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Inhalt | Contenuto

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_ Aufsätze _ Saggi

_ 339_ *Dieter Blume*

Amor – Bild und Poesie in Italien um 1300

_ 381_ *Mary Vaccaro*

Correggio, Francesco Maria Rondani, and the Nave Frieze in San Giovanni Evangelista

_ 405_ *Sheila Barker*

The First Biography of Artemisia Gentileschi: Self-Fashioning and Proto-Feminist Art History in Cristofano Bronzini's Notes on Women Artists

_ 437_ *Avinoam Shalem*

Objects in Captivity: Preliminary Remarks on the Exhibiting and Making of Images of the Art of War

_ Miszellen _ Appunti

_ 467_ *Ingeborg Bähr*

Bronzefirnis- und Brokatpapiere in der Bibliothek des Kunsthistorischen Instituts in Florenz



1 Simon Vouet, *Portrait of Artemisia Gentileschi*,
about 1625. Private collection

THE FIRST BIOGRAPHY OF ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI SELF-FASHIONING AND PROTO-FEMINIST ART HISTORY IN CRISTOFANO BRONZINI'S NOTES ON WOMEN ARTISTS

Sheila Barker

Haveva Orazio una figlia chiamata Artemisia, che nella pittura si rese gloriosa, e sarebbe stata degna d'ogni stima se fusse stata di qualità più onesta e onorata.¹
(Giovanni Battista Passeri, *Vite de' pittori, scultori ed architetti che hanno lavorato in Roma, e che son morti dal 1641 al 1673*)

Born in Ancona around 1580, Cristofano di Ottaviano Bronzini (Fig. 2) moved to Rome sometime before 1591 in order to pursue his career at the papal court.² While in Rome, Bronzini composed sonnets for Duchess Flavia Peretti Orsini and researched women worthies

in the library of Angelo Rocca and the Vatican. In 1615, he assumed the position of train-bearer to Cardinal Carlo de' Medici and followed his patron to Florence, where he died in 1633.³ Bronzini's most noteworthy literary accomplishment is his dialogue *Della dignità et della nobiltà delle donne*, a thirty-two-tome manuscript at the Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze that he composed in Florence largely between 1615 and 1622 and to which he added corrections and marginal notations in subsequent years.⁴

Portions of this mammoth tribute to female virtue were published during his lifetime in the form of

¹ *Die Künstlerbiographien von Giovanni Battista Passeri*, ed. by Jacob Hess, Leipzig/Vienna 1934 (Rome 1772), p. 122.

² On Bronzini's career, see Martino Capucci, s.v. Bronzini, Cristoforo, in: *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, XIV, Rome 1972, pp. 463f.; Xenia von Tippelskirch, "Die Indexkongregation und die Würde der Frauen: Cristofano Bronzini, 'Della dignità e nobiltà delle donne'", in: *Frauen in der Frühen Neuzeit: Lebensentwürfe in Kunst und Literatur*, ed. by Anne-Marie Bonnet/Barbara Schellewald, Cologne/Weimar/Vienna 2004, pp. 235–262: 239f.; eadem, "Lecture e conversazioni a corte durante la reggenza di Maria Madalena d'Austria e di Cristina di Lorena", in: *Le donne Medici nel sistema europeo*

delle corti, XVI–XVIII secolo, ed. by Giulia Calvi/Riccardo Spinelli, Florence 2008, I, pp. 131–143: 140; Suzanne G. Cusick, *Francesca Caccini at the Medici Court: Music and the Circulation of Power*, Chicago/London 2009, pp. xx and 340, note 10; Xenia von Tippelskirch, *Sotto controllo: letture femminili in Italia nella prima età moderna*, Rome 2011, pp. 139f. and notes.

³ Bronzini's unpublished death date of 13 December 1633 is documented in a register of Florentine burials; see ASF, Ufficiali poi Magistrato della Grascia, 195 (1626–1669), fol. 90r.

⁴ Cristofano Bronzini, *Della dignità et della nobiltà delle donne*, BNCF, mss. Magl. Cl. VIII, 1513–1538 (comprising twenty-two volumes bound in



2 Anonymous, *Portrait of Cristofano Bronzini*, in: Cristofano Bronzini, *Della dignità et nobiltà delle donne: Dialogo [...]. Settimana Prima, e Giornata Quarta*, Florence 1625, frontispiece. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magl. 3.2.288

thirty-two tomes and supplemented by four additional tomes of indices). See Maura Scarlino Rolih, “Code magliabechiane”: un gruppo di manoscritti della Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze fuori inventario, Scandicci 1985, p. 35. It appears that Bronzini began the manuscript in Rome around 1614 and continued at least through 1625, returning at even later moments to amend some of his earlier passages; for other attempts to date the manuscript, see Tippelskirch 2011 (note 2), p. 142, and Capucci (note 2).

⁵ Cristofano Bronzini, *Della dignità, et nobiltà delle donne: Dialogo [...]. Settimana Prima, e Giornata Quarta*, Florence 1622; *idem, Della dignità, et nobiltà delle donne: Dialogo [...]. Settimana Prima, e Giornata Prima*, Florence 1622; *idem, Della dignità, et nobiltà delle donne: Dialogo [...]. Settimana Prima, e Giornata Prima. Di nuovo Ristampata, e corretta dall'Autore*, Florence 1624; and *idem, Della dignità, et nobiltà delle donne: Dialogo [...]. Settimana Prima, e Giornata Quarta*, Florence 1625.

four books dedicated to the most powerful women of the Medici grand ducal court. The first book, published in 1622 (but reissued in an expurgated edition in 1624), as well as the second one, published in 1625 (Fig. 3), were both dedicated to Archduchess Maria Magdalena of Austria (1589–1631), the widow of Grand Duke Cosimo II de’ Medici and the mother of Ferdinando II de’ Medici, the heir to the grand ducal throne for whom she served as co-regent between 1621 and 1628.⁵ The third book, published in 1628, was dedicated to the archduchess along with her daughter Margherita de’ Medici, who was wedded that same year to Odoardo Farnese, duke of Parma.⁶ The fourth and final book, published in 1632, was dedicated to Christine of Lorraine, dowager grand duchess of Tuscany and former co-regent for her grandson Ferdinando II.⁷ Despite the author’s dying wish for the rest of his manuscript to go to press, the majority of his text remains unpublished even today.⁸

Among the many unpublished reams of Bronzini’s manuscript are some fifty pages that furnish biographical profiles for dozens of female painters, sculptors, and embroiderers. Most of the women artists described here are Italian. The exceptions include three Spanish artists (María de Jesús Torres, Isabel Sánchez Coello [1564–1612], and Francisca de Jesús),⁹ one French artist (described only as the wife of *monsieur* Bonelli and so far untraceable), and collectively the women artists of China. Since several of

⁶ *Idem, Della dignità, et nobiltà delle donne: Dialogo [...]. Settimana Seconda, e Giornata Ottava. Alle SS. spose novelle*, Florence 1628.

⁷ *Idem, Della virtù, e valore delle donne illustri. Dialogo [...]. Settimana Seconda, Giornata Settima*, Florence 1632.

⁸ According to Bronzini’s will, Baccio Bandolini was entrusted with the posthumous publication of the remainder of the manuscript, but this never occurred; see ASF, Notarile moderno, Protocolli, 14115 (notary Virgilio Boncristiani), fols. 63v–64r.

⁹ On Spanish women painters in the Renaissance, see Mindy Nancarrow, “The Artistic Activity of Spanish Nuns During the Golden Age”, in: *Essays on Women Artists: “The Most Excellent”*, ed. by Liana De Girolami Cheney, Lewiston 2003, pp. 41–51. On María de Jesús and Isabel Sánchez (also known as “Isabel Collo”), see Julia K. Dabbs, *Life Stories of Women*

these notices on early modern women artists deserve scholarly attention due to their historiographic significance, all of them are published here in the Appendix. This article, however, will focus on just one of these: Bronzini's fascinating yet problematic profile of Artemisia Gentileschi (Rome 1593–Naples 1654?), which should now be regarded as her earliest biography.

Bronzini's Treatise: Background

As a whole, the treatise *Della dignità et della nobiltà delle donne* is firmly inscribed within the genre known as the *querelle des femmes*. Bronzini evinced his profound knowledge of this literary tradition with the historiographic overview that he inserted into the tenth *giornata*, or division, of his treatise. Here he identified Christine de Pizan (1364–1430) as the forerunner of the women writers of his own age who had come to the defense of their gender.¹⁰ Several of the latter figure prominently in Bronzini's text: Moderata Fonte (the penname of Modesta da Pozzo, 1555–1592),¹¹ Maddalena Salvetti Acciaiuoli (a Florentine poetess who enjoyed Christine of Lorraine's patronage, ca. 1553–1610),¹² and Lucrezia Marinella (1571–1653), to whom Bronzini had lent his professional support on several occasions.¹³

In the course of his historiographic overview, Bronzini also unfurled a long list of the male writers who, throughout history, had taken up the cause of women.¹⁴ Among the treatises that he cited most

Artists, 1550–1800, Farnham 2009, pp. 460, 464, as well as her source: Damiaõ de Froes Perym, *Theatro heroico, abecedario historico, e catalogo das mulheres illustres em armas, letras, açoens heroicas, e artes liberaes*, Lisbon 1736–1740, I, pp. 549f., II, pp. 269f.

¹⁰ Bronzini (note 4), I520, II, fol. 49r. According to Bronzini, pro-woman writings were also carried out by women from the following Florentine families: the Soderini, Malespini, Acciaiuoli, Strozzi, Cavalcanti, Martelli, Bandini, Zanchini, Capponi, Minerbetti, Niccolini, Compagni, Adimari, and the Selvaggi Ridolfi; see *ibidem*.

¹¹ *Idem* 1624 (note 5), Giornata Prima, p. 30, Giornata Seconda, p. 37; and *idem* 1625 (note 5), Giornata Quarta, p. 115.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 119.

¹³ Bronzini 1624 (note 5), Giornata Prima, p. 30; *idem* 1625 (note 5),



3 Cristofano Bronzini, *Della dignità et nobiltà delle donne: Dialogo [...]. Settimana Prima, e Giornata Quarta*, Florence 1625, titlepage with hand-colored engraving. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magl. 3.2.288

Giornata Quarta, pp. 82, 89, 94, 112, Giornata Sesta, pp. 4f.; *idem* (note 6), Giornata Ottava, p. 196. Bronzini corresponded with Marinella in the 1620s and strongly promoted her writings at the Medici court; see Tippelskirch 2008 (note 2), pp. 140f.; Sarah Gwyneth Ross, *The Birth of Feminism: Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England*, Cambridge/London 2009, pp. 292–294; Christina Strunck, *Christiane von Lotbringen am Hof der Medici: Geschlechterdiskurs und Kulturtransfer zwischen Florenz, Frankreich und Lotbringen (1589–1636)*, Petersberg 2017, pp. 118–123.

¹⁴ Bronzini named over fifty male authors who defended women in their writings, including Cardinal Pompeo Colonna (whose apology was then kept in the Vatican Library's "armario segreto 3370") and Cardinal Girolamo della Rovere (whose treatise was kept in "armario segreto 1586"); see Bronzini (note 4), I520, II, fols. 48r–49r. On proto-feminist writings in

frequently are Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* (written in 1355–1359), Giuseppe Betussi's translation of the former as *Delle donne illustri* (first published in 1545 with further editions in 1547, 1558, and 1596), Lodovico Dolce's *Dialogo della institutione delle donne* (also published in 1545, with further editions in 1547, 1553, 1559, and 1560), and Cornelio Lanci's *Esempi della virtù delle donne* (published in Florence in 1590), mostly focused on ancient women but also featuring modern ones such as Maddalena Acciaïoli and Isabella Andreini. Bronzini also drew upon two writers with special connections to the women of the House of Medici, namely Don Silvano Razzi, who had dedicated the first volume of his six-volume treatise *Vite delle donne illustri per santità* to Virginia de' Medici in 1595 and the second one to Christine of Lorraine in 1597, and Fra Niccolò Lorini, O.P., Cosimo II de' Medici's confessor and the author of *Elogii delle più principali sante donne del sagro calendario e del martirologio romano*, which was dedicated to Maria Magdalena of Austria in 1617.

Bronzini designed his treatise to appeal above all to Maria Magdalena of Austria and Christine of Lorraine, the two women who had reigned over Tuscany first as consorts of Medici grand dukes and then as co-regents.¹⁵ In addition to praising his powerful

female patrons throughout the text, Bronzini sought to serve their interests by proclaiming that women have a natural aptitude for rulership and that they are morally superior to men. These controversial claims provoked a backlash. Immediately after the first division of the treatise was published in 1622, the Congregation of the Index determined that several of the arguments for the superiority of women had departed from orthodox belief. Bronzini was thus compelled to correct his text and, after approval by the Congregation, republish it in the revised edition of 1624.¹⁶

Women Artists in *Della dignità et della nobiltà delle donne*

Within the twenty-four *giornate* into which Bronzini's *Della dignità et della nobiltà delle donne* is divided, Artemisia's biography is located in the fifteenth *giornata*, well ensconced in the unpublished latter half of the manuscript. In contrast to the published sections of Bronzini's manuscript, the fifteenth *giornata* for the most part takes the form of a minimally structured *selva*.¹⁷ The collective aim of this medley of erudite quotations and anecdotes is to lionize both ancient and modern women who had demonstrated exceptional bravery, musical talent, or artistic skills. The pages brim with the names

Italy, see Giovanni Battista Marchesi, "Le polemiche sul sesso femminile nei secoli XVI e XVII", in: *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, XXV (1895), pp. 362–369; Beatrice Collina, "Lesemplarità delle donne illustri fra Umanesimo e Controriforma", in: *Donna, disciplina, creanza cristiana dal XV al XVII secolo: studi e testi a stampa*, ed. by Gabriella Zarri, Rome 1996, pp. 103–119; Paola Malpezzi Price/Christine Ristaino, *Lucrezia Marinella and the 'Querelle des Femmes' in Seventeenth-Century Italy*, Madison 2008; Androniki Dialeti, "Defending Women, Negotiating Masculinity in Early Modern Italy", in: *The Historical Journal*, LIV (2011), I, pp. 1–23; Christina Strunck, "Die femme fatale im Kirchenstaat: Positionen der *Querelle des Femmes* in Rom (1622–1678)", in: *Frauen und Päpste: Zur Konstruktion von Weiblichkeit in Kunst und Urbanistik des römischen Saeculo*, ed. by Eckhard Leuschner/Iris Wenderholm, Berlin 2016, pp. 3–20; 5–8; *eadem* (note 13), pp. 60–66. For a broader examination of the theme, see Julie D. Campbell, "The *Querelle des femmes*", in: *The Ashgate Research Companion to Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Allyson M. Poska/Jane Couchman/Katherine A. McIver, Abingdon 2013, pp. 361–379.

¹⁵ See Kelley Harness, "La Flora and the End of Female Rule in Tuscany", in: *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, V (1998), pp. 437–476: 449f.; Cusick (note 2), pp. 105, 194f.; Strunck (note 13), pp. 118–123.

On Maria Magdalena's pro-woman visual propaganda, see Kelley Harness, *Echoes of Women's Voices: Music, Art, and Female Patronage in Early Modern Florence*, Chicago 2006, pp. 42–55, 125f., 137–140, and Riccardo Spinelli, "Simbologia dinastica e legittimazione del potere: Maria Maddalena d'Austria e gli affreschi del Poggio Imperiale", in: *Le donne Medici* (note 2), II, pp. 645–679. Cosimo II was still alive when Bronzini was composing his work, but his health was so delicate that the court was already planning for the future regency (Cusick [note 2], pp. 194f.).

¹⁶ Tippelskirch 2011 (note 2), pp. 145–147, argues that the censure was mainly due to Bronzini's interpretations of sacred scripture regarding the superiority of women, which became highly seditious when directed to women with power. See also *eadem* 2004 (note 2), pp. 235–262, and Cusick (note 2), pp. 194f.

