ASPECTS OF ART LECTURE

THE ITALIAN PLAQUETTE

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I WAS asked as I came into this room, 'What are plaquettes?' The answer is that plaquettes are little single-sided bronze reliefs which were part of the fabric of Renaissance life. If you wrote a letter, the box from which you took your pen might have a plaquette on the lid. As likely as not the inkstand would also be decorated with plaquettes, and your pounce-box would again be ornamented with reliefs. You might wear one in your cap or round your neck, and there might be another on the pommel of your dagger or your sword. In the room in which you slept there could have been a lamp with a plaquette of a Sacrifice to Cupid or Priapus on the lid, and alongside it might have stood one of those small bronze tabernacles with a plaquette of the Pietà or the Virgin and Child, which are nowadays called paxes though many of them must have been intended for domestic use.

The fact that it was planned for general currency determined the character of the art form. Whereas with medals the emblem or allegory on the back refers to the status or career or character of the person who is represented on the front, the imagery of plaquettes is non-specific. In those reliefs in which the subject-matter is not religious, the artist's aim was to establish visual metaphors of the principles of conduct of his time. There were types of courage. It might be Marcus Curtius leaping into the chasm, or Horatius Cocles defending the bridge. It might be David triumphant over Goliath, or it might in Florence be the linked figures of David and Judith on a plaquette in Washington, which is unaccountably explained by scholars as Judith and Mercury.[1] Courage implied Rectitude, and it is Rectitude

[1] E. Molinier, *Les Plaquettes: Catalogue raisonné*, 2 vols. (1886), no. 496 (as North Italian). Ricci, *The Gustave Dreyfus Collection: Reliefs and Plaquettes* (1931), no. 295 (as North Italian). Bode, in *Berliner Museen: Amtliche Berichte*, xxxvii (1915–16), c. 258 (as Moderno). Bange, Staatliche Museen zu

that is depicted in a plaquette by the master signing IO. F.F. of two lions attacking a naked youth with the legend: ET SI CORPUS NON FIDES MACULABITUR.[1] Further down the spectrum, in a plaquette by the same artist showing a bull barring the path of a lion,[2] Rectitude becomes the ox-like virtue of Constancy. There are allegories of Decency, like the story of the king's son refusing to shoot arrows at his father's corpse, which is shown in a North Italian plaquette generally described as a Martyrdom of St. Sebastian,[3] allegories of Restraint, like that series of admonitory plaquettes by Riccio, which show the Drunkenness of Silenus, a Bacchanal of drunken children, and a third scene where Virtue, on the right, is veiled.[4] A whole group of plaquettes has as its subject the allegory of the virtuous life, and its end product, Fame.

In the mythology of the plaquette, however, there was one weapon against which Rectitude and Courage were of no avail, and the scene of Vulcan forging the Arrows of Cupid is depicted on a very large number of reliefs. Sometimes it was worked out with great imagination, as in a beautiful relief by Riccio where Venus holds a smouldering torch,[5] and sometimes it was treated much less delicately, as in a Mantuan cap-badge, where Venus brandishes the bow of Cupid and the moral is pointed with the triumphant motto AMOR VINCIT OMNIA.[6] Love, of course, did triumph, in Rome between a double row of figures, of which that behind, to judge from its diagonal accent, was inspired by a spiral columnar relief,[7] in Venice on a shield raised by putti from the Saturn Throne.[8] Only one force indeed could counter this triumphal progress, and that was Chastity, who could confiscate

Berlin: *Die italienischen Bronzen der Renaissance und des Barock*, zweiter Teil: *Reliefs und Plaketten* (1922), no. 499 (as Moderno).

[1] Molinier, no. 630. Ricci, no. 312.

[2] Molinier, no. 511. Bange, no. 703. Ricci, no. 294.

[3] Molinier, no. 477. Ricci, no. 289.

[4] Complete versions exist in the National Gallery of Art in Washington (A. 216.57C) and in Berlin. The third of the three reliefs has also been described (Bange, no. 377) as an allegory of Fate.

[5] Molinier, no. 226. A unique version exists in Washington (A. 412.135B).

[6] Molinier, no. 482 (as North Italian, end of the fifteenth century). Bange, no. 544 (as Paduan, *c.* 1520).

[7] A unique version in Washington (A. 296.19B) is attributed by Migeon (in *Les Arts*, no. 80 (August 1908), p. 16) to Filarete and is classified by Ricci (no. 19) as Florentine.

[8] Molinier, no. 78 (as school of Donatello). A North Italian origin for the plaquette is postulated by Planiscig (*Die Estensische Kunstsammlung* (1919), no. 378).

the bow of Cupid and drag Venus by her hair.[1] You may feel all this is rather trite, for we have been conditioned to believe that meaning in Renaissance works of art is invariably arcane. So I repeat once more that these plaquettes fulfilled their function only if they were understood.

Their appeal extended far beyond the boundaries of the locality or country in which they were produced. Once coined, a moral type spread with astonishing rapidity. A plaquette by Francesco di Giorgio is reproduced in marble on the façade of the Certosa at Pavia, plaquettes are copied on the doorway from the Palazzo Stanga at Cremona in the Louvre, and plaquettes appear again at the bottom of the Porta della Rana of Como Cathedral. Where the marble copy is datable, it naturally throws some light on the date of the plaquette. Most of the instances of the direct copying of plaquettes in marble occur in the magpie culture of Lombardy, and from Lombardy the practice was transferred to France, to Dijon, and Pagny, and Orleans, and Blois, and Tours, and Chartres. I shall not go into that point in detail here, since it is amply discussed in the great book on plaquettes by Molinier,[2] and most of the French imitations are, in any case, so late as not to affect the dating of the plaquettes. More curious is the response that they evoked in Germany, where replicas were made in lead and where they were adapted by Weiditz and other artists. The most vivid tribute to the vogue of the plaquette north of the Alps is the painting of *Esther before Ahasuerus* by Burgkmair in Munich (Pl. I), which was painted for William IV of Bavaria in 1528. The setting is an open hall supported by square piers, and at the top of each of them, below the capital, and at the bottom, above the base, there are grisaille reliefs. Classical reliefs we might assume, until we look at them more closely and find that each reproduces a plaquette. Above the doorway on the right is the Moderno Hercules and the Nemean Lion, on the central pier are two plaquettes by the master signing IO. F.F., on the piers behind are a Milanese plaquette of a triumph and the right half of the Pseudo-Fra Antonio da Brescia's popular Abundance and a Satyr, and on the three piers on the left are the left half of the Abundance and a Satyr, an Allegory of

[1] Ricci, no. 50 (as Florentine, fifteenth century). The correct attribution to the master signing IO. F.F. is advanced by Maclagan (Victoria and Albert Museum: *Catalogue of Italian Plaquettes* (1924), p. 55) on the strength of partly effaced inscriptions on examples in the Victoria and Albert Museum and at Modena.

[2] Molinier, i, pp. xxi–xxvi.

