Holbein’s Early Illustrations to the Old Testament

Apocalypse cuts, which first appeared in T. Wolff’s octavo N.T. of 1523, and are related to the Wittenberg Apocalypse of 1522, are made in much the same degree as these Genesis cuts are to the first Saxon Genesis illustrations of 1523. If Abraham’s Sacrifice, especially, be compared with the 6th or 21st Apocalypse woodcut, it will be seen how very close is the resemblance in style. Of the Apocalypse woodcuts, six were cut by Holbein’s earlier and rougher woodcutter, Hans Herman, and the rest by the accomplished Lützelburger, and it is doubtless to the latter, as Professor Schmid has pointed out, that the Genesis woodcuts must also be attributed.

The author just quoted regards as an earlier and less skilful work of Lützelburger than the Apocalypse, the other series of illustrations by Holbein to the Pentateuch, five in number, of extreme rarity, of which the British Museum is so fortunate as to possess a copy, presented to the Print Room in 1899, by the late Mr. William Mitchell [PLATE II].

Adam Petri’s “Das Alte Testament deutscher,” 1534, 8vo, an edition unknown to the earlier writers, either on editions of the Bible or on Holbein, is mentioned by H. A. Schmid, with the remark that the only copy known is in the municipal library at Colmar. So far as the date of publication indicates, this series of woodcuts (80 by 66 mm.) is later than the series of eleven made for Wolff’s edition, and it is more original, being entirely independent, both in choice of subject and in the composition of the woodcuts, of the precedent set at Wittenberg. In this case the woodcuts do not specially illustrate Genesis and Exodus, but one is allotted as a frontispiece to each of the five books of the Pentateuch, a very infrequent practice in German Bibles. They are distributed as follows:-1. Genesis, fol. 1, The Creation of Eve. 2. Exodus, fol. 81 v., The Crossing of the Red Sea. 3. Leviticus, fol. 141 v., Aaron offering incense in the Tabernacle. 4. Numbers, fol. 191 v., Moses and the Brazen Serpent. 5. Deuteronomy, fol. 255. Moses reading the Law to the Israelites.

As the illustrations will show, there is very little fault to be found with the cutting, though the line in No. 2 is rather coarser than elsewhere. In No. 1, which is not very clearly printed in the London copy, it should be noticed how the left contour of the trunk of the tree disappears in the brilliant rays which emanate from the head of the Almighty, whereas this brilliance is sufficiently subdued towards the right, though the rays still continue, for the contour to be seen through the halo. The Brazen Serpent subject is very perfect both in cutting and printing.

THE EARLIEST COPY OF LEONARDO DA VINCI’S BATTLE OF ANGHIARI
BY KARL FRIEDRICH SUTER

RESERVED in the storeroom of the Uffizi, is a copy of Leonardo da Vinci’s Battle of Anghiari [PLATE I], which has not hitherto obtained the notice it deserves. Milanesi recorded this panel—which has been in the possession of the Florentine Gallery for centuries—as “copia non finita.” Although this work has since then been briefly entered in monographs on the artist, no authority has considered it worth while to investigate the work more thoroughly. As there are quite a number of other copies of Leonardo’s composition, the large drawing in the Louvre, by Rubens, being the best known, the fragmentary work in the Uffizi storeroom seems to have failed to arouse anyone’s interest.

But an examination of this picture, which is painted in oils on panel, brings to light quite unexpected facts, by the aid of which the obscure history of Leonardo’s Battle of Anghiari is considerably cleared up. Firstly, we are undoubtedly inclined to agree with Milanesi that the painting is unfinished. An important figure, a warrior kneeling on the ground in the left-hand bottom corner, which is to be found in all other copies, is entirely missing. A very thin line—hardly visible in the photograph—is all that exists to indicate the upper edge of his shield. One of the horses is unfinished, its hind legs being carried out only as far as the knee-joint. Of the horseman on the extreme right, only the head is complete, whilst the body is only sketched in its general outline. One or two unimportant parts have not been fully executed, for example the right hand of the horseman with the standard and the upper arm of the warrior with the sword.

