



The Continence of Scipio

Pieter Codde
(Amsterdam 1599 – Amsterdam 1678)

ca. 1630–35
oil on panel
54.6 x 75.6 cm
PC-100

How to cite

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Pieter Codde (1599–1678), best known for his portraits and interior scenes of soldiers, musicians, and elegant merry-makers, also painted compelling history paintings, among them *The Continnence of Scipio*. This scene from Roman antiquity depicts a celebrated moment in the life of Scipio (ca. 236–183 BCE) that epitomizes the ideal of a good and just leader. Scipio, whose full name was Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus, was the young Roman commander of the Spanish provinces during the Second Punic War. As recounted by the ancient historians Polybius and Livy (Titus Livius), Scipio led his troops in a successful siege of New Carthage (today Cartagena, Spain) in 210 BCE.^[1] Among the hostages Scipio's troops took after their victory was a "maiden of a beauty so extraordinary that, wherever she went, she drew the eyes of everyone." His men subsequently presented the maiden to Scipio as a captive. Upon discovering that this young woman was engaged to Allucius, the leader of the conquered Celtiberians who inhabited that region, Scipio summoned her fiancé and her parents and informed Allucius: "Your betrothed has been in my camp with the same regard for modesty as in the house of your parents-in-law, her own parents. She has been kept for you, so that she could be given to you as a gift, unharmed and worthy of you and of me. This is the only price that I stipulate in return for that gift: be a friend to the Roman people." Scipio then feigned accepting the ransom of gold and precious objects that the young woman's parents had brought with them to present to him in exchange for their daughter's safe return, while in fact giving these treasures to Allucius as a wedding gift. The bridegroom subsequently told his countrymen that the Roman general conquers through "arms and especially by generosity and favors."^[2] For centuries, and notably in Renaissance Europe, Scipio's actions were perceived as a model of restraint, judgement, and leadership.^[3]

Scenes from Roman history were of particular importance to the Dutch, who believed that Roman heroes embodied virtues that should serve as models for leaders of the Dutch Republic. Because of Scipio's renowned qualities of equanimity and justice, depictions of the Continnence (or self-restraint) of Scipio were often commissioned for town halls and other government buildings. In the late 1630s, for example, the city of Leiden commissioned Jan Lievens (1607–74) to paint this subject for the council chamber of the town hall.^[4] As with Codde's painting, however, a number of representations of this narrative were modest in size, indicating that such works were painted for private patrons.^[5] Many cabinet-sized depictions of the Continnence of Scipio were *portraits historiés* in which the artist's patrons were shown in the guise of the bride's elderly parents or, as in Codde's painting, the young betrothed couple. In such domestic settings, the story of Scipio and the bride of Allucius could have served as an exemplar of a number of virtues, including personal equanimity, self-restraint, loving relationships, and depth of allegiance to a wise leader.^[6]

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Trajan's Column, the First Dacian War, the first *allocutio*, scene 10, erected 106–13 CE, marble, Rome.



Fig 2. Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, *The Magnanimity of Scipio*, 1658, oil on canvas, 138.1 x 171.5 cm, Toledo Museum of Art, inv. no. 1923.3155, Gift of Arthur J. Secor.



Fig 3. Karel van Mander, *The Continnence of Scipio*, 1600, oil on copper, 44 x 79 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. SK-A-4690.



Fig 4. Pieter Codde, *The Continnence of Scipio*, n.d., medium and dimensions unknown, previously P.J.G. Van Diggelen, Scheveningen.

Codde drew from well-established compositional prototypes to compose his *Continnence of Scipio*. Scipio wears a luxurious knee-length red woolen tunic under a long red cloak clasped at the neck and a laurel wreath, all of which signify his status as a triumphant commander.^[7] He points his black ceremonial baton toward the kneeling father, who, in gratitude for the Roman's benevolence, offers him expensive metalware, including platters, tazze, pitchers, and urns. Meanwhile, as the bride's mother fervently clasps her hands in supplication, three men bring even more treasures to present to the victor. The young couple, dressed in shimmering robes, tenderly hold each other's hands while looking thankfully toward Scipio.