Virtue by Riccio, Caradosso's Hercules and Cacus and the Orpheus plaquette of the Pseudo-Melioli. In the companion painting by Burgkmair of the Battle of Cannae the central group is taken directly from a Moderno plaquette.[1]

When did the making of plaquettes begin, and how was it distributed? If those questions had been asked thirty or forty years ago, the answers would at least have been clear cut. The plaquette, the reply would have gone, was created by Donatello, and most of the surviving examples were made in Padua, except for some casts from classical gems which were all made in Florence. Ricci's great catalogue of the plaquettes in the Dreyfus collection is, for example, based on those three postulates. But I doubt if any of them is quite correct. The supposed Paduan predominance in the field of the plaquette is a matter of assumption, not of fact; Rome was a much more important centre than Florence for the casting of plaquettes after the antique; and there is only one plaquette that is firmly associable with Donatello.[2] The Donatello plaquette (Pl. II*a*) shows the Virgin and Child, and the Virgin's profile has been compared, again and again, with the Pazzi Madonna in Berlin. More decisive for Donatello's authorship is the cutting of the huge halo just above the level of the head, which we find again in an authentic work in marble, the Madonna of the Clouds. We cannot, of course, be absolutely certain that the relief was designed as a plaquette, and is not a reduction from some lost larger work, but we also know it as a coloured cartapesta squeeze in a pigmented tabernacle which cannot have been made much later than the early 1440's or much earlier than 1435,[3] so we are bound to infer that the plaquette was sanctioned, if it was not actually cast, by Donatello.

We know too that after his return to Florence from Padua, in the 1450's, Donatello made a circular relief; it was in bronze and the size of a small soup-plate, and he gave it in 1456 to his doctor Giovanni Chellini.[4] Two round reliefs by Donatello of

[1] A careful analysis of the plaquettes is given in *Burgkmair-Ausstellung* (Augsburg, 1931), no. 30, pp. 24–25.

[2] Molinier, no. 65. For the attribution to Donatello see Bode, in *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, v (1884), pp. 22–23, and Kauffmann (*Donatello* (1935), pp. 218–19).

[3] Victoria and Albert Museum, A. 45–1926. The frame is ascribed by Pouncey (in *Burlington Magazine*, lxxxviii (1946), p. 221) to Paolo Schiavo, and is plausibly assigned to a date soon after 1436.

[4] Lightbown, in *Bollettino della Accademia degli Euteleti della Città di San Miniato* (1963), no. 35, pp. 19–20.

this date do actually survive, though they are both omitted from the standard monographs. One of them is a beautiful relief in Washington (Pl. II*b*),[1] where the figures are shown in a circular window in perspective, just as they are in the marble relief outside Siena Cathedral, and a bulging balustrade is used as a counterpoise to the circular frame. In this device the relief recalls the San Lorenzo pulpits, and it is indeed a work of precisely the same time. The second relief, in Vienna, is spatially less striking, and its forms are blunted by coarse gilding, but the impress of Donatello's mind can be traced on every fold. This too is a work of the last years of Donatello's life, as the marble frame is there to testify; it was carved in Florence in the 1460's by Francesco di Simone, and must have been designed for the relief within a year or two of Donatello's death.[2] But both these works were made only in single versions, and there is no proof at all that at this late date Donatello was concerned with the casting of plaquettes.

What evidence there is suggests that the commercial manufacture of plaquettes began in Rome, not Florence, and was inspired by the collection of Pope Paul II. In 1457, long before his election to the papacy, he already owned 240 gems,[3] and we know that casts were made from them, because one bronze plaquette reproduces a classical intaglio with the Pope's arms as Cardinal. After the Pope's death in 1471 his gems became the property of Lorenzo de' Medici, and many of them still bear Lorenzo's name. But plaquettes were cast from some of them before Lorenzo's name was added, and those too must have been made in Rome. So these little reliefs really were a product of the same aggressively classicizing taste as Filarete's reduction from the Marcus Aurelius, the first datable small bronze.

The meaning of these casts from the antique was frequently in doubt. We know, for example, from the inventory of the collection of Pope Paul II that it contained a gem with a naked man standing before a seated female figure. Nowadays the plaquette based on it is described as Ceres and Triptolemus, but in the only inscribed version the female figure is named as Juno and

[1] Washington, A. 285.8B. The correct attribution to Donatello was advanced initially by Bode (*Florentiner Bildhauer der Renaissance* (1921), p. 119), who later (*Bertoldo* (1925), pp. 69–70) reassigned the relief to Bertoldo.

[2] A connexion with Francesco di Simone is correctly claimed by Hermann (in *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, n.f. xvii (1906), p. 91), but is rejected by Planiscig (op. cit., no. 91) in favour of a hypothetical Paduan origin.

[3] Müntz, in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (1876), pp. 175–6, (1877), pp. 98–104, and in *Revue archéologique* (1876), p. 173, (1878), pp. 87–92.

the scene is identified as 'Junonis consilium.'[1] So it is extremely difficult to tell whether the meaning that is attached to these images today is really the same meaning that was attached to them in the fifteenth century. Without these reproductions classical gems would undoubtedly have exercised a more restricted influence. In the Museo Nazionale in Florence there is a bronze bust of about 1460 ascribed to Donatello in which the sitter wears a medallion, with a winged youth driving a biga, round his neck. The medallion has been explained as a Platonic image of the soul,[2] probably correctly since the motif occurs again about 1465 in a funerary context on Rossellino's tomb of the Cardinal of Portugal in San Miniato al Monte. In both cases the source was a plaquette seemingly made from a gem which was in Rome in the collection of Pope Paul II.[3]

Moreover, the meaning of the symbol was apt to change. I shall take just one example of the sort of problem that is involved. This plaquette (Pl. III*a*), which was made in Mantua by an artist who was at one time confused with Melioli the medallist, is based on a lost classical gem.[4] It shows a sleeping youth seated on a corselet approached by a naked warrior with a shield in one hand and a trophy in the other; on the right on a column stands a little figure of Eros with a bow and arrow in his hands. Perhaps the artist has conceived the youth as dreaming of military prowess and of love. The same scheme recurs in a second contemporary plaquette by the master signing IO. F.F. (Pl. III*b*),[5] but this time with a difference; a lion's head is substituted for the corselet, and the figure in the centre, no longer a soldier, proffers Bacchic sacrificial emblems to the sleeping boy. One sympathizes with Ricci when, in despair, he described the subject as 'Two Hunters'. But in this case the youth is manifestly Hercules, and that is confirmed by the appearance of the same design on the back of a medal of Ercole II d'Este

[1] Molinier, no. 11, with whom the identification as Ceres and Triptolemus originates. An inscribed version of the plaquette in the Rosenheim collection (no. 651) is recorded by Ricci, no. 30.

[2] The iconography of the bust is discussed by Wittkower, in *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, i (1938), pp. 260–1.

[3] It is assumed by Wittkower that the plaquettes (for which see Molinier, no. 9) depend from the relief on the bust. This theory is not corroborated by their measurements. An attempt of Janson (*The Sculpture of Donatello*, ii (1957), pp. 141–2) to distinguish between the depiction of the horses on the bust and the plaquettes is fanciful.

[4] Molinier, no. 104. Ricci, no. 69.

[5] Molinier, no. 133. Ricci, no. 339.

later in the sixteenth century. Finally, there is a third variant of the composition (Pl. III*c*)[1] in which the sex of the sleeping figure changes and the figure in the centre has a dagger in his hand. In this case the subject is explained by the planetary of symbols of Mars and Venus, which appear at the top.

I do not want, however, to throw undue emphasis on plaquettes after the antique or upon iconography. For the claim of the plaquette to be looked on as an aspect of art rests on the fact that it was developed by a number of exceptionally gifted artists. The most prominent and by far the most prolific is the sculptor who is generally referred to by his pseudonym, Moderno. The shortest list of Moderno's works consists of fifty-nine plaquettes, and the longest consists of seventy-two, and even when his work has been scaled down, he seems to have been responsible for an astonishing number of small reliefs. There is one written record of his activity. It occurs in a passage on art in Italy written in or before 1549 by the Portuguese painter Hollanda,[2] which lists the best-known medallic engravers active in Rome in the first half of the sixteenth century. They were Valerio Belli and Caradosso, to both of whom I shall return, Benvenuto Cellini, and Moderno 'who made the seals of the Piombo'. Not very informative, you may say, but there is one thing we can deduce from it, that Moderno was not identical with any of the other artists in Hollanda's list. I should not think it worth while to make that point had it not been claimed that Moderno was a pseudonym of Caradosso.

