

# “In uno de li borghi el signore con noi altri andò ad vedere messer Lunardo Vinci firentino”. Luigi d’Aragona’s visit to Leonardo da Vinci (10 October 1517)\*

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In the spring of 1518, the French Court gathered in Amboise. They were celebrating the baptism of Francis I’s eldest son, the Dauphin François, and the marriage of Madeleine de La Tour d’Auvergne and Lorenzo de’ Medici. Francis I and Leonardo da Vinci, who had been staying at Cloux since October 1516, used the festivities as an opportunity to come to an agreement: upon the artist’s death, the paintings that the master had brought to France – which the king must have coveted in view of enriching his collection of masterpieces – would be bequeathed to him, in exchange for a comfortable financial endowment to Salaì, the artist’s favourite pupil. For many years now, critics have agreed that a significant number of Leonardo’s paintings, or, at least, paintings that were considered to be his, passed into the French royal painting collection as early as 1518<sup>1</sup>; they are, however, still divided about which works were acquired in this transaction.

The forecast income and expenses of the Duchy of Milan (financial year 1518), which record the sum of 2604 livres, 3 sols and 4 deniers tournois – or 6250 Milanese imperial lire – to be paid to Salaì, do not specify the names of the paintings being sold on this occasion: the document only refers to “quelques tables de peintures [...] baillées au Roy”<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, in spite of its reputation, Francis I’s painting collection was never inventoried during the king’s lifetime, by contrast with the royal library and the tapestry collection, stock of which had been taken for both. The first known lists that report on the French royal painting collection in a more or less systematic way date to the reign of Louis XIII. Nonetheless, it is possible to trace the content of the painting collection of the first Valois king and to identify, with relative certainty, which of Leonardo’s works, or those works believed to be his, were stored in France: by compiling scattered mentions, old descriptions of royal residences, payments, travel guides, relations between ambassadors, correspondences and partial inventories, historians can draft a list of the paintings that belonged to Francis I.

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\* Warmest thanks to John Venerella for his precious re-reading.

<sup>1</sup> JESTAZ 1999, pp. 68-72, accepted by most critics. For this subject, see FAGNART 2019, pp. 114-143.

<sup>2</sup> Paris, Archives nationales de France, J 910, fasc. 6, in the chapter “autres parties diverses” (ed. by JESTAZ 1999, p. 69 and p. 72, note 10).

Among these sources, the account of Antonio de Beatis, the canon of Melfi, chaplain and secretary to Cardinal Luigi d'Aragona (1474-1519), is one of the most valuable, as it records considerations that the secretary heard first-hand, rather than words attributed to Leonardo by a third party who repeated them to the chaplain<sup>3</sup>. This account also offers a first-hand testimony, which is essential for piecing together the final years of the master's life, his day-to-day life in the Court of Francis I and the history of his paintings in France. Still, the canon of Melfi's account is imprecise and, at times, even muddled. This is hardly surprising given that the text was developed at a later date, based on notes recorded during the meeting between Luigi d'Aragona and Leonardo. It is the result, therefore, of later rewriting and not free from literary and rhetorical considerations.

On 9 May 1517, Cardinal Luigi d'Aragona undertook a long journey to pay his respects to Charles of Habsburg, who had recently ascended to the throne of Spain. After leaving Ferrara with ten gentlemen and an equal number of servants, he returned to Rome on 16 March 1518, having passed through Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands and France. Antonio de Beatis recorded the stages of the journey in his diary on a daily basis, highlighting the foreign customs and villages visited, the distances travelled and the meetings and monuments attended. In 1521, after the death of his patron, the canon of Melfi collected the notes he had accumulated during the journey and drafted an *Itinerario*, of which at least five hand-written copies have been handed down to us (three copies are stored in the Biblioteca Nazionale of Naples; two are found in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana)<sup>4</sup>. The text has been the subject of commentaries, editions and translations since the start of the 19th century.<sup>5</sup> The transcription of Leonardo-related passages proposed by Carlo Vecce in 1990 is one of the most noteworthy, since the various hand-written testimonies of the account were collated for the occasion<sup>6</sup>.

