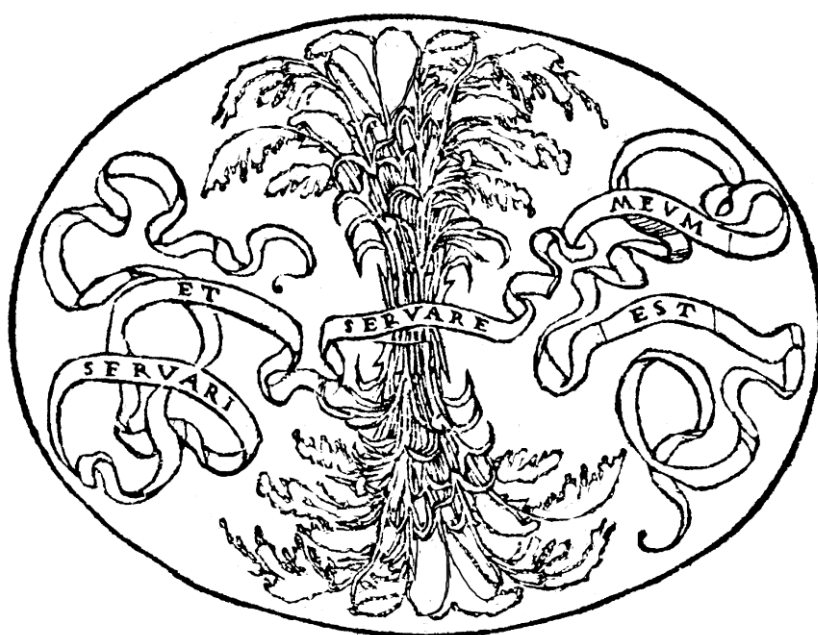


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**ON SOME LATE RENAISSANCE ORNAMENT DRAWINGS AT THE ASHMOLEAN
MUSEUM, OXFORD:**

**GIOVANNI BATTISTA LOMBARDELLI, AVANZINO NUCCI, GIOVANNI
BATTISTA DELLA ROVERE AND A PROPOSAL FOR FEDERICO BRANDANI**

The aim of this article is to present a selection of drawings for ornament from the collection of the Ashmolean Museum of Oxford hitherto anonymous or still carrying problematic attributions. Encompassing a wide range of decorations, including frames, cartouche and grotesque designs for translation in painting or other media, whether seen as single motifs or combined to form frieze or ceiling projects, ornament drawings form one of the most elusive categories which specialists still confront today. As well as the loss of the original contexts for which they might have been conceived, it is their use and function that greatly contribute to their anonymity. While it is often possible to place them chronologically, or even to link them to the house-style of a workshop, the vocabulary often reflected the broader fashion of the time, with schemes and single motifs repeated with little variation design after design and over decades. In many instances, such drawings were conceived as pattern-drawings, often gathered to form model-books, now dispersed. These would have comprised drawings by the master, but also variations by workshop members, who remain unnamed largely due to the lack of documentary evidence. Furthermore, their open-ended nature, both as a quick source of ideas for the workshop to draw from and for patrons to browse¹, meant designs were presented with very generic and neutral content that could be adapted and re-adapted to a variety of contexts. The lack of armorial devices or specific iconographies associated with this use is often a defining characteristic that complicates matters, leaving us to rely on a purely connoisseurial exercise. When such visual information, in turn, is included, it provides invaluable clues, as seen in a splendid, hitherto unattributed sheet at the Ashmolean Museum, which is the first I shall present².

A problem-solving drawing (Fig. 1) the artist began to work in graphite freely, jotting down solutions for an armorial frieze, which would have embellished a rectangular stateroom, then turning to pen and rich diluted ink to fix some of his thoughts. The presence of measurements in Roman *palmi* clearly indicates the draughtsman had a precise commission in mind. The height of the frieze would have measured 1.34 meters (6 *palmi*), excluding the upper and lower cornices, the length of both the long sides roughly 11 meters (49 *palmi*), and that of the short sides just over 7 meters (32 *palmi*). In the two segments above, the artist experimented with different solutions, with wider compartments containing empty coats of arms surmounted by coronets that do not correspond correctly to any normal Italian rank of nobility. The drawing is effectively still a general concept. The aspects of the coat of arms, and the more detailed iconography, would have been defined at a later stage of the design in collaboration with the patron, whose involvement was evidently regarded as fundamental for their accomplishment, as testified by Giovanni Battista Armenini in a chapter of the *De' veri*

For the fruitful and stimulating exchanges about the drawings here presented I shall like to warmly thank Francesco Grisolia, Florian Härb, Elena Rame, Laura Teza, Patrizia Tosini, Rhoda Eitel-Porter, Simonetta Prosperi Valenti Rodinò and James Mundy.

