



Cosimo's *Genius* and Ammannati's *Ingenium*: The Wax Model for the *Genio Mediceo*

• FRITS SCHOLTEN •

In 1582, arriving at the end of a long, successful career as a sculptor and architect, Bartolomeo Ammannati (1511-1592) wrote a letter to his fellows in the Accademia del Disegno in Florence.¹ He warned them not to make the same mistake he had – depicting fully nude figures – and expressed his profound regret for the ‘satyrs, fauns, and similar things’ that appeared on his famous *Neptune* fountain in Piazza della Signoria.² They had brought him but little fame and, worse still, had seriously troubled his conscience. Influenced by his close contacts with the Jesuits, Ammannati had distanced himself from his former career as a sculptor and devoted the last years of his life to his strong religious faith. Although he referred specifically to his most public sculpture, in the heart of Florence, he could equally well have mentioned his more modest, but no less nude fountain statue that could be seen at that time barely a stone’s throw from it: the *Genio Mediceo* (the genius of the Medici), which then stood in Palazzo Vecchio (fig. 2).³

The identity of the maker of this elegant bronze of a seated nude youth, now in Palazzo Pitti, was long obscure. In 2003, however, it could be securely credited to Ammannati.⁴ This convincing attribution was based on four sonnets by the Florentine lawyer Lelio Bonsi, which were published in

< Fig. 1
BARTOLOMEO
AMMANNATI,
*Modello for
the Genius of
Cosimo de’ Medici
(‘Genio Mediceo’)*,
Florence, c. 1556-57.
Pigmented beeswax
over an iron
armature, h. 31 cm.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum,
inv. no. BK-2018-6,
purchased with
the support of the
BankGiro Lottery.

November 1560. They appeared in *Il primo libro dell’opere toscane*, an anthology compiled by Laura Battiferra, a universally respected poet in Florence, who was also Ammannati’s wife. In his sonnets, Bonsi explicitly writes that the bronze statue was Ammannati’s creation and describes it as a ‘picciolo Atlante’, a little Atlas, holding a globe aloft in his left hand and with the star sign Capricorn tucked under his right arm. A preliminary study in wax for the *Genio Mediceo* was discovered, likewise around 2003, and was recently acquired by the Rijksmuseum (figs. 1, 3, 4).⁵ The wax sketch can be regarded as a three-dimensional exploration of the composition for the bronze fountain statue that was made around 1556-57. It is the only known certain sketch model by Ammannati and one of the few small sculptures in his oeuvre.⁶ The iconography, meaning and original function of the *Genio Mediceo* and its wax model are explored here against the background of the intellectual and artistic circles in Florence in which the sculptor and his wife moved.

Genius of the Medici

Ammannati and Laura had returned from Rome to the artist’s birthplace the year before. Cosimo de’ Medici’s court in Florence offered him new prospects, since the chances of commissions in Rome had dropped dramatically after



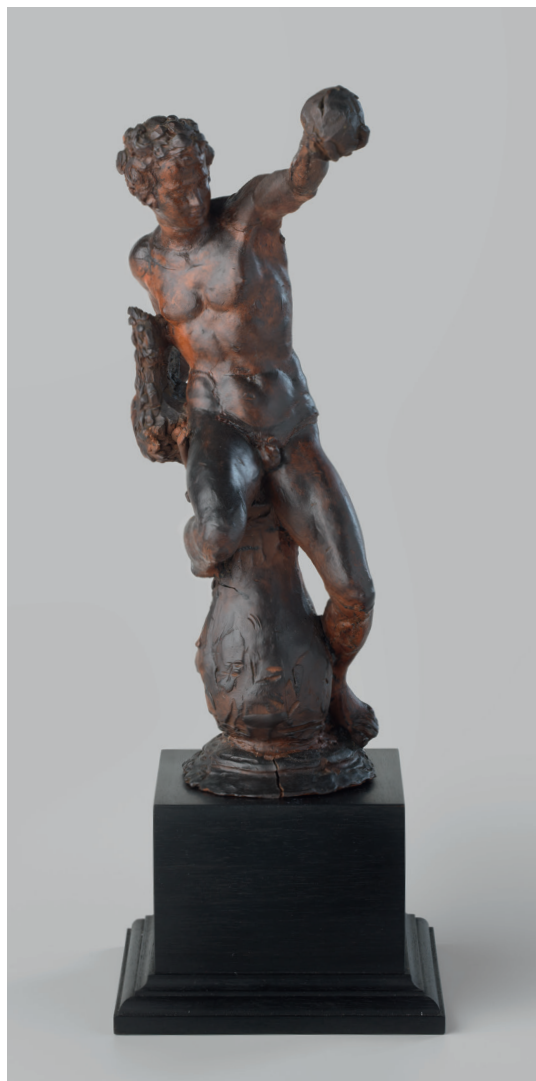


Fig. 2
BARTOLOMEO
AMMANNATI,
*Genius of Cosimo
de' Medici* ('Genio
Mediceo'), Florence,
c. 1556-58.
Bronze, h. 130 cm.
Florence, Palazzo
Pitti (Galeria Palatina),
inv. no. Oggetti
d'Arte 1911, n. 1793.
Photo: Gabinetto
Fotografico delle
Gallerie degli Uffizi.



Fig. 4
Back view of the
Genio (fig. 1).

Fig. 3
Front view of the
Genio (fig. 1).

the death of Pope Julius III. On the recommendation of Giorgio Vasari, the artistic director of the ambitious programme of arts that Cosimo had instigated for the honour of his dominion and the glory of Florence, in that same year, 1555, Ammannati was awarded the commission for a large marble *Juno* fountain, intended for the Sala Grande (Salone dei Cinquecento) in Palazzo Vecchio (fig. 20).⁷ Other commissions for monumental sculpture and architecture for the Medici ruler followed between 1556 and 1560.⁸



Fig. 5
BARTOLOMEO
AMMANNATI,
*Genius on the
funeral monument
to Marco Mantova
Benavides*,
Padua, 1545-46.
Marble.
Padua, Church
of the Eremitani.
Photo: author.

