A new collation of documents identifies a bronze Siren now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figure 1) with a sculpture noted in seventeenth-century inventories and demonstrates that it was an important sculpture at the time in Rome, passing through the collections of Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte and at least three generations of the Barberini family. The sculpture is listed in inventories of princely collections in 1627, 1644, 1671, and about 1680, sometimes described with a crown and 3 to 3½ palmi (about 31 in., or 78–79 cm) in height. 1 It was installed in three Roman palaces before being seen and later drawn by Giovanni Domenico Campiglia in the 1720s. Campiglia’s drawing was commissioned from England by the antiquarian Richard Topham and entered his “paper museum” of drawings and prints after antiquities in the great collections of Italy, which remains intact at Eton College Library. A crowned bronze Siren probably made in Rome in the last quarter of the sixteenth or the first decade of the seventeenth century. Given our incomplete understanding of bronze production at the time in Rome, attribution will have to wait for further analysis or documentary discoveries. The Siren was probably made in the cosmopolitan and highly collaborative workshops that ornamented the large-scale projects of Sistine Rome, alongside such sculpture as the lions supporting the Vatican obelisk, Saints Peter and Paul surmounting the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, and the Fountain of the Turtles in Piazza Mattei. These modelers and bronze casters included Tommaso della Porta, Bastiano Torrigiani, Lodovico del Duca, Taddeo Landini, Prospero Antichi, and later Camillo Mariani, as well as lesser known figures such as Leonardo Sormanno, Costantino de’ Servi, Francesco da Pietrasanta, and Orazio Censore. 3

The Siren is first documented in an inventory of Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte’s palace on the Via di Ripetta following his death on August 27, 1626. 4 The inventory was begun in February 1627, and the section that lists the Siren is dated April of that year. As representative for the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Del Monte was a powerful member of the Curia, but he is perhaps best known for his vast collection of ancient and modern sculpture, paintings, prints, and musical and scientific instruments and his patronage of artists, in particular Caravaggio and Andrea Sacchi, through the Accademia di San Luca. In the 1627 inventory the Siren
gives its name to a room in the palace, the “Sala da basso della Sirena” or the “Stanza della Sirena,” which in turn is used as a reference to locate other rooms. The sculpture was a primary focus of Del Monte’s collection for the official who made the inventory; it is also possible that the inventory reflects the room’s conventional name. The sculpture in the “Lower Room of the Siren” is described as “a siren in bronze [with]in a marble sarcophagus, strigilated all around . . ., 3½ palmi high, 5½ palmi long, and the sarcophagus 10 palmi long, 2½ high, 4⅞ long [i.e., wide].” The measurements of the siren convert to approximately 30½ by 48½ inches (78.4 x 123.2 cm). The Metropolitan’s Siren measures 32 by 45½ inches (81.3 by 114.9 cm). The room was otherwise populated entirely by ancient sculpture. Soon after the inventory was completed the Del Monte collection was dispersed at the behest of Francesco Maria’s heirs in a series of sales at the palace starting in October 1627 and continuing through June 1628.

By 1644 the Siren was to be found at a nexus of elite culture in Rome; it was owned by Cardinal Antonio Barberini, nephew of the reigning Pope Urban VIII, and displayed on the piano nobile of the Palazzo Barberini alle Quattro Fontane, the most acclaimed Roman palace of the day. Still installed with a sarcophagus, almost certainly the one from the Del Monte collection, the sculpture marked the transition from a suite of private rooms to the oval chamber at the heart of the palace, which in turn led onto the grand salon, crowned by Pietro da Cortona’s fresco The Triumph.
of Divine Providence (Figure 3). The only objects recorded “in the small room next to the room that leads onto the oval room [stanza ovata]” are “a large strigilated marble sarcophagus with two lion heads, 4 palmi long, 4 palmi broad,” and “a bronze siren with a crown on [its] head.” The 1644 inventory of Cardinal Antonio’s possessions was drawn up in April, by which time the pope had already taken ill, and it seems to anticipate his death in July and the consequent instability of a changing regime.