¹ For this aspect, in relation for example to the many drawings by Luzio Luzi that have come down to us, see PROSPERI VALENTI RODINÒ 2007, p. 284, no. 201b.

² Inv. WA1948.85. Here attributed to Giovanni Battista Lombardelli, *Armoial frieze*. Pen and brown ink with brown wash over black chalk. 416x537 mm. Inscribed throughout the image in pen and brown ink by the artist: Palmi 6 mano / p 49 / p 6 / p 32.

precetti della pittura (Ravenna 1586)³. The cartouches are flanked by female figures holding branches whom the artist imagined as either standing or seated. Smaller compartments, framing landscapes, separate each heraldic element. Such a geometrical articulation would have matched perfectly with the beams and lacunars of a wooden coffered ceiling, with which many of these types of friezes were often combined, and in dialogue with which must, at least in part, have developed.

Clearly appearing in the third segment is the coat of arms of the Cesi family, showing a dogwood tree sitting on a sextuple mount. On each side are two further coats of arms, this time surmounted by a cardinal's hat. They are separated from the central compartment by two smaller panels each decorated again with the Cesi arms, but this time combined with two rampant lions, a family emblem. On the far left, in graphite alone, is a further cartouche, now supported by two lively putti. In the two graphite jottings in the lower left, the artist tried to work out the number of compartments needed to fill the given space. Finally, in segment below, the Cesi's charge appears again combined with rampant lions and set against military trophies, the latter an iconographical element revealing the celebratory nature of the frieze.

In his 1956 catalogue of the Italian drawings of the Ashmolean Museum, K.T. Parker (1895-1992) believed the cardinal's coat of arms to belong to Pier Donato Cesi (1585-1656), the younger, who was raised to cardinal in 1623 by Pope Urban VIII (1623-1644), in so doing placing the drawing well into the 17th century⁴. Hugh Macandrew on the other hand rejected this identification in his 1980 supplement to Parker's catalogue without, however, suggesting an alternative solution⁵. Yet, there can be little doubt that the coats of arms are those of Cardinal Pier Donato Cesi (c. 1522-1586), senior, from the line of Acquasparta in Umbria. This shows the Cesi arms impaled with that of Antonio Ghisleri, who reigned as Pope Pius V between 1566 and 1572, and who had raised him to cardinalate in 1570⁶.

Pier Donato's fame is, above all, attached to the construction of the Palace of the Archiginnasio in Bologna, which he directed as apostolic vice-legate under Pope Pius IV (1559-1565) between 1560 and 1565, as well as to the construction of the Oratorian Church of Santa Maria in Vallicella in Rome. An ally of the Granduke Cosimo I de' Medici, who supported his candidacy to the papacy in 1572, a keen collector of antiquities and a patron of Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), and of the sculptor/architect Guglielmo della Porta (c. 1515-1577), Pier Donato became the most prominent member of the family after his election as a cardinal. He invested substantial energy and sums of money in artistic commissions in the Eternal City and in the numerous family feuds outside, which would have promoted and perpetuated the magnificence of the family name⁷.

Many were the artists at work for Pier Donato who still today remain unnamed. Yet, despite some blurry passages caused by the oxidation of the iron gall ink and the synthetic nature of the study, I believe it is possible to discern in our drawing the hand and mind of one of the artists active for the Cardinal in the 1580s, namely the Marchigian Giovanni Battista Lombardelli (1535/1540-1592)⁸. The layered technique with rich brown wash still echoes that of Marco Marchetti da Faenza (before 1528-1588) with whom, according to Lombardelli's

³ On the role of patronage and on the related sources, and for the problems surrounding the attribution of frieze designs from the second half of 16th century, see AMADIO 2016. For another relevant reading see also AMADIO 2016(2017).

⁴ PARKER 1956, pp. 411-412, no. 779.

⁵ MACANDREW 1980, Appendix 2, pp. 292-293, no. 779.

⁶ For a biographical profile of Pier Donato Cesi see BORROMEO 1980.

