



Advancing
Art&Design

The Location of Michelangelo's David: The Meeting of January 25, 1504

Author(s): Saul Levine

Source: *The Art Bulletin*, Mar., 1974, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Mar., 1974), pp. 31-49

Published by: CAA

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3049194>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

CAA is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Art Bulletin*

The Location of Michelangelo's *David*: The Meeting of January 25, 1504*

Saul Levine

Shortly before Michelangelo's marble *David* was completed, a meeting was held in Florence on January 25, 1504 to discuss its permanent location.¹ Of all the documents associated with the statue, the one recording the minutes of this meeting is the best known. It has commanded exceptional interest not only because of its importance for our knowledge of the *David* but also because it records the comments of such renowned artists as Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Piero di Cosimo, and Filippino Lippi. The manuscript, published twice in transcription in the nineteenth century, has been frequently cited, excerpted and discussed in the Michelangelo literature. Nevertheless, it has never been critically examined so as to make available a satisfactory and comprehensive exegesis of its text.

The minutes have long been interpreted as a record of a meeting devoted mainly to the question of the choice of site, without regard to the implications of the various proposals. An approach of this kind ignores the essential spirit of the document. A critical study of its text reveals a wealth of allusions to the political significance of the *David*. It indicates the intentions for the statue based upon its appearance, as well as those related to its symbolic function, orientation and site. And it gives us provocative hints that these intentions were present from the very inception of the sculpture in 1501. Of all the existing documents, the minutes of the meeting of January 25, 1504 are the most revealing as far as the iconography of Michelangelo's *David* is concerned.

* This article is dedicated to the memory of Rudolf Wittkower. I shall always deeply appreciate the sustained interest and the many kindly considerations which he extended to me at Columbia while my research on Michelangelo's *David* was in progress. I wish also to thank my former colleagues there, James H. Beck, Howard McP. Davis, Howard Hibbard, as well as Donald Weinstein of Rutgers University, for their generous support and constructive suggestions. I am especially indebted to Professor Hibbard for his final careful reading of the text and additional suggestions. I am also grateful to Fairleigh Dickinson University for a grant for the illustrations. This article derives from a chapter in my unpublished dissertation, "*Tal Cosa: Michelangelo's David - Its Form, Site and Political Symbolism*," Columbia University, 1969.

¹ The meeting was held in a meeting-room (*audientia*) of the Opera del Duomo in the vicinity of the virtually completed *David*. See Gaetano Milanesi, *Le Lettere di Michelangelo Buonarroti*, Florence, 1875, 620. The discussion reflects a direct observation and study of the sculpture before the meeting began.

² The volume was undamaged in the flood of November 4, 1966.

³ Giovanni Gaye, *Carteggio inedito d'artisti dei secoli XIV, XV, XVI*, 3 vols., Florence, 1839-40, II, 455-62. Milanesi, *Le Lettere*, 620-23. Two English translations have been published, both based on the earlier Gaye edition: Robert Klein and Henri Zerner, eds. and trans., *Italian Art 1500-1600: Sources and Documents*, Englewood Cliffs, 1966, 39-44; and Charles Seymour, Jr., *Michelangelo's David: A Search for Identity*, Pittsburgh, 1967, 141-55. In this article, the translation of the excerpted passages from Settesoldi's transcription, reviewed with useful suggestions by Dr. Beck, is my own.

⁴ Mr. Settesoldi's transcription was generously offered as an expression of his interest in my interpretation of the *David*. I am deeply grateful for

The minutes still exist in manuscript form in a volume in the archives of the Duomo in Florence.² They were first published with brief annotations by Gaye. A later transcription was published by Milanesi with some corrections of Gaye's edition.³ A new transcription was prepared for this study by Enzo Settesoldi, Archivist of the Duomo. In the present article, the excerpts from the minutes are from Settesoldi's text.⁴

Thirty persons are listed in the document as having attended the meeting. Six others (indicated in a marginal notation) were either unable to come or were inadvertently not invited.⁵ The opinions of only twenty-one speakers are recorded, including two whose names do not appear in the original list of thirty.⁶ The nature of the comments of those whose opinions (*pareri*) were not recorded may be determined from the following: "The answers of the other gentlemen who were named and whose opinion was asked have not been written down for the sake of brevity. But their opinion was to agree with those above, one to this one, one to the other without difference" ("Li altri Signori nominati e richiesti chol detto loro per piu brevità qui non si stripsono. Ma el detto loro fu che si riferiròno al decto di quelli di sopra et a chi uno et chi a un'altro de sopra detti senza discrepanza"). We may thus assume that the recorded opinions accurately reflect the sites favored by all thirty-two speakers.

The minutes reveal that nine different locations were proposed: (1) over one of the buttresses on the north side

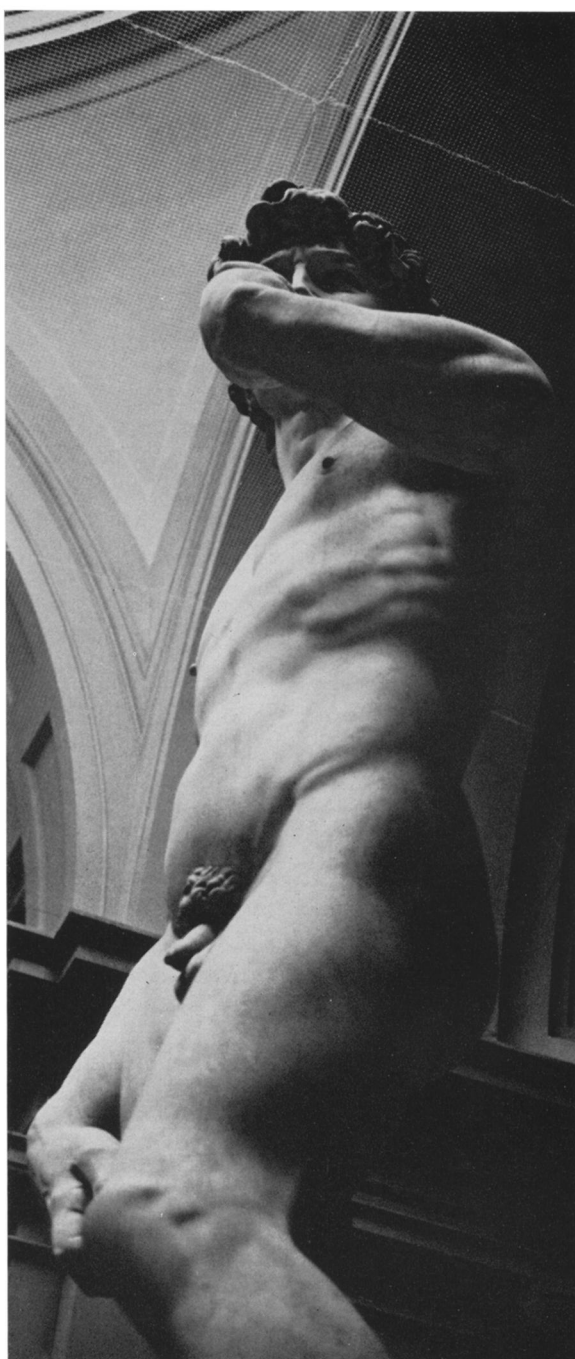
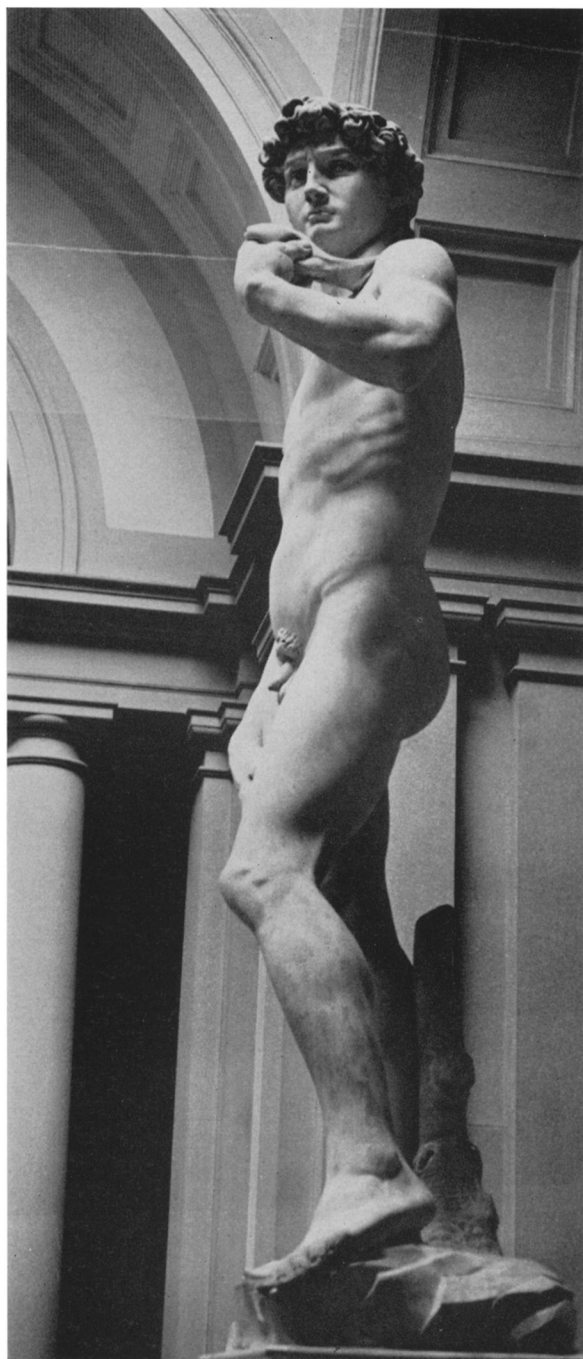
the warm friendship and many courtesies which he extended to me during my researches in Florence in 1966 and 1967.

⁵ Giovanni Chellini, fife-player, was apparently included in this group in error. He is one of the listed speakers and his remarks were recorded.

⁶ The names of the speakers are here given as they appear in the manuscript. An asterisk indicates that the speaker's opinion is recorded in the minutes:

Andrea della robbia	*Guasparre orofò
†Betto buglioni	Lodovico orafò e maestro di gietti
*Giovanni Cornuola	*El riccio orafò
Vante miniatore	*Callieno richamatore
*L'araldo di palazzo	*Davìt [Ghirlandaio] dipintore
*Giovanni piffero	Simone del pollaiuolo
*Lorenzo della golpaia	*Filippo di philippo dipintore
†Bonaccorso di bartoluccio	[Filippino Lippi]
*Salvestro gioielliere	*Sandro di botticello pittore
*Michelagnolo orafò	*Giovanni alia vero Guiliano et
*Cosimo rosselli	*Antonio da san Gallo
Chimenti del tasso	Andrea da monte a santo sovino
Francesco d'andrea granacci	pittore [the sculptor Sansavino]
*Biagio pittore	*Lionardo da vinci
*piero di Cosimo pittore	piero perugino in pinti pittore
	Lorenzo di credi pittore
	*Bernardo della Ciecha [di marchò]
	legnauuolo
*Francesco monciatto legnauuolo	} comments recorded but not listed
*El sichondo araldo	} as present

†Gaye unaccountably leaves these two names out of the list.



1 Two leftward views of Michelangelo's *David*. Florence, Accademia della Belle Arti (photo: author)

of the Cathedral; (2) in front of its west façade; (3) where the *Marzocco* stood (the Lion of Florence); (4) in the courtyard of the Palazzo Vecchio; (5) where Donatello's *Judith* stood; (6) in the bay of the Loggia dei Lanzi nearest the Palazzo Vecchio; (7) in the central bay of the Loggia; (8) in the new Grand Council Hall of the Palazzo Vecchio; (9) in

the Piazza di San Giovanni. The choices included alternate or secondary preferences as well as the suggestion that the choice of site be left to the artist.

Of the nine places proposed, two were especially favored: the Palazzo Vecchio and the Loggia dei Lanzi. The Palazzo received nine first choices and two alternates.⁷

⁷ First choices: the first Herald, Cosimo Roselli, Andrea el Riccio, Lorenzo della Golpaia, Salvestro, Gallieno, Davit, Giovanni piffero,

Giovanni Cornuola; alternate preferences: Monciatto, Michelangelo oraf.



