



Figure 01 : Tête du Christ - Léonard de Vinci

SUMMARY : LEONARDO DA VINCI, AND THE CHRIST CARRYING THE CROSS

This in-depth study aims to explore the connection between the Head of Christ drawing from Venice¹, a work by Leonardo da Vinci depicting Christ's head during the Passion, and the numerous representations of Christ Carrying the Cross created by artists from his circle, primarily Lombard and Venetian painters of the early 16th century. The central question is whether these paintings originate from a lost original by Leonardo or from a cartoon (preparatory drawing) he may have created.

Context and Methodology

- The *Venice Drawing*: Dated between 1490-1495, this silverpoint drawing is a '*ritratto di spalla*' (shoulder-length portrait), an innovation by Leonardo. It captures a moment of intense emotion as Christ turns toward the viewer.
- Historiography: Historians such as Suida, Pedretti, Marani, and Brown have suggested the existence of a Leonardesque prototype.
- Method: The study compares the *Venice Drawing* with a selection of paintings using an analytical grid based on nine criteria derived from the drawing itself (shoulder-length portrait, gaze orientation, presence of the hand pulling the hair, etc.).

Analysis of the Works

- Venetian Painters (Giorgione, Bellini): While some historians have noted a possible influence, Venetian works diverge from the *Venice Drawing*. Bellini's work does not correspond to a shoulder-length portrait, while Giorgione's approaches a profile representation, moving away from Leonardo's model.
- Milanese Painters (Giampietrino, Solario, Luini): These artists show a greater affinity with the *Venice Drawing*, particularly through the use of the '*ritratto di spalla*'. Giampietrino stands out for his prolific production of copies and variations, suggesting privileged access to a Leonardesque model.
- Special Cases:
 - Cesare da Sesto: His work presents a unique depiction of Christ and the cross.
 - Il Sodoma: Although Siennese, he is included due to his possible time in Milan and stylistic similarities.
 - Works with Two Executioners: The versions from Castello Sforzesco and the Malaspina Pinacoteca in Pavia are unique in showing the hand pulling the hair, but their quality is considered inferior.

Synthesis and Discussion

- Milanese Model: Milanese painters, particularly Giampietrino, Solario, and Luini, exhibit strong stylistic consistency, suggesting a common model.

1 : 'Head of Christ of Venice and Hand Pulling the Hair', Galleria dell' Accademia Venice (N°231)

- Giampietrino: His work is the most closely related to the *Venice Drawing*.
- Analysis of figure outlines reveals a striking similarity. His workshop likely had access to a Leonardesque cartoon.



Figure 02 : Giampietrino
Budapest



Figure 03 : Solario
Borghese Gallery

- Solario: His work shares similarities with Giampietrino, particularly in the drapery, but differs in anatomical choices.

- The Hand Pulling the Hair: Only the works from Castello Sforzesco and the Malaspina Pinacoteca in Pavia include this detail, suggesting a specific model.

The Hypothesis of Leonardo's Original Work

Arguments in Favor:

- Historians agree on the possible existence of a prototype.
- The *Venice Drawing* is a preparatory study, not a finished work.
- Giampietrino had privileged access to Leonardo's works.

Arguments Against:

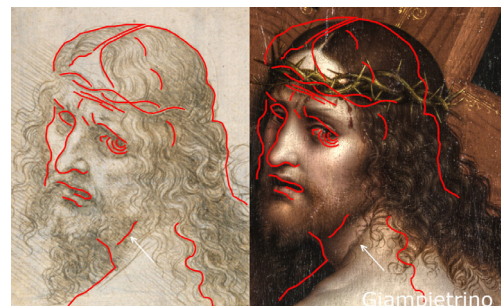
- No known work by Leonardo depicts this theme.
- Milanese works show divergences from the *Venice Drawing*²

Conclusion

While it is impossible to assert with certainty the existence of a lost original by Leonardo depicting Christ Carrying the Cross, this study highlights that:

- The *Venice Drawing* had a significant influence on Milanese artists of the early 16th century.
- Among the artists studied, Giampietrino's *Christ Carrying the Cross* is the most closely related to the *Venice Drawing*, suggesting privileged access to a Leonardesque model.

Figure 04 : Transfer of the outlines from the
Drawing onto Giampietrino's reversed portrait



- The hypothesis of a lost Leonardo original remains plausible, but other factors (patron influence, personal stylistic choices) may have shaped the artists' works.

Ultimately, this research enhances our understanding of Leonardo's workshop and the dissemination of his artistic ideas while underscoring the complexity of attribution and interpretation in art history.

² : However, in Giampietrino's case, some evidence suggests a more explicit connection to the Master.