⁷ For Pier Donato Cesi as a patron of the arts, with further references to Lombardelli's activity, see NOCCHI 2015; 2017a; 2017b; TOSINI 2018, especially p. 116.

⁸ For a biographical profile of Lombardelli see NICASTRO 2005. On Lombardelli as a draughtsman see the fundamental catalogue by GRISOLIA 2010 with ample bibliography on the artist. See also TOSINI 2011 and 2017.

principal biographer Giovanni Baglione, the artist had first trained⁹. The oval facial types with tiny, rounded features, while reminiscent of those of Raffaellino da Reggio (1550-1578), whose manner Giovanni Battista imitated and emulated, are charged with expressionistic, at times grotesque, traits, revealing the artist's very personal interpretation of the master's style. The motif of the female standing figures leaning against the cartouche as if an integral part of the ornament, rather than a distinct unit, is also a feature recurrent in Lombardelli's repertoire as seen in the friezes for the Cesi Palace of Acquasparta. Compelling comparisons can be made with hastily executed scenes depicting the *Life of St. Antony* (Figs. 2-4), in a private collection, preparatory for frescoes in the homonymous church on the Esquiline, Rome¹⁰, of 1585-1586, as well as with the quickest passages in studies for the aforementioned friezes in Acquasparta, such as *The Triumphs of Lucullus* in Madrid, Prado¹¹, and in Florence, Uffizi¹² (Figs. 5-6). The Ashmolean study would appear to date from this period of Lombardelli's career.

The overall scheme is highly dependent on Raffaellino's decorative friezes conceived by 1578 for the Villa Gambara in Bagnaia (Villa Lante), where Lombardelli might have collaborated. Yet while working within conventions, the drawing is striking for the *licentia*, as exemplified by the central coat arms, which Macandrew believed to belong to an identified member of the Cesi family. This is nothing more than a free and imaginative divertissement. Here, in a moment of fervid creativity and personal experimentation, the artist inscribed the arms in an escutcheon, which is in turn contained within a cartouche. Breaking conventions, he then decorated the latter, inserting an eagle on the left, with the rampant lion another emblem of the Cesi family, and three bends on the right-hand side. In so doing, he compressed the heraldic information within a small space, including the Ghislieri's emblem, now reversed. Above all, the Ashmolean sheet displays Lombardelli's skills as a creative composer of a specific type of decorative cycle, that of painted friezes, in which he must have been fluent. One more frieze study has been persuasively reattributed by Patrizia Tosini to Lombardelli rather than Raffaellino¹³. This is a study for Palazzo Buzi in Orvieto, now in Darmstadt, Hessisches Landesmuseum, though it is rather different in function from our drawing. Even more interestingly, the Ashmolean sheet provides evidence for Lombardelli's interest in armorial designs, of which Baglione again informs us

Né tralascierò, che sono suoi molti disegni di diuersi scudi d'arme con figurine e puttini tanto belli e gratiosi che in quel genere sperar più non si poteva; e furono in legno intagliati (I will not omit the fact that many are the drawings of various coats of arms with figures and putti, which are so beautiful and refined that you could not hope to find better. And they were carved in wood)¹⁴.

Baglione's text implies the existence of a corpus of drawings for heraldry, seemingly for translation in print.

In another inventive cartouche design (Fig. 7), both the inclusion of the Aldobrandini emblems and some stylistic traits must have prompted K.T. Parker to perceive the personality of Cherubino Alberti (1553-1615), whose activity under Pope Clement VIII Aldobrandini is

⁹ BAGLIONE 1642, pp. 45-46, especially p. 45.

¹⁰ For the sheets see GRISOLIA 2010, pp. 5, 25, note 10.

¹¹ Inv. D002968. 176x230 mm. Pen and brown ink and grey brown wash. As Giovanni De' Vecchi in TURNER 2004, no. 35, and then correctly attributed, together with a related group of drawings in Florence, Uffizi, to Lombardelli by GRISOLIA 2010, pp. 6-9.

¹² Inv. 14171. Florence, Uffizi. Giovanni Battista Lombardelli, *The Triumphs of Lucullus*. Pen and brown with brown wash. 180x239 mm.

¹³ See TOSINI 2011.