2 Head of the *David* (photo: author)

Four other opinions also seem to have favored this site, without directly mentioning it.⁸ For the Loggia, there were apparently seven first choices and five alternates.⁹ In itemizing the choices offered or implied, it is difficult to justify de Tolnay's statement that the site of the Loggia was "taken up by the majority of the *pareri* cited."¹⁰ The notion that the majority favored the Loggia, and that the site finally chosen by the authorities in front of the Palazzo Vecchio was selected in opposition to the wishes of the majority, cannot be substantiated by the document itself, which clearly indicates that there was significant agreement with the desire of the Signoria to place the *David* in the vicinity of the Palazzo.

More important, however, are indications that the decision to place the *David* in the site previously occupied by Donatello's *Judith* had little to do with this meeting, despite the statement of its organizers that they were seeking a location most appropriate for the statue ("eam locare et eidem dare locum commodum et congruum"). But if the

meeting exerted no real influence on the choice of place for the sculpture, the minutes constitute a remarkable document which illuminates the iconography of Michelangelo's *David* within the clear light of its political implications.

Before considering some of the arguments put forward to support or disparage individual proposals, it is necessary to describe certain aspects of the appearance of the *David* which affected the speakers, so that we may understand how the different views of the statue influenced the arguments as to which site was suitable.

The statue has two primary views: the front of the figure (Fig. 5) and the view from the left (Fig. 1). The front view emphasizes the heroic, Herculean stance embodying strength and a powerful defensive capacity. But as the sharply turned profile of the head directs our attention towards the left side of the figure, we discern aspects that are active, aggressive and even menacing. These culminate in the head with its *terribilità* and intensely staring eyes directed to a dangerous and threatening Goliath. In the political crisis

⁸ Both Filippino Lippi and Piero di Cosimo, although suggesting that the choice of site be left to Michelangelo, appear to link their arguments with those of Salvestro who in endorsing the site of the Palazzo implies that Michelangelo carved the *David* for this vicinity. Although the second Herald had proposed the site of the Loggia in his earlier comments, his remarks at the end of the meeting suggest that he also preferred the Palazzo because it was the choice of the Signoria.

⁹ First choices: Giuliano da Sangallo, Biagio, Bernardo di Marcho, Leonardo da Vinci, Antonio da Sangallo, Michelangelo orafo, Guasparre; alternate preferences: Botticelli, the second Herald, Lorenzo della

Golpaia, Giovanni Cornuola, Piero di Cosimo.

As an alternate place, Biaggio also proposed the steps of the central arch of the Loggia (Fig. 5).

¹⁰ De Tolnay, *The Youth of Michelangelo*, Princeton, 1943, 97. It is generally assumed that the majority favored the site of the Loggia. See, for example, Klein and Zerner (page 39) who, in the face of the document itself, conclude "that most members of the committee voted for the Loggia dei Lanzi . . ." Seymour (page 62), on the other hand, is of the opinion that the speakers were about evenly divided.

of Florence during this period, there can be little doubt as to which forces constituted the symbolic Goliath.¹¹ Although the immediate danger of Borgian expansionist policy had abated by the time of the 1504 meeting, the republican elements in Florence were still disturbed by the considerably increased power of the Medicean exiles who were always intriguing to overthrow the anti-Medicean Signoria and restore their despotic control over the city. Where the energies of the Medicean Goliath continued to be expended in anti-Florentine schemes was to the south, in Rome.¹²

In front of the Palazzo Vecchio where it was ultimately placed, *David* did indeed engage its Goliath to the south. Its head constitutes its most meaningful and expressive feature, full of symbolic political associations that had significance for contemporary viewers (Fig. 2).¹³ The placement of the figure obviously determined the direction of its gaze, and as a result the orientation of head and face was undoubtedly a factor influencing the choice of site.

Another apparent concern was the extent to which the political symbolism of the *David* would be affected by its actual location. Placed in the vicinity of the Palazzo Vecchio, it would automatically become a symbol (*insegna*) of the

government housed therein. From the remarks of the speakers it is evident that these considerations of site and orientation are sometimes deliberately ambiguous. But what is revealed, on the whole, is a serious and even tense exchange reflecting the conflicting partisanships in the political arena of Florence during this period.

Disengaged as we are from the symbolic modes of the Renaissance past, the *David* is now generally construed as a "work of art" rather than as a vehicle of emblematic function. Seen in this light, it would matter little whether the *David* was placed near the portal of the Palazzo Vecchio, or within the Loggia. The two locations are, after all, in the same general vicinity. But we become aware of some essentially non-aesthetic aspects of Renaissance imagery if we realize that the main purpose of those who defended the site of the Loggia dei Lanzi may have been to neutralize the powerful political implications associated with the head of *David*. This would have been accomplished not only by placing the statue at a relatively short distance from the headquarters of the government, but also by simply changing its orientation.¹⁴

The *David*, of course, also possessed connotations that were independent of site. Its qualities of energy and

¹¹ The crisis resulting from the Borgian-Medicean campaign against Florence in 1501 paralleled the situation faced by the city a hundred years before. At that time the Visconti of Milan had mounted a military campaign southward toward the city which although abated by the death of Giangaleazzo in 1402 persisted as a threat into the early years of the 15th century. A program of civic imagery, initiated with the Baptistery competition panels of 1401, was soon developed in works whose form and location appeared to direct a symbolism of resistance northward toward Milan. Donatello's marble *David* of 1408, originally intended for a buttress on the north tribune of the Duomo, in this location would have confronted the Milanese Goliath. Its companion piece of the same year, Nanni di Banco's *Isaiah*, as well as Donatello's *St. George* (Or San Michele, 1416) and the *Abraham and Isaac* group (the Campanile, 1421), all aimed their expressive physiognomies in a northward direction. This earlier symbolic tradition of physically orienting imagery toward a geographic source of danger was, at the beginning of the 16th century, apparently continued in Michelangelo's *David*.

¹² Since their expulsion from Florence in 1494 the Medici had plotted and maneuvered to regain control of the city. They were aligned with Cesare Borgia and his father Pope Alexander VI in their military and political schemes against Tuscany and Florence, and counted on their success to effect restoration. Pope Alexander died in August, 1503, and with his death the Borgian threat to Florence collapsed. Thereafter, the prestige and influence of Cesare diminished and he died in virtual obscurity in 1507 (Ferdinand Schevill, *Medieval and Renaissance Florence*, 2 vols., New York, 1963, II, 461-62).

However, after Piero died, also in 1503, his sons, Giovanni and Giuliano, became increasingly powerful opponents. Under Giovanni's leadership there was a steady improvement in the political influence and prestige of the Medici in Rome and elsewhere in Italy. Giovanni was elected Pope Leo X in 1513 (Adolphus T. Trollope, *A History of the Commonwealth of Florence*, 4 vols., London, 1865, IV, 311). By the time of the meeting in 1504, the underground partisans of the family had surreptitiously increased the scope and boldness of their activities. By 1512 Giovanni and Giuliano were able to effect the restoration of the Medici as rulers of the city. (For a description of the events related to the return of the Medici in 1512, see Luca Landucci, *Diario fiorentino*, ed. Iodoco del Badia, Florence, 1883, 318-37).

¹³ The Medicean understanding of the baleful stare of the head of the *David* as an expression of political hostility is attested to from the start. It was stoned - quite possibly by supporters of the family - when, shortly after its completion, it was removed from the Opera del Duomo on the evening of May 14, 1504. Thereafter, there are a number of indications of Medicean hostility toward the image, especially its head. After the Medici returned to power in the 16th century, there were at least two representations of Michelangelo's *David* in which the statue was

shown symbolically "decapitated" ostensibly because there was not enough room in the compositional field to include its head. In the Sistine cartoons and tapestries designed by Raphael for Leo X about 1515, in one of the predella borders showing a scene in front of the Palazzo Vecchio, the figure of *David* is terminated at the neck (J. White and J. Shearman, "Raphael's Tapestries and Their Cartoons," *Art Bulletin*, 1958, 193-221, fig. 13d). The *David* is also shown "decapitated" by a simulated painted molding in one of the lower panels in the room of Leo X in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. Perhaps the feelings of Florentines about the expression of the head of the *David* is best conveyed by one Riccio, who in a letter to a friend, comments about a scaffolding that has been erected in 1543 to repair its damaged left arm: "[The scaffolding] was made to restore its poor arm, but many think that it was erected to wash its face." (See Alfredo Lensi, *Palazzo Vecchio*. Milan-Rome 1929, 109, "... si abbia a lavare il viso" was then, as now, the idiomatic equivalent of "... to get rid of a dirty [anti-Medici?] look.")

¹⁴ In his earlier published views of Michelangelo's heroic *gigante*, de Tolnay saw the sculpture as a fusion of the Hercules and David types with a symbolism which emphasized the strength and power of moral fortitude. Borrowing Vasari's phrase, he also referred to the *David* as a "symbol of *governo giusto*" (*The Youth of Michelangelo*, 94, 95, 97, 153-155). More recently, however, de Tolnay has shown a sharpened awareness of the political significance of the *David*. He sees it as an "embodiment of . . . [Machiavelli's] *cittadino guerriero*" who would participate in his program for an armed citizens' militia. He correctly interprets the stoning of the *David* when it was completed in 1504 as politically inspired ("It was only natural that the Medici party would want to destroy this symbol of its enemy, the Republic"), and he sees the initial conception of the *David* as a commemoration of the new post-Medicean Florentine constitution which had been adopted shortly before its commission ("It was perhaps this latter event that gave the young master the idea of treating the David not as a biblical hero, but as the defender and just administrator of his people"; *The Art and Thought of Michelangelo*, New York, 1964, 6-11).

Charles Seymour connects the *David* with Cesare Borgia's campaign and the renewal of an earlier republican iconic symbolism engendered by political and military crisis (pages 55, 56). However, it is the sculptor's humanist "search for identity" based on Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's alternatives of individual choice - degenerative descent or spiritual ascension - that in Seymour's view "comes close to the heart of the David's meaning" (pages 51-53, 78). While a Neoplatonic reading of the *David* based on the well-known passages in Pico's "Oration on the Dignity of Man" is justified (see Levine, "Tal Cosa," 205-213), it remains ancillary to its primary political implications. Since every aspect of its left side is apotropaically thrust southward toward Rome, Seymour's conclusion that Michelangelo intended the *David* for the central arch of the Loggia dei Lanzi (pages 59-66) is doubtful.

physiognomic vitality placed it in a series of heroic Florentine sculptures. As Hartt and others have pointed out, these works embodied a dynamic symbolism related to the military and political crises threatening republican liberty in the early decades of the quattrocento.¹⁵ No matter where it was placed, the *David* could be interpreted as a defending symbol protecting the entire Florentine community, including the partisans of contending factions. Despite this, however, the *David* was charged with controversy, and if the proposal to place it in front of the Cathedral¹⁶ had been accepted, its political impact would have been considerably reduced. Though large in scale it would have been visually commingled with the many figures on the west façade (Fig. 3)¹⁷ and submerged in the historical and biblical iconographic traditions of the sculptural program of the Duomo.¹⁸

Despite some support for placing the *David* in the vicinity of the Cathedral, there was a widespread awareness that prior to the meeting a decision had already been made to disengage the sculpture from the original quattrocento Duomo program and place it in a site most appropriate for it as an emblem of the governing Republican Signoria. The conflicting opinions offered at the meeting may then be viewed as a duel between those who sought to emphasize the anti-Medicean aspects of the *David* by erecting it in the vicinity of the Palazzo Vecchio and those who would convert it into a non-partisan civic symbol (*cosa pubblica*) by locating it in another area.¹⁹ Among the latter were undoubtedly a few who were politically neutral but were attempting to arrive at a realistic compromise which would reduce the partisan connotations of the *David*.

