

Andrea Bacchi
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Donatella Pegazzano

Rondoni and Balassi

The Patronage of Domenico Maria Corsi



Milan
February 2016

CARLO ORSI

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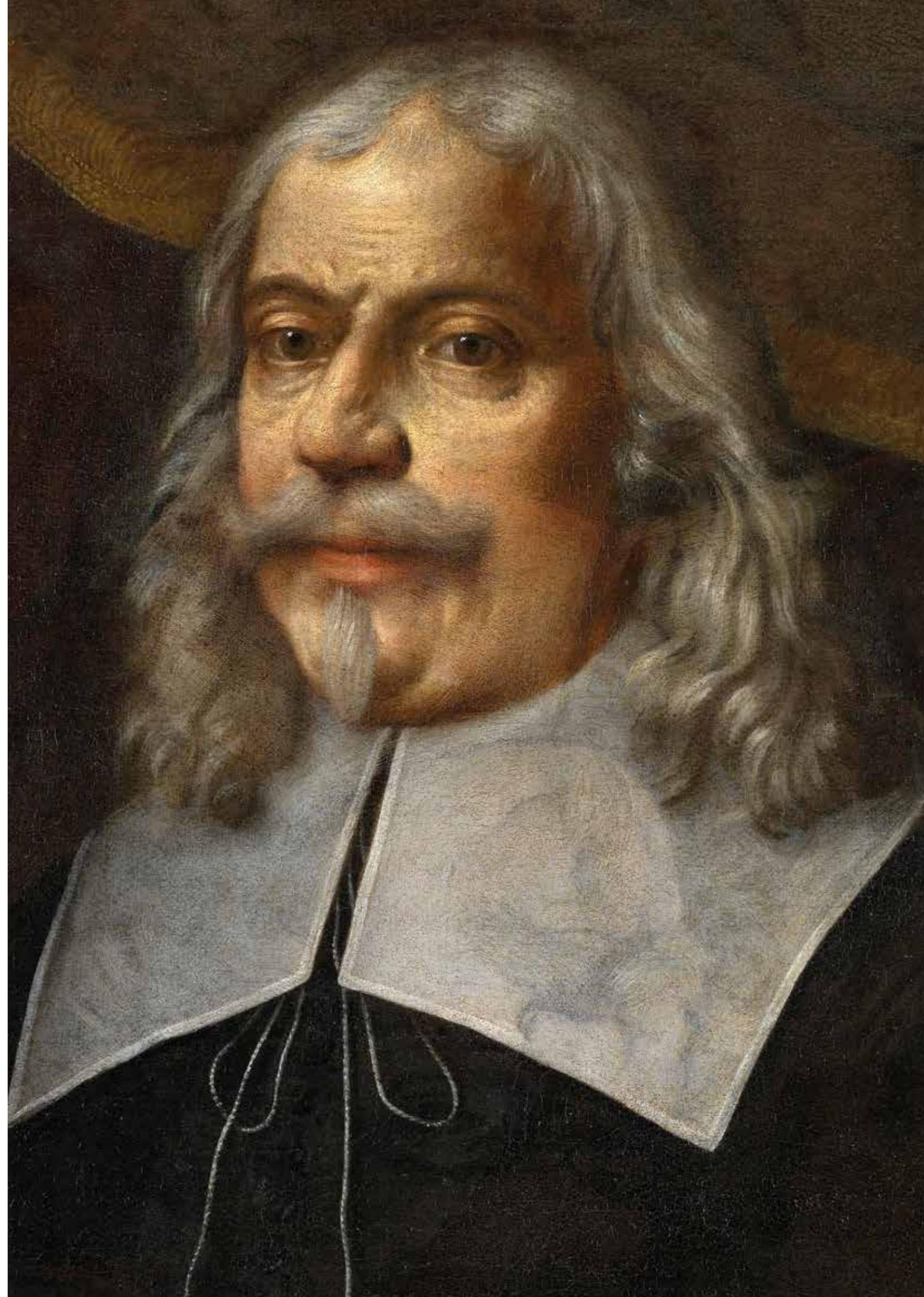
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ALESSANDRO RONDONI
(Rome c.1644 – c.1710)

Bust of Marquess Giovanni di Jacopo Corsi (1600 – 1661)

marble, height: 72 cm

PROVENANCE:

Commissioned by the sitter's son, Cardinal Domenico Maria Corsi, and paid for in 1685 (Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Guicciardini Corsi Salviati, Libri di amministrazione 552, c. 75);
Villa Corsi, Sesto Fiorentino

ALESSANDRO RONDONI

(Rome c.1644 – c.1710)

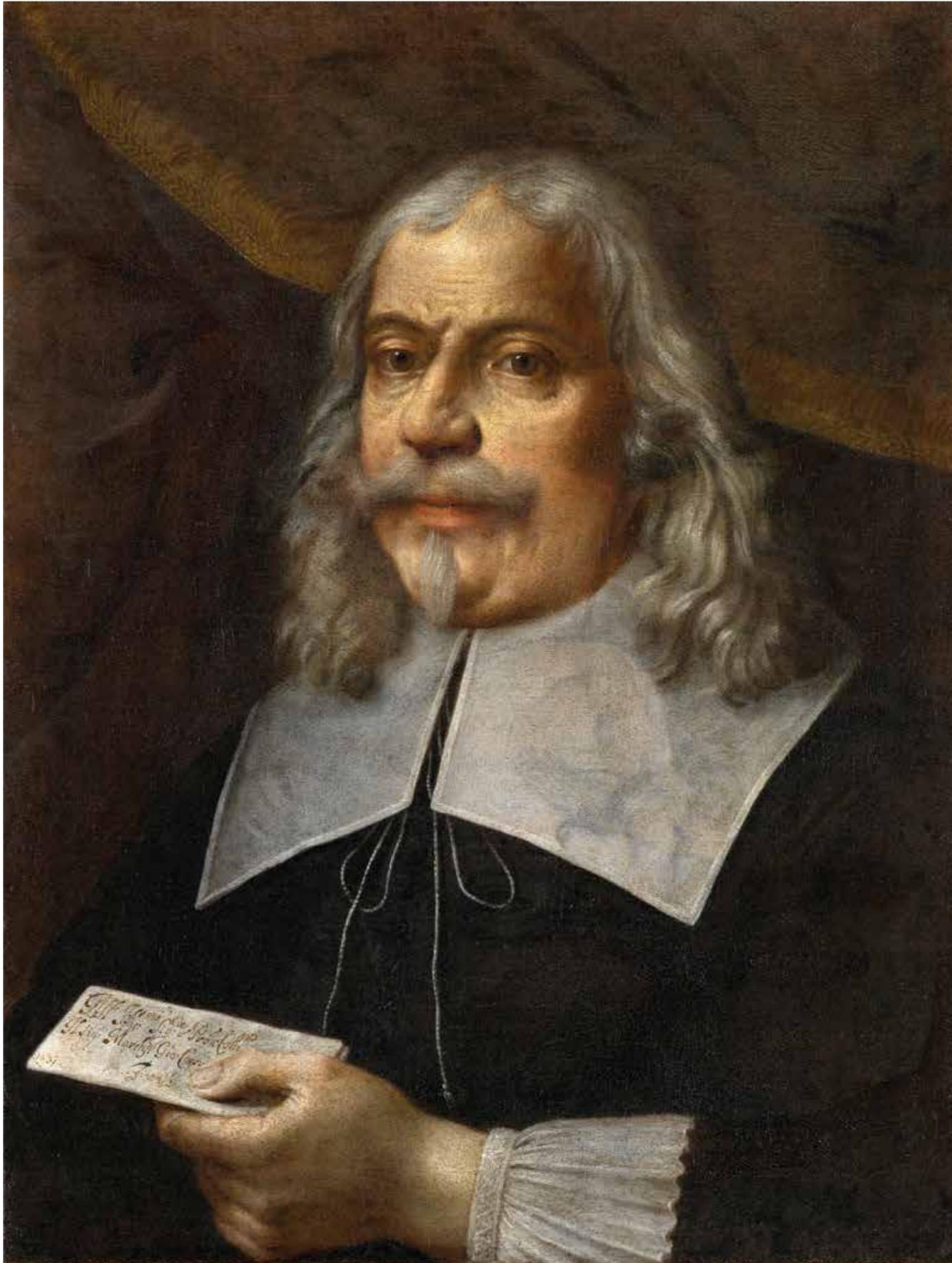
Bust of Cardinal Domenico Maria Corsi (1633 – 1697)

marble, height: 77.5 cm

PROVENANCE:

Commissioned by the sitter and paid for in 1686 (Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Guicciardini Corsi Salviati, Libri di amministrazione 552, c. 75);
Villa Corsi, Sesto Fiorentino





MARIO BALASSI

(Florence 1604 – 1667)

Portrait of Marquess Giovanni di Jacopo Corsi (1600 – 1661)

oil on canvas, 70.7 x 54 cm

inscribed and dated, lower left, on the letter: “All’Ill:mo Sig:re e
P:rone Coll.mo/ Il Sig:re March.e Gio: Corsi / Firenze/ 1661.”

PROVENANCE:

Commissioned by the sitter's son, Cardinal Domenico Maria Corsi, and paid for in 1662 (Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Guicciardini Corsi Salviati, Libri di amministrazione 547, c. 5r); probably Rome, collection of Cardinal Domenico Maria Corsi; Villa Corsi, Sesto Fiorentino

LITERATURE:

BERTI 2015, cat. n. 58, pp. 50, 149-150, reproduced pl. 29, fig. 70

Cardinal Domenico Maria Corsi: Patron of Alessandro Rondoni the Younger and Mario Balassi

*In questa sì mirabile figura
Di marmo material non veggo un orma,
Ravviso ben, che la materia è dura
Pur miro in essa un animata forma*

Sebastiano Baldini, 1682 ca.¹

¹ In this admirable figure/
Of marble material I see no flaw/
I observe well that the matter is
hard/ Yet still in it I behold an
animated form/.

For this verse, composed by
Sebastiano Baldini in praise of a
bust executed by Alessandro
Rondoni for the Viceroy of
Naples, Gaspar de Haro y
Guzmán, see GIOMETTI 2011,
pp. 355-356, note 31. I would
like to thank Cristiano Giometti
for providing me with the
transcription of the entire
passage and for exchanging
ideas. My thanks also goes to
Alessandro Angelini for his
precious advice.

² For information on the
Cardinal, see STUMPO 1983,
pp. 566-567. A family tree of the
Corsi can be found in:
GUICCIARDINI CORSI SALVIATI 1937,
pl. 1.

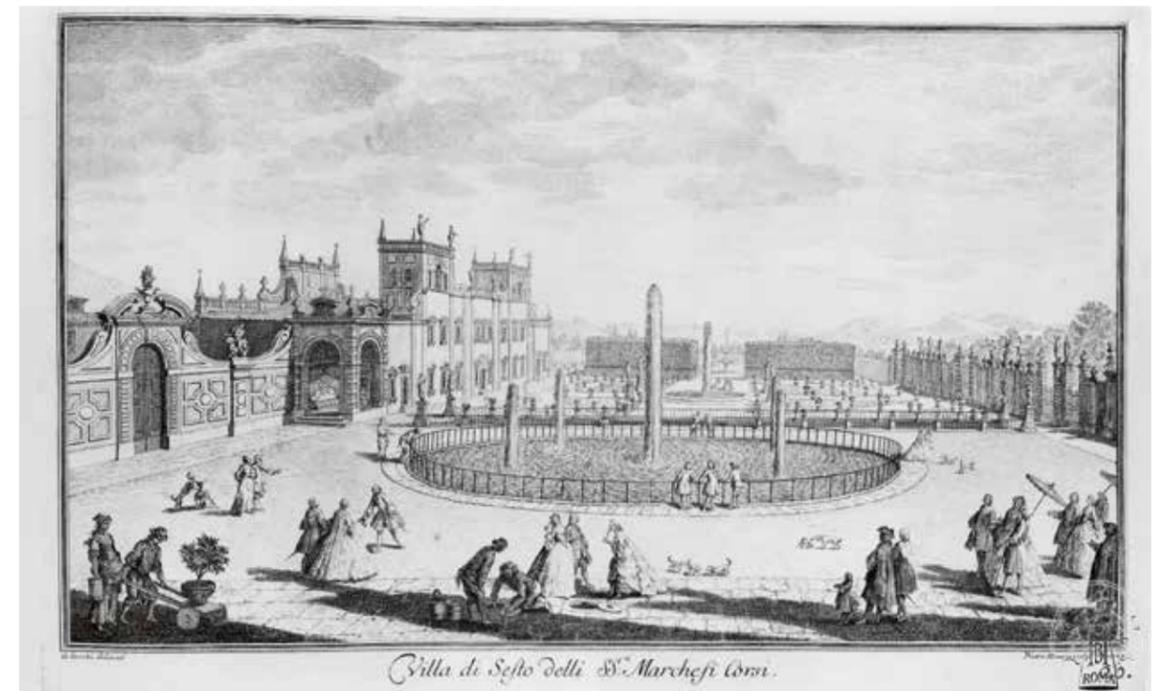
³ For the history of the
collection, see PEGAZZANO 2010,
PEGAZZANO 2015A.

The present three previously unpublished portraits come from the historic, now largely dispersed, collection of the noble Corsi family from Florence. Two of them portray Giovanni di Jacopo Corsi (1600 – 1664), Marquess of Cajazzo and ambassador for the Medici, one of the most illustrious representatives of the dynasty and known from the 16th century for his patronage and interest in the arts. The works – a marble bust by Alessandro Rondoni and a painting by Mario Balassi, which served as the model for the sculpture – were executed posthumously and commissioned at different times by Giovanni's son, Cardinal Domenico Maria Corsi (1633 – 1697), sitter of the third portrait-bust.²

The sitters, authorship, dating and the artistic and cultural context of these works were identified during the course of my own extensive research, carried out in order to reconstruct the characteristics of the Corsi collection, from its origins in the late *Cinquecento* to its dispersal during the course of the nineteenth century.³

Thanks to research carried out using the rich archival sources on this family, now conserved in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze, it has in fact been possible to uncover numerous payments relating to works commissioned and acquired by the Corsi and, as with the case of the present portraits, to connect them with the works that remained in the collection, part of it still in the possession of Corsi family descendants. I have been able to determine that the marble

effigy of Marquess Corsi belongs to a homogenous series of four sculptures consisting of three other marble busts, also published here for the first time and executed, as we shall see, by the same sculptor during the same period, between the summer of 1685 and autumn of the following year. As well as the marble image of Giovanni, portrayals of Corsi's brother, Monsignor Lorenzo Corsi (1601-1656) (Fig. 4), his son Antonio (1630-1679) (Fig. 5) and finally the bust of the aforementioned Domenico Maria Corsi, who had just become a cardinal, are in fact all works by the Alessandro Rondoni the younger.



