# INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2015, seated in the quiet reading room of the Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome, I found myself immersed in the study of 17th-century frontispieces of musical editions. My initial inquiry concerned the involvement of Flemish and Dutch artists in the production of these engravings, an intersection of artistic and musical patronage that hinted at broader networks of exchange between musicians, publishers, and visual artists. While engaged in this exploration, I had the privilege of working next to Professor Eric Bianchi, who was examining a volume by Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680), adorned with intricate marginalia likely drawn by Kircher himself. It was through Prof. Bianchi that I first encountered the manuscript MS 2478, previously studied by Margaret Murata.[1] Despite her meticulous research, the origins and significance of its decorative elements remained elusive.

As I turned the pages of MS 2478, I was immediately captivated by the delicacy and refinement of its pen-and-ink drawings. Despite their small scale, these images exhibited remarkable mastery of aerial perspective and spatial rendering. Their stylistic traits struck me as distinctly Flemish—an intriguing contrast to the overtly Roman character of the cantatas they accompanied.



Fig. 1 Luigi Rossi, "Erminia sventurata," I-Rc MS 2478.01.

Who created these images, and why? What circumstances had led to the inclusion of

Netherlandish artistic elements in a manuscript so deeply rooted in the Roman musical tradition? These questions lingered long after I had left the library, their significance heightened by the absence of scholarship addressing these visual embellishments in such musical sources.

It was not until the following year that my focus fully shifted toward the study of secular cantata manuscript decorations. While browsing the online catalogue of the Ashmolean Museum, I stumbled upon a collection of pen drawings attributed to Stefano della Bella (1610-1664). Mounted on thick laid paper and bound into an album, these sheets bore an unexpected revelation: faintly visible beneath the surface of the mount paper were musical staves and fragments of text. Determined to investigate further, I travelled to Oxford, where—armed with a desk lamp—I transcribed the texts I could read through the mounting paper. Cross-referencing them with the CLORI database,[2] I identified their origins in four distinct cantata manuscripts, all dateable to the late-17th century.



Fig. 2 Photos by the author of album WA1942.49 at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.

This realization not only challenged an established attribution but also pointed to a larger, unresolved question: how many other manuscript

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[1] Murata 2003, p. 661.

[2] CLORI is a database of Italian cantatas: www.cantataitaliana.it; this tool will be discussed later in the text.

decorations had been similarly misattributed or overlooked? It became clear that what initially seemed like a minor curiosity was, in fact, an entire field of research waiting to be explored.

## 0.1 ARGUMENT

The manuscript volumes of 17th and 18th century secular cantatas offer insight into the cultural landscape of the Italian aristocracy while also reflecting broader European influences, particularly through the activities of Italian patrons residing abroad.[3] Towards the end of the 18th century, the volumes were avidly collected and circulated also beyond Italy's borders.[4]

Secular cantatas are vocal compositions for one or more voices with instrumental accompaniment, often performed in private settings for a select audience. Typically composed for special occasions, such as academic gatherings, diplomatic visits, and weddings, these works frequently explore themes of love, drawing inspiration from both contemporary and classical literature.[5] The manuscripts that preserve them were meticulously copied by professional copyists, often in elegant script, and adorned with exquisite bindings and embellishments.[6] The degree of ornamentation varies: some volumes feature elaborate calligraphic initials, zoomorphic, vegetal, or anthropomorphic decorative initials, and finely crafted vignettes, while in other cases the subjects represented may be more difficult to interpret.

Such refined craftsmanship suggests that these manuscripts were often intended for collectors rather than practical performance use.[7] Patrons not only commissioned these works for personal enjoyment but also exchanged them as prestigious gifts among like-minded collectors.[8]

The artistic choices in decoration, whether purely ornamental or allusive to the patron, recipient, or thematic content of the cantata, reflect the cultural and intellectual environment in which they were created.

Despite their rich artistic and historical value, the decorations in cantata manuscripts have been largely overlooked by art historians, likely due to their confinement within musical sources. However, these visual elements provide invaluable insight into the aspirations and tastes of the patrons who commissioned them.

They also serve as tangible evidence of the networks of collaboration between patrons, composers, copyists, musicians, and artists within the courts where cantatas were composed, performed, and preserved. Notable examples include illustrations in the volumes of Andrea Adami da Bolsena (1663-1742), signed and dated by Pier Leone Ghezzi (1674-1755), as well as the decorations discussed in Chapter 2, designed by Filippo Juvarra (1678-1736) for Antonio Ottoboni (1646-1720).[9] Similarly, musicological scholarship has largely neglected these decorations, despite their significance as indispensable sources of information. Analyzing this repertoire of images sheds light on patterns of patronage, the intended use of these volumes, and the movement of manuscripts across collections over time. Moreover, studying these visual elements enables the attribution of previously unidentified works to specific artists, contributing to the reconstruction of their oeuvres.

