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Francesco Del Nero

The Art of Multiplication

The Italian Courtyard of the Moscow State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts has for many years conserved the same outlook, familiar to visitors over the world and to generations of art history students and pupils. Under the staircase leading up, itself a free copy of its more famous counterpart in the Florentine Bargello, a dark plaster cast of a bronze bust representing a man in his sixties, draped in an imposing cloak, is placed casually between the life-size plaster copies of Michelangelo's David and Verrocchio's Equestrian statue of Bartolomeo Colleoni (Fig. 2). While it would perhaps be unfair to pretend that the nondescript figure of the sitter attracts any kind of extraordinary attention to itself, the story behind it, upon closer scrutiny, is linked to several dramatic events that bear retelling in the following article.¹

The present-day interiors of this and other halls of the museum continue to reflect the deep reverence that Ivan Tsvetajev, the driving force and mastermind behind the Moscow museum's opening in 1912, felt towards the predominantly German-language arthistorical scholarship of the prewar era.² More than half of all the casts of portrait busts and reliefs in the Italian Renaissance hall, for example, have been created in Berlin by artisans of its famous Gipsformerei, while the general idea of the plaster cast museum came to Tsvetajev with a ready prototype in the shape of Dresden's Albertinum.³

Quite often it was no other than Wilhelm von Bode himself, considered by many as the most influential museum figure of the time, whom Tsvetajev met in Berlin in his new museum of Renaissance art opened in 1904, recommending and presenting items from the extensive Berlin collections to his Russian colleague for copying and display purposes.⁴ These meetings sure have left a lasting impression, and the eminent German is portrayed vividly in Tsvetajev's letters addressed to Juri Nechaev-Maltsov, Moscow museum's main mecenate and supporter:

"I saw Exellenz Bode in the Museum today. His energy is no way diminished by the rheumatism having affected his feet, nor by the jealous treatment that the country's scholars and museum men are giving him. However, much they beat him in the press, he is as vigorous, bold and active as ever".

Or, in a later letter from 1911:

"[...] The Kaiser-Friedrich Museum. I felt so good there, and I believe that even in many years we will not reach the same potential for acquisition that their museum administration possesses".⁵

The aforementioned plaster cast in Moscow is a palpable testament to the immediacy of this cultural exchange. The original of the portrait (Fig. 1) entered the Berlin collections in 1895, and only four years later, in 1899, Ivan Tsvetajev made his first visit to the Berlin Gipsformerei, which subsequently provided him with a copy of then-recent Berlin acquisition, along with many other items.⁶ Of course Tsvetajev, who died before the Bolshevik Revolution and somewhat luckily for himself did not live up to see all the subsequent transformations of his museum, could not foresee the perplexed story that would connect the two busts, the original and the copy, once more.

In a completely unpredictable sequence of events, the Berlin bust from which the plaster cast was taken, inventory no 2261, was placed in the special repository in the ill-fated Friedrichshain anti-aerial bunker in Berlin on the outset of World War II.⁷ It was subsequently considered a wartime loss after a fire occurred there in May 1945.⁸ In reality, however, it was evacuated to Moscow in 1946 in a damaged state and kept there in secret for some 70 years.⁹ Only in recent times was the veil of secrecy lifted, causing Bode's acquisition to reappear in the repositories of the very same Moscow museum that Tsvetajev creat-

ed.¹⁰ We have covered the intricacies and perplexities of this story elsewhere.¹¹



Fig. 1: Giulio Mazzoni (?). Bust of Francesco del Nero, bronze, Berlin.

The 2015 Berlin exhibition *The Lost Museum / Das Verschwundene Museum*, dedicated to these most unfortunate events, made it a special case to present a newly-made plaster cast of the Del Nero bust as a remembrance and a testimony to Wilhelm von Bode's fascination for Renaissance bronzes (Fig. 3).¹² Volker Krahn's short note in the exhibition catalogue points out that a special display was provided for the Del Nero bust in the halls of the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum.¹³ It stood on an Istrian marble chimneypiece in a hall imitating the interiors of a rich Venetian palazzo, the bust formed a quasi-pair with another large-scale bronze bust of pope Gregory XIII.¹⁴

In a step forward, after many years of uncomfortable silence a joint project between the Moscow and the Berlin museum emerged, making the existence of the fire-damaged original public knowledge once again.¹⁵ In Moscow, exhibiting the copy and the original to-

gether in the Italian Hall seemed like a good idea (Fig. 4).



Fig. 2: Plaster cast of Berlin SKS 2261, 1899-1912, Moscow, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts.

Restoration of the bronze bust was commissioned to Mikhail Tulubenski, an experienced museum restorer working with metal objects exclusively.¹⁶ Even if much of the fire damage to the bronze was irreversible in its essence, some things could be done. Surface contaminations were cleaned, crumbling layers of oxide stabilized, some cosmetic defects filled in, and a new mounting system with a small circular marble base replaced the missing original one (Fig. 5).

What could be more instructive than a comparison of a copy with the original? Details invisible in the plaster cast should have emerged. The real outlook of a 16th century bronze original should have enriched our understanding of this sculpture, providing an impression of life, genuineness and displaying the original texture that even the best plaster copy cannot transmit.

In reality, however, both the restorer and the author of this text were more than slightly disappointed by

what befell their eyes (Fig. 6). Inferior, shoddy workmanship during the bronze casting process (and not the subsequent fire damage), leading to holes and other defects everywhere in the sculpture, was detected. Visible seams from a multi-part mold used for the casting process, most evident around the eyes and ears of the model, spoil the bust and make the plaster copy with its muted contours somewhat preferable aesthetically. Regardless of whether these defects were caused by the imperfect bronze casting technique available to the craftsmen in the 16th century, or just exacerbated as a result of heat and war damage, the aforementioned comparison has motivated us to put the attribution of the bronze bust under closer scrutiny.



Fig. 3: Modern plaster cast in the halls of the Bode-Museum, 2015.



Fig. 4: Bust of Francesco del Nero, SKS 2261/3C-224, before the restoration, 2015.

