

Steffi Roettgen



Anton Raphael Mengs
The portrait of José Nicolás de Azara

TRINITY FINE ART

ANTON RAPHAEL MENGES

(Aussig 1728 – Rome 1779)

Portrait of José Nicolas de Azara, Marquis of Nibbiano
(Barbuñales 5 December 1730 – Paris 26 January 1804)

After 1774

oil on canvas, 82.6 x 63.5 cm, 32½ x 25 in

PROVENANCE

Probably Giuliana Falconieri,
Principessa di Santacroce

¹ The slightly smaller Prado
version measures 77 x 61.5 cm

² S. ROETTGEN, *Anton
Raphael Mengs 1728-
1778, Das malerische und
zeichnerische Werk*, Munich
1999, cat. 193.

³ J.N. AZARA (ed.), *Opere di
Antonio Raffaello Mengs.
Primo Pittore della Maestà di
Carlo III. Re di Spagna*, 2 vols.,
Parma 1780, vol. I, p. LXXIV.

⁴ J.N. AZARA, C. FEA, *Opere
di Antonio Raffaello
Menges, primo Pittore
del Re cattolico Carlo III*,
Pubblicate dal Cavaliere D.
Giuseppe Niccola d'Azara e
in questa edizione corrette
ed aumentate dall'avvocato
Carlo Fea, Rome 1787,
p. XXIV.

⁵ E. BASSI (ed.), *A. Canova. I
Quaderni da Viaggio*, *Civiltà
veneziana*, Fonti e testi II, first
series, no 2, Rome-Venice
1959, p. 137.

⁶ B. CACCIOTTI, *La collezione
di José Nicolas di Azara:
studi preliminari*, in
"Bollettino d'arte" LXXXVIII,
1993, pp. 1-54.

This is a second version of the painting that entered the Museo del Prado in 2013, coming from the collection of Azara's heirs¹. The Madrid portrait bears on the reverse of the canvas a dedication penned by the artist to his friend the sitter, who is depicted in the act of reading: "*Menges to his friend in Florence in January 1774*"². In Mengs' biography, first published in 1780, Azara himself, then *Procurator of the King at the Court of Rome* with the Spanish Embassy in Rome, tells us of the circumstances surrounding the painting of his portrait. Mengs painted the portrait while he was in Florence between 1773 and 1774, capturing the likeness of his friend who was passing through the city on his return from a diplomatic mission to the court of Parma³. Azara had also stopped off in Florence on his way to Parma in January 1774 and on that occasion he had encouraged the painter to return to Madrid in order thus to fulfil his obligation to the Spanish court. But on discovering that Mengs still had not departed two months later, Azara urged him once again to do so.



These are the circumstances in which the artist painted "*my portrait, and his friendship caused him to make a marvel of art*"⁴. Azara is likely to have taken the picture with him on his return to Rome, where Antonio Canova saw it on 4 June 1780⁵. Azara was forced to leave the Eternal City in 1798, also leaving behind him his substantial library and his collections of antiquities, paintings and drawings⁶ which were housed in the Palazzo di Spagna overlooking the square of the same name. A considerable part of his library was sold at auction in Rome in 1806, but a major portion of his art collections, including the portrait painted by Mengs, was transferred to Spain by order of his executor





and nephew Dionisio Bardaji y Azara (1760–1826), then *Auditor of the Apostolic Tribunal of the Roman Rota for the Kingdoms of the Crown of Aragon*.



Against a neutral backdrop which gets lighter towards the centre, thus throwing the sitter's head into greater relief, Azara is shown seated at a rustic table, dressed in elegant yet informal attire which sits well with his merry and friendly expression. He rests his right arm on the table, holding a book with his index finger marking his place, thus suggesting that he was caught by surprise while reading. This gesture, unusual in Mengs' portraits, depicts a precise instant, capturing a specific moment as the action unfolds.



A letter written by Azara to the engraver Mariano Salvador Carmona, Mengs' son-in-law, on 27 September 1781 tells us that *"the hand that served Mengs as a model was not mine, for I had no patience for it"* but that of *"the famous Nauman, a German Kapellmeister who was with us in Florence at that time"*⁷.

