Leonardo's 'Remarkable Medical Abomination':
an Unpublished Letter
by Ottilie von Goethe

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IN THE SPRING of 1952 the Elmer Belt Library of Vinciana acquired at auction an autograph letter of Ottilie von Goethe, née Pogwisch (1796-1872), daughter-in-law of the great poet J.W. von Goethe.¹ In her letter Ottilie discusses a Leonardo drawing she had seen in a private collection. The late Kate T. Steinitz of the Belt Library and A.H. Scott-Elliot, formerly Keeper of Prints and Drawings in the Royal Library, Windsor Castle, devoted a fascinating correspondence to our letter thirty years ago. Steinitz and Scott-Elliot suspected that the drawing seen by Ottilie was the famous 'fugitive' leaf with anatomical drawings that has been in the Schlossmuseum, Weimar, since at least the turn of the century.² This remarkable 'fugitive' has, of course, long been recognized as an escapee from the volume of anatomical studies at Windsor Castle now known as Anatomical MS. B, where its erstwhile conjugate leaf, folio 54 in the new Keele-Pedretti foliation, remains. Realizing that our letter might shed light on the mysterious interim provenance of the Weimar leaf, Steinitz and Scott-Elliot looked forward to its eventual publication. But the letter, as we shall see, presents puzzles of its own, never resolved to their satisfaction. We are now in a position to unravel some of these puzzles and reproduce the letter here, offering also a critical transcription (see Appendix, Document 1) and an English translation. Two further documents in which Ottilie discusses the same drawing are then introduced in order to elucidate the letter. By way of conclusion we attempt briefly to suggest the significance of our letter for Leonardo scholarship. To anticipate: We shall not solve the 'Windsor-Weimar puzzle', indeed we hope to complicate it considerably, and thereby to raise new questions which may eventually contribute to its solution.

Here is Ottilie's letter in translation:³


³ My translation departs significantly from Steinitz' various drafts and hopefully captures something of the characteristic flavor of Ottilie's prose. The letter is undated and gives no indication of the name of the 'professor', nor of the address of either party.
Dear Professor,

Unfortunately I have been unable to avail myself again of your kind permission to admire your art treasures, since I have not gone out in weeks and shall hardly be able to repeat my attempt of yesterday. Closer to my heart, however, than my own pleasure, is a favor which, since I have not the slightest right to hope you will grant it, is hard for me to ask; yet I find I cannot forgo the attempt to be of service to my friend Prof. Seligmann. Of course I wrote to him immediately after seeing at your place the remarkable medical abomination [die merkwürdig medicinische Abscheulichkeit] by Leonardo, and it seems that the leaf has never been engraved, so of course if you were to permit a copy to be made, I would give him the greatest pleasure therewith. Whether you will grant this I do not know, and believe me, however forward this sounds, I am suppressing a whole litany of requests. In any case please permit me, if ever I am well enough again, to view your studio.

Most devotedly,
Ottilie v. Goethe

Our letter is undated, and Steinitz' untiring attempts at ascertaining its date were frustrated at every turn. Nor could the identity of the 'professor' to whom the letter is addressed be readily determined. A later hand has appended at the end of our letter a note in pencil: 'Goethes Schwiegertochter an den Maler Sohn-Rethel' (Goethe's daughter-in-law to the painter Sohn-Rethel); and on the back of the second sheet of the letter we again find in pencil the name Sohn-Rethel. The catalogue entry of Ernst Hauswedell of Hamburg, from whom the Belt Library purchased the letter, suggests that these notes are his; it reads: 'Bittet (den Maler Sohn-Rethel) für ihren Freund, Prof. Seligmann, um die Erlaubnis, ein Blatt von Leonardo ('die merkwürdig medicinische Abscheulichkeit') kopieren zu dürfen' [Asks (the painter Sohn-Rethel) for permission to copy a leaf by Leonardo ('the remarkable medical abomination')] for her friend, Prof. Seligmann).4 This identification is spurious but instructive. Three painters with the surname Sohn-Rethel were active in late nineteenth-century Germany: the brothers Alfred (b. 1875), Carl Ernst (b. 1882) and Otto (b. 1877); all were born after Ottilie von Goethe died in 1872.5 Realizing this, Steinitz and her fellow detective Scott-Elliot considered the possibility that our letter was actually written to an elder member of the family. For the Sohn-Rethel brothers represented only the third generation of the two eminent Düsseldorf families of painters, Sohn and Rethel. Their father, Carl Rudolph Sohn (1845-1908), their uncle Richard (1814-1912), their cousin Wilhelm (1830-1899), and their grandfather Carl Ferdinand (1805-1864), were all painters. So, too, on occasion, were their mother Else Rethel and her father Alfred Rethel (1816-1859). Both Wilhelm and Carl Ferdinand Sohn taught at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art and could be considered prime candidates for the role of Ottilie's 'professor'.6 The reasoning of Steinitz and Scott-Elliot was sound, but our letter was in fact addressed to neither artist. We can now show that Ottilie's correspondent was the maternal great-grandfather of the brothers Sohn-Rethel, Professor August Grahl (1791-1868) of the Dresden Academy of Art.7