For what else we know we are dependent on seven signed works. Four of them show the Labours of Hercules (Pl. III*d*).[3] They are approximately datable—they were copied in fresco at Cremona and in marble at Como, and must therefore have been made, at latest, in the first half-decade of the sixteenth century—and their classicizing style is North Italian, but not necessarily Paduan. Thanks to Pomponius Gauricus and Scardeone, the records of bronze-casting and goldsmiths' work in Padua are so full that Moderno could hardly have escaped attention had he worked there. A parallel for these far from inspired designs is supplied by the early work of the engraver Giovanni Antonio da Brescia.

The making of plaquettes and gem-engraving often went hand

[1] Molinier, no. 104. Ricci, no. 70. I am indebted to Professor Edgar Wind for the identification of the two planetary symbols.

[2] Raczynski, *Les Arts en Portugal* (1846), p. 57.

[3] Molinier, nos. 194, 195, 201, and 204.

in hand, and it need come as no surprise that Moderno's fifth signed work is actually a hardstone carving. It shows Apollo, and is based on the print by Marcantonio after the fictive statue at the back of Raphael's *School of Athens*.[1] The print is undated, but this little carving might have been made between about 1515 and 1525. It does not in itself prove, of course, that Moderno went to Rome, though we know from Hollanda that he did so, but it does show that this time he became acclimatized to Roman High Renaissance taste. That is confirmed by the sixth signed work, a silver relief of the *Flagellation* in Vienna (Pl. IV*a*), where the central figure is based on the Laocoon. The Laocoon was engraved by Giovanni Antonio da Brescia three years after its discovery, but the source of Moderno's plaquette is apparently the somewhat later engraving by Marco Dente.[2] What is remarkable in the plaquette is its consistency, in that the style of the central figure is followed through in the two figures at the sides. Its frieze-like composition and spacious sense of interval would be inexplicable if Moderno had not also been familiar with the print of the *Massacre of the Innocents* after Raphael and other works in the same style.

The *Flagellation* has a companion piece showing the Virgin and Child with Saints (Pl. IV*b*).[3] Just as the right-hand executioner in the *Flagellation* is a High Renaissance revision of figures in the earlier Hercules plaquettes, so this scene too is a Roman recension of a North Italian type, an altar-piece of a kind we associate with Costa, where the Virgin and Child are raised on a high throne above a classical relief. But the drapery in the plaquette is classical, the cocks in the foreground depend from a classical gem,[4] and the background is filled with ornament that once more has a parallel in Giovanni Antonio da Brescia's engravings,[5] and includes little figures of the horse-tamers on the Quirinal. The analogy with Giovanni Antonio da Brescia the engraver is of some importance, since he too suffered a conversion from the style of Mantegna to that of Marcantonio, and he too was in Rome, probably between 1509 and 1525.

As soon as we look at Moderno's plaquettes sequentially an

[1] Ilg, in *Jahrbuch der K. K. Oesterreichisen Kunstsammlungen*, xi (1890), pp. 100–10.

[2] Planiscig, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna: *Die Bronzeplastiken*, no. 408. For the architectural scheme compare a dated engraving (1509) by Giovanni Antonio da Brescia (Hind, *Early Italian Engraving*, pl. 540).

[3] Planiscig, op. cit., no. 409.

[4] Molinier, i, p. 124.

[5] Hind, op. cit., pl. 556, 558, 559.

intelligible pattern can be traced. Quite a number of reliefs, religious reliefs mainly, are manifestly early works, and others are unmistakably connected with the two silver plaquettes. One of the latter is a little relief (Pl. V*a*) which exists only in bronze, but must, to judge from its defective detail, have been moulded from a gold or silver original.[1] It is indissociable from the large plaquette by virtue of the poses of the Virgin and the Saints and of the classical ornament, and the disk flanked by putti above the throne seems again to have been imitated from an altar-piece by Costa, this time in San Giacomo Maggiore at Bologna. Another is a circular plaquette of Augustus and Sibyl (Pl. V*b*),[2] where the two figures, linked together as a single formal unit, are Raphaelesque, and the relief on the rear wall once more is reminiscent of Giovanni Antonio da Brescia.[3] Another is a charming little circular relief (Pl. V*c*) which is generally described as 'A Sculptor carving a Statue of Cupid'.[4] Its real subject is Prometheus, who is described by Pomponius Gauricus in his *De Sculptura* as the first sculptor, and is shown on a Hellenistic relief in the Louvre creating Man.[5] Yet another is the plaquette of Nessus and Deianira (Pl. V*d*),[6] accompanied by two roundels showing a figure of Victory and Hercules and the Stymphalian birds. Perhaps it is worth while to turn back for a moment to one of the early Hercules plaquettes to point the transformation that overtook Moderno's style. The change is a double one. Not only does it affect the thinking behind the plaquette, which is no longer restricted by the visual clichés of quattrocento classicism, but also as the method by which the image is presented, that is its technique. Since I have used that term 'the thinking behind the plaquette', perhaps I should mention here the only case in which it is possible to reconstruct Moderno's thought processes, the only case, that is, in which a trial cast and a finished plaquette survive. The trial cast (Pl. VI*a*)[7] shows an armed youth seated among a pile of trophies, and has a parallel in an engraving adapted from a coin of Nero, showing a seated warrior personifying Rome. The final cast

[1] Molinier, no. 164. Ricci, no. 164.
[2] Molinier, no. 185. Ricci, no. 181.
[3] Hind, op. cit., pl. 559.
[4] Molinier, no. 36 (as after the antique). Bange, no. 494. Ricci, no. 211.
[5] Raggio, in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, xxi (1958), pl. 6b.
[6] Molinier, no. 205. Bange, no. 486. Ricci, no. 198.
[7] Molinier, no. 188. Ricci, no. 186. The relationship between this and the following plaquette is inverted by Ricci, who regards the respects in which the earlier differs from the later as 'mainly improvements'.

(Pl. VI*b*)[1] is parcel-gilt and much more highly chased, and a whole series of small changes has been introduced into the scheme. The head is more erect, the right foot is concealed behind the helmet, the left arm is extended with the elbow resting on the quiver, and the right wrist is slightly raised. As a result the rather loosely composed figure in the trial cast takes on the precision and coherence of the revised relief. All the elaborate plaquettes by Moderno which we take for granted because we only know them in their final state—like the circular relief of the Death of Hippolytus[2]—seem to have resulted from the action of this self-critical intelligence.

I suppose I should have said much earlier that we know Moderno's name. It was established by Bode, but in so casual a fashion—five lines in the *Kunstchronik*[3]—that practically no attention has been paid to it. These are the facts. Among the works signed by Moderno is what is nowadays called a pax with the Virgin and Child enthroned and two Saints at the sides. The signature on the back of the version in London is in the form HOC HOPVS MODERNI.[4] But sixty-odd years ago there appeared at auction another example of this pax, which was signed on the back with the artist's real name, not his pseudonym. HOC OPVS MONDEL. ADER. AVRIFEX, read the signature, with the date 1490.[5] Unluckily that particular plaquette has disappeared, but the inscription cannot be dismissed on that account. We have records of a Veronese goldsmith and hardstone carver Galeazzo Mondella,[6] and the identification of Moderno with Mondella is favoured by the fact that Verona is a far from improbable setting and 1490 a far from improbable date for the origin of this design. The name Moderno must then have been arrived at by an elision of the patronymic ADER and of the first two letters of Mondella's name. Moreover, and this I think is decisive, there are two inscribed drawings by Mondella in

[1] Molinier, no. 187. Ricci, no. 185.

