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POSSESSIONS AND REPUTATION MAKING AN *INTELLECTUAL PERSONA* IN 17TH CENTURY ROME

The central idea of this project is that since the Renaissance and through the 17th and 18th centuries, a certain number of artists, scholars and members of the liberal professions¹ struggled to construe themselves as *intellectual personae* endowed with distinct features that placed them in a distinct social rank. They did so individually and collectively, through theoretical writings and through practice, openly claiming for social recognition or more silently trying to attain it through their actions.

I have borrowed the notion of “intellectual personae” from Lorraine Daston and Otto Sibum who in the introduction to a special issue of *Science in Context* spoke of a *persona* as “a cultural identity that simultaneously shapes the individual in body and mind and creates a collective with a shared and recognized physiognomy”.² But while Daston and Sibum were primarily interested in the cultural aspects of this phenomenon, as they considered the fashioning of the *scientific personae* within the context of the history of science, I would rather focus on its socio-economic and political features within the context of the history of the *Ancien regime*, i. e. a hierarchical society, strongly characterized by ascribed status.

By *intellectual personae* I thus refer to people exercising very different activities – as I said artists, scholars, lawyers, medicine doctors – and yet sharing a common feature: they were all exercising “intellectual” or “cultivated” professions and providing “cultural” services or goods. And they all pretended that this special quality of their activities placed them in a separate rank: if they did not belong to the titled nobility, they certainly were not members of the laboring ranks of the society.

As Max Weber puts it, ascribed social status, based on honor and prestige - rather than on an economically determined relationship to the market like class -, is the major component of the social stratification within a “patrimonial state” like the early modern ones.³ Within this cultural and political context it is not surprising that the primary goal of the *intellectual personae* was to enhance their position

¹ I refer here just to law and medicine, liberal professions in the actual, not in the early modern, sense of the term

² L. Daston & O. Sibum (eds.), “Introduction: Scientific Personae and Their Histories”, *Science in Context*, 16, 1/2, (2003), pp.1-8

³ *Economy and Society* (1922)

by acquiring reputation. And to attain that goal they had mostly to rely on their special expertise. Elite members more and more frequently required their specific competences. Culture was indeed spreading around lay society, no more confined to universities and monasteries, and new “modern” patterns of consumption were conquering the “leisure classes”.⁴

The fact of possessing culture as they did made them desirable in the eyes of the political elite and supported their claims for reputation that were carried on in at least three different ways:

1. through theoretical writings
2. through a specific setting of everyday life that emphasized their specific competences and objectified their rights to what they were claiming for
3. through forms of construction of their memory that went in the same direction

At the core of this struggle for reputation there was however another reason. Early modern societies were characterized not only by status rather than class and by honor rather than wealth. They were also deeply affected by the fact of experiencing a very weak and uncertain consumer demand. Anyone wishing to sell out his products or services was therefore caught up in what has been termed as a “client economy”⁵. The demand for cultural products and services being specially restricted and uncertain, the *intellectual personae* heavily depended on the conspicuous consumption of a small élite. This meant they were compelled to act as clients of one or more powerful and rich patrons. To this uncomfortable dependence many of them reacted trying to emancipate themselves in different ways. The research project aims at bringing to light these reactions analyzing them from different points of view, not only *in vitam*, during the lifetime, but also *in mortem*, at the crucial moment of the death.

1. Artists, scholars and members of the liberal professions could entrust their claims for the excellence of their know-how – and consequently of their own excellence and nobility - to theoretical writings. Since the 14th century we actually find treatises on the “Dispute of the arts”,⁶ that is the preeminence of law or medicine, or on the superiority of arms and letters, a clear heritage of the academic disputes within the medieval schools and universities. Such treatises were often written in the form of a dialogue, which allowed the author not to take a clear-cut position, but rather to analyze the merits, or the defects, of both the disciplines under scrutiny. The vivid debate carried on by the two characters defending the opposite positions required a very careful examination of the qualities of the two opposed “arts”. And

⁴ For the definition of “leisure class” see T. Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899); for “modern” patterns of consumption, compared to “feudal” ones, see R. Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy 1300–1600* (1993)

⁵ J. Brewer, “Commercialization and politics”, in N. McKendrick, J. Brewer, and J. H. Plumb (eds.), *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (1982)

⁶ E. Garin, *La disputa delle arti nel Quattrocento*, Firenze 1947

this resulted in the more and more acute definition of their nature of intellectual endeavors. Those who performed them could not be but *intellectual personae*.

Along with these texts we also find biographies of illustrious men that included learned people along with emperors, kings or great military captains. And along with the lives of the “ancients” we begin to find those of the “moderns”.⁷ One of the first examples of this interest in the biographies of recently deceased great men is the life of Petrarca written by Giovanni Boccaccio,⁸ soon followed by the life of Dante by the same author.⁹ These works also had a promotional goal, together with a cultural one. By the two biographies Boccaccio actually wanted to highlight the “nobility” of the two modern poets, who had been at the origins of the renovated interest in the humanities.

