

Giulia Moretti Cursi

(University of Rome Tor Vergata)

THE DIONYSIAN ANCIENT RELIEFS OF THE CARDELLI COLLECTION

A Product of Seventeenth Century Classicism
or an Interpretative Paradigm?

Abstract

The paper aims to consider Cardelli collection of antiquities as a minor example pertaining to a mechanism of emulation and social ascent of the great 17th-century collections of antiquities in Rome. With this mind, we can see the reflection of the debate between the two opposite ideals of iudicium and ingenium. The oscillation between these two poles of philological practice is reflected on what has been defined by I. Faldi as the “mystification of the ancient.” One of the major representatives of this new stream was Orfeo Boselli, a pupil of Cristoforo Stati and François Duquesnoy, who restored the Dionysian reliefs preserved in the Cardelli palace in Rome. Accordingly, both ancient and pseudo-antique works will be presented along the transcription of archival texts from the Cardelli Archive kept in the Capitoline Historical Archive in Rome that are relevant to the acquisition, cataloguing, and restoration of the objects.

Keywords: emulation, iudicium, ingenium, mystification, pseudo-antique works

INTRODUCTION

Between the 16th and 17th centuries, Rome lived as a cosmopolitan city in which the interest in antiquarian culture merged with its continuous and surprising urban transformation favored both by the papacy and the noble families who decided to establish their residences there. The taste of adorning and decorating

palaces and grand villas with ancient sculptures and archaeological finds was spreading more and more. This resulted in an increasing motivation towards the restoration, integration, and completion of ancient works of art. Artists continued to be salaried by noble families with the ultimate goal of restoring the integrity of the pieces of ancient art, a requirement deemed essential for their display. In this period, they were also commissioned to produce new works which were to be exhibited next to the old ones. Whereas on the one hand, the ideological attitude of these sculptors towards the ancient is similar to that of the previous generation and remains heavily influenced by the myth of the perfection of classicism, on the other hand, there appear first symptoms of a culture in which artists feel free to distinguish themselves from their predecessors. They are no longer dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants, but creators of their own world. As a tangible sign of power and social prestige, these new collections of antiquities, mostly sculptures, constituted a sort of proof of nobility (Cugnoni 1883: 674 n. 51)¹ for their owners who were able to jump into the tradition of the illustrious Roman families of the antiquity.²

As for the ideological position of Baroque artists in general (not only sculptors), it is important to remember that a Baroque theory was never formulated.³ Unlike, therefore, the classicists, who since the beginning were provided with a set of theoretical principles (Félibien 1666–1668; Bellori 1672; Agucchi 1947) elaborated within their own circle and delineated the conceptual foundations for their creations, in the case of Baroque artists it is only from their own verbal testimonies that we must try to extract their ideas on art wherever they have been handed down to us.

It is, however, interesting to note that for all substantial diversity in the artistic works modelled after the antique taken by the sculptors of the 17th century, there is a considerable similarity of theoretical positions. The differences are mainly limited to the way of interpreting the ancient and to the choice of the

- 1 According to the humanist Enea Silvio Piccolomini, the proof of nobility lies in protecting and preserving antiquities instead of destroying them; Daltrop (1989: 58); Picozzi (1998: 56 nn. 11–12).
- 2 See the Roman residence of the Colonna family in Piazza Ss. Apostoli on the slopes of the Quirinale Hill who erected a building on the remains of the substructures of the *Serapeum* staircase equipped with a loggia decorated with sculptures from the same area. Musso (1990: 14); Scaglia (1992: 41); Picozzi (1998: 65 n. 12).
- 3 Bialostocki (1977: 29) expresses the idea that the concept of “baroque theory” can actually be identified in a wider sector but not in the specific field of figurative arts, as in this case.

historical period of ancient art most consonant with the sensitivity of individual artists.

THE MYSTIFICATION OF THE ANTIQUE IN THE 17TH CENTURY AND THE CARDELLI EXAMPLE

In the period from the mid-16th century to the mid-17th century, we see a progressive departure from the ideal beauty canons of the Renaissance, while a real philological exercise on the ancient begins. As they continue to appreciate the perfection of sculpture in ancient masterpieces, the 17th-century Roman sculptors do actually what suits them. Or, at the other extreme, they perpetrate the most insane looting and mystification of ancient sculptures, which is, however, a testimony of a wild passion for classical antiquity. In this regard, we have rightly spoken of a debate in 17th-century Roman sculpture between classical norm and inventive freedom, in other words between *iudicium* (reason) and *ingenium* (imagination).⁴

It is in this historical juncture that the activity of the restorer of Palazzo Cardelli, Orfeo Boselli (Cagiano de Azevedo 1948: 28–29; Sparti 1998: 96–97; Fortunati 2000: 69–101; Picozzi 2003: 90; Ebert-Schifferer 2005: 308), fits in, as confirmed by the receipt contained in the ledger of 1663–1682.⁵

The current external façade of the building is the result of the renovation and artistic redevelopment undertaken in four different phases promoted by the counts Alessandro Cardelli (1553–1618), Asdrubale Seniore (1594–1651), Carlo Cardelli (1626–1662) and, finally, Alessandro Cardelli (1828–1894).

