

Galerie Canesso

Tableaux anciens



PIETRO FACHETTI (MANTOVA CA. 1535 - ROMA 1619)

Portrait of Donna Livia Orsini Cesarini, Duchess of

*Civitanova, with her sons Don Alessandro and Don
Virginio*

Oil on canvas, 73 ⁵/₈" x 38 ⁵/₈"

A refined example of portraiture in the powerful milieu of Roman aristocracy at the dawn of the seventeenth century, this canvas comes from the collections of the Cesarini Dukes, for whom it was painted. It was moved from their palazzo in Rome to the one in Genzano in 1866, the year an inventory of that residence was drawn up by the painter Tommaso Minardi, who attributed the canvas to the School of Scipione Pulzone. The painting had recently been attributed to Pulzone by Andrea G. De Marchi and Maria Teresa Cantaro,(1) and the first scholar to cast doubt on his authorship was Antonio Vannugli, who instead suggested an attribution to Pietro Facchetti, (2) now confirmed and supported by Francesco Solinas and Laura Bartoni in a forthcoming article.(3)

Considered by his contemporaries as one of the principal portrait-painters of the era, Pietro Facchetti fell into oblivion in the centuries that followed, but in the years straddling the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries he achieved great success at the courts of Popes, Cardinals, Princes and Sovereigns. Having been trained in the School established in Mantua by Giulio Romano, Pietro Mantovano – as he was called – settled in Rome in 1575 and remained there until his death in 1619, initially working for Pope Gregory XIII (r. 1572 - 1585) and Cardinal Filippo Guastavillani (1541 - 1587). He then became the favourite painter of Don Paolo Giordano Orsini (1541 - 1585), and worked for Pope Sixtus V (r. 1585 - 1590) and his Peretti nephews. He nonetheless remained tied to the Gonzaga court, and worked for Vincenzo I (r. 1587 - 1612) and Eleonora de' Medici (1567 - 1611), not only as painter but agent and scout for obtaining paintings and sculptures for their collections.

Solinas and Bartoni – as well as Patrizia Rosini, in an earlier online text⁴ – propose that the Lady portrayed here is Livia Orsini Cesarini (c. 1570 - 1619), wife of Giuliano II Cesarini, first Duke Civitanova, Marquess of Montecosaro, Ardea, Genzano and Civita Lavinia, shown with two of her five children: probably Don Alessandro (1592 - 1644) and Don Virginio Cesarini (1595 - 1624). Facchetti had a mutually trusting rapport with the Cesarini family, and this is confirmed by the painting presented here. This life-size official portrait reveals the artist's awareness of current conventions regarding decorum, as reflected in the rigour of pose and almost hieratic quality of his sitters. Yet, as Solinas points out, the work has the freshness of form found in Flemish painting of the period, and special care is given to the innovative lighting effects that had recently been adopted by Caravaggio. Indeed in its description of the sumptuous clothing and jewellery, we see a rich, vibrant use of pigment. While the fluid brushwork is controlled in the faces, it becomes more animated and substantial in the fabrics and ornaments, though never losing its attention to detail and showing the painter's mastery of draughtsmanship.

We still lack clues or attributes that might securely define the identification, but a study of dress kindly carried out by Marzia Cataldi Gallo (written communication) proves most illuminating. Everything here is consistent with Spanish court fashion of the period, in particular the top robe of red velvet with vertical stripes in gold thread, opening over a *faldetta* decorated in silver thread, with the upper sleeves slit open over the arms to reveal a fabric with horizontal stripes, the latter formerly an item of male clothing; the decoration in silver thread repeats the same motif. The jewels, too, refer to current fashion, especially the pendant with two precious stones, one over the other, the uppermost (seemingly a ruby, supported by two enamelled cherubs) resembling one worn

by the Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia in a painting attributed to Sanchez Coello in the Prado. The children are dressed as little adults. The older one holds a goldfinch in his right hand – a Christological symbol which would have been intended here as a means of warding off evil spirits. With the same apotropaic intent, the smaller of the two boys wears a double gold chain around his neck, with various talismans hanging from it, including the tooth of a lion or shark and a small branch of coral, often shown in paintings hanging from the Christ Child's neck, as a premonition of the Passion, but which was also generally believed to be infallible at keeping away the Devil: it was thus the most appreciated amulet. We can also see a small gold cross, and a tripartite object, which Frank Dabell has suggested is the triple heraldic pear of the Peretti family. The younger boy rests his left hand on a miniature gold sword, and holds a small white dog by the leash; the bitch was a symbol of faith and devotion, but also of generosity and meekness.

Solinas and Bartoni propose that the portrait was painted in about 1597/1598. Marzia Cataldi Gallo (as noted above), considers certain elements that might postdate this to the very end of the century: the arrangement of the Lady's hair, which begins at the very top of the forehead; and the type of children's clothing, which indicates that they were no longer infants, and should therefore be considered no younger than five.

Notes:

1. The attribution was put forward when the painting was auctioned at Dorotheum (Vienna, Old Master Paintings, 12 October 2011, part I, lot 432), with reference to written approvals by Andrea G. De Marchi and Maria Teresa Cantaro in favour of Scipione Pulzone. De Marchi hypothesized that the work could be identified as a *Portrait of a Sforza Duchess with her two Sons* cited in the 1744 inventory of Giuseppe I Sforza Cesarini, and that it was datable to 1600.

2. Antonio Vannugli, 'Scipione Pulzone ritrattista. Traccia per un catalogo ragionato', in *Scipione Pulzone. Da Gaeta a Roma alle corti europee* exh. cat. (Gaeta, Museo Diocesano, 27 June-27 October 2013) ed. by A. Acconci and A. Zuccari, Rome 2013, p. 54.

3. L. Bartoni and F. Solinas, 'Due magnifici ritratti romani del Cinquecento: Pietro Fachetti per Donna Clelia Farnese e per suo figlio Giuliano II Cesarini duca di Civitanova', *Storia dell'Arte*.

4. Patrizia Rosini, in 'Vita e costumi di un "bastardo" di Casa Cesarini in un documento giudiziario di primo Seicento', *Nuovo Rinascimento* database (www.nuovorinascimento.org), 12 May 2013, p. 5.

LITERATURE

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- Francesco Solinas and Laura Bartoni, 'Due magnifici ritratti romani del Cinquecento: Pietro Fachetti per Donna Clelia Farnese e per suo figlio Giuliano II Cesarini duca di Civitanova', *Storia dell'Arte*.