

Poggini, Domenico

Florence 1520 – 1590 Rome

Portrait medal of the architect Domenico Fontana

Rome circa 1589



BRONZE, extremely fine contemporary striking. 40 mm diameter.

Obverse Bust to right, a portrait of Domenico Fontana, bearded, wearing a doublet, a ruff, and a medal suspended from a chain. Around, DOMINIC. FONTANA CIV. RO. COM. PALAT. ET EQ. AVR. (Domenico Fontana, Roman citizen, count of the Palatine, and knight of the Aurelian). Beaded border.

Reverse Four obelisks, each surmounted by a cross. Around, IVSSV SIXTI V. PON. O.M. EREXIT (He erected [them] by order of the most excellent Pope Sixtus V); in exergue, 1589. Beaded border.

PROVENANCE Stonyhurst College, Lancashire — sale Christie's, 'Ancient English and Foreign Coins, Banknotes, and Commemorative medals', London, 6 March 1990, lot 796



Ø 40 mm

A **PORTRAIT MEDAL** of the Swiss architect and engineer Domenico Fontana (1543–1607), struck to commemorate his resiting in the Piazza del Popolo in 1589 of the obelisk brought by Augustus from Heliopolis to Rome, and set up originally in the Circus Maximus. That obelisk is depicted on the reverse, together with three others with which Fontana is associated, placed respectively in front of S. Pietro in Vaticano (1586), outside S. Maria Maggiore (1587), and S. Giovanni in Laterano (1588).

The features of the architect shown on the obverse agree with those in an engraved portrait by Natale Bonifacio published with Fontana's book on the transport of the Vatican obelisk (*Della trasportatione dell'obelisco vaticano et delle fabbriche di Nostro Signore Papa Sisto*, Rome 1590), where he also wears a medal suspended from a chain, and with a marble portrait bust in the Victoria & Albert Museum (A.14–1938). The portrait had been produced about 1586 for a medal

commemorating the erection of the Vatican obelisk, shown on the reverse with legend IVSSV XYSTI QUINT PONT OPT MAX.¹

The medal of 1586 and our medal are attributed to the sculptor Domenico Poggini, younger brother of Gianpaolo Poggini. From the mid-1540s he and Gianpaolo were employed as goldsmiths in the service of Cosimo de' Medici, where they worked under Benvenuto Cellini. They engraved dies for the Florentine coinage, and also produced struck medals. Around 1585 Domenico moved to Rome, and soon was appointed by Sixtus V engraver at the papal mint.

Both struck and cast examples in bronze are known:

- Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Münzkabinett (cast, 39.7/40 mm)²
- Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello (two examples, struck, 38.7 and 37.8 mm)³
- Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional (two examples, 40 mm)⁴
- Milan, Johnson Collection (struck, 39 mm)⁵
- Modena, Galleria e Medagliere Estense, Inv. 3627 (38.70 mm)⁶
- Naples, Museo e gallerie nazionali di Capodimonte, Inv. 134806 (37 mm)⁷
- United Kingdom (two struck and two cast examples)⁸

¹ George F. Hill, *Portrait medals of Italian artists of the Renaissance* (London 1912), pp.79–80 no. 64; Eidlitz (*op. cit.*), p.69 no. 416; Philip Attwood, *Italian Medals c.1530–1600 in British public collections* (London 2003), p.346 no. 824; Toderi and Vannel (*op. cit.*), pp.499–500 no. 1486.

² Lore Börner, *Die italienischen Medaillen der Renaissance und des Barock (1450 bis 1750)*, Bestandskataloge des Münzkabinetts Berlin (Berlin 1997), p.145 no. 619.

³ J. Graham Pollard, *Italian Renaissance Medals in the Museo Nazionale of Bargello* (Florence 1985), III, pp.1438–1439 no. 840; Fiorenza Vannel and Giuseppe Toderi, *Medaglie italiane del Museo Nazionale del Bargello. Volume I: Secolo XVI* (Florence 2003), p.93 nos. 811–812.

⁴ Francisco Alvarez-Ossorio, *Catálogo de las medallas de los siglos XV y XVI conservadas en el Museo Arqueológico Nacional* (Madrid 1950), pp.160–161 no. 309.

⁵ Cesare Johnson, *Collezione Johnson di medaglie, I. – Secoli XV–XVIII* (Milan 1990), p.147 no. 85.

⁶ Elena Corradini, *Museo e Medagliere Estense tra Otto e Novecento* (Modena [1996]), p.67–68 no. 5 and p.130 no. 47/5 (reproduction).

⁷ Michele Pannuti, 'L'arte e la ritrattistica nelle medaglie della Collezione Farnese' in *La Collezione Farnese: Le arti decorative* (Naples 1996), p.303 no. 8.175.

⁸ Attwood (*op. cit.*), p.346 no. 825. The struck examples are in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (41 mm, 29.80 g), and British Museum (40 mm, 31.65 g); the latter is also reproduced by Ingrid Severin, *Baumeister und Architekten: Studien zur Darstellung eines Berufsstandes in Porträt und Bildnis* (Berlin 1992), pp.181–182 no. 85/III.

A variant with the lettering on the reverse expanded to IVSSV SIXTI PON. OT MAXI EREXIT and date 1589 is also recorded.⁹ The same portrait appeared (lettering heavier) with a reverse showing the harbour of Naples with legend POR NEAPOL PHILIPPI II REGIS: ARCHITECTVS and date 1598.¹⁰

REFERENCES Robert J. Eidlitz, *Medals and Medallions relating to Architects* (New York 1927), p.68 no. 414 (plate 49); Ferdinando Sacchi, 'Domenico Fontana e le Medaglie degli Obelischisti di Sisto V' in *Emporium* 45 (1942), p.125; Giuseppe Toderi and Fiorenza Vannel, *Le Medaglie italiane del XVI secolo* (Florence 2000), II, pp.503–504 no. 1498

⁹ Pietro Antonio Gaetani, *Museum Mazzuchellianum* (Venice 1761), I, p.382, Tabula XCII, no. 2; Alfred Armand, *Les médailleurs italiens des quinzième et seizième siècles* (Paris 1883–1887), II, p.263 no. 6; Prospero Rizzini, *Illustrazione dei civici musei di Brescia. Medaglie* (Brescia 1892), p.103 no. 732; *Catalogo delle monete, medaglie, tessere, bolle e placchette esposte nel Museo Civico Correr* (Venice 1898), p.84 no. 483; Eidlitz (*op. cit.*), p.68 no. 413 (39 mm); Giancarlo Alteri, 'La numismatica di Sisto V. Le medaglie' in *Roma di Sisto V: le arti e la cultura*, catalogue of an exhibition, edited by Maria Luisa Madonna (Rome 1995), p.460 no. 35.

¹⁰ G.F. Hill, 'Not in Armand' in *Archiv für Medaillen- und Plakettenkunde* 2 (1920), p.19 no. 110; Eidlitz (*op. cit.*), p.68 no. 415; Börner (*op. cit.*), p.145 no. 620.