The bronze *Genio Mediceo* and its wax model mark the start of this impressive series of works. The first mention of the piece, at least after Bonsi's sonnets, dates from 1584 and occurs in a short biography of the sculptor in Raffaello Borghini's *Il Riposo* of that year. A passage in which works including Ammannati's *Hercules and Antaeus* are described ends with the sentence: 'In questo medesimo tempo lavorò un Marte, una Venere, e due fanciulli tutti insieme di bronzo' (At the same time he did a Mars, a Venus, and two little boys all together of bronze).⁹ It is likely that one of the 'little boys' was the *Genio Mediceo*, which fits neatly in terms of material and date – in other words more or less at the same time as the *Mars Gravidus* and *Venus*, both made of bronze and dating from the 1557 to 1559 period. It is not, however, clear which statue can be identified as the

other of the two *fanciulli*. After that, it was more than three centuries before Ammannati's bronze boy was discussed again, this time by Young in his 1909 two-volume study of the Medici.¹⁰ He wrote ecstatically about the bronze, which had been rediscovered shortly before in one of the courtyards of Palazzo Pitti by the then director of the Florentine museums, Corrado Ricci¹¹ – a name he corrupted to 'Signor Cornish'. At that time it was believed to be a work by Giambologna: 'For Ferdinand I. he [= Giambologna] executed one as little known as the other [= Giambologna's *Flying Mercury*] is well known, viz., his *Genius of the Medici*, represented by a handsome boy holding aloft in one hand one of the Medici balls, and clasping under the other arm a small goat signifying Capricorn, the sign of the zodiac under which Cosimo I. was born. ... It is owing

to the diligent care for the records of the past evinced by Signor Cornish, Director of the Pitti Palace, that this beautiful statue has been brought to light, having hitherto been hidden away uncared for in a back courtyard of the palace.¹² Not long after its rediscovery the figure was moved to Palazzo Pitti,¹³ where it was exhibited as *Genius of the Medici* by Giambologna, an attribution that would fail to hold water.¹⁴

The identification of the *Genio* as a work by Ammannati can be solidly underpinned from a stylistic viewpoint. There are evident style parallels in the handling of the body, pose, facial type and treatment of the hair, between this figure and other works by the sculptor, such as the marble *genii* beside and on the tomb of Marco Mantova Benavides in Padua (fig. 5).¹⁵ There are also convincing

Fig. 6
BARTOLOMEO
AMMANNATI,
Prudenza
(*Temperanza*),
part of the
Juno fountain for
the *Sala Grande*,
Florence, 1556-61.
Marble, h. 232 cm.
Florence, Museo
Nazionale del
Bargello, inv. no.
Depositi n. 133.
Photo: Gabinetto
Fotografico delle
Gallerie degli Uffizi.





Fig. 7
BARTOLOMEO
AMMANNATI,
*Satyr from the
Neptune Fountain*,
Florence, 1560-75.
Bronze, h. c. 120 cm.
Florence, Piazza
della Signoria.
Photo: author.

similarities to the marble and stucco putti in de balustrade and on the ceiling of Ammannati's Del Monte burial chapel in the San Pietro in Montorio in Rome (1550-52),¹⁶ to the Prudenza of his *Juno* fountain (fig. 6), some of the nude bronze satyrs on the edge of his Neptune fountain (fig. 7) – particularly in the expressive *contrapposto* of their bodies¹⁷ – and lastly to some figures attributed to him: a bronze Ganymede in the Bargello¹⁸ and two youths on a mantelpiece in Villa Garzoni (Pontecasale), on which the sculptor supposedly worked in 1541 and 1542.¹⁹

Patient Wax

The wax design for the *Genio* in the Rijksmuseum is well-nigh identical in pose to the bronze fountain statue, which is four times as big and consequently almost life size (1.30 m tall)

(figs. 1, 3, 4). Aside from the size, material and detailing, there are only a few points on which the design and the finished bronze differ significantly. The wax figurine is of a youth with a physique and proportions that appear more mature than the bronze, whose body and head resemble those of an eight-year-old. The bend in the outstretched arm of the bronze boy is more acute so that the effect of the overall composition is more closed. The extended arm of the wax model gives the pose greater tension and dynamism that are more appropriate for a rather older youth than for a child. Ammannati may have initially conceived his adolescent with outstretched arm in competition with Benvenuto Cellini's ambitious *Perseus* of 1546-52.²⁰ The reason for changing the position of the arm in the bronze may have had to do with the limited size of the basin in which the statue was to stand.

The loose finish, the lack of details on the baluster and the differences in composition between the wax figure and the finished bronze tell us that it is a *bozzetto* (sketch) or a *modellino/modelletto*, a stage in the genesis of a sculpture for which Cellini used the term 'prima mano': an initial, exploratory modelling phase.²¹ The rough shape of the baluster indicates that for this decorative architectural element Ammannati would have used sketches on paper, which he subsequently worked out directly in the 1:1 casting model (*modello grande*) (fig. 8).²² The principal purpose of the smaller wax model was to establish the pose, composition and proportions. In other instances, it could have served as a presentation model (*vidimus*) or as evidence in a contract between sculptor and client.²³

Using wax to work out the initial ideas for a composition or to copy existing statues had been standard practice among Italian sculptors since the early sixteenth century. Wax had

advantages over clay because it did not have to be kept wet and was immediately ready to use. Or as the Florentine sculptor Ridolfo Sirigatti put it: *la cera sempre aspetta* (the wax always waits).²⁴ Because of its malleability, the 'living' material had also been associated with memory and recall since Antiquity.²⁵ The trade in this expensive material – around 1420 a pound of wax cost a labourer's daily wage in Florence – was controlled by specialists, such as the *Arte dei Medici e Speziali* in Florence.²⁶

Lelio Bonsi and his Sonnets

The four sonnets the young lawyer Lelio Bonsi (1532-after 1571)²⁷ wrote to Ammannati's *Genio Mediceo* were, as we have seen, included in the anthology *Il primo libro dell'opere toscane* compiled by Laura Battiferra.²⁸ Ammannati, Battiferra and Bonsi were members of the intellectual and artistic circles around the Medici court, small overlapping groups of literary men and women, historians and artists, many of whom had ties to the *Accademia Fiorentina*, where the literary heritage of Dante

Fig. 8
BARTOLOMEO
AMMANNATI,
*Design of a keystone
for Palazzo Pitti,
Florence, c. 1563.*
Pen and brown ink,
156 x 94 mm.
Florence, Biblioteca
Marucelliana,
inv. no. E 112.