These four works, as well as the painting, remained for centuries in the gallery at the Corsi villa in Sesto Fiorentino, as testified by a photograph taken by Alinari in 1885 of the busts (Fig. 2). The Sesto villa is still standing and is now known as Villa Guicciardini Corsi Salviati. The villa, as well as its famous garden, was much loved by the family, who would organise theatrical and musical events there and adorned its interiors with numerous paintings and sculptures.⁴ A print by Giuseppe Zocchi (Fig. 1) shows the villa and its garden during the mid eighteenth century when, thanks to the improvements put in

Fig. 1:
Giuseppe Zocchi, *The Villa of the
Marquesses Corsi in Sesto*, c.1750

⁴ For the history of the villa and
garden, see GUICCIARDINI CORSI
SALVIATI 1937 and PEGAZZANO
2010, pp. 41-55.

place by Marquess Antonio (1685 – 1743), the complex had achieved its definitive architectural appearance that it has been preserved to the present day, with spacious loggias and terraces overlooking the garden and various eighteenth-century statues. The reference to Alessandro Rondoni (or Rondone, as he is sometimes called in the documents) as the artist responsible for the busts depicting Giovanni Corsi and his relatives, emerges therefore from archival research; indeed, it would have been difficult to attribute the sculptures to him using stylistic analysis alone, bearing



Fig. 2:
The Gallery at the Villa
Guicciardini Corsi Salviati in
Sesto Fiorentino, 1885

in mind not only that extant work by Rondoni is rare and his oeuvre is yet to be fully reconstructed, but that one would not expect the Roman artist to be responsible for these busts, long housed in a Florentine villa. The acquisition of these four sculptures allows, therefore, for a greater understanding of the artist's oeuvre and adds another important episode to his artistic career.



Cardinal Domenico Maria Corsi and the commission of the busts from Alessandro Rondoni

The events relating to the commission of the four busts took place in late seventeenth-century Rome, and concern one of the most important figures of the Corsi family, Domenico Maria, the fourth child of Giovanni and his first wife, Lucrezia di Antonio Salviati. As the youngest son, Domenico was destined for an ecclesiastical



Fig. 3: Portrait of Cardinal Domenico Maria Corsi (reproduced in *EFFIGIES NOMINA ET COGNOMINA* 1686)

career and was therefore educated by his uncle, Monsignor Lorenzo Corsi, a sophisticated music lover and art collector. Lorenzo had a successful religious career; indeed, for seven years he was vice-legate of Avignone, a position that was considered the prelude to becoming a cardinal, but his death from the Roman plague of 1656 put an end to his aspirations.⁵

Born in Florence, Domenico Maria lived in Rome from 1656 when, following the death of his uncle, he inherited his assets (including

⁵ For Lorenzo's biography and other information concerning him, see PEGAZZANO 2015B, pp. 74-95.

the collection of pictures) as well as his ambitions. A favourite of Pope Alessandro VII Chigi, with whom he became protonotary apostolic and papal chamberlain, Domenico Maria acquired the yet more prestigious titles of vice-legate for Urbino and Ferrara and vice-governor for Fermo. On 2nd September 1686, he was promoted to the position of cardinal deacon of Sant'Eustachio under Pope Innocent XI Odescalchi, at whose election he had directed the conclave.⁶ The following year, Domenico Maria became the legate

⁶ See STUMPO 1983, p. 566.



Fig. 4:
Alessandro Rondoni, *Bust of Monsignor Lorenzo Corsi*,
height: 72 cm, private collection

of Romagna and the bishopric of Rimini, where he moved in 1687 and than died ten years later. Remembered for his remarkable administrative and governing skills as well as for the reorganization of his diocese, Cardinal Corsi also demonstrated marked artistic and collecting interests, continuing the family tradition by following in the footsteps of his father Giovanni, and particularly his aforementioned uncle Lorenzo, who had contributed to the early formation of an important picture collection in Florence. The

cardinal's collection, which is known from an inventory drawn up at his death in 1697,⁷ was located in Rome and hung in the rooms of the Corsi residence on Via Giulia rented from the monk Giulio Ricci, which was probably a floor of the current Palazzo Ricci Paracciani. The inventory describes luxurious surroundings where paintings from the most varied schools were displayed alongside very few sculptures, including two marble busts, one of which can be identified, as will be noted later on, as Rondoni's work depicting

⁷ GIAMMARRIA 2009, pp. 209-222



Fig. 5:
Alessandro Rondoni, *Bust of Antonio Corsi*, private collection

the cardinal, and a bronze *Crucifix* attributed to Algardi.⁸ Moreover, the importance of the collection, as well as Domenico Maria's library, was already recognised by Giovan Pietro Bellori who, in his *Nota delli musei...* of 1664 admired the "elegance of beautiful paintings by supreme artificers" in the Corsi residence, continuing, "... this gentleman also bestows upon us the delight of flowers in a highly refined and rare garden."⁹ Not yet a cardinal, Domenico Maria must have refined his artistic taste whilst acting as

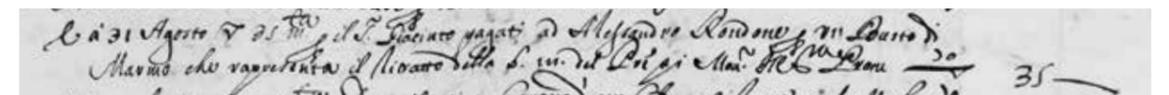
⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁹ BELLORI, 1664. At this time, Corsi no longer lived on Via Giulia, but in rented accommodation near the Oratorio di San Marcello al Corso.



an advisor and agent for Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici, for whom he would suggest drawings and paintings for acquisition.¹⁰ Domenico Maria carried out this research initially in his role as vice-legate in Urbino, where he would have procured drawings and paintings, both for the Medici cardinal and himself, predominantly by Federico Barocci, a painter admired by Leopoldo and Corsi. Having returned to Rome during the early 1670s, Domenico Maria would have carried out his activity as Leopoldo's advisor until the latter's death in 1675. The correspondence between them

¹⁰ FILETI MAZZA 1993, *ad indicem*.



demonstrates Corsi's knowledge of the Roman art market, his familiarity with artists' studios, the circles frequented by collectors and art dealers and, not least, his proximity to central figures in the Medici's artistic political arena such as *Ciro Ferri*.¹¹ The commissioning of the busts from *Alessandro Rondoni* developed in this particular context, marked by artistic interests and political ambition. With the four busts Domenico Maria intended to celebrate his own family and imminent acquisition of his position as cardinal, which rewarded the Corsi's endured

Figs. 6, 7: Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Guicciardini Corsi Salviati, Libri di amministrazione 552, c. 75. (entire sheet and detail of the payment for the bust of Giovanni Corsi)

¹¹ FILETI MAZZA 1998, pp. 145, 153-154.

¹² Archivio di Stato di Firenze (from now on ASF), Guicciardini Corsi Salviati (from now on GCS), Libri di amministrazione 552, c. 75. Payments for the other three busts are recorded on the same page of this register. Payment for the bust of Marquess Giovanni is also recorded as "a piece for the price of a marble bust representing the portrait of the father of the most illustrious Monsignor 35 scudi", ASF, GCS, Libri di amministrazione 548, dated 31 August 1685.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ ASF, GCS, Libri di amministrazione 552, c. 100.

efforts: finally, they could count a prince of the church among their family members. One could, in fact, argue that the series of busts was created precisely with such an event in mind, culminating with the execution of the portrait of Domenico Maria, now as cardinal. The first bust that our sculptor was paid for has recently been acquired by Carlo Orsi, and depicts the father of the future cardinal, Giovanni di Jacopo, as can be deduced from the registration of the payment carried out by Corsi's *maestro di casa*: "on 31 August [1685], 35 *scudi* for sir Giacinto paid to Alessandro Rondone for a marble bust representing a portrait in memory of the father of Monsignor, most illustrious master" (Figs. 6,7).¹² Payment for the second sculpture depicting Antonio Corsi, the brother of Domenico Maria, would be recorded a few months later on 30th October of the same year ("35 *scudi* paid to the said Alessandro Rondone for a portrait in marble in memory of Lord Marquess Antonio Corsi"), while on 30th November, payment for the marble of the aforementioned Monsignor Lorenzo Corsi would follow ("35 *scudi* paid to the latter for another portrait, of Monsignor Lorenzo"). And finally on 30th October the following year, in 1686, Alessandro Rondoni was paid for the final bust in the series depicting the patron himself, who had become a cardinal two months earlier ("35 *scudi* to Alessandro Rondoni for a portrait of His Eminence in marble").¹³ It is also interesting to underline how the cost for this final bust was part of the expenditures that Corsi carried out before and after his nomination as cardinal. These included, among others, a *paramento* hanging on the house's façade to announce Corsi's election as cardinal, the construction of a room for hearings with the appropriate canopy, the execution of a ceremonial mace by the Roman silversmith for Palazzo Apostolico, Bartolomeo Colleoni (1633-1708), which was surmounted by an angel and the Corsi heraldic symbol of a prancing lion.¹⁴ Together with these trappings, the marble bust represented, therefore, yet another significant and essential symbol of Corsi's new status; indeed, a cardinal had to employ portraiture as a way of sanctioning his importance and ensuring that his image would endure to posterity. The bust of Domenico Maria was probably the only one to remain in Rome from the year of its execution, and it is highly likely that the other three, not listed in the aforementioned





inventory, were destined for the gallery at the Sesto villa from the beginning, where the cardinal would often return during intervals between his many duties. A portrait of the cardinal painted by Giovanni Maria Morandi, as of yet unidentified, is recorded in a print by the engraver Jacques Blondeau and must have been contemporary to the bust (Fig. 4).

The price of the busts was not extortionate for the cardinal, because Corsi payed, as we have seen, 35 *scudi* for each one, even if

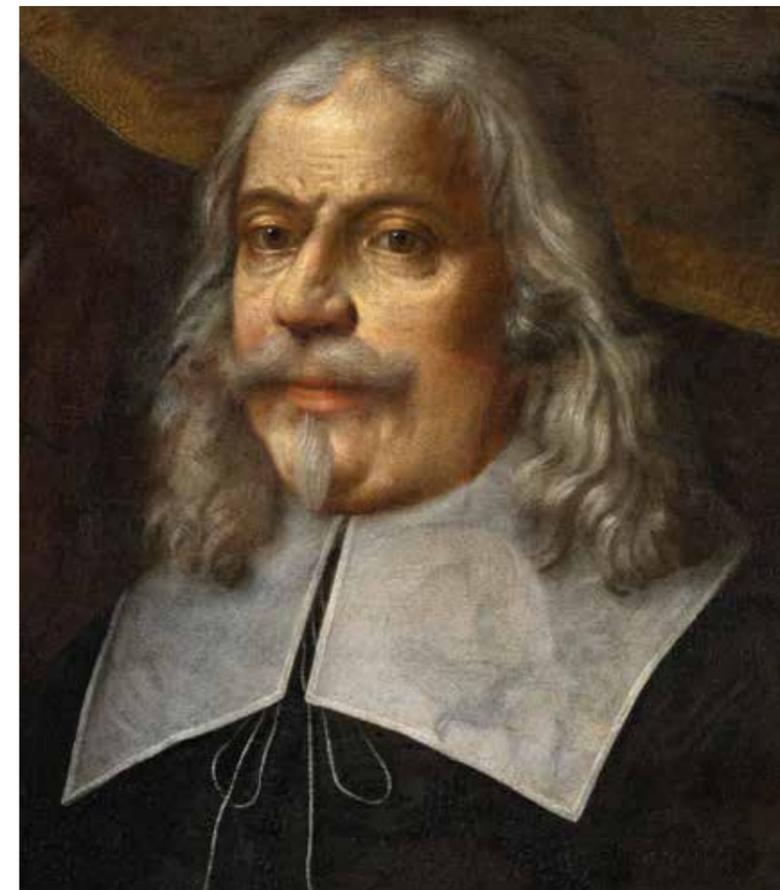


Fig. 8:
Mario Balassi, *Portrait of Marquess Giovanni Corsi*, detail

the cost of the marble was probably excluded from this amount. Rather than being a 'favourable' price, which might have been determined by the growing importance of the patron in Roman society, it seems instead to have been a 'standard' price for Rondoni's busts since, many years later, as well shall we, he was paid the same amount for each of the marble portraits of the Ginetti family.

Of the four Corsi family members that the sculptures depicted, only one, the cardinal himself, was still alive when the busts were

¹⁵ "... for customs duty, a package with three portraits sent to Rome for Monsignor; two of Lord Marquess Antonio and the other of Monsignor Lorenzo..." ASF, GCS, Libri di amministrazione 578, c. 58.

¹⁶ ASF, GCS, Libri di amministrazione 575, c. 65.

executed, while the other three had already been dead for some time, and for this reason the artist was given painted portraits to work from. Indeed, on 25th August 1685 three painted portraits, two of Antonio and one of Lorenzo Corsi, arrived from Florence, surely to be put to use by Rondoni.¹⁵ The painted portraits of Lorenzo and Antonio have not yet been identified, and we do not know who the artists were, although one of the two portraits of Antonio could be the one executed at his death in 1679 by the Florentine painter Taddeo Baldini,¹⁶ praised by Baldinucci for his



Fig. 9: Mario Balassi, *Portrait of Marquess Giovanni Corsi*, detail

¹⁷ BALDINUCCI, 1681-1728, V, 1845, p. 459.

¹⁸ As has been noted, the beginning of the year in Florence was calculated *ab incarnatione* from 25th March, therefore the date 24th March 1661, which appears in the document, is actually 1662.

ability to portray a dead person so well as to "make him appear alive and talking upon the canvas."¹⁷ This type of posthumous portraiture was a widespread phenomenon among the elite classes, with such paintings replacing the wax moulds of faces of the dead that were in great use prior to the *Seicento*. If the use of painted portraits from Florence was, therefore, necessary for the execution of the busts of Antonio and Lorenzo, the same is not true of the portrait of Giovanni, which was once in Rome in the possession of the sitter's son, Domenico Maria. Indeed, Giovanni's son had, shortly after the death of his father on 24th March 1662,¹⁸ which is

listed in a register under that date, paid the Florentine painter Mario Balassi, who was close to the Corsi, for two, probably identical, portraits of his deceased father:

"To Monsignor Domenico Maria Corsi, fifteen *scudi*... paid to the painter Mario Balassi for his efforts in having made two portraits in memory of Lord Marquess Giovanni Corsi, one of which was sent to Rome and the other given to lady Maria Virginia Corsi."¹⁹

One of the two portraits was, therefore, given by Corsi to Giovanni's widow, his second wife Maria Virginia Vitelli, while the

¹⁹ ASF, GCS, Libri di amministrazione 547, c. 5r.



