

The Galvanoplastic Replica of a Peter Cornelius Sketch for his Dante Ceiling Fresco in the Budapest Liszt Estate*

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Abstract: This study examines a piece of smith's work preserved in the permanent exhibition of the Budapest Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum, which portrays scenes from the Paradise of Dante's *Divina Commedia*. Formerly owned by Liszt, this object is a galvanoplastic replica of a sketched drawing by Peter Cornelius for his Dante ceiling in the Villa Massima in Rome. Even so, the work preserved in the Liszt Museum is nowhere mentioned in the literature on Cornelius. The name of the donor (cardinal Hohenlohe) and the year of its donation (1867) are already known to us. These circumstances allow us to conclude that its presentation as a gift may have been in connection with the successful performances of Liszt's Dante Symphony in Rome. The work was performed at the inauguration of the Dante Galeria (February 26th 1866). The patron of the exhibition was Johannes, the King of Saxony, in whose possession the drawing was at the time. The opening ceremony provided the occasion for Hohenlohe to come into contact with the ruler of Saxony, and request a loan of the drawing in order to make the galvanoplastic replica.

Keywords: Franz Liszt, Peter Cornelius, *Dante's Divina Commedia*, iconography

1.

In the permanent exhibition of the Budapest Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum there is preserved an oval-shaped patinated metal relief which depicts scenes from the Paradise of Dante's *Divina Commedia* (Figure 1).¹ This piece of smith's work is fixed to a wooden base covered with dark red velvet, to which

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¹ LM Er. 39. 29.5 × 32 cm, base: 38 × 50 cm. *Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum*. Catalogue. Compiled and edited by M. Eckhardt. Budapest: Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, 1986, Cat. no. 37.



*Figure 1: The galvanoplastic replica of Peter Cornelius's sketched drawing
(Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum, Budapest)*

is attached a brass plate bearing the inscription „Liszt Ferencz hagyatéka” [Franz Liszt’s Estate] and a piece of paper bearing the stamp of the Liszt Estate, on which can be read in handwriting „Hohenlohe kardinális ajándéka.” [A gift from Cardinal Hohenlohe]. According to the museum catalogue the date of the gift (1867) figures on the paper, but this may have worn off, since I could find no trace of it. In spite of this, we can regard the date as reliable.²

This object not only arouses interest as an artistic document of primary importance regarding the connections between Liszt and Dante, but from the standpoint of art history contains some surprises. For according to the catalogue, we are dealing with the design for a decorated ceiling which Peter Cornelius prepared for the Villa Massima in Rome, but the object is not mentioned anywhere in the literature on Cornelius.³ This is enough to justify an independent examination of the work, the aims being twofold: to clarify its connection firstly with Cornelius, and secondly with Liszt.

As no detailed iconographic description of the scenes portrayed on this object has yet been written, it makes sense to begin with it. The figures are identified by inscriptions, some of which are now barely legible. We have at our disposal a source which provides not only a reliable basis for identifying the inscriptions, but also an aid to their interpretation. Namely that in August 1817 Cornelius prepared a sketched drawing for his planned Villa Massima Dante ceiling fresco which – for reasons to be surmised later – was not carried out (*Figure 2*).⁴ In a letter he later wrote to his publisher and art dealer friend Wenner he gave a detailed description of his plan based on this drawing.⁵ As

² This claim stems from the director of the Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum and Research Centre, Mária Eckhardt, for whose helpful advice I here express my thanks. Thanks are also due to Katalin T. Bruder, deputy director of the Conservation Department at the Hungarian National Museum, with whom I undertook the on site examination of the piece of smith’s work, and to Zsuzsanna Domokos, deputy director of the Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum and Research Centre, via whose assistance this detailed examination became possible.

³ For the connection between Cornelius and the Villa Massima see: K. Gerstenberg – P. O. Rave: *Die Wandgemälde der deutschen Romantiker im Casino Massimo zu Rom*. Berlin 1934, 45–51, K. Andrews: *The Nazarens. A Brotherhood of German Painters in Rome*. Oxford 1964, 46–54, 115, F. Büttner: *Peter Cornelius. Fresken und Freskenprojekte*. I. Wiesbaden 1980, 108–113.

⁴ 38,7 × 49,6 cm. Pen and ink drawing, the central domain plus the first two sections are painted with water colours. At one time in Dresden, collection of Friedrich August.

⁵ Cornelius to Frascati Wenner, August 26th 1817: „Ich rücke den Beschauer auf jene Stelle des Himmels, wo er denselben mit allen Seeligen, Heiligen und Engeln in Gestalt einer Rose übersieht. Im innersten und höchsten Himmel ist Dante und St. Bernhard, welche durch Vermittlung der heiligen Jungfrau zur Anschauung Gottes gelangen. Ich zeige die drei Personen der Gottheit selbst, nicht die drei Ringe des Dante. Dieses gleichsam als Mittelpunkt und Schlußstein des Ganzen wird von einem Kreis von Cherubimköpfen eingeschlossen. Von da aus gehen die vier großen Strahlen, die aber wie oben erwähnter Kreis architektonisch gehalten und ebenfalls mit Engeln angefüllt sind, nach dem Character der neun Chöre, welche die Himmel tragen und bewegen. Die vier Räume, die daraus entstehen, werden jeder noch einmal durch einen reichen Feston von Blumen, Früchten und Vögeln geteilt, der ebenfalls sich von der Mitte nach den vier Ecken der Decke zieht. Auf diese Weise erhalte ich nun acht Felder, welche nach der



*Figure 2: Peter Cornelius's sketched drawing for the ceiling of the Dante room in the Villa Massima, Rome
(At one time in Dresden, Collection of Friedrich August)*

the metal relief is a replica of this sketched drawing, Cornelius's description matches the scenes portrayed in both.

