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*Ovidius Pictus: Afterlives  
of the Metamorphoses  
in Europe, from Books  
to the Arts*



IL CAPITALE CULTURALE  
*Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage*

**eum**

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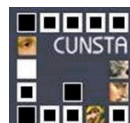
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# *Ovidius Pictus: Afterlives of the *Metamorphoses* in Europe, from Books to the Arts*

edited by  
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# Prometheus in the Palazzo del Principe

Laura Stagno\*

## *Abstract*

In the rich 16th-century decoration of Palazzo del Principe in Genoa, scenes from the myth of Prometheus – a complex narrative shaped and disseminated by a number of different sources and mediation texts – are represented. In the context of the decoration campaign committed by Andrea Doria to Perino del Vaga and his équipe (1528-1533), the theft of fire and the gift of it to mankind, with the Titan's punishment in the background, were depicted in the marble bas-relief of a monumental fireplace's *tondo*, the earliest testimony of Promethean images in Genoa. In the 1590s, Giovanni Andrea Doria, Andrea's heir, had two of the rooms he added to the palace decorated with plaster bas-reliefs on the ceilings, representing Prometheus' deeds (the creation of man, the theft of the fire from the Sun's chariot's wheel, the animation of man) and his punishment, through the intervention of Mercury who is portrayed chaining him to the Caucasus rock. This paper aims to present and analyse the iconographies of these works, connecting them to the characters and purposes of Andrea Doria's strategy of images (closely related to his political role in the Genoese state), consistently continued by his successor.

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This paper deals with the illustration of Prometheus' myth in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Genoese art. Specifically, it analyses the depiction of episodes from that complex narrative in Palazzo del Principe, built and decorated between the third and the fourth decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century for Andrea Doria, admiral to Emperor Charles V, re-founder of the Republic of Genoa and – according to Edoardo Grendi – *signore di fatto* of the Genoese state (or, at least, crucial interface between the latter's oligarchy and the Hispanic-Habsburgic imperial system)<sup>1</sup>. The palace was greatly enlarged by Andrea's heir, Giovanni Andrea Doria, general of the sea to Philip II, who commissioned significant works of art for it in the last decades of the Cinquecento and up to his death in 1606, including the stucco decoration of two vaults representing Prometheus's feats<sup>2</sup> (while in the original architectural nucleus, dating back to Andrea's time, the Promethean myth was evoked by the marble bas-relief of a monumental fireplace's *tondo*, the earliest testimony of this iconography in Genoa).

Andrea Doria's patronage introduced the use of antiquity as a model and an iconographic source on a locally unprecedented, comprehensive scale; he trusted the decoration of his palace, a veritable turning point in the history of Genoese art, to Perino del Vaga, who was at his service between 1528 and 1533 and fully displayed his vital relation with antiquity, rooted in Raphael's example<sup>3</sup>. Palazzo del Principe's iconographic program makes skilful use of diverse classical materials, taking subjects from Roman history and a number of myths (for which Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was the main source, though not the only one)<sup>4</sup>; it has been suggested that the program may have been elaborated by Paolo Giovio, though no testimony survives about its invention<sup>5</sup>.

As is well known, the myth of Prometheus is a multi-faceted narrative comprising a high number of substantial variations, ever since its remote inception. Its insertion in the cosmological frame of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (I, 78-83) – where Prometheus is briefly presented as possibly the creator of mankind, shaping the first man out of the soil of the newly created earth mixed with

<sup>1</sup> On the palace and the decorative cycles commissioned by Andrea Doria, see, among others: Askew 1956; Davidson 1959; Parma 1970; Gorse 1980; Parma 1986; Magnani 1987, pp. 27-46, 115-124; Boccardo 1989, pp. 17-75; Gorse 1992; Parma 2001, pp. 197-261; Stagno 2004; Parma 2004; Stagno 2005; Pierguidi 2010; Altavista 2013; Campigli 2012; Campigli 2014; Ginzburg 2015; Stagno 2020. On Andrea Doria's role in Genoa, see, in particular, Grendi 1992, p. 267; Pacini 1999, pp. 20-27; Bitossi 2007.

<sup>2</sup> A survey of Giovanni Andrea Doria's patronage for Palazzo del Principe is in Stagno 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Oberhuber 2001, pp. 51-56.

<sup>4</sup> Perino's frescoes include representations of the Fall of the Giants and of the tales of Perseus and Cadmus, as well as Arachne's myth (with the depiction of Jupiter's loves illustrated in her tapestry, a theme to be found both in frescoes and in tapestries, in the palace) and Phaeton's deeds. Prometheus' myth – as mentioned in the text – was represented not in frescoes, but in the marble reliefs of the main western hall's fireplace.

<sup>5</sup> Parma 1986, p. 85.

water, in the image of the gods – is but a link (although a very influential one) in a long chain of tales.