This overall design, and particularly Scipio's pose, evokes classical imagery of the *adlocutio*, an address given to troops by the emperor. Depictions of this act—such as that found on Trajan's column, the Roman monument erected in 106–13 CE (**fig 1**)—feature an emperor standing with one arm extended, often surrounded by onlookers.^[8] Karel van Mander (1548–1606) recommended a related arrangement in *Den Grondt der Edel Vry Schilderconst* (The Foundation of the Noble, Free Art of Painting) of 1604. In chapter five (“On the Ordonnance and Invention of Histories”), he indicated that a variety of figural types should be included in the crowd, writing that those personages central to the historical narrative should be portrayed standing amid onlookers who focus on them.^[9]

Codde likely based his depiction of the *Continnence of Scipio* on a lost composition by Pieter Lastman (1583–1633), the preeminent history painter in Amsterdam in the second and third decades of the seventeenth century. Lastman was Codde's neighbor, and his works served repeatedly as a model for the younger artist.^[10] As Peter C. Sutton has emphasized, Lastman's portrayal of the *Continnence of Scipio* had great resonance with later Dutch artists who depicted this subject, including Nicolaes Moeyaert (1592–1655) and Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (1621–74), the latter of whom painted this episode in the life of Scipio multiple times in the 1650s and 1660s (**fig 2**).^[11] These artists' depictions of the Continnence of Scipio suggest that Lastman's prototype similarly portrayed Scipio standing on a raised surface with key figures in the narrative kneeling near the Roman commander, against a backdrop of antique ruins.

Codde carefully modeled the figures of Scipio, Allucius and his fiancée, her father, and the sparkling treasure of expensive serving dishes to emphasize these key compositional elements. The mother of the young woman, who beseeches Scipio for clemency, is somewhat more broadly rendered. Codde modeled the attendants at right with thinly applied ocher paints to indicate their distance from the main figure groups.^[12] Codde also used color to emphasize connections among his figures. For example, the red garments worn by Scipio and the young woman's father create a

visual link between them. Similarly, the silken, gold-colored garments of Allucius and his bride unite the young couple.

Numerous texts featuring the story of the Continnence of Scipio fueled the popularity of this episode from classical antiquity for the Dutch. Codde, who was active in Amsterdam literary circles early in his career, was likely familiar with Scipio's deeds from such written sources as the 1614 Dutch edition of Valerius Maximus's *Factorum et dictorum memorabilitium* (Memorable Doings and Sayings).^[13] Valerius, who organized his historical anecdotes thematically, placed Scipio's magnanimity under the heading "Of Abstinence and Continence" and argued that lust and greed can be "repelled by good sense and reason from the hearts of famous men."^[14] Van Mander—who painted *The Continnence of Scipio* in 1600 (**fig 3**)—echoed Valerius's praise for Scipio's valor in *Den Grondt der Edel Vry Schilderconst*.^[15]

Other seventeenth-century accounts of Scipio based on Valerius Maximus appeared in well-known publications in the 1630s. Among these texts were J.L. Gottfried's world chronicle, published in 1630, with illustrated plates by Matthäus Merian I (1593–1650), as well as a collection of actions and quotations ascribed to virtuous figures, including Scipio, compiled by Franciscus Heermans in 1634.^[16] In his introduction, Heermans notes that the descriptions of virtue he included in his text were meant to provide examples of moral behavior for his readers.

Given that history paintings were somewhat rare in Codde's oeuvre, his *Continnence of Scipio* can enhance our understanding of both his own professional trajectory and his place within wider artistic trends occurring in Amsterdam. It is likely that Codde painted *Continnence of Scipio*, and another undated version of the subject (**fig 4**), in the 1630s.^[17] In this decade, the artist began populating in his merry company scenes with a greater numbers of figures in more complex compositions, often featuring notably elaborate garments made of luxurious and varied fabrics.^[18] Coinciding with these personal artistic developments were external factors, particularly the pronounced influence on Dutch history painting in these years of both the work of Lastman (who died in 1633) and the written recommendations of Van Mander regarding compositions suitable for this esteemed genre. Beyond artistic circles, another possible factor was the Dutch political landscape of the war against Spain, namely the positioning of Frederick Hendrick, Prince of Orange, as a hero in the guise of classical exemplars like Scipio. This confluence of circumstances produced an ideal moment for Codde to experiment with applying his skill at painting faces, figures, and objects to the discipline of history painting. In this instance, Codde employed many of his typical elements, such as a closely gathered crowd of individuals displaying a range of interactions, sumptuous garments, and carefully rendered still-life elements, but he reimagined them for a particular historical moment in an