The composition depicts Dante's Paradise as a mystical rose. In the central oval domain we see the highest Heaven, with on the left and right the kneeling figures of St Bernard and Dante, who via the mediation of Mary, also kneeling, arrive at the Beatific Vision. The Divinity is represented by the Trinity instead of Dante's three circles. This central domain is bordered by cherubic heads, and from it radiate four large rays filled with angelic figures, referring to the choruses of angels that sustain and mobilise Heaven. The sections thus produced are further divided by chains of fruit, flowers and birds, making eight sections all told. As an outer border there is a complete rim decorated with stars, plus various heavenly bodies, above which encircling clouds appear, on which are groups of participants who figure in the Paradise of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, arranged according to the constellations defined by Dante. Thus in the first section beneath the right half of the central domain, Dante and Beatrice appear ascending under the sign of the Moon to the first circle of Heaven, as they encounter Piccarda and his lady companion. Continuing anti-clockwise Cornelius depicts the following groups: Justinian, Folko the troubadour of Marseilles and Cunizza under the sign of Mercury and Venus, then Saint Bonaventura, Albertus Magnus and Saint Thomas Aquinas under the sign of the Sun. Above the planets Jupiter and Mars appear the heroes of Christianity with other commanders: Charlemagne, Constantine the Great, Gottfried Bouillon, Joshua and Judas Maccabaeus. Saturn is the planet of the contemplatives with Saint Benedict, Saint Romuald, Saint Francis and Saint Dominic. The next section depicts the sign of Gemini. Here Dante and Beatrice are examined by Saint Peter, Saint James and Saint John the Evangelist on questions concerning faith, hope and charity. And in the last two sections Adam, Saint Stephen the proto-

Eintheilung des Dante von Heiligen und Seeligen ausgefüllt sind, so daß sie einen großer Reif, gleichsam eine Milchstraße von Sternen, und unter jedem Chor der Abtheilung der Heiligen sieht man dasjenige Gestirn, worin Dante sie versetzt. Die acht Felder habe ich folgendermaßen ausgefüllt: Dante an der Seite der Beatrice steigt schwebend in den ersten Kreis des Himmels; als im Monde hier findet er die Jungfrauen und namentlich Piccarda und ihre Genossin. Im zweiten Felde nehme ich zwei Planeten an, den Mercur und die Venus; hier sieht man Justinian, den Minnesänger Folko von Marseille und die Cunizza. Im dritten Felde als in (dem) der Sonne sind die Doktoren, als St. Bonaventura, Albertus Magnus, Thomas von Aquin. Das vierte Feld bezeichnet wiederum zwei Planeten und zwar Mars und Jupiter; hier sieht man die christlichen Helden und Fürsten, als Karl den Großen, Konstantin, Gottfried von Bouillon, Josua und Judas Makkabäus. Im fünften als im Saturn sind die Kontemplativen: St. Benedict, St. Romuald, St. Franciscus und St. Dominicus. Im sechsten sieht man Dante und Beatrice im Zeichen der Zwillinge, wo ersterer von Petrus, Jacobus und Johannes in seinem Glauben, seiner Hoffnung und Liebe gleichsam examiniert wird. Die beiden letzten deuten den empirischen Himmel an; man sieht eine Reihe von Heiligen aus dem alten und neuen Bunde; diese Reihe fängt mit Adam an und schließt mit Johannes dem Täufer." Published in H. Riegel: *Peter Cornelius. Festschrift zu des großen Künstlers 100. Geburtstage*. Berlin 1883, 272–273, and Gerstenberg–Rave, op. cit., 47–48.

martyr, Saint Paul and Moses, plus Saint Augustine, Saint Gregory and Saint John the Baptist can be seen in the *Empyrean*.⁶

An on-site technical examination of this piece of metalwork clarified beyond any doubt that it is a bronze-patinated galvanoplastic replica, and not a cast.⁷ Evidence for this procedure included the extremely thin copperplate, plus the figures' blurred outlines. In one damaged spot where it was possible to examine the reverse side of the copperplate with a magnifying glass, nodules showed up that were beyond doubt produced by the galvanoplasty process. As the specimen is work of high quality, the possibility of there being the stamp of a galvanoplasty workshop on the reverse side was investigated by detaching the wooden base. Unfortunately, no stamp was found.

