

The Encounter of the Emblematic Tradition with Optics

The Anamorphic Elephant of Simon Vouet

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Abstract

In his excellent work *Anamorphoses ou perspectives curieuses* (1955), Baltrušaitis concluded the chapter on catoptric anamorphosis with an allusion to the small engraving by Hans Tröschel (1585–1628) after Simon Vouet's drawing *Eight satyrs observing an elephant reflected on a cylinder*, the first known representation of a cylindrical anamorphosis made in Europe. This paper explores the Baroque intellectual and artistic context in which Vouet made his drawing, attempting to answer two central sets of questions. Firstly, why did Vouet make this image? For what purpose did he ideate such a curious image? Was it commissioned or did Vouet intend to offer it to someone? And if so, to whom? A reconstruction of this story leads me to conclude that the cylindrical anamorphosis was conceived as an emblem for Prince Maurice of Savoy. Secondly, how did what was originally the project for a sophisticated emblem give rise in Paris, after the return of Vouet from Italy in 1627, to the geometrical study of catoptrical anamorphosis? Through the study of this case, I hope to show that in early modern science the emblematic tradition was not only linked to natural history, but that insofar as it was a central feature of Baroque culture, it seeped into other branches of scientific inquiry, in this case the development of catoptrical anamorphosis. Vouet's image is also a good example of how the visual and artistic poetics of the baroque were closely linked – to the point of being inseparable – with the scientific developments of the period.

Keywords

anamorphosis – Simon Vouet – Baroque science – emblematics

* In memory of Alberto Elena.

1 The Anamorphic Elephant

On 12 March 1514 Hanno, the Pope's white elephant, made its triumphant entry into Rome. It was a gift from Manuel I of Portugal to the new pontiff. The parade was magnificent, with all the pomp of the grand spectacular events that appealed so much to this member of the House of Medici who had just arrived at the pinnacle of the Roman Church. Hanno, richly dressed for the occasion, did not parade alone. He was accompanied by a procession of exotic animals, some of which, like himself, came from the Far East – incredibly colorful parrots, exotic cocks, a caged snow leopard riding a Persian horse, all draped in silk and brocades. The thick skin and the heavy legs of Hanno, his deliberate pace, were the visible image of the white elephant's invisible soul. A soul woven with long stories narrated since ancient times, and with the symbology of legends and emblems. As in a mirror, in this Hanno of flesh and bone were reflected Pliny's words and the images and the words of so many medieval bestiaries: goodness and purity, the creature that never collapses and can be implacable if threatened.¹

The great era of the emblematic had only just begun, but everything was ready to acclaim it with the enthusiasm of the Roman streets in that spring of 1514. In Hanno's wrinkled white skin also converged the rays that were being emitted from the remotest places in the world. From Constantinople to Lisbon, from Goa to Madrid, from Paris to Rome, an invisible but very real map was being woven of political and commercial relationships, of fights over land, of economic interests and struggles for power, which – with the conquest of new territories in the East and West Indies – had become progressively more complex. A map whose consequences everybody perceived but nobody saw. Hanno was to a considerable extent the visualization of such reality. The act on the stage of the great world theatre that started with the pachyderm's parade should have ended with a historic contest between him and Ganda the rhinoceros, a gift originally given by the Sultan of Cambai to Alfonso de Albuquerque in 1514 and which the governor would send a few months later to Manuel I, King of Portugal. The fearsome rhinoceros, associated with brutality, evil forces and a long list of terrifying historical features, was to gauge its strength against the forces of good. However, the Pope's wish to see with his own eyes the battle between East and West, symbolizing the battle for the conquest

1 See Silvio Bedini, "The Papal Pachyderm," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 1981, 125/2:75–90; id., *The Pope's Elephant: An Elephant's Journey from Deep India to the Heart of Rome* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1997).

of those remote lands, did not materialize. Ganda drowned when the boat that he was traveling on sank off the Ligurian coast during the voyage from Lisbon to Rome.

This unfortunate event notwithstanding, Ganda's death may be said to have coincided with his real birth. It was then that Albrecht Dürer made his famous woodcut, creating that "persistent image" of the never-seen rhinoceros, which over its long life would gain progressively more terrain over reality.² Like Hanno's parade in Rome, Ganda's image was also a mirror on whose surface were reflected the words which, disseminated since remote times, occupied the imaginary mindset of Europeans, now adopting the form of a rhinoceros.

There are persistent images that replace reality, so seductive or convincing that they succeed in dominating the cultural imagination for centuries. Dürer's rhinoceros was one of these. There are others, however, that sink into obscurity and only every now and then may randomly rise to the surface.³ When they do, like bottles thrown into the sea with a message inside, they provide us with hints that may help us to reconstruct the tapestry of a history which was always missing a few threads. This is the case of the drawing that Simon Vouet made in Rome in 1627, just over a century from the triumphant entry of Hanno, *Eight satyrs observing an elephant reflected on a cylinder* (Fig. 1).⁴

2 About Ganda and the famous woodcut by Dürer, see the excellent book by Juan Pimentel, *El Rinoceronte y el Megaterio. Un ensayo de morfología histórica* (Madrid: Abada Editores, 2010), through whose exciting content and while preparing a lecture on Dürer's rhinoceros, I found the drawing by Vouet to which this essay is dedicated.

3 About the "vitality" of images, see Peter Mason, *The Lives of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 16–17.

4 This drawing in red chalk is preserved in the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt, Inv. H. 21.762. It formed part of the collection of French drawings and engravings of Emmerich Joseph von Dalberg (1773–1833), ambassador to France and Napoleonic diplomat who bought most of the pieces for his collection in Paris. The part which included Vouet's drawing had belonged to the Marquis of Lagoy (1764–1829). Presumably, therefore, although Vouet made the drawing in Rome, he took it with him when he returned to Paris in 1627. See Vouet, *Galerías nacionales del Grand Palais 6 novembre 1990 – 11 février 1991*, edited by Jacques Thuillier, Barbara Brejon de Lavergnée, Denis Lavalle (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1990), pp. 106–107. Hans Tröschel (1585–1628, name variants: Johan, Johannes, Johann) then made an engraving based on Vouet's drawing with some variations, including reversing the anamorphosis and adding the words "Format et illustrat" to the *banderole*, which Vouet left empty in the original drawing (Fig. 2). Tröschel's engraving is essential for the dating of the drawing by Vouet, since Tröschel arrived in Rome from Nuremberg in 1624 and died there in 1628. Given that Vouet left Rome in 1627, he could only have been in contact with Tröschel during those three years. Most of the works that refer to this image date it to 1625, though



FIGURE 1 Simon Vouet, Eight satyrs observing the anamorphosis of an elephant, *Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, Inv. H. 21.762*

In Vouet's drawing a scene unfolds with only one vanishing point which leads the observer to focus his eyes on a cylindrical mirror reflecting an elephant. In the meantime, indifferent to the beholder, eight satyrs strive to find a different perspective, the correct angle from which to observe the image reflected on the cylinder. Some of them point to a confusing drawing displayed on the table, others direct their gaze and point their fingers and eyes at the elephant's image on the cylinder's surface. Somewhat amused and fascinated, as well as a trifle incredulous, they see how the distorted and incomprehensible image displayed on the table recomposes itself on the cylinder to form an elephant.

Like these satyrs, half man and half goat, the reflected elephant is also a hybrid composed of distorted strokes and a reflection. It is an anamorphosis, the visual, pictorial and geometrical version of a protean world of metamorphosing gods, animals and men. The *perspectiva artificialis*, pure natural magic,

Thuillier et al., *Vouet* (cit. note 4), p. 106 suggest 1627. It is interesting to note how the drawing is described in some catalogs and studies, such as the *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art Français*, 1909, p. 263, where we read: "S. Vouet: Des satyres regardent un petit éléphant enfermé dans un bocal qui est posé sur une table de marbre dans un jardin à la française, sanguine."

has the power to turn a chaotic fabric of lines into an elephant. A “depraved perspective” – as Baltrusaitis would have termed it – that inspires a sense of wonder in the observer, an *émerveillement* that becomes patent in the attitudes and expressions of the eight satyrs in Vouet’s drawing.⁵

But is the image that appears in the cylindrical mirror indeed an elephant? Does it not greatly resemble Dürer’s Ganda? Perhaps finally, a century after their missed encounter, the rhinoceros and the elephant have met each other in a mirror. But despite their similarity in shape, a profound difference imposes itself between them: the act of observation. In Vouet’s drawing, the creature represented, the elephant, no longer has an autonomous existence, but exists only inasmuch as there is the eye of a beholder, an eye that observes and knows from where and how to look in order to see. The eye is no longer the passive receptor of an alien world whose creatures imprint an image like the seal on wax; it is no longer the eye of the Dürerian artist who sits in front of a reticulated pane of glass and imitates with his brush the actual proportions of the world. The elephant that appears on the cylinder’s surface in Vouet’s drawing is an anamorphosis and all anamorphoses are, to a large extent, the revelation of the constructed nature of all images, including those which appear to the observer to be completely alien to his usual mode of perceptual construction.

In this sense, the elephant in the mirror is similar to Ganda, since both are, setting aside the mimetic intentions of Dürer, the convergence on a plane of dispersed strokes which, only from a specific point of view, adopt the shape of an apparent reality. Whilst Dürer, resorting to rhetorical strategies – both textual and pictorial – intended to convince his audience that his drawing was the faithful image of a rhinoceros seen from one sole vantage point, that of the observer himself viewing the animal on a specific day in a specific place, a century later Vouet delegated the observation of his elephant to eight satyrs who, amused and curious, strive to discover the right point from which to look in order to see. In fact, in his image there was no longer just one viewpoint, but as many viewpoints as there were beholders. And what was seen was the result of each and every observation. However, only the viewer’s understanding could guide the eye to the discovery of the sole point from which a tangle of

5 Jurgius Baltrusaitis published the first edition of his study on anamorphical representation in 1955 (*Anamorphoses ou perspectives curieuses*, Paris: Olivier Perrin). In 1969 he published a new version (*Anamorphoses ou magie artificielle des effets merveilleux*, Paris: Oliver Perrin); and in 1984 included it as a part of his trilogy *Les perspectives dépravées*, composed by *Aberrations* (1983, first edition 1957), *Anamorphoses* (1984) and *La quête d’Isis* (1985, first edition 1967). Quotes in this paper are from the 1984 edition: *Anamorphoses ou Thaumatargus opticus – Les perspectives dépravées II* (Paris: Flammarion).



FIGURE 2 *Engraving by Hans Tröschel after Vouet's Eight satyrs observing an elephant reflected on a cylinder*

strokes would turn into an elephant. In the same way that Hanno and Ganda were the visualization of the invisible and of a long history of countless legends and words dispersed in space and time, Vouet's elephant was the result of the convergence on a cylindrical mirror of the rays fanning out from the apparently amorphous and indecipherable image surrounding its base.

In his excellent study on anamorphoses, Jurgis Baltrusaitis concluded the chapter on the "Anamorphoses à miroir" with an allusion to the small engraving by Hans Tröschel (1585–1628) after Simon Vouet's drawing. According to Baltrusaitis, this was the first known representation of a cylindrical anamorphosis.⁶ However, many years after Baltrusaitis' scholarly analysis, nobody seems to have rescued Vouet's image from the anecdotal; it is still viewed as an isolated and failed image, a historical curiosity which, like so many other 'scientific' images produced during the seventeenth century, were merely objects of interest for the collectors of the period. The real chapter in the history of catoptric anamorphosis – with particular focus on cylindrical and conical anamorphoses – would start, according to all studies on the subject, with the

⁶ Baltrusaitis, *Anamorphoses* (cit. note 5), pp. 147–148.

Perspective cilindrique et conique by Jean Louis de Vaulezard, published in Paris in 1630, followed by the *Perspective curieuse* (1638) and the *Thaumaturgus opticus* (1646) by Jean François Nicéron. Was this a mere coincidence? In fact, many seventeenth-century cabinets of curiosities included exhibits of anamorphoses, for which there was quite a vogue, but as far as we know, all of the cylindrical anamorphoses are dated from the mid-1630s, some years after Vouet's remarkable drawing.

