

MELCHIORRE
CAFÀ

Maltese Genius of the Roman Baroque

EDITED BY
KEITH SCIBERRAS



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Editorial Note

Works by or attributed to Melchiorre Cafà do not include the artist's name in the respective captions. All captions are in English. Due to the nature of this book some pictures are repeated in different essays. The colour plates are of the Maltese works. Bibliography is updated to January 2005.

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Cafà's conclusion

Louise Rice

The thesis broadsheet of Giovanni Francesco Rota, commissioned on the occasion of his philosophy defense at the Dominican college attached to S. Maria sopra Minerva in Rome, is from an iconographic standpoint the most elaborate and ambitious invention that Melchiorre Cafà ever devised (Fig. 167). It is an imposing engraving over three-quarters of a meter high and with its arcane subject matter and its striking pictorial illusionism it demands of us a concentrated reading that takes into account the richness of its visual language.¹

The event for which the broadsheet was commissioned took place in March 1663. Given the size and complexity of the composition, it is likely that the two engravers who collaborated on the project – Jean Couvay and Jean Girardin, both Parisians based in Rome at the time – took several months to prepare the copper plates. Presumably, therefore, Cafà produced the drawing from which they worked sometime in the previous year. How he came by the commission we do not know, but the artist clearly had important connections within the Dominican order and these

may have played a part. His brother Giuseppe was a Dominican friar and it was probably through this fraternal channel that Melchiorre came by a whole series of important commissions for Dominican clients.² The year before, in 1661, he carved the wooden Madonna of the Rosary for the church of S. Domenico in Rabat; and later, two of his most important works were done for Dominican churches, namely, the St Rose for the Dominican church in Lima (1665) and the high altarpiece for S. Caterina a Magnanapoli in Rome (1667). In this connection it is also worth mentioning another print designed by Cafà, engraved by Albert Clouet in 1666, which represents the Madonna and Child with St Dominic along with Rose and three other Dominican candidates for sainthood, all of them with Peruvian connections; the print was commissioned by the Dominican friar Antonio Gonzalez, who was in Rome to promote the beatification of Rose (Fig. 168).³ The fact that the thesis broadsheet was made for a defense at the Dominican college fits perfectly, therefore, into the emerging picture we are forming of a far-flung network of



Fig. 167

Dominican patronage, to which Cafà, through his family connections, had privileged access.

Giovanni Francesco Rota, or Ruota, the young nobleman who commissioned Cafà's broadsheet, was born in Cremona in 1643, the son of Cipriano Rota and Lucia Feramoli.⁴ His father sent him first to Bologna to study grammar and rhetoric at the Accademia del Porto, a boarding school for aristocratic boys, and then to Rome to continue his studies in philosophy and theology. Although Rota publicly defended philosophical theses at the Dominican college of S. Tommaso d'Aquino at S. Maria sopra Minerva, he was not himself a Dominican and was almost certainly not enrolled there but at one of the city's other educational institutions, such as the Collegio Romano.⁵ We know from his thesis broadsheet that he based his defense on the philosophical writings of Thomas Aquinas, but whether he was granted the exceptional privilege of defending at the Dominican college because of his special interest in Aquinas, or whether, on the contrary, he concentrated on Aquinas because he knew that he would be defending at the Dominican college, remains unclear. After his defense, he completed his education at the Sapienza, where he earned a law degree in 1665. He then took holy orders and entered the prelature. Clearly a man of considerable ability and energy, he went on to a successful career in the middle ranks of the Roman Curia, holding a succession of important secretarial and administrative posts. He served as a referendary of the two signatures, and beginning in 1670 as an abbreviator *de parcu maiori*, a position he held for the rest of his life, eventually becoming dean. Meanwhile he was appointed governor of Faenza in 1673, then of Rieti (1675), Sabina (1677), Norcia (1678), Sanseverino Marche (1689),



Fig. 168

Città di Castello (1689), Benevento (1692), Fano (1693), and Iesi (1697). Throughout these years he maintained a keen interest in science and literature and corresponded from his provincial posts with like-minded friends in Rome. His particular passion was astronomy but he was also a poet and was admired by his contemporaries for his ability to couch scientific findings in poetic language. He frequented the circle of Queen Christina of Sweden and was an active presence in Rome's literary academies, first as a member and secretary of the Accademia degl'Infecondi, later as an Arcadian who went by the starry pseudonym Astreo Chelidorio.⁶ His literary output included plays and poems in Latin and Italian, as well as volumes of "philosophical, mathematical, and astronomical observations," unpublished at the time of his death and now lost.⁷ He

Fig. 168. Albert Clouet after Melchiorre Cafà, *Madonna and Child with five Peruvian candidates for sainthood*, 1666

On opposite page:

Fig. 167. Jean Couvay and Jean Girardin after Melchiorre Cafà, *Thesis broadsheet of Giovanni Francesco Rota*, for his defense at the Collegio di S. Tommaso d'Aquino at S. Maria sopra Minerva, 1663



Fig. 169

Fig. 169. Jean Couvay and Jean Girardin after Melchiorre Cafà, *Thesis broadsheet of Giovanni Francesco Rota*, for his defense at the Collegio di S. Tommaso d'Aquino at S. Maria sopra Minerva, 1663. Detail

died of apoplexy in 1706 at the age of 63 and was buried in S. Carlo al Corso, the church of the Lombards in Rome.⁸

Rota, who was twenty at the time of his defense, dedicated his conclusions to the Genoese cardinal Lorenzo Raggi (1615-87). The choice of dedicatee, like the choice of artist, suggests a network of Dominican connections at work behind the scenes. Raggi was associated with the Dominicans through his involvement with one of the most famous monuments in their church, the memorial to Maria Raggi by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, executed between 1647 and 1653.⁹ Maria Raggi was a distant relative of the cardinal's. One of those Catholic-Reformation matrons revered for their extreme piety, she was born in 1552, married at the age of twelve, and the mother of four and a widow by the time she was eighteen; she then moved to Rome and became a