Those arguments favoring the Palazzo Vecchio contain overt or disguised allusions to the politically symbolic aspects of the *David*, referring occasionally to its "meaning" or the "purpose of the work." Those preferring the Loggia

dei Lanzi, on the other hand, deal primarily with the problem of sheltering the sculpture from the weather. At this point the problem of the supposed "softness" of the marble was apparently introduced at the meeting. Before this, there is no mention of the inherent fragility of the material.²⁰ Giuliano da Sangallo commented that it was imperfect "because it is soft and spoiled, having been exposed to the rain" ("per lo essere tenero e chotto et essendo stato all'acqua"). Giovanni Cornuola responded that he "had not thought that the marble was fragile and would necessarily be damaged by water and cold" ("non havo pensato el marmo essere tenero et haver e essere guasto dall'acqua et freddi"). The fact that there already existed in Florence a number of exposed marble sculptures which gave no evidence of serious deterioration may raise some doubts about Sangallo's argument for placing it within the Loggia. Indeed, it is likely that the reason for the decision in 1464 to use marble for the image originally intended for the north tribune of the Cathedral was the progressive deterioration of an earlier *gigante* which had been made of terra cotta.²¹ The fact that the *David* stood in the open for centuries before its surfaces began to suffer is perhaps the best proof that the marble was not "soft" in 1504.²²

In this light, it can be assumed that what concerned Sangallo and his supporters was not the need to shelter the statue, but rather the political implications of site and orientation. In the Loggia, the vigorous left view of the *David* would be turned away from the enemy to the south, so as to make it face the blank wall at the western end and thus render this potent aspect of the statue ineffectual by virtually concealing it from public view.

The Signoria of course favored the site of its own Palazzo Vecchio and support for this could be openly expressed. But dangerous was disagreement of a nature suggesting

¹⁵ Frederick Hartt, "Art and Freedom in Quattrocento Florence," *Essays in Memory of Karl Lehmann*, ed. L. F. Sandler, New York, 1964, 120-22.

¹⁶ Rosselli, Botticelli and Giuliano da Sangallo suggested the possibility of this location for the *David*. Botticelli also envisioned a *Judith* on the other corner of the façade.

¹⁷ John Pope-Hennessy (*Italian Gothic Sculpture*, New York, 1955, 185, 219) gives a partial summary of the sculpture on the west façade of the Cathedral. Its general appearance, including its sculpture, is shown in a drawing, executed in Florence in the second half of the 16th century, which is in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence (Pope-Hennessy fig. 56, opp. 181). A detail is shown in Figure 3.

¹⁸ Besides the material on the west façade, the sculptural program of the Cathedral included the projects for the north side (the tribune buttresses and the Porta della Mandorla), the Campanile and the decorations for the two south portals (Porta del Campanile and the Porta dei Canonici).

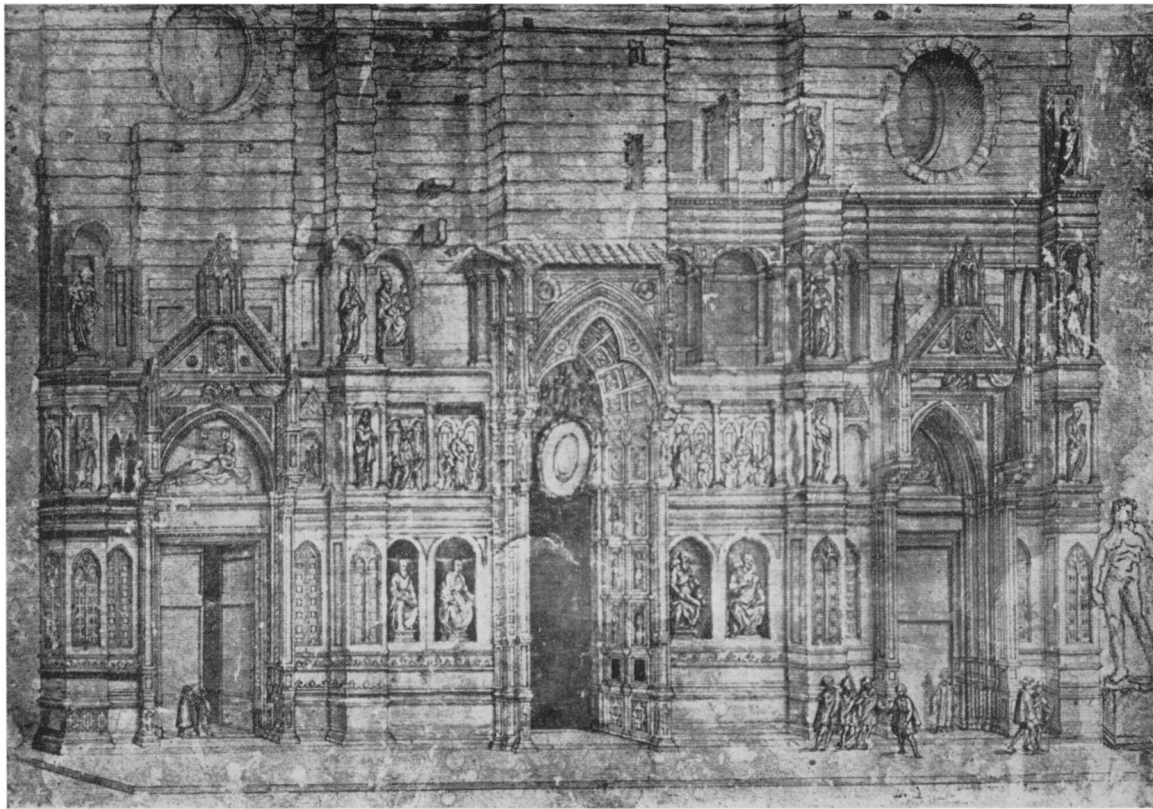
¹⁹ Apart from the predictable choice of the first Herald of the Signoria who proposed the Palazzo Vecchio, the influence of political partisanship in determining choices of site may be detected in other speakers. Among those favoring other locations were persons with known pro-Medicean sympathies. Botticelli, preferring the site of the façade of the Duomo, had long enjoyed Medici patronage. Anonimo Gaddiano says that Leonardo da Vinci had been befriended by Lorenzo the Magnificent and was thereafter for a long time in the service of a close political ally of Lorenzo, Lodovico Sforza, Duke of Milan. In 1502, Leonardo had been in the employ of Cesare Borgia himself. It is thus not surprising that Leonardo was in accord with Giuliano da Sangallo's proposal that

the *David* be placed unobtrusively against the rear wall of the Loggia. The possibility that Giuliano da Sangallo and his brother Antonio were already sympathetic to the exiled family at the time of the meeting is suggested in a letter written by Giuliano de' Medici in 1514 to his nephew Lorenzo, in which he commends the two Sangallos who "... per lo ingegno et per la fede loro sono stati sempre grati ala casa n[ost]ra..." (Gaye, III, 139).

²⁰ A careful reading of the documents (Giovanni Poggi, *Il Duomo di Firenze: Documenti sulla decorazione della chiesa e del Campanile tratti dall'archivio dell'Opera*, Berlin, 1909, docs. 446, 447; K. Frey, "Studien zu Michelagnoli Buonarroti und zur Kunst seiner Zeit," *Jahrbuch der Königlich preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, xxx, 1909, 103-80, part A, doc. 8) reveals that the block was taken from a Cathedral basement storage area (*allato a fondamenti*) and placed in the open courtyard (*curte*) of the Opera del Duomo in 1476. It is thus possible that the block had been exposed for a period of only twenty-five years before Michelangelo began to carve the *David*.

²¹ See H. W. Janson "Giovanni Chellini's 'Libro' and Donatello," *Studien zur Toscanischen Kunst: Festschrift für L. H. Heydenreich*, ed. W. Lotz and L. L. Möller, Munich, 1964, 134.

²² An examination in 1851 revealed damage to the supporting base of the *David* and in the following year a committee of artists and architects detailed the damage caused by cracking and corrosion. The statue was finally moved in 1873 to a room especially constructed for it in the Accademia; this was completed and opened to the public in 1882. (See A. Gotti, *Vita de M. Buonarroti*, II, Florence, 1875, 35-50; see also E. Pieracini, *Guida della Galleria Antica e Moderna*, Florence, 1893, 10.)



3 Detail of 16th-century drawing showing the west façade of the Cathedral of Florence. Drawing of the *David* is superimposed at right in location initially proposed at the meeting by Cosimo Roselli. Florence, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo

Medici adherence.²³ Perhaps it was for this reason that the proponents of the site of the Loggia avoided partisan allusions in emphasizing the need for protection from the weather while those favoring the site of the Palazzo referred to the “appearance” and “purpose” of the work.²⁴ On the other hand, the specter of a possible return of the Medici to Florence seemed to some to dictate the need to voice ambivalence in the formulation of ideas or in the choice of site. Yet there is a remarkable conciseness in the language used, suggesting that virtually every word had been carefully considered beforehand. This can well be understood since opinions were being recorded and written comments might be subject to hostile scrutiny if the Medici returned. These considerations became the matrix in which the debate was set, coloring its mood and explaining the occasional obliqueness of expression as well as the contradictory positions taken by individual speakers. Their comments are extraordinarily revealing when studied in detail.

Francesco, the first Herald of the Signoria²⁵ (significantly, the first speaker): “In my judgement there are two places that would be appropriate for such a statue; the first where the Judith is [Fig. 6], and the second in the middle of the courtyard of the Palazzo where the David is.²⁶ The first because the Judith is a deadly sign and inappropriate in this place because our symbol is the cross as well as the lily, and it is not fitting that the woman should slay the man, and, worst of all, it was placed in its position under an evil constellation because, since then, things have gone from bad to worse, and Pisa has been lost. The David in the courtyard is an imperfect figure because the leg which is behind him is awkward; therefore I recommend that this statue be placed in one of these two places, but I prefer that of the Judith” [Fig. 8]²⁷ (“el iudicio havete dua luoghi dove puo sopportare tale statua el primo dove e la iuditta el secondo el mezo della corte del palazzo dove e el davit. primo perche la iuditta e segno mortifero e non sta bene havendo noi la +[croce] per insegna et el giglio non

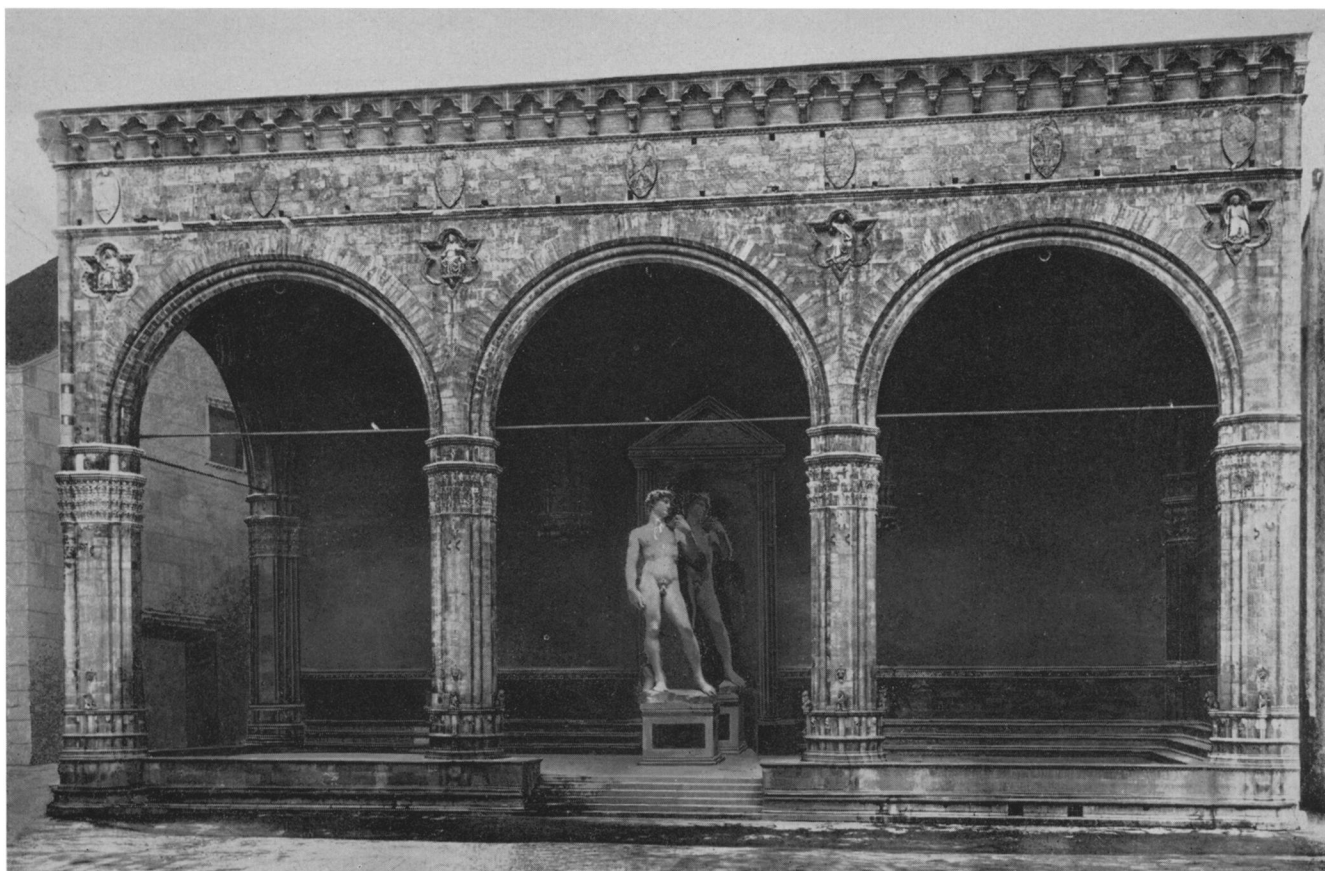
²³ After the expulsion of the Medici in 1494, laws were passed prescribing the death penalty for anyone found guilty of conspiring to effect the return of the family to Florence. Bernardo de' Nero, who had served three times as Gonfalonier of the Signoria, was executed for this in 1497 (G. F. Young, *The Medici*, New York, 1933, 249).