What the letter does not explain, on the other hand, is whether the haste to which Azara refers was due to the artist or the sitter. If we accept the latter to be the case, we should conclude that Mengs finished the portrait after Azara's departure but before he himself left Florence on 15 April 1774. Also, it has only recently been possible, thanks to Gudrun Maurer, to identify the figure of the *Kapellmeister* whom Azara mentions, as Johann Gottlieb Naumann (1741–1801), a composer of chamber music from Dresden who travelled in Italy from 1772 to 1774. He became acquainted with Mengs through his brother, the painter Friedrich Gotthard Naumann (1750–1821) who was studying with Mengs at the time and who accompanied him on his trip to Florence. Even though the musician was eleven years younger, his hand is in harmony with the rest of the portrait, merging perfectly with Azara's features. It was while observing both figures that Azara realised how similar their hands were.

In order to understand the reason behind the swap in the model for the sitter's hand, we should remember that Azara was able to spend only a few days in Florence, in other words the time strictly necessary for him to pose for his facial portrait, while Mengs, for his part, had to leave for Spain as hastily as possible – a move dictated by his commitments, as Azara himself had reminded him on more than one occasion. So in his determination not to leave the portrait unfinished, Mengs decided to use Naumann as his model, because completing

⁷ J.I. TELLECHEA IDIGORAS, *Cartas inéditas de Manuel Salvador Carmona a Eugenio Llaguno Amirola (1780-1781)*, in: *Academia, Anales y Boletín de la R. Ac. de Bellas Artes de San Fernando* Nr. 28, 1969, pp. 51-75, pp. 72-73; S. ROETTGEN, *Anton Raphael Mengs 1728-1779, Leben und Wirken*, Munich 2003, pp. 382-384, 593, p. 612 (NN 193), p. 593, G. MAURER, *Mengs y Azara testimonios de una amistad*, in S.F. SCHRÖDER, G. MAURER (ed.), *Mengs y Azara el retrato de una amistad*, catalogue of the exhibition in Madrid, 2013, Madrid 2013, pp. 14-15, p. 14.

Fig. 1 (opposite): Mengs, *Portrait of José Nicolas de Azara*, oil on panel, 77 x 61.5 cm, Madrid, Museo del Prado

the portrait on that occasion meant that he could entrust it to Naumann once it was finished so that the musician could deliver it to Azara on his return to Rome after Mengs had left for Spain. Naumann did indeed return to Rome, in fact he spent another seven years in the city with his brother's financial help. Thus it was probably he who delivered the finished portrait to Azara, because Mengs is unlikely to have taken the picture with him on his return journey to Spain, when he stopped in Parma, Milan and Turin and took almost three months to reach his final destination.

Given that the hand in the second version is identical to that in the first, it logically ensues that the replica is based entirely on the earlier version.



None of the known sources for Mengs' work mention of a second autograph copy of the portrait, yet despite our having no documentary evidence for the picture's history prior to the 1960s, there can be no question but that it is a fully autograph work by the master himself. Given that the first version was in Rome while Mengs was in Madrid from 1774 to January 1777, we may deduce that the second version was painted after Mengs' return to Rome, in other words some time between the spring of 1777 and late June 1779, a moment of the utmost tension and industry for him. The close bond of friendship between the two men is the sole plausible explanation for the fact that, despite Mengs' numerous commitments to the Spanish crown, the pope and other patrons, he still found time to produce an autograph replica of his friend's portrait. This time, however, he chose to paint it on canvas rather than on wood, which made for greater rapidity of execution. What is certain is that Azara was very close to him at this time, offering him strong moral support in the difficult circumstances with which he was having to cope. This transpires quite clearly in the biography composed for the edition of Mengs' written work which Azara published. While making no secret of the painter's shortcomings, and criticising his attitude in the last two years of his life, the biography strikes a very personal and affectionate note. The biographer's compassion for his friend's suffering and premature death shines through in many passages. For example, he writes: "*It may well seem as though in saying all of this I am avoiding the grievous passage of my friend's death. I confess that my sensibilities suffer greatly in remembering this scene*"⁸.

⁸ AZARA-FEA, op. cit., p. XXIX.



The depth of the two men's bond of friendship is borne out by a twin bust in biscuit porcelain which Azara commissioned from Giovanni Volpato in 1785. Taking his inspiration from Classical models, Volpato produced two heads in a single group, almost as though he were seeking to counter Aristotle's contention: *What is a friend? A single soul dwelling in two bodies*. The model used

⁹ S. ROETTGEN (ed.), *Mengs. La scoperta del neoclassico*, catalogue of the exhibition in Padua, Fondazione Palazzo Zabarella, 2001, Venice 2001, cat. 11.



by Volpato for Azara's head is none other than the portrait painted by Mengs⁹.



