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Back cover illustration: Iranian (Safavid dynasty, 1501–1722). Tile panel with reclining woman and man in European costume, ca. 1600–1610. Painted and polychrome-glazed stonepaste. See fig. 1, p. 63.

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### ABBREVIATIONS

MMA The Metropolitan Museum of Art  
MMAB *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*  
MMJ *Metropolitan Museum Journal*

*Height precedes width and then depth in dimensions cited.*

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**JOURNAL** 54

# Passignano, Not Leoni: A New Attribution for *A Cardinal's Procession*

**IAN KENNEDY**

In 2012, The Metropolitan Museum of Art received by donation a small painting on copper.<sup>1</sup> The work, titled *A Cardinal's Procession*, has been attributed to the Roman portrait painter and draftsman Ottavio Leoni and shows a cardinal moving in procession toward the left under a columned portico (fig. 1). He is preceded by seven male figures, one of whom carries a mace, a symbol of authority and high office. Behind him is a group of five men, one of whom supports the train of his cassock. In the background can be seen an ancient ruined tower, a road leading to a distant gateway, and a church with a dome over the crossing. All the visible faces are clearly portraits and meant to be recognized. The Museum has considered the Leoni attribution tentative, and indeed it seems difficult to sustain.<sup>2</sup> In 2013, Eric Schleier pointed

*fig. 1* Attributed to Domenico Cresti, Il Passignano (Italian, 1559–1638). *A Cardinal's Procession*, ca. 1624–26. Oil on copper, 15½ × 14¾ in. (39.4 × 37.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Damon Mezzacappa, 2012 (2012.543)





fig. 2 Domenico Cresti, Il Passignano. *Michelangelo Showing a Model of Saint Peter's to Pope Pius IV*, 1618. Oil on canvas, 93 × 55½ in. (236 × 141 cm). Casa Buonarroti, Florence

out that the painting bears little resemblance to other small subject pictures on copper by this artist, citing the monogrammed *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (ca. 1615–20) in the collection of the Banca Popolare dell' Emilia Romagna (now BPER Banca) and the signed *Suzanna and the Elders* in the Detroit Institute of Arts (ca. 1619–23).<sup>3</sup> Both works show the influence of Adam Elsheimer and Carlo Saraceni and have warm Venetian colors, different from the sober palette of the *Procession*.

Also, the portrait heads in the Museum's picture are more delicately painted than those in Leoni's larger signed ecclesiastical portraits on canvas, with their masklike faces, and those in smaller male portraits on copper attributed to him, where the handling is broader.<sup>4</sup>

A new attribution is here proposed to the Tusco-Roman painter Domenico Cresti, Il Passignano (1559–1638). Early in his career, in the later 1570s, Passignano assisted Federico Zuccaro in the completion of Vasari's frescoes in the cupola of Florence Cathedral. During his time in Venice, from 1582 to 1589, Passignano moved away from Zuccaro's dry and artificial late Mannerism toward a more measured and classicizing style influenced by Venetian painting, with its rich and somber colors and shading, and later by the new realism of the Carracci and Caravaggio. At the root of Passignano's art was a faithful adherence to the artistic demands of the Counter-Reformation for spiritual sincerity and clear narrative, no doubt a reason for his high reputation in Rome, where he was based from 1602 to 1616, as well as in Florence.

The work by Passignano most compatible with the *Procession* is a late one: *Michelangelo Showing a Model of Saint Peter's to Pope Pius IV* (1618), part of a cycle of large paintings on canvas commissioned by Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger for the Casa Buonarroti in Florence to celebrate the life of his great-uncle (fig. 2). The Casa Buonarroti picture, perhaps influenced by recent work of Jacopo Chimenti da Empoli, is more typically Tuscan than Venetian in its documentary clarity, even lighting, and clear, local colors.<sup>5</sup> It shows notable affinities with the *Procession* in the steadily observed and carefully juxtaposed portrait heads, soft shading in the faces, slow rhythms, and dignified poses.<sup>6</sup> A telling argument for the Passignano attribution is the bald, bearded figure in the group at right. The man's large cranium and facial features resemble Passignano's portrait by Justus Sustermans in the Pitti Palace from about 1630 (fig. 3).<sup>7</sup> In the *Procession* his beard is more closely trimmed, and he looks a little younger and more alert, suggesting a date in the mid-1620s. The small size of the *Procession* is unusual for Passignano, and he has successfully exploited the copper support to create an effect of great delicacy and refinement. In this respect, he may have been guided by the example of the small landscapes with ruins executed by the Dutchman Cornelis van Poelenburgh (1594–1667) in Florence and Rome about 1620–25. Their polished Northern detail, pearly gray atmosphere, and evocative architectural remains share commonalities with the *Procession*, especially the background.<sup>8</sup>

fig. 3 Justus Sustermans (Flemish, 1597–1681). *Portrait of Passignano*, ca. 1630. Oil on canvas, 24¾ × 18¼ in. (62 × 46 cm). Pitti Palace, Florence (inv. 1890 no. 565)



