

1 Giorgio Vasari (?), Study for the Decoration of the Main Courtyard in the Palazzo Vecchio (Detail of Fig. 2: Providence and Piety). Yale University Art Gallery, Everett V. Meeks Fund.

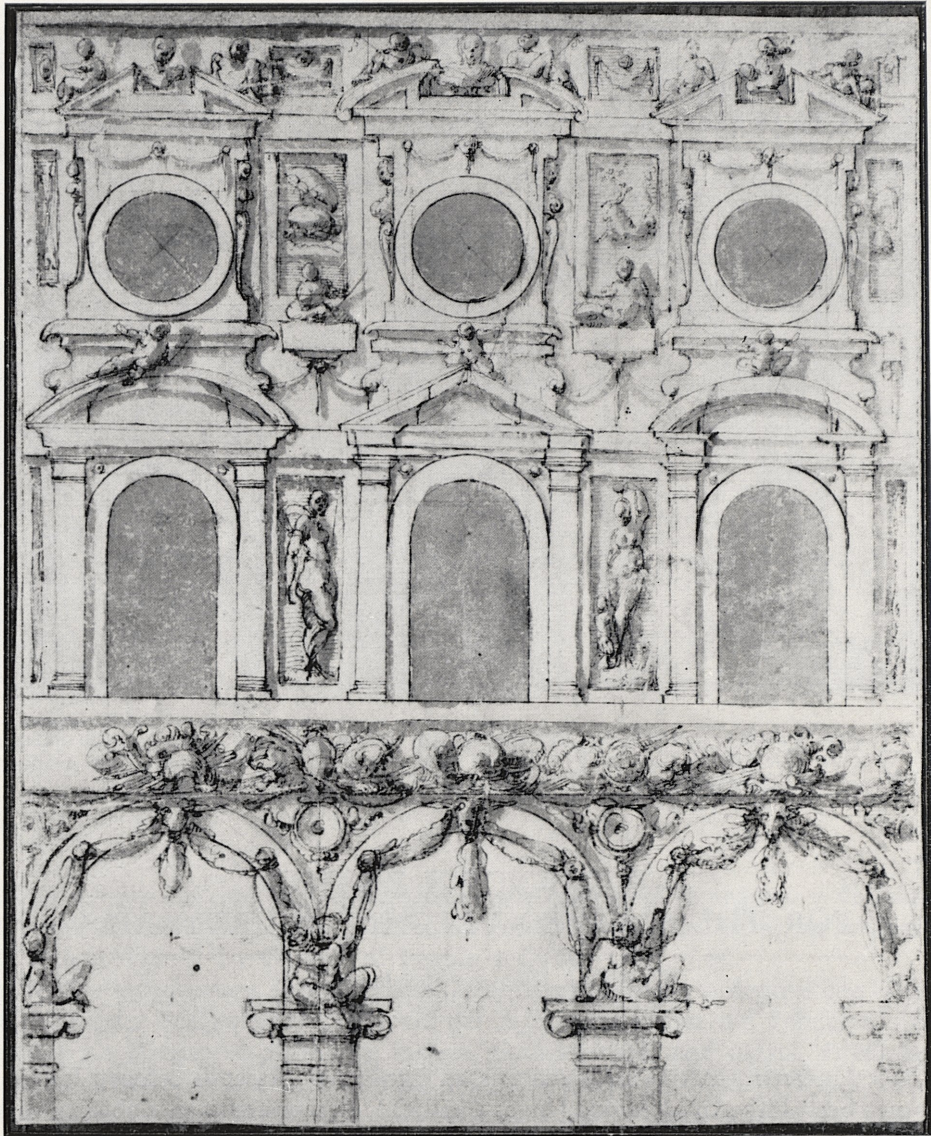
AN UNKNOWN PROJECT FOR THE PALAZZO VECCHIO COURTYARD *

by *Edmund Pillsbury*

In the Yale University Art Gallery there is an important sixteenth century Italian drawing which has not been hitherto identified (Figs. 1 and 2).¹ It represents an elaborate plan for the decoration of a façade of a building. On the upper stories the artist has framed the windows with segmental, triangular and broken pediments. These frames in turn are ornamented by busts and torchbearing putti. Between the windows there are shallow niches containing standing figures and emblems. In the lower zone the three arches are hung with garlands and a frieze is represented depicting spoils of war.

