

A detailed section of Michelangelo's 'The Descent from the Cross' fresco. It depicts Christ, with a crown of thorns and a pale, suffering expression, being supported by two men. One man, with a long white beard and a golden crown, looks down at Christ with a sorrowful expression. The other man, also with a golden crown and a red and white striped garment, is shown in a dynamic, muscular pose, supporting Christ from below. The background is dark and filled with other figures, though less distinct. The overall style is characteristic of the High Renaissance, with strong anatomical detail and emotional intensity.

CHRIST CARRYING THE CROSS

By Giorgio Vasari

JAIME EGUIGUREN

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JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES

Cover: Giorgio Vasari, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, Jaime Eguiguren, Art & Antiques.



CHRIST CARRYING THE CROSS

By Giorgio Vasari

JOSÉ GÓMEZ FRECHINA
HÉCTOR SAN JOSÉ CASTRO



FOREWORD

In the world of ancient art, from time to time discoveries come along that both surprise us and fill us with joy. The painting I am introducing here, Christ carrying the Cross, painted by one of the greatest and most renowned painters of the Renaissance, Giorgio Vasari, had until a few months ago spent its centuries of existence as an anonymous and unknown work. Its state of preservation was extremely good, despite being covered by a layer of dirt and oxidized varnish that made it difficult to undertake a clear and fair reading of the work. Following its cleaning, the colors, lights and glazes, now uncovered, along with the firm control of the palette, revealed what was without doubt the hand of the master.

In this painting, Vasari provides an enormously powerful and skillful depiction of one of the most tragic and emotive episodes in the life of Christ; with Jesus bearing his own Cross on the way to Calvary. The merciless brutality of the soldiers stands in contrast to the anguished sweetness of the women who look upon the weary Christ, down on his knees, at the very limit of his strength. This fascinating and complex composition is the fruit of a figure who was a “Homo Universalis”, a man of universal spirit, because Vasari was a painter, sculptor, architect and writer. A Renaissance man if ever there was one, to the extent that the very coining of the term “Renaissance” is attributed to him.

I would like to express my thanks to Héctor San José Castro, for introducing us to Giorgio Vasari in his period and work.

My thanks go to Angelica Pediconi who, along with Adelina Illán and Rafael Romero, carried out the restoration and technical study of the work.

My special thanks go to José Gómez Frechina for his masterful research work, presenting a complete study of the work, providing an authoritative attribution, and placing it within a specific stylistic and iconographic context.

JAIME EGUIGUREN

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GIORGIO VASARI

Arezzo, 1511 - Florencia, 1574

CHRIST CARRYING THE CROSS

Oil on panel
59 x 43,8 cm

Provenance

German Private Collection.

GIORGIO VASARI PITTORE ET ARCHITETTO ARETINO

HÉCTOR SAN JOSÉ CASTRO

In his lifetime, Giorgio Vasari reached the highest echelons with his work as an artist, painting for popes, building for princes and writing for intellectuals. None of his different facets can be understood without referring to all others. Among them, perhaps his work as a treatise writer cuts across all others¹, with his famous *Vite* offering a glimpse into artistic thinking in his time, as well as describing his own life in the passages that he reserves to those closest to him and the chapter he dedicates to himself.

We know that he was born in Arezzo on 30th June 1511, the son of Antonio Vasari and Madalena Tacci. He traced a fictitious story about his family's origins through the life of Lazzaro Vasari, one of his ancestors, who also painted. His pedigree is affirmed in the first few lines of his short biography:

“Any artist would rejoice in finding out that one of their relatives has brought glory and honor to their art, as attested by the joy I feel in finding among my ancestors Lazzaro Vasari, a famous painter of his time, not only in his hometown but across Tuscany.”²

However, Vasari is cautious against criticism from his contemporaries; he annotates that, although he's able to prove his ancestor's fame, his impartiality would be put into question in doing so.

“[...] leaving his merits and those of his family aside, I will simply and clearly state what I cannot keep quiet about, so as to not stray from the truth, which history depends upon.”³

This statement only further confirms his wish to extol his distinguished family more than is required.

He then goes on to describe how Piero della Francesca could be counted among his great-grandfather's friends, how he was able to imitate the style of Pietro Borghese to close perfection, and about the time spent painting saddles and the popularity of such commissions.

However, modern historiography paints quite a different story, questioning the veracity of the Vasarian tale. Current thinking has established that Lazzaro Vasari was really born in Cortona, under the name Lazzaro di Niccolò de' Taldi, and was a craftsman who manufactured saddles. The Vasari surname wouldn't be adopted until Lazzaro's son, namesake and grandfather of Giorgio, became famous as a ceramist (the new surname translates to “potters”). It would also lay the foundations for what became a constant in his career, the patronage of the Medici family:

“They say that, while looking for pots in a place where ancient peoples are said to have manufactured them, Giorgio found, at three arms' length underground, in a field close to the Calciarella bridge (as it was called), the arches of three ancient ovens and, spread all around, countless pieces of pots and four complete pots, which he gifted Lorenzo the Magnificent on his arrival in Arezzo, by mediation of the bishop. Lorenzo accepted them and, since then, Giorgio was at the service of the Medici family, living happily ever after.”⁴



Such adorned tale serves Vasari to address, all at once, several open fronts that could have given rise to reproach from citizens and artists with a better social standing in Tuscany. Firstly, he omits that he's only the third generation of his family born in Arezzo, also hiding the change in surname at a time when identity linked to the city is especially strong in Italy. Secondly, he furnishes his grandfather's manual activity with an intellectual perspective, since Lorenzo the Magnificent doesn't award his patronage after receiving one of his paintings but archeological artifacts chosen out of a knowledge that is worth recognizing. Finally, he links his family's destiny to that of their eternal benefactors, the Medici family.

His training as an artist started in Arezzo. As he would recount himself, the painter Luca Signorelli stayed with the Vasari family while visiting the city to deliver an altarpiece to the Order of Saint Jerome and, during his stay, he advised his father that the young Giorgio should learn to draw. This element is typically found in the biographies written by Vasari: a talent recognized when the artist is still of a young age. His first lessons would be taught by Antonio da Saccone and Giovanni Lappoli, known as Pollastra.⁵

However, it was at the workshop of the painter and glass master Guillaume de Marcillat, who had provided his services at the Duomo in Arezzo, where his artistic career would start. Vasari later wrote about him by Italianizing his name to Guglielmo da Marcilla, mentioning him as an "Arezzo prior". To begin the chapter he dedicates to him, he presents his arguments in favor of recognizing the virtue and talent of someone who decides to leave their hometown for a new place, where they would spend their life:

"Any man, however strange and faraway or barbaric and unfamiliar the region they come from, if they are virtuous and skillful with their hands, wherever they go, once their virtue is known, their name will be perpetuated by word of mouth, such is the strength of good deeds."⁶

As we've seen, this argument is a constant in Vasari's texts. In his life, he would never stop traveling across the Italian peninsula, enduring criticism from local painters who didn't take kindly to a stranger hoarding as many projects as the painter from Arezzo was ready to take on. There is, therefore, a desire in this regard, of being able to garner the acceptance of one's work colleagues through one's own talent.

In 1524, at the age of 13, Vasari would be taken to Florence by Cardinal Silvio Passerini of Cortona, a town close to Arezzo. Passerini had been close to the son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, Giovanni, who had been appointed Pope Leo X, now dead. Silvio's position within the church hierarchy was strengthened by this relationship, becoming a defender of the cause of the Medici family wherever he went.

One year earlier, he had taken part in the conclave which appointed Pope Clement VII, the name taken by another member of the family of bankers, Giulio de Medici. As with the papacy of Leo X, Florence would *de facto* transform into an extension of the Vatican State. Wishing to consolidate their power further, Passerini was sent to the city to become the governor and protector of the heirs of the Medici family, Alessandro and Ippolito, both illegitimate descendants.

Vasari's stay in the Tuscan capital would be brief, although he would frequent the workshop of Andrea del Sarto, whom he describes as a very talented man, though not very virtuous:

*"There really are reasons to lament the fortune of one born with good talent, with perfect judgment for painting, revealed to be excellent through works worthy of praise, to later see how their way of life debases them, unable to moderate any of their bad habits."*⁷

He would also visit Baccio Bandinelli's academy for drawing, where he would meet Francesco de' Rossi, nicknamed Salvati, their ages separated by a year, and with whom he would strike a long-lasting friendship.

In 1527, with Florence's elites fighting over the vast power of the Medici family, the Sack of Rome perpetrated by Charles V and the ensuing weakening of the Pope led to a revolt in Tuscany, ending with the expulsion of the Medici family from Florence. Once those who would protect him in later decades had been stripped of their power, Vasari decided to return to Arezzo with the excuse of having been called by his uncle after the death of his father a few months earlier that year. There, he coincided with Rosso Fiorentino, who had run away from Rome at the arrival of the army of Emperor Charles V, stopping at Borgo Sansepolcro and Città di Castello before arriving in Arezzo. Rosso, impressed by Giorgio, who'd managed to make a living as a painter through small commissions in the city and its surrounding area, offered him advice and drawings while preparing a *Resurrection* which, sadly, has been lost.

He would return to Florence two years later, still under the rule of the Republican Council but in an uncertain situation as a result of the Imperial troupes being present, threatening stability in the region. He coincided with Salvati once again at the workshop of Raffaello da Brescia. Despite his budding career as a painter, he decided to learn goldsmithing under Vittore Ghiberti. Perhaps he viewed this as a safer, more lucrative value at a time of uncertainty. He was still in the city when Florence was under siege from the army that defended the cause of Clement VII and the Medici family but he would flee to Pisa before the capital fell and the Medici government was reinstated. There, he took up painting again and gave up on the idea of becoming a goldsmith.

From Pisa, he traveled to Modena and, later, Bologna. After his successful campaign against the Republic of Florence, Charles V reached several agreements with Pope Clement. Among them, staging his crowning as Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, a ceremony that hadn't taken place despite it

being ten years since his appointment by the Germans. The ceremony took place in Bologna. Vasari took part in preparing the ephemeral decorations and architectures, including an impressive Arch of Triumph, which would add pageantry to the celebration, something that had fallen out of favor among Charles' predecessors. This was a unique opportunity for a young artist such as Giorgio.

In 1531, he would benefit from his earlier contact with the Medici heirs. Although Ippolito had played a more active role before his family's disgrace after the Sack of Rome, once the Emperor had put an end to the siege on Florence, Clement favored Alessandro as governor. The alternative imposed on Ippolito was an ecclesiastical position, being appointed Archbishop of Avignon. During his stay in Rome, he would call Vasari to his service. Vasari coincided in the city with his friend Salvati. Together, they studied the master works that the city harbored. Both were captivated by mythological themes but also by studying their contemporaries. Years later, Giorgio would reflect on this, arguing that studying the modern era was his true and most important master.

His first stay in Rome was brief as he became of service to Alessandro, now Duke of Florence, by the end of the year, moving back to Tuscany. However, Ippolito's patronage continued; it was his commission that resulted in the *Christ carried to the sepulcher* (Fig. 2), the first work that survives attributed to Vasari with certainty. Artist and patron kept a close relationship, as proven by the correspondence between them in regard to this painting:

*"[...] where returning to your side (even though I lack for nothing here), I hope my virtue will grow as I am striving to acquire it though the passing years and with your greatness to go as far as I can towards excellence. And so as not to deviate from the usual routine [...] so that drawing and painting might go at equal pace, I have made a cartoon for a large painting of you most Reverend Honor to be kept in your bedroom"*⁸

Despite this, the painting would end up in Duke Alessandro's bedroom. This decision can be considered a smart political tactic, looking to the family's most distinguished member after the death of Clement VII as an ally, while Ippolito would go on to become one of Alessandro's enemies. This maneuvering was probably at the suggestion of Ottaviano de Medici, a member of a lower branch of the family and who was also a patron of Vasari since his stay in Rome.

Fig. 2. Giorgio Vasari, *Christ carried to the sepulcher*, Arezzo, Museo di Casa Vasari.



The composition of *Christ carried to the sepulcher* shows an early interest for articulating a scene which includes a large number of characters. The foreground focuses on the figure of a dead Christ carried by all other characters, showing them full-bodied, in different positions and with different attitudes, in a display of drawing and composition that achieves a feeling of interrupted movement and action, providing great tension to the work which, in everything else, could be sculptural and excessively rigid. From the movement in the front we move on to a second ground where the Virgin is fainting, helped by two almost-hidden female figures, in strong contrast with the sudden movement of a horse rider on the opposite side of this pictorial plane. In the background, another representation of Christ in the distance, just after the Descent, shapes an almost circular relationship between all the characters.

The placid “endorsement” by the Duke results in Vasari remaining uninterruptedly in Florence until 1537, except for a visit to Città di Castello in 1534, where he coincided with a local painter, Cristóforo Gherardi, nicknamed *Il Doceno*, who would become his main aide until his death in 1556, assisting in decorating the Vitelli Palace. Perino del Vaga’s biography says about him:

“At the time, in San Giustino, in Città di Castello, there was a painter called Cristofano Gherardi del Borgo di San Sepolcro, who gifted by nature with a wonderful resourcefulness for grotesque and figures, arrived in Rome to visit the city and never wished to work with Perino. In fact, on his return to San Giustino, he undertook several rooms at the Bufalini palace, all of them considered works of great beauty.”⁹

Also in 1534, he received from Ottaviano a commission to paint a portrait of Duke Alessandro. This needed to be a courtly portrait that should show the governor’s dignity. From the start, the terms were extremely flexible for Vasari, the Duke conveying his wish for him to use his resourcefulness in regard to whichever details he deemed convenient:

“Mi diede il campo libero ch’io facessi una inventione secondo il mio capriccio”

Alessandro’s portrait (Fig. 3) would end up becoming not only a person’s portrait but the ideal of a Renaissance prince. On the one hand, Vasari creates an elegant continuity to the story of the Medici family, appropriating the model developed by Michelangelo for Giuliano’s tomb, at the New Vestry of San Lorenzo in Florence. With a marked profile, their hands delicately, yet firmly, hold the baton, both in armor. While in his version, Michelangelo decided on Roman armor, Vasari preferred a contemporary piece. The memory of the siege of Florence, still recent, turns the Duke into a Prince of war, a protector of the city on which his gaze is set, reflecting on his role as governor. Clearly, the city is Florence, fictitiously presenting in a forced perspective the Duomo in the foreground and the Palazzo Vecchio in the background.

All other elements of the portrait are also loaded with symbolism, as Vasari explained at length in a letter addressed to Ottaviano:

*“The armor shines, as should the prince’s mirror, so that his people and his actions can see themselves reflected in him.”*¹⁰



Fig. 3. Giorgio Vasari, *Portrait of Duke Alessandro de’ Medici*, Florence, Gallerie degli Uffizi.

The rounded seat on which the Duke sits has grotesque representations of three characters, embodying the nations subdued by Florence. Behind Alessandro, a dilapidated column reminds us of the siege in 1530, a plant growing on it as an emblem of the resurgence of the assured and fair power of the Medici family. The red cloak is the spilt blood of the enemies, reinforcing the military nature of the protagonist. In the foreground, there is a helmet at the Duke’s feet, matching the armor, with glowing embers inside it, which according to Vasari symbolize the eternal peace that his patrons have created.

This allegory works entirely not only towards building the image of the new ducal dynasty but as a political instrument for Vasari himself, who adulates his protectors to no end in an attempt to further his career in the new court; a court that is yet to be fully formed and so is more accessible to outsiders. This attitude is further strengthened in an anecdote, according to which Vasari would leave the painting aside temporarily and would focus on military architecture when Alessandro de' Medici was deep into the reconstruction of Florence, shortly after ascending to power, and into the military campaigns that would guarantee his position in Tuscany:

"Having noticed that the duke was totally occupied with fortification and building, I began to work on architectural projects in order to be able to serve him better, and I spent a lot of time on them."¹¹

This devotion influences his protector, who involves him in more prestigious projects. In this way he becomes in charge of the decorations for the arrival of Charles V in Florence in 1536. The Emperor arrived with a retinue to hand over his daughter Margarita, engaged to Duke Alessandro. Also in charge of decorations for the betrothal, Vasari would spend most of that year deep into this ambitious project, a considerable challenge, especially for someone aged only 25.

The decorations had to be as lavish as could be, with arches of triumph, fountains, columns and facades painted to create an illusion. The illusion had to be that of entering the ideal city according to 16th Century standards, which implied great similarities with classic Rome. And, indeed, the custom of embellishing the city for the amazement of locals and visitors originated in such ancient times. Vasari was already experienced as he'd collaborated in decorating Bologna for the Emperor's coronation.

The ceremony was a success. Giorgio's work was recognized by Alessandro, who economically rewarded him over what had been agreed. However, he found difficulties along the process. His young age and his condition as favorite gave rise to the envy of those subordinate to him. Furthermore, as Vasari recounts, he dismantled a plot to kill the Duke by means of an ill-fitted decoration that would have collapsed over the retinue.¹²

Before the year came to an end, he would become a member of the Guild of Saint Luke, the guild for painters with headquarters in Florence. However, Alessandro's murder at the

hands of his cousin Lorenzino led to Vasari losing his privileges and, taking heed of Ottaviano's advice, he left the city, going to the hermitage in Camaldoli, following the invitation from one of his first masters, Pollastra, to paint several altarpieces and frescos; the latter were later destroyed. Years later, he remembered this:

"Now, while I was procuring honor, name, and wealth under Duke Alessandro's protection, the poor lord was cruelly murdered and all that Fortune promised me through his favor was taken from me. On account of having lost in the course of a few years, Clement, Ippolito, and Alessandro, I resolved, on messer Ottaviano's advice that I no longer wished to follow the fortune of courts, but that of art alone, even if it would have been easy to have found a position with the lord Cosimo de' Medici, the new duke."¹³

This reflection on his prior courtly ambitions and his renewed intention of focusing solely on his painting, together with the appropriate retreat to a faraway hermitage, is probably a somewhat vain justification, since Camaldoli, though remote and seldom visited, was the destination of very influential people.

He earned the trust of the monks in the hermitage and agreed to deliver a first painting free of charge so they could verify the quality of his work for themselves. This gesture of good will earned him a fruitful relationship during the following years. He would paint for his new patrons a *Virgin and Child with St. John the Baptist and St. Jerome*, among other pieces, which was the trial work he delivered free of cost, a *Nativity* and *The Burial of Christ*. Even so, he didn't stop communications with his favorite patron, Ottaviano, for whom he continued to undertake pieces on his occasional trips to Florence.

In 1939, he interrupted his stay in Camaldoli for a longer period, moving to Bologna to undertake several altarpieces and frescos in the refectory, with the aid of his favorite assistant, Cristoforo Gherardi. He returned to the hermitage after finishing these works in the middle of the following year. There he would come into contact with one of the most influential people at the time, Bindo Altoviti, a great patron to the arts. This Florentine noble and banker was linked to several relevant families across the peninsula and was the ideal contact for Vasari, able to open doors beyond the circles of the Medici family. When they coincided in Camaldoli, Altoviti was supervising the transport of wood



Fig. 4. Giorgio Vasari, *Allegory of the Immaculate Conception*, Florence, Santi Apostoli.

to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, and he commissioned from him a *palla* for the altar of his family chapel in Florence. The theme was an *Allegory of the Immaculate Conception* (Fig. 4), a highly intellectual theme that Vasari developed with a large number of allegories and cultured references, which would have been appreciated by an educated man such as Bindo.¹⁴

The composition is divided into two fields: on the one hand, the heavenly; on the other hand, the earthly. In the former, the Virgin is held by six angels and, with her hands in prayer, she looks at



Fig. 5. Giorgio Vasari, *Allegory of the Immaculate Conception*, Florence, Gallerie degli Uffizi.



Fig. 6. Giorgio Vasari, *Allegory of the Immaculate Conception*, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum.

her feet, resting on the devil's head, showing the victory of grace over sin. The devil, half-snake, is coiling itself around a tree, where Adam and Eve are holding hands with the Original Sin. They are surrounded by several figures who are attending the scene in dread. The influence of Michelangelo is clear in the naked bodies in the foreground, undoubtedly referencing the figures that adorn the tombs of Giuliano and Lorenzo in the New Vestry.

The main piece received by the banker was only one of several pieces that Giorgio would execute on the same theme, with almost identical composition. Compared to the huge dimensions of the *palla*, Vasari produced at least two further replicas (Figs. 5 y 6) of a more reasonable size, which would increase circulation of his work as they were easier to transport. Within Vasari's production, it is quite common to find smaller pieces that carry with them the aspirations, quality and intellectual nature of his larger paintings.

Vasari would continue to work in Tuscany at the start of the 1540's, producing copies of original works commissioned by Ottaviano and Francesco Rucellai. He would also receive some minor commissions from the new duke, Cosimo I, for whom he would paint a large canvas with the theme *The Baptism of Christ* on occasion of the christening of the Duke's son, Francesco.¹⁵ At the end of 1541 he would purchase a home in Arezzo (Fig. 7), which he would personally decorate in following years, although he would soon leave Florence once again, traveling to Venice, visiting the cities of Modena, Parma and Mantua on the way.

Fig. 7. Exterior of Giorgio Vasari's residence in Arezzo.



There, he would meet his friend Salviati again and, in 1542, collaborated with someone who would be of great support to him, the writer Pietro Aretino. He's the person for whom he traveled to the city of canals, since, as he wrote: "I preferred going to Rome but a call from my great friend, Pietro Aretino, a great poet, beckoned me to Venice." Both had been corresponding since 1533, eight years before meeting in person. At their first encounter, he did the stage design for the performance of Aretino's comedy, *Talanta*.¹⁶

At the end of that same year, through the mediation of the architect Michele Sanmichele, he was awarded the commission of painting the ceiling of Giovanni Cornaro's palace. This involved nine large oil panels with the theme *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*. Sanmichele was part of Aretino's circle of friends, which was already proving useful to Vasari's career. Through the writer, he would also coincide with Titian and this meeting would truly impress the young painter.

Despite Sanmichele insisting that Giorgio should stay in Venice, Gherardi wrote dissuading him of this idea, considering that his painting was at odds with the local workshops in Veneto, since as a Florentine he gave priority to the drawing over a freer implementation of color, as opposed to Titian and his many followers.

*"The unsuitability of remaining in Venice, where drawing isn't taken into account or nurtured by the local painters. It was best to return to Rome, where there is a real school of the noble arts, where its values are appreciated more than in Venice."*¹⁷

And so, he departed to Rome in the autumn of 1542, not without stopping at Arezzo, where he started the mural paintings that would decorate his recently purchased house (Fig. 8). The project would be resumed and interrupted over the years as a result of the painter's travels. He continued with the project until 1544 as he would often come and go from Rome. He thus divided his attention between the commissions from Ottaviano in Florence and Bindo Altoviti in the city of the Tiber. The banker's support would be most suitable in Rome, as it put Vasari in contact with the Farnese family, one of the most powerful families in the capital, and with Cardinal Alessandro in particular.

Now closer to his thirties, his pictorial style is reaching its maturity and he is now recognized among the intellectual circles of the cities he visits. One of the commissions from Altoviti, a *Pietà* with an odd mythological inspiration, drew the attention of Michelangelo, leading to their first encounter. The short-tempered artist would advise Vasari to study architecture carefully. Vasari's veneration of Michelangelo would only grow on from that moment.

Also in 1544, he would receive an invitation from Gianmatteo d'Anversa, who headed the monastery of Monte Oliveto, for him to travel to Naples and paint frescos in the refectory. Against his custom, Vasari refused the commission. Although his rule until then had been to accept all projects coming his way, now in his thirties, Giorgio considers the effect that such a job, which presented some unfavorable technical difficulties, could have on his reputation. Vasari would not be convinced of traveling to Naples until a friend of his, Miniato Pitti, insisted on the invitation of his superior.



Fig. 9. Giorgio Vasari, *Tomb of the Cardinal Antonio del Monte*, Rome, San Pietro in Montorio.

This decision indeed bears fruit and his time in the city of southern Italian would be filled with commissions. The volume is such that he has to call on a number of trusted assistants, among them the inevitable Gherardi; Raffaello dal Colle and Stefano Veltroni also arrive. He leaves the city in 1546 with the impression of having taken pictorial excellence to a city whose tradition he so openly disdained. However, even at his next destination, Rome, he will continue to produce a large number of canvases for Naples.

He resumed his prior relationship with Cardinal Farnese and frequented his court. These months would have a definitive impact on his career. He found fame with the frescos commissioned for the hall at the Chancery Palace, representing the cycle of *The Works of Pope Paul III*, the Cardinal's grandfather. This work had to be completed as soon as possible and, indeed, was undertaken in just one hundred days, becoming known thereafter as the *Sala dei Cento Giorni* (Hall of the One hundred Days). The chosen theme was advised by the writer Paolo Giovio who, alongside Alessandro, would instill in Vasari the idea of writing his *Vite*.

According to Vasari, it was during a meal with Giovio and the Cardinal that the former asked him to help draft a treatise about relevant artists from Cimabue to the modern times. As a result of traveling extensively in his youth, the painter from Arezzo had written an endless number of notes that would help him in writing a few short biographies about prominent painters, sculptors and architects, drafting what would become the first Italian art history. Giovio would act as editor and encouraged Vasari over the years that it took him to complete this work.¹⁸

He would essentially spend the following two years in Arezzo, continuing with decorating his house and writing his *Vite*. He accepted some work from Cardinal Giovanni dal Monte who, after being appointed Pope in 1549 with the name Julius III, would leave him in excellent standing in Rome. He married Niccolosa Bacci, a noble from Arezzo, and this union helped erase the blemish that Vasari must have always felt surrounding his humble origins. Through his fame, he was now able to climb the social ladder to a privileged position.



Fig. 8. Interior of Giorgio Vasari's residence in Arezzo.

Towards the end of 1549, the first edition of his magnum opus, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*, was already at Torrentino's type and would see the light in the following year. The arduous task involved was highlighted by Vasari himself in a letter to the Duke Cosimo I, in which he stated it hadn't been a two-month job but was rather the work of ten years. Giorgio is referring to the travels that enabled him to write his manuscript, which in reality took a much shorter time to complete. With these words, he spoke of the unexpected length and difficulty of the task:

*"At the outset I never thought, however, to write such a large volume or to embark on such a wide sea, where in the end I was led, against my will, by too ardent a desire to satisfy those who long to know about the first origins of our arts, as well as by many fervent persuasions of friends who, because of the love that they bore me, perhaps expected more of me than was within my powers, and by certain patrons' hints, which to me are more than commands."*¹⁹

Despite the interest aroused by his volume, in 1550 he traveled to Rome without delay on finding out about the appoint-

ment of Julius III, hoping to make the most of his old patron's new power. The Pope indeed favored him over other local artists and that same year was commissioned with designing the chapel for the Monte family (Fig. 9), to which the Pope belonged, which would be the sepulcher for Cardinal Antonio dal Monte, deceased a few years earlier. In this work, he collaborated with Bartolomeo Ammannati, sculptor from Settignano, a town close to Florence.

At the same time, he painted a *Resurrection of Christ* (Fig. 10) which, according to Vasari, follows the exemplary path taken by Piero della Francesca. Christ comes out of his sepulcher in divine form while the Roman soldiers are asleep at his feet. A study of the anatomy and an attempt to reflect movement in the figure of the embodied God, speak to us about the painter's intention to revive the most excellent features of the great painters of a not so distant past.

He would also have the opportunity of preparing an altar for the Vatican, whose construction would go on until 1561, and designing the panels for the mythological fresco paintings that Julius III wished as decoration for the Loggia della





Fig. 10. Giorgio Vasari, *Resurrection of Christ*, Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale.

Vigna, at his leisure villa, Villa Giulia. Similarly, he received commissions from the artificer of his good fortunes in Rome, Bindo Altoviti, for whom he would also decorate a *loggia* at his place of residence. He remained in Rome for the following three years, busy with these projects and furthering his relationship with his idol, Michelangelo.

Once again, his travels to his native Tuscany in 1554 would lead to taking on a significant number of commissions, which he could satisfy with the help of Gherardi. While Vasari took care of the project for the choir at the Duomo in Arezzo and his several Roman projects, Gherardi followed his instructions and designs regarding several frescos with scenes from the Old Testament and the life of Christ for the Society of Jesus in Cortona and the execution of the facade of the Sforza Almeni palace in Florence. Almeni was a courtesan who was very

close to Cosimo I, and the good result of the project helped towards the Duke extending an invitation for Vasari to enter his service. Despite supporting the Medici family enthusiastically, Vasari had been out of favor since the death of Alessandro. The complete trust that Giorgio had in his assistant is proven in this episode, leaving him in charge of what would become the most productive project for his career in coming years.

This is especially important considering that this invitation arrived after the death of the Pope Julius III, earlier that year, and Vasari, without the backing of the pontiff in the city on seven hills, must seek a less hostile and more convenient environment. As we've seen, Vasari had a predilection for working for a powerful patron that could provide security. And so, he has no doubts about accepting this invitation and, discarding an offer by Tassini to go to France, he moves to Florence with his family, to substantial wages.

From 1555 onwards, he remained the Duke's favorite and the main artist in the city. Without a doubt, all the most important works, all the larger projects are commissioned to Vasari, who is famous enough to be at least tolerated by the local artists, if not fully admitted. The first of these undertakings will be the renovation and decoration of the Palazzo Vecchio, in an attempt to erase all remnants of the Republican government and transform it into a princely residence.

As he'd already done in his Neapolitan projects, the artist from Arezzo called a variety of assistants he could trust. Led by Gherardi, this included Jan van der Straet, known as Stradanus, Prospero Fontana, Giovanni Battista Naldini, Marco Faeza (who specialized in grotesques), Jacopo Zucchi and Francesco Morandini, called Poppi. Even when the technical side had to be of the highest level, in line with the nature of the commission, the intellectual side or, in other words, the iconographic program, needed to be similarly intricate, making sure to portray the fundamental values the new dynasty wanted to convey, always in keeping with the Medici dynasty itself. The person chosen was Vincenzo Borghini, who would be very close to Vasari.

The renovation started with what would become known as the Rooms of the Elements (Fig. 11), which harbored an iconographic theme based on the genealogy of the Gods. There would be six in total: the Room of the Elements, the Room of Opis, the Room of Ceres, the Room of Jupiter, the Room of Hercules and the Terrace of Juno. Linking European monar-



Fig. 11. Giorgio Vasari, *Room of the Elements*, Florence, Palazzo Vecchio.

chies to the Olympian gods was common at the time, and the Florentine Duchy wasn't going to be left behind. The allegory was completed with the twelve rooms on the floor below, known as the rooms of Leo X, whose decoration consisted in a journey through the family's history, from Cosimo the Elder to Cosimo I. Vasari would write that a perfect *pendant* was formed between both floors. This stage of renovation would be completed in 1561 but Vasari could no longer count on Gherardi's help since he died at the start of 1556.²⁰

In 1559 a new Medici Pope would be appointed, Pius IV, who would maintain a much better relationship with Cosimo I than his predecessor. This favorable policy contributed to Vasari once again receiving and accepting papal projects, after ceasing completely in previous years.

One year prior to traveling back to Rome, Vasari started the project of the Palazzo degli Uffizi in Florence. For this project, Giorgio would receive a bonus pay due to the project's relevance to the city's look and functioning. Until then, all authorities could be found in the Palazzo Vecchio. However, with the plan of Cosimo I to renew the functionality and look of the old building, he required powerful infrastructure to house all the civil servants in his court.

Addressing a work of this magnitude, he opted for creating a building with two facades, between which there would be a street that would cut across both wings, leading towards the river Arno. As regards its aesthetic, Vasari's training has been Vitruvian, and so the study of ancient times, its proportions and principles for him were essential.²¹ However, he was aware of the consequences of senseless repetition; this was a dilemma present since the return of using classical rules. It

Fig. 12. Giorgio Vasari,
Gallerie degli Uffizi,
Florence.



had been in Florence where Brunelleschi had tried to create a new logic for an old language, which adapted to modern usage, with the San Lorenzo project as its key piece. However, Vasari's vision would ponder on an even more modern language, though originating in that same building: Michelangelo's project for the New Vestry. He would comment in this regard:

*"He made a composite order more varied and novel than ancient or modern masters have been able to achieve; because in the innovations of such beautiful cornices, capitals and bases, doors, tabernacles and tombs, he proceeded quite differently in proportion, order, and rule from others who followed common practice, Vitruvius, and antiquity, not wishing to add anything. This license greatly encouraged those who saw his work to try to imitate it, and subsequently new fantasies have appeared containing more of the grotesque than of reason or rule"*²²

His concern is also in regard to something else: although he praised innovation, he seems to want to reserve it to the geniuses who know how to reach the fair measure between invention and rationality. The logic and freedom observed in how the walls of the New Vestry were articulated are the result of exquisite knowledge by the architect, and although they're a source of influence they mustn't be taken to the grotesque by less capable builders incapable of understanding the subtlety of the language.

The Uffizi (Fig. 12) were, in some way, a representation of his ideas in reality. With a clear articulation of the facade, by using simple orders and bays crowned with molding that alternates between semicircles and triangles, created by Michelangelo, he arrived at the middle, with restraint predominating over any other quality. He wouldn't see the end of the works, which lasted until 1580. After his death, it would be Buontalenti and Alfonso di Santi, from Paris, who would take the lead in the works.

In gratitude for his services, in 1561 Duke Cosimo gifted Vasari the house which he had been renting since 1557 in Borgo Santa Croce. He counted on Stradanus and Jacopo Zucchi to decorate the rooms with allegoric scenes from the history of painting. Stradanus would become his



Fig. 13. Filippino Lippi,
Botticelli and Raffaellino del
Garbo, Libro de' Disegni.

new favorite assistant after the death of *Il Doceno*, and he also collaborated in decorating the rooms of the Duchess Eleonora at the Palazzo Vecchio.

A letter written by Cosimo Bartoli, a diplomat under the orders of Cosimo and a humanist, provides the first direct reference about Vasari writing a reviewed and extended version of his *Vite*. There is a handwritten annotation by the artist, one year earlier, about how work on the engravings of the portraits in the book should start: *"si comincjo a intagliar le teste de pictorj, per fare il libro stanpato"*. Bartoli would have been aware of this because he helped write this volume, which wouldn't see the light until seven years later.

Once the decorations for the rooms of Leo X at the Palazzo Vecchio had been concluded, the Duke commissioned the renovation project for the medieval Palazzo della Carovana, of the Order of St. Stephen in Pisa, recently reinstated with Cosimo as its grand master. The model presented reorganized the facade in line with Renaissance palaces, with *sgraffito* decorations that fully cover the front of the building and a constant pattern in the bays. The Medici court approves the project and it is executed exactly as designed, alongside the renovation of the square on which the building stands.

In January 1563 the Duke, influenced by Vasari, would approve the creation of the *Accademia del Disegno*, an insti-



Fig. 14. Giorgio Vasari, *Vocation of St. Peter and St. Andrew*, originally at the Pieve di Santa Maria Asunta in Arezzo, currently at the Badia delle Sante Flora e Lucilla in Arezzo.

Fig. 15. Giorgio Vasari, *Tomb of Michelangelo*, Florence, Basilica di Santa Croce.

tution depending on the existing Guild of St. Lucas that would be in charge of completing the training of young apprentices in the different artists' workshops across the city, as well as making sure that artistic production was in line with the interests of the Duke's family.²³ Vasari's passion for drawing publicly came to light in this way, although there are also traces in his private life. Inside what is known as *Libro de' Disegni* (Fig. 13), the artist from Arezzo would compile more than 500 drawings from countless artists. It has been considered to be the foundation for his writing in *Vite*, as they illustrate the manner and style of all these creators.

Michelangelo would become the first member of the *Accademia* and, after his death in 1564²⁴, his tomb would become one of the official projects undertaken by the Academy, under the direction of Vasari.²⁵

Vasari carried this out after finishing his own family altar (Fig. 14), and the differences between one and the other couldn't have been greater. On designing this resting place, Vasari made the most of a *palla* with the theme *The vocation of St. Peter and St. Andrew*, which he had started for Julius III in 1551. The painting had been returned to him in 1561 by Pius IV, and so he turned it into the central piece of the mausoleum. The decision to reuse the painting could be that his brother Pietro had been the only male in his generation with offspring, his 3 sons being the main beneficiaries of Giorgio's testament. The altar is crowned by a *Christ crucified* accompanied by the Virgin to his right. However, against custom, he placed St. Cosmas (Cosimo) to his left, instead of St. John. Vasari would write to Duke Cosimo about these three figures being the "three forces and masters that have guided, helped and defended him." It can easily be understood that this change in pattern obeyed to a maneuver of further praising his patron.

Oddly, there is no direct reference to his condition as an artist. All of the elements either reference his family or his pious behavior. However, the exact opposite would occur in the



case of Michelangelo (Fig. 15). The monumental structure combined painting, sculpture and architecture, undertaken in the manner of his idol. It celebrates the artistic personality of the deceased, with life-size marble sculptures representing the arts mastered by the Florentine artist: painting, sculpture and architecture. The shape of the memorial has no direct precedent and is praised more as a secular than a religious monument.²⁶

Meanwhile, works on the renovation of the Palazzo Vecchio had reached their critical point and it was time to undertake what will be the heart of the new building, the Hall of the Five Hundred (Fig. 16). This had been the Council Hall during the Savonarola period and the new project not only had to eradicate any trace of the Republican Florence but establish a comparison in which the Medici family came out as clear winners. Furthermore, it was an excellent opportunity for it to be at the level or even exceed the pomp of other European courts. The program focused especially on the figure of the Duke (Fig. 17), and was reviewed in detail by Vincenzo Borghini, Giovanbattista Adriani, Vasari and Cosimo himself (Fig. 18). The paintings on the ceiling were finished in December 1565, just in time to celebrate the marriage between the son

Fig. 16. Giorgio Vasari, *Hall of the Five Hundred*, Florence, Palazzo Vecchio.



of Cosimo (who had abdicated the year before), Francesco I, and Joanna of Austria, daughter of the Emperor Ferdinand I and sister of the future Maximilian II. He would also be in charge of supervising preparations for the ceremony.

At the same time, he would design and direct the construction of the corridor that would join the two ducal residences, the Palazzo Pitti, on the other side of the Arno, and the Palazzo Vecchio, going through the Uffizi, which was concluded in only five months and would be nicknamed the Vasari Corridor (Fig. 19). The project was eccentric and enabled the movement of family members without a retinue. Its structure wasn't to be provisional, even if the original motivation may have seemed to be the son's wedding, but rather something to last in time for the dynasty to enjoy. A kilometer in length, it isn't only shaped as an isolated corridor, it goes through several of the city's buildings. It would go through the church of Santa Felicita, forming the gallery; it also goes through the corridor joining the two wings of the Uffizi.

The last decade of his life will be occupied by frantic activity, with commissions on top of long travels to conclude *Le Vite*. In 1566 alone he visited more than forty different locations, traveling through Umbria, Marche, Lombardy and Veneto, combining the installation or undertaking of projects with a research of local artists.

Decorations of the Hall of the Five Hundred, for which only the ceiling had been completed, were resumed with an iconographic program that countered two military campaigns. On the one hand, six enormous paintings that would describe the war between Florence and Pisa carried out by the Republic for 14 years. On the other hand, the military campaign led by Cosimo which ended with the



Fig.17, 18. Giorgio Vasari, *Detail of the ceiling in the Hall of the Five Hundred*, Florence, Palazzo Vecchio.

capitulation of Siena in only 14 months. Once again, Vasari was helped by Stradanus and other assistants who would finish the paintings in his absence in 1572.

During his next travel to Rome, in February 1567, he would resume his relationship with the papacy and the successor of Pius IV, Pius V, who would commission an *Adoration of the Magi* for his birthplace, Bosco Marengo, in the Piedmont. He would also deliver three canvases for the refectory of St. Peter's church in Perugia: *Prophet Elias* (Fig. 20), *Miracle of the table, spread with food* and *Wedding at Cana*. These three paintings, small in size, were carried by the painter in an unseasonable journey. As we've already mentioned in regard to the *Immaculate Conception* that he painted for Bindo Altoviti and the two known replicas thereof, it was common for small paintings produced to replicate other larger pieces, or they could be original compositions. In either case, these would be private devotional paintings that were quite successful, and so it isn't strange that a considerable number of them can be found among the production of the artist from Arezzo.

The monks in Perugia praised these compositions: "The abbot and the entire convent [...] are overcome with joy, especially the abbot. He is satisfied and considers the paintings suitable. Like me, he showers you with praise. He consid-



ers it superior to the Arezzo refectory."²⁷ One month later, he would be in charge of the decorations for the christening of Eleonora, daughter of Francesco I, in Florence.

After years of grueling work, the second edition of *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori* (Figs. 21 and 22) was published in 1568, from Giunti's types. In this edition, he references his place of birth, Arezzo, through a proclamation that shows St. Roch because of the Order of St. Roch in Arezzo. In the dedication, again addressed to the duke Cosimo I, Vasari presents this second edition which resulted from practically rewriting the previous edition. One of the main additions was including and updating the lives of artists that are closer to being his contemporaries, including himself (Fig. 23); specifically, the most relevant artists since 1550, the date of the previous edition. This involved increasing the number of pages threefold, forcing it to be divided into two volumes, the second of which was dedicated to artists who were still alive, where Vasari included himself, and references to artists from ancient times. Interesting also is his change in perspective: while he had considered the first edition a closed work, he considers this second edition as a work that, though not unfinished, at least is in a state of constant progress, expecting other artists from the coming generations to continue his example of shining light on the artists of the past for everyone else. This change



Fig. 19. Giorgio Vasari, *Vasari Corridor*, Florence.



in thought shows that Vasari was already aware not only of the effect of his life's efforts but that he'd opened a new path in art. Certainly, many have considered this the foundational text in art history.²⁸

That same year he would tackle several projects in Florence besides supervising the works at the Palazzo Vecchio, such as a *Pentecost* for Agnolo Biffoli, the Duke's treasurer, or a *Resurrection* for the regent's physician, Andrea Pasquali.

Between 1569 and 1572, Vasari would focus on pleasing Pius V, creating the side panels for a large altarpiece in the church of Santa Croce in Bosco Marengo, a *Judgment Day* and a *Martyrdom of St. Peter Martyr*. He also traveled to Rome with two assistants, Alessandro Fei and Jacopo Zucchi, to paint three chapels in the Vatican: one dedicated to St. Michael, one to St. Peter Martyr, and one to St. Stephen. Only a project for Francesco I inside the Palazzo Vecchio will distract him from the extensive work undertaken for the Pope, making him travel to Florence: designing the *studiolo* for the Duke of Tuscany, for whom he will paint a scene on the theme of *Perseus and Andromeda*. On his return to Rome, while deep into the decoration of the Regal Room at the Vatican with the help of Zucchi, he was appointed Knight of the Golden Spur by Pius V, being fairly rewarded for all services rendered.

It was the Pope's death in 1572 that triggered Vasari's return to Florence. There, he would attend the public inauguration of the Hall of the Five Hundred, which is a milestone both for the people of Florence and the artists visiting the city. Now this large project is finished, another large and prestigious commission arrives: decorating the inside of the cupola of the Duomo, a city emblem built by Brunelleschi. The chosen theme was *Judgment Day* and he will spend his last years working on it.

However, he wouldn't remain far from Rome for long as the next pontiff, Gregory XIII, happy with the work he had undertaken in the Regal Room until then, calls on him to finish it. During his stay, he continued drawing for the Duomo's cupola, also splitting his time with a new commission from the Pope to design frescos for the *Cappella Paolina*, also in the Vatican, a project he never undertook.

In April 1573 he traveled back to Florence, where the *studiolo* of Francesco I was inaugurated. Work is commissioned to build the *loggias* in the Piazza Grande of Arezo. On 27th June the following year he would die in Florence, aged 62. He left the Duomo's cupola unfinished. He was buried in the family tomb that he designed himself.

Fig. 20. Giorgio Vasari, *The prophet Elias*, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.

Fig. 21. Second edition of *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*.

Fig. 22. Giorgio Vasari, Second edition of *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*.

Fig. 23. Giorgio Vasari, Portrait of Giorgio Vasari from the second edition of *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*.

