

Poussin's Elephant

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Nicolas Poussin's "Hannibal Crossing the Alps," long considered one of his earliest surviving works, is here recognized as a portrait of a historical elephant who visited Rome in 1630 and re-dated accordingly. The article tells the story of this remarkable animal. It traces his passage from South Asia through Portugal, Spain, England, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Italy, and back again to France, and examines his encounters along the way with kings and courtiers, scholars, artists, and traveling showmen, giving insight into the diplomatic and economic uses of exotic animals in early modern Europe. Finally, returning to Poussin, it addresses the implications of the re-dating of the "Hannibal" for our understanding of the painter's stylistic development and biography.

INTRODUCTION

IN MAY 1630, an adolescent Asian elephant who had been touring Europe since he was four years old arrived in Rome. His name was Don Diego and he was the first of his kind to pass through the city's gates in over a hundred years. Stabled in a hall on the ground floor of Palazzo Venezia, he drew crowds of curious spectators who paid one *giulio* each for the chance to see him up close and watch him perform circus tricks. Among those who came to inspect the elephant was the learned antiquarian and student of natural history Cassiano dal Pozzo (1588–1657), who, intrigued and impressed by what he saw, urged his friend and protégé, the painter Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665), to make a pictorial record of the exotic visitor.¹ The resulting canvas is one of the most unusual in the artist's oeuvre. A cross between a zoological illustration and a history painting, it is a profile portrait of a living elephant that Poussin dressed up as a classical *istoria* by adding a rider and calling

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¹On Cassiano dal Pozzo, secretary to Cardinal Francesco Barberini and compiler of the famous Museo Cartaceo, or Paper Museum, a collection of more than 7,000 drawings, watercolors, and prints documenting the natural world and the material history of mankind, see the entry by Enrico Stumpo in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, s.v. "Dal Pozzo, Cassiano junior"; *The Paper Museum; I segreti di un collezionista*; Herklotz.

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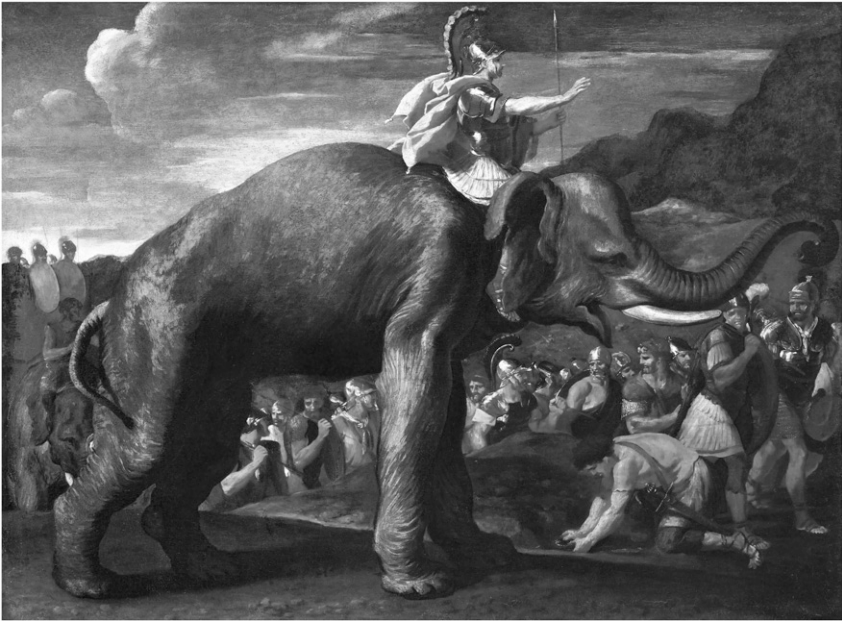


Figure 1. Nicolas Poussin. *Hannibal Crossing the Alps*, 1630. Oil on canvas, 100 x 133 cm. New York, private collection. Photo: © Frick Collection 2009.

him Hannibal (fig. 1).² The picture, for which the artist was paid the sum of forty scudi, was in Cassiano's collection at the time of his death and remained in the possession of the Dal Pozzo family until sometime around the middle of the eighteenth century, when all trace of it was lost. By the time it resurfaced and came to public attention in 1961, the circumstances behind its creation had been forgotten. Even now, half a century later, the fact that the picture records a historical animal as opposed to a creature of Poussin's invention is rarely remarked on and its date and place in the artist's chronology are regularly misrepresented. The present study aims to set the record straight by taking as its starting point the encounter between artist and elephant. From there, it goes on to tell the story of Don Diego and the epic journey that brought him to Rome. By acknowledging the elephant in the frame and piecing together his biography, it uncovers a significant chapter in the history of the importation and exhibition of exotic animals in early modern Europe. The elephant's

²The painting is privately owned and has been exhibited at the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, Vassar College, and the Frick Collection in New York City. In 2012 it underwent restoration, and in 2013 it was put up for sale at Christie's London but failed to reach its reserve and was bought in.

backstory, in turn, offers a fresh perspective on Poussin's painting and an opportunity to reevaluate the place it occupies in his life and work.

POUSSIN'S *HANNIBAL CROSSING THE ALPS*

Although the connection between Poussin's *Hannibal Crossing the Alps* and the elephant of 1630 might seem obvious once it is pointed out, those who have written about the picture in the past have proved strangely unwilling to recognize it. Since its reappearance in 1961, the painting has consistently been assigned to the years immediately following the artist's arrival in Rome in the spring of 1624. Denis Mahon called it "manifestly an extremely early work" and dated it to the second half of 1625, allocating it the first entry in his 1998 exhibition catalogue *Nicolas Poussin: I primi anni romani*.³ Others have put it around 1625–27.⁴ As far as I am aware, no one who accepts the attribution to Poussin has suggested a date later than 1628, the turn-around year when the painter came to prominence on the Roman art scene with the success of his *Death of Germanicus* and the commission for the Saint Erasmus altarpiece in St. Peter's.⁵

In assigning the picture to the artist's first years in Rome, some have pronounced it "clumsy" and "awkward," while others claim to see in it "clear evidence of Poussin's early uncertainty."⁶ But to situate a canvas as atypical as this one on such vague and subjective grounds is risky. Indeed, confusion about the genre to which it belongs probably accounts as much as anything else for the persistent misdating of the *Hannibal*. Notwithstanding the heroic title by which it has come to be known, this is not a history painting in the usual sense and should not be judged by the standards of that lofty category. Rather, it is a zoological document, to which figures have been added primarily to indicate scale and to provide an entertaining backdrop. The narrative moment—Hannibal's famous Alpine crossing—is implied by the

³Mahon, 1998, 17, 36; Mahon, 1999, 21, 44. Mahon was aware of the elephant of 1630—in fact, he knew quite a bit about him—but nothing could shake his conviction that Poussin painted the *Hannibal* half a decade earlier. In his determination to make the facts fit his own perception of Poussin's stylistic development, he even went so far as to posit that the same animal must have made an otherwise unnoticed and undocumented first visit to Rome in 1625. Mahon, 1998, 30–31n19; Mahon, 1999, 21–22n19.

⁴Blunt, 1966, 115 (1626–27); Blunt, 1967, 1:65 (among the first Roman works); Oberhuber, 128 (before December 1626); Standring, 1988, 614–15 (early 1627); Mérot, 285 (ca. 1626–27); Solinas, 292–94 (1625); Fagiolo dell'Arco, 146 (ca. 1627); Wright, 70 ("one of Poussin's earliest compositions").

⁵Thuillier dated the picture to the 1630s but thought it could not be by Poussin, attributing it instead to a follower, possibly Charles Errard: Thuillier, 1978, 160; Thuillier, 1994, 266–67 (no. B12).

⁶Blunt, 1967, 1:65; Mérot, 78; Wright, 70.

steeply sloping landscape background that signals the approach of the high mountains. But typical of the conventions of animal illustration, the elephant himself stands on a flat surface and his profile view is accompanied by a secondary, frontal view on the far left. In this respect, the portrait of Don Diego has more in common with the birds, mushrooms, seashells, and citrus fruits that fill the volumes of Cassiano's Paper Museum than with any of the artist's true narratives. Poussin is unlikely to have devoted much time or effort to a work like this, and the broad handling and loose, sketchy technique suggest little more than that he turned it out quickly.⁷ Another of the canvases he produced for Cassiano—*A Dromedary in Two Positions, with Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well*, usually dated around 1627—belongs to the same pictorial subgenre of historiated animal-painting and is similarly summary in execution.⁸

It is often pointed out, in support of an early date, that the painter mentions the *Hannibal* in an undated letter to Cassiano, in which he also alludes to his poverty and solicits financial assistance.⁹ We know from Bellori that Poussin was nearly destitute during his first months in Rome: a foreigner with no international reputation to speak of and few connections, he scraped together a living selling battle pictures for a pittance.¹⁰ Thus the letter to Cassiano pleading poverty fits our notion of the artist's misery during that first difficult period. But the fact that he was hard up when he first reached Rome does not mean that he never again experienced financial difficulties. Indeed, as he explained in the letter, he had been gravely ill and unable to work for some months; this was the reason for his urgent need. One thing is certain: the painting and the letter are contemporaneous, and if the painting was made in 1630, the letter—and the biographical information it contains—must likewise be dated to that year.

Any doubt as to when the canvas was painted can be laid to rest once and for all by simply addressing two obvious questions that confront the viewer when

⁷The execution, though rapid, is virtuosic and assured, a fact that has not gone unrecognized. "Certain details, such as the young man kneeling in the foreground on the right, are brilliant in handling": Blunt, 1967, 1:65. The soldiers in the background are "sketched in quick and brilliant brushstrokes in heavy impasto": Oberhuber, 128.

⁸The two works have been associated and their similar documentary character noted by Mérot, 78; Solinas, 294; *Poussin and Nature*, 61. Poussin may have painted other animal pictures for Cassiano, now lost. A 1715 list of the Dal Pozzo collection mentions, in addition to the *Rebecca and Eliezer* and the elephant, a five-foot-tall painting of an ostrich and seven other paintings of birds attributed to Poussin. Haskell and Rinehart, 324–26 (nos. 12, 90–91, 113, 118–19, 124, 134).

⁹Bottari and Ticozzi, 1:372–73; or see Mahon (1998, 4, fig. 1; 1999, 16, fig. 1) for a reproduction of the relevant page in the first edition (1754) of Bottari's *Raccolta di lettere sulla pittura*.

¹⁰Bellori, 426.

looking at it. Namely, did Poussin paint the elephant from life? And, if so, when could he have seen such an animal? To the first question, the answer is certainly yes. This is no imaginary elephant, derived from Roman sarcophaguses, medieval copybooks, or Renaissance bacchanals. In all its gray and wrinkly majesty, it is a vivid portrait of an elephant Poussin saw with his own eyes, specific in every detail, from the swish of its leathery tail to the upraised tip of its trunk. Although the painter himself was probably unaware of the existence of different elephant species, there is no mistaking that his model was an Asian rather than an African elephant. The distinctive slope of the back, the pronounced humplike protrusions on the forehead, the relatively small ears, and the single “finger” at the tip of the trunk are all characteristic of his kind. He is somewhat thinner than one might expect of a healthy young Asian elephant. But then again, a captive beast, fed an unnatural and insufficient diet and forced to lead an itinerant lifestyle, might very well have been in poor health.

But there is no need to rely on the evidence of the picture alone. Poussin as good as tells us that he depicted the animal from life in his letter to Cassiano: “I’ve painted the elephant, with a Hannibal dressed in antique armor mounted on top, which I’m sending you as a gift, since it seemed to me that Your Excellency wanted something of the sort.”¹¹ The artist’s use of the definite article—his reference to “the” elephant—plainly implies that he had a specific creature in mind, one that he and his patron had seen and discussed.¹² And the documentary character of the painting is further confirmed by an inscription on the back of the canvas. The text is worn and partially illegible, but the phrase that matters is clear enough: “Hannibal mounted on an elephant on his way to Rome, Nicolas Poussin painted this based on the living elephant that was brought to Rome in MDCXX[. . .].”¹³ Although the tail end of the date is impossible to decipher, the inscription clearly states that the painting is a life study based on an animal on view in Rome at the time or shortly before it was made.

