

Finding fame: painting and the making of careers in Renaissance Italy

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The following studies in this collection address central issues about the design and function of works of art and they bring to light crucial findings concerning the appearance of works, their intended sites, the requirements of their owners and the import they held for their users. These are essential for understanding the meaning that works of art had in the world. It is worth noting, however, that the objects made by artists and artisans also had an important meaning for the professions of their makers: they were the materials that constructed their careers. By the end of the fifteenth century, works of art stood as much for their creators as for their purchasers. What this meant in practice is evident in the panel of the *Madonna di Loreto* altarpiece, now installed in the Medieval and Renaissance Galleries at the Victoria and Albert Museum (Fig. 1).¹ Pietro Perugino painted the altarpiece in 1507, when he was arguably at the height of his fame as one of the most important artists in Italy. Despite this, he took on the commission for a fee much lower, in real terms, than he commonly accepted.² The clients were the heirs of a Perugian carpenter, perhaps a former colleague, and this may explain the low payment. The manufacture of the work, however, reflects a higher level of attention than the cost might lead us to expect. In particular, aspects of the underdrawing, probably made from existing cartoons, were corrected freehand, and the relatively inexpensive pigments used to colour the robes of the Madonna and St Jerome were carefully glazed to look more expensive. This suggests that one of the requirements of fame was to turn out objects of excellence, whatever their price, and that Perugino was well aware that the works of art that his business produced reflected directly upon him: he could not afford to be associated with a cheap-looking product.

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¹ Carol Plazzotta *et al.*, 'Perugino's Virgin and Child with Saints Jerome and Francis for Santa Maria dei Servi, Perugia', *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 27 (2006), 72–95.

² See Michelle O'Malley, 'Perugino and the Contingency of Value', in Michelle O'Malley and Evelyn Welch (ed.), *The Material Renaissance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 106–30; Michelle O'Malley, 'Quality and the Pressures of Reputation: Rethinking Perugino', *Art Bulletin*, 89 (2007), 674–93.



Fig. 1 Pietro Perugino, *Madonna di Loreto*, c. 1507, oil on panel, 189.1 × 157.5 cm, London, National Gallery (© The National Gallery, London)

The production values of the *Madonna di Loreto* are evidence of one of the ramifications of fame, while the commission itself suggests the breadth of the human associations that painters, even painters to the elite, established in the period. But how did Perugino and other especially sought-after artists and artisans acquire their reputations and become well known in the first place? While much of the precise information about the dating, ownership and original location of works that is necessary for tracing the steps of the careers of artisans such as the tile designers, master woodworkers and silversmiths treated in this volume is now lost, such material often survives for painters, especially those with significant reputations in the late fifteenth century. The information allows us to speculate on the role key individuals and the works they commissioned played in the creation of artists' reputations and the launch of stellar careers.

This study considers the early careers of Alessandro Botticelli, Domenico Ghirlandaio and Pietro Perugino, who were to become among the most well-known painters in late fifteenth-century Italy, and it draws on our understanding of the importance of human relationships in all aspects of life in the Renaissance. It argues that connections among people – between individual patrons and potential patrons as well as between painters and particular clients – were crucial for the development of careers, and it contends that certain works, because of their ownership and often their site, directed the trajectory of each artist's professional life.

Central to this analysis are findings in Renaissance history and art history that underscore the cohesion of neighbourhoods across social levels, highlight the importance of networks for business and political advancement, and emphasize the complexity of social interaction in the period.³ The evidence is that networks worked dynamically: they crossed social divides and were mutually reciprocal. This suggests that tracing the networks behind works of art is a way toward understanding career development.

The ideas proposed here are necessarily speculative, but it is especially worth considering the early commissions of Botticelli, Ghirlandaio and Perugino because in 1481 they were awarded one of the most important jobs in fifteenth-century Italy: the painting of the Sistine Chapel walls. It was a commission that solidified their reputations and ensured their professional success. The same cannot be said with such force, though, of the fourth member of the team, the Florentine painter Cosimo Rosselli. While Rosselli produced a large body of work, he was never famous, neither before nor after the Sistine. For this reason, he provides a control for the study. He can aid in defining fame, and his relationships may help in understanding the route the Sistine painters followed to the papal commission.

ALESSANDRO BOTTICELLI (c.1445–1510)

Early in his career, Botticelli became embedded in a network of politically powerful Florentine clients. In 1470, after a few years of painting small panels for domestic devotion, he received his first public commission in Florence. It

³ Dale Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000); Patricia Lee Rubin, *Images and Identity in Fifteenth-century Florence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007); O'Malley and Welch, *Material Renaissance*; Dale Kent, 'The Dynamic Power in Cosimo de' Medici's Florence', in F. W. Kent, P. Simons, and J. C. Eade (eds.), *Patronage, Art and Society in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Melissa Bullard, 'Heroes and their Workshops: Medici Patronage and the Problem of Shared Agency', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 24 (1994) 179–98; Nicholas A. Eckstein, *The District of the Green Dragon* (Florence: Olschi, 1995); Tracey E. Cooper, 'Mecanatismo or Clientelismo? The Character of Renaissance Patronage', in David G. Wilkins and Rebecca L. Wilkins (eds.), *The Search for a Patron in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, (Lewiston NY, Queenstown, Ontario: Edwin Mellon Press, 1996); Dale Kent and F. W. Kent, *Neighbours and Neighbourhood in Renaissance Florence: The District of the Red Lion in the Fifteenth Century* (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1982); F. W. Kent, *Lorenzo de' Medici and the Art of Magnificence* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 55; Paul D. McLean, *The Art of the Network: Strategic Interaction and Patronage in Renaissance Florence* (Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

was to paint two panels that contributed to a set of seven images of the *Virtues* for the Mercanzia, the high commercial court of Florence.⁴ The commission came about through direct, high-level intervention, which was perhaps more complicated, more political and more dependent on webs of social connections than has generally been considered.

The importance of the Mercanzia in Florence's economic life, as well as the centrality and visibility of its palace, made the commission extremely prestigious, and the job was sought by many painters.⁵ Perhaps because their choice was wide, the magistrates went through a careful procedure in which they first commissioned only the single figure of *Charity* from Antonio Pollaiuolo (Fig. 2). They then appraised it, reviewed drawings he and other artists made for the remaining six figures, and actively considered the value of hiring numerous painters over one. After this thorough procedure, they re-employed Pollaiuolo, just before Christmas 1469. He was to complete the series in nine months. When nothing was forthcoming by the following June, Tommaso Soderini, one of the *operaii* overseeing the project, intervened specifically to cause the court to hire Botticelli to paint two of the outstanding Virtues. A terse entry in the Mercanzia's accounts is specific about Soderini's contravention of the magistrates' careful commissioning process.⁶

In 1470, Tommaso Soderini was among the most powerful men in Florence after Lorenzo de' Medici, so his intervention is tantalizing. Herbert Horne introduced the idea that Soderini's motive in introducing Botticelli was friendship. He based his analysis on a jokey exchange recorded between Soderini and the painter, recently traced to Angelo Poliziano's *Detti piacevoli* ('pleasing sayings').⁷ While this has seemed to explain the statesman's support of the painter, there are issues with the dating of Poliziano's text and with the politics of the period that might cast doubt on this contained reading of the situation.

