

Francesco Giambonini. *Bernardino Lanino ritrattista e l'ambiente artistico-politico del suo tempo.*

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Francesco Giambonini's ambitious study, completed just before his death, calls attention to two moments in the career of the Piedmontese painter Bernardino Lanino (ca. 1509–81), known primarily for his religious production, in which he experimented with secular subjects. These works were previously brought to light by Andreina Griseri ("Un poeta della Controriforma in Piemonte," *Paragone* 141 [1961]: 19–36), but Giambonini offers new, and sometimes radical, interpretations of their iconography and chronology and situates them within the intellectual and political culture of the court of Duke Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy. The book consists of five chapters, four of which are case studies, and a catalogue of Lanino's paintings.

The first examines a portrait of the jurist Cassiano dal Pozzo (1558). Interpreting the objects and mottoes at the bottom of the panel alongside details from the sitter's biography, Giambonini posits the portrait as a defense of Cassiano against an unspecified malfeasance that, he suggests, must have caused his dismissal as *presidente patrimoniale* in 1560. His argument is intriguing, although occasionally weighted down by efforts to trace every motif, with mixed results, and an iconographic framework that is at times too tightly constructed. Also lacking is a consideration of audience: who would have seen this portrait and how would its message have reached the duke? More prudent, perhaps, would be to read it as a curated but general reflection of Cassiano without depending on an undocumented political scandal. Comparative examples by Moroni, Titian, and others set Lanino's portrait within a sophisticated and diffuse corpus of emblematic and allegorical images. The second chapter proposes that a later likeness of Cassiano (1575), previously unpublished, is a second portrait by Lanino described in an inventory of the Dal Pozzo family's holdings.

In his third and most radical case study, Giambonini argues — daringly and not entirely successfully — that Lanino's *Mars and Venus*, previously dated to ca. 1547–50 and ascribed to a Milanese patron, was instead painted in 1559 to celebrate Emanuele Filiberto's marriage to Marguerite de Valois, daughter of Francis I, and that the divinities are portraits of the duke and his bride. His claim is based largely on a tenuous resemblance of Mars and Venus to portraits of the ducal couple, though bolstered by iconographic evidence and traditions associating Francis I with Mars. Giambonini might have found more support from Italian

precedents such as Mantegna's alleged portrayal of Isabella d'Este and Francesco Gonzaga as *Mars and Venus* (ca. 1497); such examples would also have enriched his discussion of the problematic place of the nude in official court imagery.

The fourth chapter departs from Lanino to explore Emanuele Filiberto's deployment of the visual arts to construct an authoritative princely identity, but the discussion is undermined by Giambonini's insistence on redating a portrait of the duke by Giacomo Vighi (l'Argenta) from ca. 1572 to 1561. Inventories of artworks acquired by the duke elucidate his transformation of Turin into a cultural center that could compete with other European courts and suggest avenues for future investigation. The final chapter considers Lanino's style and influences before cataloging his paintings in the appendix, in which Giambonini seeks to correct inconsistencies and errors in the most recent monograph (Giovanni Romano, *Bernardino Lanino e il Cinquecento a Vercelli* [1986]). It is unclear whether Giambonini was aware of a similar survey in Robert Colman's unpublished dissertation (1988).

Until recently Lanino has not received significant scholarly attention and was viewed largely as a follower of Gaudenzio Ferrari — himself undergoing a needed reevaluation — so Giambonini's reintegration of Lanino and his Piedmontese/Savoyard patrons into the artistic and intellectual culture of the Cinquecento is welcome. It is therefore regrettable that Giambonini occasionally falls back on characterizations of Lanino and Piedmonte as “retrograde” (22) and “medieval” (70, 214), and that his argument is often circumstantial and reliant on hypotheticals. In addition, Giambonini approaches the material as an historian of literary culture rather than of art, enabling him to draw on a vast knowledge of Italian and French texts but occasionally causing him to overexplain well-established concepts, such as portraiture and self-fashioning, and to fail to account for critical bibliography, particularly in English. Giambonini's expertise in emblems sometimes leads him to overinterpret pictorial details, ascribing to them or their orientation precise symbolic meanings that push the bounds of probability. The footnote apparatus is impressive but dominated by published sources, partially by necessity given the lack of documentation for Lanino's paintings. Another drawback is the paucity of illustrations. Only the four primary works and five supporting images are reproduced, omitting dozens of examples that play critical roles in Giambonini's analysis — an absence that is more unfortunate because of Giambonini's dependence on visual evidence to support his claims. Nevertheless, Giambonini's book is thought provoking and adds to an expanding discussion of the visual culture of Lombardy and Piedmont in the early modern period.

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