* *I wish to express my gratitude to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., for having generously provided the funds through the David E. Finley Fellowship to carry out this research and to Dr. Everett Fahy, Dr. Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann and Mr. Michael Hirst for their timely advice during the preparation of the paper.*

¹ Dept. of Drawings and Prints, Inv. No. 1964.9.64, pen and brown ink, and brown wash, over black chalk, 242 × 193 mm., annotated on the reverse in pen and brown ink in an old hand, *franco Salviati*, and on the obverse in the lower right corner in black chalk in a modern hand, *A Tibaldi*. Acquired by Yale in 1964; previously the property of a London art dealer. On the reverse is inscribed the partial *spartimento* of an unidentified ceiling, with circular, square and rectangular panels.



2 Giorgio Vasari (?), Study for the Decoration of the Main Courtyard in the Palazzo Vecchio. Yale University Art Gallery, Everett V. Meeks Fund.

When the drawing was first published, it was attributed to the circle of Vasari and tentatively associated with a temporary decoration for Cosimo I.² The imprese represented between the oculi — the Capricorn, the Tortoise with the sail, and the two Anchors crossed — were identified as belonging to Cosimo³, and the drawing was dated prior to 1574, the year of his death.

² *Gunther and Christel Thiem*, *Toskanische Fassaden-Dekoration*, Munich, 1964, p. 48, footnote 21, pl. 128.

³ For the original source, see: *Paolo Giovio*, *Dialogo dell'imprese militari et amorse*, Lyons, 1574, p. 230.



3 Michelozzo and Vasari, Main Courtyard in the Palazzo Vecchio.

Unfortunately, no further attempt was made to identify the drawing; for I shall try to demonstrate, the drawing can be connected with a well-known project and is based upon an even better-known façade.

In 1565, for the impending wedding of Francesco de' Medici to Giovanna of Austria, Vasari undertook to decorate the main courtyard of the Palazzo Vecchio. What he carried out there can still be seen, though weathered and many times restored (Fig. 3). He represented within the loggia seventeen views of the principal cities of the Austrian Empire, an obvious gesture to ingratiate the foreigners to their Florentine hosts, and in the lunettes above the views fourteen *rovesci*, which are the reverse sides of medals, that had been previously struck, or newly invented, to commemorate the achievements of Cosimo. Over the vaults and around the *rovesci* he frescoed grotesque designs and on the upper walls of the *cortile*, in the space just above the arches, a frieze of spoils and prisoners. Finally he decorated the columns in a simulated brocade made of stuccoed-reliefs and gilding. What he did not execute was his plan to sur-

round the courtyard with twenty-four statues; twenty of which were to be executed in painting and the other four in relief.⁴ These would have gone on the pilasters around the loggia as they are shown in a drawing by Vincenzo Borghini (Fig. 4).⁵ Another project Vasari had was to extend the decorations of the courtyard into the upper stories. The details of this project are represented in the Yale drawing.

The first marks the artist made on the sheet establish the essential features of Michelozzo's design: the upper and lower string courses, the arched windows, the oculi and the arches. With the aid of a straight-edge he drew the horizontal and vertical lines defining the lateral edges and the string courses. Then, in black chalk, he sketched a grid, which is just visible in the reproduction, from which he fixed the compass points and drew the windows and arches. The resulting pen and ink lines become the basis for the rest of the drawing, and they remain unchanged and free of *pentimenti*.

This skeleton approximates with remarkable accuracy the measurements of the façade on the east side of the courtyard, the one facing the visitor as he enters from the Piazza della Signoria. Judged from the measured diagram published by Stegmann and Geymüller (Fig. 5), the ratios of the distance between the two string courses to the façade's overall breadth are extremely similar.⁶ The main discrepancy between the drawing and the façade of the courtyard today is the position of the capitals which are slightly lower in the drawing than they should be.