As for the second question—when could Poussin have seen an elephant?—there is no evidence of any such animal in Rome in the 1620s. On the contrary, the diarist Giacinto Gigli (1594–1671), who records the arrival of the elephant

¹¹Bottari and Ticozzi, 1:373: “Ho disegnato l’elefante, del quale (perche m’è paruto che V. S. Ill. n’aveva qualche desiderio) gliene farò un presente, essendo dipinto con un Annibale montato su, armato all’antica.”

¹²The same point was made by Stranding, 1988, 614.

¹³“HANNIBALIS ELEPHANTO INSIDENTIS IN V[RBEM] ADVENIEN E VIVO ELEPH ROM ADVICTO MDCXX . . . NIC. POVSSIN PINX.” The elephant is one of six paintings by Poussin so far identified, all of them from the collection of Cassiano dal Pozzo, that bear similar Latin inscriptions in classical capital letters on the reverse; all are illustrated in Fagiolo dell’Arco, 146–48, figs. 9.13–24.

in May 1630, specifically states that he was the first of his kind to be seen there in over a century: "In that month [May 1630], an elephant was brought to Rome, an animal which had not been seen there for a hundred years, not since one was sent as a gift from the King of Portugal to Pope Leo X in 1514. But this one belonged to a private individual, who charged a fee of one giulio to those who wished to see it."¹⁴ The elephant of Leo X to whom Gigli makes reference was, of course, the famous Hanno, who was born in Southern India sometime around 1510, shipped to Lisbon, and dispatched to Rome in 1513 as a gift to the newly elected pope; he died in Rome in 1517, at the age of seven.¹⁵ Gigli's claim that the elephant of 1630 was the first in Rome since Hanno is corroborated by his older contemporary Giulio Cesare Bottifango (1559–1630). In a letter addressed to his nephew and published in Rome in 1630 in the form of a pamphlet, Bottifango praised the animal as a wondrous curiosity not seen since the time of Leo X and meticulously cataloged his features. His close anatomical description is the literary equivalent of Poussin's painting (minus the classical trappings) and reflects a similar desire to document a rare and marvelous thing.¹⁶

Poussin was not the only painter to leave a visual record of the elephant of 1630. Cassiano owned a landscape with multiple elephants by Pietro Testa (1611–50), identical in size to Poussin's *Hannibal* and consistently paired with it in the Dal Pozzo inventories.¹⁷ That painting is now lost. But an engraving after one of Testa's drawings of the animal is included in Bottifango's pamphlet (fig. 2).¹⁸ Both Testa's engraving and the pamphlet

¹⁴Gigli, 1:191–92. The elephant had reached Rome by May 15, the date of an *avviso* announcing his arrival: see "Avvisi di Roma [1630]," fol. 278^v.

¹⁵On Hanno's brief but eventful life, see the engaging account by Bedini. See also Winner; Ottermann, 104–09.

¹⁶Bottifango, 5–8. Born in Orvieto but mostly resident in Rome, Bottifango was a gentleman-scholar and poet who served as secretary to several cardinals; his station in life was thus comparable to Cassiano's. See Allacci, 170; Rossi, 58–60; and the entry by Martino Capucci in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, s.v. "Bottifango, Giulio Cesare."

¹⁷Strandring, 1988, 614–15; Strandring, 2000, 211 (no. 88).

¹⁸Fusconi, 21–23, 41. The print is Testa's earliest dated work. Its close resemblance to Poussin's painting has led some to suggest that it is based on it. If one of these images influenced the other, however, I suspect it was Testa's that influenced Poussin's. Although Testa adds one or two probably imaginary props (the palm tree, the minder's turban), his inclusion of a cloth rope binding the elephant's hind leg to a vertical post is evidence that he saw the elephant in his stable in Palazzo Venezia, for the detail (absent from Poussin's painting) accords precisely with written descriptions of the elephant's captivity: see Bottifango, 6; Carlo Cartari, "Effemeridi" (Archivio di Stato, Rome, C-F, vol. 77, fol. 42^v), transcribed in D'Onofrio, 304. That said, Poussin, too, would have seen the elephant tied up in this way and although he omits the rope, the elephant's odd pose, with hind legs well back and body stretched forward, recalls that of an animal pulling against a restraint.



Figure 2. Pietro Testa. Don Diego in Rome, 1630 (from Giulio Cesare Bottifango, *Lettera dell'elefante*, Rome, 1630). Engraving, 16 x 20 cm. Rome, Istituto Centrale per la Grafica. Photo: Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo.

as a whole are dedicated to another avid collector of curiosities in Rome, Francesco Gualdi (1576–1657).¹⁹ The inscription at the foot of the print reads: “To the Illustrious Cavaliere Gualdo of Rimini, the Lucchese painter Pietro Testa gives and dedicates this image of the elephant recently seen in Rome, 1630.”

INTRODUCING DON DIEGO

So who was this elephant who came to Rome in 1630, successor to the beloved Hanno? Where did he originate and what became of him after he left the eternal city? Although he has received scant attention from historians of early modern Europe, he was, in his day, an international celebrity, who began life as the plaything of kings and ended up a hardworking professional circus act seen by many thousands of men, women, and children across Western Europe. As he

¹⁹Francesco Gualdi was born in Rimini but lived most of his life in Rome, where he served as private chamberlain to Popes Leo XI, Gregory XV, and Urban VIII, and built a reputation as a noted antiquarian and collector; his museum of curiosities was among the most famous in Rome. See Franzoni and Tempesta; Federici; and the entry by Maria Elena Massimi in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, s.v. “Gualdi, Francesco.”

journeyed through Portugal, Spain, England, France, the Lowlands, Germany, Austria, and Italy, he left a paper trail that allows one to trace his adventures. There are gaps in his story that will doubtless be filled as more facts emerge, but for the purposes of this article it is enough to outline the major chapters in his career.

Born around 1619 somewhere in India or Ceylon, he almost certainly traveled to Lisbon aboard a Portuguese vessel, following in the wake of Hanno and other famous Asian elephants who preceded him on the European circuit.²⁰ He would have been barely weaned at the time of his passage (baby elephants, for obvious reasons, were easier to transport than adolescent or adult ones) and no more than two or three years old when he reached the Iberian Peninsula. Portugal was ruled by Spain at that time and the little elephant became a possession of the Spanish Crown. From Lisbon he would have continued his journey on foot, trudging the dusty roads from Portugal to Spain. An elephant recently arrived from Portugal was exhibited in the park of Casa de Campo in Madrid in 1621: this could be our first sighting of the animal who, nine years later, was to pose for Poussin.²¹

By the spring of 1623, the animal was living in relative comfort in the royal menagerie in Aranjuez, a day's journey from Madrid. Charles, Prince of Wales (1600–49), in Spain to negotiate his marriage to the sister of King Philip IV (1605–65), was entertained at Aranjuez in April and there saw and admired the elephant, who was then about four years old and still relatively small.²² At the importuning of the Duke of Buckingham (1592–1628), who accompanied Charles on his mission, King Philip made a present of the elephant, along with other rare animals, to Charles's father, King James I (1566–1625). Back in Madrid, Buckingham lost no time in communicating the news to his king: "Sir, Foure asses you I have sent, tow hees and tow shees; five cameles, tow hees, tow shees, with a young one; and one ellefant, which is worth your seeing. Thees I have impudentlie begged for you."²³ The gift came with strings attached. Charles had to pay for the animals' fodder and for an escort to transport them first to Santander and from there by ship to England.²⁴ The Venetian ambassador to the English court wryly commented: "The King of Spain has sent His Majesty the present of an elephant. I do not know whether it comes as an earnest of the

²⁰Lach, 1967; Lach, 1970, 124–58. See also Oettermann; Bedini; Gschwend.

²¹Cámara, 66.

²²Sánchez Cano, 58.

²³*The Progresses, Processions*, 847. King James replied, "I doe heerwith sende thee a kynde letre of thanks to that King for the elephant," and added, "I hoape the elephant, camells, and asses are allreaddie by the way": *ibid.*, 848, 850.

²⁴Redworth, 112. Francisco Romano, the Spaniard who accompanied the elephant to England, was paid £150 for his services: *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 1859, 24.

Infanta or instead of her.”²⁵ (The punning play on “elefante” and “infanta” gets somewhat lost in translation.) He was, of course, quite right to be skeptical. The marriage negotiations came to nothing in the end and the Stuarts were left angered and humiliated, with a herd of asses and camels and a voracious adolescent elephant as the only return on their diplomatic investment.

The animals arrived in London in early July. John Chamberlain (1553–1628) noted their coming in a letter to Sir Dudley Carleton (1573–1632): “The King of Spaine hath sent hither five camells and an elephant, which going through towne this day sevenight after midnight could not yet passe unsene.”²⁶ The king appointed John Williams, a member of Buckingham’s household, as the elephant’s primary custodian, with instructions to keep him housed and fed, but hidden (at least for the time) from the public eye.²⁷ The animal proved an expensive acquisition. It was estimated that the yearly charge for his upkeep would come to around £275, “besides a gallon of wine daily from September to April, when his keepers say he must drink no water”—costs that would only increase as the elephant continued to grow.²⁸ Perhaps Philip had this in mind when he passed on the beast to his fellow monarch; James, at any rate, may have suspected as much, for he seems to have been less than wholly delighted by the gift. As Sir Richard Weston, chancellor of the Exchequer, remarked in August 1623, “The Lord Treasurer will be little in love with presents which cost the King as much to maintain as a garrison.”²⁹

It may have been in (or en route to) England that the elephant came by the name Don Diego.³⁰ The name carries overtly comical connotations. English playwrights of the period—and presumably the British public at large—used Diego, Dego, and even Dondego to mean “Spaniard,” generally with facetious (if not openly Hispanophobic) intent.³¹ Furthermore, besides being a common

²⁵Alvise Valaresso, Venetian ambassador in England, to the doge and Senate, 21 July 1623. Transcribed in translation in *Calendar of State Papers . . . in the Archives of Venice*, 1912, 70–80.

²⁶Chamberlain, 2:507.

²⁷The elephant was “to be well dressed and fed, but not led out to water, nor allowed to be seen by any on pain of the ‘uttermost peril’”: *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 1859, 9. The decision to avoid public display suggests that the king was planning to profit from the animal by regulating who could see him, when, and under what circumstances. On the possibility that the elephant may have toured parts of England during the later part of his stay there, see below.

²⁸*Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 1859, 65. See also *Issues of the Exchequer*, 274–75.

²⁹*Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 1859, 65.

³⁰Of the numerous seventeenth-century sources that refer to the elephant, I have so far come across only one that mentions his name. This is the account by Padre Francesco Resta of the animal’s visit to Casteldurante in March 1630, in which it is clearly stated: “L’animale si chiama Don Diego.” See “Memoria delle cose che occorrono nella casa del Santissimo Crocifisso di Casteldurante dall’anno 1628” (hereafter “Memoria”), fol. 143^r, cited in Moretti, 130.

³¹Skat, 113, 119; Griffin, 199; see also Salomon.

and quintessentially Spanish name and thus appropriate for an animal sent from Spain, Diego happens to be the Spanish equivalent of James. The elephant may have been named, in other words, in honor of his new owner, King James.³²

After the Spanish Match fell through, James turned to France and entered into negotiations with Louis XIII (1601–43), which resulted in the marriage of Charles to Louis's youngest sister, Henrietta Maria (1609–69), in May 1625. James did not live to witness the happy union; he died two months earlier, leaving his kingdom—and with it his elephant—to his son and heir. What became of the animal during this eventful period is not entirely clear. As a conspicuous reminder of the Spanish debacle, his presence in London may have grated on royal nerves; and the cost of feeding him would have done nothing to soothe the irritation. When we next hear of him, in 1626, he had been packed off to France. There are differing accounts of how this came about. David Ferrand (ca. 1591–1660), author of a learned tract commemorating the elephant's visit to Rouen in 1627, states that the animal was shipped to France “as a gift for his Most Christian Majesty Louis XIII, King of France and of Navarre.”³³ Ferrand provides certain incidental details that suggest he was reliably informed. For example, he writes that when passing through the town of Rochester on his way to France the elephant forced a horse-drawn cart off the main bridge; Rochester sits directly on the highway between London and Dover.³⁴ He also mentions that the individual who accompanied the animal to France was anxious “that His Majesty should be the first to view him.”³⁵ According to Bottifango, however, the English king (he does not specify whether he means James or Charles) gave the elephant to one of his courtiers (“uno de' suoi famigliari”), who in turn, having tired of him, sold him to French buyers.³⁶ And Bottifango's version of events is supported by another contemporary account, which identifies the courtier in question as the Duke of Buckingham.³⁷ Buckingham's involvement in the transaction or string of transactions that resulted in Don Diego's departure for France comes as little surprise, given the

³²The equivalence of the names Diego and James was the stuff of jokes at the English court, where the king and the long-time Spanish ambassador Don Diego Sarmiento de Acuña, Count of Gondomar, were on such friendly terms that they referred to themselves as “the two Diegos,” and where French envoys, resentful of Spanish influence, mockingly called the king “Don James”: Carter, 205, 208. Gondomar returned to Spain in 1622, but another Don Diego—Don Diego Hurtado de Mendoza—was named ambassador extraordinary to the English court in September 1623 and accompanied Prince Charles on his voyage home from Spain, arriving in London just a couple of months after the elephant.

