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Abstract
The story of the creation of the Neptune Fountain on the Piazza della Signoria in Florence is long and tortuous. Scholars have drawn on a wealth of documentary material regarding the competition for the commission, the various phases of the fountain's construction, and the critical reception of its colossus, both political and aesthetic. A collection of unpublished letters at the Getty Research Center in Los Angeles offers a new perspective on the making of this major public monument. Sent by Bartolomeo Ammannati to the privveditore of Pisa, they chronicle the artist's involvement in the procurement and transportation of marble from Carrara and Seravezza for the chariot and basin of the fountain during the years 1565-73. The correspondence, excerpts from which are published here, shows that Ammannati faced numerous delays and mishaps, and continual pressure from his patrons during this second phase of the fountain's construction. The letters provide further insight into the personality of one of the most important artists at the court of Duke Cosimo I, whose role required the skills of a project manager and negotiator. The commission for a grandiose fountain in Florence's main square took much longer to complete than had been expected and taxed the artist's patience, persistence and resourcefulness. [excerpt]

Keywords
Piazza della Signoria, Florence, Italy, Getty Research Center, Ammannati, Neptune Fountain

Disciplines
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3 The letters concern a number of Ammannati’s architectural projects in Florence including the column in Piazza S. Trinita and the remodelling of the Pitti Palace.

4 On the chateau and basin, see Else, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 111-66.

5 Heikamp likens Ammannati to Vasari: both were in charge of a number of projects that were worked on simultaneously and relied on organised workshops to complete them; see Heikamp, op. cit. (note 1), p. 21.


8 Ammannati had already begun work on the colossal statue of Neptune and some of the bronzes after he obtained the commission in 1560; see Ute 1973, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 205-300. It remains unclear whether Ammannati changed the design of the fountain when it was decided to use Seravezzan marbles. For a discussion of the marmo mischio basin and the interplay of water, see Campbell, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 124-26; and Heikamp, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 21-24.

THE STORY of the creation of the Neptune Fountain on the Piazza della Signoria in Florence (Fig. 43) is long and tortuous. Scholars have drawn on a wealth of documentary material regarding the competition for the commission, the various phases of the fountain’s construction, and the critical reception of its colossal, both political and aesthetic.1 A collection of unpublished letters at the Getty Research Center in Los Angeles offers a new perspective on the making of this major public monument.2 Sent by Bartolomeo Ammannati to the provevitori of Pisa, they chronicle the artist’s involvement in the procurement and transportation of marble from Carrara and Seravezza for the chariot and basin of the fountain during the years 1565-73.3 The correspondence, excerpts from which are published here, shows that Ammannati faced numerous delays and mishaps, and continual pressure from his patrons during this second phase of the fountain’s construction.4 The letters provide further insight into the personality of one of the most important artists at the court of Duke Cosimo I, whose role required the skills of a project manager and negotiator.5 The commission for a grandiose fountain in Florence’s main square took much longer to complete than had been expected and taxed the artist’s patience, persistence and resourcefulness.

The letters relate to one of the most important of Duke Cosimo’s projects: the reopening of the quarry at Seravezza and the expansion of facilities there for quarrying and transporting marble. The discovery of the richly coloured marmo mischio in the mountains near Seravezza around 1563 was attributed by Giorgio Vasari to Cosimo himself, and the purplish stone was incorporated into prominent works of art and architecture throughout Florence.6 For example, mischio corbels and footings decorate the choir and statuary tabernacles in the cathedral; a sarcophagus of mischio adorns Michelangelo’s tomb in S. Croce; there are mischio niches, doorposts and architraves in the Palazzo Vecchio and Palazzo Pitti; and two massive columns of mischio were quarried, one set up in Piazza S. Felice and another planned for Piazza S. Marco. As the head architect responsible for a number of building projects, Ammannati kept track of nearly all facets of the quarrying operation, such as the sizes and availability of bages, wages for staff, supplies of rope and fees for carts and mules.7 For the construction of the Neptune Fountain, the availability of stone from Seravezza came not a moment too soon, and Ammannati decided to use a mixture of marbles from the area, bianco and mischio for the magnificent four-horse chariot and octagonal basin (Figs. 44 and 45).8 To obtain the marble, as well as that for his many other commissions, he sent a host of drawings, models and written instructions from Florence to the provevitori at Pisa, Francesco Busini and Giovanni Caccini, who, from that navigational hub,
monitored supplies, transportation and the shipment of stone blocks arriving from Seravezza and departing for Florence. Even in writing instructions, Ammannati employed the help of others, some letters being written by an assistant, Benedetto Giramonti.10

