

ALESSANDRO NOVA

The drawings of Girolamo Romanino. Part II*



11. *Pyramus and Thisbe*, by Girolamo Romanino. Pen and brown ink, 14 by 16.6 cm. (Louvre, Paris).

PREPARATORY drawings by Romanino for surviving paintings he executed during the last thirty years of his career are not numerous, but some of his late sheets provide important evidence about various lost works.

After completing his frescoes for Cardinal Clesio at Trent, Romanino returned to Brescia in 1532. It remains controversial exactly which paintings can be dated to the early 1530s, but it is possible that a drawing now in the Louvre (Fig. 11) belongs to these years.¹ The spirited style of this sketch in pen and brown ink is similar to that of the drawings executed during his Trentine period, and the theme of *Pyramus and Thisbe* – first identified by Creighton Gilbert – was often represented by early sixteenth-century German artists, something which strengthens the drawing's connexion with Romanino's years in Trent and makes a dating between 1530 and 1535 more plausible.² Yet the chronology can perhaps be made even more precise. As Cathy Cook has pointed out, the sources record only one Ovidian cycle painted by Romanino, the frescoes once decorating five lunettes in the loggia of the

Palazzo Martinengo in the via delle Cossere in Brescia,³ a palace once owned by Leonardo III Martinengo delle Palle who died in 1536.⁴ Panazza listed this cycle among Romanino's lost works,⁵ and all subsequent scholars have taken this to be the case. Yet, while three of the lunettes have lost all trace of their frescoes, one contains three barely visible heads, and the central lunette retains the image of a woman holding a stick with which she apparently threatens two unidentified figures. It is impossible to establish whether any of these lunettes did indeed contain a fresco of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, but the surviving fragment was probably executed around 1532–34, a perfectly acceptable date for the drawing in the Louvre.⁶

Fortunately, the next two drawings – one depicting a friar perhaps discussing theology in front of a tribunal, and the other a friar preaching in a square (Figs. 12 and 13) – bring us back to firmer ground, even if the greatest connoisseur of Italian renaissance drawings to date attributed them to Lorenzo Lotto.⁷ The first scholar to link them with Romanino

*Part I of this article appeared in the March issue, pp. 159–68.

¹Paris, Louvre, inv. no. 5648 recto; pen and brown ink; 14.0 by 16.6 cm.

²See C. GILBERT: 'Una monografia sul Romanino', *Arte veneta*, XVI [1962], p. 201.

³See C. COOK: 'A New Secular Fresco Cycle by Girolamo Romanino', *Arte lombarda*, no. 68/69 [1984], p. 138. Francesco Paglia is the only source to mention these frescoes (see F. PAGLIA: *Il Giardino della Pittura* [c.1660–1713], ed. C. BOSELLI, Brescia [1967], p. 263).

⁴See G. PASERO: *Francia Spagna Impero a Brescia 1509–1516*, Brescia [1958], p. 356, note

161, and F. LECHI: *Le dimore bresciane in cinque secoli di storia*, III, Brescia [1974], pp. 210–11.

⁵G. PANAZZA: *Affreschi di Girolamo Romanino*, Milan [1965], p. 75.

⁶A. NOVA: *Girolamo Romanino*, Turin [1994], pp. 284–85.

⁷Bassano del Grappa, Museo Civico, inv. Riva 88 and 89: brush and sepia ink on dark paper; 16.8 by 25.6 cm each. They were published for the first time in H. TIETZE and E. TIETZE CONRAT: 'Contributi critici allo studio organico dei disegni veneziani del '500', *Critica d'arte*, II [1937], pp. 84–85, who assigned them to Lotto. This attribution was upheld in P. POUNCEY: *Lotto disegnatore*, Vicenza [1965], p. 10.

12. *Disputa of St Dominic*, by Girolamo Romanino. Brush and brown ink, 16.8 by 25.6 cm. (Museo Civico, Bassano del Grappa).



