

ICONOCRAZIA

The Remarkable Tomb of Abbot Meli

iconocrazia.it/the-remarkable-tomb-of-abbot-meli

ICONOCRAZIA

Potere delle Immagini / Immagini del Potere

essay writer

14 Dicembre 2020

di Ellen L. Longworth

Iconocrazia 17/2020 - "Iconocratic Studies. In memory of Sarah Jordan Lippert" (Vol. 1),
Saggi

There is only one central issue in art history, it seems to me, and that is to try to understand, in as many ways as possible, how it is that works of art come to look as they do.

John Shearman, *Only Connect: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992)

Sometime before 1445, when payments begin to the “maestri intaliatori di pietra,” Filippo and Andrea da Corona, for a “sepoltura” of Carrara marble,[1] tradition claims that Vitaliano I Borromeo conceived the idea of raising an imposing family tomb designed to hold the braid of Santa Giustina, the virgin martyr whom the Borromei claimed as their ancestress. The braid, which Vitaliano had hoped to obtain from his native Padua, was not forthcoming.[2] The tomb as we see it today is the product of three campaigns: the first begun in 1445 by Vitaliano I; the second in 1450 when payments for Carrara marble are recorded from 1450, 1453, 1456, and 1457;[3] and the third, initiated in 1475 by Vitaliano’s grandson Giovanni III Borromeo, when the upper two-thirds of the sepulcher was executed under the direction of Giovanni Antonio Piatti. By 1478, the monument was finished and installed in the Milanese church of San Francesco Grande.[4] In the early nineteenth century, the tomb was moved to the Cappella Borromeo on Isola Bella (Figs. 1 and 2).

Fig. 1. Monument to Vitaliano I and Giovanni III Borromeo, completed by 1478. Installed in the church of San Francesco Grande, Milan; now in the Cappella Borromeo, Isola Bella. Marble. Photograph courtesy of the Amministrazione Borromeo.

Fig. 2. Detail of the sarcophagus of the Monument to Vitaliano I and Giovanni III Borromeo. Photograph courtesy of the Amministrazione Borromeo.

Perhaps because of the success of the Borromeo commission and perhaps because a similarly elaborate monument was required, Antonio Meli, abbot of the Benedictine monastery of San Francesco in Cremona, contracted with Piatti[5] on 14 March 1478 (1479 by our calendar) to construct a “reliquary” to the “glory” of the Persian Martyrs Marius, Martha, and their two sons, whose remains had been housed in the crypt of the church of San Lorenzo, in a “*piccola reliquia*,” since their transport from Rome sometime during the late eleventh or early twelfth century.[6] However, the monument, named and described in the initial contract as the *Arca dei Martiri Persiani*, was in fact a *double* tomb, for Abbot Meli’s sarcophagus, as clearly indicated in his contract with Piatti, was to be included in the design of the monument.[7] Moreover, the Meli family chapel, completed the year before, was where the double sepulcher was to be installed.[8]

The contract[9] indicates that the monument was to be made of Carrara marble and was to include an *archam* for the bones of the saints and a *sepulchrum* for the abbot. Meli’s share of the double tomb should include his figure in the “same marble” along with the insignia of his house (*insignias domus*). The saints’ *archam*, elevated directly above the abbot’s sarcophagus, was to be supported on columns and decorated with eight *quadre* or narrative reliefs—three for each of the long sides and one for each of the flanks, their number and placement clearly indicating that Abbot Meli had in mind from the first a free-standing monument. Stipulated also was a “framework” and “certain figures and ornaments” located “above,” whose design was left to Piatti’s discretion, with the directive that these be as laudable in form as those belonging to the shrines of San Domenico (Fig. 3), San Pietro Martire (Fig. 4), and Sant’Agostino (Fig. 5).[10]

Fig. 3. Nicolo Pisano and others. Shrine (*Arca*) of San Domenico, begun c. 1264. Erected in the church of San Domenico, Bologna, in 1267. Marble. Photograph: author.

Fig. 4. Giovanni Balduccio. Shrine (*Arca*) of San Pietro Martire, completed in 1339. Erected in the church of Sant’Eustorgio, Milan. Marble. Photograph: author.