³³Ferrand, 29. On David Ferrand, Rouennese publisher, pamphleteer, bookseller, and author of several volumes of verse, see Mellot, 69–70.

³⁴Ferrand, 31–32.

³⁵Ibid., 30.

³⁶Bottifango, 6.

³⁷“Memoria,” fol. 143^f. The passage in question is transcribed in translation below.

part he played in acquiring the elephant for England in the first place. How precisely he engineered the handover and what he got in exchange have yet to be clarified (I suggest one possible scenario below), but if Louis XIII was at any point the intended recipient he seems to have shown little interest and by 1626 Don Diego had passed permanently into private hands.

A word about this habit of kings of offloading their elephants onto their friends and allies. For all their rarity, royal elephants often ended up as wandering gifts. They were ruinously expensive to maintain and their charm tended to wear off along with their novelty. Don Diego was not the first of his kind to be passed around from one royal menagerie to another. In 1591, Philip II of Spain (1527–98) sent an elephant as a gift to the newly crowned king of France, Henry IV (1553–1610). Initially enchanted, Henry ordered his receiver-general to provide the necessary funds for her upkeep, “because we desire that the elephant which has been sent to us from the Indies should be maintained and cared for as a rare thing, the like of which has never before been seen in this our realm.”³⁸ Within a year, though, perhaps bored by her antics or appalled by the cost of her upkeep, he regifted the beast to his fellow monarch, “madame ma bonne sœur” Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603).³⁹ She, in turn, well aware of what was involved in the animal’s maintenance, let it be known in no uncertain terms that “Her Majesty was not content with the sending of the elephant.”⁴⁰ Like the white elephants of proverbial fame, these poor creatures often ended up neglected, mistreated, or handed over to others ill-equipped to care for them.

Tracing the ownership of Don Diego after he passed out of royal hands offers rare insight into the economics of exotic animals in early modern Europe. Ferrand dedicated his 1627 treatise to “Monsieur Sevender, hollandais,” whom he identified as the owner of the elephant and the man responsible for bringing him to France.⁴¹ But Sevender did not, in fact, own the animal; he merely leased him for a certain period of time. The owner was a man of much loftier status: Claude de Lorraine, duc de Chevreuse, grand chamberlain and grand falconer of France (1578–1657). A favorite of Louis XIII, this powerful and influential peer enjoyed close ties with England. He helped negotiate the marriage of Charles and Henrietta Maria and acted as the English king’s proxy at the wedding in Notre Dame on 11 May 1625, a part he played with glittering panache.⁴² Following the wedding, Chevreuse accompanied the bride to England, where he was warmly received by Charles, who expressed his gratitude by inducting him into the Order of the Garter. Chevreuse was also intimately acquainted with the

³⁸Delisle, 358; for the translation, Lach, 1967, 173.

³⁹Delisle, 359.

⁴⁰*List and Analysis of State Papers*, 316.

⁴¹Ferrand, 3–4.

⁴²*A True Discourse*, 11.

Duke of Buckingham. In the diplomatic and ceremonial conduct of the royal wedding, each served as ambassador extraordinary to the other's king. They were much in each other's company. In the lead-up to the event, Buckingham stayed in Chevreuse's sumptuous palace near the Louvre; and afterward, the two men traveled together to England in the cortège of the new queen and jointly participated in the many receptions and festivities that followed upon their arrival. It was almost certainly while in England that Chevreuse was either given the elephant or persuaded to purchase him.⁴³ Since Buckingham is said to have carried on scandalously with Chevreuse's wife—the infamous Marie de Rohan—during the couple's stay in London, one might even speculate that Don Diego was delivered to the husband as a consolation prize. However it happened, by the second half of 1626 the elephant belonged to Chevreuse.

Jean (or more likely Jan or Johan) van Sevender was a Dutch-born purveyor of linen who lived in the Faubourg Saint-Germain in Paris. On 21 January 1627, he signed a contract with the duc de Chevreuse, according to which he agreed to pay a sum of money up front in return for the fees earned by exhibiting the duke's elephant to the public. He took responsibility for feeding and maintaining the animal while touring with him around France, and promised to return him to his owner's estate at Dampierre, alive and in good health, after one year (1627).⁴⁴ When Sevender's lease was up, Chevreuse struck a similar deal with Guillaume Cardomier, "bourgeois de Paris," who again paid him a sum of money for the use of his elephant. This time the arrangement was to last two years (1628–29) and came with permission to escort the animal outside of France. Cardomier then turned around and subcontracted his rights to a certain Johan Wigans, a Flemish merchant based in Rouen, who paid him 6,000 livres for the privilege.⁴⁵ On 1 May 1628, Chevreuse signed yet another lease, this time with Georges Pierre of Châlons, formerly a bugler in the employ of Chevreuse's older brother, the duc de Guise, and now a merchant based in Paris. Pierre agreed to pay Chevreuse the same sum—6,000 livres—for the use of the elephant

⁴³In his account of Don Diego's visit to Casteldurante in March 1630, Padre Francesco Resta summarizes the elephant's history as follows: "It is generally believed that he was brought when still quite young from the East Indies to the King of Spain aboard the galleons of his fleet; that the King gave him to the Prince of Wales at the time a marriage between said Prince and the Infanta, sister to the King, was being negotiated, which then did not take place; that the Prince made a present of him to the Duke of Buckingham, his great favorite; that Buckingham likewise gave him as a gift to the son of the duc de Guise when the latter brought [King Charles's] bride, sister to the King of France, to England; and that he then sold him for the sum of 2,000 scudi to these men who now have custody of him": "Memoria," fol. 143^r.

⁴⁴"Minutes et répertoires du notaire Claude I Ménard [1627]," fol. 16^r; 21 January 1627.

⁴⁵"Minutes et répertoires du notaire Claude I Ménard [1628]," fol. 96^r; 11 April 1628.

for a period of two years (1630–32). He paid the bulk of it in advance, even though the lease was not due to go into effect for another two years, but the contract guaranteed that his money would be returned in the event that the elephant died before he took custody.⁴⁶

These rental arrangements clearly benefited both parties. The duke received a significant sum up front and rid himself of the cost and inconvenience of the animal's upkeep, while the leaser acquired a source of income that he hoped would enable him to cover his initial and ongoing expenses and still turn a profit.⁴⁷ Sevender, Cardomier, Wigans, and Pierre were middlemen: reasonably prosperous professionals who managed the elephant much as a modern-day agent might manage a star attraction. They booked his appearances, hired the staff, handled the finances, and commissioned the various broadsheets and pamphlets advertising the elephant's arrival in town.⁴⁸ Six thousand livres was a hefty sum for a two-year lease, and on top of this, the leaseholder was responsible for paying for fodder, transportation, stabling, salaries, publicity, and all other related costs. That he expected to make a net profit is an index of the public's craving for anything new, strange, and exotic: he counted on many thousands of men, women, and children being willing to pay a fee in order to satisfy their curiosity to see the animal. Local chroniclers record what was charged in certain cities where Don Diego was exhibited and the sliding scale that was used in order to maximize ticket sales.⁴⁹ A mathematically inclined

⁴⁶Gandilhon.

⁴⁷Chevreuse was not the first to conceive of such a scheme. Queen Elizabeth was petitioned to allow the keeper of the elephant given her by Henry IV to go on tour with her to the United Provinces. Exactly the same arrangement was proposed: that he would maintain the animal at his own expense (estimated at £200 or more per annum) and in return would keep whatever she earned in entrance fees. See *List and Analysis of State Papers*, 148, 316. It is possible that Don Diego himself was rented out in this way during his three years in England (1623–26). In his *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* of 1646, Thomas Browne writes: "Not many yeares past, we have had the advantage in England, by an Elephant shewne in many parts thereof, not only in the posture of standing, but kneeling and lying downe" (106). Unless Hansken (about whom more will be said below) made an otherwise undocumented visit to England, Browne is presumably referring to Don Diego. For an undated English broadsheet advertising the exhibition of an elephant, see Faust, 312–13.

⁴⁸Faust, 278–79, 292–311.

⁴⁹The prices listed here are for adults; children generally paid half. The rates were flexible and changed over time. Those willing to pay a premium price could attend the elephant's opening performances, whereas those with less ready cash could wait till the novelty had worn off and then go for a cheaper rate. If the elephant stayed in town long enough, the entrance fee could eventually drop by as much as 80 percent. Nuremberg, 1629: 8 kreuzer, later reduced to 4 kreuzer, and later to 2 kreuzer. Memmingen, 1629: 1 batzen (= 4 kreuzer). Augsburg, 1629: 5 kreuzer. Rimini, 1630: 3 bolognini. Perugia, 1630: 1 grosso. Rome, 1630: 1 giulio. Agen, 1633: 16 sous, later reduced to 8 sous, then 5 sous, then 3 sous.

historian, well versed in exchange rates, could probably crunch the numbers and work out how many tickets needed to be sold for the leaseholder to come out ahead.

The leaseholder may have traveled with the elephant, but he probably had little to do with the day-to-day business of training, feeding, and seeing to the immediate needs of the animal. This was the responsibility of his minder or governor—the Indian term is *mabout*—who was never far from his side. It was the minder who taught the elephant the tricks with which he amused and amazed his audiences. Don Diego was a talented entertainer.⁵⁰ He stood, knelt, or lay down on command. He allowed his minder to clamber onto his back or to perch on his ear or on his upturned trunk. He drank wine from a wine glass (but he was fastidious and would swallow it only if it was “pure and good”; otherwise he would spit it out through his trunk).⁵¹ He smoked tobacco through a reed and showed no sign of disliking it.⁵² He was fond of oranges and could peel one on the tip of his tusk so delicately that the rind fell away in a single curl;⁵³ he could reach into his minder’s breeches-pocket with his trunk and snuff up the sweets that were hidden there.⁵⁴ So well behaved was he that visitors were permitted to approach and touch his skin, and those who were bold enough even climbed on his back. One observer noted with astonishment that he was house-trained: when he needed to relieve himself, “he gave a sign with his voice and was immediately brought a small tub so that he could urinate into it.”⁵⁵

The relationship between the animal and his minder was apparently quite tender. Bottifango marveled at the way “[his governor] approached him, and in his French tongue said many things to him, as if beseeching him, while stroking his ears, his muzzle, and his neck; . . . [the elephant] extended his trunk as though to caress him, and the minder responded by squeezing and stroking it.”⁵⁶ Others, too, observed the elephant’s affection for his minder: “He showed great love for the young man who took care of him, and they say he would not sleep at night if he could not see or hear him nearby, and would make a great racket if left with

⁵⁰There are several detailed eyewitness descriptions of Don Diego’s performances. See, for example, *Augsburg during the Reform Era*, 183–84; “Memoria,” fols. 144^v–145^v; Horn, 15; Bottifango, 7–8.

⁵¹Bottifango, 7. See also “Memoria,” fol. 144^v: “He drank nothing but wine, and that of the sweet variety, which he so loved, that when once he was given a dry wine, he made it clear that he would not take it. He did not drink as much as he ate, for in a full day he consumed no more than eight flasks of wine, and those not very big.”

⁵²Bottifango, 8.

⁵³Delort, 48–49.

⁵⁴Bottifango, 8.

⁵⁵Giacomo Antonio Pedroni, “Sei libri di diarii di varie cose” (Biblioteca Gambalunga, Rimini, Sc. MS 209–14), transcribed in www.comune.rimini.it/servizi/citta/storia_di_rimini/-microstoria/pagina82.html: “dà segno con la voce, et subito gli è portato un mastelletto a posta per urinarvi dentro.”

