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**A VENETIAN ECCLESIASTIC:  
A SCULPTURE BY GIOVANNI  
BONAZZA FROM THE NATIONAL  
GALLERY OF ART IN WASHINGTON**

One of the sculptures exhibited in the tenth hall on the ground floor in the western wing of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC is a marble bust entitled *A Venetian Ecclesiastic* (Fig. 1). Made from Carrara marble, it portrays a middle-aged man clad in a mantle, under which the lavish creases of a priest's rochet can be seen.<sup>1</sup> In 1976 the bust was exhibited at The Heim Gallery in London, namely at the tenth annual exhibition entitled "Italian Paintings and Sculptures of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries". Two years later the London gallery sold the bust to the National Gallery of Art in Washington. Already at the 1976 exhibition, *A Venetian Ecclesiastic* was attributed to Giusto Le Court (Ypres, 1627 – Venice, 1679) and dated to the third quarter of the seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, a more detailed analysis included in the documentation of the sculpture's sale to the Washington gallery states that among the oeuvre of this Flemish sculptor, the bust shows most analogies with the statue of San Lorenzo Giustiniani on the high altar of the church of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice.<sup>3</sup> Since Le Court's *San*

<sup>1</sup> The dimensions of the bust are 75.5 x 64.1 x 32.7 cm.

<sup>2</sup> For the 1976 exhibition and data about the sales and attribution cf. *Italian Paintings and Sculptures of the 17th and 18th Centuries [10th Annual Summer Exhibition]* (London, The Heim Gallery), London 1976, no. 28; *Sculpture: An Illustrated Catalogue* (Washington DC, National Gallery of Art), Washington 1994, p. 130; [http://www.nga.gov/fcgi-bin/tinfo\\_f?object=56663](http://www.nga.gov/fcgi-bin/tinfo_f?object=56663).

<sup>3</sup> "Bust of an Ecclesiastic, Marble, H. 74 cm (without stand). This bust, in contrast to that of Doge Giovanni Pesaro (see no. 27 in Heim Gallery catalogue of Summer Exhibition 1976) shows Le Court's style in its full maturity. It has all the flickering vitality of surface and attention to expressing the tactile quality of flesh and various materials characteristic of Le Court. One can aptly apply to it Nicola Ivanoff's words about the Madonna on the high altar of the Salute in Venice: 'The marble seems entirely to have lost its natural hardness, turning in the folds from reflections of silk into a material that is soft, malleable, effervescent – one might almost say foamy' (cf. Nicola IVANOFF, Monsù Giusto ed altri collaboratori del Longhena, *Arte Veneta*, II, 1948, p. 118.). The present bust



1. Giovanni Bonazza, *A Venetian Ecclesiastic*, National Gallery of Art, Washington



2. Giovanni Bonazza, *A Venetian Ecclesiastic*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, detail



3. Giovanni Bonazza, *Monument to Pope Alexander VIII*, Duomo, Treviso, detail



4. Giovanni Bonazza, *Dogaressa Elisabetta Querini Valier*, *Monument to Doge Silvestro Valier*, Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice, detail

*Lorenzo Giustiniani* dates from the period between 1670 and 1674, the bust was also believed to date from the same time. In a study of Giusto Le Court and his Venetian oeuvre, Andrea Bacchi mentions the bust and identifies it as the sculptor's work from around 1670.<sup>4</sup>

Despite all this, *A Venetian Ecclesiastic* shows clear and unambiguous analogies with the works of Le Court's pupil Giovanni Bonazza (Venice, 1654 – Padua, 1736). The early decades of Bonazza's activity are still insufficiently explored and the catalogue of his oeuvre from that time is still not precise.<sup>5</sup> His stylistic development can be clearly followed only from 1689 onwards, when the large funerary monument of Gerolamo Garzoni on the inner façade of the Venetian church of the Frari was made and over the last decade of the Seicento.<sup>6</sup> In his study of the sculptor, Semenzato identifies two basic sources of Bonazza's inspiration: Giusto Le Court and Filippo Parodi.<sup>7</sup> The bust displays signs of having been inspired by similar works of Giusto Le Court, such as the bust of Francesco Moro in the church of San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti and the bust of Giovanni Maria Grattarol in the church of San Canciano, but the style of chiselling and particularly the psychological traits of those portrayed are markedly different.<sup>8</sup> Le Court's portraits exude an inner restlessness and a solemn austerity, captured in excellently balanced, rounded and compact facial contours, whereas Bonazza's figures are characterised by refined and less tense faces that often border on irony additionally accentuated with soft and meticulously finished marble surfaces. The face of the bust

indeed displays the closest affinity not with any of Le Court's tomb portraits, but with the statue of S. Lorenzo Giustiniani upon the same altar, which would date it to the early 1670s."