The issues raised by Vouet's drawing concerning its meaning and relevance stem from two different questions. The first has to do with Vouet's reasons for creating this unusual image, a question that itself has two aspects: first, why did the artist chose the device of the cylindrical anamorphosis, and second, what is the significance of the other elements in the composition, from the elephant to the satyrs and even the empty *banderole*, which Tröschel completed in his engraving with the motto "format et illustrat." The second question regards the possible impact and consequences of Vouet's drawing. Was it really just an isolated image? Was it not in some way integrated into the developments which a few years later would take place in the field of catoptric anamorphosis?

2 Francophile Rome

In Rome 1625 is a jubilee year. Descartes knows this and is making preparations for his Italian journey. The Baroque city is under construction. The quarter of San Lorenzo in Lucina with its humble houses and narrow streets, is crowded with the bustle of artists, painters, sculptors and artisans. The effervescence of this capital of the arts exerts its magnetism, drawing aspirants from every corner of Italy and Europe who are seeking to perfect their art, pursuing masters who might bequeath to them their techniques or transmit to them something of the genius of Raphael, Caravaggio, Titian, Guercino or Annibale Carracci. However, it is not the pure love of art which leads them to settle in Rome but the abundance of jobs and commissions available in connection with the large ateliers, engaged in producing a stream of paintings and sculpture to meet the demands of the market, and the vast architectural projects sponsored by the Church or wealthy patrons with the promise of considerable economic returns.⁷ Art merchants seem to be waiting behind every corner. One might

7 On the art market and patronage in Baroque Rome, see the excellent study by Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters: A Study in the Relations between Art and Society in Baroque Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

find Bartolomeo Manfredi, Stefano Maderna or Antiveduto della Gramatica rambling the streets around Piazza San Lorenzo, sharing home and workplace. But along with the Italians, a wave of Flemish and French artists have started to arrive in Rome. The sculptor Christophe Cochet, the painters and engravers Charles Mellin (Claude Lorrain or Carlo Lorenese), Valentin de Boulogne, Nicolas de la Fage, Jacques de Letin, Nicolas Poussin, Claude Mellan, and many others, are among them.

For most of them life is a far cry from the idyllic image of the creative artist in his atelier devoted, when not painting, to study, contemplation, and cultivated conversation. The economics of the art market meant that they could hardly afford to rent a room to sleep in and had to share a place to work with colleagues. Misery, vice, courtesans, drunkenness and rivalry, not to mention theft and crime, marked the rhythm of daily life that more than one would pay with a jail term.⁸ This was not the case, however, with one of the most illustrious French painters working in Rome in the 1620s, Simon Vouet, who occupied a privileged position on the margins of this artistic sub-world. He arrived in Rome in 1613 at the age of 23, with a subsidy granted by King Louis XIII of France for him to perfect his painting skills, which were recognized as remarkable when he was still quite young.⁹ Vouet's residence must have seemed a veritable palace in comparison to the tiny rundown rooms of his colleagues.¹⁰ The young French painter became a reference point and prince

8 See Stéphane Loire, "Gli artisti francesi a Roma. Vouet, Mellan e Poussin," in *Barocco a Roma. La meraviglia delle arti*, edited by Maria Grazia Bernardini, Marco Busagli (Roma: Skira, 2015), pp. 97–105. On the art market and the social and economic life of artists, see Patrizia Cavazzini, "Oltre la committenza: sul commercio d'arte a Roma nel primo Seicento," *Paragone*, 2008, 59:79–92; id., *Painting as Business in Early Seventeenth Century Rome* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008); id., "Le milieu de Simon Vouet. Les peintres à Rome entre l'Académie de Saint-Luc et les tribunaux romains de la première moitié du Seicento," in *Simon Vouet en Italie*, edited by Olivier Bonfait, Hélène Rousteau-Chambon (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011), pp. 137–149; Richard E. Spear, Philip Sohm, *Painting for Profit: The Economic Lives of Italian Seventeenth Century Painters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Laura Bartoni, *Le vie degli artisti: residenze e botteghe nella Roma dai registri di Sant'Andrea delle Fratte, 1650–1699* (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2012).

9 Cfr. André Félibien, *Entretiens sur les vies et les ouvrages des plus excellents peintres anciens et modernes*, Vol. 4 (Paris: Sebastien Mabre-Cramoisy, 1685), p. 80; Louis Demonts, "Essai sur la formation de Vouet en Italie," *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art Français*, 1913:309–348.

10 Cfr. Stati delle Anime, San Lorenzo in Lucina, 1623, fol. 18, in Archivio Storico Vicariato di Roma; according to this document, among the French artists that lived in Vouet's

of the Roman art world, his success culminating in his election as *principe* (director) of the Accademia di San Luca in 1624, substituting Antiveduto della Gramatica who had been caught out in a dubious financial affair.

Apparently at least the initial purpose of this artists' academy (founded in 1577) was to contribute to the education of artists and cater to their needs. However, the actual reasons for its existence soon became patent. On the one hand, in the wake of the Council of Trent, the political agenda of the reformed Church turned to the control of pictorial representation as a channel for the diffusion of its propaganda. At the same time, art had become big business in Baroque Rome and it was necessary to establish a system to control the flow of commissions, work assignments, and the production and distribution of works of art and commissioned copies.¹¹ As might be expected of an association authorized to manage the art market in Rome, internal conflicts, rivalries and struggles were frequent within the Accademia. In 1624 its *principe*, Antiveduto della Gramatica, was accused by Giovanni Baglione of planning to sell for his own profit a painting belonging to the academy – Raphael's *Saint Luke Painting the Virgin* – putting a copy in its place. Just a year later Pietro Paolo

house, we can find Jacques de Létin, Jacques Dupré, Alexandre de Horion (from Liege), Nicolas Poussin, Jean Lhomme (also known as Giovanni Lomi), Nicolas Lagouz, Pierre Votrel, Jean Lemaire, Giacomo Noel, Egidio Orion (probably Gilles Horion) and Pierre Mellin. Cfr. Jacques Bousquet, "Documents sur le séjour de Simon Vouet à Rome," *Melanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, 1952, 64:287–300; Massimo Pomponi, "Artisti a Roma nel primo trentennio del Seicento," in *Alla ricerca di "Ghiongrat". Studi sui libri parrocchiali romani (1600–1630)*, edited by Rossella Vodret (Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2011), pp. 107–188.

- 11 About the Accademia di San Luca, see Matteo Lafranconi, "L'Accademia di San Luca nel primo Seicento. Presenze artistiche e strategie culturali dai Borghese ai Barberini," in *Bernini dai Borghese ai Barberini. La cultura a Roma intorno agli anni Venti*, edited by Olivier Bonfait, Anna Oliva (Roma: De Luca, 2004), pp. 39–45; John Nicholas Napoli, "The Accademia di San Luca in the Seventeenth Century: Theory, Practice, and Legitimacy" (Master's thesis, Washington University, 1997); Peter M. Lukehart, *The History of the Accademia di San Luca, c. 1590–1635*, project of the National Academy of Art – Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts – Archivio di Stato di Roma – Accademia di S. Luca, 2010: http://www.nga.gov/casva/accademia/index_ita.shtm (accessed 12 May 2015). On the appointment of Vouet as Prince of the Academy in particular, see the work by Noëlle La Blanchardière, "Simon Vouet, prince de l'Académie de Saint-Luc," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de l'art français*, 1972:79–93. One of the first decisions of Maffeo Barberini after being appointed pope in 1623 was to grant the academy the right to decide who could and who could not be considered an artist in Rome. He also nominated his nephew Cardinal Francesco Barberini as patron of the Accademia. See Renata Ago, "Gerarchia delle merci e meccanismi dello scambio a Roma nel primo Seicento," *Quaderni storici*, 1997, 96:663–683; Cavazzini, *Painting as Business* (cit. note 8).

Bronzino accused him of attempting to embezzle the academy's funds for his own enrichment.¹²

With a view to resolving these internal conflicts, the academy's protector, Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte, convoked a plenary session on 20 October 1624 during which Vouet was elected *principe*.¹³ This appointment epitomized the prestige attained by the French painter and his excellent relations with the Roman elite. The Francophile wing of the Counter-Reformation Church had been gaining momentum and the appointment of Maffeo Barberini as Pope Urban VIII in 1623 seemed to confirm that trend. These were favorable times for the French in Rome. The election of Vouet as *principe* of the Academy of San Luca was a manifestation of the friendly ties that Rome wished to consolidate with the French court and in fact Vouet knew that he could count on the unconditional support of the art patron and collector Francesco Barberini, who was well known for his pro-French policies.

Simon Vouet was born in Paris in 1590. His father was a painter of modest talent and circumstances, but Simon demonstrated his remarkable ability with the brush very early in life, and at the age of fourteen he was sent to England to paint the portrait of a French lady of noble birth living in London.¹⁴ A few years later, Baron Achille de Harlay de Sancy, who was appointed by the king as the French ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, took Vouet with him to Pera to paint the portrait of Sultan Mustafa I. Once he had completed this commission, Vouet left Constantinople and headed for Venice, where he stayed for some months to study the Venetian painting tradition from the last century and tried to break into the circles of the wealthy merchants and powerful art dealers of the Serenissima Repubblica. He came armed with letters of recommendation from influential figures in French politics and culture, but something must have gone wrong as a few months later he decided to try his luck instead in Rome, where he arrived in March of the year 1613.¹⁵ He would end up staying

12 Cfr. Raymond Ward Bissell, "Simon Vouet, Raphael, and the Accademia di San Luca in Rome," *Artibus et Historiae: An Art Anthology*, 2011, 63:55–72.

13 About the patronage of Francesco Maria del Monte and his relationship with Vouet, see Zygmunt Wazbinski, "Simon Vouet et le cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte: une hypothèse sur le mécénat d'Henri IV à Rome," in *Simon Vouet: actes du colloque international Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, 5-6-7 février 1991*, edited by Stéphane Loire (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1992), pp. 149–157.

14 Cfr. Felibien, *Entretiens* (cit. note 9), p. 491.

15 Cfr. Francesco Solinas, "Ferrante Carlo, Simon Vouet et Cassiano dal Pozzo. Notes et documents inédits su la période romaine," in Loire, *Simon Vouet* (cit. note 13), pp. 135–147, p. 136.

there until 1627, and during this long sojourn Louis XIII, on the advice of his mother Maria de Medici, provided him with an allowance to finance his studies, gradually increasing it over the years as his career progressed.

During his first years in Rome, Vouet fell under the spell of Caravaggio and he showed himself to be a superb exponent of the *manfrediana methodus*. It was the period when he painted *The Fortune Teller* (1617), *The Musicians* (1617), *The Two Lovers* (1618) and *The Swordsman* (1618) – flashes of everyday life that create a sense of complicity between the spectator and the painter, encouraging us to reconstruct a story that is not explicitly depicted, but only alluded to, a flight from allegorical classicism but not from allegory. Against dark backgrounds, the light on the faces and the clothing imbue the protagonists with great impact and force. Likewise, in these early years Vouet produced a stream of works in a smaller format on a vast range of subjects, and a large number of Italian and French painters were beginning to consider Vouet as a master and a source of inspiration. Around 1620 he undertook his first large-scale works, receiving commissions that would make him one of the most celebrated baroque painters in Rome. Examples include his painting *The Birth of the Virgin* for the Church of San Francesco a Ripa and the frescoes in the Alaleoni Chapel of the Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina. Devoting his time to religious themes was the price he had to pay for success, but as an exponent of the school of Caravaggio he knew very well how to combine the message of faith with the apparently pagan.

To a large extent Vouet owed his privileged position as one of the preferred painters of the great Roman art patrons to the unconditional support of Cassiano dal Pozzo, who had settled in Rome around the same time.¹⁶ *Il cavalier Dal Pozzo* who, according to his father, was an “idler,” did not stand out for his efforts to introduce himself into the elite political and economic circles of Rome, distracted as he was by his passion for antiques, military and civil history, and all manner of wonders and curiosities, which abounded in the Rome of those decades. Uninterested in political or economic success, he nevertheless earned a reputation at a young age as an erudite collector, and was sought after by a powerful political elite anxious to dress up its power in the attire of art, erudition and history. In 1615 Dal Pozzo, from his residence in Vicolo della Croce, a few meters from Vouet’s house, began his monumental project for a *Museo Cartaceo* or ‘paper museum’, the intent being to assemble an encyclope-

16 About the patron-artist relationship between Dal Pozzo and Vouet, see Eric Schleier, “Les commanditaires de Vouet à Rome,” in *Simon Vouet: Les années italiennes (1613–1627)* (Paris: Hazan Eds., 2008), pp. 67–80, pp. 72–74.

dic body of knowledge ranging from the vestiges of ancient Rome to the vestiges and wonders of nature, an infinitely vast world enclosed within the walls of his home and composed of images which faithfully reflected everything that could not be possessed.¹⁷ The project led Dal Pozzo to establish links through correspondence with some of the most famous European intellectuals of the time, such as Nicolas de Peiresc, who in turn promoted his activities and erudition, multiplying the resonance of his name in philosophical, artistic and scientific circles all over Europe.