When almost one century later Leonardo Bruni read the manuscript of the life of Dante by Boccaccio, he had at least two reasons to pick up this heritage and write his own biography of the great poet.¹⁰ In the first of the *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Istrum* (Pier Paolo Vergerio) he had presented on the one side Niccolò Niccoli, who condemned all the moderns, and on the other side Coluccio Salutati, who rescued from blame at least the three “excellences” – Dante, Petrarca and Boccaccio -. They, he claimed, fully deserved to stand by Cicero and Virgil. Moreover he wrote in vernacular (Italian) both the life of Dante and that of Petrarca.¹¹ To the celebration of the moderns along with the ancients, he thus added a strategy of promotion of vernacular as a literary language as noble and elegant as Latin.¹²

Before writing on the two “excellent” moderns, Bruni, who had studied with Michele Crisolora and could read Greek, had got acquainted with the biographical literary genre by translating from Greek into Latin the lives of Cato, Demosthenes, Cicero, written by Plutarch,¹³ making them available for his contemporaries. His work met such a great success¹⁴ that a few decades later, a Roman printer issued a full translation into Latin of the *Lives* of Plutarch at which several humanists had worked.¹⁵ The translation of the *Lives and Sentences of the Ancient Philosophers* by Diogenes Laertius soon followed,¹⁶ accompanied by the edition of the lives of grammarians and rethors by Svetonius.¹⁷ A few years later Antonio Manetti

⁷ G. Tanturli, “Le biografie d’artisti prima del Vasari”, in *Il Vasari storiografo e artista*, Firenze, INSR, 1976, pp. 275-298

⁸ *De vita et moribus Francisci Petrarchi* (1341-42)

⁹ *De origine vita studiis et moribus viri clarissimi Dantis Aligerii florentini poetae illustris et de operibus compositis ab eodem* (1357)

¹⁰ *Vita di Dante* (1436); in the same years Giannozzo Manetti [1396-1459] also wrote a biography of the three *Dantis, Petrarchae et Boccacii vitae*, that circulated manuscript

¹¹ *Vita di Petrarca* (1436)

¹² In 1435 Bruni actually had a dispute on the vernacular with Flavio Biondo

¹³ Written respectively in 1408, 14, and 1415.

¹⁴ G. Stimato, *Autoritratti letterari nella Firenze di Cosimo I: Bandinelli, Vasari, Cellini e Pontorno*, p. 32

¹⁵ Han, around 1470; see C. Giovanardi, “Il bilinguismo italiano-latino del Medioevo e del Rinascimento”, *Storia della lingua italiana*, a cura di L. Serianni e P. Trifone, vol. II, “Scritto e parlato”, Torino, Einaudi, 1994, pp. 435-468

¹⁶ *Vitae et sententiae philosophorum e graeco in latinum traductae, interprete Ambrosio Traversari Camaldulensi* (1472)

¹⁷ *De grammaticis et rethoribus clarissimis libellus* (1474)

included six literates among his *Huomini singolari in Firenze dal MCCC innanzi*, written between 1494 and 1497, and Vespasiano da Bisticci began to collect the materials for his work *Vite di letterati*, which was finished by 1498 and circulated in manuscript. Both books were written in vernacular and the *literati* they treated of were all “modern”.

“Modern” painters too found their advocates: Filippo Villani included a chapter on Cimabue, Giotto and other painters of his times in his *De origine civitatis Florentiae*.¹⁸ The novelty was picked up by Bartolomeo Facio in his *De viris illustribus*, written at the middle of the 15th century and a few years later by the already mentioned Antonio Manetti in his *Vita di Filippo di ser Brunellesco*, which actually conformed to the pattern set by Boccaccio in his *Vita Dantis*.¹⁹ The same Manetti included eight artists among his Florentine illustrious men since 1300.²⁰ And Paolo Giovio added the lives of Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raffaello to his *Dialogus de viris litteris illustribus* written in 1527.²¹

Thus when Vasari published his *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* in 1550 there already existed a long tradition of biography-writing on modern poets, philosophers, painters, sculptors, architects. All the biographers shared a promotional goal: the idea was on the one side to emphasize the excellence of the moderns in comparison with the ancients; on the other side, though, the aim was to stress the intellectual character of the arts, from letters to figurative arts, and consequently their distance from the mechanical crafts. This clearly involved a more or less evident plea for the gentility of those who exercised them. The noun “nobilita” together with the adjective “nobile” or “nobilissimo” and the adverb “nobilmente” recurred 87 times in Vasari’s *Lives*, referring both to the arts and to the “artefici” who performed them. And the term honor with all its derivatives appeared as many as 424 times.

This promotional aim also rested on a century-long tradition. Its origins could be traced back at least to Petrarca. In fact, according to very influential Italianists, Petrarca “renovated the etymon of “poetry”, substituting for the medieval concept of humble artisanal and technical profession the more exclusive meaning of composition expressed “non vulgari forma sed artificiosa quadam et exquisite et nova”.²² Relying on the newly-discovered Ciceronian oration *Pro Archia poeta* with its classical praise of the poet’s profession, he modified the whole system of the arts, giving poetry the special place it deserved thanks to its outstanding greatness.²³ But if “the name poetry, meaning at first Latin poetry, received much honor and glamor through the early humanists, and by the sixteenth century vernacular poetry and prose began to share in the prestige of Latin literature”²⁴, the status of the visual arts was much more insecure.

¹⁸ Written around 1381-82.

¹⁹ G. Tanturli, “Le biografie d’artisti prima del Vasari”, in *Il Vasari storiografo e artista*, Firenze, INSR, 1976, pp. 275-298

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² A Battistini & E. Raimondi, “Retoriche e poetiche dominanti”, *Letteratura italiana*, vol. III, “Le forme del testo”, I “Teoria e poesia”, pp. 5-348, Torino, Einaudi, 1984, p. 44

²³ *Ivi*, p. 45

²⁴ P.O. Kristeller, “The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 12, 4 (1951), pp. 496-527, pp. 510-11

And this notwithstanding influential attempts to posit it on more authoritative bases like the *Commentarii* by Lorenzo Ghiberti, in which the sculptor pleaded for the “honor and glamor” also of painting and sculpture.²⁵