Fig. 10: Alessandro Rondoni, *Bust of Marquess Giovanni Corsi*, detail

other was sent to Rome to be displayed in the patron's home. One of the two paintings that Balassi was paid for in 1662 is undoubtedly the one that has been acquired, together with the bust of Giovanni, by Carlo Orsi, which is the same work cited in the inventory of the cardinal's Roman residence.²⁰

The ties between Balassi and Corsi were longstanding and already by 1630 the painter had worked both for Giovanni and Monsignor Lorenzo Corsi; his brother Fausto, who had worked as the keeper of Cardinal Carlo de' Medici's possessions, was also at the service of the Corsi, probably with the same role until at least the 1630s.²¹

²⁰ The portrait was located in the "study or library in the last apartment" and was described as "a picture showing the portrait of the Marquess Giovanni, Father of his Eminence, in two and a half palms in a black frame." In GIAMMARRIA 2009, p. 220. The measurements of the two works do not correspond in terms of height, but they are close in terms of length, considering that a Roman palm was equivalent to 22.34 cm.

²¹ PEGAZZANO 2015A, pp. 90, 95.

²² According to the parish family book of the church of Sant'Andrea delle Fratte, Rondoni appears to have been nine years old in 1653, therefore he must have been born in 1644. Cf. CAPOFERRO 2009, p. 309. For more on Rondoni's family, see BARTONI 2012, pp. 505-507. Here, Alessandro Rondoni's birth date is not specified, but the date 1646 is put forward as the earliest testifying to his existence. For information on the sculptor's activity, see also the essay by Andrea Bacchi in this volume.



Figs. 11, 12: Alessandro Rondoni, *Bust of Don John of Austria or Phillip IV of Spain (?)*, marble, height 86 cm, Pasadena, Norton Simon Museum, with a detail of the signature

The painting was, therefore, consigned to Rondoni, who would execute the bust of Giovanni by closely following the portrait made by the Florentine painter more than twenty years earlier, as a comparison between the two works reveals. Rondoni reproduced Giovanni's face with great care, even borrowing the lines on the forehead and the waves in the hair from the painting, and going as



far as to replicate the expansive collar and the cord that fastens it in marble (Figs. 8-10). The only addition made by the sculptor is the generous swathe of fabric at the lower part of the bust, which contributes to the overall elegance and solemnity of the work, whilst resolving the 'problem' of how to conclude the piece. Alessandro Rondoni, born probably in 1644,²² belonged to a family

of stonemasons and sculptors from Lombardy dedicated principally to the restoration and sale of antiquities. It is likely that his earliest artistic education took place in the workshop of his father, Francesco, who was a member of the Accademia di San Luca. In the field of portraiture, the first known bust by Rondoni is probably the signed and dated 1671 depiction of who is believed to be either Don John of Austria or Phillip IV of Spain (Pasadena, Norton Simon Museum, Fig. 12).²³ The sophisticated sculpture depicting Cardinal Marzio



Ginetti, with the bust part in porphyry, must have followed shortly after this, since it is documented in 1673 (Fig. 13).²⁴ At the time of the works produced for Corsi, the sculptor would therefore already have been well versed in the field of portraiture and probably would have achieved a certain amount of recognition; this is supported by the fact that in around 1682 Sebastiano Baldini dedicated a sonnet (quoted at the opening of this essay) to his bust portraying the Marquess of Carpio and Viceroy of Naples, in which he eulogises

²³ I would like to thank Thomas Norris of the Norton Simon Museum for sending me the file containing the little information that we have on this bust, which requires further research and was acquired by this institution in 1965.

Fig. 13: Alessandro Rondoni, *Bust of Cardinal Marzio Ginetti*, marble and porphyry, height: 89 cm, Rome, Santarelli collection (formerly with Carlo Orsi Gallery), detail

²⁴ For this bust, see GONZÁLEZ-PALACIOS 2004, and the essay by Bacchi in this volume.

²⁵ For this bust of the Viceroy of Carpio, documented in his Roman inventory in 1682, before his departure for Naples on business, see DE FRUTOS SASTRE 2009, p. 673, note 868.

the work's animate forms in spite of the hardness of marble.²⁵ Aside from this praise, which was not so unusual for a sculptor to receive in the seventeenth century, Rondoni must have felt quite sure of himself or he would not have undertaken the challenging execution of as many as three of his busts using painted portraits. Of course, this was a necessary practice in the case of the deceased, but it was nonetheless more challenging than working from a live model. Furthermore, the portraits depicting the Corsi were not "triples", that is, representing the three viewpoints of the face simultaneously in order to facilitate at least the reproduction of a profile. Celebrated examples of this genre are the triple portrait of Charles I by Antony



Figs. 14, 15:
Left: Alessandro Rondoni, *Bust of Monsignor Lorenzo Corsi*, Private collection (detail);
Right: Alessandro Rondoni, *Bust of Giovanni Corsi* (detail)

²⁶ For this issue, see ANGELINI 1999, p. 35 and BACCHI 2009, pp. 58-59.

van Dyck and Philippe de Champaigne's portrait of Cardinal Richelieu, both of which were executed precisely to facilitate three-dimensional representation. To sculpt a bust based upon a painted portrait and not a live model was an arduous task, as was observed by the likes of Bernini.²⁶ Rondoni's conditions, however, were of course somewhat different from Bernini's, dealing instead with the representation of the deceased whereby a reasonable level of likeness was probably satisfactory.

The busts produced for the Corsi confirm how Rondoni had developed a bust-portrait typology that he repeated with consistency over time, so much so, that if one wanted to look for comparable

examples, they could easily find them in any of the works mentioned so far by the artist, which all present the same characteristics: sharp and firm outlines, measured and composed drapery with the recurring motif of swathes of fabric that are folded under the arm to form a large loop, such as in the busts of Giovanni and Lorenzo Corsi (Figs. 14,15). The hairstyles vary in form but are always somewhat static and the distinction between the face and the hairline is sharp. A faithfulness to this model and undeniable stylistic affinities with the Corsi busts are detectable in a series of six sculptures executed by



Fig. 16:
Alessandro Rondoni, *Bust of Marquess Marzio Ginetti*, Roccaforte, parish church

²⁷ For this series of busts see PETRUCCI 1999, p. 226.

the artist depicting, also in this case, members of a single family: the Ginetti. These affinities are evident particularly in the busts of Marquess Marzio, Giuseppe Ginetti, and Cardinal Marzio Ginetti²⁷ (figs. 16-18), whose portrait Rondoni had already painted in 1673. Originally from Velletri, where they had a residence brimming with now lost antiquities, the Ginetti undertook strategic social climbing throughout the course of the seventeenth century, managing to name as many as two cardinals among their family, Marzio and Giovan Francesco.

For many years, Alessandro Rondoni contributed to the restoration and acquisition of antiquities for the Ginetti, so much so that the sculptor could almost have considered himself a sort of ‘family’ artist, who actively participated in other undertakings carried out by the Ginetti, such as the sculptural decoration of their chapel in Sant’Andrea della Valle in Rome, or the execution of various sculptural portraits, including those mentioned above of the cardinals.²⁸ The sculptor’s service to the Ginetti went back at least to 1663, when his first payment is documented for the restoration

²⁸ See Bacchi’s essay in this volume.



Fig. 17:
Alessandro Rondoni, *Bust of Giuseppe Ginetti*, Roccagorga, parish church

²⁹ For the restoration carried out by Rondoni on behalf of the Ginetti, see CAVAZZINI 2008, pp. 52-59.

³⁰ PETRUCCI 1999, p. 225.

he carried out on the Velletri sculptures²⁹ and in 1703. As has been noted, this last date of payment for 35 *scudi* was in fact for each of the six busts depicting the Ginetti. They are still located in the sacristy to this day, and are considered almost a dedication to the memory of the family and the parish church of Roccagorga, located in what is now Latina,³⁰ at that time the family’s estate.

If some characteristics of Rondoni’s busts, such as a certain static solemnity, recall his lengthy activity as a restorer of antiquities, when he would have been accustomed to reintegrating or

reconstructing busts and heads, these elements also demonstrate an interest in the portraiture of Ercole Ferrata, so much so that Antonio Bertolotti’s proposition that he was Rondoni’s teacher is probably true.³¹ Following the death of his father in 1667, it is plausible that Rondoni would have decided to seek out further training with a well-known sculptor, such as Ferrata.

While this influence is undeniable, with the Corsi busts belonging to the Algardian tradition that had been advanced by Ferrata and his school,³² it is still difficult to prove Bertolotti’s theory. In any

³¹ BERTOLOTTI 1881, p. 277.

³² MONTAGU 2011, p. 5.



Fig. 18:
Alessandro Rondoni, *Bust of Cardinal Marzio Ginetti*, Roccagorga, parish church

case, Corsi must have appreciated the style of portraiture demonstrated by Ferrata, who had also sculpted a bust of Cardinal Leopoldo, the Medici family member that Domenico Maria had been closest to. Choosing an artist like Rondoni was cheaper, and moreover, Ferrata was ill and close to death at the time of the Corsi commission, passing away in 1686. If, therefore, one cannot fully exclude the possibility that Corsi may have come into contact with Rondoni through Ferrata, who was director of the Accademia Medicea di Roma alongside Ciro Ferri, a place well known to

Domenico Maria, I would argue that it is highly likely that the main link between the future cardinal and our sculptor was Livio Odescalchi (1658 – 1713), nephew of Pope Innocent XI, a great collector and one of the protagonists in Roman cultural circles during the second half of the seventeenth century.³³ Corsi was indeed very close to the Odescalchi family, and in 1676, as it has already been mentioned, he had directed the conclave that would elect Pope Innocent. Moreover, it would seem that Corsi had had a prolonged personal relationship with Livio at that time. In about 1677, for example, a print deriving from a painting by Ferdinand Voet was dedicated to Corsi with an image of Odescalchi,³⁴ and a portrait of the latter, listed in the aforementioned inventory from 1697,³⁵ was located in Corsi's Roman home. Finally, Corsi left Odescalchi a painting from his collection in his will, to be chosen by him. If the links between Corsi and Odescalchi are certain, there are also connections between the latter and Alessandro Rondoni: payments to the sculptor for figures of fighting putti and the restoration of a bust of Augustus are indeed recorded in the Odescalchi archive from 1692 and 1695.³⁶ A letter from the Venetian collector Quintiliano Rezzonico, who had commissioned works from Ercole Ferrata and other Roman sculptors, suggests, however, that contact between the two went back at least a decade earlier. In a letter dated 20th June 1682, therefore a few years prior to the Corsi commission, Quintiliano asks Odescalchi for information about Rondoni, who had sent two busts to Venice for him that had not, however, been to his taste.³⁷ It is therefore more likely that Corsi, moving among the Odescalchi circle during the 1680s, might have asked Livio, a collector of sculpture, to recommend a skilled artist who perhaps was not too costly from whom to commission portraits of himself and his family.

³³ For Odescalchi, see COSTA 2009.

³⁴ For the print and the identity of the sitter, see MONTANARI 1996, p. 54.

³⁵ In GIAMMARRIA 2009, p. 219.

³⁶ For these payments to Rondoni from Odescalchi, see WALKER 2002, p. 312, note 8.

³⁷ PIZZO 2002, p. 135.

Giovanni di Jacopo Corsi, Florentine Nobleman and Medicean Ambassador, and the Sesto Villa

Giovanni Corsi, who had received the posthumous gift of a marble bust from his son, was the son of Jacopo and Laura Corsini. His father had been a major figure in Florentine cultural life in the late *Cinquecento* and his name is inextricably linked, together with that of Giovanni de' Bardi and his *Camerata*, to the birth of the melodrama.



As well as music, Jacopo cultivated an interest in figurative art, commissioning and collecting sculptures and paintings from artists such as Cristofano Stati, who sculpted an *Orpheus* for him (now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York) that celebrated the completion of the first musical opera, *Euridice* of 1600, and from Giovanni Caccini, who was responsible for marble busts of the Corsi family, as well as from Santi di Tito, Niccolò Betti and many others.³⁸ These interests were also shared by Jacopo's brother, Bardo (d.

Fig. 19: Valore and Domenico Casini, *Portrait of the Marquess Giovanni Corsi*, private collection

³⁸ PEGAZZANO 2010, pp. 27-39.



1624), who was the true mastermind behind the great economic fortunes of the House of Corsi and was responsible for the acquiring the Neapolitan estate of Cajazzo, through which they would obtain the noble title of Marquess.

