient and modern works, Scipione engaged in a competition for prestige among his contemporaries, such notable personalities as the Cardinals Odoardo Farnese, grandson of Paul III, and Pietro Aldobrandini, *Cardinal Padrone* of Paul V’s predecessor, Clement VIII.²⁵ In an effort to surpass his competitors, Scipione purchased the antiquities collection of the Ceuli family in 1607.²⁶ While the Borghese collections were already grand, this monumental acquisition augmented their artistic corpus with an impressive conglomerate of material that boasted an astounding array of both ancient and modern artwork. Simultaneously, the collection

²³ Ehrlich, 29.

²⁴ Forclaz, 25. Under the Borghese reign, a poem appeared on the talking statue of Pasquino in Rome that commented upon Borghese supremacy: “Dopo i Carafa, i Medici e i Farnese / or si deve arricchir casa Borghese,” Giorgio Carpaneto, *Villa Borghese: Natura, arte, aneddoti, curiosità*, (Rome: Rendina editori), 2003; 12.

²⁵ Burke, 95-111; the Borghese family seems to have modeled their political agenda after that of Paul III Farnese and acted in direct competition with the Aldobrandini. This may have been due to the Borghese family’s rise to power under Farnese rule in the mid sixteenth century.

²⁶ Silvano Giordano, ocd, *Le istruzioni generali di Paolo V: ai diplomatici pontifici, 1605-1621* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag GmbH, 2003), 108-109.

invested the Borghese with a local pedigree by visually equating the ancient and modern innovations of Rome with the present *familia*.

As outlined above, Nicolas Cordier's *Il Moro* is more than just an ancient statue or a validating connection to antiquity for the Borghese family; the Moor is also an emblem of Christianity and an international archetype of the Borghese political agenda. In the following four chapters, this thesis will illuminate these various facets of the African figure with the ultimate objective of shedding light on Cordier's *Il Moro* as a representative of an understudied moment in the history of early modern Rome.

Chapter 1: Opulent Objects

The materials of *Il Moro* and their possible significances

Il Moro is a composition of many materials, both ancient and modern, in contrasting alabaster, black marble and colorful details. The torso, in extravagant *alabastro fiorito*, is identified as an ancient Roman fragment by the Cordier historian Sylvia Pressouyre.²⁷ The size of this fragment and the choice of alabaster, however, make this identification distinctive; few alabaster sculptures have survived from antiquity. The questions surrounding the age of the fragmented torso lie both literally and symbolically at the heart of the composition. Additional ancient references incorporated by Cordier – most notably in the African appendages that complete the composition – further augment these questions with the ultimate objective of impregnating the African with ancient connotations.

The Ancient Fragment

According to Sylvia Pressouyre, all three of Cordier's known polychrome works (the *Sant'Agnese* from circa 1604-1605, and *La Zingarella* and *Il Moro*, circa 1607-1612) contain ancient fragments.²⁸ The alabaster torso of *Il Moro*, from the high waist belt to the hemline, is labeled antique by Pressouyre based upon the numerous traces of restoration visible on the material, and a significant horizontal break that exists at the hip of the sculpture.²⁹ Moreover the curvilinear drapery above the break at the hip contrasts significantly with the more angular, vertical folds below. The undulating upper portion, twisting around the African's abdomen and arms, indicates Cordier's personal style and provides a contrast with the arguably ancient skirt.

²⁷ Pressouyre, *Nicolas Cordier*, vol. II, 414.

²⁸ *Ibid*, vol. I, 183.

²⁹ *Ibid*, vol. II, 414.

The artist's penchant for delicate, twisting folds is clearly visible throughout his oeuvre, particularly in his *Santa Sylvia* at the oratory of San Gregorio Magno, and his personification of Charity at Santa Maria Maggiore. The colorful details of the belt and hem on either end of the apparently antique fragment ingeniously bracket and mask the sharp edges of what remains.

In a study of the sculpture's crack lines (schematically rendered in Figs 2 and 3) the alabaster portion of the figure reveals minimal changes to the central fragment between the high waist-belt and colorful hem. This stands in sharp contrast with the more creative additions or reinterpretations along the periphery of the central block. The alabaster above the waist is highly fractured, particularly down each arm. The series of cracks evident, in squares and horizontal stripes, may indicate a veneer. This theory is supported by the paths of the natural stone patterns visible across the chest; the colorful stripes and clouding of the richly marbled alabaster shift noticeably between breaks. Most conspicuously the sharp red veins in the stone above the waist-belt do not coincide with those below. Given the rare, sumptuous quality of the material, these additions by Cordier were probably made from additional fragments of the original alabaster sculpture, stemming from what remained of the upper torso, or from the now lost lower legs and base.

In the area between the high waist-belt and decorative hemline, the cracks are more vertically oriented, with at least one large crack bisecting the skirt in both the front and back. The intricate pattern of the stone continues unobstructed throughout, arguably proving this portion's unaltered state.³⁰ Crevices were at one time filled with painted plaster to mask imperfections. These repairs, now flaking away, offer insight into the sculpture's evolution and reveal many seventeenth-century cosmetic alterations.

³⁰ One minor exception to this statement regards a square of alabaster inserted toward the back of the left thigh of the figure, presumably to mask some imperfection in the fragment.

In contrast with Cordier's undulating furrows above the waist, the skirt has a simple austere quality as the deep, smooth folds fall gently over the curve of the thighs.³¹ Simply put, the style of carving in this lower portion of the alabaster indicates antiquity. Though it is difficult to establish the age of this fragment, one of the surest ways to argue a date of creation without the benefit of provenance is to identify an archetype. In establishing an origin, we are in search of a comparable large-scale composition that incorporates what remains of the original fold schema of the skirt. Given the spare indications of alteration below the waist belt, the pooling of folds between the legs and at the groin of the sculpture will serve as a point of departure.

The short length of the alabaster skirt initially alludes to a representation similar to Diana in her knee-length hunting tunic. The angular fabric folds of *Il Moro*, however, argue for a more substantial costume than its current truncated manifestation. Fabric folds often fall vertically rather than diagonally in compositions depicting short tunics, but the deep "V" centered over the groin of the African indicates a large quantity of fabric that would have reached the ground. The tunic length, given the folds represented, is therefore implausible. In addition to this, I postulate that a waist belt was not a part of the original composition; the folds of fabric were not intended to stop at the high waist but rather would have continued up the torso of the ancient figure.

Already the original intent of the alabaster fragment appears vastly different from what it has become. After combing through various collections of antique sculpture, I came to the conclusion that this alabaster skirt is feminine in shape. The deep "V" of fabric, and the lack of genitalia visible underneath the folds of drapery indicate the sculpted form of a woman.³² This

³¹ This style is emulated, though not copied exactly, in Cordier's other, completely modern compositions. The artist's drapery is more consistently delicate. See Cordier's *Santa Sylvania in San Gregorio Magno* in Pressouyre, vol. II, 372-375.

³² Draped male figures from antiquity often incorporate allusions to genitalia, rather than a deep recess between the thighs.

theory is further bolstered by the pronounced rounded hips of the figure. Though masked well, the size and shape of the African's hips diverge noticeably from the figure's black marble appendages; the fabric of the skirt curves over thighs much larger than the corresponding legs appended below the hemline. The fabric seems layers thick at the knees while the folds carved across the chest and arms look thin and delicate. These discrepancies imply more than a difference in gender, but also a difference in scale. The original sculpted woman would have been a larger than life-sized composition. These disparate proportions highlight the incorporation of multiple compositions in Cordier's African figure rather than a cohesive creation of the artist.

Of the many sculptural types investigated, the most plausible connection found is with the *Petite Herculanaise*, or Small Herculaneum Woman sculpture type. First standardized in fourth-century BCE Greece, the Small and Large Herculaneum Woman sculpture types were incorporated into the visual language of the Roman Empire during the reign of Augustus. These sculptural forms were typically reserved for honorific representations of women, and are believed to be a form of state-sanctioned portraiture that publicly showcased honored wives, mothers and daughters of the Roman elite.³³ These sculpture types are characterized by women swathed in layers of fabric, pulling and twisting the drapery around their bodies as they stand in quiet repose. A mass of drapery is created in long, gently curving folds down the hips and legs of these women, much like the alabaster midsection of *Il Moro*.

The Small Herculaneum Woman converted into a Muse in the Villa Farnese collection (Fig 6) is an excellent comparison to Cordier's African. Like *Il Moro*, the fabric folds that encompass the marble figure curve in semi-circular waves across the abdomen and culminate in

³³ Jens Daehner, *The Herculaneum Women: History, Context, Identities*, (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum Publications, 2007), 73-85; Jennifer Trimble, "The aesthetics of sameness : a contextual analysis of the large and small Herculaneum woman statue types in the Roman empire" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1999).

a “V”-like formation over the groin. With minor alterations, the Farnese *Muse* would closely resemble Cordier’s fragment.

If the torso of *Il Moro* came from an alabaster representation of a Small Herculaneum Woman, then the original sculpture would have been highly unusual. Both the Small and Large Herculaneum sculpture types, which were first categorized in the eighteenth century, were almost always crafted in white marble, though they became polychrome with paint and added decoration. The only other known alabaster sculpture modeled after the Herculaneum type is a Large Herculaneum Woman transformed into Saint Agnes, crafted by none other than Cordier himself (Fig 8).³⁴ That Cordier is associated with the only two known alabaster examples of the figure type that would come to be classified as the Herculaneum Woman is problematic. Only a small leap is necessary to consider the artist a forger rather than a restorer.

Should this be the case, and Cordier did fabricate his own antiquity, why would the artist model the torso of an African man after a female portrait sculpture type? Though the similarity is pronounced, no overt effeminate connotations seem connected to the African. Rather than perform as a commentary on the figure represented—as a lesser or emasculated being—the torso has assumed a new significance; it has become masculine.

Though the Small Herculaneum Woman sculpture type is persuasive as a source, no exact ancient model with a matching fold schema has been identified.³⁵ So is the alabaster skirt an actual ancient fragment, or a clever reinterpretation of antique precedent? The rare material and lack of archetype are two difficult points to disregard, even in light of the piecemeal construction. Without testing the material, I cannot definitively prove the alabaster’s antiquity.

³⁴ Special thanks to Professor Jennifer Trimble at Stanford University for her assistance in the Small Herculaneum Woman type and sculptural associations.

³⁵ Special thanks to Professors Margaret Laird and Jennifer Trimble for their assistance in the search for ancient precedent.

However, the indicators of multiple carving styles and disproportionate appendages return the viewer to the possibility that the fragment is antique. Most likely, *Il Moro* is a spoliated conglomerate of materials combined for a purposeful message. Cordier strategically implemented the alabaster fragment in his African figural composition. Regardless of the fragment's actual age, there is something to be said for the antique message propagated by this component of the sculpture. The message, in this case, supplants the historical date of creation. Further the torso is by no means isolated; various other allusions to antiquity exist in Cordier's work, from the sculpture's black marble appendages to the colorful decoration.

African Face

In tandem with the alabaster skirt, the features of the African face of *Il Moro* add to the illusion of antiquity. Though a modern addition by the artist, the face of *Il Moro* closely resembles a fragmentary portrait of an African man currently housed at the Museo Nazionale Romano, tentatively dated to the second century CE, the so-called *Testa di negro*, or *Head of an African* (Fig 9).³⁶ A close examination of Cordier's model offers yet another level to the significance of the African man.

When confronted with the ancient African *Testa*, one is struck by an intense pair of inlaid eyes, highlighted with white marble, that seem to communicate directly with the viewer. In conjunction with this penetrating gaze, the slight wrinkles on the forehead and barely-parted lips add a momentary quality to the figure's expression and give the impression of surprise. The smooth, gently sculpted neck twists the head towards what would have been the left shoulder of the original composition while a rich mass of hair dominates the scalp. The texture of this hair, in

³⁶ Museo Nazionale Romano, inventory number 49596.

tight, cork-screw curls ending with shallow drill holes, infuses the youthful African visage with energy. These curls, in groups of three or four, cross diagonally over the scalp and offer an intricate pattern in contrast with the pristine, symmetrical face.

Three large cracks pass through the hair around the sides and back of the head, reminding the viewer of the original broken state of the work. These cracks center around the very unusual mass of hair that extends down the back of the head, from the crown to the nape of the neck. This rectangular protuberance makes the *Testa* unique: I have yet to find another example of this singular hairstyle in representations of Africans in antiquity.

At the center of this effluence of hair is a deep hole measuring approximately one inch in diameter of no known use. In conjunction with the oddly shaped hair, this hole may have once stabilized some external addition to the sculpture, perhaps a headdress or even some sort of elaborate clothing. This premise is made even stronger by the earring holes still visible in the earlobes, which further indicate a decorative composition of multiple materials no longer visible today.³⁷

Compared to this theoretical original appearance of the work, the *Testa* now seems a stripped object in its current manifestation. The spare quality of the *Testa* and its quiet emotional countenance could have fueled Cordier's selection of the fragment as an ideal model from which to establish a new identity.

Like the alabaster skirt, the African head is steeped in uncertainties. Cordier's replica so closely adheres to the Museo Nazionale Romano fragment that the provenance of this African portrait has been called into question. In 1986, the historian R. M. Schneider argued that the

³⁷ The significance of earrings has long been a source of debate in the study of Africans in European culture. Though not specifically tied to African culture in the Greco-Roman world, they became a sign established in the Renaissance; T.F. Earle, 23-24.

fragmented head was not an antique work of art from the second century CE, but rather a product of the *Cinquecento*.³⁸ This conclusion was based upon a visual analysis that compared the *Testa* against Cordier's *Il Moro*.³⁹ Schneider, however, makes no effort to establish a creator of the original African portrait, nor does he reconstruct a possible provenance, but the argument in and of itself has greatly impacted the perception of the *Testa*. Today, the African head is no longer on display at the Museo Nazionale and Schneider's remarks are the final and most recent comments in the museum file on the work.