A lengthy entry in one of Ottilie's diaries in the Newberry Library, Chicago, dated Dresden, 23

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4 Hauswedell, p. 32, no. 226. I would like to thank the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, for providing me with a photocopy of this entry.
6 For the Rethels see Thieme-Becker, XXVIII, pp. 187 f.; for the Sohns, XXXI, pp. 216 f.
7 On Grahl see Thieme-Becker, XIV, pp. 491 f. Presumably our letter remained in the Sohn-Rethel family, which would explain Hauswedell's error. For convenience, here is a schematic family tree of the characters involved:

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October 1857, deals with the very episode recounted in our letter. The syntax of the original German is uncharacteristically convoluted and occasionally quite ungrammatical. We reproduce the German text (see Appendix, Document 2) and attempt to construe it in the following English translation:

_Friday 23 October_

... I had a bad headache. But since it was a nice day I nevertheless decided... to avail myself of Professor Grahl's permission and to view his collection... In no private, indeed in no public collection that I have ever heard of can one count by the dozens drawings by Raphael, Michelangelo and Correggio, all Italian painters being represented, and of masters of the second and third rank Grahl possessed more than fifty leaves. There were so many by Raphael that I cannot recall them all... By Correggio there were wonderful things... Michelangelo was also richly represented; but one of the most important leaves seemed to me to be a leaf by Leonardo on which were the two end and side groups of the _Last Supper_ by Leonardo. Christ was missing, so the two halves were separated by a white gap. I should have liked to hear Leonardo speak, to ask him why he did not remain faithful to this sketch, for he must of course have had weighty reasons, though to me at least it seemed more beautiful and livelier [than the mural]. In an engraving [of the painting] the left group, that is the left when one faces the leaf, has three heads, the last at the table, all three in profile; this is not so in the drawing, and on account of the compositional variety this is much more beautiful; and the other group, though basically the same [as in the painting] seems to me to be more lively. With Seligmann in mind, I asked him [Grahl] about such drawings as might prove that Leonardo drew not merely caricatures but actual cases of disease _nicht bloss Carikaturen, sondern wirklich Krankheitsfälle_. He said he had one of that type, perhaps the most horrifying, most dreadful _entsetzlichste, grauliachste_ imaginable, and for Seligmann's sake I asked him to show it to me. It is true, there is nothing more horrifying; it was truly dreadful; I described it to her that her friend Seligmann, also mentioned in our letter, was interested in Leonardo's anatomical studies, leading her to inquire whether the professor had any anatomical drawings by him.

Franz Romeo Seligmann (1808-1892), physician and professor of the history of medicine at the University of Vienna, was especially interested in comparative anatomy, which he studied in part from the perspective of racial theory. He even came to own a collection of skulls of different races, a product of a scientific expedition in which his brother participated in 1857-59; and in 1865 Seligmann toured the skull collections of Germany in connection with his research. He combined his professional activities with a keen interest in the history of art. Indeed, he had some talent as a draftsman and at one time considered a career as a sculptor.