There is, in addition, a certain amount of overlap between the projected plan and the finished decorations. Both, for example, employ the motif of festoons suspended from Capricorn's heads and from putti. Although this aspect of the courtyard's decoration no longer exists, Mellini writing in 1565 described it⁷, and it is recorded in the official book of payments kept by Giovanni Caccini. According to the latter, there were *...cinque puttj di terra cottj et 9 teste di carta pesta di capricornj et 25 teste di lioni pur' di carta pesta messj di stagniuolo a piu pregj per servitio del cortile per ornar' festonj di verzura...*⁸ Since the courtyard has in all nine arches, with two on each side except for the eastern one which has three, there must have been a Capricorn's head over each arch and a putto on the capitals of the central columns. Such an interpretation is corroborated by Mellini, who described the capitals as being: *I capitelli sopra i quali nella parte dinanzi, cioè verso il mezzo dove è la fontana[,] sono putti di rilievo, che abbracciano festoni, che pendono dalla bocca di alcune teste di Capricorni.*⁹ Similarly, the lions' heads mentioned in the payment were probably placed around the arches and used as hooks to hold the festoons. In this way there would have been two on each of the nine arches and, in the absence of putti, an additional two in each corner, making a total of twenty-six; only one more than the payment specifies.

⁴ Karl Frey, *Der literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris*, II, Munich, 1930, pp. 185, 192, 194, 196-197. First notice of the sculpture project occurs in the letter of Vasari to Borghini dated June 13, 1565. Its subsequent fate can be traced through Borghini's reply to Vasari on June 17th, Vasari's letter of June 18th, and Borghini's final compromise solution on the 19th of that month.

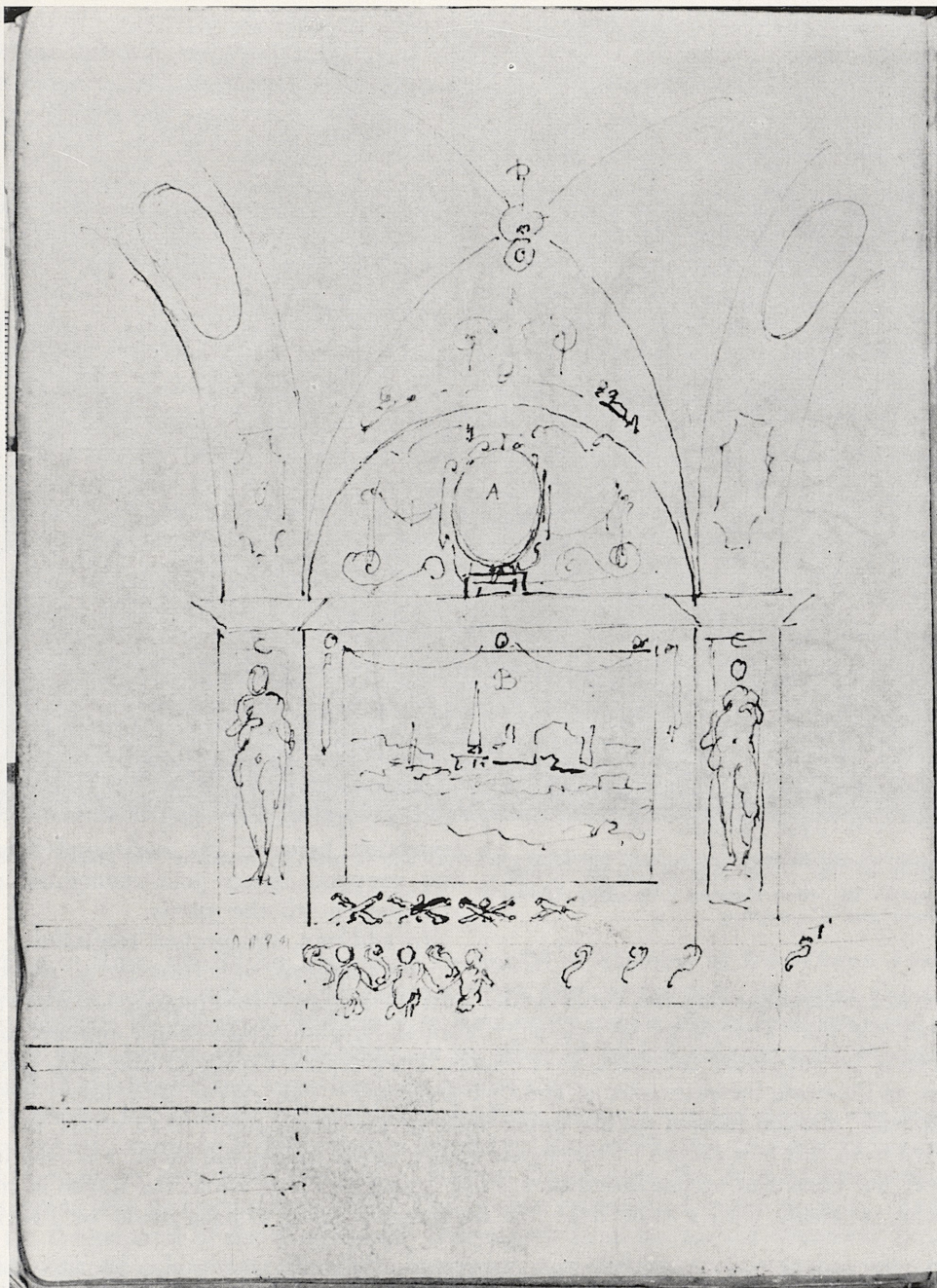
⁵ Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Cod. Magliabechianus (Carte Borghini, Prov. Rinuccini), filza II.X.100, c. 80 verso, pen and brown ink, 213 × 152 mm. First published by Piero Ginori Conti, *L'Apparato per le nozze di Francesco de' Medici e di Giovanna d'Austria*, Florence, 1936, pp. 57-60, fig. 18. A note appearing on the following page of the notebook, which Ginori Conti failed to transcribe or make reference to, specifies the number of *rovesci*, topographical views, statues and light fixtures that were intended for the loggia. It reads: *A n° 15/B n° 16/C n° 24/D n° 11.*