¹⁷ This was the same genre employed by a detractor of womanhood, Giuseppe Passi, for his *I donneschi difetti* of 1599, as noted by Suzanne Magnanini/David Lamari, "Giuseppe Passi's Attacks on Women in *The Defects of Women*", in: *In Dialogue with the Other Voice in Sixteenth-Century Italy: Literary and Social Contexts for Women's Writing*, ed. by Julie D. Campbell/Maria Galli Stampino, Toronto 2011, pp. 143–194: 146.

of some sixty-four early modern female musicians.¹⁸ They also muster thirty-three names of early modern female artists, qualifying Bronzini's manuscript as the first work of European literature to have ever taken up the topic of women artists *in extenso*.¹⁹

Bronzini stated openly that very little in his work is original.²⁰ Indeed, following a medieval composition technique known as *compilatio*, it is the case that he made liberal use of Vasari's 1568 edition of the *Lives of the Artists* for his profiles of Properzia de' Rossi, Plautilla Nelli, Lucrezia Quistelli, and Sofonisba Anguissola, copying large passages almost unaltered into his own text.²¹ Bronzini also mined several additional sources for this purpose. He reused verbatim the information on Marietta Robusti, known as "la Tintoretta", that had been published in Raffaello Borghini's *Il Riposo* of 1584,²² the same book that provided Bronzini with the epitaph composed by Vincenzo di Bonaccorso Pitti for Properzia de' Rossi; for the latter, Bronzini found another epitaph in Giulio Cesare Croce's *La gloria delle donne* of 1590.²³ For his account of Irene di Spilimbergo's

early death, Bronzini indicated his source as the volume of eulogistic poetry edited by Dionisio Atanagi in 1561.²⁴ Muzio Manfredi's *Madrigali [. . .] sopra molti soggetti stravaganti composti* of 1606 was his source for the poems about Fede Galizia and Barbara Longhi, whereas Paolo Mini's *Discorso della nobiltà di Firenze e de' fiorentini* of 1593 supplied information about Alessandra del Milanese.²⁵ Bronzini's enterprising search for material even led him to Italian translations of Juan González de Mendoza's *Historia de las cosas más notables, ritos y costumbres del gran reyno de la China* from 1585, which furnished the basis for his remarks on Chinese women artists:

[. . .] we know that in China there are the women of great genius and expertise in painting and sculpture, and they demonstrate excellence in drawing as well as in painting; in relief and in intaglio; and especially in making paintings of plants, birds, and every sort of wilderness, as is well demonstrated by the paintings that are sent from there to our lands; one of these, reports Father Giovanni Gonzalez di Mendozza in his *Storia della China*, book one,

¹⁸ See Cusick (note 2), p. xix.

¹⁹ By comparison, in the 1568 Giunti edition of Vasari's *Lives* there are a total of four women artists mentioned together in the life of Properzia de' Rossi. Passing references to additional women artists in Vasari's text are scattered pell-mell throughout the work. The references to women artists in the treatises of Lodovico Guicciardini, Raffaello Borghini, and Francisco de Holanda are few in number and brief. On Vasari's attitudes towards women's practice of art, see e.g. Fredrika H. Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism*, Cambridge 1997; and Katherine McIver, "Vasari's Women", in: *Reading Vasari*, ed. by Anne B. Barriault et al., London 2005, pp. 179–188. The present article does not take into consideration Bronzini's profiles of ancient women artists, since this material is entirely derivative from such sources as Antonio Billi, Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, and Lucio Faberio, not to mention Boccaccio, Pliny, and many others as well. For the Renaissance historiography on ancient female artists, see Jacobs (note 19), pp. 24f.

²⁰ See Tippleskirch 2004 (note 2), p. 238 and notes; and *eadem* 2008 (note 2), p. 139. For some of Bronzini's more prominent sources, see *eadem* 2004 (note 2), pp. 236–238.

²¹ For these profiles, see Appendix, nos. I, 2, II, and I2. Cf. Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. by Rosanna Bettarini/Paola Barocchi, Florence 1966–1997, IV, pp. 399–405, V, pp. 427–428, 588. With regard to Sofonisba, Bronzini made some original observations in the section (found in the same tome)

that is dedicated to female musicians (see Appendix, no. I2). On the use of *compilatio* in writings about women, see Campbell (note 14), p. 362.

²² See Appendix, no. 24; cf. Raffaello Borghini, *Il Riposo*, Florence 1584, pp. 558f.

²³ See Appendix, no. I with notes 97 and 98. Croce's book was also Bronzini's source for a poem about Lavinia Fontana; see Appendix, no. 22 and note 102. On Borghini's description of Robusti see Catherine King, "Looking a Sight: Sixteenth-Century Portraits of Woman Artists", in: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, LVIII (1995), pp. 381–406: 393. Notably, Bronzini calls the sculptor by the name "Properzia de' Rossi Felicini"; I have not been able to determine his source for the surname 'Felicini'; a noble family of Bologna; see Pompeo Scipione Dolfi, *Cronologia delle famiglie nobili di Bologna*, Bologna 1670.

²⁴ See Appendix, no. 20. Cf. Dionisio Atanagi, *Rime di diversi nobilissimi et eccellentissimi autori in morte della signora Irene delle signore di Spilimbergo*, Venice 1561, on which see Anne Jacobson Schutte, "Irene di Spilimbergo: The Image of a Creative Woman in Late Renaissance Italy", in: *Renaissance Quarterly*, XLIV (1991), pp. 42–61, and Julia K. Dabbs, "Sex, Lies and Anecdotes: Gender Relations in the Life Stories of Italian Women Artists, 1500–1800", in: *Aurora*, VI (2005), pp. 17–37: 24–26.

²⁵ See Appendix, nos. 6–8 and notes 100, 101. For Manfredi's poems on Longhi and Galizia, see Jacobs (note 19), pp. 128–132, 143f., 172–175. For another poem in honor of Fede Galizia by Cesare Rinaldi of Bologna, published in 1609, see Paola Tinagli/Mary Rogers, *Women and*



4 Ma Shouzhen (attributed), *Orchid and rock*, 1572. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 1982.1.7

5 Xue Susu, *Flowers*, detail, 1615. Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, inv. B66D22



page 16, was seen by him, having been carried to Lisbon in the year 1582 by Captain Ribera, [and it was] of such excellence and beauty that not only did it astound all those who saw it, but also what is very rare indeed, that is, it was regarded as a wonderful work by His Majesty the King [of Spain] himself, and even by the most famous and excellent men in that profession [of painting].²⁶

The description of the types of subject matter preferred by the women artists of China accords remarkably with the examples of art that have come down to us, as in the case of works by Ma Shouzhen (1548–1604) (Fig. 4) and Xue Susu (1564–1637) (Fig. 5).²⁷ Bronzini’s text makes it clear that Chinese women artists were known and appreciated at the court of Madrid already in the sixteenth century and at the court of Florence by the early seventeenth century. No doubt, this knowledge – much like the awareness that there had been celebrated women artists in ancient Greece and Rome – led some of Bronzini’s contemporaries to see women artists less as anomalies and more as emblems of a civilization at the peak of its glory.

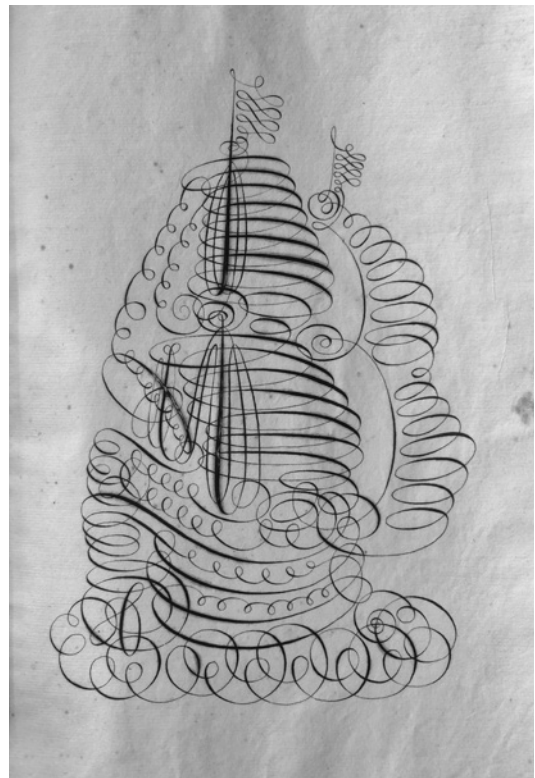
the Visual Arts in Italy, c. 1400–1650: Luxury and Leisure, Duty and Devotion. A Sourcebook, Manchester 2012, pp. 283f., no. 4.

²⁶ Appendix, no. 21. It is not clear which edition of the work Bronzini would have consulted. In the first Italian edition of González de Mendoza’s book, *Dell’historia della China*, Rome 1586, the passage referred to is on p. 22. In the two later Italian editions, published in Venice in 1588 and 1590, it is on pp. 26f. Perhaps he looked at one of these later editions and accidentally wrote “16” instead of “26”.

²⁷ On Ma Shouzhen, see *Views from the Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists, 1300–1912*, exh. cat. Indianapolis et al. 1988/89, ed. by Marsh Smith Weidner, Indianapolis 1988, pp. 72–81, cat. nos. 4–9; Ellen Johnston Laing, “Wives, Daughters, and Lovers: Three Ming Dynasty Women Painters”, *ibidem*, pp. 31–39: 37; Monica Merlin, *The Late Ming Courtesan Ma Shouzhen (1548–1604): Visual Culture, Gender and Self-Fashioning in the Nanjing Pleasure Quarter*, Ph.D. Diss., The Queen’s College, The University of Oxford 2013. On Xue Susu (Wu), see *Views from the Jade Terrace*, pp. 82–87, cat.

In his eagerness to include contemporary women artists, Bronzini sometimes relied on hearsay, a practice that led to occasional errors such when he referred to Chiara Varotari as “Santa” Varotari.²⁸ By contrast, whenever the manuscript furnishes descriptions of the women artists that Bronzini knew personally or the artworks that he had examined with his own eyes, it is an invaluable historiographic resource. The most striking instance of this regards Lavinia Fontana, whom Bronzini knew in Rome and whose altarpiece in Saint Paul’s Outside the Walls he visited in company of the painter. His admiration for Fontana is made clear not only by his encomiastic excesses (directed as much to her character as to her artistic talent) but also by the sheer length of this profile: covering six pages, it is the longest of all the artists’ biographies.²⁹

The list of women whose artistic production Bronzini had some direct knowledge of is impressive. In his profile of Diana Scultori (called “Diana Mantovana”), Bronzini stated that he had purchased two engravings she had made of a paleo-Christian-era capital, perhaps identifiable with existing prints by the artist.³⁰ In Florence, Bronzini spoke of having seen Plautilla Nelli’s paintings on display in private Florentine homes, and when the adolescent Giovanna Garzoni visited the Medici court there, he took account of her musical skills as well as the talent she displayed in both her painted miniature for Maria Magdalena of Austria and her calligraphy samples (Fig. 6).³¹ Of particular



6 Giovanna Garzoni, *Galleon at sail*, about 1617–1621, in: *eadem*, *Libro de' caratteri*, Rome, Biblioteca Accademica di San Luca, Ms. inv. 1117, fol. 42r

historiographic value is Bronzini’s account of Arcangela Paladini. Not only is it the earliest biography of Paladini, but it also adds many important details to what is currently known about this scantily documented artist, such as the trills that marked her vocal perfor-

nos. 10–13, and Daria Berg, “Cultural Discourse on Xue Susu, a Courtesan in Late Ming China”, in: *International Journal of Asian Studies*, VI (2009), pp. 171–200.

²⁸ For Varotari, see Appendix, no. 17. Bronzini’s is the earliest literary record of Chiara Varotari, written two decades before Carlo Ridolfi’s *Le Maraviglie dell’arte* [...], Venice 1648, II, p. 83. On Ridolfi’s description of Varotari, see Maria H. Loh, *Titian Remade: Repetition and the Transformation of Early Modern Italian Art*, Los Angeles 2007, pp. 166f. The only other blatant errors that I have detected are Bronzini’s passing mention of a female artist named Antonia Grandina of Brescia (see the beginning of the life of Lavinia Fontana, Appendix, no. 22), apparently the result of his confusion about the male artist Antonio Gandino (1565–1630), and his misidentification of Diana Scultori’s husband, explained below in note 30.

²⁹ See Appendix, no. 22. By comparison, only five lines are dedicated to Fontana in Borghini (note 22), p. 568.

³⁰ See Appendix, no. 14. Scultori made at least three engravings of ancient architectural decorations, which are now very rare. It is very likely that Bronzini owned no. 29 in Paolo Bellini, *L’opera incisa di Adamo e Diana Scultori*, Vicenza 1991, p. 214, dated 1576, since he repeats the references in its inscription to “numidici lapidis” and Saint Peter’s Basilica. As for his second engraving, he perhaps may have owned no. 33, *ibidem*, p. 219, which is dated 1577 and bears the name of Battista di Pietrasanta. In his notes on Scultori, Bronzini erroneously claimed that Battista di Pietrasanta was her husband, but in fact Battista was a carpenter who frequently collaborated with Scultori’s first husband, Francesco da Volterra, an architect.

³¹ See Appendix, nos. 2 and 26. For his knowledge of Nelli’s paintings



7 Giovanni Battista Lupicini, *The muse of painting* (Portrait of Felice Lupicini), around 1606–1625. Columbia Museum of Art, Samuel H. Kress Collection

mances; her specialization in embroidering portraits, flowers, foliage, birds, mammals, and fish; Maria Magdalena’s dispersal of Paladini’s art throughout Europe; and descriptions of Paladini’s portraits of Cosimo II that are confirmed by Medici inventories.³²

within the convent of Santa Caterina da Siena, Bronzini relied on the account given to him by the archbishop of Florence in addition to Vasari’s text. Nevertheless, Bronzini seems to have seen for himself the convent’s workshop, as discussed below. For Bronzini’s remarks on Garzoni, see Sheila Barker, “‘Marvellously Gifted’: Giovanna Garzoni’s First Visit to the Medici Court”, in: *The Burlington Magazine*, CLX (2018), pp. 654–659: 659.

³² See Appendix, no. 18. The pen-and-ink and embroidered portraits of Cosimo II by Paladini that Bronzini describes have been located in the Medici inventories; see Lisa Goldenberg Stoppato, “Arcangela Paladini and the Medici”, in: *Women Artists in Early Modern Italy: Careers, Fame, and Collectors*, ed. by Sheila Barker, London/Turnhout [2016], pp. 81–97: 88f.

³³ See Appendix, nos. 5 and 13. On Ortensia Fedeli, see Sheila Barker, “Painting and Humanism in Early Modern Florentine Convents”, in: *Ar-*

One striking fact that emerges from Bronzini’s survey of the women artists in his midst is that the majority of Florence’s active women artists were nuns. Bearing witness to the artistic ferment in Florentine convents are his accounts of individual nuns such as Alessandra Martelli, Angela Cherubina Angelelli, and Ortensia Fedeli,³³ as well as his precious testimony about the workshop at the Florentine monastery of Santa Caterina da Siena, where he saw “wonderful pictures and [sculpted] figures of angels, virgin saints, and martyr saints, some painted and others done in miniature with such excellence and with such skill and sweetness, that they truly seem to be heavenly creatures”.³⁴ Several of the artists Bronzini described as being currently active at Santa Caterina are not included in the preceding account of that workshop, written in 1596 by Fra Serafino Razzi (1531–1613).³⁵ One of the artists that Bronzini was the first to have associated with this workshop is Felice Lupicini (Fig. 7), the niece of Cristofano Allori. According to Bronzini, she was active in her convent both as a painter and as an illuminator.³⁶ Other female artists that Bronzini was the first to have associated with this Dominican convent include Lucrezia Capponi, Lucrezia Torrigiani, Giovanna Monsalvi, Maria Vincenza Brandolini, Suor Caterina Eletta Rosselli (baptized as “Fiametta”), and Reparata del Bono. All of them received Bronzini’s praises not only for their skills as painters and sculptors but also for their commanding knowledge of Biblical scripture.³⁷

tiste nel chiostro: produzione artistica nei monasteri femminili in età moderna, conference proceedings Florence 2013, ed. by eadem/Luciano Cinelli, Florence 2015, pp. 105–139: 105, 128.

³⁴ Appendix, no. 4.

³⁵ Serafino Razzi, *Istoria degli Huomini illustri, così nelle prelature, come nelle dottrine, del sacro ordine de gli predicatori*, Lucca 1596, pp. 371f. On Razzi’s portrayal of the artistic practice at Santa Caterina da Siena in Florence, see Catherine Turrill, “*Compagnie and Discepoli*: The Presence of Other Women Artists at Santa Caterina da Siena”, in: *Suor Plautilla Nelli (1532–1588): The First Woman Painter of Florence*, conference proceedings Florence/Fiesole 1998, ed. by Jonathan Nelson, Florence 2000, pp. 83–102: 96–100.