and Petrarch was studied. Others were involved together in the Medicis' great art projects, as conceivers of the iconographic programmes, as project leaders or as practitioners: illustrious artists like Vasari,²⁹ Agnolo Bronzino and Cellini,³⁰ and poets like La Lasca and Gherardo Spini.³¹ There were also others such as the collector and patron Bernardo Vecchietti,³² the humanists Vincenzo Borghini, Raffaello Borghini and Cosimo Bartoli and, last but not least, the historian, philologist and poet Benedetto Varchi (fig. 9).³³ Varchi it was who in 1549 became famous in art history as the instigator of the *paragone* debate, the exchange of ideas about the primacy of the arts.³⁴ To that end, three years earlier, he had invited eight prominent Florentine painters and sculptors to give their views on the question as to which was

the greater art – painting or sculpture. Among the respondents were several who belonged to the Ammannatis' circle of friends, including Michelangelo, Bronzino and Vasari. It was in this fertile cultural soil that Battiferra's poetic talent rapidly took root after she and Ammannati moved from Rome. She was acclaimed by colleagues as a 'laura' – a laurel – or as Daphne, the *alter ego* she called herself after the nymph who changed into a laurel tree in one of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Her portrait was painted by Bronzino and modelled on the profile portrait of Dante, with Petrarch as her literary example (fig. 10).³⁵ She published her first book in Florence in 1560, the *Primo libro* that contained 187 of her own poems, with more than forty verses by poets in her network.³⁶ The anthology has been described as a virtual literary salon and a Who's Who of mid-sixteenth-century Italy.³⁷ Battiferra had earmarked a special place in her book for the still young Lelio Bonsi, but a printer's error meant that this escaped readers' notice.³⁸

Bonsi, a child prodigy from a prominent Florentine family, soon attracted the attention of Varchi, who took him under his wing and even made him his heir.³⁹ As soon as he turned eighteen, Bonsi, doubtless with Varchi's support, was admitted to the Accademia Fiorentina, of which the latter was also *provveditore* (director of studies) in 1551. In that same year he moved to Pisa to study law, but he maintained close contacts with Florence. When he returned in 1558, he joined the service of Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici, Cosimo I's son. Bonsi remained in the service of the Medicis for the rest of his life. In 1560 some lectures he had given at the Accademia were published, including one about a comet and a commentary on a poem by Petrarch.⁴⁰ The only certain portrait of him, a medal by Domenico Poggini, dates from some ten years later (fig. 11),⁴¹ but we may also see Bonsi in the

Fig. 9
TITIAN, *Portrait of Benedetto Varchi*, c. 1540.
Oil on canvas,
117 x 91 cm.
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum,
inv. no. GG 91.
Photo: KHM-Museumsverband.





Fig. 10
AGNOLO BRONZINO,
Portrait of Laura Battiferra, c. 1555.
Oil on canvas,
83 x 60 cm. Florence,
Musei Civici
Fiorentini – Museo
di Palazzo Vecchio,
Donazione Loeser,
inv. no. MCF-LOE1933-17.
Photo: Scala,
Florence.



Fig. 12
AGNOLO BRONZINO,
Portrait of a Young Man (Lelio Bonsi?),
c. 1550-55.
Oil on wood,
75 x 57.5 cm. London,
National Gallery,
inv. no. L40;
on loan from a
private collection.

portrait of a young man painted by Bronzino in the early fifteen-fifties (fig. 12).⁴² Together with Varchi and Bronzino, he also appears as one of Cellini's eulogists in 1568.⁴³

In 1555, not long after Bartolomeo Ammannati and Laura Battiferra moved from Rome to Florence, Lelio Bonsi came into their orbit. Here again, Varchi must have been the link, for in 1556 and 1557 the young man regularly appeared in the correspondence between Varchi and Battiferra and sometimes acted as their 'postboy'.⁴⁴ The prominent place the poet gave Bonsi in her *Primo libro* a few years later suggests that he had meanwhile become a family friend of the couple. His quartet of sonnets 'a messer Bartolomeo Ammannati', in which the *Genio* is mentioned, has to be seen as a homage to the sculptor and his poet wife, who often entertained him in their home, and *en passant* to Varchi, too. It is quite possible that he witnessed the creation of the statue in Ammannati's workshop and wrote his poems in response.⁴⁵

Fig. 11
DOMENICO POGGINI,
Portrait Medal of Lelio Bonsi, 1571.
Bronze, diam. 44 mm.
Florence,
Museo Nazionale
del Bargello.
Photo: Gabinetto
Fotografico delle
Gallerie degli Uffizi.



Genii

Lelio Bonsi called Ammannati's bronze a 'little Atlas', but this poetic image was not followed by later art historians. As we have seen, in 1909 Young described the statue as a *Genio medico*: a naked youth with a sea goat – Cosimo I's astrological sign of Capricorn – under his arm, holding aloft a globe supposedly referencing one of the *palle*, the balls in the Medici arms.⁴⁶ This specific and individual iconography was rooted in a concept from Classical Antiquity – that of the personal genius, the classical forerunner of the Christian guardian angel.⁴⁷ Genii can be traced back to the third century BCE, and could refer either to the spirit of a specific place or region (*genius loci*), to the character and natural inclinations of an individual, or to the astrological constellation that governed the fate of every human being.⁴⁸ They were consequently ubiquitous. As protectors of individuals, genii were always associated with the male gender, more particularly with the *pater familias* and with the family's continuity and reproductive strength.⁴⁹ They were the personal tutelary deities of men from cradle to grave and were especially honoured at birthday celebrations. A man's genius embodied his virility and sexual potency, his energy, temperament and personality.⁵⁰ The male genius had a female counterpart in the *juno*; the *juno* protected a woman's fertility and her ability to bear children.⁵¹ In Antiquity, notions of male sexual power and female fertility translated into two symbols, the serpent and the cornucopia.⁵²

In the last centuries before the Christian era, the association of the genius with the *pater familias* extended to countless other 'paternalistic' domains – the 'founding fathers' of cities, buildings and all sorts of institutions. The Roman emperor (as the *pater* of his subjects) and the state as the abstract *pater*

familias, had tutelary deities, the *genius Augusti* and the *genius populi Romanorum*.⁵³ Under Augustus, the imperial genius even became one of the city gods and his veneration was widespread. Temples were dedicated to him⁵⁴ and Ovid reported that as many as a thousand images of Augustus's genius were worshipped at the public temples and the shrines at crossroads.⁵⁵ The senate had moreover issued a decree that a libation had to be made to the *genius Augusti* at every banquet – public or private.⁵⁶ The primary aim of this imperial genius cult was to promote unity in the empire and the authority of the dynasty.⁵⁷ There are tangible traces of this cult in coins, statues and reliefs on altars, where the genius of Augustus (and of later emperors) was usually personified as a man, generally young, sometimes wearing a toga, carrying a libation in a *patera*.⁵⁸

