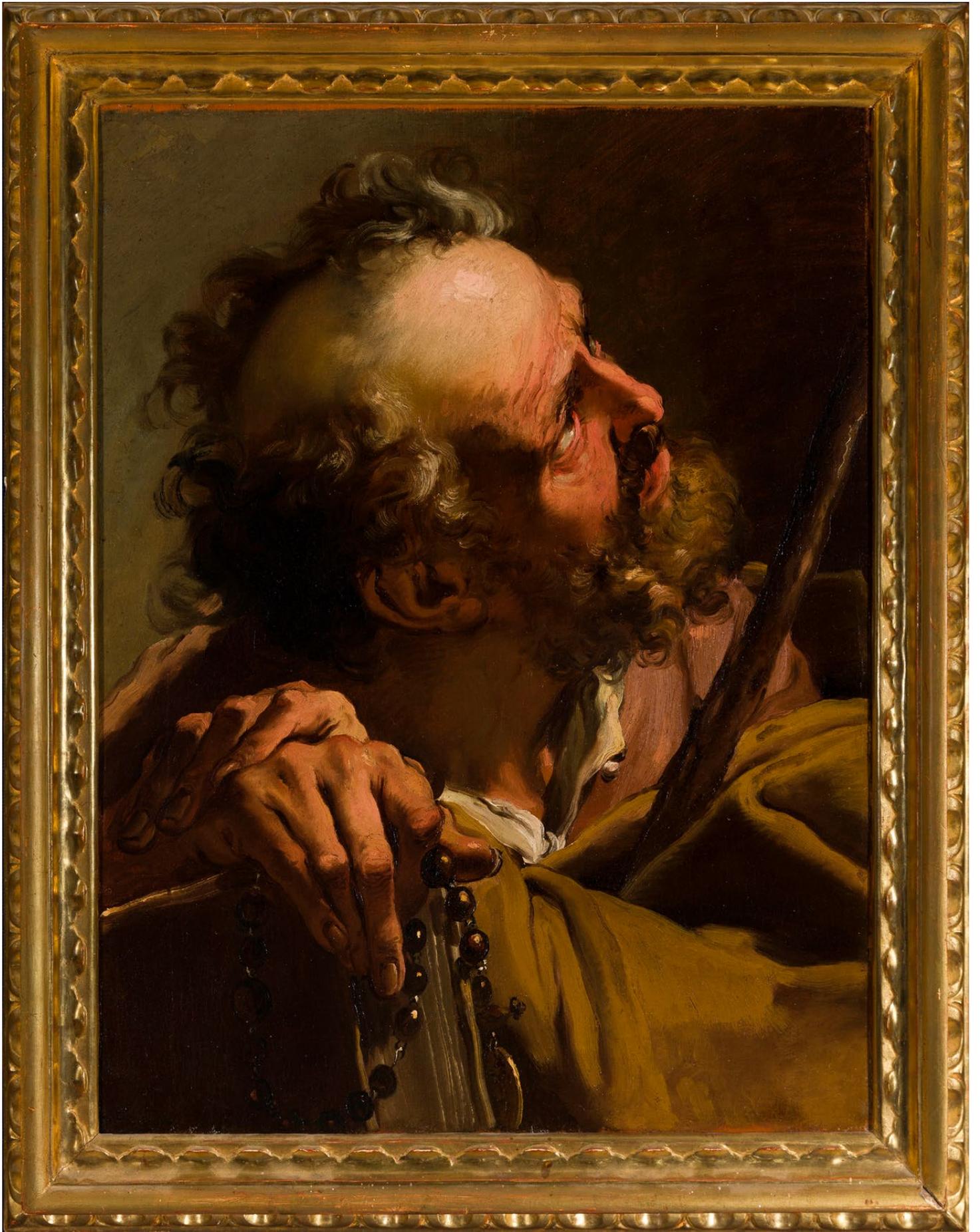


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Gaetano Gandolfi

**Bust of an Old Man
with a Rosary**







Gaetano Gandolfi
 (S. Matteo della Decima,
 Bologna 1734 – Bologna 1782)