To date, scholarly musicological research has primarily focused on composers, copyists, patrons, and collectors, rarely considering all these figures simultaneously. Little to no attention has been given to drawings and decorations, nor has a methodology for their systematic study been

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[3] Fabris 2014; Ruffatti 2015.
[4] Bennett 2013; Coover 2001; Giovani 2017; Jeanneret 2017; Morelli-Simi Bonini 2016.
[5] Goudriaan 2013, p. 56; Klaper 2019; Rostirolla 2003; Sirch-Sciommeri 2014; Timms 2001.
[6] Jeanneret 2015; Morelli 2006; Ruffatti 2007.
[7] Murata 1993, pp. 254-255.
[8] Morelli 2006, pp. 22-26.
[9] Rostirolla 2001, pp. 445-449.

developed. This oversight may be due to limited familiarity with artistic techniques, challenges in identifying iconographic sources, or difficulties in attributing specific hands. Additionally, the scarcity of archival records documenting payments for manuscript embellishments has also contributed to this gap in scholarship.

This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by systematically examining the artistic elements of cantata manuscripts. My investigation, rooted in direct engagement with these sources, aims to highlight the visual culture that surrounded the secular cantata, revealing the networks of artists, patrons, and musicians that shaped its material form.

Through a series of case studies, this research project highlights the extensive documentary value of these images, while also considering the cognitive and interpretative processes involved in their reception by contemporaneous audiences. Decorations in cantata manuscripts invite a broader engagement that extends beyond the auditory experience. Their visual elements encourage contemplation, requiring intellectual and aesthetic interpretation from the viewer.

Following a presentation of the research context, problems, significance, and limitations of this study, this introduction provides a brief overview of the dissertation's chapters. Finally, the adopted methodology will be outlined, along with a detailed explanation of key terms used.

## 0.2 CONTEXTUALIZATION

Despite the growing interest in secular cantata manuscripts, research on their decorative apparatus remains sparse. Studies have primarily focused on composers and copyists.[10] For instance, the continuously updated bibliography on this vocal repertoire collected in CLORI contains no dedicated titles on decorations.[11] Furthermore, the structure of the database records for each cantata does not include dedicated specific fields for them.[12] Occasionally, terms such *Letterone*, *Iniziale*, or *Capolettera* [= capital letter, initial] appear within the searchable field of "notes". Nonetheless, CLORI has proved to be an extremely useful tool for this research, as it displays the first page of each cantata, allowing for immediate visualization of whether and how a manuscript is decorated.

Some foundational contributions, such as Giancarlo Rostirolla's analysis of Pierleone Ghezzi's musical output (caricatures, portraits, manuscript and book decorations), have drawn attention to the intersection between music, visual art, and patronage.[13] Similarly, scholars such as Ellen Rosand and Zachariah Victor have explored the relationship between text and image in Ghezzi's vignettes, particularly in relation to Alessandro Scarlatti's (1660-1725) cantatas.[14] However, these studies have not systematically addressed the technical execution, artistic authorship, and broader implications of manuscript decorations.

A significant advance in the study of decorated music manuscripts is found in Margaret Murata's monograph on Marc'Antonio Pasqualini's (1614-1691) cantatas.[15] In dating manuscript I-Rc Ms 2478 (discussed in Chapter 1), she closely examined the twelfth drawing, a highly detailed depiction of Piazza Navona in Rome.

Through architectural references, she determined that the manuscript was produced between 1651, the year of the Pamphilj obelisk's installation atop Bernini's Fountain of the Four Rivers, and 1656, when the façade of Sant'Agnese

[10] Jeanneret 2009; ead. 2015; ead. 2017; Marx-Watanabe 1987; Rose 1974; Ruffatti 2007; id. 2019.
[11] www.cantataitaliana.it
[12] https://cantataitaliana.it/en/node/1675 (last accessed 05.03.2025).

[13] Rostirolla 2001.
[14] Rosand-Victor 2004, pp. 154-157.
[15] Murata 2003, p. 661.

in Agone neared completion on the left side of the square.

Another crucial source of information regarding manuscript decoration, albeit outside the cantata repertoire, was found by Jean Lionnet in payment records for the oratory libretto San Marcello by Bernardo Pasquini (1637-1710).[16] In this case, Flavio Chigi (1631-1693) paid the artist Silvestro Nola (or Nolli) (fl. 1650–1677) a specified sum for the decoration of the manuscript. This remains the only known direct evidence of financial compensation for an artist involved in music manuscript embellishment. A second unpublished example will be analyzed in Chapter 4.

Carrie Churnside has also provided significant insights into secular cantatas set to music by Giovanni Paolo Colonna (1637-1695) and ingeniously decorated by Carlo Antonio Buffagnotti (1660-c. 1717).[17] This collection of compositions, GB-Lbl Add. MS 27931, was created as a gift, most likely for Cosimo III of Tuscany (1642-1723), in hopes of securing future commissions. This mode of operation is further confirmed by Churnside's analysis of a manuscript housed at the Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, I-MOe Mus.C.312, for which Buffagnotti produced a similar volume intended for Francesco II d'Este (1660-1694). The presence of a dedicatory letter, along with an accompanying letter found in the city archive in which Colonna acts as an intermediary between the court and the artist, provides rare documentary evidence of the mechanisms underlying the gifting of such decorated manuscripts and their implications.

