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Source: *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 4, Special Issue: Civic Self-Fashioning in Renaissance Bologna: historical and scholarly contexts (DECEMBER 1999), pp. 430-439

Published by: Wiley

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24412718>

Accessed: 30-01-2017 09:04 UTC

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Charles V in Bologna: the self-fashioning of a man and a city

KONRAD EISENBICHLER

The imperial coronation of Charles V in Bologna on 24 February 1530 was a one of the most important ceremonial events of the sixteenth century. It anointed Charles V as political leader of the Christian world, it formalized the newly established peace and collaboration between the emperor and the pope, and it provided the context for a number of political agreements that were to determine the course of European history for the remainder of the century, if not beyond. Not surprisingly, the ceremony was preceded by extensive negotiations between the papal and imperial secretaries whose job it was to iron out, to their employers' satisfaction, the specific details of coronation protocol and ceremony. The coronation itself was presided over by the pope, who, three months earlier, had transferred himself and his court from Rome to Bologna in order to be there to meet the emperor when the latter entered the Papal States. The ceremony was carefully observed by the throngs of illustrious invited guests who crowded into the basilica of San Petronio, where the central moments of the coronation were staged, as well as by the large crowd that filled the open-air spaces through which the pope and emperor passed. And it was carefully examined, at a distance, by those interested persons and governments throughout Europe who read the narrative of the event in the printed and manuscript descriptions that were circulated at the time.¹

For Bologna and the Bolognese, the coronation of Charles V marked the high point of that extended moment when the two most important leaders of Christendom were concurrently residing in the city. For four months the city on the Po replaced the city on the Tiber and became the *de facto* spiritual and temporal centre of Christendom, with the pope and the emperor tending to their affairs from their respective quarters in the Palazzo de' Signori in the

I am grateful to dott.ssa Anna Maria Scardovi of the Biblioteca dell'Archiginnasio di Bologna and to Professor Sheryl Reiss of Cornell University, Ithaca, for their generous help in tracking down references. An earlier version of this work was delivered at the 1998 annual meeting of the Renaissance Society of America in Washington, DC. On-site research for this article was financially assisted by a grant from Victoria University in the University of Toronto.

¹ There is no bibliography of these descriptions; however, for a good working list see Tiziana Bernardi, 'Analisi di una cerimonia pubblica. L'incoronazione di Carlo V a Bologna', *Quaderni storici*, 21/1 (1986), 191 and 195 (with bibliographical references in the notes on 197–9); Vicente De Cadenas y Vicent, *Doble coronación de Carlos V en Bolonia, 22–24/II/1530* (Madrid, 1985), *passim* (who transcribes selections from many of these documents in the appendix to his volume); and Bonner Mitchell, *Italian Civic Pageantry in the High Renaissance. A Descriptive Bibliography of Triumphal Entries and Selected Other Festivals for State Occasions* (Florence, 1979).

very heart of Bologna. Not surprisingly, the event acquired quasi-mythical importance for the Bolognese and for their civic self-image. As Tiziana Bernardi points out, a description of the coronation appears in nearly all contemporary Bolognese chronicles, histories, and even diaries of the period.² But then, it would have been inconceivable for the Bolognese not to focus on this extended event and not to see it as a defining moment in the city's current history.

For the rest of Europe, however, the fact that Bologna, rather than another city, was briefly home to the two most important leaders of Christendom had little long-term importance. Similarly, the elaborate display of imperial majesty and papal prerogative that marked the coronation ceremonies ultimately amounted to nothing more than the final gasp of a world-system that was about to disappear. In the words of Charles V's biographer, Karl Brandi, this imperial coronation was the last ceremonial display of pre-modern concepts of empire.³ Franco Gaeta, who examined the humanists' views on empire *vis-à-vis* Charles's empire, pointed out that the very idea of a universal monarchy died with the Peace of Augsburg (1555) and the abdication of Emperor Charles V (1556).⁴ In fact, after Charles V no other Holy Roman emperor was ever crowned by a pope.

