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Giovanni Sanguinetti

**The Roman Women Bring their Gold
and Jewellery to the Treasury as a Token
of Their Faith and Their Love of Country**











Giovanni Sanguinetti
(Mantua, 1789 - Rome, 1867)

The Roman Women Bring their Gold and Jewellery to the Treasury as a Token of Their Faith and Their Love of Country

Pencil and watercolor on beige paper, 880 x 1590 mm

LITERATURE: hitherto unpublished.

The Commission

This large watercoloured drawing is the work of Giovanni Sanguinetti who produced it to a commission from Count Francesco Rizzini¹, his friend and a fellow Mantuan, between 1821 and 1822.

The first mention of “an order for a picture” from Rizzini for “100 zecchini in addition to expenses set at 75 scudi” occurs, without any indication of the subject, in a letter addressed by a young assistant on 30 June 1821 to Tommaso Minardi, San-

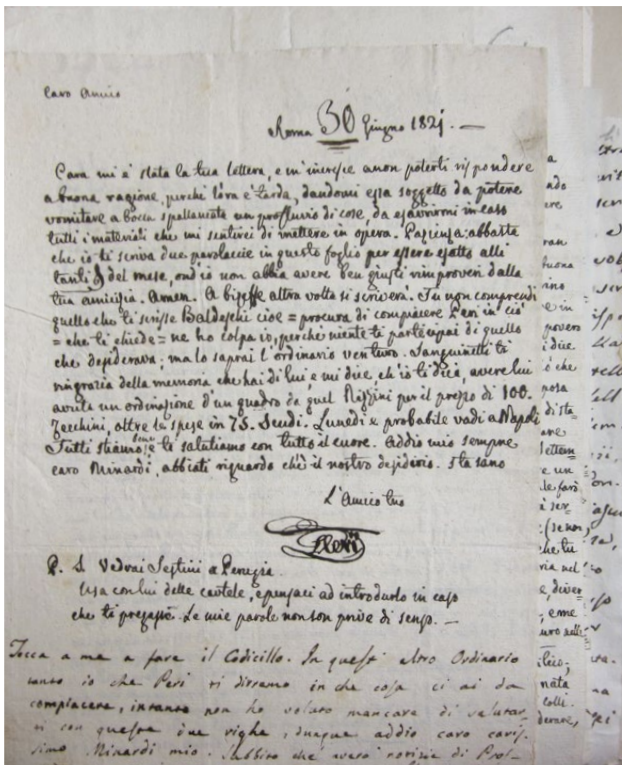
guinetti’s master in Rome and the then Director of the Accademia di Belle Arti in Perugia (**fig. 1**)². Sanguinetti himself, on 13 August of the same year, personally acquainted Minardi with the commission: “Count Rizzini has commissioned from a small picture larger than the *Hours* painted in oil, the subject of which is *The women of Rome when they bring their gold and jewellery to the Treasury as a token of their faith and their love of country*”³ (**fig. 2**).

The commission came immediately after Rizzini had purchased *Time and the Hours Before Jupiter and*

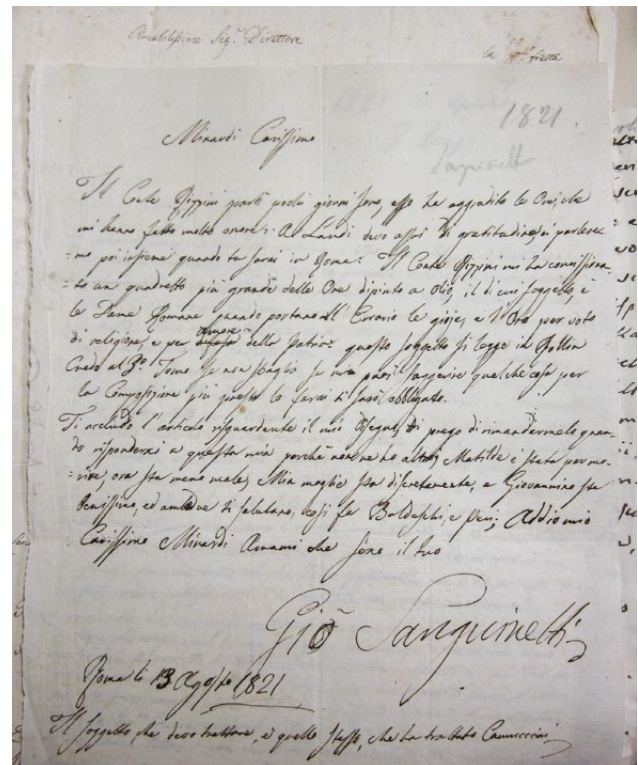
¹ For Francesco Rizzini, see *La famiglia Rizzini dal XVII al XX secolo*, Guidizzolo, Centro Culturale San Lorenzo, 2003, esp. pp. 61-68.