*Bust of an Old Man
 with a Rosary*

Oil on canvas; 56,2 x 45,3 cm
 Bibliography: unpublished

The successful composition of this painting, dazzling in its handling of colour which, despite the dominant shades of brown and the cool pink of the flesh and tunic, vibrates in the gleam of its brushwork and its skilfully measured use of *chiaroscuro*, allows us to assign it to the hand of the Bolognese painter Gaetano Gandolfi, one of the most highly appreciated Italian painters of his day – the second half of the 18th century – on the vast stage of art not only in Europe but in distant Russia and in the even more distant Americas¹.

1. D. Biagi Maino, *Talento di famiglia. La pittura di Ubaldo, Gaetano e Mauro Gandolfi*, in *Da Bononia a Bologna. 189 a. C. / 2011. Percorsi di eccellenza nell'arte bolognese*, Turin, Allemandi 2012, pp. 297 et seq.

Gaetano was the last heir to the great tradition of the Bolognese school of painting that had had such an impact on European art through the work of the Carracci family and their followers. Fully conscious of this fact, he proved capable of upholding its splendour until the very last years of the *ancien régime* thanks to his immense talent and to his ability to interact with what other Italian – particularly Venetian and Roman – schools and northern European schools were producing, combining tradition with the innovations of his most sophisticated contemporaries. Extremely learned and endowed with a prodigious memory that allowed him to hark back to a broad variety of mo-



I. Gaetano Gandolfi, *Bust of an Old Man with a Rosary*, Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie

dels which he had approached through his study of painting, including in the course of his limited yet crucial travels in Italy, France and England, and of the countless prints in Bologna's refined

collections, Gaetano also benefited from familiarity with the art of his brother Ubaldo, who was slightly older than him and equally skilled in producing intriguing character studies.



This painting hung until now alongside the *Bust of an Old Man Leaning on a Staff* discussed here and everything points to the two pictures having been painted almost in competition with one another, because it is obvious that both portray the same model, an elderly, bearded man who posed for the elder Gandolfi on more than one occasion. In both