Since Jacopo died young, his children were brought up by Bard, who provided them with a sophisticated education, in fitting with their new aristocratic status. A brief biography of Giovanni, compiled probably at the end of the seventeenth century by one of the family secretaries, recounts the salient moments of his life, from his student years at the Accademia Militare di Parma where he learnt the “chivalric code”, to his two weddings, the first with Lucrezia Salviati in 1628 and the second, as has been mentioned, with Virginia Vitelli in 1640.³⁹ A fine portrait of Giovanni, stylistically similar to Domenico and Valore Casini (Fig. 19), must derive from the years of his first marriage, and was also displayed in the Corsi villa in Sesto Fiorentino alongside Rondoni’s busts. Here, the Marquess is portrayed in all his youthful pride, clothed in a sumptuous and elegant Turkish-style costume standing beside a hunting dog, an activity that was much loved both by Giovanni and his brother Lorenzo, who would participate in the frequent hunts organised by the Medici court. Like many of the members of important Florentine families of the period, Giovanni also dedicated himself to the service of the Medici as an influential member of their court. The prestigious role bestowed upon him by the great grand-ducal House is testimony to the status that Corsi had achieved in Florentine society: in 1634, Giovanni was sent by Grand Duke Ferdinando II de’ Medici as an ambassador to Milan to pay tribute to the new governor. Three years later, he was elected as a senator, while in 1645 he was part of Giovan Carlo de’ Medici’s cortege in Rome, shortly after his nomination as cardinal. In 1655 he was entrusted with another important ambassadorial role in Rome for the nomination of Pope Alessandro VII. It was on this occasion that he was struck down by an apoplectic attack, which would leave him disabled until his death in 1661. Less interested in art than his brother Lorenzo and son Domenico Maria, who were the true family collectors and responsible of the richness of the collection throughout the seventeenth century, Giovanni nonetheless bought still lifes and landscapes, and commissioned pictures from Baccio del Bianco, Francesco Furini and Pandolfo

³⁹ PEGAZZANO 2015A, p. 86, note 71.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

Sacchi, who in 1631 was entrusted with carrying out the frescoed decorations for the residence on Via Tornabuoni and in the Sesto villa.⁴⁰ The villa and its garden would undergo changes and received constant care from Giovanni and his brother Lorenzo who, from 1625 until the 1640s, would commission the architect Gherardo Silvani to carry out significant decorative and structural work. Sixteenth-century sculptures by Stoldo Lorenzi, a *Misenus* and a *Triton* (now lost) surmounting two fountains, and by Pietro Bernini depicting a *Satyr with a Panther* (Berlin, Staatliche Museen), were joined by antique fragments from Rome, restored by Antonio Novelli. It was in 1625 during Giovanni and Lorenzo's time that a gallery, running along the entire left façade of the villa that backed



Fig. 20:
Photograph of the villa's gallery
reproduced in GUICCIARDINI
CORSI SALVIATI 1937

onto the garden, was constructed. Just as had been the case with the Florentine residence a few years previously, when the Corsi had fitted out a *quadreria*, located in the space specially designed for a gallery, so did the gallery at Sesto assume not only social functions but also those for the display of paintings and sculpture. In 1687, shortly prior to the completion of Alessandro Rondoni's busts, sixty paintings including "portraits of women, flowers, fruit and many kinds of animals for the Gallery of the said villa" arrived in Rome, perhaps on account of Domenico Maria's initiative.⁴¹ Although there is no archival evidence, the busts must have arrived during the same period (the one portraying Domenico Maria arrived, however, in Florence after his death in 1697). In any case, the busts are listed in

⁴¹ ASF, GCS, Libri di amministrazione 587 (log book of debtors and creditors, 1685-1698).



⁴² The cardinal's collection was in fact moved, almost in its entirety, to Florence together with the library, to enrich the holdings at the Corsi residence on Via Tornabuoni and the Sesto villa. See PEGAZZANO 2015A, p. 85.

⁴³ GUICCIARDINI CORSI SALVIATI 1937, p. 68. The same author reproduces Rondoni's bust of Domenico Maria Corsi, but without naming the artist (Fig. 27).

this gallery in a later inventory of 1757:⁴²

“Two marble statues of 3 arms high, one representing Lucrezia Romana

Two groups of marble of three arms high, representing nymphs and pastors

A marble Billygoat, which plays with a *putto*, upon a marble base, with a bowl of eggs.

A marble panther with a *putto*, which shows him a cluster of eggs.

Four marble busts, one representing Lord Cardinal Domenico, the other Marquess Antonio Senior and the fourth Monsignor Lorenzo Corsi.

Four little marble *putti* in four niches of the said gallery (...).

Six pictures on canvas of 3 ½ arms of light, between various insignia of the orders of the Courts of Europe, with a tinted *chiaro scuro* frame.”⁴³

If, therefore, at the end of the seventeenth century the four busts had, as their backdrop, the walls crowded of paintings of this gallery, at the time of this inventory they were instead displayed together with a series of sculptures depicting mythological subjects, which are those now located in the external niches of the villa's Orangery, which Vittorio Barbieri built in the 1740s for the Corsi.

The same group of works, the busts by Alessandro Rondoni and Barbieri's sculptures, were in turn displayed, probably during the second-half of the eighteenth century when the gallery space was reduced to create two living rooms, in the villa's second gallery, which was used following the closure of the courtyard loggia. This is in fact the location reproduced in the aforementioned photograph of 1885, where the series of busts is arranged equally spaced between the great windows. Subsequently, the layout of this loggia/gallery would mutate once again, as is seen from a photograph (Fig. 20) reproduced in the 1937 text on the villa of Giulio Guicciardini Corsi Salviati, from which it is clear that the busts were at that time located on the opposite side of the room, while various portraits of the Corsi family from different periods were hung upon the walls: the remaining trace of an illustrious past.

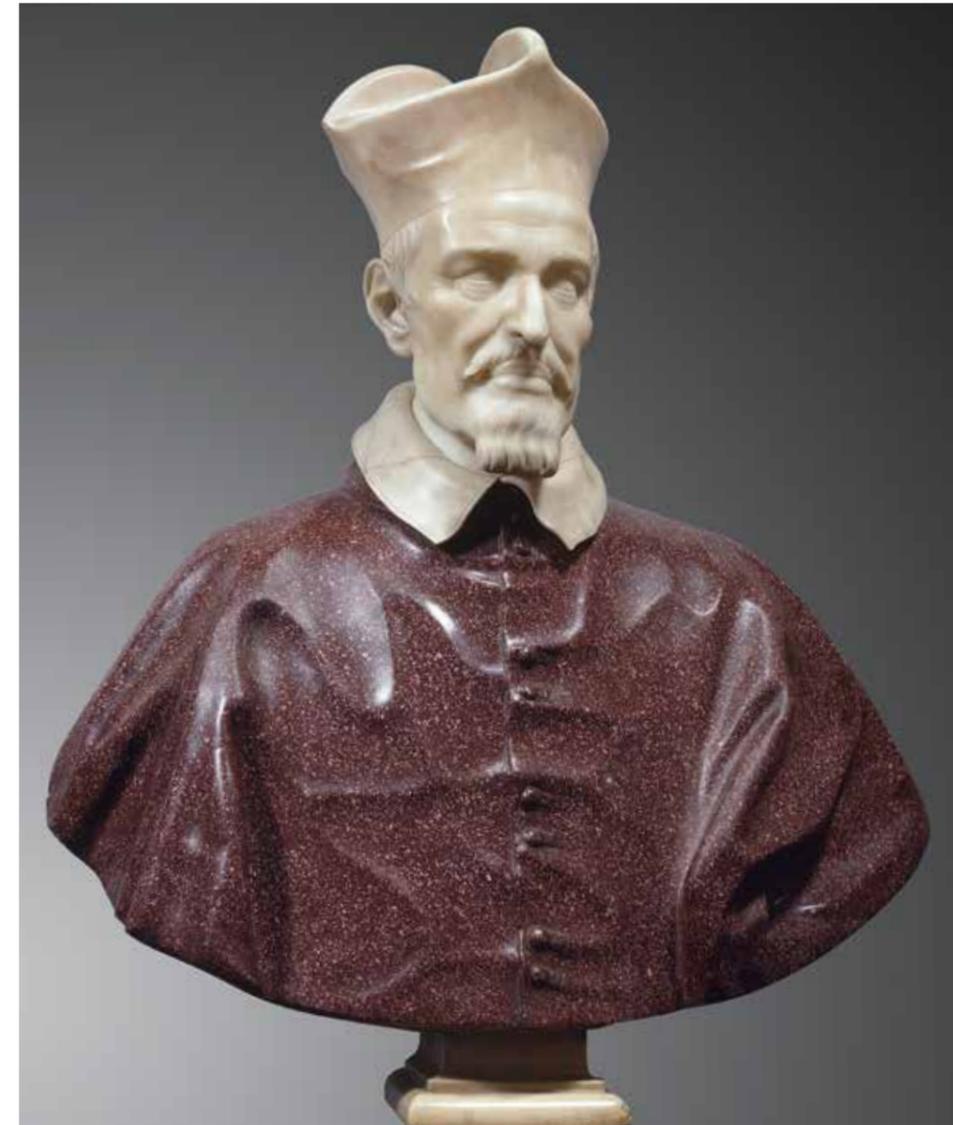


¹ There is no monographic study on Rondoni; the most up to date text remained, until now, ZANUSO 1996. Often the sculptor is referred to as "Rondone", for example in a letter of 1672 from Giovanni Paolo Ginetti, or in the 1674 payment from the Altieri (cfr. *Infra*), but the Louvre busts are signed "Rondoni" (cfr. *Infra*): in this essay, the artist will therefore be referred to as such.

"Rondoni! Who was this man?": aside, perhaps, from specialists in Roman Baroque sculpture, these words could have been declared by any person that comes across, even today, a work ascribed to Alessandro Rondoni. Indeed, until recently, we still knew very little about this sculptor, from his date of birth to his date of death, from the name of his first teacher to his birthplace: he was, therefore, often confused, even until recently, with another Alessandro Rondoni, born in Como, who was in fact the grandfather of our sculptor.¹ In 1996, when a biographical entry was dedicated to the artist in a volume on seventeenth-century Roman sculpture, almost half of the works that we now know of had not yet emerged. Moreover, the Rondoni discussed in this essay, who never really managed to gain a position of prestige for himself in Rome, must have nonetheless enjoyed a certain level of recognition between the end of the 1670s and the first years of the 1680s, when one of the major patrons and collectors of the day, the Spaniard Gaspar de Haro y Guzmán, VII Marquess of Carpio (1629-1687) and papal ambassador from 1677 to 1682, commissioned an important portrait bust from him, not yet identified. The discovery of the Corsi busts is a fundamental addition to our knowledge of this sculptor, who emerges as a significant figure that shapes the precise characteristics of Roman sculpture in the years following the death of Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1680) Ercole Ferrata (1686) and Antonio Raggi (1686). According to the parish family book of the church of Sant'Andrea delle Fratte in Rome, it seems that in 1653 Alessandro, son of Francesco Rondoni, was nine years old: he must, therefore, have been born around 1644. Since the father, also a sculptor and restorer himself and son of the better known Alessandro Senior (1560-1634), carried out his activity for

² CAPOFERRO 2009, p. 309, note 18; BARTONI 2012, p. 507. From 1671 to 1710 Alessandro was listed under the parish of San Lorenzo in Lucina, cfr. GUERRIERI BORSOI, 1990, p. 111, note 24. It is possible that Andrea Rondoni was also related to Alessandro, documented as a plasterer in 1682 among the craftsmen working on the vault of the Church of Gesù, cfr. CURZIETTI 2011, p. 54.

some time in Rome, we can be almost certain that Alessandro Junior was born in Rome (and, indeed, he would be referred to as "Roman" in the Marquess of Carpio's inventory, cfr. *Infra*).² Our sculptor is documented as such for the first time in November 1663, when he received 65 *scudi* from the Ginetti for a marble statue to adorn the Velletri residence, which was destroyed almost entirely by bombings



during the Second World War.³ From that moment onwards, the sculptor would work continuously for the aristocratic family, as much for Cardinal Marzio (1585 – 1671) as for his nephew, Giovanni Francesco (1626 – 1691), created Cardinal in 1681, and finally for Monsignor Giovanni Paolo. Rondoni virtually became the Ginetti family sculptor, carrying out both restoration of antiquities and his

Fig. 1: Alessandro Rondoni, *Bust of Cardinal Marzio Ginetti*, marble and porphyry, height 89 cm, Santarelli collection (once with Carlo Orsi Gallery)

³ ANGISSOLA 2008, p. 56.



own sculptural inventions but, most significantly, executing an extremely important group of portrait busts: almost all of the major works currently known of by the artist – the Corsi busts are one of the few exceptions – derive, in short, from Ginetti patronage.

A few years after the first recorded payment to Rondoni in 1667, the movement of a group of statues to the Velletri residence from Francesco Antonio Fontana's (1641 – 1700) workshop is recorded.⁴ Fontana, like Rondoni, was the son of an artist, born in Rome to a sculptor, Francesco, also once active as a restorer, and originally from the diocese of Como.⁵ A few years later, as we shall see, Alessandro and Francesco Antonio would work together on another project, and following this they were both active for the Marquess of Carpio: it is therefore possible that their relationship was somewhat close. In a letter from Giovanni Paolo Ginetti to Paolo Semidei from 19th May 1672, one reads, for example: "When Francesco [Fontana] the sculptor who made the Triton cannot come to Velletri, call upon Rondone, and do not say anything about having spoken with Francesco".⁶ Francesco Antonio is frequently recorded in construction sites led by the somewhat more famous Carlo Fontana, born in Rancate, also in the diocese of Como, and it is highly likely that the two had family ties (the Fontana, as is known, were a very prolific dynasty of architects, sculptors and stonemasons).⁷ A great architect and a protagonist alongside Carlo Maratti on the Roman artistic scene on the cusp of the eighteenth century, Carlo Fontana took on the role of major artistic consultant for the Ginetti from at least around 1667, designing the funerary chapel in Sant'Andrea della Valle, for which Rondoni would execute the most impressive works of his entire career.⁸ It is possible, therefore, that his family's origins in the diocese of Como could have encouraged the relationship between Alessandro and the Fontana family. Already in January 1667, Rondoni sold a statue of *Hercules* to the Ginetti, which he himself had restored in 1670, and in the years immediately afterwards, Alessandro continued to act as an intermediary for the Ginetti, seeking out antiquities for their Velletri residence.⁹ Francesco Antonio Fontana was, as we shall see, also active both as a restorer and dealer, while Rondoni merely continued to advance the family business; his Grandfather had been a major figure in the market for antiquities in Rome at the beginning of the seventeenth century.¹⁰

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ On the sculptor's career, cfr. DI GIOIA 1997.

⁶ "Quando Francesco scultore [il Fontana] che ha fatto il Tritone non voglia venire a Velletri si chiami Rondone, e lo mandi con tacere di haverne parlato con Francesco", CAVAZZINI 2001/2002, p. 280, note 99.

⁷ DI GIOIA 1997, pp. 658-659.

⁸ CAVAZZINI 1999, pp. 402-404.

⁹ ANGISSOLA 2008, p. 56.

¹⁰ Cfr. in particular CAPOFERRO 2009.



The trust bestowed upon him by the Ginetti family enabled Alessandro Junior to receive the commission for one of the most important works executed during the course of his career, an exceptional porphyry and white marble bust of Cardinal Marzio Ginetti, ordered from him in 1673, two years after the prelate's death; for this work, now in the Santarelli collection in Rome (and formerly with Carlo Orsi), Rondoni received some 80 *scudi*.¹¹ Marzio Ginetti had been one of Urban VIII's protégés, and the Ginetti would remain faithful to the Barberini even after 1644, as the procession of effigies and portraits depicting members of the aristocratic family, now untraced but once at the Velletri residence testifies.¹² Moreover, it is

¹¹ GONZÁLES-PALACIOS 2004, pp. 19-21; LA BELLA 2012, p. 153.

