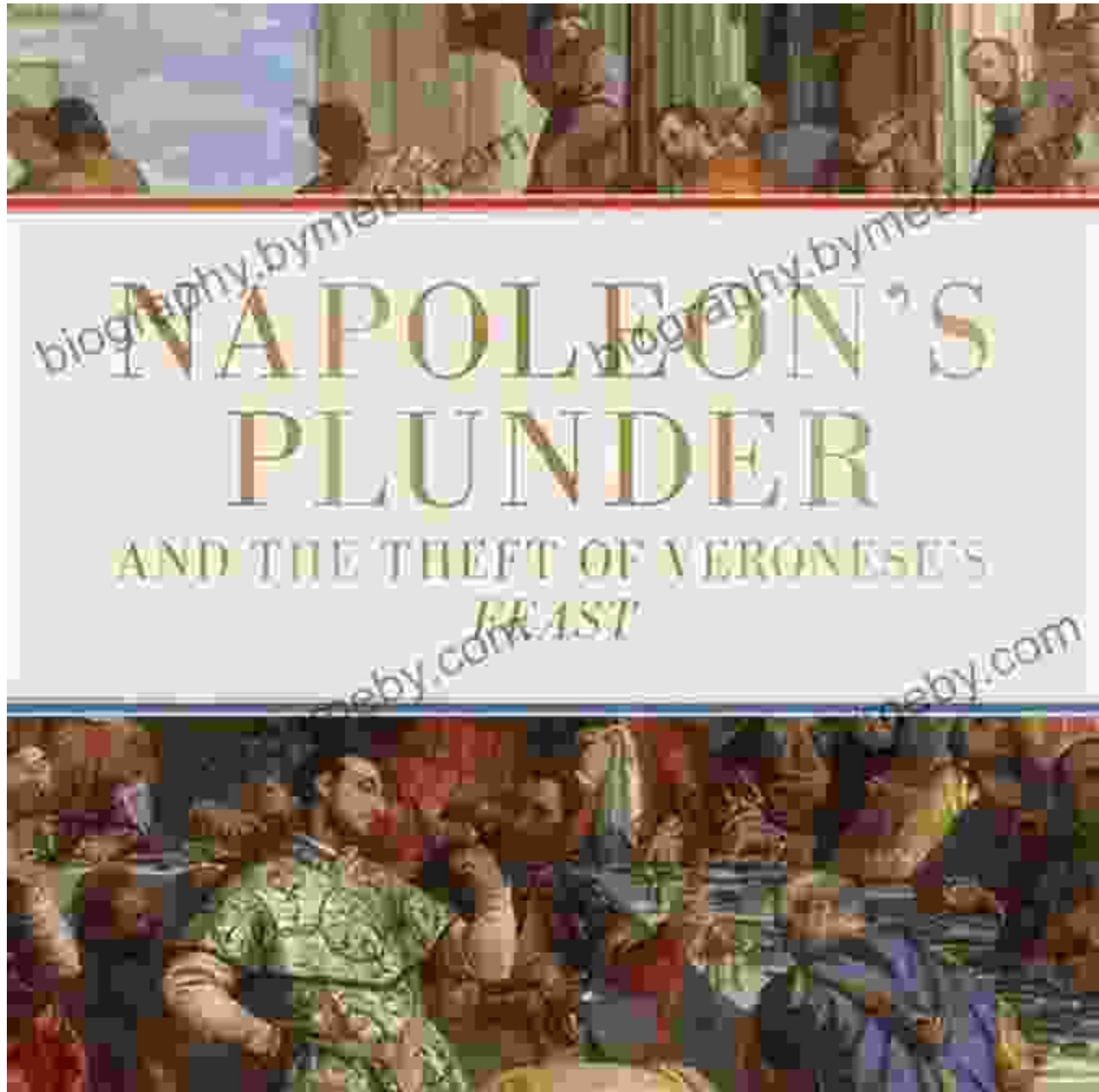


# Discover the Captivating History of Napoleon's Theft of Veronese Feast



The theft of Veronese Feast from Mantua by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1797 stands as one of the most infamous plunderings in history. This colossal

painting, a masterpiece of the Italian Renaissance, became a symbol of Napoleon's insatiable desire for cultural conquest.



