

LEONARDO DA VINCI, SCULPTOR

By RAYMOND S. STITES

IN VIEW of the ill-fated attempt of Geheimrat Bode to acquire, in the wax bust of the Flora, a real Leonardo for the Berlin Museum, writers have become more chary in attempting to assign works of sculpture to that artist. The most successful of recent efforts has been that of Professor Meller of the Budapest Museum, a review of whose article in the Prussian *Jahrbuch* appeared in the *Art Bulletin*, Vol. II, pp. 129 ff. He was able to identify a bronze group in his museum as a cast from a model made as a study for the Trivulzio monument; but this little equestrian bronze (23.5 cm. high) is so badly cast that most of the modelling has been lost. It does show, however, the spirit of Leonardo's sketches, and Meller deserves credit for a very complete working over of Leonardo's career as a sculptor. In addition to a number of scattered studies in the *Burlington Magazine*, and a restatement of Bode's belief in his recent *Studien über Leonardo da Vinci*, there has recently appeared a very thorough work on the subject of Leonardo as sculptor by the man most familiar with the Milan of Leonardo's time, Malaguzzi Valeri.¹ Malaguzzi Valeri throws into high relief the close relationship of Leonardo to his pupil, Rustici, and his master, Verrocchio. The suggestion is advanced that Leonardo participated extensively in the commissions received by Verrocchio, particularly in the Colleoni monument.

The difficulty with all the attempts to attribute sculpture to Leonardo is the lack of any *point d'appui*. So far as literary evidence goes, the best that we have is the notice that Leonardo helped Rustici to finish the figures of the Pharisee, Levite, and St. John over the door of the Florentine baptistery (Fig. 8). The other items to be found in Vasari or in Leonardo's own notebooks cannot be brought into connection with any extant monuments. Since nothing remains of the Sforza undertaking and next to nothing of the Trivulzio monument, it is very hard for us at the present day to form any judgment as to the justification Leonardo had in parading before his contemporaries as a great sculptor. Any reconstruction of the sculpture of Leonardo, or any identification of extant sculpture as his, must be pretty largely subjective. Evidence of style is vitiated by the difficulty of inferring style in sculpture from style in painting. Despite these objections, I wish to call attention to a terra-cotta in the Louvre, and to its counterpart in Florence, as being, in my opinion, works by Leonardo.

¹ Francesco Malaguzzi Valeri, *Leonardo da Vinci e la scultura*, Bologna, Zanichelli (1922).

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The Camondo collection is placed in such an inconspicuous part of the Louvre that it has never attracted the attention that some other private collections have enjoyed. Among its treasures is a terra-cotta group which, placed in a better light and in a more frequently visited room, would certainly have had a larger audience (Figs. 1, 2, and 10). It bears the commendatory label, "Attributed to Pollaiuolo."

There are, in fact, some things in the modelling of the hair, the open mouths of the combatants, and the treatment of surface forms, that remind one of the familiar group of Hercules and Antaeus. An examination of Pollaiuolo's drawings shows also that the terra-cotta group has something of his language of line; but the group diverges from his drawings in its utterly different anatomy. With Pollaiuolo a disjointed anatomy is unified by what it expresses.¹ In this group a natural anatomy is nearly disjointed by emphasis on expression.

The fundamental objection to the association of this group with Pollaiuolo is that it is clearly the work of a *Cinquecento* master. In fact, it makes one think of such a man as Giovanni da Bologna. The front panel on the base of the Rape of the Sabines (Fig. 3) furnishes a kind of parallel for the Louvre group: the anatomy in both cases seems to have something of the Michel-angelesque. The modelling of the hair, however, has with Giovanni da Bologna passed the stage of individual locks in which the Louvre group seems still to stick. A closer comparison reveals that the equestrian group at the left of the relief has less vigour of modelling and a corresponding loss of life. The tempestuous shaking of the horse's head, which tosses the locks first to right, then to left, in the terra-cotta, is diametrically opposed to the stiff treatment of the neck and mane in the bronze. In composition, too, there is great discrepancy between the bronze and the terra-cotta. The figures in the former appear to be so many individuals acting independently of each other, whereas in the latter they form a unit.