outdoor setting reminiscent of Lastman.^[19] In subsequent years of intense activity, Codde opted to maintain his focus on portraits and genre interiors—perhaps to find success on a market moving away from history painting, rather than to assuage his personal artistic ambition. Nonetheless, The Leiden Collection's *Continnence of Scipio* confirms that he did indeed possess the skill, knowledge, and passion for depicting celebrated figures from the past in a manner that spoke, in the present, to the aspirations of his Amsterdam clientele.

- Elizabeth Nogrady and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., 2024

Endnotes

1. See Polybius, *Histories*, X.19; and Daniel Walker Moore, *Polybius: Experience and the Lessons of History* (Leiden, 2020), 79–86. See also Livy, *The History of Rome*, ed. Frank Gardner Moore (Cambridge, MA, 1943), XXVI.50, 193, in which the events are covered in detail.
2. Translation from Livy, *The History of Rome*, ed. Frank Gardner Moore (Cambridge, MA, 1943), XXVI.50, 193.
3. See Petrarch's unfinished poem *Africa* (1338–43) and Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* (III, 20) of 1531. For modern accounts of Scipio Africanus, see Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *Greater than Napoleon: Scipio Africanus* (Edinburgh, 1926); Howard Hayes Scullard, *Scipio Africanus: Soldier and Politician* (Ithaca, 1970); and John Briscoe, "The Second Punic War," in *Cambridge Ancient History*, ed. A.E. Astin et al. (Cambridge, 1989), 59–65, 73–74.
4. Lievens's *The Continenence of Scipio Africanus*, 1640 (formerly the Vroedschapskamer of the town hall in Leiden) was destroyed in a fire on 12 February 1929. Regarding this commission, Arnold Houbraken wrote: "gelyk ook in den jare 1640, voor den Prins van Oranje, en Borgermeesteren van Leiden twee groote stukken, waar van het eene verbeeld de berugte daad van den Roomschen Scipio Africanus, daar hy de ondertrouwde Princesse hem aangeboden haren Bruidegom ongeschonden te schenk weder geeft" (such as in 1640 for the Prince of Orange as well as two pieces for the Leiden burgomasters, one of which depicted the famous deed of the Roman Scipio Africanus when he returns the engaged princess inviolate to her groom). See Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 1: 298. For the English translation, see Arnold Houbraken, *Arnold Houbraken's Great Theatre of the Netherlandish Painters and Paintresses*, trans. Hendrik J. Horn and Rieke van Leeuwen, RKD Studies, 2021 (houbraken-translated.rkdstudies.nl).

The subject continued to be popular in public buildings into the mid- and late seventeenth-century Netherlands, as can be seen in the version by Dirk Hardenstein (1620–81/1701) from around 1649–53 for the Burgomaster's chamber in the town hall of Deventer (in situ), and in Gerard de Lairese's (1641–1711) interpretation from 1688–89 for the civil council chamber of the Court of Appeal of Holland, Zeeland, and West-Friesland (Binnenhof, The Hague). For the choice of certain historical subjects in particular settings, see Beatrijs Brenninkmeyer-de Rooij, "To Behold Is to Be Aware: History Painting in Public Buildings and the Residences of the Stadtholders," in *Gods, Saints, and Heroes: Dutch Painting in the Age of Rembrandt*, by Albert Blankert et al. (Exh. cat., Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art; Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Washington, D.C., 1980), 65–76.

5. See, for instance, Jacob de Wet the Elder (ca. 1610–after 1675), *The Continenence of Scipio*, 1610 (Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe); and Nicolaes Knüpfer, *The Continenence of Scipio*, ca. 1637 (Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf). See also Steven Robert Golan, "The Depiction of Scipio Africanus and the

Spanish Girl for Public and Private Patrons: *Exempla* of the Princely and Marital Values,” in “Scenes from Roman Republican History in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: *Exempla virtutis* for Public and Private Viewing” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1994), 165, 176–80.

6. Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (1621–74), *The Continenence of Scipio*, 1659 (Philadelphia Museum of Art), is an example of a *portrait historié*. See Peter C. Sutton, “‘The Continenence of Scipio’ by Gerbrandt van Den Eeckhout (1621–1674),” *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 78, no. 336 (1982): 8. In the Leiden Collection painting, the extreme length of her father’s beard and crone-like appearance of her mother make them unlikely candidates for this type of portrait, while the more individualized features of the young woman and Allucius may depict the patrons who commissioned the painting.
7. John Brian Campbell, “Crowns and Wreaths, Roman,” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2015), <https://oxfordre.com/classics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-7329>.
8. See Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., “Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, *The Continenence of Scipio*,” in *Gods, Saints, and Heroes: Dutch Painting in the Age of Rembrandt*, by Albert Blankert et al. (Exh. cat., Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art; Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum (Washington, 1980), 174–75, no. 41. These scenes appear also on Roman coins and other ancient monuments, among them the Arch of Constantine, a tradition that was adapted by many later artists, including Raphael (1483–1520), Giulio Romano (1499–1546), and Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640).
9. Karel van Mander, *Den Grondt der Edel Vry Schilderconst* (Haarlem, 1604), chapter 5, no. 23, fol. 17r.
10. Jochai Rosen, *Pieter Codde (1599–1678): Catalogue Raisonné* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2020), 34–36. Lastman, too, lived on the Sint Anthonisbreestraat. See the biography of Lastman in this catalogue by Piet Bakker.
11. Peter Lastman applied this compositional type when depicting other subjects as well, including in his *Coriolanus and the Roman Women*, 1622 (Trinity College, Dublin), while Rembrandt also used it in his *History Painting with Self-Portrait of the Artist*, 1626 (Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden). See Peter C. Sutton, *Northern European Paintings in the Philadelphia Museum of Art: From the Sixteenth through the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1990), 79–83.
12. This range of buildup, modeling, color, and detail of execution was one that Codde often employed in his history paintings. For a similar approach when depicting background figures, see *The Sacrifice of Polyxena* in the Kremer Collection. See Eric Jan Sluiter, *Rembrandt’s Rivals: History Painting in Amsterdam (1630–1650)* (Philadelphia, 2015), 310. Codde’s facility with ocher pigments can also be seen in the oil sketch *The Dead Adonis Lamented by Venus, the Three Graces and Cupid*, 1640–50s (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg).
13. Codde’s connection to literature is evident in the 1627 play *Tyrus*, in which the playwright Elias Herckmans (1596–1644) mentioned him in the dedication, while in 1633 Codde published a love poem in *Hollande Nachtegaelken*. See Paul Brandt Jr., “Notities over het leven en werk van den