## Plunder: Napoleon's Theft of Veronese's Feast

by Cynthia Saltzman

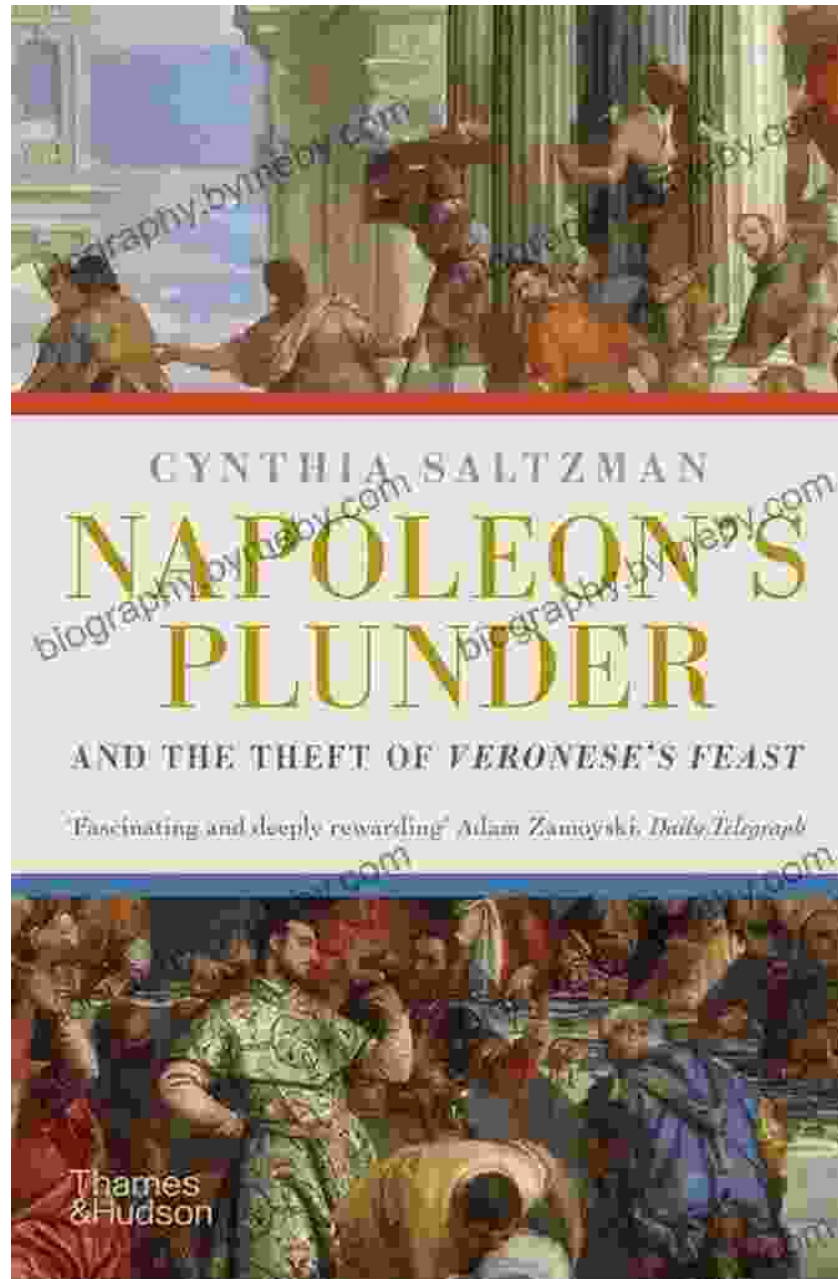
★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

Language	: English
File size	: 50597 KB
Text-to-Speech	: Enabled
Screen Reader	: Supported
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
X-Ray	: Enabled
Word Wise	: Enabled
Print length	: 319 pages



### The Veronese Masterpiece

Created by the renowned Venetian painter Paolo Veronese in 1562, Veronese Feast was a monumental work of art. Depicting the biblical story of Pentecost, the painting featured a vibrant composition of over 100 life-sized figures.