13. *St Dominic preaching*, by Girolamo Romanino. Brush and brown ink, 16.8 by 25.6 cm. (Museo Civico, Bassano del Grappa).



was Roberto Longhi.⁸ They may well represent the *disputa* and preaching of St Dominic, and, this being the case, they are probably connected with a now lost fresco cycle in the cloister of S. Domenico, Brescia, where Ridolfi records Romanino as having painted scenes of the life of this saint.⁹ The cycle was destroyed during the nineteenth century, but a document informs us that it was commissioned before 1534:¹⁰ on 5th January that year, Fra Anastasio de Farfengo acting in the name of the prior of the convent, appointed a proxy to come to an agreement with Romanino – then probably not in Brescia – who had failed to honour an earlier contract drawn up by the notary Galeazzo Meloni. It seems that the arguments of the proxy were effective, for the artist began work on the cycle; but we also know that he never finished

it, being dismissed by the friars who were not happy with his work. Unfortunately, the sources do not reveal when this happened, but the two drawings must be dated to around 1534–35 because their heterodox style belongs to the most eccentric period of Romanino's career: indeed, they are closely related to the truly bizarre frescoes at Malpaga, and they are also close in style to his extraordinary cycles in Valcamonica (Pisogne, Breno, Bienno). This type of painting was probably little appreciated in Brescia at this late date. As Ridolfi states: Romanino 'began to fresco a cycle of the life of St Dominic, but since he painted – as he usually did – many bizarre things, those friars did not like his work; moreover, since those Fathers did not understand much about art, they did not wish him to continue the work'.¹¹

⁸ His opinion was recorded by A. BANTI and A. BOSCHETTO: *Lorenzo Lotto*, Florence [1953], p. 117, and the attribution is accepted by: M. L. FERRARI: *Il Romanino*, Milan [1961], pl. 32; G. PANAZZA with the collaboration of A. DAMIANI and B. PASSAMANI: *Mostra di Girolamo Romanino*, exh.cat., Duomo Vecchio, Brescia [1965], p. 228; PANAZZA, *op.cit.* at note 5 above, p. 69; H.A. PETERS: 'Bemerkungen zu oberitalienischen Zeichnungen des XV. und XVI. Jahrhunderts', *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch*, XXVII [1965], p. 164; and A. BALLARIN: in *Le siècle de Titien. L'âge d'or de la peinture à*

Venise, exh.cat., Grand Palais, Paris [1993], p. 397.

⁹ C. RIDOLFI: *Le meraviglie dell'arte*, Venice [1648], p. 253 (ed. D. VON HADELN, I, Berlin [1914], p. 269).

¹⁰ See C. BOSELLI: *Regesto artistico dei notai roganti in Brescia dall'anno 1500 all'anno 1560*, Brescia [1977], II, p. 83.

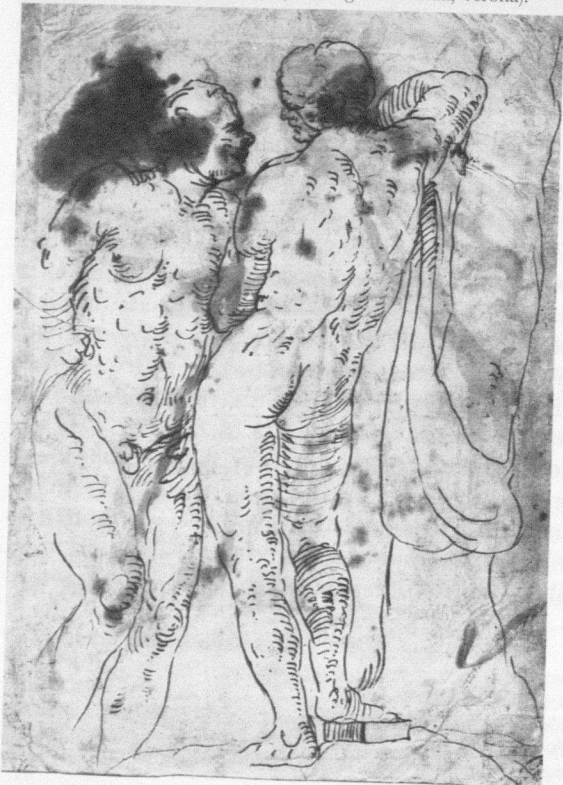
¹¹ RIDOLFI, *loc.cit.* at note 9 above.



14. *The martyrdom of St George*, by Girolamo Romanino. 1540. Tempera (finished in oil), 453 by 245 cm. (S. Giorgio in Braida, Verona).



15. *A seated man*, by Girolamo Romanino. Pen with brush and brown ink, 28.5 by 20.5 cm. (Kunstmuseum, Düsseldorf).



16. *Two naked men* (recto of Fig. 15), by Girolamo Romanino. Pen and brown ink, 28.5 by 20.5 cm. (Kunstmuseum, Düsseldorf).

