

«AND WITH THE CHISEL YOU GIVE LIFE TO MARBLES»
MELCHIOR BARTHEL AND THE *SATYR*
FOR ARCHDUKE LEOPOLD WILHELM
OF AUSTRIA

MAICHOLO CLEMENTE



GALLERIA CARLO VIRGILIO & C.



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ARTE ANTICA MODERNA E CONTEMPORANEA

Translation

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MELCHIOR BARTHEL

(Dresden 1625 – 1672)

Satyr

1662

White Carrara marble; h. 53,5 cm (without socle: h. 40 cm)

PROVENANCE: bought in Venice for Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of Austria; described in the inventory of the collection of Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of Austria (A. Berger, "Inventar und Kunstsammlung ...", *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien*, 1, 1883, p. CLXXVI, n. 514); from 1662 in the Imperial collections of Vienna; in 1735 reproduced in *Prodromus* by Frans van Stampart and Anton Joseph von Prenner (tav. 27; here fig. 23); private collection.

The title citation is taken from the verse composition the painter Sebastiano Mazzoni dedicated to Barthel in 1661 (S. Mazzoni, Il Tempo perduto, Venice 1661, p. 65: «E tu col Ferro sai dar vita a i Marmi»).

This brief review presents research that is part of an upcoming, more extensive scientific paper by Simone Guerriero and myself, specifically dedicated to the presence of sculptures by Barthel and Le Court in Leopold Wilhelm's collection.





Head lifted slightly upwards to his left, we immediately recognise this sylvan, griffon-like figure sculpted in white Carrara marble to be a *Satyr*,¹ with head of curly hair and hirsute beard. His pointed ears are those of a goat, and his hooked nose has flattened nostrils on which emerges a small carbuncle or *bitorzo*.² Beneath the thick, dishevelled eyebrows his expression appears excited, curious and lusty; nourishing a craving, it would seem, that his feral and malicious smile emphasizes. Indeed Giovanni Battista Dalla Porta writes: «Satyrs are a cross between the figure of a man and a he-goat, and a sign of excessive lechery».³ The hairy-chested subject has a goatskin knotted over his right shoulder, the animal's hoof hanging at the end. At the back, at mid-height, the bust has been hollowed out by a hammer at the sides in order to lighten it, while in the centre the sculptor has created a support whose vertical side tapers upwards.

Confirming the attribution of the *Satyr* to Melchior Barthel,⁴ presented here for the first time, are comparisons with works he certainly sculpted during his seventeen years based in Venice, where he disembarked for the first time around 1653, two years before the arrival of Giusto Le Court (also known as Josse de Corte, 1627-1679), the artist from Ypres who would become the highest representative of baroque sculpture in Venice.

¹ With reference to the description given by J. Hall, *Dizionario dei soggetti e dei simboli nell'arte*, Milan 1998, pp. 363-364. To which I would add that of *Pan* (Ivi, p. 314).

² Seventeenth century term included in the entry for *deformities* by Emanuele Tesauro in his *Vocabulario italiano*, unpublished text edited by M. Maggi, Florence 2008, p. 22.

³ G. B. Dalla Porta, *La fisionomia dell'huomo et la celeste*, Venice 1652, p. 535.

⁴ A recent biography of the sculptor has been written by S. Guerriero, *La Venere di Melchior Barthel per l'arciduca Leopoldo Guglielmo d'Asburgo*, Verona 2022, pp. 13-41. Besides being a monograph of the sculptor, the volume makes a fundamental contribution to updating and expanding his catalogue.

It is worth remembering that until 1670, the date of his return to Dresden, his city of origin, where he was made court artist, Barthel was indeed, alongside Le Court, one of the most sought after and rated sculptors of Venice. His participation in high profile Venetian enterprises – suffice it to think of the statues for the main altar of San Pietro di Castello (built at the behest of the Senate), the *Dolphin Monument* on the counterfaçade of the Church of San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti (fig. 1) or the *Monument to Melchiorre Lanza* in the Dominican Basilica of Santi Giovanni e Paolo – only enhanced his name, to which Sebastiano Mazzoni had already paid homage in one of the poems in his anthology, *Il Tempo perduto*, published in Venice in 1661. Singing his praises, the Florentine clearly expresses the wonder provoked in him by the works of the «celebrated German», writing: «And I who was never filled with amazement; / At the sight of your works learned to be amazed».⁵

Barthel's fame was certainly further amplified by his involvement, alongside Le Court, Bernardo Falconi, Michele Fabris known as l'Ongaro and Francesco Cavrioli, in the decoration of one of the most famous monuments of the Venetian Seicento: the tomb of Doge Giovanni Pesaro designed by Baldassare Longhena in the Venetian Basilica dei Frari between 1663 and 1669.⁶ For that imposing structure, where Le Court took the principal role not only due to the number of works he made, but also for having the privilege of depicting the renowned deceased, Barthel conceived two large sculptural groups: one portraying *Religion* and *Constancy*, the other *Truth* and *Justice*.