⁵⁶Bottifango, 7.

anyone else.”⁵⁷ Numerous sources report that both man and beast were francophone. After each glass of wine or roll of bread, the minder inquired of his charge if he liked it and “the elephant responded with an utterance that sounded like *oui*, at the same time bending his left knee in an act of reverence and thanks.”⁵⁸ The troupe they traveled with, on the other hand, was multinational and, in addition to three Frenchmen, included a Spaniard, an Englishman, and a Fleming.⁵⁹

Wherever the elephant showed up, crowds converged, eager for entertainment. A casual remark of the great Baroque sculptor Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598–1680) conveys a sense of the excitement surrounding a celebrity pachyderm. Bernini would have witnessed the enthusiastic public response to the elephant of 1630 and to another—the famous Hansken—who came to Rome in 1655. When, at the ripe old age of 67, Bernini traveled from Rome to Paris at the invitation of King Louis XIV (1638–1715), he likened his own progress to that of an elephant: “Bernini’s brief stops at the various resting places gave time for word to disseminate about his journey, so that entire towns were depopulated, so to speak, of their residents, who desired to see with their own eyes that man whose greatness had already been widely publicized through his own works. Indeed, Bernini himself used to say in jest that ‘the elephant was then traveling around,’ the sight of which usually makes everyone run to see it as it passes by.”⁶⁰

But life on the road was hard. The elephant traveled on foot, the team following behind in a carriage. When it rained, he was covered with a sheet of waxed canvas but required to trudge on. He was put up wherever there was room enough for him and often this meant that he stayed in cold stony chambers on the ground floor of town halls or palaces. Despite his tameness, he was kept in restraints whenever he was not performing. The jurist Carlo Cartari (1614–97), who was just sixteen when Don Diego came to Rome, remembered seeing him and noted that “being male, he had two fairly long tusks on either side of his trunk, for which reason he was always kept tied up.”⁶¹ Testa depicted him bound by his hind leg to a stout wooden beam (fig. 2).

Still, his life was not without its occasional thrills, and we pick up the picaresque thread of it in France, where he arrived in the summer of 1626.⁶²

⁵⁷“Memoria,” fol. 145^v.

⁵⁸Bottifango, 8. See also Horn, 86; *Augsburg during the Reform Era*, 183–84.

⁵⁹“Memoria,” fol. 143^r.

⁶⁰Bernini, 192.

⁶¹Archivio di Stato, Rome, C-F, vol. 77, fol. 42^v, transcribed in D’Onofrio, 304. See also Bottifango, 6.

⁶²Ferrand, 32, states that the episode at Montreuil (for which, see below) occurred “some seven or eight months ago.” Since the dedication to his pamphlet is dated 14 April 1627, this implies that the elephant reached France in August or September of the previous year.

After disembarking at Calais or Boulogne, he set off for Paris, but discreetly and insofar as possible incognito, in order that the first formal viewing should be the king's. One of his first stops en route was at Montreuil-sur-Mer, and there the mayor and other leading citizens of the town, impatient with these restrictions and eager to inspect the exotic visitor for themselves, barricaded his enclosure in the hope of delaying his departure. Ferrand records what happened next:

Seeing this and that they needed to be on their way, whether amicably or by force, the elephant's minder, who was an Englishman, told his master to leave it to him, and leading the animal, he instructed him by words and signs, which the elephant understood very well, to tear through the barricades. The animal, who was just as intelligent as he was strong, did as instructed and tore down the barricades, and from there, arriving at the city gate, shattered a section into two pieces, clearing a passage for himself and those who accompanied him, so that they could exit from that town that had attempted to delay them. And it is quite true that he broke the tip of one of his tusks that he uses to defend himself, as can testify anyone who has seen the animal.⁶³

In Paris in the autumn of 1626, the elephant created a sensation. László Cseffei (1592–1662), a Hungarian nobleman visiting France for the first time, wrote to his mother back home that he had not yet seen anything particularly marvelous there, with the exception of an elephant.⁶⁴ Alessandro Scaglia (1592–1641), the representative of Carlo Emanuele I di Savoia at the court of Louis XIII, was equally impressed and tried to acquire the animal for his duke's menagerie in Turin.⁶⁵ Among the crowds who flocked to see him were the erudite bibliophiles Pierre and Jacques Dupuy (1582–1651 and 1591–1656), who hastened to send a description of him to their friend, the eminent antiquarian Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580–1637), knowing his insatiable curiosity in all such matters.⁶⁶ The elephant seems to have been in poor health at the time. Peiresc, at his home in Provence, was under the impression that he was near death, and in a letter written in December of that year he lamented his demise, only to be reassured by his Parisian correspondents that the animal had not in fact died. Peiresc wrote back in January 1627, expressing his relief: "I was pleased to hear that the elephant is not dead. But I would be even more so were I to learn that some fine painter has undertaken to depict him and some expert naturalist to study and observe him, to write an exact

⁶³Ferrand, 30–31.

⁶⁴Murdoch, 132.

⁶⁵Osborne, 82.

⁶⁶Peiresc, 1:116–17. The literature on Peiresc is vast but see, most recently, Miller, 2015; also Miller, 2000; Federici.

description of his nature and above all to establish whether or not it is true that he understands with such ease the spoken commands of his minder. Monsieur [Melchior] Tavernier should make a fine etching, illustrating not only the whole animal but also his principal parts. And if the creature should die, it would be a very good thing if he were to be dissected by some capable and inquiring men.⁶⁷ Like his friend and fellow antiquarian Cassiano dal Pozzo three years later, Peiresc hankered after a picture of the animal. Elephants were still such a rare sight, especially outside the Iberian Peninsula, that anyone at all interested in natural history would have shared his desire to establish an accurate visual record. Peiresc continued to badger his correspondents for more information until the elephant left Paris sometime early in 1627.

In mid-April, the animal was in Rouen, in northwestern France.⁶⁸ In 1628, presumably under the direction of his new manager Johan Wigans, he passed through Ghent and Antwerp (fig. 3).⁶⁹ Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), in Antwerp at the time, probably saw him. A close friend and regular correspondent not only of the Dupuy brothers and of Peiresc, but also of Cassiano dal Pozzo, the painter had no doubt heard of the animal long before he arrived in his home town. If he made drawings of Don Diego, none has survived. But elephants were very much on Rubens's mind for some time thereafter. He had studied the great *Triumph of Caesar* series by Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506) when he was in Mantua in his twenties and owned copies of some or all of the canvases. Now, perhaps inspired by his recent encounter with Don Diego, he painted a pastiche based on the fifth in the series, *The Elephants*. To the row of three African elephants copied more or less faithfully from Mantegna, he added two Asian ones, both male and full of vigor and personality (fig. 4). Although their poses have been shown to derive from earlier prints, the vividness of their expressions and coloration suggests that the painter had a firsthand familiarity with the animal.⁷⁰

⁶⁷Peiresc, 1:122–23. Melchior Tavernier (1594–1665) was engraver and etcher to the king as well as a prolific publisher of illustrated books and atlases.

⁶⁸Ferrand, 4–5. In his prefatory epistle, dated 14 April 1627, Ferrand intimates that the elephant was soon to leave town.

⁶⁹Loisel, 2:28; Arblaster, 150, 218, citing a special edition of the Antwerp gazette *Nieuwe Tijdinghen*, issued on 30 June 1628, which features “an account of the nature and characteristics of the Elephant” along with the woodcut title page illustrated here.

⁷⁰Wood, 1:72–90. It is worth pointing out that Rubens—who, like Poussin, was probably unaware of the existence of different species of elephant—has corrected Mantegna's animals. By hiding their large African ears and giving them a single finger at the tips of their trunks, he has effectively turned them into Asian elephants. By a telling coincidence, Poussin also made a copy of Mantegna's elephants and he, too, felt compelled to correct them. In a drawing probably based on an engraved reproduction (Rosenberg and Prat, 1:402–03, no. 206), he retains the African ears but gives the animal in the foreground the distinctively humped profile of an Asian bull elephant.



Figure 3. Don Diego in Antwerp, 1628 (from *Nieuwe Tijdinghen*, 30 June 1628). Woodcut. Location unknown.

After Antwerp, Don Diego may have passed through Utrecht. A delightful drawing by the Utrecht-based artist Rolaent Savery (1576–1639) records an adolescent male Asian elephant scratching his hind quarters against a tree (fig. 5). Unmistakably drawn from life, it has been dated to the years Savery spent at the court of Rudolf II in Prague (1603–13).⁷¹ The imperial menagerie was famous in its day, but I have found no evidence that it contained an elephant when Savery was in residence there and I wonder if the drawing might not be a later work, made after he returned to the Netherlands—in other words, if it might not be a portrait of Don Diego. It and two other Savery drawings of the same animal were engraved, probably by Robert van

⁷¹Bisanz-Prakken, 22 (cat. no. 3); *Echt tierisch!*, 156–57.



Figure 4. Peter Paul Rubens. *A Roman Triumph*, ca. 1629–30. Oil on canvas laid down on oak, 87 x 164 cm. London, National Gallery. Photo: © National Gallery.

Voerst, around 1634 and included in Crispijn de Passe's *Della luce del dipingere et disegnare*, published in Amsterdam in 1643 (fig. 6).⁷² Particularly in the profile view, Savery's elephant shows a striking resemblance to the animal recorded by Poussin and Testa: he is about the same age (this one can judge from the length and thickness of his tusks) and is similarly malnourished in appearance, his gauntness making his forelegs appear longer, his pelvis more pronounced, and his hump more prominent than is normal for a healthy young Asian elephant.

Don Diego then continued on into Germany. In April of 1629 he reached Frankfurt, where a flurry of broadsheets and pamphlets announced his appearances (figs. 7–9).⁷³ One of these, an early work by the distinguished Bohemian etcher Wenceslas Hollar (1607–77), stands out for its artistic refinement (fig. 9). It is, however, a deceptive likeness. Hollar inscribed it “The Elephant seen throughout Europe in 1629,” but in fact he based the central figure as well as the seven little elephants in the background on an earlier print by Gerard von Groeningen, representing an altogether different elephant who passed through the Netherlands in 1563 (fig. 10).⁷⁴ Hollar was in and around Frankfurt at the time (the print was published in nearby Strasbourg) and he probably saw the animal, but evidently he found it easier or more expedient to

⁷²Hollstein's *Dutch and Flemish*, 260–63 (no. 36); Bartilla and Kubíková, 168–69, 176–77.

⁷³Faust, 292–311.

⁷⁴Ibid., 288–89, 294–97; *The New Hollstein . . . Wenceslaus Hollar*, 1:58–59 (no. 76); *The New Hollstein . . . Gerard van Groeningen*, 1:60–61 (no. 24).

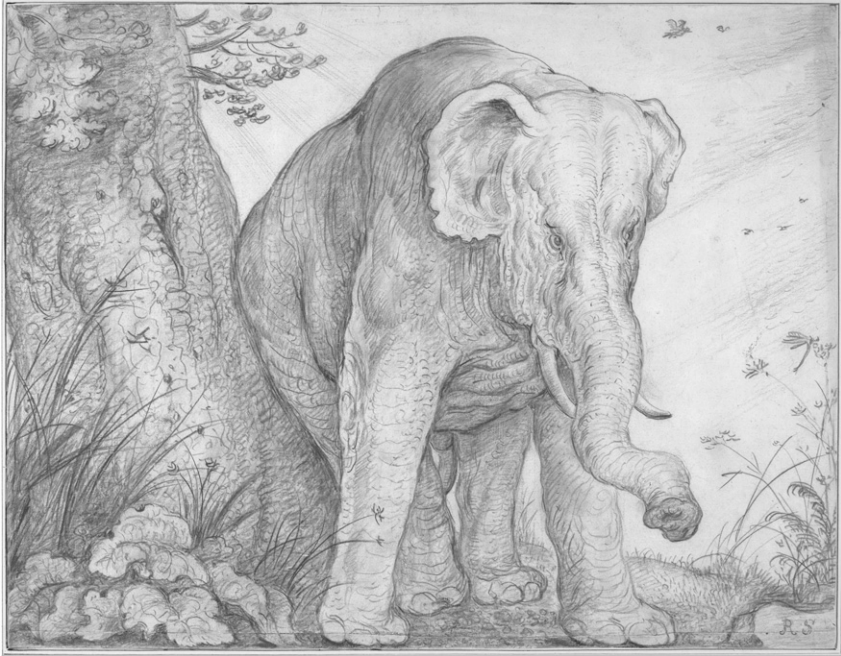


Figure 5. Roelant Savery. A male Asian elephant (possibly Don Diego) scratching himself against a tree, possibly 1628–29. Black and red chalk, 43.3 x 55.7 cm. Vienna, Albertina. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

copy an existing image than to create one from scratch. In contrast, the vignettes around the edge of the print illustrating Don Diego's various tricks are not based on any earlier work and have a freshness and charm that the central image cannot rival.