⁶ From the vertical distance between the two string courses that is given by Carl v. Stegmann and Heinrich v. Geymüller (*Die Architektur der Renaissance in Toscana*, II, Munich, [1885-1907], p. 21, fig. 20) can be calculated the lateral span of the façade; the ratio of which differs from that of similar distances measured on the drawing by less than six percentage points.

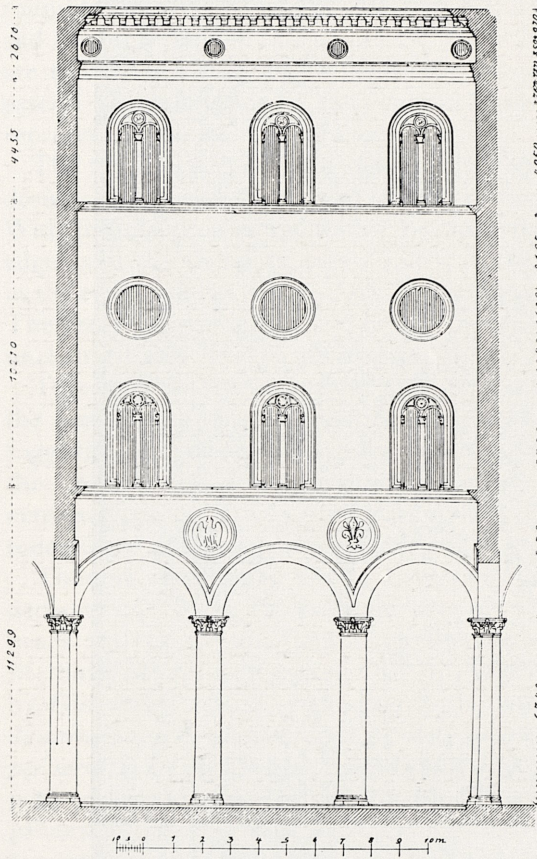
⁷ See note 9 below.