Fig. 5. Attributed to a follower of Giovanni Balduccio. Shrine (*Arca*) of Sant’Agostino, dated 1363. Installed over the altar of San Pietro in Ciel d’Oro, Pavia. Marble. Photograph: author

A second notarial document, dated 17 April 1479, records Piatti’s acceptance of the commission, for which he was to be compensated 400 *ducati*, the first payment to be made immediately. A third document, from 26 June of the same year, reiterates the abbot’s desire for the monument and names his brothers as guarantors of the remaining 300 *ducati* owed Piatti. On 9 August the abbot died, and within a year Piatti also was dead.[11] Nevertheless, by early October of 1482, the double tomb was standing in the

chapel the abbot and his brothers had provided,[12] the brothers having engaged Piatti's former partner, Giovanni Antonio Amadeo, to complete the project.[13] The monument received the bones of the Persian Martyrs on 6 October, the day of its consecration.[14]

The reassignment of the commission to Amadeo is first recorded in a document of 18 August 1480. The document tells us that Piatti's death had rendered the arca "imperfect" (*magister Johannes Antonius de Piattis mortui sunt, imperfecta dicta fabrica arche predicte*)[15] and that Amadeo had been contracted to finish it. The fact that Amadeo claimed the entirety of the 300 *ducati* still owed Piatti[16] suggests that the state in which the tomb had been left at the sculptor's death was even less than "imperfect." The necessity in June 1479 for the document reiterating the abbot's desire for the monument may indicate that little progress had been made by then. That it names his brothers as guarantors of the tomb may also suggest that Abbot Meli may have been gravely ill.

The execution of large-scale sculptural projects in Lombardy, such as the Meli tomb, were collaborative ventures often governed by agreements between artists—a procedure made clearer with the publication in 1989 by Richard Schofield, Janice Shell, and Grazioso Sironi of documents pertaining specifically, but not exclusively, to Amadeo (see n8). We now know, for instance, that in September of 1473, Piatti contracted with Amadeo, Lazzaro Palazzi,[17] and Giovanni Giacomo Dolcebuono as equal partners, plus a fifth younger artist, Angelo da Lecco, to share the profits and expenses should any one of them be offered work on the façade of the Certosa di Pavia, or in Milan, or in any place ruled by the Sforza.[18] In November of 1476, Amadeo and Piatti drew up a second agreement that extended their partnership to sites beyond Sforza territory.[19]

From a description of the abbot's tomb published in 1794, three years before the suppression of the church of San Lorenzo and the subsequent dispersal of major parts of the monument, we learn that the upper sarcophagus, which served as the saints' *arca*, was decorated with the eight *quadre* indicated in Meli's testament, with richly worked ornamentation in between.[20] The reliefs recount the martyrdom of the four saints and thus follow the biographical narrative tradition of saints' tombs established by the shrine of San Domenico.[21]

Fig. 6. Detail of three of the eight narratives originally belonging to the Meli Tomb—the *Arca dei Martiri Persiani*—preserved as twin pulpits in Cremona Cathedral. Photograph: author.

The late eighteenth-century account of the tomb also informs us that the saints' *arca* stood on four "graceful" candelabrum-shaped columns, a type in vogue at the time, having been introduced by Amadeo in his design for the façade of the Colleoni Chapel in Bergamo, completed in 1476 (Fig. 7).[22]

Fig. 7. Giovanni Antonio Amadeo. Detail of the façade of the Colleoni Chapel, Bergamo, 1475. Photograph courtesy of the Biblioteca d'Arte, Castello Sforzesco.

Under the elevated casket lay the abbot's effigy, now lost, on *una tavola* of marble[23] surrounded by an inscription recording his name and the date of his death.[24] No mention is made of the superstructure assumed for the monument, which presumably would have provided a primary locus for the sculptures associated with the tomb, those "certain figures and ornaments" located "above" that the abbot had left undetermined but that he expected to be of unquestionable quality.

Among the sculptures traditionally identified as once belonging to the Meli tomb are the "Foulc" *Madonna and Child*, owned by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and two *Clerics*, known as "San Benedetto" and "San Lorenzo," in the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida (Figs. 8 and 9). Four angels also associated with the monument, who hold Instruments of the Passion, are in Milan in the Museo d'Arte Antica of the Castello Sforzesco (Fig. 10). Also in Milan is a tondo of the *Nativity* carved in low relief and bearing an inscription that names two of the Persian martyrs—Marius and Martha (CORP.S.M.MARII ET MARTHA)—who, along with their sons Audifax and Abrachum, had been put to death in Rome in the third century (Fig. 11). Another tondo, in the Musée du Louvre, of the *Annunciation*, is executed in a similar style and is inscribed with Meli's name and title: ANTO. DE MELJS. I.V.DOCT.ABB.F. A third tondo, of the *Adoration*, is in a private collection in Florence, inscribed with the names of Audifax and Abrachum.[25]

Fig. 8. Detail of a "Cleric," known as *San Benedetto*, from the *Arca dei Martiri Persiani*. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida. Marble. Photograph: author.