In May, the elephant stopped in Nuremberg. There he performed at the Fechthaus, an open-air arena lined with viewing balconies where audiences gathered to see plays, fencing tournaments, acrobatics and circus acts, bearbaiting, and bull fights. Don Diego was a popular attraction. The noble youth of the town took turns climbing on his back and two of them had their exploit recorded in a drawing (fig. 11).⁷⁵ A life-size portrait of the animal painted on the inner wall of the Fechthaus commemorated his stay there

⁷⁵Faust, 298–300. The drawing shows Friedrich Volckamer and Wilhelm Kress enjoying a glass of wine while riding on the elephant's back. Clearly modeled on figure 8, the drawing with an accompanying memo noting the particulars of the elephant's visit to Nuremberg is tipped into a copy of Conrad Gesner's 1563 *Thierbuch*, in the section on elephants.

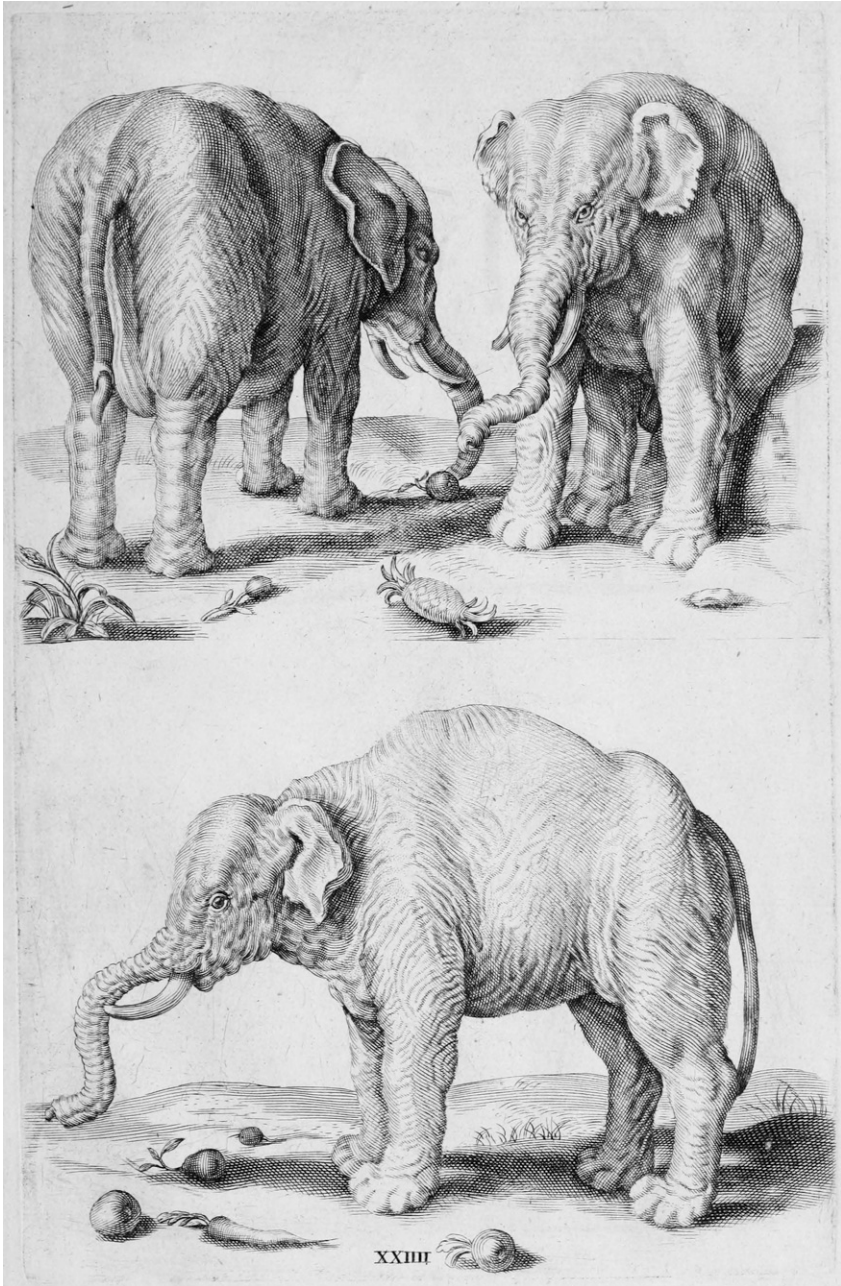


Figure 6. Robert van Voerst (attrib.) after Roelant Savery. Three views of a male Asian elephant, before 1636, reprinted in Crispijn de Passe, *Della luce del dipingere et disegnare*, 1643–44. Engraving, 28.8 x 18.5 cm. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute. Photo: Internet Archive.

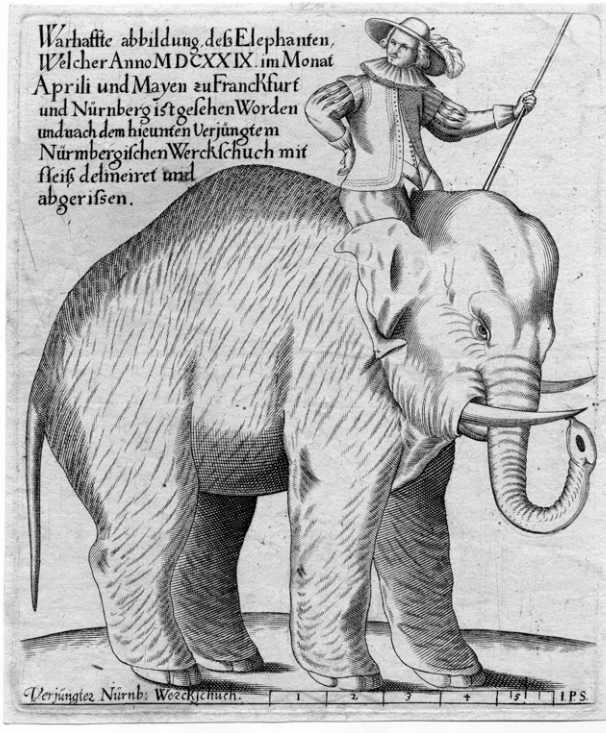


Figure 7. Don Diego in Frankfurt and Nuremberg, 1629 (from Caspar Horn, *Elephas*, Nuremberg, 1629). Engraving, 15.5 x 12.8 cm. London, British Museum. Photo: © British Museum.

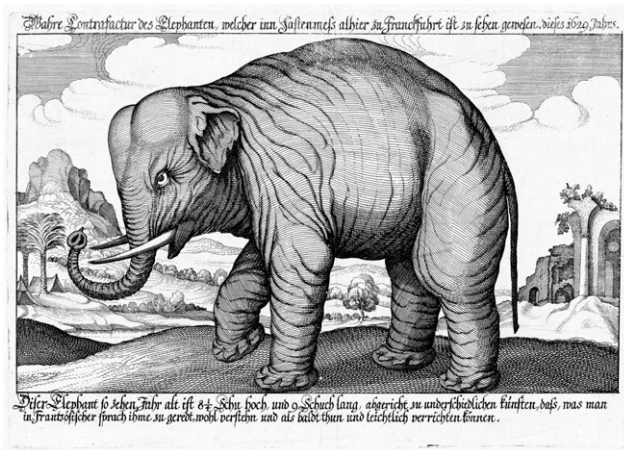


Figure 8. Don Diego in Frankfurt, 1629. Etching, 19 x 25.5 cm. London, British Museum. Photo: © British Museum.

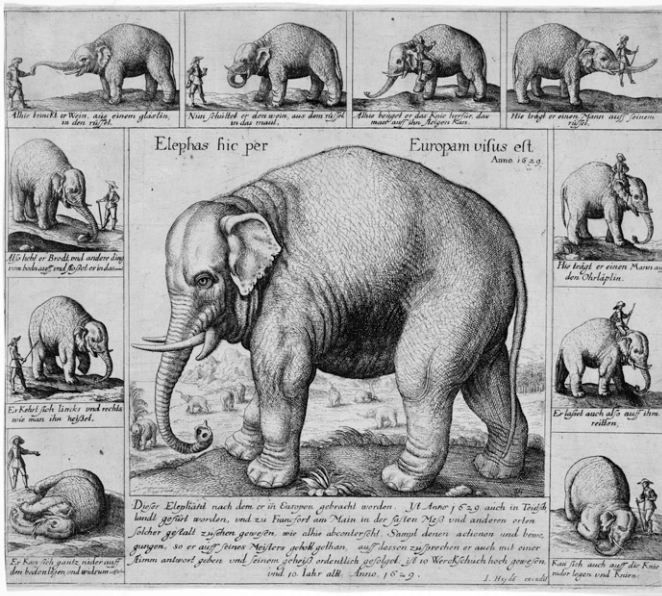


Figure 9. Wenceslas Hollar. Don Diego in Germany, 1629. Etching, 24 x 28 cm. London, British Museum. Photo: © British Museum.

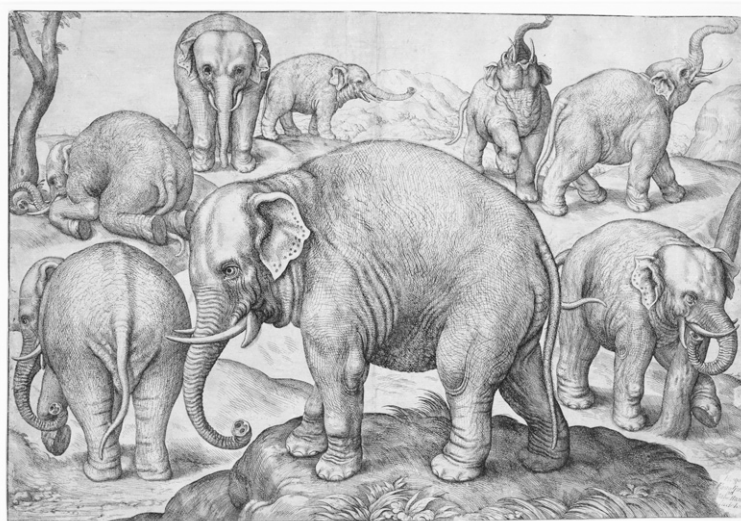


Figure 10. Gerard von Groeningen. The Elephant of 1563 in eight different positions, 1563. Engraving, 40.5 x 54 cm. London, British Museum. Photo: © British Museum.

(figs. 12 and 13). In July, he hit Memmingen,⁷⁶ Augsburg,⁷⁷ and Regensburg.⁷⁸ This last town is on the Danube and from there he either took passage on a river boat or continued on foot into Austria.⁷⁹ He is likely to have visited Linz and Vienna, but his next documented stopover was in Graz in October. There he was stabled at an inn, which became known as the *Gasthof zum Elephanten*; his likeness was painted in the courtyard, and below it, in rhyming verse, an inscription commemorated his visit: “In the year 1629, verily in the month of October, this elephant stabled here and was seen with delight and wonder by many men and women. Praise and honor to the Almighty who in the elephant gives such clear and fine proof of his omnipotence.”⁸⁰

He then crossed into Italy. From Graz, the shortest and least mountainous route would have been via Gorizia and the Veneto. But at least one source places him in Milan and claims that he crossed the Alps to get there.⁸¹ If true, this would mean that he retraced in reverse some portion of the route taken by the famous elephant of Archduke Maximilian, who crossed the Brenner Pass in the dead of winter on his journey from Portugal to Vienna in 1551–52. The misery of that poor beast in the freezing conditions he encountered is movingly imagined in the climactic scene of José Saramago’s 2008 historical novel *The Elephant’s Journey*. Inns where the archduke’s elephant stayed in Bressanone and Bolzano are still named after him and it is not impossible that Don Diego found shelter in those same stables.⁸² All the same, given the extreme difficulty of mountain travel in

⁷⁶Schorer, 135, cited by Oettermann, 122: “On 7 July an elephant was brought here and exhibited in the school house, for one *batzen* per person.”

