A DRAWING FOR THE FONTE GAIA IN SIENA

By RICHARD KRAUTHEIMER

Professor of Art at Vassar College

The Metropolitan Museum has recently acquired a small drawing which, although only a fragment, is a document of prime importance in the history of fifteenth-century Italian art. It shows two sides of a balustrade, standing at right angles, evidently the left portion of some structure. On each side are two pointed niches flanked by pilasters, which are subdivided by string courses, and topped by a cornice of rich Gothic foliage. Female figures holding attributes are seated in the niches. From the front pier of the balustrade rises the figure of a woman clad in a lamb- or goatskin and a cloak, a laurel wreath in her curls. She carries a small boy on her arm and leads another by the hand. A monkey crouches on top of the back pier, a she-wolf projects somewhat awkwardly from the bottom of the pier between the rear niches. Foliage and figures are drawn free hand, the figures strongly modeled by shading in short strokes and crosshatchings, which, in the depth of the draperies and behind the bodies, are fused into black ink spots. The lines of the architecture were drawn with a ruler after the figures had been outlined.

A companion piece to this drawing has been known for a number of years and is in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (Dyce Collection, no. 181). The London drawing shows, on a sheet roughly the size of the New York fragment, the corresponding right portion of the same structure. It is drawn on the same kind of vellum with the same ink and with identical strokes and lines. Details, architectural and otherwise, are merely indicated in the London drawing. Instead of a monkey, a dog crouches on the right rear pier; the scantily cloaked woman on the right front pier wears a crown; the figures seated in the four niches hold different attributes. The sheet is more narrowly cut at the bottom but slightly larger on either side. In short, the two sheets must originally have formed part of one and the same drawing.

I

Jenö Lányi, in Zeit- schrift für Bildende Kunst, 1927, has rightly identified the London drawing as a project for the Fonte Gaia in Siena, the large, richly sculptured fountain set up by Jacopo della Quercia in the Piazza del Campo opposite the Palazzo Pubblico. Replaced since 1866 by a weak copy, its remnants, though sorely weathered, are known to every visitor to the splendid upper loggia of the Palazzo Pubblico. The history of the Fonte is well documented, and again Lányi and, later, Peleo Bacci have on the whole interpreted the documents convincingly. This history, however, is of some importance in assigning the drawing its right place, so that it seems best to risk carrying coals to Newcastle by recapitulating the key points with some clarification.

On December 15, 1408, maestro Jacopo was commissioned by the city of Siena to execute a fountain, 16 braccio (28 feet) long and 8 braccio (14 feet) wide, with “sculptures, figures, foliage, cornices, steps, pilasters and coats-
of-arms” and “to make or cause to have made a
drawing of said fountain in the council hall of
the Palazzo Pubblico.” This first drawing would
appear to have been a large outline sketch
painted, as was customary in fifteenth-century
Italy, on the wall of that room. In full or nearly
document of January 11, 1418, the new design
of January 1409 was merely an enlargement of
and addition (*reaugmentum et readditio*) to the
first project of December 1408. The project of
January 1409 was fixed in a “new drawing,” and
this *novo designum*, “drawn on a certain
full size, this sketch was intended to show the
council members how the city’s money was to be
spent. Apparently this first project was not
satisfactory for, on January 22, 1409, a second
contract was signed with Jacopo on the basis
of a new design. Since the price of the fountain
was raised by 400 florins to a total of 2000, it
seems reasonable to conclude that this second
project was more elaborate than the first. At the
same time, as stated in a much later arbitration
sheet of vellum (*carta pecudina, carta edina*) by
the hand of master Jacopo” was deposited, in
lieu of a detailed description, with the notary
who had drafted the contract. Throughout the
next few years it was referred to time and again.
Jacopo was to start April 1, 1409, and he re-
ceived an advance payment; but, despite good
intentions, work was delayed another five years.
First, the till of the city was empty in just those
years, 1409-1412; second, Jacopo was tied down
by work in Lucca. By the spring of 1413 funds had apparently been accumulated, and between May and September the city wrote half a dozen letters urging him to start immediately and direly threatening his friend and guarantor, Francesco da Valdambrino.

