

RAPHAEL'S: LO SPASIMO DI SICILIA

by

MONICA CULQUI JORDAN

(Under the direction of Shelley Zuraw)

ABSTRACT

My study of Raphael's painting *Christ Bearing the Cross* also known as *Lo Spasimo di Sicilia*, 1515-16 concentrates on the style of the painting, its patronage, and the cultural milieu in which it was created. The formal aspects announce the artistic innovations of Raphael's late career. The lasting impact the painting had on subsequent artistic generations demonstrates Raphael's ingenuity and *sprezzatura*. The study further reveals the patron, Jacopo Basilico's involvement with the work, his relationship with the Olivetan order, and how their association became a factor in the creation of the narrative. *Lo Spasimo* was produced in an artistic climate in which artists experimented and competed with one another to create their best works. Raphael transformed the traditional iconography of Christ Bearing the Cross, and in the process developed a new style of narrative painting less classically balanced from that of the Renaissance.

INDEX WORDS: Raphael Sanzio (1483-1520), Lo Spasimo di Sicilia, Palermo, Olivetan Order, University of Georgia, Lamar Dodd School of Art, Mónica Culqui Jordan, Georgia.

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A la memoria de mi madre

María Piédad Flores de Culqui

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INTRODUCTION

The *storia* will move the soul of the beholder when each man painted there clearly shows the movement of his own soul. It happens in nature that nothing more than herself is found capable of things like herself; we weep with the weeping, laugh with the laughing, and grieve with the grieving, these movements of the soul are made known by the movements of the body.¹

Alberti's premise, in his book *On Painting*, made a profound impact on artists who set forth the process of creating forms found in nature. In addition, Alberti drew an analogy between Cicero's oration and painting. He claimed that in the same way a speaker's use of language could stir the emotions of the listener, so could artists by their use of movement and gestures in the figures they painted. In Raphael's *Christ Bearing the Cross*, also known as *Lo Spasimo di Sicilia*, Alberti's idea of creating these palpable visual forms is formulated with Raphael's ingenuity to bring added drama and dynamism to a *storia*. Raphael's process of creation by the use of his previous figures and themes as well as the figures of other artists is phenomenal. The artist encapsulated the procession to Calvary, showing major incidents of the Stations of the Cross and combined them with a specific moment associated with the Sorrows of the Virgin. Raphael highlighted the encounter of mother and Son in the foreground of the pictorial space with a veracity and palpability that welcomes the spectator to weep with the weeping women and grieve with the grieving mother of Christ.

¹ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, translated with introduction and notes by John R. Spencer, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966) 25.

The importance of *Lo Spasimo* is greater than its adherence to Alberti's treatise. This work demonstrates Raphael's keen judgment in combining events in the life of Christ and His mother as part of the composition that enabled him to satisfy the dictums of the church, the patron's devotion, and the religious order for which the painting was commissioned. Raphael seized the opportunity to expand on the realism and drama of his *stanze* frescoes, intensifying these effects in the different format of an altarpiece. In doing so, he created a religious narrative that, in turn, became the model for his famous competition with Sebastiano del Piombo and catalyst for the artist's last painting, the *Transfiguration*, which marked the end of the High Renaissance style.

Raphael painted *Lo Spasimo di Sicilia* around 1515-1516 [Fig. 1].² The work was commissioned by the wealthy Sicilian lawyer, Jacopo Basilico, for the church of Santa Maria dello Spasimo in Palermo.³ The painting arrived in Sicily in 1520 after going through a series of unfortunate events.⁴ By 1533, the incomplete status of the church complex, and its location near the city walls, meant that the community and its painting were in danger.⁵ In order to protect the church, the government of Palermo built a

² The composition was replicated shortly after its completion in a print by Agostino Veneziano of 1517, and serves as *terminus ante quem* for *Lo Spasimo*. Sydney Freedberg, *Painting of the High Renaissance in Rome and Florence*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961) 348; Thomas P. Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance, Art and Magnificence* (New York, London: Yale University Press, 2002) 221.

³ For a brief chronological discussion of events after *Lo Spasimo* arrived in Sicily see Christa Gardner von Teuffel, in "Lo Spasimo di Sicilia" in *Raffaello in Vaticano*, exh. cat. (16 ottobre 1984-16 gennaio 1985) 272-276, esp. 272. For further studies of the church's history, and its congregation, as well as this painting see, Giuseppina Cotroneo and F.S. Brancato, *La chiesa palermitana di S. Maria dello Spasimo*, (Palermo, 1986) 5-127; Maria A. Spadaro, *Rafaello e lo Spasimo di Sicilia*, (Palermo: Accademia Nazionale di Scienze Lettere e Arti, 1991)5-34, esp. 28, and Ana Maria La Fisca and Giovanni Palazzo, *Santa Maria dello Spasimo* (Palermo: Edizioni Guida, 2nd ed., 1997) 16-30.

⁴ Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, , ed. G. Milanesi (Florence: G.C. Sansoni 1906) IV, 357-358, esp. 358.

⁵ La Fisca and Palazzo, *Santa Maria dello Spasimo*, 28.

massive military bastion around the outside walls of the church [Fig. 2]. By 1573, Santa Maria dello Spasimo had become a military stronghold with a bastion built on its adjacent walls; this prompted the transfer of the painting along with its congregation to the nearby church of Santo Spirito.⁶ In 1661, Philip IV arranged to take *Lo Spasimo* secretly from Palermo.⁷ In Spain, the painting was placed on the high altar of the Alcazar's royal chapel, undoubtedly the most important site in the whole palace.⁸ There, in a letter sent to the Count of Monterey, Cardinal Fraquenotti described the painting as the "world's most precious jewel." During the Napoleonic Wars, the painting was taken to Paris where it was transferred from panel to canvas. It was only returned to Madrid in 1822.⁹ With its final installation in El Museo del Prado, Madrid, *Lo Spasimo* seemed to have lost its appeal for scholars and as Helen Ettliger states, the painting "languished as a stepchild of art history."¹⁰

⁶ Gardner von Teuffel, "Lo Spasimo di Sicilia" in *Raffaello in Vaticano*, 272; La Fisca and Palazzo, *Santa Maria dello Spasimo*, 27; Cotroneo and Brancato, *La chiesa palermitana di S. Maria dello Spasimo*, 14; and Spadaro, *Rafaello e lo Spasimo di Sicilia*, 5-34.

⁷ In his notes for Vasari's, *Le Vite*, IV, Milanese explains that Philip IV secretly paid the monks 1000 scudi for allowing the painting to be taken out of Palermo, 358. However, both Marqués and Spadaro mention a sum of 4000 scudi for the church and 500 scudi for the friar who took care of its removal: Manuela Mena Marqués, "Presencia historica de obras de Rafael en España" in *Rafael en España*, exh. cat., Museo del Prado (Mayo-Agosto, 1985) 16; and Spadaro, *Rafaello e lo Spasimo di Sicilia*, 22.

⁸ Marqués, "Presencia historica de obras de Rafael en España" 14-17; Antonio Moreno Garrido, "Un dato inédito para la historia del *Pasmo de Sicilia*, de Rafael" in *Boletín del Museo del Prado*, 2, no. 6 (Sept-Dec, 1981) 159-162; Gardner von Teuffel, "Lo Spasimo di Sicilia, in *Raffaello in Vaticano*." 272.

⁹ Antonio Moreno Garrido, 159-162.

¹⁰ Helen S. Ettliger, "Raphael's *Lo Spasimo*: Its historical and iconographical background" in *Source I*, 4 (1982), 13-15, attributes the lack of interest in the painting to the inconclusive debate among scholars about its authorship, which the painting's bad state of preservation does not help clarify. However, according to Konrad Oberhuber, *Raphael, The paintings* (Milan: Electa, 1999) 216, the recent cleaning of the painting shows the same luminous colors and rich harmonies Raphael used for the tapestries cartoons, which supports Beck's statement that the work is done by Raphael in its entirety, James H. Beck, *Raphael* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1994) 118.

CHAPTER 1

FORTUNA CRITICA

In the sixteenth century, *Lo Spasimo* was greatly admired, and indeed Vasari continued to consider it as a wonderful thing (*una cosa meravigliosa*).¹¹ Vasari's account of *Lo Spasimo* [Fig. 1] is of central importance because he was the first person to discuss the painting. Although Vasari never saw the painting he described it well, noting that from its creation it was considered a marvelous work. His description and adulation of the painting alludes to Raphael's ingenuity and the preciousness of the altarpiece.¹² He emphasized the number of figures included in the altarpiece as well as their different emotional and physical attitudes. This helps the viewer to experience the pain and suffering of the people who follow Christ as well as the anger and brutality of His aggressors. Vasari's description also indicates the new approach Raphael used in *Lo*

¹¹ Vasari, *Le vite*, IV, 357-358; See also Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of The Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 2nd. ed, 3 vols., trans. Gaston du C. De Vere (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1979) 877-915; Although modern scholarship has not treated *Lo Spasimo* extensively, the painting has been discussed to varying degrees by the following: Sydney Freedberg, *Painting of the High Renaissance in Rome and Florence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961) 2, 348-351; John Pope-Hennessy, *Raphael* (Edinburgh & New Jersey: New York University Press, 1970) 16, 27; Luitpold Dussler, *Raphael, A Critical Catalogue of his Pictures, Wall-paintings, and Tapestries*, trans. Sebastian Cruft from the original German edition, *Raffael, Kritisches Verzeichnis der Gemälde, Wandbilder und Bildteppiche*, Munich: F. Bruckman KG, 1966 (London, New York: Phaidon, 1971) 44; Kathleen Weil-Garris Posner, "Raphael's Transfiguration and the legacy of Leonardo" *Art Quarterly*, 35, 4 (1972) 342-373, esp. 346 and 353; Kathleen Weil Garris Posner, *Leonardo and Central Italian Art: 1515-1550* (New York: New York University Press, 1974) 7, 15; Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 80, 81; Sydney Freedberg, *Raphael, Michelangelo and others, Raphael and his contemporaries in Rome* (Vassar, 1983) 1-17, esp. 12; Marcia B. Hall *Color and Meaning* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 92; James H. Beck, 39, 118; and Konrad Oberhuber, *Raphael, The paintings* 214-217; Thomas P. Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance, Art and Magnificence* (New York, London: Yale University Press, 2002) 221.

¹² Vasari, *Lives*, 2, 902.

Spasimo. It is the palpability of his novel approach that sets this altarpiece apart from the more static altarpieces that he had produced earlier. The dynamism and strong depiction of emotions found in the painting were clearly influenced by his work in the *stanze*.

In this [Lo Spasimo] may be seen the impious ministers of the Crucifixion, leading Him with wrath and fury to His death on Mount Calvary; and Christ, broken with agony at the near approach of death, has fallen to the ground under the weight of the Tree of the Cross, and, bathed with sweat and blood, turns towards the Maries, who are in a storm of weeping, Moreover, there is seen among them Veronica,¹³ who stretches out her arms and offers Him a cloth, with an expression of the tenderest love, not to mention that the work is full of men-at-arms both on horseback and on the foot, who are pouring forth from the gate of Jerusalem with the standards of justice in their hands, in various most beautiful attitudes.¹⁴

The climax of Vasari's narrative concerns the painting's history: on its way to Palermo, it was touched by tragedy.¹⁵

This panel, when completely finished, but not yet brought to its resting-place, was very near coming to an evil end, for the story goes that after it had been put on shipboard, in order that it might be carried to Palermo, a terrible storm dashed against a rock the ship that was carrying it, in such a manner that the timbers broke asunder, and all the men were lost, together with the merchandise, save only the panel, which, safely packed in its case, washed by the sea to the shore of Genoa. There, having been fished up and drawn to land, it was found to be a thing divine, and was put into safe keeping; for it had remained

¹³ Milanesi in the Italian version of Vasari's *Le Vite*, IV, 357, notes that Vasari's description of Veronica is a mistake. There is neither an image of Veronica nor of the cloth in the painting. The stretching arms belong to the Virgin. Because Vasari inaccurately described the painting, one of two things can be assumed. He either heard a faulty description of the painting through word of mouth or saw a print of *Lo Spasimo* done by an artist other than Agostino Veneziano. Veneziano's print adheres to the original very closely, Christa Gardner von Teuffel, "Spasimo di Sicilia," 276-277. However, there were reproductions in other mediums such as tapestries and oil by artists of lesser fame in which some details of the composition are changed, Candance Adelson, "Lo Spasimo" and "La Salita al Calvario," in *Raffaello al Vaticano*, 277-280. Perhaps it was one of these other reproductions that Vasari saw, helping to explain his account of the Veronica, which is not in Raphael's painting.

¹⁴ Vasari, *Lives*, 2, 358.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 358.

undamaged and without any hurt or blemish, since even the fury of the winds and the waters of the sea had respect for the beauty of such a work. The news of this being then bruited abroad, the monks took measures to recover it, and no sooner had it been restored to them, by the favour of the Pope,¹⁶ than they gave satisfaction and that liberally, to those who had rescued it. Thereupon it was once more put on board ship and brought at last to Sicily, where they set it up in Palermo; in which place it has more fame and reputation than the Mount of Vulcan itself.¹⁷

Despite Vasari's erroneous inclusion of Veronica with her cloth, his account demonstrates how clearly the dramatic event could be read. His account attests to Raphael's ingenuity and ability to create a palpable *storia* or history painting. Furthermore, by emphasizing the preciousness of the painting, Vasari underscored the fact that the work surpassed the divinity of its religious context because it was a *cosa meravigliosa* done by Raphael.¹⁸

In the twentieth century, the debate among scholars has ranged from the painting's iconography and production to the artistic influences that led to its creation. Scholars are still divided about whether or not Raphael's most trusted assistants, Giulio Romano and Giovan Francesco Penni, carried out large portions of the painting.¹⁹ According to Sydney Freedberg, *Lo Spasimo* became a disparate composition in the

¹⁶ It is not clear how Pope Leo X's intervention might have made the painting accessible for the Palermitans. Gardner von Teuffel, in "Lo Spasimo di Sicilia," 276, tentatively suggests that it was the result of some commercial and economic transaction; Dussler, 44.

¹⁷ Vasari, *Lives*, 2, 902.

¹⁸ Sylvia Ferino Pagden, in her article "From cult images to the cult of images: the case of Raphael's altarpieces," in *The Altarpieces in the Renaissance*, eds; Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 165-189, esp. 168, explains that Vasari's account of the painting focused upon and proclaimed its beauty above all else. She adds that during the artist's lifetime, such adoration surpassed that conferred upon its religious significance.

¹⁹ Dussler, 40; Freedberg, *Painting of the High Renaissance in Rome and Florence*, 348-349; Oberhuber, *Raphael, The paintings*, 214-217; Joseph Polzner, "Dürer et Raphael" *Nouvelles de L'estampe* 17, (Sept-Oct 1974), 15-22 esp. 15-17.

hands of one of Raphael's pupils.²⁰ Freedberg linked Raphael's *Lo Spasimo* with *The Stanza dell' Incendio* (1514-1517).²¹ He pointed out that, of all the artist's altarpieces, it was the most dramatic and that Raphael employed the drama and dynamism of the *stanze* frescoes in an attempt to deliver an intense realism to *Lo Spasimo*. However, all the figures in the painting looked artificial and manufactured, and Freedberg contended that this was because the work had been painted by Penni, whose lack of talent muddled Raphael's design. He also explained that many of the figures were modeled on previous works by the master and were placed in the same straight-line geometrical composition that Raphael used for the Vatican tapestries. Freedberg lamented that in Penni's hands, the dramatic force of *Lo Spasimo* ended up lacking grace, and Raphael's compelling moving procession is reduced to a series of diagonal lines running through the composition.²²

Regarding the artist's influences, critics have noted that of Albrecht Dürer and other northern artists.²³ Recently, Konrad Oberhuber reassessed Luitpold Dussler's argument that Northern influences, especially that of Dürer's *Large and Small Passion*, are evident in the painting. Both scholars believed, like Freedberg, that the painting was not done by Raphael, but was instead a workshop creation.²⁴ James Beck, on the other

²⁰ Sydney Freedberg in *Painting of the High Renaissance in Rome and Florence*, 348-351.

²¹ Ibid, 348-351, states that *Lo Spasimo* is very similar to the frescoes in the *Salla dell'Incendio*. However, the latter work that was carried out by Giulio Romano followed compositional designs attributed to Raphael. He goes on to say that for *Lo Spasimo*'s design, Raphael borrowed compositional ideas from the Vatican tapestries, a work done roughly at the same time.

²² Ibid, 349.

²³ Dussler, 40; Polzner, 15-16; Oberhuber, 214-217, mentions that Raphael tried to rival the greatest Northern masters in order to make the picture more easily comprehensible to his Sicilian patrons who preferred the sensuous appeal to the emotions of Netherlandish painting.

²⁴ Dussler, 44; Oberhuber, 216.

hand, traces the artistic influences not to Dürer's prints, but to North Italian, especially Ferrarese, works.²⁵ Beck found the painting hard to read but also the most adventurous painting of the artist's career.²⁶ While Helen S. Ettliger briefly relates some of its history, iconography, and issues of patronage, Anna Maria la Fisca, Giovanni Palazzo, Maria A. Spadaro, Giuseppina Cotrineo, F.S. Brancato, and Gardner von Teuffel provide extensive historical information. Their scholarship sheds light on the historical background not only of the painting, but also of the construction of the church of Santa Maria dello Spasimo, a commission by the same patron as the altarpiece itself.

Although most scholars agree that *Lo Spasimo* is a daring and splendid work, a convincing formal analysis of the painting has not yet been done. In a search for a fuller understanding of its iconography, production and artistic influences, a glance backward to the time of its origin is necessary. Furthermore, it seems only reasonable to go back and study not only the patron for whom *Lo Spasimo* was done, but also the cultural and artistic milieu in which it was produced. This investigation in turn will provide us with a better understanding of Raphael's design, and allow us to appreciate the artist's ingenuity and *sprezzatura*, as he rethought the traditional form and function of the altarpiece.

