A Romanesque Aquamanile in the Form of a Dragon

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Bassani, writing in 1816, records two pictures by Loves in the Casa Tognoli at Bologna;[54] one, representing *St Theresa kneeling at the Feet of Christ*, is stated to be a copy after Guercino, and this strikes an extremely convincing note, since Guercino did in fact paint such a picture at the very time when we know Loves to have been active in his studio.[55]

In 1864 the firm of Weigel in Leipzig offered for sale a print of *The Madonna teaching the Child to read*, as by Loves and apparently after Guercino.[56] There is an etching in the British Museum[57] of this subject,[58] cut closely round the border of the actual composition (and consequently without marginal space for an inscription, if any existed), which I suggest may conceivably be from the same plate as Weigel's example, which must presumably have borne Loves' name.[59]

Nagler records a rare etching of a landscape with figures and buildings which bears the date *1. giu. 1631* and the letters *ML* in monogram form;[60] this afterwards passed, as part of the E. Harzen Collection, to the Hamburg Kunsthalle.[61] I have never actually seen a copy of the print, but, with the greatly appreciated assistance of the Warburg Institute and the authorities of the Kunsthalle, I obtained a photograph of it. This confirms what was after all a shot in the dark on the basis of the exiguous data supplied by Nagler, since the style of the landscape proclaims it quite unmistakably to be by a pupil of Guercino, and in view of the initials and the date there can be little doubt that it is the work of Loves (Fig. A).

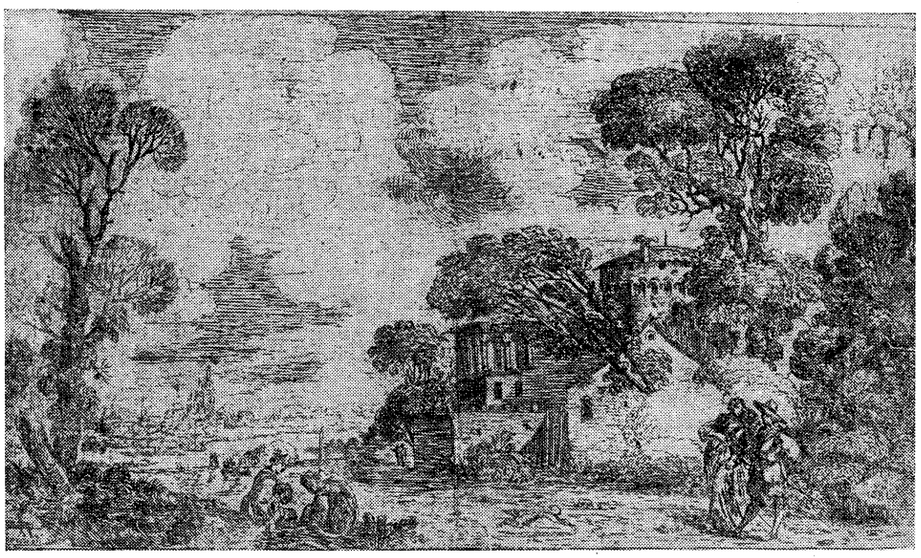


Fig. A. LANDSCAPE. Etching, signed ML and dated 1631. (Kunsthalle, Hamburg)

In the Kupferstichkabinett at Berlin[62] I noted an indifferent etching, bearing the apparent monogram *ML*, of Guercino's *Raising of Lazarus* now in the Louvre; it is reversed from Pasqualini's print (the first state of which bears the date 1621), which in its turn is in reverse to the painting. It seems probable that the Berlin etching is by Loves—possibly an early effort based on Pasqualini's engraving.

Monsignor Giovanni Bottari published[63] an undated letter from Guercino to an unknown correspondent referring to a Signor Matteo who has been ill, has been unable to come to Modena, and has asked Guercino to write on his behalf concerning a payment. In a footnote Bottari guesses with some plausibility that the Matteo of the letter may have been Matteo Loves.

[54] PETRONIO BASSANI: *Guida agli amatori delle belle arti . . . per la Città di Bologna*, Bologna [1816], p. 204: '*Q*[uadro] *Santa Teresa inginocchiata a' piedi del Signore, f* [igure] *i*[ntere], *copia del Guercino, di Matteo Loves*'; and p. 205: '*Q*[uadro] *S. Sebastiano legato ad un Albore, f* [igura] *i*[ntera], *di Matteo Loves*'.