From Azara's letter to the engraver Carmona mentioned earlier, we learn that in 1781 he was overseeing the engraving of a portrait of himself which he had commissioned from the famous engraver Domenico Cunego (1727–

Fig. 2: Giovanni Volpato, *Double bust of José Nicolas de Azara and Anton Raphael Mengs*, biscuit porcelain, 28 x 17 x 14 cm, 1785, Bergamo, Accademia Carrara

¹⁰ ROETTGEN 1999, op. cit., cat. 193, GR 4.

1803), who also produced other engravings based on work by Mengs¹⁰. After supervising Cunego's work for three months, Azara's arduous judgment of the work was extremely severe: "*What is missing is variety in the carving and skilled handling of the burin*". If we examine the result, we might consider his words unfair, yet they help us to understand Azara's very high expectations of a



Fig. 3: Domenico Cunego, *Portrait of José Nicolás de Azara*, engraving, 408 x 313 mm, 1781 (drawing by Francisco Javier Ramos)

work of art. Though faithful to the two paintings, the engraver has altered the shape of the head, making it look slightly rounder, a change which we should probably blame on the preparatory drawing for the print which the inscription on Cunego's engraving tells us was by Francisco Javier Ramos (1744–1817), a Spanish artist who studied under Mengs and lived in Rome on a grant from

the *Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando* from 1777 to 1787.

Today Azara's central role in disseminating Mengs' literary legacy, his memory, his character and above all his place in the renewal of painting, is both well-known and abundantly illustrated in existing literature. Their friendship was solidly rooted in their shared enthusiasm for Classical art. Alongside his career

¹¹ G. SÁNCHEZ ESPINOSA, *Nicolás de Azara, lettore, bibliofilo ed editore neoclassico*, in: G. CANTARUTTI and S. FERRARI (ed.), *Paesaggi europei del Neoclassicismo*, Bologna 2007, pp. 141-162.



as a diplomat and a politician, and thanks to his Classical education, Azara nurtured his literary vein by translating and publishing several important texts¹¹. His impulsive and polemical temperament may be discerned primarily in his correspondence with the publisher Giambattista Bodoni in Parma¹², but also in the essay on aesthetics which he added in his own hand to the edition

Fig. 4: Antonio Canova, *Stele dedicated to José Nicolas de Azara as RESTITUTOR QUIETIS*, plaster, 180 x 120 cm, 1796/7, Possagno, Gypsotheca e Museo Antonio Canova

¹² A. CIAVARELLA (ed.), *De Azara-Bodoni. Lettere dal 1789 al 1803*, Parma 1979.

¹³ N. GARCIA DIAZ, Review by M. D. GIMENO, *J. N. de Azara, Epistolario (1784-1804)*, Madrid 2012, in: *Cuadernos de Ilustración y Romanticismo*, no. 18, 2012

¹⁴ SCHRÖDER, MAURER 2013, op. cit., pp. 36-38.

¹⁵ G. CASANOVA, *Chevalier de Seingalt, Geschichte meines Lebens*, ed. H. VON SAUTER, Berlin 1985 (German translation of the complete French edition published in 1962-1964), XII, p. 17.

¹⁶ ROETTGEN 1999, op. cit., U178, whereabouts unknown, p. 515.

¹⁷ E.P. BOWRON, *Pompeo Batoni, a complete catalogue of his paintings*, New Haven and London 2016, cat. 403.

of Mengs' *Opere* without even acknowledging his authorship of the piece. In politics Azara was loyal to the Spanish crown, supporting the suppression of the *Society of Jesus* in 1773. He subscribed to and supported the ideas of the Spanish *ilustradores* who concerned themselves in the second half of the 18th century with opening Spain up to Europe. His vast and recently published correspondence shows him to have been "*the most European Spaniard of his day*"¹³. Like many of the intellectuals who were his contemporaries, he adapted to the new political circumstances after 1789, following the French invasion of Italy, and eventually became one of those who masterminded the *Bologna Armistice* of 1796 and the *Treaty of Tolentino* which the Papal States enforced on Napoleon in 1797. Canova, who wished to dedicate a stele to Azara to commemorate his part in the negotiations with the French, decided not to carve the stele after all when he was apprised of the extremely tough terms attached to the final accord. In the course of his meetings, however, Azara forged a bond of friendship with Bonaparte and was appointed Spanish Ambassador in Paris from 1789 to 1803, only being relieved of the post a few weeks before his death¹⁴.



