



1 Poggini, Silver Medal on Philip II (enlarged). Madrid, Museo Arqueológico.

A MEDAL BY G. P. POGGINI DEPICTING PERU AND PREDICTING AUSTRALIA

by George Kubler, Yale University

A delightful, instructive, and important letter from Madrid, written by Gianpaolo Poggini to Cosimo de' Medici, appears without explanation among the reports sent to the Duke by Bishop Bernardello Minerbetti of Arezzo in 1562 during his term as Florentine Ambassador to the Spanish Court.¹ A transcription of the letter precedes the translation. Punctuation as well as phrases necessary to the meaning have been supplied in the English version.

Inll(ustriss)mo Ecc(ellentiss)mo mio Signore.

Auendo sempre fatto partecipe a V(ostra) Ecc(ellen)tia di quelle poche medaglie che per questo buon Re mio sig(n)ore ò fatte, così ora di nuovo auendo ritrattolo e fattoli uno riuerso per la India, la quale ò vestito li omini e le donne colli abiti che usono in el Peru, come quella vedrà, e quello animale che pare uno cammello et una pecora così fatta e la ò ritratto da una che è qui viva e ve l'ò messa per essere animale raro che è buona come le nostre di lana, latte e carne, e porta soma come asino, e la ò fi(g)urata carica di fasci di argento. La donna che porta a offerire il mezo mondo è fi(g)urata per la India provincia, come piace al s(igno)re Gonzalo Peres. Ma io l'atribuisco alla fortuna o providenzia, secondo il motto suo ; e detta inuentione fu prima mia, dipoi conferitola col s(igno)re Gonzalo Per(es) mio s(igno)re e buono amico, parendoli buona inuentione, s'è afaticato in farli l'anima e parte del corpo con il consiglio di molti litterati di questa Corte, et così l'ò missa in opera. E quale ella è, la inuio a V(ostra) Ecc(ellen)tia pregandola che, per amore dell'e(f)figie che vi è iscultata — che molto se li asomiglia — la tenga fra lle altre sue cose moderne e accetti il mio buon cuore, non potendo offerirgli altro, e lLa suplico umilmente che per l'amor de dDio voglia essere contenta di farmi gratia di esaldire la mia suplichia che con questa sarà :

¹ Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Carteggio Mediceo Principato, filza 4894, n. 256. I am grateful to Dr. Middeldorf for enriching my references with materials which were unavailable to me in Madrid in 1963 (especially notes 2, 3, 4) and for improving my translation. Dr. Andreas Grote verified my transcription.

Acciochè la mia povera e vecchia madre si possa sustentare tanto, che possa venire di costà a farlo io, e insieme servire a V(ostra) Ecc(ellen)tia e farli parechi riversi di medaglie delle sue magnifiche opere di più sorte operate, e così monete di quella bontà che ne ò fatte per S(u)a Mag^{ta} in I(n)ghilterra e in Fiand(r)a, tonde e ben coniate come oggi si fa in Parigi, del quale tengo l'ordigno e modello per darne a S(u)a Mag^{ta}, come mi à ditto che vuole fare nuova moneta; e il s(igno)r Ambasc(i)atore di Lucca potrà ragualliare a V(ostr)a Ecc(ellen)tia l'affetione e desio che tengo a venire servi(r)Lla, che Iddio me ne dia la gratia; pregando N(ost)ro S(igno)re Iddio che La felicità e prosperi come desia.

Della Corte Cattolica alli 28 di Febraro 1562

*Umilissimo e devoto servitore di V(ostra) Ecc(ellen)tia
G. Paolo Poggini*

Address :

*All'inll(ustrissi)mo ecc(ellentiss)mo Sig(no)re
il Sig(no)re Duca di Fiorenza, (mio?) Sig(no)re e
Patrone.*

My most illustrious and excellent Lord.

I have always informed Your Excellency about those few medals which I have made for this good king my Lord (Philip II). Recently I have again portrayed him anew and made an obverse for him, representing India. I dressed men and women with the clothes they wear in Peru, as you see; and that animal which resembles both a camel and a sheep. I have portrayed it from one which is alive here (in Madrid), and I have included it (in the design) because it is a rare animal and a useful one, since like ours it gives wool, milk, and meat, and it bears loads like an ass. I have shown it burdened with bars of silver. The woman who bears the half globe as an offer represents the Indian province (of Peru). Thus my Lord Gonzalo Perez is pleased (to interpret it). But I prefer to identify her as Fortune or Providence. The idea was mine in the first place, then I discussed it with my Lord and good friend Gonzalo Perez; it seemed to him a good idea and he spent much effort on designing the motto and refining the representation,, with the help of many learned men at this Court. And accordingly I executed it. And this I send to Your Excellency, begging that for the sake of the portrait which is thereupon engraved, and which is a good likeness, you will keep it among your modern things, and that you will accept my good intentions as I have nothing else to offer you. I (also) humbly beg that for the love of God you will gracefully hear the request which I submit herewith:

That my poor, old mother will (be helped) to subsist until I come there to help her myself, and at the same time serve Your Excellency, and execute various reverses for medals, illustrating Your splendid deeds of the most varied sort; and also coins of the same quality as I have made them for his Magnificence in England and in Flanders, carefully struck and well shaped as they do it nowadays in Paris. For that I have the machinery and model to produce some for Your Magnificence, as I was told that you want to have new coins struck. The Ambassador of Lucca² will inform Your Excellency of my devotion and the desire I have to come and serve you. May God grant me this favor. I pray to Our Lord God that he give You happiness and prosperity, as much as You may desire.