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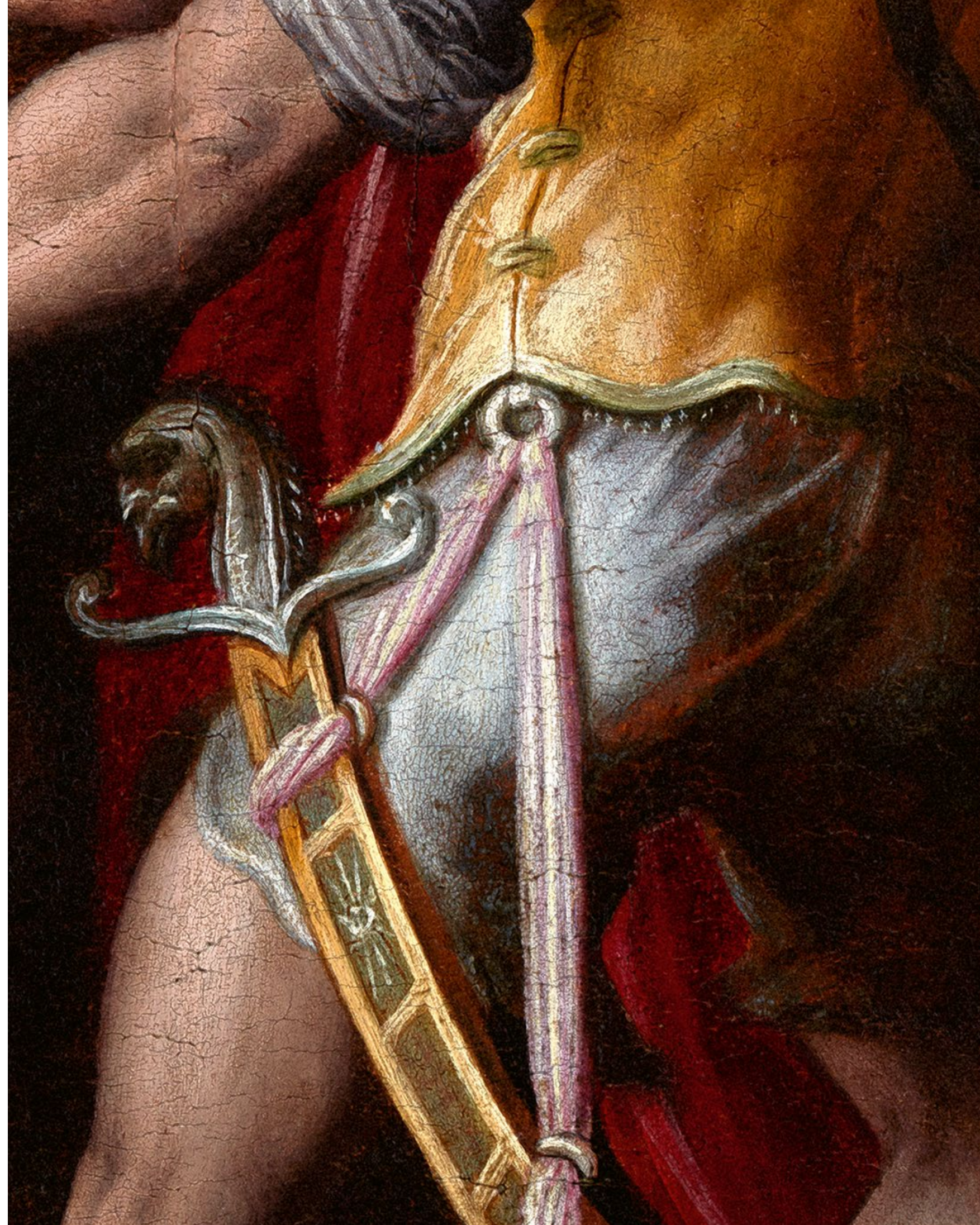
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A NEW CHRIST CARRYING THE CROSS BY GIORGIO VASARI

JOSÉ GÓMEZ FRECHINA

Unknown to the public and to specialist critics, what we are unveiling here (following its identification, necessary restoration and technical study) is a new painting by Giorgio Vasari (Arezzo, 1511 – Florence, 1574) depicting Christ Carrying the Cross (fig. 24; oil on panel, 59cm x 43.8cm), which forms a pair in terms of measurements, with just a few variations, with a Vasari work depicting the same subject preserved in Lawrence (Kansas), at the Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas, Museum purchase, State Funds, 1953.0015 (fig. 25; oil on panel, 59.2cm x 44cm), which is considered a small-scale replica of a since-disappeared altarpiece work for a private chapel in Rome¹.

The iconographic subject of Christ Carrying the Cross is not particularly common as an individual or independent subject for an altarpiece, as is the case with the famous example known as *Lo Spasimo di Sicilia* by Raphael Sanzio (Urbino, 1483 – Rome, 1520) housed at the Prado National Museum². Instead, this episode tends to be part of the narrative and episodic sequence of the cycles of Christ's Passion in predellas or the platforms of altarpieces alongside the Washing of the Feet, the Prayer in the Garden, the Arrest of Christ, Christ before Caiaphas, the Flagellation, the Crowning with Thorns, Christ before Pilate, and so on.

All the same, in Christian art, after the Crucifixion of Jesus, the passage of Christ Carrying the Cross, with its high emotional charge, intense suffering and the opprobrium of Christ

with the crown of thorns and having to bear the cross on his way towards Golgotha is, without doubt, the most frequently-represented Gospel story from the last moments of Jesus' public life.

This narrative and descriptive Gospel passage, with its many figures and depicted in the open with specific spatial references, offers artists a wide array of options and variations. It is included in the synoptic Gospels (Matthew 27: 31; Mark 15: 21 and Luke 23: 26), mentioning the help Jesus received from Simon of Cyrene in bearing the weight of the cross. In the Gospel of St. John, 19: 16, however, Simon is not mentioned.

In this new painting of Christ Carrying the Cross by Vasari, the canonical Gospel texts are not followed to the letter, with the inclusion of Jesus meeting Veronica while on the road to Calvary, following a widespread popular tradition that was often represented in the Mysteries of the Passion, based on apocryphal texts (*Gospel of Nicodemus*).

The attention given over to the *Via Crucis* by the Franciscans who were the guardians or custodians of the Holy Places at the end of the middle ages helped to foster the representation of the drama of the Mysteries of the Passion, which included the figure of a young woman called Veronica (from *vera icona*, true image) who wiped the sweat and blood from Christ's face with her veil.

In the painting we are studying here, the figure of Christ occupies the prime hierarchical position in the composition, in the foreground with considerable emotional charge, almost hemmed in by the rest of the figures who, tumultuously and almost forming a harmonic scenographic plane, make up an imaginary semicircle around him, and with the wooden cross-pieces of the cross perfectly squared.

For his depiction of the Passion scene, Vasari chooses the moment of anguish and heightened emotional tension involving the exhausted Jesus' collapse, having reached his limit, barefoot and wearing the crown of thorns tightly round his temples. The three shafts of light over Christ's head, symbolizing his divinity, go even further to focus the faithful's attention on the extreme suffering of the Son of God with his arm around the short section of the cross.

Reduced to his knees without letting go of the heavy cross, Christ (in his desperation and bewildered by the shouts of

the soldiers) turns his head at the supplication of the kneeling Veronica who, full of love and compassion, and fearless of the soldiers' violence, offers him her veil to wipe away the dust, sweat and blood from his face. Vasari decided to use images to narrate the interaction of glances between the pious woman and the Redeemer just at the moment prior to the miraculous impression of the features of the Holy Face on the cloth.

A close look at Vasari's painting reveals two antagonistic parts in the composition's ensemble, with contrasting and opposing sentiments, in which the *patibulum* acts as a physical hinge point between the two parts; on the one hand the use of violence and the brute force of the three Roman soldiers with their broad and menacing arms and, on the other, the impotence, pain and compassion of the three kneeling women (among whom we can also identify Mary Magdalene), the Virgin Mary who stands with tears running down her face, crossing her fingers together in anguish while looking towards her Son, and the young Saint John, who is holding his sobs in with his hands. Completing this group, another Mary, with a circular gold halo on her head, a woman with a bonnet and a Mameluke, identified by his exotic headdress.

Further back, elderly officials with greying beards crowd round, with mounted soldiers coming out of one of the gates of Jerusalem with two banners, one of which bears the acronym SPQR (Senatus Populus Que Romanus).

In Giorgio Vasari's pictorial code, we occasionally find, as we do here, an ancient classical study based on ancient monuments and archaeological remains, as reflected by the Roman clothing and helmets, with sphinxes, tritons, crests and visors, as well as the *fascies*, the eagle banner and the *vexillum* topped with Victoria or arms.

In the interests of keeping true to the historical narration of this Gospel passage, Vasari also included the backdrop of Mount Calvary, characterized here as a desolate and barren peak with two solitary crosses whose upper cross-pieces are cut out directly against the cloud effect. It is in this point that our panel differs from its counterpart in Kansas.

The soldier raising his arm and furiously intent on lashing Christ with a rope is reminiscent, in the contorted look on his face, his mouth wide open, of the armored horseman with the red turban from Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*, executed for

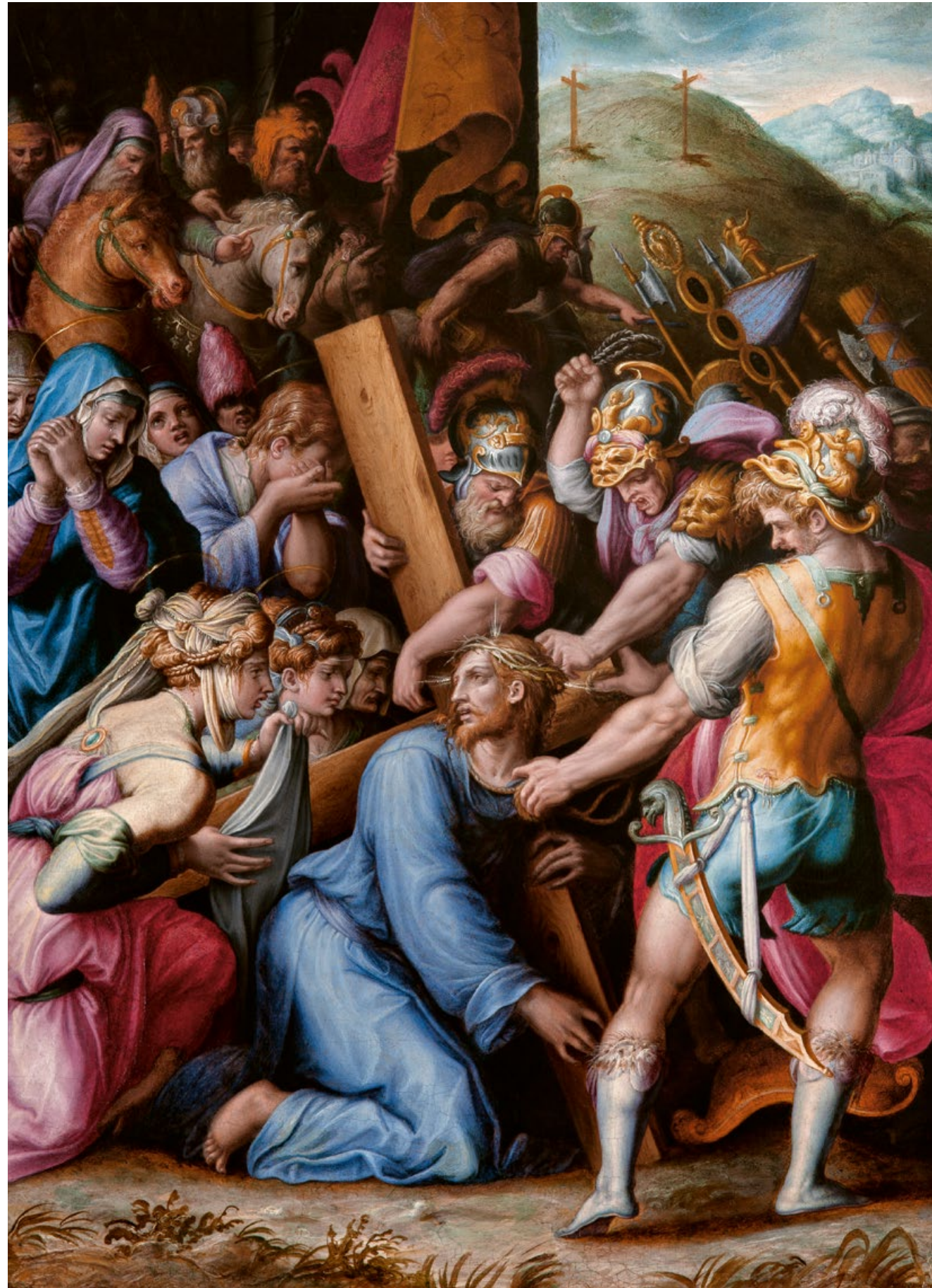
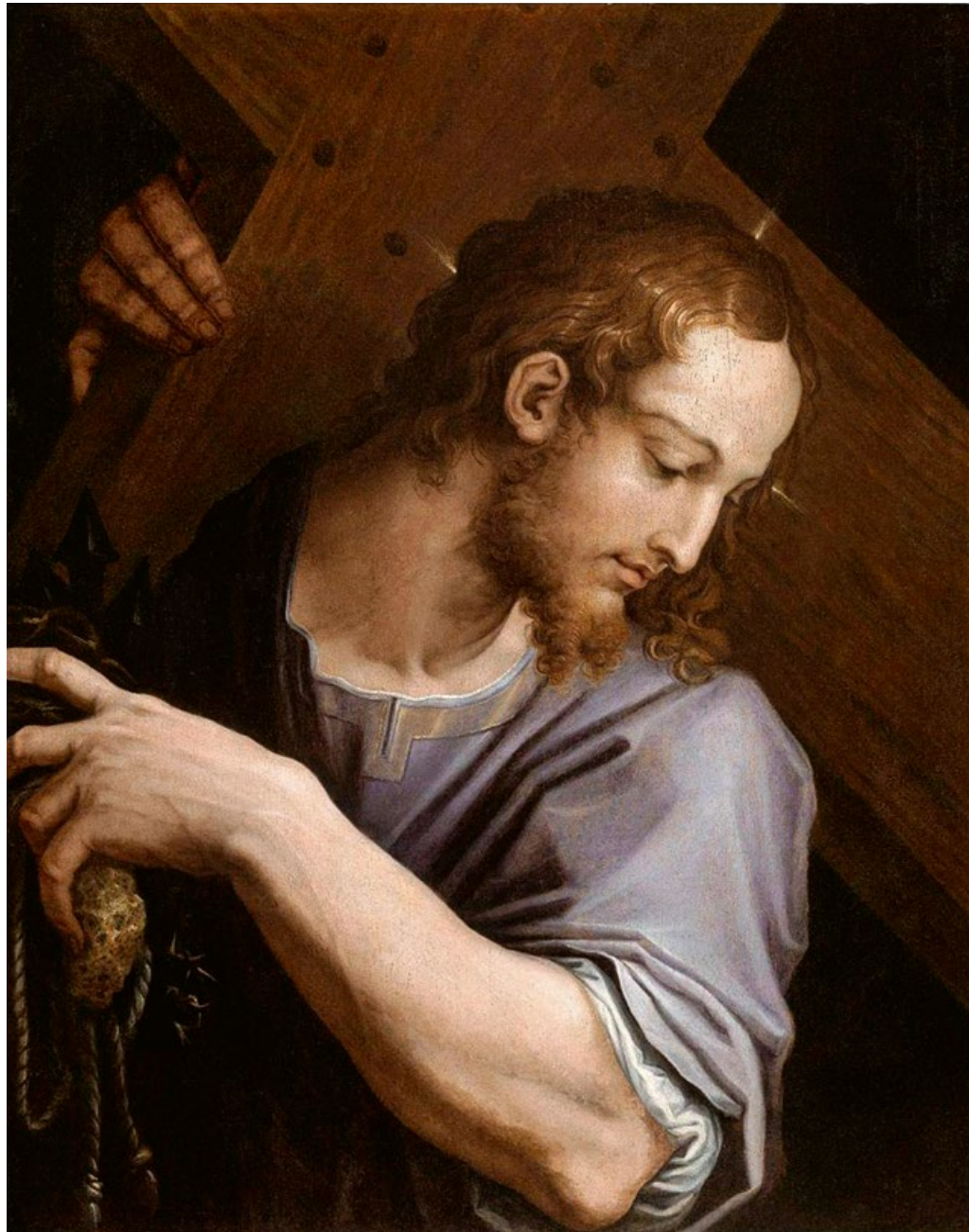


Fig. 25. Giorgio Vasari, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, Lawrence (Kansas), Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas, Museum purchase, State Funds, 1953.0015.



Fig. 24. Giorgio Vasari, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, Jaime Eguiguren, Arte y Antigüedades.

Fig. 26. Giorgio Vasari,
Cristo portacroce,
Private Collection.



the Grand Council Hall in Florence's Palazzo Vecchio, of which a number of copies are known, and an engraving by Lorenzo Zacchia, dated 1558.

Leonardo started this mural painting, on commission from the Florentine republic, in 1503, with the preparatory undertaking of a cartoon in a room in the Santa María Novella monastery of Dominican monks. He would later go on to complete the fresco work marking the events of the Battle of Anghiari. For the wall opposite Leonardo's fresco, the governor of Florence commissioned Michelangelo to paint a mural documenting the Battle of Cascina, of which he only ever completed a sketch, leaving the commission unfinished when he travelled to Rome to undertake a series of projects for Pope Julius II. Known copies of Leonardo's work include one by Rubens

preserved at the Louvre, whereas of Michelangelo's *Battle of Cascina*, which includes a number of anatomical studies of soldiers surprised on the banks of a river while bathing, we have the copy made by Bastiano da Sangallo (Norfolk, Viscount Coke and the Trustees of the Holkham Estate).

Vasari's description in his *Le Vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani...* bears witness to his having turned his attention to this figure from the Battle of Anghiari: "un soldato vecchio con un berretton rosso gridando tiene una mano nell'aste, e con l'altra inalberato una storta, mena con stizza un colpo per tagliar tutte a due le mani a coloro, che con forza digrignando i denti, tentano con fierissima attitudine di difendere la loro bandiera"³.

The energetic expression of this face is in accordance with the guidelines set out by Leonardo in his *Treatise on Painting*, on how to compose a battle: "The vanquished and defeated should appear pale, their eyebrows raised and close about the brow, and the forehead lined with many and painful wrinkles; on both sides of the nose they should have certain arched folds going from the nostrils to the corner of the eyes; the nostrils flared (perhaps causing those folds); the mouth wide open showing the upper teeth, expressive of violent lamentation"⁴. One of Leonardo's preparatory drawings has survived for this warrior, housed at Budapest's Szépművészeti Múzeum, originally from the old Esterházy collection.

The soldier wearing a helmet and with his back to us (with his face in profile and his sword hanging from his waist, at the head of the death cortege leading to the mount of Golgotha) is an example of the importance of anatomical studies in Vasari's compositions, and of the tendency towards *contrapposto* for certain figures, fostering the idea of dynamism and movement in their gestures and poses.

Due to its powerful emotional charge and sense of devotion, the depiction of the Cristo portacroce iconographic subject, generally without spatial references on a neutral background, with the figure of the Savior in half or three-quarter length, had enjoyed great fortune and acquired an iconic character particularly in areas of the north of Italy since the early 16th century, with significant examples by Giovanni Bellini, Giorgione, Andrea Mantegna, Paolo da San Leocadio, Bartolomeo Montagna, Alvise Vivarini, Gian Francesco de' Maineri, Fernando Yáñez de la Almedina, Fernando Llanos, Sebastiano del Piombo, Andrea Solario, Gerolamo da

Vicenza and Francesco Raibolini il Francia, to name just a selection.

These early examples of the cross-bearing Christ would soon be followed in the mid-16th century by other models by Francesco Salviati, Girolamo Romanino, Tiziano, Bernardino Luini, Giovanni Antonio Bazzi il Sodoma, Giampietrino, Gerolamo Muziano, París Bordone and Altobello Meloni.

Vasari's version of the half-length *Cristo Portacruz* bearing the weight of the cross on his back and holding a range of Passion instruments⁵ belongs to the mid-16th century, during his last months in Rome before entering the Medici court in the service of Duke Cosimo I in Florence, with the project to decorate the Palazzo Vecchio (*Quartiere degli Elementi*).

There is a description of this Vasari Cristo Portacroce (fig. 26) by the Arezzo-born painter in his autobiographic book, where he mentions many of his creations: "Ricordo come a di XX di maggio 1553 Messer Bindo Altoviti ebbe un quadro di braccia uno e mezzo drentovi una figura dal mezzo in su grande, un Cristo che portava la Croce che valeva scudi quindici d'oro"⁶.

This easel painting, which was long considered lost, and was executed by Vasari for the influential banker Bindo Altoviti (a great patron of the arts who was openly hostile to the Medici cause), was recently identified by Carlo Falciani in a private collection (panel, 90.8cm x 71cm)⁷.

In Lorenzo Torrentino's 1550 first edition of *Le Vite dei più eccellenti architetti, pittori et scultori italiani da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri*, a key work in Italian artistic historiography, Vasari refers in glowing terms to the subject of Christ carrying the Cross in the work of the Venetian painter Sebastiano Luciani, better known as Sebastiano del Piombo (Venice, 1485 – Rome, 1547) during his long stay in Rome where he would return to this devote subject on several occasions on both wood and slate: "Conduisse con gran fática al Patriarcha d'Aquilea un CHRISTO, che porta la croce, dipinto nella pietra dal mezo in su, che fu cosa molto lodata: avvenga che Sebastiano le mani & le teste molto mirabilmente faceva"⁸.

In this painting with its powerful visual impact depicting Christ Carrying the Cross (not linked to a sequence or narrative episodic sequence), Vasari focusses the attention with compositional skill on the immediate foreground, with cinematic overtones, where the figure of Christ is alone, against a neu-

tral background, bearing the heavy burden of the cross with serene stoicism and decorum. The Savior, his eyes downcast and almost in complete profile, is accompanied by the three shafts of light, subtle visual coding representing divinity, as is the case in the work by Vasari we are examining here and in the Kansas replica.

Christ's tensed left arm, bathed in a powerful burst of light, is holding a number of Passion instruments; the sponge, the crown of thorns, rope and the three nails, which are visually evocative of Michelangelo Buonarroti's sculpture of *The Risen Christ*, in the Roman church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, in which Jesus is also depicted carrying various instruments of the Passion⁹.

This highly-charged and empathic image of Christ Carrying the Cross (made at the behest of the Florentine-born banker Altoviti, and without doubt intended for a private and domestic setting, such as a little palace chapel) seems to have been conceived, as with so many other 16th-century paintings, with the solitary figure of a suffering Christ in order to move the viewer to prayer and empathic meditation. It transmits a certain proximity and immediacy, as well as an expressive and emotional charge that would predispose the faithful to meditate on the holy mysteries of the Passion, leading them to contrition through these iconic models of great pious efficacy.

This devotional depiction of Christ took its inspiration from a Vasari drawing preserved in Edinburgh's National Gallery of Scotland (inv. RSA 219 recto)¹⁰. The use of this masculine model with a specific pose for a range of compositions, with minor modifications across varying subjects or themes, points to one of the most commonplace practices in Vasari's pictorial output with the repetition of models. As such it was used prior to Altoviti's *Christ Carrying the Cross* in the figure of a young servant from the panel of the *Banquet of Esther and Ahasuerus* (1549), executed by Vasari for the refectory of the Convento delle Sante Flora e Lucilla in the town of his birth, and now on display in Arezzo's Museo Nazionale d'Arte Medievale e Moderna¹¹. Other examples where the same prototype was used (although as a mirror image) came later, during Vasari's Florentine period, in a figure from the painting of *Lorenzo il Magnifico Receiving the Tribute from the Ambassadors* (ca. 1556-1558) in the Palazzo Vecchio (fig. 27)¹².

The genesis or original inspiration behind these two paintings by Vasari with the subject of Christ Carrying the Cross, both

being small-scale copies of a lost panel, coincide with Vasari's activities in Rome under the papacy of Julius III (22 February 1550 to 23 March 1555). With the patronage of Cardinal Giovanni Maria Ciocchi del Monte (1487 – 1555), recently named Pope Julius III, Vasari worked on the Del Monte chapel in the temple of

San Pietro in Montorio, under the general supervision of Michelangelo and with the collaboration of Bartolomeo Ammannati in the sculptural decoration¹³. In the Del Monte chapel Vasari executed the altar painting of the *Baptism of Saul* (1550-52), the background of which included a beautiful architectural scenography full of figures (fig. 28). The painter and treatise-writer Giovanni Baglione bore witness to the fact that Vasari put a self-portrait of himself into this work: "et in una di quelle persone, che vi sono, fece il ritratto di se medesimo"¹⁴.

