

NOTAE NUMISMATICAE

ZAPISKI NUMIZMATYCZNE



Tom XV

MUZEUM NARODOWE W KRAKOWIE
SEKCJA NUMIZMATYCZNA
KOMISJI ARCHEOLOGICZNEJ PAN
ODDZIAŁ W KRAKOWIE

Kraków 2020

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Adres redakcji / Address of the Editorial Office:

Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie
ul. Józefa Piłsudskiego 12, 31-109 Kraków
tel. (+48) 12 433 58 50, e-mail: notae@mnk.pl
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Redakcja

Dear Readers,

It is with great pleasure that we present volume XV of *Notae Numismaticae – Zapiski Numizmatyczne* to you. In accordance with the principles that we have adopted, our texts are published in the conference languages with English and Polish abstracts. The whole of the present volume can be found as PDF's on the website of the National Museum in Krakow (<https://mnk.pl/notae-numismaticae-zapiski-numizmatyczne-1>), as are previously published volumes of the journal. The website also contains general information about the journal as well as information for prospective authors and reviewers.

The Editors

AGNIESZKA SMOŁUCHA-SŁADKOWSKA

The National Museum in Krakow

ORCID: 0000-0001-5765-5567

Pairing Antagonists: Pisanello's Medals of Niccolò Piccinino and Francesco Sforza*

ABSTRACT: Among the early medals made by Pisanello (Antonio Pisano, c. 1395–c. 1455), considered as the “inventor of the modern medal”, there are two of mercenary captains, Niccolò Piccinino and Francesco Sforza (the future duke of Milan). At the alleged moment of the medals’ execution both condottieri were in the service of Filippo Maria Visconti, Duke of Milan, who appears to have been the most probable commissioner. The pairing of these two captains was not coincidental – they were successors to the leaders of the two greatest Italian military companies, the *bracceschi* (led by Braccio da Montone) and the *sforzeschi* (of Muzio Attendolo Sforza), whose juxtaposition soon became a topos among contemporary chroniclers and biographers. The article outlines the political background of the commission and discusses the content and iconography of the two medals.

KEY WORDS: Pisanello, Filippo Maria Visconti, Niccolò Piccinino, Francesco Sforza, condottieri (mercenary captains)

ABSTRAKT: *Zestawiając przeciwników. Medale Niccola Piccinina i Francesca Sforzy autorstwa Pisanello*

Wśród wczesnych medali Pisanello (Antonio Pisano, ok. 1395–ok. 1455), uważanego za „twórcę nowożytnego medalu”, są dwa medale kondotierów Niccola Piccinina i Francesca Sforzy (przyszłego księcia Mediolanu). W domniemanej chwili wykonania medali obaj byli na usługach Filippa Marii Viscontiego, księcia Mediolanu, który jest też najbardziej prawdopodobnym zleceniodawcą dzieł. Wykonanie pary medali dla tych dwóch dowódców nie było przypadkowe – byli oni

* I would like to thank John Jefferson for improving the language of this article.

następcami liderów dwóch najświetniejszych włoskich kompanii, tzw. *bracceschi* (którym przewodził Braccio da Montone) i *sforzeschi* (pod kierownictwem Muzia Attendola Sforzy), których przeciwstawianie wkrótce stało się toposem wśród kronikarzy i biografów. Artykuł przedstawia tło polityczne dla tego zlecenia artystycznego oraz omawia treść i ikonografię obu medali.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Pisanello, Filippo Maria Visconti, Niccolò Piccinino, Francesco Sforza, kondotierzy (dowódcy najemni)

*They hate each other,
two leaders of hostile peoples*

Pius II, *Commentari*¹

At some point in the late 1430s/early 1440s Pisanello was commissioned to execute three medals. One of them was of the Duke of Milan, Filippo Maria Visconti (Pl. 1, Fig. 1),² and two were of the Visconti condottieri: Niccolò Piccinino (Pl. 1, Fig. 2) and Francesco Sforza (Pl. 1, Fig. 3). The latter two medals are often mentioned in the same breath having been similarly dated to c. 1441, with mercenary captains as their subjects and being linked by numerous formal and stylistic similarities. The years c. 1441 found both Piccinino and Sforza in the service of Visconti. As Milanese military leaders, although averse to each other, they were especially valuable to Visconti, as successors to two great captains, Muzio Attendolo Sforza and Braccio da Montone. It is worth considering the duke of Milan in the role of the medals' commissioner, supported by the fact that he was the patron of both the condottieri, and of Pisanello. The reason underlying such a commission was political.

BRACCESCHI CONTRA SFORZESCHI

The Duke of Milan³ did not take part in the Ferraro-Florentine council of 1438–1439, which witnessed the creation of the first Renaissance medal by Pisanello.⁴ By that time Visconti had already been involved in a long-lasting conflict with

¹ “Non ferebant se duo duces inimicarum gentium”, Pius II on Muzio Sforza and Braccio da Montone, in PIUS II (VAN HECK ed.) 1984, vol. 1: 194.

² The medal is usually dated for c. 1441, being most probably the second, after Palaeologus, medal made by the artist, HILL: Cat. 21; POLLARD 2007: Cat. 2; SCHER 2019: Cat. 2. For an earlier dating of this medal see below, n. 110.

³ DBI, vol. 47 (1997), “Filippo Maria Visconti, duca di Milano” [G. Soldi Rondinini]. For Filippo Maria Visconti see esp. CENGARLE and COVINI (eds.) 2015.

⁴ HILL: Cat. 19. For the discussion on the first medal by Pisanello see mainly: WEISS 1966; LAVIN 1993; SCHER 1994: Cat. 4a [S.K. Scher]; SYSON and GORDON 2001: 29–34, 113–114; LAZARIS 2007: 293–324; CHRISTIANSEN, WEPPELMANN and LEE RUBIN (eds.) 2011: 196–197, Cat. 64 [S.K. Scher]; JONES 2011: Chap. 3.

Florence (and Venice), and he was not on good terms with Pope Eugene IV – on the contrary – he openly supported the antipope.⁵ His alliance with the antipope was dictated by multi-threaded political sympathies,⁶ including the fact that Marie of Savoy, Visconti's wife, was one of his daughters; the couple never had an heir. Filippo's only child was a bastard, Bianca Maria,⁷ whom he legitimized and gave his name, Visconti. Lacking a male successor, the search for an appropriate husband for Bianca – the future heiress of the Duchy – loomed large in his mind. Therefore already in 1431, when she was only six, Filippo betrothed her to his military captain, Francesco Sforza, in return for the latter's loyalty – a pure act of pragmatism.⁸ A formal contract was signed two years later. Keeping Francesco tied close to him and deceiving him with promises, Visconti did not stop searching for a better, more trustworthy, candidate. The wedding was repeatedly postponed, until finally a more attractive candidate for the duke's son-in-law appeared in the person of Alfonso of Aragon,⁹ who had just inherited his claims to the kingdom of Naples, after the death of the Queen of Naples, Joanna II of Anjou.¹⁰ Identical claims were being made by René of Anjou, who was favored and supported by Pope Eugene IV, Florence and Venice. But the struggle for the Neapolitan throne had already begun earlier, in the 1420s, when the queen was involved in a conflict with Pope Martin V.¹¹

The pope's plan had been to replace her with Louis III of Anjou right after excommunicating the queen to facilitate the matter. The conflict quickly turned into a military enterprise. Louis, supported by the papal forces, took Naples in 1420, but the city was immediately taken over by the army of Alfonso of Aragon, to whom the childless queen had promised the succession in exchange for military help. The conflict soon drew in the two greatest Italian military forces of the time – the companies led by Braccio da Montone¹² (allied with the queen), and by Muzio Attendolo da Cotignola, known as Sforza¹³ (supporting the Anjou king). The pact

⁵ The antipope, Felix V (r. 1439–1449), was elected in opposition to Eugene by the council in Basel, which had been in session since 1431 and deliberating at the same time as the Council of Florence. For the internal conflict in the church during the years of Basel and Ferraro-Florentine councils see STIEBER 1978, for the election of Felix V see 56ff and 190ff.

⁶ Felix V had previously been Duke of Savoy, reigning as Amadeus VIII (DBI, vol. 2 [1960], "Amedeo VIII, duca di Savoia" [F. Cognasso]), with a reputation for exceptional piety and political efficiency (STIEBER 1978: 57).

⁷ She was legitimized in 1430 by Sigismund of Luxembourg. DBI, vol. 10 (1968), "Bianca Maria Visconti, duchessa di Milano" [F. Catalano].

⁸ Filippo Maria Visconti bias against his own condottieri is a well known topic. His approach is often given as an example of difficult relations of mercenaries with their masters, see MALLETT 2009: 105.

⁹ DBI, vol. 2 (1960), "Alfonso V d'Aragona, re di Sicilia, re di Napoli" [R. Moscati].

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, vol. 55 (2001), "Giovanna II d'Angiò, regina di Sicilia" [A. Ryder].

¹¹ *Ibidem*, vol. 71 (2008), "Martino V, papa" [C. Bianca].

¹² *Ibidem*, vol. 49 (1997), "Fortebracci, Andrea" [P.L. Falaschi]. For a wider view see material gathered in BARUTI CECCOPIERI (ed.) 1993.