Natural grandson of Ferdinand I, the king of Naples, and a cousin to Isabella d'Aragona, the Duchess of Milan, Luigi d'Aragona was born in 1474 and had been named Cardinal of Santa Maria in Cosmedin by Alexander VI<sup>7</sup>. After some diplomatic missions, he was called to the pontifical Court, where he became a close collaborator of Julius II, and then of Leo X. Luigi d'Aragona, therefore, found himself in Rome during Leonardo's stay there. It is reasonable to imagine that the two men spent time together, or at the very least, knew each other<sup>8</sup>. This may explain the cardinal's visit to Leonardo, in the castle of Cloux, on 10 October 1517: "Da Turso, dove se dimorò per tucte le nove del mese, do poi pranso se andò ad Amboys distante VII leghe [...] In uno de li

<sup>3</sup> VECCE 1990, pp. 51-72; VILLATA 1999, pp. 262-263, n. 314; ARRIGHI, BELLINAZZI, VILLATA 2005, pp. 240-242; OCCHIPINTI 2011, p. 99; FAGNART 2019, pp. 103-104; FRANK, TULLIO CATALDO 2019, pp. 287-289.

<sup>4</sup> Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, X F 28; Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, XIV H 70; Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, XIV E 35; Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 10786; Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 3169.

<sup>5</sup> PASTOR 1905.

<sup>6</sup> VECCE 1990, pp. 51-72.

<sup>7</sup> DE CARO 1961, *ad vocem*.

<sup>8</sup> TULLIO CATALDO 2016, p. 356.

borghi el signore con noi altri andò ad videre messer Lunardo Vinci firentino, vecchio de più de LXX anni, pictore in la età nostra excellentissimo”<sup>9</sup>.

Getting older (he was 65 and not 70, as Antonio de Beatis had written) and especially irritated – disillusioned, even – by the scant recognition he had received in Rome, Leonardo was no doubt happy to show these Italians the residence that Francis I (and his mother, the influential Louise of Savoy) had provided him, which was located merely a few hundred metres from the castle of Amboise, where the Court regularly assembled. The artist may also have been proud of the staggering pension that Francis I had bestowed upon him. In one of the autograph copies of the *Itinerario* that we have – the one stored in the Biblioteca Nazionale of Naples (XIV H 70), whose transcription was completed 15 July 1522 – Antonio de Beatis provides an account of his favourable conditions, which included the master’s ability to avail himself of the king’s Court in France: “Esso ultra le spese et stantia da re di Franza ha 1000 scuti l’anno di pensione et lo creato trecento”<sup>10</sup>. We know that this information was accurate. The pension record signed by the king indicates that, in 1517 and 1518, Leonardo received 1000 *ecus soleil* (that is 2000 *livres tournois*) per year, while Francesco Melzi received 200 *ecus* (or 400 *livres tournois*) on a yearly basis<sup>11</sup>. These sums are beyond compare with those granted to artists in the service of Francis I, whether French, Italian or Flemish: during the same period, Andrea del Sarto received 225 *livres tournois* per year, while Jean Clouet, the only person – or one of very few people – allowed to depict the king and members of the Court, received only 180 *livres tournois* per year.

Cardinal Luigi d’Aragona’s visit also gave Leonardo an opportunity to explain his scientific projects, in particular, his anatomical studies: “Questo gentilhuomo ha composto de notomia tanto particolarmente con la demonstratione de la pictura, sì de membri, come de muscoli, nervi, vene, giunture, d’intestini, et di quanto si può ragionare tanto di corpi de huomini come di donne, de modo non è stato mai anchora facto da altra persona. Il che habbiamo visto oculatamente; et già lui disse haver facta notomia de più de XXX corpi tra mascoli et femine de ogni età”<sup>12</sup>. Would the artist have referred back to research that had recently been carried out in Rome, concerning the relationship between a foetus and its mother, and whether the foetus has a soul of its own, independent of that of its mother, studies that recently had caused him some trouble? Perhaps. Cardinal d’Aragona and his companions also examined the notes that the master had collected during his life around a range of subjects, thoughts that he was in the process of organising for publication: “Ha anche composto de la natura de l’acque, de diverse machine et d’altre cose, secondo ha referito lui, infinità de volumi, et