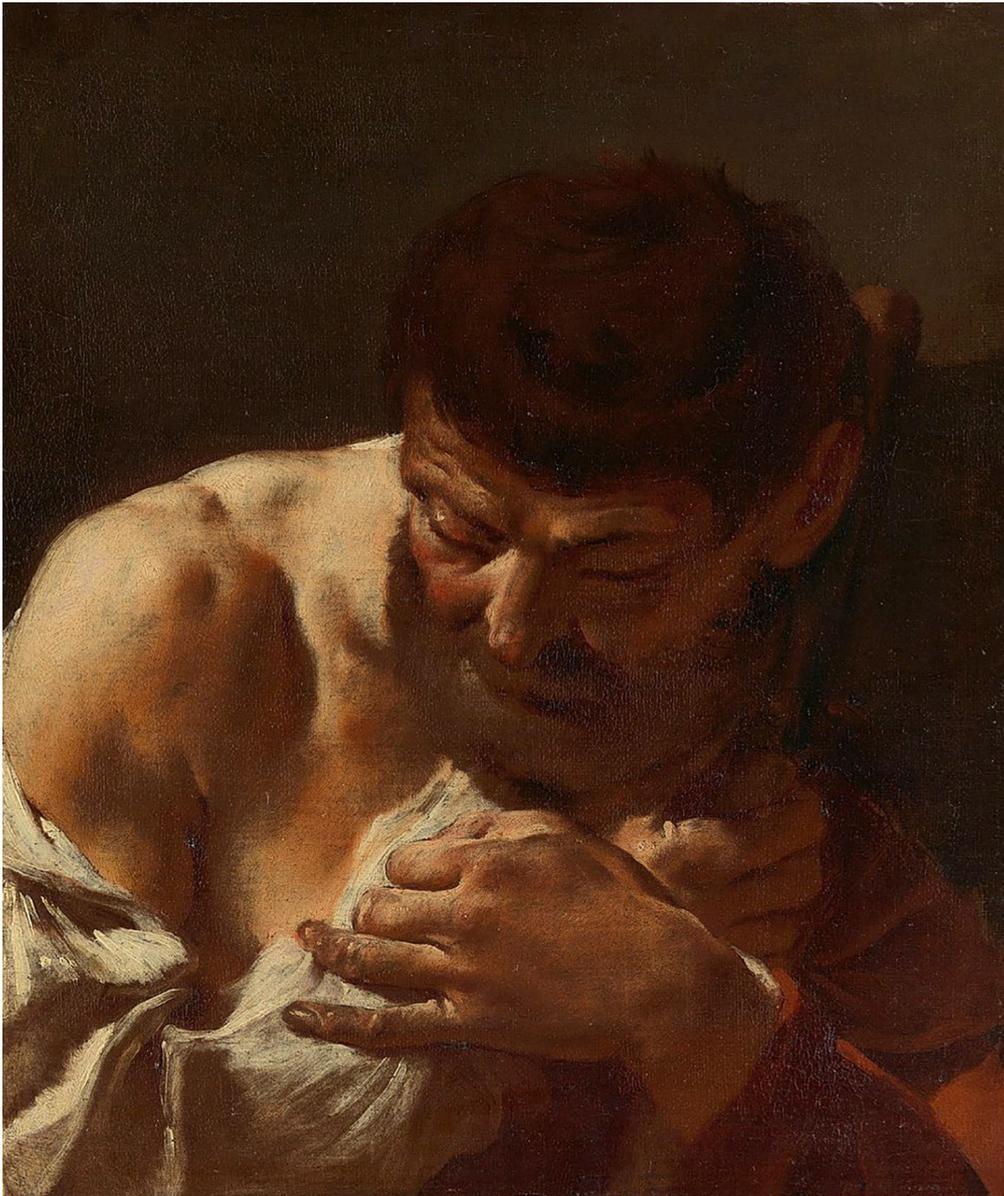
pictures he is portrayed in a three-quarter pose, almost in profile, facing right in one and left in the other in such a way as to allow us the better to grasp the features of both brothers' styles, which were subtly different in terms of their handling of sentiment and in their draughtsmanship.

The work also replicates – or is replicated in



2. Gaetano Gandolfi, *Bust of an Old Man with a Rosary*, engraving





3. Giovanni Battista Piazzetta, *Bust of a Man (Saint Matthias?)*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

– a celebrated painting of the same subject² that has been hanging in the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart since 1978 (fig. 1), which is of the same size and only differs from this study in a few subtle details. Gaetano, who was equally skilled with the burin, also engraved this image in the *Foglio contenente sette stampe* (Folio containing seven prints) that includes some of his finest engravings (fig. 2)³. It seems likely that one of the two paintings – this one and the one in Stuttgart, both of them unquestionably autograph as we can tell from the superb quality of the brushwork – was commissioned by a patron

who may have been dazzled by the quality of the engraving but above all by the pose of this intense “portrait” of an old man whose precedent may be found in much Bolognese and also Venetian work (Piazzetta; fig. 3) but into which the great Gandolfi’s subtle style breathes true life.

Donatella Biagi Maino

2. Cfr. D. Biagi Maino, *Gaetano Gandolfi*, Turin, Allemandi 1995, p. 372.

3. Reproduced and commented on in D. Biagi Maino, initialled entry in “Idea Prima”. *Disegni e modelli preparatori, pittura di tocco dal '500 al '700*, catalogue ed. D. Biagi Maino, A. M. Matteucci Armandi and A. Ottani Cavina, Bologna, Savelli, 1996, pp. 112-114.



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