² Archivio di Stato di Roma [hereinafter ASR], Fondo Ovidi, b. 1, L. Ceri to T. Minardi, 30 June 1821.

³ Ibid, b. 1, G. Sanguinetti to T. Minardi, 13 August 1821.



1 Archivio di Stato di Roma, Fondo Ovidi, b. I, L. Ceri to T. Minardi, 30 June 1821



2 Archivio di Stato di Roma, Fondo Ovidi, b. I, G. Sanguinetti to T. Minardi, 13 August 1821



3 Luigi Impaccianti (copy after Giovanni Sanguinetti), *Time and the Hours Before Jupiter and Juno Enthroned*, oil on canvas, 87 x 56 cm. Asola, Museo Civico "Goffredo Bellini"

Juno Enthroned, Sanguinetti's first watercoloured drawing shown at the Accademia di San Luca in Rome and much praised in the June 1821 edition of the "Giornale Arcadico" by Giuseppe Tambroni, a former President of the Accademia d'Italia, who appreciated the deep understanding that it displayed of the work of masters from "the best

times"⁴. We can get an idea of this now lost painting from a copy produced by Sanguinetti's pupil Luigi Impaccianti, now in the Museo di Asola (Mantua)⁵ (fig. 3).

The Iconography

The theme depicted is based on an episode illustrated by Charles Rollin in his *Histoire romaine*, as the painter pointed out to Minardi when asking him to suggest "something for the composition."

4 G. Tambroni, *Belle Arti. Pittura di storia. Sanguinetti [sic] Giovanni - mantovano*, in "Giornale Arcadico di Scienze, Belle Lettere e Arti", XXX, June 1821, pp. 425-426.

5 See *I disegni del Museo Civico "Goffredo Bellini" tra neoclassicismo e purismo*, exhibition catalogue (Mantua, 30 November 2003 - 6 January 2004), curated by R. Casarin, Mantua, Sometti, 2003, pp. 120-121; S. Petrillo, *Contro la «peste Gallica»: Giovanni Sanguinetti direttore dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Perugia (1822-28)*, in E. Del Albeni, G. Manuali (ed.), *L'Accademia riflette sulla sua storia. III 800/900*, Perugia, ABPress, 2020, pp. 74-95, esp. pp. 74, 79.





4 Nicolas-Guy Brenet, *Piety and Generosity of the Women of Rome*, 1785. Paris, Musée du Louvre

Les dames romaines se défont de leurs bijoux pour fournir l'or nécessaire au présent destiné à Apollon, the passage in the *Histoire romaine* which Rollin took from Plutarch, describes a particular moment in Roman Republican history when, after Marcus Furius Camillus had conquered Veii in 395 BC, the women of Rome displayed extraordinary generosity by donating their gold and jewellery to the public Treasury in order to acquit a vow that they had made to Apollo⁶. Rollin's *Histoire*, published in Paris in five volumes between 1738 and 1741, was completed by his pupil Jean-Baptiste-Louis Crevier. Its first Italian edition (Rome, Desideri) came out in 16 volumes in 1785–7 and ran into several more editions, including one published in Rome by Vincenzo Poggioli in 1806–9. Analytical and didactic in nature, it offered a formidable repertoire to those French and Italian artists at the turn of the 18th century

6 C. Rollin, *Histoire romaine*, nouvelle édition, t. 2, Paris, 1741, p. 416–417.

who embraced the moralising precepts of historical painting, discovering edifying material with a strong ethical value in the classical world.

In particular, the episode of the *Women of Rome*, set in the Temple of Saturn in the presence of the tribunes, was initially taken up by Nicolas Guy-Brenet who showed his painting (*Piety and Generosity of the Women of Rome*, Paris, Musée du Louvre; fig. 4) at the Paris Salon of 1785.

Sanguinetti, however, chose a different moment in the narrative. In the letter mentioned above, he wrote to Minardi that: “the subject which I am to address is the same as that addressed by Camuccini”⁷. In 1816 Vincenzo Camuccini had begun work on a painting for Pierre Louis de Blacas d’Aulps, the French Ambassador to the Holy See⁸, which must have met with instant success if Marino Torlonia, the Duke of Poli, had a replica made of it – the replica in question may be the picture now in Glasgow⁹, (fig. 5) – and Domenico Marchetti made an engraving of it¹⁰ (fig. 6).

