

DESCRIPTION OF THE WORKS OF JACOPO SANSOVINO SCULPTOR OF FLORENCE

The while that Andrea Contucci, the sculptor of Monte Sansovino, having already acquired in Italy and Spain the name of the most excellent sculptor and architect that there was in art after Buonarroti, was living in Florence in order to execute the two figures of marble that were to be placed over that door of the Temple of S. Giovanni which faces towards the Misericordia, a young man was entrusted to him to be taught the art of sculpture, the son of Antonio di Jacopo Tatti, whom Nature had endowed with a great genius, so that he gave much grace to the things that he did in relief. Whereupon Andrea, having recognized how excellent in sculpture the young man was destined to become, did not fail to teach him with all possible care all those things which might make him known as his disciple. And so, loving him very dearly, and doing his best for him with much affection, and being loved by the young man with equal tenderness, people judged that the pupil would not only become as excellent as his master, but would by a great measure surpass him. And such were the reciprocal friendliness and love between these two, as it were between father and son, that Jacopo in those early years began to be called no longer Tatti, but Sansovino, and so he has always been, and always will be.

Now, Jacopo beginning to exercise his hand, he was so assisted by Nature in the things that he did, that, although at times he did not use [Pg 188] much study and diligence in his work, nevertheless in what he did there could be seen facility, sweetness, grace, and a certain delicacy very pleasing to the eyes of craftsmen, insomuch that his every sketch, rough study, and model has always had a movement and a boldness that Nature is wont to give to but few sculptors. Moreover, the friendship and intercourse that Andrea del Sarto and Jacopo Sansovino had with each other in their childhood, and then in their youth, assisted not a little both the one and the other, for they followed the same manner in design and had the same grace in execution, one in painting and the other in sculpture, and, conferring together on the problems of art, and Jacopo making models of figures for Andrea, they gave one another very great assistance. And that this is true a proof is that in the altar-piece of S. Francesco, belonging to the Nuns of the Via Pentolini, there is a S. John the Evangelist which was copied from a most beautiful model in clay that Sansovino made in those days in competition with Baccio da Montelupo; for the Guild of Por Santa Maria wished to have a bronze statue of four braccia made for a niche at the corner of Orsanmichele, opposite to the Wool-Shearers, for which Jacopo made a more beautiful model in clay than Baccio, but nevertheless it was allotted to Montelupo, from his being an older master, rather than to Sansovino, although his work, young as he was, was the better. That model, which is a very beautiful thing, is now in the possession of the heirs of Nanni Unghero; for which Nanni, being then his friend, Sansovino made some models of large boys in clay, and the model for a figure of S. Nicholas of Tolentino, which were all executed of the size of life in wood, with the assistance of Sansovino, and placed in the Chapel of that Saint in the Church of S. Spirito.

Becoming known for these reasons to all the craftsmen of Florence, and being considered a young man of fine parts and excellent character, Jacopo was invited by Giuliano da San Gallo, architect to Pope Julius II, to Rome, vastly to his satisfaction; and then, taking extraordinary pleasure in the ancient statues that are in the Belvedere, he set himself to draw them. Whereupon Bramante, who was likewise architect to Pope Julius, holding the first place at that time and dwelling in the [Pg 189] Belvedere, having seen some drawings by this young man, and a nude recumbent figure of clay in full-relief, holding a vessel to contain ink, which he had made, liked them so much that he took him under his protection and ordered

him that he should make a large copy in wax of the Laocoon, which he was having copied also by others, in order to take a cast in bronze—namely, by Zaccheria Zacchi of Volterra, the Spaniard Alonzo Berughetta, and Vecchio of Bologna. These, when all were finished, Bramante caused to be seen by Raffaello Sanzio of Urbino, in order to learn which of the four had acquitted himself best; whereupon it was judged by Raffaello that Sansovino, young as he was, had surpassed the others by a great measure. Then, by the advice of Cardinal Domenico Grimani, orders were given to Bramante that he should have Jacopo's copy cast in bronze; and so the mould was made, and the work, being cast in metal, came out very well. And afterwards, having been polished, it was given to the Cardinal, who held it as long as he lived not less dear than if it had been the antique; and when he came to die, he left it as a very rare thing to the most Serene Signoria of Venice, which, after having kept it many years in the press of the Hall of the Council of Ten, finally in the year 1534 presented it to the Cardinal of Lorraine, who took it to France.

While Sansovino was acquiring greater fame every day in Rome with his studies in art, being held in much consideration, Giuliano da San Gallo, who had been keeping him in his house in the Borgo Vecchio, fell ill; and when he departed from Rome in a litter, in order to go to Florence for a change of air, a room was found for Jacopo by Bramante, likewise in the Borgo Vecchio, in the Palace of Domenico della Rovere, Cardinal of San Clemente, where Pietro Perugino was also dwelling, who at that time was painting for Pope Julius the vaulting of the chamber in the Borgia Tower. Whereupon Pietro, having seen the beautiful manner of Sansovino, caused him to make many models in wax for himself, and among them a Christ taken down from the Cross in the round, with many ladders and figures, which was a very beautiful thing. This and other things of the same sort, and models of various fantasies, were all collected afterwards by M. Giovanni Gaddi, and they are now [Pg 190] in his house on the Piazza di Madonna in Florence. And these works were the reason that Sansovino became very intimately associated with Maestro Luca Signorelli, the painter of Cortona, with Bramantino da Milano, with Bernardino Pinturicchio, with Cesare Cesariano, who was in repute at that time for his commentaries on Vitruvius, and with many other famous and beautiful intellects of that age. Bramante, then, desiring that Sansovino should become known to Pope Julius, arranged to have some antiques restored by him; whereupon Jacopo, setting to work, displayed such diligence and so much grace in restoring them, that the Pope and all who saw them judged that nothing better could be done. These praises so spurred Sansovino to surpass himself, that, having given himself beyond measure to his studies, and being, also, somewhat delicate in constitution and suffering from some excess such as young men commit, he became so ill that he was forced for the sake of his life to return to Florence, where, profiting by his native air, by the advantage of his youth, and by the diligence and care of the physicians, in a short time he completely recovered.

In the year 1514, when festive preparations of great richness were to be made in Florence for the coming of Pope Leo X, orders were given by the Signoria and by Giuliano de' Medici that many triumphal arches of wood should be made in various parts of the city. Whereupon Sansovino not only executed the designs for many of these, but himself undertook in company with Andrea del Sarto to construct the façade of S. Maria del Fiore all of wood, with statues, scenes, and architectural orders, exactly in the manner wherein it would be well for it to be in order to remove all that there is in it of the German order of composition. Having therefore set his hand to this (to say nothing in this place of the awning of cloth that used to cover the Piazza of S. Maria del Fiore and that of S. Giovanni for the festival of S.

John and for others of the greatest solemnity, since we have spoken sufficiently of this in another place), beneath that awning, I say, Sansovino constructed the said façade in the Corinthian Order, making it in the manner of a triumphal arch, and [Pg 194] placing upon an immense base double columns on each side, and between them certain great niches filled with figures in the round that represented the Apostles. Above these were some large scenes in half-relief, made in the likeness of bronze, with stories from the Old Testament, some of which are still to be seen in the house of the Lanfredini on the bank of the Arno; and over them followed architraves, friezes, and cornices, projecting outwards, and then frontispieces of great beauty and variety; and in the angles of the arches, both in the wide parts and below, were stories painted in chiaroscuro by the hand of Andrea del Sarto, and very beautiful. In short, this work of Sansovino's was such that Pope Leo, seeing it, said that it was a pity that the real façade of that temple was not so built, which was begun by the German Arnolfo.

The Pope departed from Florence, and had a conference at Bologna with King Francis I of France; and then he resolved to return to Florence. Whereupon orders were given to Sansovino that he should make a triumphal arch at the Porta S. Gallo, and he, not falling back in any way from his own standard, executed it similar to the other works that he had done—namely, beautiful to a marvel, and full of statues and painted pictures wrought excellently well. His Holiness having then determined that the façade of S. Lorenzo should be executed in marble, the while that Raffaello da Urbino and Buonarroti were expected from Rome, Sansovino, by order of the Pope, made a design for it; which giving much satisfaction, Baccio d'Agnolo was commissioned to make a model of it in wood, which proved very beautiful. Meanwhile, Buonarroti had made another, and he and Sansovino were ordered to go to Pietrasanta; where, finding much marble, but difficult to transport, they lost so much time, that when they returned to Florence they found the Pope departed [Pg 195] for Rome. Whereupon, both following after him with their models, each by himself, Jacopo arrived at the very moment when Buonarroti's model was being shown to his Holiness in the Torre Borgia; but he did not succeed in obtaining what he hoped, because, whereas he believed that he would at least make under Michelagnolo part of the statues that were going into that work, the Pope having spoken of it to him and Michelagnolo having given him so to understand, he perceived on arriving in Rome that Buonarroti wished to be alone in the work.