All this plausibly suggests the idea of an incomplete copy, but a more thorough examination proves to us that this incomplete work could never have been finished. There is no room on the panel either for the rest of the hind legs of the horse or for the missing warriors. Are we to consider the painter as having made a grave error of judgment, as to the space at his disposal? This seems most unlikely. We could

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\(^1\) Vasari, Edition Milanesi, IV, p. 42.
The Earliest Copy of Leonardo Da Vinci's Battle of Anghiari

hardly credit the clumsiest and most diletante copyist with such a procedure. We are consequently forced to the conclusion that the fragmentary condition of the Uffizi picture was—at all events up to a certain point—deliberate. The copyist can never have had the intention of including the whole composition, as it has been handed down to us by Ruben and others, on this panel.

This impression is strengthened if we carefully examine individual parts of the picture, as for example the two men fighting on the ground. The meaning of this group has been made clear to us by the other copies: one warrior has torn the other to the ground by his hair and is in the act of cutting his throat. These two figures are nevertheless, from a certain aspect, very carefully executed, and yet they remain strangely incomplete. The left hand of the aggressor is entirely missing, so also is the back of the head of the under man. The missing parts are not even suggested by any preparatory drawing, so that the head appears preposterously to be half-buried in the ground. What is shown of the two fighting figures is executed in great detail, the rest has simply been left out. Surely this is no normal copyist. We also cannot escape from the impression that only those parts actually carried out were intended to be represented. We are thus forced to the conclusion that the Uffizi picture represents the copy of an unfinished original, the accidentals due to its condition included. As it is of course out of the question that an unfinished copy should have been so ascribed, we can only consider it as a copy of an incomplete original by Leonardo.

Leonardo produced two versions of the Battle of Anghiari. The first was a cartoon, which he brought to such a point of completion between October, 1503, and February, 1505, that he was able to start the execution of the painting in the Sala del Consiglio in the Palazzo della Signoria. He was engaged during the months following upon this in transferring the design on to the wall. He never completed this labour. Technical difficulties so discouraged him that he left Florence on June 1, 1506, and he never again took up the unlucky and unfinished work.

This cartoon can now be considered as a model for the Uffizi copy, for the simple reason that it was already brought to a high degree of finish. We must thus incline to the idea that the Uffizi picture is a replica of the mural decoration. The theory has long been accepted that Leonardo painted the Battle of Anghiari in the Sala del Consiglio. But no one has risked any statement as to how far he got with his work there. It is in this respect that the Uffizi panel furnishes us with information.

The fact that the Uffizi copy is actually a faithful rendering of the painting in the Sala del Consiglio, is supported by other evidence, particularly by the information that Vasari gives us concerning the cartoon in his life of Leonardo. He wrote as follows:—Leonardo began by drawing a cartoon at the hall of the Pope, a place in S. Maria Novella, containing a story of Niccolo Piccinino, captain of Duke Filippo of Milan. Here he designed a group of horsemen fighting for a standard, a masterly work on account of his treatment of the fight, displaying the wrath, anger and vindictiveness of men and horses; two of the latter, with their front legs involved, are waging war with their teeth no less fiercely than their riders who are fighting for the standard. One soldier, putting his horse to the gallop, has turned round and, grasping the staff of the standard, is endeavouring by main force to wrench it from the hands of four others, while two are defending it, trying to cut off the staff with their swords; an old soldier in a red cap has a hand on the staff, as he cries out, and holds a scimitar in the other and threatens to cut off both hands of the two who are grinding their teeth and making every effort to defend their banner. On the ground, between the legs of the horses, are two foreshortened figures who are fighting together, while a soldier lying prone has another over him who is raising his arm as high as he can to run his dagger with his utmost strength into his adversary’s throat; the latter, whose legs and arms are helpless, does what he can to escape death. The manifold designs Leonardo made for the costumes of his soldiers defy description, not to speak of the scimitars and other ornaments, and his incredible mastery of form and line in dealing with horses, which he made better than any other master, with their powerful muscles and graceful beauty.

Although Vasari bases this elaborate description of Leonardo’s work upon the cartoon, it is most improbable that he ever saw it again. On the other hand he will have been intimately acquainted with the unfinished fresco in the Palazzo della Signoria. The fact that his description is not solely based upon the cartoon but upon a coloured model is betrayed, unknown to himself, by the mention of a red cap (beretton rosso) worn by one of the warriors. The account given by Vasari presents peculiarities