The imperial coronation of Charles V was not only a final act, but also an exercise in diminution. As the crucial moment approached, the quickly changing political and religious situation of western Europe forced the emperor to revise his plans for a grand coronation in the basilica of St Peter in Rome, with his vassals and the imperial electors in attendance. Instead, he was obliged to settle for a rather quickly arranged coronation in Bologna, a city of admittedly secondary importance, in the basilica of San Petronio, a locally venerated saint, and with few of his vassals and none of the imperial electors present. Then, instead of proceeding royally from Rome to Naples, as he had planned, to take formal possession of his inherited Neapolitan kingdom, Charles V rushed off to Germany to tend to the pressing political, religious, and military problems that were awaiting his immediate attention north of the Alps.

Charles V was not the only participant in these events obliged to scale down his aspirations. Clement VII himself, careful to avoid further conflicts with the emperor and intent on securing a place on the world stage for his Medici family, found it more advisable to see that Charles V did not go to Rome. This, in turn, forced him to forego the prestige of hosting the emperor in the eternal city that was the capital of his temporal and spiritual realm. Also, instead of using the opportunity of this encounter to foster the well-

² Bernardi, 'Analisi', 171. At the same time, Bernardi points out that the descriptions are quite similar, suggesting the presence of an official script (*spartito*) used as the basis for subsequent descriptions (171-2).

³ Karl Brandi, *The Emperor Charles V. The Growth and Destiny of a Man and of a World-empire*, trans. C. V. Wedgwood (London, 1939), 288.

⁴ Franco Gaeta, 'L'idea imperiale degli umanisti e l'impero di Carlo V', in *Roma Costantinopoli Mosca* (Roma, 1983), 149.

being of the Christian commonwealth, Clement VII seemed obstinately single-minded in his own immediate and personal concern of advancing the cause of his illegitimate son, Alessandro de' Medici. Tending carefully to the needs of the moment, the pope was little aware that the world was changing around him and that he would be the last of that group of pontiffs we, today, have grandiosely labelled the 'Renaissance popes'.

While the emperor and the pope were obliged by circumstances to lower their aspirations and scale down their plans, the citizens of Bologna, instead, were able to take advantage of the situation to raise their stakes and bolster their city's image. The local nobility met and mingled with the emperor, while artists and craftsmen worked to present Bologna in a new light: not the second city in the Papal States, recently recaptured and subjugated, but an ancient city that could be a valid alternative to Rome itself.

The refashioning of Bologna had subtly begun at the very moment of Charles V's arrival, when his entry procession followed a direct path from the periphery to the centre of the city.⁵ Ignoring the standard medieval processional pattern that followed and mapped out the outline of the ancient Roman camp, Charles V's route brought him instead directly from the western city gate at San Felice straight to the city centre and to his appointed residence at the Palazzo dei Signori, the political heart of Bologna. This change echoed the ancient Roman practice for imperial entries, which proceeded directly from the city limits to the Senate, the political heart of Rome. To underscore further this Roman motif, Charles's route was marked at regular intervals, not by allegorical or religious *tableaux vivants*, as would be the case in medieval entries, but by triumphal arches constructed to resemble their ancient Roman prototypes.

The 'Romanizing' of the entry route went hand in hand with the 'Romanizing' of the emperor. Some forty years ago André Chastel pointed out that the entry of Charles V into Bologna – and then the later entries into other Italian cities (Siena, Florence, and Rome in particular) – led to a revision of the iconology of imperial entries whereby they were, in fact, 'Romanized' and made 'antique'. In particular, Chastel pointed out how references to the emperor's personal family lineage (as head of the House of Hapsburg), to previous German emperors, and to recent imperial history were reduced, if not completely removed from the iconographical programme, to be replaced by images that sought to present the current emperor and his exploits through the allegorizing model of their classical antecedents.⁶

In the case of the 1529 imperial entry into Bologna, Charles was presented not so much as an Hapsburg, but as a Roman emperor in the tradition of Caesar, Octavian, Titus, and Trajan (whose figures were emblazoned on four

⁵ For an excellent description and analysis of the traditional medieval pattern of taking processional possession of a city, see Silvia Mantini, *Lo spazio sacro della Firenze medicea. Trasformazioni urbane e cerimoniali pubblici tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento* (Florence, 1995).