Recent findings have added concrete substance to an affirmation that appeared in the artist's biography in *Curiosa Saxonica* of 1748. In the brief profile dedicated to Barthel it was emphasized how the master from Dresden received accolades from various princes for monuments he made in Venice.⁷ On which note, with the correct attribution to Barthel of the portraits of *Orazio Farnese* and *Almerigo d'Este*, two princes who died fighting in the war against the Turks, important definitive confirmation is established of what had appeared generically in sources.

It should also be mentioned, and it is a particularly interesting fact given the type of work presented here, that Barthel also distinguished himself in the production of sculptures for the art market and private collectors of the time, one of the sectors in which Venetian artists were apt to excel for variety of themes (sacred as well as profane), typologies of sculpture (busts, reliefs, reclining or standing figures etc.), and for the sublime quality of their art.⁸

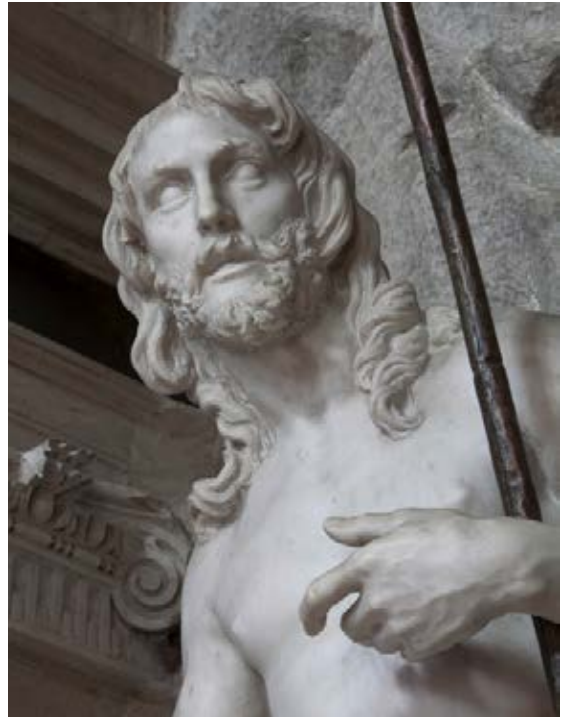
⁵ S. Mazzoni, *Il Tempo perduto*, cit.

⁶ New aspects regarding the monument were put forward by M. De Vincenti, «Vincere l'oblio. Sui monumenti funebri veneziani del secondo Seicento», in *La "splendida" Venezia di Francesco Morosini (1619-1694). Cerimoniali, arti, cultura*, atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Venice, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, 19-20 novembre 2019), ed. by M. Casini, S. Guerriero, V. Mancini, Venezia 2022, pp. 61-72.

⁷ *Curiosa Saxonica*, Dresden 1748, pp. 360-364.



1. Melchior Barthel, *Faith*, Venice, Church of San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti



2. Melchior Barthel, *Male bust*, Stra, Museo Nazionale di Villa Pisani

3. Melchior Barthel, *Saint John the Baptist*, detail, Venice, Church of the Scalzi

Much admired for his works in ivory, some ending up in Dresden but others in Florence, bought by Leopoldo de' Medici on the advice of Marco Boschini, who was known for having little appreciation for sculpture, Barthel also had the opportunity to sculpt works in marble, among which medium-sized statues, such as the *Venus* mentioned below. Worthy of mention for example is the bust of a young man (fig. 2) made for the Pisani family, great collectors of statuary, who created one of the finest sculpture collections in seventeenth century Venice. Among the numerous works, today conserved in Villa Pisani in Stra but in part from their Venetian residence, are pieces by Clemente Molli, Le Court, Falconi and Filippo Parodi from Genoa. The subjects of the statues are also greatly varied: divinities from Olympus, sibyls, ancient emperors, and varied allegories. In short, a magnificent assembly of marble images, among which the art of Melchior Barthel is on display.

To return to our *Satyr*, it is with *Saint Peter* (figs. 4-5) and *Saint Mark*

⁸Cfr. S. Guerriero, "Le alterne fortune dei marmi: busti, teste di carattere e altre 'sculture moderne' nelle collezioni veneziane tra Sei e Settecento", in *La scultura veneta del Seicento e del Settecento: nuovi studi*, Proceedings of the Colloquium (Venice, Istituto Veneto di Scienze Lettere ed Arti, November 30 2001), ed. by G. Pavanello, Venice 2002, pp. 73-149; Id. S. Guerriero, "Il collezionismo di sculture 'moderne'", in *Il collezionismo d'arte a Venezia. Il Seicento*, ed. by L. Borean e S. Mason, Venice 2007, pp. 43-62.