In his autobiography, Vasari tells us that he executed his *Baptism of Saul* with the idea of not following the line marked out by Michelangelo's fresco of the *Conversion of Saul* from the Vatican's Cappella Paolina: "Poi dunque che fu coronato e quietato alquanto, la prima cosa che volle si facesse si fu sodisfare a un obbligo, che aveva alla memoria di Messer Antonio vecchio e primo cardinal di Monte, d'una sepoltura da farsi a S. Piero a Montorio. Della quela fatti i modelli e disegni, fu condotta di marmo, come in altro luogo s'è detto pienamente, et in tanto io feci la tavola di quella cappella, dove dipinsi la conversione di S. Paulo: ma per variare da quello que avea fatto il Buonarruoto nella Paulina, feci S. Paulo, come egli scrive, giovane che già cascato da cavallo è condotto dai soldati ad Anania cieco, dal quale per imposizione delle mani riceve il lume degl'occhi perduto et è battezzato. Nella quale opera, o per la strettezza del luogo, o altro che ne fusse cagione, non sodisfeci interamente a me stesso, se bene forse ad altri non dispiacque, et in particolare a Michelagnolo"¹⁵.

Another important papal commission worked on by Vasari was the painting of the *Calling of Sts. Peter and Andrew* (1551) for a chapel in the Palazzo Apostolico, now kept in the abbey of Sante Flore e Lucilla in Arezzo (fig. 14), which shows a clear debt to Raphael Sanzio's tapestries from the Sistine Chapel¹⁶.

Fig. 27. Giorgio Vasari, *Lorenzo il Magnifico Receiving the Tribute from the Ambassadors*, Florencia, Palazzo Vecchio.



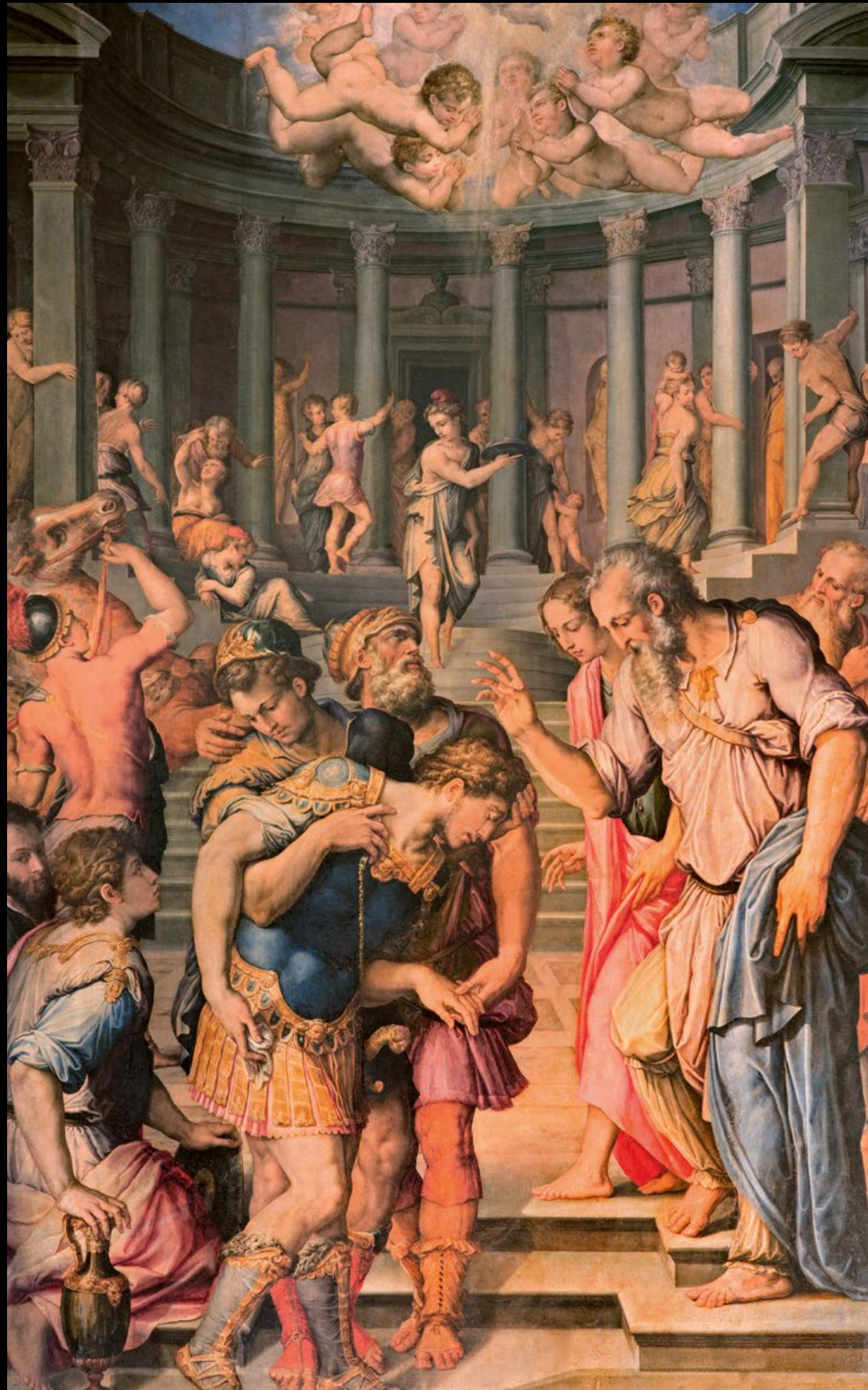


Fig. 28 Giorgio Vasari, *Baptism of Saul*, Rome, San Pietro in Montorio.

Fruit of Giorgio Vasari's relationship with the confraternity of San Giovanni Decollato in Rome (made up of Florentine citizens who had settled in the Eternal City), was the painting *Beheading of St. John the Baptist* (1553) executed by the Tuscan painter for the main altar of the Oratorio di San Giovanni Decollato¹⁷.

While staying with the banker Bindo Altoviti, Vasari undertook the decoration of Villa Giulia, the recreational residence of Pope Julius III, with a number of frescoes depicting the stories of Ceres and Bacchus, other projects for the Altoviti villa (since disappeared) and the frescoes for the vault of the Palace *loggia* the banker had on the banks of the Tiber with stories from the life of Ceres and Inventions of the Twelve Months, currently preserved in Venice's Museo di Palazzo: "Tornato dunque a Roma e dato fine alle dette opere cominciate, e fatta una tavola all'altar maggiore della Compagnia della Misericordia di un San Giovanni decollato, assai diverso dagl'altri che si fanno comunemente, la quale posi su l'anno 1553, me ne volea tornare, ma fui forzato, non potendogli mancare, a fare a Messer Bindo Altoviti due logge grandissime di stucchi et a fresco. Una delle quali dipinsi alla sua vigna con nuova architettura, perché essendo la loggia tanto grande che non si poteva senza pericolo girarvi le volte, le feci fare con armature di legname, di stuoie, di canne, sopra le quali si lavorò di stucco, e dipinse a fresco come se fussero di muraglia, e per tale appariscono e son credute da chiunque le vede, e son rette da molti ornamenti di colonne di mischio, antiche e rare; e l'altra nel terreno della sua casa in ponte, piena di storie a fresco. E dopo per lo palco d'una anticamera quattro quadri grandi a olio delle quattro stagioni dell'anno..."¹⁸.

Vasari himself tells us, in his notes from a few months earlier, of another commission with the same subject of Christ carrying the Cross for the noblewoman Ersilia de Cortesi: "Ricordo come oggi questo dì 6 di maggio 1553 la Signora Ersilia de Cortesi moglie del Sig. Fabbiano de Monti mi diede da fare un quadro per la sua capella drentovi il Nostro Signor Jesu Cristo che porta la croce per prezzo di scudi sessanta d'oro. Il qual quadro finito perché ella lo pagassi restò in mano a Pierantonio Bandini in Roma a stanza mia e così, se ancora, per scudi 60, era detto quadro braccia 2 largo alto 3 scudi 60. Questo quadro si dette a Andrea della Fonte com'è segnato innanzi"¹⁹. As Barbara Agosti points out, Vasari confuses Ersilia's husband Giovanni Battista de Monti with his brother Fabbiano in her memory²⁰.

In his "Autobiography", drafted for *Le Vite*, Vasari comments that in the end he gave this *Christ Carrying the Cross* (originally painted for Cortese) to his friend Andrea della Fonte: "e questi finiti fui forzato ritrarre per Andrea della Fonte mio amicissimo una sua donna di naturale, e con esso gli diedi un quadro grande d'un Cristo che porta la croce, con figure naturali, il quale aveva fatto per un parente del Papa, al quale non mi tornò poi bene di donarlo"²¹.

Ersilia Cortese, born in Rome in 1529, was part of Pope Julius III's family circle having married his nephew Giovanni Battista Del Monte, thereby enjoying his shelter and protection when she became a young widow in 1551²². Ersilia was the niece of the eminent cardinal Gregorio Cortese whose body of Latin letters she would later publish, and daughter of the lawyer Jacopo Cortese, a native of Modena who settled in Rome as bishop of Vaison-la-Romaine from 1551 to 1568. In 1553 Jacopo Cortese commissioned Vasari to undertake a *Cristo morto sorretto da Dio Padre con lo Spirito Santo e angeli* which would subsequently end up in the hands of Altoviti and is



Fig. 29. Giorgio Vasari,
Adoration of the Magi,
Edinburgh, National Galleries
of Scotland.



housed in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Nancy (oil on panel, 172cm x 128cm; inv. no. 668)²³.

In 2003 Rick Scorza identified, in the inventory of works belonging to Vasari's friend, the Benedictine monk Vincenzo Borghini (Florence, 1515 – 1580), the *Christ Carrying the Cross* that has been preserved at the Spencer Museum of Art since its purchase in 1953, quite justifiably attributing it to the painter Giorgio Vasari and linking it directly to the lost Ersilia Cortese altarpiece work, as a replica made by him, on a smaller scale, recognizing at the time that no other compositions were known²⁴. The discovery, now, of this other replica

from the brush of Giorgio Vasari, and which we are introducing here, opens up new avenues for study and greater knowledge of the artist's replicas, which he would occasionally offer as gifts to customers or friends.

This *Christ Carrying the Cross* panel, belonging to Jaime Eguiguren, Arte y Antigüedades, presents the stylistic characteristics of the painter Giorgio Vasari, along with painstaking execution in the details, allowing us to attribute the painting without hesitation as the work of the master from Arezzo. It presents an underdrawing with the occasional *pentimenti*, such as the arrangement of Mary Magdalene's right eye,

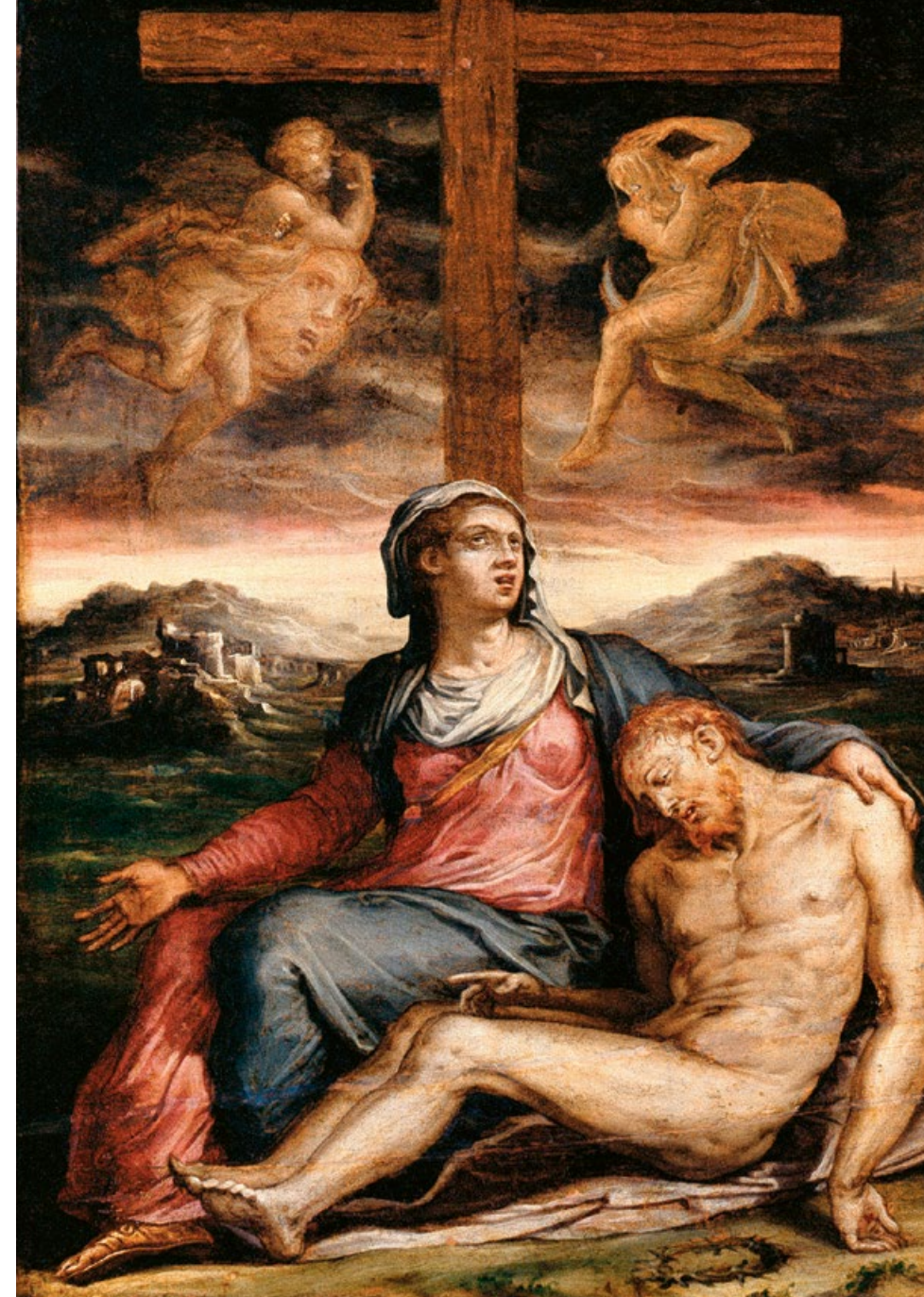


Fig. 30 Giorgio Vasari,
Pietà fra il Sole e la Luna,
Monte dei Paschi di Siena,
Chigi Saraceni collection.

or the line of the horizon at the top of Mount Calvary. In the paint layer of the work, the combination of organic browns and the use of drying agents in the dark areas produces a texture with tiny pockets or bubbles, as is also the case with the other version from the Spencer Museum of Art (for more precise details, we would refer readers to the technical study by Icono, at the end of this publication).

At first glance, the most palpable difference between these two Vasari versions of *Christ Carrying the Cross* is the wide-ranging chromatic palette of some of the figures. The growing demands for Vasari to provide a specific genre of reli-

gious works intended for worship gave rise to replicas of certain compositions, as is the case here.

In fact, one of the defining characteristics of Vasari's pictorial *modus operandi* was the repetition of models from one composition to another, and here we could also add the habit of carrying out smaller copies of generally religious works intended for public altars or private chapels.

Notable examples of Vasari works following this pattern include an *Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 29; oil on panel, 65cm x 48cm) that also belonged to the assets of Vincenzo Borghini

Fig. 31. Giorgio Vasari, *The Marriage Feast at Cana*, Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum.

and which, having passed through a private collection in New York, is now part of the National Galleries of Scotland collections (NG2807)²⁵. It is an original Vasari replica of the altarpiece he himself painted some time after 1566 for Pious V, intended for his funeral chapel in Santa Croce, Bosco Marengo.

The *Pietà fra il Sole e la Luna* (fig. 30) on display in Siena²⁶, Monte dei Paschi di Siena (Chigi Saraceni collection; oil on panel, 40cm x 30.5cm) is another Vasari *quadretto* (small-scale reproduction) of a large composition completed in Rome by the Tuscan master for Altoviti in 1542: “gli feci in un quadro a olio un Cristo, quanto il vivo, levato di croce e posto in terra a’ piedi della Madre, e nell’aria Febo che oscura la faccia del Sole e Diana quella della Luna. Nel paese poi, oscurato da queste tenebre, si veggiono spezzarsi alcuni monti di pietra, mossi dal terremoto che fu nel patir del Salvatore, e certi morti corpi di Santi si veggiono, risorgendo, uscire de’ sepolcri in vari modi. Il quale quadro, finito che fu, per sua grazia non dispiacque al maggior pittore, scultore et architetto che sia stato a’ tempi nostri e forse de nostri passati”²⁷. In his *Ricordanze*, Vasari indicates that he received 50 *scudi* for the work, and that it measured “tre braccia di altezza per due e un terzo di larghezza”. The Louvre’s Département des Arts Graphiques preserves a preparatory drawing (inv.2096), and the *Pietà* panel that belonged to Altoviti (192cm x 136cm) was sold by Christie’s New York²⁸.

Another major example of this practice involving original replicas is the painting of the *Miracle of the Prophet Elisha* (oil on panel, 40cm x 29cm) in Florence’s Uffizi Gallery (fig. 20)²⁹. This *quadretto* by Vasari was replicated at a smaller scale for the altarpiece of the chapel of the Sacramento in San Pietro (Perugia). For Jacopo Dei, the abbot of San Pietro, Vasari would paint three paintings originally intended for the conventual refectory (*Miracle of the Prophet Elisha*, *The Marriage Feast at Cana* and *A miracle of St. Benedict*). The Budapest Museum of Fine Arts preserves another Vasari *quadretto* (oil on panel, 40cm x 28cm), which is a replica of the composition of *The Marriage Feast at Cana* in Perugia (fig. 31).

In 1540, Giorgio Vasari completed the painting of *The Conception of Our Lady* for the patron and banker Altoviti, intended for his private chapel in the church of the Santi Apostoli in Florence (fig. 4): “Ricordo come a di 10 di agosto 1540 Messer Bindo di Antonio Altoviti cittadino fiorentino mi alloggiò una tavola da farsi nella Chiesa di Santo Apostolo di Firenze alla Cappella sua drentovi l’albero del Peccato al quale si alegato Adamo et Eva e molti Patriaci et profeti et a sommo la nostra Donna che vestita di Sole con la gratia dello splendor suo gli scioglie et coi piedi calca la testa del serpente legato e avvolto intorno all’albero, colorita alio con diligentia e per detto prezzo di essa non si dichiarò senon che finite secondo che opera fusi dovessi essere dichiarato il pagamento et così non simesse ne tempo ne altra cosa. Et così mi fu dato la tavola che fu alta braccia 6 et mezzo et largo quarto. Fu stimata detta tavola a di 4 di settembre 1541 da Jacopo du Pontormo pittore da Giovannantonio Sogliani Ridolfo Giriandai scudi 300 et io mi contentai di scudi 250 cioè”³⁰.

In his own Autobiography from *Le Vite*, Vasari describes Altoviti’s commission for the Santi Apostoli: “D’Ottobre adunque l’anno 1540 cominciai la tavola di messer Bindo, per farvi una storia, che dimostrasse la concezione di Nostra Donna, secondo che era il titolo della cappella. La qual cosa perché a me era assai malagevole, havutone M Bindo, ed io il parere di molti comuni amici, huomini litterati, la feci finalmente in questa maniera, figurato l’albero del peccato originale nel mezzo della tavola, alle radici di esso, come primi trasgressori del comandamento di





Fig. 32. Wax seal, on the back of the panel.

Fig. 33. Attributed to Vincenzio Ulivieri, also called Livo, *The Conversion of St. Paul*, Greenville, Bob Jones University Museum and Gallery.

sfeci a altri per aventura, non satisfeci gia a me stesso: come che io sappia il tempo, lo studio, e l'opera chi'io misi particolarmente negl'ignudi, nelle teste, e finalmente in ogni cosa. Mi diede Messer Bindo, per le fatiche di questa tavola trecento scudi d'oro, & in oltre, l'anno seguente mi fece tante cortesie, & amorevolezze in casa sua in Roma; dove gli feci in un piccol quadro, quasi di minio, la pittura di detta tavola, che io saro sempre alla sua memoria ubbligato³¹.

Four years later, Vasari painted a smaller version of *The Conception of Our Lady* (fig. 5) for the study in the Altoviti villa in Rome, and which Paola Barocchi identified with the one preserved at the Uffizi Gallery (oil on panel, 58cm x 40cm; inv. 1524)³².

He mentions this commission in *Le Ricordanze*: “Ricordo, come a di 9 di Aprile 1544 Messer Bindo Altoviti ebbe da me un quadretto piccolo, pieno di figure, fatte con grandissima diligenza, per porlo in suo scrittoio; che vera drento ritratto la tavola della concetione della Nostra Donna, come ella sta appunto in Santo Apostolo di Firenze, la quale monto scudi quindici di lire sette scudi 15”³³.

Another original version by Vasari of *The Conception of Our Lady* is preserved in the Ashmolean Museum de Oxford (oil on panel, 57.5cm x 41.2cm; inv. A991), which previously belonged to Sir Philip Miles, Bt, Leigh Court, Bristol until 1884³⁴ (fig. 6).

It is worth noting that the two small-scale versions of *The Conception of Our Lady* share almost identical measurements, as is also the case with the two versions of *Christ Carrying the Cross*.

These two panels depicting the passage from Christ's Passion were in all probability painted in Florence. One belonged to Vincenzo Borghini while we still do not know who owned the other. It is possible that identifying the lacquer seal on the back of the panel may provide certain information regarding its owner (fig. 32). This new version of *Christ Carrying the Cross* was executed at approximately the same time as the Spencer





Fig. 34. Francesco Morandini, also called il Poppi, *Studies of female heads*, Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi.

Fig. 35. Francesco Morandini, also called il Poppi, *Studies of soldiers' heads and helmets*, Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi.

Fig. 36. Francesco Morandini, also called il Poppi, *Studies of soldiers' heads and helmets*, Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi.

Fig. 37. Francesco Morandini, also called il Poppi, *Studies of heads and a leg*, Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi.

Museum of Art version, around 1560. There is no doubt that in Florence Vasari would have had to use the preparatory drawing he had made in Rome (since disappeared) for the lost Ersilia Cortese work. It is highly probable that the dimensions of the drawing would not vary too much from that of the two *quadretti*. As such, the scale between the two supports, drawing and panel, would not appear to have been so very different. An example that serves as a reference is one of the preparatory



drawings for *The Conception of Our Lady* preserved in the Louvre's Département des Arts Graphiques (inv.2082 recto), measuring 51.8cm x 35.7cm, or the drawing of Christ's *Presentation in the Temple* by Vasari – a preparatory work for the altarpiece of the church of the monastery of Monteoliveto (Naples, Museo di Capodimonte) – also in the Louvre (inv.2080 recto), which measures 54.7cm x 38.7cm. These completed Vasari drawings are of similar sizes to both the artist's panel we are dealing with here and the one in Kansas.

