



# Boselli's Philosophers Identified as Socrates and Plato

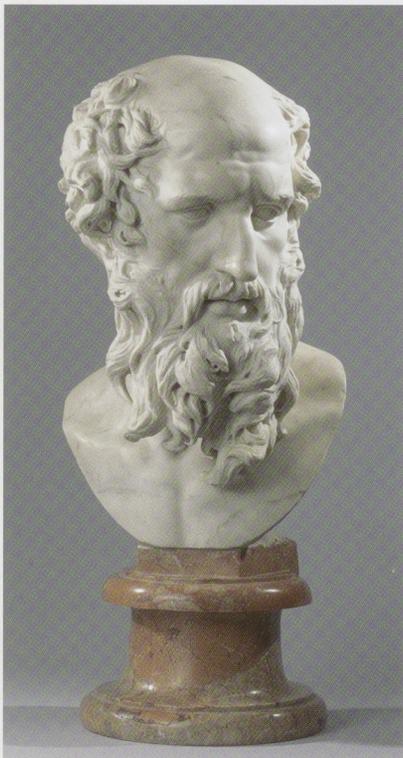
• MENNO JONKER •

In his article 'Sandrart's Philosophers on the "Amsterdam Parnassus"', Frits Scholten identified two busts of philosophers by Orfeo Boselli (1597-1667) to a design by François du Quesnoy (1597-1643) in the Rijksmuseum's collection as *Plato* and *Aristotle* (figs. 1 and 2).<sup>1</sup> In this contribution, I propose an alternative

*Detail of fig. 5*

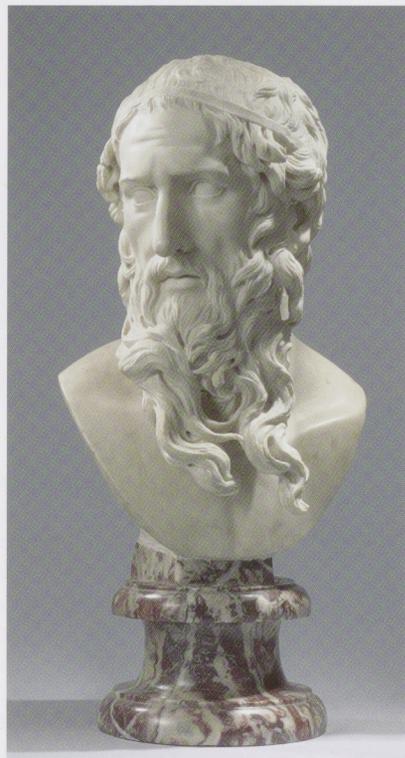
labelling of the busts based on contemporary examples.

Although Boselli's bust with the bald head (fig. 1) has fairly consistently been interpreted as Plato, authors have variously identified the bust with the headband (fig. 2) as Sophocles, Xenophon or Aristotle.<sup>2</sup> Scholten, too, described the first head as Plato and



*Fig. 1*

ORFEO BOSELLI TO A DESIGN BY FRANÇOIS DU QUESNOY, Here identified as *Socrates*, c. 1635-40. Marble, h. 44 cm (with pedestal 61 cm). Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, on loan from the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, BK-1986-44-A.



*Fig. 2*

ORFEO BOSELLI TO A DESIGN BY FRANÇOIS DU QUESNOY, Here identified as *Plato*, c. 1650. Marble, h. 46.5 cm (with pedestal 63 cm). Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, on loan from the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, BK-1986-44-B.