³⁶ See Appendix, no. 3. Felice Lupicini’s artistic activity was mentioned much later by Padre Giuseppe Richa, *Notizie istoriche delle chiese fiorentine*,



8 Artemisia Gentileschi, *The penitent Magdalene*, about 1615–1617.
Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina

Artemisia Gentileschi's Biography

Among the female artists' biographies in Bronzini's treatise, Artemisia Gentileschi's merits particular attention because of its length, its unique content, and its coincidence with the early blossoming of her career in Florence.³⁸ Most likely written in 1618 or 1619 and thus dating from the same period as her *Penitent Magdalene* (Fig. 8) and her *Judith and her maidservant* (Fig. 9), both

Florence 1754–1762, VIII, p. 283, as indicated in Jacobs (note 19), pp. III, 166, and it would appear that Bronzini's manuscript was Richa's source. Lupicini's brothers Giovanni Battista (1575–1648) and Francesco (1590–post 1656) were professional painters who also apprenticed under Allori; biographical notes on the family are in BNCF, Poligrafo Gargani, 1159, fols. 7, 27, 97. Again, it seems that Richa relied on Bronzini's manuscript for his discussion of the women artists at Santa Caterina da Siena, although he altered some of the names: Maddalena Angelica Minerbetti is called by Richa "Suor Angiola Mi-



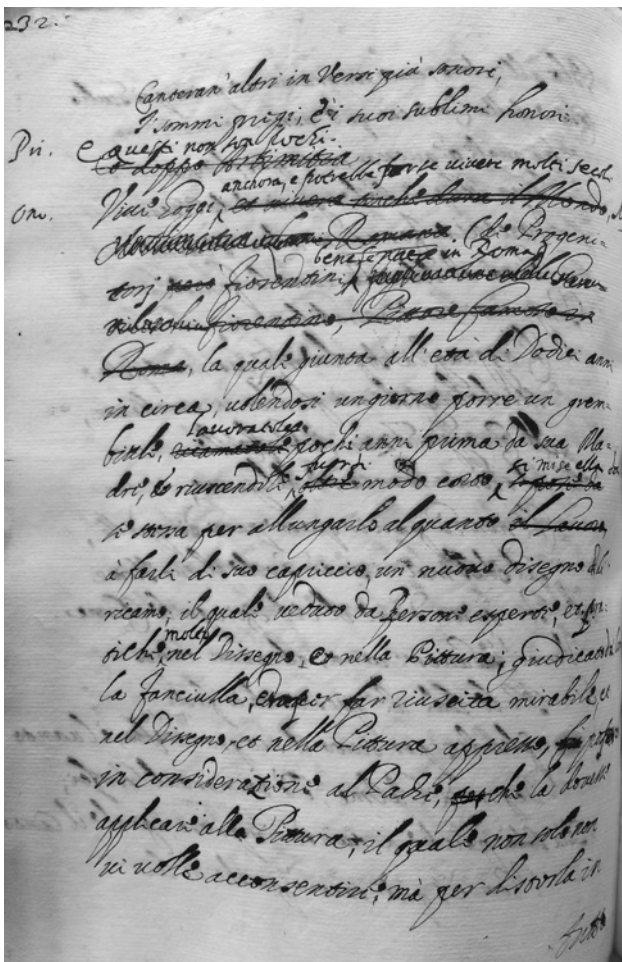
9 Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith and her maidservant*, about 1612–1614 or 1618/19.
Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina

in Palazzo Pitti, it stands as the very first literary notice of this painter, then in her mid-twenties. The narrative spans her adolescence in Rome and ends with the recognition of her professional establishment in Florence. Distinguishing the biography of Artemisia from Bronzini's other vignettes of women artists is the undeniable fact that hers is largely fictitious. Yet, as will be shown below, this early biography of Artemisia remains of

nerbetti" and Maria Vincenza Brandolini is called "Suor Vincenza Brandolini" (Richa, VIII, p. 283). Richa's historiographic references to these nuns are mentioned in Turrill (note 35) and *eadem*, "Reviewing the Life and Literature of Plautilla Nelli", in: *Plautilla Nelli: arte e devozione sulle orme di Savonarola = Art and Devotion in Savonarola's Footsteps*, exh. cat. Florence 2017, ed. by Fausta Navarro, Livorno 2017, pp. 19–33: 25 and 32, note 19.

³⁷ See Appendix, nos. 4 and 25.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, no. 23.



10 Cristofano Bronzini, *Della dignità, et della nobiltà delle donne*, Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magl. Cl. VIII, 1525, I, fol. 125v

singular utility to the reconstruction of her early years despite its inaccuracies. This is because it sheds light on the way she was perceived by those contemporaries of hers who read this account and because it reveals, as I will argue, how the artist wished to be perceived, having been astutely crafted to accord with her society's notions of female virtue and artistic genius.

Spanning three pages, Artemisia's biography (Fig. 10) is one of Bronzini's longer profiles of a woman artist. By comparison, the majority of contemporary artists are only accorded a sentence. Bronzini does not insinuate anywhere in Artemisia's biography that he had met her, nor does he claim to have seen her artworks, but it can be reasonably presumed that they knew each other since they both enjoyed Medici patronage and because Bronzini clearly had a keen interest in the visual arts.³⁹ An absolute *post quem* for the dating of the account is established by Bronzini's arrival in Florence in 1615; the probable *ante quem* stems from Artemisia's departure from the city in March of 1620, in light of the fact that the account speaks of Artemisia's ongoing presence in Florence. Bronzini must therefore have obtained an account of her life sometime between those two dates, with 1618/19 being the most likely period since the immediately sequential biographical notice in his text regards the visit of Giovanna Garzoni to the Medici court that arguably took place in 1620.⁴⁰

Although Bronzini's biography of Artemisia is almost entirely devoted to recounting her youth in Rome, it mentions neither Agostino Tassi nor the legal case that Orazio Gentileschi brought against him in 1612 upon discovering that Tassi had raped his daughter.⁴¹ This omission is surprising in light of the presump-

³⁹ Artemisia had enjoyed the patronage of the grand duke since 1614; see Sheila Barker, "Artemisia's Money: The Entrepreneurship of a Woman Artist in Seventeenth-Century Florence", in *Artemisia Gentileschi in a Changing Light*, ed. by eadem, Turnhout 2018, pp. 59–88: 62.

⁴⁰ For the date of Garzoni's visit, see Barker (note 31), pp. 656 and 657, note 16.

⁴¹ First published in part in *Artemisia Gentileschi/Agostino Tassi: atti di un*

processo per stupro, ed. by Eva Menzio, Milan 1981; in English translation by Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, Princeton 1989, pp. 409–487; and in a new, partial transcription by Patrizia Cavazzini, "Documenti relativi al processo contro Agostino Tassi", in: *Orazio e Artemisia Gentileschi*, exh. cat. Rome/New York/Saint Louis 2001/02, ed. by Keith Christiansen/Judith W. Mann, Milan 2001, pp. 432–445.

tion on the part of most scholars that at least some shadow of scandal would have accompanied Artemisia when she moved to Florence with her husband in 1613.⁴² Such views are based on the existence of a letter that Orazio Gentileschi wrote from Rome on 3 July 1612 to Christine of Lorraine to request her help in bringing Agostino Tassi to justice for the rape of his daughter; sent along with his letter were several legal depositions witnessing Tassi's wickedness under the title "Summarium romana [*sic*] stupri in virginem."⁴³ Notably, however, no evidence has yet been found to indicate that Orazio's plea elicited a response from the Medici court, so perhaps his supplication garnered only fleeting attention and was quickly forgotten.⁴⁴ If not prompted simply by reasons of decorum, the silence of Bronzini's text with regard to Artemisia's adolescent trauma may indicate that Bronzini as well as the majority of the Florentine court were unfamiliar with the contents of Orazio's letter.

The biography of Artemisia in Bronzini's manuscript provokes suspicion less because of the omission of the rape and its legal ramifications than because of the blatant fabrications that replace those two troubled years in her timeline. Here is the complete text, translated into English:

⁴² George Hersey, "Female and Male Art: Postille to Mary Garrard's *Artemisia Gentileschi*", in: *Parthenope's Splendor: Art in the Golden Age in Naples*, ed. by Jeanne Chenault Porter/Susan Scott Munshower, University Park, Pa., 1993, pp. 322–335: 329, has been the most strident proponent of this theory, labeling Artemisia "a famous rape victim" and arguing that she addressed this scandal head-on, using her identity as a wronged woman as a kind of titillating brand-identity for her artworks, a "dashing enterprise [...] to play the beautiful defamed rape-victim". More measured theories of the probable public knowledge of the rape trial are put forth by Elizabeth S. Cohen, "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History", in: *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, XXXI (2000), pp. 47–75: 51; Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi around 1622: The Shaping and Reshaping of an Artistic Identity*, Berkeley 2001, pp. 22, 109–113; and Dabbs (note 24), p. 28.

⁴³ Orazio's letter was first published in Leopoldo Tanfani Centofanti, *Notizie di artisti tratte da documenti pisani*, Pisa 1897, pp. 221–224. The summary of testimonies from Tassi's trial dated 17 February 1612 is bound immediately after Orazio's letter; see ASF, Mediceo del Principato, 6003, unnumbered folios (approximately fols. 71r–72v).

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Cropper, "Vivere sul filo del rasoio: Artemisia Gentileschi", in: *Orazio e Artemisia Gentileschi* (note 41), pp. 263–281: 264, has hypothesized that Christine of Lorraine responded to Orazio's letter by intervening in the trial to obtain Tassi's condemnation and arranging Artemisia's marriage to a Florentine subject, following up later on with patronage of the young artist. For accounts of those years that do not assume the dowager grand duchess's behind-the-scenes support for the artist, see Sheila Barker, "A New Document Concerning Artemisia Gentileschi's Marriage", in: *The Burlington Magazine*, CLVI (2014), pp. 803f., and Francesca Baldassari, "Artemisia nel milieu del Seicento fiorentino", in: *Artemisia Gentileschi e il suo tempo*, exh. cat., ed. by *eadem*, Milan 2016, pp. 23–33: 25, where Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger is supposed to have offered Artemisia the protection she required upon arriving in Florence.

There lives today (and may she live many centuries!) Mizia,⁴⁵ of Florentine ancestry but born in Rome, who, one day, when she was about twelve years old, wanted to wear a skirt that her mother had made for her a few years earlier. Finding the skirt now to be by far too short, she decided to lengthen it by herself, and when she did this, she added a little something of her own imagination, adding an embroidery design that she had invented. It happened that this skirt was seen by experts in the realms of design and painting, and they were convinced by what they saw the young girl had a potential for great achievement in these arts. They spoke with her father and strongly encouraged him to let his daughter study painting, but he would have none of it. Not only did he refuse to teach her, but he also tried to prevent her from becoming an artist by sending her to the convent of Sant'Apollonia in Trastevere for her education. Here in the convent, however, she felt more strongly inclined than ever to become a professional painter, and she begged the abbess to let her study in secret the good painting of a worthy master. The abbess brought her several paintings, including a *Susanna* by Caravaggio, an artist once judged to be the greatest painter alive. The copies that Artemisia made of these paintings came

⁴⁵ Here in the text, the words "Artimitia Lomi Romana" have been crossed out and replaced with the moniker "Mizia". This nickname may have been in wide use even in Rome, since in his rape trial testimony Antonio Mazzantino recalled her name as "Solpizia or Artemisia", with the meaningless "Solpizia" surely being a mistranscription of "sol Mizia" (just Mizia). For Mazzantino's testimony see *Artemisia Gentileschi/Agostino Tassi* (note 41), pp. 55–57, and Garrard (note 41), p. 457.

out so well (especially one of the *Susanna*) that everyone was amazed, and none more so than her own father. When Orazio saw the copies and was assured that they were done by his daughter, he was stunned with disbelief and exceedingly impressed. Still not convinced, he sent his daughter additional paintings to copy, this time quite large ones, all by Caravaggio (whose style she always tried to imitate as the one that pleased her most). After she completed the copies with a masterful finish, some were sold, attaining prices of 300, 500, and even 600 and more, even though these were among her very first paintings. She then married and was brought by her husband to Florence, his native city. The paintings and portraits she made here were as admired no less than the ones made by the above-mentioned Lalla Cizicena,⁴⁶ and they adorned and still adorn the rooms of the most prominent and respected gentlemen, and the halls of the most illustrious and exalted princes living in Florence today.⁴⁷

Although the known facts regarding Artemisia's youth and her artistic formation in her father's home are scanty,⁴⁸ enough is known to expose the preceding narrative as a predominantly fictional tale. The most patently spurious elements include the assertions that her father contributed in no way whatsoever to her artistic training; that he had placed her in a Roman convent in the years leading up to her marriage; and that during her time in the convent she made (otherwise undocumented) copies of Caravag-

gio's paintings that sold for many hundreds of scudi. Because of the biography's unreliability, the historian's first impulse might very well be to disregard it entirely. However, by probing into the motivations behind its falsehoods, it is possible to perceive aspirations and anxieties that align precisely with what is known about Artemisia's preoccupations in these years, affording precious insight into the artist's life and her deepest concerns.

Separating Fact from Fiction

This was not the first time that the account of a woman artist's life had been fictionalized in order to make the female subject more appealing to historical audiences. As shown by Fredrika H. Jacobs, Giorgio Vasari fabricated key aspects of his vita of Properzia de' Rossi in order to bring it into accord with the stereotypical ideals of women as characterized by contemporary treatises.⁴⁹ However, while much of the Artemisia biography is patently untrue, it does not appear that Bronzini was the one who invented these stories about her youth. Based on the internal characteristics of Artemisia's biography, it will be argued here that she is most likely the person who masterminded it and that Bronzini merely transcribed what was conveyed to him, either by Artemisia or by her associates.

An inquiry into the authorship of this biography ought to begin by acknowledging the apparent purposefulness underlying all of its discrepancies with the reality of Artemisia's youth. These apocry-

⁴⁶ On the Roman painter Iaia of Cyzicus, described in Pliny as being highly paid, quick, and renowned for her portraits of women (including one of an old woman and a self-portrait made with the help of a mirror) see Ann Sutherland Harris/Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550–1950*, New York 1976, p. 23, and Dabbs (note 9), pp. 24, 27f. and 33, note 24. The artist is also described by Bronzini (note 4), 1520, II, fol. 101v, thus: “vergine tutto il tempo di sua vita, dipinse in Roma con il pennello, et col cestio in avorio, le figure delle donne. Pinse anco un napolitano in una tavola grande, et nel specchio ritrasse se stessa tanto del naturale, che chiunque vide tal pittura ne stupì. Hebbe costei (come pur hora fu detto della dianzi nominata Marzia Romana) la mano nel dipinger tanto veloce che veruno a suo tempo l'arrivò mai; et quel che più importa, pinse con tant'arte, che avanzò di gran lunga i più illustri nell'arte del suo

tempo, le cui tavole, quadri, e ritratti furono poi tanto pregiati che adornarono le camere et sale più illustri e più pregiate persone di quello et altri secoli.”

⁴⁷ See Appendix, no. 23.

⁴⁸ The early years of Artemisia's life have been laid out in numerous studies, including Garrard (note 41), pp. 13–34; R. Ward Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art*, University Park, Pa., 1999, pp. 1–21; Patrizia Cavazzini, “Artemisia nella casa paterna”, in: *Orazio e Artemisia Gentileschi* (note 41), pp. 283–295; and Julia Vicioso, “Costanza Francini: A Painter in the Shadow of Artemisia Gentileschi”, in: *Women Artists* (note 32), pp. 99–120.

⁴⁹ Fredrika H. Jacobs, “The Construction of a Life: Madonna Properzia De' Rossi 'Schultrice' Bolognese”, in: *Word and Image*, IX (1993), pp. 122–132; 126.

phal elements, rather than resembling the bumbling confluents of a confused author or even the fanciful diversions of an overly imaginative author, appear instead to be the components of a strategic design, one whose aim was to whitewash Artemisia's scandalous past and reshape it in conformity with the literary stereotypes of women worthies and idealized feminine characteristics. It is difficult to imagine that Bronzini would have deliberately confabulated a biography for Artemisia without her complicity, for as a contemporary living in the same city she could have easily denounced his distortion of the truth, thereby calling into question the veracity of his whole enterprise. With everything to lose and very little to gain from this one false biography, it is difficult to believe that Bronzini, characterized as a "perfect courtier" by one historian,⁵⁰ would have risked losing face at the Medici court with a baseless fabrication about his famous female contemporary. By contrast, Artemisia stood to benefit greatly from the chance to rewrite her life story and to have a respected author place this sanitized version before the eyes of the Medici grand duchesses. Given her female patrons' insistent hallowing of female virtue in their efforts to create a "court of the saints", it is understandable that Artemisia might have wished to retroactively fashion herself as a product of natural artistic inclination and a wholesome education in a convent.⁵¹

Finally, in assessing the authorship of Artemisia's apocryphal biography, it should be recalled that Bron-

zini earnestly aspired to obtain accurate accounts. He noted whenever his source was his own direct knowledge or a reliable contemporary, and otherwise he mined from authoritative publications such as Vasari's *Lives*. Indeed, Bronzini's reliability as a biographer was recently endorsed by historian Susanne Cusick in her meticulously documented study of the composer Francesca Caccini, a close contemporary of Artemisia's who also lived in Florence and who likewise enjoyed Medici patronage.⁵² Since Bronzini's other biographies of women artists all adhere closely to the information that was available to him, we can infer that, acting in good faith, he unwittingly put his trust in a misleading source in the case of Artemisia.⁵³

The Truth Below the Surface

Despite its fictional elements, Artemisia's earliest biography cannot simply be dismissed from historiographic consideration. This is due to the fact that several of its incidental details align with the true course of her childhood years in mesmerizing ways. These highly specific yet gratuitous biographical details – a stylistic element with no parallel in Bronzini's other biographies – frequently touch on intimate aspects of Artemisia's experience that only her family would have known. For instance, when the story opens, it is either late 1605 or early 1606 since Artemisia, born in 1593, is said to be twelve years old. It can be gleaned from the narrative at this point that she has no mother to help her with the care of her person

⁵⁰ Tippelskirch 2011 (note 2), p. 140.