⁸ Herman-Walther Frey, *Neue Briefe von Giorgio Vasari* (Der lit. Nachlass, vol. III), Burg b. M., 1940, p. 238, No. 96.

⁹ Domenico Mellini, *Descrizione dell'Entrata della Sereniss. Reina Giovanna d'Austria et dell'Apparato fatto in Firenze nella venuta, etc.*, Florence, 1566, p. 118.



4 Vincenzo Borghini, Study for the Decoration of the Loggia Showing Vasari's Proposal to Put Statues on the Pilasters. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale.



5 Elevation of the East Façade of the Main Courtyard in the Palazzo Vecchio (from *Stegmann and Geymüller*).

Another place where the project represented in the drawing overlaps the finished decorations is in the frieze. As one may still see (Fig. 6), it occupies a similar position, the zone between the arches and lowest windows, and represents spoils of war. One may raise the objection that in the final decorations the arms-bearing bosses are retained and the frieze represents prisoners as well as pure spoils, but the explanation of the presence of the former explains that of the latter. Because the arms represented in the bosses were that of the Florentine Republic, an anathema to Cosimo, the logical thing was to do away with them, and their bosses, altogether, which has been done in the drawing. Failing this, the next best remedy was to convert at least one of the arms into that of the Medici. This Vasari did with the boss of the middle of the south wall of the courtyard.¹⁰ But having done this, he was faced with the problem of accommodating the bosses into the frieze. The solution he devised was to put a prisoner on either side of each boss. In this way, since the prisoners are represented seated on the ledge beside the cuirasses and trophies and tied to the bosses, they provide visually a transition between the horizontal ledge and the rounded bosses and iconographically a complement to the spoils.

In addition, the project represented in the drawing appears to correspond to an aspect of the courtyard decorations that was never carried out: the statues Vasari intended to place around the loggia. Of the twenty-four he originally wanted Borghini reduced the number to four. The subjects he suggested for these were Pietas, Providentia, Consiglio and Fare (sic), and they were to illustrate the principles of good government.¹¹ The allegorical figures represented in the drawing, though located on the upper walls of the *cortile* rather than under the loggia, may derive from this idea (Fig. 1). The figure shown in the right-hand niche, a female holding a cup over her head and accompanied by a child, could be Piety, while the figure in the left-hand niche, a female with a stole over her shoulders holding a staff, could be Providence.

¹⁰ Florence, Archivio di Stato, Depositeria Generale, filza 1475, c. 4 verso. See *H.-W. Frey*, op. cit., p. 230.

¹¹ *K. Frey*, op. cit., II, 1930, p. 197, letter of Borghini to Vasari, June 19, 1565: *PIETAS in Deum, PROVIDENTIA erga cives, CONSILIVM Bonum in rebus agendis, Mature FACERE in rebus bene consultis, che e [è] Temere Dio, Carezzare i cittadinj, Consigliare con sapientia, Eseguire con valore. Et queste due ultime, che n'havevo ragionato per l'arco n° II. [Arco alla Dogana], se ben per via di discorso, poiche quello e [è] copioso et forse aggiugnervi piu darebbe disagio, io fermerej queste, che sarebbono due statue di donne, PIETAS et PROVIDENTIA, 2 di huominj il CONSIGLIO et il FARE, che ben gli troveremo qualche nome a proposito. The manuscript notes for this *invenzione* can be found on carta 104. 3 verso of the above-mentioned Borghini notebook (BNCF, filza II.X.100; see footnote 5).*



6 Giorgio Vasari and Assistants, Frieze on the East Façade of the Main Courtyard in the Palazzo Vecchio.

According to Ripa, the former appears in the medal of Tiberius as *Una Donna à sedere, con una tazza nella destra mano, e col gomito manco posato sopra un fanciullo*; the latter, also according to Ripa, appears in the medal of Probus as *Una donna stolata, che nella destra mano tiene uno Scettro, e nella sinistra un Cornucopia, con un globo a' piedi*.¹² Significantly Providence represented in this way refers particularly to magistrates.