Dominican tertiary at a house for women attached to S. Maria sopra Minerva, where she lived a life of exemplary virtue and died in 1600.¹⁰ Efforts to have her beatified as a first step toward canonization began immediately after her death. The Dominicans saw obvious benefits to advancing one of their own; and the Raggi clan, eager to have a saint in the family, did what they could to promote her cause. Thus the decision to commission Bernini's memorial and to erect it in the Dominican church where Maria Raggi had worshiped and was buried resulted from a shared agendum linking her order and her family. The money to pay for the monument was left by Lorenzo's uncle, Cardinal Ottaviano Raggi. But Lorenzo was his uncle's executor and was responsible along with Ottaviano's brother Tommaso for overseeing the execution of the monument; his name and coat of arms appear prominently in the inscription. Apart from the Maria Raggi monument, there is other evidence of the cardinal's close ties to the Dominican order. He regularly employed Dominicans as his spiritual advisors.¹¹ He also served as cardinal protector of the Confraternity of the Most Holy Name of Christ, a lay organization founded by a Dominican friar and based at the church of S. Maria sopra Minerva.¹² Curiously, the confraternity's chapel (third on the right of the nave), which had been assigned to it by Pope Pius IV with a dedication to the Holy Name of God, was taken away from it at some point in the mid-1660s and rededicated to Blessed Rose of Lima; the person in charge of the chapel's redecoration was none other than Fra Antonio Gonzalez, who commissioned Cafà's engraving of the Madonna and Child with Saints in 1666 and who must also have been intimately involved in the commission for the statue of St Rose.¹³ Although these circumstances may be

entirely coincidental, they illustrate just how interconnected were the circles of artists and patrons in the Dominican orbit in these years.

After this brief introduction to the major players who had a role in the creation of Cafà's broadsheet, let us turn now to the object itself. Thesis broadsheets, or "conclusions" as they were often called for lack of a more exact term, were commissioned by students on the festive occasion of their public academic defense.¹⁴ They were distributed to the members of the audience at the outset of the event and served both as a program enabling those present to follow the progress of the disputation and as a memento once it was over. They usually consisted of three basic parts: an image of some kind, often heraldic in character; a dedicatory text; and the conclusions themselves, in other words, the theses that the student was prepared to elaborate and defend in response to objections posed by his examiners. The conclusions might be philosophical, theological, legal, or medical, depending on the student's course of studies. The earliest thesis broadsheets were predominantly textual; the image was relatively small and confined to the top of the page. Over the course of the seventeenth century, however, there was a steady shift in emphasis. The image grew in size and importance relative to the text and eventually swallowed it up altogether. The text remained an essential element, naturally, but was increasingly embedded into the narrative framework of the image. Cafà's broadsheet represents an extreme illustration of this evolutionary process. The image takes up the entire sheet. The dedicatory text is inscribed on a fictive marble tablet on which putti hang garlands of laurel, and as for the conclusions, the academic substance of the defense, they are boiled down

and condensed into a single statement that covers but in no way spells out the philosophical topics to be debated (Fig. 169). Chiseled onto the statue base, the text reads simply:

CONCLUSION. That whatever St Thomas taught concerning Logic, Universal Natural Philosophy, and Metaphysics is true.¹⁵

Such brevity is unprecedented. Normally, thesis broadsheets list a series of specific topics; there may be twenty, fifty, or even a hundred or more conclusions arranged in two or three columns or incorporated into the design in some other way. Here, instead, a single conclusion embracing all of Thomist philosophy obviates the need for any others. It is a cunning device, for it implies the exceptional brilliance of the student, ready to defend any and every aspect of Aquinas's philosophical writings, while at the same time it liberates the artist from the necessity of accommodating a cumbersome list of multiple conclusions within his pictorial invention. The effectiveness of Cafà's design, with its broadsheet-within-a-broadsheet construction, depends to a large extent on this radical reduction of its disputational content down to a single all-encompassing conclusion.

Cafà's composition both is and represents a thesis broadsheet. In other words, the design of the actual broadsheet centers on a fictive broadsheet, rendered illusionistically as though held aloft by a cluster of putti and by winged figures personifying Fame and Glory, the whole airborne formation superimposed over a distant landscape, which is itself enclosed within an illusionistic frame that surrounds the entire design. One of the engravers signs his name at the foot of the inner broadsheet, while the other adds his in the lower right corner of the



Fig. 170



Fig. 171

outer broadsheet, thus enhancing the effect of layered realities.¹⁶

It is the inner, or fictive, broadsheet that is, of course, the essential part of the composition, the rest functioning primarily as an elaborate framing device. Here, in the upper left hand corner, the great Dominican theologian St Thomas Aquinas is seated on clouds with a book (perhaps the *Summa theologiae*, or his main philosophical text the *Summa contra gentiles*) open at his side. From the sun on his breast, which is his identifying attribute, emanate two sharply defined beams of light. One is directed down toward a statue of a semi-nude youth standing on a tall pedestal in the open courtyard below. The other is directed up and strikes the constellation Leo in the zodiacal band in the upper half of the composition. From there the beam is deflected downward at a right angle so that it too sheds light on the statue. Two putti directly below St Thomas hold a banderole inscribed with the phrase: “The Aquinine sun illuminates both by this lion and by this ray.” At the angle

of the convergence of the two beams, near the head of the statue, a second inscription reads: “by both rays” (Fig. 170).

