



PORTRAIT OF URBAN VIII

Among the portrait busts of Pope Urban VIII Barberini (1623-1644) created by Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680), this bronze example, preserved in the Vatican Apostolic Library, derives directly from the 1632 marble *portrait*, a masterpiece of Bernini's portraiture, now in the collections of the National Galleries of Ancient Art in Palazzo Barberini.

The similarity between these two works also determines the date of the bronze, which can therefore be traced back to 1632-1633, a period of intense portraiture activity for Bernini, who also created the famous busts of Scipione Borghese, the highly cultured nephew of Pope Paul V, and the noblewoman Costanza Bonarelli during those years. It is also known that in the 1630s Bernini developed a precise portrait formula specifically designed for the execution of the figure of Urban VIII.

Originally, the bust was housed in the Barberini family library, set within a niche in the wooden bookcase crafted in 1633 by Giovanni Battista Soria. In 1902, it was transferred from Palazzo Barberini to the Vatican Library, which acquired it along with the entire bookcase and the entire Barberini Library.

The portrait, in its simplicity—with only a *mozzetta* and a *camauro* on his head—offers a shining example of formal synthesis and emotional intensity. Every detail of the face is rendered with meticulous care. The image, which makes a powerful impression as a whole, highlights the psychological depth and charismatic personality of the pontiff.

At the time, the marble version was described as “an effigy of such beauty and likeness” for having been created quickly and wonderfully. Similarly, the bronze bust embodies the same expressive power and refinement of workmanship and finish. The material quality of the bronze also shows an extremely vivid play of light and shadow which, in the different rendering of the surfaces, seems to give further movement and softness to the face and robe.