<sup>9</sup> VECCE 1990, p. 56.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> The pension record signed by the king concerns two years: “A maistre Lyennard da Vince, peintre ytalien, la somme de deux mil escus soleil a luy ordonné par le Roy et sond. roole pour sa pension d’icelles deux années”; “A messire Francisque Meyllcio, ytalien, gentilhomme qui se tient avec led. maistre Lyenard, la somme de huit cens livres tournois a luy semblablement ordonnée par le Roy et sond. roole pour sa pension des deux années.” Paris, Archives nationales de France, KK 289, folio 352v (ed. by JESTAZ 1999, p. 70). In 1510 and 1511, Louis XII had paid Leonardo 400 *livres tournois* per year.

<sup>12</sup> VECCE 1990, p. 56.

tucti in lingua vulgare, quali si vengono in luce, saranno profugui et molto delectevoli”<sup>13</sup>.

At least three paintings were also showcased to the Italians: “[Lunardo Vinci] quale mostrò ad sua Signoria illustrissima tre quatri, uno di certa donna firentina, facta di naturale, ad instantia del quondam magnifico Iuliano de Medici, l’altro di san Iohanne Baptista giovane, et uno de la Madonna et del figliolo che stan posti in gremmo de sancta Anna, tucti perfectissimi”<sup>14</sup>. What can we learn from these lines, which have already given rise to endless commentary?

Firstly, there is nothing to indicate that Cardinal d’Aragona and his group saw all of the paintings Leonardo brought from Italy. Without a doubt, the hosts were received in one of the rooms of Cloux; they did not visit the entire residence, in which other works may have been stored<sup>15</sup>. In 1518, during the festivities that brought the Court to Amboise, Francis I doubtlessly negotiated for a collection of more than three works from Leonardo. Everything points to the fact that this lot also contained a *Standing Leda and the Swan*; however, this is not mentioned by Antonio de Beatis<sup>16</sup>. We can consider this to be true, since the inventory composed in 1525, upon the death of Salaì, lists such a work. It was priced at 200 *ecus*, that is, the same sum as the home of the master’s pupil<sup>17</sup>. In all likelihood, however, this document lists the subjects of the compositions that Leonardo bestowed upon the king of France. Most importantly, since 1590, a *Standing Leda and the Swan* attributed to Leonardo – the perfection of which is noted by Paolo Lomazzo – was located in the castle of Fontainebleau, before disappearing after 1692, after which this work is no longer listed in the French royal collections<sup>18</sup>.

Secondly, Antonio de Beatis’s testimony only allows us to definitively identify one of the three paintings mentioned, namely the one described as “uno de la Madonna et del figliolo che stan posti in gremmo de sancta Anna”, which corresponds to the *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* in the Louvre (*fig. 1*). In *Leonardi Vincii Vita*, which was drafted sometime around 1526, Paolo Giovio confirms the former presence of Leonardo’s painting in France, as an early purchase by Francis I: “Extat et infans Christus in tabula cum matre Virgine Annaque una colludens, quam Franciscus rex Galliae coemptam in sacrario collocavit”<sup>19</sup>.

Identifying the other two paintings that Luigi d’Aragona and his group saw at Cloux in October 1517 is less simple.

In my opinion, the one described as “l’altro di san Iohanne Baptista giovane”

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> SHELL, SIRONI 1991, p. 97 and note 26.

<sup>16</sup> For the history of a *Standing Leda and the Swan* attributed to Leonardo in France, see FAGNART 2019, pp. 139-143.

<sup>17</sup> SHELL, SIRONI 1991, p. 103.

<sup>18</sup> LOMAZZO 1590 (ed. by KLEIN 1974, pp. 24-25).