Alessandro Cardelli, who entrusted the management over the project to the architect Francesco da Volterra, conducted the first phase of the work, which began in 1592.⁶

4 Opinion expressed by Faldi (1992: 223), who adds that the two are the same as used by Quintiliano to indicate two dialectical terms of the expressive process.

5 ASC, AC, Div. II, *Giornale dal 1663 al 1682*, 24 aprile 1663, T. H, f. 32: “Al signor Orfeo Buselli scultore quindici mila buoni come sopra paganili a’ bon conto de bassirilievi restaurati, e da restaurarsi nella Casa Grande”.

6 Scano (1961: 22–25); Mori (1997: 78); Ebert Schifferer (2005: 203–204). ASC, AC, Div. III, T. 184, f. 1 says: “Io Alessandro Cardelli f[acc]io memoria come in questo giorno 8 di giugno 1592 ho cominciato a fabricare, et più per commodita che per seguire la fabbrica comin-

The restructuring was interrupted for the first time in 1603 following the death of Laura Mancini, wife of Alessandro Cardelli. The resumption of the work took place in 1612 (Scano 1961: 22; Ebert Schifferer 2005: 304 n. 5) and the project was continued until 1633 under the supervision of Asdrubale Seniore, son of Alessandro Cardelli. Starting from 1633, the son of Asdrubale, Carlo Cardelli, took over.

Carlo continued the work financed previously by his father Asdrubale, dedicating himself to the creation of stuccos and decorative niches that focused on the main staircase⁷ and at the main floor.⁸ His name appears engraved on the upper doors of the apartments on each floor as well as below the family coat of arms on the second floor, according to the custom of the Roman palaces of the late Renaissance (Letarouilly 1840–1857: 197 pl. 57; Scano 1961: 24; Frommel 1985: 139; Mori 1997: 35; Ebert Schifferer 2005: 304).

Based on the documents in the family archive, we can say that the renovation promoted by Carlo Cardelli was one of the most prolific and innovative, since it led to the creation of a stable with the capacity of a dozen horses; new rooms on the ground floor; a second noble apartment located on the second floor and equipped with an uncovered loggia and a terrace; and, finally, an additional noble apartment located on the ground floor with two reception rooms decorated with stuccos and frescoes and three rooms for private use (Ebert Schifferer 2005: 304). It is also to Carlo that we owe the reconstruction of the chapel “a volta, et adornata con suoi stucchi, pitture, et oro con un'altra camera contigua pur a volta, stuccata e dipinta.”⁹

The existing first floor apartment also retains a terrace decorated with statues and fountains (Ebert Schifferer 2005: 304). In addition, the floor and the architectural lines of the rooms underwent renovations in different places with the use of stucco and gilding¹⁰. On the death of Carlo Cardelli in 1662, the tutor

ciata, et qui notero tutte le spese che giornalmente si faranno”, and a little further on the same page: “L'adi X ho fatto altra risoluzione, et ho cominciato a fare buttare da fondamenti al tetto quella parte di facciata della mia casa che e della p[rim]a detta facciata come tutto il resto era di pietra busa et cattiva materia si rifara tutta di tavolozza...”

7 ASC, AC, Div. I, *Memoria degli accrescimenti e miglioramenti fatti nel palazzo Cardelli*, T. 146, f. 1 says: “Si è fatta tutta la scala maestra da' fondam[en]ti p[er]fino in cima di pianta magnifica”.

8 ASC, AC, Div. II, T. H, f. 32, “Giornale dal 1663 al 1682”.

9 ASC, AC, Div. X, sez. 2a, t. 146, f. 13, “Memoria degli accrescimenti, et miglioramenti fatti nel Palazzo Cardelli parte da Asdrubale, e parte da Carlo seniori Cardelli”.