This quality of separation of the figures is still more noticeable in the work of Bertoldo as illustrated in the battle relief at the Bargello. Bertoldo seems very backward. His composition gives the impression of being derived piece by piece from models on ancient sarcophagi. This source may explain the anatomy of his horses, with their small heads and necks and relatively large bodies. Certainly the anatomy could hardly be derived from the study of living models, for the muscles of the fore quarters are very inaccurately placed, while those of the hind quarters are completely omitted. In comparison, the biting head of the Paris horse strikes one as a natural termination of the powerful and convincing neck, and the musculature in general reminds one of such anatomical studies as Leonardo undertook in connection with

¹ Cf. A. B., Vol. 4.

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his biological research (anatomical studies, however, which did not prevent the introduction of certain details such as the flamboyant tail, for the sake of expression rather than anatomy).

There is one point in which the Camondo group shows considerable knowledge of the work of Verrocchio, namely, in the handling of hair. (Compare the hair of Verrocchio's David with that of the short-haired warriors.) There is also some analogy between the Camondo horse and the Colleoni horse; but the positions are so different that no direct comparison can be made.

In the case of an unassigned group like the one in the Camondo collection, it is inevitable that one's attribution should depend upon one's estimation of its value. To me the Camondo group seems striking enough to be by a man of the first rank. Since the men of first rank of the period around 1500, to which it belongs, are pretty well-known, I think it significant that it does not precisely fit into the work of any of the major sculptors. Although both Michelangelo and Raphael were sufficiently impressed by the general interest in horses, stimulated by Verrocchio and carried further in Leonardo's Anghiari battle-piece, to turn occasionally to equestrian studies, there is nothing in the solitary drawing which I know by Michelangelo in which a horse occurs, nor in the occasional drawings of horses and fighters by Raphael (Venice Academy, Louvre), to argue any connection between their work and that of the Camondo group.

Richter publishes a very instructive note by Leonardo on "How to Depict a Battle":

Make the victors running in haste, the hair and other light things flapping in the wind, their eyebrows drawn high. One who runs always throws the opposite limbs forward, so that when the right leg is advanced, the left arm also reaches out. You must depict the defeated and wounded as pale, their eyebrows where they come together drawn high, the flesh above being wrinkled in folds which denote pain. Across the bridge of the nose are several wrinkles that mount up from the brow of the nostrils, running to the beginning of the eyes. The nostrils are drawn high, so those folds that hold the bowed lips show the upper teeth and the teeth are parted as by cries and shrieks of pain. One shades his anxious eyes with his hand, the palm of the hand turned against the enemy, with the other holding himself up from the ground sustaining his half-fallen chest. Others you must depict crying loud with wide-open mouths and in flight. You can see some who, deprived of their weapons and beaten down, try with teeth and nails to take revenge upon the victors. You must have a horse running unreined amongst the enemy, his mane fluttering in the wind, making great damage with his hoofs.

The very decided movement of the Camondo group from right to left, accentuated by the movement of the combatant who is falling from the horse, and reciprocating for the painful biting by the beast by tearing at its tender nostrils, suggests a companion piece. The powerful sketchy modelling of movement toward the left, even in the rear of the group, so confirmed this

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suggestion that I was roused to highest anticipation when I learned that there were two similar terra-cotta groups in the possession of an American collector in Florence (Figs. 4 and 5). This collector has very kindly allowed me to make photographs of his groups and to make a careful inspection and take the measurements of them. The two groups correspond to each other in measurements, composition, and modelling, but are dissimilar to the group in the Louvre. The group in the Louvre is about 41 cm. broad, 47 high, and 22 thick. One (Fig. 5) of the groups in Florence is $60 \times 55 \times 26$ cm., the other (Fig. 4), $50 \times 54 \times 26$ cm.

In both of the Florence groups the composition is overcrowded through the addition of an extra figure falling in front of the horse. This figure projects in an ugly fashion at the bottom of the group and distracts attention from the main action. It reminds one of Leonardo's observation: "There are some, insane, who are so diverse in mind that the figures in their compositions seem to run here and there as if without thought or meaning." In contrast, one cannot help but note the absolute necessity of every one of the five figures in the Camondo group. Each contributes to the realization of the action, and it is impossible to conceive the group without it.

