

Lorenzo Bartolini

Savignano di Prato 1777 – Florence 1850

BUST OF ROSALIA VENTIMIGLIA Y MONCADA

Marble, h. 61 cm

The attribution to Lorenzo Bartolini of the *Bust of Rosalia Ventimiglia y Moncada* still in the collection of the Dukes of Alba in the Palacio de Liria in Madrid (inv. E-79; 61 x 50 x 26 cm), of which the bust analysed here is another unpublished version, was made thanks to Leticia Azcue Brea, who just over ten years ago published an important passage of the travel diary of the patron, Carlos Miguel Fitz-James Stuart, XIV Duke of Alba (Madrid 1794 – Sion 1835). On 10 December 1819, in Florence, Carlos Miguel, who had married Moncada in February 1817 in Rome, wrote: “I had Rosalía’s bust made by Bartolini, and it turned out perfectly”. Azcue Brera also identified the plaster model from which the marble seems to have been drawn in Bartolini’s Plaster Gallery, which subsequently became part of the collections of the Galleria dell’Accademia in Florence.¹ In all likelihood, Carlos Miguel also commissioned his own bust from Bartolini on the same occasion, kept with what is thought to be its companion piece in Palacio de Liria (inv. E-61; 73 x 57 x 32 cm); again, the plaster model survives in the Accademia in Florence (in his travel diary, though, the Duke made no reference to his own bust).²

Carlos Miguel did not simply undertake a more or less lengthy classic ‘Grand Tour’, but instead travelled between Italy, where he spent most of his time moving between Florence, Rome and Naples, and Austria, England, Switzerland and France for almost ten years, first between 1814 and 1818, and then again between 1818 and 1823. Throughout this time he kept two diaries, later revised and corrected in Madrid in 1830.³ Though he did not like Florence (in 1815 he wrote, “I do not like it nor does it suit me”; these impressions were confirmed in 1819:

¹ Leticia Azcue Brea, *La escultura italiana del siglo XIX y el coleccionismo privado en Madrid*. 1: *Adamo Tadolini y Lorenzo Bartolini*, in “Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando: Academia”, CVI-CVII, 2008, p. 195; Leticia Azcue Brea, entry in *Lorenzo Bartolini: scultore del bello naturale*, catalogue of the exhibition (Florence, Galleria dell’Accademia) ed. by Franca Falletti, Silvestra Bietoletti, Annarita Caputo, Florence 2011, p. 254, cat. no 33.

² Leticia Azcue Brea, entries in *El XIV Duque de Alba coleccionista y mecenas de arte antiguo y moderno*, ed. by Beatrice Cacciotti, Madrid 2011, pp. 328-329 and 336-337, cat. nos III.9 and III.13.

³ Beatrice Cacciotti, *Note sulla vita di un collezionista*, in *El XIV Duque de Alba* cit., p. 80.





Lorenzo Bartolini, *Bust of Rosalia
Ventimiglia y Moncada*, Florence, Gallerie
dell'Accademia



Lorenzo Bartolini, *Bust of Rosalia
Ventimiglia y Moncada*, Madrid, Palacio de
Liria, collection of the Dukes of Alba





Giuseppe Patania, *The Nurse Shows Jacob Fitz-James Stuart y Ventimiglia the Bust of His Mother Rosalia Ventimiglia y Moncada*, Private collection

“Florence displeased me as always”),⁴ he nonetheless recognized Lorenzo Bartolini as one of the greatest sculptors active in Italy at the time, and perhaps the best and most appreciated portraitist to the high society of Florence and elsewhere. The relations between the Duke of Alba and the Tuscan master were intense, and Palacio de Liria still preserves a series of busts

⁴ Cacciotti, *Note sulla vita di un collezionista* cit., pp. 82-83.





Lorenzo Bartolini, *Bust of Carlo Miguel Fitz-James Stuart, XIV Duke of Alba*, Madrid, Palacio de Liria, collection of the Dukes of Alba



executed by Bartolini, alongside a copy after the very famous *Medici Venus* (155 x 45 x 37 cm).⁵ Though he was particularly interested in the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations, as evidenced by his numerous visits to Naples, Pompeii and the Portici museum, and succeeded in assembling an exceptional collection of antiquities, Carlos Miguel in no way neglected modern sculpture or painting. In 1820, for example, he commissioned from Louis Comte a portrait

⁵ Jorge García Sánchez, *Los círculos artísticos y la colección de pintura y de escultura moderna*, in *El XIV Duque de Alba* cit., pp. 177-183; Leticia Azcue Brea, entries in *El XIV Duque de Alba* cit., pp. 329-335, cat. nos III.10-12.