A date in the mid-1620s may also be inferred from the identity of the cardinal, who can perhaps be identified with Cardinal Francesco Sforza (1562–1624) on the evidence of a drawing of 1621 by Ottavio Leoni (fig. 4).<sup>9</sup> Both painting and drawing show a thin, narrow face with the point of the chin accentuated by the trim of the beard. In the drawing, the mustache is dark, but in the *Procession* it has whitened, and the sitter looks somewhat older and more fragile. On the basis of his appearance, the painting can perhaps be assigned a date near the time of his death in 1624.

Sforza was the great-nephew of the Farnese Pope Paul III (r. 1534–49). His mother was Caterina de' Nobili, great-niece of Pope Julius III (r. 1550–55), and his father Count Sforza of Santa Fiora in southern Tuscany. Francesco was born in Parma, where he received a military education under his relative Duke Ottavio Farnese, followed by service in Flanders under the renowned military commander Alessandro Farnese. This part of his career may be reflected in the grisaille reliefs of Saint Paul and his conversion on the upper left and lower right of the painting, as Saint Paul also began his career as an army officer. In 1581, Sforza was betrothed to Virginia de' Medici (1568–1615), illegitimate daughter of Cosimo I, but the engagement was canceled when he decided to enter the Church. His sister Costanza had married Giacomo Boncompagni, the illegitimate son of Pope Gregory XIII (r. 1572–85), so Sforza advanced

fig. 4 Ottavio Leoni (Italian, 1578–1630). *Cardinal Francesco Sforza*, 1621. Black and red chalk with white heightening on blue paper, 9 × 6 in. (22.8 × 15.2 cm). Downing College, University of Cambridge

rapidly, receiving the cardinal's hat in 1584. With his former ties to the Medici, he remained a leading supporter of the Medici faction in the Roman curia. From 1591 to 1597, he deployed his military skills as papal legate in the Romagna, suppressing brigands. At his death, he was bishop of Frascati and vice dean of the College of Cardinals. His posthumous inventory includes a group of portraits and paintings attributed to well-known artists but does not mention the Metropolitan Museum's picture.

Many of the other figures in the *Procession* can be plausibly identified and reflect Sforza's Florentine and Roman connections, even if no specific links with the cardinal have so far been established. All are portrayed at ages consistent with a date for the painting in the mid-1620s. The emphasis in the group at left appears to be on Florence. On the evidence of a Sustermans portrait of about 1627 in the Pitti Palace, the youth in the ruff may be the Grand Duke Ferdinand II, who succeeded to the dukedom in 1628, when he came of age.<sup>10</sup> The lean-faced man to his left, by comparison with another Sustermans portrait in the Corsini Gallery, Florence, may be the tapestry weaver Pietro Fevere (1579–1669).<sup>11</sup> A native of Antwerp, Fevere was invited to Florence by Cosimo II in 1619 and put in charge of





fig. 5 Ottavio Leoni.  
Monsignor Giovanni  
Ciampoli, 1627. Engraving,  
plate 5½ × 4¾ in. (14 ×  
11.6 cm). National Gallery of  
Canada, Ottawa

the court tapestry factory in 1633. The figure to the left of the mace bearer, on the basis of a Sustermans of about 1630 in the Pitti Palace, may be Pandolofo Ricasoli (1581–1657), a theologian and canon of Florence Cathedral.<sup>12</sup> The mace bearer himself, with long nose and full sideburns, resembles the same official on the far right of *Priors of the Signoria Instituting the Feast of San Giovanni Gualberto*, by the Florentine painter Filippo Tarchiani.<sup>13</sup> The feast was added to the General Roman Calendar in 1595, but as the Tarchiani is datable to about 1630, it is possible that the youngish mace bearer portrays the office holder at the time the picture was painted rather than when the feast was instituted.

