

Head of Pan

Lorenzo, Michelangelo, Attila and a lost plaquette prototype

by *Michael Riddick*



ABSTRACT

Examined is the discovery of an engraved rock crystal evidently serving as the master prototype for a quantity of late 15th century bronze plaquettes. A relationship of the rock crystal with Lorenzo de' Medici is drawn by way of a relationship with its subject: a *Head of Pan*. Also discussed is the crystal's reproduction in a sketch by a young Michelangelo and finally surveyed is the curious loss of the object's meaning in exchange for what would become a universally vilified image of Attila the Hun.



The prototype and plaquette casts of the *Head of Pan*



Fig. 01: A bronze plaquette cast of a *Head of Pan* (l) and the engraved rock crystal prototype (r) (Private Collection)

The present article concerns itself with the discovery of an engraved rock crystal, believed lost, which served as the master model for a bronze plaquette relief of a *Head of Pan* known from a quantity of casts thought made during the last quarter of the 15th century.

The discovery of such artworks once used for the casting of plaquettes is not an unfamiliar event. In 2007 John Boardman and his team at the Beazley Archives at Oxford located a formerly 'lost' antique cameo¹ which served as the master model for a series of Roman and Florentine bronze cast reproductions while first possessed by Pietro Barbo (1417-71) and later by Lorenzo de' Medici (1449-92). The object was discovered in a London private collection.² Similarly, the crystal that is the subject of this article was likewise found in London. A qualifying reason for the location of these formerly lost objects in the ambit of London is due

to the last major collections of glyptic arts which found their zenith during the English Baroque and Victorian era, only to be later dispersed into various museum and private collections. The present crystal is mounted in a bejeweled English frame, ca. 1700.³

The historical discussion of experts regarding the source for the plaquette casts of a *Head of Pan*, have only brought to our awareness two related cameos that are descendent of its influence. Emile Molinier first noted a carnelian bust of Pan cited in the Cabinet du Roi in Paris⁴ and Francesco Rossi commented on a *Faunus Ficarius* cameo located at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.⁵ Both objects have been considered later creations derivative of the motif popularized by the plaquette and its later incarnations.

The first association of the present rock crystal in coincidence with the plaquette is found in Jeremy Warren's 2014 catalog of the Ashmolean Museum plaquette collection, in which he suggests the rock crystal could be based on the plaquette's design.⁶ However, a small photographic reproduction of the crystal, in the referenced Sotheby's catalog entry,⁷ was insufficient to draw any firm conclusions. The present author, granted access to the crystal, here draws the firm conclusion that the crystal is indeed the prototype from which the plaquettes derive.

The crystal is engraved in intaglio with superb precision, delicacy of hand and with a vitality that is enchanting in its character. The rock crystal is polished on both sides with a flat reverse and convex obverse. Apart from an insignificant later dint along the lower jaw line of the subject, not reproduced in the plaquettes, the crystal retains the same wondrous beauty it likely had the day



Fig. 02: The convex surface of the crystal (l) juxtaposed beside its plaquette counterpart with corresponding concave surface (r)

it was made, a quality celebrated and typical to these revered objects of virtue.

Confirming of its role as the prototype for the bronze plaquettes is its corresponding size (Fig. 01), depth of relief (Fig. 02) and correlation in all minute details.

The rock crystal measures 45 x 34 mm while the plaquette casts share this same general dimension with the better casts being approximately 1 mm wider due to the material, presumably wax, plaster or clay, used to press over the rock crystal itself, resulting in a nominal border outlining the edge of the relief.

Two of the finest published casts of the *Head of Pan* plaquette are found in examples from the Mario Scaglia

collection⁸ and one formerly with the collection of Cyril Humphris.⁹ When observed from its reverse as a right-facing profile, the crystal is commensurate with the plaquette (Fig. 03). For added visual comparison, the present author has overlaid a faux bronze tone atop the rock crystal with a comparison of it featured beside the Scaglia example. As one may observe (Fig. 04), the fine locks of hair extending from the head are reproduced in subtle detail on the plaquette. The delicately fluted ridges of Pan's horns are likewise reproduced as well as a small indentation along the lobe of the ear. The grooved channels of the hair are mirrored in the plaquette copy as well as a subtle portion of facial hair, left of the moustache. Also reproduced is the texture of the nebris, or fawn skin, tied at the chest by the legs of a fawn whose hooves terminate at the margin of the crystal



Fig. 03: A comparison: rock crystal photographed from reverse (l); Scaglia example (r)



Fig. 04: A comparison: rock crystal photographed from reverse (l); Scaglia example (r)

reproduced alike on the plaquette. On the Humphris example (Fig. 05) we may observe the commensurate modeling of the face with synchronous contours. The teeth of Pan are further remarkably translated in this example.

One variance between the crystal and the two aforementioned fine plaquette casts is the apparent addition of a lock of hair centered between the bulk of the lower horn and the tip of the ear (Fig. 06).¹⁰ This distinction comes by way of an added groove separating what would otherwise be a continuous lock of hair as featured on the crystal. This characteristic is particularly apparent on the cited examples as well as a fine cast at the Civic Museum of Brescia.¹¹ The present author suggests this may have been an accident or loss to the mold that occurred when removing the impression from the crystal or made while preparing the mold for casting. It appears to be the only feature distinguishing these finer plaquette casts from the crystal.