²⁴ See below, especially the remarks of the First Herald of the Signoria, Giovanni piffero, il Riccio, Gallieno, Davit and Salvestro.

²⁵ For a description of the Herald as the chief representative of the Signoria, see Lensi, 60, 61, 64.

²⁶ Donatello's bronze *David*, which had been transferred from the Palazzo Medici in 1495, together with the *Judith* (Frey, part A, doc. 7).

²⁷ Despite the phrasing (“In my judgment . . . I recommend . . .”) the Herald, as the official spokesman of the Signoria, is indicating *its* choice, rather than a personal one.



4 Reconstruction of Loggia dei Lanzi as it appeared in 1504 showing the two locations for the *David* within central arch proposed by Giuliano da Sangallo (photo: Alinari)



5 The *David* under lateral arch, left, in location proposed by Second Herald. The painter Biagio suggested the steps of central arch

sta bene che la donna uccida l'homo et maxime essendo stata posta chon chattiva chonstellatione perche da poi in qua siete iti di male in peggio e perdessi poi pisa. El davit della corte e una figura et non e perfecta perche la gamba sua di drieto e sciocha pertanto io consiglieri che se ponesse questa statua in uno de dua luoghi ma piu tosto dove e la Juditta").

Donatello's *Judith* is a "deadly sign" because it is a Medici symbol. Had it not originally stood in the Palazzo Medici and there as an *insegna* served the needs of the hated family?²⁸ Was it not, therefore, in conflict with the traditional democratic symbols of the commune and the Republic, the Red Cross and the Lily, which in the recently restored Florentine republic functioned also as anti-Medicean emblems? This is clearly the contrast implied in the Herald's reference to "our symbol." He urges, then, the replacement of the *Judith* with Michelangelo's *David* because the latter is a suitable anti-Medicean emblem of republican government and therefore symbolically consistent with "our" Red Cross and Lily.

Since the *Judith* and Donatello's bronze *David* were originally private emblems of the deposed Medici, his pejorative comments about them are understandable. The moral and formal criticism conveys, in fact, a disguised hostility to the implications of Medicean ascendancy and success symbolized by the two sculptures. "It is not fitting for the [Medici] woman to slay the man"²⁹ and the backward (left) leg of the *David* is "awkward" (*schiocha*) only because the head of an anti-Medicean Goliath is underfoot.³⁰ For the Herald, it is likewise futile to convert established Medicean symbols into republican ones;³¹ apparently, certain aspects of their harmful potency survive, for it was an "evil [anti-republican] constellation" which attended the symbolic "capture" of the Medicean

Judith when it was placed in front of the Palazzo Vecchio in 1495, and "things have gone from bad to worse and Pisa has been lost" as a consequence.³²

Giuliano da Sangallo is the first to elaborate the proposal made previously by Cosimo Rosselli that the *David* be placed in the Loggia dei Lanzi: "I had in mind the corner of the church [the Duomo] as suggested by Cosimo [Fig. 3] and it would be seen [there] by the passersby. But since it is a public thing, and the marble is imperfect, being fragile and soft as a result of having been exposed to the weather, it does not seem to me that it would survive permanently; for this reason, instead, I think that the best place would be in the middle bay of the Loggia della Signoria, and centrally under its vault so that it is possible to go around it; or closer inside near the wall, in the middle, with a black niche behind it in the manner of a little chapel [Fig. 4]; if it is exposed to the weather it will quickly deteriorate, and it is better for it to be covered" ("L'animo mio era volto in sul chanto della chiesa dove a detto Cosimo et e veduta da viandanti. Ma poi che e cosa pubblica veduto la imperfectione del marmo per lo essere tenero e chotto et essendo stato all' acqua non mi pare fussi durabile per tanto per questa causa, o, pensato che stia bene nell'archo di mezo della loggia de Signori o, in el mezo dell'archo che se potessi andarle intorno, o, dal lato drento presso al muro nel mezo cho nuno nichio nero di drieto in modo di cappelluza che se la mettono all' acqua verra mancho presto et vuole stare coperta"). Sangallo seeks to minimize the partisan connotations of the *David* by referring to it as a general civic symbol (*cosa pubblica*) that requires protective shelter.³³ In suggesting that it be located in the middle bay of the Loggia, "so that it is possible to go around it" he is, perhaps, anticipating the opinions of those at the meeting who were concerned with the visibility of the different

²⁸ See H. W. Janson, *The Sculpture of Donatello*, Princeton, 1963, 198ff.

²⁹ In his remarks on the *Judith*, the Herald offers an opinion that contradicts the Medici view expressed by an inscription which had at one time been attached to its pedestal: "Piero Son of Cosimo Medici has dedicated the statue of this woman to that liberty and fortitude bestowed on the republic by the invincible and constant spirit of its citizens" (Janson, 198). The dedication may also have been a tribute to his wife, Lucretia Tornabuoni, whose portraits show a striking resemblance to the head of the *Judith*.

Despite the traditional association of Judith with the Virtue of Humility expressed in another inscription (also possibly a tribute to Lucretia) on the sculpture: "... behold the neck of pride severed by the hand of humility" (Janson, 198), the Herald, in support of his political animosity against this former Medicean symbol, may be using a tradition of hostility against the biblical Judith which had already appeared in European literature: by 1504, Brant's *Narrenschiff* had already achieved a widespread popularity and existed in many translations. A stanza devoted to Judith contains the following lines, "Had Judith not dressed up and spruced/Holofernes had not been seduced" (Sebastian Brant, *The Ship of Fools*, trans. E. H. Zeydel, New York, 1944, 299).

³⁰ The comment by the Herald on the "awkwardness" of the left leg does not appear valid as an aesthetic judgment. The probable explanation is that the Herald is conveying a pro-Republican sympathy for the decapitated Goliath upon whose head the "awkward" foot of this Medicean symbol rests.

³¹ The action of the Signoria with respect to the bronze *David* and the *Judith* by Donatello was based on the idea that images should be "captured" by appropriate changes in location and inscription or ornament rather than that Medicean symbols should be destroyed or replaced.

After the expulsion of the Medici in 1494, the *Judith* was removed from the Palazzo Medici, and a new inscription emphasizing the victory of the republican elements in Florence was carved on its pedestal: *Exemplum sal. [salutis] Pub. [publicae] Cives posuere MCCCCXCV*. In its new site the *Judith* was now interpreted in both expression and menacing gesture as exemplifying hostility to the oppressive tyranny of the exiled family (Lenzi, 84). Donatello's bronze *David*, taken from the Palazzo Medici at the same time, was installed in the inner court of the Palazzo Vecchio. It was also converted into a republican *insegna* in 1498 when four civic coats of arms were added to its pedestal. They were of "... marmo bianco, liberta, popolo, commune e bianco e rosso" (Lenzi, 84).

The Herald is, in effect, voicing a complaint that this policy of symbolic "conversion" is not only inadequate, but disastrous ("... and Pisa has been lost as a consequence"). He is reiterating an early post-revolutionary policy with regard to Medicean *insegne* which had been announced by the authorities in 1497. "E a di 11 di maggio, la Signoria, ch'era gonfaloniere Piero degli Alberti, fecione disfare e scarpellare tutte l'arme delle palle nel palagio de' Medici e altrove" (Landucci, 149). Badia also notes the following: "Il partito è del di 8, ed ordinare che in ogni luogo, dove il Commune di Firenze ha giurisdizione, si distruggano le armi e insegne di Lorenzo de' Medici e dei suoi figli ed eredi; e che in luogo di quelle (dove si potesse fare comodamente), si ponga l'insegna del popolo fiorentino, cioè la croce rossa in campo bianco" (Landucci, n. 2). Possibly the first Herald had this decree in mind when he spoke of the fact that "havendo noi la [croce] per insegna et al giglio."

³² Pisa freed itself from Florentine domination after the expulsion of Piero in 1494. In 1509 it once again fell under the control of Florence.

³³ Compare the reference, *cosa pubblica*, with the *sal[utis] Pub[licae]* in the republican inscription of 1495 on the pedestal of the *Judith*.

sides of the figure. But this is contradicted in his next suggestion that the work be placed in its own niche ("in the manner of a little chapel") in the rear wall of the Loggia. This proposal is significant because, in effect, it extends his first thought that it be placed in the vicinity of the Duomo. In such a niche, the biblical, Christian aspects of the David iconography would be emphasized, and the contemporary, controversial political aspects of the work would be virtually eliminated. Here the figure would become an image with a single, frontal view, its left side almost completely concealed by the framing of the niche. Within such a recess, it would be almost buried in a position significantly distant from normal public view and submerged within the deepest shadows of the Loggia. If Giuliano da Sangallo's final plan had been accepted, the *David* – standing within a tabernacle – would have been rendered so innocuous that even its general civic symbolic associations would have been attenuated.

Giovanni piffero (fife-player) rejects Giuliano da Sangallo's proposal with arguments that are almost entirely concerned with its symbolic aspects: "I would agree with what Giuliano has said if it could be seen in its entirety [in the central bay of the Loggia], but it cannot be seen in its entirety; it is necessary to think of its purpose, its appearance, of the opening, of the wall, of the roof; all [this] is of consequence because it is necessary [to be able] to go around it; on the other side, some wretch may attack it with a bar; [for this reason] it appears to me that it would be better in the courtyard of the Palace, as suggested by Francesco the Herald, and there it would be of great comfort to the 'holy big-shot' [*crystone*: contemporary slang for a 'distinguished person'] being in a place worthy of such a statue" ("... io confermerei el detto di giuliano se si vedessa tutta, ma non si vede tutta ma e sa a [*sic*]³⁴ pensare alla ragione, all'aria, alla apertura alla pariete et al tecto pertanto bisogna andarle intorno et dall'altro lato potrebbe uno tristo darle chon uno stangone mi pare stia bene nella corte del palazzo dove dixè Messer Francesco araldo e sara grande conforto allo crystone essendo in tale luogo degno di tale statua").

Giovanni's comments seem to be based on two sets of alternatives: (1) The site of the Loggia *versus* a site where the work can be seen freely and unhampered by physical limitations, the most satisfactory place being in front of the Palazzo Vecchio. It is reasonable to assume from the text (*et dall'altro lato*) that he had the *ringhiera* of the Palazzo in mind even if he does not mention it specifically. (2) The *ringhiera versus* the courtyard within the Palazzo, which had the advantage of protecting the sculpture against possible vandalism. Within the building, it would also be

suitable as an *insegna* identified with the anti-Medicean Signoria.