Hesiod himself, in his *Theogonia* (vv. 507-616) and *Works and Days* (vv. 42-58), presents two somewhat divergent versions, and his Prometheus has been defined as «not some given entity» but rather a «process, as it were, already operating in the Greek archaic period»<sup>6</sup>. The two crucial narrative nuclei of the theft of fire, gifted to man (a recurrent theme shared in many other mythologies)<sup>7</sup>, and of the torture by the eagle devouring Prometheus' liver on the Caucasus were well established in the Greek tradition – but with different takes and moral judgments upon Prometheus' feats<sup>8</sup>. Aeschylus shaped the powerful image of the beneficent Titan bringing civilization to mankind (and being atrociously punished for that), through the gift of fire from which all arts derived; thus establishing a long-lasting legacy<sup>9</sup>. The Promethean creation of man instead – though certainly known in Athens in the fourth century, as it is cited in passing by Menander and Philemon – was not the focus of any known great work in the heart of the Greek world, while it enjoyed a higher degree of success at its periphery<sup>10</sup>. It became important in Roman culture, particularly since the Augustean age, as attested by mentions by Horace and Catullus and, more importantly, by the citation in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* mentioned above<sup>11</sup>.

From these foundations a number of tributary or alternative storylines and symbolic interpretations grew through the works of late-antiquity scholars, fathers of the church, medieval and Renaissance authors. It is in the context of the rich tapestry of different traditions and details available in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century that the specific iconographies chosen in Palazzo del Principe's decoration are to be read.

With regard to the first instance – the marble tondo, depicting the fire's theft and the gift of it to mankind (fig. 1) – it is to be noted that here the Promethean myth is inserted in a decorative context in which the theme of fire (the purest of elements, which «sordida purgat», as the inscription at the top of the overmantel states) recurs, and a wider discourse on civilization is evoked. The bas-relief is part of a majestic fireplace designed by Perino del Vaga, the execution of which has been traditionally attributed to Silvio Cosini, though it has been argued on the basis of extensive stylistic comparisons that all its marble parts may more likely be the work of Niccolò della Corte and his collaborators<sup>12</sup> (fig. 2).

<sup>6</sup> Beall 1991, p. 355. See also Trousson 2001, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> Trousson 2001, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Raggio 1958, p. 44; Trousson 2001, pp. 33-40.

<sup>9</sup> Trousson 2001, pp. 40-69.

<sup>10</sup> Raggio 1958, p. 46; Trousson 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Raggio 1958.

<sup>12</sup> Campigli 2014, pp. 87, 90. A survey of earlier bibliography is in note 34, p. 100.



It is a significant early example of the inclination to use Prometheus' story in the decoration of fireplaces, a choice which Lomazzo would later explicitly advise, citing «Prometeo quando fura il fuoco divino dello spirito» among the subjects appropriate for such places<sup>13</sup>, and which – it has been remarked – would find particular favour in the Emilian area, as attested by the examples by Pellegrino Tibaldi in Palazzo Poggi in Bologna, by Ludovico Carracci in the lost fresco in Palazzo Casali in the same city (documented through an etching by Pissarri) and by Guercino in casa Fabri in Cento (the detached fresco can be seen in the local Cassa di Risparmio's collection)<sup>14</sup>.

Though the scene's link to flames – both the real ones in the hearth and those represented in other parts of the fireplace or, in the guise of thunderbolts in Jupiter's hands, in the room's vault's fresco – is obvious to the point of banality, the specific way in which the episode is depicted is meaningful and relatively unusual. In the top section of the tondo, Prometheus can be seen stealing fire from the sun with a torch in his right hand, while using the flaming one in his left hand to light the torch of a man standing below him; the Titan's gift to mankind is at the same time propagating further, being passed on from one female figure to another in the crowd that occupies most of the space. Prometheus' theft of the fire from the sun – rather than from Jupiter's thunderbolt or Vulcanus' workshop, as indicated in earlier tradition – is first described by Servius<sup>15</sup> and then Fulgentius<sup>16</sup>, from whose texts a tradition depends that was received into the narrative of Boccaccio's influential *Genealogie deorum gentilium* (which since its *editio princeps* in 1472 also enjoyed a significant editorial success as a printed book, and was an important source for humanists who wrote on the theme)<sup>17</sup> as well as Giovanni del Virgilio's *Allegorie Librorum Ovidii Metamorphoseos*<sup>18</sup>. It is here illustrated in a simplified form (no image of the sun's chariot is included) and on a small scale (on an even smaller scale, making the detail barely legible, the image of the Titan's punishment is also represented in the left background) (fig. 3).

Prometheus' gesture – which through his extended arms connects sun and man – shows some similarity with that depicted in Parmigianino's drawing at the Pierpont Morgan Library (circa 1524-1527)<sup>19</sup> (fig. 4), but with a funda-

<sup>13</sup> Lomazzo 1585, VI, 23, p. 342.

<sup>14</sup> The Emilian examples are cited in Raggio 1958, p. 60.

<sup>15</sup> Servius, *Ad Vergilius*, Ecloga VI, 42, in Maurus Servius Honoratus 1881 (<<https://tinyurl.com/5n6kvet4>>, 18.12.2023).