<sup>19</sup> “There is also a painting of the Christ child playing with the Virgin, his Mother, as well as with Anne, which king Francis, king of France, bought, and which he placed in his chapel”. GIOVIO around 1526 (ed. by FRANK and TULLIO CATALDO 2019, p. 271). For Leonardo’s life by Paolo Giovio, see VECCE 2005, pp. 62-71, in particular pp. 68-70, and AGOSTI 2008, pp. 52-60.

corresponds to *Saint John the Baptist/Bacchus in a landscape*, and not to *Saint John the Baptist*<sup>20</sup>. The lot of paintings by Leonardo – or those considered to be by him – that Francis I purchased in 1518 also included this painting, which is now attributed, after its recent restoration, to the master’s workshop, possibly to Francesco Melzi (*fig. 2*)<sup>21</sup>. Since the secretary to Cardinal d’Aragona does not refer to the landscape or the desert, and the epithet “giovane” can just as easily describe the *Saint John the Baptist* as the *Saint John the Baptist/Bacchus in a landscape*, there is doubt that the mention refers to *Saint John the Baptist/Bacchus in a landscape*. However, I believe that the secretary to Cardinal d’Aragona is indeed evoking the *Saint John the Baptist/Bacchus in a landscape*. Firstly, only one painting depicting Saint John the Baptist – not two – in the French royal painting collection was associated with Leonardo until the reign of Louis XIV. It is then that commentators mention the work in question, specifying that the saint is seated in a desert. Furthermore, a “quadro cum uno Santo Johanne grando” is recorded in the inventory after the death of Salai<sup>22</sup>. However, if we accept that the paintings cited in this document correspond – at least partially – to copies of the originals sold to the king of France in 1518, this mention supports the idea that Francis I bought the *Saint John the Baptist/Bacchus in a landscape*: the epithet “grando” is better suited to *Saint John the Baptist/Bacchus in a landscape* than *Saint John the Baptist*. Furthermore, copies of *Saint John the Baptist/Bacchus in a landscape* were made at an early date in France. This is the case for the one listed in the inventory after Sébastien Zamet’s death, which was drafted on 13 August 1614. Captain, concierge and general superintendent for the buildings of the castle of Fontainebleau, then, starting from 1603, superintendent for the queen’s houses and finances, Zamet had privileged access to the royal collections. Moreover, as the post-death inventory attests, he decorated his private home with reproductions of the king’s original paintings. Alongside copies of works by Raphaël, Titien, Sebastiano del Piombo, Andrea del Sarto or Rosso, the document records four Leonardo copies, including “n°765 Ung aultre tableau painct sur thoille garny de sa bordure de bois paint et doré de feuillages continus où est représenté ung saint Jehan au désert contenant cinq piedz et demy de hault sur quatre piedz et demy de large [178,2 x 145,8 cm], prisé 36 livres”<sup>23</sup>. This mention further confirms that it is the *Saint John the Baptist/Bacchus in a landscape* that was conserved in the castle of Fontainebleau, not the *Saint John the Baptist*: the writers specify that the figure is depicted in a desert. Finally, there is no source that suggests that the *Saint John the Baptist* belonged to Francis I: in 1517, the painting was perhaps always stored in Italy; its transition to the French royal collections did not occur until the reign of Louis XIV, who purchased it from the banker Jabach<sup>24</sup>. The argument that

<sup>20</sup> FAGNART 2019, pp. 117-125.

<sup>21</sup> DELIEUVIN, FRANK 2019, p. 332 and the contribution by Cinzia Pasquali in this volume.

<sup>22</sup> SHELL, SIRONI 1991, p. 104.

<sup>23</sup> Paris, Archives nationales de France, M.C., XIX, 381, 13 August 1614 (ed. by GRODECKI 1992, pp. 185-258, in particular p. 247, no. 765). This document also lists copies of the *Virgin of the Rocks*, the *Proserpine ravished by Pluto* by Gaudenzio Ferrari, then attributed to Leonardo, and the *Mona Lisa*.

<sup>24</sup> FAGNART 2019, pp. 209-221. See also MARANI 2009, pp. 45-59.