Its rich colors, intricate details, and theatrical lighting techniques made it a stunning spectacle, earning it widespread acclaim. The painting became an integral part of the collection of the Gonzaga family, rulers of Mantua.

### **Napoleon's Invasion and Plundering**

In 1797, Napoleon's victorious army overran Italy. As the French general sought to consolidate his power, he imposed heavy war contributions on the conquered territories. Art became a prime target for plunder, as Napoleon believed that these treasures belonged to the French nation.

### **Resistance in Mantua**

Mantua, a fortified city, initially resisted Napoleon's demands. However, after a prolonged siege, the city fell in February 1797. The Gonzaga collection, including Veronese Feast, became a prize for the victor.

### **The Art Commission**

Napoleon established the Art Commission to oversee the selection and transport of looted artworks to Paris. Headed by the architect Claude Bernier, the commission faced the difficult task of determining which works were most valuable and portable.

### **Veronese's Masterpiece Chosen**

Recognizing the exceptional quality and historical significance of Veronese Feast, the commission earmarked it for transport to Paris. Despite the protests of the Mantuan people, the painting was ruthlessly removed from its rightful home.

### **The Travail to Paris**

The journey to Paris was perilous. The massive canvas required special handling and protection as it was transported by cart and boat. However, the painting arrived in Paris in 1798, where it was displayed as a trophy of Napoleon's conquest.

### **Public Reaction and Controversy**

The theft of Veronese Feast sparked outrage in Italy and beyond. Many saw it as a sacrilegious act, robbing a city of its cultural heritage. Artists and intellectuals condemned Napoleon's actions as an assault on civilization.

### **Quatremère's Denunciation**

Antoine Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy, a prominent art historian, penned a scathing denunciation of the plundering. He argued that art should be protected, not looted, and that its removal from its original context diminished its value.

### **Napoleon's Legacy and the Return of Veronese Feast**

Napoleon's military conquests spread French influence and ideas across Europe. However, his plundering of art left a dark legacy. Many looted masterpieces remained in France, including Veronese Feast.

### **Congress of Vienna**

Following Napoleon's defeat in 1815, the Congress of Vienna attempted to restore the balance of power in Europe. As part of this process, looted artworks were discussed, and some were returned to their original owners.

### **Veronese Feast's Triumphant Return**

Austria, which had taken control of Mantua, negotiated for the return of Veronese Feast. In 1816, the painting was finally restored to its rightful home, where it has remained ever since.

### **The Enduring Impact of the Theft**

The theft of Veronese Feast by Napoleon Bonaparte remains a potent reminder of the destructive nature of war and the importance of preserving

cultural heritage. The painting's return to Mantua symbolized the resilience of a city and the triumph of art over adversity.

Today, Veronese Feast continues to captivate visitors at the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua. Its vibrant colors and masterful execution transport viewers to a bygone era, a testament to the enduring power of art and the complexities of history.

## Additional Resources

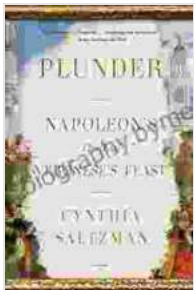
\* [The Plunder of Art in the Napoleonic Wars]

([https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/napol/hd\\_napol.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/napol/hd_napol.htm)) \* [The

Congress of Vienna and the Restitution of Looted Art]

(<https://www.jstor.org/stable/42627829>) \* [Paolo Veronese: Master of the

High Renaissance](<https://www.nga.gov/exhibition/paolo-veronese.html>)



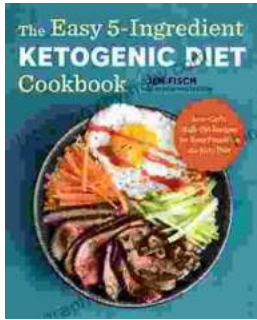
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