The ancient status of the head is further complicated by the lack of an established, documented provenance. The acquisition of the *Testa* by the Museo Nazionale Romano in the early 20th century is the first known written documentation of the work.⁴⁰ Only one vague conjecture is documented in the sculpture's file at the museum, which hypothesizes that the head was once a part of the Museo Kircheriano, the collection of the Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher founded in 1630.⁴¹ Unfortunately, there is no proof of this connection. No extant documentary evidence proves the fragment's antiquity.

Historically speaking, the *Testa* is an entirely plausible second-century CE object.⁴² By the reign of the Emperor Hadrian, the importation and use of polychrome stone in Rome was pervasive, reflecting a contemporary penchant for the exotic.⁴³ Colorful stones were often used to depict foreigners. Additionally, representations of Africans were present in the Mediterranean

³⁸ Rolf Michael Schneider, *Bunte Barbaren: Orientalenstatuen aus farbigem Marmor in der römischen Repräsentationskunst* (Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 1986), 176-77. For documentation of the *Testa*, see Schneider, 215, BK 13 (Taf. 43, 1-2).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 215, BK 11 (Taf. 42, 1-2).

⁴⁰ According to museum documents, the *Testa di negro* entered the museum in 1907-1908; handwritten note in the object file, Museo Nazionale Romano, not signed or dated.

⁴¹ "Forse dal Kircheriano;" object file, Museo Nazionale Romano, not signed or dated.

⁴² The *Testa di negro* has been cited as a product of both second century BCE and second century CE, however the inlaid eyes indicate a later date of creation and argue for the second-century CE.

⁴³ Maxwell Anderson, *Radiance in Stone: Sculptures in colored Marble from the Museo Nazionale Romano* (Rome: De Luca Edizioni d'Arte S.p.A., 1989), 18.

throughout the Greco-Roman era, from the Hellenistic period onwards.⁴⁴ When compared with other antique African heads, comparable patterns do arise. For example, the African head at the Brooklyn Museum exhibits similarly coiled curls with punctured ends and gently parted lips that closely resemble the *Testa* at the Museo Nazionale.

If the *Testa* is not antique, the next plausible assumption would be that the work is a product of the early modern period. Of the three-dimensional images of Africans created in the Renaissance, the similarities with the *Testa* are less readily visible: the hair of the African head is unique, as seen in comparison with the bust of the Congolese ambassador, Antonio Manuele (Fig 10), and Christoph Jamnitzer's *Mohrenkopf* which both have short, cropped hair.⁴⁵ Further, though all three faces have accentuated, polychrome eyes, the *Testa* utilizes intarsia, while the African Ambassador and the *Morenkopf* are painted.

The assumption has been made before that the *Testa* may in fact be the product of the artist Nicolas Cordier himself.⁴⁶ Though the *Testa* bears a striking resemblance to the work of Cordier, it is not an exact match with the face of *Il Moro*. In a close comparison of features, the slimmer quality of Cordier's emulation of the *Testa* becomes apparent. High cheekbones and a more drastically furrowed brow accentuate the face of *Il Moro* and provide an arguably more elegant quality to the African visage. Conversely, the eyes of the *Testa* are larger, the cheeks are slightly rounder, and the forehead shorter. The hairstyles are extremely similar, down to the directions of the curling locks of hair across the scalp. Cordier has even incorporated the

⁴⁴ Jean Devisse and Michel Mollat, *The Image of the Black in Western Art: From the Pharaohs to the Fall of the Roman Empire*, translated by William Granger Ryan (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1979): 269-283; Frank M. Snowden Jr. *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983): 14; by the 6th century BCE, images of Africans were found throughout the Mediterranean.

⁴⁵ However the *Morenkopf* does have pierced ears, with one earring still remaining from the original composition. For more on Jamnitzer's *Morenkopf*, see Earle, 181-209, or Renate Eikelmann, *Der Mohrenkopfpokal von Christoph Jamnitzer* (Munich: Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, 2002).

⁴⁶ Anderson, 70.

enigmatic cascade of curls down the back of the head.⁴⁷ The difference here lies in the artist's manner of carving; the work of Cordier has a voluminous quality to the hair that is tempered with a delicate carving style to the African's features and a general precision that is lacking in the original version. The sharp, angular incisions and deep drill holes on the *Testa* indicate the work of a different hand.

The *Testa* could still prove to be a sixteenth-century creation simply because the object may have been "antiqued."⁴⁸ As Leonard Barkan discusses in *Unearthing the Past: Archeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture*, Michelangelo himself toyed with the "antiqueness" of his own work, most notably in the *Sleeping Cupid and Bacchus*.⁴⁹ In the case of the *Cupid*, the artist supposedly buried the sculpture in order to fool the Pope himself into believing the piece was of antique origin. The *Bacchus*, conversely, was made into an antique work by those documenting the sculpture, in both written and drawn media.⁵⁰ Barkan deduces from these two situations that the object of creation was meant not only to equal the past, but to supplant it. This ideology was supported by the tale of the *Farnese Hercules* in which Michelangelo favored the restored legs of the sculpture (by Guglielmo della Porta) over the later discovered actual legs of the ancient work because "le opere della scultura moderna potevano stare al paragone de' lavori antichi."⁵¹

Should we believe the argument established by R. M. Schneider, that the *Testa* may be in keeping with this classicizing tradition and a product of the early modern period, does that then

⁴⁷ What remains uncertain is the possible inclusion of the enigmatic hole within the hair protuberance in keeping with the *Testa* model.

⁴⁸ Leonard Barkan, *Unearthing the Past: Archeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 204; see also Janet Burnett Grossman and Jerry Podany and Marion True, eds. *History of Restoration of Ancient Stone Sculptures* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 2003), 16.

⁴⁹ Barkan, 201-207.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 203; Barkan states that even Ulisse Aldovrandi includes the work in his survey of antique Roman art, describing it at length before admitting to its actual provenance.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 204.

impact Cordier's use of the African visage in *Il Moro*? The chosen model for any aspect of the African person, whether of antique or modern origins, would be a conscious decision on the part of the artist. In light of the alabaster fragment, Cordier selected a corresponding archetype for the African's face that, if not ancient, was suitably ambiguous in age in order to convey his classicizing message overall. The *Testa* is recreated in *Il Moro* in almost every detail: the shape of the face, the inlaid eyes, the hair pattern and style, etc. Even the minute details such as the pierced ears clearly indicate Cordier's intent to copy the head exactly.⁵² Thus we must assume that Cordier faithfully recreated the *Testa* as a purposeful message. This message is made complete with the decorative additions to the alabaster and black marble form.

Borghese Investment

The colorful additions to *Il Moro* amount to the decorative hemline, belts, and shoes. Of these three polychrome additions, the belt in *rosso antico* that crosses over the left shoulder and down the chest of the African figure most significantly impacts the final composition because of the message it conveys. The family crest of the Borghese, with alternating dragons and eagles, decorates this shoulder strap as it unifies the *nero di belgio* chest of the African man with the alabaster torso. As an isolated and overtly modern detail within the composition, the emblazoned Borghese insignia establishes a connection between the African and the Papal family.⁵³ As *Il Moro* one of the few sculptures in the entire antiquities collection to bear this heraldic demarcation, such an overt statement must be taken into account. Cordier is known to have

⁵² The sculpture has earring holes, though it has never been documented with earrings, evident in period depictions of the sculpture in the 17th-18th century in Pressouyre, *Nicolas Cordier*, vol. II, fig. 191, 192.

⁵³ This detail may indicate that the African is a servant of the Papacy, a fact that will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

made this detail only once more, carved into the ancient, grey marble, fragmented tunic of *La Zingarella* (Fig 7), another polychrome pastiche within the collection.

La Zingarella, often considered the sister sculpture of *Il Moro*, is very similar to the African statue because of its polychrome effect. The grey and white marble torso, made complete with delicate bronze appendages, also dates from within the same approximate years as *Il Moro*, from 1607 until Cordier's death 1612. Across the grey marble tunic at the Gypsy's neck a similar motif of alternating eagles and dragons appears. This complementary detail indicates a possible connection between the subject matter portrayed. Interpretations of this connection will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, in conjunction with the literary ties that further stress this bond between the African and Gypsy figures.

The Borghese insignia impregnates the Cordier figures with a symbol of possession that is hard to ignore. Why would Cordier include heraldic references to the papal family if not to demarcate their sense of possession? A tie between *Il Moro* and the Borghese family emerges as the search for cultural significance expands outward to the greater narrative of the Borghese collection and the larger political message propagated by the papal family.

The Big Picture

Fashioned for the Villa Borghese, Cordier's *Il Moro* is an amalgamation of antiquity. Though the age of various components is questionable, their ancient sentiment is clear. Cordier effectively created a contemporary antiquity by elaborating upon various antique models and fabricating a new identity. *Il Moro* is the result of a dialogue between contemporary and antique references that unite both the African with the Borghese and the foreigner with antiquity.

With Cordier's model established, questions now arise surrounding the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century understanding of the fragment as an antique object. While the age of Cordier's models and materials cannot be established definitively, that does not negate the sculpture's status as an ancient work of art. The actual age of the sculpture's components is subject to the early modern perception of their antiquity. The question of age and of the original intent of Cordier's *Il Moro* will be revisited in the fourth and final chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 2: The Narrative: A reconstruction of the contemporary gaze

In the acquisition and construction of properties throughout the city, the Borghese masterfully engineered the dual message of secular and ecclesiastic sovereignty. The various Borghese palazzi in and around Rome built a Roman façade over their humble Sienese origins.⁵⁴ The Palazzo Borghese in Campo Marzio became the hub of the secular branch of the family. While Paul V took residence in the Papal estates at the Vatican and on the Quirinal, his Papal Nephew required an independent locus from which to operate his own court. The opportunity presented itself in the purchase of the Borgo Palace in 1609. Today referred to as the Palazzo Torlonia, the Borgo Palace afforded Scipione Borghese the space necessary to receive notable guests, while maintaining a desirable proximity to the Vatican that allowed him to remain at his uncle's beck-and-call. In the same year, construction began on the Villa Borghese complex on the Pincian hill, just north of the city. These two structures were used in varying degrees for the storage and presentation of Scipione's expansive collection of art.

The Borghese collection was used for more than just the simple adornment of palatial residences; it also reflected the Borghese family's wealth, culture, and power. Within the context of the collection, the sculpture of *Il Moro* by Nicolas Cordier emerges as an unusual component. Period sources may provide some explanation. The most widely circulated early sources on the Borghese collection are travel guides. In Giacomo Manilli's 1650 *Villa Borghese fuori di Porta Pinciana*, the Villa Borghese is described in considerable detail and Manilli offers what is considered a standard explanation of the space.⁵⁵ After analyzing Manilli's publicly circulated

⁵⁴ Ehrlich, 1.

⁵⁵ Manilli's is not the only travel guide still extant today, for example Domenico Montelatici's *Villa Borghese fuori di Porta Pinciana, con l'ornamenti che s'osservano nel di lei palazzo e con le figure delle statue più singolari*, from

text, this thesis will progress backwards in time to a lesser known source: an epic poem documenting the collection by the little-known poet Scipione Francucci. This early document, composed and dedicated to Scipione Borghese in 1613,⁵⁶ elaborates on the layout and narrative motifs of the collection while it was still in the Borgo palace. Francucci's interpretation is much closer chronologically to the sculpture's date of completion, and complicates the later widely-circulated interpretation of the Borghese public persona, as well as the significance of *Il Moro*. The varying perspectives within these two texts take the reader through different interpretations of the same corpus of imagery. A comparison of the two may help reconstruct the significance of Cordier's *Il Moro* from its first presentation in the Borgo to its permanent position in the ostentatious Villa Borghese.

La Stanza del Moro

Though the Borghese owned properties throughout the city and in the fashionable countryside, the family still sought an ideal venue for the conspicuous reception of foreign dignitaries. In 1609 Pope Paul V bequeathed a vineyard outside the Pincian Gate to his Cardinal Nephew, Scipione Borghese. This territory marked the final piece of the Pincian complex, where Scipione immediately began construction on an edifice worthy of the family's extensive collection. With the exception of a small study space on the *piano nobile*, the building was not constructed as a permanent residence, but rather as a venue for public display and the pursuit of *Otium*, leisure and contemplation.⁵⁷ The bulk of Scipione's acquisitions moved from his

1700, and A. Brigentio's *Villa Burghesia vulgo Pinciana poetice descripta*, published 1716; Pressouyre, *Nicolas Cordier*, vol. II, 413-415.

⁵⁶ Francucci's poem was never published.

⁵⁷ Ehrlich, 171.

residence in the Borgo to the Villa Borghese on the Pincian Hill in 1616, and the remainder of the collection in 1625.⁵⁸

As with the Borgo Palace, the Villa Borghese, also referred to the Villa Pinciana, was specifically Scipione Borghese's domain; Pope Paul V rarely visited the complex and did not attend the lavish gatherings held there. The space embodied more of the secular, opulent aspect of the Borghese family than the pious endeavors of the Borghese pope. Lavish parties held for visiting ambassadors and the local elite occurred on a regular basis either inside the central hall of the ground floor, or under festive tents in the surrounding park.⁵⁹ Though these gatherings were necessary components of courtly society in the early modern era, the papacy eluded censure by avoiding these more ostentatious occasions.

Jacomo Manilli's travel guide is the earliest comprehensive description of the Borghese collection in its final home. In a text that meanders through both the gardens and interior spaces, Manilli transforms the viewer into one of the privileged visitors of this private collection. Each space is described individually. Though the material in these gallery rooms was a mix of ancient and modern artwork, priority was given to the ancient sculptures; they provided the names of each room.⁶⁰ *Il Moro* was counted among the more distinct works of art in the collection and lent its name to the space in which it was showcased. This choice alone speaks volumes on the importance given to this singular African representation in the midst of a sea of more standard or typical subject matter.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 41, n. 100.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 41-43.

