

Andrea Bacchi

CARLO ORSI



Antonio Giorgetti

The Head of the Angel with the Sponge

ANTONIO GIORGETTI

(Rome (?) doc. from 1657 – Rome 1669)

Head of an Angel

Terracotta, height 40 cm, 15¾ in

PROVENANCE

With Heim Gallery, London, 1983

EXHIBITED

Rome, Palazzo Sacchetti, 15 May – 30 June 1991, *Fasto romano: dipinti, sculture, arredi dai Palazzi di Roma*, cat. no. 8

LITERATURE

Portrait & Figures in Paintings & Sculpture, 1570-1870, Summer Exhibition (15 June – 26 August 1983), Heim Gallery, London, [1983], cat. no. 26;
S. ANDROSOV, in S. ANDROSOV (ed.), *Alle origini di Canova: le terracotte della collezione Farsetti*, catalogue of the exhibition (Rome, Fondazione Memmo), Venice 1991, p. 92 (under cat. no. 39);
C. MELOCCHI, in A. GONZÁLEZ-PALACIOS (ed.), *Fasto romano: dipinti, sculture, arredi dai Palazzi di Roma*, exhibition catalogue, Rome 1991, pp. 105-6;
S. ZANUSO, *Antonio Giorgetti*, in A. BACCHI (ed.), *Scultura del '600 a Roma*, in collaboration with S. ZANUSO, Milan 1996, p. 808;
M.S. WEIL, *Bernini drawings and bozzetti for the Ponte Sant'Angelo: a new look*, in "Harvard University Art Museums bulletin", VI, 1999, p. 150, note 1;
M.C. BASILI, in *Antonio Giorgetti (ad vocem)*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 55, Rome 2001, p. 293;
B. BOUCHER (ed.), *Earth and Fire: Italian Terracotta Sculpture from Donatello to Canova*, catalogue of the exhibition held in Houston (2001 – 2002) and London (2002), New Haven and London 2001, p. 208

This terracotta sculpture was presented to the public for the first time in 1983, at the Heim Gallery in London, as the work of a Roman sculptor of the third quarter of the 17th century. The names of Alessandro Algardi and Antonio Giorgetti were immediately suggested given the strong resemblance between this face and that of the *Angel* who accompanies San Filippo Neri in the famous statue in the sacristy of Santa Maria in Vallicella (fig. 3), a masterpiece by the Bolognese sculptor, and the others executed by his pupil Giorgetti throughout his career (especially those of the iconostasis in the Abbey of Grottaferrata).¹ The attribution of the terracotta to Antonio Giorgetti was proposed by Marc Worsdale and later confirmed by Jennifer Montagu, as noted in the catalogue of the exhibition *Fasto romano* of 1991 (which failed to mention the previous publication of the sculpture in 1983).² The 1991 catalogue, probably on the basis of a suggestion by Worsdale or Montagu, proposed an immediately obvious parallel with another, practically identical terracotta (fig. 4), just 5 cm shorter since it ended immediately beneath the neck (whereas our piece also includes part of the bust). This second *Head of an Angel* belonged to the well-known Venetian collection of Abbot Filippo Farsetti (1703 – 1774) and is now, like many other pieces from this collection, in the Hermitage in St Petersburg. In the catalogue of Casa Farsetti, the aforementioned *Head* was ascribed to Gian Lorenzo Bernini, but its relationship with the *Angel with the Sponge* sculpted for Ponte Sant'Angelo by Antonio Giorgetti in 1668-1669, to





a design by Bernini himself (fig. 1), was recognized in 1988.³ However, Mark Weil had already independently mentioned the *Head* under consideration here as a preparatory model for the statue on the bridge.⁴ The attribution of the Hermitage terracotta (and as a consequence that under discussion here) has been unanimously accepted for some time.⁵ Yet the true model for this *Head* should be sought in the terracotta by Alessandro Algardi now in the Museum



für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg (fig. 2), a preparatory study for the marble version in the Vallicella (fig. 3). This invention achieved enormous popularity (masterfully analysed by Jennifer Montagu in 1977). On the back of a drawing by the Bolognese painter Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi in the Teylers Museum in Haarlem (brought to the attention of scholars by Ann Sutherland Harris)

¹ *Portraits & figures in paintings & sculpture 1570 - 1870*, London 1983, no. 26.