<sup>16</sup> Fulgentius, *Mythologiarum libri*, II VI, *Fabula Promethei*, in Fabii Planciadis Fulgentii 1970 (<<https://tinyurl.com/y4arf3ny>>, 18.12.2023).

<sup>17</sup> Boccaccio, *Genealogie deorum gentilium*, Liber IV, cap. XLIV, *De Prometheo Japeti filio, qui fecit Pandoram et genuit Ysydem et Deucalionem*, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio* 1998, p. 448. On the text's fortune in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, see Gambino Longo 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Giovanni del Virgilio, *Allegorie Librorum Ovidii Metamorphoseos*, I, 2, in Ghisalberti 1931, p. 72, no. 27.

<sup>19</sup> Chapman, Bambach 2000-2001, p. 144, no. 95, with bibliography.

mental difference: in the drawing the Titan is going to animate through fire the man he has just created, while in the Genoese *tondo* the focus is on the collective character of the event presented. Of the many facets of the myth, it is the role of Prometheus as the bringer of civilization to mankind that is celebrated here. It is a powerful image rooted in Aeschylus' tragedy, the highest narrative embodiment of the primitivist *topos* of the wise hero leading the human race from a state of brutishness to living in communities and using crafts, which Johnson aptly defined «the Promethean commonplace»<sup>20</sup>.

This aspect survived in the medieval tradition – for instance, Petrus Comestor mentioned the Titan's role of civilizer of men, whom he «de rudibus fecit doctos», as a possible explanation of his being credited with creating the first human being<sup>21</sup> – and was at the centre of Boccaccio's portrayal of the “historical” Prometheus. Boccaccio famously founded his discourse on the distinction between “natural” and “civil” – or social – man («Est enim homo naturalis, et est homo civilis»). Natural men were «rudes et ignari», similar to ferocious beasts («belve»), until Prometheus, «homo doctus», «quasi de novo creet, docet et instruit, et demonstrationibus suis ex naturalibus hominibus civiles facit, moribus scientia et virtutibus insignes»<sup>22</sup>. In short, Boccaccio's Prometheus is presented as the founder of human society<sup>23</sup>. The many figures in the bas-relief's foreground receiving or passing the flaming torches, both male and female and clad in diverse *all'antica* attires (with the man who raises the torch lit by Prometheus wearing what appears to be a Phrygian cap, an attribute of oriental people in classical and Renaissance art), evoke a varied and reciprocally supportive mankind made civilized and social through Prometheus' gift, the architectures dominating the background an emblem of their evolved status. An iconographical antecedent for this focus on the collective beneficiaries of the Titan's generosity, though expressed in a different medium and style, is to be found – rather than in the complex paintings by Piero di Cosimo, deeply indebted to the neoplatonic interpretation of the myth as proposed by Ficino's comment of Plato's *Protagoras*, as well as to Boccaccio's work<sup>24</sup> – in the tapestry depicting Prometheus stealing the fire made in Bologna for Francesco Caprara in 1522<sup>25</sup>. Woven (possibly in Giovanni de Gesulis' workshop)

<sup>20</sup> Johnson 1962.

<sup>21</sup> Comestor 1526.

<sup>22</sup> Boccaccio 1998, p. 452.

<sup>23</sup> On Boccaccio's description of Prometheus' myth, his sources, innovative treatment of the theme and impact, see Raggio 1958, pp. 53-54; Steiner 1991, pp. 23-25, 35-39; Trousson 2001, pp. 128-143; De Petris 2003, pp. 83-111.

<sup>24</sup> Cieri Via 2002; E. Capretti in Parenti, Padovani, Capretti 2015, pp. 326-329, with earlier bibliography.

<sup>25</sup> The tapestry is part of a long *spalliera*, created before 1634 by attaching it to another tapestry depicting Prometheus deceiving Jupiter over the sacrificial offerings. On its history and iconography, see Steiner 1991, pp. 168-176; Forti Grazzini 2016a-b.

after cartoons produced by the late Francesco Francia's heirs and collaborators, Caprara's two Promethean tapestries might have had Celio Calcagnini's erudite compilation of classical and medieval tales, *Epitome super Prometeo et Epimetheo* (composed before 1508), as their most immediate source<sup>26</sup>. The tapestry depicting the flames' theft includes the representation of a group arranged in a semicircle, at the centre of which stands Prometheus distributing the fire to men and women (accompanied by a child bearing a fireplace shovel), revealed as rich or poor by the way they are dressed, who proffer torches and candles (fig. 5). Though these characters' clothes are modern, while the ones portrayed in the Palazzo del Principe's relief are mostly classical, the shared focus on the results of Prometheus' action is evident. It has been noted that in this tapestry the theme of mankind's civilization – of which fire is a means and a symbol – has been singularly emphasized, as a way to celebrate the patron's projected image of civilizator and benefactor (attested by the presence of the Caprara coat of arm on the stone block on which the child is sitting, as well as his name and features inserted in other parts of the pair of tapestries)<sup>27</sup>.