Many things are going on at once in this complex triangulation of light. To begin with, a putto holds a cardinal’s hat over the constellation Leo and thereby transfigures the celestial lion into the coat of arms of the dedicatee, Cardinal Raggi. The Raggi heraldry consists of a diagonal band superimposed over a lion rampant (Fig. 171). In Cafà’s print, the ray of light shooting out from Thomas’s sun becomes the diagonal band, Leo becomes the lion, and the two together form an iconography in equal measure hagiographic and astrological in honor of the sponsor.¹⁷ Nor does the compliment end there. The ray of light alludes not only to Raggi’s heraldry but also to his name, since in Italian “raggio” means “ray.” The pun works best in Italian. When expressed in Latin, as in the phrase *ab utroque radio* (“by both rays”), the word still evokes the *meaning* of the patron’s name but

Fig. 170. Jean Couvay and Jean Girardin after Melchiorre Cafà, *Thesis broadsheet of Giovanni Francesco Rota*, for his defense at the Collegio di S. Tommaso d’Aquino at S. Maria sopra Minerva, 1663. Detail

Fig. 171. Cornelis Bloemaert after Luigi Primo, *The Raggi coat of arms*, detail of a thesis print for a member of the Raggi family at the Collegio Romano, c. 1640



Fig. 172

Fig. 172. Jean Couvay and Jean Girardin after Melchiorre Cafà, *Thesis broadsheet of Giovanni Francesco Rota*, for his defense at the Collegio di S. Tommaso d'Aquino at S. Maria sopra Minerva, 1663. Detail

is no longer so obviously homophonic. The play on words depends to a certain extent on the viewer automatically, even unconsciously, translating from Latin into Italian as he reads the text.

The beams of light, the “raggi,” are clearly central to Cafà’s narrative. Both shine on the statue, one directly and one indirectly, and as they do the statue appears to respond. He turns toward St Thomas, and with his hand to his breast seems to speak the words inscribed next to his face: “[I am illuminated] by both rays.” Who is represented by this statue and what role does he play in the symbolic trigonometry of the design? The answer lies in the dedicatory text inscribed on the block of stone below St Thomas (Fig. 172). Here Rota addresses his patron:

Your Eminence, my Memnon begs that you bend on him the ray of your favor. Under the Aquinine sun, he has learned to modulate his small voice, [but] dares not [speak] publicly, unless

strengthened by your patronage. If you look on these theses in a kind light, you breathe life in that hope and the very statues will speak of your goodness. Live long, etc. Your most humble and devoted servant, Giovanni Francesco Rota.

The reference is to the famous statue of Memnon at Thebes in Egypt. According to ancient authors, this statue was said to utter strange murmurings, in other words to speak, when touched by the light of the rising sun.¹⁸ It was a legend much loved by seventeenth-century poets and antiquarians, who reveled in its allegorical connotations.¹⁹ Cafà and his iconographic advisers may have been particularly influenced by an earlier thesis print, in which the Memnon story is converted into an allegory of patronage. Commissioned by Guglielmo Dondidi for his philosophy defense at the Collegio Romano in 1623, the print situates the seated statue of Memnon at

Fig. 173. Theodor Krüger after Giovanni Lanfranco, *The statue of Memnon at Thebes*, from the thesis broadsheet of Guglielmo Dondini, for his defense at the Collegio Romano, 1623

