

Real Presence, Iconic Images, and Iconoclasm  
from Byzantium to the Reformation

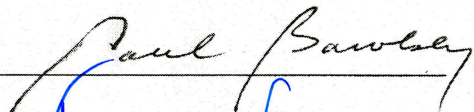
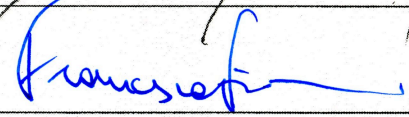
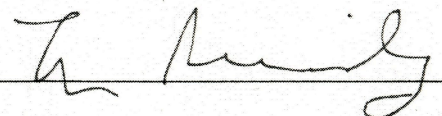
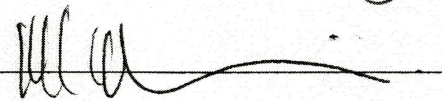
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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the relation of iconic images to Real or spiritual presence, analyzing key debates and exemplary case studies in a long history of controversy, from the iconoclastic period of eighth and ninth centuries in Byzantium to the Reformation in Italy of the sixteenth. The focus is the icon of Christ's Passion-what became the *imago pietatis* in the Latin West and the related *pietà*-reexamined as a site of cultural conflict, theoretical reflection and artistic negotiation. The study begins with the icon's development in Byzantium, emerging in the wake of religious conflict, and examines its cultic appropriation in Italy, where it becomes bound to controversy as the Eucharistic vision of Gregory the Great. It culminates in the icon's transformation by Renaissance artists in the sixteenth century, when Reformation critique of cult images as mediators of spiritual presence lay at the center of a crisis that would define modern Europe.

By articulating a shared history of spiritual imaging between Byzantium and Italy, my study offers an alternative to canonical narratives of artistic progress that cast them in hierarchical terms, contributing to a reevaluation of Renaissance art history currently underway. Attending closely to the work of images in relation to their viewers – as mediations of presence, beyond their status as representation – the dissertation articulates the mutual interrelation of artistic and cultic functions, integrating realms of study traditionally divided in scholarship. More broadly, by setting Renaissance artworks within a longer historical dynamic of icons and iconoclasm, this study reflects upon the deep structure of tensions regarding images and idolatry that were formative to the thought and culture of early modern Europe, and continue to resonate with force in our day.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### INTRODUCTION

Icons and Presence	1
Iconic images between East and West	5
State of the Field: Byzantine and Italian Art History	10
The doubling of cult and art	12
Chapter summaries	17

### CHAPTER I Real Presence and Icon Theory: The Iconoclastic Debates in Byzantium

Introduction	21
Icons and presence	23
The icon in an expanded field of interpretation	29
Icons and the cult of relics	34
Icons, Christology and the Incarnation	39
Circumscription, representation and economy	47
Icons, ontology and presence	51
Icons, theology and economy	55
Conclusion: icons and Real presence	58

### CHAPTER 2 Reinventing a Byzantine icon as Real Presence at Santa Croce in Gerusalemme

Introduction	65
History of the icon	69
The icon <i>Akra tapeinosis</i>	73
Micromosaic icons in Byzantium	75
Icon revival in Renaissance Rome	77
Reinventing icon as sacred vision	80
Framing sacred experience	86
Santa Croce and “Jerusalem in Rome”	93
Conclusion: from icon to idol and iconoclasm—the Mass of Gregory	102

**CHAPTER 3** Iconic imaging and idolatry: Rosso Fiorentino's *Dead Christ with Angels*

Introduction	105
Iconic-cultic presentation	107
The spiritual image	111
The perfected body	114
Religious meaning and controversy	120
The Transubstantiated body as Eucharistic image	124
Sacred erotics and sublimation	128
The doubling of cult and art: transgression or reformation?	140
Conclusion: idols of art and icons of piety	142

**CHAPTER 4** Reforming the idol: Maerten van Heemskerck's *St. Luke and the Virgin*

Introduction	147
A defense of painting within painting	149
Humanism, iconoclasm and the Reformation	154
The statue as idol and art	159
Reforming the statue/idol: iconomachy on the stage of painting	166
Sculptor as creator/destroyer: a myth of origin for Christian art	169
Conclusion: iconoclasm as internalized critique	171

**CHAPTER 5** From idol of art to icon of piety: iconoclasm in Michelangelo's *Rondanini Pietà*

Introduction	176
Reception history and contextualization	180
Sculpture as palimpsest	187
Sculptural process, materiality and spiritual imaging	191
Interlude: sculpture, sonnets and self-formation	198
Idolatry, iconoclasm and spiritual reformation	201
From idol to icon	206
Conclusion	214
<b>CONCLUSION</b> Icons and iconoclasm, past and present	218
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	228
<b>FIGURES</b>	265



## LIST OF FIGURES

- 0.1 Icon of Christ *Akra tapeinosis*, Byzantine ca. 1300. Gold and polychrome tesserae on wood, set in wax, 23 x 28 cm. Basilica di Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.
- 0.2 Israhel van Meckenem, *Imago pietatis*, ca. 1490. Engraving, 16.8 x 11.2 cm. Staatliche Museen, Berlin.
- 0.3 Rosso Fiorentino, *Dead Christ with Angels*, ca. 1525. Oil on panel, 133.4 x 104.1 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Charles Potter Kling Fund, 58.527.
- 0.4 Maerten van Heemskerck, *St. Luke and the Virgin*, ca. 1545. Oil on panel, 145 x 203 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes.
- 0.5 Michelangelo, *Rondanini pieta*, ca. 1550s-1564? Marble, h.195 cm. Castello Sforzesco, Milan. Photo reproduced in Fiorio, *The Pietà Rondanini*, unnumbered plate.
- 0.6 Israhel van Meckenem, *The Mass of St. Gregory*, ca. 1500. Engraving, 468 x 294 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.
- 1.1 Icon of Christ, Byzantine, 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century. Encaustic on panel, 84 x 45.5 cm. Monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai.
- 1.2 Mandylion, mid-to late 14thC. Tempera on panel with a silver gilt revetment. Church of Saint Bartholomew of the Armenians, Genoa.
- 1.3 Paten with Communion of the Apostles, Constantinople or Syria, 6thC. Silver repoussé with gilding and inscription in niello, diameter 35 cm. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., Byzantine Collection, BZ.1924.5.
- 1.4 Throne of Maximian, detail of John the Baptist with the Lamb of God, mid-6<sup>th</sup> century. Ivory relief. Archepiscopal Museum, Ravenna.
- 1.5 Khludov psalter, fol. 67r, mid-9thC. Tempera on vellum, 19.5 cm x 15 cm. State Historical Museum, Moscow.
- 2.1 Reliquary and silver frames, late 14thC, with addition of base and aedicule from 18thC. Wood, glass and metal with encased relics. Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.
- 2.2 Detail of Fig. 0.1.
- 2.3 Icon of Christ *Akra Tapeinosis*, 12thC. Tempera on panel. Kastoria, Greece.
- 2.4 Icon with gold and enamel revetment and frame, Constantinople, 12thC. Jerusalem, Museum of the Greek Patriarchate.

- 2.5 Icon of St. Katherine (reverse of Fig. 0.1), Italo-Byzantine. Tempera on panel.
- 2.6 Epitaphios of Stefan Uros II Milutin, ca. 1300. Silk and velvet; embroidery, gold and silver wire and silver thread. Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Belgrade.
- 2.7 Prothesis niche with *Akra tapeinosis*, Longanikos, church of the Dormition. Reproduced in Gerstel, *Thresholds of the Sacred*, 143.
- 2.8 Feast Day Triptych, Byzantine, 1390s. Micromosaic, metal, enamel. Florentine baptistery of San Giovanni in Fonte.
- 2.9 Fig. 0.1 before restoration. Photo from Istituto Centrale del Restauro, Rome.
- 2.10 Stone relief of Pope Gregory celebrating Mass, with fresco of Gregory below. Sala di Costantino, Vatican Palace, Rome.
- 2.11 Anonymous, *Imago Pietatis*. 15thC, woodcut on paper attached to an English Carthusian Miscellany. British Museum, Add. 37049, fol. 2r.
- 2.12 Icon with the Dormition of Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Crete, 1457. Tempera and gold on wood. Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens.
- 2.13 Mosaic icon of St Demetrios, 13th-14thC. Gold and polychrome tesserae on wood, set in wax; silver gilt frame. Sassoferrata, Italy.
- 2.14 Icon of Christ with triptych revetment. Sancta Sanctorum, San Giovanni in Lateran, Rome.
- 2.15 Plan of Sessorian Palace, Rome.
- 2.16 Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, fresco. Sala Sistino, Vatican Library, Rome.
- 2.17 Antoniazio Romano, *True Cross cycle*, ca. 1492-1495. Ceiling fresco, apse. Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.
- 2.18 Baldassare Peruzzi (attributed), Mosaic vault. ca. 1500. Helena chapel, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.
- 2.19 Majolica inscription, 1500s. Stairwell to Helena chapel, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.
- 2.20 Helena chapel, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.
- 2.21 Gregory chapel, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.

- 2.22 Antonio da Sangallo, ca. 1500. Sketch of apse and corridors to underground chapels at Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome.
- 2.23 Bramante, Crypt of Tempietto, 1500s. San Pietro in Montorio, Rome.
- 2.24 Enguerrand Quarton, *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1453-54 (detail). Oil on panel. Avignon.
- 2.27 Anonymous broadsheet, ca. 1500s. British Museum.
- 2.28 Anonymous Florentine woodcut, ca. 1480s. British Museum.
- 2.29 Master Seewald, *Mass of St. Gregory*, 1491. Oil on panel, Stadtmuseum, Münster.
- 3.1 Parmigianino, *The Vision of St. Jerome*, 1527. Oil on panel, 343cm x 149cm. National Gallery, London.
- 3.2 Sandro Botticelli, *Lamentation*, ca. 1490. Tempera on panel, 140cm x 207 cm. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.
- 3.3 Giovanni Bellini, *Dead Christ Supported by Angels*, ca. 1465-70. Tempera on panel, 91 x 131 cm. Pinacoteca Comunale, Rimini, Italy.
- 3.4 Rosso Fiorentino, *Deposition from the Cross*, 1521. Inscribed RUBEUS FLO FAC A S MDXI. Panel, 341 x 201 cm. Volterra, Pinacoteca.
- 3.5 Detail of Fig. 0.3.
- 3.6 Michelangelo (attributed), Study for the *Ubeda Pietà*, 1530s. Black chalk drawing. Louvre, Paris.
- 3.7 Sebastiano del Piombo, *Ubeda Pietà*, 1533-39. Oil on slate, 124 x 111 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid.
- 3.8 Detail of Fig. 3.4.
- 3.9 Gaddi torso, Hellenistic. Marble. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.
- 3.10 Bed of Polycleitus, 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> century BCE. Marble copy of Roman relief, location unknown.
- 3.11 Michelangelo, *Risen Christ*, 1519-21. Marble, h. 80.75cm. Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, Rome.
- 3.12 Jacopo Caraglio after Rosso Fiorentino, *Pluto and Proserpina*. Engraving from *Loves of the Gods*. Graphische Sammlung Albertina.
- 3.13 Rosso Fiorentino, *Death of Cleopatra*, ca. 1525. Oil on panel. Museum Braunschweig, Kunstmuseum des Landes Niedersachsen.
- 3.14 Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 1538. Oil on canvas, Uffizi, Florence.
- 3.15 Detail of Fig. 0.3.
- 3.16 Rosso Fiorentino, *Deposition from the Cross*, 1528. Oil on panel, 270 x 201 cm. Convent delle Sorelle delle Orfanelle. Sansepolcro, San Lorenzo, Italy.
- 3.17 Detail of Fig. 0.3.
- 3.18 Detail of Fig. 3.7.

- 4.1 Maerten van Heemskerck, *St Luke and the Madonna*, 1550s. Oil on panel, 205.5 x 143.5cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes.
- 4.2 Maerten van Heemskerck, Courtyard of the Casa Sassi, ca. 1532-6. Pen drawing with wash, 230 x 215 mm. Kupferstichkabinet, Berlin.
- 4.3 Phillips Galle after Heemskerck. Frontispiece to “*Inventiones Heemskerckianae*,” 1569. Engraving, 28.2 x 23.7 cm. Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin.
- 4.4 Detail of Fig. 0.4.
- 4.5 Maerten van Heemskerck, *Self-portrait*. Oil on canvas, 42.2 x 54 cm. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England, Inv. 103.
- 4.6 Phillips Galle after Maerten van Heemskerck. Engraving from *The Story of Daniel*, Bel and the Dragon, plate 6, 20.3 x 25 cm.
- 4.7 Detail of Fig. 4.6.
- 4.8 Maerten van Heemskerck, Garden of the Casa Galli. Drawing. *Skizzenbucher*, 79D2, vol. II, fol. 72r. Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin.
- 4.9 Maerten van Heemskerck, Head of Laocoön. *Skizzenbuch*, 79D2, vol. II, fol. 39r. Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin. *Skizzenbuch*, 79D2, vol. II, fol. 39r.
- 4.10 Maerten van Heemskerck, *Landscape with the Good Samaritan*, ca. 1550. Oil on panel. Haarlem, Frans Halsmuseum. Kat. Nr.58.
- 4.11 Detail, Herman Muller after Maerten van Heemskerck, *The Children of Mercury*, 1568. Engraving. Reproduced in Grosshans, Maerten van Heemskerck, *Die Gemälde*, pl. 219.
- 4.12 Theodore Galle after Maerten van Heemskerck, from the series *Divi Caroli V Imperatoris...victoriae*, 1527. Engraving.
- 4.13 Maerten van Heemskerck, *St. Luke and the Virgin*, 1532. Oil on panel, 168 cm x 235 cm. Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, cat. 18.
- 4.14 Maerten van Heemskerck, Courtyard of Cardinal Valle. The inscription reads: *Haec visuntur Romae, in horto Card. A Valle, eius beneficio, ex antiquitatis, reliquiis ibidem conservata*. *Skizzenbucher*, vol. II, fol. 128.
- 4.15 Detail of Fig. 4.1.
- 4.16 Maerten van Heemskerck, Sculptures at the Villa Madama. *Skizzenbucher*, 1 fol. 46r.
- 4.17 Sigismondo Fanti, *Sphera di Iove*. from *Triumpho di Fortuna*, Venice, 1527, carta xxxviii recto.
- 4.18 Mithras relief. Musée du Louvre.
- 4.19 Giulio Romano, Gianfrancesco Penni and assistants, *Destruction of the Idols*, ca. 1520s. Fresco, Sala di Costantino, Vatican Palace, Rome.
- 4.20 Tommaso Laureti, *Triumph of Christianity*, ca. 1582-85. Ceiling fresco, Sala di Costantino, Vatican Palace, Rome.