Who is the author of the bronze bust and what is it? The answer should of course to be found in three subsequent editions of the Berlin catalogues of the Italian bronze sculptures. According to Bode's 1904 first edition, and the 1930 posthumously published last pre-war edition, as well as in Fritz Goldschmidt's 1914 interim rendition of the same, the bust is representing Francesco Del Nero, papal treasurer to pope Clement VII Medici, and comes from the Palazzo Del Nero (Torrighiani) in Florence, being acquired in 1895.¹⁷ This last provenance detail is extremely important in itself. Torrighiani palace, expanded and rebuilt in the 19th century, has incorporated the older Palazzo del Nero dating back to 1530's, thus allowing both Bode and present-day scholars to identify the Berlin bust with a documented portrait of the sitter that stood in his family home.¹⁸ According to the 1914 catalogue of Goldschmidt, a reworked marble version, made later and lower in quality, was put on the grave of Francesco del Nero in the Santa Maria Minerva church in Rome.¹⁹ Interestingly, the 1930 Bode catalogue drops this "lower in quality" definition completely.



Fig. 5: Bust of Francesco del Nero, SKS 2261/3C-224, after the restoration, 2016.

Giulio Mazzoni (1525–1618), a pupil of Daniele da Volterra, is named as the potential author, with a reference to Giorgio Vasari, complete with a question mark denoting the uneasiness that the catalogue authors feel about the attribution. The short testimony by Giorgio Vasari remains by far the only information related to this artist, more famous for his activity as a painter and stuccoist working in the Palazzo Spada,²⁰ and bears repeating in full:

„Another disciple of Daniello is Giulio Mazzoni of Piacenza, who commenced his studies with Vasari, when the latter was painting a picture in Florence for Messer Biagio Mei which was subsequently dispatched to Lucca, where it was placed in the Church of San Piero Cigoli. [...] This Giulio, having afterwards learned to work in stucco from Daniello, and in this respect becoming the equal of his master, has decorated the whole of the inside of the Palace belonging to Cardi-

nal Capodiferro, producing admirable works there, not in stucco only but in painting also, stories namely, both in oil and fresco; and these have procured him high commendations which are fully merited. The same artist has executed the bust of Francesco del Nero in marble, a portrait taken from life, and so good a one that it does not seem possible to produce a better, from all which we may fairly hope for him the most distinguished success; nay there can be no doubt but that he will ultimately attain to the highest point of perfection in our arts.”²¹



Fig. 6: Bust of Francesco del Nero, SKS 2261/3C-224, after restoration, 2016. Close-up view of head showing cast seams.

It can be seen that Vasari, who apparently knew Mazzoni quite well, makes no mention of any bronze bust ever being created by him, or a marble head made after a bronze, but a marble from life – a very significant difference. Not clarifying the matter is Frida Schottmüller, Bode's student and successor in the Berlin museums, who, writing just one year after

Bode's death for the famous Thieme-Becker dictionary, criticizes the attribution of the Berlin del Nero bust to Mazzoni as only "hypothetical".²² The question mark becomes persistent, making its way into the 2006 catalogue of wartime losses of the Berlin Skulpturensammlung and present-day texts.²³ The somewhat dubious assumption about Mazzoni's authorship of the bust is based on prior research, however. Two texts written shortly after the bust's purchase by the Berlin museums need to be examined in detail here, revealing the peculiar logic leading the eminent German scholars of the era to suggest this attribution.

The first text devoted to the Del Nero bust explicitly was an article that Wilhelm von Bode wrote for the 1896 issue of the Berlin museums yearbook, just a year after the acquisition of the artwork.²⁴ Remarkably eloquent and thoroughly brilliant in style, it resembles a poetical essay more than a dry official report.

The text begins as a memoir of a series of visits made by Bode to the church of Santa Maria Minerva, which is "like no other in Rome full of tombs adorned with beautiful portrait sculptures".²⁵ Yet the author makes note of dirt and general neglect having set home in the building, and then treats the reader with a shocking story: a bust that had long provoked his interest, made "in the manner of Raphael's late portraits" has been replaced with a modern bronze copy, its golden color betraying its modernity. At some other date, a different bust is installed on that place, yet later still Bode pays a visit to the church again only to find the niche empty. The reader, puzzled as he is with this series of vanishing and reappearing originals and copies, then has to deal with a major discovery:

*"Last year, I paid a visit again to the interior of the church. Banks and chairs were dumped in a heap on one side, so several tombs invisible during the previous visits thus came to light. One monument impressed me, with an impressive sculptural portrait of an aged man who seemed familiar. On closer inspection, not only did I recognize the same man whose bronze bust we possess in our Berlin collection, but found the two quite identical."*²⁶

Bode's further train of thought anticipates the big question that the reader has in mind: can it be that the bronze bust from Berlin is a later copy and the marble one is the original? The answer is provided without hesitation:

*"An inspection of the marble bust, placed high, from a closer distance showed that the marble bust has much lower quality than the bronze, and has the characteristic features of a copy, even if it was created just a little later in time."*²⁷

The article ends with a sentence no less poetical than the one it begins with, thus resolving the conflict pointed out in the beginning of the text:

*"During the visit that I paid to the aforementioned interior of Santa Maria Minerva a few weeks ago, prosaic cleanliness and order stroke me as reigning the place. [...] Close by an entrance, in a niche, a bust stands again. A smaller, but similar bust in the right nave of the church stroke me as the same beautiful original that was there before. It seems like a gush of fresh wind has blown from the old monastery rooms into the church."*²⁸

So, the problem of original and copy, together with the problem of thievery in the badly kept Roman churches, are all dealt with masterfully. Yet another problem ensues. An attentive reader will notice that the bronze bust, according to Bode's own words, was obtained by him not from the Palazzo Torrigiani (Del Nero), as the later catalogues state, but from an English private collector of German descent, Mr Henry Pfungst, together with some other Italian bronzes from his collection.

The personality of Mr Henry Joseph Pfungst (1844–1917) may merit a closer look here.²⁹ Having made his fortune through merchandise in wines and spirits, he was a collector of some quite eclectic taste – as catalogues of English miniature, Chinese inkwells, Italian Maiolica or Gainsborough drawings, for example, come to show.³⁰ It seems clear also that Pfungst was one of the many figures on the world art market that Bode supplied with his protection and consultations as a part of a well-functioning system.³¹ The cata-

logues of his Italian small bronzes collection were certainly made with Bode's help.³²



Fig. 7: Giulio Mazzoni, Bust of Francesco del Nero, Santa Maria Minerva, Rome.