⁵¹ On the emphasis on morality and decorum during the regency of Christine of Lorraine and Maria Magdalena, see *eadem* 2008 (note 2), pp. 138f., in which the Medici court under their influence is described as a "corte dei santi". When he did not observe these imperatives, Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger was shunned by the grand duchesses after his play *La Fiera* satirized female virtue in 1619; see Janie Cole, *Music, Spectacle and Cultural Brokerage in Early Modern Italy: Michelangelo Buonarroti il Giovane*, Florence 2011, I, pp. 292–295. Patrizia Cavazzini, "Artemisia and the Other Women in Agostino Tassi's Life: Attitudes to Women's Improper Sexual Behaviour in Seventeenth-Century Rome", in: *Artemisia Gentileschi: Taking Stock*, ed. by Judith W. Mann, Turnhout 2005, pp. 39–49:

42f., suggests that women's honor was not as closely dependent on the observance of chastity as has been supposed. However, Cavazzini's study regards Rome, whereas in Florence it seems that feminine behavior was held up to stricter standards. In her attempts to attain Medici patronage, Artemisia would presumably have been expected to observe the decorum for upper-class women.

⁵² Cusick (note 2), p. xx: "Because Bronzini had known Francesca for at least fifteen years when he wrote it, and because his ideal audience – the elite women of the Medici court – knew her person and her story better than he, the sketch is an invaluable biographical source."

⁵³ For Bronzini's accidental errors in his notes on artists, see above, note 28.

or the mending of her clothing. Archival documents confirm that Artemisia's mother, Prudenzia Montone, died in childbirth at age thirty on 26 December 1605,⁵⁴ and thus the opening of this anecdote reverberates with a daughter's genuine memories of the loss of a parent.

Another point of contact with reality concerns the convent that is invoked in this account, Sant'Apollonia in Trastevere. A religious house of Franciscan tertiaryaries with this name did in fact once exist; moreover, it was not far from Santo Spirito in Sassia, where Artemisia's family had resided since mid-July of 1611.⁵⁵ Artemisia may have even visited the convent's church at some point, and she would have gone right past it on her documented excursion to the Basilica of Saint Paul's Outside the Walls in the late summer of 1611.⁵⁶ Although Orazio did not send her to this or any other convent (despite what is written in Bronzini's text), the rape trial records indicate that it had been his intention to do so. Tuzia Medaglia, who lived with the Gentileschi family, was under oath when she reported how Orazio would have preferred for Artemisia to become a nun rather than to marry: "Even when I moved into [Orazio's] house, he warned me not to speak to his daughter about husbands, rather, that I should persuade her to become a nun, which I tried to do several times."⁵⁷ Artemisia, however, showed no interest in heeding this advice. According to Tuzia, "[Artemisia] always told me that her father

did not need to waste his time because every time he spoke of her becoming a nun he alienated her".⁵⁸

Another revealing detail of the account, and one that perhaps only Artemisia would have thought to include, is the gratuitous reference to her admiration for Caravaggio above all other painters. The penetrating truth of the reference is born out by the Caravaggesque influences in her oeuvre, and it underlines what will be argued below about Artemisia's desire to be seen as a direct disciple of Caravaggio, rather than as her father's understudy.⁵⁹ Finally, it is a striking coincidence that Artemisia is said to have copied Caravaggio's *Susanna and the Elders* – a painting whose existence is not attested to by any other source – with great skill. This artistic subject is the only one to be specified in Artemisia's biographical account and it also happens to be the subject of Artemisia's first signed work from her youth, the Pommersfelden *Susanna and the Elders* (Fig. II), which she completed in Rome in 1610.⁶⁰ In light of this last coincidence and other factual correlations, it is hard to imagine who else but Artemisia could have invented the fictions of her earliest biography.

Once it is recognized that the story in Bronzini's text originated with Artemisia herself, its fictions become as significant as its facts. This is because the stories she invented to cloak her past are inevitably imprinted with her own mental constructs, including her ambitions, her anxieties, and her personal inter-

⁵⁴ See R. Ward Bissell, "Artemisia Gentileschi: A New Documented Chronology", in: *Art Bulletin*, L (1968), pp. 153–168: 154, note 9.

⁵⁵ On the church of Sant'Apollonia in Trastevere, founded in 1582 and demolished in the nineteenth century, see Giuseppe Vasi, *Tesoro sagro e venerabile; cioè le basiliche, le chiese, i cimiteri e i santuari di Roma con le opere di pietà e di religione*, Rome 1771, p. 39, and Mariano Armellini, *Le chiese di Roma: dal secolo IV al XIX*, Rome 1942, II, pp. 852f. For the Gentileschi family's transfer here in mid-July of 1611 from their previous residence on Via della Croce (where the rape had taken place), see Garrard (note 41), p. 21. The specific location of this house in Santo Spirito is in Vicioso (note 48), pp. 105f.

⁵⁶ Her visit to Saint Paul's, where she surely would have taken note of Lavinia Fontana's altarpiece (mentioned in Appendix, no. 22), is re-

corded in the testimony of Antonio Mazzantino, on which see *Artemisia Gentileschi/Agostino Tassi* (note 41), pp. 55–57, and Garrard (note 41), p. 457.

⁵⁷ From the English translation *ibidem*, p. 422.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 421.

⁵⁹ On the role of Caravaggio's art in Artemisia's formation of a personal style as well as an independent professional identity, see Mary D. Garrard, "Identifying Artemisia: The Archive and the Eye", in: *Artemisia Gentileschi in a Changing Light* (note 39), pp. 11–40: 16–19.

⁶⁰ On this work and its significance in Artemisia's early career in Rome, see Garrard (note 41), pp. 183–209, and Patricia Simons, "Artemisia Gentileschi's *Susanna and the Elders* (1610)", in: *Artemisia Gentileschi in a Changing Light* (note 39), pp. 41–57.

pretation of the *virtuosa* ideal.⁶¹ To begin with, Artemisia's claim that she was placed in a convent in the period between her mother's death and her marriage to Pierantonio Stiattesi reveals that she was anxious to counter any gossip about the rape that had occurred precisely in that time-frame, a conclusion that dispels the recent claim that Artemisia willfully brandished her identity as a rape victim (in a sort of branding tactic) for the sake of expanding the market for her art.⁶² Besides furnishing her with an alibi, the story of her enclosure in a convent may have also served to alleviate any lingering dishonor due to various allegations made during the rape trial, including the claims that Artemisia had been the subject of men's conversations⁶³ and that she sometimes looked out at the world from her window "molto sfacciatamente" ("very impudently").⁶⁴

The exposure in male spheres that Artemisia had been charged with could stain a woman's honor.⁶⁵ As Bronzini's own text reminds us, it was not enough to act with probity; a woman was also expected to avoid the mere appearance of impropriety, as well as to avoid witnessing the sinful acts of others, which was not easy to do while walking around in a city or taking part in secular society:

But as for going outside on occasion, as we've said, this too should be done only very rarely (especially in the case of ordinary days), and on festival days with good and virtuous companions, always observing in the places where one might go the true manner of a chaste and conscientious woman, not only in speech but also

⁶¹ On the *virtuosa*, referring to the historical ideal of the creative and talented female, see Jacobs (note 19).

⁶² Here I refer specifically to the theory articulated by Hersey, summarized in note 42 above.

⁶³ Such accusations were made in the testimonies of Giovanni Battista Stiattesi and Agostino Tassi, for which see Garrard (note 41), pp. 426, 445, 451; and in the testimony of Marcantonio Coppino, for which see Cavazzini (note 41), p. 435.

⁶⁴ Cited from the testimony of Mario Trotta in Cavazzini (note 41), p. 434. Other witnesses recalled her appearance at the window of her



11 Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1610. Pommersfelden, Collection Graf von Schönborn

in the face and in all one's gestures [...]. Nor should you believe that just because one is married, that it is acceptable to listen to all that is said, to say anything at all, and to converse with just anyone. If you should be invited to banquets and celebrations, keep company

home: Luca Pentti and Antonio Bertucci, for whose testimonies see *ibidem*, pp. 434, 438, as well as Antonio Mazzantino, for whose testimony see Garrard (note 41), p. 457. On the moral codes that Artemisia broke by being seen at a window, see Thomas V. Cohen/Elizabeth S. Cohen, *Words and Deeds in the Renaissance Rome: Trials Before the Papal Magistrates*, Toronto 1993, pp. 159–187, and Cavazzini (note 48), pp. 286 and 292, note 41.

⁶⁵ See for instance Anna Esposito, "Donna e fama tra normativa statutaria e realtà sociale", in: *Fama e publica vox nel medioevo*, conference proceedings Ascoli Piceno 2009, ed. by Isa Lori Sanfilippo/Antonio Rigon, Rome 2011, pp. 87–102.

only with the most blameless and respectable women and let your conversation be serious and wise. Don't listen to lascivious talk; don't look and don't even veer your eyes towards the wicked acts that are sometimes done in various places. Instead, carry yourself in such a way so that in those places the body [is] as a stranger and a pilgrim, while your soul remains in its proper home, its kingdom as it were, with your husband and your family. The virtuous woman flees from all places where her purity and her honor could be put at risk; nor should you decide to put your fortitude to the test.⁶⁶

This passage from *Della dignità et nobiltà delle donne* suggests that a woman's chastity and virtuous behavior were indispensable passkeys to the pro-woman enclave at the Medici court, thereby indicating a potential motivation for Artemisia's false claim to have spent her adolescent years in a convent.⁶⁷

In Florence and elsewhere in Italy, convents did in fact sometimes present women with the opportunity to obtain artistic training. As we have seen, Bronzini acknowledged this fact by treating monastic women artists as a special subcategory, lavishing praise on exemplars such as Suor Plautilla Nelli, Nelli's students in the Florentine convent of Santa Caterina da Siena, Angela Cherubina Angelelli, and Ortensia

Fedeli. It was additionally recognized that laywomen could also benefit from the flourishing artistic culture of monasteries, since Maria Magdalena of Austria's favorite, Arcangela Paladini, had formerly stayed at the Florentine convent of Sant'Agata, where she was trained to paint and embroider thanks to the patronage of Christine of Lorraine.⁶⁸ Artemisia's claim to have been sent by her father to a religious house was thus a credible explanation of how she could have learned to paint if not at the hands of her father.

A second invented element in Artemisia's biography, the anecdote of her precocious prowess in embroidery, may hold deeper implications. It is important to note, for instance, that the story abides by the conventional plotline found in several of Vasari's biographies, according to which some of the great artists first manifested their talent far outside the workshop (an obvious example being the story of how Giotto's talent was first recognized when he drew pictures in the mud while watching over his flock).⁶⁹ In Artemisia's case, however, the story of her early signs of artistic talent also serves to strengthen the impression that Artemisia received no help whatsoever from her father in either the discovery, or the development, of her talent for painting (which was certainly one of her more contentious claims).⁷⁰ The anecdote traces

⁶⁶ Bronzini (note 4), 1525, II, fols. 119v–120r: “Questa donna maritata [...] deve ella rimaner sempre rinchiusa dentro le porte della sua casa? Non già, ma uscire alle volte, come si è detto, et queste anche di rado, et particolarmente nei giorni che non sono festivi et nei festivi con buona et honesta compagnia: osservando sempre in tutti i luoghi dove ella va, quella vera maniera di donna honesta et grave, così nelle parole, come nel volto, et in tutti i gesti nella guisa, che fu accenata di sopra: né pensi che per essere maritata, le stia bene udire ogni cosa, parlar d’ogni cosa, et haver pratica con ogni persona: ma trovandosi a conviti, et feste, solamente con donne honestissime, et di buona fama s’accompagni, et sieno i suoi ragionamenti gravi et prudenti: quei motti lascivi, non ascolti; né vegga, né rivolga mai gli occhi a gli atti disonesti che in diversi luoghi alle volte si fanno: anzi disponga se stessa in modo che ivi il corpo, come forestiere et peregrino, ma l’animo col marito et con la sua famiglia si ritrovi nella propria casa, come in suo regno. Fugga la virtuosa donna tutti i luoghi ne quali può soprastar pericolo alla sua honestà et suo honore; né curi di fare esperienza della sua fortezza.”

⁶⁷ On the moral and religious climate of the early seventeenth-century

Florentine court, see Harness 2006 (note 15), pp. 40–55; Tippleskirch 2008 (note 2); Cusick (note 2), pp. 39–60, 194f.; Cole (note 51), pp. 299–316. Artemisia's “preoccupation with the social virtue of honor” is argued in Elizabeth S. Cohen, “What’s in a Name: Artemisia Gentileschi and the Politics of Reputation”, in: *Artemisia Gentileschi: Taking Stock* (note 51), pp. 121–130: 128.

⁶⁸ See Goldenberg Stoppato (note 32), pp. 87–89. On the training of young women in artistic skills upon their placement in monasteries by the Medici grand duchesses, see Barker (note 33), pp. 124–134.

⁶⁹ On the discovery of talent as an archetypal characteristic of the myth of the artist, see Ernst Kris/Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment*, New Haven 1979 (first German ed. Vienna 1934), pp. 26–37; and with particular reference to the legendary discovery of Giotto's talent, see Paul Barolsky, *Giotto's Father and the Family of Vasari's Lives*, University Park, Pa., 1992, pp. 20f.

⁷⁰ Neither in the rape trial testimony nor in Orazio's letter to Christine of Lorraine is it ever explicitly stated that Orazio trained Artemisia in her

her artistic genesis to a textile art that her father did not practice, and one that was seen as a particularly feminine art form, thereby excluding Orazio from any pretension to being the source of her artistic gifts and talents. Perhaps even more to the point, Artemisia's story situates her artistic talent within a matrilineal line of descent, rather than a patrilineal one.⁷¹

Artemisia's story of her debut in needlepoint was a particularly astute narrative strategy at the Medici court, where embroidery was held in high esteem following the cultural interests of Grand Duchess Maria Magdalena and her mother-in-law Christine of Lorraine.⁷² Bronzini's own text implies that embroidery and painting shared a certain equivalency, as is indicated by his placement of the descriptions of talented embroiderers such as the "three sisters of Ferrara" among the profiles of painters.⁷³ At one point Bronzini even asserted that the designs of a famous female needleworker in Toledo were a fair match for any pen-and-ink drawing or painted design:

I don't wish, however, to fail to mention the Spanish woman from Toledo Francesca di Giesù [Francisca de Jesús], for if she had lived instead in ancient times, she would have been an even better match for Athena [than Arachne], because the most sharp and subtle geniuses of the present age admire in her talent for weaving

profession. Nevertheless, it is universally presumed in the historiography that she learned her art from her father, beginning with Giovanni Baglione's statement in 1642 that Orazio taught his daughter how to paint and specifically how to carry out "ritratti dal vero" (Giovanni Baglione, *Le vite de' pittori scultori et architetti dal pontificato di Gregorio XIII. del 1572 in fino a' tempi di Papa Urbano Ottavo nel 1642*, ed. by Valerio Mariani, Rome 1935 [facsimile of the ed. Rome 1642], p. 360). In Orazio's letter to Christine from 1612, he states that Artemisia had been studying painting for three years at that point. On this letter and what it indicates about the probable chronology of Artemisia's apprenticeship in painting, see Cavazzini (note 48), p. 288, and R. Ward Bissell, "Re-thinking Early Artemisia", in: *Artemisia Gentileschi: Taking Stock* (note 51), pp. 19–38: 20.

⁷¹ Many thanks to Mary D. Garrard for drawing my attention to the significance of this issue.

