Bernini, Tomb of Urban VIII. Rome, St. Peter's (photo: Anderson 123)
This paper is partly in the nature of an extended, and I hope expansive, footnote to an extraordinarily important and strangely neglected essay on Bernini's tomb of Urban VIII published in 1971 by Catherine Wilkinson (fig. 1). Her brief article focused specifically on the iconography of the figures of Charity and Justice, but Wilkinson's interpretation has important implications for our understanding of Bernini's art generally. She demonstrated, in effect, that the two figures do not represent, as had always been taken for granted, the traditional moral allegories of Charity and Justice, but illustrating the relatively simple, not to say superficial, and often soporific character of Bernini's art as it was commonly conceived. Taking up the doctrinal formulations of the Council of Trent and as well as other supporting texts, Wilkinson made it clear that Bernini's figures are intellectually sophisticated, indeed profound evocations, not of the moral virtues, but of the divine virtues of Charity and Justice. The virtues are therefore not qualities of Urban VIII personally, but attributes of his office as the Vicar of Christ on earth. Interestingly, Wilkinson overlooked what is perhaps the most striking testimony to her interpretation: a painting by Baglione in which Divine Wisdom, crowned by the dove of the Holy Spirit, reaches down from heaven with golden chains to link to herself and to each other her earthly representatives, Charity and Justice (fig. 3). Bernini's allegories therefore cannot be understood as mourners for the departed pope. Among the least valuable implications of Wilkinson's work, for example, is that it obviated the embarrassing need to construe Charity's maternal benevolence as an expression of grief (fig. 3). The initial key to the significance of the allegories is that Bernini did not accompany the pope by the cardinal moral virtues normally

*Wilkinson overlooked what the two figures do not represent, as had always been taken for granted, the traditional moral allegories of Charity and Justice, but illustrating the relatively simple, not to say superficial, and often soporific character of Bernini's art as it was commonly conceived. Taking up the doctrinal formulations of the Council of Trent and as well as other supporting texts, Wilkinson made it clear that Bernini's figures are intellectually sophisticated, indeed profound evocations, not of the moral virtues, but of the divine virtues of Charity and Justice. The virtues are therefore not qualities of Urban VIII personally, but attributes of his office as the Vicar of Christ on earth. Interestingly, Wilkinson overlooked what is perhaps the most striking testimony to her interpretation: a painting by Baglione in which Divine Wisdom, crowned by the dove of the Holy Spirit, reaches down from heaven with golden chains to link to herself and to each other her earthly representatives, Charity and Justice (fig. 3). Bernini's allegories therefore cannot be understood as mourners for the departed pope. Among the least valuable implications of Wilkinson's work, for example, is that it obviated the embarrassing need to construe Charity's maternal benevolence as an expression of grief (fig. 3). The initial key to the significance of the allegories is that Bernini did not accompany the pope by the cardinal moral virtues normally

**Irving Lavin**

**BERNINI'S BUMBLING BARBERINI BEES**

*Misericus Dominus, et justus, et Deus noster miseretur* (Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful, Ps. 116:5)*

---

2. Wilkinson's point of departure was her observation in this essay by Panofsky (1965, 141-59) below.
3. Ibid. by Kuglermann (1970), 199ff. The inscriptions on the painting read as follows: Qui natus in excelsis deus est nobis; Deus qui est in excelsis et in sublimi; qui est Deus, qui est in excelsis, qui est Deus, qui est in sublimi. (Off the earth and in the sky, God and God to the throne, let him who judges the earth delight in justice.)
4. — *... the allegories, touched by the sense of loneliness at the death of a second pope, our moved to tears and justice, in a sense of grief barely managed to hold the moral that was largely guided by Urban's rule.* (Ibid. 191f., 192f.) But almost (195 f., 192) also interprets the allegories as mourning, but according to the pope's compatriotic sympathies: *“Further queries...”*
Charity's compassionate response to his excruciating Jeremiad. Wilkinson cites a remarkably close precedent for Bernini's concept in a painting by Lanfranco illustrating the action of the Virgin interceding with her son to save a repentant soul (fig. 6). To a degree, the composition, and perhaps also the concept, seems to echo the figure of Charity Bernini's father, Pietro, had carved years before in Naples (fig. 7). The point of the subject, however, is explicitly represented in a painting by Guercino, famous in his day, as evidenced by an engraving in which the accompanying inscription treats the subject of Charity as a memento mori reminding the viewer that his own redemption is in direct proportion to his participation in God's love (fig. 8). Charity is a vigorously dynamic and earthly figure who conceives the papal tomb primarily by resting her sleeping charge against the sarcophagus—an image that insistently recalls the themes of the Pieta and entombment of Christ, whose sacrifice was the prototype of all acts of charity. In sharp contrast, the passive figure of Justice stands, or more accurately leans against the tomb, in a pose that redolent of languor and passivity (fig. 9). Whereas Charity has fewer accompaniments than usual (two babies rather than three), Justice has more: the book, and fasces in
addition to the canonical sword and balance. The attributes obviously relate to the quinquennial forms of justice: legal, commutative and distributive, derived ultimately from Aristotle, developed by the scholastics, and formulated definitively at the Council of Trent. Three points concern us here. The crofused pose of the figure and the inclusion of the faces have a common theme with respect to the sword and balance, which evoke the impartial and retributive nature of justice. Crofused legs were a frequent attribute of figures representative of unburied meditation and contemplation, and in this case the motif expresses one of the fundamental attributes of God's justice, that it is slow and deliberate. Vincenzo Cartari explains the fact that Saturn was often represented with his feet tied together as indicating that Divine Goodness does not run quickly or noisily to castigate error, but belatedly and slowly, so that the sinner is unconscious before he feels the pain. Under the heading precisely of Divine Justice Cesare Ripa describes the faces with the ax, carried by the liiters before the consuls and the Tribune of the People, as signifying that in the execution of justice overzealous castigation is unwarranted, and that justice should never be precipitous but have time to mature judgment while unbinding the rods that cover the ax. The crofused pose and the faces occur together in a painting of Justice attributed to Battista Dossi (fig. 16).