This pressure alone might have proved unsuccessful, but in Lucca that December Jacopo found himself entangled in a somewhat irregular affair in which the dramatis personae were his assistant, Giovanni da Imola, a lady from a good Lucchese family, the lady's jewelry, and her brother-in-law. In order to raise hush money to conceal her trysts with master Giovanni and possibly in preparation for an elopement, the lady pawned her jewelry to Jacopo. At this point the affair blew up: Giovanni went to prison for nearly seven years, a hard punishment it would seem; both the lady and her jewelry were retrieved by irate relatives, her husband remaining strangely silent; and Jacopo, after his government had intervened in his favor, hurried to Siena in the last days of December 1413. A workshop was rented, the masonry work commissioned with a deadline set for July 1415, and deliveries of stone contracted on January 10, 1414, “for the figures and orna-

Project for the Fonte Gaia in Siena, 1409, possibly drawn by Jacopo della Quercia. Opposite Page: fragment in the Metropolitan Museum, 7 7/8 by 8 3/8 inches, brown ink on vellum. Dick Fund, 1949. Above: fragment in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 6 by 9 inches. The central portion of the plan is missing. From left to right the figures in the niches have been identified as Hope, Temperance, Fortitude, Faith, Justice, Humility, Prudence, and Charity.
trapezoid. Since this change entailed “a greater amount of work,” Jacopo was to receive an additional 400 florins. On the whole the altered plan was approved, but the raise in payment was left uncertain—fortunately for the curious historian. As was to be expected, difficulties arose from the ambiguity of wording, and an arbitration became necessary early in 1418. The arbitration instrument refers to the enlargement of the fountain “two braccie and two-thirds in length and as much in width”; it adds specifically that the enlargement was to be achieved by adding storie, narrative reliefs, and stipulates the price for these additions at 280 florins—full-value florins, nota bene, not three-quarter florins, as the city had in mind. Once this arbitration had been agreed upon, Jacopo appears to have proceeded with all the speed to be expected. With only the slightest further pressure from the committee the fountain was completed and full payment receipted by him in October 1419.

II

No great amount of learning or acumen is necessary to see that the Fonte Gaia, as it rose on the Piazza del Campo prior to 1866, corresponded to the project as amended in 1415 and completed in 1419. The fragments in the loggia of the Palazzo Pubblico, casts made from the sculptures before their removal, and a few old photographs all give much the same picture—a water basin enclosed on three sides by a trapezoidal balustrade; the Virgin seated in the center, flanked by two small standing angels and eight Virtues, all seated in round-topped niches; two storie, the Creation of Adam and the Expulsion from Paradise, at the very ends of the wings; two scantily dressed women, each with two small boys, on the front piers; finally, she-wolves projecting from the piers onto the front balustrade. Nor is it hard to perceive that the drawing, while closely linked to the fountain as completed, represents a less elaborate version of the same design. The over-all scheme, the figures seated in niches, the freestanding women on the front piers, the water-spouting lupae, the black and white coat-of-arms of Siena, are close enough to the fountain as set up. At the same time, the storie are conspicuously absent, and the shape is rectangular rather than trapezoidal. There are minor differences; the niches topped by pointed arches, the attributes of the Virtues, the stance and drapery of the figures on the front piers are all at variance with the design as executed. Since the invention of the storie and the change of shape were alterations specifically agreed upon in 1415, the drawing must represent a project for the Fonte Gaia prior to that date.