¹³ DBI, vol. 4 (1962), "Attendolo, Muzio, detto Sforza" [P. Pieri].

between Queen Joanna and Alfonso was confirmed in the summer of 1421. Alfonso, assisted by Braccio, entered the city, and found it ruled by the queen's favorite.¹⁴ Soon an unsuccessful attempt to imprison both the queen and her lover resulted in the expulsion of the Aragonese from the city by the troops of Muzio Sforza. In light of such an open betrayal the queen changed sides. She adopted the papal idea of leaving the throne to her family, thus supporting Louis III. She broke all the earlier arrangements with Alfonso and appointed Louis in his place as her future successor.

In the background of these events another military conflict germinated, as if behind the backs of the pope and the queen. It arose in the city of L'Aquila (Abruzzi), in the heart of the Italian Peninsula. Already during the peaceful coexistence of the queen and the Aragonese when in Naples, Joanna II nominated Braccio da Montone (at that moment in their dual service), as a *connestabile* of the region of Abruzzi. In 1422 L'Aquila, the leading city of the region, attempted to throw off the shackles of Naples by appealing to the protection of the papal alliance. Braccio's troops were sent to besiege the city. However, when the queen changed sides, the hitherto loyal captain did not abandon the siege of L'Aquila. In this situation, the only way out for Joanna II was to send Sforza, who as commander of the allied papal and Neapolitan armies had just been made a Great Constable, to help the city.¹⁵

Why did Braccio care so much about L'Aquila, that he decided to oppose the powerful forces of the queen and the pope, remaining faithful only to the Aragonese monarch, who was actually already on his way back to Spain? His military career up to that point helps answer this question. Andrea Fortebraccio, known as Braccio, was born into a family of Perugian nobles,¹⁶ which, as a consequence of their exile at the very end of the 14th century, had lost their ancestral seat in nearby Montone. From his youth onward his career decisions were motivated by a desire to recover the position in Perugia. The military engagements he undertook were usually in reference to this opportunity.¹⁷ Already in 1407 Braccio was offered his first lordship by Rocca Contrada,¹⁸ in exchange for a military protection over the city, as was a usual practice for condottieri. He entered the service of Ladislaus

¹⁴ Giovanni Caracciolo, known as Sergianni – Great Seneschal of Naples. DBI, vol. 19 (1976), "Caracciolo, Gianni" [F. Petrucci].

¹⁵ MALLETT 2009: 68–69.

¹⁶ Braccio's father was *capitano del popolo* of Florence in the years 1372–1373. DBI, vol. 49 (1997), "Fortebracci, Andrea" [P.L. Falaschi].

¹⁷ This inclination of Braccio is strongly stressed in his "Vite" written by Giannantonio Campano in 1458 (for discussion see FINZI 1993. Claudio Finzi calls Braccio's attempts to regain the homeland "a key" to his biography, see *ibidem*: 52).

¹⁸ Now Arcevia, Marche.

of Naples, Joanna's brother and predecessor, but as soon as the king took Perugia, the condottiere changed sides to support his antagonists: the Florentines and a newly-elected Pisan antipope John XXIII.¹⁹ The antipope made Braccio Count of Montone and a captain-general of the Church's army. However, it was not enough. He took advantage of the opportunity and, abusing the moment when the antipope was vividly engaged in the matters of the Council of Constance, led his army to Perugia. The dismayed Perugians called for help from another condottiere, Carlo Malatesta, who tried to push the attack back. The battle, which took place near Sant'Egidio, ended in victory for the *bracceschi*.²⁰ As a consequence, Braccio was acclaimed signore of Perugia on 18 July 1416, but he lacked legitimacy.²¹

When the Council of Constance came to an end, a new pope was sitting on St. Peter's throne, a Roman, Martin V Colonna. Martin's far-reaching and long-awaited goal was to renew the papacy in Italy. Braccio tried to negotiate with the pope about his leadership in Umbria, but the pope's position was unambiguous. He deemed the condottiere useless and sent an army to defeat him. This army of a burgeoning Italian papacy, led by the best possible candidate for the task, Muzio Sforza, was crushed at Spoleto. Martin V now had to negotiate with Braccio.²² As a result, his power was stabilized in the lands he had obtained. He was also officially made a papal vicar, in return for his military help.²³ As such he went into the service of Alfonso of Aragon, who came to Naples at his aunt's invitation in 1421. Adhering more to Alfonso's patronage than the queen's or the pope's, Braccio saw in his new reign a chance to enlarge his own territories and strengthen his power. But his master was already outside Italy, and the allied enemy armies were heading towards him.

On the way to L'Aquila the army lead by Muzio Sforza had to cross the Pescara River. While the *sforzeschi* were fording the river, a gale blew up and caused an unforeseen tragedy. According to his biographers, Muzio fell into the water in full armor while

¹⁹ For the Great Western Schism of the Church see ROLLO-KOSTER and IZBICKI 2009; for the election and deposition of John XXIII see STUMP 2009.

²⁰ This was because of an innovative tactics of Braccio, in subsequent years widely imitated. His method was based on a division of the army into small troops (in order to make maintaining personal control over them easier); as such the squadrons were constantly rotating in and out of the battlefield and Braccio always had some rested troops ready to fight, which, in turn, increased the rapidity of the movements, making them difficult to predict. Another important innovation in the structure of Braccio's army was organizing the troops around a scheme called *lanze* – minor basic squads consisting of three people (*unum caporalem, unum equitorem et unum paggium*), which guaranteed the efficiency of the soldiers. These were characteristic features of the new school of warfare, called after the captain: "la braccasca". MALLETT 2009: 69–72; FERENTE 2005: 8ff.

²¹ For circumstances and for archival documents in regard to this event see REGNI 1993: 136–146.

²² These negotiations in Florence passed down to posterity thanks to Leonardo Bruni, who mentioned a song which irritated the pope: "Papa Martino non vale un quartino / Braccio valente vince ogni gente", sung by the youth on the streets of the city, FINZI 1993: 8.

²³ For details see REGNI 1993: 136–137.

trying to help one of his pages and drowned.²⁴ Leadership passed on to his skillful son, Francesco, at the moment twenty-three years old, supported by two talented captains: Bartolomeo Colleoni, and Jacopo Caldora. This orphaned army was awaited by Braccio da Montone, together with an experienced old captain, Gattamelata, and Braccio's leading pupil and compatriot (born in Callisciana, near Perugia), Niccolò Piccinino.²⁵ At that time L'Aquila was still under the siege and Braccio, not wanting to waste his army, waited until the citizens began to suffer from hunger. The army led by young Sforza found Braccio's outside the walls and the battle took place near the city. The hitherto novel military tactics of Braccio were not as surprising anymore in the 1420s.²⁶ Moreover Jacopo Caldora, who served as the captain general of Naples, was Braccio's former pupil. Braccio had to face his own tactics, reinforced by innovations developed by his opponents. This two-fold difficulty led to his defeat,²⁷ and death from an injury three days after the battle, on 4 June 1424.²⁸

Two of the greatest figures of Italian warfare died at almost the same time, replaced by the next generation of captains. As leaders of the best trained armies of Italy stood Francesco Sforza for the *sforzeschi* and Niccolò Piccinino for the *bracceschi*,²⁹ the heirs of two antagonists. Only a year after the events recalled here, in 1425, they both joined the service of the wealthy Milanese duke, Filippo Maria Visconti, to lead wars in Lombardy for him.

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* * *

In 1435 Queen Joanna died, establishing as her successor René d'Anjou (a brother of Louis III who died a year earlier). Alfonso of Aragon did not intend to give up his claims and returned to Italy to take over Naples. However, just at the very beginning of his campaign, trying to conquer the small city of Gaeta, his fleet was crushed near the island of Ponza by a Genoese army at the behest of Filippo Maria Visconti. Alfonso was captured and brought before the Duke. This personal

²⁴ MALLETT 2009: 69.

²⁵ Piccinino's nickname derived from his short stature. This feature finds its reflection in a popular anecdote that once fleeing the battlefield he was shoved into a sack and carried over the shoulder of one of his soldiers. MACHIAVELLI, Lib. 5, Chap. 23. Piccinino joined the forces of Braccio da Montone in 1416, a decision which determined his entire professional life. For Piccinino see DBI, vol. 83 (2015), "Piccinino, Niccolò" [S. Ferente], and FERENTE 2005: 4ff.

²⁶ See n. 20.

²⁷ However, it was not Braccio, but his captains, Piccinino and Gattamelata, who are to be blamed for the failure, as reflected in an anonymous epigram from the time: "Aquila bella chi t'ha scapillata? Niccolò Piccinino et Gattamelata" (Beautiful Aquila, who had lost you? / Niccolò Piccinino and Gattamelata), quoted after EROLI 1876: 15.

²⁸ MALLETT 2009: 73–74; ZUG TUCCI 2001.