It has been proposed that the Siren came into the Barberini family as a result of the marriage of Anna Colonna to Taddeo Barberini on October 24, 1627. This is a tempting hypothesis, given the significance of the siren for Colonna family heraldry and the politically important marriage of the recently elected pope’s nephew into one of Rome’s oldest families. As it is now clear, however, that the Siren remained with the possessions of Cardinal del Monte until as late as April of that year, if the sculpture were connected to the nuptials it would have been as a recent purchase rather than a treasured family possession. Just as likely, the Siren could have passed directly from Del Monte’s heirs to Taddeo’s brother Cardinal Antonio (or perhaps to his brother Francesco and then to Antonio). In 1644, while Taddeo was still alive, the Siren is documented in Antonio’s possession, installed in rooms that had previously been occupied by Francesco, but never by Taddeo or Anna. Though still a teenager at the time and not yet a cardinal, Antonio Barberini is known to have purchased paintings...
from the Del Monte collection upon its dispersal. He could have purchased the Siren at another of the Del Monte sales. None of this is to say that the Siren could not have originated in or around the Colonna family before coming into the possession of Cardinal del Monte, which remains a very real possibility.

In the 1660s the Siren was displayed in the so-called Casa Grande—the Palazzo ai Giubbonari near the Campo dei Fiori. This was the first major Barberini residence in Rome, purchased by Urban VIII’s uncle Monsignore Francesco Barberini in 1581. After his return from France in the late 1650s, Antonio purchased this property from his nephew Maffeo Barberini, the prince of Palestrina, and lived in lavishly appointed rooms there until his death in 1671. Between 1663 and 1666 Antonio spent a large sum to refurbish the ground-floor apartment, which was designed expressly to house and display his art collection. The Siren is documented there in August 1671, in the room numbered 52 for the purposes of Antonio’s posthumous inventory, as “an ancient modern metal siren 3½ palmi high” and appraised at 50 scudi. The room was part of a winter apartment near the library and contained, in addition to the Siren, twelve paintings and sixteen heads and busts, mostly antique. It is probable that the sarcophagus was moved with the Siren to the Casa Grande and that they were installed together there.

By about 1680 the Siren had returned to the Palazzo alle Quattro Fontane along with other paintings and sculptures inherited by Antonio’s nephew Maffeo. It is listed in an inventory probably made that year as “a metal siren on a walnut-colored base, edged in gold.” It was probably installed in the ground-floor rooms of the north wing, for the palace had been renovated in the 1670s to allow greater use of the ground floor, and the secular side of the family continued to inhabit the north wing of the building. In the Quattro Fontane, as in the Casa Grande, the Siren was probably in a set of rooms designated for the display of paintings and sculpture. Most of the sculptures listed in the inventory were supported by walnut brackets (peducci) or bases (sgabelli) with gilt edges, just as the Siren was, and there was no functional furniture in some of the rooms. The by now familiar sarcophagus is listed, but it was probably no longer installed with the Siren. While this is the last known mention of the Siren in inventories, the sarcophagus remains in the Palazzo alle Quattro Fontane to this day (Figure 4).

No record of the Siren has surfaced from the succeeding forty years, but it must have remained in the Barberini family, perhaps passing from Maffeo to his son Cardinal Francesco or to his son Prince Urbano (and then upon his death in 1722 to Francesco). It probably remained in the Palazzo alle Quattro Fontane with many of the other sculptures and paintings acquired by the family in the seventeenth century. In the 1720s the painter, draftsman, and printmaker Giovanni Domenico Campiglia must have recorded the Siren in a checklist of sculpture in the palace that he sent to a patron in England, Richard Topham, to solicit commissions for drawings. Topham ordered a drawing of the Siren and noted it, as “una Sirena di Metallo,” in a list of drawings he organized by the location of their subjects in Italian collections.

