

***Pasquino at the crossroads:  
the statue, the square and the public in the 16<sup>th</sup> century\****

This paper will focus on the relationship between Pasquino<sup>1</sup> and the square where it was (and still is) displayed in Rome in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This is the century during which the reputation of Pasquino was so firmly established as to spread to all of the Western European world, as it has remained till today.

From the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, piazza Parione in the homonymous *rione* (“quarter”) in the historical center of Rome, began to be referred to (in maps, literary sources, notary seals, etc.) more and more often as “piazza Pasquino” (which is the name it still bears today) by virtue of the ancient marble group, nicknamed “Pasquino”, which had been displayed there since at least 1501. This process of “toponomastical colonization” by the group on the square that hosted it can be read as evidence of the “Ausstrahlung” of the work of art on the context around it. In other words, it testifies to the power of the work to interact with the pre-existing public space so much so as to affirm a new perception and a different use for it, in so successful a way as to abolish the traditional name of the square forever.

As is well known, the popularity of Pasquino (or “Pasquillo”, in the Latinized version) is not primarily due to its value as an ancient sculpture. It is instead connected to a special use of the statue which started in early 16<sup>th</sup> century and is still in *auge* nowadays. The statue was and remains the primary place where satirical texts against the authorities were/are attached. These

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<sup>\*</sup> I wish to thank Ben Totushek for helping me with the English translation and Peter Bae of the Interlibrary Loan of Columbia who kindly and promptly provided me with all the books and articles which I have been requesting during the last months (and they were many and in most cases difficult to find...). For reasons of space, the bibliography given in the following notes is reduced to the minimum.

<sup>1</sup> “PASQUINO: a mutilated ancient statue set up on a Roman street corner, became the repository for anonymous and usually satiric comments (pasquinades) on contemporary events and persons. It was one of the “talking statues” in early 16<sup>th</sup>-century Rome”, in *The Classical Tradition*, eds. A. Grafton, G.W. Most, S. Settis, Cambridge (MA) and London 2010, *ad vocem*.

texts, called the *pasquinades*, satirized the pope and his court in the early modern era and the politicians (as you might imagine, Berlusconi was one of Pasquino's favourite subjects) in our time.

Although five hundred years separate us from Pasquino's birth in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Rome, and our communication means are extremely advanced since that time, people still do what Roman citizens did back then: they write on a scrap of paper, usually some witty criticism against the authorities, take some glue with them and go post it on the statue so that everybody who passes by can read it. Therefore, we can claim that Pasquino is still alive; its power of attraction has not diminished, and although it has to some extent evolved from a subversive counterpoint to a tourist spot in Rome, to deal with its early history today is not a mere exercise of erudition. It should instead provide one with a historical framework to approach the role of public squares even in our post-industrial society. Now, as in the past, ever since the Greek *agora*, squares shape the identity of a city by offering a place where heterogeneous groups of people can assemble. They have both social and political value, and it is therefore not surprising that monuments displayed in public squares (such as fountains, columns, obelisque, single or group sculpture) have a function that goes far beyond the decorative. On the contrary, they interact with the urban and architectural context, they define the identity of a space by marking it as a political, social, or ritual venue, and when there are multiple monuments in the same square (such as in the case of Piazza della Signoria in Florence) they compete each other, something like chess pieces vying for strategic dominance of the board.

Pasquino offers the rare chance to reflect on a variety of these functions: it is a work of art which was originally displayed for its artistic value and for the self promotion of its patron, then used during an annual religious feast reviving the classical custom of pinning poems to statues; it went on to become the mouthpiece of Papal propaganda, and finally, it established itself as the place for expressing biting anonymous comments on the pope and his court, (and it was later on even

used as a bulletin board). It was often “dressed” in different guises to represent religious as well as pagan subjects, and played a considerable part in many religious and civic celebrations which passed through Rome in early modern times.

Far from diminishing its charm, the fact that the statue was fragmentary, its iconography not at all clear until late 19<sup>th</sup> century, served to create a special attractive *aurea* around it: Pasquino was a statue with an uncertain identity which could ideally become whatever its patron or its audience wanted; it was an extremely versatile image which stimulated imagination by artists, antiquarians, literati etc.<sup>2</sup> It was a powerful symbol of considerable complexity and of “Protean meaning”<sup>3</sup> and it is therefore comprehensible only within a multifaceted social and historical context.

Given its ability to convey such a wide range of aspects, Pasquino has understandably attracted wide interests by scholars of various disciplines, such as literature, archaeology, art history, anthropology, political and social history etc., since mid 18th century onwards. However, many aspects of its history still remain obscured, and many others have been misunderstood.

My paper aims to plug some of these gaps and to offer a plausible answer to the main question of the studies dedicated to Pasquino: why was just this statue able to affirm itself as the very place for posting texts *in vituperio*? To solve this problem we will have first to deal with the early modern reception of the work of art, both from a stylistic and iconographical point of view, then we will have to investigate the figure of its modern patron, Cardinal Oliviero Carafa (1430-1511), and finally we will see how was used and perceived the public space where Pasquino was displayed.

