

THE SCHOOL OF SALVIATI AND THE ILLUSTRATIONS TO THE CHIRURGIA OF VIDUS VIDIUS, 1544

by

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FIFTY years ago the Bibliothèque Nationale published a series of facsimiles, slightly reduced, of the illustrations from their Latin manuscript 6866. This was the translation of a collection of Greek surgical texts, which were published by Vidus Vidius in 1544, and these illustrations are the ones upon which the woodcuts in this edition were presumably based. This series of facsimiles was preceded by an Introduction by H.O. (mont), which, with its wealth of detail and valuable references, has served as the foundation for all subsequent studies on this aspect of Vidus Vidius's work. The account given is a remarkable one, but it is only as one studies it more closely that one becomes aware of certain difficulties only partially resolved. It is with these difficulties and their solution that this paper is concerned.

They arise in the main from two assumptions put forward by Omont: namely, that the original manuscript purchased by John Lascaris was soon acquired (*bientot acquis*) by Cardinal Ridolfi, and that the references in the manuscript version to Joannes Santorinos of Rhodes and Primaticcio of Bologna enable one to attribute the drawings in the Greek and Latin manuscript versions in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Greek 2247; Latin 6866) to Santorinos and Primaticcio respectively.

The former assumption fails to account for the presence of the original manuscript in the Laurentian Library in Florence rather than in the Bibliothèque Nationale, unless we assume apparent dishonesty both on the part of Lascaris, who, it is suggested, sold it to the Cardinal Ridolfi, and on the part of Vidus Vidius, who failed either to present it to Francis the First or, alternatively, to return it to Cardinal Ridolfi, but brought it back to Florence with him when he left France.

The second assumption disregards the close similarity that exists between many of the two sets of drawings in the Latin and Greek manuscript versions in the Bibliothèque Nationale. So close a resemblance argues a remarkable skill on the part of the technicians employed by Auer and a close adherence to an original series of drawings. All are in pen, brown ink and brown wash. Two styles may be distinguished, coarse and fine, depending on the thickness of the stroke. A similar style may be employed throughout a drawing or the two styles may mingle; and a similar distinction is maintained in the copies. Such is the skill shown that where differences occur it may as a rule be assumed they are intentional. Some are trivial, others derive from the difficulty in portraying simultaneously figures prone and erect, a difficulty solved in one group by

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portraying the extension bed as vertical, rather than horizontal. Not perhaps a very satisfactory device, but that adopted in the woodcuts in the printed edition. On the other hand, the whole series differs markedly from the original miniatures and if, as Omont states, the artist had them before him, the liberties he has taken are remarkable.

The original manuscript is one of forty-four bought by John Lascaris for Lorenzo the Magnificent on the occasion of his second journey in 1491 to Constantinople. The actual collection was at Crete, and the purchase was completed at Candy on 5 April 1492 at a total cost of 405 ducats, within a few days of the rather unexpected death of Lorenzo in Florence. On his return, however, Lascaris was confirmed in his position as head of the Laurentian Library by Peter de Medicis, from whom he enjoyed the same privileges as he had had from his father. There are then no reasons for believing that this purchase was disclaimed and the books left on his hands but, on the contrary, good reasons for thinking that they were added to the valuable collection that Lorenzo had formed. Unless then Lascaris stole the book at the time the library was despoiled a few years later, he would never have been in a position to sell it to the Cardinal Ridolfi.

The Medicis Palace was looted in 1494, when Peter de Medicis failed to prevent the entry of Charles VIII into the city and was, with the rest of his family, expelled. Owing to the efforts of the young cardinal, his brother, as much as possible of the library was saved and was smuggled to the Convent of San Marco. A year later Lascaris was employed by the city to draw up an inventory of these books, which were sold the following year to the monks for 3,000 ducats. Subsequent to the death of Savonarola they in turn became discredited, and the young cardinal, soon to become Pope Leo X, bought back the collection he had helped to save and removed it in 1508 to Rome.