Leonardo’s cartoons were as devoid of colour as those of his contemporaries. We know from the Adoration of the Kings in the Uffizi, and the St. Jerome in the Vatican Gallery that the master even completed his paintings in monochrome, and only at the last did he clothe the under-painting with a covering of colour. The only cartoon extant, the Virgin and St. Anne in the Royal Academy, London, is in black and white. Vasari describes another cartoon of Adam and Eve from which a tapestry was to be carried out in Flanders and clearly states that it was a monochrome. "Pero col penello di chiaro e senza lumeggiato di bluca un prato di erbe infinite con alcuni animali, etc."
A—Print by Lorenzo Zacchia (1558) based on Leonardo’s unfinished fresco of The Battle of Anghiari

B—Print by W. Hanssonlier after a sixteenth century copy, now lost, of Leonardo’s Battle of Anghiari

Plate II. The earliest copy of Leonardo da Vinci’s Battle of Anghiari
ties rather difficult to explain. The fact that the description of the two horsemen on the right is not quite correct, has already been remarked by others, notably Seiditz. On the other hand no one has noted the fact that an important figure in the composition: the warrior crouching beneath his shield on the left, has entirely escaped mention. This is really remarkable in an analysis of the picture in which not only each figure, but every gesture is individually described. The Uffizi panel explains Vasari’s inexactitudes. The two horsemen which he describes incorrectly are here hardly to be deciphered. Only the heads have been carried out, but they are so low in tone as to be hardly recognizable. And the figure which Vasari omitted to mention is also missing on the panel. It is thus obvious that Vasari did not describe the cartoon, but a coloured composition which was just as obscure and incomplete as the Uffizi copy. He accurately describes the model which the painter of the Uffizi picture copied and this could naturally be no other than Leonardo’s unfinished fresco in the Palazzo della Signoria. Whilst the painter accurately reproduced what he saw, the historian, who set out to describe the cartoon, is forced to refresh his memory of it by aid of the obscure and unfinished composition.

But he gives us another proof that the Uffizi panel is an accurate copy of Leonardo’s fresco. From it we can deduce the nature of the accident that Leonardo had whilst he was carrying out his fresco.

The Uffizi picture has been labelled “unfinished.” It might just as well have been called “damaged,” for while the lower half is fairly clear the upper has lost definition and run together. The horseman on the extreme left is still to a certain extent recognizable. But in the case of the warrior with the carved sword the details have become almost entirely submerged in the predominating dark tones. The left hand grasping the sword is barely visible. Even less clear are the two right-hand figures whose heads have entirely receded into blackness. Only the silhouette projects from the light ground. One might think that the upper parts of the Uffizi panel had suffered heavy damage did not more careful examination teach us that the state of preservation of the upper part is in no way different from that of the lower. From this we are forced to deduce that the inequalities of the copy existed in the original. This must have been in the strangest condition—well preserved in the lower parts and very heavily damaged in the upper ones.

We possess various records with regard to the calamity that befell Leonardo in the execution of his fresco. Giovio and Vasari inform us that the artist used an entirely unsuitable ground for his painting, one which was incapable of absorbing the colours. Anonymus Gaddianus3 is more detailed. He informs us that “Leonardo borrowed the receipt for the preparatory ground (stucco) from Pliny, but did not fully understand its preparation. He first experimented with a panel (quadro)4 in the Sala del Papa, where he was working and, having leant it against a wall, proceeded to light a charcoal fire in front of it and by its heat dried the panel out. He then attempted to employ the same methods in the Sala (del Consiglio), where the fire dried out the lower parts, but not the upper ones, which the warmth could not reach, with the result that the colour ran in this part.”

This account by “Anonymous,” which seems quite trustworthy, if only on account of the mention of Pliny, confirms the contention that Leonardo’s painting must have been in just such a state as the copy would lead us to suppose. The Uffizi panel is therefore a Leonardo document of great value, for it gives us an unexpected insight into the tragedy of the great decoration. Whilst other copyists, though basing themselves not on the cartoon but on the picture in the Sala del Consiglio, attempted to complete the composition, the painter of the Uffizi panel only rendered what he saw. Certainly a copy, so exact, of an incomplete and damaged painting, was an unusual product of the sixteenth century, and only the unbounded admiration in which Leonardo’s creations were held makes its existence understandable.