This is the same kind of discourse visually created in Palazzo del Principe by using a number of subjects taken from antiquity, both mythological and historical: the glorification of Andrea's role as *pater patriae*, rescuer and refounder of the Republic of Genoa is reflected in the iconographic program of the atrium's frescoed lunettes – in which Rome's foundation is central – as well as the planned decoration for the north façade, never carried out but attested to by Perino's preparatory drawings enriched by notes, in which Furius Camillus – in Livy's words, «a new Romulus, a second founder of Rome»<sup>28</sup> – is the absolute protagonist, with an unusual focus on the theme of *rifondar Roma per Chamillo* and *rifondare Roma la seconda volta*<sup>29</sup>. Among the mythological cycles of Andrea's apartment, mostly based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the motif of the hero bringing civilization and harmony or founding cities recurs in the depiction of the deeds of Perseus, Hercules, Cadmus; in the hall where the fireplace stands – the ceremonial heart of Andrea's palace, whose entrance door is surmounted by a bust of Augustus, himself celebrated as founder of a “new Rome” and initiator of a novel golden age – the great fresco representing Jupiter that strikes the rebel Giants, restoring civilized order, has been read as an allegorization of Andrea's triumph over his enemies and his pacification of the Genoese state<sup>30</sup>. In the monumental structure of the fireplace, dominated by the Doria

<sup>26</sup> Sandolini 2004 (<[https://www.egramma.it/eOS/index.php?id\\_articolo=2545](https://www.egramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=2545)>, 18.12.2023); Forti Grazzini 2016b.

<sup>27</sup> Forti Grazzini 2016b, p. 50.

<sup>28</sup> Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, V, 49; Plutarch, *Camillus*, 31-32.

<sup>29</sup> Stagno 2020, pp. 236-237.

<sup>30</sup> Boccardo 1989, p. 56. An alternative interpretation considers Jupiter as symbolic projection of Charles V (Parma 1986, pp. 122-123).

eagle crowned by a personification of Victory, the two marble statues flanking the overmantel represent *Peace burning arms* (fig. 6), reaffirming the allusion to the concord and union among men that Doria – according to the prevailing contemporary narrative – had brought to Genoa, traditionally plagued by internecine fighting<sup>31</sup>. Thus, the gift and collaborative distribution of fire as onset and emblem of a civil and peaceful society illustrated by the Prometheus' *tondo* are to be considered as significant tesserae of a rich mosaic of images that resonate with the idea of a new foundation and a new age, inaugurated by Andrea.

Giovanni Andrea Doria inherited Palazzo del Principe from Andrea in 1560 and greatly enlarged it. In the mid-1590s he commissioned the decoration of the rooms, gallery and chapel added at the *piano nobile* level to Marcello Sparzo, a master plasterer from Urbino to whom he had previously committed the execution of a colossal statue of Jupiter for the palace's north garden and of sculptures for his churches in Loano and in Pegli<sup>32</sup>. The plaster reliefs on the ceilings of the two rooms opening on the eastern-side loggia illustrate Prometheus' deeds (displaying a much ampler narrative sequence than the fireplace's *tondo*) in their central *quadri* (figs. 7, 8).

Documented payments to Sparzo date the stuccoes on these vaults to 1599 (presumably they were completed in that year)<sup>33</sup>, but though they were ideated by the same artist, the stylistic difference between the two – which are noticeable notwithstanding the non optimal condition and 19<sup>th</sup>-century repaintings of the stuccoes – point to the first one (in the room facing south), with its rigid and simplified figures, being carried out by assistants, and the second one (in the adjoining room, facing north) being mainly the work of the master himself<sup>34</sup>.

The *quadro* or large medallion at the centre of the first room's vault represents the creation of man (fig. 7). The main source is of course Ovid's previously mentioned, brief allusion to the possible role of Prometheus in *Metamorphoses* I, vv. 78-83:

Natus homo est, sive hunc divino semine fecit  
ille opifex rerum, mundi melioris origo,

<sup>31</sup> On the iconographies linked to the image of Andrea Doria as bringer of concord and freedom to Genoa, see Stagno in press.

<sup>32</sup> Galassi 1999; Stagno 2018, pp. 220-241.

<sup>33</sup> Merli, Belgrano 1874, p. 69; Galassi 1989, p. 89.

<sup>34</sup> Galassi remarks on the high quality of Prometheus' figure in the second room (Galassi 1999, p. 94); Gorse perceives an inferior quality in both rooms' decorations in comparison with the work of Sparzo in the palace's western rooms and with his other Genoese production, attributing the execution of these vault stuccoes' mostly to the hand of assistants (Gorse 1980, pp. 146-147); Stagno points out the presence of parts of different qualitative level and character in the plasterwork decorating the two rooms, citing the angular and simplified figures in the first room's ceiling as the result of one or more assistants' intervention (Stagno 2018, pp. 235-236).

sive recens tellus seductaque nuper ab alto  
 aethere cognati retinebat semina caeli;  
 quam satus Iapeto mixtam pluuiabilibus undis  
 finxit in effigiem moderantum cuncta deorum.