Leonardo was unable to present a painting by one of his pupils to Cardinal d'Aragona does not consider the testimony of Antonio de Beatis in its entirety<sup>25</sup>. In fact, Carmelo Occhipinti has already noted that the expression “tucti perfectissimi”, which refers to the three paintings in the secretary's travel journal, does not describe the perfectly autograph nature of the pieces or how finished they are<sup>26</sup>. It must instead refer to a link with one of the peculiarities that was recognised in the artistic production of Leonardo and his workshop at that time, namely the “dolcezza”, “soavità”, “mollezza” with which the master managed to infuse the figures. Beatis states this clearly in his account: “Et benché il prefato messer Lunardo non possa colorire cum quella dulceza che solea, pur serve ad fare disegni et insegnare ad altri”<sup>27</sup>.

In terms of the first painting that Antonio de Beatis lists as being in Cloux, it can probably be associated with the *Mona Lisa* (fig. 3): “uno di certa donna firentina, facto di naturale, ad instantia del quondam magnifico Iuliano de Medici”. This work became part of Francis I's collection at an early date: when the *Vite* was written, the portrait was already in the castle of Fontainebleau<sup>28</sup>. Furthermore, a copy, designated as a “quadro dicto la Ioconda” (corrected to “dicto la Honda” in the margin), is cited in the post-death inventory of Salai in 1525<sup>29</sup>. As a result, the painting was doubtlessly part of the lot of Leonardo's works that Francis I purchased in 1518. Later sources also attest to this: in 1642, in his *Trésor des merveilles de la maison royale de Fontainebleau*, Pierre Dan writes that “le grand Roy François achepta ce Tableau douze mille francs”<sup>30</sup>. Still, Antonio de Beatis's passage is hardly in line with what we know about the famous painting: the secretary evokes not only the portrait of a Florentine lady, but also a commission from Giuliano de' Medici. Could the long process involved in producing the portrait – the peak of the master's art – clarify the secretary to Cardinal Aragona's remarks, which are, at first glance, contradictory? Probably. Started in Florence in 1503, the painting continued in Rome between 1513 and 1516 when Leonardo was in the service of Giuliano de' Medici, as shown by an analysis of the landscape. As a result, even if some doubt remains, it can be suggested that the *Mona Lisa* was in Cloux in October 1517 and that it was presented to Luigi d'Aragona as a demonstration of the characteristic *dolcezza* of the Italian master's work.

On 11 October 1517, one day after their meeting with Leonardo, Cardinal Luigi d'Aragona and his companions went to Blois. It is primarily the library “tucta piena di libri” that caught their attention. According to Antonio de Beatis, the room was home to “uno astrolabico”, “uno ingeniosissimo horologio” and “un quatro dove è pintata ad oglio una certa signura di Lombardia di naturale assai bella, ma al mio iuditio non

<sup>25</sup> DELIEUVIN 2012, p. 246.

<sup>26</sup> OCCHIPINTI 2011, pp. 31, 98-99.

<sup>27</sup> VECCE 1990, p. 56.

<sup>28</sup> FAGNART 2019, pp. 125-135.

<sup>29</sup> As indicated by SHELL, SIRONI 1991, p. 100, note 48, the “quadro di una dona aretrata” (that is, a painted lady, not withdrawn, as in modern Italian) that is cited, without evaluation, in the inventory of Salai's possessions, likely coincides with an initial mention of a copy of the *Mona Lisa*, which was then abandoned, as evidenced by the fact that the painting was not taken.

<sup>30</sup> DAN 1642, p. 136.

tanto come la signora Gualanda”<sup>31</sup>. In the margin of the autograph copy stored at the Biblioteca Nazionale of Naples (ms. X F 28, folio 78r), whose transcription was completed on 21 August 1521, two annotations specify the description: “Quadro dove è di naturale une S.ra milanese”; “S.ra Isabella Gualanda”<sup>32</sup>. For many years, it was believed that Antonio de Beatis was comparing the portrait kept at Blois with the Florentine one that he had seen the previous day at Cloux. This interpretation has further stoked debate about the identity of the woman depicted in the portrait, which today is stored in the Louvre: Lisa del Giocondo, the wife of Francesco del Giocondo, became, in the eyes of some specialists, Isabella Gualanda or Gualandi, the Naples-born supposed mistress of Giuliano de’ Medici, whose beauty was such that she inspired the poets of that age<sup>33</sup>. Indeed, nothing in Antonio de Beatis’s text supports this interpretation: rather, the cardinal’s secretary hoped to emphasise that the woman depicted in the Blois portrait was less beautiful than the Neapolitan Isabella Gualanda, whose beauty must have been known to Luigi d’Aragona and his group<sup>34</sup>.