The connection between the birth of an individual and his personal genius (or her *juno*) was expressed in the worship of the tutelary deity on birthdays.⁵⁹ In this way, the place of the genius was established in the cosmological system, its role in the astrologically determined fate of every human being. Horace expressed this in a famous passage, in which the genius is described as 'the companion which controls the natal star; the god of human nature, in that he is mortal for each person, with a changing expression, white or black'.⁶⁰ This ancient concept of the personal genius and its astrological connection with the fate of humankind – especially the cult of the genius of Emperor Augustus – was sufficiently well known in the Renaissance, from the writings of Suetonius and Cicero among others, and tied in with a belief in the role of heavenly bodies as the determinants of the fate of every individual that was widely held in Cinquecento Florence. Above all, it fitted perfectly with Cosimo's image politics.⁶¹

The Genius of the New Augustus

The Florentine ruler modelled himself as a new Augustus, successor to the wise first emperor of Rome, who was also regarded as the founder of Florence. Commissioned by Cosimo, the humanist and court iconographer Vincenzo Borghini was the main proponent of Augustus's founding role.⁶² The idea was reflected, among other things, in Vasari's *The Foundation of Florence* in the Sala Grande of Palazzo Vecchio (1563-65).⁶³ With a consistent use of Augustinian iconography, Cosimo thus claimed his role as the restorer of Florence's power and prosperity in the footsteps of the supposed imperial founder of the city of Rome. Astrology was cited extensively to underpin Cosimo's identification with Augustus. Every time a scion of the Medicis came to power in Florence, this was destined by fate and the stars: *come avevano i cieli destinato* (as the heavens had determined), as Benedetto Varchi put it in his *Storia fiorentina* – written to Cosimo's instructions from 1547 onwards.⁶⁴ Of no one was this more true than Cosimo himself, whose open identification with the first Roman emperor began in 1537-39 when he adopted the latter's star sign Capricorn and Ariadne's eight-starred crown, the Corona Borealis, to which he attached the motto *fiducia fati* (trust in fate), derived from Suetonius's account of Augustus's faith in the stars.⁶⁵ Cosimo himself was born under an extraordinary astrological constellation of 'Saturn with Capricorn rising', a horoscope in which his leadership was already ordained.⁶⁶ Augustus also had Capricorn in the ascendant and chose that sign of the zodiac as his personal emblem.⁶⁷ Suetonius regarded this ascendant as a portent of the emperor's greatness and his fortunate rule. Cosimo probably copied the Capricorn from an Augustinian denarius, where the star sign is usually accompanied by a cornucopia, a globe and a rudder (fig. 13).⁶⁸



Fig. 13
DENARIUS OF
EMPEROR AUGUSTUS,
reverse with
Capricorn, holding
globe and rudder,
and bearing a
cornucopia on
its back, Roman,
c. 18-16 BC.
Silver, diam. 18 mm.
Photo:
coinarchives.com,
public domain.

Initially, the scope afforded the duke to project himself as the new Augustus was limited; if he took it too far he would have insulted the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, to whom he owed allegiance and under whose authority he was. In the veneration of Charles's dominion – by virtue of his office – there was likewise identification with the first Roman emperor, with whom the Habsburg ruler also shared the horoscope, including Capricorn ascendant.⁶⁹ It was only after 1555-56, following Charles's abdication, that Cosimo's use of this Augustinian iconography took on freer forms.⁷⁰ The Capricorn appeared, for instance, as a symbol of the duke's monarchical ambitions in the spirit of Augustus ('monarch of the world', as Vasari wrote in his *Ragionamenti*) around 1555-57 in the centre of the floor of the Sala di Cosimo in Palazzo Vecchio.⁷¹ The creation of the Cosimo-Augustus image was to culminate in 1573 in Vincenzo Danti's statue of the duke as *alter-Augustus* (fig. 14).⁷²

The making of Ammannati's *Genio* cannot be seen in isolation from the duke's image politics and the intensification of his Augustus worship immediately after the death of Emperor Charles V.⁷³ The fact that in Roman Antiquity the personal genius was directly related to a person's birth and fate and especially that Emperor Augustus had assiduously promoted the veneration of his personal genius and even institutionalized it would not have escaped either Cosimo, an avid reader of Suetonius and Cassius Dio,⁷⁴ or his humanist advisors. The Capricorn, as a prominent motif of the *Genio mediceo*, is thus one of the keys



Fig. 14
VINCENZO DANTI,
Cosimo de' Medici as
Emperor Augustus,
Florence, c. 1572.
Marble, h. 280 cm.
Florence, Museo
Nazionale del
Bargello, inv. no. 15 s.
Photo: Gabinetto
Fotografico delle
Gallerie degli Uffizi.

to the personal significance, focused on Cosimo, of the statue as the genius of the 'new Augustus'.

The World in his Hand

In 1909, Young described the sphere the naked boy holds up as a Medici *palla*, but in the context of the cosmological genius iconography, a broader interpretation makes more sense.⁷⁵ Through Augustus, the sphere was already linked to his star sign Capricorn, as a symbol of the world and his

dominion over it, and Cosimo adopted it in his *impresa*, for example in the version published in 1602 by Battista Pittoni in his *Imprese di diversi Principi ...* (fig. 15).⁷⁶ In this meaning of 'world', the sphere was also used in Cosimo's solemn entry into Siena on 28 October 1560, after he had taken the city.⁷⁷ Various ephemeral triumphal arches and statues were erected for the *entrata*, a project in which Ammannati played a major role as artistic leader, and Cosimo was presented as the new Augustus. Writing from Siena, in a letter to Cosimo dated 3 November 1559 – in which he described the works he had under construction for the entry – Ammannati mentioned a statue in imitation bronze of 'Ottavio Augusto col capricorno e 'l mondo in mano' (Octavius Augustus with Capricorn and the world in his hand) that would be put up in Piazza Piccolomini.⁷⁸ Even though the emperor would not have been depicted as a naked boy, the iconographic kinship with the *Genio* is striking. Among the other decorations created for this entry was a triumphal arch with a terrestrial globe bearing the Greek text *KOSMOS-KOSMOU-KOSMOS*, which in his description of the spectacle written in 1560, Anton Francesco Cirni explained thus: 'Duke Cosimo honours the world and the world honours him, or rather, the world is Cosimo's and he is the world.'⁷⁹ In one of his sonnets, Bonsi described the *Genio*'s sphere as a ball with two poles – in other words a terrestrial globe: 'And he looks, and he holds aloft the one pole and the other in his left hand, and with his right the heavenly animal that the prince of Tuscany has made his own.'⁸⁰ In short, the sphere held by Ammannati's *Genio* must not be seen only as a Medici *palla*, but also and above all as *cosmos* ('the world'), something Vasari also stressed in his *Ragionamenti*: '... palla che è messa per la terra ... è un corpo cosmo che così è nominato dalli astrologi il mondo' (... [a] sphere