Noteworthy is the exposed space nested between the two locks of hair as observed in the highlighted area just discussed. In the photographic representation of the

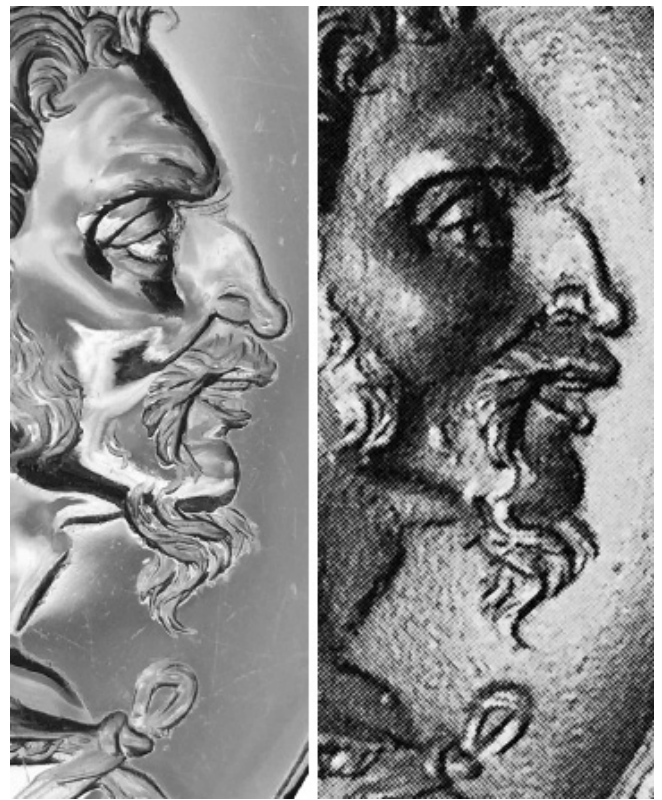


Fig. 05: A comparison: rock crystal photographed from reverse (l); Humphris example (r)

crystal this space appears wider than on the plaquette cast, however this margin is greatly reduced when taking an impression of the crystal (Fig. 07). This engraved area of the crystal belongs to the most excavated portion, dipping one or two millimeters into its surface. While the photo of the crystal from its reverse adequately translates the characteristics of the plaquette, there are certain qualities irreproducible from this method of study. Therefore, a reliance on a direct impression made from the crystal has also proven useful for comparison with the plaquette casts.

The previously discussed flaw interrupting the lock of hair, as displayed on the three above noted examples, does not translate onto other examples like one at the Bargello Museum¹² or another in the Brescia Museum.¹³



Fig. 06: A comparison: rock crystal photographed from reverse (l); Scaglia example (r)

Nor does the flaw appear on a later variation with an added inscription (Rossi 2011; Variant C), to be discussed. In these other examples the lock of hair is continuous and follows the engraved rock crystal with exactness. This distinction between the three initially noted plaquettes and these additional examples suggests at least two production incidences for the earliest casts of the plaquette. Rossi made this same observation and established a Variant A to distinguish between the two incidences of early casts derived from the prototype.¹⁴

Rossi's Variant B¹⁵ represents a later cast of the original type but adds a relief to its reverse, typically reproducing other 'antique' themed plaquettes. For example, a well circulated 'antique' *Bust of a Woman*¹⁶ is found

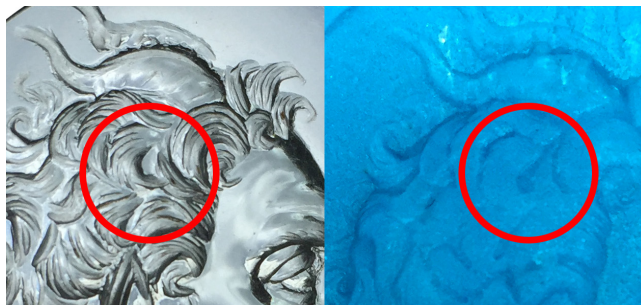


Fig. 06: A comparison: rock crystal photographed from reverse (l); an impression of the crystal (r)

on two examples of this variant as well as an antique reproduction of a Valerio Belli (1470-1546) composition on another.¹⁷ In this later variant, the plaquette takes on the seeming functionality of a medal. An example like this may have served as the inspiration for a mid-16th century painted enamel by Jean Penicaud II, featuring a bust of Pan coupled with the bust of a woman (Fig. 07).



Fig. 07: A mid-16th century painted enamel attributed to Jean Penicaud II (Louvre)

Another later cast variant of the original type adds the inscription ATILA FLAGELLUM DEI (Rossi's Variant C; Fig. 08, left)¹⁸ to the inner concave rim of the plaquette and was probably made sometime after the relief's association with Attila beginning in the very last years of the 15th century, to be discussed. An even later derivative of this type is Rossi's Variant D (Fig. 08, right)¹⁹ which reproduces a weaker cast version of the same relief but with an added rectangular flange and integral suspension loop.



Fig. 08: Rossi Variant C (left, Hungarian National Museum), Rossi Variant D (right, Buttazzoni Collection)

A hypothesis for the crystal's presence with Lorenzo

Scholars have given a general dating for the first production of the *Head of Pan* plaquettes to the last quarter of the 15th century, chiefly due to its observed appearance on a stone medallion at the Pavia Cathedral, suggesting the plaquettes must have enjoyed some degree of circulation prior to the Pavia medallion's inception.

The *Head of Pan* has generally been categorized among those plaquettes belonging to an 'antique' theme, reproduced after authentic classical or contemporaneous classically inspired gems. These 'antique' plaquettes represent some of the earliest origins for these small reliefs, undergoing production from the mid-15th century into the first decade or two of the 16th century.²⁰

Given its ascription to the last quarter of the 15th century there are but a minority of possibilities where casts of the plaquette could have reasonably emerged. Though by no means finite, the most probable options would include either an origin in Pietro Barbo's Roman workshop, known for actively churning out plaquette copies of the celebrated gems in his collection, or Lorenzo de' Medici's active Florentine studio descendent of Donatello (1386-1466) and operated by his heirs, particularly Bertoldo di Giovanni (d. 1491). Given the dating ascribed to this plaquette and a consideration of Barbo's lifespan (d. 1471) while also considering that much of Barbo's Roman production is located during the 1450s,²¹ a Florentine locus seems a reasonable possibility.