10 According to the suggestion of S. Ebert Schifferer, the renovation promoted from 1592 and concluded with the interventions of Carlo Cardelli were not dictated by technical neces-

of his son Asdrubale Juniore, Francesco Falconieri, granted the rent of Palazzo Cardelli to Domenico Colonna for 550 scudi. This event is quite important from a historical point of view since on this occasion, an inventory of the assets and decorations in the building was compiled.¹¹ This description discloses that the extraordinary decorations corresponding to the entrances of the apartments were a prelude to reaching the main hall; from there, through the staircase, you had access to an arrangement of the apartments that corresponded to the architectural ceremony of the Roman Renaissance palaces (Frommel 1985: 139; Waddy 1990: 4–5).¹²

sity but by the willingness on the part of the family members to renew and raise their social standard through the promotion of architectural changes in line with the current late Renaissance and Baroque trends, as was also the case with the palaces of the Mattei and Falconieri families: Howard (1982: 51). However, the creation of two identical noble apartments as well as the insertion of an additional noble apartment on the ground floor leaves room for a multitude of logistical options such as, for example, the idea to have self-contained suites for rent or the decision to distinguish the main apartment in which to live from a secondary apartment used for representative purposes or the possibility of having two separate housing structures in the same building related to two branches of the family. Ebert Schifferer (2005: 304–305).

- 11 ASC, AC, Div. Misc. II, sez. 2a, T. 146, f. 13. In T. 146, ff. 123–124 says: “Schala Grande cominciando dall’ultimo piano di sopra per scendere a basso. Alla Porta della Sala sopradetta: Arme di Casa Cardelli di stucco con altri lavori simili ben condizionati. Nella muraglia del piano di detta scala: Volta con diversi lavori di stucco senza alcuna rottura. Nel muro di detto Piano doi bassi rilievi antichi con cornice di stucco senza rottura alcuna... Nel fine di detto Caposcale per andare à basso... due ovati con festoni di stucco e altri lavori simili senza lesione alcuna. Porta della sala del Primo Appartamento Nobile sopra detta Porta un ovato con festone attorno con una statueta in piedi di sei palmi con due statue nude di huomini di stucco. Nel Muro di detto Piano due Bassi rilievi con cornici attorno di stucco e diversi fogliami et animali simili senza lesione... Terza scala ò Branco per andare à basso. Nel fine di detta schala Piano con lavori di stucco ben condizionati. Nel fine di detta Schala due ovati senza statue con suoi fenestrini di stucco... 4° Schala ò branco per andare à basso all’entro-ne. Nel piano di detta schala. Nella volta diversi lavori di stucco ben condizionati, et dalli lati del detto Piano Due ovati alti con sua base da mettervi statue con cornice lisce, e diversi lavori di stucco. Porta di detto piano della stanzola... sopra à detta Un basso rilievo piccolo di marmo. Porta a mano destra del detto Antrone per entrare nelle stanze terreno... sopra di detta Porta un Ovato con busto di marmo d’Imperatore con lavori di stucco”.
- 12 The alternation between ancient bas-reliefs and architectural niches inside which busts are inserted also occurs in the layout of the staircase of Palazzo Mattei di Giove: Panofsky Soergel (1967: 122 n. 53–123 n. 60); Guerrini (1982: 21–22 tavv. V–IX). The main staircase of this palace was built between 1607 and 1609 and was subsequently decorated with sculptures, reliefs, statues, and portraits. A plausible explanation for this resemblance could be the relationship between Count Asdrubale Cardelli Seniore and the Marquis Asdrubale

The interest of Carlo Cardelli in the acquisition of works of artistic value is confirmed by an act of commission and sale of 7 October 1654, which provides for the purchase of two alabaster statues “with feet, hands and metal heads gilded, made by the sculptor Nicola Menghino.”¹³ At the death of Carlo Cardelli, Monsignor Francesco Falconieri, legal guardian of the count’s son Asdrubale, sold the statues to Agostino Chigi for 250 shields in 1663.¹⁴

In the same years, O. Boselli carried on his restoration and critical reworking, while bringing together various ancient fragments of different origins gave him a new plasticity in a timeless and history-free decorative context. The process is that of a mythologization of an antiquity deemed the golden age of art, but whose historical and stylistic dynamics are not understood and to which new stylistic meanings and perspectives are attributed.¹⁵

This action consists of a total of five reliefs divided into two groups: above the front doors of the first floor, there is a relief depicting the childhood of Dionysus and one depicting the Dionysian *thiasos*, while on the second floor, there are reliefs with Dionysus resting and with Silenus, both in a specular position, faced by a relief depicting the Muses on the right side door above (Matz, Duhn 1881: n. 2252, 2311. Matz 1969: 411 n. 36 Beil. 106, 1. Matz 1975: 493 n. 343 pl. 335, 502–505 pl. 347. Ferrari, Papaldo 1999: 417. Picozzi 2003: 112 n. 8). In view of this enumeration, it is evident that the Dionysian theme clearly prevails.