(figs. 6-7) made by Barthel around 1663 that the bust had its first and most compelling connection. Soaring over the main altar of San Pietro di Castello, previously Venice cathedral and ancient seat of the patriarch, the two weighty statues – that «successfully show the Saxon sculptor’s adhesion to a ‘Venetian’ baroque style»⁹ – present some of the stylistic peculiarities that characterize the language of the German artist. In both we note the insistence on the differentiation of the various surfaces, with the hair, beard and eyebrows worked with the rasp and tip of the chisel. In the clarity of skin they take on a rough, rugged grain that, along with the concrete thickness of the curls and the tousled hair around the cheeks and lips, and on the chin and neck, we find present in our *Satyr*. Equally obvious is the shared hairstyle: for example, the spiralling inverted cone shape we see emerging at the *Satyr’s* left temple is similar to that Barthel carved on the opposite side of the face of *Saint Peter*, in Venice. While in a comparison with *Saint Mark*, the mythological figure shares lineaments and profile – forehead creased with lines, nose equally curved – and further similarities can be found both in the shape of the eyebrows and outline of the eyes. These last are notable for their precise shape, and are identical in a large number of Barthel’s works carried out over time. The specificity of the detail is in the large medial angle of the eye, zone of the tear duct. In the Church of Santa Maria di Nazareth, known as Scalzi, in the Mora Chapel, this detail can be found in the statue of *Saint John the Baptist* (fig. 3), thought to be one of the sculptor’s first works carried out in Venice (around the latter half of the 1650s), and signed: «MERCIIHR BARTEL F.». On the same occasion he decorated the chapel with other sculptures: together with the winged *genietti* on the side walls, Barthel was responsible for the angel at the top of the tympanum and the two recumbent prophets at the sides. A pair of statues with the same rapacious look, unkempt hair and thick beard as the unpublished work under examination.

To ideate and sculpt our *Satyr* the artist from Dresden must also have been inspired by antiquity: perhaps a series of prototypes chosen from among those he had the opportunity to see directly both in Rome and Venice, and of which, as was usual, he may have made some sketches. Joachim von Sandrart, in the pages of his *Academia Todesca* (1675-1679), in which the first biography of Barthel was published, besides celebrating him as a sculptor and credit to the nation of Saxony,¹⁰ recalls his sojourn in Rome, which he writes lasted some three years: from 1650 to 1653.¹¹ So it doesn’t seem entirely unlikely that in Rome Barthel was influenced by one of the most famous statues of the period, which also fascinated Rubens:¹² *Old Centaur Ridden by Eros*, then

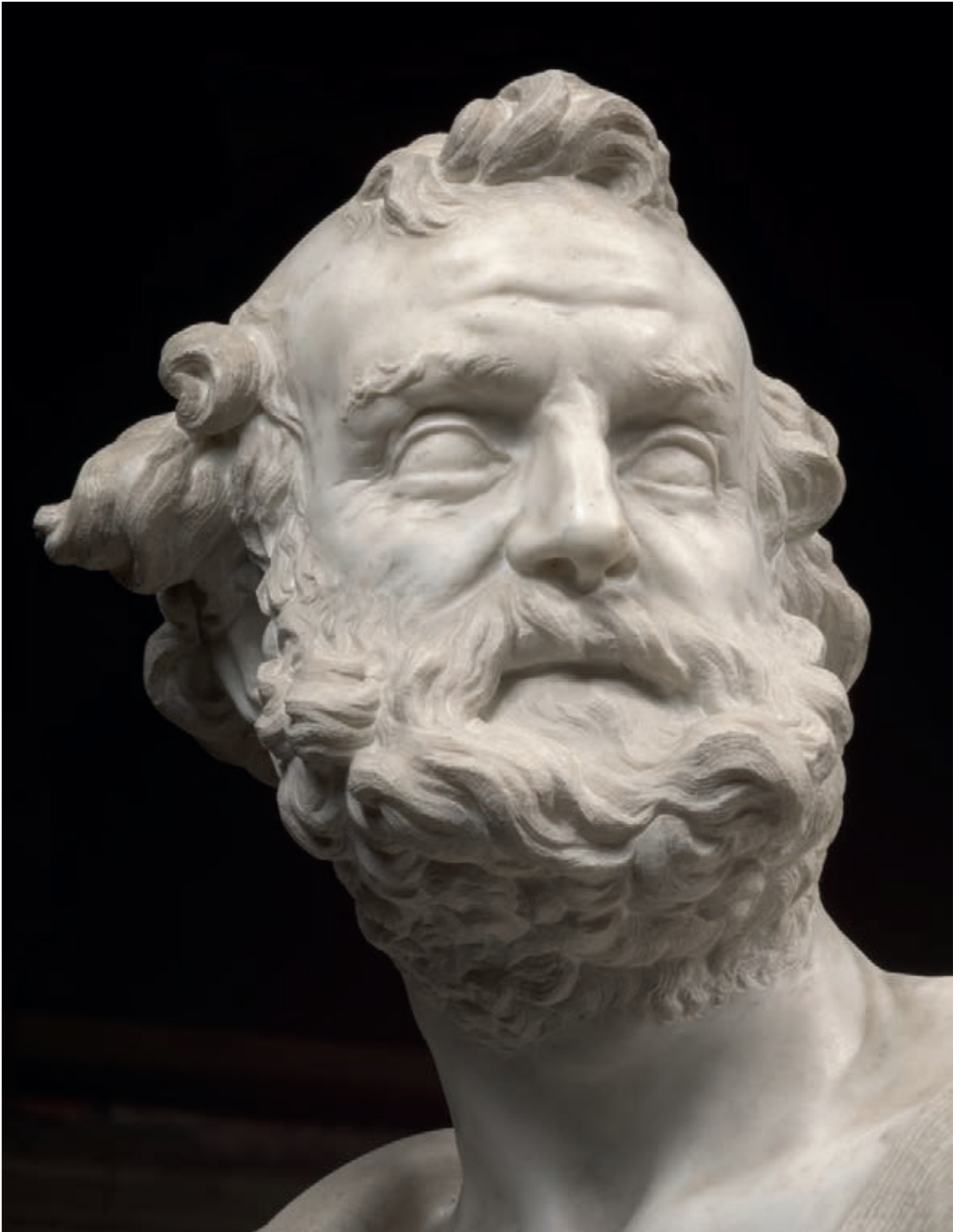
⁹ S. Guerriero, *La Venere di*, cit., p. 19.