The commission of plaquettes in Donatello's late Florentine workshop, whose last projects in bronze were typically executed under the auspices of Donatello's assistants, such as Bertoldo, saw an initial production of plaquettes under Lorenzo's father, Piero de' Medici (1416-69), during the mid-15th century.²² The facture of plaquettes in Donatello's workshop may have been a response to Barbo's serial output of copies of his gems.²³ However, the Florentine workshop remained

active after Donatello and Piero's deaths and plaquettes likely continued to be produced through commissions made by Lorenzo.²⁴

Although other centers of production are possible the general understanding of plaquette production during the last half of the 15th century centers upon these two chief hotbeds of production: Florence and Rome. Rossi makes the observation that Florentine productions



Fig. 09: *The Realm of Pan* by Luca Signorelli, ca. 1490 (destroyed; formerly at the Kaiser Friedrich Museum)

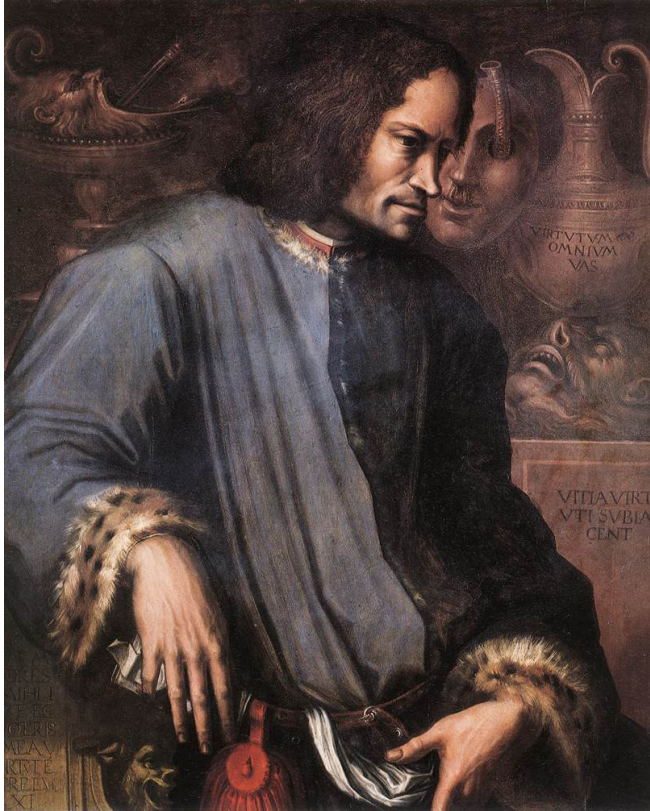


Fig. 10: *Portrait of Lorenzo the Magnificent*, by Giorgio Vasari, ca. 1533-34 (Uffizi)

“generally exist in larger editions,”²⁵ and this same observation is made by the present author, who counts thirty-seven identified examples of the *Head of Pan* plaque in its earliest state,²⁶ a quantity generally high for known specimens of the ‘antique’ variety. While Rossi’s observation is true on a general level there are also exceptions to this matter and it is by no means conclusive evidence for a Florentine origin.

Nonetheless, significant also is Lorenzo’s particular collecting focus which concentrated predominantly on Bacchic and Dionysian themes. While his collection was not the largest of its time, it happened to be one of the best, most legendary and certainly a carefully calculated

one. The incorporation of a gem featuring Pan would have made sense for Lorenzo’s collecting habits as Laurie Fusco and Gino Corti comment, “Lorenzo’s taste was particular, favoring mythological subjects, especially Dionysiac themes...subjects that evoked the world of gods, heroes, nymphs, satyrs, sileni and putti.”²⁷

Although the rock crystal is not referenced in Lorenzo’s inventories, this does not imply it did not belong to him. Rather, there are a fair number of gems that belonged to Lorenzo’s collection that were never featured in his inventories, including several important pieces we can confirm once formed part of his collection through tertiary means.²⁸

Apart from these general observations, further correlations can be suggested through an investigation of the impetus for the production of these plaquettes. What did the object mean to the owner and what purpose did plaque reproductions of it serve?

Like the production of complex allegorical themes expressed in the small reliefs cast by Riccio for the educated elite of Padua, a similar scenario may be true in the case regarding the *Head of Pan* and its meaning for Lorenzo. Apart from being facetiously addressed as Pan in his youth,²⁹ Lorenzo later adopted its substantive meaning on a more important level in his later years.³⁰

Lorenzo’s private interests are best expressed in the thematic villas he frequented in the pastoral regions outside of Florence. These were a retreat from the stresses of state politics and it is here that we find Lorenzo’s full expression of Golden Age ideals. Central to this was his retreat at the Villa Careggi, centered on Platonic morals instituted by his grandfather Cosimo

de' Medici (1434-64). During Lorenzo's reign the atmosphere and ambiance of the villa paid homage to the literary works of Virgil, of which Lorenzo was well-educated on in his youth. At the Villa Careggi, Lorenzo adopted the iconographic role of Virgil's Pan Medicus, as featured in Virgil's second *Eclogue*,³¹ becoming a Golden Age symbol and harbinger of cosmic unity.