One question still remains to be answered. Leonardo’s fragment remained intact upon its wall for half a century. It was not destroyed till 1557, when Vasari changed the Sala del Consiglio into the Sala del Rinascimento. At what point during this long period was the Uffizi copy created? An engraving by Lorenzo Zacchia [Plate II, A] of the year 1558, gives us the answer. This print, though using other models for the composition, as the inscription states, is nevertheless mainly based upon the fresco. Observe in this print how the heads of the two right-hand horsemen have been altered, how the helmets are quite different in shape and how between and at the back of the two heads an arm wielding a sort of battle-axe has made its appearance. These details, as proved by other copies are quite false. Since Zacchia doubtless attempted to render what he had seen—although with reconstructive intent—we can

4 "Quadro" is here not given to mean a finished painting, but only a wooden panel with the particular painting ground.
The Earliest Copy of Leonardo Da Vinci’s Battle of Anghiari

get a very fair idea of the ghastly condition in which the upper right-hand part of the fresco must have been in 1550. The fact that the break up of the work that was spoilt at the very outset must have continued unchecked to its final destruction, is also confirmed by Vasari’s attempt to describe the composition. It must already have been very obscure before 1550, when the first edition of his biography appeared, if he could profess to see in the two horsemen on the right, defenders in the flag, attempting to hack through the shaft with swords held in their uplifted hands! According to this the Uffizi copy must have been painted much earlier. It presents Leonardo’s painting before the misfortune that the artist had met with had been augmented through the destruction inflicted by time. It was probably carried out not very long after the time at which the painter finally abandoned his work. Till now the question whether copies existed deriving directly from the cartoon, has not been thoroughly investigated. The Uffizi picture, however, gives us almost complete information as to the condition of the fresco. It can, therefore, be reckoned among the few quite authentic documents which can supply us with a representation of one of Leonardo’s lost works.

A NOTABLE SERVICE OF MEISSEN PORCELAIN
BY THE EARL OF ILCHETER

In the year 1712, I had occasion to draw attention in the Correspondence columns of the Burlington Magazine (vol. XX, p. 361), to the material service rendered in 1751 by Sir Charles Hanbury-Williams, then British Minister at Dresden, to the budding factory of porcelain at Chelsea. Further papers touching on this matter have now come to light, and it may be of interest to supplement the information then given with details of the service of Dresden china which proved so useful for the purpose.

On February 4, 1748, Sir Charles wrote to his friend, Henry Fox, afterwards created Lord Holland:

“I believe I never told you that the King of Poland has given me a set of China for a table of thirty Covers, which woud cost here fifteen Hundred Pounds. I wish anyone would give me so much for it in England. Could not Digby[1] speak to the Prince about it? No one else will buy such a thing. Tis prodigious fine. I design to send a description of the Desert China in a letter to Lady Caroline,[2] because its what no Englishman that has not been at Dresden can have an Idea of.”

At this period Augustus III was occupying the throne of Poland. He was also Elector of Saxony, and resided for most part of the year in Dresden. Hanbury-Williams had been appointed Minister to both courts in 1747, and with the exception of some months at the court of Berlin, remained there in an official capacity until his appointment to Russia in 1755.

Count Brühl, the king’s favourite Minister at that period, was notorious for the extravagance of his tastes and the vast sums which he lavished upon works of art. Sir Charles had something to say of him:

1 Edward, later sixth Lord Digby.
2 Lady Caroline Fox.

“I was once at a Dinner where we sat down at one table two hundred and six People (twas at Count Brühl’s) when the Desert was set on, I thought it was the most wonderful thing I ever beheld. I fancied myself either in a Garden or at an Opera, But I could not imagine that I was at Dinner. In the middle of the Table was the Fountain of the Piazza Navona at Rome, at least eight foot high, which ran all the while with Rose-water, and tis said that Piece alone cost six thousand Dollars. I verily believe that Count Brühl has above thirty thousand Pounds worth of China in his house.”

The lists followed, according to his promise; although nowhere is any mention made of the decoration on the plates and dishes[3]:—

A SERVICE OF CHINA FOR A DINNER AT A TABLE OF 30 COVERS.

1. Epargne.
2. Large Oval Terrines with their Dishes.
4. Large Round Terrines with their Dishes.
4. Small Oval Terrines with their Dishes.
4. Small Round Terrines with their Dishes.
4. Large China Pans for Large Pyes with their Dishes.
8. Very Large Dishes.
12. Middle Sized Dishes.
6. Large Sallad Dishes.
20. Middle Sized Oval Dishes.
40. Soup Plates.
144. Plates.
4. Large Covers for Dishes.
4. of the Middle Sort.
8. of the Small Sort.
4. Oval Covers.
6. Ice Pails.
8. Sauce Boats.
8. Branch Candlesticks.

[3] Six rix-dollars at this period had the same value as one English guinea.

Holland House MSS.