Galvanoplasty is a process for making metal replicas, first produced in 1838 by Jacoby in St Petersburg and Spencer in Liverpool.⁸ Basically the process is as follows: "The conductivised negative form having been suspended as a negative pole – cathode – in an acid copper bath, copper separates onto the conductivised graphitised surface, and the positively charged copper ions of the copper sulphur solution lose their electric charge at the negative pole, as a result of which refined granulated copper emerges. The negatively charged sulphate residue moves to the positive pole – the pure red copper anode – where it dissolves the quantity of copper that separated onto the form. The porosity of the copper produced makes it necessary that it be soldered, which is generally done with tin-lead, and more rarely with silver."⁹

From this brief description we learn one thing relevant to the present examination: a galvanoplastic replica cannot be made directly from a work of art with a flat smooth surface. The participation of a sculptor is needed, to have made a three-dimensional copy of Cornelius's drawing – probably from plaster – to be used for the galvanoplasty process.

2.

Cornelius had grand plans when he joined the Saint Luke society of Roman Nazarene painters, led by Overbeck. As he said in a letter written in 1814: "At last I come to what according to my innermost conviction would, I feel, be the

⁶ Cornelius gives fewer details in his description of the last two sections, only indicating Adam and John the Baptist. The remaining figures can be identified by the captions on the plate. The depictions of the last section were similarly identified, on the basis of the drawing, by E. Förster: *Peter Cornelius. Ein Gedenkbuch aus seinem Leben und Wirken*. I. Berlin 1874, 197–198.

⁷ The plate is also considered a galvanoplastic replica in the Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum catalogue. See footnote 1.

⁸ F. Binder: *Handbuch der Galvanoplastik*. Weimar 1884, 113–120.

⁹ K. T. Bruder: "A szobi kantharosz restaurálásai" [The restoration of the cantharos at Szob] *Isis. Erdélyi Magyar Restaurátor Füzetek* 3. Székelyudvarhely: Haáz Rezső Múzeum 2003, 78.

most powerful, I would say the infallible, means of giving German art a new direction compatible with the great era of the nation and with its spirit: this would be nothing less than the revival of Fresco-Painting as it was practised from the great Giotto to the divine Raphael.”¹⁰ Since Cornelius knew that this programme could not be realized without gaining the support of influential German commissions, he wrote the same year, together with other artists, a memorandum to crown prince Ludwig of Bavaria, to Metternich, the Austrian Minister of State, and to Hardenberg the Chancellor of Prussia, requesting them to support the foundation of a new monumental German art by commissioning works.¹¹ Although at the time commissions from Germany were not immediately forthcoming, in Rome there were some who responded to the invitation.

In 1815 Cornelius managed to persuade the Prussian consul in Rome J. S. Bartholdy not to have one of the rooms in his house decorated ornamentally – as he had originally planned – but with frescoes depicting scenes.¹² Choice eventually fell on the story of Joseph in Egypt, and the series of frescoes executed by Cornelius, Overbeck, Schadow and Philip Veit achieved such a breakthrough, that their contemporaries spoke of the birth of a new German art. Count Raczyński wrote as follows in 1816: “Every time I entered this little room I felt as if I stood at the crib from which gazed upon me with vivid eyes a child, born in poverty but rich in the holy spirit: the new German art.”¹³

The favourable reception of the Casa Bartholdy resulted in further Roman commissions. The Marquis Carlo Massimo, who owned a house and garden adjacent to the Lateran basilica, had his enthusiasm aroused by the success of the Nazarenes, and decided to have three rooms in his house painted with scenes from works by Ariosto, Tasso and Dante: the first two by Overbeck, the third by Cornelius.¹⁴

At that time Dante’s star had begun to rise again all over Europe, so to elevate him for inclusion in the line of Italian national poets was certainly timely.¹⁵ The Dante cult could also be felt in Cornelius’s Roman surroundings;

¹⁰ Förster, op. cit., 155. Quoted in Andrews, op. cit., 34.

¹¹ M. Wagner: *Allegorie und Geschichte. Ausstattungsprogramme öffentlicher Gebäude des 19. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland von der Cornelius-Schule zur Malerei der Wilhelminischen Ära*. Tübingen 1989, 41.

¹² R. E. MacVaugh: *The Casa Bartholdy Frescoes and Nazarene Theory in Rome, 1816–1817*. Ann Arbor 1982.

¹³ A. A. Raczyński: *Histoire de l’art moderne en Allemagne*. III. Paris, 1836–41. Quoted in Andrews, op. cit., 37.

¹⁴ From a letter of Overbeck’s we learn that the original plans included the painting of a Petrarch room. Büttner, op. cit., 98. M. G. Messina: “Dante, Tasso, Ariost. Der deutsche *Sturm und Drang* und sein Einfluß auf das ikonographische Programm des Casino Massimo”. In: *Die Nazarener in Rom*. München 1981, 294–301.

¹⁵ For the Dante cult see E. Auerbach: *Die Entdeckung Dantes in der Romantik. Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*. 7, 1929, 682, M. Pittwood: *Dante and the French Romantics*. Geneva 1985.

in this regard it is sufficient to mention that at S. Isidoro, the headquarters of the Nazarenes, there were readings everyday from the *Divina Commedia*, while Joseph Anton Koch, who belonged to Cornelius's circle of friends, did a great many illustrations for works by Dante.¹⁶

Cornelius began the preliminary drawings for the Villa Massima Dante scenes in August 1817, though we hear of the plan earlier in the winter of the same year.¹⁷ Only the sketch for the ceiling was done in detail, his ideas for it being outlined in the letter to Wenner quoted at the beginning of this study.¹⁸ On September 3rd the parties concerned agreed a contract in which it was laid down that the frescoes were to be executed by Cornelius within three years. Cornelius and Franz Horny – to whom he allotted the smaller, ornamental tasks – began drawing the cartoons for the ceiling fresco at the beginning of 1818.¹⁹ Three cartoons were finished: one of the inner oval domain, which perished not long after it was done,²⁰ and from the outer strip one of the second and third sections,²¹ and one of the sixth and seventh sections.²²

Preparatory work was therefore well under way when, at the beginning of April, Peter Cornelius received an offer from the crown prince Ludwig of Bavaria to paint the Glyptothek at Munich.²³ Although committed to a contract, the artist had no hesitation in accepting the crown prince's offer, since his Roman frescoes – as he himself confessed – were intended first of all to arouse interest in his own country and produce commissions. At the intercession of Ludwig, Carlo Massimo released Cornelius and Horny, and the Dante room ceiling was eventually executed by Philipp Veit, based on Cornelius's ideas, but with a different design (*Figure 3*). The walls were painted by Joseph Anton Koch.²⁴

¹⁶ O. R. Lutterotti von: *Joseph Anton Koch. 1768–1839. Leben und Werk*. Wien, München 1985, 44–48.

¹⁷ On the commission see Büttner, op. cit., 97–100.

¹⁸ See footnote 5. For the preliminary drawing for the walls see Büttner, op. cit., 100–105.

¹⁹ Ibid., 99, 110, Gerstenberg–Rave, op. cit., 49–51, 117.

²⁰ „Dieser Karton ist im Jahre 1819 von Cornelius bei seinem Abgange aus Rom seinem Freunde Joseph Koch zur Aufbewahrung übergeben worden, und seitdem ist jede spur desselben verloren.“ H. Riegel: *Cornelius der Meister der deutschen Malerei*. Hannover 1866, 390.

²¹ Düsseldorf, Kunstmuseum, 182 × 355 cm. *Die Düsseldorfer Malerschule. Exhibition Catalogue*. Düsseldorf 1979, 289–291, picture no. 53. Gerstenberg–Rave, op. cit., picture no. 2, Büttner, op. cit., picture no. 95.

²² Until World War II in the Leipzig Museum der bildenden Künste, 182 × 357 cm. Gerstenberg–Rave, op. cit., picture no. 3, Büttner, op. cit., picture no. 96.

²³ Ibid., 100.

²⁴ *Die Nazarener in Rom*, op. cit., 302–316. The fact that Cornelius could not finally realize his plan is deemed a great loss to the history of 19th century German art and culture (Gerstenberg–Rave, op. cit., 46). Andrews (op. cit., 48) also laments this, comparing the less successful ceiling fresco by Philipp Veit with the one originally planned.



*Figure 3: Philipp Veit: ceiling fresco
from the Dante room in the Villa Massima, Rome*

3.

From the start Cornelius was concerned to have reproductions made of his sketched drawing. For this reason in October 1817 he offered the further planned set of five drawings of the ceiling to be bought by Wenner, so that the publisher could have engravings made of them, and publish them with explanatory texts.²⁵ Wenner agreed, but when the painter broke his contract with Carlo Massimo, he also withdrew his agreement with Wenner to publish the engravings.

Cornelius did not, however, abandon informing the general public about his monumental composition. The result of his efforts was a brochure about forty pages long that was published in 1830 in Leipzig.²⁶ The publication contributed to the increasing popularity of the Dante cult, and included lithographs based on Cornelius's drawing by his pupil Adam Eberle. These depicted separately the central domain of Paradise and the eight outer strips, the drawings being supplied with explanatory texts by Professor Döllinger (*Figure 4*).²⁷

The task that faced whoever made the metal relief was no less than to produce a piece of smith's work based on a sketch which remained in many areas incomplete. First of all it was necessary to fill out the composition, as shows clearly in the drawing in the case of the outer frame which is indicated only in some places, and the frame of cherubic heads surrounding the central domain, which is not executed in the section between the kneeling Saint Bernard and Dante. Similar additions are found also in Eberle's lithograph.

The smith's work differs from the drawing and the lithograph in respect to another part also. In the latter versions, Saint Bernard and Dante in the frame of cherubic heads are kneeling, but the metal replica puts them in the central oval shape. While in the graphic depictions we are faced with deliberate illusion-making – Saint Bernard and Dante, who occupy a middle position spatially, form a connection between the observer's space and that of Heaven – the metal relief does not make use of this device. The reason the galvanoplastic replica does not use this illusionistic approach, which would obviously have achieved its full effect in the monumental form which was not carried

²⁵ For Ruscheweyh's engravings Niebuhr was to write texts. Riegel, op. cit., 275. See further Büttner, op. cit., 99, Gerstenberg–Rave, op. cit., 46.