[55] Painted for Lyon in 1634 and now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts at Aix-en-Provence (payment in advance received on January 5, 1634; payment on completion entered on August 18 of that year).

[56] *Rudolf Weigel's Kunstlager-Catalog*, Part 33, Leipzig [1864], p. 66, No. 24531: '*Maria lehrt dem Christuskinde Lesen, wahrscheinlich nach Guercino*'. It is catalogued with the English engravings.

[57] No. 1864-11-14-487, placed with Guercino's own etchings. It certainly reflects an early composition of Guercino. I have never seen another copy of it; this copy was acquired from Messrs Holloway and Son, not from Weigel.

[58] The nude Child stands, full length, on a cloth placed upon a narrow table, behind which the Madonna stands, visible to the waist, supporting him with her right hand. They face the spectator, but both look down at an open book held by the Child, into which the Madonna, leaning over his left shoulder, points with her left index finger. The print certainly reverses the original composition.

[59] The etching which I very tentatively attribute to Loves is not to be confused with another etching of the same composition (copy in the British Museum, with the engravings after Guercino, No. 1874-8-8-858). This latter carries the inscription *Ioan. fran. Cent. inuentor*, which would of course have obviated Weigel's *wahrscheinlich*.

[60] G. K. NAGLER: *Die Monogrammisten*, iii, Munich [1863], No. 2446, and iv, No. 1972.

[61] *Verzeichniss der Kupferstich-Sammlung in der Kunsthalle zu Hamburg*, Hamburg [1878], p. 98 ('*rechts Herr und Dame promenirend*'). The Kunsthalle inventory number is 3385.

[62] Berlin, Neues Museum, Kupferstichkabinett, No. 766–94 (placed with Pasqualini's engravings).

[63] *Raccolta di Lettere sulla Pittura, Scultura ed Architettura*, v, Rome [1766], pp. 36 f. (No. XIII).

ERICH MEYER

A Romanesque Aquamanile in the Form of a Dragon

IN the Middle Ages, water-jugs were used both for ablution before Mass and at table in the households of the nobility; either as altar decoration or as secular table ornaments, they were especially richly fashioned. During the Romanesque epoch in particular, they were often given the forms of animals, fabulous monsters, men or horsemen, so that at first

sight they appear more like pure sculpture than utensils. A small number of such vessels in terracotta has been preserved; of the existence of others, formed of precious metals, we know almost exclusively from old inventories; the greater number were made of bronze. About 340 of these bronze aquamaniles were known in 1934 to Otto von Falke and the author of the present article and were published in the first volume of *Bronzegeräte des Mittelalters*.[1] Since then a small number of new examples have appeared, particularly in the Brummer Collection in New York, from which they were then acquired by the Metropolitan Museum.[2] Examples of high quality are certainly to be found among them; but they really provide no new material for art history, since they consist of variations of types already familiar.

Of far greater artistic and historical importance is the Dragon Aquamanile (Figs. 1, 9, 10) from a private collection published here for the first time. Magnificent in conception, with its decorative details, small figures in full relief and engraved ornaments, it is one of the most beautiful as well as the most richly ornamented medieval aquamaniles in existence.

The half bird, half dragon-like creature (height 34·5 cm: length 34·4 cm) stands on the legs of a lion, similar to those known in many other aquamaniles.[3] Behind, the body rests on the tips of the wings. The tail is curved upwards and ends in a palmette. A headless, four-legged animal serves as handle; on to its back clambers a beardless, long-haired man. The monster's head is raised threateningly; in the mouth is held a man in monk's habit; his hollow body forms the spout. The great ears, between which lies the aperture for filling, the eyes set with almandine, and the immense, protruding bony structure of the forehead, all give to the animal an air of bestiality, terrifying in its strangeness, an expression which is heightened by the masterly engraving of the entire surface, but at the same time transmuted into decoration and functional utility.

The casting is in *cire-perdue* technique. On the breast, below the strip ornamented with a stag, is to be seen the square hole used for scraping out the terra-cotta core; it was filled with a darker metal after the casting (Fig. 10). Further proof of the use of the *cire-perdue* technique, in which all aquamaniles of the Middle Ages were done, is provided by the marks of the core, spread evenly over the surface, but scarcely visible in the reproductions.