- 4.21 Detail, Giulio Romano, Gianfrancesco Penni and assistants, *Donation of Constantine*, ca. 1520s. Fresco, Sala di Costantino, Vatican Palace, Rome.
- 4.22 Athena and Prometheus, 3rdC Roman relief. Musée du Louvre.
- 5.1 Michelangelo, Rome *Pietà*, 1498-1500. Marble. St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican.
- 5.2 Michelangelo, *Victory*, 1532-34. Marble, h. 261cm. Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.
- 5.3 Michelangelo, *Florentine pietà*, ca. 1547-55. Marble, h. 226cm. Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence.
- 5.4 Michelangelo, *Studies for a Deposition*, ca. 1552. Black chalk drawing on paper. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 1846.85.
- 5.5 Michelangelo, *Entombment*, ca. 1510. Tempera on wood, 159 x 149cm. National Gallery of Art, London.
- 5.6 Michelangelo (attributed), *Pietà*, ca. 1530-36. Red and black chalk pencil drawing. Albertina, Vienna.
- 5.7 Reconstruction of *Rondanini* with bust of Christ. Reproduced in Paolucci, Michelangelo, *The Pietàs*, 138.
- 5.8 *Rondanini*, side view of leg. Reproduced in Paolucci, Michelangelo, *The Pietàs*, unnumbered plate.
- 5.9 *Rondanini*, view of legs and arm of original figure. Paolucci, Michelangelo, *The Pietàs*, unnumbered plate.
- 5.10 *Rondanini*, side view. Photo reproduced in Fiorio, *The Pietà Rondanini*, unnumbered plate.
- 5.11 *Rondanini*, detail of carved marble. Paolucci, Michelangelo, *The Pietàs*, unnumbered plate.
- 5.12 *Rondanini*, detail of scarred torso. Paolucci, Michelangelo, *The Pietàs*, unnumbered plate.
- 5.13 Michelangelo, *Christ on the Cross between the Virgin and St. John*, ca. 1550s-60s. Drawing, black chalk with white lead. Louvre, inv. 700.
- 5.14 Michelangelo, *Christ crucified*, 1562-1563. Wood, h. 265mm. Casa Buonarrotti, Florence, inv. n.75.
- 5.15 Michelangelo, *Last Judgment*, detail of Bartholomew. 1535-41. Fresco, Cappella Sistina, Vatican Palace, Rome.
- 5.16 *Rondanini*, detail of stone bridge between arm and torso. Reproduced in Paolucci, Michelangelo, *The Pietàs*, unnumbered plate.
- 5.17 Vatican *Pietà*, detail of band. Reproduced in Paolucci, Michelangelo, *The Pietàs*, unnumbered plate.
- 5.18 *Rondanini*, detail of faces. Photo reproduced in Fiorio, *The Pietà Rondanini*, unnumbered plates.

- 5.19 Michelangelo, *Christ on the Cross between the Virgin and St. John*, ca. 1550s-60s. Drawing, black chalk and white lead, 41.2 x 28.5 cm. British Museum, inv. 1895,0915.509.



## INTRODUCTION

### Icons and Presence

...[S]haping man, [God] discovered, together with the lovely creation of all things, the first form of sculpture; from which man afterwards, step by step... as from a true pattern, [took] statues, sculptures, and the science of pose and of outline.... [T]he first model from which there issued the first image [*la prima imagine*] of man was a lump of clay, and not without reason, seeing that the Divine Architect of time and of nature, being Himself most perfect, wished to show in the imperfection of the material the way to add and to take away.... He gave to man that most vivid color of flesh, from which afterwards there were drawn for painting, from the mines of the earth, the colors themselves for the counterfeiting of all those things that are required for pictures.... [Afterwards], Belus, son of the proud Nimrod, about 200 years after the Flood, caused to be made that statue wherefrom there was afterwards born idolatry.

Giorgio Vasari, *Proem* (1550, 1568)<sup>1</sup>

The history of art in the West has long been viewed in terms of a predominant theme: the progress of the image towards naturalistic representation. In both the codification of artistic principles and their remarkable achievement in works of art, the Italian Renaissance has been seen as a watershed: a break with the Middle Ages and an overarching concern with the religious aims of art. Perhaps no other text has done more to canonize this progressive view than Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*. Yet as the passage from its preface shows, Vasari's own history of art begins well before the Renaissance. Alongside, indeed formatively shaping, a narrative that celebrates Cimabue's and Giotto's turn to Nature in the fourteenth-century, the foundations of art-making and its progress are set within a longer tradition and set of concerns rarely engaged by Renaissance scholars: the first image as modeled for artists by God; the idolatry of religion

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<sup>1</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori...*, 1550, 1568; for the Italian, I draw upon various editions throughout. For English translation, I refer to and at times amend Gaston du Vere's *Lives of the Painters, Sculptor and Architects*, with Introduction and Notes by David Ekserdjian, 2 vols. (Alfred Knopf: New York, Toronto, 1996), here 27. The Proem clearly draws upon other sources and precedents, but my argument does not depend upon Vasari as sole author.

and art; and later, the attribution of iconoclasm to Christians themselves against the ancient works prized in the Renaissance as models of artistic emulation.<sup>2</sup>

In joining together the history of Renaissance art with the story of the first, divinely made image and its subsequent, fraught history, Vasari's *Proem* serves as a prologue for my own study. His historically reflexive work, written in the midst of Reformation turmoil and the contemporary iconoclasm that threatened the foundations of artistic practice, reflects the degree to which art's history and works of art have been shaped by tensions emerging from a longer history of religious image-making, tensions which crucially changed the course of European art and culture in Vasari's own time.<sup>3</sup> Central to this history is the story of the image as it both emerged from, and became bound up in, claims and controversy over *Real presence* – divine, spiritual and Eucharistic.<sup>4</sup> Yet to date, scholars have yet to fully engage the Renaissance in these terms.<sup>5</sup>

Like Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, my dissertation reaches further back in time to rethink Renaissance art within the frame of a longer historical dynamic. The point of departure is not the intertwined origins of the world and its art, but the interrelated phenomena of the icon, iconoclasm and theories of the sacred image, from their origin in Byzantium of the eighth and

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<sup>2</sup> For Vasari on God as the original *Artifex*, see Paul Barolsky's *A Brief History of the Artist from God to Picasso* (Penn. State University Press, 2010), esp. 1-10. As Barolsky writes (4): "the perfect *maniera* (of Michelangelo) was, in effect, as conversion, a return to the unsurpassed perfection of the divine hand."

<sup>3</sup> For one of the few volumes that considers idolatry during this period, focused primarily on interaction between Italy and the New World, see Michael Cole and Rebecca Zorach, eds., *The Idol in the Age of Art: Objects, Devotions and the Early Modern World* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009). See also Alexander Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Although it focuses on a different era and set of images, mostly drawn from Northern and Eastern Europe, see Milena Bartlová's study of medieval images and presence, *Skutečná Přítomnost: Středověký Obraz Mezi Ikonou a Virtuální Realitou*, Vyd. 1 (Praha: Argo, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Although concerned only with icons as mediations of presence, an exception is Hans Belting's *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), discussed below.

ninth centuries, as they provide a frame for reinterpreting artworks produced in Italy during the pressures of the Reformation in the sixteenth.<sup>6</sup> While this may seem a long stretch to connect, there is a historic connection between these periods and concerns. Notably, the Byzantine defense of sacred images and cult that emerges from the iconoclastic debates forms the foundation for the response of the Roman church to Reformation critique in the sixteenth.<sup>7</sup> Yet even given this continuity, histories of art tend to bracket sacred image theory and religious cult from considerations of art.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Renaissance art, and by extension the origin of the artwork in its modern sense, has been defined precisely by the separation of these two realms.<sup>9</sup>

As a challenge to this historiographic divide, a primary aim of my study is to explore how sacred image theory, icons, and cult might newly inform our understanding of Renaissance works of art and artistic practice in this period, bridging categories of scholarship that have been

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<sup>6</sup> While important studies have engaged the *long durée* of icons and iconoclasm, few have drawn a connection between Byzantium and Reformation Italy, because in general Italy is not considered to have been affected by iconoclasm. For a comparison of the two epochs, focused on Byzantium and Northern Europe, see David Freedberg, "The Structure of European and Byzantine Iconoclasm," in *Iconoclasm: Papers given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975*, eds. Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (Birmingham, UK: Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1977), 165-77.

<sup>7</sup> The continuity is clear not only in the decrees on sacred images of the Council of Trent (1563) but in Gabrielle Paoletti's later treatment and expansion of these concerns. Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle immagini e profane* (1582), in *Trattati d'arte del cinquecento fra manierismo e controriforma*, Paola Barocchi (ed.), Bari 1961. For English translation, see Gabriele Paleotti, *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*, Texts & Documents, introduction by Paolo Prodi and trans. by William McCuaig (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> In recent years, there has been a developing scholarship on the subject. The following are important studies that examine the intersection of art and cult in the Renaissance: Christoph Luitpold Frommel and Gerhard Wolf, eds., *L'immagine di Cristo dall'Acheropita alla mano d'artista: dal tardo medioevo all'età barocca* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 2006); Erik Thuno and G. Wolf, eds., *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Rome, 2003); G. Wolf, *Schleier und Spiegel: Traditionen des Christusbildes und die Bildkonzepte der Renaissance* (München: W. Fink, 2002); Klaus Kruger, *Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren: Ästhetische Illusion in der Kunst der frühen Neuzeit in Italien* (Munich, 2001); Alexander Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For recent discussion of the topic, see Fredrika Jacobs "Rethinking the Divide: Cult Images and the Cult of Images," in *Renaissance Theory*, James Elkins and Robert Williams, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2008) 95-114 and Megan Holmes, "Miraculous Images in Renaissance Florence," *Art History*, 34, no. 3 (June 2011): 432-465.

<sup>9</sup> Most recently and influentially, Hans Belting made this argument in *Likeness and Presence*.

pursued separately.<sup>10</sup> In particular, I aim to demonstrate how the overlap of these categories gives insight into Italian artworks poised on the cusp of the Renaissance-Reformation, a period that also tends to fall into different disciplinary domains. In order to do so, the dissertation considers icons and icon theory together with exemplary case studies of artworks that enter into dialogue with iconic precedents or themselves instantiate what I define as iconic or cultic functions. As a bridge between these domains, it charts the cultural transformation of a Byzantine icon as an object of cult in Rome, where it becomes bound to controversy as the Eucharistic vision of Gregory the Great. This prominent example of cultural appropriation of an icon from East to West lays the groundwork for considering the icon's artistic transformation by Renaissance artists during the Reformation, focusing on exemplary artworks by Rosso Fiorentino (1494-1540), Michelangelo (1475-1564) and Maerten van Heemskerck (1498-1574) within the context of early modern Rome.<sup>11</sup> In these case studies, I aim to show the role of iconoclasm in the culture of their production, in order to articulate complex interrelations between image making and breaking that relate to a longer history of concerns regarding images and idolatry.<sup>12</sup> More broadly, my analysis of the historic dynamic between iconic images and iconoclasm gives insight into the deep structure of early modern European thought and culture, as it was formed in

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<sup>10</sup> Jacobs, "Rethinking the Divide," 103-10, also argues for 'presence' as a characteristic binding together these realms, drawing upon the distinction Robert Armstrong makes between "works-in-invocation" to define the efficacy of cultic images and "works-in-virtuosity" to describe their artistic power. While her purview is not icons *per se* but votive images (*tavolette*), the point still applies.

<sup>11</sup> For a recent and important study that takes this approach with regard to Byzantine influence on Renaissance works of art (which was published in the course of writing my dissertation), see Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (Zone Books, MIT Press, 2010), also discussed below.

<sup>12</sup> See Anna M. Kim, "Creative Iconoclasm in Renaissance Italy," in Stacy Boldrick, Leslie Brubaker, and Richard Clay, eds., *Striking Images, Iconoclasm Past and Present* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 65-80.

the crucible of controversy over Real Presence, and the intertwined idolatries of religion, art and the mind.<sup>13</sup>

### Iconic images between East and West

Given the apparent stylistic differences between Byzantine icons and Italian Renaissance art of the sixteenth century – icons as ‘hieratic and static’ and Renaissance works as ‘naturalistic and life-like’ – how might we trace a meaningful lineage between icons and art?<sup>14</sup> We might begin with David Freedberg’s observation that “the ontology of holy images [icons] is exemplary for all images.... [and] the Byzantine theology of images is exemplary for all subsequent image theory.”<sup>15</sup> By this he meant that the very structure of sacred images or icons – as mediations by which an absent prototype is made present before its viewers – reveals something fundamental about the work of images more generally. As the word “representation” suggests, every image, as a form of visual representation, is bound to a kind of “presence.”<sup>16</sup> It might be said that sacred

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<sup>13</sup> James Simpson pursues these connections during the English Reformation in, James Simpson, *Under the Hammer: Iconoclasm in the Anglo-American Tradition* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> In describing Byzantine art in these terms, I repeat the most common perception of them. In contrast to this, as I will argue, it is precisely the icon’s animation as spiritually “moving” that brings it into connection with Renaissance exemplars. For a recent reevaluation of the icon in these terms, see especially Bissera V. Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> David Freedberg, ‘Holy Images and Other Images,’ in *The Art of Interpreting (Papers in Art History from the The Pennsylvania State University)*, Susan C. Scott, ed. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 87. See also the related claim by Hans-Georg Gadamer, ‘The Ontological Valence of the Picture,’ in *Truth and Method*, trans. Donald G. Marshall and Joel Weinsheimer (New York: Continuum, 2006), 137: “only the *religious* picture (*Bild*: also, image) displays the full ontological power of the picture.... Thus the religious picture [icon] has an exemplary significance. In it we can see without any doubt that a picture is not a copy of a copied being, but is in ontological communion with what is copied...allow[ing] what they present to be for the first time fully what it is.”

<sup>16</sup> Current interest in images and presence spans art historical accounts primarily focused on religious images, such as Rupert Shepherd and Robert Maniura, eds., *Presence: The Inherence of the Prototype within Images and Other Objects*, Histories of Vision (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006) and Klaus Kruger, “Authenticity and Fiction: On the Pictorial Construction of Inner Presence in Early Modern Italy,” in *Image*

images, or icons, make the production of presence their primary aim, bringing it to its fullest realization in exemplary, but also problematic, ways. For not only do icons claim to re-present a former presence, as mere outlines of something seen or encountered in the world. They also claim to mediate, manifest or give access to Real, invisible or *spiritual* presence – paradoxically, through visible, material means.<sup>17</sup>

A second, related way in which the categories of icon and art might usefully be brought together is through a consideration of the meaning of the “living image,” beyond its usual association with pictorial naturalism.<sup>18</sup> As Vasari reiterates in the *Lives*, the ability to make a work of art “life-like,” in the sense of living (*viva*) and breathing, is celebrated as a defining characteristic of artistic virtuosity.<sup>19</sup> Like the Byzantine icon, which is also characterized as “living” (*empsychos*), works by Renaissance artists such as Michelangelo were understood as infused with animating spirit or even “divinely” inspired.<sup>20</sup> While the praise of Michelangelo as *divino* may be read as a topos, it nonetheless reflects a complex cultural patrimony derived from

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and *Imagination of the Religious Self in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, R. Falkenburg, W. Melion and T. Richardson, eds. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2007) 37-69, and those which engage more broadly with theories of agency following from the theory of Alfred Gell, such as overviewed in a recent article by Caroline van Eck, “Living Statues: Alfred Gell’s *Art and Agency*, Living Presence Response and the Sublime,” *Art History*, vol. 33, no. 4 (2010): 642-59. It might be argued that a new and increasingly important field of image theory, *Bildanthropologie*, flows from an exploration of the iconic dimension of images as meditators of presence; I discuss these works in a philosophical-phenomenological vein in my Conclusion below.

<sup>17</sup> The early work of Herbert Kessler and Gerhard Wolf (as evident for example, in their jointly edited volume, *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation: Papers from a Colloquium Held at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome and the Villa Spelman, Florence, 1996* (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998), has been followed by a growing literature on what Carole Walker Bynum terms “Christian Materiality.” See her book of the same name: *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (Zone Books, 2011). A useful summary of material may be found in her recent essay, “The Sacrality of Things: An Inquiry into Divine Materiality in the Christian Middle Ages,” *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 78 (1) 2012: 3-18.