¹⁰ J. von Sandrart, *L’Academia Todesca della Architectura, Scultura et Pittura*, I, Nuremberg 1675, p. 374.

¹¹ J. von Sandrart, *L’Academia Todesca del- la Architectura, Scultura et Pittura*, III, Nuremberg 1679, p. 75.

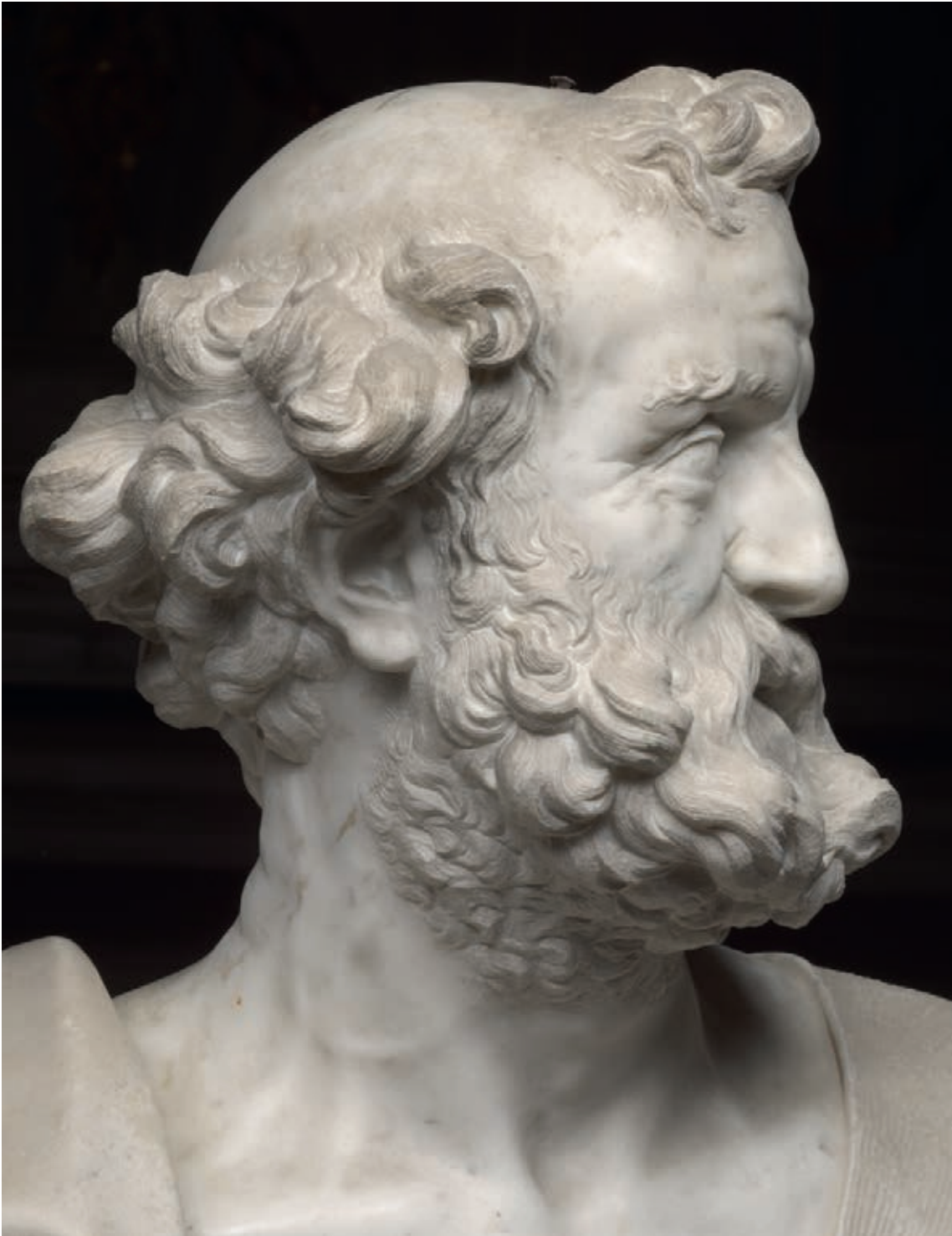
¹² M. van Der Meulen, *Rubens’ copies after the Antique*, vol. II, ed. by A. Balis, London 1994, pp. 83-87, nn. 65-69.