¹⁴ BAGLIONE 1642, p. 46.

largely documented¹⁵. Philip Pouncey was surely correct however in suggesting the name of Pseudo Bernardo-Castello, later identified with Avanzino Nuci (c. 1552-1629) by the same scholar, with an unpublished note in the departmental archive of the museum¹⁶. In support of this attribution I'd like to draw on a comparison with a sheet in Biblioteca Reale in Turin, yet another example of Avanzino Nucci's draughtsmanship, if rather provincial, identified by Pouncey with a manuscript note on the mount, but to my knowledge, like the Ashmolean drawing, hitherto unpublished (Fig. 8)¹⁷. No work can be connected to this design. However, Nucci's activity for the Aldobrandini is documented by a payment for «sei historie» (six paintings, now lost) in c. 1604, executed for the private chapel of Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, nephew of Pope Clemente VIII, in his Palazzo Aldobrandini al Corso, Rome (now Palazzo Doria Pamphili)¹⁸ and our cartouche design may presumably date to this time of his career. The phoenix above centre might be a reference to Clement VIII, detail that seems to point towards the years of his papacy for the execution of this drawing¹⁹.

In a further inventive drawing, personifications of Justice and Fortitude flank a cartouche on the left and right, respectively, for which the artist tries alternative solutions (Fig. 9)²⁰. At the top is a cardinal's hat with winged putti imagined in flight as they draw back curtains open to unveil the scene below. The generic iconography, with the two virtues above being commonly found as decorations of escutcheons, and the absence of inscriptions or emblems, makes it difficult to narrow down its purpose, and in fact, our drawing retains all the traits of a repertoire drawing to be shown to one or more prospective patron for discussion. The hand is however that of a well-defined and worthy artistic personality working in the late Renaissance, whom Parker attempted to identify with Giovanni Battista Ricci da Novara (1552-1627). More recently, Giovanni Santucci put forward the name of the Modena born painter and designer Giovanni Guerra (1544-1618)²¹. As to the latter suggestion, neither the facial types nor the handling chimes with those by Guerra. Guerra's mannered and slender figural types can in contrast be observed in his extensive corpus of drawings that has come down to us. This now includes a hitherto unnoticed sheet, again in the Biblioteca Reale of Turin, catalogued by Aldo Albertini as in style of Taddeo Zuccaro²², but unmistakably a work by Guerra, that I should like to note in this context (Fig. 11)²³. Parker's attribution, on the other hand, although incorrect, is indicative. The scholar's acute eye evidently perceived the same traits seen in drawings once attributed to Ricci da Novara, by virtue of the monogram

¹⁵ PARKER 1956, App. B, p. 557, no. 19.

¹⁶ Unpublished notes on the Talman collection, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, Western Art Department. This was evidently an oral communication to Hugh Macandrew who in the 1970s was preparing a complete catalogue of the Talman drawings, a project which remained unaccomplished.

¹⁷ Inv. 15725 DC, Turin, Biblioteca Reale. See BERTINI 1958, p. 52, no. 388 (as Ventura Salimbeni). Pen and brown ink with brown wash, the composition squared for transfer, on laid paper. Inscribed on the mount «Pseudo Bernardo-Castello (Pouncey)». See also BERTINI 1958, p. 52, no. 387 (as Ventura Salimbeni) for another example of Nucci's draughtsmanship, also carrying Philip Pouncey's manuscript note.

¹⁸ HIBBARD 1964.

¹⁹ «E a tempi nostri è stata la fenice impresa di papa Clemente Ottavo senza motto, che più volte l'abbiamo veduto nella sua sedia pontificale» (RIPA 1624-1625, II, p. 345).

²⁰ Inv. WA1942.54.109. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, Small Talman album. Here attributed to Giovanni Battista della Rovere, *Cartouche design*. Pen and black ink over lead or graphite with grey wash on laid paper. The sheet belongs to an album assembled by the collectors and architects William and John Talman gathering a remarkable collection of ornament prints and drawings, at the Ashmolean Museum since 1942. It carries one of the Talman's elaborate gilt borders.

²¹ PARKER 1956, cat. 667. G. Santucci under folio 109 in the on-line catalogue at [John Talman: an early eighteenth-century collector of drawings \(unipi.it\)](http://John.Talman:an.early.eighteenth-century.collector.of.drawings.unipi.it) <January 1, 2022>.