The anecdote is fairly anodyne; it concerned why Botticelli had not taken a wife. Two things are relevant here. First, it seems strong to assert friendship from the remarks, as they have the character of casual male badinage at a worksite. Secondly, and more importantly, the story probably does not date from 1470 or earlier. Poliziano only started his book in 1477, but the first tranche of work, written before April 1478, concerns stories of important

⁴ For the commission, panel sequence and document transcriptions, see Alison Wright, *The Pollaiuolo Brothers* (New Haven and London: Yale, 2005), 231–49; 561–3.

⁵ The Mercanzia's palazzo was adjacent to the Palazzo Vecchio; the room to be decorated was on the ground floor. The interest of several painters was noted in the deliberations of 18 December 1469: Wright, *Pollaiuolo*, 562.

⁶ On Soderini's appointment to the Operà, see Alessandro Cecchi, *Botticelli* (Milan: Motta, 2005) 100; for the document, see Wright, *Pollaiuolo*, 563.

⁷ H. L. Horne, *Alessandro Filipepi, Commonly Called Sandro Botticelli* (London: 1908), 43–4, docs I, II; Cecchi, *Botticelli*, 62–3. For Poliziano, see Ida Maier, *Ange Politien: La formation d'un poete humaniste, 1469–1480* (Geneva: Droz, 1966), 419–24.



Fig. 2 Antonio Pollaiuolo, *Charity*, 1470, tempera and oil on cypress wood, 167 × 87 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (© Photo SCALA, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Attach. Culturali)

Florentines, dating from the second third of the fifteenth century.⁸ These tales were probably gleaned from the Medici and their associates: Poliziano was living in Lorenzo de' Medici's house at the time. As Tommaso Soderini was Lorenzo de Medici's uncle, such stories might have concerned him, but the Soderini/Botticelli exchange only appears in the second group of *detti*, written

⁸ Angelo Poliziano, *Detti piacevoli*, ed. Tiziano Zanato (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1983), 1–2.

in May and June 1478.⁹ In 1478, Botticelli was working both for the Medici and for the Florentine Signoria, and he and Soderini might reasonably have met in the Medici palace or government buildings. The implication is that this was not a story from the past, but a conversation that occurred around the time that Poliziano recorded it. Poliziano's two other quips of Botticelli's support this reading. They were both recorded in the period from mid-1478 to late 1479, when the humanist, as prior of San Paolino, was the painter's next door neighbour and thus had the opportunity to talk with him regularly.¹⁰ The chronology suggests that the exchange cannot be used convincingly to argue for a friendship between Soderini and Botticelli in 1470, so there is probably another reason that Soderini put Botticelli's name forward.

That reason may have been political. The month of June 1470, when he intervened in the Mercanzia commission, was a particularly complicated time for Soderini because he had just slipped from the highest stratum of power.¹¹ Soderini served, among his many positions, as one of Florence's ambassadors in the negotiations over the balance of power in Italy occasioned by the crisis of Rimini, begun in 1468.¹² Complicated discussions with Milan, Venice and Naples dragged into 1470, and by April it became clear to Lorenzo that Soderini, a hugely ambitious politician, was supporting alliance with Naples purely because it would cause war with Milan, Florence's traditional ally, and war would increase the young Lorenzo's dependence on him. Lorenzo was furious, and in May he asserted his own will in the negotiations. By June, according to Paula Clarke, Soderini was showing 'greater humility to Lorenzo'.¹³ During the same spring, Lorenzo was actively tightening his control of government offices and restricting their powers; his intentions included a reform of the Mercanzia and command of its artistic commissions.¹⁴ At the time, Lorenzo already controlled the Mercanzia's *opera* overseeing the court's commission at Orsanmichele.¹⁵ Given Lorenzo's political ambitions at the Mercanzia, it is almost certain that he was involved in Soderini's flouting of the court's strict commissioning process. Certainly using Soderini, a court *operaio*, to effect change correlates with the way Niccolai Rubenstein argues that Lorenzo preferred to dominate, that is, by manipulating established channels of

⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁰ Poliziano was appointed prior at Lorenzo's instigation in October 1477; he left Lorenzo's household in June 1478: Maier, *Ange Politien*, 421–2.

¹¹ See Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence under the Medici, 1434–1492* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 201–2; Paula C. Clarke, *The Soderini and the Medici: Power and Patronage in Fifteenth-century Florence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 180–201.

¹² Clarke, *Soderini*, 177–94.

¹³ Clarke, *Soderini*, 193–4.

¹⁴ Rubinstein, *Government of Florence*, 199–215; Clarke, *Soderini*, 201–07; Melinda Hegarty, 'Laurentian Patronage in the Palazzo Vecchio: The Frescoes of the Sala dei Gigli', *The Art Bulletin* lviii (1996), 265–85; Andrew Butterfield, 'Verrocchio's "Christ and St Thomas": chronology, iconography and political context', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 124, no. 1069 (April 1992), 225–33.

¹⁵ Butterfield, *Verrocchio's Christ*, 229.

power.¹⁶ Lorenzo's goals and Soderini's need to demonstrate Medici loyalty in June 1470 suggest that the imposition of Botticelli at the Mercanzia had more to do with politics than with the promotion of a friend.

While this may help to explain the reason for Soderini's intervention, how Botticelli was chosen is still a question. While there was probably little connection in 1470 between Botticelli and Lorenzo and Soderini, the web of mutual associations among them was strong. Botticelli was the next-door neighbour of Ser Nastagio Vespucci. The family members were familiars of the Medici household, and this means that they were associates of Soderini as well as of Lorenzo. Ser Amerigo, Nastagio's father, served three generations of Medici as Chancellor of Florence.¹⁷ Ser Nastagio, a renowned jurist, was a notary to both the Signoria and the Arte del Cambio, the bankers' guild. Working closely with the Medici in two spheres of their operation, he probably could easily have learned of Medici interest in the commission and have lodged a recommendation of his neighbour. Nastagio's brother, the humanist Giorgio Antonio Vespucci, knew Lorenzo as a fellow member of the Platonist circle (in 1476 Lorenzo chose Giorgio Antonio to tutor his wards) and he was also closely connected to Soderini: by 1470 he had been tutoring Soderini's sons for about ten years.¹⁸ Giorgio Antonio could have made sure the statesman knew the young painter was available. While there is no evidence that the Vespucci championed Botticelli, it is clear that either Lorenzo or Soderini, or both, could easily have come to learn details about the painter when they were considering an intervention at the Mercanzia. Given that neighbourhoods were among the principal arenas in Renaissance Florence for establishing bonds of social, business and political support, it is not unthinkable that the Vespucci might have wanted to position themselves as power brokers by promoting their neighbour for a prestigious commission.¹⁹ Because Botticelli's work had hitherto been centred on domestic pieces, he probably was not considered by the court originally, and this may have made him especially attractive to Lorenzo for asserting power.

In any case, Botticelli seized the opportunity to make an impact on the look of the Virtues (Fig. 3). He subtly edited the model proposed by Pollaiuolo's *Charity* by making his *Fortitude* more monumental and more *all'antica* than

¹⁶ Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Palazzo Vecchio, 1298–1532* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 3.

