

# “I’m No Angel”: A Terracotta Model of *Saint Vincent Ferrer* by Giuseppe Sanmartino

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IN 1996, THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF Art acquired an elegant terracotta model of a robed winged figure that bore on its base the ink inscription g. sammartino (Figures 1–3). The figure had first come to the Museum’s attention in the catalogue for a London sale,<sup>1</sup> where it was described as an angel and attributed (despite the above-noted inscription) to the circle of Angelo Piò. However, the possibility, apparently rejected by the auction house, that the figure had indeed been made by Giuseppe Sanmartino, the key Late Baroque sculptor in Naples, seemed to us quite persuasive.<sup>2</sup> In light of our existing holdings of Neapolitan art, which included numerous *presepio* figures attributed to Sanmartino but no conventional sculpture by his own hand, it was an obvious candidate for acquisition. Beyond its intrinsic aesthetic appeal, the small statue is a fine example of the extensive and fruitful contacts between the arts that characterized the Baroque era—an interaction particularly well demonstrated in the culture of eighteenth-century Naples.

Not only are the sculptors in Naples known to have worked closely with painters; they also, famously, extended their own activities in other artistic areas.<sup>3</sup> Works in two of these other mediums, porcelain and the previously cited *presepio* figures, are richly represented in the collection of the Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts. Although both genres generally fall under the rubric of decorative arts rather than of sculpture, sculptors played prominent roles in establishing the prestige of these fields. The Naples Royal Porcelain Manufactory established by Ferdinand IV in 1771 and its predecessor at Capodimonte (ca. 1740–59) were especially renowned for their production of three-dimensional figures and groups, and challenged the reputation of the factories at Meissen, Sèvres, Doccia, and elsewhere in the eighteenth century. Stylistically, however, their output was less than purely Neapolitan, for while some of the

sculptors who worked at the Naples factories were of local origin—for example, Nicola Fumo and Francesco Celebrano (a gifted sculptor, painter, and noted modeler of *crèche* figures, who was the principal modeler and painter at the royal manufactory between 1772 and 1779)—for the most part the sculptors who dominated the city’s porcelain modeling activities came from elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

The *presepio* was a different affair altogether. Neapolitan artists whose primary output was full-scale sculpture in marble and stucco were actively involved in the production of the *presepi*, modeling the heads and shoulders of the angels and human figures as well as the lively animals. However, while the Museum owns a significant number of *crèche* figures attributed to such “mainstream” artists as Matteo Bottiglieri, Salvatore Franco, Angelo Viva, the already-noted Celebrano, and Sanmartino (Figure 4),<sup>5</sup> until recently no purely sculptural work by any of these artists was represented in our collection. The newly acquired Sanmartino terracotta finally makes up for this deficit.

The main question we had to answer to support the attribution to Sanmartino was where this figure would have fit into his known oeuvre. A number of terracotta sketches or models attributed to this sculptor have recently appeared on the art market,<sup>6</sup> supplementing the small group already housed in public collections;<sup>7</sup> most have been linked to important marble sculptures that still exist in churches in southern Italy. However, the Museum’s graceful but sober winged figure bore little compositional resemblance to the many angels Sanmartino carved for the churches of Naples and the surrounding region (Figures 5, 6),<sup>8</sup> a discrepancy that may have impeded its attribution.<sup>9</sup>

A closer look at our figure reveals that its identification as an angel was mistaken. An inspection of the details shows that the gracefully draped robes actually constitute the habit of the Dominican order and that what might appear to be a wind-swept forelock on the tonsured head is actually a flame (its tip has broken off). This observation will lead the viewer familiar with the iconography of Catholic saints to the conclusion

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Figure 1. Giuseppe Sanmartino (Italian, Neapolitan, 1720–1793). *Saint Vincent Ferrer*, ca. 1750–51. Terracotta, H. 14 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (37.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Rogers Fund and Friends of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts Gifts, 1996 (1996.93)

that the figure depicted is the Spanish Dominican saint Vincent Ferrer (1350–1419), the fiery preacher termed the “Apocalyptic Angel” on account of his impassioned sermons to heretics and the uncovered in which he warned of the Last Judgment.<sup>10</sup>