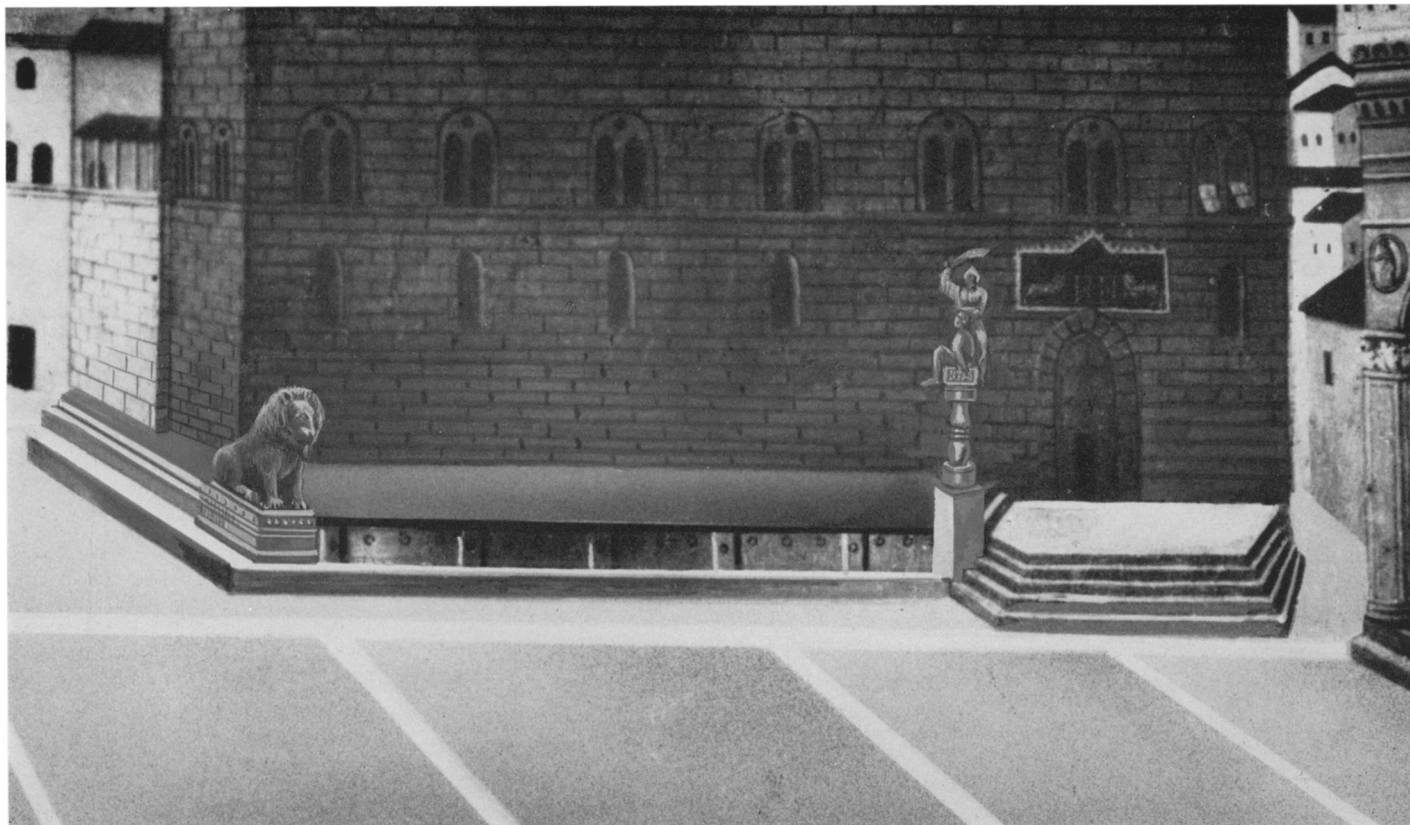
"But it cannot be seen in its entirety [in the Loggia]; one must think of its purpose, its appearance . . . the opening . . . the wall . . . it is necessary to go around it . . ." Here is vividly documented the fact that the front of the *David* was not considered to be its exclusive or primary view. Giovanni also links the problem of more complete visual accessibility with the appearance (*aria*) and purpose (*ragione*) of the work, implying politically significant connotations in the ability to see the statue "in its entirety." His allusions to such things as the opening (*apertura*), the wall (*pariete*), and the roof (*tecto*) should be interpreted as expressing greater concern with the ease of visual engagement than with that of protective shelter. He obviously prefers a site without obstructing or confining surfaces and obscuring shadows. It is not altogether certain which wall he has in mind – the main wall cited by Sangallo, or the western wall at the end of the Loggia – but in either case the work would suffer from the limitations imposed on the spectator's vision and mobility. Certainly this would be the case if it were placed in the niche proposed by Sangallo. Considering its appearance, particularly the aggressive qualities of its gaze, and its purpose as an apotropaic symbol aimed towards adversaries to the south in Rome, it is evident that if Sangallo's plan were followed the head of the *David* would impotently face a blank wall, in a direction inconsistent with its "purpose" (*ragione*). It may be reiterated that in this location, the *David* would be in a limiting, cramped environment, divorced from the areas of significant public circulation, and, above all, with its meaningful left side virtually concealed from the spectator's view.

"On the other side," in the open on the platform (*ringhiera*) in front of the Palazzo, "it could be seen in its entirety."³⁵ However, there were surreptitious partisans of the exiled family who because of the *David's* political symbolism preferred not to see it in this location – with its malevolent mien and fierce warnings projected towards the Medici in Rome – and who, consequently, might take direct action against the image were it placed on this site. "One must think of its purpose" and "some wretch may attack it with a bar" are linked conceptually in Giovanni's mind. He does not raise the possibility of vandalism in his arguments against the site of the Loggia which is also accessible to the public. The reason for this becomes apparent when one realizes that it is only in front of the Palazzo Vecchio (as Francesco the Herald has already stressed) that the *David* assumes its primary role as an anti-Medicean symbol, and thereby invites retaliatory partisan vandalism. When other locations are discussed, the

³⁴ Settesoldi here offers a literal transcription of the manuscript. The sense is accurately conveyed in both Gaye's and Milanese's transcription of *ma e' s' à pensare*.

³⁵ Seymour (page 153) translates "dall'altro lato" as "perhaps"; Klein and Zerner (page 43) read it idiomatically as "on the other hand." However, linguistic usage, as found in Dante's *Inferno*, supports a literal translation of "on the other side": "dell'un de' lati fanno all'altro lato

scherma;/volgansi spesso i miseri profani" (" . . . and the profane wretches often turn themselves, of one side making a shelter for the other side"). Dante also provides a different equivalent for "on the other hand": ". . . e genera il pel suso/ per l'una parte e dall'altra parte il dipela" (" . . . and on the one hand brings out the hair and on the other hand strips it off . . ."); Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Italian text with trans. John D. Sinclair, New York, 1961, 86, 313).



6 Altered detail from early 16th-century painting showing the *Marzocco* and Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* as they appeared on the *ringhiera* of the Palazzo Vecchio in 1504. Florence, San Marco

partisan connotations of the *David* are either diminished or eliminated altogether, and the question of vandalism is not raised.³⁶

Inside the courtyard, it would not only be protected from attack, but “it would be of great comfort to the distinguished one [because of its] being in a place worthy of such a statue.” Here, as a political emblem, the work is directly linked with the Signoria in its own citadel of republican power. The language is curious, but the meaning is clear: the *David* is viewed as an emblematic image which also reinforces (*sara grande conforto*) the prestige and *virtù* of

the “holy big-shot” (*crystone*)³⁷ who can be none other than Piero Soderino, the distinguished head of the anti-Medicean Florentine government during this period.³⁸

Andrea called Il Riccio, goldsmith, is similarly concerned with possible damage to the *David*. His comments are remarkable for their direct allusions to the apotropaic qualities of the figure: “I agree with the place cited by Messer Francesco the Herald [the courtyard of the Palazzo Vecchio] and there it would be well covered and would here be most highly regarded and most carefully watched against acts to damage it [or read: “against its being

³⁶ That there was some justification for the fear of vandalism against the *David* was afterwards confirmed when the statue was stoned while being moved at night from the Opera del Duomo. Landucci's entry for May 14 (page 268) reads: “E in questa notte fu gittato certi sassi al gigante per fare male. Bisogna fare la guardia la notte.” That this stone-throwing was not just an adolescent prank, but was in all likelihood politically motivated, is conveyed in Landucci's “per fare male” (*ibid.*). Although the directive to place the *David* on the site occupied by the *Judith* was not issued until May 28 (Frey, part C, doc. 23) it is entirely probable that its intended location was known even before May 14. The stoning of the *David*, undoubtedly by pro-Medicean partisans, may have represented a protest not only against its aspects as a republican *insegna*, but also against its replacement of the *Judith*, which for their supporters must have always remained a Medicean symbol despite its conversion into a republican image in 1495.

³⁷ This word is probably the most difficult to decipher in the manu-

script. Gaye (page 461) reads it as “auctore,” and Milanesi (page 622) as “autore.” Both are extremely doubtful and inconsistent with contemporary linguistic usage. Settesoldi's transcription of “crystone” is, with the exception of the first letter, supported by the writing of “tristo” in the same passage. On this basis he suggests also an alternate reading of “tristone” which, considering the exigencies and pressures confronting Piero Soderino at this time could also allude to him.

³⁸ Soderino was one of Florence's leading and most active citizens, and closely associated with the Signoria when the *David* was conceived and commissioned. During the ominous period when Cesare Borgia was approaching Florence in May, 1501, Soderino and Benedetto de' Nerli were sent as representatives of the Signoria to negotiate with him. He had been President (*gonfalonier*) of the Signoria for its regular two month periods. In 1502 he was appointed President-for-Life (*gonfalonier-a-vita*) when the tenure of the office was made permanent. Soderino, together with other members of the Signoria, resided in the Palazzo Vecchio.



7 Montage showing locations for the *David* and the *Marzocco* proposed by Gallieno



8 Site for the *David* proposed by First Herald to replace the *Judith*, and chosen by the Signoria as its permanent location

spoiled”]³⁹ and it is better to enclose it so that the passersby go to look at it; it is not for such a thing to go towards the passersby, nor should the figure come to look at us” (“Io mi achordo dove dicie Messer Francesco araldo e quivi stare bene coperta et essere qui piu stimata e piu riguardata quando fussi per essere guasta et stare meglio al coperto et e viandanti andare a vedere et non tal cosa andare incontro a viandanti et non che la figura venghi a vedere noi”).

“It is better to enclose it so that the passersby go to look at it.” Here Riccio links the appropriateness of its being placed within the courtyard with those who would normally “go to look at it.” These would be the members of the Signoria and others who had occasion, for purposes of government or other official business, to enter the building. They would, in effect, be viewing and responding to a “friendly” and reassuring image.

But placing the statue outside, in front of the Palazzo is an entirely different matter. Not only would it invite the possibilities of damage (*guasta*) as an anti-Medicean *insegna*, but it would also direct its menacing aspects against the Florentines. “It is not for such a thing to go towards the passerby.” The *David* should, instead, “go” against the enemy; nor should the malevolent stare of its head be turned upon the loyal citizens of the republic (“nor should the figure come to look at us”). The language that Il Riccio uses underscores our impression that he sees the work as imbued with an almost magical sense of apotropaic potency.⁴⁰ It is in this context that he uses the dramatic phrase, “such a thing” (*tal cosa*); a remarkable phrase, indeed, to describe what for the modern viewer, may be seen essentially as a “work of art.”

From another point of view, Il Riccio’s arguments curiously parallel those presented by Sangallo. Within the courtyard, the work would also be sheltered (“and there it would be well covered”) as well as protected from harm. And if we infer from Sangallo’s comments that he wanted to remove the *David* from conspicuous public display, then Il Riccio goes even further in pointing out that the work would be concealed behind the façade of the Palazzo (“... and it is better to enclose it”). By his almost passionate references to what for him is an awesome work, and by his stress upon its hostile characteristics, Il Riccio perhaps manages also to assuage the partisans of the Medici with a proposal which, after that of Sangallo, is another means of withdrawing and isolating the statue.

Gallieno, embroiderer, is the first to propose for the *David* the site occupied by the *Marzocco*: “According to me, as I visualize it, and seeing the quality [nature?] of the form of the statue, it would be better where the Lion of the square is, having a base with ornamentation; this place is convenient for such a statue and the Lion might be placed

at the side of the portal of the Palace on the corner of the parapet [Figs. 6, 7]” (“A me secondo mio ingegno e veduto la qualita della statua disegno stia bene dove e el lione di piazza con uno inbasamento in ornamento el quale luogo e tal statua e conveniente e el lione mettendo al lato alla porta del palazzo in sul chanto del muricciuolo”).