While it is true that in February 1496 the government of Florence wrote to Lascaris suggesting that he might have in his possession certain manuscripts belonging to the collection, there is no evidence that this was so, or that he had in fact purloined any of them, and one of Leo X's first actions as Pope was to call Lascaris to his side, which he would scarcely have done had he believed him guilty of such an act, still less had he actually sold such a book from the collection he so valued to Ridolfi, Leo's own cousin, whom he had made Cardinal in 1517.

I believe then that we may assume that the original manuscript remained in the Medicean Library at Rome, and that together with the rest of the collection it passed to another of Leo's cousins, Clement VII, who subsequently transferred it once more to Florence and provided for its future security.

Cardinal Ridolfi did, however, acquire the books and manuscripts belonging to Lascaris after his death in 1535, and these were added to that famous library, which, on his death in 1550, was purchased by Marshal Strozzi, a relative of Catherine de Medicis and of the Cardinal. On the marshal's death, Catherine in turn purchased the library but, it would seem, neglected to honour her bargain and, on her death, her library was by letter patent, on 14 June 1594,

made crown property, and thus saved from falling into the hands of her creditors. Now amongst these books is another copy (Greek MS. 2248) of the original manuscript with which we are concerned. This is, I believe, the version Ridolfi purchased from Lascaris, the working copy which he had prepared for publication and the one on which the Greek version (2247) is based. It is obviously the earlier of the two, though, as happened to so many of Catherine's books, it has been re-bound. Its preparation entailed constant reference to the original manuscript, which may well, therefore, have been in Lascaris's care at the time of his death, and so passed into that of Cardinal Ridolfi.

This is presumably the old manuscript referred to by Vidus Vidius, but it is clear from lines quoted by Schöne* that it was still considered as belonging to the Medicean Library, which had passed into the possession of Clement VII, and that his was the credit of 'making it common property and so ensuring that the art of the physician should be as safe and sound as aforesaid'.

The first volume represents then a fair copy, presumably prepared by Lascaris himself, to whom we owe so many first editions of the Greek classics, for the printer. It would appear that there was originally no intention of illustrating it, for there are no illustrations in the text as in the original Laurentian manuscript or in the other versions but, at the end, there is a collection of very amateurish drawings, which are clearly derived, nevertheless, from those in the original.

Where the originals are intact, they follow them closely, where they are defaced, they make good the deficiency, and on occasions where they appear to be lacking, they supply the want. They are clearly based on a knowledge of the Greek text and, where the originals are obscure, serve to clarify their meaning. Lascaris was amongst the first to appreciate their didactic value, for the following epigram, though published in the later version long after his death, can only apply to these drawings and not to those in the later version, as Omont assumes.

By John Lascaris to John Santorinos of Rhodes

who again made clear by his keen intellect these long obscure diagrams of the healing art

From Thera originally as strangers to holy Rhodes (came) the ancestors of Santorinos, whose fame is widespread: and he himself is the noblest of men, and among the famous not without need of honour: he who alone hunted down a prize that brought gain to the world, who fashioned stands, loops, fastenings of stretched bandages of universal use, so doing grace to his godlike sire.

This appears to be the older version referred to by Bandini, though it is by no means as old as he had supposed, and these, we suggest, the pictures treated in so cavalier a fashion by the artist employed to make a new set of drawings.

The copy that the Cardinal had acquired was one already prepared for the printer by Lascaris, whom he had known for many years. The Cardinal, moreover, had provided a home for many of the young Greek scholars selected by Lascaris for the Hellenic School founded by Leo X. One of these, Matthaeus

* Schöne, p. xxi.



Drawing ascribed to the School of Salviati.
No. 1139.

NOTE ON ILLUSTRATIONS

Two drawings having much in common with the original drawings used by Vidus Vidius for his book. One (1139) is in the fine manner and the other (1140) in the coarse. Both are ascribed to the School of Salviati and are published with the kind permission of the Directress of the Cabinet of Drawings and Prints, the Uffizi, Florence.



Drawing ascribed to the School of Salviati.
No. 1140.

Devarius of Corfu, was now his librarian. It was natural that he should seek to have the book published without further delay and inevitable that he should turn to Francis I, to whose party he and his cousin, Cardinal Salviati, were becoming irretrievably committed.