The letters sent to Pisa during 1565 show Ammannati anxious to take delivery of the large blocks for the horses on the fountain, one from Carrara and two from Seravezza. These pieces, identified in the letters as the 'cavoli di marmo', would have been specially prepared and blocked out at the quarry to make them as light as possible for transportation and, as was common practice, would have been given final sculpted form by, or under the direct guidance of, the artist himself on their arrival in Florence. The pressure was on, as the ceremonial entry into Florence of Joanna of Austria, Francesco de' Medici's Habsburg bride-to-be, was to take place on 16th December of that year and, despite the fact that only a part of the work was finished, Ammannati's Neptune Fountain was intended to be a major spectacle on the route of the procession.11 In a letter dated 16th June 1565, Giramonti instructs Busini to send 'il marmo del cavallo ... quando rinovassi acqua', referring to the water level of the Arno, which needed to be sufficiently deep for the blocks to be transported safely.12 By October, the piece had still not been sent to Florence, and newly quarried blocks of micio for the two horses were awaiting transportation from the marina near Seravezza. On 11th October Ammannati wrote to Busini ordering that a boat ('scafa') be sent to Seravezza 'to convey the marbles for the horses for the fountain of the Piazza' and that the provveditore should send him 'that piece of marble in Pisa for that horse', for which he would prepare the roads for transportation by cart to Florence as well as having ready the appropriate payments.13 By this time, the statuary elements of the centrepiece, Neptune surrounded by tritons, had been set up in the centre of the fountain, and Ammannati might have hoped to add the magnificent stone horses in time for Joanna of Austria's arrival.14 However, the marble for the horses failed to appear before the unveiling of the fountain on 10th December.15 Nine days earlier, Ammannati had sent a letter to Busini begging him to send the needed materials by boat, declaring that 'His Most Illustrious Excellency desires that the fountain be brought to finish' and beseeching him 'to make every effort to send the materials as soon as possible'.16 In the end, the entrata was a success, and, as descriptions of the event indicate, Ammannati brought to a satisfactory, if temporary, state of completion the chariot and its four horses as well as the basin decorated with subsidiary figures and marine motifs. The foundations of the fountain, the aqueduct pipes and the colossal Neptune had been completed, and payment records reveal the presence of one marble horse and two bronze, one of which was identified as a satyr. The missing components of the fountain, including at least three horses and ten figures, were made of stucco painted to resemble cast bronze, while decorations on the exterior of the chariot and fountain were temporarily made of stucco and the cement basin was painted to imitate coloured marble.17

The solution was indeed temporary, as Ammannati made clear in subsequent letters to Busini. On 23rd March 1566 (stile nuovo), after writing three letters asking for news of the 'marmo per el cavallo', he stressed that he was under pressure from his patrons to finish the work, since the parts of the fountain made of stucco were liable to deteriorate.18 In May, the artist again requested that Busini send whatever materials he could when the water levels allowed it and that his efforts would be 'pleasing to His Illustrious Excellency because he desires that I get to work because those [portions] that are of stucco are deteriorating'.19 The deterioration was indeed noticeable - Agostino Lapini recorded that just a few months after the fountain's temporary unveiling, the stucco figures were completely ruined and had become a mess.20 For Ammannati, such an exhibition could not have come at a worse moment. In the wake of the competition for this prestigious commission, his work was under close scrutiny: his embittered rival Benvenuto Cellini wrote malignly of his expenses, and Giorgio Vasari, the friend who had supported Ammannati in the contest to take on the Neptune fountain, gave the colossal a decidedly lukewarm evaluation, choosing not to remark upon the statue since the fountain was not yet finished.21 The sight of Neptune's world crumbling below him was far from pleasant.