During the course of the years Dal Pozzo devoted much of his, albeit modest, fortune to the commissioning of works to enrich his paper museum. Moreover, his relations with artists extended well beyond his archaeological and naturalistic interests, since he became a prestigious art patron, merchant and collector. It is known that he greatly admired Nicolas Poussin and collaborated with him on various projects beginning in 1626, as well as commissioning many paintings, but there were others as well.¹⁸ The most significant of these was in fact Simon Vouet, with whom he developed a close friendship and whose career he sought to promote in every way he could. He started by requesting the artist to make some drawings for his paper museum, went on to give him significant commissions, and in the end accumulated a large collection of his works.¹⁹

17 In recent years, Cassiano dal Pozzo has been the object of important research. It would be impossible to mention them all, so I refer first to the classic study by Giacomo Lumbroso, *Notizie sulla vita di Cassiano dal Pozzo* (Turin: Paravia, 1875). See also *Quaderni puteani. The Paper Museum of Cassiano dal Pozzo*, 4 vols. (Milan: Olivetti, 1989–1993); Francesco Solinas, *I segreti di un collezionista – le straordinarie raccolte di Cassiano dal Pozzo 1588–1657*, 2 vols. (Roma: De Luca Editori, 2000–2001); *The Paper Museum of Cassiano Dal Pozzo. A Catalogue Raisonné* (London: The Royal Collection Publications, 2001–2015), and, of course David Freedberg, *The Eye of the Lynx: Galileo, His Friends, and the Beginnings of Modern Natural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) and Giuseppe Olmi, *L'inventario del mondo. Catalogazione della natura e luoghi del sapere nella prima età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992), pp. 315–379. On the immense task of publishing the materials of Cassiano dal Pozzo preserved in different collections, directed from the Warburg Institute of London, see the information provided at <http://warburg.sas.ac.uk/research/projects/cassiano> (accessed 2 June 2015).

18 See *Poussin et la construction de l'antique*, edited by Marc Bayard, Elena Fumagalli (Rome: Academie de France, 2011).

19 Vouet's reliance on the friendship and constant support of Cassiano dal Pozzo is reflected in two of the few letters of the French painter that have been preserved, sent from Genoa to Dal Pozzo on 21 May and 4 September of 1621, published in Giovanni Gaetano Bottari, *Raccolta di lettere sulla Pittura, Scultura, ed Architettura scritta dai più celebri personaggi dei secoli XV, XVI e XVII*, Vol. I (Milan: Giovanni Silvestri, 1822), pp. 331–333. Cfr. Haskell, *Patrons and Painters* (cit. note 7), pp. 98–119.

When in 1623 Maffeo Barberini ascended the pontifical throne as Pope Urban VIII, Cassiano's activities as an art patron intensified. Francesco Barberini, who was appointed a cardinal by his uncle, took on Cassiano as his personal secretary, no doubt in the expectation that Cassiano's international fame as an erudite scholar, archaeologist and botanist, as well as his vast knowledge of the arts and sciences would add lustre to his own intellectual reputation in the eyes of the Roman and European public. This was the beginning of the so-called "family" of Francesco Barberini, the "gentilhuomini dell' Eminentissimo Cardinale Barberino," a circle in which the arts, the sciences, and the policies of the pope came together to create the style which history has dubbed "Baroque."²⁰ Dal Pozzo was the friend and patron who, at that time, introduced Vouet to the aristocracy, elite patrons, and the upper echelons of the Roman Francophile party, making him an important actor in the Paris–Rome axis which played a significant role in political and intellectual life of Europe in the early decades of the seventeenth century.

Vouet was a frequent visitor to the home of the brothers Giulio and Marcello Sacchetti, a family of Tuscan origin like the Barberini and Cassiano himself, powerful bankers and important art collectors. The passion of Marcello Sacchetti for poetry and cultivated conversation, as well as his Frenchified tastes, had drawn him into the circles of Maffeo Barberini well before the latter was named Pope. The role of the Sacchetti was crucial in the configuration of the Roman baroque style and Pietro de Cortona, Vouet and Poussin were among their favorite artists.²¹ They were in charge of proposing which artists were to decorate the interior of Saint Peter's Basilica and all of those chosen were members of the Sacchetti circle: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Giovanni di Stefano

20 About the circle of Francesco Barberini, see P.J.A.N. Rietbergen, *Power and Religion in Baroque Rome: Barberini Cultural Policies* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 388 and ff. Regarding the complex concept of "baroque," discussions on the subject are so extensive and the studies so numerous that it would be impossible to mention them all here. A good example of this plurality of perspectives can be found in *Unfolding the Baroque: Culture and Concepts*, monographic volume of *Res Aeterna* (2010). It is worth recalling the essay "What is Baroque" in Erwin Panofsky, *Three Essays on Style*, edited by Irving Lavin (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1995), pp. 17–90. For an extensive bibliography on the Roman Baroque, see *Barocco a Roma* (cit. note 8).

21 About the patronage and political power of the Sacchetti brothers, see Giuseppe Ceccarelli, *I Sacchetti* (Rome: Istituto di Studi Romani, 1946); Lilian H. Zirpolo, "Climbing the Social, Political and Financial Ladders: The Rise of the Sacchetti in Seventeenth-Century Rome," *The Seventeenth Century*, 1997, 12/2:151–171; id., *Ave Papa / Ave Papabile: The Sacchetti Family, Their Art Patronage, and Political Aspirations* (Toronto: Center for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2005).

Lanfranco, Andrea Sacchi, Valentin de Boulogne. And, of course, Simon Vouet himself who, after a brief stay in Genoa between 1620 and 1621 and a stop in Milan to attend the appointment ceremony of the previous pope, Gregory xv, saw his fame and reputation grow.²²

The election to the papal throne of Urban VIII, who was known as a great Francophile and lover of the arts and sciences, was enthusiastically acclaimed by the most innovative sector of Rome's cultural elite. Galileans, members and illustrious associates of the Roman Accademia dei Lincei, the defenders, in short, of freedom of thought and artistic expression, interpreted his election as the exit from a long tunnel of intellectual and philosophical repression. Concerning the arts, when Maffeo Barberini became pope, his family's passion for collecting was already well known, but from 1623 onward the features of the Barberini's patronage became a symbol of their innovative projects and their political preferences. The artists who orbited around the Sacchetti and Cassiano dal Pozzo soon became the Barberini pope's favorites. One of the first gestures expressing the enthusiasm of these artists for the new pope, as well as their desire to gain his favour and win prestigious commissions, was the portrait of Urban VIII painted by Vouet in 1623, which is preserved in an engraving by Claude Mellan.

A few months later, at the request of Francesco Maria del Monte, who was entrusted with transmitting the wishes and projects of the Sacchetti to the pope, Vouet obtained the commission to paint an altarpiece for the chapel of the new choir of Saint Peter's Basilica. He worked intensely during the following months, preparing a full-scale *disegno* on the subject that he had been commissioned to depict. Once completed, it was approved by the "Congregazione della Reverenda Fabbrica." However, some time later the artist was ordered to

22 Vouet was recalled to Genoa, through the intermediation of Cassiano dal Pozzo, by Paolo Giordano II Orsini, Duke of Bracciano, to decorate his residence after his marriage to Isabella d'Appiano d'Aragona, Princess of Piombino. At Genoa, Vouet met the Doria brothers, who soon became important clients and patrons of the painter. The trip to Genoa, which took place between September 1623 and mid-1624, was very successful and important for Vouet's career. Besides the works commissioned by the Duke of Bracciano, he made a large number of paintings for the Doria, many of them after his return to Rome, including *San Sebastian Cured by Pious Women* and *David with the Head of Goliath*. Also noteworthy among the works sent to Genoa from Rome is *The Crucifixion* for the high altar of the Raggi Chapel in the Jesuit church of Sant'Ambrogio in Genoa. Cfr. Viviana Farina, "Remarques sur le voyage génois de Simon Vouet. Nouvelles réflexions à propos du 'Portrait de Giovan Carlo Doria', des prémisses de la galerie des portraits des poètes et d'une nouvelle chronologie pour la 'Crucifixion' du Gesù," in Bonfait, Rousteau-Chambon, *Simon Vouet* (cit. note 8), pp. 87–115.

change the subject of his painting, and to prepare an image which would serve as a background to Michelangelo's sculpture *The Pietà*.

Despite his resentment, Vouet sought to satisfy his patrons, but his project was not accepted and the brilliant French painter, incapable of swallowing such an offence, decided towards the end of 1626 to accept the invitation of his king, Louis XIII, to return to Paris.²³ He would remain in Rome only for a few more months to finish some of his works and witness the birth of his daughter, fruit of his marriage some time earlier to the painter Virginia da Vezzo. This proved to be the end of his Italian period, an intense stage during which he not only proved the quality of his art but also that he would not accept a secondary role.²⁴ He turned his back on the rarefied world of Roman patronage, but took back with him to Paris all he had learned, the experience of having lived in and been a key figure during the great period of Baroque art in Rome.

3 Under the Sign of Baroque: The Meeting of the Emblematic with Optics

The modern divisions in the disciplines have fragmented this period of history between art and science, and thus their respective histories been written, but today few historians would dispute the fact that in the seventeenth century the borders between art and science were very different from how they are viewed nowadays. The Rome of Simon Vouet was a world shaken by scientific and philosophical reflections that were as disturbing as they were promising. Only two years after Vouet came to Rome, Galileo had been called to testify in the dark trial that would end in 1616 with the anti-Copernican decree. But

23 Actually the entire process was marked by shady maneuvers and confusing messages beneath which were both Pope's changing projects and the intention to replace Vouet with one of his great rivals, Pietro da Cortona, at that time the favorite of the Sacchetti, a development which especially offended Vouet. See Zirpolo, *Ave Papa / Ave Papabile* (cit. note 21), pp. 72–76.

24 The work was finally assigned to Nicholas Poussin and Pietro da Cortona and on 17 April 1627 Vouet announced to the Reverenda Fabbrica di San Pietro that he intended to return to Paris and demanded that he be paid for the work done. On May 29 he submitted his resignation as Prince of the Academy of San Luca, having requested a few days before, on May 13, that Francesco Barberini be appointed protector of the Academy, replacing the recently deceased Cardinal Del Monte. In late July Vouet headed for Venice, where he stayed for a few months. Finally, on November 25 he arrived in Paris, accompanied by his family and by his colleagues Jacques Lhomme and Jean Baptiste Molle. Cfr. Thuillier, *Vouet* (cit. note 4), pp. 106–108.

alongside these threatening shadows, defenders of the new science were raising their philosophical weapons.