Mattei, who commissioned the embellishment of the staircase of his palace with busts of emperors in 1634: Ebert Schifferer (2005: 307). ASC, AC, Misc. II, T. 140 f. 1: “a scorniciare e lavorare la pietra simile a quelli del palazzo dell’Ill.mo Sig. Asdrubale Mattei”.

13 ASC, AC, Div. I, T. 6, f. 13; AC, Div. I, FC, T. 216, 11 aprile 1663: “Riscossi dall’Ecc.mo Don Agostino Chigi, e sono scudi 150 p. pezzo di due statuette di alabastro bianco con teste, mani, et piedi di metallo dorato et suo zoccolo di marmo nero scorniciato ovale; et scudi 100p. doi piedistalli p. suddette statue di commesso bianco, et nero marmellato di giallo, vneduti al suddetto S. ra = scudi 250”.

14 Agostino Chigi, Prince Farnese, was the nephew of the reigning pontiff. He also purchased, among other things, four busts of emperors with pedestals for 400 shields; eight carved and gilded stools for 223.20 shields, a buggy for 160 shields, harnesses for 90 shields and more. The proceeds from the sale were, in part, donated to works in suffrage of the deceased: celebration of Masses in the family chapel in Trinità de ‘Monti and donations to the Institute of the lost spinsters of Santa Eufemia and to the nuns “Barberine”, see ASC, AC, Div. I, T. 11, f. 10.

15 Here it is preferred the thesis according to which it is formed by pieces taken from ancient originals assembled together to receive a new context and a new artistic form: Faldi (1992: 217); Picozzi (2003: 90).

The first Dionysian relief (Fig. 1) depicts an episode from Dionysus' childhood. This type of iconography is generally chosen for the decoration of child sarcophagi (Matz, Duhn 1881: 28 n. 2252; Turcan 1966: 431–440 pl. 22 a; Matz 1968: 343 tav. 106, 1). This notion is confirmed by the cyclical narrative form, a feature that often includes events related to the episodes of the birth and childhood of Dionysus in which we witness a juxtaposition of separate scenes such as, for example, the death of Semele, the birth of Dionysus from the thigh of Zeus, the bath of the new-born, the child riding a ram, the establishment of his cult, the playful reception of his attributes (Zanker 2008: 135–166). The scenes are never presented in an orderly chronological fashion and they rarely appear on the sarcophagus itself. They generally constitute separate episodes. The classicism of the figures imbues the scene with a sense of tranquility and transports it to a bucolic realm free of space-time patterns (Huskinson 1996: 30–39). Interestingly, the main narrative picture of the relief is not influenced by any dramatic or distressing atmosphere. The events concerning the dramatic abandonment of the new-born baby, saved by Zeus after the death of his mother Semele, whose birth was induced by lightning, and the subsequent incubation period spent inside Zeus' thigh, are omitted. The story that follows from this narration, therefore, seems to suggest timeless, idyllic, and “indefinite” images. What interested the artists was the possibility of recreating the idyllic and carefree atmosphere in which the child had lived during his short life. The relief shows the blessed life of the child in the midst of nymphs who take care of him and make daily gestures, such as the bath, which reassure him and associate him with any other new-born.

The figures of satyrs and Silenus give the background a familial atmosphere to the point of taking on the appearance of grandparents (Zanker 2008: 135–166). The playful aspect of the story is underlined by a relief from München (Matz 1968: 413, tav. 255 n. 170) in which the god holds the fan hidden by a veil, the sacred *liknon* (Matz 1968: 413, tav. 255 n. 170), as if it were a toy. In addition to the temporal dynamics of the representation, the core of the Bacchic message is also highlighted. In identifying the deceased child with Dionysus, whose birth had followed a death, a possible return to life is envisaged, albeit in forms unknown beforehand (Matz 1968: 413, tav. 255 n. 170). Both Friedrich von Duhn and Robert Turcan considered the relief to be the result of a 17th-century integration on the basis of an ancient original (Ebert Schifferer 2005: 309–310, 308 Abb. 9). The scene is comparable stylistically and iconographically to the one on the left side of a lid resting on a sarcophagus in the

Camposanto of Pisa (Matz 1968: 316–318 tav. 191,1; 413 tav. 255), with a relief from a child's sarcophagus preserved at the Glyptothek in Monaco, and with a relief preserved in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore (Lehmann-Hartleben, Olsen 1942: 10–12 f. 2).