In the Florentine groups the modelling is weak. The drapery is allowed to interfere with the bodily forms, for example, the biceps on the left arm of the right figure in Figure 4. A certain disjointedness betrays an insufficient knowledge of anatomy. Just as the figures are not so placed as to make the group a unit, each single figure is disintegrated, as we notice emphatically if we try to piece together the various parts of the horse. A striking example of impossible anatomy is given by the left leg of the man escaping from the hind quarters of the horse. It should be compared with the right leg of the man in the left foreground of the Paris group. A still sharper contrast is furnished if one compares the treatment of hair on the Florentine groups with that on the Camondo group. In the latter the hair is modelled by one who is accustomed to see his work finished in bronze. The other workman has carved his hair into clumsy locks, the heaviness of which seems to contribute considerably to the burden the horse has to support. The lack of finish on the back of the Florentine groups (Fig. 6) should also be noted, since the back of the Louvre group is practically as well finished as the front.

It must be said that the Florentine groups are above suspicion as to age. They were successively in the possession of two noble Florentine families (one, the Rucellai). So far as is known, they had always passed as the work of Rustici. This attribution of them is supported by a comparison with his drawings in the Uffizi. These exhibit the same lack of anatomical knowledge: witness the placing of the bent leg of the right-hand figure in the drawing (Fig. 7). An analogy appears in the placing of the bent leg of the Levite of the

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baptistery group (Fig. 8). Perhaps the baldness of the Levite and the general reluctance to the representation of hair in Rustici's drawings is a comment on the awkward handling of hair in the Florentine terra-cottas. The raised arm of the left-hand figure in the drawing has the defects in anatomy so noticeable in the terra-cottas.

The close relation of Leonardo to Rustici, studied in detail in the above-mentioned book of Malaguzzi-Valeri, is of course recorded by Vasari, to whom we are indebted for the following information. Rustici studied with Verrocchio, and after Verrocchio's death fell very naturally into the circle of Leonardo, with whom he worked for a time. The relationship was mutually pleasant, and from Rustici's standpoint profitable. He learned from Leonardo how to make horses, and proceeded to turn them out in various media for his own pleasure. Rustici lived for a time in the street of the Martelli and was particularly intimate with Piero Martelli. Leonardo, according to a memorandum in his note-book of the 22d of March, 1508, was at Florence in the house of Piero Martelli. Among Rustici's numerous other friends is mentioned Francesco Rucellai, to whose family, as we have just noted, came the two Florentine terra-cottas. Thus the stylistic evidence for their authorship is bolstered up by independent literary evidence.

In addition to the groups already discussed, I know of another group which was formerly in the collection of the German antiquary, Brauer. Although mentioned in the *Burlington Magazine* for February, 1916, it has never, so far as I know, been reproduced. Since it has now come by bequest into the possession of the Bargello we may anticipate an appropriate publication. Mr. Horne considered it inferior to the group assigned to Rustici (Fig. 9) in his own collection. Through the courtesy of Count Gamba I have been allowed to study it.

In the Brauer group the action is from left to right. The terra-cotta has sometime been given a coat of brown paint, the disappearance of which reveals exquisite modelling on the head of the horse and the face of the rider, who with compressed lips and upraised arm (forearm and hand missing) is about to deal the finishing blow to an opponent falling across his lap. Below, in the right foreground, a man who has fallen half under the horse seizes the foot of the rider and is about to bite it. Behind the horse, to the left, is a man who corresponds to the crushed figure of the Paris group. Another warrior is in front of the horse. The dimensions, $44 \times 47 \times 23$ cm., coincide almost exactly with those of the Paris group.

There are, however, some differences between the groups, which should be noted. In the Brauer group the helmet of the man who has fallen behind the horse, the fantastic hat of the man who is rising in front, and the tail of the

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horse seem to be additions defectively modelled and lifeless. The tail of the horse corresponds rather closely to that of one of the privately owned groups (Fig. 4). Subtracting, however, these three defects, we have a companion piece to the Camondo group. In fact, the heads of the horse and rider are perhaps more spirited than in the Paris composition.