So, an important issue here – if the Berlin bust was bought from a fellow collector in London, where does the Torrigiani palace provenance come from? Bode is proud to inform the reader of his unexpected discovery.

*“Mr Pfungst knew only that it comes from Italy and depicts some Count del Nero [...]. Browsing through the pages of Bocchi's Bellezze, I found that this family had a palace on the Arno, near the Palazzo Torrigiani, which Baccio d'Agnolo together with Tomaso del Nero built and furnished. Bocchi provides a detailed description of the palace, which has been heavily changed since and is now connected with Palazzo Torrigiani – and in one hall on the mantelpiece he mentions Una testa in bronzo di Francesco del Nero – “A portrait of Francesco del Nero in bronze”.*³³

Having thus clarified – instantly – the name and the personality of the sitter, Bode provides us with a precise provenance of the bust. He finds both in a 1591 Florentine text, revised and expanded in 1677, and not reprinted ever since during his lifetime.³⁴ Bode's erudition and historiographic acumen are worthy of admiration all the more for the fact that it seems that Bocchi's text is read by the eminent scholar as an amusement in his free time (“browsing through ...”).

Bode's further arguments are somewhat predictable and read as follows: The Berlin collection is in possession of the very same bust described in Bocchi's text (1). It is the original created during the sitter's lifetime – because bronze busts, as Bode well knows, in the 15th and 16th century have remained a rare exception, a privilege reserved for the lucky few (2). It was subsequently copied in marble for the tomb (3) (Fig. 7).

It is curious, however, that Bode makes no mention whatsoever of the Vasari text in his 1896 article. Intensely studied over and over, reprinted many times with commentary and a scientific apparatus by Gaetano Milanesi, the Vasari text was infinitely more accessible and easier to obtain than the Bocchi-Cinelli's Bellezze. Also, the marble bust in Santa Maria Minerva was already linked to the name of Giulio Mazzoni at least since 1760 Giovanni Bottari's edition of Vasari's Vite.³⁵ This kind of omission seems strange. Intentional or not, a lack of information at this stage is certainly beneficial to the attribution logic. With a text directly stating that Mazzoni did his image in marble from life, the kind of primacy Bode wants for his bust would be subject to hard questions.

Yet in his 1896 article Wilhelm von Bode, having so brilliantly established the provenance of the object and the name of the sitter, does not say a single word about the potential author. A bit further in the text he does pose the inevitable question, only to show remarkable humility in the matter: the author cannot be named even “tentatively”. Searching among the names of sculptors (Cristoforo Romano, Antonio Sansovino, Gianfrancesco Rustici) he selects none of them – a markedly unexpected behavior for a scholar intent on attaching names of importance to

various works of art (Leonardo³⁶, Michelangelo³⁷), or on changing major names in sequence as in the case of the presumed Marietta Strozzi bust.³⁸ What he never did so far to the best of our knowledge was leaving the readers waiting for a name.



Fig. 8: Giulio Mazzoni, Bust of Francesco del Nero, Santa Maria Minerva, Rome.

While it is difficult to reproach Bode of withholding evidence or of lying outright, he is certainly guilty of concealing the true provenance of the bust in a quite diplomatic way. It is in the 1930 publication of his famous autobiography, *Mein Leben*, that the true provenance is revealed: the bust was bought directly from the Torrigiani collection, together with a Luca della Robbia medallion with head of a youth, for a sum of circa 50 000 franks.³⁹ The beautiful story of browsing through Bocchi's "Bellezze..." is most certainly fake, and it is irrelevant whether the bust has really passed through Pfungst's hands. The wine trader may have served as a middleman to facilitate the export of the piece from Italy, avoiding legal accusations. And it was no one other than Stefano Bardini, the Florentine antiquarian of worldwide renown, who dealt with

Bode directly and was the true orchestrator of the sale.⁴⁰

Ernst Steinmann, a renowned scholar, author of popular books on Michelangelo and Botticelli, will suggest the name of Giulio Mazzoni for the Berlin bust, complete with a reference to Vasari, some 12 years later after Bode's article.⁴¹ Steinmann's 1908 article is not altogether devoid of the novelist approach of his precursor. He begins it with a large quote from a 1549 letter of Giovanbattista Busini to Benedetto Varchi, containing a reference to the personality of Francesco Del Nero, treasurer to pope Clement VII. A repulsive image of a wretched old man with signs of dementia, "repeating things over and over for the hundredth time",⁴² arrogant, unlikeable, pathologically greedy and having questionable personal hygiene standards, ensues. The citations from Varchi and Paolo Giovio, who all knew Del Nero in person, abound. The logic of the text is clear – the bust is not beautiful, but so was the prototype. We should therefore appreciate the sculpture for its truthfulness. One is left to wonder whether Steinmann ever knew of a contemporary historical fiction novel portraying the same Francesco Del Nero as a young and glamorous Renaissance lover-boy, but if he did, this emphasis on ugliness may be intentional. The two attempts at a historical portrait, made so close in time, could not be more different.⁴³

Further arguments of Steinmann concur with those of Bode's, whom he praises for his unmistakable eye of a connoisseur, "Scharfblick".⁴⁴ According to Steinmann, the bronze bust is the unquestionable prototype, Vasari having one of his lapses of memory, as was often the case with him. The sculptor who made the marble copy on the grave (not necessarily Mazzoni!) appealed to the wishes of the relatives of the deceased in making his version more likeable, embellishing Del Nero's features and making the overall effect less depressive. The differently treated folds of clothing, according to Steinmann, support the earlier dating of the bronze version. A simpler stand-up collar on the bronze bust presumes an earlier date, a more complex fold-out one on the tomb sculpture – a later one. The more complex drapery and a different posture of the head of the marble version are results of a

less than satisfactory modification of the original, fitting it to the limited space of the marble niche.