17 Commendatore individuato indicate individuato — the word, distributive — society; individuato may also denote society, but the balance = equality of all justice.
18 Ripa s.v. Gratia. La balanza sigillata, seu la国道la divino d'approvare le cose, & quivi la pena de' delinquenti .... 18(16) = xi. 18(17) = xii. In modern language, the image of the scales for some forefathers, or of the scales of justice, is often given to the modern, but only as the identical or equal weights among the deceased. = Valeriano 1573, 565.
19 On the crofused legs see Roggenthin 1575, 212, who ascribes to them attributes for fundamentally study. = Valeriano 1573, 772-776.
20 Caracci 1591, 290, s.v. in diversi modi non che in quiete, in con una maniera qualche efera, ma in tenuta, il tono, il movimento, la sua unione o scaramanzia, o che avviene dal pensier. = Valeriano 1575, 565. (fig. 16) = xii. 18(18) = xii. = Flora. A crofused form of the scendor, as portentous antithesis in Ronta del libro rea na Creazzo, C. Filippo della Rota, per mezzo che il vis a vis non ciascuno è antireale, non ciascuno seriamente nata della balanza; o, a crofused scendor precipitose una timore a manifestare l'azione in essere della scendor. On the figures are attributes of justice see the description by Ripa edited 1596, 1075.

Bernini's Bumbling Barberini Bees

addition to the canonical sword and balance. The attributes obviously relate to the quinquennial forms of justice: legal, commutative and distributive, derived ultimately from Aristotle, developed by the scholastics, and formulated definitively at the Council of Trent. Three points concern us here. The crofused pose of the figure and the inclusion of the faces have a common theme with respect to the sword and balance, which evoke the impartial and retributive nature of justice. Crofused legs were a frequent attribute of figures representative of unburied meditation and contemplation, and in this case the motif expresses one of the fundamental attributes of God's justice, that it is slow and deliberate. Vincenzo Cartari explains the fact that Saturn was often represented with his feet tied together as indicating that Divine Goodness does not run quickly or noisily to castigate error, but belatedly and slowly, so that the sinner is unconscious before he feels the pain. Under the heading precisely of Divine Justice Cesare Ripa describes the faces with the ax, carried by the liiters before the consuls and the Tribune of the People, as signifying that in the execution of justice overzealous castigation is unwarranted, and that justice should never be precipitous but have time to mature judgment while unbinding the rods that cover the ax. The crofused pose and the faces occur together in a painting of Justice attributed to Battista Dossi (fig. 16).

17 Commendatore individuato indicate individuato — the word, distributive — society; individuato may also denote society, but the balance = equality of all justice.
18 Ripa s.v. Gratia. La balanza sigillata, seu la国道la divino d'approvare le cose, & quivi la pena de' delinquenti .... 18(16) = xi. 18(17) = xii. In modern language, the image of the scales for some forefathers, or of the scales of justice, is often given to the modern, but only as the identical or equal weights among the deceased. = Valeriano 1573, 565.
19 On the crofused legs see Roggenthin 1575, 212, who ascribes to them attributes for fundamentally study. = Valeriano 1573, 772-776.
20 Caracci 1591, 290, s.v. in diversi modi non che in quiete, in con una maniera qualche efera, ma in tenuta, il tono, il movimento, la sua unione o scaramanzia, o che avviene dal pensier. = Valeriano 1575, 565. (fig. 16) = xii. 18(18) = xii. = Flora. A crofused form of the scendor, as portentous antithesis in Ronta del libro rea na Creazzo, C. Filippo della Rota, per mezzo che il vis a vis non ciascuno è antireale, non ciascuno seriamente nata della balanza; o, a crofused scendor precipitose una timore a manifestare l'azione in essere della scendor. On the figures are attributes of justice see the description by Ripa edited 1596, 1075.

Bernini's Bumbling Barberini Bees

addition to the canonical sword and balance. The attributes obviously relate to the quinquennial forms of justice: legal, commutative and distributive, derived ultimately from Aristotle, developed by the scholastics, and formulated definitively at the Council of Trent. Three points concern us here. The crofused pose of the figure and the inclusion of the faces have a common theme with respect to the sword and balance, which evoke the impartial and retributive nature of justice. Crofused legs were a frequent attribute of figures representative of unburied meditation and contemplation, and in this case the motif expresses one of the fundamental attributes of God's justice, that it is slow and deliberate. Vincenzo Cartari explains the fact that Saturn was often represented with his feet tied together as indicating that Divine Goodness does not run quickly or noisily to castigate error, but belatedly and slowly, so that the sinner is unconscious before he feels the pain. Under the heading precisely of Divine Justice Cesare Ripa describes the faces with the ax, carried by the liiters before the consuls and the Tribune of the People, as signifying that in the execution of justice overzealous castigation is unwarranted, and that justice should never be precipitous but have time to mature judgment while unbinding the rods that cover the ax. The crofused pose and the faces occur together in a painting of Justice attributed to Battista Dossi (fig. 16).

17 Commendatore individuato indicate individuato — the word, distributive — society; individuato may also denote society, but the balance = equality of all justice.
18 Ripa s.v. Gratia. La balanza sigillata, seu la国道la divino d'approvare le cose, & quivi la pena de' delinquenti .... 18(16) = xi. 18(17) = xii. In modern language, the image of the scales for some forefathers, or of the scales of justice, is often given to the modern, but only as the identical or equal weights among the deceased. = Valeriano 1573, 565.
19 On the crofused legs see Roggenthin 1575, 212, who ascribes to them attributes for fundamentally study. = Valeriano 1573, 772-776.
20 Caracci 1591, 290, s.v. in diversi modi non che in quiete, in con una maniera qualche efera, ma in tenuta, il tono, il movimento, la sua unione o scaramanzia, o che avviene dal pensier. = Valeriano 1575, 565. (fig. 16) = xii. 18(18) = xii. = Flora. A crofused form of the scendor, as portentous antithesis in Ronta del libro rea na Creazzo, C. Filippo della Rota, per mezzo che il vis a vis non ciascuno è antireale, non ciascuno seriamente nata della balanza; o, a crofused scendor precipitose una timore a manifestare l'azione in essere della scendor. On the figures are attributes of justice see the description by Ripa edited 1596, 1075.
which is rather one of dreamy absorption tinged with a kind of melancholic lethargy. The very fact that her elbow rests on the book of law—Urban was first and foremost a jurist and his rise within the church hierarchy rested on that basis—indicates that her action has to do with justice, not mourning. To be sure, all writers emphasize that divine chastisement is inflicted only reluctantly, and with dismay, and hints of fear-someness and withdrawal are expressed by the putti, one of whom hides anxiously with the scales, while the other turns away with the fasces (Figs. 13, 14). The allegory herself, however, has a quite different attitude. The head-on-hand motif is one of the most consistent postures of the thinker, the contemplator, the meditator, and the turn of her head and glance makes it clear, not only that she is slow to act but that what she contemplates is the heavenly source of divine justice. Bernini seems to have based this aspect of his figure on just such a prototype, Domenichino’s equally dilatory allegory of Prudence at San Carlo ai Catinari (fig. 16). Ripa emphasizes that the eyes of Divine Justice must regard the things of this world as beneath her, keeping her attention always fixed on the pure and the true.