²⁶ *Umriss zu Dantes Paradies von Peter von Cornelius*, mit erklärendem Texte von Dr. J. Döllinger. Leipzig 1830.

²⁷ One preliminary drawing survives for the lithograph, depicting the first section of Heaven. Basle, Kupferstichkabinett, Inv. 1943.84, 20.2 × 24 cm. The drawing bearing the signature of P. Cornelius is rightly attributed to Eberle by Büttner in op. cit., 110, footnote 237, and in *Zeichnungen deutscher Künstler des 19. Jahrhunderts aus dem Basler Kupferstichkabinett. Exhibition Catalogue*. Kunstmuseum Basel 1983, 45–47, picture no. 63. Andrews, op. cit., 116 (picture no. 47) by contrast considers it to be by Cornelius himself.



Figure 4: Adam Eberle: part of the lithograph of Peter Cornelius's sketched drawing

out, is that its use would have put at risk the unity of the smith's work's symmetrical composition.

Since whoever prepared the galvanoplastic replica – as also the lithograph – must have known Cornelius's sketched drawing, it is worth tracing Cornelius's wanderings as an artist. After breaking the contract with Carlo Massima we find the artist in autumn 1819 still in Rome, where he began drawing sketches for the Glyptothek.²⁸ This means that the Dante drawing remained in Rome for a time, giving Philipp Veit, who in the summer of 1818 took over the work of painting the Dante ceiling, the opportunity to study it, along with Cornelius's lost central cartoon, for his own composition.²⁹ When the painter left for Munich, he took with him the Dante ceiling drawing – used in 1830 by Eberle for his lithograph – and only became separated from it at the end of 1844.³⁰

²⁸ Saur. *Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon*. 21. München–Leipzig 1999, 243–246.

²⁹ Büttner, *op. cit.*, 116.

³⁰ By this time, however Cornelius was working in Berlin. He completed large-scale frescoes in Munich – the Glyptothek, Alte Pinakothek, Ludwigskirche – but his relations with Ludwig the Bavarian crown prince (from 1825 king) deteriorated, and he had to seek new commissions. In 1841 he offered his services to Fried-

The background to this is that the king of Saxony, Friedrich August, through an intermediary commissioned a drawing from the painter for his brother prince Johannes as a Christmas present. In his letter to B. v. Minckwitz written in Berlin on December 1st 1844 Cornelius offered the Dante drawing in his possession, which was accepted with pleasure by the king.³¹ The drawing must have reached the person it was intended for, because we know from Riegel's 1870 Cornelius monograph that the Dante drawing was owned by Johannes, who was now king of Saxony.³² King Johannes (reigned 1854–1873) is by no means a secondary figure regarding the present topic; under the name Philaetes he was one of the leading Dante scholars of his age. His name is associated with a German translation of the *Divina Commedia*.³³ We shall have occasion to return to him later.

4.

Liszt cultivated good relations with several well-known painters of the period – Delacroix, Ingres, Ary Scheffer, Henri Lehman, Overbeck, Steinle, Kaulbach, Doré, Zichy, Munkácsy. Cornelius, too, he knew personally, and several times expressed his admiration of his painting. Once, comparing him to the Renaissance master he most admired – along with Michelangelo – he called him a modern Raphael.³⁴ On another occasion he mentioned Cornelius and Overbeck as “princes of art”.³⁵ Liszt and his second partner, princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein, from whose considerable collection of drawings no Cornelius drawing could be missing,³⁶ maintained contact with the artist during their Weimar period. In Rome this deepened into a personal friendship between the princess and the artist. Cornelius even listened to her opinions on artistic matters, once calling her his “secret advisor”.³⁷

rich Wilhelm IV, King of Prussia, and moved to Berlin, where his chief activities were in association with the restoration of Berlin Cathedral, the *Campo Santo* planned by the Hohenzollern dynasty, and the painting of the series of frescos at the cathedral. This was followed by a long stay in Rome from 1853 until 1861, after which he again worked in Berlin until his death in 1867. See Saur, op. cit. (footnote 27). For Friedrich Wilhelm IV's artistic patronage see: Friedrich Wilhelm IV. Künstler und König. Neue Orangerie im Park Sanssouci, Potsdam. Berlin, 1995.

³¹ For the correspondence see: Förster, op. cit., 255–256.

³² Riegel, op. cit., 389.

³³ *Lexikon der Deutschen Geschichte. Personen. Ereignisse. Institutionen. Von der Zeitwende bis zum Ausgang des 2. Weltkriegs* (ed. G. Taddey) Stuttgart 1983, 1078–79.

³⁴ Liszt to Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein. Berlin, October 4th 1861. *Franz Liszt. Selected Letters*. Translated and edited by Adrian Williams. Oxford 1998, no. 490.