Sanguinetti appears to have taken his inspiration for his overall composition from Camuccini’s work, but with the addition of a number of obvious variants such as the presence of trompe-l’oeil perspective, with the scene opening out onto a luminous landscape and a larger number of figures (twenty-six in all) including women, soldiers, aediles and tribunes charged with managing public finances.

7 ASR, Fondo Ovidi, b. 1, G. Sanguinetti to T. Minardi, 13 August 1821. For Camuccini’s painting, see Camuccini, Finelli, *Bienaimé protagonisti del classicismo a Roma nell’Ottocento*, exhibition catalogue (Rome, Galleria Francesca Antonacci, 15 May – 5 July 2003), curated by F. Antonacci, G.C. de Feo, Rome, 2003, no. 8.

8 Vincenzo Camuccini (1771–1844) *bozzetti e disegni dallo studio dell’artista*, exhibition catalogue (Rome, Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna, 1982), curated by G. Piantoni de Angelis, Rome 1978, p. 62.

9 Donated to the Museum (inv. no. 319) by Mrs. Cecilia Douglas in 1862, the painting *Roman Women Offering Their Jewellery in Defence of the State* (oil on canvas, 72.4 x 128.9 cm) is dated 1825–9.

10 *The Women of Rome Offer The Aediles Their Jewellery*, the engraving (etching and burin, 528 x 807 mm; the sheet 715 x 990) is taken from a drawing by Giovanni Battista Borani; see C. Le Blanc, *Manuel de l’amateur d’estampes*, 24 24, V. 3, p. 601, 1854–59; C.A. Petrucci, *Catalogo generale delle stampe tratte dai rami incisi posseduti dalla Calcografia Nazionale*, 271, 1953, p. 77.



5 Vincenzo Camuccini, *The Women of Rome Offer Their Jewellery to the Aediles*. Glasgow, Glasgow Museums Resource Centre



6 Domenico Marchetti (inc.), Giovanni Battista Borani (drw.), *The Women of Rome Offer Their Jewellery to the Aediles*. Rome, Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica



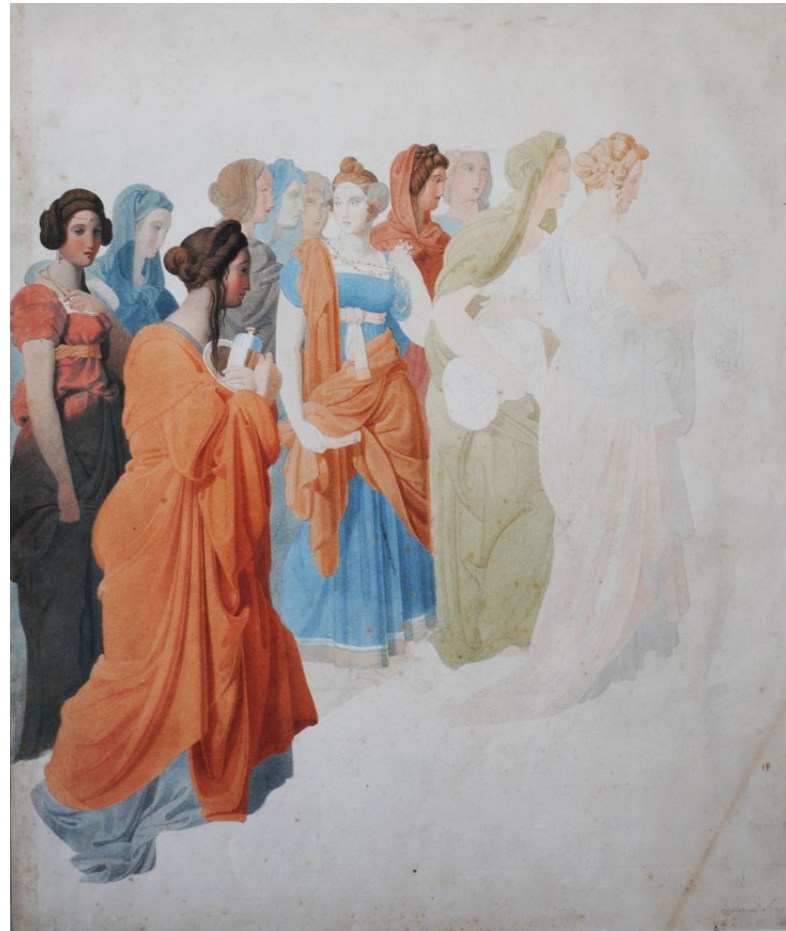
The Phases in the Picture's Creation

Giovanni Sanguinetti began to devise the picture in the months in which, having taken over from Tommaso Minardi as Director of the Accademia di Belle Arti in Perugia, he moved to the Umbrian capital to take up his post on 12 January 1822, simultaneously occupying the Chair of Painting, which he was to hold for over twenty years until June of 1841¹¹.