A close study of the Brauer piece shows that the three additions mentioned were added before baking. There are no additions on the Paris piece. I conclude, therefore, that it was the first to be finished, and that the other was left in an unfinished state, only to be completed by Rustici.

If we can assume that the Camondo group represents the work of Leonardo, the relation between Leonardo and Rustici would be clarified as follows: The Camondo group and the unfinished Brauer group came into Rustici's possession about the time that Leonardo left Florence in 1506. Rustici finished the Brauer group and baked it and perhaps claimed it as his own. In any case he secured, as Vasari records, a considerable reputation as a sculptor of horses. Then, keeping the Paris group as a model, he produced from it the two Florentine groups. Possibly he took it to France with him, finally. Meanwhile his reputation was such that he secured the commission for the three figures on the baptistery. In 1508 he was able to obtain Leonardo's help to complete them. How much of Leonardo they may have about them it is impossible to say with assurance, but it would appear that the Levite has very little. The other may have more. At least, Leonardo's counsels rescued Rustici from an uncomfortable situation, and after Leonardo's departure, the indifferent artist continued to enjoy his bouquets and a secure reputation as a sculptor.

I have just indicated my belief that Leonardo made the Camondo group and its counterpart before 1506 — a belief based on what we know of the evolution of the horse in Leonardo's works. The study of the horse, it is well known, was a passion with him from a very early period. In fact, it was an almost inevitable passion for a young man of intellectual tastes growing up in the studio of Verrocchio at the time when bronze equestrian monuments were the ambition of every *condottiere*. The horse appears conspicuously in the cartoon for the "Adoration of the Kings" just at the time that Verrocchio was engaged on the Colleoni monument. The passion was given added incentive, first by the prospect and then by the reality of the removal of Leonardo to Milan. In spite of his boasting letter of 1482, it was not until 1489 that Leonardo began the Sforza horse. The Battle of Anghiari commissioned in 1503 gave Leonardo another great opportunity in equestrian studies. It is with the horses of this period that the Camondo and Brauer groups show closest analogies. Finally, after Leonardo's return to Milan in 1509, he

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received a new impetus to equestrian studies in the commission for the Trivulzio monument.

The Camondo and Brauer groups are true to the tradition of Verrocchio's workshop in their insistence on line. Characteristically Verrocchian, too, was the preference for a plastic material, bronze, where expense did not prevent it. Bertoldo, on the other hand, even when working in bronze, attempted the effects of carving. Just as Leonardo was true to the tradition of his teacher, Verrocchio, so Michelangelo was true to the tradition of his teacher, Bertoldo, in allowing the feeling for form to outweigh that for linear composition.

The Camondo and Brauer groups are certainly conceived as reliefs, even pictorial reliefs, but, as seen from either end (Fig. 10), they might almost be taken for sculpture in the round. In the careful modelling of the back of the Camondo group survives the mediaeval instinct for the sacredness of the object as a whole, an instinct lost in the Renaissance when the outward show of the façade became sufficient. In the disposal of the figures, all facing the spectator, this Renaissance feeling appears, nourished down to Leonardo's time by the long succession of Florentine painter-sculptors. It is largely the traditional feeling for pictorial composition which unifies the groups despite their Baroque movement. The survival through the Renaissance of the Gothic and its re-emergence in the Baroque are well illustrated in these groups.

