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MONUMENTAL GROTESQUE

Michelangelism and Ornament in Sixteenth-Century Florence Through the Case Studies of Niccolò Tribolo and Silvio Cosini

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Submitted in fulfilment of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
History and Philosophy of Art

University of Kent
School of Arts

December 2021
June 2022

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Wordcount: 91,800

Covid Impact Statement

The covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the course of this research. Having started my three-year doctoral programme in September 2018, I was only able to do my research regularly for the first year and a half. I returned to Italy for a period of field research in March 2020, exactly when the pandemic broke out and the national lockdowns began. Since then I have always stayed in my hometown, Prato, not being able to meet my supervisory team in person, and to access university resources. In Italy, cultural institutes (archives, libraries, museums) remained closed from March to September 2020, and then again from November 2020 to May 2021. This forced me to limit the archival research on Silvio Cosini, which would have needed further investigation; the closure of libraries has caused difficulties and slowdowns in gathering bibliography; the closure of the museums, and of the Medici Chapel in particular, has reduced the opportunities for fieldwork (direct contact with the works, collection of new photographic material).

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank my supervisors for their guidance and advice, Ben Thomas, Tom Henry, and Hans Maes. I am grateful to the Vice Chancellor's Research Scholarship that funded my doctorate at the University of Kent. I thank Alessandra Giannotti and Marco Campigli, for agreeing to exchange thoughts and hints with me on the art of Niccolò Tribolo and Silvio Cosini. I am also grateful to Lorenzo Gnocchi for the chats and support, and to Giuseppe Giari, for guiding me in archival research. Particular recognition goes to Sarah Ishbel Rodgers and Pam D'Antonio for having thoroughly proofread the thesis. Lastly, I want to thank my family and friends for their patience over the last years.

Abstract

In the celebratory biography of Michelangelo, Giorgio Vasari emphatically stated that the remarkable originality of the Medici Chapel ornament had persuaded many artists to resort to licenses of grotesque kind. In reality, the Medici Chapel ornament was part of a hyper-decorative trend that Michelangelo rather opposed. This research therefore wants to investigate the conflicted relationship between Michelangelo, ornament and Michelangelism, so as to delineate with greater clarity the origins of the peculiar sixteenth-century phenomenon of dimensional and iconographic growth of ornament, which here we call 'monumentalisation of the grotesque.'

A new iconographic analysis shows that the design of the Medici Chapel ornament was entrusted to Andrea Ferrucci, a close collaborator of Michelangelo. Admittedly, a broader analysis of the relationship between Michelangelo and ornament proves that he opposed excessively decorative practices, and that his main interest was rather directed to the human figure. See in particular the Sistine Ceiling, where Michelangelo replaced the traditional grotesque with the *Ignudi*, unwittingly initiating a process of anthropomorphisation of the ornament.

To understand the relationship between Michelangelo's fame and the ensuing Michelangelism, the figure of Niccolò Tribolo is of the utmost importance. He was the first to address Michelangelo's unfinished works, when he had to complete the Medici Chapel and the Laurentian Library in 1542. Tribolo conceived a hybrid language, simultaneously Michelangelesque and grotesque, which still conditions our historical evaluation of Michelangelo's works. He conceived this synthesis thanks to his mimetic eclecticism: just as in the *Goddess Nature* (1529) he acquired the decorativism of Tyrrhenian sculpture, similarly he assimilated Michelangelo's anatomies in the statues of *Heaven* and *Earth* for the Medici Chapel (1533) – today lost but which we have traced in a drawing by Jacopo Tintoretto. He also initiated a fundamental reflection on the 'unfinished,' which in the 1540s culminated in the execution of *Fiesole* for the Castello garden, and in the assembly of the unfinished *Phases of Day* in the Medici Chapel.

However, it is in Silvio Cosini's work that the synthesis between Michelangelism and ornament originates. Michelangelo entrusted Cosini, a pupil of Ferrucci, with the execution of the grotesque ornament of the Medici Chapel in 1524. By that date, Cosini was already a mature sculptor, devoted to a lively experimentalism. A new philological examination of the sources shows that his collaboration with Michelangelo was limited to only 1524, and that

therefore the *Trophies* were also made in that year. They then served as a paradigm to Michelangelo for the execution of the grotesque armour of the infamous *Dukes* (1526-34).

Becoming aware of our excessively celebratory bias towards Michelangelo allows us to give due credit to the artistic contribution of his most talented collaborators. Similarly, in order to more clearly identify the altering power of Michelangelo's fame, it is necessary to distinguish his original intentions from those of Michelangelism. This research pursues these aims by deliberately adopting a lateral perspective, that of grotesque ornament, whose relationship with Michelangelo has been scarcely analysed by scholarship.

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Introduction

In the originality of [the Medici Chapel] *beautiful cornices, capitals, bases, doors, tabernacles, and tombs, Michelangelo departed in a significant way from the measures, orders, and rules men usually employ, following Vitruvius and the ancients, because he did not wish to repeat them. His licence has greatly encouraged those who have seen his way of working in order to set about imitating it, and new fantasies were subsequently seen to exhibit more of the grotesque than reason or rules in their decorations. Thus artisans owe an immense and everlasting debt to Michelangelo, since he broke the bonds and chains that made them all continue to follow a common path.*[1]

By quickly browsing through any bibliography relating to Michelangelo, even those most recent, one will easily notice the frequency with which scholars refer to his unsurpassed artistic genius.[2] This is a historiographical vice that rests its foundations on a historical distortion, centred on the promotion of Florentine art in general, and of Michelangelo's art in particular, orchestrated by Giorgio Vasari in his *Lives*, a biased, albeit very precious, account of the Italian Renaissance artistic reality.

The main intent of this thesis is to subvert this historiographical habit, carrying out a historical revision, which has the ambition to moderate our perception of Michelangelo's 'genius.' For this purpose, it was decided to focus the research on perhaps the most marginal, and certainly the least studied, aspect of Michelangelo's work: the ornament. The analysis of the conflicted relationship between Michelangelo and ornament allows us to take an unusual and decentralised point of view, from which we can look at Michelangelo's genius with a more

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[1] VASARI, Giorgio, *Vita di Michelagnolo Buonarroti fiorentino pittore, scultore et architetto*, in IDEM, *Le vite de'più eccellenti pittori scultori et architettori*, Florence 1568. The full and original version of Vasari's *Vite* is easily available on Wikisource (https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Opera:Vite_de%27_piu_eccellenti_architetti,_pittori_et_scultori_italiani), and I have resorted to it most of the time. Therefore, throughout the entire thesis, Vasari's *Vite* are referenced without indicating the edition, volume and page. In some cases, I will resort to the Milanesi edition, since the comments he produced are useful for my dissertation (MILANESI, Gaetano – VASARI, Giorgio, *Le vite dei più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori scritte da Giorgio Vasari con nuove annotazioni e commenti di Gaetano Milanesi*, Florence 1906). In the body of the text, the English translation will be preferred, taken from DE VERE, Gaston du C. – VASARI, Giorgio, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, translated by Gaston du C. De Vere,* London 1912-1915; whereas, when referencing *Vite* in the notes, the original text will be preferred.

[2] Just to cite some examples: BAMBACH, Carmen, *Michelangelo. Divine draftsman and designer*, New York 2017; FROMMEL, Christoph Luitpold, *Michelangelo's tomb for Julius II. Genesis and genius*, Los Angeles 2016; GNANN, Achim, *Michelangelo. The drawings of a genius*, Vienna 2011; NARDINI, Bruno, *Michelangelo. Biografia di un genio*, Florence 2000; WALLACE, William, *Michelangelo at San Lorenzo. The Genius as Entrepreneur*, Cambridge 1994; MARANI, Pietro, *The genius of the sculptor in Michelangelo's work*, Montreal 1992.

objective gaze and less emphatic tones. This will thus allow us to reconsider some significant issues concerning the figure of Michelangelo and his role as an innovative genius of all the arts.

It is first necessary to dwell on the evolution of ornament, and on the definition of grotesque, which is rather difficult to outline due to its unconstrained nature. Vasari attempted to provide a description in the preface to his *Lives*: «The grotesque is a kind of free and humorous picture produced by the ancients for the decoration of vacant spaces in some position where only things placed high up are suitable. For this purpose they fashioned monsters deformed by a freak of nature or by the whim and fancy of the workers, who in these grotesque pictures make things outside of any rule, attaching to the finest thread a weight that it cannot support, to a horse legs of leaves, to a man the legs of a crane, and similar follies and nonsense without end. He whose imagination ran the most oddly, was held to be the most able.»[3] Deviances of the rules, monsters of nature and artist whims, therefore, used in antiquity to decorate walls. In his various biographies, Vasari used the term in a rather fluid fashion: in the *Life of Perin del Vaga*, he matches grotesque to «animals, fruits and other minute things ... small figures, masks, putti and other fantasies,» even comparing it to «poems;» in the well-known passage in Michelangelo's *Life* that we have placed at the opening, grotesque becomes synonymous with license and absence of rules even in architectural planning. What remains constant throughout *Lives* is the combination of grotesque with terms such as *bizzarria*, *invenzione*, *grazia*.[4]

In describing its characteristics, Vasari drew inspiration from the words of book VII of Vitruvius's *De Architectura*, within which the reference to this type of decorative painting is found: «*monstra* […] *sine ratione* […] *habentes sigilla alia humanis alia bestiarum capitibus,*» thus «*falsa.*» Then follows the severe judgement of Vitruvius and his refusal of an art that has no connection with reality: «*Neque enim picturae probari debent, quae non sunt similes veritati,*

[3] VASARI – MACLEHOSE, Louisa S., *Vasari on technique. Being the introduction to the three parts of design, architecture, sculpture and painting, prefixed to the Lives of the most excellent painters, sculptors and architects*, London 1907, p. 246.

[4] VASARI, *Proemio*: «*opera allegra e dilettevole* […] *somma grazia e bellezza;*» *Vita di Filippino Lippi*: «*Fu primo ancora a dar luce alle grottesche che somiglino l'antiche, e le mise in opera di terretta e colorite in fregi con più disegno e grazia che gli innanzi a lui fatto non avevano* […] *molte grottesche ... fatte stranamente con invenzione e disegno bellissimo*;» *Vita di Giovanni da Udine*: «*Andando Giovanni con Raffaello, restarono l'uno e l'altro stupefatti della freschezza, bellezza e bontà di quell'opere […] Queste grottesche dunque ... fatte con tanto disegno, con sì varii e bizzarri capricci ... con quelle storiettine così belle e leggiadre;*» *Vita di Andrea da Fiesole e altri fiesolani*: «[Silvio] *ha passato infiniti e massimamente in bizzarria di cose alla grottesca;*» *Vita di Perin del Vaga*: «*quegli che con più leggiadra e bella maniera conducesse grottesche e figure […] figurine, fogliami, animali e grottesche, fatte con grande invenzione.*»

nec, si factae sunt elegantes ab arte, ideo de his statim debet 'recte' iudicari, nisi, argumentationes certas rationes habuerint sine offensionibus explicatas.»[5]

At the end of the fifteenth century, the paintings of Nero's Domus Aurea were discovered, which were rich in those 'monstrous' ornaments described by Vitruvius. Since they were hidden underground, they took on the name of *grottesche* – the *grotte* were the dark underground rooms. In his autobiography, Cellini briefly dwells on grotesque, and criticises the term that has come into use, preferring the word *mostri* to describe that type of ornament.[6]

Many were the artists who ventured into the ravines of Nero's palace to study and copy the paintings, and so the ancient pictorial style found wide use in the fresco decorations by Filippino Lippi (*Carafa Chapel*, Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, Rome, 1493), Luca Signorelli (*San Brizio Chapel*, Orvieto, 1502), Pinturicchio (*Piccolomini Library*, Siena, 1507), Perugino (Collegio del Cambio, Perugia), Amico Aspertini (*Sant'Agostino Chapel*, San Frediano, Lucca, 1509), and others, who used grotesques to frame the stories painted on the walls. However, the inspiration for the decorations did not come only from Domus Aurea: Morto da Feltre, one of the first to feverishly study ancient painting, went as far as Campania (Pozzuoli, Baia) to find traces of it[7] – it is therefore plausible that Pompeian paintings were already known. Furthermore, the refined stuccos that decorated the galleries of the Colosseum were still intact in those years, and therefore visible, as were the decorations of Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli.[8]

Nero's paintings were not such a dazzling surprise, but rather a fecund confirmation, and were part of an increasingly systematic antiquarian research. However, Renaissance grotesque did not refer only to antiquity, and welcomed the most varied suggestions, such as

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[5] VITRUVIUS, *De Architectura,* book VII, ch. 5, 3-4. "monsters [...] without reason [...] figures, some with human heads, and others with the heads of beasts." "No pictures should be tolerated but those established on the basis of truth; and although admirably painted, they should be immediately discarded, if they transgress the rules of propriety and perspicuity as respects the subject."

[6] CELLINI, Benvenuto, *Vita*, I, XXXI : «*Il qual non è il suo nome: perché sì bene, come gli antichi si dilettavano di comporre de' mostri usando con capre, con vacche e con cavalle, nascendo questi miscugli gli domandavano mostri; e mostri è 'l vero lor nome e non grottesche.*»

[7] VASARI, *Vita di Morto da Feltre e Andrea di Cosimo Feltrini*, says that Morto «*fu il primo a ritrovarle e mettere tutto il suo studio in questa sorte di pitture.*» Among those who studied, copied and disseminated ancient art and grotesques, it is also worth mentioning Jacopo Ripanda, Nicoletto da Modena, Zoan Andrea, Giovanni Antonio da Brescia, Amico Aspertini, Baccio Baldini, Francesco Rosselli, Ghirlandaio, Giuliano da Sangallo, Cesare da Sesto. As for artist's *taccuini*, drawings and engravings representing grotesques, see: DACOS, Nicole, *La découverte de la Domus Aurea et la formation des grotesque à la Renaissance*, London 1969, pp. 57-99; CHASTEL, André*, La grottesque,* Paris 1988, p. 31; ACIDINI LUCHINAT, Cristina, *La grottesca*, Turin 1982, pp. 165-169; GUEST, Clare Estelle Lapraik, *The understanding of ornament in the Italian Renaissance*, Leiden 2016, pp. 515-518.

[8] It is VASARI, *Vita di Morto da Feltre*, to mention the places where ancient painting was visible. See also the sixteenth-century drawing, probably by Giovanni da Udine, representing the decoration of the north corridor of the Colosseum (Paris, Musée du Louvre, 4341).

North European medieval fantasies, as was the case of the ornaments of the Abbey of Santo Oliveto Maggiore, Siena, where Sodoma inserted monstrous creatures taken from Hartmann Schedel's *Nuremberg Chronicle* (1493).

In the second quarter of the sixteenth century, the workshop of Raphael revived the grotesque decoration, which found its culmination in the Villa Madama and in the Vatican Logge, both executed at the end of the 1510s, at the behest of Pope Leo X. Giovanni da Udine rediscovered the ancient formula for stuccos, and thanks to his training alongside a Flemish miniaturist,[9] introduced elements of botanical precision into the grotesque decorations – the most relevant example is the *Loggia di Psiche*, Villa Farnesina, Rome. As Guest rightly points out, Raphael's workshop allowed a systematisation of the grotesque, a «synthetic style» that was «used to represent wholes which can accommodate and harmonize parts.» Thus we witnessed a syntactic shift of the grotesque, from peripheral ornament (frame) to subject of the artwork (field).[10]

The debate on the definition and validity of the grotesque involved a number of sixteenth-century art theorists.[11] Perhaps the one who best grasped the variegated nature of this decorative style was the Neapolitan architect Pirro Ligorio, who in his *Libro di Antichità* states that grotesques were used to «*recare stupore et meraviglia… per significare quanto sia possibile la gravidanza et pienezza dell'intelletto, et le sue imaginationi*» (to bring amazement and wonder... to illustrate the extent of the prosperity and fullness of the intellect, and of its imagination). Ligorio also underlines the symbolic value of the grotesques, which are «*ad uso di lettere hieroglyphiche fatte, come per significare in ciò varii avvenimenti negli piccoli principi*» (for the use of hieroglyphic letters made, as if to signify various events in the little principles).[12]

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[9] VASARI, *Vita di Giovanni da Udine*, mentions Giovannis's training with a Flemish miniaturist, to be recognised with the cartogropher Johannes Ruysch (GUEST, *The understanding,* p. 533). ACIDINI, *La grottesca*, pp. 179-180, finds similiraties between Giovanni's *Stufetta* of Cardinal Bibbiena and the naturalistic miniatures of the school of Ghent and Bruges.

[10] GUEST, *The understanding*, pp. 476-477, 580-581.

[11] See: MOREL, Philippe, *Il funzionamento simbolico e la critica delle grottesche nella seconda metà del Cinquecento*, in *Roma e l'antico nell'arte e nella cultura del Cinquecento*, Rome 1985, 149-178. See also: ACIDINI, *La grottesca*, pp. 183-192.

[12] The *Libro delle Antichità* by Pirro Ligorio is an encyclopedic work in several volumes, known only in manuscript form, datable around 1570s. Archivio di Stato di Torino, ms. Ja III 10, preserves the sixth volume, which contains the long definition of the term "*Grottesche*" (cc. 151v-161v). As for the linguistic value of the grotesque, see: GUEST, *The understanding*, pp. 567-578 (we will analyse in more detail the hieroglyphic value of grotesques in the chapter dedicated to Tribolo, § *Hieroglyphica. Grotesque and Egyptian studies*). The severe judgment that Vitruvius reserved for grotesques came back into vogue in the period of the Counter-Reformation, in the writings of Gilio da Fabriano (*Dialogi*, 1564) and Gabriele Paleotti (*Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane*, 1582), who supported the vacuity and illogicality of the grotesque decoration.

Now that we have clarified that during the sixteenth century the definition of grotesque expanded to include the most heterogeneous inspirations, and that even then there was an unsolved tension between the exercise of fantasy and style (*capriccio*), and symbolic language (hieroglyphics), let us look at what occurred in sculpture. Although Pomponio Gaurico in his *De Sculptura* (1504), following Vitruvius, despised the use of monstrous creatures as contrary to nature, we note an early imaginative vivacity in fifteenth-century sculpture, not yet explored in contemporary painting. We find *monstra*, bizarre combinations, and Dionysian enthusiasm in many Florentine monuments, especially following Donatello's experiments. The inspiration came from ancient ruins, fragments of architectural decoration and sarcophagi.[13] From antiquity, the fifteenth-century sculptors derived the *candelabra*, a type of ornament usually vegetal that stood vertically on the frame, and its variant called 'peopled scroll,' which was further animated by objects and fantastic creatures, and which would actually fit, albeit anachronistically, within the definition of grotesque.[14] We find grotesque elements in Donatello's works, such as the heads-capitals of the *Cavalcanti Annunciation*, Santa Croce (1435), and of the niche of *Christ and St. Thomas,* Orsanmichele, Florence, in addition to the Dionysian putti that pervade his art, which are a motif taken from the ancient peopled scrolls, and which find a devout development in the works of Desiderio da Settignano (*Marsuppini Tomb*, Santa Croce, Florence, 1459). Candelabra, festoons, animated by putti, sphinxes and other monsters became part of the sculptural vocabulary of the Rossellino brothers (*Bruni Tomb*, Santa Croce, Florence, 1450; *Tomb of the Cardinal of Portugal*, San Miniato in Monte, 1460s), Benedetto da Maiano (Altar of San Fina, San Gimignano, 1477), Mino da Fiesole (*Tornabuoni Tomb*, Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, Rome, 1481).

Refined examples of proto-grotesque decoration are also found in fifteenth-century Siena, in the works of Antonio Federighi, Lorenzo Marrina, and Francesco di Giorgio Martini, who in his treatise on architecture (1478-81) recommended the use of «*dalfine, spiritelli … mostruosi animali, come se arpie, et altri simili ricinti e fogliati ornamenti*» to decorate the pillars (dolphins, putti... monstrous animals, such as harpies, and other similar fences and

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[13] On the richness of ancient sculptural vocabulary, see: WATERS, Michael J. – BROTHERS, Cammy, *Variety, Archeology, & Ornament. Renaissance Achitectural Prints from Column to Cornice*, Charlottesville 2011.

[14] VASARI, *Vita di Donatello*, anachronostically uses the term grotesque when describing the *Cavalcanti Annunciation*: «*una Nunziata di pietra di macigno, che in Santa Croce di Fiorenza fu posta all'altare e cappella de' Cavalcanti, alla quale fece un ornato di componimento alla grottesca, con basamento vario et attorto e finimento a quarto tondo, aggiugnendovi sei putti che reggono alcuni festoni.*» On the ancient peopled scroll, see: TOYNBEE, J.M.C. – WARD PERKINS, J.B., *Peopled Scrolls. A Hellenistic motif in Imperial Art*, in *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 1950, XVIII, p. 1-43.

leafy ornaments).[15] Also in Urbino, where Francesco di Giorgio worked for a long time, a predilection for proto-grotesque decoration developed, especially in the marble door frames of the Ducal Palace, executed by Ambrogio Barocci in the 1470s, with a peculiar predilection for trophies. Finally, even in Northern Italy there was a flourishing of sculptural decoration, visible above all in the work of Pietro Lombardo (*Roselli Tomb*, Sant'Antonio, Padua, 1467), Andrea Bregno, who worked mainly in Rome (*Podocataro Tomb*, Santa Maria del Popolo, 1505), and Cristoforo Romano (Certosa di Pavia, 1490s).

In the last decades of the fifteenth century, following the explosion of grotesque decoration due to the new archaeological investigations that we mentioned earlier, even in sculpture there was a further enrichment of the decorative repertoire. In advance, the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio carried out some peculiar research on grotesque armour, as can be seen in the many bas-relief portraits of knights with fantastic helmets and breastplates with masks[16] – this evolutionary line of grotesque sculpture was essential for Andrea Ferrucci, and later for Silvio Cosini. Yet, Giuliano da Sangallo, who in the last two decades of the century produced two notebooks of antiquarian reliefs (*Taccuino Senese* and *Codex Barberini*), was probably one of the most careful investigators of ancient ornamental imagery. The results of his studies are visible in his works, such as the fireplace and capitals in Palazzo Gondi, and the Sacristy of Santo Spirito, Florence (1490s), which display monstrous and mythological creatures. Successors of his investigation were Andrea Sansovino (*Corbinelli Altar,* Santo Spirito, Florence, 1492; *Sforza-Basso della Rovere Tombs,* Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome, 1506) and Benedetto da Rovezzano. The latter in particular, became one of the greatest Florentine experts in sculptural grotesque decoration, reaching the apex in the unfinished *Monument to San Giovanni Gualberto* (1513), within whose pillars we find satyrs, harpies, masks, dragons and other various objects. As we will see in detail later, also around the Carrara quarries, along the Tyrrhenian coast of both Tuscany and Liguria, a particular predilection for marble grotesque developed, especially in the works of Matteo Civitali (Lucca), Donato Benti (Genoa and Pietrasanta), Domenico and Pandolfo Fancelli, Stagio Stagi, and Bartolomé Ordoñez (Pisa and Pietrasanta).

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[15] MARTINI, Francesco di Giorgio – MALTESE, Corrado, *Trattati di architettura, ingegneria e arte militare*, Milan 1967, I, p. 65.

[16] See Andrea del Verrocchio's *Scipio Africans* (1465-68), Musée du Louvre, Paris, and *Hannibal the Carthaginian* (1500), Frascione Collection, Florence. See also Francesco di Simone Ferrucci's *Alexander the Great* (1485), National Gallery, Washington, and Andrea Della Robbia's *Darius III King of Persians* (1500-15), Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon. Of the same type is Leonardo da Vinci's drawing of a warrior in profile (London, British Museum, 1895.915.474).

Michelangelo hardly participated in this evolutionary path of sculptural grotesque. We will see in the development of the thesis how he related to ornamentation, but it is worth dwelling here on an extremely important element, which in some way modified the evolution of the grotesque: the extraordinary fame of Michelangelo's work. Although it cannot be said that Michelangelo actively participated in its development, his peculiar artistic research nevertheless had an impact on the grotesque due to the pervasive fame of his art. Michelangelo's anatomical gigantism thus became part of the ornamental repertoire, both in painting and in sculpture, and the human body became a decorative element, which, like the grotesque, found infinite variations and expressed the artist's *capriccio*.[17] Michelangelo's gymnastic *Ignudi* appear in the frescoes of Rosso Fiorentino and Francesco Primaticcio (Palace of Fontainebleau, 1530s), Parmigianino (Santa Maria della Steccata, Parma, 1531), Francesco Salviati (Sala dell'Udienza, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, 1545), Pontormo (the lost choir of San Lorenzo, Florence, 1550s). Similarly, figurative sculpture – especially of nudes – became an element of architectural ornamentation. Payne examines the ornamental use of the human figure in sixteenth-century architecture, mainly Venetian, and traces its origin in the Medici Chapel and in the facade of San Lorenzo – if not even in the niches of Orsanmichele.[18]

To a certain extent, the Medici Chapel indeed marked a fundamental moment in the evolution of sixteenth-century sculptural decoration – in a similar way to what the Sistine Ceiling did for pictorial decoration. However, contrary to what Vasari claims, it was not so much an example of license *alla grottesca*, but rather the affirmation of the supremacy of the human figure in monumental design. Starting from the second quarter of the century, through an initial anthropomorphisation, we see a more general monumentalisation of the grotesque, which went from being a delicate ornament used mainly in frames, to having a central and dominant role in the execution of sculptural apparatuses of fountains and gardens. We believe that Michelangelo's collaboration with Niccolò Tribolo and Silvio Cosini at the Medici Chapel played a fundamental role in this process. Therefore, more than the Medici Chapel in its most strictly museum and inert sense, it was its chaotic and prolonged execution, the resulting intervention of many artists, its impact and its fame as a masterpiece of Michelangelo, to determine a significant moment for the evolution of the grotesque in a monumental sense.

There are two elements of Tribolo and Cosini's art that had a particular impact on sculptural grotesque: the use of Michelangelo's *non finito* as a representation of

[17] See: EMISON, Patricia, *Creating the Divine Artist. From Dante to Michelangelo*, Leiden 2004, p. 251.
[18] PAYNE, Alina, *Reclining Bodies. Figural ornament in Renaissance architecture*, in COLE, Michael W., *Sixteenth-century Italiana art*, Oxford 2006, pp. 218-239 (229-31 in particular).

metamorphosis, which was one of the basic features of the grotesque imagery, since the main subjects were hybrid and mutant creatures;[19] and an overwhelming predilection for ornamentation (*horror vacui*), which well embodies the capricious dimension of the grotesque, and which would condition Michelangelo in the execution of the Medici Chapel *Dukes*. Both of these characteristics, typical of the art of Tribolo and Cosini, together with more general and pervasive Michelangelism, contributed to making the sculptural grotesque monumental, and would ultimately lead to the works of Bartolomeo Ammannati (the complex system of figurative and grotesque decoration of the *Fountain of Neptune*, Piazza della Signoria, Florence, 1560-70s), Giambologna (*Appenine Colossus*, garden of Villa Demidoff, Pratolino, Florence, 1580), and Bernardo Buontalenti (*Grotta Grande*, Boboli Gardens, Florence, 1580s, where the unfinished statues of the *Prisoners* were inserted).

The thesis is therefore structured in three monographic chapters, dedicated to the three supposedly most compelling personalities that frame the process of monumentalisation of the grotesque and its relationship with Michelangelism. The feature that unites them is their participation in the works of the Medici Chapel. The starting point of our reflection is therefore the ornamentation of the Medici Chapel, of which Vasari bluntly emphasises the extraordinary revolutionary value. From the Medici Chapel ornamentation we will start a broad discourse that soon ceases to centre only on Michelangelo's relationship with ornament, and extends to also include Michelangelo's creative process, his relationship with the historical and social context of the time, with tradition, with the client, and with the collaborators, up to carefully examining the creative independence of the latter.

The role that Michelangelo's collaborators played in the conception of the Medici Chapel – and in its final appearance as an unfinished work – is in fact the other major topic of this research. What we intend to emphasise is on the one hand the complexity of the execution of the Medici Chapel, which could not have been managed autonomously by Michelangelo alone. On the other hand, we intend to demonstrate that the final result is in effect a failure compared to the original project, and that only in retrospect was the intention to cloak the unfinished work with an aura of mythological artistic perfection.

[19] On Tribolo's use of *non finito*, see: CIARDI DUPRÈ DAL POGGETTO, Maria Grazia, *Presentazione di alcuni problemi relativi al Tribolo scultore*, in *Arte Antica e Moderna*, IV, 1961, pp. 244-247. On Cosini's predilection for unfinished surfaces, see: DALLI REGOLI, Gigetta, *Il trapano e la pietra. Note sull'uso del trapano nella lavorazione del marmo tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, in *Critica d'arte*, 8, LXIII, 2000, 6, pp. 31-44; EADEM, *Silvio Cosini e l'Ornamento. Vitalità e trasformazione di modelli antichi alle soglie del Cinquecento*, in *Les cahiers de l'ornement*, 3, 2020, pp. 104-119.

As we will see, the historical distortion began when the construction site of the Medici Chapel was closed in 1534 due to the death of the client Pope Clement VII, and reached its definitive crystallisation when Tribolo and Vasari, who were called to execute the conclusion of the chapel in 1540-50s, not only did not proceed with the work, but also decided to mount many of the statues still in their raw state. The fearful interventions of Michelangelo's successors introduced a new aesthetic to the Medici Chapel, and suggested a different interpretation of Michelangelo's art. In fact, mounting the still incomplete statues generated a formalisation of the *non finito*, which Tribolo was simultaneously introducing in his own statue of *Fiesole*, which is a figure caught during her transmutation into stone (fig.182). Both the assembly of the incomplete statues in the Medici Chapel and *Fiesole* render semantically valid a formal defect of many works by Michelangelo, the accidental incompleteness. We believe that the aesthetic choice that Tribolo introduced in them finds its reasons in the familiarity he had with the grotesque imagery, within which experimentation and metamorphosis were substantial values. Tribolo's distortion contributed to the creation of a new artistic language, Michelangelism, which took only some superficial elements from the works of Michelangelo and mixed them with other variegated suggestions.

However, if Tribolo was among the first and among those who with greater conviction formalised Michelangelism, and then adapted it to the modes of grotesque ornament, experiments of monumentalisation of the grotesque can already be seen in the works of Cosini, a close collaborator of Michelangelo. For several reasons, the *Trophies* he made for the Medici Chapel in 1524 are in fact part of this phenomenon (figg.251-252). Not only are they a traditional decorative motif made monumental in size, but they also reinterpret an ancient fragment in an ornamental sense (the central cuirass reproduces the anatomy of the *Belvedere Torso*),[20] covering its surface with a further layer of decorative motifs. They therefore represent the quintessence of the *horror vacui* typical of Cosini's sculpture, which also partly influenced Michelangelo.

To a certain extent, Cosini embodied the prototype of the daring experimenter. Thanks to his training alongside Andrea Ferrucci – who was also divided between an extremely dense and imaginative decorative sculpture on the one hand, and figurative sculpture on the other – and his collaboration with Michelangelo, Cosini created a hybrid grotesque language of unusual carnal strength. A language that also struck Michelangelo, who adapted Cosini's

[20] As for the implementation of ancient statuary fragments into the grotesque imagery, see: GUEST, *The understanding*, p. 442-493.

vocabulary on the grotesque armour of the statue of *Giuliano*. A language with which Tribolo became acquainted when he went to Pisa at a time when Cosini was staying there.

From a methodological point of view, an attempt was made to pursue additional and varied paths. For the reconsideration of Michelangelo's artistic genius, we wanted to rely on more contemporary critics – Wallace (1994), Emison (2004), Brothers (2008), Hemsoll (2012), Pöpper (2014), to name the most important interventions – as well as a reinterpretation of primary sources (from Vasari's *Lives*, to Cosimo Bartoli's *Ragionamenti Accademici*, up to Francesco Bocchi's *Le bellezze della città di Fiorenza*). For the reconstruction of the working process of the Medici Chapel, the careful examination of Michelangelo's *Carteggio* was of fundamental importance, and in some points this raised new critical suggestions (for example, Michelangelo's desire to participate in the works of the Medici Chapel only as supervisor, and not as material executor).[21]

In the chapter dedicated to Tribolo, an in-depth formal analysis of his works has allowed us to frame the sculptor's eclecticism with greater precision – his language greatly varies depending on the suggestions he receives in the places where he works. This helps to make it clear that Tribolo's Michelangelism was above all functional to the maintenance of a certain artistic prestige, which allowed him to work in direct contact with the Florentine ruling class. Furthermore, thanks to a careful iconological reading of his works, it was possible to see how the grotesque pantheism that can be found in many of Tribolo's works is far from the more rigid humanist Platonism of Michelangelo, thus underlining how much their two artistic conceptions were irreconcilable. Finally, a great deal of work was done to examine the drawings, both those usually assigned to Michelangelo – of which in at least one case a possible attribution to Tribolo's workshop is proposed – and those of Jacopo Tintoretto, in which was discovered the depiction of the preparatory models of the two statues that Michelangelo entrusted to Tribolo, *Heaven* and *Earth*.

The work carried out on Cosini originally had to be centred on a new archival research, which should have removed all doubts relating to his date of birth. Unfortunately, the investigation was partly unsuccessful, even if it was possible to trace new documentary hints that suggest that Cosini was born before 1498. This led to supporting his artistic autonomy in the years in which he was in the Medici Chapel with more certainty, and therefore to give him (and his master Ferrucci) credit for the ornamental inventions present in the chapel.

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[21] BUONARROTI, Michelangelo, *Letter to Giovan Francesco Fattucci*, 31 March 1523, in BAROCCHI, Paola – RISTORI, Renzo, *Il carteggio di Michelangelo,* II, Florence 1967, pp. 366-367.

Furthermore, a rereading of *Ricordi*, the account of the payments of the Medici Chapel collaborators, made it possible to limit his interventions solely to 1524. A careful formal and iconological reinterpretation was also applied to the works of Cosini, which allowed, in a similar way to what was done for Tribolo, to better delineate his artistic conception and his influences, so as to put them in contrast with Michelangelo and Michelangelism.

Chapter 1

Michelangelo Buonarroti
«La beltate che dalla terra al ciel vivo conduce»[1]

«La scuola delle nostre arti»[2]
The Fame of Michelangelo's Medici Chapel.

The factors that contributed to creating the exceptional fame of the Medici Chapel (fig.1) are vast and varied, and it would be too complex to enumerate them here.[3] It is certain, however, that if one wanted to give a clear and impartial judgment of Michelangelo's artistic work, it would be necessary to recognise that he already enjoyed a widespread and rooted celebrity when he was alive, and that therefore our every judgment will inevitably be conditioned by a critical sedimentation, greatly polarised, that has endured for centuries. The artistic historiography dedicated to Michelangelo, especially the one that arises at the same time as the remote life of the artist, and therefore to a certain extent directed by himself, often points so high that it risks leading to mere idolisation. Although it is an extremely complicated task, this research intends to be based on the avoidance of mythologising of Michelangelo.

Therefore, before starting this discussion, it is necessary to clarify the somewhat controversial and anti-Michelangelo point of view that we intend to adopt. Although we are aware that the controversy and the antithesis foresee a perspective as biased and partial as that of blind alignment, we believe that it is a greatly useful and stimulating exercise to no longer consider Michelangelo as the absolute genius of all arts, but as a limited artist in many ways, who encountered countless adversities, to which he was often unable to offer satisfactory solutions. The fact that his shortcomings have been included in an exceptionally celebratory narrative, and thus have been changed and subverted to become positive values worthy of admiration and imitation, is part of that historical distortion that this research intends to circumvent.

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[1] BUONARROTI, Michelangelo, *Rime* (edited by GIRARDI, Enzo Noè), Bari 1960, p. 20.
[2] VASARI, *Letter to Duke Cosimo I de' Medici*, 16 february 1563, in FREY, Karl, *Der Literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasari*, Munich 1923-40, I, p. 719.
[3] See: ROSENBERG, Raphael, *Beschreibungen und Nachzeichnungen der Skulpturen Michelangelos. Eine Geschichte der Kunstbetrachtung*, Munich 2000, pp. 146-199.

The Medici Chapel is perhaps one of the most emblematic cases of that bias. Over the course of about fifteen years of work (1519-1534), Michelangelo barely managed to accomplish what he had initially planned. Despite the fact that this was in reality a failure, the Medici Chapel has always been considered one of the highlights of Michelangelo's artistic production. The causes of this failure were many: an excessively ambitious and expensive project, which was based on Michelangelo's misplaced confidence in the financial capacities of the Medici patronage of Clement VII; the legitimate limitations of Michelangelo himself in the organisation of an architectural site (the first of his career);[4] imponderable difficulties in the procurement of marble; the parallel execution of the Tomb of Julius II still weighing on Michelangelo; and above all the will of the client that Michelangelo execute most of the statues by hand – many of which remained unfinished – so that the prestige of the Medici family was accompanied by that of the artist, in a combination that should have re-launched the image of the Medici as governors of Florence.

Regarding this last point, a letter that on 31 March 1523 Michelangelo wrote to Giovan Francesco Fattucci, superintendent of the works in the Medici Chapel on behalf of the still Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, future Pope Clement VII, is illuminating.[5] After giving an account of how, according to him, the facts concerning the progress of the works at the Medici Chapel had unfolded (at that date the works were on hold waiting for the marble of the tombs), Michelangelo complained that in the initial agreements it was not at all clear that Cardinal Giulio required Michelangelo to carry out the works personally. Michelangelo was particularly concerned with resolving the issue of the Tomb of Pope Julius II, whose execution had been interrupted upon the death of the pope, at which time the heirs demanded a financial adjustment, and therefore the conclusion of the work. Michelangelo's idea at the time was to devote himself to the Medici Chapel only at the design level, and then soon return to carry out the other huge commission, the Tomb of Julius II. Michelangelo therefore only cut out for himself the role of director of works, and certainly not that of material executor. His hope, however, was shattered precisely in this letter of March 1523, and clashed with the explicit will of Cardinal Giulio to have works by Michelangelo in his family chapel.

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[4] ELAM, Caroline, *The site and early building history of Michelangelo's New Sacristy*, in *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorisches Institutes in Florenz*, XXIII, 1979, 1/2, pp. 155-161, lists the architectural errors Michelangelo made.

[5] BUONARROTI, Michelangelo, *Letter to Giovan Francesco Fattucci*, 31 March 1523, in BAROCCHI, Paola – RISTORI, Renzo, *Il carteggio di Michelangelo,* II, Florence 1967, pp. 366-367: «*Lui mi disse 'Noi vorremo pure che in queste sepulture fussi qualchosa di buono, cioè qualchosa di tuo mano'. E non mi disse che volessi che io le facessi*.»

Before going through the encomiastic literature of the Medici Chapel, it is useful to recall the chronology of the works. There is no documentary certainty as to the start date of the works, as no contract of assignment has survived. However, thanks to a *memorandum* by Battista Figiovanni, canon of San Lorenzo and spokesman of Cardinal Giulio in Florence, we know that discussions on the possibility of erecting a mausoleum of the Medici family to house the tombs of the Magnificent Lorenzo and Giuliano (fig.4), and of the Dukes, Lorenzo di Urbino (fig.2) and Giuliano di Nemours (fig.3), had already begun in June 1519. According to what Figiovanni states, the building of the Medici Chapel began in November of that same year.[6] In Michelangelo's correspondence the works are not mentioned until autumn 1520, when some difficulties are recalled for the «*tristi portamenti degli scalpellini*» (bad behaviour of the stonecutters), as well as doubts about how the four tombs should be positioned in the chapel. Michelangelo discussed with the client the possibility of erecting a monument in the centre of the chapel, which would contain all the tombs, but Cardinal Giulio was unsure of this solution.[7] Soon, Michelangelo and Cardinal Giulio arrived at the solution we see today, that is, three tombs set against the walls, two single ones for Lorenzo d'Urbino and Giuliano di Nemours, and a double one for the Magnifici. In April 1521, the *pietra serena* framework was being erected, while Michelangelo was in Carrara providing instructions for the quarrying of the marble.[8] On 20 and 21 April 1521 Michelangelo signed two contracts with two different companies for the extraction of three hundred cartloads (*carrate*) of marble.[9] On 19 November 1523, Cardinal Giulio was elected pope with the name of Clement VII.

There is no further news of the progress of the works until 8 January 1524, when Michelangelo began to note down in detail every activity concerning the chapel in his *Ricordi*.[10] From January to March 1524, Michelangelo had dedicated himself to the creation of the wooden model of the architectural frame of the single tombs, which was finished on 10

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[6] CORTI, Gino, *Una ricordanza di Giovan Battista Figiovanni*, in *Paragone*, N.S. XV, 1964, 175, p. 31; PARRONCHI, Alessandro, *Una ricordanza inedita del Figiovanni sui lavori della Cappella Medicee*, in *Atti del Convegno di Studi Michelangioleschi*, Florence/Rome 1964, pp. 322-242. See also the retracing in ELAM, *The site*, pp. 162-169.

[7] BUONARROTI*, Letter to Cardinal Giulio de' Medici*, 31 October 1520, in *Il carteggio*, II, 1967, p. 259; DE' MEDICI, Giulio, *Letter to Michelangelo Buonarroti*, 28 November 1520, *Ibidem*, p. 260; BUONINSEGNI, Leonardo, *Letters to Michelangelo Buonarroti*, 17 and 28 December 1520, *Ibidem*, pp. 267-269.

[8] LUNETTI, Stefano, *Letter to Michelangelo,* 20 April 1520, from Florence to Carrara, *Ibidem*, pp. 288-289: «*avendo posto la basa del chantto a l'entrata, chome sapete, è statta vista da moltti. Ànno infra loro auto moltte dispute, in che modo abia a stare l'entrata della chapella;*» FATTUCCI, Giovan Francesco, *Letter to Michelangelo*, 21 April 1521, from Florence to Carrara, *Ibidem*, p. 292: «*Le cose della sacrestia vanno bene, benché Ciecone si vanta che le cornicie si metteranno su, e falle finire.*»

[9] See: SANSONE, Sandra, *Architettura delle sepolture nella Sagrestia Nuova. Concezione e costruzione*, in NOVA, Alessandro – ZANCHETTIN, Vitale, *Michelangelo. Arte Materia Lavoro*, Venice 2019, p. 238.

[10] BARDESCHI CIULICH, Lucilla – BAROCCHI, Paola, *I Ricordi di Michelangelo*, Florence 1970.

March.[11] The marble carving for the architectural elements of the single tombs began in March, and were entrusted to a large team of stonecutters and carvers. At the beginning of the work on the marbles, Michelangelo made a commitment to the client to complete the marble frameworks of the two single tombs by the end of the year, while he could not make promises for the execution of the statues.[12] Indeed, in June 1524 the execution of the marble framework of one of the two single tombs – in all likelihood that of Lorenzo di Urbino – had been almost completed.[13] By March 1526, Michelangelo had made eight life-size models of the statues that were to decorate the tombs.[14]

On 17 June 1526, one of the two single tombs was walled up, and the other twin single tomb was about to meet the same fate, as it was «*squadrata tucta o pocho mancha*» (completely carved, or in any case nearly so). Of the figures, Michelangelo had at this point begun to sculpt one of the two *Dukes* (figg.14-15), the four *Phases of Day* for the two single tombs (figg.10-13), and the *Madonna* for the tomb of the Magnifici (fig.16). By the end of June, Michelangelo had wished to begin the other *Duke* as well, after which he would only need to do the four *Rivers*, which he never sculpted in the end, but today a fragmentary model is preserved at the Accademia delle Arti del Disegno, Florence.[15]

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[11] *Ibidem*, p. 119: «*E a dì dieci di marzo* [...] *a Bastiano legnaiuolo lire sei per quatro giornate, che fu l'ultimo dì che fu finito uno de' modegli delle dua sepulture della sagrestia.*»

[12] FATTUCCI, *Letter to Michelangelo*, 4 April 1524, in *Il carteggio*, III, 1973, pp. 57-58: «*l'arei mostra al Papa perché quando gli dissi come le due sepulture sarebbono murate in questo anno, cioè il quadro ma non tutte le figure, n'ebbe tanto piacere che voleva che io gli mostrassi la lettera.*»

[13] IDEM, 7 June 1524, *Ibidem*, p. 80: «*Et benché Nostro Signiore gli sia piac[i]uto grandemente, et presene grandissimo piacere et delli sfondati et d'ogni cosa, pure a me pare uno picolo luogo per dua papi, et io, per me, gli arei messi dove e' duchi; ma per averne guasi fatta di quadro una, non ci è ordine. Pensate di ornarle il più che potete, et non guardate a spesa.*» On 23 May 1524 (*Il carteggio*, III, 1973, pp. 76-77), Clement VII asked Michelangelo to insert his tomb and that of Leo X inside the Medici Chapel, thus requiring a complete rethinking of the configuration of the tombs (which according to this new project, should have been two Popes, two Dukes, two Magnifici). Considering the limited room of the chapel, it seems that in Michelangelo's lost letter, he suggests that the tombs of the Dukes be removed and replaced with those of the Popes – Michelangelo must also have complained that a rethinking of these proportions of the entire project, would have nullified the work done up to that moment.

[14] From March to October 1524, Michelangelo had been purchasing materials for the execution of the eight clay models of the statues mentioned in letter from Leonardo Sellaio of 10 March 1526, (*Il Carteggio*, III, 1973, pp. 214-215: «*avevi fatti e' modegli delle 8 fighure che non si gettono in forma*»). See: BARDESCHI CIULICH–BAROCCHI, *I Ricordi*, pp. 128-133. See also: ECHINGER-MAURACH, Claudia, '*E si rinasce tal concetto bello'. Michelangelo e la genesi delle sculture nella Sagrestia Nuova*, in *Michelangelo*, 2019, pp. 199-215; WALLACE, William, *Michelangelo at San Lorenzo. The Genius as Entrepreneur*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 88.

[15] BUONARROTI, *Letter to Fattucci,* 17 June 1526, in *Il carteggio*, III, 1973, pp. 227-228: «*Io lavoro el più che io posso, e infra quindici dì farò chominciare l'altro chapitano; poi mi resterà, di chose d'importanza, solo e' quatro fiumi. Le quatro figure in su' chassoni, le quatro figure in terra che sono e' fiumi, e' dua chapitani e la Nostra Donna che va nella sepultura di testa sono le figure che io vorrei fare di mia mano e di queste n'è chominciate sei; e bastami l'animo di farle in tempo chonveniente, e parte far fare anchora l'altre che non importano tanto*». In *I Ricordi*, p. 124, on 27 October 1524 Michelangelo noted that he had one of his own pieces of marble transported from via Mozza to the Medici Chapel, «*llungo quatro braccia giuste, grosso un braccio e octavo, largo un braccio e dua terzi*» (cm 208×65,2×96,6) that served to sculpt «*una figura di quelle che vanno in su' chassoni.*» The only figure that has similar measures to these is *Night*, which would be the first statue Michelangelo sculpted. On 24 October 1525,

The works were interrupted in May 1527, when the Medici were expelled from Florence, following the crisis between Clement VII and the emperor Charles V, which resulted in the disastrous Sack of Rome. A republican government was established in Florence, which Michelangelo enthusiastically joined, designing the city's fortifications. According to Vasari, in this period Michelangelo also continued «the statues for the tombs of San Lorenzo, but in secret.»[16] In August 1530, the Medici regime was re-established, and Michelangelo fled the city, fearing retaliation by the Medici for joining the Republic. Clement VII, however, showed himself magnanimous, and forgave Michelangelo's betrayal, on condition that he immediately resume work for the conclusion of the Medici Chapel.

In the autumn of 1530, therefore, the second phase of the works began in the Medici Chapel, during which Michelangelo shuttled between Florence and Rome, managing to carve out for himself the role of sole director of the works.[17] In the execution of the statues, a team of collaborators took over, made up of talented Florentine sculptors chosen by Clement VII: Niccolò Tribolo, Raffaello da Montelupo, Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli. In 1533, Tribolo was given the task of executing the allegories of *Heaven* and *Earth* to be placed in the side niches of the Tomb of Giuliano di Nemours – only *Earth* was completed, but it is now dispersed (fig.148). Montorsoli and Montelupo respectively executed the statues of *San Cosma* and *San Damiano*, for the tomb of the Magnifici (figg.17-18). In October 1532, Giovanni da Udine also came to Florence to create the stuccoes on the vault.[18]

On 25 September 1534 Pope Clement VII died, thus interrupting the financing of the enterprise. In that same month, Michelangelo had abandoned Florence forever, leaving the chapel unfinished. Upon the death of the client, and when Michelangelo abandoned the site, the progress of the Medici Chapel was as follows: finished in its architectural structure; the marble framework of the single tombs had been executed and mounted on the walls; of the seventeen statues planned, only ten had been executed (four *Phases*, two *Dukes*, two *Saints*,

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four statues resulted as «*chonciate*» but not yet finished (*Il carteggio,* III, 1973, pp. 173-174). According to NELSON, Jonathan K., *Poetry in stone. Michelangelo's ducal tombs in the New Sacristy*, in GASTON, Robert – WALDMAN, Louis Alexander, *San Lorenzo. A Florentine Church*, Florence 2017, pp. 471-473, these four statues would have been *Night, Day, Giuliano,* and *Madonna*. On the contrary, ECHINGER-MAURACH, *E si rinasce tal concetto bello*, considers them to be the four *Phases*.

[16] VASARI, *Vita di Michelagnolo Buonarruoti fiorentino pittore, scultore et architetto*, in IDEM, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori et architettori*, Florence 1568.

[17] WALLACE, *Michelangelo at San Lorenzo*, pp. 129-134. Michelangelo spent much more time in Rome than in Florence. He was in Rome in April 1532, and then from the summer 1532 for the next 9-11 months; then in November 1533. From June to September 1534, he stayed in Florence for the last time, before the definitive departure for Rome.

[18] CECCHI, Alessandro, *Le perdute decorazioni fiorentine di Giovanni da Udine*, in *Paragone. Arte*, XXXIV, 1983, 399, pp. 30. Giovanni da Udine noted: «*Adì 4 dito* [October]*, io aggiunsi Fiorenza et acchominciai di lavorare di stucho a la Sagrestia di San Lorenzo dove vanno le sepolture del Ducha Lorentio e Ducha Giuliano de Medici de mano de Michel Angelo Bonarotti scultore*.»

Madonna, *Earth*), and of these only *Giuliano* and the *Saints Cosma and Damiano* were perfected, and only the two *Dukes* were placed in their niches; Giovanni da Udine's stuccoes on the vault were finished, but the frescoes in the lunettes remained at the simple state of graphic study; the marble decoration of what should have been the sumptuous attics of the tombs, with trophies, herms, and figures, was drastically reduced; the marble framework of the double tomb of the Magnifici was never begun.

Therefore, similar to what happened with the Tomb of Julius II, the grandiose initial projects had to be drastically revised. Only in 1547, by the will of Duke Cosimo I, the four *Phases of Day* were mounted over the sepulchres, unfinished, by Tribolo, then *architettore* of the chapel – as *factotum* of the Medici court, in those same years Tribolo was creating the grandiose sculptural apparatus of the garden of the Villa Medici at Castello.[19] Tribolo also had to transport the statues for the Tomb of the Magnifici, the *Madonna* and *Saints Cosma and Damiano*, to the chapel, yet it is not certain whether the stark setting we see today is due to him, or to Vasari, who in the 1550s would take over from Tribolo, now deceased, in the ducal reorganisation of the buildings abandoned by Michelangelo. It is not even possible to be sure whether the models of the *Rivers* were placed for a period at the foot of the tombs. The interventions of Tribolo and Vasari were therefore minimal and extremely fearful – but we will return later to the value of the assembly of the unfinished *Phases* – and generated a proto-museum crystallisation of the chapel, which was de facto placed under a shrine to be admired.

It was in the years immediately following Michelangelo's abandonment of the Medici Chapel in 1534 that the celebration of his myth was fomented. Artist copies, both on paper and through clay models, of the statues of the chapel raged already in the 1530s – the drawing by Federico Zuccari significantly portrays a handful of artists intent on observing and drawing, even with athletic gestures, the works of the chapel (Paris, Musée du Louvre, Departement des Arts Graphiques, 4554r, fig.19). From the 1530s, we know the drawings by Battista Franco, which were later followed by those by Francesco Salviati and Giovan Battista Naldini, up to the engravings by Comelis Cort dating back to 1570 (figg.19-27).[20] Small clay

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[19] RICCIO, Pierfrancesco, *Letter to Duke Cosimo I de' Medici*, 31 December 1546, Asfi, Mediceo del Principato, 616, c. 64, in ASCHOFF, Wiebke, *Studien zu Niccolò Tribolo*, Frankfurt 1967: «*Et ci farò piacere, così s'andrò rassettando tutti doi questi luoghi da ragnatele e dalla polvere che n'hanno di bisogno, accertandola che tutta Firenze s'è allegrata di questo fatto come degno di V.E.*»

[20] ROSENBERG, *The reproduction and publication of Michelangelo's Sacristy. Drawing and prints by Franco, Salviati, Naldini, and Cort*, in AMES-LEWIS, Francis - JOANNIDES, Paul, *Reactions to the master*, Aldershot 2003, pp. 114-136. See also: JOANNIDES, Paul, *Salviati and Michelangelo*, *Ibidem*, pp. 68-92; LAZZARO, Claudia, *Michelangelo's Medici Chapel and its aftermath. Scattered bodies and Florentine identities under the Duchy*, in *California Italian Studies*, VI, 1, 2016, pp. 1-35.

copies – or even casts of the preparatory models – of the statues travelled throughout Italy. We know that in 1536 Vasari sent a wax head by Michelangelo to Pietro Aretino in Venice, perhaps together with copies of the *Dukes*, and that Jacopo Tintoretto was a fanatic collector of reproductions of Michelangelo's statues.[21] Tribolo himself made clay copies of the *Phases* and the *Madonna* in 1534-35 (figg.175-177). This blind admiration of Michelangelo's work, however, did not pass only through the channels of the work of the artists. In 1536, on the occasion of his triumphal entry into Florence, Charles V could not avoid making a stop at the Medici Chapel to admire Michelangelo's masterpieces. Finally, on the occasion of the birth of the Accademia del Disegno (1563), a ducal organ in all respects strongly desired by Vasari, the Medici Chapel was elected as the meeting place of the artists, to definitively establish its value as a "school of all arts."

Therefore, although the Medici Chapel could certainly not be considered a success as a whole, given that Michelangelo abandoned the works still unfinished and unmounted, it immediately began a fragmentation of every element, which was isolated, de-contextualised, and carefully studied, establishing each element as a top model to imitate. For this reason too, the interventions of Tribolo and Vasari during the 1540-50s necessarily had to be cautious and attentive, for the process of fetishisation was already underway, and any modification of those fragments risked compromising the entire work. Besides, any attempt to refine the statues or to intervene in the configuration of the tombs would have contaminated the purity of the Michelangelo brand, an option that must have seemed unthinkable, since what was now defended was no longer the original sepulchral function of the Medici Chapel, but rather its value as testimony of the artistic genius of Michelangelo, and therefore of all Florence.

If with regards to the Medici governors (whether popes or dukes) the appropriation of Michelangelo's art was admittedly an attempt to legitimise their illegitimate power, the idolatry of the genius of Michelangelo by the artists was very much based on the indisputable quality of his figural sculpture, the result of his research into the beauty of the human body. However, from praising the genius of the figure sculptor Michelangelo, they quickly went on to celebrate his qualities as an architect, and above all as an ornamental sculptor, so much so that he was considered the promoter of artistic license, and the one who freed art from the yokes of antiquity.

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[21] LARIVAILLE, Paul, *Aretino and Michelangelo: annexed and connected for an afterthought*, in *Varia Aretiniana*, Rome 2005, pp. 337-353. On Tintoretto's collecting plaster copies of Michelangelo's statues, see: RIDOLFI, Carlo, *Vita di Giacopo Robusti detto il Tintoretto, celebre pittore, cittadino venetiano*, Venice 1642; BORGHINI, Raffaello, *Il Riposo*, Florence 1584.

While Michelangelo was still alive, two biographies were dedicated to him. The first was that of Giorgio Vasari, included in the 1550 edition of his *Lives*.[22] The second was the one written in 1553 by Ascanio Condivi, a close collaborator of Michelangelo.[23] Finally, the posthumous 1568 edition of Vasari followed, with some corrections and with the addition of the description of the sumptuous funeral celebrations dedicated to Michelangelo, who died in 1564.[24] These are the texts that founded Michelangelo's mythology. To provide an idea of the idolatry that Michelangelo enjoyed in these texts, look at how many times the word *'divino'* is used. If Condivi contained himself, at least on a linguistic level, with only five repetitions («*la divinità di Michelagnolo,*» «*divin'opera*» referring to *Pietà*, «*divine*» are the statues of the Medici Chapel, the Last Judgment has a «*divina compositione,*» and finally Michelangelo is a «*divino spirito*»), Vasari goes much further reaching twenty-five uses of the word 'divine' in the edition of 1550, which then reach thirty-three in the subsequent edition of 1568. Thus, the birth of Michelangelo is «something celestial and divine;» Michelangelo's hands are described as «*divine*» if not «*divinissime*;» the features of Giuliano di Nemours' statue are «*sì divini*» that «whoever studies the beauty of the buskins and the cuirass, believes it to be celestial rather than mortal;» the figures of the *Last Judgement* «have infused in them divine grace and knowledge;» and so on.[25]

The divine character of Michelangelo's genius, and specifically of his Florentine nature, emerged in an equally commendable way almost a decade before the first edition of Vasari's *Lives*, in a letter that Anton Francesco Doni addressed to Michelangelo in 1543, in which he immeasurably sang the praises not only of Michelangelo's artistic genius, but also of his works, and in particular of the statues in the Medici Chapel.[26] Doni begins with an exhortative «*O divino huomo*,» and continues shortly after «*più mi glorio che voi siate nato nel mio nido che di tutti i trophei ch'avesse mai la patria nostra*» (I am more proud that you were born in my nest than of all the trophies that our homeland ever had), making two precise characteristics immediately apparent. The first is the divine nature of Michelangelo, which will be often reiterated throughout the letter, to the point of even going so far as to compare Michelangelo

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[22] VASARI, entry *Michelangelo Bonarroti Fiorentino*, in *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori et scultori italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri*, Florence 1550.

[23] CONDIVI, Ascanio, *Vita di Michelagnolo Buonarroti raccolta per Ascanio Condivi da la Ripa Transone*, Rome 1553.

[24] VASARI, *Vita di Michelagnolo Buonarroti fiorentino, pittore scultore et architetto*, in *Le vite de'più eccellenti pittori scultori et architettori*, Florence 1568.

[25] For a compelling investigation of the concept of divinity in sixteenth-century art, see: EMISON, Patricia, *Creating the Divine Artist. From Dante to Michelangelo*, Leiden 2004, pp. 3-18.

[26] DONI, Anton Francesco, *Letter to Michelangelo*, 12 January 1543, in *Il carteggio*, IV, 1979, pp. 160-163.

directly to God, since both create men from matter;[27] the second, more subtle but much more relevant, is that Michelangelo was Florentine, thus implying that only in that land could divine creatures like him be born.

Already from the end of the fifteenth century with Lorenzo the Magnificent, and then a constant trait along the course of the whole sixteenth century with the Popes Leo X and Clement VII first and with the Duchy of Cosimo I later, the combination of genius and *fiorentinità* (Florentine origin) implied the close relationship between art and Medici patronage. Thus, celebrating the Florentine *genius loci* was actually glorifying the magnanimity of the Medici, who through their shrewd and sophisticated government had allowed the arts to flourish. Therefore, when Vasari praises the divinity of Michelangelo with irrepressible enthusiasm, he does so driven not only by an undoubted admiration for Michelangelo's skills, but also by a parochial pride, which hides the most servile propaganda partisanship aimed at glorifying the Medici, lords of Florence as well as protectors of Vasari himself. Vasari's parochial and propaganda spirit is clearly visible in the opening words of the biography dedicated to Michelangelo:

> *And because He* [God] *saw that in the practice of these professions and in these most singular crafts—that is, painting, sculpture, and architecture—Tuscan minds were always among the greatest and most elevated, and because they were more scrupulous in their efforts to study these arts than any other people of Italy, He wanted to bequeath to this spirit, as his native city, Florence, the most worthy among all the other cities, so that the perfection Florence justly achieved with all her talents might finally reach its culmination in one of her own citizens*.[28]

Vasari's glorification of Michelangelo reaches one of its highest peaks when he talks about the Medici Chapel. The comparison between Vasari's words – the same in both the 1550 and 1568 editions – and those of Condivi, makes Vasari's more purely propaganda intentions even more evident. If Condivi in describing the Medici Chapel makes no mention of architecture and ornamentation, focusing more on the unfinished statues and the awe that Michelangelo had towards the Medici – especially the new Duke Alessandro – Vasari's

[27] *Ibidem*: «*Et certo io vi tengo per uno Iddio, con licenza della nostra fede, perché, sì come quando Domenedio hebbe fatto Adam di terra, soffiò lo spirito vitale in esso; così voi, volendo, col potere di quello che v'ha fatto virtuoso infondereste l'anima in quei figuroni morbidi et musculosi.*»
[28] VASARI, *Vita di Michelagnolo Buonarroti*, 1550, 1568.

narrative takes on completely different tones. Before dwelling at length in the description and glorification of the statues («Is there anyone who, in the art of any century, has ever seen ancient or modern statues made like these ones?» he wonders at a certain point galvanised), Vasari dedicates ample space to the celebration of architectural order and sculptural ornamentation of the Chapel:

> *And since Michelangelo wanted to execute the project in imitation of the Old Sacristy done by Filippo Brunelleschi but with a different order of decorations, he created inside a composite decoration, more varied and original than ancient or modern masters had for some time been able to achieve, for in the originality of its beautiful cornices, capitals, bases, doors, tabernacles, and tombs, Michelangelo departed in a significant way from the measures, orders, and rules men usually employ, following Vitruvius and the ancients, because he did not wish to repeat them. His licence has greatly encouraged those who have seen his way of working in order to set about imitating it, and new fantasies were subsequently seen to exhibit more of the grotesque than reason or rules in their decorations. Thus artisans owe an immense and everlasting debt to Michelangelo, since he broke the bonds and chains that made them all continue to follow a common path.*[29]

Vasari therefore considers Michelangelo the promoter of the license of art in the sixteenth century, which allowed artists to free themselves from the heavy burden of the rigid ancient norm. Vasari therefore believes that the widespread fashion of grotesque decoration has its origin in the Medici Chapel.

Vasari's assessment of Michelangelo's extraordinary abilities as an architect and ornamental sculptor echoed greatly in the Florentine artistic literature of the sixteenth century. Cosimo Bartoli in his *Ragionamenti Accademici* (1567) takes up the same concepts expressed by Vasari, when he affirms that «*del Buonarroto non si può dire tanto bene che sia bastante, per lodarlo quanto sono i meriti suoi*» (what we say about Buonarroti is never good enough, to praise him as much as his merits are). However, if Vasari credits Michelangelo with having allowed architects and ornamental sculptors to freely compose according to their imagination, Bartoli acknowledges that Michelangelo never let himself be taken by the heat of the bizarre as an end in itself, in fact he «*non pose mai un Capitello dove ordinariamente ha da stare la basa, né messe al Capitello una maschera coprendoli quasi che il mostaccio con una*

[29] *Ibidem*.

mensola; né ingrossando o stravolgendo sconciamente le Membra fece apparire come Mostri, quelle belle proporzioni che gli antichi usarono nelle cose loro» (never placed a capital where ordinarily the base has to stand, nor did he put a mask on a capital in such a way that the muzzle covered the shelf, nor did he make those beautiful proportions that the ancients used in their buildings appear as Monsters by swelling or distorting the members). We could then ask ourselves where exactly Michelangelo's license is positioned, whether in the field of norms or that of bizarre; one also wonders if the unbridled bizarre spirit that will be seen spreading in much architecture of the second half of the sixteenth century really has any relationship with the Medici Chapel.