[2] Molinier, no. 191. Ricci, no. 189 (both as *Fall of Phaeton*).

[3] Bode, in *Kunstchronik*, xv (1903–4), c. 269.

[4] Inscribed versions in London (Victoria and Albert Museum), Paris (Louvre), and Washington (National Gallery of Art). There are small differences between the forms of the signature in the three versions.

[5] The relief appeared at auction successively in London (Higgins sale, 1904, 29 January, no. 47) and Paris (Garnier sale, 1916, 18–23 December, no. 520).

[6] For Mondella in Vasari, *Vite*, ed. Milanesi, v, p. 318, and Thieme, *Künstlerlexikon*, xxvi (1931), p. 58. The attribution to Mondella of a hardstone carving in the Louvre (Kris, *Steinschneidekunst*, no. 280) is unconvincing.

the Louvre. And though their scale is a great deal larger than that of the plaquettes, the repertory of poses is close enough to substantiate Moderno's authorship.

That brings me to what, to my way of thinking, are the most immediately attractive of the plaquettes associated with Moderno, two groups of larger scenes of which Moderno's authorship is probable but cannot be demonstrated in a conclusive way. The first consists of four reliefs of the Labours of Hercules (Pl. VII*a*),[1] which have all the appearance of small works by a large-scale sculptor and in three of which the designs depend directly from the antique. The figures fill the whole height of the field, and impress us by their splendidly controlled plasticity. In that they stand in contrast to the small plaquettes, but conform to the drawing in the Louvre. Only in one of them, Hercules strangling the Serpents, does the artist have recourse to a purely decorative device, that of extending the serpents' tails in arabesques over the flat ground of the relief. A fifth plaquette, palpably by the same hand and also rectangular, shows the Death of Lucretia,[2] and reveals Moderno, if it be Moderno, as a narrative artist of great sensibility.

The same hand was responsible for what bid fair to be considered the most appealing of all Italian plaquettes (Pl. VII*b*). Their subject is the Orpheus legend,[3] and they are enchantingly poetic scenes. In looking at them one recalls the little mythological roundels of Cima da Conegliano. The context is more pictorial and the finish is less fine than in any mature Moderno plaquette, and the system of modelling is more powerful and more abrupt. The ground-line, for example, projects to the level of the frame, and the flat surface is broken up by forms that are sometimes modelled and sometimes incised. But one figure, the Eurydice in the Redemption scene, has an exact parallel in Moderno's work.[4] It cannot be ruled out that a painter or engraver was responsible for the designs. Two much less subtle companion plaquettes of scenes from the Legend of Arion are reminiscent of the pictures of Michele da Verona.[5]

[1] Molinier, nos. 193, 196, 197, and 203. Ricci, nos. 190, 193, 194 and 201. Three of the four plaquettes depend directly from the antique.

[2] Molinier, no. 237. Ricci, no. 214.

[3] Molinier, nos. 207, 208, 209, 210. Ricci, nos. 206, 207, 208, 209.

[4] Compare the Eurydice on the right of Molinier no. 208 with the Saint on the right of the Virgin and Child enthroned with Saints (Molinier no. 164). The attribution to Moderno is questioned by Middeldorf (*Medals and Plaquettes from the Sigmund Morgenroth Collection*, 1944, no. 251).

[5] Molinier, no. 206. Ricci, nos. 204, 205.

The doyen of goldsmiths when Moderno was in Rome was Caradosso. He was born in Milan about the middle of the fifteenth century, was employed as a medallist at the Sforza court, left Milan for Rome some years after the expulsion of Lodovico il Moro, and died in 1527. None of his works in precious metals survives, and his reputation is largely due to a passage in Cellini's *Life*. He was one of the few contemporaries whom Cellini did not decry. 'He dealt in nothing but little chiselled medals', says Cellini, 'made of plates of metal and such-like things.' There are no signed Caradosso plaquettes, but there are some which can be looked on as authenticated, in that they conform in style to the reverses of his medals and correspond in subject with scenes on a silver inkstand which are described in some detail in the *De Nobilitate Rerum* of Ambrogio Leone.[1] One relief described by Leone showed the Rape of Ganymede; the foreground was occupied by horsemen watching Ganymede carried up into the sky. This scene is shown in a rare rectangular plaquette.[2] Another scene mentioned by Leone is a Battle of the Centaurs and Lapithae, of which bronze versions in exactly the same format survive (Pl. VIII*a*).[3] There were two other scenes on the inkstand, Hercules and Cacus, and Hercules and the Nemean Lion, of which no record has come down to us.[4] So famous was this inkstand and so delicate were its reliefs, that sulphur casts were made from them, and as late as 1586 examples of the reliefs in bronze, or of the moulds from which the bronze reliefs were made, were in the studio of Caradosso's grandson in Milan. Figures from two of the plaquettes appear on the doorway from the Palazzo Stanga at Cremona, which was carved shortly before 1500, so they must have been designed by Caradosso at the Sforza court before he left for Rome. The presiding artists in Milan were Bramante and Leonardo, and the influence of both is reflected in these little scenes. The architecture is Bramantesque, and Bode for that reason ascribed the design of the reliefs directly to Bramante.[5] But against that it must be objected that the figure style is quite strikingly unlike Bramante's, as we know it from the Brera frescoes or from the engraving by

[1] Ambrogio Leone, *De Nobilitate Rerum*, 1525, c. xli.

[2] Molinier, no. 149. Bange, no. 619.

[3] Molinier, no. 150. Ricci, no. 96.

[4] A record of the Hercules and Cacus is perhaps preserved in an upright plaquette by Caradosso of this subject (Ricci, no. 104), the main figures from which recur in a fictive relief in Burgkmair's *Esther before Ahasuerus* in Munich.

[5] Bode, in *Zeitschrift für Numismatik*, xxxiii (1921–2), pp. 145–55.

Prevedari from a Bramante cartoon. Much more significant is the connexion with Leonardo, especially with that fascinating sheet at Windsor with studies for a group of St. George and the Dragon which was made in the late 1490's in Milan.[1] But in an antecedent phase of Caradosso's work his figure style was indeed based on Bramante. The main proof of that is a little plaquette of a Triumph (Pl. VIII*b*),[2] which exists in a single version in Washington, where the figure in the chariot conforms in style to the fresco of the philosopher Chilon from the Palazzo del Pretorio at Bergamo and the precipitous recession of the architecture recalls the intarsia of the Decollation of the Baptist from Bramante's design at Bergamo and the roundel beneath the fresco in the Sala del Tesoro of the Castello in Milan. In Rome, in the works to which Cellini refers, the style of Caradosso must have become more classical. That it did so is proved beyond all doubt by the reverse of his portrait medal of Bramante. This is the style with which we might expect plaquettes of later date to correspond. None has been identified, but I rather wonder if one of them is not a beautiful rectangular relief of Augustus and the Sibyl (Pl. VIII*c*) which is sometimes mistakenly ascribed to Riccio.[3] The plaquette seems to have been cast from an original in gold or silver, and the Raphaelesque figures on the right would be less unaccountable in Rome than they appear in Padua.