²² Inv. D.C. 15872, Turin, Biblioteca Reale. Here attributed to Giovanni Guerra, *Coronation of a pope*. Pen and brown ink with brown wash on laid paper. As «Cerchia degli Zuccaro» in BERTINI 1958, p. 59, no. 455.

²³ The delicate use of pen and wash suggests the sheet dates from c. 1585-1590, at the time of Guerra's intensive activity under Pope Sixtus V in collaboration with Cesare Nebbia.

'JBR' appearing on some sheets, interpreted by early connoisseurs as the initials of the artist. It was Philip Pouncey who later recognised it as the signature of Giovanni Battista della Rovere (1561-1633), to whom our sheet can be confidently attributed²⁴. The same expressive and free treatment of anatomy, use of free chalk underdrawing and vibrant pen line, enriched by delicate wash, can be detected in many other sheets under Giovanni Battista della Rovere's name, such as a signed and dated one at the Morgan Library, New York (Fig. 10)²⁵. Otherwise known, along with his brother Giovanni Mauro, for drawings of religious narrative subject produced in line with the culture of the Counter-Reformation, this represents a rare example of a sheet of purely ornamental nature by Giovanni Battista.

Among the most beautiful and yet problematic ornament drawings in the Talman collection of the Ashmolean Museum is an elaborate design for a stucco panel over a fireplace (Fig. 12)²⁶. A repertoire of inventive ideas, it depicts an empty escutcheon, flanked by Minerva and by a personification of Fortitude, each holding an olive and an oak branch – an allusion to the concord of Peace and Strength. Two putti below sit on a plinth holding flames, their heads turned towards the centre of the composition, while above two mischievous boys balance on festoons and pull strings to which the heraldic element is attached. The name of Taddeo Zuccaro (1529-1566) as the author of this drawing was first suggested by Philip Pouncey, who rightly felt that the design showed a taste postdating Baldassarre Peruzzi (c. 1481-1536), to whom Parker had initially attributed our sheet. The suggestion was taken up by John Gere in his seminal publication of 1969 on Taddeo's drawings. Following Parker, Gere persuasively argued that the oak might refer to the ducal family of della Rovere. He saw it as a drawing produced by Taddeo for one of the Della Rovere's residences during his stay in the Duchy between 1551 and 1553. At this time, the taste for stucco decoration was particularly in vogue in the Marche and found an original interpreter in the sculptor Federico Brandani, also from Urbino, (c. 1525-1575). Gere felt that the function and Marchigian context for which this drawing might have been produced could account for the formulae employed, as well as for the «deliberate» handling of the pen which he admitted is unlike Taddeo's own. However, when considering the drawing in the context of Taddeo's draughtsmanship, even when compared to drawings for decorative enterprises, the sheet remains so exceptional that the context and function may not be sufficient to justify the drawing's form. It seems to me that the rich linearity noted by Gere might instead be in debt to Prospero Fontana's drawings, as seen in studies connected to the *Feast of Gods* in Villa Giulia²⁷, whose mannerist and expressive traits our draughtsman tempers with a classicising taste. And I wonder if we should look instead for an artist where such traits converge. One possibility that should be contemplated is that this, rather than being a drawing by Taddeo producing an exceptional sheet in the manner of Brandani's stucco work, on the contrary could be an example by Federico Brandani, designer and draughtsman between the Zuccari and Prospero Fontana.

²⁴ For the question of the monogram, see VITZTHUM 1961; A. Blunt, *Supplements to the Catalogues of the Italian and French Drawings, with a History of the Royal Collection of Drawings*, in SCHILLING 1971, p. 115, no. 415.

²⁵ Inv. 1993.401. New York, The Morgan Library & Museum. Giovanni Battista della Rovere, *Doubting Thomas*, pen and brown ink with brown wash on laid paper. Signed and dated on verso: «1593 JBR 167 ?temb». For other compelling comparisons, see London, British Museum, inv. SL5237.69, also signed and dated; London, Windsor Castle, inv. RCIN 990228 and RCIN 990230, or Florence, Uffizi, inv. 7278 F.