Several other studies mention decorations but do not examine them thoroughly. See the study on the masterfully decorated manuscript dedicated to a "Signora Maria Pignatelli" discovered by Dinko Fabris and Giulia Anna Romana Veneziano, and later discussed by Alexandra Nigito.[18] Furthermore, Arnaldo Morelli and Eleonora Simi Bonini, have discussed the cantatas collected in Giovanni Battista Vulpio's (fl. 17th century) inventory of which several were decorated.[19]

Realizing the absence of scholarly attention, I began to approach these manuscripts not only as musical documents but as visual objects, shaped by the same aesthetic concerns that governed contemporary book illustration and collecting practices. My research has been guided by the conviction that these images, far from being mere embellishments, played a crucial role in shaping the reception and transmission of cantatas.

## 0.3 METHODOLOGY

This dissertation adopts a combined archival and analytical approach, integrating stylistic analysis, provenance research, and textual examination, to investigate the decoration of 17th and 18th century secular cantata manuscripts. Building upon the classification proposed by Margaret Murata, this study focuses on the *raccolte antologiche da collezione* [= anthological collections]. According to Murata, these collections were "compiled either by interested composers or professional copyists. Homogeneous in structure and handwriting, these sources are often the best-preserved due to their refined external appearance (rich bindings, decorated initials, pen-drawn vignettes). The unwieldy format suggests that they were not intended for practical use."[20]

This study is grounded in direct examination of manuscripts held in European libraries and private collections, including the British Library in London, the Casanatense Library in Rome, the Library and Museo della Musica in Bologna, the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, the University Library in Hamburg, and the Vatican

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[16] Lionnet 1980, p. 302.
[17] Churnside 2009.
[18] Fabris-Veneziano 2009; Nigito 2016.
[19] In Morelli-Simi Bonini 2016 see the transcriptions of the inventories on pp. 195-214.
[20] Murata 1993, pp. 254-255.

Library. The investigation focuses on artistic attributions, iconographic sources, and the socio-cultural context of the volumes' production and circulation. Given the interdisciplinary nature of this research project, it draws upon methodologies from the history of music, art, literature and collecting, as well as material culture studies.

A key methodological component of the present study is its technical and stylistic analysis of manuscript decorations, which allows for the identification of distinct hands and potential workshop practices. This study examines drawing techniques, including the use of different inks, graphite, chalk, and engraving, as well as compositional choices, such as shading, line quality, and spatial organization.

By comparing these elements across different manuscripts, it is possible to group decorations according to shared stylistic traits, suggesting connections between artists, copyists, or patrons.

Another fundamental aspect of the methodology is a systematic comparison of manuscript illustrations with contemporaneous iconographic sources, including prints, book illustrations, paintings, preparatory sketches, and loose drawings. This comparative approach helps determine whether specific images were copied, adapted, or newly conceived. The recurrence of iconographic models or specific techniques across multiple manuscripts can indicate the presence of a workshop, the involvement of a single artist, or the preferences of a patron who favored certain themes.

This research project has led to significant new attributions, including the identification of approximately 80 drawings by the Master of the Roman Songbook who was active in the context surrounding nobleman Domenico Jacovacci (1604-1661) in Chapter 1, and the attribution of 32 previously unrecognized designs to Filippo

Juvarra in Chapter 2. This latter attribution is particularly groundbreaking, as it sheds new light on Juvarra's early connections with the Ottobonian circle during his formative years in Rome. It is likely, as Rostirolla postulated regarding Ghezzi's drawings for Adami da Bolsena, that Juvarra may have seen the decoration of Antonio Ottoboni's cantatas as a means to gain recognition and secure future commissions.[21] Given that these works date to 1709-1710, it is no coincidence that in the following years, Juvarra was actively involved in Antonio and Pietro Ottoboni's (1667-1740) musical theater productions. This discovery offers a novel perspective on Juvarra's career trajectory and his strategic engagement with the Roman artistic milieu.

Finally, the drawing analyzed in Chapter 4, examined in relation to both its musical and visual components, is reattributed to Carlo Antonio Buffagnotti. Furthermore, the study reassesses its function as a gift to the author of the musical composition it displays.

This study acknowledges the methodological challenges inherent in attributing manuscript decorations. In many cases, the lack of archival documentation, such as payment records or explicit references to artists, complicates the process of identifying individual hands.

