Early Italian drawings have always been rare and precious documents. In the sixteenth century, when Giorgio Vasari began to collect drawings by Italian artists to illustrate his biographies, those by thirteenth or fourteenth century masters were already difficult to find. Vasari boasted of several sketches by Giotto, “the most eminent of all the painters in the city of Florence,” in his possession: “And that those who shall come after, may better know the excellence of this great man, and may judge him from drawings by his own hand, there are some that are wonderfully beautiful preserved in my book... which I have collected with great diligence, as well as with much labour and expense.” No drawings by Giotto, however, are extant today, and it is quite possible that Vasari himself, in his enthusiasm, attributed studio copies to the master’s hand. This assumption is supported by the fact that two surviving Giottesque drawings that have been traced back to Vasari’s collection are actually early copies of lost works by that artist. One of these drawings, The Visitation of the Virgin to Saint Elizabeth, from the Uffizi, can be seen in the current exhibition of Italian Drawings: Masterpieces of Five Centuries which will be at the Metropolitan Museum from March 2 through April 9. The other, a fifteenth century drawing after Giotto’s Navicella, is the subject of this article.

There probably never were very many drawings in the early years of Italian painting. Artists followed traditional formulas rather than seeking novel inventions that had to be explored in tentative sketches, paper and parchment were scarce, and painting itself was mainly done in fresco, so that much of the preparation was sketched in charcoal or red ocher directly on the wall. It is not surprising, then, to learn that most of the preserved drawings of the trecento and early quattrocento are copies of completed works. These sketches were used in workshops for reference or as patterns, and the handling to which they were subjected is an additional explanation of their scarcity today. Although for a long time the Uffizi Visitation (Figure 3) was thought to be Giotto’s original design for the fresco in the lower church of the basilica in Assisi, it was done by a contemporary Florentine...

Contents

A Page from Vasari’s Book of Drawings

By Claus Virch

Two Reliefs of the Early Old Kingdom

By Nora E. Scott

A Newly Discovered La Tour: The Fortune Teller

By François Georges Pariset

Italian Prints

By A. Hyatt Mayor

March 1961

185

194

198

206

185
artist as a copy either of the fresco, as Bernard Berenson supposed, or of a drawing by Giotto available to those working in his atelier.

The Metropolitan Museum's drawing of the Navicella (Figure 4) was also considered an original design by Giotto, as an old inscription on the lower left indicates. Another old inscription, written on the boat, perhaps by the copyist himself, identifies the subject precisely: "The ship by Giotto which is in Saint Peter's in Rome in mosaic" (la nave di giotto ch[ono?] i santo

Fig. 3. The Visitation of the Virgin to Saint Elizabeth, by an unknown artist. Florentine, XIV century. Pen and ink on parchment. 8 3/4 x 13 3/4 inches Uffizi Gallery, Florence

pietro a roma di musaicho). For a better understanding of our drawing we have to dwell at some length on this mosaic, one of the great Roman monuments of the fourteenth century.1 About thirty-three feet high and fifty-two wide, it was Giotto's most conspicuously monumental work, perhaps his masterwork. Placed high on the western wall of the entrance tower to the open courtyard in front of the basilica of old Saint Peter's, glistening in the southern sun, it must have been a spectacular sight. Vasari, in his biography of Giotto, describes it in detail and marvels at the effect produced by mere pieces of glass. In a world that was still poor of pictures, in the medieval city of Rome with its glorious past in ruins and its later splendor still to come, its impact must have benumbed the pilgrims who were flocking from near and far.

The scene represented is the miracle of Christ walking on the sea, as described by Saint Matthew (14: 24-32): "And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee upon the waters. And he said, Come. And Peter went
down from the boat, and walked upon the waters, to come to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and took hold of him and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Dominating the center of the mosaic was the boat bearing the apostles, from which the mosaic derived its name, the Navicella. This boat, struggling through the waves, was long thought to symbolize the trials of the early Church, an erroneous interpretation propagated by a seventeenth century guidebook to Rome. But the key figure of the mosaic certainly was Saint Peter, and at Rome, as Mrs. Jameson says, Saint Peter is the Santissimo. The most significant work of art in his own basilica must have referred to him, the Prince of the Apostles, the founder of the Catholic Church.