Fortuitously, recently published studies of Sanmartino’s early work<sup>11</sup> allude to just such a figure of Saint Vincent made by the young sculptor, not only supporting the attribution of the present terracotta to this artist but dating it as well. Elio Catello has demonstrated



Figure 2. Profile view of statuette in Figure 1

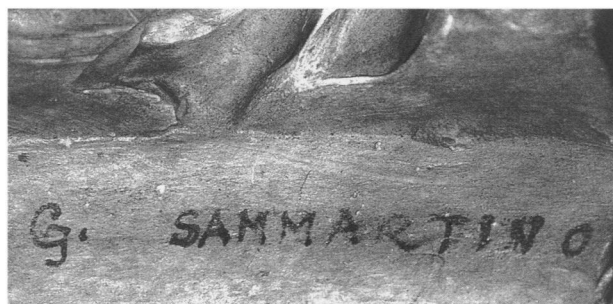


Figure 3. Detail of statuette in Figure 1, showing inscription



Figure 4. Attributed to Giuseppe Sanmartino. *Head of an Angel* (detail of dressed crèche figure), second half of the 18th century. Polychrome terracotta and wood, composition body, silk robes, H. (of figure) 17¼ in. (43.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Loretta Hines Howard, 1964 (64.164.8a-c)



Figure 5. Giuseppe Sanmartino. *Angel Holding a Flambeau* (one of a pair from the Chiesa dei Girolamini, Naples), 1787. Marble, H. 102¾ in. (260 cm). Naples, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte

that Sanmartino's earliest documented commission, about 1750, for the Dominicans of San Pietro Martire in Naples, was for the creation of a clay model for a silver statue of Saint Vincent Ferrer. Based on a drawing by the painter Giuseppe Bonito, the finished sculpture was to be produced by the goldsmith Francesco Manzone. In his affidavit, dated 1759, Bonito asserts that he was charged by the Dominican fathers

to make a design for a statue of the glorious Saint Vincent Ferrer, which I did, and also to oversee the creation of the clay model, to be used to make the silver statue, whose model was made in my house by D. Giuseppe Sanmartino, sculptor, constantly attended by me, and in this situation, I always understood from what was said by the persons above that the Silver-

smith who was to make this statue was Signor D. Francesco Manzone, [and] that many times before initiating work on the said Model the fathers came to my house, once with the above Manzone, whom they ordered in my presence to take the Gesso mold with all urgency, since to work on the statue he had to start very soon, so that the same Manzone with his assistants came to my house to take the said mold, and as I was not satisfied by Padre Califano for my inconvenience, the said molds, made by Manzone, remained in my house for several years and about a year and a half ago were collected by Padre Califano.<sup>12</sup>

A number of factors support the conclusion that the Metropolitan terracotta is the one described in this affidavit, and that it physically documents one of the





Figure 6. Detail of sculpture in Figure 5

sculptor's earliest compositions. Beyond this, the model graphically demonstrates the crucial mediating role played by Neapolitan sculptors in the production of silver sculptures (Figures 7, 8)—the extraordinary lifesize busts and figures of the saints venerated by the religious orders that controlled so much of the patronage and the real estate in Baroque Naples.<sup>13</sup>

This spectacular genre was a phenomenon as peculiar to the city as the *presepio* itself, and also a particularly vivid demonstration of the interaction between the arts in Naples. Typically, the design for such a figure would have been realized in a three-dimensional model by a sculptor and executed by a silversmith. The conditions under which the commission here in question was executed, all spelled out in Bonito's document, help to explain some of the features that make the work distinctive within Sanmartino's oeuvre. In his affidavit, the painter insists on the fact that the model was made in his own house and that Sanmartino worked under his direct and constant supervision. This dependence on another artist's design may account for the model's major difference from much of Sanmartino's later work—its comparatively subdued drapery style. Moreover, the composition's formal resemblance to another slightly earlier Dominican