Three little figures in lively movement are sporting round the neck of the monster. Under the throat crouches a small hairy ape (Fig. 1), holding in both paws bread or fruit which he is eagerly devouring. To his left, with one foot still on the dragon's back, but bending far forward and with both arms stretched out towards the ape, is a man with a pointed beard (Fig. 9): he seems to be intent on snatching the monkey's booty away from him. Both these tiny figures may have been intended to represent the depravity of animal and human intemperance, and find their counterpart on the other side in the form of unchastity or avarice, a naked man with a Jew's hat, who touches his member with his right hand and in his left holds up a roundel engraved with a flower (Draughtsman? Coin?) (Fig. 1). Whilst these little figures pursue their occupations, without concern or modesty, undeterred by the monster, the monk is swallowed by the dragon. The dragon itself must be understood to represent evil, for virtue is destroyed and wickedness is allowed to run riot.

The medallions on the wings indicate that this aquamanile was not destined for church use, but for the banquet table of a noble house. Both of them represent, with slight variations, a galloping horseman with a sword in his right hand lifted behind his head. As far as it is possible to judge from the worn state of the surface, they wear chain armour reaching down to their feet without tabards, and hold a broad-sword with a straight hilt and large, round, disc-shaped pommels. The one riding towards the right (Fig. 11) bears a short triangular shield on his left arm and his head is almost entirely covered by a curved helmet of the shape usual about 1220;[4] his counterpart wears a rather earlier type of helmet but one which is also to be found about 1220.[5] This provides a first indication of the date.

The engraving can further help us to determine origin and age. It extends over the whole of the body, except underneath, and is used partly to indicate feathers and fur, explaining anatomical functions, partly purely as ornament. The antique motif of the beading serves to frame and divide the surfaces. A Romanesque wave pattern is used to ornament the smaller friezes, either with the usual rounded and dentated little leaves (on the tail) or in the much rarer form of fleshy, arrow-like half-leaves (on the neck). Sometimes both forms of leaves are intertwined. The larger surfaces are covered with branches or scrolls, freer in movement and more luxuriant in growth, in which, on the breast, a leaping stag, on the back a dragon, crouching to spring, have been introduced. The drawing of the even scroll pattern is contrasted with the cross-hatching of the background. It was not engraved in the bronze with the graver but was drawn with the modelling tool on the wax model and then cast.

The Cinquantenaire Museum at Brussels possesses a candlestick 1·43 m high[6] (Fig. 12) from the Belgian Abbey of Postel, the foot of which is supported by the tails of three dragons. The three intervening spaces are filled with scrolls and figures. As in the case of our aquamanile, the dragons' tails end in flat scrolls with engraved leaf palmettes. The dragon's wings are ornamented with beautifully engraved scrolls bordered with beading and enclosing a wave pattern. Here, too, both kinds of foliage are represented, the indented many-leaved and the fleshy, unindented half-leaf,[7] and here too the ornament detaches itself from a cross-hatched background. In addition to this, both in the candlestick and the aquamanile the legs of the dragons are ornamented with beading and in both a stag is used as a decorative motif.

The relationship between these two bronzes is so close, that even if one does not consider them as both from the same workshop, they would yet seem to bear witness to two masters from the same neighbourhood closely dependent on one another. In the case of the Brussels candlestick, Lower Lorraine

[1] OTTO VON FALKE and ERICH MEYER: *Bronzegeräte des Mittelalters*, Band I. *Romanische Leuchter und Gefässe. Giessgefässe der Gotik*, Berlin [1935].

[2] The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Bulletin* [May 1948].

[3] FALKE-MEYER, *op. cit.*, pl. 378, 400 ff.

[4] PAUL POST: *Das Kostüm und die ritterliche Kriegstracht im deutschen Mittelalter*, Berlin [1928–39], pl. 106 k 3. DEMAY: *Le Costume au Moyen-age d'après les Sceaux*, Paris [1880], fig. 99.

[5] PAUL DESCHAMPS: *La sculpture française à l'époque romane*, Florence, Paris [1930], pl. 53A; POST, *op. cit.*, pl. 106, i 5.

[6] FALKE-MEYER, *op. cit.*, pl. 62 a–d.