In Careggi a literary cult dedicated to Pan was established among Lorenzo and his humanist peers who all promoted the ideals of Platonism and followed the themes championed in Virgil's *Eclogues*. Their poetic expressions were thought to infuse them with the power to connect with the divine through the process of poetry.³² Pan was revered as a deity in charge of the cycles of time, or as Lorenzo describes in his poem, defining "all that's born and dies."³³

In 1480 Lorenzo hosted a revival of Saturnalia at Careggi in lieu of celebrating his family's patron saints, an event that made indistinct the boundaries of social class and brought the ruling figures into festivity with the local peasants.³⁴ In this role, Lorenzo lived out his Pan-Arcadian fantasy as the benefactor of worldly harmony, and as the festival came to a close, and the social strata rebalanced, he again showed he was governor of "all that's born and dies."

The Villa at Careggi served as a place where Lorenzo and his companions could experience their own version of Virgil's fantastic world. The early 1480's were the zenith of this activity in which the pressure of Florentine rule prompted Lorenzo and his entourage to escape the city for the rural ambitions of their ideal world, composing their own eclogues centered around Pan and a love for nature, song and poetry. The conclusive homage

to this memory is identifiable in Lorenzo's receipt of *The Realm of Pan*, painted in 1492 by Luca Signorelli (Fig. 09). Giorgio Vasari later revives the association of Pan with Lorenzo in his posthumous portrait of him (Fig. 10), depicting the head of Pan upon a plinth with the inscription: VITIA VIRTUTI SUBJACENT, or *Virtue Overcomes Vice*. The pointed ears and open mouth of Pan recall a distant mode of the effigy featured on the engraved crystal.

Judging by the style, quality and condition of the engraved rock crystal, it is probably a late 15th century creation based on a classical motif. Lorenzo may have



Fig. 11: Bust of Pope Paul II (Pietro Barbo), carnelian intaglio by Giuliano di Scipione Amici, 1470 (Palazzo Pitti, Museo degli Argenti)



Fig. 12: Rock crystal intaglio of a Head of Pan (l); carnelian intaglio of Pope Paul II (r) (Palazzo Pitti)

commissioned such a crystal, particularly considering his Pan-centric role at the Villa Careggi and his lifelong esteem for the mythical deity. A reasonable impetus for such a commission may have been the 1480 Saturnalia event he organized, with plaquette copies being reproduced later during the 1480s as Lorenzo and his friends increased their visits to the Villa Careggi to engage in Pan-centric poetry and the idyllic pleasures of the pastoral. Such dating aligns with the current scholarship's suggestion concerning the origins of the plaquette.

Also considerable is Lorenzo's influence over the revival of antique gem engraving.³⁵ As such he certainly commissioned works to be added to his collection which would have complimented his antique acquisitions. Gem collectors kept close observation of one another regarding the movement of their objects, particularly

important ones.³⁶ For example, Lorenzo descended on Barbo's collection and was able to acquire some of his important gems following Barbo's death in 1471. As an observer of Barbo's activity its possible Lorenzo may have followed in his footsteps by commemorating the occasion of his Saturnalia not unlike how Barbo commissioned the gem engraver Giuliano di Scipione Amici to execute an engraved carnelian portrait of him in 1470 (Fig. 11), honoring the new rules he instituted for the jubilee.³⁷

While attributions are not the intended territory of this article, there are some slight corollaries between the *Head of Pan* and Barbo intaglios beyond their left-facing profile busts and shared widths. As a general rule, glyptic attributions are challenging or virtually impossible but a few similarities between the two objects are notable such as the small tuft of hair peeking from the base of Barbo's crown, rendered in a manner close to Pan's and the infinitesimally curved strokes delineating the eyebrows on each relief, engraved in like manner. Additionally, the smoothly curved contours along the edge of the noses and the modeling of the faces share a similar gelatinous-like luminous distinction. The pupils on both are carefully drilled just slightly beyond the orb of the eye and the palmettes extending from Barbo's triple-crown terminate in sharply chiseled, angular hooks in the same manner as the wild hair protruding from Pan's forehead (Fig. 12). However, the textures exhibited on each relief are quite different in their subject, making further comparisons daunting or impossible.³⁸

Nonetheless, that Amici may have been called upon to create the *Head of Pan* intaglio is certainly open to possibility. This is also sensible given the period suggested for its facture, ca. 1480. Fusco-Corti note

Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga commissioned engraved gems from Amici as late as 1483.³⁹ Amici's provision to more than one patron and collector of gems exemplifies his service to the prominent collectors of the day, probably also inclusive of Lorenzo. Amici, in addition to being a revered gem engraver, was also an antiquities dealer who helped locate antique gems for his patrons. Certainly, Amici's knowledge of antique motifs through his dealing activities would have served an ample foundation for source material through which to conceive his contemporaneous designs celebrating the antique past.

Nonetheless, the aim here is not to secure an attribution for the crystal inasmuch as to point out some observations worthy of possible exploration by others

better equipped for such tasks. In sum, it is worthwhile to note that while the plaquette casting of gems began with a reverence for and dissemination of antique objects that were unique and celebrated in their time, the reproduction of modern gems, made in the antique style, could similarly be celebrated. In particular, their distinction becomes prominent by their promulgation of a story or theme on behalf of the individual responsible for their commissioning. They could serve to enhance a commissioner's stature among their immediate peers or to the public. Lorenzo was certainly witting of this benefit, one example being his commissioned medal documenting the Pazzi conspiracy which served to strengthen the loyal support of the Florentine citizenship.

Michelangelo's *Head of a Satyr*

An additional relationship possibly linking the crystal with Lorenzo's ownership can be suggested by a hitherto unnoticed reproduction of it in a drawing by Michelangelo (1475-1564) (Fig. 13). The most recent consensus is that the drawing represents a classical bust with disheveled hair and a beard, though formerly the sketch carried the association of a satyr, as described by Johannes Wilde.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Paul Joannides interestingly noted the sketch is "intimately suited to the type of antiquarian culture absorbed by Michelangelo in the Medici household."⁴¹

The drawing is executed in two inks beginning with a grey-brown used to render the head and followed upon

later by a brown ink which completes the addition of a classicized bust. The drawing is stylistically dated to 1501-03 when Michelangelo returned to Florence from Rome.