All these neat, coherent arguments, so beautifully expressed in gothic script of the *Monatshefte für Kunstwissenschaft*, do not make much sense, unfortunately. One needs only to compare two images today to see that the simplified forms of the bronze bust drapery have an aloof all'antica character that could claim origins both in the 16th and 19th centuries. That the protagonist's head protrudes awkwardly from them; and his head bearing tell-tale lines of a piece-mold cast could hardly claim for originality.

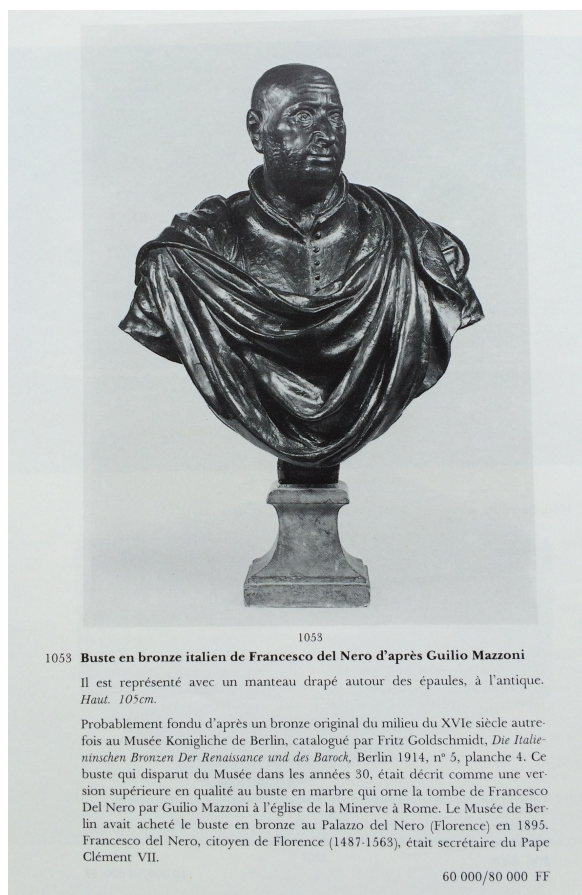


Fig. 9: Portrait of Francesco del Nero (here referred as 2nd bronze version).

It is clear that important details such as ears, eyes, eye socket areas and facial hair are all treated infinitely better in the marble bust. It is the marble bust in Santa Maria Minerva, not the bronze one, which stands much closer stylistically to works by Mazzoni's teacher, Daniele da Volterra and his often-copied

Michelangelo, as Charles Davis rightfully notes in his paper investigating the probable Bartolomeo Ammannati participation in the tomb design.⁴⁵ The more harmonious design of Michelangelo's drapery details is much closer in execution to the marble bust of Del Nero on the tomb and not to its bronze counterpart. The awkward stand-up collar of the latter looks like a simplification in comparison, made by a less-than-stellar copyist for reasons of practicality – simpler cast shape, easier casting process.



Fig. 10: Portrait of Francesco del Nero (here referred as 2nd bronze version).

It is the drapery of the marble bust, not the bronze one, that looks more genuine and finds direct analogies in the Uberto Strozzi bust in the same Roman church, whose tomb is dated 1563 and which Ulrich Middeldorf too ascribes to the hand of Giulio Mazzoni.⁴⁶ And finally, it was not the larger shape of the bronze bust that required a modification to fit the niche on the tombstone, but the smaller one of the

marble bust itself – the corners have been added along two sides, as can be seen in the photograph (Fig. 8). This, in turn, is most logical if indeed the marble is the original one described by Vasari – and it is as such that it is featured in August Griesebach’s 1936 book dedicated to portrait busts in Roman churches.⁴⁷ Or, for that matter, in Arturo Pettorelli’s 1922 monograph on Giulio Mazzoni, which disregards the Berlin bust completely but gives eloquent praise to the marble:



Fig. 11: Portrait of Francesco del Nero (here referred as 2nd bronze version).

“Vasari’s compliment is well justified: the sculpture is full of dignity and life, as if something from the spirit of Gian Lorenzo Bernini has been born in it at the wane of the 16th century.”⁴⁸

Leaving aside the issue of the original and copy for now, let us pose a different question. Can it be proved with certainty that the bronze bust, whoever its author is, the one that was bought by the eminent German scholar from either of his friends, the Florentine antiquarian or the English wine merchant, was really the one that stood in Palazzo Del Nero as described in Bocchi’s “Bellezze...”?



Fig. 12: Portrait of Francesco del Nero (here referred as 2nd bronze version).

Even this is far from certain. Valentina Catalucci’s excellent investigation into the existing documentation related to the collections of the Del Nero family reveals a troubling fact: the portrait mentioned by Bocchi in 1591, while already present in the 1576 inventory of the Palazzo, does not appear in any document later than 1595, the year that the family heritage was divided between two brothers.⁴⁹ If we presume that the bust had spent the three centuries untouched on the same mantelpiece, it could possibly, while not necessarily, be mentioned elsewhere.

Complicating the situation further is another important fact. It should be noted, contrary to what Bode and Steinmann presume, that the bronze bust of Francesco del Nero is not the only existing copy. A very similar bronze bust with identical dimensions, never appearing in the critical literature so far, has

been sold at Sotheby's Monaco auction in 1986, resurfacing most recently on a smaller art auction in France.⁵⁰ Extremely similar in overall appearance and patina colour, it differs from the Berlin version in a few areas, the most obvious being the mounting system with a quadrangular base made of Florentine stone (Figs. 9, 10). No information about the provenance is given by either of the auctioneers. While the attribution to Mazzoni is expressed with a degree of uncertainty in all cases, the proposed dating is still 16th century. Which one, if any, is the original mentioned by Bocchi?



Fig. 13: Plaster cast in the Palazzo Mozzi.

Resolving the mystery, or at least, shedding some light on this second bronze bust of Francesco Del Nero was made possible with a discovery of an interesting item in the little-studied repositories of Palazzo Mozzi in Florence, part of the Archivio Storico Eredità Bardini, which was brought to my attention by Dr. Lynn Catterson of Columbia University.⁵¹

There, in the temporary storage rooms undergoing renovation, another plaster of the Del Nero bust is located, quite different from the plaster copies dis-

cussed above.⁵² Unlike the pristine Berlin Gipsformerei-copies, this one was never brought to completion, left unfinished, unpainted, devoid of a mount, and was subsequently broken on the sides (Fig. 13). Crude, visible seams of a composite casting form on the surface of the plaster were left untouched. Why is it there? What was its original purpose?