[7] In our illustration only the dentated leaf is visible. But see FALKE-MEYER, pl. 62c.

is the only conceivable place of origin. The Abbey of Postel, from which it comes, lies north-east of Antwerp, not far from the Meuse. Let us remember that from Carolingian times Lorraine was the chief centre of European bronze casting and is the home of the metal work, known as *Dinanderie*, so called from the town of Dinant, that the chief foundries of zincblende (the galmey of the Middle Ages) were to be found on the Meuse and that this metal next to copper was the most important ingredient for brass-founding. For many centuries the bronzes of Lorraine were exported to every part of Europe. It is unknown, on the other hand, for bronze vessels to be imported from other districts to the Meuse valley. On this account therefore the candlestick and the Dragon aquamanile must be considered as the creations of Belgian workshops.

If one compares the candlestick and aquamanile more closely it becomes apparent that they were not quite contemporary creations. The motif of the three dragons, resting on their heads and front legs with their tails curling over their backs, is well known from many Romanesque candlesticks,[8] admittedly without the decorative scroll-work engraved on their bodies which distinguishes both the Postel candlestick and the Dragon aquamanile. One might suppose that purely decorative ornamental trimmings of this sort were first introduced when the dragon motif as such had become all too frequent and therefore uninteresting. Decorative adornments of this sort tend in fact to appear at the end of a stylistic epoch.[9] But there is no doubt that the dragons of the Postel candlestick, as is shown in their heads and in details such as their protruding backbones, are yet truer to nature and more in keeping with the dragons of the high Romanesque epoch than those of the aquamanile. The candlestick must be one or two decades earlier and the figures in relief indicate this date. They correspond, in their squat proportions and in the linear drawing of their garments, to the style of the miniatures of about 1200. The Dragon aquamanile, however, represents the art of the bronze casting of Lower Lorraine in its latest Romanesque stage, about 1220.

The date and place of origin of the aquamanile seem thus to be convincingly established. One more question concerning the latter, however, is yet to be considered; that of the connection between the works of the Meuse valley and Lower Saxony, the second centre for medieval bronze casting. Just as the art of metal casting was able to develop in Lorraine on account of the presence of galmey, large workshops could exist in Germany on the northern slopes of the Harz Mountains on account of the existence there of the second of the two necessary raw materials, copper. Since the time of Bishop Bernward of Hildesheim (about 1000), both centres, Lorraine and Lower Saxony, had remained in close touch with one another and through the trade in raw materials these relations continued on a lively footing. We have shown in our book, that models of candlesticks and water-jugs made in Lorraine were often imitated with alterations, and that the Eastern versions, through a certain coarseness and clumsiness, generally differ from their well-proportioned, precise and neatly executed originals. The type of our Dragon aquamanile seems likely to have been known in the East and to have been imitated in one or other of the workshops of Lower Saxony, probably Hildesheim. That this was so, is proved by a Dragon aquamanile from the Thyssen Collection at Lugano,[10] which has been already published as Hildesheim work, and has recently entered the Reinhart Collection at Winterthur (Fig. 8). The pieces resemble one another so closely in their conception and in their engraving, that it is scarcely necessary to call attention to details such as the posture, the construction of the head, and the tail. The Thyssen Dragon also holds a man in his muzzle, whose body has, however, been broken off, so that now only his hands are visible. But the differences are obvious. The Thyssen Dragon lacks the suppleness and organic completeness of the other. It is stiffer and has less vitality, the legs are more squat, the wings slope back at less of an angle, the head is not raised but is set quite straight on the barrel shaped neck. In short, the modeller has not been able to attain the expressive beauty of the original, either in the general composition or in the engraving.

It must be emphasised that the aquamanile published in this article can scarcely have served as the original for the Thyssen Dragon. That this is not the case, and that these two pieces which have been accidentally preserved very incompletely represent what was probably formerly rather a comprehensive group of cast vessels, may be indisputably inferred from the form of the handle. In the Thyssen example, instead of the animal, a kneeling man attacking the dragon with an axe serves as the handle. This figure is no unique invention. Similar elongated forms in other late Romanesque vessels and candlesticks are well known but such grotesque stretching is found exclusively in Lower Saxon examples, never in the bronzes of Lorraine.[11]