44. Detail of Fig.43.

45. Detail of Fig.43, showing the north-east corner.
But Ammannati stayed calm even in trying circumstances. From 1566 to 1567 a great deal of marmo mischio made its way to Florence, including the two blocks for the horses from Seravezza and various pieces for the fountain’s chariot and basin. 23 Ammannati sent encouraging words to Busini: ‘I yet have faith in Your Lordship that each time one says to the Duke that so much mischio marble has arrived, His Excellency is greatly pleased . . .’ 24 In other letters, directions were given to mark the different blocks according to their intended destination, with the blocks for the fountain to be marked with the letters P 2; those for the Piti, P 3; for the column, C 4; for the Cathedral, O 5; for the Palazzo Vecchio, P 6; and for the Magistrati (Uffizi), M. 25 Minor mishaps were inevitable; in one letter Ammannati beseeches Busini ‘fare diligentia’, pointing out that someone at the quarry had neglected to mark one of the blocks, and so the workers unloading the marble at the port did not know where it was supposed to go. 26 The year before, there had been trouble from the bargemen. ‘Quegli barchiulli e navicellai’, Ammannati wrote, were bad because they made a scene, literally shrieking (‘strillano’) so that they could receive more than they deserved. Even worse, the artist continued, they were complaining to Busini in Pisa, giving excuses for not wanting to do what they were supposed to do, so that ‘all us ministers are set at cross purposes to such rabble’. He urged Busini to punish in the harshest manner the next person who wrongly complained, making clear the strength of feeling he harboured against the workmen. 27

23 ‘guaia a Suo Eleganza Illustrissima perche desidera che ti li svolizi a lavorare quelli che sono . . . e di stucchi si disfano’; BAL, 11th May 1565, FS; 1566, NS.
24 ‘Due posti mesi che tutta si guasta e diventa una porcheria’; Lapini, op. cit. (note 14), p.128.
25 In Bandinelli’s Life of 1568, Vasari wrote that Giambologna’s model for the Neptunewas thought to be better than all the others and maintained that Bandinelli, who had died in 1560 before he could carry out what was originally his commission, was the most skilled of all. In his brief description of Ammannati’s life, he remarks on the statue of Neptunewith ‘perch’è l’opera della fonte, a cui ha da stare in mezzo il detto Neptuno, non è finita, non ne d’altri o; see Vasari, op. cit. (note 17), V, p.274, and VI, p.591. Lapini records that, when the colonou was unveiled, ‘cho non mancò chi lo bisognava né chi lo lodava’; see Lapini, op. cit. (note 14), p.148; and Settimmanni, op. cit. (note 14), fol.349v. On Cellini’s versions, see Elle, op. cit. (note 1), pp.85–91.
26 The delivery of these portions are recorded in payments in ASF, Miniere, fol.104r–105r and 172v; see Zanghetti, op. cit. (note 23), pp.312 and 324, notes 26–27; idem, op. cit. (note 7), p.62; note 15; and Cinelli and Vonnell, op. cit. (note 14), p.103.
27 ‘. . . ancora o far fede a Vostro Signoria che ogni volta che si dice al ducato e gli venne tanti mischi che Suo Eleganza va un piacere grandissimo’; BAL, 15th March 1565, FS; 1566, NS.
28 This letter, dated 2nd March 1565, NS, is cited in the Christie’s catalogue but was not among those acquired by the Getty Research Institute. In another letter, dated 26th October 1566, Ammannati requests that the blocks of mischio for the fountain be marked with F; see Christie’s 1997, p.14, and BAL, 26th October 1566.
29 In this letter of 30th December 1567, Ammannati discusses one block that bore a sign for the fountain and another without, possibly intended for the Piti: ‘Cioe un pezzo tanto lungo e tanto largo e tanto grosso era il segno della fontana ho de Piti secondo che sono e possoni e libre. E se noe’ songo Almeno che alla casa no se lavavano ricordato di segniare la madure adire senza segno_ perché quando si sputasse al porto noe nessuno che intendeva e noi o ne ripetutano del tutto alla lieta di V.S. si che de nuovo si pote se ne facessi fane dilet- gente;’ see BAL, 30th December 1567.
30 ‘Tutti noi ministri siamo posti incovza da tale canaglie; ‘Lo farei gestare amista da carbone’, roughly translated as ‘punish him beyond what seems just’, possibly an allusion to the fact that charcoal was expensive for what it was. Ammannati, a bronze caster, needed charcoal in great quantity; see S. Battaglia: Guasc Dizionario della lingua ital- iana, Turin 1962, II, p.746. The passage from Ammannati’s letter of 22nd January 1567, NS, reads: ‘questi barchiulli e navicellai sono anzi male perché vengono qua e strillano tanto che vinti dal fascio e da lo loro non che ne pernono e sempre vanno alla insosta salvente e che non vogliono poi calare e diceno l’altra mia desti tanto e poi peggio che se vengono alimentare a voi a Pisa per comodato e mostrare di non volere servire tale che tutti noi ministri siamo posti incovza da tale canaglie pero sarei diporate che quando voi sentite che uno si lamenta a torto lo farei gestare a misura di carbone per esempio degli altri questi anni novo più de uno studio del migliaio 140 cesto ingredo davo ma tanto pero dite loro vilianza’; see BAL, 22nd January 1566, FS, i.e. 1565, NS.
The overall shape of the fountain is not a perfect octagon but, as contemporaries described it in 1565, comprised four major and four minor faces, terminating in eight angles, which Mellini likened to the 'coni della pianta dell'abaco del capiello Conti, ma più spunati dell'ordinario'; see Mellini, op. cit. (note 15), p. 111.