Moreover, distinguishing between original drawings and later additions, or between freehand compositions and those based on printed sources, presents further difficulties. Access to manuscripts can also be restrictive, with some volumes held in private collections or subject to conservation limitations. Where direct examination was not possible, this study relied on high-resolution digital reproductions and comparative visual analysis of related sources. As I examined these manuscripts firsthand, comparing decorative techniques and stylistic

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[21] Rostirolla 2001, pp. 445-446.

elements, I found myself reconstructing lost connections between artists and musicians, often through minute details that had gone unnoticed. This hands-on engagement with the materials shaped not only my methodological approach but also my understanding of the aesthetic and intellectual world in which these manuscripts were produced.

By addressing these methodological dimensions, this dissertation not only advances knowledge of manuscript decoration within the cantata repertoire but also contributes to broader discussions on artistic attribution, visual culture in musical sources, and the dynamics of artistic and intellectual exchange in Baroque Europe.

My methodological approach is shaped by my background in art history, with a specialization in graphic arts. Before focusing on manuscript decoration, I worked extensively with prints and drawings in Professor Ton Koopman's collection, where I developed expertise in the technical analysis of engravings, pen drawings, and iconographic sources. This direct engagement with historical graphic materials, handling objects, assessing their artistic execution, and tracing their provenance, provided me with essential tools for examining manuscript illustrations beyond their decorative function.

Applying this experience to the study of cantata manuscripts, I approach their visual elements as integral components of a broader artistic and intellectual context. Rather than treating them as secondary embellishments, I consider them as visual statements, shaped by artistic choices that reflect patronage dynamics, cultural trends, and the practical constraints of manuscript production. This interdisciplinary perspective, combining stylistic analysis with material study and archival research, allows for a more nuanced understanding of the intersection between music and visual culture in the 17th and 18th centuries.

## 0.4 TOOLS FOR THE RESEARCH: THE DATABASES CLORI AND MYNTHA

The CLORI database has been an essential tool in this research, providing transcriptions of cantata texts, detailed manuscript records, and corresponding bibliographic references. Additionally, CLORI includes technical musical data related to the performance of the pieces, which, while not directly relevant to this study, offer valuable contextual information. However, one notable limitation of the database is its lack of systematic documentation of manuscript decorations.

To address this gap, I engaged directly with the developers of the platform, particularly Prof. Teresa Maria Gialdroni (University of Rome Tor Vergata). Through discussions and collaboration, I was able to highlight the specific needs of my research. My participation in academic conferences, such as the 2019 symposium titled "Dal database alla ricerca: nuovi studi sulla cantata italiana" at Palazzo Primoli, and the masterclass I conducted in Rome in 2024 titled "Nel disegno della cantata", provided further opportunities to present these concerns and explore potential integrations and further collaborations.

During my research, I also developed a parallel database, Myntha, designed to bridge this gap by systematically cataloging manuscript decorations and linking them to CLORI's existing records. Myntha was created in collaboration with Dr. Chris Handy at Leiden University and aims to offer a more comprehensive approach to the visual and artistic aspects of cantata manuscripts. By integrating these resources, this study not only enhances our understanding of manuscript decoration but also contributes to the broader accessibility and documentation of these materials within the scholarly community.

Myntha was developed not merely as a repository of images, but as a purpose-built

research tool for the systematic documentation of manuscript decoration in cantata sources. The database is designed to capture a wide range of descriptive, technical, and contextual data. Each entry includes precise information on dimensions, technique, manuscript provenance, and connections to both existing and reconstructed cantatas. Where applicable, records are linked to the corresponding entries in the CLORI database and supported by bibliographic references. Iconographic subjects are standardized using ICONCLASS, ensuring compatibility with international museum practices.[22] Importantly, Myntha enables the direct comparison of decorations with their visual sources via an image-overlay toggle function. This feature supports attributional and compositional analysis, while a proportionality tool, measuring the relative scale between the illustrated subject and the human figure, offers insights into the legibility and intended visual impact of the decoration. By foregrounding these aspects, Myntha facilitates a more nuanced reading of cantata imagery and its interpretive frameworks, both aesthetic and performative. As such, Myntha not only responds to a lacuna in existing cantata catalogues but also exemplifies the broader methodological orientation of this dissertation, which emphasizes the interplay between image, music, and material context in the study of 17th- and 18th-century manuscript culture.

## 0.5 TERMINOLOGY AND CLASSIFICATION

The terminology used to describe manuscript decoration varies across disciplines, often lacking a systematic classification in relation to musical sources. This dissertation establishes a structured vocabulary to differentiate among formats, types of decorated elements found in cantata manuscripts, and the diverse techniques used to realize them. Although different techniques and types of decorations may be present at the same time, by defining these categories, this dissertation contributes to a more precise and systematic analysis of visual elements in music manuscripts.

