## 'The true style of antique decoration': Agostino Brunias and the birth of the Adam style at Kedleston Hall and Syon House

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# The genesis of Robert Adam's 'true style'

On 17 January 1758, a few months before turning 30, Robert Adam arrived in London after several years spent in Rome on his grand tour. Two and a half years before, during his lifechanging stay in the Eternal City, he had already decided not to return to his native Edinburgh and instead open an office in London. 1 Now, setting foot in the English capital, he ambitiously aimed at conquering the architectural scene and establishing himself as the foremost architect in Britain. But what were the secret weapons that he intended to use to market his style as radically new and exciting? What were the characteristics of this new language of decoration that eventually made him one of the most successful of all 18th-century British architects? Adam could present his novelty through carefully designed contrast in colour, shape and dimensions to create 'movement', as he famously described at the beginning of his Works in Architecture more than a decade later.2 However, first and foremost he could offer a radically new experience of the antique, based on a manifold principle of quotation from architectural, sculptural, decorative and ornamental Roman prototypes, all of which were well known to his clientele. This 'architecture of reference', which alluded to a Rome experienced by the vast majority of his patrons, both in the flesh and through the antiquarian publications that filled their libraries, constitutes the essence of Adam's striking success. It was a 'revolution' in the whole system of architecture, which introduced 'the true style of antique decoration' through a 'careful search into the purest sources of antiquity' - as Adam affirmed in a typical self-celebratory manner in the *Works*.<sup>3</sup> In the following decades his innovative conception of the architectural interior crossed the Channel to be imitated and reinterpreted all over Europe, both in its centres and its remoter provinces. To study the characteristics and the modus operandi of Adam's earliest commissions is therefore to study some of the traits that neoclassical interior decoration would express as a whole.

We shall see that among the many ingredients that contributed to the elaboration of this language, three proved to be essential. Firstly, the presence of the skilled draughtsman Agostino Brunias, one of Adam's earliest employees, who emerges as instrumental in helping forge the new style; secondly, the *Admiranda Romanarum Antiquitatum* (1693), a celebrated publication on antique Roman reliefs that provided many of the decorative motifs incorporated by Adam; and finally a resourceful collection of drawings after the antique within easy reach of London – the Topham collection, preserved then, as now, at Eton College Library.<sup>4</sup>

The earliest convincing incarnations of Adam's new 'true style' – at least in terms of interior decoration – were two small rooms that no longer survive: Lady Caroline's Dressing Room at Kedleston Hall (Fig 4.1), and a small 'closet' (or cabinet) on the first floor of one of the angular towers at Syon House, both designed in early 1760 and very similar in size and decorative character.

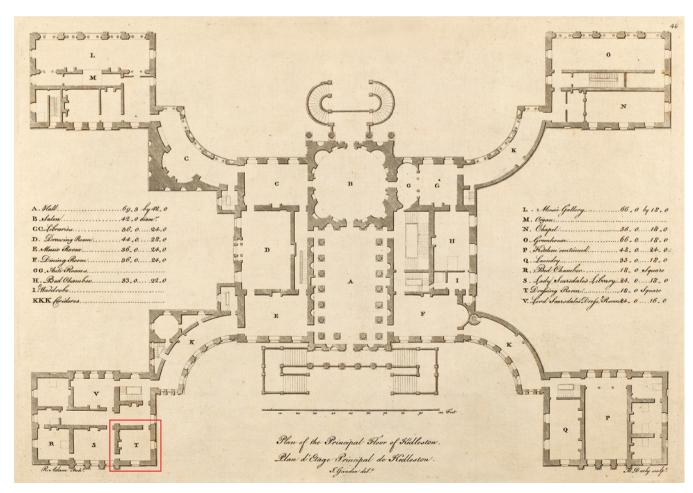
The essential characteristics of the decorative language they expressed had already been conceived five years earlier. After his arrival in Rome in late February 1755, Adam became progressively aware that his future success rested on an easily available repertoire of forms and motifs that he could market as faithfully antique and

clearly distinct from what the previous generation of British architects had offered.<sup>5</sup> His early correspondence from Rome reveals an obsessive preoccupation in assembling books, drawings and plaster casts from the antique, as well as originals, and months later the 'Antique mad' Robert could write to his sister Peggy that his lodgings at Casa Guarnieri were full of 'antique cornices, friezes, figures, bas-reliefs, vases, altars, so that I now have a room as full as it can stick from roof to the floors'.6 At the same time he employed painters and draughtsmen to draw 'the fountains, the buildings, the statues' and everything that he considered to be of interest in or around Rome.<sup>7</sup> In the summer of 1755, while studying ornaments under Charles-Louis Clérisseau and Laurent Pécheux, and having just met Piranesi, Adam firmly decided to 'go to the bottom of things' and 'to outdo Chambers in figures, in bas-reliefs and in ornaments, which, with any tolerable degree of taste so as to apply them properly, make a building appear as different as night from day'.8 This resolution perfectly sums up what would be the essential traits of Adam's

originality in terms of interior decoration: the complex arrangement of painted panels, grisailles, plasterwork plaques and reliefs, marble tablets and grotesque ornaments, that made his style so clearly recognisable and distinct both from immediate predecessors such as Daniel Garrett, Matthew Brettingham and James Paine, and from his contemporary and rival William Chambers. It is true there had been several earlier individual attempts to create interiors based on antique decorative examples, notably by William Kent and by James 'Athenian' Stuart.9 However, Adam's use of details derived from the repertory of Classical antiquity was conducted on a scale and with a consistency hitherto unknown.

Back in London in January 1758, Adam set out to make the best use of his vast collection of antique originals and printed, drawn or plastercast models. By February he had already rented a house in St James's Place and started to 'pay his respects to the great' and to invite visitors, as he now had 'a place for showing his things'. <sup>10</sup> A move shortly afterwards to larger premises in Lower Grosvenor Street gave him more scope;

Fig 4.1
Plan of the principal floor
at Kedleston, by Robert
Adam (from John Woolfe
and James Gandon,
Vitruvius Britannicus, IV,
London, 1767, plate 46).
Lady Caroline's Dressing
Room is indicated in red.



this apartment was clearly intended as a showcase to display his repertoire in order to gain new commissions, while at the same time promoting his related activity as a dealer - the full extent of which is revealed by Jonny Yarker in Chapter 2 of this volume. Adam's correspondence from London shows the crucial importance that he assigned to his drawings and how these started to attract his first clients. 11 In December 1758 he was introduced to Sir Nathaniel Curzon, newly embarked on building a grandiose house at Kedleston in Derbyshire to rival the Earl of Leicester's Holkham Hall, then still under construction.12 Just a month before meeting Adam, Curzon had given the commission of his new house to the 60-year-old Matthew Brettingham, and now, seeing Robert's drawings at the architect's house, he was 'struck all of a heap with wonder and amaze' and 'every new drawing he saw made him grieve at his previous engagement with Brettingham'. 13 Robert soon went to Curzon's house, proposed alterations to Brettingham's designs, took the opportunity to comment negatively on previous designs submitted by 'Athenian' Stuart, and was put in charge of all the grounds on the spot. 14 A year and a half later, in April 1760, he was given a free hand on the whole house, a responsibility that until then had fallen upon James Paine, as Brettingham had left before the end of 1759. Adam could now finally concentrate on the interiors and apply his new language on a monumental scale.15 By May he was producing various solutions for the plan and the garden façade, drawing wall elevations for several rooms, and he had been given full responsibility