This newly discovered piece is of unusual importance for two reasons: artistically, it is a late Romanesque vessel of the richest and most stately quality so far known and represents a high level of achievement in medieval bronze casting; historically it extends the range of our present knowledge, as it affords fresh evidence of the close dependence of Saxon bronze utensils on those of Lorraine. In our book *Die Bronzegeräte des Mittelalters* we had held the opinion that the ornamentation of the surfaces of Romanesque bronzes with leaf-work, beading and scrolls was a peculiarity of Saxon work. The newly discovered Dragon aquamanile and the hitherto little noticed candlestick in Brussels, however, contribute to the view that the East took over these forms also from the West. The present author hopes to show later on that a similar division between Western and Eastern bronzes also applies to a series of altar crosses and crucifixions.[12] Perhaps through this means fresh light will be shed on the question of the artistic origin of the most important of the late Romanesque bronze fonts, the well-known example in Hildesheim Cathedral.

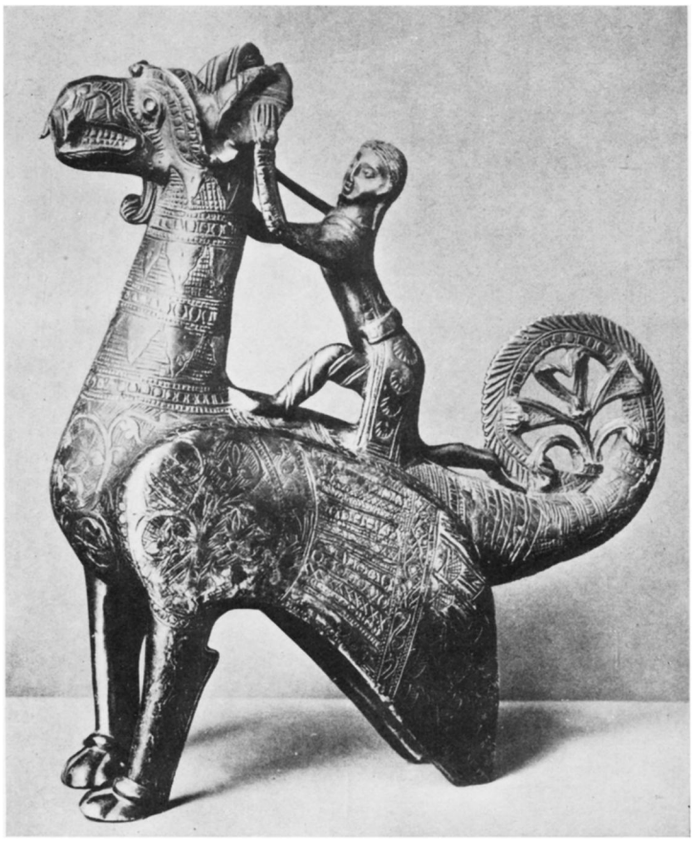
[8] The earliest dated example, the Gloucester candlestick of 1110 in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Compare also the large seven-branched candelabra at Reims, Prague, Brunswick and Milan (FALKE-MEYER, *op. cit.*, pl. 88, 60, 83, 61).

[9] On the subject of bronze casting, the Chinese vessels of the Chou Period, the Luristan bronzes and the Egyptian bronzes of the New Kingdom and modern period must not be overlooked.

[10] FALKE-MEYER, *op. cit.*, pl. 246a b.

[11] FALKE-MEYER, *op. cit.*, pl. 180, 182, 183, 330.

[12] Rather beyond the scope of works considered here, a cross in the Archbishop's palace at Utrecht and a crucifix in the Schnüttgen collection (WITTE: *Die Skulpturen der Sammlung Schnüttgen*, Berlin [1912], pl. 5, no. 4) belong to the West, for example, to the East a crucifix from Wiedelah am Harz in the Germanisches Museum at Nuremberg (FALKE-MEYER, *op. cit.*, pl. 250).



8. Dragon Aquamanile. From Lower Saxony, probably Hildesheim. Bronze. (Reinhart Collection, Winterthur.)

9. Another view of the Dragon Aquamanile reproduced in Fig. 1.

10. Another view of the Dragon Aquamanile reproduced in Figs. 1 and 9.

11. Detail of Fig. 1. Medallion on the right wing.

12. Detail of candlestick from the Abbey of Postel. Made in Lower Lorraine, about 1200. Bronze. Height, 143 cm. (Musée du Cinquantenaire, Brussels.)

1. Dragon Aquamanile, from Lower Lorraine, about 1220. Bronze. Height, 34·5 cm. Length, 33·4 cm. (Private collection.)