The first two reliefs have the figures of Ino, Dionysus, and the nymph sitting with an amphora, while in the third, coming from the tomb of the Calpurnii Pisones¹⁶ in Rome, the nymph with an amphora is absent from the scheme. Turcan recognizes a certain alertness and alarm in the attitudes of the characters in the Cardelli relief, noting that one of the three female characters tries to hide the infant by throwing a restless look to the left, so much so that the nurse covers him promptly with his *peplum* (Turcan 1966: 431–440).

On the Pisa lid, the same atmosphere of anguish is evident in the male figure – to be identified possibly with Heracles or with a brother of Semele (Illyrio or more likely Polydoro) – who rushes to the right (Turcan 1966: 431–440). He is in full alarm, his cloak swells under a wind in feverish agitation. In this regard, we believe we can report the verses of Nonnos of Panopolis that could be used for the description of the specimens from Rome and Pisa (*Dionysiaca*, IX, 29–34¹⁷). The mere presence of Actaeon prevents us from continuing with the parallelism. In these circumstances, the nurse should represent Ino: but the affectionate gesture of the bearded man does not facilitate her identification. The nymph on the side is reminiscent of a scene from the Philadelphus' *pompè* that associates the birth of Dionysus with the bubbling of miraculous springs. According to C. Robert, the interpretation of the nymph is associated with a *Quellnymphē*.

Heydemann (1880: 430–432) would readily identify the bearded figure with Silenus, were it not for the fact the old companion of the nymphs is bald and rarely seen wearing a female chiton tight at the waist (at the most, he sometimes

16 It is an underground burial chamber discovered in the Salario district, within the Bonaparte area, in 1885. Based on the brick stamps and the iconographic and stylistic analysis of the sculptures that appear on the sarcophagi, the sepulchre is assumed to be constructed in the Antonine era: Lanciani (1885: 35); Kleiner (1977: 79); Huskinson (1996: 86).

17 Gigli Piccardi 2003: Nonn. *Dionysiaca*, IX, 29–34: Αἱ δὲ λαξοῦσαι Βάκχον ἐπηχύναντο, καὶ εἰς στόμα παιδὸς ἐκάστη ἀθλιξέων γλαγέεσσιν ἀνέβλυνεν ἰκμάδα μαζῶν. Καὶ πάϊς ἀντικέλευθον ἐς οὐρανὸν ὄμμα τιταίνων ὕπτιος ἦεν ἄυπνος, ἀμοιχαίρῃσι δὲ ῥυταῖς ἡέρα λακτίζων διδυμάονι τέρπετο παλμῶ (“Having taken Bacchus in their arms, they each put the milk coming from their breasts into the baby's mouth without him having to suck them. The newborn, turning his eyes to the sky in front of him, lying on his back, remains awake, rather having fun kicking in the air by throwing both feet alternately”).

wears a flowing robe) and the snake never belongs to what we know to be his usual attributes. According to C. Robert, it is a mountain divinity dressed in a costume reminiscent of the theatrical one, composed of a sleeved chiton and high-waisted dress.¹⁸ The difficulty in accepting this hypothesis lies in the observation that, generally, mountain divinities are always naked, with a flap of cloak on the legs or sometimes on the shoulder. Furthermore, generally, they never hold snakes as attributes, but a branch or a shrub, and they appear perched on a rocky surface against the background of the composition.

Although not in full conformity with the Silenus of the Cardelli relief, this interpretation can be suggested for the Silenus that appears on the lid of the Pisa sarcophagus, where we can clearly distinguish a pine twig. However, this type of plastic rendering with beard and abundantly long hair, this androgynous god hairstyle exactly reflect the iconography of Dionysos-Sabatius,¹⁹ the incarnation of the god *Père* (Turcan 1966: 431–440), as seen elsewhere on imperial-era sarcophagi.²⁰

18 C. Robert's opinion on this matter is somewhat complex. In proposing the identification of Silenus who accompanies the Muses with a mountain deity, he also affirms the impossibility of conferring a univocal interpretation on the relief, leaving any suspicion on his possible iconological analysis to the *Verdacht der Ergänzung*: Robert (1919: 306).

