

Canini Versus Maratti: Two Versions of a Frontispiece

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IN 1952 The Metropolitan Museum of Art bought a drawing which has proved something of a puzzle (Figure 1).¹ Although it bears an old attribution to Franceschini, it was rightly recognized by Nicholas Turner as the work of Giovanni Angelo Canini (Rome, 1617?–66). However, despite the word *ACADEMIA* on the tablet, the drawing's subject and purpose have remained obscure.² It is my intention in this note to identify the former and to put forward a suggestion as to the latter.

The key to the meaning of the image lies in its striking similarity to a print by Guillaume Vallet after Carlo Maratti (Figure 2),³ which, as the inscription on the banderole makes clear, serves as the frontispiece to the *Fasti Senenses*. This book, containing a collection of the lives of the Sienese saints, was published by the Accademia degli Intronati in Siena in 1661 and dedicated to Pope Alexander VII Chigi, a descendant of an old noble Sienese family and himself a member of the Accademia under the name of "il Guadagno."⁴ In fact the book has two frontispieces, that designed by Maratti being the first. The second was designed by Raffaello Vanni, a Sienese artist living in Rome, and was also engraved by Vallet in Rome; this second frontispiece, in obvious reference to the contents of the book, represents Siena, accompanied by her traditional wolf and twins, kneeling before the Virgin, with the Sienese saints thronging the clouds (Figure 3).

It is, however, Maratti's frontispiece that primarily concerns us. It is so close to Canini's drawing that a verbal description would serve almost equally well for both: a young person (definitely female in the Maratti, androgynous but probably male in the Canini), crowned with laurel, is kneeling beside a spear (or

staff) and a cornucopia (or basket) of fruit, and splashing water onto the roots of a gourd plant which twines around an oak tree at the right; against the tree hangs a large gourd with a hole cut in its side and crossed pestles above it, being supported by winged putti (or a putto). In the background figures advance towards and up a mountain with several subsidiary peaks, on the summit of which stands a figure surrounded by a star-shaped radiance (or with a star above its head).

If the second frontispiece refers to the subject of the book, the first refers to the institution publishing it, the Accademia degli Intronati, the emblem of which is a gourd of the type used in Tuscany to store salt and keep it dry, with two crossed pestles and the motto *MELIORA LATENT*. Its meaning depends on the use of the gourd and salt as metaphors for the head and wits

1. Purchased by the Department of Prints in 1952, the drawing was transferred to the Department of Drawings in 1980. Jacob Bean with the assistance of Lawrence Turčić, *15th and 16th Century Italian Drawings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1982) no. 3 of Appendix, "17th Century Italian Drawings Acquired Since 1978," as G. A. Canini, "Allegorical Composition with a Young Man Kneeling Before a Tree," repr. p. 298. Jacob Bean has generously provided unstinting help in the preparation of this article.

2. Nicholas Turner, "Drawings by Giovanni Angelo Canini," *Master Drawings* 16 (1978) pp. 387–396. Turner proposed to see in the object held against the tree by the putto "the Chigi stemma of three *monti* surmounted by a star (rendered as if in soft sculpture)," which would be a somewhat surprising anticipation of Claes Oldenburg. But his conclusion that the drawing "was made for a Chigi-backed academy" turns out to be correct, even if the academy was not, as he supposed, in Rome.

3. The plate mark of the print in the British Library copy of the book measures 23.7 × 17 cm.

4. Siena, Biblioteca Comunale, MS. Y.1.20, p. 25.



1. Giovanni Angelo Canini (1617?-66), *The Impresa of the Accademia degli Intronati*, ca. 1660. Pen and brown ink, brown wash, heightened with white, over black chalk, on brown-washed paper, $9\frac{1}{2} \times 6\frac{5}{8}$ in. (24.0 \times 16.9 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1952, 1980.119



2. Guillaume Vallet (1632–1704), after Carlo Maratti (1625–1713), First frontispiece of *Fasti Senenses*, 1661(?). Engraving, $9\frac{1}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$ in. (23.6 \times 16.0 cm.), trimmed to image line with artists' names below. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 51.501.2657



3. Vallet, after Raffaello Vanni (1587–1673), Second frontispiece of *Fasti Senenses*, ca. 1660. Engraving. Reproduced by permission of The Burke Library of Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York (photo: Lawrence Turčić)