Figure 7. Attributed to Giuseppe Sanmartino and Francesco Manzone (silversmith and bronze founder; Italian, Neapolitan, 1697–1760/67). *Saint Dominic*, ca. 1750–60. Silver and gilt copper, H. 34 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (88 cm). Naples Cathedral, Chapel of the Treasury of San Gennaro



Figure 8. Attributed to Giuseppe Sanmartino and Filippo del Giudice (silversmith; Italian, Neapolitan, act. 1707–86). *The Penitent Magdalene*, 1757. Silver and gilt copper, H. 39 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (100 cm). Naples Cathedral, Chapel of the Treasury of San Gennaro

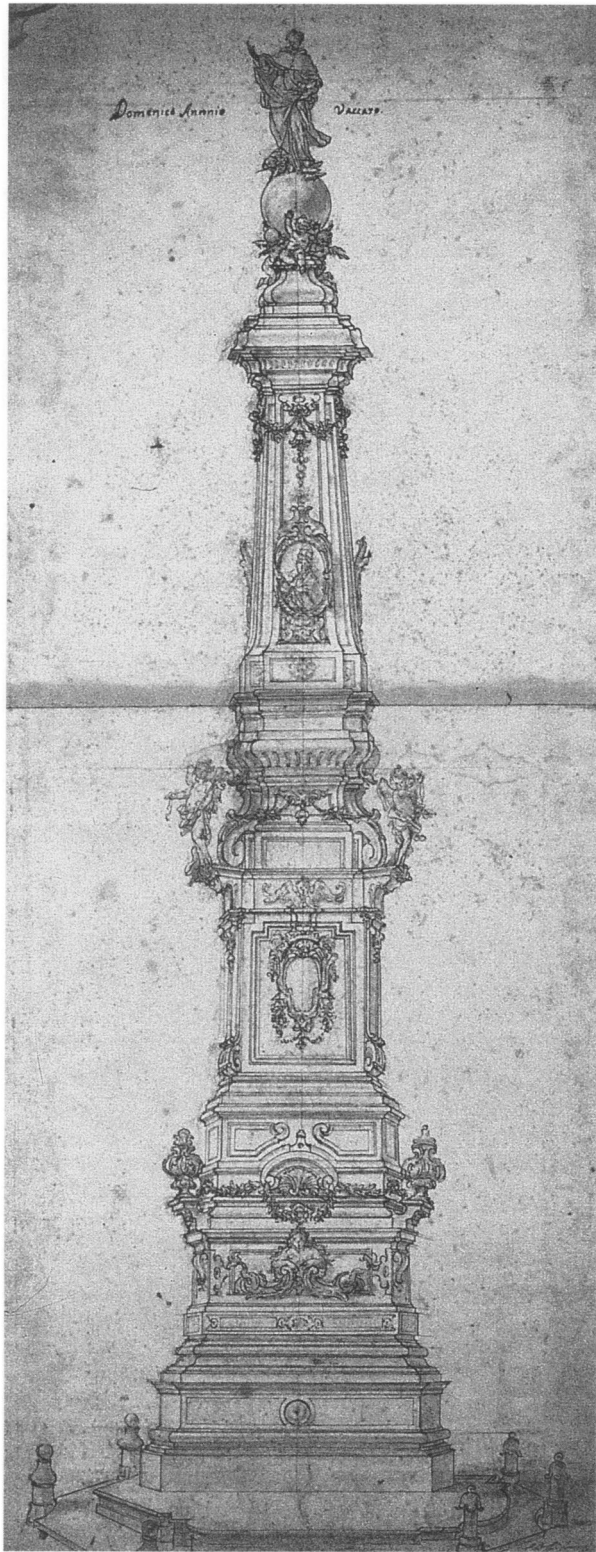


Figure 9. Domenico Antonio Vaccaro (Italian, Neapolitan, 1678–1745). *Design for the Obelisk of Saint Dominic, Piazza San Domenico Maggiore, Naples, ca. 1737*. Pen and brown ink, brush and brown wash, and black chalk, on cream laid paper, 31 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 12 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (80.2 x 30.8 cm). Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution/Art Resource, N.Y. Museum purchase through gift of various donors, 1901–39–218