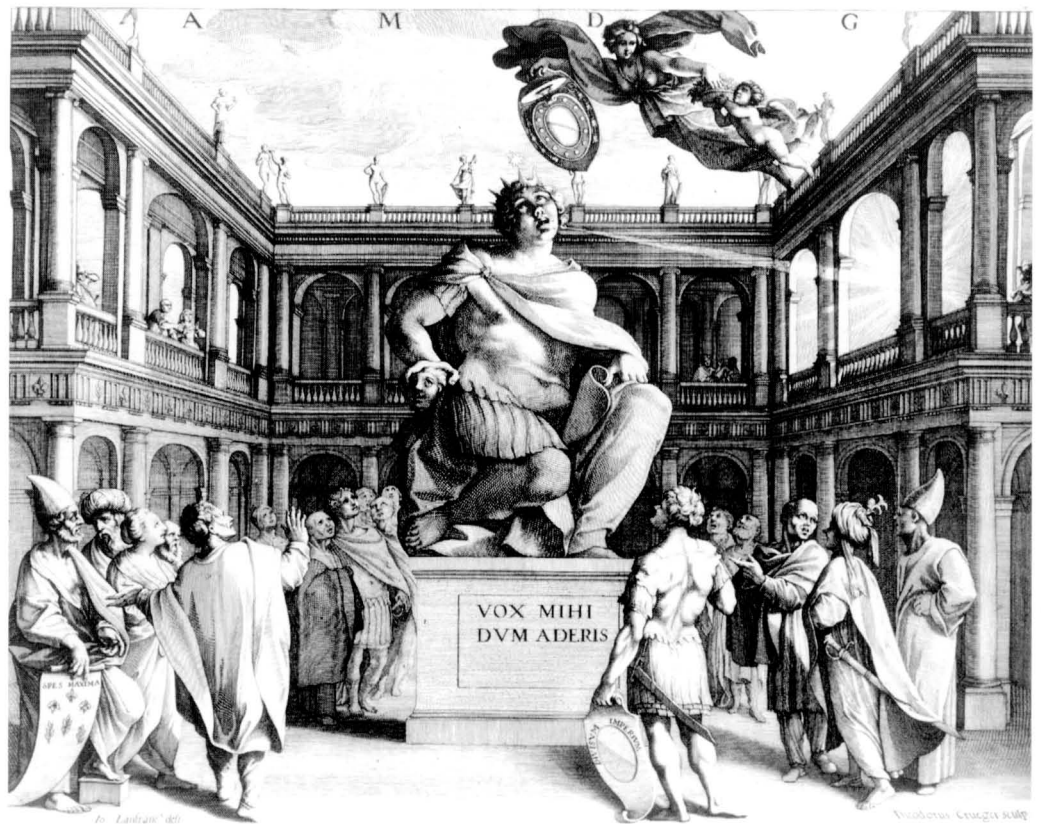


Fig. 173

the center of an arcaded courtyard (Fig. 173). The coat of arms of the dedicatee, Cardinal Marcantonio Gozzadino, is carried overhead by Aurora, the goddess of the dawn. As she scatters petals to signal the start of day, light streaming through the upper arcade triggers the miraculous phenomenon. An inscription on the base of the statue seems to echo the words that the statue itself addresses to the rising sun: *VOX MIHI DVM ADERIS* (“I will have voice while you are present”). The idea expressed in the engraving is reiterated and expanded in the dedicatory preface to the poems published on the occasion of Dondini’s defense: “Like stony Memnon, who uttered sound when touched by the rays of the sun, I too, who for three years have studied Philosophy in silence, having now turned to your light, [...] in the illumination of your presence, I speak.” The statue is thus likened to the student; the sun to the dedicatee, Cardinal Gozzadino; and

the ray of light that elicits the miracle to the beneficent effects of Gozzadino’s patronage.²⁰ Exactly the same conceit is at work in Cafà’s broadsheet, but with enhanced significance. For here the rising sun doubles as the attribute of St Thomas, whose philosophical writings are the basis of Rota’s disputation, while the rays of light that cause the statue (i.e. the student) to speak are the punning embodiment of Cardinal Raggi’s patronage. The iconographic density of the conceit is characteristic of thesis prints generally and we may be sure that Cafà, like other designers of such works, devised his composition in close consultation with a programmatic advisor.

Every bit as striking as these iconographic intricacies are the formal complexities of the composition. Cafà delights in superimposing multiple layers of illusionistic reality. He surrounds the entire sheet with a fictive frame, which seems to exist primarily so that the



Fig. 174

allegorical figures of Fame and Glory can overlap it with their wings, thus suggesting that they emerge from or are flying in front of this enframed space. Cafà does much the same things at S. Caterina a Magnanapoli, where once again it is the wings of the angel in the lower left that overlap the frame. Frames for Cafà, as indeed for many other baroque artists, do less to contain the design than to suggest the impossibility of containment: to imply, in other words, a free-flowing continuum between fictive and real space.

Passing through the frame, our eye encounters an expansive landscape that leads back across a broad body of water toward a distant town (Fig. 174). In this composition where everything is so carefully calculated, the landscape too contributes to the meaning. The town is Cremona, the defendant's birthplace. It is not, admittedly, a very exact portrait but it does feature Cremona's salient landmark, its famous campanile. Called affectionately the *torrazzo* by those who live in its shadow, it is, at 111 meters, the tallest campanile in Italy (Fig. 175). Cafà also alludes to the surrounding topography of Cremona. The city is situated on the northern bank of the Po, just to the east of the confluence of the Po and the Adda rivers (Fig. 176).

Cafà brings the Po into the foreground, dramatizing its great width, while on the left he depicts the fork where the Po and the Adda mingle their waters. The veduta is the link between the outer and the inner broadsheets. Fame and Glory hold up Rota's conclusion like a trophy of academic victory over the city of his birth, suggesting Cremona's joy and pride at the accomplishment of her noble son. The *torrazzo* pointing up at the fictive broadsheet, almost but not quite brushing the curled-up lower edge with its pinnacle, underscores the connection.

The sources for this type of pictorial illusionism are so numerous that we should probably not think of them as sources at all, but examples of a common interest in clever visual game-playing. Designers of thesis prints had a special fondness for this kind of thing. The thesis broadsheet commissioned a quarter of a century earlier by Lorenzo Raggi himself, for his own defense at the Collegio Romano, is a spectacular example of illusionistic engraving (Fig. 177). With its central scene in the form of a fictive tapestry held by living satyrs perched on marble herms, and with ignudi and bronze tondi crammed into the margins, it recalls the witty complexities of Annibale Carracci's

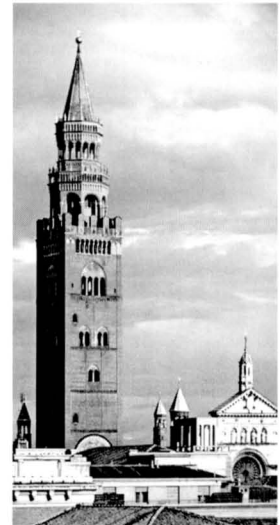


Fig. 175

Fig. 174. Jean Couvay and Jean Girardin after Melchiorre Cafà, *Thesis broadsheet of Giovanni Francesco Rota*, for his defense at the Collegio di S. Tommaso d'Aquino at S. Maria sopra Minerva, 1663. Detail

Fig. 175. The *torrazzo* of Cremona



Fig. 176. After Antonio Campi, Map of Cremona and its surroundings, detail, 1595

Fig. 176

Farnese ceiling. Another example, conceptually even closer to Cafà's, is the thesis of Savo de' Conti Marsciano, who defended in law at the Sapienza in 1646 (Fig. 178). In it the student's conclusions are inscribed on a fictive broadsheet, *i.e.* a broadsheet within the broadsheet.²¹ But the most immediate precedents are not, in fact, thesis broadsheets, but a pair of commemorative broadsheets featuring the medal of Androcles and the lion, dedicated to Pope Alexander VII and engraved by Giovanni Battista Bonacina in 1659, one after a design by Bernini and the other after a design by Pietro da Cortona (Figs 179-180).²² Both involve the conceit of a broadsheet within a broadsheet. Form and content are conceptually merged; and the invention sets up a self-referential loop in which the work of art and the thing it depicts are one and the same. Cafà seems to have taken elements from both of these engravings. The allegorical figures of Fame and Truth who hold up the fictive broadsheet in Cortona's design are echoed in the comparable figures of Fame and Glory in Cafà's; the putti and the fat branch of Chigi oak in

Bernini's design resemble the putti and laurel branch in Cafà's invention. These similarities are, I think, too striking to be coincidental, especially given the fact that Cafà's composition postdates the Androcles broadsheets by only three years. Nonetheless, however much Cafà's design may be indebted to this earlier pair, in one respect it represents a significant departure. Whereas the fictive broadsheets in Bernini's and Cortona's designs consist primarily of text, the one in Cafà's is largely pictorial and it is this that gives his composition its quirky visual effect. The insertion of a pictorial "broadsheet" into a pictorial composition involves the juxtaposition of contrasting systems of perspective and scale and evokes with dizzying logic an illusion within an illusion.