It would appear a young Michelangelo working upon classical themes used the crystal as a reference for the face of his subject and later returned to it, adding the remainder while possibly referencing a classical sculpture. For what purpose such an exercise was intended is unknown. It could have been a simple experiment rendered on a single occasion or even years apart, as Michelangelo was known to revisit older sheets and work over them. For example, the



Fig. 13: *Head of a Satyr* by Michelangelo, ca. 1501-03 (Trustees of the British Museum; Inv. 1895,0915.495)

dating of this sketch, based upon the later brown inked portion and not the earlier inked head, is only eight or nine years removed from the time in which Michelangelo was resident in the Medici household. Contrarily, Michelangelo is known to have jumped between disparate subjects during the first years of the 16th century while undertaking a wide range of

commissions.⁴² Interestingly, we might wonder if the trimming of the sketch could be due to its association with the ovular shaped crystal. Further, perhaps the seemingly unrelated robe and drapery was an attempt by Michelangelo to convert Pan into Virgil, recalling Lorenzo's admiration for such themes.



Fig. 14: *Head of a Satyr* by Michelangelo, ca. 1501-03 (l) (Trustees of the British Museum; Inv. 1895,0915.495); rock crystal intaglio of a *Head of Pan* (r)

Suggestive that Michelangelo used the crystal as a reference and not a plaquette copy or other source is remotely implied by its left-facing profile.⁴³ The crystal may have appealed to Michelangelo due to its graphic-like qualities that offer it an illustrative appeal when viewed in proper lighting. The maniacal gaze of the subject in Michelangelo's drawing is also characteristic of the crystal. When viewed from a particular angle the eyes of Pan glow in a disconcerting fashion that is brilliantly simulated by Michelangelo's drawing (Fig. 14). Likewise, the hair toward the middle-back of the head is carved in deeper relief on the crystal, causing the hair closer to the face, in lesser relief, to gain more light when viewed at a particular angle. This may account for Michelangelo's decision not to render the extremities of the head while instead focusing on the characteristics of the face as the chief subject.

Hugo Chapman notes that Michelangelo drew inspiration from antique classical sources including "the famous collection of ancient cameos collected by the Medici."⁴⁴ Michelangelo's biographer, Ascanio Condivi (1925-74), observes how Lorenzo would "send for him many times a day and would show him his jewels,

carnelians, medals and similar things of great value."⁴⁵ Martha Dunkelman is apt to comment that a young and ambitious Michelangelo, having access to a celebrated repertoire of classical subjects would have been a "doorway into the past, a magnifying lens on the ancient culture that was still in the process of being rediscovered in his day."⁴⁶ Later in his career Michelangelo provided designs for engraved gems and Hadrien Rambach makes the fascinating suggestion, "it would be logical, if not certain, for the teenager-artist to have tried gem-engraving at least once, as an exercise, while learning his art in the Medici circle and seeing gems on a daily basis."⁴⁷

Following his admission to the Medici household in 1489, Michelangelo was tutored under Bertoldo di Giovanni, who by this time would have had a hand in the casting of plaquettes on Lorenzo's behalf. Bertoldo was not himself immune to the reproduction of Lorenzo's gem collection on reliefs crafted by his own hand, namely those he sculpted for the Palazzo Scala.⁴⁸ Similarly, the individual who first introduced Michelangelo to the Medici household's San Marco gardens, Francesco Granacci, himself is known to have sketched one of Lorenzo's gems.⁴⁹ The habit of those artists working in the vicinity of the Medici, to reproduce the family's prized gems, is a hallmark characteristic of the culture surrounding Bertoldo and his pupils.

Michelangelo appears to later reprise, unconsciously or consciously, his brief rendering of the rock crystal on a sheet depicting a *Satyr's Head* known at the Louvre (Fig. 15). Beneath the marvelous ink drawing is a head of mediocre quality reproduced in red chalk, a study by Michelangelo's student, Antonio Mini. Michael Hirst points out that the model head employed on this sheet



Fig. 15: *Head of a Satyr* by Michelangelo, aft. 1522 (Louvre)

by Mini is the same as another reproduced by a more capable student on another sheet belonging to a NY private collection.⁵⁰ Michelangelo, here investing his time in educating Mini, perhaps recalls his own early youthful exercises copying and reproducing the classical motifs featured in Lorenzo's collection. In this instance, he appears to recall the profile of Pan rendered two decades prior.

The remarkable saga of Michelangelo, Lorenzo and Pan share an interesting genesis in the first documented sculptural work by Michelangelo. The account is recorded by Condivi who recalls Michelangelo's fascination with a smiling classical marble bust of a faun in Lorenzo's garden. Michelangelo sculpts his own version in marble and while the antique counterpart's mouth was hardly recognizable due to age, Michelangelo renders his version anew "so that one could see its cavity with all the teeth."⁵¹ According to Condivi, the sculpture so entertained Lorenzo that it was the catalyst for him to adopt the young artist into his fold.



Fig. 16: Detail of *Michelangelo Showing Lorenzo il Magnifico the Head of a Faun* by Ottavio Vannini, ca. 1638-42 (Palazzo Pitti, Museo degli Argenti)

One might wonder if the crystal *Head of Pan* partly commemorates Michelangelo's lost marble *Head of a Faun*. The crystal's graphic and delicate delineation of Pan's teeth rendered into his partly open mouth is a curious feature. The event of Michelangelo's presentation to Lorenzo of his sculpted *Head of a Faun* is also much later celebrated in Ottavio Vannini's (1585-1643) fanciful fresco of the scene, executed ca. 1638-42 (Fig. 16). The subject of the sculpture appears to rely on a source related to the crystal. Whether this was happenstance or intentional is to be pondered.