Two earlier projects are referred to in the documents, the first plan of December 1408, and the novum designum of January 1409, the latter an enlargement of and addition to the former. Neither is described expressly except for the vaguest references to foliage, cornices, figures, and so forth; but the enlargement of 1415 is carefully specified. It entailed the increase of the over-all measurements of the fountain from 8 by 16 to 10 2/3 by 18 2/3 braccie. This increase was caused on the wings by the addition of the storie, each measuring precisely 2 2/3 braccie; on the rear wall it resulted from the addition of the angels beside the Virgin, since again they correspond exactly to the increase in length. All details not specifically mentioned as additions, nine seated figures in niches, standing figures on the front piers, and other figures on the rear piers, ornament and the like, must be presumed part of the already existing project. In brief, the drawing represents the fountain as it was to be executed until 1415.

It cannot, however, reflect the very first project as laid down in December 1408. The increase in cost, stipulated for the additions of 1409 and 1415, speak for themselves. The change from the first to the second design was clearly more extensive than that from the second to the final project. For this latter enlargement, comprising the storie and the two small angels, Quercia was paid 280 florins; for the change from the first to the second project, he was credited with the sum of 400 florins. Since city administrations never like to waste money, the plan of 1408 must have been much smaller than that which remained in force from 1409 until 1415. The alterations and additions of 1409 can at best be surmised on the basis of prices paid elsewhere for comparable work. For a life-size
freestanding figure the opera of Florence cathedral was wont to pay 100 florins, for a group of two figures 125 florins, and it did not matter whether the artist was Donatello or some run-of-the-mill sculptor. But then, in Florence the commissioning body customarily furnished the marble, while in Siena the artist acted as contractor and had to procure his own material. As a consequence Sienese prices were 30 to 40 florins higher for a life-size statue and correspondingly more for a group of three figures. Hence one wonders whether the two freestanding groups on the front piers and the corresponding small figures on the rear of the fountain, as they appear in the drawing and in the final project of 1415, were not the decisive enlargement made in 1409. If this conjecture holds, the first project of 1408 would have comprised only the balustrade with eight figures around a center figure, all seated in niches.

The drawing, then, reflects the second project for the Fonte Gaia as envisaged in 1409. It contains all the elements of the fountain as finally completed, aside from those specifically enumerated as additions in 1415. It cannot reflect the first project of 1408, which was less costly and thus much smaller. Of course, even together the two drawings in New York and London remain fragmentary; the center portion is missing, and the comparative lengths of the flanks and rear wall suggest that the latter ought to have been one fourth longer. It must have contained one more figure, presumably seated in a center niche, around which the others are gathered. There arises the question of the identity of this figure and its relation to the program as a whole. But before discussing this program we must consider the style of the sculptures in the drawing.

III

At first glance the sculptures in the drawing hardly seem to be by the same hand that carved those of the Fonte Gaia after 1415. None of the figures in the drawing bears any signs of the powerful bulkiness, the rich twisting of the gigantic bodies, draped or nude, which are considered to mark Jacopo della Quercia’s personal style. But then, forcefulness, violence, and bulky solidity come to the fore in his work only in the last twenty years of his life. Indeed, they dominate first the very statues of the Fonte Gaia, between 1415 and 1419, and grow ever stronger until finally they are developed to the fullest in the statues and reliefs at San Petronio in Bologna, between 1425 and 1438. Prior to 1415 Jacopo’s style is of a quite different nature—the figures are strong without bulkiness, agitated without violence, the faces firm but fine, the hands long, slim, and almost snake-like. True, little is known of the first twenty years of Jacopo’s working life, from about 1385 to 1405. Perhaps, as Enzo Carli has proposed with good reasons, a Madonna, now on the Piccolomini altar in Siena cathedral and dated apparently...
call his sculptures in Ferrara and Lucca, from the tomb of Ilaria (1406) to the Saints of the Trenta altarpiece (about 1412), and the tomb of the wives of Lorenzo Trenta at San Frediano, and to the young Saint now in the cathedral of Lucca.