Although he never married, Azara in Rome conducted a love affair for many years with one of the most prominent and beautiful women in the city's high society, Giuliana Falconieri (1748–1814) who married Prince Antonio Publicola Santacroce in 1767. Giuliana is mentioned in numerous literary sources of the period and described by Giacomo Casanova as "*young, beautiful, gay, lively, inquisitive and laughing*"¹⁵. We do not know when their relationship began, but if we consider that Mengs produced a pastel portrait of the princess some time between 1777 and 1779¹⁶, we may suppose that it was at about that time. Giuliana Santacroce's salon attracted cardinals, diplomats, artists, politicians, ranking foreign visitors and intellectuals, the cream of the papal capital of her day. Her admirers included Prince Lorenzo Colonna and Baron Arnsfeldt, pretender to the throne of Sweden, while the renowned and highly influential Cardinal de Bernis and the Count of Floridablanca achieved the rank of favourites. Floridablanca, who was Spain's Ambassador in Rome from 1772 to 1776, was portrayed by Pompeo Batoni while the latter was in Rome¹⁷ and subsequently by Goya, in 1783, by which time he had become the King of Spain's Prime Minister (the latter portrait now hangs in the Banco de España

in Madrid). The portrait painted by Batoni remained in the Palazzo Santacroce in Rome until the 19th century, according to a manuscript (whose whereabouts are currently unknown) entitled “*Quadri della Galleria del Principe D. Antonio Santacroce*” and which can be dated to c.1869¹⁸. Given that Azara ‘replaced’ Floridablanca, probably after the latter’s departure from Rome in 1776, as the Princess’s favourite, he is highly likely to have offered her a portrait of himself

¹⁸ A.M. CLARK, *Pompeo Batoni. A complete Catalogue of his Works with an Introductory Text*, ed. E. P. BOWRON, Oxford 1985, p. 340.



painted by his friend Mengs. This is very probably the second version that has now resurfaced, a hypothesis seemingly borne out by its Roman provenance.



On the death of Antonio Publicola Santacroce in 1792, it fell to Azara in his capacity as executor to supervise the drafting of an inventory of the Prince’s

Fig. 5: Angelika Kauffmann, *Portrait of Giuliana Santacroce as Lucretia*, oil on canvas, 92,5 x 79,8 cm, 1791, Warszawa, Muzeum Narodowe

¹⁹ ASR, Paleani, not. A.C. vol. 4909.

²⁰ CIAVARELLA, op. cit., II, p. 129.

²¹ CACCIOTTI, op. cit., p. 53.

²² CIAVARELLA, op. cit., II, p. 135.

²³ J. JORDAN DE URRIES Y DE LA COLINA, *La embajada de José Nicolás de Azara y la difusión del gusto neoclásico*, in C.J. HERNANDO SANCHEZ (ed.), *Roma y España*, Madrid 2007, p. 964.

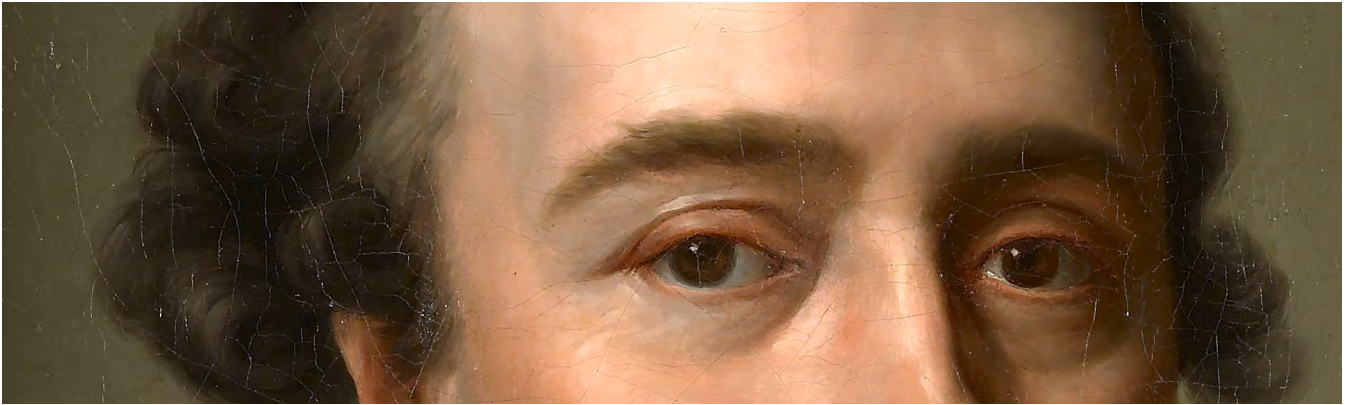
²⁴ A. ADEMOLLO, *La Principessa Santacroce*, in "Fanfulla della Domenica", Year VI, no. 8, 24 February 1884, no. 8.