Form the Catholic Court, the 28th of February 1562.

Your Excellency's most humble and devoted servant
G. P. Poggini

² Error for Arezzo? or Florence. Bernardello Minerbetti, Bishop of Arezzo and plenipotentiary for Florence at the Spanish Court; on him see *F. Inghirami*, *Storia della Toscana XIII*, Fiesole 1844, p. 420; *K. Frey*, *Der literarische Nachlass Vasari's I*, München 1923, pp. 297, 681 ss.; *Archivio Mediceo del Principato, Inventario Sommario* (in: *Pubblicazioni degli Archivi di Stato, I: Archivio di Stato di Firenze*), Roma 1951, pp. 147, 167, 172-3.

From the evidence of the letter it appears that the Ambassador obliged the medallist by forwarding his petition to the Duke under diplomatic cover. The adjoining reports from Minerbetti make no reference to Poggini's letter. A few other such inclusions appear among Minerbetti's Madrid papers, but this is the only one from an artist. From Poggini's remarks it also appears that he had been at court perhaps as early as 1554, in Brussels and in England, in his capacity as sculptor of medals and as an expert on coining, from whom Philip II expected advice on technical improvements in minting practices. The main purpose of the letter is to ask permission to return to Florence for family reasons, but in the course of the letter Poggini gives a detailed description of a medal he had just made for Philip II.³

This medal⁴ exists in two versions and three examples in the Museo Arqueológico in Madrid.⁵ A gilded silver example in excellent condition is illustrated here (Fig. 1) and in the catalogue by Alvarez-Ossorio. Another example in *metal blanco* (silver) is mentioned in the catalogue. A third one of bronze in the same collection is not listed: it differs in several details from the silver ones.

No other Renaissance medal exists which describes Peruvian Indians and animals, or which attempts to fix an allegorical type for the Indies. José Toribio Medina⁶ discussed documents which describe a medal designed for Gonzalo Pizarro by Augustin de Zárate before 1541, but no copy survives, although the existence of such a medal is certified in the state papers concerning Gonzalo's treasonable efforts to create an independent Peruvian monarchy under his own rule. The medal is described as showing a woman astride an unbridled horse with the legend: LIBERTAS PATRIAE TUETUR.

Poggini mentions with pardonable pride and redundancy the aid he received from Gonzalo Pérez, the Secretary of State of Philip II from 1556 to 1566.⁷ He insists upon his friendship with this important personage, whose humanistic attainments were admired throughout Europe. Poggini credits Gonzalo Pérez with the composition of the legend on the reverse of his medal: RELIQVVM DATVRA — INDIA.

There is no evidence that Poggi succeeded in modernising the mint as he hoped. Die-presses did not enter Spanish usage until the reign of Philip II.⁸ Nor is there any evidence that his petition to return to Italy was granted by the Duke.

Babelon observed that G. P. Poggini, "un des premiers, semble avoir conçu l'idée de séries de médailles constituant l'histoire métallique d'un règne".⁹ His medals generally commemorate an event in its sequence: the beginning of the reign of Philip II; the peace of 1559; the royal marriages; the annexation of Portugal; the partition of the Indies.

³ Poggini came to Spain from Brussels probably in 1558 or 1559, but there is no firm proof; the notices of his presence in Florence on 3.XI.1561 and 18.X.1562 (cfr. *K. Frey*, *Der lit. Nachl. cit.*, pp. 637, 688 and elsewhere) are puzzling: it seems as if Poggini had frequently been confused with the goldsmith and medallist Pietro Paolo Galeotto (on him see also *Vasari-Milanesi*, V, 390; VI, 251; VII, 542-3). Poggini did not return to Florence, but maintained his relations with the Grand Duke, as witnessed by a similar letter of 24 May 1568, published by *I. B. Supino*, *L'Illustratore Fiorentino per l'anno 1905*, Firenze 1905, p. 53 ss.