that is set upon the ground ... is a cosmic body that the astrologers therefore call the world).⁸¹ It makes this *palla-mondo* a symbol that not only provides a play on the duke's first name (Cosmo/Cosimo), as in the Greek text on the triumphal arch in Siena, it also expresses his dominion in the line of Augustus.⁸² Ammannati's *Genio* consequently bears the symbols of the two cosmic spheres in his hands: the celestial – the Capricorn – and the terrestrial in the shape of the *palla-mondo*. Wholly in the spirit of Antiquity, it depicts – as the personal genius of the *pater familias* of Tuscany, Cosimo 'pater Patriae'⁸³ – the link between the celestial bodies and earthly mankind.⁸⁴ As the dictator of fate, the *Genio* also aptly embodies Cosimo's motto *fiducia fati*. And thus the statue, as the deliberate regeneration and reformulation of the *Genius*

Augusti, should actually be called the *Genius Cosmi* – the personal genius of Cosimo as the new Augustus.⁸⁵

Antique Bronzes

It seems unlikely that Ammannati was the only inventor of this exceptional genius iconography, nor is his erudite spouse a candidate.⁸⁶ The originator must be sought among Cosimo's humanist advisers, such as Borghini, Varchi or Bartoli, who provided the duke with clever iconographic programmes and symbols, ferreted out from classical literature. They found the idea of an iconographic innovation like the ruler's personal genius in Suetonius, Cassius Dio, Ovid and other classical authors.⁸⁷ Needless to say, Ammannati had a major role to play in visualising the concept and he, too, turned to Antiquity for inspiration.

Fig. 15
Impresa of Duke
Cosimo de' Medici,
engraving no. 13 from
Giovanni Battista
Pittoni, *Imprese
di diverse principi,
duchi, signori e
d'altri personaggi
et huomi illustri*,
Venice 1602.
Heidelberg,
Universitäts-
bibliothek,
<https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/pittonii602/0017>.

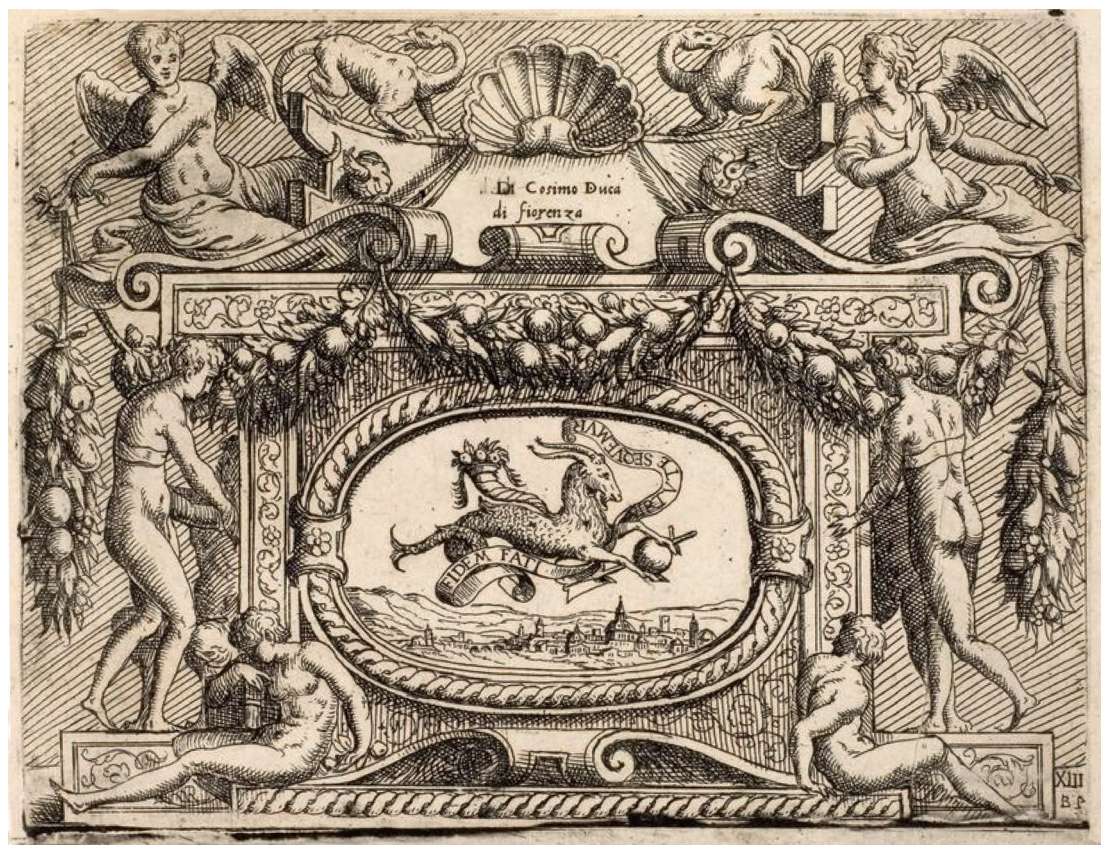




Fig. 16
Genius pouring a
drink for a griffin,
fragment of relief
from an architectural
frieze at Trajan's
Forum, early
2nd century.
Rome, Museo
Lateranense,
inv. nos. 9760, 9648.