The two groups together thus offer a veritable concert of psychological and moral states, the allegories themselves acting in a counterpoint perhaps deliberately analogous to the saintly figures in the crossing piers beneath the dome, Veronica, Andrew, Longinus and Helen (fig. 15), carried out under Bernini’s supervision during the same period as Urban’s tomb, they represent the principal passion relics posessed by the basilica. The two female saints—one active, one passive—are earthbound and outward directed, while the two men (one active, one passive) appear upward directed and inspired from heaven.

This theme, that is, the divine origin and earthward dispensation of God’s grace in the form of Charity and Justice, carries deep into the motivation and ultimate significance of the monument, which is in fact the first papal tomb incorporating these two virtues together and in isolation. Rarely, they appeared together independently, as in the painting by Baglione. They were commonly included in cycles of the virtues, and in Domenichino’s series at San Carlo, the attributes of Justice include both the sword and the fasces (fig. 17). Most importantly, there was a certain tradition for pairing the allegories in relation to papal portraits, since from the Middle Ages on these virtues played fundamental roles in the theoretical dis-
cusions of the extent and limitations of papal rule—the so-called «plenitudo potestatis». This last context was clearly a factor in Bernini’s conception. One direct source was the image of Pope Urban I flanked by Justice and Charity in the series of grandiose papal portraits by Giulio Romano in the Sala di Costantino, which document the awesome continuity of the church of Rome since its establishment by the first Christian emperor (fig. 18). This onomastic reference may reflect three reasons contemporary sources report for Urban’s choice of his name: because of his affection for the city; because he wished to emulate the great achievements of his namesakes; and because, realizing that he tended to be rather rigid («aliquanto ... rigidet») by nature, the name would be a continuous reminder to be temperate. On the «urbanity» of the pope’s rule we shall have more to say presently. Underlining the first two motivations may be a particular understanding of the role played by the image of Urban I in the Sala di Costantino cycle: as the first pope to identify himself literally with the capital of the empire, he would have been the embodiment par excellence of the virtues associated with the church’s dominion. The allusion is no doubt also to Urban II, promoter of the first crusade, who was known specifically in another source and may have been a model for Urban VIII’s zealous support for foreign missions and the Propaganda Fide. Interestingly, the same allegories reappear in the final portrait of Urban VIII, by Cherubino Alberti (fig. 19). The point is that this combination of virtues, while perhaps appropriate to a specific individual, was also emblematic of the vicarious role of all the successors of Peter as magistrates of the church.

The sense of continuity is expressed in the basic conception of the tomb, which is a kind of epitome of the two papal monuments previously erected in new St. Peter’s, those of Paul III (figs. 20) and Gregory XIII (fig. 21). The parallel and continuity between them is established by the use of corresponding materials, and by the echoing pyramidal composition of the pediment of the pope seated on a pedestal, before and beside which are placed white marble pairs of allegories. The levitating gesture of Urban VIII, moreover, which repeats that of St. Peter himself in the Sala di Costantino (fig. 22), seems deliberately to intermediate between the palm-down pacification of Paul III and the triumphal exclamation of Gregory XIII. Bernini’s allegories leaning against the sarcophagus seem also to link the reclining and isolated standing figures on the two earlier monuments, while relating the tomb to its psychological and spatial environment in a new way. These papal monuments have a close parallel in an engraved political allegory that is rooted in the Petrarchan tradition of allegorical triumphs, and that in turn anticipates many of the features of Bernini’s conception. The composition was designed by Joseph Heintz, court painter to the emperor Rudolph II, and executed by Lucas Kilian in Venice in 1603, to celebrate the appointment of Heintz’s brother Daniel as architect of the city of Bern (fig. 23). Seated atop a two-stepped structure the triumphant figure of Justice brands her sword and holds her scales aloft, looking heavenward. She is flanked below by standing figures of Truth

27 Carmo, Quadraro 1979, 1980, was able to offer as specific many of the visions of Urban I in the Sala di Costantino seen for us in a conversation with the artist of Justice and Charity.
28 Riegl 1901-02, XIX, 13, xiv, XIX, 17, 17.
29 Childe 1970, 110, see Begg, ad. not., No. 56, 1717-11. The same frame appears for several portraits, including Gregory X, Leo X, and Paul V, the latter recognized by Alexander Marc (Genova 1988, i, figs. 210, figs. 379, 397, No. 27, 21).
30 "There are the only papal tombs erected in new St. Peter’s by Urban VIII’s design" (Bergonzi 1989, 10). For particulars on the tomb of Paul III on Campagna 1978,核心区 original tomb of Gregory XIII, which was replaced in the eighteenth century, Vigano 1980, 116, 118, 128, 134, 140, 144, 164, 176, 178, 1980, 135, 156, 208, 216, 245.
31 The relationship to St. Peter in the Sala di Costantino was noted by Raphael 1970, 123. On Paul III in «una in pacis pacificae» see Flavio 1991, 13.
32 The relationship of the Urban VIII tomb to the preceding was observed and described by Bergonzi 1970, see also Poggi 1978, 15, 207, 217, 221, 225, 257, 1974, 45, 1957, No. 422.
Bernini's Bumbling Barberini Bees

(1) Francesco Mochi, St. Veronica; (2) Bernini, St. Longinus.