19 The cult of Sabazios arose in Phrygia at the beginning of the 1st millennium BC and appeared in Greece in the late 5th century BC. Its myth originates from the union of Zeus, in the form of a bull, with Demeter, from which Persephone was born and from the subsequent union of Zeus, in the form of a snake, with Persephone, from which Dionysus was born in the shape of a bull. This parental dyad of Orphic ancestry clarifies, in iconographic terms, the reason why in the Dionysian representations, the ceramists of the 5th century BC oscillate between two types of Dionysus, one bearded and dressed in the oriental style, the other youthful and beardless, and then landed in Roman art (2nd–3rd centuries AD), in which we witness the persistence of the two types. In the classical age, starting from 430 BC, the juvenile type of Dionysus is codified; the god appears beardless and with long hair surmounted by an ivy or vine crown together with the miter, naked or semi-panelled and accompanied by the attributes of the *thirsoi* and the *kantharos*: Buccino (2013: 18). It is assumed that the cult of Sabazios had a purely oracular character and that its diffusion was limited to a popular environment. Evidence of this cult can be found in the *Vespae* (Arist. *Vespae* 9–13), which shows the oracular character of the god through the infusion of sleep in the subjects who adored him, and in the *Birds* in which Cybele and Sabatius are invoked: Arist. *Aves*, 876 ff. Another testimony is that offered by the *Lysistrata*, in which the ridiculous religious practices addressed by women to Sabatius and Adonis are criticized (Arist. *Lys.* 387 ss.). One of the clearest examples of religiosity of the 4th century BC is offered by the testimony of Demosthenes: Bianchi, Vermaseren (1982: 649–670).

20 Here, Turcan compares a bronze bust from Pompeii in which, however, some attributes are missing, such as the fawn skin (*nébris*), the ivy shoot, and the bunches of grapes. The recog-

On the other hand, this Zeus-Sabazios, which is mentioned in the Orphic hymns at the end of the 2nd century AD, that is about ten or twenty years later than our reliefs (although the dating of the hymns is not absolutely certain), is represented as Semele's father, "the resonant Eiraphiotes" (Turcan 1966: 431–440).

A tradition, that of Euripides in *The Bacchae*, brings back to Zeus the gesture of having saved the child himself from the flames of his lightning, although the vulgar attributed the rescue to Hermes. According to this same version of *The Bacchae*, lightning strikes only after Semele's normal conception, and Bacchus's maternal aunts see this as a deserved punishment for a false pretension. From there, he was taken to the nymphs of the Cithaeron to escape Hera's persecution.

The second Dionysian relief (Fig. 2) represents the Dionysian *thiasos*, which shows up in figurative arts from the early 6th century BC until late antiquity (Schöne 1987: 1–11, 23). This growing interest in the procession of Dionysus in the decoration of Roman sarcophagi in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, however, does not attract an equally intense and serious reflection in modern research. Numerous studies have been dedicated to Dionysus himself, both in the religious and philological fields, with questions about the origin, worship, and meaning for the development of theatre in the foreground. Precisely for this reason, it is surprising that a similar philological study is missing with regard to *thiasos* (Schöne 1987: 1–11, 23). Dionysus appears as the only god to be always accompanied by a procession. Unlike other deities, his nature seems to be less characterized by his individual actions and events, which is reflected in the constant presence of the characters of his retinue. So far, all attempts to clarify the etymology of the word *thiasos*, commonly associated with the Greek word *thyrsos*, have failed. In a broader sense, we can say that the term was used by cultured private parties that used to come together to offer a sacrifice to the divinity by preparing parades and festivals of various kinds for the occasion. Although the first epigraphic attestations of the term date back only to the Hellenistic age, it is necessary to go back at least to the 7th century BC in search for its beginnings. In this period, Alcman mentioned associations of men who dedicated themselves to intoning *Peana* on the occasion of the common meals

nition of the image of Dionysus Sabatius in this bust is based on the comparison with a character represented on a sarcophagus of the National Roman Museum (dressed in a long chiton, with *tympanon* and *kalathos*) and on the literary text of Diodorus (Diod. III, 63, 3–4; IV, 4, 1–2).

(Schöne 1987: 1–11, 23). In the following century, Solon mentions the *thiasos* referring to *thiasotai* association. In classical times, the term came to designate the festive context dedicated to Dionysus and was also used by Herodotus in the episode related to the Scythian king Skyles, who, having decided to be initiated into the Bacchic mysteries, undertook a *thiasos* through the streets of the city of the Boristeni and received the consecration of Dionysus-Bacchus in the Greek city of Olbia (Hdt, I, 79, 1–5). A poetic but quite informative description of the Dionysian *thiasos* is also to be found in the *Bacchantes* by Euripides (Eur., *Bacch.* 55–61²¹), first staged in the year 406 BC, in which men, Theban women, Maenads, and satyrs form a procession that surrenders completely to Dionysus. The size of the figures and the arrangement of the first four female characters with the central caesura represented by the three-quarter Maenad help to frame the relief in the so-called series B of the sarcophagi which bears the images of the Dionysian *thiasos*. The distinctive features of this series can be seen in the large number of figures participating in the *thiasos*, in their tight arrangement, and in the substantial height of the relief which has strong chiaroscuro accents owing to the use of the drill (Ebert Schifferer 2005: 309–310). The chronology of this series is in the range between 180 and 250–260 AD. In particular, the left arm of the Maenad stretches with a curvilinear motion in the direction of a bunch of grapes, which, in the original composition, is probably part of a branch that extended for the entire upper edge of the sarcophagus case. Based on these details, it is possible to suggest a date between 230 and 240 AD for the Cardelli relief.