- Amsterdamschen schilder Pieter Codde,” *Historia* 12 (1947): 28. See also Valerius Maximus, *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium libri IX*, VI.3. For the Dutch edition, see Valerius Maximus, *Des alder-vermaertsten ende wel-sprekensten Histori-schrijvers Valerii Maximi*, trans. Conradus Mirkinus (Rotterdam, 1614). For an English translation, see Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, vol. 1, books 1–5, ed. and trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey, Loeb Classical Library 492 (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 364–67. Discussions of Valerius Maximus as a source for seventeenth-century Netherlandish artists can be found in Steven Robert Golan, “Scenes from Roman Republican History in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Exempla virtutis for Public and Private Viewing” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1994), 169, 210n13; and Amy Golahny, *Rembrandt’s Reading: The Artist’s Bookshelf of Ancient Poetry and History* (Amsterdam, 2003), 186.
14. Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, vol. 1, books 1–5, ed. and trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey, Loeb Classical Library 492 (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 365.
 15. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors, among them Cesare Ripa and Karel van Mander, praised Scipio for his good manners, respectability, and kindheartedness more than for his military victories. See Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia of Uytbeeldinghen des Verstants*, trans. Dirck Pietersz. Pers (Amsterdam, 1644), 7, where he notes “En ’t is geen wonder dat dese dappere Romeinsche Hoofdman, niet soo seer door zijn kracht, als door zijn goede manieren en achtbaerheyd . . . gestelt wort” (And it is no wonder that this heroic Roman captain, not so much for his power, but for his good qualities and estimation . . . is positioned). See also Karel van Mander, *Den Grondt der Edel Vry Schilderconst* (Haarlem, 1604), chapter XIII, no. 17, where Van Mander noted, “Scipio en Alexander meer gepresen, hun ghemoeden te hebben verwonnen, dan van weghe hun krijchs victorien” (Scipio and Alexander praised more for having triumphed over their [base] impulses than by cause of military victories), as translated in Walter S. Melion, *Karel van Mander and His “Foundation of the Noble, Free Art of Painting”: First English Translation, with Introduction and Commentary*, Brill’s Studies on Art, Art History, and Intellectual History 62 [Leiden, 2023], chapter 13, no. 17, 338. For Van Mander’s painting, see Hessel Miedema, “De grootmoedigheid van Scipio, een schilderij van Karel van Mander uit 1600,” *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 26, no. 2 (1978): 51–59.
 16. See J.L. Gottfried, *Historische Chronica, oder, beschreibung der furnembsten Geschichten, so sich von Anfang der Welt biss auff unsere Zeitten zugetrage* (Frankfurt, 1629–34). Pieter Lastman and Rembrandt likely used Merian’s imagery as inspiration for their own scenes from history. See Amy Golahny, *Rembrandt’s Reading: The Artist’s Bookshelf of Ancient Poetry and History* (Amsterdam, 2003), 138–44. Codde used Merian’s etching of “King Hezekiah Destroys the Idols” from *Icones Biblicae* (Frankfurt, ca. 1625–30) as a model for his painting of the same subject (present whereabouts unknown). See Jochai Rosen, *Pieter Codde (1599–1678): Catalogue Raisonné* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2020), 34–35. See also Franciscus Heermans, *De guldene annotatien van Franciscus Heermans vertonende de treffelijckste daden, deuchden ende sententien der voornaemste coningen, princen, filosoophen, poeten, orateuren ende andere magnefijque en heroique personen* (Amsterdam, 1634), 173–74.
 17. Codde’s other known painting of *The Continenence of Scipio* was formerly in the collection of P.J.G. van

Diggelen, Scheveningen (The Hague); see RKD image no. 0000002607. Eric Jan Sluijter contends that Codde primarily made history paintings toward the beginning of his career, though he notes it is difficult to date the artist's works. For this painting, Sluijter proposes a date of around 1633 to 1635. See Eric Jan Sluijter, *Rembrandt's Rivals: History Painting in Amsterdam (1630–1650)* (Philadelphia, 2015), 297–98. Ellen Borger also suggests that this work was from earlier in Codde's career, in part because his contemporary Jacob Duck (ca. 1600–1667)—who, like Codde, was a painter of guardroom pictures—produced scenes of women as the spoils of war in the second half of the 1630s, albeit in contemporary settings (*Guardroom Scene with Spoils of War*, ca. 1635–39, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh; *Interior of a Guardroom with Soldiers Inspecting the Booty, with a Pleading Couple*, 1635–39, Staatsgalerie im Schloß Johannisburg, Aschaffenburg). See Ellen Borger, *Geschilderde wachtlokalen: De Hollandse kortegaard uit de Gouden Eeuw* (Exh. cat. Naarden, Nederlands Vestingmuseum) (Zwolle, 1996), 17. In either scenario, this production of history paintings early in his career suggests that Codde did indeed value this lauded genre and sought to make his mark in that realm, even as it lay outside the primary area of specializations for which he was known.

18. Caroline Bigler Playter, “Willem Duyster en Pieter Codde: The ‘Duystere Werelt’ of Dutch Genre Painting, ca. 1625–1635” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1972), 67–68.
19. Compare, for example, passages of Codde's *The Continnence of Scipio* to the gold dress and carpet in his *Dutch Cavaliers and Their Ladies Making Music*, 1631 (Bristol Museum Collections), as well as the hairstyles and depictions of folds in fabric in his *Gallant Company*, 1633 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).

Provenance

- (Sale, Christie's, London, 25 October 1985, lot 84.)
- (Sale, Christie's, London, 6 July 2006, no. 102.)
- [Jack Kilgore and Co., Inc., New York.]
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2007.

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