²⁵ Roma, ASR, Notaio A.C. Petrus Paparozzi, Istromenti, vol. 5325.

assets¹⁹ which did not, however, contain his widow's property. When Azara visited in Florence in 1796, he was in the Princess's company, according to a letter addressed to Bodoni²⁰. The *Diario di Roma* reports rumours circulating on 27 September 1798 regarding Azara's imminent dismissal as Ambassador and the departure from Rome of the Princess "*believed to be his wife*". When Azara moved to Paris, he left his property in Rome to the Princess by way of a donation²¹. In connection with his final and much lamented departure from Rome, Azara tells Bodoni: "*It is not possible to explain the confusion in my head with my departure from a country so beloved by me, leaving all my friends and having to furnish a house in Paris and to abandon in the house in Rome all those many things that were the delight of my life.*"²². Giuliana Falconieri is known to have joined Azara in Paris, but she is also known to have married a certain Bernard-Jean-Maurice Duport (1762–1832), the former Finance Minister of the French Government of the Roman Republic²³, in that city in 1799. Unfortunately we have very little information regarding her last years, and most of that is ambiguous. We know only that she died in Naples on 20 February 1814²⁴. An inventory of her property drafted in 1815 in the house that she had rented in Rome lists furniture, clothes, household items and porcelain but very few paintings, and even those estimated to be worth very little. The inventory does, however, refer to an "expert painter" possibly charged with estimating the worth of valuable works of art missing from volume in question²⁵. Her works of art, together with the considerable amount of property owned by the Santacroce family, was bequeathed directly to her sole heir, her first-born son Prince Francesco Santacroce.

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AZARA: AMBASSADOR AND COLLECTOR



The second son of an illustrious Aragonese family, José Nicolas de Azara was born in Barbuñales in the province of Huesca in 1730. He received his first posting in 1760 to the Secretariat of State in Madrid, where he was to remain for five years until his transfer to Rome as the King's General Agent and Procurator in the papal capital.

Thanks to the benevolent protection of outgoing agent Don Manuel de Roda and to his own innate guile, he very soon put together a network of informers and a circle of confidants in the city, which allowed him to take the place of official diplomacy.

His diplomatic skills, displayed over twenty years, proved to be a crucial element in Spanish policy and Azara became one of the most prominent people in the capital. Emblematic in this sense is his presence in the salon of Princess Giuliana Falconieri di Santacroce, a salon frequented at the time by diplomats, cardinals and monsignors.

Also appreciated in French circles, he played a mediator's role in initial negotiations between the Church and Napoleon. Fearing a French invasion of the Papal States, Pope Pius VI charged him in May and June 1796 to meet with the French commissioners in Milan and he eventually brokered the signing of an armistice in Bologna.

On returning to Rome, the Ambassador was acclaimed by the people as their saviour. The Pope himself proclaimed three days of thanksgiving and commissioned Giuseppe Valadier to design and erect a triumphal arch to greet him. The Senate coined a medal in his honour, and engravings of his portrait began to circulate in which he was described as the "Liberator of

Rome". Canova himself even thought of celebrating him in a commemorative stele depicting the personification of the city of Rome writing the words "RESTITUTOR QUIETIS" around his portrait set in a medallion supported by a cherub. But after producing a plaster model, the sculptor shelved the project on being apprised of the harsh terms of the agreement.

Moreover, the negotiations served little purpose because Napoleon invaded the Papal States in February 1797.