Furthermore, the drawing reflects the dual nature of the courtyard decorations themselves. Whereas the festoons and putti were a temporary ornament, the frescoes and stucco-work were to remain as permanent features. Likewise the changes the drawing proposes are of a permanent as well as a temporary kind. The project represented in the drawing, for instance, called for the removal of the quattrocento bifurcations from the arched windows. In addition, the oddly-shaped columns — alternately octagonal and circular — were to become uniformly rounded and the capitals transformed from the Corinthian to the simpler Ionic order.

For this reason alone the project may have been dropped as being too costly and time-consuming to execute. Yet another reason may have been the courtyard's inadaptability. By way of praising Vasari's decorations, Cini in 1566 described the courtyard as being *oscuro e disa-*

¹² Cesare Ripa, *Nova Iconologia*, Padua, 1618, pp. 414, 427.

*stroso, ed in tutte le parti quasi inabile a ricever nessuna sorte d'ornamento.*¹³ One factor contributing to this effect of darkness, yet one that Vasari might well have wanted to ameliorate, was the field of golden lilies in blue quadrofoils, the emblem of the House of Anjou, which until the restorations in 1809 covered the upper stories of the courtyard (Fig. 7).¹⁴ And perhaps, too, there may have been on the part of Cosimo, a sentimental desire to preserve Michelozzo's façades since the design for them, as Vasari himself points out, was based on that of the Medici palace.¹⁵

A further point in favor of this identification of the Yale drawing is the authorship. Although it has only been attributed to the "circle" of Vasari, it might be considered as a work of Vasari himself. The figure style, for example, may be compared with that of a drawing in the Uffizi, dated 1567/68, for the façade of the Palazzo Montalvo.¹⁶ The use of wash resembles that in a drawing in the Heald Collection, of 1565, for an arch at the entrance to the Borgo Ognissanti.¹⁷ And in the facile handling of the frieze trophies it is similar to the borders Vasari drew for the drawings in his *Libro de' disegni*¹⁸ and his well-known drawing for the frontispiece of the 1550 edition of *L'architettura di Leonbattista Alberti*.¹⁹ The flickering, yet tightly controlled, indication of figures and architectural details, the delicately restrained application of wash, in long thin brushstrokes, and, coincident with the change of purpose, the self-confident and almost mechanical, spinning out of the decorative motifs — all are characteristics of his hand.

The drawing does not appear to be attributable to either Jacopo Zucchi or Giambattista Naldini — two artists previously suggested.²⁰ As evidenced by the recently published ceiling drawing in the British Museum²¹ and a catafalque design in the Pierpont Morgan Library²²,

¹³ (*Giov. Battista Cini*), "Descrizione dell'Apparato fatto in Firenze per le nozze, etc.", in: *Le Opere di Giorgio Vasari*, ed. by *Gaetano Milanesi*, VIII, Florence, 1882, p. 569. For the attribution to Cini of this little book that was published anonymously by I Giunti in 1566, see *Antonio Lorenzoni*, *Carreggio artistico inedito di D. Vinc. Borghini*, Florence, 1912, pp. 154-159.

¹⁴ *Auguste Grandjean de Montigny and Auguste Famin*, *Architecture Toscane*, 2nd Edition, Paris, [1812], p. 4, pl. XXXII. For the report of the restorations carried out under Mayor Pucci, see: *Giuseppe Del Rosso*, *Ragguaglio di alcune particolarità ritrovate nella costruzione dell'antico Palazzo della Signoria di Firenze, detto in oggi il Palazzo Vecchio e delle innovazioni che hanno avuto luogo in quella fabbrica all'occasione degli ultimi risarcimenti, etc.*, Siena, 1815.

¹⁵ *Vasari-Milanesi*, II, pp. 435-436.

¹⁶ *Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi*, No. 958 Orn., pen and brown ink, and brown wash, with traces of black chalk, 259 × 386 mm.; illustrated and discussed in: *Thiem*, op. cit., pp. 105-108, pl. 130.

¹⁷ Pen and brown ink, and brown wash, over a preliminary drawing in black chalk, 413 × 272 mm.; see: *E. Pillsbury*, *Drawings by Vasari and Vincenzo Borghini for the Apparato in Florence in 1565*, in: *Master Drawings*, v, 1967, pp. 281-283, pls. 24, 25a.

