

walterpadovani.

Antonio Raggi

**Bishop Saint Triumphs
Over the Devil**





walterpadovani.







(Vico Morcote, Ticino, 1624
- Rome, 1686)

*A Bishop Saint
Triumphs Over
the Devil, 1655-65 ca.*

Marble; height 110 cm

Inscribed low down on the left-hand side of the base: A. Raggi

PROVENANCE: Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco collection.

Maestro Giuseppe Ducrot has done an integration on the Saint's right hand, sculpting the thumb and the last two phalanges of the index and middle fingers.

While the rediscovery of this remarkable marble statue which once belonged to Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, the great scholar and expert on Rome in the age of Bernini, is an outstanding event in the context of the study of Roman sculpture in the Baroque era, it is nevertheless an object that raises many questions, starting with the subject depicted. It is no easy matter to identify the saint with his hand raised in blessing, his only identifying features a book in his right hand and a devilish figure chained at his feet. His youth – his beardless features speak of a young man of about twenty or thirty – makes it unlikely that he can be identified with St. Augustine or St.

Ambrose, who were consecrated bishops at 42 and 34 and died at over 70 and over 50 respectively (in traditional iconography they are almost invariably depicted as old, or at the very least mature, with flowing beards). Yet the statue's imposing presence suggests that we are looking at one of the Doctors of the Church, and the devil at the saint's feet is in line with the traditional iconography of Augustine and Ambrose as the implacable foes of heresy – although in this instance it does not appear possible to identify the figure at the saint's feet, with an animal's tail in place of his legs, with either the personification of Heresy, who is generally depicted as a woman with unkempt hair and flaccid breasts,

or with a generic heretic. Furthermore, Ambrose generally holds a specific attribute, the scourge, in his hand.

Another decidedly puzzling feature of this statue is its size. Where was such a small marble statue intended for display? On the altar of a church in 17th century Rome, the bishop would have been far too small, nor is it easy to envisage such a statue playing a complementary role in a larger complex. A tomb, for instance, might have been adorned with small allegorical statues – think, for example, of the tombs in the Aldobrandini Chapel in Santa Maria Sopra Minerva – but hardly with the figure of a saint such as the one under discussion here. In that connection, it might be useful to compare our statue with Bartolomeo Cennini's *St. Sebastian*, some 128 cm. high, on the high altar of the small church dedicated to that saint in Boccheggiano, not far

from Massa Marittima. The statue in question was commissioned by an erudite antiquarian called Leonardo Agostini and is dated 1651¹, so it is not too far removed from the period to which (as we shall see below) it seems appropriate that we should date our *Bishop Saint*. Also, it is worth pointing to Giacomo Filippo Parodi's *Flagellation of Christ*, which is 90 cm. high and which is still in the chapel of the Palazzo Reale in Genoa (formerly Palazzo Balbi then Durazzo) where Carlo Giuseppe Ratti saw it.²

1 Astutillo Pellegrini, *Due grandi nomi legati ad un'opera d'arte: Leonardo Agostini e Bartolommeo Cennini*, in "Bollettino della Società Storica Maremmana", 19, 1969, pp. 31–5; Susanna Zanuso, *Bartolomeo Cennini*, in Andrea Bacchi (in conjunction with Susanna Zanuso), ed., *Scultura del '600 a Roma*, Milan 1996, p. 795

2 Luca Leoncini, entry in *La Passione di Cristo secondo Bernini: dipinti e sculture del barocco romano*, catalogue of the exhibition (Palazzo Incontro, Rome) curated by Giovanni Morello; Francesco Petrucci; Claudio Massimo Strinati, Rome 2007, pp. 66–8, cat. 12.