²⁵ Beck, *Raphael*, 118.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 118.

CHAPTER 2

PATRONAGE

Documents relating to the painting's patron, Jacopo Basilico, that might shed light on his family history and affiliations with Rome are not as extensive as one would like them to be. One can only speculate about the patron and his commission of *Lo Spasimo* based on the limited information available.²⁷ Jacopo Basilico (originally from Messina), was a successful lawyer in Palermo with important Tuscan connections through his marriage to Eulalia Resolmini, who was from a wealthy Pisan family.²⁸ The few documents available provide information on the couple's strong sense of religiosity and their commitment not only to the Sorrows of the Virgin but also to the Olivetan monks at Palermo. It was the patron's family connections and involvement with this religious order as well as his religious devotion that were the impetus both for the commission and for the painting's iconography.²⁹

Jacopo Basilico commissioned the altarpiece of *Lo Spasimo* from Raphael and donated the land and money for the construction of the Olivetan church where the

²⁷ Gardner von Teuffel states that it is still a mystery how a seemingly insignificant man like Basilico could obtain such a commission, "Lo Spasimo di Sicilia," 272. Perhaps the mystery can be solved with Spadaro's suggestion in *Raffaello e lo Spasimo di Sicilia*, 8., that Raphael accepted the Sicilian commission to extend his fame "out of this world." Yet conversely, because the commission was for a Sicilian site, instead of Rome, written evidence about the arrangements is lacking.

²⁸ Gardner von Teuffel, "Raffaels römische Altarbilder: Aufstellung und Bestimmung," in *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* v 50 no. 1 (1987) 1-45 esp. 18-23.

²⁹ In Ingrid Rowland's "Render Unto Caesar the Things which are Caesar's: Humanism and the Arts in the Patronage of Agostino Chigi" in the *Renaissance Quarterly*, V 39, Issue 4 (Winter, 1986), 673-730, she demonstrates how Agostino Chigi employed patronage to further his ambitions. It is easy to speculate that many others tried to emulate his use of artistic patronage as a means to elevate their social and financial status.

painting was to be displayed.³⁰ Basilico's selection of famous artists and the newest styles indicates his desire to elevate the status of the already expanding Olivetan order and perhaps, to place Sicily in a closer artistic proximity to Rome. In doing so, Basilico's importance as a lay member of the order of the Olivetans of Palermo and his status as a supporter of the Palermitan court through his family connections (namely that of his wife and brother-in-law, Guglielmo Ajutamicristo) would also be elevated.³¹

Basilico's wife, Eulalia Resolmini, belonged to an old and wealthy family of Pisan origin that owned land in a quarter of Palermo known as the Kalsa [Fig. 2]. Both she and her husband were the good friends of Fra Benedetto di Messina, who resided in the existing Olivetan abbey of Santa Maria del Bosco in Catalamauro, a province near Palermo.³² At the time of her death in 1500, Eulalia had requested that a piece of land be donated in her memory to the Olivetan monks.³³ Basilico gave the land in 1508, and in 1509, Pope Julius approved his petition to build the new church on the site, which was to

³⁰ He chose an important artist, Antonello Gagini, to sculpt the marble frame for Raphael's altarpiece. The design of the church is a combination of the Gothic Catalan tradition and classical Renaissance influences brought to Sicily by the architect Matteo Carnilivari from Noto. Matteo Carnilivari incorporated aspects of classical Renaissance architecture with the more traditional Norman Gothic influences that were predominant in fifteenth century Sicily. The desire to include the classical Renaissance aspects in architecture and arts in Sicily, Cotroneo explains, was due to the wealth brought to Sicily by merchants and bankers from Tuscany and Spain. Cotroneo and Brancato, *La chiesa palermitana di S. Maria dello Spasimo*, 16, 18; La Fisca and Palazzo, *Santa Maria dello Spasimo*, 20-21; Gardner von Teuffel, "Raffaels römische Altarbilder: Aufstellung und Bestimmung," 18-23; Spadaro, *Raffaello e lo Spasimo in Sicilia*, 25-33.

³¹ Very little is known about the patron Jacopo Basilico (sometimes referred as Giacomo Basilico) or his wife Eulalia Resolmini, and even less about Guglielmo Ajutamicristo. Guglielmo Ajutamicristo is mentioned in an article by Dora di Cara, *Old Mansions* (Palermo: Casa Editrice Krea S.r.l. 1988), where she states that his Palazzo Ajutamicristo still stands in Palermo. Di Cara tells us that Ajutamicristo was a rich merchant member of a banking family in Palermo. See also Paolo Morello, *Palazzo Abatellis, Il Maragma del Maestro Portulano da Matteo Carnilivari a Carlo Scarpa* (Palermo: Grafiche Vianello, 1989) 13.

³² Maria A. Spadaro, *Raffaello e lo Spasimo di Sicilia*, 7; Gardner von Teuffel, "Raffaels römische Altarbilder: Aufstellung und Bestimmung," 19; Ana Maria La Fisca and Giovanni Palazzo, *Santa Maria dello Spasimo*, 20.

³³ Gardner von Teuffel, "Raffaels römische Altarbilder: Aufstellung und Bestimmung," 18.

be administered by the abbey church in Catalamauro.³⁴ Basilico expected the building of the church to last approximately six years.³⁵ Just before the intended completion of the church, sometime between 1514 and 1515, Jacopo Basilico must have begun negotiations for an altarpiece by Raphael.³⁶

In addition to being supporters of the Olivetan monks, Basilico and his wife were both strict adherents to the devotion known as the Sorrows of the Virgin.³⁷ The Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin first emerged in the thirteenth century, were established in the fifteenth century in Cologne, and by the end of the sixteenth century, had become widespread in Europe [Fig. 3].³⁸ Furthermore, Basilico knew about the site where an Armenian Church in Jerusalem dedicated to the Sorrows of the Virgin had stood.³⁹ He was very particular about the arrangements for the building of his church in Palermo because he wanted it to be analogous in placement to the church in Jerusalem that was

³⁴ Gardner von Teuffel, “Lo Spasimo di Sicilia,” 272; Giuseppina Cotroneo and F.S. Brancato, *La chiesa palermitana di S. Maria dello Spasimo*, 14; Spadaro, *Rafaello e lo Spasimo di Sicilia* 7.

³⁵ Gardner von Teuffel in “Lo Spasimo di Sicilia,” 272.

³⁶ Ibid, where she explains the stylistic aspects of the painting that allow us to date it between 1514 and 1515, 272.

³⁷ Spadaro, *Rafaello e lo Spasimo di Sicilia*, 7; La Fisca and Palazzo, *Santa Maria dello Spasimo*, 21; Ettlinger, “Raphael’s Lo Spasimo: Its historical and iconographical background.” 13; Gardner von Teuffel in “Lo Spasimo di Sicilia,” 272.

³⁸ Francis J. McAree, S.T.D and Patrick J. Sheridan, D.D, *Dictionary of Mary “Behold your Mother,”* (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1997, 1st. ed. 1985) 445-447; Richard P. McBrien, *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1995) 947. The Sorrows of the Virgin “is a Marian title pertaining to the spiritual martyrdom of Mary, particularly in the Passion and death of her Son.” By the fourteenth century her sorrows were fixed at seven: the prophecy of Simon, the flight into Egypt, Christ’s being lost in Jerusalem, the encounter with Christ on His way to Calvary, the crucifixion, Christ’s descent from the Cross, and His burial.

³⁹ Spadaro, *Rafaello e lo Spasimo di Sicilia*, 7; Gardner von Teuffel, “Raffaels römische Altarbilder: Aufstellung und Bestimmung, 22-23. In Hugues Vincent and F.M. Abel, *Jérusalem: recherches de topographie, d’archéologie et d’histoire*, (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1912-1926) II, 610-637, esp. 616, the authors account for a XIII century small church called *Sainte-Marie de Paymoson*, and their explanation of the name relates to the spasm or suffering of the Virgin.

near a gate, called the Porta Giudicaria or Judgment Gate.⁴⁰ The importance of this placement becomes clear when one traces the procession created by this path. However, before the path is traced, a brief explanation about the Stations of the Cross is necessary. The Stations of the Cross is a devotion that physically recreates the journey Christ underwent during His Passion, and it consists of several episodes from His entrance into Jerusalem to His crucifixion on Golgotha.⁴¹ In Jerusalem this path became known as *Via Dolorosa* or Way of the Cross.⁴² The Armenian Church of Santa Maria de Spasmo was on a well known site, the path which leads to the Porta Giudicaria, where Christ exited the city of Jerusalem toward Calvary or Golgotha [Fig 4].⁴³ It appears that Basilico's intention was to recreate using Palermo's city walls, a portion of the *Via Dolorosa* on his property, by analogously siting the existing Greek Doors (*porta dei Greci*) [Fig. 5] and the Church of Santa Maria dello Spasimo to the Porta Giudicaria and Armenian Church of Santa Maria de Spasmo in Jerusalem.⁴⁴ This explains Basilico's major preoccupation

⁴⁰ Maria A. Spadaro's reference to the Armenian Church is based on a document from the notary public Pietro Taglianti (from the text of Roberto Patricolo, *Lezione introduttiva; alle origini di S. M. dello Spasimo*, pg. 36) in her footnote 7 pg 7. She demonstrates how specific Basilico was about having his church modeled after the Armenian Church in Jerusalem, which was also called Santa Maria de Spasmo. Gardner von Teuffel, "Raffaels römische Altarbilder: Aufstellung und Bestimmung," 22-23, points out that the church was in the Christian quarter of the Old City. Von Teuffel also states that Basilico "quoted this Armenian Church as a model for his church."

⁴¹ Susan D. Shantz, *The Stations of the Cross: A Calculated Trap?* (London, Ontario: Centre for Social and Humanistic Studies, University of Western Ontario, 1991)25; Richard P. McBrien, *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 1222.

⁴² F.E. Peters, *Jerusalem*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), 501-502.

⁴³ Vincent and Abel, *Jérusalem; recherches de topographie, d'archéologie et d'histoire*, II, 620, 627; Peters, 502; Gardner von Teuffel, "Raffaels römische Altarbilder: Aufstellung und Bestimmung," 22.

⁴⁴ The map of 1577-1581 by Matteo Florimi clearly shows a similar path from the Kalsa quarter entrance doors (Greek Doors) to the Santa Maria dello Spasimo complex. Basilico's Kalsa quarter "magically" recreated a *Via Dolorosa*. See Robert Ousterhout in "Rebuilding the Temple: Constantine Monomachus and the Holy Sepulchre," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, V48, No 1 (March 1989) 78 for a symbolic interpretations of such recreations.

with such details as that of the church's placement and as Spadaro suggests, with the details of the painting's iconography.⁴⁵

Basilico wanted a visual representation of the encounter of Christ with the sorrowful Virgin on the way to Calvary.⁴⁶ Sources tell us that the Armenian Church of Santa Maria de Spasmo was the place where the fourth Station of the Cross and the fourth Sorrow of the Virgin, the meeting of Mother and Son, occurred.⁴⁷ It becomes evident that Basilico was determined to have that specific moment depicted because it would have underscored the relationship of his church and the actual episode that took place along the *Via Dolorosa*. It is also likely that the gates in Raphael's *Lo Spasimo* allude both to the Greek Doors, which was the main entrance leading to the land owned by Basilico's wife, and to the Judgment gate in Jerusalem.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Spadaro, *Raffaello e lo Spasimo di Sicilia* 7-8.

⁴⁶ Ibid 7-8, states that Basilico was so precise about his orders that he probably not only described the painting's iconography to the artist, but also pushed to have specific and relevant details included.

⁴⁷ Vincent and Abel, 620.

⁴⁸ Spadaro, *Raffaello e Lo Spasimo di Sicilia*, 7 and Gardner von Teuffel, "Raffaels römische Altarbilder: Aufstellung und Bestimmung, 22-23 both relate the same information about the location and importance of the analogous sites for Jacopo Basilico. Gardner von Teuffel, however, expands her discussion concerning Basilico's use of the Armenian Church as a model for his church in Palermo. She adds that the Armenian Church contained a funerary chapel, which helps explain Basilico's added interest in this church, since the complex of Santa Maria dello Spasimo in Palermo was built in memory of his late wife, Eulalia Resolmini, who died in 1500. Furthermore, it has been speculated by the writer of this thesis that Jacopo Basilico might have been of Greek ancestry, which helps associate the Greek doors in the Kalsa quarter to the painting's iconography. It would have been very important for Basilico to have this in place, especially since Vincent and Abel, 620, states that the Porta Giudicaria was the city gate where Christ exited on His way to Golgotha. It would have exemplified how religious and devoted Basilico was to his faith. More importantly, as argued by Cotroneo, *La chiesa palermitana di S. Maria dello Spasimo*, 16, the location of the Kalsa quarter went through an expansion during this period. The building of the church was part of this development and it also helped elevate the Olivetan order. Basilico's secular and religious associations made it possible for him to obtain a commission by a famous painter that would help affirm his status. Consequently, if the social and political circumstances in the early sixteenth century in Sicily were of progress and growth, it is reasonable to speculate that such conditions would attract not only Raphael but other artists. Construction of buildings went hand in hand with artists' creative endeavors so that to acquire commissions outside Rome would indeed widen the scope of an artist's fame. This helps explain why a highly sought-out painter like Raphael would accept a commission for a church outside of Rome. Moreover, these socio-political circumstances coincide with Gardner von Teuffel's explanation that the painting was returned from Genoa to Palermo because of some political and economic transaction, "Lo Spasimo", 272. It is also interesting to note that political associations among the Curia may have dictated the location of *Lo Spasimo*. Although, it was Julius II who approved the building of Santa Maria dello

Jacopo Basilico's commitment to his late wife's final request and the building of the church dedicated to the Sorrows of the Virgin appears to be the impetus for the iconography of the painting. The latter must also be viewed in light of his dedication to the Olivetan Order. The Olivetan monks took as their mission the revitalization of devotion both to Christ's Passion and to the Virgin.⁴⁹ Basilico's association with the Olivetan monks probably reinforced his determination to provide a painting with an iconography appropriate to the site.

The Olivetan monks who came to Sicily and settled there in the late 1400's were a reformed branch of the Benedictine Rule from Siena.⁵⁰ Their Rule owed its origin to the ascetic fervor of a Sienese professor of philosophy, Giovanni Tolomei (later Beato Bernardo Tolomei). After recovering his eyesight through the intervention of the Blessed Virgin, he vowed to lead a life of religious contemplation. In 1313, along with two companions (the Sienese Senators, Ambrogio Piccolomini and Patricio Patrici), Tolomei went into the wilderness, renouncing the world, and giving himself to God in complete asceticism.

Due to their extreme austerity, Tolomei and his two companions came under the scrutiny of the Church and had to appear before Pope John XXII in Avignon to explain their activities. Tolomei sent his two disciples to Avignon where they succeeded in gaining the good will of the Holy Father. John XXII instructed them to go to Guido di Pietromala, Bishop of Arezzo and ask him to give them a Rule that had the approbation

Spasimo, he also seemed to have favored the Genoese, probably because of its close proximity to his birthplace. Thus he might have helped the Genoese to keep the painting there as recounted by Vasari. However, after Julius II's death in 1513, Leo X ascended to papacy. It was he who helped to send the painting to its proper final destination, *Le vite*, 358.

⁴⁹ Kurt J. Sundstrom *The Chioistro Grande of Monte Oliveto Maggiore and the Olivetan Reform Movement*, (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 2000) 155-172.

⁵⁰ For the beginnings of the order see, Placido M. Lugano, *Origine e Primordi dell'ordine di Montoliveto (1313-1450)*, (Siena: Tip. E. Lit. Sordomuti di L. Lazzeri, V2, 1903) 9-153, and Kurt J. Sundstrom *The Chioistro Grande of Monte Oliveto Maggiore and the Olivetan Reform Movement*, 18-61; La Fisca and Palazzo, *Santa Maria dello Spasimo*, 16-19.

of the Church. They were confirmed to the Rule of St. Benedict because of a dream that the bishop once had, in which the Virgin put the Rule of St. Benedict into his hands and gave him white habits for the people who he saw kneeling at her feet. Bishop Pietromala did not doubt that the monks in his dream were the Sienese hermits commended to his care by the Pope. He then clothed the three of them with white habits and gave them the Benedictine Rule, placing them all under the protection of the Blessed Virgin.

Tolomei took the name of Bernardo. He renamed the olive-filled mountain where he had gone in seclusion “Monte Oliveto” in memory of Christ’s agony and as a perpetual reminder of the life of sacrifice and expiatory penance that he and his followers had undertaken. The Olivetan Order’s diffusion and expansion was very ambitious. The Rule built another monastery in Arezzo and just after a few years, expanded to Camprera, Volterra, San Gimignano, Gubbio, Foligno, and Rome. In Rome, by papal decree in a bull dated April 1351, they were given their own church, S. Maria Nuova.⁵¹ The expansion of the order not only included central Italy, but also territory outside the mainland. By 1489, the order controlled a pre-existing abbey, the Church of S. Maria del Bosco in Catalamauro (central Sicily).⁵² Jacopo Basilico had been a prelate of this church, and his donation allowed for the expansion of the Olivetan monks to other parts of the island.⁵³

The iconography of Basilico’s altarpiece refers not only to his own and his wife’s devotion to the Sorrows of the Virgin, but also to the two most significant aspects of the origins of the order, Christ’s Agony and an association with the Blessed Virgin. The fact that the narrative suggests all these themes sheds light on the demands made by the patron, or more precisely the patrons, who in this case included not only Jacopo Basilico

⁵¹ Lugano, *Origine e Primordi dell’ordine di Montoliveto (1313-1450)* 144.

⁵² Cotroneo and Brancato, *La chiesa palermitana di S. Maria dello Spasimo*, 14; La Fisca and Palazzo, *Santa Maria dello Spasimo*, 16.

⁵³ La Fisca and Palazzo, *Santa Maria dello Spasimo*, 19-21.

but also the Olivetan monks. They were able to commission the most sought-out artist of the time to deliver a painting with a remarkably innovative imagery. In order to do so, Raphael did not invent a new iconography; rather, his bold manipulation of an existing one made the painting original.