One of the main centres of defence of the new science formed around Prince Federico Cesi, who in 1605 founded in Rome the Accademia dei Lincei. Those who participated were firm defenders of Galilean science, but even before Galileo leapt to fame with his celestial observations in 1610, they had shown an interest in novelty and a dislike of the restrictions and philosophical censorship of the academic institutions and theological powers. Viewing Giovanni Battista Della Porta as a figure emblematic of their aspirations, they elected him an honorary member of the academy. Natural magic, the curious and wonderful effects of nature, the deception of the eye produced and revealed by mathematics, were as much at the heart of the Lincean intellectual project as astronomy, Galilean physics and natural history. Soon after he arrived in Rome, Cassiano dal Pozzo – author of the *Museo Cartaceo* and discriminating collector of antiques and the paintings of Vouet, Pietro da Cortona, Lanfranco and Poussin – began to participate actively in the circles connected with Prince Cesi's academy. Together with Giovanni Ciampoli, Virginio Cesarini and Johannes Faber, he helped to prepare Galilei's treatise *Il Saggiatore* for publication; printed in 1623, this project testified to the philosophical and scientific convictions of the Linceans. In 1622 Dal Pozzo was elected a member of the academy, in precisely the same year as another of the leading figures of the Roman Baroque effervescence, Cardinal Francesco Barberini, who in addition to his intense activity in the political arena and as a patron of the arts, was engaged in the interesting task of transmitting the news of scientific developments between Rome and the rest of Europe.²⁵

The coincidence of key protagonists gravitating to Rome in this period, and the overlapping of space and time between the spheres of artistic and scientific production raise the question as to whether the boundaries between the two were real or imaginary. Do we think it is possible that those who gave voice and form to the new aesthetic aspirations of the Roman Baroque established clear demarcations between their own approach and that of their colleagues in the field of science? Is it possible to think that those who were fascinated by the novelties of the heavens, by the marvellous geometry of light or machines, or by the strange forms of nature from distant lands, perceived these topics to be alien to the expressive poetics of the arts that they were promoting? Couched

25 Dal Pozzo's personal project was intertwined with the scientific projects of the Accademia, so much that after the death of Federico Cesi in 1630, he acquired all the materials of the academy and added them to the large collection housed in his own residence. Cfr. Freedberg, *The Eye of the Lynx* (cit. note 17), pp. 57–58 and 143–147.

in such terms, these questions contain a fallacy at their heart, because to apply modern distinctions to science and art in the seventeenth century would be an unforgiveable anachronism.

After the long and fruitful discussions of recent decades on the influence of art on science, and on the appropriation by art of scientific investigation with regard to the origins of modernity, recently some scholars have begun to talk about a “Baroque science.”²⁶ They have shown that this phenomenon should not be regarded as a loan or an appropriation – either by art or by science – of the achievements and perspectives of the other, but rather as the manifestation of shared concerns, issues and aspirations using different forms of expression. The deception of the senses, the illusory nature of the apparent, the invisible geometrical framework of things that only the intellect can discover – or invent –, the enigmas and the transforming power of light and mirrors, to name but a few examples, lay at the heart of the work of painters like Bernini and Pietro da Cortona, and of natural philosophers such as Galileo, Descartes and Bacon – in the daring frescoes with which the artists adorned chapels, domes and dining halls, and in the treatises which the scientists wrote on physical mathematics or on the physiology of human perception.

We do not know in what way Simon Vouet may have participated in the philosophical, literary and scientific debates that were certainly taking place in the circles which he frequented in his Italian years. The physical proximity of the protagonists in a story always makes research difficult for the historian, and in the present case Vouet found himself so often in the company of Francesco Barberini or Cassiano dal Pozzo that he must not have felt the need to record the details regarding his collaboration with these important figures. Besides, as he said in one of the few letters that have been conserved, he was not used to writing.²⁷ His forté was to paint and to draw. Vouet’s story therefore must be reconstructed based on the products of his art, not the voice of his words, which have been lost in time. But of all his works, it is precisely one small piece, a failed image relegated to the margins of catalogues, that gives us the best clue as to the relationship between his painting technique, his visual poetics and the science of his time: *Eight satyrs observing an elephant reflected on a cylinder*. In this drawing Vouet captured the most characteristic elements of the Baroque. By juxtaposing two perspectives, he places the viewer before a

26 I refer especially to José Ramón Marcaida, *Arte y ciencia en el barroco español* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2014) and Ofer Gal, Chen Morris, *Baroque Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

27 Letter from Vouet to Cassiano del Pozzo, May 21, 1621, in Bottari, *Raccolta di lettere sulla Pittura* (cit. note 19), p. 331.

scene that unfolds in a linear perspective as if in a theatre, conveying a feeling of the reality therein; and at the same time within the same scene, an illusory, anamorphic perspective prompts reflection on the reality of what in reality does not exist. A sense of wonder is evoked at the *prestige* of optics, shared by the satyrs but also by whoever observes this scene within a scene.

Ever since Baltrusaitis drew attention to the drawing by Vouet and the subsequent engraving by Tröschel in his study on anamorphosis, the two images have been included in the studies on seventeenth-century anamorphic representations, if only in passing, in an almost anecdotal fashion. No one, however, has stopped to wonder why Vouet made this particular drawing. At most it has been suggested that it might have represented a *divertissement* for the author, or a curiosity that he intended to give to some friend who was interested in the science of optics, without however providing any indication as to who the recipient might have been.²⁸ What is clear is that this fanciful drawing of satyrs gazing at the anamorphosis of an elephant was – by its structure and format, by its allegorical content and the *banderole* (bearing the inscription “format et illustrat” in the engraving of Tröschel) – conceived as an emblem.²⁹

28 Quite recently Alexander Marr has noted that drawing and engraving were intended to serve as a “print thesis,” cfr. Alexander Marr, “Crowned with Harmless Fire. A new Look at Descartes,” *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2015, 13:14–15. Indeed, given its characteristics, Vouet’s anamorphic drawing could have been a *scudo* for a thesis print. I do not know, however, on what sources and arguments Marr relied and I have not found any information on this aspect in the Archivio di Stato of Rome, where most records concerning the presentation of academic theses in the Rome of the period are kept. As I was completing this essay, I learned that Marr is working on an article on Vouet’s anamorphical drawing. About the Italian baroque “thesis print,” see Louise Rice, “Jesuit Thesis Prints and the Festive Academic Defence at the Collegio Romano,” in *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773*, edited by J. O’Malley et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), pp. 148–169; id., “*Pomis sua nomina servant*: The Emblematic Thesis Prints of the Roman Seminary,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 2007, 70:195–246, especially dedicated to the *scudi* for the Jesuit Seminario Romano; id., “Pietro da Cortona and the Roman Baroque Thesis Print,” in *Pietro da Cortona. Atti del convegno internazionale Roma-Firenze, 12–15 novembre 1997*, edited by Ch. Luitpold Frommel, S. Schutze (Roma: Electa, 1998) and the recently published book by Antonella Pampalone, *Cerimonie di laurea nella Roma barocca. Pietro da Cortona e i frontespizi ermetici di tesi* (Roma: Gangemi Editore, 2015). See also Véronique Meyer, “Les frontispices de thèses: Un exemple de collaboration entre peintres italiens et graveurs français,” in *Seicento. La peinture italienne du XVIIe siècle et la France* (Paris: Documentation française, 1990), pp. 105–123.

29 In a sense, the *scudo* was also an emblem but it was made especially for the ceremony in which the thesis was publicly defended.

Emblems were designed to evoke in the observer the memory of virtues, activities and achievements that were associated with its owner and, as the authors of treatises on emblems underlined, to achieve this goal it was crucial “to excite a sense of wonder” with strategies of pictorial rhetoric.³⁰ The iconography of the emblem had to escape the commonplace images that filled the visual world of the public it was addressing and resort instead to the odd, the unusual, images which had never been seen before by human eyes, but whose reality was confirmed by a long textual tradition, from Aristotle to Pliny, from Ovid to Aelius and Horapollo, classical authors whose works were drawn upon extensively by the authors of treatises on iconology and the art of emblems such as Lodovico Dolce, Piero Valeriano and Girolamo Ruscelli between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Seven-headed hydras, winged female figures, men with goat’s legs, fauns, satyrs and all kinds of mythical hybrids and monsters shared space with the exotic elephant, rhinoceros, lynx and crocodile. The emblem was a visualization of the invisible, and in this sense it bordered on the concept of the “exotic” which was beginning to take shape in the seventeenth century thanks to the awareness that the feeling of strangeness and wonder is determined by the point of view of the observer, and that the exotic has to be viewed from a specific perspective, without which it would cease to be such.³¹ It seems that the emblem was a catalyst, itself an insignia on a smaller scale of the Baroque taste for *meraviglie* (wonders) and the conceptual value that was attributed to it.

Vouet’s anamorphic drawing not only incorporates all the features required for an effective emblem; the artist has pushed them to the limit, making the very nature of the symbolic representation visible and introducing wonder

30 This feature that all the emblems should have was well expressed by Hercole Tasso in his *Della realtà et perfetione delle imprese* (Bergamo: Comino Ventura, 1612), p. 86, where he recommended that the most amazing animals be included in emblems, such as lions, leopards, tigers, parrots, crocodiles and elephants, many of them only seen in the Far East or Africa, because an emblem made of pets, chickens, hens or lambs would be a great disservice for the possessor of the emblem and nobody would remember him. On p. 190 Tasso returns to the same theme of wonder born from the rarity or novelty of nature, and shortly before, commenting on the work of Scipione Ammirato, *Rota, overo delle imprese* (Naples: Gio. Maria Scotto, 1562), we read: “Deve l’impresa eccitare la meraviglia nelle persone dotte: la quale nasce non da l’oscurità delle parole, ne dalla recondita natura delle cose, ma dall’ accoppiamento, & misto dell’una & l’altre, per cagione di che vien costituito un terzo, di natura da lor diversa, producente essa meraviglia,” p. 127.

31 On the origins of the concept of “exoticism” in modern times, see Peter Mason, *Infelicitities. Representations of the Exotic* (Baltimore/London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998).

into a scene that was already wonderful. The satyrs are fantastical beings in themselves,³² but their expressive faces show how surprise, awe and wonder are only kindled if one is standing in the right place, looking at the object from the right perspective. The elephant reflected in the cylindrical mirror is given form through their eyes and through their act of observation, it becomes real only if they know how to look at it. The triumphant return to Europe in the flesh of the great exotic beast, which a long tradition of texts had transformed into a privileged symbol of all the virtues, was skilfully used to enhance the prestige of noblemen, popes, and cardinals with aspirations to the papal throne. Whether it was from Asia or Africa, the texts of Pliny, Ovid and Aristotle had attributed to the elephant the highest moral, and even intellectual and religious, qualities. The era of iconography and the emblematic, echoing not only the stories of the ancients but the new discoveries reported by contemporary travellers, elaborated detailed descriptions of the mighty wonders of the elephant, which made it worthy of occupying a privileged place in emblems and *imprese*.³³ Horapollo, in his *Hieroglyphica*, considered it to be the very image of the man who investigates the truth and value of things. With its attributes of harmony, fairness and temperance, Horapollo declared that the elephant was an emblem worthy to represent kings, rulers and princes, and Valeriano depicted it as such in his edition of the work of Horapollo.³⁴ In the same vein, Lodovico Dolce used the elephant in an emblem for Emanuel Filiberto of Savoy, accompanied by the motto “Infestus infestis”,³⁵ as did Camillo Camilli.³⁶

While it is not known for certain who commissioned the drawing by Vouet – if indeed it was commissioned – the presence of the elephant suggests that the

32 Satyrs are a common theme throughout the emblematic literature, largely due to rules on emblem making, which prescribed that human figures should not be included; nymphs and satyrs could express human attitudes and features without being fully human. Cfr. Tasso, *Della realtà e perfetione delle imprese* (cit. note 30), Part I, pp. 24, 26; Girolamo Ruscelli, *Le imprese illustri con espositioni e discorsi* (Venice: Franciscus Rampazzetto, 1556), pp. 14–16.

33 Cfr. Laura Orsi, “The Emblematic Elephant: A Preliminary Approach to the Elephant in Renaissance Thought and Art,” *Anthropozoologica*, 1994, 20:69–86; Christian Bouzy, “El Tesoro de la Lengua: un cas d’éléphantiasis emblématique de la citation,” *Cahiers d’études romanes*, 2001, 5:49–71.

34 Pietro Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica sive de sacris Aegyptorum, aliarumque gentium literis commentarii* (Basel: Michael Isengrin, 1556), ff. 16v–21r.

35 Lodovico Dolce, *Imprese nobili et ingegnose di diversi principi, et d'altri personaggi illustri* (Venice: 1583).

36 Camillo Camilli, *Impresse illustri di diversi, coi discorsi di Camillo Camilli, et con le figure intagliate in rame di Girolamo Porro Padouano* (Venice: Francesco Ziletti, 1586), pp. 57–59.

patron could have been someone connected with the Barberini family, heirs to the papal throne of Giovanni de Medici, who had paraded his beloved Hanno through the streets of Rome in 1514. However, it is worth remembering that another French artist, Jacques Stella, painted a work which had an elephant as its centrepiece for Agostino Mascardi (1590–1640) – a friend of the Doria, one of the ruling families in Genoa – around a time that was much closer to the date of Vouet's drawing (1627), and that Vouet must have met Stella during his sojourn in Genoa in 1620–1621.