⁶ André Chastel, 'Les entrées de Charles Quint en Italie', in *Fêtes et cérémonies au temps de Charles Quint* (Paris, 1955–60), II, 203.

medallions on the triumphal arch at the city gate of San Felice). On this same gate, under the four medallions, stood statues of the Roman generals Furius Camillus and Scipio Africanus, and beneath them statues of the Roman senators Scipio the Younger, Scaevola, Metellus, and Marcellus. This strongly 'Roman' iconology continued along the processional route inside the city with figures of the gods Janus and Apollo, with equestrian statues of Numa Pompilio and Caesar Augustus, and with a variety of muses and classical allegorical figures.⁷ This drastic change in iconology at the moment of the emperor's arrival in the city set the stage for the later metamorphosis whereby, for the purpose of the coronation ceremony, Bologna was temporarily turned into Rome.

The imperial advisors, and in particular the Grand Chancellor Mercurino Gattinara (1465–1530), had been seriously concerned about the validity or, perhaps more importantly, about the perceived validity of an imperial coronation performed outside the eternal city. Giovan Battista Malatesta, the Gonzaga ambassador in Venice, pointed out that Gattinara was 'completely of the opinion that His Majesty should not be crowned here [in Bologna] so that neither Lutherans or others should quibble saying that the coronation was not performed in the established place'.⁸ The problem was not insignificant. This was, after all, the first time ever that a Holy Roman emperor was to be crowned in a city other than Rome. If the coronation was not carried out according to standard practice, Charles's enemies could argue that it was null and void, and this could open the way for the election of a new or a counter-emperor. The importance of the cathedral of Rheims as the coronation site of French kings, and the efforts undertaken just one hundred years earlier by Joan of Arc to bring about the consecration of Charles VII of France in that church (1429) illustrate the importance of traditional coronation sites and rituals. Similarly, in order for rituals to have their desired effect, they must conform to time-tested patterns, otherwise they lose their sense and their power. It was therefore important for the imperial party to demonstrate clearly to everyone that Charles V could be crowned in Bologna and according to the traditional ritual.

The concerns of Gattinara and the other advisors were addressed by a formal examination that determined, in fact, that ancient emperors had indeed been crowned in places other than Rome, and therefore, on the strength of antique and Roman authority, an imperial coronation was valid regardless of where it was performed. Then, to strengthen this claim even further, this time with medieval argumentation, it was pointed out that the pope maintained his powers regardless of where he currently resided ('ubi papa ibi Roma'), and therefore he could carry out all his papal duties fully,

⁷ Gaetano Giordani, *Della venuta e dimora in Bologna del Sommo Pontefice Clemente VII per la coronazione di Carlo V Imperatore celebrata l'anno MDXXX. Cronaca con note documenti ed incisioni* (Bologna, 1842), 12–16.

⁸ Luigi Gonzaga, *Cronaca del soggiorno di Carlo V in Italia (dal 26 luglio, 1529 al 25 aprile, 1530)*, ed. Giacinto Romano (Milano, 1892), 145, n. 1.

including the crowing of an emperor, wherever he happened to be at that moment.⁹

Although it was now demonstrated that an emperor could be crowned in a place other than Rome, some concerns still lingered in the minds of the organizers of the ceremony, so much so that they felt the need to reinforce the validity of Bologna as a coronation site. This was done by turning the sites directly involved in the coronation ceremony into symbolic representations of their counterparts in Rome. Emmanuel Rodocanachi put it bluntly, and not without a sense of humour, when he pointed out that 'On avait trouvé au surplus un ingénieux moyen de tourner les difficultés que créait la différence des lieux; on dressa un décor.' More recently, Bernardi, who has analysed the semantics of the coronation ceremony, noted that 'Bologna underwent a veritable metamorphosis and was transformed into Rome.'¹⁰