If others had used the broadsheet-within-a-broadsheet format before him, Cafà turned it to new advantage, exploiting the doubling of the form to celebrate two individuals instead of one. The design of the inner, or fictive, broadsheet could easily stand alone; it is a thesis broadsheet complete in all its parts, and typical of the genre its imagery

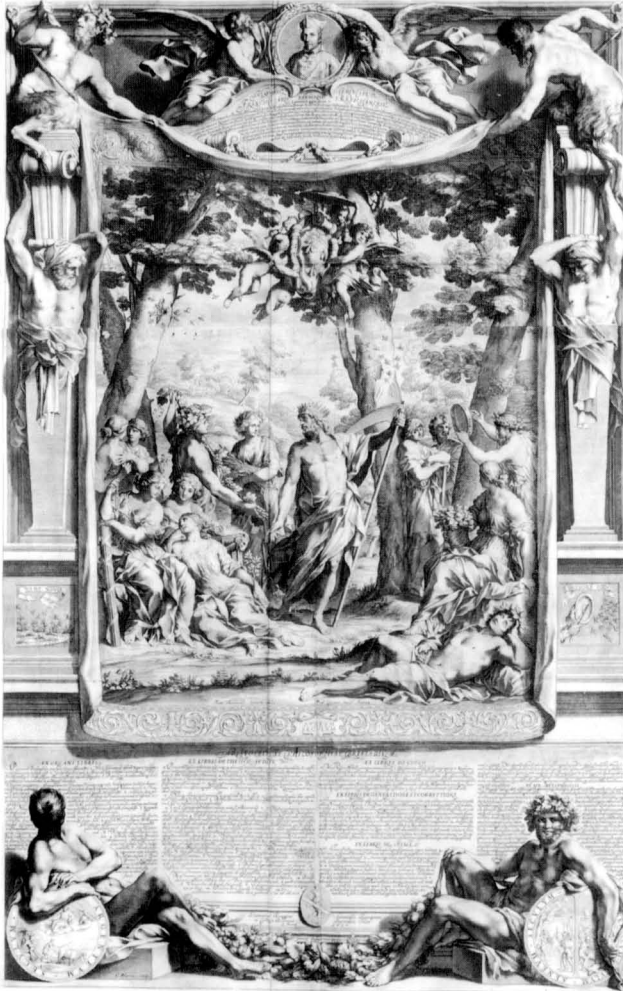


Fig. 177

concentrates on the dedicatee, Cardinal Raggi. The outer or actual broadsheet, with its view of his native Cremona, instead extols the student. Fame and Glory share their gifts between Raggi and Rota, while the branch of laurel alludes to both: to the dedicatee by punningly recalling his given name (*lauro* = *Laurentius*)²³ and to the defendant by evoking the laurels (*laurea*) that are the symbol of academic achievement. Thus, without directly challenging the conventions of the genre, Cafà has found a way to make his thesis broadsheet as much about the student as his sponsor.

In all three of these works by Bernini, Cortona, and Cafà, there is yet another level of artifice to be considered. While most broadsheets