Finally, the last two Dionysian reliefs were considered in the Matz-Duhn repertoire as parts of two halves of the front of the same sarcophagus (Matz 1968: 502–505 tav. 347). The left half was associated with the relief with Dionysus' rest (Matz, Duhn 1881: 72–74 n. 2311; Robert 1919: 306–316. Ebert Schifferer 2005: 305) (Fig. 3), the right half with the relief with Silenus' rest (Fig. 4). No doubts had been raised about their antique origin, although similar representations on

21 Di Benedetto 2004: Eur., *Bacch.* 55–61: ἀλλ' ὦ λιποῦσαι Τμῶλον, ἔρυμα Λυδίας, θιάσος ἐκόμισα παρέδρους καὶ ξυωεμπόρους ἐμοί, αἵρεσθε πάπιχώρι' ἐν Φρυγῶν πόλει τύπανα, ῥεας τε μητρὸς ἐμά θ' εὐρήματα, Βασίλειά τ' ἀμφὶ δώματ' ἐλθοῦσαι τάδε κτυπεῖτε Πενθέως, ὡς ὁρᾷ Κάδμου πόλις (Therefore, having left the Tmolos, bulwark of Lydia, you are my thiasos, you women who from barbarian populations I have brought with me, my companions in peace and travel, raise the typical hand drums of the land of the Phrygians high, one of mine invention and of the mother Rhea. Having come here, around the house of the sovereign, the abode of Pentheus, now make noise so that the city of Cadmus will notice you).

Roman sarcophagi were not attested either as regards the decorative or dimensional arrangements.

Robert (1916: 306–316) concluded that it was a pastiche. On the basis of his knowledge of the Dionysian sarcophagi, he had no difficulty with point out comparable counterparts for each of the figures on the Cardelli reliefs, which had been almost ignored by scholars. Robert believed he could extrapolate eight different fragments of six different sarcophagi from the reliefs, using a purely archaeological method of investigation. He did not use artistic cognitive methods, which are often employed in archaeological studies.

As early as a year after the publication of his work, Sieveking tried to formulate the hypothesis that both reliefs originally formed a single complex. Although he never studied the genesis of these pieces directly during the Renaissance and in the modern age, he decided to attribute them to a late ancient era, in particular to the Constantinian age. According to Sieveking, they represented the visit of Dionysus to Icarius and the subsequent donation by the god of the vine. Amelung (Matz 1968: 502–505) re-proposed the problem, offering new solutions to the interpretation of the restorations and expressing an aesthetic justification according to which “the reliefs are particularly ugly”. It is difficult to solve the iconographic problem. On the basis of the plasticity and the drapery of the figures, the style of execution would seem to approach the Antonine period.

Further information on the restoration technique followed in the execution of these works can be found in chapter XIX of book II of his work:

Disse che la figura principale dee avere il più degno luogo, che è al mezzo, o alla man dritta dell'opera, e dee essere di abito, di proporzione, di atto superiore a tutte le figure esistenti. Che l'azioni, le quali elli opera, devono tutte attentamente osservare, fuggendo tutte le cose le quali possono far diversione, o divisione di azione. Mi rimetto nei restanti esempi nominati e alle altre cose dette. La prima operazione dunque è sopra tavola ben piana collocare il modello, e riguardarlo con ogni squisitezza possibile, intendendo colcato e non dritto, e chi vi segnasse una croce in mezzo dell'altezza e larghezza, per più avvantaggio, non farebbe male. Fatto questo, nelle parti di sopra e di sotto, bisogna porre due regoletti, tanto alti quanto è alto il maggiore rilievo delle figure, ed un altro nel fianco sinistro a riguardarlo, fermati con cera, o altro modo, in squadra perfetta e che siano pari, a segno che non alzino uno più dell'altro in alcun cotto; e chi vi ponesse il quarto regolo, onde il modello stesso come dentro un botaro riguardato, sarebbe anco meglio. Questo telaro così riguardato conviensi col compasso partirlo in otto, o dieci parti di sotto e di sopra, con numeri 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 ecc. e così li fianchi con numeri corrisposti, cioè che l'uno di sopra