Fig. 14: Plaster cast in the Palazzo Mozzi.

The fact that Palazzo Torrigiani, incorporating the ancient home of the Del Nero, stands just across the street from Palazzo Mozzi, Stefano Bardini's former trade headquarters and now museum, can itself be deemed a lucky coincidence. The dealer's influence and connections notwithstanding, the neighbourhood factor itself was probably helping him to exert control over the sale of the important Torrigiani collection.⁵³ Plaster casts, as well as pioneering photo-reproductions, could readily be made by skilled craftsmen and restorers working for Bardini nearby, for advertising and documentary purposes.⁵⁴ It is hardly a coincidence therefore that the present-day archives of Bardini's once flourishing trade operations conserve a copy of

the portrait of Francesco Del Nero in plaster.

Thankfully, several good quality photographs available allow us to make important observations about this plaster and the second of its bronze counterparts (Fig. 12).⁵⁵ A left-side view of the second bronze version (Fig. 11) reveals an interesting detail invisible on the frontal photo – traces from a multi-part casting mold for the bust are visible once again on the shoulders and on the forehead of the model. They do not coincide with similar traces on the head and the face of the Berlin bust now in Moscow, yet the technique looks familiar. The characteristic V-shape line formed by junctions of the mold pieces on the left temple of the subject is precisely the same on the plaster, making us believe the two were created in the same mold (Figs. 11 and 14).

This would of course put the dating of the second bronze version far out of the 16th century and well into 1890-s territory. To the already complicated history of originals and copies, a potential forgery is now added. Was Bocchi's text and the Torrigiani palace used as instruments of provenance construction for faked works of art sold via an international network?

It is certainly possible that this bronze copy was created by Bardini's assistants with no fraudulent intent, as a replacement for the original Del Nero portrait in the Torrigiani palace. Yet its presence is in a way quite alarming.⁵⁶ It is instructive to remind the reader of an experiment conducted by the National Gallery in Washington. In 1993, seven apparently identical busts of pope Paul III Farnese, all ascribed to Guiglielmo della Porta (1516–1577), from several different museum collections, were analyzed by means of XRF radiography. The metal composition of all seven busts provided a shocking result – not one of the versions, which all closely followed the marble original from the museum of Naples, was apparently manufactured before the year 1869, when electrolytically purified copper began to be available for casting purposes, effectively denouncing them all as forgeries.⁵⁷

The XRF analysis of the Berlin bust, now in Moscow, has not yet been made. Maybe in the future new technical means will obtain a meaningful result and the question of Giulio Mazzoni's authorship, or lack of the former, will be settled once and for all. Yet even in

the case no such conclusive result can be obtained, the complicated story behind the portrait of Francesco Del Nero and its multiplied versions will remain. The peculiar and contradictory logic of Bode and Steinmann, with their deliberate omissions and voluntary treatment of sources, unfounded assumptions and shortcuts taken, becomes a document in itself, possessing all the vestiges of exquisite style of German scholarship of a bygone era. It seems fitting therefore to quote their compatriot Frank Arnau, author of best-selling book on fakes: "The forgery begins where something is substituted. A work represented as not what it is becomes a forgery."⁵⁸ It is vital, therefore, to strive for correct identification of each of the Francesco Del Nero portraits. Until the puzzle is solved, we have to be content with these observations which, following William McAlister Johnson's ironic definition of a catalogue article, "reflect the knowledge of the moment, or, more properly speaking, document the ignorance of the day."⁵⁹

Endnotes

1. The author hereby expresses his heartfelt gratitude to the Biblioteca Hertziana in Rome and to the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, whose generously offered fellowship in 2017 has made the research and the writing of the following article possible.
2. For an excellent summary survey in English, see Bénédicte Savoy and Sabine Skott, *A European Museum-Cocktail around 1900. The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow*, in: *The Museum is open*, eds. Andrea Meyer and Bénédicte Savoy, Berlin 2014, p. 77-88.
3. The correspondence between Tsvetaev and Georg Treu together with commentaries was published in 2006. Erhard Hexelschneider, Alexander Baranov and Tobias Burg (eds.), *In Moskau ein kleines Albertinum bauen. Iwan Zwetajew und Georg Treu im Briefwechsel (1881–1913)*, Cologne 2006.
4. For a modern reassessment of Bode's influence and personality, see Tilmann von Stockhausen, *Wilhelm von Bode. Der mächtigste Museumsman seiner Zeit*, in: *Klassiker der Kunstgeschichte. Von Winckelmann bis Warburg*, ed. Ulrich Pfisterer, München 2008, p. 143.
5. Some of his visits are documented by Tsvetaev in his letters to Nechaev-Maltsov, published with a commentary in 2008–2011. Quoted are letters 872 and 912, in: *Маргарита Борисовна Аксененко, И.В.Цветаев – Ю.С.Нечаев-Мальцов. Переписка. 1897–1912*, vol. 4, Moscow, 2011, p. 214, p. 255-256.
6. Moscow plaster cast inventory number "II.2.в 42"; exact acquisition date unknown, bought between 1899 and 1912. See letter 429 and 912, in: *Аксененко* 2008, vol. 2, p. 130; Аксененко 2011, vol. 3, p. 255-256. For the acquisition date of the Berlin bust, see below.
7. For an account of the evacuation measures see Irene Kühnel-Kunze, *Bergung – Evakuierung – Rückführung. Die Berliner Museen in den Jahren 1939–1959* (= Jahrbuch Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Sonderband 2), West-Berlin 1984.