Seligmann was one of Ottile's closest friends and had been her personal physician ever since he was called upon to deliver her illegitimate daughter in 1835. His visits were as regular as their exchange of letters, and Seligmann's name is ubiquitous in Ottile's diaries and letters from October 1857, deals with the very episode recounted in our letter. The syntax of the original German is uncharacteristically convoluted and occasionally quite ungrammatical. We reproduce the German text (see Appendix, Document 2) and attempt to construe it in the following English translation:

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Clearly this episode is the same as the one alluded to in our letter, which must, therefore, have been written some weeks later. Ottile had been in Dresden for more than a year and was ill, as our letter suggests, for weeks at a time. Grahl had extended the invitation to Ottile at their first meeting, in the Dresden Print Cabinet on 13 October 1857. We thus owe our letter about Leonardo's 'remarkable medical abomination' to the fact that Ottile felt well enough by the twenty-third to accept the professor's invitation. Let us now attempt to reconstruct the sequence of events that led Grahl to show Ottile the 'most horrifying, most dreadful' drawing imaginable. Grahl, as we have seen, first showed Ottile a drawing connected with Leonardo's _Last Supper_, perhaps a (lost?) preliminary study or a pupil's copy of one. This evidently reminded her that her friend Seligmann, also mentioned in our letter, was interested in Leonardo's anatomical studies, leading her to inquire whether the professor had any anatomical drawings by him.

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9 Tagebucher V, pp. 308 f.

10 For the following, see the entries on Seligmann in Neue Österreichische Biographie, 1815-1918, Vienna, 1926, VI, pp. 55-69; and in Biographisches Lexikon der hervorragenden Ärzte aller Zeiten und Völker, third ed., Munich, 1962, V, pp. 217 f. A contemporary curriculum vitae is in Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Österreich, Vienna, 1857, XXXIV, pp. 59-54. Cf. Hein Bluhm's authoritative editorial introductions to the various volumes of Ottile's diaries.
1835 until her death in 1872. Indeed, Seligmann was near the top of the list of men with whom Ottlie was hopelessly, and haplessly, in love. Seligmann was keenly interested in Leonardo’s anatomical studies. In 1854 he was in London, and we know that a letter of introduction from Ottlie enabled him to study the Leonardo anatomical drawings at Windsor Castle. He later expressed his gratitude to her: ‘Your letter to Phipps was of the greatest importance to me... because only through him was it possible for me to see the anatomical drawings by Leonardo da Vinci at Windsor, which were of the greatest interest to me’.

Seligmann’s preoccupation with Leonardo as an anatomist did not abate after his pilgrimage to Windsor Castle. He gave Ottlie a copy of A.F. Rio’s 1855 monograph on Leonardo for her sixtieth birthday, on 31 October 1856. She notes in her diary that she finished reading the book in July of the following year, and a few weeks later Seligmann visited her in Dresden. This was two months before the events in question, and his visit can only have reinforced in Ottlie’s mind the connection between her friend and Leonardo.

Thus it is that, ‘with Seligmann in mind’, Ottlie, upon examining the study of the Last Supper, thought to ask Professor Grahl whether he had any anatomical drawings by Leonardo. What precisely she asked for is as mysterious as the nature of the drawing Grahl produced in response to her query. Certainly, Ottlie’s transition from the Last Supper drawing to caricatures and then to cases of disease is a stunning non sequitur. Had Grahl mentioned or shown to her caricatures by Leonardo? Her diary certainly gives no indication of this.

11 ‘Ihr Brief an Phipps war mir von grösster Wichtigkeit... weil es mir nur durch ihn möglich war, die anatomischen Handzeichnungen von Leonardo da Vinci in Windsor zu sehen, die für mich von höchstem Interesse waren’. Seligmann’s letter is cited without date in Neue österreichische Biographie, VI, p. 66. Four hundred and fifty-three of Seligmann’s letters, including the one quoted here, are in the Goethe-Schiller Archive in Weimar; cf. Karl-Heinz Hahn, Goethe und Schiller-Archiv: Bestandsverzeichnis, Weimar, 1969, p. 128. The Phipps mentioned here is probably Ottlie’s erstwhile lover, Edmund Phipps (1808-1857), novelist and brother of Sir Charles Phipps (1801-1866), Keeper of the Privy Purse from 1849 to 1866 and previously (from 1847) Treasurer and Private Secretary to Prince Albert. This helps to explain how Ottlie’s letter of introduction got Seligmann into the Royal Library at Windsor. On Charles Phipps see Dictionary of National Biography, London, 1977, XV, p. 114. Ottlie may have written directly to the latter.