²⁶ Inv. WA1942.54.122. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, Small Talman album. Here attributed to Federico Brandani, *Design for an overmantel panel*, pen and brown ink on laid paper, lower left edge partially made up, the sheet surrounded by an elaborate gilt border. Inscribed on the verso «S(cudi) 119 da lac(.)q», very plausibly by the artist himself. On the drawing see PARKER 1956, pp. 231-232, no. 464 (as possibly by Baldassarre Peruzzi); GERE 1969, pp. 45-47 and pp. 182-183, no. 155 (as Taddeo Zuccaro); G. Santucci under folio 122, as Baldassarre Peruzzi, with no reference to Gere's publication mentioned above, in the on-line catalogue at [John Talman: an early eighteenth-century collector of drawings \(unipi.it\)](http://John.Talman.unipi.it) <January 1, 2022>.

²⁷ Inv. 1875,0710.2631. London, British Museum. See GERE-POUNCEY 1983, part 1, no. 103.

Otherwise previously unknown as a draughtsman, the hand of Brandani has in recent years been identified by Giovanni Santucci in a drawing of c. 1571²⁸. Now presented in two sheets, these were probably once joined together to show a project for the remodelling of the fifteenth-century Chapel of the Dukes of Urbino (or of the Annunciation) in the Basilica of Loreto, commissioned by Guidobaldo II della Rovere (reigned 1538-1574). Works on the chapel were underway when they were paused in May 1572, only to resume a decade later under the patronage of Guidobaldo's son, Francesco Maria II (reigned 1574-1631), this time with Federico Zuccaro as the artist in charge²⁹.

The drawing is beautifully layered to suggest the different depths and textures of the wall. Two important implications in my opinion arise from the identification of the Loreto design, which have not been remarked upon as yet. First and foremost, Brandani effectively emerges not only as a skilled draughtsman but also as an artist who has deeply absorbed Taddeo's mature draughtsmanship. The comparisons here presented eloquently illustrate this point (Figs. 13-16). The consonances are such that one wonders if the hand of Brandani might be further recognised among some of the very many drawings still associated to the names of Taddeo or indeed Federico «from the critical 1560s» onwards³⁰. This would in fact be hardly surprising, given the intense exchange that must have existed between Brandani and Taddeo since the 1540s in Urbino but also in Rome, where their presence is documented in 1553 in Villa Giulia along that of Bartolomeo Ammannati, and of the Bolognese Prospero Fontana, who had taken over direction from Giorgio Vasari. Brandani often turned to Taddeo for inspiration of specific narrative scenes decorating his ceilings, as those in the Palace Baviera in Senigallia (late 1550s), or in the Palace Corboli Aquilini in Urbino (now in Palazzo Ducale, after 1562-1568). However, he was evidently a multifaceted artistic personality. For the Loreto project now demonstrates that he was capable of devising the entire ensembles, rather than being a mere executor of other artists' designs, as his personality has been characterized by some scholars³¹. And these were ensembles where the narrative scenes never tended to be literally reproduced but rather appropriated. The second and broader consideration concerns the role of drawing in Brandani's creative process – a practice no doubt less often associated to the activity of *plasticatori*, but evidently a fundamental and economical tool not only in the creative process, but also as a reference for workshop members often charged with the translation of the master's ideas.

The overmantel's drawing style clearly suggests an earlier dating than the Loreto design. But with this, it shares its dependence on Taddeo Zuccaro, as well as revealing the mind and hand of a sculptor in the clear taste for the interplay of three-dimensional and in-relief elements. And that this sculptor might be identified with Brandani seems to be indicated

²⁸ Invs. WA1944.102.48 and WA1944.102.49. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, also and perhaps not accidentally forming part of the Talman collection. See SANTUCCI 2014. I shall note that while it is possible that two sheets were once joined together, there is no material evidence that the project was actually ever folded to form a paper model, as suggested by Santucci, as the folding marks marked 'b' by Santucci himself in fig. 14 are not present.

²⁹ For a recent contribution on Federico's activity on the Loreto chapel, see RUSSO 2015.

³⁰ For the thorny question concerning the distinction of hands between the two brothers see, at least, MUNDY 2005. The sheet in Berlin, Staatliche Museen Kupferstichkabinett, inv. 2214, was previously believed to be a study for the *Assumption of the Virgin* in the Pucci Chapel (ivi, pp. 171, 184, note 19). However, this is no doubt a later study by Federico for one of the compartments on the ceiling of the Chapel of the Annunciation in Loreto, as most evidently shown by the framing lines. This was noted by John Gere with a manuscript annotation on the mount, and is now accepted by James Mundy. I am enormously grateful to James Mundy for sharing an entry of his forthcoming catalogue of Federico's drawings with me. For the study for the Pucci *Assumption* in a private collection, an attribution to Taddeo, rather than to Federico, was favoured by GERE 1966, p. 290.