Fig. 9. Detail of a "Cleric," known as *San Lorenzo*, from the *Arca dei Martiri Persiani*. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida. Marble. Photograph: author.

Fig. 10. Two of three angels holding Instruments of the Passion, associated with the *Arca dei Martiri Persiani*. Museo d'Arte Antica, Castello Sforzesco, Milan. Marble. Photograph: author.

Fig. 11. *Nativity*, tondo from the *Arca dei Martiri Persiani*. Museo d'Arte Antica, Castello Sforzesco, Milan. Marble. Photograph: author.

Abbot Meli's double tomb, although certainly larger and more elaborate—with three additional reliefs, several more statuettes, and, most importantly, designed not as a wall-mounted tomb but free-standing—may have looked something like the monument to Gian Stefano Brivio (Fig. 12) erected after 1486 in the Milanese church of Sant'Eustorgio by Tommaso Cazzaniga and Benedetto da Briosco,[26] with Meli's effigy framed by similar columnar supports. We might imagine the superstructure of the tomb taking on the appearance of the upper two-thirds of the shrine of Peter Martyr, the "Foulc" *Madonna and Child* and the Ringling *Clerics* taking their places within a tabernacle, while the several angels could have been positioned on the edge of the structure, its sloping sides perhaps providing for the *tondi*. [27] More than a decade later, probably beginning in 1498, Amadeo oversaw the design and execution of the Arca di San Lanfranco for the church of

San Lanfranco, on the outskirts of Pavia (Fig. 13).[28] The casket, elevated on slender candelabrum-shaped columns, is decorated with narratives from the saint's life. Thus it is possible that this monument might provide clues to the appearance of Abbot Meli's double tomb.[29]

Fig. 12. Tommaso Cazzaniga and Benedetto da Briosco (begun by Francesco Cazzaniga). Monument to Gian Stefano Brivio, after 1486. Erected in the church of Sant'Eustorgio, Milan. Marble. Photograph: author.

Fig. 13. Giovanni Antonio Amadeo. *Arca di San Lanfranco*, 1498. Church of San Lanfranco, Pavia. Marble. Photograph courtesy of the Biblioteca d'Arte, Castello Sforzesco.

The double sepulcher that Meli commissioned from Piatti, but for the consideration given to his own burial, followed the form that in the fourteenth century became common for the tombs of saints: raised on supports, decorated with elaborate narrative cycles recounting the life—and death—of the saint (or saints), and, more often than not, free-standing.[30] The elevation of the relics with access from the four sides of the *arca* allowed the faithful easy access to see and touch. Anita Moskowitz, in her comprehensive study of Gothic sculpture in Italy covering the period from roughly 1250 to 1400, finds that previously, for hundreds of years, from the fifth through the twelfth centuries, large sculpted funerary monuments were rare. Instead, burial in proximity to sainted remains was common among the well-to-do.[31] This practice of *depositio ad sanctos*, known from Late Antiquity and taken for granted well into the fifteenth century, makes its appearance as early as the fourth century, when the “privatization of the holy” by wealthy and influential Christians brings the “holy grave” into the orbit of a single family.[32] The appropriation by wealthy citizens of defining aspects of saints' tombs in the late medieval society of Italy, however, would have to wait for the example presented by the Arca of San Domenico, after which there was no dearth of monumental tombs constructed in Italy as private memorials for those who could afford them. More particularly, with the erection in 1267 of the Arca of San Domenico, a “flurry of commissions” for elaborate funerary monuments ensued, surprisingly coming first from members of the mendicant orders, particularly the Franciscans and Dominicans.[33]

Among the many large tombs and other categories of funerary sculpture Moskowitz identifies, there is no mention of a tomb such as Abbot Meli's, causing one to conclude that, with no precedent in medieval Italy for the abbot's double tomb, this double sepulcher was nothing short of extraordinary. Erwin Panofsky discusses at length a defining feature and phenomenon of the Renaissance, which is what he terms the secularization of the sacred. However, Panofsky's examples of funerary monuments are different in type from Meli's tomb and identify no category of tomb monument that is even vaguely related to the abbot's remarkable invention.[34]

But is the secularization of the sacred what Meli had in mind? Or was it instead a pure act of piety? Or was it the need, related to the desire to derive benefit from proximity to sainted remains, to take outright possession of them? Or a combination of these possibilities? Or to provide a suitable resting place for these bones, in the manner of the *arca* of San Pietro Martire, which had been created by the Visconti to honor and, quite literally, elevate the remains of the Dominican Inquisitor who had been murdered the century before, as well as to bring luster to Sant'Eustorgio, the church the Visconti had selected as their own?[35] In the latter case, the motives seem clear, whereas we doubtless never will know what, precisely, motivated Antonio Meli. What we do know is that he chose as the models for his new double sepulcher the most famous and illustrious monuments of the time and chose as his artist-in-charge the sculptor who had brought to completion with apparent efficiency and success another free-standing monument worthy of a saint: the dynastic tomb of the family Borromeo.