(compare the Italian saying that a gourd without salt is like a head without wits), while the pestles indicate the exercises by which the members of the Academy refine and cultivate their intelligence.⁵ As one could guess even without the inscription *ALIT ARTES* (which looks rather like an afterthought),⁶ the woman is nurturing the vine on which the gourds grow. The laurel wreath on her head, and the spear and cornucopia which she has evidently put down in order to perform her task, indicate that she is to be seen as Virtue, for among the various alternatives that Cesare Ripa gives for the portrayal of such a personification is one of “a woman, dressed in gold, full of majesty, holding in her right hand a spear and in her left a cornucopia full of various fruits . . . ,” and another is to be “crowned with laurel.”⁷

The background of Maratti’s design seems to suggest the difficult path that members of the Academy must traverse, and one of them, apparently seen from

the back, has reached the plateau on the top and stands within the aura of light. The fact that this light is in the form of a star, and shines above a mountain with several subsidiary rises (even if there are more than three of them), is surely to be seen as a reference to the star and three *monti* in two quarters of the Chigi arms, just as the oak tree up which the vine grows must refer to the oak in the other two quarters, indicating the pope to whom the book is dedicated. Perhaps it would not be too fanciful to see the figure who has reached the summit as Alexander VII himself.

Undoubtedly the Canini drawing represents the same subject. There are some differences from Maratti’s design, of which the most interesting is the characterization of the men in the middle ground as a warrior, a scholar with a book, and an artist with a palette; a fourth head is visible behind the scholar, but no body or attributes are to be seen. Other differences, however, may be ultimately more significant. The objects on the ground behind the kneeling figure are less defined than in the Maratti version, the staff having no visible spearhead, and the fruit being contained in something which cannot be identified as a cornucopia; lacking Virtue’s specific attributes and apparently male, this figure has no clear meaning. On the other hand, the figure on the top of the mountain, who, in the Maratti version, has no particular identity, is depicted by Canini as winged, holding a spear in one hand and a wreath in the other, attributes which correspond to those of yet another personification of Virtue described, and illustrated, in Ripa’s *Iconologia*: “a beautiful and graceful young woman, with wings on her shoulders, holding in her right hand a lance and in her left a wreath of laurel, with a sun on her breast.”⁸

5. Michele Maylender, *Storia delle accademie d'Italia* III (Bologna, 1929) p. 366.

6. Joan R. Mertens, curator of Greek and Roman Art in the Metropolitan Museum, has suggested that this inscription may have been intended as a pun. While the Latin “*alit artes*” means “it [or ‘she’] nourishes the arts,” the similar-sounding Greek ἄλς (genitive ἄλός) means the sea, specifically the shallow water near the shore, and also salt; already in classical times the plural ἄλεις was used to refer to the wits, in just the same way as was the salt in the gourd of the Academy’s impresa. Such a Latin/Greek pun would have been altogether in keeping with the erudite wit of a learned academy.

7. *Iconologia di Cesare Ripa perugino* . . . (ed. of Venice, 1645) pp. 671, 672.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 672.

What then was the purpose of this drawing?

The first frontispiece of the *Fasti Senenses* is basically no more than an elaboration of the emblem of the Accademia degli Intronati. Such an image as Canini's might have served equally well for some other publication, or for an independent painting made for the Academy, and even the reference to the Chigi arms might not have been inappropriate, since, in addition to the pope, his two nephews Agostino and Cardinal Flavio Chigi were both members of the Intronati.⁹ But no such book is known, nor is there any record of such a painting.¹⁰ It seems far more likely that Canini's drawing represents an alternative project for the same print, which was subsequently executed according to Maratti's design.

This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that, as has been shown, the two designs can be described in almost the same words. Thus, both drawings could have been produced in response to the same program, which one may suppose was supplied to the artists by the patron who commissioned the print.

Why two drawings should have been made is harder to determine, but a possible explanation emerges from the account books of Cardinal Flavio Chigi. The cardinal took a great personal interest in the *Fasti Senenses*, paying for a copy to be made before publication,¹¹ and for the engraving and printing of at least the first frontispiece, if not also the second. Both Canini and Maratti had already worked for him (as had Raffaello Vanni's brother, Michelangelo), and Canini in particular was something of a protégé; he was employed by the cardinal on a number of other projects before his death in 1666, and was chosen to accompany the cardinal's legation to Paris in 1664, to draw the various sights along the route.¹² If there are no payments recorded to any of the draughtsmen for designing the prints, that is in no way surprising, for such drawings were the kind of thing that an artist would be expected to produce for his patron without a fee, and that he would be happy to do in the hope of obtaining favor and some more significant commission. With both Canini and Maratti, such hopes would have been amply fulfilled.