The event known as the “fainting” or *spasimo* of the Virgin depicts her falling or in the process of falling down in dismay. It is visually and theologically linked to Christ carrying the Cross because it is the suffering and near death of her Son which causes her sorrow. Raphael had already depicted the image of *Christ bearing the Cross* [Fig. 6] in the *predella* scenes of the Colonna major altarpiece c. 1505. Moreover, his older colleague Sodoma (Giovanni Antonio Bazzi, 1477-1549) had done an image of the same subject matter for the major Olivetan cloister at Monte Oliveto between 1505-1508, displayed in the main entrance of the cloister to remind the monks of Christ’s sacrifice [Fig 7].⁵⁴ Raphael may have known of this image, and realized that painting the iconography of Christ bearing the Cross with the fainting of the Virgin would allow him to create a intricate narrative that highlighted the patron’s local devotion and connected with the order. Raphael took an image typically relegated to *predella* scenes, which called for a horizontal composition and transformed it, by placing it on a vertical axis. This subject, most frequently part of a narrative cycle, was recreated as the central theme depicted on a panel of monumental proportions.⁵⁵ Raphael’s ingenuity goes even further, since he also depicted a precise moment in Christ’s carrying of the Cross and meeting His

⁵⁴ In his dissertation *The Chostro Grande of Monte Oliveto Maggiore and the Olivetan Reform Movement*, 119, Kurt J. Sundstrom argues that the Benedictine and Benedictine reform monasteries initiated the tradition of creating elaborate narrative cycles in their cloisters dedicated to their founder. It is interesting how closely the careers of Sodoma, Raphael and an Olivetan monk Fra Giovanni da Verona, who trained at the cloister in *intarsia*, intertwine. Sodoma painted some of the images in the cloister depicting the life of St. Benedict, and Giovanni da Verona did the inlay of the choir stalls (1502-05). In 1508 Sodoma was in Rome working on the *Stanza della Segnatura*, only to be replaced by Raphael, and Fra Giovanni was the artist who was commissioned to do the *intarsia* panels in the same room (1512-15).

⁵⁵ The size of the painting, 318 by 229 cm., merely indicates that Raphael was adhering to the demands of the commission. The panel was for a late-gothic church; thus, it had to be tall.

mother. He did this without disobeying the dictums of the Vatican which declared that the Virgin could not have yielded to ultimate despair and fainted (*lo spasimo*) during the Passion because of the incorruptibility of her flesh.⁵⁶ By emphasizing their interaction, not the Virgin's fainting, Raphael was able to include the patron's chosen theme and the church's dedication to both the Blessed Virgin and the Agony of Christ. Raphael ingeniously arranged this precise moment bringing it to life with a realism and dynamism that separate this altarpiece from the more static *sacra conversazioni* of his earlier career.

Jacopo Basilico was part of the ever-expanding papal or Roman culture. He associated with wealthy families and members of a religious order in Sicily who had some connection with wealthy families and members of the Curia in Rome.⁵⁷ It was presumably due to such associations in Rome that Basilico and the Olivetan monks in Palermo were able to obtain the service of an artist already so strongly associated with the papacy in Rome. Vasari tells us that Raphael, while working with *Lo Spasimo*, was also busy with other works, including the *stanze*.⁵⁸ Raphael's patrons in Rome included not only the reigning popes and cardinals like Julius II (1503-1513), Leo X (1513-1521), Cardinal Giulio de' Medici (Clement VII, 1523-1534), and Cardinal Bibbiena, but also secular men of remarkable social and intellectual stature like Tommaso Inghirami, Baldassare Castiglione, and Agostino Chigi. Yet, even from Sicily, Jacopo Basilico had

⁵⁶ In 1506, Tommaso de Vio, known as Cajetan, one of the leading Dominican theologians of the day and subsequently the master general of the Dominicans and a protégé of Pope Julius II, published a treatise on the Virgin's sacredness. Gardner von Teuffel, "Lo Spasimo di Sicilia," 272; Campbell, 221; Ettlinger, "Raphael's Lo Spasimo: Its historical and iconographical background" 13-15.

⁵⁷ In the Middle Ages and Renaissance, members of a noble or wealthy ruling family customarily did the funding of churches' confraternities or congregations. Tolomei, a noble Siennese who counted Ambrogio Piccolomini among his friends, funded the Olivetans as already mentioned (See note 51). The Olivetan monks had many wealthy families who donated money and land for their expansion. As Contrineo explains (See note 30), the wealth brought to Palermo was from Tuscany and Spain. Basilico's wife came from Pisa and his brother-in-law Giugielmo Ajutamicristo was a rich dealer and member of a banking family of Palermo. At present, there is no concrete evidence that their interaction played a part in the political and economic transaction that Gardner von Teuffel mentions as the probable reason for *Lo Spasimo*'s return to the Olivetans in Palermo, *Lo Spasimo di Sicilia*, 272.

⁵⁸ Vasari, *Le Vite*, IV, 358.

the money and position to arrange this commission. Moreover, Vasari's account demonstrates how modern Raphael was in his ambition to disseminate his work outside Rome, accepting a commission from a wealthy lawyer of Palermo that would enhance his fame abroad.⁵⁹

At a time in which, under the aegis of Agostino Chigi, translations of Greek texts were undertaken and Rome's first Greek academy was established by Leo X in 1513,⁶⁰ it might be possible to assume a connection between Jacopo Basilico, a native of Messina, and Pietro Bembo. Pietro Bembo, who learned Greek under Constantine Lascaris in Messina, was a friend of Raphael, and had become secretary to Pope Leo X in 1512. As mentioned, Giuglielmo Ajutamicristo was Basilico's brother-in-law and also belonged to a banking family.⁶¹ Agostino Chigi, the patron *par excellence* at the time, was also a wealthy banker who monopolized the Tolfa trade in Italy. Moreover, Agostino Chigi was the protector of the Augustinian order in Rome, for which he commissioned several works. These programs were carried out by none other than Raphael in Santa Maria della Pace and Santa Maria del Popolo.⁶² Unfortunately, we are not able to concretely tie these personages together. Nevertheless, these intellectual clerics and wealthy bankers form the connecting tissue that could link Basilico and Raphael. Again, one is left to conjecture that religious leaders and important financiers of the time had a shared interest in

⁵⁹ Ana Avila, "Influencia de Rafael en la pintura Española del siglo XVI a través de los grabados" in *Rafael en España*, exh cat. Museo del Prado (Mayo-Agosto, 1985) 43-53, esp. 52. She relates Vasari's account of how impressed Raphael was with Raimondi's talent in the engravings he had done. In their first meeting, Raphael sent for some of his own work to be duplicated by Raimondi. The results were not only a diffusion of Raphael's compositions but earnings the prints provided for both artists.

⁶⁰ Ingrid Rowland, "Render Unto Caesar the Things which are Caesar's: Humanism and the Arts in the Patronage of Agostino Chigi", 714.

⁶¹ La Fisca and Palazzo, *Santa Maria dello Spasimo*, 20; Filippo Meli, *Matteo Carnilivari e L'architettura del Quattro e Cinquecento in Palermo* (Roma: Fratelli Palombi Editori, 1958) 15.

⁶² Ingrid Rowland, "Render Unto Caesar the Things which are Caesar's: Humanism and the Arts in the Patronage of Agostino Chigi", 714.

acquiring wealth and social status as well as the status that came with collecting the marvelous works by Raphael.

CHAPTER 3

CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC MILIEU

Rome's cultural milieu in the last two decades of Raphael's life was defined by important figures of the Roman Curia such as Pope Julius II, Pope Leo X, Cardinal Giulio de Medici, and wealthy bankers like Agostino Chigi. These figures were actively involved in the competitive commissioning of works of art for churches and private residences. Artists such as Raphael and Michelangelo became, literally, precious commodities.⁶³ From Raphael's appearance in Rome in 1508 until his untimely death in 1520, an antagonistic rivalry developed between these two famous artists. Their contentious relationship can be seen in their work, as well as in the associations they forged, especially in the case of Sebastiano del Piombo.

Around 1516, when Michelangelo and Sebastiano were at their closest, Cardinal Giulio de Medici commissioned two altarpieces for his archiepiscopal church in Narbonne, France.⁶⁴ Raphael was asked to do the *Transfiguration* [Fig. 8], and later, Sebastiano del Piombo was commissioned to paint the *Raising of Lazarus* [Fig. 9].⁶⁵ Lo

⁶³ Sheryl E. Reiss, *Cardinal Giulio d'Medici as a patron of art, 1315-1523*, (Ph.D. Dissertation-Princeton Univ., 1992) 312.

⁶⁴ Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 41; see also Cecil Gould, *The Raising of Lazarus by Sebastiano del Piombo* (London: National Gallery, 1967) 9.

⁶⁵ Sheryl E. Reiss, *Cardinal Giulio d'Medici as a patron of art, 1315-1523*, 312, and Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 66-67. Both authors state that a commission was given to Raphael first. Sheryl Reiss explains that the images' order of appearance, the *Transfiguration* first and the *Raising of Lazarus* second, came from medieval times, so that if Raphael was given the *Transfiguration*, Sebastiano would have to do the *Raising of Lazarus*. Hirst adds that because of the sequence of the images and according to some letters from Sellaio to Michelangelo, the commission for the *Raising* seemed to have been arranged by Michelangelo for Sebastiano when the former was in Rome for a brief time in the winter of 1516 to see

Spasimo should be understood as the pivotal first step, not only in the fierce rivalry between the artists, but also in the innovation that the competition inspired.

Soon after his arrival in the eternal city, Raphael took over Sodoma's work in Pope Julius II's Vatican *Stanze*. There he also came in contact with Giovanni de Verona, the Olivetan monk from Monte Oliveto who did the *intarsia* panels for the *Stanza della Segnatura* (1512-1515).⁶⁶ In 1511, Agostino Chigi became Raphael's patron and brought Sebastiano Luciani, later known as del Piombo, to Rome from Venice.⁶⁷ Agostino Chigi commissioned both artists to paint the ceiling and walls of his suburban villa, now known as the Villa Farnesina (1509-1511), with mythological scenes.⁶⁸ Sebastiano's style of painting as seen in the frescoed *Polyphemus* (1511), adjacent to Raphael's *Galatea* (1513) in the Sala de Galatea, reveals his early experiences in Venice with Giorgione.⁶⁹ Giorgione had been Sebastiano's major influence after his years of apprenticeship in Giovanni Bellini's workshop.⁷⁰ However, in Rome, Sebastiano began to study the antique [Fig. 10] and to assimilate the classical Roman style in emulation of the art of Michelangelo. For his *Death of Adonis* (1512-13) [Fig. 11] in the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Sebastiano took the figure of the dead Holofernes from Michelangelo's *Judith*

Cardinal Giulio de Medici. Hirst explains that if this information is correct, then the responsibility for creating this competition does not belong to Cardinal Giulio de' Medici but to Michelangelo.

⁶⁶ Sundstrom, *The Chioistro Grande of Monte Oliveto Maggiore and the Olivetan Reform Movement*, 61; Vasari, *Lives*, 2, 890.

⁶⁷ In 1531 the office of Piombatore was given to Sebastiano by Clement VII, who as Cardinal gave Sebastiano the commission for the *Raising of Lazarus* fifteen years earlier, Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 108; Vasari, *Lives*, 2, 1308.

⁶⁸ Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 33; Sydney Freedberg, *Painting in Italy. 1500-1600*, 3rd edition, (New Haven and London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1993) 109.

⁶⁹ Marcia B. Hall, *Color and Meaning*, 102.

⁷⁰ Bruce Cole, *Titian and Venetian Painting, 1450-1590*, (US: Westview Press, 1999) 47; Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 1; Vasari, *Lives*, 2, 1308.

and *Holofernes* [Fig. 12] on the Sistine ceiling and adapted it into the dead body of Adonis. The painting shows Sebastiano's successful assimilation of the formal Roman style with his own sensual and tonal Venetian training. The figures, clearly influenced by Michelangelo, appear transformed by the hand of the colorist. The female figures are massive, yet lacking the sculptural mode of Michelangelo's figures in the Sistine ceiling, they appear more sensual and soft.⁷¹

It is reasonable to assume that it was Sebastiano's enthusiasm for emulating Michelangelo's art that led to the artists becoming friends and colleagues, although it is not clear exactly when this association began. Their close contact allowed Michelangelo to know what was happening in Rome when he departed for Florence in 1516, leaving Sebastiano as his deputy.⁷² It might also be assumed that the collaboration between Michelangelo and Sebastiano del Piombo was due in part to the antagonistic rivalry between Michelangelo and Raphael.⁷³ Michelangelo's powerful, even shocking, work was not as often favorably received as the more harmonious, balanced, and classical work of Raphael.⁷⁴ It was the fame of the latter for the harmony of his compositions and color

⁷¹ Sydney Freedberg, *Painting in Italy. 1500-1600*, 111; Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 38, and Robert S. Liebert, M.D., "Raphael, Michelangelo, Sebastiano: High Renaissance Rivalry," in *Source II*, 3 (1984) 60-68, esp. 61. Sebastiano's body of the dead Adonis in his *Death of Adonis*, is clearly adapted from the body of the decapitated Holofernes. Sebastiano had not only used the form of the figure, but also placed it in the same context as Michelangelo's figure, that of a dead body.

⁷² Sydney Freedberg, *Raphael, Michelangelo and others, Raphael and his contemporaries in Rome*, 11; Michael Hirst, "The Chigi Chapel in S. Maria della Pace," in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, V24, (1961) 161-185, esp. 161.

⁷³ Robert S. Liebert, M.D., "Raphael, Michelangelo, Sebastiano: High Renaissance Rivalry," 60-61. He states that Michelangelo's reaction to Raphael led to the creation of a major painter, Sebastiano, who might otherwise have been buried in obscurity. He also says that the relationship between Michelangelo and Sebastiano can only be understood when considered as triangular in nature, involving Raphael. It is worth noting that after Raphael's death, their relationship started to deteriorate and came to a halt when Michelangelo was commissioned to paint the *Last Judgment* in 1534, after Sebastiano's suggestion that it should be done in oil.

⁷⁴ Vasari, *Lives*, 2, 1309.

that prompted Michelangelo to pursue the Venetian painter after his arrival in Rome.⁷⁵ Their collaboration would allow Michelangelo to combine the supremacy of his *disegno* with that of Sebastiano's Venetian *colore*, thereby challenging Raphael's work.⁷⁶ Thus, one might say that the later rivalry between Sebastiano and Raphael was essentially initiated by Michelangelo's antagonistic feelings toward Raphael.

The first collaboration between Michelangelo and Sebastiano was the Viterbo *Pietà* [Fig. 13]. The massive and sculptural aspects of the figures can be easily visualized as marble variations on Michelangelo's first *Pietà* [Fig. 14]. Yet, the landscape in which Sebastiano placed the figures is soft and sensuous, reflecting his Venetian roots.⁷⁷ The drawings that Michelangelo provided Sebastiano for the commission [Fig. 15] closely resemble the figures of the prophets and *ignudi* of the Sistine ceiling [Fig. 16]. These drawings would seem to indicate that the two artists' association began when Michelangelo was finishing the Sistine ceiling in 1512 or shortly thereafter.⁷⁸ However, in the end, their collaboration revealed the pronounced differences between their individual styles.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 1309.

⁷⁶ Vasari, *Le Vite*, IV,357; Cecil Gould, *The Raising of Lazarus by Sebastiano del Piombo* (London: National Gallery, 1967) 11.

⁷⁷ S. J. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy, 1500-1600*, (3rd ed New Haven and N.Y.: Penguin Books Ltd., 1993) 113.

⁷⁸ For a complete explanation of the Viterbo collaboration leading to other works by Sebastiano before he received the commission for the *Raising of Lazarus* see Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, Chapter 3, 41. Hirst states that the first collaboration between Michelangelo and Sebastiano was the Viterbo *Pietà*, an altarpiece for the church of San Francesco in Viterbo (now in the Museo Civico of the same city). By using the studies and preparatory drawings for the work, Hirst dates the commission and their collaboration as early as 1513. The figures have a close relationship to those on the ceiling, since it would have been only a year after its completion that Michelangelo made the drawing for Sebastiano's commission. Hirst, (in his footnote 17, page 45) compares the figure of the *Delphic Sybil* [Fig.16], especially her legs in a seated position with the legs of the seated Virgin in the Viterbo *Pietà*. The outer mantle ending in a pointed crease can also be seen in both figures.

Roughly at the same time as Michelangelo's initial collaboration with Sebastiano on the Viterbo altarpiece, Agostino Chigi commissioned Raphael to decorate his chapel in Santa Maria della Pace. The surviving frescoes include two superimposed tiers on the entrance wall to the chapel [Fig. 17]. However, Cecil Gould and Michael Hirst disagree over the image intended for the chapel's altarpiece. Since the chapel underneath the frescoes was surfaced with sculpture in the seventeenth century, no record exists of its previous appearance.⁷⁹ According to Gould, an image of the Resurrected Christ, proposed by Hirst, would have been too large for the small space.⁸⁰ Instead, he suggests that the image Raphael had in mind was that of the *Pietà* as recorded in a drawing now in the Louvre [Fig. 18].⁸¹ He notes that the figure of Raphael's Madonna is derived from Michelangelo's Madonna in his *Pietà*, but in Raphael's version, she has risen to her feet. After having laid down the body of Christ, the Virgin's arms maintain the same outstretched position as Michelangelo's sculpture. In addition, Raphael's figure of Christ can be closely related to the body of Christ in Sebastiano's Viterbo *Pietà* [Fig. 13]. Thus, it compares very closely to both Michelangelo's *Pietà* and Sebastiano's Viterbo *Pietà*. Ultimately Raphael's drawing suggests the degree of competitiveness that existed between all three artists.