In advocating for the *David* the site of the *Marzocco*, traditionally an *insegna* associated with Florentine liberty and defense, Gallieno emphasizes a symbolism which both works have in common. He reinforces this by explaining that “seeing the quality of the form of the statue, it would be better where the Lion is.” Form (*disegno*) and place are linked together to stress the connection between symbol and site. Moreover, not only is the site of the *Marzocco* fitting, but the physical location readily permits the replacement (“el quale luogo e tal statua e conveniente”). In his reference to “a base with ornamentation” he may have had in mind emblematic forms, possibly including an inscription, which would accentuate the political implications of the work. Even though the site is at the corner of the Palazzo, at some distance from its main portal, his suggestion is perhaps even bolder than the Herald’s proposal to use the site of the *Judith*. If Gallieno’s opinion had been accepted, there would have been three emblems (the *David*; the *Judith*, converted into a republican *insegna* after its transfer from the Palazzo of the deposed Medici in 1495; and the *Marzocco* [Fig. 7]), each freighted with anti-Medicean meanings, arranged in a significant sequence guarding the façade and the portal of the building.

Gallieno’s proposal to extend, in effect, the sculptural program in front of the Palazzo Vecchio is also interesting since it anticipates in the location suggested for the *Marzocco* the site chosen by Piero Soderini in 1508 for the “republican” phase of the *Hercules and Cacus*, a group ultimately completed by Bandinelli in 1534.⁴¹

Davit [Ghirlandaio], painter, the next speaker, echoes Gallieno’s position: “In my opinion, Gallieno has indicated the place more worthy than any other; this is a congruous and suitable place; and [therefore] put the Lion in the other place that he has mentioned, or in another place which may be shown to be better” (“A me pare che Gallieno habia detto el luogo tanto degno quanto altro luogo et quello sia el luogo congruo et commodo et porre el lione altrove dove e detto o in altro luogo dove meglio fussi indicato”).

As the *Marzocco* was the traditional political symbol of communal republican defense and, therefore, appropriately situated, so the *David* in this location would be an equivalent symbol. In agreeing with Gallieno, Davit again stresses the point that the site should be connected with the meaning and function of the sculpture. In so doing, he

³⁹ The term “guasta” is used by Riccio as “damage” resulting from either vandalism or exposure. Since, however, he has previously defended the location of the open courtyard of the Palazzo Vecchio because the sculpture “guivi stare ben coperta,” his use of “guasta” would seem to suggest that he favors the site because it could be a good place to enclose the *David* and prevent attempts to damage it.

⁴⁰ The idea that an image was actually invested with “magical” potency was not alien to the Renaissance mind, which was widely committed to

astrology, omens, portents and other superstitious beliefs (see Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore, rev. ed., London, 1950, 313ff. See especially page 328 for references to images fashioned for magical purposes. See also Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, iv, New York, 1934, 574ff., for a discussion of the so-called astrological images of the Renaissance).

⁴¹ For a summary of the history of this group, see John Pope-Hennessy, *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture*, 1970, 363, 364.

reminds his listeners, in effect, that this is the central issue of the discussion and the reason for their having been invited to the meeting. It is not mere coincidence that he uses the same phrase, inverted from the Latin, which appears in the introduction to the minutes of the meeting: to consider a "locum commodum et congruum," and which he expresses (in Italian) as "luogo congruo at comodo." A location that is congruous is one which is fitting in that it is consistent with the symbolic nature of the image. Since it is a republican *insegna* with its head turned towards a real and actual threat, it should be placed in front of the stronghold of anti-Medicean power where it would be properly oriented towards the enemy. Any other interpretation of "congruo" (*congruum*) as used here would be out of context. Just as the site selected should be congruous, so also should it be appropriate (*commodo*). It is apparent from his choice of these words why Davit Ghirlandaio found the place of the *Marzocco* "more worthy than any other."

* * *

There was some urging at the meeting that the decision should be left to the artist himself. If the final choice of site, in front of the Palazzo Vecchio (Fig. 8), reflected Michelangelo's opinion, this would constitute prima facie evidence of a basic accord between Michelangelo and the Signoria. Such an agreement, if it existed, would have further consequences. It would indicate a relationship between sculptor and patron in which the Signoria (rather than the Opera del Duomo) was the responsible authority for the project. There are, indeed, significant indications in the minutes that Michelangelo made the *David* for the location favored by the Signoria.

Piero di Cosimo, the last speaker recorded, says: "I agree with Giuliano da Sangallo, *but even more* that it should accord with him who made it, for *he knows best* where it should be placed" ("Io confermo el detto di giuliano da sangallo e piu che se ne achordi quello che l'a facta che lui sa meglio come vuole stare"). It is possible that he agrees with Sangallo as a formal courtesy and that he hints that the *David* was made for a site other than the Loggia. This is revealed, for example, in the comments of **Salvestro**. In a careful arrangement of phrases, he conveys the idea that the site of the Palazzo which he favors is the choice of the sculptor himself: "I believe that he who has made it can give the best location, and I think that it would be best in the vicinity of the Palazzo, and he who has made it, without a doubt, knows better than anyone else the place most suitable for the appearance and manner of the figure" ("Credo che quello che l'a facta sia per darle migliore luogo e io per me me stimo intorno al palazzo stare meglio e che quello che l'a facta niente dimancho come, o, deto sappia meglio el luogo che nissuno per l'aria e modo della figura"). Twice, *before* and *after* he has stated his own choice for the vicinity of the Palazzo Vecchio, Salvestro underlines the

intention of the sculptor, strongly implying that this is Michelangelo's choice also.

Philippo di Filippo (Filippino Lippi), who follows Salvestro, also endorses the idea of deferring to the wishes of Michelangelo. "I am for all that has [just] been so well said and I believe that the artist has better and for a longer time thought of the place and that all that has been said [by Salvestro] was intended to confirm his [Michelangelo's] choice by the one [Salvestro] who has spoken so wisely in what he was saying" ("Io [sono] per tutti e stato detto benissimo et credo che el maestro habia meglio e piu lungamente pensato el luogo e dallui s'intenda confirmando el detto tutto di chi a parlato che saviamente si e detto").

What may be suspected in Salvestro's arrangement of phrases seems openly stated by Filippo. If his comments are read correctly he is saying that Salvestro's remarks are intended to confirm the fact that Michelangelo had the site of the Palazzo in mind ("dallui [of Michelangelo] s'intenda confirmando"). If Salvestro uses a reference to the "appearance and manner" ("l'aria e modo") of the work to stress this, then Filippo also emphasizes this with the comment, "e piu lungamente pensato el luoguo."

Philippo's remark that the artist had been thinking about the location "for a greater length of time" is most revealing. It is well known that Michelangelo's procedure involved considerably more than technical skill in the craft of carving. Above all it entailed a conception of the image and its intended site that was virtually complete at the inception of the work. The very elements of symbolic form and reference immanent in the *David* sustain the interpretation that it was conceived for the Signoria and the Palazzo Vecchio from the outset. When it was completed it certainly was most "fitting" for its location next to the portal of the Palazzo Vecchio.⁴²

If there are strong indications that Michelangelo was in accord with the Signoria in its preference for the site of the Palazzo Vecchio, it can also be inferred that the authorities of the Opera and the Arte della Lana were similarly in agreement. Certainly the text of the Latin introduction to the minutes reveals that both Michelangelo and these authorities coincided in their views about a proper location for the *David*. The work should be erected "in such a place as is understood to be a firm and solid support in agreement with the report of Michelangelo, the master [who made] the said Giant and the Consuls of the Arte della Lana" ("... in tale loco esse dictum locum solidum et resolidatum ex relatu Michelangelii magistrum dicti Gigantis et Consulum artis lane..."). Interestingly enough, we have here what appears to be a virtual directive on the part of the authorities (and Michelangelo) not to use the Loggia dei Lanzi as a site for the *David*. There is evidence that the pavement of the Loggia was not strong enough to hold Michelangelo's *gigante*. When the bronze *Judith* was installed in the Loggia in 1506, it was necessary to construct a foundation to support its weight.⁴³ It is thus hardly likely

⁴² Both Carl Neumann ("Die Wahl des Platzes für Michelangelos David in Florenz im Jahr 1504," *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, xxxviii, 1916, 1-27) and de Tolnay (*The Youth of Michelangelo* 97) are of the

opinion that Michelangelo intended the *David* for the position near the Palazzo portal.

⁴³ Landucci, 301, 302.

that the Loggia would have been considered satisfactory as a “locum solidum et resolidatum.” In this injunction, appearing in the introductory text of the minutes, there is perhaps an argument, offered in advance, against the site of the Loggia. We have reason to conclude that the Opera and the Guild authorities as well as Michelangelo and the Signoria were united in their desire to find (as the introduction states) “a congruous and suitable place” (“locum commodum et congruum”) for the *David*, and that this location, if we can be guided by remarks of Salvestro and Filippo, was the site of the Palazzo Vecchio.

If the meeting is understood as having been arranged in order to freely arrive at a decision as to where to place the *David*, then the introduction to the document is extraordinary in its clear directive that the decision should accord with the wishes of the artist and the authorities (“ex relatu Michelangeli magistrum . . . et Consulium artis lane”), in advance of any discussion. In fact, the opinion of the Signoria is developed at the meeting in such a manner as to convey and reinforce this official intention.

The opinion of Francesco, the first Herald, as mouthpiece of the Signoria, carried the greatest weight at the meeting. This authoritative opinion, reflecting the Signoria’s choice of site, is announced at the beginning and then is echoed at the very end of the meeting. Although the opinion of the second Herald is the sixth in the sequence of statements, there is a significant addition to his comments which, as the manuscript discloses in a marginal notation, “was added last after all had spoken” (“questo aggiunte poi dopo detto d’ogniuno all’ultimo”). The second Herald concludes with the following: “. . . and before your esteemed selves judge where it should go, you should consult with the Signori [of the Signoria] because they are very wise” (“et avanti che si disponghino le magnificentie vostre doe e a stare lo conferiate chon li signori perche vi e de buoni ingiegni”). This last statement was certainly added to remind the group that the opinion of the government was crucial. The fact that the discussion was, in effect, bracketed at its start and conclusion by the wishes of the Signoria indicates that a point of view of obviously earlier origin was being virtually imposed despite the seemingly free deliberation of those who attended. The Government itself indeed had the authority (which it had exercised previously) to make final decisions in the matter of public art programs.⁴⁴

* * *

The comments of **Francesco Monciatto** are interesting in their indications that the discussion took place in the light of a decision that had already been made: “I believe that everything that is made is made for a specific purpose and I believe this because it [the *David*] was made to be placed on [one of] the outside pilasters or buttresses around the church. The reason one should not want to put it there I do not know, for there it appears to me it would serve

well as an ornament of the church and the Consuls [of the Arte della Lane] and the place has been changed” (“Io credo che tucte le cose che si fanno si fanno per qualche fine e cosi credo perche fu facta per mettere in su e pilastri di fuori o sproni intorno alla chiesa. La causa di non ve le mettere non so e quivi a me pareva stessi bene in ornamente della chiesa et de consoli e mutato loco”).

As he continues towards a conclusion, one senses that he wishes to avoid having to make a choice of site. “I advise that since it is quite apparent that you have given up the first plan then [consider either] the palace or the vicinity of the church [other than the north tribune]; because I have not been able to make up my mind, I defer to what the others say, since because of the shortness of time I have been unable to properly consider the place that is most fitting” (“Io consiglio che stia bene poiche voi siate levato dal primo obiecto o, in palazzo, o, intorno alla chiesa e non ben resoluta referirommi al decto d’altri Come quello che non, o, ben pensato per la extremita del tempo, del luogo piu congruo”).

Since Monciatto is only the second speaker, his remarks seem to be based on what he heard some time before, rather than during the meeting. His comments, “the reason for not putting it there I do not know,” and, “since it is apparent that you have given up the first place,” followed by the terse use of the past tense, “and the place *has been changed*” (“e mutato loco”) all indicate that the meeting is taking place against the background of an accomplished fact. A decision had already apparently been made to install the *David* somewhere in the vicinity of the Piazza della Signoria, or perhaps more specifically in front of the Palazzo Vecchio.