The group at right seems more connected to Rome. The confident-looking cleric in the gray surplice behind the cardinal may be Monsignor Stefano Sauli (d. 1649), recognizable on the basis of a Leoni drawing of 1618, where he looks somewhat more youthful.<sup>14</sup> Sauli was

from a prominent Genoese family and moved into the circle of the Barberini pope Urban VIII after his succession in 1623. In 1638, he was appointed archbishop of Chieti. The figure holding the cardinal's cassock, with his round face and plump cheeks, resembles another rising churchman, Monsignor Giovanni Ciampoli (1590–1643), as recorded in a Leoni drawing of 1625 and an engraving, also by Leoni, of 1627 (fig. 5).<sup>15</sup> Ciampoli, well known as a poet, was born in Florence and studied in Padua and Pisa before joining the circle of Galileo at the Medici Court. In 1614, he moved to Rome, where he took holy orders. In 1621, he became Secretary of Secret Briefs to Pope Gregory XV and then to Urban VIII. He kept in touch with Galileo and supported him within the church hierarchy, but when the latter's heliocentrism was finally condemned in 1632, Ciampoli was exiled and served as governor of various towns in the Papal States. Later he was appointed historiographer to the king of Poland. In the mid-1620s, he was thus at the height of his career and the most important cleric in the group after the cardinal, with whom he shared connections in Florence and Rome. He may even have been involved in commissioning the painting, judging by the way the bald artist seems to be seeking his approval.

The background details are more elusive and are more difficult to associate with existing precedents. The imposing church resembles no known building, though there may be a distant reference to Florence Cathedral in the large ribbed dome flanked by a smaller one.<sup>16</sup> The statue at the apex of the pediment balustrades is of Saint Michael and the Devil, a reference to the Church militant and probably also to Sforza's career in the army and the Church. In the coat of arms, the device above the oval escutcheon may be a summary version of a galero, a ceremonial hat with wide brim and shallow crown formerly worn by various ranks of the Roman Catholic clergy and, in the case of a cardinal, colored red. The galero is a standard device in ecclesiastical heraldry and the only allusion here to Sforza, since the escutcheon itself has been left blank. The ruined circular tower recalls the tower of the now-demolished ancient Roman Porta Salaria, as recorded in a print by Giuseppe Vasi, in the way the outer wall reveals an inner core at the top. However, the wall in Vasi's print lacks the apertures seen in the painting.<sup>17</sup> The straight road leading to a distant gateway may allude to the Via Pia, a new artery constructed by Pope Pius IV in the 1560s from the Quattro Fontane to Michelangelo's Porta Pia. Passignano's sketchily indicated gate appears to be two storied and narrower in the upper story, like Michelangelo's, but otherwise does not resemble the

Porta Pia in any specific way.<sup>18</sup> Sforza was buried in the church of San Bernardino alle Terme, a circular building of 1598 founded by his mother just off the western end of the Via Pia (now Via XX Settembre), but it bears no likeness to the church in the *Procession*.<sup>19</sup> Although the church and coat of arms adorning its facade cannot, at this time, be identified, their prominence suggests they are significant. It seems possible that they relate to one of those processing in the foreground, and might relate to a commission or proposal for either a renovation of an existing church or raising of a new one.

Suggestions have been made as to the context of the *Procession*, but since the participants as identified here would never have paraded together in normal circumstances, it is likely the subject is more generically a celebration or commemoration of Sforza rather than a record of a specific ceremony.<sup>20</sup> As demonstrated, who commissioned it and when cannot as yet be determined, but in view of Sforza's origins and career, the choice of Passignano as an artist equally well known in

Florence and Rome would have been a natural one; in the mid-1620s he is recorded in Rome at least twice.<sup>21</sup> Passignano's reputation remains that of a conservative and transitional painter cautiously adapting to the innovations of the early Baroque, but in a Florentine context the meticulous realism of the *Procession* seems progressive in the way it looks forward to the finesse of Carlo Dolci. For this reason, the work deserves an observable niche among the noteworthy early seventeenth-century paintings of Florence and Rome.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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IAN KENNEDY

