



FONTES  - Quellen und Dokumente zur Kunst 1350-1750
Sources and Documents for the History of Art 1350-1750

Two Early Statements about Michelangelo 'not in Steinmann-Wittkower'

Auszüge aus:

NICCOLÒ FRANCO,
Le pistole vulgari di M. Nicolo Franco (Venedig 1539)

herausgegeben von

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FONTES 42

Zitierfähige URL: <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/volltexte/2009/840/>

URN: urn:nbn:de:bsz:16-artdok-8401

QUELLEN UND DOKUMENTE ZU MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI – E-TEXTE, NR. 6
 SOURCES AND DOCUMENTS FOR MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI – E-TEXTS, NO. 6

LE
 PISTOLE
 VVLGARI
 DI .M.
 NICOLO
 FRANCO

[*COLOPHON*:]

IN VINITIA NELE STAMPE D'ANTONIO

Gardane, a li .xx. d'Aprile, nel'anno del Signore M. D. XXXIX.

(printer's mark of Antonio Gardane, with: “.A. / .G.”)

CON GRATIA ET PRIVILEGIO.

*Si Vieta; che sotto questo Inclito Senato, nissuno ardisca imprimere, ne in altri luochi
 impressa, vendere la presente opra, senza licentia di Antonio Gardane, Stante
 il Privilegio a lui conceduto per anni diece ne lo Eccellentissimo Consiglio
 di Pregati, sotto pena di perdere tutte l'opre, e pagare ducati du=
 cento: cinquanta a l'Arsenale, cinquanta a chi accusa; e cen=
 to a li Magnifici signori di Notte, come nel Pri=
 vilegio ampiamente appare.*

[*DEDICATION*:]

“Al Reverendissimo Monsignor Leone Orsino eletto di Fregius, Nicolo Franco Beneventano.”
 “Di Venetia il primo di Luglio. Del M. D. XXXVIII.”

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Le pistole vulgari di .M. Nicolo Franco, Venezia 1539, Title page.

Perhaps as a reaction to the circumstance that Pietro Aretino had blocked the publication of Franco's book of letters at the press of Francesco Marcolini (who was Franco's first friend and sponsor in Venice), the frontispiece of the *Pistole vulgari*, in the first edition printed at the new press of Antonio Gardane, is modelled rather closely on that of Serlio's recent *Regole generali di architettura sopra le cinque maniere de gli edifici* ("In Venetia Per Francesco Marcolini da Forlì", "M.D.XXXVII. / Il mese di settembre"). The large format of the *Pistole* and its typographical design in general confer upon it a decidedly 'Marcolini look', as if Franco wished to thwart Aretino's wishes visually.

INTRODUCTION

Among the many early printed mentions and references to Michelangelo, included neither in the *Michelangelo Bibliographie 1510-1926* of Ernst Steinmann and Rudolf Wittkower (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1927) nor in its successors, are two found in Nicolò Franco's *Le pistole vulgari di M. Nicolo Franco* (Venezia: Antonio Gardane, 1539). These two texts, and others similar to it in brevity and generality, are not perhaps extremely precious documents of Michelangelo's life and art, but they do reflect his contemporary reputation and fame, a factor which in turn refracted back onto his life and work. In their totality such 'minor' references constitute a mosaic that, as it expands, will enrich and complement the picture offered by more substantial narrative sources about Michelangelo. As the leading artist of his time, Michelangelo constitutes a particularly central case, and indeed a turning point in the evolving rôle of the artist and his art in a societal context.

The poet and writer Nicolò Franco (Benevento 1515-Rome 1570) studied law at Naples, and then attempted his fortune as a poet. He visited Venice in 1536, publishing his *Tempio di Amore* there with the publisher Francesco Marcolini in the same year. By 1537 he had established himself in Venice, entering the service of the already famous Pietro Aretino, acting as Aretino's secretary and participating in the preparation of Aretino's works of 1538-1540, and in particular of Aretino's first book of letters (see *FONTES*, 37, including a general consideration of the 'Künstlerbrief', pp. 11-17). Franco's *Pistole* represents a direct and almost instant imitation of Aretino's *Primo libro di lettere* (1537), a work which nearly invented the genre 'libro di lettere' single-handedly. Aretino learned of Franco's projected book of letters, and he blocked its publication by his own publisher, Francesco Marcolini. The enmity engendered by this conflict ended in a bitter feud between Franco and Aretino, and, in mid-1539, led to Franco's departure from Venice. Owing to Aretino's opposition, the publication of Franco's *Pistole vulgari* was delayed until April 1539. The letters collected in the book extend from 10 September 1531 until 4 November 1538, and the letter of dedication, dated 1 July 1538, suggests that the latest letters were composed intentionally for the letter collection, with a view toward publication. Without Marcolini's support, Franco was forced to turn to an untried publisher, a Frenchman active in Venice, Antoine Gardane, who sometimes went by an Italianized version of his name ('Antonio Gardano'). Gardane, who subsequently became an important publisher, especially of musical texts, began his publishing activity with *Le pistole vulgari di M. Nicolo Franco* in 1539. Gardane printed a second edition of this work in 1542 in a smaller format. The person of Nicolò Franco and his *Pistole vulgari* will be treated more amply in a forthcoming number of *FONTES* treating Nicolò Franco's 'Künstlerbriefe' written to Titian, Jacopo del Giallo, and Jacopo Sansovino.

FULL TEXTS

The two references to Michelangelo are found in the following two passages.

- (1) fols. 227r-231v: “Pistola di M. Nicola Franco, nella quale scrive ad Amore: (...)” / Di Vinetia. / Del M. D. XXXVIII.”