⁴ Cfr. *Armand* I, 239, 10; *Heiss*, Florence II, 40, 18 and pl. III, 4; *Van Loon* I, 238 fig.; *L. Forrer*, *Bibliographical Dictionary of Medallists* IV, London 1909, p. 633; *G. F. Hill*, in *Archiv für Medaillen- und Plakettenkunde* II, 1920-21, pp. 49, 315; *G. Habich*, *Die Medaillen der ital. Renaissance*, Berlin s. a., 118, LXXX, 6. The piece — in silver — which Poggini sent to the Grand Duke probably is that which is now preserved in the Bargello (*I. B. Supino*, *il Medagliere Mediceo*, Firenze 1899, p. 408). On G. P. Poggini see *Heiss*, Florence II, p. 27 ss. and *P. Grottemeyer* in *Thieme-Becker*, *Künstlerlexikon* XXVII, 1933, p. 188.

⁵ Dm. 38 mm. *Francisco Alvarez-Ossorio*, *Catálogo de las medallas de los siglos XV y XVI conservados en el Museo Arqueológico Nacional*, Madrid 1950, pp. 151-2, n. 230.

⁶ *Medallas coloniales Hispano-Americanas*, Santiago de Chile 1900, p. 11.

⁷ *Angel González Palencia*, *Gonzalo Pérez*, Madrid 1945.

⁸ *Felipe Mateu y Llopis*, *La moneda española*, Barcelona 1946, p. 259.

⁹ *J. Babelon*, *Jacome da Trezzo*, Paris 1922, p. 94.

The three medals in the Museo Arqueológico are dated as of late 1561 or early 1562 by the letter published here. They probably commemorate another aspect of Philip's reign, which we might call that of the continuing voyages of discovery. The allegorical female figure, whom Gonzalo Pérez designated as INDIA (i.e. America), and whom Poggini regarded as being rather of Fortune or Providence, proffers a *mezzo mondo*, represented as blank in the lower hemisphere. The Spanish voyages of discovery in these decades brought the Pacific Islands into European view. Only in 1606 was Australia to be claimed for the Spanish Crown by Pedro Fernández de Quirós.¹⁰ The existence of a southern continent was predicated as early as 1461 (Sanz mentions a medal by Francesco Laurana bearing a map of a southern continent)¹¹, and its discovery became a formal Spanish objective after 1567. Quirós, to be sure, never set foot on Australia, and his claim to the *Nuevas Indias Australes* or AUSTRALIA (*honore* the house of Austria and Philip III) was made on Espiritu Santo Island in the New Hebrides. Torres Strait, between New Guinea and Australia, takes its name from Luis Vaez de Torres, one of Quiros' captains, who was able to estimate the size of the Australian continent as equal to that of Europe and Asia Minor from Ireland to Persia, including the Mediterranean, and to describe its people and climate to his commander.

The Poggini medal reflects the hope of geographers and humanists at the Spanish Court that such a continent or continents would eventually form part of the Indies. Poggini perhaps missed the point, but Gonzalo Pérez made him identify the allegorical figure as INDIA beneath the motto RELIQUVVM DATVRA.

On the medal, the figure of the Indies strides towards the coast, with the people and the wealth of Peru (the llama burdened with silver) at her back. In the waves of the Pacific Ocean at her feet, and below the *mezzo mondo* in her hands, four outward-bound ships are making sail. The allusion to great hopes of ocean discovery is unequivocal.¹²

RIASSUNTO

L'autore ha potuto trovare nell'Archivio di Stato di Firenze la lettera accompagnatrice (datata 1562, 28 Febbraio) a una medaglia del G. P. Poggini inviata dall'artista al Granduca Cosimo I tramite l'ambasciatore presso la Corte Spagnola B. Minerbetti.

Questa medaglia, forse identificabile con l'esemplare d'argento conservato nel Museo Nazionale di Firenze, doveva celebrare la recente scoperta delle ricchezze del Peru, raffigurata simbolicamente sul dorso con figura di donna portante un „mezzo mondo“ e di un llama carico di sbarre d'argento. È l'unico pezzo rinascimentale conosciuto che mostra Indiani e animali Peruviani. Nella lettera, Poggini esprime la sua speranza di essere richiamato a Firenze per modernizzare il metodo di coniare usato presso la Zecca Fiorentina, progetto in seguito non accolto dal Granduca. La medaglia doveva essere l'espressione delle grandi speranze nutrite dalla Corte Spagnola che i territori recentemente scoperti facessero parte delle Indie presagendo così le scoperte delle enormi distese oceaniche fino all'Australia.

¹⁰ *Carlos Sanz*, *Australia. Su descubrimiento y denominación*, Madrid 1963.

¹¹ Laurana's medal of Charles III of Anjou lists on its reverse a fifth continent „Brumae“ (*Hill*, 63).

¹² My colleague at Yale, *Mrs. Ursula Lamb*, tells me of two German notices. *Leopold von Ranke*, *Die Osmanen und die spanische Monarchie*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Leipzig, 1877, p. 356, described the medal as relating to the Manila galleons. *Adolf Rein*, *Europäische Ausbreitung über die Erde*, Potsdam, 1931, p. 175, repeated Ranke's description, adding that it signified how „Europa und die Welt sollten ihre Vollkommenheit im spanischen Wesen finden“.