The only artist whose work can compare in delicacy with Moderno's is the mysterious master signing IO. F.F. So far as we can tell he was not a very prolific relief artist, but the plaquettes that he did make achieved quite extraordinary popularity. Indeed if a census were taken of plaquettes on weapons, his would far outnumber those of any other artist. Artistically his designs are notable not only for their delicacy, but for the compactness of the forms and for an impeccable sense for the relation of the figure to the circular field. Many of them exist in two formats, one shield-shaped and the other circular, and in every case it is the circular version that is the original. As to the date when they were made, we have only one piece of evidence, that a plaquette of Marcus Curtius plunging into the ravine before the Forum is reproduced in an engraving by Lucas

[1] Windsor no. 123331. Clark (*A Catalogue of the Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci in the collection of His Majesty the King at Windsor Castle*, i (1935), pp. 24–25) proposes a later dating *c.* 1507–8. [2] Molinier, no. 155. Ricci, no. 102.

[3] Molinier, no. 417 (as Paduan). Bange, no. 629 (as style of Bramante). Ricci, no. 130 (as Riccio).

Cranach.[1] The engraving is not actually dated, but was probably made in 1506, so the plaquette (and others like it) must date from the late fifteenth or very early sixteenth century. In a plaquette of Phaedra and Hippolytus which depends from a woodcut made by Jacob von Strassburg after a sarcophagus in Rome, a figure derived from Mantegna is inserted in the centre of the scene.[2] The use of allegory, moreover, which is one of the factors that distinguish this master's plaquettes from Moderno's, suggests that they were planned in a humane environment. It is generally assumed that the letters in the exergue are to be read as JOHANNES FRANCISCUS FECIT,[3] and the artist may, therefore, be the bronze caster and medallist Giovanni Francesco Ruberti, who is mentioned in Mantua between 1483 and 1523, provided weapons for the Mantuan court, and was engaged in 1492 in striking coins by a new process at the Mantuan mint. The only signed work by Ruberti that we know is a medal of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga of about 1484, where the handling is a good deal clumsier than that of the plaquettes, but on the analogy of Moderno it is quite possible that Ruberti's style in later works grew smoother and more urbane.

In Venice the principal bronze sculptors of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were Camelio and Leopardi. Both artists are known as sculptors in relief, Camelio as the author of two signed reliefs in the Ca' d'Oro which were incorporated in his monument, and Leopardi as the author of the circular friezes which run round the flagstaffs outside St. Mark's. Arguing from these works, we may infer that Camelio was responsible for a small relief of Vulcan forging the Wings of Cupid (Pl. IX),[4] which was copied by Carpaccio in the late 1490's in a painting in the St. Ursula cycle, and that Leopardi was responsible for the beautiful circular relief adapted from Mantegna with a Combat of Ichthyocentaurs of which versions are in Paris, Berlin, and Washington.[5] But a signed plaquette by Leopardi, with the unrecorded inscription A.L.V. at the base, also survives (Pl. X*a*).[6] It is conventionally described as the Instruction of Cupid in Architecture—the figure on the right is

[1] Molinier, no. 139. Ricci, no. 347. For the relationship to Cranach see Glaser, *Cranach* (1921), p. 54. [2] Molinier, no. 127. Ricci, no. 337.

[3] For earlier hypotheses as to the identity of this master see Hill, in Thieme, *Künstlerlexikon*, vii (1912), p. 444.

[4] Pope-Hennessy, in *Burlington Magazine*, cv (1963), p. 23.

[5] Molinier, no. 411. Ricci, no. 260 (both as Paduan).

[6] A. 162–1910. Given by Bode, *Bertoldo* (1925), pp. 51–53, to a follower of Bertoldo.

Mercury—and has an unsigned companion piece, known through a stucco cast formerly in the Bardini collection in Florence, of Vulcan forging the Helmet of Mars (Pl. X*b*).[1] In both works the style is less classical than on the flagstaffs, and it may well be that the reliefs were modelled between 1482, when Leopardi is first mentioned in documents, and 1490, when he assumed control of the concluding stages of the casting of Verrocchio's Colleoni monument.

Among Camelio's and Leopardi's contemporaries in Venice were two much more provincial artists. One of them has been confused with the medallist Fra Antonio da Brescia. By temperament an eclectic, he took his designs from whatever sources were to hand, and did not scruple in this plaquette of Abundance and a Satyr to combine a Satyr[2] drawn from Dürer's Satyr Family with a female figure drawn from an early work by Marcantonio. Less accomplished but more inventive is the artist signing Ulocrino. Eighty-odd years ago it was suggested that the name Ulocrino might be a fusion of the Greek οὐλος and the Latin crinis, and was adopted by the Paduan sculptor Riccio, who is also described as Crispus or curly-haired.[3] The suggestion, quite an ingenious one, is embodied in the standard book on Riccio,[4] and there is only one objection to it, that Ulocrino's and Riccio's plaquettes are totally unlike. The case for regarding Ulocrino as Venetian rests on the twin supports of style and iconography. His religious plaquettes—four of them represent St. Jerome—seem to reveal some knowledge of the figure style of Basaiti and Carpaccio, and the Venice of Carpaccio comes to mind again with a plaquette of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Aristotle (Pl. XIII*a*). The closest analogies for this curious scene occur in the woodcut illustrations to Zoppino's *Vite de philosophi moralissimi*, which was published in Venice in 1521. But the plaquette may actually be rather earlier, for the *De Anima* of Alexander of Aphrodisias was first published in Venice in translation in 1495; and though the Greek edition of Alexander of Aphrodisias' Aristotelian commentaries appeared also in Venice between 1513 and 1536, it is tempting to link the relief with the earlier book, since its translator was Girolamo Donati, one of the earliest patrons of Riccio.[5] It was for Donati,

[1] For this relief see Bode, op. cit., pp. 79–80.

[2] Molinier, no. 121. Ricci, no. 118.

[3] Molinier, i, pp. 176–7.

[4] Planiscig, *Riccio* (1927), pp. 462–3.

[5] Ed. Kristeller, *Mediaeval and Renaissance Latin Translations and Commentaries*, i (1960), pp. 184 ff.

for example, that Riccio designed his plaquette of two genii stealing the books of wisdom from a sleeping female figure, with beneath it the inscription *ΣΕΜΝΗΚΛΟΠΙΑ* or Proud Theft.[1] Possibly it was Donati who laid down the terms of reference of Ulocrino's Death of Meleager,[2] where the figure of the dying Meleager derives from the antique.

One of the difficulties about dating Ulocrino's works is that despite their rather coarse technique the poses that are employed in them often look surprisingly evolved. An example is the figure of Althaea, placing the brand in the fire at the back of this plaquette, and another is contained in a plaquette of St. Cecilia seated at her organ, which has as its counterpart the scene of Apollo triumphant over Marsyas.[3] Both scenes apparently belong to a larger series of plaquettes with allegories of harmony. It must be recognized frankly that these plaquettes by Ulocrino are not of much significance as works of art; their interest resides in the ideas they illustrate, and they are really little culture tokens handed to us by the past.

Once we reach Padua and the work of Riccio, the circumstances change. Riccio's plaquettes are culture tokens too, but culture tokens which reflect the mind of a great artist. His development as an artist in relief can be followed through three major works, the Scenes from the Legend of the Cross, made for the Servi in Venice during the 1490's; the Paschal Candlestick in the Santo at Padua, which was begun in 1507 and finished in 1515; and the Della Torre monument at Verona, which seems to date from about 1520. It is in this framework that we must set Riccio's plaquettes. Luckily enough of them are signed, generally with an R or an RI or an RIO on the back, to remove almost all doubt about what Riccio did or did not execute. The poles of his development are best established through the religious plaquettes. By far the earliest of them is a little relief of the Entombment.[4] Its figure style depends from that of his master Bellano, and it must have been completed about 1490, and is thus earlier than the earliest of his large reliefs. The emotions are unruly, and the figurative language is undisciplined. But

[1] Molinier, no. 238. Ricci, no. 221.

