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Essay for Metropolitan Museum of Art website
Curatorial Research/Curatorial Studies section
November 16, 2014



Fig. 1. Pier Leone Ghezzi, *Benedict XIII Presiding over the Provincial Roman Synod of 1725*, Basilica of St. John Lateran, circa 1725, oil on canvas, 243.5 by 311.1 cm, Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art, Purchased with funds from the State of North Carolina, 1952 (52.9.157). [View a high-resolution version of this image on Google Art Project.](#)

Two months into my GlaxoSmithKline Curatorial Fellowship at the North Carolina Museum of Art, John Coffey, Deputy Director for Art, asked me to put together a dossier exhibition drawn from the museum's permanent holdings, which include an outstanding collection of early-modern Italian paintings and sculpture. My initial idea was to resurrect two or three Italian paintings from storage, but I ended up selecting one enormous narrative canvas painted in eighteenth-century Rome, Pier Leone Ghezzi's *Benedict XIII Presiding over the Provincial Roman Synod of 1725* (fig. 1), signed and dated 1725. You can find out more about this painting [here](#).

After we determined that the Ghezzi would fit into the exhibition space, my fellowship supervisor, David Steel, Curator of European Art, suggested that I take a look at another object in storage, a uniface cast-bronze medallion with profile portrait of Pope Clement X Altieri (pope 1670–76) (figs. 2-3). This Berniniesque relief was acquired by the NCMA in 1970 (Paul Drey Gallery, NY—from Heim Gallery, London, 1969) and placed on view for only a few years after an outside expert proposed that the artist was not Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680) but Gioacchino Francesco Travani (active ca. 1634–75), a die engraver and goldsmith employed by the papal mint from ca. 1655–74. According to the seller, the medallion came from the Altieri Palace, Rome via a French private collection. The Altieri provenance has not been confirmed.



Fig. 2 (left). Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Pope Clement X Altieri*, circa 1670–76, bronze, Diam. 280 mm, Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art, Purchased with funds from the State of North Carolina, 1970 (70.20.1), obverse. The sitter, wearing a *camauro* (papal skullcap), *mozzetta* (short, hooded cape), and stole, is recognizable as Pope Clement X on the basis of his facial features and the heraldic ornament represented on the stole, a star representing the pontiff's aristocratic Roman family, the Altieri. Fig. 3 (right). Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Pope Clement X Altieri*, circa 1670–76, bronze, Diam. 280 mm, Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art, Purchased with funds from the State of North Carolina, 1970 (70.20.1), reverse.

I was captivated by the simple and elegant bronze roundel—especially its virtuosic modeling, tonal depth, and textural richness produced by the combination of glossy bust with granular background—and proceeded to study it from multiple vantage points in order to tie it together with the Ghezzi for our installation. First on my agenda was to learn more about commemorative medallions as a class of object and second was to evaluate the evidence for Travani's authorship of the NCMA example.

Our plaque belongs to the portrait medal tradition that began in early fifteenth-century Italy with the creation of coin-like metal discs bearing images—especially profile portraits—and inscriptions on both sides. Seventeenth-century portrait medallions are similar to Renaissance medals but are considerably larger, sculpted on one side only, and either cast in metal and sometimes gilded, or sculpted in marble and/or terracotta. Popes were the primary patrons of such objects.

When the Raleigh Museum purchased the Clement X relief, Bernini's name had been connected with it because of the superb modulation of the face and because Bernini sketched the pontiff's left-facing profile in red chalk (Leipzig, Museum der bildenden Künste, inv. 7906) and sculpted at least two marble busts of him, including a version owned by the pope's adopted nephew, Cardinal Paluzzo Paluzzi Albertoni Altieri (now in the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Palazzo Barberini, Rome). Rudolf Wittkower saw the medallion when it was at the Heim Gallery, London in 1969 and inclined toward an attribution to Bernini. However, when contacted by NCMA director Justus Bier the following year, Wittkower was cautious. While he noted the "rather nervous zigzag folds of the papal mantle" that compared with Bernini's late style, he asked for an opportunity to study the medallion again in the original before agreeing to make a final judgment. Unfortunately he died before he was able to do so—in October 1971—so Bier then wrote to Ann Sutherland Harris, who was preparing a catalogue of Bernini's drawings (1977). Harris in turn deferred to bronze specialist Graham Pollard, who suggested—based on his study of a photograph—that the NCMA plaque was made by Travani because Travani struck some portrait medals for Clement X in which the effigies were similar to the one on the medallion. The Museum accepted this view and placed the reattributed medallion on view until around 1980, when it transferred its entire collection to a new building.