⁶⁰ Katrin Kalveram has expertly converted Manilli's documentation into a series of floor plans, explaining where each sculpture in the collection once stood; Kalveram, 166-167; appendix III.

In the *Stanza del Moro*, the moor was juxtaposed with the *Servi*, two ancient polychrome sculptures of the Camillus type (Figs 4 and 5).⁶¹ Manilli refers to *Il Moro* and the *Servi* as “trè statue antiche del naturale.”⁶² The author took great care in explaining the placement of each work within the room. *Il Moro* took prominence of place along the northern wall, and was effectively isolated from the other sculptures in the room by a row of busts of Greek and Roman rulers. As the largest sculpture in the space, the moor was showcased on a quadrangular pedestal decorated with faux paper scrolls.⁶³ Comparably, the Camillus sculptures on the adjacent eastern wall stood upon triangular bases decorated with sphinxes. These sculptures stood between a window and doorway that led out to the “secret gardens” along the western façade of the villa. Across from the *Servi*, a table was topped with an urn in black marble, identified as *Paragone* by Manilli. The author uses the same term to describe the skin of *Il Moro*, and so these objects may be contemporaneous, both crafted in the relatively new material of *nero di belgio*, a fine-grained black marble.⁶⁴ Finally, on the south wall facing the Moor, the period viewer would have been confronted by the surprising addition of a porphyry relief bust of Christ atop a gilded stool.⁶⁵

Visitors to the *Stanza del Moro* were inundated with color; the panoply of alabaster, black marble, purple porphyry, and *giallo antico*, together with decorative details and various bronze and gilded surfaces, effectively shaped the space. Decoration to the walls further added to this effect: Manilli documents nine paintings in the room, three of which are identified as representations of the *Pietà*. One such painting, possibly Raphael’s famous *Entombment* of 1507,

⁶¹ Much like Cordier’s Zingarella, these two Camillus sculptures are restored with bronze appendages.

⁶² Manilli, 83.

⁶³ Ibid, 84; Manilli identifies the detail on the base of *Il Moro* as “cartocci alle face, e con cantelle negli angoli.” I identify the *cartocci* as paper rolls or plaques that would curve the otherwise flat surface of the base. Sadly, Manilli does not state if anything was written on the Moor’s base. The term *cantelle* is hard to decipher, but brings to mind singers and may have referred to small *putti*.

⁶⁴ *Nero di Belgio* was first quarried in the late sixteenth century. See Gabriele Borghini ed., *Marmi antichi* (Rome: De Luca Edizioni d’Arte, 1989), 256.

⁶⁵ Manilli, 85.

was hung above the porphyry bust; another by Taddeo Zuccaro was placed over the paragon table and urn; and the final *Pietà*, by the artist Passignano, was placed on the wall behind *Il Moro*.⁶⁶ Though the specific intent of this subject matter remains elusive, the religious message hangs heavily over the space, a fundamental detail that will be explored shortly.

Of the various objects in the room, the Camillus sculptures, as *Servi*, are the closest visual connection to *Il Moro*. The general pose of all three sculptures conveys a remarkable similarity. Each work incorporates an ancient alabaster fragment into the final composition.⁶⁷ The cropped alabaster tunics give the impression of youthful attire and the rich alabaster color contrasts sharply with the dark appendages added to each frame. The *contrapposto* pose, with weight on the left leg and with the right arm lifted, adheres to the standard sculpture type of the Camillus figure, the young religious servant.⁶⁸ The notable difference between *Il Moro* and the *Servi* lies in the direction of the gaze; while the *Servi* glance in the direction of their outstretched right arms, the African twists his head to the left to confront the viewer before him. Though their faces are turned in different directions, the gaze of all three sculptures is slightly downcast and submissive in accordance with their gentle gestures.

Due to their overt similarities, the differences between *Il Moro* and the *Servi* emerge only upon further inspection. The subtle signs of opulence in *Il Moro* visually differentiate this sculpture from its counterparts; the wide range of materials used by Cordier, the *giallo antico*, *rosso antico*, and *serpentino* that decorate the alabaster in patterned inlay sharply contrast with

⁶⁶ Ibid, 85.

⁶⁷ The Borghese originally owned four alabaster sculptures of arguably ancient origins in their collection. As mentioned in Chapter One, this amount is highly unusual. Three different types of alabaster are identifiable, but only one sculpture (*Il Moro*) is completed with marble appendages rather than bronze. For more on these sculptures, see Kalveram, 204, 213-215.

⁶⁸ Claudio Parisi Presicce, "Da Zingara a *Camillus*. Storia antiquaria del bronzo capitolino," in Filippo Trevisani and Davide Gasparotto. *Bonacolsi l'antico. Uno scultore nella Mantova di Andrea Mantegna e di Isabella d'Este*, ed. Filippo Trevisani and Davide Gasparotto. (Milan: Electa S.p.A., 2008), 56.

the rather simple compositions of the *Servi* in alabaster, *rosso antico* and bronze.⁶⁹ These polychrome decorations, coupled with the differences in ethnographic detail, make Cordier's sculpture the most evocative work in the space, hence Manilli's choice for the name of the room.⁷⁰ Manilli's reader is thus instructed to prize Cordier's work above all else.

The visual similarities between the Moor and the Camillus type are unmistakable. At the very least, Cordier was familiar with these preceding works, if not directly connected to their restoration.⁷¹ As *Il Moro* is effectively the third servo in the room, one wonders if this grouping is purely aesthetic, or if these figures are arranged in a purposeful narrative. Though Manilli does not expand on this aspect, one possible connection emerges when the Moor and *Servi* are examined in the context of the room. The African and Camillus sculptures interact with the southern wall as a unit: *Il Moro*'s primarily frontal gaze, together with the *Servi* and their rightward-facing attention, feasibly respond to and communicate with the gaze of the porphyry visage of Christ. Though the Moor is the largest sculpture and the most colorful, his deferent position, oriented toward the south wall, arguably converts *Il Moro* into a loyal servant of the porphyry relief.⁷² This connotation is further enhanced by the religious paintings on the walls: the three *Pietà* scenes tinge the sculptural dialogue with a devout Christian undertone. References to the Passion of Christ support the homage paid to the porphyry bust as the symbol of the resurrected King of Heaven. It is therefore my belief that the ancient sculptures in the *Stanza del Moro* are strategically oriented to project ultimately the veneration of Christ.

⁶⁹ A short mantle in *rosso antico* conceals the shoulders of one of the two sculptures, and both wear thin *rosso antico* cords that tie around the waist.

⁷⁰ Kalveram, appendix III.

⁷¹ One wonders if Cordier himself restored the two alabaster *Servi*. To date, no artist has been credited with their restoration.

⁷² This sense of interaction between artwork stems from a long-standing tradition of speaking statuary popular in this period. For more on this tradition within the Borghese collection, see Genevieve Warwick, "Speaking Statues: Bernini's *Apollo and Daphne* at the Villa Borghese," *Art History*, 27, no. 3 (2004): 353-381. For more on public instances of speaking statuary, see Michael Cole, "Cellini's Blood," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 81, no. 2 (1999): 215-235.

By responding to the image of Christ, *Il Moro* enters a religious narrative. In conjunction with the ancient context imbued by the Camillus posture and attire, this connection fosters a Christian antiquity within the African figure. The room comments upon the triumph of Christianity over Rome's pagan past even as it makes use of the ancient Roman visual vocabulary. *Il Moro*, as an African and antique figure, enters this symbolic narrative as a representative of the world united under the Christian faith.

This interpretation of the *Stanza del Moro* fits seamlessly into the larger Borghese message of Catholic supremacy. Manilli's guide is not, however, the only period interpretation of Cordier's African figure. An even earlier text, Scipione Francucci's epic poem of 1613, indicates that *Il Moro* may be more specifically linked to a contemporary polemical situation within the city.

La Galleria dell'Illustrissimo Signore

In 1609, the same year construction began on the Villa Borghese complex, Scipione Borghese moved into his residence on the Via di Borgo Nuovo.⁷³ Here, Scipione held court independent from both the secular half of the Borghese family and his papal uncle. Within the walls of the Borgo Palace Scipione housed his ever-expanding collection.⁷⁴

Though few specifics are known about this first residence, the state of Scipione Borghese's collection in this liminal moment has been preserved in one illuminating document,

⁷³ Cesare d'Onofrio, *Roma vista da Roma* (Roma: Arti Grafiche Jasillo, 1972), 207: the Borgo palace, now Palazzo Torlonia, stands today on the via della Conciliazione.

⁷⁴ Giordano, 108-109; Teodoro Amayden, *La storia delle famiglie Romane* (Bologna: Forni Editore, 1967), 309-310. In 1607, the collection had grown exponentially when Scipione acquired 273 sculptures from the Ceuli family, which likely constitute the epicenter of what is now considered the Borghese collection. The Ceuli were also foreigners to the city of Rome—Pisan bankers whose family prospects grew and then declined exponentially in the course of the second half of the sixteenth century.

housed today in the Vatican Secret Archives. *La Galleria dell'Illustrissimo et Reverendissimo Signor Scipione Cardinal Borghese*, composed in 1613 by the poet Scipione Francucci, offers a rare glimpse into the early orientation of both the painting and sculpture within the Borghese collection.

Little is known about Scipione Francucci himself. As dependents upon wealthy patronage, poets such as Francucci forged their livelihood penning laudatory verses on the admirable endeavors of private patrons. The art collection of a prominent Roman would have been an ideal source of inspiration for any enterprising author.

Francucci's poem offers Scipione Borghese, and indirectly the general public, a poetic epic that thematizes the Borgo collection. The poem is composed of 560 verses within eight canti. In essence, the text evokes the poetic tradition of Dante Alighieri, and the reader traverses one realm of the collection after another, encountering famous personages along the way. As the poet explains in the introduction, the artwork itself whispers inspiration into his ears.⁷⁵ Francucci animates the often disparate figures in each room within a series of vignettes that compose a narrative.⁷⁶ The canti, as individual chapters, in essence delineate separate spaces within the larger collection.⁷⁷ As a text completed only a year after Cordier's death, this largely unexplored epic poem may provide an explanation for the unique commission of *Il Moro*.

The canti oscillate between religious and ancient subject matter. Most of the overarching themes of the poem are initiated in the first canto, where Scipione and his uncle are introduced

⁷⁵ “ella [la Pittura] medesima poteva somministrarmi i concetti; e pur col solo gusto quasi dettarmi, o sussurarmi le parole, mi accinsi antimosamente à questa nova impresa.” Francucci, introduction, 6 (obverse)-7.

⁷⁶ The early modern literary tradition of poetic epigrams disseminated the popular rhetorical device of speaking statuary throughout the Italian peninsula; Christian, 46.

⁷⁷ There seem to be seven rooms, or possibly eight in total. The eighth canto discusses more the larger impact of the Borghese on the city of Rome. Cesare d'Onofrio also comments upon the poem's topographic orientation, d'Onofrio, 208.

within the gallery space, first as the owners and patrons and then subsequently as subjects of artwork within the room. In this manner the Borghese are visually conflated with various ancient Roman figures.⁷⁸ Most notably, Scipione Borghese is compared favorably with the martyr-hero Marcus Curtius, the Roman soldier who saved the Republic by riding into the open chasm that appeared in the Roman forum.⁷⁹ An overt connection of the family with antiquity is thus made abundantly clear from the very beginning.

At the start of the composition, the poet vividly elaborates upon the interior. Bronze thresholds admit the viewer into a room banded by three cornices of Ionic, Corinthian and Composite design. Columns (of unknown structural significance or location within the room) are decorated with capitals adorned with the Borghese dragons and eagles, while *finestre alabastrine*, or windows with alabaster panes, suffuse the gallery with a rosy glow.⁸⁰ There follows an account of a series of bronze reliefs that depict various heroic Borghese endeavors.⁸¹ The space is completed with a series of sculptural representations of ancient gods and goddesses.

The second canto progresses in a similar classicizing fashion; Roma reigns supreme over the ashes of Troy, while Aeneas initiates the lineage of the city.⁸² Canto Three, however, takes a sharp turn, shifting from pagan history to Old Testament figures: Abraham sacrificing Isaac, and Judith and David with the heads of Holofernes and Goliath. In a similar vein, Canto Four picks

⁷⁸ Francucci, stanza 36; “Gli Augusti lor cedon di Scipio al vanto;” also in this room are a number of painted depictions of previous notable Popes. The most significant of which, given our current conversation, is Paul III Farnese.

⁷⁹ D’Onofrio, 208-209. Scipione Borghese is converted into the ancient martyr-hero of Marcus Curtius in the *Diluvio Romano*, the flood of 1606. Though less catastrophic than the flood of 1598, the natural disaster prompted heroic connotations: Scipione Borghese fearlessly surveyed the damage of the Tiber’s onslaught as he rode through the chaotic city streets, just as the ancient Roman soldier Marcus Curtius sacrificed himself in the Forum Romanum. According to Francucci, Scipione risked his life for the good of the Roman people.

⁸⁰ Francucci, stanzas 39-41.

⁸¹ It is at this point that Francucci described the *Diluvio Romano*. See n. 73.

⁸² Francucci, stanzas 81-121; the Barocci painting of Aeneas, Anchises and Ascanius fleeing Troy is accompanied by a sculpted representation of Romulus and Remus.

up with the New Testament, overtly focusing upon the Annunciation and Adoration of Christ.⁸³

The end of Christ's life, through the Passion and into the Resurrection is continued in Canto Five, where Raphael's *Entombment* seems to have taken a place of prominence in stanzas 300-306.