Clues to understand the social reputation of these disciplines can also be found in the collections or encyclopedias of “all” the arts and sciences that were a fashionable literary genre in early modern Europe: their classification criteria can be revealing of the rank in which each art or science was placed,²⁶ or rather of the total absence of ranking.²⁷ In 1585 Tommaso Garzoni for example published his *La piazza universal di tutte le professioni del mondo*²⁸, which soon became very popular and was re-published around thirty times before 1670. No modern or ancient system of classification is clearly detectable.²⁹ Doctors in civil law are listed at the beginning of the book between grammarians and calendar-makers, but lawyers are rather far away, between mathematicians and alchemists. Painters are mentioned between apothecaries and servants and pages, and architects between woodcutters and pub keepers. Conrad Gesner, the author of the *Bibliotheca Universalis*,³⁰ another sixteenth-century “best seller”, also listed the “fine arts” scattered among transportation, clothmaking, alchemy, trade, agriculture, etc. And as late as 1697, the *De artium et scientiarum natura ac constitutione libri quinque*, by Gerardus Johannes Vossius, listed “four groups of arts: The vulgar arts such as tailoring and shoemaking: the four popular arts of reading and writing, of sports, of singing and of painting (this group was borrowed from Aristotle’s Politics ...); the seven liberal arts; the main sciences of philosophy (with eloquence), jurisprudence, medicine and theology”.³¹ A lot of work was still needed to rescue of the fine arts from the traditional promiscuity with the mechanical crafts.³² And still more work was necessary to successfully assert that those who practiced them were not artisans, performing mechanical activities³³.

As we have seen with Antonio Manetti, Sebastiano da Bisticci, Paolo Giovio and others, scholars and poets also had their biographers. This tradition continued in the 16th and 17th century, accompanying the increasingly popular phenomenon of biographical writings on visual artists. A few decades after Vasari,

²⁵ Probably finished in 1447

²⁶ P.O. Kristeller, “The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 12, 4 (1951), pp. 496-527, pp. 519

²⁷ Cherchi,

²⁸ Tomaso Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo mon-do Slang adj.*

Enormous; huge: a mondo list of pizza toppings.

adv.

Extremely; very: a mondo big mistake.

..... Click the link for more information., a cura di P. Cherchi & B. Collina, 2 voll. Torino, Einaudi, 1996

²⁹ Kristeller, cit.,

³⁰ (Zurich 1548)

³¹ Kristeller, cit., p. 520

³² Kristeller, cit.

³³ Distinct words for the two functions were still to be invented, “artista” or “artifice” meaning both artisan and artist

Gabriello Chiabrera for example wrote an *Elogi d'uomini illustri* in which he narrated the lives of recently disappeared intellectuals from Tasso to Galilei. Individual biographies like the *Vita di Ludovico Ariosto*³⁴ or the *Vita di Francesco Guicciardini*³⁵ became more and more frequent, along with the autobiographies, from that of Jacopo Sannazaro³⁶ to that of Cardano³⁷ and to the many others that followed in the 17th century.

Moreover, although in theory law, medicine and natural philosophy enjoyed a higher status than painting, sculpture and architecture, flesh and bones lawyers, medicine doctors, scholars, scientists also needed to struggle for status recognition. Even lawyers felt the need of leaving a written trace of their lives: in 1656 Carlo Cartari, an office-holder in the Roman Curia, wrote a repertory of all the highest-rank lawyers in the Roman Curia that included his own autobiography.³⁸

2. Explicit declarations and theoretical writings are by no means the only ways in which persons belonging to the “middling sort” could claim for social recognition. Their life style or, in other words, the material setting of their lives also acted as “instruments of credit”, that is ways of asserting their reputation and credibility.³⁹ The already mentioned *Piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, which sometimes included in the description of a profession that of the signs of distinction adopted by its members, of the medicine doctors, for example, said: many physicians of our time have names “da se stessi chiari e famosi, piu’ che non sono i raggi di Febo a mezzo giorno. Hor questi et altri hanno posto la medicina all’eta’ nostra nella piu’ alta parte del tempio dell’honore, e gli hanno attribuito cosi’ eminente seggio, che la Minerva di Fidria non fu posta veramente in luogo tanto sublime, et elevato”⁴⁰. Of the law doctors it declared: “Sono nobili i leggisti per l’insegne del Dottorato a lor concesso, ch’e’ la berretta da dottore, della quale dice Luca di Penna, che l’Ammiraglio del Regno di Sicilia e’ adornato ancor esso; l’anello in dito in segno, che si congiunge con la scienza veramente; la zona d’oro in segno che si cinge di perfettione: la toga virile in segno, che vuol vivere quietamente, e da huomo riposato”⁴¹.

Biographies, letters, contemporary chronicles often described the noble life-style adopted by this or that artist, but also by this or that scholar, etc. Vasari already treated this issue although not as extensively as later biographers. His *Vite* are all organized around a recognizable pattern that includes

³⁴ By G.B. Pigna, Venezia 1603

³⁵ By Remigio Fiorentino, Treviso 1604

³⁶ Published after his death in *Arcadia di m. Iacopo Sannazaro nuouamente corretta, & ornata d’alcune annotationi da Thomaso Porcacchi. Con la vita dell’auttore, descritta dal medesimo, & con la dichiarazione di tutte le voci oscure, che son nell’opera*, Venezia, appresso Gabriel Giolito de’ Ferrari, 1566

³⁷ *De vita propria*, 1576. Visual artists also had begun to write autobiographies: see Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Commentarii*, vol. II; *Vita di Benvenuto Cellini*, written between 1558 and 1566, first published in Naples in 1728, who clearly followed the pattern set by Vasari.

³⁸ *Advocatorum Sacrii Consistorii Syllabum*, Roma, Zenobio Masotti, 1656.