This miracle was frequently depicted during the first centuries after Christ, with Christ practically fishing the sinking Peter out of the waves. It is very possible that the mosaic outside old Saint Peter’s symbolized the baptism of the apostle who himself had been ordered by Christ to be a fisher of men and who had baptized thousands in the waters of the Tiber. This meaning is perhaps echoed by the angler who is quietly seated on the shore at the left, casting his line into the rough sea filled with fish. Such a fisherman is also frequently seen in representations of the early centuries, mostly in connection with baptism. Regardless of the plausibility of this interpretation, it becomes obvious from studying all single elements of the mosaic that its iconography is based on Early Christian sources. Most probably there was a fourth or fifth century mosaic of the Navicella in the forecourt of Saint Peter’s that by Giotto’s time was quite dilapidated. When Cardinal Jacopo Gaetano de Stefaneschi, canon of the basilica of Saint Peter, commissioned the new Navicella around 1310, Giotto may have been called upon

Fig. 4. The Metropolitan Museum’s Navicella, by Parri Spinelli (1397-1453), Italian. Pen and brown ink. 10 7/8 x 15 7/8 inches Hewitt Fund, 1917
to rejuvenate an old and venerated relic rather than to create anew. He kept the archaic, spread-out, symmetrical, almost heraldic composition: the prophets on clouds are placed symmetrically, the wind gods blow from the left and from the right, the group of Christ and Saint Peter is balanced by the architecture on the left which was inspired by the lighthouse of Ostia (a traditional element in representations of ships and sea since late antiquity), and the Arcadian fisherman balances the kneeling figure of the donor, Cardinal Stefaneschi.

For two hundred years Giotto’s mosaic displayed its monumental splendor as a symbol of the Church of Rome. But then the destructive force of progress set in and condemned it to a slow death of decay and tragic mutilation. The story is sad to tell. In 1605, when Carlo Maderno added his nave to Michelangelo’s splendid beginning of the new Saint Peter’s, the old forecourt and surroundings had to be torn down to make room for this grand conception. By 1610 the severely damaged mosaic—we hear that almost fifteen hundred pounds of glass had been sold by this time as rubble—was taken off in three pieces and either dumped in the courtyard of the Swiss guards or perhaps temporarily put up on the new south wall of the Vatican palace. In 1617, extensively restored, it found what seemed to be its final place on a wall to the right of the entrance to the new Saint Peter’s, above a fountain. But this was not the end. In 1629 it was again moved, and placed inside Saint Peter’s high above the entrance, probably in order to protect it from steady deterioration. And twenty years later it was back in the courtyard of the Swiss guards, until in 1660 Bernini’s all-encompassing revision of the existing buildings made more changes necessary, and the once famous mosaic is mentioned as “demolita.” This would seem to be the last of it. But the sad ruin was still not quite forgotten, and in 1673–1675 it was completely reconstructed by Orazio Manenti. What we see now, hardly noticeable in the vastness of Saint Peter’s, high up inside the portico of the entrance, is Manenti’s handiwork (Figure 2), far removed from Giotto’s original.