Francucci returns to ancient subject matter in the sixth canto. The dichotomy of chastity and carnal love is explored in the vivid comparison of Diana discovered in her bath by the hunter Actaeon, and Venus surrounded by her many paramours.⁸⁴ This bifurcated narrative may comment on the deeper debate of piety and temporal love within an ecclesiastical realm of thought. Out of this complex dichotomy of subject matter, *Il Moro* finally makes its appearance in Canto Seven, where confrontation dominates.

The seventh canto is replete with climactic meetings. Penthesilea, the Amazonian warrior, rides fearlessly into the fray and towards the statue of Achilles where she will meet her demise. Seneca dies gazing heavenward as his life's blood slowly drains, dripping in rivulets over his frail flesh. Ganymede is plucked suddenly from the earth by the amorous Zeus-as-eagle, while Polyphemus screams in anguish as an obliging satyr extracts a thorn. In one of the more gentle encounters, *Due fanciulli che scherzano*, who may be the *Servi* (Figs 4, 5), extend their arms in a loving embrace as if reuniting after a long separation. Meanwhile a jovial, youthful *Moro* asks a reticent *Giovanetta Mora* to a dance, though she shies away from his advances. These final figures are Cordier's creations—*Il Moro* and *La Zingarella*.

⁸³ Ibid, stanzas 217-260; there is also a plethora of St John the Baptist imagery in this room as well, painted by Raphael, Caravaggio and Veronese, stanzas 264-269.

⁸⁴ Ibid, stanzas 329-358 on Diana and Actaeon, stanzas 363-381.

Coupled with these pairings and climactic moments, multiple busts of “August Senators” dominate the final stanzas of the canto.⁸⁵ Traditional Roman names like the Camilli, Flavii and Decii again inspire connections between the old aristocracy and the new. Most notably, the favorable comparison of the bust of Scipio Africanus with that of Scipione Borghese offers an overt assimilation; Scipione’s humanity is made comparable to that of his ancient predecessor.⁸⁶ This composition progresses seamlessly into the eighth and final canto, where Francucci expands the reader’s worldview to encompass the many civic and religious projects conducted by Scipione and his illustrious uncle. After listing the many positive traits of Paul V, the author waxes poetic on the Pope’s cultivation of the city, citing by name such works as the Acqua Paola. According to Francucci, Rome was made magnificent under the Borghese reign, “...fatta più bella che ne tempi antichi.”⁸⁷ Scipione’s shining personage is also addressed within the canto, where the author again concentrates on his humanity and conservation of the peace.⁸⁸ The Borghese cardinal’s contribution to the family is summed up in his acquisition of art. According to Francucci, the many bronzes, marbles and paintings give eternal honor and fame to the family name.⁸⁹

In the seventh canto, *Il Moro* participates in more than just a dialogue with “la Moretta.” As stated at the beginning of the canto, every image is “vivacious and honest;” the sculptures

⁸⁵ Ibid, stanzas 468-472.

⁸⁶ Ibid, stanza 473.

⁸⁷ Ibid, stanza 497.

⁸⁸ Ibid, stanzas 515-519.

⁸⁹ Ibid, stanzas 559-560. The final canto, as a foil to the first, addresses the future of the Borghese family. Francucci spends fifteen stanzas on the young Marcantonio II Borghese and his wife Camilla Orsini. At this point, Francucci refers to the Borghese family members via *simulacra*, or representations. This may indicate that there is indeed an eighth room to the collection, though the number of works discussed in the final canto is noticeably less than any of the preceding canti; Ibid, stanzas 523-538. As the secular hope of the family, the clan’s investment in the young couple is made readily apparent in the poet’s allusions to their conquest of barbarous nations and unsurpassed beauty. the “barbere Genti” whom the Borghese conquer seem to be the Ottomans, first referenced in stanza 533; Camilla Orsini, as “la Beltà divina / Della leggiadra, e gloriosa Orsina,” is compared favorably against Octavia and Cleopatra.

faithfully replicate their models.⁹⁰ This comment refers to the assembly of polychrome sculpture within the space. *Il Moro*, *La Giovanetta Mora*, the Camillus sculptures and the *Dying Seneca* are all constructed of at least two materials of varying colors. References to distant lands like Spain, Portugal and India in the opening stanzas further emphasize an exploration of the surrounding world.⁹¹

The vignette in which *Il Moro* participates in the Francucci poem is significant to the history and ultimate meaning of the sculpture. While the Moor gestures to the “Mooress” with his left hand in an offer to dance, *La Zingarella* timidly rebuffs his offer. Her shy countenance contrasts with what Francucci describes as *Il Moro*’s pleasing face and bright smile.⁹² Amid the various classical representations in the room, *Il Moro* slides seamlessly into the theme of antiquity. Francucci’s only allusion to the age of the polychrome sculpture rests in his identification of the artist; the sculpture is a “Giovanetto moro statua del Franciosio.”⁹³ This *Franciosio*, this Frenchman, refers to Cordier, making use of his popular contemporary nickname of *Franciosino*, the little French man.

The poem alludes to a physical proximity between the moor and the gypsy. Since Francucci’s initial statement, the pair have been noted for their similar construction techniques and design motifs. Like *Il Moro*, *La Zingarella* is also composed of an amalgamation of colorful

⁹⁰ Ibid, stanza 405; “Tanto è vivace qui ciascuna imago, / Che’l vero, è vero; perché à lei simiglia / E la Natura ancor tanto è Natura / Quanto imitar sà qui l’alta scultura.”

⁹¹ Ibid, stanzas 404-405; In the introductory synopsis of Canto Seven, a vague comment may allude to the moor as a Spaniard, “More il morale Ispano...”; the breadth of locations discussed in the canto are hinted at in the second stanza, “dal Mar Inda al Tago,” possibly referring to the Indian Ocean and Tago, or Tejo river on the Iberian peninsula.

⁹² Ibid, stanzas 450-451.

⁹³ Ibid, stanza 450.

media of arguably ancient and modern origins.⁹⁴ The grey marble torso, considered an ancient fragment,⁹⁵ is made complete with white marble additions to the gypsy's attire, and coupled with delicate bronze appendages.⁹⁶ Decorative motifs also unite the figures, for example the Borghese insignia etched on both the Gypsy's hem and the Moor's shoulder strap.⁹⁷ Since this first documentation of the statue, *Il Moro* has been grouped together with *La Giovanetta Mora*, today referred to as *La Zingarella* or *The Gypsy*, in modern scholarly texts.

The connection with gypsy culture is not surprising with regards to *Il Moro*. Gypsies in the early modern period were identified with Near Eastern or North African origins, often called Tartars, Ishmaelites or even Ethiopians.⁹⁸ The characteristic striped clothing, trademark of the Gypsy, became synonymous with Biblical attire.⁹⁹ Bearing this in mind, the striped *alabastro fiorito* of *Il Moro* could then indicate a gypsy connotation.¹⁰⁰ Though tempting, this interpretation must be tempered by the clues found in Francucci's documentation. Much can be said for the descriptive words chosen by the author; in the poem, Francucci identifies *La Zingarella* as the "Giovanetta Mora." As the earliest known mention of the pair, this documentation ascribes the gypsy with a Moorish, or African, connotation as the counterpart to *Il*

⁹⁴ Kalveram, 233-234; Pressouyre, *Nicolas Cordier*, vol. II, 415-417; besides *La Zingarella*, Cordier also created the polychrome *Sant'Agnese* for the church of Sant'Agnese fuori le mura, Rome, commissioned by Pope Clement VIII Aldobrandini circa 1604-1605.

⁹⁵ The grey marble torso may have been a representation of a man originally, given the similarities found between the *Zingarella* and the Orator Type. Should this indeed be the case, Cordier fabricated another reassignment of gender like *Il Moro*. Special thanks to Professor Margaret Laird for her insight on Roman Imperial sculpture types throughout this research.

⁹⁶ In this respect, *La Zingarella* is much like the *Servi*.

⁹⁷ In addition to the Borghese insignia, *Il Moro* and *La Zingarella* are also united by similar cymbal-shaped clasps on their clothing. However, it should be mentioned that, in the oeuvre of the artist, *La Zingarella* most closely relates to the *Sant'Agnese*, another polychrome sculpture composed of an ancient fragment and completed with marble and bronze additions.

⁹⁸ Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1972), 15.

⁹⁹ Michele Pastoureau, *L'Étoffe du Diable: Une histoire des rayures et des tissus rayés* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991), 36-37; Pastoureau identifies a fifteenth-century shift in the significance of striped attire, from a negative or derogatory connotation to an association with a specific point in time, namely the life of Christ.

¹⁰⁰ Pressouyre, "Le 'Moro'," 81.

Moro rather than the investment of gypsy culture into the Moor. Here we have the original intended meaning of the pair: this Moorish couple exists within the simultaneously antique and global realms of the Borghese collection.

The difference in placement between the 1613 poem and the 1650 travel guide is remarkable. Giacomo Manilli locates the Moor and Gypsy in different rooms and on separate floors of the complex. The division of *Il Moro* from *La Zingarella* has been described as a separation caused by a loss of knowledge.¹⁰¹ Either the Cordier sculptures were originally paired but became separated in the move to the Villa Borghese, or the works were relocated within the gallery during the forty-year gap of documentation.

While *Il Moro* is placed within the context of the *Stanza del Moro*, Manilli places *La Zingarella*, the Moor's one-time compatriot, in the room directly above the African man within the Villa Borghese. Entitled *La Zingara*, she too lends her name to the room in which she resides, but the general motif within seems more Bacchic in theme.¹⁰²

If, by 1650, the gypsy figure is considered a component of the Bacchanal, *La Zingarella* seems a far cry from the religious setting of her one-time compatriot. Even so, the two texts discussed here offer parallel implications. As a gypsy, *La Zingarella* is still a reference to antiquity; in the early modern period gypsies were understood as maintaining an ancient near-eastern mode of dress that was incorporated into biblical imagery in the sixteenth century.¹⁰³

Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood go so far as to declare that the period viewer identified

¹⁰¹ Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny. *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press. 1981), 341.

¹⁰² Ibid, appendix III; the room contains multiple sculpted and painted images of Bacchus and his followers that are paired in conjunction with various depictions of Venus.

¹⁰³ Pastoureaux, 36. Similarly, the *Servi* also have a peculiar connection with gypsy culture: in an inventory of the Borghese collection in 1610, the sculptures are each identified as "Zingara," or gypsies. The bronze Camillus sculpture at the Capitoline was first identified as a Zingara in *Antiquarie Prospettiche romane* in 1496-1497, Trevisani, 57. Manilli is in fact the first to document these copies of the Camillus statue type as servants, Kalveram, 215.

gypsies as living biblical antiquities.¹⁰⁴ In either context, in the Borgo or on the Pincian Hill, the African is associated with sculptures of complementary significance: *Il Moro* has gone from gesturing to an ancient yet contemporary biblical woman to an imperial portrait bust of Christ. The connections implied reflect a simultaneously ancient and religious connotation upon the African figure.

The ideas expressed within the *Stanza del Moro* act as a microcosm of the larger themes present in Borghese international politics. The prominence of the African figure represents the public message expressed by the Borghese concerning foreigners in Rome circa 1600. Though the gypsy seems to have fallen in stature in the four decades between Francucci and Manilli, the religiously driven narrative imbues *Il Moro* with a politically charged significance. In expanding outward in Chapter Three to view the situation of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Rome, eye-witness accounts of African visitors, and select African groups within the city will offer a sense of the public reception of Africans in Rome and the Borghese drive to incorporate Africa into the Catholic fold.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 102-103.

¹⁰⁵ Jean Devisse and Michel Mollat. *The Image of the Black in Western Art: From the Early Christian Era to the "Age of Discovery"* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1979), vol. II, part 2, 288, n. 126.

Chapter 3: The African Element: The Congolese and the Borghese

The preconceived notion of the Italian peninsula as a Eurocentric society contrasts sharply with the actual early modern Papal agenda. Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Holy See actively sought connections with various foreign communities around the world. The city of Rome cultivated and maintained a particularly long-standing connection with the African continent during this period. Two sub-Saharan societies emerged as pivotal connections for the papacy, and contact with them may illuminate the history and ultimate message of *Il Moro*. The land of Ethiopia emerged in Roman consciousness in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a community rooted in the origins of the Christian faith. The Kingdom of the Congo then took precedence in the century following as a coveted new convert to the religion. Stemming from these Sub-Saharan ties, the African presence in Rome was felt in two modes: in documentation, both literary and visual, and in the physical presence of ambassadorial and religious delegations.

The Traditional Connection

Early modern European scholars found the vagaries of the African continent a constant source of interest. The term “Ethiopian” or “Abyssinian” was interchangeable with “African” throughout the early modern period and became synonymous with black African features. The “land of Ethiopia” as a topographical location was amorphous; without first-hand knowledge of the country, the borders of Ethiopia were only vaguely understood.¹⁰⁶ Knowledge of the historically Christian nation of Ethiopia in the early modern period was based largely on a fusion

¹⁰⁶ Kaplan, 52: prior to the Crusades, most information on Africa in Europe stemmed from ancient texts.

of the Ethiopian community with characters from the Bible, most notably the Queen of Sheba.¹⁰⁷ Questions abounded about the state of Ethiopia, particularly regarding its government and devotion to the Catholic faith. From the mid-twelfth century, the legendary Prester John, ruler of Ethiopia, provided a convenient locus on which to postulate theories on the nature of the African nation.