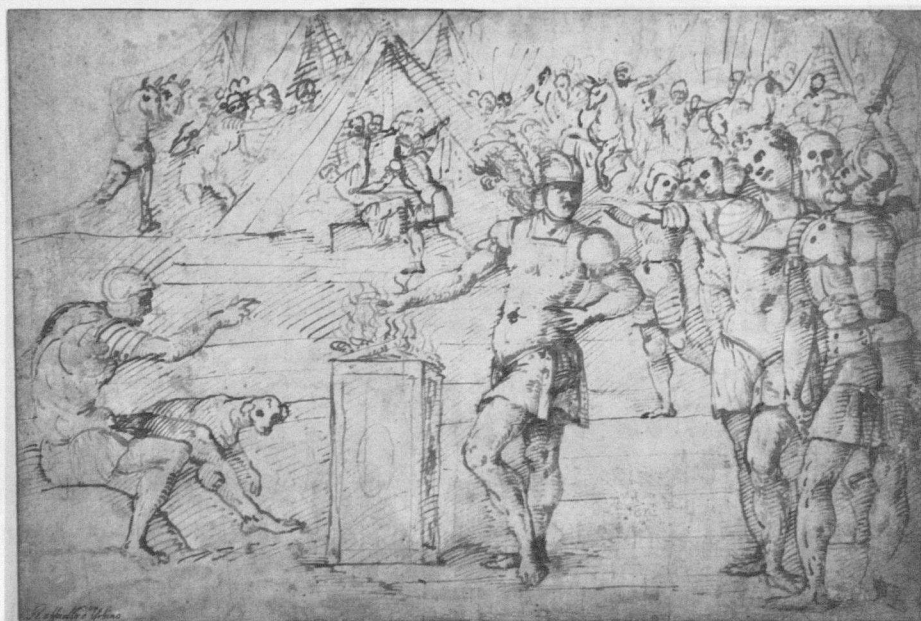
Approximately five years later, in 1540, Romanino was invited by Leone Bugatto, minister general of the Canons of S. Giorgio in Alga, to paint the organ shutters of S. Giorgio in Braida in Verona.¹² One of the two inside shutters represents St George tortured with a hooked wheel (Fig. 14), and a preparatory drawing for the figure of the judge watching the martyrdom is now in Düsseldorf (Fig. 15).¹³ By a curious coincidence Romanino's two surviving preparatory drawings for organ shutters are now both in the Kunstmuseum in Düsseldorf and we can easily compare them. The compositional sketch for the shutters at Asola of 1524–25 (reproduced as fig. 31 in the first part of this article) is very slightly larger and was certainly executed before Romanino started work on the

¹²The exterior shutters are dated 1540 (see PANAZZA, DAMIANI and PASSAMANI, *op.cit.* at note 8 above, pp. 122–23). In addition to Romanino's canvases, there are other works connected with Brescia in this church: an altar-piece by Moretto, also dated 1540, and an altar-piece painted by Francesco Caroto in 1545 representing St Ursula surrounded by her followers (the Orsoline Dimesse were founded in Brescia in 1535). The leader of the monastery must have been Brescian, and indeed, as Sergio Marinelli has pointed out to me, G.F. TOMASINI (*Annales canonicorum secularium Sancti Georgii in Alga*, Udine [1642]) tells us that the Brescian Leone Bugatto was minister general in 1540 and that he rebuilt S. Giorgio in Braida in 1551 when he was the abbot of the monastery.

¹³Düsseldorf, Kunstmuseum, FP 9496 verso; pen and brown ink, brush and brown ink, extensive damage on the left-hand side; 28.5 by 20.5 cm. (published for the first time in PETERS, *op.cit.* at note 8 above, p. 164). On the recto, *Two naked men* (Fig. 16) are drawn in pen and brown ink.



17. *The Siege of Saguntum*, by Girolamo Romanino. Pen and brown ink, 26.6 by 42 cm. (Uffizi, Florence).



18. *Mucius Scaevola*, by Girolamo Romanino. Brush and brown ink, 27.8 by 40.9 cm. (British Museum, London).



19. *Scene from Roman(?) history*, by Girolamo Romanino. Pen and brown ink, 22.5 by 41.3 cm. (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).



20. *Two naked men with a goat*, by Girolamo Romanino. Pen and brown ink, 23.5 by 16.7 cm. (Louvre, Paris).

canvas. The later sketch was probably made while the painting was in progress, perhaps because Romanino found it necessary to adjust this part of the composition, and it should be regarded as a sort of 'auxiliary' drawing.