Figure 10. Gennaro Trillocco (Italian, Neapolitan, late 18th–early 19th century), after a model by Giuseppe Sanmartino. *Saint Gregory the Great, 1785*. Polychrome wood. Chiesa Madre, Manduria

commission, the bronze figure of the saint that crowns the Obelisk of Saint Dominic (also cast by Manzone after a design by Domenico Antonio Vaccaro; Figure 9),<sup>14</sup> suggests that the entire team at work on the Saint Vincent might have been directed to follow yet another artist's model.

Still, for all the constraints imposed on Sanmartino by his subordination to the painter's authority, it is fascinating to see how much of the sculptor's mature style is already revealed in this composition. The powerful and painterly modeling and broad swathes of flickering drapery, majestic vestiges of Solimena that mark Sanmartino's later sculpture, are all on display, even in this small scale; so, too, is the benign, almost Arcadian mood typical of Sanmartino, which here



Figure 11. Giuseppe Sanmartino. *Abundance*, 1772. Marble. Church of San Martino, Martina Franca

somewhat belies the saint's fiery reputation, emblemized by his flaming forelock.<sup>15</sup> The lyrical naturalistic grace and beautiful gestures that characterize Sanmartino's suavely modeled clay bozzetti as well as his more angularly carved marbles are also in evidence. On the other hand, although the neo-Mannerist proportions that mark his later work are clearly in evidence, the serenely poised Saint Vincent displays less of their rebounding contrapposto and complexity.

Overall, however, the Museum's terracotta fits nicely in Sanmartino's oeuvre in a stylistic continuum with his other known works. The sculptor seems to have employed virtually identical compositional devices for several later large-scale sculptures, among them the *Pius VI* of 1776 in the Abbey of Casamari, north of

Naples,<sup>16</sup> and the model that he produced about 1785 for the polychrome wood statue of *Saint Gregory the Great* in the Chiesa Madre, Manduria (Figure 10). Moreover, despite the great compositional divide between this calmly poised figure of Saint Vincent and Sanmartino's convoluted angels, with their elaborately winding, deeply cut draperies, all the countenances display a clear family resemblance (see Figures 5, 6)—as do the faces of his numerous marble allegorical figures, such as the ones in the Certosa of Naples and in the church of San Martino, Martina Franca (Figure 11); these are all also first cousins to the modeled heads of many of the *presepio* angels, a number of which are to be found in our own collection (see Figure 4), thus lending at least a modicum of support to their traditional attribution to Sanmartino.<sup>17</sup>

Of the silver sculptures attributed to Sanmartino, the most renowned of them—both fairly close in date to the Saint Vincent commission, and still in the Chapel of the Treasury of San Gennaro, Naples Cathedral—



Figure 12. Giuseppe Sanmartino and Giuseppe and Gennaro del Giudice (silversmiths; Italian, Neapolitan, both act. 1774–1801). *Saint Vitus*, 1787. Silver and gilt copper, H. 63 in. (160 cm). Church of San Vito, Forio d'Ischia



Figure 13. *The Washerwoman*. Model by Giuseppe Gricci (Florence, ca. 1700–Madrid, 1770), after an engraving by Charles-Nicolas Cochin, *père*, based on a painting by Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin. Capodimonte, ca. 1752–58. Soft-paste porcelain, H. 7¼ in. (18.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Jack and Belle Linsky Collection, 1982 (1982.60.279)