Mascardi (also known as Sarzano), an expelled Jesuit, had come to Rome in August 1623 and quickly consolidated links with Maffeo Barberini, especially through Virginio Cesarini, a member of the Lincei and *maestro da camera* of the newly appointed Pope. Mascardi entered the service of Alessandro d'Este, and after his patron's death in 1624, was hired by the prince and cardinal Maurice of Savoy to help set up an academy at his private residence, the Palazzo Montegiordano, a task to which Mascardi devoted himself with great energy, becoming the ideologist of the new Accademia dei Desiosi.³⁷ The speech which he delivered at the inauguration of the cardinal's academy was published in *Prose vulgari* (Venice, 1625), a volume that opens with a magnificent frontispiece designed by Jacques Stella and engraved by Jerome David (Fig. 3).³⁸ The frontispiece is actually an elaborate version of Mascardi's own *impresa*, which appears elsewhere in the book accompanied by a motto from Ovid and the verses of M. Annaeus Lucano's *Pharsalia* that inspired the "soul" or motto of the *impresa*: "citraque cruorem" (Fig. 4).³⁹ The image is of an elephant with five darts that bounce off his skin, symbolizing the vicious attacks that may attempt, but will always fail to bring down the fiery Mascardi, who despite all adversities

37 About Mascardi, see Eraldo Bellini, *Agostino Mascardi tra 'ars poetica' e 'ars historica'* (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 2002), pp. 7–15.

38 Agostino Mascardi, *Prose Vulgari di Monsignor Agostino Mascardi, Cameriere d'Honore di N. Sig. Urbano VIII* (Venice: Bartolomeo Fontana, 1625).

39 Ovid's words were drawn from his *Remedia amoris* (731–732): "Ut pene extinctum cinerem, si sulphure tangas, vivet, & ex minimo maximus ignis erit." The verses of *Farsalia* are: "[par pelagi monstribus Libycae sic belua terrae] sic Libycus densis elephans oppressus ab armis omne repercussum squalenti missile tergo frangit et haerentis mota cute discutit hastas: 210 uiscera tuta latent penitus, citraque cruorem confixae stant tela ferae: tot facta sagittis, tot iaculis unam non explent uulnera mortem," M. Anneo Lucano, *Pharsalia*, L. VI, 207–213. Regarding the dichotomy between "soul" and "body," the emblematic literature considered the visual figure to be the body of the emblem while the words that accompanied it were the soul. This distinction, or at least the inanimate nature of the figure, was disputed by some theorists, such as G. Ruscelli.



FIGURE 3 *Frontispiece to Agostino Mascardi's Prose vulgari (1625), drawn by Jacques Stella and engraved by Jerome David*



Vt pene extinctum cinerem si sulphure tangas
Viuet, & ex minimo maximus ignis erit.

*Sic Lybicus densis elephas oppressus ab armis
Omne repercussum squalenti missilei tergo
Frangit, & harentes mota cute discutit hastas:
Viscera tuta latent penitus, CITRA QVE CRVOREM
Confixæ stant tela feræ: tot facta sagittis,
Tot iaculis, vnâ non expleat vulnera mortem.
Lucanus lib. sexto.*

FIGURE 4 Agostino Mascardi's emblem, included in his *Prose vulgari* (1625)

will remain constant and magnanimous.⁴⁰ Mascardi's elephant is as docile as the animal depicted in the emblem of Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy, but in this case he is protected by Mercury and Minerva, by wisdom and the arts of war. Mascardi's choice of emblem was a reference to his new patron, the

40 On the frontispiece by Jacques Stella, see Sylvain Kerspern in <http://www.dhistoire-et-dart.com/Stella/Stella-cat-Rome1624-5.html#ProseVulgari> (accessed 15 July 2015).

prince of the House of Savoy, and the fact that Stella was chosen to execute the commission demonstrates the good relations that existed between the Accademia dei Desiosi and the community of French artists in Rome.

The circle of the Desiosi began meeting in Rome in 1623, shortly after the arrival of Cardinal Maurice of Savoy in the city to participate in the conclave that elected Maffeo Barberini as pope. The cardinal, installed in one of the wings of the sumptuous Palazzo Montegiordano owned by the Orsini family, conceived the academy as an instrument at the service of the new regime, the new “aedes barberiniana.”⁴¹ Within this Roman stronghold of the Francophile party, intellectuals in the service of the pope gathered, among them Cassiano dal Pozzo, Virginio Cesarini and Pietro Sforza Pallavicino, all of whom saw the renewal of the arts and sciences as an indispensable element of political renewal. Their admiration for the new science and their support for Galileo in his grim battle with the Church were in line with the somewhat euphoric sentiments which led the Accademia dei Lincei to publish *Il Saggiatore* in that same year, 1623.⁴²

While the academy of Maurice of Savoy presented itself as a theatre of virtue and moral regeneration, the *desiosi* cultivated an interest in the latest astronomical and geographical discoveries, and in mathematics, from its Platonic dimension to its technical and artistic applications. Nothing in the intellectual universe fell outside the purview of the Accademia dei Desiosi, but parallel to the flow of proposals and reflections, the prince tirelessly promoted the arts, painting, sculpture and music, becoming one of the great patrons of the Baroque period, whose volume of commissions could compare with that of the Borghese, the Sacchetti, or the Barberini family itself. It is not surprising, there-

41 About the Accademia dei Desiosi, see Ricardo Merolla, “L’Accademia dei Desiosi,” in *Il gran teatro del mondo. Roma tra Cinque e Seicento: storia, letteratura e teatro*, monographic issue of *Roma moderna e contemporanea*, 1995, 3121–155; id., *L’Accademia dei Desiosi. Storia e testo* (Roma: Carocci, 2008); Paola Ugolini, “Paradoxical Virtues: Intellectuals between the Court and the Academy in Agostino Mascardi’s ‘Che la corte è vera scuola non solamente della prudenza, ma delle virtù morali’ (1624),” *The Italianist*, 2014, 34/1:54–72; Michele Maylander, *Storia delle Accademie d’Italia*, 5 vols. (Bologna: Cappelli, 1926–1930), Vol. II, pp. 173–174.

42 Cfr. Pietro Redondi, *Galileo eretico* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), pp. 87–97. Mascardi himself wrote two discourses: “Dell’aritmetica” and “Della geometria,” which were included in his *Discorsi Morali su la tauola di Cebete Tebano* (Venice: Antonio Pinelli, 1627), pp. 268–280 and 280–288. These are followed by another, “Dell’astrologia” (pp. 288–298), in which, by praising both the speculative and practical aspects of astronomy, he clearly provides a defense of the heliocentric cosmology, referring to the recently discovered sunspots and the opacity of the lunar body.

fore, that the painters living in Rome at that time felt irresistibly attracted to the Accademia dei Desiosi, which also competed with the Accademia di San Luca by devoting two days a week to the training of artists.

The power and patronage of Maurice of Savoy is expressed in a drawing by Vouet, his *Allegory in honour of the Cardinal of Savoy*, of which an engraving was made shortly afterwards by Claude Mellan.⁴³ In this picture twelve figures on cylindrical pedestals represent the members of the dynasty and surround the main figure who stands on an octagonal base. The protagonist of the scene, Maurice of Savoy, holds in one hand a sphere with the symbols of the House of Savoy and in the other a bow – a genuine Apollo, inspiring, and a true patron of the arts.⁴⁴ We do not know whether Vouet made this drawing out of a desire to pay homage to the cardinal or if it was commissioned by the latter, but it is precisely in this context that the anamorphic representation of the elephant surrounded by satyrs that Vouet drew at the same time makes sense. The answer to the enigma as to why Vouet was led to devise such an unusual anamorphic scene can be found in the writings of a faithful member of Maurice of Savoy's retinue, Emanuele Tesauo, who for the funeral ceremonies of the prince in 1657 wrote a eulogy entitled "The Cylinder" in which we read:

I will distract my eyes from the teary object of these remains recounting his heroic virtues, concluding in that which he himself, in the prime of his life, made public to the world, when he [Maurice de Savoy] raised as his heroic emblem the mirror in the form of a cylinder, accompanied by the witty words: OMNIS IN UNUM. [...] This flash of heroic ingenuity shone on the emblems of this Royal House: docility in the elephant of Emanuel Filiberto; speed in the centaur of Charles the Great; tirelessness in the bird of paradise of Vittorio "l'invito" [sic] [...]. The generous Maurice used as

43 The *Allegory in honour of the Cardinal of Savoy*, a drawing in red chalk (Louvre Museum, Département des Arts graphiques: XVIIe siècle), is dated ca. 1625, which is quite likely because Mellan arrived in Rome in the spring of 1624 and Vouet left the city in July 1627. See the interesting interpretation of this image by Maxime Préaud, "Simon Vouet, Claude Mellan et le cardinal Maurice de Savoie," in Loire, *Simon Vouet* (cit. note 13), pp. 557–562.

44 The analogy between Maurice of Savoy and Apollo was made by his contemporaries. See, for example Emanuele Tesauo, *Panegirici* (Turin: Bartolomeo Zavatta, 1659), Vol. 1, p. 155. It should be emphasized, however, that a double reading of the Apollonian figure is possible, because he was also identified at the time with the figure of Christ. Therefore, it can be said that Vouet's iconography plays on the double meaning of the god Apollo in order to refer both to Maurice of Savoy's role as patron and to his project of moral and theological regeneration. See Préaud, "Simon Vouet" (cit. note 43).

emblem the *curved mirror in the form of a column*, called a cylinder by the Peripatetics, in the centre of which, joining colourful mirror images that outside the mirror appear misshapen and tortuous stains, in its crystal bosom take on the most perfect form; and he added the caption OMNIS IN UNUM. I stated that this work be the best model of ingenious ventures. And such is its body, constituted by the strange property of the cylindrical mirror; a new discovery of clever ingenuity [*sottilissimo ingegno*]; and it is also for the words that give soul to the body, taken from that famous verse from the king of poets.⁴⁵

The cylindrical anamorphosis with the elephant was therefore a work for Maurice of Savoy,⁴⁶ and the “*sottilissimo ingegno*” who invented it could be none other than Simon Vouet. Tesauro’s story is, however, unclear, probably because he was more interested in celebrating the genius of Maurice of Savoy and using the anamorphic representation to illustrate his conception of *ingegno* (ingenuity) than in recognizing the merit of those who had invented the “wonderful artifice” or to provide a faithful reconstruction of the events. Emanuele Tesauro wrote the above words in 1657, thirty years after the drawing was made, and during this interval much happened that could explain the distorted narration of the facts. These were the years when research on cylindrical and conical catoptrical anamorphoses was being conducted, especially on French soil, novel perspectives that were completely unheard of in 1627 when Vouet executed his drawing and when, according to Tesauro, an invention of *sottilissimo ingegno* had come into the hands of the Prince of Savoy. Tesauro spoke with hindsight in his eulogy, and likewise in a work that can be considered one of the great manifestos of Baroque culture, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* (first edition 1654), where he stated that the anamorphic picture was the central element in the emblem Maurice of Savoy had chosen for his Accademia dei Solinghi. This academy was founded by the prince in Turin after he had left Rome in the early months of 1627, and was intended as a continuation of the Accademia dei Desiosi:

Most ingenious is that emblem [*impresa*] which Prince Maurice de Savoy, as eternal patron of the ingenious, chose for his heroic and famous Acad-

45 Tesauro, *Panegirici* (cit. note 44), pp. 151–152.

46 A few pages later, Tesauro says that the prince used the cylinder as an emblem for his Accademia dei Solinghi, which he clearly here has confused and identified with the Roman Accademia dei Desiosi; cfr. Tesauro, *Panegirici* (cit. note 45), pp. 154–155. On the confusion between the two academies, see Merolla, “L’Accademia dei Desiosi” (cit. note. 41), pp. 133–138.

emy of Arms and Arts called “dei Solinghi.” That is, the *mirror* COMICO [sic] in which stains appear on the flat surface, but when reflected upwards become perfect and harmonious figures. Many significant circumstances concur on that. Therefore, firstly, *the body of the impresa* could not be more *ingenious* for its artifice, nor more *noble*, nor more *marvellous*, nor more peculiar, being a new birth of the *Mathematics of mirrors*, the most miraculous of all Arts, followed by ingenious application.⁴⁷

It is noteworthy that in these lines of the *Cannochiale aristotelico* Tesauro refers to a conical rather than a cylindrical mirror, which could weaken the idea that the origin of the emblem chosen by the Prince was the drawing of Vouet. It is furthermore stated that the miraculous mirror “came to royal hands” around 1627, but without specifying whether those royal hands were already in Turin or were still in Rome, from whence Maurice of Savoy departed on January 20th of that year:

It is well known that his Highness was far ahead of any other intellect. This *miraculous mirror* having been invented by a very subtle spirit from Paris around 1627 and one of the originals reached the Royal Highnesses before becoming famous in Italy, this Prince, who by then was wondering which emblem to use for his academy, to see such a strange and wonderful discovery, immediately applied it and made his symbol.⁴⁸

The incongruencies between the two texts cast doubt on the credibility of the information provided by Tesauro. Indeed, the discovery was attributed to ‘a very subtle French spirit’, but perhaps Tesauro, after so many years, no longer made a distinction between the original contribution of Vouet and the advances in catoptrical perspective that followed, especially with Jean Louis Vaulezard’s *Perspective cilindrique et conique* (1630), the first work to treat the question of cylindrical and conical anamorphosis mathematically.