³⁹ M. Biagioli, *Galileo’s Instruments of Credit: Telescopes, Images, Secrecy*, 2006

⁴⁰ Ed. Serravalle di Venezia, Roberto Meghetti, 1605, p. 158

⁴¹ *Ivi*, p. 100

familial and social origins; education and training; work; experiences; voyages; fortune and misfortunes; death; praises and glory; school and artistic legacy; character and habits; virtues, singularities and peculiarities.⁴² This gave him the opportunity of stressing the best success-stories and the most honorable life-styles. Of Giotto, for example, he wrote that he returned to Florence from Ravenna “con grandissimo onore e con grandissima facultà”. This idea that personal excellence would result in honors and riches was again expressed in the lives of Taddeo Gaddi, Iacopo di Casentino and many others. In some occasions Vasari also mentioned the honors and riches deriving from the artist’s glory to his relatives⁴³. And in quite a few cases, he explicitly referred to the life-style of his biographeds: of Iacopo della Quercia he said he fully deserved the title of knight, the he “onoratissimamente ritenne vivendo”; on Andrea Mantegna he commented: “Tiensi ancora memoria grandissima dello onorato viver suo”; on Bramante he observed that “sempre splendidissimamente si onorò e visse, et al grado, dove i meriti della sua vita l’avevano posto, era niente quel che aveva a petto a quello che egli avrebbe speso”; and finally of Michelangelo Buonarroti he wrote: “di onorati vestimenti ha sempre la sua virtù ornato, dilettaosi di bellissimi cavalli, perché essendo egli nato di nobilissimi cittadini ha mantenuto il grado”.⁴⁴

These still rather sober statements by Vasari became an increasingly flamboyant *topos* in 17th century biographies. The *Vite* of Giovan Pietro Bellori are quite a good illustration of this evolution, as the aristocratic ethos was defined more and more precisely, and the material culture experienced more and more things to objectify in.⁴⁵ According to Bellori, for example, Agostino Carracci “per elevarsi dalla sua fortuna umile, nobilito’ il cognome de’ Carracci con l’impresa del carro celeste, che sono le sette stelle dell’Orsa, facendolo impresa e arme della sua famiglia”⁴⁶. And Anton van Dyck had “maniere signorili piu’ tosto che di huomo privato, e risplendeva in ricco portamento di habito e divise, perche’ assuefatto nella scuola di Rubens con huomini nobili, et essendo per natura elevato, e desideroso di farsi illustre, percio’ oltre li drappi, si adornava il capo con penne e cintigli, portava collane d’oro attraverso al petto, con seguito di servitori”.⁴⁷ In these pomps he spent the greatest part of his conspicuous earnings, so that he left his heirs “poche facolta’, consumando il tutto nella lautezza del suo vivere piu’ tosto da principe che da pittore”⁴⁸. Van Dyck was by no means the only one to use out all his earnings in living like a prince. Giovanni Lanfranco also spent all what he earned, to the point that “delle molte ricchezze acquistate non molto avanzo lascio’ morendo al signor Giuseppe suo figliolo, havendo tenuto vita splendida , con la sua famiglia, e speso tremila scudi l’anno in Napoli, dove possedeva una casa, et in Roma una vigna a San Pancrazio con

⁴² G. Stimato, *Autoritratti letterari nella Firenze di Cosimo I: Bandinelli, Vasari, Cellini e Pontorno*, p. 42

⁴³ See for example the lives of Iacopo di Casentino or of Michelozzo Michelozzi

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⁴⁵ G.P. Bellori, *Le vite de’ pittori, scultori et architetti moderni*, Roma, successori del Mascardi, 1622

⁴⁶ *Ivi*, p. 114

⁴⁷ *Ivi*, p. 255

⁴⁸ *Ivi*, p. 263

un casino, ch'egli dipinse al proprio genio e degli amici". Different biographers told very similar stories. Giovanni Battista Passeri, for example, stated that Salvator Rose walked around Rome "pomposo di abiti con servitor appresso colla guardia d'argento, e tutto pieno di sfarzo".⁴⁹

These sorts of behaviors were by no means confined to visual artists. Characters as distant as the poet Giovanni Battista Marino, on the one side, and the philosopher Cesare Cremonini, on the other side, called forth very similar statements on the part of their contemporaries and early biographers.⁵⁰ Marino used all his acquaintances and relationships to gather an art collection and a library that, in his words, were worthy of the greatest princes.⁵¹ Cremonini walked around Padua always followed by a retinue of students that evoked the retinues of a feudal Lord.

3. The few account books that have survived and the transactions some of these persons went into often confirm these descriptions. In those forms of conspicuous consumption many of them, as we have seen, spent most of their earnings, economically ruining themselves.⁵² But we cannot hastily dismiss this behavior as a typical example of social emulation. These people did not simply aim at acquiring an appearance of nobility; they aimed at declaring it, imposing it on their fellow-citizens. In a certain way we can say that they had to "conspicuously consume", since they had to maintain one crucial point: a noble life-style was the only suitable for them, because theirs was true nobility, derived from their virtue and personal excellence. If it did not descend from "ancient wealth", their greatness was nonetheless assured by the possession of art and culture⁵³.

In Veblen words we might say they wanted to transform their "derivative leisure" – that is the leisure deriving to them from the services performed for the elites - into an instrument of social claim: they were "excellent", they lived "splendidly", therefore they were fully entitled to be part of the nobility.

In Brewer terms we may say that the narrowness of the market obliged them to act as "clients" of this or that "patron" and that they struggled to acquire a more independent status. The adoption of aristocratic manners was part of a strategy aiming at enfranchising them from their client condition. Being as great as their counterpart they commanded the market, dictating their own conditions to those who wanted to acquire their services.

Yet, if the biographers tend to stress the emulative behaviors and the mere adoption of aristocratic

⁴⁹ *Vite de' pittori, scultori ed architetti che hanno lavorato in Roma. Morti dal 1641 al 1672*, Roma, Vivarelli, 1977, p. 425

⁵⁰ On Marino see G.B. Loredano, *Vita del cav. Marino*, ; on Cremonini see Gabriel Naudé's commentaries in R. Pintard, *Le libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVIIe siècle*, Genève, Slatkine, 1983, p. 171.