Documentation of Prester John first appeared in the twelfth century in the wake of the First Crusades to Jerusalem.¹⁰⁸ The fabled ruler embodied the European hope of and need for Christian expansion. This “extra-Islamic savior of Christendom,” in the words of the scholar Paul Kaplan, quickly evolved into a descendant of one of the three Magi, the biblical kings who traveled to Bethlehem in honor of the birth of Christ.¹⁰⁹ Over time, as Europeans came to understand more about Africa and the ethnographic appearance of sub-Saharan African people, depictions of Prester John shifted from a Caucasian or Persian man into a black African.¹¹⁰ This in turn impacted the perception of the three Magi, calling into question their ethnicity. Scholarly debate surrounding this topic offered the explanation that, if the kings indeed came from three different lands, then they would have differed culturally, if not also ethnically. The first extant theological documentation asserting an African Magus came from John of Hildesheim’s late thirteenth-century *Historia Trium Regum*. In this work, the Magi came from the three known continents of Europe, Asia and Africa, the third king clearly identified as a black Ethiopian.¹¹¹ As the inheritor of this lofty association, the “Emperor of Ethiopia,” Prester John, in effect became the living third Magus.

¹⁰⁷ For early representations of the Queen of Sheba, and the evolution of her imagery, see Devisse and Molat, *From the Early Christian Era to the “Age of Discovery,”* Part II, vol. II, 18, 29-31.

¹⁰⁸ Kaplan, 45.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 44-45.

¹¹⁰ Devisse, *From the Early Christian Era to the “Age of Discovery,”* Part II, vol. II, 122; Kaplan, 49.

¹¹¹ Kaplan, 56, 62-68.

Throughout the fourteenth century, the ever-contemporary Prester John was consistently referred to as both king and priest, a shining example of the Christian triumph over the encroaching Islamic world. A deeper connection with Ethiopia became increasingly desirable to European society as the Crusades offered ever-dwindling results, and the pressure of Islamic domination increased.

Italians came face-to-face with their Ethiopian contemporaries at the Council of Florence. In 1439 a papal legate was sent to Ethiopia with a letter of invitation addressed to the illustrious emperor, Prester John.¹¹² The religious ruler of Ethiopia was not the only exotic guest invited; ambassadors from all over the Christian world were called upon to contribute to the ecumenical council that sought the standardization and regulation of Catholic doctrine and practice. Apparently, according to contemporaries, this invitation never reached the actual ruler of Ethiopia, Zere Jaqob.¹¹³ However, a similar invitation reached Jerusalem where a select number of Ethiopians resided as monks. Their abbot, Nicodemus, sent a small party of Ethiopians, together with a faction of Coptic Christians, to participate in the historic event.¹¹⁴

At the close of the Council of Florence, the Ethiopian ambassadors expressed an interest in seeing the great Christian relics of Rome, most particularly the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul, before returning to their homes. In the diary of a contemporary, Paolo Letij Petronio, the Africans were invited at the behest of Pope Eugenius IV to view the most precious treasures of the realm. The ambassadors met with various city governors and prominent citizens during this

¹¹² P. Mauro da Lionessa, *Santo Stefano Maggiore degli Abissini e le relazioni Romano-Ethiopiche* (Vatican City, Topographia Poliglotta Vaticana 1929), 134-138: "Carissimo Filio Presbytero Johanni Imperatori Aethiopiae Illustrissimo."

¹¹³ This assumption is based on the account of the letter-bearer's travels by one of his companions, Thomas Bellaci, documented in Devisse, *From the Early Christian Era to the "Age of Discovery,"* part II, vol. II, 117, n. 180-181; this, however, is contested in other texts that assert the Ethiopians traveled to the Council from both Ethiopia and Jerusalem: see da Lionessa, 138.

¹¹⁴ da Lionessa, 138.

visit and participated in a formal procession through the city. The occasion was considered so momentous that Pope Eugenius IV commissioned bronze bas reliefs in honor of the Ethiopians that were incorporated into the central doors of Old Saint Peter's (Fig 11).¹¹⁵

Commemorating the ambassadorial procession speaks volumes on the period interest in these visiting foreigners. On the bronze doors crafted by the artist Filarete, friezes of visiting dignitaries accompany large panels depicting God the Father, the Virgin Mary, and the Saints Paul and Peter.¹¹⁶ In the bottom right plaque, below the feet of St Peter, the Ethiopian delegation encounters Pope Eugenius IV in an ostentatious hall, presumably in Rome. Lifted on a dais, the Pope extends an open text to the most prominent visitor, allowing him to view its contents.¹¹⁷ The plaque culminates with a grand procession of the Ethiopians and Copts into the city of Rome. The delegation arrives on horseback, with a locally-dressed Italian man in the foremost position riding through the city gates with a trumpet in his hands. Directly behind, the most august ambassador rides a steed led by two more Italian men who process on foot. The throngs of viewers are implied by the four heads peaking over the city walls above the retinue and the pairs of courtly figures leaning against the railings of grand homes beside the city gate.

Filarete's documentation of these foreigners contains few African ethnographic details. Coptic hats depicted throughout indicate more the Egyptian element than any sub-Saharan connection. On average, only one African face is identifiable in each scene. This representational

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 142-144.

¹¹⁶ For more on the bronze doors by Filarete, completed in 1445, see Michele Lazzaroni and Antonio Muñoz, *Filarete, scultore e architetto del secolo XV* (Rome: W. Modes, Editore, 1908), 15-89. In addition to the inclusion of the Ethiopians, the top scene on the left door, below the feet of the Savior, depicts the Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaeologus and his retinue, which seems to include Africans within the party; Devisse and Mollat, *From the Early Christian Era to the "Age of Discovery,"* vol. II, part 2, 119-121.

¹¹⁷ da Lionessa, 142-143. There is some debate surrounding the identity of the leading figure of the Ethiopians and Copts, the most popular of which being Abbot Andrea of Egypt, Lazzaroni, 75.

choice is surprising considering the amount of documentation surrounding the ambassadorial visit that indicates the presence of black Africans in the retinue.

An interesting detail worth mentioning is Filarete's portrayal of ambassadorial attire: the mass of Ethiopians and Copts in audience with Eugenius IV on the left side of the Filarete panel appear to be wearing striped garments. This specific aspect evokes the gypsy references discussed in Chapter Two. The striped attire of these exotic visitors, as depicted on the bronze doors, may have been the stem from which the local conflation of African and gypsy culture originated.¹¹⁸

In response to this Ethiopian ambassadorial visit, Pope Eugenius IV offered a Roman center to the African nation, the church of Santo Stefano Maggiore degli Abissini. Located within the Vatican complex, the small church extends westward from the apse of Old St Peter's Basilica.¹¹⁹ In 1539, a hospice was added to Santo Stefano, purchased by Pope Paul III Farnese, who, as discussed earlier, was a significant influence on his papal namesake, Pope Paul V.¹²⁰

Santo Stefano Maggiore acted as a center for visiting pilgrims and was allowed the freedom to practice Ethiopian rituals, rather than the strict Catholic mass. Due to this sanctioned space, the number of visiting Africans in Rome increased. Johannes Potken, a Roman priest and translator of the Ethiopian language, described a nominal presence of African priests in the city in his personal diary in 1513, while only a decade later, another eye-witness, Giovanni Leone

¹¹⁸ The significance of this detail will be revisited again in Chapter Four.

¹¹⁹ da Lionessa, 174: though the Ethiopians were given Santo Stefano, the Ethiopian ambassadors did not stay there, but rather as guests at the Cancelleria.

¹²⁰ See Chapter Two. Interestingly, Paul V restored Filarete's doors in 1619, adding his own inscription, "Paulus V Pont Max / Restauravit A Pontif XV," Lazzaroni, 87-88.

Africano, argued that priests, “sing[ing] by the sun,” could be seen everywhere, and most particularly in Rome.¹²¹

The number of African priests recorded at Santo Stefano steadily increased throughout the sixteenth century, with over thirty priests in residence by 1588.¹²² The center welcomed priests from various orders, and fostered Ethiopian studies in Rome.¹²³ The Borghese Pope, in accord with his predecessor Paul III Farnese, continued to patronize Santo Stefano Maggiore; a *breve* from 1607 indicates the continued Papal support of the African church and hospice.¹²⁴ Unfortunately, relations with Ethiopia turned sour early in Paul V’s reign due to the ascension of the Ethiopian Emperor Susnios, a loudly anti-Catholic ruler who denounced Papal control.¹²⁵ The loss of this connection must have urged Paul V to expand his political horizons in order to maintain contact with the African continent.¹²⁶ The timely interest of the newly converted Kingdom of the Congo offered just such an association, one that was as desirable for the papacy as for the Congolese.

Contemporary Contact

At the outset of his reign, Paul V inherited a domain spanning four continents.

Missionaries from religious orders engaged in regular expeditions across the globe in an effort to

¹²¹ da Lionessa, 186: Giovanni Leone Africano wrote “Da lei [cioè dall’Etiopia] vengono certi religiosi frati, i quali hanno i loro visi segnati col fuoco, e si veggono per tutta l’Europa e specialmente a Roma.”

¹²² *Ibid*, 187-188.

¹²³ In 1549, under the support of Pope Paul III, Johannes Potken produced the first translation of the New Testament in Ethiopian. The following year, another Catholic priest, Father Pietro Paolo Gualtieri di Arezzo, translated the Ethiopian Mass of the Apostles into Latin.

¹²⁴ da Lionessa, 175: “Da oltre cento anni, come si nota nei censuali predetti [della Basilica Vaticana] per concessione del Capitolo, abitano nella detta chiesa [di S. Stefano Maggiore] gli Abissini Etiopi o Indiani, ai quali il Santissimo Signor nostro dà gli alimenti, e la Basilica nostra dà la chiesa e l’abitazione.”

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 238.

¹²⁶ Richard Gray, “A Kongo Princess, the Kongo Ambassadors and the Papacy,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 29, fasc. 2 (May 1999): 150: the author discusses how such connections with Christian Africa became of vital importance to the Curia.

expand the Catholic world.¹²⁷ This voracious desire for expansion is most accurately commented upon by the Discalced Carmelite Pietro della Madre di Dio, who wrote in 1605 that “Come l’apostolo Paolo, il papa vuol abbracciare tutto il mondo.”¹²⁸ This need to “embrace the world” was largely spurred by the reputation of Paul V’s direct predecessor, Clement VIII Aldobrandini, who first initiated Papal contact with the Congo. The resulting competition with the Aldobrandini pope impacted the initiatives in diplomacy enacted by Paul V throughout his reign.¹²⁹

A surprisingly deep connection existed between the Borghese Papacy and the Congolese government in the first decade of the seventeenth century. The tie was mutually beneficial. With the Ottoman Empire encroaching upon the Christian world in the Eastern Mediterranean, Pope Paul V sought to fortify Christian society by strengthening ties with the fiercely Catholic Congolese monarchy. King Alvaro II of the Congo equally stood to gain from the connection with the papacy, hoping to free the Congo from the constraints of the Portuguese who had established a trade monopoly on the shores of the African kingdom in the mid fifteenth century.¹³⁰

Among the various preexisting global ties to the Papacy, a burgeoning connection with the Congo was of particular interest to the Borghese pope. Prior to this connection, all correspondence between the Congo and the Papal States were directed through Portuguese ambassadors who had maintained control since colonizing the country. It was Clement VIII who

¹²⁷ Alexander Koller, *Die Außenbeziehungen der römischen Kurie unter Paul V Borghese (1605-1621)* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2008), 377, for example, the Congo was first evangelized by the Jesuits and later by the Discalced Carmelites under the reign of Paul V.

¹²⁸ Koller, 357.

¹²⁹ Giordano, 119, during his reign Paul V amassed over eighty diplomatic missions around the world, twenty of which went to extraordinary destinations in Africa and East Asia.

¹³⁰ Margarite Hutchinson, ed., *A Report of the Kingdom of Congo, and of the Surrounding Countries; Drawn out of the Writings and Discourses of the Portuguese, Duarte Lopez, by Filippo Pigafetta, in Rome, 1591* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), xiv-xv, 70-78.

offered the first method of communication outside Portuguese avenues by inviting the Congolese to send ambassadors directly to Rome.¹³¹

In 1608, after years of detours and obstacles the Ambassador from the Congo, Antonio Manuele Nsaku Ne Vunda, arrived in Rome, together with his greatly diminished retinue.¹³² The Congolese Ambassador's health was in such a poor state that the grandiose plans for his entry into the city were canceled. Antonio Manuele was taken directly to his sickbed in the Vatican Palace. Within a week's time, the Pope himself gave the Ambassador his last rights, and the African man passed away.¹³³

This was not the conspicuous occasion that Pope Paul V had originally envisioned. The orchestrated entrance of the Congolese ambassador into Rome was to be a monumental occasion; the ambassador would have led a grand procession through Rome on the Feast Day of the Epiphany.¹³⁴ Though this holy day holds little significance in the twenty-first century, in the early modern period the Day of the Epiphany, January 6th or 8th, was commemorated in honor of the three biblical Magi who visited the Christ Child at his birth in Bethlehem. The Ambassador would have traveled in a highly visible solemn procession across Rome, culminating at the Vatican Palace, to visit the materialization of Christ on earth, Pope Paul V, in much the same manner as a Biblical Magus before the Christ Child.¹³⁵

In and of itself, the Congolese procession would have been a grandiose, if ephemeral, instance of the African presence in Rome. Though the spectacle did not come to fruition as

¹³¹ Gray, 147.

¹³² Ibid, 147-149; When Ambassador Antonio Manuele left the Congo in 1604, he traveled with at least twenty-five men. When the group finally arrived in Rome in January of 1608, the number of companions had dwindled to four. The pitiful survival rate and lengthy travel time seems primarily the product of Portuguese and Spanish intervention. The Congolese were detained on numerous occasions en route to Italy.

¹³³ Ibid, 149.

¹³⁴ Teobaldo Filesi, *Roma e Congo all'inizio del 1600: Nuove Testimonianze* (Como: Casa Editrice Pietro Cairoli, 1970), 34.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 34.

planned, the macabre turn of events fostered a new use for the accoutrements of public display: the procession of the Epiphany became the funeral of Antonio Manuele. The brief visit of the African ambassador, including glimpses of his funerary cavalcade, is documented in an engraving with significantly classicizing undertones (Fig 12).¹³⁶ This planned presentation of a black African to Roman society is effectively one of the first concrete instances of the Roman propagation of the African Magus.