Diffusion of the prototype and the vilification of Attila

There is the tendency among catalogers to identify the *Head of Pan* plaquette as *Attila the Hun as a Faun*. However, the present author suggests the motif was originally intended as an effigy of Pan,⁵² later repurposed in association with the vilification of Attila.

In consideration of the suggested dating for the origin of the crystal and its later plaquette copies, the relief would have been given ample time, following the death of Lorenzo and exile of the family from Florence in 1492, to lose its original context and meaning and eventually secure a renewed negative connotation with Attila. A stimulus for this misguided connotation would have been realized by the distribution of printed versions of *Attila Flagellum Dei*, whose first edition was published in Venice in 1477. The book includes the unsettling story of Attila's mother impregnated by her beloved dog, resulting in Attila as the offspring and taking on the attributes of a man-dog.⁵³ The origin of the story is unknown but probably derives from an oral tradition perhaps not unlike one that prompted Pope Pius II's remarks that the Huns were born of the union between women and demons.⁵⁴

With a sufficient quantity of casts of the *Head of Pan* plaquette in circulation following Lorenzo's death, it may have been only a short while before these plaquettes, lacking their intended context, instead became associated with the 'man-dog' Attila as described in the book that smeared his image.

The earliest direct link between the plaquette of Pan and a connection with Attila is found in two sources dating just before the turn of the century. Donato Contrari's inedit Venetian manuscript, *Cronaca veneta sino al 1433*, in which Attila's doggish characteristics are again noted,



Fig. 17: Detail of a manuscript, *Cronaca veneta sino al 1433* by Donato Contrari, ca. 1500 (Vienna National Library)

features along with it, Contrari's crudely rendered portrait of Attila borrowed from the plaquette of Pan which serves as its visual reference (Fig 17).⁵⁵ The inscription: ATI.LA accompanies the effigy. The plaquette of a *Head of Pan*, or a plaster impression thereof, would have logically belonged to a manuscript maker like Contrari whose craft often relied on classical source materials, of which plaquettes were a convenient device.⁵⁶ In fact, another manuscript, probably Roman and dating to the same period, is a Missal of Cardinal Antoniotto Pallavicini attributed to the Pallavicini Master which also visually references the relief (Fig. 18).



Fig. 18: Detail of an illuminated border on a Missal of Cardinal Antoniotto Pallavicini, ca. 1500 (British Library; Inv. 60630, ff. 9, 19-32 f. 29)



Fig. 19: Stone medallion of *Attila* at the Pavia Cathedral, attributed to Giovanni Antonio Amadeo, ca. 1491-98

This association by Contrari of the plaquette in correlation with Attila probably carried over or was equally given by way of tradecraft to those involved in the execution of the stone medallions at the Cathedral of Pavia, depicting a quantity of celebrated heroes from the antique past. While attributions for the makers of the medallions is foggy, Warren and Rossi note the medallion reproducing the Attila motif (Fig. 19) was most likely executed by Giovanni Antonio Amadeo ca. 1491-98. For the maker of the Attila medallion, borrowing from the plaquette model of Pan required only the addition of its inscription, *ATTILA FLAGELUM DEI*, to secure its identity with the reviled warrior. The inscription, borrowing from the book title responsible for Attila's presumed man-dog characteristics, thus served as the only contextual modifier required to hitherto displace the plaquette's original meaning and offer it a new one into the 16th century and beyond.

The unique creation of the Attila medallion, borrowing from the *Head of Pan* plaquette was not a singular occasion by the makers of the cathedral's medallions. Burnett and Schofield offer examples of how the makers borrowed designs for their reliefs from a variety of sources including antique coinage, a quantity of medals and possibly other plaquettes.⁵⁷ The ham-handedness of the medallion makers is ridiculed by the aforementioned authors for their "crimes against numismatics,"⁵⁸ observing the various blunders made in which elements from a variety of sources were mixed to derive new or simply confounded meanings on the medallions.

Following the substitution of Pan for Attila at the Pavia Cathedral, the association remains steady throughout the 16th century. It is probably shortly following the turn of the century that we find the later, but reasonable casts of the *Head of Pan* plaquette with the inscription *ATTILA FLAGELUM DEI* incised along its inner margin (see Fig. 08). From this prototype were probably cast



Fig. 20: Anonymous 16th century medal of *Attila* based on the *Head of Pan* prototype (Goodman collection)



Fig. 21: Woodcut of *Attila* by Tobias Stimmer for Paolo Giovio's *Elogia vororum bellica virtute illustrium*, 1575

the lesser quality *Head of Pan* plaquettes in which the aforementioned relief is cast integrally with a square flange and suspension loop (see Fig. 08).

These later plaquettes appear to have inspired or served as the reference for a quantity of mid-to-late 16th century medals reproducing Attila as a faun along with the inscription: ATTILA REX (Fig. 20). The reverse of these medals often feature the city of Aquileia on their reverse along with the appropriate inscription identifying the city. A number of variations occur among versions of these medals but they clearly recall an influence originating with the crystal's motif.⁵⁹ A woodcut by Tobias Stimmer for Paolo Giovio's book, *Elogia vororum bellica virtute illustrium*, published in 1575, adopts the aforementioned medal's image of Attila (Fig. 21).⁶⁰ It also could have



Fig. 22: 1894 engraving of *Attila* from Charles Horne's *Great Men and Famous Women*

served as a direct source for the medals, borrowing again from the earlier prototype.

