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PADUAN

MUSICAL PROCESSION

CIRCA 1510

Terracotta
34 x 16 x 31 cm

Provenance:
French Private Collection

Comparative Literature:

Leo Planiscig, *Andrea Riccio* (Wien: A. Schroll, 1927).

Giancarlo Gentilini, "Un busto all'antica del Riccio e alcuni appunti sulla scultura in terracotta a Padova tra Quattro e Cinquecento", *Nuovi studi* 1 (1996), 29-46.

Vittorio Sgarbi, ed., *La scultura al tempo di Andrea Mantegna: tra classicismo e naturalismo*, exh. cat (Milan: Electa, 2006).

Andrea Bacchi and Luciana Giacomelli, "Rinascimento di terra e di fuoco. Figure all'antica e immagini devote nella scultura di Andrea Riccio" in Andrea Bacchi and Luciana Giacomelli, eds., *Rinascimento e passione per l'antico: Andrea Riccio e il suo tempo*, exh. cat. (Trento: Castello del Buonconsiglio, 2008).

Giuliana Ericani, "Giovanni de Fondulis. Un importante capitolo della scultura rinascimentale padana" in Paola Venturelli, ed., *Rinascimento cremasco. Arti, maestri e botteghe tra XV e XVI secolo* (Milan: Skira, 2015).

A crown of vine leaves covers the head of the hirsute horseman who is travelling on a donkey while playing the *lira da braccio*. He is wearing a torn pelisse, leaving his muscular arms and legs uncovered, and wears sandals and breeches to mid-calf (we should point out here the sole obvious lacuna in this terracotta, the figure's right foot). The donkey is

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escorted by four children wearing sleeveless tunics. They are divided into two pairs, and the two at the back are reading an album. This singular cortege is evocative of classical compositions, such as the *thiasos* escorting Dionysus in India. In this precise case, the procession of the divinity includes Silenus riding a donkey, surrounded by satyrs. The branch of vine that crowns our horseman seems indeed to refer to a bacchanalian context, but the hairiness of his face and the dry physique are of course irreconcilable with the figure of Silenus. These physical characteristics would be more appropriate for Hephaistos, who in Greek vase painting enters Olympus on a mule, but the musical instrument and the vine crown are not appropriate for the mythological blacksmith. The definition of the iconography and the identification of a precise literary source would require thorough research that it has not been possible to complete for this initial publication.

However, the style means it is possible to make suggestions concerning the date and the place of execution of this sculpture. The children's lacerated clothing, the surprising realism with which the animal and its leather bit are described, the strong desire to emphasize purely anecdotal details, such as the gourd that hangs from the horseman's side, refer to two terracotta sculptures from Padua, also about 30 centimetres high, but which depict an isolated figure, which were probably modelled during the final decade of the 15th century: the supposed *Peasant Resting* in the Vienna Kunsthistorisches museum, (Inv.Nr. KK_7345) and the *Spinario* (fig. 1) at the Bode Museum in Berlin (Inv.Nr. 204). From Leo Planiscig's studies (1927, p. 105-108), these two pieces have been recognized in the literature as early works by Andrea Riccio, the main figure of terracotta and toreutic sculpture in Padua during the first third of the 16th century: a hypothesis for attribution which has recently received credit from Giancarlo Gentilini (in *Rinascimento* 2008, p. 61, 65). After all, not only stylistic reasons, but also the unusual iconography of this little terracotta group, imbued with reminiscences of antiquity, fits well into the cultivated climate of this university city of the Veneto. However, unlike the statuettes in Vienna and Berlin, the work examined here does not fit into the context of reflections on precise Hellenistic prototypes, such as the *Spinario* or the *Old Drunken Woman*, now at the Musei Capitolini in Rome, nevertheless these three works have in common debts to Bartolomeo Bellano, the presumed master of Riccio and their association with the supposed *Paduanische Naturalismus*.

At the end of the 15th century, two paths leading to naturalism were opened to sculptors from Padua: on the one hand, the harsh and so to speak, barbarian language of Bellano "*lessico aspro e per così dire barbarico*" (Bacchi-Giacomelli 2008, p.25); on the other there are the figures imbued with a vital energy "*pervase da un'energia vitalissima*" (Aldo Galli dans *Rinascimento* 2008, p. 254) of the artist from Crema, Giovanni de Fondulis, who, it is now known, was also indispensable for the young Riccio. The author of our terracotta seems, however to look more towards the first path, leading to Bellano. For example, the footwear, with the distant ancestry of Donatello, seems to be studied from the shield carrying *putti* of



Fig. 1 Andrea Riccio, *Spinario con le vesti stracciate*. Bode Museum in Berlin (Inv.Nr. 204).

the Raccabonella monument at San Francesco Grande of Padua (fig. 2), Bellano's last work, who died shortly after 1495; our figures' bushy hair is also an indication of a relation with the two bronze *spiritelli* of the Franciscan church.

Terracotta sculpture of Renaissance Padua is however a field that is still largely magmatic. This is shown by the fact that the personality of Giovanni de Fondulis, which is essential for the evolution of three dimensional art in Padua, has only been reconstituted in the past decade, in other words, when Giuliana Ericani (in *La scultura* 2006, p. 92-94) showed by means of documentary evidence that he was the author of the Baptism in the Museo Civico di Bassano del Grappa (inv. S192 C; see *idem, Rinascimento* 2015). Artists active around 1500 still remain surrounded by mystery, such as Antonio Antico, Fondulis's son-in-law, to whom the *Apostle* in the Worcester Art Museum is attributed, or Domenico Boccasano, who created the *St. James* and *St. Philip* on the altar of St. Nicolas of Tolentino in the church of the Eremitani of Padua (1495), while the attribution of other works remains uncertain, such as the later statues (in terracotta) on the adjacent altar to the Virgin, which are already of the second decade of the 16th century: attention was drawn to them by a major article by Giancarlo Gentilini (1996).

It is therefore probable that our terracotta was created at the beginning of the 16th century, as suggested by the dreamy air with which our horseman is playing the lyre. The large moustache and long wavy beard, in addition, make this singular figure the twin of the fantastical print by Jacopo de' Barbari, *Triton and Nereid* (fig. 3) which can in fact be dated in the early years of the 16th century (Giorgio Marini, in *Rinascimento* 2008, p.368-369, cat. 61).

Luca Siracusano



Fig. 2. Bartolomeo Bellano, *Putto* on the Raccabonella monument at San Francesco Grande of Padua



Fig. 3. Jacopo de' Barbari, *Triton e Nereide*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam