

HERCULES FLORENTINUS *

by Leopold D. Ettlinger

When Lorenzo il Magnifico died on April 8th, 1492, Michelangelo — his biographers tell us — was so stricken with grief over his master's death that for many days he was unable to do any work. When he had regained his composure he bought a large block of marble that had been lying in wind and rain, and from it he carved a Hercules four *braccia* high.¹ At first it seems odd that at such a moment Michelangelo chose to carve not a likeness of his dead friend and patron but a mythological figure, albeit a favourite of the Florentines. This choice, however, becomes less strange if we recall that Michelangelo always eschewed portraiture. The *duchi* of the Medici Chapel resemble Roman generals or emperors in appearance but are not portraits, and the sculptor himself scornfully rejected the notion of their likenesses. The bust of Brutus, while surely alluding to the murder of the hated tyrant Alessandro de' Medici by Lorenzino, is again in no sense a portrait of the liberator, but the political monument of "a man of action".²

There is another curious thing about the Hercules of 1492. Both Condivi and Vasari follow the reference to it with the story of the snowman which Piero de' Medici commanded Michelangelo to build in the courtyard of the Medici Palace during that rare snowfall in January 1494, which was so graphically described by Luca Landucci.³ The ironic incongruity of the two tasks — the carving of a marble hero and the playful making of an ephemeral snowman — certainly struck Michelangelo's biographers, but one suspects that the proximity in the accounts of two personal friends may reflect some autobiographical remark of Michelangelo's himself who might have hinted at the significance of a Hercules in memory of Lorenzo as compared to the fatuous trifle ordered by his successor.

A little later Hercules representations play another significant role in Florence, when three years after Lorenzo's death the Medici were expelled. On October 9th, 1495, the Signoria decreed that certain works of art in the Medici Palace were to be turned over to the *operai* of the Palazzo Vecchio. It is of course well-known that as a result of this decision Donatello's bronze David and his Judith were transferred, and it has often been pointed out that it was rather the symbolic political significance of these two statues than their artistic merit which prompted the Florentines to exhibit them in a public place.⁴ But it is not always realized that these were not the only pieces selected. The minutes of the Signoria meeting, after mentioning the David and Judith continue:

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¹ *Ascanio Condivi*, Vita di Michelangelo, Rome, 1553, chapter X (ed. Paolo D'Ancona, Milan, 1928, p. 47). *Vasari-Milanesi*, VII, p. 145.

² *Martin Weinberger*, Michelangelo the Sculptor, I, London - New York, 1967, p. 330.

³ *Luca Landucci*, Diario fiorentino dal 1450 al 1516, ed. Iodoco Del Badia, Florence, 1883, p. 66 f.

⁴ *Janson*, Donatello, II, pp. 77-86, 198-205. *Frederick Hartt*, Art and Freedom in Quattrocento Florence, in: *Essays in Memory of Karl Lehmann*, New York, 1964, pp. 114-131 (p. 125).

*Deliberaverunt quod... et tres alie statue Herculee, affixe in pariete sale principalis dicti palatii in quibusdam tabulis cum eorum pertinentiis, debeant per eos ad quos pertinet consignari spectabilibus officialibus operariis palatii dominorum, ad omnem eorum requisitionem et voluntatem, ut dictas statuas cum omnibus eorum pertinentiis mictant et ponant in dicto palatio magnificorum dominorum in illis locis in quibus videbitur dictis operariis, vel in sala nova que ad presens hedificatur prope dictum palatium dominorum, prout videbitur dictis operariis expedire et melius convenire.*⁵

Although neither details about subject matter nor the artist's name are given there can be no doubt that these three pictures must have been the canvasses painted by the Pollaiuolo brothers with the stories of the Hydra, the Nemean Lion and Anteus which according to the Inventory of 1492 had been hanging *nella sala grande di Lorenzo*.⁶

Michelangelo's choice of the Hercules image while he was sorrowing over the death of Lorenzo il Magnifico and the Signoria's decision to remove three Hercules pictures from the Medici Palace to the seat of the republican city government at the moment of the fall of the ruling family can hardly be due to coincidence. We must ask whether this Greek hero did perhaps hold some special place of esteem in Florence, since reference to Renaissance interest in classical mythology seems hardly a sufficient explanation.

I

It is of course a well known fact that the exploits of Hercules, his strength, his fortitude in the face of all adversities, his compassion for the weak, his fight against monsters and tyrants had through the centuries been regarded as worthy examples not only of bravery but of Virtue personified. In a manner of speaking the medieval Hercules tradition appears summarized on Nicola Pisano's pulpit in the Pisa Baptistery, where Hercules has become the personification of Christian fortitude. Even if the heroic nude figure, Nicola's Fortitudo, is the result of a re-awakened interest in classical art, no artist could have made Hercules into an allegory of Virtue if literary Christianising interpretations of the classical hero had not preceded him.⁷ Of the many examples one only need be quoted here, and it was chosen on account of its importance within a specifically Florentine tradition. A fourteenth century canzone, ascribed to Dante, speaks of Hercules as the fighter against all dangers who brings peace and prosperity to all the world. He is, without any hint of paganism, an *exemplum virtutis*.⁸

It is in this context that the image of Hercules first appears in Florence. In 1281 the authorities of San Gimignano received a letter from the Podesta of Florence, sealed in green wax with the *sigillum ipsius comunis... in cujus circulo erat ymago cuiusdam hominis nudi cum lancea in manu et hec erant lictere circumstantes: SIGILLUM FLORENTINORUM*.⁹ The encyclopedia which Benzo d'Alessandria compiled early in the fourteenth century contains a more explicit reference to this seal which makes it clear that Hercules was indeed represented

⁵ Eugène Müntz, *Le collections des Médicis au XV^e siècle*, Paris-London 1888, p. 103.

⁶ E. Müntz, op. cit., p. 62 f.: *Uno panno, cornicie intorno messa d'oro, di br. 6 per ogni verso, dipintovi dentro Erchole ch'amaza l'Idra. Uno panno, cornicie intorno messa d'oro, di br. 6 per ogni verso, dipintovi dentro Erchole che sbarra el Leone ... Uno panno di br. 6 chorniciato intorno e messo d'oro, depintovi Erchole che scoppia Anteo, tutte queste fatiche d'Erchole sono di mano del Pollaiuolo.*

⁷ Peter Gerlach, art. "Herkules", in: LCI, II, 1970, pp. 243-246, with extensive bibliography. Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, Stockholm, 1960, pp. 68, 93-96.

⁸ The *canzone* ascribed to Dante is addressed to Hercules and was published by Curt Rothe, in: *Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch*, 12, 1930, pp. 133-160. See also Marcel Simon, *Hercule et le Christianisme*, Paris, 1955, p. 176 ff. Lines 88-90 of the poem read: *Che ci difenda d'ogni mortal guerra | e questa nostra terra | riducha ad vera pace e buono stato.*

⁹ Robert Davidsohn, *Forschungen zur Geschichte von Florenz*, II (Aus den Stadtbüchern und -Urkunden von San Gimignano), Berlin, 1900, p. 220, no. 1636.

on it: *Florentia... unde miror quid sculpture significant sigillo ipsius civitatis impresse; est enim in eo Herculis ymago clavam manu gestantis et versus talis: HERCULEA CLAVA DOMAT FLORENTIA PRAVA.*¹⁰

Giovanni Villani, while reporting in his *Cronica* an incident of 1308, mentions the *suggello del comune, dov'era intagliata l'immagine dell'Ercole*¹¹ and the most extended description of it is to be found in Gregorio Dati's "Istoria di Firenze", written at the turn from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century. He discusses the symbols — *segni* — of Florence, of which the first is the Lion, given to the town in its beginnings by the founders, the Romans, and hence found all over the town in relief or carved from stone as a warning that the lion, the most powerful of animals, is guarding Florence. Donatello's Marzocco, and an earlier lion on the ringhiera outside the Palazzo Vecchio shown on Piero di Cosimo's Portrait of a Man in Armour (London, National Gallery)¹² together with the lions at the corner of the cornice of the Palace appearing in the same painting are significant examples for the survival of this symbol. But in our context Dati's sixth symbol is of particular importance: *Il sesto è l'Ercole, il quale portano ne' suggelli del Comune, e con detto segno suggellano le lettere, a significazione, che Ercole fu gigante, che andava spegnendo tutti i Tiranni, e inique signorie, e così hanno fatto i Fiorentini.*¹³ Both these symbols, the lion and Hercules, are clearly political in intention, because they signify the power of Florence and warn her enemies, the Hercules seal in particular making use of the image of a popular fighter for justice and right.

Unfortunately, not a single specimen of the Hercules seal survives today, though only seventy years ago Davidsohn still found one attached to a letter written in 1303 and addressed to the Comune of San Gimignano by the *Priori, Gonfaloniere* and *Capitano della Guerra* of Florence.¹⁴ However, a small woodcut appearing on the title page of D. M. Manni, "Osservazioni istoriche sopra i sigilli antichi", published in 1739¹⁵, corresponds closely to the older descriptions of the Hercules seal (Fig. 1).

Variations between the accounts of this seal are hardly material and it can be taken for certain that apart from the seal with the Florentine lily, the *giglio*, a Hercules seal was in use during the late Dugento and early Trecento, though there seems to be no evidence that it replaced an earlier one which had borne the image of S. Giovanni.¹⁶ The question really is, why should Hercules have been chosen at all for a Florentine seal? Medieval seals normally bear the picture of a saint, a ruler, or an emblem.¹⁷



1 Hercules Seal, Dugento. After D. M. Manni, 1739.

¹⁰ Remigio Sabbadini, *Le scoperte dei codici latini e greci ne' secoli XIV e XV*, Nuove ricerche, Florence, 1914 (Reprint Florence, 1967), p. 132 note 21.

¹¹ Villani-Dragomanni, II, 1844, p. 128.

¹² No. 895. Martin Davies, *The Earlier Italian Schools* (= National Gallery Catalogues), London, 1961², p. 424.

¹³ Goro Dati, *Istoria di Firenze dall'anno 1380 all'anno 1405*, Florence, 1785, p. 126 f.

¹⁴ Davidsohn, op. cit., p. 257 f.; the inscription read: *Sigillum priorum artium et vexilliferi justitie Florentinorum*.

¹⁵ *Osservazioni istoriche di Domenico Maria Manni* Accademico Fiorentino sopra i sigilli antichi de' secoli bassi, 30 voll., Florence, 1739-1784; the seal appears on the title-page of each volume.

¹⁶ M. Simon, op. cit., p. 179.

¹⁷ The only other medieval Hercules seal known to me was used by Frederick II of Aragon, King of

It has been suggested that Hercules appeared on Florentine documents because he was the legendary founder of the town.¹⁸ But this explanation is certainly incorrect. All early sources from Villani to the sixteenth century speak of Florence as of a Roman foundation, and the hotly debated question whether the town was first settled under Sulla or under the triumvirs is irrelevant to us. In any case, the alleged role of Hercules as a drainer of marshes and founder of the town was introduced into the early history of Florence only by the arch-forger Annius of Viterbo in his "Antiquitates" which were first published in 1498.¹⁹ But since Annius' fabrications have some bearing on the fortunes of Hercules in Florence they have to be considered, even if only in parenthesis.

Annius tells his readers that Florence was first settled by the people of Fiesole, who in turn had their own town on a piece of land made habitable by Hercules after he had drained a swamp, as was his habit to do whenever he found one. As if this were not enough of a fantastic tale, Annius goes on to say that the name of the river Arno is derived from an Aegyptian epithet of the founder and that the Florentine lion is none other than the lion of Hercules.²⁰ In spite of Annius' learned reference to his alleged source — Berossus, the priest and author of a Babylonian history — it is more likely that he twisted until it fitted his own ends a text which had been written nearer home. For Boccaccio in his widely read "Genealogia Deorum", after discussing Albricus' moralizing interpretation of the Hercules-Hydra legend wrote: *Ego autem arbitror aliquem strenuum fuisse virum, qui averterit aquas ex diversis scaturiginibus loca palustria atque fetida facientes...*²¹

But to return to the Hercules seal. It is impossible to state with any degree of certainty why this Greek hero should suddenly appear in so prominent a place. Walter Paatz, when discussing the seal, suggested that the choice of imagery throws a sharp light on the humanistic spirit of Florentine culture in the late Dugento. The city government, he argued, picked on this specific symbol in order to tell all the world that Florence, like Hercules, was conscious of her power and would not allow any obstacles to stand in the way of her final goal: a *pax florentina*. But this explanation seems too definite, and one must question the assumption that Florentine thinking at this early period was guided by "humanistischen Geist".²²

Naples. It is attached to a document of 1305 and shows Hercules wearing the lion skin and carrying his club, with the inscription INICIUM SAPIENCIE TIMOR DOMINI. *Pietro Sella and M.-H. Laurent*, I sigilli dell'Archivio Vaticano, I, Città del Vaticano, 1937, p. 329, no. 1062, pl. 81.

The literature on the Florentine seal is fairly extensive, but the following deserve notice: *Luigi Passerini*, Il sigillo fiorentino con l'Ercole, in: Periodico di Numismatica e Sfragistica 1, 1868, pp. 276-288. *Demetrio Marzi*, La Cancelleria della Repubblica Fiorentina, Rocca S. Casciano, 1910, pp. 377-385, 436, 448, 541. *Nicolai Rubinstein*, Vasari's Painting of The Foundation of Florence in the Palazzo Vecchio, in: Essays in the History of Architecture Presented to Rudolf Wittkower, London, 1967, pp. 64-73 (p. 67 and note 47).

¹⁸ *L. Passerini*, op. cit., p. 276 f.

¹⁹ *Johannes Annius* Viterbiensis, Commentaria super opera diversorum auctorum de antiquitatibus loquentium, Rome, 1498.

²⁰ The following quotations are given from the Paris edition, 1512: (Annius of Viterbo) Antiquitatum variarum volumina XVII ab Anno declarata, Paris, 1512-1515, Bk. VII, fol. LX verso: *Phesulai: ... planities paludosa erat ... usque ad Herculem Aegyptium qui omnes paludes retorsit in unum alveum, cui cognomen tum suum Arnium indidit, ut in commentariis Berossianis exposuimus*. Bk. XV, fol. CXXXVIII recto: *vocabulum Phesule argumento est planitiem paludosam fuisse, et fama Fluentina cui standum est, id asserit. Ergo eam Aegyptius Hercules habitabilem fecit ... illis suum insigne Leonem prestitit, et fluento suum Aegyptium cognomentum Arno indidit ad hanc usque aetatem*. See also *Roberto Weiss*, An Unknown Epigraphic Tract by Annius of Viterbo, in: Italian Studies Presented to E. R. Vincent, Cambridge, 1962, pp. 101-120 (p. 113).

²¹ *Giovanni Boccaccio*, Genealogie deorum gentilium libri, ed. *Vincenzo Romano*, II (= Opere, XI), Milan, 1951, pp. 632-643 (p. 640).

²² *Walter Paatz*, Werden und Wesen der Trecento-Architektur in Toskana, Burg b. M., 1937, pp. 100-104 and 181.



2 Hercules and Cacus. Florence, Campanile.

Nevertheless, if we think of Hercules in a wider context there is some truth in this. Hercules, the fearless hero, was indeed an embodiment of all virtues desirable in a vigorous city state. When Petrarch composed his “*De viris illustribus*”, probably at the end of the 1330’s and not long after the introduction of the Hercules seal, he opened the list of great exemplary men with Hercules. The theme of this treatise, it must be remembered, is the contention that only those can be called truly illustrious whose *virtus* enabled them to achieve fame through great deeds, for fame, according to Petrarch, is “the companion and herald of virtue”.²³ The image on the seal, like the *virii illustres* on the walls of council chambers, must have been an admonition: virtue will be achieved by those who follow in the footsteps of the paradigms.²⁴ But at the same time Hercules also held political significance when his likeness was attached to Florentine state documents. As a symbol of invincible strength he served as a warning to potential enemies. In short, the implications of choosing this particular symbol were both moral and political, and the efficacy of the image works on more than one level of meaning.

One other Florentine Hercules representation should be mentioned in this context, the plaque from the Campanile showing Hercules and Cacus (Fig. 2). Whatever the significance of this scene within the decorations as a whole²⁵, it seems worth stressing that the one exploit of Hercules here included shows him with a defeated robber who had terrified the countryside.²⁶ Again physical strength and moral purpose are united when Hercules appears meting out justice. Hardly by chance this view lived on in Florence. Rinaldo degli Albizzi, one of the leaders in the struggle against Milan during the years 1423 and 1424, compared the Florentines to a new Hercules who would overcome all evil tyrants.²⁷

²³ *Franco Gaeta*, *L’Avventura di Ercole*, in: *Rinascimento*, 5, 1954, pp. 227-260 (p. 253).

²⁴ *N. Rubinstein*, *Political Ideas in Sieneese Art*, in: *Warburg Journal*, 21, 1958, pp. 179-207 (p. 189).

²⁵ The forthcoming book by Dr. *Marvin Trachtenberg* will throw new light on these problems.

²⁶ *M. Weinberger*, *op. cit.* (see n. 2), pp. 243-246.

²⁷ As quoted by *Eve Borsook*, *The Companion Guide to Florence*, London, 1966, p. 46.



3 Hercules - Fortitudo. Florence, Cathedral, Porta della Mandorla.

II

After playing so important a role on the Dugento seal Hercules makes his next significant appearance among the Florentines on the Porta della Mandorla of the Cathedral.²⁸ The documents tell us that work on this door was executed between 1391 and 1405, and they give us

²⁸ The suggestions by *Charles Seymour, Jr.* about an earlier gigantic Hercules statue made first in: *Homo Magnus et Albus. The Quattrocento Background for Michelangelo's David of 1501-1504*, in: *Stil und Überlieferung in der Kunst des Abendlandes (Akten des 21. Internat. Kongresses für Kgesch. in Bonn 1964)*, II, Berlin, 1967, pp. 96-105 and again in: *Michelangelo's David. A Search for Identity* (= *A. W. Mellon Studies in the Humanities*), Pittsburgh, 1967, p. 30 is based on an imperfect understanding of the terms used in the relevant documents. For a proper explanation of the phrase *uno ghugante overo Erchole* see *Horst W. Janson*, *Giovanni Chellini's 'Libro' and Donatello*, in: *Studien zur toskanischen Kunst, Fs. für Ludwig H. Heydenreich*, Munich, 1964, pp. 131-138 (p. 135, n. 25).



4 Three Exploits of Hercules. Florence, Cathedral, Porta della Mandorla.



5 Hercules and the Lion, Hercules and Anteus. Florence, Cathedral, Porta della Mandorla.

the names of the four sculptors involved. Their respective shares in the sculptural decorations have been much debated, but questions of attribution need not detain us since our concern is with the Hercules representations on the right jamb where he appears no less than four times, prominently standing by himself, the lion-skin over his left-shoulder, the club (now partly broken off) in his right hand (Fig. 3), but embedded among the *rinceaux* there are also shown three of his exploits: the killing of the Nemean Lion, the wrestling match with Anteus, and the slaying of the Hydra. The last is badly damaged, but still clearly identifiable (Figs. 4 and 5).

Two rather different explanations of this puzzling appearance of Greek mythology on a Cathedral door have been offered. Richard Krautheimer regarded these motifs *all'antica*, both in form and content, as alien elements in the predominantly medieval context of the portal, and in trying to find an explanation for their intrusion he wrote: "The reliefs on the jambs of the Porta della Mandorla throw light on the links between humanism and art in Florence during these years... The preponderance of incidents from the Hercules story... calls to mind the fact that it is in these years that Coluccio Salutati completed his work on

the Labors of Hercules... It cannot be a mere coincidence that both the Florentine humanists and the masters of the Porta della Mandorla developed a simultaneous interest in Hercules".²⁹

While Salutati's text³⁰ was indeed written during the very same years while work on the Porta della Mandorla was in progress, one cannot help asking whether his Hercules is really the same as the one appearing at the Cathedral. Though we have before us in both instances the transformation of a much older tradition, it need not have been transformed with the same end in mind. However, before pursuing this question, another interpretation of the iconography of these decorations must be mentioned.

Erwin Panofsky has argued that the sculptural decorations on the jambs of the Porta della Mandorla — single figures or small scenes alternating with angels — are subject to what he aptly called an *interpretatio Christiana* in classical guise. In fact, he explained the individual figures as representatives of the four Cardinal Virtues, among whom Hercules stands for Fortitude, and "the profusion of Hercules scenes... can be accounted for by the fact that the Italian Trecento had come to interpret Hercules as a representative not only of the virtue Fortitudo in particular but also of *virtus generalis* or *virtus generaliter sumpta*... It should be noted that the *Libellus de imaginibus deorum*, nearly contemporary with the Porta della Mandorla, invariably and almost monotonously interprets all labors of Hercules as *exempla virtutis*".³¹

These widely divergent readings of the imagery on the Porta della Mandorla pose the question whether these Hercules scenes are in fact a "Renaissance" intrusion into an otherwise Christian iconography, or whether they present yet another example of christianized and moralized classical mythology. For obviously the meaning attached to Hercules differs from that connected with him on the seal or the Campanile plaque. An answer to our question can only be found if we look in each case at the context in which he makes his appearance instead of isolating him as a revived classical hero.

The two earlier examples clearly occur in secular contexts, and the seal is a political symbol, while the meaning of the plaque may have political implications. But the Porta della Mandorla is the north entrance to the Cathedral and not surprisingly its decorations are purely religious in character. The Virtues and the Hercules incidents in the *rinceaux* are intertwined with angels, the gable is decorated with an Assumption of the Virgin flanked on the lateral pinnacles by two prophets, and in the lunette we see a (later) Annunciation. It would therefore be strange indeed if the mythological carvings on the jambs were without religious significance.

The single figure of a Hercules standing for Fortitude has an obvious precedent in Nicola Pisano's Fortitudo on the pulpit of the Pisa Baptistery. But in Florence the Greek hero may have stood for much more. Panofsky has pointed out that "in Giovanni Pisano's Pisa pulpit... Hercules, emancipated from the tetrad of the Cardinal Virtues and helping to support the entire structure, forms the counterpart of the Archangel Michael, embodying the sum total of the moral virtues while Michael embodies the sum total of the theological ones".³²

On the Porta della Mandorla the single figure of Hercules has no obvious counterpart, but the Hercules theme is emphasized by the addition of three of the hero's exploits. Perhaps their selection can help us in understanding the role of mythological topics in this particular case, for we must not forget that apart from the twelve canonical labors there were many more exploits from which fitting incidents might be chosen. Boccaccio in the "Genealogia deorum" lists no less than thirty-one.³³

²⁹ Krautheimer, Ghiberti, p. 279 f.; see also *ibid.*, p. 52 f.

³⁰ For an appraisal of the text see: *Coluccii Salutati De laboribus Herculis*, ed. Berthold Louis Ullmann, Zurich, 1951, Introduction.

³¹ E. Panofsky, *op. cit.* (see n. 7), p. 150 n.

³² E. Panofsky, *loc. cit.*

³³ Ed. V. Romano (see n. 21), vol. II, p. 632 ff.

Hercules' combat with the Nemean Lion so closely parallels Samson's similar feat that the two heroes and their rendering in this particular deed became interchangeable. But it is a little more difficult to account for the interest in the Anteus story. The legend tells us that this son of the Earth goddess could not be defeated as long as he clung to his mother. Hence Hercules had to lift him off the ground in order to strangle him. Allegorical and moralizing explanations of this story go back to the one given as early as the fifth century A. D. by Fulgentius, who had seen *virtus* personified in Hercules and *libido* in Anteus.³⁴ Both Boccaccio and the widely used mythological tract "De deorum imaginibus" still argued along similar lines, thereby perpetuating a kind of psychomachia motif in the fight and defeat.³⁵ On the other hand, Dante in "De Monarchia" had given a new twist to the story which is highly significant in any Florentine context. While discussing ordeal he observes that the ordeal of single combat may be held to reveal the judgement of God. *Quod si contra veritatem ostensam de inparitate virium instetur, ut assolet, per victoriam David de Golia obtentam instantia refellatur; et si Gentiles aliud peterent, refellant ipsam per victoriam Herculis in Antheum. Stultum enim est valde vires quas Deus confortat, inferiores in pugile suspicari. — Iam satis manifestum est quod per duellum acquiritur de iure acquiri.*³⁶

Dante's interpretation links Hercules with David, another favourite of the Florentines, and as we shall see later this parallel was still recognized in the sixteenth century. In any case, both the Lion and the Anteus episodes can be said to belong within the wider context of that christianized Hercules, who had frequently been discussed by medieval theologians and who had also made his appearance in medieval art.³⁷ Unfortunately, no firm interpretation of the Hydra episode can be offered but it might be suggested that Hydra was perhaps identified with the dragon or snake signifying evil, in which case the three episodes would form a homogenous unit.

But even without certainty about the Hydra episode it should be clear that Hercules is not an interloper on the Porta della Mandorla, an alien Greek in Christian Florence, and once we admit the essentially religious character of these representations they become mythological antetypes in a Christian context. With this we realize that any reference to Florentine humanism of the period, and specifically to Salutati's "De laboribus Herculis" misses the point, since his outlook differed fundamentally from that of the theologian who must have been responsible for suggesting the decorations of the Porta della Mandorla. For Salutati — scholar, humanist, patriotic citizen of his home-town whose Chancellor he was — elaborated in his long treatise an earlier short commentary on Seneca's "Hercules Furiens", and an unmistakably stoic attitude to classical mythology is apparent throughout his arguments. There are no overt references to Christianity, though there is a good deal of moral allegory. As Hans Baron in his book "The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance" put it: "So little indeed had he [Salutati] a parallel in mind between pagan deities and Catholic Saints that in all his references to the widespread theory of the origin of religion from the apotheosis of great human beings he never forgot to stress the inherent danger of idolatry; he liked to expound the opinion of the Fathers that those deified heroes who had seduced their contemporaries by their glamour and power were demons".³⁸

³⁴ *Furius Publius Fulgentius*, *Mythologiae*, Bk. II, § 7 (ed. Basle, 1549, p. 136).

³⁵ *G. Boccaccio*, *Amorosa Visione*, canto VIII, vv. 34-39 (ed. *Vittore Branca*, Florence, 1944, p. 46, and the editor's commentary p. 450).

³⁶ *Dante*, *De Monarchia*, II, 9, 11 (ed. *Pier Giorgio Ricci*, Verona, 1965, p. 207 f.).

³⁷ See note 8.

³⁸ *H. Baron*, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, Princeton, 1966², p. 295 ff. (p. 299).

And yet it is hardly surprising that there were also those who did object, as they had objected before, to any comparison between classical and biblical figures. The preference for Hercules rather than David or Samson as an example of Virtue is given particular poignancy if we recall that during the same years the poet writer Cino Rinuccini reproached those who compared ancient deities with Christian Saints.³⁹ Of course, he had in mind the humanists, and hardly the little figures not easily discovered on the jambs of the Porta della Mandorla. Nevertheless, his invective, Salutati's treatise, and these carvings give us a vivid insight into the complexity of the situation at the beginning of the Renaissance when Hercules simultaneously played several roles, all of which can claim to be based on a long and respectable tradition.

III

Hercules makes his third and perhaps most striking Florentine appearance in the Palazzo Medici, where during the latter part of the Quattrocento he was displayed time and again in paint and bronze, for Lorenzo il Magnifico was surrounded by representations of Hercules and his exploits. The most conspicuous of these were the three large canvasses, already mentioned, which in 1495 were taken from the *sala grande di Lorenzo* to the Palazzo Vecchio. Originally they were in gilded frames six *braccia* square, and they showed Hercules killing the Hydra, Hercules strangling Anteus, and Hercules overcoming the Lion of Nemea. The originals are lost, but the three compositions must have been famous as their echoes are widely dispersed and artists of the stature of Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo took notice of them.⁴⁰ It is not certain whether these canvasses were painted for Piero di Cosimo or his son Lorenzo. While Antonio Pollaiuolo in a letter of 1494 claims that he painted them 34 years earlier, Vasari states that they were done for Lorenzo.⁴¹ A date about 1460 makes sense since it would place these large decorative pictures at the time of the completion of the palace. However, Pollaiuolo's style hardly agrees with Piero's taste, as we know it not only through the Gozzoli chapel but also from Filarete's vivid account.⁴² If, on the other hand, Lorenzo commissioned the canvasses he would have done so after he became head of the family in 1469. We know that he was among Pollaiuolo's admirers and if the canvasses, as we may assume, gave evidence of this master's vigorous anatomical interests and powerful style, a date about 1470 makes better sense within his chronology. The question must remain open for lack of evidence.

But there are still extant important Hercules representations which can be linked with the Medici. First of all we have two small panels with exploits of Hercules in the Uffizi (Figs. 6

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

⁴⁰ Leonardo: Codex Urb. lat. 1270, fol. 128 v (Treatise on Painting by Leonardo da Vinci, ed. A. Philip McMahon, Princeton, 1956, vol. II, fol. 128 v; vol. I, p. 130). Carlo Pedretti, Leonardo da Vinci on Painting. A Lost Book, Berkeley, 1964, p. 195.

For Raphael: A. E. Popham and Johannes Wilde, The Italian Drawings of the XV and XVI Centuries ... at Windsor Castle, London, 1949, no. 791. See also the Oxford drawing, *Fischel* no. 191.

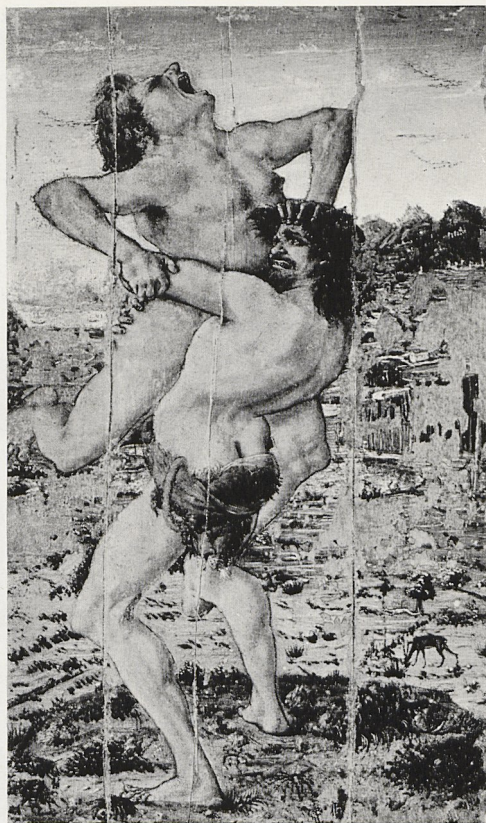
For Michelangelo: Popham-Wilde, op. cit., no. 423. J. Wilde, Italian Drawings in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum. Michelangelo and his Studio, London, 1953, no. 33 r. Tolnay, Michelangelo, I, p. 197 f; III, p. 100 f., figs. 139, 140. About the influence of the Hercules and Anteus group in particular, Rolf Kultzen, Eine Anmerkung zur Vermittlung figürlicher Kompositionstypen durch die italienische Buchillustration des späten 15. Jahrhunderts, in: Pantheon, 25, 1967, p. 412 ff. Ursula Hoff, The Sources of 'Hercules and Anteus' by Rubens, in: In Honour of Daryl Lindsay. Essays and Studies, Melbourne, 1964, pp. 67-79.

⁴¹ Maud Cruttwell, Antonio Pollaiuolo, London-New York, 1907, p. 257. Vasari-Milanesi, III, p. 293 f.

⁴² Ernst H. Gombrich, The Early Medici as Patrons of Art, in: Italian Renaissance Studies. A Tribute to the Late Cecilia M. Ady, ed. by E. F. Jacob, London, 1960, pp. 279-311 (p. 297 ff.).



6 Antonio Pollaiuolo, Hercules and the Hydra.
Florence, Uffizi.



7 Antonio Pollaiuolo, Hercules and Anteus.
Florence, Uffizi.

and 7). They are not of equal size — the Anteus panel measures 16.0×9.5 cm. and the Hydra panel 17.5×12.0 cm. — and we may suspect that they too belonged to a triad, of which the third, now lost, had shown Hercules killing the Lion, for on stylistic grounds it is clear that the two surviving panels belong together.

While the authorship of Pollaiuolo has never been doubted, the purpose of these small pictures has often been discussed. It has been suggested that they were either *modelli* for the large canvasses or miniature copies after them, but both hypotheses are untenable since models of this kind and small copies of larger pictures are out of keeping with fifteenth century Florentine practice. Format and manner rather indicate that they must have formed part of the decorations of some piece of furniture, perhaps a small casket or cabinet. Since we know how deeply Lorenzo was interested in the significance of Hercules (see below) one might even suggest that they adorned his writing desk. In any case, they must have been an old Medici possession since they were transferred in 1798 from the Galleria Palatina to the Uffizi.⁴³

⁴³ *Attilio Sabatini*, *Antonio e Piero Pollaiuolo*, Florence, 1944, p. 81.



8 Antonio Pollaiuolo, *Hercules and Anteus*, bronze.
Florence, Museo Nazionale.

Most famous of all Lorenzo's Hercules images is the bronze group of Hercules wrestling with Anteus by Antonio Pollaiuolo in the Bargello (Fig. 8). When the 1492 Medici inventory was compiled the group was in the room of Giuliano, the later Duke of Nemours, but it is unlikely that it was commissioned for him, because he was only five years old when Antonio left Florence for Rome in 1484 to make the bronze tomb of Pope Sixtus IV.⁴⁴ The suggestion that the group might have been commissioned by Lorenzo il Magnifico is convincing in the light of his preoccupation with Hercules.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *L. D. Ettlinger*, Pollaiuolo's Tomb of Pope Sixtus IV, in: *Warburg Journal*, 16, 1953, pp. 239-274 (p. 242 ff.).

⁴⁵ *Italian Bronze Statuettes. An Exhibition Organized by the Arts Council of Great Britain*, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1961, no. 8.

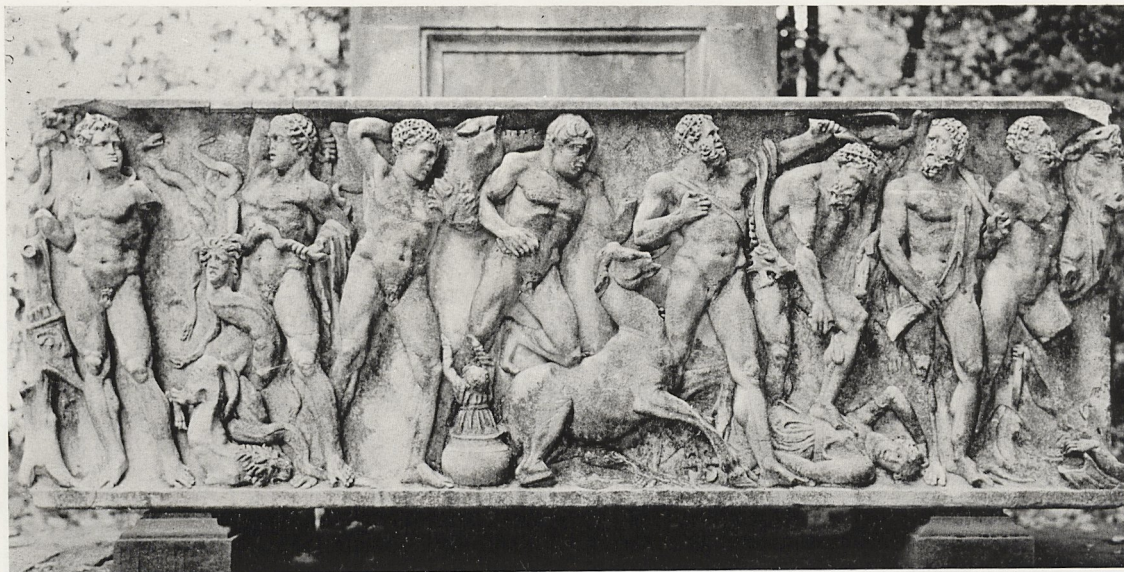


9 Antonio Pollaiuolo, Hercules, bronze. Berlin (Ost), Bode-Museum.



10 Antonio Pollaiuolo, Hercules, bronze. New York, Frick Collection.

It seems remarkable that the other two bronze statuettes which can be attributed to Pollaiuolo with any degree of certainty both represent Hercules. One of them is now in the Bode-Museum, East Berlin (Fig. 9), the other in the Frick Collection, New York (Fig. 10). Unfortunately, neither is documented or mentioned in any of our sources. But what makes the two interesting is the fact that two distinct types were chosen for representation, both with antecedents in classical and later art. The Berlin Hercules is bearded, heavily built, and middle-aged; the Frick Hercules is young, lithe, and beardless. Neither of these bronzes has a provenance which allows us to draw any conclusions about its original destination. But since Antonio was highly esteemed by Lorenzo, the possibility that either one or perhaps both of these precious collector's pieces were made for him cannot be ruled out. For it must be remembered that another artist in Lorenzo's circle, Bertoldo di Giovanni, also created Hercules



11 Hercules Sarcophagus, Roman. Florence, Boboli Gardens.

statuettes in bronze (Frederiks Collection, the Hague; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Pinacoteca Estense, Modena), though none of them are listed in the Medici inventory. While it is true that the bronze statuette *all'antica* was fashionable and prized by collectors, the insistence on the Hercules theme among artists close to Lorenzo de' Medici is noteworthy, even it cannot be claimed that all these statuettes were made for him personally. But before asking whether we can discover any reason for Lorenzo's predelection and thereby perhaps grasping the particular meaning Hercules held for him, a brief consideration of the pictorial tradition to which Pollaiuolo's Hercules images belong will show how remarkably faithful they are to a peculiarly Florentine heritage.

Compositionally, two of the three Hercules exploits as shown by Antonio Pollaiuolo follow Florentine rather than classical models. Only in the case of the killing of the Hydra did he turn to a Roman prototype for the general arrangement of the group⁴⁶, while for the stance of the protagonist he used his favorite formula expressive of vigorous action, as we know it from the fighters in the centre of the *Battle of the Nudes* engraving and the archers of the *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* (London, National Gallery). Yet ultimately this pose too can be traced back to Hercules representations on Roman sarcophagi.⁴⁷

Vasari's description of the lost canvas depicting Hercules with the Nemean Lion gives a clear indication that Pollaiuolo had used the formula generally employed when depicting Samson with the lion: ... *ammazzando il leone, gli appunta il ginocchio sinistro al petto, ed afferrata la bocca del leone con ambe le sue mani, serrando i denti e stendendo le braccia, lo apre a sbarra per viva forza; anchorché la fiera, per sua difesa, con gli unghioni malamente gli graffi le braccia*.⁴⁸ Variations of this group can be found, among others, in a Raphael drawing at Windsor⁴⁹ and

⁴⁶ Phyllis Pray Bober, *Drawings after the Antique by Amico Aspertini*, London, 1957, p. 64 and fig. 57.

⁴⁷ See for example the sarcophagus now in the Boboli Gardens (fig. 11).

⁴⁸ *Vasari-Milanesi*, III, p. 294.

⁴⁹ *Popham-Wilde*, op. cit. (see note 40), no. 791 v.



12 Hercules and the Lion, bronze, Italian, 16th Century. London, Victoria and Albert Museum.

a small bronze group, datable in the early sixteenth century, in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Fig. 12). Pollaiuolo's use of the Samson formula is all the more striking since during the latter part of the Quattrocento a different formula was more popular which showed Hercules and the lion standing opposite each other like wrestlers, a type of the combat which derives from classical models.⁵⁰ But a glance at the *Porta della Mandorla* (Figs. 4, 5) reveals Pollaiuolo's immediate source, and it should be noted that he followed an earlier Florentine, and in the last resort medieval, prototype rather than the fashion for classical models. Such a choice from an artist so much indebted to ancient art can only indicate the insistence on a specifically Florentine tradition in the case of an Hercules exploit.

⁵⁰ The best known example is the Hercules sarcophagus in the Villa Borghese, Rome.



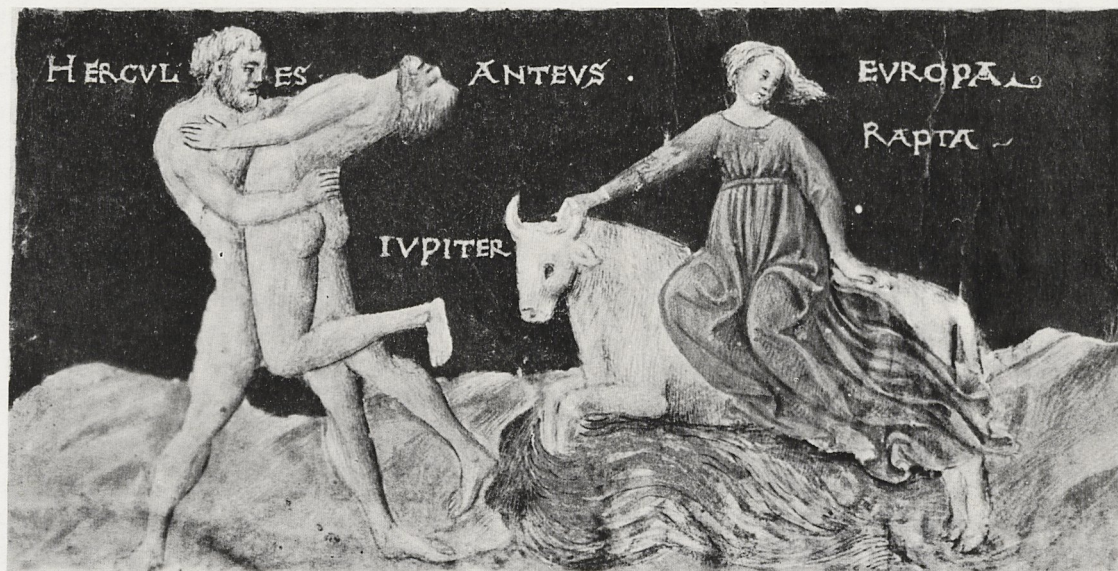
13 Hercules and Anteus, Classical group (restored). Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Courtyard.



14 Antico, Hercules and Anteus. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

This is true also for the way in which he showed Hercules overcoming Anteus. Classical art invariably employed a formula best known from the heavily restored group now in the courtyard of the Pitti Palace (Fig. 13), a scheme of composition which was taken up by Antico for his small bronze rendering of the story (Fig. 14).⁵¹ Hercules is shown lifting Anteus from behind.

⁵¹ About the classical group see *Adolf Michaelis*, *Geschichte des Statuenhofes im Vaticanischen Belvedere*, in: *Jb. des Kaiserl. Deutschen Archäol. Instituts*, 5, 1890, p. 39, where the story of the acquisition of the group and its restoration is given in some detail. See also *Hans Dütschke*, *Die antiken Bildwerke in Florenz*, Leipzig 1875, p. 18 f., no. 37, and *ibid.*, III, p. X. *Guido A. Mansuelli*, *Galleria degli Uffizi, Le Sculture*, I, Florence, 1958, pp. 13-22, quotes some literature. The Antico bronze is published by *Hermann Julius Hermann*, *Pier Jacopo Alari-Bonacolsi, genannt Antico*, in: *Jb. der Khist. Slgn. des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, 28, 1909/10, pp. 264-266, pl. XL, and in *Leo Planiscig*, *Die Bronzeplastiken. Katalog (= Kunsthistorisches Museum in Wien, Band IV)*, Vienna, 1924, p. 54 f. A replica, from the Straus Collection, is now in the Museum of Fine Arts at Houston.



15 Leonardo da Besozzo, Hercules and Anteus, Europa and the Bull. Miniature in the Crespi Chronicle, Milan, Coll. Crespi-Morbio.

Pollaiuolo's group in the Bargello (Fig. 8) presents us with a curious but characteristic paradox. Perfected once before in classical antiquity the art of making bronze statuettes was a typical Renaissance re-creation of the fifteenth century, and it became the connoisseur's and artist's touchstone if a true taste *all'antica*. As far as the treatment of forms goes Pollaiuolo's Hercules and Anteus group is no less classisizing, and with his superb mastery over anatomy, expression, and his pliable material he did create a work in the antique manner, although he did not follow a classical model. But he did not invent this front-to-front wrestling match as is generally believed. Again he turned to Florentine tradition and looked carefully at the small scene on the Porta della Mandorla (Fig. 5).

