

THE DRAWINGS OF MICHELANGELO AND HIS FOLLOWERS IN THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM

This volume comprises a full and detailed catalogue of drawings by and after Michelangelo in the Ashmolean Museum. The Ashmolean possesses the third largest collection in the world of drawings by Michelangelo – after the Casa Buonarroti and the British Museum – and a rich group of drawings by Michelangelo's pupils and close associates, as well as a number of contemporary copies after drawings by the master that have subsequently been lost. It also houses a significant number of copies, the majority of the sixteenth century, after Michelangelo's works in all media, that shed light on his reputation and influence among his contemporaries and immediate successors.

The catalogue is preceded by two introductions. The first provides the fullest account yet published of the history and provenance of Michelangelo's drawings; the second surveys the various types of drawing that Michelangelo practised and gives a synoptic account of his stylistic development as a draughtsman.

All the Ashmolean's autograph drawings by Michelangelo, and most of the associated drawings and the copies, came from the collection of Sir Thomas Lawrence, the greatest collection of Old Master Drawings ever formed in Britain. This volume contains two detailed appendices that endeavour to trace as exactly as possible the histories of all the drawings by or after Michelangelo that Lawrence owned, both before he acquired them and after they were dispersed.

Paul Joannides, Professor of Art History at the University of Cambridge, has published widely on the painting, sculpture, architecture, and, in particular, the drawings of the Italian Renaissance. Among his major publications in this area are his standard account *The Drawings of Raphael* and his *Inventaire* of drawings by and after Michelangelo in the Louvre. He has also written on topics in French painting of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

*The Drawings of Michelangelo
and His Followers in the
Ashmolean Museum* ❧

PAUL JOANNIDES

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To

Catherine Whistler

Jon Whiteley

Timothy Wilson

and

above all

Marianne Joannides



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PREFACE

The second volume of Sir Karl Parker's comprehensive catalogue of the drawings in the Ashmolean Museum, devoted to the Italian schools, was published in 1956. It remains an admirable and impressive work. Few scholars then, and fewer now, could have undertaken such a task single-handedly. But the treatment of the two most important artists examined in it, Raphael and Michelangelo, has certain limitations. Dealing with a collection of Italian drawings that then numbered more than eleven hundred sheets, Parker could not go into as much detail as the works of these artists merited. And his catalogue also came at a particular moment in art-historiography that both nourished it and restricted it.

The Ashmolean's collection of drawings by Michelangelo and Raphael had been the object of one of the most significant cataloguing efforts of the nineteenth century, Sir John Charles Robinson's *A Critical Account of the Drawings by Michel Angelo and Raffaello in the University Galleries Oxford*, published in 1870. Robinson's study of the drawings of both artists was informed by a practical consideration of their purpose, a vast acquaintance with drawings of all the European schools, and a profound knowledge of, and insight into, the painting, sculpture, and applied arts of the Italian Renaissance. In certain respects, his work has not been surpassed. But Robinson, although critical of many of the attributions under which the drawings had been acquired, and gifted with a fine sense of style and quality, tended to accept traditional views rather than question them. And, in the area of Michelangelo scholarship, he was a little unfortunate in that his book was published five years before the quatercentenary of Michelangelo's birth, in 1875, which intensified interest in the artist and produced a number of major monographs, including one still important for Michelangelo studies, the two-volume biography of the artist by Aurelio Gotti (1875). Knowledge of this book, and of those issued under its stimulus by Springer (1878, 1883, 1895), and Symonds (1893), would have enriched the factual and historical context of the works that he discussed.

From the point of view of drawings scholarship proper, Robinson's work evinces no very specific approach. This was to change, in the immediately succeeding period, under the impulse of Morelli's morphological method, in which the study of minute forms was shown to be an important indicator of authorship. Morelli's own work was only peripherally concerned with drawings, and his attributions of drawings – nearly always demotions – are among the weakest areas of his scholarship. But his rejection of all forms of evidence other than the visual was extremely influential and led to a concentration on purely visual taxonomy, which, directly or indirectly, stimulated a massive expansion in the classification of Renaissance painting and an intense effort to attain greater precision in attribution and dating. However, it is worth remarking that Morelli's "method," the most readily assimilable aspect of his work, functioned most effectively when dealing with repetitive and, generally, relatively minor artists. It was less equipped to deal with artists whose styles changed rapidly and radically and, in the study of drawings, insufficiently flexible to accommodate the fact that an artist might employ several media and make drawings of several different types in preparation for the same painting. It is interesting that perhaps the most effective employment of the Morellian method was by Sir John Beazley, in his groupings of Athenian vase painting, a species of artistic production that is inevitably repetitive.