¹² CAVAZZINI 2001/2002, p. 267.



possible that the decision to commission a posthumous portrait of the Cardinal with a porphyry *mozzetta* (cardinal's cape) and a white marble head had been inspired by the *Bust of Urban VIII* in porphyry and bronze, a work by Bernini and Tommaso Fedeli (1631; Rome, Barberini descendants), which enjoyed fame throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹³ Although this influential prototype had already been used in 1673 as a model by Innocent X, who had commissioned a bust with the same characteristics from Alessandro Algardi (Rome, Doria Pamphilj Gallery), other than these two unique pieces, it is not easy to find comparisons for Rondoni's work, and it is significant that one of the few examples is the still

Figs. 2,3: Apotheosis of Claudius (prior to restoration), Madrid, Prado; Giovan Battista Galestruzzi, Claudio Colonna, engraving, 1657

¹³ PIERGUIDI 2015, pp. 394 – 397.

¹⁴FERRARI, PAPALDO 1999, p. 522; other portraits in porphyry are cited in GONZÁLEZ-PALACIOS 2004, p. 21.

anonymous red and white marble portrait of *Cardinal Bernardino Spada* (Rome, Spada Gallery), who was another of the Barberini's protégées.¹⁴ In this bust, the *mozzetta* is executed in *rosso antico* marble, and not in the more precious and rare porphyry, which is very difficult to sculpt: Rondoni's *Marzio Ginetti* is an elegant testimony to the patron's ambition, which offered Alessandro the opportunity to demonstrate his skill in handling such a hard marble. Moreover, the artist portrayed the cardinal's resemblance, noble and strong despite signs of age, with consummate skill. Upon viewing

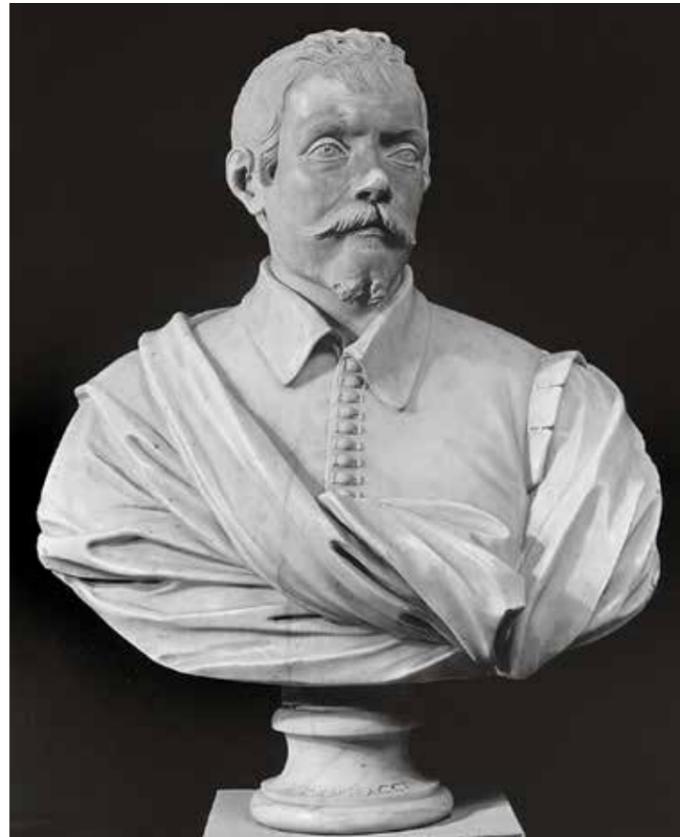


Fig. 4: Paolo Naldini, *Bust of Annibale Carracci*, marble, height 88 cm, Rome, Protomoteca Capitolina

this bust, the Algardian, classical lineage of Rondoni's visual language is clear: even if it is certain that he learnt his technique from his father, who had learnt his from Alessandro Senior, there is no doubt that for all three artists, a constant point of reference must have been the work of another sculptor also from the Como region, the well-established and highly active Ercole Ferrata, one of the two favourite pupils of Algardi (the other being Domenico Guidi). An entire generation of sculptors had spent their formative years in Ferrata's workshop, going on to become protagonists on

numerous sculptural projects, to which Rondoni took also part. Already in 1671, however, precisely the date and signature on the marble, Alessandro had sculpted the portrait now in the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena.¹⁵ The bust, bedecked in armour, displays the insignia of the Golden Fleece on its chest, one of the most important chivalric honours in Spanish tradition; in addition,

¹⁵http://www.nortonsimon.org/collections/browse_artist.php?name=Rondoni%2C+Allesandro

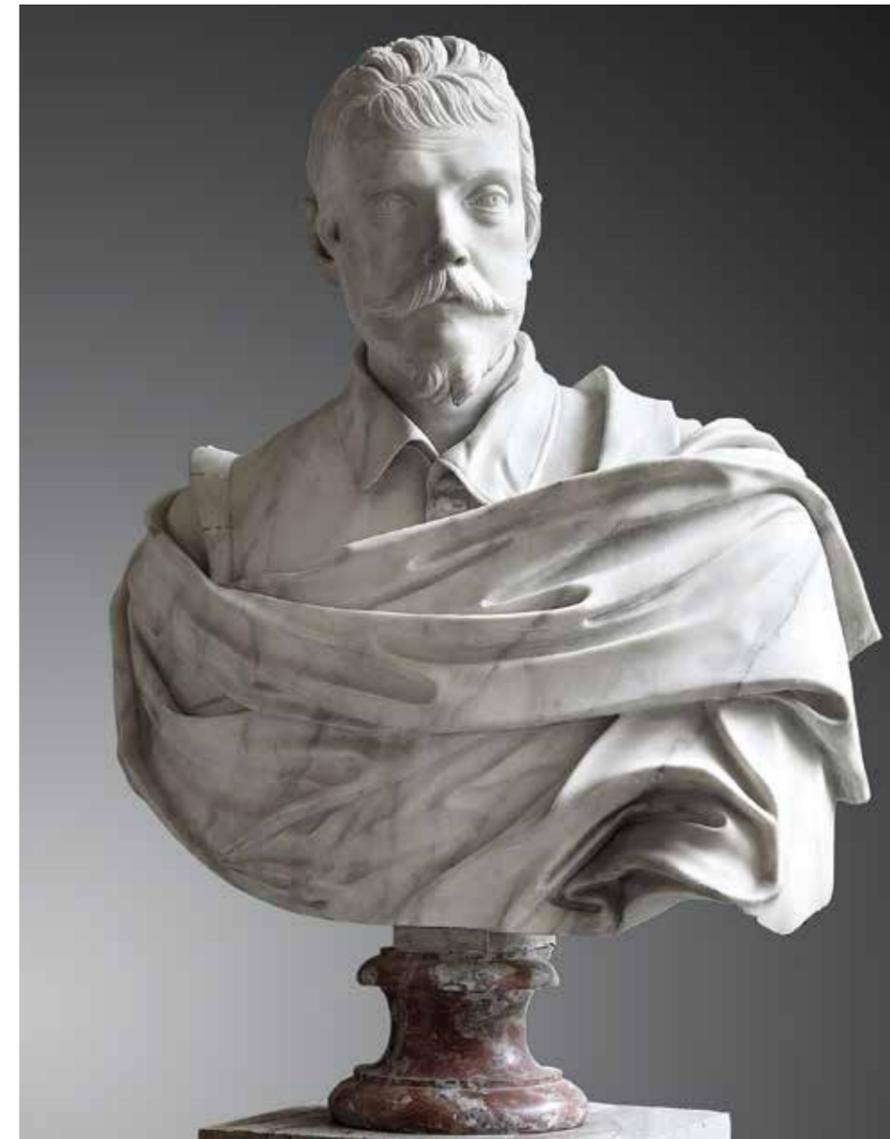


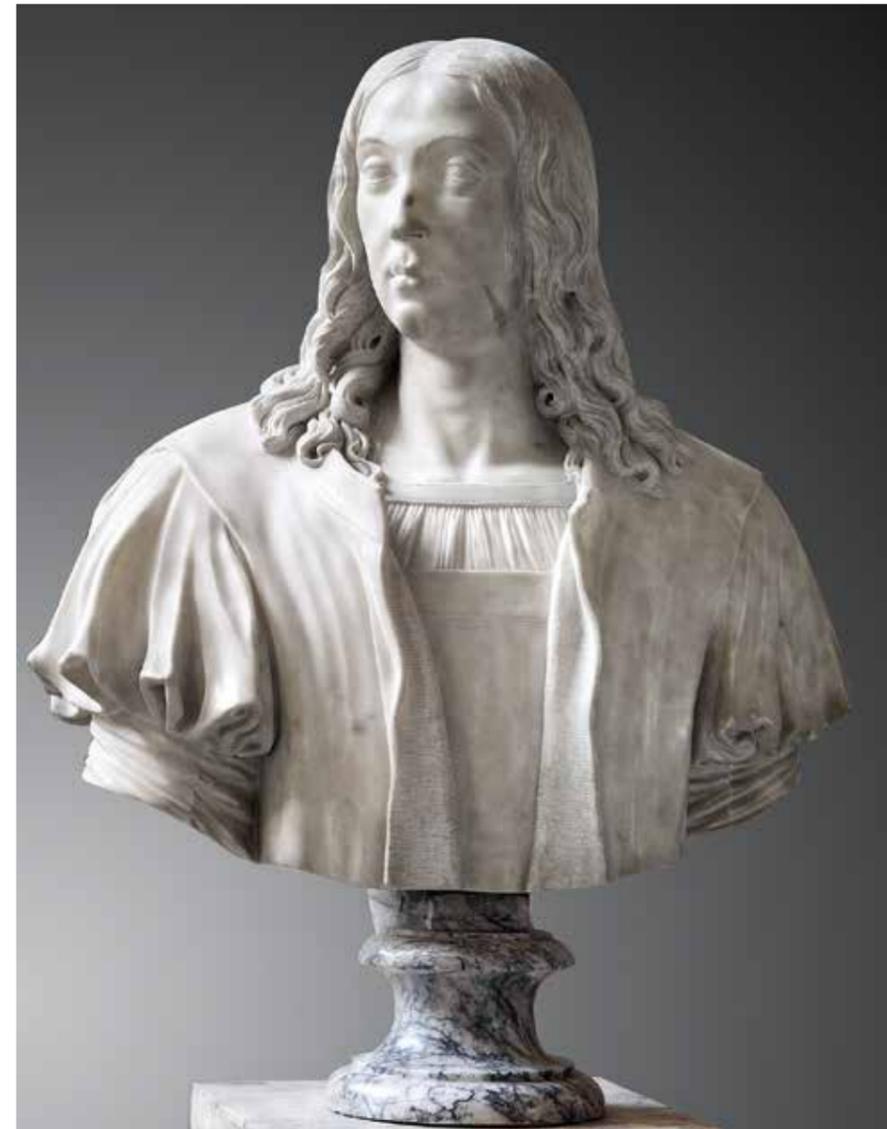
Fig. 5: Alessandro Rondoni, *Bust of Annibale Carracci*, marble, height 70 cm, Paris, Louvre

the conventional base is replaced by a rock surmounted by an eagle with spread wings, which supports the portrait itself. Although the sitter's identity has not yet been uncovered, we can be certain that it is a Spanish dignitary, of the highest prestige: already, therefore, at such a precocious age, Rondoni had close connections with a patron linked to the monarchy or at least to the Viceroy, ties that were later



reinforced following the Marquess of Carpio's commission. The base of the Pasadena bust, in particular, is a quotation from the celebrated *Apotheosis of Claudius*, an antique sculpture restored during the seventeenth century (perhaps by Orfeo Boselli), engraved and printed in 1657 and given to Phillip IV by Cardinal Girolamo Colonna in 1664 (Madrid, Prado).¹⁶ The bust's creative innovation,

¹⁶ SCHRÖDER 2002.



whereby the sitter is taken up to the sky on the outspread wings of an eagle, evokes the rite of the deification of Roman emperors; from this, we are to assume that Rondoni's work is a commemorative bust, probably the effigy of a sovereign (already by 1664, Giovanni Pietro Bellori described the sculpture now in the Prado as a "Deification of Claudius", therefore it is unlikely that the same iconographic formula

Fig. 6:
Alessandro Rondoni, *Bust of Raphael*, marble, height 70 cm,
Paris, Louvre

would be adopted for the portrait of a living person). The most likely theory is that the bust portrays none other than Phillip IV, who died in 1665, but it remains impossible to establish who the patron was (possibly Lorenzo Onofrio Colonna).

During that same year of 1671, Francesco Antonio Fontana was involved in the great decorative scheme for the Colonnade at St. Peters, one of the major projects, in terms of expense and the number of craftsmen involved, that took place in Baroque Rome. In

the enterprise. In 1667, the decision was made to involve prominent figures such as Ferrata, Raggi or Melchiorre Cafà and Domenico Guidi, but due to their lack of interest in what may have seemed a minor project, younger and less expert sculptors were called upon, among them Filippo Carcani, Michel Maille and “our” Fontana.¹⁷ If Fontana sculpted three unspecified statues on the southern curved arm of the Colonnade,¹⁸ other artists, although not documented, must have worked alongside Morelli in the years immediately after 1671. In particular, it has been noted that almost all of the artists

¹⁷ For the history of the project, cfr. MARTINELLI 1987.

¹⁸ PEDROLI BERTONI 1987, pp. 31-34.