⁷⁷Roeck, 26–27; *Augsburg during the Reform Era*, 183–84. The elephant was exhibited in the *Tanzhaus*.

⁷⁸Gumpelzhaimer, 1126: “A young ten-year-old elephant, very big and strong, was brought here for viewing in July. He was displayed in the forecourt of the house to which he gave his name. He was the first of his kind to be seen here.” There is still a *Haus zum Elephanten* in Regensburg, formerly the residence of the imperial envoys to that city and later converted into a pharmacy.

⁷⁹Eight decades earlier, in 1552, another Asian elephant had traveled by river boat from Innsbruck to Vienna; see Oettermann, 109–16; Faust, 284–85; Gschwend, 22–23.

⁸⁰Nossek, 1:346: “In dem 1629ten Jahr / Diess Monat October fürwahr / That dieser Elefant allda Stallung hann, / Ihn haben gesehen viel Frauen und Mann / Ob Freud und verwundern sich sehr / Dem Allerhöchsten Lob und Ehr / Der in dem Elefanten so klar und fein / Gibt zu erkennen die Allmacht sein.”

⁸¹Giacomo Antonio Pedroni, “Sei libri di diarii di varie cose” (Biblioteca Gambalunga, Rimini, Sc. MS 209–14), cited in www.comune.rimini.it/servizi/citta/storia_di_rimini/-microstoria/pagina82.html.

⁸²On the journey of the archduke’s elephant and his passage across the Alps, see Oettermann, 109–16; Faust, 284–85; Gschwend 22–23.

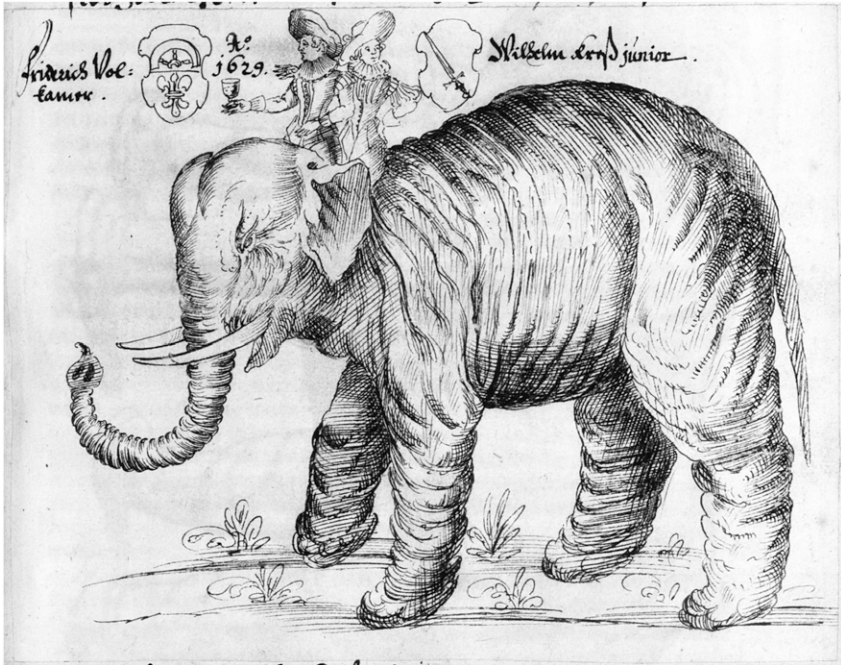


Figure 11. Don Diego in Nuremberg, with two young noblemen on his back, 1629. Pen and ink. Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: Dr. Jörn Günther Rare Books AG.

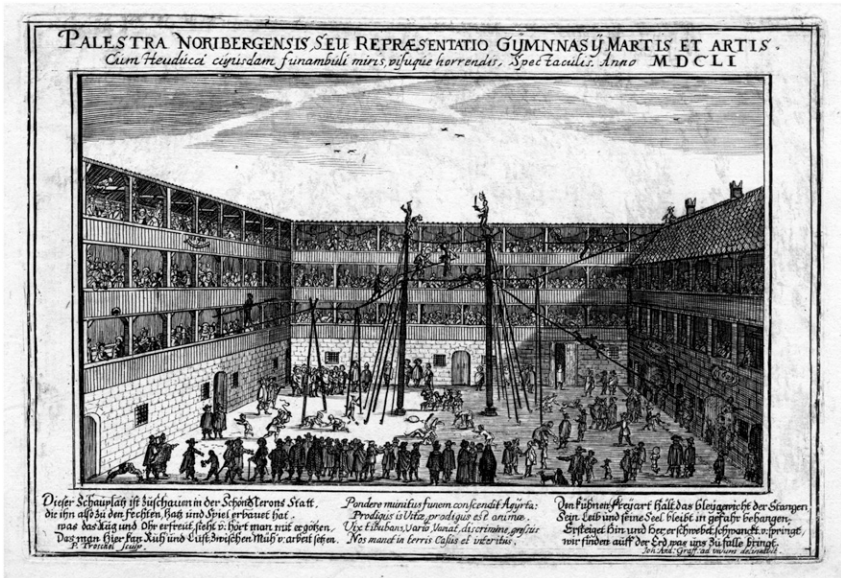


Figure 12. Peter Troschel after Johann Andreas Graff. The Fechthaus in Nuremberg, after 1652. Etching, 16 x 24 cm. London, British Museum. Photo: © British Museum.



Figure 13. Detail of figure 12, with the life-size portraits of the two elephants who passed through the Fechthaus in the seventeenth century painted on the inner wall, Don Diego on the right under the date 1629 and Hansken on the left under the date 1652.

winter, it seems more likely that he would have taken the southern route and reached Milan (if indeed he went there) via the flat roads and populous cities of the Po Valley.

Whatever his point of entry, he could hardly have arrived in Italy at a less auspicious moment. Warring Spanish, French, and imperial troops were on the march throughout the northern states; Mantua was under siege; and the entire region was in the grip of a calamitous epidemic of bubonic plague that was to cut in half the population of some cities by the year's end. At the leading edge of the deadly miasmas, Don Diego plodded slowly southward. On 6 February 1630, he reached Bologna. The city was on the lookout for disease and living in dread of its arrival; yet not only was the elephant allowed to enter, he was put up in the *salone* of the Palazzo del Podestà for nearly three weeks.⁸³ The city's nobility crowded into the hall to catch a glimpse of him. In the crush, tempers flared. Marchese Virgilio Malvezzi (1595–1653), arriving with a numerous entourage, found a seventeen-year-old student, Count Francesco Piccolomini, blocking his view and tried to push him out of the way. When the young man stood his ground, Malvezzi slapped him and then set his henchman on him. Fortunately no one was killed, but the incident resulted in a bitter feud that lasted eight years, until Malvezzi (by then in the employ of Philip IV and living in Madrid) admitted to having been in the wrong and sent a formal apology.⁸⁴

The pope's brother Prince Carlo Barberini (1562–1630) was in Bologna at the same time as Don Diego, on a peacemaking mission as general of the Holy Church. Lodged outside the city walls in the Olivetan monastery of S. Michele in Bosco, he was laid low by an infection reportedly brought on by kidney stones and died there on February 25.⁸⁵ The funeral was to be held five days later in the basilica of San Petronio, just across the piazza from the Podestà where the elephant was stabled. The Senate may have judged it inappropriate that the animal should remain on view at such a time, or perhaps his stay in Bologna had simply reached its scheduled end; whatever the reason, Don Diego and his troupe left town within twenty-four hours of Carlo's death. The plague arrived a few weeks later and before the year was out an estimated 15,000 citizens—nearly a quarter of the city's population—had died.⁸⁶

⁸³Masini, 225: On 6 February 1630 “there arrived in Bologna an elephant of enormous size, and he was exhibited in the *salone* of the Podestà, where he stayed for twenty days, many thronging to see him.”

⁸⁴Antonio Francesco Ghiselli, “Memorie antiche” (Biblioteca Universitaria, Bologna, MS 770, XXVI, 874), transcribed and discussed in Malvezzi, xii–xiii. On Malvezzi's distinguished career as author and diplomat, see the entry by Clizia Carminati in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, s.v. “Malvezzi, Virgilio.”

⁸⁵Brighetti, 38.

⁸⁶*Encyclopedia of Plague and Pestilence*, 201.

In the following month, Don Diego put in appearances in Forlimpopoli,⁸⁷ Cesena,⁸⁸ Rimini,⁸⁹ and Pesaro. At the invitation of Francesco Maria II della Rovere, Duke of Urbino (1549–1631), he spent three days in Casteldurante (later Urbania), where he was accommodated in the garden of the ducal palace. Padre Francesco Resta, who chronicled events of importance in the duchy, wrote a detailed and fascinating account of the visit.⁹⁰ The duke's librarian, the learned academician Vittorio Venturelli, further commemorated the occasion by writing a treatise on elephants;⁹¹ and the duke himself commissioned a painting of the animal, which is recorded hanging in his *guardaroba* at the time of his death a year later.⁹² Continuing southward, Don Diego spent three days in Perugia, where he was housed in the *sala del consiglio* of the Palazzo dei Priori and enthusiastically inspected by the ladies and gentlemen of the region.⁹³

⁸⁷Vecchiazzani, 2:320: "1630 . . . in March an enormous elephant put on a spectacular show in Forlimpopoli."

⁸⁸Biblioteca Malatestiana, Cesena, MS 164.93.2, fol. 19, transcribed in *Storie barocche*, 360: "1630 / An elephant passed through Cesena, watched with wonder by everyone."

⁸⁹For the elephant's stay in Rimini, see Bottifango, 4. See also the excellent but uncredited online entry entitled "L'arrivo del elefante," based on material drawn from the diaries of the seventeenth-century Riminese chronicler Giacomo Antonio Pedroni (Biblioteca Gambalunga, Rimini, Sc. MS 209–14), at www.comune.rimini.it/servizi/citta/storia_di_rimini/-microstoria/pagina82.html. From Pedroni, a canon of the cathedral of Santa Colomba (better known as the Tempio Malatestiano), we learn that the elephant arrived in Rimini on March 14 and stayed four days before continuing on toward Pesaro. Pedroni further reports that the elephant was owned by a Frenchman; that he arrived from Milan having crossed the Alps in winter; that while in Rimini he was housed in the stables of the late Cesare Clementini; and that the public was charged 3 bolognini per person to view him. He describes the animal in detail, lists his various tricks, and marvels at his intelligence and refinement. On the day he left for Pesaro, there was torrential rain. The Frenchman and his servants covered him in a waxed canvas hanging almost to the ground and followed behind in a carriage.

⁹⁰"Memoria," fols. 142^v–145^v; also Moretti, 130, 169n60. Resta spent time with the members of Don Diego's troupe, gathering information about the animal's history and habits. It is he who records the elephant's name and who mentions Buckingham's role in the animal's removal to France along with other pertinent details. I am indebted to Dottor Massimo Ceresa, who very kindly photographed and sent me the relevant pages of the manuscript when I was far from Rome.

⁹¹"Historia naturale del Elefante descritta da Vitt. Venturelli d'Urbino [1630]" (Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire de Montpellier, section Médecine, MS H 175). I have not had an opportunity to consult this manuscript. On Venturelli, *letterato* and librarian, who wrote, among other things, the funeral oration on the death of Federico Barocci, see Grossi, 119–20.

⁹²Semenza, 104.

⁹³Meniconi, 123, 192n467: "Sunday 28 April 1630, late in the evening, an animal called an elephant arrived, accompanied by eight or ten men, and was conducted to the Sala del Consiglio in the Palazzo dei Priori, where he was exhibited; men and women thronged to see him, paying one grosso per person. . . . Early Thursday morning, the elephant left on his way to Rome, having spent three days here, and on Tuesday and Wednesday many gentlewomen came to see him."