¹⁷ On the Vespucci see Horne, *Botticelli*, 70; Rab Hatfield, *Botticelli's Uffizi Adoration: A Study in Pictorial Content* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 15, n. 18; Waldman, Louis A., 'Botticelli and his Patrons: The Arte del Cambio, the Vespucci, and the Compagnia dello Santo Spirito in Montelupo', in Rab Hatfield (ed.), *Sandro Botticelli and Herbert Horne* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009); on Ser Amerigo, see Ronald G. Kecks, *Domenico Ghirlandaio und die Malerei der Florentiner Renaissance* (Munich and Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2000), 45.

¹⁸ On Lorenzo as a poet, see Sara Sturm Maddox, *Lorenzo de' Medici* (New York: Twayne, 1974); on Giorgio Antonio as a tutor, see K. J. P. Lowe, *Church and Politics in Renaissance Italy: The Life and Career of Cardinal Francesco Soderini* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 11–12; and Nicoletta Baldini, 'In the Shadow of Lorenzo the Magnificent. The role of Lorenzo and Giovanni di Pierfrancesco de' Medici', in Mina Gregori (ed.), *In the Light of Apollo*, (Athens: Silvana, 2003), 277.

¹⁹ See note 3.



Fig. 3 Sandro Botticelli, *Fortitude*, 1470, tempera and oil on cypress wood, 167 × 87 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (© 2001 Photo SCALA, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Attach. Culturali)

Pollaiuolo's figure. As Alison Wright notes, this induced Pollaiuolo to create, in his final three Virtues, figures that were more substantial, more classical and more spatially immediate than the first three panels.²⁰ The critique that Botticelli's work made of Pollaiuolo's suggests that Botticelli recognized the value of the commission and determined to use it to draw attention to his skills and advance his career.

²⁰ Wright, *Pollaiuolo*, 231–49.

His strategy worked. Botticelli's commissions in the 1470s suggests that, whether or not he was actually nominated by Lorenzo for the Mercanzia *Fortitude*, the painter was regarded as one of the Medici's painters of choice soon after the panel was completed. This does not mean that Lorenzo was one of his principal clients – the Medici did not commission much painting – but that the panel, as evidence of an association, was an agent for later work.²¹ It is possible that Lorenzo actively put Botticelli forward for public and private commissions, but simply being perceived as being favoured by Lorenzo made Botticelli attractive to others.²²

The evidence for this analysis is that, in the mid-1470s, Botticelli created images of the *Adoration of the Magi*, a Medici subject, for the Pucci, well-known Medici supporters; for the Operà of the Palazzo Vecchio, a group known to be controlled by Lorenzo; and for Gasparre del Lama, the chief broker at the Arte del Cambio.²³ Del Lama was not socially connected with the Medici, but his altarpiece contained images of Cosimo and other members of the Medici family as magi and onlookers. In the same period, Botticelli painted portraits of young Florentine men holding a medal of Cosimo il Vecchio.²⁴ Both the altarpiece and the portraits seem to have been intended to demonstrate political loyalty. There are no such works for non-elites by other painters, and this suggests a complex conception of Botticelli as associated with the Medici and thus a good choice for people who wanted to impress the family.

More directly, Botticelli was hired by Giuliano de' Medici to create his standard for the joust held in 1476; by Lorenzo or his wards to paint the *Primavera*; and by the family or its supporters to create posthumous portraits of Giuliano, killed during the Pazzi conspiracy. In addition, the Signoria employed Botticelli to paint *pitture infamante* of the Pazzi conspirators.²⁵ This was almost certainly at the suggestion of Lorenzo, who was a member of the Otto di Guardia in May 1478 and composed the epigrams for the figures, which remained visible on government buildings for seventeen years.²⁶

²¹ See Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

²² E. H. Gombrich, 'The Early Medici as Patrons of Art', in E. F. Jacobs (ed.), *Italian Renaissance Studies: A Tribute to the Late Cecilia M. Ady*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1960), 279–311 and S. Fermor, 'Botticelli and the Medici', in Francis Ames-Lewis (ed.), *The Early Medici and their Artists*, (London: Birkbeck College, 1995), 169–85.

²³ The Pucci *Adoration of the Magi* is described by Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de piu eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, ed. Gaetano Milanesi (Florence: Sansoni, 1878–85), Vol. III, 313; the Palazzo Vecchio *Adoration* by the Anonimo Magliabechiano: Horne, *Botticelli*, 44–9. On Lorenzo's control of the Opera del Palazzo, see Hegarty, 'Laurentian Patronage', 264–85. On the Del Lama altarpiece, see Hatfield, *Botticelli's Adoration*, 70–86.

²⁴ Cecchi, *Botticelli*, 142. For a summary of the literature on the Uffizi *Young Man with Medal*, see Bert W. Meijer (ed.), *Firenze e gli antichi Paesi Bassi, 1430–1530: dialoghi tra artisti: da Jan van Eyck a Ghirlandaio, da Memling a Raffaello* (Livorno: Sillabe, 2008), 176. On a Botticelli portrait of a youth possibly holding a similar medal, see Kieth Christiansen, 'Botticelli's Portrait of a Young Man with a Trecento Medallion', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 129, no. 1017 (November 1987), 744.

²⁵ Horne, *Botticelli*, 63–4. On *pitture infamante*, see Samuel Y. Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment: Art and Criminal Prosecution during the Florentine Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

²⁶ On Lorenzo, see Hegarty, 'Laurentian Patronage', 267; on Botticelli, see Horne, *Botticelli*, 63–4.



Fig. 4 Sandro Botticelli, *Madonna and Child and St John*, tempera and oil on panel, 96 cm diameter, Museo Civico, Piacenza (© 1990, Photo SCALA, Florence)

Banking connections were also important. In 1478, the Salutati bank, probably Benedetto Salutati himself, commissioned a tondo of the *Virgin and Child* from the painter as a gift for Cardinal Gonzaga, his client and his neighbour in Rome (Fig. 4).²⁷ The work is particularly important because the cardinal's household was a meeting place for Roman humanists, and if the gift reached him, it put an impressive example of Botticelli's work before a group of discerning men with influence in the highest circles of the Vatican. This could

²⁷ See Dario Covi, 'A Documented Tondo for Botticelli', in M Grazia Ciardi Duprè Dal Poggetto and Paolo Dal Poggetto (eds.), *Scritti di storia dell'arte in onore di Ugo di Procacci* (Milan: Electa, 1977), 270–2. On Cardinal Gonzaga, see David S. Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal and His Worldly Goods: The Will and Inventory of Francesco Gonzaga (1444–1483)* (London: Warburg Institute, 1992), 25–6, 48–9, 88.

be significant, depending on who was responsible for hiring Botticelli for the Sistine commission. In 1480, the Vespucci commissioned Botticelli to create, with Ghirlandaio, frescoed images of Saints Augustine and Jerome flanking the door to the choir of Ognissanti.

By the late 1470s, Botticelli's reputation was strong with clients in intersecting circles of government, banking and neighbourhood, arenas of operation that often also encompassed Medici interests. In addition, numerous of his works were visible publicly, which means that Botticelli's images were in a position to shape concepts of devotion and ideas of political strength in Florence. By 1481, his name may have been known outside the city; certainly powerful people could recommend him.