Whatever the case, could the portrait seen in Blois be associated with the one that is incorrectly designated as *La Belle Ferronnière* (fig. 4)? It seems likely to me, even though Leonardo’s name is not mentioned in this part of the *Itinerario*<sup>35</sup>. Antonio de Beatis notes that the painting depicts a Milanese woman, who was probably dressed in the so-called Spanish fashion, popular then in Lombardy. Among all of the paintings that were believed to be stored in the French royal painting collection at this extremely early period, only the Leonardo’s *Portrait of a Woman* (The *Belle Ferronnière*) depicts a woman wearing a *camora*, that is, a luxurious, low-cut dress, the sleeves of which, depending on the use, could be removed and were connected to the dress by large ribbons. When hit by wind, their richness was further enhanced. The woman’s hairstyle is also Spanish-inspired: the hair is held back by a silk *coif*, which is kept in place by a *lenza*, a silk ribbon decorated with a red jewel, perhaps a ruby.

The first confirmed appearance of Leonardo’s *Portrait of a Woman* in the French royal collection dates to 1642<sup>36</sup>. On this date, Pierre Dan records it among the master’s works that are conserved in the “Cabinet des peintures” in the castle of Fontainebleau in his *Trésor des merveilles de la maison royale de Fontainebleau*: “Le quatrième vn portrait d’une Duchesse de Mantoue”<sup>37</sup>. Even though this source is late, it is conceivable that the painting was in France at an earlier time. Indeed, the

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<sup>31</sup> VECCE 1990, p. 57.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>33</sup> VECCE 1990, pp. 59-72.

<sup>34</sup> FRANK, TULLIO CATALDO 2019, p. 238.

<sup>35</sup> FAGNART 2019, p. 60.

<sup>36</sup> FAGNART 2019, p. 198.

<sup>37</sup> DAN 1642, p. 135. Could this description clarify the question of who the model is? Could the portrait depict Beatrice d’Este, who married the Duke of Milan in May 1491? The links between Leonardo’s painting and the sculpted portrait that Gian Cristoforo Romano made of this princess around 1491, on the occasion of her marriage, make this an appealing hypothesis, even more so when considering the French sources that can support it. Pierre Dan describes the model as “une Duchesse de Mantoue”, the city where d’Este’s family is originated.

portrait bears one of the earliest numbers (no. 16) in the inventory of the French royal collection, which was drafted by Charles Le Brun in 1683<sup>38</sup>. However, Arnauld Brejon de Lavergnée demonstrated that this document was organised in favour of a chronological order, recording the progressive enrichment of the French royal collections until the reign of Louis XIV<sup>39</sup>. As a result, the works that are associated with the early numbers are those that come from the oldest parts of the royal collections, namely the collections of Louis XII and Francis I.

While *Portrait of a Woman* became part of the French royal painting collection at an early date, the exact circumstances of its acquisition remain unknown. In an article that was published in 1975, Jean Adhémar believed that he recognised Leonardo's portrait in an inventory of paintings found in one of the furniture-management records surviving from Queen Anne of Brittany<sup>40</sup>. In fact, the reference to “ung autre tableau paint sur boys d'une femme de fasson ytalienne”, which appears in the inventory, is so vague that it could refer to any portrait of an Italian woman, or a woman dressed in an Italian style<sup>41</sup>. Furthermore, as demonstrated by Caroline Vrand, the inventory in question was drafted on 24 July 1499 and not 1500, as Jean Adhémar thought, that is, at a time when the French armies had not yet defeated the Duke of Milan<sup>42</sup>. Therefore, it is impossible that Louis XII seized the paintings described in this inventory of goods conserved by Anne of Brittany during his first campaign into Italy in anticipation of conquering the Duchy of Lombardy.