Now that the Museum’s fragment has come to light, the drawing, though incomplete, shows with utmost clarity that not only the size and style but also the program of the Fonte Gaia, as envisaged in 1409, differed essentially from that executed after 1415. Like the completed fountain, this second project shows eight figures seated in niches (and presumably a ninth in the center) and four statues on the corner piers. But among the seated figures only six are identified by their attributes as Virtues. Temperance, in the second niche from the left, holds a pitcher; Fortitude, in the third, clasps a column; Faith, in the fourth, a cross. The fifth niche, at the left edge of the London drawing, is occupied by Justice, carrying a sword. The figure in the sixth niche, holding a burning candle, was identified by Lányi as Humility, and the seventh as Temperance. But since Temperance appears in the second niche the figure in the seventh must be another Virtue. The third eye on her forehead, overlooked by Lányi, suggests that she may be Prudence; for Prudence has more often than not two faces, looking forward and backward, and may be represented with three eyes.

There remain to be explained the two seated figures who flank the composition of the drawing, in the first and eighth niches respectively. As long as only the London drawing was known, the figure to the very right could be interpreted as Wisdom. But, oddly enough, this is the only one among the eight without wings. Hence she is not an allegorical figure but a mortal one, although saintly. Indeed, she is the saintly woman beyond compare, the Virgin Mary, seated and reading from her prayer book as she often does in scenes of the Annunciation. Opposite her, in the first niche, is seated the angel Gabriel, grasping a fleur-de-lys scepter, announcing to Mary the coming of Christ.

Thus the program represented by the drawing envisaged a series of only six Virtues,
flanked by the Annunciation, a strange combination indeed. Within an assembly of the Virtues the figures of the Annunciation have no proper place, and, to boot, six Virtues are just not enough Virtues. Mary and the angel Gabriel look like intruders, and that is what they are. They have, in the program of 1409, clearly taken the place of two Virtues, which at an earlier time, presumably in the 1408 program, had occupied the end niches of the fountain. All through the Middle Ages, in Italy as elsewhere, both the number and selection of the secular Virtues had varied. The customary number of four, Fortitude, Temperance, Justice, and Prudence, was frequently enlarged. Regardless of the number of secular Virtues, however, the theological triad of Faith, Hope and Charity remained constant. It is strange, then, that in the drawing only one theological Virtue, Faith, should be seated among five of her secular sisters.

Clearly, in the first program as planned in December 1408 Faith could not have been left thus lonely but was presumably accompanied by Hope and Charity. In the second project of January 1409 these two Virtues were replaced by the Annunciation. Finally in the third project, as executed after 1415, the Annunciation yielded again to the two theological Virtues who appear to this day on the fountain.

The group of Virtues gathered around a center figure has, in Sienese art, a very specific meaning. It represents Good Government, using symbolically any particular medieval government’s outstanding qualities. The dominating figure is variable. It may be an allegory of Governo, Good Rule, and it is thus represented in Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s grandiose mural in the Palazzo Pubblico at Siena, where six Virtues gather around the imposing figure of a dignified ruler. They are Peace, Prudence, Fortitude, Magnanimity, Temperance, and Justice, with the theological Virtues, Faith, Hope, and Charity, flying overhead. (Wisdom, both divine and secular by her nature, is removed to an equally important secondary allegory and holds the scales of computative and distributive justice, commercial and penal law.) However, the place of honor could also be held by the Virgin, for in Siena the Virgin and Good Government had become synonymous. Since 1259 the city had placed itself under the special protection of the Virgin as Empress of the Universe and specifically of Siena, and the rule of the city was exercised by the City Council in her name. Hence, throughout the territory of Siena, the Virgin could and did take the place of Good Rule, presiding over both the secular and theological Virtues. A mural of 1393 in the town hall of San Miniato al Tedesco sums up the situation. The Virgin is flanked by Prudence and Justice, by Fortitude and Temperance; Charity flies overhead, bearing a scroll with the inscription:

Chi in questo mondo mecho si governa
Ornar di fama il fo da questa donna
E poi per premio gli do vita eterna.

(Who governs with me in this world
I'll have crowned with fame by this Lady
And thereafter I give him as a reward eternal life.)