⁷² Bronzini noted that Arcangela Paladini, although held in high regard for her painting, attained the favor of the highborn *dame* of the Medici

damasks and brocades her stupendous works, creating in cloth that which a worthy painter could only barely express with a pen or with a paintbrush and panel.⁷⁴

In light of such passages, the anecdote about Artemisia's accomplishments in embroidery effectively contextualizes her artistic impulses within the sphere of a feminine skill that many of Bronzini's contemporaries believed to have no less claim on *disegno* than those arts favored by Vasari.⁷⁵

Much in the same way that it situates Artemisia's artistic origins within a feminine, even matriarchal, matrix, the fictitious biography emphatically demonstrates that the Caravaggesque impulse in her art was the result of a woman's intervention, not her father's. Credit for introducing Artemisia to Caravaggio's paintings is explicitly withheld from Orazio Gentileschi and assigned instead to the abbess of Sant'Apollonia. While there would not seem to be any substance to the implausible story of the abbess who brought Caravaggio's paintings into the convent, there may nonetheless be a kernel of truth at its core. With regard to Artemisia's earliest firmly attributed work, the *Susanna* of 1610, Gianni Papi has argued convincingly that the young artist possessed a direct and autonomous knowledge of Caravaggio's oeuvre as opposed to one that was filtered through her father's

court because of her embroidery skills, a claim confirmed by recent historical research; see Goldenberg Stoppato (note 32), p. 89. On the prestige of needle painting at the Florentine court and beyond, see Sharon T. Strocchia, "Knowing Hands: Nuns and the Needle Arts in Renaissance Tuscany", in: *Artiste nel chiostro* (note 33), pp. 29–50; Adelina Modesti, "Nun Artisans, Needlecraft, and Material Culture in the Early Modern Florentine Convent", *ibidem*, pp. 51–69; Sheila Ffolliott, "'Più che famose': Some Thoughts on Women Artists in Early Modern Europe", in: *Women Artists* (note 32), pp. 15–27: 20f.

⁷³ See Appendix, no. 15.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, no. 16.

⁷⁵ Paolo Lomazzo celebrated a female embroiderer, Caterina Leuca Cantona, in a poem dedicated to women artists; see Jacobs (note 19), pp. 23f. Paolo Morigia's *Nobiltà di Milano*, Milan 1595, I, pp. 299f., contains a chapter on embroiderers in which two women, Cantona and Lodovica Pellegrini, are named.

production.⁷⁶ Moreover, Papi's research suggests that Orazio's complete conversion to Caravaggism may have taken place after his daughter had already fully embraced this new style.⁷⁷ If Artemisia indeed embraced Caravaggio's manner well before her father did, this would explain why her invented biography repeatedly asserts that her artistic formation occurred independently of her father's influence.

Artemisia's biography is not the only one in Bronzini's manuscript to hail a woman artist's autodidactic formation. The adolescent Spanish portraitist María de Jesús Torres, for example, is said to have had great skill in painting despite not receiving any training whatsoever.⁷⁸ However, whereas the stories of Artemisia and Torres both inspire marvel, Artemisia's biography stands apart from the latter as well as all the other profiles of women artists in this manuscript because of the inclusion of an antagonist, that is to say, a figure who opposes the woman's efforts to pursue her vocation. Portrayed as being at once irrelevant to Artemisia's aesthetic education and at the same time Draconian in his efforts to crush her nascent artistic career, Orazio Gentileschi emerges as Artemisia's nemesis in this account. The prominence of this antagonistic father-figure in Artemisia's biography can perhaps be best explained by Artemisia's fear that her father would be wrongly credited for her own accomplishments, a sentiment that was surely fueled by

the disputes that arose between father and daughter in these years.⁷⁹

At the same time that Artemisia's biography diminishes her father's contribution, it identifies an alternative source for her talents in nature itself. It states that, within the convent, Artemisia became "più che mai inclinata a questa professione" (more inclined than ever to become a painter). The term employed here, *inclinata*, referred to an inborn vocation preordained by the heavens. It is used in Bronzini's text in the context of only one other female artist: Properzia de' Rossi, defined by Bronzini as "da Natura inclinata al disegno" ("inclined by nature to the art of design").⁸⁰ A survey of the use of this term in the 1568 edition of Vasari's *Lives* clearly shows the aggrandizing implications of ascribing Artemisia's talent to natural inclination. The notion of natural inclination features as the prime mover behind the careers of Cimabue ("inclinazione di natura"), Giotto ("inclinazione della natura"), Simone Martini ("uomini che sono dalla natura inclinati"), Spinello Aretino ("tanto inclinato da natura"), Alesso Baldovineti ("inclinazione della natura"), Lorenzo Costa ("da natura inclinato"), Giovanni and Gentile Bellini ("inclinatissimi"), Andrea del Sarto ("spinto da naturale inclinazione"), Garofalo ("nacque [...] di maniera inclinato"), Michelangelo ("molto inclinato"), Primaticcio ("da natura inclinato"), Titian ("molto inclinato"), and even Vasari himself ("molto inclinato").⁸¹ Of the

⁷⁶ Gianni Papi, "Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1626): gli anni romani, il soggiorno fiorentino", in *Artemisia Gentileschi*, exh. cat. Florence 1991, ed. by Roberto Contini/Gianni Papi, Rome 1991, pp. 31–62: 34–37. Dissenting opinions that stress varying degrees of Orazio's conceptual and manual intervention in the Pommersfelden *Susanna* are summarized in Bissell (note 70), pp. 19 and 22f.

⁷⁷ See Papi (note 76), and *idem*, "Mary Magdalen in Ecstasy and the Madonna of the Svezzamento: Two Masterpieces by Artemisia", in: *Artemisia Gentileschi in a Changing Light* (note 39), pp. 147–166.

⁷⁸ Appendix, no. 9.

⁷⁹ Not infrequently, talented women of this era feared that credit for their own achievements would be given to their fathers or their male teachers. As if anticipating that this would occur, the trope in Sofonisba Anguissola's *Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola* topples the Pygmalion stereotype; see Mary D. Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba

Anguissola and the Problem of the Female Artist", in: *Renaissance Quarterly*, XLVII (1994), pp. 556–622: 556–566. Francesca Caccini's worry that "the simple-minded" would credit her father with the music she published herself is discussed in Cusick (note 2), pp. 109f. Elisabetta Sirani's "struggle to achieve recognition for her accomplishments" is noted in Babette Bohn, "The Construction of Artistic Reputation in Seicento Bologna: Guido Reni and the Sirani", in: *Renaissance Studies*, XXV (2011), pp. 511–537: 533f. For Artemisia's heated conflicts with her father upon returning to Rome, see the letters she and her husband wrote to Francesco Maria Maringhi in Francesco Solinas/Michele Nicolaci/Yuri Primarosa, *Lettere di Artemisia: edizione critica e annotata con quarantre documenti inediti*, Rome 2011, nos. 12–14, pp. 38–45; for the theory that a dispute over her dowry payment was at the base of this fighting, see Barker (note 39), pp. 68–71.

⁸⁰ Appendix, no. 1.

⁸¹ Vasari (note 21), II, p. 35 (Cimabue), p. 96 (Giotto), p. 191 (Simone

handful of women artists mentioned in this edition of the *Lives*, only the four Anguissola sisters are accorded assistance from natural inclination, having “da natura inclinazione alla virtù” (“an inclination to virtuosity given to them by nature”).⁸²

It is not known whether Artemisia ever read Vasari’s *Lives*. However, by the time Bronzini had included her biography in his text, Artemisia had already painted the *Allegory of inclination* (Fig. 12) for the ceiling of the Galleria in Casa Buonarroti in the summer of 1615.⁸³ Within the context of the Galleria’s iconographic program, the *Allegory of inclination* refers to the irresistible divine force behind Michelangelo’s undertaking of an artistic career. It is therefore unquestionable that she was familiar with Vasari’s concept of natural inclination and with its role in the historiographic construction of artistic genius. Moreover, as Mary D. Garrard has noted, Artemisia fused her own likeness with this imagery representing Michelangelo’s predestination for artistic glory, thereby assimilating herself to the ideal of artistic genius as defined in Buonarroti the Younger’s early seventeenth-century iconographic program.⁸⁴

Conclusion: Artemisia, Art Historiography, and Biographical Exceptionalism

Despite its apocryphal nature, Artemisia’s earliest biography contains several particularities that correlate precisely with what is known about her

Martini), p. 277 (Spinello Aretino), III, p. 314 (Baldovinetti), p. 415 (Lorenzo Costa), p. 422 (Giovanni and Gentile Bellini), IV, p. 343 (Andrea del Sarto), V, p. 409 (Garofalo), VI, pp. 108, 109 (Michelangelo Buonarroti), p. 143 (Primaticcio), p. 155 (Titian), p. 369 (Vasari), and many other examples besides.

⁸² *Ibidem*, V, p. 428.

⁸³ The iconographic program of the ceiling and walls of the Galleria had been determined by its patron, Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger (1568–1646), a librettist and member of the Accademia della Crusca; see Ugo Procacci, *La Casa Buonarroti a Firenze*, Milan 1968, and Adriaan W. Vliegenthart, *La Galleria Buonarroti: Michelangelo e Michelangelo il Giovane*, Florence 1976, pp. 22f., 49–51, 77, 170–173, 174–176. Buonarroti the Younger was also the godfather to Artemisia’s stillborn daughter, Agnola, on which see Barker (note 39), pp. 59–88: 74, doc. 3, p. 81, note 8, p. 83, note 55.

⁸⁴ See Garrard (note 59), pp. 14f.



12 Artemisia Gentileschi, *Allegory of inclination*, 1615. Florence, Casa Buonarroti

childhood from documentary sources. Moreover, its fictional elements conveniently dissemble the scandalous episodes that could have tarnished her reputation and hindered her career at the Florentine court. Given these findings, it can be reasonably assumed that the account originated with the artist herself and that through a kind of ventriloquism (not so unlike Michelangelo's instrumentalization of Condivi to assert his own claims of autodidacticism), Artemisia concealed her role in fashioning the account that issued from Bronzini's pen. A parallel situation has been recognized in regard to Simon Vouet's *Portrait of Artemisia Gentileschi* (Fig. 1). Even though this likeness of Artemisia was painted by the hand of another artist, Garrard has argued that it would be more appropriate to consider the image to be the result of a synthesis of ideas mutually agreed upon by the painter and the sitter. Indeed, it is very likely that Artemisia would have wanted to exercise control over such design aspects as her association with the tools of both drawing and painting, as well as the pose and facial expression that convey her character. Noting that no other female portrait by Vouet manages to conjure such verve and such spirited awareness of her audience, Garrard suggests "we may reasonably conclude that Artemisia collaborated in creating the portrait's expression".⁸⁵

By means of her idealized biography, Artemisia succeeded in assimilating herself to the socially constructed ideals of both female virtue and artistic genius. The story of her enclosure in a convent con-

notes her virginity and purity, while the story that she learned to paint in the convent by copying after Caravaggio testifies to her inborn talent, her independence from her father, and her self-possession. This pair of concepts, virginity and autonomous capability, has precedents in the 'biographical' signatures of women artists featuring the designation *virgo* (virgin) and in their references to themselves as the sole creators of their own images.⁸⁶ Well-known examples include Sofonisba Anguissola's signature on her earliest dated self-portrait at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, "Sophonisba Angussola virgo se ipsam fecit 1554" and her declaration SOPHONISBA ANGVSSOLA VIRGO IPSIVS MANV EX SPECVLO DEPICTA CREMONAE on her miniature at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (Fig. 13).⁸⁷ Similarly, in Lavinia Fontana's formula LAVINIA VIRGO PROSPERI FONTANAE / FILIA EX SPECVLO IMAGINEM / ORIS SVI EXPRESIT ANNO / MDLXXVII on the *Self-portrait at the virginal* (Rome, Accademia di San Luca), the artist acknowledged herself as the daughter of a painter but made it clear that only her mirror helped her make the painting on which this inscription appears.⁸⁸

Just as she was preceded by other women artists in using self-representation to assert her purity and her independence, Artemisia was also preceded by them in making recourse to fictions and embellishments.⁸⁹ As suggested by Jacobs, the imagery of Lavinia Fontana's painted self-portraits was, above all, a device for presenting the artist in conformity with the Renais-

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 11. See also the discussion of the playful implications of Artemisia's outstretched pinkie finger as shown in Vouet's portrait in Mary D. Garrard, "Artemisia's Hand", in: *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism*, ed. by Norma Broude/Mary D. Garrard, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 2005, pp. 63–79 (reprinted in *Artemisia Gentileschi: Taking Stock* [note 51], pp. 99–120).

⁸⁶ On the implications of the term 'virgo' in women artists' signatures, see Garrard (note 79), pp. 582f. Convent artists perhaps did not need to make recourse to these topoi in the same way: their moral purity was implied in the title 'suor' and their artworks in some cases may have been collaborative workshop productions; regarding nun artists, see Ann Roberts/Marilyn Dunn, "Convents", in: *Dictionary of Women Artists*, ed. by Delia

Gaze, London *et al.* 1997, pp. 21–28, with preceding bibliography; *Artiste nel chiostro* (note 33); and *Plautilla Nelli: arte e devozione* (note 36).

⁸⁷ On these two paintings, see *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue sorelle*, exh. cat. Cremona/Vienna/Washington, D.C., Rome 1994, pp. 196f., no. 6, 188f., no. 2.

⁸⁸ On this painting, see Maria Teresa Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana bolognese: "pittora singolare" 1552–1614*, Milan 1989, pp. 72–74, no. 4a.12; Garrard (note 79), pp. 589–595; *Lavinia Fontana of Bologna, 1552–1614*, exh. cat. Washington, D.C., 1998, ed. by Vera Pierantonio Fortunati, Washington, D.C./Milan 1998, pp. 52f., no. 2.

⁸⁹ See, for instance, Catherine King, "Italian Artists in Search of Virtue, Fame, and Honour c. 1450–c. 1650", in: *The Changing Status of the Artist*, ed. by Emma Barker/Nick Webb/Kim Woods, London 1999, pp. 56–87: 72–74.

sance ideal of the *virtuosa*.⁹⁰ However, by comparison with Fontana's visual topoi, Artemisia's biographical fabrications are highly idiosyncratic and consequently more revealing of her personal experiences and inner mind.

Perhaps no biography of an early modern artist completely escapes questions about truthfulness. Historians have shown clearly that the literature on artists' lives is fundamentally epideictic, and that as a consequence it occupies a "terrain in which fact and fiction co-exist".⁹¹ Biographers from Vasari to Freud and beyond have treated artists as a natural category marked by exceptionalism, adapting the life stories of male artists to fit rhetorical models and mytho-heroic constructs. Women artists, by comparison, were doubly impacted by this biographical exceptionalism, since their rupture with gender stereotypes led to an additional qualification as marvels among their sex and thus as miracles of nature.⁹² This seems to hold true whether the women were passive objects of biography or active collaborators, autobiographers, and self-portraitists.⁹³ Beginning with her autobiography for Bronzini and continuing with her copious self-references in paintings, the posturing in her correspondence, and even the encomia authored by her friends, Artemisia Gentileschi was one of the more active, shrewd, and resourceful figures in this regard. Liberally cloaking herself in myth, she was one of many women artists who negotiated a viable profes-



13 Sofonisba Anguissola, *Self-portrait*, about 1556. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Emma F. Monroe Fund, inv. 60.155

⁹⁰ Jacobs (note 19), pp. 149–153. In a similar vein, Katherine McIver, "Lavinia Fontana's *Self-Portrait Making Music*", in: *Women's Art Journal*, XIX (1998), pp. 3–8: 5, observes that Fontana cannot be presumed to have had musical talents just because she portrayed herself with her fingers on the keyboard of a virginal, an instrument that alludes to the artist's purity and her learning; cf. Garrard (note 79), p. 589, note 71. On Fontana's tendency to depict herself at a younger age, see Babette Bohn, "Female Self-Portraiture in Early Modern Bologna", in: *Renaissance Studies*, XVIII (2004), pp. 239–286: 255f.

⁹¹ Quotation from Claire Farago, "The Absolute Leonardo" (review of Thomas Frangenberg/Rodney Palmer, *The Lives of Leonardo*, London/Turin 2013), in: *Journal of Art Historiography*, 13 (2015), <https://arthistoriography.wordpress.com/13-dec15/>, p. 3. See also Patricia Rubin, "What Men

Saw: Vasari's *Life of Leonardo da Vinci* and the Image of the Renaissance Artist", in: *Art History*, XIII (1990), pp. 36–46. For the epideictic nature of artists' biographies see Carl Goldstein, "The Image of the Artist Re-viewed", in: *Word and Image*, IX (1993), pp. 9–18: 12, and Dabbs (note 24), p. 28, in which see also p. 22 for an anecdote in Baldinucci regarding Artemisia whose veracity is disputed by some and accepted by others.

⁹² Harris/Nochlin (note 46), pp. 26–35; Fredrika H. Jacobs, "Woman's Capacity to Create: The Unusual Case of Sofonisba Anguissola", in: *Renaissance Quarterly*, XLVII (1994), pp. 74–101; Garrard (note 79), pp. 573f., 588f. On the impact that women artists' gender has had on their biographies, see Dabbs (note 24), pp. 20–22.