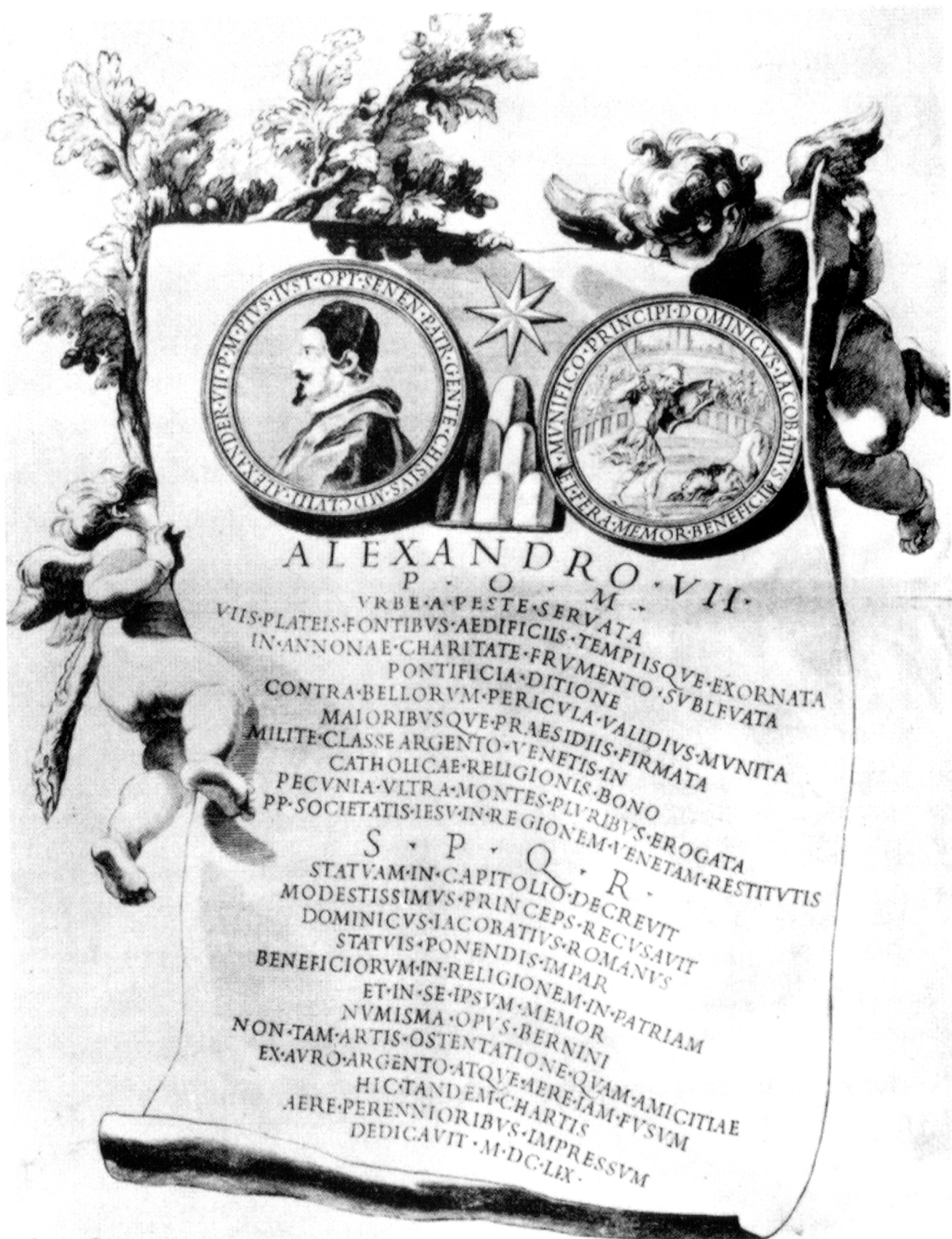


Fig. 178

were printed exclusively on paper, high-end celebratory broadsheets like these tended to be issued not only on paper but also in a luxurious limited edition printed on satin silk. These deluxe copies were reserved for the dedicatee and a very small number of privileged recipients. Since the dedicatee was by definition the prime viewer, one could argue that compositions of this sort were ideally conceived for the medium of shimmering fabric, not of paper at all. We may think of them, then, as silken objects depicting paper objects depicting sculptural objects (the medal in the case of Bernini's and Cortona's designs, the statue in the case of Cafà's). There is a certain irony here. The

Fig. 177. Johann Friedrich Greuter after Gian Francesco Romanelli, *Thesis broadsheet of Lorenzo Raggi*, for his defense at the Collegio Romano, 1637

Fig. 178. Johann Friedrich Greuter after Gian Maria Colombi, *Thesis broadsheet of Savo de' Conti Marsciano*, for his defense at the Sapienza, 1646



Opus Equitum Joannis Laurentii Bernini

Joannes Baptista Penasconi fecit

Fig. 179



Fig. 180

Opposite page:
Fig. 179.
Giovanni Battista
Bonacina after
Gianlorenzo
Bernini, *Androcles
and the Lion*, 1659

Fig. 180.
Giovanni Battista
Bonacina
after Pietro
da Cortona,
*Androcles and the
Lion*, 1659

text in both Bernini's and Cortona's broadsheets makes specific reference to the *paper* on which they are printed; in a variant of a common poetic conceit, it suggests that these paper documents will outlast the medal they commemorate, although the medal is issued in the seemingly more durable materials of gold, silver, and bronze. The presence of Fame and Glory in Cafà's design perhaps hints at the same idea. Memory outlasts all else; memory is embodied in words; and words are recorded in ink on paper. The apotheosis of the paper broadsheet depicted in each of these three works signifies the immortalization of the dedicatee's memory.²⁴

In his thesis print for Giovanni Francesco Rota, Cafà revealed his

remarkable pictorial imagination and proved that he was as adept at working in two dimensions as he was in three. At the same time, we can legitimately call this a sculptor's print. It deals, after all, with a sculptural theme. The story of Memnon is not only a metaphor for the student who speaks out in defense of his theses. It is also a legend about a statue of stone that comes to life, a speaking likeness shaped by the artist's skill and warmed by the beneficent generosity of a caring patron. Cafà, as far as we know, never designed another thesis print. In his one venture in this highly specialized and aristocratic genre, he crafted an allegory on the art of sculpture and the power it shares with paper to evoke the illusion of life and project the permanence of memory.

- 24 Azzopardi 1999[i], p.9; Azzopardi 1999[iii] p.18. The document is in the Archives of St Paul's Grotto, Wignacourt Museum, Rabat. In the same year, the document was independently discovered in the Notarial Archives Valletta by Dr Keith Sciberras. It is also discussed *supra* by Sciberras.
- 25 Marulli or Marullo is not a common surname in Malta. The Marriage records of Birgu include the following three names: Paolo Marullo father of Battistina, who got married on 10.2.1575; Dottor Onofrio Marullo married to Isabella on 21.12.1596 and Lorenzo Marullo married to Adriana on 17.07.1604. Information kindly supplied by Dr Simon Mercieca.
- 26 In Xewkija, Gozo, a statue of St Paul was placed in the Parish Square, with an inscription recalling the preaching of St Paul to the people of Malta and Gozo. This statue has recently been transferred to one side of the new Parish Church.
- 27 Erroneous date. It should have been 1607.
- 28 Boisgelin 1805, vol. 1, p.27 as quoted by Freller 1996, p.125.
- 29 Houel 1787, vol. IV, p.110 as quoted by Freller 1996, p.283.