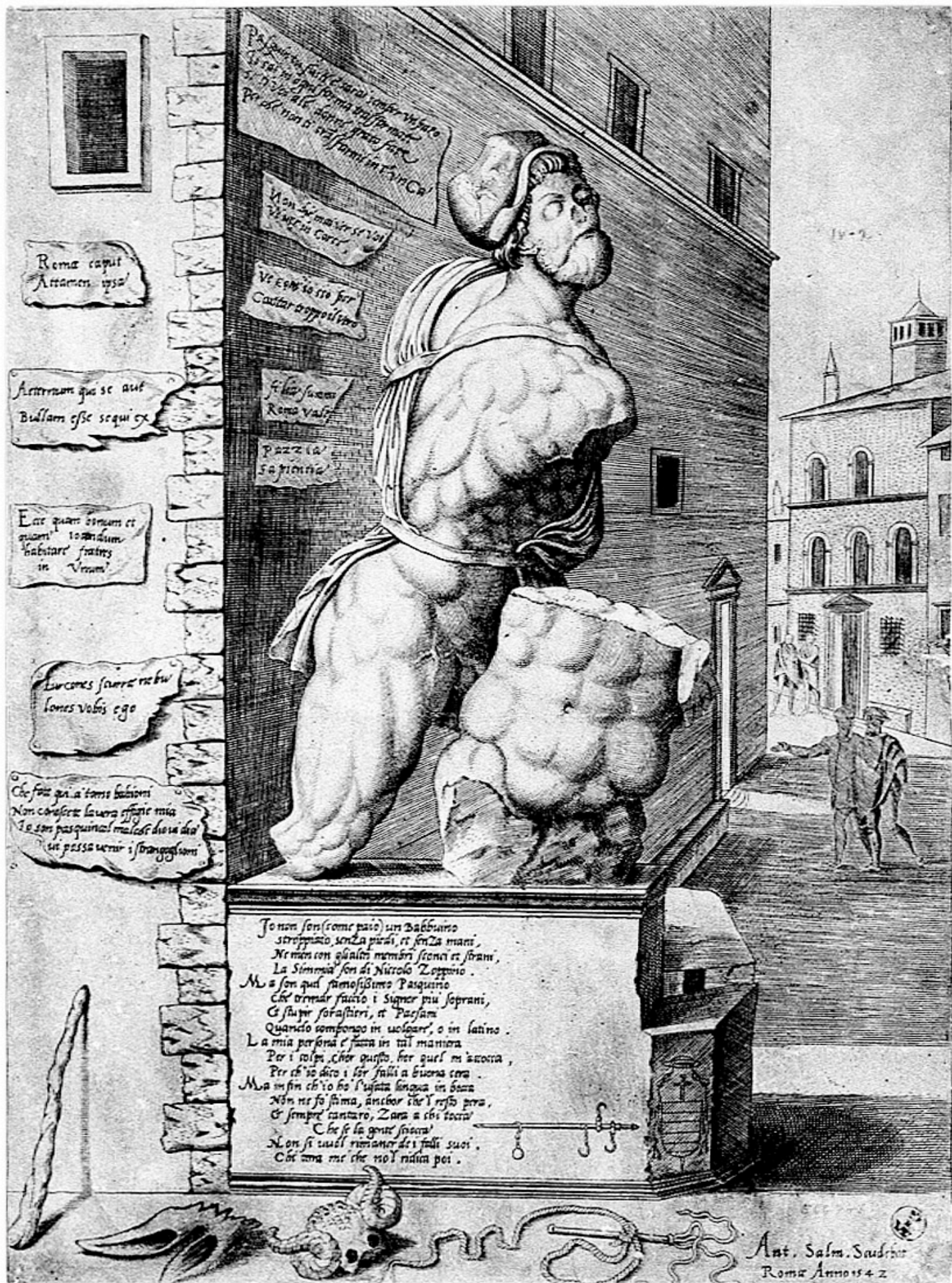
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<sup>2</sup> On the appreciation of fragmentary statues in 16<sup>th</sup> century see L. Barkan, *Unearthing the past*, New Haven-London 1999, particularly pp. 209-31 for Pasquino.

<sup>3</sup> A. Reynolds, *Cardinal Oliviero Carafa and the Early Cinquecento Tradition of the Feast of Pasquino*, in “Humanistica Lovaniensia. Journal of Neo-Latin Studies”, 1985, 34, pp. 178-208

The engraving reproduced below is by Antonio Salamanca, Rome 1542 (*Speculum Romanae  
Magnificentiae*)





Roma caput  
Attamen ipsa

Arcturum qui se aut  
Bullam esse sequitur

Eae quae ortuum et  
quanti totum  
habitare fratres  
in Verum

Lurcones scire vobis  
lones vobis ego

Che son qui a toni habito  
Non conosci la uera effate mia  
Io son pasquino malcosto ho in die  
se passa uerri i stragglioni

Paquino fa il diuino semper uisato  
Quasi in ogni forma trasformata  
si ha la dote d'ogni greca fare  
Per d'ogni d'ogni forma in l'vica

Non si ma se se non  
Vale in Corte

Ve equo so se fer  
Cactar appouitro

si ha suoni  
Roma vale

Pazzia  
sa pienza

Io non son (come pare) un Babbuino  
stroppiato senza piaz, et senza mani,  
Ne man con qu'altro membri stonci et strani,  
La Simonia son di Nicolo' Zoppino.  
Ma a son qual famosissimo Pasquino  
che orinar fauto i Signor piu soprani,  
Et super forastieri, et Pasquam  
Quando compongo in uolgar, o in latino.  
La mia persona e fatta in tal maniera  
Per i colpi, cheor questo her quel m'ancora,  
Per ch'io dico i ser falli a buona cera  
Ma in fin ch'io ho l'usata lingua in bora  
Non ne fo stima, anchor che l'redo para,  
Et sempre cantaro, Zana a chi tociu'  
Che se la gente s'incra'  
Non si vuol rimandar de i falli suoi.  
Che ama me che no l'india poi.

Ant. Salm. Sculpsit  
Roma Anno 1542