Cardinal Giulio de' Medici knew of the developing rivalry between these artists, and this may have prompted him to give the commission of the *Transfiguration* to Raphael and the *Raising of Lazarus* to Sebastiano, in 1516. The cardinal also knew how

⁷⁹ Cecil Gould, "Raphael at S. Maria della Pace," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 120, no 1484, (1992) 78-88 esp. 80.

⁸⁰ Michael Hirst, "The Chigi Chapel at Sta. Maria della Pace," 169, founds his theory of the Resurrected Christ on the premise that the inscriptions that were in place describe a Resurrection scene.

⁸¹ Cecil Gould, "Raphael at S. Maria della Pace," 80.

busy with other projects Raphael was at the time, which made him fear that Raphael would not be able to advance quickly with his painting.⁸² Indeed, Raphael was preparing the cartoons for the Vatican Tapestries (1514-16) while simultaneously preoccupied with the completion of the *cupola* for Chigi's chapel in Sta. Maria del Popolo, begun in 1513, and working on Basilico's commission for *Lo Spasimo* (1515-16). Thus Cardinal Giulio's tactic seems to have been to force the two artists to compete with one another, knowing that they would not only want to exceed the other, but also to finish first.⁸³ Moreover, Michelangelo's departure for Florence left Raphael as the uncontested first artist in Rome, opening the field for other artists to attempt to surpass him.⁸⁴ Sebastiano, as Michelangelo's deputy, seems to have taken this potential very seriously, and the commission given by Cardinal Giulio de' Medici became the catalyst for his fierce desire to eclipse Raphael. Letters from a close friend of Michelangelo, Leonardo Sellaio, indicate that an air of suspicion and enmity prevailed, at least on Sebastiano's part.⁸⁵ The fact that Raphael took his time before starting his work made Sebastiano feel as if the delay was orchestrated to incite some added competition between them or prevent him from doing his best.⁸⁶ In any event, Sebastiano, full of suspicion and anxiety, started

⁸² Cecil Gould, *The Raising of Lazarus by Sebastiano del Piombo*, 10.

⁸³ Sheryl E. Reiss, in "Cardinal Giulio d' Medici as a patron of art, 1315-1523," 314, suggests that Cardinal Giulio de Medici not only was aware of Sebastiano and Michelangelo's collaboration for the Viterbo *Pieta*, but also for that of the Borgherini chapel in San Pietro Montorio. It was perhaps this same collaboration that he wanted for his commission, which superseded that of the Borgherini chapel. Cecil Gould in *The Raising of Lazarus by Sebastiano del Piombo*, 10, tells us that the Cardinal knew how busy Raphael was and commissioned his rival to urge him on. If this is true, then the choice of altarpiece as companion pieces was the Cardinal's. Moreover, the correspondence between Sellaio and Michelangelo shows that Sebastiano was not happy about the competition because it made him feel very suspicious of his rival, Raphael, whom he loathed.

⁸⁴ Sydney Freedberg, *Painting of the High Renaissance in Rome and Florence*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961) 265.

⁸⁵ Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 66.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 67.

painting in the spring of 1517, aided by Michelangelo's designs. Sebastiano's emotional upheaval reveals his awareness of how important this commission was, as demonstrated in the correspondence between Sellaio and Michelangelo. It was not only for a Cardinal belonging to the most illustrious de' Medici family, but also a companion piece for the work of the great Raphael.

Although Sebastiano's emulation of Michelangelo's art provided him with a certain recognition as early as 1512, he could not compete with the attention Raphael was getting at the same time. Raphael had already attained fame in Florence, both for his numerous images of Madonna and Child and for his altarpieces.⁸⁷ Two with relevance for *Lo Spasimo* are the *Colonna Altarpiece* c. 1505 [Fig. 19], and the *Entombment* of 1507 [Fig. 20]. In the *Colonna Altarpiece*, Raphael depicted the subject matter of *Lo Spasimo* or *Christ Bearing the Cross* in the *predella*.⁸⁸ Immediately after this altarpiece, he was commissioned to do a scene of *The Entombment*, for Atalanta Baglioni, now in the Borghese Gallery, Rome.⁸⁹ These two very different altarpieces reveal Raphael's evolution in his early years.

The *Colonna Altarpiece* still reflects Perugino's influence; the composition is balanced, highly symmetrical, and harmonious. However, the Florentine influence in his work already begins to appear in the massive figures of St. Peter and St. Paul. In the *Entombment*, Raphael abandons the Umbrian traditional landscape for a more dynamic

⁸⁷ Sydney Freedberg, *Raphael, Michelangelo and others, Raphael and his contemporaries in Rome*, 4.

⁸⁸ Interestingly enough, the *predella* for this piece contained a narrative cycle of Christ's Passion and one of the sections is Raphael's first depiction of *Christ Bearing the Cross* or the *Procession* with the crowd going from left to right and the Virgin helped by her entourage as she faints.

⁸⁹ Sylvia Ferino Padgen, "Iconographic demands and artistic achievements: The genesis of three works by Raphael" in *Raffaello a Roma Il convegno nel 1983* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Elefante, 1986) 13-27.

approach. Whereas, the Peruginesque landscape in the *Colonna Altarpiece* is relatively static and void of clouds, the landscape of the *Entombment* has specific types of clouds, trees, and even a background secondary scene, Calvary with three crosses. This detail elaborates the *storia* of the last moment in Christ's Passion. Furthermore, the landscape in the *Entombment* serves as a directional guide for the viewer. The eye is drawn from the crosses up on the hill in the upper right corner down to the lower left of the pictorial space, where the viewer encounters the flaccid dead body of Christ.⁹⁰ Its subject matter was the first of its kind for altarpieces. More common were the Deposition and Lamentation.⁹¹ However, prototypes for this scene of Christ's body being transported to the tomb existed in *predella* panels and also an engraving by Mantegna [Fig. 21].⁹²

The series of drawings for the *Entombment* reveal Raphael's attempt to create a dynamic group of interacting figures.⁹³ From these series of preparatory drawings for the *Entombment*, Raphael's working methods can be outlined. The drawings demonstrate that Raphael changed his mind about the subject matter; his original subject was the

⁹⁰ Dussler, 10; In Sylvia Ferino Padgen, "Iconographic demands and artistic achievements: The genesis of three works by Raphael," in *Raffaello a Roma Il convegno nel 1983*, esp 20-21, points out that the *Entombment* included a *predella* depicting the theological virtues and most importantly, a *cimasa* above illustrating God the Father. She adds that this composition would be a direct influence in Raphael's later work as he struggled to incorporate the two fields extending the pictorial plane into one.

⁹¹ Sylvia Ferino Padgen, "Iconographic demands and artistic achievements: The genesis of three works by Raphael," 21, states that Michael Hirst considers Michelangelo's painting of the *Entombment* for the church of S. Agostino in Rome to be the forerunner of the present work, Michael Hirst, "Michelangelo in Rome: an altarpiece and the 'Bacchus'" in *The Burlington Magazine CXXIII*, 1981, 581-593, esp. 588-589.

⁹² Individual models can be traced to a variety of sources; from Signorelli's *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*. All of these models have a connection to the antique relief of Meleager, which was known in the Renaissance and interpreted by various artists. They did so because Alberti contended and stated that an artist capable of capturing the flaccid and motionless body of a corpse was indeed a good artist. Thus it seems that it was very important to every artist at the time to demonstrate his capabilities. Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, 73-74.

⁹³ Pope-Hennessy, *Raphael*, 53.

Lamentation [Fig 22, 23]. In an attempt to explain the change, some scholars argue that it must have been at the demand of the patron, while others attribute it to Raphael's ingenuity and ambition.⁹⁴ He wanted to depict a dramatic event that took into account the patron's personal circumstances as part of the iconographical program.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, the drawings [Fig 24, 25] and the final image [Fig 20] show Raphael's desire to create interacting figures that seem palpable and alive as they reenact the dramatic action of an event. His source of inspiration was surely the treatise on painting by Alberti.⁹⁶

Alberti, in his *Treatise on Painting* published in 1436, wrote that the major work of the artist is not the colossus, but history painting (*storia*) for it takes more ingenuity to create a story than to do a colossus.⁹⁷ According to Alberti's treatise, the basic ingredients for a successful *storia* are a good story and a firm grasp of the most important moments of the narrative. The depiction of action with the pertinent movements, gestures, and expression of the protagonists, and the right setting, costume, and accessories are also required.⁹⁸ Raphael in his Florentine years already started to introduce these ideas in his work. In the *Entombment*, Raphael not only worked out these

⁹⁴ In Kurt Foster's review of John Pope Hennessy, "Raphael, New York, 1970," in *Art Quarterly*, (1972), 425-427, he argues that the decision was made by the patron, Atalanta, who probably consulted with her advisors to create an analogy between her personal circumstances and a classic historical event. Sylvia Ferino Padgen, "Iconographic demands and artistic achievements," in *Raffaello a Roma Il convegno nel 1983*, in her footnote 69, page 23, explains that the scholars who attribute the responsibility of the changes to Raphael are John Pope-Hennessy, Anna Forlani and Oskar Fischel among others.

⁹⁵ Sylvia Ferino Padgen, "Iconographic demands and artistic achievements," in *Raffaello a Roma Il convegno nel 1983*, provides a reading of this altarpiece's iconography that relates to events in the patron's life. Atalanta's son had been murdered by a very close and personal associate. Meleager, as the legend goes, was also killed under similar circumstances. The painting was in memory of Atalanta's son, and the story of Meleager served as a symbolic commemoration of Atalanta's son.

⁹⁶ Alberti, 71; Sylvia Ferino Pagden, "Raphael's Invention of 'Storie' in His Florentine Drawings," 89.

⁹⁷ Alberti, 72.

⁹⁸ Alberti, 71; Sylvia Ferino Pagden, "Raphael's Invention of 'Storie' in His Florentine Drawings," 89.

principles but also brought his art closer to the dramatic and innovative work of his two famous contemporaries, Leonardo and Michelangelo. Later, Vasari conceded to Raphael the first place as a painter of *storie*, but he noted that this was only because Raphael was unable to surpass Michelangelo, and being a man of great judgment opted to become the better history painter.⁹⁹

Raphael took as his inspiration the dynamism and dramatic action of Michelangelo's cartoon for the *Battle of Cascina* [Fig. 26].¹⁰⁰ He not only introduced the dramatic action required to make a *storia*, but he also added details that were unusual for this type of subject, such as the *spasimo* (fainting) of the Virgin which usually appears in the Lamentation or Deposition, not in the Entombment. Raphael transferred this detail from a drawing originally for a Lamentation to the final image of the *Entombment*.¹⁰¹ Another detail that is shown in the preparatory sketches but does not appear in the final painting is the holy woman lifting the veil from the unconscious Virgin's face [Fig. 23]. Interestingly enough, Raphael repeated this detail in *Lo Spasimo*, ten years later.

Although it can be argued that the changes Raphael made in the *Entombment* had to do solely with the requirements of the commission, Raphael was probably influenced by the treatises on painting as well as those on classical rhetoric. He knew about Aristotle's *Poetics*, wherein the philosopher contends that a writer of tragedy or comedy must know how to keep the story flowing until it comes to its climactic end.¹⁰² In the

⁹⁹ Vasari, *Le Vite*, IV, 375.

¹⁰⁰ If one is to agree with Michael Hirst, "Michelangelo in Rome: an altarpiece and the 'Bacchus,'" 581-593, esp. 588-589, that the painting of the *Entombment* for S. Agostino in Rome done by Michelangelo is the forerunner for Raphael's *Entombment*, then Raphael not only took the cartoon as inspiration, but also the figure of the dead Christ of Michelangelo's *Entombment*.

¹⁰¹ Sylvia Ferino Padgen, "Iconographic demands artistic achievements," 23-24; Pope-Hennessy, *Raphael*, 53.

¹⁰² Sylvia Ferino Padgen, "Iconographic demands artistic achievements," 23-24.

Entombment, Raphael picked the most climactic and important moment of the *storia*, Christ's body being taken to the tomb. The people transferring the body of Christ and those gathered around the figure of the Virgin are the supporting actors that move the narrative. They are depicted with "gestures and pertinent movements" that lead to the climactic end, the poignant moment of the men struggling with the weight of Christ's body. Thus, we can see Raphael working out his methods and artistic innovations using both visual and written sources. He wanted not only to create a dramatic story that could be closely related to the patron's personal circumstances, but also to assimilate and emulate the art of Leonardo and Michelangelo.

Ironically, when Raphael arrived to work in the *stanze*, the altarpiece type known as *sacra conversazione* was preferred over the more dramatic and dynamic altarpiece he had just completed. Typically, such a work consists of the Virgin and Child surrounded by four or more saints who communicate in silence, often allowing for a balanced and symmetrical composition. Raphael produced a series of altarpieces between 1508 and 1514 that adhered to this arrangement; however, his developing ideas in the *stanze* can be traced in these paintings as well.¹⁰³ One of them is the *Madonna di Foligno* c. 1512, his first important altarpiece of the Roman period.¹⁰⁴ Although traces of Perugino's influence as well as that of Leonardo and Michelangelo can be read in this image, a new development is also apparent.¹⁰⁵ By comparing the *Madonna di Foligno*, 1512, now in Vatican Pinoteca, Rome [Fig. 27], and the *Sistine Madonna* [Fig. 28] of the same year,

¹⁰³ Dussler, 31; Pope Hennessy, *Raphael*, 207.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Greenhalgh, *The Classical Tradition in Art*, (London: Gerald Duckworth Co., Ltd. 1978) 105.

¹⁰⁵ While Dussler, 31-32 states that the Virgin's figure comes directly from *Leonardo's Adoration of the Virgin*, in the Uffizzi, Pope-Hennessy, 207, states that the movement of the child's body was inspired by Michaelangelo's *Doni Tondo*. 207.

one can see how Raphael was able to manipulate the *sacra conversazione* tradition and transform it into his own artistic vocabulary.

The iconography in both altarpieces refers to a miraculous event.¹⁰⁶ It is in the arrangement of the figures in both altarpieces that Raphael's development can be seen. In the *Madonna di Foligno*, Raphael placed St. Jerome standing behind the donor who kneels with very little movement at the right corner of the pictorial space. They both look up to the Virgin and Child, directing the viewer's eye to the apparition. Across from these figures, St. Francis also looks up to the apparition while St. John the Baptist not only looks at the viewer but points toward the miraculous sight. By following their gestures, we can see that their positions create a triangular format. The resulting symmetry and equilibrium not only show Leonardo's influence, but also how Raphael goes beyond the master's influence to add movement in the figure of the Virgin. He positions her legs and feet in the same manner of Leonardo's Madonna in the *Adoration of the Magi*. Furthermore, Raphael's depiction of the restless Child is derived from Michelangelo's Child in the Bruges Madonna, amalgamating the influences of the two most famous artists of his own time.¹⁰⁷ It is all of these details that make the altarpiece more palpable and real, and one already sees Raphael's manipulation of figures and composition in simple ways that convey a rich and complex reading of the image depicted. He no longer uses the massive architecture of his Florentine altarpieces, but depicts a landscape in the center of the pictorial space that adds immediacy as the viewer sees and wants to enter this space with the chance of perhaps getting closer to the apparition and the miracle itself. As such, the composition attains a psychological depth

¹⁰⁶ Dussler, 31; Pope Hennessy, *Raphael*, 207.

¹⁰⁷ Dussler, 31.

that is further emphasized by Raphael's use of pictorial tradition, and situating the figures of Virgin and Child on a crescent moon with the clouds and angels all around them.¹⁰⁸

The *Sistine Madonna* of 1512 is an ideal visual example of the *sacra conversazione*, conceived as a perfect essay in balance and harmony.¹⁰⁹ The composition depends upon the implicit triangular shape that holds the figures in a clear hierarchical arrangement. The figures stand behind and immediately above two angels who are looking up into the heavenly realm. Their connecting glances, especially with Santa Barbara to the right of the image, make the viewer fully aware of the heavenly sight. Raphael's holy figures seem to be alive and human, despite the fact that they are depicted in the celestial realm. Only when the curtains are pulled back is the viewer able to experience them. Raphael not only placed the divine figures in perfect order, a triangle composition, but he also took into account the ultimate location of the painting, and these details are all part of its iconography.¹¹⁰ Although both the *Madonna di Foligno* and the *Sistine Madonna* have the same central theme, an apparition, the feeling of awe and amazement that such a spectacle would induce becomes more apparent in the *Sistine Madonna*. The sense of immediacy is generated by the seemingly effortless clarity of form, psychology and the illusion of movement that makes the figures appear overwhelmingly real, as if they are in the viewer's realm.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ It is the crescent moon surrounded by angels that recalls Perugino's fresco of 1479 in the apse of the choir of Sixtus IV's chapel in St. Peter's, Dussler, 31 and Pope-Hennessy, 207.

¹⁰⁹ For a recent reading of the *Sistine Madonna* see Loren Partridge, *The Art of Renaissance Rome 1400-1600* (New York; Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996) 86-91.

¹¹⁰ Dussler, 36-37.

¹¹¹ Greenhalgh, 106.

One must keep in mind that at this time Raphael was also busy working in the *stanze*, and in 1514 he started the cartoons for the Vatican tapestries where this new dynamic approach became more pronounced. Raphael was developing a new artistic language, using his innovative approach in the *stanze* and transferring it to religious images.¹¹² Raphael's *St. Cecilia Altarpiece*, from 1514, now in the Pinoteca, Bologna [Fig. 29], in comparison to his *Sistine Madonna* of only two years earlier, shows a remarkable and distinct progression of movement and dynamism.¹¹³ The *St. Cecilia Altarpiece* not only departs from the *sacra conversazione* format but also includes the movement of the angels in heaven at the top of the picture plane. It is still a *sacra conversazione*, but no longer do we have the Virgin and Child nor the symmetry or equilibrium found in previous images of this subject matter. Here, instead we have a circle of figures that surround St. Cecilia while she is experiencing the miracle that induces her ecstasy. The surrounding figures are participants in the conversation and witness to the miracle. Mary Magdalene addresses the viewer, and the angels in the heavens add to the movement of the whole image. It is a dynamic and discernible composition in which the viewer is asked not only to see the saint in ecstasy but also to hear the music that comes from heaven. There is a psychological depth in the figures' appearances, epitomized by St. Cecilia's ecstatic gaze. The brilliant colors in the drapery, taken from Michelangelo's *cangiantismo* of the Sistine ceiling, reveal that Raphael was still keeping up with the work of his antagonist. The figure of the elegant and poised Mary Magdalene is not classical and static, but belongs to another aesthetic

¹¹² Freedberg, *Painting of the High Renaissance in Rome and Florence*, 268.