In developing this classification, I have drawn inspiration from previous studies on manuscript decoration, particularly those of Giuseppina Zappella, which provide a foundational framework for analyzing initials and their stylistic variations.[23]

### 0.5.1 FORMAT

The manuscripts examined in this research exist in various formats. One common size is *quarto oblungo*, measuring approximately 10 x 27 cm, also known as *carta da ariette*. This format typically contains four staves arranged in two systems for solo voice and basso continuo or three staves for two voices and basso continuo. Another frequent format is *carta reale*, measuring 20 x 27 cm, which doubles the height of the previous format while maintaining the same width. This size accommodates eight staves grouped into four systems for solo voice and basso continuo or two systems for three voices and basso continuo. Alternatively, it may feature six staves grouped into three systems for solo voice and basso continuo or two systems for two voices and basso continuo. In rare cases, the 20 x 27 cm format is used with staves traced along the short side of the sheet. The sheets were often trimmed, a necessary step for gilding the exposed edges not enclosed by the binding. In some cases, these free edges were instead colored red or other hues. Volumes of exceptional format diverge from these

[22] ICONCLASS is a hierarchical classification system for iconographic content, originally developed by art historian Henri van de Waal in the Netherlands during the mid-20th century. Widely adopted by museums,

libraries, and image databases, it enables the standardized description and retrieval of subjects depicted in visual artworks. https://iconclass.org/.
[23] Zappella 2012; ead. 2013.

common sizes. For instance, the large vellum volumes designed by Carlo Antonio Buffagnotti, discussed in Chapter 4, measure 36.2 x 30.3 cm.

Like printed music editions, initials or decorations are typically positioned in the top left corner of the page. A blank space is left at the beginning, with the staves starting slightly towards the right. Generally, the drawn decoration occupies an area ranging from 6 to 8 cm by 8 to 10 cm.

Margaret Murata has argued that richly decorated volumes were not intended for practical use and were difficult to perform from.[24] However, the cantata collections discussed in Chapter 2 offer an alternative perspective, suggesting that some of these manuscripts, despite their elaborate ornamentation, may have been assembled after their initial use in performance.

A valuable glimpse into how cantatas may have been performed is provided by one of the wide portraits Anton Domenico Gabbiani (1652–1726) painted of the Florentine court musicians, now held at the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Florence (inv. 1890, 2802). Though the sitters have not yet been identified with certainty, it is particularly notable that the harpsichordist is playing from a score where both the text and notation for the soprano line are present, allowing him to embellish the notated basso continuo part according to his own creativity. The singer holds a copy of the same score in his hands. Interestingly, the music is written on carta da ariette, and the pages are kept together by a red ribbon, suggesting a practical and flexible format for performance. This visual evidence offers an alternative to the – as Murata suggested - "unwieldy bound collections" narrative and contributes to a better understanding of the ways in which cantatas may have been performed.

## 0.5.2 TECHNIQUE

While techniques may vary even within the same volume, they generally fall into two main categories: free-hand methods and printing-derived methods, which may also be combined. The first category includes drawings executed in pen and ink, brush and ink (using tempera, gouache, watercolor, white chalk, etc.), bistre, graphite, as well as black and red chalk. These methods involve direct application of the medium onto the surface. By contrast, the second category consists of techniques such as engraving, etching, and drypoint, which create images through printing processes. The complexity of these techniques necessitates specialized labor and the use of specific tools, such as printing presses.[25]

## 0.5.3 OVERVIEW OF FORMATS, TECHNIQUES AND TYPES OF DECORATION

Decorative elements in cantata manuscripts vary significantly in complexity and function. Table 0.1 offers a structured overview of principal types. This chart represents different types of formats, and techniques, as well as various types of decoration, vignettes and initials that can be found in cantata manuscripts. It should be noted that some fields in the chart have been left blank. Given the wide range of techniques encountered so far, and considering their strong affinity with 17th- and 18th-century drawing and printing techniques, it is highly plausible that similar methods were also employed be linked to the same production context. For example, manuscripts US-Cn Vault Case MS 5067 and GB-Cfm MU MS 131, although not the focus of this thesis, are worth mentioning as cases that have not yet been compared in the literature but that share these distinctive features.

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[24] "[...] (3) Formal anthologies typically of uniform hand and gathering structure. They can also be autograph or professionally copied. They are often oversize, decorated and probably not intended to be used for performance. [...]". Murata 1990.

[25] When multiple 'hybrid' manuscripts—characterized by printed decorations or initials—are found, they can

in cantata volumes. Finally, while paper is the predominant support material, in some cases, the manuscripts may have been produced on parchment, as evidenced by the two magnificent volumes decorated by Carlo Antonio Buffagnotti.

## 0.6 DECORATION RECEPTION

The interaction between visual decoration and the reception of music in these manuscripts operates on multiple levels. While the primary function of these volumes remains musical, their embellishments suggest a more nuanced and multifaceted engagement within the cantata repertoire. The visual elements encourage both intellectual and sensory engagement, bridging the auditory and pictorial realms.

Although I am not a musician and therefore cannot assess the performability of these manuscripts in practical terms, my approach focuses on the interaction between image, text, and page layout.