The choice for a coronation site fell not on the homonym of the Vatican basilica, the Bolognese cathedral of San Pietro, but rather on the church of San Petronio. Although at first surprising, such a choice was, in fact, very logical. First of all, the basilica of San Petronio was much larger than the cathedral of San Pietro and could thus accommodate a far greater number of spectators. Second, although its titular saint was a minor fifth-century ecclesiast, he had been bishop of Bologna (431–50) and was now its protector. Local veneration for him was so strong that his basilica far overshadowed in civic and popular devotion the cathedral itself, dedicated to the prince of the apostles. Even when the cathedral was enlarged and renovated in the seventeenth century, or when it received an elegant new façade by Alfonso Torreggiani (1747), the medieval basilica of San Petronio, with its unattractive unfinished façade, continued to enjoy cultic and cultural primacy in the heart and soul of the Bolognese. A third important factor in favour of San Petronio was that this church was located on the Piazza Maggiore, the very political and spiritual heart of the city, and that it faced the city's most important civic buildings, in particular the Palazzo dei Signori

⁹ 'Di poi si cominciò a trattare circa le cose della Coronazione di S. Maestà, dove ne nacque qualche difficoltà in questo modo, cioè se questa sì famosa, et tanto trionfale opera fosse fatta nella Città di Roma, o vero in detta Città di Bologna, perche già era costume al tempo degli Imperatori Romani fare queste Cerimonie in Roma, donde sopra tale negotio fu consultato poterse fare non tanto in Bologna quanto ancora in ogni altra Città dove più si contentava la Santità di Nostro Signore confortandosi con quel detto già di lungo confermato, la sua Potestà, cioè, che il Papa *Omnia potest*. Aggiungendoci poi quell'altro detto, che dice, *Ubi Papa, ibi Roma*, e così fu dichiarato dare la Corona dell'Impero a Carlo con tutta la Potestà, che si può in Bologna dare, e massime essendo di stirpe nobilissima, e tanto Catolico, e meritevole di tal Dignità, e così si contentò Sua Santità di farlo, e Sua Maestà di riceverlo' (anon. [probably G. Negri], 'Cronica di Bologna nel tempo vi dimorava Clemente VII Pontefice, et Carlo Quinto Imperatore', transcribed in Gaetano Giordani, 'Miscellanea di scritti riguardanti la coronazione di Carlo V Imperatore in Bologna, raccolta da Gaetano Giordani' [Bologna, Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, MS B 1753], 38–9).

¹⁰ Emmanuel Rodocanachi, *Histoire de Rome. Les pontificats d'Adrien VI et de Clément VII* (Paris, 1933), 243; Bernardi, 'Analisi', 178. Both scholars, however, overestimate the extent to which Bologna was made out to be Rome. Rodocanachi, in particular, first incorrectly identifies the Roman site of imperial coronations as the Lateran basilica, and then plainly exaggerates when he says that 'les tours, les chapelles, la basilique de Latran qui, à Rome, servaient de lieu et de décor aux diverses phases de la cérémonie, furent reproduites en bois' (243).

and the Palazzo del Podestà. The piazza and the façades of its contiguous buildings formed a natural, powerful, and elegant setting for a formal ceremony of such world-wide importance.

Having chosen San Petronio, it was now necessary to link it with the traditional coronation site. In her analysis of the ceremony, Bernardi says that the basilica was completely restructured ('interamente ristrutturato') because 'the Bolognese church had to become St Peter's in Rome'.¹¹ That, however, is an exaggeration. There was no permanent restructuring of the fabric of the church, but only the construction of a raised wooden walkway to the main altar and of three temporary wooden chapels, one outside and two inside the church, each named in direct reference to its counterpart in the Vatican basilica. The external chapel was set at the top of the steps in front of the church and named Sancta Maria Inter Turres, while the two chapels inside the church were raised in the left side of the nave and named San Gregorio and San Maurizio.¹² Other than these three temporary chapels, the only other addition that made a clear reference to the Vatican basilica was a porphyry disk (again, temporary) that had been laid down just inside the church on the raised wooden walkway that led to the main altar. Its purpose was to represent the *rota porphyretica* in the pavement of St Peter's that marked the spot where, on Christmas Day 800, Charlemagne had been crowned emperor by Pope Leo III.