The elephant reached Rome in the second week of May 1630. Guards had been manning the city gates since January, vetting all newcomers for signs of plague, but the elephant was once again given free entry. Coming as he did from the direction of Perugia, he is likely to have passed through the Porta del Popolo and paraded down the length of the Corso on his way to take up residence in Palazzo Venezia. About his time in Rome, disappointingly little is known. That he remained there for at least a month is certain, for he was “still to be seen and admired” in mid-June.⁹⁴ Gigli, Bottifango, and Cartari attest that he drew large crowds. Testa and Poussin cannot have been the only artists who went to Palazzo Venezia to observe and draw him. Bernini, for one, must have seized the opportunity. Many years later, he was to design Rome’s most famous elephant, who stands in front of S. Maria sopra Minerva with an obelisk on his back. But even before then, perhaps as early as 1632, he toyed with the idea of an elephant base for an obelisk in the gardens of Palazzo Barberini. A drawing and a clay model for the project survive (figs. 14–15).⁹⁵ The statue, which was to have been made of granite or bronze, was never executed and remained on the drawing board until Bernini revived it for Alexander VII. Another artist who surely came into contact with Don Diego was the Neapolitan painter Andrea de Leone (1596–1675), who is documented in Rome in May 1630 and who could have seen the animal both there and in Naples a few months later. His huge *Elephants in a Circus*, commissioned by Viceroy Monterrey in 1634 for the decoration of the Buen Retiro in Madrid, bears all the signs of having been directly inspired by his encounter with the animal (fig. 16).⁹⁶ Like Poussin and Testa, De Leone belonged to the circle of artists closely associated with Cassiano dal Pozzo and may have been drawn to the subject, just as they were, through the influence of this erudite man.

⁹⁴Bottifango, 3, 16.

⁹⁵D’Onofrio, 435–45 (who notes the connection with the elephant of 1630); Waddy, 261–62, 400n391; *Bernini: Sculpting in Clay*, 27, 136–41. Bernini’s elephant project for the Barberini has been variously dated around 1632, when the family acquired the obelisk of Antinous, and 1658, when the details of the design and a drawing by Bernini are mentioned in a letter from Cardinal Francesco’s *antiquario* Leonardo Agostini. That the Windsor drawing records a Barberini project is confirmed by the bees decorating the summit of the obelisk. Complicating the narrative, however, is the fact that the obelisk in the drawing is relatively petite, distinctly tapered, and inscribed with only one vertical row of hieroglyphs, whereas the obelisk of Antinous is nearly twice as tall as the obelisk in front of the Minerva, is less tapered, and has two vertical rows of hieroglyphs on each face.

⁹⁶Di Penta, 64–65. The affinity between De Leone’s elephants and Poussin’s *Hannibal* was noted by Schütze, 190.

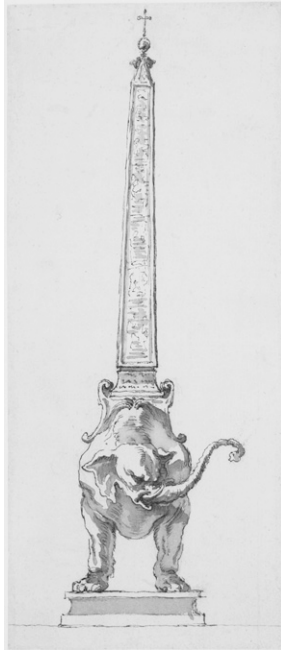


Figure 14. Gianlorenzo Bernini. Presentation drawing for the Barberini elephant and obelisk project, ca. 1632–58. Pen and ink and wash over black chalk, 27.3 x 11.6 cm. Windsor, Royal Library. Photo: Royal Collection Trust © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2017.



Figure 15. Gianlorenzo Bernini. Modello for the Barberini elephant and obelisk project, ca. 1632–58. Terracotta, 59.5 x 54.5 x 27 cm. Florence, Corsini collection. Photo: © Anthony Sigel 2016.



Figure 16. Andrea de Leone. *Elephants in a Circus*, ca. 1634–40. Oil on canvas, 229 x 231 cm. Madrid, Prado Museum. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

Soon Don Diego was on the road again.⁹⁷ He traveled next to Naples, arriving in August for an extended stay.⁹⁸ Naples was probably the southernmost stop on his Italian tour. His movements over the next six months are unclear; he may have waited until winter, when infection rates tended to drop, before turning

⁹⁷After his first four or five weeks in Rome, Don Diego faced competition for the public's attention, when Cardinal Santacroce, papal nunzio to Poland, fleeing an outbreak of plague in that country, returned home on June 10, bringing with him a menagerie of rare animals, including an elk and several leopards and lions, as well as splendid horses and dogs. Gigli, 1:194.

⁹⁸Croce, 407n3, citing the chronicler Ferrante Bucca, who in an entry of August 1630 mentions the animal "brought by certain Frenchmen, who stayed in Naples many days inside a house so that he could be shown; and it was a curious thing; having expected to see something monstrous, and observing instead what understanding he had and how obedient he was, he seemed more human than bestial; and they made him do various tricks, and he almost seemed to speak."

northward and crossing plague-devastated Tuscany. Florence was one of the cities worst hit by the epidemic and there is no evidence that he put in an appearance there, although earlier his manager seems to have entertained the idea of offering him for sale to the grand duke.⁹⁹ By the time we pick up the elephant's trail, in April and May of the following year, he was in Genoa.¹⁰⁰

By the fall of 1631, Don Diego had left Italy and crossed into Provence. He was seen in Toulon and made a side trip to Peiresc's estate at Beaugency outside Aix.¹⁰¹ Peiresc had been curious to know more about the animal ever since his friends in Paris had first told him about him five years earlier and he leapt at the opportunity to see him with his own eyes and study him at his leisure. The elephant spent three days at Beaugency. The episode is recorded by Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), who writes of it in some detail in his biography of Peiresc:

He was told that there was an Elephant come to Tolon, which he caused to be brought to *Beaugensier*, that he might examine something about which, four years since, he had wrote to [the brothers Du Puy], when the Beast was carried to Paris. It was now brought out of Italy, being the same which, a year before, was shewed at Rome: and I wonder what made the owner thereof tell *Peireskius*, that he was 14 years old, when as at Rome, the year before, he gave him out to be but eleven years old, as by the Picture thereof dedicated to the Knight *Gualdus*, and the description thereof, made by *Bottifangus*, may be seen. Moreover, *Peireskius* two whole dayes together, what with asking Questions, what by making experiments, learned so many things, that he accounted himself satisfied. Among other things, when he had tried him with all kinds of meats, especially, commanding to give him sweet things, which he loved best, so that the Elephant began to know him, and to fawn upon him; he grew so confident, as (his Keeper doing the same first) to put his hand into his mouth, and feel how many teeth he had.¹⁰²

Peiresc was pleased to discover that the beast had eight teeth, thus disproving Pliny's claim that elephants have only four. While he was at it, he took a wax impression of the teeth. Some years earlier, he had purchased a giant's tooth and had proudly written about it to several of his correspondents; but now he recognized, upon examining Don Diego's mouthful, that he had been duped, that what he had bought was not a relic of an extinct race of giants, but an

⁹⁹"Memoria," fols. 142^v–143^r: "They go to Rome, whence it is said they will turn around and head back toward Florence to make a sale of the animal to the Grand Duke."

¹⁰⁰Schiaffino, fol. 130^r: "In the months of April and May, there was an elephant in Genoa, who was shown for a fee."

¹⁰¹Peiresc, 2:293–94, 4:36–37; Gassendi, 59–61.

¹⁰²Gassendi, 59–60.

elephant's molar.¹⁰³ He also studied the animal's joints and even managed to weigh him, using cannonballs as counterweights. Like the Duke of Urbino and like his friends Cassiano and Gualdi in Rome, Peiresc wanted a pictorial record of the elephant and planned to commission an image "painted in a threefold posture."¹⁰⁴

That the elephant stopped in Beaugency makes for a pleasing plot twist, given Peiresc's long acquaintance with the animal via letters. Peiresc belonged to a network of intellectuals who collected curiosities and amassed information about all things ancient and modern, local and exotic, manmade and natural. The republic of letters was an estate without borders that stretched across Europe and beyond, and the elephant, on his journey, came into frequent contact with it. Peiresc, Pierre and Jacques Dupuy, Rubens, Francesco Maria della Rovere and his librarian Venturelli, Bottifango, Gualdi, Cassiano, and even Poussin himself were united by common interests and by lines of communication that hummed with the exchange of intelligence and ideas. Although Don Diego's appeal was by no means limited to this community of *curiosi*, it is in the prints, paintings, treatises, and chronicles made or commissioned by these men that his memory is most vividly preserved.

The elephant left Beaugency for Aix. In November he was in Avignon, stabled in the papal palace.¹⁰⁵ December found him in residence in the Commanderie de Sainte-Luce, the local headquarters of the Knights of Malta, in Arles.¹⁰⁶ He had by then been under the management of Georges Pierre for at least a year and a half. Pierre's two-year lease was due to end in May 1632 and perhaps the troupe headed north to restore the animal to his owner. But if so, they soon returned southward, for in August 1633 the elephant was in Agen,¹⁰⁷ and in September, in Montpellier.¹⁰⁸ At some point Pierre must have reached an

¹⁰³Ibid., 60; Miller, 2000, 30.

¹⁰⁴Gassendi, 60.

¹⁰⁵Balincourt, 54: "In 1631 in the month of November, an animal called an elephant was brought to Avignon; it is the largest creature on earth and had never before been seen in these parts. Monsieur the vice-legate had him conducted into his palace, where the people came out of curiosity to see him." The vice-legate at the time was Archbishop Mario Filonardi (d. 1644).

¹⁰⁶Véran: "In the month of December, they brought an elephant to Arles, ten feet high and with legs like sardine barrels. He was lodged at Sainte-Luce."

¹⁰⁷"Journal agenais des Malebaysse," 248: "19 August 1633, an elephant was brought to this town and was put up at the home of Monsieur de la Court, on the rue de Garonne, and he stayed there a month and a half. To see him, at first one paid 16 sous, then it was lowered to 8 sous, then 5 sous, and then 3 sous."

¹⁰⁸Delort, 48–49: "In the same month of September 1633, an elephant was seen in Montpellier, who was put up at the house of Mademoiselle de La Colombière, which now belongs to the magistrate Sieur Greffeuille." Delort goes on to describe the elephant's penchant for oranges and his skill in peeling them with trunk and tusk.

understanding with the duc de Chevreuse; he either bought the animal outright or agreed to act as the duke's agent in putting him up for sale.¹⁰⁹ On 17 January 1634, Don Diego was sold by Georges Pierre to Hilaire Gardy, a merchant from Troyes, for the price of 15,000 livres.¹¹⁰ Pierre agreed to deliver the animal within the month to Marmande in Gascony, accompanied by two attendants, whose salaries and keep were henceforth to be paid by Gardy. Marmande is a mere sixty kilometers from Agen, where the elephant had spent a month and a half the previous year, so it would seem that, after leaving Italy, Don Diego remained in the South of France, traveling back and forth between its major towns and cities.

After the sale we lose track of Don Diego. If the animal's unnatural scrawniness in the images by Poussin and Testa is anything to go by, he was not thriving by the time he reached Rome. Adult Asian elephants require up to 330 pounds of food per day and the cost of feeding this one may have outstripped his earnings.¹¹¹ Then, too, by 1634, he was fifteen years old and had reached sexual maturity.¹¹² Young males in musth are known for bouts of extreme aggression. He may have become more than his handlers could cope with. There is no record of when, where, or how Don Diego met his end, but it seems probable that, like others of his kind brought to Europe as curiosities, he died relatively young.

Shortly before the sale of Don Diego, competition arrived in the form of a three-year-old female elephant from Ceylon, who reached Amsterdam in 1633 aboard a Dutch East Indiaman. This was Hansken, the elephant so famously and sympathetically portrayed by Rembrandt (fig. 17) and later by Stefano della Bella (fig. 18). Hansken's career followed much the same course as Don Diego's. Initially owned by the Prince of Orange, she was sold to a private citizen who took her on the road. She stayed mainly in Northern Europe, crisscrossing back and

¹⁰⁹According to Padre Resta ("Memoria," fol. 143^r), the elephant's manager was already his owner by the time he reached Casteldurante in late March 1630, having purchased him from the duc de Chevreuse for the sum of 2,000 scudi. If Resta was right about this, the original lease (transcribed in full in Gandilhon, 210–11) must have been redrawn as a bill of sale sometime between 1628 and 1630. It is worth noting that in Testa's engraving, the elephant's rider is blowing a trumpet. Could he be Pierre himself, who once served as *trompette des gardes* to the duc de Guise?