Rather than evaluating their usability for performance, I examine how visual elements interact with the structure of the manuscript as a whole, whether they follow consistent patterns, whether they were conceived as part of a unified artistic project, and how they contribute to the reader's experience of the text. The sequencing of decorated pages, the placement of initials and vignettes, and their relationship to the surrounding textual content all provide crucial insights into the intended function of these manuscripts beyond their auditory purpose.[26]

Considerations regarding the perception of the musical page when enriched with decoration or imagery are relevant. In particular, the placement and sequencing of decorative elements within the manuscript may not be arbitrary but rather can actively shape the reader's experience. The order in which the cantatas are bound also influences the way the images are encountered, creating visual and thematic connections between them. In some cases, this structured arrangement generates deliberate contrasts or continuities, as seen in the Ghezzi manuscript at Yale, US-NH Misc. Ms. 166, where images with distinct chromatic qualities, monochromatic gray tones or warm reddish hues, alternate systematically. As the pages are turned, this interplay of color produces a perceptible visual rhythm, enhancing engagement with both the imagery and the manuscript.

Decorations, by virtue of their typology, serve a more complex role: they may illustrate the theme of the cantata, allude to the patron, or reference the intended recipient of the manuscript. For instance, in Chapter 1, decorative elements are shown to primarily serve a contemplative function. Elite readers, presumably well-versed in artistic trends, could immerse themselves in the landscapes, recognizing themes, stylistic traits, or specific artistic influences. The prevalence of Flemish-like landscapes, which were fashionable at the time, along with recognizable Roman cityscapes or literary subjects derived from widely circulated prints, such as those by Antonio Tempesta (1555–1630), suggests a sophisticated visual culture that complemented the cantata's musical dimension. In Chapter 2, the act of discernment plays a crucial role in the reception of manuscript decorations. Initials are sometimes hidden within vignettes or constructed through intricate combinations of phytomorphic, anthropomorphic, and zoomorphic elements. This interplay between text and image engages the viewer in an active process of decoding, transforming the act of reading into a playful exercise in recognition and interpretation.

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[26] I sincerely hope that singers and instrumentalists will assess the performability of these volumes by reading directly from their decorated pages.
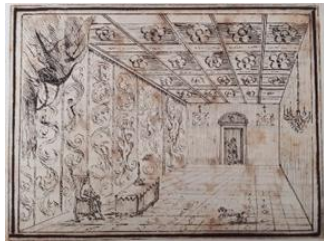
Table 0.1

| **Format** | | |
|---|---|---|
| Quarto oblungo, or *carta da ariette* | Ca. 10 x 27 cm | |
| | Luigi Rossi, *Io piangea presso d'un rio*, [Composizioni vocali da camera], I-GR Crypt. it. 2.01 |  |
| Oblong format | Ca. 20 x 27 cm | |
| | Unknown, *All'or ch'avverso fato*, Cantate musicali di diversi autori (…), GB-Lbl MS Add.34057.09 |  |
| Royal format | Ca. 36,2 x 30,3 cm | |
| | Giovanni Paolo Colonna (design: Carlo Antonio Buffagnotti), *Che al rotar di molti anni*, GB-Lbl Add. MS 27931.21 |  |

| Technique | | |
|---|---|---|
| Freehand | Pen and ink(s), wash, heightening | |
| | Antonio Biffi (design: Filippo Juvarra), *Madre, vicina è l'ora*, GB-Lbl MS Add. 34056.21 |  |
| | Brush and ink(s): wash, heightening | |
| | Alessandro Scarlatti (design: Pier Leone Ghezzi), *Di Cipresso funesto*, US-NH Misc. Ms. 166.07 |  |
| | Chalk(s) | |
| Plate printed | Engraving | |
| | Etching | |
| | Alessandro Stradella, *Vaghe calme*, GB-Cfm MU MS 131.07 |  |
| | Drypoint | |
| **Types** | | |
| Calligraphic initial | Ornamental initials created through elaborate calligraphy rather than pictorial illustration. They serve to embellish the text while maintaining a strong connection with the text. They are generally traced in pen and ink. | |
| | Alessandro Scarlatti, *Sento nel core*, I-Mc L.22.24 |  |
| Decorated initial | Unlike purely calligraphic initials, these feature additional artistic elements such as floral motifs, figurative embellishments, or abstract designs. | |
| Allusive | Some initials contain visual elements that reference the text, composer, patron, or a symbolic theme. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Giovanni Buzzoleni, *Lumi scaltri troppo fieri*, I-BGc Fald. 227/84b.2 |  |
| Non-allusive | Some initials serve a purely ornamental function without a direct link to the content | |
| | Unknown (design: Master of the Roman Songbook, or context of Domenico Jacovacci), unknown cantata, ["A"] *Naked Fortune on a wheel*, US-NYSwann 4

