

The exemplary scholarship of Anna Forlani Tempesti reminds us of the central importance of the study of the material object: close scrutiny of drawings can yield new observations and interpretations. I count myself fortunate to have looked at drawings on many occasions with Anna in Oxford and in Florence, and I offer this case study as a tribute to her varied interests as a connoisseur and scholar of drawings.

At the Ashmolean Museum in his early years as Keeper from 1934, Karl Parker lost no opportunity to enhance the collection of Italian drawings, which would grow considerably until his retirement in 1962. He bought a striking figure study by Bernardino Gatti, *Il Sojaro*, in 1939 (fig. 1), which made a perfect companion to a sheet by the same artist that had previously come to Oxford from the bequest of the antiquarian Francis Douce (1757-1834), formerly owned by Sir Peter Lely, Jonathan Richardson Senior and Sir Joshua Reynolds (fig. 2).<sup>1</sup> Parker's new acquisition also had a distinguished provenance, coming from the Reynolds and the Lawrence collections.

Drawn on a substantial sheet of paper and considerably cut down (now 442 x 223 mm [the caption of Fig. 1 reads: 403 x 223 mm]), Parker's acquisition presents a study of a standing apostle which is built up in layers, with the materials lavishly used. Seen from a low viewpoint, the figure is caught in strong light, which plays over his body and heavy drapery, and he gesticulates in surprise and awe. Gatti placed the form using black chalk, modelling it to some extent including considerable hatching at that stage. With the brush dipped in ink, he then applied strong hatched and cross-hatched lines, next adding white heightening and touches of colour - yellow and pink - perhaps with light effects in mind, together with swirls of grey wash that enhance the tonal range. The monumentality and dynamism of this striking figure is accentuated by Gatti's use of white around the contours to conceal previous revisions and to create radiant light around the form.

Over his career, Bernardino planned three illusionistic fresco scenes that involved gesticulating apostles seen from below. The *Ascension* in San Sigismondo, Cremona, of 1549 presented the scene in a single image, with the Apostles gathered in an earthly zone. In the dome of Santa Maria della Steccata, Parma in c. 1560-1572, the *Assumption of the Virgin* with her

reception into Heaven is depicted in the centre, while around the drum beneath (painted at the end of that project), individual apostles witness this vision, with each figure's body language registering amazement. Finally, Gatti planned a large *Assumption* altarpiece in the Duomo at Cremona from 1574, which would have included expressive apostles, but he died before completing the project.

The Ashmolean *Standing Apostle* (together with other single *Apostle* studies in Chatsworth, Rennes and the J. Paul Getty Museum) has been connected either with the San Sigismondo *Ascension*,<sup>2</sup> or with the Steccata *Assumption*.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, Gatti's procedures involved making elaborate studies with many revisions as he worked towards a satisfactory resolution, and the Ashmolean *Standing Apostle* reflects more closely the position of an apostle in the later Steccata fresco rather than any of the figures in San Sigismondo. In this case study, I will examine the question of whether Bernardino made this drawing in about 1549 or towards 1572.

Importantly, the second drawing by Gatti in the Ashmolean, with studies of a *Kneeling Apostle*, can be identified with certainty as a preparatory study for the San Sigismondo *Ascension* (fig. 2). Made in a similar layered technique, the sheet is additionally squared for transfer to a larger scale. Prior to making this study, Gatti had set out his initial thoughts in a pen sketch for the lower part of the *Ascension* composition (Florence, GDS, inv. 2102 F), with standing and kneeling apostles looking upwards and gesturing in surprise.<sup>4</sup> Detailed individual studies then followed. He worked up his idea for a kneeling figure with arms upraised in wonder, using pen lines, fluid ink washes and white bodycolour over black chalk (fig. 2). At this stage, his interest was in the expressive potential of the pose, so that he did not develop the foreshortened head beyond the initial chalk sketch. Reviewing his progress and perhaps dissatisfied with the appearance of the drapery at the apostle's waist, Gatti vigorously brushed additional white bodycolour over this area, before re-studying the drapery folds and belt separately at the right. Finally, in a quick sketch of the entire figure in black chalk at the lower right (later partially cut and overlaid by collectors' marks) he modified the pose. He twisted the apostle's upper body to the left, altering the original dynamic to show the figure with his raised



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Fig. 1 Bernardino Gatti, *Standing Apostle*, pen and brush with black ink and brown and grey washes over black chalk, heightened with white bodycolour, with yellow and pink pigment on laid paper, 403 x 223 mm. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, inv. WA1939.86.

paspartout has been cut out: is it fine with you?



2



3

because of a lack of space, the editors of the book made a decision to eliminate fig. 2 (detail of the Kneeling Apostle)

Fig. 2 Bernardino Gatti, *Kneeling Apostle*, pen and brush with black ink and brown washes over black chalk, heightened with white bodycolour, squared in black chalk; a separate fragmentary study in black chalk, on laid paper, 235 x 190 mm. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, inv. WA1863.650.

Fig. 3 Bernardino Gatti, *Standing Apostle*, black and red chalk, pen and brush with grey-black ink and grey washes heightened with white bodycolour, squared in red chalk, on laid paper, 398 x 218 mm. Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, inv. 84.GG.651.

hands now joined in prayer. Gatti employed this revised figure in the final fresco, doubtless studying it more closely in a further elaborate drawing, given his intensely considered design process.