<sup>18</sup> See discussion in Fredrika Jacobs, *The Living Image in Renaissance Art* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005); for summary of key points, see also Jacobs, “Rethinking the Divide,” 108.

<sup>19</sup> See for example Vasari’s definition of the artistic achievements of the *terza maniera* (or third and highest style of art) in his *vita* of Raphael.

<sup>20</sup> For the Byzantine term, see discussion in Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon*, esp. 1-2, 14, 82. David Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1970) is an important source for wide-ranging discussion of this subject in the context of Renaissance artistic practice and theory.



biblical, Christian, Neoplatonic and other sources that inform the culture of this time.<sup>21</sup> Among many examples of the importance of this patrimony, the myth of St. Luke as the originary, divinely inspired artist who painted the Virgin and Christ from life was employed to defend both the cult of icons and artistic practice in the Renaissance.<sup>22</sup>

A third line of continuity is evident in Italian art theory. As Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) wrote in his widely influential *Treatise on Painting* (1435, Latin; 1436, Italian), portraits have a divine force (*forza divino*) by which the absent is made present, and the dead seem almost alive.<sup>23</sup> As we will see, the image as representative of persons *in absentia* (as deployed by Roman Emperors) provided an important model for the icon's initial conceptualization. But the icon's later theorization in Byzantium was further complicated by other models of "presence-making" which give a wider view of the type of image at the center of my study. These include relics or contact icons, such as the legendary icons of Christ's face (material remains infused with holiness); the Eucharist (consecrated or 'graced' matter) and, most formatively, the *sui generis* example of the incarnate Christ (a mystical unity of human body and divine spirit). When the subject of an icon was the synoptic image of the dead, but living Christ, what is called the *Akra Tapeinosis* in the East [Fig. 0.1] and the *imago pietatis* in the Latin West [Fig. 0.2], the complication of the icon as model of presence was effectively doubled.<sup>24</sup> As Erich Auerbach

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<sup>21</sup> Stephen Campbell addresses the widespread currency of the notion of divinity and its problematic ascription to Michelangelo in "'Fare Una Cosa Morta Parer Viva': Michelangelo, Rosso, and the (Un)Divinity of Art," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 84, No. 4 (Dec., 2002): 596-620, esp. 596-98.

<sup>22</sup> See discussion in Jacobs, "Rethinking the Divide," 109.

<sup>23</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *De pictura* of 1436, Book II: "Nam habet ea quidem in se vim admodum divinam non modo ut quod de amicitia dicunt, absentes pictura praesentes esse faciat, verum etiam defunctos longa post saecula viventibus exhibeat." In this way, Alberti writes, painters "feel themselves to be almost like the creator."

<sup>24</sup> In addition to *Likeness and Presence*, Hans Belting charted this genealogy in *Das Bild und sein Publikum im Mittelalter: Form und Funktion früher Bildtafeln der Passion* (Berlin, Mann, 1981) [*The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. M. Bartusis and R. Meyer (New Rochelle, 1990)],

once argued, the triumph of Christ through his “voluntary humiliation” constitutes a “watershed in ancient rhetorical and philosophical thinking:” a formulation of power in terms of dialectic rather than unity.<sup>25</sup> I examine the Byzantine basis of this image type of the Passion in Chapter 1, which revisits the textual sources of the iconoclastic debates to discern their fundamental origin in controversy over an icon’s relation to spiritual presence.

In the chapters that follow, I examine how this complex theory of images was conceptualized and put into practice within the context of intersecting concerns and controversy regarding spiritual presence. But rather than engage images as illustrations or *reflections* of theory and religious controversy, I demonstrate how images become sites that actively *reflect upon* or stage ideas and debates.<sup>26</sup> To this end, I draw out the significance not only of iconography or ideology tied to patronage, the usual focus of religious studies of the image. Rather, I explore the ways in which the icon implies issues concerning the relationship of image to matter, body to spirit, original to copy, veiling to unveiling. This involves a consideration of the materiality of images (mosaic, paint, and stone); their spatiality (both the formal construction of space and relation to the external spaces in which they are encountered); and phenomenology (their peculiar force as epiphany and revelation).<sup>27</sup> By means of these considerations, I articulate the stakes of an “incarnational aesthetics”: not only the embodied effects of images on their viewers, and but also how such effects give rise to, and render problematic, the “presence” an

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which builds on the seminal work by Erwin Panofsky, “*Imago Pietatis*”: Ein Beitrag zur Typengeschichte des ‘Schmerzensmanns’ und der ‘Maria Mediatrix,’” in Festschrift Max J. Friedlander zum 60. Geburtstag, (Leipzig, 1927).

<sup>25</sup> Eric Auerbach, “*Sermo humilis*,” pts. 1 and 2, *Romanische Forschungen* 64 (1952): 1-64; cited in Peter Parshall, “The Art of Memory and the Passion,” *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 81, no. 3 (Sept. 1999): 460.

<sup>26</sup> These artistic experiments in their relation to religious and artistic reformation of the period are the subject of compelling analysis in Alexander Nagel’s, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*.

<sup>27</sup> Within a rhetorical tradition common to both Byzantium and Italy, this might be described in terms of *energeia*. A longer treatment of this subject would trace the shared roots of these concepts in theological and rhetorical sources.

image produces. As we will see, the powerful, affective dimension of sacred images makes them potential sites not only of viewer transformation, but also of the confusion that leads to idolatry, and, in extreme cases, iconoclasm.

Finally, while studies of an image's relation to presence generally focus on miracle-working icons or relics, my own approach widens the view towards what I define as "iconic images." With this expanded concept, I aim to bring into comparative view works often studied separately in art history: cult icons and Renaissance painting and sculpture.<sup>28</sup> What unites them, I will argue, is their relation to the production or mediation of spiritual presence. My focus throughout on concepts of spirit (*pneuma*, *spirito*, *aria*) and related notions, such as grace (*kharis*, *grazia*), serves to bridge the divide between art theory and its theological and religious counterparts that inform our understanding of icons/cult images.<sup>29</sup> In their overlapping theological and artistic significance, these terms also provide a different perspective on the "living" or animated image, drawing together a defining characteristic of Byzantine icons and one of the highest aims of Renaissance art. By charting a history of art according to an image's relation to spiritual presence, rather than naturalistic representation, I aim to uncover confluences between realms traditionally divided by disciplinary boundaries, contributing to a revision of art's history between East and West currently underway.

### **State of the Field: Byzantine and Italian Art History**

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<sup>28</sup> On this issue, see most recently Peter Parshall: "We have long ago discarded the old model of the new realism as a moment of awakening when artists suddenly sat up and began to look at the world. Nonetheless, the degree to which inherited formal types continued to feed the art of the Renaissance bears further reflection – *Antikenformel* as much as medieval iconic formulae." "Fra Filippo Lippi and the image of St. Luke," *Simiolus vol. 33* (2007), 21.

<sup>29</sup> See note 23 above.

Vasari's *Lives*, which has formatively shaped the discipline of art history from its origin in the nineteenth century, is often cited as the historic cause for the denigration of Byzantine art vis-à-vis a more lively, naturalistic Italian art.<sup>30</sup> As is well known, Vasari characterizes the *rinascita* or rebirth of art specifically as a decisive move away from the “crude painting” of the *maniera greca* (the “Greek manner” or style, equated with the Byzantine).<sup>31</sup> With this story, Vasari placed the supersession of hieratic, Byzantine prototypes by a superior Italian painting at the very heart of art's renewal from the dark passage of the Middle Ages. While Vasari's narrative remains influential, in recent decades scholars have come to acknowledge the formative influence of Byzantine icons on Italian art and culture, inaugurating a much-needed revision of this story. As my work builds upon this scholarship, I will briefly summarize how it departs from some of its main lines to contribute a different view.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> For discussion, see the seminal essays by Robert Nelson, “Living on the Borders of Byzantine Art,” *Gesta*, 35.1 (1996): 3-11; and Anthony Cutler, “The Pathos of Distance: Byzantium in the Gaze of Renaissance Europe and Modern Scholarship,” in *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450-1650*, Claire Farago, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 23-45. It should be noted that until the discovery of a hoard of icons at the monastery of St. Catherine's in Sinai and their cataloging by Weitzmann in the 1950s, the history of Byzantine icons could not be written. Moreover, another impediment hindering their appreciation and study, as scholars such as Robert Nelson and Bissera Pentcheva have noted, is that the aesthetic effects (radiance, brilliance, and color) of mosaic icons *in situ* were largely lost in their reproduction in black and white photographs. As Gervase Matthew notes, the perception of Byzantine figures as elongated or distorted, which gave rise to an interpretation of a ‘psychology of style,’ is due in part to photographs which fail to take into account the angle of vision from which optical deviations would be corrected. Matthew, *Byzantine Aesthetics* (London: John Murray, 1963), 35.

<sup>31</sup> See Vasari, *Life of Giotto*. The question of what Vasari meant by *maniera greca* is ongoing. Matthew, *Byzantine Aesthetics*, 9, is among those who argue that the phrase is not meant to apply to Byzantine exemplars but rather the *arte Bizantina* as practiced by Italian artists.

<sup>32</sup> There is a large and fairly new category of scholarship that places Byzantine and Italian culture within a paradigm of exchange across a shared Mediterranean world, engaging Byzantine objects within Italian contexts as objects of gift-exchange, ideological display, or carriers of artistic motifs. For a recent collection which exemplifies this approach, see Angeliki Lymberopoulou and Rembrandt Duits, eds., *Byzantine Art and Renaissance Europe* (Ashgate: Farnham, UK, Burlington, VT, 2013), esp. Introduction, 1-8. While acknowledging the value of this ground breaking work and the Mediterranean paradigm, my research follows a different set of paths and emphases.

Hans Belting's magisterial work, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, has been seminal in recasting the legacy of Byzantine art, particularly its sacred images or icons, to the religious and artistic culture of Renaissance Italy.<sup>33</sup> While Byzantium's foundational role in the development of Renaissance humanism has long been acknowledged, the story of the transmission of classical texts and rhetorical training from Byzantium to the West fit securely within an historiographical tradition of the Renaissance as a secular, classical revival: a break with a medieval and religious past that affirms the Vasarian paradigm. With regard to the history of Italian art, scholars such as Ernst Kitzinger had earlier documented the crucial influence of Byzantine prototypes – in their vivid rendering of emotion – to Italian devotional painting of the *trecento*.<sup>34</sup> But the impact of these studies did not extend beyond the field of Byzantine studies. Nor did their claims challenge the main contours of Renaissance art history.

Belting's study was a bold attempt to recast the canonical story of Italian Renaissance art by demonstrating the unacknowledged, yet clearly fundamental, role of Byzantine icons to the life of Italian city-states, and moreover to the full flowering of Italian art, not just its early development.<sup>35</sup> Insofar as Vasari's story was also the myth upon which the discipline of art history was founded, Belting's reassessment held the potential to challenge more than the history of Italian art. Yet, as scholars have noted, in his historicizing narrative of a progression from the "cult of images into the cult of art," Belting essentially reiterates the Vasarian paradigm of a historic break in the Renaissance between medieval Byzantine icons and art. The decisive

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<sup>33</sup> See note 6 above.

<sup>34</sup> For an updated analysis of this question, see Hans Bloemsmas, 'Byzantine Art and Early Italian Painting,' in *Byzantine Art and Renaissance Europe*, 37-60.

<sup>35</sup> See especially Ch. 20, Religion and Art: The Crisis of the Image at the Beginning of the Modern Age, in Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 458-54.

moment is simply pushed forward: from Giotto's drawing after nature in the *quattrocento*, to the artistic refinements of Raphael and his contemporaries in the first decades of the sixteenth.<sup>36</sup> In other words, Italy during the Reformation is seen to be a watershed in the caesura between art and religion, a view that accords with Hegel's teleology in his universal history of art.<sup>37</sup>

### The doubling of cult and art

While indebted to Belting's groundbreaking work, my own raises a challenge to it.<sup>38</sup> Specifically, I focus on the period of the Reformation in Italy as exemplary of artworks that, I propose, are best understood not in terms of the *separation* of art and cult, but in their interrelation, and moreover the tensions the merging of these categories gives rise to.<sup>39</sup> These tensions I claim to be crucial to understanding the complex aesthetic strategies these artworks employ in their dual status as religious and artistic images during the controversies of the

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<sup>36</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 489-90.

<sup>37</sup> The Reformation and Luther in particular signal for Hegel the movement of spirit 'coming to itself,' as described in his *Aesthetics* (1820s). See discussion by Joseph Leo Koerner in *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 33-5.

<sup>38</sup> Two kinds of challenges have been issued with regard to Belting's historical picture of "image into art." The first is that the cult of images continued, and still continues, in Italy after Belting's so-called break; this argument is exemplified by Robert Maniura "The Icon is Dead, Long Live the Icon: The holy image in the Renaissance," in *Icon and Word: the Power of Images in Byzantium. Studies presented to Robin Cormack*, Antony Eastmond and Liz James, eds. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 99 see also the Introduction to Erik Thunø and Gerhard Wolf, eds., *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2003). Yet this is hardly a fair criticism, as Belting himself acknowledges this point. Second and more compelling is the view that the medieval image is *already a form of art*. See for example Charles Barber, "On Cult images and the Origins of Medieval Art," *Intellektualisierung und Mystifizierung mittelalterlicher Kunst* Eds. Martin Büchsel and Rebecca Müller (Berlin, 2010), 28. See also the earlier "From Image into Art: Art after Byzantine Iconoclasm," *Gesta*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (1995): 5-10.

<sup>39</sup> Indeed, without such a view, it would be difficult to explain the Counter-Reformation concern with transgressive, licentious artworks that drew upon the powers of their religious counterparts to lead viewers astray. See *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Norman P. Tanner, ed. (London: Sheed & Ward: Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 776: "...all sensual appeal [*lascivia*] must be avoided, so that images are not painted or adorned with seductive charm [*procaci venustate*]..." This is further addressed in Paleotti's *Discorso*.



Reformation. In order to accommodate artworks that fall within this period, Belting describes them as images with a “double face.” By this he means that works of art functioned unproblematically both as “receptacles of the holy” and as “expressions of art.”<sup>40</sup> This may have been the case in Protestant Germany, where the separation of art and cult does indeed lead to increasingly divided realms of images. But such a view is clearly at odds with evidence we have about how such works were received in Italy, where circumstances during the still unsettled decades of the sixteenth century were arguably very different.

To cite a famous example, we might recall Leonardo da Vinci’s description of the quandary a friend found himself in when he was attracted to a painting Leonardo had made of a sacred figure. According to Leonardo, the image was so beautiful that the owner was disturbed by his own, sensual response to it. The patron’s solution was not to “see” the painting as an image in double terms, as a work of art and of religion, as Belting suggests. According to Leonardo’s account, he “wanted to remove the attributes of the saint [lit. the deity] so he would be able to kiss it without misgivings....in the end his conscience...forced [him] to remove it from his house.”<sup>41</sup> What this example and similar stories indicate is that the “doubled image” was not one that was simply and unproblematically encountered as an image under two descriptions.<sup>42</sup> As

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<sup>40</sup> The description is based upon a passage by Martin Luther on images. See Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 458.