The allegorical female figure holding the drape (sail) forms with this item the capital letter "P". |  |
| Phytomorphic | Initials formed with plant-shaped motifs | |
| | Anonymous (design: Filippo Juvarra), *Del costante amor*, GB-Lbl MS Add. 34056.04 |  |
| Zoomorphic | Initials formed with animal-shaped motifs | |
| | Alessandro Scarlatti (design: Filippo Juvarra), *M'ha diviso il cor dal core*, GB-Lbl MS Add. 34056.19 |  |
| Anthropomorphic | Initials formed with human-shaped motifs | |
| | Luigi Rossi, *Al soave spirar d'aure serene*, F-Pn RES VM7-59-101.01 |  |
| Figurative | Initials formed with other figurative motifs | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Luigi Rossi, *Ch'io sospiri al vostro foco*, F-Pn RES VM7-59-101.28 |  |
| Combined | Initials formed with combinations of motifs | |
| | Carlo Francesco Pollarolo (design: Filippo Juvarra), *Cara Filli, io ti lasciai*, GB-Lbl MS Add. 34057.01 |  |
| Vignette with initial | Representations imbued with spatial connotations. These may range from simple elements such as groundlines or sky textures to more elaborate depictions of seascapes, landscapes, or architectural backdrops. They often accompany the initials, sometimes reinforcing their meaning, or serving as decorative flourishes independent of textual content. | |
| Allusive | Vignette visually recalling the theme of the cantata, with initial. | |
| | Alessandro Scarlatti (design: Filippo Juvarra), *O sol degl'occhi miei*, GB-Lbl MS Add. 34056.14 |  |
| Non allusive | Vignette with theme unrelated to the cantata, and with initial*. | |
| | Unknown (design: Master of the Roman Songbook, or context of Domenico Jacovacci), unknown cantata [on verso last verses of Luigi Rossi's *Chi consiglia un dubbio core*], ["A"] *Carnival in the streets of Rome*, US-NYSwann 1<br><br>*) in this case the text of the cantata is not known. |  |
| Historiated | Vignette with initial, featuring subjects drawn from other (literary) sources | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Unknown (design: Master of the Roman Songbook, or context of Domenico Jacovacci), unknown cantata, [*"P"*] *Two soldiers shaking hands or Castor and Pollux*, US-NYSwann 2 |  |
| Hidden | Vignette with initial concealed within the decorative scheme. These initials require active engagement from the viewer to be discerned. | |
| | Alessandro Stradella, *Pensi olà, che si bada?*, Oxford, Ashmolean museum, GB-OAM WA1942.49.29, olim D-Hs ND VI 2263,1.13 |  |
| Vignette without initial | | |
| Allusive | The vignette illustrates the content of the cantata's text | |
| | Giovanni Lorenzo, *Intorno a picciol lume*, Oxford, Ashmolean museum, WA1942.49.10, olim GB-Lbl. Add.24311.04 |  |
| Non allusive | The vignette illustrates a theme unrelated to the content of the cantata | |
| | Venanzio Leopardi (design: Master of the Roman Songbook, or context of Domenico Jacovacci), *Di già dato il tributo avea l'amante*, I-Rc MS 2478.16 |  |
| Full page drawing | In rare cases, manuscripts feature elaborate full-page illustrations that either complement the text or exist as independent artistic statements. Some examples include allegorical representations or detailed landscapes framing the musical notation. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Giovanni Paolo Colonna (design: Carlo Antonio Buffagnotti), *Ligio di due pupille*, I-MOe MUS C 312.05 |  |
| No initial /no vignette | | |
| Removed | | |
| Substituted | When the initial, vignette or decoration in general is removed and replaced with a patch of paper, usually inscribed with a textual initial. | |
| | Alessandro Stradella, *Il più tenero affetto*, GB-Lbl. Add.24311.01 |  |
| Not substituted | When only a patch is left without any other indications | |
| | Mario Savioni, *Ahi qual voce importuna*, US-CAh MUS Ms 106.01 |  |
| Not realized | When the space for the initial or decoration is left blank | |
| | Antonio Cesti, *Alpi nevose e dure*, I-PEu Cass. 23.07 |  |

Similarly, in Chapter 3, the initials—though concealed—are set within landscapes unmistakably derived from widely collected print series depicting views of Rome or other well-known backdrops. These include frontispieces from series by Ercole Bazzicaluva (1590–1641) or Balthasar Moncornet (1600–1668). Familiarity with these visual references would have enhanced the reader's engagement, as they navigated between musical and visual layers of meaning within the manuscript.

Finally, in Chapter 4, decoration takes precedence over musical performance. In this case, the drawing absorbs the text of the cantata, transforming it into a structural and visual representation of the composition itself. Although textual excerpts remain embedded within the design, they serve to reinforce the underlying themes of the cantata rather than functioning as a direct script for performance. This example highlights the extent to which manuscript decoration could transcend its illustrative function to become an integral part of the cantata's reception and reinterpretation.

Through this research project, I have come to see these decorated manuscripts as more than repositories of musical texts; they are objects of contemplation, intellectual engagement, and artistic ambition. Understanding them requires a dialogue between disciplines, musicology, art history, and material culture studies, an approach that has continuously shaped my perspective throughout this project.