²⁹ The succession following Braccio was not obvious. His son, Oddo was too young at the moment of his father's death and less experienced than the favorite Piccinino, therefore the latter took control shortly after; Oddo died in 1425. FERENTE 2005: 7.

meeting revolutionized Filippo's plans: he not only released Alfonso and sent him with honors back to the South,³⁰ but also decided to marry him to Bianca, therefore guaranteeing him succession in Milan. It was not a turn of events Francesco Sforza expected. His betrothal to Visconti's daughter already gave him not only a long-term hope of succession, but also granted him the Visconti name (Francesco was declared Filippo's adoptive son), as well as the fiefs of Castellazzo, Bosco and Frugarolo.³¹ To express his dissatisfaction with the Duke's actions, he left Milanese service in 1436 to join Venice – the main Visconti political opponent.

In the 1430s the military power of the Serenissima began to crumble. In 1432 Venetians decapitated their captain-general, Francesco Bussone (Carmagnola), formerly the main Milanese condottiere, accused of plotting with his former master – Duke Filippo Maria. Employing Francesco Sforza under these circumstances was more than a risky decision. Now Francesco stood against the duke (and still contracted future father-in-law) whose forces were led by Piccinino, the favorite pupil of his father's biggest rival. Thus the representatives of the two military companies were again on opposing sides. During the period of 1436–1440, both condottieri fought against each other, with Piccinino on the Milanese side, and Francesco fighting for Venice and Florence. At the end of June 1440, following the famous battle of Anghiari which ended with the defeat of Milanese troops commanded by Piccinino, Visconti's attitude changed.³² In the same year, Sforza was back in the duke's service, and finally married to Bianca in October of 1441 during a solemn ceremony in Cremona (Bianca's dowry). Sforza gained lordship over the city of Cremona and the future succession to the Duchy of Milan.³³

In the meantime, Niccolò Piccinino was successively working on his position in relations with the duke, becoming his "man of trust". Already in 1433, he was appointed to govern the city and army during Visconti's absence.³⁴ On 2 December 1437³⁵ the duke adopted him (as with Sforza before him) into the Visconti family, bestowing permission to use the Visconti coat of arms and territorial possessions, which were enlarged in the ensuing years.³⁶ A year later, he was nominated as governor of Bologna. Fate ceased to favor him only at Anghiari, yet despite the defeat

³⁰ See MACHIAVELLI, *Lib. 5, Chap. 5*.

³¹ DBI, vol. 50 (1998), "Francesco I Sforza, duca di Milano" [A. Menniti Ippolito].

³² For the battle of Anghiari and further references see "Anghiari, battle of" in ROGERS (ed.) 2010: 47–48.

³³ DBI, vol. 50 (1998), "Francesco I Sforza, duca di Milano" [A. Menniti Ippolito]. Sforza once more, even after marriage with Bianca Maria, will be in the Venetian service in 1446, however, get back to Visconti shortly before the latter's death in 1447.

³⁴ FERENTE 2005: 13.

³⁵ HILL: *Cat. 22* gave a later date (1439) for this event and his mistake is still widely repeated in the literature on the Piccinino's medal. On the proper date of 1437 see FERENTE 2005: 14.

³⁶ DBI, vol. 83 (2015), "Piccinino, Niccolò" [S. Ferente]; FERENTE 2005: 14.

Piccinino's attitude became even more demanding and his ambitions more personal than hitherto.³⁷

In November 1441, right after Sforza's marriage, a treaty proclaiming peace in Lombardy was declared. The peace initiative was Sforza's alone, and was signed in the camp of his troops in Cavriana.³⁸ Francesco Sforza, the new Lord of Cremona, played the double role of mediator and host. Thus, the sidelined Piccinino, as his master Braccio did before, strengthened his relations with Alfonso of Aragon who became the King of Naples on 2 June 1442. On 7 June Piccinino was awarded with both his name and coat of arms, now becoming Niccolò Visconti d' Aragona.³⁹ Simultaneously, still officially in the service of Visconti, he enlarged his territories with the so-called Pallavicino State, and started to realize a plan unfavorable to Visconti, the creation of his own domain. Its final point was to include Perugia within it. In the city he was greeted enthusiastically, even though it was under the rule of the Baglioni family.⁴⁰ In 1443 Piccinino was called to Milan by the duke, leaving his troops under the command of one of his sons, Francesco. In his absence, the troops were surprised and beaten by Sforza and young Piccinino was taken prisoner.⁴¹ Soon after and still in Lombardy, Niccolò died (of grief, as someone have claimed) in 1444, leaving his territories and people in the hands of another son, Jacopo. Duke Filippo Maria Visconti commissioned a solemn funerary oration prepared by Pier Candido Decembrio,⁴² and Piccinino's body was buried with all honors in the choir of the Milan Cathedral. No one imagined then that this marble tomb would be dismantled just over ten years later, in August 1455, on the order of his old rival, the subsequent Duke of Milan – Francesco Sforza.⁴³

THE MEDAL OF NICCOLÒ PICCININO

The medal of Niccolò Piccinino (Pl. 1, Fig. 2)⁴⁴ is one of Pisanello's best realizations; it is known in many copies, made both in lead and in bronze.⁴⁵ I consider

³⁷ E.g. as a result of ignoring him in territorial donations among other Visconti condottieri, Piccinino agreed to attack Venetian troops (still led by Francesco Sforza), only if he were granted Piacenza (FERENTE 2005: 14–15). Thus he provoked the duke's anger, reflected in the often quoted bitter words: "These condottieri have now reached the stage when if they are defeated we pay for their failures, and if victors we must satisfy their demands and throw ourselves at their feet – even more than if they were our enemies. Must the Duke of Milan bargain for the victory of his own troops, and strip himself to receive favours from them?" (MALLETT 2009: 105).

³⁸ MALLETT and HALE 1984: 40.

³⁹ FERENTE 2005: 14.

⁴⁰ The Baglioni family attained power in the city after the events of 1420s, FERENTE 2005: 15.

⁴¹ DBI, vol. 83 (2015), "Piccinino, Niccolò" [S. Ferente].

⁴² FERENTE 2005: 15–16, for the oration see DECEMBRIO, *Oratio Petri Candidi Decembrii*: cols. 1047–1084. In the oration the duke himself was particularly praised as well.

⁴³ WEGENER 1993: 165.

⁴⁴ HILL: Cat. 22; for further bibliography see CORDELLIER and MARINI (eds.) 1998: Cat. 123.

⁴⁵ The best specimens are a bronze copy from Berlin (see BÖRNER 1997: Cat. 8,1; FRIEDLAENDER 1882: 31, Nr. 2, Taf. 2, in Berliner collection there is also a copy in lead: BÖRNER 1997: Cat. 8,2), a lead copy

a bronze specimen from Berlin to be the finest among those known to me, presenting an especially high quality of relief.⁴⁶ The obverse bears a portrait of Piccinino facing left, wearing plate armor over a shirt of mail, and a tall, floppy cap. A preliminary drawing to the portrait, attributed to Pisanello, is preserved in *Codex Vallardi* (Pl. 2, Fig. 4).⁴⁷ Here, instead of armor, the condottiere wears a civilian outfit, but the characteristic headgear remains the same. The surrounding inscription on the obverse follows: NICOLAVS PICININVS VICECOMES MARCHIO CAPITANEVS MAX[imus] AC MARS ALTER (*Niccolò Piccinino Visconti, marquess, a most great captain and a second Mars*). The condottiere's name was enriched by his affiliation to the Visconti family and the title of marquess given to him by Filippo Maria in 1438, Piccinino is also called a "Capitaneus Maximus" – *a most great captain*, and finally a mythological analogy is invoked by naming him "Mars alter" – *a second Mars*.⁴⁸

An eye-catching detail on Piccinino's armor is a small monogram present on a shoulder piece, most probably being an armorer's mark. The sign is composed of the two crowned "A" letters with additional left-hand serifs.⁴⁹ This same mark can be found on two other medallic works. The first is a medal of Ludovico Gonzaga,

from Galleria Franchetti–Ca' d'Oro, Venice (Inv. No. 242, there is also a late copy: Inv. No. 241), two bronze copies in Bargello, Florence (VANDEL and TODERI 2003: Cats. 12–13), and a very fine bronze copy in Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon (Inv. No. 2404); there are also many copies in other collections – two in Brescia (bronze: RIZZINI 1892: Cat. 18, see also PIALORSI 1982: 8–9; lead: RIZZINI 1892: Cat. 19); two in the British Museum (bronze – G3,IP.748, and lead – 1923,0611.1); two bronzes in Victoria and Albert Museum (Inv. A.170–1910 and 672–1865); a specimen from the Lehman collection in the Metropolitan Museum, which is believed by Scholten possibly being a cast from the 16th c. (SCHOLTEN 2011: Cat. 45, there is one more, albeit worse specimen in the collection, Cat. 46); an ex Dreyfus copy in the Kress Collection (POLLARD 2007: Cat. 4); a specimen from Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des Médailles (CORDELLIER and MARINI (eds.) 1998: Cat. 123); three specimens in Milan, Castello Sforzesco (JOHNSON and MARTINI 1986: Cats. 432–434); a lead specimen in Biblioteca Ambrosiana (Medagliere), Inv. No. MM3739 (ALTERI 2016); a copy in Museo Bardini, Florence (VANDEL and TODERI 1998: Cat. 1, see also CAVALLARO and PARLATO (eds.) 1988: Cat. 79 [R. Magri]); a late copy in Museo Correr (*Catalogo delle monete...* 1898: Cat. 17); a bronze specimen from the Morgenroth Collection, now in Art, Design, and Architecture Museum, UC Santa Barbara (MIDDELDORF and GOETZ 1944: Cat. 4), which was found in the foundations of a house in Verona. Hill also lists specimens of the medal in Modena, Ferrara, Hamburg. For an imprint of the Piccinino medal (made of clay) found in Augsburg in 1998, see HERMANN 2000 and FLEPS 2000.