Fig 4.2
Adam office, Agostino
Brunias, Design for a
Window Wall for Lady
Caroline's Dressing Room
at Kedleston Hall, probably
as executed, pencil, pen and
watercolour on paper, 1760.



for decorating a small space in the north-west corner of the family pavilion: Lady Caroline's Dressing Room. <sup>16</sup> This, the first room that Adam executed at Kedleston and one of the first he ever designed, was only 18ft (5.5m) square, unconstrained by Curzon's collection of paintings and statues, and therefore a space where Adam could experiment with his new 'true style of antique decoration' in total freedom.

### Adam, Brunias and Lady Caroline's Dressing Room at Kedleston Hall (1760–1)

The correspondence recorded in the Appendix to this essay reveals the different phases of the commission: in May 1760 Curzon sent a section of the room to Robert Adam, who by July could already write to his brother James that he 'had done a painted room' for Curzon, 'quite in a new taste'; a month later the overall design, 'the work of great labor [sic] and study', had been completed (Appendix, nos 1, 3-5). A preparatory drawing for the ceiling survives at Sir John Soane's Museum in London, while three finished elevations and a ceiling, most probably as executed, are still kept at Kedleston (Figs 4.2-4.4, see Fig 4.7).<sup>17</sup> All are here attributed to the hand of the Italian Agostino Brunias, one of the two draughtsmen, with the Flemish Laurent-Benoît Dewez, whom Adam had brought back from Rome to London to work in his office. While Dewez was mainly in charge of line drawings, Brunias had been trained as a painter and was responsible for 'ornaments, for landscape and figures and other things of that nature'. 18 Dewez fled the Adam office for Brussels at the end of 1758, but Brunias remained as Adam's master draughtsman from 1758 until 1764, when he in turn left in search of better employment.<sup>19</sup>

The vast majority of Adam's early decorative schemes preserved at Sir John Soane's Museum can be assigned to Brunias's hand, and his role in the formulation of the early Adam style must have been paramount.<sup>20</sup> As we shall see, he was at the same time in charge of copying drawings after the antique to provide a repertory of 'ornaments' to be employed in Adam's decorative schemes. Along with the drawings for the 'closet' at Syon – which were also produced by Brunias and are discussed on p 114 – these early drawings for Lady Caroline's Dressing Room constitute the first complete ornamental scheme ever produced by the Adam office to make extensive use

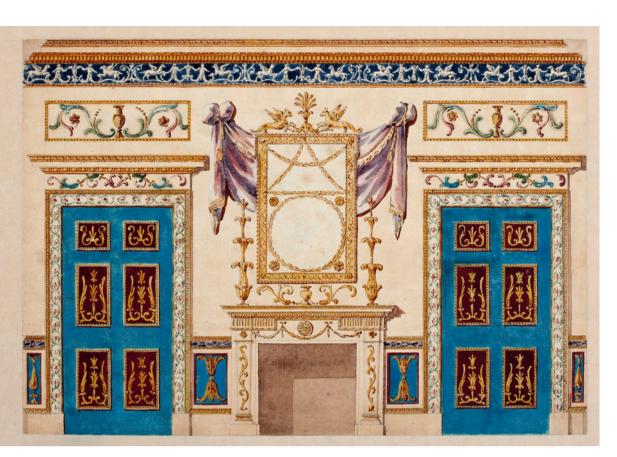


Fig 4.3
Adam office, Agostino
Brunias, Design for a
Chimney Wall for Lady
Caroline's Dressing Room
at Kedleston Hall, probably
as executed, pencil, pen and
watercolour on paper, 1760.



Fig 4.4
Adam office, Agostino
Brunias, Design for a
Wall for Lady Caroline's
Dressing Room at
Kedleston Hall, probably as
executed, pencil, pen and
watercolour on paper, 1760.



Fig 4.5
Agostino Brunias,
Decorative Paintings in
the Manner of Roman
Fresco for Lady Caroline's
Dressing Room at
Kedleston Hall, tempera
paint on canvas, 1760.





of grotesque decoration: not surprisingly, Adam intended to publish them to disseminate the novelty of his innovative solutions (Appendix, no 4). They are also the earliest Adam office drawings to survive in colour, which was used to evoke to its fullest the chromatic vivacity of the ornaments derived from the antique.

Brunias was also put in charge of the room's physical execution, as the decorations were to be painted in London using the détrempe technique, or distemper, presumably on rolls of paper (Appendix, no 4). The painted rolls were then sent and installed at Kedleston only after May 1761 (Appendix, no 9), while the mouldings and frieze were executed in relief by local craftsmen - the latter based on models provided by the plasterer Joseph Rose, who was to remain one of Adam's most important long-term craftsmen and collaborators (Appendix, nos 2-3).<sup>21</sup> The chimney piece of 'statuary marble, part gilt' was probably executed by Michael Henry Spang, a prolific Danish sculptor who had already provided several chimney pieces for Kedleston (Appendix, no 8).22





The mirror shown in the chimney wall elevation seems to have been executed (see Fig 4.3), as a 'looking glass in two plates 4 feet by 2 feet 6 inches gilt frame' is listed in an inventory of the room compiled in 1804.23 The rectangular and oval figurative paintings on the walls and the circular one at the centre of the ceiling (see Figs 4.2, 4.4) and 4.7) were surely also executed by Brunias, who attempted to reproduce on canvas the same détrempe technique that he had used on paper for the other wall and ceiling decorations (Fig 4.5). This water-based medium unfortunately deteriorated quickly over the years to the point that in 1807 the room was dismantled. The Adam paintings survived in their frames at Kedleston until the 1960s, when they were removed and stored before being sold to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1975.<sup>24</sup> The two best preserved, still in their original pinewood gilt frames, are today on display in the British Galleries of the museum, while the rest are kept in storage. The frames were executed by Sefferin Alken – the most famous ornamental carver of the time, who often worked for Robert Adam, as well as for William Chambers and Henry Flitcroft – and they were clearly judged too projecting when installed in the small room (Appendix, nos 9-10).25 Finally, the room was furnished with two neoclassical giltwood window seats, as shown in the elevation for the window wall (see Fig 4.2), and a pair of tables with scagliola armorial slabs, all surviving today in the house.<sup>26</sup>

## Adam's and Brunias's antique sources for the room

What resources could Adam, driven by his ambition to create a 'new taste', draw upon for such a commission? What antique 'figures', 'bas-reliefs' and 'ornaments' were available to him at that date, to help formulate a 'true style of antique decoration'? For the 'figures' - the framed figurative paintings – a source was readily to hand. The surviving canvases at the Victoria and Albert Museum all depict pairs of women in classical dresses in a landscape, symmetrically arranged around vases, altars, columns and baskets of fruit, in a manner very close to Brunias's surviving wall elevations, suggesting that the drawings show what was actually executed (see Fig 4.5). It has been proposed that these figures represent 'vestals, virgin priestesses of the Ancient Roman religion, highly regarded and respected for their devotion and purity' – possibly because four of them seem to be involved in taking care of the sacred fire.27

Nevertheless, they should probably be considered as a more general reference to ancient Roman women caught in daily activities — a subject well suited to a lady's dressing room.

