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Source: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Jun., 1978), pp. 235-241

Published by: [College Art Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3049779>

Accessed: 14/06/2014 02:20

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The Proportions of Ghiberti's *Saint Stephen*: Vitruvius's *De Architectura* and Alberti's *De Statua**

Piero Morselli

Ghiberti's *Saint Stephen*, commissioned by the Arte della Lana for its tabernacle at Orsanmichele, is the last of three bronze sculptures executed by the artist for the decorative program of the Florentine *Oratorio* (Fig. 1).¹ Although Ghiberti himself praised the statue in his *Commentarii* as one "fatta con grande diligentia,"² the *Saint Stephen* has often been regarded as a faltering step in the artist's career. Recently Krautheimer pointed to it as an example of the artist's unsuccessful solution

to the problem of large-scale sculpture,³ and Seymour referred to it as "Ghiberti's homage to the medieval style of the original Trecento marble image which his own displaced."⁴

I shall show, however, that precisely those characteristics of Ghiberti's *Saint Stephen* which have seemed most problematic mark it as belonging to that revolutionary period in the development of the Early Renaissance when new artistic aims were formulated that consciously departed from earlier

* I am indebted to Professor David Summers, University of Pittsburgh, for his generous assistance with the parts of this study dealing with proportion. I also wish to thank Professor David Wilkins, University of Pittsburgh, and Dr. Diane Zervas, Villa I Tatti, Florence, for helpful suggestions concerning the final form of this article.

N. B. A bibliography of frequently cited sources follows the footnotes.

¹ The extant documents (admirably analyzed by Krautheimer) reveal the history of the *Saint Stephen* in general outline. The statue of the young protomartyr was commissioned in the spring or summer of 1425 by the powerful Wool Guild (Arte della Lana) to replace an old marble *Saint Stephen* which had occupied the Guild's niche at Orsanmichele since ca. 1399 (now in the museum of the Opera del Duomo). W. and E. Paatz, *Die Kirchen von Florenz: Ein Kunstgeschichtliches Handbuch*, Frankfurt am Main, 1940ff, IV, 504 and n. 177. This old work was thought to have been surpassed in style and beauty by the modern bronze statues of the Lana's strongest competitors, the Calimala and the Cambio. The commission document clearly reveals the Guild's intention to beautify the existing niche and to replace the statue of its patron saint so that ". . . dictum pilastrum vel in pulcritudine et ornamenta excedat val saltem possit in ornamento pulcrioribus adequari"; Krautheimer, Doc. 107, dig. 114. A presentation drawing was executed in Ghiberti's workshop probably shortly after (in ca. 1425) for the committee of the Arte della Lana. (The drawing was first identified in the Louvre and attributed to Ghiberti by H. Kauffmann, "Eine Ghibertizeichnung im Louvre," *Jahrbuch der preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, L, 1929, ff; Krautheimer, 97-98, n. 19, sees it as Ghiberti's first project for the *Saint Stephen*. Cf. also Middeldorf, 190, who attributes it to Fra Angelico.) By February 1, 1429 the figure of the *Saint Stephen* was in position in the Guild's old niche which, for still unknown reasons, was not modernized. It is not unlikely that the actual installation of the statue took place on December 26, 1428, the feast of the patron saint of the Guild.

² Ghiberti refers to the commissions in his *Commentarii*: "Tolsi a'ffare dai governatori dell'arte della lana una statua d'ottone di braccia quattro et mezo la quale statua puosono nello oratorio d'Orto sancto michele, la quale statua è fatta per sancto Stephano martire la quale secondo l'opere mie fu fatta con grande diligentia"; Ghiberti, I, 48. Ghiberti's words of praise for the *Saint Stephen* contrast with his dry, business-like description of the Calimala *Saint John the Baptist* and the Cambio *Saint Matthew*. This may be indicative of the artist's pride in this specific work.

³ Krautheimer, 100. The same writer explained the small scale of the *Saint Stephen* (compared to Ghiberti's previous works at Orsanmichele) in light of the Guild's difficult financial situation and Ghiberti's preoccupation with the impending commission for the Paradise doors; *ibid.*, 96. Krautheimer's conclusions should be reconsidered for the following reasons: although by 1427 the Arte della Lana had called a temporary halt to payments for statuary of the Cathedral because of the Florentine war against Milan (see Seymour, 87), on August 5, 1427, the Guild ordered four thousand pounds of bronze for the casting of the *Saint Stephen*; Krautheimer, Doc. 111, dig. 140. It becomes evident that despite the critical times, the Lana did not place any restriction on the amount of bronze and money then thought to be

necessary for the statue of its patron saint. Nor is there any documentary evidence that the Guild cancelled or tried to cancel part of the order thereafter. That the entire amount of material was surely delivered in full is attested to by a later document (*ibid.*, Doc. 113, dig. 154) which refers to the Lana's intention to sell a considerable quantity of surplus bronze from the casting of the *Saint Stephen*. This material, 1666½ pounds, was sold three years later (1430) to the Opera del Duomo for one hundred florins (*ibid.*, dig. 169), a price considerably below the current market (*ibid.*, 46, n. 6, and Docs. 19, 121, dig. 78). Neither can Ghiberti's preoccupation with the commission of the Paradise doors explain the reduced size of the *Saint Stephen*. First, the artist was not new to an experience of this kind and was well suited artistically and technically to handle such situations. Second, by the fall of 1428, a time which is generally agreed upon as Ghiberti's beginning of the actual work on the east doors of the Florentine Baptistry, the *Saint Stephen* must have been at the advanced state of chasing and polishing, procedures generally left to the various assistants. The reason(s) for the small scale of the *Saint Stephen* must then be sought elsewhere.