³⁵ Liszt to Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein, June 17th 1860. *Ibid.*, no. 436.

³⁶ *Sammlung von Handzeichnungen aus dem Besitze der Fürstin Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein (1819–1889)*. Hirsch, München, 26. November 1921. No. 42. Plate VIII. In the sale catalogue the centre of the drawing entitled *Symbolic Depiction of Mercy* has the figure of Christ blessing two worldly rulers being presented to him by two female saints.

³⁷ Liszt to Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein. Berlin, October 4th 1861. Williams, op. cit., no. 490.

Liszt makes mention of individual works by Cornelius in several letters. He very early observed one of the chief strengths of his painting, namely its clearly expressed programmatic intent. In 1843 he wrote from Munich as follows to his first partner, the countess Marie d'Agoult: "In the Ludwigskirche, painted solely by Cornelius, the painter set himself the ingenious programme of somehow making a picturesque *Credo*, and of grouping all his composition around verses from the Nicene Creed."³⁸ When Liszt was in Berlin in 1861 – where he gave an informal recital in Cornelius's home – he admiringly paid tribute to a picture by him of Ezekiel.³⁹ On another visit to Berlin – in 1864 – he recalled an exhibition of Cornelius cartoons.⁴⁰ Thus Liszt had a thorough acquaintance with the paintings of Cornelius, and we can presume that he was aware that the metal replica in his possession was made from one of his works. This is supported by the hypothesis expressed later concerning the circumstances of its commissioning.

Liszt must have greatly valued the gift not just because of Cornelius, but also because of the subject portrayed. After all, the composer, as so many in his time, was an enthusiastic champion of the *Divina Commedia*, and considered Dante's works to be one of humanity's greatest achievements.⁴¹ He first read it during his visit to Italy in 1837 with Marie d'Agoult, and its elemental effect on him inspired straightaway the composition of the Dante Sonata.⁴² The topic, requiring a monumental form, occupied Liszt further, the eventual result of which was the Dante Symphony composed during the Weimar years and performed in Dresden in 1857. Liszt originally imagined the work with projected pictures: the music was to have been accompanied by dioramas based on the Dante illustrations of Bonaventura Genelli, but the composer's experiment eventually was not realized due to the cost.⁴³ Even so this shows that Liszt was seriously interested in pictorial depictions of the *Divina Com-*

³⁸ Liszt to Marie d'Agoult. Munich, October 22nd 1843. In this letter Liszt enthusiastically recounts his memories of the artistic patronage in Munich of Ludwig I, remembering how in contrast to the disorderliness he saw in Italy, there "not only is everything beautiful, but everything in its right place". Ibid., no. 166.

³⁹ Liszt to Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein. Berlin, October 4th 1861. Ibid., no. 490.

⁴⁰ Liszt to Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein. Berlin, September 21st 1864. Ibid., no. 540.

⁴¹ He once compared them to the pillar of cloud that led the Jews through the desert. Liszt to Carl Alexander. June 24th 1849. The occasion for this remark was Liszt's presentation of a volume of Dante to the grand duke. *Briefwechsel zwischen Franz Liszt und Hans von Bülow*. Ed. La Mara. Leipzig 1898, 26.

⁴² The joint reading took place at the foot of Comolli's statue of Dante and Beatrice in the gardens of the Villa Melzi in Bellagio. Liszt to Louis de Ronchaud. Bellagio, September 1837 (*Gazette musicale*, July 22nd 1838 294–296). *An Artist's Journey. Lettres d'un bachelier ès musique. 1835–1841*. Ed. C. Suttoni. Chicago and London 1989, 65–67.

⁴³ Genelli fostered good relations with cultural circles in Weimar, and was an important illustrator of Dante at the time, doing a series of 36 Dante illustrations in 1846–47. Engravings were made of Genelli's drawings by H. Schütz, which were published between 1846 and 1852. See H. Ebert: *Bonaventura Genelli. Leben und Werk*. Weimar 1971, 90–96. On his Weimar contacts see *ibid.*, 186–192.

media.⁴⁴ For him this was a matter of principle: all his life he was a believer in the unity of the arts, and in his composing methods art and music were always closely connected; behind the birth of many of his works lies an inspiration from art.⁴⁵

In 1865 Italy celebrated the six hundredth anniversary of the birth of Dante.⁴⁶ This anniversary gave renewed impetus to the Dante cult sweeping Italy (and Europe), one of whose important events was the opening of Cavaliere Romualdo Gentiluzzi's Dante Galeria in Rome. Gentiluzzi's plan was that the Dante Symphony be performed at the opening in connection with the exhibition of twenty seven paintings depicting scenes from the *Divina Commedia*, in the name of the unity of the sister arts.⁴⁷ Liszt happily accepted Gentiluzzi's plan and requested that the explanatory text attached to the symphony be distributed among the audience.⁴⁸

From contemporary press reports we learn that the concert inaugurating the Dante Galeria on February 26th 1866 was a success, and the work was performed again on March 3rd. The Dante Symphony was conducted by Liszt's pupil Giovanni Sgambati, whom Liszt presented with an ebony baton decorated with silver in token of his appreciation, while two sonnets were addressed to the composer by Domenico Venturini entitled *Dante e Liszt*.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Princess Wittgenstein's collection of drawings included one by Joseph Anton Koch depicting Dante's Hell, which Liszt may also have known. Wittgenstein-Sale, op. cit., no. 204.