In fact, Adam and Brunias derived most of their figures from plates in the *Admiranda Romanarum Antiquitatum* (1693), a reference publication that enjoyed immense success among grand tourists, antiquarians and artists throughout the 18th century and that was omnipresent in the period's most important libraries (Fig 4.6).<sup>28</sup> The *Admiranda* had been produced by the greatest art historian and antiquarian of

Fig 4.6 Giovanni Pietro Bellori and Pietro Santi Bartoli, Admiranda Romanarum Antiquitatum, Rome, Giovanni Giacomo & Domenico de Rossi, 1693, plates 37–39, 41, 'Palladis Artes' (works of Minerva).











Fig 4.7
Adam office, Agostino
Brunias, Design for a Ceiling
for Lady Caroline's Dressing
Room at Kedleston Hall,
probably as executed,
pencil, pen and watercolour
on paper, 1760.

the 17th century, Giovanni Pietro Bellori, and illustrated by the antiquarian and engraver Pietro Santi Bartoli, and its collection of ancient artefacts constituted a constant source of inspiration for Adam.<sup>29</sup> Compositions derived from images in the book are ubiquitous in his country and urban houses. 30 Not surprisingly, the Admiranda was also used extensively for the later decoration of various main rooms at Kedleston. In this case, the elegant figures used in the dressing room, taken from Bartoli's plates illustrating the 'Palladis Artes' (works of Minerva) from the frieze of the Temple of Minerva in the Forum of Nerva in Rome, were to resurface in several successive Adam interiors, such as Svon House in Middlesex, Home House and Kenwood House in London, Newby Hall in Yorkshire, and even on the frontispiece of the first volume of his Works in Architecture.

While in many cases Adam retained Bellori's iconographic interpretation of Bartoli's plates in the *Admiranda* to create decorative cycles with a consistent subject, often the antique images were used purely for ornamental purposes. At Kedleston, Adam and Brunias cut and pasted only a few of the 'Palladis Artes' as convenient examples of dignified draped women, even mixing them from different plates and reversing the direction of some: inevitably Bellori's original

explanation of them as acolytes of Minerva engrossed in the works presided over by the goddess was lost in the process (*see* Figs 4.5–4.6). Despite their very modest quality and decorative nature – Brunias was by no means a great figurative painter – the Kedleston canvases play a rather significant role in 18th-century art, as they are among the earliest examples of neoclassical painting, contemporary to Anton Raphael Mengs's *Parnassus* at Villa Albani in Rome (1760–1), or to the first classically inspired works of Gavin Hamilton or Joseph-Marie Vien.<sup>31</sup>

If Adam could rely on the publications and drawings that he had brought back from Rome for the 'figures' and the 'bas-reliefs' of his interiors, what he lacked at the beginning of his career were sources for ancient 'ornaments' that could be used to embellish walls, ceilings and carpets in order to give an antique consistency to the whole. As this author has explained in another essay, there were very few surviving antique 'grotesque' decorations in Rome by the middle of the 18th century, and publications illustrating them were even scarcer.<sup>32</sup> For ancient ceiling decoration, Adam and other architects of his generation, such as Chambers, relied heavily on the few that had been printed in antiquarian publications since the late 17th century. The Kedleston ceiling is in fact derived from one in the 'Bains des Augustes a Rome', reproduced in the celebrated Antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures published by the abbot Bernard de Montfaucon, copies of which were in both Adam's and Curzon's libraries (Figs 4.7 and 4.8).33 This must surely be the reason why the first guide to Kedleston printed in 1769 described the decoration of the room as derived from the Baths of Diocletian.<sup>34</sup> while most probably the ceiling published by Montfaucon comes from one of the chambers of the nymphaeum in the Domus Transitoria on the Palatine Hill, known in the 18th century as the 'Baths of Livia' or 'Baths of Augustus'.35

However, the inspiration for the decoration of the rest of the room came from a different source. Before elaborating the design for Lady Caroline's Dressing Room, Adam must have discovered one of the largest English collections of drawings after the antique, which had belonged to the connoisseur and collector Richard Topham (1670–1730) and had been located at Eton College Library since 1736. The Topham collection contained a vast number of drawings of ancient ceilings and wall elevations, all executed by Pietro Santi Bartoli's son, Francesco Bartoli. This

easily accessible, colourful and detailed resource on ancient grotesque decoration was exactly what Adam needed for his 'ornaments' and was later plundered by other architects such as James Wyatt and Charles Cameron. Many surviving copies of these Bartoli drawings, in the hands of Agostino Brunias and later of Giuseppe Manocchi (who joined the Adam office in 1765), are today preserved among the Adam drawings at Sir John Soane's Museum and in an album at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles (the latter in the hand of Brunias only).<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, in the RIBA collection in London is a miscellaneous volume almost certainly once in Adam's possession that contains further coloured copies on tracing paper, attributed here to the hand of Agostino Brunias.38 While the Brunias copies at the Soane and at the Getty were probably executed later – as their paper bears watermarks possibly dating from the late 1760s - those at the RIBA, although they are drawn on tracing paper and therefore not bearing any watermark, were most likely realised around 1760, as they show details all reused for the decoration of Lady Caroline's Dressing Room and the Syon House 'closet'.<sup>39</sup>

All these copies testify that Adam sent some of his most skilled collaborators to Eton to make drawings that could be used as a source for patterns by his office. In the ensuing years, these drawings became an integral aspect of Adam's interior designs, and there are direct references to them in the surviving Adam family correspondence.<sup>40</sup> They prompted a rapid change in Adam's decorative language: colour became increasingly important and a flatter, yet more delicate and complex decoration replaced the simpler and thicker forms of previous ceilings and wall elevations. Thanks to the Topham collection, Adam and his collaborators could finally complete their system of reference to the antique and introduce 'true' grotesque decoration in England.