We might ask, however, why the Vespucci, the great family of the *gonfalone* and Botticelli's neighbours, did not hire him before 1480, when his reputation was solid. An answer to that might have to do with the timing of the Botticelli's career and the Vespucci family's need for a work of art in the early 1470s. To consider that, it is necessary to turn to Domenico Ghirlandaio.

DOMENICO GHIRLANDAIO (1449–1494)

The agencies that drove Ghirlandaio's career were probably less cohesive than those that influenced Botticelli's. However, like Botticelli, Ghirlandaio undertook his first public commission in Florence in the early 1470s. He was hired to create in fresco an altarpiece of the *Deposition* in the chapel of Amerigo Vespucci, in the church of Ognissanti (Fig. 5). The commission was substantial, and it is surprising that the Vespucci did not hire Botticelli, who was on their doorstep, worshipped at the Ognissanti, and was clearly capable of taking on a major work. Certainly loyalties within *gonfalone*, along with the prestige that Botticelli gained in painting for the Mercanzia, should have led the family to consider their neighbour – to consider him, that is, if he were available at the time of the commission.

The exact date of the Vespucci chapel is unknown.²⁸ However, Karl Schlebusch has recently discovered a group of documents that make it clear that the construction of the chapel could not have begun until after November 1473.²⁹ This means that Ghirlandaio could not have begun until months, perhaps not until at least a year, after that date. While exact knowledge of Botticelli's career in the mid-1470s is hazy, it is likely that he was hired by Guaspare del Lama at just this time – late 1473 or early 1474 – when del Lama was captain of the guild of St Peter Martyr at Santa Maria Novella and thus in a position to

²⁸ See Jean K. Cadogan, *Domenico Ghirlandaio, Artist and Artisan* (New Haven and London: Yale, 2000) 192–3.

²⁹ Karl Schlebusch, 'Domenico Ghirlandaio und die Familienkapelle der Vespucci in der Kirche Ognissanti in Florenz', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz*, forthcoming 2011. I am extremely grateful to Professor Schlebusch for allowing me to read his text before publication.



Fig. 5 Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Pietà*, fresco, Church of the Ognissanti, Florence (© 1997. Photo Scala, Florence)

negotiate for a private chapel in the church.³⁰ Around the same time, Botticelli may also have been hired by the Pucci to paint a tondo of the *Adoration of the Magi*, particularly if the tondo in the National Gallery, London, is the one Vasari noted in the Pucci palace.³¹ These commissions were prestigious; Botticelli may simply have been too busy to take on the commission for the Vespucci.

Of course, neighbourhood, while powerful, provided only one of many networking opportunities in Florence, and Ghirlandaio, not Botticelli, may have been the Vespucci's first choice. The family may have been attracted to Ghirlandaio for his style, especially his ability to evoke the Netherlandish painting that was so popular among the Florentine banking elite.³² For the composition of the Vespucci *Pietà*, Ghirlandaio drew directly on several Netherlandish and German works of art known to be in Florence by 1470, such as

³⁰ See Hatfield, 1976, 15–16.

³¹ See Cecchi, 2005, 120.

³² For ownership, see Paula Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 121–4.



Fig. 6 Attributed to Rogier van der Weyden, *Transport of Christ to the Tomb*, oil on panel, 110 × 96 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (© 1990, Photo SCALA, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Attach. Culturali)

this *Lamentation* (Fig. 6), and he attempted a particularly Flemish approach to painting Christ and the Virgin.³³ This means that the painter had access to the small Netherlandish works that were only able to be viewed in the palazzi of the rich. Perhaps the Vespucci drew on their connections in Arte del Cambio banking circles to make it possible for Ghirlandaio to study these imported pictures, or it may be that Ghirlandaio was known for his interest in them, and the recommendation of the painter went from a banker to Nastagio. In either case, the Vespucci commission put Ghirlandaio's work into a public and highly visible site in Florence – the chapel was near the main portal of Ognissanti – and it may have had an influence on the painter's most signifi-

³³ Paula Nuttall, 'Domenico Ghirlandaio and Northern Art', *Apollo* cxliii (1996), 17 and Nuttall, *From Flanders*, 85, 113, 146, 153.



Fig. 7 Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Classical Philosophers and Doctors of the Church*, 1475–76, fresco, Biblioteca Latina, Vatican

cant commission of the 1470s: his employment in 1475 to decorate the Library of Pope Sixtus IV at the Vatican (Fig. 7). Jean Cadogan argues that the commission itself suggests that Ghirlandaio had a wide reputation, but the sites of Ghirlandaio's early work make it unlikely that he was well known outside Florence and its environs, so a different connection probably brought him to the attention of the papal court.³⁴

In this context, it is essential to consider the nature of commissions under Sixtus IV, crowned in 1471. There is a long tradition based on Vasari, the inconsistency of the quality of the works created under Sixtus, and the pope's background as a Franciscan scholar and reformer, that Sixtus was not interested in the visual arts *per se*.³⁵ However, as Isabelle Frank has argued, his

³⁴ Cadogan, *Ghirlandaio*, 45.

³⁵ On the work of Sistine papacy see Ludwig Pastor, *The History of the Popes, From the Close of the Middle Ages*, Vol. IV (London: Kegan Paul, 1900); Isadora Liberale Gatti, '“Singularis eius inaudita doctrina”: la formazione intellettuale e francescana di Sisto IV e suoi rapporti con gli ambiente culturali', in Fabio Benzi (ed.), *Sisto IV: Le arti a Roma nel primo rinascimento* (Rome: Associazione Culturale Shakespeare and Company 2, 2000); Wright, *Pollaiuolo*, 370. On the inconsistency of work produced under the pontiff, see Eunice D. Howe, *Art and Culture at the Sistine Court: Platina's Life of Sixtus and the Frescoes of the Hospital of Santo Spirito* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2005), 9.

distinct ability to recognize and seize opportunity made him appreciate the force art had for shaping his own image and that of the papacy.³⁶ This did not make him a discerning patron, but it did attune him to the power of the visual.³⁷ The evidence suggests that, for Sixtus, clarity and directness of message were the most important features of a work of art.³⁸ While Sixtus probably gave those running his projects clear directions about the subject matter of a proposed work, he is likely to have left decisions about the specifics of images and the choice of artists to his project managers.³⁹ These were men whose expertise lay in areas outside the visual arts, and it seems that that the quality of the artists they chose was in relation to the status of the audience a new work would enjoy.⁴⁰

The Vatican Library project was run by the renowned humanist Bartolomeo Platina, appointed Librarian in 1475 and probably the assistant librarian for the previous four years.⁴¹ Platina was a key member of the Roman humanist circle and an intimate of the household of his former pupil, Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga.⁴² He was also particularly close to the humanists of Florence, where he had studied Greek. Platina kept the project accounts. They demonstrate that he was responsible for all aspects of renovating and outfitting the rooms: he organized builders, employed a stained-glass maker, engaged ironworkers, and hired joiners and mosaicists.⁴³ He was clearly responsible for finding and appointing the artisans who worked in the library, and this suggests that he is also likely to have found the Library's painters.