This particular configuration with the adversaries facing each other was not confined to this one representation before Antonio took it up — employing it not only for the lost canvas and the bronze, but also the small Uffizi panel (Fig. 7) —, for the same grouping appears on one of the illustrations in Leonardo da Besozzo's Crespi Chronicle (Fig. 15) which can be dated about 1440. The stylistic and iconographic sources of this manuscript have been discussed a great deal, but there is general agreement about its derivation from some Tuscan model of the early fifteenth century rather than from Uccello's lost frescoes in the Palazzo Vitelliani in Padua, though its style may nevertheless show Uccello's influence.

Antonio's respect for a distinctly Florentine tradition was not confined to his representation of these episodes from the Hercules story. The Frick Hercules (Fig. 10) repeats *verbatim* the pose of the Hercules-Fortitudo on the Porta della Mandorla (Fig. 3). In both cases the Greek hero is young and beardless; the *contrapposto* with the weight placed on the right foot is the same, and in both cases the left arm is set akimbo, while the lion's skin is arranged in such a manner that the head rests on the upper left arm.

The clearly Florentine flavour of Pollaiuolo's Hercules representations is unmistakable, and most, if not all of them are somehow connected with Lorenzo il Magnifico. We must ask therefore why there was such an insistence on local tradition.

The answer can be found, it seems, in the writings of Cristoforo Landino, the humanist, philosopher and poet, who became Professor of Rhetoric and Poetry in Florence in 1458, and was among the teachers of Lorenzo, remaining his lifelong friend and an important member of his circle. His "De vera nobilitate" is cast in the typical Renaissance form of a dialogue, and among the participants in the discussion are Lorenzo, his brother Giuliano, Leon Battista Alberti, Poliziano, Ficino, Gentile Becchi, and of course Landino himself. Although the dialogue was written about 1475 Landino wants us to believe that the meeting he describes took place soon after Piero de' Medici's death at the end of 1469 — a significant date. For the book opens with a fulsome eulogy of the Medici family, and Landino emphasizes that he would not dare to compare any other with it. This praise of the house of Medici is addressed to Lorenzo. The book ends with an extended moral interpretation of the Hercules myth, for he is the most noble and the supreme example to be followed. Of his exploits only five are discussed in any detail and explained in Neo-Platonic terms, but among them are the fights against the Lion, the Hydra and Anteus.⁵²

Both the supposed occasion of these deliberations about true nobility, and the structure of the dialogue with the reference at the beginning to the young Lorenzo as new head of the Medici family and at the end with the demonstration of Hercules' virtue are important in our context. But there is an even more significant reference to Hercules in Landino's principal treatise, the "Conversaciones Camaldulenses", and this time the speaker is none other than Lorenzo himself.⁵³

We are introduced to a group of people escaping from the summer heat of Florence to the monastery of Camaldoli in the cooler hills, some distance south of the town. Lorenzo and Giuliano, Alberti, Ficino, Landino and others — very much the same group of friends who had debated true nobility — are assembled. The topic of their investigation is the value of a contemplative life, or rather the question why a contemplative life is better than an active one. But Lorenzo, whose political role in Florence should be borne in mind, without denying the value of the *vita contemplativa* delivers a spirited and learned address in praise of the *vita activa*. Characteristically his main point is the relevance of an active life within the community and the civic virtue which it holds. In the course of this argument he remarks:

*Sed revertor ad antiquos. Fuit sapiens Hercules. At non sibi sapiens; verum sua sapientia omnibus paene mortalibus profuit. Nam maximam orbis partem peragrans horrendas feras substulit, pernitiōsa ac immania monstra perdomuit; crudelissimos tyrannos coercuit, plurimis populis ac nationibus ius libertatemque restituit; quod si apud Athlantem praeceptorem suum commoratus ociosae sapientiae tantum operam dedisset, pro Hercule sophistam haberemus, neque illum Iovis filium quisquam dicere auderet, quandoquidem ne Iupiter quidem ipse, si illum ex Platonicorum sententia mundi animam interpretamur, unquam cesset; qui si cessaret, omnia quae assiduo motu agitantur, cessarent. Non enim caeli assidua mobilitate se circumferrent; nulli astrorum ortus obitusque apparerent; non ipsa elementa mutua inter sese transmutatione agitentur; non fluere fluvii; non ferret quicquam tellus; nihil immutarent horae; nihil sortirentur Parcae; nihil carerent Musae.*⁵⁴

This passage about Hercules is the only extended reference to classical mythology and its moral lessons in the whole long speech delivered by Lorenzo, and not fortuitously perhaps

⁵² Eugenio Garin, *Testi inediti e rari di Cristoforo Landino e Francesco Filelfo*, Rome, 1949, published extracts from "De vera nobilitate", see particularly p. 24 ff. For the complete text of the treatise see the edition by Maria Teresa Liaci, *De vera nobilitate* (= Nuova collezione di testi umanistici inediti o rari XV), Florence, 1970; the Hercules myth p. 107 ff.

⁵³ See E. Garin, *op. cit.*, p. 26 ff.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

it is followed immediately by a reference to the example of the archetypal Christian *vita activa*, St. Paul.

But judging from the utterances of Lorenzo's friends, Hercules was discussed not only as an example of an active life and of civic virtue as needed in the leader for Florence, there was also much talk about understanding Hercules' deeds in the light of Neo-Platonic philosophy. The passage just quoted has such implications, but the trend becomes even more explicit in a letter written by Ficino in 1477, where he speaks of Hercules as standing for reason, arguing: *Hic occidit Anteum, id est, immania quaedam simulacra phantasiae. Quando videlicet a terra atollit in altum, hoc est, quando a sensibus et corporali imaginatione se moverit. Hic quoque leonem domat, id est, iracundiam cohibet. Hic hydram obtruncat multis undique capitibus pullulantem, id est, concuspiscendi vim amputat.*⁵⁵

It should be noted that Ficino lists precisely those three episodes which Pollaiuolo had painted for the Sala Grande of the Medici Palace, and possibly also on some piece of furniture belonging to Lorenzo il Magnifico.

It is of course not suggested here that Pollaiuolo ever illustrated, so to speak, the writings of either Landino or Ficino. His works rather belong in a much wider sense within the same imaginative and intellectual world in which they wrote their philosophy and in which Lorenzo discussed with his friends the different duties of a statesman and of a philosopher. Hence the Labours of Hercules which Pollaiuolo fashioned and the statuettes which he made were neither straightforward *exempla* of virtue nor were they Neo-Platonic charades. Like all Renaissance imagery they are ambiguous and operate on more than one level of meaning. And these meanings are not only those believed in by Lorenzo, for stratified beneath them are older ones, just as the forms of these Quattrocento renderings are based on tradition. The civic Hercules of Landino's "Conversationes" has an ancestor on the Dugento seal, and the exploits painted for the *Sala grande di Lorenzo* still carry echoes of the Porta della Mandorla and its Christian context, just as Lorenzo could speak of Hercules and St. Paul almost in the same breath.

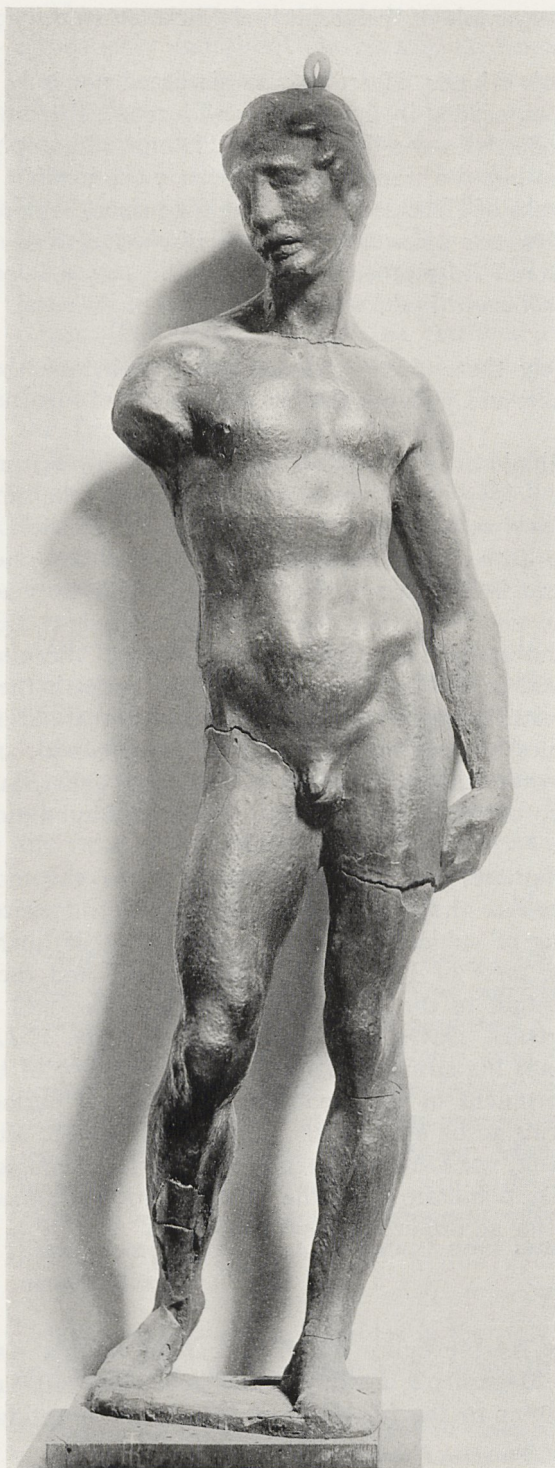
But nevertheless the political aspect of the praise of his hero Hercules seems the most significant element in the speech Landino puts into the mouth of the most powerful citizen of Florence. The defeat of tyrants, the freeing of subject nations, the restitution of liberty — all credited to Hercules — are characteristic *topoi* of Florentine republicanism, and these ideals were proudly proclaimed from the Dugento to the Cinquecento. They were still in Michelangelo's mind when he created his Hercules, David, and Brutus. In the case of Lorenzo il Magnifico, they must be seen as perhaps his strongest claim to the legitimacy of his position. Whatever his place within the government of the Republic, his political outlook had clearly had to be one befitting a man aspiring to be a leader in a community which, after all, remained a republic. Neither Lorenzo himself, nor Landino when providing the ideological background for Medici propaganda, both in "De nobilitate" and the "Conversationes", made a fortuitous choice when they picked Hercules for so important a symbol.⁵⁶

