CHAPTER 5

Leonardo’s Cartonetti for Luca Pacioli’s Platonic Bodies

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The drawings of the sixty regular bodies that illustrate De divina proportione by Luca Pacioli in the parchment version in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, marked S.P. 6 (previously Cod. F 170 sup.), have been studied extensively.1 In De viribus quantitatis, Luca Pacioli recalls the graphic models executed by Leonardo’s “in-effabile senistra mano” ... “in detto libro ... qual ancora apresso di noi tenemo maravigliosi a ognuno che li mirano.” The work was destined for Galeazzo Sanseverino, Pacioli’s “peculiare patrone,” before passing into the hands of Galeazzo Arconati (later donated to the Ambrosiana in 1637 along with Leonardo’s famous manuscripts of which only the Codex Atlanticus is still in Milan, the others now being at the Institut de France in Paris). One could surmise that Pacioli did not mean that he possessed the book (despite the fact that the usage of the singular “qual” would lead us to believe this), since once finished it necessarily would have been handed over to Sanseverino. He refers instead to Leonardo’s preparatory drawings, today believed to be dispersed.2 However,

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1 See Alessandro Rovetta, “I dipinti di Leonardo e dei leonardeschi,” in L’Ambrosiana e Leonardo, exh. cat., Milan, Biblioteca-Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, 1 December 1998–30 April 1999, ed. Pietro C. Marani, Marco Rossi, Alessandro Rovetta (Novara: Interlinea, 1998), 134–139 (previous bibliography). There also exists a very good facsimile of De divina proportione in the Ambrosiana Library: Luca Pacioli. De divina proportione, introduction by Augusto Marinoni, “Fontes Ambrosiani in lucem editi cvra et stvdio Bibliothecae Ambrosianae,” LXXII (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 1982). Although of great use in the study of the illustrations, the following considerations are based on direct examination of the original by myself (along with the drawings of Leonardo’s Codex Atlanticus which will later be mentioned) on 16 September 2013. I would like to express my sincerest thanks to Franco Buzzi, Marco Navoni, Elena Fontana, Elisa Mantia, and all the staff at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana for the kindness and assistance shown to me, and to Christian Bayliss for the translation of my text.

2 Marinoni, in the accompanying booklet to the facsimile edition (see n. 1) also sustains that (p. 14) Pacioli kept for himself Leonardo’s original drawings, stating however that “nell’impossibilità di confrontare gli originali con queste copie è legittimo ritenere che la differenza sul piano estetico sia notevole,” and adding that “Noi non sappiamo se Leonardo numerò i suoi disegni originali. Conoscendo le sue abitudini siamo quasi sicuri che egli lavorasse su fogli ancora sciolti, seguendo l’ordine del testo ....” For quotation of Leonardo’s
the illustrations in the Ambrosian Codex are considered to be “the best copy of the original Vinci works” even though “the appearance of several of the sheets indicate considerable and direct intervention by Leonardo, especially in the drawing,” as confirmed by Martin Kemp. The almost picturelike, exceptionally fine finish of some of the bodies in the Ambrosiana copy, especially when compared to the lack of quality in others, point unequivocally to Leonardo at least concerning a part of the tables that bear evidence of very fine left-handed strokes in the shaded areas, for example, the bodies drawn on tables VIII, XI, XV, XVIII, XX–XXII, XXIX, XXX, and XXXV, on ff. 95 v, 96 v, 98 v, 100 v, 101 r, 101 v, 102 r, 106 v, 107 r, and 108 v, with beautiful drawings also on ff. 107 v, 108 r, 109 v, and 110 r. The many remaining drawings of the Ambrosiana manuscript are less refined than are those in the other known versions of the *De divina proportione*, kept at the Bibliothèque de Genève with the mark ms. Langues Étrangères 210. They are more flowing and almost monochrome, except for some prisms painted in violet, even though the amanuensis of the text in the Geneva Codex is the same as the Milanese: the copyist Giovanni Battista Lorenzi, who will soon be the subject of an exhibition in the Biblioteca Trivulziana at the Castello Sforzesco. I do not intend either to deal with problems related to the interpretation of the platonic bodies in this essay or to solve once and for all the problem of the authorship of the plates in the Ambrosian Codex. It seems prudent, however, to analyze the way Leonardo (and his assistants) transposed his drawings in at least three illustrated versions of the *De divina proportione* (as well as the two in Milan and Geneva; the third, the original destined for Ludovico il Moro, has yet to be found) and in a printed version published in Ven-


5 I have not however examined the original version of the Geneva Codex, of which there exists a recent and excellent facsimile just published by Aboca Museum Edizioni, Borgo San Sepolcro, 2010. This facsimile is accompanied by the volume *Antologia della Divina Proporzione di Luca Pacioli, Piero della Francesca e Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. Duilio Contini, Piergiorgio Odifreddi, Antonio Pieretti (Aboca: Borgo San Sepolcro, 2010), with a collection of essays also previously published (like the afore-mentioned one by A. Marinoni in n. 1, C. Quattrini and others). I have examined the facsimile in the version kept at the Biblioteca Trivulziana, with thanks to Isabella Fiorentini.