But the Ovidian narrative is greatly enriched by other details and episodes, which had aggregated and stratified during the following centuries in various streams of traditions, in a continuous *labor* of assimilation, transformation and rewriting that had its apex in the Renaissance, when this kind of approach characterized literary communication generally<sup>35</sup>. These additional materials, originating from different sources, were often integrated in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century *volgarizzamenti* (translations into vernaculars) of Ovid's poem. The plastic character and crucial role of these "mediation texts" – which routinely added or transformed contents and at the same time helped made the *Metamorphoses* accessible to artists – have been evidenced by a growing body of research pioneered by Bodo Guthmüller and including specific studies on the sources of some of Perino's frescoes in the Doria palace<sup>36</sup>.

In Palazzo del Principe, the illustration of mankind's origin comprises three separate episodes, that – following the construction of a unified narrative in literary sources – link the creation of the first human being with the theft of fire, used to enliven the inanimate creature shaped by the Titan.

Already in the reliefs of sarcophagi of the first centuries C.E. where the Titan was presented creating the first human being, this did not exhaust the depiction of the subject: a second phase of animating the thus produced figure by applying fire was added, usually by a winged genius (in some cases Minerva was also present, infusing the soul)<sup>37</sup>.

But more specific storylines, enriched by subsequent literary contributions and presenting a number of variations, were later constructed and used as source of articulate and complex renderings of Prometheus' story.

In the foreground of Sparzo's composition, Prometheus touches the reclining figure he has just moulded mixing the soil of the newly-created earth and streams of rain, according to Ovid's text; he acts as a *figulus*, in fact reflecting the praxis of the plasterer that created this very image, and seems to be holding a *figulus'* tool in his left hand, though the detail is not entirely legible (the representation of the Titan holding such a tool can be seen, for instance, in the right section of Piero di Cosimo's Munich panel, in line with the tradition that,

<sup>35</sup> Borsetto 1990. Prometheus' theft of fire is here used as a metaphor of the rewriting of previous text as part of the mainstream process of literary production during the Renaissance.

<sup>36</sup> Guthmüller 2008; Guthmüller 1986; Guthmüller 1997; Guthmüller 2009. For the analysis of the sources of Perino's frescoes in the room called "of Arachne" or "of the Metamorphoses": Casamassima 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Raggio 1958, pp. 47-48.

starting with Lactantius and flourishing in the Renaissance, enhanced the role of Prometheus as sculptor, in fact as inventor of the art of making statues)<sup>38</sup>.

In the top left section of the *quadro* Prometheus is shown while stealing the fire from a wheel of the Sun's chariot: a motif – as mentioned above – introduced by Servius<sup>39</sup> and further developed by Fulgentius, who building on Servius' text presented a narrative in which the fire was acquired by the Titan (transported *ad superos* by Minerva, who had admired his *opus*) from the chariot's wheel to enliven the inanimate creature he had shaped, touching the latter's breast with flame («clam ferulam Foebiacis applicans rotis ignem furatus est, quem pectusculo hominis applicans animatum reddit corpus»)<sup>40</sup>. In Sparzo's rendition, the animation scene – which was widely represented in the visual arts in a plurality of media, from the illustrated versions of the *Ovide moralisé* to Renaissance cycles as diverse as the Liberia Marciana's reliefs and Palazzo Bufalini's frescoes –<sup>41</sup> is presented in the lower left part of the composition, and marks the completion of the creation process<sup>42</sup>. Minerva is not depicted aiding Prometheus's flight, but her figure is prominently displayed on the right side, contemplating the creature the Titan just moulded, which she will help bring to life.

This three-episode version of the tale was propagated by key texts. Boccaccio in his *Genealogie's* ample treatment of the myth recounts it, quoting both Servius and Fulgentius as sources («sane his a Servio et Fulgentio superadditur fabula»)<sup>43</sup> and ensuring its lasting fortune. Giovanni del Virgilio and Raffaele Regio cite it<sup>44</sup>, and most of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century ovidian *volgarizzamenti* include it, to some degree. While Niccolò degli Agostini's work, published in 1522, presenting the theme of man's creation does not mention the fire's theft at all<sup>45</sup>, Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara's *Metamorfosi* (1561) succinctly evokes the whole story in three verses («O che così Prometeo il componesse / Di terra schietta, e d'acqua viva, e pura. / Poi col foco del ciel l'alma li desse»), comprising

<sup>38</sup> Lactantius (*Divinae Institutiones*, 2, XI) suggested that Prometheus shaped the first statue, rather than the first man, as a way to make the myth's narrative compatible with a Christian point of view («Verum quia poetas dixeram non omnino mentiri solere, sed figuris involvere, et obscurare quae dicant, non dico esse mentitos, sed primum omnium Promethea simulacrum hominis formasse de pingui et molli luto, ab eoque primo natam esse artem, et statuas, et simulacra fingendi»); see Trousson 2001, pp. 104-105. On the perception of Prometheus as an artist and the artist as Prometheus between the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, see Steiner 1991, pp. 40-83.

<sup>39</sup> Servius, *Ad Vergilius*, Ecloga VI, 42.