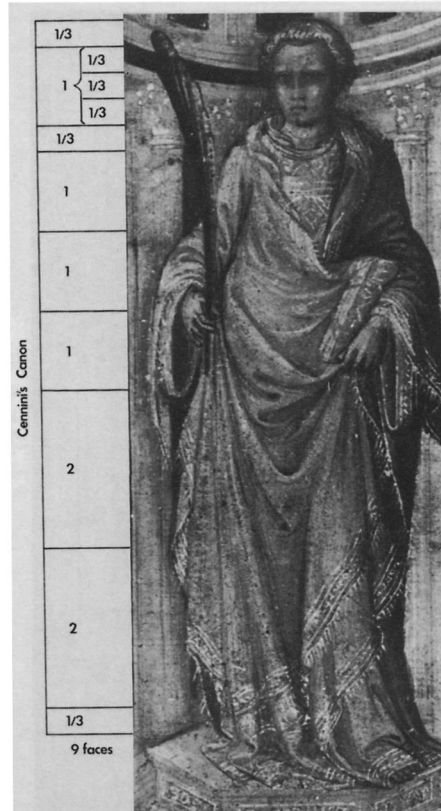
A more plausible answer can be found in the possible use of the geometric proportional method applied at Orsanmichele to adapt the statues to their tabernacles. Recently Ghiberti's use of a traditional geometric relationship has been associated with his establishment of the height of the *Saint Matthew* and its base in relation to its tabernacle. See Zervas, 36-44; cf. also her "Systems of Design and Proportion used by Ghiberti, Donatello and Michelozzo in Their Large-scale Sculpture Ensembles between 1412-34," Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1973, I, 3. The method also provides that the combined height of the statue and base should equal half the total tabernacle height. The practice appears to have been a standard one for the Orsanmichele ensembles: Zervas, n. 18. Actual measurements tend to confirm this view. Zervas's observation on a heretofore neglected aspect of the Orsanmichele sculptural program may explain the small size of the *Saint Stephen*.

Although the commission document of 1425 for the *Saint Stephen* seems to indicate that the Guild intended to remodel the old niche (see note 1), this was never accomplished and the new bronze statue was placed in the extant niche. When Ghiberti was faced with the task of casting a statue for the niche, he must have been forced to adjust its size to the old tabernacle in order to reach a proportional relationship in harmonic balance with the other ensembles of the *Oratorio*. The measurements of the *Saint Stephen* and its tabernacle seem to indicate that he did just that. The height of the present statue is 230cm and the base is 20.8cm. There are indications, however, that the *Saint Stephen* may have originally carried a halo; cf. Krautheimer, 97, n. 16. As the view of the statue in its niche was necessarily from below, the halo, in order to be seen properly *di sotto in su*, must have been supported on a rod of at least 15-16cm protruding from the head. Thus the total height of the statue (base and figure with halo) can be considered to have been ca. 265-67cm, strikingly close to half the height of the tabernacle, whose measurement is ca. 533cm. (The height of the tabernacle can only be approximated; the present weathered state of the stone at the base and at the top precludes an accurate measurement.)

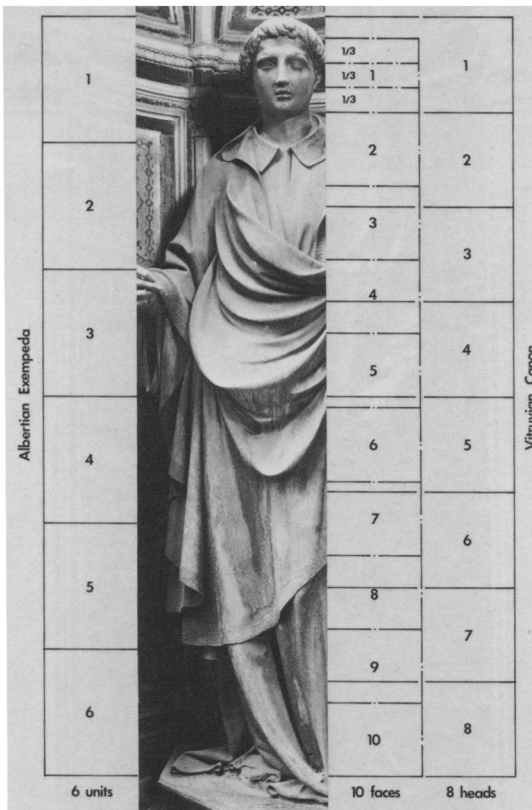
⁴ Seymour, 73.



1 Ghiberti, *Saint Stephen*. Florence, Orsanmichele (photo: Alinari)



2 Ghiberti (workshop?), *Saint Stephen*, presentation drawing with Cennini's canon of proportion added. Paris, Louvre (photo: Cabinet des Estampes)



3 Ghiberti, *Saint Stephen*, with Vitruvian and Albertian measurements added. Florence, Orsanmichele (photo: Alinari)

workshop practices. To be precise, the statue reflects a concern with new systems of proportion. In fact, the transformation of the project from its early phase, presumably recorded in a drawing now in the Louvre,⁵ to the bronze that Ghiberti finally cast, demonstrates a transition from medieval to Renaissance ideas about the proportions of the human figure and the significance of those proportions. Whereas the preparatory drawing follows the traditional workshop canon as set down for us by Cennino Cennini (Fig. 2), the bronze conforms to two different and new canons (Fig. 3): one is ancient, corresponding to the measurements of Vitruvius, whereas the other is related to the modern *exempeda*, the measurement used by Alberti in his *De Statua*.⁶

The adaptation of the presentation drawing to Cennini's canon should not come as a surprise, for Ghiberti's previous works at Orsanmichele, the *Saint John the Baptist* and the *Saint Matthew*, are also governed by these traditional figural proportions.⁷ It is thus of prime importance that in the course of the project for the *Saint Stephen*, Ghiberti turned to significantly different concepts. As will be evident, the *Saint*

⁵ See above, note 1.