These four explicit references obviously did not 'completely restructure' San Petronio, but they did work their magic to change San Petronio into St Peter's. Functioning as stage sets (Bernardi rightly calls them 'luoghi deputati'), the three chapels and the disk proposed a transfer of meaning from the prosaic reality of Bologna to the idealized fiction of Rome. This led contemporary viewers and chroniclers to use verbs such as *cognominare* ('to surname, to second-name'), *designare* ('to designate'), *rappresentare* ('to represent'), *dire* ('to call'), *repraesentare* (Lat., 'to represent'), *adscribere* (Lat., 'to ascribe, attribute, designate') when referring to the three chapels.¹³ Although clearly aware of the ploy, they suspended disbelief and, as we ourselves do in theatre or cinema, fully accepted the fiction that the sets were reality.

Not only San Petronio, but also the church of San Domenico, which was used as the terminus for the emperor's post-coronation cavalcade, was re-interpreted as a Roman church. An anonymous description of the events,

¹¹ Bernardi, 'Analisi', 178.

¹² For an early seventeenth-century description, with illustrations, of Old St Peter's, see Giacomo Grimaldi, *Descrizione della basilica antica di S. Pietro in Vaticano Codice Barberini Latino 2733*, ed. Reto Niggli (Vatican City, 1972). In particular, see figure 51¹ on 138–9, a watercolour cross-cut of the old basilica clearly showing the *rota porphyretica* in the middle of the nave. For Grimaldi's references to the porphyry disk, see 257; to the chapel of San Maurizio, 232, 233, and 355; to San Gregorio, 70; and to Santa Maria in Turri (*sic*), 191, 278.

¹³ 'Cesare fu condotto ad una Capella posta nella ghiesia a man sinistra ne lo intrare: qual rappresenta la Capella di santo Gregorio' and 'lo condusse piu oltre ad unaltra capela: che e a man sinistra del detto ponte: che era detta Capella di santo Mauritio' and 'ritorno sul primo ponte in mezzo del quale era una rota che si chiama rota porphirea' (anon., *Prima e seconda coronatione di Carlo V Imperatore* [Bologna, 1530], sign. a iv^v, also

published in Bologna in 1530, explicitly describes the Dominican church as 'a surrogate for St John's Lateran',¹⁴ the official residence of the bishop of Rome. It was to San Domenico that, after his coronation, Charles V moved in procession in order to be consecrated a canon of St John's Lateran, thereby respecting the tradition that required all Holy Roman emperors to be canons of that church.

The same anonymous chronicler cited above further underscores the antique Roman nature of the entire coronation ceremony and festivities by referring, throughout the description, to Emperor Charles V as 'Caesar' and to Pope Clement VII as 'Peter', thus revealing how thoroughly the two contemporary leaders were perceived as modern embodiments of their classical antecedents. And lastly, he calls the entire coronation a 'triumph', thus indicating that the current emperor's processions and coronation were seen as the return of a victorious Roman emperor into the city. Clearly, the anonymous narrator viewed the coronation ceremony as a contemporary enactment of an antique event taking place in Rome itself.

Like the temporary chapels erected in San Petronio, however, the lustre of the day was not to translate itself into a permanent shine for Bologna. From the very beginning the decorations for the coronation had been ephemeral and were not intended to remain in place to beautify the city for years to come. Subsequent attempts to immortalize the event with artworks that would be in public view in the city also came to naught. Shortly before his departure from Bologna Charles V expressed his wish to commission a chapel in San Petronio that would commemorate his coronation in that church. His intention was to decorate the chapel with painted and marble images of his coronation, dedicate it to St Mauritius, and fund a permanent chaplaincy for it. He set aside 400 gold *scudi* for it, a model was built, and the Bolognese senator Lodovico Barbonesi was placed in charge of the project.¹⁵ However, the siege of Florence soon forced Charles V to abandon his project and to redirect those much-needed funds to the Florentine endeavour. Similarly, the proposal made by the basilica's board of governors (*fabbriceria*) to decorate the incomplete façade of San Petronio with the imperial arms and scenes depicting the coronation events also failed to materialize, again because of the emperor's inability to fund the project.¹⁶ The historian Francesco Guicciardini, sometime governor of the Romagna, may not have