sta adeliritto con l'uno di sotto, e così gli altri va discorrendo. Questi numeri infilati sono fatti a fine di porre le squadre sopra -sempre- alle parti ed a che siti si vogliono, per pigliare distanze e profondità giuste. In somma, il modello così aggiustato è come un quadro graticolato per ben copiarlo, come usano li pittori negli originali di valore. Gli estremi della superficie del marmo si spianano e si riguardano perfettamente e si spartono in tanti pezzi, con i suoi numeri corrispondenti, come il modello. Poi con le scalette stabilite, segnando prima tutta la macchina delle figure, si può nel nome dell'Altissimo cominciare, avvertendo, come ho detto altrove, di lasciar la pietra sopra squadra e però osservare che il modello dà le misure sue dal di fuori di esso, perché in lui il telaro è parte dell'opera, e nel modello è di vantaggio. Il punto che dalla croce nel mezzo serve per riconoscere l'in qua e l'in là della figura, ed è di tanto valore, che con li due regoli soli nelle testate, senza li due dei fianchi può portar l'opera, atteso che egli può dare le distanze, e li regoli le calate. È ancora da avvertire, che si devono prima lavorare e finire le figure poste a man dritta dell'opera, che le altre; la ragione è che lavorando le altre si potrebbe restarvi ferri, ed averne disgusto, e così prima finir le superiori ed alte, che le inferiori e basse, per l'istesso rispetto.²²

The first part of this excerpt comprises some tips for the realization of reliefs after the antique. According to Boselli, one of the chief indications to follow is to emphasize the main figure of the relief by placing it in the center of the composition or, alternatively, on the right, while giving weight to his gestures and actions. In the second part of the text, some indications are illustrated for a correct management of the proportions and arrangement of the characters based on their role in the plot and development of the scene represented. In this sense, in fact, even the proportions to be used are essential because they not only establish a hierarchy between the characters but also guide the viewer's judgment by placing a lesser or greater emphasis on the importance of the figures. Unfortunately, there are no other archival indications that allow us to establish precisely the extent and quality of the restoration carried out by Boselli on the reliefs placed in proximity of the Palazzo Cardelli doorway. An important fact to be reckoned with is the anomaly (detected also by Ebert Schifferer in one of his important studies on the restoration of these reliefs [Ebert Schifferer 2005: 303–311]), according to which the date of the account paid to Orfeo Boselli would be after the death of Carlo Cardelli (1626–1662) and would, therefore, coincide with the date that refers to the accounts paid to creditors by Monsignor Francesco Falconieri, the guardian of his son Asdrubale Juniore. One may

22 Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Codice Palatino 833, O. BOSELLI, *Osservazioni della scultura antica d'Orfeo Boselli Romano*, Libro II, Cap. XIX.

wonder if it was not a transcription error in the compilation phase of the ledger. According to the suggestion of Ebert Schifferer, it is presumable that the date of 24 April 1663 reported in the ledger is to be considered²³ a *terminus ante quem* of the works carried out by the sculptor on the bas-reliefs, which must have already been completed by 7 October 1654 under Carlo Cardelli.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the considerations made so far, it would be a stretch to see the Dionysian reliefs as the result of a homogeneous and organically conceived decorative program aimed at glorifying such themes as intoxication and the enjoyment of the pleasures of life. However, it is possible to track down some common points of iconographic reference suggested by Count Carlo Cardelli himself, who around the time of the restoration by O. Boselli, alluded to certain preferences in style and iconography in the agreement clauses with the sculptor Nicola Menghini.²⁴

Even though it is not, therefore, a collection of antiques of international resonance, it is evident that even in this case, it is possible to go back far beyond the material aspect of the individual pieces and in an eternal succession of events and characters, see one of the most deeply rooted needs of humanity: to leave a lasting trace of itself through its best image.

Abbreviations

- AC Archivio Cardelli
- ASC Archivio Storico Capitolino
- Div. Divisione
- f./ff. Foglio/fogli
- Fasc. Fascicolo
- Misc. Miscellanea
- T. Tomo

²³ *Ivi*

²⁴ ASC, AC, Div. I, FC, T. 6, fasc. 13, f. 453r.: “In oltre le dette statue debbano rappresentare ó qualche deità ó Virtù ó Vergini ó Imperatrici ó sia elettione vostra cioè ad elettione di detto Sig. Carlo” (Ebert Schifferer 2005: 310–311).

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Fig. 1. Roma, Palazzo Cardelli, Ground floor, Relief with childhood of Dionysos.

Fig. 2. Roma, Palazzo Cardelli, first floor, Dionysian relief with Thiasos.

Fig. 3. Roma. Palazzo Cardelli, second floor, relief with rest of Dionysos.

Fig. 4. Roma, Palazzo Cardelli, second floor, relief with Silenus resting.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4