The Accademia in Perugia still has a partial study (pencil and tempera on paper, 610 x 475 mm) for the left-hand side of the *Women of Rome*, yet it shows considerable differences with the final version both in the distribution of the figures and in their iconography (fig. 7).

In October 1823 the large drawing was still in the painter's workshop in Perugia, where it was seen by Jean-Baptiste Wicar who was working at the time on a commission for an altarpiece depicting the *Marriage of the Virgin* for the Chapel of the Holy Ring in the Cathedral: "[Wicar] very much liked the composition of the *Women of Rome*, and he told me that as far as he could recall, she [sic] liked it better than Camuccini's picture", Sanguinetti informed Minardi¹².

This recognition sounds very much like an attempt at reconciliation after the controversy that had accompanied Sanguinetti's appointment in Perugia, when his neo-16th century style had been pitted precisely against Wicar's "17th century" classicism of French inspiration. In recommending Sanguinetti to the authorities in Perugia, Minardi had, in fact, highlighted the fact that his pupil was "completely untarnished [...] by the evil that strikes so many valid Italian artists, causing them to sicken with



7 Giovanni Sanguinetti, study for *The Women of Rome Bring Their Gold and Jewellery to the Treasury*. Perugia, Museo dell'Accademia di Belle Arti

common shame, I refer to the cursed French style"¹³.

In September 1824, after purchasing another large watercoloured drawing from Sanguinetti depicting *Pallas' Funeral* (now in the Civic Collection in Asola, Mantua; fig. 8), Francesco Rizzini was tempted to turn his back on his own *Women of Rome* in the hope of being able to buy the Camuccini picture¹⁴.

When that attempt fell through, he once again requested an oil version of Sanguinetti's wa-

11 He was to remain Director of the Accademia, on the other hand, only until 1828, when he was succeeded by Pietro Canali (S. Petrillo, *Contro la «peste Gallica»*, op. cit.).

12 ASR, Fondo Minardi, Letter from G. Sanguinetti to T. Minardi: the letter, though undated, is datable to October 1823 thanks to its reference to certain circumstances in Perugia life.

13 Perugia, Archivio storico della Fondazione Accademia di Belle Arti, b. 31, tit. VIII, art. 1, letter from T. Minardi, 19 December 1821. The letter is published in full in E. Ovidi, *Tommaso Minardi e la sua scuola*, Rome, Rebecca, 1902, pp. 222-223.

14 ASR, Fondo Ovidi, b. 1, L. Menicucci to T. Minardi, 21 September 1824.



8 Giovanni Sanguinetti (here attr.), *Pallas' Funeral*, 1823, pen, watercoloured grey and brown ink, lead white, pastel on paper, 870 x 1550 mm. Asola (Mantua), Museo Civico "Goffredo Bellini"

tercolour in December 1824¹⁵. In Lombardy in the 1820s, though the winds of liberalism were gradually fuelling the growing popularity of Romantic historicism, the Mantuan Count's interests were still clearly pegged to the solid antiquarian taste that dominated the cultural circles in which Sanguinetti moved.

In this connection, it is of some significance that in criticising the publication in Milan of a "Library for women", in other words of a "collection of romantic compositions", in the Roman periodical "Giornale Arcadico" in 1822, Pietro Odescalchi had pointed precisely to the exemplary value of historical subjects and, in an effort to demonstrate how in ancient Rome "even women felt a vibrant love of country", he mentioned the episode in which "in the time of Brennus [they] redeemed Rome, and with true

civic magnanimity they removed the gold and jewellery from their clothing, thus earning from the Senate a decree enjoining that they should be praised from the podium on a par with men"¹⁶.

In extolling ancient history's educational role, the critic was making his particular reference to the episode of the *Women of Rome* in the very months in which Rizzini was contemplating commissioning the subject from Sanguinetti, who was still in Rome at the time.

Yet ultimately the work never entered Rizzini's collection, because there is no mention of it in an inventory of his possessions drafted in 1853 which does, on the other hand, mention both Sanguinetti's *Pallas' Funeral* and a *Madonna and Child*¹⁷.