printed in Giordani, *Della venuta e dimora*, 63); 'fu condotto ad una capella posta nella giesia a man sinistra ne lo intrare qual rapresenta la capella di santo Gregorio' (anon. description of the coronation of Charles V in Bologna [MS Zani, Biblioteca di Parma], in De Cadenas, *Doble coronación*, 242); 'proinde ducitur ad altare majus, quod divi Petri Apostoli romanam aram repraesentabat' (Heinrich Cornelius Agricola von Nettesheim, *De duplici Coronatione Caroli V Caesaris apud Bononiam Historiola*, in De Cadenas, *Doble coronación*, 219); 'in sacellum Divo Mauritio adscriptum adduxerunt' and 'ad medium usque templi, cui loco Rotae Porphyreae nomen indiderant, traductus est' (Agricola in De Cadenas, *Doble coronación*, 219). Bernardi, 'Analisi', 178, makes the same observation.

¹⁴ 'surrogato in loco di santo Giovanni Laterano' (anon., *Prima e seconda coronatione*, 13).

¹⁵ Mario Fanti, *La fabbrica di S. Petronio in Bologna dal XIV al XX secolo. Storia di una istituzione* (Rome, 1980), 181; William Eisler, 'Carlo V a Bologna e i suoi rapporti con gli artisti del tempo', *Il Carrobbio*, 7 (1981), 141.

¹⁶ Eisler, 'Carlo V a Bologna', 141.

been far off the mark when he noted that Charles V 'took the imperial crown in Bologna with a great number of people present, but with little pomp and expense'.¹⁸

The few visual images of the imperial coronation that were created are much more limited in scope and fail, somehow, to highlight Bologna. Nicholas Hogenberg's series of forty woodcuts showing the emperor and the pope in procession after the coronation does not include Bologna at all, but depicts only the participants and the pageantry of the occasion.¹⁹ Their complete lack of any visual referents to a specific urban context, Bolognese or otherwise, is startling. A majolica cup (Faenza, Casa Pirola, c. 1530) depicting the coronation makes no attempt at all to portray the Bolognese event realistically but, rather, sets it inside a palace hall. Carmen Ravanelli Guidotti points out that the iconology for this illustration is taken from a drawing by Domenico Beccafumi that, in turn, reproduces a fresco by Pinturicchio depicting Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini kneeling in front of Pope Eugenius IV (Libreria Piccolomini, Duomo, Siena, 1502–6).¹⁹ And so, once again, the city of Bologna is conspicuously absent from the visual record.

The lack of a permanent visual record to highlight Bologna may, in fact, be closely tied to the nature of the ceremony itself. In spite of Charles V's belief that the coronation was a liminal experience intended to effect a change in him, the reality of the situation may perhaps best be summarized in the words of the elegant (and aloof) Cardinal Pietro Bembo who chose to stay out of town and hear about the events in the bucolic tranquillity of his villa outside Padua. Writing on 16 March 1530 to the papal chamberlain Monsignor Vettor Soranzo, in Bologna, Bembo asked to be kept informed on the pope's stay, his intended departure, and 'those things that are read with pleasure by someone who is outside the theatre, as I am'.²⁰ In using the word *teatro*, the cardinal is implying both a theatre of action and a spectacle, and may even be suggesting that events in Bologna are akin to comedy or farce. A subsequent letter of 7 April 1530, this one addressed to Pope Clement VII

¹⁷ '[Carlo V] prese in Bologna con concorso grande ma con piccola pompa e spesa, la corona imperiale' (Francesco Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, ed. Silvana Seidel Menchi [Torino, 1971], 2040 [book 20, chap. 1], my translation).