Platina's Mantuan career shows that he knew that the artists most highly regarded throughout Italy were trained in Florence.⁴⁴ While he may not have been especially knowledgeable about individual Florentine painters, it happens that in the period in which he would have been searching for appropriate artists to decorate the Library, he was in close contact with

³⁶ Isabelle Frank, *Melozzo da Forlì and the Rome of Pope Sixtus IV (1471–1484)* (PhD thesis: Harvard University, 1991), 3, 21–3. See also Egmont Lee, *Sixtus IV and Men of Letters* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1978), 41.

³⁷ On Sixtus' role as a patron see Frank, 'Melozzo da Forlì', 2–3; Howe, *Art and Culture*, 10.

³⁸ Most visual works produced for the pope contain inscriptions or longer texts.

³⁹ See Frank, 'Melozzo da Forlì', 1; Howe, *Art and Culture*, 9–10.

⁴⁰ See Frank, 'Melozzo da Forlì', 33, for this rationale, argued for Sixtus himself.

⁴¹ Howe, *Art and Culture*, 55. On the renovation of the rooms, see Deoclecio Redig de Campos, *I Palazzi Vaticani* (Bologna: Licinio, 1967), 57–63; Giovanni Morello, 'La Biblioteca Apostolica', in Carlo Pietrangeli (ed.), *Il Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano* (Florence: Nardini, 1992), 197–8; Cadogan, Ghirlandaio, 199.

⁴² On Platina in Mantua and Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, see Chambers, *Renaissance Cardinal*, 53; David S. Chambers, 'Il Platina e il Cardinale Francesco Gonzaga', in Campana and Paola Medioli Masotti, *Bartolomeo Sacchi, il Platina*, (Padua: Antenore, 1986) 9–18; Howe, *Art and Culture*, 41–4.

⁴³ M. Eugene Muntz, *Les arts a la cour des papes pendant le XV et le XVI siècle*, 5 vols., Vol. III (Paris: Thorin, 1882), 121–35; reprinted in Cadogan, *Ghirlandaio*, 341–2.

⁴⁴ Martin Warnke, *The Court Artist*, trans. David McLintock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 84, argues that Mantuan humanists were competent in artistic matters because of the interests of Vittorino da Feltre; see Emilio Faccioli (ed.), *Montova: Le lettere* (Mantua: Istituto Carlo d'Arco, 1962), Vol. II, 55 for the letter to Federico Gonzaga concerning Platina.

Florentine colleagues.⁴⁵ In 1474, Platina dedicated his text *De optimo cive* to Lorenzo de' Medici. Nicolai Rubinstein and Alison Brown have emphasized the fact that the questions, politics and modes of expression of the book are identical to those in the texts of Florentine humanists from the early 1470s; in other words, Platina had been engaged with Florentine humanists on a shared intellectual project.⁴⁶ Soon after his presentation of the book, Platina received letters praising the work from Lorenzo and from other humanists, including Donato Acciaiuoli and Bartolomeo Scala, the current Chancellor of Florence.⁴⁷ Later correspondence attests to continuing relations between Platina and Florentine scholars into the 1480s.⁴⁸ Platina could have drawn on these associations to gain intelligence about painters in Florence who might have been available to work in Rome. Again, there is no evidence of such correspondence, but he might easily have learned about Ghirlandaio from, for example, Bartolomeo Scala, who surely knew about the painting of the burial chapel of Amerigo Vespucci, his long-serving colleague in the chancery.

A commission from the pope was highly prestigious; it offered Ghirlandaio an immense opportunity for building his reputation and enhancing his career. Ghirlandaio addressed this opportunity by creating an *all'antica* design for his client's medieval subject matter, images of philosophers, saints and doctors of the church. While the design is innovative and atmospheric, there are significant problems with the depictions: the perspective is not consistently keyed to a viewer from below and there are differences in scale among the figures. The documents show that Domenico was hired with his brother Davide – the brothers were often employed together for commissions in the 1470s. Partly because of the problems with the figures and partly because all payments after the first instalment were collected by Davide, scholars have generally argued that Domenico largely 'left' the murals to be painted by Davide.⁴⁹ Against this interpretation is the concept, wisely advanced by Ronald Kecks, that Ghirlandaio is unlikely to have ignored the prestige value of a papal commission.⁵⁰ In fact, the murals have suffered from extensive retouching and repainting, and this makes the attribution of hands difficult, if not

⁴⁵ Stefan Bauer, *The Censorship and Fortuna of Platina's Lives of the Popes in the Sixteenth Century* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006) 19–21.

⁴⁶ Nicolai Rubinstein, 'Il "De optimo cive" del Platina,' in Campana and Masotti, *Bartolomeo Sacchi*, 137–44; Nicolai Rubinstein, 'The *De optimo cive* and the *De Principe* by Bartolomeo Platina', in Roberto Cardini, *et al.* (eds.), *Tradizione classica e letteratura umanistica per Alessandro Perosa* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1985); Alison Brown, 'Scala, Platina and Lorenzo de' Medici in 1474', in *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honour of Paul Oskar Kristeller* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1987), 328.

⁴⁷ Rubinstein, 'De optimo'.

⁴⁸ Bauer, *Censorship*, 20.

⁴⁹ Domenico was paid in November 1475 for work already begun; all other account entries, which appear until May 1476, record payment to Davide. However, as payment was commonly picked up by workshop members, this alone would not indicate the absence of Domenico; see, for example, Wright, *Pollaiuolo*, 215. On the brothers and the workshop, see Cadogan, *Ghirlandaio*, 153, 170.

⁵⁰ See Kecks, *Ghirlandaio*, 74.

impossible.⁵¹ However, it is clear from the payment documents from the Passignano commission, begun just after the Library, that it was the brothers' practice to work collaboratively, with Domenico painting the most important parts.⁵² While problems of management can explain the inconsistencies of scale – problems that relate to Ghirlandaio's relative inexperience as a workshop manager – it is important to recognize that the murals did not offend Platina or Sixtus, who clearly accepted the work.

Only six weeks after the Vatican job ended, the brothers began the fresco of the *Last Supper* at the Vallombrosan convent at Passignano, just south of Florence, and this suggests that the commission was negotiated while Ghirlandaio was engaged in Rome. The convent was particularly rich and important; its value is underlined by the fact that, in 1485, Lorenzo de' Medici took it by force as a benefice for his son Giovanni, the young prelate.⁵³ The brothers were hired by the convent's abbot, Don Isodoro del Sera, a well-connected Florentine with associates in the world of banking, politics and humanism.⁵⁴ He might have learned of Ghirlandaio's papal commission through one of these channels. The commission suggests that the prestige of the Vatican had an immediate impact on the brothers' career. Later commissions suggest that Ghirlandaio's reputation was healthy and that he increasingly painted for clients in the orbit of the Medici. According to Vasari, he worked in 1477 for Giovanni Tornabuoni, the Medici bank manager in Rome.⁵⁵ In Florence, in 1478, Ghirlandaio was engaged by Francesco Sassetti, assistant manager of the Medici bank, and by the Confraternity of the Buonomini, which was largely funded and directed by Lorenzo.⁵⁶ In 1480, Ghirlandaio was hired by the friars of the Umiliati at Ognissanti; he was also again employed by the Vespucci at Ognissanti, this time to create the figure of St Jerome while Botticelli produced St Augustine. Evidence of his standing in Florence is also indicated by the fresco and altarpiece commissions he received in 1478–79 in Pisa. Pisa was under the dominion of Florence, and he was hired by the cathedral's single

