

La facciata dipinta di Palazzo Bini, progetto di Perin del Vaga

Abstract

The Painted Façade of Palazzo Bini, a Project by Perin del Vaga

The previously unpublished drawing presented here is the project for the façade decoration of Palazzo Bini in Rome. The building was located on Via del Consolato until 1888, when it was demolished to make way for the creation of Corso Vittorio Emanuele II. It is probably the *modello* intended for the patron Bernardo Bini, a highly important Florentine banker and treasurer of Leo X, to whom the Medici arms, depicted above the entry doorway, are dedicated. The drawing constitutes a rare example of a Renaissance façade decoration project that would have been executed in the monochrome fresco style, typically used to imitate ancient Roman reliefs. This *all'antica* style, then much in vogue in Rome, was used to decorate over 200 buildings, painting them with varying levels of complexity. The most famous artists in this field were Polidoro da Caravaggio and his partner Maturino, active from around 1520 until the Sack of 1527.

The iconography is based on the theme of fire, symbol of the Roman *Domus* and of the eternity of the Urbs. The stories begin with Aeneas' encounter with the Cuman Sybil, alluding to the birth of Rome, continue through its first rulers, and end with king Tarquino Prisco and his queen, Tanaquilla. In particular, the scenes dedicated to Numa Pompilio, a religious-minded king and peacemaker, to the Vestals and to the rites of ancient Rome, create a symbolic link to Leo X, as a restorer of peace and defender of Christendom, thereby underlining the ties between the pope and Bernardo Bini. The patron is further glorified by linking him to the glorious origins of Rome, to the virtues of its rulers and to the noble, courageous Mutius Scaevola, themes that return to life on the sheet for the painted façade.

The drawing was executed in 1521, and is assignable to Perin del Vaga on the basis of three elements: stylistic analysis, comparisons to his later architectural projects and the attribution to the artist of the interior decoration of Palazzo Bini, by both Domenico Gnoli and Rodolfo Lanciani, who saw the frescoes before the demolition of the building. This project from Del Vaga's youth and its similarities to other, later decorations by Polidoro and Maturino, allow us to highlight his central role in façade decoration in Rome and the influence he exerts in this field from 1520 to 1522, which has thus far been undervalued. Comparisons with his later architectural endeavors and to his other mature works, such as the *basamento* of the Stanza della Segnatura and the Sala Paolina, show how much the *all'antica* style, the iconography and the technique of the façade decoration of his early period, were of fundamental inspiration throughout his career.