¹⁸ Nicholas Hogenberg is sometimes known as Jan Nicolas Hogenberg or as Hans Hogenberg. Biographical information on him is very scarce, but he seems to have been born in Munich in 1500. Copies of the woodcuts are to be found in the Cabinet des Estampes, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; at the Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid; at the Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna; and elsewhere. There are several contemporary editions of these woodcuts. Two of the early ones are reproduced in William Stirling-Maxwell, *The Procession of Pope Clement VII and the Emperor Charles V after the Coronation of Bologna on the 24th February, MDXXX, Designed and Engraved by Nicolas Hogenberg and Now Reproduced in Facsimile with an Introduction* (Edinburgh, London, Paris, Amsterdam, 1875) and in *La Coronación imperial de Carlos V* (Madrid, 1958). Thirteen of the woodcuts appear in P. J. Goetghebuer, 'Sur l'entrée de l'Empereur Charles-Quint à Bologne en 1529', *Messenger des Sciences Historiques de Belgique* (Gand, 1855); and four in Rodocanachi, *Histoire de Rome*.

¹⁹ Carmen Ravanelli Guidotti, *Ceramiche occidentali del Museo Civico Medievale di Bologna* (Bologna, 1985), 78.

²⁰ 'Vi priego, e abbiate pazienza, a darmi per un verso alle volte, se non spesso, novella della stanza costì di N.S., e quando si crede che egli sia per partirsi; e di quelle cose che si leggono volentieri da chi è fuori del teatro, come sono io' (Pietro Bembo, *Lettere*, ed. Ernesto Travi [Bologna, 1987–93], 112, letter 1061).

himself (still residing in Bologna), again used the term *teatro* and made still more veiled allusions to spectacle (if not even to farce):

Holy Father. While Your Holiness has spent these last days in the theatre of the world, among so many Lords and so many great men that no one alive today has ever before seen so many together, and [while you have] placed the rich, beautiful and honoured imperial crown on the head of Charles V, I have remained in my little villa, of which I spoke to Your Holiness, in a tranquil and, to me, dear and sweet solitude, where I have found, more than in previous years, that the earth, because of the long serenity of these past months and because of the warmth of the air, was already all green, and the trees had their leaves. . . . [This springtime] not only the swallows, but also those other birds that do not winter among us, but return here in the spring, filled with their sounds [*accenti*] the new and clear and unusually warm and happy sky. This made me less envious of the festivities in Bologna and of the many gentle men of my city whom I, coming back here, met on the road, all red and out of breath on account of the fact they were running to see these festivities that much sooner. Nor did I think, in all those pleasant days, of anything else but of how I could render some favour to Your Holiness for the great courtesy and sweetness you showed me in Bologna. But leaving this aside, apart from the pleasures I have drawn from my little villa, I have also [had the pleasure of] hearing about these festivities. For having heard of them, instead of having seen them, will be good for me when I will later come to rely on the image and semblance [of these festivities] in the description Monsignor Giovio will draw of them with his learned and pleasant style.²¹

Bembo seems to be pulling the pope's leg. The extended contrast between the bucolic calm of the countryside and the frenzied festivities of the city, the comment about migratory birds filling the air with their 'accents' (a veiled reference to foreigners), the comic description of the Venetian lords rushing, short of breath, to Bologna, and the awareness of having fared better for not having witnessed the events, all point to a humorous, if not even farcical take on the pomp and pageantry of the imperial visit.

For Bembo, as for others, the coronation had been a spectacle, an elaborate fiction constructed to depict an imagined reality. And, as a piece of theatre, it had worked its magic well. After Gattinara's concerns about the legitimacy of the ceremony and the site had been addressed by legal and imaginative responses, no one eventually did cast doubts on the validity of Charles V's imperial coronation in Bologna or on the symbolic transfer of identification from Rome to Bologna. In the final analysis, on that February day in Bologna, reality and fiction had easily blended and had refashioned a

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 124, letter 1076 (my translation).

man and a city: Charles V had become Holy Roman emperor, San Petronio had turned into St Peter's, San Domenico into St John's Lateran, and Bologna had briefly become Rome. Perception had conquered reality and Renaissance self-fashioning had carried the day.

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