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On Some Unpublished Late Drawings by Ferràù Fenzoni

GIULIO ZAVATTA

A cache of Old Master drawings has recently come to light at the Pinacoteca Comunale in Faenza, a fragment of an originally larger, coherent group.¹ This, in fact, is what remains of the drawings collection formed by the painter and engraver Giuseppe Zauli (1763–1822), which he sold in 1797 to the city’s newly founded drawing school to be used, along with paintings and prints, as teaching materials.² Zauli had been trained at the Accademia Clementina, Bologna, under Gaetano Gandolfi (1734–1802). He was friends with the celebrated engraver Francesco Rosaspina (1762–1841) and Felice Giani (1758–1823). The latter, aware of his willingness to teach, recommended him to the city of Faenza, who appointed him to run the Scuola di Disegno e Plastica, founded in 1796 and in operation from 1801.³ The role played by Zauli during his many years as director of the school—which exists to this day and is named after his pupil, the Faenza artist Tommaso Minardi (1787–1871)—was rather more important than his artistic career, which consisted mainly in the production of drawings and engravings.

At the time of the school’s acquisition of Zauli’s entire collection in 1797, it was valued at “scudi tremila cinquecento settantotto e baj[occhi] 47 (3,578 scudi and 47 bajocchi).” In an appendix list of the holdings of “disegni,” ninety-one items were described individually, alongside “diverse carte, che non erano state note” (“various sheets, which have not been listed”). From this group of ninety-one separately listed sheets, I have been able to identify fifty-one drawings now preserved in the Pinacoteca Comunale, Faenza, which I hope will eventually be published in a full catalogue. In almost every case, the surviving drawings are from the circle of the Gandolfi and other eighteenth-century Bolognese artists, each one closely corresponding to an item in the 1797 list.

That the original collection was almost immediately reduced in number doubtless resulted from drawings being “borrowed” for use in the studio. There is, in fact, historical proof of this. In 1803, the privilege of borrowing from the collection was formally suspended, because many of the best pieces had by then gone missing (“fu sospesa per essersi trovati mancanti molti de’ migliori pezzi”). Only then were custodians appointed to safeguard the collection, but the damage had already been done.

If the Zauli collection originally consisted mainly of eighteenth-century drawings by his masters and by fellow artists of the Accademia Clementina—including Gaetano and Ubaldo Gandolfi (1728–1781), Felice Giani, Giuseppe Santi (1761–1825), and Giovanni Battista Frulli (1765–1837)—a small, but unusual group from this list deserves special consideration because of its earlier date: “6. disegni di Ferràù Fenzoni.” These six sheets by the seventeenth-century artist Ferràù Fenzoni (1562–1643), a native of Faenza, were valued, in total, at scarcely 1 scudo—that is, less than many of the drawings by living artists, including the prolific Giani, and much less than another seventeenth-century item, an as yet un-
The first unpublished drawing represents the 
Traced cartoon by Guido Reni (“cartone di Guido
[Reni]”), appraised at 40 scudi.

Four of the six drawings by Fenzoni can now be identified among the remnants of the Zauli collection in the Pinacoteca Comunale, Faenza. All are small pen-and-ink studies, datable to Fenzoni’s late career, which was spent in Faenza in the early decades of the seventeenth century, after periods of activity in Rome (early 1580s) and in Todi in Umbria (1594-99). As works made locally, the drawings were probably picked up by Zauli while he was teaching in Faenza. (Fenzoni was evidently not considered worthy of being collected seriously, hence their low valuation.) The four unpublished drawings in the Pinacoteca Comunale are comparable to other studies by Fenzoni, especially those for late paintings, and their identification prompts a few general observations on the artist’s late style.