The three surviving wall elevations for Kedleston show that Adam and Brunias drew most heavily for inspiration on three original Francesco Bartoli drawings in the Topham collection – all depicting details probably derived from the Domus Transitoria on the Palatine Hill.<sup>41</sup> The framed oval panels visible in Fig 4.4, the grotesque decoration around them and the garlands displayed on the upper part of the wall all came from a drawing illustrating the same ceiling from the 'Baths of Augustus' published by Montfaucon (Fig 4.9), copies of which survive in Brunias's hand both in the RIBA and the Getty series.<sup>42</sup> This drawing may also have

served Adam as inspiration for the ceiling, along with the Montfaucon engraving.<sup>43</sup> But the frieze with white griffins and tritons on a blue background, visible on all the elevations and eventually modelled by Rose (*see* Figs 4.2–4.4), the rectangular figurative panels framed by grotesque decoration and the general colour scheme all derive instead from a large drawing depicting a complex ceiling, whose copy by Brunias at the



Fig 4.8 (left)
'Peinture a fresque d'une chambre des Bains des Augustes a Rome' (from Bernard de Montfaucon, L'antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures, 15 vols, Paris, Florentin Delaulne [et al], 1719–24, supplement III (1724), plate 59).

Fig 4.9 (below)
Francesco Bartoli, Drawing of an Antique Ceiling from the Palatine, pencil, pen, watercolour and body colour on paper. Inscribed in pen on recto, lower left, within the red border, 'Fran[cis]cus Bartolus. Fecit. Anno 1721–', and on the lower centre; inscribed in pen on verso, lower right: 'Volta del palazzo di Tito'.





RIBA must have been used as a source (Figs 4.10 and 4.11). <sup>44</sup> The gilded floral decoration on a blue background in the dado and the general decorative pattern of the wall must have come from a colourful drawing depicting a large lunette (Fig 4.12), a copy of which appears among the drawings at the RIBA (Fig 4.13). <sup>45</sup> Finally, the figurative paintings shown in the Bartoli drawings (*see* Figs 4.9, 4.10 and 4.12) clearly served as inspiration for the arrangement of the female figures in the panels for the room (*see* Fig 4.5). <sup>46</sup>

On the basis of this series of well-known engravings and drawings, Adam and Brunias therefore conceived a decoration that was radically new for the early 1760s, both in England and on the Continent. Aside from the frames, mouldings and frieze, all the other details must have been painted, certainly to evoke the traditional flatness of grotesque decoration, something to be privileged in such a tiny space. This was a feature that was not always retained in Adam's later commissions. One wonders whether he took inspiration in this sense from the painted ceilings by William Hannan in the

Fig 4.10 (above)
Francesco Bartoli, Drawing
of an Antique Ceiling from
the Palatine, pencil, pen,
watercolour and body colour
on paper, 521 × 521 mm,
1721, previously inscribed
on verso, now pasted on
canvas, 'Una volta trovata
nel Monte Palatino, 1721'.

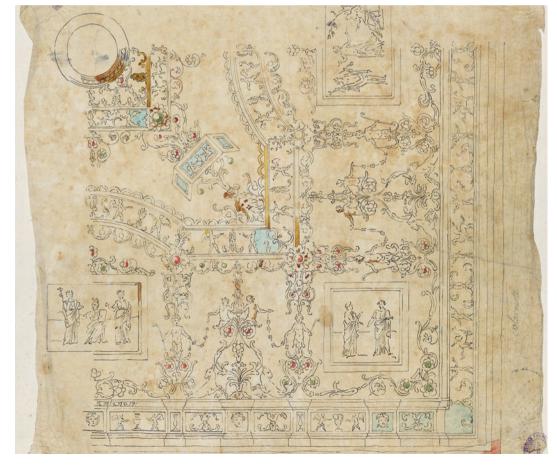


Fig 4.11 (right)
Agostino Brunias, Section
of an Antique Ceiling from
the Palatine, after Francesco
Bartoli, pen, watercolour
and body colour on paper,
c 1760, inscribed in pen on
recto, centre 'Monte
Palatino'.



Fig 4.12
Francesco Bartoli, Drawing of an Antique Lunette from the Palatine, pencil, pen, watercolour and body colour on paper, 1721, previously inscribed on verso, now pasted on canvas, 'Una lunetta di volta arcata trovata sul Monte Palatino, 1721'.



Fig 4.13
Agostino Brunias, Drawing of an Antique Lunette from the Palatine, from Francesco Bartoli, pen and watercolour on tracing paper, c 1760, inscribed in pen on recto, lower right 'Monte Palatino'.

Red Drawing Room and Tapestry Room at West Wycombe Park, Buckinghamshire, both faithful copies of Francesco Bartoli's drawings at Eton and probably executed before Lady Caroline's Dressing Room at Kedleston.<sup>47</sup>

# The Syon House 'closet' (1760–1)

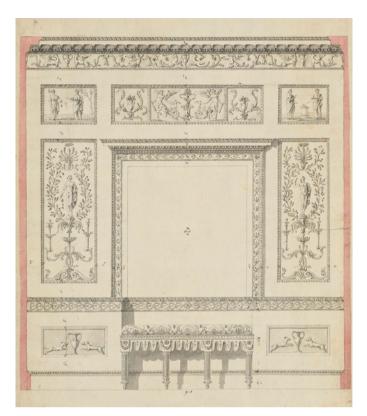
Fig 4.14
Robert Adam, Preparatory
Sketch for the Window
Wall Elevations of the
Closet at the Top of One of
the Towers at Syon House,
Middlesex, probably as
executed with modification,
pencil on paper, c 1760.

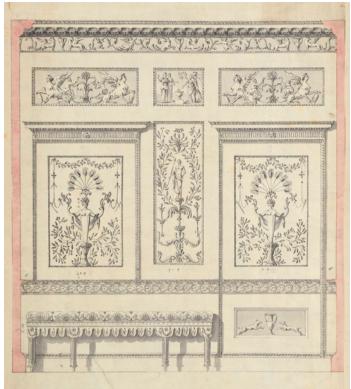
Decorated at exactly the same time as the room at Kedleston was a small closet on the first floor of one of the angular towers at Syon House, the seat of the 2nd Earl and Countess of Northumberland in Middlesex (Figs 4.14–4.16). In the 1760s Syon was radically transformed by Adam into one of his most monumental and successful interiors, while the Northumberlands – elevated to the dukedom in 1766 – would become his most



faithful patrons, commissioning work at Alnwick Castle and Northumberland House, their other estates in Northumberland and London.<sup>48</sup> The closet, actually a small cabinet, was evidently Adam's first experiment at Syon, and work on it must have started in the first half of 1760.49 It was 'fitted, painted and ornamented after ve antique; being the first essay in that Taste executed in Engl[an]d w[hic]h has since so universally prevailed in this Kingdom', as Thomas Percy, the celebrated man of letters and tutor of the Northumberlands' sons, reported years later.50 The 'closet' has long gone, possibly destroyed during 19th-century refurbishment works on the house, but Sir John Soane's Museum still preserves a preliminary sketch in Adam's hand and two wall elevations, here attributed to Agostino Brunias (see Figs 4.14 and 4.15); furthermore, there are two colourful elevations in the Brunias album at the Getty Research Institute (see Fig 4.16).51 This small space shared many similarities with Lady Caroline's Dressing Room at Kedleston: from the character of the decoration, which was probably painted in the same détrempe technique, to the window and wall seats. Not surprisingly, it was also based on a set of Francesco Bartoli drawings in the Topham collection (Figs 4.17-4.19), copies of which survive among the RIBA drawings (Fig 4.20).52