There are, however, payments for the engravings—in fact, it would seem, too many. The *Registro di mandati* for 1660–61 records three payments for frontispieces to the *Fasti*: the first, on March 3, 1660, was for sixty *scudi* repaid to the abbate Nicolò Piccolomini “for a similar sum he had paid for the plate engraved for the frontispiece of the book entitled *fasti*

senenses”;¹³ the second, of April 6, 1660, was for thirty-five *scudi* paid to Vallet “for having engraved in copper the impresa of the Accademia degli Intronati”;¹⁴ and the third, of December 19, 1661, was for the same sum to be paid to Vallet “for having engraved a frontispiece which will be placed in the book entitled *fasti senenses*.”¹⁵ Finally, Giacomo de Rossi was paid to print 600 plates.¹⁶

This may seem confusing, even allowing for the fact that there are two frontispieces. It is clear that the second payment must refer to the frontispiece that concerns us, representing the impresa of the Academy. I suggest, albeit with some hesitation, that the first payment may have been for the second frontispiece, for this includes on the base behind the figure of Siena a coat of arms surmounted by the crown of a marchese, which I have not succeeded in identifying; evidently this cannot have been a direct Chigi commission, but it is not inconceivable that Flavio

9. Siena, Biblioteca Comunale, MS. Y.1.20, p. 29; Agostino bore the name “il Degnevole,” and Flavio “il Pareggiato.”

10. I am grateful to Professor Paolo Nardi, secretary of the Accademia degli Intronati, who investigated this question on my behalf.

11. A payment to his steward of 13 *scudi*, in repayment of the same sum paid to Jacomo Voccello “per la copiatura di un libro intitolato *fasti senenses* copiato per ordine di Sua Eminenza,” is registered under January 13, 1660, in the cardinal's *Registro di mandati* (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana [BAV], Archivio Chigi, vol. 536; I have expanded the contractions).

12. For the Chigi patronage see Vincenzo Golzio, *Documenti artistici sul seicento nell'archivio Chigi* (Rome, 1939); for Canini's drawings of the legation see Heinrich Brauer, “Giovann Angelo Canini als Landschaftszeichner,” in the unpublished “Festschrift für Walter Friedländer zum 60. Geburtstag” (1933; typescript in the Warburg Institute Library, London).

13. BAV, Archivio Chigi, vol. 536, *mandato* 3218: “Sig.ri Pietro e Filippo Nerli li piacerà pagare al Sig.re Abb.e Nicolò Piccolomini scudi sessanta m.ta quali gli facciamo pagare per suo rimb.o de altrettante pagati per il rame intagliato del frontespizio del libro intit.o *fasti senenses* . . . 3 Marzo 1660.”

14. Ibid., *mandato* 3251: “Detto [Pietro Paolo Nerocci] pagarete à Guglielmo Vallett' Intag.re de rami scudi trentacinque m.ta sono per havere intagliato in rame l'impresa dell'Accademia degl'Intronati di Siena d'ord.e di S.E. . . li 6 Aprile 1660. . . .”

15. Ibid., *mandato* 4054: “Detti [Pietro e Filippo Nerli] li piacerà pag.re à Guglielmo Vallett' Intagliatore di rame scudi trentacinque m.ta per havere intagliato un frontespizio che va posto nel libro intitolato *fasti senenses* fatto per servizio dell'Emin.mo Sig.r Card.e . . . Li 19 Decem.re 1661. . . .” This payment is quoted in Golzio, *Documenti*, p. 354.

16. Ibid., *mandato* 4067: “Detto [Urbano Guidi Disp.re di S.E.] pagarete à Gio: Giacomo Rossi stamp.re scudi quattro e b. [blank] m.ta sono per stampatura, e carta di seicento rami per servizio del libro *fasti senensis* [sic]. . . .”

Chigi was called upon to subsidize what must have been a very costly enterprise.