Fig. 1a Filippo Parodi, *Sleeping Christ Child*, Cleveland, The Cleveland Museum of Art



But the feature that strikes the most intriguing and (for us) the most interesting chord is unquestionably the inscription which can be seen low down on the left-hand side of the base (carved from the same block of marble as the statue) and which reads: “A. Raggi”. This is unlikely to be the sculptor’s actual signature. Steven Ostrow recently analysed a fair number of 17th century Roman sculptors’ signatures and the results of his research show that none of the great masters of sculpture in the Baroque era in Rome, from Gian Lorenzo Bernini and Alessandro Algardi to Domenico Guidi and Antonio Raggi himself, ever signed their work.³ Naturally there are exceptions, and special importance attaches to the case of Pierre-Étienne Monnot, who has left us numerous signed marble pieces, but he always signed in Latin, generally in capital letters, and usually on a prominent part of the work. And the *St. Sebastian* in Boccheggiano, for instance, has an inscription on the base which reads: “Statuam marmoream divi Sebastiani Romae exculptam – Leonardus Agostini d.d. anno Iubilei MDCLI – Bartolomeus Cennini Florentinus fecit”.⁴ In the inscription on our statue, on the other hand, the artist’s surname has not been Latinised, it is in small letters, and the name has been abbreviated, in addition to which it is missing the traditional letter ‘F’ for ‘fecit’. Thus Raggi’s name may well have been engraved at a later date by the statue’s owners, who may have kept alive what was possibly only an oral tradition suggesting that it was by him. On the one hand, it seems unlikely that the name of Raggi, a sculptor whose rediscovery in the modern era dates back only to than the 1970s (if we ignore a pioneering article by Antonia Nava Cellini published in 1934), would be used in the absence of information confirming the statue’s attribution beyond all reasonable doubt to “Il Lombardo” (the nickname



Fig. 1b Filippo Parodi, *Sleeping Christ Child*, detail of the inscription. Cleveland, The Cleveland Museum of Art

by which this sculptor of Swiss origin was known in Rome). On the other hand, a stylistic analysis of our *Bishop Saint* bears out the attribution to Raggi. Interestingly, Parodi’s *Flagellation of Christ* in the Palazzo Reale in Genoa bears a similar inscription: “J.F.Parodi”, on its base;⁵ the inscription is identical to that which appears on the lower edge of a *Sleeping Christ Child*, again by Parodi (Fig. 1a, 1b), now in The Cleveland Museum of Art but hailing originally from the Durazzo collection.⁶ These two inscriptions (the second of which is in a truly unusual position) cannot be considered to be signatures in the full sense of the term, but are likely to have been added to the statues by the wife of Giacomo Filippo Parodi’s son, the painter Domenico Parodi. Moreover, the attribution

3 Steven Ostrow, *Sculptors’ Signatures in Baroque Rome: some preliminary observations*, in “Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte”, LXXVII, 2014, p. 520.

4 Pellegrini, *art. cit.*, p. 35.

5 See note 2.

6 Carlo Milano, entry in *Da Tintoretto a Rubens: capolavori della collezione Durazzo*, catalogue of the exhibition (Palazzo Reale, Genoa) curated by Luca Leoncini, Milan 2004, p. 310, cat. 53.

to the sculptor who carved the *Sleeping Christ Child* is confirmed by Ratti, and its authenticity cannot be questioned.⁷ Thus the inscription “A. Raggi” may very well have been added to the *Bishop Saint* by one of the sculptor’s heirs or by one of the statue’s earlier owners.

Raggi, who was born in the Canton Ticino in 1628, soon moved to Rome like so many of his compatriots, and began to work in the city in 1643. He is recorded until 1650 both as working in Algardi’s workshop and as being a member of Bernini’s team working in St. Peter’s, although he unquestionably received his initial training at the hands of Algardi.⁸ In that connection, it is worth looking at his *Martyred Female Saints* carved in stucco for Santa Maria dell’Umiltà (1651–2),⁹ which are very close in style to the work Algardi. Immediately thereafter, Raggi moved firmly under Bernini’s wing, becoming his closest and most loyal assistant from 1652 when, in a famous letter sent to the Este court in Modena, Geminiano Poggi reported that “Il Lombardo” was already the master’s favourite pupil:

[Bernini] names the former [Raggi] the best, for he is young and full of talent and works with great speed: he is taking him for a pupil and says that he uses him in his best commissions, but I felt as he spoke that he would be loath to see him leave Rome, even though he said that if it were a matter of serving Your Highness, he would be more than willing to send him to you, indeed he would have the models of the works made here, supposing that he would work for Sassuolo, which would be akin to loaning him.¹⁰

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ For Raggi’s career and, in particular, for his training and transition from the manner of Algardi to that of Bernini, see most recently Stefano Pierguidi, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini e Antonio Raggi alla cappella Alaleona nei Santi Domenico e Sisto*, in “Nuovi Studi”, XVIII/19, 2013, pp. 181–92, with preceding bibliography.