At this time, with the favour of Pope Leo, the Florentine colony had bestirred itself out of emulation of the Germans, Spaniards, and Frenchmen, who had either begun or finished the churches of their colonies in Rome, and had begun to perform their solemn offices in those already built and adorned; and the Florentines had sought leave likewise to build a church for themselves. For which the Pope having given instructions to Lodovico Capponi, the Consul of the Florentine colony at that time, it was determined that behind the Banchi, at the beginning of the Strada Giulia, on the bank of the Tiber, an immense church should be built, to be dedicated to S. John the Baptist [San Giovanni dei Fiorentini] ; which might surpass in magnificence, grandeur, cost, ornamentation, and design, the churches of all the other colonies. There competed, then, in making designs for this work, Raffaello da Urbino, Antonio da San Gallo, Baldassarre da Siena, and Sansovino; and the Pope, when he had seen all their designs, extolled as the best that of Sansovino, because, besides other things, he had made at each of the four corners of that church a tribune, and a larger tribune in the centre, after the likeness of the plan that Sebastiano Serlio placed in his second book on Architecture. Whereupon, all the heads of the Florentine colony concurring with the will of the Pope, with much approval of Sansovino, the foundations were begun for a part of that church, altogether twenty-two canne[12] in length [1 canna = 2.234m]. But, there being not enough space, and yet wishing to make the façade of the church in line with the houses of the Strada Giulia, they

were obliged to stretch out into the stream of the Tiber at least fifteen canne; which pleasing many of them, because the grandeur as well as the cost was increased by making the foundations in the river, work was begun on this, and they spent [Pg 197] upon it more than forty thousand crowns, which would have been enough to build half the masonry of the church. In the meantime Sansovino, who was the head of this fabric, while the foundations were being laid little by little, had a fall and suffered a serious injury; and after a few days he had himself carried to Florence for treatment, leaving the charge of laying the rest of the foundations, as has been related, to Antonio da San Gallo.

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Sansovino undertook to make the tomb of the Cardinal of Arragon and that of Cardinal Aginense; and he had caused work to be begun on the marbles for the ornaments, and had made many models for the figures, and already Rome was in his hands, and he was executing many works of the greatest importance for all those lords, when God, in order to chastise that city and abate the pride of the inhabitants of Rome, permitted that Bourbon [Charles de Bourbon, ally of Charles Quint] should come with his army on the 6th of May, 1527, and that the whole city should be sacked and put to fire and sword.

In that ruin, besides many other beautiful intellects that came to an evil end, Sansovino was forced to his great loss to depart from Rome and to fly to Venice, intending from there to pass into France to enter the service of the King, whither he had been already invited. But, halting in that city in order to make himself ready and provide himself with many things, for he was despoiled of everything, it was announced to the Prince Andrea Gritti, who was much the friend of every talent, that Jacopo Sansovino was there. Whereupon there came to Gritti a desire to speak with him, because at that very time Cardinal Domenico Grimani had given him to understand that Sansovino would have been the man for the cupolas of S. Marco, their principal church, which, because of age and of weak foundations, and also from their being badly secured [Pg 198] with chains, were all opening out and threatening to fall; and so he had him summoned. After many courtesies and long discussions, he said to Sansovino that he wished, or rather, prayed him, that he should find a remedy for the ruin of those tribunes; which Sansovino promised to do, and to put it right. And so, having agreed to do the work, he caused it to be taken in hand; and, having contrived all the scaffoldings in the interior and made supports of beams after the manner of stars, he propped in the central hollow of woodwork all the timbers that sustained the vault of each tribune, and encircled them on the inner side with curtains of woodwork, going on then to bind them on the outer side with chains of iron, to flank them with new walls, and to make at the foot new foundations for the piers that supported them, insomuch that he strengthened them vastly and made them for ever secure. By doing which he caused all Venice to marvel, and not only satisfied Gritti, but also—which was far more—rendered his ability so clearly manifest to that most illustrious Senate, that when the work was finished, the Protomaster to the Lords Procurators of S. Mark being dead, which is the highest office that those lords give to their architects and engineers, they gave it to him with the usual house and a passing handsome salary. Whereupon Sansovino, having accepted it most willingly and freed his mind of all doubt, became the head of all their fabrics, with honour and advantage for himself.