The Sack of Rome in 1527 by the Imperial troops had brought untold suffering to Italy and so great a diminution in her wealth that she could no longer afford her munificent patronage of the arts and of scholarships. It was right, therefore, that Francis I should be urged to play a similar role, the need for which was so clearly expressed in his own letter patent to Neobar, published on 17 January 1539. Without patronage and subsidy it was becoming impossible to publish the first editions of the Greek manuscripts, which were essential if knowledge of the past was not going to perish in the troubled Europe of those times.

The king's intention, so clearly expressed, led to the rapid accumulation of Greek manuscripts. Jerome Fondulus, who had been the private secretary and personal friend of the great bibliophile, Cardinal Salviati, and was now the Dauphin's tutor, was one of his most active advisors and agents. His ambassadors in Rome and Venice, d'Armagnac, bishop of Rodez, and Pellicier, bishop of Montpellier, were instructed to buy those for sale and whenever possible to have copies made of those which were not. For this purpose Pellicier is said to have kept twelve copiers permanently employed in his household in Venice, while d'Armagnac in Rome made use of the workshop of Christopher Auer. Many private individuals sent him manuscripts as gifts and in particular Francis Asulanus.

This important text, which was also of such practical value, was likely, therefore, on all counts to appeal to the king of France. If Vidus Vadius, a member of the Cardinal's household in much the same way as Rabelais was of the Cardinal du Bellay's, was, with his librarian Devaris, the obvious person to prepare the translation, Auer was an obvious choice for the preparation of the presentation copies for the king and during the next few years George d'Armagnac would employ him in the same way on a further fourteen Greek texts. The choice of the artist was probably no less evident.

It has been suggested because of a brief reference to Primaticcio, confined to the manuscript version, that these originals are by this artist, but Vidus Vadius does no more than state that, amongst others, John Santorinos of Rhodes had been a witness of the trouble he had gone to in preparing them, as had Primaticcio of Bologna, and that he had used their work on occasions. This falls far short of acknowledging these two as the artists responsible for these lovely drawings, the assumption Omont would have us make, nor is it probable that at this juncture Vidus Vadius would go out of his way to belittle the assistance he might have received from his two influential friends: Santorinos, the personal friend of the Cardinal, Primaticcio, the chief of the king's painters. He seems, nevertheless, to have been anxious to define their respective roles as being those of onlookers, who occasionally helped, rather than those of active participants.

There are some reasons, both on stylistic grounds and simple considerations

of space and time, which render it exceedingly unlikely that Primaticcio could have played any important role in their production. For, though he was for a short time in Rome in 1540, engaged in making extensive collections of antiques for the king of France, it is doubtful whether he had at that time sufficient leisure to undertake these drawings, though on one occasion he may have helped. It is more likely that the artist concerned in making the drawings was one attached to Cardinal Salviati's household, in much the same way as Vidus Vidius and Devaris were to that of Cardinal Ridolfi. Vasari tells us that at about this time this artist, Francesco Rosso, so closely associated with the Cardinal that he is now commonly known as Francesco Salviati, had been employed by Giulio Camillo to illustrate his book for dispatch to the king of France, and this in itself renders it likely that he would be called upon to play a similar part in the preparation of these two texts, which were also designed for presentation to the king. For Salviati was known to be highly esteemed by him and actively supported by Aretino, with whom Giulio Camillo was, as Adhémar points out, also familiar.

They have certain distinguishing and recurrent features, such as the crouching figure of the bearded assistant and the rather Asiatic face of one of the patients, which one encounters from time to time in the drawings of Salviati, but not in those of Primaticcio and the drawings as a whole have little of the latter's languorous and characteristic grace. They do not appear to have been done by Perino del Vaga, who had recently returned to Rome, to whom Vidus Vidius might well have had recourse, for he was one of his uncle Ghirlandaio's best pupils, for again they have little more than a hint of Perino's peculiar and rather decadent elegance. On the other hand, as one turns over the vast collection of Salviati's drawings at the Uffizi, one is at last conscious of coming very close to the original drawings used by Vidus Vidius for his book, and it is in this collection that I finally came across the two drawings that are so obviously from the same hand, one of which is in the fine manner and one in the coarse. They are classified under the heading of Salviati and his school, and the attribution to Salviati himself is not certain.

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