<sup>4</sup> Andrea BACCHI, "Le cose più belle e principali nelle chiese di Venezia sono opere sue": Giusto Le Court a Santa Maria delle Salute (e altrove), *Nuovi Studi*, XI/12, 2006, p. 154.

<sup>5</sup> For a short biography and a catalogue cf. Matej KLEMENČIČ, Giovanni Bonazza, *La scultura a Venezia dal Sansovino a Canova* (edd. Andrea BACCHI, Susanna ZANUSO), Milan 2000, pp. 702–704.

<sup>6</sup> Camilo SEMENZATO, *La scultura veneta del seicento e del settecento*, Venezia 1966, p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> Camilo SEMENZATO, Giovanni Bonazza, *Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte*, II, 1959, pp. 283–314.

<sup>8</sup> Andrea BACCHI, Giusto Le Court, *La scultura a Venezia...* 2000, cit. n. 5, p. 743.



5. Marble frame for the painting of Pietro Negri, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice



6. Giusto Le Court, Cherub's head, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice



7. Giusto Le Court, Cherub's head, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice



8. Giusto Le Court, Cherub's head, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice

in question resembles the physiognomy of the marble sculpture of Pope Alexander VIII chiselled by Bonazza in the choir of the Treviso cathedral between 1690 and 1695 (Figs. 2, 3).<sup>9</sup> The facial tissue of both figures, soft as dough, as well as accentuated eyes with bags and visibly raised, caricature-like arches of the eyebrows are formed in a similar way. A very similar artistic approach can be traced in the marble sculpture of Dogressa Elisabetta Querini Valier, which the sculptor created for the funerary monument of Doge Silvestro Valier between 1702 and 1708 in the Venetian church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo (Fig. 4).<sup>10</sup> Unlike in the Treviso monument, which was sculpted a decade earlier, the lightness and a certain summary quality of the details of the physiognomy and paraments of Pope Alexander VIII is replaced with an even more refined and detailed presentation of the facial features, hair, jewellery and clothes. A reason for these changes could be Giovanni Bonazza's collaboration with Filippo Parodi (Genoa, 1630–1702) during the decoration of the Capella delle Reliquie in the

<sup>9</sup> KLEMENČIĆ 2000, cit. n. 5, p. 702.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 703.



9. Giusto Le Court, Cherub's head, Holy Cross altar,  
Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice



10. Giusto Le Court, Cherub's head, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice

Basilica del Santo in Padua. Parodi's stay in Venice and Padua during the last two decades of the Seicento introduced a certain vivacity, serenity, scenery and innovation that the master adopted during his previous stay in Rome and his collaboration with the sculptors from Bernini's circle there.<sup>11</sup> Parodi's virtuoso and rapid stone-working and his propensity for masterfully chiselled details and luminously finished marble surfaces are clearly reflected in the art of Giovanni Bonazza. In the bust in question this can be detected in the dynamic contrast between the meticulously polished pleats of the mantle and the rich, thick and shallow, unpolished folds of the rochet.

In the first two decades of the eighteenth century, Bonazza created a series of reliefs featuring busts of famous individuals, philosophers, mythological heroes, saints or genre motifs that were very popular with collectors, but were better known as *Teste di carattere*.<sup>12</sup> In these he displayed all his imagination and art, depicting various psychological states and specific physiognomies, in which a multitude of precise details only accentuates the caricature quality of the figures, which borders on the grotesque. Prominent among them are two large marble reliefs that in profile depict King Attila and Ezzelino da Romano and are kept at the Civic Museum in Padua.<sup>13</sup> Although the bust in question is of a different character, the execution of its details reveals great similarity with the heads of the two tyrants from the Civic Museum in Padua, which were most probably created in the first decade of the eighteenth century.

A more reliable dating of the Washington bust is made difficult by the fact that the portrayed ecclesiastic and the original provenance and context of the work are unknown. But considering the stylistic analysis and the explicit quality of the work, the bust could be chronologically placed in the highly prolific and successful period of the first decade of the eighteenth century, when Giovanni Bonazza,

<sup>11</sup> SEMENZATO 1966, cit. n. 6, pp. 29–31.

<sup>12</sup> Simone GUERRIERO, *Le alterne fortune dei marmi: busti teste di carattere e altre "sculture moderne" nelle collezioni veneziane tra Sei e Settecento, La scultura veneta del seicento e del settecento. Nuovi studi* (ed. Giuseppe Pavanello), Venice 2002, pp. 88–97.