Fortunately, due to its fame and prominent position, Giotto’s mosaic was frequently copied and inspired artists for generations after him. The Metropolitan Museum’s drawing, apart from being one of the earliest, has often been considered one of the most faithful copies of the original before its first alterations. But this is not the case. Detailed comparison and evaluation of all existing early copies has produced a quite definite idea of the original, best shown in Beatrix’s engraving of 1559 (Figure 1), though one has to subtract certain mannerisms of his style. The most obvious discrepancies between our Navicella and the engraving are the omissions in the drawing: the donor and the groups of prophets on their clouds are missing, and there is only one wind god blowing instead of two. Besides, this devilish-looking, horned demon has wings instead of the strange fins which Giotto had taken over from antique representations. The round cap of the angler is changed into a pointed hat, Christ is brought forward onto the bit of land on which the donor had been kneeling, and many more small changes could be pointed out. We note, then, that this is not a copy in the sense that other early drawings which carefully reproduced contemporary works in the pattern-book tradition were copies. A copy it is, but in more modern and more original terms. Drawn about a hundred years after the placement of Giotto’s mosaic, it displays an active and creative rather than an archaeological interest in the past. The artist of our drawing found himself fascinated by one of the greatest masterpieces of bygone days, in the same spirit as Michelangelo when he copied figures from frescoes by Giotto and Masaccio or as Rubens when he, some hundred years later, copied Michelangelo’s Night from the Medici tombs. In sketching Giotto’s mosaic our artist infused it with his own style and molded it according to his own vision. He changed the symmetrically spread-out, serenely balanced, and hieratically static composition and gave it a flowing rhythm from left to right, at the same time accentuating the story. The wind blows from the left with such force that the bulging sail is to be seen even above the spar; the boat is given more direction by curving its stern and pointing its bow, and by separating the apostles who are aft and crowding those in the bow. The movement culminates in the encounter of Christ and Saint Peter, who are enlarged and brought forward to
a more dominant position—thus leaving an apostle in the bow of the ship without the object of his astonishment and awe.

Two other drawings are closely connected with ours and, although there have been opinions to the contrary, definitely by the same hand. They carry further the variations on the Navicella theme. One of them (Figure 5) was formerly in

![Image of a drawing of the Navicella](image)

**Fig. 5. The Navicella, by Parri Spinelli, from the Northampton Collection. Pen and brown ink. 10 3/4 x 14 3/4 inches. The drawing, here reproduced from an engraving in Ottley's *The Italian School of Design*, was purchased by the Cleveland Museum after this article had been prepared for press.**

fashioned frontality, now turn toward each other and form a more closely unified group; but most important, the fisherman and the tower have been abandoned. Still further removed from the original is the next drawing, now in the Bonnat Museum in Bayonne. Squeezed on a sheet half the size of the former two, the Navicella has been transformed into the miraculous draft of fishes

the collection of the Marquess of Northampton. It is more freely drawn and shows many changes: a multitude of wind gods blow with full force from the left, and the boat has a fanciful deck at the stern like that in Andrea da Firenze's fresco of the Navicella in Santa Maria Novella of about 1350, though a direct connection need not necessarily be assumed. The placing and the attitudes of the apostles in the boat are changed, the one in the bow now watching the rescue of Saint Peter with a rather jolly expression; Peter and Christ, having lost their old-
that they may have been slightly cut and their edges are frayed—are sufficiently similar for us to assume that they once formed part of the same sketchbook. It apparently consisted of leaves measuring approximately 10¾ by 7¾ inches that had been pasted together in the middle and then stitched into book form. The Northampton Navicella, like the Metropolitan’s, was drawn across two pages of the open book and shows on the reverse studies of ships drawn separately on each page. The Bayonne drawing is only half the size, that is, only on one page, also with the study of a boat under full sail on the reverse. What could have been more tempting than to see if the Metropolitan’s sheet, which was mounted on old, thick cardboard, had similar ships on the reverse? Once the cardboard was removed, it turned out that long ago another piece of paper had been pasted on the back of the drawing because of its fragile condition. By holding our drawing against a strong light, however, we can make out on the reverse fantastic ships (Figure 6) very much like those on the Northampton sheet and also separately drawn on each half of the double pages of the sketchbook.

When was this sketchbook broken up? It is impossible to say. All three drawings were in England by the early eighteenth century. The Northampton and Bayonne drawings bear the collector’s mark of Jonathan Richardson, Sr. (1665-1745). Richardson also knew our drawing, then in the collection of the Earls of Pembroke (from whom it was bought by the Museum at auction in 1917), since he and his son John had helped the eighth earl, Thomas Herbert, with the classification of the vast collections at Wilton House. In 1722 Richardson and his son published An Account of the Statues, Bas-reliefs, Drawings and Pictures in Italy, France, etc. with Remarks based on John’s notes from travels in Italy, and we read about “the Bark of Giotto” (which by that time had become Manenti’s much altered version): “‘Tis very Beautiful, and much better Colour’d than I imagin’d: The Fisherman is the Best Figure, and is really fine. My Father has the Drawing, but without that Fisherman. My Lord Pembroke has one more Perfect.” The one