Francesco Bocchi in his guide *Le bellezze della città di Fiorenza* (1594) dedicates ample space to the description of the Medici Chapel. His celebration of the chapel takes on exceptionally emphatic tones, also extending into the celebration of architecture and ornamentation, which he ascribes totally to Michelangelo. Thus, «*capitelli, cornici e rarissimi intagli, sono fatti con bellezza così felice, che non chiede la voglia altrui, ancora che sia bramosa, né ornamento più sublime, né leggiadria più allegra*» (capitals, frames and very rare carvings are made with such happy beauty that the desire of others, even if greedy, does not ask for more sublime ornament, nor more cheerful grace). For the first time, Bocchi also dwells on the sculptural furnishings, glorifying the «*due bellissimi candelieri, intagliati con festoni e con grottesche, e con altri ornamenti, cosi gentilmente bizzarri, che vincono per sua bellezza ogni facultà di parole et ogni pensiero*» (two beautiful candlesticks, carved with festoons and grotesques, and with other ornaments, so kindly bizarre, that they conquer every faculty of words and every thought for its beauty). At the end, Bocchi's assessment is unambiguous: «*ogni miglior sapere, ogni gentile artifizio, ogni sovrana industria sia adunata in questo nobile ricetto e che sia piovuta dalle Grazie tutta la leggiadria, tutto l'ornamento, tutta la nobiltà, onde puote divenire opera umana incomparabile e stupenda*» (every best knowledge, every gentle artifice, every superior industry is gathered in this noble refuge, and all the gracefulness, all the ornament, all the nobility have rained down from the Graces, so that it can become human work, incomparable and beautiful).

Reading in a row all these unconditional commendations received both in the Medici Chapel and in the unsurpassed artistic skills of Michelangelo, the suspicion arises that this is largely empty and baseless rhetoric, typical of Florence of the time, pervaded by servile sophisms of all sorts. However, the worrying fact is that a large part of subsequent

historiography has been nourished by this hyperbolic praise, and our judgment is still based on it.

Below we intend to reinterpret the architectural skills that Michelangelo used in the Medici Chapel, and we also propose the hypothesis that as regards the grotesque ornamentation, so praised by Vasari, Michelangelo made use of the contribution of Andrea Ferrucci and Silvio Cosini. Finally, we analyse the relationship that Michelangelo had with ornamental sculpture and with grotesque vocabulary. Objects of this analysis are some drawings traditionally assigned to Michelangelo, depicting elements that were typical of the grotesque language; and the works in which ornamentation plays a role of primary importance, such as the Tomb of Julius II and the Sistine Ceiling.

Michelangelo as architect. Codex Coner.

In 1516, Pope Leo X launched a competition among the major artists of the time, for the design of the facade of San Lorenzo, the church owned by the Medici family, left unfinished by Brunelleschi almost a century earlier. The competition attracted artists such as Baccio d'Agnolo, Giuliano and Antonio da Sangallo, Andrea and Jacopo Sansovino, Raphael, and also Michelangelo. Leo X intended to replicate with a sumptuous and permanent marble facade the ephemeral apparatuses that Jacopo Sansovino set up for Leo X's triumphal entry into Florence on 30 November 1515. The purpose of these ephemeral apparatuses – of which Vasari only describes the one that Sansovino executed for the facade of the Cathedral of Florence but which must have been numerous and scattered in various points of the city – was to hide the medieval remains «*di ordine tedesco*» (Gothic) considered barbarian remnants of a dark past, through a neoclassical revival inspired by ancient Roman architecture.[30]

The restoration of the facade of San Lorenzo was therefore part of a cultural cleansing operation, aimed at celebrating the renewal of the splendour of an idealised antiquity facilitated by the benevolent Medici governance in Florence. The design presented by Michelangelo, that defeated all competition, provided for a somewhat austere architectural backdrop, within which numerous statues would be inserted – the wood model is today preserved at Casa Buonarroti, Florence.[31] For the first designs of the architectural backdrop

[30] VASARI, *Descrizione dell'opere di Iacopo Sansavino scultore fiorentino*, in *Vite*.
[31] See BUONARROTI, *Letter to Domenico Buoninsegni*, 2 May 1517, in *Il carteggio*, I, 1965, pp. 277-279: «*far questa opera della facciata di San Lorenzo, che sia, d'architectura e di schultura, lo spechio di tucta Italia*»; IDEM, *Letter to*

(Florence, Casa Buonarroti, 44Ar, 45Ar, 47Ar, figg.30-31), Michelangelo took inspiration from the projects of Giuliano da Sangallo (Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, 277Ar, 281Ar, figg.28-29), mixing some of Sangallo's architectural elements and just slightly distorting the proportions, which become more elongated in Michelangelo's design than in Sangallo's.[32] This distortion was probably caused by the fact that Michelangelo generally copied architectural drawings freehand, not being interested in the exact measurements and proportions between the various architectural elements, as we will see later with the copies from the Codex Coner. The initial collaboration with Baccio d'Agnolo and Jacopo Sansovino was soon rejected by Michelangelo, who, as often happened, preferred not to share the work with other masters.[33]

The relevant element of the design process for the facade of San Lorenzo – ultimately never built – lies, on the one hand, in the feverish study of architectural partitions initiated by Michelangelo to overcome his shortcomings in architectural design; on the other hand, in the fact that the subsequent project for the Medici Chapel arose from the undertaking of the San Lorenzo facade. If regarding the design of the facade, Michelangelo relied on Sangallo's studies, for each architectural element Michelangelo began instead an intense, yet rather quick and superficial, study of the so-called Codex Coner, a notebook composed of surveys and measurements of ancient architectures carried out by Benedetto della Volpaia around 1514 (London, Sir John Soane's Museum). As Brothers rightly points out, however surprising it may seem, Michelangelo's long career as an architect was totally based on this extremely short and compressed form of self-training.[34] Bambach argues on the other hand that Michelangelo's sound knowledge on architecture is precisely perceivable in the *disciplined style* of his drawings from Codex Coner.[35] However, the only example of Michelangelo's architectural design prior to the facade of San Lorenzo – excluding the Tomb of Julius II which must be considered a monumental sculpture rather than a proper architecture – is the Chapel

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Berto da Filicaia, 13 September 1518, *Ibidem*, II, 1967, pp. 82-83: «*farò la più bella opera che si sia mai facta in Italia.*»

[32] For a keen analysis of the drawing 45Ar of Casa Buonarroti, portraying the likely model of the San Lorenzo facade designed partly by Michelangelo, see: BAMBACH, Carmen, *Michelangelo. Divine draftsman and designer*, New York 2017, pp. 108-110. As for Giuliano da Sangallo's projects at the Galleria Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, most likely made for the facade of San Lorenzo, see: FROMMEL, Sabine, *Giuliano da Sangallo*, Florence 2014, pp. 327-330. As for Michelangelo's appropriation of Sangallo's (and others') prototypes for the San Lorenzo facade, see: HEMSOLL, David, *The Laurentian Library and Michelangelo's architectural method*, in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, LXVI, 2003(2004), pp. 31-33.

[33] See the livid letter Sansovino wrote to Michelangelo when he discovered they would no longer work together at San Lorenzo: TATTI, Jacopo, called SANSOVINO, *Letter to Michelangelo,* 30 June 1517, *Ibidem*, p. 291: «*E non mi ero avisto anchora che voi non faciesti mai bene a nessuno […] maladetta quella volta che voi dicessi mai bene di nessuno universalemente.*»

[34] BROTHERS, Cammy, *Michelangelo, drawing, and the invention of architecture*, New Haven 2008, pp. 45-83.

[35] BAMBACH, *Michelangelo. Divine draftsman,* pp. 119-121

of Leo X, in Castel Sant'Angelo, Rome, datable around 1513-16, where we note a bald and severe style, yet already rather undisciplined in the use of architectural elements, with a shelf placed strangely in the centre to support the architrave. The words of Michelangelo himself, reported by Vasari, come to mind: when in 1546 Michelangelo was entrusted with the completion of St. Peter's in Rome, seeking to avoid that colossal task, he said that «architecture was not his proper art.»

Comparing the drawings of the Codex Coner with those of Michelangelo that derive from them, we note some important elements that allow us to revise significantly our understanding of the architectural skills of Michelangelo. Although the Codex Coner is a precise survey of important monuments of ancient Rome, and its purpose was evidently to grasp the methods and uses of ancient architecture, Michelangelo shows rather little interest in those exact notes. He had no desire to learn specific knowledge about architecture, and preferred to concentrate on a few significant details, such as bases, cornices and pillars – rarely capitals – which he quickly copied with the intention of acquiring only their shapes and outlines. In other words, it seems that Michelangelo, driven by an irrepressible urgency probably caused by the ruthless competition of his much more experienced rivals, intended to learn only enough to design the various elements of the facade of San Lorenzo.

Significantly, Michelangelo's copying operation rarely took into account the sculptural ornamentation of the various architectural portions. For example, compare folio 131 of the Codex Coner (fig.32), where we see two superimposed variations of richly decorated column bases, with the Michelangelo's drawing 1A of Casa Buonarroti (fig.33), where Michelangelo copies the outline of the left base, with only unconvincing hints at ornamentation. Equally interesting is the comparison between folio 147 of the Codex Coner (fig.34), where various decorative solutions are proposed for a volute keystone, and the copy made by Michelangelo in the aforementioned drawing 1Ar of Casa Buonarroti (fig.35): here too, Michelangelo ignores the decorative details, focusing only on the outline with an uncertain trait that makes us understand that these drawings were made freehand, without the aid of technical drawing tools – we know in fact that at the time of the works for the Medici Chapel, Michelangelo made use of one of his collaborators, the draftsman Stefano di Tommaso Lunetti, for the realisation of the technical drawings.[36]

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[36] See WALLACE, *Michelangelo at San Lorenzo*, p. 83. As for Michelangelo's difficulties in architectural design through drawing, see: BROTHERS, Cammy, *Designing what you cannot draw. Michelangelo and the Laurentian Library*, in MAURER, Golo – NOVA, Alessandro, *Michelangelo e il linguaggio dei disegni di architettura*, Venice 2012, pp. 153-167.

The various architectural details of the Codex Coner that Michelangelo could not use in the facade of San Lorenzo, came in handy when he was called to design the Medici Chapel and the Laurentian Library. The same bases and shelves of the drawings mentioned above can be recognised in those then executed in the chapel, demonstrating that when in 1519 Michelangelo was working on its design, he still continued to refer only to the prototypes he had copied from the Codex Coner. The operation of copying architectural elements, together with Michelangelo's lack of preparation in architectural design, generated the style that Vasari enthusiastically defines «more varied and original than ancient or modern masters had for some time been able to achieve.»[37]

A further example of Michelangelo's exploitation of the architectural vocabulary of the Codex Coner is the peculiar trapezoidal window placed on the lunette of the Medici Chapel. Michelangelo took this element from folio 132 of the Codex Coner (fig.36), in which Benedetto della Volpaia reproduced the two types of opening of the Temple of Vesta in Tivoli, including its peculiar trapezoidal window. With his usual ease, Michelangelo copied the elements of that folio in the 8Ar drawing of Casa Buonarroti (fig.37), showing disinterest in the exact replication of measurements and proportions, and conducting the drawing freehand. The trapezoidal window Michelangelo then included in the Medici Chapel was met with some success, and Bocchi highly praises its beauty – though he does not understand the reference: «*un finestrone adorno da somma grazia con frontespizio maraviglioso; e come che sia da basso alquanto più largo, che non è disopra, tuttavia è nella vista molto magnifico e bellissimo*» (a large window adorned by supreme grace with a marvellous frontispiece; despite it being below somewhat wider than it is above, yet it is very magnificent and beautiful in view).

We think again of Vasari's words that describe the architectural elements of the Medici Chapel as completely alien to the models of antiquity: «In the originality of the beautiful cornices, capitals, bases, doors, tabernacles, and tombs, Michelangelo departed in a significant way from the measures, orders, and rules men usually employ, following Vitruvius and the ancients, because he did not wish to repeat them.»[38] In the light of what has been said, we further realise how partial and biased Vasari's analysis is, depending both on a limited

[37] This same celebratory enthusiasm for the originality of Michelangelo's architecture often recurs throughout Vasari's biography. When speaking of the Medici Tombs, VASARI, *Vita di Michelangelo*, writes: «*con le invenzioni dell'architettura delle sepolture è forza confessare che egli abbia avanzato ogni uomo in queste tre professioni.*» Again, speaking of a project for a facade of a Roman palace: «*né il più vario, né il più ornato, né il più nuovo di maniera e di ordine, avenga, come s'è visto in tutte le cose sue, che e' non s'è mai voluto obligare a legge, o antica, o moderna di cose d'architettura, come quegli che ha auto l'ingegno atto a trovare sempre cose nuove e varie e non punto men belle.*»

[38] See HEMSOLL, *The Laurentian Library*, for a reassessment of Vasari's words, and for a keen analysis of Michelangelo's method of appropriation of ancient and contemporary architectures.

knowledge of the vocabulary of ancient architecture – much more varied and much less canonical than what Vitruvius described and therefore than what Vasari believed[39] – and above all on an unconditional celebration of every artistic ability of Michelangelo, who, even when copying, could only be original.

Michelangelo ornamentista. With the help of Andrea Ferrucci at the Medici Chapel.

If with regards to the architectural design of the Medici Chapel, Michelangelo relied on the limited knowledge he had gathered through the study of the projects of Giuliano da Sangallo and of Benedetto della Volpaia's Codex Coner, we will see now that with regards to the Medici Chapel ornament, Michelangelo relied on the help of his friend Andrea Ferrucci and his workshop of talented sculptors. Although this topic will be discussed at length in the chapter dedicated to Silvio Cosini, it is useful here to recall what the sculptural ornament of the Medici Chapel consists of, and thus to analyse the relationship between Michelangelo and Ferrucci.

Although Vasari greatly praises the ornament of the Medici Chapel, and considers it the main reason for the diffusion of license and grotesque decoration in the sixteenth-century art, the ornament in truth occupies a rather small space within the general configuration of the chapel. We find elements of grotesque decoration only in the single tombs of Giuliano di Nemours and Lorenzo di Urbino (the frieze of masks, the capitals with satirical heads, the monstrous creatures of the pediments, figg.45-47), and in their attics never completed, that we know from the drawings and that should have consisted of trophies, herms, thrones, and naked figures (fig.48). In April 1524, the grotesque decoration of the Tomb of Lorenzo di Urbino was entrusted to the most talented of Ferrucci's pupils, Silvio Cosini, who also began to sculpt the two *Trophies* for the attics (figg.251-252).[40] The execution of the corresponding decorative portions of the tomb of Giuliano di Nemours were instead entrusted in all probability to Francesco da Sangallo, although many doubts still remain in this regard.[41] Furthermore, even the stucco ceiling made by Giovanni da Udine in 1532 – unfortunately

[39] WATERS, Michael J – BROTHERS, Cammy, *Variety, Archeology, & Ornament. Renaissance Achitectural Prints from Column to Cornice*, Charlottesville 2011.

[40] The attribution of the decorative elements of the Tomb of Lorenzo di Urbino to Silvio Cosini finds wide agreement in the scholarship, and dates back to: VASARI, *Vita di Andrea Ferrucci e altri fiesolani*, in *Le vite*, 1568. For more bibliographical details, see the third chapter.

[41] CAMPIGLI, *Silvio Cosini*, 2007, believes that the capitals and frieze of Giuliano's tomb were sculpted by Francesco da Sangallo. However, given the shareable doubts raised by GIANNOTTI, *Francesco da Sangallo*, about the identity of the latter, a review of the attributions would be desirable. In a wholly hypothetical way, with regard to the capitals alone, of notable quality, Simone Mosca is proposed here, who reached the Laurentian site in May 1525.

removed in the eighteenth century – must have had a rich grotesque decoration, according to what Bocchi reported («*fogliami, rosoni, uccelli, maschere e varie cose bizzarre, che sono messe a oro*», foliage, rosettes, birds, masks and various bizarre things, which are gilded).[42]

Michelangelo hired Ferrucci for the work on the Medici Chapel on 29 March 1524, as is clear from his *Ricordi*.[43] His official task was to «*guidare l'opera delle sepulture… cioè mectere le pietre innanzi agli squadratori*» (guide the work of the burials... that is, put the stones in front of the stonecutters), therefore to coordinate the work of the stonecutters who had just begun to carve the marble structures of the single tombs. Since he was simultaneously engaged as foreman of the Cathedral, Ferrucci granted his help to Michelangelo for only two months, and on 31 May 1524 their collaboration officially ended.[44]

Michelangelo and Ferrucci had already worked together. The first collaboration dates back to the first decade of the sixteenth century, when Michelangelo was commissioned to carry out the statues of the *Apostles* for the Cathedral, of which he only began to sculpt the *Saint Matthew*. Following Michelangelo's abandoning the work, the undertaking was entrusted to a team of Florentine sculptors, composed of Jacopo Sansovino, Benedetto da Rovezzano and Andrea Ferrucci – who sculpted the *Saint Andrew*.[45] Much more important was their collaboration in the project of the facade of San Lorenzo of 1517-18, in which, according to what emerges from the epistolary, Ferrucci participated in a role that was similar to the one he was later entrusted in the Medici Chapel, that of coordinator of the works of foundation, during the time Michelangelo was in Carrara to extract the necessary marble.[46]

The decorative portions of the Medici Chapel closely resemble those used by Ferrucci in his previous works, in particular the green men and trophies of the *Carafa Chapel* and the *Pandone Tomb*, San Domenico Maggiore, Naples, datable to around 1510 (figg.231-232). Admittedly, if we look at what we can consider the definitive design of the Medici Chapel single tomb (Paris, Musée du Louvre, 838, fig.48), we note that it does not present any of the elements of grotesque decoration that were later executed by Cosini. It can thus be assumed that those grotesque decorations were an original contribution by Ferrucci and his workshop.

Indeed, Ferrucci's Neapolitan works brought the link between architecture and ornamental sculpture to an almost indissoluble fusion. The *Altar of the Madonna Bruna* in

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[42] BOCCHI, Francesco, *Le bellezze della città di Fiorenza*, Florence 1594.
[43] BARDESCHI CIULICH, Lucilla – BAROCCHI, Paola, *I Ricordi di Michelangelo*, Florence 1970, p. 123.
[44] *Ibidem*, p. 141.
[45] For the sculptural group of the *Apostles* in the Cathedral of Florence, see: CINELLI, Carlo – MYSSOK, Johannes – VOSSILLA, Francesco, *Il ciclo di Apostoli nel Duomo di Firenze*, Florence 2002.
[46] See FERRUCCI, Andrea, *Letters to Michelangelo,* from Florence to Carrara, 8 July 1517, in *Il carteggio*, I, 1965, p. 292; 9 March 1518, *Ibidem*, p. 323; 13 July 1518, II, 1967, p. 5.

Santa Maria del Carmine (*ante*-1512, fig.228) is the final result of a practice that Ferrucci was already conducting on the *Altar of the Crucifixion* in Fiesole (1495, today Victoria and Albert Museum, London, fig.225). In these works, columns, capitals and portals are submerged by grotesque ornaments and figures, which in part replace the role of support and frame of architecture. This is a typical feature of Florentine sculpture in the second half of the fifteenth century, particularly noticeable in the works of Benedetto da Maiano, such as the *Pulpit* of Santa Croce, or the *Portal* of Palazzo Vecchio. The ornamental emphasis and *horror vacui* of Ferrucci – and of Cosini – also tried to break into the Medici Chapel, but it found some resistance in Michelangelo, who, as we shall see, preferred a more austere architectural setting that framed and gave prominence to the figures, rather than a decorative exuberance that risked compromising the monumentality of the works.

In a similar way to what has been said about architectural design, also in the case of sculptural ornamentation, Michelangelo preferred to rely on a team of experts, led for the first two months by Ferrucci, and later, as we shall see, by Cosini himself. It was not so much Michelangelo's «*licenzia*» that had «encouraged those who have seen his way of working in order to set about imitating it, and new fantasies were subsequently seen to exhibit more of the grotesque than reason or rules in their decorations,» but rather the creative freedom that Ferrucci and Cosini were able to enjoy within a construction site in which Michelangelo intended to spend as little time as possible.

«Dove vanno figure di marmo non ci vuole essere altra cosa» Michelangelo and the ornament

From the end of the fifteenth century, the ornamental vocabulary, specifically of the grotesque nature, enjoyed ever more pervasive success, especially in fresco painting (Luca Signorelli, Pinturicchio, Perugino, Filippino Lippi, Domenico Ghirlandaio). Yet, even in sculpture the grotesque found ample space, especially in the works of sculptors from Northern Italy (the monastery of the Certosa di Pavia, Andrea Bregno, Gian Cristoforo Romano, Pietro and Tullio Lombardo). Also in Florence the tradition of sculptural decoration had been well rooted since the fifteenth century, with Donatello and Desiderio da Settignano, the Rossellino brothers, the Maiano family, and Andrea Verrocchio and his collaborators. Florentine ornamental sculpture gradually evolved to also incorporate the grotesque vocabulary especially at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as we see in the works of Giuliano da Sangallo, Andrea Della Robbia, Andrea Sansovino, Benedetto da Rovezzano, and Andrea Ferrucci.[47]

The role of the grotesque, both in the works of painting and in those of sculpture, was mainly decorative and filling, and it was therefore usually relegated to the margins of the compositions. Due to its marginal function, grotesque decoration could undergo two treatments: either its execution became merely mechanical and repetitive (for example in the *Piccolomini Altar*, Cathedral of Siena, made at the end of the fifteenth century by Bregno); or on the contrary, within the limits that were imposed upon it, grotesque decoration allowed ample creative freedom (see for example the today fragmented grotesque cornices of the *Monument to San Giovanni Gualberto*, that Benedetto da Rovezzano carved by 1513, figg.41-44).[48]

Undoubtedly, Michelangelo knew grotesque vocabulary well, his biography being studded with encounters with the world of fantasy and monstrosity. The first encounter was perhaps the one with the oddities of Northern painting, when as a young boy he copied an engraving of Martin Schongauer's *The Torment of St. Anthony*. The marble copy of the *Head of Faun* then followed, at the time of his apprenticeship at Lorenzo the Magnificent's Garden of

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[47] See the *Introduction* of this thesis. As for the grotesque, see: DACOS, Nicole, *La découverte de la Domus Aurea et la formation des grotesque à la Renaissance*, London 1969; CHASTEL, André*, La grottesque,* Paris 1988; ACIDINI LUCHINAT, Cristina, *La grottesca*, Turin 1982; GUEST, Clare Estelle Lapraik, *The understanding of ornament in the Italian Renaissance*, Leiden 2016.

[48] Biagio Milanesi, who commissioned the *Monument to Giovanni Gualberto* in 1505, stated that anyone who saw the burial carved by Benedetto da Rovezzano was convinced that there was no «*in Italia un'altra simile.*» (Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Corporazioni religiose soppresse dal governo francese, n. 260, *Storie Vallombrosane*, ms., c. 41r).

San Marco. There is also an intriguing hypothesis, though never proved, that in the 1490s a twenty-year-old Michelangelo may have collaborated with Giuliano da Sangallo, Simone del Pollaiolo, Andrea Sansovino, and Benedetto da Rovezzano on the grotesque ornament of the Sacristy of Santo Spirito, Florence (figg.38-40).[49] Still, his collaboration on the aforementioned *Piccolomi Altar* in Siena is certain. Furthermore, his travels to Rome inevitably led him to look at both the primary ancient sources of grotesque vocabulary, and its Renaissance elaborations.

However, to consider Michelangelo the first promoter of the liberation of the arts by means of ornamentation only because he, by force of circumstances, had numerous opportunities to stumble upon grotesque works, is equivalent to saying that Leonardo was a follower of Michealngelo simply because for a few months the two worked side by side. Instead, it is much more useful to analyse his works, and to see how much space Michelangelo dedicated to ornamentation in them. We will then notice Michelangelo's somewhat stubborn aversion to grotesque language, which he replaced with a total and enthusiastic dedication to the study of the human body, or rather, of the *figura*.

Significant and enlightening in this sense is an episode reported by Vasari. In 1550, Vasari himself and Bartolomeo Ammannati were commissioned by Pope Julius III to design and execute the *Del Monte Chapel* in the Church of San Pietro in Montorio, Rome (figg.49-50). Michelangelo, now an elderly man, was called in only as supervisor of the works. At Vasari's request to insert a grotesque ornament, and therefore to introduce Simone Mosca, a renowned ornamental sculptor, into the team of artists, Michelangelo was adamant and curtly replied that «*dove vanno figure di marmo non ci vuole essere altra cosa*» (where there are to be figures of marble there must not be any other thing). Given the personal involvement of Vasari, and the fact that this episode is reported both in the *Life* of Michelangelo and in that of Mosca, Michelangelo's words must have been exactly these and they must have particularly struck Vasari.[50]

The *Del Monte Chapel* therefore, so austere in decoration, so powerful in Bartolomeo Ammannati's severe sculptural figuration, would correspond to the idea that Michelangelo always had of the use of ornament. Admittedly, it could be objected that Michelangelo was at

[49] LUPORINI, Eugenio, *Benedetto da Rovezzano*, Milan 1964, pp. 51-53, proposes the possibility that Michelangelo flanked for a period Benedetto da Rovezzano in the carving of the grotesque capitals of the Santo Spirito Sacristy. Yet, Luporini's theory has not been taken up by later historiography.

[50] See VASARI, *Vita di Michelangelo*, and in particular *Vita di Simone Mosca scultore et architetto*, in *Le vite,* 1568. On the other hand, in his *Dialogos* (1548), Francisco De Hollanda puts laudatory words in Michelangelo's mouth regarding the grotesque decoration (BAROCCHI, *Scritti del Cinquecento*, Milan-Naples 1971, I, pp. 283-284). However, there are many doubts about the veracity of these dialogues.

that time old and far from the frenzy of work on the Medici Chapel, and that therefore this position cannot be indicative of his entire previous career. While this is in part a correct objection, we must also consider that precisely because he was elderly and free from any contingency linked to huge commissions – and cumbersome clients – this clear expression of his aversion towards ornamentation appears even more powerful, as it is free and unconditional.

Significantly, the only systematic study of the relationship between Michelangelo and ornament is an essay by Schottmüller dating back almost a century.[51] Although the artistic framework proposed by Schottmüller is correct, and broadly contextualises Michelangelo's ornament within the decorative frenzy that was spreading in Florence as early as the fifteenth century, the historian betrays a purely Vasarian (and still romantic) bias in several points, considering Michelangelo the only and unattainable expression of the artistic genius of the time.

Schottmüller therefore tends to belittle the decorative research of Michelangelo's contemporaries, even going so far as to define the works of Benedetto da Rovezzano as «*ein Abstieg, kein Aufsstieg*» (a descent, rather than an ascent).[52] She also assigns to Michelangelo alone the invention of the fantasies of the floor of the Laurentian Library, since «*so klar und harmonisch… dass man sie ungern dem Jüngeren, Tribolo, zuerkennt*» (so clear and harmonious, that one is reluctant to assign them to the young Tribolo) – despite the formal analysis clearly confirming that the author of the decoration was Tribolo himself, who in those years was certainly not a beginner.[53] Schottmüller achieves a further level of levity by attributing the invention of the decorative apparatus of the Medici Chapel entirely to Michelangelo, and while dwelling at length on the beauty of the capitals and the frieze of the tombs, she never acknowledges the possibility that Ferrucci and Cosini, expert ornamental sculptors, may have contributed significantly to the configuration of these decorative details.[54]

Finally, in a passage relating to the ornamentation of the Tomb of Julius II, Schottmüller unwittingly reveals how exaggerated it is to consider Michelangelo an expert ornamental sculptor. While acknowledging that the execution of the tomb's ornament was entrusted to a team of ornamental sculptors led by Antonio da Pontassieve, and although she confirms that

[51] SCHOTTMÜLLER, Frida, *Michelangelo und das Ornament*, in *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien*, N.F. II, 1928, pp. 219-232.
[52] *Ibidem*, p. 226.
[53] *Ibidem*, p. 227.
[54] *Ibidem*, p. 230.

there is no reference to those particular grotesques either in Michelangelo's drawings or in his previous or later works, the historian cannot refrain from assigning the authorship of the ornamental inventions again to Michelangelo alone, ignoring the fact that the decorative parts of the Tomb of Julius II remarkably resemble those of Andrea Sansovino's works, both the Tombs in Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome, and the *Holy House* of Loreto, the construction site from and towards which many of the ornamental sculptors of the Tomb of Julius II came.[55]

Therefore, considering the historical distortions that cloud Michelangelo's real artistic skills, it is essential to seek a new critical balance, which, on the one hand, attempts to clearly highlight Michelangelo's limited skills in some sectors of artistic production – and therefore gives due credit to his collaborators; and which, on the other hand, objectively analyses Michelangelo's use of ornament.

Grotesque imagery in drawings.

One of the unexpected side effects of Michelangelo's immense fame is that his corpus of drawings is as large and rich as the attributions of many of his pieces are uncertain and debated. Copies and imitations spread very early, and made the identification of Michelangelo's graphic style somewhat difficult.[56] As for the drawings that present a purely grotesque imagery, six drawings can be traced that probably belong to the hand of Michelangelo; they are: Windsor, Royal Library, RL12762; London, British Museum, 1859.0625.557 and 1895.0915.496; Oxford, Ashmolean Museum KP II 323 (P323); Hamburg, Kunsthalle, 21094; Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, 233F.

The drawing 1895.0915.496 of the British Museum (fig.51-52) is closely related to the drawing 233F of the Uffizi (fig.53).[57] They are both pen studies referable to unfinished Florentine enterprises to which Michelangelo dedicated himself in the early sixteenth century: the creation of the twelve marble *Apostles* for the Cathedral, and the execution of the fresco of the *Battle of Cascina* for Palazzo Vecchio. In the two drawings, we see an identical standing

[55] For an analysis of Michelangelo's decorative language, see also: SUMMERS, David, *Michelangelo and the language of* art, Princeton 1981, pp. 149-153; BURROUGHS, Charles, *Michelangelo at the Campidoglio. Artistic identity, patronage, and manufacture*, in *Artibus et historiae*, XIV, 1993, 28, pp. 85-111.

[56] PÖPPER, Thomas, *Michelangelo. The Graphic Work*, Cologne 2014, pp. 6-26, extensively argues that Michelangelo's corpus of drawings needs a drastic revision of its dimensions. BAMBACH, *Michelangelo. Divine draftsman*, disputes Pöpper's proposal, and indeed includes drawings of dubious origin in the corpus. As for the fame of Michelangelo's drawings, see VASARI, *Vita di Michelangelo*, in particular the episode of the young Bartolomeo Ammannati who stole some of Michelangelo's drawings from the construction site of the Medici Chapel; and the story of the cartoon for the *Battle of Cascina*, highly copied and finally even torn to pieces.

[57] See also Paris, Louvre, 12691.

figure, with a thoughtful pose leaning on a book, most likely a study for one of the Evangelists. We see also a quick sketch of a horse fight in the London drawing, and a naked figure in the Florentine one, clearly studies for the *Battle of Cascina*.

The elements that most interest this research, however, are the studies of grotesque capitals with masks and griffins, that we find in the *verso* of the British Museum drawing, and in the lower right corner of the Uffizi drawing *recto*. They are usually considered to be studies for the capitals of the niches that should have housed the statues of the *Apostles* in the Cathedral. De Tolnay, on the other hand, traces a close relationship between the masks of the London sheet with those executed on the left block of the Tomb of Julius II; whereas Hirst instead considers them studies for the niches of the Piccolomini Altar in Siena.[58]

Whatever the purpose of these studies of capitals, the relevant fact to underline is that in the early sixteenth century, Michelangelo explored the possibilities of grotesque decoration, probably drawing inspiration from Filippino Lippi's frescoes in the Strozzi Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, and the capitals of Giuliano da Sangallo in Santo Spirito and Palazzo Gondi. Similarly to what would have happened for the Codex Coner, even in these early grotesque studies Michelangelo acquires the ancient and Renaissance prototypes with ease and little interest, although we can see, especially in the profiles of the masks of the London sheet, a remarkable expressive charge in the sharp features of the face.

We turn now to look at the Hamburg drawing 21094 (fig.54). Due to the presence of similar studies of anatomical details of the face (ear, lips, eye), it must be related to the drawing D3117 of the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Besançon (fig.55). As also confirmed by the isolated parallel lines and the names *'Alessandro'* and *'Antonio'* on the Hamburg sheet, in both cases they would be didactic sheets, that is, drawing exercises that Michelangelo prepared for his collaborators. It is therefore difficult to say whether the subjects portrayed in these drawings belong to Michelangelo or to his collaborators. If the excessive affectation of the Besançon sheet suggests that it should be assigned to a late follower of Michelangelo, many doubts remain about the Hamburg drawing.

The element that interests us most in the Hamburg drawing is the head profile wearing a fantastic helmet. While the face has ideal and canonical features, in the helmet we find a heterogeneous assortment of animals. Helmets similar in all respects to this were part of the

[58] De Tolnay, Charles, *Corpus dei disegni di Michelangelo*, II, Florence 1976, pp. 51-52, and Hirst, Micheal – Dunkerton, Jill, *The young Michelangelo,* London 1994, pp. 84-85.

Florentine artistic vocabulary since the second half of the fifteenth century, when Verrocchio and his workshop created numerous profiles of warriors in bas-relief.[59]

Michelangelo only twice used grotesque helmets in his works.[60] The first time, in the cartoon of the *Battle of Cascina* (1505-06), where, according to the known reproduction made by Bastiano da Sangallo, in the midst of the naked bodies of the bathers, we also see that of an armed warrior with a fantastic helmet. The second time was for the statue of *Lorenzo di Urbino* in the Medici Chapel, probably executed by June 1526.[61] In neither case does the helmet eventually executed resemble that of the Hamburg drawing, thus allowing us to discard the hypothesis that it may be a preparatory study, and rather confirming that it is an ensemble of imaginative exercises that served to test the skills of the pupils.

Therefore, the authorship of the invention of the Hamburg helmet has very little value, first because it does not add much to that grotesque line of research well rooted in Florence as early as the fifteenth century; and then because it has no real use in the works actually completed by Michelangelo, being merely a hatching exercise on an accumulation of imaginative surfaces.

Given its purely didactic value, the Hamburg drawing could be dated to the late 1520-30s – a period in which we find other similar didactic sheets – and not to 1504 as is traditionally believed. If a later dating were correct, the Hamburg drawing could have been executed in the period of the work at the Medici Chapel and would thus fall within that brief and uncertain season of exploration of grotesque imagery that interested Michelangelo in those times, stimulated above all by Clement VII's desire to see in his Laurentian works «*qualche nuova fantasia*» (some new fantasy).[62]

The Ashmolean Museum drawing P323 (figg.56-57) has the same didactic value. The dragon on the front dashed in pen covers earlier sketches of faces in profile done by students. Studies of heads, eyes, and curls (similar to the Besançon sheet) are also found on the *verso*, where we see exhortations written by Michelangelo to Andrea Quaratesi («*andrea abbi pazienza*»), scion of a rich Florentine family who had the privilege of receiving drawing

[59] See *Introduction*.
[60] As for Michelangelo's famous drawing depicting the *Count of Canossa* (London, British Museum, 1895.0915.492), the hypothesis expressed by DUSSLER, Luitpold, *Die Zeichnungen des Michelangelo: Kritischer Katalog*, Berlin 1959, p. 260, seems very likely. Admittedly, the drawing might be a historical forgery made by a compiler mixing together various Michelangelesque motifs derived from his works and drawings.
[61] BUONARROTI, *Letter to Fattucci*, *Il carteggio*, III, 1973, pp. 227-228: «*Io lavoro el più che io posso, e infra quindici dì farò chominciare l'altro chapitano*» implying that one of the two *Dukes* was already accomplished. The accomplished *Duke* might be *Lorenzo* for his Tomb was the first to be carved.
[62] FATTUCCI, *Letter to Michelangelo*, 10 March 1524, *Il carteggio*, III, 1973, pp. 41-42: «*À caro il palco, et vorrebbelo bello et non riquadrato, ma con qualche fantasia nuova*»

classes directly from Michelangelo.[63] The winged dragon shows impressive realism in the canine paw and head, and the entangled neck and tail. Again, there is no equivalent of this dragon in the works executed by Michelangelo, and must therefore be considered an exercise for the benefit of the pupils.

We now come to the two drawings that more than all the others have a significant importance for the understanding of the ornament of the Medici Chapel. These are the drawing 1859.0625.557 in the British Museum, London (fig.58), and the drawing RL12762 in the Royal Collection of Windsor (fig.59). Both drawings depict satirical faces, but only the Windsor satirical mask finds an effective comparison in the ornament of the Medici Chapel – to be precise in the frieze of the single tombs – and is therefore almost certainly to be considered a study by Michelangelo placed at the service of the ornamental sculptors.[64] The creative process that would have led to the execution of that frieze of masks will be analysed in detail in the chapter dedicated to Cosini. However, it is now urgent to discuss the creative authorship of the British Museum drawing, which, unlike the other, does not find any effective confirmation in the Medici Chapel ornamentation.[65]

The red chalk drawing of the British Museum presents three expressive satirical faces, which, in the authoritative opinion of De Tolnay, would have served Michelangelo to investigate the possibilities of human moods.[66] In the lower right corner, we see two wrestlers, whose pose – one lifting the other off the ground by the waist – leads us to identify them as Hercules and Antaeus. Precisely due to the presence of the wrestlers, De Tolnay dates the sheet to 1525, as he relates it to the creation of the pendant for the *David* in Piazza della Signoria. De Tolnay also certainly considers it by Michelangelo's hand, an opinion also favoured by the provenance of the drawing from Casa Buonarroti.

The story of the pendant for Piazza della Signoria, which eventually became the marble colossus of *Hercules and Cacus* sculpted by Baccio Bandinelli (fig.65), is quite complex, and its

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[63] We find evidence of the relationship between Quaratesi and Michelangelo in: *Il carteggio*, III, 1973, pp. 292, 314, 400, 413, 431. See in particular: QUARATESI, Andrea, *Letter to Michelangelo*, 30 June 1522, from Florence to Florence, *Ibidem*, p. 431, where a ten-year-old Quaratesi makes arrangements for a meeting with Michelangelo, probably for a drawing class: «*Iersera ebi una grossa febre. Pure, stamattina mi sennto unn pocho meglio. E sepemi male di non potere iersera venir g[i]ù; abiatemi per ischusato. Vedrò di venire stasera a cena chon esso voi, se dovessi venire charponi*.»

[64] As for the collaboration for the creation of grotesque masks, and of other architectural and iconographic motifs, see: DAL POGGETTO, Paolo, *I disegni murali di Michelangelo e della sua scuola nella Sagrestia Nuova di San Lorenzo*, Florence 1979.

[65] WILDE, Johannes, *Michelangelo and his studio,* London 1953 (1975), pp. 66-67, firmly affirms the lack of connections between the drawing heads and those of the Medici Chapel.

[66] DE TOLNAY, *Corpus*, II, pp. 54-55.

chronology is not entirely clear.[67] We know that as early as 1508, the republican government of Pier Soderini thought of having Michelangelo make a statue to be placed next to his own *David*.[68] Vasari says that when quarrying the marble necessary for the facade of San Lorenzo, therefore around 1516, an enormous block measuring nine and a half *braccia* in height and five *braccia* in width was extracted. Michelangelo immediately proposed himself to sculpt it, with the intention of creating a pendant for the *David*, having as its subject «*Ercole che uccidesse Cacco*» (Hercules killing Cacchus). To convince Leo X and Cardinal Giulio to entrust him with the task, Michelangelo made «*più disegni e variati modelli*» (several drawings and various models). However, Leo's death in December 1521 stopped all projects. While in the meantime Michelangelo had committed himself to the execution of the Medici Chapel, Clement VII later decided to entrust the execution of the colossal *Hercules* to Bandinelli.

This point of the story is the most nebulous from a chronological point of view. We know from an act of the Republic of 22 August 1528, that about three years earlier, therefore in 1525, the huge block of marble arrived in Florence.[69] This news would find confirmation in a chronicle published by Gaye, according to which the block reached Florence on 20 July 1525.[70] According to Vasari's account, at the time of the arrival of the marble in Florence, the commission had already passed to Bandinelli, who had already made a wax model of «Hercules who, having fixed the head of Cacus between two stones with one knee, was constraining him with great force with the left arm.» However, Bandinelli had to discard this first model, since, once he had viewed the block, he realised that the measurements of the model did not conform with those of the block – this first model is in all probability identifiable with the one now preserved at the Bode Museum, Berlin (fig.66).

From a letter that Fattucci sent to Michelangelo, dated 14 October 1525, we know that at that time Bandinelli was working on the models for the statue of *Hercules and Cacus*.[71] In all likelihood, Fattucci is referring to the second batch of models, that is, those made by Bandinelli after he was forced to discard the initial model. After Clement VII chose the model with «Hercules [having] Cacus between his legs, and, grasping his hair, was holding him down after the manner of a prisoner,» Bandinelli began working with marble, carving «as far as the navel, laying bare the limbs in front.»

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[67] The story of the colossus of *Hercules and Cacus* is told in: VASARI, *Vita di Baccio Bandinelli scultore fiorentino*, Florence 1568.

[68] SODERINI, Piero, *Letter to Alberigo Malaspina*, 16 December 1508, in GAYE*,* Johannes, *Carteggio inedito d'artisti dei secoli XIV, XV, XVI*, Florence 1839, p. 107.

[69] *Ibidem*, p. 98.

[70] *Ibidem*, p. 464. The document mentioned by Gaye must rely on the chronicles (*Istorie*) that Giovanni Cambi wrote until 1535, when he died, and then published by Ildefonso di San Luigi in 1786.

[71] *Il carteggio*, III, 1973, pp. 170-171: «*Della statua di Bacio per ora non ne sarà altro se non a fare ' modegli.*»

On 22 August 1528, with the act we have mentioned above, the new republican government assigned the conclusion of the colossus of *Hercules and Cacus* to Michelangelo, who decided to change subject to «Samson holding down two Philistines,» for which he must have made at least two models. The first is that of the *Two Wrestlers* today preserved in Casa Buonarroti (fig.68); the other, more refined, is known to us both from the drawings by Tintoretto that portray it, and from the bronzes obtained from it, preserved in various museums around the world, including the Bargello, Florence, and the Frick Collection, New York (fig.67).[72] Finally, with the restoration of the Medici governance in 1530, the execution of *Hercules and Cacus* was again entrusted to Bandinelli, who finally completed the statue, which was placed on the square in 1533.

The chronological reconstruction of the genesis of *Hercules and Cacus* is useful for dating the British Museum drawing. De Tolnay's proposal to date it to July 1525, the presumed date of arrival of the marble block in Florence, appears unconvincing. In fact, since the work had been entrusted to Bandinelli before the arrival of the block in Florence, Michelangelo had no reason to keep studying the poses of a statue entrusted to someone else. If anything, it would be more plausible that the British Museum drawing dates back either to the very first commission promoted by Soderini in 1508, or to the discovery of the huge block of about 1516, or to the resumption of the work by Michelangelo in 1528.

Furthermore, the pose of the two wrestlers in the British Museum drawing is not consistent with the iconography of Hercules and Cacus, with the descriptions that Vasari gives us of the preparatory models, nor with the models we know, which all see one figure (or two) prostrating at the feet of another.[73] In fact, the pose of the drawing is better suited to the iconography of Hercules and Antaeus. Interestingly, Vasari does not mention the commission of *Hercules and Cacus* in the *Life* of Michelangelo, but he does recall in passing a wax model of an «Hercules bursting Antaeus,» which Michelangelo gave to Leone Leoni at the time of the pontificate of Paul IV (1555-1559). We must ask ourselves whether Michelangelo's studies of Hercules and Antaeus, first on paper and then on wax, could be connected with the

[72] Tintoretto's drawings depicting *Samson and the Philistines*: Bayonne, Musée Bonnat, 143; Besancon, Musée, 3129; Cambridge, Fogg Art Museum, 185; London, Seilern Collection, 99; Oxford, Christ Church Library, 0359, 0360.

[73] According to the version of the myth narrated in VIRGIL, *Aeneid,* VIII, 259-261, Cacus was actually killed by Hercules by suffocation: «*hic Cacum in tenebris incendia vana vomentem corripit in nodum complexus, et angit inhaerens elisos oculos et siccum sanguine guttur.*» Yet, the iconography of *Hercules and Cacus* in Renaissance was that of Hercules holding down the enemy at his feet, as confirmed in VASARI, *Vita di Baccio Bandinelli*, where he tells that when the young Bandinelli was learning how to sculpt – thus around 1500 – he carved a small *Ercole che si tiene sotto fra le gambe un Cacco morto,* Hercules holding *between his legs* a dead Cacus.

commission for the pendant of Piazza della Signoria or not. We keep this question open for the moment, and turn to examine the three satirical faces of the British Museum drawing.

We find an exact copy of the lower satirical face of the British Museum drawing – the weakest of the three – in the *verso* of the drawing 392 of the Städel Museum, Frankfurt (fig.60). The technique is the same (red chalk), the use of parallel hatching for the shaded areas is similar, but the general style is not – the line is more marked and confident in the British Museum sheet – which would suggest that they belong to two different hands. The Frankfurt sheet shows many faces, satirical and human, of which the one on the left is particularly interesting, as it is the best accomplished of the group. We find an exact copy of this satirical face on the back of sheet 53F of Casa Buonarroti (fig.61).

The authorship of the red chalk drawing 53F was recently debated by Davis.[74] The *recto* of the sheet (fig,62) in fact shows various subjects, which, although Davis tries hard to assign them to Michelangelo, are undoubtedly part of the artistic vocabulary of Tribolo and his workshop (Venus, and Hercules and Antaeus for the Castello fountains, the *Letto di Policleto* for the Laurentian Library pavement). What interests us about this sheet by Tribolo is the sketch that portrays Hercules and Antaeus, which he planned to place on top of the *Fontana Grande* of the Castello Garden, whose execution in marble he entrusted to Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli, though he never completed the work.[75] The pose that the two wrestlers take on the sheet of Casa Buonarroti is the same as that portrayed in two twin sketches of Hercules and Antaeus on the red chalk drawing P317 of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (fig.63). The authorship of the Oxford sheet is equally uncertain, but the two wrestlers' sketches show a style similar to that of the British Museum sheet, and is therefore usually believed to be an autograph by Michelangelo – an attribution further supported by the presence of a long written composition in Michelangelo's handwriting. However, the various subjects of the Oxford sheet show a poor and playful style, which is therefore most likely attributable to

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[74] DAVIS, Charles, *Michelangelo or Tribolo? Drawings for sculpture*, in ECHINGER-MAURACH, Claudia, *Michelangelo als Zeichner*, Münster 2013, pp. 189-199.

[75] As for the issue of the marble *Hercules and Antaeus* for the Castello *Fontana Grande*, see: VASARI, *Vita di Fra' Giovan'Agnolo Montorsoli scultore*, *Vita di Niccolò detto il Tribolo scultore et architettore*, and *Vita di Baccio Bandinelli*, 1568. Tribolo commissioned Montorsoli to execute the marble statue of *Hercules and Antaeus*, which should have been placed on the top of the *Fontana Grande*. Montorsoli first prepared a model, then went to Carrara to choose the marble, where he began to sketch the block. Back in Florence, he almost completed the statue, except that Bandinelli, jealous by Montorsoli's commission, convinced Duke Cosimo and his *magiordomo* Pierfrancesco Riccio that Montorsoli was doing a bad job. Riccio then had the work of *Hercules and Antaeus* interrupted, and Montorsoli went to Genoa indignant. Finally, Bandinelli destroyed the statue of *Hercules and Antaeus*. As for Tribolo's design of the statue (Budapest, Szépmuveszetu Mùzeum, 1944), see: WALDMAN, Louis Alexander, *A drawing by Tribolo for Montorsoli's lost Hercules and Anteaus at Castello*, in *Bulletin du Musée Hoingrois des Beaux-Arts*, 105, 2006(2008), pp. 93-100, 259-263.

young pupils. Furthermore, many elements are, again, consistent with Tribolo's artistic vocabulary, such as the horse, the crab, and the owl (fig.64).[76]

In summary, from the British Museum drawing depicting the three satirical faces and the two wrestlers, we find three other drawings that are related to it in terms of themes, style and technique (red chalk): the drawing 392 of Frankfurt with similar satirical faces, in turn connectable with the drawing 53F of Casa Buonarroti; the latter has elements on the *recto* that can be traced back to the works of Tribolo, including a sketch of Hercules and Antaeus in all respects similar to those of the Oxford drawing P317, within which we again find subjects that can be linked to Tribolo. Except perhaps for the drawing 53F of Casa Buonarroti, all seem to be didactic sheets, if not even doodles, circulating in the workshop. However, one wonders at this point in the workshop of whom these sheets circulated, whether in that of Michelangelo or that of Tribolo. Therefore, we must also ask ourselves about the attribution of the sheet of the British Museum. Indeed, having no convincing connection with the works of Michelangelo, the British Museum drawing must be considered either a purely didactic sheet which had a significant success among the pupils;[77] or we must remove the attribution from Michelangelo and assign it to someone else, the best candidate being Tribolo, given that many of those subjects, and the satirical faces in particular, are in all respects part of his figurative vocabulary – we must recall that the Castello *Fontana Grande* sees at its base an octagonal plinth, on which satirical heads with varied expressions are carved in bas-relief.[78]

The issue of the British Museum drawing 1859.0625.557 is extremely complex and therefore remains open. During the development of the thesis, two solutions will be proposed. The first is that the drawing does not belong to Michelangelo but rather to Tribolo, or perhaps a sculptor of his entourage, either Montorsoli or Pierino da Vinci, and would have been executed during the design of the *Fontana Grande* in the Castello garden. The second maintains the attribution to Michelangelo and reconnects it to the design of the decorative apparatus of the Medici Chapel and to the drawing with the satirical mask of the Royal

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[76] The knight on a horse might be a study for the ephemeral equestrian statue of Giovanni delle Bande Nere that Tribolo made in the occasion of the wedding of Duke Cosimo and Eleonor of Toledo in 1539. The crab can be connected with the Cancer of the ceiling of the Laurentian Library. The owl might be a study for the clay model of the *Night* that Tribolo made in 1534-35.

[77] See also Lille, Musée d'Art et Histoire, 95, a drawing of satirical masks, usually connected to the British Museum drawing.

[78] See also: DAL POGGETTO, *I disegni murali*, pp. 222-227, with mural drawings attributable to Tribolo, including a satirical mask, dated to *post*-1537. For different attributions, see: ELAM, Caroline, *The mural drawings in Michelangelo's New Sacristy*, in *Burlington magazine*, 123, 1981, pp. 593-602, who extensively turns to Montorsoli for the mural drawings.

Collection of Windsor, yet underlining that Ferrucci and Cosini significantly participated in the development of that grotesque ornament.

Ornament in Michelangelo's works

After having questioned Michelangelo's creative independence both in the architectural and ornamental design of the Medici Chapel, and having thus verified the extent to which Michelangelo was interested in grotesque imagery through the analysis of his drawings, we now turn to examine those of his accomplished works in which grotesque elements appear. We will only examine the works prior to the Medici Chapel, since we believe that the later ones, such as Palazzo dei Conservatori or Porta Pia, Rome, are too late and derivative works to be considered truly innovative and therefore useful for this analysis.

As mentioned, Michelangelo had to have already begun studying the possibilities of grotesque decoration around 1505-06, as is evident from the drawing 1895.0915.496 of the British Museum, and from that 233F of the Uffizi. However, no material execution followed these drawings, at least if one does not want to accept the theory of De Tolnay, who believes that they were used to prepare the decoration of the Tomb of Julius II – we will investigate this point further shortly.

The execution of the *Doni Tondo* dates back to the same years of the *Apostles*' undertaking.[79] The *Doni Tondo* wooden frame has an intricately grotesque decoration, executed by Domenico del Tasso, a member of a family that for generations had been involved in wood carving. Most likely, we owe to him, if not the whole design, at least the grotesque ornamental motifs. It is therefore of little interest for this investigation.

Of greater interest are the monumental enterprises of the Tomb of Julius II and the Sistine Chapel. The first has a rich grotesque decoration on the architectural framework, which dates back to the years 1513-14. It is widely believed that the left plinth with satirical faces is the only fragment of the decoration that Michelangelo personally carved, probably dating back to 1506. The Sistine Chapel, on the other hand, does not have any kind of grotesque decoration, rather investigating the expressive potential of the human body to the point of exasperation. As Emison rightly pointed out, the Sistine Ceiling could be considered a gigantic and monumental grotesque, whose subjects are no longer fanciful monsters and

[79] See NATALI, Antonio, *Dating the Doni Tondo through antique sculpture and sacred texts*, in MARANI, Pietro, *The genius of the sculptor in Michelangelo's work*, Montreal 1992, pp. 307-322.

chimeras, but the human body.[80] It is here that perhaps we find Michelangelo's only contribution to grotesque.

The Tomb of Julius II

The decades-long undertaking of the Tomb of Pope Julius II (1505-1545) is so intricate that it is not possible here to account for the whole working process.[81] However, it is particularly interesting to dwell on the attribution and chronology of some decorative elements, and to suggest some alternatives to the reconstructions proposed by recent scholarship. As is often the case with marginal decorations, there is no documentary evidence that clearly certifies who the author is, and therefore one must instead rely on formal analysis. What we know for sure is that in July 1513 Michelangelo entrusted the stonemason Antonio da Pontassieve and his team to execute «*la faccia che viene dinanzi*» (the front facade), and to complete it within a year.[82] We must therefore think that the four grotesque plinths of the base date back to these years, as well as the entire lower order of the tomb, richly decorated with grotesques. The higher order, much more austere, was to be instead carried out by "Urbino" (Francesco dell'Amadore) and Giovanni dei Marchesi starting from August 1542.

In an excessively mechanical way, Schottmüller assigns to Michelangelo the most aesthetically successful portions of the grotesque decoration of the lower order.[83] More recently, Frommel restricts Michelangelo's intervention to the left plinth only, where we see a head holding a plaque, on which two satirical masks are placed, and with elegant and sinuous flying creatures filling the four corners (fig.69).[84] Frommel assigns this fragment to Michelangelo both on the basis of the same aesthetic bias of Schottmüller that considers Michelangelo the only sculptor able to produce refined and minute bas-reliefs; and also on the basis of the well-known attribution of De Tolnay, who believed that the study of the capital with masks of the sheet 1895.0915.496 of the British Museum was preparatory for this left plinth.[85] To make the assignment of the left plinth to Michelangelo plausible, Frommel believes that he carved it during the first months of the tomb's execution, between February and April 1506, shortly before Michelangelo indignantly abandoned the newly opened

[80] EMISON, *Creating the Divine Artist*, p. 251.
[81] For an updated analysis of the Tomb of Julius II, see: FROMMEL, Christoph Luitpold, *Michelangelo. Marmor und Geist. Das Grabmal Papst Julius' II und seine Statuen*, Regensburg 2014 (translated into Italian, *Michelangelo. Il marmo e la mente. La tomba di Giulio II e le sue staue*, Milan 2014, and then re-edited in English, *Michelangelo's tomb for Julius II. Genesis and genius*, Los Angeles 2016).
[82] FROMMEL, *Michelangelo*, Milan 2014, p. 38.
[83] SCHOTTMÜLLER, *Michelangelo und das Ornament*, pp. 222-226.
[84] FROMMEL, *Michelangelo*, Milan 2014, p. 33-34.
[85] DE TOLNAY, *Corpus,* II, 1976, pp. 51-52.

construction site, due to a quarrel with the Pope. The work on the Tomb resumed only after the Pope's death, in 1513, and it was then that Michelangelo called Antonio da Pontassieve to take care of the architectural framework.

Although different hands can be recognised in the execution of the grotesque decoration of the Tomb of Julius II, of which one is more refined and expert, and the other more arid and mechanical, it seems rather limiting to believe that the expert hand must necessarily belong to Michelangelo, who had never tested himself at sculptural ornamentation before. Indeed, Shottmüller is right to assign large sections of the grotesque decoration to the same refined hand – besides the left plinth, also the pediments of Leah and Rachel's niches (fig.70), and some fragments of the pilasters. Yet, it is difficult to agree with her in believing that the expert hand is Michelangelo's, especially since he was simultaneously engaged in making the statues of *Moses* and the Louvre *Slaves*.

Unfortunately, the information relating to Antonio da Pontassieve is scarce, and does not allow us to establish a comparison with his previous or subsequent works.[86] However, just by looking at the grotesque decorations of the monuments executed by the workshops of Gian Cristoforo Romano and Andrea Sansovino, it remains certain that there were numerous ornamental sculptors working in Rome in those years. It is precisely in competition with works like those that Michelangelo designed the Tomb of Julius II, responding in particular to the Tombs of Cardinals Ascanio Sforza and Girolamo Basso della Rovere that Sansovino executed in Santa Maria del Popolo starting from 1505 (fig.279). In other words, the insertion of the grotesques in the lower order of the Tomb responded to a specific and widespread taste in Roman sculpture at the beginning of Cinquecento, and Michelangelo could not help but align himself with this prevailing artistic current that was particularly favoured by Julius II and his entourage. Not surprisingly, in the 1540s, Michelangelo decided to completely abandon that decorative abundance in the execution of the upper floor of the monument.

The only document that testifies to who Antonio da Pontassieve's collaborators were is a letter dated 19 August 1514 that Silvio Falcone sent to Michelangelo to give him an account of the state of the work of the Tomb of Julius II. In addition to Antonio, Falcone recalls *mastro Bernardo*, *Rinieri*, an unidentified Lombard sculptor (*quello lombardo*), and *Cecho* who dealt exclusively with the carving of pure architectural framing (*scultura di quadro*).[87] A team of five stonemasons therefore, of which Antonio was the head and probably a mere agent and not a

[86] See FROMMEL, *Michelangelo*, p. 38, in particular n. 179. In 1508-09, Antonio carved the corinthian capitals of Bramanate's choir of San Pietro.
[87] FALCONE, Silvio, *Letter to Michelangelo*, 19 August 1514, in *Il carteggio*, I, 1965, p. 149.

proper worker, Cecho was the frame sculptor, and presumably Bernardo, Rinieri and the Lombard were the ornamental sculptors. Interestingly, we find a Bernardo di Battista da Carrara and a Ranieri Nerucci among the ornamental sculptors who worked on the *Holy House* of Loreto starting from 1515, in the years in which Andrea Sansovino directed that construction site.[88] They must therefore have been specialists who were particularly in demand in the monumental marble enterprises of those years.

We find many similarities between the grotesques of the Loreto *Holy House* and those of the Tomb of Julius II. It is therefore worth briefly summarising the events of the construction of the *Holy House* of Loreto.[89] According to tradition, the *Holy House* is the natal residence of the Madonna, miraculously transported to Loreto in the 13th century. In 1507, Julius II removed the Holy House from the control of the Bishop of the nearby village of Recanati, and annexed it to direct papal control. Intent on enhancing the sacred building, Julius II commissioned Donato Bramante to design a marble ornament that enveloped it. Bramante made a preparatory model in 1509, and in 1510 the direction of the works was entrusted to the refined medallist and ornamental sculptor Gian Cristoforo Romano, who however died in May 1512, causing a temporary interruption to the works. In June 1513, the undertaking was therefore entrusted to Andrea Sansovino, who dedicated himself to the execution of the marble ornament until 1526, also inviting Benedetto da Rovezzano and Baccio Bandinelli to collaborate with him. In November 1530, the direction of the works passed to Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, who resorted to Niccolò Tribolo, among many others, for the creation of some important narrative bas-reliefs.

In all likelihood, the numerous and rich grotesque elements of the *Holy House* were entirely carried out under the direction of Sansovino, therefore between 1513 and 1526. However, Gian Cristoforo Romano had to contribute at least in terms of design, and before he died he must have left hints and plans for the ornamentations. A central role in the execution – and probably in the conception – of the grotesque reliefs with satyrs and tritons of the *Holy House* pedestal was also played by Benedetto da Rovezzano, who was active in Loreto between 1515 and 1518. Figurations in a similar manner to those made by Benedetto da Rovezzano, with tritons holding plaques, are also found in two reliefs of the niche that contains *Moses* in the Tomb of Julius II, a fact that has rightly led Frommel to believe that at least one of the two reliefs was executed by Tommaso Boscoli in 1533, for he had just finished

[88] GRIMALDI, Floriano, *L'ornamento marmoreo della Santa Cappella di Loreto*, Loreto 1999, p. 72.
[89] On the Loreto *Holy House*, see also: WEIL-GARRIS, Brandt, *The Santa Casa di Loreto. Problems in Cinquecento sculpture*, New York 1977; FATTORINI, Gabriele, *Andrea Sansovino*, Trento 2013.

his assignment at the construction site of the *Holy House* (figg.71-72).[90] This proposal would thus open the more than likely possibility that the grotesque decoration of the lower order of the Tomb of Julius II was carried out in several phases, and not only in 1513 by the team of Antonio da Pontassieve.

In conclusion, from what has been said so far, the hypothesis of Michelangelo's active participation in the conception and execution of the grotesque decoration of the Tomb of Julius II appears, if not completely unlikely, at least difficult to sustain. Schottmüller's theory that would recognise Michelangelo's style both in the left plinth with masks, and in the pediments of the niches of Leah and Rachel, on the one hand contradicts the certain and documented evidence that it was Antonio da Pontassieve's team of expert ornamental sculptors that took care of the execution of the lower order; on the other hand, Schottmüller does not take into account the long working time necessary for Michelangelo to sculpt the *Moses* and the Louvre *Slaves* – in addition, this is an evident sign that Michelangelo had cut out for himself the role of sole figurative sculptor. Furthermore, Frommel's proposal to date the left plinth with masks to 1506 and assign it to Michelangelo is equally extravagant, since in February 1506 Michelangelo had just brought the marbles from Carrara and thus just opened the construction site, which was to close only two months later. It therefore seems strange that he decided to start the abnormal enterprise of the Tomb of Julius II from the execution of such a marginal decorative portion.

Rather, the hypothesis according to which Michelangelo preferred to extensively rely on a team of ornament experts, either in 1513 or in the 1530s, to execute those grotesque portions so dear to the papal patronage, and so widespread in the Roman environment of those years, seems more likely. Indeed, the minute carvings, the graceful flourishes, the fluidity of the lines of many elements of the grotesque decoration of the Tomb do not convincingly conform with the style of Michelangelo, and seem more similar to the manner of the Roman workshop of Andrea Sansovino (the delicate grotesques of the coeval Tombs in Santa Maria del Popolo, figg.73-74), or perhaps even that of Gian Cristoforo Romano, heir to an over-decorative Lombard tradition (Certosa di Pavia), and who was in Rome working for the papal court between 1506 and 1510.[91]

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[90] BOSCOLI, Tommaso, *Letter to Michelangelo*, 11 August 1533, in *Il carteggio,* IV, 1979, p. 39.
[91] CERIANA, Matteo, *Ganti, Giovanni Cristoforo*, entry in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 1999, vol. LII.

Sistine Ceiling. Monumental Body Grotesque

In the spring of 1508, Julius II commissioned Michelangelo to fresco the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, which had hitherto been decorated with a now antiquated starry sky. Michelangelo took four years to complete the grandiose undertaking, and the frescoes on the ceiling were revealed in November 1512.

The frescoes of the Sistine Ceiling are important to this research for two reasons. The first concerns Michelangelo's fame, and the consequent historical distortion – similar in all respects to the one that also affected the Medici Chapel –, which from Vasari onwards has surrounded the work of a biased mythical aura. The second, more significant, reason specifically concerns the grotesque decoration, which is completely absent in the Sistine Chapel, and would therefore confirm Michelangelo's lack of interest in this type of ornament.

Concerning the first point, Vasari's mythology says that Michelangelo «in twenty months carried that work to perfect completion by himself alone, without the assistance even of anyone to grind his colours.» As Wallace has rightly argued, such a commendable statement cannot find confirmation either in the logic of artistic practices, or in the formal analysis of the frescoes where there are different hands, or in the documentary evidence.[92] However, if we wanted to indulge Vasari's judgment, we might think that he actually meant that Michelangelo finished the fresco of the ceiling without the help of other *maestri*, who he indeed had initially called to help him as experts in fresco technique (Francesco Granacci, Giuliano Bugiardini, Iacopo di Sandro, Indaco Vecchio, Agnolo di Domenico, Aristotile). Unsatisfied with their advice, Michelangelo refused their intervention and chased them away. This episode is however indicative of Michelangelo's awareness of his own limits, and of his habit, not always completely serene, of requesting the help of experts who had a wider knowledge on a field that he did not master. As we have said, the same thing would happen during the execution of the Medici Chapel, when Michelangelo requested the intervention of Andrea Ferrucci to design the sculptural ornamentation of the tombs, and of Giovanni da Udine for the stucco decoration of the vault.

As for the absence of grotesque decoration in the Sistine Ceiling, some of the arguments presented by Hemsoll are of extreme interest.[93] As we have already said, grotesque decoration was already widespread at the end of the fifteenth century, especially in the

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[92] WALLACE, William, *Michelangelo's assistants in the Sistine Chapel*, in *Gazette des beaux-arts*, XI, 110, 1987, n. 1427, pp. 203-216.