IV

Michelangelo's choice of a Hercules for the marble figure which he carved on his own accord while still under the impression of the Magnifico's death will now seem less puzzling since we can understand it as yet another chapter in the life-story of Hercules Florentinus,

⁵⁵ *Marsilio Ficino, Opera omnia*, Basle, 1576 (Reprint, ed. *Paul Oskar Kristeller*, Turin, 1959), p. 775 f. *André Chastel, Art et Humanisme à Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique*, Paris, 1959, p. 275.

⁵⁶ I must thank my friend *Christoph Luitpold Frommel* for insisting on the paramount importance of this political symbolism when he was good enough to discuss my paper with me.



16 Michelangelo, David - Hercules, bozzetto. Florence, Casa Buonarroti.

and a statue over seven feet high would in fact have been the first truly gigantic monument to him, had it ever been set up somewhere in the city.⁵⁷ Furthermore, a Hercules as an allegorical commemoration of the leading Florentine citizen would have been understood immediately by the contemporaries since it drew on traditional imagery, and in selecting this particular theme and giving it a monumental treatment Michelangelo showed both a sense of the occasion and sensitivity toward the ideals of Lorenzo.

Though the statue does not survive we can still reconstruct its original appearance.⁵⁸ Charles de Tolnay has recently suggested that a bozzetto in the Casa Buonarroti (Fig. 16), which hitherto had been linked with the David, preserves for us Michelangelo's model.⁵⁹ This suggestion is convincing for the bozzetto shows a youthful athlete who is a direct descendant of Antonio Pollaiuolo's Frick Hercules, and through this intermediary of the Hercules-Fortitudo on the jamb of the Porta della Mandorla. The obvious affinities of Michelangelo's Hercules model to his David are also significant, since they show once again how close to each other these two heroes were in the mind of Florentines.

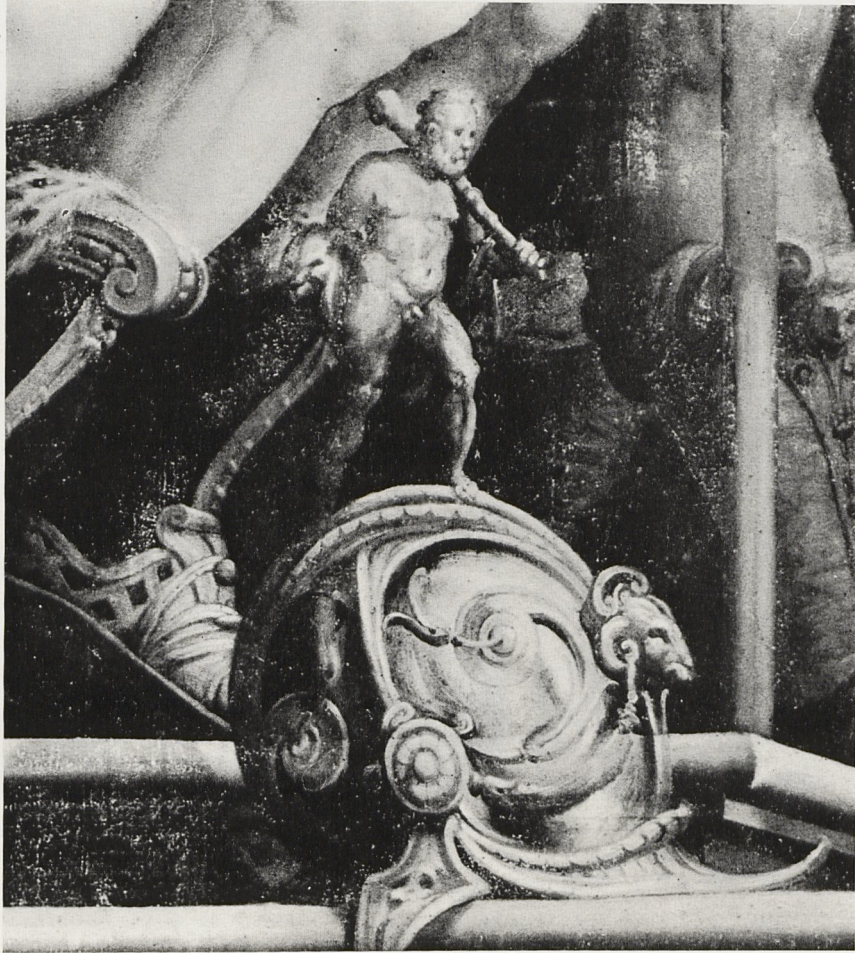
This juxtaposition persisted, for as is well known Michelangelo was twice involved with the commission for a Hercules and Anteus or Cacus group to be set up outside the Palazzo Vecchio as a counterpart to his David.⁶⁰ The vicissitudes of this scheme, which was in the end realized by Baccio Bandinelli, are not our concern, but it must be stressed that this official commission for a public monument to the hero of political virtue makes sense only when understood within the Florentine Hercules tradition. If we stand today in the Piazza della Signoria lamenting the absence of another Michelangelo group and nursing unkind

⁵⁷ See above, note 28.

⁵⁸ *M. Weinberger*, op. cit., pp. 44-47.

⁵⁹ *Ch. de Tolnay*, Michel-Ange, Paris, 1970, p. 258 and the same author's Une composition de la jeunesse de Michel-Ange: "Hercule étouffant le lion de Nemée", dessin au Musée du Louvre, in: *Gaz. B.-A.*, 6^e ser., 71, 1968, pp. 205-212.

⁶⁰ *M. Weinberger*, op. cit., pp. 237-250.

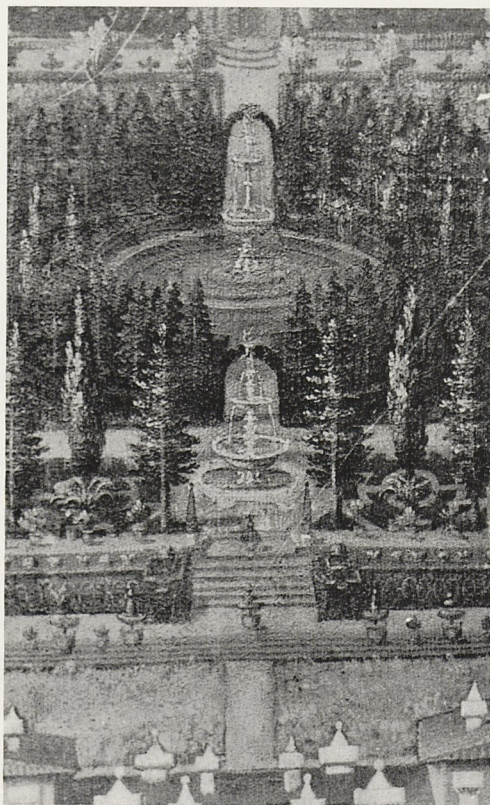


17 Giorgio Vasari, *The Foundation of Florence* (detail: helmet of Marc Anthony). Florence, Palazzo Vecchio, Salone dei Cinquecento.

thoughts about Bandinelli's Hercules and Cacus, we would do better to admit that, however imperfect artistically, this group is historically speaking a link in the tradition which spans more than two centuries. David and Hercules are still neighbours as they had been for Dante. Virtue and civic pride still stand before us, reminding us of the might and political role of Florence.