⁹³ On women artists as active shapers and fashioners of their identities, see above all King (note 23); also Bohn (note 90), pp. 239–286.

sional identity in the gap between her society's cultural lexicon of female stereotypes and the complexity of her reality.⁹⁴

I wish to dedicate this article to the memory of Jane Fortune (1942–2018), who underwrote my research unstintingly and who inspired me with her total dedication to uncovering the history of women artists. Vital support was given to me throughout its gestation by the trustees and staff of the Medici Archive Project. Warm thanks go to Francesca Fantappiè for bringing Bronzini's manuscript to my attention, and to Babette Bohn, Mary D. Garrard, Fredrika H. Jacobs, Ortensia Martinez Fucini, Chloe Bazlen, Aoife Cosgrove, Carlotta Paltrinieri, and my two anonymous peer-reviewers for reading drafts and offering invaluable suggestions for improvement. I am particularly grateful to Samuel Vitali for his meticulous scrutiny of the manuscript as well as his insightful additions throughout. Finally I thank the staff of the Sala dei Manoscritti at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze and the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz for having graciously assisted my use of their collections. All translations and transcriptions in this article are my own.

⁹⁴ According to Cohen (note 42), pp. 67–71, Artemisia dexterously exploited her testimony during the rape trial of 1612 as an opportunity for self-fashioning, assertively putting “forward the image by which she wishes to be known”, that is to say, as a virtuous, conscientious, and confident young woman whose honorable reputation had been assailed by unscrupulous and nefarious individuals. Furthermore, while the details of her stories were not always plausible, “in both language and behavior Artemisia stuck to the course that she hoped would best secure her honorable, public identity” (*ibidem*, p. 71).

Appendix

Transcriptions of notes on early modern women artists from Cristofano Bronzini, Della dignità et della nobiltà delle donne, BNCF, Magl. Cl. VIII, 1525, I.

In the transcription, accents, apostrophes, and word divisions have been adapted according to modern usage, whereas the original spelling, punctuation, and capitalization have generally been maintained. Marginal and interlineal additions to the text are designated by circumflex accents (^...^).

I. Properzia de' Rossi

[fol. 89r] [loss] che ebbero generoso animo di mettersi [fol. 89v] con le bianche, e tenere mani, nelle cose ^di^ pietra più dure, fra la ruvidezza de' marmi, et l'asprezza del ferro per conseguire l'honorato desiderio tale et riportarsene eterna ed immortal fama, come fece non molti anni sono Properzia de' Rossi Felicini gentildonna bolognese e giovane virtuosa e [loss; possibly: soll]icitatissima non solamente nelle cose di casa (come l'altre) ma tanto versata in molte scienze che non che infinite persone, ma gran parte degli uomini gli ebbero invidia. Costei fu di aspetto bellissimo, et sonò, e cantò nei suoi tempi meglio forse che altra persona della sua città, et perciò era di sottilissimo et rarissimo ingegno, si mise (come per passatempo, essendo da natura inclinata al disegno) ad intagliare noccioli di persichi, li quali si bene e con tanta pazienza et diligenza lavorò, che fu cosa singolare et maravigliosa il vederli, non solamente per la sottilità del lavoro, ma per la sveltezza delle figurine che ella [fol. 90r] in quegli faceva, et per la delicatissima maniera del compartirle. Et certamente era un miracolo vedere ^in su^ un nocciolo così picciolo tutta la Passione di Christo Signor Nostro, fatta con bellissimo intaglio, con una infinità di persone oltre i crocifissori et gli Apostoli. Questa cosa le diede animo, dovendosi fare l'ornamento delle tre porte alla prima facciata del San Petronio in Bologna, tutta a figure di marmo, ch'ella per mezzo del marito chiedesse a gli capi scultori una parte di quel lavoro, li quali di ciò furono contentissimi, ogni volta ch'ella havesse fatto veder loro qualche opera di marmo condotta a perfezione di sua mano. Onde ella subito posto mano a' scarpelli fece in brevissimo tempo al Conte Alessandro de' Pepoli (come uno de' principali Deputati a tant'opera) un ritratto di finissimo marmo, dov'era il Conte Guido suo padre tanto del naturale che niente più ^essendo tenuta da tutti una bellissima testa^; la qual cosa piacque infinitamente [fol. 90v] non solo al Conte Alessandro e tutti capi scultori, ma a tutta la città, e perciò più che volentieri le diedero poi una parte di quella loro tanto importante opera. Nella quale a concorrenza d'Alfonso da Ferrara (scultore a quei tempi celeberrimo) intagliò, ed in pochi giorni ella finì (con grandissimo stupore et maraviglia di tutta Bologna) un grande e

leggiadrissimo quadro dove fece la moglie del maggiordomo del faraone, che innamoratasi di Giuseppe, quasi disperata di tanto pregarlo all'ultimo gli toglie la veste d'attorno, con una donnesca grazia, e più che mirabile; la qual opera, come da tutti fu riputata bellissima, fu a lei, per altro rispetto, di grandissima sodisfazione, doppio la quale, non volle far altro mai, per conto di detta fabrica, ancorché ne fosse grandemente pregata, e fuor di modo scongiurata da tutti i principali della città, et [fol. 91r] intendenti dell'arte; eccettoché da un certo maestro amico⁹⁵ (anzi nemico di honorate azzioni) che per invidia sempre la disuase, e sconfortò da così bell'opera (non sapendo egli cercar fama, se non col dissuadere, et con l'opporsi appresso, et contraddire) a fine che l'opera di tanto eccellente donna non caminasse. Vizio naturale d'alcuni che conoscendo l'imperfezione loro e 'l valore altrui non possono vedere, se non con gli occhi pregni d'invidia, arrivar altri dove essi appena possono solamente col temerario ardire loro avvicinarsi. Ma non poté però operar tanto questa sciocca maligna emulazione di costui che finalmente non si conoscesse il valor di lei, et la malignità di lui, il quale segretamente poi si adoperò ancora perché il tanto da ogniuno pregiato lavoro d'essa Properzia le fosse riconosciuto con pochissimo prezzo, di che ella non curò nulla, mostrando con generoso animo di far anco di ciò pochissimo conto. [fol. 91v] Fece nondimeno doppio due angeli in marmo di grandissimo rilievo e di bellissima proporzione ^diligentemente lavorati^ che tuttavia hoggidì si veggono della medesima fabrica della stupenda et gran Chiesa di San Petronio, onde per le maravigliose opere in duro marmo da lei con dotta mano intagliate, e con grand'arte condutte a fine, meritò di esser celebrata fra i più degni scultori della sua età ^essendo arrivata costei nell'arte della scoltura Dedalo di Mezione, e più di Panopeo e Teodoro Samio, e qualunque altro eccellente in tal arte^ (a Pompeo Vizani lib. xi).⁹⁶ All'ultimo poi (per sua nuova ricreazione) si diede ad intagliare stampe di rame e ciò fece con grandissima lode, riuscendole ogni cosa perfettissimamente. Andò la fama di così nobile ed elevato ingegno per tutta Italia, pervenendo sino agli orecchi di Papa Clemente settimo, il quale subito che hebbe coronato l'Imperatore in Bologna, dimandato di lei, trovò esser morta quella medesima settimana ^l'anno millecinquacentotrentatré; e perciò^ al Papa, ch'era volenteroso di vederla, spiacque grandissimamente la morte di così eccellente donna. Ma molto più spiacque a' suoi cittadini et ad altri che appieno conobbero il valor suo, li quali mentre ella visse, la tennero per un grandissimo soggetto a'

suoi tempi, onde poi Vincenzo di Buonaccorso Pitti fece sopra di lei questo epitaffio:

Fero splendor di due begl'occhi accrebbe
Già marmi a marmi, o stupor novo e strano
Ruvidi marmi delicata mano
Feo dinanzi vivi, ahi morte, invidia n'hebbe.⁹⁷

[fol. 92r] Ho veduto nel libro di Giorgio Vasari pittore e architetto aretino, ritrovarsi per testimonio del valore et grande eccellenza di tanta donna, alcuni disegni di mano di lei, fatti di penna, et altri ritratti dalle cose di Raffaello da Urbino, molto buoni, et grandemente lodati da persone intendenti dell'arte. Così è, et holli veduti anch'io, come viddi quella bellissima ottava, fatta in sua lode da Giulio Cesare della Croce, che veramente è rara, parlando di lei in questa guisa:

Fu Propertia de' Rossi sì fondata
ne la scoltura e sì famosa e chiara
Ch'ancora l'opra sua si mira e guata
Come cosa stupenda unica e rara
Onde in quei tempi molto fu stimata
Dal Gran Scultor Alfonso da Ferrara
E fu in tal Arte di tanta eccellenza
Che co' i più dotti fece a concorrenza.⁹⁸

2. Plautilla Nelli

[fol. 92r] Né però mancarono altre donne (ancorché [fol. 92v] Properzia disegnasse benissimo) che la paragonassero non solamente nel disegno ma fatto con così bell'opere in pittura, com'ella in scoltura, e acquistatosi perciò nome immortale. Di queste la prima fu Plautilla, fattasi monaca et priora poi nel monastero di Santa Caterina da Siena in Firenze, la quale cominciando a poco a poco a disegnare et ad imitare, co' i colori, quadri et pitture de' maestri eccellenti, condusse con tanta diligenza alcune cose a fine, che fece maravigliare i più dotti [et] ^eccellenti^ pittori de' suoi tempi. Di mano di lei si trovano due tavole nella Chiesa del detto Monastero di Santa Caterina, et una particolarmente ve n'è che è molto lodata, dove sono i Magi che adorano il Signore Nostro: fece ancora oltre a ciò altri quadri che andorno fuori di Firenze, et hoggi trovasi ^anco di sua mano^ nel monastero di Santa Lucia di Pistoia, essere stata tuttavia conservata [fol. 93r] una tavola grande nel Choro, nella quale è la Madonna col Bambino in braccio, San Tomaso, Sant'A-

⁹⁵ The Bolognese painter and sculptor Amico Aspertini (1474/75–1552).

⁹⁶ Pompeo Vizzani, *I due ultimi libri delle historie della sua patria*, Bologna 1608, lib. xi, p. I.

⁹⁷ Published in Borghini (note 22), p. 428.

⁹⁸ Published in Giulio Cesare Croce, *La gloria delle donne*, Bologna 1590, p. 18.

gostino, Santa Maria Maddalena, Santa Caterina da Siena, Sant'Agnese, Santa Caterina Martire, et Santa Lucia, tutte figure bellissime, et di maniere notabili. Nel suo monastero poi di Firenze è un Cenacolo grande, et di gran considerazione; nella sala dove le monache lavorano è una tavola ampla fatta parimente per mano della detta Plautilla opera [^](per quanto fu a me raccontata da Mons. Ill.mo Arcivescovo di Fiorenza) veramente esquisita, [^]et di molta eccellenza, un quadro d'altare e in Santa Maria del Fiore nel quale sono Istorie della vita di Santo Zenobio, antichissimo vescovo di Firenze, molto belle, et per le case di molte gentildonne et gentilhuomini di Firenze suoi parenti sono tanti quadri di bellezza notabili veduti da me che troppo saria lungo a voler di ciò ragionare. Et perché questa virtuosa donna innanzi che lavorasse tavole grandi et opere d'importanza, attese ancora a lavorare et far di minio [^]con isquisita delicatezza varie e diverse figurine di Christo Signor Nostro, della Vergine Santissima Sua Madre, d'Angeli e vergini bellissime[^]. Sono di [fol. 93v] sua mano molti quadri belli affatto appresso diverse persone, de' quali non accade far altra menzione al presente. In quelle cose poi ch'ella ricavò da altri, mostrò bene che havrebbe fatto opere maravigliose se (come fanno gli huomini) avesse havuto commodo di studiare et attendere al disegno, et ritrarre cose vive et naturali. Et che ciò sia vero, si vede manifestamente in un quadro d'una Natività di Christo Signor Nostro, ritratto da uno che già fece il Bronzino a Filippo Salviati. Similmente il vero di ciò dimostra in questo che nelle sue opere, i volti et fattezze delle donne (per haverne vedute a suo piacimento) sono assai migliori, che le teste de gli huomini et più simili al vero, e veramente mirabili. Ha ritratto in alcuna delle sue opere in volti di Donna Costanza de' Doni (stata a suo tempo d'incredibile bellezza, et honestà) tanto bene, che non si può più oltre desiderare. Fece questa rara donna tal profitto nella pittura ed in quella appresso così buone discepole, che perciò molt'altre dello stesso monastero invaghitesene furono cagione che di comun consenso si destinasse (come fu destinato) una stanza appartata per la pittura, in che molte di loro riuscirono e tuttavia riescono in somma eccellenza.

3. Felice Lupicini

[fol. 94r] [...] vi si trova hoggi [*i.e. in the convent of Santa Caterina da Siena in Florence*] la Lupaccina Felice, discepola degnissima e sorella consobrina amatissima di Cristofano Bronzini degli Allori, pittore famosissimo (et oso quasiché dire senza pari in questa nostra età) la quale con l'istruzione, e avvertimenti di così gran maestro è riuscita anch'ella così rara, che nel miniare e pingere, viene giudicata eccellentissima; et andare al pari (per non voler dire, superiore) a qualsivoglia altra persona passata e presente celebrata per singolare in tale professione.

4. Maria Vincenza Brandolini and other women artists at the convent of Santa Caterina da Siena

[fol. 94r] Ho veduto io in Fiorenza quadri e figure mirabili [fol. 94v] d'angeli e sante vergini, e martiri, altre dipinte ed altre miniate da loro con tanta eccellenza con tant'artificio e con sì dolce maniera, che sembravano appunto creature celesti, onde sperar si deve che l'onorata fama del loro virtuoso operare sia per avanzar molti secoli, e durar anco forse sinché dura il mondo. Dentro all'istesso monastero vi è anco Maria Vincenza Brandolini, rara nella sua scoltura, et ve ne son molte dentro all'istesso monastero, et ve ne sono molte altre ancora (che nominatamente non mi si permette il ramentarle) le quali in tanta eccellenza lavorano di minio di rilievo e di scultura, che veramente è un stupore, ed il tutto con tanta delicatezza e diligenza che le Serenissime Altezze di Toscana vi han perciò volsuto mandare e mandano tuttavia (come per maraviglia e stupore) le opere loro in Ispruch, in Germania, in Spagna, in Francia, in Baviera, ed in molti altri luoghi dove son monache e signore loro attinenti, ed in tanta copia, che altri però difficilmente possono sperare di havere loro quadri e figure stimate e pregiate dentro e fuori di Fiorenza a maraviglia.

5. Ortensia Fedeli and Alessandra Martelli

[fol. 95r] In Santa Agata quivi ancora in questo nostro secolo del 1631 [*previously written as: 1625*], con gran fama di valore, di bontà, e di eccellenza in quest'arte della pittura, Suora Ortensia Fedeli, dotta nella lingua latina e greca; musica molto graziosa, nella quale vi compone con molt'arte e giudicio; suona de' più sorte d'istromenti; e nella pittura è tanto rara e pregiata; anzi son tante rare e pregiate le sue opere, che oltre le spirituali in buon numero dipinte con gran devozione [^]sin quando era fanciulla, come vedersi può nell'ingresso della Chiesa di detto Monastero, ove maravigliosamente dipinse la vita e miracoli di detta Santa; [^]se ne veggon' altre però de' fuori de' frutti, fiori, e piante, con augelli; ritratti in tanta eccellenza che ben pare che [fol. 95v] in lei volesse dimostrar la Natura quanto ella operi in quelle persone, che a far tutte quelle cose si mettono a cui da essa natura sono inchinate, e molto ben disposte. Ho veduto io presso Illustrissimi signori quadri ecclesiastici grandi, mezzani, e piccioli, fatti di sua mano con tanta eccellenza che fan stupire ogniuno. Come parimente fanno quelli di Alessandra Martelli, la quale oltre a ciò è sì eccellente e rara nella miniatura che molte sue opere rimaste in Fiorenza (oltre le mandate a Roma, ed in molt'altre parti della Christianità) sono tenute per opere molto rare e care, e degne di stare al paragone di quant'altre ne vadino hoggi in volta.

6. Alessandra del Milanese

[fol. 96r] Famosa parimente nella pittura fu Alessandra del Milanese, monaca dell'istesso Ordine di San Domenico in Fi-

renze, nel Monastero di Santa Caterina sudetta, la quale come afferma Paolo Mini⁹⁹ (medico et istoriografo di que' tempi) scrivesi haver ella introdotto et rinnovato il miniare, già arte quasiché affatto tralasciata et spenta a quel secolo.