Such projects commonly involved numerous assistants or other independent artists who “signed on” for the job. In the case of the abbot’s monument, there is ample stylistic evidence among the several statuettes associated with the tomb, and the eight narratives, that a number of sculptors of varying degrees of skill were employed in its execution. Close scrutiny of the two *Clerics* (Figs. 8 and 9), for instance, reveals enough variation in their handling to argue for the attribution of each to a different sculptor, while the slender cleric known as “San Lorenzo” (Fig. 9) and the “Foulc” *Madonna and Child* probably were carved by the same hand.

Although the remarkable nature of the abbot’s monument has engendered no noticeable interest, the “Foulc” *Madonna and Child* and the two *Clerics* have received scholarly attention, the debate over their authorship having been revived in an article published in 1991, wherein all three figures are assigned to Piatti.[36] This assessment refutes the longstanding attributions of the Ringling *Clerics* to the Mantegazza, to Amadeo, or to a “follower of Amadeo,” and of the “Foulc” *Madonna and Child* to the Mantegazza.[37]

Piatti’s only known documented work is the life-sized sculpture in relief of *Plato* in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, the date of 1478 located with an inscription on the outer edge of the shell niche in which the figure stands (Fig. 14).[38] The sculpture is composed of stiff, sharp-edged drapery, broad and rough in manner, the heavy-handed treatment having little in common with the precision and delicacy of the Ringling and Philadelphia figures. In fact, it seems unreasonable to me to assume that shortly after having completed the figure of *Plato*, Piatti could have carved the exquisite “Foulc” *Madonna and Child* with its delicate physiognomy, crisply defined drapery, elegantly mannered gestures, and finely chiseled long-fingered hands, or the more austere *Clerics* (Figs. 8 and 9), with their distinctive square jaws and aquiline noses, the deftly rendered stretch and sag of worn flesh over bony structure, the long, elegant fingers, and the simple vestments arranged in broad pleats and soft triangular folds.

Fig. 14. Giovanni Antonio Piatti. *Plato*, dated 1478. Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan. Photograph: author.

More likely to belong to Piatti, in my opinion, are two of the eight prophets carved for the Borromeo tomb during the third and final campaign. They stand at the corners on the front of the sarcophagus, that is, framing the side of the monument that would have faced into the nave when the tomb was originally situated in San Francesco Grande (Fig. 2). Their robes, recalling Piatti's treatment of the *Plato*, are defined by dull, broadly cut folds arranged in heavy masses reminiscent of crumpled cardboard. A slight slouch, slender sloping shoulders, long torsos, full beards, and the extension of the first finger of the right hands that grasp the ends of scrolls also recall the *Plato*. (The remaining six Borromeo *Prophets* appear to have been carved by four, or more likely five, other separate hands.)

The incongruities of style between the *Plato* and the Ringling and Philadelphia sculptures have been explained in reference to the materials employed—that the hard stone out of which the *Plato* was carved and the more tractable marble from which the statuettes were fashioned would have yielded different results. In my opinion, however, the formal difficulties of ascribing the “Foulc” *Madonna and Child* and the *Clerics* to the same hand who carved the *Plato* are too many and too severe to be explained away by differences in the material. Nevertheless, whoever carved the “Foulc” *Madonna and Child* and the *Clerics*—with a consideration that perhaps the *Castello Angels* may belong to the same stylistic group if not to the same hand—I am quite certain it was not Piatti. Instead, it was a gifted sculptor in the circle of Amadeo and the Mantegazza who deserves to be known and recognized on his own merit.

In sum, there is no scholarly accord concerning Piatti's role or the role of any other artist, including Amadeo, in the execution of the Meli tomb. The immediate involvement in the carving has yet to be determined, however.[39] In fact, the attributions of the Ringling and Philadelphia sculptures to Piatti proceed primarily from the evidence provided by written sources. The nature and frequency of collaborative agreements among sculptors working in and around Milan makes attributions that rely primarily upon archival evidence especially suspect, since the receipt of a commission on the part of one sculptor might very well involve other artists unnamed in the contract. This not uncommon circumstance could—and did, it seems—result in projects having been accomplished wholly or largely by others, any declaration of the contracted artist's signature—as on the Meli Tomb—to the contrary:

Ant. de Meliis i. u. doctor abb f. 6 Octo.
Corp. S. M. Marii et Martae MCCCCLXXXII
A. Amadeo f. h. o.[40]

As Anita Moskowitz has observed, after the example of the Arca of San Domenico, monumental tombs for private use became common among the wealthy in Italy. But Abbot Meli's tomb and the Borromeo sepulcher are remarkable in that they essentially are

unlike any other funerary structures created in Lombardy during the Quattrocento, both in form and in function—realized and intended. They stand apart as exceptional hybrids and represent a significant development in monumental funerary art where, in the same monument, the two worlds of saints and men, of which the Quattrocento was so cognizant, commingle, or were meant to, offering instructive examples of the continued importance of the veneration of, and desire to possess, sainted remains.