Monciatto’s viewpoint is also noteworthy in its revelation of contemporary assumptions about congruity and suitability in the placing of works of art (“I believe that everything that is made is made for a specific purpose”). He begins his discussion with this idea and pointedly concludes with a reference to the congruity of site: “I have been unable to properly consider the place that is most fitting” (“. . . che non, o, ben pensato . . . del luogo piu congruo”). Monciatto is voicing an attitude about the relationship between the work of art and its site which was perhaps universally held during this period. Francesco the Herald and others who support the site of the Palazzo Vecchio, or the sculptor’s choice, could readily agree with Monciatto that there should be a consistency between the purpose of the image and site (“tucte le cose che si fanno si fanno per qualche fine”) but within a context that Monciatto has chosen to ignore. Unlike most of the others at the meeting, he is thinking of the circumstances of 1464–66 when the block for the *David* had been intended for a figure on the north tribune of the Cathedral. Nor is he apparently concerned with its *disegno* (form), *modo* (manner), or *aria* (appearance). For the others, however, the *David* begun in 1501 was born in a set of circumstances which had little, if anything to do with the previous history of the block. For them it possessed instead a symbolic

Vecchio simply by order of the Signoria.

⁴⁴ Donatello’s marble *David* of 1408 originally had been commissioned by the Opera del Duomo and then transferred in 1416 to the Palazzo

function altogether immediate and contemporary in its partisan political allusions. And it was precisely because the opponents to the site of the Palazzo Vecchio (Sangallo and others) fully understood the force of the traditional view of congruity, expressed in Monciatto's phrase, that they attempted to neutralize it with arguments (of shelter and protection) which would justify placing it elsewhere.

* * *

"E mutato loco" (Monciatto) and "el maestro habia meglio e piu lungamente pensato el luogo" (Philippo). Perhaps in the very coupling of these two phrases by Monciatto and Philippo we can reinforce some documentary indications which suggest that the site of the Palazzo Vecchio was considered for Michelangelo's *David* as early as 1501.

Monciatto has assumed that Michelangelo had been commissioned in 1501 to complete the original project of 1464–66. He is seemingly confused and puzzled that the site of the north tribune is not being considered. He is, of course, apparently unaware that from the beginning of the renewed project of 1501 there is a conspicuous absence of reference to the site intended for the *David*. It is not mentioned in the meeting held in the Opera del Duomo on July 2, 1501 to inspect the block,⁴⁵ and the question of site is omitted from the commission contract of August 16 of the same year.⁴⁶ Moreover, it never appears in any of the documents listing expenditures which were made until the work was completed in 1504.⁴⁷

In significant contrast, however, is the fact that the documents relating to the block prior to 1501 often refer to site. In the commission granted to Agostino del Duccio on August 18, 1464, the contract refers to a "gughante . . . per porre in sunnuno degli sproni di Sancta Maria del Fiore d'atorno alla tribuna di detta chiesa."⁴⁸ The document of December 20, 1466 which terminated the project refers indirectly to site in its allusion to the earlier contract of August 18, "prout in dicta locatione continetur."⁴⁹ When the project was revived in 1476, a document of May 6, assigning the block to Antonio Rossellini, refers to the "gughante s'aveva a finire e porre in sununo degli sproni della chiesa," using language virtually identical with that of the contract of 1464.⁵⁰ In the last reference to the block, before 1501, a document of January 1, 1477, noting expenditures, again refers to a "giughante per uno de' pinacholi della chupola."⁵¹ In the face of these repeated references to location in the previous history of the block, the consistent omission of such references in all subsequent

documents from 1501 until the completion of the statue in 1504 is indeed curious, and, in fact, unprecedented. From these circumstances alone the conclusion is inescapable that when the project was resumed in 1501, the authorities were already considering a site other than the Duomo for Michelangelo's *David*. We may also conclude that this anticipated location was even then politically controversial, otherwise why was there complete silence about it?

We also sense at the beginning of the work on the *David* a suppression of information about it. One would imagine that the start and progress of so important a sculpture would have elicited some notice; yet it is not referred to in the contemporary chronicles. Landucci who was generally sensitive to noteworthy events does not mention it. Instead there can be detected efforts to shroud the project in secrecy. Shortly after the work was begun a payment was made for an enclosure which was erected around it.⁵² This was an unusual procedure as the courtyard of the Opera del Duomo was itself an enclosed private workshop area. The erection of a special fence around the work may be construed as an effort to isolate it from even the artisans, workmen and others who had normal access to this area. This atmosphere of concealment seems to have persisted to the very end. How else can we explain the unusual circumstance of the removal of the completed *David* from the Opera grounds on the *night* of May 14, 1504?⁵³

Another curious circumstance related to the beginning of the *David* in 1501 – one which is perhaps linked with the absence of any reference to site and the element of furtiveness – is the emergence of the idea of the spoilage of the block. It has been traditionally accepted that the block had been spoiled in 1466 in the quarry at Carrara by Bacellino, an assistant of Agostino di Duccio, or by Agostino himself. It has been assumed that these circumstances influenced the decision to terminate the project in 1466. Yet despite the pervasiveness of this belief, the extraordinary fact is that a study of all the pertinent documents before 1501 fails to reveal a single allusion to spoilage.⁵⁴ Not only are there no such references in the 1466 documents involving Duccio and Bacellino, but there are none in the two documents of 1476 and 1477, when the project was briefly reactivated. The contract of 1476, granting the commission to Antonio Rossellino states: ". . . considerato che già sono molti anni che fu alloghato Aghostino scultore uno gughante di marmo el quale è al presente allato a fondamenti el quale gughante s'aveva a finire e porre in sununo degli sproni della chiesa."⁵⁵ The wording simply indicates the

⁴⁵ Poggi, doc.448.

⁴⁶ Frey, part A, doc.8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, docs.10–15.

⁴⁸ Poggi, doc.441.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, doc.444.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, doc.446.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, doc.447.

⁵² Frey, part A, docs.12, 13.

⁵³ Landucci, 268.

⁵⁴ Vasari–Milanesi, vii, 153, n.2.

More recently, Seymour (35–38), citing evidence developed by Janson ("Giovanni Chellini's 'Libro,'" 131–38) suggests Donatello's overall supervision of the north tribune program from 1463, and theorizes that the work on the block was terminated on December 30, 1466 because of Donatello's death a few days before. Seymour can also find no evidence for the belief that the block had been spoiled at that time. For the association of the Medici with the Cathedral program of 1463–66 and a possible connection of the abandonment of the *David*-block project with the Pitti rebellion of the previous August, see Levine, "*Tal Cosa*," 30–32.

⁵⁵ Poggi, doc.446.

original assignment to Agostino and instructs Rossellino to begin work on the block (*s'aveva a finire*). Although Agostino is mentioned, his name is not coupled with a reference to spoilage as it is in the contract of August 16, 1501, when the commission was given to Michelangelo. In the brief and direct language of the contract of 1476 there is not a hint of any special problem associated with the condition or shape of the material. The idea of a spoiled block appears for the first time in the document of the meeting held on July 2, 1501 to inspect the stone ("Operarii deliberaverunt quod quidam homo ex marmore vocato Davit *male abozatum* et *resupinium* existem in curte dicte Opere . . .").⁵⁶ It is repeated again in the contract of August 16 (" . . . quendam hominen vocato Gigante abozatum per magistrum Augustinum grande de Florentia, et *male abozatum* . . .").⁵⁷

According to Vasari, the Florentine authorities were considering the granting of the commission for the *David* some time prior to the July 2 meeting. "Some of his [Michelangelo's] friends wrote to him from Florence telling him to return since it is possible he might, as he had wished, carve a figure from the spoiled block of marble in the Opera; Piero Soderini, Gonfalonier of the city, had talked of giving the marble to Leonardo da Vinci."⁵⁸ On the face of it, the meeting of July 2 seems to have been arranged for the sole purpose of ascertaining the feasibility of using the block which had presumably been spoiled. Yet the instructions in the document imply that it had already been determined prior to this meeting to use the block. Before this point can be developed further, it is necessary to summarize some of the facts related to the history of the block.

In the document of December 20, 1466, which details the Opera's account with Agostino di Duccio, the location of the block is not given. Instead there is the instruction that it was to "remain under the control of the Opera authorities" ("*remaneat in manibus dicte Opere*").⁵⁹ Shortly afterwards on December 30, in the document describing the final settlement of the sculptor's claims, the stone is described as being in the immediate vicinity of the Cathedral, ". . . existentum in opera videlicet apud ecclesiam."⁶⁰ This seems to be the same site which is described as being "allato a fondamenti" (the basement storage area of the Duomo)⁶¹ in the contract of 1476 with Antonio Rossellino. It is likely, therefore, that the block was carried directly to this storage area when it arrived in Florence in 1466. It was then apparently brought for the first time to the sculpture workshop court of the Opera in 1476-77 since the document of July 2, 1501 states: "The Operai considered the marble *male* figure known as the *David* which had been badly blocked and now lies in the courtyard of the Opera" ("Operarii deliberaverunt quod quidam homo ex marmore vocato *David male abozatum* et *resupinium* existem in curte dicte opera").⁶² We have reason to believe conse-

quently that the block was in the same place (within the Opera courtyard) and in the same horizontal position (*resupinium*) in July, 1501 as it was twenty-five years before. Yet in the contract of 1476 there is no question of inspecting the marble to see whether Rossellino could proceed with the carving. He is simply instructed to continue the project (*s'aveva a finire*) whereas in 1501 it was thought necessary to examine the block, to determine "si possit absolvi et finire,"⁶³ before granting the commission.

At this point one may consider an inspection procedure which would probably have been used if the problem of determining feasibility had been a genuine one. In its supine position, the three exposed major faces of the block could easily have been measured to determine whether there was enough material to accommodate a preconceived figure; in this position it could have been similarly examined for possible flaws. A single ninety-degree rotation of the block would have then permitted a study of its fourth surface, to complete the examination. On the other hand, to raise it to a vertical position ("erigi, et elevari in altum") required a major engineering operation. Considering the large size and enormous weight of the block, there was obviously involved a costly expenditure for the time and labor of the work-crew, as well as for the necessary material and apparatus. Notwithstanding the reason for elevating the block which is given in the document, we can assume that all of this was done because it had already been determined to proceed with the project.

The wording of the July document suggests that those who came to the meeting already possessed a fairly complete visualization of the image which was ultimately to be extracted from the rough block. In all previous references, from 1464 on, the characteristic "ghugante" is used which indiscriminately fuses the conceived figure with the mass of blocked-out marble before the carving has begun. The document of July, 1501, on the other hand, contains a reference to "quod quidam homo ex marmore vocato Davit,"⁶⁴ a phrase which corresponds more closely to a planned figure with a more concrete visualization of its final form. This phrase in the document points to the possibility that at some time between May (when he probably returned to the city) and the beginning of July, Michelangelo, at the invitation of the authorities, had studied the block and had indicated his ability to extract a *David*, one that already reflected a preconceived program. In all likelihood, he then made a small model which permitted the authorities to visualize this image (*quod quidam homo*, etc.), approve it, and then arrange for the July 2 meeting. The document itself provides a basis for the plausibility of our belief that this is what actually occurred: It describes a committee of experts (*magistros in hoc expertos*) who have been called to determine whether it was possible to extract an image from the block, yet curiously enough it does not

⁵⁶ Frey, Part A, doc.8.

⁵⁷ Milanesi, *Le Lettere*, 620.

⁵⁸ Pope-Hennessy, *Italian High Renaissance*, 308.

⁵⁹ Poggi, doc. 444.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, doc. 445.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, doc.446.

⁶² Frey, part A, doc.8.

⁶³ Poggi, doc. 446.

⁶⁴ Frey, part A, doc. 8.

mention the only person who could authoritatively do this: the sculptor who would be involved directly with the carving itself. Was his presence not required because Michelangelo had already rendered such an expert opinion?