Fig. 6. Tracing of the ships on the reverse of the Metropolitan Museum’s Navicella

Fig. 7. Sketches by an unknown xiv century Florentine artist, in a Vasari mount
École des Beaux-Arts, Paris
without the fisherman obviously is the Northampton one, the “more perfect” one the Metropolitan’s. The Bayonne drawing, which the father also owned, might have been considered too far removed from the original to be mentioned in this context.

In the second edition of the Richardson publication (1754) the text reads exactly as quoted above, but in Amsterdam in 1728 there had appeared a French edition of this valuable work, that gives additional information on the Richardson/Northampton drawing—“qui a été autrefois à Vasari”—which once belonged to Vasari. W. Young Ottley, who later owned the drawing, wrote the same in his The Italian School of Design of 1823. Although this desirable Vasari provenance has been questioned, there is a tiny clue for proving the usually well-informed Richardson right. At the lower left edge of the Northampton drawing are some hardly noticeable pen lines that are unrelated to the design of the drawing and of a curious nature. Similar pen work appears along the right edge of our Navicella sheet, and since there is more on our sheet we can see that it is part of an architectural border. These ornamental lines are the remnants of the decorated mats that Vasari used for his drawings. The sheets of drawings were pasted on mats which were then beautifully framed by decorative architecture drawn by him or his pupils in a style thought to be appropriate to the drawing. In cartouches above, he placed portraits of the respective artists from proof prints of his woodcut illustrations for his biographies. A number of these mats are still preserved and treasured as the only proof that certain drawings once formed part of Vasari’s Libro de’ Disegni, actually a collection of five voluminous albums, long since dispersed. Especially interesting for us is a drawing attributed by Vasari to Cimabue and still on its Vasari mount which is now in the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Vasari, in his biography of Cimabue, mentions this drawing by the “renewer of art” as the opening page to his Libro. He framed it in what he must have considered a suitable thirteenth century setting of simulated Gothic architecture, with finials and crockets (Figure 7). But despite this reverent treatment the moldings of the pilasters at the left and the right cut ever so slightly into the actual drawing and have left pen lines on the sheet that are comparable to those on our drawing and the Northampton one. We may conclude that our drawing had a Gothicizing framework similar to that of the Cimabue, as the crockets on the upper right indicate. It must have been crowned by a woodcut profile of Giotto as it appears in the illustrated Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects. Unfortunately, this mount no longer exists.

When the drawing was removed from the old cardboard mount, something unexpected came to light: the paper we mentioned which forms a backing bears another drawing (Figure 8). What could be more appropriate than to find it another copy of a famous monument? Sketched with black chalk and then partly executed in strong parallel lines, it is a copy of Adam and Eve from Masaccio’s fresco of the Expulsion in
the Brancacci chapel in Florence. In addition it bears a little study of a young man with rolled-up sleeves and the slashed knee breeches of a Swiss foot soldier, drawn on the spot. It is, on the whole, a feeble sketch, imitating the style of Bandinelli and done probably about 1550 in Florence. The traces of framework extend from the earlier drawing onto the backing sheet at the upper right, so evidently the drawing was already frayed and fragile when it came into Vasari’s possession and had to be relined.

It is surprising that Vasari did not mention this rare “Giotto” drawing when he praised the beauties of the Navicella mosaic in his life of Giotto. A possible explanation would be that he acquired it only after the revised and augmented second edition of his book in 1568 and before his death in 1574.

That the Navicella drawings were Giotto’s original studies for the mosaic was believed for a long time. Metz (1789) and Ottley (1823), who both published the Northampton version in beautiful facsimile engravings, still adhered to the old attribution. As late as 1917 the auction catalogue listed the original drawing as by Giotto. Now most scholars agree with Berenson’s suggestion that all three show the draftsmanship of Parri Spinelli. Our current exhibition of Italian Drawings offers a good opportunity to study this attribution.