<sup>13</sup> Simone GUERRIERO, *Testa di Attila, Testa di Ezzelino da Romano, Dal Medioevo al Canova, Sculture dei Musei Civici di Padova dal Trecento all'Ottocento* (edd. Davide Banzato, Franca Pellegrini, Monica De Vincenti), Padua 2000, pp. 163–166, cat. 90, 91.

having settled down in Padua, gained a great reputation and created some of his most prominent works.

Returning in order to Giovanni Bonazza's teacher Giusto Le Court, in order to show the differences between the two sculptors, the "Fiammingo" can be attributed the sculptural decoration of the large marble frame for the painting of Pietro Negri in the Venetian church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (Fig. 5). The frame of the painting consists of a richly profiled black marble wreath with large sculpted cherub heads in the middle of all four sides and in the corners (Figs. 6, 7). The heads exceed the life size. The faces of the eight cherubs in Carrara marble are flanked with volutes pressing with their weight the angel wings (Fig. 8). The year 1670 and an inscription mentioning the donor, Prior Agostino Maffei of Verona, are engraved below the cherub head in the middle of the bottom side of the frame. Maffei was responsible for having this frame made and the commission of the large canvass depicting the saints of the Franciscan Order, including the donor's portrait. Early writers, such as Pietro Antonio Pacifico, Domenico Martinelli and Giannantonio Moschini discussed this donation almost exclusively in connection with the painting of Pietro Negri.<sup>14</sup> Only Giambattista Soravia made a fleeting remark about the frame with eight angel heads.<sup>15</sup> Considering the quality of the execution and the stylistic analogy with most of the sculptor's other similar works, the cherub heads can be added to the catalogue of the works of Giusto Le Court. They evoke the sculptor's works, such as the putti flanking the sculpture of San

<sup>14</sup> Pietro Antonio PACIFICO, *Cronica Veneta*, Venezia 1697, pp. 375–376; Domenico MARTINELLI, *Il Ritratto ovvero le cose piu' notabili di Venezia*, Venezia 1705, p. 591; Giannantonio MOSCHINI, *Guida per la Citta di Venezia all' amico delle Belle Arti*, II/I, Venezia 1815, p. 169.

<sup>15</sup> Giambattista SORAVIA, *Le Chiese di Venezia, Chiesa Parrocchiale di S. Maria Gloriosa detta de' Frari*, II, Venezia 1823, pp. 128–129: "Il gran quadro al di sopra circondato da marmorea cornice decorata da otto Angioli (solo teste) offre l'albero della Francescana Famiglia dipinto da Pietro Negri Veneziano l'anno 1670. Nell'alto v' è la Vergine Assunta cui si fa incontro Gesu Bambino corteggiato dagli Angeli; e nell'estremità inferiore il ritratto di Fra Agostino Maffei Veronese che sostenne la spesa dell' opera. ANNO DOMINI M. DCLXX/FR. AVGVSTINVS MAPHEVS VERONEN./ QVI MVLTA BONA FECIT/ TAM IN ECCLESIA QVAM IN HOC/ CONVENTV MAGNE DOMVS F. F. / Nel mezzo dell' iscrizione v' è lo scudo della famiglia Maffei."

Lorenzo Giustiniani in the church of San Pietro di Castello, or the putti carrying the coat-of-arms of Giovanni Pesaro on the Doge's tomb in the Frari, Venice.<sup>16</sup> Le Court transformed the traditional iconographic motif with the sweet boyish physiognomy of cherubs into giant heroic heads of colossal dimensions that resemble his allegoric figures. It is sufficient to remember the melancholic face of the remember figure of *Justice* from the monument to Alvise Mocenigo in the Venetian church of San Lazzaro dei Mendicoli or the agitated head of Lo Studio on the tomb of Doge Giovanni Pesaro mentioned earlier and the bust of Sybil from Villa Pisani in Stra.<sup>17</sup> The cherubs also resemble those on the altar of the Holy Cross from 1672 (Figs. 9, 10), again in the Frari, although they are more expressive because of the iconography of Christ's death. The same altar, above the crucifix, features a cherub head with an identical motif of wings pressed between two volutes like in the relevant marble frame.