To achieve an original and inventive scheme of decoration. Adam and Brunias dismissed the architectural structure shown in the Bartoli wall elevations (see Figs 4.17 and 4.18) but retained and freely reinterpreted many of the fanciful decorative details. This can be seen throughout the surviving Adam drawings: from the initial idea as laid out on the sketch, where the details are assembled freely for the first time (see Fig 4.14), to the finished coloured elevations (see Fig 4.16). For instance, the two herms shown in the large panels within architectural aedicules in Figs 4.15 and 4.16 derive from the central figure drawn by Bartoli in Fig 4.18, but with elements (such as the peacock feathers, foliage and the pedestals on which the herms rest) derived from decorative elements encircling the main central figures in Fig 4.17. The same is true of the more elongated vertical panels that appear in all the elevations (see Figs 4.15 and 4.16), where the figures and the scrolling foliage derive from Fig 4.17, but with decorative elements borrowed from the central panel in Fig 4.18. Furthermore, the dogs flanking an amphora in panels on the dado in the elevations are derived from the central frieze







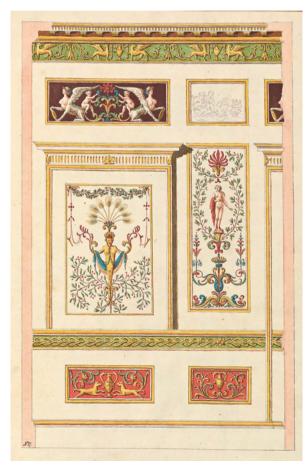


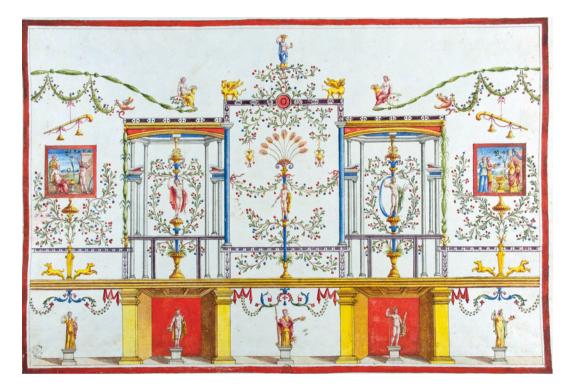
Fig 4.15 (above)
Adam office, Agostino
Brunias, Designs for the
Wall Elevations of the
Closet at the Top of One of
the Towers at Syon House,
Middlesex, probably as
executed, pencil, pen and
watercolour on paper,
c 1760, the right-hand
drawing inscribed 'Sion'
both in pencil on recto,
lower left, and in pen
on verso, top right.

Fig 4.16 (left)
Agostino Brunias, Designs
for the Wall Elevations of
the Closet at the Top of
One of the Towers at Syon
House, Middlesex, probably
as executed, pencil, pen,
watercolour and gouache
on paper, c 1760.

panel in Fig 4.18, while the central panel above the window in Figs 4.15 and 4.16, with winged centaurs and Erotes, is almost a literal copy of Fig 4.19. These drawings show very clearly how Adam and Brunias made free and inventive use of the Bartoli originals, as a source of inspiration rather than a constrictive model. Brunias's coloured elevations (see Fig 4.16) most probably record what was executed, and suggest that the colours of the original drawings by Francesco

Bartoli were retained for most of the details. As at Kedleston, the execution of the cabinet was most likely given to Agostino Brunias, who presumably then recorded the whole scheme in his volume at the Getty, therefore joining together in the same pages the 'antique' sources of the new decorative language and one of the first examples of its practical execution. Elevations of the Syon cabinet were later published by Michelangelo Pergolesi, another decorator who

Fig. 4.17
Francesco Bartoli, Drawing of an Ancient Wall
Elevation from the 'Baths of Constantine', pencil, pen, watercolour and body colour on paper, 1711, inscribed in pen on recto, lower centre 'in aedibus Rospiliosi, e Balneis
Constantini M. Repert.
1711'; inscribed in pen on verso, lower left 'No. 2'.



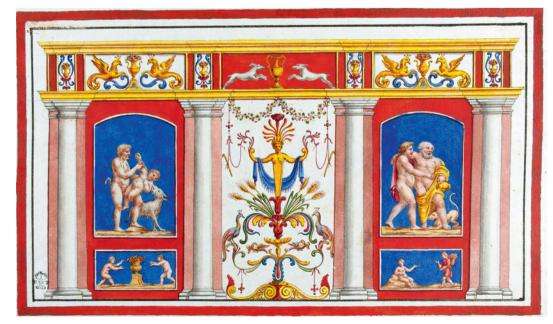


Fig 4.18
Francesco Bartoli, Drawing of an Ancient Wall Elevation, pencil, pen, watercolour and body colour on paper, c 1710–25, inscribed in pen on verso, lower right 'Fran[ces]co Bartoli Fece' and 'del Palazzo di Augusto'.



Fig 4.19
Francesco Bartoli, Drawing of an Ancient Ornamental
Panel from the 'Sette Sale', pen, watercolour and body colour on paper, c 1720–5, inscribed in pen on recto, within the red border, lower left and right 'Fran[ces] co
Bartoli', and in pen on verso, lower left 'un ornamento del Palazzo di Tito'.



Fig 4.20
Agostino Brunias, Drawing of an Ancient Wall
Elevation from the 'Baths of Constantine', from
Francesco Bartoli, pen and watercolour on tracing paper, c 1760, inscribed in pen on recto, lower right 'Nelle Terme di Costantino al Palazzo Rospigliosi'.

worked for Adam at Syon, as plates 64 and 70 in his *Designs for Various Ornaments* – a collection of plates published serially in London between 1777 and 1801, which served as a pattern book for neoclassical decorators.<sup>53</sup>

#### Conclusion

In these two small rooms, unconstrained by previous designs, displays of artworks or functional preoccupations, Adam and Brunias were able to develop for the first time a style of decoration that would spread all over Europe in the following decades. Most importantly, they established here a modus operandi based on the principle of quotation from antique sources that would be refined in subsequent years and adopted by most architects of Adam's generation. Adam would have provided the initial sketch of compositions, as for the cabinet at Syon (see Fig 4.14), while Brunias would have developed these early ideas into a final scheme with the help of the Bartoli drawings in the Topham collection. This extremely painterly manner of interior design soon mutated into a more 'sculptural' approach, and the wall paintings – though at times retained in small spaces - were usually replaced in later Adam schemes by an arrangement of plaster-

work reliefs and plaques, marble tablets or painted panels, often in grisailles, to be inserted into the bare wall. Adam and Brunias turned increasingly to antiquarian illustrations for inspiration, especially those by Bellori and Bartoli, thereby establishing a sophisticated twofold system of reference to Roman antiquity: to the originals that could be experienced in Rome, and to the antiquarian publications that were common knowledge among Adam's patrons and their guests, and which were often physically contained within the architecture. Robert Adam managed to keep faith with his early determination to 'outdo Chambers in figures, in bas-reliefs and in ornaments', and his new language of decoration, fully expressed for the first time in Lady Caroline's Dressing Room at Kedleston and the cabinet at Syon, would become the key to his outstanding success.