¹¹³ Hall, *Color and Meaning*, 112, tells us that after the *St. Cecilia altarpiece*, Raphael's oil paintings were largely done in a *chiaroscuro* mode or at least contained elements of *chiaroscuro*. She adds that the taste in Rome around 1515 moved toward the dramatic narrative and away from the devotional images that had been commissioned in the first half of the decade.

altogether.¹¹⁴ John Shearman believes she comes from the study of a Hellenistic model.¹¹⁵ It is Raphael's apparently limitless ability to adapt and change that made other artists envious of him. It is thus reasonable to assume that the artist continued this same method or conception when he began *Lo Spasimo*.

It was Raphael's approach that gave Sebastiano even more reason to envy and loathe the artist whose talent Sebastiano's association with Michelangelo was intended to surpass. In this artistic milieu, long before Cardinal Giulio de' Medici gave his commissions to Raphael and Sebastiano, one can see how closely these two artists were competing with each other simply by looking at the altarpieces they had just finished. In Raphael's *Lo Spasimo*, the asymmetrical design resembles his previous *Expulsion of Attila* fresco of 1513. The dramatic action of the figures comes from the same rhetorical technique that he used in the *Fire in the Borgo* of 1515. While the style of *Lo Spasimo* arises from Raphael's personal artistic development, its design does convey a close relation in terms of expression and dynamic composition to Sebastiano's Leningrad *Pietà*.¹¹⁶ Raphael finished *Lo Spasimo* soon after Sebastiano finished his Leningrad *Pietà* in 1516 [Fig 30].¹¹⁷ In Sebastiano's *Pietà*, one also finds an asymmetry that is missing

¹¹⁴ Beck, 106.

¹¹⁵ Shearman, *Mannerism*, 58. He states that the form as it is depicted shows an incipient Mannerist work and an example of Raphael's anti-classicism. Dussler, 40, on the other hand quotes Shearman's argument but adds that the figure of Mary Magdalene is Raphael's first contribution to the stylistic form now called Mannerism. Either way, it shows that Raphael was always evolving.

¹¹⁶ Sydney Freedberg, *Raphael, Michelangelo and others, Raphael and his Contemporaries in Rome*, 1-65, esp. 12-13.

¹¹⁷ Sebastiano's *Pieta*, which resembles an Entombment or Lamentation more than a *Pietà*, is now in the Hermitage. Hirst states that this *Pietà* is still a mysterious work, lacking information on its patronage. He presumes that the patron might have been one of the leading Spanish residents in Rome like Jeromino Vich, ambassador at the papal court since 1512, who left Italy along with the painting soon after its completion. Based on the influence it provided for Spanish art, it is also presumed that the painting was in Spain for a brief time. Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 46.

from his earlier paintings. This asymmetrical composition introduces diagonals that add dramatic shifting and action to the figures, recalling Raphael's *Entombment* of 1507.¹¹⁸ Moreover, a comparison between Sebastiano's *Raising of Lazarus* [Fig. 9] and Raphael's *Lo Spasimo* [Fig. 1] shows that Sebastiano was clearly influenced by Raphael's work. The angle that creates the asymmetrical design in both works is to the left side of the pictorial plane. In Sebastiano's work, the crowd that is coming from the left back toward the front define the same straight line that the figures of soldier, and three men on the left foreground do in Raphael's work. The strongest diagonal in both works comes from the upper right hand corner of the picture plane. Sebastiano includes a figure stretching out his arms that parallels the stretching arm of the mounted soldier who is holding the wooden baton or scroll in *Lo Spasimo*. Such similarities suggest that Sebastiano was intently looking at Raphael's most recent altarpiece, but more importantly, they help shed light on the progression of Raphael's *Lo Spasimo*.

Lo Spasimo's impact can be judged by the fact that Sebastiano felt compelled to follow its compositional design, which had the same dramatic and innovative artistic vocabulary as that of the *stanze*. Unfortunately for Sebastiano, his emulation of Raphael's work served to emphasize the difficulties of combining this dynamic compositional design with Michelangelo's drawings. In his *Raising of Lazarus*, it is easy to see Michelangelo's collaborative input.¹¹⁹ The existing studies in the Bonnat Museum at Bayonne [Fig. 31] and the British Museum [Fig. 32] not only attest to Michelangelo's

¹¹⁸ No one really knows how Sebastiano started this dynamic composition. The fact that it is so close to *Lo Spasimo* in production and completion adds to the mystery of the work. The image is also related to Raphael's *Entombment* in that the direction of movement in each comes from the upper right hand corner down to the bottom left corner, with the figure of the dead Christ in the immediate frontal space.

¹¹⁹ Vasari, *Lives*, 2, 1311. Also, for a complete analysis of the painting see Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 66-75, and Cecil Gould, *The Raising of Lazarus by Sebastiano del Piombo*, 14-28.

general contributions but also his specific role in the development of the figure of Lazarus.¹²⁰ The *Raising of Lazarus* depicts the biblical scene of Christ reviving Lazarus after the fourth day of his death (John 11:28-44). The miraculous scene is set before a landscape with the architecture placed in the upper left of the composition. A river where women are washing clothes separates the architecture or cityscape from the crowd that is approaching to watch the miracle of Christ reviving Lazarus, set in the bottom center of the pictorial space. Following convention, the figures of Martha and Mary Magdalene appear among the main protagonists in the crowd.¹²¹ However, the figures of Christ and Lazarus, especially that of Lazarus, are not posed in traditional fashion. Lazarus was typically depicted as upright, his stiff figure wrapped in linen strips, but Sebastiano's Lazarus is a moving and dynamic figure. He is removing strips of material as he gazes at Christ. Some scholars suggest that Michelangelo might have designed both Christ and Lazarus.¹²² This would explain why the figure of Christ who stands on a pedestal with his legs in a *contrapposto* pose has an uncanny resemblance to Michelangelo's *David*. Moreover, the figure of Lazarus is extremely disproportionate to the figure of Christ. He seems gigantic; if he were to stand up, he would tower over Christ. This indicates Sebastiano's apparent inability to work with Michelangelo's designs.¹²³ The *Raising of*

¹²⁰ Gould, *The Raising of Lazarus by Sebastiano del Piombo*, 14.

¹²¹ Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 67, and Gould, *The Raising of Lazarus by Sebastiano del Piombo*, agree that the placement of the saint to the right of Christ, and Mary Magdalene to the left, both kneeling, creates the pyramidal balance form that Michelangelo would have known from the art of Giotto. It would have come from Giotto's *Raising of Drusiana*, in Florence and not Giotto's *Raising of Lazarus* in Padua. This detail helps attest to Michelangelo's involvement in this work.

¹²² Ibid, Hirst and Gould both agree that there is a relationship between the figures of Christ and Lazarus similar to that of Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* in the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. This supports the theory that both figures were done by Michelangelo, even though, as Cecil Gould explains, no record proves this. However, Gould adds that the foot studies on the same sheet as the Lazarus sketches are identical to those of Christ in the *Raising of Lazarus*.

¹²³ As stated by Cecil Gould, in *The Raising of Lazarus by Sebastiano del Piombo*, the psychological depth of Michelangelo's figures imbued his work with a profundity that no one could rival, 19.

Lazarus contains many aspects that seem to reveal Sebastiano's struggle with the composition.¹²⁴ His challenge was to combine a multi-figured design with unequal diagonals coming from both sides and converging at the center, and figures in dramatic poses and actions comparable to what Raphael had done in the recently finished *Lo Spasimo*.¹²⁵

For Raphael, on the other hand, *Lo Spasimo* became a point of departure, in the sense that he, too, had to compete with his most recent work. *Lo Spasimo* was the catalyst in the conception of his next major altarpiece, the *Transfiguration*. An early drawing for the original composition of the *Transfiguration*, now in Vienna [Fig. 33], shows that Raphael changed his mind as he had done before with the composition for the *Entombment*. Moreover, the *Transfiguration* attests to the artist's preoccupation with its subject matter and required spacial dimensions. He could not surpass *Lo Spasimo* by simply painting a traditional *Transfiguration*. Customarily, the scene was depicted with only four or five figures as in Bellini's *Transfiguration* [Fig 34], and such an image could never surpass the multi-figure action of *Lo Spasimo* or the *Raising of Lazarus*. *Lo Spasimo*'s dimensions were new and without precedent in Italian art.¹²⁶ It seems reasonable to assume that the choice for the elongated vertical altarpiece was not Raphael's but rather that of the patron who commissioned the work for a late Gothic-

¹²⁴ Michael Hirst points out that the figure of Martha fades away in the darkness of the background. The figures of some of the people reflect Sebastiano's attempt to create what Leonardo had created in the *Adoration of the Magi*, where the contrast of young and old, handsome and gruesome come together to create an added realism that surpassed anything done before. Here, they are more like portraits and do not accomplish the same realism that was created by Leonardo.

¹²⁵ It is very interesting that scholars comment ever so briefly about the fact that Sebastiano must have been looking at *Lo Spasimo*.

¹²⁶ Gardner von Teuffel, "Lo Spasimo di Sicilia," 272; Jacob Burckhardt, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Italy*, edited and translated by Peter Humfrey, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 191.

style church. With the *Transfiguration*, Raphael faced similar architectural constraints. The shape and dimensions of the altarpieces not only show that Sebastiano looked back at *Lo Spasimo* to resolve the monumentality of his composition, but also that Raphael diverged from the traditional iconography of the Transfiguration in order to accommodate the dimensions of the pictorial space. Thus, Raphael went back to the biblical text and linked several scenes together and in so doing, the artist departed from the classical Renaissance style, creating an innovative and complex narrative.

In the biblical account of the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8) a voice from the cloud that hovers over the apostles tells them, “This is my Son, the Beloved, Listen to him.” Jesus and the two apostles proceed to come down from the mountain where the transfiguration occurred and they question Christ about Elijah, one of the prophets in the vision (Mark 9:9-13). When they reach the bottom, they come across a crowd with a father holding an epileptic, demonic child, and Christ becomes angry at the inability of the apostles to save him. He then says, “Faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? ...Bring him to me.” (Mark 9:14-29). He saves the child after the father professes his faith. Thus, the scene in Raphael’s *Transfiguration*, like the biblical passages it represents, is related on a theological level to the miracle of the *Raising of Lazarus*. Both touch upon questions of faith. The *Raising of Lazarus* points out Martha’s lack of faith, in questioning Christ’s ability to revive Lazarus after he had been dead for four days (John 11:33-34), and the *Transfiguration* examines the faith of the disciples as well as that of the possessed child’s father. This line of thinking on Raphael’s part attests to the artist’s ingenuity since he combined the two distinct events together in order to emphasize one didactic message.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ He likely realized that the passages would not only satisfy his desire to surpass Sebastiano’s multi-figure composition, but also work to establish a common ground with the companion piece. Sidney Freedberg, *Raphael, Michelangelo and others, Raphael and his contemporaries in Rome*, 15; Kathleen

Scholars have called the *Transfiguration* the announcement of the end of the High Renaissance.¹²⁸ However, the writer of this essay believes that while the *Transfiguration* is a complete departure from High Renaissance ideals, *Lo Spasimo* already signaled the beginning of the end in many respects. In *Lo Spasimo*, Raphael depicted a religious narrative in the most dramatic and palpable form. Never before had this been done in an altarpiece, and according to Vasari, *Lo Spasimo* became famous as soon as it was completed.¹²⁹ What made this altarpiece so unusual and influential in 1516, besides its having been painted by the most sought-out court painter in Rome, was Raphael's transformation of the subject from a horizontal *predella* to a vertical monumental altarpiece. By doing so, Raphael altered the character of his image. *Lo Spasimo* shows Raphael's limitless ability to assimilate and manipulate previous forms. This enabled him to incorporate the narrative form of his history paintings in the *stanze* with the religiosity required for an altarpiece in a most penetrating, palpable, and innovative way.

Weil Garris Posner, *Leonardo and Central Italian Art: 1515-1550* (New York: New York University Press, 1974) 10.

¹²⁸ Kathleen Weil Garris Posner, *Leonardo and Central Italian Art: 1515-1550*, 10.

¹²⁹ Vasari, *Le Vite*, IV, 348; J. Burckhardt, *The altarpiece in Renaissance Italy*, 191.

CHAPTER 4

LO SPASIMO

Raphael's *Lo Spasimo* is a painting for which only one certain preparatory drawing has been identified [Fig. 35] and very limited information has been found regarding its patronage.¹³⁰ However, despite the relative lack of documentation, its innovative qualities and the impact it had on other artists can still be appreciated. According to most scholars, Raphael's work in the *stanze* reveals the artist development of a dramatic, narrative style.¹³¹ It was in the *stanze* that Raphael started to articulate his figures around circular voids, which added dramatic force to his compositions.¹³² This same artistic vocabulary would be used to create *Lo Spasimo*, which became the pivotal altarpiece in one of the most renowned competitions of the sixteenth century and the catalyst for the artist's last masterpiece, the *Transfiguration*. Furthermore, with his bold manipulation of the image of Christ carrying the Cross, Raphael helped the patron, Jacopo Basilico, recreate specific sites from the most sacred path, the *Via Dolorosa*, in the Kalsa quarter of Palermo. Raphael enacted in paint both the fourth Station of the Cross and fourth Sorrow of the Virgin, sacred moments on the Passion (on this road in Jerusalem).

¹³⁰ Although Gardner Von Teuffel, "Lo Spasimo," 272, and Spadaro, *Raffaello e Lo Spasimo di Sicilia*, 7, state that there are three preparatory drawings, only one is done by Raphael, the other two are by Giulio Romano. Please see chapter 2 for Patronage, pg 9.

¹³¹ Frances Ames-Lewis, *The Draftsman Raphael* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986) 5; David Rosand, "Divinità di cosa dipinta," 143-164.

¹³² Pope-Hennessy, *Raphael*, 100.

Raphael's ability was to synthesize Roman officially sanctioned imagery with scriptural text and popular devotion, and in *Lo Spasimo* this aspect of the artist's ingenuity is clearly visible.¹³³ The artist imaginatively demonstrated not only his innovative transformation of an already well known iconography -- Christ carrying the Cross -- but also his prowess in terms of the close competition that existed among Michelangelo, Sebastiano del Piombo and himself. It was in this competitive environment that Raphael rethought the form and function of the altarpiece and transformed a traditional horizontal composition to a narrative of vertical and monumental proportions. Using the subject Christ carrying the Cross for its processional arrangement, and perhaps also influenced by Dürer's *Bearing of the Cross* from the *Large Passion*, 1497-1499 [Fig. 36], Raphael was able to include themes described by the patron in the painting's iconography.¹³⁴ The patron's devotion was to the Sorrows of the Virgin, but more specifically to her pang or agony in the Fourth Sorrow, which was precisely the image the patron wanted represented in *Lo Spasimo*. Brilliantly, Raphael utilizes the subject matter and its connection with the Stations of the Cross to focus our attention, first and foremost, on the physical and spiritual journey that Christ underwent during His Passion.¹³⁵ The addition of an event from the Sorrows of the Virgin underscores the pathos to which we are encouraged to respond, and as such Raphael delivered a palpably dramatic religious narrative.

¹³³ Ingrid D. Rowland, *The Culture of the High Renaissance*, (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 239.

¹³⁴ Dürer's *Bearing the Cross* has some details that we also see in Raphael's *Lo Spasimo*, and perhaps it is the similarity of these details that prompts scholars to say that Dürer and other Northern sources were Raphael's inspiration for his *Lo Spasimo*. See footnote 23.

¹³⁵ Susan D. Shantz, *The Stations of the Cross: A Calculated Trap?*, 25.

However, Raphael encountered a problem in depicting the fainted Virgin in the image of Christ carrying the Cross, as he had previously done in the *predella* scene of the Colonna Altarpiece of 1505. In 1506, Tommaso De Vio had addressed the problem of the Virgin's fainting, stating that this could not have happened on the way to Calvary, and therefore could not be depicted.¹³⁶ At the same time that Jacopo Basilico was making his donation to the Olivetan order, de Vio became the master general of the Dominican order and special protégé of Julius II, who had approved the building of the church in Palermo. Tommaso de Vio, in his treatise, concluded that the Virgin was "Full of Grace," which would have sustained her through her sorrow and that, therefore, the title was not dignified enough for the Blessed Virgin, and the feast of the Spasimo was not canonical. However, since the feast was already a popular devotion among the lay people and confraternities, it could continue, but it would have to be known as the *Dolores* of the Virgin. The Dominicans, in fact, were the first to celebrate the feast of the "De Pietate Virginis." De Vio's treatise also made allowances for this ceremony to be instated by certain supplicants and requests for the indulgences of the feast of the Spasimo of the Blessed Virgin Mary.¹³⁷

Raphael in *Lo Spasimo* adhered to the limitations mandated by the Vatican and did not include the Virgin's fainting. At the same time, he complied with the patron's request by depicting her *spasimo* or pang of agony, intensified by the actions and attitude of the female figure in the right foreground. Raphael encapsulated the Stations of the Cross and patron's devotion to the Sorrows of the Virgin in the narrative, and reinforced

¹³⁶ See footnote 56.

¹³⁷ Helen S. Ettliger, "Raphael's *Lo Spasimo*: Its historical and iconographic background," 13, Ettliger questions the coincidence of the date of the writing of the treatise with Basilico's petition to the Pope to construct the church and to dedicate it to this feast. She adds that although there is no evidence that this 'occasion' is in reference to Basilico's petition, the lack of record for another request of the same kind leaves room for speculation. Perhaps De Vio had Basilico's petition in mind.

the dedication of the church for which it was intended, by highlighting the encounter between the fallen Christ and the sorrowful Mary. He illustrated the most poignant and important moment of the *storia*, so the viewer cannot help but feel the agony of Christ and share in the obvious pain and suffering of His mother.