⁴⁶ A relief quality can be noticed in a form of the sitter's ear, which is far better modeled in this specimen than in other copies, as well as details of the sitter's hair and shirt of mail, as well as clearly defined feathers of the griffin and grass on the reverse side. The "AA" mark is also clearly engraved (for the mark see below).

⁴⁷ For the drawing of Niccolò Piccinino's physiognomy in *Codex Vallardi* (Musée du Louvre, département des Arts graphiques, Inv. No. 2482) see esp. FOSSI-TODOROW 1966: Cat. 303, tav. cxxiii and CORDELLIER and MARINI (eds.) 1998: Cat. 121 with further bibliography. Hill (1905: 127, note) suggested that *Codex Vallardi* 2327r also provides a portrait of Piccinino, but it seems to present a different physiognomy (FOSSI-TODOROW 1966: Cat. 380, tav. cxxxi). Several more preliminary drawings for Pisanello's medallic works are known, e.g. profile portraits of Emperor John VIII Palaeologus (*Codex Vallardi*, 2478) or Filippo Maria Visconti (*Codex Vallardi*, 2483).

⁴⁸ Paralleling a skilled warrior to the god of war was an ancient topos, and can be found in Roman literature, e.g. in Livy (XXI, 10), where Hamilcar, Hannibal's father, is called a second Mars.

⁴⁹ The mark is clear also on specimens in Lisbon and Paris (see here, n. 46).

also by Pisanello from a few years later.⁵⁰ The other is of Alfonso, the Duke of Calabria, made by Andrea Guacialoti.⁵¹ Its presence was first noted by Hill in 1920 on the Gonzaga medal.⁵² There were attempts to identify it with armorers' marks attributed to Ambrogio de Osma of Brescia (Pl. 2, Figs. 5a–b) or Anrigolo d'Arconate.⁵³ These proposals, however, should be treated with the utmost caution. What can be plausibly assumed is that the mark belonged to a Milanese workshop, which were considered the best in the period. The popularity of the most esteemed armorers in Milan was so high that visitors included their workshops in their itineraries.⁵⁴ A high-quality full suit of armor often served as a prestigious gift.⁵⁵ If the “AA” monogram could indeed have been easily identified by a contemporary beholder with some well-known Milanese workshop, then it need not have any political significance, but simply directed special attention to the condottiere's precious and professional equipment.

On the reverse side, a transformation of the Roman she-wolf suckling the divine twins Romulus and Remus is depicted. In the place of the wolf-mother, Pisanello put a she-griffin breastfeeding the twins, which are Piccinino (sitting to the front) and his deceased master, Braccio da Montone,⁵⁶ both inscribed with proper captions. The divine twins were believed to be sons of Mars, in this way the allegory corresponds with the last part of the obverse inscription. Presenting Niccolò in this symbolic junction with his famous compatriot, the artist aimed to raise his rank as a condottiere and highlight his martial formation. The she-griffin wears a collar with the inscription “PERVSIA”, the Roman name for Perugia, whose symbol was a griffin, present on the city seal since the 14th century and favorably placed in public spaces.⁵⁷ A symbolic animal, based on both the *Lupa Romana* and the Perugian

⁵⁰ HILL: Cat. 36.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*: Cat. 745.

⁵² George Hill in 1920 published a short letter on Pisanello's armor mark in the Burlington Magazine, as a comment to S.J. Camp's note on Milanese helmets in a previous issue of the journal (CAMP 1919; the Hill-Camp additional letters: HILL and CAMP 1920). As suggested Hill, Ludovico Gonzaga could have intended to indicate a Milanese origin of his armor (HILL and CAMP 1920: 49), however Camp considered it impossible to identify the armorer – as he noted “not all Milanese marks are crowned and not all crowned marks are Milanese” (*ibidem*: 50).

⁵³ POLLARD 2007: 27, n. 4. Pollard based his idea on research of armorer's marks by Lionello Boccia, however, this author was very tentative about his hypothetical identifications, see BOCCIA 1982: 284 (for Anrigolo d'Arconate) and p. 286, no. 61 (for Ambrogio de Osma).

⁵⁴ This was a case of the Missaglia family in via Spadari, see SYSON and GORDON 2001: 63.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ This glorifying of Braccio might have been the reason why Vasari also ascribed to Pisanello a medal of Braccio (of whom no medal is known), see VASARI: 12.

⁵⁷ The mythical origins of Perugia are tied with two symbolic animals, a lion and a griffin. In Palazzo dei Priori two 13th-century bronze figures of both animals made by Arnolfo di Cambio are preserved (now in the “Sala del Grifo e del Leone”). In the 15th century the figures decorated an entrance to the public meeting hall (later known as “Sala dei Notari”) of the same Palazzo dei Priori. More for the griffin as the symbol of Perugia see JOHNSTONE 1962. A *griffone*, because of its “biformis naturae” was also a Christological symbol, as well as a symbol of courage and strength, joining both the nature of a lion and an eagle (RUGOLO 1996: Cat. 10).

griffin, demonstrates a sophisticated junction of symbolical meanings recalling both the real and ideal sentiments of the captain.

In the time of Pisanello, a now commonly known bronze she-wolf⁵⁸ was still placed in the Lateran papal palace, not yet being on the Capitol, where it was brought by order of the Pope Sixtus IV in 1471. It is possible that Pisanello saw the sculpture (lacking the infant figures) when working on the fresco cycle in the Lateran palace's interior in 1431–1432.⁵⁹ But the wolf part of Pisanello's beast does not resemble the sculpture at all. Its source was more plausibly ancient Roman coinage, which the artist was interested in, as indicated by Luke Syson and Dillian Gordon.⁶⁰ Especially close to Pisanello's creation is the iconography of silver Republican didrachms dating back to the 3rd century BC (Pl. 2, Fig. 6).⁶¹ The twins on the medal have been altered,⁶² as was the mother, but the details – a treatment of the tail, which wraps around the rear leg of the animal, as well as modeling of a rib-cage and tense haunches⁶³ – allow recognition of this coin as a direct source. The exact configuration of both infants suckled by a she-wolf (close in pose to the ancient numismatic depictions) was repeated in the late 15th century by an anonymous artist on a plaquette, now in the Kress collection (Pl. 2, Fig. 7).⁶⁴

The she-griffin appears on the medal as a personification of the motherland of the two condottieri, Niccolò and Braccio – sons of Mars and infant generals, presented as beloved children of Perugia – in this respect compatriots and “brothers”. A special emphasis on the place of origin, which could create a unique relation between the two persons, was a common topos in politically dismembered and

⁵⁸ BOBER and RUBINSTEIN (eds.) 2010: Cat. 184; MAGRÌ 1988. For a wider context see HERKLOTZ 1985: esp. 17–21.

⁵⁹ CORDELLIER (ed.) 1995: 45–46, doc. 13; DE MARCHI 1998. For Pisanello's sojourn in Rome and the drawings of ancient sculptures see BLASS-SIMMEN 1995.

⁶⁰ See SYSON and GORDON 2001: 120–121.

⁶¹ For the coin see CRAWFORD 1974: 20 (type). The same motif of the Roman she-wolf can also be found on many imperial coins (e.g. those of Antoninus Pius, Hadrian, or Vespasian). Cornelius Vermeule also sees the griffin as directly copied from a coin of Gordianus III struck in Poecaea (Ionia) in the middle of the 3rd century (VERMEULE III 1987: 269–270). Despite the similarity of the two griffins, a direct relation between the images remains, however, rather difficult to prove.

⁶² Such a placement of twins does not seem to appear on any of the ancient coins, as already noticed by Cécile Dulière, see DULIÈRE 1966: 82.

⁶³ Cécile Dulière noted that the griffin's front legs have a “Perugian” origin, due to the fact that ancient (i.e. etruscan or hellenistic-Roman) depictions of the creature had always “paws of the beast” and not bird-claws, see DULIÈRE 1966: 82, n. 7.