Fig. 4 (left). Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Pope Clement X Altieri*, circa 1670–76, bronze, Diam. 278 mm, Rome, Museo Nazionale del Palazzo di Venezia, Inv. PV 1637. Fig. 5 (right). Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Pope Clement X Altieri*, circa 1670–76, bronze, Diam. 278 mm, Private collection, Milan, courtesy of Galleria Andrea Daninos, Milan

Having remained in storage since then, the NCMA papal medallion has escaped the notice of scholars. An NCMA *Bulletin* of 1971 mentioned its acquisition, and H. Lee Bimm (1974), Pietro Cannata (1984, 1996, 1999), and later scholars have noted the existence of our particular Clement X medallion but listed its location as Heim Gallery, London, which closed in 1986. When I picked up the research last spring, I learned that our tondo has at least five “cousins.” These include three cast-bronze roundels roughly equal to the Raleigh example in size (all four between 276 and 280 mm): one in the Museo Nazionale del Palazzo di Venezia, Rome (said to have come from a princely Roman collection; fig. 4), one in a private collection in Milan courtesy of Galleria Andrea Daninos, Milan (fig. 5), and a gilt bronze formerly in the Conti collection, Rome and now in the Museo del Palazzo della Penna, Perugia (fig. 6; ex coll. Valentino Martinelli).



Fig. 6. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Pope Clement X Altieri*, circa 1670–76, gilt bronze, Diam. 276 mm, Perugia, Museo del Palazzo della Penna, Valentino Martinelli Collection, Inv. 296.

Also in Perugia is a much larger terracotta medallion (400 mm) with an inscription identifying the pontiff (fig. 7; ex coll. Martinelli), which recalls the inscribed bronze (317 mm) in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 8; [07.204.1](#)). The latter was purchased in 1907 from the dealer J. & S. Goldschmidt. With regard to the example sold by Daninos, which came to light in 2002, it may be a medallion recorded by Bimm as formerly in the collection of Antonio Muñoz, Rome (1884–1960) but untraced today.



Fig. 7 (left). Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Pope Clement X Altieri*, circa 1670–76, terracotta, Diam. 400 mm, Perugia, Museo del Palazzo della Penna, Valentino Martinelli Collection, Inv. 208. Fig. 8 (right). Gian Lorenzo Bernini,

Pope Clement X Altieri, circa 1670–76, bronze, Diam. 318 mm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1907, 07.204.1.

Bimm (1974) connected all of the Altieri papal medallions with an inventory description of October 24, 1677 listing an “Effige di Clemente decimo assai bella, del Cavalier Bernino; senza lettere e senza rovescio. Medaglione assai grande.” (A rather beautiful image of Clement X by Cavalier Bernini; without an inscription or reverse image. A very large medallion). (Cfr. Silvana Balbi De Caro in *Medaglia* 1974). The inventory is said to be a list of medals belonging to the eminent seventeenth-century scholar Carlo Cartari (1614–97), prefect of the Archivio of Castel Sant’Angelo from the 1640s until the 1670s, and a consistorial advocate from 1642 (later Dean of the College of Consistorial Advocates). During the 1670s Cartari was hired by several different Roman families to reorganize their private libraries. The most important of these commissions came from the Altieri family, whose library he superintended from 1674 until the end of his life.

Cartari’s boss at the Altieri Library was Paluzzo Altieri, Clement X’s influential “cardinal nephew,” who brought his library with him to the Altieri palace when he joined the pope’s household in 1670. Around this time Paluzzo commissioned Bernini to create a funerary monument for his newly beatified ancestor, Ludovica Albertoni, in the church of San Francesco a Ripa, Rome, and reportedly convinced the artist to do the work for free in exchange for arranging clemency for Bernini’s exiled brother Luigi. (Luigi had been forced to flee Rome after committing a scandalous act in St. Peter’s in 1670). Paluzzo was also the owner and likely patron of the above-mentioned marble bust of Clement X. Cartari, whose cousin Giulio Cartari was one of Bernini’s favorite pupils, witnessed the sculpting of the bust in progress in Bernini’s studio in May 1676.