Figure 14. *Woman Carrying a Basket of Onions* (crèche figure), Italian (Naples), second half of the 18th century. Polychrome terracotta and wood, composition body, garments of various fabrics, H. 16¼ in. (41.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Loretta Hines Howard, 1964 (64.164.6a,b)

are half-length figures: the forcefully Baroque *Saint Dominic* (Figure 7; probably a collaboration with Manzone) and the deeply emotive *Penitent Magdalene* (Figure 8); executed in silver by Filippo del Giudice).<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, some of Sanmartino's final compositions to be produced in silver—the *Saint Vitus* (Figure 12) in the church of San Vito, Forio d'Ischia;<sup>19</sup> the *Saint Roch* in the Cathedral of Ruvo di Puglia;<sup>20</sup> and the *Tobias and the Archangel Raphael* in the Chapel of the Treasury of San Gennaro—all full figures, show a return to the more Arcadian, naturalistic spirit of the present terracotta.

In a sense, it is this straightforward naturalism that ultimately distinguishes the *presepio* figures by

Sanmartino and his followers from the universe of Neapolitan porcelain. Most of the figures made by the Capodimonte porcelain manufactory are profoundly imbued with the pan-European spirit of the Rococo; only in such series as the *Cries of Naples*, where Giuseppe Gricci appears to have been moved by the vitality of Neapolitan street life, do we detect a relationship to the *presepio*. Both the *presepio* and the porcelains undoubtedly reflect what has been termed "the virtual mania in 18th-century Naples for costume studies and depictions of picturesque *lazzaroni*."<sup>21</sup> However, the Rococo delicacy and coquettish elegance of even the most lowly of the Capodimonte porcelain characters (Figure 13) tend to set them





Figure 15. Cup and saucer, Royal Porcelain Manufactory?, Naples, ca. 1784–1800. Soft-paste porcelain, cup H. 2 1/8 in. (6.4 cm); saucer diam. 5 3/8 in. (13.7 cm). Inscribed in red on underside of cup: Uomo e Donna di Buccino; on underside of saucer: Donna di T Pietro Diana. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1906 (06.369a,b)

apart from the lively and earnest naturalism of parallel figures made for the crèche (Figure 14).

A number of figures made for the later Royal Factory, linked with the sculptor Aniello Ingaldi (who is also associated with the production of crèche figures), show a spirit closer to the *presepio* than most of that manufactory's more Neoclassical production.<sup>22</sup> But the group of works in porcelain that is more closely allied to the *presepio* figures does not include figures at all but is limited to a later product of the royal manufactory, the "Vestiture del Regno" tableware.<sup>23</sup> These works were inspired by one of the more ambitious Enlightenment projects of Ferdinand IV, the dispatch of artists to travel throughout the Kingdom of The Two Sicilies in order to depict the variety of regional vernacular costumes to be found within the realm. Sketches dated primarily between 1784 and 1788 (and probably reflecting festival garb rather than everyday wear) became the sources for this series of tableware showing the local populace in its native environment (Figure 15). The possibility that many of the *presepio* figures were also inspired by the 1793 publication<sup>24</sup> of this royal project, or the still earlier 1773 publication by Pietro Fabris of his *Raccolta dei varii vestimenti ed arti del Regno di Napoli* . . . remains to be investigated.<sup>25</sup> Yet, while the figures depicted in the sketches and on the painted dinnerware incline toward a more naturalistic mien than their Rococo-era counterparts, they seem mired in a static isolation imposed by the high taste of the Neoclassical period. The crèche figures inhabit a different world, continuing, for decades into the nineteenth century, to display the emotional engagement and naturally animated gestures adopted by Giuseppe Sanmartino at the start of his brilliant and influential career, and embodied in the Museum's elegant terracotta model of *Saint Vincent Ferrer*.