The wealthy Etonian Richard Topham, Esq., attended Trinity College, Oxford. A gap in his banking activity sug-
gests that shortly after he left college, in December 1693, he embarked on an eighteen-month Grand Tour, but he seems never to have left England again.28 Topham was a landowner and a member of Parliament. His abiding passions lay in the Mediterranean past. He was an accomplished Greek linguist, owned a few antiquities, and above all spent his energy and wealth tracking down and acquiring books; his library was considered among the finest of his day.29 From these interests stemmed his collection of drawings and prints documenting the antiquities surviving in major Italian centers, particularly Rome and Florence. His effort and approach were highly effective: he collected 703 prints and 2,432 drawings. Thanks to Topham’s wishes and the advocacy of his relative and executor Dr. Richard Mead, the collection remains intact today in the Eton College Library, where it was deposited shortly after Topham’s death in 1730.30

How Topham’s idea for a “paper museum” evolved is not entirely clear, but he knew of similar efforts to document the antiquities of Italy as early as 1709, and he must have begun acquiring drawings sometime between 1716 and 1721.31 Topham implemented a methodical process for selecting subjects and commissioning drawings.32 Agents in Rome—early on his countryman William Kent and later the Roman painter Francesco Fernando Imperiali—sent him descriptive lists of antiquities collections. From these lists he would make his selections and then send back his “order.” The agent would allocate each individual object, or sometimes a whole collection, to one of a stable of draftsmen who would execute original drawings. The agent sent the drawings to England, where Topham annotated and led them, loose, in volumes organized topographically.33 The genesis and preservation of the drawing after the Siren follows this path, with one difference: Campiglia worked outside the standard arrangement, himself acting as both agent and draftsman.34

Although today Pompeo Batoni is the best known of artists who worked for Topham, Bernardino Ciferri, Carlo Calderi, and Giovanni Domenico Campiglia received the lion’s share of the drawing commissions.35 Campiglia would become one of the most active disseminators of antique imagery of his day, and it was in Topham’s employ that the young artist refined his skills for drawing after antique sculpture.36 He made drawings for all the engravings in Antonio Francesco Gori’s six-volume Museum Florentinum (Florence, 1731–62) documenting the antiquities of the Grand Dukes of Tuscany.37 As draftsman and engraver, Campiglia also

5. Giovanni Domenico Campiglia (Italian, 1692–1775). Una Sirena di Metallo, ca. 1720–30. Graphite and/or black chalk, 10½ x 16 in. (27 x 40.5 cm). Inscribed on recto at bottom left: Bn/2/105; on verso at bottom left: Campiglia, at bottom right: Palazzo Barberini no. 4. Stamped at bottom of Siren’s central fin with Richard Topham’s initials framing a caduceus. Eton College Library, Windsor, England, Topham Drawings (Bn. 2, no. 105)
collaborated with Giovanni Bottari to produce *The Museo Capitolino* (Rome, 1741–55), a catalogue of that grand Roman collection. Pope Clement XII appointed him superintendent of the Vatican’s collection of printing plates, the Calculografia Camerale, upon its formation in 1738, after the acquisition of the massive collection of the De Rossi publishing house. In the prime years of his career Campiglia was at the center of a movement that revived printmaking in Rome.

Campiglia’s drawing (Figure 5) is the lynchpin that identifies the Metropolitan Museum’s *Siren* with the sculpture that moved through the Del Monte and Barberini collections. Most significantly, the drawing shows the creature missing her left tail fin. Visual and technical analyses of the bronze indicate that the terminal section of the left tail, from just above the thumb and forefinger of her grasp, is a repair that was cast on to the sculpture subsequent to its original production. In contrast to the rest of the sculpture, which exhibits very little cold-working, this repaired section is heavily chased. The longitudinal ridges that extend to the tips of the left bifurcated fin are also more regularly spaced than those on the right fin and are carefully picked out on both sides (see Figures 6, 7). X-ray fluorescence analysis reveals that the composition of the repaired fin is markedly different from the rest of the sculpture. The relatively high level of zinc and low levels of trace elements present in the left fin characterize the repair as a brass, while the main section of the *Siren* is a leaded tin bronze with trace nickel and iron, a typical alloy for large sixteenth-century sculpture.