Of course, scholarship of Michelangelo, Raphael, and their period had expanded enormously between 1870 and 1956, with the 1903 and 1938 editions of Berenson's *Drawings of the Florentine Painters* only the most obvious monuments to increased attention to Renaissance drawing. But Berenson, the single most important if not always the dominant figure in the scholarship of Italian drawings for the first half of the twentieth century, retained throughout his life a commitment to a type of study that, however qualified by his vast experience and penetrating intelligence, was guided by the method of Morelli, with its pretensions to scientific objectivity in distinguishing

one hand from another. Berenson and other writers discarded a good number of drawings in the Ashmolean's collection from Michelangelo's oeuvre, and even though many of Berenson's insights as to both authorship and dating were acute, his bent to the normative and to the rejection of works that did not conform to a relatively limited number of criteria was in some respects regressive. Despite Parker's sophistication, independence of thought, and clarity of judgement, his approach reflected these attitudes, although by no means in the extreme form found in the views of some scholars of the 1920s and 1930s, a period much preoccupied with what its proponents believed were scientific methods of attribution. Thus, even though Parker was remarkably clear-sighted, his catalogue registers, for example, some attributional insecurities with regard to Michelangelo drawings that had, in the view of most later scholars, already been put to rest by Johannes Wilde.

In the catalogue of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian drawings in the Royal Collection, undertaken in collaboration with A. E. Popham, in which Wilde was responsible for the drawings by Michelangelo and his followers, and still more so in his catalogue of drawings by Michelangelo in the British Museum of 1953, a work still unequalled, Wilde had changed the nature of cataloguing, and – for those alert enough to realise it – of drawing connoisseurship. Before the Second World War, Wilde's work on Michelangelo drawings had shown him to be a fairly orthodox follower of the "scientific" school, severe in his judgements, and all-too-willing to reject genuine drawings. Given the opportunity, during the War, to study the corpus of drawings by Michelangelo in Britain in a single location, he was compelled to change his views. Receiving, one would imagine, inspiration from Robinson's work, Wilde's approach was, initially, archaeological. Drawings were objects, physical things made for particular purposes – not that Parker did not appreciate that, but he did not make it the basis of his approach – and before judgement was to be passed upon them as works of art, they should be interrogated as to their purposes and the nature of the thought that they embody. In place of the "scientific" method, which all too often ignored medium, date, and purpose, and which made little effort to determine the function of a drawing within patterns establishable from the examination of other drawings and the ways in which paintings, sculptures, and buildings must be planned, Wilde concentrated on what the drawing could tell its interrogator. The deferral of aesthetic pronouncement in the interests of a neutral investigation of a drawing's purposes allows, once this is accomplished, for enhanced aesthetic appreciation.

The nature of the Ashmolean's collection of Michelangelo drawings makes it particularly appropriate for the exercise of Wilde's approach, for the majority of its autograph sheets are working ones, and there are relatively few drawings made by Michelangelo as independent works of art. To re-examine the work of Robinson and Parker in the light of Wilde makes it clear that the Ashmolean's Michelangelos still have more to teach us.

Furthermore, Michelangelo scholarship has developed substantially since 1956. For a body of illustrations of Michelangelo's drawings, critics had then to rely primarily on Frey's collection of plates, published in 1909. But soon after Parker's catalogue was published, the situation began to change. In 1959 appeared Luitpold Dussler's very comprehensive catalogue of Michelangelo drawings, a publication whose usefulness, even to those who did not agree with the views expressed in it, was qualified only by its limited number of illustrations. In 1962 came Paola Barocchi's comprehensive catalogue of drawings by Michelangelo and his school held in the Casa Buonarroti and the Uffizi, which had not previously been fully illustrated. This catalogue made it much easier than before to integrate drawings in the Ashmolean with those in Florentine collections. Barocchi's catalogue also prompted a review of fundamental importance by Michael Hirst, which, in addition to restoring to Michelangelo a number of drawings that Barocchi had allocated to Michelangelo's students and followers, provided a lapidary statement of the principle by which Wilde had operated: that the function of drawings tends to determine their form. The publication of Hartt's very extensive anthology of Michelangelo's drawings in 1975 continued the process, which culminated in the appearance, between 1975 and 1980, of the magnificent *Corpus dei Disegni di Michelangelo* undertaken by Charles de Tolnay, who had previously written a fundamental monograph on the artist and many articles. De Tolnay's *Corpus* again altered the general picture, and it is now the standard work of reference. Sheets of drawings are reproduced in colour in their original size and with rectos and versos orientated as in the originals, few sheets of real significance are omitted, and de Tolnay endeavoured to include even sheets that he himself felt unable to accept as autograph. This *Corpus* has further extended our knowledge and has made it easier to see Michelangelo's drawings en masse and to link works in the Ashmolean with ones elsewhere. De Tolnay's achievement deserves especial praise since, in preparing the *Corpus*, he was led to change many of his earlier negative views about the drawings he catalogued. For an aged scholar – de Tolnay's death followed by only a few weeks the publication of the final volume of the *Corpus* – such

willingness to reconsider views formed many years previously demonstrated an openness, an honesty, and an integrity that are wholly admirable.