[2] Molinier, no. 255. Ricci, no. 159.

[3] For the Apollo and Marsyas see Molinier, no. 252, and Ricci, no. 157. The St. Cecilia is mistakenly classified by Molinier as an anonymous Paduan plaquette (no. 392), but is restored to Ulocrino by Bange (no. 423) and all later authorities.

[4] Planiscig, *Riccio* (1927), pp. 452, 492. Four signed examples of the plaquette are known.

a means of salvation lay ready to hand. It was supplied by the engravings of Mantegna. In Riccio's next plaquette of the Entombment (Pl. XI*a*)[1] some of the figures are drawn from a famous engraving by Mantegna, while others derive from a Mantegna-designed bronze relief.[2] The rather eclectic character of the whole composition would indicate a dating about 1500, and that is confirmed by the presence in it of children like those in the foreground in the relief of The Proving of the Cross in the Ca' d'Oro. By the standard of the earlier plaquette, this is a noble and moving work, but it is much less noble and less moving than the relief of the Entombment on the Paschal Candlestick. The difference between the two is that in the later, the Candlestick relief, classicism no longer results from a conscious mimetic process but has become a natural mode of speech. Both in the first Entombment plaquette and in the second, the sarcophagus is parallel to the relief plane, but on the Paschal Candlestick it recedes slightly to the right, and in the third and latest of the Entombment plaquettes (Pl. XI*b*) this divergence between the plane of the sarcophagus and the plane of the relief is even more pronounced. This plaquette is often discussed as though it were no more than a free variant of the Entombment on the candlestick, but the two scenes differ in imagery and style. In imagery in so far as the plaquette is conceived symbolically—the body is held so that the wounds are exposed to the spectator and on the sarcophagus is an inscription: 'He whom the whole world could not contain is enclosed within this tomb'—and in style in so far as the figures are more erect and classical, and relate to the reliefs on the Della Torre monument. So we are bound to assume a dating about 1520–5 for this plaquette.

Sometimes in his secular plaquettes Riccio speaks to us with the voice of an antiquary rather than an artist. He does so, for example, in what, to judge from the numbers that survive, must have been his most popular relief, the Sacrifice of a Swine,[3] where the central group corresponds with an engraving by Mocetto. But elsewhere he uses classical motifs with wonderful naturalness and sensibility. Who, for example, would guess that the figure of Venus in this enchanting plaquette of Vulcan forging the Arrows of Cupid (Pl. XII*a*) was based on a classical torso, if the same torso did not occur again in the much better-

[1] Molinier, no. 220. Ricci, no. 126. Planiscig, *Riccio*, pp. 288–92. For the Vienna relief see Planiscig, *Bronzeplastiken*, pp. 8–9.

[2] Molinier, no. 221. Ricci, no. 127.

[3] Molinier, no. 235. Ricci, no. 141.

known plaquette of Venus chastising Cupid?[1] Obviously these reliefs cannot be divorced from the great paintings which form their background—the Fête Champêtre in the Louvre, the Dresden Venus, the Judith in the Hermitage—but it remains remarkable that so much of the spirit of these works, their richness and their sensuality, should be transferred to bronze reliefs on so diminutive a scale. In its union of figures and landscape Riccio's plaquette of Meleager proffering the Boar's Head to Atalanta (Pl. XII*b*)[2] is an equivalent in sculpture for Palma Vecchio's little Mars and Venus at Brooklyn or for the small paintings by Previtali in the National Gallery. In this and in a whole series of related plaquettes Riccio is faithful to Giorgione's pastoral vision of the world, and so direct is the modelling, so skilful the surface working that the landscapes give the illusion of being light-suffused.

I wish that it were possible to linger over them, but if I did so, I should be prevented from discussing another scarcely less attractive aspect of Riccio's small reliefs. This is a whole group of plaquettes which have in the past been looked upon as Riccio's, but of which Riccio's authorship is now mistakenly denied. One of the most characteristic (Pl. XIV*a*) shows a child standing on a satyr's back.[3] With one hand he waters a laurel bush, and with the other pulls down its topmost branch. Round the trunk is twined a snake and above it is a pair of wings. A withered tree stands on the right. This antithesis between the child and satyr has a parallel in a painting by Lorenzo Lotto in Washington, which formed the cover of a portrait of Bernardo de' Rossi, Bishop of Treviso.[4] Lotto's panel represents two figures beside a withered tree from which a new branch springs. One is a satyr surrounded by the symbols of indulgence, and the other is a child armed with the instruments of reason, behind whom a path leads to the summit of a hill. Those emblems which do not occur in Lotto's portrait, the snake and wings and zephyr head, are hieroglyphs drawn from the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* of Colonna. If there were any doubt that the winged child

[1] The relief of Vulcan forging the Arrows of Cupid exists in a single rectangular relief in Washington (A. 413.136B) and a single circular relief in Berlin (Bange, no. 361). For the Venus chastising Cupid see Molinier, no. 227, and Ricci, no. 133.

[2] Unique version in Washington (A. 414.137B), for which see Molinier, no. 228, and Ricci, no. 137.

[3] Molinier, no. 244 (as Riccio), Ricci, no. 226 (as Master I.S.A.).

[4] National Gallery of Art, Washington. The portrait, in Naples, is dated 1506.

represented Virtue, it would be dispelled by a second plaquette, from which the satyr is omitted and which has the word VIRTUS in the exergue at the base.[1] Here the child tugs at a winged vase filled with laurel branches and has a snake in his left hand. This plaquette is double-sided, and on the back is a seated female figure crowning a male mask carried towards her by a running child. Behind (and this is common to one or two other plaquettes in the series) is a palm-tree sprouting laurel, and beneath are the letters FA for Fama, Fame. In yet another plaquette (Pl. XIV*b*)[2] the child Virtue, with a basket on his head, waters the palm-tree which sprouts laurel, while Fame sits with her trumpet to her lips. In a fourth variant[3] of the motif the child holds a rudder, and at the back is the emblem of Pegasus. The letters F.V.D. in the exergue have been transcribed 'Fortunam virtus ducit', but it is clearly Fame not Fortune that is the subject of the plaquette. The last of the plaquettes that have been denied to Riccio[4] is a summing up or an extension of all these images. The symbol of the virtuous life, this time a youth, receives the accolade of Victory while a propitiatory sacrifice is offered on the right.

All these plaquettes are in lower relief than Riccio's religious or mythological plaquettes, and the flattening of the surface brings with it a new linear emphasis in the design. That is no doubt the reason why one of the most typical plaquettes of all has never been ascribed to Riccio. I mentioned that the hieroglyphs used in certain of these little works depended from the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, and this plaquette, which is slightly salacious, like so much of the secular art produced in Padua, is actually based on an illustration to Colonna's text. The woodcut represents a fountain on which is shown a nymph surprised by a satyr who pulls back the curtain beneath which she lies asleep. In the plaquette (Pl. XIII*b*)[5]—which exists only in a single version—this motif, the satyr drawing back a curtain hanging from a tree, has been preserved, but the nymph now lies on an elaborate couch supported by a sphinx. No longer sleeping, she seeks the protection of a snake symbolizing Prudence coiled

[1] Molinier, no. 239. Ricci, no. 228. Unique example in National Gallery of Art, Washington (A. 506.228B).

[2] Molinier, no. 242. Ricci, no. 224.

[3] Molinier, no. 240. Ricci, no. 224.

[4] Molinier, no. 233. Ricci, no. 140.