⁶ The constructional schemes of both canons presented in this study derive from calculations *in situ*.

⁷ Cf. Zervas, 37-38; 38, n. 14. For a different opinion of the *Saint Matthew*, see C. Seymour, "Some Aspects of Donatello's Method of Figure and Space Construction: Relationship with Alberti's *De Statua* and *Della Pittura*," in *Donatello e il suo tempo*, Florence, 1968, 195-206.

Stephen marks the first known attempt in the Renaissance to draw upon Vitruvius and Alberti for the construction of a figure.⁸ Whereas the use of Vitruvian proportions is significant in that it reflects humanistic trends in Florence in the first decades of the quattrocento, the use of the *exempeda* is more problematic. Alberti has not been thought to have been in Florence until 1434, and his presence as early as 1427 or 1428, the year in which Ghiberti cast the *Saint Stephen*, would raise important questions about the sequence of events in Florence in the second and third decade of the quattrocento.⁹ This brief study will not follow these implications; rather, it will simply consider the proportions evident in the *Saint Stephen*, the change that occurred in the proportions between the planning and the execution of the statue, and the evidence suggesting that one of the most radical changes in this process resulted from the intervention of Leon Battista Alberti.

The *Saint Stephen* as executed differs in several respects from its presentation drawing, which, as has been pointed out, undoubtedly reveals several trecento stylistic traits.¹⁰ In fact, measurements of the Louvre drawing also indicate that the data on proportions of the human figure set down by Cennini in his *Libro dell'arte*—the face divided into three equal parts (forehead, nose, and lower part including mouth and chin) and the body eight and two-thirds faces high (plus one-third for the distance of the hairline to the top of the head not mentioned by Cennini)¹¹—provide the drawing with its proportions (Fig. 2).¹²

On the other hand, the finished bronze in its liveliness and

organic clarity shows that the artist altered the medieval abstraction of the presentation drawing in favor of a more classical vocabulary. It has not been recognized, however, that this shift is largely the result of a change in proportion governing the statue. The face of the statue of the *Saint Stephen* is also constructed according to a division into thirds, a familiar feature in traditional canons¹³ which originated in Vitruvius's text (Fig. 3).¹⁴ The rest of the body derives much more directly from the Roman text and clearly conforms to the Vitruvian fractional measurements of the human figure, which specify that “. . . the face from the chin to the top of the forehead and the roots of the hair [should be] a tenth part; . . . [and] the head from the chin to the crown an eighth part.”¹⁵ Figure 3 shows the division of the *Saint Stephen* according to such a prescription.

It must be noted, however, that Ghiberti's statue does not seem to conform to the Vitruvian specification of the placement of the midpoint of the figure at the navel.¹⁶ Rather, the midpoint appears to be at the pelvis. This is not surprising, for the emendation, which will become a typical Renaissance feature,¹⁷ may, in the *Saint Stephen*, be understood in the context of the Albertian *exempeda* or, equally, with respect to Ghiberti's own emendation of the Vitruvian canon in his *Commentarii*: “. . . Non mi pare del centro sia el bellico, parmi debba essere dove è 'l membro genitale e dove è nasce, ovvero ov'è la inforcatura humana.”¹⁸ This and the adaptation of the *Saint Stephen* to the Vitruvian specifications neglected by medieval artists,¹⁹ although Vitruvian manuscripts were

⁸ Krautheimer, 100, noted in the *Saint Stephen* a ratio of 1:8 between the head and the body, but he did not pursue the concept further. Seymour, 73, on the other hand, saw in the statue the same Byzantine adaptation of the Vitruvian canon that he thinks also governs the *Saint Matthew*. (For a more exacting interpretation of the *Saint Matthew* figural proportions, see Zervas, 37-38). The fact, however, that the midpoint of the figure of the *Saint Stephen* seems to be situated at the pelvis and not at the navel as in Byzantine canons (see note 13) clearly reveals the 15th-century emendation of the Vitruvian canon. See the fundamental essay on human proportions of Panofsky, 90-91, n. 64.

⁹ Such as the date of Masaccio's death and the dating of Alberti's *De Statua*. Nevertheless, the argument here presented will indirectly support the opinion of the art critics who place Masaccio's death in 1428 and believe a dating of *De Statua* prior to 1435 (see below, notes 52, 55).

¹⁰ Krautheimer, 99.

¹¹ For the nine-faces canon derived from Cennini, cf. Panofsky.

¹² Cennino d'Andrea Cennini, *The Craftsman's Handbook, the Italian "Il Libro dell'Arte"*, trans. D. V. Thompson, Jr., New York, 1960, chap. 70, 48-49. See Zervas, 38, n. 14, who also acknowledges the conformity of the Louvre drawing to Cennini's canon.