The crown depicted in the drawing also differs from that of the sculpture. Though of essentially the same form, the tines in the drawn version are broken and grouped more toward the front, while on the sculpture they are more intact and regularly spaced around the circumference. The uncomfortable fit of the current crown and the different composition of its metal indicate that it, too, is a replacement. Its form is so close to that in the drawing (which presumably represents the original) as to suggest that the replacement was made in consultation with the original crown. Despite the difference in proportions of the torso, the features of the drawing make it clear that the Metropolitan Museum’s *Siren* is the subject. The same number of fins at her waist is indicated, as are the high bustline, pronounced navel, and tendrils of hair resting on her chest. The uneven curve of the middle right tail is expressed in the drawing, and the hands are carefully observed as they grasp the tails—the right thumb bent at the first knuckle, the left straight. Campiglia took an off-center vantage point to show some of the hair tumbling down her back. Then, as now, this was clearly an admired feature of the sculpture.

The most jarring discrepancy between the drawing and the sculpture is the change in characterization of the human half of the siren. The slender torso, arms, and neck of a girl are rendered in bronze, while the drawing shows a barrel-chested woman with more developed musculature. Several
points ameliorate the disjuncture between sculpture and drawing. In recent years repeated praise for Campiglia’s fidelity to the model may have inadvertently, but unfairly, flattened the contours of his artistic personality. But even as a young man, however, he was no slavish copyist. In this early commission he subtly transformed his subject, creating an antiquity from a sculpture made less than fifty years earlier. It is important to remember that Campiglia worked for Topham as a free agent; his commissions were not doled out by a middleman, nor were his drawings collected and verified by a third party before being shipped. It bears recalling that Topham was interested exclusively in images of antique sculpture in the “Sala da basso della Sirena” is listed as antica, except for the Siren, which is described without mention of age. All the sculpture in the “Sala da basso della Sirena” is listed as antica, except for the Siren, which is described without mention of age. This omission, and the fact that the Siren was displayed surrounded by antique sculpture, may signal a certain ambiguity already developing around its age and provenance, at most only about fifty years after it was made. The uncertainty intensified in the 1671 inventory of the late Cardinal Antonio Barberini’s possessions, where the seemingly perplexed notary described the Siren as both ancient and modern (“Una Serena di Metallo antica Moderna”).

Campiglia’s drawing for Topham’s collection completes the transformation, as the sculpture morphed completely into an antiquity in the eyes of its eighteenth-century beholders.

Equally important was the sculpture’s role at the Palazzo Barberini alle Quattro Fontane, as described in the 1644 inventory. Lucia Faedo has associated the sculpture with a striking metaphor at the outset of Horace’s Ars Poetica, esteemed as a handbook of rhetoric since the early Renaissance. Horace describes the siren’s hybrid body as an exemplum of distorted literary invention, a counterexample to his ensuing treatise. In his 1642 book-length description of the palace, the scholar Girolamo Tezi (Hieronymous Tetius) referred to the Sala Ovale at Quattro Fontane as “in truth adapted to literary exercises.” The bronze Siren by the doorway could therefore have presented an elegant but arresting reminder to the literary men who entered the room not to pervert their discourse, and the sarcophagus in which it was installed must have strengthened its connection to antiquity. The Sala Ovale was unique not only for its oval plan; its decoration also marked a sharp departure from the Baroque splendor of Roman palatial interiors. Its white walls were interspersed with simple Ionic pilasters, and it was “ornamented very elegantly with marble statues everywhere.” Considering that Cortona’s brilliant fresco decorated the room to the west, and that the suite of rooms to the south was known for its crimson damasks, this elliptical space with its restrained and largely monochrome classicism must have stood out. The bronze Siren, with its faceted scales and tumbling hair scattering light, would have been a foil, in color and material, for the white marbles that stood beyond the nearby door.