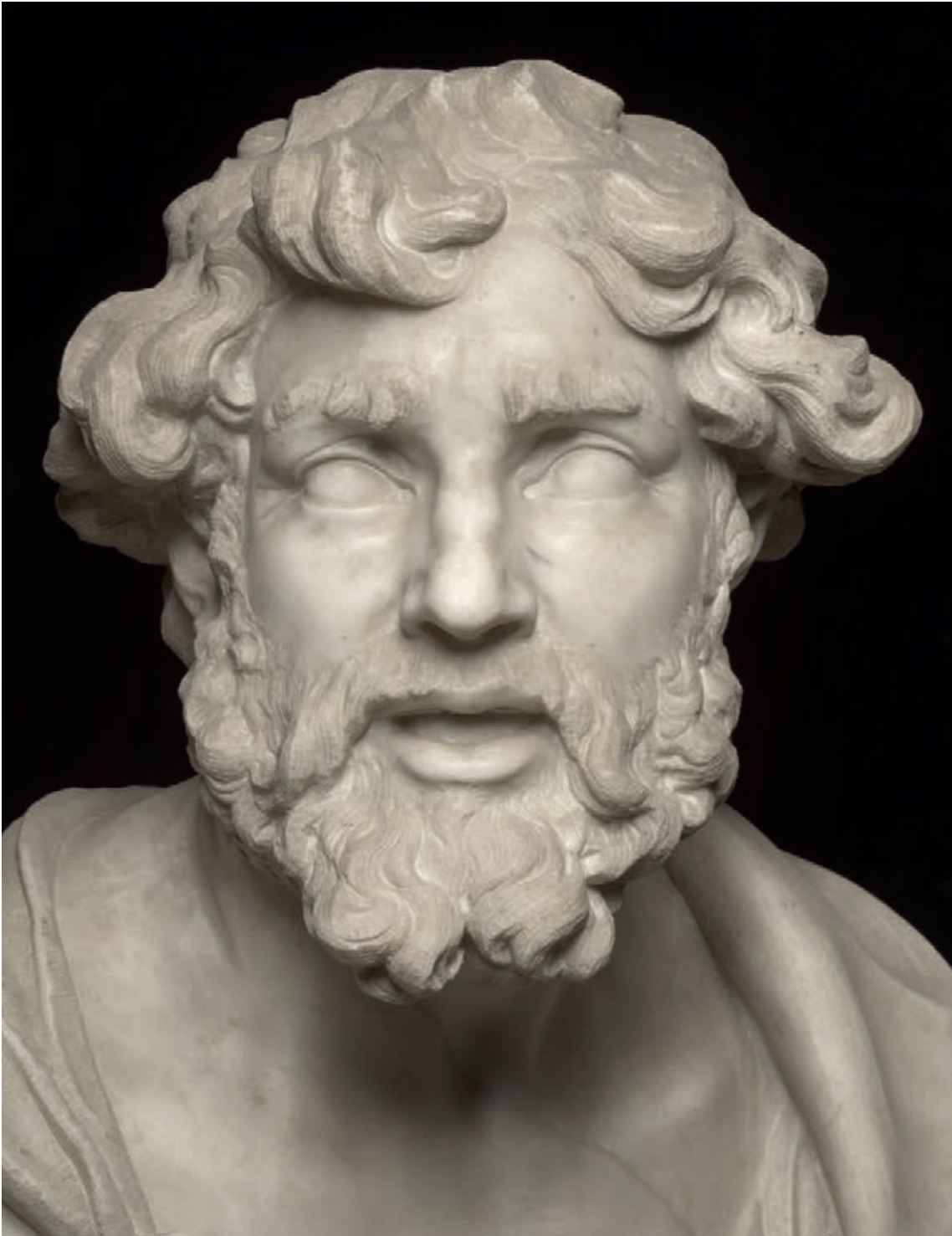
4. Melchior Barthel, *Saint Peter*, detail, Venice, Church of San Pietro di Castello