Fig. 3  
 BARTHOLOMÄUS  
 KILIAN II AFTER  
 JOACHIM VON  
 SANDRART,  
*Homer, Heraclitus,  
 Hippocrates,  
 Socrates, Sophocles,  
 Demosthenes*, print  
 in Joachim von  
 Sandrart, *L'Academia  
 Todesca della  
 Architectura,  
 Scultura e pittura:  
 Oder Teutsche  
 Academie der  
 Edlen Bau- Bild- und  
 Mahlerey-Künste...*,  
 Nuremberg 1675-80,  
 vol. 1, II-I-VIII, fig. h  
 (after p. 50).

the second as Aristotle, this time on the basis of an ode written by Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679) in 1644 to a Plato and Aristotle 'captured in stone' in the collection of the painter and collector Joachim von Sandrart (1606-1688).<sup>3</sup> The first directly traceable reference to Boselli's busts was made by the German traveller Zacharias von Uffenbach (1683-1734).

In 1711 he mentioned two marble busts representing Plato and Sophocles after a visit to the then owner Lambert ten Kate (1674-1731).<sup>4</sup> It is possible that these busts had been in Sandrart's possession, although the time that elapsed between Vondel's description in 1644 and the reference in 1711 could reasonably suggest two different pairs of philosophers – particularly since

Fig. 4  
 BARTHOLOMÄUS  
 KILIAN II AFTER  
 JOACHIM VON  
 SANDRART,  
*Plato, Theophrastus,  
 Aristotle, Seneca,  
 Democritus, Diogenes*,  
 print in idem, fig. 1  
 (after p. 52).



Vondel does not give a literal description of the pieces.<sup>5</sup> Supposing that these are the same busts, evidently both Von Uffenbach and Vondel took the bust without the headband (fig. 1) to be Plato, but there was some discussion about the second: Sophocles or Aristotle? A comparison with other early modern examples may shed light on this.

Every collection of any consequence contained classical and contemporary busts of philosophers, which were studied and published as prints with commentaries by, among others, Fulvio Orsini in Rome (1570), Johannes Faber in Antwerp (1606), André Thevet in Paris (1584), and Sandrart in Nuremberg (1675) (figs. 3 and 4).<sup>6</sup> Whereas a philosopher can