[93] HEMSOLL, David, *The conception and design of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling. 'Wishing just to shed a little upon the whole rather than mentioning the parts'*, in BURKE, Jill, *Rethinking the High Renaissance. The culture of the visual arts in the early sixteenth-century Rome*, Ashgate 2012, pp. 263-287.

frescoes of large representative rooms. One of the greatest experts in the grotesque technique was Pinturicchio, and comparing his works with the Sistine Ceiling makes clear the process that led Michelangelo to get rid of the purely decorative minutiae of the grotesque, to give more space to the main subject of his artistic research, the human body.

As Hemsoll rightly points out, the basic structure of the Sistine Ceiling is rather traditional: a series of squared scenes, interspersed with the *Ignudi* (flesh and bronze) that act as fillers. The innovative element of the Sistine Ceiling lies precisely in having replaced the imaginative grotesques that framed the frescoes by Pinturicchio, for example in the Piccolomini Library in Siena or in the Altar of Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome, with naked figures in athletic poses. Not that the figure (naked or not) was not part of the repertoire of Pinturicchio's grotesques, but in his works they are small in size and occupy a marginal and corollary role in the economy of the entire work. Michelangelo takes those marginal elements, reinterprets them according to his own aesthetic taste, expands them and piles them around the narrative scenes, without respecting the margins that would compete with them, thus also coming to overlap the different levels.

Emison finds in the composition of the Sistine Ceiling, and in particular in the insertion of the *Ignudi* with ever-changing poses, an intrinsically capricious attitude of Michelangelo, which would correspond to the 'licentious' spirit of his art. Emison therefore comes to consider the Sistine Ceiling as «a colossal grotesque, in the sense that disparate parts are boldly juxtaposed.»[94] Emison's intriguing theory serves as a starting point for analysing in detail the creative process that Michelangelo pursued in the conception of the *Ignudi*. Admittedly, due to their filling and decorative function, the *Ignudi* can in a certain sense be equated with grotesque ornamentation. However, their ornamental function does not exactly correspond to an immeasurable deployment of *varietas* and artistic license as it might seem at first glance, and as Emison tends to believe.

As Brothers points out, Michelangelo made extensive use of what the scholar defines as *repetitive strategy*, that is the repeated use of the same model/module, which however represented from different points of view and thus appearing in continually different guises, transmits to the viewer a feeling of variety (figg.75-78).[95] According to what Giovan Battista Armerini recounts in his treatise *De veri precetti della pittura* (1587), for his compositions of figures, Michelangelo would often have used wax models, which he not only painted from opposite points of view, but which he would have also twisted the limbs to make the models

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[94] EMISON, *Creating the Divine Artist*, p. 251.
[95] BROTHERS, *Michelangelo, drawing*, pp. 22-39.

assume always slightly varied poses.[96] This creative strategy is particularly evident in the *Ignudi*, and seems to have repercussions not only on the conception of *Prophets* and *Sibyls*, but also in subsequent works by Michelangelo.

To clarify how this creative method took place, two drawings are particularly explanatory: sheet 75F of Casa Buonarroti (fig.79), and sheet 1859.625.568 of the British Museum (fig.83). They are preparatory studies that investigate the possibilities of the *Ignudi* poses, and therefore Michelangelo's autography should not be doubted.[97]

On sheet 75F, we see a preparatory study for the pair of *Ignudi* on the right of the third frame (fig.80), outlined in pencil and finished in pen only in the torso and arm. What is interesting to note is that the correspondence between the preparatory study and the two painted *Ignudi* is not exact. Apart from the slightly varied pose between the two painted *Ignudi* (the front arm and the rear leg assume different positions), what must be emphasised is that the bust is much more twisted in the preparatory study than in the paintings, appearing almost exactly in profile at the pectoral level, and exposing part of the scapula, with a muscle tension absent in the painted *Ignudi*.

This slight discrepancy testifies that in all likelihood Michelangelo did not use wax models, or at least not immediately. It would seem instead that in this drawing Michelangelo is portraying a model from life, whom he required to assume various poses, more or less strained, more or less insistent in the twist. Perhaps, from these first sketches Michelangelo would subsequently draw wax models, which he may have used for further anatomical inventions, without needing the live model anymore.

This procedure of study from life is clearly visible in the British Museum sheet. On the right, three quick ink sketches are seen in succession. From their comparison, it is clear that Michelangelo was portraying a live model, who he asked to change position, and whom he himself turned around, to portray him from different points of view. Interestingly, from these three quick sketches, Michelangelo will draw six *Ignudi* (fig.85). The sketch above will inform the left *Ignudo* of the third frame (same arm stretched between the legs) and the right one of the fourth frame (same pose of the crossed legs). From the sketch at the bottom left, Michelangelo will instead draw the left *Ignudo* of the second frame (same pose and

[96] ARMERINI, Giovan Battista, *De veri precetti della pittura*, Ravenna 1587, book II: «*Di due figure di tondo rilievo, solamente col vortarle, se ne cavano molte in pittura e tutte tra sé diverse. Poi che ciò pur si vede nel Giudizio dipinto da Michelangelo, lui essersi servito [...] egli ne aveva fatte di cera di man sua, e che li torceva le membra a modo suo, immolandole prima le giunture nell'acqua calda*.»

[97] For a keen analysis of the creative process of the *Ignudi*, see also: O'GRODY, Jeannine Alexandra, *"Un semplice modello": Michelangelo and his three-dimensional preparatory works*, PhD dissertation, Cleveland 1999, pp. 195-200.

perspective of the torso) and the one on the left of the first frame (same arm). Finally, the left *Ignudo* of the third frame (same arm crossed with the legs) and the left one of the fourth frame (same view of the lower back and buttocks) derive from the sketch at the bottom right. The exact same creative strategy is also visible in the sketches at the bottom of sheet 75F, which Michelangelo will use to design both the right *Ignudo* of the second frame and the right one of the fifth (figg.81-82).

The drawing of the British Museum offers a further point of reflection. On the left, we see a well-finished preparatory study for the right *Ignudo* of the fifth frame (the same one that we mentioned earlier comes from the rapid sketches of sheet 75F, fig.82), which, due to the realistic anatomical rendering of the musculature, seems to be taken from a model from life. There are two striking features of this masterful preparatory study. The first is the lateral torsion of the torso, which creates a well-marked fold in the abdomen, very similar to the *Belvedere Torso* pose (fig.84). This would indicate that Michelangelo asked his models to act the poses of the prototypes of ancient statuary. The second feature to underline appears somewhat sinister, but would be indicative of Michelangelo's tireless commitment to the study of the human body. The head that falls back; the arm raised in such an uncomfortable pose that it seems tied up in some way to keep it locked in that position, perhaps at the elbow; the general state of heavy gravitational abandonment of the limbs, like the position of the legs, kneeling in the first draft and then only subsequently varied with the insertion of the raised and supporting leg; these are all signs that make it probable that the portrayed body belonged to a dead man.

It appears therefore evident how complex Michelangelo's creative method was. To the knowledge of the ancient prototypes, he added a careful study from life carried out on both living and dead models; this was first followed by the creation of wax or clay models, from which he could later draw further graphic studies, and finally the finished work.[98] At the same time, however, and perhaps precisely because of the considerable duration of this scrupulous investigation, Michelangelo resorted to repetitive strategies, supposedly in an attempt to speed up the final execution of increasingly monumental undertakings. Thus, from a study of a model, he obtained an anatomical module that he used on several other works, perhaps composing it with other modules. In this regard, we notice in the *Prophets* and *Sibyls* the use of models similar to those used for the *Ignudi*: the *Cumaean Sibyl* has the exact same arm as

[98] As for Michelangelo's mixing sculptural prototypes with anatomical studies, see: HEMSOLL, David, *Imitation as a creative vehicle in Michelangelo's art and architecture*, in FRANKLIN, Jill A., *Architecture and Interpretation*, Woodbridge 2012, pp. 225-230.

the *Ignudo* of the fourth frame; the *Persian Sibyl* has the same pose as the *Ignudi* of the second frame; the *Libyan Sibyl* has her arms raised exactly like the *Ignudo* in the fourth frame, and although one is seen from the back and the other from the front, they seem to have the exact same silhouette. The modules prepared by Michelangelo for the Sistine Ceiling would also be used in the Medici Chapel: the reclining woman portrayed in the pendentive above the rib vault of *Hezekiah and Manasseh* assumes the exact same pose as the *Day* of the Medici Chapel (fig.86). In the chapter dedicated to Tribolo, we will see another significant example of the importance of Michelangelo's anatomical modules for the creative process of the Medici Chapel *Heaven*.

It is precisely in this practice that Michelangelo's capricious license can be recognised. His obsessive investigation of the human body led him to find ever more sophisticated study techniques, but which at the same time allowed him a large space of creative freedom. In the Sistine Ceiling *Ignudi,* the essence of Michelangelo's research is distilled, based entirely on the exploration of the human body, which would become a valid subject for every type of art, even ornamental and grotesque, as we will see in detail with Tribolo and Cosini. With the Sistine Ceiling therefore begins the process of monumentalising the grotesque: the ornament ceases to be minute and peripheral, and instead takes on increasingly colossal and anthropomorphic forms.[99]

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The first chapter aimed to frame the relationship between Michelangelo and ornament. Through the analysis of drawings and works, we explored Michelangelo's lack of interest in the grotesque, and the consequent delegation to more expert ornamental sculptors, as we have seen both in the collaboration with Andrea Ferrucci at the Medici Chapel, and with Antonio da Pontassieve at the Tomb of Julius II.

Contrary to what scholarship often conditioned by Vasari's hagiographic reconstruction usually does, we wanted to emphasise how Michelangelo's monumental works were the result not only of his pervasive genius, but also of a difficult mediation that even involved collaborators in design level. Analysing his works from the decentralised perspective of ornament made this mediation particularly evident, and made it possible to record Michelangelo's little contribution to the evolution of grotesque imagery.

[99] As for Michelangelo's interest in architectural anthropomorphism, see: HEMSOLL, *The Laurentian Library*, pp. 59-62.

Despite Michelangelo's lack of involvement, the exceptional celebrity of his art nevertheless influenced ornament, which welcomed the explosive anatomies of the Sistine Ceiling, starting a process of anthropormophisation of the ornament. As we will see in detail in the next chapter, following the closure of the Medici Chapel construction site, Michelangelism became increasingly popular, and generated a hybrid ornamental style, which found one of its most compelling expressions in the Castello garden designed by Tribolo.

Chapter 2

Niccolò Tribolo
«Non è ingannare la Natura»[1]

Introduction. Tribolo's misunderstanding

It is extremely difficult to interpret judiciously the impact that Michelangelo had on the younger generations of sculptors working alongside him during the years of the works for the Medici Chapel and the Laurentian Library. Yet, one of the characters who undoubtedly benefited the most was Niccolò Pericoli, known as Tribolo (1497-1550).[2] Following his direct collaboration with Michelangelo in 1533, when he was entrusted with the execution of two important statues for the tomb of Giuliano di Nemours, Tribolo began a journey that would deeply mark the artistic environment of sixteenth-century Florence.

The influence that such experience had on Tribolo's art is the subject of this chapter. Even though it is true that we cannot ignore the Michelangelism of Tribolo's sculpture, we must also underline the dissimilarities.[3] Indeed, there is a significant distance between the two sculptors: whereas Michelangelo transfigures reality in order to heroically transcend it, Tribolo seeks its internal dynamics to extrapolate a completely superficial tenderness. His is not so much a naturalistic investigation, but rather a desire to create an empathic connection with the grace of forms.[4]

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[1] PERICOLI, Niccolò, called TRIBOLO, *Letter to Benedetto Varchi*, 15 February 1547, in VARCHI, Benedetto, *Due lezzioni,* Florence 1549, p. 151: «*Solo questo mi pare a me, che la scultura sia ne[l] concetto del operatore dimostrare quello che el vero e non è ingannare la Natura*.»

[2] VASARI, Giorgio, *Vita di Niccolò detto il Tribolo scultore et architettore*, in *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*, Florence 1568. About Tribolo's dates of birth and death, clarifications differring from Vasari's version of events: BALDINI, Nicoletta, *Nuovi documenti e alcune ipotesi su Niccolò di Raffaello di Niccolò ditto il Tribolo*, in *Niccolò detto il Tribolo tra arte, architettura e paesaggio. Atti del convegno 2000,* edited by PIERI - ZANGHERI, Signa 2001, pp. 19-28. See also: GIANNOTTI, Alessandra, *Niccolò Pericoli, detto il Tribolo*, entry in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 2015, vol. LXXXII.

[3] On Tribolo's assumptive Michelangelism, see: WILES, Bertha Harris, *Tribolo in his Michelangelesue vein*, in *Art Bulletin*, 14, 1932, pp. 50-70.

[4] In his *Libro della beltà e grazia,* Benedetto Varchi indicates Tribolo's sculpture as an inimitable model of grace: «*Ma qui si potrebbe dubitar meritamente onde nasce questa qualità e grazia della quale noi ragioniamo, la quale senza dubio non risulta, come credono molti, dalla misura e proporzione delle membra [...] se ciò fusse, ne seguirebbe che ogni mediocre maestro, avendo del medesimo marmo, saperebbe contrafare una figura del Tribolo, pigliando le medesime misure e proporzioni*.»

For many reasons Tribolo is a central figure in the artistic developments of the second half of the century in Florence.[5] It was Tribolo, in fact, who was responsible for completing the unfinished works by Michelangelo at San Lorenzo. Hence, he was the first to find himself compelled to bring forth personal solutions to matters concerning a previous and distant generation. In 1534 Michelangelo had resolutely abandoned Florence so as not to return, after the client Clement VII had passed away. It was Tribolo's turn to serve power, which now appeared under new guises, no longer Roman and papal, but citizen and ducal. Alessandro de' Medici at first, and then Cosimo I de' Medici, had assumed the role of Duke of Florence in the 1530s, giving way to a new historical course of which Tribolo soon became the principal artistic spokesperson.[6] Tribolo inherited a tradition that did not belong to him – that of Michelangelo – but which had an irresistible appeal for the Duchy, who wanted nothing more than to match the height of the previous generation of Medici rulers. Michelangelo was an instrument of cultural legitimisation, of which ducal Florence had to appropriate itself – and Vasari's *Lives* are the culmination of this propaganda trend.

However, Tribolo was not Michelangelo. His work experience prior to his collaboration on the Medici Chapel led him to become engaged with a figurative world that had little to share with that of Michelangelo. The apprenticeship with Jacopo Sansovino, the Roman years alongside Baldassarre Peruzzi and the Raphael circle, the collaboration on Andrea Sansovino's *Holy House* of Loreto, are all episodes that distanced Tribolo from Michelangelo rather than bringing him closer.[7] Nevertheless, it is true that there was indeed a relationship, almost a friendship, between Tribolo and Michelangelo. The young Tribolo, as Vasari recounts, admired the cartoon of *Battle of Cascina* – although nothing of that desperate muscular tension is visible in Tribolo's early works. The paths of the two crossed again in the 1520s, when Tribolo was asked to carve a tomb in Bologna that Michelangelo had only designed on paper, the *Barbazza Tomb*, now unfortunately lost. This is the seed of their collaboration,

[5] On Tribolo's key relevance in the artistic development of sixteenth-century Florence, see: HEIKAMP, Detlef, *Invenzione e disciplina: l'uomo, l'artista, l'architetto. Prefazione*, in *Niccolò detto il Tribolo tra arte, architettura e paesaggio. Atti del convegno 2000,* edited by PIERI - ZANGHERI, Signa 2001, pp. 11-18.

[6] See: BIETTI, Monica – FERRETTI, Emanuela, *Il granduca Cosimo de' Medici e il programma politico dinastico nel complesso di San Lorenzo a Firenze,* Florence 2021.

[7] Vasari states that Tribolo was trained in Jacopo Sansovino's workshop («*Jacopo lo prese volentieri per averlo conosciuto in bottega di Nanni Unghero*»). Giannotti's studies seek to shed light on the still rather obsure activity of the young Tribolo, retracing a complex network of relations: GIANNOTTI, Alessandra, *Il teatro di natura. Niccolò Tribolo e le origini di un genere. La scultura di animali nella Firenze del Cinquecento*, Florence 2007, pp. 35-62; EADEM, *Tribolo giovane e le figure 'meravigliose' di San Petronio*, in *Nuovi studi*, 2012, n. 18, pp. 167-184; EADEM, *Tribolo lungo le coste della Versilia*, in *Paragone*, s. 3, 2014, n. 116, pp. 3-20; EADEM*, Sebastiano Serlio, Niccolò Tribolo e l'eredità di Baldassarre Peruzzi. L'altare della Madonna di Galliera a Bologna*, in *Prospettiva*, 2015, nn. 159/160, pp. 174-198. See also: GRIMALDI, Floriano, *L'ornamento marmoreo della Santa Cappella di Loreto*, Loreto 1999.

which would be repeated in the following decade in Florence, when Tribolo would interpret the suggestions of Michelangelo to the best of his abilities.

It is fundamental to stress the difficulty of communication between the two in this last phase. Tribolo attempted to comprehend Michelangelo's ideas for the Laurentian Library, but belonging to different artistic realities prevented the two from communicating on the same level.[8] After all, the years spent close to Jacopo Sansovino must have left some mark on his formation. Indeed, his apprenticeship occurred precisely in the years when the tension between Jacopo Sansovino and Michelangelo had reached its climax, that is during the competition for the design of the facade of San Lorenzo, in which both participated. As we know, the work was eventually assigned to Michelangelo. This defeat must have made Sansovino burn with anger, as evidenced by a livid letter dated June 1517, in which he accuses Michelangelo of not having agreed to collaborate together.[9]

While Tribolo did not possess the sophisticated intellectual abilities of Michelangelo, he was able to interpret and give an image to the needs of the Florentine *intelligentsia* of the sixteenth century. Benedetto Varchi was one of his closest friends and greatest admirers. The same can be said of Luca Martini, Annibal Caro and the ducal *maggiordomo* Pierfrancesco Riccio. Not to mention the erudite Cardinal Pietro Bembo, whom Tribolo must have encountered before 1539, as referred to in a letter from Varchi to Carlo Strozzi.[10] Despite the speculative limits of one who did not have an education in letters – clearly evident in both the ungrammatical letters that Tribolo wrote and in his discomfort of being a member of the literary *Accademia Fiorentina* – Tribolo was nevertheless able to engage in dialogue with the humanists of his time.[11]

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[8] On the Laurentian Library, see: WITTKOWER, Rudolph, *Michelangelo's Biblioteca Laurenziana*, in *The art bulletin*, XVI, 1934, pp. 123-218; GRONEGGER, Thomas, *Il progetto per la scala del Ricetto, da Michelangelo al Tribolo a Vasari ad Ammannati: nuove interpretazioni*, in RUSCHI, Pietro, *Michelangelo architetto a San Lorenzo*, Florence 2007, pp. 105-127. On Tribolo's interventions, see: CATALANO, Maria Ida, *Il pavimento della Biblioteca Mediceo Laurenziana,* Florence 1992; FERRETTI, Emanuela, *Vasari, Ammannati e l'eredità di Michelangelo nei cantieri di San Lorenzo*, in ACIDINI, Cristina – PIRAZZOLLI, Giacomo, *Ammannati e Vasari per la città dei Medici*, Florence 2011, pp. 35-47.

[9] TATTI, Jacopo, called SANSOVINO, *Letter to Michelangelo,* from Florence to Carrara, 30 June 1517, in BAROCCHI, Paola – RISTORI, Renzo, Il *carteggio di Michelangelo,* I, Florence 1965, p. 291. The passages that better acknowledge the furious tone of the letter: «*E non mi ero avisto anchora che voi non faciesti mai bene a nessuno,*» «*maladetta quella volta che voi dicessi mai bene di nessuno universalemente.*» This episode finds confirmation also in: VASARI, *Descrizione dell'opere di Iacopo Sansavino scultore fiorentino*, in IDEM, *Vite*.

[10] VARCHI, Benedetto, *Letter to Carlo Strozzi*, from Padua, 21 October 1539, in GAYE, Johannes, *Carteggio inedito d'artisti dei secoli XIV, XV, XVI*, II, 276.

[11] On the circle of artists and intellectuals gathering around Cosimo I's court – called '*setta del Riccio*' by Vasari – and Tribolo's relations with humanists, see: HEIKAMP, Detlef, *Luca Martini, i suoi amici artisti e Pierino da Vinci*, in CIANCHI, Marco, *Pierino da Vinci: atti della giornata di studio*, Florence 1995, pp. 67-71; CECCHI, Alessandro, *Il Tribolo, la corte medicea, i letterati e gli artisti suoi amici*, in PIERI, Elisabetta - ZANGHERI , Luigi, *Niccolò detto il Tribolo tra arte, architettura e paesaggio. Atti del convegno 2000*, Signa 2001, pp. 29-36; IDEM, *Il maggiordomo ducale Pierfrancesco Riccio e gli artisti della corte medicea*, in *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institut in*

This is precisely the strength of Tribolo's art – the misunderstanding. Not only with Michelangelo, but also with patrons and intellectual friends. Failing to understand them, he preferred to remodel their language in his own personal way, delivering a hybrid to the history of Florentine art that we still cannot disconnect from the name of Michelangelo, but which has little, if anything, to do with him. Tribolo was a shopkeeper, at the disposal of power; Vasari describes him as «*male complessionato*,» weak, inclined to obedience and to satisfy others. He was therefore generous, busy, and eclectic; from the ephemeral apparatuses of the festivities accomplished with *prestezza* – which undoubtedly were the works most congenial to him – to the design, arrangement and execution of garden marbles and fountains, up to the regulation of rivers and marshes.[12] A festival director, an engineer and a sculptor. A man who preferred making rather than thinking.

We find confirmation of Tribolo's artistic approach in his response to the *Paragone* debate on the comparison of the arts, the famous *querelle* called by Varchi in 1546, in which the most prominent Florentine artists of the time participated.[13] There are very few occasions when an artist like Tribolo finds space to express himself through words. Although some of his letters are known, they mostly refer to very pragmatic issues, thus leaving no room for theoretical reflections.[14] Even in its succinctness, Tribolo's response is therefore an extremely precious attestation of his thought, and deserves to be carefully examined in order to philosophically frame the sculptor.

Florenz, XLII, 1998(1999), pp. 115-143; FRAGNITO, Gigliola, *Un pratese alla corte di Cosimo I. Riflessioni e materiali per un profilo di Pierfrancesco Riccio*, in *Archivio storico pratese*, LVII, 1986, pp. 31-86. On the *Accademia Fiorentina*, see: PLAISANCE, Michel, *Une première affirmation de la politique culturelle de Come Ier: la transformation de l'Acadèmie des "Humidi" en Acadèmie Florentine (1540-1542)*, in IDEM, *L'Accademia e il suo Principe. Cultura e politica a Firenze al tempo di Cosimo I e di Francesco de' Medici*, Manziana 2004, pp 29-122.

[12] VASARI, *Vita Tribolo*, telling of the equestrian statue of Giovanni delle Bande Nere, father of Duke Cosimo, that Tribolo executed in Piazza San Marco, Florence, for the wedding of Cosimo and Eleonor of Toledo in July 1539: «*Fu quest'opera con tanto giudizio et arte condotta dal Tribolo, ch'ella fu ammirata da chiunche la vide, e quello che più fece maravigliare, fu la prestezza nella quale egli la fece.*» Tribolo contributed to and supervised the following festivities: January 1536, rearrangement of Ottaviano de' Medici's house to host Margaret of Austria for her wedding with Duke Alessandro de' Medici; April 1536, Emperor Charles V's triumphal entry in Florence; July 1539, wedding of Duke Cosimo de' Medici and Eleonor of Toledo; March 1541, birth of Francesco de' Medici; plus, every Summer, Tribolo took care of fireworks for Festa di San Giovanni, patron saint of Florence. On Tribolo's involvement in the design and execution of parades, see: GIANNOTTI, *Il teatro*, pp. 68-73. The literature about Tribolo as garden designer and engineer is rather extended. The most valuable contributions are: POPE-HENNESSY, John, *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture*, London 1963, pp. 77-78; WRIGHT, David Roy, *The Villa Medici at Olmo a Castello: Its History and Iconography*, Princeton 1976; PIERI, Elisabetta - ZANGHERI , Luigi, *Niccolò detto il Tribolo*; GIANNOTTI, *Il teatro*; CAPECCHI, Gabriele, *Ipotesi su Castello. L'iconografia di Niccolò Tribolo e il giardino delle origini (1538-1550)*, Florence 2017; FERRETTI, Emanuela, *Acquedotti e fontane del Rinascimento in Toscana: acqua, architettura e città al tempo di Cosimo I de' Medici*, Florence 2016.

[13] VARCHI, Benedetto, *Lezzione nella quale si disputa della maggioranza delle arti, e qual sia più nobile, la scultura o la pittura,* Florence 1546. See also: THOMAS, Ben, *The Paragone Debate and Sixteenth-Century Art*, DPhil thesis, Oxfrod 1997, pp. 66-94.

[14] See *Il carteggio*, III, 1973, p. 180; IV, 1979, p. 24.

Taking the part of sculpture, Tribolo writes that it is nothing but the objective representation of truth («*dimostrare manualmente quello che el vero*»), therefore a three-dimensional replica of reality. Contrary to painting (called «*la bugia*»), sculpture is not a chimeric illusion («*non è ingannare la Natura*»), since it does not deceive the senses. By praising its sensual and concrete properties, Tribolo surprisingly uses the example of the blind man, who although is unable to see a statue, can still recognise its appearance by touching it, something that cannot happen with painting, which only has two-dimensional properties. The tangible properties of sculpture, which Tribolo underlines in several passages («*più sustanzia*»), may refer to the intimate use of the small bronze statues, so popular in the Renaissance.[15]

Throughout his career as a sculptor, it is possible to trace two phases, separated by the collaboration with Michelangelo at the Medici Chapel. That meeting undoubtedly marked Tribolo, but it was above all a forerunner for the acceptance of Tribolo's work in the new ducal course led by Cosimo I. Having flanked Michelangelo in the Medici Chapel, after he had already been appreciated by Pope Clement VII in Loreto, was a significant leap in his career, which opened the doors to new and more arduous undertakings.

The first phase of his career was prior to his participation in the San Lorenzo works in 1533. These are the years of his training in Florence under the aegis of Jacopo Sansovino, followed by the Roman stay, the first Bolognese experiences, up to the meeting in Pisa with Silvio Cosini and Stagio Stagi in 1527-28. Here Tribolo came across grotesque sculptural imagery, which from 1523 Pandolfo Fancelli at first, and then Stagi, were applying to redecorate the altars of the cathedral.[16] Cosini was also in Pisa in 1528, to execute two angels holding candelabra. The episode of these two angels as told by Vasari is extremely intriguing: according to Vasari, one of the two was in truth sculpted by Tribolo. Although historians now all agree in assigning both statues to Cosini,[17] Vasari's misunderstanding of attribution significantly outline the relationship – still not well defined by historiography – between Tribolo and Cosini. Certainly the two knew each other and had a fruitful exchange – their similar style clearly testifies to this.

[15] Cardinal Pietro Bembo wrote «*la vagheggerò saporitamente*» about a small bronze Venus. See: BAROCCHI, Paola, *Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento*, Milan-Naples 1971-1977, p. 1169.

[16] CASINI, Claudio, *Il rinnovamento dell'arredo scultoreo del duomo dal 1523 al 1545*, in IDEM – CIARDI, Roberto Paolo – TONGIORGI TOMASI, Lucia, *Scultura a Pisa tra Quattro e Seicento*, Florence 1987, pp. 156-184.

[17] BACCI, Peleo, *Gli Angeli di Silvio Cosini nel Duomo di Pisa (1528-1530): con documenti inediti e commenti relativi alla sua vita*, in *Bollettino d'arte del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione*, XI, 5/6/7, 1917, PP. 111-132, first assigned both angels to Cosini relying on documentary evidence. See also: DALLI REGOLI, Gigietta, *Silvius Magister*, Galatina 1991, pp. 16-17, 37-39; DEL BRAVO, Carlo, *Silvio e la magia*, in *Artista*, 1992, pp. 8-19.

The Pisan years close to the ornamental sculptors led Tribolo to execute what has been rightly called a 'monumental hieroglyphic:'[18] the *Goddess Nature* sculpted in 1529 by order of Giovanbattista Della Palla to support an antique vase to be sent to the King of France, Francis I. The sculptural group should have become a fountain and in fact Tribolo unfolds on the body of the Goddess a grotesque repertoire – satyrs, tritons, bizarre animals, putti – that he would then have also reused for the fountains in the garden of Castello.

The *Goddess Nature* is an essential work for the understanding of Tribolo's art, the one in which he demonstrated his mastery of sculptural technique, not only in the impressive deployment of compositional and iconographic fantasies, but also in the rendering of the varied surfaces of the stone, passing smoothly from the pictorial delicacies of the low relief, to the muscular twists of the putti in high relief. Tribolo's style closely resembles that of Cosini, especially in the rendering of the decorative forms, which forcefully come out from the plan with an impressive fluidity of movement.

In the summer/autumn of 1533 Tribolo returned to Florence.[19] At that moment working for the *Holy House* of Loreto, Tribolo, together with Giovan Angelo Montorsoli and Raffaello da Montelupo, were sent to Florence by Pope Clement VII to provide sound support to Michelangelo, still stuck in the completion of the Laurentian projects. This last phase of the works lasted approximately a year, until September 1534 when Clement VII died, causing Michelangelo to abandon Florence and thus the works in San Lorenzo.

The pope hoped that with the intervention of this new team it would have been possible to finish the ambitious project of the Medici tombs, which had been ongoing, with many difficulties, for almost fifteen years. Michelangelo actually exploited the help of those young sculptors: Montorsoli and Montelupo sculpted respectively the *Saints Cosma and Damiano* who were to flank the figure of *Madonna and Child*; Montorsoli was also in charge of refining and polishing the statues of the *Dukes*; just a year before, Silvio Cosini had collaborated with Giovanni da Udine for the stuccos of the ceiling;[20] Tribolo was asked to transpose into marble two figures that Michelangelo had modelled only in clay, *Heaven* and *Earth*.

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[18] GIANNOTTI, *Il teatro*, p. 37.

[19] PERICOLI, Niccolò, called TRIBOLO, *Letter to Michelangelo,* from Loreto to Florence, 26 July 1533, in Il *carteggio*, IV, 1974, p. 24. Tribolo announces here his forthcoming arrival in Florence in mid-August, after he recovered from a malaise preventing him from travelling.

[20] FIGIOVANNI, Battista, *Letter to Michelangelo,* 10 August 1532, in *Il carteggio*, III, 1973, p. 425. Figiovanni was *canonico* of San Lorenzo from 1507 and *provveditore* of the works for the Medici Chapel. He writes here that a certain Silvio (in all probability Cosini, even if the Family name is not mentioned) was waiting for a job to be assigned to him, wishing to flank Giovanni da Udine in accomplishing the stucco decorations. This letter must be put in relation with: COSINI, Silvio, *Letter to Michelangelo*, from Genua to Florence, 13 April 1532, in *Il carteggio*,

Tribolo began to carve only the female figure of *Earth* into the marble, which was unfortunately destroyed in the eighteenth century following a fire – but her features are known thanks to a drawing. The figure, which for a long time was believed to be by the hand of Michelangelo himself, shows characteristics similar to Michelangelo's female statues for the Medici Chapel. The pressure for a stylistic uniformity in the chapel led Tribolo to embrace Michelangelo's manner, and it is here that for the first time Tribolo's Michelangelism appears.

A further formal investigation that Tribolo was able to conduct on Michelangelo's statues was offered to him in 1535-36, when Ottaviano de' Medici asked him to make clay copies of the *Phases of Day*. Tribolo managed to capture all their languid tension, completing those parts that the great master had left unfinished in marble – a license that he would have not taken for the marbles when he had the opportunity.

The 1530s thus opened the second phase of Tribolo's career, during which he would show a fluctuating relationship with Michelangelism. In the works of his last fifteen years of life, we note that he acquired the innovations of Michelangelo – the forced twists of the mighty bodies – but at the same time he produced a further innovative interpretation. Tribolo's attitude towards Michelangelo is represented by one of his statues for the garden of Castello, the nymph *Fiesole*, executed in the early 1540s. Looking at her generous body shapes and exaggerated *contrapposto*, we see the depth of the mark that time spent next to the statue of *Night* left in Tribolo's style. What needs to be underscored is the peculiar struggle between the human figure and the harsh matter of the stone that is portrayed here, which emulates Michelangelo's *non finito*. Tribolo is presenting a personal interpretation of the over-historicised tendency of Michelangelo not to conclude his works of sculpture, and formalised the artistic flaw, which became part of the sculptural vocabulary.[21]

The stylisation of *non finito* is not only visible in *Fiesole*, but also in the clay copies of the *Phases of Day*, where Tribolo used the scratches of the tooth chisel to give a vibrant tone to the surface.[22] This 'stylisation of incompleteness' implies a basic misunderstanding of the author's original intentions. More than the terrible grandeur of the statues of the Medici Chapel, Tribolo received a distorted practice of making sculpture. The signs of the unfinished process

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III, 1972, pp. 394-395, where Cosini, who finished the works in Genoa alongside Perin del Vaga, offers Michelangelo his services.

[21] See: CIARDI DUPRÈ DAL POGGETTO, Maria Grazia, *Presentazione di alcuni problemi relativi al Tribolo scultore*, in *Arte Antica e Moderna*, IV, 1961, pp. 244-247; HEIKAMP, *Invenzione e disciplina – Prefazione*, p. 11.

[22] On Tribolo's use of the tooth chisel to model clay, see VASARI, *Vita di Giuliano Bugiardini pittore fiorentino*, in IDEM, *Vite*: «*quando si risolvé il Tribolo ad aiutarlo, per che, fatti alcuni modelli in bozze di terra, i quali condusse eccellentemente, dando loro quella fierezza e maniera che aveva dato Michelagnolo al disegno, con la gradina – che è un ferro intaccato – le gradinò acciò fussero crudette et avessino più forza, e così fatte le diede a Giuliano.*»

still left visible in many parts of the *Phases* were no longer considered defects to hide. So much so that when Tribolo in 1542 as *architettore* of the Medici Chapel received the task of setting what Michelangelo had left unfinished, he eventually decided to mount the *Phases* on the sepulchres as Michelangelo had left them, that is, unfinished. He did this despite the fact that if he had wanted, he would have been able to finish the marbles – an activity often left to the assistants, as evidenced by the intervention of refining the *Dukes* executed by Montorsoli, and that Tribolo himself must have known well from the time of his apprenticeship with Jacopo Sansovino.

The tooth chisel marks, the holes of drill, the juxtaposition of polished parts to others in the rough state, all become signs of a new expressive language of which Michelangelo is no longer responsible. The generation of Tribolo and Cosini acquires those "errors" making them voluntary signs of the expression of the mutation in progress. This attitude opposes that of Michelangelo, who through a long and arduous creative process was on a frantic search for a form that reflected his idea of perfect beauty.

The misunderstanding is therefore the key to comprehending the relationship between Michelangelo and Tribolo, and is in fact also the heart of the definition of license. Although Tribolo could not totally understand Michelangelo'art for the two belonged to different generations, he fashioned an interpretation that still affects our view of Michelangelo.

Goddess Nature, 1529: Tribolo in his anti-Michelangelesque vein. The influence of Silvio Cosini and the Tyrrhenian sculpture.[23]

The Goddess Nature

Hieroglyphica. Grotesque and Egyptian studies

The fascination that the wealthiest Italian (and European) aristocracy showed at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of sixteenth century for grotesque decoration is usually connected with the rediscovery in the 1480s of the wall paintings of Nero's Domus Aurea, hidden underground for centuries.[24] Although the Domus Aurea paintings show a rather rigid and mechanical system of frames, it is conventional to think that their discovery is sufficient reason to explain the undeniable diffusion of grotesque ornamentation in all fields of High Renaissance art. In particular, it is believed that this discovery had initiated a process of liberalisation of the arts, and that therefore fantasy and license were exclusive prerogatives of this particular artistic phase.

In truth, the discovery of Nero's paintings is part of a path, increasingly more systematic and better financed, of study and cataloguing of ancient art, that included not only Greco-Roman art, but also Etruscan and Egyptian. The essential centre of this advancement of antiquarian studies was Rome, which in the first half of the sixteenth century saw two popes belonging to one of the most culturally refined families in Europe, Leo X and Clement VII Medici.[25]

The study and cataloguing of antiquity led to an accumulation of symbols that soon took on the task of forming a mysterious vocabulary of images, so as to create a modern hieroglyphic script that was supposed to deliver the mysteries of divine transcendence to posterity. Fifteenth-century Florence was the intellectual centre of the rediscovery of the value of hieroglyphic symbols, in a period in which the entire Egyptian culture experienced an incredible re-evaluation, thanks to the writings of Marsilio Ficino.

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[23] The definition "Tyrrhenian sculpture" is taken from GIANNOTTI, *Tribolo lungo le coste*. With that, we mean the artistic phenomena taking place in the surroundings of Carrara and its quarries, notably along the Tyrrhenian coast, comprehending the region of Versilia, and villages such as Pietrasanta, Lucca and Pisa.

[24] As for the grotesque, see: DACOS, Nicole, *La découverte de la Domus Aurea et la formation des grotesque à la Renaissance*, London 1969; CHASTEL, André*, La grottesque,* Paris 1988; ACIDINI LUCHINAT, Cristina, *La grottesca*, Torino 1982; GUEST, Clare Estelle Lapraik, *The understanding of ornament in the Italian Renaissance*, Leiden 2016.

[25] On the spread of studies on the ancient Egyptian culture, see: ACIDINI LUCHINAT, Cristina, *La grottesca*, Turin 1982, pp. 170-172; CURRAN, Brian A., *The Egyptian Renaissance. The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy*, Chicago 2007, in particular ch. 9 'Egyptian Lives (and Afterlives) in the Rome of the Medici Popes,' pp. 189-225; GUEST, *The understanding*, pp. 567-578. On the Medici Popes predilection for the grotesque, see: O'BRYAN, Robin Leigh, *The grotesque in the Medici taste*, PhD dissertation, Charlottesville 2000.

The translations of the most important texts of ancient philosophy – and therefore their dissemination and popularisation – are due to Ficino, in particular the *Corpus Hermeticum* of the Egyptian Hermes Trismegistus.[26] The translation into Latin of this text by Ficino in 1463 was so successful that Trismegistus began to be considered a true pagan prophet, the progenitor of all Western thought, as well as the inventor of hieroglyphic writing.[27] Thus, Ficino affirmed with ever greater conviction that the hieroglyph contained the deepest and most hidden meaning of things, an idea that was also confirmed in the texts of the ancient Neoplatonic philosophers, which Ficino tirelessly translated, including Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus.

In Ficino's *Commentary* on Iamblichus's *De mysteriis Aegyptorium*, translated in 1497, we read:

> *The Egyptians imitated the very nature of the universe and the work of the gods; they also showed the images of the mystic and hidden notions in the form of symbols, in the same way in which Nature too expresses occult causes in apparent forms or in symbols, as it were, and the gods explain the truth of the ideas of manifest images.*
>
> *Therefore, since they understood that everything that is superior delights [mankind] through its similitude with the inferior, and since, moreover, they wish to be filled with goodness by the superior, since they wish to imitate it according to their abilities, they rightly offer, according to their abilities, a way of action agreeing with the superior, when they put the hidden mysteries in manifest symbols. When you interpret these, dismiss the sounds and accept the meanings.*[28]

The search for the hidden meanings of the hieroglyphs culminated with the publication in 1505 of Horapollo's *Hieroglyphica*, a first attempt at interpreting the Egyptian hieroglyphs. The text dated back to the fifth century AD, and was known as early as 1419, when Cristoforo Buondelmonti rediscovered the manuscript on the island of Andros and brought it to Florence. It contributed to the spread of the use of grotesque/para-hieroglyphic symbology, as can be deduced from the publication in 1499 of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, an allegorical novel usually assigned to the Venetian friar Francesco Colonna, rich in illustrations inspired

[26] As for the fame of Hermes Trismegistus, and Ficino's translating philosophy books, see CURRAN, *The Egyptian Renaissance*, pp. 89-105.
[27] See FICINO, Marsilio, *The Philebus Commentary*, ed. and trans. by ALLEN, Michael J.B., Los Angeles 1975, pp. 270-273.
[28] See CURRAN, *The Egyptian Renaissance*, p. 98.

by the Greek-Roman and Egyptian imagery. That same imagery would soon lead to the most prosaic emblematic symbolism, as evidenced by the publication in 1531 of *Emblemata* by Andrea Alciato.

Continuing to retrace the rediscovery of hieroglyphic symbolism, one cannot fail to mention the work of Pierio Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica*, a foundational text that was only be published in 1556, but which had engaged its author since the 1510s. Significantly, this colossal project was started under the aegis of Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, not yet elected pope Clement VII, who was a great lover of esoteric studies.[29] Valeriano's *Hieroglyphica* would form the basis of later symbolic encyclopaedias, such as Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1593), and Filippo Picinelli's *Mundus Symbolicus* (1653).

It was therefore in this cultural climate that Tribolo's most significant work concerning grotesque decoration, the *Goddess Nature* of Fontainebleau, saw the light.[30] The statue can in fact be considered one of the earliest examples of "monumentalisation of the grotesque," a phenomenon that would soon spread to major European courts, thanks to the design and execution of immense palaces of pleasure, with their vast gardens to be decorated with stone and marble. *Goddess Nature* was created in a period of profound crisis for the Italian states, which led many artists to emigrate towards peripheral destinations, not the last of which was France. Tribolo's *Goddess Nature* anticipates many of the subsequent artistic developments, such as the Italian School of Fontainebleau, which took root a few years later with Benvenuto Cellini, Rosso Fiorentino and Francesco Primaticcio; and also the execution of the Castello garden, designed by Tribolo himself in the 1540s for Duke Cosimo I, which would become the prototype of the *giardino all'italiana*.[31]

For all these reasons, being able to understand the profound iconological meanings of the *Goddess Nature* allows us not only to frame and re-evaluate the artistic contribution of one of the most elusive sculptors of this period, but also to shed light on a crucial artistic era, in a phase in which the cumbersome legacy of the 'divine' Michelangelo still seems not to have completely compromised future artistic developments.

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[29] *Ibidem*, pp. 227-231.

[30] As for the interest of Francis I of France to Egyptian culture, see: CROIZAT-GLAZER, Yassana C., *The role of ancient Egypt in masquerades at the court of François Ier*, in *Renaissance Quarterly*, LXVI, 2013, 4, pp. 1206-1249.

[31] On the importance that Castello had on the development of the Italian garden, see: PIERI, Elisabetta – ZANGHERI, Luigi, *Niccolò detto il Tribolo tra arte, architettura e paesaggio. Atti del convegno 2000,* Signa 2001.

Florence and the international chessboard in 1520s-30s

According to Vasari, Tribolo came back to Florence in 1528, after a period spent in Rome, Bologna and Pisa. During his stay in Florence, Tribolo received a major commission from the personal art dealer of the King of France, Giovan Battista Della Palla, who asked him to create a marble support for an ancient vase, to be sent to the royal Château de Fontainebleau, where it still stands today: the statue of *Goddess Nature*. Della Palla was a controversial character at the time: vigorously anti-Medici, in 1522 he participated in the unsuccessful conspiracy hatched against Cardinal Giulio de' Medici (future Pope Clement VII). In close relations with the French royal court, in 1528 Della Palla was commissioned by King Francis I to procure and send him artworks from Florence. This fact made Della Palla sadly known to posterity for having stripped the city of some of its masterpieces.[32]

Vasari writes that Della Palla «declared his mind to Tribolo, and what he proposed to have done; and he, setting to work, made him a Goddess of Nature.» We understand that Tribolo was just the material executor, and that the idea of configuring the support as a statue depicting the *Goddess Nature* came from Della Palla himself, or from some intellectual friend of his.[33] Tribolo's creative contribution, however, consisted in remodelling the ancient

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[32] For the biography of Della Palla, see: PIERI, Sandra, *Della Palla, Giovan Battista*, entry in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 1989, vol. XXXVII. As for Della Palla as art agent for Francis I, see: ELAM, Caroline, *Art in the service of Liberty. Battista della Palla, art agent for Francis I*, in *I Tatti studies*, 5, 1993, pp. 33-109. Due to Della Palla, many masterpieces headed France: besides Tribolo's *Goddess Nature*, Baccio Bandinelli's *Mercury*, Michelangelo's *Hercules*, paintings by Andrea del Sarto, Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio, Pontormo, Rosso Fiorentino, Fra' Bartolomeo. See also: GIANNOTTI, Alessandra, *Una fontana all'antica per il re: François Ier e l'enigma della Diana Efesia di Niccolò Tribolo*, in *Il sogno d'arte di François Ier*, edited by CAPODIECI, Luisa – BROUHOT, Gaylord, Rome 2019, pp. 277-278. Thanks to Della Palla's correspondence, published in ELAM, *Art in the service*, Appendix, pp. 80-109, we understand that most likely Tribolo was commissioned with the statue of *Goddess Nature* at the end of 1528. See: *Ibidem*, letter from Della Palla in Florence to Filippo Strozzi in Lyon, 21 January 1529, doc. 5, pp. 86-93 (ASF, Carte Strozziane, sec. V, 1209, fasc. I, no. 24), where Della Palla writes: «*sono già più settimane che io cominciai a mettere cose insieme [...] pochi pittori et scultori son qui rimasti che vaglino niente che non lavorino qualche cosetta per me*», suggesting the idea that at this date, the Florentine artists (perhaps also Tribolo) were already at work to create something to send to France. According to what Della Palla wrote in an undated *memorandum* to Filippo Strozzi, he sent to the port of Marseilles «*40 casse di pitture, sculpture, anticaglie et altre gentilezze, oltre ad altre simili cose rimaste in Firenze*» (*Ibidem*, doc. 20, pp. 107-09, ASF, Carte Strozziane V 1221, Vol. 1, no. 14, fols. 98r-99r). Elam considers this *memorandum* to be dated *post*-October 1529, when Filippo Strozzi moved back to Italy. Tribolo's name appears in Della Palla's *memorandum*, as a possible agent to accompany the shipment to Marseilles, even though his intervention is eventually discarded («*Tribolo, oltre a non havere la lingua né la pratica della terra [...] sarebbe come il pesce fuori dall'acqua*»). However, the fact that Tribolo was taken into consideration for this task, leads us to believe that the *Goddess Nature* was at that point finished and ready to be sent. Lastly, considering that the last notice of Della Palla's endeavour for the French king is dated 9 December 1529 (a letter from Filippo Calandrini in Lucca to Della Palla in Florence, *Ibidem*, doc. 19, p. 106, ASF, MAP CIII, 54), we can consider this date as the ultimate *post quem* for the despatch of the *40 casse* to Marseilles, and therefore of the execution of Tribolo's *Goddess Nature*.

[33] The vase, that the statue of *Goddess Nature* had to be the support of, has disappeared, and scholarship has put no effort in retracing it. However, a suggestion about its characteristics might come from the letter that Filippo Calandrini sent from Lucca to Della Palla in Florence, dated 9 December 1529 (ASF, MAP CIII, 54, published in ELAM, *Art in the service*, doc. 19, p. 106). Calandrini writes of «*2 pillette*» (two little basins), that he wants to send

prototype with remarkably licentious ease, so as to satisfy the restless antiquarian obsessions of the client.

1529 was a year of political upheavals for Florence.[34] In October, the city was besieged by the Imperial troops of Charles V, who, in view of the new alliance with the Papacy after the Peace of Barcelona in June, aimed to bring down the republican government, and thus restore the Medici dominion. The anti-Medici party of Florence had taken advantage of the weakening of Pope Clement VII after the Sack of Rome in 1527, and had managed to overturn papal supremacy over the city, establishing the Republic.[35]

After a year of resistance, the siege of Florence ended on 12 August 1530, when the city consented to a "honourable" surrender, which resulted in independence from imperial hegemony, but also in the restoration of the Medici power. In 1532 the Duchy of Florence was in fact established, and Alessandro de' Medici, the illegitimate son of Clement VII, became the first Duke.

The reason for this revolution was, as said, the Sack of Rome. The Holy Roman Empire and France had been fighting for supremacy over the continent, and Italy became the object of their dispute, as well as their battleground. On 6 May 1527, Charles V's army of Landsknechts had in fact arrived in Rome, plundering it fiercely and forcing the Pope to take refuge in Castel Sant'Angelo. After a weeks-long siege, on 5 June the Pope surrendered and fled Rome, heading to Orvieto. However, the occupation and raid by imperial troops continued until February 1528. In the meantime, the French troops advanced into Italian territories, winning battles in Genoa and besieging Naples.

In June 1529, exhausted and worried about the arrival of the Ottomans from East, Charles V signed, as mentioned, the Barcelona Agreement with the Pope Clement VII, which led to the re-establishment of the Medici power in Florence. In August 1529, Charles V also signed the Peace of Cambrai with Francis I of France, which provided for the renunciation of any recourse on the Italian territories by France. To sanction the newfound peace between the Empire and France, it was also decided that Francis would have married Charles V's sister, Eleonor of Austria.

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to Pisa (most likely, for the despatch of the forty cases to Marseilles). One of the two *pillette* might be the vase for Tribolo's *Goddess Nature.*

[34] As for the events taking place in Italy in this period, see: GUICCIARDINI, Francesco, *Historia d'Italia*, Florence 1561, books 19-20.

[35] Interestingly enough, during the siege, the pope commissioned Benvenuto di Lorenzo della Volpaia and Tribolo himself to carry out a model of the city, in order to better plan any attacks. See: CAMEROTA, FIlippo, *Tribolo e Benevenuto della Volpaia: il modello ligneo per l'assedio di Firenze,* in PIERI, Elisabetta, *Niccolò detto il Tribolo tra arte, architettura e paesaggio. Atti del convegno 2000*, Poggio a Caiano 2001, pp. 87-104.

It was in this complex historical context that Tribolo's *Goddess Nature* was executed. Considering its function as a gift for the King of France, immediately after the end of a gruelling conflict, it seems at least plausible that there was some relation between political events and the ideation of the work. *Goddess Nature*'s references to the power of fertility led to the belief that the statue could be a wish for a rebirth after the battle.[36]

Iconography

Tribolo's *Goddess Nature* (fig.87) is inspired by the Hellenistic Ephesian Artemis Polymastos (fig.88), whose iconography was known since the pontificate of Leo X, therefore since the 1510s, when in all probability the statue was unearthed in Rome, and collected in Palazzo Farnese, as revealed by Ulisse Adrovandi in his guide to Rome of 1556. Aldrovandi does not recognise the statue as Artemis, and instead names her «*Dea della Natura, o pure la Natura istessa*.»[37] Extending her arms forward in offering, the Farnese Artemis presents herself in a rigidly static pose. On her chest she wears a breastplate with zodiac symbols and a large necklace of acorns. A large cluster of breasts descends over the bust, as far as the belt. The lower limbs are tightly bandaged in a robe that presents six orders of animal protomes: lions, deer, bulls, bees fertilising flowers, winged female figures, sphinxes/harpies. On the arms, two per limb, are other rampant lions. She is today preserved at the Museo Archelogico of Naples, philologically restored in the nineteenth century with limbs and head in dark bronze.

Starting from the discovery of the ancient prototype, the iconography of Polymastos began to spread, especially in the works of Raphael's workshop, who excelled in the rediscovery and dissemination of ancient imagery (Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican Logge, Villa Medici, Villa Lante al Gianicolo).[38] Of particular interest is the drawing by Giulio Romano (Wien, Albertina, 43033), datable to the early 1520s,[39] within which the artist investigates the possibility of using the iconography of the Polymastos for a fountain. It would be the most direct precedent for Tribolo's *Goddess Nature*, whose function was to support a basin of water.[40]

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[36] See also: ZORACH, Rebecca, *Blood, milk, ink, gold: Abundance and excess in the French Renaissance*, Chicago 2005, pp. 83-134; CROIZAT-GLAZER, *The role of ancient Egypt*, pp. 1222-1223.
[37] MAURO, Lucio – ALDROVANDI, Ulisse, *Le Antichità della città de Roma*, Venice 1556.
[38] NIELSEN, Marjatta, *Diana Efesia Multimammia. The metamorphoses of a Pagan Goddess from the Renaissance to the Neo-Classicism*, in *From Artemis to Diana. The Goddess of Man and Beast*, Copenaghen 2009, pp. 457-458.
[39] As for the dating and attribution of the drawing, see: OBERHUBER, Konrad – GNANN, Achim, *Roma e lo stile classico di Raffaello 1515-1527*, Milan 1999, p. 281.
[40] GIANNOTTI, *Una fontana ,* p. 282.

Tribolo's *Goddess Nature* largely adheres to the ancient prototype, but also introduces essential innovations. The most important difference that best illustrates the typical sixteenth-century sliding towards an unbridled reworking of multiple inspirations, lies in the chaotic unfolding of the creatures along the whole body of the goddess. If the animals in the Hellenistic prototype were hierarchically ordered, with Tribolo they break out of the constraints of natural creation. We are in fact in the mysterious world of grotesque creation, where the shapes merge to form monsters never seen, and the experiment wins over experience. Creation becomes creativity, thus shifting from the natural to the artificial, therefore artistic. On this ground, license has the upper hand, feeding on suggestions of the most varied. The starting model was ancient, therefore authoritative, but its modern declension must have been free and unencumbered, approaching the forbidden with ill-concealed satisfaction, until it touches the limits of the obscene.

Tribolo's creatures resemble those appearing in the stucco decorations of the Vatican Logge invented by Giovanni da Udine, but many other elements taken from the Florentine artistic tradition must be added to this: the Sansovinesque Neo-Attic proportions of the hieratic face of the goddess; the Donatellism of the joyful putti, altered by the Michelangelesque muscular and dynamic poses, yet filtered by the grace of Andrea del Sarto; the naturalistic investigation of Verrocchio in the proper animalistic representations; varied sculptural surfaces, made of intermittences between graceful smooth parts on one side and rough portions on the other – a technical *divertissement* that can be traced back to the experiments of Cosini in the Medici Chapel and in the *Strozzi Tomb*, and would soon become part of Tribolo's vocabulary, as we will see later.

Scholarship has so far provided a number of readings of Tribolo's statue, to which we only intend to add some further considerations.[41] Tribolo's *Goddess Nature* displays several references to the Egyptian cult: the body of the deity of Fontainebleau appears wrapped in bandages to imitate Egyptian mummification; the grotesques covering her function as hieroglyphics; on the back, an insect recalls the sacred Egyptian scarab, a symbol of uni-generative reproduction;[42] a phallus (fig.89) refers to the myth of Isis and Osiris, as was told by Plutarch, where it is said that «of the parts of Osiris's body the only one which Isis did not

[41] See: DEL BRAVO, *Quella quiete*, pp. 1467-1469; GIANNOTTI, *Il teatro*, pp. 36-38, and again in EADEM, *Una fontana*, pp. 280-281; HADOT, Pierre, *The veil of Isis*, Cambridge-London 2006, in particular ch. 19 '*Artemis and Isis.*'

[42] HORAPOLLO, *Hieroglyphica – Delli segni hieroglifici, cioè delle significazioni di scolture sacre appresso gli Egittij*, translated in Italian vulgar by Pietro Vasolli da Fivizzano, Venice 1547, p. 5r.

find was the male member, for the reason that this had been at once tossed into the river»[43] – in the statue, it is in fact behind, hidden from the sight of the goddess. United to female genitalia, it has wings, because in death it finds the way of fertilisation and therefore of rebirth.[44] Plutarch further clarifies this generative dynamic of the Egyptian myth in this way:

> *The creative and germinal power of the god, at the very first, acquired moisture as its substance, and through moisture combined with whatever was by nature capable of participating in generation.*

The reference to the river, and therefore to Osiris' fertilisation, is given by the function of the statue, which was to act as a fountain, and was therefore hidden by pouring water.

Already in ancient times, the cult of Isis had overlapped that of Ephesian Artemis.[45] Iamblichus states that it was the Pythagoreans who created the dyad Artemis-Isis; Xenophon of Ephesus also presents the two goddesses as one; Lucius attests the Isiac cult in Ephesus, superimposed on that of Artemis; in Macrobius we also read that Isis was represented with the whole body thickly covered with nipples joined together.

Most likely then, Nature here takes the form of Isis, who, according to Plutarch, is the «female principle,» receiving within her bosom «all appearances and forms.» By her nature she is always inclined «to the First and Supreme of all, and offers herself to it, permitting it to generate and discharge into herself emissions and likenesses.» Plutarch also provides a Platonic interpretation of the figure of Isis, which finds figural confirmation in the statue of Tribolo. He describes the goddess as «an image of existence in Matter: that which is born is an imitation of that which is.» Nature is therefore a fallacious image, which in its restless mutability reflects the true essence, which, however, remains hidden.

Similarly, Tribolo's statue of *Goddess Nature* is as fallacious and vicious as Plutarch states. The deformed creatures covering the body of the Goddess clearly symbolise this. The toad, which before taking on its definitive appearance undergoes a decisive change from being a simple tadpole, is in fact depicted by the sculptor without legs, still imperfect (fig.90).[46] The

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[43] The myth of Isis and Osiris is contained in: PLUTARCH, *Moralia*, 351c-384d (*Moralia, Volume V: Isis and Osiris. The E at Delphi. The Oracles at Delphi No Longer Given in Verse. The Obsolescence of Oracles.* Translated by Frank Cole Babbitt. Loeb Classical Library 306, Cambridge 1936).

[44] On the variegated iconography of the winged phallus in ancient Rome (called *fascinus,* often used as *tintinnabula*), see: PARK, Adam – MCKIE, Stuart, *Material approaches to Roman magic. Occult objects and supernatural substances*, Oxford 2018.

[45] See: HADOT, *The veil of Isis*; WITT, Reginald Eldred, *Isis in the Ancient World*, London 1997.

[46] HORAPOLLO, *Hieroglyphica*, p. 9r: "*L'embrione significando, descrivono una Rana [...] sì che alcuna volta vedesi la rana mezza perfetta*."

two birds pecking each other are symbol of sodomy (fig.91).[47] The snail, with its slow slobbering crawl, is a symbol of lasciviousness[48] and laziness.[49] The bat (fig.92), which lives in darkness, isolated from the light of knowledge, indicates ignorance.[50] The ostrich (fig.93), which according to tradition would also eat iron, represents voracity.[51] On close inspection, all creatures are shown as greedy, whether they are those birds of prey that stick to the breasts or fruit, or the satisfied sipping satyrs (figg.89, 96). Nature therefore appears as if she were under attack, and drained of her generosity. This is nothing more than the cycle of life, which descends to Earth and goes back to Heaven through eternal natural reproduction.

As has been shown, the statue appears imbued with the typical Florentine Neoplatonism. Given the strong references to the Egyptian cult, it seems credible that a text infused with Neoplatonic thoughts such as *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum* of that Iamblichus who was a supporter of divination and founder of theurgy, was a fundamental source of inspiration for the conception of this peculiar *Goddess Nature*.[52] One passage in particular seems to adapt precisely to the concepts represented in the statue:

> *Let us now discuss another species of doubts, the cause of which is occult, and which is accompanied with violent threats. But it is variously divided about the multitude of threats. 'For it threatens either to burst the heavens, or to unfold the secrets of Isis, or to point out the arcanum in the adytum, or to stop Baris, or to scatter the members of Osiris to Typhon, or to do something else of the like kind.' [...]*
>
> *There is a certain genus of powers in the world which is partible, inconsiderate, and most irrational, and which receives reason from another, and is obedient to it; neither itself employing a proper intelligence, nor distinguishing what is true and false, of what is possible or impossible. a genus therefore of this kind, when threatenings are extended, is immediately coexcited and astonished, because it is naturally adapted to be led by representations, and to allure other things, through an astounded and unstable phantasy. [...]*
>
> *The theurgist, through the power of arcane signatures, commands mundane natures, no longer as man, nor as employing a human soul; but as existing superior to them in the*

[47] *Ibidem*
[48] PICINELLI, Filippo, *Mondo simbolico, o sia Università d'imprese scelte, spiegate ed illustrate*, Milan 1653.
[49] RIPA, Cesare, *Iconologia*, Venice 1560.
[50] *Ibidem*
[51] *Ibidem*
[52] The text was translated from Greek to Latin in 1497 by Marsilio Ficino.

order of the Gods, he makes use of greater mandates than pertain to himself, so far as he is human … he [the theurgist] *teaches us the magnitude and quality of the power which he possesses through a union with the Gods, and which he obtains from the knowledge of arcane symbols.*[53]

Besides the precise reference to the «secrets of Isis» and to the «member of Osiris,» we also see correspondence between the «multitude of violent threats» and the voracious creatures that attack the body of Tribolo's goddess, lacking «a proper intelligence.» Those creatures are themselves as indistinguishable representations of whether true or false, possible or impossible, the result of an «astounded and unstable phantasy.» The only one capable of interpreting this «arcane signatures» is the theurgist, a sort of mystical philosopher and sacerdotal vehicle in contact with the divinities from whom he receives true knowledge. The theurgist may perhaps be played by the king himself. What better gift for a sovereign with a fine intellect such as Francis I than a hieroglyph with a difficult interpretation that neoplatonically symbolised the complex generative dynamics of Nature, now subjected to him again. A flatterer like Giovan Battista Della Palla knew well how to titillate the interest of such a huge ego.[54]

Pisa and the Tyrrhenian sculpture

It is right to pause now to summarise Tribolo's artistic career prior to the execution of the *Goddess Nature*, the 'monumental hieroglyphic.' In particular, we will try to understand how a predominantly figurative sculptor could bring to completion a work that sums up the most bizarre characteristics of ancient and grotesque art. We will therefore go through Tribolo's career, focusing on those episodes of his biography that allow us to frame and solve this dilemma.

The execution of the *Goddess Nature* took place in 1529, after Tribolo's Roman and Bolognese stay and his consequent stay in Pisa. Due to Vasari's confused biography, this phase of Tribolo's life and his Pisan activity still appear obscure, entrusted only to conjectures. Yet, we will propose some hypotheses in the hope of better delineating the relations between

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[53] IAMBLICHUS, *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians*, translated by Thomas Taylor, Somerset 1999, pp.

[54] As for Della Palla's knowledge of king Francis I's cultural preferences, for him having attended the French court for six years, see: ELAM, *Art in the service*, pp. 75-79.

Tribolo and Cosini, in a period in which most likely they were both in Pisa. We must therefore account for the episode of the two angels carved for the main altar of the cathedral.

Restoration of the Pisan Cathedral

In 1523, an important internal restoration of the cathedral was inaugurated in Pisa. The beginning of the works coincided with the election of the new *Operaio della Primaziale*, Giovan Battista Papponi, who promptly started the phase of restoration, which lasted over seventy years, until 1595.[55]

The works began with the execution of the *Altar of San Biagio*, located in the southern arm of the transept (figg.97-101). Due to the scarcity of native artists, the work was entrusted to an external sculptor, Pandolfo Fancelli da Settignano, who was in the city to execute works in the churches of San Francesco and Santa Maria della Spina.[56] To help, Fancelli called Stagio Stagi, a talented sculptor from Pietrasanta, who was entrusted with the restoration of the Pisan cathedral when Fancelli died in 1526.[57]

Pandolfo Fancelli stayed for a period in Spain, following his cousin and fellow sculptor Domenico Fancelli, who was entrusted with very important commissions: the *Tomb of the Infant Juan* in Avìla, and the *Tomb of the Catholic sovereigns Ferdinand and Isabella* in the Capila Real of Granada, just to mention the most relevant.[58] Upon his death in April 1519, Domenico left three works at the planning stage, the most important of which was the *Tomb for the Catholic sovereigns Philip the Handsome and Joanna the Mad* (figg.102-104). The young Emperor Charles V entrusted to the Spanish sculptor Bartolomé Ordoñez to finish the monument dedicated to his parents.

In order to access marble more easily from the quarries, Ordoñez decided to move to Carrara, where he set up his workshop. The works under his leadership proceeded quickly,

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[55] *Operaio* was the official commissioner of the works (*Opera*) of the Pisan Cathedral (*Primaziale*). On the works of restoration, see: CASINI, *Il rinnovamento dell'arredo scultoreo del duomo dal 1523 al 1545*, in IDEM – CIARDI, Roberto Paolo – TONGIORGI TOMASI, Lucia, *Scultura a Pisa tra Quattro e Seicento*, Florence 1987, pp. 156-184.

[56] On Pandolfo Fancelli, see: ABBATE, Francesco, *Gian Giacomo da Brescia, Pandolfo Fancelli e le presenze spagnole nella bottega carrarese di Bartolomé Ordoñez*, in CIARDI, Roberto Paolo – RUSSO, Severina, *Le vie del marmo: aspetti della produzione e della diffusione dei manufatti marmorei dal '400 al '500*, Florence 1992, pp. 139-148; BELLESI, Sandro, *Fancelli*, *Pandolfo*, entry in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 1994, vol. XLIV.