¹³ As Panofsky, 90-91, n. 64, has pointed out, although Vitruvius's text was known in the Middle Ages (see below, note 20), only the data on the division of the face into thirds and the famous statement about the inscribability of the human figure into a square and a circle (described around the navel) were transmitted by medieval writers. The other specifications of the figure proportions were generally forgotten or neglected. A rare reference to the Vitruvian-derived ten-head module was

recently found by E. Battisti (*Encyclopedia of World Art*, London, XI, 726), in Ristoro d'Arezzo's *Della composizione del mondo*, 1282. Based on this discovery, Battisti associates the proportional measurements of the contemporaneous Cimabue crucifix in Arezzo with Vitruvius's canon.

¹⁴ Vitruvius, Bk. III, chap. 1, 159.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* In the *Saint Stephen* the anatomy of the body is somewhat obscured by the drapery. This does not preclude the reading of the Vitruvian canon in the statue, however, for the Roman writer, working with a fractional system, does not specify the division points of the body. In fact, it is by multiplying the head by eight and the face ten times (both elements here clearly visible) that Vitruvius obtains his overall proportions of the human figure, proportions which in the *Saint Stephen* conform precisely to his rule.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁷ See for instance, Ghiberti, I, 231; F. Giorgi, *Francisci Giorgii Veneti de harmonia mundi totius cantica tria*, Venice, 1525, cited by Panofsky, 91, n. 65; and Alberti, *On Sculpture*, 144, pl. 1, who was, to the best of my knowledge, the first writer to specify the midpoint of the human figure at the pelvis in his table of measurements appended to *De Statua*.

¹⁸ Ghiberti, I, 231. It is not to be excluded, however, that Ghiberti may possibly have derived this feature from Alberti. See above, note 17. Ghiberti's use in the *Commentarii* of ideas derived from his predecessors has not yet been satisfactorily investigated. An attempt to interpret a difficult passage of the *Commentarii* that may indicate Ghiberti's reference to previous writers, e.g., Alberti, was recently undertaken by Parronchi, 380-414. The issue, however, is still obscure and in need of further study.

¹⁹ See above, note 13.

known in Florence in the trecento,²⁰ make Ghiberti's statue the first figure in the round in quattrocento sculpture actually to break away from traditional workshop practice. This is consistent with Ghiberti's exploration of new artistic formulas in the second decade of the fifteenth century;²¹ it reflects the artist's known contacts with the Florentine circle of humanists,²² and is consistent with his enduring interest in studies of human proportions.²³

In his list of anthropometric data, Vitruvius stated that a foot is a sixth of the length of the body.²⁴ As the ancient writer set down his proportions of the human figure in a fractional system, however, he never specified the points of division of the human body. It was Leon Battista Alberti, the first Renaissance artist-theoretician, who proceeded to define the points of division of the human figure, in the table of principal measurements that he appended to *De Statua*. With mathematical specificity he expressed the divisions of the human figure in variable measurements, making the length of the figure commensurate with the proportions of the individual parts of the body. As far as his overall method of proportion is concerned, Alberti freed himself from tradition.²⁵ He divided the total length of the body into six equal feet (*pedes*), each foot into ten inches (*unceolae*), and each inch into ten smaller units (*minuta*).²⁶ He called this organic system the *exempeda*. If the *Saint Stephen* is divided into six equal parts, following Alberti's formula, a correspondence with Alberti's *exempeda* is obtained that is too precise to be accidental (Fig. 3). The first unit falls on the shin, the second

one above the knee (both points are defined by the position of the left knee clearly shown in the statue), the third at the pubis, the fourth at the lower edge of the sternum, the fifth close to the line of the shoulders, and the sixth at the top of the head, just as the Florentine humanist advocated in his *trattatello* on sculpture.²⁷ Furthermore, the placement of the midpoint of the body at the pelvis also accords with Alberti's proportional system.²⁸

With his table of principal measurements, derived from "the many bodies considered to be the most beautiful by those who know,"²⁹ Alberti sought the "perfect beauty distributed by Nature, as it were in fixed proportions, among many bodies. . . ." ³⁰ The qualities of harmonic simplicity, elegance of stance, and firmness that the statue of the *Saint Stephen* conveys reflect Vitruvian aesthetic theory, the concept of "symmetria,"³¹ and the mathematical and methodical discipline derived from Alberti. The outcome admirably carries out the biblical description of the young protomartyr: ". . . full of grace and fortitude" (Acts 6:8).

Ghiberti's abandonment, in the statue, of the traditional proportional measurements used in the presentation drawing reflects the development of the theory of sculptural proportions beyond medieval standards and establishes Ghiberti's last work at Orsanmichele as the first quattrocento monument in the round to reflect both classical and contemporary humanist ideas about human proportions. This dramatic change in Ghiberti's vocabulary was the result of a new attitude toward classicism which was most probably stimulated

²⁰ Vitruvian texts were diffused in Italy long before Poggio Bracciolini's well-known discovery in 1414 of the St. Gall text. After the first half of the trecento they were used by Petrarch, Boccaccio, Giovanni Dandi, and Niccolò Acciaiuoli: see L. Ciapponi, "Il de architectura di Vitruvio nel primo umanesimo," in *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, III, 1960, 59–99. See also J. von Schlosser, *Die Kunstliteratur, ein Handbuch zur Quellenkunde der neueren Kunstgeschichte*, Vienna, 1924, 219; and E. Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, New York, 1939, 39, n. 18. In addition to Bracciolini's text in Florence there existed several manuscripts of *De Architectura*. Boccaccio, for example, willed his copy of the Vitruvian text to a monk of S. Spirito in Florence in 1374 and, upon his death, the MS became part of the *parva libreria* of the convent. Niccolò Acciaiuoli, in a will dated 1359, bequeathed his copy to S. Lorenzo in Florence. See C. Krinsky, "Seventy-eight Vitruvian Manuscripts," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, III, 1967, 36–70.