The Uffizi has sent an exquisite pen drawing by Spinelli of a seated female figure symbolizing Fortitude (Figure 9), holding a shield and a sword. We immediately recognize the same calligraphic shorthand, the same intriguing rhythm of slow, limp curves suddenly ending in sharp hooks, the same crisscross pattern of quick, vigorous strokes for shading, the same linear abbreviations for faces and hands, hair and folds. Obviously this is the work of a man who loved to draw, who was obsessed with line. There still exist more than two dozen sheets of drawings by him, almost all with sketches on both sides of the paper and perhaps all from one or more sketchbooks. They add up to an unusually large number, considering the scarcity of drawings of such an early date. And it seems that in a very modern sense the artist drew for the sake of drawing, since none of his sketches can be related to any of his known paintings or frescoes. Vasari commented on his stylization of figures, “longer and more graceful than those of any painter before,” elongated, like Modigliani’s, out of all proportion, bent in svelte curves, with narrow sloping shoulders, and small heads on long necks. “The edges of their garments were draped fully and most gracefully, falling from above the arm to around the feet.”

In some drawings the figures are buried in an abundance of rippling folds dripping in cascades to the ground and comparable only to German sculpture of the fifteenth century or some bizarre expressions of late northern mannerism of the sixteenth.

Parri Spinelli was born in Arezzo in 1397 and died there in 1453. Son of a much greater painter, Spinello Aretino, he studied first with his father,
then in Florence where young artists of that time were brimming over with the new ideas of the Renaissance. Parri, however, continued in the Gothic tradition of the previous generation, exaggerating it into the mannered style which is best expressed in his drawings. Regarded now as a minor painter behind the times, he received chauvinistic praise from Vasari, who also came from Arezzo. According to Vasari (but with little likelihood), Parri studied in Florence with Lorenzo Ghiberti, who from 1403 to 1424 was working on his famous bronze doors for the Baptistry. In any case, the young Parri must have known this major work that was progressing under his eyes. One of the medallions of the great doors shows the storm on the Sea of Galilee, and in Ghiberti’s treatment of the theme (Figure 11) we are struck by the similarity to Parri’s drawings. There is a strong echo of Giotto’s Navicella—Ghiberti knew the mosaic, which he mentions in his Commentarii—but the relationship, oddly enough, is closer to the Northampton drawing. Though the eleven disciples are differently arranged in the boat and the sail is furled, we recognize the deck at the stern and the group of Saint Peter and Christ placed before the boat.

Another medallion, this one by Andrea Pisano on the first bronze door of the Baptistry, also resembles one of Parri’s drawings: the seated figure of Fortitude (Figure 10) is like a sculptural sister to Parri’s graphic figure from the Uffizi. Here also is the precedent for the strange hexagonal “halo.” The lines which look like vague indications of a throne on Parri’s drawing may perhaps be wings—as they appear, for example, on the Fortitude which with the other Christian Virtues decorates the Loggia dei Lanzi, executed between 1383 and 1386 by several Florentine sculptors.

We are not suggesting that Parri copied the Pisano and Ghiberti reliefs outright, but could he—and perhaps Ghiberti—have had access to a commonly used pattern book from which he copied his figures and scenes, including the Navicella? Future research on Parri’s drawings may throw some light on their relation to works they seem to copy or to his own paintings. Whether they are copies or inventions of his imagination they show a linear quality that is fervent and yet intensely lyrical, abstract, and expressive, and an immediacy and individuality that especially appeal to us today.

1. The most thorough treatise on Giotto’s Navicella, with a critical discussion of the older literature, is that by Wilhelm Paeseler, “Giottos Navicella und ihr spätantikes Vorbild,” Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte, V (1941), 49-162.

Fig. 10. Fortitude. Bronze relief by Andrea Pisano (about 1290-1349) from the Baptistry of San Giovanni in Florence

Fig. 11. The Storm on the Sea of Galilee. Bronze relief by Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455) from his first door for the Baptistry of San Giovanni in Florence