⁹ Jacopo Curziotti, *Antonio Raggi e le statue di sante martiri in S. Maria dell’Umiltà*, in “Annali della Pontificia Insigne Accademia di Belle Arti e Lettere dei Virtuosi al Pantheon”, V, 2005, p. 269.

¹⁰ *Palazzo Ducale di Sassuolo*, edited by Massimo Pironcini, 1982, p. 165, doc. XXII; Andrea Bacchi, *Sculture e apparati decorativi*, in *Il palazzo di Sassuolo, delizia dei duchi d’este*, edited by Filippo Trevisani, Parma 2005, p. 52.

The *Bishop Saint* under discussion here already betrays the spirit of Bernini in the muted vehemence of the bishop’s attire and in the curve described by the figure of the saint himself, which is striking when one looks at the statue from the left (the side with the inscription). Precisely the handling of the folds in the bishop’s cope echo the masterpieces of Raggi’s mature years, for instance his *Noli Me Tangere* in the Alaleona Chapel in the

Fig. 2 Antonio Raggi upon design by G.B. Bernini, Alexander VII, Siena, Cathedral





Fig. 3 Antonio Raggi, *St. Bernardino of Siena*, Siena, Cathedral, Cappella del Voto.

church of Santi Domenico e Sisto, which has recently been dated to between 1665 and 1674¹¹; but by comparison with the frenetic display of skill achieved by Raggi in the attire of the Magdalen in that group, our *Sainted Bishop* appears to belong to a somewhat earlier phase in the sculptor's career.

11 See the article mentioned in note 8.

In short, it would appear that this magnificent, if small, statue can be dated to the later 1660s, when Raggi was still working continuously on Bernini's commissions (for instance the interior decoration of Santa Maria del Popolo). An extremely stringent comparison may be made with regard to the gesture of hand raised in blessing, which as it does so, also raises the bishop's clothing. In that gesture a specific parallel may be drawn with the same detail in the figure of *Alexander VII* which Raggi carved to a design by Bernini for Siena cathedral in 1661–63 (Fig. 2).¹²

Also the position of our figure's legs mirrors that of the legs in a statue of *St. Bernardino* which "Il Lombardo" carved to a design by his master for the Cappella del Voto, also in Siena cathedral, in those same years (Fig. 3).¹³ So while fully conscious of the fact that the utmost prudence is required when faced with a statue devoid of any kind of documentary evidence and carved by an artist whose stylistic development was significant, albeit consistent and with no major fault lines in the courses of his career, it is possible to suggest with a relative degree of certainty that this *Bishop Saint* be assigned a date close to these works, thus somewhere between 1655 and 1665. Raggi was gradually to move away from the solid plasticity both of this previously unpublished statue and of his *St. Bernardino* in Siena in his more mature and personal sculptures, adopting an elongated, one might almost say "thready", manner which he developed primarily on account of the considerable amount of time that he spent working with stucco, a technique in which he was a master of unparalleled skill.

Andrea Bacchi

12 Monica Butzek, *I monumenti ai papi Alessandro VII, eseguito da Antonio Raggi su modello di Gian Lorenzo Bernini, e Alessandro III di Melchiorre Caffà ed Ercole Ferrata*, in *Le sculture del Duomo di Siena*, edited by Mario Lorenzoni, Cinisello Balsamo (Milan) 2009, pp. 88–91.

13 Alessandro Angelini, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini e i Chigi tra Roma e Siena*, Cinisello Balsamo (Milan) 2008, p. 173; Alessandro Angelini, *La decorazione scultorea della cappella Chigi tra Seicento e Settecento*, in *Le sculture del Duomo di Siena op. cit.*, pp. 77–8.



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

wp.