Vasari was an extremely prolific artist and, as Sally J. Cornelison reminds us, his Autobiography makes clear that many of his works are not referred to on account of the sheer number involved: "Ma perchè troppo sarei lungo a volere minutamente raccontare molte altre pitture, disegni che non hanno numero, modelli, e mascherate che ho fatto.." ³⁵.

Carlo Falciani also comments that the height of 3 *braccia* (174.96cm) of the (since lost) Ersilia Cortese altarpiece bears a fairly close parallel with the works found on an altar in a small palace chapel, at a price of 60 *scudi*, more than that paid for Altoviti's *Christ Carrying the Cross*, suggesting



with considerable justification that the composition would have been of a narrative nature with multiple figures, and of which we could get a fairly accurate idea from the reduced version carried out by Vasari now preserved in Lawrence (Kansas) ³⁶.

A historian, great philologist of the Tuscan language and scholar of Dante Alighieri, in 1552 Vincenzo Borghini was elected *spedalingo* (Prior) of the Ospedale di Santa Maria degli Innocenti in Florence, an orphanage supported by the influential Silk Guild since the early 15th century ³⁷. Borghini was extremely interested in the visual arts, he had contact with many young artists and some of the residents from the orphanage that he directed, and he helped Vasari with information about the lives of artists and in the completion of complex iconographic projects.

In the inventory drafted by the Florentine notary Raffaello Eschini a few days after the death of the Benedictine Borghini in August 1580, he revealed the Florentine intellectual's interest in books, manuscripts, drawings, prints, wax figures, sculptures and paintings ³⁸.



Rick Scorza has attributed to Ventura di Vincenzo Ulivieri (familiarily referred to by Borghini as Livo) a panel of *The Conversion of St. Paul* (fig. 33), housed today at the Bob Jones University Museum and Gallery in Greenville (South Carolina), which appears in Eschini's inventory alongside the *Christ Carrying the Cross* with the note: "uno quadro simile" ³⁹. With the occasional modification it follows very much the same line as the altarpiece painted by Vasari for the Del Monte di San Pietro in Montorio chapel in Rome (fig. 28).

In the same study, Scorza also provides Livo's inventory from May 1581 (located in the Archivio Innocenti), listing works left to him by his protector Vincenzo Borghini, including the *Christ Carrying the Cross* after the *Adoration of the Magi*, both protected from the light by a little taffeta curtain, which tells us just how much Borghini prized these paintings: "(1) Uno quadro de' Magi colorito a olio con suo ornamento di noche intagliato et messo d'oro, con sua cortina di taffetà verde di uno braccio et 1/8 et di lunghezza di 7/8; (2) Uno quadro colorito a olio d'uno Cristo che porta la croce con il medesimo ornamento di sopra" ⁴⁰.



Fig. 38. Giovanni Battista Naldini, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, capilla Lenzoni, Badia Fiorentina.

As commented by Cornelison, the two paintings of *Christ Carrying the Cross* and *The Conversion of St. Paul* had matching frames, as recorded by the sales catalogue for the Panciatichi Ximenes d'Aragona collection in 1902⁴¹. Both works were housed in the Ospedale di Santa Maria degli Innocenti until they were sold to the Marchese Panciatichi in 1833.

It is Giorgio Vasari himself who tells us that he painted the episode of Christ Carrying the Cross on at least two other occasions. That would account for a number of frescoes depicting the same Christ's Passion subject on a doorway leading to the gardens of the Servite Order monastery of San Piero in Arezzo, dated 28 April 1530. The other example in written sources mentioning a Christ Carrying the Cross by Vasari appears in *Le Ricordanze* dated 14 July 1545, referring to a fresco work for the Monte Oliveto monastery in Naples⁴².

Fig. 39. Giorgio Vasari, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, Florence, Basilica de Santa Croce.

Few doubts remain that the presence of Vasari's *Christ Carrying the Cross* in the possession of his friend Vincenzo Borghini should be interpreted in a religious sense, of a devotional nature, this being one of the episodes with the greatest emotional content in the entire Christ's Passion cycle. Providing access to this Vasari painting, in the Ospedale di Santa Maria degli Innocenti, to two young painters who enjoyed the protection of the institution's director, left a lasting mark, as commented by Scorza⁴³.

Said scholar points out that a number of heads from this Vasari *Christ Carrying the Cross* were copied in a sketchbook belonging to Francesco Morandini, known as Il Poppi (Poppi, 1544 – Florence, 1597), who was one of Vasari's most favored disciples. He spent time as a resident of the Ospedale de la Piazza della Santissima Annunziata, and we know of a *Portrait of Vincenzo Borghini* by him, which is preserved in Karlsruhe's Staatliche Kunsthalle. It is recorded that in his training Morandini made copies and illustrations in this sketchbook of works by Michelangelo, Raphael, Andrea del Sarto, Federico Barocci and Giorgio Vasari.

On a folio with *Studies of female heads* (fig. 34) kept at the Uffizi's Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe (4264F), Il Poppi reproduces the trio of female heads with their backs to Christ from Borghini's painting by Vasari. Another folio with *Studies of soldiers' heads and helmets* (fig. 35), recorded as inv.4267F, copies the head of the bearded Roman centurion with his arm around the crosspiece of the cross, and the head of one of the mounted soldiers wearing a lion's skin as a helmet. The third folio from this sketchbook, which also features *Studies of soldiers' heads and helmets* (fig. 36), with inventory number inv.4268F, depicts the soldiers' heads and helmets in the foreground. Finally, in another folio with *Studies of heads and a leg* (fig. 37), recorded with inventory number inv.4270F, Il Poppi copies the exotically-hatted Mameluke slave who goes before the horsemen on their exit from the gates of Jerusalem⁴⁴.

Giovanni Battista Naldini (Florence, 1535 – 1591), who was also called Battista degli Innocenti, joined the orphanage directed by Borghini at a tender age. A member of the Acca-



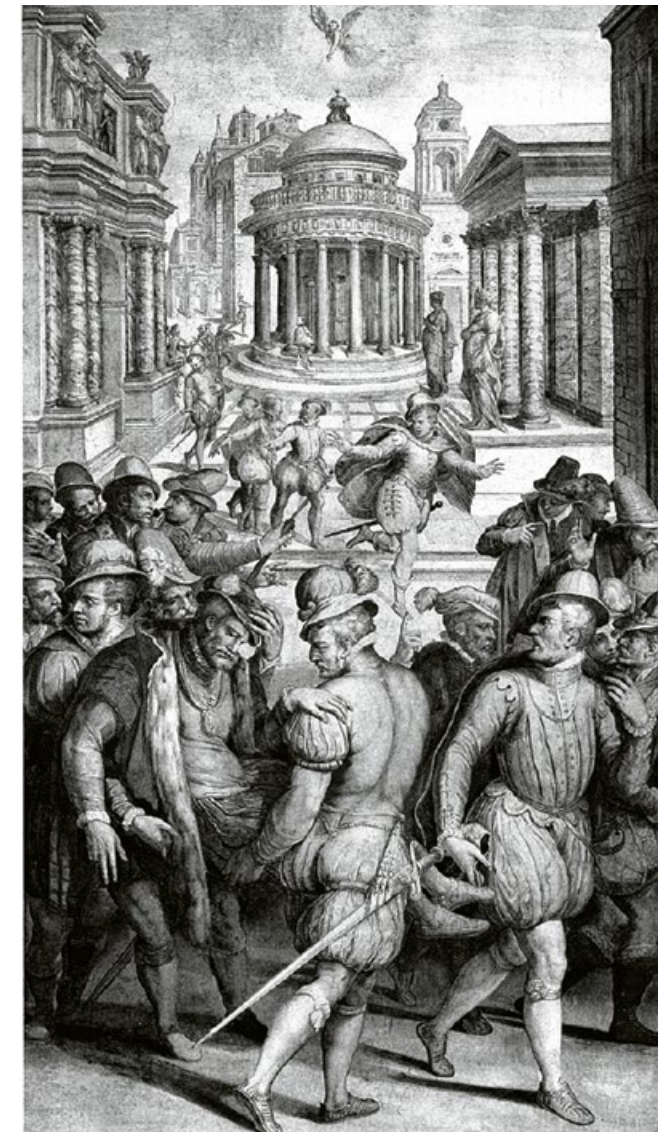


Fig. 40. Giorgio Vasari, *Christ Carrying the Cross* (detail), Florence, Basilica de Santa Croce.

Fig. 41. Giorgio Vasari, *Coligny Wounded*, Vatican, Sala Regia.

demia del Disegno, Naldini worked with Vasari on the Salone dei Cinquecento in the Palazzo Vecchio and, later, was also involved with Francesco Morandini on the decoration of Francesco I's *Studiolo*.

Naldini's *Christ Carrying the Cross* painted for the Lenzoni chapel of the Florentine Abbey (fig. 38) where Borghini had taken Benedictine vows in 1532, shows that when a young man he passed through the Florentine workshop of the painter Jacopo Carrucci, also called Il Pontormo and, most of all, points to the influence of Vasari's version of this Passion episode⁴⁵. As with our master from Arezzo, he portrays the entrance gateway to Jerusalem in shadow on the extreme left and focusses all light on the cross-bearing Christ falling to his knees, turn-

ing his head towards the humble gesture of Veronica who is holding a cloth or veil. The soldiers with their cuirasses and helmets take inspiration in Vasari's composition, but with less frantic gesticulations. The main change is the figure of Simon of Cyrene, who is pictured helping Christ to bear the weight of the cross with an arm that serves as a nod to Michelangelo.

In the reforms undertaken by Vasari in the summer of 1566 as part of the renovation of the Franciscan basilica of Santa Croce in Florence, at the behest and under the protection of

Duke Cosimo I de' Medici (1519-1574), having completed works at the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella, he painted three altarpieces, returning once again in the Buonarroti chapel to the dramatic Passion passage relating *Christ Carrying the Cross* (fig. 39), which he completed at the end of 1572 when he was executing the *Last Judgement* fresco work for the dome of Florence Cathedral. Vasari completed the painting of two other altars within the iconographic programme created by his friend Borghini, on the subject of the *Incredulity of Saint Thomas* for the Guidacci chapel and a *Pentecost* for the Biffoli chapel⁴⁶.

This great altar ensemble, arranged next to the funeral monument to Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), and prepared by Vasari and other members of Florence's Accademia del Disegno, was the result of a 1568 commission from Lionardo Buonarroti (1522-1599), Michelangelo's nephew and heir. The cleaning and painting of this altarpiece painting (oil on panel, 420cm x 270cm) enabled Cornelison to identify the portraits of Michelangelo and the Florentine painter Giovanni Battista di Jacopo di Guaspare, better known as Rosso Fiorentino, in the figures of Nicodemus carrying a ladder over his shoulder, and Joseph of Arimathea, bearing the *titulus crucis* in Hebrew, Greek and Latin⁴⁷.

Vasari included a large number of figures in this great vertical painting, but as with the other two versions of *Christ Carrying the Cross*, he prioritized the foreground interaction of Veronica and Christ as he falls to his knees under the weight of the cross (fig. 40). In this case, as his falls, Jesus' left hand rests on a rock, as it does in the print of the same subject by Albrecht Dürer (ca.1498-99) from his *Large Passion* series.

The figure of Simon of Cyrene, stripped to the waist and with his Herculean arm helping Jesus, is a novelty in Vasari's interpretation of the subject of *Christ Carrying the Cross*, and which would also be followed by his disciple Giovanni Battista Naldini in his work on the same subject from the Florentine Abbey.

In this painting from the Santa Croce basilica he would again use the same spatial reference of the gateway to Jerusalem with the departing authorities and soldiers on horseback with banners taking up the left-hand half of the upper part of the composition, with the rest being occupied by a barren landscape with a sky effect full of clouds. The two bare-chested thieves with their hands tied are one notable novelty in the procession towards Golgotha.



Fig. 42. Giorgio Vasari, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, Florence, Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe delle Gallerie degli Uffizi.



Fig. 43. Follower of Vasari, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, Madrid, Museo Lázaro Galdiano.



Fig. 44. Rafael Sanzio, *Christ falls on the Way to Calvary*, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

Fig. 45. Marcantonio Raimondi or Agostino Veneziano, *Christ falls on the Way to Calvary*.





For the swooning Virgin on the left-hand side of the composition, Vasari without doubt took inspiration from an engraving by Giulio Bonasone, after Raphael's preparatory drawing for the Baglioni Entombment (Rome, Galleria Borghese)⁴⁸. Another identified source used by Vasari in this composition was the Roman soldier with his back to us who is twisting his torso and holding the rope that passes around Christ's neck like a halter on the right-hand side, based on an engraving by Giovanni Jacopo Caraglio of *Saturn and Philyra* after Giovanni Battista di Jacopo, known as Rosso Fiorentino (Florence 1495 – Paris, 1540). Vasari would include this figure once again in his fresco work *Coligny Wounded* for the Sala Regia in the Vatican (fig. 41)⁴⁹.

Vasari made a number of preparatory drawings for the Santa Croce altarpiece, one particularly accomplished one from the Uffizi Gallery's Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe (inv. 1190E, 321mm x 242mm; fig. 42), which presents certain



Fig. 46. Lucas van Leyden, *Christ and Veronica*.

Fig. 47. Albrecht Dürer, *The Way to Calvary*.

changes with regard to the final painting⁵⁰. Madrid's Lázaro Galdiano Museum preserves one drawing (inv. 00558; 344mm x 257mm), which is most certainly Vasari copy, and which has escaped the attention of art critics (fig. 43).

Of the sources from which Giorgio Vasari drew for this composition of *Christ Carrying the Cross* for the noblewoman from Rome, Ersilia Cortese (lost, and yet known through the two original small-scale author replicas), it is without doubt worth highlighting the painting executed in Rome in 1515-16 by Raphael Sanzio depicting *The Fall on the Way to Calvary* – subsequently also known as *Lo Spasimo di Sicilia* – intended for the main altar of the church of Santa Maria dello Spasimo in the monastery of the Olivetana Order from Palermo in Sicily (fig. 44), which apparently also saw the involvement of Giulio Romano and Giovan Francesco Penni⁵¹. The commission patron Giacomo Basilicò was extremely devoted to the Virgin Mary, with particular dedication to Our Lady of Sorrows.



Fig. 48. Joan de Joanes, *Christ on the Way to Calvary*, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

Another important focal point in the depiction of this Passion episode is made up of Pilate, with his command baton and soldiers on horseback as they leave through the gates of Jerusalem. Simon of Cyrene offers to help Christ bear the weight of the cross with his powerful arms. The figure of the soldier with his back to us in the foreground counterbalances the group of women and heads the group pushing Christ on with a rope.

The mounted soldier dressed in a cuirass and carrying the banner which is fluttering in the breeze acts as a hinge point with the final compositional planes, where small-scale figures are pictured in motion, at the head of the procession with the two thieves, Gestas and Dismas, their hands tied behind their backs. In the background we see the Mount of Golgotha with two crosses and a pagan altar with a statue.

It is interesting to note the early interest shown by Vasari in the print of Raphael's *Lo Spasimo* as demonstrated by *Christ Carried to the Sepulcher* (fig. 2)

from 1532 (Arezzo, Casa Vasari) where he drew inspiration from the mounted soldier carrying the command baton⁵².

In his *Vita da Raffaello da Urbino* Vasari relates this famous work depicting the *Fall on the Way to Calvary* for the church of Santa Maria de las Angustias in Palermo: "*Fece poi Raffaello per il monasterio di Palermo detto santa Maria dello Spasmo, de frati di monte Oliveto una tavola d'un Christo, che porta la croce, la quale è tenuta cosa meravigliosa. Conoscendosi in quella, la impietà de' Crocifissori, che lo conducono alla morte al Monte Calvario con grandissima rabbia, dove il Christo appassionatissimo nel tormento dello avvicinarsi alla morte, calcato in terra per il peso del legno della Croce, & bagnato di sudore, & di sangue, si volta verso le Marie, che piangono dirottissimamente. Oltre ciò si vede fra loro Veronica, che stende le braccia, porgendoli un panno, con uno affetto di Carità grandissima. Senza che l'opera è piena di armati à cavallo, & à piede, iquali sboccano fuori della porta di Gierusalemme con*





Fig. 49. Vicent Macip and Joan de Joanes, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, Segorbe, cathedral.

Fig. 50. Joan de Joanes, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, Private Collection.

gli stendardi della giustizia in mano, in attitudini varie, & bellissime. Questa tavola finita del tutto, ma non condotta ancora al suo luogo, fu vicinissima à capitar male, perciocche secondo che e'dicono, essendo ella messa in mare, per essere portata in Palermo, una orribile tempesta, percosse ad uno scoglio la nave, che la portava di maniera, che tutta si aperse, & si perderono gli huomini, & le mercanzie, eccetto questa tavola solamente, che cosi incassata come era su portata dal mare in quel di Genova; Dove ripescata & tirata in terra, fu venduta essere cosa divina, & per questo messa in custodia; essendosi mantenuta illesa, & senza macchia, ò difetto alcuno, perciocche fino alla furia de'venti, & l'onde del mare hebbono rispetto alla bellezza di tale

*opera, della quale divulgandosi poi la fama, procacciarono i Monaci di rihaverla, & appena, che con favor del Papa ella fu renduta loro, che satisfecero, e bene, coloro che l'havevano salvata. Rimbarcatala dunque di nuovo, & condottola pure in Sicilia, la posero in Palermo, nelqual luogo ha piu fama, & riputazione che'l monte di Vulcano*⁵³.

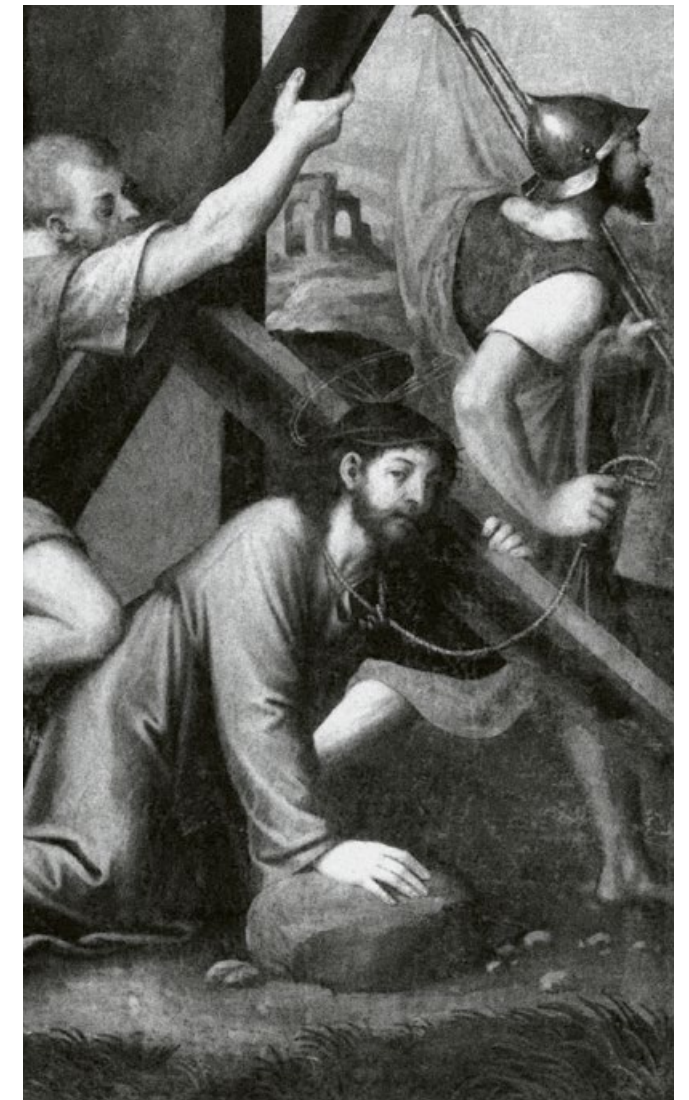
Vasari, being both familiar with, and the owner of, engravings (like his iconographic friend Borghini), proved extremely permeable and indiscriminate when it came to those graphic sources of Nordic origin that has previously depicted the passage of Christ Carrying the Cross with all its narrative and descriptive potential. It is as such that a debt has been observed in Vasari's compositions to the 1515 engraving of *Christ and Veronica* (fig.46) by Lucas van Leyden (ca.1494-1533); the engraving *Way to Calvary* by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) belonging to the Large Passion (fig. 47), and also to a print of the same subject by the German engraver from the Small Passion series. Finally, Vasari may also have known of Martin Schongauer's (ca.1440/53-1491) early engraving, *Large Bearing of the Cross* from around 1475⁵⁴.

The influence of Raphael's *Lo Spasimo di Sicilia* extended as far as the painter Joan Macip, better known as Joan de Joanes (Valencia?, ca.1500 – Bocairent, 1579) as demonstrated in the panel *Christ carrying the Cross* (fig. 48) from the Prado National Museum (P.000849; oil on panel, 93cm x 80cm)⁵⁵.

Joan Macip Navarro was part of a major dynasty of artists from Valencia, headed by his father, the altarpiece painter Vicent Macip, which continued after the death of Joanes in 1579 with his son Vicent Macip Comes who carried on the family aesthetic until the early years of the 17th century.

Joan de Joanes's connection to Raphael goes back a long way and can be observed in the parallels Palomino draws between the former and both Raphael and the Spaniard Luis Morales: "He was a disciple of Raphael da Urbino, and he also imitated the Divine Morales; but with such superior excellence than either of them, that he surpassed them in beauty, the loveliness of the coloring, and physiognomies, and equaled them in everything else: so that they are only distinguished in this way"⁵⁶.

This painting from the Prado originates from the old altarpiece of the guild of silversmiths, dedicated to its patron saint, Eligius, in the church of Santa Catalina in Valencia,



which was contracted to Vicente Macip and his son Joan de Joanes on 20 June 1534 for 260 pounds, with one of the contract clauses setting out that Joanes and nobody else was to undertake all of the painting work within a period of no more than five years⁵⁷.

This *Christ Carrying the Cross* by Joan de Joanes formed part of the altarpiece platform, along with the companion piece of the *Last Supper* (92cm x 84cm; Valencia, Museum of Fine Art), the central panel from the predella which, having been rescued from a fire, were donated by the Marquis of Angulo to the Order of Montesa in the convent at the Temple of Valencia. This *Christ Carrying the Cross* would go on to join the San Carlos Royal Academy of Fine Art in Valencia as a reward for having preserved the Temple convent's works seized by Marshal Suchet, and was offered, along with a *Mary Magdalene* by the painter Jerónimo Jacinto de Espinosa (Cocentaina, 1600 – Valencia, 1667) from the convent of Santa Catalina,



Fig. 51. Polidoro da Caravaggio,
The Way to Calvary, Naples,
Museo de Capodimonte.

to King Ferdinand VII during his visit to the city in 1814, then going on to form part of the royal collection and, subsequently, the Prado National Museum. During its time at the San Carlos Academy, the academician Vicente Noguera defined it as “the Canon or rule of painting in the sublimity, variety and beauty with which Joanes breathed life into the figures...”⁵⁸

Joan de Joanes did not have first-hand knowledge of Raphael’s *Fall on the Way to Calvary* or *Lo Spasimo di Sicilia*, but he was familiar with a 1517 engraving of the composition made by Agostino Veneziano (Venice, 1490 – Rome, 1540). Here, in contrast to Raphael’s work, Christ is seen standing up carrying the weight of the cross with help from Simon of Cyrene. Joanes incorporated the emotive charge of Jesus, who is looking, grief-stricken, towards his Mother, who has fallen to her knees, powerless before the sacrifice of her Son. The diagonal formed by the cross marks the sense of movement, with soldiers both on foot and on horseback and holy figures arranged in a crowded composition.