The last drawing by Romanino which can be precisely dated is in the Uffizi (Fig. 17). The sixteenth-century inscription at the lower centre, '*Saguntum obsessum*', was in the past misread as '*Sergomson*', a non-existent artist to whom the sheet was attributed.¹⁴ Around the turn of this century Pasquale Nerino Ferri, then director of the Gabinetto dei Disegni, ascribed it on the mount to the Lombard school of the sixteenth century. Florence Kossoff was the first to suggest, also on the mount, that the drawing was by Romanino,

and, she related it to the *Mucius Scaevola* in the British Museum (Fig. 18) as well as to the *Scene from Roman(?) history* in the Ashmolean (Fig. 19).¹⁵ The subject of the Uffizi drawing was correctly identified by Roberto Longhi as the *Siege of Saguntum*, the important episode in Roman history to which the inscription refers.¹⁶ The Spanish city was an ally of Rome, and its surrender to Hannibal after a long siege precipitated the Second Punic War. As Roger Rearick has pointed out, Romanino has represented the moment at which the citizens burn their belongings in the square, as the Carthaginian army lies in ambush on the hill at the back. The sheet's attribution and iconography are thus in no way problematic, but its dating needs to be re-examined. According to Rearick, the

¹⁴Florence, Uffizi, 8199S; pen and brown ink, blots and tears; 26.6 by 42.0 cm. Original inscription: '*Saguntum obsessum*' at the lower centre; later inscriptions: '8199' and '43' at the lower right. For '*Sergomson*', see E. SANTARELLI, E. BURCI and F. RONDONI: *Catalogo della raccolta di disegni autografi antichi e moderni donati dal prof. Emilio Santarelli alla Reale Galleria di Firenze*, Florence [1870], p. 538.

¹⁵London, British Museum, inv. no. 1946-7-13-50; brush and brown ink; 27.8 by

40.9 cm; later inscription: 'Raffaello d'Urbino'; the drawing has never been reproduced. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, Parker 670; pen and brown ink; 22.5 by 41.3 cm. Inscribed: 'Romanino da Bres' (see K.T. PARKER: *Catalogue of the Collection of Drawings in the Ashmolean Museum*, II, *Italian Schools*, Oxford [1956], pp. 361-62).

¹⁶His oral opinion is quoted in A.M. PETRIOLI: *Disegni italiani della collezione Santarelli. Secoli XV-XVIII*, Florence [1967], pp. 47-48.



21. *Two naked men with a goat*, attributed to Girolamo Romanino. Engraving, 23.5 by 17.4 cm. (British Museum, London).

drawing 'corresponds exactly to what one could expect from an old, tired and impatient artist, whose feeble hand is no longer capable of producing appealing formal effects', and should therefore be dated 'between circa 1555 and his death around 1566'.¹⁷ This late date has been accepted by many scholars who have connected all three drawings with the frescoes executed by Romanino's son-in-law Lattanzio Gambara on the façade of the Case del Gambero in Brescia. The con-

tract which regulated the first partnership between the two painters was drawn up on 26th February 1549,¹⁸ and their collaboration was so successful that in 1556 Lattanzio married Margherita, one of Girolamo's daughters.¹⁹ According to some sources, Romanino, who had received the commission to decorate the Case del Gambero, passed it on to his son-in-law as Margherita's dowry, and this legendary account has somehow influenced modern scholarship. However, the *Siege of Saguntum* does not relate to this fresco cycle and the drawing can be dated as early as 1546.

It is likely that the sheet in the Uffizi is a preparatory drawing for one of the triumphal arches erected to celebrate the visit of cardinal Andrea Cornaro, who entered Brescia as its bishop on 29th July 1546. The Cornaros boasted of their descent from the *gens Cornelia*,²⁰ and it is therefore obvious why it was appropriate to decorate these arches with scenes of Roman history: among the scenes specified in the programme for the entry devised by the Brescian General Council, was the *Siege of Saguntum*, which took place in 219–18 B.C. when Publius Cornelius Scipio was one of the consuls.²¹ As far as I know, this was the first and also the last time that this rare episode was represented in Brescian art, and we can therefore confidently date the Uffizi drawing to 1546.