²¹ Cf. Krautheimer, 100, for a discussion on Ghiberti's artistic aims in the late 1420's. See also Zervas, 36–44.

²² Ghiberti's friendship with Ambrogio Traversari and his association with Niccolò Niccoli, Leonardo Bruni, and other humanists has been long recognized. For a discussion of the relationship between Ghiberti and the Florentine humanists, cf. Krautheimer, 294, 305. See also Zervas, 36–44, for Ghiberti and Niccolò Niccoli. Moreover, it is relevant to note that one member of the four-man committee appointed by the Arte della Lana to supervise the work on the *Saint Stephen* was Alessandro degli Alessandri (Krautheimer, Docs. 111, 112, digests 140, 148), an influential personality in Florentine social and political circles and also a fervent humanist; cf. *Dizionario biografico*, s.v. "A. Alessandri," by G. Pampaloni. Alessandro, to whom Matteo Palmieri addressed the preface of his *Vita civile*, participated with Cosimo de' Medici, Domenico di Leon Buoninsegni, and others in the classical, theological, and philosophical discussions held at S. Spirito under the direction of the humanist Roberto de' Rossi; cf. M. Cosenza, I, 118 and IV, 3089. Alessandro's position as *Operaio* elected by the Wool Guild to supervise the work on the *Saint Stephen* assures his contact with Ghiberti and establishes an additional link between Ghiberti and the humanists.

²³ This is demonstrated by the third book of his *Commentarii*. Ghiberti's proud statement in Book Two that "etiandio che avesse avuto a fare figure grandi fuori de la naturale forma, [ho io] dato le regole a condurle con perfetta misura" (Ghiberti, I, 51), is also an indication of his knowledge of proportional rules and enduring interest in them. Coincidentally it should be noted that Middeldorf, 184, pointed out the possibility that the four saints in the wings of Fra Angelico's Linaiuoli Tabernacle (1433) were actually designed by Ghiberti and that they particularly recall the *Saint Stephen* in articulation and harmony. See also J. Pope-Hennessy, *Il Beato Angelico*, New York, 1974, 16. Middeldorf's observation is quite interesting in view of the fact that the figural proportions of the Linaiuoli's saints seem to approximate a combination of the Vitruvian and Albertian canons.

²⁴ Vitruvius, Bk. III, chap. I, 159.

²⁵ Although the relationship of the length of the foot to the height of the body is still loosely derived from Vitruvius.

²⁶ Alberti, *On Sculpture*, 125.

²⁷ Although, as previously mentioned, the anatomy of the *Saint Stephen* is hidden by the drapery, enough points of division that conform to the *exempeda* are clearly discernable—from the top of the head to the line of the shoulders, from the point above the knee to the shin, and from the shin to the sole of the foot—to suggest the statue's adherence to the Albertian canon. These points, in turn, proportionally indicate the location of the remaining two divisions according to Alberti, the pubis and the lower edge of the sternum, locations also confirmed by common knowledge of human anatomy.

²⁸ See above, note 17.

²⁹ Alberti, *On Sculpture*, 135.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ See Panofsky, 68–69, n. 19, for a discussion of Vitruvius's aesthetic theory.

by contacts with local humanist scholars and by the influence of the prophet of the grand new style, Leon Battista Alberti. The conformity of the *Saint Stephen* with a Vitruvian system of proportions does not necessarily imply Alberti's influence, for Vitruvius was a source easily available to Ghiberti in Florence. The statue's concordance with the *exempeda*, however, clearly suggests direct contact with Alberti and implies the artist's presence in Florence.

That the Signoria's ban on the Alberti family was lifted only on October 22 and 23, 1428,³² has led scholars and critics to conclude that Leon Battista did not visit Florence prior to this date.³³ This is not altogether justified. A visit by Alberti to Florence in late 1427–early 1428 and, consequently, a contact with Ghiberti are not implausible, on the basis of an evaluation of the Alberti family's political standing with the Signoria of Florence in the first decades of the fifteenth century and an assessment of the scarce available information on Alberti's movements of this period. Such a visit would have coincided, as we shall see, with a rethinking of the size of the *Saint Stephen*, the preparation of a new model or design, and the beginning of the procedures for casting the statue.

Since the early years of the fifteenth century, the Signoria, forced by powerful external forces to reconsider the harsh decree against the Alberti clan, showed signs of relaxing their attitude toward the exiled patrician family.³⁴ The strongest pressure came in the 1420s from continuous papal requests,³⁵ one of which, signed by Pope Martin V, was carried to the city in December 1425 by his faithful emissary, Giuliano Cesarini.³⁶ These strong diplomatic measures soon yielded positive results. In 1425, for instance, the Signoria returned to Alberto Alberti, pontifical treasurer in Bologna since 1420, all of his estate that had been previously confiscated.³⁷ In the same year, moreover, Alberti was made a canon of the Metropolitana Fiorentina (S. Maria del Fiore)³⁸ and, shortly thereafter, was nominated honorary Abbot of S. Savino in Pisa, then under Florentine domination.³⁹ These factors, besides showing symptoms of reconciliation between the

Signoria and the Alberti, also indicate Alberto's presence in Florence prior to October 1428. In 1426, furthermore, bans against the poet Francesco d'Altobianco degli Alberti, a relative of Leon Battista's exiled in Padua, and in 1427 against another member of the family, Giannozzo Alberti, were lifted.⁴⁰ The presence of the former in Florence is attested by a notarial document of 1427, which indicates that, in the same year, the young poet was in Florence attending to his own interest in a bank partnership.⁴¹

Thus, the repeal of the banishment of members of the Alberti family, their presence in Florence prior to October 1428, and, most significant, their participation in religious and commercial activities in the city clearly indicate the attenuation of the rivalry between the Signoria and the exiled family. This reinforces the possibility of a brief visit to Florence by Leon Battista prior to October 1428.