It is still possible to associate the arrival of *Portrait of a Woman* in France with Louis XII. The work was stored in one of the residences of Ludovico Sforza; the king of France, or someone acting on his behalf, may have been able to appropriate it, in the same way that 380 books were seized in the library of the Visconti and the Sforza in Pavia in the autumn of 1499<sup>43</sup>. Brought to France in the summer of 1500, these books were then collected in Blois, in a new building that was constructed, starting from 1498, “du costés des fossés”, as indicated in the classifications of certain volumes, as well as Antonio de Beatis in his *Itinerario*. The role of Charles II Chaumont d'Amboise must be emphasised in connection with these transfers. Lieutenant-general to the king in the Duchy of Milan between 1500 and 1511, he was one of the most active supporters of the dissemination of Lombard art in France, not only with his uncle, the influential Cardinal Georges I d'Amboise, but also with other members of the Court and the king<sup>44</sup>. His presence in Milan made it easy to send objects and art to the northern Alps, facilitating contact with Lombard artists. In this way, he sent white-marble medallions

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<sup>38</sup> “n°16 Un autre tableau du mesme représentant le portait d'une femme demie figure sans mains, hault d'un pied 10 pouces sur 1 pied 4 pouces de large, peint sur bois avec sa bordure dorée”, with the following in the margin: “veu a Paris le 8 aoust 1690”. BREJON DE LAVERGNÉE 1987, p. 100, no. 16.

<sup>39</sup> BREJON DE LAVERGNÉE 1987, pp. 33-35.

<sup>40</sup> ADHÉMAR 1975, pp. 99-104.

<sup>41</sup> PARIS, BNF, ms. fr. 22335, 1495-1511 (ed. by VRAND 2010); see also LEROUX DE LINCY 1860-1861.

<sup>42</sup> VRAND 2011, pp. 69-70.

<sup>43</sup> HERMANT 2015, p. 123.

<sup>44</sup> GIRARD-PIPAU 1972, pp. 176-181; BARDATI 2009, *passim*; GAGGETTA 2013, pp. 287-321, in particular pp. 303-304.



with the faces of Roman emperors from Italy, in order to decorate the spandrels of the north-west gallery – gone today – of Meillant castle<sup>45</sup>. Could Charles d’Amboise have brought Leonardo’s *Portrait of a Woman* to the Court, during his stay there between early January 1507 and mid-February of that same year?<sup>46</sup> And further, could the work correspond to Leonardo’s “piccol quadro”, which arrived in Blois during this period, as evidenced in the letter from Francesco Pandolfini, the Florentine ambassador to the Court of France, to the members of the Signoria of Florence on 12 January 1507? This painting – which inspired Louis XII to commission Leonardo – is traditionally associated with one of the versions of the *Madonna of the Yarnwinder*. However, it is not clear if this work was delivered to its commissioner, Florimond Robertet<sup>47</sup>. It could just as easily correspond to another of Leonardo’s works that in Blois at an early date, such as *Portrait of a Woman*, mentioned a few years later in the library of Blois castle by Antonio de Beatis. Notwithstanding its plausibility, however, this remains but a hypothesis.

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<sup>45</sup> JESTAZ 2003, pp. 273-303, in particular pp. 294-296; MUNOZ 2016, vol. 1, pp. 190-192.

<sup>46</sup> FAGNART 2019, pp. 59-60.

<sup>47</sup> FAGNART 2019, pp. 53-56.

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*fig. 1.*  
Leonardo da Vinci, *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*.  
Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. 776.



*fig. 2.*  
Francesco Melzi (?), *Saint John the Baptist/Bacchus in a landscape*.  
Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. 780.

*fig. 3.*  
Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. 779.

*fig. 4.*  
Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of a Woman* (The “*Belle Ferronnière*”).  
Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. 778.