(3) Francesco Ducci, St. Andrew; (4) Andrea Biffi, St. Helen, Rome, S. Petri (photos: Andrew 20530, 20528, 20531, 20532).
and Charity, who rest their arms on the pedestal. Truth looks up to the sun (one of Urban VIII’s emblems) and Charity holds one child while looking down toward the other who reaches up toward her; between them at their feet on the lower level cringes the chained figure of Avarice. Apart from the theme of the allegory, its relevance for Bernini lies in the unity and coherence of the composition, and the psychological counterpoint enacted by the figures.

The earlier papal monuments had included four allegories each, alluding to the terrestrial and celestial virtues of the popes: Paul III—Justice, Prudence, Peace and Abundance; Gregory XIII—Charity, Peace, Faith, Hope. The monument to Paul III was first erected freestanding in a side aisle with the allegories placed at the front and back; when it was moved and reinstalled in a niche in one of the crossing piers, Justice and Prudence were placed at the base while the other two were set on the pedestal above. Bernini may be said to have abstracted and combined the two chief virtues of the earlier tombs, Justice and Charity. The significance of this choice must be understood in the light of a project to integrate the choir and crossing of St. Peter’s in one grandiose and comprehensive program. At the center the tomb of St. Peter was crowned with a new baldachin that expressed Christ’s triumph in its very design; and the papal altar was surrounded in the crossing piers with relics and images of saints evoking Christ’s passion, the whole embodying the process of sacrifice and salvation.

It must have seemed positively providential that the Farnese tomb, having been transferred to one of the crossing piers, was, so to speak, ‘in the way’ of this vast program. The idea of moving it to the apse (1628–9) to form a pair with the tomb of Urban gave the opportunity to demonstrate the significance of papal succession through the location of the two monuments, as well as their design. Placed in the lateral niches the pair flanked the tomb of St. Peter himself at the center of the crossing. This arrangement formed a coherent group of memorials that served to illustrate the millennial papal succession and hegemony initiated under St. Peter and established under Constantine. Moreover, the choice of Justice and Charity created in relation to Paul III’s Justice and Prudence an inseparable contrapposto in meaning, as well as form: the cardinal virtues traditionally associated with earthly dominion, the wise ruler, with the divine virtues proper to the pope as a spiritual leader, the just judge. A final correlation and contrast is evident in the treatment of what is, literally and figuratively, the central theme of both tombs, that is, death itself. In both cases the caducity of earthly existence is expressed by wing-borne inscriptions with the names of the deceased (fig. 24).

35 It has been suggested that Urban VIII's reason for moving it to the apse (1628–9) was to effect a pair with that of Paul III because the Farnese pope was a model for his own papacy, ambitions that the new pope was able to demonstrate through the demonstration of papal continuity and the material embodiment of papal terrestrial and spiritual dominion.

36 In his theme of papal succession in the arrangement of the tombs on St. Peter’s baldachin, 1627–9, Bernini followed others who have been much copied, notably in the depiction of Christ giving the Keys to St. Peter as part of the millennial decoration of the apse of the old basilica. But one panel for the altar at the center of the apse, between the two tombs, is especially important. The three Virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity, for the moral virtue Prudence, but also to signify the new window inscribed with this charge evoking a corresponding shift in meaning for Justice.

Bernini’s Bumbling Barberini Bees

By the author of the ground-breaking book, Bernini: Art of the Baroque

bbling Barberini bees and the spirit in which they were conceived was provided by Bernini himself. His words are quoted by his biographers in recounting an incident that took place at the unveiling of the tomb of Urban, in the presence of the pope’s ferociously inimical successor, Innocent X, who had driven the Barberini family into exile: «One cannot refrain at this point from recalling a cutting reply the Cavaliere gave in demonstration of his firm allegiance to Urban, to a person of high station who was not sympathetic to the Barberini family. He had represented here and there on the sarcophagus of the tomb a number of bees, for no other purpose than to allude wittily to Urban’s arms. The person noticed, and in the presence of others said to the Cavaliere with a smile, Sir, you have wished by placing the bees here and there to portray the dispersion of the Barberini family (the members had then withdrawn to France), to which without a moment’s hesitation Bernini replied, But you, Sir, may well know that dispersed bees at the sound of a bell return to congrege, referring to the great bell on the Capitoline that sounds at the death of every pope. Bernini’s reply brought him great applause from those who relished on the risk he took at that time to remain constant to the memory of his benefactor. »

85. Bernini’s reply brought him great applause from those who relished on the risk he took at that time to remain constant to the memory of his benefactor.

He umphs over the very emblem of earthly caducity. At the same time, the lyrical delicacy of the motif reinforces a hint of nostalgia implicit in another emblematic association of the laurel and bee, the Virgilian Golden Age evoked rhapsodically by contemporaries in relation to the Barberini papacy. 83 «That tree of knowledge, of triumph, of poetry, of empire, of immortality, of chaste; and similarly the bee of eloquence, poetry, continence, clemency, diligence, artifice, long and prosperous life, eternal felicity, peace, and union, »

The primary witness to the meaning of the tomb is to be found where it should be, in the coat of arms of the Barberini pope, attached to the face of the arch at the apex of the niche (fig. 49). Here an extraordinary—indeed, as far as I know unique—operation is performed by two heaven-sent messengers. The Barberini escutcheon, instead of arriving, as in the ceiling of the Palazzo Barberini (fig. 35), is detached from the papal tiara and keys and carried aloft. 90 The image is a living demonstration of the fleeting earthly presence and spiritual sublimation of an individual mortal who briefly occupied the center of an eternally abiding creation of the will of God.