⁶⁴ Now in The National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection, Inv. No. 1957.14.144, see CORDELLIER and MARINI (eds.) 1998: Cat. 124. Due to the stylistic differences, however, it cannot be attributed to Pisanello but is commonly believed to be late 15th-century, probably made in Roman circles. For the first wider discussion on the plaquette (and attribution to Pisanello), see DULIÈRE 1966.

scattered Renaissance Italy.⁶⁵ Both condottieri desired and aspired to be the city's sanctioned rulers, always being her servants and protectors. The medal's message was to indicate the proper lords and heirs of the city, but serving only the one who was left and had taken over the inheritance of his predecessor and master. The complex structure of symbolic-allegorical mixture serves the propaganda message: Niccolò Piccinino – a great captain, the son of Mars, the son of Perugia and a “brother” in arms of Braccio – should be the one to exercise authority in the city. Death interrupted his plan, the pursuit of which was later explicitly articulated by Machiavelli ascribing to Piccinino a “desire to recover the states of Braccio”.⁶⁶

As for Piccinino himself, naming him the “second Mars” is actually quite accurate, not only because he was renowned for his profession. Piccinino was one of those soldiers who were devoted to military activity and fully committed to their duties. He was regarded as cruel, bold and rash,⁶⁷ yet adored by those he supported. Pope Pius II noted in his *Commentaries*, that once when Piccinino fought in Tuscany the enemy's soldiers “worshiped him as a deity that provides matter of war”.⁶⁸

Many years after Piccinino's death, a poem was published in Vicenza in 1489 entitled “Altro Marte”,⁶⁹ which is a certain reminiscent of the obverse inscription from Pisanello's medal. It was written in honor of Niccolò Piccinino by a Perugian poet, Lorenzo Gualtieri (1426–1496), called “Spirito”.⁷⁰ The existence of the poem had been hitherto noted in the context of our medal, but without further conclusions.⁷¹ The reason could be that the poem was printed almost fifty years after the medal was made, and as such was regarded as an unrelated later production of a Perugian humanist. However, not only Lorenzo Gualtieri served under Piccinino as a soldier (together with his father) during the capture of Assisi by Piccinino in 1442,⁷² but one

⁶⁵ A similar concept was used concerning Pisanello himself. Pisanello was a compatriot of Guarino da Verona, whose friendship is confirmed by a well-known Latin poem written by Guarino c. 1438. After glorifying Pisanello's artistic skills, Guarino described the joy of their city, Verona in the words: “This indeed Minerva and your fatherland, in which we both rejoice, and which has given us kindred names, may not suffer: that fatherland whose glory you spread far and wide by the many virtues, prudence, dignity, modesty, generosity, and good faith, for which all men celebrate you. Great is the renown that comes to our Verona from the excellence of your worth (...)”. HILL 1905: 113–118, for the poem translation see: 114–116; CORDELLIER (ed.) 1995: doc. 10. For the importance of a birthplace and its use in the public laudatory sphere see MCMANAMON 1990: Chap. 3: “Bona externa. Birthplace, Descent, Education” (esp. pp. 36–62).

⁶⁶ MACHIAVELLI, Lib. 5, Chap. 5.

⁶⁷ For Piccinino's personality see e.g. RICOTTI 1845: 99–104.

⁶⁸ “(...) Picininumque quasi deum colebant, qui solus belli materiam ministraret”, PIUS II (VAN HECK ed.) 1984, vol. 1: 89. According to the pope, the soldiers did not want to end the war, fearing that they would return to farm works.

⁶⁹ GUALTIERI 1489; for a summarized description see DBI, vol. 60 (2003), “Gualtieri, Lorenzo” [G. Arbizzoni].

⁷⁰ For Gualtieri see *ibidem*.

⁷¹ The connection between Pisanello's medal and the poem was already noted by Serena Ferente, DBI, vol. 83 (2015), “Piccinino, Niccolò” [S. Ferente].

⁷² DBI, vol. 60 (2003), “Gualtieri, Lorenzo” [G. Arbizzoni].

of the manuscripts of the work was dedicated to Jacopo Piccinino, Niccolò's son, already in 1463.⁷³ The suggestion arose that the production of the poem, due to its triumphal tone and the author's vivid expectations, could have already been started during the years of his military service under Piccinino and was then gradually updated with new events.⁷⁴ If true, it would mean that both works, the medal and the poem, could have been created in the same year or over a very short distance of time.

The poem consisted of 101 chapters grouped in 3 books, relating to the life of Niccolò Piccinino, including the events of his service under Braccio da Montone. For our discussion, the third chapter from the first book is particularly important.⁷⁵ Right at the beginning of the poem, the author uses a mythological parallel to present the origin of the military vocation of Niccolò Piccinino "of Perugian blood" – "the second Mars in arms".⁷⁶ When a little boy, already orphaned by his father, the god Mars appeared to him on a horseback urging him to follow the profession of arms.⁷⁷ The reason for Piccinino's soldierly vocation was the need for his service expected by the greatest powers of Italy and abroad, including Visconti, House of Anjou, Aragonesi and the Papal States.⁷⁸ In the further text of the poem such a fantastic narration does not appear, making the initial chapters of the first book unique in this regard. The uniqueness of the opening, together with the late dating of the completion of the poem,⁷⁹ indicates that it had to be the medal by Pisanello which awakened the poet's imagination, serving as an inspiration for a mythologically-based vision (simultaneously creating a mythical explanation for the family's power). As a source for the poem's title, Pisanello's medal helped construct the legend of Niccolò Piccinino's life. All this ultimately was in the service of his son, Jacopo,⁸⁰ who died tragically in 1465, arrested and sentenced to death by King Ferrante of Naples, two years after the poem was dedicated to the young Piccinino by the faithful, and hopeful, Gualtieri.

⁷³ As can be learned from the author's note in the codex of the Civic Library of Verona, Mss. 1241–1242, DBI, vol. 60 (2003), "Gualtieri, Lorenzo" [G. Arbizzoni].

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁵ GUALTIERI 1489: Lib. 1, Chap. 3, s.p. (*Como lo dio Marte venne in visione a Nicolo piccinino* [...]).

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*: Lib. 1, Chap. 3, s.p. ([...] *Congram triumpho opienne nelcamino / Perdarne lume a future memorie / Gloriate al mondo el sangue perugino / Dapuoì chal mondo nacque vnaltro marte / Nelarme solo Nicolo piccinino* [...]).

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*: Lib. 1, Chap. 3, s.p. ([...] *Uno giorno ripossandosi el garzone / Dormendolapso pieno daltri pensieri / Gliaparue vna mirabile visione / Cheliparcan vedere per vno senthiere / Venire et prosimarsi apoco apoco / Sopra vno cauallo vno forte caualiere / [...] Ecomincio quel caualieri possente / Figliuolo ascolta le parole mei / Per farte sopra lialtri elpin eccellente / [...] Sequita larte militare chio dico* [...]).

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*: Lib. 1, Chap. 3, s.p. ([...] *Aspectate lacasa dei bisconte / [...] Aspectate lacasa incoronata* [...] *del sangue di francia / [...] Aspectatte lacasa de Ragona* [...] / *Aspectan lachiesa per auerte* [...]).

⁷⁹ DBI, vol. 60 (2003), "Gualtieri, Lorenzo" [G. Arbizzoni].

⁸⁰ DBI, vol. 83 (2015), "Piccinino, Jacopo" [S. Ferente].

THE MEDAL OF FRANCESCO SFORZA

As the great *fama* of Braccio passed on to Niccolò Piccinino, such a great *fama* of the old Sforza was granted to his son. However, on the medal of Francesco his father remains unmentioned. The medal of Francesco Sforza (Pl. 1, Fig. 3),⁸¹ as with most of Pisanello's works, is known from many casts produced mainly in bronze or brass.⁸² From these, especially fine are specimens in the collections of the Staatliche Museen, Berlin, and Galleria Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro in Venice. Both present high quality of relief, with clear details and lettering.⁸³

On the obverse, Francesco wears plate armor over a shirt of mail and a tall cap with a round crown, his curly hair emerging from under the cap. This medallic portrait seems to be rather one of the weaker examples of Pisanello's works of this type, moreover, it seems that the artist could not make a preparatory drawing of his subject's physiognomy – in contrast to his earlier medals, here Pisanello presented his sitter in a curious pose, with the face shown in profile but the figure slightly turned so that his back is apparent.⁸⁴ The inscription follows: FRANCISCVS SFORTIA VICECOMES MARCHIO ET COMES AC CREMONE D[ominus] (*Francesco Sforza Visconti, marquess and count, and lord of Cremona*).

The reverse side is far better designed. In the center a beautifully sculpted head of a horse dominates the flan. The unbridled mount has open nostrils and jaw, extended tongue, bulging eyes, his ears flattened on the neck. Right below the eye, a pulsing vein adds an illusory vitality to him. This study of a horse's head is much better than that of the condottiere's portrait. Numerous drawings of mounts sketched from nature are known from the artist's hand.⁸⁵ Several are close to this depiction, like the one

⁸¹ HILL: Cat. 23.

⁸² Two specimens in Berlin (bronze from the Friedländer collection: BÖRNER 1997: Cat. 9.1 [see also RUGOLO 1996: Cat. 3], and lead: Cat. 9.2); two specimens in Galleria Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro, Venice (Inv. Nos. 228 and 229); a specimen with a loop from Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des Médailles (CORDELLIER and MARINI (eds.) 1998: Cat. 128); a bronze from the National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kress Collection (POLLARD 2007: Cat. 5); a bronze specimen with a loop in the Metropolitan Museum (1974.169); two specimens in Bargello (POLLARD 1983: Cat. 6; VANNEL and TODERI 2003: Cats. 14–15); three rather clumsy bronze specimens in Milan, Castello Sforzesco (JOHNSON and MARTINI 1986: Cats. 437–439). Hill also lists specimens in Ferrara, Frankfurt and Glasgow. There are many more copies in other collections.