There were plenty of surviving depictions of antique genii, mainly on coins and sarcophagi, but tutelary deities associated with individuals or *genii augusti* were much rarer.⁸⁸ Most of the genii in the form of winged putti or *spiritelli* that populate decorative Roman acanthus swags and made a comeback as an ornamental element in the Renaissance would not have given Ammannati much to go on.⁸⁹ There are, though, a few examples that were accessible in sixteenth-century Rome that could have inspired the sculptor. There is a striking similarity, for instance, to a number of winged genii that spring from an acanthus scroll on a Roman frieze that adorned a cornice on Trajan's Forum in Ammannati's day.⁹⁰ With hands raised, these naked youngsters in profile pour wine from a carafe into a drinking bowl for a griffin

(fig. 16). They are about the same age as Ammannati's *Genio Mediceo* and bear an arresting likeness to the boyish face, the torso and the position of the upraised arm. The pouring of the wine also comes surprisingly close to the notion of fountain water flowing from the *palla-mondo*.

Ammannati was probably also inspired in his choice of the theme of the naked boy holding up a sphere by an antique bronze that must also have been on display in Rome. It is a standing boy dating from the late second century, dressed only in a short toga, draped over his back (fig. 17). Although his pose differs from the *Genio Mediceo*, there are nevertheless noticeable similarities in nudity, age, facial type, material and the motif of the globe in the hand. This antique statue was certainly part of Giovan Battista della

Fig. 17
Young Augustus
 or *Geta*, Roman,
 late 2nd century.
 Bronze, h. 102 cm.
 Rome, Galleria
 Borghese,
 inv. no. CCLII.
 Ministero per i beni e
 le attività culturali –
 Galleria Borghese.



Porta's extensive collection of classical sculpture in Rome, which was purchased in its entirety by Giovan Battista Borghese in 1609.⁹¹ Della Porta had taken this collection over from his older brother Tommaso, whose dealings in antiquities are documented from the fifteen-seventies onwards. Tommaso must have acquired the bronze in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, probably from another Roman collection.⁹² It is significant that the statue was described in Giacomo Manilli's guide to the Borghese collection as an *Augusto giovanetto, co'l mondo in mano* (a young Augustus, with the world in his hand).⁹³ Clearly it was seen at an early stage as a portrait of the young Emperor Augustus. If this name was also used in Ammannati's time, the bronze would have been particularly attractive to Ammannati and Cosimo's advisers. The parallel between this supposed young Augustus with his globe in his hand and the statue of the emperor – likewise *co'l mondo d'oro in mano* – that was part of Cosimo's entry decorations in Siena in 1560 may not be a coincidence.⁹⁴ Ammannati transformed his fairly static classical examples into a much more dynamic seated figure, in *contrapposto*, that inescapably echoes the poses of Michelangelo's *ignudi* in the Sistine Chapel, with their twisted torsos and the contrasting positions of arms and legs (fig. 18).

Palazzo Vecchio or Palazzo Pitti?

In 1540 Cosimo moved from the family palace, Palazzo Medici, to the old Florentine town hall, Palazzo Vecchio. It was an unmistakable signal of his position of power. He had the surroundings and the interior of the palazzo drastically remodelled.⁹⁵ In the former *quartiere* of the Medici pope Leo X (1475-1521) – a suite of six rooms that Vasari and his assistants decorated with events from Medici family history between 1556 and 1560 – Cosimo had one room devoted to



Fig. 18
MICHELANGELO,
Ignudo, from the
ceiling fresco of
the Sistine Chapel,
Rome, 1508-12.
Fresco (detail).
Vatican, Sistine
Chapel.
Photo: public domain.

himself, where the decorations revolve around his 'establishment and consolidation of Tuscany under the sign of Capricorn'.⁹⁶ This Sala di Cosimo can be seen as the culmination of a long tradition of image-making: after 1560 the personal veneration of the duke and his self-promotion tailed off, and the value of his regime to Florence moved further into the foreground as a subject.⁹⁷ Although the *Genio Mediceo* came to light near Palazzo Pitti in 1900, it seems more likely that the statue was originally intended for one of Cosimo's new personal chambers in Palazzo Vecchio.

This idea is confirmed by the chronology and suggested by a stanza from one of Bonsi's sonnets:

Chi con incude mai, ne con martello
Far più d'altra potria longeva e adorna
del gran Duce toscan l'altra reggia?

(Who could ever, with anvil or with hammer,
Make the great Tuscan duke's proud palace
The most long-lived and adorned of all?)⁹⁸

The poem must have been written before November 1560, when the *Primo libro* appeared, so it is unlikely that

l'altera reggia was a reference to Palazzo Pitti, which Ammannati did not start to renovate on Cosimo's instructions until 1561. Given the many other projects the sculptor had in hand in the years running up to 1560, it would have made no sense for him to work on a fountain statue for a house that did not yet have Cosimo's full attention. The iconography, form and time of creation of the *Genio*, on the other hand, fit perfectly into the decorative scheme for Palazzo Vecchio, in which Ammannati, in tandem with Vasari, had been closely involved since 1555, among other things with the making of the large marble *Juno* fountain for the Sala Grande. The individual statues for this ensemble are now in the Bargello (fig. 19).⁹⁹ The iconography of that fountain and the chronology of its

creation, at virtually the same time as the *Genio*, support the idea that the *Genio Mediceo* fountain was likewise intended for Palazzo Vecchio.¹⁰⁰ It was recently suggested, moreover, that the *Genio* might have been made for a fountain that was installed in 1557 *al piano delle camere del duca*, in other words near Cosimo's private quarters in Palazzo Vecchio. Lastly, in the poem Battiferra wrote in response to Bonsi's sonnets, she explicitly refers to three statues that were to be part of the *Juno* fountain, so that a link was also forged on a poetic level between the *Genio* and *Juno* water features before 1560.¹⁰¹

Altogether, four fountains were planned for Palazzo Vecchio, two of which were eventually completed. Of those two, only the fountain in

Fig. 19
BARTOLOMEO
AMMANNATI,
*Juno Fountain for
the Sala Grande in
Palazzo Vecchio*,
Florence, 1556-61.
Marble, h. 500 cm.
Florence, Museo
Nazionale del
Bargello, inv. no.
Depositi nos. 132-49.
Photo: Gabinetto
Fotografico delle
Gallerie degli Uffizi.