In the end, however, perhaps the sharpest insight into the significance of Bernini’s bumbling Barberini bees and the spirit in which they were conceived was provided by Bernini himself. His words are quoted by his biographers in recounting an incident that took place at the unveiling of the tomb of Urban, in the presence of the pope’s ferociously inimical successor, Innocent X, who had driven the Barberini family into exile: «One cannot refrain at this point from recalling a cutting reply the Cavaliere gave in demonstration of his firm allegiance to Urban, to a person of high station who was not sympathetic to the Barberini family. He had represented here and there on the sarcophagus of the tomb a number of bees, for no other purpose than to allude wittily to Urban’s arms. The person noticed, and in the presence of others said to the Cavaliere with a smile, Sir, you have wished by placing the bees here and there to portray the dispersion of the Barberini family (the members had then withdrawn to France), to which without a moment’s hesitation Bernini replied, But you, Sir, may well know that dispersed bees at the sound of a bell return to congrege, referring to the great bell on the Capitoline that sounds at the death of every pope. Bernini’s reply brought him great applause from those who relished on the risk he took at that time to remain constant to the memory of his benefactor. »
Bernini’s Bumbling Barberini Bees


Images of Nepotism. The Painted Ceiling of Palazzo Barberini, Princeton, 1991

Images of Nepotism and the Visual Encomium during the Pontificate of Urban VIII. The Ideal Palazzo Barberini in a Dedicatory Print.» Memoria dell’Arte Italiana a Roma, XXL, 1995, 219-224


Southern, R. W., Stilemo Vivi di Moi in the Middle Ages, Cambridge MA, 1962

Sokol, R., Domesticini, New Haven and London, 1982

Takamori, O. M., Attributions de la peinture de l’an 1700. Italian Renaissance paintings, 3 vols., Geneva, 1928-1942

Tremont, C., «Praesentantia et presentia». Zum Grabmal Pius III., in Festschrift für Reinhold Reinhard, Munich, 1990, 131-141

Tommaso, J. C., Die Buchstaben in der Künstlerhandschrift. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der bildlichen Handschrift, Hamburg, 1924

Toselli, P., Pietro da Cortona, Venice, 1976

Wallach, G., The Iconography of Bernini’s Tomb of Urban VIII, L’urle, XIV, 1971, 55-68


Zucchi, R., Bernini’s Golden Expressions, Engel and Weelschi, Volume XXIII, Amsterdam, 1973

Zuccarelli, J., Joseph Bernini, Il Museo, Zeichnungen und Dokumente, Munich 1981

Illustrations

Alinari

ARFED: Archivio della Reverenda Filatrice di S. Petron

Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana

FCGD: Biblioteca Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Rome

SAGON: Superintendenza alle gallerie, Naples
except that Bernini assimilated this motif, and the figure of Historia represented on the front of Paul III's cope (fig. 25), to the traditional winged personification of Death, which now becomes also the fateful recorder of life. 30

However, the choice of Justice and Charity alone for the tomb of Urban—unprecedented, I repeat, in papal funerary iconography—suggests that this combination of virtues, in their divine nature, had special meaning in the case of Urban VIII. (I want to emphasize here parenthetically, that the tomb of Urban was an astonishing, even revolutionary departure from the grandiose, self-expository monuments covered with great visual biographies, erected by his recent predecessors, Sixtus V and Paul V at Santa Maria Maggiore. 31) The complementary and necessary attributes of Charity and Justice were a constant feature in the ideology of the good magistrate from antiquity on, discussed and eulogized in innumerable ways in innumerable texts. One of the leitmotifs of this theme made it particularly relevant to Urban VIII because it was based on the equally ancient tradition that the social organization of the bee, three of which animals constituted the coat of arms of Urban VIII, represented the ideal state: a hierarchical monarchy where every individual had its assigned place which it never transgressed, and where every individual made its contribution to the commonweal, wholeheartedly, and in utter harmony with its fellows. 32 Two specific characteristics of the bee were especially relevant to the ideology of the good ruler, the fact that the bee could inflict pain stinger, and was thus feared by its friends. 33 The other important characteristic was that the ruler, the bee often thought to be a queen, larger, more important and constantly surrounded and guarded by his subjects—had no stinger. 34

On both these counts, the ideal state of the bee was based on and derived from the ideal of Charity and justice inherent in its nature. In general terms, the bee became one of the important emblems of the ideal ruler, as when Alciati depicted Princely Clemency as a hive to which bees are attracted. In this capacity the ruler treats his subjects with justice and clemency, or as an enthroned seated ruler to whom the bees fly in good will (figs. 26, 27). 35

Pungent and acute is the motto of another emblem of the Princep Perfecto, illustrated by a swarm of bees following its leader (fig. 28). 36

In another case, the swarm following the king illustrates the pajouge on the stignatio king bee from Seneca's discourse on Clemency to indicate that, in Pliny's words, majesty alone...
Bernini's Bumbling Barberini Bees

The idea was clearly taken as apposite for Urban, whose very name, as we have seen, incorporated the ideal of rigor tempered by charity. All these metaphors, the stings like a bee, the poetic victory over the ferocious lion, the rule by majesty alone, the domination of urbanity, were applied to the pope in the literary celebrations of his election. Indeed, I suspect that the tradition of the bee as the embodiment of the God-like coincidence of opposites, chelmency and justice, may have been the most important factor in the choice of those allegories for the tomb. In any case, these associations of the bee must have made the election of Maffeo Barberini to the papacy seem like a heaven-sent materialization of those same divine virtues that were the quintessential attributes of the vicar of Christ on earth.

This point may be thought of, and certainly was thought of by contemporaries, as literally true. One more bee-fact is necessary to understand why. Because of the attributes we have discussed, and for many other reasons, as well—for example, the perfect geometry of its hive and the perfect efficiency of its anatomy—the bee was regarded as endowed with a supernatural intelligence. Whence it became a symbol of Divine Wisdom, whose primary aim was to make perfect in his own image. The idea is both clausal and biblical: «Led by such tokens and such instances, someone has taught that bees have issued forth from the lion's mouth, including a fencer of his flock nearby. Rubens came forth sweetness,» Judges 14:5-6, 8, 14;» this biblical episode is mentioned in a poem addressed to Urban's brother Antonio, a Capuchin monk, which alludes to the spirit's rise to heaven from the corrupt body. Rubens here also identifies Urban's poetry with the mellifluousness of bees. The bees infusing specifically from the lion's mouth, including a formation of three, draw an obvious parallel between Urban, celebrated as a poet in the Greek style, and Dindar, whose poetry was said to have been instilled by honey that bees had dropped upon him as a child. But the basic image and the conceit derive from a broader concept, that is, self-control, Donizelli de Stigliano, the most noble form of Force, represented by Rapa as a man straddling and bridling a lion (fig. 29). Rapa's image had been taken up as a counterpart to Strength by Domenichino (fig. 30).» This ideal of self-restraint was clausal in origin, associated above all with Alexander the Great, whose greatness was augmented by his self-control, which proved his greatness as much as any victory: «...great-minded as he was and still greater owing to his control of himself, and of a greater proved by this action as much as by any other victory; because he conquered himself...»

change the text.
Principis clementia.