In addition to the serially cast Aquileia medals there is a less common Italian medal portraying a fictive bust of Attila, either modeled after or serving as the model for a *Cosmographica* woodcut printed, ca. 1580. At the close of the 17th century, Giovanni Bonazza (1654-1736), or someone belonging to his circle, also created a stylized interpretation of the design in bronze relief.

The portrayal of Attila as a faun continued up through the end of the 19th century via the distribution of engraved

prints based on these earlier models. One late example is an engraving from Charles Horne's 1894 edition of *Great Men and Famous Women* (Fig. 22).

Conclusion

It's remarkable to consider that a small glyptic the size of a mere thumbprint could later serve as the prototypical man-beast Western consciousness has come to understand as the great warrior barbarian Attila. It certainly serves as an example of how the development of varied media over time served to reproduce and deliver certain physiognomies of history and culture, a testament to the iconographical power of glyptics. This idea is not too far a stretch for the imagination when we consider how profoundly impacting the marginalized art of the miniature has impacted human emotion and awareness. For example, we may consider Dunkelman's novel observation that one of the Western world's most revered images of the divine, that of a horizontally extended God in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* (Sistine Chapel), is not necessarily the unique invention of Michelangelo's genius but a homage to the *Etesian Winds* depicted on the most celebrated carved stone of the Italian Renaissance, the *Tazza Farnese*.⁶¹ To consider such a powerful painting borrows from no less than a detail of about 3½ inches exemplifies the impact these small objects had on the lives of artists, patrons and the populace of both past and present.

While the most conclusive survey of this article involves the validation of the crystal as the source for its derivative plaquette copies, we can only reasonably hypothesize on its origins and purpose. As no inventory lists examined by the present author mention a specific rock crystal intaglio of this type among the important collections of the period, it is the present author's hope to at best vindicate the object's meaning from its indecorous association with Attila and restore its possible significance as a symbol for the Golden Age vision Lorenzo de' Medici so importantly dedicated his life to, lest the plaquette's meaning lamentably is 'born and dies.'

Endnotes

- 1 The located cameo was that of *Ceres and Triptolemus*. For a discussion of the cameo and its plaquette reproductions see: Riddick, Michael (accessed April 2016) *Ceres and Triptolemus*. renbronze.com/2013/11/15/ceres-and-triptolemus-5/
- 2 Boardman, John (accessed April 2016). *The Marlborough Gems*. beazley.ox.ac.uk/gems/marlborough/boardman.htm
- 3 While the association of the present crystal with Lorenzo is later to be discussed, it's notable the original mount is lost, a trait common to those objects once associated with Lorenzo's collection and others as well. That the crystal has been preserved in a fine frame also indicates its importance was once understood.
- 4 Molinier, Emile (1886). *Les Bronzes de la Renaissance: Les Plaquettes*. 2 Vols. Paris, France; p. 23, No. 41
- 5 Rossi, Francesco (2011). *La Collezione Mario Scaglia – Placchette*, Vols. I-III. Lubrina Editore, Bergamo; pp. 55-56; No. I.22
- 6 Warren, Jeremy (2014). *Medieval and Renaissance Sculpture in the Ashmolean Museum, Vol III, Plaquettes*. Ashmolean Museum, UK; pp. 911-912; No. 372
- 7 Sothebys sale, 12 April 1990; Lot 182
- 8 Rossi (2011). *ibid.*
- 9 Sothebys sale, 11 Jan 1995; No. 281
- 10 Special thanks to Neil Goodman (ilquattrocento.com) for communicating this observation (email, April 2016)
- 11 Rossi, Francesco (1974). *Placchette*. Sec. XV-XIX. Neri Pozza Editore, Vicenza, Italy; pp. 6-7; No. 9
- 12 Toderi, Giuseppe and Fiorenza Vannel (1996). *Placchette Secoli XV-XVIII, Museo Nazionale del Bargello*. Studio per Edizioni Scelte, Firenze, Italy; pp. 28-29; No. 28
- 13 Rossi (1974). *ibid.*; No. 8
- 14 Rossi (2011). *ibid.*
- 15 Rossi (2011). *ibid.*
- 16 See Toderi-Vannel (1996) No. 48R for an example in which the antique *Bust of a Woman* is featured with an antique bust of *Minerva* on its opposing side.
- 17 Rossi (2011). *ibid.*
- 18 Rossi (2011). *ibid.*
- 19 Rossi (2011). *ibid.*
- 20 For a discussion of this see: Rossi, Francesco (1989). *Le Gemme Antiche e le Origini della Placchetta*. Vol. 22 *Studies in the History of Art. Italian Plaquettes*. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.; pp. 55-69
- 21 Lewis, Doug (2006). *Placchette e rilievi di bronzo nell'età del Mantegna, Mantova e Milano* (Rossi, Francesco, ed.) Skira; pp. 3-15
- 22 For a discussion of this see: Riddick, Michael (accessed April 2016). *Bacchus Discover Ariadne on Naxos (Freehand Variant)*. renbronze.com/2015/01/10/bacchus-discovering-ariadne-on-naxos-freehand-variant/
- 23 Lewis, Doug (2001). *Rehabilitating a Fallen Athlete: Evidence for a Date of 1453-54 in the Veneto for the Bust of a Platonic Youth by Donatello*. *Studies in the History of Art*, No. 62. *National Gallery of Art*. Yale University Press.
- 24 Lorenzo was certainly active in the commissioning of bronze medals during the 1480s and the existence of plaquettes cast after gems belonging to his collection is accepted, notwithstanding the existence of a small quantity of bronze casts of his *Apollo and Marsyas* gem, reproducing his incised *ex gemmae* thereupon.
- 25 Rossi (1989). *ibid.*
- 26 Riddick, Michael (accessed April 2016). *Head of Pan (Attila)*. renbronze.com/2015/05/21/bust-of-attila-the-hun-as-a-faun-faunus-ficarius/
- 27 Fusco, Laurie; Corti, Gino (2006). *Lorenzo de' Medici: Collector and Antiquarian*. Cambridge University Press; p. 96
- 28 *ibid.*
- 29 Ruff, Allan (2015). *Arcadian Visions: Pastoral Influences on Poetry, Painting and the Design of Landscape*. Windgather Press, UK; p. 31
- 30 An early instance of Lorenzo's homage to Pan is found in his poem, *Laltercazione* (also called *De Summo Bono*), written at age twenty. For more details see: McStay, Heather O'Leary (2014). *Viva Baccho e viva Amore: Bacchic Imagery in the Renaissance*. Columbia University; p. 14
- 31 Ruff (2015). *ibid.*
- 32 Hall, Kathryn Frances (2009). *Pan's Follower: Baccio Bandinelli's Villano Statue at the Boboli Garden*. Wofford College; pp. 18-19
- 33 McStay (2014); p. 322
- 34 Hall (2009); p. 19
- 35 In 1477 Lorenzo brought the medallist Pietro de' Neri Razzanti (b. 1425) to Florence to teach gem engraving in the hopes of making Florence another center for the high quality output of the art form (see 2006 *Grove Encyclopedia of Decorative Arts*, Vol. 1; p. 411). Contemporary gems, after the antique, did form part of Lorenzo's collection, as observed in several of the Medici gems at the Archeological Museum of Naples.
- 36 Fusco-Corti (2006); p. 186
- 37 Gennaioli, Riccardo (2012). *Gems of the Medici*. Florence; p. 34
- 38 The present author wishes to interject here that the *Head of Pan* also bears a close stylistic affinity with a widely diffused plaquette of Julius Caesar (see Toderi-Vannel [1996] Nos. 29-31) that is confidently associated with a production tied to Barbo in Rome. The present author posits the idea this *Caesar* plaquette is possibly derived from a Renaissance intaglio probably by the same hand responsible for the *Head of Pan*, possibly Amici.
- 39 Fusco-Corti (2006); pp. 182-83
- 40 Wilde, Johannes (1953). *Italian Drawings in the British Museum, Michelangelo and his School*. London; pp. 3-4; No. 02