But why a third payment? The reason for this is made clear in the volume of *Giustificazioni*. While the *giustificazione* of the payment to Nicolò Piccolomini unfortunately adds nothing to the information in the *mandato*,¹⁷ and there is no *giustificazione* for the payment to Vallet of April 1660, that of December 15, 1661, for the second payment to the engraver, explains the absence of any record for the first: "Signor Guglielmo Vallett engraver in copper has made a plate of one *palm* high [22.34 cm.] on the orders of the Most Excellent Patron, which shall be placed in the book called *fasti senenses*, and it is a duplicate [of that] made by himself before April 1660 for which he was paid thirty-five *scudi*, as appears in the *mandato* dated 6 April of the same year: and for the same sum another *mandato* can now be made." Below is the statement: "The said Signor Guglielmo Vallett, engraver, has made the said plate newly engraved as stated above and it was ordered by me on the command of Monsignor Nini our Maggiordomo this day and year as above," signed "Nicolò Simonelli Guardarobba."¹⁸

Taken literally, this would mean that Vallet had engraved an exact duplicate, and one would have to assume that the first plate was badly scratched, broken, or otherwise rendered unserviceable.¹⁹ One might, however, posit another interpretation, that the first design was considered unsatisfactory and that a second was engraved to take its place, similar but different. In that case, one might assume that the first version followed Canini's drawing, now in the Metropolitan Museum.

Whether this interpretation is correct or not, it would be easy to find fault with Canini's design. It has already been pointed out that the kneeling figure is iconographically imprecise, for the sex appears to be male, there is no evidence that the fruit is contained in a cornucopia, and the staff could as well be the handle of a hoe or some other agricultural implement as that of a spear; yet the figure does wear a wreath, presumably of laurel, making it at least plausible that he was intended to personify Virtue. If that is so, then Canini has committed the solecism of representing the same personification in two quite different forms and places in the same drawing.

Nor can it be disputed that the design is dull, particularly when it is compared to Maratti's. Canini's kneeling figure is in strict profile, so that he does not relate to the background as does Maratti's woman in

three-quarter view, and, despite the prominence given to the three men on the left, the central position of the kneeling youth and his fixed gaze towards the putto (not even the *impresa*) place too much emphasis on the right side of the sheet. Maratti's woman concentrates her attention on the root of the vine she is watering, and our gaze follows hers, rises up the tree with the vine, and swings across to the putti with the much larger and centrally placed emblem, whence one foot of the putto below the gourd leads on to the figure in the center of the light.

In the comparative clarity of its iconography and the sureness of its composition Maratti's design would inevitably have defeated any competition from Canini.²⁰ It makes no effective difference whether this competition took place before the plate was engraved, or whether, as I have suggested, the deficiencies of Canini's design were recognized only after it had been engraved and when, either spontaneously or on commission, Maratti offered his alternative version. In either case, the existence of Canini's drawing sheds a fascinating light on the care and attention that went into the preparation of such frontispieces, the cutthroat rivalry between artists in seventeenth-century Rome, and the difference between a competent minor artist and one of the major figures of the latter half of the century.

17. BAV, Archivio Chigi, vol. 475, unpaginated.

18. BAV, Archivio Chigi, vol. 476, unpaginated: "Il Sig.r Guglielmo Vallett intagl.re de rami ha fatto un rame alto un palmo d'ord.e dell'Em.mo Pröne qu.le v`a posto nel libro, detto, *fasti senenses*, et è un duplicato fatto dal med.mo sin' d'aprile 1660 qu.le gli è stato pag.to scudi trentacinq. m.ta; come appare dal mand.to speditoline sotto li 6 Aprile del sud.o anno: et per l'istessa somma hora gli si puol far un altro mand.to. Et in fede etc. q.sto di 15 Dec.re 1661.

"Il sud.to S.r Guglielmo Vallett Intag.re hà rifatto il sud.o rame intag.to di nuovo come sopra, e gli fù ordinato da me per comando di mons.re Ill.mo Nini nfo magg.re Duomo questo di sud.o et anno.

Nic. Simonelli Guard.ba

"Comp.e farete un mand.to de scudi trentacinq. m.ta per il prezzo del sud.o rame intagliato: Dalle stanze in M.te Cav.o Li 19 Dec.re 1661

Iacomo Nini"

19. I have not had the opportunity to make a careful comparison of the engravings used in the various copies of this book. Certainly the print in the Metropolitan Museum is from the same plate as that in the book in the British Library, and if the former has a scratch on it to the left of the star, this appears to be something that could easily have been burnished out, without necessitating the high cost of reengraving the whole plate.

20. A drawing after the Maratti-Vallet print is in the cathedral collection in Malta, inv. no. 35.