## 0.7 THESIS STRUCTURE

Each chapter of this dissertation constitutes a separate case study; together they contribute to portraying the visual landscape in 17th- and 18th-century secular cantatas manuscripts and their reception.

The **first chapter** revolves around manuscript I-Rc Ms 2478 from the Biblioteca Casanatense. Through an in-depth analysis of its decorative elements, this study reconstructs a coherent group of drawings attributable to the circle of the Roman nobleman Domenico Jacovacci (1604–1661). Best known for his heraldic, genealogical, and bibliographic manuscripts, as well as for his role in city administration as Maestro di Strade, Jacovacci emerges here as a central figure in a localized visual culture of mid-17th-century Rome.

Although Jacovacci's historical writings have recently been examined by Maria Barbara Guerrieri Borsoi, the visual authorship of the *imprese* found in his manuscripts has never been conclusively addressed. This study argues that, in the absence of payments to external artists and given the highly autobiographical nature of many of the illustrations, these works are best understood as the product of Jacovacci's direct involvement—whether by his own hand or under his close supervision. Among these, particular attention is given to a compelling portrait of the composer Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583–1643), which prompts a reassessment of possible ties between Jacovacci and the musical culture of his time.

While no extant documentation explicitly links Jacovacci to musical activities, his close ties to prominent patrons of Baroque Rome—including popes, high-ranking prelates such as Cardinal Mazarin (1602–1661), monarchs like Queen Christina of Sweden (1626–1689), and artists including Jan Miel (1599–1663), Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi (1606–1680), and Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), with the latter deeply involved in theatrical and musical production—suggest a more complex and culturally embedded profile than has previously been acknowledged.

The **second chapter** shifts focus to two cantata manuscripts decorated by Filippo Juvarra. These manuscripts, already known for their exceptional artistic quality, reveal significant aspects of Juvarra's early artistic practice and his approach to integrating visual elements within musical contexts. This case study examines

Juvarra's technique, the interplay between image and text, and the broader implications of his involvement in manuscript decoration.

The **third chapter** investigates a collection of drawings preserved in an album at Oxford, traditionally attributed to Stefano della Bella. This case study demonstrates that these drawings were originally vignettes removed from four late-17th-century cantata manuscripts. By tracing the sources of these drawings, many of which were copied from contemporaneous prints, this chapter reconstructs the provenance history of one of the four manuscripts, previously believed lost or destroyed during World War II. This volume, exclusively featuring cantatas by Alessandro Stradella (1643-1682), provides new insights into the circulation and collection of cantata manuscripts in England between the late- 18th and early- 19th centuries. The practice of extracting illustrations from manuscripts, while not uncommon, is explored in light of the collecting activities of Sir John Symmons (1745-1831), who likely separated these drawings to sell them individually due to financial constraints.

Additionally, this chapter examines the iconographic sources for these decorations, which were predominantly prints published in France, that depict urban Roman landscapes from the early 17th century to the 1640s, highlighting the rapid dissemination of visual culture across Europe. The placement of initials within the illustrations, mirroring the approach seen in Juvarra's manuscripts, suggests an intentional engagement with the reader and performer through visual interplay.

Finally, the **fourth chapter** presents an in-depth study of a case in which a cantata was transformed into a visual representation and gifted as a token of friendship by Carlo Antonio Buffagnotti to the composer Giovanni Battista Bassani (1650-1716). This chapter establishes that the drawing is one of Buffagnotti's earliest works, datable to 1684 based on the publication date of the cantata it features. Buffagnotti, a multifaceted figure who worked as a graphic artist, musician, composer, and music printer, did not date his works. However, by identifying the specific cantata depicted, this study provides a secure chronological reference for his artistic output. The drawing reflects Buffagnotti's early influences, particularly his engagement with the graphic style of Stefano della Bella, whose works he encountered through his training with Mengazzino (Domenico Santi, 1621-1694), a pupil of Agostino Mitelli senior (1609-1660), who was a direct associate of della Bella. The practice of gifting artistic works as a means of securing patronage is further contextualized by Buffagnotti's later production of two extraordinary cantata manuscripts for Cosimo III and Francesco II d' Este, as well as his design of a printed tribute to the singer Piera Ghei (fl. 17th century), who performed in a 1693 opera by Giacomo Antonio Perti (1661-1756) in Bologna. This chapter thus explores the intersections between artistic production, musical performance, and patronage strategies in the late 17th century.

Taken together, these case studies demonstrate the broader significance of cantata decorations within the cultural and artistic landscape of the Baroque period. They highlight the role of visual elements in mediating the reception of cantatas, the networks of artistic exchange underlying their creation, and the evolving practices of manuscript collection and modification over time. As the first systematic study dedicated to decorations of this musical repertoire, this dissertation not only fills a significant scholarly gap but also establishes a methodological framework for future investigations. Ultimately, it offers a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between music, visual arts, patronage, and collecting, revealing previously unexplored dimensions of the Baroque cantata manuscript tradition.