the *cortile* remains, partly executed by Ammannati in 1556-57 and crowned with Andrea del Verrocchio's famous *Putto with a Dolphin* (c. 1472).¹⁰² The other was the now lost water feature that was installed near Cosimo's private quarters in 1557 for which Ammannati's *Genio* was probably intended.¹⁰³ These three *camere del duca* were among the most prestigious and impressive rooms in the building;

their lavish decorations were executed in 1559-60.¹⁰⁴ The construction of a small fountain in their immediate vicinity fits seamlessly in terms of the chronology; bills reveal that the preparations for it were in full swing in the summer and autumn of 1557. A wooden fence for the fountain was built in the passage 'near a room opposite His Excellency's chamber' and a mason was paid for the stone

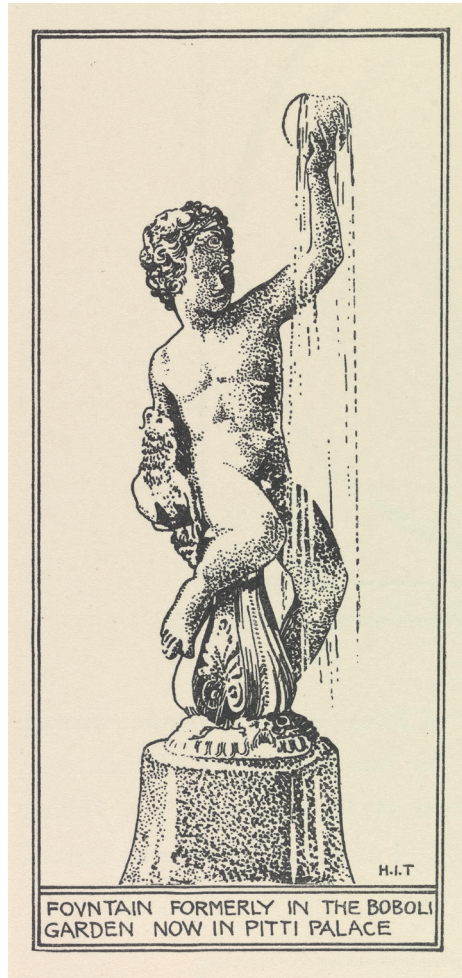
Fig. 20
BARTOLOMEO
AMMANNATI,
Juno, part of the
Juno Fountain for
the *Sala Grande* in
Palazzo Vecchio,
Florence, 1556-61.
Marble, h. 180 cm,
Florence, Museo
Nazionale del
Bargello, inv. no.
Depositi n. 135.
Photo: Gabinetto
Fotografico delle
Gallerie degli Uffizi.



base of the basin of the fountain.¹⁰⁵ Although the precise location of this water feature can no longer be established, it is clear that it was installed in a passage very close to Cosimo's private quarters, on the first floor of the palazzo and due west of the Sala Grande, where Ammannati's large *Juno* fountain was to go. This was also a logical place in technical terms, because running water was already present in this part of the building for the planned *Juno* fountain and for a bath for Cosimo. This position also shows why Battiferra suggested a poetic link between her husband's two fountains, the *Genio* fountain and the nearby *Juno* fountain: both, after all, were fed by the same water, coming from the Boboli gardens up the hill.

Genio and Juno

In the knowledge that Ammannati's bronze can be seen as Cosimo's personal genius, there is also a substantive connection between the two fountains. On his large *Juno* fountain with her strongly matriarchal iconography and emphasis on fertility, the goddess is enthroned on a rainbow (figs. 19, 20). She is the *alter ego* of Eleonora of Toledo, Cosimo's wife, an identification that stems from Paolo Giovio's *Ragionamento* of 1556.¹⁰⁶ In a sonnet about her husband's fountain, Battiferra also made a subtle allusion equating Juno and Eleonora.¹⁰⁷ As we have seen, in Antiquity the *juno* was the female counterpart of the *genius* and was associated with fertility and progeny, so Ammannati's two fountains also reference the tutelary deities of Cosimo and Eleonora, and the two water features are one another's pendants. Placing the *Genio Mediceo* in Cosimo's own quarters – that is near the large *Juno* fountain – meant that this inherent bond between Cosimo's *genius* and Eleonora's *juno* was manifest.¹⁰⁸ This connection was reinforced by the similarity of the poses of the bronze *Genio* and the marble *Juno*: both are shown seated, with the left arm



raised (figs. 1, 20). The duke's guests would have been able to recognize the relationship between the two fountains without much difficulty, were it not for the fact that the *Juno* fountain was never shown complete and was only installed in the Sala Grande for a short while; six of the eight statues stood in Palazzo Vecchio until 1579, while the two river gods found places elsewhere in Florence. Eventually, in 1588, the ensemble ended up on the terrace of the courtyard in Palazzo Pitti.¹⁰⁹

A similar fate awaited the *Genio*. At an unknown moment the bronze moved to the gardens in which it was set up as a fountain in the nineteenth century (fig. 21).¹¹⁰ Its removal probably

Fig. 21
INIGO TRIGGS,
'*Genio mediceo*.
Fountain formerly
in the Boboli garden
now in Pitti Palace',
illustration from *ibid.*,
*The Art of Garden
Design in Italy*,
London 1906, p. 74.
The Hague,
National Library
of the Netherlands,
sign. 1361 B 51.

had to do with alterations to Palazzo Vecchio after Cosimo I's death. In an etching made on the occasion of the wedding banquet held in the Sala Grande for Cosimo II in 1607, it can be seen that against the south wall – where the *Juno* fountain should actually have been installed – there is a small fountain in a niche. It is not possible to identify it from the print, but it does demonstrate that it was possible to have a small water feature there and the possibility that the *Genio* stood there at some point cannot be ruled out.¹¹¹ Ammannati's bronze was not completely hidden, though: the statue was in any event

spotted by Taddeo Landini, as the similarities in pose between the *Genio* and the slender naked boys in bronze on his 1581-88 *Fontana dei tartarughe* in Rome prove (fig. 22).¹¹²

Coda: *Genius* and *Ingenium*

The ancient Greek word for wax, *keros*, is the etymological ancestor of the Italian *cera*. Interestingly, *keros* also means 'fate' and 'death', while the root 'ker' means soul, life and heart.¹¹³ These semantic entanglements bring fate, life and death together in a material and etymological sense in the wax *modello* of the *Genio Mediceo*, which could after all be seen as the controller of fate. In its iconography, the little wax figure also embodies the two meanings of the concept of genius: the classical genius as protector, and the 'genius' or 'ingenium' of the artist from whose brain and hands it has sprung.¹¹⁴ The *Genio Mediceo* is thus firmly rooted in a sixteenth-century humanist tradition: in his widely read treatise *De imitatione*, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola first brought the two concepts – *genius* and *ingenium* (ingenuity) – together, when he advocated following *genium propensionemque naturae* (one's own genius and natural propensity).¹¹⁵ Ammannati's wax *Genio modello* is thus not only one of the rare survivors of the modelling process used by Italian sculptors in the sixteenth century, with its material and iconography it also significantly transcends the importance of a random survival of this early modern artists' practice. And although we may ask ourselves whether the artist himself was aware of all these associations, there can be little doubt that they were well known in the humanist scholarly circles in Florence in which he moved. It may be thanks to this extraordinary layering of meanings that the fragile model survived for centuries,¹¹⁶ as an image of Cosimo's *genius* and Ammannati's *ingenium*.

