A Distributive Justice
By Giovanni Battista Franco

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The allegorical significance of a drawing by the Venetian artist, Giovanni Battista Franco (fig. 1),\(^1\) presently in the Frank Jewett Mather, Jr. Collection of the Princeton University Art Museum, has escaped the attention of art historians of the Italian Renaissance. Listed in the Princeton Catalogue of Italian Drawings as *Seated Allegorical Figure with Sword and Crowns, Ostrich, Helmets, Miter and Putti Carrying Headgear*,\(^2\) this drawing is more accurately described as a representation of distributive justice. Unique circumstances surrounding the invention of the drawing suggest, moreover, that it may have been intended for one of Franco’s most famous patrons, Guidobaldo II, Duke of Urbino (1514-74).

During the period when Frank Jewett Mather, the art historian, owned the drawing, it was exhibited in New York at the Roerich Museum. The catalogue of this exhibition listed the subject of the drawing as Juno, an assumption presumably based upon the erroneous identity of the bird as a peacock. F. L. Gibbons’ recent correct identification of the large bird as an ostrich supplies the necessary key to the total allegory.\(^3\) Indeed, it provides the basis for the interpretation of Franco’s subject as a personification of Justice. As I shall demonstrate, the female in Franco’s drawing is a representation of a distinctive kind of Justice—Distributive Justice. In medieval and renaissance legal history Distributive Justice functioned as that arm of a state or of a ruler which imposed taxes or military burdens, punished offenders and distributed rewards and honors.

Careful scrutiny of Franco’s *Distributive Justice* (fig. 1) is necessary to explain the action occurring in the drawing. From the opening of the cornucopia above the head of Justice, several different varieties of headgear and what appear to be coins tumble out. These objects fall towards the figure of Justice who supports a crown on her right thigh and offers another to the putto in front of her, who is already holding a crown. In addition, a tall conically-shaped hat is balanced precariously upon Justice’s left thigh. The running putto at the lower left of the drawing holds a hat which resembles a mitre. When all of these objects are counted, Franco drew eight items of headgear, several of which are carried by putti who scurry about, presumably distributing these honors.

My interpretation of the three major objects below the cornucopia differs from that of Gibbons in only one respect: the identification
Fig. 1—Giovanni Battista Franco, Italian, ca. 1510-61, Seated Allegorical Figure with Sword and Crown, Ostrich, Helmets, Miter and Putti Carrying Headgear, Pen and brown ink with light tan wash on gray paper (21.6 x 16.1 cm.) The Art Museum, Princeton University, Gift of Frank Jewett Mather, Jr. (Photo: The Art Museum) Hereafter referred to as Distributive Justice.