Longworth Illustrations

Fig. 1. Monument to Vitaliano I and Giovanni III Borromeo, completed by 1478. Installed in the church of San Francesco Grande, Milan; now in the Cappella Borromeo, Isola Bella. Marble. Photograph courtesy of the Amministrazione Borromeo.

Fig. 2. Detail of the sarcophagus of the Monument to Vitaliano I and Giovanni III Borromeo. Photograph courtesy of the Amministrazione Borromeo.

Fig. 3. Nicolo Pisano and others. Shrine (*Arca*) of San Domenico, begun c. 1264. Erected in the church of San Domenico, Bologna, in 1267. Marble. Photograph: author.

Fig. 4. Giovanni Balduccio. Shrine (*Arca*) of San Pietro Martire, completed in 1339. Erected in the church of Sant'Eustorgio, Milan. Marble. Photograph: author.

Fig. 5. Attributed to a follower of Giovanni Balduccio. Shrine (*Arca*) of Sant'Agostino, dated 1363. Installed over the altar of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro, Pavia. Marble. Photograph: author.

Fig. 6. Detail of three of the eight narratives originally belonging to the Meli Tomb—the *Arca dei Martiri Persiani*—preserved as twin pulpits in Cremona Cathedral. Photograph: author.

Fig. 7. Giovanni Antonio Amadeo. Detail of the façade of the Colleoni Chapel, Bergamo, 1475. Photograph courtesy of the Biblioteca d'Arte, Castello Sforzesco.

Fig. 8. Detail of a "Cleric," known as *San Benedetto*, from the *Arca dei Martiri Persiani*. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida. Marble. Photograph: author.

Fig. 9. Detail of a "Cleric," known as *San Lorenzo*, from the *Arca dei Martiri Persiani*. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida. Marble. Photograph: author.

Fig. 10. Two of three angels holding Instruments of the Passion, associated with the *Arca dei Martiri Persiani*. Museo d'Arte Antica, Castello Sforzesco, Milan. Marble. Photograph: author.

Fig. 11. *Nativity*, tondo from the *Arca dei Martiri Persiani*. Museo d'Arte Antica, Castello Sforzesco, Milan. Marble. Photograph: author.

Fig. 12. Tommaso Cazzaniga and Benedetto da Briosco (begun by Francesco Cazzaniga). Monument to Gian Stefano Brivio, after 1486. Erected in the church of Sant'Eustorgio, Milan. Marble. Photograph: author.

Fig. 13. Giovanni Antonio Amadeo. *Arca di San Lanfranco*, 1498. Church of San Lanfranco, Pavia. Marble. Photograph courtesy of the Biblioteca d'Arte, Castello Sforzesco.

Fig. 14. Giovanni Antonio Piatti. *Plato*, dated 1478. Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan. Photograph: author.

* Versions of this paper were presented in Venice (Italy) in April of 2010 at the annual conference of the Renaissance Society of America; in March of 2011 at the annual meeting of the South-Central Renaissance Conference in St. Louis, MO; and in February 2019 at the annual conference of the College Art Association in Chicago, IL.

[1] Girolamo Biscaro, "Note di storia dell'arte e della scoltura a Milano dai libri maestri Borromo (1427–1478)," *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, *Archivio Storico Lombardo* XLI, fasc. I (1914), pp. 71–108, here pp. 76–77.

[2] Felice Calvi, *Famiglie notabili milanesi*, 4 vols. (Milan 1881), 2: Tav. VI; Diego Sant'Ambrogio, *I Sarcofagi Borromeo ed il Monumento dei Birago all'Isola Bella (Lago Maggiore)* (Milan 1897), p. 29.

[3] Sant'Ambrogio, *I Sarcofagi Borromeo*, p. 29.