Fig. 22
TADDEO LANDINI,
*Fontana delle
tartarughe* (detail),
Rome, 1581-88.
Bronze and marble.
Rome, Piazza Mattei.
Photo: author.



ABSTRACT

In 2018 the Rijksmuseum acquired the wax *modello* for the *Genio Mediceo* ('Genius of the Medici'), a bronze fountain statue that was made around 1557 in Florence by Bartolomeo Ammannati for the Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo I de' Medici. It is Ammannati's only known undisputed wax model. The attribution is confirmed by a reference to the statue in four sonnets by the lawyer Lelio Bonsi – published in 1560 by Ammannati's wife, Laura Battiferra.

The *Genio Mediceo*, a naked youth holding a Capricorn and a sphere – representing the cosmos ('cosmo', as an allusion to Cosimo) – represents the personal protector (genius) of the Medici ruler, and harks back to a concept from Classical Antiquity. Cosimo modelled his image on the Roman emperor Augustus, the supposed founder of Florence, and also adopted his genius cult and star sign of Capricorn. As the symbolic link between the heavens and the earth, Ammannati's Genio watched over Cosimo's fate, which was determined by the stars, and embodied the motto of this 'new Augustus': *fiducia fati* ('trust in fate').

The *Genio* fountain was designed for Cosimo's private apartments in Palazzo Vecchio and can be seen as the 'male counterpart' of the marble Juno fountain that Ammannati made for the Sala Grande in that palazzo: in Antiquity, the *juno* was the female version of the *genius*. The Juno fountain was associated with Cosimo's wife, Eleonora of Toledo.

NOTES

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- 8 Paolozzi Strozzi and Zikos 2011 (note 1), nos. 8, 12, 13, 33; Janet Cox-Rearick, *Dynasty*

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 - 10 George Frederick Young, *The Medici*, 2 vols., London 1909-11, vol. 2, pp. 364, 372 (fig.) and 413.
 - 11 http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/corradorricci_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/ (accessed 11 November 2019).
 - 12 Young 1909-11 (note 10), vol. 2, p. 364.
 - 13 Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, inv. no. Oggetti d'Arte 1911, n. 1793.
 - 14 Cf. Pizzorusso 2003 (note 3), p. 72 for the later attributions to Tribolo, Stoldi, the anonymous 'Maestro dei bronzi di Pratolino' and others.
 - 15 Kinney 1976 (note 1), pp. 141-42, fig. 224; D'Albuquerque 2018 (note 5), p. 83.
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 - 19 Venturi 1936 (note 1), pp. 371-74, and fig. 310. Kinney 1976 (note 1), p. 107; Paolozzi Strozzi and Zikos 2011 (note 1), no. 5, esp. p. 368.
 - 20 Cf. D'Albuquerque 2018 (note 5), p. 81 (influence of Sansovino's 'Bartolini Bacchus').
 - 21 Myssok 1999 (note 6), pp. 17-19.
 - 22 Cf. Paolozzi Strozzi and Zikos 2011 (note 1), nos. 28-32.
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- 32 For Vecchiotti see Michael Bury, 'Bernardo Vecchiotti, Patron of Giambologna', *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance*, vol. 1 (1985), pp. 13-56, and appendix II.
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- 34 Leaatrice Mendelsohn-Martone, *Paragoni: Benedetto Varchi's 'Due Lezioni' and Cinquecento Art Theory*, Ann Arbor 1982; Myssok 1999 (note 6), pp. 55-59; Christiane J. Hessler, 'Maler und Bildhauer im sophistischen Tauziehen. Der Paragone in der italienischen Kunstliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts', in Ekkehard Mai, Kurt Wettengl and Andreas Büttner (eds.), *Wettstreit der Künste. Malerei und Skulptur von Dürer bis Daumier*, Wolfratshausen/Munich/Cologne 2002, pp. 82-97, esp. pp. 86-91; Barocchi 1960-62 (note 2), vol. 1 (1960), pp. 3 ff; Cecchi 1991 (note 30).
- 35 Plazzotta 1998 (note 28); Cristina Acidini et al., *The Medici, Michelangelo, and the Art of Late Renaissance Florence*, cat. Florence (Palazzo Strozzi)/Chicago (Art Institute of Chicago)/Detroit (The Detroit Institute of Arts) 2002, no. 13; B. Eclercy (ed.), *Maniera: Pontormo, Bronzino and Medici Florence*, cat. Frankfurt am Main (Städel Museum) 2016, no. 106. For the lost portrait of Battiferra that Hans van Aachen made around 1585 see Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, Haarlem 1604, fol. 290r: 'Hy conterfeytte oock aldaer een gheestighe Poëtersse oft Dichtster, geheeten Madona Laura, van welcke tronie hy de Copije behielt, en is noch t' Amsterdam tot zijn Discipel Pieter Isaacksz., seer Meesterlijck ghehandelt wesende.' ('He also painted there the likeness of a witty Poetess, called Madona Laura, of which head he kept the copy, and it is still in Amsterdam with his pupil Pieter Isaacksz, very masterfully handled.'): see Bernard Aikema and Isabella di Lenardo, 'The Formative Years in Italy – Stylistics and Social Networks', in Thomas Fusenig (ed.), *Hans von Aachen (1552-1615): Court Artist in Europe*, Berlin/Munich 2010, pp. 85-93, esp. p. 91. With thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers of this article.
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- 37 Kirkham 2006 (note 28), pp. 32, 39, 40.
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- 50 Nietzsche 1975 (note 47), p. 4.
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- 52 Nietzsche 1975 (note 47), pp. 8, 9.
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