³¹ For example by GERE 1963, especially p. 310, note 17, and by CLIFFORD–MALLET 1976, especially p. 406, note 10. In fact, Franco's and Taddeo's drawings were only some of the many graphic sources Brandani used for inspiration. For two recent useful overviews on Brandani, see DELPRIORI 2017 and PROCACCINI 2019, both with ample bibliography.

by comparisons with the panel's vocabulary and its specific declension with his finished work, including the splendid *Nativity* in the Oratorio di San Giuseppe, a work that is culturally not distant from our drawing³². The similarities between the physiognomy of the candle-bearing children and the chubby, expressive putti modelled, almost drawn, on the ceiling must surely not be coincidental (Figs. 17-19). Equally, striking is the idea of the drapery resolving in voluminous bows, or the play of tightly folded curls and masks and festoons – all original motifs that recur throughout Brandani's production from the second half of the 1550s (Figs. 20-23). This encompassed fashionable overmantels, where Brandani re-proposed over and over established *all'antica* formulae which must have been highly sought after by the local elites (Figs. 24-25)³³.

³² In the light of the current evidence, the late dating to the 1570s of much of Brandani's sculpted output, including the *Nativity*, in recent years suggested by GENOVA 2015, is not persuasive, as eloquently argued by DELPRIORI 2017, pp. 114-115.

³³ One more drawing traditionally associated with Prospero Fontana since GERE 1965 should be mentioned in this context. This is *Virtue subduing Fortune*, Julius III's personal device, at the Royal collection (inv. RCIN 905990), an exact match with the stucco in Villa Giulia first attributed to Brandani by HOFFMANN 1967. Formerly attributed to Taddeo and to Giorgio Vasari, this remains an unusually polished drawing for Prospero. I wonder, if cautiously, if I should tentatively suggest that it be considered a worked-up modelletto of Prospero's swift idea in Florence, Uffizi (inv. 109066 r.), by Brandani himself. I shall note that Serena Quagliaroli and Matteo Procaccini independently raised the same question (orally, January 2022).



Fig. 1: Here attributed to Giovanni Battista Lombardelli, *Compositional study for a frieze, incorporating the Coat of Arms of Cardinal Pier Donato senior*. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum



Fig. 2: Here attributed to Giovanni Battista Lombardelli, details of Fig. 1



Figs. 3-4: Giovanni Battista Lombardelli, *Scenes from the Life of St. Antony*. Private collection

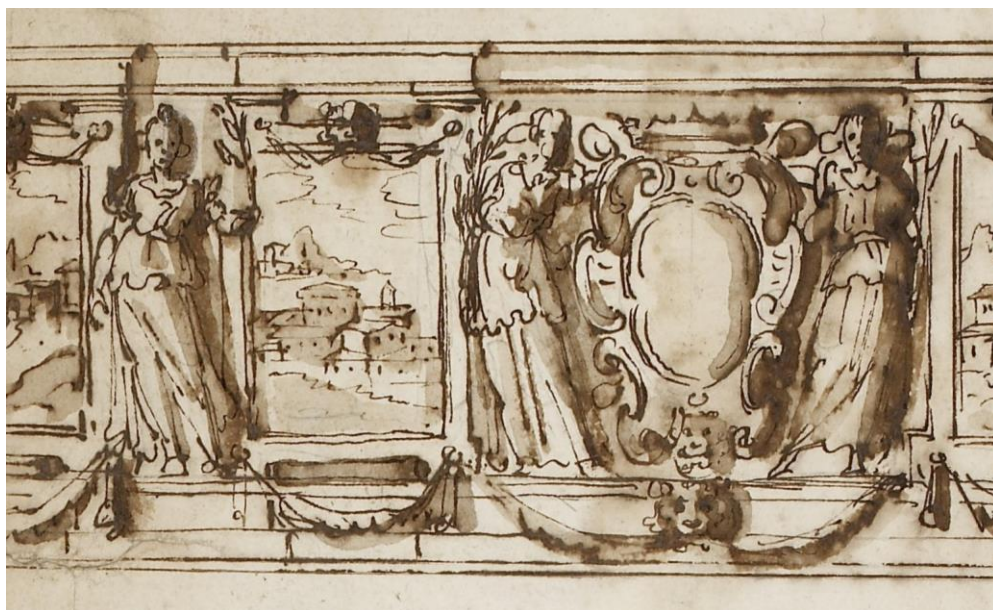


Fig. 5: Here attributed to Giovanni Battista Lombardelli, detail of Fig. 1



Fig. 6: Giovanni Battista Lombardelli, *The Triumphs of Lucullus* (detail). Madrid, Prado