Seligmann may well have shared Rio’s opinion of Leonardo’s caricatures, ‘ces débauches d’imagination’. However that may be, given Seligmann’s keen interest in Leonardo’s anatomical studies, it seems quite likely that the physician had stressed to Ottlie that he was less interested in Leonardo’s caricatures than in any drawings depicting genuine medical phenomena, and that this occasioned Ottlie’s query. This would explain Ottlie’s pointed contrast between ‘mere caricatures’ (bloss Carikaturen) and ‘actual cases of disease’ (wirklich Krankheitsfälle). In that case it is entirely possible that the ‘most horrifying, most dreadful’ drawing shown to her by Grahl was in fact one of Leonardo’s more graphically explicit anatomical drawings, of which the Weimar leaf is certainly an outstanding example, rather than literally a study of a case of disease.

The fact remains that Ottlie found the mysterious drawing, as she variously puts it, ‘most horrifying, most dreadful’ and an ‘abomination’. Her use of these terms elsewhere in her diary leaves no doubt of the visceral nature of her response. She uses the reflexive form of the verb entsetzen when she ‘recoils in horror’ at the sight of a deathily ill Seligmann and adopts other forms when she fears she has wounded a son or sister. To be sure, she also uses gräulich and abscheulich rather formulaically to describe particularly ‘dreadful’ colds and ‘abominable’ weather. But she reserves the substantive Abscheulichkeit for emotionally charged subjects. When in her diary she discusses a painting by an unnamed Spanish master, she writes: ‘Another Spanish portrait of a young man... is in its abomination [seiner Abscheulichkeit, seiner Verworfenheit] so well painted, his character is so etched in his face, the evil rake with his shaggy hair, the blotches on his skin, the evil sparkling eyes which, as if alive, follow one...’ The subject of this painting, a rake or libertine (Wüstling), clearly had a powerful effect on Ottlie, and her paranoid response needs no commentary. But her diary entry confirms that Ottlie did indeed find the Leonardo drawing quite literally ‘abominable’.

We know that in true Victorian fashion, Ottlie expected the arts to be uplifting, to fulfill religious and moral needs, and to be a source of...
comfort; she never ceased to regard Art as a 'Sister of Mercy'. Ottile would scarcely have found any of Leonardo's anatomical drawings especially edifying, and the Weimar leaf, with its graphic studies of the human brain and, still more, the male and female genitalia, would surely have struck her as particularly abominable. A remark by the late Walter Scheidig, formerly Director of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Weimar, suggests that such a response would have been common in her circle. He writes 'that our anatomical drawing would have been consigned to destruction if Grand Duchess Sophie had seen it, is to my mind beyond doubt'.

If Grahl described his Leonardo drawing as 'most horrifying, most dreadful', no doubt the professor was trying to warn his refined guest that it might offend her sensibilities. She seems to have taken the hint, but she asked to see the drawing anyway 'for Seligmann's sake'. She then wrote to Seligmann about the drawing, 'and that is enough for me'. Ottile's letter to Seligmann (see Appendix, Document 3) is preserved among her correspondence in the Goethe-und Schiller-Archiv in Weimar. Here is how she describes the 'abomination' to Seligmann:

... I asked him for your sake, and he was entirely of the opinion that Leonardo found pleasure in reproducing ugly caricatures from nature, but that many drawings were rather reproductions of states of disease, not inventions. He said he owned perhaps the most horrifying [entsetzlichste] leaf of that sort which one could behold. In order to be able to describe it to you I let him show it to me. It was a head from which the nose was missing, and from which the two eyes emerged like two balls, so horrifying [entsetzlich] that having once seen it one cannot be free of it. It is drawn with the pen and in sepia. The two other much smaller heads which he showed me were, to be sure, ugly by virtue of their engregiously swollen noses; perhaps they were also diseased, but there was no comparison with the larger head. He expressed the opinion that the smaller heads might have been reproduced in engravings but the larger one certainly not. Naturally I wanted to secure a copy for you, but he seemed disinclined during an initial visit, and I shall now canvass my sources on every side.

This letter is informative on several scores. For one thing, Ottile indicates that Grahl owned several drawings by Leonardo: the 'abomination', the Last Supper study (also mentioned in her diary), and the two smaller, grotesque heads (only mentioned here). Indeed we know that two further Leonardo drawings from Grahl's collection were auctioned by Sotheby's in 1885: a sheet of Sketches of Children's Heads and a Female Profile. Most important for our purposes, however, is Ottile's explicit description of the 'abomination': 'It was a head from which the nose was missing, and from which the two eyes emerged like two balls.' That does not describe any of the studies on the Weimar leaf.