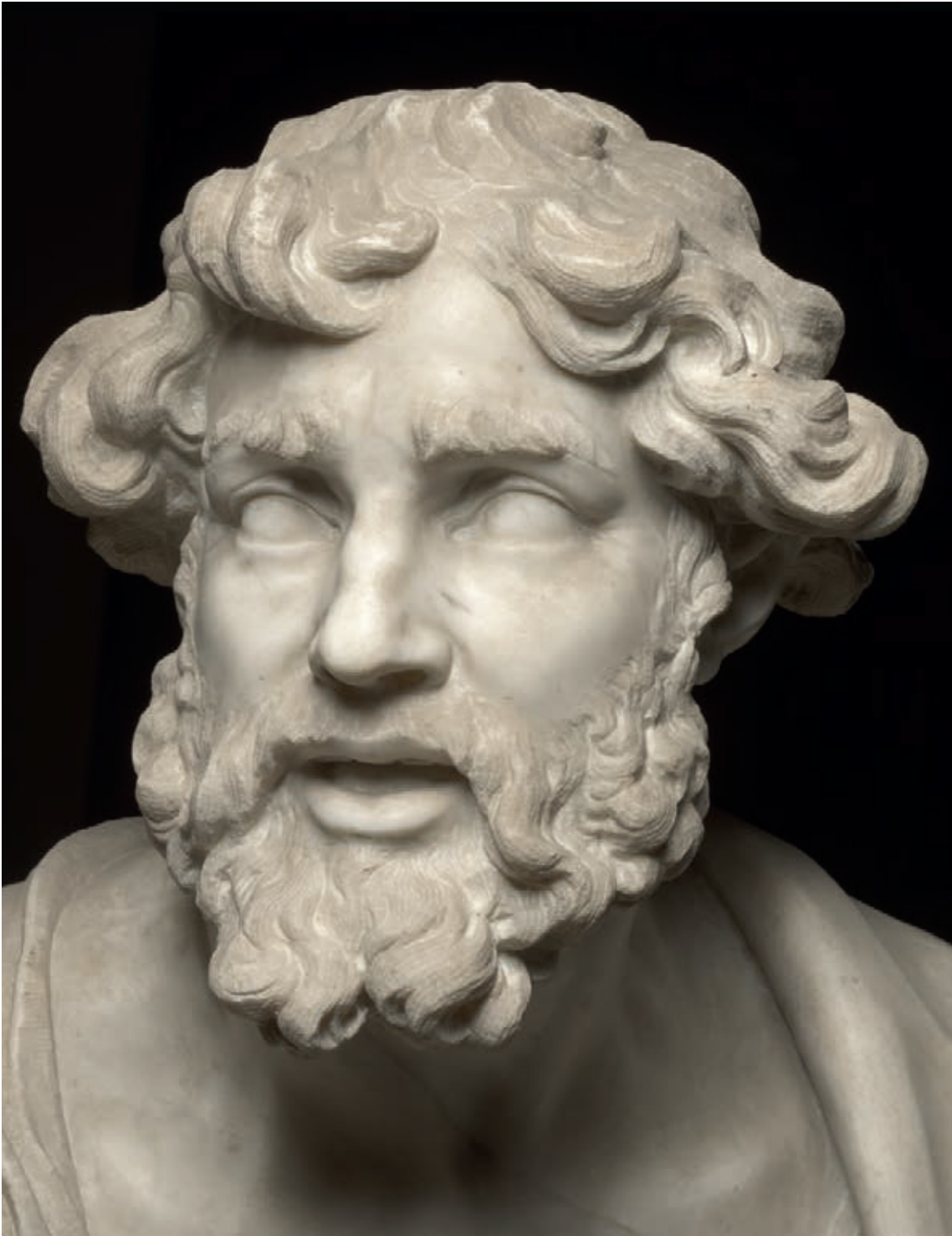
5. Melchior Barthel, *Saint Peter*, detail, Venice, Church of San Pietro di Castello





6. Melchior Barthel, *Saint Mark*, detail, Venice, Church of San Pietro di Castello





7. Melchior Barthel, *Saint Mark*, detail, Venice, Church of San Pietro di Castello

in the Borghese collection and now in Paris, at the Louvre, where it arrived in October 1808.¹³ From the face of the mythological creature, half man and half horse, Barthel seems to have kept in mind the dynamic play of the tufts of hair, their thickness and surface roughness, and softened them somewhat to suit a more baroque stamp. It is interesting to note how part of the beard (on the left side of both figures), has been almost identically parted (fig. 9). A significant detail witnessing Barthel's undisputed ability to assimilate certain features of ancient sculpture while bringing them up to date by means of an original language and a high level of execution. Venice, with its innumerable collections of classical art – some easily accessible, for example the Statuario Pubblico – certainly offered him a wide range of similar subjects with equally instructive formal peculiarities.¹⁴

Faun-like reference images are dotted all over Venice. Besides the satyric face among the reliefs of the capitals at the Palazzo Ducale, are depictions of the subject both among the statues decorating the Libreria Marciana, and in one of the arches of the Procuratie Nuove.¹⁵ Furthermore, the Pisani collection, where one of Barthel's abovementioned works is conserved, includes a portrayal of the mythological creature. It is a bust of *Satyr* (fig. 8) most probably sculpted by Bernardo Falconi¹⁶ from Ticino, whose presence along with portrayals of other mythological deities indicates the popularity of such iconography with art lovers of the time.

In view of the above, the *Satyr* under examination demands attention for various reasons. Not only does it indeed attest to the high quality attained in the genre by the Saxon artist – both on a conceptual level and from a technical point of view – it also represents another important piece in the reconstruction of the nucleus of works that Barthel and Giusto Le Court made up until 1662 for Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of Austria (1614-1662), which is to say one of the most renowned collectors of the seventeenth century. Brother of Emperor Ferdinand III, he had built up one of the most famous collections of the time, above all between 1647 and 1656, when he was governor of the Netherlands (1647-1656). Proof of the extraordinary uniqueness of the collection are innumerable paintings by David Teniers the Younger, his court painter, in which the nobleman is portrayed among the

¹³ M. Minozzi, M-L. Fabrèga-Dubert, J-L. Martinez, in *I Borghese e l'Antico*, exhibition catalogue (Rome, Galleria Borghese, December 7 2011 - April 9 2012), ed. by A. Coliva, M-L. Fabrèga-Dubert, J-L. Martinez, M. Minozzi, Milan 2011, pp. 406-408, cat. 74.