### Acknowledgements

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### **Appendix:**

# Documents related to Lady Caroline's Dressing Room at Kedleston Hall, May 1760 to July 1761

#### 1 Robert Adam to Lord Curzon, 7 May 1760

'I have received the section of Lady Carolines Dressing room and shall get the Drawings made for it and send them and instructions to Mr Swan when done.'54

#### 2 Robert Adam to Lord Curzon, London, 6 June 1760

'In the meantime I send you inclosed a Drawing for the base and surbase mouldings of Lady Carolines Dressing room to full size. The Ornament of the Mouldings must be carved, but the ornament in the frieze of the Surbase may be painted – so that they may proceed with these mouldings in the meantime. I should wish to have the Drawing of the Chimney Piece of that Dressing room that it might go into the section provided you have fixed on it, or if you incline that I should design one for it.'55

#### 3 Robert Adam to Lord Curzon, London, 16 July 1760

'The sections for the Lady Carolines Dressing Room are well advanced and painted, so is also the Ceiling. Mr Rose has modelled and sent down the Frieze at large for this man [the executioner] to execute from. I am very hopeful you will approve of these drawings, as they have been the work of great labor and study, and I flatter myself they will be agreeable to Her Ladyship.'56

### 4 Robert Adam to James Adam, London, 24 July 1760

'When I was at Kedleston Sir N. spoke to me one day about publishing the Designs of His House, which I told him I certainly would do so soon as all was done & Executed. I have done a painted room for him, which is quite in a new taste, & I have Brunias now employed in painting in size to learn that

method as Oyl Colours will by no means answer. They call that manner of painting in French, à la detrempe, and I think he succeeds wonderfully with it. But I tremble for B[runia]s for I do not think he has Constitution for this Countrey. I therefore whish you would cast about for some clever one in that way or some boy with good dispositions to Ornament & Figures, & keep him either at work with you or Send Him to England & I could put him under Bruny, as he complains much of his Eyes & I find grudges much drawing of ornament so small that it blinds him, so that I am convinced he would do every thing he could to learn one in [fol 3v] order to relieve himself. But I would not chuse one altogether Ignorant. Let me know what sort of Lad your Scholar is, & how he draws & what George is doing, I suppose C[lérisseau]- will keep them constantly busy. From what I have said you see that Supposing one could get the Best things they do engraved by degrees it would produce a Works insensibly of great value & great Fame. You may perhaps object that this is publishing all your Manner your Ornaments & Study's. That I grant is true, But at the same time I doubt that if you do not publish them yourself some other will which is worse. Sir Nats. Fronts & Sections may make near 10 plates including the painted room & if you publish detail of organ, Silver plate, Carpets &c many more. Then there is the Bridge, the Ruins, The Towers, The pheasant house (a new Contrivance), a new Gateway to his avenue and a new Temple. Then there is Mr Lascelles's plans & fronts. General Blands Room & Green House & Temple. I think I mentioned to you that the Green House turns out in the Execution Handsomer than it is possible to conceive & surprized myself as infinitely prettyer & more antique like in the reality than in the Drawing. Then there is my Lord Northumberland, my Lord Coventry, in Short many others that it is needless to repeat which would make no bad publication already, & if the plates could be gone on with I should think it no bad Scheme. But english Engraving is not to be ventured upon So that I only leave these things to your reflexion.'57

#### 5 Robert Adam to Lord Curzon, London, 5 August 1760

 $^{\circ}$ I have now finished the Design for Lady Caroline's Dressing Room which I must send in a small box by the wagon as rolling would destroy the drawings entirely.'58

#### 6 Robert Adam to Lord Curzon, London, 11 August 1760

'I was informed that you was to be in town in a few days which made me delay sending the Sections of Lady Carolines Dressing room as I hoped to have the Honour of showing them to you here. Your answer will determine me.'59

#### 7 Robert Adam to Lord Curzon, London, 23 April 1761

'I beg you'd be so good as desire Mr Wyatt [the clerk of the works] to Send me the Exact Sizes of

the panels of the Window Shutters of the Painted Dressing room and also of the Soffite pannel within the Mouldings as it will be necessary to have Ornaments painted for them to match the whole compleat.'60

#### 8 Robert Adam to Lord Curzon, London, 8 May 1761

'I received the Honour of Your Lordship Letter of the 5th Ins.t which by being much out of Town in little excursions I am not able fully to answer, particularly with respect to the Chimney piece doing by Spang for Lady Scarsdales dressing room. But I intend to see him tomorrow morning and to push him to get it compleated. Since your Lordship went out of Town I have made great progress in the paintings, and I think Twelve or 14 days will finish the whole.'61

#### 9 Robert Adam to Lord Curzon, London, 15 May 1761

'I have now got all my affairs so settled that I would sett out for Kedleston directly. But as the Painted Room wont be finished for 8 days, I shall regulate myself according to Your Lordships desire. If I sett off directly it will be impossible to see the Painted Room begun, and going on whilst I have the Honour of being with Your Lordship, nor would I carry down my Italian with me to assist. And if I delay my setting out till the paintings are ready, I am affraid it will throw my time too near that of Your Lordship coming to the Birthday, which might prove inconvenient. I could go to Kedleston directly after the Birthday if that would answer equally well for Your Lordship and then both the painting and the frames making by Alken would be finished. But I leave it entirely to Your Lordships choice ... Whatever time you please to fix my coming to Kedleston, if it is after the paintings are finished, it would be necessary to appoint the people who are to cut out and paste up the ornaments that they might be present, so as to put them on the method of doing it right.'62

## 10 Robert Adam to Lord Curzon, London, 9 July 1761

'I have received both Your Lordship and Mr Wyatt's letters concerning the Picture Frames in the painted room, and am very sorry at the projections being too great. But if one compares them with ordinary picture frames they are not near so much raised, as even those for very small pictures, and particularly the oval frames which I made extremely thin. To be sure it would be the best way to sink them in the walls, if it was not for destroying the paintings by the dust and dirt it would occasion in the room by cutting away the plates, and therefore the least which is to be chosen which is to reduce the mouldings according to Mr Wyatts sketch, or rather to avoid the appearance of two astragal in this manner [a sketch of the section of the frame is drawn on the bottomright corner of the page]. As for the circular frame in the centre of the ceiling, I think the best method

for it would be to make it in two separate pieces and to let the inner part be only a small astragal with beads, and the outter ring of some other flatt moulding, and to cut the remaining ornament which goes between them by itself and fix it to the ceiling, and to paint the ground of a colour like the ground of the freeze or surbase there [a sketch follows of a section of the ceiling and frames with the inscriptions 'ceiling', 'astragal', 'ceiling', 'moulding', 'ceiling'; below the middle section of the ceiling is another inscription: 'upon this ground to

put an ornament cutt in wood and fixd up, to be gilt and to have a purple ground']. This is all that occurred to me as a remedy unless, as Your Lordship proposes, you was to make the square frames answer your other pictures, and have new ones done wither [with a] plane, or if you have no pictures that answer exactly to them you might perhaps get somethings painted for them. I have not done the above sketches to any scale, not having any copy of the mouldings which were given to the joiner and carver.'63