The iconographic scheme for the celebrations contained a mixture of sacred and secular themes. It was a rich and detailed programme, but unfortunately the other two drawings for the series cannot be precisely connected with the subjects recorded. For example, the fourth arch was dedicated to episodes of patriotism, but only the scenes of Decius who fought alone against the enemies of Rome during the Samnite wars and of Quintus Curtius who threw himself into the abyss are listed: it is however true that the deeds of Mucius Scaevola would have been an appropriate subject for this arch. The sheet in the British Museum (Fig. 18) could be either an idea rejected by the iconographic advisors or a proposal developed between the draft of the programme (March 1546) and the triumphal entry itself (July 1546): in any case, it should be pointed out that the drawings in Florence (26.7 by 42.2 cm.), London (27.8 by 40.9 cm.) and Oxford (22.5 by 41.3 cm.) have very similar dimensions.²²

The 1546 triumphal arches were built in praise of Cardinal Cornaro, but they were commissioned by the local

¹⁷ W.R. REARICK: *Tiziano e il disegno veneziano del suo tempo*, exh.cat., Uffizi, Florence [1976], p. 130. It should be noted that Romanino died before June 1562 (see c. COOK: 'The last lost works by Romanino and Gambara', *Arte lombarda*, no. 70/71 [1984], pp. 159 and 165 note 18). Furthermore, Cathy Cook, whom I thank, has discovered a document in which Romanino is said to have died around 1560: Carlo and Giacomo, Romanino's sons state that 'dictum quondam eorum patrem decessisse iam annis duobus preteritis vel circa' (Brescia, Archivio di Stato, filza 725, notaio Giacomo Roberti, 22nd June 1562).

¹⁸ C. COOK: 'The collaboration of Romanino and Gambara through documents and drawings', *Arte veneta*, XXXVIII [1984], pp. 186 and 192.

¹⁹ See P.V. BEGNI REDONA and G. VEZZOLI: *Lattanzio Gambara, pittore*, Brescia [1978], p. 13.

²⁰ See G. ROBERTSON: *Giovanni Bellini*, Oxford [1968], p. 132.

²¹ The programme, drawn up on 19th March 1546 is preserved in the Biblioteca Queriniiana, Brescia (MS E.L.7, fols. 261r–270v). The second arch was richly decorated: 'FIDES. Marco Attilio Regolo prostrato che vardi [sc. guardi] nel sole, condonato dal magistrato cartaginese, senatori, cum breve sopra al prostrato che dica: fides saluti perpetuas praeponitur, verso iambo. Una città ossessa: quam non levare ex fame docet fides. Sagunto città ardente cum breve: fides saluti publicae praeponitur'. The text is transcribed in P. GUERRINI: 'L'ingresso episcopale in Brecia dei due Cardinali veneti Francesco e Andrea Cornaro', *Brixia Sacra*, VIII [1917], pp. 3–21.

²² M. JAFFÉ (*The Devonshire Collection of Italian Drawings. Venetian and North Italian Schools*, London [1994], p. 186) has recently argued that a sketch in brown ink with brown wash on white paper at Chatsworth represents *The pyre raised before Hannibal's troops at the fall of Saguntum* (Livy, XXI.14), and has attributed the drawing to Romanino, con-

necting it with the sheet in the Uffizi. Interestingly, the Chatsworth drawing is inscribed 'Racfael' by a later hand at the lower right, corresponding with the inscription 'Raffaello d'Urbino' on the *Mucius Scaevola* in the British Museum. Furthermore, the trumpeters on the right-hand side are probably derived from Romanino's frescoes on the right-hand wall of the choir of S. Antonio, Breno, painted around 1536–37. Yet the drawing's style does not seem to fit with the other three sketches, nor do its measurements (19.4 by 26.8 cm.) correspond with those of the other three sheets. I have not seen the original, but three alternatives must be considered: First, that the Chatsworth sheet is by Romanino, perhaps documenting a first idea which was rejected before a *modello* was made and later replaced by the Uffizi solution that it served as a pendant to the Uffizi drawing to be placed on the opposite side of the triumphal arch. Secondly, that it was produced by a close follower as a pendant to Romanino's Uffizi design. This seems most plausible, as the draughtsman re-uses ideas developed by Romanino at Breno, notably the two trumpeters in the middle of a fresco representing three Christian martyrs thrown into a furnace – a situation from the Bible not unlike that described by Livy. We know from documentary evidence that an artist called Daniele Mori was for over a decade in Romanino's house and workshop during this period, and that he helped the painter in his fresco cycles in the Valcamonica. Could the Chatsworth drawing be by Daniele Mori? The lack of any comparative material makes this suggestion purely hypothetical. Thirdly, the drawing may be by another artist and/or for another project, but this would imply that the *Siege of Saguntum* was a more popular subject than the evidence would suggest. If this is indeed the case, and I think it unlikely, the date 1546 is no longer a fixed term for the series related to the Uffizi drawing.