The fountain, therefore, as planned in 1409 and as it appears in the drawing fragments must be viewed as an allegory of Good Government first and foremost. The figures of dog and monkey may possibly conform to this program, the former as a symbol of watchful loyalty, the latter of faithlessness. It is only within this framework that the two female figures on the outer piers become meaningful. They represent indeed, as has been assumed for some time, Rhea Silvia, or Illia, and Acca Laurentia, the former wearing the crown due a king’s daughter, the latter clad in a goatskin as becomes the wife of the goatherd Faustulus. They are accompanied by the twins Romulus and Remus. Together they allude to the foundation of the city of Siena, the town of Senus, Romulus’s son. Hence the over-all program of Good Government, with specific reference to Siena, is fully consistent in the drawing—infinintely more so than in the fountain as executed. With the change of program in 1415 Acca Laurentia and Rhea Silvia are out of place, so much so that their identifying attributes and garments were played down, to a degree which rendered them unrecognizable for centuries.
Whether in the original programs for the Fonte Gaia the center position was held by an allegory of Good Rule or by the Virgin remains an open question. Only the lucky find of the missing center fragment can provide the final answer. Whichever of the two occupied the place of honor, the over-all design represents nothing but Good Government, following an old Sienese tradition. The insertion of the Annunciation in 1409 nearly destroyed the traditional scheme. On the other hand, it introduced a strong Mariological element. Whatever the reason for this change, it became necessary to eliminate two of the Virtues, thus making the program of Good Government nearly unrecognizable. The dilemma was resolved in the third program of 1415. The Mariological element was strengthened. The Virgin holds the central position within the fountain, and the two storie specifically allude to her as the Bringer of Salvation and the Intercessor for Mankind. At the same time, the program of Good Government was reconstituted. The two theological Virtues, rashly eliminated in 1409, were reintroduced beside their six sisters. The 1415 enlargement of the fountain was not intended simply to make the structure richer and more imposing. It aimed also, and perhaps primarily, at greater consistency by integrating the two different programs, that of Good Government, with the Virgin presiding over a full set of Virtues, and a Mariological program with her as the Bringer of Salvation.

IV

The drawing represents in our opinion the larger part of Jacopo della Quercia’s project for the Fonte Gaia as submitted in January 1409. But it does not necessarily follow that the drawing is by Jacopo’s own hand, and every single connoisseur whom I have consulted has been very hesitant to pronounce himself in this sense. The reasons for this hesitancy fall under three headings: the rarity of original fifteenth-century drawings; the alleged differences between the style of the drawing and Jacopo’s sculptural style; and the hesitant and at times awkward lines of the drawing, which appear to contrast with the freedom and impetuosity of the artist’s personality.

The trusting belief held by a former generation in the genuineness of drawings by early Italian masters has been shaken in recent years. Many a drawing which thirty years ago went by the name of a great master has been reclassified as a copy done by a disciple or colleague for his own sample book, or as a finished drawing executed by an assistant under the master’s supervision. Justified as it is, this scepticism at times may have gone too far. True, prior to 1450 drawings by a master’s own hand were by no means as frequent as after that date. Full-size mural sketches in place of preparatory small-scale designs were no doubt common Italian practice, witness Jacopo’s first project for the Fonte Gaia of December 1408 as referred to in documents. When preparing a finished drawing for submission to the authorities, sculptors
would occasionally employ a "professional," meaning a painter. The legal difficulties, caused by the rigid segregation of sculptors' and painters' guilds, would recommend such procedure. Sculptors, however, did make both sketches and finished small-scale drawings. Jacopo, when submitting the project for the sculptural decoration of San Petronio in Bologna (1425), prepared a small-scale drawing "with his own hand" and signed it. From this drawing a local painter sketched a full-size mural for the benefit of the committee in charge. In Siena sculptors' drawings were frequent, beginning with the silverpoint project for the pulpit of Orvieto cathedral of about 1350. Throughout the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, contracts time and again refer to drawings done by the sculptors themselves (manu sua). It did not matter whether they were the competition drawings "on paper...and panel" for the carved choir stalls of the cathedral in Siena (1388-1389), or the novum designum for the Fonte Gaia, "drawn on vellum...by master Jacopo with his own hand (manu sua)," submitted to the City Council in January 1409. Clearly the term manu sua and the master's signature have the legal meaning of a contractual obligation, but, throughout, the contracts differentiate drawings done by the master from others merely submitted by him. When Nino Pisano was commissioned to execute the tomb of Bishop Scarlatti in Pisa it was done on the basis of "a painting given to the committee by said master" but not drawn manu sua.