<sup>41</sup> *Leonardo da Vinci, Treatise on Painting*, ed. A.P. McMahon, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1956), 13v; see discussion in Nagel, “Icons and Early Modern Portraits,” in *El Retrato del Renacimiento*, Miguel Falomir, editor and curator (Museo del Prado, Madrid, 2008), 424. While the story itself may be fictitious, its content is not far removed from similar accounts of sexual passion towards works of art, as Vasari relates in the *Life* of Fra Bartolomeo. For discussion, see Robert W. Gaston, “Sacred Erotica: The Classical Figura in Religious Paintings of the Early Cinquecento,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 2, no. 2 (1995): 238–64.

<sup>42</sup> Recently Bette Talvacchia has argued that such works were non-problematic, but were understood as images of carnal beauty that reflected heavenly perfection. See “The Word Made Flesh: Spiritual Subjects and Carnal Depictions in Renaissance Art,” in Marcia Hall and Tracy Cooper, eds., *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 49-74. While I agree with her connection between corporeal beauty and perfection, I find her overall argument is lacking in substance. There is a

I will show, the doubling of cultic and artistic power, and the troubling of decorum in the process, is precisely what makes this period and its artworks of such great interest. I take up these issues beginning with my discussion of Italian painting in Chapter 3.

In contrast to Belting, my dissertation also delves more deeply into the *question* of image and presence: probing the structure and operation of iconic images, as well as the forms of presence they produce.<sup>43</sup> This emphasis also distinguishes my approach from other revisions of Renaissance art history that seek to reenvision Byzantine-Italian relations. Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood's *Anachronic Renaissance*, for example, presents compelling evidence for the seminal influence of Byzantine artifacts on the Italian Renaissance, as "an alternative antiquity" equal to that of the classical works of art.<sup>44</sup> Their thesis proposes rethinking Renaissance artworks according to substitutional chains of authoritative prototypes, according to which Byzantine icons – particularly after the fall of Constantinople (1453) and the closing of access to the Holy Land – are accorded an exceptional status.<sup>45</sup> This "re-orientation" of the Renaissance eastward, and especially towards Jerusalem, is one with which this dissertation roughly accords.

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conceptual difference between "sensuousness" and "sensuality" which is not observed. Moreover, her argument forecloses discussion of the possibility that erotic works of art were in any way problematic, a claim that does not accord with how they were discussed during the Council of Trent.

<sup>43</sup> While Belting makes a distinction between sacred 'presence' in the holy image and the 'presence' of the artist's idea in the work of art (*Likeness and Presence*, 459), how we might understand this presence is explicitly not addressed. A recent volume edited by Robert Maniura and Rupert Shepherd titled *Presence: The Inherence of the Prototype within Images and Other Objects* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) also assumes an intuitive notion of 'presence' and takes up instead the question of the relation of likeness to presence. More promising is Klaus Krüger, "Authenticity and Fiction: On the Pictorial Construction of Inner Presence in Early Modern Italy," in *Image and Imagination of the Religious Self in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, R. Falkenburg, W. Melion, and T. Richardson, eds. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2007), 37-69. See also example the description, though somewhat awkward, of 'living presence response' in Caroline van Eck's 'Living Statues: Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency*, Living Presence Response and the Sublime', *Art History* 33 (2010), 1-19. One might more usefully term this mode "affective presence." On this phenomenon see for example Ernst Van Alphen, "Affective Operations of Art and Literature," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 53/54 (Spring-Autumn, 2008), 20-30.

<sup>44</sup> Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*.

<sup>45</sup> *Anachronic*, Ch. 1, 'Plural Temporality of the Work of Art,' 7-20. Like Belting, *Anachronic* points to the decades of the Reformation as the historic juncture that signals the emergence of the artwork; the last work of Raphael in the 1520s forms the context for the discussion. See Ch. 28, 'Space for Fiction,' 347-66.

In particular, the reinvention of a Byzantine icon in the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, the subject of my second chapter, builds upon this seminal insight. Yet, as compelling as the argument of the book is, the overriding emphasis on *historical consciousness* regarding icons as authoritative images elides a crucial feature: their phenomenologically forceful, and psychologically *affective*, dimension, as seemingly true manifestations of the divine.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, unlike Nagel and Wood's project, the focus of my study is not perceptions of temporality or authority that made Byzantine icons central to Renaissance art - an important, but primarily historiographical argument. Although their claims concerning the significance of icons within Italian Renaissance culture support my argument, my own study concerns what might be called a Christian anthropology of the image or the alignment of Renaissance art with traditions of Christian mimesis. Beyond the Italian appropriation of Byzantine artifacts, I am interested in understanding the artistic means according to which Renaissance artists appropriated the powerful effects iconic encounter.

Here we can briefly touch upon another important sense in which icons and cult images furnish a model for the Renaissance artists that I will address in the dissertation.<sup>47</sup> Beyond their status as authoritative or authentic images (as emphasized by Belting, Nagel and Wood), icons offer powerful models of affective rhetorical and devotional presentation. Rosso Fiorentino's *Dead Christ with Angels* of circa 1525 [Fig. 0.3], the subject of Chapter 3 of my study, serves as exemplary of the potent effects of the "doubling" of cult and art in this regard. Indeed in crucial

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<sup>46</sup> As Frank Fehrenbach notes in his review of *Anachronic Renaissance*, College Art Association online review (March 2011). See *Anachronic*, 17: "The work can represent itself either as a magical conduit to other times and places or as an index pointing to its own efficient causes...It is finally the tension between the two models of the work's temporality that becomes the content of the work of art."

<sup>47</sup> Although focused on the Veil of Veronica and the icon as a mirror as models for theories of art making in the Renaissance, a crucial study in this regard is Wolf's *Schleier und Spiegel*. I discuss the exemplarity of Christ's image/icon for Byzantine image theory in Chapter 1 of the dissertation.

respects, Rosso's striking interpretation of the *imago pietatis* motivates the backward tracing of this dissertation to its foundation in Byzantine prototypes and theory. For, as I will argue, Rosso's Christ is presented to the viewer with the force of a cult icon. The painting foregoes linear perspective and other techniques that would frame the subject and place it at a distance from us as a work of art. Instead of this artificial distance, the subject – Christ's passionate body, physically dead and yet spiritually living – is brought into intimate relation to us.<sup>48</sup> The artist's animation of the image as a living, sensuous *presence* produces an artwork with just those characteristics that were seen to be the domain of the icon or cult image. Moreover, the haptic dimensions of image veneration – the ardent touching with eyes and hands – are absorbed into the picture plane itself, effecting a visual touching or 'communion' with the sacred body.

Yet the painting also contains highly sophisticated, inter-pictorial elements that overtly signal the painting's status as artifice. That is to say, in addition to appropriating these iconic elements, the artist also creates complex aesthetic strategies by which idolatrous response to this sensual body might be displaced. Klaus Kruger's notion of *ästhetische Alterität* (aesthetic alterity) provides a useful theoretical model for understanding the oscillation between the perception of divine presence and simultaneous recognition of the mediating role and presence of the artist at work in Rosso's painting.<sup>49</sup> Whether Rosso's invention is a transgressive response to the iconic tradition or a devout one, the operation it effects provides illuminating insight into the doubling of cult and art in this period and the potential for idolatry it yields.

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<sup>48</sup> For discussion of the psycho-devotional effects of what is called 'reverse perspective,' see Aaron Tugendhaft, "Paradise in Perspective: Thoughts from Pavel Florensky," *Kronos: Metafysyka, Kultura, Religio* (Jan. 2009): 1-11.

<sup>49</sup> Kruger, *Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren*.

A consideration of the tensions the ‘doubled image’ give rise to sets the stage for the final chapters of the dissertation. These examine what I argue is an internalized struggle or iconomachy over modalities of the image as idol and icon, performed within artworks themselves.<sup>50</sup> While Maerten van Heemskerck’s *St. Luke and the Virgin* [Fig. 0. 4] visualizes a debate concerning the twin idolatries of art and cult during the Reformation, Michelangelo’s last work, the partially destroyed *Rondanini pietà* (c. 1550s-1564) [Fig. 0.5], gives insight into interrelated processes of material and spiritual reform: a precursor of iconoclasm against the “idols of the mind” formative to the thought and culture of early modern Europe.

## Chapter Summaries

Rather than a *longue durée* study of the icon between Byzantium and Italy, my dissertation is a comparative examination of confluences at certain significant junctures between these two cultures. My approach has been to balance the long view of their shared history with close readings of sources and images that reveal these connections.<sup>51</sup> I have structured my argument by following a singular theme throughout – the image’s relation to Real presence – in order to probe the significance of this strand across differing historic periods. I then engage this theme throughout what I demonstrate are interconnected realms of image theory, religious and artistic practice. The argument gains historical grounding by focusing on the history of a specific image type from East to West – the synoptic icon of Christ’s Passion, *Akra tapeinosis*, in its cultural translation as the *imago pietatis*, and historically related images of the *pietà* by Renaissance

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<sup>50</sup> I briefly engage the idea of internalized struggle in the context of Michelangelo’s partial destruction of the Rondanini *pietà* in “Creative Iconoclasm,” 75-6. Chapter 5 builds upon and extends this work.

<sup>51</sup> Jaś Elsner, tracing the iconoclastic debates to their roots in antiquity, discusses the challenges and virtues of a *longue durée* approach in “Iconoclasm as Discourse: From Antiquity to Byzantium,” *The Art Bulletin* 94, no. 3 (September 1, 2012): 368–94.

artists. The focus in Italy is also geographically specific: the works cluster within the sphere of Rome where the Byzantine icon I examine takes on legendary cult status. Within a long trajectory from East to West, close attention to period sources and concerns, and focused case studies that attend closely to dimensions of artworks, bring contextual richness and robustness to what might otherwise be an intellectual or cultural history of an image type.<sup>52</sup>

Chapter 1, “Real Presence and Icon Theory: The Iconoclastic Debates in Byzantium,” lays the groundwork for understanding the development of theories of the icon, through a close reading of Byzantine sources from the iconoclastic debates of the eighth and ninth centuries. It examines the icon’s fundamental relation to spiritual presence (as modeled by relics; the Eucharist; and the Incarnation) and the fundamental tensions surrounding this relation. My focus is the icon of Christ as the image-type at issue in the controversy that formatively shapes the image theory that emerges from it. The writings of John of Damascus (c. 665-749), whose works were to be most influential in the Latin West, are especially important in examining the phenomenological dimension of icons: the complex, dynamic interplay between Real and affective presence in iconic encounter and the role of embodied response. Rereading the sources with attention to this dynamic, I highlight the necessity of the “activation” of icons by their viewers, and the potential for viewer transformation by means of this process within a spiritual economy of images.

Chapter 2, “Reinventing Icon and Vision at Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome” examines the cultural translation of a Byzantine icon of Christ as a famous cult image, as it becomes bound to claims and controversy over Real or Eucharistic Presence. The subject is a late

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<sup>52</sup> For the history of the *imago pietatis* from Byzantium to Italy in the medieval period, see Belting’s *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, Mark Bartusis, trans. (New Rochelle, N.Y. : A.D. Caratzas, 1990).

thirteenth-century micromosaic icon of Christ, *Akra tapeinosis* [Fig. 0.1], which was reinvented as the “first” *imago pietatis* or legendary vision of St. Gregory the Great of Christ during the Mass [Fig. 0.6]. A study of the icon within the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme explores the role of various elements in its cultic activation: its “miraculous” materiality and facture as micromosaic; the physical and spatial frames of its ritual viewing; and the phenomenological significance of its embodied devotion in a subterranean chapel. I also briefly examine the icon’s dissemination in prints of the Mass of Gregory on the eve of the Reformation, when it becomes one of the most highly indulgenced images in religious culture, firing controversy over the *imago pietatis* as a vision of the Real presence, and motivating iconoclasm.

Chapter 3, “Iconic Imaging and Idolatry: Rosso Fiorentino’s *Dead Christ with Angels*,” is a close reading of Rosso’s painting, described in a document by the artist as an image in *forma pietatis*. As discussed earlier, by interpreting this painting within the frame of iconic imaging and icon theory, I attempt to read its complex aesthetic structure and striking phenomenal effects in a new light. The attempt of artists such as Rosso to bring their divine subjects “to life” before the devotional viewer effectively appropriated the fundamental operation, and authority, of icons. As I will show, not only does the painting reflect the appropriation of modes of imaging from iconic and cultic traditions. It further draws attention to innovative, self-reflexive artistic effects in the process, setting artistic practice on a par with the miraculous operation of divine prototypes. Merging cultic and artistic performance, artists such as Rosso created innovative strategies for the persuasive, visual depiction of Christ’s Real or spiritual presence, preserving and transforming Byzantine prototypes such as the cult icon at Santa Croce, but also blurring the boundaries between cult and art, icon and idol.

The final chapters - “Reforming the Idol: Maerten van Heemskerck’s *St. Luke and the Virgin*” and “From Idol of Art to Icon of Piety: Iconoclasm in Michelangelo’s *Rondanini Pietà*” – examine artworks at the height of Reformation controversy that I argue actively reflect upon this conflict. The protagonists are two artists with shared commitments to the aesthetic ideals of Renaissance art – the Dutch artist Heemskerck and the Italian Michelangelo. Both were deeply shaped by the artistic milieu of Rome, but were divided in the sixteenth-century by geographical lines of separation in a newly confessionalized Europe, and later by disciplinary ones. In case studies, I demonstrate how each grappled with the pressures of the Reformation in remarkably complex and parallel ways. In holding the value of the religious image and its potential for idolatry in tension, both engage in what I describe as an internalized iconomachy or image struggle. It is a battle waged quietly and reflectively with the implements of the painter’s brush and sculptor’s chisel, in which material acts of art making parallel and reflect internal conflicts in the imagination.<sup>53</sup> In this inward-turning process of reflection, I aim to uncover within the visual arts themselves a critical movement that has been overlooked in the landscape of textual invective and religious violence that has shaped our understanding of the Reformation. In pursuing this line of inquiry, I explore a mode of critique that reflects a longer historical dynamic and dialectic within the Christian tradition, in which the value of the image is continuously challenged, valorized and reformed.

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<sup>53</sup> Kim, “Creative Iconoclasm in Renaissance Italy,” 75-6.



## CHAPTER 1

### Real Presence and Icon Theory: The Iconoclastic Debates in Byzantium

For the icon is a mirror and an enigma suitable to the materiality of our body.

John of Damascus, *Orations in defense of sacred images*<sup>54</sup>

Christ's icon is a contradiction in itself; it is even impossibility.... The history of Christ's icon is the history of making the impossible possible.

Hans Belting<sup>55</sup>

## Introduction

The two quotations above point towards the complexity of icon theory and the image type that are the focus of this dissertation. Both emerged from controversy over sacred images in Byzantium during the course of the eighth and ninth centuries in what is now known as the iconoclastic debates. In his *Orations* composed in defense of icons under attack, John of Damascus (c.665-749) invokes the Pauline formula of seeing God “through a mirror darkly or enigmatically” (*di' esoptrou en ainigmati*). With this curious metaphor, which likely derives from the analogy of mirrors used to indirectly observe celestial phenomena whose brightness would otherwise damage vision, Paul described our human mode of encountering the divine in the world, until the end-time when the elect will see God “face to face.”<sup>56</sup> The enigmatic nature

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<sup>54</sup> John of Damascus, *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tre*, II.5 and III.2. For the Greek, see *Patrologia Cursus Completus: Series Graeca* (hereafter PG), ed. J-P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1857-66), 94-6 and the edition by P. B. Kotter, ed., *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, 5 vols. English translation by Andrew Louth, *St. John of Damascus: Three Treatises on the Divine Images* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), which also provides Kotter's original pagination. I refer to the Greek for key terms to amend Louth's translation.