On 4th February 1571, NS, Ammannati wrote to Busini, 'e V. S. sono divere a quello scarpellino che faghi scaglioni per la fonte che ne mancir a altre narciolere e subito sagli mandra danaro'; on 10th February 1571, Ammannati wrote to Giovanni Caccini, 'da li inclusa a quello scarpellino che fa gli scaglioni della fonte da la piazza e che seiqui il faghi pischiati'; see BAL, 4th and 10th February 1570, FS. Examples of such templates by Michelangelo for the Library of S. Lorenzo include a number of scaglioli, in this case referring to basement mouldings and thresholds; see Wallace, op. cit. (note 5), pp. 165 and 173-75. Vasari refers to scaglioli in his stair-case designs; see Gaye, op. cit. (note 7), pp. 48-51 and 53-55. Examples for other commissions by Ammannati of cornices and other architectural elements are repr. in M. Kiene: Bartolomeo Ammannati, Milan 1993, pp. 217-18 and 235.

Se quello scarpellino ... a fatto cosa nessuna di quello che aveva cominciato de fare la manda quanto prima; 'Il Serenissimo principe ma comesso che si rimetta mano per finirlo'; BAL, 19th April 1572. There is evidence that this scarpellino offered good value for its services; an undated fragment written in Ammannati's hand states that 'de gli scaglioni della fonte se parlo a Francesco di Ser Iacopo, e gli e' agiolevole lo scarpellino perché ne fa bonissimo mer- cato'; BAL, fragment no. 89A.

Campbell provides a reconstruction of the fountain's appearance with the higher walls at the time of the enuista of 1585; see Campbell, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 117-18 and 124.

'Siamo a lavorare i Maestri senza cier reduci'; Settmanetti, op. cit. (note 14), fol. 56v.

Furthermore, the scarpellino had not made any of the decornati that go with the quadrilato, probably referring to the large catchpots placed along the protruding corner sections of the fountain. Ammannati writes: 'V. S. in commenda per mandare al scarpellino che tolse afare gli scaglioli della fontana di piazza da Francesco di Ser Iacopo e d menandargli che vol dire che egli non oceva quanto e ubilato e gli a fatto certi scaglioni spagnolati tutti i diritti e quegli che andavano in arco che sono 8 pezi non a fatto nessuno lunghi 2/3 braccia che in tuto son 20 braccia e non a fatto quegli decornati che vanno col quadrilato per stare e conteri sopra caudo'; BAL, 10th May 1572.