Thanks to the discovery of Cartari’s 1677 description of the “effige di Clemente decimo” by Cavalier Bernini, most scholars now accept the idea that Bernini designed and produced papal medallions such as the example in Raleigh. They surmise that Bernini would have made a sketch of the pope’s profile (as in the Leipzig sheet), sculpted the first model in wax, and then delegated the casting to a foundry

specialist. Girolamo Lucenti (1627–92), a highly respected sculptor, founder, and die engraver who supervised the papal mint from 1668 to 1679 and did much of Bernini’s bronze work, is the most likely person to have executed this task. After the casting was complete, Bernini would have refined and incised the surface with his sculptor’s tools.

We can make a hypothesis about the inception and display of the Clement X relief based on what we know about Clement’s art patronage and the patronage and collecting of his peers. The commission likely originated with the pope’s *maestro di camera*, Cardinal Camillo Massimo (1620–77), described in papal *avvisi* as the “seconda creatura” of the pontiff. As High Chamberlain, Massimo oversaw all of Clement’s official artistic projects. Massimo himself was one of the most important art patrons and collectors of the seventeenth century, and the pope thought so highly of his connoisseurship and antiquarian knowledge that he appointed Massimo superintendent of the decoration of the Altieri Palace and other familial projects.

Cardinal Massimo’s enormous collection included paintings, antique sculpture, medallions, coins, medals, cameos, and other objects, so it is not surprising that he also owned a bronze medallion with a portrait of the Altieri pope. A post-mortem inventory of his palace at the Quattro Fontane, Rome redacted on October 11, 1677 lists “Un ritratto della San: me: di Clem.^e X.^o in bronzo.” This bronze work was the only portrait in the Sala dell’Udienza (one of two audience chambers) on the *piano nobile* of the palace.

Massimo’s collection was largely dispersed within two years of his death. Palazzo Massimo alle Quattro Fontane was likewise sold, along with the cardinal’s unsold paintings, antiquities, and furnishings, to Cardinal Francesco Nerli in 1679. However, the bronze portrait seems to have remained with Massimo family at least until 1686, when it was described in the post-mortem inventory of the cardinal’s younger brother Fabio Camillo III (1621–86). Fabio’s *palazzetto* at the Quattro Fontane, where the family had moved in 1679 and which passed by inheritance to his daughter, Giulia Massimo (d. 1711), lists “Un Tondino di metallo rappresentante la Sa: Mem: di Clemente Decimo con cornicetta di

Pero nera tonda” (a small tondo of metal representing the holy memory of Clement X with a little tondo frame of black pear wood). Giulia was Cardinal Massimo’s last heir and sold the *palazzetto* to Cardinal Nerli shortly after Fabio’s death. No one has traced the cardinal’s Clement X relief beyond the *palazzetto* of 1686, but it is quite possibly the medallion now in North Carolina—framed in an exquisite seventeenth-century carved and gilded tondo said by the previous owner to be original to the work (fig. 9). (Stay tuned for a scientific analysis of the frame.)



Fig. 9. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Pope Clement X Altieri*, circa 1670–76, bronze, Diam. 280 mm., Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art, Purchased with funds from the State of North Carolina, 1970 (70.20.1), framed.

The surviving evidence of the Clement X medallion—one gilded, at least three bronze, one inscribed bronze, and one terracotta—suggests that it was produced as a series for a small group of recipients. Perhaps the gilded version was made for Clement himself, while the others were manufactured for the pontiff’s close advisors including Cardinal Massimo. Clement IX Rospigliosi (pope 1667–69) spawned a similar series of portrait medallions of which the following are known: two bronzes (one in a private collection and the other at the Courtauld Gallery, London), two gilt-bronze roundels (Fogg Museum, Cambridge, MA and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston), one marble roundel (for sale in Rome in 2002), and an oval-shaped, white-marble plaque noted by Bimm in 1974 as housed in a private Roman collection. Like the NCMA Altieri roundel, the [Cambridge Rospigliosi medallion](#) (308 mm) has recently

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been resurrected from storage and placed on view in the new Fogg Museum galleries that opened on November 16, 2014.

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The exhibition Depicting the Papacy in Late Baroque Rome: Gian Lorenzo Bernini and Pier Leone Ghezzi will run through April 6, 2015, at the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh.

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