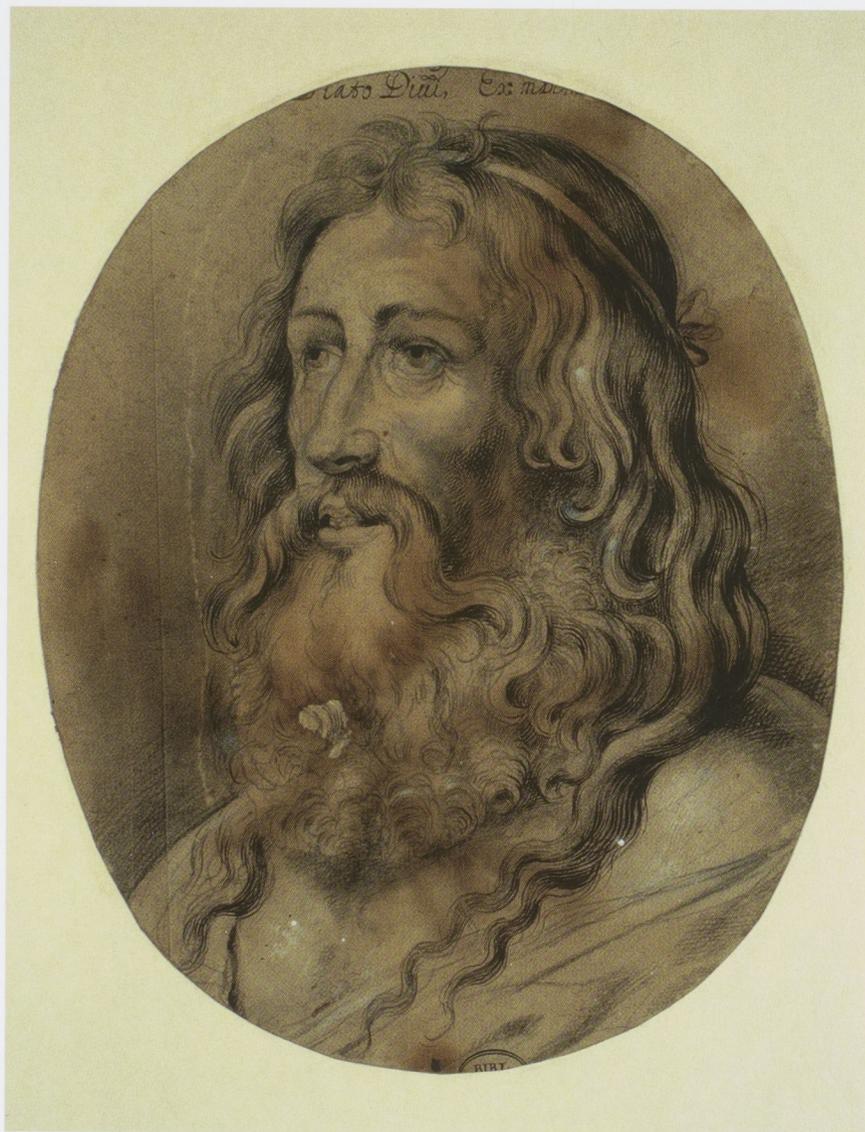


Fig. 5  
 PETER PAUL RUBENS,  
*Plato*, before 1609.  
 Drawing,  
 279 x 229 mm.  
 Göttingen,  
 Georg-August-  
 Universität  
 Collection, H 32.

usually be recognized in a painting by his attributes or an anecdotal context, a bust can generally only be identified on the basis of an inscription. Often, the physical features of classical thinkers are simply reduced to an old man with a beard. In the case of Boselli's bust with a headband (fig. 2), however, the headband itself provides us with a good clue, because by no means all philosophers were pictured with a fillet around their brow like

this. Neither was Aristotle, who was sometimes shown as a beardless youth, but was most often given a beard and a head covering (fig. 4, third medallion). This latter attribute is quite characteristic of both the Middle Ages and the early modern era.<sup>7</sup> One does, however, encounter the headband in images of Homer and Sophocles. Although the two are not depicted as pure thinkers, they do appear in sets of busts and prints of illustrious Greeks

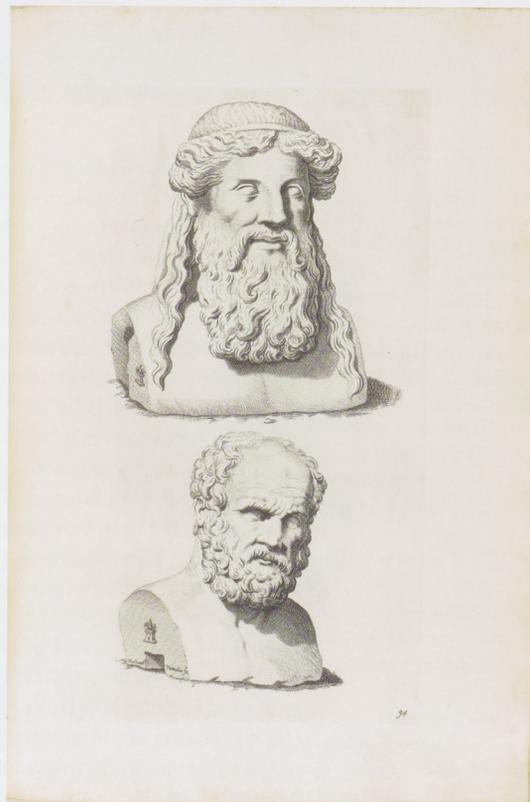


Fig. 6  
MICHIEL SNIJDEERS,  
Study sheet with  
drawing examples,  
after 1630.  
Etching and engraving,  
180 x 244 mm.  
Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum,  
purchased with  
the support of the  
F.G. Waller Fonds,  
RP-P-1996-81.