It is important to emphasize that *Lo Spasimo* is organized not as a centralized icon but as a narrative that progresses both in time and space. In other words, Raphael asks the viewer to literally read the image as an event unfolding over time. The artist employed compositional schemes developed in the *stanze* to deliver the dramatic narrative, but also interpreted the images of other artists to emphasize specific points of the drama. For instance, Raphael chose the pose of the fallen Christ from a print of Lucas Van Leyden of *Christ Carrying the Cross* from 1515 [Fig. 37] to add emphatic meaning to the direction of his narrative. This print was a recent arrival in Rome when Raphael was designing *Lo Spasimo*; it incidentally also serves as the *terminus post quem* just as Agostino Veneziano's print of the painting of 1517 serves as its *ante quem*.¹³⁸

The narrative begins at the upper right hand of the pictorial space with a massive architectural opening that refers to the gates of Jerusalem. It is from these city gates that the procession to Calvary flows. Raphael alters the traditional direction, left to right, of narrative paintings to communicate two essential ideas about Christ's journey. First, the viewer is made to understand that Christ is leaving the city. He is moving from right to left, reversing the normal triumphant imagery of Christ's Passion. Many images depict Christ entering into Jerusalem as the prelude to His Passion; one example would be Duccio's *Entry into Jerusalem* of 1308-11 [Fig. 38] from the reverse of the *Maestà* in the Siena Cathedral. In this scene, Christ and the procession move upward and left to right

¹³⁸ Thomas Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance, Art and Magnificence*, 221.

as they enter the city gates. The gates are compositionally in the same place as the gates in *Lo Spasimo*, the upper right of the scene. In contrast to Dürer's *Christ Bearing of the Cross*, the gates are set on the far left of the field, emphasizing the expulsion of Christ from the city. In both, however, the direction of His movement remains left to right.

Secondly, by keeping the door in the same place as Duccio's image of Christ entering the city, and using the reversal of direction, Raphael clearly marked the succession of Christ's Passion, highlighting specific moments as they unfold in front of the viewer. Raphael's use of Lucas Van Leyden's print indicates his attempt to add meaning to the reversed direction of his image as it clearly states that Christ is leaving the city. Furthermore the reversal of direction in *Lo Spasimo* underscores an almost subconscious awareness of disorder implied by the reversal of the natural order of things. Furthermore, the preeminence of these gates reinforced the connection with Palermo; the gates stand in close proximity to the events and church that the patron knew was dedicated to the Sorrows of the Virgin in Jerusalem. The Porta Giudicaria in Jerusalem corresponded to the so-called Greek doors that allowed entry to Basilico's property in the Kalsa Quarter [Fig 2 and 5].

A group of soldiers on horseback come out of the gates behind their leader, whose elaborate military costume suggests an identification of Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator of equestrian rank. The white horse, a sign of distinction, marks his status.¹³⁹ The turbaned man by his right is one of the Jewish priests who brought Jesus to Pilate (John 18:28-40).¹⁴⁰ Raphael places these two figures just outside the gates to signal the

¹³⁹ "Pontius Pilate." The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume XII, 1911 online article, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12083c.htm>.

¹⁴⁰ The turbaned man is an example of how modern Raphael was, as Ingrid Rowland in *The Culture of the High Renaissance*, 91, tells us that turbans were in vogue at this time. Raphael's ingenuity can be appreciated in this small detail because it brings the painting closer to the contemporary way of life, thus creating a close relationship between viewer and subject matter.

beginning of Christ's journey to Golgotha. According to the scriptures, Pilate interrogated Christ, asking him if he was king of the Jews, and Christ replied "it is you who say that I am a king..." (John 18:33-40). At this response, Pilate had a note written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek, "Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews," that was to be affixed at the top of the cross. When the Jewish priests voiced an objection, Pilate answered, "what I have written, I have written" (John 19:21-22). In Raphael's painting, Pilate holds what may first appear to be a wooden baton, but on closer inspection seems to be a papyrus scroll, a reference to the notice he had written. Pilate points the rolled-up papyrus at the cross carried by Christ, as if he were stating his response to the priests. From this dramatic introduction, the viewer's eye is directed to the group of figures beneath the extending arm of Pilate, which is an ingenious and subtle way to indicate Pilate's authority and the lack of power the holy women have in the events that will unfold.

Among this group of people the viewer first sees the highlighted figure of the Virgin as she has fallen to her knees and extends her arms toward the figure of Christ on her right in an attempt to touch Him. Her pose of pain and suffering is emphasized by the concern of the male figure behind her who watches over the encounter and female figure on Mary's left who supports her by the waist and holds up the Virgin's veil with her right hand. Raphael reworked previous figures to make the Virgin's pain and suffering evident without displaying "the corruption of her flesh" (her fainting), the action deemed unacceptable by Tommaso de Vio. Instead, he recalled his *Entombment* of 1507 not only to foreshadow the ultimate death of Christ and suffering of His mother, but to emphasize the pain and agony at the moment of their encounter on the way to Golgotha.

Raphael's use of figures from the *Entombment* is an inventive way to literally and figuratively frame the image of the most poignant moment between Mother and Son at the low foreground of the pictorial space. Literally, the viewer knows that the moments unfolding in this image are specific moments of the Stations of the Cross, which are part of the entire Passion of Christ. Figuratively, one sees the image of Pilate and the Jewish priest as symbolic antecedents to Christ's Passion. The eye follows the unfolding moments, through their gestures, arriving at the encounter of Mother and Son, which is displayed at the bottom foreground of the pictorial space. The narrative continues upward culminating with Calvary, the place of His ultimate death. Evoking to the *Entombment* by the pose of the Virgin and her attendants helps bring to mind the last moments of His Passion, the Lamentation and Entombment. Only in these final occurrences is the Virgin allowed to faint in total despair as the many images belonging to this pictorial tradition indicate.

We know that Raphael altered the subject matter of a Lamentation [Fig 22, 23] into an Entombment [Fig 24, 25] by the many preparatory drawings for his 1507 *Entombment* [Fig 20]. It is also evident from these preparatory drawings that the artist was already trying to convey action and drama in this early altarpiece. He was also attempting to emulate the work of Michelangelo. He wanted to add this same dynamism to this new commission, in order to surpass his rivals. In the many drawings for the *Entombment*, we see images of figures supporting the Virgin and expressing concern for her well being. In one of the preparatory drawing, now in the Louvre [Fig. 23], the standing figure of the holy woman lifts the Virgin's veil to provide her with fresh air and reveal her face. The kneeling woman to the Virgin's left holds her by the waist in order to prevent her from falling against Christ, who lies in her lap. The attention of the figures

surrounding both mother and son is direct to her apparent fainting. In the final image of the *Entombment* [Fig 20], the standing holy woman holding the Virgin seems to be more preoccupied with the men who struggle with the figure of the dead Christ, while the other two holy women are concerned with the Virgin. Raphael reworked the figures in these drawings and in the final painting to create the representation of the holy woman at the right foreground of *Lo Spasimo*.

In *Lo Spasimo*, Raphael combined the figure in the drawing who lifts the veil with the figure in the final painting who holds up the Virgin. The figure reaches to the Virgin's veil and lifts it up with her right hand, revealing Mary's face to the spectator, and she supports the Virgin by holding her around the waist. She is neither standing nor sitting this time, but kneeling, allowing her greater dynamic force than that of the figures from which she was modeled. She is closer to the Virgin and looks directly at her. Her profile shows how similar her hairstyle is to that of the figure holding the Virgin in the *Entombment*, and they are both wearing a green diadem. Furthermore, Raphael foreshadows the Lamentation, the moment of the Virgin's great sorrow that will cause her to faint. She extends her arms trying to touch Him with her hand right below his armpit. The Virgin's posture alludes to her embrace of His body that she will do in the Lamentation. It is His death that will cause her to swoon in despair, and she will faint at the inevitable moment of Christ's entombment.

It is interesting to point out that although almost ten years separates these two altarpieces, the portrayal of St. John and Mary Magdalene bear an uncanny resemblance to the figures of the same characters in *Lo Spasimo*. Moreover, the pose of St. John in the *Entombment* is the same as that of a figure sometimes identified as Federigo II, Duke of

Mantua in the *School of Athens* fresco.¹⁴¹ In the *School of Athens*, this figure looks with amazement at what Pythagoras is doing [Fig. 39], and it is with this same intensity and amazement that John looks at the encounter of Virgin and Christ. With his pose, Raphael alludes to the Pythagoreans and splendidly delivers yet another didactic message, the importance of discovering that a higher order is part of our spiritual nature.¹⁴² In addition, it is John's gaze that directs the viewer's eye to focus on the central figures, which are of mother and son in the most poignant moment of the composition.

Christ's figure is under the cross and surrounded by the darkness of the ground as He looks at His mother. Christ's countenance faces both the altar and viewer with his arm extending forward and firmly placed on top of a rock. Raphael's fallen Christ is in a pose reminiscent of depictions of Christ in Agony [Fig 40, 41]. It is said that Christ prayed and "in his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood" (Luke 22:44), and "he threw himself on the ground and prayed" (Mark 14:35). However, the direction of the pose is also reversed from previous poses of the same subject [Fig. 6, 41]. Raphael's intentions at this moment were brilliant, because by reversing the pose, the artist placed Christ's face in front of the viewer with the altar between them, and in so doing he created, in visual form, a physical connection between the altarpiece and faithful. When the mass was celebrated, all present would share in the consecration and elevation of the host and chalice and experience the mystical transformation of the body and blood of Christ while viewing the altarpiece. One would also participate in the pain and suffering of Christ on his way to Calvary, and more

¹⁴¹ Vasari, *Lives*, 2, 886; Marcia Hall, *Raphael's School of Athens*, (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 22.

¹⁴² D. W. Hamlyn, *Pelican History of Western Philosophy* (England: Penguin Books, 1987), 17-19.

importantly, it is at the moment of the Transubstantiation that the faithful were reminded of Christ's ultimate sacrifice.

Raphael depicts Christ's arm firmly placed on top of the rock, alluding symbolically to the church itself. First, the rock symbolizes not only the sacred ground of the Mount of Olives creating the pathos of Christ's agony as He kneels in a semblance of supplication, but also to the church as a whole, proclaiming again that the church was built upon Peter, the rock. Keeping in mind the religious order for which the painting was commissioned, one can appreciate Raphael's systematic way of thinking. The Olivetan cloister at Monte Oliveto was named in memory of Christ's agony and as a perpetual reminder of the life of sacrifice and expiatory penance the founders had undertaken. By having all these images that allude to various passages of Christ's Agony in the Garden, the altarpiece becomes a clear statement, depicted in symbolic yet discernible ways, that in *Lo Spasimo* help elevate the Olivetan order, church, patron and artist.

At this point, the viewer experiences the gravity of the moment. One sees the figure of Christ fallen under the cross, as His gaze is directed toward his mother who is surrounded and supported by the holy women. Christ's face reveals an expression of a calm and quiet sadness that conveys humility with a controlled stoicism as he encounters His mother. His attitude and the painful representation of his face dripping with sweat and blood emphasize his desolation.¹⁴³ Raphael achieves a remarkable duality here; Christ appears simultaneously divine and human in contrast to His mother's devastated and helpless action of distress. Raphael created yet another duality by the use of light. He introduced a light source that comes from the left side of the pictorial space and highlights the cross and face of Christ. The viewer can see that Christ is between the

¹⁴³ Oberhuber, *Raphael The Paintings*, 216.

cross and darkness of the ground. However, the sign of eternal hope is depicted by the action of Simon the Cyrene, who stands directly above Christ lifting the cross. The darkness of the earth and rock on which Christ firmly rests his hand symbolizes human sin and chaos. This is in contrast to the highlighted area of Christ's face and cross immediately above him, symbolizing the hope brought to humankind by Simon's lifting of the cross as if it were the top of a tomb from where Christ will rise redeeming mankind of its sins.

Raphael reworked the figure of Aristotle in the *School of Athens* [Fig. 42] for the figure of Simon. Each looks to the right as he moves forward. Both figures are indicating directions; Aristotle is pointing down to the matters of earth, symbolizing his departure from Platonic idealism, while the gaze of Simon directs the viewer toward Golgotha. Just as Aristotle focuses upon the physical realm, Simon's arms, extending down to hold the cross, emphatically point to the suffering inflicted upon Christ, which is a human experience and in essence a "matter of earth." The flexing muscles of his arms show Simon's exertion as he lifts the cross away from the fallen Christ. It is through Simon's forceful movements that Raphael communicated the human aspect of Christ's suffering and ultimate death. His gaze also leads the viewer to the figures on his right. The man with the lance, the rump of the horse and the receding group of people on the road to Calvary visible at the top of the pictorial space serve to connect the central composition to the poignant culmination of the narrative. However, before our gaze travels in the direction of the receding procession, the action of the man with the menacing lance at the immediate right of Simon the Cyrene arrests our eyes. One is compelled to look at his action and that of the *repoussoir* figure next to him.

This figure at the far left of the pictorial space pulls Christ by the waist with a rope. Raphael reversed his pose from the stance of the figure in the fresco of the *Judgment of Solomon* [Fig. 43]. The figure's pose stops the diagonal movement coming from the top right to the bottom left of the composition, preventing the spectator from leaving the pictorial space. It is the figure's strong left arm, continuing in line with its firmly set left leg, that arrests the motion. The figure's left side is in contrast to the action of its right side. While his right leg, extending backward, leads the viewer's eye back to the center foreground and the main protagonists, his right hand holds the rope used to pull Christ by the waist. His pose and action serve not only compositionally to stop the spectator's eye, but also to remind us of the story of Solomon's judgment.¹⁴⁴ The judgment involves two mothers, one who would rather give up her own child than see him die and the other who keeps her claim despite the order to have him put to death by being cut in two (1Kings 3:16-28). Raphael's reference to this Biblical incident was deliberate and underscored his depiction of the man pulling Christ by the waist, indicating the halving of His body, and by Mary extending her arms in the same pose as the female figure in the *Judgment of Solomon*.¹⁴⁵ The viewer experiences painful emotions as the narrative is brought back to mind through Raphael's reuse of images from the story. The viewer understands with great sorrow that in *Lo Spasimo*, Christ, an innocent man, will be crucified, and his mother cannot prevent his death.

The dreadful sight of Christ being pulled by the rope adds anguish and despair to the scene and causes the immediate response of moving away from it. The way out is to follow the rope as it is drawn toward the road where the people are going to Calvary in

¹⁴⁴ The figure in the *Judgment of Solomon* holds the child with his left hand in contrast to the *repoussoir* figure who holds the rope in his right with the same upward movement. He is fully clothed as opposed to the half-nude figure in the *Judgment of Solomon*.

¹⁴⁵ Dussler, 44.

the background landscape. However, before one can continue on this road, the figure of the man with a lance intervenes between Simon and the *repoussoir* figure. The viewer is again stopped in order to study the figure's action, which compositionally and literally adds emphatic meaning to the narrative. The man with the lance is reminiscent of the figure with the sword in a study for the *Massacre of the Innocents* [Fig. 44]. In *Lo Spasimo*, this figure serves many purposes. He seems to be about to strike Christ, and as the viewer sees the point of the lance, the action of the figure right next to it, whose back is to the viewer, also becomes evident once again. The motion created by looking back and forth at these two figures is what brilliantly creates the dynamic interaction of the people in the foreground of the altarpiece. Raphael utilized not only the poses of the two figures but also the images associated with them from his previous work in a deliberate attempt to direct the viewer's eye and add drama to the story. The man with the lance is about to strike an innocent man, and his brutality is made explicit as it reminds us of the pose and intention of the figure in the *Massacre of the Innocents* who is trying to grab a child from his mother's arms in order to kill him. Again, the viewer is made to experience painful emotions, and the themes implied by the actions of both figures, the man with the lance and the *repoussoir* figure, are subtly yet powerfully reiterated – the plight of a mother trying to spare her child's life and the murder of innocents.

The man with the lance also helps redirect the viewer's attention back to the horse on the left, and then leading the eye to the tiny figures in the background who are traveling on the road to Calvary. Through them, the viewer encounters the somber and long road to Christ's ultimate death. The landscape, reminiscent of northern prototypes, is calm and still; yet already black clouds have gathered. The two trees on either side of the road frame the final destination far off on the horizon. From behind the horizon line,

the source of light is strong, and it encompasses the blue sky bringing the viewer's eye to the very top of the pictorial plane. As this light spreads over the firmament, it becomes calm and quiet, suggesting a feeling of serenity that the viewer understands as heaven or the promised gift that will be attained by Christ's sacrifice. It is with this play of light that Raphael demonstrates clearly the duality of heaven and earth. The light of the top of the pictorial space illustrates peaceful tranquillity in contrast to the chaotic movement in the lower half of the altarpiece where a second, unexplained source of light comes from the left. This is how Raphael intensified the drama of the encounter. That light reveals only Christ's face, placing the rest of his body in shadow and darkness, while illuminating the entire figure of the Virgin to whom the painting is dedicated, emphasizing her suffering. Raphael unites the luminous horizon line of the landscape in the background with the highlighted foreground by applying the same yellow hue in both spaces. The viewer's eye looks for and follows this hue which draws attention to the back of the landscape once again. The effect creates a sense of the long road Christ must travel. This is yet another duality that Raphael represents in *Lo Spasimo*. The calm and stillness of the landscape in the background or top of the pictorial space is deliberately contrasted to the chaotic and dramatic encounter portrayed in the dark foreground of the pictorial space. It is the space of the lower portion of the image that is shared with the viewer, where Christ is brought down by the sins of the world. The pain and suffering found in the lowest and darkest of places is only to be surmounted by his ultimate sacrifice – His death. Raphael uses the lower point of view and play of light to emphasize a didactic religious meaning in the altarpiece. The viewer observes that it is in the terrestrial realm that human sin caused Christ's greatest suffering. It is at this lower point in Christ's life as well as the lower point of view of the pictorial plane that the

viewer experiences the burden of the sacrifice. Nevertheless, through this same sacrifice the faithful will attain the 'light' that comes with eternal life as promised by Golgotha depicted at the top of the pictorial plane and the luminous light behind the horizon. Raphael's demonstration of modal and systematic thinking culminates with his *Transfiguration* as he used the light again to differentiate the terrestrial and celestial areas of its drama.¹⁴⁶ However, it is in *Lo Spasimo* that Raphael planted the seed for the dualities created by his use of light, while added a definite palpable dynamism to his narrative.