The placement of the tomb is different, but the arrangement of the figures is roughly analogous. The less resolved character of the Faenza sheet (especially the figure of the Mary at center) suggests that it came first. As observed by Nicolas Schwed, it is not clear whether the study in Oxford—and thus now also the new drawing in Faenza—can be related to a drawing of the Three Marys at the Tomb, with St. Peter and an Angel in the Uffizi, Florence (Fig. 3). Schwed considers the latter most likely to be a finished, independent
Figure 2
FERRÀU
FENZONI
Three Marys at the Tomb, with St. Peter and Angels
Oxford, Ashmolean Museum

Figure 3 (below)
FERRÀU
FENZONI
Three Marys at the Tomb, with St. Peter and an Angel
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi
work of art, made to look like a small painting ("come un piccolo quadro"). The Uffizi sheet bears an old inscription stating that it is from the hand of Fenzoni and that it was consigned by the artist to a collector in 1640. By then the artist—already nearly eighty years old—had stopped painting owing to his poor eyesight (as he himself confessed in a letter of a decade earlier), and, as Schwed has hypothesized, he may well also have given up drawing by that date.

The second new drawing in the Pinacoteca Comunale represents the Holy Family with an Angel Offering a Plate of Fruit to the Christ Child (Fig. 4). It likewise cannot be connected with a surviving painting, but is a variant of a drawing of the same subject, now in the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (Fig. 5). Whereas the Faenza sheet is less fully resolved and shows the composition with half-length figures in a horizontal format, the one in Ottawa—dated by David Franklin to c. 1620—is upright, with full-length figures. Schwed correctly linked the Ottawa drawing sty-
listically to preparatory studies for the painting of the *Birth of the Virgin* of c. 1614–22 in the church of S. Petronio at Castel Bolognese (Fig. 6), especially two compositional pen studies that are rich in differences, one in the Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam (Fig. 7), and the other in the Uffizi, Florence. The new sheet in Faenza resembles these two compositional drawings, especially in the characteristic oval faces of the figures.

The third unpublished sheet shows *The Deposition* (Fig. 8), a subject often explored by Fenzoni. Despite the clear similarity to a drawing in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Fig. 9), perhaps a *prima idea* for a little *Deposition* painted on copper, also preserved at Faenza (Fig. 10), the Faenza pen study might instead be related to the large altarpiece of the subject in the same museum (Fig. 11), for which two other preparatory studies, both in the Uffizi (Figs. 12–13), have already been identified. Both
of these, in turn, seem to anticipate the beautiful *modello* in a private collection, Chicago (Fig. 14), which is much closer to the final painting. The newly identified sheet in Faenza probably represents the earliest idea of this group of studies: contained within framing lines is the large group of figures for the lower part of the composition, at the center of which is the corpse of Christ, rather more contorted than in the final solution, which was reached only after further changes. On the other hand, other figures can already be seen in their chosen poses. For instance, the
Figure 11 (far left)
FERRAÙ FENZONI
The Deposition
Faenza, Pinacoteca Comunale

Figure 12
FERRAÙ FENZONI
The Deposition
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi

Figure 13 (far left)
FERRAÙ FENZONI
The Deposition
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi

Figure 14
FERRAÙ FENZONI
The Deposition
Chicago, Private Collection
figure of the Magdalene at lower right is almost identical to the one in the first Uffizi sketch (see Fig. 12). The Faenza sheet, the second Uffizi sketch (see Fig. 13), and the Chicago modello all have similar figures of angels holding torches in the background (absent in the small Deposition on copper in Faenza). Because of its connection with the altarpiece, the new study in Faenza may also be dated to about 1622, the year in which, on 14 November, Fenzoni pledged to decorate his family chapel in the now destroyed church of the Madonna del Fuoco, where the altarpiece, executed in 1623, originated. Schwed observed that the Metropolitan Museum drawing marks an intermediate stage between the large altarpiece and the small copper of the Deposition. So, too, then does the Faenza study, which further demonstrates the recycling of a repertory of figur-
Figure 16
FERRAÙ
FENZONI
Holy Family
Location Unknown

Figure 17
FERRAÙ
FENZONI
Study for the Head of the Virgin
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi
Figure 18
FERRÂU
FENZONI
Sheet of Compositional Studies
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi

Figure 19
FERRÂU
FENZONI
Sheet of Compositional Studies
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi
to the untraced painting, once again in reverse. In contrast to the other unpublished drawings by Fenzoni at Faenza, in this case the new variant represents a later stage in the creative process. Like the second Florentine study sheet, the composition is still in reverse, but other changes bring it closer to the choices made in the transfer of the composition to the canvas, such as the poses of the Virgin and Child and the motif the baby’s leg hooked over the Virgin’s arm. In the Faenza study, Fenzoni explored the idea of including four winged angels, two standing behind the Virgin, and two in the middle background, all of which were eliminated in the painting. Compared to the other newly identified drawings by Fenzoni, this sheet, with its subtler, more confident, and more accurate handling, must date from slightly earlier in the artist’s career, doubtless coinciding with the dating proposed by Giuseppe Scavizzi for the related painting, between 1605 and 1614, during the artist’s first and most eccentric period in Faenza.

The four unpublished drawings presented here can be related not only to paintings, but also to other drawings, and in some instances, such as the Three Marys at the Tomb with St. Peter and the Angels and the Holy Family with an Angel Offering a Plate of Fruit to the Christ Child, they provide variants of compositions known so far by only a single drawn study. As Nicolas Schwed correctly stated, technical is a useful indicator for dating drawings by Fenzoni. During his final period in Faenza, Fenzoni produced mainly small pen drawings with dense, insistent strokes. Indeed, this type of study, which emerged at the turn of the seventeenth century, became Fenzoni’s preferred mode of expression from 1620 onward, as reported by Francesco Scannelli (1616–1663).
in his Microcosmo della Pittura of 1657: “visse quasi per un secolo intero, e nella sua ultima vecchiaia disegnava di continuo con la penna, e dava in tal modo a conoscere il talento, e gusto della Professione” (“He lived for almost an entire century, and in his final years he drew continuously with the pen, and in this way he demonstrated his talent and the love of his Profession”). The fact that the near sixty-year-old artist was considered already to be in his last phase is confirmed by Giulio Mancini (1559–1630), who in 1620 wrote: “in sua vecchiaia ha riformato quella fiera che dava nelle sgangaramenti in sua gioventù” (“in his old age he reined back that fieriness that gave his youthful work such unhinged force”). The numerous pen sketches of this late period do indeed differ from his earlier drawings made in Rome and Umbria, which were executed mainly in red or black chalk. In his later studies he had also a penchant for complete compositional studies instead of the numerous studies of single figures known from his early career. Moreover, in the pen studies frequent variants can be found. As recorded in the painting treatise of his contemporary Giovan Battista Armenini (1530–1609), father of Andrea Armenini (fl. 1607–39), who in 1639 published a collection of poems dedicated to the work of Fenzoni, he sketched over and over again, which enabled him to arrive at better solutions and to remove extraneous details (“schizzare e disegnare più volte è cagione che si aggiunge molte cose in miglior forma et anco se ne levano molte come superflue”). For Fenzoni, however, these modifications or pentimenti were not just a method of correcting himself: the endless thematic variations of the late drawings constitute an element of fantasy that is typical of Fenzoni’s draftsmanship in his Faenza period, and in many respects accounts for his originality.

Indeed, as noted by Giuseppe Scavizzi, there was a progressive decline in his painting after his return to Faenza, especially in his large-format works. The first few works painted by the artist after his return to his native town retain their individuality, but Fenzoni soon suffered from the isolation of the Romagna, with its aggressive Counter-Reformation culture. The risks faced by artists from the Inquisition were vividly exemplified by the case of his older contemporary Giovan Battista Bertucci the Younger (1539–1614), who was long imprisoned and forced to renounce his sins. The impact of this oppressive religious climate seems to have played a greater role in Fenzoni’s work than the influence of the art of Ludovico Carracci (1555–1619).