Il Matrimonio mistico e La visione della Rose di Santa Rosa da Lima: Due Rilievi Di Cafà alle Descalzas Reales Di Madrid

- 1 Con la sua consueta generosità, Jennifer Montagu mi inviò nell'estate del 1998 le fotografie di questi due rilievi, che le parevano (a ragione) in qualche relazione con un'opera, riconducibile proprio a Cafà, che la mia tesi di dottorato (della quale ella era correlatrice) documentava nella collezione di Cristina di Svezia. A darne per prima notizia per iscritto è stata (sempre su segnalazione di Montagu) Di Gioia 2002, pp. 180-181. È naturalmente con l'amichevole consenso di queste due studiose – le ringrazio vivamente –, che pubblico le opere in questione. Sono grato a Jennifer Montagu anche per aver voluto leggere questo saggio, migliorandolo con consigli e critiche.
- 2 Oltre alle gravi cadute del materiale dello sfondo, e alla probabile perdita di qualche elemento figurativo – di cui si fa cenno più oltre nel testo –, una buona parte dei perni che fissano le parti metalliche sembra troppo visibile e invadente per essere originale.
- 3 Secondo quanto comunicato da Ana Garcia Sanz, conservatrice del Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales.
- 4 Cfr. Schenone 1992, II, pp. 679-699.
- 5 Uscito a Roma nel 1664.
- 6 Così nell'indirizzo iniziale, con pagine non numerate.
- 7 Leoni 1665, pp. 54-55.
- 8 Una possibilità avvalorata dalle derivazioni di cui parleremo più sotto.
- 9 Leoni 1665, pp. 199-200.
- 10 Cfr. nota 3.
- 11 Il documento (pubblicato da Golzio 1939, p. 302) attesta che l'Artusi venne pagato per «la

- rinettatura, pulitura, cisellatura, indoratura della stola»: dove ci si può chiedere se la specificazione «della stola» riguardi solo la doratura, o voglia limitare a quel particolare settore anche le altre operazioni menzionate. Il fatto che Cafà non chieda un pagamento specifico per sé ma si rimetta alla generosità del committente (il cardinal nipote Flavio Chigi), potrebbe far pensare che egli abbia avuto compiti di direzione e soprintendenza. Montagu 1991, p. 70, sembra propendere per questa interpretazione, mentre M. Butzek 2000, pp. 187-188, pare credere ad un impegno diretto dello scultore.
- 12 Cfr. Montagu 1984, pp. 50-61.
- 13 Significativamente il disegno viennese reca un *incidatur* firmato proprio da quel padre Leoni grazie al cui libretto su Santa Rosa abbiamo decifrato precisamente l'iconografia dei nostri rilievi (cfr. Montagu 1984).
- 14 Per un'ampia e competente discussione del problema, cfr. Di Gioia 2002, pp. 176-181.
- 15 Golzio 1935, pp. 64-74 (70, 72).
- 16 Cfr. Montagu 1996, pp. 5 e sgg.
- 17 Pubblicato in Montanari 1998, p. 370.
- 18 *Ibidem*.
- 19 Cfr. Di Gioia 2002, pp. 165-181.
- 20 Cfr. Montagu 1985, II, p. 342. Jennifer Montagu ritiene che questi oggetti fossero meno rari di quel che si potrebbe pensare, e mi ricorda, tra gli altri esemplari analoghi, l'*Estasi della Maddalena* algardiana con il fondo di lapislazzulo, sempre a Madrid (cfr. *ivi*, p. 365) e la superba *Agonia nell'orto degli Ulivi* di Giovanni Giardini (cfr. Montagu 1996, p. 129).
- 21 Cfr. Montanari 1997, pp. 187-264 (241). Per il coinvolgimento di Baldi nell'iconografia di Santa Rosa vedi M. G. Bernardini 1997, pp. 213-222, e la bibliografia lì citata.
- 22 Cfr., per tutto questo, Montanari 1997, e Montanari 1998, p. 370.

Cafà's conclusion

- 1 Paris, Bibl. Nat., Ed. 35a, I, pp. 122-23; 76 x 59.7 cms. On the banderole below St. Thomas: *Hocque LEONE, hoc et RADIO SOL fulget AQUINAS*. To the left of the statue's head: *Ab utroque RADIO*. On the tablet below St. Thomas: *Eminentissimo et Reverendissimo Principi S.R.E. Cardinali LAVRENTIO RAGGIO. RADIVM tui favoris, Eminentissime, orat sibi meus MEMNON. Sub AQUINATE SOLE aliquantulum vocem didicit inflectere, propalam non audet, nisi tuo firmetur praesidio. Si benigno has THESESES lumine aspexeris, in illam spem animabis, et tuam vel ipsae STATVAE loquentur benignitatem. Vive diu, et Christiano Orbi, tibi, et Vale. Eminentissimae et Reverendissimae D. T. Humillimus et Divinctus Ser[fo]us] Io[ann]es] Franc[iscus] Rota*. On the statue base: *CONCLVSIO. Quicquid docet D. Thomas in Logica, Universa Philosophia naturali, et Metaphysica verum est. Disputabitur publice in Conventu S. Mariae super MINERVAM a Io. Francisco Roti Cremonen. sub assist. Fr. Antony Franc. Fracassi Ord. Pred. Romae anno 1663 Men. Martij*. At the lower edge of the fictive broadsheet: *Io. Girardin Parisinus Sculp.*; in the lower left corner: *Melchior Cafà Meliten. In. et Delin.*; in the lower right corner: *I. Cowway Parisinus sculp.*