⁸³ The Ca' d'Oro specimen seems to be better cast on the obverse side, where even the petals of a flower-form stop are modeled, the Berlin piece conversely, as can be noticed on the decorated book binding (all details lacking in the Venice specimen).

⁸⁴ The opinion has been ventured that the medallic obverse might be a repetition of a painted portrait of Francesco which has been lost (SYSON and GORDON 2001: 112, see also here below). This, however, seems unlikely that an individual portrait executed by Pisanello could have presented a sitter not in profile view but in such a curious pose as executed on the medal. A different notion was made also by Syson in 1998, who suggested that the Sforza medal might have been a workshop work (SYSON 1998: 394–395).

⁸⁵ The attention Pisanello paid to likenesses of horses can be reflected by the enormous amount of drawings he devoted to these animals, see FOSSI-TODOROW 1966: 26–30, esp. Cat. 37, p. 74, and tav. xlvii (*Codex Vallardi*, 2355). For the naturalism of the Pisanello horses (in the context of the Palaeologus medal) see JÜREN 1973: 219–225.

from Paris (*Codex Vallardi*, no. 2355; Pl. 3, Fig. 8), presenting a horse with similarly opened jaw. But this horse's portrait shows greater resemblance to ancient art than just capturing nature, with elements such as being unbridled, or the specific styling of the horse's mane (a characteristic high "ponytail" above the head), indicate its ancient origin. It is plausible that here once more a concept was borrowed from an ancient coin. It was suggested that a Seleucid tetradrachm with the horned Bucephalus might have served as a model (Pl. 3, Fig. 10a).⁸⁶ A similar depiction of the horse's head also appears on a Roman Republican silver coin with Hercules on the obverse (Pl. 3, Fig. 10b),⁸⁷ and on a 4th-century, Carthaginian tetradrachm (unbridled; Pl. 3, Fig. 10c).⁸⁸ Pisanello's horse's head can be also linked to the so called "Protome Medici" / "The Medici-Riccardi horse" (Pl. 3, Fig. 9),⁸⁹ a variously dated ancient bronze sculpture, once probably being a part of a larger statue. In the period it was in possession of the Medici family,⁹⁰ and could have been seen by Pisanello when in Florence. Another monumental horse's head was certainly seen by the artist in Rome. Among the sketches and drawings attributed to Pisanello and his circle is one presenting a dioscuro from the monumental Dioscuri Group on the Quirinale (at the time known as Monte Cavallo; Pl. 4, Fig. 11), thought to be Roman copies of a bronze Greek original.⁹¹ This drawing was most probably made in Rome during the years 1431–1432 when Pisanello worked on the Lateran. The dioscuro is the one forming the "OPVS FIDIAE"⁹² part of the sculpture. As illustrated in 15th- and 16th-century depictions, a horse from this pair consisted mainly of the head, the rest of the front of its body was replaced by a brick support (Pl. 4, Figs. 12–13). This

⁸⁶ See VERMEULE III 1987: 271–272; placing of Bucephalus on the reverse, if indeed conscious, could have been a deliberate reference to the greatest leader of antiquity, Alexander of Macedon, with whom Sforza would later be compared on the portal of the Palazzo Vimercati (c. 1450). SYSON and GORDON 2001: 120; cf. MARINI (ed.) 1996: Cat. 83 [D. Gasparotto].

⁸⁷ SYSON and GORDON 2001: 120.

⁸⁸ DEGENHART 1973: 411, n. 99 and VERMEULE III 1987: 271.

⁸⁹ Now in Museo Archeologico di Firenze; it is generally considered to be a 4th-century BC Greek (PAOLOZZI STROZZI and BORMAND (eds.) 2013: Cat. V.1 [G. C. Cianferoni] or a 2nd/1st-century BC Hellenistic work (GREGORI (ed.) 2004: Cat. II.5). The head was recently restored (2015).

⁹⁰ The sculpture was probably already among "anticaglie" of Cosimo Medici, and with great probability was studied by Donatello before 1443 (influencing his later "Protome Carafa" from c. 1455 as well as the horse statue of Gattamelata from 1453). The first mention about the Medici horse's head came from the inventory of 1494, PAOLOZZI STROZZI and BORMAND (eds.) 2013: Cat. V.1 [G. C. Cianferoni]. The most recent discussion on the Carafa's horse's head is by Leah Clark, who did not date the sculpture, considering it equally plausible that it can be as well 15th-century as ancient (CLARK 2018: 22–58). A similar head, or one of those mentioned, served in the 16th century Ruggiero Bascapè to complement the famous *Lion attacking a Horse* (now in Musei Capitolini) monumental marble sculpture, which for many centuries served as a symbol of the city of Rome.

⁹¹ GREGORI (ed.) 2004: Cat. I.12; CORDELLIER and MARINI (eds.) 1998: Cat. 84. The drawing is kept in Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan (F. 214), its attribution is still hard to define, for details see *ibidem*.

⁹² See FOSSI-TODOROW 1962: esp. p. 146; BOBER and RUBINSTEIN (eds.) 2010: Cat. 125. In the time of Pisanello one of the two pairs was attributed to Phidias, and the second to Praxiteles, among others by Flavio Biondo and Angelo Decembrio, see CORDELLIER and MARINI (eds.) 1998: Cat. 84.

vivid element of the ancient group of a dioscuro repelling a horse, believed to be designed by Phidias' hand, could also have been what inspired the artist.

The image of a horse has always been a symbol of prestige and high status. Good mounts were simply very precious.⁹³ But a message provided by an unbridled mount to be repelled could have been also understood as a symbol of good government. At almost the same time as when the medal was executed, Leon Battista Alberti in Ferrara was finishing his treatise "De equo animante", dedicated to Leonello d'Este in 1441 in the context of preparing an equestrian statue in honor of Leonello's deceased father, Niccolò d'Este.⁹⁴ According to the author, the art of riding was based on two main fundamentals: discipline and ethics. Alberti underlined the dual nature of the horse, which can both "trample down an enemy" and yet be guided by gentle touches of the bridle, always staying loyal to the horseman. Thus horses were suited to both war and the comforts of peace – a theme especially often raised in the context of the occupation of condottieri.⁹⁵ The main topic of the treatise is how to domesticate a horse, situating horsemanship as a metaphor of government.⁹⁶ A horse can remain immune to leadership if the leadership is poor, but becomes domesticated in the hands of proper, self-disciplined man.⁹⁷ This courtly interest in the subject could also have inspired Pisanello in the late 1430s when he was at the Ferrarese court. Therefore, the depiction of such a horse's head reminiscent of ancient models was fully justified for a condottiere (and highly-skilled rider), as well as for a new ruler of Cremona.

Below the horse's head lies a pile of three closed books and a sword. These are an allusion to Sforza's skills, as he was not only a talented captain (as indicated by the horse's head and sword) but also a learned intellectual.⁹⁸ Both characteristics were crucial for a ruler, which is how he wanted to be considered and perhaps also how his father-in-law wanted to see him.

⁹³ An interesting comparison would be King Ferrante of Naples' issue of a new coin type in February 1472, the reverse of which he chose an image of a horse with the inscription "EQVITAS REGNI" (in a letter by the king to the officials of the royal *camera*, he indicated that to depict a horse on the reverse of his coin was Diodeme Carafa's suggestion!). Ferrante's instructions was only to issue a coin in style of ancient "medaglie", with a portrait on the obverse, and a "worthy thing" on the reverse, CLARK 2018: 51–53.

⁹⁴ This treatise is generally devoted to the art of horse riding, for the recent edition of the treatise see ALBERTI (GRAYSON and FURLAN eds.) 2017. For the discussion on the treatise see SCHIESARI 2003.

⁹⁵ SCHIESARI 2003: 7; ALBERTI (GRAYSON and FURLAN eds.) 2017: 4.

⁹⁶ SCHIESARI 2003: 9–10; ALBERTI (GRAYSON and FURLAN eds.) 2017: 6.

⁹⁷ SCHIESARI 2003: 11; ALBERTI (GRAYSON and FURLAN eds.) 2017: 7.

⁹⁸ SYSON and THORNTON 2001: 22. Not without reason, Cesare Ripa would later present a personification of "Autorità or Potestà" with exactly the same attributes in his *Iconologia*: books and pieces of armor lying below her throne (RIPA (BUSCAROLI ed.) 1992: 36–37; MARINI (ed.) 1996: Cat. 83 [D. Gasparotto]).

THE MEDALS OF PICCININO AND SFORZA AS A PAIR. QUESTIONS ON COMMISSION AND DATING

Both of the condottieri medals share some features,⁹⁹ which simultaneously differentiate them from the medal made by Pisanello for Visconti.¹⁰⁰ For this reason, the medals are commonly paired together, and subsequently these formal and iconographic differences plausibly suggest that the condottieri medals were made after the Visconti medal. The duke's medal is larger (c. 102 mm, while the condottieri medals share the same diameter of c. 88–90 mm). Visconti's medal relief is noticeably higher. Inscriptions on the condottieri medals are composed of larger letters and less concentrated, which makes the obverse compositions clearer. The condottieri busts are also better planned in their lower part and fit the semicircular shape. Moreover, the condottieri medals lack a plain raised border which was applied both in the Visconti and on the reverse of the Palaeologus medal, and if applied would argue for their early dating, however, it will appear again in a medal of Alfonso of Aragon (dated not earlier than c. 1449).¹⁰¹ Considering the iconography, the main difference lies in the treatment of the reversal scenes – in the Visconti medal, the scene has a pictorial character reminiscent of Pisanello's painted works and also recalling the reverse of the Palaeologus medal. For the condottieri, however, Pisanello prepared emblematic compositions, based on symbols and allegorical in content. Whereas a complex *all'antica* allegory requiring additional captions is depicted in the case of Piccinino, the Sforza medal uses only symbolic depictions of a horse's head, a sword, and books, which are quite easy to resolve. In both cases the artist's signature appears: in a shorter version (PISANI P[ictoris] OPVS) on Piccinino's and expanded on Sforza's medal (OPVS PISANI PICTORIS).