II

As we saw above, Kate Steinitz and Miss Scott-Elliot knew neither the date of Ottile's letter in the Belt Library, nor the name of her correspondent, nor the place of residence of either party. Nonetheless they suspected that Ottile's 'abomination' was actually the fugitive Weimar anatomical leaf. Steinitz allowed for the possibility that Ottile saw the drawing during one of her sojourns in Weimar, and both she and Scott-Elliot hoped that our letter might eventually shed light on the 'Windsor-Weimar puzzle'. Their expectation was quite reasonable. The Weimar leaf is, after all, the only 'medical' (anatomical) drawing by Leonardo known to have been in Germany in the late nineteenth century. The mere fact that Ottile actually saw her 'abomination' in 1857 in a private collection in Dresden rather than in Weimar, would not by itself preclude the possibility that it was the


19 'Dass' unsere anatomische Zeichnung bestimmt als unanständig vernichtet worden wäre, wenn sie der Grossherzogin Sophie unter die Augen gekommen wäre, steht meinem Frachtsens ausser Zweifel'. (Letter to Steinitz, 26 November 1963.)

20 I am grateful to the staff of the Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv in Weimar for kindly and expeditiously providing a photograph of Ottile's letter to Seligmann and for permission to quote it here. I am also profoundly grateful to Professor Heinz Bluhm, who on shamefully short notice took an entire day off from his own work to transcribe the autograph. His reading of the passage concerning Leonardo confirms my own.

21 Catalogue of the Drawings by the Old Masters formed by the late Professor August Grahl of Dresden which will be sold by auction... 27th day of April, 1885, and following day. London, 1885. Grahl's own attributions are 'strictly adhered to' in this catalogue, which only lists two Leonardo drawings: no. 345, described as 'Sketches of Children's Heads, pen and ink' (65 X 77 mm.) and no. 346, 'Female Profile, black chalk, retouched with lead pencil' (92 X 128 mm.).
Weimar leaf she saw. For we simply do not know how nor when the leaf made its way to Weimar. As Walther Scheidig, former Director of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Weimar, explained to Steinitz, the records of the Schlossmuseum itself show no trace of the leaf prior to its discovery in 1925 among a store of Italian drawings, where it was correctly labeled as a Leonardo.22 The leaf was first published by Emil Möller in 1930, but Eugène Müntz, in his great monograph on Leonardo of 1899, had already quoted a letter from Carl Ruland, Director of the Grand Ducal Museum in Weimar, describing the Weimar leaf.23 This is the earliest testimony of its presence there. In short, nothing we know about the provenance of the Weimar leaf precludes its having arrived in Weimar toward the end of the last century — conceivably, after Grahl’s death in 1868.

Yet we now know from Ottilie’s letter to Seligmann that the drawing she saw in Grahl’s collection in Dresden was in fact not the Weimar leaf. To be sure, the head from which ‘the two eyes emerged like two balls’ is reminiscent of the study of the optic nerves on the verso of the Weimar sheet. But none of the heads on this sheet is lacking a nose. What, then, can Ottilie have seen in Grahl’s collection?

We learn from the new Keele-Pedretti edition of the Windsor anatomicals that the Weimar leaf is almost certainly not the only leaf missing from Anatomical MS. B.24 Perhaps Ottilie was shown yet another fugitive leaf from the Windsor collection. Clearly we cannot be certain that this is the case, but the possibility should not be dismissed without further consideration. Ottilie expressly notes that the drawing was done with the pen in sepia, like the Weimar leaf and so many of the late anatomical studies. Moreover, her description strongly suggests a community of subject matter between the ‘abomination’ and the series of studies of the cerebral ventricles and the cranial and optical nerves which includes the Weimar leaf as well as Windsor folios 113 r 103 r and 32 r.