Because of its great weight, the idea of raising the block cannot be separated from the actual intention to use it. And raising it was actually necessary for the carving of the figure to be carried through. The July 2 meeting should then be understood as one called to approve, by means of a formal vote, a decision already made before July 2 to reactivate the project.

Elsewhere the document states that "They [the Opera] wish this giant form to be raised and elevated . . . so as to stand upright, so that it may be seen by masters experienced in this, whether it can be carried through and finished" ("desiderantes talem gigantem erigi et elevari in altum . . . in pedes stare ad hoc ut videatur per magistros in hoc expertos si possit absolvi et finiri").⁶⁵ Two views emerge from a study of the entire text: One seems to be a privately entertained belief (implicit in the elevation of the block) that it could readily be used to produce the image that had been conceived. The other is a new and publicly stated idea that the block is spoiled (*male abozatum*) and therefore presents difficulties. Vasari and Condivi, writing decades later, may or may not have known of the references to "male abozatum" in the documents of July 2 and August 16, but there is reason to believe that they were basing their narratives on what had apparently been circulated about the block by the authorities of the Opera in 1501. Indeed, they narrated the tales so vividly and dramatically as to insure the permanent diffusion of the idea of a spoiled block for the *David* in virtually all subsequent references to the work.

In his discussion, Condivi concentrates on the "tradition" of the spoiled block: "The Operai of Santa Maria del Fiore had a piece of marble nine braccia high; it had been brought from Carrara a hundred years before by a craftsman who, judging by what one can see, was no more skillful than he should have been. For so that he might be able to transport it more conveniently and with less labor, he had blocked it out in the quarry itself; but he had done it in such a way that neither he nor anyone else had had the heart to put hand to it and carve a statue, either of that great size or much smaller. As they could not carve anything good from this piece of marble . . . they sent for Michelangelo . . . and having heard that he was confident that he could carve something good from it, they finally offered it to him."⁶⁶

For Condivi, the spoilage of the block is the reason for its transfer to the personal custody of Michelangelo. Support for this view was in all likelihood fostered by the Opera in 1501, for it could conveniently serve to postpone (until it was completed) the need to deal with the problem of where to place the statue. In Vasari's report, not only is there a similar emphasis on the "giving" of the marble to the

sculptor, but we find also a striking indication that the notion of spoilage was introduced to make possible the separation of the *David* from the Duomo. The following passage is especially significant for its direct allusion to the problem of site: "And the work had been done so badly . . . and it was altogether bungled and ruined, so much so that the Operai of Santa Maria del Fiore, who were in charge, had given it up for dead without bothering to finish it. It had been like this for many years, and was likely to remain so . . . and they granted it to him (Michelangelo) as a thing of no use, thinking that whatever he might make of it would be better than the state it was in then; for it was of no use to their building either in pieces or in that condition."⁶⁷

While it is possible to read in these passages a later sixteenth-century response to the, by then, famous Michelangelo as artist-hero and genius, it is more relevant to detect the disguise and concealment which made the game of a "salvaged" spoiled block necessary to the authorities in 1501. If the block is "a thing of no use" and "of no use to their building," then possibly it could be used *elsewhere*. Seen in this light, the curious absence of any reference to the site, which coincides with the introduction of the notion of a spoiled block, becomes quite understandable: If it had already been determined not to install the yet-to-be completed *David* on the original site of the Duomo, could not this then conveniently be justified by a myth of salvage?

The idea that the block was in such poor condition as to make it difficult to extract an image suitable for the Duomo also lessened its connection with the original quattrocento program. If anything could be achieved by giving it to Michelangelo, what would thereby be produced would be something *new*, rather than something completed. Separated in this manner from its own origins and traditional associations, it would be easier upon its completion to assign the *David* to a new site, including the vicinity of the Palazzo Vecchio.

* * *

If the account of the circumstances attending the commission of the *David* appears to be reliable in Vasari's report, perhaps he is equally accurate in stating that it was intended for the Palazzo Vecchio from the very start: "So Michelangelo made a wax model in preparation for the carving and portrayed in it, as a device for the palace, a young David with a sling in his hand; as he defended his people and governed them with justice, so might those who governed the city defend it courageously and govern it with justice."⁶⁸ The assumptions implicit in this statement by Vasari have been either ignored or misinterpreted. Even so careful a scholar as Barocchi sees this in terms of a tradition of Vasarian error. She believes that "l'interpretazione politica . . . ha tutta l'apparenza di una illusione a posteriori giacche 'l'insegna del palazzo' presuppone la collocazione in Piazza della Signoria, decisa solo quando la statua era quasi

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Pope Hennessy, *Italian High Renaissance*, 308, 309.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

compiute” (italics added).⁶⁹ With Vasari’s explicit statement so vividly and directly confronting them (“Michele Agnola fatto un modello, un Davit . . . per la insegna del palazzo”), scholars have ignored its significance because of their misunderstanding of the actual nature and purpose of the meeting of January 25, 1504. Barocchi’s conclusion is based on the assumption that this meeting was held to *decide* where the *David* would be placed. Other writers have reflected a similar view that it was called for the purpose of serious deliberation to determine a location.⁷⁰

The invitation to the meeting, however, indicates that it was intended only to solicit opinion; “. . . and desiring such advice as may be useful . . .” (“. . . et desiderantes tale deliberaverunt mitti ed effectum . . .”). In general, it was consistent with a tradition of ad hoc conferences which, from time to time, had been held in Florence to discuss civic problems, including public art programs.⁷¹ Such meetings were organized on occasion for the purpose of arriving at a binding decision by means of a vote. Such a decision had a “legal” official status and could not be annulled by any other authority or agency. This procedure occurred at the meeting held on July 2, 1501 to inspect the block. The document indicates that the majority decision would be registered by the traditional use of voting beans: “*prefati omnei operaii et per tres fabas nigras ex relatu consulum deliberauerunt.*”⁷² Although, in this instance, an affirmative majority vote approving its use was to be anticipated, the block would not have been used (at least not for the *David*) if the participants had voted negatively. However, it is precisely the absence of a vote which characterizes the meeting of January 25, 1405.

The mold from which this meeting was cast seems to have derived from those informal adjuncts of governmental organization known as the *Consulte* and *Practiche*. These, according to Felix Gilbert, “were a relatively minor link in the intricate chain of magistrates and councils which constituted the government machinery of the Florentine Republic.”⁷³ The minutes of the meeting are similar in form to the protocols of these *Practiche* which “report discussions, giving the names of the speakers and brief summaries of what they said.” The topics covered included virtually all problems of government policy and function: constitutional, financial, diplomatic and military. And, as Gilbert concludes, the “scope of the issues on which the citizens were to give advice are not easily determined.” Apparently, in view of the discussion of the location of Michelangelo’s *David*, the range of issues also included art.

There were deliberations and exchanges of opinion at these meetings, and they also, on occasion, played a genuinely consultative role, which influenced the voting that took place elsewhere in the regularly constituted

institutions of the government such as the councils. Nevertheless there was nothing of a constitutional nature which required adherence to the opinions of the *Practiche*.⁷⁴ Indeed, not only could majority opinion be rejected, but meetings could take place in which the government’s decision was already determined, but not necessarily publicized in advance.⁷⁵

The meeting of January 25, especially in its organization and structure, may then be seen as nothing more than a *Practica*, the outcome of its deliberations being predictably without resolution as far as the meeting itself was concerned. The final location of the statue in front of the Palazzo Vecchio seems to have accorded with the predetermined aim of the Signoria, which was reflected in the artist’s conception and execution of the work. If this is true it may then be concluded that the decision determining the choice of site for the *David* had little to do with the meeting itself. One may then ask why the meeting was held in the first place.

* * *

At first glance, it might seem that since the *David* had been originally associated with the Cathedral and commissioned by the Opera del Duomo, the meeting was called as a convenient device for legitimizing its assignment to another location. However, there already existed an appropriate precedent for the transfer of Michelangelo’s *David* to the site of the Palazzo Vecchio without the necessity of consulting an ad hoc group. Donatello’s marble *David* of 1408, also commissioned by the Opera del Duomo, had been transferred in 1416 to the interior of the Palazzo Vecchio simply by order of the Signoria. At this time the procedure seems to have been an entirely “proper” expression of the normal prerogatives of the Florentine government.

Why, then, it may be asked again, if the site in front of the Palazzo Vecchio was the one intended by the Signoria, was it necessary to organize the meeting held in 1504? The political situation at this time was significantly different from that existing in 1416. The transfer of Donatello’s *David* to the Palazzo Vecchio at that time underscored its political symbolism as an emblem of the democratic Florentine Republic which stood united against the menace of foreign threats.⁷⁶ In the face of such dangers, whatever political factionalism may have existed was submerged in an atmosphere of unity which was strengthened by a powerful civic humanism. As a symbol, Donatello’s *David* was apparently not controversial to the Florentines. The Signoria could therefore undertake an action of transfer without fear of serious repercussions.

⁶⁹ Barocchi, II, 202.

⁷⁰ De Tolnay, *The Youth of Michelangelo*, 96; Pope-Hennessy, *Italian High Renaissance*, 12; Seymour, 57; Klein and Zerner, 39.

⁷¹ See, for example, Richard Krautheimer, *Lorenzo Ghiberti*, Princeton, 1956, 31ff.

⁷² Frey, part A, doc. 8.

⁷³ Felix Gilbert, “Florentine Political Assumptions in the Period of

Savonarola and Soderini,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, xx, 1957, 187.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁷⁶ Ferdinand Schevill, *Medieval and Renaissance Florence*, 2 vols. New York, 1963, II, 349.

Within a few decades the situation in Florence was to change drastically. With the return of Cosimo de' Medici from exile in 1434, the city was to be continually beset with divisive political currents. These flowed from the polarities of Medicean and anti-Medicean power and their ensuing conflicts.⁷⁷

In regard to Michelangelo's *David* the circumstances are in sharp contrast with those attending the relocation of Donatello's work. It was precisely because of its basically partisan implications that restrictions against an independent course of action by the Signoria in 1504 made the meeting of 1504 necessary. Indeed, so seriously did the members regard the undercurrents of resistance towards the intended placement of the sculpture that it is evident that the Signoria was ready, as a last resort, to compromise, to accept the site of the Loggia dei Lanzi itself. But in this potential concession there is still a reservation which would link the statue with its function as an emblem of the Signoria. In his first comments (as sixth speaker at the meeting) the second Herald offers as an alternative to Sangallo's preference for the central bay of the Loggia the bay closest to the Palazzo Vecchio (Fig. 5). There, he observes, it "could be covered and honored by its closeness to the Palace" ("... stare coperta et essere honorata per chonito del palazzo").

It is in this admission by the Signoria of the ultimate possibilities of compromise that the political tensions surrounding the image are once more revealed. Because of this, the meeting served a purpose which the *Pratiche* fulfilled in general. According to Gilbert, "The magistrates found it useful to have some way of testing the reactions of the citizens . . . and it was equally important for the citizens to have this chance of expressing their opinions . . . Because it [the *Practica*] was an important political factor, it was inevitably drawn into Florentine internal struggles."⁷⁸ In this comment by Gilbert we discern the essential meaning of the meeting of January 25. It was required because of the partisan political implications associated with the sculpture. While the meeting served as means to indicate the political stance of the participants, it also helped to discharge the tensions of controversy. In addition, it enabled the Signoria to test the degree of opposition so that if there should be overwhelming antagonism, it could resort to the compromise implied in the first remarks of the second Herald. Above all, by its very simulation of a genuinely consultative procedure, it would blunt and disguise in some measure the arbitrariness of the Signoria's actual intention. It was because the *David* was so pointedly an anti-Medicean symbol that the meeting was called, and conversely, the very need for the meeting reaffirms the politically controversial nature of the work. It is doubtful whether this *Practica* would have been called if these considerations had not existed. Given the fact of precedent (Donatello's marble *David*) it was not actually required. The tenor of the discussion conveys the tensions of partisan commitment or antagonism (and even political

neutrality) which were so vividly present during those years of the Florentine Republic. Reading the minutes of the meeting in this light, one must conclude that the document belongs as much to the political literature of the period as it does to the archives of art history.

Fairleigh Dickinson University

⁷⁷ Nicolai Rubenstein, *The Government of Florence Under the Medici (1434-1494)*, Oxford, 1966, 2 and passim.

⁷⁸ Gilbert, 189.