¹⁸ See *Otto Kurz*, *Giorgio Vasari's "Libro de' disegni"*, in: *Old Master Drawings*, xii, 1937, p. 32 ff. and (*Catherine Monbeig-Goguel*), *Giorgio Vasari dessinateur et collectionneur*, *Catalogue of the Exhibition*, Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, Paris, 1965.

¹⁹ *Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi*, No. 394 Orn., pen and brown ink, and brown wash, 265 × 195 mm.; illustrated on the cover of the periodical "Il Vasari" from 1927 to 1943 and from 1957 to 1960; identified as being the frontispiece for the 1550 edition of Alberti's treatise by *Wolfram Prinz*, *La seconda edizione del Vasari e la comparsa di "vite" artistiche con ritratti*, in: *Il Vasari*, xxi, 1963, p. 1 [not reproduced].

²⁰ *Thiem*, op. cit., p. 48, footnote 21.

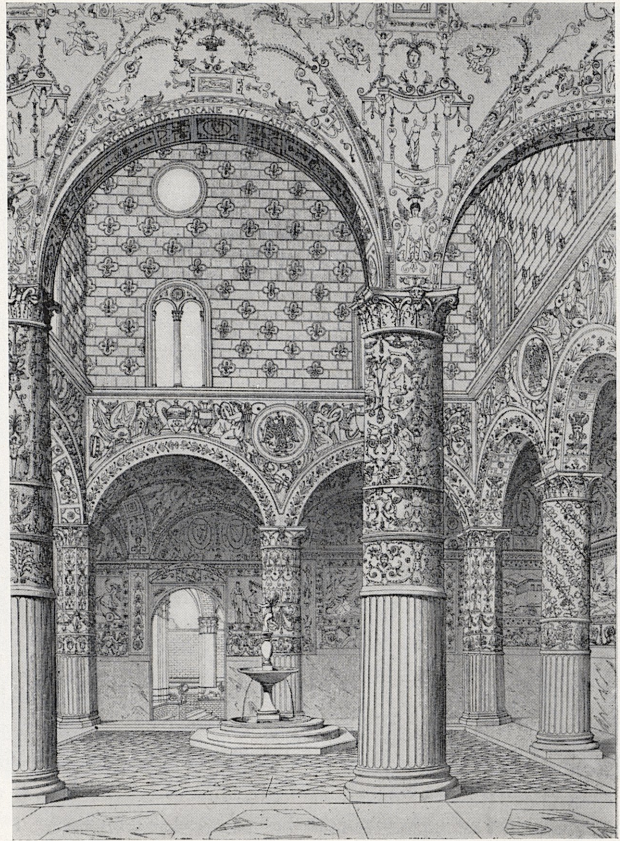
²¹ *Print Room*, No. 1874-8-8-3, pen and brown ink, with various coloured washes, over a preliminary drawing in black chalk, 210 × 340 mm. The source of the convincing attribution is unknown. It is mistakenly characterized by *Paola Barocchi* (*Complementi al Vasari Pittore*, in: *La Colombaria*, xxviii, 1963-64, p. 286, fig. 112 [illustrated]), as a study for the ceiling of the Terrazzo di Saturno in the Palazzo Vecchio. More likely, since one of the coffers represented in the drawing displays a cardinal's hat, it was done for Ferdinando de' Medici in Rome, Zucchi's major patron, and in connection with the decorations of either the Palazzo di Firenze or the Villa Medici.

²² No. 1965.5, pen and brown ink, and brown wash, over a preliminary drawing in black chalk, 394 × 257 mm. I am grateful to Mr. *Philip Pouncey* for having first suggested the correct attribution. It is illustrated by *Eve Borsook* in her article on the Funeral of Cosimo I, in the *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, xii, 1965/66, p. 53, fig. 11.

Zucchi's drawing style is considerably more fluid and summary in treatment. While Naldini's, whose drawings are better known²³, is more liberal in its use of wash and is quicker, with more broken lines.