The lack of documentary information on Alberti's whereabouts from the time he took his degree in canon law in Bologna to his documented presence in Rome in 1432 has caused difficulties in tracing his movements during this period. Nonetheless, there are several indications that he went to Rome in late 1427 or 1428, shortly after receiving his degree.⁴² As Krautheimer has pointed out, this would have been the natural course of action for an intelligent young doctor in canon law looking for a proper position.⁴³ Moreover, the tenor of the papal bull that, in October 1432, appointed Alberti *abbreviator apostolicus* seems to date his appointment to the priorate of S. Martino in Gangalandi prior to 1431.⁴⁴ Finally, the strongest indication of his presence in Rome by at least 1428 is the preface to the Italian version of *Della pittura*.⁴⁵ If indeed he was in Rome, it is not unlikely that during the trip there he attempted to visit Florence, a necessary stop for a land journey from Bologna to Rome.⁴⁶ The circumstances would have been favorable, and it is quite improbable that Alberti would have been unaware of the less severe attitude of the Signoria toward his family. Certainly he must have kept himself informed of the situation and of his status as a member

³² Passerini, II, 367.

³³ On the other hand, a visit by Leon Battista Alberti in Florence after October 1428 has been frequently suggested: see Mancini, 67, and Michel, 60–61; Krautheimer, 318–19, does not exclude it and considers it perfectly possible. Grayson, 109, n. 2, thinks that a visit prior to 1434 is uncertain, although it may be inferred from the reference to Masaccio in the preface to *Della pittura*; and, L. B. Alberti, *L'Architettura*, trans. G. Orlandi, Milan, 1966, xi.

³⁴ In 1414, for instance, the Dieci di Balìa abolished the decree that forbade the Alberti women to occupy the family houses. By the same token the fine of one thousand florins to be levied if any of them married a Florentine was revoked. Cf. Florence, Archivio di Stato, *Consigli maggiori, provvisioni*, CIII, 17, 21; CIV, 16, 17, 25, 55, 58.

³⁵ On December 8, 1424, for instance, Martin V wrote an official letter to the Dieci di Balìa in favor of the Alberti: see Passerini, II, 344.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 166–67. Cesarini, professor of law at Padua, became Cardinal of S. Angelo in Rome in 1426. A powerful figure and a zealous friend of the humanists, he was considered the most distinguished cardinal of the 15th century; see Cosenza, V, 364.

³⁷ *Dizionario biografico*, s.v. "Alberto Alberti," by A. d'Addario.

³⁸ S. Salvini, *Catalogo cronologico de' canonici della chiesa metropolitana fiorentina*, Florence, 1782, n. 357; and *Dizionario biografico*, s.v. "A. Alberti," which corrects the date given by Salvini (1445). This is obviously incorrect as Alberti died in that year.

³⁹ *Dizionario biografico*, s.v. "A. Alberti."

⁴⁰ Mancini, 66.

⁴¹ R. Cessi, "Gli Alberti di Firenze in Padova," in *Archivio storico italiano*, XL, 1907, 257, n. 3.

⁴² Alberti appears to have received his degree in Bologna prior to 1428. See Mancini, "Nuovi documenti e notizie sulla vita di L. B. Alberti," *Archivio storico italiano*, XIX, 1887, 193–94. It is most likely that he had left the city by 1428 because the university was closed due to the civil strife (see *ibid.*, *Archivio storico*, 193–94, and Mancini, 61), which led to the expulsion of the papal legate Louis Aleman; see J. Beck, "Jacopo della Quercia's Design for the Porta Magna of San Petronio in Bologna," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, XXIV, 1965, 120, n. 12.

⁴³ Krautheimer, 318.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 318–320, for full discussion.

⁴⁶ In the 15th century Florence was the southern terminus of a major route across the Apennines. Traffic from the North converged at Bologna and then followed the roads over the mountains to Florence. From there travelers proceeded to Rome along two main arteries, one by way of Siena, the other via Arezzo and Perugia: see D. Sterpos, *Firenze-Roma, Comunicazioni stradali attraverso i tempi*, Novara, 1964, 92, 299, n. 24.

of the exiled family. Moreover, the temptation to visit Florence must have been great. Florence was, after all, the city of his fathers, a place he had never seen and, most important, a center of exciting artistic and scientific achievements. Alberti probably remained in the city for a short time as a guest of some influential reinstated member of his family. The person who comes to mind as the most likely host to the young doctor is Alberto Alberti. There are, indeed, several indications that strengthen this possibility.