#### **Notes**

- 1 On Adam's grand tour, Fleming 1962 is still invaluable, especially 109–244. See also Ingamells 1997, 5–8, and Tait 2008, especially 45–123. On the early days of the Adam London office, see Fleming 1962, 159–60, 168–9. On the formation and sources of his style, see Stillman 1966, passim, esp 10–12, 15–26, 31–40, 82–3, no 75; Harris 2001, esp 1–17.
- 2 Adam and Adam 1773–1822, vol I, 3 (note A).
- 3 Ibid, 3, 5 (note C) and 16.
- 4 See Aymonino et al 2013.
- 5 Fleming 1962, 109–244; Stillman 1966, 31–40; Tait 2008, 45–123.
- 6 Adam refers to himself as 'Antique mad' in a letter from Rome to his sister Peggy (Margaret), dated 4 March 1755 (NRS, GD18/4766, fol 1v). On Robert's collection at Casa Guarnieri, see NRS, GD18/4797, fol 1v.
- 7 NRS, GD18/4766, fol 1v.
- 8 NRS, GD18/4777, fol 1r.
- 9 See for example the Presence Chamber at Kensington Palace (1724) and the parlour at Rousham, Oxfordshire (1738), both by William Kent (Croft-Murray 1962–70, vol II, 234–5 and fig 41; Sicca 1986, 137, 142–4; Cornforth 2004, 137–88 and figs 174 and 175; Weber 2013, 101–2, 123–4, 135–6, 173–9). Or the interiors at Spencer House, London; Wimbledon House, Surrey; Nuneham Park, Oxfordshire, or those unexcuted for Kedleston Hall all designed by James 'Athenian' Stuart in 1758–9 (Bryant 2006; Hewlings 2006). Adam explicitly acknowledged his debt to Kent and especially to Stuart for having introduced 'grotesque paintings' to England. See Adam and Adam 1773–1822, vol I, 5 and notes C and E.
- 10 NRS, GD18/4847, fol 1v.
- 11 See for instance ibid, fol 2r; NRS, GD18/4853, fol 1v; GD18/4854, fols 1r-2v.
- 12 The literature on Robert Adam's work at Kedleston Hall is vast. See esp Harris 1987 and Harris 2001, 19–39
- 13 NRS, GD18/4854, fol 1r. See also Harris 2001, 19.
- 14 NRS, GD18/4854, fols 1v-2r.
- 15 See Harris 2001, 21-2.
- 16 Harris 1987, 52–4, nos 37–9; Harris 2001, 21–3. See also the Appendix to this essay. Lady Caroline's Dressing Room was later known also as the Painted Breakfast Room (not to be confused with

- the 'Painted Breakfasting Room' planned for the west end of the south front in 1768 but never executed) and is referred to as such in various publications. It is also referred to as Lady Scarsdale's Dressing Room.
- 17 For the preparatory drawing in Sir John Soane's Museum (SM, Adam vol 11/44), see Aymonino et al 2013, 28, cat no 18. For the elevations and ceiling kept at Kedleston, see Harris 1987, 52–4, nos 37–9; Bristow 1996, 82–3, fig 82; Harris 2001, 22–3, figs 20 and 22. In addition to these, at Kedleston is preserved also an outline sketch in pen of the chimney wall with measurements, almost certainly in the hand of Robert Adam (NT 109903).
- 18 NRS, GD18/4811, fols 1r-1v. On Brunias, see Fleming 1962; Huth 1962; Croft-Murray 1962-70, vol II, 177; Stillman 1966, 41-2; Kriz 2008, esp 37-69; Bagneris 2010; Aymonino et al 2013.
- 19 NRS, GD18/4854, fol 2v (for Dewez). I am indebted to Frances Sands for the date of Brunias's departure from the Adam office.
- 20 See for instance the drawings attributed to him by Frances Sands in the Sir John Soane's Museum's Collection Online Database. See also Appendix, no 4.
- 21 This is most likely Joseph Rose senior rather than junior, who would have been around 15 years old in 1760 (see Beard 1975, 237–44; Harris 2001, passim; Murray 2012).
- 22 Kedleston 1769, 23. For Michael Henry Spang, see Roscoe et al 2009, 1161–2.
- 23 National Trust, Scarsdale collection, Kedleston Hall (henceforth KH), L2-1/1, fol 7.
- 24 Hardy 1978, 199–201; Harris 1987, 52–4; Harris 2001, 23. See also the curatorial file in the Victoria and Albert Museum Archive (MA/1/S649).
- 25 For Sefferin Alken, see Beard 1981, 241–2; Roscoe et al 2009, 11–14. On his role at Kedleston, see also Hardy 1978, 201; Harris 2001, 23.
- 26 See Hardy 1978, 200-201, figs 6, 8; Harris 2001, 23.
- 27 See the Victoria and Albert Museum collection database entry for the paintings at http://collections. vam.ac.uk/item/O53065/painted-panel [accessed 30 June 2017].
- 28 Two copies of the book are preserved today in the library at Kedleston (NT 3042398 and NT 3042399), though we cannot be sure whether they were acquired by Lord Curzon or one of his descendants.
- 29 On Bellori and Bartoli's publications, see Petrucci, A 1964 'Bartoli, Pietro Santi', in Dizionario biografico