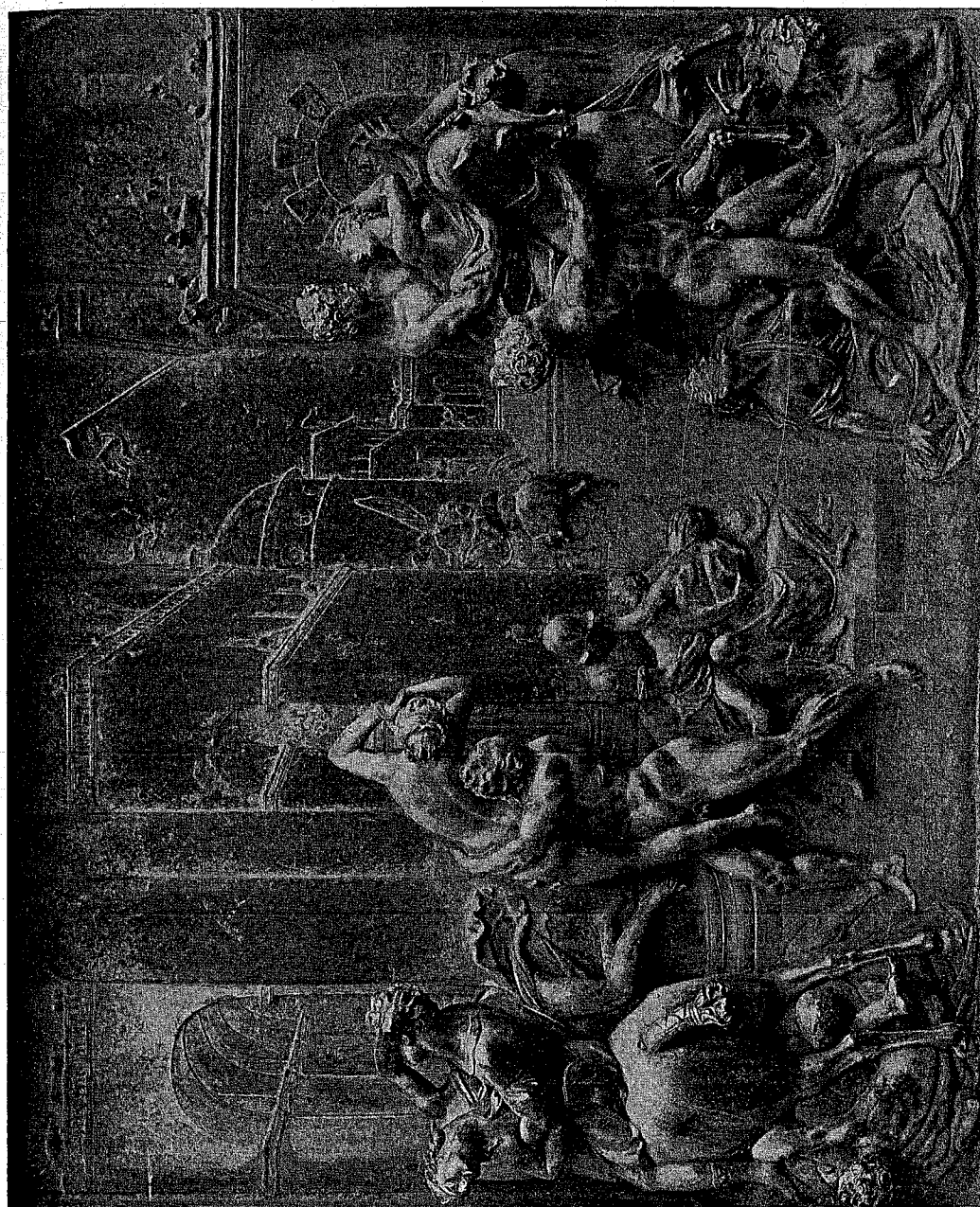
The groups have value as illustrating the study of expression, to which Leonardo devoted considerable time. In the Camondo group every mouth is open to express pain, nevertheless each expression of pain is individualized. The rearing horse crushes the man behind him. The man in the foreground, "deprived of his weapons," uses his teeth upon the big toe of the rider, and, as a fulminating spark, this action explodes the entire group into a frenzy of battle. The cavalier, screaming with pain, chokes his opponent, who pulls on a lock of the horse's mane. The horse bites the falling soldier — who, it should be noted, has a face closely corresponding to that of the warrior in the Budapest Museum. The whole is in motion, no part of which radiates into space. We may regard the group as a representation of a particular combat, or, if we like generalizations such as those with which Rubens's pictures are labelled, as a concentration of the whole fury of war.