When the Roman Republic was proclaimed, Azara moved to Florence and it was while he was in that city that he received news, in April 1798, of his appointment to the post of Spanish Ambassador Extraordinaire in Paris.

When he quit the European political scene in November 1803, his first thought was to return to Italy, which he had left only reluctantly and where he had



abandoned the many things that "were the delight of [his] life". His health was so poor by then, however, that before he could implement his plan, he died in Paris, assisted by his brother Felix, on 26 January 1804.



Carlo Fea mentions Azara's remarkable penchant for antiquarian studies and the generous protection that he accorded artists and men of letters, highlighting the fact that his opinion was sought in commenting on ancient monuments, recalling the generosity with which he made his collection of sculpture and extremely well-stocked library accessible to scholars, and extolling his role in promoting the study and organisation of the vast corpus of Winckelmann's work.

The artists and intellectuals with whom Azara was in touch included not

Fig. 6: Medal of the Roman Senate dedicated to Azara, gold, 1796, diameter 52 mm

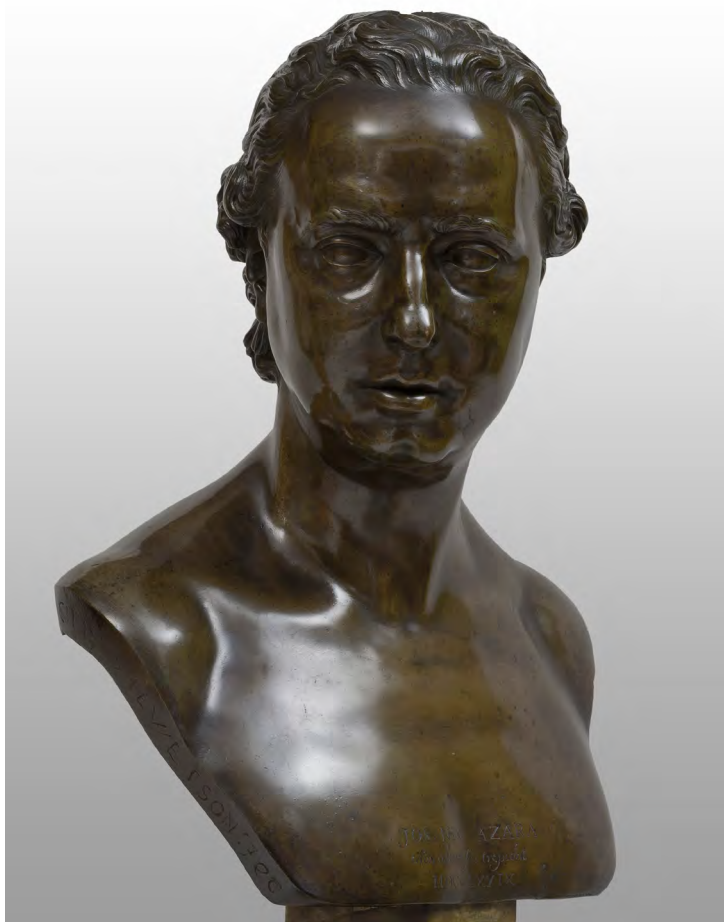
only Winckelmann and Mengs but representative exponents of every field: Raffaello Morghen and Giovanni Volpato (with whom he tested a method for manufacturing porcelain and perfecting varnish), Giovanni Pichler and Nathaniel Marchant, Bartolomeo Cavaceppi, Carlo Albacini, Chistopher Hewetson and Antonio Canova, Anton von Maron, Angelica Kauffmann and Jean Louis David, Francesco Milizia and Pietro Marquez, Gavin Hamilton, the Visconti – father and son –, Carlo Fea and Séroux d’Agincourt; he also engaged in frequent correspondence with Giambattista Bodoni, forging



with him a lifelong bond of friendship. The two men worked together on a cultural programme whose chief aim was the publication of the classics, their partnership resulting in the publication of *Horace*, *Virgil*, *Catullus – Tibullus – Propertius*, and of the *De Imitatione Christi*, in addition to the *Opere di Antonio Raffaello Mengs* in 1780 and to Francesco Milizia’s *Memorie degli Architetti antichi e moderni* in 1781. But Azara was always kept abreast also of other work. The engraving of Correggio’s *Abbess’ Chamber* in Parma, a project on which Azara had been working for a long time but was unable to execute,

was eventually completed by Bodoni, who submitted his proofs of Correggio's sixteen lunettes to the Ambassador for his approval.