<sup>55</sup> Hans Belting, “In Search of Christ's Body. Image or Imprint?” in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation: Papers from a Colloquium Held at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome and the Villa Spelman, Florence, 1996* (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998), 1-2.

<sup>56</sup> Paul, 1 *Corinthians* 13:12. According to Jeremy Tanner, the metaphor also has a basis in the Old Testament “where not only is God not to be known directly, but even the reflected brightness of someone like Moses, who was in close proximity to God when receiving the commandments, must be veiled to avoid harm to lesser mortals.” Robin Osborne and Jeremy Tanner, eds., *Art's Agency and Art History*, New Interventions in Art History (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 88.

of this viewing is that it is truly an encounter with the divine, but a vision of the sacred shaped to the limits of our body and perceptive faculties. While this “enigmatic” mode of seeing is a topos invoked throughout the long history of sacred images I take up in this dissertation, it is one into which John gives special insight. He is perhaps the first theologian or philosopher to argue from the perspective of embodied cognition for the truth-bearing capacity of images.<sup>57</sup> Challenging the very ground upon which iconoclasts object to icons as containers of the divine, John affirms their materiality as precisely that which makes them necessary religious media in a spiritual economy encompassing God and human beings. Like mirrors reflecting and dulling an otherwise blinding light, icons give access to what is otherwise incomprehensible, acting as mediations between heaven and earth, humanity and divine spirit.

Paul’s metaphor emphasizes the role of the icon as a form of appearance that we grasp through materials and the senses (*aisthesis*). In this respect, the icon as appearance is not a clear view or grasp of the divine. Hans Belting’s description of the icon of Christ as an impossibility – the “paradoxical search for a body where a body had been but had disappeared ever since” – indicates the complexity of the image-type invoked during the Byzantine debates as the exemplar for how sacred images effect such a vision.<sup>58</sup> As we will see, the possibility and necessity of an “impossible” image was predicated on the *sui generis* event and mystery of the Incarnation. The Incarnation, the descent of God into man, is invoked by iconophile writers not only as the primary ground for the legitimacy of icons, as a form of mediation between human and divine worlds inaugurated by God himself. In an important sense icons themselves come to be viewed as a form of incarnation: the Real or spiritual presence of their depicted subject inherent in

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<sup>57</sup> Here John is drawing not only on the Christian anthropology of Paul but upon earlier writers such as Maximus the Confessor and Pseudo-Dionysius; see discussion below.

<sup>58</sup> As in note 2 above.

material form. How an incarnational aesthetics of the image was theorized and debated, and the tensions that emerge in the process, are the focus of this chapter.

## Icons and Presence

Spanning the period from 680 – 850 CE, the Byzantine iconoclastic debates are arguably the most protracted and significant inquiry into the nature and function of sacred images up until that time; as such, they represent a turning point in the history and theory of images more generally. In antiquity, the metaphysics of the relation of an image to its prototype, and related questions concerning the epistemological and ethical value of images, were already a subject of debate by the time of Plato's philosophical dialogues in the fifth century BCE. Most famously, Plato, in the *Republic*, disparaged the image as an *eidolon* or simulacrum at a third remove from the reality of the Forms; yet he also affirmed the role of the image or *eikon* as a reflection of Beauty in the ascent to the Divine.<sup>59</sup> The ambivalence of Neoplatonic and Patristic writings on the image that follow from Plato's legacy reflect a lack of resolution with ancient origins concerning the epistemological value of images.<sup>60</sup> Well into the Christian era, these ancient questions arising anew in the context of image-worship and the biblical prohibition of the graven image remained largely under-theorized and unresolved.<sup>61</sup> The icon, as it emerged within this milieu, carried with it great potential as an instrument in the practice of Christian religion, but also gave rise to problems precisely within this practice, as we shall see.

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<sup>59</sup> For example, Plato, *Republic*, Book 10, esp. 509d and 603b, and *Phaedrus*, respectively. For discussion of the dual nature of the image in Plato, see most recently James I. Porter, "Plato and the Platonic Tradition: the Image beyond the Image," *Yearbook of Comparative Literature* 56 (2010), 75-103.

<sup>60</sup> The seminal discussion of this history is Gerhard Ladner, "The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 7 (1953): 3-34.

<sup>61</sup> For the *longue durée* history of this question, from the archaic period forward, as well as a compelling justification of this approach, see Elsner's "Iconoclasm as Discourse," 368-69.

While theologians such as Augustine (354-430) had invoked the visual image (*imago*) as a metaphor for understanding the more fundamental concept of man's relation to God – as made in His image and likeness (*imago Dei*) – the patristic consideration of images in the Latin West remained secondary to the investigation of theological doctrine and belief.<sup>62</sup> By contrast, while they were also rooted in theology, political and cultural pressures that threatened the very unity of their society urgently motivated the Byzantine debates.<sup>63</sup> What was at stake was the legitimacy of the icon as a mediator of the sacred persons and powers within Byzantine culture. Their iconomachy (*eikonomachia*), literally, “image-struggle,” focused specifically on the sacred image (*eikôn*) itself. In addressing the contested issue of whether a man-made image was capable of truthfully depicting a divine subject, and therefore worthy of veneration, the Byzantines advanced a complex and sophisticated examination of the nature and potency of pictorial representation itself. Arguably, their examination marks not only a watershed in the history of the Christian image and devotional practice, but moreover has shaped our understanding of images in the present.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Convergences and differences between Byzantine and Latin theories of the image in this period are discussed by Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak in “Replica: Images of Identity and the Identity of Images in Prescholastic France,” J. Hamburger and A.M. Bouchè, eds., *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 2006), esp. 46-50. The issue is complex and stands in need of further investigation.

<sup>63</sup> The scholarship on Byzantine iconoclasm is vast and I will not attempt to review it here. Among more recent and penetrating surveys of the topic, with extensive bibliography, is Leslie Brubaker's “Icons and Iconomachy,” in *A Companion to Byzantium* (Blackwell, 2010); see also Robin Cormack's ‘Art and Iconoclasm’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, Elizabeth Jeffreys, ed., with J. Haldon and R. Cormack (Oxford, 2008). Important sources, both textual and material, have been compiled and interpreted by Brubaker and John Haldon in *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca 680-850): The Sources An Annotated Survey*, Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman monographs 7 (Aldershot, 2001), and set within a comprehensive historical framework, with extensive bibliography, in Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (c. 680-850): a history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Seminal works on the defense of icons are discussed below. For an excellent discussion of the Carolingian response to Byzantine iconoclasm, see Thomas Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia, 2009).

<sup>64</sup> As discussed in the Introduction. See also Marie-José Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*, R. Franes, trans., (Stanford, 2005) for a reading of the iconoclastic debates as the origin of contemporary image theory and practice.

The Byzantine image debates, punctuated by two periods of iconoclastic edicts and the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 (hereafter Nicaea II), came to resolution only with the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843. During the course of these arguments, icons and their veneration were defended against the historic charge of idolatry, overturning the biblical injunction against graven images that earlier had been employed by Christians themselves in their prohibition of pagan worship.<sup>65</sup> The debates also transformed prior ontological and epistemological frameworks rooted in Platonic, Neoplatonic, and Aristotelian philosophy, particularly as interpreted by the Greek Fathers of the fourth century, and sources such as Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>66</sup> In the course of reformulating these ideas, both iconoclasts and iconophiles engaged and clarified fundamental questions regarding the relation between vision, matter and spirit in the accession of truth and the mediation of divine presence.<sup>67</sup> As I will show, the debates were not only shaped by the earlier Christological debates of religious Councils; icon theory served as the ground to actively work through Christological doctrine and solidify it in visual practice, as a form of what we might call ‘visual theology.’

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<sup>65</sup> The biblical injunction against graven images is found in *Ex.* 20:4-5; 1 *Ev.* 26: 1; *Deut.* 6:13. The extent of the reversal from earlier Christian arguments against the veneration of images is reflected in Origen’s *Contra Celsum* (248) VII.64: “Christian and Jew are led to avoid temples and altars and images by the command: ... ‘You shall not make a carved image for yourself nor the likeness of anything in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.’ ... And not only do they avoid [such worship], but when necessary they readily come to the point of death to avoid defiling their conception of the God of the universe by any act of this kind contrary to his law.” Henry Chadwick, ed. and trans., *Origen: “Contra Celsum”* (Cambridge, 1953), 447. Jaroslav Pelikan probes this reversal in his Introduction to *Imago Dei The Byzantine Apologia for Icons*, The A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1987, (Princeton, 1990), 1-5. See also RPC Hanson, “The Christian Attitude to Pagan Religions up to the Time of Constantine the Great,” *ANRW* Band 2.23.2 (Berlin, 1980).

<sup>66</sup> See Ladner, “The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy.”

<sup>67</sup> See Jaroslav Pelikan’s *Christianity and Classical Culture The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism*, Gifford lectures at Aberdeen, 1992-93 (New Haven and London, 1993). On the relation of Byzantine theories of the image to Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy, see Barasch, *ICON: Studies in the History of an Idea*, 70-84; to Aristotelianism, see Kenneth Parry, *Depicting the Word Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden and New York: 2007), 52-63. For the contribution of Greek Patristic thought to the debates, Ladner’s, “The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers” and Pelikan’s *Imago Dei*.

As a result of these debates, the Byzantines developed a defense of images that not only was to define orthodox religious practice and the modern Byzantine state.<sup>68</sup> The implications for Western image theory and religious practice were also significant. John of Damascus' treatise, *De Orthodox Fide*, which includes the outlines of his defense of icons and its supporting basis in Christian anthropology, became widely influential in the Latin West. In fact, due to the Latin translation of the third part of his trilogy on the Orthodox faith –the *De Expositio Fide* - John's writings were to be more influential in the West than in the East, where they became an authoritative compendium of Greek patristic thought.<sup>69</sup> In the Latin Church, the image was placed on a par with scripture as a means of accessing the holy.<sup>70</sup> Both iconoclast and iconophile arguments of this period were to shape that momentous battle over sacred images nearly seven centuries later, during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.<sup>71</sup> Not only were the Acts of Nicaea II invoked as the basis of sacred image doctrine at the Council of Trent (1545-63).<sup>72</sup>

Even as the main premises of Byzantine image theory were translated to the West, interpreting the original Byzantine sources in close detail, as I do in this chapter, presents particular difficulties for the modern reader. The debates allude to centuries of sources and earlier discussions, from classical antiquity to Patristics, as well as mystical writings. They are also cast in polemical language that stands at odds with modern sensibilities. Moreover, as

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<sup>68</sup> On the significance of these discussions to the formation of Byzantine identity, see the Introduction to Brubaker and Haldon, eds., *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, iii-iv and Chapt. I of Pelikan's *Imago Dei*, 7-39.

<sup>69</sup> See Andrew Louth, *St. John Damascene Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford, 2002), 3, 84-5, 186, 287; and E. Kuryluk, *Veronica and her cloth: history, symbolism, and structure of the 'true' image*, (Oxford, 1991), 143.

<sup>70</sup> Elsner, "Iconoclasm as Discourse," 386.

<sup>71</sup> See David Freedberg, "The Structure of Byzantine and European Iconoclasm."

<sup>72</sup> See discussion below. The Acts of Nicaea II, which defined and defended the icon and its veneration before the schism between the Eastern and Latin Churches (1051), were expressly upheld at the Council of Trent, a fact little remarked by early modern scholars, but fundamental to understanding the Council's stance on sacred images. The arguments of Byzantine iconoclasts prefigure the *sola Scriptura* stance of the Reformers, both with regard to the primacy of the *Logos* over the image and written over unwritten tradition.

historical documentation, the evidence of this material is distorted by its rewriting by the eventual victors in the conflict, the iconophiles.<sup>73</sup> Yet for all of these difficulties, and indeed because they are so complex, the iconoclastic debates of this period are a rich source that still bear further investigation.

In revisiting these sources, particularly in light of recent interpretations that have substantially clarified their meaning and significance, my aim is not to re-present either a comprehensive view or understanding of them. Rather, I focus specifically on how they grapple with the question of image and presence, a relation I argue to be fundamental to their motivation and outcome. This concern distinguishes my approach from those of earlier scholars. I also view the debates from a longer historical trajectory in which this question was to reemerge.<sup>74</sup> While scholars have acknowledged Real presence as an issue underlying tensions in the period, none to date have charted a history along these lines, nor have they taken Byzantium and the Reformation in Italy as coordinates for comparative study.<sup>75</sup> Yet arguably Italy was the foremost inheritor of the Byzantine tradition of icons, a shared heritage from the period when both were under the rule of a Christianized Roman Empire.

In examining confluences between image theory and debate between these two cultures, it should be noted that there is no equivalent term in Greek for the Latin “*praesentia*” according to which we might map their connection. Therefore any study of icon and “presence” in a Byzantine context begins from the acknowledgment that what we pursue here is at times an inductive or inferential inquiry. Moreover, what constitutes ‘icon theory’ still remains a matter of

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<sup>73</sup> Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca 680-850): The Sources*.

<sup>74</sup> Elsner, who begins his study from the opposite historical side of mine, speaks eloquently to the usefulness of a *longue durée* approach, in “Iconoclasm as Discourse,” 368-69.

<sup>75</sup> Freedberg, in “Structure of Byzantine and European Iconoclasm,” compares some aspects of the Byzantine crisis to the Protestant Reformation of the North.

open debate. For instance, there is still fundamental disagreement among scholars whether the icon is best characterized as a “real presence” or a divine *absence* – two seemingly contradictory positions. Clarifying how such divergent interpretations might be understood, and indeed revealing this as a structural tension specific to the icon, I attempt to move towards a deeper understanding of how image theory negotiates fundamental problems of mediation between worlds of human and divine, material and spiritual.

As a second point of reference for the chapters to follow, which examine the cultural and artistic translation of icons and image theory in Italy, I articulate the history of these debates in specific relation to the icon of Christ [Fig. 1.1]: its central role in the dialectical process through which sacred images were contested, defended and defined. Shaped by the Christological controversies of preceding Councils, the debates consistently invoke the icon of Christ or *eikon tou Theou* as the testing ground upon which the defense of all icons stands or falls.<sup>76</sup> For both iconophiles and iconoclasts, what constitutes the “true” image of Christ lay at the heart of their controversy, which is often dated from the purported removal of an icon of Christ from the Chalke Gate in Constantinople.<sup>77</sup> Here I also bridge two bodies of scholarship: those that emphasize the *theological* dimension of the controversy and those that see an *aesthetic* turn or affirmation of the icon in its status as representation.<sup>78</sup> Finally, while important scholarship has focused on Christ’s “disembodied” face or the *vera* icon in this regard, as a model for probing issues of materiality, spirit and representation, my focus instead is the embodied, incarnate image

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<sup>76</sup> *Eikôn tou Theou* is the formula given by Paul in *Colossians* I:15 and 2 *Corinthians* IV.

<sup>77</sup> Scholars disagree whether an icon of Christ was removed from the Chalke gate or the story was a retrospective legend. For a summary, see Elsner, “Iconoclasm as Discourse,” 379. In either instance, the story highlights the Christ icon as a subject of controversy.