⁵¹ On the condition of the murals, see Redig de Campos, *Palazzi Vaticani*, 57–63; Morello, 'La Biblioteca Apostolica', 197–202, Joséx Ruysschaert, 'Platina e l'aménagement des locaux de la Vaticane sous Sixte IV (1471–1475–1481)', in Campana and Medioli Masotti, *Il Platina*, 145–151; Guido Cornini, ' "Dominico Thomasii florentino pro pictura bibliothecae quam inchoavit": il contributo di Domenico e Davide Ghirlandaio nella Biblioteca di Sisto IV', in Benzi, *Sisto IV. On the figures' scale*, see Ronald G. Kecks, *Domenico Ghirlandaio* (Florence: Quattrone, 1998), 74; Kecks, *Ghirlandaio und die malerei*, 199–203.

⁵² Cadogan, *Ghirlandaio*, 202–03; doc 11, 342–3.

⁵³ Picotti, *La giovinezza del futuro Leone X* (Milan: Hoepli, 1928), 88.

⁵⁴ Del Sera and Bartolomeo Scala were godfathers to the banker Bernardo Ranieri's daughter; see Alison Brown, *Bartolomeo Scala, 1430–1497, Chancellor of Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 111–12.

⁵⁵ Vasari, *Le vite de piu eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, Vol. III, 259–60.

⁵⁶ On Sassetti, see Cadogan, *Ghirlandaio*, 230–36; Eve Borsook and J. Offerhaus, *Francesco Sassetti and Ghirlandaio at Santa Trinità, Florence* (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1981). On the Buonomini, see Tommaso Rosselli Sassatelli del Turco, 'La chiesetta di San Martino dei Buonomini a Firenze', *Dedalo*, viii (1928); Amleto Spicciari, 'The "Poveri vergognosi" in 15th century Florence', in Thomas Riis (ed.), *Aspects of Poverty in Early Modern Europe* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Sijthoff, 1981); Dale Kent, 'The Buonomini di San Martini: Charity "for the glory of God, the honour of the city, and the commemoration of myself"', in Francis Ames Lewis (ed.), *Cosimo 'il Vecchio' de' Medici, 1389–1464* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 49–67.

operaio, who was appointed by the Florentine Signoria and answered to Archbishop Filippo de' Medici, a distant relative of Lorenzo and clearly supported by the more important branch of the family.⁵⁷

As this *précis* suggests, while Botticelli shot to fame, Ghirlandaio's career was a slow but steady build-up of influence and connections, surely helped by the Vatican commission but also aided by the importance of the sites and patrons of his paintings.

PIETRO PERUGINO (c.1445–1523)

Like Ghirlandaio, Perugino received a significant commission from the Vatican relatively early in his career, in this case, after establishing himself in Perugia and working about six years in the city and its surrounds.⁵⁸ It seems that Perugino's command of the most up-to-date technique of his trade – particularly painting in oil – gained him immediate attention in Perugia, but the sites of his early altarpieces and frescoes suggest he had only a local reputation.⁵⁹ Thus there must have been a particular human connection that brought Perugino to the attention of the papal court, where, in 1478 or early 1479, he was hired to fresco the apse of the chapel that Sixtus IV built as his own burial place in St Peter's.⁶⁰ This, called the chapel of the canons' choir, was dedicated in December 1479. Perugino must have been brought to Rome specifically for the work, because in 1478 he was clearly painting the datable, but now fragmentary, fresco cycle that survives in Cerqueto, a tiny town just south of Perugia.

The Perugino story has two main questions: who oversaw the chapel project and how was Perugino chosen? While there are no records for the chapel like those for the Library, it is probable that the project manager was Giovannino de' Dolci, the Florentine master woodworker who was the overseer of works in the Apostolic Palace throughout Sixtus' papacy.⁶¹ His responsibility for the burial chapel's decoration seems especially likely because he managed the decoration of the Sistine chapel, begun only two years after the burial chapel was dedicated.⁶² At the Sistine, Giovannino signed the contract with the painters; he was responsible for judging the value of their work and he disbursed

⁵⁷ Michele Luzzatini, 'Filippo de' Medici Arcivescovo di Pisa e la vista pastorale del 1462–1463', *Bollettino storico pisani*, xxxiii–xxxv (1964–66).

⁵⁸ Jeryldene M. Wood, 'The Early Paintings of Perugino' (PhD thesis, Virginia, 1985); Pietro Scarpellini, *Perugino* (Milan: Electa Editrice, 1984), 18–28.

⁵⁹ See Pietro Scarpellini and Maria Rita Silvestrelli, *Pintoricchio* (Milan: Federico Motta, 2004), 72–3 for Perugino's influence in the area.

⁶⁰ See L. D. Ettlinger, 'Pollaiuolo's Tomb of Pope Sixtus IV', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 16 (1953), 269; Wright, *Pollaiuolo*, 374–6.

⁶¹ Stefano Borsi, Francesco Quinterio, and Corinna Vasic Vatovec, *Maestri fiorentini nei cantieri romani del quattrocento* (Rome: Officina, 1989), 199–212.

⁶² For the contract, see Arnold Nesselrath, 'The Painters of Lorenzo the Magnificent in the Chapel of Pope Sixtus IV in Rome', in Francesco Buranelli and Allen Duston (eds.), *The Fifteenth-Century Frescoes in the Sistine Chapel* (Vatican City: Musei Vaticani, 2003) 39–75.

project funds. He may have had the same responsibilities, which are similar to those of Platina in the Library, for the burial chapel. Furthermore, because Giovannino, as the head of large building projects throughout the Papal States, was responsible for hiring workers, it may have been his job to find a painter for the chapel of the cannons' choir.⁶³

A major problem in this regard was that between April 1478 and January 1480/81, the Pazzi War effectively closed off the possibility of hiring a Florentine. Florentine artists were recognized in the Vatican as pre-eminent in Italy in all fields; for example, in 1477, the year before the attack, the Vatican had gone to the trouble of getting Antonio Pollaiuolo released from a prestigious Florentine embroidery project so he could take on similar papal work.⁶⁴ But with Florence effectively closed, drawing on the Vatican's networks within the Papal States may have been the most efficient way to locate a painter of excellence. Here, the useful link may have been one of the governors of Perugia who, in the 1470s, were men with humanist connections. If this were the route taken to Perugino, it may be that Platina was part of the process. Platina not only oversaw the Library decoration, but was also, as Eunice Howe notes, 'the driving force behind' the fresco cycle of the Hospital of Santo Spirito, which Sixtus built and decorated in the mid-1470s.⁶⁵ We know that Giovannino knew Platina; he worked with him on aspects of fitting out the Library, and he might have turned to the Librarian for assistance in finding a painter. Two governors of Perugia, one of the key cities of the Papal States, were in a position to recommend Perugino. The first, Niccolò Perotti, was governor from 1474 to 1477, the period when Perugino worked in the Signoria's palace and created at least two altarpieces for local families. Perotti was one of the most able and prolific scholars in Sixtus' service and he maintained an active network of scholarship with colleagues in Rome.⁶⁶ He knew Platina well and he retired locally; he could have passed Perugino's name to Rome. Alternatively, Cardinal Raffaele Sansoni-Riario, Sixtus' nephew who became governor in June 1478, could have been the conduit through which the Vatican learned of the talented Umbrian painter. The cardinal later built the Cancelleria; he was particularly attuned to the nuances of art, and, as the most scholarly of the pope's nephews, was in contact with the humanists.⁶⁷

This proposal is extremely hypothetical; probably the precise agency that brought Perugino to Rome will never be known. Once at St Peter's, however, Perugino proved a sage choice. He was certainly aware of the concerns at stake

⁶³ He oversaw the building of the forts at Civitavecchia, Ronciglione and Tivoli, as well the construction of the cappella maggiore that became the Sistine chapel; Borsi, *Maestri fiorentini*.