Joan de Joanes, who worked for many years in the workshop of his father, Vicent Macip, adopted the paternal formula of depicting Christ on his feet with the cross as he appears in the predella with five scenes from Christ’s Pasion in the *Altarpiece of Sts. Denis and Margaret*, from the church of San Juan del Hospital in Valencia, which was painted by Vicent Macip in about 1507 for the Sanfeliu family⁵⁹. This monumental altarpiece is preserved today in Valencia Cathedral.

The link with the Agostino Veneziano engraving may also be observed in the *Christ Carrying the Cross* from the predella with five Passion scenes from the Joan de Joanes *Altarpiece of the Crucifixion* preserved in the parish of San Nicolás de Bari and San Pedro Mártir in Valencia.

In the painting of *Christ Carrying the Cross* (fig. 49) from the predella of the main altarpiece of Segorbe Cathedral, a joint work by Vicent Macip and Joan de Joanes, we can also observe the influence of Veneziano’s engraving in the soldier with his back to us and the group of soldiers on horseback. This painting was mainly executed by Vicent, and features human figures reminiscent of the style painted by the Italian painter Paolo da San Leocadio, whose disciple he once was,



Fig. 52. Polidoro da Caravaggio, The Way to Calvary, London, National Gallery.

other than the group made up of the Virgin, Saint John and Mary Magdalene in the foreground, who were painted by his son, Joan⁶⁰. As early as the 18th century, Ponz commented on its parallels with Raphael: “The one on Amargura Street is an almost exact copy of the painting that Your Majesty has by Raphael, known as *Lo Spasimo di Sicilia*, of which I have already spoken with you”⁶¹.

It is worth noting that Joan de Joanes studied and used Veneziano’s engraving solely as a source of inspiration, ultimately executing a free interpretation of it. In the 19th century, Viardot would describe it as: “a clear yet not servile imitation”⁶². The fact that Joanes took inspiration from this engraving is also seen in another panel (62cm x 42cm) of his in a private collection depicting *Christ Carrying the Cross* (fig. 50), paired with a *Crowning with Thorns* and a *Flagellation* belonging to

Fig. 53. Jacopo Bassano, *Christ Falling on the Way to Calvary*, Glyndebourne, Christie Collection.



the predella of an altarpiece⁶³. In this painting Joanes, while reducing the figures, repeats the scene of Christ leaning his hand on a rock on the way to Golgotha, as seen in Raphael's work.

A follower of Raphael Sanzio in Rome from 1515, and a collaborator on the decoration of the Apostolic Palace Lodges in the Vatican City, the painter from Lombardy Polidoro Caldara (Caravaggio, ca.1499 – Messina, 1543) – better known as Polidoro da Caravaggio due to the town near Bergamo where he was born – shows his debt to Raphael's *Lo Spasimo di Sicilia* when he undertook the same iconographic subject in Messina (*The Way to Calvary*)⁶⁴.

After Raphael's death, Polidoro da Caravaggio entered into association with Maturino Fiorentino, and they became extremely successful specializing in the grisaille fresco decoration of the facades of the palaces of Rome, as attested to by Vasari in the following comments he devoted to them: "*E perché erano in Roma pur molti, che di grado, d'opere e di nome i coloriti loro conducevano più vivaci et allegri, e di favori più degni de più sortiti, cominciò entrargli nell'animo, avendo Baldassarre Sanese fatto alcune*

Fig. 54 . Jacopo Bassano, *The Way to Calvary*, London, National Gallery.



facce di case di chiaro e scuro, d'imitar quello andaré et a quelle, già venute in usanza, attendere da indi innanzi. Per il che ne cominciarono una a Monte Cavallo dirimpetto a San Salvestro in compagnia di Pellegrino da Modena, la quale diede loro animo di poter tentare se quello dovessi essere il loro esercizio; e ne seguitarono dirimpetto alla porta del finaco di San Salvatore del Lauro un'altra; e similmente fecero da la porta del fianco della Minerva una historia, e di sopra San Rocco a Ripetta un'altra, che è un fregio di mostri marini. E ne dipinsero infinite in questo principio, manco buone dell'altre, per tutta Roma, che non accade qui raccontarle per avere eglino poi in tal cosa operato meglio"⁶⁵.

As a result of the Sack of Rome in 1527 and the death of Maturino due to the plague, Polidoro left for Naples, where he painted an *Altarpiece of Saints Andrew and Peter and Souls in Purgatory* for a brotherhood of fishermen in Sant'Angelo alla Pescheria. After Naples, Polidoro settled in Messina where he executed the *capolavoro* of *The Way to Calvary* (fig. 51), commissioned by Pietro Ansalone, the consul of the brotherhood of Catalans for the oratory of the church of the Santissima Annunziata, also known as "*dei Catalani*".



This altarpiece (oil on panel, 310cm x 247cm) by Polidoro da Caravaggio, housed today at the Capodimonte Museum and Gallery (inv.Q 103)⁶⁶, was finished by the painter from Lombardy in 1534, as its engraving in the libretto of Colagiacomo d'Alibrando titled *Il Spasmo di Maria Vergine* bears witness, and it received high praise from Giorgio Vasari: “*Appresso nel ritorno di Carlo V da la vittoria di Tunizi, pasando egli per Messina, Polidoro gli fece archi triomfali bellissimi, onde n'acquistò nome e premio infinito. Laonde egli, che di continuo ardeva di Desiderio di rivedere quella Roma, la quale di continuo strugge coloro che statì ci sono molti anni provare gli altri paesi, avendo ne l'ultimo fatto una tavola d'un Cristo che porta la croce, lavorata a olio, di bontà e di colorito vaghissimo. Nella quale fece un numero di figure che accompagnano Cristo a la morte, soldati, farisei, cavagli, donne, putti et i ladroni innanzi, col tener ferma la intenzione, como poteva essere ordinata una giustizia simile: che ben pareva che la natura si*

Fig. 55. Jacopo Bassano, *Christ Falling on the Way to Calvary*, Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum.

*fusse sforzata a far l'ultime pruove sue in questa opera veramente eccellentissima*⁶⁷.

Polidoro da Caravaggio had Raphael's composition of *Christ falling on the way to Calvary* in mind for the main altar of the Olivetani church in Palermo, where Pietro Ansalone had a chapel, and he wanted to compete with it, executing a number of preparatory drawings in oil on panel. The fact that Polidoro took Raphael's composition into account is observed in his draft painting *The Way to Calvary* preserved in the Vatican Museums (oil on panel, 60cm x 45cm; inv.652), a first pictorial draft with a reduced palette in which he largely followed on in the same vein as his master, incorporating the figure of Veronica with the Holy Face imprinted on her veil⁶⁸.

Polidoro's second sketch of the painting from the church of the Annunziata dei Catalani is also preserved in the Capodimonte National Museum and Gallery (oil on panel, 71cm x 54cm; inv. Q 740), where the artist remained faithful to Raphael's composition in the figure of the horse with the banner and the Virgin, with her arms stretched out towards her fallen Son with the crown of thorns⁶⁹.

Polidoro's third sketch for *The Way to Calvary*, which is compositionally closer to his final version, is preserved in London's National Gallery (oil on panel 73.3cm x 59.3cm; inv. NG 6954), originally from the Philip Pouncey collection, and it introduces the ambitious approach to the landscape and the swooning Virgin (fig. 52)⁷⁰.

The final composition of Polidoro da Caravaggio's *The Way to Calvary* presents a multi-focal character structured around the cross-pieces of the cross. The artist positions the exhausted Christ in the middle, fallen under the weight of the cross with a rope around his neck, a soldier cruelly pulling on it, and Simon of Cyrene offering to help him bear his load. To the right we see Mary Magdalene, kneeling with her fingers entwined, and Veronica, with the image of the Holy Face. At the top, on a hill under the city of Jerusalem, we see a crowd of soldiers on foot and on horseback with the two thieves stripped to the waist with their hands tied.

On the left, the swooning Virgin being tended to by a group of women along with Saint John makes up the other important focal point with great expressiveness and dynamism. The Jewish people are seen crowding around a huge tree trying to catch a glimpse of the Savior's suffering on the way to Golgotha.

The engraving of Raphael's *Lo Spasimo di Sicilia* was also used as a primary iconographic source of inspiration by Jacopo dal Ponte, known as Bassano (Bassano del Grappa, ca.1510 – 1592) for various of his compositions depicting the subject of Christ Carrying the Cross⁷¹, as we saw with Vasari's small-scale replicas. The attention Bassano paid the engraving of the composition is also clearly demonstrated by his use of it in the *Martyrdom of St. Mark*, housed at the Royal Collection in Hampton Court Palace.

Bassano's version of *Christ Falling on the Way to Calvary* (oil on canvas, 137cm x 117cm) (fig. 53) from around 1544-47, originally from the San Giovanni convent in Bassano del Grappa, and now housed in the Christie collection in Glyn-debourne (Lewes, Sussex), presents a clear debt to the 1517 engraving of Raphael's painting⁷². It is as such that we observe the same posture in the soldier in the foreground dragging Christ along with a rope, and the figures of the Virgin with her arms stretched out towards her Son and some of the Marys.

Bassano's landscape format composition of *Christ Falling on the Way to Calvary* painted in about 1543 and housed at Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum (oil on canvas 81.9cm x 118.7cm) includes a new feature in the swooning Virgin being tended to by the Marys, but it remains faithful to Raphael's work in other elements, such as the soldier with his back to us with the rope over his shoulder, the way Christ is turning his head or the group of riders⁷³.

There are further parallels in Bassano's *Christ on the Way to Calvary* (oil on canvas 96cm x 122cm) painted in about 1536 from the Fondation Bemberg in Toulouse⁷⁴, in which we observe the departure from the gates of Jerusalem, with Christ once again leaning his left hand on a rock and the soldier at the head of the procession holding a rope, as in Raphael's composition. Bassano also once again includes the swooning Virgin and, in this case, the two thieves, Gestas and Dismas, with their crosses.



In 1984, the National Gallery in London purchased a work by Jacopo Bassano from around 1544-45 on the subject of *The Way to Calvary* (oil on canvas 145.3cm x 132.5cm; NG 6490)⁷⁵. In this work (fig. 54), Jacopo was inspired by the engraving of Raphael's *Lo Spasimo di Sicilia* and Dürer's engraving of *Christ Falling on the Way to Calvary* for his series of the Small Passion. As Vasari would do later, in his *Christ falling on the way to Golgotha*, the Venetian painter gives prominence to the glance exchanged with Veronica, who compassionately offers her veil to wipe Jesus' face.

Finally, we would mention the *Christ Falling on the Way to Calvary* (fig. 55) by Jacopo Bassano from about 1552, housed at Budapest's Szépművészeti Múzeum (oil on canvas 94cm x 114cm; inv. 5879)⁷⁶, in which the painter returns to the episode of Christ falling with the cross, focusing on Veronica offering Jesus her veil with both hands.

Pedro Fernández de Murcia, also known as Pseudo Bramantino, author of the *Altarpiece of St. Helen* from the cathedral of Girona and documented until 1523, broke away from classic Renaissance tradition and, during his stay in Naples, undertook a peculiar version of *The Way of Calvary* (fig. 56) for San Domenico Maggiore (oil on panel transferred to canvas, 174cm x 150cm)⁷⁷. On 20 October 1512, the commission patron Manfredino de Bucchis was given permission to set up a chapel in San Domenico dedicated to Mount Calvary⁷⁸.



Fig. 56. Fig. 56 Pedro Fernández de Murcia, *The Way of Calvary*, Naples, San Domenico Maggiore.

Fig. 57. Martin Schongauer, *Large Bearing of the Cross*.

Like Vasari, Pedro Fernández showed an avid interest for Nordic figurative culture, known through engravings. Some of the elements of this composition by the painter from Murcia, who was active in the Italian territories during the first decades of the 16th century, follows *The Large Bearing of the Cross* (fig. 57), a masterpiece by the German painter and engraver Martin Schongauer (Colmar, ca.1440/53 – Breisach, 1491), executed in 1475, which in turn was inspired by a lost composition on the same subject by Jan van Eyck.

The fallen Christ with the lopsided crown of thorns bearing a large cross and with his head turned to the viewer follows Schongauer's landscape image (28.9cm x 42.9cm) with few changes. The same can be said for the way the authority figures are arranged, following Christ on horses. The influence of Leonardo's caricatures, which Fernández must have taken in during an earlier stay in Milan, can be seen in some of the faces he paints.

Fig. 58. Ridolfo Bigordi, also called Ghirlandaio, *Christ on the road to Calvary*, London, National Gallery.

Fig. 59. Biagio di Antonio Tucci, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, Paris, Musée du Louvre.



The foreshortened presentation of the white horse in the foreground is clearly inspired by the horses in Schongauer's print. The soldier on horseback motions to Simon of Cyrene who, like the soldier, is pointing his index finger towards Christ. Occupying the side opposite the soldier is a group formed by the Virgin with a bonnet and cloak, her arms outstretched, the Marys and St. John. The road to Golgotha winds its way towards the back, as in Vasari's version of *Christ Carrying the Cross* for the Santa Croce basilica.

The panoramic landscape including magnificent rocky outcrops cut out against the sky would be a constant feature in Fernández's output. Such is the case of *Vision of the Blessed Amedeo Menez de Sylva*, housed at the Galleria Nazionale del Palazzo Barberini in Rome (inv.3574; oil on panel, 277cm x 320cm)⁷⁹ and *Saint Francis receiving the Stigmata* preserved in Turin's Galleria Sabauda (tempera on panel, 194cm x 151cm)⁸⁰.

Giorgio Vasari's friend Ridolfo Bigordi, known as Ghirlandaio (Florence, 1483-1561), son of the also painter Domenico Ghirlandaio and Costanza di Bartolomeo Nucci, undertook a *Christ on the road to Calvary* (fig. 58) in the Florentine church of San Gallo, which was praised by Vasari in his portrayal of the painter: "Ridolfo intanto, disegnando al cartone di Michelangelo, era tenuto de'migliori disegnatori che vi fussero e perciò molto amato da ognuno, e particolarmente da Raf-





Fig. 60. Bernardino di Betto detto il Pintoricchio, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, Isola Bella, Palazzo Borromeo.

Fig. 61. Giovanni Antonio Bazzi, also called Il Sodoma, *Christ Falling the Way to Calvary*, Greenville, Bob Jones University Museum and Gallery.

con prontezza e vivacità. La quale opera, in cui sono molte teste bellissime, ritratte dal vivo e fatte con amore, acquistò gran nome a Ridolfo: vi è ritratto suo padre et alcuni garzoni che stavano seco, e de' suoi amici il Poggino, lo Scheggia et il Nunziata che è una testa vivissima⁸¹.

Ridolfo Ghirlandaio's painting depicting the subject of *The Procession to Calvary* was purchased in 1883 by the National Gallery in London (inv. NG1143; oil on canvas, transferred from wood 166.4cm x 161.3cm), and corresponds to Ghirlandaio's early activity, circa 1505, after undertaking the *Coronation of Mary* for the nunnery in Ripoli, now housed at the Musée du Petit Palais in Avignon.

Like Vasari, who used the soldier with the red turban from the central group in the *Battle of Anghiari* as an iconographic source for his *Christ Carrying the Cross*, Ghirlandaio returns to this head for the soldier with helmet behind the cross shouting at the Virgin, the Marys and St. John.

For his depiction of this Passion of Christ Gospel passage, Ridolfo did not picture Christ falling, but instead includes the figure of Simon of Cyrene helping to bear the cross and Veronica kneeling and holding a cloth bearing the Holy Face. As with many contemporary paintings, a soldier leads the procession, his back turned to us. He is dragging Jesus along with a rope, which in this case is tied to his waist. In the background one can make out Mount Calvary with two crosses cut out against the cloudy sky.

A Tuscan example of *Christ Carrying the Cross* from the last third of the 16th century and attributed to the painter Biagio di Antonio Tucci (Florence, 1446 – ca.1510) is housed at the Louvre Museum (inv. 296; tempera and oil on wood 190.5cm x 191cm). This painting, from around 1470/80, by Biagio di Antonio, a little-known painter often confused with his contemporaries, and whose restitution only began in the 1930s,



Fig. 62. Bernardino Barbatelli, also called Il Poccetti, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, Arezzo, Museo Statale di Arte Medievale e Moderna.



was commissioned by the Antinori family for their chapel at the Santo Spirito church in Florence (fig. 59)⁸².

Christ, with a golden halo and a crown of thorns sitting tightly round his temples, carries a squared cross with the help of Simon of Cyrene, who is also barefoot. Biagio di Antonio turns Christ's head towards his mother, making visual contact as she compassionately intertwines her fingers. Next to the Marys and St. John we see Veronica, kneeling to one side and holding the cloth with the Holy Face.

A black soldier who in his left hand holds the nails of the crucifixion and the Titulus Crucis with the INRI inscription, referring to the passage in St. John 19:19, pushes Christ with a rope tied around his waist. Several armored soldiers with helmets make way for the procession towards Golgotha, which is seen at the top of the road.

An earlier work than Raphael's *Christ falling on the Way to Calvary*, painted in Rome for the church in the Santa Maria dello Spasimo monastery in Palermo, was the small version of *Christ Carrying the Cross* by the painter Bernardino di Betto, known as Il Pinturicchio (Perugia, 1454 – Siena, 1513).

Il Pinturicchio's work (fig. 60) is dated to the year of his death on a little cartouche that acts as a sort of *trompe l'oeil* on the frame reading: Questa Opera E dima / no Delpintorichio Da / Perugia MCCCCCXIII), and is preserved in the collections of the Palazzo Borromeo de Isola Bella (Piedmont)⁸³.

The panel's dimensions (51cm x 42.5cm), its miniaturesque style of depicting this moving episode from the Passion of Christ, and the fact that it was intended for private devotion, bear similarities with Vasari's two versions dealing with the same iconographic subject. The exuberance, the use of gilt, the decoration and style are reminiscent of Pinturicchio's

work from the 1490s, in particular the Sala dei Santi in the Appartamenti Borgia at the Vatican with the episodes of Isis and Osiris. It quite possible that the painter from Perugia first kept this prized panel and then signed it at the end of his life.

Dressed in a red tunic tied round the waist and a golden halo over his head with the three shafts of divine light, Christ moves forward barefoot carrying the cross on his left shoulder. He wears a rope round his neck like a halter, taut due to the pulling of the soldier heading the procession. He turns his head at his hair being pulled by another of his captors who is bearing a mace.

Behind them, surrounded by Roman soldiers holding banners, is the group formed of the Marys, St. John and the Virgin, who looks bewildered to find herself being held by

the neck by one of the soldiers. On a more distant plane, immersed in the dense landscape, one can make out the progress being made by the two thieves and, to one side, the crosses being put up.

Throughout his artistic career, Giovanni Antonio Bazzi, known as Il Sodoma (Vercelli, 1477 – Siena, 1549), and whose biography was included in Vasari's *Le Vite*, painted several scenes with subjects from the Passion of Christ⁸⁴. He painted the fresco image of a solitary *Cristo Portacroce* in the Abbey of Monte Oliveto Maggiore.

The Bob Jones University Museum in Greenville houses a *Christ Falling on the Way to Calvary* (oil on panel 201.9cm x 156.2cm; inv.115.1) by Giovanni Antonio Bazzi, in which Christ with a crown of thorns falls on the way to Calvary, leaning his right hand on a rock, in the same way as he appears in Dürer's engraving of the same subject for the Small Passion series (fig. 61). The expression of pain and Christ's physiognomic features are similar to other *Ecce Homo* or *The Arrest* paintings by the Vercelli-born artist.

Il Sodoma carried out other works on the same subject of the Passion of Christ. One of these is housed in the Chiesa di S. Maria Valleverde, Celano (Abruzzi), and another in the Santa Maria Maggiore basilica in Rome, which includes a reduced number of figures, the swooning Virgin and Simon of Cyrene helping.

This brings us to the conclusion of our review of some of the *Christ Carrying the Cross* compositions by other artists who were more or less contemporary to Giorgio Vasari, and which provide a better context for the two small-scale replica versions by Vasari, with their connections to Italian figurative culture and Nordic engraved sources. Finally, we would mention *Christ Carrying the Cross* (Fig. 62) by the Tuscan painter Bernardino Barbatelli, known as Il Poccetti (Florence, 1548 – 1612)⁸⁵.

This altarpiece (oil on panel, 254cm x 281cm) was painted by Poccetti in about 1580-1585, at a time when (shortly after a brief visit to Rome where he studied Raphael) we know he undertook a fresco painting for six lunettes in the main cloister of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, depicting passages from the life of St. Dominic.

The work remained at the Chiesa de Santa Cecilia in Florence until the end of 18th century, when it was taken to Arezzo, where it is now housed at the Museo Statale di Arte Medievale e Moderna.

This vertical composition is divided into two by the cross-piece of the cross carried by Christ at the center, flanked by the two thieves stripped to the waist with their hands tied behind their backs, which is an iconographic novelty. The armored Roman soldier on horseback with a helmet counterbalances the group formed of the Virgin, St. John and the Marys, who witness the suffering of Jesus, powerless to intervene.

The identification and recovery of this skillfully-executed panel painting of *Christ Carrying the Cross* by Giorgio Vasari provides new information for our understanding of his original replicas used in altarpieces, and may now be included in the Arezzo-born painter's pictorial corpus.

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GIORGIO VASARI'S CHRIST CARRYING THE CROSS, PARADIGM OF CINQUECENTO ARTISTIC TECHNIQUES

RAFAEL ROMERO
ADELINA ILLÁN

Giorgio Vasari is without doubt a fascinating figure from the Italian Renaissance. He was fortunate (or perhaps unlucky) enough to live in one of the moments of greatest artistic splendour, alongside indisputable geniuses such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael. His extraordinary gift for public relations, and the advantageous connections he had with major figures from all spheres of power, both political and religious as well as the wealthy bourgeoisie, proved an extraordinary boon to his artistic activities, helping him to receive numerous commissions and projects.

He had extensive knowledge of the painters of the past, and he knew the most renowned artists from his own period, having dealings with the most important active workshops, particularly in Florence and Rome. While an apprentice he trained at the major workshops of Andrea del Sarto, Baccio

Bandinelli, Rosso Fiorentino, Francesco Salviati and, briefly, Michelangelo Buonarroti himself. His time at these workshops must have equipped him with considerable knowledge of both past and current artistic techniques. This is clearly brought to bear in the prologue of his work *Le vite de' piu eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri* (1550)¹.