Of course, it could be hypothesized that the author of the image chosen by Maurice of Savoy for his emblem was not Simon Vouet, but there are reasons to dismiss this possibility. Firstly, if indeed such an anamorphic image came into the prince’s hands in 1627, it could not have been through the treatise of Vaulezard, which was published three years later. But it is more important still

47 Emanule Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico, o sia, l'idea dell'arguta et ingeniosa elocutione, che serve a tutta l'arte oratoria, lapidaria et simbolica* (Venice: Paolo Baglioni, 1663 [1654]), p. 629.

48 Ibid., p. 630.

to underline that the image was made precisely when the prince was establishing his academy in Rome and casting about for ideas for an appropriate emblem.⁴⁹ In addition, the French painter himself was closely linked to the circle of intellectuals and artists meeting in the Palazzo Montegiordano and the image reflected in the cylinder was not accidental, because it was an elephant, as in the emblems of Mascardi and Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy.⁵⁰ Vouet had long expressed his desire to gain the favour of Maurice of Savoy; in a letter sent from Genoa to Cassiano dal Pozzo in 1621, he wrote, “I know from your letter that you have talked of me to the Prince Cardinal of Savoy, whom I would love to serve, knowing the benefit such a service could bring me before my master the King.”⁵¹ It is likely then that Vouet made his drawing with the intention of offering it as a possible emblem to the Francophile Prince Cardinal,⁵² but having decided in haste to leave Rome, Vouet could have sent it to him to Turin in the form of the engraving by Tröschel. Subsequently Maurice of Savoy could have decided to use it in the emblem for his Accademia dei Solinghi.

49 The records of the academy sessions indicates the days on which its members discussed this issue and the emblem that was finally chosen for the Desiosi: five crowns intertwined with plant motifs. No mention is made of anything that might resemble Vouet’s anamorphic drawing. Cfr. Merolla, *L’Accademia dei Desiosi* (cit. note 41), pp. 57–49.

50 Preaud, “Simon Vouet” (cit. note 43) also maintains that there is a conceptual similarity between the *Allegory in Honor of Cardinal of Savoy* and Vouet’s cylindrical anamorphosis.

51 In Bottari, *Raccolta di lettere sulla Pittura* (cit. note 19), p. 332.

52 Despite Tesauo’s words claiming that the anamorphic image – conical or cylindrical – was the emblem of the Accademia dei Desiosi, the diary of the academy did not indicate so. At least it was not the emblem of the Roman Accademia dei Desiosi, although it is likely that it was indeed that of the Accademia dei Solinghi in Turin. The famous frontispiece of *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* would be a version of the Solinghi emblem, which coincides with the image of Villa della Regina (also known as Villa Ludovica), venue of the meetings of the “Solinghi,” in a thesis print made in 1654 by Giovenale Boetto for a thesis dedicated to Maurice of Savoy (Turin, Galleria Sabauda, inv. Stampe 2432). Cfr. Kristine Korlud, “The Gem and the Mirror of Heroic Virtue: Emanuele Tesauo and the Heroic at the Court of Savoy,” in *Shaping Heroic Virtues: Studies in the Art and Politics of Supereminence in Europe and Scandinavia*, edited by S. Fogelberg Rota and A. Hellerstedt (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 79. Villa Ludovica’s design was as much theatrical and exuberantly baroque as the anamorphic emblem of the Accademia dei Solinghi, it was a “pleasant garden of labyrinthine form” amid green hills. In the “body” of the emblem “spots” represent the real garden labyrinth, but reflected in the mirror and subject to the rules of perspective, these spots recomposed themselves into perfect characters spelling out the *motto* or “soul” of the emblem: “omnis in unum”; cfr. Tesauo, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* (cit. note 47), pp. 629–630.



FIGURE 5 Emanuele Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* (1663)

The ambiguities, contradictions and lack of precision in Tesauro's account do not prevent us from discovering in his words the philosophical and rhetorical value contained in the catoptrical anamorphosis. Indeed, there was no image better suited to represent the conception of ingenuity proposed by Tesauro: the perfect balance between the sagacity to find the right "circumstances" and the versatility to link them.⁵³ If metaphor was the main element of Baroque rhetoric, being at once textual and visual, anamorphosis was in a sense the ideal metaphor. As Tesauro reminds us, painters who simply resort to mimesis will never surpass the level of *docto artificio*, whilst those who opt for a new manner of representation in which the resulting image is not a mere copy, but the fruit of an understanding that established a new relationship with the reality perceived by the senses, could reach the apogee of ingenuity.⁵⁴

Echoing in the words of Tesauro was a long tradition that had seen in mirrors the greatest artifice of illusion, a venerable tradition that was recuperated in the natural magic of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and carried even further. Book XVII of the second edition of Giovanni Battista della Porta's *Magia Naturalis* is entirely devoted to catoptrical images, the wonderful optical effects that could be achieved with the prestidigitation of mathematics. Truly it seemed a miracle "to make a mirror that only represents images of what you want," as the Neapolitan magician promised, but it would seem like a miracle only to the uninitiated who do not know the causes, the hidden structure of appearances, when in fact it was no more than the skilful application of the principles of geometry and knowledge of the science of optics.⁵⁵

53 "Natural talent is a wonderful force of intellect, comprising two natural talents, insight and versatility. The insight penetrates the most remote and tiny circumstances of any matter, such as substance, matter, form, accident, properties, causes, purposes, sympathies, similarities and contraries, the superior and the lower, logos, correct misleading; all things that lie in all things side by side each other. The versatility, rapidly captures relations between these circumstances, joins or separates them, increases or decreases them, deduces one from another, refers one by other, and with marvelous skill puts one in the place of other;" "The genius consists of two operations of the intellect, namely: the wisdom to find the circumstances and the versatility to relate them," *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* (cit. note 47), pp. 75 and 629 respectively.

54 "This appears quite clear in painting and sculpture, for those who know perfectly mimic the symmetry of natural bodies are called *doctos artifices*, but only those who paint with wit, are called *ingenious*," Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* (cit. note 47), p. 76; see also p. 78.

55 Giovan Battista Della Porta, *Della magia naturale* (Naples: C. Vitale, 1611), p. 627. The Latin edition was published in 1589. I use here the Italian edition published in Naples in 1611, which includes some changes and additions.

Pure natural magic, in short, was what was contained in that “miraculous mirror” on whose surface an elephant was reflected. In the work of Della Porta a crack was already present in the mirror understood as the most accurate portrayal of what actually exists in reality, the mirror which, for painting, had become the symbol of the perfect illusion which deceives the observer, the ideal to be reached in painting in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The development of linear perspective was just one manifestation of this. A mirror whose reliability was only possible if one accepted the reliability of the senses, because only if one accepts that the eye transmits to the mind what really exists in the exterior world, does it make sense to believe that a painting, by transferring the same image to the mind, is reality itself.⁵⁶ However, in the late sixteenth century the meaning of illusion was beginning to transform itself as a consequence of the development of the geometrical techniques that underlay linear and mimetic perspective, passing from deceiving the eye into thinking that what is before it is real when it is only a picture, to tricking the eye into seeing a reality that does not exist.

Between the treatises of Giovanni Battista della Porta and those of Tesauro, which represent a kind of theoretical culmination of the Baroque, almost a century had passed, and the crack in the faithful mirror kept widening until its surface finally shattered, becoming the manifestation of the great trick of optics, which “by certain proportions of perspective, with strange and ingenious appearance, make you see what you do not see.”⁵⁷ Anamorphosis is inseparable from the idea that it is the mind which constructs images from stimuli reaching the senses, that the forms produced in the mind do not necessarily correspond to the existing forms in the outside world. The elephant, in fact, only exists in the mirror, but we know that things reflected in a mirror only begin to exist when they are in the presence of an observer, a spectator.

The anamorphic elephant of Vouet was born in the Baroque land of the emblematic tradition, but thanks to this image the geometrical science of optics embarked on a new, hitherto unexplored path. Previously it had investigated the rules of certain “secret” and “depraved perspectives,” that is, optical

56 See Susana Gómez, “La ilustración científica y el engaño de los sentidos,” in *El giro pictórico*, edited by Mario Casanueva (Mexico: Anthropos, 2009), pp. 39–71.

57 Tesauro, *Il cannocchiale aristotelico* (cit. note 47), p. 82. About this transformation of the concept of “illusionism,” see the excellent book by Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye. Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), especially chapter 3.

anamorphosis, in which the movement of the observer's eye was required to "correctly" perceive a distorted image on a surface. However, neither the practice nor the theory of cylindrical and conical catoptric anamorphoses were addressed.⁵⁸ Vouet's intention was to create great surprise and wonder with his emblem and for this reason he resorted to the artifice of the cylindrical mirror. It is doubtful that mathematical principles were uppermost in his mind, though it is true that, as we have seen, he moved in circles where both mathematics and speculation about optical phenomena were the order of the day. He, like any competent painter, needed a sufficient knowledge of geometry to be able to compose a correct perspective, but the drawing of the elephant in the mirror does not appear to be based on the development of the necessary mathematics on his part. Most likely, as Baltrusaitis suggested, Vouet was inspired by the examples of cylindrical anamorphoses from China that abounded in the cabinets of wonders of the Ottoman court and that he could have seen during his trip to Pera to paint the portrait of the sultan.⁵⁹ Like Hanno the elephant, like Ganda the rhinoceros, cylindrical anamorphoses could also come from distant lands and inspire feelings of wonder and admiration. But the Chinese exercises in anamorphoses were purely empirical, arrived at by a process of trial and error since the artists were not aware of the geometrical rules underlying them. The emblem of Vouet created quite a stir, igniting the curiosity of geometers predisposed to speculate on the philosophical implications of magic mirrors.

4 From Rome to Paris

Vouet arrived in Paris at the end of November 1627. A promising future awaited him as a royal painter and he immediately plunged into intense activity, producing a stream of drawings and paintings which engravers sought to keep up with and translate into prints. But not far from the Palais du Louvre where he was granted several large rooms to live and work in, were the headquarters of

⁵⁸ There are many works, not always of reliable quality, on the history of anamorphosis. See, obviously, the work of Baltrusaitis, *Anamorphoses ou Thaumaturgus opticus* (cit. note 5). See as well Fred Leeman et al., *Hidden Images: Games of Perception, Anamorphic Art, Illusion from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1976); more technical and less philosophical is Kirsti Andersen, *The Geometry of an Art. The History of the Mathematical Theory of Perspective from Alberti to Monge* (New York/London: Springer, 2007), especially pp. 413–418 and 452–459.