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⁵² R. Spear & P. Sohm (eds.), *Painting for Profit. The Economic Lives of Seventeenth-Century Italian Painters* (2010); the notion of "conspicuous consumption" obviously comes from T. Veblen, *The Theory of Leisure Class*,

⁵³ P. Findlen, *Possessing Nature. Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy*, (1994)

patterns of consumption, their testaments and their inventories of goods or those of other fellow-artists or fellow-scholars or fellow-jurists often tell a rather different story. More than emulation of aristocratic habits their domestic interiors show their desire to fashion and assert themselves as *intellectual personae* as different from their patrons as they are different from artisans or merchants.

4. Historians agree that during the 16th century and the more so after the end of the wars of Italy in 1559 and the conclusion of the Council of Trent in 1563, social and political boundaries within the Italian urban societies were becoming increasingly stringent. This socio-political evolution was accompanied by a cultural one: the criteria for defining who belonged to the nobility, for entering into one of the military orders like that of the Knights of Malta, for having access to high offices, were progressively more precisely defined and regulated and hence became even harsher. It is not by chance that historians have spoken of an aristocratic “*serrata*” (closure). At the same time, though, the distribution of wealth among the different social classes underwent a slight transformation in the direction of a less pronounced inequality. Italy as a whole was less rich, but wealth was slightly less unevenly distributed. Especially in the second half of the 17th century in many Italian cities there thus opened a space for intermediate social groups – not very rich nor very poor, not aristocratic nor plebeian – that could aspire to improve their social position and status. Merchants and prominent artisans obviously were an important component of these social groups, just as they had been since the Renaissance. But along with this people occupying the summits of the trades we can also find persons who offered other kinds of goods or services. The services and goods precisely provided by those people who are at the core of the present project: lawyers, doctors in medicine, men of letters, artists.

At the same time another important transformation was occurring, while the weight of mobile wealth was rising as compared to that of real estate. The growing interconnection of economy and trade produced an increase in the quality and quantity of financial devices circulating in urban environments and in their relative share in the composition of patrimonies.

Yet mobile wealth was not confined to financial devices like credit bonds, letters of exchange and the like. As it is now well known, the Renaissance brought with it an expansion of the market for objects, both on the side of the demand and on that of the offer. Compared to real estate, even the best collections of works of art represented a limited financial value (it has been calculated that the great patron of arts cardinal Scipione Borghese spent in his collections a ridiculous percentage of his total revenues). However they embodied other relevant values.

5. The association between nobility and land or even urban real estate was one of the foundations of European *Ancien régime* societies. The property of land was indeed the major source of

honor and prestige and the rent from land was the most appropriate source of income while profit and earnings from labor were decidedly less prestigious.⁵⁴ On this ground competition with the nobility was clearly very difficult. Noble lands and prominent mansions significantly participated in the definition of nobility and the property of an urban palace was a fundamental component of an aristocratic status.⁵⁵ But all over Europe and even in Italy, one of the European regions where the manor system was less pervasive, in rural contexts seigniorial families obviously owned the largest and most valuable part of the land. Recent studies on Venice, Rome and other Italian cities have shown that also in urban contexts the largest and most valuable part of the real estate belonged either to the Church or to the nobility.⁵⁶

However, starting with the Renaissance other categories of honorific goods appeared, complementing the traditional ones I have just mentioned: paintings, statues, illuminated books, carved stones, alabaster vases, tapestries, oriental rugs and the like. Both Giovanni Pontano at the end of the 15th century and, with even greater details, Sabba da Castiglione at the middle of the Cinquecento carefully listed these sorts of objects as the necessary complements of the accomplished gentleman's well-furnished home.⁵⁷ Along with these works of art and luxurious items one could also find new technical artifacts like scientific instruments, geographical maps, mirrors, fine Venetian glasses, Italian ceramics and oriental porcelains and even a few natural curiosities.⁵⁸

All these goods belonged to the category of movables. According to early modern jurists, compared to real estate their possession was undoubtedly "viler", that is less important and less prestigious. Significantly, though, it was French jurists rather than Italian ones who thoroughly confronted with this difference. Facing the norms disciplining inheritance in the framework of the customary laws of most French regions, they construed a fundamental difference between the inherited goods and those properties the deceased had personally acquired. While the first ones could only be transmitted to legitimate heirs, testators had full property rights over the latter ones and could freely dispose of them within their last wills. This difference, however, originally concerned the only interesting family goods, that

⁵⁴ J.-Y. GRENIER, *L'économie d'ancien régime: un monde de l'échange et de l'incertitude*, Paris 1998. An evidence of this underestimation of labor lays in the fact that office-holders were paid by assigning them a rent over a state-property, and high-level services were remunerated with gifts rather than with wages.