As the viewer travels along the road to Calvary, one cannot help but understand Raphael's greatest achievement in creating the drama of Basilico's devotion in *Lo Spasimo*. He considered the subject matter and through a rich narrative created a complex *storia*. It is Raphael's harmonic genius at its best that enabled him to incorporate some of his own previous images to add emphatic meaning to the figures and create the drama of *Lo Spasimo*. Raphael used a dynamic composition that is emphasized by the diagonals coming from the top of both corners to the center lower foreground as well as the diagonal lines that revert back to the top or central background of the pictorial space. He did so in order to break away from the static pageantry of the procession as in the previous images of Christ Bearing the Cross and to create a dynamic representation, which captured a moment in time with the climactic and poignant messages in the very front of the altarpiece. Inspired by Alberti's treatise, Raphael in his own time artistically challenged tradition with his penultimate painting, *Lo Spasimo*. It became a model for other artists and their work. It was this innovative style that bridged his already exceptional altarpiece of 1507, *The Entombment*, to the more evolved and compelling *Transfiguration*.

¹⁴⁶ Hall, *Color and Meaning Practice and Theory in Renaissance Painting*, 115.

CONCLUSION

Scholars have called *Lo Spasimo* “effective and economical,” and what they seem to be referring to is the way Raphael varied his techniques and procedures during the course of his career¹⁴⁷. Francis Ames-Lewis mentions not only how Raphael reverted at times to a graphic style or method that he had exploited earlier but also his development of a new technical handling as he encountered the challenge of a new artistic problem¹⁴⁸. Scholars seem to suggest that the economy of means in the case of *Lo Spasimo* is the result of Raphael’s use of his own previous images. He transformed them to add to the poignancy of the important moment of this particular narrative -- the encounter of Mother and Son. However, that point of view minimizes Raphael’s ingenuity and *sprezzatura*. One must look at Raphael’s bold transformation of his previous work and deliberate placement of his figures not as mere “effectiveness” but an innovative re-use of his own compositions. It is the careful transformation of his own figures with every visual detail relating to a literal detail that keeps the narrative flowing and emphasizes its drama. Thus, by using figures that add to the dramatic complexity of the narrative, and by creating a duality within the pose of Christ, Raphael asks the faithful to participate directly in this moment as if they were in the company of hallowed beings. Raphael encapsulated and condensed the human drama of the Passion into one poignant moment: the encounter of Mother and Son. This satisfied the patron’s devotion, the symbolic

¹⁴⁷ Ames Lewis, 19.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 19.

meaning of the order, and the Vatican dictum, as well as the reformation the Olivetan order was undergoing at the time.¹⁴⁹

In addition, this altarpiece helped the patron recreate the *Via Dolorosa* on his property. Basilico's church, Santa Maria dello Spasimo, was symbolically in the same location as the fourth Station of the Cross. The faithful would have the painting as a reminder of Christ's agony as he traveled this painful path, and they would experience His torment while gazing at His mother in great sorrow. Although, the faithful witness so much grief and sorrow, the promise of eternal salvation comes through the second duality of the painting. Set far away in the background or high view-point, the light of heaven fills the viewer with hope.

Raphael's innovation was his depiction of a visual chronology of Christian dogma in a single pictorial space. It provided the patron, indeed all Rome with different ways of relating a *storia*, one that embraced the rhetoric of the time. This dynamism would be pursued by his competitor, Sebastiano del Piombo, whose work *The Raising of Lazarus* indicates the struggle Sebastiano had in emulating *Lo Spasimo*. It was *Lo Spasimo* that inspired Sebastiano to attempt to create his multi-figure altarpiece that, in the end, only pointed out how difficult it became for the artist to combine Raphael's dynamic composition with Michelangelo's massive and sculptural figures. The competition as such left Raphael the uncontested victor.

Finally, by using figures of his recently finished work, Raphael emphasized how great his achievements were, not only as an artist but also as a courtier. A courtier, in the Renaissance, was a person of great knowledge of all things, and in this single composition Raphael demonstrates his great knowledge and his *sprezzatura*. More importantly, *Lo Spasimo* was the catalyst for his last work, *The Transfiguration*, which

¹⁴⁹ Sundstrom, 155-172.

announced to the world that the classically balanced narrative codified in his paintings less than a decade earlier, was no longer Raphael's goal. Ironically, this message was delivered as he lay in his tomb. Nevertheless, *Lo Spasimo* gave the world of art a new language, and in so doing, Raphael's *cosa meravigliosa* aesthetically and religiously has transcended time.

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ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1. **Raphael**, *Christ Bearing the Cross (Lo Spasimo di Sicilia)*, 1515-16, oil on panel, 318 x 229 cm; signed RAPHAEL URBINAS. Prado, Madrid.

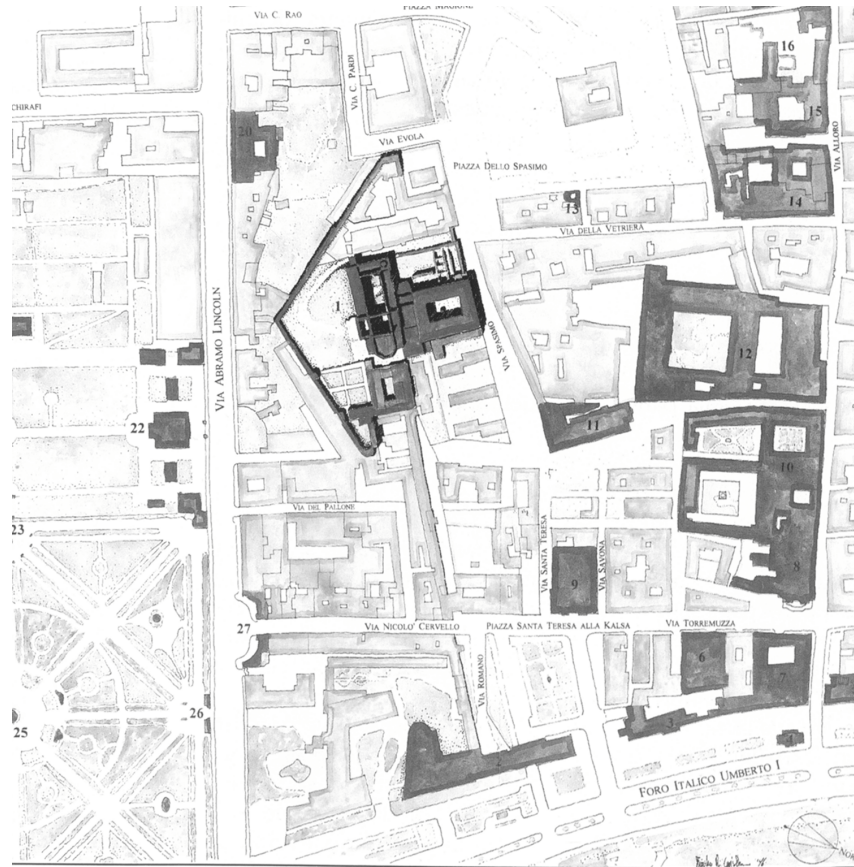


Fig. 2. Modern map of urban zone showing the complex of S. Maria dello Spasimo and surrounding fortifications. (adapted from La Fisca, and Palazzo, Giovanni. *Santa Maria dello Spasimo*. 1997, p. 17).

Legend

1. The complex of S. Maria dello Spasimo and its bastion
2. The Greek doors (Porta dei Greci)
3. The city wall
4. Music hall
5. Wall of the infidels
6. Old church of San Mattia Noviziato dei Crociferi
7. Gioieni Petrulla Palace
8. Church and Convent of the Virgin of Mercy
9. Church of S. Teresa
10. Abatellis Palace
11. Hospital of Bianchi



Fig. 3. **Albrecht Dürer**, *The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin*.
 c.1496-1497. Oil on panel. Central panel. Alte
 Pinakothek, Munich, Germany. Side panels.
 Dresden Gallery, Dresden, Germany.

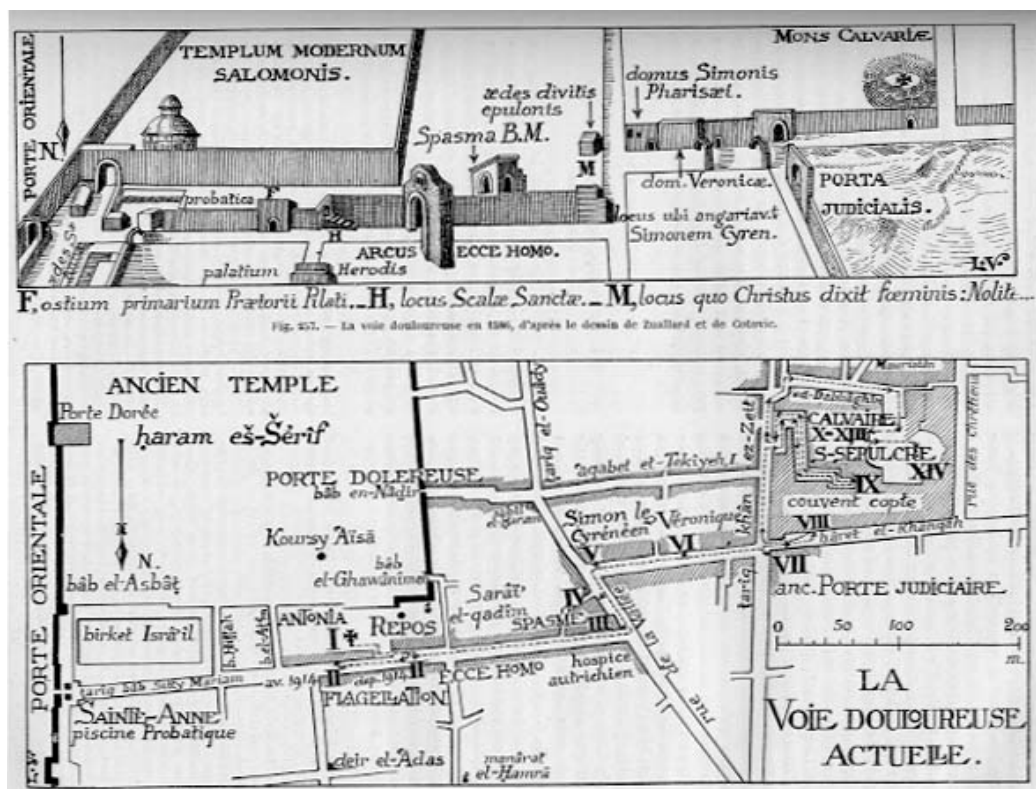


Fig. 4. Map of the Via Dolorosa adapted from *Jérusalem: recherches de topographie, d'archéologie, et d'histoire*, II, p. 627.



Fig. 5. **Matteo Florimi**, Map of Palermo, (1577-1581); indicating with the arrow the complex of Santa Maria dello Spasimo. It also shows the Greek Doors as number 54. Adapted from La Fisca, and Palazzo, Giovanni. *Santa Maria dello Spasimo*. 1997, p. 4.

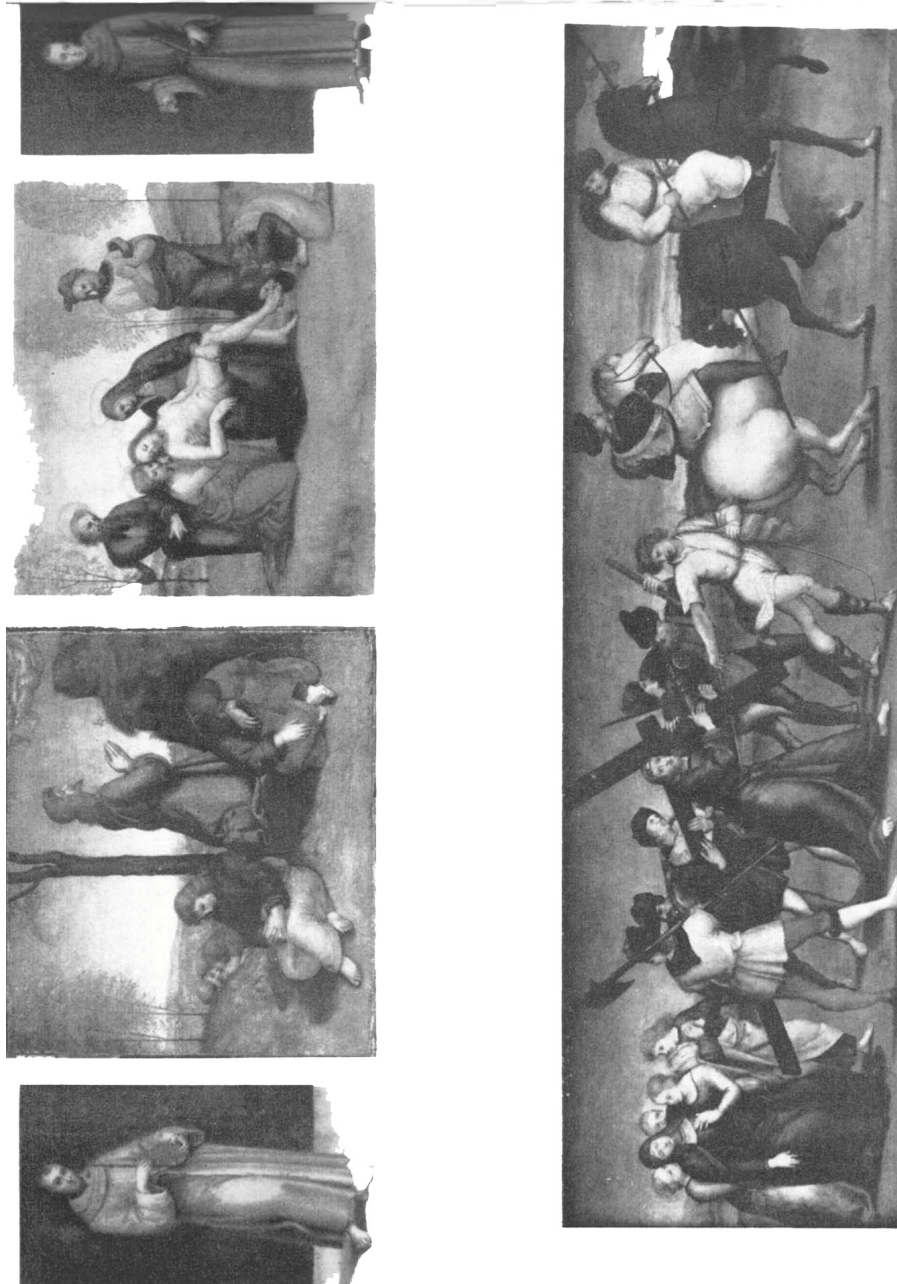


Fig. 6. **Raphael**, *Predella* sections of the *Colonna Altarpiece*, c. 1505, Oil in panel, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Fig. 7. **Sodoma**, *Christ Bearing His Cross*, 1505-1508, fresco, Monte Oliveto Maggiore, Siena.



Fig. 8. **Raphael**, *The Transfiguration*. c.1519-1520. Oil on panel. Pinacoteca Apostolica Vaticano, Rome.



Fig. 9. **Sebastiano del Piombo**, *Raising of Lazarus*, Oil on canvas, transferred from wood, 381 x 289.6 cm. National Gallery, London.



Fig. 10. **Sebastiano del Piombo**, *Study after the antique*. Pinoteca Ambrosiana, Milan.



Fig. 11. **Sebastiano del Piombo**, *Death of Adonis*, c. 1512, *Oil on canvas*, 189x285 cm. Uffizi, Florence.



Fig.12. **Michelangelo**, *Judith and Holofernes*, 1508-12. Sistine Chapel, Vatican, Rome.



Fig.13. **Sebastiano del Piombo**, *Pietà*, c. 1516. Museo Civico, Viterbo.



Fig. 14. **Michelangelo**, *Pietà*, 1498-1500, Marble, height 68 ½",
Saint Peter's, Vatican, Rome.

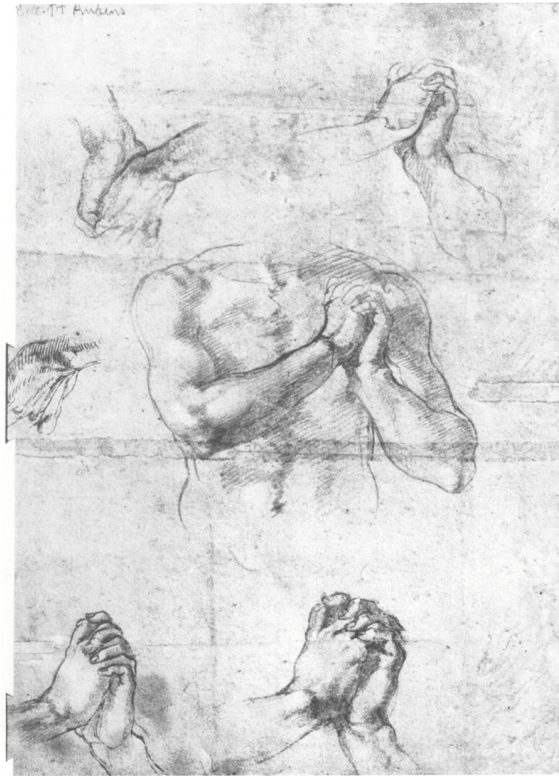


Fig. 15. **Michelangelo**, *Studies for a Pietà*.
Albertina, Vienna.