*Independent scholar*

#### NOTES

- 1 There are several inscriptions on the reverse of the panel, in an old, possibly nineteenth-century hand; the only ones currently decipherable are the names Kremer(?) and Hadzel(?). The condition of the painting is good apart from a diagonal band of restoration that runs from the sky above the right-hand side of the church pediment into the column on the far right.
- 2 The Leoni attribution is supported by various scholars, notably Adriano Amendola and Antonio Vannugli (email from Vannugli to Keith Christiansen, November 30, 2012, curatorial files, Department of European Paintings, MMA); Francesco Solinas (2013, pp. 23–24, 37n56, fig. 15, as datable to 1618–22); Xavier Salomon (2015, p. 389); Cloe Caverio de Carondelet (2016, pp. 55–57); Yuri Primarosa (2017, pp. 716–17, no. 60, as ca. 1620–21); and Clovis Whitfield (2017).
- 3 Eric Schleier, letter to Keith Christiansen, June 2, 2013, curatorial files, Department of European Paintings, MMA. For *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, see Primarosa 2017, p. 706, no. 54, and p. 150, fig. 97. *Suzanna and the Elders* is in the Detroit Institute of Arts (41.89).
- 4 For the ecclesiastical portraits, see Primarosa 2017, p. 675, no. 20, and p. 67, fig. 40; and p. 682, no. 27, and p. 135, fig. 93; for the portraits on copper, see *ibid.*, pp. 684–85, nos. 29–31, and pp. 122–23, figs. 85–87.
- 5 See, for example, Empoli's *Saint Eligius and King Clovis* (1614), Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence (inv. 1890, no. 8663). Reproduced in Marabottini 1988, p. 105, pl. xliv.
- 6 Another comparison for the *Procession* from about the same period is an early work by Justus Sustermans (1597–1681), who was soon to become the leading portrait painter in Florence. The painting (Gallerie degli Uffizi, Niobe room, inv. 1896, no. 721) represents the Florentine senate swearing allegiance to Ferdinand II de' Medici and was painted between 1621, the date of the ceremony, and 1626. For a reproduction, see <https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/the-senators-of-florence-swearing-allegiance-to-ferdinando-ii-de-medici> and Palazzo Strozzi 1986, vol. 1, *Pittura*, p. 315, no. 1.161. A finished study, different in many ways, is in the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford (WA1974.3). The slightly less formal Oxford version is especially similar to Passignano.
- 7 See Palazzo Strozzi 1986, vol. 1, *Pittura*, p. 321, no. 1.166.
- 8 See Harwood 2002, pp. 19, 74–77, figs. 11, 66, and no. 4.
- 9 Primarosa 2017, p. 528, no. 449. See also *ibid.*, p. 298, no. 57, for an earlier drawing of Sforza by Leoni, ca. 1602–5. Whitfield (2017) identifies the cardinal as Francesco Maria del Monte.
- 10 Pitti Palace, Florence (Poggio a Caiano no. 138). See Palazzo Strozzi 1986, vol. 1, *Pittura*, p. 318, no. 1.163.
- 11 See Palazzo Pitti 1983, p. 44, no. 23.
- 12 Palazzo Strozzi 1986, vol. 1, *Pittura*, pp. 320–21, no. 1.164.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 163, no. 1.53.
- 14 Accademia Toscana di Scienze e Lettere "La Colombaria," Florence (712). See Tordella 2011, pp. 126, 147–48, and Primarosa 2017, p. 488, no. 385. Amendola and Vannugli (see note 2 above) identify him with Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi (1595–1638) on the basis of a Leoni drawing of 1621 (Primarosa 2017, p. 218, fig. 138, and p. 527, no. 447). There is a resemblance, but Ludovisi was made a cardinal in that year on the accession of Pope Gregory XV, his uncle, and it would be difficult to explain the absence of his titular robes in a painting dating from about 1624.
- 15 Primarosa 2017, p. 595, no. 559. Another drawing (*ibid.*, p. 652, no. 658) is the model for the engraving. See also *ibid.*, pp. 222, 239, 254, 368, 652, 729. For more on Ciampoli,

see De Ferrari 1981. Marziano Guglielminetti and Mariosa Masoero (1978) make no reference to any connection between Ciampoli and Sforza.

- 16 Viewed under infrared reflectography, the building appears originally to have been simpler, with the dome, crossing, and balustraded pediment added at a second stage.
- 17 Vasi 1747, pl. 3.
- 18 A connection with the Via Pia and the Quirinal Palace is suggested in Primarosa 2017, p. 716. Whitfield (2017) associates the background with the Tre Fontane complex on the Via Ostiense as seen in a print by Giuseppe Vasi of 1753.
- 19 An earlier Passignano, *Wedding Feast Banquet of Duke Ferdinand I of Florence* (1589; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, inv. 1522), also includes numerous portraits, but the buildings in the background are equally difficult to relate to existing examples.
- 20 Primarosa (2017, p. 717) suggests the procession relates to ceremonies subsequent to the death of a pope. Cavero de Carondelet (2016) relates it to a cardinal receiving his title.
- 21 Nissman 1979, pp. 196–97.

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