⁵⁵ See for example R. Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy 1300–1600* (1993)

⁵⁶ J.-F. Chauvard, *La circulation des biens à Venise: stratégies patrimoniales et marché immobilier, 1600-1750*, Roma, École française de Rome, 2005; R. Fregna, *La pietrificazione del denaro: studi sulla proprietà urbana tra XVI e XVII secolo*, Bologna, CLUEB, 1990; M. Barbot, *Le architetture della vita quotidiana: pratiche abitative e scambi immobiliari nella Milano d'età moderna*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2008

⁵⁷ G.G. Pontano, "De splendore: liber unus", in *Ioannis Ioviani Pontani Opera*, Venetiis, per Bernardinum Vercellensem, 1501; S. da Castiglione, *Ricordi overo Ammaestramenti di Monsignor Saba da Castiglione Cavalier Gierosolimitano ne quali con prudenti, e christiani discorsi si ragiona di tutte le materie honorate, che si ricercano a un vero gentil'huomo*, Venezia, per Paulo Gherardo, 1554

⁵⁸ R. Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy 1300–1600* (1993); L. Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (1996); "Consumi culturali nell'Italia moderna", a cura di R. Ago e O. Raggio, special issue of *Quaderni storici*, 114 (2004); E. Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance* (2005); G. Guerzoni, *Apollo e Vulcano: i mercati artistici in Italia, 1400-1700*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2006

is real estate. With the appearance and diffusion of new forms of wealth like credit bonds and venal offices, a clear-cut distinction between movable and immovable goods became more and more necessary and since the beginning of the 17th century the French jurists worked hard at defining it.⁵⁹

Italian jurists on the contrary showed a great indifference towards this issue. The ancient Roman law paid almost no attention to the problem and the early modern Roman jurists did the same: Prospero Farinacci, an outstanding lawyer who published a *Repertorium de ultimis voluntatibus*, mentioned movable goods just to say that jewels and other precious items were assimilated to immovable possessions,⁶⁰ and when Giovanni Battista De Luca, the most important Italian jurist of the 17th century dealt with movable goods, it was just to say that there is a difference between those that are used out by consumption (for ex. food) and those that are not (for ex. furniture).⁶¹ Yet Italian jurists actively participated in the definition of the *fideicommissum*, a juridical device similar to the English entail that limited the property rights on the entailed goods, generally forbidding any sort of alienation. Similar results were thus reached: movable goods were not automatically included in the *fideicommissum* and therefore enjoyed lower legal protection.

In Italy and France (and in the other European countries as well) movables had therefore a viler status than immovable goods. They were less protected by the law and, in principle, less desirable. In fact many seventeenth-century Roman testators disposed for the selling out of all their home furnishings, including silverware and precious textiles but, to my knowledge, no one ordered the sale of a real estate.⁶² Yet this viler status of movables was not as universally established as what I have said until now may suggest. Under certain conditions objects could become very valuable. "Treasures" – either Church treasures or Crown ones – usually consisted of very precious items made of extremely expensive raw materials. Their value was that of the gold and gems of which they were made or adorned. But value, even strict economic value, not necessarily consisted in precious materials. Value, as medieval and early modern theologians alleged, depended on the desirability of the thing, not on the preciousness of its components or on its intrinsic qualities. Desirability, and consequently value, could indeed easily shift from objects that were precious because they were made of precious materials to objects that were prized because they were new or unique or particularly refined.

With the development of the Renaissance, these sorts of objects became even more available for

⁵⁹ See for exemple N. Gouget, *Traicté general des criées et decrets, hypotheques & nantissementes*, Paris, 1616; J. Ancillon, *Traité de la différence des biens meubles et immeubles des fonds et des gagières dans la coutume de Metz*, Metz 1698; C.-J. de Ferrière, *Dictionnaire de droit et de pratique*, Paris 1771; R.-J. Pothier, "Traité des propres" in Id., *Oeuvres posthumes...*, vol. II, Orléans 1777-78

⁶⁰ Lyon 1646

⁶¹ *Instituta civile divisa in quattro libri con l'ordine de' titoli di quella di Giustiniano ...*, Colonia, a spese di Modesto Fenzo stampatore in Venezia, 1743

⁶² On the contrary the family palace is the last thing to be sold out by ruined families: see M. Bevilacqua,

Italian urban consumers, as Goldthwaite, Jardine, Guerzoni, Welch - and Braudel before them⁶³ - have extensively shown. Their novelty resided in the fact that on the one hand there was a very high know-how embedded in them, on the other hand their appreciation required a new kind of connoisseurship, capable to recognize inventiveness, craftsmanship, refinement. As we have seen from the quotations of Pontano and Sabba, consumers were interested in boasting this connoisseurship that implemented their prestige. In mercantile societies as these were, to give things their right value was indeed a very appreciated – and required – skill⁶⁴. And obviously producers were also interested in boasting their know-how: outstanding craftsmen were entitled to higher wages, more regular work and greater contractual power.⁶⁵

6. Artifacts had thus a power they exercised in a quite different semantic field than land. Their appraisal required completely different competences than the appraisal of land, and the social network within which they could act was also very dissimilar. But I will come back on this point later.

If the competition around the possession of land was almost impossible for those who were neither nobles nor ecclesiastic institutions, was it easier when the possession of movable goods was at stake? We have seen that Marino had gathered a collection of paintings “worth of a prince”. Was Marino an exception thanks to his immense success and consequential enormous resources, or did other people issued from similar “middling” social milieus adopt similar patterns of consumption and allocation of expenditure? To answer these questions I have for the moment collected archive data for a dozen men who died in Rome between 1639 (Amadori) and 1698 (Ciampini). They were lawyers (Amadori and Pari), playwrights (Azzavedo), antiquarians and scholars (Angeloni, Ciampini and Contelori), painters (Raspantini), sculptors (Ferrata), carvers (Mola), architects (Peparelli and Borromini), musicians (Liberati). For all of them we have a post-mortem inventory and for the majority we also have a last will. We thus have a few clues to figure out how the material setting of their lives may have looked like and to understand if they attached a particular value to their movable goods.