[57] On Stagio Stagi, see: RUSSO, Severina, *Le botteghe versiliesi: contributo per lo studio della scultura decorativa tra i secoli XV e XVI*, in *Le Vie del marmo*, pp. 33-72; GIANNOTTI, Alessandra, *Stagi,* entry in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani,* 2018, vol. XCII; ARU, Carlo, *Scultori della Versilia. Lorenzo e Stagio Stagi da Pietrasanta*, in *L'arte*, 12, 1909, pp. 269-287.

[58] On Domenico Fancelli, see: ZURLA, Michela, *Domenico Fancelli, i re di Spagna e la congiuntura carrarese*, in MOZZATI, Tommaso – NATALI, Antonio, *Norma e capriccio*, exhibition catalogue, Florence 2013, pp. 132-145; CONDORELLI, Adele, *Fancelli, Domenico*, entry in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 1994, vol. XLIV.

but unfortunately Ordoñez died in December 1520, though he did leave in his will precise provisions to his Italian collaborators about the division of the work to complete the tombs.[59]

Angels. Tribolo's collaboration with Silvio Cosini

In the 1550 edition of *Lives*, Vasari dedicates very few lines to the biography of Cosini, and had not yet compiled that of Tribolo. While maintaining the unusual format of being combined with the lives of other *fiesolani*, the life of Cosini was to be extended and modified in the subsequent edition of 1568, in which edition the detailed *Life* of Tribolo makes its appearance. In the 1550 edition, Vasari succinctly assigns to Cosini «two marble angels in Pisa for the main altar, which are on two columns.»

However, the 1568 edition sees a decisive retraction. Vasari now divides the paternity of the two angels between Cosini and Tribolo. Thus, we read that Cosini made only one of the two angels, «to face the one by Tribolo; and he made it so like the other that it could not be more like even if it were by the same hand.» Vasari delves into further details in Tribolo's biography, where he says that Tribolo would in fact have arrived in Pisa called by Stagi, then foreman of the Pisan Cathedral, and here, «having nothing else to do,» started to make one of the angels that was going to adorn the two columns made by Stagi himself. Vasari's description of the angels corresponds both in size and iconography to those actually executed, now preserved in the Museo della Primaziale in Pisa (fig.297).

Despite Vasari's confusion, scholarship rightly ascribes the two angels to Cosini's hand alone, both for the stylistic unity that binds them, and due to formal comparisons with other works by the sculptor. Furthermore, according to the payment documents published by Bacci, Cosini received the commission for two marble *angiuli* in February 1528, for which he was later paid with 700 lire in December 1530.[60] There is no doubt therefore that the execution is to be ascribed completely to Cosini.

However, given the precision with which Vasari takes the trouble to correct his version of the facts, both in the biography of Cosini and in that of Tribolo, it seems at least strange that in his words there is not hidden even a small kernel of truth. With respect to this, there are a

[59] On Bartolomé Ordoñez's stay in Carrara, see: CAMPIGLI, Marco, *L'appartamento spagnolo. Giovanni de' Rossi nella bottega di Bartolomé Ordoñez*, in GALLI, Aldo – BARTELLETTI, Antonio, *Nelle terre del marmo*, Pisa 2018, pp. 197-214; MOZZATI, Tommaso, *Charles V, Bartolomé Ordoñez, and the Tomb of Joanna of Castile and Philip of Burgundy in Granada: An iconographical perspective of a major royal monument of Renaissance Europe*, in *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 59, 2017, pp. 175-201; MIGLIACCIO, Luciano, *Uno spagnuolo: Bartolomé Ordoñez sulle rotte mediterranee del marmo*, in *Scultura meridionale in età moderna nei suoi rapporti con la circolazione mediterranea*, 1, 2007, pp. 125-145; IDEM, *Carrara e la Spagna nella scultura del Primo Cinquecento*, in *Le vie del marmo*, pp. 101-133.

[60] BACCI, *Gli angeli*, pp. 128-130.

number of hypotheses that can be put forward. The most likely is that Tribolo participated only at a preliminary level, by providing drawings or models in clay or wax.[61] To better identify his eventual intervention in the works over the Pisan Cathedral, it is necessary first to explain the chronology of the sculptor's movements around these dates.

Relying on the payment registers and the correspondence with Michelangelo, we know that from June 1525 to August 1527, Tribolo was carrying out two projects in Bologna: in one project he was engaged with his team, composed of Simone Cioli and Solosmeo, participating in the carving of the narrative cycle of the portals of the church of San Petronio; in the other project, he was bringing to completion Michelangelo's design of the funeral monument for Andrea Barbazza for the same church.[62] We also know that in the autumn of 1527 Tribolo was in Carrara, where he must have estimated the price of the *Altar of the Blessed Sacrament* for the cathedral of the city, together with Giovanni de' Rossi.[63] In those same months, Bartolomeo Barbazza in all probability died, ending the endeavour of his father's tomb. According to what Vasari says, it was at that point that the discouraged Tribolo went to Pisa having been called by his *amicissimo* Stagio Stagi. This therefore took place at the end of 1527. If Cosini's intervention began in February 1528, a few months after the arrival of Tribolo, Cosini was most likely called due to Tribolo's renunciation to continue any work, given that, as Vasari says, Tribolo had not received from the Operaio «the payment that he expected.» Tribolo's non-payment and Cosini's call were connected with the arrival of the new Operaio, Antonio Urbani, who took the office after the death of Giovan Battista Papponi.

Neither Cosini nor Tribolo were new to the execution of angels. Around 1521-22, Cosini carved an angel holding a candelabra for the Cathedral of Volterra (fig.221), and the right angel of the *Tomb of Antonio Strozzi* in Santa Maria Novella, Florence (fig.233).[64] Scholarship has assigned to Tribolo one of the angels that adorn the crowning of the *Tempietto of Santissima Annunziata* of Pontremoli (1526, fig.302), and some bas-reliefs of angels in San

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[61] Tribolo's working method often consisted in simply preparing clay models for his workshop, as occurred in Bologna for the decorations of San Petronio's portal. See: GIANNOTTI, *Tribolo giovane*, pp. 170-171. VASARI, *Vita di Tribolo*, says that during his apprenticeship with Sansovino, Tribolo soon became well versed in modelling wax and clay (*avendo aggiunto la pratica de' ferri al saper bene fare di terra e di cera*).

[62] Information about the payments to Tribolo for San Petronio's portal are accounted in GIANNOTTI, *Tribolo giovane*. Moreover, we know of three letters exchanged between Bartolomeo Barbazza, Tribolo and Michelangelo in October 1525. See *Il carteggio*, III, pp. 168, 175, 180.

[63] Telling of the carving of Barbazza tomb, Vasari refers without specifying the dates that «*andò il Tribolo stesso a Carrara a far cavar i marmi, per abozzargli in sul luogo e sgravargli, di maniera che non solo fusse (come fu) più agevole al condurgli, ma ancora acciò che le figure riuscissero maggiori*.» According to Giannotti, Tribolo went more than once in Carrara while working in Bologna.

[64] The attribution of the Volterra Angel is due to: CAMPIGLI, Marco, *Silvio Cosini e Michelangelo*, in *Nuovi studi*, 12, 2007, pp. 85-87.

Petronio's portals, Bologna (fig.301).[65] Tribolo and Cosini were about thirty years old when they got to Pisa, they were therefore called upon because other expert figurative sculptors could not be found in Pisa. The restoration work that had been carried out up to that time had mostly concerned the reconfiguration of all the altars of the cathedral. Therefore, the craftsmen who had been required were ornamental and frame sculptors, versed in the execution of capitals and decorative friezes. Stagi, as well as Fancelli before him, were in fact more comfortable in ornamental works than in carving rounded figurative sculpture.

Although the two Pisan *Angels* show subtle formal variations (some details of the clothes, slightly more or less fluffy hair, slightly more or less wavy drapery), they are mostly identical, as Vasari himself accounts with surprise. There is also a decisive departure from the style of Cosini's master, Andrea Ferrucci – see in particular the pair crowning the *Altar of the Crucifixion*, originally for San Girolamo, Fiesole, but today preserved at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (fig.305). Although Cosini resumes yet softens Ferrucci anxious style – a personal elaboration of the late results of Andrea del Verrocchio's (fig.306), quite similar to the very first Andrea Sansovino's in Monte San Savino (fig.307) – the plastic and elegant pose with the body stretched in a static motion clearly refers to the angels for the Sforza-Basso Della Rovere Tombs in Rome of the later, more classic, Neo-Attic, Hadrianic Andrea Sansovino (fig.298). Since Cosini's angels are the mirror image of each other, they might derive from the same and unique preparatory model.

Considering that nothing is known of Cosini's travels to Rome – this possibility will however be discussed in the next chapter – we might presume that Andrea Sansovino's prototype was unknown to Cosini. We could thus think that the preparatory model of the Pisan *Angels* was carried out by Tribolo himself, since he stayed in Rome between 1523 and 1524, collaborating with Baldassarre Peruzzi and Angelo Marrina to complete the *Tomb of Pope Adrian VI*, Santa Maria dell'Anima – thus, he was certainly able to see Sansovino's angels.

The hypothesis that Tribolo provided the preparatory model of the Pisan *Angels* is further supported by the analysis of the painting *Martyrdom of Saint Catherine* (1530-40) by Giuliano Bugiardini. Vasari states that Tribolo supplied Bugiardini with models for the figures in the painting. The angel above carrying the cross is similar in all respects to the Roman angels of Andrea Sansovino (same posture, same wide sleeve at the shoulder, same downward gaze, fig.299). Since compared to the Sansovino prototype, the angel in Bugiardini's painting

[65] As for Tribolo's angels, see: GIANNOTTI, *Tribolo giovane*, p. 169. The attribution of the angel of Pontremoli is due to COGGIOLA PITTONI, Laura, *Jacopo Sansovino scultore*, Venice 1909, p. 142, then clarified by DEL BRAVO, *Quella quiete*, p. 1466, and eventually embraced and proposed again by GIANNOTTI, *Tribolo lungo le coste*, p. 7-8.

has wings, like those of Cosini, we could deduce that Tribolo first made a model for the Pisan angels, which he later delivered to Bugiardini.

Tritons: Silvio Cosini, Bartolomè Ordoñez, Stagio Stagi

At this point, it is necessary to account for a fairly recent attribution assigned to Tribolo within the Pisan works of restoration. Giannotti in fact traces the intervention of Tribolo in the frieze placed at the crown of the *Altar of Santa Maria e Clemente*, located in the north arm of the transept of the cathedral. Its execution started in the period in which both Tribolo and Cosini were in Pisa, in the first months of 1528, after the *Altar of San Biagio* by Fancelli and Stagi had been brought to a conclusion (figg.97-101).[66]

In the frieze of the *Altar of Santa Maria e Clemente* there is a procession consisting of six tritons (fig.105). Since they show «*estro e sensibilità per la resa anatomica*,» Giannotti assigns the invention of this piece to Tribolo, while reserving some doubts about the execution, which could remain with Stagi, who was at this point foreman of the Cathedral.

This attribution allows us to touch upon some important issues and clarify relevant points on the diffusion of the grotesque imagery. If it is true, as Giannotti reveals, that none of the other altars made in the cathedral in these years has an imagery similar to the two made in 1528 (in addition to that of *Santa Maria e Clemente*, at the same time the one dedicated to *Santi Giorgio, Giovanni e Francesco* was made in the southern arm of the transept, with similar characteristics), it must also be conceded that the triton is a motif that belongs to the repertoire of the ancient Roman sarcophagi, collected in the Camposanto, a few steps from the Pisan cathedral. The one named *Sarcophagus of Tritons and Nereids* welcomes inside a pair of tritons in the same pose as those of the frieze, that is, holding an object: the *bucranium* in the case of the frieze, a portrait of the deceased in the case of the ancient sarcophagus. This type of sarcophagus was particularly widespread in antiquity and similar examples are also found in other collections.[67] There would then be no need to assume Tribolo's intervention for such an iconographic choice.

Furthermore, the idea of inserting wings on the Triton had already been used by Bartolomé Ordoñez in the *Tomb of the Spanish sovereigns Philip the Handsome and Joanna the Mad* in the angular *termini* of the grave (figg.103-104), which at least until 1533 remained dismantled in Carrara, and therefore easily accessible by those artists who were passing

[66] GIANNOTTI, *Lungo le coste,* pp. 11-14.

[67] Capitoline Museums, Rome; Maffei Museum-Lapidarium, Verona; Museo Archeologico, Naples, just to account for some of them. See: ZANKER, Paul, *Living with myths: the imagery of Roman sarcophagi*, Oxford 2012.

through the quarries. Ordoñez must have drawn inspiration from Lombard-Venetian sculpture – winged female tritons appear at the top of the *Vendramin Tomb*, made by Tullio Lombardo in Venice (1499). A Venetian stay of the Spaniard should not be considered to explain this exchange of suggestions, for Carrara was a fundamental crossroads where sculptors from all over northern Italy, many of whom from Lombardy, used to gather.[68] Moreover, Ordoñez seems to particularly appreciate the decorative motifs of the artists' *taccuini* (figg.113-114), such as those of Cesare da Sesto (Morgan Library, New York) and Giuliano da Sangallo (*Codex Barberini* and *Taccuino Senese*). If we consider that Pandolfo Fancelli was one of Ordoñez's closest collaborators in the years when he was sculpting the Carrarese tombs, it is easy to think that Stagio had adopted the iconographic idea from him. So, again, there is no need to suggest the name of Tribolo in the ideation.

On the contrary, it seems that it was Tribolo who was conditioned by that type of imagery deployed in Pisa, when more than a decade later he was called to design the fountains for the Medici garden of Castello. Here, the *Fountain of Fiorenza* has satyrs sitting on dolphins (an iconographic *divertissement*, which makes evident the conjunction of the triton as a half satirical and half sea creature) that look very much like the two-tailed "bearer" tritons of the Pisan frieze: identical pose with raised arms, same sexual arousal and feral aspect (figg.107-108).

On the iconography of the "bearer" tritons with double tail there are some other important elements to add. It should be noted that Cosini has often represented some examples of them, even before intervening in Pisa. He made one in the helmet carved in the *Minerbetti Monument*, Santa Maria Novella, Florence (1527, fig.263), and a pair at the base of the pilasters of the *de' Vicariis Altar* in the Cathedral of Salerno (fig.268-269).[69] They are up-to-date replicas of the very similar tritons executed by Andrea Ferrucci in the *Carafa Chapel* in Naples, dating back to around 1512. Interestingly, Tribolo in his *Goddess Nature* replicated with subtle variations the left triton carved by Cosini in the *de' Vicariis Altar* (fig.89). The pose is in fact an exact mirror copy; only the position of the arm and the hair differ.[70] Even more

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[68] As for Carrara being a fundamental crossroads for sculptors all over Italy, see: GALLI, Aldo – BARTELLETTI, Antonio, *Nelle terre del marmo. Scultori e lapicidi da Nicola Pisano a Michelangelo*, Pisa 2018; MERCURIO, Amedeo, *Le vie del marmo. Atti della giornata di studio*, Florence 1994; CIARDI, Roberto Paolo – RUSSO, Severina, *Le vie del marmo. Aspetti della produzione e della diffusione dei manufatti marmorei dal '400 al '500*, Florence 1992.

[69] The attribution of the decoration of the side pilasters of *de' Vicariis Altar* to Silvio Cosini, is due to: CAMPIGLI, Marco, *Silvio Cosini e Michelangelo 2: oltre la Sagrestia Nuova*, in *Nuovi Studi,* XIII, 2008, 14, pp. 72-74. For their dating, see the next chapter.

[70] For the pose of the Triton at the base of *Goddess Nature,* Tribolo assembled two different figures. He took inspiration not only from Silvio Cosini's *Triton* in Salerno, but also from an ancient sarcophagus, dating back to 2nd century AD, where a Triton seen from behind holds his tail exactly as Tribolo's. The sarcophagus was originally preserved at Palazzo Colonna at Montecavallo, Rome, but today is at Museo dell'Abbazia of

interesting, the faces of the Pisan tritons are casts of the theatrical masks that we see in the *de' Vicariis Altar* (fig.106). This would hint at Cosini's participation, at least at a conceptual level, in the execution of the Pisan frieze. It was he, therefore, who introduced new suggestions and updated the formal repertoire of the Pisan restoration with *estro e sensibilità per la resa anatomica* – and not Tribolo as Giannotti believes. Admittedly, Tribolo was in turn deeply influenced by this imagery, and convincingly assimilate the grotesque repertoire developed by Cosini in those years, as demonstrated by both the *Goddess Nature* and the garden of Castello.

However, on a closer inspection, the *Goddess Nature* also shows elements taken from Versilia and Pietrasanta sculpture. In particular, *Goddess Nature*'s circle of putti bearing festoons with birds of prey recalls some decorative elements that Stagi deploys in the holy water fonts carved in 1522 for the cathedral of San Martino di Pietrasanta (fig.110). Furthermore, the 'ostrich' of Tribolo's caryatid of Fontainebleau looks like the creatures with the long beak deployed on the cup of the baptismal font made by Donato Benti for the church of San Giacinto in Pietrasanta (fig.109).[71]

We can therefore state that Tribolo certainly stopped in Pisa, though it is difficult to establish the extent of his real interventions, if ever there were any. However, we definitely sense that in Pisa something occured, changing Tribolo's style. Indeed, from the Sansovinesque reliefs of Bologna he suddenly moved on to the grotesque licenses of the *Goddess Nature*. It must therefore be deduced that Tribolo acquired from Cosini that creative freedom which permitted him to shatter the grids imposed by tradition. Even though Tribolo's figurative repertoire appears already abundant after his Roman experience, this remains nevertheless stuck in an appropriation of the sole ancient figure statuary. Whereas after Pisa his way of modelling figures becomes, like Cosini's, more complex and sensual, and his imagery expands to include oddities previously unknown to him. As anomalous as it may seem, it was not so much in Rome that Tribolo modernised his manner, but rather in Pisa.

Grottaferrata. This prototype was particularly renowned at the end of Quattrocento, when it was copied in *Codex Escurialensis* (f. 34). Among the many artists who assimilated it, Pinturicchio sticks out for having used it in the ceiling of the Palazzo of Domenico della Rovere in Rome. See: DACOS, Nicole, *A propos d'un framment de sarcophage de Grottaferrata et de son influence à la Renaissance*, in *Bulletin de l'Institut historique belge de Rome*, XXXIII, 1961, pp. 143-150; CAVALLARO, Anna, *Draghi, mostri e semidei, una rivisitazione fiabesca dell'Antico nel soffitto pinturicchiesco del Palazzo di Domenico della Rovere*, in DANESI SQUARZINA, Silvia, *Roma centro ideale della cultura dell'antico nei secoli XV e XVI*, Milan 1989, pp. 147-148.

[71] Donato Benti is renowned to be Michelangelo's contact person in the Carrarese quarries during the Medici Chapel works. On him, see: RUSSO, *Le botteghe*, pp. 48-53; MOZZATI, Tommaso, *Alcune novità sulle sculture della Cattedrale di Genova: Benedetto da Rovezzano, Donato Benti e la Famiglia Fieschi*, in *Nuovi Studi,* XIX, 2014, 20, pp. 33-68; ZURLA, Michela, *Un fiorentino nelle "terre del marmo": Donato Benti tra Genova e Pietrasanta*, in GALLI – BARTELLETTI, *Nelle terre del marmo*, pp 165-196.

Here, in close contact with the ornamental sculptors of the Tyrrhenian coast, he expands his vocabulary of images, embracing with renewed conviction and awareness the grotesque taste increasingly popular in those first decades of the century.

Rome and Bologna. The Ancient repertoire and the relation with Michelangelo

In the narrative bas-reliefs that adorn the lateral portals of the cathedral of San Petronio in Bologna, Tribolo demonstrates an appropriation of the prototypes of ancient statuary. In those that surely belong to him (figg.115-126), there are punctual citations from the ancient figural repertoire available in Rome (*Laocoon*, *Dioscuri* of Montecavallo, *Belvedere Torso*).

In the two years that Tribolo spent in Bologna (1525-27), he does not seem particularly interested in Michelangelo's innovations, despite the fact his Florentine training and his Roman stay had undoubtedly led him to approach the works of Michelangelo. This element is even more significant considering that in parallel with the works for the portal of San Petronio, Tribolo was carrying out the *Tomb of Andrea Barbazza*, designed by Michelangelo himself.

Unfortunately, having never been completed and its elements being dispersed, the characteristics of the *Barbazza Tomb* are unknown. We are not even aware of any preparatory drawings that can clarify how it was structured and decorated.[72] From the letters that both Tribolo and Bartolomeo Barbazza (son of Andrea and commissioner of the work, as well as *canonico* of the church of San Petronio since 1518) sent to Michelangelo, it is not possible to obtain any relevant information, except chronological data and suggestions regarding the difficulties encountered by Tribolo in interpreting Michelangelo's notes.

The only clue of a certain relevance about the *Barbazza Tomb* is provided by Vasari, when he says that Tribolo went to Carrara to rough-hew two «*putti grandi*» to be placed in the tomb, which were then brought to Bologna and abandoned there in the chapel of San Petronio after the work was interrupted because of Bartolomeo's death.[73] Some hints to the characteristics of the *Barbazza Tomb* can be provided by looking at the subsequent funeral projects related to Tribolo's circle. Vasari's ambiguous expression *putti grandi* opens up various interpretations. They could depict fleshy children, of particularly large dimensions,

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[72] There exist some Michelangelo's architectural drawings for tombs not related to his main projects for Julius II and Medici Chapel: Florence, Casa Buonarroti, 93Ar; Dresda, Kupferstichkabinett, C 49r. However, it is rather difficult to connect them to the Barbazza project.

[73] GIANNOTTI, *Tribolo giovane*, p. 170, nn. 35,36 p. 180, suggests the possibility that the two *putti grandi* of the Barbazza Tomb had flown into the Hercolani collection, considering that an inventory of 1792 accounted "*due angeli*" by Tribolo in the Hercolani Chapel in San Petronio. Unfortunately, these two angels are today lost.

perhaps holding a coat of arms, similar to those placed at the crown of the *Tomb of Matteo Corti*, Camposanto, Pisa, made by Tribolo in 1546, with the collaboration of his pupils, Antonio Lorenzi and Pierino da Vinci (fig.127). Or that '*grandi*' not referring to the size but to the age of the children, may suggest that the two statues represented adolescents, perhaps in the style of the Sistine Chapel *Ignudi*, therefore completely similar to the funeral genies of Pierino da Vinci's *Tomb of Baldassare Turini*, Cathedral of Pescia (1552, fig.128), a kind of figure that Michelangelo still seems to investigate in the first sketches for the tombs in the Medici Chapel (figg.129-130).[74]

All that can be stated with certainty is that, as long as Tribolo took care of the project, he mainly looked after architectural issues and the positioning of the monument, as the letters reveal. Just before the definitive abandonment of the works caused by Bartolomeo Barbazza's death in Autumn 1527, Tribolo put his hand to the figurative decoration of the funeral monument, going to Carrara to extract the necessary marble. In the Bolognese years, therefore, the engagement with Michelangelo's figurative language was not as close and direct as we might expect.

Rather, at this stage Tribolo can be seen to be decisively conditioned by his years in Rome. Curiously, Vasari overlooks Tribolo's Roman passage in his biography, while recalling it in passing in the *Life* of Michelangelo Senese, aka Angelo Marrina, stating that Tribolo *giovanetto* (it is around 1524) flanked the Sienese sculptor by carving «some of the things [...] considered the best of all» in the *Tomb of Pope Adrian VI*, designed by Baldassarre Peruzzi.[75] Tribolo's intervention is recognised in the putti holding the coat of arms of the left podium (which have characteristics similar to the putti of the *Goddess Nature*, figg.131-132), and doubtfully in the narrative bas-relief at the centre of the monument.

Even for this episode in the life of Tribolo, we have no holdings clarifying the reasons for his collaboration with Peruzzi. Tribolo probably arrived in Rome in 1523 following Giovanni Gaddi, a generous Florentine banker, whose Roman house became a gathering point for intellectuals and artists. Yet, what must be underlined about Tribolo's Roman stay is his apparent estrangement from the grotesque, that was increasingly taking over in the arts of the time, also due to the special preference that the Medici popes showed for this type of decoration. Leo X commissioned the grotesque decoration of the Vatican Logge (1518) from

[74] London, British Museum, 1859-4-14-822v, 1859-6-25-545r.
[75] VASARI, *Vite d'Alfonso Lombardi ferrarese, di Michelagniolo da Siena e di Girolamo S.Croce napoletano scultori e di Dosso e Battista pittori ferraresi*, in IDEM, *Vite*.

the Raphael workshop. Clement VII, not yet pope, wanted Giovanni da Udine to decorate with grotesque stuccos the Loggetta of Palazzo Medici in Florence (1521).[76]

What most interested Tribolo in this phase of training were the compositions of the figures, in an attempt to acquire and rework the greatness of ancient statuary. He evidently envisaged for himself the career of figure sculptor, surely in imitation of Michelangelo. Certainly inspired by the cartoon of *Battle of Cascina*, which in his youth he studied like any Florentine artist of the time, Tribolo wanted to understand Michelangelo's ease in modelling bodies in ever-changing poses, positioning them in frenetic compositions. However, his temperament led him to approach the more peaceful delicacy of his master Jacopo Sansovino, confirmed later in Rome by the encounter with Andrea Sansovino's sculpture and with the most antiquarian and classic Raphaelesque culture, that of Baldassarre Peruzzi, who in the tomb of Adrian VI similarly showed a significant debt to Andrea Sansovino's neo-Attic style (figg.133-134).

In Rome, therefore, Tribolo, perhaps guided by the passion for antiquity of his patron Giovanni Gaddi, embarked on a journey that led him to the rediscovery of the grandiose quiet of ancient statues, favouring later in Bologna soft and calm forms. So much so that in San Petronio, when it was necessary to show a conflict, as in *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (fig.115), Tribolo dilutes any tension in the dazed and sweet faces of the characters, all concerned with inserting the prototype just acquired by antiquity (*Mitra and the Bull*, fig.116). The same can be said of the softly modelled body of the left figure of *Joseph Sold by his Brothers* (fig.117), which is an exact replica of *Dioscuro di Montecavallo* (fig.118). Similarly, in the right figure of *Joseph interpreting dreams* (fig.119), Tribolo prefers to represent *Belvedere Torso*'s back, furrowed by the clean line of the spine, rather than the powerful anatomy of the abdomen and thighs (fig.123).[77]

Admittedly, in the panel of *Joseph Interpreting Dreams,* we note the first timid attempts to elaborate Michelangelo's figurative language. In the long beard in which the right figure puts his hand in a meditative pose, we recognise the well-known gesture proposed by Michelangelo both in the Sistine Chapel *Prophet Jeremiah* (1512) and in the Julius II tomb's *Moses* (1513), a theme previously already investigated by Giovan Francesco Rustici in the

[76] On Giovanni's work in Florence, see: CECCHI, Alessandro, *Le perdute decorazioni fiorentine di Giovanni da Udine*, in *Paragone. Arte*, XXXIV, 1983, 399, pp. 20-44. On Medici Popes' predilection for the grotesque imagery, see: O'BRYAN, Robin Leigh, *The grotesque in the Medici taste*, PhD dissertation, Charlottesville 2000.

[77] A probable preparatory study by Tribolo for the back of the *Belvedere Torso* might be the red chalk drawing: Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, 212S (fig.123). On the diffusion of graphic studies of the *Belvedere Torso*, see: MARANI, Pietro, *The genius of the sculptor in Michelangelo's work*, Montreal 1992, pp. 122-133.

Preaching of Saint John the Baptist in Florence (1511, fig.120). Furthermore, in the direct citation of the *Laocoon* that Tribolo depicts in the left figure, although the painful writhing is visible, this is softened by the gentle anatomy frozen in a languid pose that resembles more a slow awakening rather than a suffering yearning. The sculptor here appropriates the interpretation that Michelangelo gave of the same theme in his infamous *Dying Slave* (1513, fig.122), as confirmed by the same position of the arms, with the right hand delicately resting on the chest. A tribute perhaps to, and a declaration of *fiorentinità*, rather than a contest with the great master. Certainly, a reference immersed among many others.

What clearly emerges from these years of formation is a typical attitude of the even more mature Tribolo: his eclecticism and loose reworking of multiple hints, to which he added his own natural predisposition to the juvenile grace of proportions, which was probably due to his training for years in the execution of putti.

Earth and Fiesole, 1533-1539.
Tribolo in his Michelangelesque vein.
From the years at the Medici Chapel to the Garden of Castello

State of the works at the Medici Chapel in 1533

As can be deduced from a letter he sent to Michelangelo in July 1533, Tribolo headed to Florence between August and October of that year.[78] Vasari says that the work Tribolo made at the *Holy House* of Loreto impressed Pope Clement VII to the extent that he decided to send Tribolo and his partner Raffaello da Montelupo to the church of San Lorenzo to speed up the execution of the Medici tombs.[79] Together with the two, Giovan Angelo Montorsoli, who was then in Rome, was summoned to Florence for the same purpose.[80] Already there from October 1532, Giovanni da Udine was making the stuccos of the chapel dome.[81]

This new phase of the works on the Medici Chapel began in late 1530, following the resolution of the siege, and should have involved the execution of ten still-missing statues. In the previous years in fact, only the two *Dukes*, the four *Phases of Day* and the *Madonna* had been begun to be sculpted. After a tiring ideation phase, the configuration of the two single tombs of the Dukes – different from the double one of the *Magnifici* – had in fact been prepared by 1524, when the carving of the architectural decoration began. In 1526, the architectural frame of the tomb of Lorenzo di Urbino was mounted on the wall. Therefore, the four figures to be placed in the lateral niches, the four *Rivers* to be placed on the ground, and the *Saint Cosma and Damiano* for the tomb of the Magnificent Lorenzo and Giuliano, were still

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[78] See: PERICOLI, Niccolò, called TRIBOLO, *Letter to Michelangelo,* from Loreto to Florence, 26 July 1533, in *Il carteggio*, IV, 1979, p. 24. Tribolo promises Michelangelo he would come back to Florence by mid-August («*a la più lu[n]ga a mezo agosto*»). However, Tribolo is paid for his work at Loreto in October 1533, suggesting the hypothesis that he might have stayed in Loreto longer than he told Michelangelo in the letter. See: GRIMALDI, Floriano, *L'ornamento marmoreo della Santa Cappella di Loreto*, Loreto 1999, pp. 83-84.

[79] VASARI, *Vita di Tribolo*: «*Papa Clemente, avendo veduto tutte quell'opere* [in Loreto] *e lodatole molto, e particolarmente quella del Tribolo, deliberò che tutti senza perdere tempo tornassino a Firenze, per dar fine, sotto la disciplina di Michelagnolo Buonarroti, a tutte quelle figure che mancavano alla sagrestia e libreria di S. Lorenzo et a tutto il lavoro, secondo i modelli e con l'aiuto di Michelagnolo quanto più presto acciò finita la sagrestia tutti potessero.*»

[80] From LUCIANI, Sebastiano, called DEL PIOMBO*, Letter to Michelangelo*, from Rome to Florence, 17 July 1533, in *Il carteggio*, VI, 1979, pp. 17-19, we deduce that at this date Montorsoli was already in Florence working alongside Michelangelo in the Medici Chapel («*Nostro Signore... molto si contenta... del Frate che habi cominciato a lavorare*»).

[81] Giovanni da Udine noted in his "Rotulo Recamador," lost during World War II, yet copied in JOPPI, Vincenzo, *Nuovo contributo alla storia dell'Arte del Friuli e alla vita dei pittori e intagliatori friulani*, in *Monumenti storici pubblicati dalla R. Deputazione veneta di storia patria*, Venice 1887, p. 11: «*Io Giovanni da Udine adì primo d'Ottobrio 1532 mi partii da Forlì chon maistro Domenico et viensi alla volta di Fiorenza*. *Adì 4 dito* [October]*, io aggiunsi Fiorenza et acchominciai di lavorare di stucho a la Sagrestia di San Lorenzo dove vanno le sepolture del Ducha Lorentio e Ducha Giuliano de Medici de mano de Michel Angelo Bonarotti scultore*» As for Giovanni's activity in Florence, see: CECCHI, Alessandro, *Le perdute decorazioni fiorentine di Giovanni da Udine*, in *Paragone. Arte*, XXXIV. 1983, 399, pp. 20-44.

missing. According to the dating proposed in this research, the two *Trophies* by Cosini had begun in 1524, then left unfinished and abandoned in a corner, because in the meantime the design of the tombs slightly changed.[82]

In this last phase of the works, Michelangelo was occasionally present on site, and the new team was unable to complete the work according to plan. Montorsoli perfected the two *Dukes* – and Cosini's *Trophies* served as a paradigm for completing their armour. Montorsoli and Montelupo executed *Cosma and Damiano* which would accompany the *Madonna* already executed by Michelangelo.

Tribolo should have translated into marble the clay models of *Heaven* and *Earth* that Michelangelo had prepared in October 1533.[83] They had to be placed in the lateral niches of the *Tomb of Giuliano di Nemours*. However, due to an illness that forced him to be bedridden, Tribolo was only able to begin the female figure of *Earth* before the closing of the works. Unfortunately there is no news on the figures that were to be placed on the sides of the other tomb of Lorenzo d'Urbino, although Del Bravo believes that there might be the allegory of *Nobilty* on the left, and that of the *Noble Soul* on the right. The scholar arrives to this conclusion examining the pose of Lorenzo, whose tissue close to his nose might be imbued with perfume to cover the stench of the Dragon that *Nobility* treads according to the traditional allegory – Lorenzo was particularly fond of perfumes, and collected them in a little box, the same box that he holds on his left knee.[84]

The execution of the four *Rivers* was never started, most likely because the life-size preparatory models made by Michelangelo had such a dramatic force that their transposition in marble did not seem urgent. Many doubts remain about the *Crouched Adolescent* of the Hermitage, which, if it really was to be attributed to Michelangelo and to the design of the Medici Chapel, was to be placed on the attic of the tombs, together with the *Trophies* – therefore suffering a fate similar to them.

Sansovinism in Loreto

Before examining Tribolo's interventions in the Medici Chapel, it is necessary to dwell on his experience at the *Holy House* of Loreto (fig.135), which is further proof of Tribolo's eclecticism and his ability to assimilate diverse stimuli in order to fit into an already begun

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[82] WALLACE, *Michelangelo at San Lorenzo*, p. 131, on the other hand, dates the *Trophies* to 1532.

[83] See BUONARROTI, Michelangelo, *Letter to Giovan Battista Figiovanni*, from Florence to Florence, 15 October 1533, in *Il carteggio*, IV, 1979, p. 55: «*doman da ssera arò finiti dua modelli picholi che io fo pel Tribolo.*»

[84] DEL BRAVO, Carlo, *La bellezza dei Duchi di Michelangelo*, in *Artista*, 2002, p. 179.

work site – something significantly close to what happens when he works in the Medici Chapel.

The execution of the marble casing of the sacred relic of the House of Virgin Mary in Loreto was for many reasons a moment of extreme importance for sixteenth-century sculpture. Being financed directly by the Papacy, it had to reflect its taste and sumptuously represent its power. The *Holy House* can therefore be read as a mirror of papal taste increasingly oriented towards a Bramantesque and Raphaelesque interpretation of antiquity. The artists who succeeded one another at the helm of the site faithfully respected this unitary vision, despite making use of a highly inclusive and anti-individualistic working method.[85] The comparison between the *Holy House* and the Medici Chapel, therefore, highlights all the design and executive limits of the latter.

Andrea Sansovino inherited the construction site and started the execution of the *Holy House* marble decoration in 1513. To assist him, he called a large team of stonemasons, from Carrara, Settignano, Rovezzano, and upper Lombardy – probably hired in the Carrarese quarries. In the thirteen years that Sansovino supervised the works, most of the narrative reliefs representing the life of Mary were carried out. In this phase, also the purely decorative and allegorical reliefs of the base were sculpted, exploiting a magnificent grotesque imagery. In 1515 the expert Florentine ornamental sculptor, Benedetto da Rovezzano, was called upon to carve the larger decorative reliefs (fig.136), while the small ones, containing bizarre grotesque candelabra similar to the ornament deployed in Pisa, were probably made by the Carrara team (fig.137). In these years, Sansovino sculpted *Annunciation*, *Nativity of Jesus*, and the left side of *Marriage of the Virgin* (fig.138), yet he most likely provided drawings and models for the other six episodes, executed by other sculptors. By 1526, Domenico Aimo, a pupil of Sansovino, carved *Dormition of the Virgin*, and Baccio Bandinelli began *Nativity of the Virgin*, leaving it incomplete in 1525 due to disagreements during the work.

After Sansovino's departure in 1526 and the crisis of the Papacy following the Sack of Rome of 1527, the works suffered a setback, and would only resume in April 1530, when Clement VII went to visit the site in person. In this phase, Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, the Pope's favourite architect, was placed in supervision of the works. He used an almost completely renewed team of stonemasons, and to finish the narrative reliefs he called on

[85] For a brief report of the works at the *Holy House*, see § *The Tomb of Julius II*.

Tribolo, Raffaello da Montelupo and Francesco di Vincenzo da Sangallo in January 1531, who partnered up, creating a company.[86]

The three completed the narrative cycle in the next two years. Tribolo completed *Marriage of the Virgin* initiated by Sansovino (fig.139), and sculpted the *Transport of the Holy House*, together with Francesco. The latter individually carried out only the small relief of *Mary and Joseph at the census*. Montelupo appears to have been the most prolific of the trio, completing Bandinelli's relief, and carrying out *Adoration of the Magi* and the small *Visitation of Mary and Elizabeth* from scratch.

Tribolo was the company representative, and took on the burden of completing the relief of the great Sansovino, a task that undoubtedly intimidated even the most daring. Vasari says that Tribolo also provided the preparatory models for some of the all-round statues of the niches. Seeing Tribolo already at this stage directing a team of marble executors is particularly relevant in outlining his artistic stature, since also in his mature Florentine phase serving the Duchy, he would above all be a leader of a workshop and master of a large group of talented pupils.

The narrative cycle completed by Tribolo's company appears covered in a graceful Sansovinism, indicating that the group of sculptors sought to give uniformity to the whole work. However, the relief of *Marriage* offers the opportunity to compare the quiet, even geometric, style of the old Sansovino, with the more vibrant one of Tribolo, who was increasingly looking for his own personal interpretation of the Florentine sculptural tradition. The relief looks like a long frieze, where the figures are arranged in two opposing queues. Besides the central group composed of the spouses and the priest, Sansovino also carried out that of the women on the left. Tribolo was given the task of ending the episode with the group of Mary's suitors, composing the right queue.[87]

Stylistically, the gap between the two halves is remarkable. Whereas Sansovino indulges in a calm grace, all feminine and pious, strongly indebted to the elegant movements of the

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[86] On Francesco di Vincenzo da Sangallo, see: GIANNOTTI, Alessandra, *Francesco da Sangallo. Un nome per due scultori*, in *Paragone*, LXVII, 3, 126=793, March 2016, pp. 3-24, where the scholar argues that the Francesco da Sangallo mentioned by Vasari working in Loreto must not be confused with the son of Giuliano da Sangallo, whose name was Francesco and who was a sculptor as well. The sculptor working alongside Tribolo in Loreto must instead be identified with Francesco di Vincenzo Baccelli, aka Sangallo, born in Florence in 1504, thus being eight years younger than Francesco di Giuliano da Sangallo, who indeed in his accredited sculptures displays a totally different style.

[87] The episode of the marriage of Mary with Joseph is written in the apocryphal Protoevangelium of James, IX, 1-3, a well known text, which was widely used in art to represent the life of Virgin Mary. According to James, to choose the spouse of the Virgin, Zachary, high priest of the Temple, gathered all the widowers of the village, giving each of them a stick. He who received a sign from God would become Mary's husband. A dove came out from Joseph's stick, designating him as the custodian of Virgin Mary.

ancient Maenads, Tribolo on the contrary unfolds a heartfelt and disruptive humanity, with bodies that impose their gravity with an amplitude of gestures.[88]

We immediately notice an amused game of artistic citations, whose conceptual paternity is consistent with both Sansovino's work and Tribolo's. The man who breaks the stick with his leg is a theme that in nearby Umbria both Perugino and Raphael had used a few decades earlier. Since in Tribolo's *Life* Vasari specifically focuses on this figure when describing the panel, it seems plausible to assign its ideation completely to Tribolo.[89] The chubby child sitting on the stairs (fig.141) is a theme dear to the Florentine artistic tradition, which had started from the Hellenistic *Putto with a duck* of the Medici collection, reinterpreted by Luca della Robbia in the Cantoria of the Florentine Cathedral, and thereafter by Pontormo in the *Visitation* of the Church of Santissima Annunziata. The putto on the stairs, together with the old bearded man on the threshold (fig.144), are two motifs we also meet in *Nativity of the Virgin*. The episode is sculpted in 1525 by Bandinelli on the right side, where we see a ragged little boy playing with a dog (fig.140); and in 1531 it was completed by Montelupo on the left part, where an elderly character with a long beard thoughtfully attends the birth (fig.143). The fact that figures with similar features are found in different portions of the narrative cycle of the Holy House, suggests the idea that, before his departure from Loreto, Sansovino provided either sketchy prototypes through drawings or actual preparatory models, which the new team of sculptors freely assembled.

Although the sharp difference in sculptural feeling separating the two halves of the *Marriage* could be considered the result of the two different hands working on it, it must be noted that this might rather depend on mere narrative needs – a sort of struggle between feminine and masculine – already planned by Sansovino in the conceiving stage. Sansovino was in fact perfectly able to use an anguished language that too often is simplistically defined as Michelangelesque. This can be seen in the groups of angels (fig.146) that Sansovino sculpted in his episodes, which refer to his surprisingly "anti-classical" beginnings, where the

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[88] For a sound analysis of the bas-relief of *Marriage of the Virgin*, with a particular attention in underscoring the differences between the portion carved by Andrea Sansovino and that made by Tribolo (who however was not yet identified), see: VENTURI, Aldolfo, *La scultura del Cinquecento. Parte 1*, Milan 1935, pp. 161-163. Venturi superbly succeeds in delineating the manneristic limits of the part sculpted by Tribolo, even if the scholar seems to neglect the possibility that Tribolo might extensively rely on Sansovino's preparatory models. Still enlightening is the comparison Venturi makes between Giulio Romano's reception of Raphael's art and Tribolo's of the sculpture of Andrea Sansovino, in a highly convincing, yet somewhat biased, effort in seeking a common artistic spirit in the generation of artists inheriting the "Great Masters"' work. Particularly problematic is Venturi's tendency not to acknowledge Tribolo's accuracy in composing and organizing such agitated figures within the architectural background.

[89] VASARI, *Vita di Tribolo*: « *gli venne capriccio di far, fra molte figure che stanno a vedere sposare la Vergine, uno che rompe tutto pieno di sdegno la sua mazza, perché non era fiorita, e gli riuscì tanto bene, che non potrebbe colui con più prontezza mostrar lo sdegno che ha di non aver avuto egli così fatta ventura.*»

emotional temperature was far from being quiet and pacified. Looking at the terracotta reliefs of the *predella* of *Pala di San Lorenzo* (*ante*-1505, today preserved in the Church of Sant'Agata, Monte San Savino, Arezzo, fig.145), we find almost precise references to the figures on the right panel of Loreto's *Marriage of the Virgin*: saints with long beards, whose locks elegantly descend on the chest; Pollaiolesque figures with agitated poses and folksy clothes (bodice, ankle boots, large cloaks, peasant hats, worker turbans).

In light of this, to assign the ideation of the bursting right-wing group either to Tribolo or to Sansovino is rather difficult. Indeed, the answer to this attributive dilemma most likely lies in the middle. There is no doubt that Tribolo was apprehensive about confronting a great master whose work he admired since his Florentine training, and therefore he strongly wished to pay homage to him and respect his projects. At the same time, Tribolo wanted to highlight his artistic autonomy, which was now increasingly heading towards a highly receptive eclecticism.

Even if we do not know the preparatory models that Sansovino had undoubtedly made for an episode that he himself should have sculpted, nor is it known how he wanted to arrange the figures to put them at the service of the narrative, we have the feeling that Tribolo's actual intervention mainly consisted in the difficult translation into marble of Sansovino's suggestions, attempting to give them a formal coherence that was as faithful as possible to what has already been executed. While the large drapery and expanded muscles of Tribolo's figures show a monumental energy mostly unknown to Sansovino, Tribolo yet assimilates from him the care in the execution of minute details, which limpidly stand out on the sculptural surface.

Moreover, the gestures, although they are large and emphatic, indeed respect a carefully studied composition, which can be considered Tribolo's signature, and which we will also see displayed in his intervention at the Medici Chapel. The man on the far right, with the leg in the foreground and the arm that falls on it, proposes variations of the pose of the handmaid on the opposite extreme; the diagonals of his broad stride also replicate those of the first man in the row of suitors. Plus, the first group is perfectly framed by the arch of the architectural backdrop; and the trio on the stairs is nothing but a proposition of human ages, flourishing from childhood, through maturity, towards old age.

Back to Florence. Michelangelism

Tribolo returned to Florence between the summer and autumn of 1533, following the call of Pope Clement VII. The two had already met in 1529-30, when the pope asked the sculptor to make a topographical model of the city of Florence besieged by the troops of Charles V.[90] Evidently, Tribolo had been already openly siding in favour of the Medici return to lead the city, a move that would have ensured the role of privileged court artist during the Duchy of Cosimo I.

As mentioned, Montelupo and Montorsoli arrived in the Medici Chapel together with Tribolo. The season that begins with their arrival can be called "of Michelangelism," and laid the foundations for the judgment that still hangs on the Medici Chapel. More than ten years had passed since the beginning of the works, and given the discouraging slowness in seeing the Medici mausoleum finally completed, it must have become perceivable that the initial grandiose projects would never be respected. Unfortunately, the new team did not conclude much.

Surely, Michelangelo left indications on how to continue the execution of the missing figures. We know from Vasari that he prepared the models for *Heaven* and *Earth*, and for *San Damiano*, and that helped Montorsoli in the conception of *San Cosma*.[91] Despite his occasional presence until 1534, and then his complete absence, the execution of those marble statues was decidedly affected by Michelangelo's influence. Sharing that experience in the chapel, which became a workshop in all respects, the "Michelangelesque" Tribolo, Montelupo and Montorsoli started a competition for who would succeed in reaching the dizzying heights of Michelangelo's sculpture.

Earth

From the letter that Michelangelo wrote to Giovan Battista Figiovanni, we know that by the middle of October 1533 he had prepared two «*picholi modelli*» for Tribolo, which must be identified with the preparatory models of the two «naked statues» that Vasari mentions in the

[90] CAMEROTA, *Tribolo e Benvenuto della Volpaia*.

[91] As for the models Michelangelo prepared to Tribolo, see: BUONARROTI, Michelangelo, *Letter to Giovan Battista Figiovanni*, from Florence to Florence, 15 October 1533, in *Il carteggio*, IV, 1979, p. 55; and VASARI, *Vita di Tribolo*. In *Vita di Baccio da Monte Lupo scultore e Raffaello suo figliolo* we read that Michelangelo prepared a model for the statue of *San Damiano* («*e fra l'altre cose* [Michelangelo] *gli fece fare, secondo il modello che n'aveva egli fatto, il San Damiano di marmo*»). *Vita di Fra' Giovan'Agnolo Montorsoli scultore* reads that Montorsoli made first a full scale model of *San Cosma*, which then Michelangelo modified, making by himself the head and the arms of the figure («*fece di sua mano Michelagnolo la testa e le braccia di terra, che sono oggi in Arezzo tenute dal Vasari*»).

biography of Tribolo, the «weeping» *Earth* and *Heaven* «with the arms uplifted», which were to be placed in the lateral niches of the tomb of Giuliano.[92] Vasari says that Tribolo «fell ill of a grievous sickness, ending in a quartan fever» and was therefore not able to assiduously follow the work in the Medici Chapel. However, the desire not to lag behind «*gl'emuli suoi*» Montelupo and Montorsoli, «that had taken possession of the field,» made him first create a clay «*modello grande*» of *Earth*, and then transpose it into marble with great «diligence and assiduity.» As far as we know, the statue of *Heaven* never began.

Unfortunately, the marble statue of *Earth* no longer exists. However, important information can be deduced from the inventories of the Uffizi Galleries drawn up between the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century. We infer that, probably due to the lack of its *pendant Heaven*, Tribolo's sculpture was not placed in the chapel, and soon became part of the Medici collections, arranged in the west corridor of the Uffizi Gallery.[93] That wing of the building suffered extensive damage following a fire in 1762, and *Earth* must have been destroyed on that occasion. However, the statue has been recognised in a drawing by Tommaso Arrighetti, preserved today in Gabinetto delle Stampe e dei Disegni of Uffizi (4533F, fig.148). [94]

In the Arrighetti drawing, the female figure appears wrapped in a large cloak, leaving the front body naked. In a twist far from being contrived, the woman is standing, the left leg holding the weight of the body and the right slightly bent. The deeply bowed head, with the profile of the face almost parallel to the ground, mimics the introspective intensity of the *Night*. The left hand, free from the grip of the mantle, slightly rises in a gesture of lament.

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[92] VASARI, *Vita di Tribolo*: «*volle Michelagnolo che il Tribolo facesse due statue nude, che avevano a metter in mezzo quella del duca Giuliano che già aveva fatta egli, l'una figurata per la Terra coronata di cipresso che dolente et a capo chino piangesse con le braccia aperte la perdita del duca Giuliano, e l'altra per lo Cielo, che con le braccia elevate tutto ridente e festoso mostrasse esser allegro dell'ornamento e splendore che gli recava l'anima e lo spirito di quel signore.*»

[93] In CINELLI, Giovanni, *Descrizione di Firenze*, BNCF, Cod. Magl. XIII, 34, 222v, a handwritten work datable by 1681, we read: «*segue poi una femmina abbozzata da Michelangelo, da questa banda medesima, figura intera per una e fu fatta per una nicchia della Cappella, o per dir meglio, Sagrestia Nuova di S. Lorenzo, ove stette molti anni e di poi qui fu trasportata*», insinuating that the statue of *Earth* was even placed in its niche to the right of Giuliano di Nemours. We find another annotation of our statue, attributed again to Michelangelo, in the inventory of the Uffizi Galleries compiled in 1704 (INV, 1704 = SBASF, Archivio, ms. 95, *Inventario di tutto quanto fu consegnato a Gio. Franc. Bianchi Custode della Galleria di S.A.R. dopo la morte del di lui genitore, dal 1704 al 1714...*, n. 162), where the height of three *braccia* is reported (about 1.50 m), confirming the identification of the statue as Tribolo's *Earth*, given that this measurement corresponds to those of the niche. Transcripts of these documents are reported in: HEIKAMP, Detlef, *La Galleria degli Uffizi descritta e disegnata*, in BAROCCHI, Paola – RAGIONIERI, Giovanna, *Gli Uffizi. Quattro secoli di una galleria. Atti del convegno Internazionale di Studi*, Florence 1983, pp. 461-488.

[94] PARRONCHI, Alessandro, *Sui 'murali' michelangioleschi della Sagrestia Nuova*, in *Prospettiva*, 17, 1979, pp. 79-80, is the first to put in relation Arrighetti's drawing to Tribolo's *Earth*.

Although the drawing of Arrighetti differs in some details from Vasari's description of the figure, there is no doubt about the correctness of its identification as the weeping *Earth*.

It is now necessary to pause to analyse the conceiving process that led to the execution of *Earth*. By doing so, we intend to highlight how much in this phase of the works Michelangelo relied on the creative proposals of his assistants – or, we could even say, how he was increasingly disinterested in matters relating to the Medici Chapel.

As already mentioned, Michelangelo in October 1533 made in clay the two preparatory models of *Heaven* and *Earth* for Tribolo. Even though the only indication we have about the iconography of *Heaven* is the description that Vasari gives – «with the arms uplifted, all smiling and joyful» – we must think that for compositional reasons it was in clear contrast with the female figure of *Earth*, thus being a masculine and specular replica.

Del Bravo has suggested that *Heaven* be identified with a male figure many times portrayed in the drawings of the school of the Venetian painter Jacopo Tintoretto (figg.162-164).[95] The many perspectives in which the figure is captured in these drawings suggest that it was a statuette that Tintoretto kept in the workshop and used to inspire his pictorial compositions.[96] Marciari considers the male statuette depicted in Tintoretto's drawings to be a preparatory model for Jacopo Sansovino's *Mercury*, positioned in one of the niches of the Loggetta in Piazza San Marco, Venice.[97] Although the resemblance between Sansovino's statue and Tintoretto's male statuette is undeniable, Marciari's attribution does not exclude the possibility that Sansovino too was referring to Michelangelo's model of the Medici Chapel *Heaven*. It might have been Tribolo himself who introduced Sansovino to Michelangelo's model of *Heaven*, when in 1535 he went to Venice accompanied by Benvenuto Cellini to meet the old master (the execution of the Loggetta, and its sculptural apparatus, in fact began in 1536).[98]

As can be deduced from some other of his drawings, Tintoretto was a great admirer of Michelangelo, and possessed small copies of the statues of the Medici Chapel.[99] Most likely,

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[95] See: DEL BRAVO, *La bellezza*. The drawings where the male figure is depicted are: Oxford, Christ Church Library, 0361, recto and verso; Rotterdam, Boymans-van Beuningen Museum, I 225; Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, 712.

[96] This same male figure is recognisable also in the preparatory drawing (Paris, Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, n. 5382) for *Saint George killing the dragon*, London, National Gallery.

[97] MARCIARI, John, *Drawing in Tintoretto's Venice*, New York 2018, p. 97.

[98] CELLINI, *Vita*, I, 76-79.

[99] RIDOLFI, Carlo, *Vita di Giacopo Robusti detto il Tintoretto, celebre pittore, cittadino venetiano*, Venice 1642, writes that Tintoretto, for extraordinarily admiring Michelangelo's art, asked Daniele da Volterra to provide him «*piccioli modelli* [...] *cavati dalle figure de Medici poste in San Lorenzo.*» Drawings of the head of Giuliano: Frankfurt, Staedelsches Kunstinstitut, 15701 recto and verso; Oxford, Christ Church Library, 0357, 0358 recto and verso. Dusk: Florence, Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe degli Uffizi, 13048 F recto and verso; London,

Tintoretto did not possess simple copies drawn from the statues completed in marble, but rather he owned replicas of the preparatory models of those same statues. In confirmation of this, see his drawings where Giuliano di Nemours appears strangely naked, and not armoured as in his marble counterpart (fig.159).[100] Most likely, Tintoretto depicted here a preliminary anatomical study Michelangelo made before carving the marble. The fact that Michelangelo first studied the figure naked is confirmed both by the drawing 10F of Casa Buonarroti, (fig.161), where we see an anatomical study of a seated figure's legs;[101] and in the most refined project we know of the configuration of Giuliano's tomb (Paris, Musée du Louvre, Deparment des Arts Graphiques, 838r, fig.48), where he seems to be portrayed naked. Lastly, as ultimate confirmation of the existence of a preliminary model of a naked Giuliano, see the *Tomb of Jacopo Sannazaro,* Santa Maria del Parto, Naples, designed by Montorsoli at the end of the 1530s, right after having worked in the Medici Chapel, where on the left we see a statue sculpted by Bartolomeo Ammannati of *Apollo* (or *David*, fig.160), which has exactly the appearance of the naked Giuliano depicted by Tintoretto in his drawings.

A number of features lead us to follow Del Bravo and deem the male statuette portrayed in Tintoretto's drawings as the preparatory model of the Medici Chapel *Heaven*: it shows powerful muscles and a tense *contrapposto*, typical characteristics of Michelangelo's art; it matches Vasari's description of *Heaven* as a figure captured by a profound ecstasy; since the raised arm does not exceed the height of the head, the pose was presumably calculated to allow the statue to maintain the right proportions within a rectangle – such as that of the niche flanking the statue of *Giuliano*. Furthermore, if placed next to *Earth*, there are similar and complementary characteristics – *Heaven* looks up, *Earth* down, one stands on the right leg, the other on the left, this way making their bodies a sort of parenthesis that contains the statue of *Giuliano*, further accentuated by the position of the outermost arms, with the hand raised to the height of the pelvis (fig.174). The definitive confirmation that the male statuette portrayed in Tintoretto's drawings is the Medici Chapel *Heaven* comes from the museum of Casa Buonarroti, where we find an identical clay *Virile Torso* by Michelangelo's hand (fig.169).[102] Although it has been rightly related to the Louvre *Dying Slave*,[103] the fingerprints

Seilern Collection, 100 recto and verso. Day: Paris, Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, 5384; Oxford, Christ Church Library, 0356 recto and verso.

[100] Tintoretto's drawings portraying a naked Giuliano di Nemours are: Oxford, Christ Church Library, 0354, 0355 recto and verso.

[101] GNANN, Achim, *Michelangelo. The drawings of a genius*, Vienna 2011, pp. 215-216, rightly refers this drawing to the statue of Giuliano di Nemours, dating it at 1524-25.

[102] For the attribution to Michelangelo, see: GOLDSCHEIDER, Ludwig, *Michelangelo's sketches in clay and wax*, in *The connoisseur <London>*, 1953, 531, pp. 73-75; DE TOLNAY, Charles, *Michelangelo*, IV, Princeton 1954, p. 157.

on the edges suggest that it was conceived as a fragmented module[104] that would serve as a base to add limbs and head, and thus compose various male figures[105] – as far as we know, just *Heaven* and the *Dying Slave*, but probably a careful analysis of Michelangelo's figures would reveal many others. We can then state with some certainty that Tintoretto portrayed the model of *Heaven* that Michelangelo prepared for Tribolo.

The new proposal that we want to make here concerns Tintoretto's drawing 0361 of the Oxford Christ Church Library (fig.165), where we find the statuette of *Heaven* accompanied by a female figure. From the pose and the hair, it is clear that she was inspired on the *Venus Pudica*, an ancient prototype that Michelangelo had carefully studied (fig.166-168).[106] For this reason, and for being the female figure in the drawing coupled to the preparatory model of *Heaven*, it is likely that she is the preparatory model of *Earth* that Michelangelo executed for Tribolo.[107] Considering that the preparatory models of the two allegories were in Tribolo's possession after Michelangelo had made them, we can think that they reached Venice on the journey that Tribolo and Cellini made in 1535 to visit Sansovino. Tribolo might have donated them to Sansovino, his friend and master, to draw inspiration for the statues of the Loggetta.

FALCIANI, Carlo, *Alcuni disegni, e "modelli di terra bellissimi"*, in *Artista*, 1998, pp. 84-99, proposes the hypothesis of assigning the *Torso* to Pontormo, who would have used it to invent figures in the lost frescoes of San Lorenzo.

[103] O'GRODY, Jeannine Alexandra, *"Un semplice modello": Michelangelo and his three-dimensional preparatory works*, PhD dissertation, Cleveland 1999, pp. 102-114, 226-228, convincingly connects the *Torso* with the Louvre *Dying Slave*.

[104] See also Andrea Commodi's drawing of the *Torso,* presumably of the end of the sixteenth century (Florence, Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe degli Uffizi, 18538 F), where we see it with its current fragmented appearance.

[105] As for Michelangelo's conceiving method for the pose of his figures, see: ARMERINI, Giovan Battista, *De veri precetti della pittura*, Ravenna 1587, libro II, p. 139: « *Di due figure di tondo rilievo, solamente col vortarle, se ne cavano molte in pittura e tutte tra sé diverse. Poi che ciò pur si vede nel Giudizio dipinto da Michelangelo, lui essersi servito [...] egli ne aveva fatte di cera di man sua, e che li torceva le membra a modo suo, immolandole prima le giunture nell'acqua calda*».

[106] The reference at *Venus Pudica* is proposed by: PARKER, Karl Theodore, *Disegni veneti di Oxford. Catalogo mostra*, Venice 1958, n. 48, p. 39, and ROSSI, Paola, *I disegni di Jacopo Tintoretto*, Florence 1975, p. 51. There exist four Michelangelo's drawings after the same female torso of *Venus Pudica*, taken from all the four angles: the view of the sides and three-quarter are conserved at Casa Buonarroti (16Fr; 41Fr); the frontal and rear are at the British Museum (1859-6-25-570r; 1859-6-25-571r). WILDE, Johannes, *Michelangelo and his studio*, London 1953 (1975), p. 80, dates the drawings at the mid-1520s, for stylistic reasons, and consider them to be preparatory studies for the female figures at the Medici Chapel. Interestingly, there is also a very early drawing (1500-04), where, together with other figures, we find *Venus* depicted both from the back and profile (Chantilly, Musée Condé, 29r).

[107] KRAHN, Volker, *A bronze after Michelangelo's model for Earth*, in *The Burlington Magazine*, 160, 1383, June 2018, pp. 462-469, argues that the bronze statuette of *Eve*, preserved at the Bayerishes Nationalmuseum of Munich (fig.149), and dated to the end of the sixteenth century, is a cast of Michelangelo's original preparatory model for *Earth*. Krahn bases his argument on the resemblance between the Munich bronze statuette and Tribolo's marble statue of *Earth*, as depicted in Arrighetti's drawing. This, however, is not a sufficient evidence to consider the bronze to be drawn from Michelangelo's preparatory model. Seeing the exactness with which the bronze reproduces the features of Tribolo's marble, we tend to believe either that the bronze is a copy of Tribolo's final model for *Earth*, or that it was modelled after Tribolo's marble.

Since the models were in Venice, Tintoretto could admire them even after many years – or perhaps even acquire them – and thus portray them, in all probability being well aware that they were composing a diptych and that they had been executed by the much admired Michelangelo.[108]

At Casa Buonarroti, it is preserved a clay *bozzetto* of a *Female Nude* (fig.171), which can be placed in relation to the creation of *Earth*. Given the low naturalistic rendering of the figure, which places it far away from the sophisticated monumentality of the *Virile Torso*, an attribution to Michelangelo seems rather unlikely.[109] Instead, the hypothesis of attributing the *Nude* to Tribolo should be embraced, given the stylistic similarity with a *Male Nude* at Casa Buonarroti (fig.172), certainly by Tribolo, which presents similar anatomical errors.[110] Not only does the *Female Nude* present an uneven modelling, but also the pose appears not totally convincing. Her back appears forcefully muscular and under load, implying a vigorous leaning of the bust onwards. However, from the front this leaning is not plausibly represented, the abdomen being rather stretched. Plus, the body proportions are unrealistically elongated, so as the shapes formally simplified. Similar features are visible also in Casa Buonarroti's *Male Nude*, which must be ascribed to Tribolo for its remarkable resemblance with his bronze putti of Castello – same delicate manner and a very typical way to conduct the shape of the head, especially in the curly hair (a free interpretation of Giuliano di Nemours') and in the entranced expression.

The *Female Nude* has similar, albeit not identical, characteristics both to the female figure drawn by Tintoretto (the anatomy of the legs in particular), and to the marble statue of *Earth* depicted in the drawing of Arrighetti. We are therefore led to believe that the *Nude* is a further and intermediate study of *Earth*, carried out by Tribolo before making the clay *modello grande* Vasari mentions.

Now that we have identified Michelangelo's preparatory model, and Tribolo's intermediate *bozzetto* and final marble statue, we have all the necessary elements to carry out a reflection on the creative process that led to the configuration of *Earth*. When Michelangelo delivered the two preparatory models to Tribolo in October 1533, the one of *Heaven*, so faithful to other of his prototypes, had been outlined in more detail, whereas instead *Earth*

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[108] See: FARINELLI, Stefano, *Il Cielo e la Terra tra Michelangelo, Tribolo, Sansovino e Tintoretto. Ispirazioni tra Firenze e Venezia*, in *L'Artista*, III, 2021, 3, pp. 4-15.
[109] For an accurate literature review of the *Female Nude*, see: RAGIONIERI, Pina, *I bozzetti michelangioleschi di Casa Buonarroti*, Florence 2000, pp. 48-53.
[110] *Ibidem*, pp 60-63.

still had to be at a preliminary stage of the ideation, as is confirmed by the Oxford drawing, where she appears still without arms. It was then in this gap that Tribolo intervened, and his decision to start his assignment directly from *Earth*, not yet fully defined in her appearance, had to stem from the urgency to find a satisfactory configuration for the diptych of statues.

From Michelangelo's germinal idea of a naked figure with her gaze turned to the right, in his clay model Tribolo initially considers adding a powerful twist of the bust, in an attempt to imitate the conflicting poses of the chapel statues already made by Michelangelo. However, the difficulties of translating that complicated posture into marble must have made him desist from pursuing that path. This is why the final marble statue is characterised by a rigid frontality, to which the movement of the leg and the position of the head attempt to create dynamism.