¹⁴ Cfr. *Collezioni di antichità a Venezia nei secoli delle Repubbliche*, exhibition catalogue (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, May 27 - July 31 1988), ed. by M. Zorzi, Rome 1988; *Lo Statuario Pubblico della Serenissima. Due secoli di collezionismo di antichità 1596-1797*, exhibition catalogue (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, September 6 - November 2 1997), ed. by I. Favaretto and G. L. Ravagnan, Cittadella 1997.

¹⁵ Cfr. G. Lovato e P. Usicco, *Scultura Veneziana. Gli Dei dimenticati in Piazza San Marco*, Venice 2021, pp. 29 (fig. 7), 38 nr. XXIII.

¹⁶ As suggested by Simone Guerriero, who better explains the attribution in his upcoming publication.



8. Bernardo Falconi, *Satyr*, Stra, Museo Nazionale di Villa Pisani

canvases of the most famous Italian and Flemish painters of the Quattro, Cinque and Seicento acquired by him, and in which appear here and there small marble and bronze sculptures (fig. 10). After his return to Vienna, his collection was installed in the rooms of the Stallburg, part of the old Hofburg complex. In his Viennese years Leopold Wilhelm continued to gather up works, considerably increasing not only the number of paintings, but also of sculptures, both ancient and modern. And it is at this moment that his interests turn to Venetian sculpture, leading him to commission and buy works by the two best sculptors in the city.

Recently, the specific details of this *dénouement* have been admirably reconstructed by Simone Guerriero, who, setting out from the discovery of the *Venus* (fig. 13) sculpted by Barthel for the prestigious client, shines light on the role of co-protagonist he played.¹⁷

¹⁷For this commission see, with previous bibliography, S. Guerriero, *La Venere di Melchior Barthel*, cit., pp. 41-82.





9. *Centaur Ridden by Eros*, detail, Paris, Musée du Louvre



10. David Teniers the Younger, *Leopold Wilhelm of Austria in his Gallery in Brussels*, Madrid, Museo del Prado





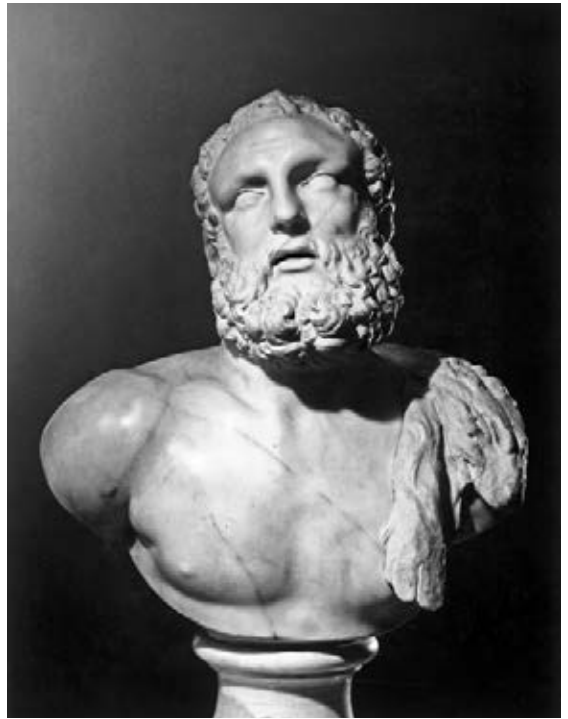
11. Melchior Barthel, *Saturn*, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum



12. Melchior Barthel, *Female Bust with Diadem*, Saint Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum



13. Melchior Barthel, *Venus*, Galleria Gallo Fine Arts



14. Frans van Stampart & Anton Joseph von Prenner, *Prodomus*, Viennae Austriae, Johann Peter van Ghelen, 1735, plate 28, detail
 15. Melchior Barthel, *Hercules*, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

The reconstruction of the episode led Guerriero to reconsider in its entirety the group of works acquired by the archduke in Venice through his intermediary, Count Humprecht Jan Čzernín di Chudenice (1628-1682), which after his death was merged, together with his incomparable painting collection, into the Imperial collections. Of the series of sculptures, only a part naturally ended up at the Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna, where, at least until September 2022, they were still almost all inventoried as works by Le Court. In fact the Fleming had certainly produced two, which is to say the pair of busts *Content* and *Envy*, on which he had carved his name. While the remaining seven Guerriero attributes to Barthel for stylistic reasons: a redress of paternity that was also found to have a solid documentary basis. Indeed, a re-reading of the personal correspondence in Čzernín's archive uncovers new information: a combination of facts that, as Guerriero writes, throw «new light on Leopold Wilhelm's interest in Venetian sculpture of the time». ¹⁸ In the various missives sent by the archduke's secretary to Čzernín in Venice, not only do we find comments on the sculptures as they gradually arrive in Vienna, but also a mention of subjects (for example, *Mars* and *Juno* are