The structure of their houses and the number of the rooms show they were well-off men. But this does not necessarily mean they shared the same ideas about how to set their households. Avvocato Pari was for example very austere: his rooms were almost empty of decorations: very few paintings, just

⁶³ F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, 2 vols, Paris, 1949; Id., *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme, XV^e-XVIII^e siècle*, 3 vols., Paris 1967-79. For this shift from prized because rich to prized because refined see also A. Quondam, *Cavallo e cavaliere. L'armatura come seconda pelle del gentiluomo moderno*, Roma, Donzelli, 2003; Id., *Tutti i colori del nero. Moda e cultura nell'Italia del Cinquecento*, Roma, Colla, 2007

⁶⁴ It was this very skill, when correctly applied, that in the eyes of the Church redeemed merchants from the suspicion of avarice: see G. Todeschini, *I mercanti e il tempio. La società cristiana e il circolo virtuoso della ricchezza fra medioevo ed età moderna*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2002

⁶⁵ See, for an example drawn from the glass trade, F. Trivellato, *Fondamenta dei vetrai: lavoro, tecnologia e mercato a Venezia tra Sei e Settecento*, Rome, Donzelli, 2000

one mirror, very few wall hangings. And no small fashionable objects like snuffboxes or silkflowers, no curiosities like turtle-shells and similar, just one technological device (a clock under its glass cage). Even his furniture was austere and basilar: no ebony studioli, for example, nor fancy small tables. Avvocato Amadori, on the contrary, was fond of paintings and sculptures and his house was overcrowded with them. But he also had two ebony and ivory small cupboards, one studiolo “dipinto all’indiana”, two pair of flower vases, beautiful wall-hangings in every room and so on.⁶⁶

The house of the playwright Giovanni Azzavedo was by far less rich, yet he had a beautiful collection of paintings and quite a few of these little sophisticated objects that were becoming fashionable in the cultivated milieus: a cup made in turtle-shell, a small watch-purse interwoven with tiny pearls, two small cases containing scissors and penknives with coral and mother-of-the-pearl handles, and so on. The architect Peparelli, whose material setting was quite traditional, had nonetheless a “galleriola”, with many paintings and a few statues. And also Borromini, whose house was certainly far from extravagant, nonetheless had a huge collection of paintings.⁶⁷

All of them, moreover, had a library.⁶⁸ Here too we find differences: avvocato Pari, for example, had almost 400 books, but only 60 were not law texts and thus not connected to his profession. The others showed a larger spectrum of interests: the two architects Borromini and Peparelli and the painter Raspantini obviously possessed many texts pertaining to their profession, but they also had a few collections of poems, plays, novels, stories from ancient Rome, and so on.

Very few of these ensembles of objects may be considered a real “collection”, showing the assortment and comprehensiveness we usually associate with the term. Most of the time they were mere gatherings of scattered objects of different quality and nature. Yet it was precisely the contemporaneous presence of “works of art”, natural curiosities, fashionable items, technological devices, non-professional books, etc. that constructed the image of the cultivated man. All together these things conveyed a message to the inhabitants and the visitors of the house, displaying an agency within the specific social network to which their owners aspired to belong.⁶⁹ The distribution of the spaces within the house and the specialization of certain rooms – the *sala*, the *galleriola*, the *study*, etc. – along with the presence of the

⁶⁶ The almost complete transcription of his inventory at <http://www.enbach.eu/it/banche-dati/interni-romani/proprietari/amadori.aspx>

⁶⁷ See the full transcription of his inventory at <http://www.enbach.eu/it/banche-dati/interni-romani/proprietari/borromini/casa-borromini-.aspx?UID=>

⁶⁸ Unfortunately, though, some of them are not inventoried in details and thus we don’t know their precise composition.

⁶⁹ On the agency of things there is now a rather vast literature: see B. Latour, *La clefs de Berlin et autres leçons d’un amateur des sciences*, Paris, La Découverte, 1993; A. Gell, *Art and agency*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998; B. Blandin, *La construction du social par les objets*, Paris, PUF, 2002; A. Pottage & M. Mundy eds., *Law, Anthropology and the Constitution of the Social. Making Persons and Things*, Cambridge, Cambridge Un. Press, 2004; T. Dant, *Materiality and Society*, Open Un. Press, 2005; D. Miller ed., *Materiality*, Durham, Duke Un. Press, 2008; C. Knappet & L. Malafouris eds., *Material Agency: Towards a non Anthropocentric Approach*, Berlin, Springer, 2009;

pieces of furniture supporting that specialization – the *studioli*, the pedestals, the bookshelves, the multiple *tavolini* – all exerted the same kind of action. They construed the right of their owners to belong to the network of those who prized *Culture*. Their single and even total value was rather irrelevant: among the house equipment, only certain pieces of furniture or of silverware had significant costs. Yet their agency went beyond their financial value: they actively participated in the construction of the *intellectual persona*.

The case of Giovanni Ciampini (1633-1698) perfectly illustrates what I am trying to say. Issued from a well-off family with no noble ascendance, Giovanni began his career in the Roman Curia by purchasing a minor office, affordable by the middling-sorts of people like him. At the same time, though, he engaged actively in cultural enterprises: in 1671 he founded the *Accademia dei Concilii*, with the goal of establishing on philological grounds the history of the Church. In 1676 he joined the editorial board of the *Giornale de' letterati*, a sort of Roman *Journal des sçavans*, and in 1677 he gave life into his own house to the *Accademia fisico-matematica*, within which scientists and science-amateurs regularly gathered to make experiments, collect evidences and comment them. These endeavors were accompanied by the creation of an imposing library of more than 7.000 books and a similarly impressive collection of ancient marble fragments, inscriptions and coins.⁷⁰ Through the *Giornale de' letterati* he entered into the Republic of letters and began exchanging epistles with other learned men in Europe. But the real makers of his reputation were his library and his antiques collection that attracted visitors from Rome and abroad. It was them that made him the *intellectual persona* he aspired to be.