Figs. 7,8:
Alessandro Rondoni, *Bust of Marquess Marzio Ginetti* (detail), Roccagorga, parish church; *Bust of Marquess Marzio Ginetti*, Rome, Sant'Andrea della Valle, Ginetti chapel

1656 when Alessandro was still a boy, Pope Alessandro VII declared that above each of the columns of the immense portico, a corresponding statue should be mounted upon the cornice of the parapet. In 1661, one of Bernini's most trusted collaborators in those years, Lazzaro Morelli, had received the first payments for the models in clay and pozzolana which would be interpreted in travertine marble; but the works proceeded very slowly, and with the passing of time, both the patron and Bernini himself lost interest in



responsible for the cornice statues for the two twin churches on Piazza del Popolo were active, or would be later, on the Colonnade site: among them was indeed Rondoni, paid for a statue on one of the straight arms of the Colonnade between 1702 and 1703 (cfr. *infra*).¹⁹ It is, therefore, possible that Alessandro was already part of the team active on the southern curved arm of the Colonnade, working under Fontana; the accompanying documentation for the sites of the two churches on Piazza del Popolo uphold this hypothesis. Indeed, on 31st January 1675, Alessandro received almost ten *scudi* for the

Fig. 9:
Alessandro Rondoni, *Allegory of Strength*, Rome, Sant'Andrea della Valle, Ginetti chapel

¹⁹ PETRAROIA 1987, p. 241.

execution of eight statues in travertine marble of *Carmelite Saints* for the cornice of Santa Maria di Montesanto, one of the two “twin churches” financed by Cardinal Girolamo Gastaldi. That same day, other sculptors were paid: Francesco Antonio Fontana (also ten *scudi*; his name follows that of Rondoni and closes the list), Sillano Sillani (ten *scudi*), Lazzaro Morelli (40 *scudi*), Filippo Carcani (65 *scudi*), Giovanni Maria de Rossi (11.40 *scudi*); previously, for the same project, Sillani had already received 50:86 *scudi*; Giovanni Maria de Rossi 88 (in two instalments), Fontana 50, Morelli 50 again, Giovanni Battista de Rossi and Lorenzo Buratti 280. The payments do not specify the individual roles of each sculptor, but it is



Fig. 10:
Alessandro Rondoni, *Allegory of Fame*, Rome, Sant'Andrea della Valle, Ginetti chapel

impossible that every one of them would have executed a statue. Buratti, in any case, who was paid on 1st July 1674 in one instalment, is not known to have been a sculptor, and could have prepared or provided the marble. In Titi's guide, we read that the artists responsible for those statues were “Morelli, Rondone, Silano, Antonio Fontana & others”.²⁰ The names of Carcani and de' Rossi were therefore left out, but the reference is in any case very precise. It is also possible that our artist, who was paid just 10 *scudi*, was merely supporting (once again, we could say) his friend and colleague Fontana in executing one of the *Saints*. Immediately afterwards, he moved on to work on the statues of *Franciscan Saints* for the cornice

²⁰ TITI [1674 – 1763], 1987, p. 203.

of the twin church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli, and in this case the documentation allows us to attribute, with precision, two statues to Cosimo Fancelli, two to Carcani, and one each to Morelli, Maille, Ferrata and a German artist identified as “German Lorenzo” cited, however, in Titi's guide in reference to a wooden sculpture for Santo Spirito in Sassia; it is more likely that the artist was the young Johann Bernard Fisher von Erlach, who was in Rome from 1671 to 1683, and was active in those years as a sculptor for the Marquess of Carpio.²¹



²¹ GOLZIO 1941, pp. 134, 142-144; TITI [1674 – 1763] 1987, p. 203 and FERRARI, PAPALDO 1999, p. 286 (for the identification of “German Lorenzo”).

Figs. 11,12:
Alessandro Rondoni, *Portrait of Cardinal Giovanni Francesco Ginetti in prayer*, Rome, Sant'Andrea della Valle, Ginetti chapel;
Alessandro Rondoni, *Bust of Cardinal Giovanni Francesco Ginetti (detail)*, Roccaporga, Parish church

²² TITI [1674 – 1763], 1987, p. 204.

Significantly, therefore, neither Fontana nor Rondoni would work on the second site and indeed, their names are not mentioned in Titi's guide.²² The *Saint* cycle, in any case, was an echo on a smaller scale of the imposing parade of statues surmounting the Colonnade of St Peters (Bernini, as has been noted, had assisted Carlo Rainaldi in designing the Piazza del Popolo churches), and Fontana's involvement (assisted by Rondoni) at Santa Maria di Montesanto had been almost preordained. The subsequent exclusion of both

²³ “[...] quattro statue che egli ci ha vendute per situarle sopra la facciata della loggia in prospetto del primo cortile del Palazzo Altieri al Giesù cioè le statue di un Adone, una Venere, un Caracalla, et un Settimio Severo obligandosi il detto Sig. Rondone di rimuovere, ristaurar le medeme a tutte sue spese, e fattura nel modo, et forma, che li verrà ordinato dal Sig. Carlo Maratta nostro Pittore”, SCHIAVO 1962, p. 66.

artists from the Santa Maria dei Miracoli site reveals, however, the difficulty they had in asserting themselves within the field of monumental statuary, a genre that Rondoni would seldom turn to later in his career.

Between September and December 1674, meanwhile, Alessandro was paid some 200 *scudi* for selling four antique statues to the Altieri family, which he himself had restored and would occupy an important place in the family residence of Pope Clement X. The accompanying documentation is very important, for it suggests a



Fig. 13:
Paolo Naldini, *Bust of Gaspare Marcaccioni*, Rome, Santa Maria del Suffragio

²⁴ *Ibidem*. For the identification of these statues (of those sold by Rondoni, only one is perhaps still *in situ*) cfr. FOX 1996, pp. 163-164, 195.

direct relationship with the great Maratti: “[...] four statues that he has sold us to put over the façade of the loggia overlooking the first courtyard at Palazzo Altieri al Giesù, namely, statues of an Adonis, a Venus, a Caracalla, and a Septimius Severus, obliging the said Mr. Rondone to remove and restore the same piece at his own cost, and in the way that Mr. Carlo Maratta, our Painter asks of him”.²³ In the December of 1676, the aforementioned Sillani also sold two statues to the Altieri for the same loggia.²⁴ Maratti, as has been noted, was working on one of his more important works at precisely that





moment, the *Allegory of Clemency* for the ceiling of the salon at Palazzo Altieri (1674-1675), and he was by this time the most important painter in Rome. A short time before, in about 1674, the two portrait busts by Paolo Naldini depicting *Raphael* and *Annibale Carracci* had been placed in the Pantheon (now in the Protomoteca at the Capitoline Museums), commissioned directly from Maratti who, in agreement with his friend Giovanni Pietro Bellori, wished to celebrate the tutelary deities of the artistic lineage, of which he saw himself as the most illustrious heir to. Naldini's terracotta models remained in the hands of the painter (they are listed in his personal inventory from 1712),²⁵ and perhaps it was Maratti himself who commissioned Rondoni to make the two replica busts now in the Louvre. They are the only signed marbles, together with the Norton Simon bust, by the sculptor (the portrait of *Raphael* as *Alessandro/Rondoni fecit*; the portrait of *Annibale* as *Ale Rondoni*), which have often been attributed by scholars to Alessandro Senior, and therefore considered prototypes of the Naldini busts.²⁶ If the *Raphael* portrait is very close to the prototype, despite being of higher quality, the *Annibale* bust executed by Rondoni is not a strict copy of the Roman model, and in this instance the superiority of Rondoni's marble is glaringly obvious compared with Naldini's more reserved example; in particular, the drapery, from the noble but rich folds, is a *tour de force*. The two busts now in the Louvre are recorded in France from at least 1722, when they were listed in the inventory of the Meudon Castle. The temptation would be to imagine that they had been a gift from Maratti or Bellori to the French (in this instance, the newly founded Académie in Rome?) who had remained close to Rome's triumphant classicism at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries. The ties with Maratti, which may have been at the origin of the *Raphael* and *Annibale* portraits, would also be a key element in ensuring that Rondoni would receive the most prestigious commission of his entire career. As was suggested at the opening of this essay, Alessandro would sculpt a bust of the affluent and powerful Marquess prior to 1682, as is clearly marked in the inventory of the Carpio collection drawn up in Rome that year: "A statue of Your Excellency in Bust form, or, half figure, in white marble with armour, upon a pedestal of Egyptian Stone, in various

²⁵ M.G. BARBERINI, in BOREA, GASPARRI 2000, I, pp. 478-479; cfr. also MARCHIONNE GUNTER 2003A, p. 119, note 290.

²⁶ CORDELLIER 1992, pp. 30-33; BRESCH-BAUTIER, BORMAND 2006, p. 190.



colours, with your trophies in white marble executed by Mr Alessandro Rondoni, the Roman Sculptor.”²⁷ According to evidence in the Odescalchi archive, Carpio had called upon Maratti in the March of 1677, immediately after reaching Rome: “As soon as he reached Rome, the Licce sent for Maratta, the famous painter, because His Excellency had a penchant towards painting, since he who is adept at this profession will be able to progress because one works hard willingly and profusely.”²⁸ Soon after, the painter must have completed the well-known drawing depicting an *Ideal Academy*, now in the Devonshire collection at Chatsworth (known also through an engraving by Nicolas Dorigny).²⁹ It is probable that Maratti became a privileged agent immediately, making artistic choices on behalf of Carpio. However, another equally important playing card for Rondoni must have been his long-standing friendship with Francesco Antonio Fontana, who provided the Marquess with numerous antique sculptures, working also as a restorer.³⁰ In any case, today we cannot but be surprised by the wealthy Gaspar de Haro y Guzmán’s decision to commission his portrait bust from Rondoni: between the end of the 1670s and the beginning of the 1680s, both Ferrata and Raggi were still active in Rome, and let us not forget that Domenico Guidi executed his most memorable works during those years, such as the *Bust of Gaspare Thiene* for his funerary monument (1679-1682; Rome, Sant’Andrea della Valle), while Lorenzo Ottoni was also recognised as a portrait artist with great expertise. Unfortunately, the loss of the effigy that would have been a significant *tour de force* (the elaborate polychrome pedestal had probably been sculpted by Rondoni himself, and the “marble trophies” were not far in conception from the eagle of the Norton Simon bust) does not allow us to analyse Rondoni’s later work, but it is clear that earlier essays, such as the bust now in Pasadena and that depicting Marzio Ginetti and, perhaps, the two busts now in the Louvre (if these were indeed executed prior to about 1680, as has been suggested here), allowed Alessandro to achieve remarkable credit, particularly in the field of portraiture.

In the Marquess of Carpio’s 1682 inventory, Bernini’s works are also clearly listed: “*due mascheroni di creta cotta*” (two grotesque masks in terracotta), as are those by a certain Giovanni Battista Capozio, a stonemason and the author of a porphyry fountain; strange,

²⁷ “Una statua di Sua Ecc.za in Busto, ò, mezza figura di marmo bianco con Armatura, su Piedestallo di Pietra egitia, e di diversi colori, con suoi Trofei di marmo bianco fatto dal signore Alessandro Rondoni Scultore Romano”, CACCIOTTI 1994, pp. 138 and 193; DE FRUTOS SASTRE 2009, pp. 637-638

²⁸ “Appena giunto in Roma il Licce mandò a chiamare il Maratta famoso pittore per havere S.E. Un genio particolare alla Pittura, che chi sarà valente in questa professione haverà campo di approveciarsi perche si spenderà volentieri e senza miseria”, DE FRUTOS SASTRE 2009, p. 360.

²⁹ S. RUDOLPH, in BOREA, GASPARRI 2000, I, pp. 483-484.

³⁰ CACCIOTTI 1994, pp. 142-143.

therefore, that the “*Quattro mezze figure di marmo bianco, che rappresentano, una la Verità, l'altra la Buggia, la terza la Prudenza e la quarta l'Invidia con loro quattro Piedestalli di marmo*” (four half figures in white marble representing Truth, Deceit, Prudence and Envy with four marble Pedestals), which entered Spain (*Truth* and *Prudence* went to La Granja while *Deceit* and *Envy* went to the Casa del Labrador in Aranjuez) were without attributions.³¹ Ferrata, Ottoni and Giovanni Battista Foggini have all been suggested as possible authors of the busts,³² but none of these seem convincing; the more likely hypothesis would be to pair these works, which are cited immediately after the Marquess's portrait, with Rondoni, whose name could have been omitted either because it was implicit, or simply because the busts were not signed, unlike perhaps the effigy of the Marquess. This issue requires further research (indeed, the series does not necessarily seem to have been executed by a single hand) but certain idiosyncrasies in the drapery (particularly in *Truth* and *Deceit*),³³ characterised by parallel folds that are sharply incised, are found in many works by our sculptor, such as the *Allegories* in the Ginetti chapel. During the same years, Rondoni had achieved yet more success: since the better-established Raggi, who in 1673 had signed a contract for the execution of the majority of the decorative scheme for the Ginetti chapel in Sant'Andrea della Valle, was taking a while to finish his work, in the July of 1676 Alessandro was paid 125 *scudi* for *Fame* in bas-relief (although it was in reality a half relief) above Marzio Ginetti's funeral monument.³⁴ Between 1683 and 1684, Rondoni also executed the two figures of *Justice* and *Fortitude* positioned above the columns on the right-hand side of the same chapel, which together with the other marbles that will be discussed, were perhaps the most important public works ever to be executed by the sculptor (his participation in the site at Sant'Andrea della Valle is duly mentioned in Titi's guide).³⁵ In 1690, he was then paid for the three statues on the tympanum of the chapel's altar (*Humility*, *Vigilance* and a *Crowned Angel*).³⁶ Finally, in 1703, Rondoni would also receive payment for the *Busts of Giovanni Paolo Ginetti* and *Marzio Ginetti*, which may date to, or at least were begun, some years earlier.³⁷ But the most important piece of the entire ensemble was undoubtedly the full-length, kneeling portrait of *Cardinal Giovanni Francesco Ginetti*, positioned opposite the portrait of *Cardinal*

³¹ CACCIOTTI 1994, p. 193.

³² DE FRUTOS SASTRE 2009, pp. 361-362; DE FRUTOS SASTRE 2014, p. 649.

³³ For iconographic issues, see DE FRUTOS SASTRE 2014.

³⁴ CAVAZZINI 1999, pp. 407-408.

³⁵ TITI [1674 – 1763] 1987, p. 79.

³⁶ CAVAZZINI 1999, p. 410.

³⁷ *Ibid.*



Marzio Ginetti, from 1683-1684, Raggi's last work (the sculptor died, as has been mentioned, in 1686). Certainly, a comparison with this fine work, with its vibrant drapery, sheds light upon the limits of Rondoni's practice when tackling the genre of monumental statuary.³⁸ The allegorical figures positioned upon the columns and the tympanum at the altar were without doubt more successful. In any case, the trust bestowed upon Rondoni by Ginetti, above all in terms of the portrait bust genre, would remain strong: in Alessandro's expenditures note of 1703, which included payment for the Ginetti chapel portraits, a further three busts were listed, depicting once again *Monsignor Giovanni Paolo*, *Marquess Marzio* and *Giuseppe*

³⁸ *Ibid.*



Figs. 14,15:
Alessandro Rondoni (?), *Truth*, Segovia, Palacio Real de la Granja de San Ildefonso;
Alessandro Rondoni(?), *Deceit*, Aranjuez, Casa del Labrador, Real Sitio

³⁹ CAVAZZINI 1999, p. 410; PETRUCCI 1999, p. 226.

Ginetti, all commissioned for another family home in Lazio (and still to be found in the parish church at Roccagorga to this day).³⁹ Our sculptor is also responsible for a further three Ginetti busts depicting *Cardinal Marzio*, *Marquess Marzio* and *Monsignor Giovanni Paolo* (in the same church at Roccagorga), which constitute a veritable dynastic celebration, precisely like the group commissioned by Cardinal Corsi from Rondoni.