EMBLEMA CXLIX.

Bernini’s Bumbling Barberini Bees

pervades all things . . . , yes, unto him all beings thereafter return, and, when unmade, are restored; no place is there for death, but, still quick, they fly unto the ranks of the stars, and mount to the heavens aloft» (Virgil, Georgics, IV, 219–27).55 «For my spirit is sweet above honey: and my inheritance above honey and honeycomb» (Ecclesiasticus 24:27).56

To be sure, all popes are elected by the action of Divine Providence, operating through the ballots of the College of Cardinals. But at the election of Maffeo Barberini, the action of Divine Providence— the descent of the Holy Spirit, one might well assert—was made physically manifest by the sudden appearance through an open window of the Conclave of nothing less than a swarm of bees! The event is alluded to in a tapestry illustrating Urban’s election, where a conspicuously open window is shown conspicuously in the background (fig. 34).57 The wonder is repeated in Pietro da Cortona’s frescoed vault in the great salon of the Palazzo Barberini (fig. 45), where the invading swarm is framed by a wreath of laurel (the second major Barberini emblem, concerning which we will have more to say presently) and surmounted by the papal arms.58 A contemporary account of the decoration actually describes the scene as Divine Providence commanding immortality to crown with its diaphanous diadem the arms of the new pope, whose election had made him «King of the Bees.»59 The story of the election, and Cortona’s reference to it, had yet a deeper significance, however, since Urban’s victory was confirmed only after a recount was taken, at his insistence, when it was discovered that a ballot was missing from the scrutiny that had elected him.60 This is the primary scene represented in the election tapestry, where allegorical figures of Modesty and Magnanimity fly into the conclave to celebrate the urbanus virtue displayed in his own election.61 His coronation and abjuration of immortality, pressed by the miracle of the bees, were thus occasioned by his exemplary demonstration of virtue in its most heroic form, self-restraint. The pope’s biographer commented: «It was a truly memorable deed that will render his name forever most glorious because, seeing himself at one point pope and then not pope, with great courage and with such a magnificent heart he decided to let the welfare of the universal Church prevail over his own desire for the supreme principate. Wherefore amongst his other signal faculties and spiritual qualities are the constancy, magnanimity, and generosity he demonstrated in his heroic act, it will be sufficient to render his name immortal and celebrate to the world the manner in which he assumed the papacy.»62 It might thus well be said that the age of the Baroque was ushered in by a supreme act of ephemerality— the sudden descent upon Rome, the church, and mankind, of an unmistakably heaven-sent swarm of bumbling Barberini bees, conveying to the chosen one the divine virtues of Clemency and Justice proper to his newly acquired office.

With that swarm began the terrible invasion (plague, as some would have it by the time Urban’s reign ended) of bees, the number of which populating Rome and the papal states one day later estimated at more than ten thousand.63 In my estimation, however, what distinguished the Barberini bees was not their number—many popes had been great builders and art patrons, and many pious and other games had been played with their coats of arms. But none had acquired the active, literally volatile presence of the Barberini bees. Perhaps one should rather say transience, for to my mind and in our context, at least, the Barberini bees embody the notion of ephemeralism in their period more profoundly and more pungently than any other sign. They fly against the blue sky in the church of the virgin at the altar of heaven (fig. 36); and in the early medieval apse mosaic in the basilica of St. Cosmas and Damian in the heart of the Roman forum, where a Barberini restoration gave new life to the image of Urban’s predecessor, the sainted Pope Felix IV (Felicitas, Happyness), they fructify the garden of paradise (fig. 37).

This same quality informs the famous bees that have alighted on Urban’s tomb, having now

55 The subject of Urban’s election has been ably explained in their correspondence by Scott (1935, 1:157–60), who concludes that although the conclave (1621) was well attended in the sense that the conclave of the Barberini pope, whose election had made him «King of the Bees.»59 The story of the election, and Cortona’s reference to it, had yet a deeper significance, however, since Urban’s victory was confirmed only after a recount was taken, at his insistence, when it was discovered that a ballot was missing from the scrutiny that had elected him.55 This is the primary scene represented in the election tapestry, where allegorical figures of Modesty and Magnanimity fly into the conclave to celebrate the Urbanus virtue displayed in his own election.56 His coronation and abjuration of immortality, pressed by the miracle of the bees, were thus occasioned by his exemplary demonstration of virtue in its most heroic form, self-restraint. The pope’s biographer commented: «It was a truly memorable deed that will render his name forever most glorious because, seeing himself at one point pope and then not pope, with great courage and with such a magnificent heart he decided to let the welfare of the universal Church prevail over his own desire for the supreme principate. Wherefore amongst his other signal faculties and

57 The subject of Urban’s election has been ably explained in their correspondence by Scott (1935, 1:157–60), who concludes that although the conclave (1621) was well attended in the sense that the conclave of the Barberini pope, whose election had made him «King of the Bees.»59 The story of the election, and Cortona’s reference to it, had yet a deeper significance, however, since Urban’s victory was confirmed only after a recount was taken, at his insistence, when it was discovered that a ballot was missing from the scrutiny that had elected him.55 This is the primary scene represented in the election tapestry, where allegorical figures of Modesty and Magnanimity fly into the conclave to celebrate the Urbanus virtue displayed in his own election.56 His coronation and abjuration of immortality, pressed by the miracle of the bees, were thus occasioned by his exemplary demonstration of virtue in its most heroic form, self-restraint. The pope’s biographer commented: «It was a truly memorable deed that will render his name forever most glorious because, seeing himself at one point pope and then not pope, with great courage and with such a magnificent heart he decided to let the welfare of the universal Church prevail over his own desire for the supreme principate. Wherefore amongst his other signal faculties and