'Per beneficio de nostri padroni e di coteste poverette'; 'Non manchi di venire subito altr-

marble, all of which needed to be cut according to precise measurements (Fig. 40). In February 1570, stile fiorentino (1571, stile nuovo), Ammannati sent Busini an enclosure ('inclusa') for Giovanni Caccini to give to 'that mason who was making the steps for the fountain', probably a design for him from which to work. Over a year later, Ammannati demanded that 'if that scarpellino ... has done any of the work he was ordered to do, send it as soon as possible'. The artist was working under renewed pressure from his patron for, in the same letter, he told Busini not to send marmo mischio for the fountain because 'His Serene Highness has ordered me to set about finishing it'. Also at that time, a drastic change was made in the design of the fountain basin. As Malcolm Campbell has pointed out, an entry for March 1572 in the diary of Francesco Settmanetti records that the walls of the basin were to be lowered so that the water inside might be visible. Furthermore, a wooden fence was placed around the fountain so that 'the Masters could work without being seen', suggesting they needed privacy in the hustle and bustle of the Piazza della Signoria.

Ammannati was not at all pleased when he received the marble for the scaglioni. On 10th May 1572, he asked Caccini to send the scarpellino to Florence, writing that everything was the wrong length and that many of the scaglioni did not match one another ('som-paginati'). Frustrated, he beseeched 'artisismo' Caccini to force the scarpellino in Pisa to come to Florence to see what he had done and to bring anything else he had worked on, 'for the sake of our patrons and of this poor man', that is, of Ammannati himself. The letter ended on a threatening note: the scarpellino should act immediately and take this business seriously. By the following month, Amman- nati had decided to take matters into his own hands in order to bring the scaglioni to completion. On 10th June 1572 he wrote to Busini about the bad work of the scarpellino, whom he identified as Mateo Starnazini, a workman from Carrara then living in Pisa. Starnazini's work was ugly and badly done, Ammannati describing it as 'una porcheria'. In consequence, Ammannati and his workers were hav-
Three portraits by John de Critz for the Merchant Taylors’ Company

by ROBERT TITTLER, Concordia University, Montreal

Compared with the patronage for portraiture extended by individual leading livyners, not to mention portraits of the court circle or the aristocracy, the London livery companies were surprisingly slow in the sixteenth century to commission easel portraits of their own leading members. Notwithstanding such works as Holbein’s group portrait of Henry VIII granting the royal charter to the newly formed Company of Barber-Surgeons in 1540 (Barber-Surgeons’ Hall, London), only a trickle may be identified and dated with certainty before the last decade of that century, and not until after that did the practice become common among the leading companies. Yet from that time on it moved rapidly forwards. Companies not only commissioned portraits with increasing frequency but, by about the 1620s, they turned to the most fashionable ‘picture-makers’ of the day, such as Daniel Mytens and Cornelius Johnson, to portray their leading masters and benefactors, both living and deceased. To that list may now be added the name of John de Critz, three of whose portraits can be identified as having been commissioned by the Merchant Taylors’ Company as early as the fiscal year 1606-07.

This has not been discovered before may well be due to the confident assertion of the catalogue of the Merchant Taylors’ pictures, Frederick M. Fry (Master of the Company in 1895-96), that no mention of the acquisition of these pictures had been found in the Company’s records as catalogued by him in 1907. Yet a company account of 1606-07 records the payment of five pounds to John Decreete for making Sir Thomas Whites picture in a fairer large frame’ and another five pounds to ‘Mr John DeCreete for making the prince picture all anewe in the kings chamber and for Mr Dow his picture in a faier frame’.

1 Portrait of Nicholas Leate, thrice Master of the Ironmongers, commissioned from Mytens by Leate’s three sons for presentation to the Company in 1621; see Leate, Nicholas (1555/6-1611); in H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison, eds.: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford 2004, ref.1625; see also London, Guildhall Library MS16988/5, Freeman’s Admissions and Inventories of the Ironmongers’ Company, p.7.


4 London, Guildhall Library MS45408/9, Merchant Taylors’ Company Masters’ and Wardens’ Account Book no.9, microfilm frame no.91, account for 1606-07.

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