The way in which Tribolo arrived at the final configuration of the marble *Earth* went through other passages. Although he was unable to replicate the conflicting poses typical of Michelangelo's sculpture, he still wanted to pay homage to the language of the great master, but of this he took only the elements that best suited his style. As has already been said when talking about the Loreto relief of the *Marriage of the Virgin*, Tribolo usually planned his works paying particular attention to the compositional balance, especially when he was called to complete a work started by others. He must therefore have reached the final configuration of *Earth* by carefully analysing the finely accomplished model of *Heaven*, since, as has already been said, there are precise correspondences in the poses between the two figures. Besides, we notice exact references to other figures of the chapel: *Earth*'s bent head, so exaggeratedly curved, is a glaring reference to *Night*; equally derivative is the presence of the mantle revealing the frontal nudity of the figure, taken directly from *Dawn* (figg.150-151).

Although left free to operate in almost complete autonomy due to the progressive disinterest of Michelangelo, Tribolo nevertheless suffered a significant formal conditioning, which led him to create one of his most Michelangelesque works. However, he was unable to fully adhere to the innovations of Michelangelo's sculptural language, partly due to his still limited technical preparation, and partly due to the short time available caused by the uncertain fate of the entire project.

Tribolo's Phases of Day. The tension between finished and unfinished

Tribolo's reflection on Michelangelo's language does not end with the closure of the Medici Chapel in 1534. As Vasari reveals, during the time when the fate of the chapel was still uncertain due to Michelangelo's abandonment, Tribolo made clay copies of the four *Phases of Day* and of the *Madonna*. *Day, Dusk* and *Dawn* are now preserved in the Bargello, while *Night* and the *Madonna* have been lost. Tribolo donated *Night* to Giovan Battista Figiovanni, *canonico* of San Lorenzo and administrator of the works of the Medici Chapel. Figiovanni in turn gave it to Duke Alessandro, who gave it to Vasari, who kept it in his home in Arezzo. Tribolo donated the *Madonna* on the other hand to Ottaviano de' Medici, protector of the arts and a man close to the ducal court. These subsequent changes of ownership dismembered the original collection, preventing it from being enjoyed as a whole. Given Vasari's reference to Duke Alessandro, we are sure that Tribolo modelled these statues before January 1537, when Alessandro was assassinated. Interestingly, Tribolo intentionally neglected the two *Dukes*, which must have been at an advanced stage of execution right after 1534.[111]

Tribolo's three surviving terracotta copies of the *Phases of Day* have two main characteristics. The first is that they do not replicate the state of incompleteness of the marble originals, even proposing a possible finishing of the heads of *Day* and *Dusk*.[112] The second is that their surface is marked by thin scratches of tooth chisel (fig.179), a technique that is particularly dear to Tribolo, as Vasari reveals when talking about the clay models Tribolo prepared for Giuliano Bugiardini, starting from a drawing by Michelangelo: Tribolo gave them «that boldness of manner that Michelagnolo had put into the drawing, and [worked] them over with the gradine, which is a toothed instrument of iron, to the end that they might be somewhat rough and might have greater force.»[113] From the observation of these two characteristics, intriguing reflections can be drawn on Michelangelo's *non finito*, which will be useful for the analysis of *Fiesole* of Castello.

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[111] According to BUONARROTI, Michelangelo, *Letter to Giovan Francesco Fattucci*, from Florence to Rome, 17 June 1526, in *Il carteggio*, III, 1973, pp. 227-228, by that date Michelangelo had worked on six figures for the Medici Chapel. From these words, we deduce that he had already made: the four *Phases of Day*, the *Madonna*, and one of the *Dukes*. Michelangelo states in the letter that he would have started the other *Duke* as well, by the next fifteen days. VASARI, *Vita di Fra' Giovann'Agnolo Montorsoli scultore*, in *Le vite*, tells that the two *Dukes* were positioned in their niches before Michelangelo's leaving in 1534.

[112] Interestingly, the statues sketched in Tintoretto's drawings also present that same state of refinement – particularly, the hair of *Day*. This might mean either that Tintoretto owned copies drawn from Tribolo's replicas (a possibility confirmed by the fact that copies of the Tribolo *Phases of Day* were well known, being also part of the collection of the French royal court of Fontainebleau, as argued in JENKINS, Catherine, *Michelangelo at Fontainebleau*, in *Print quarterly*, XXVIII, 2011, 3, pp. 261-65), or rather that Tintoretto's drawings relied on Michelangelo's original preparatory models of the *Phases*, which might have been displaying an ideal state of accomplishment, not duplicated then in the marble statues. This would reinforce the hypothesis that Tintoretto's whole collection of the Medici Chapel statues actually derived from preparatory models.

[113] VASARI, *Vita di Bugiardini*.

Tribolo’s three *Phases of Day* surprise us for the accuracy of the reproduction. Not only did Tribolo replicate with the greatest care the complicated pose, but he also exactly reproduced the position of the fingers, every muscle mass, every wrinkle of the skin (fig.178). It is clear, therefore, of his desire to match the greatness of Michelangelo's sculpture through the exact reproduction of every detail of the statues. Furthermore, Tribolo wants to surpass the ‘divine’ Michelangelo by proposing the completion, so long denied, of those figures, thus making his clay replicas an essay of the high level of his abilities.

However, it is surprising that when in January 1547, as *architettore* of the chapel, Tribolo finally had the opportunity to put his hand to those statues he had studied so carefully, he did not finish the figures still left incomplete – in particular *Day* and *Dusk*.[114] Instead, he decided to mount them on the sepulchres unfinished as they were.

Thus, Tribolo gave a new expressive sense and artistic meaning to the incompleteness of Michelangelo’s statues. Although he might have done so driven by the deference he felt towards the ‘divine’ Michelangelo,[115] the prolonged observation of the *Phases of Day* when modelling the clay copies must have made Tribolo grow in the belief that the beauty of those works lay in the alternation between finished and unfinished parts, similar to what happens in sketches on paper, where inspiration slowly takes shape through layers of disordered signs.[116] If we think back to the words with which Vasari describes Tribolo’s clay models made for Bugiardini, «he used the tooth chisel so that they might be somewhat rough and might have greater force,» we realise that Tribolo had developed a particular taste for the rough surfaces, which were able to create unexpected luminous contrasts, impossible to obtain on a perfectly smoothed and finished surface.

The mutant forms, in continuous and dynamic metamorphosis, greatly fascinated Tribolo's mind. By mounting the *Phases* unfinished, he was totally embracing the philosophy that inspired the grotesque imagery represented along the body of his *Goddess Nature*. In the renewed awareness that reality is in no way fixed and frozen in perfect shape, Tribolo decides to indulge malleability in an attempt to grasp the essence of things. Using Tribolo’s words, sculpture does not deceive Nature.

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[114] From a letter of 31 December 1546 of Pierfrancesco Riccio, *maggiordomo* of Cosimo I, adressing the Duke (Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Mediceo del Principato, 616, c. 64, 31 dic 1546, published in ASCHOFF, Wiebke, *Studien zu Niccolò Tribolo*, PhD dissertation, Frankfurt 1966), we learn the intention to clean the Medici Chapel, in order to start a new phase of works.

[115] It is worth to remind that Tribolo himself calls Michelangelo “Divine” in the letter he sent to Benedetto Varchi to reply on the *Paragone* debate.

[116] According to VASARI, *Vita di Bugiardini*, Tribolo left visible the signs of the tooth chisel to imitate the style of Michelangelo’s drawings.

The garden of Castello. The monumental grotesque

Just two days after the assassination of Duke Alessandro on 7 January 1537, a barely sixteen-year-old Cosimo de' Medici was elected by *Senato dei 48* «*capo e primario del governo della Città di Firenze e suo dominio e de' Magistrati e Offici di quella*» (chief of the government of the City of Florence and its domain and of the Magistrates and Offices therein), according to the imperial regulation of 1530. His very young age made the Florentine aristocracy believe that they could easily control and manipulate the new ducal government. However, Cosimo immediately managed to have his authority recognised with the Battle of Montemurlo on 1 August, defeating the members of the anti-Medici party led by Piero Strozzi who wanted to overthrow his dominion.[117]

Aware of the risks and dangers that threatened his safety in the city, in the early years of his Duchy, Cosimo preferred the privacy of country life. Therefore, he began to renovate his country estate in 1538, which stood at the extreme limits of Florence, in an area called Castello. The villa had belonged to the cadet branch of the Medici (*Popolani*) since 1477, when Giovanni di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, father of Giovanni dalle Bande Nere and Cosimo's grandfather, bought it together with his brother Lorenzo.[118]

Cosimo wanted to expand and rearrange the large garden of the property. In 1539 he entrusted the work to Tribolo, on the advice of Ottaviano de' Medici and Cristofano Rinieri, two of the most influential characters of Florence, and great supporters of Tribolo's work. Without ever being able to see his work finished, the garden of Castello kept Tribolo busy until his death in 1550. After that, the garden was completed by his son-in-law, David Fortini, and then by Vasari.

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[117] As for Cosimo I de' Medici (1519-1574), and his rise to power as Duke of Florence at first, and then Grand Duke of Tuscany from 1569 to his death, in the endless literature, see: SPINI, Giorgio, *Lettere di Cosimo I de' Medici*, Florence 1940; BALDINI, Baccio, *Vita di Cosimo Medici, primo Granduca di Toscana*, Florence 1578; GALLUZZI, Jacopo Riguccio, *Istoria del Granducato di Toscana sotto il governo della casa dei Medici*, Florence 1781; D'ADDARIO, Arnaldo, *La formazione dello Stato moderno in Toscana: da Cosimo il Vecchio a Cosimo I de' Medici*, Lecce 1976, pp. 193-245; DIAZ, Furio, *Il Granducato di Toscana. I Medici*, Torino 1976; FASANO GUARINI, Elena, *Cosimo I de' Medici – Duca di Firenze, Granduca di Toscana*, entry in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 1984, vol. XXX.

[118] Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, called Il Popolano (1463-1503), must not be confused with the Magnificent Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici (1449-1492). Lorenzo il Popolano was the patron of Sandro Botticelli, to whom he commissioned the most renowned paintings of Quattrocento, *The Birth of Venus* and *Primavera*, which were preserved in the Villa of Castello. See: MELI, Patrizia, *Lorenzo de' Medici (Lorenzo il Popolano)*, entry in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 2009, vol. LXXIII.

The iconography of the garden of Castello, on whose authorship of invention many doubts still remain, aimed at celebrating the Tuscan territory, which was now subject to the authority of Cosimo.[119] The main theme was in fact birth, intended as a metaphor for Cosimo's new government: the extraordinary wealth of waters, the idea of representing the Florentine rivers gushing from the mountains, the choice to place *Venus* (which is actually *Fiorenza*) *Anadyomene* at the centre of the garden, the presence of so many fountains, were all elements that referred to the concept of generation.

Fiesole. Metamorphosis and non finito

With a languid and defenceless gaze, the nymph is writhing to escape from the tight grip of the rocks. While the right leg is bent in an attempt to push the bubbling stone away, the left one is almost completely immersed in it. In a bold *contrapposto*, the chest and shoulders face away from the legs, as does the head. The mighty left arm is clinging to the rock, holding a crescent moon, which is the ancient sign of the city of Fiesole.[120] The other arm leans to support the weight of the body in a precarious balance, while the right hand is undergoing a mutation, with the fingers disappearing between the folds of the stalactites (fig.182).

According to legend, after diving into the waters of the river Mugnone, the nymph Fiesole was transformed into rock, thus creating the place where the city of Fiesole was founded.[121] Unfortunately, since the statue is the only survivor of a mostly dispersed and

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[119] To identify the author of the iconography of the Castello garden is rather difficult, and scholarship has proposed many names over the years. WRIGHT, David Roy, *The Villa Medici at Olmo a Castello: Its History and Iconography*, Princeton 1976, gives the paternity of the invention to Pierfrancesco Riccio, Cosimo's *maggiordomo* and highly influential mediator between the Duke and the artists. CONFORTI, Claudia, *L'invenzione delle allegorie territoriali e dinastiche del giardino di Castello a Firenze*, in *Il giardino come labirinto della storia*, Palermo 1984, pp. 190-197, proposes at first Luca Martini, central character of these years, erudite *dantista* and most likely first promoter of Varchi's *Paragone* debate. EADEM, *La grotta "degli animali" o "del diluvio" nel giardino di Villa Medici a Castello*, in *Quaderni di Palazzo Te*, IV, 1987, p. 71, believes that also the intellectual priest Cosimo Bartoli participated in the invention of iconography, followed by CAPECCHI, Gabriele, *Ipotesi su Castello. L'iconografia di Niccolò Tribolo e il giardino delle origini (1538-1550),* Florence 2017, p. 27. Lastly, TRIMBOLI, Marco, *Cristofano Rinieri e Cosimo I de' Medici. Rapporto d'amicizia e corrispondenze di mecenatismo*, in *Studi di storia dell'arte*, XIX, 2008, pp. 295-304, makes the name of Cristofano Rinieri, first relevant commissioner of Tribolo, and owner of a Villa at Castello as well.

[120] VASARI, *Vita Tribolo*: «*Fiesole, la quale tutta ignuda nel mezzo della nicchia esce fra le spugne di que' sassi, tenendo in mano una luna, che è l'antica insegna de' Fiesolani.*»

[121] Palla Rucellai il Giovane dedicated some verses to the myth of Fiesole: *Ma non premise il ciel, che lungo tempo / Della sua crudeltade ella godesse / Ch'un dì nel suo Mugnon bagnando i veli / Egli ancor vago della bella mano / Gelossi, e di tal ghiaccio ivi la strinse / Che il suo sangue gelando andando al core / Tosto fe' trasformarla in duro sasso, / Che Fiesol il nome anch'oggi serba*. See: DEL BRAVO, *Quella quiete*, p. 1485. In BOCCACCIO, Giovanni, *Ninfale Fiesolano,* octaves 436-437, we read Fiesole was founded by Atlante, with no mention of the legend of the nymph Fiesole transformed into rocks. In POLIZIANO, Agnolo*, Letters, edited and translated by S. Butler,* Cambridge-London 2006 (published for the first time in*: Omnia opera Angeli Politiani et alia quaedam lectu digna, quorum nomina in sequenti indice videre licet,* Venice 1498), Fiesole is mentioned as one of Atlante's daughters. See: CURTI,

dismembered sculptural complex, it is rather difficult to offer a convincing interpretation – especially considering that *Fiesole* had to accompany the lost statue of *River Mugnone*.

What must be underlined in the statue is its evident Michelangelism, which is fulfilled in two parallel directions. On the one hand, the features of *Fiesole* are a clear reference to the Medici Chapel *Night*, proposed not only by the pose, but also by the massive proportions. On the other, the contrast between the parts of the finished body and the raw rocks recalls the *Prisoners* that Michelangelo had started to sculpt for the Tomb of Julius II, abandoned in Florence (fig.183). In *Fiesole*, therefore, Tribolo probes the most recent elements of Michelangelo's sculpture present at that time in the city, and proposes an innovative synthesis.

We could say that with *Fiesole*, Tribolo reaches the apex of the formal investigation he had started in the Medici Chapel, copying the statues of Michelangelo.[122] The dating of the statue is not easy, since it is a *unicum* without effective contemporary comparisons. However, we are led to believe that it coincided with Tribolo's return to the Medici Chapel as supervisor in 1540s, when he assembled the still incomplete *Phases*. Indeed, *Fiesole* confirms that the Medici Chapel assembly operation was not dictated by lack of time or deference to the divine Michelangelo. Nor much by incapacity, given that the finishing of the rough-hewed statues was a phase of the sculptural process often left to the assistants, that Tribolo knew well, for he presumably had polished the statues of Jacopo Sansovino when he was still a young apprentice. The assembly of the incomplete statues was instead the result of Tribolo's arbitrary as well as convinced predilection for the "unfinished."

In *Fiesole* there is a basic semantic shift, suggested not so much by the profound understanding of the meanings of Michelangelo's sculpture, but rather by the observation and analysis of its final results, almost always incomplete, to which only in retrospect one can try to make sense. Thus the incompleteness of Michelangelo's statues – caused by the excessive workload – becomes with Tribolo part of the sculptural vocabulary, taking on the meaning of struggle between raw material and finished form. Following the legend, *Fiesole* is in all respects a prisoner of matter, exactly as are the unfinished Michelangelo *Prisoners* for the Tomb of Julius II. With the only difference being that the incompleteness of *Fiesole* is already

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Elisa, *"Tutte eran ninfe a quel tempo chiamate". Boccaccio e le ninfe: osservazioni sulla tradizione toscana*, in *Lettere italiane*, LXVII, 2, 2016, pp. 246-265.

[122] WILES, *Tribolo*, p. 70, had the merit of discovering *Fiesole* and assigning the statue to Tribolo, and finishes her essay with these words: «*I think this relief may stand as the masterpiece of Tribolo's mature period – his most successful venture in the Michelangelesque vein.*»

justified at a conceptual level, whereas that of Michelangelo's sculptures is only a contingency that occurred in the executive phase.

The use of the "unfinished" as an expression of the grotesque vocabulary, giving shape to metamorphosis, finds an interesting precedent in the work of Filippino Lippi. Among the grotesque decorations of the Carafa Chapel, Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome, dating back to the end of the 1480s, we see a naked female figure whose raised arms are turning into wide vegetal leaves (fig.185). The pose is taken from a menade of an ancient Bacchic sarcophagus, now preserved in the British Museum, London, but originally located inside the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome. From a drawing by the Anonimo Settentrionale dating back to 1460 (fig.184), we know that, contrary to today, at that time the aforementioned menade appeared without arms and right leg.[123] Filippino compensates for the missing fragments by inserting natural details, thus giving life to a further prototype, that of the human figure in vegetal metamorphosis, which was to be widely diffused among Tuscan artists of the early sixteenth century.[124] We find similar figures in Donato Benti's sculptural production in Pietrasanta, dating back to the first decade of the sixteenth century (fig.187);[125] Benedetto da Rovezzano used it in the *Soderini Tomb,* Church of Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence (1512-13, fig.186);[126] we see a man on his knees with vegetative arms also in the *Holy House* of Loreto (1510-20s, fig.188), whose authorship can be assigned either to Andrea Sansovino (figures not so dissimilar to this are seen in the *Basso-Della Rovere Tombs* in Rome, 1506, fig.74), or to Benedetto da Rovezzano, who, as we have already said, worked from 1515 to 1518 at Loreto.[127]

The ornamental repertoire developed by Sansovino and Rovezzano, in the footsteps of the antiquarian research of Lippi, was of extreme importance to the art of Tribolo, who seems

[123] The drawing by Anonimo Settentrionale is preserved in Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Cod. F. 237, inf. Nr. 1707v. A drawing of the same menade is also visible in Amico Aspertini's *Wolfegg Codex*, ff. 31v, 32. See: PARLATO, Enrico, *La decorazione della Cappella Carafa: allegoria ed emblematica negli affreschi di Filippino Lippi alla Minerva*, in DANESI SQUARZINA, Silvia, *Roma centro ideale della cultura dell'antico nei secoli XV e XVI*, Milan 1989, pp. 169-184.

[124] As for the implementation of ancient statuary fragments into the grotesque imagery, see: GUEST, *The understanding*, p. 442-493.

[125] In the Pulpit of the Church of San Martino, Pietrasanta, 1508, there is a female figure standing, whose legs are immersed in tree trunk and the arms are leaves. In the Baptisamal font in Church of Santi Lorenzo e Barbara of Serravezza, Lucca, 1517, we see a woman seated, whose limbs are becoming plants. See: RUSSO, *Le botteghe versiliesi*, pp. 48-54.

[126] On Benedetto da Rovezzano and the imagery of *Pier Soderini Tomb*, see: MATUCCI, Benedetta, *Ornamentation simbolique. Una rilettura del cenotafio Soderini di Benedetto da Rovezzano*, in *Artista*, 2007, pp. 74-109.

[127] FATTORINI, *Andrea Sansovino*, p. 246, confidently assigns that figure to Andrea.

to embrace their pantheistic philosophy with growing conviction, placing metamorphosis at the centre of creation.

River Gods

The influence that the Medici Chapel statues had on Tribolo's sculpture does not stop only at *Fiesole*. The Castello garden also contemplated the statues of *Arno* and *Mugnone*, which were to act as fountains. Although the statues have been lost, Vasari informs us that they were made by Tribolo himself, providing a useful description of them. The grey stone statue of *Mugnone*, which accompanied that of *Fiesole*, was about two meters long, and carried on his shoulder the vase from which the water gushed. From Vasari's words alone, it is difficult to understand the pose he assumed, but we can deduce that it must have been somehow inspired by the Medici Chapel recumbent *Day* («with the left leg crossed over the right»). We can anyway get an idea of its appearance from a most likely precise replica made by Battista Lorenzi, representing the same River God (fig.191).[128] The statue of *Arno*, «which were completed by Tribolo to perfection,» had a vase resting on one thigh, and leaned on the Marzocco lion, the symbol of Florence. In all likelihood, he must have been half-reclined as well.[129]

Today, the Bargello preserves two clay models of *River Gods* (fig.189). Anatomically impeccable yet extraordinarily daring in pose, their quality is excellent and superior in inventiveness to the clay copies that Tribolo had made of the *Phases of Day*. This could make one suspect that it was not Tribolo who made them, but rather a later sculptor, perhaps Giambologna, who made the Boboli *Fountain of Oceanus*. However, looking at the clay and wax models by Giambologna, we immediately notice their sketchy and hasty nature, far from the powerful uniformity of the two *bozzetti* of Bargello.[130] These two models are indeed to be assigned to Tribolo, who after his careful studies of the sculptural apparatus of the Medici Chapel, demonstrates to master, at least in clay modelling, the complicated figurative language of Michelangelo.

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[128] Battista Lorenzi's piece dates back to 1582 and was made for the Florentine garden of Jacopo Salviati (today Palazzo Capponi). Documents of the commission are reported in: UTZ, Hildegard – RAGGIO, Olga, *Skulpturen und andere Arbeiten des Battista Lorenzi*, in *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 1973, 7, p. 69. The connection of Lorenzi's statue with Tribolo's is due to: CAPECCHI, *Ipotesi su Castello*, p. 71.

[129] Most likely, the iconography and pose of Tribolo's *Arno* are reproduced in a drawing by Vasari, Florence, Gabinetto dei disegni e delle stampe degli Uffizi, O 394 (fig.192).

[130] The *Oceanus Fountain* in the Boboli Garden, Florence, presents three seated figures, allegories of the rivers of the world, nourishing the ocean. There is a terracotta model of a seated *River God* by Giambologna, dated 1580, at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, much resembling the two Bargello bozzetti. However, the surface of the London terracotta features a remarkably rough modelling, significantly distant from the Florence ones.

The Bargello *River Gods* do not present the features of the Castello *Rivers* described by Vasari, thus excluding the hypothesis that they were preparatory studies for *Arno* and *Mugnone*.[131] In addition to being almost perfectly specular – a sign of belonging to one same sculptural group – the two bozzetti are in fact seated and not lying down, taking on a complex twist, with the legs widely spread.

They might be the preparatory models of the colossal *Rivers Badraga and Ibero*, which Tribolo conceived for the triumphal arrival into Florence of the Emperor Charles V in 1536. They were part of the ephemeral apparatuses prepared for that grandiose event, and had to accompany the colossal statue of *Hercules against Hydra*, which was placed in Piazza San Felice. Being made of ephemeral materials, of those colossuses today remains only the description provided by Vasari, who says little if not to report the attributes that characterised them. In any case, the dating of Bargello's *bozzetti* to 1536, the year of Charles V's entry into Florence, is consistent with the execution of the clay copies of *Phases*, to which they are stylistically related.

As a further confirmation of an assignment of the two marvellous Bargello clay models to Tribolo, it should be considered that the unusual sitting pose of the two rivers had certainly been investigated by Tribolo in the *River God* that he sculpted for the villa of Cristofano Rinieri in Castello, today Villa Corsini (fig.190). In this grey stone statue, which dates back to the same years as the works for the garden of Villa Medici, Tribolo resumes the posture of Michelangelo's *Ignudi* of the Sistine Ceiling, offering though an entirely innovative interpretation. The flowing beard imitating the flowing of the river is a motif taken from Donatello's *Abraham and Isaac* for the Campanile of the Florentine cathedral – and will also be repeated later by Tribolo's master, Jacopo Sansovino, in his *Neptune* for the Palazzo Ducale in Venice. Interestingly, the statue is composed of fragments stuck together, as confirmed by Vasari («which figure is made of pieces, and put together with such diligence and art, that it appears to be all of one block»), a practice considered by Benvenuto Cellini «*un'arte da ciabattini*» (an art for cobblers).[132]

Tribolo proves therefore to be particularly receptive in appropriating the figurative language of Michelangelo's Medici Chapel. After all, the *Phases of Day* are nothing more than elaborations of the prototypes of recumbent figures, which in ancient times were used for the

[131] GIANNOTTI, *Il teatro*, p. 79, considers instead the two clay *bozzetti* at Bargello to be very initial preparatory models for *Arno* and *Mugnone.*
[132] Albeit Cellini himself assembled different fragments both for the restoration of the Greek fragmented marble then become *Ganymede*, and for the grey stone *Narcissus*. See: CELLINI, Benvenuto, *La Vita*.

allegories of rivers. Tribolo acquires the ancient prototype from Michelangelo, brings it back to its original function, and inserts further formal suggestions (the seated pose for example), often taken from other artistic moments by Michelangelo himself. He thus creates a highly functional and above all particularly successful mixture, given that Michelangelo's "divinisation" was already underway, making the reference to Michelangelo's work a *conditio sine qua non* of any clients of the time.

1540s: The struggle with Michelangelism. The decoration of the Laurentian Library pavement: Grotesque in an intellectual space

In May 1542 Tribolo was appointed *Architettore della Chiesa* of San Lorenzo by order of Cosimo I.[133] Having now become the Duke's trusted man, Tribolo received the onerous task of finally completing the two Laurentian buildings abandoned by Michelangelo in 1534.

From a superficial analysis, it might seem that Tribolo mounted the not yet finished *Phases of Day* on the tombs of the Medici Chapel, only out of deference and respect for the work of Michelangelo. However, we have shown above that in truth he consciously did it, responding to a personal and innovative aesthetic taste, which in those same years Tribolo was formalising in the Castello garden. Therefore, what might seem an obsequious intervention, actually takes on a completely opposite value, with Tribolo deliberately imposing his will on, and in opposition to, Michelangelo – who, judging from the late assembly of the *Tomb of Julius II*, preferred that the statues be finished and perfected, even by different hands from his own. This intervention by Tribolo – a modern curatorial act in all respects – has imposed a new aesthetic and therefore a new iconography on the entire Medici Chapel, and consequently has remarkably conditioned our judgment both on the chapel and on the entire work of Michelangelo. We might state that the formalisation of the unfinished originated exactly from the assembly of the *Phases of Day*.

The assessment usually reserved for Tribolo as supervisor of the works of San Lorenzo is based above all on his interventions in the Laurentian Library, which were two. On the one hand he attempted to start the construction of the staircase which was to connect the vestibule (*Ricetto*) with the reading room; on the other hand, he was responsible for the execution of the ceiling and floor of the reading room. Both interventions were based on very general indications that Michelangelo had left before leaving Florence.

The construction of the stairs and the wooden ceiling were particularly dear to Clement VII, who especially in regards to the decoration of the ceiling, begged Michelangelo to create something as close as possible to the increasingly widespread fashion of the grotesque, even providing the stuccos by Giovanni da Udine at the Medici Palace as reference («*Et se voi vi potessi acomodare qualche sua fantasia, o vero livrea, come à ffatto in quella camera che fe' maestro Giovanni da Udine, credo l'arebbe caro*», Fattucci to Michelangelo, 13 April 1524).

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[133] ASL (Archivio San Lorenzo), 2129, fol. 5r, 8 May 1542: *"Niccolo detto il Tribolo scultore per ordine di S. Ecc.a fu dal nostro capitolo eletto Architettore della Chiesa con quella provisione che da S. Ecc.a darà dichiarata, come al libro di partiti segnato B."*

Thus, it is ironic that exactly the execution of those elements which the pope more often and with greater concern urged, in the end was not due to Michelangelo, who in fact did everything to neglect that portion of the works. Instead, it was Tribolo who had to take on this task, presumably because the world of ornaments was much more congenial to him than to Michelangelo.

The procedure that Tribolo carries out on the floor significantly indicates how, from Michelangelo's vague hints, Tribolo still managed to create a language, albeit surely derivative, however enriched and enhanced by the most diverse references. After all, Tribolo adopts on the floor the artistic method he has always used, that is, to pay more attention to the final result than to the reasons that motivate its realisation. That is why the floor is an alien element both to the specific intellectual building and to Michelangelo's original ideation.

Ricetto's Staircase

Before delving into the decorative imagery of the ceiling and floor of the reading room, it is necessary to dwell on Tribolo's failed execution of the staircase of the Ricetto.[134] As can be deduced from the letters between Michelangelo and the papal intermediary Giovan Francesco Fattucci, the design of the staircase began before 10 March 1524.[135] Initially, the staircase should have been a simple double-ramp one («*salita a due scale*»[136]), as represented in a *folio* kept in the Archivio of Casa Buonarroti (fig.194), and further confirmed by the drawing 92A in the same collection (fig.195). However, a year later, in April 1525, the pope requested a modification to the project, wishing for the staircase to be composed of a single monumental ramp that would occupy the entire Ricetto («*una che tenessi et pigliassi tutto il ricetto*»[137]).

The evolution of the staircase design is clearly visible in the aforementioned drawing 92A of Casa Buonarroti, where we can see two different double-ramp solutions, and some first meditations on the monumental single staircase on the *verso* of the sheet. According to what Wittkower argues, Michelangelo might have produced many other solutions for the staircase,

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[134] On the progress of the staircase's planning, see: WITTKOWER, Rudolph, *Michelangelo's Biblioteca Laurenziana*, in *The art bulletin*, XVI, 1934, pp. 155-180; GRONEGGER, Thomas, *Il progetto per la scala del Ricetto, da Michelangelo al Tribolo a Vasari ad Ammannati: nuove interpretazioni*, in RUSCHI, Pietro, *Michelangelo architetto a San Lorenzo*, Florence 2007, pp. 105-127; FERRETTI, Emanuela, *Vasari, Ammannati e l'eredità di Michelangelo nei cantieri di San Lorenzo*, in ACIDINI, Cristina – PIRAZZOLI, Giacomo, *Ammannati e Vasari per la città dei Medici*, Florence 2011, pp. 35-47.

[135] FATTUCCI, Giovan Francesco, *Letter to Michelangelo,* from Rome to Florence, 10 March 1524, in *Il carteggio*, III, 1973, pp. 41-42.

[136] *Ibidem*, 9 April 1524, pp. 71-72.

[137] *Ibidem*, 12 April 1525, pp. 141-142.

which, due to their variability, later proved to be of difficult understanding for Tribolo, when he was entrusted with its execution[138].

Between 1525 and 1533, there is no news about the design of the staircase. Yet, in summer 1533, we note a renewed zeal in Michelangelo's correspondence.[139] On 20 August 1533 the contract for the execution of the staircase was stipulated, with Michelangelo still present in Florence.[140] Thus, the carving of the steps started, but was interrupted the following year, due to the Pope's death and to Michelangelo's abandonment of the construction site. Most likely, the few steps carved in this phase are the same «*quattro scaglioni*» assembled by Tribolo when he was asked to complete the work left unfinished by Michelangelo.[141]

Concerning the shape of the steps, several proposals have been made, based on the difficult interpretation of the word "*rivolte*" written in the contract of August 1533. The most convincing of these proposals is the recent one by Gronegger, who believes that the term *rivolte* indicates a discontinuity in the course of the step, which therefore should have been configured with a rectilinear and tridentate surface, as can be seen in an anonymous drawing, kept at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (RCAF, 1949 19.92.90 v, fig.197).[142]

When in the second half of the 1540s, Tribolo installed the four steps, he soon realised that their assembly would have damaged the architectural elements already built on the wall on which the staircase had to rest. Specifically, part of the volutes supporting the horizontal moulding should have been cut (fig.196), hence Tribolo's need to contact Michelangelo, and ask him for elucidations about the project. Tribolo visited Michelangelo in Rome, but the trip was not successful, as Michelangelo was extremely reticent.[143]

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[138] WITTKOWER, Rudolph, *Michelangelo's Biblioteca Laurenziana*, in *The art bulletin*, XVI, 1934, pp. 123-218.

[139] See: DEL PIOMBO, Sebastiano, *Letter to Michelangelo*, from Rome to Florence, 23 August 1533, in *Il carteggio*, IV, 1979, pp. 44-45, where Del Piombo encourages Michelangelo to set the works at San Lorenzo, including the staircase, as rapidly and as best as possible; FIGIOVANNI, Battista, *Letter to Michelangelo*, from Florence to Florence, 31 August 1533, in Ibidem, p. 52.

[140] See: GRONEGGER, *Il progetto*, pp. 106-107, nn. 15-16. The contract says: «*In che* però *si dichiara expresso che li scaglioni ànno a essere 14, tutti d'un pezzo l'uno e massime li primi 7 colle rivolte, sanza che si dimostri alcun convento.*»

[141] VASARI, *Vita Tribolo*: «*Mettendo poi mano il Tribolo per ordine di sua eccellenza voler finire le scale della libreria di San Lorenzo, cioè quelle che sono nel ricetto dinanzi alla porta, messi che n'ebbe quattro scaglioni, non ritrovando né il modo, né le misure di Michelagnolo*…»

[142] For an analysis of the Metropolitan Museum drawing, and its implications in retracing Tribolo's executing the Ricetto staircase, see: catalogue entry n° 38 in RUSCHI, Pietro, *Michelangelo architetto a San Lorenzo*, Florence 2007, pp. 136-137.

[143] VASARI, *Vita Tribolo*: «*Con ordine del Duca* [Tribolo] *andò a Roma, non solo per intendere il parere di Michelagnolo intorno alle dette scale, ma per far opera di condurre lui a Firenze. Ma non gli riuscì né l'uno, né l'altro, perciò che non volendo Michelagnolo partire di Roma con bel modo si licenziò, e quanto alle scale mostrò non ricordarsi più né di misure né d'altro.* »

Yet, Tribolo was not discouraged, and continued the construction of the staircase, as Gronegger's findings and analysis convincingly demonstrate (fig.198). Tribolo finished the execution and assembly of the tridentate steps of the base platform, on which a further single-flight staircase, leading to the door of the reading room, was to be mounted. Probably, before his death in September 1550, Tribolo was only able to prepare the support structure for the upper single-flight staircase, without assembling it. When at the end of the 1550s, the project was taken over by Vasari and Ammannati, the staircase assembled by Tribolo was dismantled and rebuilt *ex novo*, referring to a new model made by Michelangelo, who this time proved to be more open to cooperation.

Since it was based on the imprinting of the works begun in August 1533, the staircase executed by Tribolo had to be faithful to Michelangelo's directives, although these must have been vague and certainly not unequivocal. Tribolo's staircase therefore reflects Michelangelo's original intentions, those prior to his departure for Rome in 1534. Michelangelo proves not to be particularly sensitive to architectural design – the incident of the collision between the staircase and architectural elements of the wall might be not so much due to a bad interpretation by Tribolo of Michelangelo's drawings, but rather due to a blatant oversight by Michelangelo himself at the design level. It should also be noted that the staircase assembled by Tribolo did not present any kind of particular proto-baroque curved line in the modelling of the steps, as instead the staircase still present in the Ricetto as assembled by Ammannati in 1559 does.

The episode of the Ricetto staircase as reconstructed here, portrays Michelangelo as an artist not entirely at ease in architectural design. Tribolo's staircase – and therefore Michelangelo's original staircase – does not seem particularly revolutionary, rather appearing as a hasty solution to a rather ordinary initial idea (the double-flight staircase leaning against the walls). Only the intervention of Vasari and Ammannati, more than twenty years after the beginning of the work on the original staircase – therefore in a completely different artistic era and with the marginal involvement of Michelangelo – would have led to that architectural oddity that is the staircase as we know it today.

«Qualche fantasia nuova» Ceiling and floor

In all probability, Tribolo went to Rome after 1546 – that is, after assembling the statues in the Medici Chapel – probably between 1547 and 1548. According to what Vasari says, Tribolo did not go to Rome only to talk with Michelangelo, but also to study new "*alla rustica*" decorations of terracotta floors. At the time when Tribolo went to Rome, there were two main examples of floor decoration with red and white terracotta in the city (according to the *Preface* of *Lives*): one was Raphael's Vatican "Sala dei Chiaroscuri," where the floor uses two-tone terracotta to create geometric motifs; the other was in Castel Sant'Angelo, where Pope Paul III had commissioned Perin del Vaga to restore a wing of the building, and in one of the rooms there originally was a two-tone terracotta floor with the coat of arms of the Farnese Pope (today replaced by a much more sumptuous marble floor).

However, it must be recognised that the Laurentian Library floor unfolds an intricate ornamental design that for its figurative complexity and technical sophistication far exceeds any contemporary example. According to Catalano, Tribolo worked hard to obtain such sophisticated results, seeking to imitate the "*niello*" and marble scratching technique.[144]

As mentioned, Clement VII strongly advised Michelangelo in relation to the decoration of the wooden ceiling as early as March 1524, when in a letter from Fattucci dated the 10th of that month, the pope requested that the «*caro palco*» had to be «*bello et non riquadrato, ma con qualche fantasia nuova*» (the dear ceiling had to be beautiful and not squared, but rather with some new fantasy). Again in a letter of 3 April 1524, the pope reaffirmed that he did not want the decoration to present «*riquadramenti come sono questi qua*» (frames like these) but rather an unspecified «*bello andamento.*»

Michelangelo promptly sends drawings which, as it turns out from a letter of 13 April, finally satisfied the pope, who however adds some notes on the dimensional correspondence with the decoration of the floor (*que' di sotto*), by which date Michelangelo was evidently already working. Furthermore, significantly, it is more clearly defined here what was meant by "new fantasies," specifying that they had to be *livree* (to be understood as dynastic symbols), and Fattucci suggests that to fully please the pope, Michelangelo had to take as

[144] CATALANO, Maria Ida, *Il pavimento della Biblioteca Mediceo Laurenziana,* Florence 1992, pp. 32-34. Grooves were made on the red clay backdrop according to a predetermined design, then saturated with thinner layers of white clay. Most likely, red clay was taken at Impruneta, and the white one at Montelupo. Red clay must have been cooked first, but before cooking, it must have been engraved to be filled with the white clay in the second cooking. The smoothness of the pavement is indicative of a treatment with linseed oil or waxes, repeatedly passed on the surface in order to obtain a more effective protection.

reference the stucco decoration that Giovanni da Udine had carried out in Palazzo Medici in Florence, also commissioned by Pope Clement.[145]

Even a year after that dense exchange of letters taking place in March-April 1524, the pope continues to advise Michelangelo so that the ceiling is executed according to his precise will. On 12 April 1525 the pope asked to revise once again the project for the ceiling, particularly insisting on the fantasy of the decoration. On 17 June 1526, Michelangelo writes that he cannot yet start working on the ceiling since the wood is not yet ready («*sollicitereno che e' si secchino el più che si potrà*»), but that he intends to do it as soon as possible.

The execution remains suspended until the second phase of the Laurentian works, that is, after the resumption of 1531. On 17 July 1533, Sebastiano del Piombo warned Michelangelo that the pope would send *zoveni scultori* from Loreto – he is referring to Tribolo and Montelupo – also mentioning the ceiling as still to be built.[146] According to the letter, Catalano believes that as early as this date, Tribolo had been in charge of the execution of the wooden ceiling of the Library.[147] However, given that at this stage of his career Tribolo had no experience in wood decoration, this theory seems rather unlikely.

According to documents, the floor begins to be installed on 8 September 1549, and proceeded in parallel with the execution of the ceiling.[148] The material execution of the floor is carried out by Santi Buglioni, while the wooden ceiling and benches are done by Giovan Battista del Tasso and Antonio di Marco di Giano known as Carota. Given that in the documents of the Fabbriche Medicee Tribolo appears as referee for payments to the workers, we understand that he was supervisor of the works, and therefore most likely also the designer of the floor and ceiling.

The starting point for the invention of the decoration of the ceiling and floor was in all probability Michelangelo's drawing 126Ar of Casa Buonarroti (fig.199), which seems to refer to the ancient coffered ceilings, in particular in the version reinvented by Giuliano da Sangallo in the vestibule of the sacristy of Santo Spirito.[149] We see a large central square, separated from the three gabled rectangles of the sides by large bands. The central square has small rectangular panels at the corners, and an ellipse at the centre, at the ends of which are *bucrani*

[145] CECCHI, *Le perdute decorazioni*.
[146] As for the exchange of letters, see: *Il carteggio*, III, 1973, pp. 41-42, 57-58, 64-65, 71-72, 141-142, 227-228; IV, 1979, pp. 17-19.
[147] CATALANO, *Il pavimento*, p. 13.
[148] The documents are published in: MARQUAND, Allan, *Benedetto and Santi Buglioni*, Princeton 1921; BORSI, Franco, *Firenze del Cinquecento*, Rome 1974.
[149] FROMMEL, Sabine, *Giuliano da Sangallo*, Florence 2014, p. 119-120.

with garlands. To frame the geometric composition, Michelangelo envisaged some unidentified figures, which Wittkower calls "angels," but which were more likely Victories as seen in the ancient Triumphal Arches. Also between the three lateral gabled rectangles, Michelangelo placed standing figures.

The material execution does not slavishly follow Michelangelo's project, a symptom of the intervention by Tribolo. If the decrease of the lateral gabled rectangles from three to two can be traced back to the perplexities that Clement VII already showed in April 1524 (thus making this date a useful *ante quem* for dating the Casa Buonarroti drawing), the flowering of purely ornamental elements is to be assigned to the mind of Tribolo.

The wooden ornamentation was part of a long artistic tradition, which at the beginning of the sixteenth century found in Baccio d'Agnolo one of the most exquisite representatives, and which in the middle of the century saw in Giovan Battista del Tasso the most up-to-date spokesperson. Yet, the same cannot be said of the two-tone terracotta decoration, and the floor of the Laurentian Library was in all respects a bizarre peculiarity in Florentine art, gathering and mixing the most varied knowledge and figurative repertoires.

What is interesting to determine now is the presumed Michelangelism of the inventions developed in the decoration of the ceiling and floor of the Laurentian Library, given that studies tend to mechanically connect them to the ornamentation deployed in the Medici Chapel in the previous two decades.

It would instead be more advantageous to relate the fantasies of the Library with what Tribolo was simultaneously executing in the garden of Castello, where the grotesque, now risen to monumental dimensions, gave image to values of natural generation and growth. We will examine how such a figurative repertoire, marked by completely earthly instances, could fit into a place devoted to intellectual and spiritual growth such as the Library. The comparison with the decorations put in place in other contemporary libraries will be useful for this purpose.

The feeling, equivalent to that which we have when looking at the Medici Chapel so bare in its unfinished state, is that Tribolo, voluntarily or not, conceived a sparkling and luxuriant frame, of which, however, he completely ignored the content. This is exactly where the definition of Tribolo's artistic profile lies, well exemplified by his awkward participation in the lectures of the Accademia Fiorentina.

Masks. The Library as a grotto

Looking at the sumptuous wooden frames of the ceiling and their mirroring on the two-tone terracotta floor, it seems at least singular to note that the reading room of the Laurentian Library does not present any narrative cycle hinting at the saving power of knowledge, as instead happens in the Piccolomini Library of Siena, in the Vatican of Rome, and in the Marciana of Venice, where we find ponderous decorative cycles, mixing medieval encyclopedism with the typically humanistic cult of intellectual personalities.[150]

If Michelangelo had properly completed the Laurentian project, he supposedly would have inserted a narrative cycle within the grotesque decoration, as might be confirmed by observing two facts. The first is that Giovanni da Udine's stucco and fresco decoration in Palazzo Medici, that the pope pointed out as reference for the decoration of the library, also included «some stories in half-relief, executed in stucco,»[151] thus mixing ornament with a figuration that gave image to the virtues of the client – not dissimilar to that executed in the Vatican Logge for Leo X. The second fact is a drawing by Vasari, where he reproduces with some modifications the ceiling of the Laurentian Library (fig.201),[152] and inserts human figures inside the panels, forming an encomiastic figurative cycle. It might be likely that what we see in the drawing 126A of Casa Buonarroti is therefore a frame within which to insert a much wider narrative cycle. However, since no further Michelangelo studies related to the decoration of the reading room are known, reconstructing the possible narrative cycle is extremely difficult, as well as misleading.

Despite this, the possibility that the ceiling was originally intended to host a narrative cycle opens up the important question of the gap that separated Michelangelo's intentions from Tribolo's execution. This gap was caused on the one hand by the difficulties in communicating and interpreting Michelangelo's vague indications; and on the other hand, by the awareness that Michelangelo's signature on the work was a sufficient reason to ensure its success, therefore any further intervention risked distorting its identifying characteristics. This unbridgeable distance generated a fundamental misunderstanding, which led to a distortion of Michelangelo's original project.

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[150] As for the iconographic programmes of these libraries, see: RANFAGNI, Tommaso, *La Libreria Piccolomini nel Duomo di Siena. Ipotesi per un'esegesi iconologica*, in *Schifanoia*, 42/43, 2012(2013), pp. 285-294; MANFREDI, Antonio, *L'antica sede della Biblioteca Vaticana*, in PIAZZONI, Ambrogio – MANFREDI, Antonio – FRASCARELLI, Dalma – ZUCCARI, Alessandro – VIAN, Paolo, *La Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, Città del Vaticano 2012; IVANOFF, Nicola, *La Libreria Marciana. Arte e iconologia*, Florence 1968.

[151] VASARI, *Vita di Giovanni da Udine*. Palazzo Medici decoration is today lost, but it is known due to Vasari's description.

[152] London, Courtald Institute of Arts, D.1952.RW.35. For an analysis of the drawing, see: HÄRB, Florian, *Drawings of Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574)*, Rome 2015, p. 354.

As Catalano rightly reveals, the iconographic programme developed by Tribolo in the ceiling and floor of the reading room does not seem to respect any rigorous design, so that the decoration accumulates without carrying out a coherent and uniform thought, pursuing rather a "playful *varietas*."[153] Tribolo's decoration therefore seems not to respect any precise design, being rather a disordered accumulation of symbols and emblems, mostly praising the glory of Duke Cosimo (i.e. the Capricorn, fig.211).[154]

Little can be added to the analysis already made by historians of the library's decorative apparatus. However, some clarifications can be made, in particular on Tribolo's evident obsession with the representation of satirical masks, which Catalano believes to be a citation, then reworked, of the studies on the theme made by Michelangelo for the Medici Chapel.

We are thinking in particular of the drawing representing three satirical faces and two wrestlers, preserved at the British Museum (1859.0625.557, fig.58), traditionally assigned to Michelangelo, dated to the second half of the 1520s and related to the decoration of the Medici Chapel. Several variations of the hand of copyists are known, and the drawing is therefore usually placed as the basis of a certain "grotesque Michelangelism," a hasty historical judgment of which Tribolo is often the victim.[155] Although the provenance of the drawing from Casa Buonarroti suggests an attribution to Michelangelo, many elements lead us to the possibility of moving the assignment to an artist gravitating around Castello during the work on the garden, either Tribolo himself, Montorsoli, or Pierino da Vinci.[156]

The British Museum drawing would be much more coherently included in the decoration of the Castello *Fontana Grande*, which deploys a considerable number of satirical faces with varied and bizarre expressions (fig.210), and, above all, contemplated at its peak a marble statue of *Hercules and Antaeus* already at the beginning of its design.[157] Notably, we

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[153] CATALANO, *Il pavimento*, p. 8.

[154] According to GIOVIO, Paolo, *Ragionamento di Mons. Paolo Giovio sopra i motti, disegni d'arme, d'amore, che comunemente chiamano imprese*, Venice 1556, p. 31, the Capricorn would have watched over the government of Cosimo.

[155] Drawings with masks and faces, derived from the British Museum sheet: Frankfurt, Städel Museum, 392r; Florence, Casa Buonarroti, r; Lille, Musée d'Art et Histoire, 95. The expression "grotesque Michelangelism" wants to synthesise the scholarly tendency to consider Michelangelo a pioneer of the grotesque decoration. For example, see CATALANO, *Il pavimento*, p. 18: « *Per le invenzioni ornamentali, la Sagrestia fu uno dei testi eletti dalla generazione della Maniera che qui scopriva nella radice vitalistica e individualizzante di maschere e mascheroni un patrimonio di immagini straordinarie destinato ad avere larga fortuna. Quelle invenzioni erano frutto del pensiero michelangiolesco unico e totalizzante che rompendo ogni limite consueto, collegava figura ed ornato riconducendoli ad una matrice comune.*» It is evident how Catalano's examination is highly influenced by Vasari's statement on Michelangelo's "*braking the ties and chains of tradition.*"

[156] As for the change of attribution of the British Museum drawing, see chapter 1, § *Grotesque imagery in drawings*.

[157] VASARI, *Vita Montorsoli*, writes that Montorsoli started to sculpt the marble statue of *Hercules and Antaeus*, after having made a full-scale model. However, due to some bad rumors perpetuated by Bandinelli, Duke Cosimo and Pierfrancesco Riccio decided to fire Montorsoli from the work, who therefore went to Genoa leaving the

know of two studies of *Hercules and Antaeus* made by Tribolo, the drawing 1944 of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest (fig.216), and above all the drawing 53F of Casa Buonarroti (figg.61-62). The style and technique (red chalk) of Casa Buonarroti is consistent both with the drawing of the British Museum, and with the Ashmolean Museum P317, which represents two sketches of wrestlers: all three could be connected to the design of the Castello fountains.[158]

The obsessive deployment of masks along the surface of the floor of the Laurentian Library (each of the thirteen squares has twelve masks inside, and many others are counted in the lateral grotesque bands, fig.209) would then be no longer referable to Michelangelo's caricatural studies, but rather to Tribolo's genuine investigation of the motif of the satirical face, which fits well into the garden decoration – and many were in Castello.

We therefore begin to understand that the imagery that Tribolo executed for the decoration of the library has its roots in the research that he himself was carrying out in parallel in the Castello garden. This operation of free figurative reuse, which does not find solid justification in an environment of refined humanistic culture such as the library, can be explained by an incorrect interpretation of the ideas provided by Michelangelo's project. In other words, Tribolo (and the Medici court with him) rejected the mere function of frame for grotesque decoration, and instead elevated it as the one and only theme of the entire figurative structure.

The negation of the allegorical-narrative figuration, generally used for the decoration of the other Renaissance libraries, and the consequent preponderance of pure ornamental amusement, shifts the creative axis from the content to the frame. The frame becomes the subject, whilst the content becomes completely abstract and intangible.[159] The real content of

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statue unfinished. This must be happening in the first years of 1540s, thus at the very beginning of the Castello works. The bronze statue of *Hercules and Antaeus*, still adorning the top of *Fontana Grande*, would eventually be made by Ammannati twenty years later.

[158] As for Tribolo's drawings, see: LLOYD, Christopher, *Drawings attributable to Niccolò Tribolo*, in *Master drawings,* VI, 1968, 3, pp. 243-245 (many attributions are however wrong and great part of the published drawings are assignable to the Florentine painter Jacone); WALDMAN, Louis Alexander, *A drawing by Tribolo for Montorsoli's lost Hercules and Anteaus at Castello*, in *Bullettin du Musée Hoingrois des Beaux-Arts*, 105, 2006(2008), pp. 93-100, 259-263; DAVIS, Charles, *Michelangelo or Tribolo? Drawings for sculpture*, in ECHINGER-MAURACH, Claudia, *Michelangelo als Zeichner*, Münster 2013, pp. 189-199. The drawings surely assignable to Tribolo are: Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphique, 50 (a preliminary study for the equestrian statue of Giovanni delle Bande Nere), 49 (the project for the niche of Aesculapius for Castello. The statue of Aesculapius, carved by Antonio di Gino Lorenzi, and the basin are now in Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, Florence); London, Sir John Soane's Museum, vol. 114, ins. 18, f. 19 (various studies for niches, probably for Castello), f. 14r (the project for the niche of Pan, for the grotto of Castello, never made); Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, Kdz 25281 (the project for the niche of Neptune, for the grotto of Castello, never made); Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, O1172 (the project for the niche of Mercury for Castello, never made).

[159] On the shift from frame to field of ornament, see: GUEST, Clare Estelle Lapraik, *The understanding of ornament in the Italian Renaissance*, Leiden 2016, pp. 476-477, 580-581.

the library is in fact the book collection, therefore the "study" taking place in the ergonomic benches of the reading room.

Therefore, the library decoration is a frame that, with its intertwining and unpredictable accumulation, shows the disturbing and dangerous chaos of earthly life, from which the provident scholar rises thanks to his culture. Indeed, the act of discovery is represented in the panel of the so-called *Letto di Policleto*, an ancient theme that depicts Psyche unveiling a sleeping Eros – Soul discovering Love. The spiritual elevation is instead represented by the chariot with the two horses of the passions, taking up the Platonic myth. In the midst of the vortex of plant branches, masks and emblems, these are the only two images that consistently present the function of the place (fig.211).

The mask can take on multiple meanings within Renaissance symbolism, extending from the concept of imitation, and therefore of fraud and distorted appearance – even to include art – to that of worldliness and ostentation of material goods.[160] It is therefore extremely difficult to give a single interpretation, also considering the extreme variety of the masks deployed in the Laurentian Library, which look more like satirical heads than simple masks. However, there are some characteristics that make us lean towards their interpretation as guardians on the border between different realities.

Among the many masks of the Library, take for example the screaming one, composed of many radiant strips, visible both on the ceiling and on the floor (fig.208). It can be recognised as Pan's head, which according to Boccaccio's description in his *De genealogiis deorum gentilium*, was on fire («*eius faciem ignitum elementum*»), so much so that – continues Boccaccio – many identify Pan with the Sun, «*rerum pater dominusque*» (father and lord of all things).[161] In fact, Pan is nothing more than the personification of the natural universe ("Πάν" means "everything" in Greek), and in Ripa's *Iconologia*, relying on Boccaccio's mythography, under the entry "*world*," namely Pan, we read that the god's *"red and fiery face stands for the pure fire that is above the elements on the border of the celestial spheres*."[162] The flaming mask of the library can then be interpreted as an envelope that separates the earthly universe from

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[160] RIPA, *Iconologia*, pp. 92, 116, 230, 430.
[161] BOCCACCIO, Giovanni, *De genealogiis deorum gentilium*, book I, chap. IV. Translated in vulgar for the first time in: *Geneologia degli Dei. I quindeci libri di m. Giovanni Boccaccio sopra la origine et discendenza di tutti gli Dei de' gentili, con la spositione & sensi allegorici delle fauole, & con la dichiaratione dell'historie appartenenti à detta materia. Tradotti et adornati per messer Givseppe Betvssi da Bassano*, Venice 1547.
[162] RIPA, *Iconologia*, p. 416.

the celestial one. It is mirrored in the various green men on the floor, from whose open jaws plant shoots emerge, turning into dolphins (fig.205).[163]

A further declension in this sense of the mask is found in the many "double *gorgoneion*" scattered both on the floor and on the ceiling (fig.202). The "double *gorgoneion*" is a particular type of mask, in which two opposite faces share a common large mouth. The first known representation dates back to the 4th century BC in the Phoenician area (Tharros, Sardinia), and was then taken up in the Middle Ages to represent the Hell that swallows the damned (Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, ms. fr. 403, f. 40, Book of Revelation, XIII century, fig.204) thus marking the boundary between life and death.[164] The first Renaissance appearance in sculpture seems to be in the *Minerbetti Tomb* carved by Silvio Cosini, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, where the double *gorgoneion* adorns one of the trophy shields, "swallowing" the coat of arms of the deceased's family (fig.203). Most likely, it is precisely from the tomb carved by Cosini that Tribolo takes up the motif, given that also one of his double *gorgoneion* swallows the Medici coat of arms.[165]

A final example of the mask as symbol of border is the two- or three-faced mask (fig.207). The two-faced is the traditional representation of Janus, a Roman deity who protected the thresholds, and which would then give its name to the first month of the year, January. The triple head (also used by Cosini in the mask that adorns the top of the *Strozzi Tomb* in Santa Maria Novella, fig.237) adds a central head, the present time, to the past and future.

It can therefore be said that the decoration of the Laurentian Library is an attempt to give image to an alternative dimension, parallel to and isolated from worldly and earthly life. Enclosed in the midst of the grotesque chaos of the floor and ceiling, the reading room thus becomes a sort of intermediate limbo, an island of peace where spiritual elevation is finally possible thanks to the study granted by the magnanimous ducal benevolence.

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[163] The combination of the green man with the couple of dolphins is a motif taken from antiquity, that can be seen in Giuliano da Sangallo's *Taccuino senese*, the survey he made when studying ancient ruins in Rome (fig.114). Sangallo would duplicate the motif in his capitals in the Sacristy of Santo Spirito, Florence (fig.38). Tribolo seems to acquire the motif also from medieval books (Codex Egberti, 980 AD, Trier, City Library, fig.206).

[164] See BALTRUSAITIS, Jurgis, *Il Medioevo fantastico. Antichità ed esotismo nell'arte gotica*, Milan 1973, pp. 42-82. The Hell represented as a ferocious head with legs that chases Death is a frequent motif in medieval apocalyptic iconography.

[165] The use of masks in the coats of arms, whether as double *gorgoneion* or not, will become very common in the sixteenth century: Tasso, Pisa, Pierino da Vinci.

Therefore, the iconographic programme of the library decoration is in all respects similar to that of the Castello garden, also a place of peace and spiritual retreat. In both cases, an attempt is made to give image to the chaos and threats from the outside world, and the salvific order of the Duke is proposed as a cure. Cosimo, who often called himself "Cosmo," in fact means "order," which is the mirror principle of Χάος. The etymology of the Greek word Káos probably comes from χαίνω, χάσκω "to be wide open" and χάσμα "chasm." Thus, masks as threshold might be interpreted as symbolic representation of chaos.[166] Accordingly, the library is thought to be like a grotto.

Accademia Fiorentina

The issue of the relation between Tribolo and the Florentine intellectual world is essential to understand the artistic significance of his work, and finds a possible explanation for Tribolo's participation in the Accademia Fiorentina.[167]

On 1 November 1540, a group of twelve friends led by Giovanni Mazzuoli, known as Stradino, founded the Accademia degli Umidi, with the aim of meeting periodically to discuss the Tuscan language, Dante and Petrarch. The cultural potential of this small meeting of private citizens was soon perceived by Duke Cosimo, who in fact within a couple of months inserted his most trusted intellectuals into the Accademia (Cosimo Bartoli, Pierfrancesco Giambullari, Giambattista Gelli, and above all his *magiordomo* Pierfrancesco Riccio), an act that led to the birth of the Accademia Fiorentina on 8 March 1543, and which actually transformed the Umidi into a ducal institution.

Not only writers and intellectuals were welcomed within the Accademia, but also all the predominant Florentine artists of the time, in the hope of creating a fertile union between letters and arts that could found a new mythology, useful for strengthening ducal power. On

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166 On the Renaissance interpretation of Chaos, see: MANDOSIO, Jean-Marc, *Il concetto di Caos nel Rinascimento*, in ROTONDI SECCHI TARUGI, Luisa, *Bruttezza e bizzarria nel Rinascimento*, Florence 1998, pp. 405-441.

167 As for the Accademia Fiorentina, see: DI FILIPPO BAREGGI, Paolo, *Una nota alla politica culturale di Cosimo I: l'Accademia fiorentina*, in *Quaderni storici*, XXIII, 1973, pp. 527-574; VASOLI, Cesare, *Considerazioni sull'Accademia Fiorentina*, in *La nascita della Toscana. Convegno di studi per il IV centenario dalla morte di Cosimo I de' Medici*, Florence 1980, pp. 3-63; M. PLAISANCE, Michel, *Une première affirmation de la politique culturelle de Come Ier: la transormation de l'Acadèmie des "Humidi" en Acadèmie Florentine (1540-1542)*, in IDEM, *L'Accademia e il suo Principe. Cultura e politica a Firenze al tempo di Cosimo I e di Francesco de' Medici*, Manziana 2004, pp. 29-122. As for the relations between artists and *accademici*, see: HEIKAMP, Detlef, *Rapporti tra accademici ed artisti nella Firenze del '500*, in *Il Vasari*, N.S. 1, 15, 1957, pp. 139-163; CECCHI, Alessandro, *Il Bronzino, Benedetto Varchi e l'Accademia Fiorentina: Ritratti di poeti, letterati e personaggi illustri della Corte Medicea*, in *Antichità viva*, XXX, 1991, pp. 17-28; IDEM, *Il Tribolo, la corte medicea, i letterati e gli artisti amici suoi*, in *Il Tribolo*, pp. 29-36; EVERSON, Jane, *The Italian Academies 1525-1700. Networks of culture, innovation and dissent*, Cambridge 2016.

11 February 1541 – in a phase of still preliminary transition – the first artists to enrol in the Accademia were Tribolo and Bronzino, who were followed by Michelangelo on 31 March, and then by Giovambattista del Tasso (4 November 1544), Francesco da Sangallo (8 January 1545), Benvenuto Cellini (23 April 1545), Baccio Bandinelli (21 May 1545).

However, on 4 March 1547, the Accademia underwent an internal reform which led to the expulsion of many of its members, including the original founders and all the artists, excluding Michelangelo. In 1549, the Accademia reopened its doors to the artists, on the condition that they take lectures, or write some composition approved by the censors. Of the initial nucleus of artists, only Bronzino, the only one with real poetic ambitions, would be readmitted after he presented *Tre canzone sorelle*, dedicated to Cosimo.

It was within the Accademia Fiorentina, that in 1546 the famous dispute on the *Paragone* of the Arts was launched by Benedetto Varchi. Following the prayers of his Florentine friends (including Riccio), in 1543 Cosimo I allowed Varchi to return to Florence, after having remained in exile in Padua for a long time for his republican and anti-Medici sympathies.

Varchi and Tribolo were linked by close friendships. On 1 May 1538, Varchi sent Tribolo and Bronzino a copy with a dedication of his vernacular translation of the XIII book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[168] Varchi also uses words of supreme admiration for Tribolo in his *Libro della beltà e grazia*, where indicates Tribolo's sculpture as an unattainable model of beauty, that is impossible to be duplicated. Finally, on the death of Tribolo in September 1550, Varchi dedicated a grieving sonnet to him, describing him as a man *di bontà pieno* (full of goodness).

From Varchi’s words, Tribolo is revealed as a character perfectly inserted into the twisted mechanisms of the new Duchy of Cosimo, well-liked by all thanks to his willing and accommodating temperament. If, however, his graceful art enjoys enormous esteem and recognition, we also understand that the same cannot be said of Tribolo's literary knowledge. In the dedication to Tribolo and Bronzino in the *Metamorphoses*, although recognising a certain familiarity with *le cose poetiche,* Varchi says that the best expert of the two is Bronzino, certainly not Tribolo.

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[168] «*Al Tribolo scultore, et al Bronzino dipintore amicissimi suoi [...] Et per seguire l'usanza mia di mandare le cose fatte, o tradotte da me, o a quelle persone, le quali havendone ottima cognitione le potessero correggere et amendarle, o a quelle ch' per essermi amiche che di buona natura le dovessero tener care et scusarle, l'ho indirizzate a voi duoi, i quali è l'uno e l'altra di queste cose perciò che oltra l'essermi ciaschuno di voi egualmente amicissimo et oltra la pari et di grandissima eccellentia vostra dell'uno nella scultura, et dell'altro nella pittura vi dilettate ambo duoi ed intendete nelle cose poetiche e massimamente il Bronzino come, oltra suoi componimenti, dimostra l'avere tutto Dante e grandissima parte del Petrarca nella memoria assai più oltre che non crederebbero per aventura quelli, i quali non sanno, che si come poesia non è altro che una dipintura che favelli, così la pittura non è altro una poesia mutola.*»

The relationship between Varchi and Tribolo is in some way the mirror of the relationships that normally existed between intellectuals and artists in Florence of the time, and of which the Accademia Fiorentina is the most shining example: a kind of benevolent exchange, in which the former attempted to educate the latter to the subtleties of poetry, thus elevating manual art to intellectual art. This exchange, however, was not always fruitful and fertile, and often encountered reticence and impediments, the same that led to the expulsion of the artists from the Accademia.