7. As most of their contemporaries, the men I am presenting also made last wills and dictated post mortem provisions about their goods. Wills may be very standardized documents just dealing with the enumeration of a certain number of bequests and the nomination of an heir. But it also happens to find very eloquent texts (like the ones I will now examine), and this is an evidence in itself. People spending a remarkable amount of time in writing their testament usually aimed at justifying their choices but also at fashioning a particular self-image. Their wills often appear as a self-celebration or self-promotion, like the other texts I have mentioned above. Along with the material setting of their life, the material setting of their death also participated in their self-promotion.

The dispositions for a pious legacy, the selling of all the “useless” furniture and ornaments of the home (canopies, wall-hangings, silverware, jewels etc.) and the investment of the resulting money in secure credit bonds and rents, followed by the creation of a *fideicommissum* prohibiting any form of alienation were widespread measures in 17th century Rome. Not only nobles and patricians, but also merchants and

⁷⁰ See the full transcription of his inventory at <http://www.enbach.eu/it/banche-dati/interni-romani/proprietari/ciampini.aspx> A partial transcription of the catalogue of his library at <http://www.enbach.eu/en/databases/books/zotero.aspx>

well-off artisans often left instructions in this sense in their last wills. And they usually did so primarily to protect the family real estate. Thus testators often entailed the family house or otherwise protected it against alienations and dismemberments. The same destiny was usually envisaged for family lands, when they existed. Real estate was indeed a collective – more than individual – property. Part of it probably derived from agnates or other members of the kin group, other shares came from one's wife dowry and still others from the current contribution of all the family members. *Fideicommissum* made it patent: every successive owner was just the beneficiary of the patrimony, but could not alienate nor divide the real estate.

Thus entails usually concerned real estate, while the “viler” movable goods were typically ignored. Even worse, as I said testators often invited to sell them to pay for the expenses or simply to invest the money in some kind of financial rent. Only a few people envisaged a different destiny for a certain number of their objects, to which they evidently attached a special value. The distinction of one or more particular objects among all those that filled any house generally depended on its “history”: how the owner had “acquired” it (by inheritance, by gift, by purchase, and so on), for how long, how he/she used it (every day, in special occasions, etc.), and so on. It also happened that testators entailed some movable goods, furtherly upgrading them from the rank of vile things to that of valuables.

The men I am dealing with in this project indeed made this sort of choice, entailing and therefore binding with inalienability their professional instruments, their books, their collections, or even some of the products of their craftsmanship. Mola entailed a sword he had magnificently carved. Azzavedi, Ciampini and Liberati entailed their libraries so that they may benefit to their heirs. For the same reason Ferrata entailed the instruments of his *studio*, and Ciampini his “museum”. In their eyes the sword, the libraries, the sculpture instruments, the antique remains evidently were not simple “objects”, but “subjects” endowed with a special agency. They had to stand forever inalienable and undispersed for the good of each generation of temporary owners and in perennial memory of him who had entailed them.

The memory of oneself and the good of future generations: these were the transcendent values to which these men “sacrificed” their properties.⁷¹ And since they wanted to construct themselves as *intellectual personae* they rather naturally bet on cultural enterprises: Ciampini, Ferrata and Pari left the financial resources to create public schools;⁷² Borromini just left them to allow his unique heir to study

⁷¹ For this notion of “sacrifice” as a mean to nurture transcendental entities see D. Miller, *A Theory of Shopping*,

⁷² Several examples of *bourgeois* arranging by their last wills the foundation of a school are mentioned, for the 16th century, in G. Huppert, *Les bourgeois gentilhommes*, Chicago-London, Un. of Chicago Press, 1977, pp. 1574; and Id., *Public Schools in Renaissance France*, Urbana and Chicago, Un. of Illinois Press, 1984, pp. 19-23. For Italy the first examples that I know are the foundations of a school for poor young painters by Muziano in 1592 (P. Di Giammaria, *Girolamo Muziano Brixien pictor in urbe da Brescia a Roma*, Brescia, Shakespeare & Company, 1997, pp. 165-66) and by Federico Zuccari in 1609 (Arch. Acc. S. Luca, Roma, finca II, b. 2, cit. in V. Lanciarini, *Atti della R. Accademia di Belle Arti denominata di San Luca*, Roma, Tip. Delle Mantellate, 1894, pp. 31-32). G. Baglioni (see *Le vite de' pittori, scultori, architetti et intagliatori*, Napoli 1733, pp. 117-118) mentioned the provisions made by Zuccari that thus were very probably known by Ciampini; were they also known by Pari?

architecture; avv. Amadori founded not a school but an *Avvocatura dei poveri*, a sort of legal aid society.⁷³

By entailing the very instruments of their art or profession, those people thus pursued a two-fold goal: on the one side they promoted it, providing the material means for its advancement, from simple labor tools to actual schools for the enhancement of learning; on the other side, they powerfully contributed to the construction of their memory: the ecclesiastical benefice that had to endorse the *Avvocatura dei poveri*, for example, was entitled to Amadori and the man who enjoyed it had to drop his family name and adopt that one. Liberati, Pari and Raspantini all left provisions for the fabrication of a marble plaque bearing an inscription that would describe their praiseworthy enterprises. Ciampini bounded with a *fideicommissum* the engraved copper plates of the illustrations of his own books; and so on. By so doing they clearly meant to eternalize their memory, to make their name immortal, as Ciampini wrote. As with the patrician families and their urban palaces, or with the titled nobility and their seigniorial lands, the association of a name and an “inanimate” thing was meant to secure memory by founding it on solid – in the real sense of the word – bases. Differently from real estate, however, these specific goods did not simply materialize a family name, a collective identity. On the contrary they eternalized an individual identity, founded on personal virtue. Thus not just life, but also death powerfully participated in the construction of the *intellectual persona*.

⁷³ See the partial or integral transcription of these testaments at <http://www.enbach.eu/en/databases/digital-collections/last-wills.aspx>