Fig. 7  
MICHEL NATALIS,  
Plato and Socrates,  
print in Joachim  
von Sandrart (ed.),  
*Galleria Giustiniana  
del marchese Vincenzo  
Giustiniani*, vol. 2,  
Rome 1640, fig. 34.

and Romans. Joachim von Sandrart also placed the two in medallions (fig. 3, the first and fifth medallions): Homer is readily identifiable by his blind look, while Sophocles has a short beard.<sup>8</sup>

In the seventeenth century, however, the characteristics of Boselli's bust with the long beard and headband (fig. 2) were reserved first and foremost for Plato, thanks in part to the publications of Orsini (issued by Theodoor Galle in 1570 and 1598), Faber (1606), Sandrart (1675) (fig. 4, first medallion) and lastly Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1685).<sup>9</sup> Plato's features can also be found in a drawing by Rubens (1577-1640) (fig. 5), which was owned by Johann Friedrich von Uffenbach (1687-1769), Zacharias's brother.<sup>10</sup> Lucas Vorsterman (1595-1675) later produced the study as a print,<sup>11</sup> which probably served in turn as the example for Michiel Sniijders's study sheet in the Rijksprentenkabinet (fig. 6). So, in short, if Boselli's bust represents Plato, who is the other philosopher (fig. 1)?



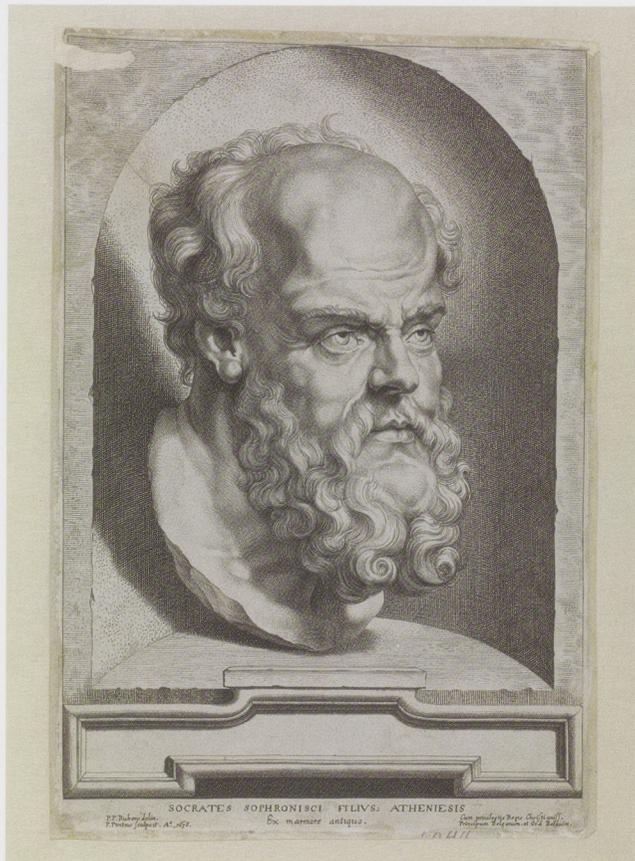
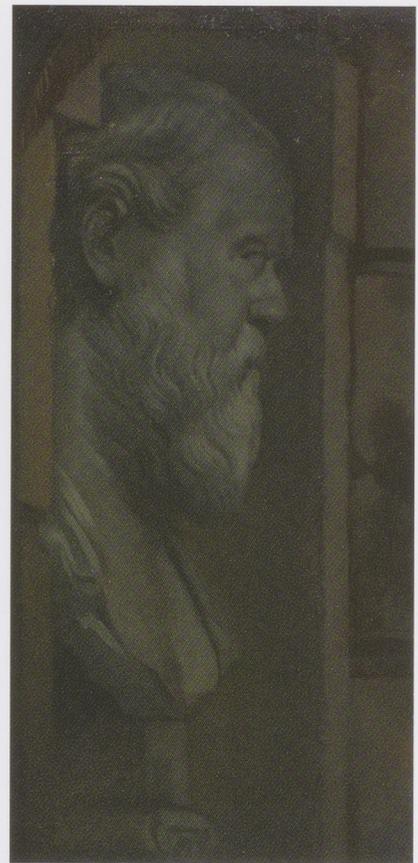


Fig. 8  
PAULUS PONTIVS  
AFTER RUBENS,  
*Socrates*, 1638.  
Engraving,  
315 x 211 mm.  
Koninklijk Museum  
voor Schone Kunsten.  
© Lukas – Art in  
Flanders vzw.