Another similarity between the condottieri medals is the orientation of the inscriptions: both start at the same point, which is different than on the Visconti medal (which starts at the bottom). They are similarly organized, listing names and functions. Both Sforza and Piccinino adopted the name Visconti (*Viccomes*), and the title of marquess. The difference appears in the second part mentioning the Lordship of Cremona in the case of Sforza, and with the title of “a most great captain” (*Capitaneus Maximus*) in the case of Piccinino, who is additionally called “a second Mars”. The Sforza inscription is opened with a floral-shaped stop,¹⁰²

⁹⁹ See e.g. SYSON 1998: 394–395.

¹⁰⁰ A tradition with its source in Pier Candido Decembrio's *Vita Philippi* (for the discussion on Decembrio's work see IANZITI 2016) says that the Duke did not want to be portrayed by anyone except the fabulous Pisanello, which is a clear allusion to Alexander the Great. For other likenesses of Filippo Visconti see BUGANZA 2015: 255.

¹⁰¹ Eleonora Luciano has already drawn attention to this feature (CHRISTIANSEN, WEPPELMANN and LEE RUBIN (eds.) 2011: 248 [Cat. 95, E. Luciano]).

¹⁰² This kind of stops is repeated on the reverse.

Visconti's opens with a star. The medals illustrate the artist's interest in the ancient iconography (both motifs could have been taken from the ancient Roman coinage),¹⁰³ probably recalled from his stay in Rome during the early 1430s. Both the mutated *Lupa Romana*, as well as the *all'antica* horse's head, refer to the world of images connected with the ideology of the golden era of the Imperium Romanum.

The question is whether the medals of Niccolò and Francesco were commissioned together, as a pair, a supposition strongly supported by their formal similarities, and whether they were executed at the same time?

The medals are generally dated to c. 1441 in the literature, the year of Sforza's marriage and the Cavriana treaty. The *post quem* date for the medal of Piccinino has to be 1437, when he was affiliated to the Visconti family. However, it seems impossible to consider it as earlier than Palaeologus' or Filippo Maria Visconti's medal, which shifts this date about two to three years. The *ante quem* date for the Piccinino medal is c. 16 July 1443–May 1444, when its obverse was reproduced in a fresco on the wall of the Guantieri chapel in Santa Maria della Scala in Verona (Pl. 4, Fig. 14) by Giovanni Badile (1379–c. 1451).¹⁰⁴ The only date we can link with the Sforza medal is that it had to be made after his marriage with Bianca (25 October 1441) due to his title given on the obverse.¹⁰⁵

If the medals were produced as one commission, and after the completion of the Visconti medal, we should look for the moment when both captains were together in his service. If so, the medals could have been created during a short period of time between October 1441 (Sforza's wedding) or even more probably 20 November 1441 (the treaty of Cavriana) and late 1443 / early 1444 (Badile's frescoes execution). Several even more precise hypotheses have been given. Venturi suggested that the medal of Piccinino could have been made in Venice in 1442.¹⁰⁶ Heiss believed that the occasion of the final signature of the peace of 1441 ("pace di Martinengo") between Milan, Venice and Florence, which gathered all the three of them at Milan at the end of the year, could have been the moment when Pisanello executed all three medals.¹⁰⁷ This assessment was repeated by Hill,¹⁰⁸ and more recently by Davide Gasparotto.¹⁰⁹ But such a possibility is difficult to accept due to stylistic differences, the same differences

¹⁰³ There is evidence of Pisanello being a collector of ancient coins, see e. g. WEISS 1966: 13–14.

¹⁰⁴ Four of Pisanello's medals are reproduced in the frescoes, namely the medals of Piccinino, Palaeologus, Leonello d'Este and of Sigismondo Malatesta, for the frescoes see more in ZERBATO 1977; JONES 2015, but cf. CORDELLIER and MARINI (eds.) 1998: Cat. 278.

¹⁰⁵ It is worth noting that Eleonora Luciano suggested that the medal of Filippo Maria Visconti could have been executed just for this occasion, see CHRISTIANSEN, WEPPELMANN, and LEE RUBIN (eds.) 2011: 248 (Cat. 95, E. Luciano).

¹⁰⁶ VENTURI 1939: 86 (and after him CHIARELLI 1972: 84).

¹⁰⁷ HEISS 1881: 124–125.

¹⁰⁸ HILL: 6.

¹⁰⁹ MARINI (ed.) 1996: Cat. 83 [D. Gasparotto].

that caused some scholars to propose a very early dating for the Visconti medal, as even predating the Palaeologus piece.¹¹⁰ A basis for this earlier dating would be a signed letter, suggested to be an autograph of Pisanello,¹¹¹ written to Filippo Maria Visconti from Rome on 28 June of an uncertain year (but considered to be 1431 or 1432,¹¹² as connected with the execution of the frescoes in the Lateran basilica). The artist asks the duke to “wait until next October, when he hopes to send the work which, as Signor Ambrogio¹¹³ will have testified, he had undertaken to execute in bronze”.¹¹⁴ The letter preserved in the Fillon collection was not sold with the rest of it in 1879, and disappeared.¹¹⁵ There is still no scholarly consensus as to its authenticity.¹¹⁶

From extant archive documents mentioning Pisanello around the probable time of the execution of the condottieri medals, we can learn only that he was present in Milan on 11 May 1440, reporting the conquest and loss of Verona to the Duke of Milan.¹¹⁷ In March 1441 he was in Mantua,¹¹⁸ and in August in Ferrara.¹¹⁹ Another document places him in October of 1442 in Venice.¹²⁰ A plausible period for executing the pair of condottieri medals falls after the treaty of Cavriana, and before the artist's stay in Venice,¹²¹ i.e. between November 1441 and October 1442, with 1442 as the more probable.¹²²

¹¹⁰ The earliest date, 1431/1432, was suggested by Luke Syson in 1994 (SYSON 1994: 53, n. 36.), but he changed his mind in subsequent publications (see SYSON 1998: 404, n. 40 and SYSON and GORDON 2001: 67, where the authors date the piece for 1435–1440). However, the Syson concept was upheld (with a question mark) by Ruggero Rugolo in 1996 (for Rugolo the date *ante quem* should be regarded “the autumn of 1431”, for his arguments see RUGOLO 1996: Cat. 1), as well as by Annegrit Schmitt, who argued for Filippo Maria Visconti, as predating the Palaeologus one (SCHMITT 1998: 341–343). Recently the dating c. 1431 was upheld also by Ulrich Pfisterer (PFISTERER 2009: 97).

¹¹¹ CHARAVAY 1878: ser. 9, p. 297, doc. 2087; see also MÜNTZ 1879: 47, n. 1.

¹¹² In Hill's opinion the letter, if genuine, belongs to 1432 (HILL 1905: 52, note).

¹¹³ He most probably refers to Ambrogio Traversari present in Rome in 1431 (CHARAVAY 1878: ser. 9, p. 297, doc. 2087; MÜNTZ 1879: 47, n. 1.).

¹¹⁴ Quotation after HILL 1905: 53–54. Once it was suggested by Dominique Cordellier (CORDELLIER and MARINI (eds.) 1998: Cat. 49), that this bronze work mentioned could have instead been a medal of Sigismund of Luxembourg (lost or never completed), a very tempting hypothesis.

¹¹⁵ RUGOLO 1996: 138, Cat. 1; HILL 1905: 53–54.

¹¹⁶ See MÜNTZ 1879: p. 47, n. 1 (the letter was reported to him by Montaignon), where he believed it to be original, but changed his opinion in 1889; see also STEVENSON 1888: 458–459, n. 2; HILL 1905: 53, note; Cfr. with A. Venturi in his 1896 ed. of Giorgio Vasari's life of Pisanello (VENTURI (ed.) 1896: 43), his opinion was later repeated by Schmitt (SCHMITT 1995: 50 and 278, n. 56 and IDEM 1998: 356, n. 21); J. Woods-Marsden (WOODS-MARSDEN 1988: 187–188, n. 10) sees the letter as possibly original; for the summary of opinions see CORDELLIER (ed.) 1995: doc. 14. For recent opinions see SYSON and GORDON 2001: 18–19, and note 69; PFISTERER 2009: 97.

¹¹⁷ See HILL 1931: 190. For the source see CORDELLIER (ed.) 1995: 77–83, doc. 30.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*: 86–87, doc. 33.

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*: 93–94, doc. 35–36.

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*: 105–106, doc. 42.