Le Court's cherubs from the Frari, particularly the one above the donor's inscription from 1670, may have served as a model for a similar motif adopted by the master's most consistent pupil, Enrico Merengo. This is evident in two cherub heads carved by Merengo under the lateral sculptures of angels on the altar of the Holy Family in the Venetian church of Santa Maria di Nazareth at the end of the Seicento.<sup>18</sup>

The new additions to the catalogues of Giovanni Bonazza and his teacher Giusto Le Court show a mutual connection between these two protagonists of Venetian sculpture. Naturally, there are also clear differences that followed the development and changes in the Venetian sculpture from the 1670s to the first decade of the Settecento. The monumentality and power visible in the cherub heads in the Frari are transformed in the Washington bust into a softer, subtler and more caricature-like expression, heralding new trends and ideas in the sculptural works of the Serenissima.

<sup>16</sup> BACCHI 2000, cit. n. 8, p. 742.

<sup>17</sup> Simone GUERRIERO, „Di tua Virtù che infonde spirito a i sassi“. Per la prima attività veneziana di Giusto Le Court, *Arte Veneta*, LV, 1999 [2001], pp. 49–71.

<sup>18</sup> For sculptures on the altar of the Holy Family cf. Rudolf BREUNIG, *Enrico Meyring 1628–1723. Ein Bildhauer aus Westfalen in Venedig*, Rheine 1997, pp. 173–183.

## GIOVANNI BONAZZA: DOPRSJE BENEŠKEGA DUHOVNIKA IZ NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART V WASHINGTONU

V National Gallery of Art v Washingtonu hranjeni marmorni doprsni kip *Beneškega duhovnika* je bil doslej pripisan Giustu Le Courtu in okvirno datiran okoli leta 1670, a ga lahko zaradi slogovnih analogij z deli kiparja Giovannijsa Bonazze (Benetke, 1654 – Padova, 1736) prepoznamo kot njegovo lastnoročno delo. Doprsje v Washingtonu kaže podobnosti v obdelavi marmorja in načinu obravnave volumna, pa tudi fiziognomske skladnosti, npr. z rahlo karikiranim izrazom kipa papeža Aleksandra VIII. v prezbiteriju katedrale v Trevisu, izklesanim med letoma 1690 in 1695, ali s kipom *dogaressa* Elisabette Querini Valier z nagrobnega spomenika doža Silvestra Valierja, ki je nastal med letoma 1702 in 1708 v beneški cerkvi Santi Giovanni e Paolo.

Ker je obravnava površine zelo minuciozna, mehka in sijajna ter blizu Bonazzovim delom iz prvega desetletja osemnajstega stoletja, kot so *Teste di carattere* v Musei Civici v Padovi, bi naše doprsje verjetno lahko datirali v to obdobje.

Bonazzovemu učitelju Giustu Le Courtu (Ypres, 1627 – Benetke, 1679) se pripisuje osem monumentalnih marmornih glav kerubinov, ki so nastale leta 1670 kot okras okvirja iz črnega marmorja za velikansko oljno sliko Pietra Negrija v beneški cerkvi Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari. Deške obraze kerubov je tu Le Court spremenil v orjaške in herojske glave kolosalnih dimenzij, ki so blizu njegovim alegoričnim likom, kot je *Pravica* na spomeniku Alviseju Mocenigu v beneški cerkvi San Lazzaro dei Mendicoli ali vznemirjene glave *Lo Studio* na grobnici doža Giovannijsa Pesara v Frarih.

V članku predstavljene atribucije kažejo tesno povezanost Giovannijsa Bonazze in njegovega učitelja Giusta Le Courta, vendar z jasno orisanimi razlikami, ki so nastale kot posledica razvoja in sprememb v beneškem kiparstvu med sedemdesetimi leti sedemnajstega in prvim desetletjem osemnajstega stoletja.

### Slikovno gradivo:

1. Giovanni Bonazza, *Doprsje beneškega duhovnika*, National Gallery of Art, Washington
2. Giovanni Bonazza, *Doprsje beneškega duhovnika*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, detajl
3. Giovanni Bonazza, *Spomenik papežu Aleksandru VIII.*, Duomo, Treviso, detajl
4. Giovanni Bonazza, *Dogaressa Elisabetta Querini Valier*, Spomenik dožu Silvestru Valierju, Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Benetke, detajl
5. Giusto Le Court, *Glava kerubina*, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Benetke
6. Giusto Le Court, *Pravica*, Spomenik Alviseju Mocenigu, San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti, Benetke, detajl
7. Giusto Le Court, *Glava kerubina*, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Benetke
8. Giusto Le Court, Glava kerubina, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Benetke
9. Giusto Le Court, Glava kerubina, Oltar sv. Kriæa, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Benetke
10. Giusto Le Court, Glava kerubina, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Benetke