⁵⁹ Cfr. Baltrusaitis, *Anamorphoses ou Thaumaturgus opticus* (cit. note 5), pp. 167–177.

an institution with which Vouet must have been familiar after his long stay in Rome, namely, the Couvent de la Place Royale, the mother house of the Order of Minims.⁶⁰

A few steps away from Vouet's Roman residence in Via Ferrattina (now Via Frattina) was the convent of the Trinità dei Monti, privileged affiliate of the Parisian headquarters of the O.M. in the Place Royale and well known to Francophile circles in Rome. It is difficult to believe that Vouet – the French king's protégé, a favourite of the Barberini, and painting master to Charles Mellin, who worked on the convent's decoration – would not have crossed its threshold with a certain frequency.⁶¹ The links between Italy and the French Minims date back to the founding of the order at the end of the fifteenth century, when Francis of Paola, a hermit who had become famous in his native Calabria thanks to his miraculous, thaumaturgical and healing skills, was summoned by the King of France in his last illness. Although the healer could do no more than advise the king to commend himself to God, his holiness and good intentions earned him the crown's protection and from then on the Order of the Minims enjoyed the unconditional support of the French monarchy, which did its best to encourage the spread of convents all over France and the rest of Europe.

In the sixteenth century the order proved to be one of the strongholds of the Counter-Reformation in France. However, this was not incompatible with its being highly independent – perhaps more than other religious orders of the time – favoring the interests of France instead of those of Rome.⁶² The main activity of the members, at least according to the order's rule, was the practice of the virtues exhorted by Francis of Paola, namely, austerity, meditation, and asceticism. They did not think highly of a life devoted to study, which was

60 About the Couvent de la Place Royale, see Odile Krakovitch, "Le couvent des Minimes de la Place Royale," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de Paris et de l'Île-de-France*, 1979, 39:87–258; id., "La vie intellectuelle dans le trois couvents minimes de la Place Royale, de Nigeon et de Vincennes," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de Paris et de l'Île-de-France*, 1982, 109:23–175.

61 On the important role played by the convent of Trinità dei Monti in scientific and artistic relations between Paris and Rome in the seventeenth century, see Antonella Romano, "La culture scientifique à Rome à la Renaissance," *MEFRIM*, 2002, 114/2:467–605; id., "Mathematics and Philosophy at Trinità dei Monti: Emmanuel Maignan and his legacy between Rome and France," in *Conflicting Duties: Science, Medicine and Religion in Rome (1550–1750)*, edited by Maria Pia Donato and Jill Kraye (London: The Warburg Institute, 2009), pp. 157–180; Pascal Duborg, Antonella Romano, "La Trinité-des-Monts dans la République romaine des sciences et des arts," *MEFRIM*, 2005, 117:7–43.

62 About the Order of Minims, see P.J.S. Whitmore, *The Order of Minims in Seventeenth-Century France*, in *International Archives of the History of Ideas* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1967).

considered to be a deviation from the path of religious righteousness and the search for authentic knowledge of the divine. But this did not stop them from drawing up a pedagogical project in the sixteenth century and selecting a series of outstanding friars to engage in this project. Not only did they establish scholarly libraries (including what was considered to be one of the finest libraries in Paris), but their convents, in particular the mother house in the Place Royale, soon became famous for the research that was conducted within their walls.

It was from the Couvent de la Place Royale that in the 1620s the Minim father Marin Mersenne set out to weave one of the most important networks of correspondence and exchange of philosophical and scientific information in the Baroque republic of letters. One of the Minims' hobby-horses was to combat superstition and atheism, but they found a modern way to confront this issue: far from opposing the scientific research and the new philosophies which seemed to threaten the pillars of tradition, they turned around and used them in their favour. Thanks above all to Marin Mersenne, one of their most illustrious members, they found in mathematics their best ally to demonstrate the power of reason, the gift with which God had endowed man. They forswore, however, mathematics interpreted in a metaphysical key, which could have been associated with Neoplatonic or cabalistic tendencies, instead preferring to follow the path of mathematics understood as the most powerful instrument of human reason, a tool with which to shape the architecture of reality.

The importance that the Minims ascribed to the practical dimension of knowledge was reflected in the interest they showed in engineering and the arts at a moment when mathematics had seeped into the pictorial arts no less than in the mechanical works.⁶³ They were in all aspects an atypical order, laden with inner contradictions: they exalted and fostered meditation and asceticism but at the same time showed a predilection for the practical applications of knowledge; they preached poverty and abstinence while enjoying the plaudits of the powerful; they defended the Church of Rome while heeding the wishes and interests of the king of France. It may have been precisely this ambiguous stance, and the absence of clear dogmatic rules, that allowed them to express themselves more freely.

We have no news regarding Vouet's relationship with the convent of the Trinità dei Monti during his Roman years, but he must have encountered the Minims, even if any links would have taken time to mature and we only begin to find traces after Vouet's return to Paris. The first known cylindrical anamor-

63 Cfr. Whitmore, *The Order of Minims* (cit. note 62), p. 151.

phosis in early modern Europe is that of Vouet; one of the first extended treatises on the subject was written by the Minim friar Jean François Nicéron; and finally, one of the most impressive anamorphoses of the seventeenth century – although not catoptric – is to be found in the Trinitá dei Monti, painted by the Minim friar Emmanuel Maignan. However, the story here is anything but linear and it is necessary to shuttle back and forth between Paris and Rome to follow the traces of the development of studies on anamorphoses and, of course, their application.

In fact, the first important treatise on catoptric anamorphosis was *The Perspective Curieuse* published by Nicéron in 1638, which would be followed in 1646 by his *Thaumaturgus Opticus* (1646). We shall return to these two texts later, but let us now turn to another mathematician and to his interest in the science of mirrors: Jean Louis de Vaulezard, a French knight of whom we know almost nothing beyond the fact that in 1630 he published a French edition of *In artem analyticam isagoge* (1591) by François Viète and that in the same year he published in Paris the *Perspective cylindrique et conique*, the first work to provide a geometrical treatment of cylindrical and conical anamorphoses. Cylindrical and conical mirrors must have started to appear in Paris, since the trail of marveling testimony begins there and Vaulezard recounts that it was his students who asked him for a lesson on the subject.⁶⁴ For them he wrote an intentionally short and simple treatise which drew a picture in words of a cylindrical anamorphosis which could very well apply to Vouet's drawing:

Provided a convex cylindrical mirror; provided a plane where a circle is described, equal to the base of the said mirror, and on which it is laid; & the eye's distance to the mirror & height over the plane provided. Provided as well a figure of one's choice, outlined & described on a flat surface, let us describe on the aforesaid plane another figure which will appear inside the cylinder exactly as the one proposed before, when the cylindrical mirror joints the circle on the plane & the eye is fixed on it at the required distance.⁶⁵

64 Jean Luois Vaulezard, *Perspective cilindrique et conique. Ou Traicté des apparences veuës par le moyen des miroirs cilindriques et cóniques, soient convexes ou concaues: ensemble la construction & position des figures objectées au mesmes miroirs, afin que leurs apparences soient conformes à la volonté* (Paris: Iulian Iacquín, 1630), "Advertissement au Lecteur," f. 1. See too Andersen, *The Geometry of an Art* (cit. note 58), p. 413.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Among the definitions and axioms which dominated Vaulezard's discourse there was space for a brief reflection on the feeling of wonder such mirrors provoke, when a confused mass of lines reconstructed on their surface almost magically turn into perfect and recognizable figures.⁶⁶ There was also just time enough for a fleeting reference to the philosophical consequences of such a wonderful artifact:

The eye brings back everything that it perceives to the intellect, as if it were the most perfect of things which are represented by the object, in spite of any defects, which are only referred to the position & disposition of the object in itself.⁶⁷

My thesis here is that it was precisely Vouet's anamorphic representation that, on his return to Paris, stimulated the curiosity of geometers and encouraged them to search for the rules underlying this new optical phenomenon. In the case of Vaulezard, there is no explicit mention of Vouet, but there is something perhaps more significant, namely, the book's frontispiece which features a cylinder on whose surface appears the image, not of an elephant, but of a human figure that could well be the portrait bust of Vouet (Figures 6, 7).⁶⁸

If we now attend to the words of Jacques D'Auzoles Lapeyre, in 1631 (one year after the publication of Vaulezard's work) a young French man of "eighteen years" made a portrait of him that "looks more like a monster than a man but the application of a cylinder on the indicated circle represents me so well and naturally that he very much resembles me."⁶⁹ The "extraordinary spirit" responsible for this anamorphic portrait of Lapeyre was none other than Jean François Nicéron, who – perhaps like Vaulezard's students – was fascinated by the recent novelty of cylindrical mirrors and their curious effects,

66 Ibid., pp. 26–27.

67 Ibid., p. 6.

68 This statement of mine should be taken as a simple interpretative hypothesis. It seems possible, in fact, that it was a visual quotation of Vouet and its resemblance to both the portrait by Leoni made shortly before and Vouet's self-portrait (preserved in the Museum of Fine Arts of Lyon) seems to support this assumption. One is struck, for example, by the wavy lock of hair that falls to the sitter's shoulder, a characteristic feature of Vouet's portraits in those years.

69 Cfr. Jacques D'Auzoles Lapeyre, *Mercurie Charitable* (Paris: Chappelle Saint Michael, 1638), pp. 72–73. According to Whitmore, *The Order of Minims* (cit. note 62), p. 156, 248–249, in the anamorphic portrait of D'Auzoles drawn by Nicéron there was nothing new or original, it being only the experimental application by the artist of the principles of perspective.

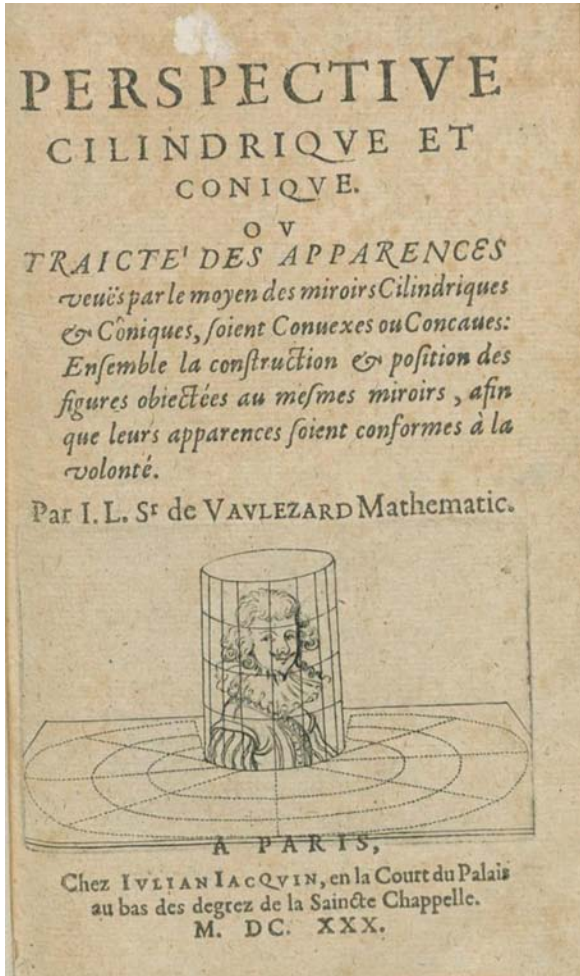


FIGURE 6 *Frontispiece to Jean-Louis Vaulezard's Perspective cilindrique et conique (1630)*

by Vouet's anamorphic elephant, or by some of the cylindrical anamorphoses which Vouet supposedly brought back with him from his trip many years ago to Constantinople.

Born in Paris in 1613, Niceron joined the order of the Minims in 1632, first entering the convent of Nigeon-Chaillet but then after a few months moving to the mother house in Place Royale.⁷⁰ There his taste for mathematics and

70 Agostino de Rosa has written excellent studies on the intellectual and personal life of

the marvelous effects of optics found fertile soil in which to develop, thanks in particular to the intellectual approach and projects of Marin Mersenne, whose conception of mathematics and the potential of human reason, alongside the general inclination of the Minims for the arts and sciences, proved essential to Nicéron's intellectual training. In 1638 he published *La perspective curieuse*, one of the most important works of the seventeenth century on perspective.⁷¹ Book III of this work was devoted to "catoptrics or the science of mirrors," which was capable of creating the most prodigious effects, an issue that Nicéron remembered having read in Book 17 of Della Porta's *Natural Magic*. Propositions III and IV offered an explanation of the invisible geometric rules which can turn distorted strokes into something perfectly recognizable if properly reflected and observed on a convex cylinder surface. The image chosen by Nicéron to help the reader understand this curious phenomenon was an anamorphosis of Saint Francis of Paula (plate LVIII) which, although signed by Nicéron, corresponds exactly to the saint's portrait painted by Vouet and engraved by Jean Lenfant.⁷² The book ends with proposition V, where we find a discussion of the geometrical properties of conical mirrors.