A protector of artists and men of letters, including young scholars with little or no experience, he was named an honorary member of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid, of the Accademia di San Luca in Rome, of the Reale Accademia in Parma, of the Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen and of the Accademia Colombaria in Florence, and he also belonged to the Roman Arcadia, in which he took the name of "Admeto Cillenio".



He was asked to intervene in organising the Museo Pio-Clementino, one of the most important museum projects in the papal capital. By a quirk of fate, in his capacity as assistant to the Directoire commissioners, he also took part in dismantling that museum during the French requisition. "Apollo will be saved," he said reassuringly during preliminary negotiations in 1796, but in the event Napoleon's greed spared neither it nor other masterpieces. He also directed the arrangement of the funerary apparatus to mark the death of Carlos III in the church of San Giacomo degli Spagnoli.

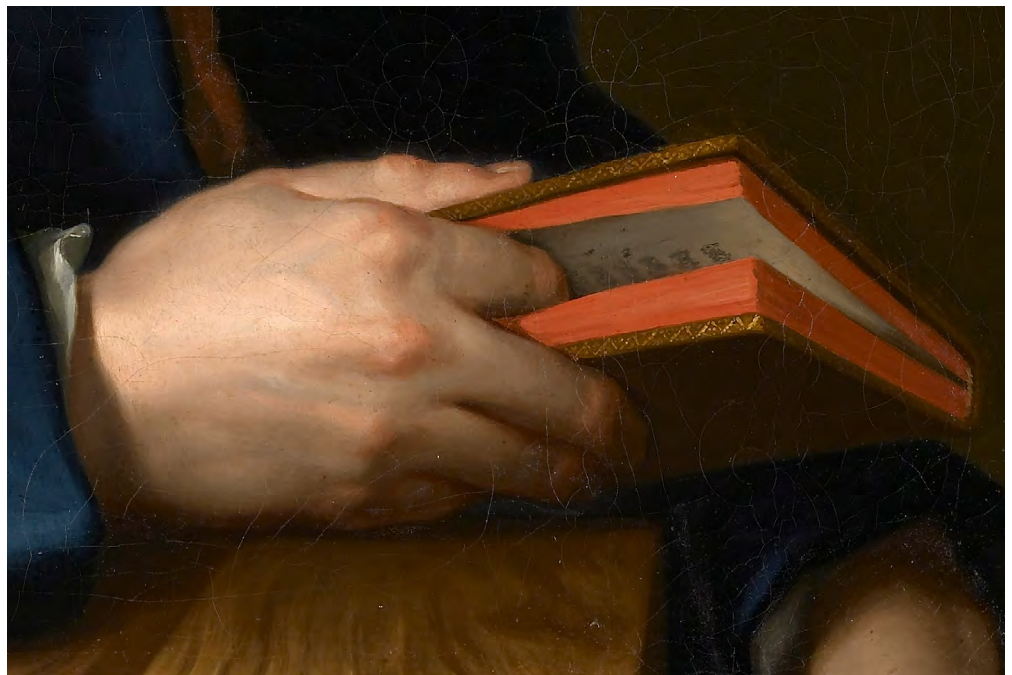
Figs. 7 (opposite), 8:
Christopher Hewetson, *Anton Raphael Mengs*, bronze, Madrid, Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas; José Nicolás de Azara, bronze, private collection



In 1777 Azara promoted an archaeological excavation in the land surrounding the Villa Negroni (in other words, the Villa Peretti Montalto Massimo) which led chiefly to the discovery of frescoed walls. But his interest in antiquities focused primarily on portraits of Greek figures, and in that respect a dig conducted in the Villa dei Pisoni in Tivoli in 1779, for which Azara bore the cost, was particularly successful, producing three statues and fully fifteen heads. A great collector of antiquities, he is known from an inventory drafted in Rome in 1796 to have left some eighty-seven pieces to the King of Spain.