The story of Hercules Florentinus in the sixteenth century is a different chapter, which has recently been told by others.⁶¹ The Medici Dukes were only too conscious of the continuing power and usefulness of this image, and Cosimo I in particular through his attachment to Hercules showed keen awareness of tradition. Three important examples suffice to make this point and to round out our story.

⁶¹ Kurt W. Forster, *Metaphors of Rule. Political Ideology and History in the Portraits of Cosimo I de' Medici*, in: *Flor. Mitt.*, 15, 1971, pp. 65-104 (p. 72 ff.). Hildegard Utz, *The Labors of Hercules and Other Works by Vincenzo de' Rossi*, in: *Art Bull.*, 53, 1971, pp. 344-366.



18 The Castello Gardens with their Fountains. Detail of lunette panel, showing the site of Castello. Florence, Museo Firenze com'era.



19 Niccolò Tribolo and Bartolomeo Ammannati, Hercules Fountain. Castello, Villa Medicea.

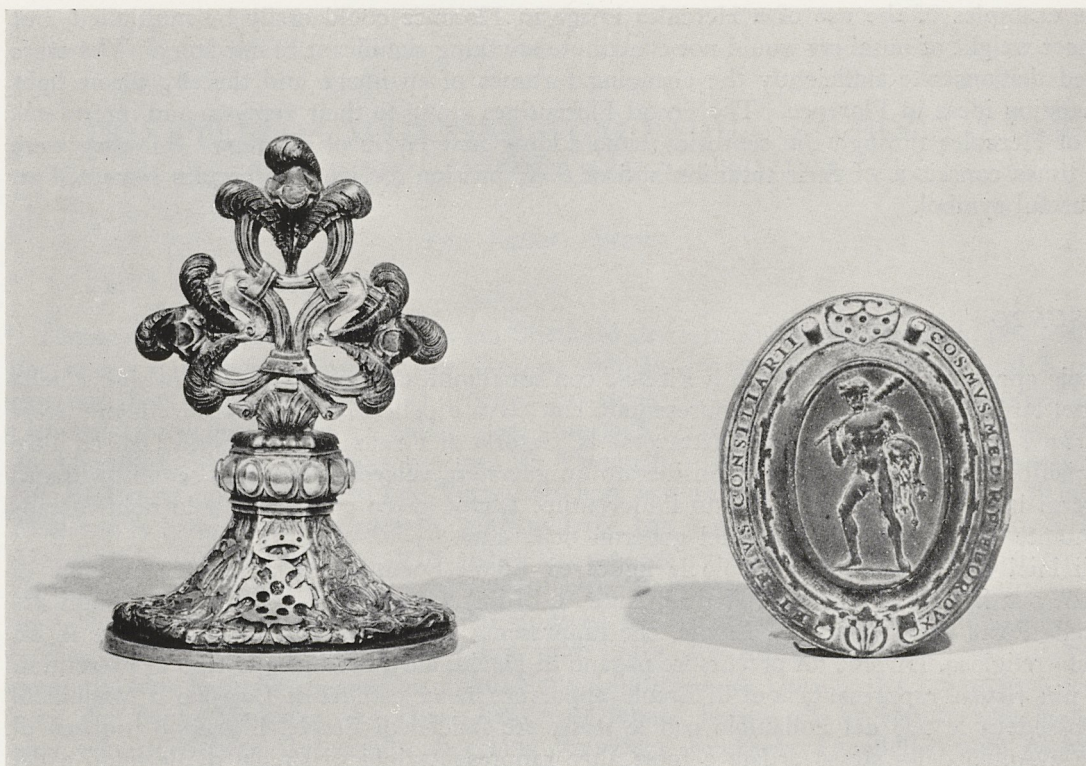
On Vasari's painting in the Palazzo Vecchio depicting the Foundation of Florence⁶², Hercules appears as an ornament or rather crest on the helmet of Mark Anthony, one of the putative founders of the town (Fig. 17). Nicolai Rubinstein in a revealing analysis of this picture and its historical significance suggested rightly that Hercules was included in this elaborate representation because the wearer of the helmet claimed him among his ancestors.⁶³ But there may be further reasons for giving Hercules, even if only in image, so honoured a place.

The Hercules crest showing him with club and lion skin closely resembles the figures on the Dugento seal (Fig. 1). Moreover, when Vasari painted his Foundation of Florence, Annius of Viterbo's fable about Hercules' role in the foundation of the town had become well known, even if it was hotly contested by sounder scholars. Taking everything together, Hercules had to be included in a painting about the origins of a state now ruled by a Medici who was successor to Lorenzo il Magnifico, and his omnipresence in the Sala dei Cinquecento is a further reminder of his importance to Medici symbolism.

Another painting by Vasari in honour of Cosimo I shows the Duke with the artists whom

⁶² See *Flor. Mitt.*, 15, 1971, p. 101, fig. 33.

⁶³ See above, note 17.



20 Seal of Cosimo I, emerald. Florence, Museo degli Argenti.

he patronized⁶⁴, among whom is Tribolo holding the models of the two fountains which he made for the Medici Villa at Castello. They are still in existence, though they no longer form a pair as intended, and shown on an old view of the gardens at Castello (Fig. 18).⁶⁵ One of them, now transferred to Petraia, is crowned by an allegorical figure representing, according to Vasari, Florence.⁶⁶ The other and larger fountain is still at Castello (Fig. 19). On top of it stands a Hercules and Anteus group by Ammannati. No comment on this juxtaposition as originally planned is needed beyond pointing out that an age old symbolism hitherto implicit was made explicit in an age very much addicted to allusive political imagery.

But the most revealing example of Cosimo's sense of tradition is the *intaglio* which was cut probably soon after he came to power in 1537, and was used by him as a seal (Fig. 20).⁶⁷ It takes us right back to the beginnings of the Hercules Florentinus since it was clearly made with the late medieval seal in mind (Fig. 1).

⁶⁴ See Flor. Mitt., 15, 1971, p. 107, fig. 2.

⁶⁵ The lunette, formerly in the Villa Medicea of Artimino, is now conserved in the Museo Firenze com'era.

⁶⁶ *Pope-Hennessy, Sculpture, III*², p. 359 f.

⁶⁷ Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Museo degli Argenti. Attributed by *Gaetano Milanesi (Vasari-Milanesi, V, p. 384)* to Domenico di Polo. See also *Ernst Kris, Meister und Meisterwerke der Steinschneidekunst in der italienischen Renaissance*, Vienna, 1929, I, pp. 41, 158; II, pl. 25, fig. 103. About Domenico di Polo's Hercules and Anteus medal for Cosimo I, *Igino Benvenuto Supino, Il medagliere Mediceo nel R. Museo Nazionale di Firenze*, Florence, 1899, p. 100, no. 263 and *K. W. Forster, Pontormo*, Munich, 1966, p. 146.

The examples of the use of a Hercules image in Florence could easily be multiplied, but the sheer weight of numbers would not contribute anything significant to our story. The cases selected demonstrate sufficiently the changing fortunes of an image and thereby throw light on changing ideas in Florence. The proud Florentines clung to their versions and interpretations of Hercules through the centuries, time adding new layers of meaning. But they were at all times conscious of their tradition and of their mission for which Hercules remained an ever useful symbol.

RIASSUNTO

Ercole appare per la prima volta a Firenze con un significato specifico su di un sigillo della città del tardo Trecento, dove è rappresentato con clava e pelle di leone, con l'iscrizione *Herculea clava domat Florentia prava*. Attraverso la "Istoria di Firenze" di Gregorio Dati ed altre fonti risulta chiaro che Ercole era considerato un guerriero valoroso che aveva sconfitto tiranni e governi ingiusti come avevano fatto i Fiorentini. L'eroe greco era un simbolo politico rappresentante la rettitudine morale del governo della città.

Agli inizi del quindicesimo secolo la figura di Ercole-Fortitudo e la rappresentazione di tre delle sue fatiche (il Leone di Nemea, Anteo e l'Idra) apparvero tra il "fogliame" sugli stipiti della Porta della Mandorla. Ercole, che rappresenta la virtù, in questo caso appare in un contesto religioso. Diviene un precursore pagano di David, altro personaggio caro ai Fiorentini.

Le più vistose rappresentazioni di Ercole apparvero nella cerchia di Lorenzo il Magnifico, che possedeva le tele del Pollaiuolo con le stesse tre fatiche di Ercole, il gruppo bronzeo di Ercole e Anteo dello stesso artista e forse altre rappresentazioni di Ercole di Bertoldo e del Pollaiuolo. Lorenzo ed i suoi amici parlavano di Ercole come modello di tutti i buoni governanti e come eroe morale a protezione dei deboli contro i malvagi tiranni, come risulta dagli scritti del Landino.

Quando Michelangelo, dopo la morte di Lorenzo, scolpì un Ercole monumentale, commemorò il suo mecenate nel modo più adatto, poiché continuò una tradizione vecchia di un secolo che voleva Ercole simbolo di tutte le virtù politiche care ai Fiorentini.

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After D. M. Manni (see note 15): Fig. 1. — After H. J. Hermann (see note 51), Pl. XL: Fig. 14.