[5] Unique example in National Gallery of Art, Washington (A. 396.119B) ascribed by Ricci (no. 119) to the Pseudo-Fra Antonio da Brescia.

round the tree. To all appearances this is a very late plaquette, and it provides impressive proof of the vitality of Riccio's imagination and of his command of form.

I have spent so long talking about the early history of the plaquette, that I have left myself less time than I should wish to talk about its end, but end it did within two decades of Riccio's death. Small bronze reliefs were made after that time, of course, but by the middle of the 1550's the Italian plaquette as a continuing organism was dead. The plaquettes we have been looking at till now belong broadly to three types. First, the mid-fifteenth-century plaquettes which were cast from gems. Second, plaquettes like those of Moderno or of Caradosso which are related, expressly or by implication, to goldsmiths' work. Third, plaquettes like those of Riccio or of the Orpheus scenes ascribed to Moderno, which are nothing more nor less than little bronze reliefs. In the final phase, the wheel comes full circle and the link with engraved gems is reaffirmed. The revolution was effected by two artists who were best known as engravers of gems or crystals, Vallerio Belli, who died in 1546, and Giovanni Bernardi, who survived him for seven years.

Just as we know no late plaquettes by Caradosso, we know no early works by Belli. He was born at Vicenza about 1468, and moved to Rome, where he seems to have remained until the Sack. After a brief period in Venice, he returned to Vicenza where he worked from 1530 till his death. Through the whole of this time his main commissions came from Rome, from the courts of Clement VII and Paul III. Almost all Belli's bronze plaquettes are related to crystal or hardstone carvings, either to actual carvings which have been preserved or to hypothetical carvings which have vanished. For that reason there is a temptation, from which even Molinier was not immune, to dismiss his attitude to the plaquette as reproductive, and to look at the reliefs as inferior copies of expensive and unique originals. I doubt if they were looked at in that way in the sixteenth century. The crystals are the works listed by Vasari, of course, but it was through the bronzes made from them that Belli maintained his contacts with what was evidently a vast public and exercised an influence on taste. Judging from the quality of the best of the bronze casts and the richness with which they were sometimes mounted, it seems that Belli's incredibly subtle mastery of bronze relief was prized as it deserved. Certainly it was thanks to Belli that in the second quarter of the sixteenth century the endlessly popular religious images that were distilled

by Moderno from Mantegna were superseded by the metropolitan idiom of Raphael.

Quite a number of sources testify to the accomplishments of Belli's medals after the antique. Hollanda mentions them in the 1540's, and so does a Northern collector, Bonifazius Amerbach. But Vasari, faced with the phenomenon of Belli, seems to have felt some reserve. 'If nature had made of Valerio as good a designer as he was skilled in carving,' writes Vasari,[1] 'he would far have surpassed the ancients instead of equalling them as he did.' This reserve was due to the discreditable fact that Belli did not design his own reliefs. The Passion scenes in his most famous work, the Casket of Pope Clement VII, were made 'from drawings by others', since, says Vasari, 'he always availed himself of the drawings of other artists or of antique gems'. But the fact remains that Belli's style is exceptionally homogeneous. The reason for its uniformity is that his models were subjected to an assimilative process that was both rigorous and personal. Perhaps I should take just one example to indicate the way in which he worked. This is a drawing (Pl. XV*a*)[2] made for Belli, which was from the first designed for transfer to crystal and bronze. The author is Polidoro da Caravaggio, and it was prepared in Rome about 1525. Here (Pl. XV*b*) is the plaquette that Belli made from it.[3] In the drawing the Betrayal takes place above a wall and is visualized from a low viewing point, hence the confused articulation of the figures at the back. In the plaquette, on the other hand, the wall is done away with, and the scene is reconstructed on a raised base-line on the level of the eye. The seven figures in the foreground are preserved, with certain changes, but the type of the soldier behind Christ is modified, the pose of Malchus is revised, and a whole series of other changes is introduced in the beautifully individualized figures at the back. Rather significantly the voluminous drapery of Polidoro is abandoned in favour of drapery which defines the forms with classic economy and grace. The unifying factor in Belli's work is that he approaches all his models from the standpoint of an instinctive Hellenist.

The case of Bernardi is rather different. He was almost thirty years younger than Valerio Belli, was first employed by Alfonso d'Este at Ferrara, and then, like Belli, migrated to the court of

[1] Vasari, *Vite*, ed. Milanesi, v, pp. 379–83.

[2] Popham and Wilde, *The Italian Drawings of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries in the Collection of His Majesty the King at Windsor Castle* (1949), no. 692.

[3] Molinier, no. 270. Ricci, no. 354.

Clement VII, attracting the notice first of Ippolito de' Medici and then of Alessandro Farnese. In Rome Bernardi came under somewhat the same influences as Belli, and like Belli depended in the main for his designs on artists from the circle of Raphael. In some respects he was a more enterprising crystal carver, but his work is vitiated by the lack of a strong personal stylistic will. In his masterpiece, the Cassetta Farnese, the oval crystals he engraved from designs by Perino del Vaga are conceived as little transparent paintings rather than as reliefs, and when bronze casts were made from them, the artist's deficient command of relief style was doubly evident. Moreover, where Belli impresses his reliefs with a sense of unfaltering seriousness, Bernardi's was a rather trivial mind, from which even great designs emerged debased. Who, for example, would suppose, were it not widely known, that behind Bernardi's *Fall of Phaeton* (Pl. XVI*a*)[1] lay a presentation drawing by Michelangelo (Pl. XVI*b*)? The crystal in this case has disappeared, and it was no doubt inescapable, on grounds of size, that Bernardi should omit the splendid figure of Zeus which supplies the formal and literary motivation of the scene. What was not inevitable was that the figure of Phaeton should be moved to the centre of the upper group and replaced on the left by a contorted horse, that Eridanus should be shown gazing inquisitively upwards, and that the inspired figures of Phaeton's grief-stricken sisters should be reduced to mannered formulae. Confronted by another of the Cavalieri drawings, the Rape of Ganymede,[2] Bernardi's attitude towards it was no less inartistic and impercipient.

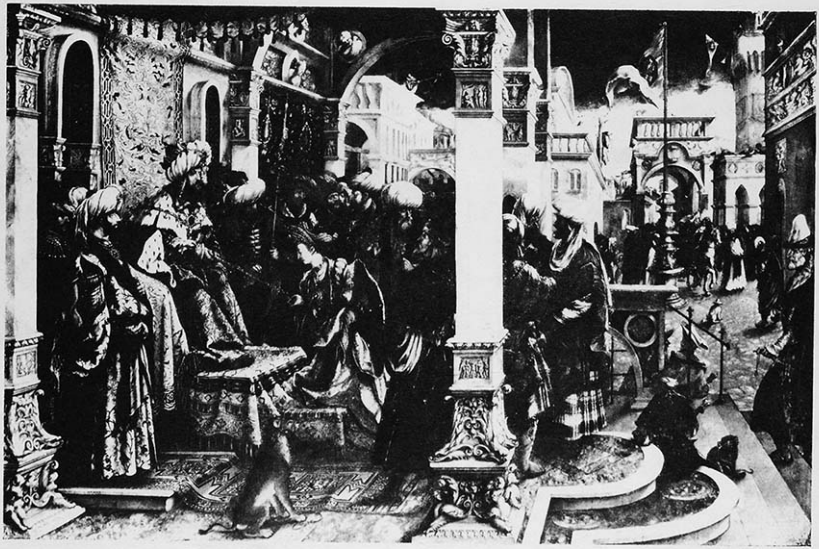
These, then, are some of the problems offered by the Italian plaquette. To sum up, there are problems of origin and attribution, problems of date, problems of meaning, problems of style, and finally problems of taste. I doubt if any of them will be definitively solved. Until the time of Giovanni Bernardi and Valerio Belli, the authors of these reliefs either did not sign the works that they produced or signed them in so ambiguous a fashion that their identities remain in doubt. Perhaps time will eventually reveal a fully signed plaquette by the master IO. F.F. or some payment which proves in an utterly conclusive way that Mondella really was Moderno. Perhaps it will bring forward a handful of plaquettes that are exactly dated and are not simply

[1] Molinier, no. 327. For the drawing see Popham and Wilde, op. cit., pp. 253–4.