Fig. 16. **Michelangelo**, *Delphic Sibyl*, 1508-12, Fresco,
Sistine Chapel, Vatican, Rome.

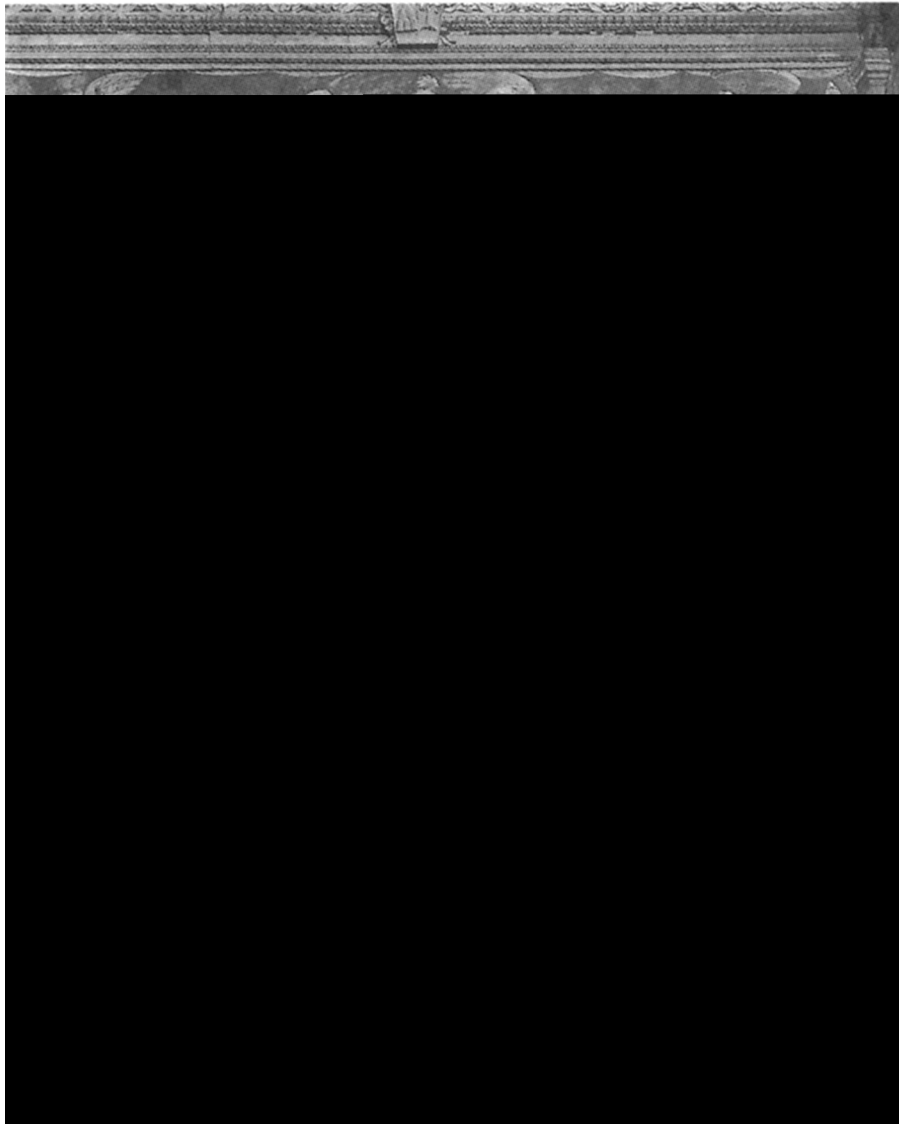


Fig.17. Santa Maria della Pace, Chigi Chapel. Rome.



Fig.18. **Raphael**, *Pietà*, The Louvre.



Fig. 19. **Raphael**, *Madonna Enthroned with Saints*; in the lunette *God the Father*, *Colonna Altarpiece*, 1504-1505. Tempera on wood. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

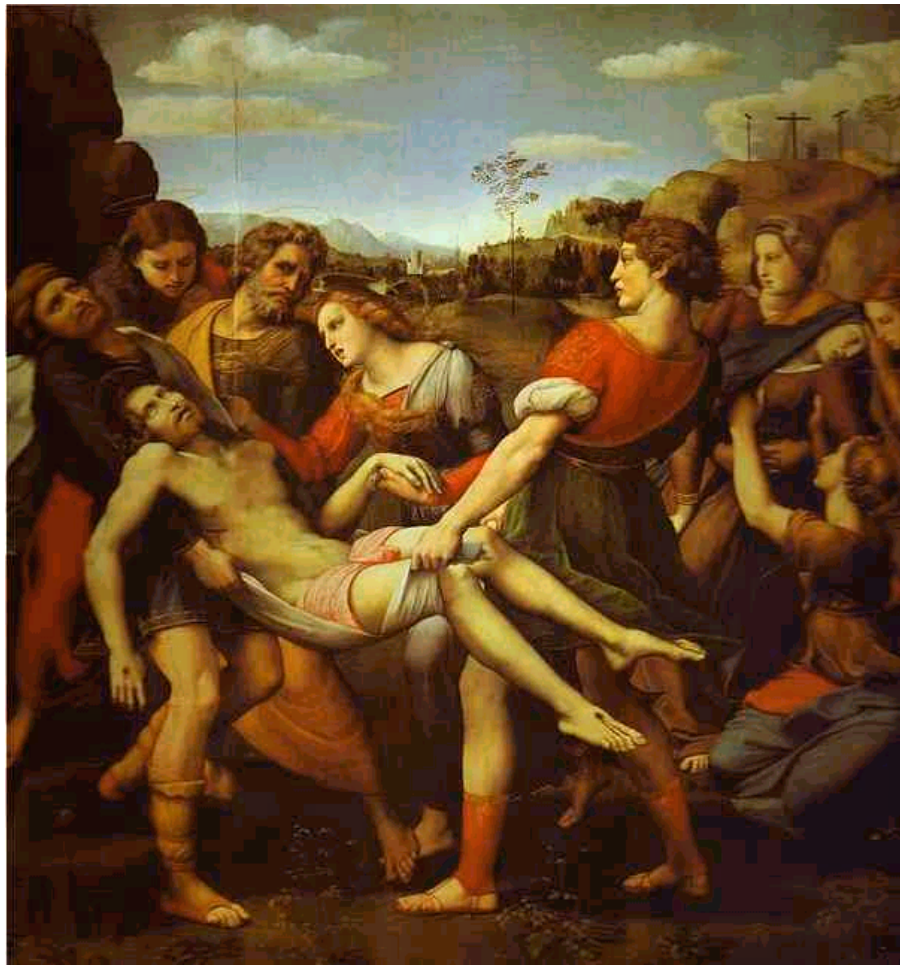


Fig. 20. **Raphael.** *Entombment.* 1507. Oil on panel. Museo Galleria Borghese, Rome.



Fig. 21. **Mantegna.** *The Deposition*, Engraving, Uffizzi, Florence.



Fig. 22. **Raphael**, *Study for the Pieta*, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum.

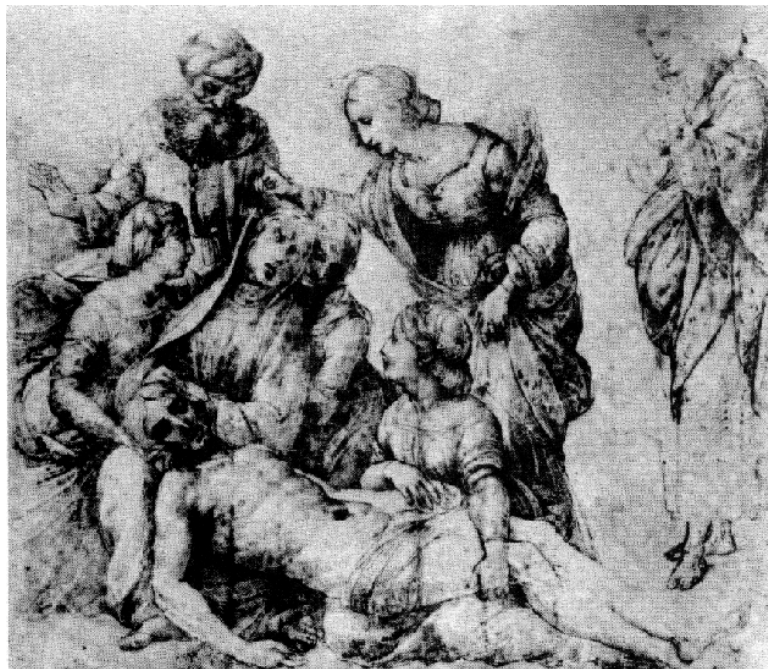
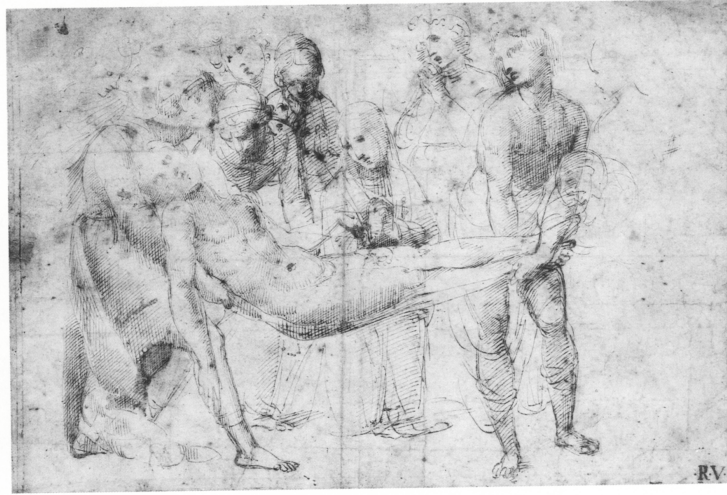


Fig. 23. **Raphael**, Final modello for the *Pietà*, pen and ink, over styles and black chalk underdrawing, Paris, Louvre.



37. Study for *The Entombment*. c. 1507. Ink on paper, 8¼ × 12¼". British Museum, London

Fig. 24. **Raphael**, *Study for the Entombment*, ink on paper, London, British Museum.



Fig. 25. **Raphael**, *Study for the Entombment*, London British Museum.



Fig. 26. **Aristotile da Sangallo**, Copy after Michelangelo. *Battle of Cascina* cartoon, Holkham Hall, Earl of Leicester.

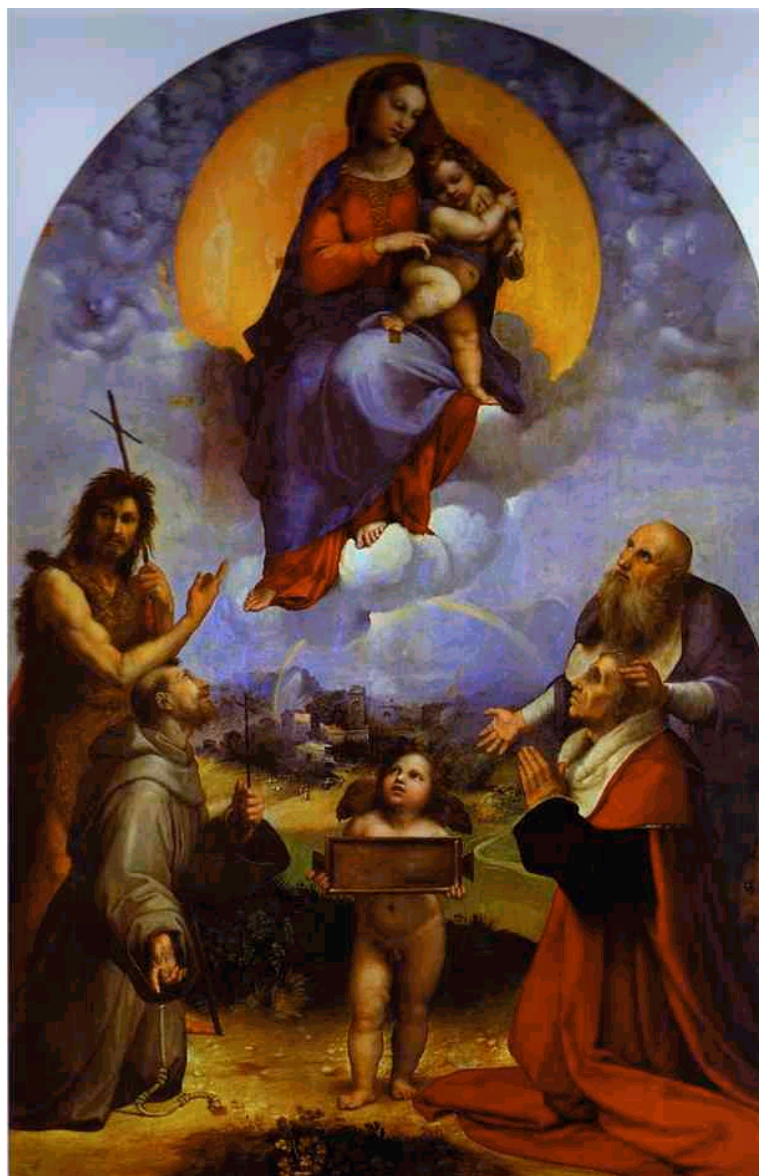


Fig. 27. **Raphael**, *Madonna di Foligno*, c. 1511-1512. Oil on pastel. Pinacoteca Apostolica Vaticano, Rome.



Fig. 28. **Raphael**, *Sistine Madonna*, 1512-13, Oil on canvas, 264 x 196 cm. Gemaldegalerie, Dresden, Germany.



Fig. 29. **Raphael**, *Santa Cecilia Altarpiece*, 1513-14, Oil on canvas, 220 x 136 cm. Pinoteca, Bologna.



Fig. 30. **Sebastiano del Piombo**, *Pietà*, 1516, Hermitage, St. Peterburg.

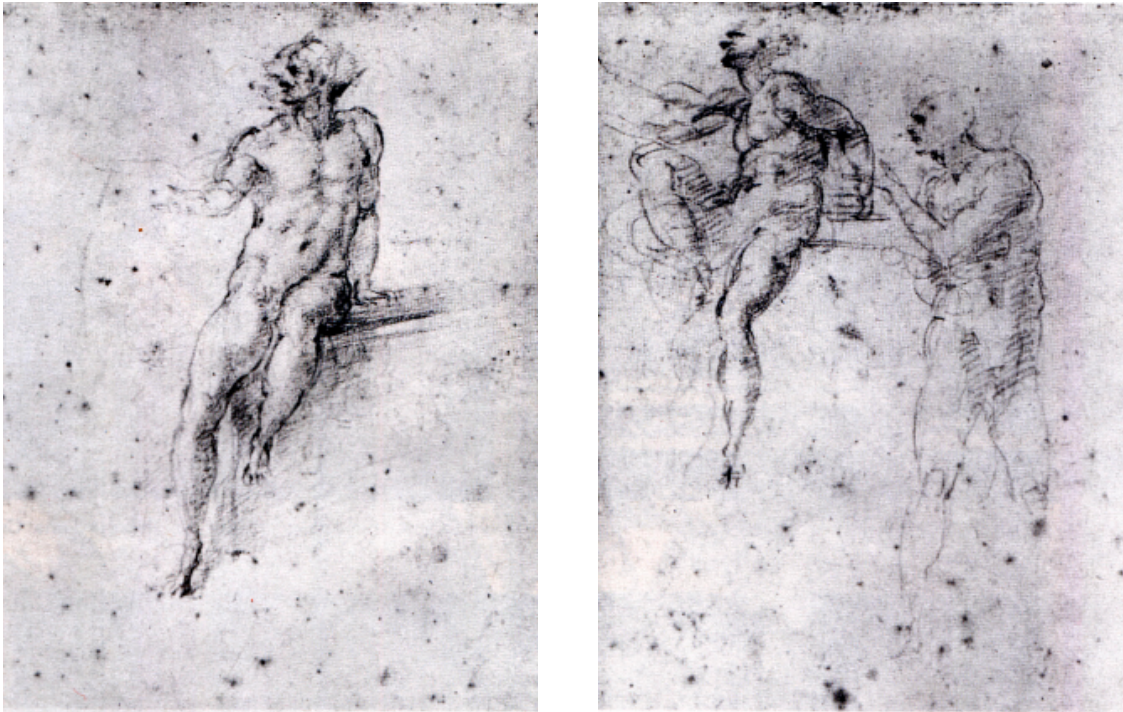


Fig. 31. **Michelangelo**, Studies for the *Raising of Lazarus*, Musée Bonnat, Bayonne.



Fig. 32. **Michelangelo**, Studies for the *Raising of Lazarus*, Musée Bonnat, Bayonne.



Fig. 33. **G.F. Penni**, copy after Raphael. *Modello for the Transfiguration*, Albertina, Vienna.



Fig. 35. **Raphael**, Study for *Lo Spasimo* (?), Albertina, Vienna.



Fig. 36. **Dürer**, *Bearing the Cross* from the *Large Passion*, 1497-1499. Woodcut.



Fig. 37. **Lucas Van Leyden**, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, 1515.



Fig. 38. **Duccio di Buoninsegna**, *Maestà* (back, central panel), *The Entry into Jerusalem*, 1308-11, Tempera on wood panel, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena.



Fig. 39. **Raphael**, detail of the *School of Athens*, fresco, Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican, Rome.



Fig. 40. **Dürer**, *Agony in the Garden* from *the Large Passion*, 1497, woodcut.



cat. no. 20

Fig. 41. **Lucas Van Leyden**, *Agony in the Garden* from the *Circular Passion*, 1509.



Fig. 42. **Raphael**, detail of the *School of Athens*, fresco, Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican Rome.



Fig. 43. **Raphael**, *The Judgment of Solomon* (ceiling panel). 1509-1511. Fresco. Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican, Rome.



Fig. 44. **Raphael**, Modello for the *Massacre of the innocents*,
Museum of fine Arts, Budapest.