At the same time, the friendship between Varchi and Tribolo helps to frame the inspirations of Tribolo's art more precisely. The fact that Varchi dedicated the XIII book of the *Metamorphoses* to Tribolo at the beginning of the works for the Castello garden, indicates that Varchi was in some way the occult prompter of the iconography of the garden. Ovid's work, infused with miraculous mutations and mythical creatures, must have served Tribolo to refine his grotesque art.

* * *

In the reconstruction provided in this chapter, it was useful to divide Tribolo's career into two opposing phases, so as to make evident the dichotomy, and the consequent need for hybridisation, between the grotesque and Michelangelesque imagery, which resulted in a process of monumentalisation of the grotesque. Tribolo's predisposition to collaboration, as well as the frequency with which he was called to finish the works of other masters, led him to respectfully and eclectically assimilate their style, to the point of developing his own synthesis.

His *Goddess Nature*, so imbued with the freest reinterpretation of antiquarian culture, can be placed at the beginning of the pantheistic developments of the ornamentation of gardens and pleasure palaces. Similarly, Tribolo's formalisation of Michelangelo's *non finito* had repercussions both in the final layout of the Medici Chapel, and in the grotesque imagery, which was enriched with a further representation of the metamorphosis, as can be seen in the Castello *Fiesole*.

Due recognition was given to the exchange of inspirations that involved Tribolo and the ornamental sculptors of the Tyrrhenian coast during his Pisan period. He deepened here his relationship with Silvio Cosini, who will be the protagonist of the next chapter, in which we will analyse his uncommon artistic awareness.

Chapter 3

Silvio Cosini
«E questo è solo per la bona fama che è di voi»[1]

Introduction. The issue of Silvio Cosini's youth.

Silvio Cosini is one of the most mysterious characters of the first half of the sixteenth century. Bizarre both in his creations and in his behaviour, he was a restless and wandering spirit, so jealous of his own independence that he often bordered on rudeness, but if necessary he could unctuosly prostrate himself to get a job.[2] The enigma that surrounds much of his existence is mainly due to the short and elliptical biography that Vasari dedicates to him.[3] Besides, the documentary evidence that historiography has so far accumulated about him has reconstructed his life only starting from the collaboration alongside Michelangelo in the Medici Chapel, and has framed with a certain precision mostly his maturity.[4] We still know very little about his youth and his artistic training, and this research was originally intended to fill this gap. Unfortunately, an unsuccessful and misleading archival investigation unfolded.

Cosini's biography written by Vasari is squeezed within that of Andrea Ferrucci, Cosini's master. Yet, despite being so brief, it contains both essential information on the works Cosini created, and some colourful hints on his restless existence. According to what Vasari noted, Cosini was originally from Fiesole. However, in the payment records transcribed by Michelangelo for the works in the Medici Chapel, Cosini is registered with the name of *Silvio el*

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[1] COSINI, Silvio, *Letter to Michelangelo,* from Genoa to Rome, 13 April 1532, in BAROCCHI, Paola – RISTORI, Renzo, *Il carteggio di Michelangelo*, Florence 1973, III, p. 395.

[2] Cosini abandoned the work on the *Tomb of Raffaele Maffei*, leaving the sepulchre unfinished, as shown in a resentful letter dated 11 November 1531 that Paolo Riccobaldi wrote to Mario Maffei, who commissioned the work: «Your Lordship is right to complain about Silvio Pisano for being faithless» (see: D'AMICO, John F., *The Raffaele Maffei Monument in Volterra. Small town patronage in the Renaissance*, in *Supplementum festivum*, Binghamton 1987, p. 484). On the other hand, as reported in the letter that gives the title to this chapter, only a year later Cosini was lavish with compliments for Michelangelo because, short of money, he was looking for a new job at the Medici Chapel, which would in fact come in the summer (see: *Il carteggio*, III, 1973, p. 425).

[3] VASARI, Giorgio, entry *Andrea Ferrucci*, in *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori et scultori italiani*, Florence 1550; IDEM, *Vita di Andrea Ferrucci e altri fiesolani*, in *Le vite de'più eccellenti pittori scultori et architettori*, Florence 1568.

[4] CAMPIGLI, Marco, *Silvio Cosini e Michelangelo*, in *Nuovi studi*, XI, 2007, 12, pp. 85-116; IDEM, *Silvio Cosini e Michelangelo 2. Oltre la Sagrestia Nuova*, in *Nuovi Studi,* XIII, 2009, 14, pp. 42-54; IDEM, *Silvio Cosini, Niccolò da Corte e la scultura a Palazzo Doria*, in *Nuovi Studi*, XIX, 2014, 20, , pp. 83-104; PRINCIPI, Lorenzo, *Un altare a Portovenere e altre novità per il secondo soggiorno genovese di Silvio Cosini, tra Padova e Milano*, *Ibidem* pp. 105-144; IDEM, *Silvio Cosini a Savona*, in *Paragone*, LXVIII, 132=805, March 2017, pp. 3-26; IDEM, *La punizione di Marsia. Un rilievo di Silvio Cosini e il sepolcro di Jacopo Sansovino a Venezia*, in *Arte Veneta*, LXXV, 2018, pp. 55-77; DALLI REGOLI, Gigetta, *Silvio Cosini e l'Ornamento*. *Vitalità e trasformazione di modelli antichi alle soglie del Cinquecento*, 3, 2020, pp. 104-119.

Pisano, suggesting that he was originally from Pisa.[5] Yet, in the documents we know bearing his name, we find him frequently referred to as *Silvio di Giovanni di Neri da Cepparello*, or alternatively *da Poggibonsi*. Therefore, we have no certainty about Cosini's birthplace.

We do not even know when he was born precisely. In the 1550 edition of the *Lives*, Vasari states that Cosini died in Milan in 1540 at the age of thirty-eight, but retracted this in the 1568 edition, saying that Cosini died at the age of forty-five – however, this time he did not specify the year of death. Putting together the two versions provided by Vasari, the commentator of the *Lives* Gaetano Milanesi arbitrarily established that Cosini was born around 1495, and since then scholarship has disregarded the issue of Cosini's date of birth.[6] However, today we have Cosini's death certificate, drawn up in Milan on 16 December 1545, where it is stated that Cosini died *annorum circa 40*.[7] While not indicating the precise age, this document provides a vague *ante quem* for the birth of Cosini – the year 1505. With an approximation so wide that it cannot have a high historical value, we can say that Cosini was born between 1495 and 1505.

This research was initially intended to definitively establish the year and place of birth of Cosini. The aim was to understand how mature Cosini could have been when he began his collaboration with Michelangelo in 1524. In fact, we intended to confirm the suspicion that by that date Cosini was a fully formed and autonomous artist, since it was difficult to believe the conventional narrative that wanted him to be a simple pupil of Ferrucci, who fortunately made room for himself in the construction site of the Medici Chapel.

It was therefore decided to conduct research again on the registers of the baptised, a survey already conducted by Bacci more than a century ago.[8] Excluding the possibility that Cosini could be a native of Fiesole as Vasari says, and not being able to trace the registers of villages that are too small, such as Poggibonsi and Cepparello, we concentrated on the registers of the baptised in Pisa, easily available online.[9]

[5] BARDESCHI CIULICH, Lucilla – BAROCCHI, Paola, *I Ricordi di Michelangelo*, Florence 1970, p. 127.

[6] MILANESI, Gaetano – VASARI, Giorgio, *Le vite dei più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori scritte da Giorgio Vasari con nuove annotazioni e commenti di Gaetano Milanesi*, Florence 1906, IV, p. 481, note 3. It should be noted that Campigli, later followed by Principi, instead believe that Cosini was born in the early sixteenth century, and that therefore he began to work on the Medici Chapel around twenty years of age.

[7] Milan, Archivio di Stato, *Popolazione*, p.a. 93, published in: SACCHI, Rossana, *Il disegno incompiuto*, Milan 2005, II, p. 449, n. 188: «*Porta Orientale parrocchia Sancti Jo. al Fonte, in campo sancto: Magister Silvius Pisanus de Petra Sancta annorum circa 40 ex pleuresi in 4 decessit sine signo pestis judicio suprascripto*».

[8] BACCI, Peleo, *Gli Angeli di Silvio Cosini nel Duomo di Pisa (1528-1530): con documenti inediti e commenti relativi alla sua vita*, in *Bollettino d'arte del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione*, XI, 5/6/7, 1917, pp. 111-132.

[9] See http://battesimi.sns.it/battesimi. Vasari seems to affirm the possibility of Cosini being born in Fiesole as a literary trope, in order to unite more convincingly him with the master Ferrucci, who was truly a native of Fiesole.

After a thorough research, unfortunately the result that Bacci had already arrived at was confirmed, namely that Cosini was not born in Pisa. Although Silvio's name did not emerge, we found his brother Vincenzo (1504) – already discovered by Bacci – and above all his sister Piera (1498) – that Bacci overlooked. Given the subordinate role of Vincenzo in his brother's workshop, it seems plausible to believe that Silvio was the elder of the two, and that he was therefore born before 1504 – a *terminus ante quem*, which had already been established by Bacci. However, it is the discovery of the date of birth of Silvio's sister Piera that could tighten even more the chronological arc that is useful to identify Silvio's date of birth. The Cosini family (Silvio's grandfather, uncles and aunts) had permanently transferred to Pisa since the mid-fifteenth century. Although Silvio's father, Giovanni, does not seem to have been born in Pisa, evidently he soon had to join his father and siblings in the city, where he then had Piera in 1498. Although it is not entirely impossible that Giovanni moved to Pisa and had Piera, he then moved to another city and had Silvio, and then returned to Pisa where he finally had Vincenzo, for intellectual simplicity, it is easier to think that Silvio was born before Giovanni's transfer to Pisa which undoubtedly took place within 1498, the year of birth of Piera. We could then assume that Silvio was born before this date, therefore before 1498, but not much earlier, given that when Silvio died in 1545, he was forty-something years old.

This would mean that when in 1524 Cosini began his collaboration with Michelangelo in the Medici Chapel, he was already twenty-six years old, a rather advanced age for a simple workshop apprentice.[10] Many clues, which we will analyse in depth in the course of this chapter, lead us to consider Cosini as a sculptor who was completely autonomous when he worked in the Medici Chapel.

Among the elements that would indicate Cosini's maturity and autonomy at the moment of his entrance into the Medici Chapel, perhaps the most obvious is the salary of twenty-five *soldi* a day that he began to receive starting from September 1524, which was considerably high, equal to that of the foreman Meo della Corte. Cosini would not have secured such a high salary if he had been a simple apprentice, or a simple stonemason.

It should also be remembered that Cosini was chosen as *intagliatore* (ornamental sculptor) of the Medici Chapel only after the famous Florentine *intagliatore* Simone Mosca (1492-1553) gave up participating in the Medici Chapel undertaking, as he was engaged in the execution of the marble decorations of the Cesi Chapel, Santa Maria della Pace, Rome. Cosini

[10] Take, for example, Pierino da Vinci, who, despite being an *enfant prodige*, died as an established and renowned sculptor at the age of only twenty-three.

was therefore considered a good substitute for an experienced and much sough-after sculptor, which would indicate that he enjoyed a reputation similar to that of Mosca.

In light of these considerations, in this chapter we will examine in detail the role that Cosini played within the Medici Chapel, and we will find confirmation of the feeling that prompted this research from the beginning, namely that he occupied the position of superintendent of the ornamental apparatus. He thus contributed not only as a mere executor, but most likely established a close dialogue with Michelangelo also at the design level. Cosini would then be the one who convinced Michelangelo to introduce the grotesque language into the Medici Chapel. To make this hypothesis even more convincing is the analysis of Cosini's later works, which were always centred on a strong decorative experimentalism, which we cannot only consider the result of participating as ornamental sculptor in the Medici Chapel.

Once established that in 1524 Cosini was in fact a mature sculptor, we need to understand how he formed this artistic autonomy. Vasari introduces the figure of Cosini as *creato* of Andrea Ferrucci in the latter's biography.[11] According to Vasari's account, Ferrucci, now an elderly man, entrusted the execution of the *Strozzi Tomb* to Cosini and his other pupil Maso Boscoli. This is the first work executed by Cosini mentioned by Vasari. Surprisingly, Vasari seems to be very precise in the dating of this work, but subsequent historiography, starting with Milanesi, has confused the right succession of the facts. In fact, the carving of the *Strozzi Tomb* had actually begun in 1522 as Vasari notes – and we will see confirmation of this later – but perhaps due to Strozzi's death and the consequent end of funding, the work was set aside for a certain time, until it was taken over by Strozzi's widow, Antonia Vespucci, who commissioned the completion of the works. The tomb must have been mounted around 1525 by Cosini alone, who had now become the sole executor of Ferrucci's commissions.

In the same period (early 1520s), Cosini also carved one of the two *Angels* for the main altar of the Cathedral of Volterra – this too was a commission of Ferrucci's which he shared with his talented pupil. Both the *Strozzi Tomb* and the Volterra *Angel* show craftsmanship and technical confidence. Assuming *ante*-1498 as Cosini's date of birth, he was about twenty-four years old in 1522, a premature age but still consistent with the surprising artistic achievements that can be appreciated in these two works.

Considering that we know with certainty that starting from 1522 Ferrucci increasingly delegated his commissions to Cosini – Cosini's collaboration in the Medici Chapel was also facilitated by Ferrucci's intercession – we can imagine that this had already happened in

[11] Only in the 1550 edition of *Lives* Vasari described Cosini as Ferrucci's *creato*.

previous years. We could perhaps recognise Cosini's still immature hand in Ferrucci's works dating back to the second decade of the sixteenth century.

According to the reconstruction proposed by Naldi, in 1512 Ferrucci returned to Florence after a long stay in Naples.[12] In that same year, Ferrucci was appointed foreman of the Opera of the Florentine Cathedral, a position he held until his death in 1526. In 1512, Cosini may have been fourteen, an appropriate age to begin his apprenticeship in a workshop. According to Vasari, from his appointment as foreman of the Opera, and therefore from his return to Florence, Ferrucci created the statue of *Sant'Andrea* and the *Bust of Marsilio Ficino* for the Cathedral, a marble fountain for the King of Hungary (lost), the *Chapel for Cardinal Thomas Bakócz*, in Esztergom, Hungary, and the two *Angels* for the Cathedral of Volterra, of which we have already mentioned Cosini sculpted one.

It is probable that Cosini formed his talent as an ornamental sculptor precisely by working with the master on these works.[13] It was in fact common to leave the execution of the decorative parts to apprentices, especially when the endeavour was particularly tedious. We can therefore think that the ornaments of the lost Hungarian fountain, but above all some elements of the pilasters of the *Bakócz Chapel* are to be ascribed to the young Cosini (the works were carved in Florence and then transported to Hungary). The masks and green men, the coats of arms and episcopal mitres, the bizarre creatures, the monogram of the name Jesus IHS, which we see in the *Bakócz Chapel* (figg.218-220), are all elements particularly dear to Cosini's grotesque vocabulary. In all likelihood, this was the workshop where the young Cosini began to become familiar with the sculptural technique.[14]

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[12] NALDI, Riccardo, *Andrea Ferrucci. Marmi gentili tra la Toscana e Napoli*, Naples 2002.

[13] As rightly pointed out by CAMPIGLI, *Sivio Cosini*, 2009, the hypothesis that Cosini could have accompanied Ferrucci to Naples is to be excluded. Besides, after an archive research at the Opera del Duomo of Florence, we failed in finding the name of Cosini in the counting books of that institution, which could mean that Cosini did not help his master in the works at the Florentine Cathedral.

[14] As for the Bakócz Chapel, see: BALOGH, Jolán , *La Cappella Bakócz di Esztergom*, in *Acta Historiae Artium Acadamiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, III, 1956, pp. 1-198.

1524. Silvio 'el Pisano' working at the Medici Chapel. The contribution of the Florentine decorative tradition in the conception of the marble ornamentation of the Medici Chapel.

New chronology of Silvio Cosini's interventions at the Medici Chapel – April-December 1524.

The first documentary evidence we possess of Silvio Cosini dates back to 2 April 1524. With the name "*Silvio decto el Pisano*," he appears together with other twelve stonecutters in the payment registers (*Ricordi*) that Michelangelo noted down in detail in the first months of work of the Medici Chapel.[15] Cosini is here hired as a simple stonecutter, and is paid twenty *soldi* a day like his companions, for three days of work. This means that he began work on the Medici Chapel between the 30 and 31 March 1524. Undoubtedly, his participation was closely connected with the call by Michelangelo of the master of Cosini, Andrea Ferrucci, which took place on 29 March 1524, just a day before Cosini was hired.[16]

Ferrucci was hired by Michelangelo «*per mectere le pietre innanzi agli squadratori*,» therefore to coordinate the marble carving in the chapel, which between the end of March and the beginning of April 1524 could finally be started. The wooden model for the (single) tombs had just been completed, after three months of work.[17] Presumably, Ferrucci's task was not only that of supervisor and foreman, but also that of providing manpower, if starting from his hiring, the stonecutters increased from four to thirteen.[18] Among the new workers hired, there was obviously also Cosini, being Ferrucci's most talented pupil. With this large team of collaborators, Michelangelo's intention was to quickly finish the architectural and decorative framing of the walls that would house the tombs. The stonecutters would have had to follow the wooden model that had just been prepared, and Michelangelo reserved his personal participation only for the figures, whose carving would begin as soon as the necessary marble blocks had arrived from Carrara.

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[15] BARDESCHI CIULICH, Lucilla – BAROCCHI, Paola, *I Ricordi di Michelangelo*, Florence 1970, p. 127.

[16] *Ibidem*, p. 123: «*Richordo chome oggi, questo dì venti nove di marzo 1524, maestro Andrea da Fiesole scharpellino, chapo maestro all'Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore, è venuto a guidare l'opera delle sepulture che io fo nella sagrestia di San Lorenzo, cioè a mectere le pietre inanzi agli squadratori; e verrà a decta opera una volta el dì per un'ora, e quando bisognierà, vi starà anchora un mezo dì e un dì intero, che chosì siàno d'accordo. E chiesemi decto maestro Andrea, per far questo, duchati sei el mese; io gniene profersi quatro: assai a dare in quel mezzo, secondo mi dice Baccio legniaiuolo, che è stato mezzano. E decto maestro Andrea feci chiedere agli Operai di suo chonsentimento, a messer Iachopo da Prato.*»

[17] WALLACE, William, *Michelangelo at San Lorenzo. The Genius as Entrepreneur*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 88-89.

[18] *I Ricordi,* p. 127. Bargiacca, Michele del Castello, Giovanni della Bella, Monciato were working at the Medici Chapel since 7 March 1524. In the sheet of 2 April, there are nine new workers, of whom seven were paid for three days, exactly as Cosini, and two were paid for four days, as the four 'veterans.' This means that the seven workers paid for three days were hired the day after Ferrucci became foreman, and thus that they probably were recommended to Michelangelo by Ferrucci.

We can therefore think that this initial phase of the work was to a certain extent delegated to the foreman Ferrucci, with whom Michelangelo had to engage in a fruitful artistic dialogue. Compared to Michelangelo, Ferrucci was much more of an expert in the execution of ornamentation, having created numerous wall marble tombs and altars throughout his career, particularly rich in grotesques. Plausibly, Michelangelo called Ferrucci not simply to have a trusted sculptor to guide the work, but also and above all to get advice on the ornamental iconography. The only drawing certainly by Michelangelo's hand referable to the Medici Chapel ornamentation (London, Windsor Castle, Royal Collection, 12672r, fig.59) is a particularly expressive satyr head, which in its iconography recalls some sculptural masks made by Ferrucci in Naples in the previous decade (*Carafa Chapel* and *Pandone Tomb*, fig.231). It seems that the one in Michelangelo's drawing is a bizarre and imaginative elaboration of Ferrucci's prototypes, as if Michelangelo had asked his friend to provide him with some suggestions for masks, Ferrucci had offered him some workshop models, and Michelangelo had started to fantasise on paper about the possible variations of those models.

This creative delegation that Michelangelo granted to Ferrucci and Cosini must have been laxer than is usually believed. When at the end of March 1524 Michelangelo called the almost sixty-year-old Ferrucci to collaborate in the Medici Chapel, Ferrucci was engaged in the role of foreman of the Opera of the Florentine Cathedral. Elderly and overburdened by other commitments, Ferrucci nevertheless accepted to take part in the undertaking of the Medici Chapel, an indication that Michelangelo had to be particularly insistent. One has the feeling that, once the design of the more properly architectural parts had been completed with the wooden model, Michelangelo was in search of collaborators to help him take care of the decorative portions.

According to the agreement that Michelangelo stipulated with the Operai of the Cathedral, Ferrucci was to work in the Medici Chapel for only two months. In fact, on 31 May 1524, Ferrucci was discharged with a pay of ten *ducati* (five a month), and his role as foreman from that moment on would be held by Meo della Corte, who received a pay of twenty-five *soldi* a day.[19] Probably, in the months of April and May, Michelangelo and Ferrucci (and potentially Cosini) prepared the iconography of the sculptural ornament of the chapel, and by mid-May the carving of the ornaments had begun.

We deduce that the carving of the ornamental apparatus was designed by mid-May, from a letter of Giovan Francesco Fattucci dated 17 April and another dated 17 May 1524. We learn

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[19] BARDESCHI CIULICH–BAROCCHI, *I Ricordi*, pp. 140-141.

here that Michelangelo had requested expert *intagliatori* to be sent to Florence, clearly because the design of the ornamental portions was nearing completion.[20] In his letters, Fattucci recommends Simone Mosca, a sophisticated ornamental sculptor, who in that same period was carrying out the marble decoration of the Cesi Chapel, in Santa Maria della Pace, Rome. It was precisely because of this previous Roman commitment that Mosca gave up and returned immediately to Florence – but he would then arrive in the spring of 1525. Fattucci also suggests the name of «*uno intagliatore mantovano come il Mosca,*» perhaps to be identified with Simone Mantovano (who participated in 1526 in the restoration of the cathedral of Pisa led by Pandolfo Fancelli); and «*Ciechone che sta a San Gallo,*» to be recognised either as Francesco di Vincenzo Baccelli da Sangallo, or as Francesco di Giuliano da Sangallo.[21] A "Francesco da Sangallo" would indeed work at the Medici Chapel from August 1524.

Despite the relinquishing of Mosca, who undoubtedly would have been the preferred choice for the execution of the sculptural decorations, the carving of the ornaments began all the same, as can be seen from a note by Michelangelo relating to payments of 21 May 1524, where he hires as *intagliatori* (and not as simple *scalpellini*, stonecutters) Gino d'Antonio Lorenzi and Silvio Cosini. Cosini's salary continued to be only twenty *soldi* per day, while Lorenzi's was four *grossoni*, equal to twenty-eight *soldi*, the highest ever recorded in the Medici Chapel registers.[22] Lorenzi only worked for fourteen weeks in total, between May and June, and then briefly in December.

It is difficult to understand how Cosini and Lorenzi divided the roles, just as it is almost impossible to understand which parts were executed in this period.[23] However, as regards Cosini's interventions, we can rely on the words of Vasari, who assigns to him «some carved marble capitals over the pilasters of the tombs, with some little masks so well hollowed out

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[20] FATTUCCI, Giovan Francesco, *Letter to Michelangelo,* from Rome to Florence, 17 April 1524, 17 May 1524, in BAROCCHI, Paola – RISTORI, Renzo, Il *carteggio di Michelangelo,* III, Florence 1973, pp. 66-67, 74.

[21] See: GIANNOTTI, Alessandra, *Francesco da Sangallo. Un nome per due scultori*, in *Paragone*, LXVII, 3, 126=793, March 2016, p. 11.

[22] BARDESCHI CIULICH–BAROCCHI, *I Ricordi*, p. 140: 21 May 1524, «*Questi dua qui di socto sono intagliatori: l'uno a venti soldi el dì chome gli altri, cioè el Pisano, l'altro che à nnome Gino, a quattro grossoni el dì.*»

[23] On the role that Gino d'Antonio Lorenzi might have had in the carving of the ornaments, see: WALLACE, *Michelangelo at San Lorenzo*, pp. 120-124; CAMPIGLI, Marco, *Silvio Cosini e Michelangelo*, in *Nuovi studi*, 12, 2007, pp. 91-92. Lorenzi's high pay can be explained either as the recognition of his value and expertise as a sculptor, or as the result of the demanding task he had to accomplish. Arbitrarily, Wallace assigns to Lorenzi the five large dado blocks at the base of the Tomb of Lorenzo, whereas instead Campigli assigns to him the festoons of the tabernacles. We do not know enough about Lorenzi to be sure of these attributions.

that there is nothing better to be seen, [...] some friezes with very beautiful masks in the act of crying out, [...] certain trophies to complete those tombs, but they remained unfinished.»[24]

To better delineate Cosini's interventions inside the Medici Chapel, it is useful to clarify some points about the chronology of his collaboration. As we have already said, the first payment received by Cosini dates back to 2 April 1524, and we thus deduced that he was hired at the end of March. Throughout the month of April, Cosini, as a simple stonecutter, worked tirelessly every day (most likely, twenty-five days), until a break in the first two weeks of May, at the end of which he was hired again, this time in the role of ornamental sculptor (*intagliatore*). From this moment on, he would work continuously – with only one probable two-week summer break – until 3 December 1524. From 3 September to 12 November 1524, his pay saw a substantial one-quarter increase, from twenty to twenty-five *soldi*, reaching the pay of the foreman Meo della Corte.[25] From the end of March to 3 December 1524, Cosini worked for about one hundred and fifty days.

Contrary to common belief, Cosini never worked in the Medici Chapel in 1525. This historiographical conviction is based on a misinterpretation of two payment sheets, on which Cosini's name is transcribed together with those of the other stonecutters, but in which the date at the top is without the year (April 9, April 15).[26] Bardeschi and Barocchi, the first to collect and publish the sheets of *Ricordi* accompanied by commentary notes, arbitrarily dated these two sheets to 1525, and subsequent historiography has never doubted this dating. In truth, on a more careful analysis of the two sheets, we realise that they must be dated to 1524: the workers listed in the two sheets are consistent with the workers operating in April 1524 (and not with those of April 1525); Cosini is named *el pisano* in the two sheets, whereas from August 1524 onwards he would always be called more confidentially *Silvio*; there already is a payment dated 8 April 1525, and a payment the day immediately after would be highly improbable; there is also a payment dated 15 April 1525, where the list of workers does not match that of the sheet in question. Considering that these two sheets would have been the only ones on which Cosini's name appeared outside the chronological arc described above (April-December 1524), we can state that he never worked in the Medici Chapel in 1525.

The correct dating of the two sheets to the year 1524, and no longer to 1525, clearly delineates the temporal extension of Cosini's participation in the work of the Medici Chapel, and leads to exclude the possibility that he continued to gravitate around the construction site

[24] VASARI, *Vita di Andrea Ferrucci e altri fiesolani*, in Idem, *Le vite*.
[25] BARDESCHI CIULICH–BAROCCHI, *I Ricordi*, p. 146: «*a Silvio decto Pisano bisognia dare venticinque soldi el dì, ché chosì mi sono nuovamente chonvenuto secho.*»
[26] *Ibidem*, pp. 136-137, 169.

even after the date of the last known payment, that of 3 December 1524.[27] If we accept this reconstruction of the facts, we must then think that in about eight months Cosini completed all the decorative elements described by Vasari, therefore the capitals, the frieze of masks, and the trophies. Given the relative brevity of Cosini's participation in the chapel, we do not intend to add any other decorative details to the Vasari list variously assigned to Cosini by critics, with the exception of the monstrous creatures over the lateral niches of the Tomb of Lorenzo d'Urbino, which display a style consistent with that of Cosini.[28]

We now intend to reconstruct the succession of works entrusted to Cosini, and therefore clarify the authorship and chronology of many portions of the Medici Chapel's decorative apparatus, so as to better judge the real importance of Cosini's intervention.

It is not entirely clear how the carving was divided between the two single tombs, and we cannot be completely sure whether the decorative details of the two tombs were done simultaneously, or rather separately at different times. However, from what can be deduced from the correspondence of 1524, it seems likely that the effort initially concentrated on only one of the two single tombs, and that the other tomb was sculpted at a later stage, mirroring the one already made.

Almost certainly, the first tomb to be executed was that of Lorenzo d'Urbino, for it has some decorative details that are absent in the Tomb of Giuliano di Nemours – we are referring to the bizarre monstrous creatures sculpted by Cosini, which we only find above the arches of the lateral niches of the Tomb of Lorenzo. It is also evident that the decorative details of the two tombs were carved by two (or perhaps more) different hands. From the stylistic analysis, it can be deduced that Cosini only dealt with the Tomb of Lorenzo, executing the aforementioned monstrous creatures, the capitals, and in all probability only a small section of the frieze of masks. There are still many doubts about the authorship of the corresponding parts on the Tomb of Giuliano.

In light of what we have retraced so far, and following the careful analysis of the frieze of masks recently conducted by Donetti, we intend to propose a new chronology of Cosini's work

[27] CAMPIGLI, Marco, *Silvio Cosini e Michelangelo 2: oltre la Sagrestia Nuova*, in *Nuovi Studi,* XIII, 2009, 14, pp. 74-75, states that it is not unlikely that Cosini kept gravitating towards the Medici Chapel up until 1527. This tendentious conviction is based on the assumption that, according to the mis-dating of the two sheets of *Ricordi* to 1525, Cosini might have been an occasional collaborator of Michelangelo, one who worked a week every once in a while.
[28] DALLI REGOLI, Gigietta, *Silvius Magister*, Galatina 1991, p. 11, assigns to Cosini the imaginative vases of the niches; whereas CAMPIGLI, *Silvio Cosini*, 2007, pp. 102-104, assigns to him the left candlestick of the altar.

at the Medici Chapel.[29] In all likelihood, his intervention began with the capitals and bizarre monstrous creatures. Since they compose the same horizontal band above the niches, it is likely that Cosini was responsible for this compartment of the wall. Cosini completed these works between mid-May and July/August 1524.

Over the summer, Cosini must have devoted himself to the frieze, yet only making the right portion of it, the one that is now in correspondence with the statue of *Dawn*. As Donetti rightly points out, in this portion we see a greater mastery of carving and a more imaginative iconographic experimentation, which are lost in a more mechanical simplification in the rest of the frieze. The portion made by Cosini should have served as a model for the rest of the frieze, which was sculpted by Francesco da Sangallo (whose identity still needs to be clarified), starting from late August.[30] This is confirmed by a note in *Ricordi* dated 1 October 1524, where Michelangelo noted that Sangallo was at work on the frieze, and that this had to be done following a model already prepared.[31] Finally, starting from September, Cosini devoted himself to the *Trophies*.[32]

The two *Trophies* are usually dated to much more advanced phases of the work, whether it is 1527 (Campigli), or even 1532 (Wallace). However, if we decide to categorically rely on the payment documents, we cannot do anything other than date the *Trophies* to 1524. We assume in fact that the completion of these two massive sculptures would somehow have been recorded by Michelangelo, and the name of Cosini (to whom they must certainly be assigned) would surely reappear in the registers after 1524.[33]

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[29] DONETTI, Dario, *Modelli, produzioni, variazioni. L'organizzazione del lavoro nel cantiere della Sagrestia Nuova*, in NOVA, Alessandro – ZANCHETTIN, Vitale, *Michelangelo*, Venice 2019, pp. 217-231.

[30] The issue of the identity of the 'Francesco da Sangallo' who worked at the Medici Chapel from August 1524 is rather intricate. Wallace, Campigli and Donetti confidently consider him to be the famous son of Giuliano da Sangallo. However, this identification presents some limitations. In fact, Francesco di Giuliano da Sangallo was such an important figurative sculptor in 1524, that it would seem at least odd that he accepted to carve a simple frieze of masks. No one seems to acknowledge this anomaly. At the same time though, the fact that his pay was of twenty-two *soldi* at first (thus, quite high), and the fact that he was later paid per work done, and no longer per day, might look as he received a special treatment. GIANNOTTI, *Francesco*, argues extensively about the existence of the namesake Francesco di Vincenzo Baccelli da Sangallo, who was the sculptor working alongside Tribolo at Loreto in the 1530s. Giannotti tentatively proposes the possibility that Francesco di Vincenzo might have been also the one working at the Medici Chapel. We would need to fully retrace the artistic identity of Francesco di Vincenzo to be completely sure whether he carved the mask frieze at the Medici Chapel.

[31] BARDESCHI CIULICH–BAROCCHI, *I Ricordi*, pp. 150: «*A Francesco da Sangallo darete un duchato e mezzo; e questo perché tolse a fare in chottimo, a dua duchati, el braccio d'un certo fregio al paragone d'una parte che ce n'è facta. Ànne facto un braccio: perché non è finito come l'altro, non gli vo dare di più, se non osserva quello ha promesso.*»

[32] For a retracing of the decoration of the attics of the single tombs, and therefore of the *Trophies*, see: JOANNIDES, Paul, *Michelangelo's Medici Chapel. Some new suggestions*, in *The Burlington magazine*, 114, 1972, pp. 541-551.

[33] Yet, we must acknowledge the fact that the payments of 1526-27 in Michelangelo's *Ricordi* are rather confused, and thus the possibility that Cosini got back to work at the Medici Chapel in those two years cannot be totally excluded.

A dating of the *Trophies* to 1524 becomes more convincing if we connect their execution to the considerable pay increase that Cosini had since September. His pay in fact reached that of the foreman Meo della Corte, a sign that Cosini was called upon to tackle a particularly difficult undertaking. The increase might depend on the creation of the *Trophies*, which are entirely three-dimensional sculptures and request a higher degree of craftsmanship.[34]

At the same time though, a dating of the *Trophies* to 1524 opens up some issues that need to be resolved. The first issue concerns the time necessary for the execution: we must ask ourselves if it is possible that in just over two months (the period in which he was paid twenty-five *soldi*), Cosini was able to rough-hew the two statues, and bring the meticulous ornamental carving to a fair degree of advancement.

The second issue concerns the provision of marble from Carrara, which, we know from Michelangelo's correspondence, was late in arriving in Florence, especially the large blocks, which we are sure did not arrive before 1525.[35] Being one hundred and thirty centimetres high, the *Trophies* undoubtedly belong to the category of large blocks, and we could thus think that their execution also occurred in 1525, or later.

The third and final issue is much more complex, and concerns in a broader sense the execution of the decorative apparatus of the entire Medici Chapel, which for the most part was gradually set aside to speed up the work. The hypothesis that the *Trophies* were already begun and left incomplete at the end of 1524, might mean that already at this date Michelangelo had decided to renounce the sumptuous decoration of the attics of the tombs, which, as we see in drawing 838 of the Louvre (fig.48), included for each tomb a trophy, four sorrowful adolescents, and four herms holding shells. As Joannides rightly points out, disregarding such an important portion of the decorative layout of the tombs certainly must

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[34] CAMPIGLI, *Silvio Cosini*, 2007, pp. 94-95, believes that Cosini's pay increase was due to the carving of the four capitals of the Tomb of Lorenzo.

[35] On 22-23 April 1521, Michelangelo ordered the extraction of 300 cartloads of marble from Carrara, which slowly reached Florence over the next three years (see: ELAM, Caroline, *The site and early building history of Michelangelo's New Sacristy*, in *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorisches Institutes in Florenz*, XXIII, 1979, 1/2, pp. 169-171, docc. 8-10). Michelangelo was dissatisfied with the blocks for the statues, and ordered a new quarrying, as can be seen from the correspondence with his contact person in Carrara, Topolino (*Il Carteggio*, III, 1973, pp. 45-45, 54, 59-60, 68-70, 79-82, 98-99, 102, 119, 123, 137, 153-154, 163, 203-204). On 9 July 1524, Fattucci writes that the pope agrees to a new quarrying, but suggests saving some of the old blocks (*Ibidem*, pp. 89-90). In October 1524, Michelangelo was finally forced to sculpt one of the *Phases* (probably *Night*) using one of his own pieces of marble preserved in via Mozza (*I Ricordi*, p. 124). On 1st January 1525, Michelangelo continued to complain to Pope Clement VII about the quality of the marbles (*Il Carteggio*, III, 1973, p. 171). On 24 October 1525, Michelangelo wrote to Fattucci that he had begun to sculpt four figures (*Ibidem,* pp. 173-174). On 17 June 1526, Michelangelo summerises the work on the figures in these terms: «*infra quindici dì farò chominciare l'altro chapitano; poi mi resterà, di chose d'importanza, solo e' quatro fiumi. Le quatro figure in su' chassoni, le quatro figure in terra che sono e' fiumi, e' dua chapitani e la Nostra Donna che va nella sepultura di testa sono le figure che io vorrei fare di mia mano e di queste n'è chominciate sei*» (*Ibidem*, pp. 227-228).

not have been a decision taken with a light heart.[36] Thus, it might seem contradictory that Michelangelo abandoned the idea of making the *Trophies* only two months after their execution began.[37]

Let us therefore try to make plausible a dating of the *Trophies* to 1524, taking into account all the difficult issues described above. It must first be said that the work in the Medici Chapel was in no way linear, and certainly did not respond to an efficient organisation. Michelangelo was in fact under intense pressure, starting from that of Clement VII, who did not exempt himself from doing his utmost to make requests that were sometimes objectively infeasible – such as that made in summer 1524, of inserting his and Leo X's tombs inside of the Medici Chapel, subverting all the projects that had been made up to that moment. Furthermore, the failure to execute the *Tomb of Julius II* was still hanging over Michelangelo, and the heirs of Julius II demanded that an agreement be reached as soon as possible. Lastly, there was also a shocking inefficiency in the supply of marble, which forced a continuous rethinking of the organisation of the work. For all these reasons, it is often misleading to analyse the working progress at the chapel in excessively mechanistic terms of cause and effect, as if the construction site, or the very mind of Michelangelo and the client, were a clear, perfectly oiled gear. That was not the case.

The first two issues can easily be overcome. There can be little doubt that Cosini – who we must not consider a simple stonecutter – could in two and a half months sketch the two *Trophies*. They in fact show a degree of finishing that is still coarse, and therefore did not require an effort that was too prolonged over time. However, if one still has doubts in this regard, we can connect to the second issue, that about the supply of marble, and we can thus extend for a further two months the execution of the *Trophies.* In a letter dated 12 July 1524, Michelangelo wrote to Meo della Corte, asking him to move inside the Chapel «*dua pezzi di marmo*» (two marble blocks) that had been left outside.[38] On the Piazza San Lorenzo lay the

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[36] JOANNIDES, *Michelangelo's Medici Chapel*, p. 546.

[37] In Federico Zuccari's drawing representing a group of artists gathering in the Medici Chapel to copy the statues (Paris, Musée du Louvre, Departement des Arts Graphiques, 4554r, fig.19), we see one of the *Trophies* positioned over the right columns of the niche of Lorenzo d'Urbino, and not at the central axis of the Tomb, as in Michelangelo's project (Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques, 838, fig.48). Whether the *Trophy* was actually mounted or not, Zuccari's drawing testifies the impossibility of positioning the two Trophies according to the original plan. Indeed, there is not enough room on the attics for the two massive *Trophies*, symptom either of Cosini's misunderstanding of Michelangelo's will, or of a change of measures during the execution of the architectural frame of the tombs.

[38] BUONARROTI, Michelangelo, *Letter to Meo della Corte*, 12 July 1524, in *Il carteggio*, III, 1973, p. 93: «*Meo, i' son di nuovo sollecitato che io lavori e che io mandi più presto che io posso a richavare e' marmi che non son buoni; però io vi prego che domactina, um pocho a migliore ora che l'usato, voi siate in sulla piazza di San Lorenzo, acciò che noi possian vedere dua pezzi di marmo che vi sonno*[...] *che noi gli mectian drento.*» This finds confirmation in

load of marbles that Michelangelo could not use due to defects or incorrect dimensions. On 9 July, three days before Michelangelo contacted Meo della Corte, Fattucci pressured Michelangelo to speed up the carving process.[39]

It is likely that Michelangelo decided to use those discarded «*dua pezzi di marmo*» not for the precious figures that he himself wanted to carve, but rather for the dimensionally more prominent elements of the decorative apparatus, which in fact was the portion of the tombs that was being carved in that period – on 7 June 1524, the architectural framing of one tomb was almost completely sculpted.[40] We can therefore think that the two pieces of marble chosen by Michelangelo were used to sculpt the two *Trophies*. It is likely that between July and August Michelangelo roughly sketched the shape and finally in September entrusted its completion to Cosini, who for the next two months took care to refine the ornamental details.[41]

Finally, coming to the third issue, the doubts that a dating of the *Trophies* to 1524 could raise about such an early abandonment of the sumptuous decoration of the attic, can be overcome by referring to two observations. The first: it is not certain that Cosini abandoning the carving of the *Trophies* in November/December 1524 is connected with Michelangelo's renunciation of the entire project of the attic. Perhaps, more simply, Cosini had to abandon the Medici Chapel due to new and more pressing external commissions. Michelangelo then may have freed him from his commitments in the chapel, and only temporarily set aside the *Trophies*, in anticipation of their completion at a later stage of the works, perhaps closer to the actual assembly of the attic.

To this, we must add the second observation: it is evident from the payment registers and from the correspondence, that in autumn 1524 the work of the chapel was hit by a substantial financial crisis of the client. On 8 October, there was a lowering of the wages of most of the stonecutters, and on the 18th of the same month Michelangelo complained about

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BARDESCHI CIULICH–BAROCCHI, *I Ricordi*, p. 131, where Michelangelo noted: «*A dì venti tre di decto* [July] [...] *decti a Baccio di Puccione lire sei* [...]*: m'à aiutato insino a dì decto, per mectere marmi nella sagrestia*.»

[39] FATTUCCI, *Letter to Michelangelo,* from Rome to Florence, 9 July 1524, *Ibidem*, III, 1973, p. 86-87: « [the Pope] *non desidera altro se non che voi faciate presto et bene.*»

[40] IDEM, *Letter to Michelangelo,* from Rome to Florence, 7 June 1524, *Ibidem*, III, 1973, p. 80, writes of one tomb «*quasi fatta di quadro.*» It must be noticed that Andrea Ferrucci was discharged on 31 May 1524, which might indicate that Ferrucci had settled the ornamental design, and the execution could proceed without his guide. Moreover, Gino d'Antonio Lorenzi, the *intagliatore*, stopped working in Summer 1524 a signal of the fact that most likely the architectural/ornamental setting of one of the tombs was completed.

[41] For a different reconstruction of the facts following the solicitation made to Michelangelo by Fattucci to speed up the carving of the marbles, see: ECHINGER-MAURACH, Claudia, *'E si rinasce tal concetto bello'. Michelangelo e la genesi delle sculture nella Sagrestia Nuova*, in *Michelangelo. Arte Materia Lavoro*, Venice 2019, pp. 199-215, who on the contrary believes that Michelangelo began sculpting the statues of the *Phases* over the summer 1524, and not the *Trophies*.

the lack of supply of money to finance the company.[42] This generated a prolonged interruption in Michelangelo's communications with Fattucci, which lasted almost two months – from 1 October to 22 November, Fattucci complains of hearing nothing from Michelangelo.[43] It is therefore likely that, after having decided in the summer to start the decoration of the attics with the *Trophies*, Michelangelo changed his mind in the autumn, and stopped the work, partly because he was aware that he would not be able to guarantee wages to the workers, and partly because he was offended by the objectively hurried methods of papal patronage.

In light of what has been argued up to now, a dating of the *Trophies* to 1524, in compliance with the analysis of payments to Cosini, seems plausible. We can therefore propose that the *Trophies* were carved by Cosini in the autumn of 1524, receiving a high pay of twenty-five *soldi* a day.

Although this may seem an unbearable workload for just one sculptor, it must be assumed that Cosini worked tirelessly almost every day for about eight months, and that it is not too far-fetched to believe that he was helped by assistants and collaborators. We are thinking above all of Maso Boscoli (Cosini's companion in Ferrucci's workshop, and his collaborator for the creation of the *Antonio Strozzi Tomb* in Santa Maria Novella), who began working in the chapel in May 1524,[44] just when Cosini was appointed *intagliatore*. Or of Francesco del Tadda, another pupil of Ferrucci, who was hired at the end of August,[45] close to Cosini's pay increase of 3 September and the carving of the *Trophies*.

What has been argued so far has served to elucidate some key points of the artistic relationship between Michelangelo and his collaborators, as well as to better delineate Cosini's artistic value as ornamental sculptor. Ferrucci's participation in the Medici Chapel was essential to fine-tune the final details of the architectural decoration, just as Cosini's

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[42] BARDESCHI CIULICH–BAROCCHI, *I Ricordi*, pp. 150-151: «*Meo dalla Corte e Bernardino Basso e Silvio e Cecho del Tadda e el Biancha Lana Bastiano di Macteo ànno avere l'usata provigione; gli altri, di sopra schritti, ànno aver diciocto soldi el dì, salvo Agniolo e Gianni di Remmia che ànno avere sedici soldi el dì. Francesco da Sangallo, che lavora in choctimo, à avere lire nove*»; BUONARROTI, Michelangelo, *Letter to Giovanni Spina*, 18 October 1524, in *Il carteggio*, III, 1973, 110: «*e se avete chommessione datemela [...] quantità che mi tocha insino a oggi. Se non l'avete, [... n']abbiate arrossire.*»

[43] FATTUCCI, *Letters to Michelangelo*, in *Il carteggio*, pp. III, 1973, p. 108, 1 October 1524: «*Arei caro che qualche volta voi m'avisassi come le cose vanno, et quello che voi lavorate»;* p. 114, 31 October 1524: «*questa è la terza lettera che io v'ò scritta, né mai mi avete risposto*»; p.116, 22 November 1524: «*io ò riceuta una vostra a me gratissima, che in verità n'è otta, ché di tante lettere v'ò scritto non n'ò mai auta risposta*».

[44] *I Ricordi*, pp. 140-149 (May 21 - September 24, 1524), to be identified with "*Maso*", later also named "*Maso del Boscho.*"

[45] *Ibidem*, pp. 147.

interventions were of extreme importance to provide the modern synthesis between Ferrucci's ornamental vocabulary and Michelangelo's figure sculpture.

Cosini was able to enjoy a stimulating environment, as well as creative freedom, which allowed him to experiment with forms and techniques. This was due to Michelangelo's particular disposition, in some ways hasty and anxious, and therefore permissive and open to suggestions. Cosini's creations in the Medici Chapel have little or nothing to do with those of Michelangelo prior to the Medici Chapel. Whereas, on the other hand, there is a timid, albeit indisputable, influence of Cosini's grotesque imagery in the statues of the *Dukes* that Michelangelo made in the years following 1524.

This conditioning of the grotesque in Michelangelo's sculptural language is mainly visible in Giuliano's cuirass, which Vasari rightly believes to be a "celestial" masterpiece («Whoever studies the beauty of the buskins and the cuirass, believes it to be celestial rather than mortal»). In all probability, Michelangelo initially planned to represent the *Dukes* naked, and only in a later stage he decided to represent them with their rich military armour.[46] We are not going so far as to say that Michelangelo decided to introduce cuirasses to the *Dukes* only after seeing Cosini's *Trophies*. However, given the new dating to 1524 of the *Trophies* proposed here, there cannot be much doubt that Giuliano's cuirass was an excellent response to the cuirass of Cosini's left *Trophy*, considering that the *Dukes* were sculpted, or rather rough-hewed, around summer 1526, and that *Giuliano* was refined by Montorsoli only in 1533.[47]

In Giuliano's cuirass, it seems as if Michelangelo was giving a sample of his insurmountable skills as a sculptor, even in the most meticulous ornamentation. The mask on the chest, which in Cosini's *Trophy* looks like a green man with a long vegetable moustache and a fluttering turban, in Giuliano's becomes an excessively dense stratification of disparate elements. The facial features are deeply carved and tenebrous, the canine nose flattened, the biomorphic moustache as an extension of the cheeks, a double wattle under the chin, bear ears on the forehead, a double shell-like crown, and finally wings with long feathers – all concentrated in a single mask (fig.261).[48]

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[46] As said in the previous chapter, Tintoretto drew the figure of Giuliano strangely naked (Oxford, Christ Church Library, 0354, 0355 recto and verso). This might mean that Tintoretto owned the preparatory model of the statue of Giuliano, which at the beginning of the project should have been portrayed naked. This might also be confirmed looking at the Louvre design 838, the most complete project of the single tombs that we know. We note also here that the Duke at the centre seems naked.

[47] BUONARROTI, Michelangelo, *Letter to Fattucci*, 17 June 1526, in *Il carteggio*, III, 1973, pp. 227-228.

[48] See also the mask on *Giuliano*'s back, generally not visible. It has much simpler features than the front mask, and the attribution remains rather doubtful (Montorsoli?), as if it were part of the free exercises that Michelangelo granted to collaborators, not unlike the murals in the crypt.

The lavishly decorated breastplate (*lorica*) was a motif of the ancient Roman sculpture, which found many expressions in the Florentine art, especially starting from the profiles of warriors sculpted by Andrea del Verrocchio and his workshop in the 1460s. Andrea Ferrucci belonged to a family of sculptors from Fiesole, which also counted among its most prominent members Francesco di Simone Ferrucci, a close collaborator of Verrocchio, as well as Andrea's master. Andrea Ferrucci himself sculpted the bust of *Julius Caesar*, now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, with a *lorica* richly decorated with grotesques (fig.254). It is therefore not difficult to think that Cosini received the imprinting from that Verrocchiesque figurative culture to which Ferrucci belonged, and that he employed a revised and updated version of this figurative culture in his *Trophies*.

The presence of Ferrucci and Cosini in the Medici Chapel was particularly important because they introduced a vocabulary into the chapel that Michelangelo did not master, and by which however Michelangelo was influenced in turn. Furthermore and above all, the simple fact of being part of the Medici Chapel allowed Cosini's sculptural decoration to receive great visibility, further enhanced by the fact that Michelangelo's magnificent original project was never completed, and therefore every little element that contributed to the final execution became enormously significant.

Andrea Ferrucci between Florence and Naples.

Before carefully analysing the portions of the Medici Chapel decoration created by Cosini, it is useful to dwell on the artistic career of Andrea Ferrucci, who was a prominent figure for the start of the work and for the development of the decorative apparatus. After all, it was he who allowed Silvio Cosini to enter the workshop of the Medici Chapel. We will notice that Cosini was extraordinarily influenced by Ferrucci's sculpture, in particular by its later declinations, the Neapolitan ones that took place in the first fifteen years of the sixteenth century.

Vasari says that Andrea Ferrucci began his career in the workshop of his father's cousin, Francesco di Simone Ferrucci, a close collaborator of Andrea del Verrocchio, and a sculptor who was particularly appreciated at the end of the fifteenth century. In the workshop of his renowned relative, Andrea Ferrucci initially specialised in the ornamental carvings («*fogliami*»), but he soon moved on to sculpting figures. Throughout the entire biography, Vasari's shrewd critical sense repeatedly reproaches Ferrucci for conducting his works

«rather with the skill of his hand than with art,» and therefore lacking the firmness and order of «*disegno.*»

However severe this judgment may seem, Vasari actually did not deviate too much from the truth, when he glimpsed a meandering expressive tension in Ferrucci's art, a passion for asymmetries and for figurations bordering on caricature. Ferrucci's sculpture participated in fact in a linguistic current that crossed most of the Florentine sculptors working at the end of the fifteenth century, and that was moved by the footsteps of the most eccentric researches of Verrocchio, Pollaiolo, Andrea Della Robbia, and Giuliano da Sangallo. We can include in this current many of Ferrucci's peers, such as the first Andrea Sansovino, Benedetto da Rovezzano, Giovan Francesco Rustici. They received the expressive experiments of Donatello, and practiced in the hybridisation of registers and styles. For all of them, the grotesque ornament became a further instrument of artistic expression, to be investigated and reworked, in order to convey a new and vivifying creative anxiety. Ultimately, we can label this current as "anti-monumental," for it was often disunited and dedicated to the description of the minute. It can be contrasted with the more closely understood “Michelangelism,” which indeed made simplification and monumental unity its *raison d'être*.

In all Ferrucci's work, we find an example that perfectly summarises what we have just said. This is the *Altar of the Crucifixion*, now preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, but originally located in the Church of San Girolamo, Fiesole (fig.224). It was commissioned by Tita Salviati in 1493, and executed by Ferrucci and his partner, Jacopo d’Andrea del Mazza, by 31 August 1495, when the payments to the two sculptors were settled.[49]

The architectural scheme follows that of the *Corbinelli Altar*, sculpted by Andrea Sansovino only a few years earlier (in the early 1490s). However, Ferrucci's *Altar* stands out for its sparkling preciousness, obtained thanks to the marble rendered dazzling white, contrasted by the red marble of the background of the niches (fig.226). The sparkling whiteness is further accentuated by the gilding applied to many details, and which covers in particular the background of the central episode of the Crucifixion (fig.225). The angels flying at the side of the cross in the central panel, and those praying at the top of the altar (fig.227), perfectly embody the spirit of the entire work. Twisted in pained expressions, with their nervous and improbable drapery, yet so finely worked, the angels are at the same time a *tour*

[49] For an analysis of Andrea Ferrucci’s sculpture, see: NALDI, Riccardo, *Andrea Ferrucci. Marmi gentili tra la Toscana e Napoli*, Naples 2002. As for the *Altar of the Crucifixion*, see: *Ibidem*, p. 14.

de force of Ferrucci's excellent technical skills, and an expression of the typical self-referential tensions that Florentine art would have explored in the first decades of the Cinquecento, especially in the painting of Rosso Fiorentino and Pontormo, in turn so intimately connected with the art of the Spanish Alonso Berruguete.[50]

The sculptural ornament literally submerges the architectural partitions, giving the impression that Ferrucci intended to conceal the architectural structure through decorative luxuriance. Ferrucci finally succeeded in bringing this intimate interconnection between sculpture and architecture to the apex in the *Altar of the Madonna Bruna*, Church of Santa Maria del Carmine, Naples (1510, fig.228), where the almost liquid figures of the angels create a vortex that frames the sacred icon of the Madonna Bruna, thus taking over the architectural elements, whose components are now barely mentioned, and which are thus forced to succumb to the power of sculptural figuration. It was precisely because of this sculptural vigour that fills every nook and cranny of available surface that the *Altar of the Madonna Bruna* has often been thought to be a work by Spanish sculptors. But Naldi rightly assigned it to Ferrucci, given the indubitable references to his other works.[51]

Ferrucci spent a long period in Naples (1504-1512), in all probability establishing his own workshop there, and being particularly active for the wealthiest class of the city. Without wishing to examine in detail Ferrucci's Neapolitan works, we now intend to dwell on some elements that are useful for evaluating Ferrucci's contribution both in the training of Cosini and in the execution of the Medici Chapel.

We will therefore examine the decorative apparatus of only two of Ferrucci's Neapolitan works, the *Carafa (di Santa Severina) Chapel*, and the *Tomb of Galeazzo Pandone*, both located in the church of San Domenico Maggiore, Naples. The two works can be dated to the last years that Ferrucci worked in Naples, therefore around 1510. Both unfold a rich grotesque vocabulary, and appear to have numerous references to the imagery deployed by Cosini in his own works.[52]

As already mentioned, the only drawing we know by Michelangelo, almost certainly made specifically for the decoration of the Medici Chapel, is a satyr head with an expression blocked in a mocking grimace (Windsor, Royal Collection, 12672r, fig.59). It has also been said that the drawing has characteristics similar to the masks used by Ferrucci in his Neapolitan

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[50] About the *Altar of the Crucifixion*, Leopoldo Cicognara wrote: «*Chi non direbbe che i due angeli volanti e laterali alla croce non fossero disegnati da Michelangelo?*» (CICOGNARA, Leopoldo, *Storia della scultura dal suo Risorgimento in Italia fino al secolo di Napoleone*, Venice 1813, IV, p. 269). As usual, the need for referencing Michelangelo in order to ennoble the art of Cinquecento's sculptors.

[51] NALDI, *Andrea Ferrucci*, pp. 117-141.

[52] *Ibidem*, pp. 143-212.

works. We are referring to some decorative details of the *Carafa Chapel* and the *Pandone Tomb*, in particular the green man of the right pillar of the entrance arch of the *Carafa Chapel*, and the one of the left pilaster of the *Pandone Tomb* (fig.231).

Given the dense concentration of signs, the Windsor drawing must have been the result of a series of second thoughts. At the edges of the face, we can in fact recognise at least two different layers of signs, the lighter ones of the first draft, and the darker ones of the corrections. At the height of the ears, twisted horns are hidden by the most marked strokes of the diadem and the skullcap. Besides an indecision about the size to be given to the diadem, we generally see an attempt to simplify the shape of the head. From the chaotic mane and the peculiar horns of the underlying head, through frenetic signs we pass to a simpler inverted-U shape, similar to the masks of the frieze of the Medici Chapel. This would confirm that the Windsor drawing is the model prepared by Michelangelo for the frieze masks, partly made by Cosini.

By comparing Michelangelo's drawing with Ferrucci's Neapolitan green men mentioned above, we can see several similarities. The grimace in Michelangelo's drawing closely resembles the *Carafa Chapel* green man with the open mouth, from which leaves emerge. Further, the somatic features, and in particular the expressiveness of the eyes and brow arches, recall the green man of the *Pandone Tomb*. Admittedly, the green man of the *Pandone Tomb* seems to be the reference model for the corrections made subsequently to Michelangelo’s drawing. Therefore the diadem, the expressiveness of the eyes, the motif of the double curl on the sides of the face, the inverted-U simplification, all seem to be elements inserted by Michelangelo under the advice of Ferrucci, or perhaps of Cosini himself, who knew his master’s prototypes well.

The Windsor drawing is therefore of great importance since it makes evident the collaboration and handover between Michelangelo and the collaborators. The overly elaborate fantasies of Michelangelo's initial head undergo a decisive revision by the *ornamentisti*, Ferrucci and Cosini, who knew the job better than the master, and therefore realised that for a frieze composed of the same element repeated countless times, a formal simplification was way more practical. As will become clearer as we argue for Cosini's interventions in the Medici Chapel, Michelangelo's drawing underwent further changes when it was executed in marble, a further sign of the independence and freedom that Michelangelo granted his collaborators.

However, Ferrucci's contribution in the decoration of the Medici Chapel does not end with the suggestion of the iconography of the mask for the frieze. If we compare the Medici

Chapel *Trophies* with those made by Ferrucci in the grotesques of the *Carafa Chapel* and of the *Pandone Tomb*, we realise how substantial Ferrucci's contribution had been in fine-tuning the decorative details of the Medici Chapel.

As already mentioned, the idea of inserting the *Trophies* on the crowning of the tombs of the Medici Chapel dates back to Michelangelo's first projects, as can be seen in particular in the Louvre drawing 838 (fig.48), which is the most complete and best refined project known of the tombs.[53] In the Louvre design, the trophy is placed at the centre of the attic, and is the most prominent element of the entire decorative ensemble. The cuirass at the base of the trophy is a smart invention, as it exploits the fragmentary nature of the *Belvedere Torso* (fig.253) – from which the anatomy and abdominal pose of the cuirass are clearly taken – to put it at the service of an actual fragment of armour.

The *Belvedere Torso*, broken and incomplete, is therefore assimilated without any desire to remedy its incompleteness, but rather by making the most of its potential as a fragment. Incompleteness is thus enhanced with pleased amusement. Yet, however ingenious the invention may seem, and as much as it perfectly aligns with Michelangelo's *non finito*, the cuirass in the Louvre design was not an original idea by Michelangelo. In fact, it is an exact copy (almost a cast) of the cuirass that Ferrucci sculpted in bas-relief in the grotesques of the *Carafa Chapel* and the *Pandone Tomb* (fig.232).

It is difficult to establish whether the idea of mixing the cuirass with the pose and anatomy of the *Belvedere Torso* first came to Ferrucci during the years of his stay in Naples, or whether he assimilated the ideas of others, considering that the cuirasses hanging from a thread and assuming strange poses are a recurring element of the grotesque imagery, particularly appreciated in Lombardy – and many Lombard sculptors were in Naples in the same years in which Ferrucci stayed there.[54] It is certain, however, that Ferrucci often uses the pose of the *Belvedere Torso* in the grotesque figurations of his Neapolitan works. In addition to the cuirasses already mentioned, we also find the typical pose of the abdomen of

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[53] JOANNIDES, *Michelangelo's Medici Chapel,* p. 542, considers the Louvre drawing 838 an autograph by Michelangelo. See also: BAMBACH, Carmen, *Michelangelo. Divine draftsman and designer*, New York 2017, pp. 121-126.

[54] See: ABBATE, Francesco, *Appunti su Pietro da Milano scultore e la colonia lombarda a Napoli*, in *Bollettino d'arte,* 6, LXIX, 1984, 26, pp. 73-86. It is worth considering that Andrea Bregno (1418-1503), a Lombard sculptor particularly active in Rome and the designer of the *Piccolomini Altar* in Siena, was the first owner of the *Belvedere Torso*. Besides, we find many examples of trophies in the Lombard sculptural ornamentation. The pilasters of the *Monument to Galeazzo Visconti*, designed by Gian Cristoforo Romano in 1492 for the Certosa of Pavia, are filled with trophies of any sorts. This habit became common, and also the Lombard sculptor Bambaia lavishly decorated the *Tomb of Gaston de Foix* with trophies in 1515-22. Other examples can be found in the works by the Lombard sculptors Pace Gagini and Tamagnino (*Portal* of Palazzo Lorenzo Cattaneo in Genoa, 1504).

the *Belvedere Torso*, with that deep groove of the fold above the navel, in the creatures in plant mutation on a pillar of the *Carafa Chapel* (fig.230).

It should also be emphasised that Cosini's transposition into marble of the *Trophies* for the Medici Chapel respects the indication of the Louvre drawing 838. The cuirass of the Cosini *Trophies* is in fact also a reworking of the *Belvedere Torso*, yet embellishing it with a dense ornamental luxuriance. Cosini applies in the *Trophies* a synthesis between the vigour of Michelangelo's sculpture and the iconographic inventions of the ornamental tradition, of which his master Ferrucci was a convinced representative. In other words, Cosini is the initial proponent of that process of "monumentalisation of the grotesque" which we said was a predominant phenomenon in the art of the following decades.

This quick overview of Ferrucci's work has served to highlight the value and the extent of his contribution within the construction site of the Medici Chapel. It should be added that, as Campigli rightly points out, the period that Ferrucci spent in the service of the Medici Chapel corresponded to his slow but inexorable departure from the work of sculptor, caused by his advanced age, which in fact led him to death in 1526, only two years after his appointment as foreman of the Medici Chapel. This naturally favoured the activity and career of his pupils, in particular Cosini, and it is therefore difficult to establish exactly where the contribution of one ended and that of the other began.

The interventions of Ferrucci and Cosini were highly significant because they attempted to introduce grotesque decorative language inside the Medici Chapel, so as to satisfy the Pope's pressing requests. If we look again at the project for the single tombs of the Louvre drawing 838, we see that Michelangelo had not considered any kind of grotesque ornamentation in the architectural partitions. In the drawing, in fact, we do not find either the frieze of masks, nor the capitals with masks, nor the monstrous creatures above the niches. It is evident then that all these elements were original contributions by the Ferrucci-Cosini team. The two tried to dampen the excessive rigidity of Michelangelo's project, which was instead characterised by a clear separation between architecture and sole figurative sculpture. The task of Ferrucci and Cosini was to use ornament to soften the architectural connections, so as to make the union between architecture and sculpture more substantial – similar to what Ferrucci had created in the *Altar of the Madonna Bruna*. Indeed, many sacred architectures carried out by the end of the second decade of the sixteenth century, such as the Certosa of Pavia, the Holy House of Loreto, the Cesi Chapel in Rome, the tombs of the Spanish

sovereigns preserved in Carrara, the internal restoration of the Cathedral of Pisa, were all the result of the increasingly widespread taste for luxurious marble decoration.

It appears evident from the Louvre drawing 838 that Michelangelo was unable to fully acknowledge and fully embrace this hyper-decorative trend, being in some ways succubus to his own formidable research on the human figure. For this reason, Ferrucci and Cosini tried to play a role of mediation between Michelangelo's limited vision on one hand, and the pervasive grotesque language on the other. However, the often adverse circumstances of the Medici Chapel construction site did not allow this mediation to take a definitively convincing form.

Cosini 'figurista' and 'ornamentista' for the Strozzi Tomb. Experiments in sculpture.