1. Paris, Louvre. Camondo Collection



2. Paris. Louvre. Camondo Collection



3. Florence. *Loggia dei Lanzi*. Panel: Rape of the Sabines



4. Florence. Private Collection



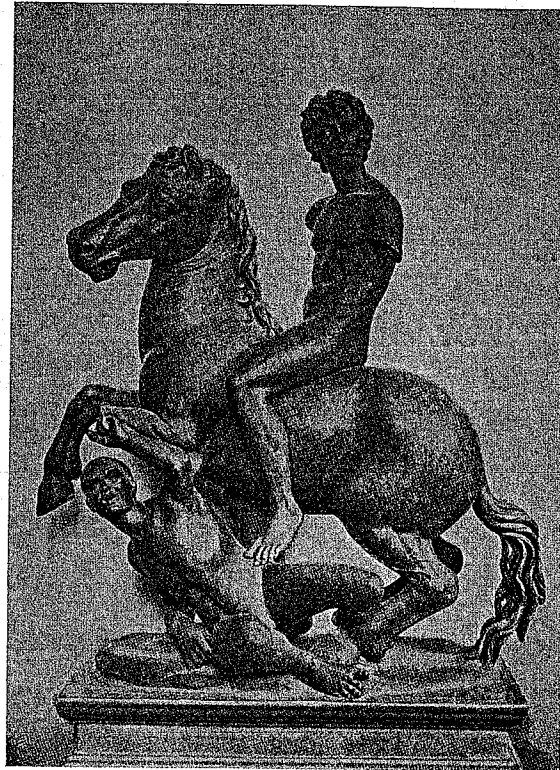
5. Florence. Private Collection



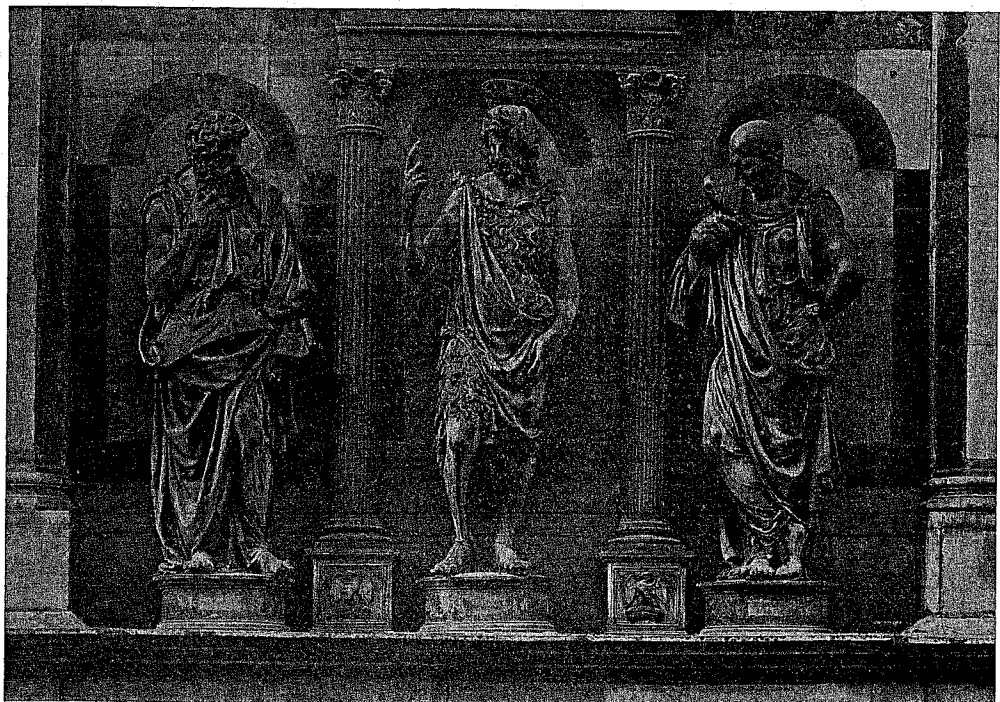
6. Florence. Private Collection



7. Florence. Uffizi



9. Florence. Horne Collection



8. Florence. Baptistry. Pharisee, Levite and St. John



10. Paris. Louvre. Camondo Collection