There is no doubt that all of this made an artist of Vasari. Not a genius like the great maestros of his day, but certainly an important painter, the head of one of the busiest workshops in Florence, a man with a perfect knowledge of the technical devices of the art of painting in the Cinquecento. He didn't limit himself to altar or easel painting, but also carried out a prolific number of mural works and the occasional piece of architecture. All of which gives us an idea of the artist's skills, his versatility and his detailed artistic knowledge.



I. Characteristics of the support

The panel used for this *Christ carrying the Cross*, executed by Giorgio Vasari in about 1560, presents all of the characteristics of 16th-century central Italian wooden supports (figs. 1 and 2). One might well say that in that century the structure of this type of panel underwent major innovations compared to previous periods: changes in the reinforcements on the back, the type of joints and the way they were made up. One example of this evolution is that, by the end of the 15th century, they began to stop attaching bars to the support, opting instead for unglued crossbars that slotted

into grooves running against the grain. It is also true that, in a way, standards of manufacture slackened off somewhat, with a tendency to use wood of an inferior quality².

The type of wood remained unchanged, with poplar (*populus nigra*) being most commonly used across the entire peninsula, other than in northern regions where it was combined with other types such as pine, fir or walnut.³ The panel before us here was made of poplar, made up of three vertical planks of high-quality wood (the central

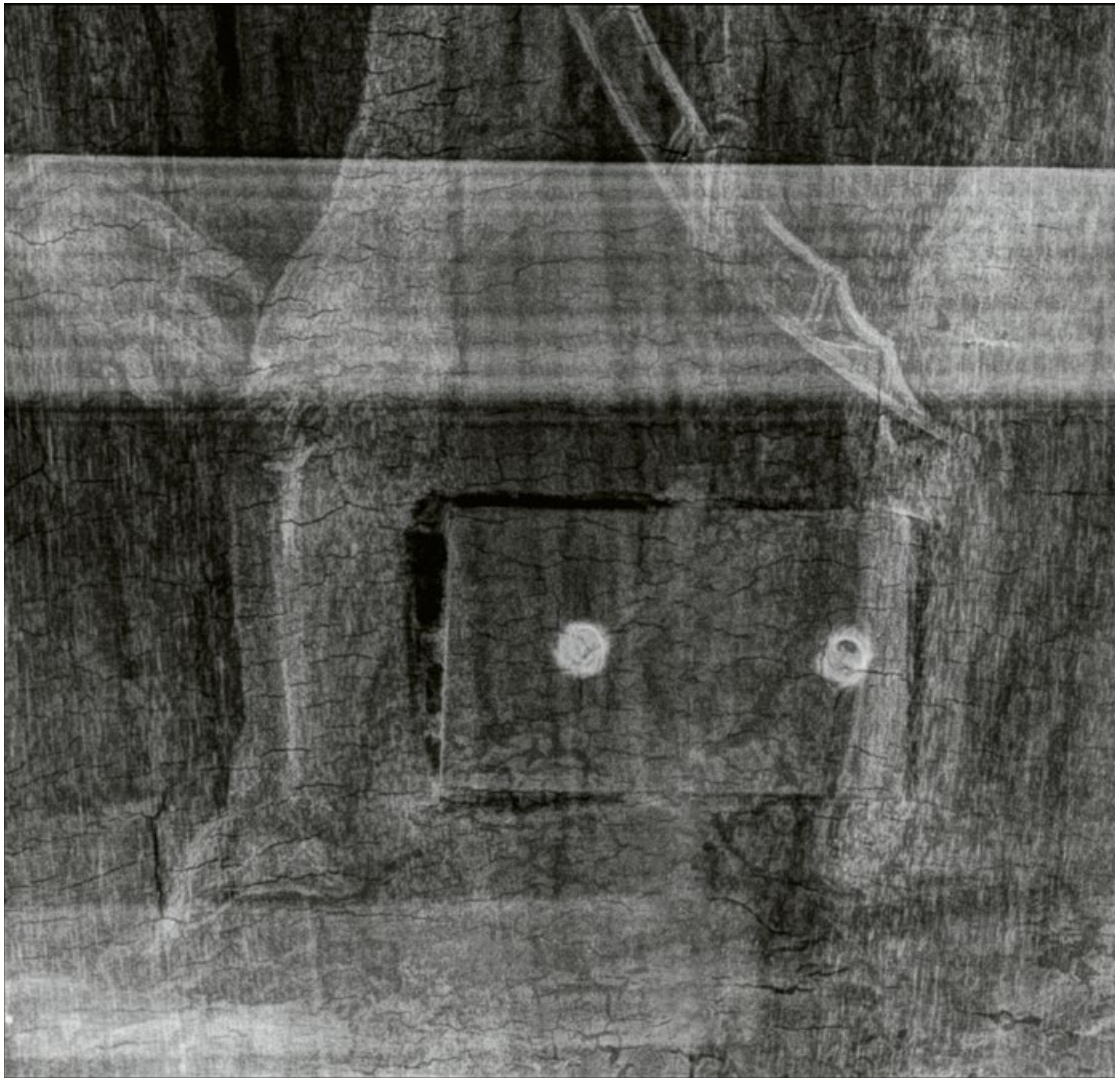
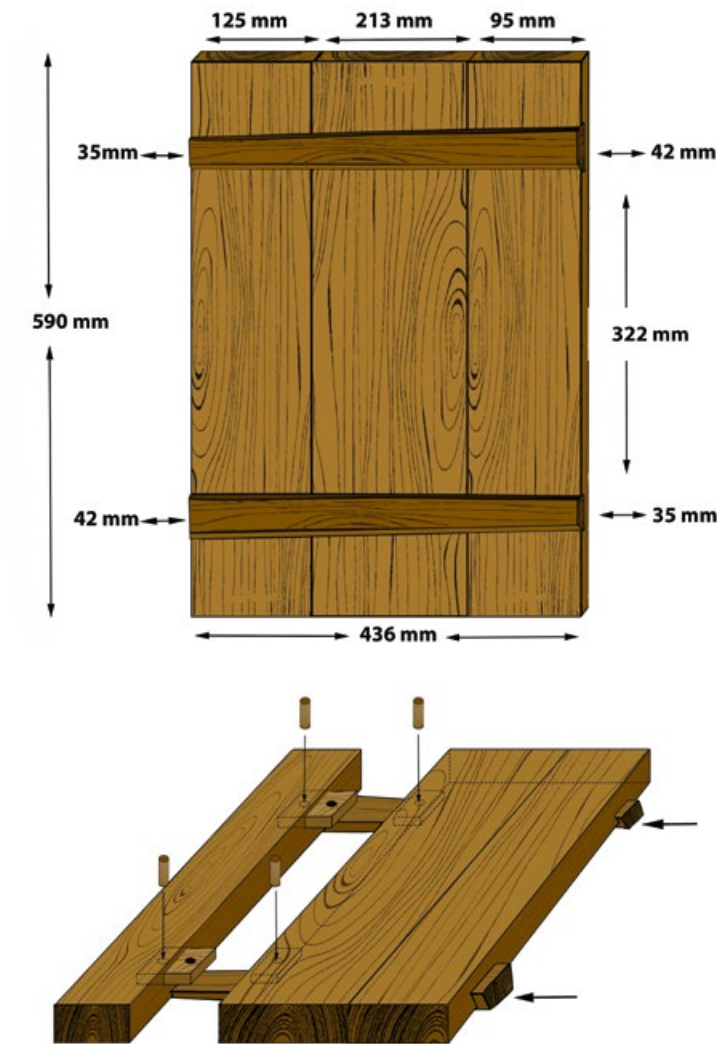


Fig. 4. Fig. 4 X-ray detail of one of the internal pegged dowels



one being slightly wider), free of knots or imperfections and with a thickness varying slightly between 25mm and 29mm⁴ (fig. 3).

The three vertical panels of wood were joined together with edge-to-edge joints. X-ray imaging shows that the joints were secured using internal dowels (*ranghette*), with two to each one (fig. 4). The support, thus assembled, was further strengthened using two cross-bars of decreasing width, each one inserted into groove cavities bored into the support, presenting a trapezoidal dovetail cross-section. These splines inserted into grooves were intended to stop the support losing its shape, and yet allowing for the natural movement of the wood, and as such they were not glued. They were also normally made of a harder wood than that of the panel. This type of construction using trapezoidal cross-section splines inserted into pre-prepared grooves in the wood appears to have originated in Medieval Byzantine icons⁵ (figs. 5 and 6).



Fig. 2. Reverse

Fig. 3. Dimensions of the support and the elements of which it consists

Fig. 5. Diagram of the panel structure

Fig. 6. Detail of the trapezoidal cross-piece being inserted into the groove on the back of the panel





Fig. 7 . General x-ray of the work

The structure described above is a perfect example of the model used mainly in areas of Tuscany and Rome during the *Cinquecento*. One might also say that the quality of this painting's support was of a higher standard than the average (fig. 7).

It is interesting to compare this work with the version housed at the Spencer Museum of Art (Kansas, US). Here, although the measurements are extremely similar (59cm x 44.2cm), there are certain variations in the support. The three planks of wood making up the panel have been arranged horizontally, and each joint is also fixed using a wooden peg. The structure is secured with a vertical, trapezoidal cross-section spline inserted into a groove in much the same way as in our panel. X-ray imaging also throws up an odd detail; on the right-hand edge a long wooden wedge has been inserted. The opinion of the conservators is that this must have been to correct some kind of flaw in the wood⁶.

This contrast in how the two panels were assembled is interesting, with the one from the American museum being more unorthodox, although still within the normal parameters of the types of supports used in Italy at the time.

These panels did not always need to be strengthened using splines, as their dimensions and the thickness of the panels did not necessarily call for it. See, for instance, the paradigmatic example of Leonardo de Vinci's *Gioconda*, whose measurements (79cm x 53.4cm) are greater than those of the Vasari panel. Here the two vertical pieces of poplar are joined with edge-to-edge joints in the middle of the work, and there is no reinforcement at the back. This is all the more significant when we consider that this is a much thinner panel than the one we are dealing with here, with a thickness varying between 12.4mm and 13.8mm⁷.

II. Preparation of the wooden panel

Next, the wooden panel had to be prepared in order to attain the ideal surface for painting, which no longer called for the complex succession of coats applied during the *Trecento* and *Quattrocento*, as set out in all its precision by Cennino Cennini in the treatise he wrote at the end of the 14th century⁸. These were normally made up of a two-fold layer of gypsum and animal glue binder, or *gesso*, the first being thicker, known as *gesso grosso*, and then a second much thinner one, known as *gesso sottile*. Their function was mainly to provide a suitable base for the subsequent gilding and polishing stages.

With the disappearance of the tradition of using gilding in backgrounds, halos and other details during the 15th century, such a complex process was no longer necessary, and from the end of the 15th century preparation had become much simpler. Often just the one coat of *gesso* was enough, or at the most two, bound with animal glue. This is exactly what we find in our panel, where we see a thick layer of gypsum and

anhydrite, with traces of barium sulfate, presenting a clearly yellow coloration due to the decay of the animal glue binder⁹ (fig. 8). Judging by the granulometry and composition of this layer we can state that it was *gesso grosso*.

Another regular feature in 15th-century Italian panel preparations, and which is described by Vasari in his text on artistic technique, is the application of animal glue in order to seal the preparation:

When the artist wants to start painting, that is to say having applied the gesso onto the panels or canvasses in their stretchers, and having sanded down the surface, four or five layers of the finest glue are applied with a sponge¹⁰

The fact that in our work, this insulating layer of glue (whose purpose is to avoid the binder from the subsequent paint lay-

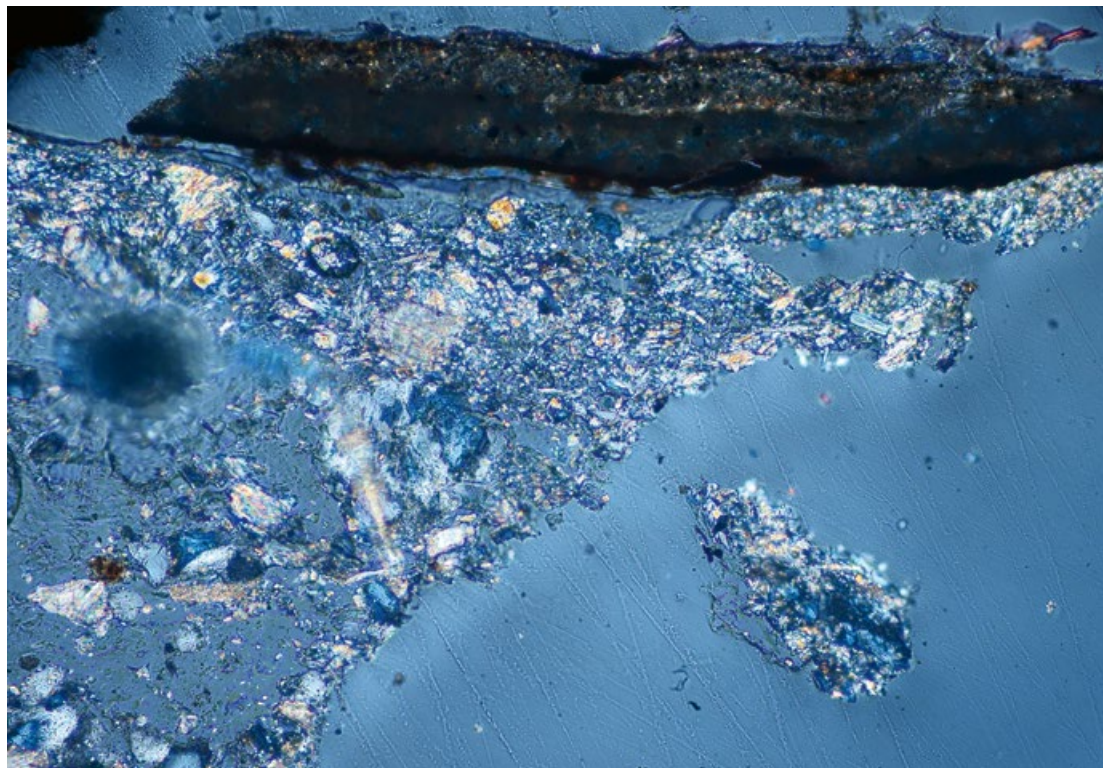


Fig. 8. Thin section prepared from a cross-section in which we can observe a single layer of *gesso grosso* made up of anhydrite and gypsum with animal glue binder (500X transmitted light). We can also observe the presence of bubbles.

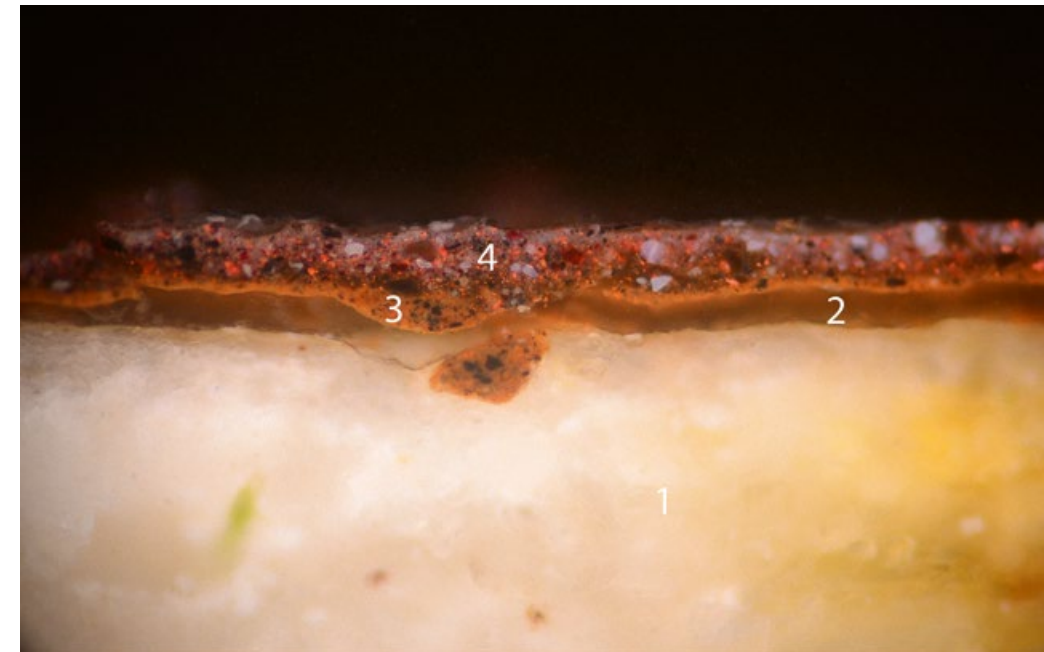


Fig. 9. Cross-section (200X) in which we can observe the preparatory coat (1), the insulating layer of glue (2), the earthy orange-colored priming (3) and the pictorial layer (4).

ers penetrating the preparatory layer), presents no signs of oxidation or discoloring, allows us to conclude that, as Vasari himself described, a high-quality, impurity-free glue was used (fig. 9).

Another technical characteristic typical of 15th and 16th-century painting is the use of fine white or colored primers. In Florence, we know that the coloring of this sort of *imprimatura*, often semi-transparent due to the amount of oily binder they contained, varied greatly between one workshop and another. It is as such, for instance, that Rosso Fiorentino often used yellow or yellowy-green bases, Sebastiano del Piombo opted for more of a grey-brown hue, while Andrea del Sarto preferred toasted tones and Michelangelo went for whites. Vasari explains this in detail in his treatise:

*[...] In the first place the (imprimatura) has to be made up of pigments with drying qualities such as white lead, drying agents and earth, such as are used in making bells, which are carefully mixed, and when the preparatory coat of glue is dry, this is applied to the panel and beaten in the palm of the hand in such a way that it becomes consistent and spreads uniformly, and this is what is known as *imprimatura*¹¹.*

The study of the cross-sections taken from this work indicate that, in all probability, the colored priming was applied as described above, due to the uniformity and thinness of this layer, something that tends to be observed in Florentine and Roman works of the time¹². The color described in the text must have lent a toasted ochre or reddish brown tone, given that the *earth used in making bells* must have been the clay used in the molds when casting the bells, which has a reddish hue. This is a very similar color of ground layer to the one in the work we are dealing with here, which also contains considerable quantities of charcoal black¹³.

After applying this thin layer of colored ground, a preliminary sketch was carried out including the main details and elements of the composition: the underlying drawing. This sketching process underwent a process of evolution from the middle age until the 16th century in all artistic schools, increasing in simplicity, moving from sophisticated and repeated strokes, often crisscrossing each other, arranging all the details, volumes and even the shading, to the most advanced stage of the Renaissance, by which time the drawings only marked the contours and main lines of the composition¹⁴.



Fig. 10. Infrared detail of the work.



Fig. 11. Infrared detail of the work.

As is well known, Vasari was a great master of drawing, and his skills are on display in this work's underlying drawing¹⁵. Digital infrared photography shows confident and fluent strokes marking out the contours and outlines of the figures down to the tiniest of details¹⁶ (figs. 10, 11 and 12).

The few corrections made when it came to executing the painting, which we shall be describing shortly, tell us that the artist was faithful to a precise preliminary drawing, probably copied across from a pre-existing drawing or cartoon. It is likely that in the artist's workshop a detailed drawing was kept of the earliest version of this large-scale work, undertaken for Ersilia Cortese in Rome in 1553, a drawing which, according to the study being presented here by José Gómez Frechina, may have been reused subsequently for our panel and for the Spencer Museum version, both from around 1560. The different palette of colors in the two works would point to a lapse of time between the execution of the two versions, or simply that the artist opted for a different chromatic palette. However, there is no doubt about the same cartoon being used for both works.

In order to confirm this we superimposed the images of both works, observing that they matched each other exactly with just the tiniest of variations, in the position of the Calvary crosses and the height of the hills. This confirms that both works were based on the same cartoon. This process also showed us the minor difference in size between the two works.

In his text, after describing the ground, Vasari is extremely explicit about the way drawings were transferred onto panels or canvasses:

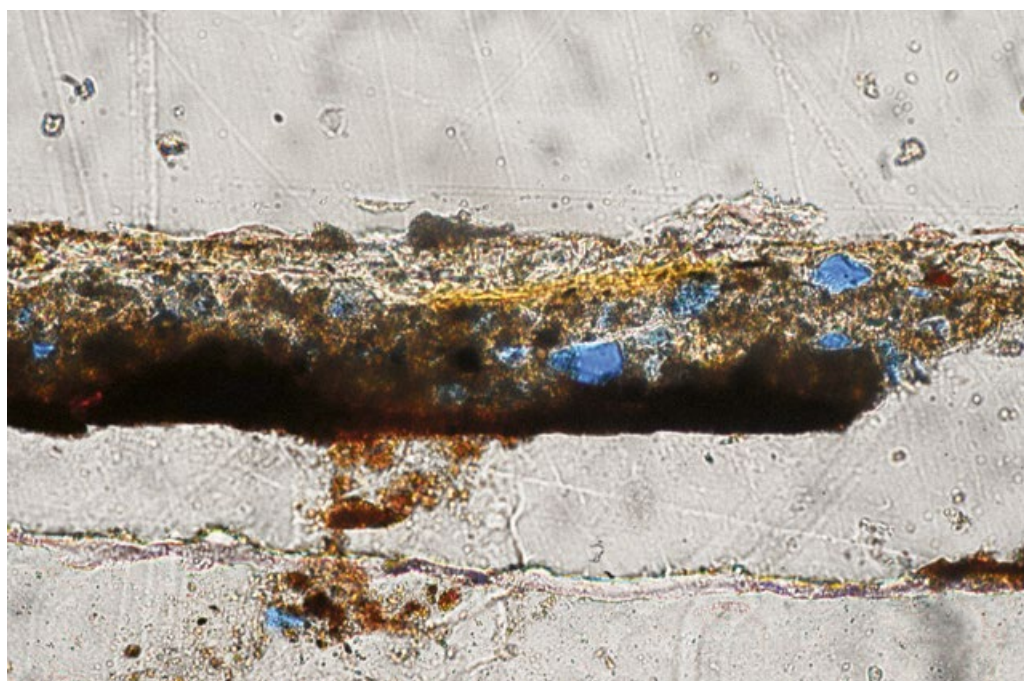
[...] take the cartoon that you drew, with the figures and inventions and everything you want to put in it, and arrange it on another piece of paper covered in black on one side. This side should be in contact with the priming. Once both have been fixed with little nails, take a punch made of iron, ivory or some hard wood and go over the contours, marking them firmly. Doing so the cartoon does not get damaged and the figures and other details come out well outlined on the panel or stretched fabric¹⁷.

There is no doubt, as mentioned in other texts from the period, that this transfer was then copied over using a brush or pen.