There was thus a process of “moderation” or tempering that seems to have gone hand in hand with Fenzoni’s advancing age. The painter’s last years, as described by Mancini and later by Scannelli, were tinged by a certain fear of his own mortality, as evidenced by his numerous wills and above all by the carving of his tombstone, also preserved in the Pinacoteca Comunale, Faenza. The significance of the passage carved on this monument has not, in my opinion, been fully appreciated. Dated 1622 (the same year as the commission of The Deposition for his chapel in the church of the Madonna del Fuoco), the artist had the tombstone engraved: “expectabo donec veniat,” that is, “I will wait until [death] arrives.” The slightly morbid outlook of an elderly man, somewhere between realistic expectation and resignation (it must be remembered that the painter lived for another twenty-three years), may explain the shift toward a more devotional style of painting in his late period, which nevertheless included the touch of the bizarre that had always characterized his work.

This sense of deterioration, both personal and pictorial, was not paralleled in his drawings. Often made on small pieces of paper, they seem to have become more intimate, sequential, and dynamic. Paradoxically, however, when enlarged to the scale of oversized altarpieces, the inventions became stiff. In his rapid sketches of the second and third decades of the seventeenth century, the old artist still revealed a fervent inventiveness, despite the weakening of his touch and perhaps also his sight. There seems, in the words of Scavizzi, to be “a disconnect between his imagination and the end product, that is, between his first thoughts, which are still free of convention
and restrictions, and the finished picture, which had to be suitable to hang over an altar” (“una frattura fra la sua immaginazione e il prodotto finale, cioè fra i primi pensieri che son liberi da convenzioni e costrizioni e il quadro, che deve essere accectato e finire su un altare”). The four new drawings presented here increase the number of variants in Fenzoni’s work, such as the multiple options for a new composition of The Deposition, a subject that had by then become for him a little tired. They moreover add to the catalogue of his drawings several sketches in a technique that was not only typical and very personal to the artist, but which is not easily related stylistically or iconographically to any particular school. In effect, they represent the survival of late Mannerist motifs well into the seventeenth century, but with a freshness that made them still attuned to the new century.

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NOTES


4. Contemporary copy of the donation contract preserved in the archive of the Pinacoteca Comunale, Faenza (original document now in the Archivio di Stato di Faenza, Instrumenti, vol. 84, 1797, fols. 75ff.). In it, Giovanni Ugolini and Pietro Pani formally accepted the appraisal on behalf of the city of Faenza; the document was accompanied by a list of drawings dated 29 October 1797.

5. Contemporary copy of the decree preserved in the archive of the Pinacoteca Comunale, Faenza. Dionigi Strocchi and Alessandro Racciardelli formally complained to the municipality about the absence of numerous works from the consignment of the collection of paintings by “Città Zauli, professore di disegno.”


7. Inv. no. 2647. Pen and brown ink; 150 x 272 mm. Inscribed at lower right, in black chalk, 55; on verso: stamped with the mark of the magistrate; museum stamp with the inventory number and soprint. 333; and inscribed at lower edge, in black ink, E. Alberghi.


10. Ibid., p. 332.


12. Inv. no. 2652. Pen and brown ink; 92 x 108 mm. Inscribed at lower right, in black chalk, 59; on the verso of the backing, stamped by the museum in 1919 with
the inventory number and soprint. 338; and inscribed at lower edge, in black ink, E. Alberghi.

13. Inv. no. 17916. Pen and brown ink; 125 x 93 mm; see David Franklin, Italian Drawings from the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 2003, no. 24, repr.; Scavizzi and Schwed 2006, no. D123, repr.; and www.metmuseum.org/art.

14. Oil on canvas; 224 x 147 cm; see Scavizzi and Schwed 2006, no. P60, repr.

15. Inv. no. RP-T-1981-48. Pen and brown ink; 297 x 180 mm; see ibid., no. D120, repr.; and www.rijksmuseum.nl.

16. Inv. no. 12648 F. Pen and brown ink, with corrections in opaque white; 385 x 254 mm; see Scavizzi and Schwed 2006, no. D121 (with previous bibliog.).