The drawing may have been one of those promised to Cosimo in Borghini's letter of April 5th, 1565: with his letter Borghini enclosed Vasari's so-called *modello* for the courtyard decorations and relayed Vasari's intention to do further drawings of the various particulars.²⁴ If so, it was probably executed between the end of March and the end of June. The commission to make drawings for the *apparato* and other special decorations was given to Vasari in January.²⁵ Already in March some of the main features of the projected courtyard decor were fixed. This is established by a previously unpublished document which lists the various places in Germany and Austria that were to be portrayed from nature.²⁶ It was dispatched on March 17th to Girolamo Craffter and to the Florentine ambassador in Vienna. By the end of June Borghini expressed his opinion on the statuary project, and shortly thereafter work on the other parts began. In September, except for the hanging of the festoons, the project as it survives was complete.²⁷

Doubtless the courtyard deserved elaborate adornment. Its role in the festivities in 1565 entitled it to special consideration. It was to come at the end of a long line of triumphal arches, fountains and statues dedicated to the glories of the Medici, the Imperial House and their respective lands and to serve as the prelude to the newly decorated Salone Grande. It was furthermore designated as the place where Francesco would receive his bride and from whence



7 View of the Main Courtyard in the Palazzo Vecchio (from *Grandjean and Famin*).

²³ For example, see: *P. Barocchi*, *Itinerario di Giovambattista Naldini*, in: *Arte antica e moderna*, 1965, pp. 244-288; and *Anna Forlani Tempesti*, *Alcuni disegni di Giambattista Naldini*, in: *Festschrift Ulrich Middeldorf*, Berlin, 1968, pp. 294-300.

²⁴ *Giov. Bottari and Stefano Ticozzi*, *Raccolta di lettere etc.*, vol. I, Milan, 1822, p. 185.

²⁵ *K. Frey*, op. cit., II, p. 878, Ric. Nos. 301-302.

²⁶ Florence, Archivio di Stato, *Miscellanea Medicea*, filza 16, ins. 8, c. 3 recto: *Copia della nota delle Città Terre et Luoghi di Germani da far in prospettiva data allj Craffter, alli 17 di marzo 1564 [1565]*. A list of places follows. On c. 5 recto is written: *Nota delle Città del Imp(eratore da far' in prospettiva mandata al Vienna Amb(asciato)re Ricasoli allj 17 di marzo*.

²⁷ *K. Frey*, op. cit., II, p. 185.

he would escort her into the palace.²⁸ During the planning Borghini could even say that the courtyard should be made *la sede e domicilio d'ogni grazia, virtù e contentezza*.²⁹

To anyone who visits the courtyard today there is conveyed a less than pleasing impression of incongruity. The richness and splendour of the decorations made by Vasari obscures the pure severity of Michelozzo's architecture, while conversely, the quattrocento parts detract from the effect of the later decorations. If Vasari had carried through with the project indicated by the Yale drawing, he would not only have changed Michelozzo's design but created an ambient in keeping with the decorations of the rest of the palace.

²⁸ See the manuscript *Diario Fiorentino*, written by *Settimanni*, in the Archivio di Stato in Florence, Ms. 128, c. 353 recto.

²⁹ *Bottari-Ticozzi*, op. cit., p. 185.

RIASSUNTO

L'articolo tratta di un disegno recentemente acquistato dalla Yale University Art Gallery. Il disegno rappresenta un progetto d'addobbo per una facciata, progetto che l'autore ha accertato essere destinato al cortile principale di Palazzo Vecchio. Infatti nel 1565 in occasione delle nozze di Francesco de' Medici con Giovanna d'Austria furono commissionate al Vasari le decorazioni del cortile che, realizzate in maniera fastosa, sono ancora visibili, incongruentemente sovrapposte all'architettura di Michelozzo. Il disegno acquistato dalla Yale rivela l'intenzione del Vasari di estendere le decorazioni anche ai piani superiori del cortile e di eseguire modifiche permanenti alle facciate di Michelozzo. Se il suo progetto fosse stato eseguito fino in fondo, egli avrebbe trasformato il cortile di Michelozzo in un ambiente in armonia con le decorazioni del resto del palazzo.

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