7. *Fede Galizia*

[fol. 96v] Famosa e celebre (anzi eccellentissima) nell'arte della pittura fu anco Fede Galizia fanciulla milanese, la quale nel pinger del naturale ^et particolarmente^ frutti et piante, riuscì tanto rara, che perciò da molti et in spezie dal Manfredi, con l'occasione di dare naturalissimi ritratti ^(veduto da lui e fattone fede a me)^, ne venne lodata, come hora udirete con li seguenti versi:

Mirai due forme di beltà celeste
E nuntio n'hebbe in sicurtà del vero;
Ma mentre co 'l pensiero
Luna e l'altra, e con gli occhi e col desio
Contemplavo, vid'io
D'ambe le labbra, benché finte aprirsi,
E ciascuna per Dea meco scoprirsi
[fol. 97r] Allor forte gridai, Chi ne fa fede?
Echo rispose: FEDE.
Queste, ch'io miro qui bellezze finte
Da Verginella man dotta, dipinte
Esser non pon terrene
Che troppo rare son, troppo perfette
E sol parono elette
A render vana l'amorosa spine,
Ma pur creder si dee, se ne fa fede,
La purissima FEDE
Angeli son, non donne
Le Due, e hor miro, finte non, ma vive,
O ch'al men sono dive
Ma pur sono Donne, e finte
E da Donzella pinte
Credalo ogni huom' s'io 'l credo;
E chi nol crede?
Se fede ce ne fa l'istessa Fede?¹⁰⁰

8. *Barbara Longhi*

[fol. 97r] Celebre e famosa parimente fu Barbara Longhi da Ravenna, eccellentissima anch'ella nel pingere, et rarissima nel conservarsi Vergine sinché [fol. 97v] visse, la quale non tralignò

punto dal valore di Luca, cittadino ravennate suo padre, e dal fratello, nell'istessa professione eccellentissimi, di cui però un bel spirito scrisse ^Muzio Manfredi^ tre madrigali in tal guisa:

La Barbara Pittrice
Cui di vincer pingendo, altrui non lice
Si dissegna, o colora
La Natura, dell'Arte s'innamora:
E sol, ch'un tratto tiri,
Apena, che si miri,
Quel che esser deve, al mirator predice.
Pinger la vidi un fiore
E non finito ancor, spirò l'odore

La Barbara Pittrice
È si perfetta d'Arte
Che per lei cede la Natura a l'Arte
Anzi si tien felice,
Poiché da man sì rara
[fol. 98r] D'abbellir ciò che fa, gioiosa impara:
E già sì nel oprar fatta è sicura,
Ch'esser si crede insieme Arte e Natura.

La Barbara Pittrice
O dipinga, o disegni
Par, ch'a Natura d'operar insegni;
E l'insegna e le dice
Che non sarà mai come lei felice:
Risponde la Natura
Altri che tu, mai non me fe' paura,
Ma sei donna e donzella
E ti fo mia compagna e mia sorella.¹⁰¹

9. *María de Jesús Torres*

[fol. 98r] Oltre a queste, Maria di Giesù spagnuola (della città di Toledo) figliuola di Giovanni Torres nell'età di sedici anni, fu sì esperta nella pittura et nel ritrarre al naturale, che ben mostrò di non voler esser di men valor in tal'arte di quante famose persone, nell'istessa sieno state a' tempi andati: a cui però non fu mostrato nel nobilissimo essercizio suo alcun ammaestramento che in tale opera si ricerchi, perché i mirabili artifici delle sue mani ne tranno ogniuno di dubbio, et fra gli altri, li nobilissimi et artificiosissimi quadri fatti a [fol. 98v] intuito di persone grandissime, ne fanno et faranno sempre, perpetuo testimonio del valor suo.

⁹⁹ Paolo Mini, *Discorso della nobiltà di Firenze, e de' fiorentini*, Florence 1593, pp. 107f.

¹⁰⁰ Muzio Manfredi, *Madrigali [...] sopra molti soggetti stravaganti composti*, Venice 1606, pp. 228f.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 202f.

10. *Isabel Sánchez Coello*

[fol. 98v] Vive hoggi Isabella da Monviedro, terra nel regno di Valenzia, figliuola d'Alfonso Sanchies, famoso pittor del Re Filippo, la quale fa ritratti tanto del naturale, che ammirati ne restano tutti quelli che sono dell'arte. E oltre a ciò letterata; versata nella musica; suona con somma eccellenza di arpa, di cetera, di viola, et d'altri stromenti; ma quel che rende più chiaro il valor suo è la sua gran bontà, l'honestà, et la sua gentilezza, che è senza pari.

11. *Lucrezia Quistelli*

[fol. 98v] Celebrarono già Clemente e Didimo (ambo duo alessandrini) Anassandra, per donna singolare et rara, perché hebbe mirabile cognizione dell'arte della pittura, ma de' nostri tempi celebrano, et fanno particolar menzione che al disegno et alla pittura insieme attendesse similmente con molta sua lode ^et facesse mirabile riuscita^ Lucrezia figliuola d'Alfonso Quistelli [fol. 99r] della Mirandola, et moglie del conte Clemente Pietra, come si può vedere in molti quadri et ritratti che lavorò di sua mano, degni d'esser lodati da ogniuno.

12. *Sofonisba Anguissola*

[fol. 9r] Sofonisba ^Angosciola^ cremonesa (oltre lo essere stata gran letterata, et nella pittura ^molto essercitata anzi^ eccellentissima) fu anco nella musica tanto esperta, et così bene ammaestrata che in essa si conobbe mirabile et rara, et molto comendata. [...]

[fol. 99r] Ma Sofonisba nobilissima Cremonese, figliuola d'Amilcare Angosciuola, con più studio, et con miglior grazia, che qualsivogli altra persona de' suoi tempi, s'affaticò dietro alle cose del disegno, onde non è maraviglia se poi seppe non pur disegnare, colorire, e ritrarre del naturale, et copiare eccellentemente cose d'altri, ma da sé sola far cose rarissime et bellissime di pittura onde meritò per mezi d'un suo ritratto d'esserle onoratamente scritto da Papa Pio quarto l'anno 1561, e che Filippo secondo, Re di Spagna, havendo inteso dal Duca d'Alba le rare virtù et gran meriti suoi, mandasse per lei. Et fattala condurre honoratissimamente in Spagna, la tenesse appresso la Regina con grossa provisione, et con stupor di tutta quella corte, che ammirò come [fol. 99v] cosa fuor di modo maravigliosa la grand'eccellenza di tal donna, delle opere della quale ne mandò già Tommaso Cavalieri, gentilhuomo romano al Gran Duca Cosimo, che ancora con gran riguardo si serbano insieme con un'altra bellissima opera, parimente di mano di detta Sofonisba, nella quale si vede una fanciullina, che si ride d'un putto che piange perché havendogli ella messo innanzi un canestrino pieno di gambari, uno di essi gli morde un dito, del qual disegno et invenzione gentile non si può vedere cosa più graziosa, né più simile al vero, et più gustosa.

13. *Angela Cherubina Angelelli*

[fol. 99v] Angela Cherubina Angelelli, nel monastero degli Angeli in Bologna, dipinge et fa ritratti tanto bene e tanto del naturale che ha poche altre persone che la ugualino.

14. *Diana Scultori*

[fol. 99v] Diana Mantovana la quale visse negli anni 1577 non solo dipingeva eccellentemente ma intagliava in rame con tanta isquisitezza particolarmente i disegni, e fogliami fatti dall'eccellente Battista di Pietrasanta suo marito, che era un stupore. Tengoci appresso di me duo dei suoi bellissimo intagli levati da un capitello antico d'una colonna di pietra numidica ch'era già nella chiesa antica di San Pietro di Roma, lavorati con tanta diligenza e bellezza che par veramente non si possa vedere in questo genere cosa né con più diligenza fatta, né più bella.

15. *Three sisters of Ferrara who excel in needlework*

[fol. 99v] In molte altre città, luoghi, e terre d'Italia [fol. 100r] infinite donne potrei annoverare che dell'invenzione, disegno, pittura, o ricamo sono state e sono tuttavia veramente mirabili, ma basti per hora ramentar solamente le tre sorelle ferraresi [sic] (così per l'eccellenza loro nominate) che di ricami, et inventioni, con disegno bellissimo, trapassano i più periti che vi sieno; et fanno di seta e d'oro nobilissime tele di diverse imagini figurate; appresso alle quali (o misera Aragne) le tue sarebbero parute offuscate di nebulose macchie, sì come altra volta parvero quando con Pallade haveste ardire di lavorare a prova (di Aragne e Pallade, veggasi le Metamorphosi di Ovidio libro 6).

16. *Francisca de Jesús*

[fol. 100r] Non vo' tacere però Francesca di Giesù spagnuola Toletana, che s'ella ancora fosse stata ne' tempi antichi, con maggior ragione havrebbe potuto competere con Pallade, posciaché i più arguti et elevati ingegni di questi tempi ammirano nella sua arte di tessere damaschi et broccati, le stupende opere sue, facendo ella [fol. 100v] nelle tele ciò che qualsivoglia valente pittore potrebbe a pena con penna o con pennello disegnar in tavole.

17. *Chiara Varotari*

[fol. 102r] Et in Venezia, l'opere di Santa Padovana, donna eccellentissima nella pittura se si consideran con buon occhio, si toccherà con mano, e non solamente ella ugguagliò nella pittura il famoso Alessandro Padovano [Alessandro Varotari, called il Padovanino] suo fratello, in quella tanto eccellente e celebre, ma superò infiniti di questo nostro secolo, effetti della sua virtù che la rese e renderà pregiata appresso i più pregiati e nobili spiriti di questo nostro e de' venturi secoli.

18. *Arcangela Paladini*

[fol. 102r] Veggansi anco in Fiorenza l'opere di Arcangela Paladini la quale nella pittura e disegno fu così rara che ne fece stupire i maestri di quella. Lascio al presente il ramentarci di nuovo che nel canto musicale ella fu rarissima, e facciovì sol menzione che nella detta città di Fiorenza vi si veggano de' suoi più e più quadri di devozione, particolarmente nelle stanze e nelle guardarobbe [fol. 102v] di quelle serenissime Altezze; tra' quali un ritratto del serenissimo Gran Duca Cosimo secondo, fatto con la penna, e così ben deliniato, che avanza la maestria d'ogni altro di tale professione. Videvisi in oltre un altro ritratto grande dell'istesso Serenissimo Gran Duca al naturale, armato dal petto in su, tutto lavorato da lei di punti di seta di ricamo e colorito così bene, e con tanta arte, e diligenza che vien tenuto per cosa veramente rara, e tra le pregiate delle stesse Altezze serenissime di Toscana, le quali per tante sue rare qualità in vita et in morte, ne tennero grandissimo conto, la onde essendo chiamata a più gloriosa vita, le fecero a perpetua memoria un deposito di marmo nobilissimo in Santa Felicità. [...]

[fol. 128r] Vive ancora fra tant'altre virtuose donzelle e donne et viverà ancor lei ne' secoli avvenire pe' 'l suo gran valore et gran bontà di vita l'Arcangela ^di cui pur dianzi fu brevemente ragionata^ [sic] moglie di mastro Giovanni Ricamatore [Jan Broomans], uno de' principali in quest'arte, et ambedue stipendiati dalla Serenissima Arciduchessa d'Austria Maria Maddalena Gran Duchessa di Toscana; ma specialmente per le sue rare virtù amata, et sovente accarezzata e regalata l'Arcangela, la quale (lasciando stare di ramentarvi di nuovo, ch'ella suona, et canta con voce delicatissima et gratiosamente con passaggi et trilli artificiose) disegna e dipinge al pari di qualsivoglia nominata persona in questa professione; ricama del naturale tanto eccellentemente con l'ago qualsivoglia ritratto di faccia humana, figure d'animali, piante, fiori, et frondi, uccelli, et pesci, che più né meglio potrà, né potrà già mai fare qualsisia huomo [fol. 128v] per bene eccellente che si trovi nella Pittura. Se ne veggiono opere conservate con molto riguardo appresso di Sua Altezza Serenissima quali han fatto stupire non pure molte Signore et Dame principali (ben rare nel ricamare) et altre persone intendenti dell'arte, ma i maggior pittori et disegnatori che vivono in questi tempi in Italia et fuori, in Germania, in Polonia, in Francia, et in Spagna, dove dalla Serenissima sudetta ve ne sono stati mandati, per singolari et con singolar maraviglia ricevuti, stimati, havuti cari, anzi tenuti carissimi.

19. *French woman artist, wife of "monsù Bonelli"*

[fol. 102v] E se queste memorie non bastano, veggansi quella della moglie di monsù Bonelli in Parigi, la quale dipinge così eccellentemente che le sue opere sono pregiate quanto altra di qualsivoglia pittore famoso di questi nostri tempi.

20. *Irene di Spilimbergo*

[fol. 103r] Veggansi in oltre quelle de Irene, una delle signore di Spilimbergo, la quale fu così eccellente nella pittura che Tiziano gran pittore si stupì del valore di così nobile vergine. Et non solamente fu rara nel pennelleggiare, ma virtuosa in lettere et in costumi. Morì in giovanile età, che altrimenti superava quasi quanti mai furono eccellenti in quest'arte. La cui morte, con mesti accenti et lacrimose rime, fu meritatamente et pianta et cantata da i più famosi poeti del suo tempo.

21. *Chinese women artists*

[fol. 104v] E per uscire de' nostri paesi, habbiamo che nella China sono le donne di grand'ingegno e sapere nella pittura e scoltura, e riescono eccellentemente così nel disegno come nel dipingere; nel lavoro di rilievo e d'intaglio, e specialmente nel far pitture di fogliami, d'uccellami, e d'ogni sorte di selvaggiu-mi, come si può molto ben giudicare dalle tavole che vengono di là ne i nostri paesi; una delle quali, dice il Padre Giovanni Gonzalez di Mendoza nella sua Storia della China libro primo cartella 16, vide egli fatta portare a Lisbona l'anno millecinquocento ottantadue, dal Capitan Ribera, di tanta eccellenza, e bellezza, che non solamente fece stupire tutti quelli che la videro, ma quel che poche volte suol occorrere, parve opera mirabile all'istessa Maestà de Re Cattolico, e sino a i più famosi ed eccellenti huomini di quella professione.

22. *Lavinia Fontana*

[fol. 121v] Et chi non ammirerà con stupore ^dopo Antonia Grandina Bresciana pittrice famosissima anco la famosa^ Lavinia di Prospero Fontani [sic] bolognese, donna aggraziata et modesta al possibile et in tutte le sue azzioni humile, et gentilissima, et nella pittura eccellentissima? [fol. 122r] E benché nel trattato del Domenichi, nella traduzione di Leon Battista Alberti, intitolata La Pittura, nella quale forma un perfetto pittore, non trovasse ella forse la perfezione sua (essendo già perfettissima) si poteva però humilmente in se stessa allegrare, veggendosi compita in quello, che l'autore forse trovare non seppe, et parimente conoscere quelle molte e rarissime doti a lei dalla natura concesse, e dall'arte limate, le quali solo non consistono intorno la pittura, ma intorno alle nobilissime parti dell'animo, facendola anco eloquente, amabile, e discreta ^al possibile^, dandole appresso giudizio et cognizione più che mediocre delle belle et buone lettere, onde col mezzo loro fu cara a' principi et signori grandi, e carissima a i privati; e tanto più quantoché non vide giamai in lei quella affettata et maninconica bizzarria la quale molti pari suoi tanto fastidiosamente sogliono mendicare per mostrarsi singolari. Anzi in cambio di quella [fol. 122v] trattandosi ogni hora in lei gentilezza, cortesia, et nobiltà d'animo (oltre a quella, che le virtù sue meritatamente acquistate le