Nicéron; see especially his "L'oblio del visibile, la memoria dell'invisibile: Jean François Nicéron taumaturgo ottico," in *Jean François Nicéron. Prospettiva, catottrica e magia artificiale*, edited by Agostino De Rosa (Rome: Aracne, 2013), pp. 3–85. De Rosa notes that besides the portrait of Jacques D'Auzoles, in the years immediately following, Nicéron made several similar portrayals, currently preserved in the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Palazzo Barberini, in Rome. De Rosa (cit., p. 10) also mentions that Nicéron may have made the drawing for a memorial equestrian of D'Auzoles "lost today." I believe that the drawing recently acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and consisting of a cylindrical anamorphosis after a drawing by Hendrick Goltzius (Accession Number: 2013.203), attributed to Nicéron and dated between 1620 and 1640, could be this drawing.

71 *La perspective curieuse, ou magie artificielle des effets merveilleux: de l'optique par la vision directe, la catoptrique par la reflexion des miroirs plats, cylindriques & coniques, la dioptrique par la refraction des cristaux* (Paris: Pierres Billaine, 1938). Mersenne and Gilles Personne de Roberval, after the death of Nicéron, prepared a new edition of the book, this time with the title: *La perspective curieuse du reverend P. Nicéron, minime, divisée en quatre livres. Avec L'optique et la catoptrique du R.P. Mersenne ... mise en lumiere après la mort de l'auteur* (Paris: Langlois, 1652) and reprinted it in 1663.

72 Preserved in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Département des Estampes. On the Third Book of *La perspective curieuse*, see Isabella Friso, "Dal terzo libro de la *Perspective Curieuse*: sulla riflessione, sulla cattottrica e sugli specchi" and Cristina Candito, "Jean François Nicéron: cattottrica e anamorfofi," both in De Rosa, *Jean François Nicéron* (cit. note 70), pp. 351–378 and 237–249 respectively. See also Didier Bessot, "Synthèse et développement de techniques d'anamorphoses au XVII^e siècle: les traités du père Jean-François Nicéron," *MEFRIM*, 2005, 117:91–129.



FIGURE 7 Simon Vouet's portrait painted by Ottavio Leoni, ca. 1625

La perspective curieuse opens with a beautiful frontispiece that offers a visual index of its contents and programme (Fig. 8). Against a classicist architectural structure, two *putti* accoutred with a polyhedral lens and a pointer gaze in astonishment at a panel, discovering how a confused conglomerate of Ottoman faces can be transformed through a marvelous optical artifice into the portrait of the Christian King of France. Behind them another *putto* looks up delightedly at an inverted conic anamorphosis hanging from the vault of an arch, while in

the foreground to the right a fourth *putto* points to a portrait of King Louis XIII that he is contemplating, anamorphically reflected in the surface of a cylindrical mirror.⁷³ The similarity between this anamorphic portrait and the image of the elephant made by Vouet a few years before is striking, leading us to think that the frontispiece of the *Perspective curieuse*, which only bears the signature of Pierre Daret de Cazeneuve (“Daret sculpsit”), could have been designed and drawn by Vouet.⁷⁴ It must be remembered that beginning in 1637 Daret would be one of Vouet’s closest collaborators, a loyal interpreter of his style and a devoted custodian and curator of the engraved plates of his oeuvre after his death.⁷⁵ At the same time, although we do not have documentary evidence of a relationship between Vouet and Nicéron during this period, it is worth noting that Vouet was a habitué of the convent in the Place Royale as he was entrusted by the Minim fathers with the decoration of some of its halls.

In the same year which saw the publication of his first work, Nicéron was appointed mathematics teacher by the general of the Minim order and sent to the Roman convent of the Trinità dei Monti, where he stayed from the end of May 1639 to the end of March 1642. It was there that he met another of the artists and mathematicians closely associated with the production of anamorphic images – Emmanuel Maignan, who was himself a member of the Minim order and with whom Nicéron collaborated in the realization of the anamorphic

73 For a detailed analysis of this frontispiece, see Agostino De Rosa, “I Trattati di Jean François Nicéron,” in De Rosa, *Jean François Nicéron* (cit. note 70), pp. 271–284; id., “Il divino codice segreto della magia artificiale: I trattati di Jean François Nicéron,” in *Rappresentazioni alle soglie del vuoto*, edited by Agostino De Rosa and Giuseppe D’Acunto (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2014), pp. 145–181.

74 This hypothesis was proposed by William Crelly in *The Painting of Simon Vouet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), pp. 16–17, 110–120, but has been contested by De Rosa (“L’oblio del visibile” (cit. note 70), pp. 74–75, pp. 26, 74, n. 134) based on the study of Marianne Grivel, “Excudit et privilèges. Les éditeurs de Vouët,” in *Simon Vouet: actes du colloque international* (cit. note 13), pp. 307–329, 321–222. However, I believe that De Rosa may have misinterpreted Grivel’s words; she only asserts that Daret only became the editor of Vouet plates after 1640, but we should not confuse “editor” with “engraver.” Obviously, Daret had produced several engravings based on Vouet’s works prior to that date. In the case of the frontispiece of *La perspective curieuse*, the engraver (*sculpsit* or *incisit*) was Daret and the editor (*excudit*) was Pierre Billaine; only the *inventor* remains unknown.

75 Cfr. Grivel, “Excudit et privilèges” (cit. note 74), pp. 320–321. Note also that one of the greatest ambitions of Daret (1605–1678) was to become the engraver of the most important books in the context of the philosophical and scientific debate of his time. See Simon Lhopiteau, “Pierre Daret: étude monographique et catalogue de son oeuvre,” PhD Thesis (Centre André Chastel, 2005).



FIGURE 8 Frontispiece to Jean François Niceron's *La perspective curieuse* (1638)

painting in the convent of the Trinità dei Monti.⁷⁶ Our story therefore seems to be coming full circle. The first cylindrical anamorphosis was created in an atelier very close to Monte Pincio, where the Minims had their headquarters in Rome, by Simon Vouet, a French artist who would later move back to Paris, but the further development of the “depraved perspective” would be by Nicéron’s hand, when he was sent by his order to the city of the seven hills.⁷⁷ In these years Nicéron undertook the task of preparing a revised and more complete version of his work on anomalous perspectives for a scholarly readership, although, as in the original version of *La Perspective curieuse*, he states on the first page that it would also be a “curious and useful work for painters, architects, sculptors and all those whose work rests on the study of drawing.” This amplified work was *Thaumaturgus opticus*, which was published in 1646 but whose impact Nicéron would never see as he died prematurely at the age of 33 in the autumn of that same year.⁷⁸ If in the case of *La Perspective curieuse* doubts hover over the authorship of its frontispiece, in the case of the *Thaumaturgus* it is clear that the engraving was the work of Simon Vouet,⁷⁹ whom Nicéron in his opening remarks to the reader in both works describes as the epitome of expertise in optics and, in particular, its application. Almost twenty years after he conceived his anamorphic emblem, this frontispiece demonstrates Vouet’s continued interest in exploring the marvelous effects of optics, and the work of a new generation of geometers such as Nicéron reveals its debt to the painters and the visual poetics of the Baroque.

76 See Cosimo Monteleone, “Toto Habet sacramenta quot delineationes: il San Giovanni Evangelista di Jean François Nicéron a Roma,” in De Rosa, *Jean François Nicéron* (cit. note 70), pp. 167–210.

77 The relationship between Nicéron and Maignan and their collaboration in the mathematical studies for and the realization of the anamorphic decoration of the convent of Trinità dei Monti would exceed the scope of this article. I therefore refer the reader to other studies: Agostino De Rosa, “Passi nell’infinito: le opere dei padri Emmanuel Maignan e Jean François Nicéron a Trinità dei Monti, Roma,” in De Rosa, *Jean François Nicéron* (cit. note 70), pp. 153–166; Giulio Frattini, Francesco Moriconi, “Datazione e attribuzione dell’anamorfosi di San Giovanni a Pathmos presso il Convento della Trinità dei Monti a Roma,” *MEFRIM*, 2010, 117:123–135; Romano, “Mathematics and Philosophy at Trinità dei Monti” (cit. note 61), pp. 160–166; Whitmore, *The Order of Minims* (cit. note 62), pp. 155–186.

78 *Thaumaturgus opticus, seu admiranda Optices [...], Catoptrices [...], Dioptrices [...] Pars prima* (Paris: Langlois, 1646).

79 For a detailed analysis of this frontispiece, which was engraved by Charles Audran, see De Rosa, “I Trattati di Jean François Nicéron” (cit. note 73); id, “Il divino codice segreto della magia artificiale” (cit. note 73).

Vouet did not compose his drawing of the elephant on the cylindrical mirror by applying the rules of cylindrical anamorphosis, which were still unknown, nor it seems did Nicéron when he painted the anamorphic portrait of Jacques D'Auzoles in 1631. In Europe the study of cylindrical anamorphosis did not originate from an independent and linear development of the geometric science of perspective, although many of the geometrical principles that would make it possible were known. The triggering factor is to be found in that "lordly racket" – to use Panofsky's expression – in that great tumult of ideas, communicative practices, expressive poetics and reflections on the nature of knowledge which, indissolubly coinciding in time, gave rise to Baroque culture in Italy during the first decades of the seventeenth century.

Vouet conceived his original anamorphic representation in order to produce an emblem that would reflect the moral virtues of its owner. However, he was able to resort to this particular subject – the curious and marvelous cylindrical mirror – because in the cultural atmosphere that surrounded him, in a world eager for innovation in the arts and sciences, the dream of human reason conceived as the faithful mirror of nature, a passive perception that restricted itself to impinging on the mind with the simple information conveyed by the senses, had begun to fall apart. This fundamental shift was already present in Galileo's *Saggiatore* and, albeit in a very different way and based on quite dissimilar philosophical assumptions, Giovanni Battista della Porta had also begun to open the path with his *Magia naturale*; intimations could be found in Pietro Accolti's *Lo inganno degli occhi*; and as early as 1644 Gian Lorenzo Bernini would write that "Ingenuity and design constitute the Magic Art by whose means you deceive the eye and make your audience gaze in wonder."⁸⁰ These are but a few of the endless examples of the encounters that took place between the expressivity of art, the science of optics, and natural and artificial magic in the Baroque period.⁸¹ Such complex syntheses, such theatrical tur-

80 Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *L'Impresario*, edited by Massimo Ciavolella and Donald Beecher, in *Gianlorenzo Bernini: New Aspects of his Art and Thought*, edited by Irving Lavin (London /University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), p. 102.

81 I plan to continue my research analyzing the relationship between the development of this type of anamorphosis from Vouet to Nicéron on the one hand, and Descartes's reflections on vision and the sciences of optics and catoptrics on the other, as well as the influence of anamorphic practices on the development of new concepts by intellectuals such as Descartes and Gassendi regarding the theory of knowledge. Interesting in this sense is the work by Lyle Massey, *Picturing Space, Displacing Bodies. Anamorphosis in Early Modern Theories of Perspective* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), where the author reviews Baltrusaitis's brief assertions on this issue. For reasons of space, this part of my work will have to be postponed to another article.

moil dominated by illusionism and the deceiving of the senses, was perfectly captured by Nicéron, who seems to paraphrase Della Porta when he addresses the reader to explain the title of his work, *La Perspective curieuse*: “curious” not for its usefulness, which was undisputed, but because it added the delectable to the useful; “artificial magic” because, even though to people’s ears this could seem a suspicious expression, “we are entitled to call artificial magic that which produces the most beautiful and admirable effects which art and human industry could attain.” The perspective was the true magic, the perfection of all the sciences, the queen of the art of prestidigitation.⁸² And geometry, as was the case with natural history in those times, now owed an immense debt to the emblematic tradition.

82 Nicéron, *La perspective curieuse*, “Au Lectour.” The pages of the *Opticus Thaumaturgus* dedicated to the reader are almost the same, and the same arguments are set forth, although it should be noted that the term “magic” has been removed, the author using instead the term “thaumaturgy.” On the relations between optical and natural magic see Clark, *Vanities of the Eye* (cit. note 57), chap. 3, who underlines the relevance of the concept of *praestigium*.