First, then, he erected the public building of the Mint, which he designed and distributed in the interior with so much order and method, for the convenience and service of the many artificers, that in no place is there a Treasury ordered so well or with greater strength than that one, which he adorned altogether in the Rustic Order, very beautifully; which method, not having been used before in Venice, caused no little marvel in the men of that city. Wherefore, having recognized that the genius of Sansovino was equal to their every need in the service of the city, they caused him to attend for many years to the fortifications of their State. Nor did any long time pass before he took in hand, by order of the Council of Ten, the very rich and beautiful fabric of the Library of S. Marco, opposite to the Palazzo della Signoria, with such a wealth of carvings, cornices, columns, capitals, and half-length figures [Pg 199] over the whole work, that it is a marvel; and it is all done without any sparing of expense, so that up to the present day it has cost one hundred and fifty thousand ducats. And it is held in great estimation in that city, because it is full of the richest pavements, stucco-work, and stories, distributed among the halls of the building, with public stairs adorned by various pictures, as has been related in the Life of Battista Franco; besides many other beautiful appurtenances, and the rich ornaments that it has at the principal door of entrance, which give it majesty and grandeur, making manifest the ability of Sansovino. This method of building was the reason that in that city, into which up to that time there had never entered any method save that of making their houses and palaces with the same order, each one always continuing the same things with the same measure and ancient use, without varying according to the sites as they found them or according to convenience—this, I say, was the reason that buildings both public and private began to be erected with new designs and better order.

The first palace that he built was that of M. Giorgio Cornaro, a most beautiful work, erected with all proper appurtenances and ornaments at a cost of seventy thousand crowns. Moved by which, a gentleman of the Delfino family caused Sansovino to build a smaller one, at a cost of thirty thousand crowns, which was much extolled and very beautiful. Then he built that of Moro, at a cost of twenty thousand crowns, which likewise was much extolled; and afterwards many others of less cost in the city and the neighbourhood. Wherefore it may be said that at the present day that magnificent city, in the quantity and quality of her sumptuous and well-conceived edifices, shines resplendent and is in that respect what she is through the ability, industry, and art of Jacopo Sansovino, who therefore deserves the highest praise; seeing that with those works he has been the reason that the gentlemen of Venice have introduced modern architecture into their city, in that not only has that been done there which has passed through his hands, but also many—nay, innumerable—other works which have been executed by other masters, who have gone to live there and have achieved magnificent things. Jacopo also built the fabric of the loggia in the Piazza di S. [Pg 200] Marco, in the Corinthian Order, which is at the foot of the Campanile of the said S. Marco, with a very rich ornamentation of columns, and four niches, in which are four figures the size of life and in bronze, of supreme beauty. And that work formed, as it were, a base of great beauty to the said campanile, which at the foot has a breadth, on one of the sides, of thirty-five feet, which is about the extent of Sansovino's ornamentation; and a height from the ground to the cornice, where are the windows of the bells, of one hundred and sixty feet. From the level of that cornice to the other above it, where there is the corridor, is twenty-five feet, and the other dado above is twenty-eight feet and a half high; and from that level of the corridor to the pyramid, spire, or pinnacle, whatever it may be called, is sixty feet. At the summit of that pinnacle the little square, upon which stands the Angel, is six feet high, and the said Angel, which revolves, is ten feet high; insomuch that the whole height comes to be two hundred and ninety-two feet. He also designed and executed for the Scuola, or rather, Confraternity and Company of the Misericordia, the fabric of that place, an immense building which cost one

hundred and fifty thousand crowns; and he rebuilt the Church of S. Francesco della Vigna, where the Frati de' Zoccoli have their seat, a vast work and of much importance.

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But, if she [Venice] has received from him beauty and adornment, he, on the other hand, has received many benefits from her. Thus, in addition to other things, he has lived in her, from the time when he first went there to the age of seventy-eight years, full of health and strength; and the air and that sky have done so much for him, that he does not seem, one might say, more than forty. He has had, and still has, from a most talented son—a man of letters—two grandchildren, one male and the other female, both of them pictures of health and beauty, to his supreme contentment; and, what is more, he is still alive, full of happiness and with all the greatest conveniences and comforts that any man of his profession could have. He has always loved his brother-craftsmen, and in particular he has been very much the friend of the excellent and [Pg 202] famous Tiziano, as he also was of M. Pietro Aretino during his lifetime. For all these reasons I have judged it well to make this honourable record of him, although he is still living, and particularly because now he is by way of doing little in sculpture.