8. *Skulpturensammlung. Dokumentation der Verluste. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin*. Band VII. Skulpturen, Möbel, eds. Lothar Lambacher et al., Berlin 2006, p. 163, no. 2261.
9. The presence of the Del Nero bust in the repositories of Pushkin Museum was de facto disclosed in: Konstantin Akinscha, Grigori Koslow and Clemens Toussaint, *Russische Dokumente zur Beutekunst*, in: *Anzeiger des Germanischen Nationalmuseums*, Nürnberg 1997, p. 137-154, p. 149.
10. The Del Nero bust is included in the electronic database for transferred artworks maintained by the Russian Ministry of Culture. Index number 02.07.1458864. URL: www.lostart.ru/move/ru/1414609/?lang=ru&tpg=1414609&PAGEN_1=19 01-02-2018. Pushkin State Museum inventory number 3C-224 (ZS-224).
11. Vasily Rastorguev. *From a Russian Perspective. Notes on the History of the Italian Sculptures from the Berlin Museums in the Custody of the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, 1945–2015*, in: *Jahrbuch Preußischer Kulturbesitz*, Bd. 51, 2015, p. 164-187.
12. As for the plaster cast, it can still be ordered today from the same manufacturers. See #2425 in: *Katalog der Originalabgüsse. Heft 6. Christliche Epochen. Spätantike, Byzanz, Italien Freiplastik, Reliefs, Bronzestatuetten*, Berlin 1961.
13. See Volker Krahn's essay in Julien Chapuis and Stefan Kemperdick (eds.), *Das verschwundene Museum. Die Verluste der Berliner Gemälde- und Skulpturensammlungen 70 Jahre nach Kriegsende*, Berlin 2015, p. 69. Also by the same author „Ein ziemlich kühnes Unterfangen . . .“. *Wilhelm von Bode als Wegbereiter der Bronzenforschung, seine Erwerbungen für die Berliner Museen und seine Beziehungen zu Sammlern*, in: *Von allen Seiten schön. Bronzen der Renaissance und des Barock*, ed. Volker Krahn, Berlin 1995, p. 34-55.
14. Inv. SKS 271, with an attribution to Taddeo Landini (1561–1596). Not devoid of interest in the light of what follows, is the fact that the bust was bought from Stefano Bardini just two years prior, in 1883. See Valerie Niemeyer Chini, *Stefano Bardini e Wilhelm Bode. Mercanti e connoisseur fra Ottocento e Novecento*, Firenze 2009, p. 75; ill. 20, p. 150.
15. The Del Nero bust has been presented among a list of 53 other items in a joint conference held by the Moscow and Berlin curators Vasily Rastorguev and Neville Rowley, *Da Berlino a Mosca. Sculture italiane del Tre e del Quattrocento, perdute e ritrovate (1945–2016)*. Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, 3 May 2016. URL: www.khi.fi.it/5374054/20160503_Rastorguev-Rowley. 01-02-2018
16. An account of the restoration work has been published electronically at www.museumconservation.ru/data/works/nero/index.php, 01-02-2018
17. Wilhelm von Bode and Fritz Knapp, *Die italienischen Bronzen. Königliche Museen zu Berlin. Beschreibung der Bildwerke der christlichen Epochen*, Band II, Berlin 1904, p. 2, №224; Wilhelm von Bode, *Bildwerke des Kaiser-Friedrich-Museums. Die italienischen Bildwerke der Renaissance und des Barock, Zweiter Band: Bronzestatuetten, Büsten und Gebrauchsgegenstände*, Berlin / Leipzig 1930, p. 2, №. 5; Fritz Goldschmidt, *Die italienischen Bronzen der Renaissance und des Barock. Erster Teil: Büsten, Statuetten und Gebrauchsgegenstände. [Königliche Museen zu Berlin. Beschreibung der Bildwerke der christlichen Epochen. Bd. 2.]* Berlin 1914, p. 2, no. 5, Taf. 4.
18. Leonardo Ginori Lisci, *I palazzi di Firenze nella storia e nell'arte*, Firenze 1972, vol. 2, p. 675 ss.; Valentina Catalucci, *La Famiglia Del Nero di Firenze. Proprietà, patrimonio e collezioni: il palazzo Del Nero (oggi Torrigiani in piazza dei Mozzi)*, in: *Studi di storia dell'arte*, v. 24, 2013, p. 147-180.
19. Goldschmidt 1914, *Die italienischen Bronzen*, p. 2.
20. The extensive critical literature on Giulio Mazzoni as painter and stuccoist will not be cited here for considerations of brevity. An excellent survey can be found in Monica Grasso's article for the *Dizionario Bibliografico degli Italiani*, vol. 72, 2008; available online at http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giulio-mazzoni_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/, 01-01-2018.
21. Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architetti* [1568], a cura di Gaetano Milanese, vol. 7, Firenze 1881, p. 70; translation here by Mrs Jonathan Foster taken from George Bell & Sons English edition: Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, vol. 5, London 1892, p. 178-179.
22. Frida Schottmüller, Giulio Mazzoni, in: *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, eds. Ulrich Thieme and Felix Becker, vol. XXIV, Leipzig 1930, p. 314.
23. Lambacher 2006, *Skulpturensammlung*, p. 163, no. 2261; Chapuis / Kemperdick 2015, *Das verschwundene Museum*, p. 69.
24. Wilhelm von Bode, *Die Bronzebüste des Francesco del Nero im Berliner Museum*, in: *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preußischen Kunstsammlungen*, vol. 17, 1896, p. 235-238.
25. Bode 1896, *Die Bronzebüste des Francesco del Nero*, p. 235. English translation here and below by the author.
26. Bode 1896, *Die Bronzebüste des Francesco del Nero*, p. 235.
27. Bode 1896, *Die Bronzebüste des Francesco del Nero*, p. 236.
28. Bode 1896, *Die Bronzebüste des Francesco del Nero*, p. 238.
29. Offering valuable information about Bode's relations with Pfungst and other British collectors is Jeremy Warren, *Bode and the British*, in: *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, vol. 38, 1996, p. 121-142.
30. *Catalogue of a Collection of Miniatures Lent in 1914–15 by Henry Joseph Pfungst*. [Victoria and Albert Museum], London 1915; *A Descriptive Catalogue of a Collection of Chinese & Japanese Midzu-ire, Writers' Water-Vessels, Formed by H. J. Pfungst*, F.S.A. compiled by Hogitarō Inada, with an introd. by A. J. Koop, [London?] 1912; *A Descriptive Catalogue of a Small Collection of Italian Maiolica in the Collection of Henry J. Pfungst*, London 1890; *Catalogue of the Collection of Works by Thomas Gainsborough, R. A. and Old Pictures and Drawings by Different Artists of Henry J. Pfungst*, London 1917.
31. For other examples, see Stockhausen 2008, *Wilhelm von Bode*, p. 145-146.
32. For more on this part of Pfungst collection, auctioned by Christies in 1917 and bought by John Pierpont Morgan, see: Flaminia Gennari Santori, "I was to have all the finest". *Renaissance Bronzes from J. Pierpont Morgan to Henry C. Frick*, in: *Journal of the History of Collections*, vol. 10, 2010, p. 307-324. Some privately printed catalogues of the Pfungst collection with Bode's contributions and remarks are conserved at the V&A museum library. URL: <http://copac.jisc.ac.uk/id/2763016?style=html&title=Extra%20copies%20of%20the%20catalogue%20of%20the%20Pfungst%20collection> 10-02-2018
33. Bode 1896, *Die Bronzebüste des Francesco del Nero*, p. 236-237.
34. Francesco Bocchi and Giovanni Cinelli, *Le Bellezze della città di Firenze*. Firenze 1677. For a reassessment of the text's influence and role see Julius von Schlosser, *La letteratura artistica*, Firenze 1964, p. 371. The first and only English edition by Harvey Miller Publishers is of comparatively recent date. Francesco Bocchi, *The Beauties of the City of Florence. A Guidebook of 1591*, eds. Thomas Frangenberg and Robert Williams, Turnhout 2005.
35. Giovanni Bottari (ed.), *Vite de più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architetti, scritte da Giorgio Vasari, correte da molti errori e illustrate con note*, vol. 3, Roma 1760, p. 144. In Bode's defense it should be noted that the name of Francesco del Nero does not appear in the alphabetical index of the more common Vasari-Milanese edition. There, however, the bust in Santa Maria Minerva can be found by searching for Giulio Mazzoni. A footnote reference, too, mentions the Bottari identification and laments the fact that this information is not reflected in modern guidebooks. Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architetti* [1568], a cura di Gaetano Milanese, vol. 7, Firenze 1881, p. 70, note 3.
36. To name just a couple of recent publications on the formidable "Florastreit": Hans Ost, *Edeltrödel. Neues zu der Leonardo da Vinci oder seinem Umkreis zugeschriebenen „Flora“ des Bode-Museums in Berlin* (electronically published, 2008, <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/volltexte/2008/494/>); 01-01-2018, and the fundamental Ulrike Wolff-Thomsen, *Die Wachs-büste einer Flora in der Berliner Skulpturensammlung und das System Wilhelm Bode. Leonardo da Vinci oder Richard Cockle Lucas?*, Kiel 2006.
37. The marble statue now tentatively identified as Aristeo by Domenico Pierati (1600–1656), lost in 1945, was in Bode's eyes the Michelangelo's *St. John the Baptist* mentioned by Vasari and made