² C. MELOCCHI, entry in *Fasto romano: dipinti, sculture, arredi dai Palazzi di Roma*, catalogue of the exhibition (Rome, Palazzo Sacchetti) ed. by A. GONZÁLES-PALACIOS, Rome 1991, pp. 105-106, no. 8; Androsov had already written about the attribution to Giorgetti of the terracotta formerly in the Heim gallery (without mentioning Worsdale and Montagu), cfr. the following note.

³ S. ANDROSOV, N. KOSAREVA, entry in *From the Sculptor's Hand. Italian Baroque Terracottas from the State Hermitage Museum*, catalogue of the exhibition, Chicago, Art Institute, Chicago 1998, pp. 96-97, no. 27. The 1788 inventory was reproduced as an appendix to *Alle origini di Canova: le terrecotte della collezione Farsetti*, catalogue of the exhibition (Rome, Fondazione Memmo), Venice 1991, p. 148 (page 20 of the original edition); on p. 92, no. 39 was another discussion of the *Head of an Angel* in the Hermitage (with reference to the other version, that under consideration here).

⁴ Our sculpture is mentioned in M.S. WEIL, *Bernini drawings and bozzetti for the Ponte Sant'Angelo: a new look*, in "Harvard University Art Museums bulletin", VI, 1999, p. 150, note 1.

Fig. 1: Antonio Giorgetti, *The Angel with the sponge*, Ponte Sant'Angelo, Rome



Figs. 2,3: Alessandro Algardi, *Head of an Angel*, terracotta, 29.2 cm, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg; San Filippo Neri with an Angel, Santa Maria in Vallicella, Rome

⁵ Both are listed as works by Giorgetti in *Earth and Fire: Italian terracotta sculpture from Donatello to Canova*, catalogue of the exhibition (Houston, Museum of Fine Arts, 2001), ed. by B. BOUCHER, New Haven 2001, pp. 208-209, no. 50; cfr. also *Bernini: Sculpting in Clay*, catalogue of the exhibition (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art) ed. by C.D. DICKERSON, A. SIGEL, I. WARDROPPER, New York 2012, p. 384, no. 30, note 3 and M.S. WEIL, *A terracotta bust of a woman or an angel by Gian Lorenzo Bernini or Antonio Giorgetti*, in *The Eternal Baroque: Studies in Honour of Jennifer Montagu*, edited by C. H. MINER, Milan 2015, p. 444.

there is a note to the effect that Giorgetti had borrowed “la testa de (l’) angelo d’algardi” (Algardi’s head of an angel”), to be identified as the Hamburg terracotta or another based on it, confirming the Roman sculptor’s fidelity to the model of his Bolognese master.⁶ It is precisely the popularity of Algardi’s *Head of an Angel*, among private collectors as well, that may explain the later popularity of this derivative work by Giorgetti: both the Hermitage terracotta (fig. 4) and our sculpture may have been created not as preparatory models but as works destined for sale. During the second half of the 17th century, particularly during the papacy of Alexander VII, the phenomenon of terracotta collecting was expanding rapidly and the most sought-after pieces were undoubtedly those by Algardi (and as a result imitations of Algardi’s works like the piece discussed here).⁷ In any case, the different degree of finishing and larger size of this piece suggest that it is earlier than the Hermitage terracotta.