## NOTES

1. Christie's, London, December 13, 1994, lot 91, "Property of a Lady."
2. This attribution was first proposed by Andrew Ciechanowiecki, who has subsequently confirmed his belief in a written communication to this author.
3. These links have been presented with scholarly thoroughness in the groundbreaking series of exhibitions and catalogues beginning with *Civiltà del '700 a Napoli, 1734–1799*, 2 vols. (Naples, 1980). Among the most notable of these multitalented artists was Lorenzo Vaccaro (1655–1706), who worked as a sculptor, silversmith, painter, and designer of ornamental architecture.
4. Giuseppe Gricci, trained as a sculptor in Florence, brought the Late Baroque style of Giovanni Battista Foggini to the Naples factory in 1743; Filippo Tagliolini, who came to Naples from Vienna in 1781, had been trained as a sculptor in Rome.
5. The practice of attributing specific unsigned *presepio* figures to known artists has often lacked a serious basis, but among the important sculptors who are certain to have produced them are Domenico Antonio Vaccaro, Francesco Celebrano, Matteo Bottiglieri, and Giuseppe Gori. Although attribution is tricky, many of these figures show close links to the manner of particular artists.
6. One representing Saint Teresa of Ávila was probably a model for the statue in Taranto Cathedral; see Andrea Bacchi, "Giuseppe Sanmartino," in Massimo Vezzosi, ed., *Terrecotte italiane tra manierismo e barocco* (Florence, 1997), pp. 48–57.
7. Elio Catello, *Sanmartino* (Naples, 1988) illustrates and discusses the *Saint Francis of Assisi* (private collection, Naples), p. 70, fig. 91; *Saint Philip Neri* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), p. 71, fig. 94; *Saint Paul* (Museo Nazionale di San Martino, Naples), p. 76, fig. 102; and *La Religione Regine* (Museo Nazionale del Palazzo di Venezia, Rome), p. 95, fig. 128. See also *Civiltà del '700*, pp. 52–53, for further discussion and bibliography.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 45, for angels in the Chiesa di Sant'Agostino alla Zecca, Naples; p. 47, in the Chiesa del Gesù Nuovo, Naples; p. 51, in the Chiesa di Sant'Antonio, Maddaloni; and p. 59, in the Chiesa della Certosa di S. Martino, Naples.
9. This lack of resemblance may have been the factor that led Christie's to attribute the terracotta to the circle of the Bolognese sculptor Angelo Piò; however, there is little to link the style of that

sculptor's work—long-necked figures with pointy chins and vast unbroken swathes of drapery—to the figure in question. See E. Riccòmini *Mostra della sculture Bolognese del settecento*, exh. cat. (Bologna, 1965), pp. 75–95, figs. 53–83.

10. Louis Réau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien* (Paris, 1955–59), vol. 3, pt. 2, p. 1330.
11. Elio Catello, "Nuovi contributi per Giuseppe Sanmartino," in *Napoli Nobilissima*, 1983, fasc. V–VI, p. 178; idem., *Sanmartino*, pp. 15, 31, 149, 160.
12. A.S.N., *Monasteri soppressi*, 651, ff. 604–604: 11 gennaio 1759:

Per ubedire al venerato ordine dell'Illustre Signor Cavaliere d. Francesco Vargas Macchiucca Avvocato Fiscale del Real Patrimonio, e Delegato della Nobil Arte degl'orefici si fà piena, ed indubitata fede da me sottoscritto, anche con giuramento quatenus bisognasse à chi la presente spetterà vedere, o sarà in qualsivoglia modo presentata in iudicio, et extra, come anni addietro à preghiere del Padre Michel'Angelo Loreto, Padre Califano, e Frà Vincenzo ebbi l'incumbenza primo di formare un'disegno di una statua del Glorioso S. Vincenzo Ferreri quale dà me fù fatto, ed insieme diriggere il Modello di creta, per indi poi potersi lavorare la statua d'Argento, quale Modello fu fatto fare in mia casa dà D. Giuseppe San Martino scultore, assestito sempre dà me, in questo stato di cose sempre hò inteso per bocca delli suddetti, che l'Argentiero doveva lavorare detta statua era il Signor D. Francesco Manzone, tanto più, che più, e più volte primo di principiarsi detto Modello si portorno in mia casa detti padri, una con il sudetto Manzone, li quali in presenza mia li ordinorno, che se n'è fusse preso il cavo di Gesso con tutta la premura, stante si doveva presto lavorare la statua sudetta, lo che il medesimo Manzone son suoi giovani si portò in mia casa à prendere il sudetto cavo, ed come che poi dal Padre Califano non fui soddisfatto del mio incommodo sono stati in mia casa alcuni anni detti cavi presi da Manzone, li quali averà circa un'anno, e mezzo, che si ripigliorno dal Padre Califano, ed per essere ciò asserito tutto vero mi sono sottoscritto.