<sup>40</sup> Fabius Planciades Fulgentius, *Mitologiarum libri III*, Liber II, VI. *Fabula Promethei*, in Fabii Planciadis Fulgentii 1970 (<https://digilibt.uniupo.it>).

<sup>41</sup> Raggio 1968, p. 49; Ivanoff 1963, pp. 51-58; Ronen 1968.

<sup>42</sup> This scene in Sparzo's composition was originally misinterpreted as a depiction of the invention of Medicine (Gorse 1980, p. 144).

<sup>43</sup> Boccaccio 1998, p. 448.

<sup>44</sup> Giovanni del Virgilio in Ghisalberti 1931; Regio 1493.

<sup>45</sup> Degli Agostini 1522, c. A III.

a generic mention of the infusion of the soul through fire<sup>46</sup>; Giuseppe Orologi (Horolloggi)'s notes, added to dell'Anguillara's text since the 1563 edition, expand on this, providing the details of the story<sup>47</sup>. Lodovico Dolce devoted the amplest space to this narrative, exposed in four *ottavas*, in his version of Ovid's masterwork, *Le Trasformazioni* (first published in 1553), describing the stealing of the fire from the Sun's chariot's wheel after the shaping of the first man and its subsequent use for the immission of the soul into Prometheus' "prole" («Et da le ruote de l'eterno Sole / Furando'l foco, a noi rivolse il piede. / Con cui l'audace a la sua nova prole / (Che prima non l'havea) l'anima diede. / Così'l foco qua giù, ch'alhor non v'era, / Primo portò da quella ardente sfera»)<sup>48</sup>.

No Doria library catalogue contemporary to the stuccoes survives, but Giovanni Andrea certainly was the owner of a rich collection which also included rare volumes<sup>49</sup>. A 17<sup>th</sup>-century list of the Doria books records the presence of an important corpus of 16<sup>th</sup>-century publications that may likely have been in the family's library since Giovanni Andrea's time<sup>50</sup>. This catalogue comprises a high number of classical authors' works, with a striking presence of "opera omnia" editions<sup>51</sup>, as well as 16<sup>th</sup>-century treatises and compilations<sup>52</sup>. It includes two generic citations of Ovid's *opera*, but also specific mentions of the Italian translation of Boccaccio's *Genealogie*, first published in 1547, and of Dolce's *Le Trasformazioni*, which was a great editorial success and was published several times since the 1553 *princeps*, but not after 1570<sup>53</sup>. Prometheus' tale as recounted by Boccaccio and Dolce – the latter, incidentally, had had contacts with the Doria circle, having provided the introductory sonnet to the first biography of Andrea Doria, published by Lorenzo Capelloni in 1562 for Gabriele Giolito and dedicated to Giovanni Andrea<sup>54</sup> – may have been used as textual source for Sparzo's stucco reliefs. No engraved illustration of the *volgarizzamenti* seems to have been used as a direct model, and none comprises the three scenes. In a significant instance of the complexities of the flux of images in relation to the texts they illustrated, the depiction of Prometheus animating the first man's figure by accosting a flaming torch to it was included in the first printed *volgarizzamento*, published in 1497 with

<sup>46</sup> Dell'Anguillara 1561, I, 18.

<sup>47</sup> Dell'Anguillara, Orologi 1563, Primo libro, Annotazioni.

<sup>48</sup> Dolce 1553, pp. 4-5.

<sup>49</sup> Stagno 2018, pp. 28-29.

<sup>50</sup> Rome, Archivio Doria Pamphilj, Scaff. 75.94. The list of books – which has not been published – was probably compiled in the mid-17<sup>th</sup>-century (Ruffini 2010, p. 374).

<sup>51</sup> Rome, Archivio Doria Pamphilj, Scaff. 75.94, ff. 35-36.

<sup>52</sup> Including «Imagine delli Dei, Cartari» and «Iconologia, del Ripa» (Rome, Archivio Doria Pamphilj, Scaff. 75.94, f.26r).

<sup>53</sup> Rome, Archivio Doria Pamphilj, Scaff. 75.94, ff. 21 and 32. On the fortune of the two works in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, see Gambino Longo 2008; Capriotti 2013, pp. 11-13, 25-28.

<sup>54</sup> See Stagno 2013, pp. 70-71.

many subsequent editions, and in Niccolò degli Agostini's book, though in neither case the text mentions the episode; while in Rusconi's woodcuts for *Le Trasformazioni* (which does describe the event in some detail) the scene is not represented, and the only image related to Prometheus depicts him shaping the figure of the first man<sup>55</sup>.