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 66.

cited). Moreover, in a letter dated September 1662, we find Leopold Wilhelm agreeing to his Venice representative's suggestion to bestow a «medallion [...] on the German sculptor [Melchior Barthel], [...] well-deserving virtuoso, all the more because [...] Your Highness [Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of Austria] desires further statues from this sculptor».¹⁹

Hence, while Le Court, as shown, contributed only with two works, we find Barthel delivering a greater number of sculptures. For the most part they are busts of subjects from classical mythology – from *Philemon and Baucis* to *Diana* and *Apollo*, including *Saturn* (fig. 11), *Hercules* and *Ceres* – all of nearly identical dimensions.²⁰ Our *Satyr* fits perfectly among such statues for size and harmonises with them from an iconographic point of view as well. Besides the typical similarities of form, by now easily recognisable (from the eyes to the differently worked surfaces to physiognomic traits and so on), even the measurements are the same.

As mentioned above, not everything the two artists sculpted became part of the assets of the Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna. Besides the *Venus*, which comes from a private collection, Guerriero identified another pair of busts at the Hermitage, St. Petersburg: two female figures (fig. 12) that definitely came from the archduke's famous collection originally.

If, on the one hand, the dynamics of the dispersion are still partially unknown – it began, as far as expert research suggests, in the final quarter of the XVIII century, under the government of Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, and proceeded with transfers to Czech and Hungarian museums after the *débâcle* of 1918 – on the other hand we are fortunate enough to have documentary evidence that permits a high level of assurance in recognising these *disiecta membra* as the statues that used to feature in the collection of Leopold Wilhelm of Austria.

The first is the inventory of the archduke's collection, compiled in 1659 but updated until the year of his death, in 1662, in which the measurements and descriptions of the various works are given, although not the maker's name; the second are the plates from the famous *Prodromus*, published in Vienna in 1735 by Frans van Stampart and Anton Joseph von Prenner: as Guerriero explains «a sort of compendium of the collections in the time of Charles VI, etchings in twenty-eight plates depicting – with no chronological or authorial order, nor regard to the relative size of the works, but arranged with the single criterion of making the plates appear attractive and balanced – 960 paintings and 228 sculptures, reliefs, gems and medallions».²¹ In short, thanks to the plates, it is possible to carry out a further, reassuring check, which the *Satyr* in question undergoes with positive results.

Entry number 514 of the inventory, page 470 *recto* reads:

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 67.

²⁰ Approx. 50 cm including support.

²¹ S. Guerriero, *La Venere di Melchior Barthel*, pp. 77-78.

Another half bust in white marble in the shape of a savage Man with thick unkempt hair and beard, and a mantle beneath his armpit.

Exactly 2 hands high, 1 hand 3 inches wide. Original²²

The dimensions correspond to those of our bust, which measures exactly 40 cm in height. Furthermore, even the iconography is confirmed. Indeed, in the fourth volume of *Thesaurus linguarum Orientalium Turcicae, Arabicae, Persicae*, a Turkish to Latin dictionary published in Austria in 1680 by Franciszek Meniński, on page 5559, we find this definition: «Wilder Mann/ Satyr. *Huomo selvatico, Satiro*. Satyre, homme sauvage».²³

The final step involves the identification of the marble image under examination among the various incisions in the *Prodromus*. As occurred for other busts, although reproduced in reverse and with slight differences compared to their original composition – exemplified in the case of *Hercules* (fig. 14), where the incision has a strip of drapery low down that does not appear on the marble at the Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna (fig. 15) – this too is easily found: it can be seen on plate 27, bottom right (fig. 16).

With the emergence of our *Satyr*, a bust of supreme quality whose assured provenance in the collection of Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of Austria can only further increase its value, the importance of the role of Melchior Barthel – alongside that of Le Court – in the scene of Venetian baroque is confirmed, as is the indisputable centrality of Venice in the artistic panorama of the Italian and European Seicento.

²² A. Berger, “Inventar und Kunstsammlung des Erzherzogs Leopold Wilhelm von Österreich: nach der Originalhandschrift im fürstlich schwarzenbergischen Centralarchive”, *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien*, 1, 1883, p. CLXXVI, n. 514: “Ein anders Brustbildt von weisen Marmel in Gestalt eines wildten Manns mit gestrobleten, dickhen Harn vnd Bartd, wie auch einen Mandl vmb die Achsel. Hoch 2 Span genau vnd braidt 1 Spann 3 Finger. Original”.

²³ F. Meniński, *Thesaurus linguarum Orientalium Turcicae, Arabicae ...*, IV, Viennæ Austriæ 1680, p. 5559.





16. Frans van Stampart & Anton Joseph von Prenner, *Prodromus*, Viennae Austriae, Johann Peter van Ghelen, 1735, plate 27, detail here reproduced in reverse