Excerpt:

fol. 230 verso (1538): “Ma descendiamo a i macanici: Prima con i Pittori, e con i Scultori hai perduta la reputatione fino a Plus ultra. E morto Apelle, che non havea altro pensiero, che di dipingere in mille foggie la forma tua con quella di Monna Venere, quando nascendo usciva dal mare. Non e piu Prasitele, che in pietra ti sculpsce la statua. Non siamo piu, ti dico, al tempo d’Andrea Mantenga, ne di Gioan Bellino. I penelli, e gli scarpelli han da far altro, che colorare, et intagliare il viso d’un Dio d’Amore. Michelagnolo, Titiano et il Sansovino harebbero poche faccende, se volesseno perdere il tempo per tua cagione. Guarda pure, e dimmi che hai tu da fare co’l resto? (...)”

- (2) fols. 233v-235v: “Pistola di M. Nicolo Franco, nella quale scrive a la Fama” (1538).

Excerpt:

fol. 235 recto: “Tu hai determinato che con MICHELAGNOLO BUONARUOTI, con TITIANO, e col SANSOVINO viva, e muora l’eccellenza de la Pittura, e de la Scultura.”

COMMENTARY TO THE FULL TEXTS

(1) The first text, excerpted from the letter, “*Pistola di M. Nicolo Franco, nella quale scrive ad Amore: (...) / Di Vinetia. / Del M. D. XXXVIII.*”, addresses the Petrarcan God of Love, commiserating with *Amore* that, where ancient painters and sculptors (Apelles and Praxiteles) were assiduously dedicated to representing him, he has been forgotten by the moderns. Even the time of Andrea Mantegna and Giovanni Bellini belongs to the past. Now brushes and chisels have better things to do than to colour and carve the face of the God of Love. Michelangelo, Titian, and Jacopo Sansovino would have little to do, if they were to want to waste time on your account. Here we find a trace of a new triumvirate of the first artists, a construction fabricated from a Venetian perspective, as testifies the inclusion of Titian and, somewhat unexpectedly, of Sansovino. Sansovino was, however, closely allied with Aretino and Titian in Venice. The remarkable absence of Raphael nearly constitutes a negative presence. Even this brief statement by Franco offers an additional testimony to the centrality of the establishment of rankings of artists in Renaissance writings about art. It may appear to modern eyes a somewhat idle and simplistic exercise, but similar phenomena have scarcely disappeared from the modern or post-modern world, as is seen in the countless cultural prizes that continue to be distributed indifferently to worthy and unworthy recipients.

(2) The second text, excerpted from the letter, “*Pistola di M. Nicolo Franco, nella quale scrive a la Fama*”, comes directly to the same point, identifying the same triumvirate of artists: “con MICHELAGNOLO BUONARUOTI, con TITIANO, e col SANSOVINO”, with their names given relief by being printed in capitals. With them live and die the excellence of painting and sculpture. For Franco the arts are Painting and Sculpture. Architecture is not taken into account. Again the presence of Sansovino, ranked alongside Michelangelo and Titian, is unusual. Michelangelo-Titian-Sansovino is a constellation almost never found unless Jacopo Sansovino or his son, or possibly Pietro Aretino, have influenced content of the text. Franco’s *Pistole* contains near the end (fols. 24r-242r) a last-minute letter addressed to Jacopo Sansovino, assuring him that “*vostro nome, tanto largo luogo nel mondo*” has not been forgotten in the small world of Nicolò Franco’s pages.

The largest part of the letters in Franco’s letter collection are written to real persons, but these two lengthy expositions are addressed to the gods of Love and Fame.

NICOLO FRANCO: SELECTED LITERATURE

Franco Pignatti, "Nicolò Franco", in: *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 50, Roma 1998, pp. 202-206

Paul F. Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World (1530-1560): Anton Francesco Doni, Nicolò Franco and Ortensio Lando*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969

Internet searches may need to consider the variants of Franco's name, 'Nicolo' and 'Niccolo'.

SEE:

Wikipedia: "Niccolò Franco"

A very extensive bibliography of texts, editions, and secondary literature, "Niccolò Franco", by Franco Pignatti (last updated in 2008), is:

www.nuovorinascimento.org/cinquecento/franco-2.pdf.

This bibliography is posted at the website: www.nuovorinascimento.org under "Cinquecento plurale / La cultura non ortodossa nell'Italia del XVI secolo: letteratura, arte, religione" (Indice / Bibliografia).

Literature treating Nicolò Franco and his *Pistole vulgari* will be cited more extensively in a future number of *FONTES* treating Nicolò Franco's '*Künstlerbriefe*' written to Titian, Jacopo del Giallo, and Jacopo Sansovino.

SEARCH TERMS / SUCHBEGRIFFE / PAROLE CHIAVI

Amore
 Andrea Mantenga
 Apelle
 BUONARUOTI (Buonarroti)
 colorare
 Dio d'Amore
 dipingere
 eccellenza
 Fama
 foggie (foggia)
 forma
 Franco, Nicolo
 Gioan Bellino (Giovanni Bellini)
 intagliare
 Jacopo Sansovino
 macanici (meccanici)
 Michelagnolo (Michelangelo)
 MICHELAGNOLO BUONARUOTI
 Monna Venere
 nascita di Venere
 Nicolo Franco
 penelli (pennello)
 pietra
 Pistola (epistola, lettera)
 Pittori (pittore)
 Pittura
 Plus ultra
 Prasitele
 reputatione (reputazione)
 Sansovino
 SANSOVINO
 scarpelli (scarpello / scalpello)
 sculpisce (sculpire)
 Scultori (scultore)
 Scultura
 statua
 TITIANO
 Titiano (Titian, Tiziano, Tizian)
 Venere
 viso d'un Dio d'Amor