During the 1680s, when Rondoni was working on the aforementioned sculptures in Sant'Andrea della Valle – his most important public Roman works – his patron was Giovanni Francesco Ginetti, who received his cardinal's robes in 1681. From 1684, he

became the archbishop of Fermo, demonstrating an untiring dedication to his episcopal duties and carrying out an intensive building program.⁴⁰ It is also interesting to compare his career with that of the Florentine Domenico Maria Corsi, who was made a cardinal in 1686, therefore also under Pope Innocent IX Odescalchi (papacy 1676 – 1689), and bishop of Rimini from July 1687. Indeed, Corsi also dedicated himself with great passion to his pastoral mission, visiting the entire diocese during the course of 1688.⁴¹ Since Rondoni's commission for the bust of Cardinal Domenico Maria dates to 1686 (for these documents, see Donatella Pegazzano's essay), we cannot exclude the possibility neither of communication between

⁴⁰ TABACCHI 2001, p. 14.

⁴¹ STUMPO 1983, p. 566.



Fig. 16:
Alessandro Rondoni, *Allegory of Religion*, Rome, Sant'Andrea della Valle, Ginetti chapel

⁴² GUICCIARDINI CORSI SALVIATI 1937, fig. 27.

the two clergymen, nor, therefore, that Rondoni had been recommended by Giovanni Francesco Ginetti. The portrait of *Cardinal Corsi*, which had already been published in 1937,⁴² and the portrait of *Giovanni Corsi*, are significant examples of Rondoni's calm and noble classicism, which perhaps seeks to be a sculptural counterpart to Maratti's portraiture and belongs to the most successful moment in the artist's career. The drapery in the portrait of *Giovanni Corsi*, in particular, lends itself to a comparison with that of *Annibale Carracci* in the Louvre, one of the best passages in the whole of Rondoni's production. In this case, we know that the sculptor was sent a painted portrait, executed by Mario Balassi

expressly to provide the Roman artist with a model to copy. Compared to the painted effigy, Rondoni enriches the Corsi bust with soft drapery which, as it envelops the left shoulder, gathers under the right arm, in keeping with the style pervasive in Rome during the seventeenth century, at least from Algardi's *Urbano Mellini* (Rome, Santa Maria del Popolo, about 1635). It is perhaps opportune to underline here that the aforementioned Naldini had adopted such a solution on more than one occasion: in particular, the busts of *Andrea Sacchi* (Rome, San Giovanni in Laterano) and *Gaspere Marcaccioni* (Rome, Santa Maria del Suffragio, about 1680) offer a truly compelling point of comparison with the present marble by Rondoni, even if the latter's drapery is marked by a signature style characterised by a distilled elegance in the subtle relief of the folds: this was a personal interpretation of Algardi's classicism.

The recognition that Rondoni had therefore achieved between the late 1680s and early 1690s, at a moment that marked Ferrata's and Raggi's exit from the artistic scene (1686), is testified by the 1692 commission for a *Fight between two putti* (now lost) from Livio Odescalchi who, in September that year, paid 70 *scudi* to the sculptor for his work. It is plausible that the group was positioned next to another two similar works, also lost, executed by Ferrata in 1683-84 and by Leonardo Retti in 1689.⁴³ A few years later in 1695, Rondoni worked with antiquities perhaps for the last time in his career. In that year, Livio Odescalchi once again paid the sculptor 40 *scudi* for his work on the alabaster sections of a monumental statue (190cm) of *Augustus*, executed "in imitation of the Antique" to serve as a pendant to "*Giulio Cesare*" (now identified as *Tiberius*) which formed part of Christina of Sweden's collection, after she acquired it from the Duke in 1692 (the two statues are now in the Prado).⁴⁴

In 1695, both Rondoni and Maglia were again paid together thirty *scudi*; the previous year, the same sum had been paid to Giacomo Antonio Lavaggi and Vincenzo Felici.⁴⁵ From the *Catalogo de Benefattori della Vecchia, e nuova Traspontina*, written by Father Avertano Maria Bevilacqua, we learn that each of the four sculptors had executed a marble statue for the high altar at Santa Maria in Traspontina (Rondoni's is the *St. Angelus*).⁴⁶ It was not a particularly significant project (indeed, it is not mentioned in Titi's guide), and the cost had been rather modest.

Once again, Rondoni and Lavaggi found themselves working alongside Giulio Napolini, Giuseppe Raffaelli and Andrea Fucigna on the Altieri chapel at Santa Maria in Campitelli in 1699, each of whom executed a *Putto* in marble: advances of 60 *scudi* were paid between April and May in 1699, but the final payment of the works is not listed.⁴⁷ Lorenzo Ottoni was a protagonist on this project and was responsible for the altarpiece in relief. The same Ottoni is

⁴⁷ SCHIAVO 1962, p. 194; ANSELMINI 1993, p. 215, note 27.



recorded together with other sculptors as having worked in the other Altieri chapel of the same church, which more or less constitutes the left transept, undoubtedly a more important site, from which Rondoni was excluded.⁴⁸ Between 1702 and 1703 Rondoni was paid for one of the statues for the Colonnade at St Peters, the *Saint Susanna* with strong Algardian overtones, a far cry from the language of Bernini, who had also worked at this important site.⁴⁹ Despite

Fig. 17: Alessandro Rondoni, *St. Angelus Martyr*, Rome, Santa Maria in Traspontina

⁴⁸ DI NAPOLI RAMPOLLA 1997.

⁴⁹ RUSSO 1987, pp. 104, 109.

⁴³ WALKER 2002, pp. 30-31, note 8.

⁴⁴ WALKER 2002, p. 31, note 8; for the inventory of Livio's collection where the two statues are listed, cfr. WALKER 1994, pp. 197, 204, cats. 50-51.

⁴⁵ MARCHIONNE GUNTER 2003B, p. 355.

⁴⁶ CATENA 1954, pp. 7, 55.

⁵⁰ TIM [1674 – 1763] 1987, p. 17.

⁵¹ CAUSA 1973, pp. 46, 102, note 93; D'AGOSTINO 2001, p. 207 (with previous bibliography).

⁵² Cfr. note 1.

playing second fiddle in that colossal enterprise, Rondoni would be duly listed among the forty artists responsible for those travertine statues in Titi's 1721 edition of *Studio di pittura, scoltura ed architettura*.⁵⁰ What is entirely surprising is Rondoni's presence in Naples in 1702, when he was paid to complete Cosimo Fanzago's unfinished work on a series of *Putti* for the arches at the entrance to the chapels at the Certosa di San Martino (two of which were executed entirely by Alessandro), a *St John the Baptist* and a *St Jerome* now at the counter-façade but originally intended for the main façade and a niche in the choir (contract of 19th April).⁵¹ This Neapolitan period, which fell between his work at Santa Maria in Campitelli and the Colonnade at St Peters, is so incongruous within Rondoni's career that could even suggest the presence of another sculptor with the same name; however, the Rondoni responsible for these works is described as "Roman" in the documentation, therefore we should not doubt our sculptor's presence in Naples. Rondoni must certainly have been looking for work at this time, but his calling to Naples during what can be considered a moment of decline in his career remains unexplained, particularly because this was an important commission, for which he was paid 650 *ducati*. This, together with his work on the *Saint Susanna* for St Peters, would be Rondoni's last documented activity as a sculptor, even though in 1710 he was listed in the parish family book for San Lorenzo in Lucina.⁵²



Mario Balassi (1604-1667)

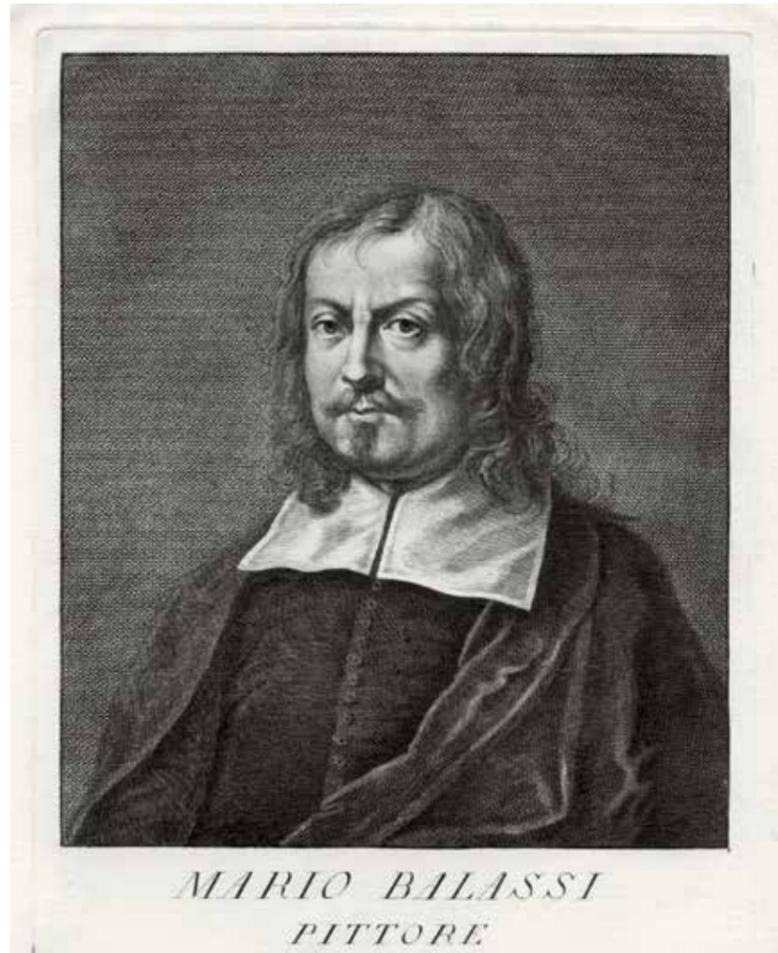


Fig. 1:
Girolamo Rossi, Domenico
Campiglia (da Balassi), *Self-portrait
of Mario Balassi*, 1756, engraving

¹ A volume by the present author dedicated to Mario Balassi has been recently printed, with a complete catalogue of paintings and drawings by the artist, which can be referred to for detailed and specific biographical information.

An artist of significant potential, but little known until now,¹ Balassi occupies a rather isolated position in the panorama of seventeenth-century Florentine painting, with somewhat original stylistic characteristics. This is probably in part due to extra-Tuscan influences that the artist absorbed during his extended sojourn in Rome, which began by assisting Domenico Cresti called Il Passignano and lasted for about ten years.² His time spent assisting this prestigious master, who was, along with Cigoli and Pagani, one



² If Balassi did indeed assist Cresti in Rome, as records suggest, he must have done so around the mid-1620s, in any case prior to Passignano's departure from Rome in 1627, while in 1634 the artist was in Florence once more; see ARONBERG LAVIN 1975, doc. 16, p. 3.

of the great innovators of Grand-ducal art, finalised the formation of our painter, which began as a boy with the Veronese Jacopo Ligozzi who was active for the Medici court, followed by time spent in Matteo Rosselli's busy workshop, a fundamental milestone in terms of his development as a draughtsman.

As is suggested in Baldinucci's detailed late seventeenth-century biography,³ having moved to the Eternal City, the young artist made



Fig. 2: Mario Balassi, *Noli me tangere*, Florence, oil on canvas, 243 x 165 cm, Ente Cassa di Risparmio

³ BALDINUCCI 1681-1728 (ed. 1845-1847), IV, 1846, pp. 586.

connections with the powerful Barberini family. From them, Balassi would receive commissions for Monterotondo, the Tuscan family's estate in Lazio, and for the Roman churches of Santa Maria della Concezione, where the *Transfiguration* dated 1630 is still located, as well as for San Caio. This no longer extant place of worship, once located near the Quirinale, housed the *Noli mi tangere* now in the collection of Ente Cassa di Risparmio in Florence (Fig. 2), a

prestigious undertaking commissioned by Pope Urban VIII himself. If the remarkable work for the Capuchin church is an essay marked by classical overtones, which besides the influence of Raphael – whose altarpiece in San Pietro at Montorio depicting the same subject he had recently copied – reflects Emilian painting, from Ludovico Carracci to Guido Reni, the canvas for San Caio is instead entirely Baroque, a revisitation of Correggio⁴ with echoes of



⁴This connection was outlined by Mina Gregori in GODI 1998, n. 12, pp. 51-53, p. 51.

Parmigianino, perhaps mediated through contact with Mastelletta.⁵ This was hardly a Florentine debut, therefore, to the extent that the only affinities with the artistic environment of his birth town were at this time those with Giovan Battista Vanni, an eccentric painter who led a similar career.⁶ On his return to Florence in around 1634, an event that does not match up with the trip to Vienna which until now has been maintained by scholars following a misinterpretation of

Fig. 3: Mario Balassi, *St Mary Magdalen*, oil on canvas, 97.5 x 73 cm, Florence, Uffizi

⁵The Barberini, with whom our painter had taken up residence, possessed various paintings by this artist; see SCHÜTZE 2007, p. 160.

⁶ Giovan Battista Vanni was also in Rome from 1624, entering the Barberini orbit and subsequently enjoying the protection of Marquess Corsi. The closeness of our painter to Vanni has been upheld in the past on numerous occasions by Mina Gregori and Francesca Baldassari.

⁷ This rectification, extensively sustained by the discovery of documentary evidence, is found in BECUCCI 2012.

Baldinucci's *Notizie*,⁷ our painter appears to have soon been working for prestigious patrons, such as Marquess Corsi, with whom he enjoyed a longstanding relationship, as the documents recently uncovered by Donatella Pegazzano prove,⁸ or the wealthy young member of the House of Medici, Don Lorenzo. For the latter, the artist executed a *Saint Mary Magdalene* in 1638 now in the Uffizi (Fig. 3), in which his personal style is firmly established,



Fig. 4: Mario Balassi, *Saint Nicholas of Tolentino Reviving the Birds*, oil on canvas, 330 x 225 cm, Prato, Museo Civico

⁸ PEGAZZANO 2015A, pp. 69-124, pp. 90, 95-96.

⁹ G. PAPI, in *Firenze* 1987, nn. 22-23, pp. 68-71, p. 70.

characterised by faces with bright red lips, lead-white fleshtones and unkempt hair that recall Volterrano's figures, an artist who was much admired by the patron who owned Villa Petraia. Also notable is the characteristic flattened, sinuous drapery, one of the artist's unmistakable trade marks, often "similar in its consistency to a medusa's membrane", as Gianni Papi observed in his description of the pendant in the Pratesi collection,⁹ which includes another version

of the cited painting in octagonal format. The lost *Assumption* for the Florentine Ardinghelli family, which Balassi was paid for between 1643 and 1644, once a key work in the chapel of San Gaetano frescoed by Lorenzo Lippi, and the great altarpiece depicting *Saint Nicholas of Tolentino Reviving the Birds* of 1648 for San Francesco a Prato (Fig. 4), one of the artist's masterpieces, are perhaps Balassi's most important works completed during the course of the 1640s. The Prato picture, a monumental and austere work, betrays various influences that derive from Passignano to Poussin and even Caravaggio, evident in the marked contrast between light and shadow and the frantic gestures of the figures.

