

APOLLO

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An Unknown Drawing by Leonardo da Vinci

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A collection of some 200 drawings, which have passed from the defunct Academy of Fine Arts in Oporto to the Escola Superior de Belas Artes of that city, includes some characteristic examples of Polidoro da Caravaggio, Giovanni de' Vecchi and Cesare Nebbia as well as a surprisingly large group by Guglielmo Caccia, better known as Moncalvo, some of which are preparatory studies for surviving pictures by this facile, pietistic artist working in Milan and lesser centres of north-west Italy before and after 1600. But a far greater surprise awaits the visitor in the form of an apparently unrecognized drawing by an artist who worked in Milan a century earlier: none other than Leonardo da Vinci (Fig. 1). Why so unlikely a name as that of Raffaellino da Reggio, the best and most intelligent follower of Taddeo Zuccaro, working at Rome, should have been inscribed on the mount of this drawing of a mother washing her child's feet, it is hard to imagine. Can it be that some excessively naïve previous owner (obviously not the discriminating Gelosi whose mark appears in the lower right-hand corner) was influenced by the fact that two of Raffaellino's best known frescoes in the Logge of Gregory XIII at the Vatican represent the Anointing of Christ's feet and the Washing of Peters? The reader will already have observed the close resemblance that the group in the Oporto sheet offers to the well-known studies of the *Virgin and Child with a cat* in the British Museum, more particularly No. 97 in the Museum catalogue, Plate 9 in Popham's monograph on Leonardo's drawings (Figs. 2 and 3). It seems to me that in the Oporto drawing one finds the same sense of plasticity in the treatment of the compact group, the same facial types, the same sketchy drawing and the same combination of blobs of wash with rapid left-handed hatching. If I am right in seeing these points of resemblance a date c. 1480 is indicated. The writing on the back of the sheet (which is laid down) appears to be 'mirror writing' compatible with Leonardo's.



The pen-drawing in the lower left-hand corner, in which the hatching is again left-handed, seems to be a humorous and unflattering impression of a baby's posterior.

I understand that several other critics have seen this drawing, and have concurred independently with the opinion expressed here of this characteristic work. Rarely does Leonardo, for all his obsession with natural appearances, give us a domestic scene so charming as this delightful study of a woman washing her child.

I should like to thank Teresa Viana for her generous help in my study of this drawing.

1. *Woman washing her child's feet*, c. 1480. Pen and brown wash, 18.4 × 11.1 cm. Escola de Belas-Artes, Oporto

The works illustrating this article are by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519).



2. *Virgin and Child with a cat*, c. 1486. Pen-and-ink and brown wash over a sketch with the stylus, 32.2 × 9.6 cm. British Museum



3. *Verso of Figure 2*, c. 1480. Pen-and-ink over a sketch with the stylus, 32.2 × 9.6 cm.