Antonio Giorgetti's career was in large part reconstructed in Jennifer Montagu's 1970 article, which highlighted the sculptor's privileged relationship with Cardinal Francesco Barberini and his oscillation between the influence of the two great protagonists of Roman sculpture of the mid-17th century, Bernini and

⁶ J. MONTAGU, *Alessandro Algardi and the Statue of St. Philip Neri*, in "Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen", XXII, 1977, p. 95.

⁷ On this issue cfr. most recently T. MONTANARI, *Creating an Eye for Models: The Role of Bernini*, in *Bernini: Sculpting in Clay cit.*, especially pp. 63-67.

⁸ J. MONTAGU, *Antonio and Giuseppe Giorgetti sculptors to cardinal Francesco Barberini*, in "The Art Bulletin", LII, 1970, pp. 278-298; on Giorgetti cfr. also S. ZANUSO, *Antonio Giorgetti*, in A. BACCHI (with the collaboration of S. ZANUSO), ed. by, *Scultura del '600 a Roma*, Milan 1996, p. 808; O. FERRARI, S. PAPALDO, *Le sculture del Seicento a Roma*, Rome 1999, ad indicem; C. BASILI, *Giorgetti, Antonio*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 55, Rome 2001, pp. 291-293. Recently the attribution to Giorgetti of the bronze bust of Clemente Merlini in the tomb in Santa Maria Maggiore, proposed by Damian Dombrowski, was rejected on a documentary basis by J. CURZIETTI, *Nuove attribuzioni a Domenico de Rossi e Giuseppe Peroni: i monumenti funebri di Giovan Pietro Moretti e Clemente Merlini in S. Maria Maggiore*, in "Storia dell'arte", 133, 2012, p. 47 (the bronze is the work of Giuseppe Peroni and Angelo Pellegrini).



Algardi.⁸ From this point of view, the *Angel with the Sponge* on Ponte Sant'Angelo (fig. 1) is an exemplary work: though executed for one of Bernini's worksites, the statue presents unmistakable Algardian characteristics, particularly in the

Fig. 4: Antonio Giorgetti, *Head of an Angel*, 35 cm, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg



Fig. 5: Antonio Giorgetti, *Angel*, Spada Chapel, San Girolamo della Carità, Rome

⁹ For the documents on the statue, in the broader context of this Berninian worksite, cfr. M.S. WEIL, *The History of the Decoration of the Ponte S. Angelo*, University Park 1974, especially pp. 84-85 and 124-125; for the subsequent restorations of Giorgetti's statue cfr. A. PAMPALONE, *Bernini restaurato: interventi di Pierre Le Gros e Lorenzo Ottoni alle fontane di piazza Barberini e all'Angelo con la spugna di Antonio Giorgetti*, in *Studi sul Barocco romano: scritti in onore di Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco*, ed. by M. SERIO, Milan 2004, pp. 398-399.

¹⁰ F. MARTINELLI, *Roma ornata dall'architettura, pittura e scultura (1660-1663)*, ed. by C. D'ONOFRIO, *Roma nel Seicento*, Florence 1969, p. 376.

¹¹ M. HEMBÜRGER RAVALLI, *Architettura, scultura e arti minori nel Barocco italiano: ricerche nell'Archivio Spada*, Florence 1977, p. 105.

facial features.⁹ Already in around 1660-1663, Fioravante Martinelli, discussing the very recent tomb of Holstenius in Santa Maria dell'Anima (payments from 1661 to 1663), described it as a work by "Antonio Giorgetti Romano, allievo dell'Algarði" ("Antonio Giorgetti of Rome, a pupil of Algardi"),¹⁰

immediately connecting the sculptor to his great Bolognese teacher. The earlier *Angels* in the Spada Chapel in San Girolamo della Carità (payments from 1657 to 1659, fig. 5)¹¹ are even more exquisitely Algardian and have faces not unlike that of the terracotta presented here.



CARLO ORSI

Via Bagutta, 14 - 20121 Milano
tel. +39 0276002214
info@galleriaorsi.com
www.galleriaorsi.com