58 The subject of Urban’s election has been ably explained in their correspondence by Scott (1935, 1:157–60), who concludes that although the conclave (1621) was well attended in the sense that the conclave of the Barberini pope, whose election had made him «King of the Bees.»59 The story of the election, and Cortona’s reference to it, had yet a deeper significance, however, since Urban’s victory was confirmed only after a recount was taken, at his insistence, when it was discovered that a ballot was missing from the scrutiny that had elected him.55 This is the primary scene represented in the election tapestry, where allegorical figures of Modesty and Magnanimity fly into the conclave to celebrate the Urbanus virtue displayed in his own election.56 His coronation and abjuration of immortality, pressed by the miracle of the bees, were thus occasioned by his exemplary demonstration of virtue in its most heroic form, self-restraint. The pope’s biographer commented: «It was a truly memorable deed that will render his name forever most glorious because, seeing himself at one point pope and then not pope, with great courage and with such a magnificent heart he decided to let the welfare of the universal Church prevail over his own desire for the supreme principate. Wherefore amongst his other signal faculties and

59 The subject of Urban’s election has been ably explained in their correspondence by Scott (1935, 1:157–60), who concludes that although the conclave (1621) was well attended in the sense that the conclave of the Barberini pope, whose election had made him «King of the Bees.»59 The story of the election, and Cortona’s reference to it, had yet a deeper significance, however, since Urban’s victory was confirmed only after a recount was taken, at his insistence, when it was discovered that a ballot was missing from the scrutiny that had elected him.55 This is the primary scene represented in the election tapestry, where allegorical figures of Modesty and Magnanimity fly into the conclave to celebrate the Urbanus virtue displayed in his own election.56 His coronation and abjuration of immortality, pressed by the miracle of the bees, were thus occasioned by his exemplary demonstration of virtue in its most heroic form, self-restraint. The pope’s biographer commented: «It was a truly memorable deed that will render his name forever most glorious because, seeing himself at one point pope and then not pope, with great courage and with such a magnificent heart he decided to let the welfare of the universal Church prevail over his own desire for the supreme principate. Wherefore amongst his other signal faculties and

60 The subject of Urban’s election has been ably explained in their correspondence by Scott (1935, 1:157–60), who concludes that although the conclave (1621) was well attended in the sense that the conclave of the Barberini pope, whose election had made him «King of the Bees.»59 The story of the election, and Cortona’s reference to it, had yet a deeper significance, however, since Urban’s victory was confirmed only after a recount was taken, at his insistence, when it was discovered that a ballot was missing from the scrutiny that had elected him.55 This is the primary scene represented in the election tapestry, where allegorical figures of Modesty and Magnanimity fly into the conclave to celebrate the Urbanus virtue displayed in his own election.56 His coronation and abjuration of immortality, pressed by the miracle of the bees, were thus occasioned by his exemplary demonstration of virtue in its most heroic form, self-restraint. The pope’s biographer commented: «It was a truly memorable deed that will render his name forever most glorious because, seeing himself at one point pope and then not pope, with great courage and with such a magnificent heart he decided to let the welfare of the universal Church prevail over his own desire for the supreme principate. Wherefore amongst his other signal faculties and
presumably pafed through a window of the basilica, to participate in the commemoration of St. Peter's departed successor and their beloved ruler—just as they had done twenty years before at Urban's election. In fact, the three large bees that allude to the coat of arms are really the leaders—king-size bees, one might say (figs. 38, 39)—of a swarm that popula­lates the monument; the others are much smaller, worker bees—indeed, they are true to scale (figs. 40, 41, 42). Transforming the papal coat of arms into a swarm of insects bustling over the papal tomb was, surely, an act of unparalleled imagination and wit, which also served to transform the mood of melancholy and despair usually associated with funeral iconography into a moment of surprise and even of joy. The essential idea was not new, however. Stinging swarms had been associated with, and attached to tombs in two closely related and complementary instances, both of which I think were semi­nally inspirations for Bernini's conceit. The Greek Anthology includes a description of the tomb of Archilochus, «who first made the Muse bitter dipping her in vipers' gall, stinging mild Helicon with blood ... Pâji quietly by, O wayfar­er, left haply thou arouse the wasps that are settled on his tomb, »5 Archilochus was the founding father of Greek lyric poetry, famous for having composed the song of victory used by the victors at Olympia, and for inventing the epode and many other verse forms; but he was also famous for his bitter satires, which wound­ed his enemies even unto death. It was thus a kind of poetic justice that at his own death his barbs should return as a reminder of his malici­ous verses, in the form of a swarm of wasps carved on his tomb. The idea was visualized in Alciati's famous emblem book (fig. 43), and given Urban's fame as a poet himself—he wrote a great deal in exactly the kind of epodic verse associated with Archilochus—there can be no doubt of his, and Bernini's, familiarity with the tradition. The second instance of apian sepulchral imagery concerned the emperor Domitian, whose cruelty, especially toward Christians, was celebrated and immortalized by the avenging attack on his tomb of swarms of wasps and bees (fig. 44):

Once Nero's name, the world did quake to hear, And Rome did tremble, at Domitian's sight; But now the Tyrant, cause of all this feare, Is laid full low, upon whose toombe do light, To take revenge, the Bee, and summer Flie, Who not escap's sometime his crueltie. 

It is remarkable indeed, and must have seemed providential to the pope and to Bernini, that these two associations between stinging insects and death, where is thy victory? (I Cor. 15:55) The other one, «O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?» (I Cor. 15:55) The other two (fig. 39), as if in response to the resurrecting command of the pope—appropriated, as Kauffmann first noticed, from the gufture of St. Peter himself in the Sala di Costantino series (fig. 22)—enfronched on his seat of wisdom, itself ornamented with bees. It is astonishing but true that the lowestmost bee, on the rim of the sarcophagus basin, has no sting—it is not broken off, it never had one (fig. 38). O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (I Cor. 15:55) The other two (fig. 39), as if resurrected, are whole again and proceed in their rise to the very border of death, commemoration, and life.

