

LUCAS CRANACH THE ELDER (1472-1553)—

PLATE 37

*Samson and the Lion—Dresden Print Room—Pen and wash in brown ink ;
15.1 × 20.6 cm. (No. 59 of Catalogue, classified as anonymous).*

Among the drawings which are commonly associated with Cranach and his school, a few small groups of more individual character than the rest stand forth as definitely autograph works of Lucas Cranach the Elder. Such are in the first place certain early drawings distinguished by their peculiar eruptive temperament ; such are furthermore a number of rough compositional sketches, of which the most representative examples are in the Leipzig Print Room. I propose here to deal with a third clearly defined group which becomes notable for including the Dresden drawing here illustrated. A common feature to the works of this group is a uniformly coarse style of handling ; their connexion, both of time and purpose, is furthermore plainly shown by the recurrence of an architectural framework surrounding each subject. I am referring to the two Dresden roundels of Angels (Inv. Nos. 67 and 68 ; repr. Woermann II, pl. 21), the recumbent Warrior, seen in foreshortening in front of a niche, at Berlin (Inv. No. 4610 ; Cat. Friedländer-Bock, p. 20, pl. 26), finally the *St. Anthony in a Niche* (formerly in the Weigel and Habich collections, now the property of Paul Sachs, Cambridge, U.S.A. ; repr. by Eisenmann, *Habich Drawings*, III, pl. 6).

An important addition to the above is the Dresden *Samson*, one of the most powerful of Cranach's drawings and one which can hitherto only have been overlooked by some curious accident. The figure is represented nude in front of a niche, crouching on the lion and tearing open its jaws in an action of extreme tension. The distorted features are turned towards the spectator ; a piece of drapery flutters backward on the right. A few spirited curves suffice to render the modelling of the body ; the concentrated force of the composition produces an effect of violent movement.

As in the other drawings mentioned, the figure is represented as if seen from below. It was therefore evidently the artist's intention that the finished works for which these studies served should be placed in a position above the level of the eye. The drawing of *St. Anthony* being squared, one is tempted to connect it with a picture, probably a mural decoration, since the figure is surrounded by an architectural frame. Designs for glass have also been suggested (Schuchardt) ; Cranach,

it will be remembered, is known to have furnished "*Muster*" for the execution of windows. Against this, however, speaks the upward perspective of all the drawings, to say nothing in certain cases of their size.

Mural paintings by Cranach are not preserved, and, indeed, he seems never to have turned his hand to frescoes. But in the account books we find a differentiation between "*Tafeln*" (i.e. panel-picture) and "*Tücher*" (i.e. pictures on canvas). These "*Tücher*" are recorded as attaining the dimensions of 8 ells in height and 28 ells in width, from which one can only infer that they were intended to serve as mural decorations. There is mention, moreover, that at intervals (it was probably on the occasion of some function or festivity) they were transported from one castle to another.



FIG. 2. SAMSON AND THE LION.
Relief on the balustrade of the "Wendelstein" at Torgau.

That the drawings in question were commissioned by the Court of Saxony which Cranach served for fully half a century, is shown by the coat-of-arms with the electoral swords on which one of the Dresden Angels is crouching. Possibly they were destined for the Castle of Torgau, the favourite residence of the Saxon princes, a construction dating in the main from Cranach's time. Affixed to the

balustrade of the great stair-tower (Wendelstein) in the courtyard at Torgau there is a relief of the same subject as the Dresden *Samson*, which indeed can hardly be explained without a knowledge of the latter (Fig. 2). Another relief under the stairway, representing Samson and Delilah, is certainly also derived from Cranach.

This brings us to the question of the date at which the drawings were made. The Torgau balustrade was completed in 1535; the drawings on the other hand must certainly be earlier. The record of Cranach's activities at Torgau commences with 1509, in which year he received payment for his travelling expenses from Antwerp via Mainz to Torgau, and, as mentioned in Scheurl's well-known eulogy of Cranach of 1st October, 1509, he painted numerous animals in the Castle, deceptively life-like. Like the woodcuts representing tournament scenes, and the somewhat later series of figures of the Apostles, the drawings must have been executed soon after the artist's journey to the Netherlands. The unbridled energy of the Samson drawing is reminiscent of Cranach's early productions, but certain features in the rendering of the figure and drapery show that it must already belong to his more mature period.

In a more primitive form (Master Arnold, XV cent.) the Samson motive already occurs as a relief on the stairway of the Albrechtsburg at Meissen, which is known to have influenced the *Wendelstein* at Torgau. That Cranach, who also treated the theme in certain panel-pictures (Weimar, Heidelberg), and in one of the tournament woodcuts already mentioned, was influenced by such older representations as the Meissen relief and, above all, by Dürer's woodcut of 1497-8, is certain. Presumably, the Torgau sculptor made use of earlier paintings carried out after Cranach's designs. This seems more probable than that he had access to a drawing by Cranach that had lain by for some years and had not before been put to use.

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Samson and the Lion. (Dresden Print Room.)

O.M.D. September, 1932.