¹²¹ The Venetian Republic was a political opponent of Milan, and due to Pisanello's relationship with Visconti, the artist had to explain himself to the officials.

¹²² Two months of 1441 (November and December) would have been too short a period to execute two medals.

Finally, regarding a possible patron, it is very unlikely that the condottieri themselves were potential clients of the artist. Piccinino did not show any interest in artistic patronage.¹²³ Francesco Sforza, on the contrary, was a generous patron, especially after becoming Duke of Milan in 1450. In 1440s he is even evidenced as commissioning artworks from Pisanello. In a letter to Sforza, dated 6 March 1440, Pisanello mentions two objects to be delivered to the condottiere: his likeness and a *cimiero* (a helmet crest).¹²⁴ The likeness in question (“imagine” executed in an unknown technique), could not have been, however, his medal, which would have been devised only after Francesco’s marriage in November of 1441.¹²⁵ Syson and Gordon considered it as a painted portrait, now lost.¹²⁶ It also should be noted that Sforza, even in later years, did not particularly favor medallic art, concentrated his patronage and propaganda in other spheres. Only two small medals by Gianfrancesco Enzola da Parma seem to have been commissioned by him,¹²⁷ which is especially surprising (and most significant), when one realizes that one of Sforza’s leading court artist was Filarete. The absence of evidence of any medal of Sforza having been made by Filarete suggests that it could have only been a conscious decision not to commission any.¹²⁸

Filippo Maria Visconti appears as the most probable commissioner, especially at a time when he had the successors of the leaders of the greatest Italian companies in his service, the *bracceschi* and the *sforzeschi*, a contraposition of which soon became a topos among contemporary chroniclers and biographers.¹²⁹ Moreover, in the funerary oration of Piccinino given in Milan in 1444 by Pier Candido Decembrio, the duke himself is praised as the one who cared for peace between these two enemies.¹³⁰ This could be reason enough to please them both with gifts illustrating their virtues and depicting political expectations, gifts simultaneously bringing glory to the duke himself as patron of the most celebrated Italian captains, both bearing his name, thus indicating the political value of his state, Milan, which at the very moment, could boast the best military base, the most skilled condottieri – loyal in

¹²³ Piccinino is not recognized as the commissioner of any work of art, it seems that such needs were beyond his sphere of interest.

¹²⁴ See PERETTI 1998: esp. 35–37 (quoted also by SYSON and GORDON 2001: 67 and 102).

¹²⁵ Cf. PERETTI 1998: 35–36, who did not exclude the possibility that what the letter mentions is Sforza’s medal, despite the “chronological hiatus”.

¹²⁶ SYSON and GORDON 2001: 102, n. 73.

¹²⁷ These were HILL: Cat. 281 (executed in 1456) and *ibidem*: Cat. 284 (dated 1459). Two other well-known Sforza medals by Sperandio and by Caradosso are posthumous.

¹²⁸ Sforza was recognized as especially modest and reluctant to “fashionable” objects, for example he misjudged Sigismondo Malatesta for his pursuit of new things (*cose nuove*; see his letter to Antonio da Trezzo quoted in SORANZO 1909: 43 and WOODS-MARSDEN 1989: 389).

¹²⁹ This contraposition is underlined already in Piccinino’s funerary oration: DECEMBRIO: cols. 1065–1066. See also in COVINI 1998: 169–171.

¹³⁰ DECEMBRIO: col. 1063.

the case of Piccinino, and politically valuable in the case of Sforza, Visconti's heir. Thus, the medals of the two antagonistic condottieri could be considered as a pair, here serving political purposes.¹³¹

ABBREVIATIONS

DBI = *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* [accessed online on www.treccani.it], 94 vols., Roma 1960–.

HILL = G.F. HILL, *A Corpus of Italian Medals of the Renaissance Before Cellini*, vols. 1–2, London 1930.

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¹³¹ Later, Pisanello would repeat this concept in medals for Ludovico Gonzaga and his deceased father, Gianfrancesco (1447), see mainly JONES 2011: 133ff. For the Gonzaga medals as treated as a pair see also HILL 1931: 194.

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Author's address:

Agnieszka Smołucha-Sładkowska
The National Museum in Krakow
12 Piłsudskiego Street, 31-109 Krakow, Poland
asladkowska@mnk.pl

- PLATE 1
- Fig. 1. Pisanello, medal of Filippo Maria Visconti, bronze, dia. 102 mm; Gabinetto Numismatico e Medagliere, Castello Sforzesco, Milan
Photo © Gabinetto Numismatico e Medagliere, Castello Sforzesco (scale 1:2)
- Fig. 2. Pisanello, medal of Niccolò Piccinino, bronze, dia. 88 mm; Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin
Photo by Lutz-Jürgen Lübke (Lübke und Wiedemann), © Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 18 200 162 (scale 1:2)
- Fig. 3. Pisanello, medal of Francesco Sforza, bronze, dia. 88 mm; Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin
Photo by Lutz-Jürgen Lübke (Lübke und Wiedemann), © Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 18 200 157 (scale 1:2)
- PLATE 2
- Fig. 4. Pisanello, profile portrait of Niccolò Piccinino, drawing, Musée du Louvre, département des Arts graphiques
Photo after CHRISTIANSEN, WEPPELMANN and LEE RUBIN (eds.) 2011: Cat. 96, p. 248
- Fig. 5a. The “AA” armorer’s mark on Piccinino’s armor (detail of Fig. 2)
- Fig. 5b. The “AA” armorer’s mark (no. 61, attributed hypothetically to Ambrogio de Osma), after BOCCIA 1982: 286
- Fig. 6. Silver didrachm, 269–266 BC, Münzkabinett der Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
Photo by Dirk Sonnenwald, © Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 18 200 983 (scale 2:1)
- Fig. 7. Anonymous late 15th-century or 16th-century artist, a plaquette with she-wolf suckling twins, dia. 84 mm; The National Gallery of Art Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
Photo © Samuel H. Kress Collection, The National Gallery of Art Washington (scale 1:2)
- PLATE 3
- Fig. 8. Pisanello, drawing of a horse head, musée du Louvre, département des Arts graphiques, Inv. No. 2355 (*Codex Vallardi*)
Photo after MARINI (ed.) 1996: Cat. 63, p. 305
- Fig. 9. “The Medici-Riccardi horse”, c. 350 BC, Museo Archeologico di Firenze
Photo © su concessione del Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Direzione Regionale Musei della Toscana)
- Fig. 10a. Tetradrachm of Seleukos I, 281–280 BC, Münzkabinett der Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
Photo by Dirk Sonnenwald, © Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 18 203 077
- Fig. 10b. Didrachm, Roman Republic, 241–235 BC, Münzkabinett der Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
Photo by Lutz-Jürgen Lübke, © Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 18 214 586
- Fig. 10c. Tetradrachm, c. 330–300 BC, Münzkabinett der Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
Photo by Reinhard Saczewski, © Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 18 206 042
- PLATE 4
- Fig. 11. Pisanello (or workshop), dioscuoro from the “Opus Fidae” group, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan (F. 214, n. 10)
Photo after SYSON and GORDON 2001: Fig. 3.56, p. 136
- Fig. 12. A dioscuoro from the “Opus Fidae” group
Photo after BLASS-SIMMEN 1995: Fig. 96, p. 90
- Fig. 13. Anonymous (from *Speculum romanae magnificentiae*), c. 1538–1562
Photo after CHRISTIAN 2010: Fig. 71, p. 101
- Fig. 14. Giovanni Badile, the fresco reproduction of Pisanello’s medal of Piccinino, Santa Maria della Scala, Verona
Photo after ZERBATO 1977: Fig. 3, p. 171



4



5a



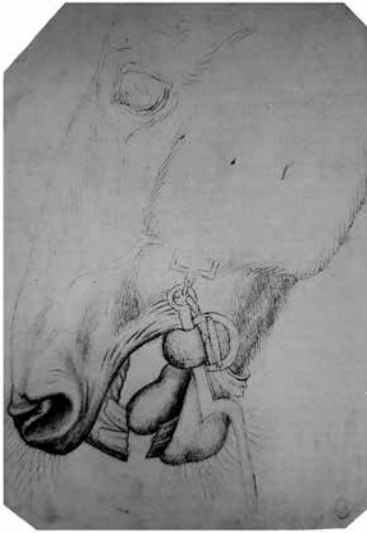
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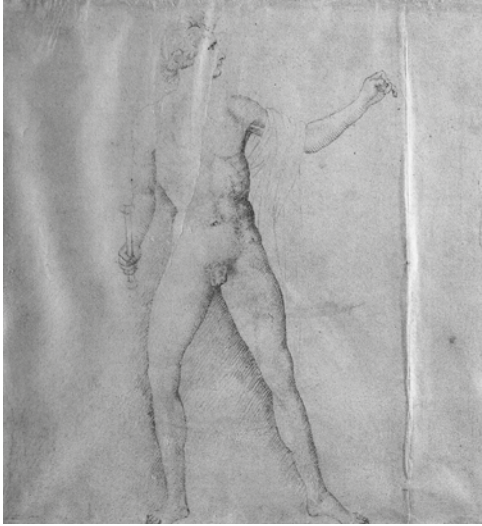
10a



10b



10c



11



12



13



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