Supposing for the moment that Ottilie did see another fugitive anatomical leaf from Windsor, how might Grahl have acquired it? August Grahl was one of the leading portrait miniaturists of his day. He is known to have visited Windsor in 1831 and to have painted Queen Adelaide as well as numerous figures at court.25 It should be recalled that, according to Ottilie, Grahl’s work was highly prized in England and that, to quote her diary account, he ‘receives all the money he wants’. She also makes this point in her letter to Seligmann (see Appendix, Document 3). Perhaps Grahl’s own professional activities at Windsor somehow provided the occasion for the exodus not only of money, but of drawings as well. Also worth considering in this connection is the Raphael documentation project executed at the behest of Albert, the German-born Prince Consort of Queen Victoria.26 The Prince Consort, whose patronage of the arts is well known, was particularly interested in the collection of prints and drawings assembled by previous kings of England and preserved today at Windsor Castle. Toward the end of 1852 he resolved to assemble a complete collection of illustrations (engravings and photographs) of the works of Raphael. He placed his personal librarians, E. Becker and his successor Carl Ruland (1834-1907), in charge of the endeavor. Ruland, who left Windsor in 1870 to become Director of the Grand Ducal Collections in Weimar (!), remained in charge of the undertaking, and eventually published a catalogue of the collection, returning to Windsor occasionally to oversee its production.27 As we have seen, it was Ruland who first informed Eugène Müntz of the presence of the Leonardo leaf in the Schlossmuseum in Weimar.

As it happens, thirteen Raphael drawings from Grahl’s collection were reproduced for the Windsor initiative, so Grahl and Ruland must

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22 Cf. Scheidig’s letter to Steinitz of 9 May 1952: ‘Das Blatt lag bis ungefähr 1925 mit der richtigen Bestimmung Leonardo da Vinci unter unseren italienischen Zeichnungen des 15./16. Jahrhunderts. Irgendwann gab es über die Herkunft der Zeichnung festhalten’ (‘The leaf lay until 1925 with the correct label Leonardo da Vinci among our Italian drawings of the 15th and 16th centuries. It was never known of provenance could be discovered... As with many other leaves from our Print Collection I thus see no possibility of establishing the provenance of the drawing’).

23 Cf. Scheidig’s letter to Steinitz of 9 May 1952: ‘Das Blatt lag bis ungefähr 1925 mit der richtigen Bestimmung Leonardo da Vinci unter unseren italienischen Zeichnungen des 15./16. Jahrhunderts. Irgendwann gab es über die Herkunft der Zeichnung festhalten’ (‘The leaf lay until 1925 with the correct label Leonardo da Vinci among our Italian drawings of the 15th and 16th centuries. It was never known of provenance could be discovered... As with many other leaves from our Print Collection I thus see no possibility of establishing the provenance of the drawing’).

24 See Keele and Pedretti, pp. 82o ff., 910 ff.

25 Thieme-Becker, XIV, p. 491. The portrait of Queen Adelaide was engraved by Joshua Reynolds.


have been in contact.28 Could drawing(s) by Leonardo have passed at least temporarily into Grahl’s collection in connection with the Raphael project? The possibility that Ruland was responsible for the transfer of the Weimar leaf to the Grand Ducal collection also suggests itself. Interestingly, Ottilie mentions the Windsor photographic projects in her letter to Seligmann, applauding them because they might encourage ‘pirates’ like Grahl to allow their own drawings to be reproduced. Evidently the Windsor photographs were not for sale, but could be exchanged for reproductions of drawings in private collections.

We do not know what became of Ottilie’s ‘abomination’ after Grahl’s death in 1868. It certainly was not among the three-hundred fifty five drawings from his collection auctioned by Sotheby’s in London in 1885.29 But according to Lugt, most of the thousands of drawings from Grahl’s collection were deposited in a bank for over forty years, then auctioned in two lots by C.G. Boerner of Leipzig. Neither sale seems to have included any Leonardo drawings.30 We may assume, therefore, that the ‘abomination’ had already passed into other hands, presumably in Germany.

Precisely around 1860, as it happens, the Grand Duke of Weimar, Carl Alexander, resolved to make Weimar the center of the German art world. An art academy as well as a German national museum was conceived and the Duke’s plans were proclaimed officially in 1860 in Düsseldorf at a meeting of the Deutsche Kunstgenossenschaft. This strategy as a whole was inspired by Ottilie’s friend and erstwhile lover from Vienna, the poet Franz von Schober.31 That Ottilie herself sympathized with the Duke’s designs, and was willing to use the considerable influence of her name and position to foster them, can be proven. In 1862 Ottilie was approached by a friend and asked to use her influence to insure that the Dresden Print Cabinet got a Dürer sketchbook, formerly in the collection of the Austrian painter Leopold Kupelwieser (d. 1862). Ottilie preferred instead to intercede on behalf of the Grand Duke in Weimar. ‘I said that the Duke and Duchess gladly bought drawings’, she writes in her diary, ‘and that I would rather write first to Schuchardt’, the curator of the Grand Ducal collection.32