hanno) la fa, et farà sempre grata et fuor di modo pregiata presso ogni gente. Lavinia Fontana adunque oltre il sonare, et cantare molto bene, scriver meglio, e dettar benissimo, dipinge tanto eccellentemente che l'opere sue havendole vedute i primi huomini dell'arte, se ne sono stupiti; li principi grandi le hanno ammirate; l'altre persone ne son rimaste attonite, sicome attonito, stupido, et confuso rimasi io in particolare quando favorendomi lei di farmi vedere qui in Roma quella gran tavola et raro quadro di San Stefano lapidato, copioso in eccellenza d'invenzione, et di diverse eccellenti figure posto nella [fol. 123r] imperial chiesa di San Paolo fuori delle mura di Roma che non pure a paragone degli altri fatti nella Pontificia di San Pietro nel medesimo tempo della medesima grandezza da' primi huomini che di tal professione erano dentro et fuori di Roma, fu giudicato stare non solo al pari dei loro, ma superarne molti di arte, d'invenzione, di maniera dolce, di giudizio, et di perfezione; onde veramente parvemi (come anco ad altri, realmente pare, et è in effetto, e così forse giudicherano altri) di veder non opera mortale ma soprannaturale. Ha fatto oltre a ciò questa rara donna alcune altre pitture tanto rare et care che non so se verun'altra persona (ancorché ben esperta nell'arte) potrà mai pensare o sperare di aggiugnere di disegno, né di grazia a lei; poichè in quelle et il suo valore et il poter dell'arte, eccellentemente si scorge. In tutte vi si vede una dolcissima aria di teste, una [fol. 123v] rara concordanza nelle congiunture delle membra, e tant'altre stupende maraviglie che lo stupore istesso si maraviglia, che mano di donna humana habbia potuto così raramente e così eccellentissimamente far in brevissimo tempo pitture sì mirabili e divine. Ha poi, oltre ciò, questa rara donna, un ingegno di tant'eccellenza et maggior forse (et senza forse, che se avesse quel Giotto, ^nacque l'anno 1276 nel contado di Firenze, et apparò l'arte da Cimabue, nobil fiorentino, et in breve tempo non solo pareggiò il maestro ma di gran lunga se lo lasciò a dietro, annullando in tutto quella toza maniera Greca, risuscitando interamente la pittura, et introducendo il ritrarre del naturale, il che si era più di dugento anni tralasciato. Et come che alcuno provato si fosse, non gli era felicemente riuscito. In somma egli diede lume alla buona maniera del dipingere, pittore tanto eccellente, e così nominato) che niuna cosa della Natura (madre di tutte le cose, ed operatrice col continuo girar de' cieli) è, o tuttavia si vien producendo, ch'ella, con lo stile, con la penna, et col pennello non dipinga, così simile a quella che non simile, anzi più tosto l'istessa, pare. Intanto che molte cose da lei fatte si trovano che il visivo senso altrui vi prende errore, quello credendo esser vero che è dipinto. Onde con verità [fol. 124r] si può dire che i suoi pennelli non comportano che questo nostro secolo riguardi con invidia l'antico. Di molti quadri nobili et naturali e d'infinite cone, tavole, e figure bellissime, fatte

di lei in Roma et fuori, et mandate in diverse parti del mondo, non parlo io per hora, perché son tante e tante, e tanto pregiate che bisognerebbono gli anni, nonché così brevi hore per potere in una minima particella discorrere delle grandi eccellenze loro, et dell'eccellente grandezza nell'arte di questa veramente eccellentissima donna, di cui anco forse più veramente, che d'altri si può dire, che vedendo il sommo facitore del tutto, l'opinione di molti nella pittura assai più lontana dal vero, che le tenebre dalla luce, per cavarli da tanti errori, si dispose mandare in terra (et particolarmente nell'alma città di Roma) questa rara donna, perché mostrasse che cosa sia la perfezione dell'arte del disegno nel lineare, d'intornare, [fol. 124v] ombrare, et lumeggiare, per dar rilievo alle cose della pittura. Volle oltre a ciò compagnarla con una bontà di vera scienza morale, et con l'ornamento di belle lettere, accioché il mondo, e del mondo la Regina Roma la eleggesse, e ammirasse per suo singolarissimo specchio nella vita, nell'opera, nella modestia, nella bontà de' costumi, e in tutte le azzioni honorate, et perché da noi, più tosto celeste che terrena cosa si credesse. Le singolari qualità et nobili maniere della quale mi legarono in modo col suo honesto, e grazioso procedere, che con verità posso ben affermare essere lei una delle rare et singolari donne ch'io m'habbia mai vedute o vive al secolo nostro, o vive al Tempio della Fama Immortale, la quale bene con sonora tromba spero che per altra voce, che con la mia rauca, porterà il celebratissimo nome suo dall'un [fol. 125r] Polo all'altro, come sonoramente principiò Giulio Cesare della Croce con que' versi:

Tra' quali a questa etate par, che sia
Gran stupor dele genti, e di Natura
Lavinia Fontana alta pittrice,
Unica al mondo, come la fenice.

Ch'agguaglia Apolodor, Zeusi, et Apelle,
Michelagnol tra gli altri sì eccellente,
Il Correggio, Tizian, e Raffaelle,
E nel ritrar sì rara e diligente

Che non ha pari in queste parti, o in quelle,
Tal c'hormai risonar s'ode il suo nome
Per tutto dove il sol spiega le chiome.

Vorrei s'io havessi vena, alzarmi tanto
Ne le lodi di questa, ch'io farei
Splender per tutto il suo gran merto, e 'l vanto
Degno di palme, e d'immortal trofei;

Ma perché a tanta impresa, uguale il canto
Non è, qui tacerò, perché di lei

[fol. 125v] Canteran' altri in versi più sonori
I sommi pregi e i suoi sublimi honori

E questi non son pochi.¹⁰²

23. Artemisia Gentileschi

[fol. 125v] [*crossed out*: ^Et doppo Artimitia^] Vive hoggi ^anchora, e potrebbe forse vivere molti secoli^ [*crossed out*: et vivere finché dura il Mondo] Mizia [*crossed out*: Artimitia Lomi Romana] de Progenitori [*crossed out*: però] fiorentini ^bene se nata in Roma [*crossed out*: figliuola del Gentileschi fiorentino Pittore famoso in Roma] la quale giunta all'età di Dodici anni in circa, volendosi un giorno porre un grembiule ^lavoratole^ [*crossed out*: ricamatole] pochi anni prima da sua Madre et riuscendole ^fuor di^ [*crossed out*: oltre] modo corto ^si mise ella da^ [*crossed out*: se pose da] se stessa per allungarlo alquanto [*crossed out*: il lavoro] a farli di suo capriccio, un nuovo disegno di ricamo; il quale veduto da persone esperte, et pratiche ^molto^ nel Dissegno et nella Pittura; giudicato da loro che la fanciulla era per far riuscita mirabile, et nel Dissegno, et nella Pittura appresso posero in considerazione al Padre [*crossed out*: per] che la dovesse applicare alla Pittura, il quale non solo non vi volle acconsentire, ma per distorla in [fol. 126r] tutto, et per tutto da questa professione la rinchiuse (per educazione) nel Monastero di Santa Apollonia in Trastevere, dove trovandosi ella più che mai inclinata a questa professione, pregò la Badessa che secretamente le volesse procurare qualche bel quadro di Pittore eccellente, et havuto tra gli altri una Susanna [*crossed out*: in particolare tanto] del Caravaggio (pittore a suo tempo principalissimo) ricopiò quelli (et questo di Susanna in particolare) tanto bene, e con tanto stupore di ogniuno (et particolarmente del Padre, quando lo vide, et fu certo esser opera della figliuola) che ne restò fuori di sé, ed oltre modo ammirato; né fidandosi di ciò, volendone egli far nuova sperienza le mandò alcuni altri quadri assai ben grandi del medesimo Caravaggio (il cui stile ella s'ingegnò sempre d'immitare come quello che sempre grandemente le piacque) quali ricopiati da lei [fol. 126v] ed in eccellenza finiti, alcuni furono venduti (et pur [*crossed out*: ella] erano de' primi suoi lavori) trecento et più scudi ^l'uno ed^ altri cinquecento, et seicento, ed oltre. Maritata poi e condotta dal Marito in Firenze sua Patria, quivi fece Quadri, et Ritratti tanto stimati, e pregiati che non meno di quelli di Lalla Cizicena (dianzi nominata), adornarono et tuttavia adornano le camere et sale de' maggiori et più pregiati huomini ^e Principi^ illustrissimi, et serenissimi insieme [*crossed out*: in lode di cui (degnamente però i più elevati ingegni di Firenze [oltre quei di Roma] fecero compositioni nobilissime) tra' quali] che hoggi vivano della detta Città.

¹⁰² Croce (note 98), pp. 19f.

24. Marietta Robusti called la Tintoretta

[fol. 126v] Et pur tuttavia vive anch'hoggi in Venezia una giovane chiamata Marietta (da tutti universalmente detta la Tintoretta, figliuola di Jacopo Robusti veneziano, chiamato anch'egli comunemente il Tintoretto) la quale oltre alla bellezza [fol. 127r] et alla grazia, et al sapere sonare di gravicembalo, di liuto, e d'altri stromenti, dipinge non solo benissimo, ma eccellentissimamente et ha fatto molte belle opere. Fra l'altre fece il ritratto di Jacopo Strada antiquario dell'Imperator Massimiliano secondo, et il ritratto di lei stessa, li quali come cosa rara sua Maestà gli tenne in camera sua, e fece ogni opera di havere appresso di sé questa eccellente donna, la quale fu ancora mandata a chiedere al Padre, dal Re Filippo e dall'Arciduca Ferdinando, ma egli, che molto l'amava non la si volle tor di vista, et però havendola maritata, si fruiva delle sue virtù, non lasciando ella continuamente a quei tempi (che ritrovavasi intorno a ventiotto anni) di far opere, che potessero stare al pari non solo del padre, ma de' più famosi pittori de' suoi giorni. Fu così eccellente il Padre,¹⁰³ che perciò dal Serenissimo Gran Duca Francesco de' Medici fu come cosa rara tenuto caro. Ma et del padre et della figliuola si [h]a detto abastanza.

25. Lucrezia Capponi, Lucrezia Torrigiani, Giovanna Monsalvi, Maria Vincenza Brandolini, Caterina Eletta Rosselli, and Reparata del Bono

[fol. 127v] Vivono pur anco hoggidì nella Città di Firenze alcun'altre nobilissime e virtuosissime donne come le Signore Lucrezia Capponi, Lucrezia Torreggiani, e Giovanna Monsalvi, tutte molto graziose nella pittura; oltre molte altre virtuose e valorose giovani fiorentine, tra queste Vincenza Brandolini, Caterina Eletta Rosselli, et Reparata del Bono, le quali in tutte le attioni loro, hanno per compagne la pudicitia, la religione, la divotione, et con queste le lettere, et le nobili arti, essendo versatissime nello studio della sacra Scrittura et tanto graziose nel discorso di quella, che con verità si può dire che habbino le grazie stesse per Ministre. Né qui si han voluto fermare, percióché se altri per fuggire l'otio si sono impiegati a coltivar orti, a tesser sporte, et così simile, queste per ricreazione d'animo senza punto tralasciare le solite orazioni loro si sono poste a far varie et devote immagini bellissime, et quando prendendo le naturali effigie delle stesse Virgine Compagne, si sono date a far figure del naturale, sono riuscite tanto mirabile che hanno tolto il vanto a qualsivoglia persona che hoggidì in cera o stucco faccia professione di eccellentemente lavorare et insomma queste loro virtù, tanto maggiormente risplendono in esse, quantoché sono accompagnate da gran modestia, da somma bontà, et da una devozione indicibile.

¹⁰³ Perhaps by "il Padre" the author meant to indicate a portrait either by, or representing, Jacopo Robusti.

26. *Giovanna Garzoni*

[*fol. 128v*] Con questa occasione mi pare anco far menzione di una fanciulla de' nostri tempi, la quale disegna, dipinge, minia, colorisce, suona, et canta eccellentissimamente chiamata Giovanna Garzoni veneziana, et fanciulla al presente del ¹⁶²⁵ di quindici anni in circa, e nata nel [*fol. 129r*] felice nostro secolo l'anno milleseicentocinque: ¹⁶⁰⁵ et allevata da' suoi Progenitori con quei più nobili costumi, virtù et Arti, che in qualsivoglia bell'ingegno desiderare si possano; poiché ella (come si è detto), disegna, dipinge, colorisce, et minia tanto eccellentemente bene, che eccede ogni credenza: Ho veduto io (et l'hanno veduta ancora infinite altre persone con esso me insieme) una Maddalena in particolare (oltre alcun'altre sue rare Pitture et opere) miniata in cartapecora, col suo nome, et cognome in bellissimo Carattere, scritto da lei in una finta carteletta di sotto, tanto ben lineata, colorita, et sottilissimamente (anzi giudiziosissimamente lavorata) che la giudicai (come anco fecero altri) degna nel vero di quelle virtuosissime mani, che la miniarono, et dignissima di quelle eminentissime, alle quali pervennero, che fu la [*fol. 129v*] Serenissima Arciduchessa d'Austria Maria Maddalena Gran Duchessa di Toscana, sovranominata. Vidi in oltre, tre sue cartelle, scritte a penna da lei, in tre principalissimi, et varii Caratteri ^{cancelareschi} corsivi, formati, e moderni talmente ben tirati, et belli, che potevano bene stare al pari di quelli de' più sopremi, et maggiori scrittori, che hoggidì vivono. Ornati poi a torno a torno non solo di artificiosi tratti, ma due di essi con disegni bellissimi di festoni, frondi, fiori, frutti, et di diversi animali volatili, et terrestri, et tutti talmente naturali, che pareano gareggiassero con la stessa Natura. Questa virtuosissima giovane, doppo haverne pasciuto gli occhi, et l'intelletto con opere tante artifiziosamente condotte da lei a somma perfezzione, si compiacque favorirne appresso, spiegare quelle sue [*fol. 130r*] virtuose mani (che hanno veramente più virtù che dita) sopra un dolcissimo

manacordo, et doppo alcune piacevoli riuscate [*i.e.*: riuscite], sciogliendo la voce (più celeste che humana) cantò prima alcuni mottetti spirituali; poi alcuni madrigali, ed ultimamente alcune Arie musicali, con tanta grazia, con tanta dolcezza, con tal melodia, et stupore, che non fu veruno, che non la giudicasse superare di gran lunga ogni altro soggetto in qualsivoglia particolare di sopra accennato e da lei in somma eccellenza posseduto: ed in effetto da ogniuno fu stimata essere fanciulla senza pari. Meritatamente però quel nobilissimo ingegno, ed Intelletto mirabile di Francesco Maria Gualterotti fiorentino¹⁰⁴ essendosi ritrovato anch'egli quivi in compagnia nostra a vedere et udire quanto vi ho detto di sopra, si compiacque [*fol. 130v*] (come sempre suole honorare i virtuosi soggetti) di stendere in sua lode il seguente bellissimo sonetto [*in the margin*: Canonico Francesco Maria Gualterotti]:

O d'ingegno sublime, e di bellezza
Giovinetta gentil, lume e splendore
D'Adria, vita d'amor, nume d'honore
c'ha la virtù per pompa, e per grandezza.
Tu vinci in grazia, in modi, in gentilezza
Ogni più raro, e celebre scrittore;
E s'adopri i color d'ogni Pittore
Trapassi il vanto, ad opre grandi avvezza;
E scrittrice, e pittrice, alteri, e nuovi
Pregi acquisti al tuo nido ond'io t'honoro
Nova Minerva, o Cinthia altra, mortale:
Tu la fama aggrandisci, e le rinovi
Ogn'hor chiaro, e pregiato, un secol d'oro
Ch'altri rende felice, e te immortale

Talmente che dalle qui poche nominate, si può vedere [*fol. 131r*] Quanto le Donne, in ogni sorte di virtù e di Nobili Arti, siano eccellenti, e maravigliosamente dotate.

¹⁰⁴ Little is known about Francesco Maria Gualterotti, son of the well-known Florentine poet Raffaello Gualterotti (1544–1638).

Abbreviations

ASF Archivio di Stato di Firenze
BNCF Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze

Abstract

Between roughly 1615 and 1622, Cristofano Bronzini (1580–1633) wrote *Della dignità et della nobiltà delle donne*, a defense of women that was partially published during his lifetime with the patronage of Medici women. This article brings to light the unpublished sections of Bronzini's manuscript containing descriptions of some thirty-three early modern women artists, ranging from Properzia de' Rossi to the female court artists of the Ming Dynasty. At the focus of this study is Bronzini's profile of Artemisia Gentileschi, offering a narrative account of the discovery of her artistic talent at age twelve and detailing her earliest vocational training in Rome up until the time of her marriage to Pierantonio Stiattesi of Florence.

Artemisia's profile in the Bronzini manuscript stands out not only because it is the earliest biographical account ever written about her, but also because it is rife with statements that have no bearing upon the real facts of her life. It is argued here that Artemisia herself supplied Bronzini with this fictitious account and that she deliberately distorted the facts of her youth in order to fashion herself according to her own aspirations as well as her society's morality codes, its female stereotypes, and its mytho-heroic archetype of the artist. In this account of Artemisia's youth in Rome, the name of Agostino Tassi and Artemisia's relationship with him are completely suppressed, while Artemisia's own father, Orazio Gentileschi, is portrayed in a negative light as her primary antagonist. Moreover, the biography purports that Artemisia taught herself to paint by studying Caravaggio's canvases, effectively asserting her place among the master's earliest and most devoted followers.

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Simon Vouet, *Portrait von Artemisia Gentileschi* | *Ritratto di Artemisia Gentileschi*, ca. 1625.
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(Abb. I, S. 404 | fig. I, p. 404)

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