[2] Molinier, no. 328. For the drawing see Popham and Wilde, op. cit., p. 457.

datable by inference. Perhaps our eyes themselves may change, and relationships will become evident which are now invisible. It is disconcerting, for example, that the links between these little works and the medal and bronze statuette remain as slender as they are. How are we to explain the fact that so few medallists applied themselves to the plaquette—that there are no plaquettes, for example, by prolific Roman medallists like Lysippus and Cristoforo di Geremia and none by a Florentine medallist as gifted as Niccolò Spinelli? How are we to explain the fact that there are no plaquettes from the circles of Florentine bronze sculptors like Bertoldo and Pollajuolo? How are we to explain the fact that only in Padua in the shop of Riccio is there a palpable connexion between the language of these reliefs and that of the bronze statuette?

But although the exact place of the plaquette in the complex of Renaissance artefacts remains ambiguous, it offers its own aesthetic compensation, and it presents a body of shared, taken-for-granted images which nobody interested in the Renaissance can justifiably ignore and which are as relevant to historians of culture as they are to historians of art.



Burgkmair: ESTHER BEFORE AHASUERUS (*Alte Pinakothek, Munich*)

PLATE I

PLATE II

a. After Donatello: VIRGIN AND CHILD
(*Victoria and Albert Museum*)

b. Donatello: VIRGIN AND CHILD WITH ANGELS
(*National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kress Collection*)

a. Pseudo-Melioli: ALLEGORICAL SCENE
(*National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kress Collection*)

b. IO. F. F.: ALLEGORICAL SCENE
(*Victoria and Albert Museum*)

c. South German (?): MARS AND VENUS
(*National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kress Collection*)

d. Moderno: HERCULES AND THE OXEN OF GERYON
(*Victoria and Albert Museum*)

a. Moderno: FLAGELLATION
(*Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna*)

b. Moderno: VIRGIN AND CHILD WITH ANGELS
(*Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna*)

a. Moderno: VIRGIN AND CHILD WITH ANGELS
(*National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kress Collection*)

b. Moderno: AUGUSTUS AND THE SIBYL
(*Victoria and Albert Museum*)

c. Moderno: PROMETHEUS
(*National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kress Collection*)

d. Moderno: NESSUS AND DEIANIRA
(*National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kress Collection*)

a. Moderno: MARS
(*National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kress Collection*)

b. Moderno: MARS
(*National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kress Collection*)

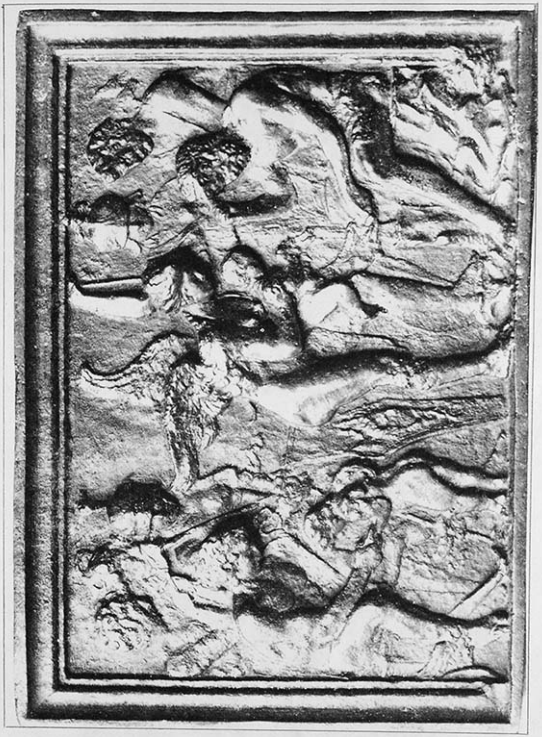
a. Moderno: HERCULES AND THE NEMEAN LION
(Victoria and Albert Museum)

b. Moderno: ORPHEUS REDEEMING EURYDICE
(Victoria and Albert Museum)

a. Caradosso: BATTLE OF CENTAURS AND LAPITHS
(*Victoria and Albert Museum*)

b. Caradosso: TRIUMPH
(*National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kress Collection*)

c. Attributed to Caradosso: AUGUSTUS AND THE SIBYL
(*Victoria and Albert Museum*)



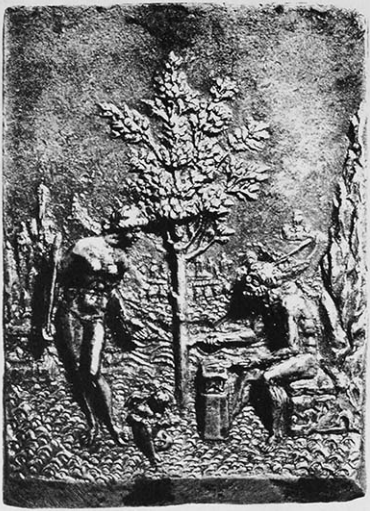
Camelio: VULCAN FORGING THE ARROWS OF CUPID (*Victoria and Albert Museum*)

a. Leopardi: THE INSTRUCTION OF CUPID IN ARCHITECTURE
(*Victoria and Albert Museum*)

b. After Leopardi: MYTHOLOGICAL SCENE
(*formerly Bardini Collection, Florence*)

a. Riccio: ENTOMBMENT
(*Victoria and Albert Museum*)

b. Riccio: ENTOMBMENT



a. Riccio: VULCAN FORGING THE ARROWS OF CUPID (*National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kress Collection*)

b. Riccio: MELEAGER PROFFERING THE BOAR'S HEAD TO ATALANTA (*National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kress Collection*)

a. Ulocrino: ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS AND ARISTOTLE
(*National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kress Collection*)

b. Riccio: NYMPH AND SATYR
(*National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kress Collection*)

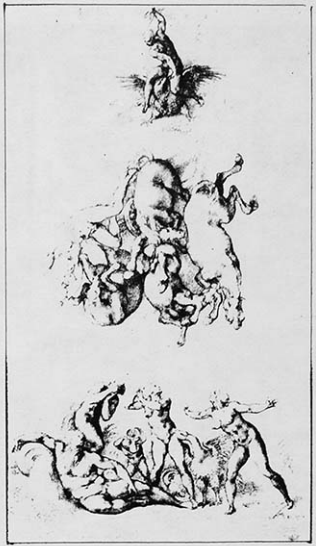
a. Riccio: ALLEGORY OF VIRTUE
(*National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kress Collection*)

b. Riccio: ALLEGORY OF VIRTUE
(*Victoria and Albert Museum*)

a. Polidoro da Caravaggio: BETRAYAL OF CHRIST
(Royal Library, Windsor Castle)
By gracious permission of H.M. The Queen

b. Valerio Belli: BETRAYAL OF CHRIST

a. Giovanni Bernardi: THE FALL OF PHAETON
(*National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kress Collection*)



b. Michelangelo: THE FALL OF PHAETON
(*Royal Library, Windsor Castle*)
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