The fact that, according to the details of a sale in 1732, an unknown third bust of *Pindarus* (in what was probably a series) was made after an example in Giustiniani's collection is no coincidence.<sup>12</sup> This collection was famous for its classical objects and was curated by Joachim von Sandrart, who, as we have seen, owned (at least) two busts of philosophers when he lived in Amsterdam. He was also responsible for the two-volume *Galleria Giustiniana del marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani*.<sup>13</sup> This catalogue, produced around 1640, contains – as well as the anonymous philosopher referred to by Scholten – two prints of herms of Socrates and Plato: one of them was engraved by Michel Natalis (1610-1668) (fig. 7).<sup>14</sup> Yet again Plato can be recognized by his long, curling beard and his headband, while Socrates has a high,



prominent forehead and a bald crown. The characteristics of Plato's teacher – also seen in Boselli's bust with the bald pate – can moreover be found in a print by Bartholomäus Kilian II (1630-1696) after Sandrart (fig. 3, fourth medallion), in a print by Paulus Pontius (1603-1658) after Rubens (fig. 8),<sup>15</sup> and in the bust of Socrates in the portrait of Pieter de la Court painted by Abraham van den Tempel (ca. 1622-1672) (fig. 9).<sup>16</sup> A bronze bust of Socrates that came up in a sale at Christie's in 2006 bears a strong resemblance to Du Quesnoy's design (fig. 10).<sup>17</sup> Although Socrates is traditionally portrayed with a pug nose, the depiction here is less of a caricature. In neither bust (figs. 1 and 9) was any attempt made to imitate meticulously the classical style: the dynamism and flamboyance of the

beards make these busts unmistakably early modern.<sup>18</sup>

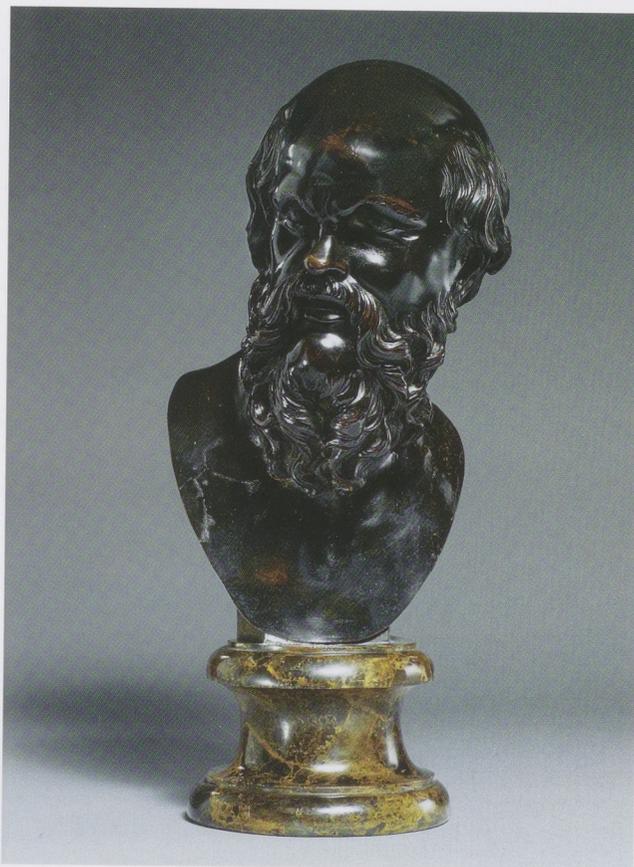
If Vondel really did see the same busts, his identification, like Von Uffenbach's, is incorrect. The characteristic features of Socrates – with a prominent forehead, bald head and curly beard – and of Plato – with a long, curling beard and a fillet around his head – were after all familiar in Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands in the circles of Giustiniani, Orsini, Boselli, Du Quesnoy, Sandrart, and Rubens. To sum up: it would appear that Boselli's two busts to a design by Du Quesnoy are not Plato and Aristotle, but Socrates and Plato.<sup>19</sup>