The ground-floor “Room of the Siren” in the Palazzo del Monte a Ripetta was otherwise populated entirely by ancient sculpture: two imperial heads (in recently restored busts), one lifesize and three over-lifesize female statues, and under-lifesize figures of Paris and a group of three jokers (buttoncini). The compiler of the 1627 Del Monte inventory, Paulus Vespignanus, regularly described objects in terms of their age—as moderna or antica—at times going so far as to note a modern head on an ancient body. All the sculpture in the “Sala da basso della Sirena” is listed as antica, except for the Siren, which is described without mention of age. This omission, and the fact that the Siren was displayed surrounded by antique sculpture, may signal a certain ambiguity already developing around its age and provenance, at most only about fifty years after it was made. The uncertainty intensified in the 1671 inventory of the late Cardinal Antonio Barberini’s possessions, where the seemingly perplexed notary described the Siren as both ancient and modern (“Una Serena di Metallo antica Moderna”).

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NOTES

1. Conversion metrics for the seventeenth-century Roman palmo are given in Lavin 1975, p. 723, and Montagu 1989, p. xi. See also notes 6 and 20 below.

2. Following a memorable evocation in the Odyssey, the siren was a popular topos in literature and visual art from classical Greece through Renaissance Italy. Sirens were invariably represented in ancient Greek art with the body of a bird and the head of a woman, but by the sixteenth century the iconography had become complex and varied. Already in the early medieval period images of the mermaid began to proliferate, including examples of twotailed women holding a tail in each hand, and Boccaccio describes sirens as fish from the navel down (see Rachewiltz 1987, p. 169). In the illustrated 1571 edition of Vincenzo Cartari’s Le imagini de i dei de gli antichi (The Images of the Gods of the Ancients; p. 218), “bird” sirens and “fish” sirens cohabit a print that accompanies his description of mythical sea creatures in the ambit of Neptune.

3. Additional comparanda include the large gilt bronze statuettes of Saint Peter and Saint Paul by Bastiano Torrigiani (Museo del Tesoro, Vatican) and Camillo Mariani’s stucco figures of saints in San Bernardo alle Terme and his bronze angels framing the icon of the Virgin in the Cappella Paolina of Santa Maria Maggiore.

4. Rome, Archivio di Stato, 30 Notai Capitolini, Paulus Vespgianus, ufficio 28, vol. 138, fols. 574r–588v; published in Frommel 1971, pp. 30–49, and see also Kirwin 1971, p. 53. Lucia Faedo (2005, pp. 50–51) identified the sculpture indicated by this inventory entry with that in the 1644 Barberini inventory and Campiglia’s drawing and asserted that the sculpture remained in the Palazzo Barberini throughout the eighteenth century, although she did not associate it with later inventories or the Metropolitan Museum’s sculpture.

5. Section headings include “Nella Scala, che discende alla Sirena,” and “Nella Scala della Sala della Sirena.”

6. Frommel 1971, p. 39, fol. 587v: “Una Sirena di Bronzo dentro d’un vaso di marmo scannellato intorno la Sirena alta palmi tre, e mezzo, longa Palmi cinque, e mezzo et il Pilo longo palmi dieci alto dui et ¼ longo palmi 4 et ¼.” Though it is tempting to the modern sensibility to picture the Siren installed just above the sarcophagus, which would function visually as a base, the notary seems to have been particularly attuned to the spatial relationships of the objects he lists, and his use of “in/within” (dentro) rather than “beneath/under” (sotto, which he uses to describe sculpture bases elsewhere in the inventory) seems pointed. It is therefore possible, even likely, that the Siren sat to some extent within the sarcophagus. The waves of strigilation on the sarcophagus could have suggested her rising from water. I wish to thank Elena Carrara for helping me clarify this point.

7. Kirwin 1971, pp. 53–54. Kirwin did not transcribe the whole sale but instead focused solely on the paintings. Wolfe (1985, looking at a different document than Kirwin’s), however, said that only paintings and books were included in the special sale to Antonio Barberini.