⁴⁵ Among his symphonic poems the *Humensclacht* was inspired by a picture by Kaulbach since destroyed, *Orpheus* by an Etruscan vase and *From the Cradle to the Grave* by a drawing by Mihály Zichy. *Septem Sacramenta* and *Via Crucis* were inspired by cartoons and engravings by Overbeck, *St Francis of Paola Walking on the Waves* by a drawing he owned by Steinle, and behind the piano pieces *Sposalizio* and *Il Penseroso* from the cycle *Années de Pèlerinage* book II lie a painting by Raffaello and a statue by Michelangelo.

⁴⁶ The centre of the cult was Florence, and the climax of the celebrations the dedication of the Enrico Pazzi's statue of Dante on 14th May, the poet's birthday, in the square in front of Sta Croce. The celebrations in Florence received wide coverage in the press. For this see H. C. Barlow: *The Sixth Centenary of Dante Alighieri in Florence and at Ravenna*. London and Edinburgh, 1866. In Florence Pazzi's statue was preceded in 1830 by Stefano Ricci's tomb memorial of Dante in Sta Croce, and in 1842 by Paolo Emilio Demi's statue of Dante in the porch of the Uffizi loggia. A great event for the Florentine cult of Dante was the discovery in the Bargello in 1840 of a fresco portrait of Dante, at the time attributed to Giotto. See G. Smith: "The Stone of Dante, and Later Florentine Celebrations of the Poet." *Archivum Romanicum. Serie I: Storia, Letteratura, Paleografia*. Leo S. Olschki 1999, 33–56.

⁴⁷ „Cosi la Galleria Dantesca sarà inaugurata delle tre arti sorelle, la Poesia, la Pittura, e la Musica." *L'Osservatore romano*, 2nd December 1865. This issue includes detailed advanced publicity about the exhibition. Quoted in Dezső Legány: "Liszt Rómában – a sajtó szerint" [Liszt in Rome – from press reports] *Magyar Zene* (36/1) 1996, 39–41.

⁴⁸ Gentiluzzi's request might also have arisen because in the meantime the Dante Symphony was successful in Pest. Liszt conducted the first movement in August 1865, and it was played again in October and December. For Liszt's letter agreeing to the request see Liszt to Cavaliere Romualdo Gentiluzzi, 22nd November 1865. La Mara, op. cit., VIII, no. 131. An eight page programme was published for the inauguration of the Dante Galeria, which contains the correspondence of Gentiluzzi and Liszt, and includes much data about the preparations for the performance. László Eösz: *119 római Liszt-dokumentum* [119 Liszt documents from Rome]. Budapest 1980, 29–31.

⁴⁹ The enthusiastic review of March 3rd in *L'Osservatore romano*, which also gives the correspondence of Liszt and Gentiluzzi, is quoted in detail in Legány, op. cit., 40–41.

After the Roman premiere of the Dante Symphony Liszt travelled to Paris to take part in the rehearsals and premiere of the Gran Mass. There he immediately became the centre of attention, and performed several times at soirees with music. At one such soiree organized by Gustav Doré on May 11th Liszt seized the opportunity to popularize his Dante Symphony and together with Saint-Saëns played extracts from it on the piano. In gratitude for the performance Doré presented the composer with an aquarelle, whose subject was *Dante and Virgil before the gates of Hell*.⁵⁰ A similar incident had happened a month previously, when Doré surprised the composer with an aquarelle on the subject of *Saint Francis of Paola walking on the waves*, which was connected to Liszt's work with the same title.⁵¹ Leaving Paris for Rome, Liszt took them with him. In a letter dated June 28th 1866 we learn that Liszt's visitors to his quarters on the Monte Mario were able to admire these works by Doré.⁵²

After this we are justified, therefore, in thinking that behind the gift in 1867 of the galvanoplastic replica depicting scenes from the *Divina Commedia* lies the success of the Dante Symphony. The donor was Cardinal Gustav von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, a close friend of Liszt, from whom he received the minor orders of the church on April 25th 1865 in the cardinal's private chapel in the Vatican.⁵³ Nothing better illustrates their intimate friendship than that for a long time the cardinal shared his quarters in the Vatican with Liszt from April 1865 to June 1866, plus receiving Liszt as a guest times without number in his residence at Tivoli, the Villa d'Este.

The person of the donor certainly means that the gift was probably presented in Rome, where at the end of 1866 Liszt's symphony, after its great success, was again performed at the Dante Galeria.⁵⁴ Also worth mentioning is that Liszt was later presented with a gift to commemorate the occasion of a performance in Rome of his Dante Symphony: the Società Orchestrale

⁵⁰ The aquarelle is in the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts (SZM 1905.1963), a copy is in the Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum. A caption in the lower right hand corner reads: d'après la symphonie de l'abbé Liszt/ G. Doré. 42.4 × 32 cm. LM cat. 106/a. See V. Kaposy: "Dessins de Gustave Dorée au Musée des Beaux-Arts." *Bulletin du Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts*. (83)1995, 147–150.