17. Inv. no. 2654. Pen and brown ink; 122 x 142 mm. Inscribed at lower right, in black chalk, 62; on the verso of the backing, stamped by the museum in 1919 with the inventory number and soprint. 340; and inscribed at lower edge, in black ink, E. Alberghi.

18. Inv. no. 1980.20.3. Pen and brown ink, on blue paper; 223 x 280 mm; see Jacob Bean, with the assistance of Lawrence Turcié, 15th- and 16th-century Italian Drawings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1982, no. 76, repr.; Scavizzi and Schwed 2006, no. D111, repr.; and www.metmuseum.org/art.

19. Inv. no. 140 (oil on copper; 49 x 40 cm); see Scavizzi and Schwed 2006, no. P70 (with previous bibliog.), repr.

20. Inv. no. 218 (oil on canvas; 282 x 191 cm); see ibid., no. P67 (with previous bibliog.), repr. (in color).

21. Inv. nos. 12651 F (pen and brown ink, with corrections in opaque white; 175 x 127 mm) and 12680 F (pen and brown ink, with corrections in opaque white, on blue paper; 360 x 261 mm); see Scavizzi 1966, p. 19, pl. 14b; Ruggeri 1967, p. 56; idem, “Novità per Ferraiù Fenzione,” Critica d’Arte, n.s. 19, no. 123, 1972, pp. 70, 72, fig. 12; Bean and Turcié 1982, p. 85, under no. 76; Mario di Giampaolo, Disegno italiano antico: Artisti e opere dal Quattrocento al Settecento, Milan, 1994, p. 137; William Griswold and Linda Wolk-Simons, Sixteenth-century Italian Drawings in New York Collections, exh. cat., New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994, p. 19; Schwed 2000, p. 54, n. 50; and Scavizzi and Schwed 2006, pp. 335–37, nos. D138 and D136, both repr.

22. Pen and brown ink, with opaque white heightening (partially oxidized), over black chalk, on light brown paper; 404 x 299 mm; see Suzanne Folds McCullagh, ed., Capturing the Sublime: Italian Drawings of the Renaissance and Baroque, exh. cat., Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, 2012, no. 66, repr. (in color).

23. Inv. no. 2667. Pen and brown ink; 151 x 182 mm. Inscribed at lower right, in black chalk, 46; on the verso, on the backing, stamped by the museum in 1919 with the inventory number and soprint. 353; and inscribed at lower edge, in black ink, E. Alberghi.

24. Oil on canvas; 82.2 x 64.8 cm; see sale, London, Bonhams, 9 July 2003, lot 5, repr. (in color); and Scavizzi and Schwed 2006, no. P49, repr. (in color), and pp. 224–25.

25. Inv. no. 12683 F. Black chalk and pastel, on blue paper; 365 x 253 mm; see Scavizzi and Schwed 2006, no. D104, repr., and pl. xvi (in color).

26. Inv. nos. 12640 F (pen and brown ink; 254 x 192 mm) and 12644 F (pen and brown ink; 171 x 246 mm); see Scavizzi 1966, p. 19, fig. 13a; Ruggeri 1967, p. 56; and Scavizzi and Schwed 2006, nos. D105–D106, both repr.

27. Ibid., p. 158.

28. Ibid., p. 221.

29. See Francesco Scannelli, Il microcosmo della pittura, Cesena, 1657, p. 203.


32. See Andrea Armenini, Rassegna di varie illustri poesie... dedicate all’immortalità del glorioso pennello del Signor Ferraiù Fenzonio Gentil’Huomo Faentino, Faenza, 1639.


34. See Scavizzi and Schwed 2006, pp. 76–85.

35. See Francesco LANZONI, La Controriforma nella città e diocesi di Faenza, Faenza, 1925, pp. 244–45; Scavizzi and Schwed 2006, p. 76; and Alessandra Bigi Iotti and Giulio Zavatta, “Per Marco Marchetti, pittore di Faenza, 1925, pp. 244–45; Scavizzi and Schwed 2006, pp. 76–85.


37. Ibid., p. 63.

38. Ibid., p. 80.
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On some unpublished late drawings by Pietro Fanzani

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