Some of the rediscovered paintings to be published shortly, characterised by indecipherable meaning and imbued with an aura of mystery, could have been executed during this period, when our painter probably followed Salvator Rosa and his circle of friends and colleagues at the Accademia dei Percossi, such as the aforementioned Giovan Battista Vanni and Lorenzo Lippi; indeed, scholars have often noted stylistic similarities between Rosa and our painter.¹⁰ In 1653, Balassi is documented in Vienna for several months, where he met Ottavio Piccolomini (1599 – 1656),¹¹ commander of the imperial army during the Thirty Years War who, once married and awarded many honours during long-awaited times of peace, dedicated himself to furnishing his own residence in Náchod Castle. Despite having earned the coveted task of painting a portrait of Emperor Ferdinand III of Augsburg from life, as is recorded by his principal biographer, Balassi, whose sojourn is documented in some rediscovered letters to his patron, would return definitively to Florence at the end of the year, after having been disappointed by the loss of a promised commission for an altarpiece for the Cathedral of Saint Stephen in the Austrian city, which was executed instead by Joachim von Sandrart. It is possible that our painter briefly visited Venice and other places mentioned by Baldinucci on his way home, even if a previous, longer sojourn cannot be excluded, a sojourn that would explain the stylistic similarities with subtle eccentricities found in Pietro Ricchi's work, noted on several occasions by scholars, the first of whom being Hermann Voss.¹² In the years that followed, Balassi executed important works for Prato, such as *The Virgin and Christ Child appear to Saint Dominic* dated 1656, now in the Museo Civico,

¹⁰ See STRUHAL 2010, pp. 43-55.

¹¹ On this, see the aforementioned contribution of Alessandra Becucci (BECUCCI 2012).

¹² Voss 1961, pp. 211-215. Pietro Ricchi was a pupil of Passignano in Florence with Balassi: the two artists' companionship probably dates back to their years as apprentices together.

but also works for the grand-ducal family. At the beginning of the 1660s, Cardinal Carlo de' Medici commissioned Balassi to paint portraits of Grand Duke Ferdinando II and Vittoria della Rovere, which he was paid for in 1661.¹³ The painting depicting Ferdinando is untraced, but the portrait of his wife, rediscovered relatively recently (Fig. 5), is a clear indication of our painter's new phase of creativity: any sign of naturalism is abandoned in favour of a highly

¹³ Elena Fumagalli's discovery of the document was made known by Francesca Baldassari in FUMAGALLI, ROSSI 2011, n. 51, pp. 210-211, p. 210.



Fig. 5: Mario Balassi, *Portrait of Vittoria della Rovere*, oil on canvas, 83 x 64 cm, formerly in the Koelliker collection, current whereabouts unknown

¹⁴ GREGORI 2001, pp. 155-164, p. 158.

personal style, archaic and mannered, which Mina Gregori has described as “extremely ornate court portraits, stylised to the point of being symbolic”.¹⁴ Although not free from Baldinucci's criticism, this phase of Nordic – note how Baldinucci states that Balassi “imitates Albrecht Dürer's finish” in the two paintings for Cardinal Carlo – and neo-Ligozzian inspiration is perhaps, for the absolute originality of these atemporal creations, the most interesting moment

of the artist's career. These paintings bear similarities with Carlo Dolci's work, an artist who, almost symbolically, would complete the *Martyrdom of St Lawrence* for the Prato cathedral, our painter's last unfinished painting.

Some rediscovered works belonging to this period - a neo-fifteenth-century style *Madonna and Child* on panel, signed and dated 1660 deriving from the Lippi collection, one of the closest families to Balassi, and an enigmatic *Queen of Armenia*, for years attributed to an earlier artist and finally restituted to our painter due to stylistic similarities with the first - are, along with the aforementioned 1661 portrait of *Vittoria della Rovere*, a group of paintings characterised by exceptional quality and a highly personalised style; they will be published by the present author in a forthcoming monograph on the artist.

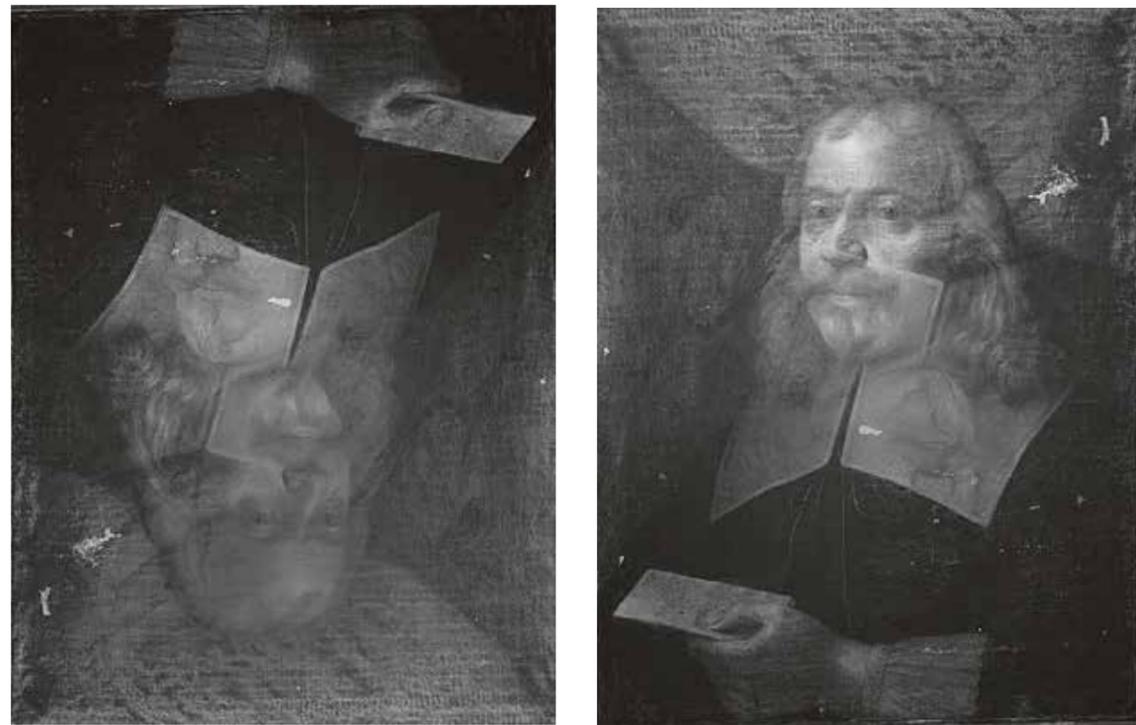
Connected with this group, not only chronologically, is the 1661 *Portrait of Marquess Giovanni Corsi* presented in this catalogue, attributed by Donatella Pegazzano to the artist even prior to the discovery of the documents that verify the work's authorship. As already mentioned, Balassi fostered working relationships with the important House of Corsi, which were already established by the second-half of the 1630s, a period in which several payments were made to the artist, discovered in the account books of the Florentine family by Pegazzano:¹⁵ On 10th May 1637 the carver Jacopo Sani is paid for a carved ornament “of a St. Mary Magdalene by Mario Balassi”, while the following year the artist was paid ten *scudi* “for the pictures in the salon”.

¹⁵ PEGAZZANO 2015A, cit., p.90, note 113 p. 95.

Although not uncommon among society of the time, the Marquess's protection also extended to other members of the family, such as the painter's older brother, Fausto Balassi (1602 – 1646), who was employed by the Corsi as an accountant and would accompany Marquess Giovanni and the prothonotary apostolic Lorenzo during their extended Roman sojourns. Giovanni di Jacopo Corsi (1600 – 1661), about whom ground-breaking research has been published in this volume, Marquess of Cajazzo and a Florentine senator, had two wives, Lucrezia Salviati, whom he married in 1628, and Virginia Vitelli, whom he married in 1640. With his first wife he had Antonio (died 1679), his first son and a future Marquess, and Domenico Maria (1633 – 1697), later Cardinal. A full-length portrait of the

¹⁶ See the essay by Donatella Pegazzano in this volume, also published in PEGAZZANO 2015A, Fig. 3, p. 86.

young Giovanni was already known of in a private collection, executed by the brothers Domenico and Valore Casini.¹⁶ In our painting, the sitter, who died on 12th May 1661, is depicted in the year of his death, as a letter with an inscription presented by the individual testifies: “All’Ill:mo Sig:re e P:rone Coll.mo/ Il Sig:re March.e Gio: Corsi / Firenze/ 1661.” [To the illustrious and most honourable Lord and Master, Sir Marquess Giovanni Corsi, Florence 1661.]. In the family documents conserved in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze, payment for the first portrait of the deceased man is recorded: “costs for the death of Sir Marquess paid [...] 23rd May



Figs. 6,7: Infrared reflectography in which the original composition is visible, later hidden by Balassi

¹⁷ ASF, Guicciardini Corsi Salviati (from now GCS), Libri di amministrazione, 545, c. 38 sn.

fourteen [lira] paid to the Painter Silvestro for the completed portrait.¹⁷ The short time available and the figure paid to the unknown artist, which is the equivalent to two *scudi*, leads us to believe that the work was a drawing, or a sketch, made from the corpse immediately following the sitter’s death. Payment to Balassi for the two portraits of the Marquess appears at the end of the same year in Domenico Maria Corsi’s account books, son of the deceased sitter. On 24th March 1662 [1661 in the Florentine calendar] we find: “15 [*scudi*] – *m.a* as above [to Andrea Migliorucci] paid by him to Maria Balassi the Painter for his efforts in having made two Portraits

in memory of Sir Marquess Giovanni Corsi, one of which was sent to Rome and the other given to Lady Marchioness Virginia Corsi”.¹⁸ We are not entirely sure which of the two works, the one sent to Rome where Domenico Maria usually resided, or the other given to the widow Virginia Vitelli Corsi, is the present portrait. We have, however, some evidence that could clarify this issue. Indeed, it is

¹⁸ ASF, GCS, Libri di amministrazione, 553, c. 13 sn.



likely that the present picture is the first of the two paintings executed by our painter, as the presence of a conspicuous pentiment would suggest: beneath the large white collar, an upside-down face can be made out, depicting Giovanni himself (Figs. 6,7). Balassi may have based his first attempt on the drawing by the mysterious Silvestro, which he then abandoned in favour of the pose that we

Fig. 8: Mario Balassi, *Studio for a Portrait of A Gentleman* (recto), red chalk with white heightening on prepared paper, 371 x 242 mm, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

admire today. The artist must have then made a second version of the portrait, which we can imagine had the same dimensions. With this in mind, it would seem more likely that the patron, Domenico Maria, must have kept the first version for himself – identifiable as our picture with the pentiment – which was thus sent to Rome, and that the second, probably of inferior quality, was then sent to console the stepmother.



Fig. 9:
Mario Balassi, *Allegory of sculpture*, oil on canvas
71.8 x 58.4 cm, private collection, formerly in Milan with Carlo Orsi Gallery

¹⁹ See PROSPERI VALENTI RODINÒ 1994, pp. 235-239, p. 237, pl. 126.

One can observe how Balassi, even on this occasion, adopts his usual pose, with the gaze directed towards the viewer and the torso slightly turned. This pose is seen in the other known works by the artist, such as the splendid *Study for a portrait of a gentleman*, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Fig. 8),¹⁹ which wonderfully presents the sitter with the same stance, even sharing details such as the letter he holds. Similarly, the later *Portrait of*

Jacopo Lippi,²⁰ a figure with whom the painter had a close relationship, which was noted by Baldinucci and is extensively supported by documents to be published shortly, demonstrates a comparable stance in the figure.

Even for his self-portrait now in the Uffizi, which has sadly come down to us in bad condition and is probably a fragment, Mario Balassi depicts himself in the same pose, better appreciated in a print from the mid-eighteenth century that reproduces the painting (Fig. 1).²¹

A stylistic analysis of the present work anticipates the characteristics deployed by the artist at a later age. The work demonstrates an emphatic refusal of his youthful infatuation with Correggio's work, which is evident in his Roman altarpiece for San Caio mentioned earlier, and in the naturalistic accents found in the *St. Nicholas of Tolentino Reviving the Birds* or the *Incarcerated Saint Peter liberated by an angel* of 1653. In the *Portrait of Vittoria della Rovere* as well as the *Allegory of Sculpture* formerly with Carlo Orsi (Fig. 9), which is also of a similar date, these characteristics are replaced by those eccentricities discussed earlier. This approach tends to be both graphic and meticulous, leading to the creation of idealised figures, otherworldly but also welcoming and reassuring. In observing the kindly face of Giovanni Corsi, a face that the artist knew well in life, one notes, for example, how the expression lines upon the forehead are transformed into a wave motif, which seems almost decorative in intent. We see a similar approach to the elaborative lace cuff, in which Balassi, not concerned with suggesting a credible texture, instead lingers upon the description of a fussy ornamental motif similar to the more extravagant embroidery used in the delightful representation of *Vittoria della Rovere* and the *Allegory of Sculpture*. The picture, executed in 1661 during the same year that the artist was named "one of the four masters [...] of nature" at the Accademia del Disegno,²² probably served as a model for the execution of the marble bust depicting the Marquess by Alessandro Rondoni, a work which is analysed by Andrea Bacchi in the present catalogue.

²⁰ Painted in 1653, as an inscription on the work testifies, until now erroneously deciphered as 1643, along with documentary evidence. The work appears at the De Larderel-Rucellai sale at Pandolfini, Florence, 24th February 1986, lot 670, p. 82, pl. 85.

²¹ The print, made by the engraver Girolamo Rossi and the draughtsman Domenico Campiglia, was included in the 1756 volume of the third *Serie di ritratti degli eccellenti pittori* by Francesco Möucke, published in Florence between 1752 and 1762 (MÖUCKE 1752 – 1762).

²² ASF, Accademia del Disegno, 12, cc. 4r-4v. Put in place around the middle of the century, this role offered teachers a number of duties which, as well as tutoring young draughtsmen, involved choosing the model, their pose and their props during the sitting. During the course of the seventeenth century, the role of the master was performed, other than by Balassi, by artists such as Vincenzo and Cesare Dandini, Volterrano, Carlo Dolci, Livio Mehus and Giovan Battista Foggini.

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