There is no evidence that Ottilie’s ‘abomination’ was ever in Weimar.33 What did become of it is, as we have seen, a mystery. The Weimar leaf, of course, did end up in the Grand Duke’s collection. Did Ottilie play a part in its acquisition? We may never know. Her diaries for the crucial last five years of her life, 1867-1872, which might hold the answer to this and many other pressing questions, have not been discovered.

Do we have at last in Ottilie von Goethe, August Grahl, Carl Ruland and their broad Anglo-German circle the missing pieces of the Windsor-Weimar puzzle? We invite historians and librarians, archivists and curators to tackle the puzzle anew.

28 See Ruland’s catalogue of the Raphael collection, passim.
29 See note 21.
30 F. Lugt, Les marques des collections des dessins & d’estampes, Amsterdam, 1921, no. 1199 (p. 210). After noting the Sotheby’s sale of 1885, Lugt says that most of Grahl’s drawings were auctioned by Boerner on 28 November 1912 and 19-20 March 1914. The 1912 auction catalogue does not include any drawings by Leonardo (see Auction CX: Manuscrits und Miniaturen des XII. bis XVI. Jahrhunderts; Handzeichnungen bei C.G. Boerner in Leipzig, 28 November 1912). I have been unable to locate a copy of the 1914 catalogue (Alt Handzeichnungen des XV-XVIII. Jahrhunderts), but am informed by the staff of C.G. Boerner (now Düsseldorf), that, pace Lugt, this sale did not in fact include any drawings from Grahl’s collection (personal communication).
31 Lugt further notes that some of Grahl’s drawings were sold at roughly the same time by A. Twietmeyer. The British Museum copy of the Sotheby catalogue of 1885 (see note 21) is annotated and shows that Twietmeyer bought many of the drawings at this auction. Presumably he then resold them.
32 ‘Fi Radziowsky frug ob ich nicht nach Dresden schreiben könnte um ein Album von Albrecht Dürer was in dem Nachlass von Kupelwieser sei, und die Familie gerne verkau­fen möchte, an Großer für die K. Sammlung anbieten. Ich sagte da die Grossherzogin u der Grossherzog gerne Handzeichnungen kaufen, wollte ich es lieber erst an Schuchardt schreiben’; Tagebücher V, p. 484 (16 January 1862).
33 Steinmür, pp. 140-4, who lists drawings by Leonardo and his school recorded as being at Weimar, cites nothing resembling Ottilie’s ‘abomination’. On the other hand, as Carlo Pedretti has shown (this volume, p. 145), everyone of those drawings, except for the anatomical leaf, had come from the collection of Sir Thomas Lawrence.
In the following transcriptions I have indicated line endings with a slash (/).

Document 1.

Ottilie von Goethe, letter to Professor August Grahl, undated (late 1857). Elmer Belt Library of Vinciana, UCLA.

Bester Herr Professor!