- The print was first published by Jennifer Montagu (Montagu 1984) and her thorough and insightful analysis is the point of departure for the present essay. See also Meyer 1990, pp. 110-11.
- 2 Born in 1628, ten years before Melchiorre, Giuseppe Cafà entered the Dominican order and was ordained priest in 1652, at the age of twenty-four. He was assigned to the Dominican monastery in Rabat, Malta, in 1656, but in 1674 he requested and was granted permission to transfer his affiliation to the monastery of S. Maria la Grande in Catania, where he may have been resident since 1665. He seems to have been active primarily as a teacher within the monastic schools. There is no evidence that he traveled to Rome, but even if he did not he or his superiors may well have written to their Roman brethren to recommend Melchiorre. For Giuseppe's career, see Forte 1977, pp. 316-17. Additional information was kindly provided to me by Father John Azzopardi.
 - 3 Montagu 1984, pp. 52-54.
 - 4 On Rota, see Ciampini 1691, pp. xlvii-xlviii; Crescimbeni 1720, II, pp. 116-21; Arisi 1741, III, pp. 146-48.
 - 5 The College of S. Tommaso was established for the education of Dominican friars; the very fragmentary records of the college contain no evidence that lay students were ever admitted there. See, for example, in the archives at S. Maria sopra Minerva (Archivio Domenicano Minervitano), II. 32, "Liber Collegii Sancti Thomae de Aquino Ordinis Praedicatorum ... Romae in Conventu Sanctae Mariae super Minervam ad religionis Dominicanae decus & incrementum erecti," which lists matriculants for the period 1603-1646.
 - 6 Rota joined the Accademia degli Arcadi in 1691, nine months after it was founded.
 - 7 Crescimbeni 1720, II, pp. 120.
 - 8 His tombstone, which can still be seen in the church, reads as follows: D.O.M./ IOANNES FRANCISCVS/ E MARCHION. DE ROTA CREMONEN./ VTR. SIG. REFER. ABBR. PARC. MAIOR DEC./ DOCTRINA MORIBVS PIETATE/ OMNIBVS CARVS/ AMICORUM AMANTISSIMVS/ ERGA PAVPERES MVNIFICENTISSIMVS/ ASTRORVM CONTEMPLATIONE CLARVS/ HVIVS ECCLESIAE PRIMVS CUSTOS/ AD AETHEREA CONVOLAVIT/ DIE XXIII MARTII AN. SAL./ MDCCVI/ AETATIS SVAE ANN. LXIII. See Forcella 1874, V, p. 356; *Le lapidi di San Carlo al Corso*, 2002, pp. 88-89.
 - 9 Bernstock 1980; *Gian Lorenzo Bernini: regista del barocco*, 1999, pp. 349-50.
 - 10 Taurisano 1958.
 - 11 After his personal theologian and confessor, the Dominican friar Antonio Santacroce, was elevated to the cardinalate, Raggi retained other Dominicans—Fra Ambrogio Viola, Fra Giovanni Battista Lanci—to fill these roles. See AGOP, XIV.17 bis, p. 47; Fontana 1670, p. 367; Fontana, 1675, p. 655.
 - 12 Gigli 1994, II, p. 577. The confraternity was founded by the Spanish Dominican Fra Diego di Vittoria "per isradicare [...] l'esecrabile abuso delle bestemmie, e dei spergiuri." See Piazza 1698, part I, pp. 496-98.
 - 13 *Ibid.*; Gonzalez de Acuña 1670, pp. 102-3. The re-decoration of the chapel was completed between 1668, the year of Rose's beatification, and 1671, the year of her canonization; the altarpiece and other paintings are by Lazzaro Baldi.
 - 14 For the defense in Seicento Rome, see Rice 1998; 1999; 2004.
 - 15 See note 1 above.
 - 16 The position of the signatures would seem to imply that Girardin engraved the inner broadsheet and Couvay the outer one. Since the print is pulled from two copper plates, with the seam horizontally bisecting both the real and the fictive broadsheets, the engravers could have worked contemporaneously, one on the upper half, the other on the lower half, switching plates half way through the process. Speed was presumably an issue, and this arrangement would have allowed them to complete the broadsheet in half the time it would have taken a single engraver. Another possibility, suggested by Montagu (1984, pp. 50-51), is that Girardin did most of the work, while Couvay engraved only the landscape, presumably after the rest was completed.
 - 17 Inventors of thesis prints often used the imagery of the constellations to allude to the dedicatee's heraldry. Cafà's invention is particularly close to the 1653 thesis broadsheet of Giovanni Calvo, designed by Alessandro Algardi and engraved by Francois de Poilly, which features a similar zodiacal band arching into the upper part of the composition, with one putto holding a cardinal's hat over Leo and another thrusting a quince branch into the lion's paw, to form the coat of arms of Cardinal Federigo Sforza (see Montagu 1984, p. 59, n. 7; Montagu 1985, I, p. 180, and II, fig. 180; Lothe 1994, pp. 208-09). The presence of a river god in the lower left corner of both compositions further supports the idea that Cafà was familiar with Algardi's work, as does the fact that both broadsheets feature Egyptian themes. Montagu points out that Raggi was born on 15 July 1615, under the sign of Leo (Montagu 1984, p. 59, n. 4).
 - 18 Strabo, *Geographia* 17.1, 46; Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 36.58; Tacitus, *Annales* 2.61.
 - 19 See Oechslein 2002, pp. 7-47.
 - 20 The print is discussed in more detail in Rice 1999, pp. 160-63.
 - 21 Savo de' Conti Marsciano was "president" of the Accademia degli Intrecciati, an elite student association based at the Sapienza, and the print, which features the emblem and motto of the academy, was reused multiple times by subsequent holders of the office.
 - 22 Varriano 1985-86, pp. 54-55; *L'Ariccia del Bernini*, 1998, pp. 102-106; *Gian Lorenzo Bernini: regista del barocco*, 1999, pp. 414-15.
 - 23 Montagu 1984, p. 59, n. 4.
 - 24 Sadly, although paper is indeed a resilient medium, silk is not. It tends to react with ink and crumble. No copies on silk of any of these three broadsheets have survived.
- ### Sulle cere di Melchiorre Cafà a Malta
- 1 Il bassorilievo in collezione privata è oggi montato all'interno di una cornice a sportello.