Fig. 9

ABRAHAM VAN DEN TEMPEL, *Pieter de la Court* (detail of the bust of Socrates), 1667. Oil on canvas, 133 x 106 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, purchased with the support of the Vereniging Rembrandt, SK-A-2243.

Fig. 10

Socrates, Italy, 17th or 18th century. Bronze and marble, h. 58.4 cm. Present whereabouts unknown.



## NOTES

1 This article was written in response to Frits Scholten, 'Sandrart's Philosophers on the "Amsterdam Parnassus"', *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin* 57 (2009), pp. 327-41. With thanks to Frits Scholten, Jenny Reynaerts and Volker Manuth.

2 A summary of the identifications of the two busts in the literature.

Vondel 1644:	Plato	Aristotle
Von Uffenbach 1711:	Plato	Sophocles
Richardson Jr 1718:	No identity	No identity
Ten Kate 1720/1725:	Plato	Sophocles/ Xenophon
Richardsons 1722/1728:	Philosopher	Philosopher
Röver 1732:	No identity	No identity
Sale Röver Jr 1806:	Philosopher	Philosopher
Sale Ebeling 1817:	Philosopher	Philosopher
Sale Sandoz 1819/20:	Plato	Aristotle
Flament 1822:	Plato	Aristotle
De Busscher 1878:	Plato/ Sophocles	Xenophon
Brummel 1942:	Plato	Xenophon

Van Gelder 1980: No identity No identity

Halsema-Kubes 1992: Plato/ Aristotle/  
Sophocles Xenophon

Scholten 2009: Plato Aristotle

For further details I refer to L. Brummel, 'Twee teruggevonden werken van François Duquesnoy', *Oud Holland* 59 (1942), pp. 97-101; J.G. van Gelder, 'Beelden en rariteiten' in de verzameling Valerius Röver', *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 31 (1980), pp. 341-54, esp. pp. 341-43; Scholten 2009.

3 Scholten 2009, p. 335 and note 24.

4 Idem, p. 327.

5 Despite the time lapse, Scholten describes it as 'highly likely' and 'very probable' that these are the same busts, see Scholten 2009, pp. 335 and 336.

6 Fulvio Orsini, *Imagines et elogia virorum illustrium et eruditorum ex antiquis lapidibus et nomismatibus expressa cum annotationibus ex bibliotheca Fulvi Ursini*, Rome 1570;