9. Vatican Library, Rome, Manuscript Division, Archivio Barberini, Ind. II, Cred. II, Cas. 25, Mazza. LXXXVI, lett. I, no. 158; transcribed in Lavin 1975, p. 178 (her numbers in brackets): “Nello Stanzino accanto alla Stanza, che va verso la stanza ovata[576] Un pilo grande di marmo scannellato, con 2 teste di leone longo p.mi 4 largo p.mi 4—/[577] Una sirena di bronzo, con una corona in testa” (p. 53). Though the dimensions as published in Lavin do not match the Del Monte sarcophagus, they are likely a mistake of the scribe or transcriber (e.g., 9 palmi written or transcribed as 4). A square sarcophagus would be odd, and a vessel 4 by 4 palmi probably would not have been described as large in this inventory.


12. For the Colonna-Barberini alliance, see Strunk 2008.

13. For a family tree, see Waddy 1990, p. 129.

14. The married couple inhabited the north wing of the palace from 1632 and remained there for less than three years before moving back to the Casa Grande ai Giubbonari. In 1635 Antonio began renting the couple’s rooms at the Quattro Fontane. In 1638 Francesco had moved from the Quattro Fontane to the Cancelleria on the Capitoline. Antonio took over some of Francesco’s rooms in the south wing soon thereafter, including the room in which the Siren was documented in 1644 (Waddy 1990, pp. 242–50).

15. An entry in Antonio’s unpublished account book verifies the purchase on May 8, 1628, of a lot consisting of paintings (notably three by Caravaggio) and books from a Del Monte sale (Wolfe 1985). The sales are attested to from the seller’s side by a Del Monte accountant’s copy of the sale list held at the Ripetta palace from October 1627 to June 1628. This document, now in the Ariciconfraternita del Santissimo Crocifisso di San Marcello, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Rome, has been selectively published (with attention only to notable paintings) in Kirwin 1971.

16. Louise Rice (in a conversation with the author) has asked if the Siren might have been made in the context of Marcantonio Colonna’s victory in the great 1571 naval battle of Lepanto. Like the Museum’s bronze, the Colonna siren is often represented crowned, with long wavy hair, and/or grasping a tail in each hand. Whether it might have been made for Palazzo Colonna, which is replete with siren imagery (see Safarik 1999), or for another purpose, this astute suggestion deserves further research.


20. Vatican Library, Rome, Manuscript Division, Archivio Barberini, Arm. 38 (746 pages); transcribed in Lavin 1975, p. 333 (her numbers in brackets): “Apartamento 3/z0/.../Stanza n.o 52—/...[931] Una Serena di Mettallo antica Moderna alta p.m 3½ /...no. 1 —50—.”

21. Lavin 1975, pp. 314–15, 333. The paintings were of all types—sacred, history, portrait, landscape.

22. This remains to be determined; the furniture section of the 1671 inventory has not been published; Lavin 1975, p. 291.

23. Vatican Library, Rome, Manuscript Division, Archivio Barberini, Ind. II, Cred. II, Cas. 25, Mazza. II, letta. A, no. 3, sec. S, p. 4; transcribed in Lavin 1975, p. 387 (her numbers in brackets): [594] “Una Serena di Mettallo Sopra ad un Scabellone COLOR di Noce listata di Oro.” As Lavin (p. 362) explains, the inventory certainly dates to after 1672 and seems to be by the same hand as a separate list of Maffeo’s sculpture that is dated 1680. References to the Siren in the 1671 (see note 20 above) and circa 1680 inventories in Lavin’s 1975 transcriptions have perhaps been overlooked because the alternate spelling of sirena as serena caused the entries to be excluded from her subject index.

24. For a description of Prince Maffeo’s use of the rooms, see Waddy 1990, pp. 263–64. The Siren was likely among the tens of sculptures in the ground floor apartments counted, but not described, by Nicodemus Tessin during his visit in 1688. He does give the enticing detail that many of the rooms on this floor had “no other furniture” besides the 335 paintings, 44 statues, and 56 busts he counted (Tessin 2002, pp. 300–306, especially p. 303; Waddy 1990, p. 265).
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