Azara's dactyliothea, which included about one hundred intaglios and cameos



put together “with great expense and intelligence”, was very much admired by his contemporaries: it is mentioned alongside the most famous collections of the period including the Borgia, Farnese, Strozzi, Ludovisi-Boncompagni and Vatican collections, and was one of those chosen to supply models for the Chigi impressions. Renowned for its “erudition and the art of cameo”, its proverbial richness caused great embarrassment to the Infante of Parma, who intended to seek out some rare stones to offer Azara as a token of his gratitude but was put off by the realisation that it was well nigh impossible to find anything equal in quality to the contents of Azara's dactyliothea, which had “mesmerised the most intelligent connoisseurs and caused even the Monarchs of Spain to

feel astonishment and wonder". This admiration on the part of the Spanish monarchs (probably expressed when Azara was back in his home country; forced to leave the rest of his collection in Italy, he always took with him, as he himself writes, "about a hundred [Greek cameos] to console [himself] by looking at them") is reflected in the subsequent interest in Azara's dactyliothea shown by Carlos IV, who eventually bought it from the Ambassador's heirs after his death.



The wonders that any tourist visiting Rome in the 18th century was advised to seek out included, in Vasi's guide, the collection "of good pictures belonging to the Minister Cav. D. Nicola de Azara illustrious Protector of the fine Arts" in the palazzo housing the Spanish Embassy to the Holy See. To obtain masterpieces of Italian Renaissance painting "[he] was not concerned to risk a few sequins" and thus, in this case too, he was exposed to the danger of being duped, as happened with a picture (the middleman in the purchase of which was none other than Bodoni) attributed to Titian but which turned out to be a "Titianesque" work, a fact that did not surprise Azara in the least because "he saw such baptisms in Rome every day and was much taken with them".

The Ambassador's private picture gallery included work by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, Diego Velázquez, Jusepe Ribera, Alonso Sanchez Coello, Anton von Maron and fifty works by Anton Raphael Mengs (including not only paintings but also miniatures, sketches and pencil and India ink drawings). Azara gave a sketch by Titian and a portrait by Sir Anthony van Dyck to King Gustav III of Sweden in 1785.

The Irish sculptor Christopher Hewetson modelled two bronze busts of Azara, one of which is owned by his heirs while the other is in the Bibliothèque Mazarine in Paris, where it probably ended up along with the bronze portrait of Mengs, also by Hewetson, which Azara had initially dedicated in the Pantheon but which he subsequently had removed, replacing it with a second, marble bust better suited to the setting.



Azara left Rome for a short time for reasons of personal safety in 1796, making a will and withdrawing his savings. In a letter addressed to Pedro Cevallos dated 7 January 1801, he mentions that when he left the papal capital in 1798 he took with him only about a hundred Greek intaglios and cameos

as a consolation to make up for the pain of leaving the rest of his collection behind. His books, pictures, statues and furniture remained in Rome, where “they are recommended to Providence” because he feared that they might fall into the hands of “crazed enemies”, and always in the hope that he might regain possession of them at the earliest opportunity.

The thoughts that went through Azara’s mind regarding his library and art collection while he was absent from Rome changed according to his political fate. His original plan was to create a collection to be moved to Spain where it



could be used to instruct and to delight the general public.

He had arranged all the items in cases on leaving Rome, but when calumny caused him to fall from favour with the monarchs and he was in dire financial straits, he started to change his mind. Intending to return to Italy, “the last seat of my old age” (as he put it), he toyed with the idea of selling to the English or to anyone willing to purchase the collection in its entirety, thus acquiring sufficient funds to allow him to live comfortably.

Soon restored to favour in the Spanish court, however, he changed his mind again. Apparently he wished to keep the books for himself, but where his pictures were concerned, while he dared not compare his collection to the King’s magnificence,

nevertheless if His Majesty should be attracted by any of the paintings in his collection, he could have them as a gift. And finally, considering the Greek portraits to be worthy of His Majesty’s taste, he would give them to him as a weak and humble token of his gratitude. And he did indeed leave his collection of antiquities to Carlos IV in an act of donation dated 1796.

It was not until after Azara’s death, however, that the nineteen cases containing busts and statues reached Spain.

While Canova was visiting the Spanish royal palace on 18 May 1804, “at one

o'clock in the afternoon Italian time", he viewed nineteen cases, failing to grant an export licence for the two that contained the so-called *Bust of Telemachus* and the so-called statue of *Britannicus*; thus the "Licence of His Eminence Card. Pro Camerlengo" for export was granted only to seventeen cases, not subject to "any duty within a term of four months".