

The following exhibition review is a postprint of a review
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Ammannati at the Bargello

Florence

by CHARLES DAVIS

AMONG THE MUSEUMS of the world, the **Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence**, is one of the very few whose collections permit the organising of exhibitions in which Italian statues, life-size and larger, play the leading role. In recent years it has returned to its origins as a national museum of sculpture, not only with notable acquisitions such as Pietro Francavilla's marble *Jason*, acquired in 2001, but also, from 2004, with a series of monographic exhibitions devoted to Italian sculptors, mainly of the sixteenth century. Florence and its museums owe a debt of gratitude to Dimitrios Zikos, who has been the guiding light in the recent cycle of exhibitions, of which the current one, *L'acqua, la pietra, il fuoco: Bartolomeo Ammannati scultore* (to 18th September), is here under review.¹ In the mid-1550s Ammannati began, but never completed, a monumental multi-figured wall fountain for the south side of the Sala Grande in Florence's ducal palace, now the Palazzo Vecchio. The Bargello houses six over-life-size marble statues made for this Fountain of Juno (Fig.37). They constitute the point of departure and indeed the conceptual centre of the exhibition. Unfortunately the Juno Fountain marks the beginning of the end of Ammannati as a sculptor in marble. In this work his early promise fades in statues marked by the massive participation of his workshop, a fact unmentioned in the catalogue. Ammannati's extensive reliance upon assistants in carving his sculptures may have had its origin in his direction of the works at the statuary court of the Villa Giulia in Rome, where, under the pressure of deadlines, vast numbers of 'decorative' statues had to be restored or made under almost assembly line conditions. Despite his recourse to the technical procedure of pointing – a large wooden compass was acquired for the carving of his colossal *Neptune* in the Piazza della Signoria, Florence (1561) – the sculptor, unlike Giambologna and Bernini, was not notably successful in controlling the transposition of his large models into stone by others. The exhibition is thus weighted towards a less felicitous period of Ammannati's work as a sculptor, that in Florence from

August 1555 onwards.

The 'spectacular reconstruction' of the Juno Fountain in the Bargello courtyard, promised as the chief attraction, is singularly unspectacular.

The statues from the Fountain remain under the eastern arcade of the *cortile*, where they have long stood in essentially the same arrangement. No attempt is made to set their reassembly into relief by, for example, lighting effects or through adding an isolating background.

They recede into the file of white statues set against white walls that crowd the courtyard. An unwitting visitor might pass by, overlooking the reconstruction as he or she enters the exhibition galleries. Devoid of temporary exhibition structures, the galleries appear larger and less crowded than in the past. The pale blown-up photographs of pages from an Ammannati notebook (Biblioteca Riccardiana, Florence) that paper the walls are not an effective foil for the sculptures in the dimly lit rooms. In room two, mostly small-scale works are shown in vitrines. The exhibition designer's memorandum suggests that these problems arise from a cerebral design process, which aimed to produce a conceptual installation rather than simply devising a visible and visually effective presentation.

The vast catalogue is blemished by a tendency to include many secondary themes, some of which might have been omitted or published elsewhere.² But, in addition to a wealth of new illustrations, there are many interesting and important new insights and contributions. The lengthy biography of Ammannati by Alessandro Cherubini is a dispirited reprise of things that have long been known. Cherubini's attempt to establish Montorsoli as Ammannati's master embodies a fundamental historiographical mistake. Borghini's *vita* of Ammannati as a sculptor is clearly based on his notes from a personal interview with the artist. Ammannati claimed only two masters: first Bandinelli, and then, dissatisfied with Bandinelli, Jacopo Sansovino. Cherubini denies the first period of study with

Sansovino, which is unequivocally reported by Borghini, but the Sansovinesque inspiration of Ammannati's first work, a relief of God the Father with angels in Pisa, escapes him completely. The subject and composition is often found in the work of Sansovino and his followers, and the bald putto seen in profile is a distinctive Sansovino motif found in that master's Medici altar in the Bargello. The principal new contributions to Ammannati as a sculptor are found in three of the essays. Most importantly they concern the Juno Fountain, often called the Kriegbaum Fountain. The statues were identified by Friedrich Kriegbaum (1928) and by Giovanni Poggi (1940). In 1963 Walter Vitzthum published a contemporary drawing of the assembled Fountain, and in 1969 Marco Dezzi Bardeschi attempted a reconstruction. In the light of contemporary descriptions based on a drawing in Ammannati's hands, which Borghini consulted, the reconstruction does not constitute an intractable puzzle, and it is also implicit in the configuration of the statues, as Kriegbaum recognised. Detlef Heikamp has added two ornamental marble peacocks, an exiguous number of new documents for the manufacture of the Fountain and a refinement of Dezzi Bardeschi's reconstruction. In the present catalogue Dimitrios Zikos and Emanuela Ferretti offer new points of departure. Zikos's well-informed essay makes new suggestions (and corrections) for the iconography, although his observations do not seem guided by a clear, consistent idea of the *concetto* of the Fountain. He also provides a more articulated documentary history of the making of the monument (cat. no.6). In Ferretti's essay the question of the Juno Fountain as an architectural wall fountain is addressed seriously for the first time. Enlarging on references cited in the Palazzo Vecchio guide by Alessandro Cecchi and Ettore Allegri (1980), she has read many of the unpublished documents that permit her to form a general picture of the architectural character of the Fountain with columns and pilasters, an entablature and two windows. Zikos and Ferretti convey the impression that the documentation for the Fountain has been fully treated, but most of it remains unpublished and unanalysed.