The adjoining room's decoration presents Prometheus' punishment (fig. 8). The scene conflates the often-represented subject which illustrates the founding, Aeschylean core of the myth – the torture of the eagle devouring the Titan's liver – with its far less frequently depicted antecedent, Mercury chaining the Titan to the Caucasus rock. The casting of Mercury in the role of executor of Jupiter's sentence is to be found in Hyginus' *Fabulae* and, most prominently, in Lucian of Samosata's *Prometheus on Caucasus*, and it is mentioned in Boccaccio's *Genealogie*<sup>56</sup>: works that are all listed in the inventory of the Doria library cited above<sup>57</sup>. At the centre of the *quadro*, under the small, sketched figures of Jupiter and the other Olympian Gods, Prometheus is represented standing, in the posture prevailing in classical art; the tension of his arched body, together with his expression of intense suffering – one of Sparzo's more convincing results, according to Maria Clelia Galassi<sup>58</sup> – emphasizes his heroic character (fig. 9), as it happens in the powerful engraving by Sebastiano de' Valentinis from Udine (1558), «an original and striking depiction of the mythological figure»<sup>59</sup> which represents the Titan «with an almost romantic violence of emotion, withstanding his torture with the heroic exaltation of a visionary»<sup>60</sup> (fig. 10). The crouching figure of Mercury at the Titan's side seems overwhelmed by the latter's tragic vitality, a study of pathos which resonates

<sup>55</sup> The relevant woodcut in the first published *volgarizzamento* (Bonsignori 1497) – an image reused not only in its subsequent editions but also in Niccolò degli Agostini's *Tutti li libri de Ovidio Metamorphoseos* (first published in Venice in 1522) – depicts Prometheus enlivening the inanimate figure he has shaped by accosting his flaming torch to it (neither the moulding of the first man nor the theft of the fire from the sun's chariot's wheel are represented), as part of an illustration also comprising the representation of the Ages of the World. Giovanni Antonio Rusconi's engraving in Dolce's *Le Trasformazioni* shows only the creation of man, partly emerging from unformed mud (quite different, in that, from Palazzo del Principe's rendition of the scene), together with the depiction of the Age of Iron. Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara's *Le Metamorfosi d'Ovidio* (first published in Venice in 1561) does not include any representation of Prometheus' feats. On Giovanni Bonsignori's text, written in 1375-1377 and published in 1497, see Guthmuller 2008, pp. 62-113. On the series of images in the *volgarizzamenti*, their re-use and variations, see Capriotti 2013; Casamassima 2017. Some notes on 16<sup>th</sup>-century prints depicting Prometheus are in Zejfart 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Hyginus 1872, [CXLIIII] p. 23; Lucian, *Works* 1915 (<https://tinyurl.com/bv78cyfx>); Boccaccio 1998, p. 448.

<sup>57</sup> Rome, Archivio Doria Pamphilj, Scaff. 75.94, f. 19v («Fabulae Igini»), f. 21r («Genealogia delli dei, Boccaccio»), f. 36r («Opera omnia Luciani»).

<sup>58</sup> Galassi 1989, p. 94.

<sup>59</sup> C. Jenkins, in Jenkins, Orenstein, Spira 2019, p. 184.

<sup>60</sup> Raggio 1958, p. 57.



with Lomazzo's observations on the tortured Prometheus as an excellent case for the depiction of the «moti del dolore», the effects of unbearable pain on the human body that are manifested «con inarcar le ciglia, stringer le labra, ed discoprire i denti»<sup>61</sup>.

Considered as part of one sequence, the scenes illustrated on the two vaults find an exhaustive source in Boccaccio's *Genealogie*, which includes all the depicted episodes and details (and, as previously indicated, is considered as a reference text for Piero di Cosimo's panels and Caprara's tapestries, too), while the ovidian *volgarizzamenti*, for instance, do not cite Merury's role in the Titan's punishment; or the iconographic choices can be the result of assembling different traditions. A learned man of letters of some repute, Pompeo Arnolfini from Lucca – knowledgeable in the field of the visual arts – held the office of secretary to Giovanni Andrea Doria at least from 1578 to 1598<sup>62</sup>. Author of works both in Italian and Latin, he is the most likely candidate to the role of iconographer for many complex artistic commissions of Giovanni Andrea comprising classical or allegorical themes<sup>63</sup>, and might possibly have devised the subjects of the Promethean decorations, too, provided that the 1599 payments to Sparzo – as previously indicated – pertain to the final phase of the stuccoes' execution.

The diverse interpretations of Prometheus' figure make it difficult to discern the reasons and intents that led to the selection of his feats for the decoration of these two rooms. From the Ovidian verses related to the creation of the first man a long-lasting symbolic reading of the Titan as allegorical signifier of the God of Genesis or emblem of the divine *Providentia* developed, which was still frequently quoted in 16<sup>th</sup>-century works; from the same episode, the tradition of Prometheus as inventor of sculpture and artist also originated, while the images of mankind's civilizer continued to enjoy good fortune, and other, alternative readings – such as that of philosopher *par excellence*, but also of superb transcender of rightful limits – were also offered<sup>64</sup>.

It has to be noted, however, that Sparzo's illustration of Prometheus' myth is part of a wider decoration campaign, which includes the depiction of Furius Camillus' deeds in the two adjoining rooms, considered the closest from the point of view of decorative structure and execution's chronology<sup>65</sup>. Significantly, subjects that were already illustrated in Palazzo del Principe in Andrea's time were again represented under his successor, on a larger scale, with an emphasis – in the case of Camillus' feats – on the confrontation with the

<sup>61</sup> Lomazzo 1585, p. 166.