- 41 Joannides, Paul (1999). In the exhibit catalog (K.Weil-Garris Brandt and C. Acidini Luchinat eds), Florence, Palazzo Vecchio and Casa Buonarroti, 'Giovinezza di Michelangelo'; p. 222; No. 13
- 42 Chapman, Hugo (2005). *Michelangelo Drawings: Closer to the Master*. Yale University Press; pp. 67-69
- 43 The Medici family were expelled from Florence in 1494 and the disruption of their collection is complex (see Fusco-Corti [2006] Chapter 7). Depending on the firm date of the sketch of the head on this sheet, it is impossible to say where, when or through what means Michelangelo would have accessed the crystal. While expelled, a portion of the Medici gem collection was kept in Rome, however, some objects could have been easily removed by the exiled family upon their departure and it is known numerous of their loyal friends kept portions probably still in Florence during the presently dated time of Michelangelo's drawing, ca. 1501-03. Additionally, Michelangelo remained in touch with Piero de' Cosimo (Lorenzo's son and successor) before and during the Medici exile, and Piero is documented by Vasari as relying upon Michelangelo for his expertise when making purchases of antique gems.
- 44 Chapman (2005); p. 63
- 45 Ascanio Condivi (1553). *The Life of Michelangelo*. Alice Sedgwick Wohl (trans., 1976), Hellmut Wohl (ed.), Baton Rouge; p. 13
- 46 Dunkelman, Martha (2010). *From Microcosm to Macrocosm: Michelangelo and Ancient Gems*. Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte, 73(3), pp. 363-376
- 47 Rambach, Hadrien (2011). Apollo and Marsyas on engraved gems and medals. *Jahrbuch für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte*, No. 61; pp. 144-45
- 48 Fusco-Corti (2006); p. 106
- 49 *ibid.*; p. 104
- 50 Hirst, Michael (1988). *Michelangelo and His Drawings*. Yale University Press; plates 17-18
- 51 Fusco-Corti (2006); pp. 56-62
- 52 Agreed upon also by Pietro Cannata. See: Cannata, Pietro (1981-2000). *Piccoli Bronzi Rinascimentali e Barocchi del Museo Oliveriano di Pesaro*. Studia Oliveriana (Serie II 1981-2000), Vol. VI-VII.
- 53 Burnett, A., & Schofield, R. (1997). *The Medallions of the "Basamento" of the Certosa di Pavia. Sources and Influence*. Arte Lombarda, (120 [2]); p. 7
- 54 Maenchen-Helfen, J. Otto; ed. Knight, Max (1973). *The World of the Huns: Studies in Their History and Culture*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press; pp. 5, 9-17
- 55 Brown, Patricia Fortini (1997). *Venice & Antiquity: The Venetian Sense of the Past*. Yale University Press; p. 146
- 56 Leino, Marika (2013). *Fashion, Devotion and Contemplation. The Status and Functions of Italian Renaissance Plaquettes*. Peter Lang, Bern, Switzerland; pp. 72-80
- 57 Burnett- Schofield (1997) *ibid.*
- 58 *ibid.*; p. 8
- 59 Rossi (2011). *ibid.*
- 60 Bietenholz, Peter (1994). *Historia and Fabula: Myths and Legends in Historical Thought from Antiquity to the Modern Age*. Brill Press; p. 205
- 61 Dunkelman (2010). *ibid.*