As mentioned above, Cosini began his activity as *ornamentista* of the Tomb of Lorenzo di Urbino with the execution of the capitals and of the monsters carved above the side niches. Both elements show a particularly innovative style, made up of disproportions, excesses, and rough surfaces, all characteristics that we would struggle to attribute to Cosini if we only looked at his first delicate works, in particular the statue of the *Angel* in the Cathedral of Volterra, and the right angel in bas-relief of the *Tomb of Antonio Strozzi*, Church of Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

However, it is precisely in the portions carved by Cosini in the *Strozzi Tomb* (fig.223) that his excellent sculptural technique is accompanied by a powerful experimentalism. Cosini shows all his capacities as a figurative sculptor, and surely carved the central panel with the Madonna and Child, the right panel with the angel, and the mask at the top. Marks of tooth-chisel are often left visible on the surface, as seen for example in the panel with the Madonna and Child, where the streaks of the tooth-chisel serve to render the aerial perspective that obscures the distant vision of the cherub in the clouds. Similarly, the marks of the tooth-chisel are used on the background to intensify the smoothness of the figures that emerge from the plan, as is the case in the angel panel. There is also an extensive use of the drill, especially among the curls of Jesus and of the cherub at the foot of the Madonna, and in the foliage of the trees. The holes of the drill are not artificially hidden, but rather are intentionally left visible, and thus become part of the figurative vocabulary.

Yet, the element of the *Strozzi Tomb* that comes closest to the ornaments sculpted by Cosini in the Medici Chapel is undoubtedly the mask placed at the top of the monument (fig.237). Composed of a front face in the centre, merged with two faces in profile at the sides,

the mask of the *Strozzi Tomb* is a masterpiece of its kind, and perfectly embodies that peculiar oddness that Vasari recognises and exalts in Cosini's art, and which is also present in the masks of the capitals of the Medici Chapel. The mask of the *Strozzi Tomb* also opens a central issue for the definition of Cosini's creativity, and helps to better frame his relationship with the figurative suggestions that Michelangelo provided him during the period at the Medici Chapel.

Indeed, the dating of the *Strozzi Tomb* is rather uncertain. It is not entirely certain whether it was executed before or after Ferrucci and Cosini's participation in the Medici Chapel. It is customary to believe that the execution of the Tomb began at the beginning of 1524, immediately after the death of Antonio Strozzi, which according to the inscription on the monument took place in January 1524. Vasari in fact tells us that the commission came from Strozzi's wife, Antonia Vespucci, who entrusted the task to Ferrucci, who, however, by now old, assigned the work to the pupils Maso Boscoli and Silvio Cosini. Vasari continues his story by stating that the final assembly of the tomb took place under the guidance of Cosini alone, at a much later stage than the execution of the various marble parts. Lastly, Vasari notes 1522 as the year of execution of the marbles, a dating however resolutely discarded by Milanesi, who considered it a printing error, since it does not conform to the date of death of Strozzi in 1524.[55] Milanesi concentrated its reconstruction on indication that Strozzi's wife commissioned the tomb, and assumed that she must have been a widow at the time of entrusting Ferrucci with the design of the tomb.

Scholarship tends to agree with Milanesi, and therefore believes that Boscoli and Cosini began carving the marble of the tomb in the first months of 1524.[56] Since it is unlikely that Cosini could complete all the parts of the monument assigned to him in just two months, Milanesi's theory would imply that starting from April 1524 Cosini was working simultaneously on both the *Strozzi Tomb* and the Medici Chapel. However, this possibility is highly unlikely, since the number of days spent by Cosini on the construction site of the Medici Chapel covers almost the entire year 1524 – in fact his free days were very few (almost none), and certainly not enough to believe that Cosini could carry out the two works simultaneously.

One could then believe that Cosini dedicated himself to the execution of the *Strozzi Tomb* only after having participated in the Medici Chapel, therefore starting from the first months of 1525. However, given that the marbles of the *Strozzi Tomb* still show a style strongly

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[55] MILANESI, Gaetano – VASARI, Giorgio, *Le vite dei più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori scritte da Giorgio Vasari con nuove annotazioni e commenti di Gaetano Milanesi*, Florence 1906, IV, p. 481, note 3.
[56] See: DALLI REGOLI, *Silvius*, pp. 12, 29-31; CAMPIGLI, *Silvio Cosini*, 2007, p. 88.

influenced by Ferrucci’s manner, within which there is only a timid attempt to include those technical experiments mentioned above, we intend to embrace the dating of Vasari, and we therefore believe that Cosini executed the *Strozzi Tomb* marbles in 1522, or in any case by 1523.

An early dating of the *Strozzi Tomb* to 1522-23 is also confirmed by an exquisitely formal element. In fact, there are strong affinities between the right angel carved by Cosini (fig.235) and the figure of Sant’Apollonia painted by Rosso Fiorentino in the foreground of the altarpiece of the *Marriage of the Virgin* in the Church of San Lorenzo (fig.236). Cosini’s angel and Rosso’s Sant’Apollonia are represented with an identical pose, the same arching of the bust, the same posture of the shoulders, the same tension of the long neck that arranges the face in perfect profile. The profile of the face is also outlined in the same way in the two figures, the same long pointed nose, the same eye socket, the same receding chin. Finally, even the slightly ruffled dress that reveals the underlying body is identical – look at the navel in particular – as well as the bob hair.

We must then understand if it was Cosini who was inspired by the figure of Rosso, or rather the opposite. To clarify this doubt, some formal observations can be made. Cosini's angel totally corresponds to the prototypes of his master Ferrucci – see in particular the bas-relief angels of the *Altar of the Madonna Bruna* (fig.234). Furthermore, if we compare Cosini's right angel with Boscoli's left one, we see that both come from a single preparatory drawing, certainly provided by Ferrucci. Whereas Boscoli obtusely adopts Ferrucci’s prototype, Cosini wisely elaborates it, slightly accentuating the arching of the pelvis, making the gestures delicate, and the features of the body softer. Therefore, rather than a copy of Rosso's Sant’Apollonia, Cosini’s angel appears to be a personalised reinterpretation of Ferrucci’s models.

We must therefore think that Cosini conceived his angel in total independence from the figure of Rosso. Thus, it is deduced that Cosini's angel preceded the figure of Rosso. In confirmation of this hypothesis, by carefully examining the figure by Rosso, we note in it particular ivory smoothness and statuary idealisation, making a decisive conditioning of sculpture more than plausible.

By a strange chance of luck, *Marriage of the Virgin* is one of Rosso's rare dated and signed paintings. On one of the steps of the staircase, we can read the inscription "RVBEVS A[NNO] S[ALVTIS] MDXXIII." The altarpiece was then finished in 1523. Therefore, if we accept the possibility that Cosini's angel preceded Rosso’s painting, we must also date Cosini's angel

to 1523, if not even to 1522, which would confirm the accuracy of Vasari's temporal reconstruction – who appears well informed about the chronology of Cosini's life.

The affinity between Cosini's angel and Rosso's Sant'Apollonia opens up a further question that deserves proper investigation. If the *Strozzi Tomb* was mounted only after Cosini's participation in the Medici Chapel, therefore after 1525, we must ask ourselves how Rosso saw Cosini's angel, since probably in 1523 the relief lay in Ferrucci's workshop, waiting for assembly. We can then suggest the hypothesis that Cosini and Rosso were linked by a close friendship, that they exchanged advice and appreciation, which is not surprising, given that the two were united by the same bizarre and restless spirit.

We now come to the mask placed on the top of the *Strozzi Tomb*. Having dated Cosini's angel with certainty to 1522-23 does not reinforce the dating of all the other fragments of the tomb. As we have already said, the tomb was assembled after 1525, and it is therefore probable that Cosini executed some portions of the tomb immediately before the assembly, in particular those ornamental connecting elements that were used to frame the figurative reliefs. One might then think that, stimulated by his experience as a proper ornamental sculptor, Cosini executed the mask of the *Strozzi Tomb* only after his participation in the Medici Chapel.

Yet, the Medici Chapel capitals denoting independence from any possible reference suggested by Michelangelo in the design phase is a clear symptom of Cosini's strong familiarity with ornamental iconography. Thus, it is not hazardous to think that the decorative apparatus of the *Strozzi Tomb* precedes that of the Medici Chapel. This would confirm the theory that Cosini (and Ferrucci) did not play a subordinate role within the Medici Chapel, but rather that they were called to participate due to their experience and familiarity with sculptural ornament. We could even go so far as to say that Michelangelo was convinced of Cosini's excellent sculptural skills thanks to the reliefs of the *Strozzi Tomb*, especially the ornamental ones.

If we look at the carving technique of the top mask of the *Strozzi Tomb*, we notice that the surface is crossed by the clearly visible streaks of the tooth-chisel, which wisely enhance the curves of the various parts. We have seen that the technique of exploiting the marks of the tooth-chisel in an expressive sense was often used by Cosini, already in the relief of the angel of 1522-23, and is therefore to be considered a peculiarity completely independent from any possible influence of Michelangelo. The mask also succeeds in excellently composing the facial masses, expressively balancing the emptiness of the eye sockets and nostrils, and the swollen fullness of the cheekbones and eyebrow arches – in a way quite similar to what we see in the

face of the angel, or those of baby Jesus and the cherub of the central relief. In other words, given the technical similarities with other parts of the monument, there is no formal reason suggesting that the mask was made in the later phase of the tomb assembly, following a Michelangelesque update. Cosini exhibited autonomy and sculptural excellence even before his participation in the Medici Chapel, and the *Strozzi Tomb* demonstrates just this. If anything, Michelangelo's frantic and permissive workshop at the Medici Chapel gave Cosini ample opportunity to further investigate the experiments he had only begun to explore in the *Strozzi Tomb*.

Cosini succeeds in combining the iconography of the mask/green man with impudent anatomical investigations. The limbs of the three-faced mask appear as flayed and flabby unrolled skin, as if three faces had been sewn together in a horrific way. Most likely, Cosini executed a facial flaying on an actual human body, and used these bold anatomical studies to inspire his creation. Vasari tells us that once, during his Pisan period (1528-30), while completing anatomical studies on the corpse of a person condemned to death, Cosini created a bodice of human skin which he wore for a long time, convinced that it had apotropaic powers.

Michelangelo is therefore of little use to frame and grasp the artistic profile of the bizarre Cosini. His prolific artistic spirit, so agile in working with stone, so autonomous and imaginative in developing the most varied suggestions, was already formed before his participation in the Medici Chapel. The proximity to Michelangelo certainly added further stimuli to those already existing, but above all it gave Cosini the ease of working independently from the workshop of the master Ferrucci, who was increasingly withdrawn into private life. Thus, it matters little whether the Strozzi mask was carved before, during or after Cosini's collaboration in the Medici Chapel. It is as much the result of the technical experiments of the *Strozzi Tomb*, as of the creative freedom of the Medici Chapel. Rather, what is important to note is that the Strozzi mask encapsulates and distils in a formidable way all the experimental research that Cosini was frantically investigating at that time, and which will also find space in the few decorative portions that he sculpted during the year spent at the Medici Chapel.

Cosini «intagliatore» at the Medici Chapel

Capitals and monsters

Now that we have fully clarified the chronology of Cosini's interventions, his artistic independence, and his and Ferrucci's creative contribution in the Medici Chapel, we turn to analyse in detail the portions of sculptural ornament that Cosini made in the Medici Chapel. As already mentioned, Cosini probably began his activity in the chapel, sculpting the capitals (fig.241) and monstrous creatures (fig.243) of the Tomb of Lorenzo di Urbino.

Each of the four capitals placed at the top of the double pilasters that frame Lorenzo's niche is composed of three masks with long volute horns. The horns depart from the nape of the masks, and the ends are joined by a garland of acorns that crosses the front of the mask, to which they are joined through a bow. Two types of masks can be recognised in the capitals: one shows a round face with a dazed expression framed by large protruding ears, the toothless mouth widens in a disturbing smile, the sunken eyes appear suffering; the other unnaturally widens the lips in a terrifying cry, the squinted eyes, the pointed ears, all together make it look like a feline yawn.

Technically, the masks display a deep carving, which makes the volumes of the face decisively emerge from the background, wisely exploiting the *chiaroscuro* obtained through the different degrees of excavation of the stone. Cosini's style is here at the same time delicate – in the care to render the complexity of the surfaces of the facial features – and rough – in the violent thrusts of the carving, and in the use of the punctuation of the drill holes for the eyebrows. Also in Ferrucci's Neapolitan works there is a similar passion for deep carvings obtained with a drill, visible above all in one of the masks of the *Carafa Chapel* (fig.229).

In the fifteenth-century Florentine tradition, heads and masks had been often used as decorations of the capitals. The most illustrious examples are those that Donatello executed for the grey stone altar of the *Cavalcanti Annunciation*, Santa Croce; the capitals of Palazzo Strozzi, designed by Benedetto da Maiano at the end of the fifteenth century; and the masks, green men and Gorgons, which Giuliano da Sangallo made in the capitals of both the Sacristy of Santo Spirito and those of Palazzo Gondi.

However, the heads that Cosini carved in the capitals of the Tomb of Lorenzo decisively differ from those precedents, thanks above all to the innovative oddity that distinguishes them. Whilst the masks-capitals of Donatello, Maiano, and Sangallo were still heavily indebted to ancient prototypes, those of Cosini completely disengage from any reference or canon, and

innovate the model. The ability to make those terrifying visions plausible with fleshy protuberances and exaggerated expressions presents a certain dose of horror realism, a sign of Cosini's familiarity with anatomical studies, both on men and on animals – the same ones we also recognised in the mask of the *Strozzi Tomb*. Yet, there are also references to antiquity, especially in the exaggeratedly wide open mouth, which is a direct reference to the ancient theatrical masks, which had large openings on the mouth to allow a correct projection of the voice of the actors who wore them. Most likely, Cosini cultivated his own passion for antiques, and collected small ancient artefacts, such as masks for example. The hypothesis that Cosini could have been an antiquarian collector is presented in Doni's *Disegno* (1549), and proposed again later by Dalli Regoli.[57] Since the character of '*Silvio scultore'* in *Disegno* is nothing more than a literary device that Doni uses to explore the possibilities of sculpture, it is misleading to consider that purely literary character as a reference for the reconstruction of Cosini's biography. However, the possibility that Cosini could actually collect small antique objects is confirmed by the use of the same theatrical mask in at least two works. We are thinking of the *De' Vicariis Altar* of Salerno, in whose left pilaster we see a group of three dramatic masks, whose central, with squeezed eyes and half-open mouth in laughter, is identical to the expression of one of the tritons that we find in the top frieze of the *Altar of Maria and Clemente* in the Cathedral of Pisa.[58]

Cosini's attempt to artfully shape the harsh reality has an exquisitely witchcraft flavour, that even Vasari recognises when he defines Cosini as «*maliastro*» (warlock) and «ready to believe in enchantments and suchlike follies.»[59] He presents in his sculpture a strongly experimental approach, in precarious balance between the crudest reality and the most fantastic visions. He therefore moves with ease between the Verrocchian realism, and the hallucinations of Giovan Francesco Rustici, Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino.[60]

For a correct analysis of the heads of the capitals of the Medici Chapel, we must mention the drawing of satirical heads commonly attributed to Michelangelo, now preserved in the British Museum (1859,0625.557, fig.58). In the previous chapter, we proposed a different attribution of the drawing to an artist working in the Castello garden (Montorsoli, or Tribolo himself, or perhaps one of his most gifted pupils, such as Pierino da Vinci), given the affinity

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[57] DALLI REGOLI, *Silvio Cosini e l'ornamento,* p. 109.

[58] See: chapter 2, § *Tritons. Silvio Cosini, Bartolomé Ordoñez, Stagio Stagi*.

[59] Cosini's fondness for magic and spiritism is argued in: DEL BRAVO, Carlo, *Silvio e la magia*, in *Artista*, 1992, pp. 8-19.

[60] Cosini's reliance to the sculptor Giovan Francesco Rustici is suggested for the first time by: GAMBA, Carlo, *Silvio Cosini*, in *Dedalo,* X, 1929/30, vol. I, pp. 229-232. CAMPIGLI, *Silvio Cosini*, 2007, pp. 88-89, finds connections with Andrea del Sarto and Pontormo.

between the British Museum drawing and the ornamentations of the Castello *Fontana Grande*. This was done above all because it seems derisory of Tribolo's creative capacities to believe that the conception of the *Fontana Grande* was so exclusively indebted to a sketch by Michelangelo's hand – a fact that instead scholarship has no difficulty in believing.

Although a change in the attribution of the British Museum drawing still seems plausible, it must be admitted that the heads of the drawing have characteristics that might be consistent with the mask at Windsor (fig.59). The accumulating fantasy of the heads of the British Museum drawing evokes both the slight sketch that can be glimpsed under the most marked signs of the Windsor drawing, and the extremely dense mask of Giuliano's armour (fig.261). Thus, it would fit perfectly into the profile of the Michelangelo who ventured in grotesque decoration, competing with the most consolidated ornamental tradition.

If we accept this description of Michelangelo, we can also accept the fact that the heads of the British Museum drawing have no particular relationship with the works of Michelangelo, inside or outside the Medici Chapel.[61] Thus, the drawing was just an exercise *pour l'art*, an iconographic investigation that served to reach the final formalisation of the Windsor drawing, which as we have said, shows a process of simplification probably due to the intervention of Ferrucci and Cosini.

May this broad discussion on the British Museum drawing of satirical heads serve above all to bring out the complexity of the phenomenon of the generational transition between the sculpture of Michelangelo and that of the young Cosini and Tribolo. The phenomenon is so complex and ambiguous that the interpretations that can be drawn from it are contradictory and opposite. On one hand, it can be believed that the drawing was actually executed by Michelangelo in a period of his career when he was particularly permeable to new references, and prolific in terms of bizarre fantasies – this version of the facts, however, risks arriving at the misbelief that Michelangelo's truly singular experience at the Medici Chapel alone can explain the objective spread in Florentine (and European) art of the monumental grotesque. On the other hand, we can believe that the British Museum drawing is the result of a completely different research aligned with properly grotesque expressions, such as those of Tribolo struggling with the decoration of the Castello garden. The two opposite positions can coexist when it is recognised that the liberation from the ancient canon (*licenza*) and the lively creative ferment that Vasari attributes to the presence of Michelangelo in Florence on the occasion of the construction of the Medici Chapel, were such pervasive phenomena in the late

[61] See WILDE, Johannes, *Michelangelo and his studio,* London 1953 (1975), pp. 66-67.

Quattrocento and early Cinquecento, that Michelangelo himself was hit by that same vortex that affected entire generations of artists.

In conclusion, from what has been said so far, we do not intend to consider the British Museum drawing as a possible model for the masks that Cosini made on the capitals of the Tomb of Lorenzo, mainly because no particular affinity can be found. However, if one wanted to find similarities, they are in any case the result of a general creative ferment, and of a widespread iconographic research into the grotesque, in which both Michelangelo and Cosini played on equal terms – we can in truth say at this point that, of the two, Cosini was far more familiar with ornamental language than Michelangelo.

The same bizarre spirit is also recognisable in the monstrous creatures that adorn the side pediments of the Tomb of Lorenzo. They are an explosion of movement: sinuous lines, rounded volumes, deeply carved surfaces crossed by the marks of the tooth-chisel, which accentuate the sensation of vibration. Cosini's monsters have a long, supple and serpentine body, ending with a fish caudal fin. The back is crossed by curled fins, which begin with a thick curly fur on the shoulder blades. The large pectoral bust resembles that of a mighty horse, and has two large and turgid breasts. The long neck is also lumpy and muscular, and holds a satirical head with a terrifying expression, the mouth wide open, the frightened eyes, the fleshy features, in all respects similar to the masks of the capitals – equally, the ram's horns are hooked to the forehead with a cloth tied with a bow.

The use of decorating the pediments of the arches with serpentine creatures came from ancient roman tradition, and examples are found especially in funerary sculpture (fig.244). It was taken up by Andrea Bregno in the Piccolomini Altar in Siena (1481-85, fig.245), and Cosini would often use this decorative element in his subsequent works. However, it is difficult to establish what kind of monsters the Cosini creatures represent, since every possible prototype is completely revisited. However, we can recognise a vague affinity with the sphinx/harpy of the fifteenth century tradition, examples of which are known in the works of the Rossellino (laver of San Lorenzo), Desiderio da Settignano (*Marsuppini Tomb*) and Andrea del Castagno (*Last Supper*). There are also similarities with some drawings by the Lombard painter Cesare da Sesto dating back to the beginning of the century (1508-12), which in turn refer to the experiments in the grotesque ornament by Filippino Lippi in the Strozzi Chapel, Santa Maria Novella (1487-1502, fig.246). Finally, probable references can be found in the Tyrrhenian sculpture by Donato Benti, in particular the baptismal font of San Giacinto in Pietrasanta (1509-11), a true sculptural bestiary (fig.247).

The monstrous creatures of the Tomb of Lorenzo allow us to delineate Cosini's profound knowledge of the decorative motifs of the fifteenth and sixteenth century. He mixes different suggestions, with the sole purpose of creating something that was completely unfastened by the rules. He achieves this ambitious result thanks to his ability to combine his own realistic research and his own technical experimentalism with both the most shocking visions and the traditional iconography.

Mask frieze

According to the chronological reconstruction proposed in this chapter, after finishing the execution of capitals and monsters, Cosini was commissioned to carve the frieze of masks. As already mentioned, Michelangelo's drawing today preserved at Windsor (fig.59) served as a model for the masks of the frieze. The drawing denotes a progressive simplification, presumably due to Ferrucci and Cosini's intervention in the design phase.

To better establish when and for how long Cosini devoted himself to the execution of the frieze, some observations must be made, relying once again on Michelangelo's *Ricordi*. We know that Ferrucci was dismissed on 31 May 1524, as the deadline for which the *Operai* of the Cathedral allowed him to serve in the Medici Chapel had expired. We also know that on 1 October 1524, Francesco da Sangallo was paid for a frieze segment that was one *braccio* long and that had to be done «*a paragone d'una parte che se n'è facta*» (matching a fragment that is already made).[62] Thanks to the piecework payments that Sangallo receives for the frieze from that date on, we know that he proceeded to work the frieze at a rate of three masks a week.

As rightly pointed out by Donetti, the right section of the frieze of the Tomb of Lorenzo (fig.248) shows a technique and a style far superior to both the rest of Lorenzo's frieze and the frieze of the Tomb of Giuliano (figg.249-250). The right section of Lorenzo's frieze might therefore be the model that Sangallo had to replicate, as noted in the payment of 1 October. Most likely, the right section was made by Cosini, who at this point had become the main referent for the chapel's sculptural ornamentation.

If we accept this hypothesis, we can also calculate the time that Cosini dedicated to the execution of the right section of the frieze. If we consider that it has eleven masks, and that it took about a week to sculpt three masks, it can be deduced that Cosini took about a month to

[62] BARDESCHI CIULICH–BAROCCHI, *I Ricordi*, pp. 150

make his portion.[63] Furthermore, if we consider that Sangallo probably started working on the conclusion of the frieze around the beginning of September, it can be deduced that Cosini sculpted his portion over the summer, between July and August. Most likely, Cosini also intervened in the design phase, and given that in the summer Ferrucci had by now abandoned the Medici Chapel for about two months, we can suppose that Cosini worked in complete autonomy on the frieze, and that therefore the corrections we see in the Windsor drawing are due to his contribution alone.

The frieze of the Tomb of Lorenzo is composed of three main sections, eleven masks in the lateral ones, and the central one composed in turn of three further sections of six, nine and six masks. Also counting the single or paired masks placed in connection with the various sections, the masks of the frieze total forty-nine, and therefore the frieze measures a total of about eight *braccia*. According to the convincing retracing proposed by Donetti, the working of the frieze began with the right section executed by Cosini. Immediately afterwards, Francesco da Sangallo probably executed the left section, which however did not entirely satisfy Michelangelo, who in the payment of 1 October 1524 that we have mentioned above, complains that a fragment sculpted by Sangallo does not correspond to the model provided to him, and therefore cut Sangallo's pay. This poorly executed fragment can be found in the first six masks to the right of the left section, where we note an inconsistent variation with respect to the rest of the masks. Two of those masks are in fact crowned with vine leaves and display characteristics more properly of a green man – it seems that Sangallo wanted to give a sample of his technical and inventive skills, but that Michelangelo preferred instead that he stick to what was established. Sangallo then continued the carving of the rest of the frieze, that is, the one corresponding to the central section, this time maintaining a certain technical and iconographic consistency.

If we compare the various sections of the frieze of the Tomb of Lorenzo, we can actually see a clear difference between Cosini's right section and the rest of the frieze. Besides showing a much superior cleanliness of carving, recognisable in the care with which every detail is finely worked, the Cosini section shows a precise iconographic variation in the succession of masks. In fact, they are composed of two different types of mask, perfectly alternating. The element that distinguishes one type from another is the crown, which is once made up of geometric rectangular staves, and the next by enveloping petals that frame two volute tufts.

[63] DONETTI, *Modelli*, p. 220, citing WALLACE, *Michelangelo at San Lorenzo*, calculates the time necessary to carve the frieze, relying on the payments per piece to Sangallo. Sangallo in fact is paid every week for half *braccio*, corresponding to three masks.

While maintaining an excellent execution, the rest of the frieze sculpted by Sangallo shows that the iconographic variation and the cleanliness of the carving are lost in favour of a single type of mask and a slight technical impoverishment, an indication of a greater mechanism in the execution not leaving too much room for experiments and refinements.

Now that it has been established how and when Cosini worked on the mask frieze, we must return for the last time to Michelangelo's Windsor drawing of a satirical face, and analyse Cosini's reception of Michelangelo's study. Presumably, the Windsor drawing was the last in a series of Michelangelo's studies, in which he investigated possible variants of the mask genre. This frenetic study can be found by analysing the Windsor drawing, which shows different layers of signs, the last of which, darker and more marked, denotes a stylisation and simplification compared to the deeper layer, which instead shows greater iconographic complexity. As said, this simplification in the drawing was due to the intervention of the ornamental sculptors, who were aware that a stylisation would be more effective in a long and repetitive work such as the frieze.

Ferrucci must have provided the initial prototypes from which Michelangelo began his iconographic investigations, for affinities are found with Ferrucci's Neapolitan masks (fig.231). However, since the execution of the frieze began in the summer, at a time when Ferrucci was no longer present on the construction site, in all likelihood it was only Cosini who took care of the development of the frieze, given that he was gradually replacing the master at the head of the workshop. Thus, in this phase of fine-tuning the ornamental apparatus of the tombs, there was a dense exchange of ideas between the director of the entire work, Michelangelo, and the subsidiary sector of ornamentation, represented first by Ferrucci, and then by Cosini, who was making himself noticed and appreciated thanks to his own imaginative experiments.

By comparing the Windsor drawing with the frieze section sculpted by Cosini, together with many similarities, we also notice many differences. If in the crown, in the frowning expression, in the open mouth, and in the drooping cheeks forming volutes, the general scheme of the mask remains similar, the final execution in marble still shows a further degree of stylisation and refinement compared to the model on paper. Cosini managed to combine the expressive needs with the geometrical rigour necessary for the execution of a frieze only a few centimetres high. The greatest effort is concentrated on the expressive gaze, where the eyebrow arches are marked and deep, and the eye sockets empty and terrifying. He eliminates the wattles and the ruffled beard, which become a pair of stylised volutes. The same applies to the crown, which, although varied, is in fact greatly simplified compared to the pierced

diadem of the Windsor drawing. Finally, the simplicity of the hole of the wide open mouth is interrupted only by the two protruding upper incisors.

Cosini therefore carries out selection and reduction of the iconographic attributes, accompanied by a calculated geometrisation of the various elements, such that each portion of the face is connected to the next. This was perhaps done in anticipation of the passage to the assistants of the execution of the entire frieze, and it is an indication that at this stage Cosini was thinking as a leader of a workshop. The execution of the right section of the frieze of the Tomb of Lorenzo, which was to serve as a model for the entire frieze, therefore marked a fundamental moment in Cosini's career, following which in fact he saw his pay substantially increase, and led him to the execution of the *Trophies*, an undoubtedly more onerous commitment than the capitals and the frieze.

Trophies

We have already mentioned the importance of the trophy in the economy of the decoration of the attics of the tombs. It had to be placed on the central axis, becoming the most prominent element of the entire crowning attic. It is therefore convincing that, once the carving of the architectural structure of the tomb and its decorative parts were almost completed in June 1524, Michelangelo decided over the summer to start the execution of the attic with the *Trophies*.[64] Thus, encouraged by Fattucci to speed up the work on the chapel as much as possible, Michelangelo decided not to wait for the arrival of the new marbles from Carrara, and to use the discarded blocks that were lying in Piazza San Lorenzo. In July he had two blocks of marble moved inside the chapel, which were to be used for the creation of the two *Trophies*.

As mentioned, if we compare the project now preserved in the Louvre (fig.48), with the trophies sculpted by Ferrucci in Naples (fig.232), we note that the cuirass designed by Michelangelo in the project replicates those sculpted by Ferrucci in the *Carafa Chapel* and in the *Pandone Tomb*. This indicates a close collaboration in the design phase between him and Michelangelo, which, however, does not necessarily have to be related to the appointment of Ferrucci as foreman of the chapel at the end of March 1524. As foreman of the walls of the church of San Lorenzo, Ferrucci already collaborated with Michelangelo in 1518 during the

[64] FATTUCCI, *Letter to Michelangelo,* from Rome to Florence, 7 June 1524, in *Il carteggio*, III, 1973, p. 80, writes of one tomb «*quasi fatta di quadro.*»

initial working phases for the facade of San Lorenzo, and therefore the relationship between the two had already been well established for years.[65]

As mentioned, the trophy of the Louvre project and Ferrucci's Neapolitan sculptural ones share the appropriation and elaboration of the ancient prototype of the *Belvedere Torso* (fig.253). Ferrucci used it also for the anatomy of creatures in plant metamorphosis, visible on the bottom pillar of the *Carafa Chapel* (fig.230). The artistic appropriation of the fragments of ancient statuary, and their disruption through the iconographic de-contextualisation, was in fact a widespread practice already at the end of the fifteenth century.[66]

We turn now to analyse the two *Trophies* sculpted by Cosini for the Medici Chapel. He kept the reference to the *Belvedere Torso*, which becomes even more evident in the three-dimensional rendering of the sculpted marble. The initial roughing of the two blocks for the *Trophies* was perhaps carried out by Michelangelo himself during the summer, immediately after having moved the two blocks inside the chapel in July, and before entrusting the completion to Cosini in September.

The two *Trophies* mirror each other, and apart from some details, they are ultimately rather similar. At the base, there is the cuirass, one held up by a truncated branch, the other by a sword. From behind the cuirasses, a pair of richly decorated shields emerge. Further behind, various types of weaponry, and a helmet at the top. Overall, also due to their state of incompleteness, the two *Trophies* appear as a chaotic mass of weapons, the intertwining and overlapping of which must have made execution highly difficult.

Cosini's *Trophies* are one of the first examples in Cinquecento sculpture in which a decorative detail, usually marginal and carved in bas-relief, assumes monumental dimensions of this magnitude. Perhaps, the only ancient sculpture that comes close to it in terms of monumental scale are the *Trophies of Marius*, dating back to the age of Domitian (1st century AD), originally placed in the so-called Nymphaeum of Alexander (fig.255).

It is now worthwhile to deepen the examination of Cosini's *Trophies*, in an attempt to highlight similarities and differences between them. Although the two *Trophies* are typologically similar, the differences that can be noted are often substantial, and allow some important observations to be drawn, both on their iconology, and on their carving process.

The *Trophies* are now kept in the narrow corridor before the Medici Chapel, which unfortunately sacrifices their overall appreciation. They were placed in the corridor

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[65] See: JOANNIDES, *Michelangelo's Medici Chapel*, p. 542.
[66] See Filippino Lippi's *Carafa Chapel*, Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, Rome, in chapter 2, § *Fiesole.*

immediately after being found in 1940 by Giovanni Poggi. The one on the left has a slightly more advanced state of finishing, and a greater refinement of carving, especially in the cuirass at the base. This is a *lorica musculata*, and is finished only in the right half, where at the height of the abdomen we see an elegant plant shoot emerging from the pubis and struggling along the mighty abdominal column. The pectorals are also richly decorated, in the centre with a green man with a long vegetable moustache and a large bowed turban, and on the nipples with a leafy spike wrapping around them. The surface of the pectorals is streaked with thin parallel lines of tooth-chisel, which bring out the delicacy of the carvings. A realistic wrinkled cloth protrudes from the hole in the collar, and we can see also a branch deprived of the thinnest branches, which supports the cuirass from the inside. From the holes in the shoulders, a metal mesh emerges with large unfinished discs, on some of which, however, one can see the desire to decorate them with subtle vegetable carvings.

Finally, the two straps on the shoulders that tie the cuirass are each decorated with a standing figure. One appears as a penitent woman wrapped in a large drapery, who closely resembles the veiled women that Pontormo painted in the *Deposition* for the Certosa del Galluzzo in 1523, a figurative prototype that found a definitive configuration in the *Madonna Annunciata* painted in 1525-28 by Pontormo in the Capponi Chapel in Santa Felicita, Florence (fig.259). The other figure is a standing bearded man, and is also drawn from Pontormo's works, being an exact copy of the *Saint John Evangelist* that the painter created in 1519 for the altar of the church of San Michele Arcangelo, Empoli (fig.258). This would confirm what was already said about the angel of the *Strozzi Tomb* that was used by Rosso Fiorentino to design his Sant'Apollonia of the San Lorenzo *Marriage of the Virgin*. Cosini was in close contact with the Florentine painters of his time, especially with those who more than others possessed his same anxious spirit, Pontormo and Rosso, and they must have had a fruitful exchange of ideas and inspirations.[67]

Continuing in the description of the left *Trophy*, in addition to quivers, swords and axes only sketched, we see two crossed shields, which, although not finished in detail, have a rich ornamentation. In one, we see a pair of intertwined rings and a mask. In the other, we see two rams facing each other from whose horns a festoon hangs, and a winged harpy.[68] The *Trophy* is crowned by a large helmet with crest, only sketched out, which supposedly would have

[67] CAMPIGLI, *Silvio Cosini*, 2007, p. 90, finds similarities between the *Madonna and Child* that Cosini sculpted for the *Strozzi Tomb*, and Pontormo's *Madonna and Child*, today at the Diamond Collection in New York (fig.239).

[68] There is an exact three-dimensional copy of this peculiar harpy with turgid breasts and fin-shaped legs, in Palazzo Blu, Pisa, probably made by Tribolo in the 1540s. See PIZZORUSSO, Claudio, catalogue enty n. 149, in CECCHI, Alessandro (et alia), *L'Officina della Maniera. Varietà e fierezza nell'arte fiorentina del Cinquecento tra le due repubbliche 1494-1530*, Venice 1996, pp. 394-395.

assumed an elaborate shape of an animal head, and of which similar examples are known in Cosini's subsequent works (figg.263, 314-315).

At first glance, the other *Trophy* presents simpler features. The *lorica musculata* does not show the ornamental complexity of the left trophy, and has a surface completely devoid of decorations. The only attribute is the skin of a fawn, whose head descends on the chest, and which is tied to the waist with its paws. The cuirass is held upright by a sword, of which we see only the animal-shaped handle that protrudes from the collar. Contrary to the other *Trophy*, the two crossed shields here present an advanced state of completeness. On one we see a pair of sacrificial bulls, and a winged *bucranium*; on the other a crowned mask, similar to those of the frieze. The helmet on top also shows some finishes that are absent in the left trophy – specifically, we see the figurine of a warrior with a shield on the ear flap (fig.260). This is one of the peculiarities of Cosini's sculpture, who, as we have also seen in the other cuirass, loved to fill the small surfaces with figurines in various attitudes.

Since between the cuirasses of the two *Trophies* we recognise a distinction similar to that which would later also be replicated in the cuirasses of the two statues of the *Dukes*, it is clear that already at this stage of the design Michelangelo intended to assign opposite and complementary attributes to Lorenzo and Giuliano. It can then be deduced that the *Trophy* on the left, so richly decorated, should have been positioned on the attic of the tomb of the energetic Giuliano, while the one on the right would have been placed on the tomb of the pensive Lorenzo.

It therefore appears evident that Cosini did not contribute in terms of iconographic design. He only made his knowledge of the grotesque decorative repertoire available, but it was Michelangelo who guided him in identifying the characteristics that was to distinguish one trophy from another, and therefore one Duke from the other. In fact, as has been said, Michelangelo most likely set himself the task of roughing out the initial blocks. Thus, it might be him who gave the *Trophies* this peculiar shape, rather difficult to execute due to the various layers that overlap both vertically and horizontally. Cosini had the task of first continuing the roughing, and afterwards he had to devote himself to the minute carving – the passion of filling every small surface with various types of figurations is Cosini's signature, which confirms to us that it was he who took care of the ornamentation. Once again, as was the case with the rest of the ornamental setting of the chapel, the two *Trophies* were also the result of a close collaboration between Michelangelo and Cosini.

At the end of this examination of the two *Trophies*, some further observations must be added. The first concerns the progress of their execution. If we consider that Cosini dealt with

them for only two months, between September and December 1524, it must be deduced that the execution of the two *Trophies* was simultaneous and parallel, otherwise it would have taken much longer. This is also confirmed by the fact that the *Trophies* show similar degrees of finishing, and in both the best worked parts are the cuirass and shields. We also have the feeling that Cosini at this point had his own team of assistants at his disposal, who might have helped him in the most grossly unskilled jobs. This would explain some simplifications, some less convincing and more sterile portions, especially visible in the right *Trophy*. In turn, this would confirm Cosini's leading role within the Medici Chapel. In a few months he had succeeded in obtaining full control of the decorative parts of the tombs, the esteem of Michelangelo who had no fear of entrusting him with increasingly onerous tasks, and his own team of collaborators which he headed.

The other observation that must be made concerns the iconographic choices, which, as we have said, belonged to Michelangelo, who was perhaps the only one who was clear about the overall design of the chapel. If what we have reconstructed so far is correct, that is, if the *Trophies* must be dated to the end of 1524, we must deduce that the distinction between the two *Dukes* started precisely from the execution of the *Trophies*, since these were the first works of the entire statuary apparatus of the Medici Chapel to be sculpted – we recall that in all likelihood Michelangelo began the statue of one *Duke* in 1525, finishing it in June 1526, when he then started working the other one.[69]

Although we do not want to say that the configuration of the *Dukes* depended on the creation of the *Trophies*, it is however to a certain extent plausible that the *Trophies* influenced some more purely ornamental choices of the *Dukes* statues. As said, the cuirass of Giuliano is an even excessive reaction to the cuirass of the left *Trophy*. The same can be said of the bizarre helmet in the statue of Lorenzo, which is an elaborate version of the *Trophies* helmets. Besides, Cosini's typical anxiety to fill the small surfaces with figures is replicated in the box that Lorenzo holds on his knee, which has an animal face to fill the surface.

The combination of all these citations that Michelangelo drew from Cosini, although undoubtedly minor and marginal, make clear the impact that Cosini's artistic conception had on the configuration of the Medici Chapel. In other words, Michelangelo became, who knows how voluntarily, the promoter of that process of "monumentalisation of the grotesque" that Cosini would later continue to explore, and which Tribolo made fully manifested in the decoration of the Castello garden. Michelangelo's simple act of inserting into the iconography

[69] See chapter 3, § *New chronology of Silvio Cosini's interventions at the Medici Chapel*, note 35.

of his own statues for the Medici Chapel elements taken from the grotesque decoration developed by Cosini, gave such bizarre, experimental, eccentric methods such visibility as to decree their imperishable success.

Vasari is perhaps right then when says that the decoration of the Medici Chapel broke "the laces and chains" that forced Florentine art to submit to the strict rules of classicism. However Vasari is wrong when he believes that the only proponent of this epochal change was Michelangelo. What we have reconstructed so far has served precisely to demonstrate the falsity of two historiographical distortions due to the factious judgment of Vasari. The first is that the Medici Chapel had been a sort of unprecedented *unicum*, when instead we have amply demonstrated that it was the result of a path of investigation into grotesque ornamentation that interested generations of Florentine artists, not least of which Ferrucci who passed the baton to his favourite pupil Cosini. The second historiographical distortion is that Michelangelo was responsible for a change in attitude towards antiquity, which from that moment on would no longer be seen in a reverential way. We have said how much this libertarian and licentious attitude towards ancient models was already widespread at least since the end of the fifteenth century, and that Cosini was a fecund experimenter in this sense.

Further clarifications about the chronology. Cosini in Rome.

Previously, we were able to specify the period of Cosini's stay inside the Medici Chapel site, thanks to the correct dating of two sheets of Michelangelo's *Ricordi*, traditionally dated to 1525. We thus circumscribed his collaboration with Michelangelo within and no later than the time span April-December 1524. From 3 December 1524 (the last payment paid to Cosini for his collaboration in the Medici Chapel) to 28 February 1528 (date of the deposit paid to Cosini for the *Angels* of the Cathedral of Pisa) there is no documentary information on Cosini and his artistic activity. As usual, the only news comes from Vasari, who assigns to this intermediate phase, the assembly of the *Strozzi Tomb*, and the execution of the *Monument to Ruggero Minerbetti*, both located in the Church of Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

To these two works, Campigli adds another one, the marble altar of the De' Vicariis Chapel, in the Cathedral of Salerno (fig.266).[70] Campigli believes that the altar was carved by Cosini when he was still in the service of Ferrucci, and dates the work to 1525. This dating is based on the contract of a parallel commission, which according to Campigli's interpretation would provide a *terminus ante quem*. In the contract that the famous Amalfi warlord Domenico D'Afflitto stipulated with the sculptors Mauro and Sansone De Amato on 31 November 1525 for the creation of a marble altar to be placed in the Cathedral of Amalfi, we read that the commissioned altar should have referred to the *De' Vicariis Altar* as for the dimensions («*la larghezza, longhezza et alctezza de la cappella habia a essere secondo la cappella del magnifico Ioanne Cola de Vicariis de Salerno in Sancto Mactheo*»).[71] This would mean that the *De' Vicariis Altar* was completed before November 1525.

However, this documentary evidence sanctioning such an early participation clashes with the formal analysis of the work. In fact, the grotesque pilasters of the *De' Vicariis Altar* – which are to be assigned to Cosini without any doubt (fig.267) – show a style that is much closer to Cosini's Pisan phase (1528-31), than to the period immediately following his collaboration at the Medici Chapel (post-December 1524). Although this contradiction between documentary evidence and formal analysis may appear irreconcilable, we can try to put forward some hypotheses that plausibly explain this dilemma.

[70] CAMPIGLI, *Silvio Cosini*, 2009, pp. 72-74.

[71] The transcription of the D'Afflitto contract for the altar of Amalfi is published in: CAMERA, Andrea, *Memorie storico-diplomatiche dell'antica città e ducato di Amalfi*, Salerno 1876, p. 642, n. 1. As for a brief biography of Domenico D'Afflitto, see: PIRRI, Pietro, *Il Duomo di Amalfi e il chiostro del Paradiso*, Rome 1941, p. 122.

The grotesques of the *De' Vicariis Altar* pilasters sculpted by Cosini show such a degree of creative autonomy, that one is led to believe that the commission came directly to Cosini alone, therefore in a period in which he was definitively freed from Ferrucci, perhaps after his death in 1526. Besides, we see that the altar presents two different styles: the predella, depicting episodes from the life of Christ, has a Spanish-fashioned poignant style, derived from Bartolomé Ordoñez and Diego De Siloe, that does not comply with the style of Cosini's pilasters (figg.275-277). Besides, *The Crucifixion of Christ* replicates a bronze panel attributed to the Lombard medalist Pier Jacopo Alari Bonacolsi, known as Moderno (figg.273-274).[72] The suspicion then arises that the *De' Vicariis Altar* was executed in two separate phases, by at least two different workshops. The first workshop, Spanish/Lombard-related, carried out the overall project and the narrative predella, and worked close to the execution of the altarpiece contained in the altar, representing the *Adoration of the Magi* and painted by Andrea da Salerno in 1519-1520.[73] Subsequently, the second workshop, that of Cosini, was called to finish the work, which for some reason had been left unfinished by the first workshop. The date of November 1525 of the D'Afflitto contract used as an *ante quem* term for the execution of the whole *De' Vicariis Altar* could then refer only to its initial project of the first Spanish/Lombard workshop, and not to the completion by Cosini. This would allow us to postpone the dating of the pilasters for some time, as the style of the pilasters is better suited to a later period in Cosini's career.

Cosini's new style of the late-1520s/early-1530s might be explained by his probable stay in Rome, where he could see the stuccos and frescoes of the Raphaelesque school, in particular the works of Giovanni da Udine and Polidoro da Caravaggio. The influence of Giovanni da Udine on Cosini's ornamental iconography is clearly visible in some details of the *Altar of Montenero*. Similarly, the armaments visible in the *Minerbetti Monument* recall the trophy fantasies that Polidoro da Caravaggio investigated for the facade frescoes that in the first half of the 1520s he painted in large numbers at Roman palaces (fig.265).[74]

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[72] See: ABBATE, Francesco, *Appunti su Bartolomé Ordoñez e Diego de Siloe a Napoli e in Spagna*, in *Prospettiva*, XLIV, 1986, pp. 39-40; NICASTRO, Maria Elisabetta, *L'eredità di Andrea Ferrucci a Napoli. Nuove proposte per la cappella de Vicariis nel Duomo di Salerno*, PhD dissertation, Perugia 2004.

[73] As for the dating of the Andrea da Salerno altarpiece to 1519-20, see: BRACA, Antonio, *Il duomo di Salerno. Architettura e culture artistiche del Medioevo e dell'Età Moderna*, Salerno 2003, p. 216. CAMPIGLI, *Silvio Cosini*, 2009, pp. 85-85, n. 22, believes instead that the painting was made on later date, between 1522 and 1526 – his dating depended obviously on the conviction that the marble *De' Vicariis Altar* was sculpted around 1525.

[74] On Polidoro da Caravaggio's activity as fresco painter, alongside Maturino da Firenze, for the facades of palaces in Rome, see: VASARI, *Vita di Pulidoro da Caravaggio e Maturino fiorentino pittori*, in IDEM, *Vite*; DE CASTRIS, Pierlugi Leone, *Polidoro da Caravaggio. L'opera completa*, Naples 2001, pp. 108-172; FRANKLIN, David, *Polidoro da Caravaggio*, London 2018, pp. 39-68. Silvio Cosini's trophies in the *Minerbetti Monument* show significant

We might suppose that Cosini moved to Rome at an unspecified moment between 1525 and 1528, that is, during that chronological gap of three years in which there is no certain news of his activities. Unfortunately, in the absence of documentary support, it is rather difficult to establish whether Cosini actually arrived in Rome, and if he really did so, it is currently not possible to understand whether he went to Rome to work or simply to update his iconographic vocabulary.

For the 1530s/40s, the documentary evidence relating to Cosini becomes more frequent and punctual, so much so that it is possible to establish with a certain accuracy his activity in these years. As mentioned, on 28 February 1528 Cosini is in Pisa to sculpt the *Angels* of the Cathedral. From a document dated May 1528, it is clear that his family (probably his first wife) lives in Florence, which would suggest that Cosini was not considering leaving Florence, perhaps because he still had work in progress there (such as the *Minerbetti Monument*?). On 5 December 1530, the two *Angels* were paid for and mounted.[75] Simultaneously, Cosini also worked in Pisa on the *Altar of Montenero*, for which he was paid on 31 May 1530.[76] Following these two commitments, Cosini dedicated himself to the execution of the *Tomb of Raffaelle Maffei*, Church of San Lino, Volterra.[77] The events of the execution of this work were rather troubled, but it is certain that Cosini worked there between 1530-31, and then temporarily abandoned the work by November 1531 to go to Genoa in the service of Andrea Doria, in whose Palazzo he executed various works in marble and stucco, in concert with another artist from Raphael's circle, Perin del Vaga.

In the summer of 1532 Cosini returned to Tuscany, first to Volterra to check the work on the *Maffei Tomb*, and then to Florence, where in all likelihood he collaborated with Giovanni da Udine on the lost stuccos of the vault of the Medici Chapel.[78] The return to the Medici

similarities with the armaments over the windows of Palazzo Milesi in Rome, today lost but still visible in the seventeenth-century engravings by Giovan Battista Galestruzzi.

[75] See BACCI, *Gli Angeli di Silvio Cosini*, p. 128-129.

[76] See the *atto di quietanza* (deed of receipt) for the Altar of Montenero, dated 31 May 1530, in Archivio Storico Cittadino di Livorno, *Contratti dell'Economia della Sambuca e Montenero (1431-1637),* letter F-A c. 56, published in Vigo, Pietro, *Montenero. Guida storico-descrittiva, con appendice di documenti inediti*, Livorno 1902, pp. 484-486. Bacci, Peleo, *Gli Angeli di Silvio Cosini nel Duomo di Pisa (1528-1530): con documenti inediti e commenti relativi alla sua vita*, in *Bollettino d'arte del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione*, XI, 5/6/7, 1917, p. 115, n. 1, published an Italian translation of a portion of the contract: «*M.ro Silvio del fu Giov. di Nerio da Cepparello, scultore dimorante in Pisa, fabbrica l'altare di Montenero per fiorini duecento venticinque larghi d'oro, pagabili da Fra Giov. Francesco del fu Matteo da Firenze con alcune condizioni.*»

[77] On the troubled events that brought Cosini to work at the *Maffei Tomb* in Volterra, see in particular: D'AMICO, John F., *The Raffaele Maffei Monument in Volterra. Small town patronage in the Renaissance*, in *Supplementum festivum*, Binghamton 1987, pp. 469-488.

[78] FIGIOVANNI, Battista, *Letter to Michelangelo*, 10 August 1532, in *Il carteggio*, III, 1973, p. 425, writes of a "*maestro Silvio*" without noting the family name. Fattucci asked Michelangelo clarifications about the role that

Chapel followed two letters that Cosini sent to Michelangelo from Genoa in April 1532, where, flattering the master for having bestowed upon him great *honore* simply by allowing him to work at the Medici Chapel, he asked him to return to work for him since he was short of money.[79] In that same year, Silvio settled with his brother Vincenzo in Pietrasanta, Silvio having married Ginevra di Stefano Procacci in a second marriage, and Vincenzo Maria di Stefano Procacci, Ginevra's sister.[80]

In 1533, Silvio and Vincenzo Cosini move to Veneto. They were called to Venice by Jacopo Sansovino, who commissioned them to execute his tomb (now lost).[81] Perhaps thanks to Sansovino's intercession, between September 1533 and June 1534, Silvio also worked in Padua at the Basilica of Sant'Antonio, where he executed stuccoes and marble reliefs.

Between 1534 and 1540, there is no certain information about Cosini's activity. We only know that the Cosini brothers still resided in Pietrasanta. The collaboration between Cosini and Giovan Angelo Montorsoli most likely dates back to these years, culminating in the execution of the *Tomb of Jacopo Sannazzaro*, for the church of Santa Maria del Parto in Mergellina, Naples. In addition, given the proximity of Pietrasanta to Liguria, and given the previous Genoese experience of the early 1530s, Cosini seems in these years to establish relations with the Ligurian cities, where he was particularly active in the early 1540s. In December 1543, Cosini in fact moved to Savona, where he carried out the relief of *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* for the Chapel of San Sisto, in the church of Nostra Signora Assunta.[82]

Silvio should have now that he was at Medici Chapel, and suggested to put him work together with Giovanni da Udine on the stucco decoration of the ceiling. «*El prefato maestro Silvio è qui e per venirvi a parlare el tanto, et che io non so; e da me nonn à promessa alchuna, se non che maestro Giovanni da Udine è qui e ch'è per fare lavorare di stuccho, o con lui o con voi.*» In another letter of Figiovanni (*Ibidem*, p. 440), dated 23 November 1532, we learn that Giovanni da Udine had a close assistant ("*suo compagno*"), who can hesitantly be identified with Cosini, although there is no assurance in this regard.

[79] COSINI, Silvio, *Letters to Michelangelo,* from Genoa to Florence, 6 and 13 April 1532, in *Ibidem*, pp. 394-396: «*Me ritrovo qui in Genua al servitio del signor Andrea Doria et anchora de la casa di Fieschi, di modo che ho assai da fare, ma core pochi dinari* [...] *Et dicovi che solamente per essere io stato al servitio vostro, in tuti quelli lochi dove io me ritrovo m'è fato honore e cortesia; e questo è solo per la bona fama che è di voi, et non già per merito di mia virtù. Sì che, per tanto, io mi ve offero in tute quelle cose che di me vi acadese servire.*»

[80] Archivio Comunale di Pietrasanta, filza G (1523-1535), III, c. 208, published in SANTINI, Vincenzo, *Commentarii storici sulla Versilia centrale*, Pisa 1862, VI, pp. 121-124.

[81] We learn about Jacopo Sansovino's commission of his tomb to Silvio and Vincenzo Cosini from his last will of 1568, where he writes that in 1533 had called the two sculptors to come to Venice in order to accomplish this task. Unfortunately, nothing remains of this endeavour. For a discussion on this argument, see: PRINCIPI, Lorenzo, *La punizione di Marsia Un rilievo d Silvio Cosini e il sepolcro di Jacopo Sansovino*, in *Arte Veneta*, LXXV, 2018, pp. 68-70.

[82] On the last Ligurian phase of Cosini, see: PRINCIPI, Lorenzo, *Un altare a Portovenere e alter novità per il secondo soggiorno genovese di Silvio Cosini, tra Padova e Milano*, in *Nuovi Studi*, XIX, 2014, 20, pp. 105-144; IDEM, *Silvio Cosini a Savona*, in *Paragone*, LXVIII, 132=805, March 2017, pp. 3-26.

Finally, in the spring of 1544, Cosini moved to Milan, where he began working for the Cathedral, together with the Lombard sculptor Bambaia. Here he executed the relief of the *Marriage of the Virgin*. Cosini died in Milan on 16 December 1545.[83]

Monumental grotesque and horror vacui

As has been said several times throughout this thesis, during the second quarter of the sixteenth century we witness a phenomenon of progressive 'monumentalisation of the grotesque' in Florentine sculpture, mainly perpetuated by the generation of Cosini and Tribolo. With the expression 'monumentalisation of the grotesque' we mean the increasingly frequent use of making the ornament, traditionally relegated to the margins of the compositions and with a subsidiary function, the true subject of the works, thus allowing the grotesque decorative repertoire to expand and assume monumental dimensions. This appreciation of ornamental subjects finds one of its precursors in Cosini, who, thanks to his apprenticeship with Ferrucci, carried out an experimental and uncanonical research, which first influenced Tribolo in his *Goddess Nature*, in the Castello garden and the Laurentian Library, and consequently all the sculptors working in the second half of the century, from Cellini, to Ammannati, up to Buontalenti.

In those years, there was a remarkable conditioning of the grotesque repertoire on art, which involved a detachment from mere narrative logics and rigorous phrasing, for the benefit of isolated poetic ideas, visionary fragments, bizarre and monstrous imaginations. It has previously been said that the *Trophies* of the Medici Chapel somehow mark the beginning of this phenomenon, since a marginal subject usually carved in bas-relief on decorative pillars took on a previously overlooked sculptural substance. Not only does the decorative theme of the trophy, usually marginal, expand and become monumental, but its surface was animated with a further decorative flicker. Historically, we are evidently now in the field of the most innovative and unbridled artifice.

Cosini's main intuition was to combine the tradition of minute and precious ornament of his master Ferrucci, that was now perceived as mechanical and arid, with the grandeur of Michelangelo's sculpture. Cosini managed to achieve this not so much by imitating the subjects of Michelangelo's works, but rather by absorbing their tormented spirit and their

[83] The document registering Cosini’s death in Milan is published for the first time in: SACCHI, Rossana, *Il disegno incompiuto*, Milan 2005, II, pp. 449, n. 188.

carnal power, which Cosini skilfully transfused into the monsters that populated his grotesque compositions. Perhaps, the most striking example of this synthetic ability of Cosini is visible in the satirical masks of the Medici Chapel, and above all in the disturbing sinuosity of the monstrous creatures of the *Tomb of Lorenzo*.

Similarly, Cosini's art in is characterised by a voracious desire for new inventions, which he often borrowed from other artists, such as Pontormo, Polidoro da Caravaggio, and Giovanni da Udine. From them he mainly assimilates figures in varied poses, which he uses to compose and fill any sculptural surface. In this sense, Cosini’s custom of placing a bas-relief is emblematic, albeit very small compared to the whole, even in the ear flaps of the helmet of the right *Trophy* of the Medici Chapel, or in the buckles of the left cuirass, a *divertissement* that Cosini will repeat later in the *Minerbetti Monument*.

This enthusiastic voracity of Cosini is to be considered the most exhaustive result of the hyper-decorative trend already visible in the works of Ferrucci, especially the *Altar of the Crucifixion* in London, and the *Altar of the Madonna Bruna* in Naples. The works of Cosini that we will analyse in this part of the chapter will give an account of his desire to seamlessly combine the sculptural monumentality that came from his experience alongside Michelangelo, with the opposite thrust of grotesque decorativism – therefore, monumentality and *horror vacui*.

Cosini’s Michelangelesque vein. Body as a grotesque

The analysis of the decorative parts of the Medici Chapel forced us to focus above all on the more ornamental inclination of Cosini's sculpture. We pointed out that one of the peculiarities of Cosini's sculpture already during his first experiments in the Medici Chapel was the tendency to fill the sculptural surface with all kinds of inspiration and invention, and that his *horror vacui* reflected both Cosini's creative thirst, and the hyper-decorative trend of many Italian sculptors of the time. We also highlighted the powerful and enthralling experimentalism of Cosini's linguistic research, and we emphasised both his dependence on Ferrucci's traditional models, and the impact that grotesque language had on Michelangelo's works.

Although Cosini always remained faithful to his grotesque and ornamental soul throughout his artistic career, we must also take into account the influence that Michelangelo had on the work of Cosini, which can be clearly seen in some details of his works. Indeed, there is no doubt that Cosini inherited from Michelangelo an excellent ability to make figures

plastically realistic in their poses and their contortions, and this is perhaps the only real point that defines Cosini's Michelangelism.

Michelangelo's conditioning on Cosini's figurations is particularly visible if we compare some subjects of Cosini's sculpture with similar ones made by the master Ferrucci. A perfect example is the figure of the triton. Cosini often resorts to this motif, and there is no doubt that he inherited the iconography from Ferrucci (fig.268), who in turn seems to borrow it from the Lombard or Sangallesque declinations of the theme.[84]

However, despite the iconographical dependence on those of Ferrucci, Cosini's tritons display a much greater skill both in the anatomical representation of the musculature and in the perspective rendering of the pose. This difference is particularly evident in the young triton that Cosini executed on the left pilaster of the *De' Vicariis Altar* (fig.269). In it, Cosini is able to wisely exploit the different degrees of relief, and therefore the *chiaroscuro*, to make such a foreshortened figure plastically plausible. The left arm that partially covers the face of Cosini's triton in a coy and mysterious gesture is a descriptive subtlety rarely seen in contemporary works. The left shoulder that clearly protrudes from the plane, and leaning forward shows the muscular back that gradually passes to a very low *stiacciato* relief, is an evident reference to the anatomies and poses of Michelangelo's figures.

We could trace the exact reference of Cosini's young triton in the central figure in the foreground of Michelangelo's famous drawing of *The Archers*, now preserved in Windsor (12778r, fig.270). If Michelangelo's *Archers* was actually delivered to Andrea Quaratesi in April 1530 as the inscription on the sheet would suggest («*andrea quaratesi venne quj a dì 12 ap*[r]*ile 1530 ed ebbe p*[er] *mandare a suo padre a pisa*»), one must think that Cosini's triton cannot deviate too much from that date, and we must therefore lean towards a late dating of the *De' Vicariis Altar*, which might have been executed around 1530 in Pisa.

However, the dilemma on the dating of the *De' Vicariis Altar* becomes even more intricate, when we realise that the young triton shows close affinities with the triton that Tribolo made at the base of the body of his *Goddess Nature* in 1529 in Florence (fig.271). Here too, the reference to the anatomy of Michelangelo's archer is clear, albeit hybridised with the pose and iconography of an ancient triton, carved on a sarcophagus from the 2nd century AD, originally kept in Palazzo Colonna in Montecavallo, Rome (fig.272). Between Cosini's *De' Vicariis Altar*, Michelangelo's *Archers*, and Tribolo's *Goddess Nature*, the latter is the only work

[84] See for example the frieze of tritons in the *Tomb Podocataro* in Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome, designed by the Lombard sculptor Andrea Bregno at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Or the tritons sculpted by Giuliano da Sangallo on the chimney of Palazzo Gondi, Florence, at the end of the fifteenth century.

of the three to have a certain date, having been executed by December 1529. At this point, it is rather difficult to establish when, how and from whom Cosini drew the idea of the De' Vicariis triton portrayed from the back, whether from the identical triton of the Tribolo *Goddess Nature*, or from Michelangelo's drawing, which from April 1530 was most likely kept by Quaratesi in Pisa, the city where Cosini had been since 1528.

Yet, we cannot exclude the hypothesis that Cosini could have seen a figure similar to Michelangelo's archer already during the period he spent in the Medici Chapel, perhaps viewing some of his anatomical studies. Furthermore, there is a strong notion that the De' Vicariis triton by Cosini preceded that of Tribolo's *Goddess Nature*, and that the exchange of ideas between the two young sculptors had taken place in Pisa in the early months of 1528, when the two met on the construction site of the Cathedral. The hypothesis of Cosini's inventive precedence over Tribolo is increasingly strengthened by the consideration that Cosini was more accustomed to sculptural decoration, that he had a prolonged association with Michelangelo, and that he had certainly already investigated the theme of the triton in the *Minerbetti Monument* of 1527 (fig.263). Finally, knowing with certainty only the date of delivery of the drawing of the *Archers* to Quaratesi but not the date of its actual execution, every chronological consideration becomes even more complex, and the dilemma of dating the *De' Vicariis Altar* is condemned to remain unsolved – at least until a clarifying document is found.

Although being able to dispel this doubt and therefore establish which were the passages of this iconographic and formal influence is important to reconstruct the relationship between Michelangelo and the 'Michelangelesque' sculptors at the most foundational moment of the latters' identity, the lack of certain data does not allow a truthful reconstruction of the facts. So far, it is certain that the diffusion of Michelangelo's figurative language had already been underway for many years, although the generation of sculptors of Cosini and Tribolo still assimilated Michelangelo's innovative formulas with a certain detachment and certain reticence.

Indeed, the young triton of the *De' Vicariis Altar* is in all respects a Michelangelesque figure, be it inspired by the *Archers* or by other figures of Michelangelo. But at the same time, it subverts Michelangelo's language, breaking and hybridising it, bending it to not so much Michelangelesque decorative needs – not a single study of triton by Michelangelo is known, nor do we find tritons in his finished works. Michelangelo thus becomes for Cosini part of the repertoire from which to draw, alongside ancient sculpture, the fifteenth-century Florentine

tradition, the teachings of the master Ferrucci, the figures of contemporary Florentine painters, and the inventions of the Raphaelesque circle.

Here then was the generational exchange that took place in those years through Cosini. After introducing Michelangelo to his grotesque experiments in the Medici Chapel, Cosini absorbs from Michelangelo anatomical fragments, a representative method of the human body, and a carnal tension. This linguistic hybridisation operated by Cosini, who tries to combine opposites – fantasy and reality, ornament and monument, whim and drama, grotesque and Michelangelo – was handed over to the generation of Tribolo and his successors, finding an excellent monumental configuration in the garden of Castello. The reticent and hybridised Michelangelism of Cosini and Tribolo was progressively more and more institutionalised, since its diffusion coincided with the return to power of the Medici in Florence.

Funeral monuments. The Minerbetti Monument and the Maffei Tomb

After having broadly contextualised Cosini's career following his participation in the Medici Chapel, we turn now to carefully examine the most important works of this period. The purpose of this section is to highlight the most accomplished and mature results of Cosini's experimentalism, enhancing his originality but at the same time noting his lack of adherents – it seems in fact that Cosini never founded his own workshop or his own school, and the only true successor he had was probably his brother Vincenzo. However, the contacts that Cosini had with the other sculptors of the circle of the Medici Chapel, in particular Tribolo and Montorsoli, gave life to a Michelangelesque language hybridised with diversified formal suggestions that would then find a complete definition in the fountains designed by Tribolo, Montorsoli and Ammannati for gardens and squares, and would therefore have founded both the ducal imagery of Cosimo I and that of the French court of Fontainebleau.

As mentioned, the first work immediately following the commitment of the Medici Chapel was probably the conclusion of the *Strozzi Tomb*, which we have already fully accounted for. Presumably, a trip to Rome followed, where Cosini got to know the most up-to-date work of Giovanni da Udine and Polidoro da Caravaggio – as we will see, also of Andrea Sansovino. On his return to Florence, and before his departure for Pisa at the beginning of 1528, Cosini dedicated himself to the execution of the *Monument to Ruggero Minerbetti* in the

church of Santa Maria Novella (fig.262), which in addition to being an experimental and better-accomplished investigation of the trophy theme already explored in the Medici Chapel, also has close affinities with the similar trophies that Polidoro made around the mid-1520s for the facade of Palazzo Milesi and Palazzo Ricci, Rome (fig.265).