- Johannes Faber, *Illustrium imagines, ex antiquis marmoribus, nomismatibus et gemmis expressae, quae exstant Romae, maior pars apud Fulvium Ursinum* | Theodorus Gallaeus delineabat Romae ex archetypis incidebat Antverpiae MDXCIIIX, Antwerp (Plantijn) 1606; André Thevet, *Les Vrais Portraits et vies des hommes illustres Grecz, Latins, et payens recueilliz de leur tableaux, livres, medalles antiques & modernes...*, Paris 1584; Joachim von Sandrart, *L'Academia Todeasca della Architettura, Scultura e pittura: Oder Teutsche Academie der Edlen Bau- Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste...*, Nuremberg 1675-80. For the two prints see also the online version of Sandrart 1675-80: <http://ta.sandrart.net/254#pagetop> and <http://ta.sandrart.net/257#pagetop>, consulted on 11 April 2011.
- 7 For Aristotle see also Orsini 1570, p. 57; Thevet 1584, p. 63.
  - 8 Ten Kate also suggests Xenophon as a possible identification. However, the Greek author is usually shown without a headband, although he sometimes wears a laurel wreath.
  - 9 Orsini 1570, p. 53; Faber 1606, p. 112; Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Veterum illustrium Philosophorum, Poetorum, Rhetorum et Oratorum Imagines ex vetustis Nummis, Gemmis, Hermis, Marmoribus aliisque Antiquis Monumentis desumptae*, Rome 1685, fol. 28.
  - 10 See online catalogue text: [http://opal-niedersachsen.de/resolve/kunsdeung\\_grapze\\_680](http://opal-niedersachsen.de/resolve/kunsdeung_grapze_680), consulted on 11 April 2011. Zacharias von Uffenbach may have known Plato's features from the Rubens drawing. If so, it seems odd that he came to a different conclusion in 1711 when he saw the bust in the Ten Kate Collection.
  - 11 Lucas Vorsterman after Rubens, *Plato*, print, 13.6 x 9.4 cm, see Barbara Gaetgens in Barbara Gaetgens and Konrad Renger, *Rubens in der Grafik*, Göttingen (Universität Göttingen), Hannover (Landesmuseum) and Nuremberg (Museen der Stadt Nürnberg), Göttingen 1977, cat. 77, pp. 112-13, fig. 44e; D. De Hoop Scheffer (ed.), *Hollstein's Dutch & Flemish Etchings, Engravings And Woodcuts 1450-1700*, Roosendaal 1993, vol. 43.
  - 12 See J.G. van Gelder, 'Lambert ten Kate als kunstverzamelaar', *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 21 (1970), pp. 139-86, esp. p. 164, note 40; Scholten 2009, p. 341, note 39.
  - 13 Joachim von Sandrart (ed.), *Galleria Giustiniana del marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani*, Rome, vol. 2, c. 1640.
  - 14 The other is Theodor Matham, *Socrates and Plato*, print in Joachim von Sandrart (ed.), *Galleria Giustiniana del marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani*, vol. 2, Rome, c. 1640, fig. 35.
- Scholten mentions a print of an unidentified philosopher by Theodoor Matham, see Scholten 2009, p. 336, fig. 15.
- 15 Who, like Snijders, derived his design from Rubens. Sandrart appears to have used the same example as Rubens (fig. 3, fourth medallion and fig. 8).
  - 16 For Socrates see also Orsini 1570, pp. 50 and 51; Faber 1606, pp. 133 and 134; Thevet 1584, p. 78.
  - 17 Christie's, London, sold the piece on 6 July 2006, lot 248.
  - 18 Van Gelder cites Wittkower's term 'baroque classicism'; see Van Gelder 1980, p. 343.
  - 19 Raphael's fresco *The School of Athens* (1509-10) cited by Van Gelder and Scholten as an example for Boselli's two busts, does not seem to be very applicable, Van Gelder 1980, pp. 342-43; Scholten 2009, note 39. Plato looks more like the artist Leonardo da Vinci (with long hair and a bald skull), see for instance George L. Hersey, *High Renaissance Art in St Peter's and the Vatican: an Interpretive Guide*, Chicago and London 1993, p. 133, while Aristotle could even be identified as Marcus Aurelius (with curly hair and beard). The pair are thus solely recognized in the context of the School of Athens. Although Giorgio Ghisi's print of 1550 was widespread, the details of the physiognomy leave much to be desired because of the small dimensions: Raphael, *The School of Athens*, 1509-10, fresco, 500 cm x 770 cm, Stanza della Segnatura, Rome; Giorgio Ghisi after Raphael, *The School of Athens*, two engravings on two joined sheets, published by Hieronymus Cock in Antwerp, 1550.