Although various northern European countries had fostered the concept of the African Magus in depictions of the *Adoration of the Magi* throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, many Italian principalities felt no inclination to adopt the African king.¹³⁷ At first glance, Rome seems to have consistently followed in this tradition.¹³⁸ However, the Congolese Ambassador's evocation of an "Oriental" king casts Roman reception in a new light.¹³⁹ This recently discovered circumstance forces a reevaluation of the Roman use of African imagery. Perhaps the principal African representations within the city were not propagated through permanent paintings and sculptures, but rather in ephemera, such as the highly visible arrival of the Congolese envoy.

In this vein, additional imagery only just uncovered in the spring of 2010 adds weight to this new outlook on the presence of the African face in Rome; two frescoes decorating the

¹³⁶ Though the ambassador is in contemporary, European attire in the central frame of the engraving, the funerary procession in the bottom right corner evokes ancient Roman triumphal procession imagery. Additionally, Antonio Manuele is depicted as the traditional supplicant kneeling at the feet of the Pope-as-Emperor in the upper left panel.

¹³⁷ Kaplan, 113-115.

¹³⁸ The first public *Adoration of the Magi* scene to incorporate the African Magus within the city known to the author is a bas relief in Santa Prudenziata by Pietro Paolo Olivieri in 1599; Steven Ostrow, "Playing with the Paragone: The Reliefs of Pietro Bernini: For Rudolf Preimesberger," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 67 Bd., H. 3 (2004): 329-364.

¹³⁹ Filesi, 34, n. 43; "Quo die (Epiphaniae) credebamus eum in Urbem solemniter ingressurum fuisse et quasi Magorum memoriam renouaturum, qui ab Oriente hac die venerunt adorare Dominum. E hic ab Oriente et extremis Africae finibus ad Urbem Ecclesiae Catholicae Caput, ad Christi vicarium venerandum et adorandum eique nomine sui Regis oboedientiam praestandam venerat..."

exterior of private palazzi in the city center showcase African faces in profile. These frescos are found on the Via Giubbonari, and Via del Pellegrino, both streets emanating from the centrally located piazza, Campo de' Fiori. Though the iconography of the face on Via Giubbonari is difficult to identify,¹⁴⁰ the face on Via del Pellegrino is definitely an African King, complete with golden robes and ostentatious crown (Fig 13). Positioned on one of the original primary roads to the Vatican, the Via del Pellegrino fresco implies the inclusion of Africans into the Roman concept of Christianity.

No specifics are known about these two newly rediscovered frescoes: neither work has been published. The fresco of the African king on Via del Pellegrino seems similar to the work of Polidoro da Caravaggio, a mid-sixteenth-century Roman fresco painter who managed one of the more well-known workshops that specialized in façade fresco commissions.¹⁴¹ In addition to the prominent African profile contained within the central roundel, two subsidiary roundels with indecipherable portraits (possibly representing the other two Magi) reside above the windows flanking the African. Classicizing grisaille figures reside between the three roundels and unify the composition. Though I cannot comment definitively on the date of this fresco, I would assert that the painting style indicates the mid-sixteenth century.

Beyond the significance of age, the Via del Pellegrino fresco associates again the African man with antiquity: the profile encapsulated in a round frame, reminiscent of numismatic portraiture, is effectively encompassed by the classicizing grisaille. The very existence of both frescos of Africans in the city center indicate a stronger local interest in African representations than previously assumed. If we are to believe that the African profile on Via del Pellegrino is an

¹⁴⁰ It is debatable whether the Via Giubbonari profile is of an African Magus or a heraldic symbol.

¹⁴¹ For more on Polidoro da Caravaggio, see Alessandro Marabottini, *Polidoro da Caravaggio*, vol. I & II (Rome: Edizioni dell'Elefante, 1969).

African Magus, we have yet another instance of the inclusion of a sub-Saharan African in the Roman religious worldview.

To return to the ambassadorial procession, the concurrent dates of the ill-fated visit of Ambassador Antonio Manuele and the Cordier sculpture seem hardly coincidental. The Congolese ambassador arrived in Rome on January 3rd of 1608, and died by the 12th of the same month.¹⁴² The exact date of commission of *Il Moro* is unknown, but a series of payments to the artist were recorded by the Borghese: two vague payments are documented in April and September of 1607,¹⁴³ as well as a series of four payments over the course of the year 1609 in increments of 100 scudi for “buon conto di lavori di scoltura fatti e da farsi per servitio dell’Illustrissimo Signore Cardinale Borghese.”¹⁴⁴ It is possible that Cordier might have been commissioned to create *Il Moro* early in 1607 in preparation for the long-awaited arrival of the Congolese Ambassador, much like the commemorative medallion that Pope Paul V also commissioned that year, depicting the meeting that soon would have occurred between the Pope and the African envoy in different costume (Fig 14).¹⁴⁵ However, if *Il Moro* was created specifically to be seen by the Congolese Ambassador, why then would the Borghese have commissioned an African of servant status? Here lies the crux of the problem: The initial servant-class connotations of the sculpture stand at odds with the visual elevation of the Congolese ambassador to such biblical heights as the embodiment of the African Magus. Though

¹⁴² Filesi, 38; as documented in a letter from the Ambassador of Venice, Francesco Contarini, which explained in detail the death of the Ambassador, and was dispatched on January 12th.

¹⁴³ Sylvia Pressouyre, *Nicolas Cordier*, vol. I, 259.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. I, 263-287.

¹⁴⁵ The inscription on the medallion proclaims “Et Congu agnoscit pastorem” or “And the Congo recognizes the shepherd.” Additionally, Paul V is not alone in his appraisal of the Congolese envoy. He is accompanied by a cardinal, presumably Scipione Borghese himself. Though this meeting never happened as depicted, the medallion showcases a manifestation of expectation on the side of the Borghese government. Figure 14 provided in this thesis is a print made from an original medallion, rather than a photograph of the medallion itself. Original medallions have yet to be found, though Filesi attests to their existence; Filesi, 33, n. 42.

there is a possibility that Cordier completed the sculpture as early as 1607, the later completion date circa 1609 is more plausible. An even later date may be attributed to the sculpture due to the acquisition of material—in 1611, Scipione Borghese reportedly received “otto pezzi di Pietre negre dette di Paragone.”¹⁴⁶ However, no funds to the artist coincide with this shipment or appear thereafter, and so this inventory notation may be connected to other works (or architectural details) within the Villa.

As discussed in chapter three, the visual similarities shared by *Il Moro* and the ancient *Servi*, and their connection to the porphyry bust of Christ, imbued the African man with a Christian context. Beyond their inclusion in a papal collection, all three sculptures may have been Christianized by their placement within the *Stanza del Moro*: the *Servi* and *Il Moro*, acting as servants to the porphyry bust relief of Christ on the southern wall, denote a Christian orientation. The Congolese procession planned for the ambassador’s arrival in 1608 symbolized homage paid by the African Magus to the Christ Child and so stressed African subservience to the Papacy. Even though Ambassador Antonio Manuele was visually equated with a King, he was still a servant of Christ as he traveled to “the Catholic ecclesiastical capital city, to venerate and adore Christ’s representative.”¹⁴⁷

The ephemeral procession of the Magus and the sculpture as religious servant both meet two central objectives: the inclusion of the African into the Christian faith, and the insertion of the African into religious history as enacted within the city. The ambassador-as-Magus is an

¹⁴⁶ Kalveram, 214; Pressouyre, *Nicolas Cordier*, vol. I, 285.

¹⁴⁷ “Quo die (Epiphaniae) credebamus eum in Urbem solemniter ingressurum fuisse et quasi Magorum memoriam renouaturum, qui ab Oriente hac die venerunt adorare Dominum. E hic ab Oriente et extremis Africae finibus ad Urbem Ecclesiae Catholicae Caput, ad Christi vicarium venerandum et adorandum eique nomine sui Regis oboedientiam praestandam venerat,” Filesi, 34, n. 43.

incorporation of the African into biblical history, into the history of the Catholic world.¹⁴⁸

Likewise, *Il Moro*'s place within the Villa Borghese, as a site filled with antique fragments and references, effectively envelopes the African with the ancient Roman identity propagated by the Borghese. The performative message of deference to the papacy broadcast in both instances successfully married the desires of both parties, the Papacy and the Congo, and solidified the friendship between nations.

To return briefly to the gypsy connection explored in chapter three; though unusual, the African-as-gypsy is not necessarily incongruous with the Borghese message. A similar act of insertion occurs in the utilization of gypsy references. Through direct connections with *La Zingarella* and the *Camillus* sculptures, and in more tangential ties such as the Filarete bronze doors, Cordier's work is imbued with the early modern concept of gypsy culture. Whether this was done consciously or not, the early modern conflation of the contemporary gypsy with biblical history effectively bolsters the message of a living, biblical antiquity.

Il Moro functions therefore as an antique reference, a part of Roman history, and the embodiment of an African Magus. This inclusion into Roman society by the Borghese consciously reinterpreted modern connections in order to fabricate an ancient noble status for the Congolese empire. This layering of significance successfully transforms *Il Moro* into a highly charged object within the program of Borghese collection. The efficacy with which *Il Moro* traverses time is as much a product of the artist as a result of the period understanding of temporality, a significant cultural development that will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

¹⁴⁸ For more on the creation of the African Magus in western art, see Kaplan.

Chapter 4: A Question of Intent: The assimilation of disparate elements

As has been proposed in this thesis thus far, two foreign bodies coexist in the figure of *Il Moro*: the ancient fragment, and the African. Isolated from its own time, the fragment lingers within *Il Moro* and imbues the African with antiquity. This conflation is amplified by the original location of the sculpture within the Borghese collection and the narratives constructed by the calculated arrangement of collection materials. Contemporaneously, the African acted as both a member of the Borghese collection, and as a reference to Borghese international politics at a time when the European understanding of the African continent evolved from a perception of a mythic territory into a real geographic location. Contact with the Kingdom of the Congo helped forge this new perspective. The two sides of *Il Moro* combine to create a sociopolitical message that benefited both the Borghese family and the political aspirations of the Kingdom of the Congo, and reflect the ever-evolving makeup of early modern international politics.

Like many of the Christian churches in Rome, the African man created by Nicolas Cordier is composed of spolia. Cordier's African traverses time in the physical and symbolic appropriation of antiquity. In this way *Il Moro* is resolutely a product of the early modern period; the sculpture is both an embodiment of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century concept of antiquity and a manifestation of perceived proximity.

The early modern Roman existed in a world of fragmented bodies. Religious reliquaries and votive offerings competed for attention with the ancient Roman fragments regularly disinterred throughout the city. This parceling of the body and reverence for disembodied forms made the seventeenth-century observer particularly disposed to accept fragmentary

compositions.¹⁴⁹ In this context, the decision to complete the alabaster torso, and furthermore to rely upon an African body, becomes significant. This instance of creative restoration goes beyond the general tendency to complete ancient works of art before placing them on display.¹⁵⁰ Had this been the case, Cordier could have simply supplanted an ancient fragmented head onto the alabaster torso, or could have fashioned one himself as with his restoration of the *Three Graces*.¹⁵¹ The sculpture of *Il Moro* was used to consciously incorporate the African into the Borghese visual message at a time when the family commissioned numerous artifacts—a commemorative medallion, engravings, frescoes, and even a monument—in remembrance of the African ambassador, Antonio Manuele Nsaku Ne Vunda.¹⁵² The strategic melding of ancient and modern foreign bodies within the Cordier sculpture raises the question of the sculpture’s ultimate meaning. What was the original intent of *Il Moro* as a commission of the Borghese family?

Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, in their latest collaboration, *Anachronic Renaissance*, look critically at the conflation of past and present in early modern art.¹⁵³ In their theory of substitution, an object’s physical age is subordinate to its ultimate significance as, for example, in the case of religious icons.¹⁵⁴ The content of the religious work and its reference to a venerable prototype generates its authenticity—the copy is comparable to its pictorial origin—while the work’s literal date of production is rendered secondary. The substitutional paradigm is

¹⁴⁹ Megan Holmes, “Ex-Votos: Materiality, Memory and Cult,” in *The Idol in the Age of Art: Objects, Devotions and the Early Modern World*, ed. Michael Cole and Rebecca Zorach (Burlington VA: Ashgate Publication Co., 2009), 163.

¹⁵⁰ Orietta Rossi Pinelli, “From the Need for Completion to the Cult of the Fragment,” in *History of Restorations of Ancient Stone Sculptures*, ed. Janet Burnett Grossman, Jerry Podany, and Marion True (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 2003), 61-74.

¹⁵¹ Pressouyre, *Nicolas Cordier*, vol. II, 390-391.

¹⁵² The objects are as follows; a commemorative medallion depicting the meeting of Paul V with Antonio Manuele; two engravings of the ambassador published in the year of his death, 1608; a frescoed lunette in the Sala Paolina in the *Scenes from the Life of Paul V* fresco cycle in the Vatican from 1610-1611; and finally a monument to Antonio Manuele in Santa Maria Maggiore by Francesco Caporale, erected in 1629. Bindman, 158-166.

¹⁵³ Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 86-87.

particularly compelling when applied to religious works of art, but does this theory still function effectively in the secular realm?

Il Moro contains an ancient alabaster fragment within the body itself. In so doing, the African acts much like a reliquary case that frames and presents this precious, ancient stone. The theory put forth by Nagel and Wood seems tantalizingly logical in the case of *Il Moro*: though the ancient skirt, as the “relic,” is irreplaceable, the “reliquary” – that which houses the relic – may be shaped to meet the needs of the viewer. These two foreign bodies, the fragment and the African, mutually contrast one another: the dark *nero di belgio* skin and ethnographic detail highlight the ancient alabaster, while the opulent material of the torso draws attention to the figure as a whole. Like any reliquary, the age of the case is subordinate to the relic within.