It is known that Alberto Alberti had been living in Bologna precisely during the years in which Leon Battista Alberti was attending the University.⁴⁷ It is also a fact that these two members of the exiled family shared common interests. Both were intellectuals, both admired the arts, and as the brilliant career of Alberto and the canonical law studies of Leon Battista indicate, both were interested in ecclesiastical affairs. They probably kept in close contact and Alberto must have shown a benevolent concern for the young man, as Leon Battista's grateful and respectful words directed to his older relative in *Della famiglia* (1433–34) demonstrate.⁴⁸ An indication of the long-standing relationship between the two Alberti can be gathered from the fact that when Alberto was created Bishop of Camerino in Perugia in 1437, Leon Battista, who was then in Bologna, undertook a trip to the Umbrian city to attend the ceremony. This occasion must have impressed the young writer particularly for, directly upon his return to Bologna, he wrote his treatise, *Pontifex*. The booklet, written in Latin and dealing with the serious responsibilities of a bishop, was completed in only a few days.⁴⁹ By late 1427–early 1428, the time of the presumed visit by Leon Battista to Florence, Alberto had rented a house in the city,⁵⁰

most probably because of his frequent visits there to take care of his own interests and to fulfill the various responsibilities connected with his post as a canon of the Metropolitana. His particular position as canon and as an influential member of the pontifical court of Martin V would have made him the appropriate person to protect and shelter his young relative.

During his stay in Florence, Leon Battista, who already enjoyed some degree of celebrity in humanist circles in the late 1420's,⁵¹ could have met the Florentine artists whom he later mentions in the preface of *Della pittura*.⁵² Certainly he would have visited Ghiberti's *bottega* in Borgo Allegri, a place known to have been the center of spirited intellectual and artistic discussions.⁵³ It is highly likely that a meeting and an exchange of artistic opinions occurred at this time between Ghiberti, whose interest in humanistic notions and proportional theories is reflected in his writings and his works,⁵⁴ and Alberti, who was doubtless already grappling with the ideas that were, a few years later, to develop into *De Statua*.⁵⁵ Such discussions of theory could have been the stimulus for Ghiberti's essay in the application of a modular system of proportions in the *Saint Stephen*.

Finally, Alberti's stay in Florence would have corresponded with the preparation of a model for the *Saint Stephen* and the beginning of the casting. Although the *Saint Stephen* commission dates from 1425, the actual work on the statue could obviously not have gotten underway until the delivery of the bronze, which had been ordered only in August 1427.⁵⁶ There are, however, no documents referring to the date of the arrival of the bronze in Florence. The time needed for the various administrative procedures and for the transportation of the bronze-carrying oxcart from Venice, via Bologna, over the

⁴⁷ Alberto had been in Bologna at least since 1420, the year of his appointment by Pope Martin V as pontifical treasurer of Bologna. (See above.) Leon Battista was already in Bologna at the time of his father's death on May 28, 1421. See *Dizionario biografico*, s.v. "L. B. Alberti."

⁴⁸ Michel, 59, n. 2; Passerini, I, 170, n. 1; and Mancini, 62, who also sees Alberto's influence on Leon Battista's artistic vocation. Coincidentally, it is interesting to note that Leon Battista was himself a canon of the Metropolitan Church of Florence and was Abbot of S. Savino in Pisa, both positions previously held by Alberto; see Cosenza, v, 35A.

⁴⁹ *Dizionario biografico*, s.v. "L. B. Alberti"; and Mancini, 145, 147.

⁵⁰ Mancini, 69, n. 2.

⁵¹ The writings of Leon Battista during his years at the university and shortly thereafter must already have attracted the attention of the humanists to the brilliant young man. G. Holmes, *The Florentine Enlightenment 1400–1450*, New York, 1969, 86, points out that a hint of Alberti's coming celebrity is indicated by Panormita's verses in the *Hermaphroditus* (1425) praising Alberti's character, nobility of birth, talent, and physical beauty.

⁵² L. B. Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. J. R. Spencer, New Haven, 1975, 39. All the arguments about the date of Alberti's first meeting with the artists whom he mentions in the preface to *Della pittura* become meaningless once these meetings are dated in Florence during late 1427–early 1428. Above all, this dating would explain Alberti's mention of Luca della Robbia, whose presence in Rome prior to 1434 cannot be documented. The new date would also clarify the delicate problem of Alberti's meeting with Masaccio. If the latter's death took place in Rome in the summer or fall of 1428, as recent biographers seem to agree (see M. Pittaluga, *Masaccio*, Florence, 1935, 156–57; K. M. Clark, "An Early Quattrocento Triptych from Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome," *Burlington Magazine*, xcii, 1951, 338ff; U. Procacci, "Sulla Cronologia delle Opere di Masaccio e di Masolino tra il 1425 e il

1428," *Rivista d'arte*, xxviii, 1953, 3–55), then Alberti could only have met Masaccio in Florence before the painter's departure for Rome.

⁵³ See Ghiberti's letter (April 16, 1425) to the Sienean goldsmith-bronze worker Giovanni Turini; Krautheimer, Doc. 155, dig. 115.

⁵⁴ For Ghiberti as a humanist, see Schlosser, II, 1912, 10f; and Krautheimer, 306–314. For Ghiberti's experiments with proportional rules in late 1410 through the early 1420's, see Zervas, 36–44.