<sup>78</sup> Representative of these respective views are Ambrosios Giakalis, *Images of the Divine. The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council Revised Edition*, (Leiden and Boston, 2005) and Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness*.



of Christ and the different set of concerns it unfolds.<sup>79</sup>

### **The icon in an expanded field of interpretation**

Before turning to a close reading of sources on the icon to adjudicate these views, it will be useful to begin with a definition of the term icon itself. For the Byzantines, the Greek word *eikôn* evoked a variety of meanings beyond the restricted use to which it is put in modern discourse, where it signifies a panel painting of a holy figure in the Orthodox Church. To appreciate the complexity of the inquiry to which it was subject in this period, I will first establish an initial semantic field for the term, and briefly summarize both its practical and theoretical underpinnings.

While canonical art histories of Byzantium focus on portable icons as most representative of a culture defined by the veneration of holy portraits, the term “*eikôn*” encompasses a much wider range of objects and representations. Indeed, the etymological root of the term, the Greek *eioikos*, suggests likeness of any kind, a concept whose definition was to figure centrally in its defense by iconophile writers.<sup>80</sup> While what was contested in the course of iconoclasm were *eikôna* claiming to be holy likenesses, these would include not only portable panels but images within the iconographic program of churches or other public spaces, ranging in size from the monumental to the miniature.<sup>81</sup> An *eikôn* could be rendered in mosaic, tempera, or fresco, varying in scale and accessibility so as to elicit a feeling of intimate connection or distant,

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<sup>79</sup> As noted in the Introduction, with Kessler and Wolf, *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, as seminal.

<sup>80</sup> Theodore of Stoudios, the 9thC iconophile whose arguments were to figure centrally during the second period of iconoclastic debate, notes this etymology in *Antirrhetici* I.16.

<sup>81</sup> Otto Demus invokes the phrase “spatial icon” to describe the decoration of church murals in *Byzantine mosaic decoration: aspects of monumental art in Byzantium* (London, 1947).

otherworldly grandeur.<sup>82</sup> When illuminated by flickering candlelight, images impressed in metal or ornamented with gold ground would reflect light and warmth on the delicate shapes of their surfaces, evoking a sense of animation and presence.

*Eikôna* could also be carved in wood, ivory or stone, inviting a tactile appreciation and apprehension of forms. Bissera Pentcheva has argued compellingly for shifting the paradigm of the icon from the model of panel painting towards relief.<sup>83</sup> Some of the most famous and ancient icons, such as the so-called Mandylion of Edessa [Fig. 1.2], were produced by physical impression, and vision itself was imagined in extromissive or haptic terms. Moreover, as I discuss below, the fundamental terms by which *eikôn* is defined are drawn themselves from the philosophical model of a form's (*eidos*) imprint in matter (*hylê*).<sup>84</sup> Recent scholarship has attempted to recuperate an appreciation of these sensuous qualities, moving beyond the focus on abstract, hieratic form that has defined the icon's status as artistically deficient within the history of Western art.<sup>85</sup> As I will argue below, both the haptic dimensions of the *eikôn* and its phenomenal effects are central to understanding its perception by the viewer, as well as fundamental issues underlying iconoclastic criticism, which hinged on the physical allure and deceptive qualities of man-made images.

In addition to signifying this wide variety of artifacts, *eikôn* had a range of theoretical meanings shaped by the inheritance of Greek philosophy which coincide closely with the way in

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<sup>82</sup> This range of media and contexts is described as part of the definition of the icon established at the Nicaea II: "made of colors, pebbles, or any other material that is fit, set in the holy churches of God, on holy utensils and vestments, on walls and boards, in houses and in streets." Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova*, vol. 13, 377D.

<sup>83</sup> See Pentcheva's introduction to *The Sensual Icon*.

<sup>84</sup> As described by Aristotle in the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*. See note 4 above for Aristotle's influence on Byzantine thought.

<sup>85</sup> Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon*. Her argument pertains most specifically to the post-iconoclastic period of art production.

which the word “image” functions in English.<sup>86</sup> For this reason and others I will discuss, I often translate “*eikôn*” as “image” when emphasizing the dual connotation of the external, material image and the internal, immaterial image of the imagination (*phantasia*).<sup>87</sup> Insofar as vision was claimed to be the highest of the senses and the foundation of knowing the material world, the interrelation of the two is critical in the evaluation of the icon as a medium of knowledge, an issue that becomes central to the iconophile defense.<sup>88</sup> This much seems the familiar, shared inheritance of the Greek *eikôn* with the Latin *imago*. But more than phantastic or imaginary, *eikôn* is at times explicitly contrasted to those qualities, particularly in the case of Christ’s icon. As in much Christian literature, *phantasia* was accorded both a positive and negative value by the iconophiles. From an epistemic point of view, it was the essential basis of human knowledge, particularly as it was tied to vision, regarded as the highest of the senses. However, as a faculty with the capacity to produce images that moved beyond resemblance to their respective prototypes, it was seen as potentially misleading and deceptive. Iconophiles were particularly pressed to answer the iconoclast critique that icon painting was an innovation based in human imagination, and therefore incapable of expressing religious truth.

Therefore *eikôn* was invariably defined in relation to what was called a *prototypon*, *archetypon*, or *paradeigma*, a legacy from Platonic philosophy and its Neoplatonic instantiations that resonates throughout the debates of the period, which also came to be shaped by Aristotelian

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<sup>86</sup> On Greek concepts of the image, see Ladner, “The Concept of the Image.”

<sup>87</sup> As Thomas Mathews notes: “This interior image deserves greater attention in our discussions of Byzantine image theory, for it is here that the creation of the icon is sometimes said to begin. In a number of Byzantine legends, the artist, in a quandary as to how to proceed with a given icon, dreams that he sees the saint and goes on to paint the image according to his dreams.” See Psychological Dimensions in the Art of Eastern Christendom (XIV), in *Art and Architecture in Byzantium and Armenia Liturgical and Exegetical Approaches* (Aldershot, 1995), 13. See also Barber’s discussion of Theodore of Stoudios on the internal image of the imagination in *Figure and Likeness*, 137.

<sup>88</sup> See the discussion of John of Damascus below.

categories and methods.<sup>89</sup> As we shall see, on one level the entire series of arguments might be viewed in terms of the definition of the relation of *eikôn* to prototype, a relation defined by a sophisticated range of terms (*ousia*, *morphê*, *eidos*, *figura*, *typos*, *skêhma*, *charakter*, *homoiôsis*, *homousios*, *mimêsis*) derived from Greek philosophy and patristics.<sup>90</sup> This relation was perceived to be central to the icon's function as a medium for the veneration of its depicted subject, and extended to its operation as part of a larger redemptive economy, an important point to which I will return.<sup>91</sup> It was also what distinguished the *eikôn* from the *eidôlon* or idol, which was condemned by iconoclast writers as a representation without grounding in reality or insofar as it claimed depict what was incapable of representation, most notably God's divinity.<sup>92</sup> As we will see, the truth-value of the *eikôn* quickly emerges as a central issue in the iconoclastic debates.

However, unlike our use of the word "image," which is often defined in contradistinction to word or text, *eikôn* was perceived by the Byzantines to be closely related to *logos* or word. The Greek term "*graphê*," which is variously translated as writing, inscription, or depiction, encompasses both concepts.<sup>93</sup> Thus icon-makers were called "image-writers," and icons were

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<sup>89</sup> On prototype and image, Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 22-33, offers an excellent overview. Beginning with John of Damascus, iconophile writers were to draw upon Aristotelian categories and concepts throughout the debates, reaching their fullest expression in the works of Nikephoros and Theodore of Stoudios. See also Ladner, "Concept," 16-7 and Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 52-63. As Parry notes (52), the history of the contribution of Aristotelianism to Byzantine thought has yet to be written.

<sup>90</sup> Ladner, "The Concept of the Image."

<sup>91</sup> See discussion below.

<sup>92</sup> See for example Theodore of Stoudios, *Antirrhetikos* 1.7, for the distinction between an icon, as a representation of a real person, and an idol.

<sup>93</sup> *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm: An Annotated Translation of the Sixth Session of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicea, 787)*, ed. Daniel J. Sahas, Toronto Medieval Texts and Translations 4 (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 14, claims no division between the two concepts. However, the iconoclastic debates were to bring their differences into high relief.

often seen as incomplete without accompanying inscriptions.<sup>94</sup> This continuity or blurring between *eikôn* and *logos* was to prove an issue of contentious argument. Iconophiles insisted on the equivalence of *eikôn* and scripture in the realm of religious knowledge and devotion, while iconoclasts attempted to prize apart the eternal sanctity of scripture and Christ-Logos from the base materiality of the man-made image and its “idolatrous” worship. As mentioned earlier, one of the most significant outcomes of the iconophile victory was the defense of visual images as equivalent to scripture in the accession of truth.

Beyond this complex of theoretical meanings and associations, the concept of *eikôn* was also formatively shaped by religious practice, which centered on the image as a site of veneration (*proskynêsis*): an honoring of the depicted subject through physical actions including bowing, prostration and/or kissing (*aspasmos*). The often-cited precedent of veneration as an action across distance derives from Roman imperial practice. The multiple visual representations of the Emperor, whether painted portraits or impressions on coins or seals, stood for his authoritative person in his absence, making him “present” to the viewer. When applied to icons by Athanasios of Alexandria (269-373) and Basil of Caesarea (330-379), this model of an image’s mediating function became the *locus classicus* to which all subsequent iconophile defenses would refer.<sup>95</sup> However, the imperial analogy left open the question of the image’s precise relation to its

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<sup>94</sup> See Robert Nelson, “Image and Inscription: Pleas for Salvation in Spaces of Devotion,” in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, L. James, ed. (Cambridge, 2007), 100-19. As Gregory Melissenus, a member of the Byzantine delegation to the Council of Ferrara (1438), is famously said to have remarked, he could not recognize the images of saints in the Latin church, nor did he venerate the image of Christ, because “he did not know in what terms He is inscribed” (*ouk oida pōs epigraphetai*). From Sylvester Syropoulos, *Vera historia*, 109, quoted in Cyril Mango’s *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453*, (Toronto, 1972), 254. An excellent introduction to the larger subject of the relation of word and image is Liz James, *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture* (Cambridge, 2007), 1-12. The relation between icon and writing - rhetorical, homiletic and ekphrastic – deserves more study.

<sup>95</sup> Pelikan, *Imago*, 38. On the Trinitarian basis of the analogy of icon and emperor portrait, see Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 73-6.

prototype, particularly with regard to its capacity and authority to mediate divine presence.

While on a theoretical level this issue gained further clarification in the debates of the period, as we will see, there is an important sense in which it remained fundamentally unresolved even by the Byzantines, both in theory and in practice.

The further paradigm of *eikôn*, and perhaps most significant to the iconoclastic debates, was Christ himself. The Trinitarian controversies of the preceding centuries which came to resolution in the seventh, had focused on the complex issue of Christ's nature and defining more precisely his relation to the Trinity.<sup>96</sup> But the fundamental concept of Christ as the Word or *Logos* made flesh – the very Image of God or *Eikon tou Theou* – left open the question of how his visible form in artificial or manufactured images related to his divine person. To understand and defend this relation, the concept of *eikôn* itself stood in need of further definition. In particular, the question of what constitutes Christ's legitimate or true image – icon, symbol or sacrament – crucially shaped this debate.<sup>97</sup> For both critics and defenders of the icon, the icon of the incarnate Christ figures centrally as a means to address the nature and function of sacred images.<sup>98</sup>

### **Icons and the cult of relics**

Because icons had been in use in Christian cultures since at least the third century, the reasons for the emergence of iconoclastic attitudes towards religious images and artifacts, beginning in

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<sup>96</sup> This is analyzed in detail by Pelikan, *Imago*, 39-87.

<sup>97</sup> See especially Stephen Gero, "The Eucharistic Doctrine of the Byzantine Iconoclasts and Its Sources," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 68 (1975): 4-22.

<sup>98</sup> This is examined by Christoph von Schönburn in *God's Human Face: The Christ Icon* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994).

the first decades of the eighth century, have been the subject of considerable speculation.<sup>99</sup> As the issue is a complex and contested one among Byzantine historians, I will not attempt to adjudicate it here. But one of the precursors to iconoclasm that bears examination, in evaluating the development of image theory in this period, is the apparent shift in the perceived power and function of icons in the decades preceding the first iconoclastic edicts. While miraculous icons or *acheiropoeita* – images claimed to be “made [*poietai*] without [*a*] human hands [*cheir*]” – are attested as early as the sixth century, evidence suggests that icons of ordinary manufacture began to take on similar claims to power by the end of the seventh.<sup>100</sup> As Leslie Brubaker has demonstrated, rather than functioning simply as portraits of holy persons in commemorative or honorific capacity, icons are accorded a similar status as relics, the physical vestiges of the holy persons themselves. In addition to accounts of icons being addressed and treated as real persons, most notably acting as godparents, icons were also adorned with lights, curtains, and moreover venerated with *proskynêsis*, acts previously reserved for holy relics. As the letters of Byzantine emperors Michael and Theophilus attest, the paint of icons was even added to the Eucharistic

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<sup>99</sup> For discussion and comprehensive bibliography, see Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Period, c. 680-850, a history*. In the words of Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 9: “Byzantine iconoclasm has been cast as a proto-reformation movement, a personal and idiosyncratic imperial policy, an aspect of a massive institutional reform in Byzantium, an atavistic reaction to the growth of the cult of icons, a foreign aberration in the history of orthodoxy, a debate over the place of the holy in society, a reaction to the collapse of the Late Antique order that shaped early Byzantium, an epistemic crisis, and a continuation of the Christological debates in Byzantine theology.”

<sup>100</sup> Ernst Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” in *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West* (Bloomington, London, 1976), 83-150; Averil Cameron, “The Language of Images: the Rise of Icons and Christian Representation,” in D. Wood, ed., *The Church and the Arts* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA, 1992), 1-43. By the second half the sixth century, a small group of miraculously produced portraits of Christ were recorded in Syria and Egypt. A text dated to 569 described the linen portrait found a generation earlier in a well at Kamouliai, probably the same portrait that was later credited with saving Constantinople from the Avar siege in 626. Evagrius, writing in the 590s, ascribed the salvation of Edessa from the Persians to a linen portrait of Christ believed to have been created when Christ pressed his face against the cloth. These were said to have been miraculously produced, without human intervention, and they were recognized as miracle-workers themselves: both acted as urban protectors (*palladia*) and saved cities from enemy attack. See Belting, *Likeness*, 498-99.

gifts, evidencing the belief that they contained real or spiritual presence.<sup>101</sup> They were also employed as altars for the celebration of the sacrament itself, functioning as substitutes for a site made sacred by the presence of relics.<sup>102</sup> The representation of Christ's figure on a Eucharistic paten [Fig. 1.3] reflects the close association of his image with the sacred gifts. As we will see, iconoclasts were later to invoke the Eucharist as the only 'true' icon of Christ, over and against such figural images.

Therefore the cult of relics provided a conceptual model for the Byzantines of the relation between holy artifact and real presence, based upon the belief that sacred powers, as they resided in physical remains, could be reiterated or communicated through touch.<sup>103</sup> Many of the famed *acheiropoeita* of the period are notably contact icons – images produced by physical impression, such as the Mandylion, a miracle-working image of Christ's face on cloth.<sup>104</sup> The manufactured icon eventually became assimilated within this framework, as a visible means of extending the touch of the relic, insofar as vision also was imagined in haptic terms.<sup>105</sup> The icon preserved

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<sup>101</sup> On the assimilation of icons into the cult of relics, see Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, esp. 13-38, who argues for the relic as the foundational model for conceiving of sacred artifacts (including icons) in haptic terms; and Brubaker, "Icons before Iconoclasm?," *Morfologie sociali e culturali in europa fra tarda antichità e alto medioevo* (Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di Studi sull'alto medioevo) 45 (Spoleto, 1998) 1215-54; and the earlier work of Andre Grabar, *Martyrium II*, (Paris, 1946), 351ff. Attested examples include icons standing in as godparents, and the paint of icons being scraped to mix into the eucharistic gifts, *Mansi*, XIV, 420B-420E; described in Barber, "From Image into Art: Art after Byzantine Iconoclasm," *Gesta*, Vol. 34, No 1 (1995), 6.