In addition to these publications, and the clear and helpful discussion of Michelangelo's drawings by function and type published by Hirst in 1988, and his complementary exhibition catalogue of 1988–9, detailed work on Michelangelo has accelerated and expanded. Perhaps the most productive area of focus is Michelangelo's architecture, study of which, although it had not been ignored by earlier scholars, was given new impetus by James Ackerman's monograph and catalogue, first published in 1961. His lead has been followed by many others, notably in the volume edited by Paolo Portoghesi and Bruno Zevi of 1964, the monograph by Argan and Contardi of 1990, and the studies by Henry Millon and Craig Hugh Smyth (1976) of the façade of San Lorenzo and Saint Peter's, which have produced numerous articles as well as an important exhibition of 1988. These and other scholars have expanded and deepened awareness of Michelangelo's architectural work, particularly in his later period.

Thus, the reader will find here one or two novelties of attribution – although few that concern Michelangelo directly – but it is in the identification of certain functions, more closely delimited datings, and wider relation with drawings elsewhere that the present work may be found useful, even though much remains shadowy. In one area, however, hitherto less fully exploited than it might have been, that of copies of various kinds, this catalogue may claim some pioneering value. Copies of lost drawings can provide additional information about Michelangelo's projects and/or his thought processes, and copies of surviving ones can enlighten us about contemporary and later responses to the artist: The study of copies provides a royal road to our knowledge of the diffusion of artistic ideas, and an effort has been made here to examine such drawings in rather more detail than has been customary in the past, although much more work, inevitably, remains to be done. In relation to the Ashmolean's collections, much valuable material on the copies and on drawings around Michelangelo can be found in the late Hugh Macandrew's supplement to Parker's catalogue, published in 1980, which included a group of drawings transferred to the museum from the Taylor Institution in 1976.

The bibliographies of individual sheets are not intended to be exhaustive, although they are probably fuller than most readers will require. They are intended to perform several functions simultaneously: to provide a short critical history of the works treated, insight into the way that scholarship has developed, and a guide to those who may wish to examine these matters further. Summaries of others' views have been provided, but their accuracy obviously depends on the concentration, intelligence, and patience of the compiler and should not be taken as gospel. The compiler can report only that he has done his best and, before his undoubted omissions and errors of interpretation are pounced upon, would remind critics that this attempt at doing justice to his predecessors, however inadequately performed, is a task many other cataloguers avoid. An advantage of providing such summaries is that, particularly in cases where there is consensus, they permit briefer catalogue entries. The compiler is not sympathetic to entries that devote many pages to the discussion of the views of other scholars and a few lines only to the objects under consideration.

All old accumulations of drawings are arbitrary in their composition, and to focus on a particular collection is a way of re-shuffling the whole pack, forcing one to see drawings elsewhere in relation to these. This different angle of vision can sometimes reveal new alignments, or, to put it another way, to think in depth about an arbitrary selection can provide a means of escape from the normative and from the falsifying teleologies that frequently attend totalising discourses.

The present catalogue was undertaken as a sequel to one with similar objectives, dealing with the drawings by and after Michelangelo in the Musée du Louvre. The two collections do not much overlap, but in a few cases more or less the same points needed to be made. In these, the compiler has freely cannibalised passages of his *Inventaire* in the hope that self-plagiarism, however reprehensible, may escape the ultimate sanction rightly incurred by plagiarism of others. Parts of the account of the formation and dispersal of Sir Thomas Lawrence's collection of drawings by and after Michelangelo, dealing with what is known or can be surmised of the history of Michelangelo's drawings, also overlap with that in the Louvre catalogue, but the discussion begun there is here considerably extended and, in some instances, corrected.

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The compiler never met Johannes Wilde, but whenever he returns to Wilde's work, his admiration increases. If, in a few instances, he has diverged from Wilde's judgments, it is in the confidence that a scholar who so enviably combined exhaustive knowledge, supreme analytical clarity, and profound empathy for his subject would be the last to desire slavish discipleship.

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