⁶⁴ See Wright, *Pollaiuolo*, 257–64; Rosalia Varoli-Piazza (ed.), *Il Paliotto di Sisto IV ad Assisi* (Assisi: Casa Editrice Francescana, 1991).

⁶⁵ Howe, *Art and Culture*, 78.

⁶⁶ See Lee, *Sixtus IV*, 87–90.

⁶⁷ See Christoph Luitpold Frommel, 'Il Cardinal Raffaele Riario ed il Palazzo della Cancelleria', in Silvia Bottono, Anna Dagnino, and Giovanna Rotondi Terminiello (eds.), *Sisto IV e Giulio II mecanti e promotori di cultura* (Savona: Coop Tipograf, 1989).



Fig. 8 Depiction of Grimaldi's sketch of Pietro Perugino's lost fresco in the apse of the Chapel of the Canons Choir, Basilica of St Peter, Rome, after Fiorenzo Canuti

in decorating the chapel that was designed to be a memorial for Sixtus, and he clearly seized the opportunity to create a work of distinction – now known only through Giacomo Grimaldi's seventeenth-century sketch (Fig. 8).⁶⁸ Perugino emphasized the pope's commitment to restoring Rome's purity by drawing on early Christian precedents for his iconography.⁶⁹ At the same time, he underlined the pope's lineage from St Peter and boldly portrayed Sixtus on the same scale as his sacred benefactors. The fresco broadcast the image Sixtus sought to convey through his patronage elsewhere and the pope must have made his approval known: Perugino would use exactly the same iconography for the pope's portrait on the altar of the Sistine chapel (Fig. 9). Indeed, the kneeling portrait became a model for the depiction of subsequent popes and

⁶⁸ Reto Niggli, *Giacomo Grimaldi, Descrizione della basilica antica di S. Pietro in Vaticano: Codice Barberini Latino 2733* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1972) 163.

⁶⁹ Ettlinger, *Pollaiuolo's Tomb*.

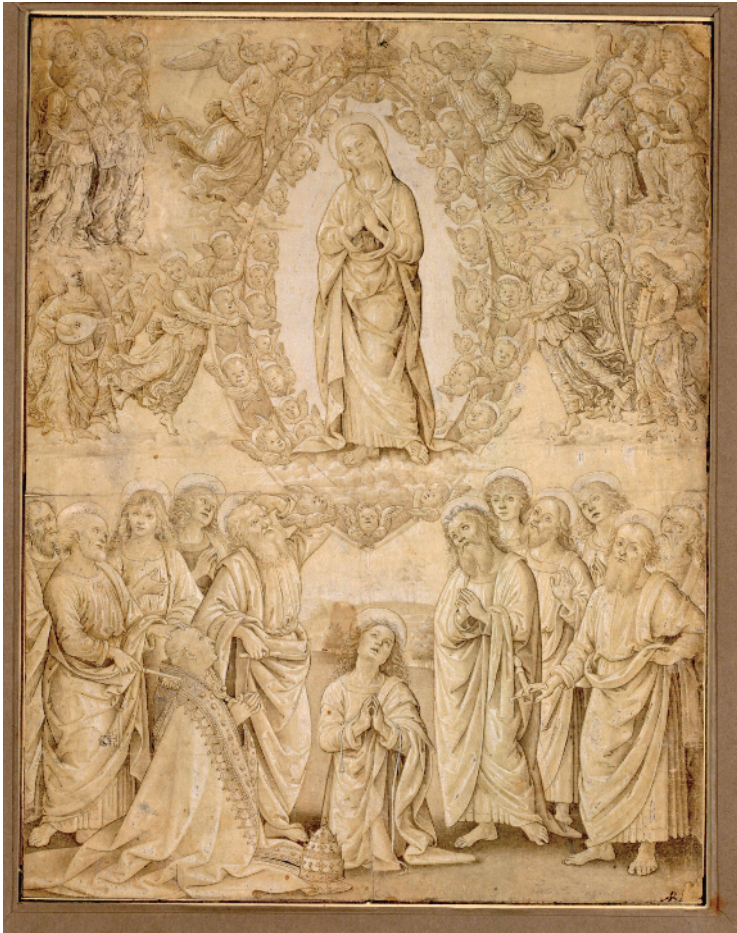


Fig. 9 Workshop of Pinturicchio, *Assumption of the Virgin* (after Perugino, altar wall, Sistine Chapel), 1481–83, metal point and ink, 13.8 × 11.4 cm, Albertina Graphische Sammlung, Vienna (© Albertina Graphische Sammlung, Vienna)

cardinals.⁷⁰ For Perugino, the work had another type of agency. It established some of his most characteristic imagery, which became the bedrock of his reputation.

THE SISTINE COMMISSION

The foregoing discussion argues that relationships were crucial, both for bringing works of art into existence and for defining painters' careers. The

⁷⁰ See Patrizia Zambrano and Jonathan Katz Nelson, *Filippino Lippi* (Milano: Electa, 2004), 457–8.

development of a painter is commonly seen in relation to the stylistic evolution of his works, and this is perceived as unrelated to his clients. However, painters could not effect stylistic development without commissions, and these were founded within the context of the rich social exchange that characterizes human interaction in the Renaissance, particularly business interaction. Fifteenth-century Italians drew on a wide body of relationships as a way to get on in all aspects of life.⁷¹ For artists, such associations not only generated careers, they had an impact on accessibility, visibility and style. It is arguable, for example, that Ghirlandaio's frescoes for the Vespucci were more Netherlandish than his other works of the 1470s, and this could have been in response to the family's taste, developed through their connections to bankers who owned Flemish painting. Certainly the look of Perugino's apse fresco was inspired by the Sistine papacy's interest in early Christian monuments.

The commission to paint the walls of the Sistine chapel, awarded in 1481, had agency in the future careers of Botticelli, Ghirlandaio and Perugino. It was also vital for Cosimo Rosselli (1439–1507), a Florentine painter with longer experience than these men and the fourth member of the Sistine team. It is not clear, however, exactly how the four painters secured the commission. Did their associations in Rome lead to further employment there, or were they helped to the Vatican by Lorenzo de' Medici in the negotiations following the Pazzi War, as Herbert Horne first suggested?⁷² Exploring the relationships that led to the commission is critical, precisely because of its importance to the artists' reputations and subsequent professional lives.