<sup>102</sup> See Barber, "From Transformation to Desire: Art and Worship after Byzantine Iconoclasm," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol LXXV, No 1 (March 1993), 8. Examples are invoked repeatedly in the writings of Anastasios of Sinai, in the *Guidebook Hodegos* of the 680s, as noted in Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantine Sources*, 254; they enter anti-heretic polemic for the first time in the writings of Stephen of Bostra (ca 690), who also mentioned honoring images with candles, curtains and incense, accoutrements previously associated with important relics; cited in Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantine Sources*, 268-69.

<sup>103</sup> Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 21-4.

<sup>104</sup> On these miraculous images, the seminal work is Ernst von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder; Untersuchungen Zur Christlichen Legende*, Texte Und Untersuchungen Zur Geschichte Der Altchristlichen Literatur (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1899). The mandylion and other famed acheiropoeitic icons have produced a wide-ranging literature that addresses the nature of pictorial representation. For a critical discussion and bibliography, see Kessler and Wolf, *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*.

<sup>105</sup> On the extromissive theory of vision and its relevance for an understanding of icons and their veneration,



contact with the holy person or event through the material trace of ‘painted’ vision.<sup>106</sup> Unlike the saints who could be venerated through their bodily remains, Christ left no direct, tangible trace other than his image.<sup>107</sup> In the place of a physical relic, the icon of Christ took on heightened significance, imagined in terms that preserved the continuity of the sacred with its physical origin in the direct vision of Christ or the impress of his visage.<sup>108</sup> Icons, in their claim to be true portraits in this regard, based their authority on their visual continuity with their prototype. This belief in an essential continuity between sacred person and their visible manifestations, drawn from the cult of relics, was to be articulated in philosophical and theological terms by iconophiles in the course of the iconoclastic debates.

In assessing the cultural climate that gave rise to iconoclasm in eighth century Byzantium, the Acts of the Quinisext council of 692 at Trullo provide a starting point for understanding the iconoclastic acts and debates that later ensued.<sup>109</sup> Focused on controlling the veneration of the sacred, they reflect what appear to be growing concerns among the church hierarchy regarding the proper use of sacred imagery. They also constitute one of the first efforts to regulate their production and institution through legislation. In particular, canon 73 prohibited the depiction of

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see Robert Nelson, “To say and to see: ekphrasis and vision in Byzantium,” in *Later Byzantine Painting Art, Agency, Appreciation* (Yale, 2007), 158-68. Georgia Frank, in *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Late Antiquity*, (Berkeley, 2000), 174-5, quotes Cyril of Jerusalem on the Eucharist: converts are invited to touch the gifts with their “eyes and the other sense organs” to sanctify them and prepare ‘the eye of faith to see divine realities.’ Frank argues for a relation between the sensory and visual dimensions of devotional practices in late antiquity and the way in which the Eucharist, relics, and then icons become instruments of divine presence based upon visual responses that can be conceptualized together as a form of visual piety.

<sup>106</sup> Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 19-20.

<sup>107</sup> For discussion, see Belting, “In Search of Christ’s Image.” The relics of the true cross, sanctified by contact with Christ, were central objects of veneration in Byzantine culture. The image of the cross was also invoked as principal among sacred representations, by iconoclasts and iconophiles alike.

<sup>108</sup> On the shift from relics to icons in the seventh-century, see André Grabar, *Martyrium: Recherches Sur Le Culte Des Reliques et L’art Chrétien Antique*, Variorum Reprint Collected Studies (London: Variorum Reprints, 1972).

<sup>109</sup> See Brubaker, ‘In the beginning was the word: Art and orthodoxy at the councils of Trullo and Nicaea II’, in Andrew Louth and Andrew Cassiday, eds., *Byzantine Orthodoxies* (Aldershot, 2006), 95-101. Barber also discusses the significance of the Council to the iconoclastic period in *Figure and Likeness*, 40-6.

the cross on the floor of buildings where it might be defiled. Canon 82 dictated that Christ be represented not by the lamb [Fig. 1.4] as in earlier Christian iconography, but rather in human form:

Therefore, while these ancient figures and shadows have been handed down as symbols [*symbola*] and outlines [*typoi*] of the truth passed on by the church, we prefer grace [*charis*] and truth [*alêthês*], which have been received as fulfillment of the law. Therefore, so that what is perfect may be depicted, even in paintings, in the eyes of all, we decree that the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, Christ our God, should from now on be portrayed as a man, instead of the ancient lamb, even in icons; for in this way the depth of the humility of the Word of God can be understood, and one might be led to the memory of his life in the flesh, his passion and his saving.<sup>110</sup>

The Acts are significant not only for their insertion of the icon within religious arguments concerning ritual purity and truth, but also for their attempt to regulate sacred representation by decree. Canon 82 in particular reflects an insistence on the primacy of figural representation over symbolic metaphor in Christian worship, specifically with regard to the icon of Christ: a shift from the imagery and understandings of the Old Testament to the New. As we shall see, the question of Christ's legitimate representation as icon, specifically in relation to the Incarnation, a historic moment that opened the possibility of seeing and knowing God on earth, was to figure centrally in the defense of the image by iconophiles.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> JD Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, 57 vols. (Florence, 1759-1927) [hereafter Mansi] 11, 977E-980B; translation by Barber in *Figure and Likeness*, 42. The beginning of the canon reads: "That artists are not to portray the Forerunner [*i.e.*, John the Baptist] pointing to a lamb. In some depictions of the venerable icons the Forerunner is portrayed pointing with his finger to a lamb, and this has been accepted as a figure of grace, prefiguring for us through the Law the true lamb, Christ our God. As Parry notes in *Depicting the Word*, 10, canon 82 refers only to the proper form of Christ's representation and not the veneration of his image. This was subsequently taken up at Nicaea II and the anti-Photian council of 869-70, the latter of which was the first to insist that Christ's image be venerated upon pain of heresy.

<sup>111</sup> The authorities at issue were Constantine of Nakoleia and Thomas of Klaudioupolis. The epistles of Germanos are reproduced in *Mansi* 13: 100B-105B; 13:105B-108A; 13: 108A-128A.

## Icons, Christology and the Incarnation

The first substantive arguments concerning images in this period are found in the letters of Patriarch Germanos (715-30) in the 720s, written in response to the iconoclastic policies of Byzantine churchmen. In the main these focus on the biblical injunction against idolatry as the worship of base, material images made by human hands. These writings are particularly important as evidence of iconoclastic concerns, which were later expunged from the Byzantine record and may only be partially reconstructed through the highly rhetorical responses of subsequent iconophiles and the Acts of Nicaea II. Germanos invokes the authority of the Greek fathers who claimed a distinction between the veneration given to the icon and the worship (*latreia*) transferred to its divine prototype through the medium of the icon. As evidence, he reasons that we do not bow to the paint or wood of the cross, but rather to what it represents.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, the icon is defended as a stimulus to pious imitation, and further claimed to be equal to scripture in this regard.<sup>113</sup> In constructing his defense of the icon, Germanos also develops an argument based upon the Incarnation, here employed for the first time. Those who reject Christ's visible image also reject his real, physical existence: a charge that likely refers to the Monophysite heresy, the subject of previous ecumenical councils.<sup>114</sup> While many of the claims advanced by Germanos derive from earlier patristic sources and prior anti-Jewish polemics known as *Adversus Judaeos*, they nonetheless provided a new foundation for the subsequent and

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<sup>112</sup> *Mansi* (100C, E, 101A, 112C-D). Basil's argument - that the honor rendered to the image passes to the prototype [*e tes eikonos timê epi to prototypon diabaneî*] – was to be reiterated throughout the debates by the iconophiles, most importantly by John of Damascus and the Council of Nicaea II. See Ladner, "The Concept of the Image," 3.

<sup>113</sup> *Mansi* (101D, 113B-116A).

<sup>114</sup> See Alexander Avenarius, *The Byzantine Struggle over the Icon On the Problem of Eastern European Symbolism*, Studia Historica Slovaca XXII (Bratislava, 2005) 37-8. Monophysitism teaches that the two natures of Christ, divine and human, are unequal; in its extreme form, docetism, it denies the human existence of Christ. Variations appeared throughout the 6th-7<sup>th</sup> centuries.

more sophisticated responses of iconophile writers to follow.<sup>115</sup>

In his *Orations Against those who Attack the Holy Images* (c. 726-30), John of Damascus developed the first sustained set of arguments for the defense of icons and their veneration. However, the *Orations* do not present a unified theory in the sense that most art historians have represented them.<sup>116</sup> Rather they are composed in the style of a *florilegium* or compilation of ideas concerning sacred images, a compilation which is based upon earlier sources, but invoked in innovative and compelling ways.<sup>117</sup> While repeating many of Germanos' arguments concerning veneration, John's *Orations* also significantly extend them, particularly with regard to the Incarnation of Christ as a basis for the legitimate representation of the divine in image.

How could the invisible be depicted? How could the unimaginable be portrayed? How could the one without measure or size or limit be drawn? How could the formless be made? How could the bodiless be depicted in color? What therefore is this that is revealed in riddles? For it is clear that when you see the bodiless become human for your sake, then you may accomplish the figure of a human form; when the invisible becomes visible in the flesh, then you may depict the likeness [*homoiōma*] of something seen....<sup>118</sup>

Whereas the emperor's edict had focused on the question of idolatry or the unholy veneration of images, John's response shifts the argument in the direction of Christology.<sup>119</sup> Christological concerns, in particular the definition of Christ's dual nature as God-man and relation within the Trinity, had been central to the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325) and further defined in the five Councils that followed throughout the fourth to the seventh centuries,

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<sup>115</sup> On the *Adversus Judaeos* literature of the seventh century as an iconophile source, see Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 36-7.

<sup>116</sup> Most recently Charles Barber has characterized John's theory of the image as a straightforwardly essentialist one, a position with which I take issue in this chapter. See also Barasch, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea*, 187-8, who takes the view that John's multi-faceted arguments are at times incompatible.

<sup>117</sup> Louth presents a close analysis of the text in Chapter VII of his excellent study, *St John Damascene*, 193-222.

<sup>118</sup> John of Damascus, *Orations* I.8.

<sup>119</sup> On Christology as a key language for the debates and its significance for John's arguments, see now Elsner, "Iconoclasm as Discourse," 378ff.

which were convened in response to Arian, Monophysite and Nestorian heresies.<sup>120</sup> In basing his defense of images on the resolutions of these councils, John of Damascus and the iconophiles who followed sought to justify the cult of icons in terms of the most significant beliefs of the Church, overturning the charge of idolatry inveighed against them by invoking tenets employed to define orthodox belief.<sup>121</sup>

The parallel described by John between Incarnation and icon was not new, but rather reflected earlier conceptions found throughout Byzantine literature, in which painting is invoked as a metaphor for the Incarnation. The topos is evident in writings such as the poems of George of Pisidia composed in the 620s during the wars of the Byzantines against the Persians:

He took the divine and venerable form,  
That painting of the unpaintable,  
which hands have not painted,  
but which the Logos, who has formed  
and molded everything, has formed  
without painting,  
just as he was conceived  
without seed, as was indeed the case.<sup>122</sup>

Here the poet likens Christ to a miraculous *acheiropoieton*, perhaps with reference to the miracle-working Kamoulion icon used by Philippikos in 586 during the Byzantine campaign

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<sup>120</sup> Arius and his followers, condemned by the First Council of Nicaea (325), held that God the Son was not eternal but created by, and therefore distinct from and unequal, to God the Father in substance. The rejection of Arianism was critical to the formation of Trinitarian doctrine. Monophysite and Nestorian beliefs, which arise in the Near Eastern provinces of the Byzantine empire, and are cited by scholars as a causal factor in the iconoclastic dispute. See the definition of Monophysitism in footnote 20 above. The followers of Nestorius claimed that Christ's natures were distinct rather than forming a hypostatic union. This is examined in detail by Jaroslav Pelikan in his monumental study, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)*, (Chicago, 1974), 39-49.

<sup>121</sup> For the relation of Trinitarian and Christological thinking in the context of these debates, see P. Henry, "What was the Iconoclastic Controversy About?" *Church History*, XLV (1976): 16-31.

<sup>122</sup> Quoted in Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 26. St. Methodius, in his dialogue *Symposium* writing ca. 300, argued that Christ assumed a human form in order to aid our imitation of him: "as if He had painted His picture for us so that we can imitate Him, its painter." Quoted in Ladner, "The Concept of the Image," 10.

against the Persians.<sup>123</sup> That the icon is employed as a means to describe the paradox of Christ, as an image miraculously ‘conceived,’ reflects how closely icon and Christ had become associated in the century prior to John’s *Orations*. Earlier Christian writers, such as Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 263–339), had claimed that the “dead colors” of paint were incapable of truthfully depicting the living Christ.<sup>124</sup> The relation between the materiality and limits of art, and Christ’s immaterial, eternal person, was to become a central issue of controversy in the second period of iconoclastic debates.

In the *Orations*, John presses the full implications of the Incarnation to articulate a set of arguments for the image without parallel in scope and complexity. The Incarnation functions as a supreme model of iconicity and its potential, which John explicates in manifold ways. Most significantly, the transformation of Christ, from eternal Logos to visible flesh, is seen to initiate radical epistemic and ethical possibilities for the Christian viewer. Because God himself chose to clothe his son in visible flesh, John argues, this choice dignifies the whole of the material world. It also becomes the basis for the legitimate veneration of icons:

I do not venerate matter, I venerate the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my sake and made matter his abode, and through matter worked my salvation.... I reverence therefore matter and I hold in respect and venerate that through which my salvation has come about, I reverence it not as God, but as filled with divine energy and grace.<sup>125</sup>

While earlier writers had claimed the primacy of sight and the sanctity of visible creation in the ascent to Christian knowledge, a deep strain of negativity towards the material world and

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<sup>123</sup> Ladner, “The Concept of the Image,” 25.

<sup>124</sup> John extends the metaphor of painting to say: “As...painters transfer the human forms to their pictures by means of certain colors, applying to their work of imitation [*mimêma*] the proper and corresponding tints, so that the archetypal beauty may be transferred exactly to the likeness, thus it would seem to me that our maker also, with certain tints as it were, by putting on virtues, paints the [divine] image [in us], with various colors according to His own beauty.” *Orations* I.50. John seems to be quoting the earlier statement of Gregory of Nyssa in *De opificio hominis*, 5 PG XLIV, 137A. See Ladner, “The Concept of the Image,” 3.