Ergebnis

Ottilie v Goethe

Freitag den 23. October

... ich sehr Kopfwend hatte. Das mal es mild war, so dachte ich trotzdem... von der Erlaubnis des Professor Grahl Gebrauch zu machen, und seine Sammlungen zu sehen... In keiner Privat Sammlung, ja in keiner öffentlichen, habe ich je [p. 2] gehört, das man Zeichnungen von Raphael von Michel Angelo, wo Correggio nach Dutzenden zählt, das auch alle italienischen Mahler vertreten waren, und das von den Meistern 2. u dritten Ranges, Grahl manchmal 50 Blätter besass: Von Raphael waren so viel dass ich mich nicht aller entzinnen kann [p. 3] Von Correggio waren wundervolle Sache... Michel Angelo war auch reichhaltig der, eines der bedeutendsten Blätter schien mir aber ein Blatt zu sein von Leonardo auf den die beiden End u Seiten des Adendmales von Leonar- do waren. Es fehlte Christos, so waren also nur 2 Hälfte durch eine weisse Lücke getrennt. Ich wollte ich hätte Leonardo sprechen hören, auszudruckend, warum er nicht diesem Entwurf treu geblieben, denn er musste natürlich sehr gewichtige Gründe haben, um dass er dies aufgab, was mir wenigstens in der Anordnung schöner u auch lebendiger erschien. [p. 4] Die linke Gruppe, das heisst die linke wenn man vor dem Blatt steht, hat ein Kupferstich der Köpfe, die letzten an der Tafel, die alle drei in Profil sind; dem ist schon nicht so in der Zeichnung, u durch die Manißfältigkeit der Stellung ist dies viel schöner, u auch die folgen- de Gruppe obgleich ziemlich dieselbe, scheint mir auch mehr Leben zu haben. Eingedenk Seligmanns fragte ich ihn nach solchen Zeichnungen, durch denen sich beweisen lassen, das Leonardo nicht bloß Carikaturen, sondern wirklich Krankheit im halsen zeichnete; er sagte er habe der Art, vielleicht dass entsetzlichste, gräulichste das man sich nur denken könne, u wegen Seligmann bat ich ihn es mir zu zeigen. Es ist wahr, dass es nichts entsetzlicheres gibt, es war wirklich gräulich; ich habe es [p. 5] an Seligmann beschrieben, das genüge mir... [p. 6] Professor Grahl... ist ein so berühmter u naheliehlich in Eng- land beliebter Portrait Mahler gewesen, das er... so viel Geld bekommen als er wollte; ausserdem war er auch 7 Jahre in Italien, u scheint Alles in seine Sammlung genug gesteckt zu haben, und zwar wohl noch ehe er die reiche Frau hatte. Ich habe nie eine ähnliche Sammlung gesehen... [p. 7]... Als ich fortging so lud mich Grahl nicht nur ein zu jeder Stunde und jeden Tag, sondern er sagte mir auch, wenn ich Oben das zu sehen wünschte, und sein Atelier hätte ich nur zu befählen...

Document 2.

Ottilie von Goethe, excerpt from diary entry for 23 October 1857. From diary 21 in the Newberry Library, Chicago. The text has been published in Tagebücher und Briefe von und an Ottilie von Goethe, ed. by Heinz Bluhm, Vienna and Frankfurt, 1962-1979, V., pp. 311-313. The following transcription, based upon an examination of the original manuscript in photocopy, differs slightly and insignificantly from the published version.
Ich frug ihn wegen Ihnen, er war vollkommen der Meinung das Leonardo Vergnügen gefunden, das hässliche Karikaturenhafte in der Natur auch nachzubilden, das aber viele Zeichnungen, eben getreue Nachbildung Krankheitszustände, nicht Erfindung sei. Er sagte er besitze vielleicht das entsetzlichste Blatt was man sehen könnte darüber, um es Ihnen beschreiben zu können, liess ich es mir zeigen; es war ein Kopf dem die Nase fehlte und die 2 Augen, wie 2 Bällen (?) heraus getreten waren, so entsetzlich das wenn man es einmal gesehen, man es nicht wieder los werden kann. Es ist mit der Feder gezeichnet und mit Sepia. Die beiden andern viel kleineren Köpfe die er mir zeigte, waren zwar wohl durch allzugrosse geschwollene Nasen usw. hässlich und vielleicht auch krank, aber es war kein Vergleich mit dem grösseren Kopf. Er meinte vielleicht waren die kleinen Köpfe gestochen, aber der grössere wohl gewiss nicht. Natürlich möchte ich Ihnen gerne eine Copie verschaffen, aber bei einer erster vierte schien er nicht geneigt, und ich will nun erst meine Erkundigungen nach allen Seiten einziehen.
1. Leonardo, Sheet of anatomical manuscript, c. 1506-8. Weimar, Schlossmuseum (recto).
2. Leonardo, Sheet of anatomical manuscript, c. 1506-8. Weimar, Schlossmuseum (verso).
Lasst ihr euch wissen:
zu Ihnen. Auf Ihre Zeit sehr
wünschenswert, auch wäre es
ihnen und den Männern geeignet,
jen Atelier auf zu setzen.

Anhän

[Unterschrift]

aus dem Museum - Rotz

5
6. Detail of Fig. 2.

7. RL 19070 v (K/P 113 r). Detail.

8. RL 12602 r (K/P 103 r). Detail.
9. RL 12603 r (K/P 32 r).