No drawing by Jacopo's hand has so far been identified and we are as ignorant regarding his style of drawing as we are well acquainted with his sculptural style. Nor can the authorship of the drawing be determined by confrontation with the style of his sculpture. Drawing and sculpture are too different in nature to permit rash comparison, and the contrast of scale does not help. The solution can rest only with the intrinsic qualities of the drawing.

Throughout, the style of drawing appears to be marked by a number of seemingly contradictory elements—a noticeable lack of freedom in the flow of the lines and an undeniable pettiness in stressing irrelevant detail, a conspicuous awkwardness in the foreshortening of the architecture and the figures, in particular the she-wolves on the rear wall, and an equally remarkable feeling for the sculptural values of the figures and for the relation of their parts in depth. No doubt the drawing was done by a sculptor; none but a sculptor would be so deeply fascinated by the roundness of a body or limb and so able to render it by careful modeling, by hook shadings which force the eye around the plastic form, or able to place a figure so as to convey clearly the distance between her shoulders, the wings, and the depth of the niche. The clear relation of body to drapery is established with unerring distinctness, for example, in the figure of Acca Laurentia, in the interlocking of her leg, the train of her skirt, and the leg of the boy at her side. Yet if these appear to be the signs of a sculptor's
draughtsmanship, they need not be indicative of Jacopo's own hand. An assistant might have done the same; but the draughtsman's grasp of the sculptural qualities of the figures appears to preclude any but a very outstanding sculptor.

On the other hand, throughout the drawing attention is paid to minor details to a degree which, at first thought, one would not expect in Jacopo's work. But late medieval and early renaissance juries insisted on just such meticulousness, since only thus was the artist's obligation clearly determined. Furthermore, at the time he submitted the new project for the Fonte Gaia in 1409, Jacopo's sculpture shows exactly this careful rendering of detail. Monumental grandeur and disregard of particulars characterize only his late style. Finally, the lack of freedom in the drawing and the hesitant flow of the lines need not be a cogent argument against Jacopo's authorship. Free and flowing draughtsmanship is not necessarily an attainment to be expected normally in a fifteenth-century sculptor. Rather, the rigorous guild system made it almost unlikely that a sculptor would consider drawing a normal everyday occupation, and more often than not he may have been ill at ease with silverpoint or pen.

The drawing is by no means the freehand sketch of a first idea, quickly thrown on paper. On the contrary it is the careful rendering of a long-considered project, a finished drawing submitted for approval. One half, the Museum's fragment, presents every smallest detail, foliage, string courses, coats-of-arms, the pillows on which the figures are seated, the embroidered hems of the garments. The London half limits itself to indicating such elements in the merest outline. No pentimenti are noticeable, no slips of the pen made and corrected. The entire drawing is apparently based on a previous sketch. Thus, in a very broad sense, it is a copy, perchance a copy by Jacopo himself working from a preparatory sketch. I for one cannot consider it impossible that a finished drawing from his hand would show the very lack of freedom, the very hesitancy characterizing the fragments.

The chances of the drawing being a replica of Jacopo's novum designum and of its being the actual novum designum pretty well balance each other. In no case should the possibility be eliminated that it is the original; caution may at times go too far. Whoever did the drawing was certainly a sculptor, and a sculptor of no mean achievement.

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