Napoli li 11 Gennaro 1759.

Giuseppe Bonito = La sudetta firma è di propria mano del Signore D. Giuseppe Bonito virtuoso dipintore di Sua Maestà (Dio guardi) = Notar Francesco Scala di Napoli (*Omissis*).

As published in Catello, *Sanmartino*, p. 160. The author dates the actual commission to 1750 (*ibid.*, p. 15) and describes the work, identified alternately as a statue (*ibid.*, p. 15) and a bust (*ibid.*, p. 31), as lost, but the indication of conflict with Manzone implied by the proffering of Bonito's deposition may suggest that in the end either the silver version was never carried

out or the commission was transferred to another silversmith. In any case, another reflection of the composition exists, a half-length reduction in silver by the nineteenth-century Neapolitan silversmith Michele Pane. See *Tre secoli di argenti napoletani*, exh. cat., Castel Sant'Elmo (Naples, 1988), pp. 74–75, no. 116, pl. 20.

13. See *The Treasure of San Gennaro: Baroque Silver from Naples*, exh. cat. (Naples, 1987).
14. Catello, *Sanmartino*, p. 15.
15. The flame may also allude to Vincent's ability to transcend the limits of his native Valencian dialect through his impassioned preaching, giving rise to the belief that he possessed the gift of speaking in tongues (like the Apostles at Pentecost whose heads were marked with flames; Acts 2:1–47).
16. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
17. Only the heads are relevant, as the bodies are merely articulated mannequins, and their silk garments, often new, may have been refashioned annually by the installer.
18. Although a few contemporary sculptors functioned in the multiple capacity of designer, modeler, and silversmith—for example, Gaetano Fumo, whose mark is found on a small silver sculpture of Saint Michael the Archangel, in the Museum (1976.46a,b)—Sanmartino apparently never did so, and the silversmiths who carried out his designs did so with varying degrees of fidelity.
19. Catello, *Sanmartino*, p. 96.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
21. So described by Raffaello Causa, "Foreign View-Painters in Naples," in *The Golden Age of Naples: Art and Civilization under the Bourbons, 1734–1805*, (1981), vol. 1, pp. 191–93.
22. See Angela Caròla Perrotti, *La porcellana della Real Fabbrica Ferdinanda, 1771–1806*, (Cava dei Tirreni, 1978), for discussion of links between porcelains and *presepio* figures. See also Clare Le Corbeiller, in Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Notable Acquisitions, 1982–1983*, p. 31, for one of the rare porcelain figures signed by Ingaldi (there spelled Ingaldo) 1982.450.17.
23. See *Le porcellane dei Borbone di Napoli, Capodimonte e Real Fabbrica Ferdinanda, 1743–1806*, exh. cat., Museo Archeologico Nazionale (Naples, 1986), pp. 381–89, 459–61, for the "Vestiture del Regno" service and some of the original drawings.
24. *Raccolta di sessanta più belle vestiture che si costumono nelle provincie di Napoli* (Naples, 1793). Reedited by Franco Mancini (Naples, 1985).
25. But see Caròla Perrotti, *La porcellana*, and "Popolo e borghesia nelle plastiche della Real Fabbrica Ferdinanda" in *Le porcellane dei Borbone*, pp. 524–27 for the influence of Fabris. Reedited by Franco Mancini (Naples, 1985).