[4] A. Rovetta, "La cultura antiquaria a Milano negli anni settanta del Quattrocento," in *Giovanni Antonio Amadeo. Scultura e architettura del suo tempo*, ed. J. Shell (Milan: L. Castelfranco, 1993), p. 405 n54, p. 407 n61; Mauro Natale, ed., *Scultura lombarda del Rinascimento. I monumenti Borromeo* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi & Co., 1997), p. 17 n20. The earliest account of the Borromeo monument in San Francesco Grande is found in Carlo Torre, *Il ritratto di Milano* (Milan: Agnelli, 1674), p. 206: *Fermateni avanti [sic] al sontuoso Mausoleo, che in questo lato diritto fuori della Nave s'innalza lavorato tutto a scarpello, il quale vien guardato da steconi di ferro; alle insigne di freni poste in più siti, conosceretelo voi per Tumulo di qualche Eroe Borromeo; indovinaste, quivi chiuso stasis il carcame di Giovanni della stessa Famiglia, Cavaliere, che alle sue nominate Imprese hebbe la Fama, a raggirarsi per tutta l'Europa risvegliando ne' cuori delle genti lo stupore col suono della sua Tomba....* Serviliano da Latuada, *Descrizione di Milano*, 5 vols. (Milan 1738), 4:252, mentions the Borromeo in relation to the church but says nothing about the tomb (*Si trova vicina ad essere perfezionata la vasta Cappella, di cui se n'è addossato il peso e l'onore l'Eccellentissima Casa Borromeo*).

[5] Biscaro, "Note di storia dell'arte," p. 97, suggests that Piatti was chosen, although a mediocre artist, because it was clear that he adhered punctually to the conditions of a contract.

[6] Angelo Monteverdi, “A proposito dell’arca dei Martiri Persiani a Cremona,” *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, a.XXXVI, fasc. xxii (1909), pp. 183–197, here pp. 183–184. In fact, two dates are given for the contract—the 14th and 15th of March—as recorded in Carlo Bonetti, “L’arca dei Martiri Persiani, opera di Giovanni Antonio de Piatti e Giovanni Antonio Amadeo (1479–1482),” *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, a.XL, fasc. xxxviii (1913), pp. 387–402, here pp. 388–389. Bonetti includes the entirety of the contract, pp. 390–392.

[7] This seems to me an extraordinary consequence of Meli’s position as abbot of the monastery in possession of the saints’ remains—his appropriation of the relics for his own place of burial, he lying humbly (but not so humbly, with his insistence that he and his family be clearly identified) below the saints’ *archam*.

[8] The patrons of the chapel were Abbot Meli and his brothers Gabriele, Giovanni, Baldassare, and Bartolomeo (Monteverdi, “A proposito dell’arca,” p. 183). According to Monteverdi (p. 183), to provide an appropriate space for the *arca* was the compelling reason behind the construction of the chapel. The names of three of the brothers appear subsequently in contracts relevant to the completion of the tomb—specifically, in Richard V. Schofield, Janice Shell, and Grazioso Sironi, eds., *Giovanni Antonio Amadeo: I documenti* (Como: Edizioni New Press, 1989), three documents record the final payments made by Meli’s brothers Gabriele, Giovanni Battista, and Baldassare to Amadeo (docs. 75, 76, and 78). An extensive restoration of the apsidal chapel—a *piccolo gioiello architettonico ed artistico*—was completed in 2002, uncovering an elaborate campaign of fresco decoration dating to 1479 (“Inaugurata la restaurata Cappelle Meli in S. Lorenzo,” *Comune di Cremona* [08 dicembre 2002]: n.p.).

[9] See n6.

[10] The shrine of San Domenico, begun by Nicola Pisano around 1264, was erected in 1267 in the church of San Domenico in Bologna and later modified and expanded. The *arca* of San Pietro Martire was completed by Giovanni Balduccio in 1339 for the Milanese church of Sant’Eustorgio. The *arca* of Sant’Agostino, dated 1363 and installed over the altar of San Pietro in Ciel d’Oro in Pavia, is attributed to a follower of Balduccio. See Anita F. Moskowitz, *Italian Gothic Sculpture, c. 1250–c. 1400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 303; also Moskowitz, *Nicola Pisano’s Arca di San Domenico and Its Legacy* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1994); and Moskowitz, “Giovanni di Balduccio’s Arca di San Pietro Martire: Form and Function,” *Arte Lombarda*, 96, no. 97 (1991), pp. 7–18. The contract is recorded in Bonetti, “L’arca dei Martiri Persiani,” pp. 390–392.

[11] Bonetti, “L’arca dei Martiri Persiani,” pp. 388, 392, 394–396.

[12] Monteverdi, “A proposito dell’arca,” p. 183.