As Parker observed, the Ashmolean's *Standing Apostle* and *Kneeling Apostle* are similar in style and handling. Yet, the *Kneeling Apostle* is closer, arguably, to an *Apostle* study in the Getty Museum (fig. 3) which is securely datable to the c. 1560-1572 project, than it is to the Ashmolean *Standing Apostle*, recalling the fact that Bernardino's style did not change much over time.<sup>5</sup> Significantly, the *Kneeling Apostle* is also closer in handling to the two *Apostle* studies at Chatsworth which clearly relate to the San Sigismondo *Ascension*.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, by comparison with the latter studies and with the Ashmolean *Kneeling Apostle*, the *Standing Apostle* is more richly layered, with a thicker application of white heightening, and with strong passages of grey wash brushed heavily over areas such as the arms and drapery by way of revision. I would argue that Gatti made both Ashmolean studies about 1549, but then later re-worked the *Standing Apostle*. He did not directly employ this pose at San Sigismondo. However, he re-considered this figure in a sheet at Chatsworth, rotating the form but retaining the dynamics of the pose (while this type of rotation may suggest the use of sculptural models, it is also likely that an experienced artist can mentally rotate a form in moving from one sheet to another).<sup>7</sup> Later, when approaching the commission for the *Assumption*, Gatti looked back at his earlier inventions, and with the different demands of the Steccata site in mind, he considered how he might use this standing figure with upraised arm, clutching his drapery. Considerable re-touching followed, with some earlier details obliterated; but Gatti was not yet satisfied. Effectively, he moved to a new sheet to design the apostle afresh in the drawing in the Getty Museum, which is on the same scale (fig. 4). There, he studied the figure in the same position, slightly changing the angle of the right arm, and making alterations to the drapery that enhanced the expressiveness of the pose. Crucially, he defined the form and profile more clearly and sculpturally before squaring the study for transfer. The Getty drawing was undoubtedly preparatory for the Steccata *Assumption* project, as the figure was directly used in the fresco. The challenge posed by the lower register of the cupola meant that each apostle was a fully-defined figure in his own space, rather than being integrated into a single composition as at San Sigismondo: this accounts for Gatti's struggle to re-mould his earlier invention.<sup>8</sup>

In the Ashmolean sheet (fig. 1) we can trace how the artist, towards 1572, effectively transformed his study of c. 1549, which had been modelled up to a certain level, into a highly painterly work, where tonal and colouristic values predominate. In its layered materiality, the sheet documents the trials and efforts of Gatti's design process in a palimpsest of alterations

and obliterations made over time, affording significant comparisons with the *Kneeling Apostle* in the same museum that displays a more linear process of revisions and changes made all at once. A fortunate survival, the *Standing Apostle* remains a remarkably rich, pictorial image, charged with a gestural energy that evokes the artist's keenness of intention in his efforts to create a powerful singular figure.

- 1 K.T. Parker, *Catalogue of the Collection of Drawings in the Ashmolean Museum, II. Italian Schools*, Oxford 1956, respectively p. 117, cat. 243 (inv. WA1939.86) and p. 116, cat. 242 (inv. WA1863.650).
- 2 *Ibidem*; M. Di Giampaolo, *Aspetti della grafica cremonese per San Sigismondo da Camillo Boccaccino a Bernardino Campi*, 'Antichità Viva', XIII, 1974, 6, pp. 27-28; B. Meijer, *Gli affreschi di Bernardino Gatti*, in *Santa Maria della Steccata*, edited by B. Adorni, Parma 1982, p. 197; G. Bora, *Bernardino Gatti detto il Sojaro*, in *I segni dell'arte. Il Cinquecento da Praga a Cremona, exhibition catalogue* (Cremona, 1997) edited by G. Bora and M. Zlatohlávek, Venezia 1997, pp. 267-269, and cat. 93.
- 3 J.A. Gere, *Drawings in the Ashmolean Museum*, 'The Burlington Magazine', 99, 1957, 650, p. 161; H. Macandrew, *Ashmolean Museum Oxford: Catalogue of the Collection of Drawings, III. Italian Schools, Supplement*, Oxford 1980, p. 262; D. De Grazia Bohlin, *Correggio and His Legacy. Sixteenth-Century Emilian Drawings*, exhibition catalogue, Washington 1984, pp. 294-297, cat. 92; G. Goldner, with the assistance of L. Hendrix and G. Williams, *European Drawings: Catalogue of the Collections*, I, Malibu 1988, under cat. 14; M. Tanzi, *Bernardino Gatti dit il Sojaro*, in *Disegno. Les dessins italiens au Musée de Rennes, exhibition catalogue* (Modena, Rennes, 1990), Rennes 1990, p. 68, under cat. 28. For a drawing in the British Museum, inv. 1946,0713.29 of an *Apostle* that also relates to the Steccata, see A.E. Popham, *Italian Drawings in the British Museum: Artists Working in Parma in the Sixteenth Century*, I, London 1967, cat. 34.
- 4 Bora, *Bernardino Gatti* cit., p. 269, cat. 91.
- 5 Goldner, *European Drawings* cit., cat. 14, inv. 84.GG.651.
- 6 M. Jaffé, *The Devonshire Collection of Italian Drawings, IV. Venetian and Northern Italian Schools*, London 1994, cat. 800 (inv. 331) and cat. 802 (inv. 329).
- 7 *Ibidem*, cat. 800 (inv. 331), the possible use of sculptural models is also mentioned.
- 8 In the case of the *Apostle* study in the British Museum, inv. 1946,0713.29, Gatti revised the figure by cutting out and overlaying more paper to accommodate his changing thoughts as he met this challenge presented by the site. See Popham, *Italian Drawings* cit.