<sup>62</sup> Arnolfini is documented as being in Giovanni Andrea Doria's service since 1578; he died in 1598. See Stagno 2018, pp. 27-28.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*; Stagno 2021, p. 195.

<sup>64</sup> Raggio 1958; Steiner 1991; Trousson 2001; Cieri Via 2002; Conticelli 2004, pp. 321-356.

<sup>65</sup> Galassi 1989, pp. 93-94; Stagno 2018, pp. 220-241.

Gauls, perceived as an anti-French theme<sup>66</sup>. Giovanni Andrea Doria's wish to enhance the continuity between his career and political role and those of his great predecessor was reflected not only in the planned pictorial celebration of the latter's glorious achievements but also in a series of artistic choices aimed at emphasizing a tangible consistency between the original nucleus of the palace and Giovanni Andrea's additions to it<sup>67</sup>. In this context, it seems plausible that the most relevant facet of Prometheus's myth continued to be, also in this instance, the Titan's role as benefactor of humanity (at the price of intense and lasting suffering), which could be used as metaphor of the good leader's attitude and beneficial actions toward his subjects. This parallel is made explicit in Orologi's *Annotazioni*, where Prometheus ascending to the heavens thanks to Minerva's help is compared to the prudent prince elevating himself through wisdom and knowledge, and gifting to his hitherto ignorant people order, laws, religion and the other good institutions, so that they can live a quiet and civil life similar to the Golden Age described by Ovid: «quivi s'asomigliara a Prometheo il Principe, saggio, e prudente, il quale salendo al cielo guidato dalla sapienza, ne riporta un perfetto ordine, delle leggi, della religione, e delle buone, e Sante istituzioni, che sono l'aia del popolo suo rozzo, come quello che è formato di fango, riducendolo a una vita quieta, civile, e riposata molto simile a quella dell'età dell'Oro finta così divinamente dal Poeta»<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> On the political meaning attached to the representation of Camillus' confrontation with the Gauls, see Stagno 2020.

<sup>67</sup> Stagno 2018, pp. 148, 158, 283. Andrea Doria's feats should have been represented in the *vacui* of the Galleria Aurea's ceiling, where they should have had pride of place in the depiction of the most illustrious Dorias' deeds, but the planned fresco decoration was never executed (*ibidem*, pp. 220-260).

<sup>68</sup> Dell'Anguillara, Orologi 1563, *Primo libro, Annotazioni*.

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*Appendix*

Fig. 1. Niccolò della Corte (?) after Perino del Vaga's design, *Prometheus stealing fire from the sun and gifting it to mankind (with Prometheus' punishment in the background)*, Genoa, Palazzo del Principe, Fireplace of the Hall of the Giants © Amministrazione Doria Pamphilj, Rome



Fig. 2. Genoa, Palazzo del Principe, Fireplace of the Hall of the Giants © Amministrazione Doria Pamphilj, Rome





Fig. 3. Niccolò della Corte (?) after Perino del Vaga's design, top section of *Prometheus stealing fire from the sun and gifting it to mankind (with Prometheus' punishment in the background)*, Genoa, Palazzo del Principe, Fireplace of the Hall of the Giants © Amministrazione Doria Pamphilj, Rome



Fig. 4. Parmigianino, *Prometheus stealing the fire from the Sun's chariot and animating the first man*, New York, The Morgan Library and Museum, Department of Drawings and Prints, IV.45 © The Morgan Library and Museum, New York



Fig. 5. Attributed to Giovanni de Gesulis' workshop after cartoons produced in Francesco Francia's heirs' workshop, *Prometheus' tapestry*, detail with *Prometheus gifting the fire to mankind*, Rome, Palazzo di Spagna, Embassy of Spain to the Holy See © Embassy of Spain to the Holy See, Rome



Fig. 6. Niccolò della Corte (?) after Perino del Vaga's design, *Peace burning arms*, Genoa, Palazzo del Principe, Fireplace of the Hall of the Giants © Amministrazione Doria Pamphilj, Rome



Fig. 7. Marcello Sparzo and assistants, *Prometheus moulding the first man; Prometheus stealing fire from the Sun's chariots's wheel; Prometheus animating the first man*, Genoa, Palazzo del Principe, Fireplace of the Hall of the Giants © Amministrazione Doria Pamphilj, Rome



Fig. 8. Marcello Sparzo, *Prometheus chained by Mercury to the Caucasus rock, with the eagle devouring his liver*, Genoa, Palazzo del Principe, Fireplace of the Hall of the Giants © Amministrazione Doria Pamphilj, Rome



Fig. 9. Marcello Sparzo, *Prometheus chained by Mercury to the Caucasus rock, with the eagle devouring his liver*, detail, Genoa, Palazzo del Principe, Fireplace of the Hall of the Giants © Amministrazione Doria Pamphilj, Rome



Fig. 10. Sebastiano de' Valentinis, *Prometheus chained to the Caucasus rock, with the eagle devouring his liver*, Wien, Albertina © The Albertina Museum, Wien

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