- for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco Medici. See: Anna Maria Voci, *Wilhelm Bode e il falso Michelangelo*, in: *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, vol. XXXVII, 2010, p. 265-278; Chapuis / Kemperdick 2015, *Das verschwundene Museum*, p. 81.
38. A bust attributed by Bode to Desiderio da Settignano became a Francesco Laurana on that particular occasion, and has raised questions of authenticity in modern times. On this, see Victor Coonin, *The Most Elusive Woman in Renaissance Art. A Portrait of Marietta Strozzi*, in: *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 30, 2009, p. 41-64, and Chryssa Damianaki, *I busti femminili di Francesco Laurana tra realtà e finzione*, Roma 2000, p. 217-271.
39. Wilhelm von Bode, *Mein Leben*, vol. 1, Berlin 1930, p. 140.
40. On Bardini, see Cristina De Benedictis and Fiorenza Scalia, *Il Museo Bardini a Firenze. Le pitture*, Milan 1984; Lucia Ciotti Faedo, Enrica Neri Lusanna and Bruno Santi, *Il Museo Bardini a Firenze. Le sculture*, Milan 1986; *Dipinti, disegni, miniature e stampe*, in: *L'archivio storico fotografico di Stefano Bardini*, ed. Everett Fahy, Firenze 2000; *Dealing Art on Both Sides of the Atlantic, 1860 to 1940*, ed. Lynn Catterson, Boston 2017. The sale of the del Nero bust is mentioned in Niemeyer Chini 2009, *Stefano Bardini e Wilhelm Bode*, p. 100, note 58.
41. Ernst Steinmann, *Studien zur Renaissanceskulptur in Rom. I: Die Büsten des Francesco del Nero*, in: *Monatshefte für Kunstwissenschaft*, vol. 1, 1908, p. 633-637.
42. *Lettere di Giovambattista Busini a Benedetto Vardii sopra l'assedio di Firenze*, ed. Gaetano Milanese, Firenze 1860, p. 97. Cited in: Steinmann 1908, *Studien zur Renaissanceskulptur in Rom*, p. 636.
43. Gabriel Brenner, *Das Liebesleben des Francesco del Nero. Ein Roman aus dem Florenz der Renaissance*, Prag 1900.
44. Steinmann 1908, *Studien zur Renaissanceskulptur in Rom*, p. 636.
45. Charles Davis, *Ammannati, Michelangelo, and the Tomb of Francesco del Nero*, in: *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 118, 1976, p. 472 + 474-481 + 483-484, ill. 21. Davis also reminds us that Daniele da Volterra took casts from life for his portrait sculptures – an important consideration given the presence of a piece-mold cast seam on the Del Nero bust.
46. Ulrich Middeldorf, *Review of August Griesebach's 'Römische Porträtbüsten der Gegenreformation'*, in: *Art Bulletin*, vol. 20, no. 1, March 1938, p. 116.
47. August Grisebach, *Römische Porträtbüsten der Gegenreformation*, Leipzig 1936, p. 17, 80-83.
48. Arturo Pettorelli, *Giulio Mazzoni da Piacenza*, Roma 1922, p. 14-15.
49. Catalucci 2013, *La Famiglia Del Nero di Firenze*, p. 158-159.
50. Published in cat. *Sotheby's Monaco, Bel Ameublement, Dimanche 30 Novembre 1986*. Lot 1053. Estimate 60000/80000 FF. It has since then resurfaced in Louviers, France; Société de Ventes Volontaires Jean Emmanuel Prunier. *Splendeurs de la Haute Époque, Dimanche 24 septembre 2017*, Lot 115, estimate 50000/60000 €. In the last sale, a base "en pierre de Florence" is mentioned in the description.
51. The author is extremely grateful to Dr. Lynn Catterson of Columbia University for her unmatched generosity, many times over providing crucial insights in the multifaceted world of Stefano Bardini. A separate gratitude is owed to Dr. Stefano Tasselli of the Galleria e Museo Palazzo Mozzi for a confirmation of the presence of the Del Nero plaster cast.
52. Palazzo Mozzi, Inv. Nr. 4926.
53. For more on Torrigiani sale, see Niemeyer Chini 2009, *Stefano Bardini e Wilhelm Bode*, p. 98-99, 172; Fahy 2000, *Dipinti, disegni, miniature e stampe*, p. 13-15.
54. Fahy 2000, *Dipinti, disegni, miniature e stampe*, p. 5-20.
55. Photos and texts uploaded at <http://www.alaintruong.com/archives/2017/09/19/35689052.html>, September 2017, 12-02-2018, have contributed immensely to our research. The author expresses gratitude to Alain R. Truong for this lucky opportunity. Curatorial files in the Bode-Museum reflect unsuccessful past attempts by Berlin museum staff to contact the owner of the second bust.
56. Some similar issues of original vs. copy vs. forgery in the Berlin museum collection are discussed in: Volker Krahn, *Bozzetti und Pseudo-Bozzetti aus Terrakotta in der Berliner Skulpturensamm-*