[13] Bonetti, “L’arca dei Martiri Persiani,” 397–400; Charles Morscheck, *Relief Sculpture for the Façade of the Certosa di Pavia* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1978), pp. 213, 287 doc. 129; Schofield, et al., *Giovanni Antonio Amadeo*, p. 121 doc. 59; Marco Tanzi, “Novità per l’Arca dei Martiri Persiani,” *Prospettiva*, 63 (1991), pp. 51–62, here pp. 53–54; and Tanzi, “Piatti, Amadeo e l’Arca dei Martiri Persiani,” in *Giovanni Antonio Amadeo. Scultura e architettura del suo tempo*, ed. J. Shell (Milan: L. Castelfranco, 1993), p. 176.

[14] Bonetti, “L’arca dei Martiri Persiani,” p. 399; Schofield, et al., *Giovanni Antonio Amadeo*, p. 127 docs. 75 and 76 from 10 and 11 October, respectively; and 129 doc. 78 from 16 December, record the final payments made by Meli’s brothers Gabriele, Giovanni Battista, and Baldassare to Amadeo (as above in n8).

[15] Schofield, et al., *Giovanni Antonio Amadeo*, pp. 121–122 doc. 59; Tanzi, “Novità,” pp. 53–54.

[16] Bonetti, “L’arca dei Martiri Persiani,” pp. 397–400.

[17] Palazzi was Amadeo’s brother-in-law; see Schofield, et al., *Giovanni Antonio Amadeo*, p. 10.

[18] Schofield, et al., *Giovanni Antonio Amadeo*, p. 99 doc. 13; also docs. 10–11, where the significance of this document of partnership is discussed at some length.

[19] Schofield, et al., *Giovanni Antonio Amadeo*, p. 106 doc. 32. No specific project is named, as it had been in the contract of 1473, nor is one known. However, within two years, Piatti was hired to execute Abbot Meli’s double tomb. Nevertheless, as also noted in Schofield, et al., with Amadeo busy at the Certosa di Pavia, he doubtless was not involved in this commission from the beginning; “but,” the authors continue, “it is not surprising that after Piatti’s death in 1480, work on the *Arca* was taken over by Amadeo” (p. 12). For Amadeo’s activity at the Certosa during these years refer to Morscheck, *Relief Sculpture*, pp. 51–53.

[20] Giuseppe Aglio, *Le pitture e le sculture della città di Cremona* (Cremona, 1794), pp. 134 ff., as in Monteverdi, “A proposito dell’arca,” p. 183 n3 and p. 184. Also Moskowitz, *Relief Sculpture*, p. 43; and Moskowitz, *Italian Gothic Sculpture*, p. 32.

[21] See Anita F. Moskowitz, *Nicola Pisano’s Arca di San Domenico and Its Legacy* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1994), p. 43; Bonetti, “L’arca dei Martiri Persiani,” pp. 389–391; and Moskowitz, *Italian Gothic Sculpture*, p. 32 (figs. 37–40). The narratives once decorating the Arca of the Persian Martyrs have been preserved since 1820 as twin pulpits in the Cathedral of Cremona (Fig. 6). The tale of the saints’ martyrdom begins with their appearance before Emperor Claudius II and their condemnation, and it ends with their decapitation and the burning of their bodies.

[22] Documents related to the completion of the Colleoni Chapel are in Schofield, et al., *Giovanni Antonio Amadeo*, p. 103 doc. 17 and p. 104 doc. 20.

[23] Perhaps best translated, as a “table tomb,” it is a form of support for the effigy elevated on legs or another type of open device, “... announcing itself as early as the twelfth century ...,” and was popular throughout the later Middle Ages. Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture: Four Lectures on Its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini* (1964; New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992), p. 54 (figs. 68, 207, and 208).

[24] Aglio, *Le pitture e le sculture*, 138–140; Monteverdi, “A proposito dell’arca,” pp. 183–184; 183 n3 records the inscription (as found in T.A. Vairani, *Inscriptiones cremonenses universae* [Cremona 1796], ccvi): “*Melius hic doctor abbas Antonius, arcam qui dedit hanc, turrim, templa domosq. simul. Concessit naturae IX Aug. 1479.*”

[25] The former identified by Tanzi, “Piatti, Amadeo e l’Arca dei Martiri Persiani,” p. 177. Narrative cycles based upon the Infancy of Christ will become common in the decoration of funerary monuments created by artists related professionally to Amadeo, the historiated sarcophagus of the recently completed Borromeo tomb providing an outstanding early example. The sarcophagus designed by Amadeo for Bartolomeo Colleoni’s equestrian monument in the Colleoni Chapel in Bergamo may be the first, along with scenes from Christ’s Passion.