The documents reveal the names of Ammannati's sculptural collaborators in making the Fountain³ and document their contribution to the carving of the statues. These documents require close reading: for instance, the four expensive capitals ('*capitelli intagliati*'), Ferretti believes, imply Corinthian capitals, but they were made by *intagliatori*, not woodcarvers as is sometimes thought, but stonemasons (*scalpellini*) who specialised in *lavori d'intaglio*.⁴ It appears that these capitals, carved to Ammannati's designs, have survived, and were recycled in the last-minute completion of Bandinelli's Udienza, as the northern interior façade of the same Sala Grande is called, in 1565, on the occasion of the marriage of Prince Francesco de' Medici, a project undertaken under Vasari's direction (Figs. 38 and 39). The capitals do not resemble the ornamental designs of Bandinelli or Baccio d'Agnolo or his son, or even Vasari, but are in Ammannati's decorative idiom (compare the basis of the Benavides colossus in Padua, the decorative elements of the Neptune Fountain, the Palazzo Portinari Salviati in Florence), and the conception of the capitals is identical with that of the capitals *alla grottesca* [p. 558:] found in Ammannati's earlier *Galleria* on the *primo piano* of Palazzo Firenze in Rome, where the decorative repertory of classical capitals is replaced by goat heads, festoons, griffins, winged figures and birds.⁵ The Palazzo Vecchio capitals are carved with capricorns, referring to Cosimo I, and the embracing pairs of putti refer to the Duke and Duchess, as did Ammannati's fountain. When Vasari completed and modified the Udienza in the summer and autumn of 1565 ('*con l'aggiunta di nicchie e di pilastri e di statue*' in Vasari's words) for the wedding of Prince Francesco, he apparently introduced stone elements left over from Ammannati's abandoned wall fountain, made from the same grey *pietra di fossato*. Fernando Loffredo explores new ground in his essay on Ammannati's Nari monument (Bargello) seen in a pan-Italian perspective, while Amedeo Belluzzi provides a treatment of architectural ornament and decorative forms in Ammannati's works, a neglected topic of fundamental importance if we wish to see Ammannati as both sculptor and architect. Some comments on individual works follow:

no.1: *Leda* (Bargello). The identification with Ammannati's *Leda* is contradicted by the dimensions given in Borghini's description. The object copies a Michelangelo design and does not lend itself to definite attribution. There are no clear connections with Ammannati, and the striking colour photographs are misleading and artificially dramatic.

no.2: *Moses* (Bargello). The attribution to Ammannati is little more than wishful thinking. The object is merely an old small-scale replica of Michelangelo. Its status is not different from that of souvenirs sold to tourists.

no.3: *Ganymede* (Bargello). There is no indication that Ammannati ever worked at Pontecasale.

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no.10: *Rooster* (Bargello). The attribution to Ammannati is speculative: if it is his work, it shows him in an otherwise unknown 'Disney' vein.

no.12: Bronze *Mars* (Uffizi). This Florentine work is not exhibited.

no.13: Bronze *Venus* (Museo del Prado, Madrid). Catalogued misleadingly as 'Ammannati?', although the entry shows that it is not by Ammannati.

no.14: '*Genio mediceo*' (private collection). This, the only new work in the exhibition, is an important small wax model convincingly shown to be by Ammannati. The dramatically outstretched arm matches the gesture of the *Mars*.

no.15: '*Genio mediceo*' (Palazzo Pitti, Florence). This appeared to be one of the '*due fanciulle di bronzo*' mentioned by Borghini, very possibly acroterial figures for the Juno Fountain.

no.17: Bronze *Hercules* (Huntington, San Marino). The entry misleadingly suggests that there is a general consensus concerning the attribution to Ammannati. The ponderation and contrapposto is different from these distinctive traits in Ammannati's Paduan works.

no.25: *Nude male* (Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig). The label 'circle of Ammannati' is misleading and at odds with the entry. There is no compelling reason why this bronze should be Florentine. A more reasonable attribution is to Alessandro Vittoria: it has a resemblance to stucco figures in the vaults of the Scala d'Oro, Venice, while the distinctive face is the same as Vittoria's missing *St Francis*, formerly in S. Francesco della Vigna, Venice.

¹ Catalogue: *L'acqua, la pietra, il fuoco: Bartolomeo Ammannati*

scultore. Edited by Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi and Dimitrios Zikos. 496 pp. incl. 420 col. + b. & w. ill. (Giunti Editore, Florence, 2011), €48. ISBN 978-8-80976-6754.

² For instance, pp. 262-93, 314-50, 460-62 and 475-76.

³ Andrea Calamech '*ischultore*', Domenico di Giovanni del Paniera, Lazzaro Calamech, Girolamo di Noferi da Sassoferrato, Donato di Battista Benti, Ceseri di Nicodemo da Carrara and others.

⁴ Florence, Archivio di Stato, Fabbriche medicee no.7, fols. 4r, 4v, 5v, 6r, 7r, 8v, 10r, 11r, 11v, 13r, 14r, 15v, 16v, 17v, 18v, 19r, 21r, 21v, 23r, 24v, 25r, 26v, 27v, 28v, 30r, 31r; no. 20, 5v, 11r, 20v, 27r, 28v, 30r, 36v, 39r, 45r, 47r, 48v, 50r, 52r, 52v, 60v, 61v; no. 4, 26r, and others.

⁵ See M.G. Aurigemma: *Palazzo Firenze in Campo Marzio*, Rome 2007, pp. 47, 79 and 121ff.

Several errors in the text have been corrected.

ILLUSTRATIONS: *see following page.*

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37. *Juno*, by Bartolomeo Ammannati. c. 1556 ff. Marble, 180 cm. high. (Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence).



38. Two capitals '*alla grottesca*', designed by Bartolomeo Ammannati. c. 1557. Grey stone. (Udienza, Salone dei Cinquecento, Palazzo Vecchio).



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