⁵⁵ The date of Alberti's *De Statua* has long been a controversial topic; nonetheless, recent scholarship seems to agree on the 1430's, just prior to *De Pictura* of 1435; cf. Michel, 1930, 20–21, and 384ff; Parronchi, 380–414; Seymour, 8, n. 12, 90; Krautheimer, 322, n. 33, does not commit himself but notices that the instruments Alberti describes in *De Statua* are fundamentally identical with the surveyor's transit employed in the *Descriptio Urbis Romae* which he dates to 1432–33. See also H. W. Janson, "The 'Image Made by Chance' in Renaissance Thought," *De Artibus Opuscula XL, Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. Millard Meiss, New York, 1961, 254, 66; and G. Becatti, "Leon Battista Alberti e l'Antico," in *Convegno internazionale nel V centenario di Leon Battista Alberti*, Rome, 1974, 56–57; on the other hand, a later date is suggested by J. Gadol, *Leon Battista Alberti, Universal Man of the Early Renaissance*, Chicago-London, 1969, 7; and by Alberti-Grayson, 5, 18–26. If the early dating of *De Statua* is accepted, and the presence of the *exempeda* in the *Saint Stephen* reinforces this view, then it seems conceivable that by 1427–28 Alberti would already have been thinking of the concepts he was to develop shortly thereafter in *De Statua*. Indeed, both the treatises on painting and on sculpture presuppose a good deal of preparatory thinking, a practice that Alberti seems customarily to have followed; see C. Grayson, "Notes on the Text of Some Vernacular Works of Leon Battista Alberti," *Rinascimento*, III, 1952, 200–244.

⁵⁶ See above, note 3.

tortuous roads across the Apennines to Florence,⁵⁷ would most probably have amounted to several months. Thus, it is conceivable that the delivery did not occur much before the end of 1427, possibly during December. The casting procedures could have started any time after this, probably in early 1428, and in the light of previous examples of similar nature, e.g., the *Saint Matthew*,⁵⁸ the figure would have occupied Ghiberti and his assistants for three or four months. A document of the Arte della Lana, dated June 30, 1428, attesting that the *Saint Stephen* was by this time in the process of completion and that the supervisory committee of the guild was empowered to make payments not exceeding one thousand florins, tends to confirm this chronology.⁵⁹

Although it is known that at the same time the bronze was ordered in August 1427 a "figura . . . de terra et cera" of Saint Stephen was ready,⁶⁰ the latter could not have been the model used for the casting of the final statue. An examination of the circumstances will support this view. The pompous words of the commission document⁶¹ and the purchase order of four thousand pounds of bronze (one thousand pounds more than for the *Saint Matthew*) strongly suggest that up to August 1427 the *Saint Stephen* was planned in a larger scale than the one subsequently used.⁶² Consequently, the model that the Lana document referred to must have reflected this greater size. That the finished statue, however, is smaller than those belonging to competitors which the Guild intended to equal and possibly to surpass⁶³ indicates that a decision to reduce the size of the statue could only have occurred between August 1427, when the bronze was bought, and the date, several months later, that marks the beginning of the final preparations for the casting. The Guild's decision to reuse the old tabernacle, thus forcing Ghiberti to adapt the size of the *Saint Stephen* to the existing niche, may have been the main cause underlying this

decision.⁶⁴ The large amount of surplus material can only be explained in this light, for it was certainly not due to mistakes by the Guild or the artist in estimating the material necessary. Thus, if this reasoning is correct, Ghiberti must have been engaged in the preparation of a second model for the casting of the Lana's patron saint sometime after August 1427. It is impossible to ascertain if the adaptation of the statue to the Vitruvian canon occurred at this time or already governed the previous model, but its adjustment to the *exempta* most probably took place during this period, a time which does not conflict with the possibility of Alberti's presence in Florence.

The *Saint Stephen* thus emerges as a significant achievement of Renaissance sculpture. Its figural proportions, reflecting ancient and humanistic modular ratios, add to our understanding of Ghiberti as a "humanist," and suggest Alberti's influence on the Florentine sculptor as early as 1427-28. This could have occurred only if Alberti was in Florence at a date prior to that generally assumed. Although the evidence in favor of Alberti's visit to Florence after his departure from Bologna is circumstantial, it is, nonetheless, given firm support by what Panofsky called "the primary material,"⁶⁵ by the adaptation of the *Saint Stephen* to Alberti's unique proportional rules.

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⁵⁷ A document related to Ghiberti's previous work at Orsanmichele, the *Saint Matthew*, reveals the route for a shipment of bronze from Venice to Florence. A. Doren, "Das Aktenbuch für Ghibertis Matthäusstatue an Or S. Michele zu Florenz," *Italienische Forschungen, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz*, 1, Berlin, 1906, 1ff., 31-32, Doc. 25. The material was carted through Ferrara, Bologna, and across the Apennines, to Florence. The document accurately details the numerous administrative expenses and *gabelle* (passage taxes) paid in Venice, Ferrara, Bologna, and Florence. These are further indications of the time-consuming procedures necessary before such a delivery reached its destination.

⁵⁸ Krautheimer, dig. 85.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Doc. 112, dig. 148. The cleaning and chasing of the statue, the most laborious and time-consuming procedure of the commission, would have occupied the remaining months until its completion and installation in the niche (see above, note 1).

⁶⁰ Krautheimer, Doc. 111, dig. 140. Most probably a figure modeled in wax and packed in clay to be used for the casting.

⁶¹ See above, note 1.

⁶² It is relevant to note that, as Krautheimer, 95, n. 15, pointed out, Ghiberti in the *Commentarii* gives the height of the *Saint Stephen* as four and a half *braccia*, adding roughly 40cm to the present height. This was probably the Guild's original stipulated measurement.

⁶³ See above, note 1.

⁶⁴ See above, note 3.

⁶⁵ Panofsky, "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, Garden City, N.Y., 1955, 1-25, originally published under the same title in *The Meaning of the Humanities*, ed. T. M. Greene, Princeton, 1940, 89-118, 10.