Certainly Botticelli, Ghirlandaio and Perugino each had friends and associates in both Rome and Florence that could have recommended them for the Sistine commission. By 1481, Ghirlandaio and Perugino were established names in Rome, and the tondo given to Cardinal Gonzaga in 1477 was a potential conduit, if it arrived, for the appreciation of Botticelli's work by those who influenced Vatican visual arts. In addition, Botticelli was known as one of Lorenzo's most admired artists.⁷³ The implication is that the Vatican could have employed these painters directly, without the aid of Lorenzo, in the same way the papacy hired Florentines for all types of artistic projects. In 1477, for example, the Vatican had gone to the trouble of getting two master embroiderers and probably Antonio Pollaiuolo, as designer, released from a prestigious Florentine embroidery project so they could undertake similar work on a paliotto Sixtus was donating to Assisi.⁷⁴ One support for the case for direct hiring for the Sistine is the situation of Perugino, who is commonly believed to have been employed to begin the project soon after he finished

⁷¹ See particularly McLean, *Art of the Network*; Kent, *Lorenzo*, 55.

⁷² Horne, *Botticelli*, 74–5.

⁷³ See note 22.

⁷⁴ Rosalia Varoli-Piazza (ed.), *Il Paliotto di Sisto IV ad Assisi* (Assisi: Casa Editrice Franciscana, 1991) 10, 29–48; Wright, *Pollaiuolo*, 257–64.

Sixtus' burial chapel.⁷⁵ Furthermore, engaging numerous masters and their workshops to collaborate was a manner of attacking a large decorating project with which Sixtus, Platina and other northern Italians were familiar. It was not a Florentine approach. Indeed, when Horne posited Lorenzo's agency, he suggested that Lorenzo had a hand in 'obtaining' Florentine painters for the pontiff, which suggests that Sixtus sought them. More recent scholarship, however, has drawn on Medici precedent and Lorenzo's later recommendation and provision of artists to make a case for Lorenzo's actively nominating the painters for cultural diplomacy.⁷⁶ Certainly, in 1481, Lorenzo knew Ghirlandaio's work and he was clearly well acquainted with Botticelli. Furthermore, the work of the painters for the Vespucci in 1480 may have made them seem like natural collaborators.

Given the connections between these painters and powerful people in Florence and Rome, Cosimo Rosselli may offer a key to the Sistine conundrum. Lorenzo was almost certainly familiar with Rosselli's work, but one of the problems with the idea of Lorenzo supporting Rosselli is the nature of his painting, often traditional in format and wooden in execution.⁷⁷ It seems unlikely to have appealed to Lorenzo, committed to the highest standards of excellence.⁷⁸ It is possible that backing Rosselli, whose major clientele was found in artisan confraternities, was useful to Lorenzo, who from the early 1470s was actively engaged in infiltrating religious sodalities and influencing their governance to assure that they supported the Medici.⁷⁹ However, such political analysis is not consistent with events of 1482, when the artists returned to Florence. Arguments for Lorenzo's involvement with the Sistine team often refer to the fact that, at the completion of the project, the Operà of the Florentine Palazzo Vecchio, unquestionably directed by Lorenzo, immediately hired the Sistine artists to decorate the newly created Sala dei Gigli.⁸⁰ However, only Ghirlandaio, Botticelli and Perugino, along with Biagio Tucci and Piero Pollaiuolo, were employed. Cosimo Rosselli was ignored. He

⁷⁵ Nesselrath, 'The Painters of Lorenzo', 51, argues against this.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 40; Caroline Elam, 'Art and Diplomacy in Renaissance Florence', *Royal Society of Art Journal*, 136 (1988), 814–17.

⁷⁷ Rosselli's brother worked for Lorenzo's father. Rosselli's 1478 altarpiece for a company of wool carders may have brought him particularly to the attention of Lorenzo, who oversaw the wool guild; see Anna Padoa Rizzo, 'Cosimo e Bernardo Rosselli per la Compagnia di Sant'Andrea dei Purgatori a Firenze', *Studi di storia dell'arte*, 2 (1991) 61–73 and Kent, *Lorenzo*, 6. On Rosselli's style, see Padoa Rizzo, 'Cosimo e Bernardo', 265; Edith Gabrielli, *Cosimo Rosselli, catalogo ragionato*, (Turin: Allemandi, 2007) 41–42.

⁷⁸ Kent, *Lorenzo*, 61; for training in judgement, see *ibid.*, 21–23.

⁷⁹ On Medici infiltration of confraternities, see Lorenzo Polizzotto, 'The Medici and the Youth Confraternity of the Purification of the Virgin', in Nicholas Terpstra (ed.), *The Politics and Ritual of Kinship: Confraternities and Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Konrad Eisenbickler, 'Lorenzo de' Medici and the Confraternity of the Blacks', *Fedes et historia*, xxv, (1994) 85–98; Eckstein, *The District of the Green Dragon*, xxv and 209; Zambrano and Nelson, *Filippino Lippi*, 188. On Rosselli's career see Gabrielli, *Rosselli*, 28–34; Anna Padoa Rizzo, 'Cosimo and Bernardo Rosselli's work for Lay Confraternities', in Arthur R Blumenthal (ed.), *Cosimo Rosselli: Painter of the Sistine Chapel*, (Winter Park, FL: Rollins College, 2001) 61–73.

⁸⁰ Hegarty, 'Laurentian Patronage'; Nesselrath, 'Painters of Lorenzo', 40; Elam, 'Art and Diplomacy', 818.

was not even employed when a substitute was required to replace Perugino. This militates against Lorenzo's sponsorship of Rosselli, for any reason.

The case for the Vatican's directly hiring Rosselli has more potential. Rosselli worked in Rome from 1456 to 1459, and this may seem like a fruitful link to the city, but the painter almost certainly worked as an assistant and so is unlikely to have acquired a reputation then.⁸¹ He could, however, have been well served in 1481 by his reputation among the artisan community in Florence, for the man in charge of the Sistine project was Sixtus' overseer, the Florentine Giovannino de' Dolci. Dolci, as a master woodworker, could easily have obtained information about painters from his associates within the city. This is promising, and lends support to an argument that each of the painters was contacted by the papacy directly.

After the Sistine, Rosselli's career continued to prosper. Although his work was in demand, however, he was rarely hired by patrons in the Medici circle or in the major Florentine convents, who often employed Perugino, Botticelli and Ghirlandaio. Instead, Rosselli's clients remained largely among the non-banking elite and members of the artisan community. The Sistine commission, however, confirmed and consolidated throughout Italy the reputations of Botticelli, Ghirlandaio and Perugino. From 1482, the prestige of their clients grew and the demand for their work was significant. Each man was clearly a formidable talent, and this was a factor in the development of his professional life. How much of a factor talent was, however, is an unknown quantity. As the career trajectories of Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, Perugino and Rosselli indicate, patronage could be related as much to relationships and social interests as to admiration for skill. Indeed, personal associations, social demands and innate talent worked together to create the reputations that led to lasting fame.

⁸¹ See Gabrielli, *Rosselli*, 24–8; the Roman projects are unknown today.