16 P. Odescalchi, *Intorno ad una biblioteca amena ed istruttiva per le donne gentili, la quale si stampa in Milano. Lettera del commendatore don Pietro de' principi Odescalchi al suo amico Salvatore Betti*, in "Giornale arcadico di scienze, lettere ed arti", XIV, pp. 61-82, esp. page 75.

17 *La famiglia Rizzini dal XVII al XX secolo*, op. cit., pp. 73-74.

15 Ibid, b. 1, letter from G. Sanguinetti to T. Minardi, 6 December 1824.





9 Giovanni Sanguinetti, *Female Figure*, c. 1830–40, pencil on paper, 447 x 290 mm. Perugia, Fondazione Accademia di Belle Arti “Pietro Vannucci” (inv. n. C431)

Writing in the Roman newspaper “Buonarroti” in 1866, Achille Monti refers to our water-coloured drawing in these terms: “A very fine picture in which the artist has, with a splendid sense of contrast, proven capable of alinging those women’s sweet faces against the strong, masculine faces of the *aediles* who, seated in all their majesty, receive the gifts that bode so well for the Republic which had such power (oh, enviable example!) that it could overcome in those women their natural and very strong love of the vanity of their adornments”¹⁸.

The Style

Sanguinetti’s ability to conceive a complex composition so harmonious in its rhythm reminiscent of a classical frieze, combined with his elegant hand, have achieved in this watercoloured drawing one of the loftiest results of his entire output, subscribing to the content and manner of classicism as learnt at the knee of Luigi Sabatelli, his first master in Milan, and subsequently enriched with neo-Renaissance accents during his training in Rome, where he moved in c. 1816 to study under Minardi.

Minardi’s profound esteem for his pupil shines through in the words with which he submitted Sanguinetti’s candidature to become Director of the Accademia in Perugia, at the very time this drawing was being produced:

[...] one of the greatest composers of our age.

This, not only for his abundant, fertile imagination, but even more admirably, for the elegance and purity with which he expresses his concepts.

His style is that of the great 16th century painters, and he is capable of addressing sacred subjects with the sweet majesty of Andrea del Sarto and of Fra’ Bartolomeo, and of handling profane

18 A. Monti, *Gli acquerelli del professor Sanguinetti*, in “Il Buonarroti”, X, December 1866, pp. 210–212.

and fierce subjects with the fiery, fearsome temperament of Giulio Romano and of Polidoro. That is proof of true genius, and of a deep understanding¹⁹.

This opinion echoed a review, penned by Giuseppe Tambroni in 1821, of *Time and the Hours*, a picture which, as we have seen, was painted only a few short months before the *Women of Rome* under discussion here:

Which design on the artist's part, in addition to being full of delicacy and philosophy, reveals in its execution a healthy and deep understanding of the great masters of the best times, of whose robust and grandiose creativity he reminds us with this work of his. The manner of the drapery, the valour of the forms and the unity and harmony of the composition show us the lofty nature of Sanguinetti's talent and prompt us to wish that fortune may

present him with the opportunity to transfer this work either onto canvas or onto a wall thanks to the generous munificence of some illustrious patron²⁰.

An outstanding example of Sanguinetti's talent as a draughtsman, this large work exemplifies the "primacy" which artists of his generation afforded to drawing as a crucial and unavoidable step in the creative process. But at the same time, it is almost of sampler of female figures handled with that sophisticated calligraphic taste – a far cry from Camuccini's stern classicism – which was to receive a fresh boost in Perugia from his study of the art of the 15th and early 16th centuries (fig. 9). This led to a fertile creative period in the late 1830s, in the course of which he produced a substantial series of Allegories commissioned from him by the Calcografia Camerale to illustrate Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* and now in the Istituto Nazionale della Grafica in Rome.

Stefania Petrillo

19 Perugia, Archivio Storico della Fondazione Accademia di Belle Arti "Pietro Vannucci, *Carteggio amministrativo*, tit. VIII, art. I, b. 31, fasc. 38, letter from T. Minardi, 19 December 1821; the letter is published in full in E. Ovidi, *Tommaso Minardi e la sua scuola*, Rome, Rebecca, 1902, pp. 222-223.

20 G. Tambroni, *Belle Arti. Pittura di storia. Sanguinetti [sic] Giovanni - mantovano*, in "Giornale Arcadico di Scienze, Belle Lettere e Arti", XXX, June 1821, pp. 425-426.



Via Santo Spirito, 26/A - Milan
P. +39 02 76 31 89 07
www.walterpadovani.it

w.p.