The hyperbolic flattery usually attributed to Bernini is belied not only by the theological na­ture of the allegories, but also by the inordinate importance attributed to death itself, by virtue of the inclusion of the Michelangelesque sar­cophagus, and especially the central role played by the figure of the Reaper in the drama of the tomb. Like the bees, Death seems to rise from the sarcophagus, a conceit derived, I think, from the tomb of a great Flemish cardinal of the sixteenth century, well known through contem­porary engravings of monuments of famous persons (fig. 45). In the tomb of Cardinal Erard de la Marche, however, Death performs his
Bernini’s Bumbling Barberini Bees

**Iconologia**

DOMINIO DI SE STESSI

La forma sulla carta, di amore la terra, muovendosi medesima e' avvolta nel castello, un animale del tempo, commisurato all'incarnare più dolce. A questo modo di pensare, che si sta aprendo con più vastità, si notano tantissime cose inamici. A non prendere, che in alto, sono in alto e non in basso. In riguardo, si vedono le forme come se si fossero fatte, in modo da trarre il bene da sé nel mondo.}

...Domenichino, Foret with Dominion over the Self, Rome, S. Carlo ai Catinari (photo: Alinari 1993)

Barberini, painted glass, Rome, S. Maria in Aracoeli (photo: EIIP Roma di Roma 1993/96, front cover)

Bernini, Barberini Bees, mixed...
role as memento mori in a traditional way, brandishing wings, favoring the bees. He may write, or rather finishes writing the name and title of Urban VIII in the black book of death (fig. 48). The bookish Death seems to recall that along with his literary interests the pope was an avid historian and bibliophile. However, a more specific reference is suggested by a rarely noted, and to my mind never properly understood peculiarity of the motif, the name of Urban’s predecessor partially visible on a preceding page. Often assumed to refer to Urban’s immediate predecessor Gregory XV, the letters are clearly legible as CL above and A I. below, that is, Clement VIII Aldobrandini. And, as if to allow any possibility of misunderstanding, exactly the right number of pages, corresponding to the number of intervening popes, namely three, are shown between that with Urban’s name and that with Clement’s. (Clement VIII, Leo XI, Paul V, Gregory XV, Urban VIII) It is not hard to understand why the reference to Gregory was avoided: that pope’s nephew, Cardinal Ludovisi, had been a bitter enemy since the time of the conclave. On the other hand, Urban had been a great favorite of Clement VIII, who had furthered his early career in many ways. However, I think there was another, more specific reason, which may even have been the inspiration for the motif of the record book itself. One of the important acts of Clement was to have established in Castel Sant’Angelo (originally the tomb of the Emperor Hadrian), the guardian fortresses of the papacy, an archive for the historical records of the church, the so-called Biblioteca Clementina. In praise of the project, Barberini wrote a poem, dedicated to Clement, which was included in all the editions of his collected verse. The poem, which is dedicated to Clement and titled De tabulario pontificio in arce Hadriana, involves an elaborate conceit specifically linking the records kept through the Pope’s generosity to the permanence of his fame. Urban himself, apart from his famous literary and bibliophilic interests, was also a great architect, establishing along with several ecclesiastical repositories, a central archive of the notarial records of the city. Hans Kauffmann, recalling the figure on Paul III’s cope, aptly described the figure of death writing in a book as a kind of allegory of History (fig. 49). Here, however, Death has the specific task of record keeper—archivist, one might well say—displaying at once the ephemeral nature of earthly things, bees as well as monuments. More specifically, he seems to be documenting the ephemeral nature of heavenly things, notably the church as embodied in the person of its temporary temporal and spiritual head. Therein lies the ultimate, and supremely paradoxical, significance of Bernini’s tomb of Urban VIII—and, I would say, of ephemerality in Baroque art generally. The very figure representing the triumph of transience, winged Death, is at the same time also the guarantor of permanence, indeed of immortality, through the achievements and fame of Urban, and through the divine virtues vested by God in the institution of the church and the papacy.

Bernini left two unmistakable clues to the supernaturally inspired truth of this message. Four of the small, ‘real’ bees appear on the legs of the sarcophagus, while a fifth has landed on a leaf of the laurel wreath that decorates the sarcophagus lid, near the tip of Death’s wing (fig. 42). Laurel was, of course, the preeminent symbol of poetry and the victorious immortality it confers; and one of the best known and most consistent of the ideas attached to bees—based on Virgil’s notion, quoted earlier, that the bee did not die but flew to heaven to join the stars—that they symbolized immortality. The two Barberini emblems coincided in the principle Barberini family impress, which depicted a flight of bees landing on the branches of a laurel tree, with the legend Hic domus (fig. 43). The meaning and history of this device are critical to an understanding of the message of the tomb. The conceit is based on a climactic passage in the Aeneid when the hero, having at last reached Latium after his peregrinations from Troy, realized that he had reached his final destination, there to establish the religion of his fathers and the hegemony of Rome, from the wondrous descent of a large swarm of bees upon a laurel tree sacred to Apollo. Heeding the signs, he declared «Hic domus, hae patria cat*» (here is our home, here our country). Maffei invented the impress to celebrate the transfer of the Barberini family from Florence to Rome, and his own call to a higher destiny, before he became pope.

The bee-infested laurel was thus a truly unprecedented forecast of the apian intervention of Divine Providence in Urban’s election. On the pope’s tomb the little bee, the very emblem ofumbling transience, almost invisible perched on its botanical equivalent, by its humble immortality clips the wings of death itself and tri...
Malèdiction.

COMMENTARII.

HISTORIC.

Di Cefare Ripa.

HISTORIC.

St non disponeva d'una destra, che volgendo il corpo grad, dunque gl' esercizi per tutto il giorno, la parte sinistra sioperbava di non essere usata; e l'altra viveva sotto le mani della destra, sotto le quali si opponeva a tutte le cose in Italia.

Andrea Alciati

Emblemata

52 Malèdiction, Tomb of Antichus, engraving. Alciati 1531, Emblemata II

53 Tomb of Cardinal Ercole de' Nobili Beccarizzi, 1537–1552. Part IV, Tome II, 160 pages

56 Histoire, Tomb of Urban VIII, detail. Rome, St. Peter's (ARSP 3772)

57 Allegory of Victory, Ripa 1615, 255

58 Borsari, Tomb of Urban VIII, detail. Rome, St. Peter's (Photo Borsari 2135813)