Fig. 7: Avanzino Nucci, *A cartouche design incorporating the Aldobrandini emblems*. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum



Fig. 8: Avanzino Nucci, *The Virgin and Child with St. Louis of France and St. Antony Abbot*. Turin, Biblioteca Reale



Fig. 9: Here attributed to Giovanni Battista della Rovere, *Cartouche design*. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum



Fig. 10: Giovanni Battista della Rovere, *St. Thomas doubting* (detail). New York, The Morgan Library & Museum



Fig. 11: Here attributed to Giovanni Guerra, *Coronation of a pope*. Turin, Biblioteca Reale



Fig. 12: Here attributed to Federico Brandani, *Design for an overmantel*. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum



Fig. 13: Federico Brandani, *Project for the Chapel of the Duchy of Urbino in the Basilica of the Holy House of Loreto* (detail). Oxford, Ashmolean Museum



Fig. 14: Taddeo or Federico Zuccaro, *Study for the Assumption of the Virgin for the Pucci Chapel in the Santissima Trinità dei Monti, Rome*. Private collection



Fig. 15: Federico Brandani, *Project for the Chapel of the Duchy of Urbino in the Basilica of the Holy House of Loreto* (detail). Oxford, Ashmolean Museum



Fig. 16: Federico Zuccaro, *Study for the Assumption of the Virgin in the Basilica of the Holy House of Loreto*. Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Kupferstichkabinett



Figs. 17-18: Here attributed to Federico Brandani, details of Fig. 12



Fig. 19: Federico Brandani, *Nativity*. Urbino, Oratorio San Giuseppe, detail of the ceiling decoration



Fig. 20: Here attributed to Federico Brandani, detail of Fig. 12



Fig. 21: Federico Brandani, *Ceiling decoration*. Urbino, Palazzo Ducale (from Palazzo Corboli Aquilini)



Fig. 22: Here attributed to Federico Brandani, detail of Fig. 12



Fig. 23: Federico Brandani, *Ceiling decoration*. Urbino, Palazzo Ducale (from Palazzo Corboli Aquilini)



Fig. 24: Federico Brandani, *Ovarmantel panel*. Cagli, Palazzo Tiranni



Fig. 25: Federico Brandani, *Overmantel panel*. Piobbico, Castello Brancaleoni

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ABSTRACT

L'articolo presenta un piccolo gruppo di disegni di tipo ornamentale del tardo Rinascimento dalla collezione dell'Ashmolean Museum di Oxford ancora anonimi o con attribuzioni problematiche. La selezione permette di toccare brevemente questioni metodologiche imposte da questa tipologia di disegno, che forse rimane ancora oggi la più elusiva per gli studiosi di grafica, per la genericità delle iconografie e per la ripetitività degli schemi compositivi proposti. L'articolo si apre con un foglio di grande inventiva qui attribuito al marchigiano Giovan Battista Lombardelli, per passare poi ad Avanzino Nucci, un altro della folta schiera degli 'artists working in Rome', secondo la felice espressione coniata da Gere e Pouncey nel 1983, e a Giovan Battista della Rovere, a lungo confuso col Ricci da Novara, per chiudere con una proposta per un altro marchigiano, lo stuccatore Federico Brandani, qui rivelato per la prima volta come talentuoso disegnatore zuccaresco.

The article discusses a small group of ornament drawings from the late Renaissance from the collection of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, still anonymous or carrying problematic attributions. The selection briefly touches upon questions of methods related to what arguably remains the most elusive category drawing specialists still face today for the generic nature of their iconographies and for the repetitiveness of the compositional schemes. The article opens with an inventive sheet attributed to the Marchigian Giovan Battista Lombardelli to move onto another of the 'artists working in Rome', Avanzino Nucci, and to Giovanni Battista della Rovere, traditionally confused with Ricci da Novara. It concludes with a proposal for another Marchigian, the stuccoist Federico Brandani, here revealed for the first time as a skilled draughtsman under the spell of the Zuccari.