¹¹⁰"Minutes et répertoires du notaire Claude III de Troyes [Jan–May 1634]," fol. 10^r: 17 January 1634.

¹¹¹See http://library.sandiegozoo.org/factsheets/asian_elephant/asian_elephant.htm. During his stay in England, when he was still a juvenile, the estimated expense of his upkeep had exceeded £275 per annum. By the time he was in his teens, his bread and wine alone was costing his keeper around 365 scudi per year. Bottifango, 8.

¹¹²The age at which male Asian elephants reach sexual maturity varies depending on nutrition and other factors; they can be as young as nine, but more typically are between fourteen and fifteen years old.

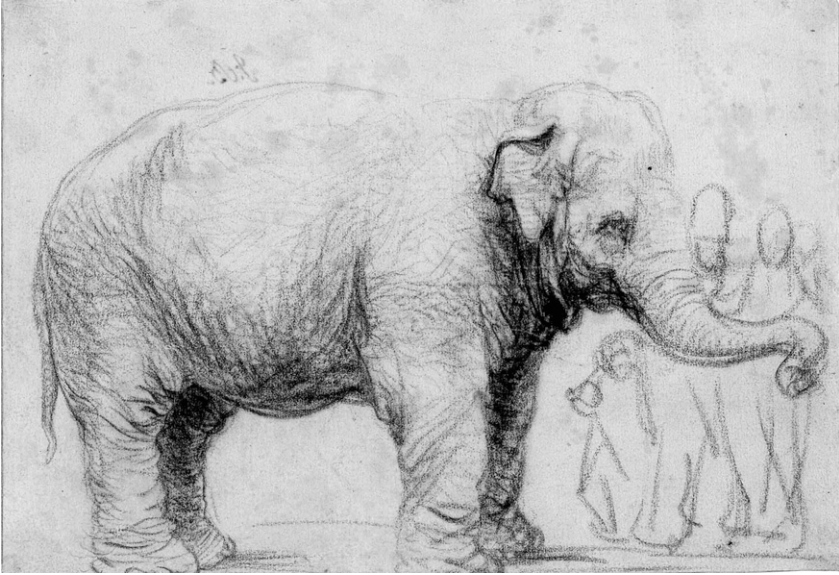


Figure 17. Rembrandt van Rijn. Hansken in Amsterdam, ca. 1637. Black chalk, 18 x 25.5 cm. London, British Museum. Photo: © British Museum.



Figure 18. Stefano della Bella, Hansken (deceased) in Florence, 1655. Pen and ink and wash, 15 x 21 cm. Turin, Biblioteca Reale. Photo: Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo.

forth between the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Poland, and Switzerland. In 1655, she headed south into Italy. In July she was in Rome and in October in Florence; but while on view in the Tuscan capital she contracted an infection and died on November 9. She was twenty-five years old.¹¹³

THE LETTER TO CASSIANO OF 1630

Having pieced together Don Diego's life story and pinpointed the moment of his encounter with Poussin, let us return to the letter the artist addressed to Cassiano dal Pozzo, in which he referred to his painting of the elephant. In that letter, now securely datable to the late spring or summer of 1630, the painter begged his friend and patron for remuneration, citing his grave need.¹¹⁴ He apologized for being unable to attend Cassiano in person and mentioned an illness, which had limited his ability to work and therefore to support himself. In addition to the painting of the elephant, he referred to drawings he had agreed to make for Cassiano (possibly for the Paper Museum) and promised to send some along soon. Cassiano responded with a payment of forty scudi. This would have been a generous sum in 1625, when Poussin was still virtually unknown and selling biblical battle scenes for a few scudi each; but by 1630 it was no more than a reasonable fee for a work of this type and size. By way of comparison, Poussin received 60 scudi for the *Death of Germanicus* in 1628 and 110 scudi for the *Plague at Ashdod* in 1631, but these are larger and more elaborate compositions than the *Hannibal*, and true rather than pseudo history paintings.¹¹⁵

¹¹³The literature on Hansken is abundant, but see, in particular, Oetterman, 124–29; Bakker; Faust, 314–47; Seneviratne; Heikamp and Roscam Abbing; and the highly entertaining and informative website <http://www.elephanthansken.com>. Hansken's skeleton is on display in Florence's Museum of Natural History.

¹¹⁴Most scholars have dated the letter, as they have the painting, to the years 1625–27; others have been less consistent, dating the letter ca. 1629 while dating the painting two or three years earlier. Only Haskell and Rinehart (322 [nos. 67–68]), as far as I am aware, have connected the letter to the elephant of 1630 and dated it accordingly; but the painting was not known to them (it came to light only after their article appeared) and they were under the mistaken impression that Poussin was describing a drawing.

¹¹⁵Michel, 27; Spear, 49, 101. The price of a painting was determined not only by the artist's reputation, but also by the size and complexity of the composition, and above all by its genre. Thus while Poussin was charging around 100 scudi for large and imposing history paintings, he was getting only a fraction as much for his landscapes, even examples as outstanding as the pendant landscapes with Saint Matthew and Saint John, for which Gian Maria Roscioli paid 20 scudi apiece in 1640. The portrait of Don Diego being neither a true history painting nor a landscape but something arguably in between the two, the price tag of 40 scudi seems just about right.

The letter to Cassiano touches on several points of biographical interest that can now be connected with absolute certainty to the first half of 1630. According to Passeri (ca. 1610–79), Poussin suffered terribly from the “French disease,” presumably syphilis.¹¹⁶ He must have been going through a particularly virulent stage in the progression of the infection in late 1629–early 1630. During these months, if the letter to Cassiano is to be believed, he was greatly debilitated and unable to work. Passeri mentions this bout of illness in connection with Poussin’s marriage, which he claims took place immediately following his convalescence in 1629. Passeri was off by one year—Poussin married on 9 September 1630¹¹⁷—but otherwise his account of the painter’s affliction perfectly accords with the letter to Cassiano.¹¹⁸

The letter also alludes to the painter’s financial difficulties. By 1630, Poussin was an established figure earning good money for his paintings; indeed, only the previous year he had been paid 400 scudi for his altarpiece in St. Peter’s. All the same, his success was recent and to judge from his bank account he had not yet amassed much wealth.¹¹⁹ So it is easy to imagine that an illness of several months could have dealt a significant blow to his finances. Quite apart from the loss of income resulting from his inability to work, he had to pay the doctors and surgeons who (according to Passeri) attended him through the crisis. His upcoming marriage to Anne-Marie Dughet, which took place shortly after he wrote to Cassiano, may have further contributed to his money worries.

¹¹⁶Passeri, 324–25. On Poussin’s ill health in 1629–30, see, in addition, Cropper and Dempsey, 228–30; Unglaub, 520–23; Wilberding. Mahon’s contention (1999, 21n18) that “there is absolutely no other supporting evidence [besides the inscription on the putative self-portrait drawing, discussed below] that Poussin was ill *circa l’anno 1630*” is manifestly incorrect.

¹¹⁷The date of the wedding is variously given in the modern scholarship as 9 August, 1 September, or 9 September, 1630.

¹¹⁸Another source that locates the crisis in Poussin’s health to 1630 is the controversial red-chalk “self-portrait” in the British Museum. This vivid image of a man, informally dressed and fiercely scowling, bears an eighteenth-century inscription on its mount, identifying it as a portrait of Poussin “made by his own hand, using a mirror, around the year 1630 when he was convalescing from his grave illness.” The attribution to Poussin has been discredited in recent years and many scholars now doubt that this is even his likeness. The features, though, are not dissimilar to those we know so well from the famous self-portraits of 1649 and 1650. And the inscription does seem to be written by someone who had access to reliable information, for the dating of Poussin’s convalescence to “circa l’anno 1630” matches what Poussin himself implies in his letter to Cassiano. On the deattribution of the drawing, see Rosenberg and Prat, 2:902–03 (no. R489); but see also Turner, who accepts the attribution to Poussin but dates the drawing to 1639; and Cropper and Dempsey, 336n17, who “regard the jury as still out.”

¹¹⁹On Poussin’s finances around 1630, see Michel, 27–29, 36.

Anne-Marie's family was far from affluent. Her father was a cook and Poussin's landlord at the time of his illness; her mother is said to have helped nurse him back to health. Anne-Marie's dowry was minimal—Olivier Michel has calculated it at about 80 scudi¹²⁰—and yet it was her money (again, according to Passeri) that enabled them to exchange his bachelor pad for a home of their own.¹²¹ All these factors—the loss of work, the medical expenses, and the knowledge that he would soon have a wife and a household to support—explain his need for cash around the middle of 1630. Thus on this point, as on every other, the letter to Cassiano accords with the elephant's presence in Rome in May and June of that year.

CONCLUSION

Of the pictures Poussin painted in the first half-dozen years after his arrival in Rome, only a handful are securely datable on the basis of documentary or other empirical evidence. To these may now be added the *Portrait of Don Diego as One of Hannibal's Elephants*, painted in or soon after May–June 1630. Although no masterpiece, it is a work of considerable charm and fascination. Zoological and historical subject matter blend seamlessly together. As Hannibal raises his arm, registering his awe at the sight of the mountains in front of him, the elephant echoes his gesture with his trunk. The soldiers who climb the slope beside him recall the officers in the *Death of Germanicus*: the light glinting off their armor is handled with similar virtuosity. The young infantryman kneeling to gather water from a spring seems plucked from a picture of Moses striking water from the rock and foreshadows the artist's first engagement with that theme a few years later. Indeed, once it is recognized that this is not one of Poussin's first tentative efforts but a product of his early maturity, sandwiched chronologically between such great works as the *Martyrdom of St. Erasmus* and the *Plague at Ashdod*, its stylistic affinity to other paintings of the period becomes easier to discern. At the same time, its anomalous subject matter and its rapid, almost casual mode of execution serve as important reminders of the range and diversity of Poussin's output around 1630.

As for the artist's encounter with Don Diego, it left little impression on his later work. His subsequent representations of elephants are for the most part based on standard images in sixteenth-century paintings, prints, and tapestries, rather than on studies from life.¹²² There is, however, one outstanding exception. For his patron Monsignor Giulio Rospigliosi (1600–69), poet and librettist (later cardinal and eventually pope), he painted, around

¹²⁰Ibid., 27–28.

¹²¹Passeri, 325. On Poussin's living arrangements around this time, see Sparti.

¹²²Rosenberg and Prat, 1:304–07 (nos. 157–58), 330–31 (no. 172), 402–03 (no. 206).



Figure 19. Nicolas Poussin. *Rest on the Flight into Egypt with an Elephant*, ca. 1635–40. Oil on canvas, 84 x 108 cm. France, private collection.

1635–40, the *Rest on the Flight into Egypt with an Elephant*, a work long known from prints and poor copies and only recently rediscovered (fig. 19).¹²³ In this picture, the elephant is naturalistically rendered and shows a close physical resemblance to the specimen in *Hannibal Crossing the Alps*. He must certainly be based on drawings Poussin made in 1630. Produced around the time that Don Diego disappears from the documentary record, the painting seems curiously prescient. As the giant tusker lumbers off into the sunset, he passes a roadside tomb, which, in its shape and construction, recalls the tomb in another of Poussin's works connected with Rospigliosi: the great second

¹²³See Rosenberg. The meaning of the elephant is enigmatic. Ripa associates the animal with multiple virtues (Kindness, Temperance, Fame, Religion), but his presence in this painting may serve merely to locate the scene in Africa. Poussin often included geo-specific elements in his Rests on the Flight into Egypt: obelisks, dark-skinned attendants serving dates, motifs plucked from the Nile mosaic in Palestrina. The elephant, who is after all the usual companion and animal attribute of personifications of the African Continent, may be another such marker. I am grateful to Pierre Rosenberg for putting me in touch with the painting's present owner, who generously supplied the color photograph reproduced here.



Figure 20. Nicolas Poussin. *Et in Arcadia ego*, ca. 1635–40. Oil on canvas, 87 x 120 cm. Paris, Louvre Museum. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

version of the *Et in Arcadia ego* (fig. 20). The resemblance of the monuments in the two paintings is haunting and mysterious. What Poussin meant by it we may never know, but perhaps it is not too fanciful to read in the juxtaposition of tomb and beast a gesture of farewell and a genial reminder that the elephant, too, once roamed in Arcadia.

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