The *Monument* is dedicated to Ruggero Minerbetti, a Guelph knight who lived in the thirteenth century, and was commissioned to Cosini by a descendant of Ruggero, Francesco di Tommaso Minerbetti. The Minerbetti considered themselves descendants of Saint Thomas Becket (Minerbetti= Minor Becket), archbishop of Canterbury, and defender of Christianity in England, and in fact in 1308 the Minerbetti family erected an altar in honour of Becket in the church of Santa Maria Novella. Francesco di Tommaso's desire to dedicate a monument to Ruggero was part of that project dating back to the fourteenth century to create a sort of family mausoleum inside the church of Santa Maria Novella.[85]

From a formal and iconographic point of view, the *Minerbetti Monument* stands out for its exclusively ornamental value. No narrative or figural element is in it, being composed of a square niche, within which an austere sepulchre is inserted, above which there is an elegant inscription surrounded by two groups of armaments on the sides. To frame the niche, we find a frieze composed of hanging draperies that place a crane in the centre, and two smooth pilasters, whose capitals are screaming masks (fig.264).

Through the *Minerbetti Monument* Cosini took a further step towards that process of monumentalisation of the grotesque that we had already seen in the Medici Chapel *Trophies*. The idea of placing trophies within a rectilinear niche seems to depend on the Polidoro trophies mentioned above, and is fully part of the Lombard ornamental tradition.[86] Thus, Cosini's contact with the young talents of the Raphaelesque school reveals it to be crucial. Although we have suggested the hypothesis that this meeting took place in Rome, it must also be considered that Polidoro painted the frescoes of the Roman facades in partnership with Maturino da Firenze, who, given his origin from Florence, could be considered the link between Cosini and the Roman ornamental world of the Raphaelesque school – as much as Perin del Vaga, another Florentine artist with a strong decorative spirit lent to Roman environments, would later be. Unfortunately, we have no documentary support for this period of Cosini's career, and we are therefore forced to make an often summary and fluctuating reconstruction, based mainly on the formal investigation of the works.

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[85] For a careful analysis of the client, see: DALLI REGOLI, *Silvius,* pp. 33-36.

[86] The motif of the armaments packed into a rectangular niche is taken from the podium of the II century AD Trajan Column. We find many Lombard declinations of this motif in Bambaia, Bernardino Luini, Cristoforo Lombardi. See AGOSTI, Giovanni, *Bambaia e il classicism Lombardo*, Turin 1990, ff. 89-94, 102, 105, 179.

The pair of trophies of the *Minerbetti Monument* are characterised by a skilful bas-relief carving, which gracefully exploits the possibilities of sculptural *chiaroscuro*. Floating on the sides of the inscription, the two trophies are identical in their composition, with the helmet at the base, two crossed shields, and a sword of which only the handle with an animal head can be seen. Both the front shields have the coat of arms of the Minerbetti (three daggers arranged in a fan), but in the left one there are also the bishop mitre and the papal keys to indicate the important role that the client Francesco played within the papal Curia. The frontal shield on the right is instead characterised by the double *gorgoneion* (fig.203), which is a motif taken from the medieval miniature tradition, and would represent the infernal chasm. There are no known previous uses of this motif in sculpture, and therefore the combination between the emblem and the double *gorgoneion* seems an original invention by Cosini, which would have found some success in the following decades – we find many coats of arms that emerge from the open jaws of a mask in the second half of Cinquecento.

Of particular interest are the helmets at the base (fig.263). The one on the left shows on the spherical cap a serpent-like creature swimming among the waves, similar to the monstrous creatures that Cosini sculpted on the *Tomb of Lorenzo* in the Medici Chapel. The visor is instead borrowed from a human skull, of impressive realism, which takes up the deadly motif of the decaying head present at the base of the inscription of the *Monument*, also of horrific realism – further confirmation of the macabre anatomy studies we have said so much fascinated Cosini. The right helmet instead features a magnificent darting and muscular triton, wrapped in large fluttering drapery, while carrying a basket of fruit. The visor has a lion-like appearance, in which one can sense a wonderful investigation of the animal physiognomy. Finally, Cosini's *divertissement* of inserting tiny figurines into any stone surface continues here too, sculpting a crouching bearded man on the ear flap.

It is difficult to go into iconological interpretations of the monument, although the most obvious and superficial reading is that of a decadent representation of the earthly splendour, from which the deceased Ruggero detached himself after death. Given the ecclesiastical career of the client Francesco Minerbetti, the total lack of Christian imagery is surprising, replaced instead by the powerful chivalrous motifs that refer to the nobility of Ruggero, who according to a family legend would have received the knighthood from none other than Charles of Anjou.

Of the *Minerbetti Monument*, the ambiguous relationship with Michelangelo and with the Medici Chapel ornamental vocabulary must be emphasised. If the use of the trophies and the masks in the capitals would suggest a direct derivation of the *Minerbetti Monument* from the Medici Chapel decoration, there are in truth many differences that separate the two works. As

Campigli rightly points out, the *Minerbetti Monument* records a clear stance by Cosini, who expands, enriches and "monumentalises" those ornamental elements that in the Medici Chapel were relegated to mere frame motifs, thus getting rid of the presumed supremacy of the beauty of the human body, much exalted by Michelangelo. Once again, Cosini does this by blending the most disparate elements, which reflect his transversal artistic culture. To the anatomical studies necessary for the correct execution of the helmets and the skull, he probably adds the knowledge of medieval manuscripts from which he deduces the motif of the double *gorgoneion*. He also uses the imagery of the ancient trophy, derived not so much from his experience with Michelangelo, but rather from the knowledge of works of Lombard culture, probably filtered by Polidoro's Raphaelism.

What is certain is that in the *Minerbetti Monument* the ornament becomes the only subject of the work. It can be thought that this depended on Cosini's nature as an *ornamentista*, but comparing this work with the previous *Strozzi Tomb* we realise that Cosini was perfectly able to also confidently master the figurative sculpture. The choice then to configure the *Minerbetti Monument* with only ornamental elements was dictated not so much by a technical limitation, but rather by a linguistic conviction, which Cosini was to continue to investigate in his subsequent works.

We turn now to examine one of the most complete and better accomplished works of Cosini, the *Tomb of Raffaello Maffei,* Church of San Lino, Volterra (fig.278). Although we have numerous documentary sources at our disposal, the dating of this monument is not entirely certain.[87] We know that on 29 January 1529, seven years after Raffaello Maffei's death, Mario Maffei – brother of the deceased – commissioned the tomb from a certain "*Johannino da Firenze scarpellinus*."[88] His identity is rather difficult to establish, and several alternatives have been proposed.[89] The most convincing of these recognises in *Johannino da Firenze* Giovanni de' Rossi, a stonemason originally from Fiesole, who collaborated in Carrara with

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[87] For the analysis of the *Tomb of Raffaello Maffei*, see: CIARDI, Roberto Paolo – DALLI REGOLI, Gigetta – LESSI, Franco, *Scultura del Cinquecento a Volterra*, Siena 1988; Dalli REGOLI, *Silvius*, p. 45-50. For an analysis of the documentary evidence see: D'AMICO, John F., *The Raffaele Maffei Monument in Volterra. Small town patronage in the Renaissance*, in *Supplementum festivum*, Binghamton 1987, pp. 469-488.

[88] A rough draft of the contract is in Forlì, Biblioteca Comunale, *Autografi Piancastelli*, busta 1340; published in D'AMICO, *The Raffele Maffei Monument*, p. 479, n. 43.

[89] D'Amico proposes to identify *Johannino da Firenze* either as Silvio Cosini's father, Giovanni di Neri, or as Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli. However, Cosini's father Giovanni di Neri was a carpenter originally from Poggibonsi, a village rather distant from Florence, and was in fact often named 'Giovanni da Poggibonsi.' Montorsoli aquired the name Giovanni only in a later time, being his original name just Angelo. Thus, D'Amico proposals must be discarded. Dalli Regoli, followed by CAMPIGLI, *Silvio Cosini, Niccolò da Corte e la scultura a Palazzo Doria*, in *Nuovi Studi*, XIX, 2014, 20, pp. 83-104, believe *Johannino da Firenze* to be Giovanni de' Rossi.

Bartolomé Ordoñez, and who is perhaps the same '*Giovanni da Fiesole*' who, according to Vasari, worked with Cosini at Palazzo Doria, Genoa.[90]

Thanks to the analysis of Mario Maffei's letters, D'Amico was able to reconstruct important steps in the design phase of the *Maffei Tomb*, although his reconstruction must be partially revised here. It seems that Mario Maffei, an eminent papal official close to the Medici Popes, sought inspiration and executors for his brother's tomb in Rome as early as 1525. On 25 October 1525, Mario wrote from Rome to Raffaello's son-in-law Paolo Riccobaldi, referent in Volterra for the execution of the tomb of Raffaello, «*io ho fatto fare un disegno che credo sarà aproposto*» (I had a design made that I believe to be appropriate), implying that he already had in hand an initial project for his brother's tomb, and that the project had been executed by a sculptor then present in Rome.[91] In October 1526, Marcello Fucci, a collaborator of Mario Maffei, wrote from Rome to Mario, who was at that time in Volterra, mentioning «*quelli disegni delle sepulture*.»[92] It is understood from the continuation of the letter, that these *disegni* must have been copies of the tombs that Andrea Sansovino had made for Santa Maria del Popolo (fig.279), an essential paradigm for most of the tombs of the early sixteenth century. The *disegni* mentioned in the Fucci letter were probably the first projects for the *Raffaello Maffei Tomb*, considering that it presents a simplified scheme of the Sansovino's tombs in Rome.

Maffei's correspondence is silent on the plans for the tomb for about two years. Significant in this sense is the letter that Mario wrote to Riccobaldi on 2 April 1527, «*tra le guerre delli homini e quella di Dio con arrabbiato tempo io non so pensar di fare cosa alcuna*» (between the wars of men and that of God, I cannot think about doing anything in this angry time). Only on 26 January 1528, Riccobaldi recalls the executor of the tomb, without however mentioning his name, and describes him contemptuously as someone «*desideroso di noie*» (eager for trouble). From these few insulting words, it is plausible that Riccobaldi is referring

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[90] VASARI, *Vita di Perino del Vaga pittore fiorentino*, talking of the Palazzo Doria decorations, writes: «*Porta di marmo ... La quale opera e lavoro intagliò di quadro maestro Giovanni da Fiesole, e le figure condusse a perfezzione Silvio scultore da Fiesole, fiero e vivo maestro.*» Dalli Regoli and Campigli argue that *Giovanni da Fiesole* mentioned by Vasari is Giovanni de' Rossi.

[91] In his analysis, D'Amico makes a little confusion with the project for the *Maffei Tomb*, overlooking the letter of 25 October 1525, and instead emphasising another way later letter of 23 February 1528, where Marcello Fucci (Mario Maffei's collaborator) wrote to Mario Maffei that the *sepultura di Capella* was finished. D'Amico (p. 478, in particular n. 38) confuses the *sepultura di Capella* with the project for Raffaello Maffei's tomb. In reality, Fucci refers to the tomb of Bernardino Capella, a close friend of Mario, who died in 1527. Mario was the executor of Capella's will and he followed the execution of Capella's tomb in Santo Stefano Rotondo, Rome. See: BENEDETTI, Stefano, *Maffei, Mario*, entry in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, LXVII, 2006; BALESTRIERI, Gianni, *Capella, Bernardino*, entry in *Ibidem*, XVIII, 1975.

[92] See D'AMICO, *The Raffaele Maffei Monument*, p. 478, n. 36.

to Cosini, since those words are well suited to the attitude that Riccobaldi and Mario had also subsequently towards Cosini, when he abandoned the work, unfinished, to go to Genoa.

Therefore, by carefully reviewing Maffei's correspondence, and in light of the hypothesis proposed above that Cosini spent a certain period in Rome around 1525, we arrive at a different reconstruction of the facts than that proposed by D'Amico. Raffaello Maffei died in January 1522. Starting from 1525 his brother Mario sought in Rome a sculptor who could design and execute the tomb for his brother, to be placed in Volterra, their native village. In all likelihood, his choice ended with Cosini, then passing through Rome – probably Cosini was chosen for his experience alongside Michelangelo in the Medici Chapel.[93] Cosini then carried out a first project, which must have been inspired by the Roman tombs executed by Andrea Sansovino. However, the project was not immediately followed up, most likely due to problems with the supply of the Carrara marble, and due to unrest that preceded and followed the Sack of Rome. For this reason, realising that there was no urgency for the *Maffei Tomb*, Cosini first returned to Florence, taking care of the commissions pending there (*Strozzi Tomb* and *Minerbetti Monument*). Then, seeing that the Volterra endeavour was not yet making any progress, he engaged in other works, first the *Angels* for the Cathedral of Pisa, then the *Altar* for the Sanctuary of Montenero. However, in the period in which Cosini was engaged in these last two enterprises, the commission for the *Maffei Tomb* was finally released. Mario and Riccobaldi must have tried to re-establish contact with Cosini, who, however, had to ask them to wait some more time since he was busy elsewhere.

However, in January 1529, the impatient Mario drew up a contract in the presence of an associate of Cosini, Giovanni de' Rossi, who in all probability started the work. A further contract followed, of which however we have lost track, in which Mario entrusted the execution of the tomb to Cosini. This lost contract is recalled in a letter dated 11 November 1531, where, complaining of Cosini's departure and his renunciation of continuing the work on the tomb, Riccobaldi writes that Mario could not retaliate against the sculptor as the commission contract that appointed Cosini as executor of the work had been lost.[94] Therefore, a contract in Cosini's name must have existed. This second contract probably was signed

[93] According to Cosini's own words, his collaboration alongside Michelangelo at the Medici Chapel, brought to him an extraordinary fame. See COSINI, Silvio, *Letter to Michelangelo Buonarroti*, 13 April 1532, from Genoa to Floence, in BAROCCHI – RISTORI, Il *carteggio,* III, Florence 1973, pp. 395-396: «*Et dicovi che solamente per essere io stato al servitio vostro, in tutti quelli lochi dove io me ritrovo m'è fato honore e cortesia; e questo è solo per la bona fama che è di voi, et non già per merito di mia virtù*.»

[94] Volterra, Biblioteca Comunale Guarnacciana, XLVII, 2, 1. This letter is extremely important because it is the first document referable to the *Maffei Tomb* in which the name of Cosini appears – he is called *Silvio Pisano*. D'AMICO, *The Raffaello Maffei Monument*, p. 484-485, publishes the letter, with also an English translation.

around 31 May 1530, when Cosini delivered the *Altar of Montenero*.[95] Cosini had to work on the *Maffei Tomb* for about a year, if in November 1531 he appears to have moved to Genoa to work at Palazzo Doria. During this year, he managed to almost complete the execution of the marbles.[96] Cosini returned to Volterra only in July 1532, in all probability to follow the latest carvings and the assembly of the tomb, which in his absence was perhaps entrusted to Stagio Stagi – to whom we can attribute the execution of some details of the decoration, in particular the third and fourth pilaster, and the right putto of the base.[97] Thanks to his experience as stuccoist in Genoa, in this phase Cosini must have also carried out the stuccos on top of the monument, representing a threatening mask at the centre, and two winged putti holding candles at the sides.

Now that we have clarified both the chronology and the whole creative authorship of Cosini, we turn to analyse the monument. It looks like an imposing tripartite marble structure. In the large central niche the statue of Raffaello Maffei lies on the sepulchre, awake and in a recumbent position, in a pose that recalls the ancient Etruscan sarcophagi unearthed in Volterra. The realistic face is evidently taken from Raffaello's death mask.[98] Raffaello holds a scroll in his hands with the Virgilian inscription SIC ITUR AD ASTRA. In the arch above him,

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[95] Cosini executed the *Altar of Montenero* in Pisa, and moved the marbles to Montenero, Livorno, on 31 May 1530, as revealed in: Livorno, Archivio Storico Cittadino, *Contratti dell'Economia della Sambuca e Montenero (1431-1637),* letter F-A c. 56, published in VIGO, Pietro, *Montenero. Guida storico-descrittiva, con appendice di documenti inediti*, Livorno 1902, pp. 484-486.

[96] FALCONCINI, Benedetto, *Vita del nobil'uomo e buon servo di Dio Raffaello Maffei detto il volterrano*, Rome 1722, p. 115, transcribes the letter of 31 November 1531 from Camillo Incontri, superintendent of the work on Raffaello's tomb, to Mario Maffei. Complaining of Cosini's departure, Incontri writes that the work at that time was «*quasi ammezzata di lavoro, massime il volto di Messer Raffaello è quasi finito*» (almost halved with work, especially the face of Messer Raffaello is almost finished).

[97] According to the letter that Mario wrote to Riccobaldi on 20 July 1532 (Rome, Biblioteca Nazionale, *Lettere autografe*, A.95.40, 4), Cosini had come back to Volterra «*per lavorare due cose*.» See D'AMICO, p. 487, n. 63. In Incontri's letter of 31 November 1531 cited above, Incontri suggests to substitute Cosini (already moved to Genoa) with Stagio Stagi, who in that period was following the restoration at the Cathedral of Pisa. From this letter, scholarship has proposed the possibility that the contribution of Stagi was much wider than that proposed here. Furthermore, due to VASARI, *Vita di Fra' Giovan'Agnolo Montorsoli scultore*, telling that Montorsoli carved the *Tomb of Raffaello Maffei*, scholarship has also proposed Montrosoli as collaborator of Cosini at the *Maffei Tomb*. However, Vasari was in truth confusing the *Tomb of Raffaello Maffei* with the *Tomb of Mario Maffei*, which was indeed executed by Montorsoli in the Cathedral of Volterra. This passage of Vasari's *Life of Montorsoli* is particularly intriguing because he seems to confuse Cosini with Montorsoli, a mistake that often occurs even today, and it is strangely similar to the mistake that Vasari did in assigning the *Angels* of Pisa both to Tribolo and Cosini. Cosini, Tribolo and Montorsoli having been trained in close proximity to Michelangelo, have been often valued superficially, and their individualities have been merged under the label 'Michelangelism.' This hasty assessment started with the great confusion Vasari made in recognising their works.

[98] Cosini had a certain familiarity with death masks. In October 1529, he was called to execute the wax death mask of Niccolò Capponi, an eminent Florentine figure, who died in Garfagnana, a northern region of Tuscany. See VASARI.

we find a darting sun inscribed with the name of Jesus (IC+XC), surrounded by tadpole-like spiritual flames.[99]

In the left niche we see the Archangel Raphael sculpted in high relief (fig.280). With his mouth ajar, he ecstatically turns his big eyes towards the altar to his left. The fleshy wings frame his torso, his body is wrapped in a wide rustling tunic. His right hand clamps the robe at chest height, while his left arm is stretched along the torso, and with his hand he holds a jar of ointments at groin level. He is represented walking majestically, the right leg forward to the left. At his feet, a small greyhound directs its faithful gaze upwards. The ointment and the dog are attributes that refer to the biblical episode told in the *Book of Tobias*, according to which the Archangel Raphael accompanied Tobias along the journey that would have led them to collect a credit in the Media region. The iconography of Raphael was established like this in the contract of January 1529, but «*senza Tobia,*» whose role was evidently assumed by the deceased Raffaello Maffei, who was accompanied to heaven by his homonymous Archangel.

In the niche on the right, we find Beato Gherardo, also sculpted in high relief (fig.281). Gherardo was a laic Franciscan friar who lived in the fourteenth century, protector of the Maffei family – the father of Raffaello and Mario was called Gherardo. From an iconographic point of view, the humble figure of Gherardo is the exact opposite of the delicate nobility of the Archangel Raphael. Gherardo is represented in his Franciscan tunic, which falls heavily on his grim and venous body. He, too, enraptured by mystical ecstasy, has a hollow and serious face, with large eyes wide open and painful. With his left hand stretched out at his side he holds a rosary, while with his right he leans on a rough stick.

The three figures in the niches also show Cosini's remarkable skills in figurative sculpture. He is able to investigate the possibilities of the representation of the human figure, managing to balance both the most noble needs of the Archangel – a flourishing Hellenistic thrill of flowing hair and emphatic gestures – with the graver realism of the deceased Maffei and Beato Gherardo.

To separate the three niches, there are four large pilasters decorated with grotesques, and here Cosini was able to give ample space to his odd fantasies. Although the design of all four must undoubtedly be assigned to Cosini, he probably made by his own hand only the first two pilasters that frame the Archangel Raphael. The grotesque of the left pilaster has an

[99] The IC+XC monogram was particularly dear to Raffaello. It is the same as found in Raffaello's autograph manuscripts preserved in the Biblioteca Vaticana, and almost certainly corresponds to what the humanist traced with his own hand in the cell where he spent the last years of his existence. See FALCONCINI, *Vita di Raffaello Maffei,* p. 142, 208; DALLI REGOLI, *Silvius*, p. 49. See in particular EADEM, *Silvio Cosini e l'Ornamento*. *Vitalità e trasformazione di modelli antichi alle soglie del Cinquecento*, in press, p. 109 and nn. 10-13. The sun with the name of Jesus appears also in Cosini's *Montenero Altar*, but with a different inscription (IHS instead of IC+XC).

elegant base of fifteenth-century flavour, on which rests a vase with a slender neck, containing fruit and spikes of wheat. From the spikes, a bizarre feminine spirit spreads its long wings upwards, wearing a puffed dress that swells and flaps in the wind. A long, narrow lobate leaf grows on her forehead. We find an exact replica of this figurine in the left pilaster of the *De' Vicariis Altar* in Salerno, a symptom of its probable chronological proximity with the *Maffei Tomb*. Above the vegetating spirit, a mask is depicted – a further declination of the prototype developed in the frieze of the Medici Chapel. From the ears of the mask, two intertwined cornucopias emerge that emit flames.

The pilaster to the right of the Archangel Raphael – which is replicated in the subsequent third pilaster, perhaps carved by Stagio Stagi – is perhaps of even greater interest. At the base we find a finely sculpted tritoness swimming on wavy waters. The lower part of her body is composed of the torso of a sea horse and a vegetal tail. The bare chest, crossed only by a thin circular cloth (a recurring motif in Cosini's figures), widens due to the raised arm that holds a rounded *stamnos* containing fruit. She has her hair gathered in a cloth knotted with a bow on her forehead (another recurring motif of Cosini), and her serene face is turned upwards. Fleshy genital-looking spikes emerge from the fruit vase, and from one of them another bizarre feminine spirit emerges. The bust with a narrow waist resembles that of a chicken, has two breasts and has neither arms nor head. Two wonderful fleshy wings rise to frame a further vaginal spike. Finally, to crown, there is a deer (heraldic symbol of the Maffei) crouched on a plaque inscribed with the monogram of Jesus (IC + XC, the same one we see in the radiant sun of the central niche), on which stands a flaming brazier.

Finally, the capitals are composed of two stylised acanthus leaves, from which a deer skull emerges, whose horns form the volutes of an Ionic capital, and are tied to the forehead by a bow.

The Montenero Altar

We turn now to carefully analyse the work that together with the *Maffei Tomb* is perhaps the most important of Cosini's *œuvre*, the *Altar of the Madonna delle Grazie*, for the homonymous Sanctuary of Montenero, Livorno (fig.287).

As mentioned, the delivery document of the *Altar* still exists, which reassures us about the dating of the work, which was completed by 31 May 1530.[100] It is problematic to establish whether the conception of the *Montenero Altar* preceded or followed the conception of the *Maffei Tomb*, however, it is certain that the two works are closely connected, both chronologically and iconographically. The *Montenero Altar* and the *Maffei Tomb* are in fact two similar declinations of the same unique artistic concept.

The *Montenero Altar* is influenced by the fifteenth-century structure of the Florentine marble altars that Cosini inherited from the master Andrea Ferrucci.[101] From them, Cosini also adopts the grotesque *horror vacui*, which he updates according to his most mystical and bizarre visions. Before attempting an iconological interpretation of the monument, which will also be applicable to a certain extent to the *Maffei Tomb*, we start first by analysing the stratified structure of the *Altar*.

Cosini's *Altar of Montenero* was originally placed in a prominent position on the main altar of the church, because it contained the sacred fourteenth-century altarpiece of the *Madonna delle Grazie*, which gave its name to the Sanctuary. In the sixteenth century, the Sanctuary was managed by the Jesuati friars, and it did not yet have the sumptuous appearance it has today, being a simple rectangular basilica. Only when in the seventeenth century the Theatine friars replaced the Jesuati at the helm of the Sanctuary, the architectural complex was enlarged and restored. In the eighteenth century, under the guidance of the Theatines, Cosini's *Altar* was separated from the sacred altarpiece of the *Madonna delle Grazie*, and was moved to a much more marginal position, inside the sacristy of the ex-votos, where it still stands today. On the occasion of this move, the *Altar* probably suffered damage and partial breakages are still visible at the edges.

The *Altar* articulation is rather complex, being divided into three vertical bands, the two lateral bands of which are in turn divided into two superimposed niches. The vertical bands are separated from each other by the usual four pilasters decorated with bizarre grotesques. To unify the three bands, there is a crowning architrave with a frieze of festoons and shields.

The central band is composed of an arched niche, within which the altarpiece of the *Madonna* was originally placed. The splay of the niche is decorated with winged heads of

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[100] See the *atto di quietanza* (deed of receipt) for the *Altar of Montenero*, dated 31 May 1530, in Archivio Storico Cittadino di Livorno, *Contratti dell'Economia della Sambuca e Montenero (1431-1637),* letter F-A c. 56, published in VIGO, Pietro, *Montenero. Guida storico-descrittiva, con appendice di documenti inediti*, Livorno 1902, pp. 484-486.

[101] Just to mention two particularly suitable examples, see Andrea Sansovino's *Corbinelli Altar*, Santo Spirito, Florence, and above all Andrea Ferrucci's *Altar of the Crucifixion*, today at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, where we see the arch with the sun and the name of Jesus IHS. In *Montenero Altar*, Cosini gets rid of the rounds with Saints – substituted by rectangular niches – and of the narrative predella.

cherubs, a recurring motif in the altars of Ferrucci. In the lunette, there is a large circular sun that radiates rays and darting flames, and which contains the monogram of the name of Jesus (IHS), a symbol venerated by the Jesuati (fig.290). In the spandrels, we find serpent-shaped winged sea monsters with large breasts, and with their jaws wide open in the act of eating a fish – a further variation of the similar monsters of the *Tomb of Lorenzo* in the Medici Chapel.

At the bottom of the central band, we find a high base, where a closed door is represented. On either side, there are two angels with crackling drapery and arms joined in an invisible embrace. Above them, an inscription in capital letters *'AVE GRATIA PLENA*.' These are the words with which the Angel Gabriel greets Mary at the Annunciation – Mary is metaphorically represented here by the closed door which indicates her virginity. Although there are some examples in Renaissance art – in particular in Andrea Del Sarto – the representation of two announcing angels in place of the more appropriate single angel Gabriel is rather unusual, in respect of the story handed down by the Gospel of Luke (1: 26-38). Relying on the words of St. Augustine, Natali argues that the coexistence of two angels in some Renaissance *Annunciations* would indicate the two main functions of the angels: one is to carry out God's will, the other is to constantly contemplate his glory.[102] As we will see below, the whole *Altar* is indeed affected by the dichotomy between active and contemplative life.

The lateral bands are occupied by four figures in niches, carved in high relief, each with an inscription that indicates their identity. In the left wing, we find Saint Jerome and Beato Giovanni Colombini, whereas in the right wing, Saint Erasmus and Beato Francesco Vincenzi.[103] The figures of the two Saints show an abbreviated and expressionist style, especially in their animal attributes (the lion for Jerome and the dolphin for Erasmus). Starting from 1499, Gerome became the patron saint of the Jesuati, while Bishop Erasmus protected the sailors – the Sanctuary of Montenero being not far from the port of Livorno, it was a frequent pilgrimage destination for sea workers. In a *contrapposto* in which the left leg is raised, the right arm diagonally crosses the bust, the tilted head directs the weary gaze to the right, the figure of Erasmus is distinguished from that of Jerome for its much more complex pose – identical to that of the Pisan *Angels*.

In their Franciscan frugality, the figures of the Beati are instead of great artistic value, and fit into that search for austerity that we have also seen in the figure of Beato Gherardo of the *Maffei Tomb*. Giovanni Colombini (1304-1367) was a rich Sienese merchant who, in

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[102] NATALI, Antonio, *Il nuovo Adamo e l'antico*, in *Paragone*, XL, 1989, 477 = N.S., 18, p. 26.
[103] DALLI REGOLI, *Silvius*, p. 43 identifies the identity of Saint Eramus, whose inscription 'S. HERMUS' is controversial.

imitation of St. Francis, stripped himself of his material possessions to devote himself to religious life. He was the founder of the order of the Jesuati, so called because their asceticism provided for the mystical contemplation of Jesus, so as to allow the transformation of man into Christ. For this reason, Cosini represents Colombini holding the sun inscribed with the name of Jesus (IHS) in his left hand. Francesco di Mino Vincenzi, also a Sienese merchant, was a close friend of Colombini and joined his Jesuati '*brigata*.' He became a close collaborator, and was the one who in 1367 obtained the first formal recognition of the Jesuati order from Pope Urban V.[104]

To underline the close communion between the two Beati, Cosini represents them as all but identical. The shaved head, the tunic with the large hood (called '*calza*'), the rosary tied to the belt, the wooden clogs at the feet, are all characteristics that identify Giovanni and Francesco as belonging to the order of the Jesuati.[105] Their heads are surrounded by thick rays of light, indicating their closeness to God. Their poses, however, are opposed. Giovanni is standing holding the *calza* on his shoulder and holding the sun of Jesus in his lap, his dazed gaze turned to the ground, or rather towards the announcing angels of the central base. Francesco, on the other hand, is gathered in prayer, his hands folded at chest height, while he looks upwards ecstatically, towards the sacred table of the *Madonna di Montenero*.

The two Beati therefore assume opposite attitudes. Giovanni, as founder of the order, leads an active life guided by the name of Jesus, whereas Francesco, in mystical rapture, is a symbol of the contemplative life. Cosini took up this dualism between active and contemplative life from Michelangelo's projects for the *Tomb of Julius II*, in those years still far from being completed. The arm raised to the shoulder and the lowered head of Giovanni resume the pose of Michelangelo's *Leah* (or *Active Life,* fig.288); the folded hands and the upward gaze of Francesco recall Michelangelo's *Rachel* (or *Contemplative Life*, fig.289). This is a detail of great interest for two reasons. On the one hand, it allows us to reconsider the dating of *Leah* and *Rachel*, which are usually considered to have been carried out in the last phase of the work of the *Tomb of Julius II* in the 1540s, and which instead would have been definitively configured already before 1530, at least on paper. On the other hand, this close resemblance between the figures of Cosini and those of Michelangelo shows Cosini's method of assimilation

[104] PIAZZONI, Ambrogio Maria, *Colombini, Giovanni, beato*, entry in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, XXVII, 1982.
[105] DALLI REGOLI, *Silvius*, p. 43, publishes excerpts of the Jesuati *Regola*: «*Pellicce non sogliamo usare se non in tempo di infermità, ma pure questo sogliamo observare che si schifi la pretiosità dei vestimenti acciò ch'altri no' cerchi di piacere in vestimenti ma in costumi, sì che non s'atenda nel panno la bellezza o vero finezza, ma considerasi l'utilitade... quanto ai piedi, nostra usanza è dandar scalzi, coi zocholi, ma gl'infermi e i deboli è conceduto di portare li scarpi; e quando fusse de bisogno, i calcetti e le calze*» (Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, mss. Ricc. 419, 1758, 1792, 1754, published in Uccelli, 1865).

of Michelangelesque models. Although citing their pose, Cosini submerges the prototypes of attributes as far as possible from the model (he changes the sex, brutalises the limbs, adds small variations in the pose), thus making the reference almost unrecognisable and vigorously affirming his own artistic individuality.[106]

We turn now to examine in detail the decorative apparatus of the *Montenero Altar*. As mentioned, the niches of stricter figurative sculpture are interspersed with four pilasters lavishly decorated with grotesques. The pilasters stand on high podiums, of which the two lateral ones are decorated with elegant bas-reliefs of fruit hanging from a ribbon (today very damaged, yet the reference to Giovanni da Udine's hanging fruits at the Vatican Logge is still perceivable, fig.296), while the two central ones present magnificent flaming vases, from which precious tassels hang.[107] Each grotesque on the pilasters have precise characteristics, and although they are similar in composition, each element that composes them takes on its own singular specific value.

The left pilaster has a naked man at the base walking in the water, who, hiding his face behind his raised arm, carries a wicker basket containing fruit. Cosini takes this figure from the stuccos that Giovanni da Udine painted at the Vatican Logge – the nudity, the wavy waters, the pose, the raised right arm, are precise quotations from the prototype of Giovanni da Udine (fig.295).[108] Above him, a terrifying winged harpy stands, without arms, replaced by architectural scrolls. On her head rests a vase with dolphin-shaped handles, from which plant shoots rise.

The second pilaster has at the base a vegetating pedestal with feral legs, on which a mysterious kneeling figure rests (fig.292). A long cloth wraps around her legs only, leaving the bust naked. With the right arm, this figure also covers the face, increasing the aura of magical mystery. The butterfly wings identify it as Psyche, the soul. She too holds fruit above her head, from which an amusing vegetable spirit emerges, whose body and wings are composed of

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[106] As a purely speculative purpose, we suggest the hypothesis that it was Michelangelo who sent Cosini to Rome in 1525, perhaps with the order to view the state of work on the *Tomb of Julius II*. On this occasion, Cosini could have carefully studied the projects and parts of the monument already built.

[107] Starting from these vases, Dalli Regoli decided to assign to also Cosini the small vases present on the jambs of the Medici Chapel (DALLI REGOLI, *Silvius*, p. 11). However, the motif of the over-decorated vase belonged to the ornamental vocabulary of Renaissance sculpture well before the Medici Chapel and any ornamental sculptors knew its iconography. There is therefore no need to assign them to Cosini, but perhaps rather to his successors, Francesco da Sangallo or Simone Mosca – we see similar vases also at the Loreto *Holy House*, where both Francesco di Vincenzo da Sangallo and Simone Mosca worked.

[108] According to DACOS, Nicole, *The Loggia of Raphael: a Vatican Treasure*, New York-London-Aberville 2008, p. 106, the episode of the Vatican Logge where the naked man walking through waters appears would be *Leucothea giving Ulysses the belt*, a very rare theme, making the scholar suspect that the stucco is a genuine invention of Raphael's workshop, and not a motif taken from antiquity.

leaves, and whose face is frozen in an expression of dismay, having the eyes and mouth wide open (fig.291). Above the spirit, another vase, this time flaming.

The third pilaster has an elegant podium at the base similar to the previous one, on which stands a slender female figure walking, with a bare chest (fig.293). She raises her arms above her head, holding fruit. This lascivious odalisque is also inspired by a figure conceived within Raphael's Roman circle, being taken from an idea that Maturino da Firenze created for the Roman facades that he frescoed together with Polidoro da Caravaggio (fig.294).[109] Here too, from the fruit that the woman carries on her head, a funny spirit of Nature peeps out, which, unlike the previous one, shows a thick fur covering its torso and face. It too has a startled expression, and holds a vase, flaming.

Finally, the fourth and last pilaster shows a much more traditional decorative vocabulary. At the base we find a pair of griffins on which a harpy stands. Vegetable weaves unravel from it, ending first in a mask, and then continuing from a vase placed above it.

The decoration of the pilasters comments and underlines the discourse carried out in the figurative configuration of the niches. It must be borne in mind that the *Altar* originally housed the altarpiece of the *Madonna di Montenero*, which represented the Madonna enthroned holding the Child Jesus, in the best fourteenth-century tradition of altarpieces, and that it was the object of veneration both of the Jesuati, and of the pilgrims who asked her for grace. Therefore, the mythology of the Jesuati is joined with that of the Marian cult, and each element of the decoration can be interpreted in one or the other sense.

The focal point of the whole composition of the *Altar* is the radiant sun that contains the name of Jesus, being the symbol of the Creator who gives shape to creation. The sun in fact emanates flames, therefore souls, which descend on the earth, giving shape to the world. However, Jesus is not only Creator, but also created, being the Son of the Virgin Mary, as the fourteenth-century altarpiece and the predella by Cosini reminds us. Jesus is made man by his own divine will, and his incarnation is represented in the central panel, which symbolises the divine and celestial dimension – and is in fact framed by a choir of cherubs.

The actions of men of faith, represented by the four figures in the lateral niches, also spring from the Sun-Jesus. Respecting the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the figures of Saints Jerome and Erasmus dominate those of the Beati Jesuati. Yet, Beati Giovanni and Francesco have their heads illuminated by divine light, the same that radiates from the name of Jesus. According to what Giovanni Colombini declared, Jesuati aimed to reach divinity already in life, through a

[109] Maturino’s figure is visible in a drawing at Windsor Castle, Royal Collection, 12959 r.

proper transmutation of their bodies.[110] Thus, Cosini represents them in their state of transmutation from a human to a divine state, when, thanks to their acts and prayers, they receive the light of Jesus.

The human dimension embodied by the Saints and the Beati is framed by the grotesque pilasters. Not just images of the variety of the earthly world, the grotesques also give ethical warnings. The male nude advancing, covering his face, sculpted at the base of the left pilaster, symbolises the blind natural instinct.[111] The natural instinct contrasts with the intellect, which the Beati Gesuati are instead endowed with, as indicated by the radiant halo surrounding their heads, the seat of the intellect. The male nude/natural instinct carries tasty fruit and the terrible harpy, symbols of eager avarice.[112] Therefore, no flames – a symbol of ascension to heaven – emerge from the vase that ends the left pilaster, but plant shoots, indicating that following the natural instinct one cannot aspire to reach the eternal heavenly dimension, but rather only to accumulate exhaustible goods. Similarly, in the pilaster on the far right of the *Altar*, we still find a harpy/avarice, a mask (a symbol of distorted appearance), and a crowning vase of plant shoots. These two pilasters at the margins rest in fact on podiums bearing the fruit, thus giving an image to the natural life that aspires only to earthly consumption.

The two central pilasters instead play a different story. The podiums on which they rest are decorated with flaming vases, and therefore indicate a life devoted to divine ascension, that of the Saints and the Beati. Psyche kneeling and covering her face symbolises the humble and modest soul,[113] whereas the odalisque offering her breast represents charity and generosity.[114] Two opposite attitudes that are reflected in the figures of Beati Giovanni and Francesco, who, as we have previously said, are symbols of the active and contemplative life of the Jesuati. The modest life and the generous life that aspire to the celestial dimension – and finally reach it as indicated by the flaming vases placed on top of the two central grotesques – generate the amazement of Nature, as evidenced by the incredulous expression of the funny spirits placed at the centre of the pilasters.

The *Montenero Altar* is therefore a broad and complex representation of the possibilities of earthly life. At the beginning of everything there is the prime mover, the Sun-Jesus, who

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[110] See PIAZZONI, *Colombini, Giovanni, beato*.
[111] RIPA, Cesare, *Iconologia*, Venice 1560, p. 288, entry '*Istinto naturale*:' «*Giovane con la faccia velata, sarà nudo e in atto di correre*.»
[112] Ibidem, p. 423.
[113] *Ibidem*, p. 582; entry *'Pudicitia*:' «*Il volto velato significa modestia et pudicitia.*»
[114] On the offering of the breast as a symbol of generosity and charity, see: *Ibidem*, p. 67; entry '*Benignità*:' «*Donna che si preme le mammelle dalle quali esce copia di latte*;» p. 85, entry '*Carità*' «*Donna che tiene il cuore ardente in mano.*»

creates everything and to whom everything returns, in a Plotinian circular descending and ascending motion. Based on the ethics that one decides to pursue, one can either remain subjugated by earthly life, which brings only temporary satisfaction, or aspire to celestial asceticism, which instead promises eternal life in the name of Jesus.

We also find this same circular iconographic structure in the *Maffei Tomb*. Here too, the Sun-Jesus scatters, and at the same time collects, the souls that give shape to the world, which is represented in all its dynamic and fallacious variety along the grotesques. From the worldly whirlwind of the grotesques, however, extraordinary figures manage to emerge: the deceased dedicatee of the monument, Raffaello Maffei, and his tutelary deities, the Archangel Raphael and the Beato Gherardo, who guided his work in life, and accompany him to God after death.

The close iconographic relationship between the *Montenero Altar* and the *Maffei Tomb*, and the fact that both find precise references in the work of Ferrucci – the Sun-Jesus is an element taken from Ferrucci's *Altar of the Crucifixion* – make us understand that these two works were a genuine Cosini invention, and were not the result of the client's wishes. In fact, the patrons of the two works, the Jesuati and Mario Maffei, belonged to distant realities, the former being devoted to an anti-clerical pauperism, whereas the latter was a high papal official. This is a further indication of Cosini's independence, capable in those years of imposing his own controversial artistic vision. As we have seen in the tense relationship that Cosini established with Maffei, his restless intransigence must have caused him more than a few troubles during his career, which could explain the progressive weakening of the commissions he received, that became increasingly minor and peripheral.

Figurative sculpture. The Pisan Angels and other examples

In the previous chapter, we extensively described how Vasari's ambiguous words triggered an intricate attribution issue for the Pisan *Angels*. Let us briefly recall that in the 1550 edition of *Lives*, Vasari laconically assigns the two Pisan *Angels* to Cosini, «He made two marble angels in Pisa for the main altar, which are on two columns.» Vasari, however, withdrew this attribution in the subsequent edition of *Lives* of 1568, in which he speaks of the Pisan *Angels* both in the expanded biography of Cosini and in the one just edited of Tribolo. Vasari writes that Tribolo was the first to sculpt an angel for the main altar of the Cathedral of Pisa, and that Cosini subsequently made the other angel «to face the one by Tribolo.» However, Vasari's words clash on the one hand with the payment documents of the *Angels*, in

which only Cosini is mentioned.[115] On the other, they clash with the formal analysis of the *Angels*, which are clearly two products of the same hand, and that hand is undoubtedly of Cosini, given that both the statues bear his signature (fig.300).

Considering that the two marble *Angels* sculpted by Cosini are perfectly identical in their pose, it can be deduced that they derive from a single preparatory model. It was therefore suggested in the previous chapter that Tribolo's contribution could be limited to the execution of that single preparatory model only. In fact, we find the same angel figure, with the same identical *contrapposto* pose, in the *Martyrdom of Saint Catherine* by Giuliano Bugiardini (fig.299), a painting for which we know that Tribolo supplied clay models.[116] Tribolo might have drawn inspiration for that model from the angels that Andrea Sansovino had carved for the tombs of Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome (fig.298), and which Tribolo may have seen and studied during his stay in Rome in 1524.

Fortunately, the payment documents reassure us both on the attribution of the two statues to Cosini and on their dating. They were executed between February 1528 and December 1530. The *Angels* were originally placed on the main altar of the Cathedral, and stood above two columns with capitals sculpted between 1524 and 1527 by Pandolfo Fancelli and Stagio Stagi, superintendents of the restoration works of the Cathedral of Pisa. In 1595, the cathedral was hit by a disastrous fire, following which Cosini's *Angels* were removed from their original position and crammed together with other marbles «*nella stanza dirieto sotto la volta*» (in the room under the vault) of the warehouses of the Opera della Primaziale.[117] Subsequently, in an unknown period, they were reinserted inside the cathedral, but in a dark and hidden position in the choir tribune, where they remained until the beginning of the twentieth century. They are now preserved in the Museo dell'Opera della Primaziale.

The *Angels* are caught in a moment of majestic descending motion, as the voluminous hair and the flourish of the drapery suggest. They assume the exact same pose, albeit specular – one leg slightly bent forward, the other backward, as if they were sliding on the clouds. One arm crosses the torso diagonally, and supports the base of the candlestick, while the other arm is raised to hold the stem. The ecstatic gaze is turned upwards, in the opposite direction from the candlestick. In the hair is a crown of leaves. The voluminous wings with long and fleshy feathers are at rest, perpendicular to the back. The candlesticks supported by the angels are embellished with a gilding that emphasises the decorative elements. The bases of

[115] See BACCI, *Gli Angeli di Silvio Cosini*, pp. 128-129.
[116] VASARI, *Vita di Giuliano Bugiardini pittore fiorentino*, in IDEM, *Vite*: « *si risolvé il Tribolo ad aiutarlo, per che, fatti alcuni modelli in bozze di terra.*»
[117] See the inventory of 31 August 1596, published in BACCI, *Gli angeli di Silvio Cosini*, p. 130.

the candlesticks are decorated with satyr masks, trophies, winged cherubs, and cloth laces. The entire marble surface of the two statues is smooth, waxy and bright – only between the plumage of the wings and the hair can drill holes be seen.

Although the two *Angels* are almost identical, we find some significant formal differences between them. The *Angel* on the left is probably the superior one. The curls are wider and more voluminous, the big eyes stand out with greater force, the structure of the face is sweeter. His robe shakes wildly, especially between the legs and at the height of the right knee, while maintaining an impressive grace in the realistic rendering of the movement. We find delicate ornamental embroidery in the buttoned edge of the robe. The belt that stops the dress at the height of the pelvis is skillfully partially hidden between the folds. In the part of the belt that emerges from the drapery, on the back of the angel, Cosini inserts his signature, OPUS SILVII. The candlestick detaches completely from the angel's body, a proof of technical virtuosity that is not replicated in the *Angel* on the right. The complete detachment from the angel's body allows Cosini to describe the candlestick in its volumetric entirety, and therefore on all three faces of the base we find lumpy satirical heads with large goat horns and a terrifying expression.

The *Angel* on the right, despite not having all the technical virtuosity of his partner, is still of great value. Although vibrant tensions of matter can be seen in it too, it is generally pervaded by a more classical and static compactness, and is perhaps more faithful to the Sansovino model. Most likely, this was the first angel to be carved.

The stylistic analysis of the two *Angels* forces us to return briefly to the issue of attribution. We have said that the reference models of the Pisan *Angels* are those that Andrea Sansovino conceived for the Sforza-Basso della Rovere Tombs for Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome. Given the passion that Tribolo had always shown for Sansovino's neo-attic sculpture, we have assumed that the model was made by (and therefore the reference to the Roman angels was due to) Tribolo. However, it must be borne in mind that Cosini was also strongly influenced by Sansovino's art. A clear demonstration of this is the *Maffei Tomb*, which replicates, albeit with variations and simplifications, the layout of the Sforza-Basso della Rovere Tombs. Therefore, considering Cosini's probable stay in Rome prior to his arrival in Pisa, we might also think that the model of the Pisan *Angels* was made by Cosini, and not by Tribolo.

Thus the unresolved issue of the relationship between Cosini and Tribolo returns. If ever there was an effective creative exchange between the two, one wonders how fruitful this was, to what extent it depended on the common artistic training in Florence in the early decades of

the sixteenth century or on their meeting in Pisa which probably took place precisely in 1528 on the occasion of the creation of the *Angels*. We also wonder how much weight their closeness to Michelangelo had on their sculptural style, how much their stay in Rome had influenced them, or any contact with different contexts, such as the Tyrrhenian-Spanish one of Stagi, or the Neapolitan-Lombard one of Ferrucci. The feeling one gets when looking at the Pisa *Angels* in light of what has been said up to now on both Tribolo and Cosini, is that Tribolo would never have been able to execute those refined delicacies of which the two Pisan statues are full, at least not during these dates. Therefore, Tribolo had to play a subordinate role compared to his peer Cosini, and it is therefore difficult to think of him as the inventor of those two magnificent statues, as if he were the master builder of the figurative apparatus of the Pisan Cathedral restorations.[118]

In the absence of precise evidence that testifies to either an actual intervention by Tribolo at least in the design phase of the *Angels*, or his collaboration with Cosini prior to this commission – perhaps in Florence under the aegis of Jacopo Sansovino, who was a figure of absolute importance for both, or perhaps in Rome in the Raphaelesque circle of Baldassarre Peruzzi[119] – it is rather difficult to establish what the two sculptors might have shared in the formation of their peculiar artistic style.

However, a certain and incontrovertible fact remains. Tribolo executed that monumental hieroglyph that was the *Goddess Nature*, so infused with grotesque poetics, only after his passage in Pisa, his previous sculpture being centred only on the figure and the narrative bas-relief. Equally incontrovertible is the fact that Cosini had been carrying out his own personal experimental research on the possibilities of grotesque sculpture for many years, at least since the time of the Medici Chapel. His experimentalism being linked to the training with Andrea Ferrucci led him to an ornamental sensitivity completely unknown to Tribolo and to Michelangelo. In other words, Tribolo's *Goddess Nature* – and all subsequent developments contained in the Castello garden – would be hardly justifiable without the process of monumentalisation of the grotesque initiated by Cosini's experiments.

Therefore, the creative authorship of the Pisan *Angels* depends mainly on our preferences, and not on certain and incontrovertible evidence. In a similar way to what we

[118] GIANNOTTI, Alessandra, *Tribolo lungo le coste della Versilia*, in *Paragone*, s. 3, 2014, n. 116, pp. 3-20, attributes various elements of the figurative decoration of the Pisan Cathedral to Tribolo's hand, neglecting the fact that Cosini was the true expert in the field of sculptural ornamentations.

[119] A *'Baldassarre'* is mentioned in Mario Maffei's letters. Rome, Biblioteca Nazionale, *Lettere* autografe, A.97.21 (3), 22 October 1526, Fucci writes to Mario Maffei: «*Non ho mai trovato Baldassarre acciò li potessi parlare di quelli disegni delle sepulture.*» This had led D'AMICO, *The Raffaele Maffei Monument*, p. 472, to believe that the first projects for the *Raffaello Maffei Tomb* was due to Baldassarre Peruzzi, who was in fact an artist dear to Mario.

have already said regarding the attributive indecision of the drawing of satirical heads traditionally assigned to Michelangelo (London, British Museum, 1859,0625.557), here too we reiterate the possibility of making contradictory hypotheses coexist. We can believe that it was actually Tribolo who provided the model for the *Angels*, drawing inspiration from the Roman Andrea Sansovino, despite this hypothesis strikingly clashing with the idea that in these years Cosini was actually far more an expert sculptor than Tribolo. Or, we can also believe that Cosini made the *Angels* in complete autonomy, considering that in all likelihood he himself went to Rome, and therefore there is no need to call upon Tribolo as a link between Cosini and the Roman environment of Sansovino. Both hypotheses are likely – the truth only depends on which side we want to tip the balance.

That said, it must also be considered that Cosini was an excellent creator of angels. Before the Pisan *Angels*, he not only executed the bas-relief of the angel in the *Strozzi Tomb*, but also one of the two *Angels* for the main altar of the Cathedral of Volterra, executed around 1521-22 together with the master Ferrucci (figg.221-222).[120] Although this statue is evidently still immature, especially in some passages of the head, it already shows all the technical mastery of the young Cosini, which stands out even more when compared with the twin statue of *Angel* made by Ferrucci. Whereas Cosini indulges in the delicate lightness of matter, Ferrucci sculpts a static angel anchored to the ground.

Examining Cosini's Volterra *Angel*, it becomes clear how fascinated he was by the rendering of drapery in motion, a feature that he also proposed in the Pisan *Angels*. In the *Angel* of Volterra, the dress adheres to the body of the figure, allowing a glimpse of its form, and thus enhancing its anatomy. At the same time, the drapery is also used to add volume and make the figure more monumental, especially in the back, where the robe thickens in swaying flourishes. Perhaps the best accomplished pieces are the legs, which a gust of wind gently strips, and the wide circular sleeve on the shoulder, which detaches decisively from the body. This *Angel* shows the craftsmanship of Cosini, who in those years found few equals among his peers – and certainly Tribolo did not reach these peaks so prematurely.

To go deeper into Cosini's figurative sculpture, one must necessarily account for his relationship with Michelangelo's figurative sculpture, which Cosini does not seem to assimilate with conviction in the works analysed so far. The Pisan *Angels* show no reference to Michelangelo's statuary, being rather a lavish elaboration of Sansovino's prototypes. It should

[120] The attribution of the left *Angel* of the Volterra Cathedral to Cosini is due to CAMPIGLI, *Silvio Cosini,* 2007.

also be noted that the pose of the *Angels* is re-proposed as it is in the figure of Saint Erasmus in the *Montenero Altar*. Still, Cosini does show some familiarity with Michelangelo's figures, and in fact we find references to the female statues of the *Tomb of Julius II* in the Beati of the *Montenero Altar*, and a reference to Michelangelo's *ignudi* in the triton of the *De' Vicariis Altar*. Yet, this process of assimilation of Michelangelo's figuration by Cosini took place in a hidden and distorted, dismembered and diminished way. Cosini in fact seems to never indulge in the bodily beauty so dear to Michelangelo.

However, we find in Cosini's late production some examples that allow us to further reflect on his assimilation of Michelangelo's figuration. We are talking about the bas-relief of *Arcadia* for the Tomb of Jacopo Sannazzaro in Naples (fig.308), the recently rediscovered bas-relief of *Apollo and Marsyas* in a private collection (fig.309), and the statue of the *Archer* at the Museum of Prado, Madrid (fig.310). These three works are united by an exasperated aestheticism of the human body, and by the fact that they are attributions that are not confirmed either in historical sources or in documentary evidence, therefore subject to the historical bias that sees Cosini as a mere product of the rampant Michelangelism of the sixteenth century. If for *Arcadia* and for *Apollo and Marsyas* there can be little doubt about their attribution to Cosini, much remains in relation to the Prado *Archer*.

The bas-relief of *Arcadia* is part of the tomb of the famous Neapolitan humanist Jacopo Sannazzaro. Vasari tells us that the tomb was sculpted by Montorsoli in Carrara between 1537 and 1541. In those same years, returning from his Paduan experience, Cosini was also in Pietrasanta (Carrara), where he had taken up home together with his brother Vincenzo in 1532. As was first suggested by Ciardi Dupré, and as has recently been analysed in more detail by Principi, most likely Cosini took part in the work of the *Sannazzaro Tomb* together with Montorsoli, since both were located in Carrara at the same time.[121] Cosini's intervention was limited to the sole execution of the bas-relief of *Arcadia*, the heart of the monument, which gives image to the most important work written by Sannazzaro (*Arcadia* in fact). Although the minute chiselling, the exasperated cleaning, and the general lasciviousness, would seem not to be suited to the works of Cosini that we have examined so far, looking carefully at the bas-relief, we can only agree with this attribution, since the human types and some technical elements definitely belong to Cosini's style. It is a much more mature and extremely refined Cosini. So mature and refined that one would think that the bas-relief we see today is the

[121] CIARDI DUPRÉ, Maria Grazia, *La prima attività dell'Ammannati scultore*, in *Paragone*, XII, 1961, 135, pp. 11-12; PRINCIPI, Lorenzo, *La punizione di Marsia. Un rilievo di Silvio Cosini e il sepolcro di Jacopo Sansovino a Venezia*, in *Arte Veneta*, LXXV, 2018, pp. 55-77.

result of several hands, including perhaps that of Bartolomeo Ammannati, who also took part in the undertaking of the *Sannazzaro Tomb*.

Interestingly, we find the same Arcadian spirit that we see in this work – the lascivious joy, the natural setting, the satirical music – in Tribolo's (and Pierino da Vinci's) garden of Castello. Furthermore, it is interesting to notice that the figure of Neptune – which is exactly replicated in the figure of Marsyas in the bas-relief of *Apollo and Marsyas* – replicates the pose of the Laocoon. Same bursting musculature, same contortion in pose – Neptune also has the same curly hair and beard. This would further reinforce the hypothesis proposed in this thesis of Cosini's stay in Rome.

At the end, we cannot fail to mention the controversial Prado *Archer*. This magnificent statue was attributed to Cosini by Del Bravo, and scholarship subsequently seems to have accepted this attribution without any particular objection.[122] However, a more careful formal analysis of the statue could question this attribution, especially for the unconvincing and exaggerated aesthetism. The ephebic naked body, the precise anatomy accompanied by the sensual softness of the limbs, the total absence of fluttering drapery and grotesque elements (except for a minute frieze of trophies on the edge of the quiver, too classically anonymous to be considered Cosinian), the exact structure of the face, the small dull eyes, are all elements that set the statue apart from Cosini's style. Although we recognise that Cosini's stay in Veneto led him to refine his style towards a soft and elegant Sansovinism (in addition to *Arcadia* and *Apollo and Marsyas*, see the bas-reliefs of Padua and Milan, figg.311-312), the *Archer* would be more convincingly attributable to a later sculptor. This should therefore be sought among someone like Ammannati, Cellini, Pierino da Vinci, if one wishes to remain in Florence, or among the Venetian pupils of Jacopo Sansovino, such as Alessandro Vittoria, who all definitely show a much more significant commitment towards the aesthetic of the human body.

* * *

The main purpose of this chapter was to give due credit to Cosini and his master Ferrucci in the design and execution of the Medici Chapel ornament. In particular, an attempt was made to clarify some fundamental but still nebulous passages in Cosini's youth, so as to determine his precocious artistic autonomy with greater precision.

[122] DEL BRAVO, *Una escultura de Silvio Cosini*, in *Boletìn del Museo del Prado*, XI, 1990, 29, pp. 7-13.

From our reconstruction, a resourceful sculptor emerged, who was already mature in the first half of the 1520s, and who enjoyed fruitful friendships with contemporary painters (Pontormo and Rosso), and who further developed his passion for ornamentation with a stay in Rome, to see the works of the Raphaelesque artists. His research found an effective synthesis in the works carried out around 1530, the *Maffei Tomb* and the *Montenero Altar*, which Cosini infused with his animist vision of the world.

The relationship he created with Michelangelo was somewhat limited, but nevertheless fruitful and reciprocal, considering that the 'divine' artist seems to welcome and rework Cosini's ornamental style. At the same time, Cosini appropriated Michelangelo's anatomies and iconographies, but always concealing and diminishing them within a broad framework of alien references.

Conclusions

The main intent of this research was to explore the impact that the Medici Chapel had in the development of sculptural ornament, taking as a starting point and criticising the encomiastic words of Giorgio Vasari. An attempt was therefore made to provide a portrait of Michelangelo as far as possible from Vasari's, deciding to highlight the legitimate limits of Michelangelo's art.

There are two traits of Michelangelo's biography on which we have focused more: the passionate study of the human figure, and the precocious fame of his art. Keeping these two factors in mind, it was possible to reconsider the historical opinion we have of Michelangelo. According to the reconstruction proposed here, Michelangelo was an artist who was excessively burdened with commissions that went beyond his closest interests, and beyond the ample limit of his abilities. The Medici Chapel was the first architectural work he had to undertake: an ambitious *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which included not only the construction of the chapel from scratch, but also the execution of the tombs, statues, stuccos, and frescoes. Despite the intervention of various collaborators, the project could not be completed, and we believe that one of the determining reasons was the fact that Clement VII exerted excessive pressure on Michelangelo, as he was eager to reinforce his popularity thanks to the collaboration with the 'divine' artist.

What interested this research was to focus on Michelangelo's relationship with ornament and grotesque. An attempt was made to demonstrate his lack of interest in it, since he believed that «*dove vanno figure di marmo non ci vuole essere altra cosa.*» It is no coincidence that in the Tomb of Julius II, he entrusted the ornamentation to Antonio da Pontassieve's team of ornamental sculptors, and he did the same for the Medici Chapel, asking for the intervention of Andrea Ferrucci's workshop. The Del Monte Chapel, a project that Michelangelo supervised in 1550 and that to a certain extent can be considered a developed version of the Medici Chapel, gives an idea of how he intended to structure a funerary chapel: with austere architecture, with few solemn figures, without any ornament. Michelangelo's main contribution to ornament was its anthropomorphisation, that is, the replacement of the grotesque with nude figures in various poses. This is particularly evident in the Sistine Chapel, where the bronze and flesh *Ignudi* are used as decorative filler.

With the passage of time, and with the consequent expansion of the freedom granted to collaborators, until the definitive handover occurred after the abandonment of the Laurentian projects in 1534, Michelangelo's artistic conception gradually lost its authenticity, mixing with the requests increasingly pressing both from the client and the collaborators. The gradual creative renunciation on the part of Michelangelo generated that artistic distortion that is Michelangelism.

The analysis of Niccolò Tribolo allowed us to better frame the phenomenon of Michelangelism, as he was called upon to complete both the Medici Chapel and the Laurentian Library. The encounter between Michelangelo's unfinished work and Tribolo's eclecticism has generated a hybrid language, which is difficult to relate to Michelangelo but which still bears today the brand of Michelangelo. If today we see the Medici Chapel bare and with the unfinished statues, we owe it to Tribolo – an operation which we consider to have been less deferential than it is usually believed, and which instead responded to a specific aesthetic taste of Tribolo, by now at the antipodes to that of Michelangelo. Similarly, if the floor and ceiling of the Laurentian Library are so densely decorated with grotesques, this too is due to Tribolo. Even the famous staircase of the Ricetto of the library looks like this today because of Tribolo.

Tribolo is therefore largely responsible for our perception of Michelangelo's works, and investigating his art was fundamental to better contextualise the phenomenon of Michelangelism. Perhaps the most important contribution of this research in the delineation of the relationship between Michelangelo and Tribolo was the discovery of the preparatory models of *Heaven* and *Earth*, the statues that Michelangelo entrusted to Tribolo in the Medici Chapel, that we found in a drawing by Jacopo Tintoretto (Oxford, Christ Church Library, 0361). We see a certain hastiness of Michelangelo, and more than a few licenses left to Tribolo, who relies on mere formal reasons to complete the task entrusted to him – a solution typical of Tribolo's eclecticism, which we also see at the *Holy House* of Loreto.

Tribolo traced a path and contributed to creating a synthesis between Michelangelism and grotesque ornament, which was to be pursued by other Florentine artists, such as Bartolomeo Ammannati and Bernardo Buontalenti. It is with him that the phenomenon that we have designated as 'monumentalisation of the grotesque' would spread, and would find ample space in the fountains and grottos of the Castello garden first, and in the Boboli garden later.

Going deeper into Tribolo's eclecticism, and investigating the phenomenon of the monumentalisation of the grotesque, the role played by Silvio Cosini in the period in which he worked alongside Michelangelo at the Medici Chapel appeared of crucial importance. According to the reconstruction proposed in this thesis, Cosini and his master Andrea Ferrucci were the ones who introduced elements of grotesque decoration into the Medici Chapel, in particular the *Trophies* inspired by the *Belvedere Torso*, and the expressive masks of the frieze. It was therefore thanks to them that Michelangelism and grotesque merged effectively for the first time. This had not happened before, considering that the grotesque ornaments of the previous Tomb of Julius II appear still traditional, following the decorative preciousness that was extremely widespread in Rome in the early decades of the sixteenth century, comparable in all respects to the solutions proposed by Andrea Sansovino in the tombs of Santa Maria del Popolo. Cosini's ornament at the Medici Chapel detaches itself from that delicate preciousness, rather harshly chiselling the stone, so as to obtain pictorial yet strongly contrasted effects. On closer inspection, the *Trophies* sculpted by Cosini, and in all probability conceived by Ferrucci in concert with Michelangelo, can be considered one of the first examples of monumental grotesque.

The analysis of Cosini's mature works makes it clear that he had to further deepen the study of ornamental imagery, especially the one that developed in Rome in the early decades of the sixteenth century (Andrea Sansovino, Giovanni da Udine, Polidoro da Caravaggio). For this reason, a stay in Rome of Cosini has been proposed, which could have occurred between 1525 and 1528, a period in which there is no documentary information on his activity. Cosini was among the first who experimented with grotesque language, and perhaps the first to insert Michelangelesque elements in sculpture – strained bodies applied to monstrous grotesque figures. The friendship between Cosini and Tribolo led the latter, extremely receptive by nature, to also absorb Cosini's experimentations, which he would later reuse to fine-tune his Michelangelism.

Tribolo's *Fiesole*, imprisoned in the rock, can be considered the prototype of the grotesque formalisation of *non finito*, and inspired Buontalenti for the design of the Grotta Grande in the Boboli garden, where he inserted Michelangelo's unfinished *Prisoners*. Originally designed for the Tomb of Julius II and abandoned for years in Michelangelo's Florentine house, the *Prisoners* were acquired by Duke Cosimo in 1564. Struggling with the completion of the Boboli garden, which was begun by Tribolo himself shortly before his death in 1550, Buontalenti decided to insert the four statues of the *Prisoners* at the corners of the

atrium of the Grotta Grande, to symbolise the struggle between Man and Nature (fig.320). Ironically, Michelangelo's statues ended up becoming a proper grotesque decoration.

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