- degli Italiani, VI. Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 586–8; Pomponi, M 1992 'Alcune precisazioni sulla vita e la produzione artistica di Pietro Santi Bartoli'. Storia dell'Arte 75, 195–225; Borea, E and Gasparri, C (eds) 2000 L' idea del bello: Viaggio per Roma nel Seicento con Giovan Pietro Bellori (exhibition catalogue, 2 vols). Rome: De Luca, esp vol I, 25–38, 113–20, 141–51, and vol II, 589–604, 625–72.
- 30 A comprehensive study on the use of antiquarian publications by Adam and in general by artists and architects in the 18th century is still lacking. But see Beard 1978, 7; Bristow 1996, 78–91; Harris 2001, 4; Aymonino 2010b; and Aymonino et al 2013, especially 16–21.
- 31 The modest quality of the decoration was already noted by the 1st Duchess of Northumberland, who, visiting Kedleston in August 1766, described the room as 'painted after the antique but sadly executed'. Archives of the Duke of Northumberland, Alnwick Castle (henceforth AC), DNP: MS 121/16, fol 54r.
- 32 See Aymonino et al 2013, especially 22-3.
- 33 See Harris 2001, 22, figs 20 and 21. For the book's presence in Adam's library, see the sale of the Adam brothers' property at Christie's, 20–22 May 1818, 2nd day of sale, 21 May, lot 144, published in Bolton 1922, vol II, appendix C, 331–2, and also in Watkin 1972, 189. For Curzon's copy, see the 1765 inventory of his library, KH, KCL1.
- 34 Kedleston 1769, 23: 'The Family-Pavilion. Breakfast Room. Eighteen feet square, finished with fresco paintings and antique ornaments, after the Baths of Dioclesian [sic]. Chimney-piece, Statuary Marble, part gilt.'
- 35 Aymonino et al 2013, 25, cat 15 (M Modolo); Gentile Ortona, E and Modolo, M 2016 Caylus e la riscoperta della pittura antica: Attraverso gli acquarelli di Pietro Santi Bartoli per Luigi XIV. Genesi del primo libro di storia dell'arte a colori. Rome: De Luca, 53–4, no 3.
- 36 Aymonino et al 2013, with previous bibliography.
- 37 Ibid, cats 16, 17, 29, 30, 37–40. Apart from the copies listed here, an additional copy of a Bartoli drawing in the hand of Brunias was sold at Sotheby's, London, 15 July 1993, lot 48, with the wrong attribution (since withdrawn) that it constituted a 'Design for the Painted Breakfast Room at Kedleston'.
- 38 RIBA, Drawings Collection, vol 54: Album of copy drawings, mainly from the published sources by Pietro Santi Bartoli, Francesco Bartoli and others, Adam, Robert, 1728–1792, office of. See the RIBA Drawings Collection catalogue, 1968–89, vol 1 (A), 17–18 (sub Adam, Robert, Office of). The RIBA also holds a volume with line copies of the Francesco Bartoli ceilings, which nonetheless cannot be assigned with certainty to the office of Robert Adam: RIBA, Drawings Collection, vols SB4–SB9, Copies of Drawings by F Bartoli, made by the latter in c 1721, of antique ceilings. See the RIBA catalogue, 1968–89, vol 2 (B), 58 (sub Bartoli, Francesco).
- 39 The Getty volume (Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2002.M.22\*) bears the watermark of J Whatman and of I Villedary; see Edward, H 1950 Watermarks, Mainly of the 17th and 18th Centuries.

- Hilversum: Paper Publications Society, 105–6, nos 1809–10, 1846, 1849, 1856. In Aymonino *et al* 2013, the Getty rather than the RIBA volume is considered, possibly erroneously, as the source for Adam and Brunias's earliest decorative schemes.
- 40 See Aymonino et al 2013, 23 and note 29
  (additionally to the sources mentioned there, see also NRS, GD18/4946, fol 1r, where James Adam mentions 'all the profusion of Eaton [sic] and Santo Bartoli'). Adam's knowledge of the Eton drawings has been referred to already in passing, especially by Bristow 1996, 83, 89–90; Connor Bulman 2001, 346; and Harris 2001, 4.
- 41 I am indebted to Mirco Modolo for the reference to the Domus Transitoria. *See also* the inscriptions on the drawings illustrated here as Figs 4.10 and 4.12.
- 42 Aymonino *et al* 2013, 25, no 15. For Brunias's copy at the Getty, *see* ibid, 25, no 16, and for that at the RIBA, *see* RIBA, Drawings Collection, vol 54, fol 37. The RIBA copy resembles more closely what was realised on the walls of Lady Caroline's Dressing Room than Montfaucon's print, suggesting that this was Adam and Brunias's source. The original Bartoli drawing was later copied also by Giuseppe Manocchi *see* Aymonino *et al* 2013, 28, no 17.
- 43 As suggested in Aymonino *et al* 2013, 25–6, nos 16 and 18 and note 43.
- 44 See Ashby 1914, 60, Eton VI, no 15; Polignac and Raspi Serra 1998, 62–3, no 39 (L Connor and F de Polignac, who incorrectly report that the drawing was copied by Clérisseau and published by Montfaucon); Aymonino et al 2013, 49 n 43. A copy by Brunias of this drawing also survives in the Getty album (Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 2002.M.22\*, no 11) and by Manocchi at Sir John Soane's Museum (Bristow 1996, 82–3, fig 85; Rowan 2003, 22, cat 13; Curzi 2010, 201, fig 3). It was later engraved in reverse in Cameron 1772, plate 54. The decorative pattern was also used by Adam and Brunias in 1761–2 as inspiration for the ceiling of the Dining Room at Kedleston (see Harris 2001, 35, fig 47), which will be the subject of an article by the present author.
- 45 See Ashby 1914, 60, Eton VI, no 13. It was later engraved in reverse in Cameron 1772, plate 56.
- 46 Another Bartoli drawing at Eton shows the same gilded floral decoration on a blue background and other similar motifs and arrangement of figures. See Aymonino et al 2013, 43, no 41. A copy of this drawing appears among the RIBA drawings (RIBA, Drawings Collection, vol 54, fol 61). This drawing was copied by Manocchi for which see SM, Adam vol 26/93, and Christie's, London, 16 July 2010, lot 46 (wrongly attributed to Brunias) and also by Charles-Louis Clérisseau, see Chevtchenko et al 1995, 100–1, no 13. It was later engraved in reverse for Cameron 1772, plate 55.
- 47 Aymonino et al 2013, 40, 42, figs 4 and 5.
- 48 For Adam's work at Syon and other Northumberland estates, *see* Harris 2001, 64–103, and Aymonino forthcoming
- 49 The first mention of work done for 'Lord Northumberland' appears in the letter of 24 July 1760 in which Robert Adam also discusses the new 'painted room' at Kedleston (see Appendix, no 4, fol 3v).

- 50 This comment appears in Thomas Percy's handwritten annotation (c 1777) to the duke's copy of Dodsley and Dodsley 1761, VI, 7: AC, DNP MS 93/A/14.
- 51 Aymonino et al 2013, 38–9, nos 37–40.
- 52 Ibid, 36–8, nos 34–6. A partial copy of the drawing illustrated in Fig 4.19 also survives at the RIBA (*see* RIBA, Drawings Collection, vol 54, fol 63).
- 53 Pergolesi's original drawings for the published plate are preserved in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. See Harris 1971, 156–7, plate 113.
- 54 KH, L1-2/5, fol 1r. The original spelling has been retained in the documents in the Appendix.
- 55 KH, L1-2/8, fols 1r-1v.
- 56 KH, L1-2/10, fol 1r.
- 57 NRS, GD18/4866, fols 3r-3v.
- 58 KH, L1-2/12, fol 1r.
- 59 KH, L1-2/13, fols 1v-2r.
- 60 KH, L1-2/18, fols 1r-1v.
- 61 KH, L1-2/19, fol 1r.
- 62 KH, L1-2/20, fols 1v-2r.
- 63 KH, L1-2/21, fol 1v.