Fig. 12. General infrared image of the work



Fig. 13. Thin section (500X) of a cross-sections taken of the Virgin's cloak. Observe how the degree of discoloration of the particles of enamel is greater at the surface level.



III. Pictorial execution

As we mentioned earlier, there are hardly any corrections, or *pentimenti*, to be observed in this work, just a few minor variations to certain elements: at first glance we notice a variation in the vertical line of the dark wall delimiting the landscape in the upper area, which was initially painted further to the right. The height of the hills of Calvary has also undergone a slight variation. As a curiosity, we noticed the same *pentimento*, though even more pronounced, in the version from the American museum. In the figures, for instance, we see a slight modification in the sole of the foot of the soldier with a sword on the right, and in the outline of the little finger on Christ's right hand.

As we can observe, the variations are minimal, and on studying the cross-sections taken from the work we notice that the execution is direct and confident, applying thin coats of color with the exact mixes of pigment, all of which denotes a skilled hand holding the brush. In this work, as we mentioned earlier, a different palette of colors has been used to that of the Spencer Museum work, the fruit of choosing totally different pigments.

The main chromatic difference is due to having used enamel blue (*smalto, smaltino*), a blue glass made of ground cobalt with poorer chromatic qualities than azurite or lapis lazuli, although originally it presented extremely similar chromatic features to the latter. But this contrast was not limited just to different pigments, as in many of the figures there is a variation in color, for instance in the American version, the Saint John who is covering his face with his hands, on the right of the Virgin, is depicted wearing a purplish cloak, whereas in our version it is a yellowish ochre hue. Meanwhile, in the Spencer Museum version Christ is wearing a light blue robe, whereas in ours it is a greyish purple.

It is hard to be certain without known analytical tests, but in the US version azurite and/or lapis lazuli appear to have been used as the main blue pigment.

In the work we are studying here, the cobalt blue presents the normal level of fading expected for this pigment, which must once have been of a more vivid tone. Furthermore, in some elements, such as the Virgin's cloak, lead minium was added to lend a certain purplish nuance to the fabric¹⁸ (figs. 13 and 14). The blue of the sky also presents a simple combination of white lead, which has preserved the color of the blue pigment better.

The use of enamel started to become widespread in Italy as of the 16th century, mainly in Venice. In Florence it was not common until the second half of the century [18]. We also know that some early exceptions exist in which enamel can be identified, such as in the portraits of famous men from the *Studiolo* of the Urbino Ducal Palace, executed between 1473 and 1476. One may conjecture that Vasari, along with other artists such as Parmigianino, Sodoma, Romanino and Bronzino, were introducing enamel into their palettes as a novelty during that middle period of the *Cinquecento*¹⁹.

We do not, however, know exactly what composition was used for the greens, although it was mostly organic, with a

yellow colorant, a large quantity of green earth and perhaps a colorant or organic green appearing to have been used²⁰.

A peculiarity may be observed in the red areas: minium (or red lead) was chosen as the main pigment, commonly combined with red earth and red organic lacquer. We can only observe the presence of vermillion, the red pigment that was most often used, in the dark background areas we will describe shortly. The structure of these elements is always extremely simple; it exactly follows the normal procedure of applying an intense red covering base, and then a transparent organic red lacquer glaze.

On other occasions, to attain a deep red, the artist experiments with an extremely dark red layer that is just translucent enough to allow for the color of the primer to come through. This layer is largely made up of organic red lacquer of an

Fig. 14 . Analysis of the x-ray fluorescence (EDXRF) of one section of the Virgin's blue cloak.

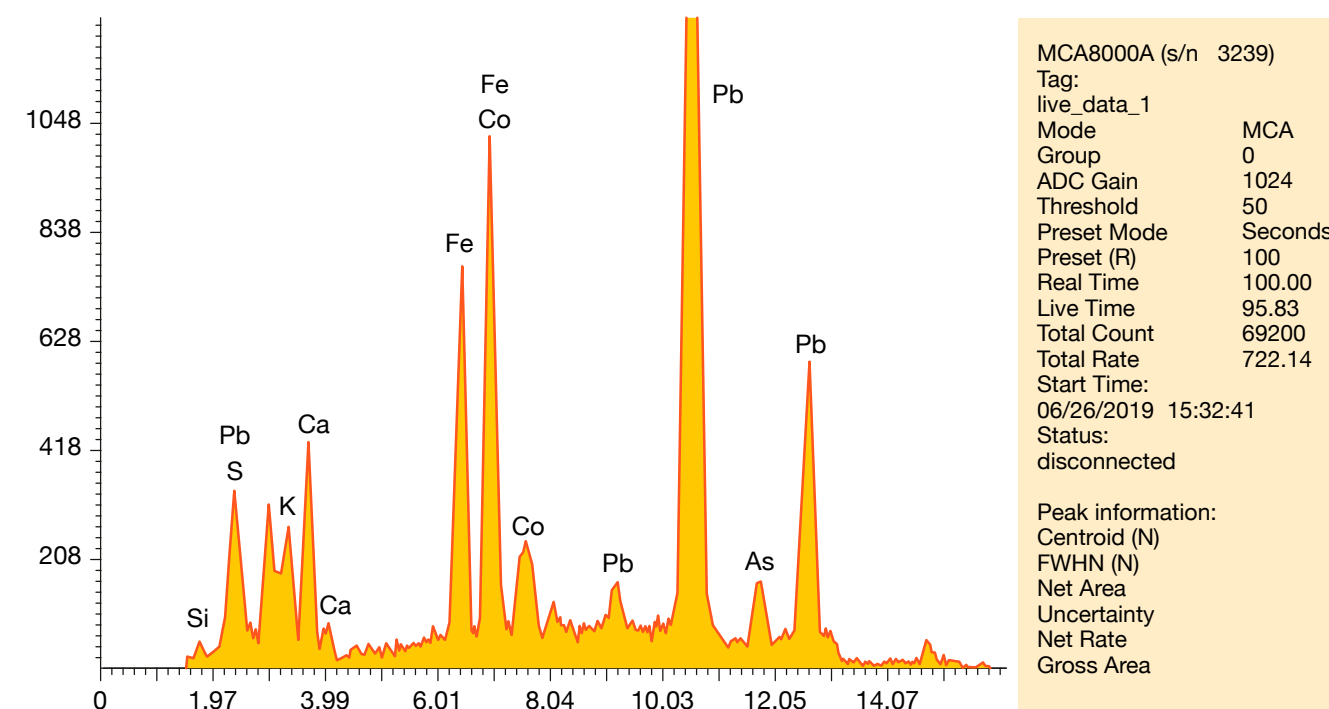
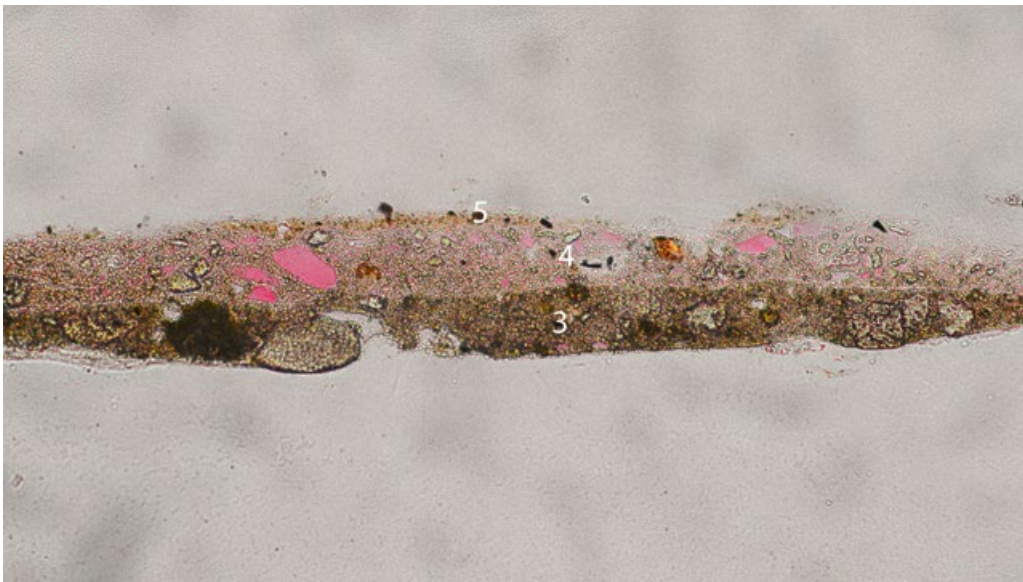
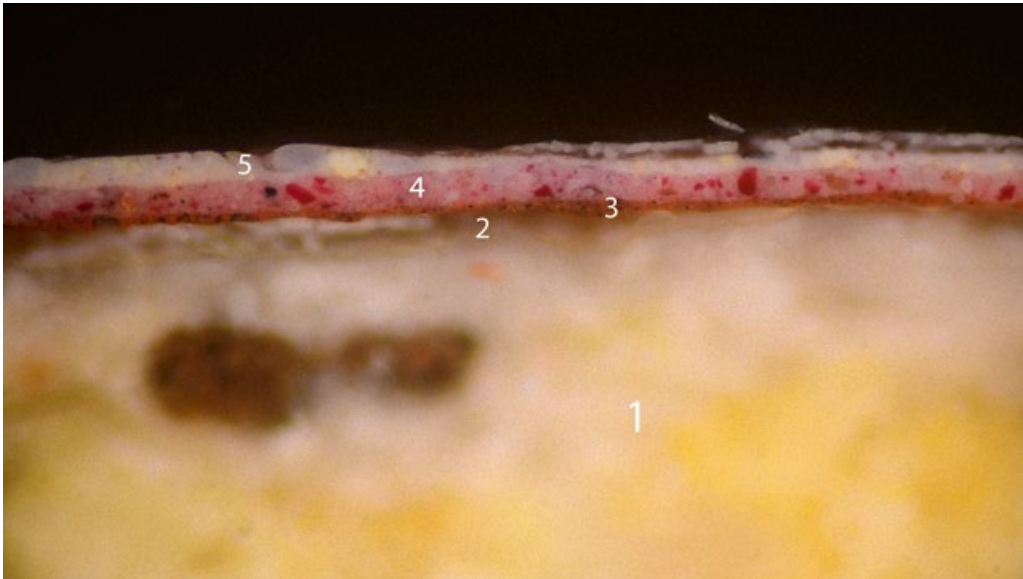


Fig. 15. Cross-section (200X) obtained from the red tunic of the woman kneeling in the lower left corner.

Fig. 16. Thin section obtained from the previous sample. Note the intense chromatic effect of the particles of organic red lacquer.



unidentified colorant, to which a minimal proportion of azurite is also added to correct the color and a tiny amount of charcoal black²¹ (figs. 15 and 16).

Another interesting technical aspect, which may be observed in both our panel and the one from the Spencer Museum, is the presence of unusual textures and alterations in the dark areas. This is a common characteristic of many High Renaissance Italian paintings, fruit of the widespread use of drying oils as binding agents. Of particular significance is the use of walnut oil in many works, due to the widely-accepted belief that it had less of a yellowing effect than linseed oil (which in fact was the most common oil). In any case, this type of oil presents more drying problems than linseed oil, which meant artists were forced to add different kinds of drying agents.

In the case of the work we are examining here, we cannot know for certain whether this oil was used in the dark areas, but what we do know is that an organic brown has been used there, earth of bituminous origin lending a brownish hue of beautiful quality and transparency,

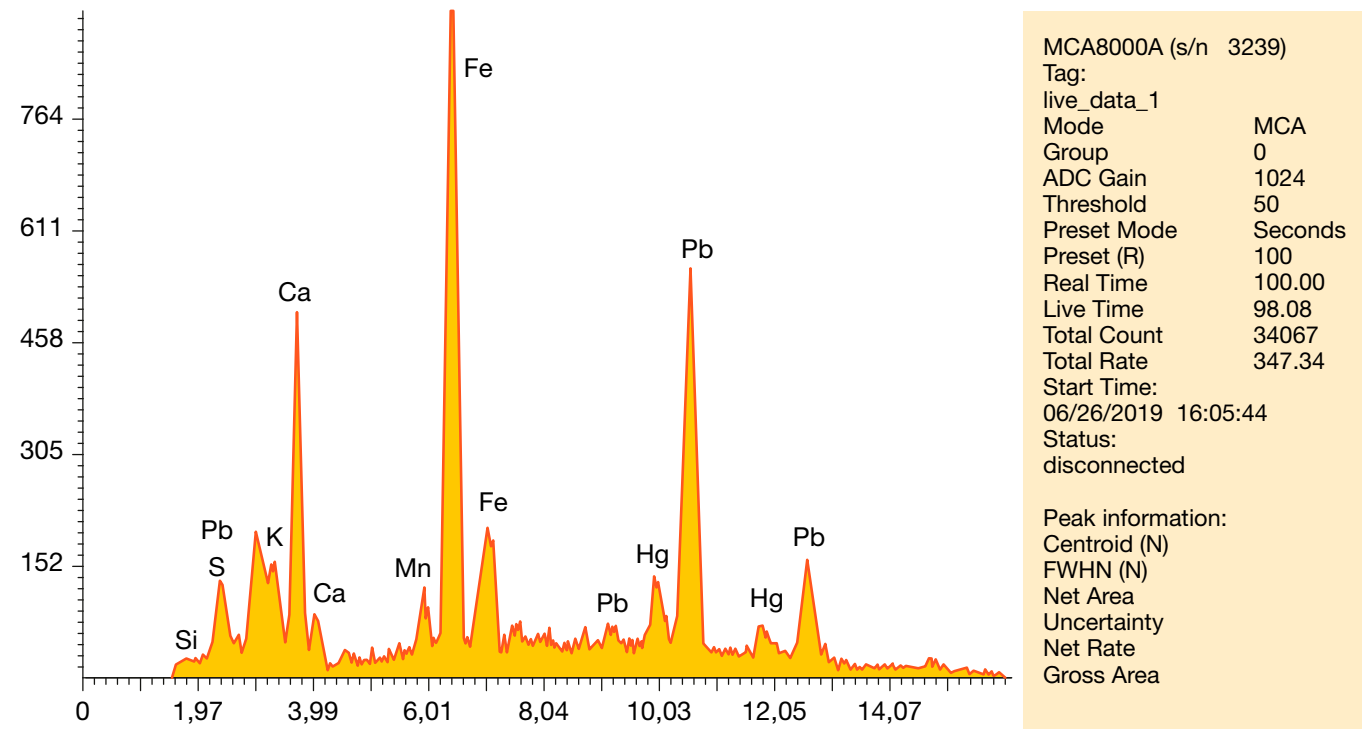


Fig. 15. Analysis of the x-ray fluorescence (EDXRF) of one section of the dark background under the yellow flag. The spectrum suggests the abundant presence of an organic brown, probably bituminous, in the background.

but which also presents issues in terms of drying²² (fig. 17). In subsequent periods these shades of brown were given different labels: Cologne earth, Van Dike brown and so on. Furthermore, we have been able to confirm that copious amounts of oil were used in these dark areas, with the probable purpose of experimenting with effects of transparency through the presence of the underlying primer.

The use of organic browns was commonplace in 16th and 17th-century Italy, particularly in Venice and, to a lesser extent, in Florence and Rome, although it was especially significant in Leonardo and his workshop, particularly in Boltraffio. In his *Tratatto della Pittura* Leonardo himself comments, for instance, with specific reference to the method of dealing with landscape backgrounds:

To attain a beautiful green, take that green and mix it with bitumen and make the shading darker²³.

It was also employed for carnation effects, with Leonardo himself stating that said coloration could be obtained using white lead, lacquer and Cologne earth (organic brown)²⁴.

Alterations in the areas of the painting involving organic browns, problematic oils and the addition of drying agents would reach their greatest levels in English 18th-century painting, causing serious problems of preservation.

We can also observe a degree of chromatic fading in some of the yellow elements such as, for example, the flag towards the top, which must have originally been a more intense color. This was executed with a combination of yellow earth and organic yellow lacquer and a small quantity of vermilion. The yellow lacquer has lost some of its original color due to these colorants being particularly liable to light discoloration. The painting's other yellows are brighter and more intense, such as the soldier on the right's waistcoat or the garment covering the torso of the woman kneeling on the left, and are based on the use of yellow lead (massicot), combined with white lead and ochre and red earth.

As we have been able to observe, the painting we are dealing with here has undergone a number of chromatic changes as a result of the use of specific pigments and colorants, and we can state that it originally presented lighter and more intense coloring. The Spencer Museum version, having been executed with different pigments, is more faithful to its original chromatic characteristics. This difference in use of pigments was probably due to the time gap of some years between the painting of the two works. But what we know for certain is that both were executed from the same cartoon or drawing, and that the *fattura* of the two works is extremely similar.



IV. Conclusions

Research works into the technical studies of the major masters of the Italian Renaissance from around the 1940s and 1950s are both abundant and increasingly exhaustive. However, there are very few studies focusing on the works of Giorgio Vasari, despite the artist being an essential benchmark for any historical-artistic or biographical study of the period and the active artists of the time.

The study of this small-scale painting, and that of the other version housed at the Spencer Museum of Art in Kansas, sheds light on the pictorial processes of this mid-16th-century Italian Renaissance master at a time of maturity in his artistic output. The technical variations between the two works pro-

vide us with valuable information about the artist's wealth of technical resources, but the parallels between the two also reveal characteristics that are key to understanding his creative personality.

Some of the alterations this work has suffered are common enough for paintings from this period and geographic environment, and are the result of experimentation in the use of different materials. The alterations in the darker areas of both our work and the Kansas version of *Christ carrying the Cross*, and the almost millimetric similarities between the two compositions (demonstrating that they came from the same drawing) are witness to the unquestionable technical link between them.

NOTES

1. Balwin Brown, G.(ed.), Vasari on technique, Dover. New York 1960

2. Casteli, C., Tecniche di costruzione dei supporti lignei dipinti, in "Dipinti su tavola. La tecnica e la conservazione dei supporti" Florence 1988, pp. 59-98

3. Dunkerton, J., Foister, S, and Penny, N., Dürer to Veronese. Sixteenth-century painting in the National Gallery, London 1999, pp. 211-217

4. It has not been possible to identify the specific species of wood microscopically due to the impossibility of taking a sample. However, through a superficial examination and due to the nature of the grain in the X-ray image, we can say that it is without doubt poplar.

5. Uzieli, L., Historical overview of panel-making techniques in Central Italy, in "The structural conservation of panel paintings" J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles 1998 pp. 125-126

6. From the video recorded on the occasion of the exhibition held following the restoration of the Spencer Museum of Art panel, we can confirm that the painting has been shortened in width by a centimeter or so, so the works may have originally been of identical dimensions. www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdS-TB0xKfU&hd=1

7. Various authors, Mona Lisa. Inside the painting, Musée du Louvre Ed. Paris 2006, pp. 30-36

8. Cennino Cennini. El libro del Arte. Akal Fuentes de Arte, Madrid 1988

9. The nature of the preparatory layer was determined by the study of X-ray fluorescence spectrums (EDXRF) and through the microscopic examination of the thin sections obtained through cross-section. The binder was determined through staining tests with protein reagents (fuchsin acid and 2,7 dichlorofluorescein). The samples presented numerous bubbles in the preparatory coat which in all probability appeared during the preparation of the gesso.

10. Balwin Brown, G.(ed.), *Op. Cit.* 1960, p. 230

11. Balwin Brown, G.(ed.), *Op. Cit.* 1960, p. 230-231

12. The layer corresponding to the preparatory insulating glue never exceeds 10 µm, always varying between around 8 and 10 µm.

13. The cross-section analysis reveals a composition including large quantities of red earth (clay), charcoal black, a little white lead, and perhaps umber, in a medium rich in drying oil. This binding material was identified through staining tests using Amido Black and Rhodamine B.

14. Galasi, M.C., L'Underdrawing nella pittura italiana del secolo XV y XVI: aggiornamenti e nuove riflessioni sulla tecnica dei pittori fiorentini, in "La pittura europea sobre tabla. Siglos XV, XVI y XVII", Madrid 2010, pp. 119-125; Bomford, D. (ed.), Art in the Making. Underdrawing in Renaissance paintings, London 2002; Galassi, M.C., Il disegno svelato. Progetto e imagine nella pittura italiana del primo Rinascimento, Nuoro 1998.

15. The characteristics of the lines and the material used suggest that it was probably executed using a fine brush with ink or a charcoal-rich paint. We have not been able to analyze the exact composition of this material.

16. The technique used at Icono I&R is digital infrared photography, using a Nikon D70 camera with a CCD sensor, modified by removing the IR passing filter. An appropriate filter was used to eliminate visible radiation.

17. Baldwin Brown, G., *Op. Cit.* 1960, p. 231

18. The enamel present in the underlying layers, which in addition has been mixed with white lead and traces of minium, has preserved its chromatic features better, whereas the surface layers present vitreous particles of enamel that have lost all of their color. This is due to being more exposed to oxygen, environmental agents and light. The white lead also appears to have a certain stabilizing effect on these oily layers including this cobalt pigment.

19. Blue cobalt glass ground to be used as pigment had been known of in Italy since the middle ages, and was referred to in texts from that period as *zafrá*. See, for example the

Memoria del magisterio de fare fenestre de vetro, by Antonio de Pisa (C14); Venice was also an important hub of glass production in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries. See Gómez, M., Chércoles, R., and San Andrés, M., Los azules de cobalto, in "Fatto d'Alquimia", Madrid 2012 pp. 273-234; Mühlethaler, B., Thissen, J., Smalt, in "Artists' Pigments. A handbook of their history and characteristics" Vol. 1. New York 1993, pp. 113-130

20. The cross-sections incisions and EDXRF analyses of the green weeds along the bottom edge indicate the presence of aluminum (at 1.55 KeV), potassium (3.31 KeV) and calcium highlights (3.69 and 4.01 KeV), suggesting the presence of an organic colorant. The sample taken from this section presents a highly translucent green layer rich in binding agents, high iron peaks (6.40 and 7.06 KeV) and the presence of aluminum and silicon would also indicate that the presence of green earth predominates. The yellow is yellow lead, and the earths correspond to the lower layers which are the soil's ochre base.

21. No analysis was undertaken to determine the type of colorant used, but it appears to be precipitated in a gypsum and alumina substrate, with potassium being a sub-product of its preparation. The UV microscope suggests that it may have originated from an insect.

22. The x-ray fluorescent analyses (EDXRF) present highly pronounced calcium peaks (3.69 and 4.01 KeV), the presence of potassium (3.59 KeV) and a large amount of iron (6.40 and 7.06 KeV) and manganese (5.90 KeV), which confirms the present of a brown of organic origin. A certain amount of vermillion and minium has also been added. With regard to the organic brown of a bituminous nature, see Bothe, C.I., Asphalt, in "Artists' Pigments. A handbook of their history and characteristics" Vol. 4, Washington 2007, pp. 111-50

23. González García, A. (ed.), Leonardo da Vinci. Tratado de pintura. Akal Fuentes de Arte, Barcelona 1986, p. 426

24. González García, A. (ed). *Op. Cit.* 1986, p. 427

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