[26] The Brivio tomb had been commissioned in 1486 from Francesco Cazzaniga, who died that same year. The monument was erected sometime later, its completion overseen by Francesco’s younger brother, Tommaso, along with Briosco, whose individual contributions to the monument are not at all clear. See Ellen Longworth, “The Renaissance Tomb in Milan” (PhD diss., Boston University, 1987), pp. 89–111. Francesco Cazzaniga and Benedetto da Briosco are known to have worked with and/or entered into contracts (*societas*) with Amadeo. See Schofield, et al., *Giovanni Antonio Amadeo*, p. 132 doc. 87, p. 417 doc. 1098, and p. 424 doc. 1125.

[27] That the upper portion of the monument may have taken the shape of a truncated pyramid was earlier suggested by Monteverdi, “A proposito dell’arca,” p. 184.

[28] The *Arca* was not yet complete in 1508 when the patron, Pietro Pallavicino da Scipione, “*protonotario apostolico e commendatario dell’abbazia di S. Lanfranco di Pavia*,” clearly felt the need to reiterate his desire for the artist to finish the monument. Schofield, et al., *Giovanni Antonio Amadeo*, p. 17 and p. 414 doc. 1087.

[29] Several sketches executed by Leonardo da Vinci for the Trivulzio monument, dated between 1508 and 1511, may also give us an idea of what such a monument may have looked like when we eliminate the horse and rider.

[30] Moskowitz, *Italian Gothic Sculpture*, p. 302.

[31] Moskowitz, *Italian Gothic Sculpture*, p. 302.

[32] Peter Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 27, 34.

[33] Moskowitz, *Italian Gothic Sculpture*, p. 302.

[34] Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture*, pp. 67–93.

[35] Moskowitz, “Giovanni di Balduccio’s Arca di San Pietro Martire,” n10.

[36] Tanzi, “Novità,” p. 55 and n39.

[37] G.A. Dell’Aqua, “Problemi’ di scultura lombarda: Mantegazza e Amadeo, II,” *Proporzioni*, 3 (1950), pp. 123–140, here p. 130; Angiola Maria Romanini, “L’incontro tra Cristoforo Mantegazza e il Rizzo nel settimo decennio del Quattrocento,” *Arte Lombarda*, 9, no. 1 (1964), pp. 91–102, here pp. 96–98; John Pope-Hennessy, *Italian Renaissance Sculpture: An Introduction to Italian Sculpture, Part II* (1958; New York: Random House, Inc, 1971), pp. 75–80.

[38] Rovetta, “La cultura antiquaria,” pp. 405–407.

[39] Schofield, et al., *Giovanni Antonio Amadeo*, are of the opinion that Piatti designed the monument and that he may have executed some of the surviving reliefs (p. 12). Tanzi, in 1991 (“Novità,” p. 54) and again in 1993 (“Piatti, Amadeo e l’Arca dei Martiri Persiani,” p. 178), assigns the *Clerics* and the “Foulc” *Madonna and Child* to Piatti. In Virginia Brilliant’s catalog created to accompany an exhibition mounted in 2010 at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, the sculptures are listed as belonging to “Giovanni Antonio Amadeo and workshop.” However, in the discussion of the *Clerics* that follows, it is questioned whether or not they are indeed by Amadeo’s hand or were instead carved by an assistant or assistants. Virginia Brilliant, *Gothic Art in the Gilded Age: Medieval and Renaissance Treasures in the Gavet-Vanderbilt-Ringling Collection* (Pittsburg: Gutenberg Periscope Publishing, Ltd., 2010), pp. 69–71.

[40] As found in T.A. Vairani, *Inscriptiones cremonenses universae*, p. ccvi, and recorded in Monteverdi, “A proposito dell’arca,” p. 194.

Ellen L. Longworth

Dr. Ellen L. Longworth was Professor of Art History in the Department of Visual & Performing Arts at Merrimack College; also former Department Chair.

More Posts

Tags: abbot of the Cremonese church of San Lorenzo, Abstract: In March of 1478 (1479 by our calendar), Antonio Meli

Category: Iconocrazia 17/2020 - "Iconocratic Studies. In memory of Sarah Jordan Lippert" (Vol. 1), Saggi | RSS 2.0 Responses are currently closed, but you can trackback from your own site.

No Comments

Comments are closed.

Iconocrazia

Rivista scientifica semestrale di scienze sociali e simbolica politica

ISSN 2240-760X | Aut. Trib. di Bari n. 3690//2011 - num Reg. Stampa 42

Bari © 2012 | designed by POOYA

Iconocrazia

Rivista scientifica semestrale di scienze sociali e simbolica politica

ISSN 2240-760X | Aut. Trib. di Bari n. 3690//2011 - num Reg. Stampa 42

Bari © 2012 | designed by POOYA