22. *Nastagio degli Onesti*, by Girolamo Romanino. Pen, brush and brown ink, 29.2 by 40.8 cm. (British Museum, London).

administration and are a healthy reminder of Brescia's secular culture. For many centuries the city's life has been dominated by the Church, and from at least the seventeenth century many historians of Brescia were priests who were interested in nurturing the myth of the *Brixia beata* shaped by Bernardino Faino.²³ This tradition has greatly contributed to our knowledge of the history of Brescia, but its bias has inevitably underemphasised the city's equally vibrant secular culture. The iconography of the 1546 arches provides a reminder that the classical heritage was not forgotten, and Romanino's drawings reveal that local artists were also eager to paint secular cycles inspired by the works of Ovid (Fig. 11) as well as by Boccaccio's *Decameron* (Fig. 22).²⁴ A similar mix of subject matter appears in the three engravings which Hind has convincingly attributed to Romanino:²⁵ two of them represent *Adam and Eve* and the *Flagellation*, while the third shows *Two nude men with a goat*, perhaps on their way to a sacrifice (Fig. 21). The specialised literature is almost totally unaware of Hind's suggestions,²⁶ but an unpublished drawing by Romanino in the Louvre (Fig. 20) confirms his attribution.²⁷

The *Siege of Saguntum* is the latest surviving preparatory drawing by Romanino, and the last fifteen years of his draughtsmanship remain undocumented. As we have

already seen, in 1549, two and a half years after the entry of Cardinal Cornaro, Romanino and Gambara began their partnership. The agreement was mutually advantageous; the older master, who was about sixty-five years old, found a gifted collaborator who could help him in the demanding fresco technique which was so suitable to his temperament; and the younger colleague, who was not yet twenty but had already assimilated the modern style of the *maniera* in the Campi's workshop in Cremona, could rely upon the contacts of his future father-in-law for a rapid success in the rich Brescian market.

Their collaboration on numerous fresco cycles was so close that it is at times very difficult to recognise their individual contributions. This was certainly no matter of concern for the two artists, but the impression is that Gambara played a major rôle from the beginning. Sometimes he used and 'modernised' the stock figures that he found in his colleague's *repertoire*, but he also contributed to their enterprise with his own original projects. One of their first collaborations was the ambitious decorative programme in the Palazzo Averoldi (c. 1550–55): it is perhaps no coincidence that the three preparatory sketches identified so far were all drawn by Gambara.²⁸

Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität, Frankfurt

²³ B. FAINO: *Catalogi quatuor compendiarum quos Coelum Sanctae Brixianae Ecclesiae circumplectitur*, Brescia [1658].

²⁴ London, British Museum, Sloane 7–116 recto: pen and brown ink, brush and brown ink; 29.2 by 40.8 cm. This drawing, which represents Boccaccio's *novella* of Nastagio degli Onesti, is unpublished but is catalogued as by Romanino.

²⁵ A.M. HIND: *Early Italian Engraving*, London [1938–48], V, p. 299 and pls. 898–99.

²⁶ The only exception is PETERS, *op.cit.* at note 8 above, pp. 170–71.

²⁷ Paris, Louvre, inv. no. 10886: pen and brown ink; 23.5 by 16.7 cm. The drawing was kindly brought to my attention by Giulio Bora, but the connexion with the engraving is my own. The size of the engraving, 23.5 by 17.3 cm., is almost identical to that of the drawing; yet the engraver, perhaps Romanino himself, has introduced small but significant changes.

²⁸ G. BORA: 'Nota sui disegni lombardi del Cinque e Seicento (a proposito di una mostra)', *Paragone*, XXXV [1984], no. 413, pp. 10 and 28 note 28; and COOK, *loc.cit.* at note 17 above, pp. 187–88. The sketch for a frieze of putti attributed to Romanino in an auction catalogue (Milan, Finarte, 28th June 1977, lot 6: pen and brown ink over black chalk; 10.6 by 31.5 cm.) cannot be related to the Averoldi cycle with any certainty (see COOK, *loc.cit.* at note 21 above, pp. 188–89). M. TANZI: 'Tre disegni del Cinquecento Bresciano', *Prospettiva*, N. 73–74 [1994], pp. 159–161, has recently attributed to Romanino a sketch with three river gods in the Musei Civici, Pesaro (inv. no. 3038A, pen and brown ink on ivory paper, 18.1 by 14.0 cm., from the collection of Countess Vittoria Mosca): the attribution is correct, but no painting can be connected with this drawing.