To further imbue the African with ancient connotations, Cordier chose to replicate an ancient African bust in the figure of *Il Moro*. Together with the African’s posture, which is in itself a direct reference to the ancient *Camillus* sculpture type, the African face supplements the identification of the sculpture’s “real” historical position. Collectively the composition projects the message of antiquity through a comprehensible visual language. Should there be any doubt regarding this interpretation, in the greater context of the Borghese collection, the *Servi* (or, more accurately, the Borghese *Camilli*) return the viewer again to the message of antiquity. From their adjacent position within the room, the postures of the *Servi* mirror that of *Il Moro* and effectively “impress” the African with ancient connotations in the *Stanza*.¹⁵⁵ Again the African body, as a receptacle for the alabaster fragment, emerges as a reliquary, and returns the viewer to the fragmentary body within while simultaneously completing the composition.

¹⁵⁵ Presicce, 55-61. The *Camillus* type is identified as a gypsy (Zingara) in the first publication of *Antiquarie Prospettiche* in the late fifteenth century. However, this designation is changed to a *servo* in the text’s republication in 1527.

Does this theory then relegate the African person to a subsidiary role in the composition? Again, we must bear in mind the conscious decision on the part of the artist to use a foreign body. As a conglomerate of subject matter, Cordier's African does not ultimately operate within the chain of replication Nagel and Wood identify as the substitutional mode, for there is no unifying origin. Rather the figure is isolated by its unique qualities. There are few life-sized, polychrome sculptures comparable to *Il Moro* in early seventeenth-century Italy.¹⁵⁶ In this light, *Il Moro* becomes more performative in nature, to use the term coined by Nagel and Wood as a mode of visual production in contrast with substitution, which stresses the creative and distinctive intervention of an artist. The sculpture emerges as Cordier's conscious reinvention of the subject.¹⁵⁷ Yet the theory of performativity, as a foil for the theory of substitution, does not adequately explain Cordier's sculpture either. Though compositional significance is in part generated directly from the conscious decisions of the artist and the moment of creation, Cordier's role as an artist or restorer is only nominally attested in period documentation.¹⁵⁸ *Il Moro* is treated like an ancient work of art in the Borghese collection, and effectively is one. The fact that the artist completely changed the ultimate form of the original composition into an African man does not negate these ancient connotations, but rather redirects them. This remnant of antiquity pulls the entire sculpture into the realm of the antique as conceptualized by the early modern viewer, and so the African is ancient by association.

As a modern composition of the artist, the African transforms the original intent of the alabaster skirt. The reciprocal relationship between fragment and frame produces an ancient yet

¹⁵⁶ The most remarkable example is La Zingarella, but even Cordier's representation of a gypsy is not ethnographically explicit.

¹⁵⁷ Nagel and Wood, "Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism," 403-404.

¹⁵⁸ Francucci, stanza 450; Francucci's mention of 'Il Franciosio' is the only known reference to the artist connected with *Il Moro* in the seventeenth century. This topic is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two of this thesis.

modern figure. Neither of the polarized camps promoted by Nagel and Wood strictly coincides with the link to the past generated by Cordier's *Il Moro*. Rather than divide the connection to antiquity from the "genius" of the artist, *Il Moro* simultaneously promotes both avenues of comprehension. A given work of art may inhabit various congruent levels of meaning, with any one concept potentially informing another. My intent is not to contradict the theories of substitution and performativity, but to shed light on their interconnected nature—I postulate that, at least in compositions such as *Il Moro*, the one does not exist without the other. Though Nagel and Wood do allude to the conscious mix of substitution and performativity in the cinquecento, they do not comment on the applicability of this fusion in subsequent centuries. The authors go so far as to insinuate the loss of substitution over time.¹⁵⁹ Should this be the case, *Il Moro* would not have been classified as an ancient figure but rather understood as an entirely modern concept. The mere fact that Cordier's sculpture is identified as antique by period viewers problematizes this sequential trajectory.

Perhaps one of the clearest ways to illuminate the complexity of *Il Moro* as both an isolated incident and component of the larger Borghese collection is to compare Cordier's African figure with another contemporary representation. In the context of early seicento politics, the African is an entirely plausible reference to the Borghese conversational agenda. Their successful "conquest" of outlying nations such as the Congo would have been a source of great pride and of artistic subject matter as well. One need only consider the Borghese fresco cycle decorating the Sala Paolina in the Vatican to see the inspiration drawn from ambassadorial endeavors; Paul V is shown meeting various emissaries, including those of the Congo and Japan,

¹⁵⁹Nagel, Wood, "Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism," 413; Nagel, Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 296-299; the loss of the substitutional mode is credited to the advent of the concept of the forgery. This is seemingly coupled with the increasing frequency of displaying ancient sculptures in fragmentary form over the course of the cinquecento.

two of his most extravagant diplomatic connections.¹⁶⁰ Rather than commemorating the Congolese ambassador in a formal meeting, Paul V uncharacteristically broke with tradition by depicting the deathbed of Antonio Manuele, where the Pope administered the foreigner's Last Rights (Fig 15). In this intimate scene the Congolese ambassador and his retinue convey subservience to the Church as they humbly receive the Pope's blessing. All together the composition projects a cultural connection as a triumph of Christianity.¹⁶¹ In the process of conveying true conversion, all vestiges of unfamiliarity have been erased. The ambassador utterly lacks indigenous references. In comparison, Cordier's *Il Moro*, with its carefully constructed theme of antiquity, appears strange and unnecessary. If the sole objective of the Borghese was to highlight the assimilation of foreign societies into the Catholic fold, why not rely upon modern European visual cues—as in the fresco cycle—or otherwise culturally indigenous attire?

Il Moro grew out of a compositional tradition of classicizing representations disseminated throughout the early modern period. The earliest commentaries on Africa emerged from classical sources. The Nuremburg Chronicles, published into the late fifteenth century, promoted particularly fantastical representations of the people of Africa. According to this text, inhabitants of the African continent had absurdly large feet for shading their faces from the sun, or lived without heads, their facial features lodged in their chests. Such imagery was based not in fact but in the speculations of Pliny the Elder. Over time these literary prefigurations based on classical

¹⁶⁰ Koller, 371-372; in addition to the fresco lunette depicting the last rites of Antonio Manuele, Paul V is depicted in a formal meeting with Matsamune, the ambassador of Japan. The Japanese envoy came to Rome in 1616 with the hope of forming an alliance against the Tokugawa shogunate. For more on the Japanese ambassador, see J.A.F. Orbaan, *Documenti sul Barocco in Roma* (Rome: Società Romana di Storia Patria, 1920), 239-240.

¹⁶¹ It is interesting to note the Africans attending Paul V in the Pauline fresco. As mentioned in Chapter Three, when the Congolese ambassador arrived in Rome his retinue had diminished to only four attendants. The Africans to the left in the composition behind Paul V appear in religious garb and may be representatives from Santo Stefano degli Abissini. Though from completely different cultures, the Ethiopians may have been requested to the bedside of the Congolese ambassador in an attempt to make his final moments more comfortable.

texts gave way to more realistic documentation circulated by fifteenth- and sixteenth-century traders and explorers. Interestingly, as this classical textual connection fell away, the bond with antiquity was reaffirmed in symbolic visual manifestations. For example, in the early sixteenth-century woodcut prints of Hans Burgkmair the Elder, the inhabitants of New Guinea and Angola are depicted with surprising detail. According to Ashley West, Burgkmair classicizes his figures with contrapposto poses and inserts them into religiously charged compositions in order to foster proximity between the subject and the viewer.¹⁶² However, Burgkmair's figures retain their indigenous clothing and are often shown in a state of semi-nude disarray.¹⁶³ Cordier builds upon these new ethnographic representations to construct a figure that is deeply enmeshed in the classical conventions of the city. The consistent tradition of looking back in order to comprehend the modern world generated a referential understanding of time in the early modern period that dictated the perception of foreign societies. Cordier's *Il Moro* fostered this predisposition to equate the modern outsider with an ancient prototype.

As a result of international expansion, the mysterious makeup of the African continent began to change in European eyes as connections were forged with distinct African societies. Around the date of commission of the Cordier sculpture, Papal Rome had established a new political alliance with the Congolese. This relationship was comparable to and effectively replaced the Pope's preexisting partnership with Ethiopia that had only recently disintegrated.¹⁶⁴ New bonds with the Kingdom of the Congo maintained the reputation of Papal Rome as an

¹⁶² Ashley D. West, "Between Artistry and Documentation: A Passage to India and the Problem of Representing New Global Encounters," in *Subject as Aporia in Early Modern Art*, ed. Alexander Nagel and Lorenzo Pericolo (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), 94-95. West asserts that the foreign family groupings portrayed in Burgkmair's woodcuts draw directly from representations of the Holy Family.

¹⁶³ It should be noted that Cordier's *Il Moro* does comply in part with this method of representation: unlike the *Servi*, the alabaster tunic of *Il Moro* falls from the left shoulder to expose the African's chest. Though not as explicit as Burgkmair's woodcuts, the different state of attire noticeably differentiates the African figure from the rest.

¹⁶⁴ da Lionessa, 238; in 1608 the loudly anti-Catholic Ethiopian ruler Susnios came to power, effectively severing the ties between the Papacy and the African nation.

international center and accomplished the Congolese objective of autonomy from the Portuguese. Like the Ethiopians before them, the Congolese actively travelled to the Papal court. By sending emissaries into the Papal territories, this African community began to be treated with the same level of deference and respect as any European nation.¹⁶⁵

Prior to this point the Portuguese treated the Congolese as found objects, possessions obtained at the moment of “discovery” in the mid-fifteenth century. This possessive mindset is mirrored in works like Burgkmair’s woodcuts, which allow the viewer an analytical perspective of the foreigner in his supposed habitat. In circumventing the Portuguese and appealing directly to the Pope, the Congolese effectively changed their standing in world politics.¹⁶⁶ Their newly established religious and historical foundations are reflected in the sculpture of *Il Moro*. In light of the Congolese connection to the Pope, a presentation of the African in foreign apparel as a natural curiosity on display like Burgkmair’s woodcuts would be inappropriate. Cordier’s African is neither a member of the fantastical historical tribes vaunted by Pliny, nor a contemporary African in hedonistic disarray. Rather the figure is clothed in a creative reinterpretation of recognizably Roman attire. Though the classical reference still separates the African from the modern Roman populace, the message is far more inclusive.

In addition to this, *Il Moro* maintains a religious undertone that further shapes the composition. As noted in Chapter Two, the dialogue between the porphyry bust of Christ in the *Stanza del Moro* with *Il Moro* and the *Servi* forcefully directs the viewer to place this ancient African within a Christian context. Similarly, had the ambassadorial visit of Antonio Manuele gone according to plan, the Roman public would have been privy to a reenactment of the

¹⁶⁵ Gray, 145-147; the papal representative, Fabio Biondi, first appealed for Congolese independence from the Portuguese in 1595. Pope Clement VIII first invited the Congolese to send an ambassador to Rome in 1597 and stressed their need to pay homage “as do all Christian Kings.”

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 150.

Adoration of the Magi on the feast day of the Epiphany.¹⁶⁷ Antonio Manuele, as the African Magus, would have processed through the city to pay homage to Paul V as the embodiment of Christ on earth. Though his reception did not go according to plan, the visit of the Congolese envoy was still strategically beneficial. Even in death, Antonio Manuele was paraded through the city in a funerary procession, from the Vatican to Santa Maria Maggiore, in public recognition of his honorary status as a religious ambassador.¹⁶⁸ The Borghese capitalized on this moment to promote positive, inclusionary imagery of Africans. Having lost the Ethiopian faction, the Congolese presented the redeeming union necessary to maintain a visible connection with Africa. As stated above, *Il Moro* was not commissioned in isolation, but was accompanied by a number of commemorative objects and images employed to mark the occasion.¹⁶⁹ The African Magus was thus no longer Ethiopian, but Congolese.

As a foreign body on multiple levels, *Il Moro* is predisposed to express the “otherness” of the African figure. The proximity of the African to the early modern viewer is at first heightened through the visual language of Roman antiquity. The foreigner is made familiar through posture, precedent, and notable accoutrements. This classicizing proximity, however, simultaneously widens the gap between the subject and its viewer. The African man, as a member of ancient society, is decidedly not a member of contemporary Roman culture. A connection with the Roman past maintains a barrier to those in the present. Cordier could have dressed the African in modern attire had his objective been total assimilation. In addition to the fresco cycle in the Sala Paolina, commemorative engravings of Antonio Manuele from the early seventeenth century also make use of this tactic (Fig 12). Instead *Il Moro* negotiates a fine balance between visual

¹⁶⁷ Bindman, 160.

¹⁶⁸ The funerary procession is commemorated in one of the engravings from the year of his death, 1608 (see Fig 12); Ibid, 163.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 158-166.

accordance and division. The sculpture utilizes the recreation of antiquity to highlight differences even as the reference enforces proximity.

The product of Cordier's mix of imagery is simultaneously approachable and evocative. *Il Moro* is an anachronism as a reliquary devoted to antiquity, in which the boundary between the fragment and its frame has effectively dissolved. To the untrained viewer, the body is whole, the African is complete. Yet when explored critically, the figure emerges as a pastiche. While the African body encases the ancient relic, *Il Moro*, as a representative of African society, is impregnated with ancient connotations and inserted into the historical religious narrative of the Christian world. In the context of the Borghese collection the African propagated the Papal message of Roman Catholic dominance in the international arena and simultaneously promoted the Congolese and their usurpation of the Ethiopian position. In essence *Il Moro* is more than an exotic object; Cordier's African is a member of ancient Roman society and, like Antonio Manuele, a servant to Christ.