lung, in: *Technè, la science au service de l'histoire de l'art*, No 36, 2012, p. 34-41.

57. Daphne Barbour and Lisha Deming Glinsman, *An Investigation of Renaissance Casting Practices as a Means for Identifying Forgeries*, in: *Studies in the History of Art*, Monograph Series III: Conservation Research, vol. 41, 1993, p. 14-29.
58. Frank Arnau, *Kunst der Fälscher – Fälscher der Kunst. 3000 Jahre Betrug mit Antiquitäten*, München / Zürich 1964, S. 6.
59. William McAllister Johnson, *Art History, its Use and Abuse*, Toronto / Buffalo / London 1990, p. 228.

Figures

Fig. 1: Giulio Mazzoni (?). Bust of Francesco del Nero, bronze, Berlin SKS Inv. 2261, Photo before 1945.(c) SMB.

Fig. 2: Plaster cast of Berlin SKS 2261, 1899-1912, Moscow, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts. (c) author.

Fig. 3: Modern plaster cast in the halls of the Bode-Museum, 2015. © author.

Fig. 4: Bust of Francesco del Nero, SKS 2261/3C-224, before the restoration, 2015 (c) Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts.

Fig. 5: Bust of Francesco del Nero, SKS 2261/3C-224, after the restoration, 2016 (c) Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts.

Fig. 6: Bust of Francesco del Nero, SKS 2261/3C-224, after restoration, 2016. Close-up view of head showing cast seams. (c) Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts.

Fig. 7: Giulio Mazzoni, Bust of Francesco del Nero, Santa Maria Minerva, Rome (c) author 2017.

Fig. 8: Giulio Mazzoni, Bust of Francesco del Nero, Santa Maria Minerva, Rome (c) author 2017.

Fig. 9: Portrait of Francesco del Nero (here referred as 2nd bronze version) (c) Sothebys Monaco.

Fig. 10: Portrait of Francesco del Nero (here referred as 2nd bronze version) (c) Prunier OVV.

Fig. 11: Portrait of Francesco del Nero (here referred as 2nd bronze version) (c) Prunier OVV.

Fig. 12: Portrait of Francesco del Nero (here referred as 2nd bronze version) (c) Prunier OVV.

Fig. 13: Plaster cast in the Palazzo Mozzi, inv. 4923 (c) author.

Fig. 14: Plaster cast in the Palazzo Mozzi, inv. 4923 (c) author.

Summary

The paper deals with the oddities and peculiarities of critical history of a bronze bust representing Francesco del Nero (1487–1563), papal treasurer in the pontificate of Clement VII de Medici. Formerly in the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, Berlin, and long considered lost in the fire of Friedrichshain bunker in May 1945, it has recently been officially rediscovered in the Pushkin Museum, Moscow, in custody there since 1946. The bronze effigy of Francesco del Nero repeats a marble image of the same sitter on his tomb in Santa Maria Minerva, Rome, thus raising the question of a copy and of the original. Also, several plaster casts and even bronze copies are known to exist. The dramatic history of the bust, acquired in 1895 for Berlin Museums by Wilhelm von Bode himself, is examined in detail, along with that of a plaster cast of the aforementioned work also in Moscow, acquired around 1899 in Berlin by the founder of the Moscow museum Ivan Tsvetaev, and produced at the Berlin Gipsformerei. New material available at hand and a critical analysis of the sources allows the author to effectively challenge the attribution of the bronze bust to Giulio Mazzoni from Piacenza (1525–1618), together with the long-held assumption of the bust being the original after which a marble effigy in the roman church of Santa Maria Minerva was made, thus raising important concerns about the work's provenance and authenticity. An examination of written sources related to the bust reveals several key inconsistencies in the account of its purchase for the Berlin Museums, while a recent (2017) rediscovery of yet another plaster cast of the bust in the legacy of a prominent Florentine dealer of antiques leads to a reconstruction of an intricate chain of fabricated copies, probably not devoid of a certain fraudulent intent.

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Title

Vasily Rastorguev, *Francesco Del Nero. The Art of Multiplication*, in: *Original – Kopie – Fälschung / Original – Copy- Forgery*, kunsttexte.de, ed. by Angela Dressen, Susanne Gramatzki and Berenike Knoblich, No. 1, 2018 (14 pages), www.kunsttexte.de.