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Kommentar zu:

MICHAIL CHATZIDAKIS (CHANIA/ BERLIN)

Schuld, Sühne und der Triumph künstlerischer Genialität – Leone Leoni's Doria Medaille

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According to Chatzidakis's article, Leone Leoni's medal of Andrea Doria struck in 1541 is part of the artist's strategy of self-representation. In particular, the author argues that the portrait on the reverse of the medal, traditionally interpreted as Leoni's self-portrait, can be considered a sort of manifesto of Leoni's claims for the autonomy of the visual arts and the »Immunität des hochbegabten Künstler-Genies«.

The author's thesis rests on a reading of two different documents. The first is a letter written by Jacopo Giustinian to Pietro Aretino on May 16, 1540 and first published in the *Lettere scritte a Pietro Aretino*, Marcolini, Venezia 1552, II, No. 98 (reprint by G. Floris and L. Mulas in 1997, critical edition by P. Procaccioli in 2003), a book to which the article makes no reference. The fact that Giustinian's letter (the original of which remains untraced) was transmitted only in a printed edition of letters should certainly be taken in account when interpreting Giustinian's report on Leoni's final condemnation to the galleys (he was sentenced in Rome, and not in Milan, as the author states on p. 1). First, we have no evidence that the letter reflects Leoni's own »wohlinszenierten literarischen Selbstrechtfertigungskonstruktion« or was inspired by the artist even in its »Metaforik«: its author was not Leoni, but Jacopo Giustinian – likely the »nipote« of the humanist Giovanni Giustinian, who was well acquainted with Pietro Aretino (E. Russo, in

http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-giustinian_res-207aff5c-87ee-11dc-8e9d-0016357eee51_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/). An educated man such as Jacopo Giustinian may have had an active role in shaping the narrative of these events. Second, a short consideration of recent literature on Aretino would easily have demonstrated that he sometimes manipulated his correspondence before publication in order to craft his public image according to his own agenda. Jacopo Giustinian's letter was written according to this agenda and published in Aretino's entourage. A closer reading of it reveals that its aim was not to justify Leoni's crime (p. 3: »Leonis Mordtat wird somit »sanktioniert«, es sei als führte die göttliche Vorsehung seine Hand zur Erfüllung einer heiligen und damit legitimierten Mission«), but rather to invoke the power of Aretino's »onnipotente penna [...], la quale so che da' principi è cotanto tenuta, che ella basteria a cacciar di galera un assassin micidiale, non che un giovane virtuoso e dabbene«. A few pages further, in the same *Lettere scritte a Pietro Aretino*, a letter

by Leone Leoni from Genoa (I, No. 348, March 23, 1541) reported on his liberation from the galleys and his reunion with his family, implicitly crediting Aretino for this happy ending. A little later in the correspondence is a letter from Francisco Duarte appears which confirms that the Spanish authorities in Genoa considered Leone to be Aretino's »cognoscydo y servidor« (II, No. 160, June 3, 1541). The second document that Chatzidakis considers is a version of Leoni's medal for Andrea Doria which represents the admiral on the obverse and an anonymous male portrait framed by chains on the reverse. Without discussing the nineteenth-century identification of the portrait on the obverse as Leoni, Chatzidakis assumes that the medal was made by the artist »als Dank für seine Freilassung« from the galleys. It is however unclear if this interpretation implies that Leoni struck the silver medal at his own expense without a commission, or if he expressed his own sentiments in a work paid for by Doria.

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According to the author, Leoni's portrait should be seen as a »memento beneficii«: his effigy and the »Zeichen der Bestrafung« (chains, hammer, galley), should be read an allusion to his liberation through Andrea Doria's intervention. On another level, the same attributes should also be read as an allegory of the »Gefangenschaft der Künste, die befreit werden müssen«. In particular the hammer, which Chatzidakis sees as chained, should be considered a symbol of Leoni's art. At a third level, the »Zeichen der Bestrafung« turns Leone into a »Erlösung wartenden Märtyrer«. However, Chatzidakis's complex reading fails to identify all the elements of this supposed allegory (he cannot identify a »geheimnissvollen Gegenstandes«, p. 6) and it rests on no internal or external source.

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Moreover, his interpretation is supported by only one iconographic comparison with a fifteenth-century *Pietà with the Attributes of the Passion* that differs dramatically from the medal in terms of its scheme, attributes, dating and function. More crucially, consideration of the complete scope of the literature on Doria's patronage (e.g. P. Boccardo, *Andrea Doria e le arti*, Rome 1989, p. 117, note 44, with previous literature on his medal), Leoni's Genoese plaquettes (e.g. W. Cupperi, in *Pinacoteca Civica di Vicenza: scultura e arti applicate dal XIV al XVIII secolo*, III, ed. by M.E. Avagnina, M. Binotto and G.C.F. Villa, Cinisello Balsamo 2005, pp. 242–243, no. 285; D. Thornton, *A Plaquette by Leone Leoni Acquired by the British Museum*, in »The Burlington Magazine«, CXXVIII, 2006, pp. 828–832) and on the medal discussed here (e.g. G. Toderi, F. Vannel, *Le medaglie italiane del XVI secolo*, Florence 2000, pp. 43–44, no. 32; P. Attwood, *Italian Medals in British Public Collections 1530–1600*, London 2003, I, p. 95, n. 6) would have shown that the identification of the portrait on the reverse with Leoni is itself controversial. No surviving inscription, iconographic precedent or external document supports this claim. E. Plon, who first proposed the identification in 1887, relies on comparison with a later medal (*post* 1549) that portrays Leoni with rather dissimilar features – the nose, the hair and the eyebrows, for example, are different. Moreover, Leoni's later medal (a unique specimen once in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan) was lost before 1912 and

cannot be compared with the Genoese portrait except via the old picture published in Plon's 1887 monograph. Finally, among the numerous medals of artists made in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, none can be found which alludes to events such as imprisonments and liberations, and none represents the artist together with his principal patron. The medal of Alessandro Bassano, antiquarian, and Giovanni da Cavino, medalist, has a completely different meaning and iconographical. Finally, it may have been worth discussing to what extent notions that belong to the Romantic and Post-Romantic discourse on art such as the »Eigengesetzlichkeit der Kunst«, the »Autonomie der Kunst« and the »Immunität des hochbegabten Künstler-Genies« may apply to the mentality of an artist of the mid sixteenth century.