of his beloved wife, still in the Palacio de Liria today.⁶ Two small copies of Bartolini's bust of Moncada also survive, one in marble now in the family palace in Madrid, and one in alabaster in the Palacio de Dueñas in Seville.⁷

It would be natural to identify the version of the portrait under discussion here as a copy of that in the Palacio de Liria, but the history of these pieces is probably far more complex. Surprisingly, the piece in Madrid lacks the elegant Neoclassical base present in almost all the busts executed by Bartolini at around this time and that the sculptor always included already when making the model (as attested by the plaster versions in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence). The aforementioned bust of Carlos Miguel currently has just such a base, as does the portrait of Moncada published here for the first time and whose original provenance remains unknown. The base is also clearly visible in the painting attributed to the Palermitan Giuseppe Patania depicting *The Nurse Shows Jacob Fitz-James Stuart y Ventimiglia the Bust of His Mother Rosalia Ventimiglia y Moncada* of around 1822 (private collection).⁸ Baby Jacob was born in June 1821 in Naples,⁹ whilst the painting showing the bust of Rosalia seems to have been executed in Palermo, the home town of Rosalia, a member of the Sicilian Moncada family. Carlos Miguel had met his future wife during one of his two stays in Sicily, in August 1816,¹⁰ but Rosalia may have returned home after the birth of her first son when her husband went back to Madrid for a brief visit in 1822.¹¹ In short, our bust may have been the original companion piece to the portrait of Carlos Miguel now in Madrid; it may have stayed in Palermo in the possession of Rosalia Ventimiglia y Moncada's family, and been replaced by a second version without the base. The aforementioned painting clearly celebrated only the mother of the little Jacob, and may testify to the arrival of the bust, perhaps brought here by Rosalia, in Palermo. Certainly, the quality of this marble leaves no room for doubt as to its execution by Bartolini himself though this does not necessarily mean downgrading the version in Madrid to a mere copy. As we have said, the Duke of Alba went back for good to Madrid in 1823, and before that year Bartolini himself or someone in his workshop may have made a second version of the bust of Rosalia from the plaster model still in his possession.

News of her husband's death in 1835 reached Rosalia when she was in Naples; from there she returned to Spain, where she survived Carlos Miguel by over thirty years (she died in 1868). She maintained an important position at the Madrid court, even being appointed chief

⁶ Cacciotti, *Note sulla vita di un collezionista* cit., p. 83.

⁷ Azcue Brea, *La escultura italiana* cit., p. 195.

⁸ Stefano Grandesso, entry in *Quadreria 2009. Dalla bizzarria al canone: dipinti tra Seicento e Ottocento*, catalogue of the exhibition (Rome, Galleria Carlo Virgilio) ed. by Giovanna Capitelli, Rome 2009, pp. 58–59, cat. no 22; Leticia Azcue Brea, *I contatti di Bartolini con la Spagna e il Portogallo*, in *Lorenzo Bartolini* cit., p. 98.

⁹ Cacciotti, *Note sulla vita di un collezionista* cit., p. 85.

¹⁰ Cacciotti, *Note sulla vita di un collezionista* cit., pp. 83 and 92.

¹¹ Cacciotti, *Note sulla vita di un collezionista* cit., p. 97.





lady-in-waiting to Isabella II of Spain (Madrid 1830 – Paris 1904). Rosalia appears to have shared her husband's great passion for art and collecting,¹² and this too confirms that she might have wished to keep the bust sculpted by Bartolini for herself, to leave it to her own family.

The Duke of Alba was probably introduced to the great Tuscan sculptor by his mother, the Marquise of Ariza, who died in 1818 in Florence and who had passed her love of art onto her son.¹³ By this time, Bartolini was a leading figure on the Tuscan art scene: already a close friend of Ingres during his stay in France and then immediately becoming a protégé of Napoleon, he ran the Accademia di Scultura in Carrara from 1807. From this time onwards, the artist became the official portraitist of Elisa Bonaparte Baciocchi, who ruled the Principate of Lucca and Piombino, and executed numerous other busts of Napoleon's family members.¹⁴ Antonio Canova, who died in 1822, was already very old at the time (though we know that Carlos Miguel visited both his workshop and that of Bertel Thorvaldsen),¹⁵ and by turning to Bartolini, the Dukes of Alba in 1819 had without doubt given themselves the opportunity to be depicted by the man who was at the time the most esteemed portraitist in Italy.

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¹² Cacciotti, *Note sulla vita di un collezionista* cit., p. 83.

¹³ Azcue Brea, *I contatti di Bartolini con la Spagna* cit., p. 97.

¹⁴ Ettore Spalletti, entry scheda in *Lorenzo Bartolini* cit., p. 200, cat. no. 11.

¹⁵ Azcue Brea, *I contatti di Bartolini con la Spagna* cit., p. 97.