Conclusion

Il Moro, as a Christian antiquity, is a representative of the contemporary connection forged between the Papal government of Pope Paul V Borghese and the Kingdom of the Congo. As an ancient work of art, the African figure simultaneously bridges the geographic divide while maintaining a sense of the “other,” the foreigner that is intrinsic to the Borghese political message. The Christian connotations superimposed upon this ancient figure reflect the religious empire amassed under Paul V’s reign. As a commentary on Congolese conversion, *Il Moro* references the new position of the Congolese as inheritors of the Biblical tradition and thus the sculpture helps to incorporate the African even as it isolates.

The future of this research lies primarily in the still nascent study of early modern connections between Rome and the African continent. As more representations of black Africans are brought to light, like the newly-discovered frescoes in downtown Rome,¹⁷⁰ the importance of the African continent to Italian society will become clearer. The largest obstacle to overcome is the preconceived notion that Italians were disinterested in African people. The imagery gathered thus far displays a fascinating negotiation of personal and foreign identity in the early modern era.

Various points of cultural interaction between Italy and the African continent deserve further exploration. Religious epicenters in Rome that fostered connections with the African continent via missionary endeavors would be an excellent initial point of departure. Known missionary work of the Franciscans, and later the Jesuits, in Ethiopia and the Congo predate the seventeenth-century missions of orders like the Discalced Carmelites who worked during the

¹⁷⁰ See Chapter Three.

reign of Paul V.¹⁷¹ Innovations in cultural understanding resulting from these political and religious connections may further expand our knowledge of the artwork produced at this time. For example, how did these missionaries come to perceive their African fold?

Churches like Santo Stefano degli Abissini, discussed in Chapter Three, are accredited with the importation of Africans into the local Roman community. The level to which other churches in Rome welcomed minorities into local devout lay societies is still unknown. The smattering of early modern African saints known today alludes to an inclusion of Africans in ecclesiastic communities in Italy as well,¹⁷² but again this question remains largely unexplored. City censuses or church records could provide the source material necessary to better explain the African connection in this capacity.

With regard to the temporal conflation of past and present in Cordier's African, this theory must now be applied to other contemporary works of art with foreign subject matter. The validity of this theory rests in its applicability. The frequency with which foreigners are depicted with classical references in posture and attire is undeniable. Antonio Manuele, for example, is characterized by a diverse range of visual markers: as a European on his deathbed; a classical African in his monument; and as an indigenous African when meeting with the Pope. Many scholars, like Ashley West, believe that allusions to the Roman past help to bridge the gap between European culture and the origins of the foreigner.¹⁷³ Though I do agree with this theory up to a point, the premise does not account for the barrier that materializes when the foreigner is

¹⁷¹ The Franciscans first arrived in Ethiopia in the 13th century; da Lionessa, 124. The Jesuits traveled to Ethiopia during the life of Saint Ignatius Loyola; Gray, 148. The Carmelites traveled to the Congo in 1610; Gray, 150.

¹⁷² For example, the Franciscan San Benedetto, who was canonized in 1807, died in a Franciscan monastery in Palermo in 1589; Giovanna Fiume and Marilena Modica, ed, *San Benedetto il moro: santità, agiografia e primi processi di canonizzazione* (Palermo: Città di Palermo, Assessorato alla Cultura : Biblioteca Comunale, 1998).

¹⁷³ West, 94. According to West, classical references help to "normalize" foreign subject matter and make the material more accessible.

classicized. Even replete with classical references, the African is still not a member of early modern society. Though period viewers may have considered themselves direct descendents of ancient Rome, they still comprehended the difference between cultures past and their own. In the case of *Il Moro*, complete assimilation is avoided in deference to a politically charged message.

Additionally, a reevaluation of Nicolas Cordier and his oeuvre will undoubtedly alter the perception of *Il Moro*. Since Sylvia Pressouyre's publication there have been very few scholarly analyses of the artist's work. There is something to be said for the stylistic similarities touched on in this thesis regarding the Borghese *Servi*, as well as a few obscure polychrome compositions in the Borghese collection. Cordier has never been officially connected to these works of art. The repetition of form and style evident between these compositions, however, indicate at the very least the hand of a follower of Cordier, if not the artist himself. Should the *Servi* prove to be restorations by Cordier, this detail would surely impact the conclusions derived from the schematic layout of the Villa Borghese *Stanza del Moro*.

Nicolas Cordier's life-sized African figure is an excellent example of the radically expanding Italian worldview during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As future scholars delve into the obscure origins of African representations in Italy, I believe that Cordier's work will become increasingly important to the overall narrative of cultural connection. The sociopolitical links established between the Italian peninsula and the African continent during the early modern period directly influence the emergent visual culture. This Sub-Saharan African figure is thus more than a possession or indicator of opulence, but a powerful reference to the Borghese desire for international religious and governmental dominance.

Images

Figure 1



Nicolas Cordier

Il Moro, 1607-1612

Image courtesy of the Louvre Museum, Paris, France (MR 303)

Figure 2

Il Moro, Schematic rendering of cracks across the alabaster torso, front view
Courtesy of Erin Giffin

Figure 3

Il Moro, Schematic rendering of cracks across the alabaster torso, rear view
Courtesy of Erin Giffin

Figure 4

Servo, restored in the 16-17th centuries
 Courtesy of the Louvre Museum, Paris
 (MA 2222)

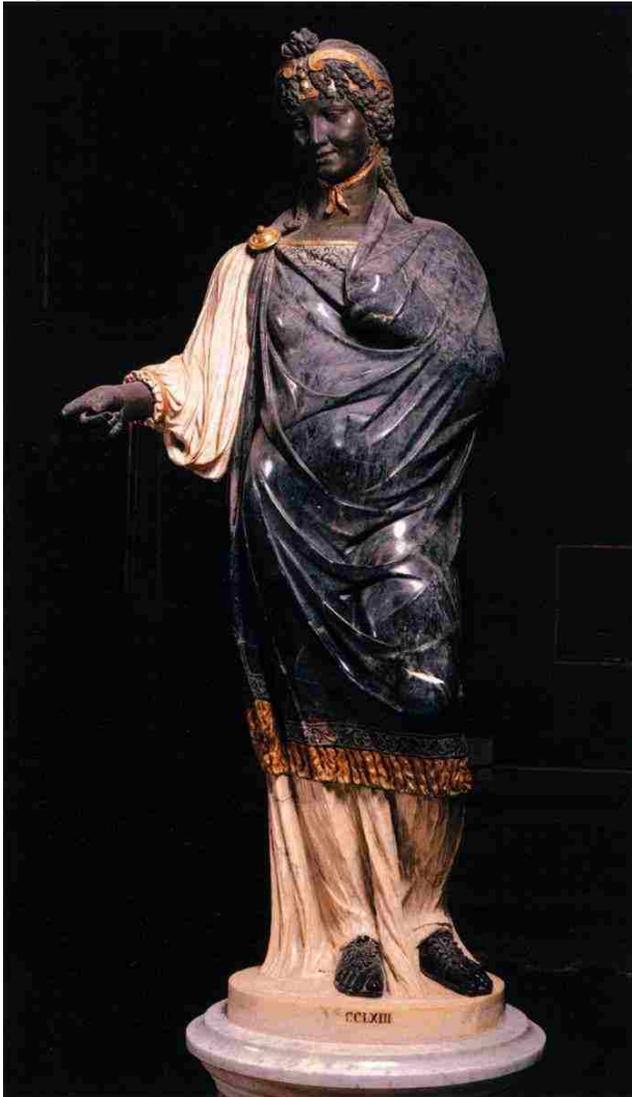
Figure 5

Servo, restored in the 16th-17th centuries
 Courtesy of the Louvre Museum, Paris
 (MA 2223)

Figure 6

Muse (Petite Herculanaise), 2nd century CE
Villa Farnese (inv. 6404)

Figure 7

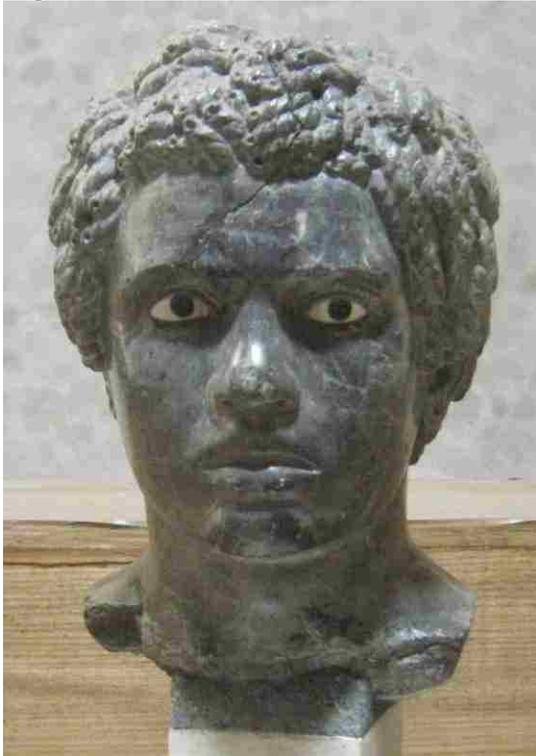


Nicolas Cordier
La Zingarella, 1607-1612
 Villa Borghese, Rome (Nr. CCLXIII)

Figure 8



Nicolas Cordier
Sant' Agnese, 1604-1605
 Sant' Agnese fuori le mura, Rome
 Image courtesy of Erin Giffin

Figure 9

Head of an African (Testa di negro)
 2nd century CE
 Museo Nazionale Romano (49596)
 Image courtesy of Erin Giffin

Figure 10

Francesco Caporale
Funerary bust of Antonio Manuele Nsaku Ne Vunda, 1629
 Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome

Figure 11

Filarete
Ethiopians meeting with Pope Eugenius IV; Ethiopians processing through Rome, 1445
 Old Saint Peter's, Rome

Figure 13

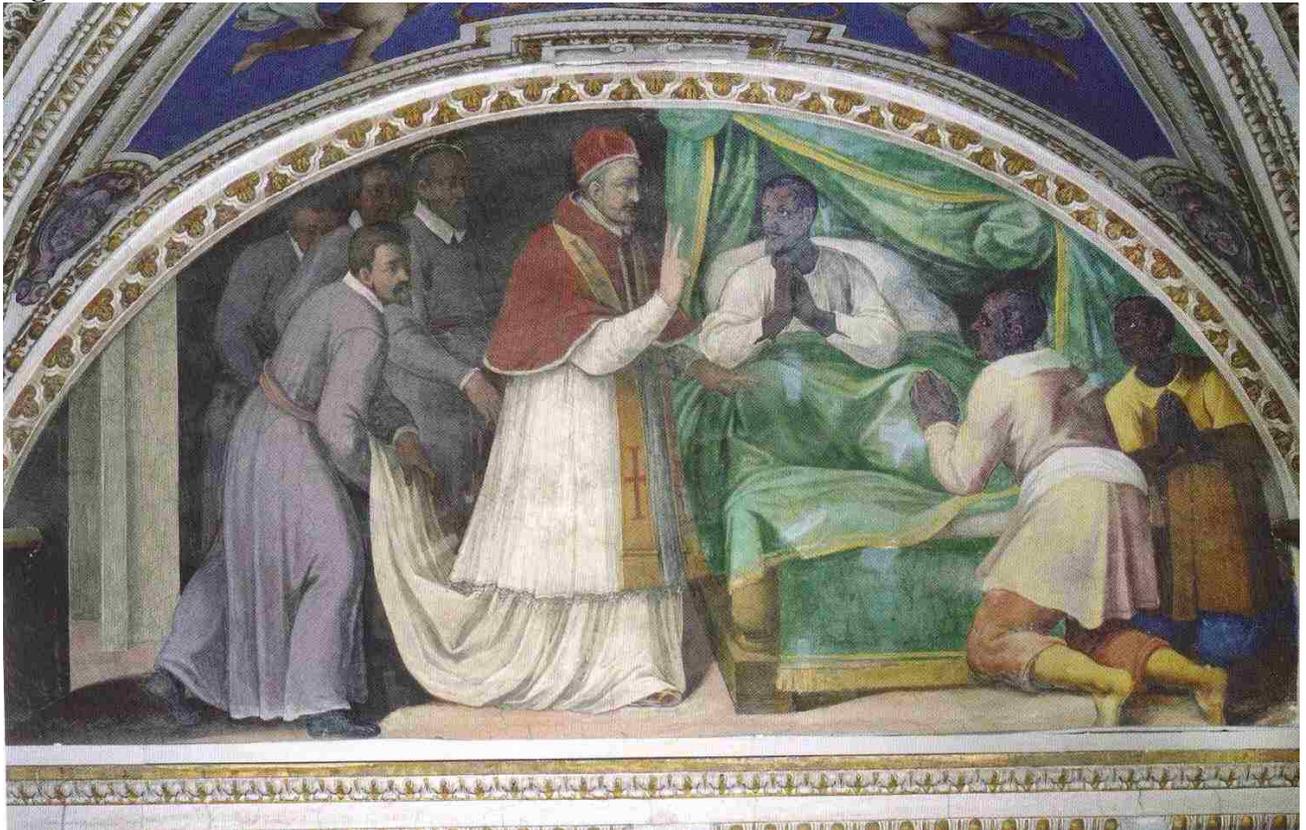


African Magus, 16th century
Via del Pellegrino, Rome
Image courtesy of Erin Giffin

Figure 14



Paul V meets with Antonio Manuele Nsaku Ne Vunda, 1607
Commemorative medallion

Figure 15

Giovanni Battista Ricci

Pope Paul V and Antonio Manuele Nsaku Ne Vunda, 1610-1611

Sala Paolina, Vatican City

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