⁵¹ The original of the St Francis of Paola aquarelle is in the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts, a copy is in the Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum. On the circumstances of the presentation of the two aquarelles, see Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum cat. 106/b. Kaposy, op. cit., 149–150.

⁵² "... j'ai repris mon ancienne demeure au Monte Mario à la Madonna del Rosario. Les plus illustres ornements de ma chambre sont maintenant les deux dessins que je dois à l'amicale munificence de Gustave Doré: St François sur les flots et Dante à l'entrée de la cité des douleurs. Tous mes visiteurs indigènes et étrangers les admirent, et je vous prie de me rappeler cordialement au souvenir de leur auteur." To Rossini June 28th 1866. *Franz Liszt's Briefe*. Ed. La Mara. VIII. Leipzig 1905, no. 143. Quoted in Kaposy, op. cit., 149–150.

⁵³ A. Walker: *Franz Liszt III. The Final Years. 1861–1886*. New York 1996, 85–90, 164–165, 330–334.

⁵⁴ Liszt was surprised by this success, as we learn from his letter to Agnes Street-Klindworth dated 24th November 1866. La Mara, op. cit., III, 188–190. 1867. On July 6th another Liszt premiere was held at the Dante Galeria: extracts were performed from his oratorio *Christus*. Legány, op. cit., 42.

Romana surprised the composer on December 6th 1881 with an ornamentally bound dedicated copy of the *Divina Commedia*.⁵⁵

The personal nature and exceptional quality of the galvanoplastic replica owned by Liszt allows us to conclude that we are dealing here with a unique object presented as a gift. The dark red velvet covering the wooden base is a reference to the donor, cardinal Hohenlohe, the gift in this way being converted into an object representative of a prince of the church. As whoever made the replica must have known the Dante drawing at the time owned by Johannes the king of Saxony, we must assume that Hohenlohe may have acted as an intermediary. The question is, how did the cardinal know of the drawing's existence. For a long time it seemed that this question could not be answered, until helpful information turned up in a letter of Liszt written on January 1st 1866 to his friend Baron Antal Augusz. From this letter we learn that the patron of the inauguration of the Dante Galeria was none other than the ruler of Saxony, King Johannes.⁵⁶

In possession of this knowledge, the circumstances of the commission can be reconstructed as follows. The inauguration of the Dante Galeria provided the occasion for Liszt and his circle to come into contact with the ruler of Saxony. Johannes may have spoken to Hohenlohe of the Cornelius drawing he owned, upon which the cardinal perhaps decided to surprise the composer with a gift to match his music, and have a piece of smith's work made based on the Dante drawing. The cardinal's intentions may have been confirmed by the Dante drawing by Doré which he had probably seen in Liszt's apartment in Rome, the story of whose acquisition he was familiar with.⁵⁷ Since the galvanoplastic replica had captions naming the figures, whoever made it needed the assistance of a Dante expert in identifying them. This was probably King Johannes himself, who could have had recourse to Döllinger's commentaries written for the lithographs of Cornelius's Dante drawing published in 1830. King Johannes's renown as a collector of books on Dante allows us to assume that he had a copy, with the aid of which the identity of the figures portrayed could easily be established.

⁵⁵ The dedication is given in: *Franz Liszt's Estate at the Budapest Academy of Music. I. Books*. Edited and compiled by M. Eckhardt. Budapest 1986, no. 46. Walker, op. cit., III. P. 439. My acquaintance with the Budapest Dante volume is due to the kind offices of Mária Eckhardt.

⁵⁶ "Sa Majesté le Roi de Saxe a daigné accepter le titre de protecteur de la société." Liszt to Baron Antal Augusz, Rome, January 1st 1866. *Franz Liszt's Briefe an Baron Anton Augusz. 1846–1878*. Hrsg. W. von Csapó. Budapest 1911, no. 35.

⁵⁷ The galvanoplastic replica, together with the Doré drawings, may already have come to Pest at the beginning of January 1872, when a permanent apartment was available for Liszt. At least, Liszt thanked the Princess Wittgenstein in a letter written from Pest on January 10th 1872 for sending his things from Rome, including works of art. "A mon retour de Vienne, je trouve ici les 7 ou 8 caisses – contenant les livres, dessins, *objets d'art*, pianos, etc. de mon établissement de Rome, que vous avez en l'extrême bonté de me faire expédier." La Mara, op. cit., VI, no. 301.

This may have been how Cornelius's composition came to be realized – though with a genre and function differing from his original intentions – in the form of a ready made object of art, a galvanoplastic replica reminiscent of an ornamental plate. This piece of smith's work acted as a souvenir of the successful performances in Rome of Liszt's Dante Symphony, of the donor, and of Cornelius, the friend whom Liszt admired so much as an artist, and who died the year the replica was presented to the composer.