<sup>125</sup> John of Damascus, *Orations*. II.14.

the senses resonates throughout the philosophical, theological, and mystical writings that constitute a formative part of Byzantium's intellectual inheritance.<sup>126</sup> John's multiple reiteration of the importance of visual perception as the basis for knowledge reflects the strength of this claim.<sup>127</sup> Over against Manichaeism and the legacy of Neoplatonists such as Plotinus, John employs the Incarnation to develop a positive Christian materialism, with the icon at its center. Earlier in his *Expositions on the Orthodox Faith*, John discussed the corporeal image used by God as "drawn from what is familiar to us."<sup>128</sup> In the *Orations*, this insight is expanded into an argument for embodied cognition.<sup>129</sup> Far from idolatrous or deceitful, John argues that icons are absolutely fitted to our corporeal condition and the density or material dimension of our minds.<sup>130</sup> Because of this conformity, icons have the specific potential to aid our knowledge of and ascent to the divine:

For since we are twofold, fashioned of soul and body, and our soul is not naked, but as it were, covered with a veil, it is impossible for us to go to the spiritual world [*ta noêta*] apart from the bodily. So just as we hear with our bodily ears audible words and understand something spiritual, so through bodily sight we come to spiritual contemplation. For this reason Christ assumed body and soul, since human beings have body and soul.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> John specifically criticizes the Manichean denigration of matter in *Orations* II.13-6, a critique reiterated in later iconophiles such as Theodore of Stoudios. A deep suspicion of matter is found in the writings of many early Christian writers, including Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Epiphanius, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, and John Cassian, as well as ancient and late antique philosophers fundamental to the Byzantine thought-world, such as Plato and Plotinus. For a fuller account of the transformation of ancient philosophy by the Church Fathers towards a positive, Christian materialism, see Chapt. 4, "The Senses Sanctified," in Pelikan's *Imago Dei*, 99-120. For the development of Platonic theories of the image into Neoplatonism, see Ladner's discussion in, "The Concept of the Image," 6-7. The example of Philo is instructive in this regard, particularly as he influenced St. Paul, Gero, "The Eucharistic Doctrine," 7-8. Platonic concepts concerning the relation of form and matter functioned equivocally as the basis for both the defense of the image in Greek patristics and the critique of iconoclasts.

<sup>127</sup> For insightful discussion, see Brubaker, "Byzantine Art in the Ninth Century: Theory, Practice and Culture," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, (1989): 23-93.

<sup>128</sup> *Expos.* 2.6-9.

<sup>129</sup> As noted by Louth, *John Damascene*, 122.

<sup>130</sup> *Orations* II.5.

<sup>131</sup> *Orations* II.5; 1.11.

In this respect, John emphasizes the anagogical function of icons, invoking the authority of Pseudo-Dionysius throughout the *Orations*.<sup>132</sup> By placing himself in the order of signs as Christ, God opened a path of connection between the realms of matter and spirit.<sup>133</sup> This path offered access not only to knowledge of a higher reality, but also to spiritual grace that makes possible ethical transformation on earth.<sup>134</sup> As part of a hierarchy that extends from the revelations of scripture to the Incarnate Christ, the icon contains signs of divine ideas, which, upon perception by the believer, enables *theôsis* or the movement of man towards God, an important point to which we will return.<sup>135</sup> To deny the legitimacy of icons is therefore to threaten the entire divine economy of symbols in which it plays a salvific, mediating role.<sup>136</sup>

For the iconophiles, the historic moment of the Incarnation, therefore, effected a momentous change in the potential relation between God, man, and the visible world of creation, on both epistemological and ontological levels. Not only did it lay the groundwork for future salvation in the Resurrection to come. It also presented the opportunity for redemption within the temporal existence of the believer. With this renewed focus on the Incarnation, the iconophiles

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<sup>132</sup> See *Orations*, I.28-33. The debt to the ideas of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite is discussed by Ladner, "The Concept of the Image," 9-10. See also Louth, *John Damascene*, 217.

<sup>133</sup> Louth, *John Damascene*, 218

<sup>134</sup> John goes so far as to describe the change in the believer with a term (*metastoiceiô*) that is also used with regard to the resurrected body, the change in Eucharistic elements, and Christ's transformation as human. See Louth, *Orations*, 67.

<sup>135</sup> Both John and the Pseudo-Dionysius employ the term *proorismos*, derived from the Pauline term *prooriztein*, which refers to God's foreknowledge or providence. See also *Orations* III: "Therefore the Law is called a shadow, but Grace truth, and that which is to come is called the things [of this world]. Thus, the old dispensation is a figure (*typos*) of a figure, and the new a figure of real things." Ladner, 19. Similarities to the writings of Maximos the Confessor are described in Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 24.

<sup>136</sup> See also *Orations*, I.36 (Louth) and Louth, *John Damascene*, 216. John also relies on the Greek patristic distinction between *theologia*, the knowledge of God in himself, and *oikonomia*, the knowledge of God as he reveals himself through his activity in the world (Louth, *John Damascene*, 91). The central role of icons in spiritual economy is engaged most extensively by Theodore of Stoudios (759-826) during the second period of iconoclastic debate, which I discuss below. Mondzain provides an important discussion of the economy of sacred images, particularly in his distinction between theological and economic knowledge, in *Image, Icon, Economy*, 18-68.



crafted a defense of sacred images that moved beyond the question of whether the veneration of images was idolatrous – a concern of the Old Testament or history prior to this act<sup>137</sup>, to argue instead for the absolute centrality of visual images to spiritual life. Inverting the charge of heresy inveighed against them by iconoclastic critics, later iconophile writers invoked the Incarnation to condemn iconoclasm as a denial of the fundamental truth of Christ's human nature.<sup>138</sup> As an image from a ninth century manuscript shows, the destruction of icons was likened to a second Crucifixion of Christ [Fig. 1.5].

Thus, while the Incarnation provided a dogmatic foundation for the possibility of Christ's representation in image, the icon itself – as an artifact mediating between the viewer and the divine archetype it claimed to represent – yet stood in need of further definition. In the Third *Oration*, John directly poses the question: "What is an image?" which he proceeds to define as a likeness (*homoiôma*), figure (*typos*) and paradigm (*paradeigmata*) of its prototype.<sup>139</sup> His answer finds its basis in the authority of the fourth-century Cappadocian fathers, who were among the first to formulate the relationship between Christ and image in Trinitarian terms.<sup>140</sup> According to their writings, Father and Son were linked by an essential unity (*ousia*), manifest in different forms (*morphai*). Hence, while an image differs in certain respects from that which it represents, just as the Father differs from the Son, there remains a common essence (*ousia*), reflected in a visible likeness (*homoiôsis*), which sustains the relation of image and its

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<sup>137</sup> Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 72. The theme of the difference between Old Testament and New Testament understanding is repeated throughout the literature, with an implicit acknowledgment of the difference between Judaism and Christianity.

<sup>138</sup> See the Acts of the Council of Nicaea II, reproduced in Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 241, 344.

<sup>139</sup> *Orations* III, 13. In a less philosophical moment, John also refers to the icon as a triumph and a manifestation; in the *Orations*, he defines six types of images.

<sup>140</sup> The image was defended in these terms by the Cappadocians, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nanzianzus, and also by Athanasius. See Ladner, "The Concept of the Image."

prototype.<sup>141</sup> The example of the aforementioned emperor-portrait formed the empirical basis of the patristic view, propagated in the much-quoted writings of Basil of Caesarea and Athanasius of Alexandria, according to which an image, as a likeness of its prototype, might stand as substitute for the absent person. The model of the emperor-image also lay at the foundation of John's understanding of the transfer of the honor (*timê*) due to Christ through the veneration given his icon.<sup>142</sup>

However, the Christological argument for the legitimacy of sacred images was not unproblematic. Patriarch Germanos had defined the icon as an image of Christ's human form only: "according to the flesh, and not his incomprehensible and invisible Godhead."<sup>143</sup> While claiming that an icon of Christ was a likeness (*homoioîma*) of its subject, John had also emphasized the difference between the natural image (*kata physikê*) of Christ, as consubstantial with God the Father, and the artificial image (*to kata thesis kai mimêsin*), "since they are not identical."<sup>144</sup> This was meant to safeguard against the objection that the iconophiles falsely sought to circumscribe what was uncircumscribable (*aperigraptos*) by either word or image: God's divinity.<sup>145</sup> Yet in invoking Basil and Dionysius the Areopagite on the image, John's

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<sup>141</sup> See Ladner "The Concept of the Image," 17-8, for John's distinction between the natural image (*physikê*), which defines Christ's relation to God, and the image made according to convention or imitation (*to kata thesin kai mimesin*), which characterizes man and the images of art. Ladner locates the *physis-thesis* distinction within the context of Aristotelian philosophy.

<sup>142</sup> John quotes Basil on this issue in *Orations* III. The precedent is found in Athanasius' *Orations* III against Arian: "In the image [*eikon*] there is the idea [*eidos*] and form [*morphê*] of the emperor ... The emperor's likeness is unchanged in the image, so that who sees the image, sees the emperor in it, and again who sees emperor, recognizes him to be the one in the image...Who, therefore, adores [*proskynôn*] the image, adores in it also the emperor. For the image is the form of the latter and his idea." Quoted in Ladner, "The Concept of the Image," 8. John and the iconophiles were to draw a clear distinction between the adoration proper to God [*latreia*] and the veneration of images [*proskynêsis*].

<sup>143</sup> Quoted in Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 71, from a letter of Germanos to John of Synada in the years prior to the official onset of iconoclasm in 730.

<sup>144</sup> *Orations* 3.16.

<sup>145</sup> See *Orations* 3.24 on circumscription.

defense seemed to imply a closer connection between the hypostasis or unity of Christ – as human and divine – and his icon. Otherwise, the icon would fail in its claim to be a true and indispensable manifestation of God’s divinity.<sup>146</sup> Though the extent of the iconoclasts’ knowledge of John’s writings is unclear, it was precisely this ambiguity they were to exploit in their next and more powerful set of arguments against the legitimacy of icons.<sup>147</sup>

### **Circumscription, representation and economy**

The Christological focus of John’s defense was adopted with great effect by the next iconoclastic emperor, Constantine V (741-75), who advanced a formidable set of arguments against the iconophiles in the early 750s.<sup>148</sup> Only parts of Constantine’s *Peuseis* or Inquiries remain. These survive primarily in fragments quoted by the iconophile Patriarch Nikephoros (c. 758 – 828), who developed an extensive reply to the Emperor’s formulations and according to which we may reconstruct the primary lines of opposition.<sup>149</sup> In the first *Peusis*, Constantine reasoned that because Christ’s person (*prosopon*) is a unity, and only his human body is depicted in a visual image, icons of Christ were heretical insofar as they divided his material and spiritual natures.<sup>150</sup> In advancing this claim, Constantine drew upon the Trinitarian concept of the essential relation

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<sup>146</sup> Barber in particular has made the essentialist view of John’s defense central to what he claims is a shift between this and the subsequent formalism of Nikephoros and Theodore of Stoudios. However, this reading of the *Orations* is open to debate. In addition to the note above, see Noble, *Carolingians*, 92 for a more nuanced view of the complexity of John’s position.

<sup>147</sup> Louth notes in *John Damascene*, 197 that while iconoclasts specifically condemned John at the Council of Hiercia (754), they do not seem to respond directly to his arguments.

<sup>148</sup> These are also preserved in the *horos* of the Council of 754 as quoted in the Acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea. See Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Period*, 254-55 for more detail. Stephen Gero *Byzantine Iconoclasm During the Reign of Constantine V with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources*, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, Subsidia 52 (Louvain, 1977).

<sup>149</sup> Nikephoros’ *Antirrhethici* I-III; PG 100, 205-533. The fragments are preserved in Hennephof, *Textus Byzantinos*, *Peusis* I=frags. 141-61, pp. 52-4; *Peusis* II=frags. 162-70, pp. 54-5. See discussion below.

<sup>150</sup> Hennephof, frags. 156-59.

(*homo-ousia*) between its equal members, employing the parallel to define an image as that which is one-in-being (*ousia*) with what it represents.<sup>151</sup> As indicated earlier, it was the incarnate Christ, as the icon of God, who provided the exemplary model by which all icons might be judged legitimate or not.

For John, the link to divine presence in the icon made the icon not only worthy of veneration, but also a medium for the ethical process by which man returned to the God. For Constantine, such presence was only possible in the sacrament of Eucharist, which therefore constituted the true image or figure of Christ:

The bread that we receive is an icon of his body, presenting the form [*morphazôn*] of his flesh, as that which has become the figure [*typos*] of his body.<sup>152</sup>

Only through priestly consecration could bread and wine, as man-made artifacts (*ta cheiropoietai*), become *acheiropoietai*, thus transcending the limits of materiality.<sup>153</sup> Moreover, since Christ himself had claimed the Eucharist to be his body, this definition had the legitimacy of scriptural authority, which was central to the iconoclastic position. The claim was reaffirmed in the *horos* or definition of the iconoclast Council at Hieria (754), during which it was stated that the Godhead chose the Eucharist as the only form (*typos*) to represent Christ, in order to safeguard against idolatry and the heretical introduction of a fourth person into the Trinity.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Hennephof, frag. 142. This is outlined by Gero in “The Eucharistic Doctrine of the Byzantine Iconoclasts and Its Sources,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 68 (1975): 4-5.

<sup>152</sup> Hennephof, frags. 166-67, preserved in Nikephoros *Refutation* II.3 (PG 100: 337). See Gero, “Eucharistic Doctrine,” 5-6. Theodore of Studios quotes a similar claim from an unidentified iconoclast: “Yes, it is legitimate for Christ to be iconized [*eikonizesthai ton Christon*] – but only as the sacred formula handed down by tradition from God himself specified: “This do in remembrance of me.” Obviously, then, it is not legitimate for him to be iconized in any other way, nor to be held in remembrance in any other way. For only this way of his being represented in an icon is authentic [*aleithes*], and only this way of iconizing him is sacred.” In Theodore the Studite, *Antirrhethici* II. 10 (PG 99: 340), quoted in Pelikan, *Imago Dei*, 58.

<sup>153</sup> Hennephof, frag. 168.

<sup>154</sup> See Gero, “Eucharistic Doctrine,” 6. The *horos* is best preserved in the Acts of Nicaea II, reproduced in Mansi, XII, col. 208ff. On the Council of 754, see Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 32-5.

While not fully reproducing Constantine's arguments, the Council at Hiereia drew out more of their implications. The biblical injunction against the worship of idols was renewed, this time with the force of Christological argument behind it. Dogma and tradition were inveighed against the iconophiles, who were judged to be heretical "innovators" and idolators over against those who followed the truth of scripture. The depiction of Christ and the saints was accorded the status of a "deceitful" practice by "polluted hands," one that "brought down the spirit of man from lofty adoration of God to low and material adoration of the creature."<sup>155</sup> Painters who attempted to "represent the divine image (*karakther*) of the Word after the Incarnation with "material colors" or the essence or person (*ousia or hypostasis*) of the Word were anathematized, along with John of Damascus and other iconophiles.<sup>156</sup>

Beyond the negative view of matter, the key points to the iconoclastic arguments were twofold: first, that in order for an image to be truthful as a representation, it must be consubstantial (*hom-ousios*) with its prototype. For this, the Incarnation and the Eucharist furnished seemingly undeniable precedents with which the iconophiles would have to contend. Second was the idea of representation as a form of circumscription (*perigraphê*), which was defined as a portrayal of a person "according to the attributes of the flesh alone."<sup>157</sup> Such a representation, the iconoclasts argued, implied existence in place and time, and therefore was incapable of depicting the invisible and eternal person of Christ.

Since Byzantine orthodoxy defined Christ as a union of two natures (*hypostaseis*), the iconophiles, who had based their defense of the icon upon the Incarnation, appeared to be cast upon the horns of a dilemma. According to the iconoclasts, either they divided the person of

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<sup>155</sup> PG, 337D.

<sup>156</sup> PG, 340D.

<sup>157</sup> PG 100, 353BD. See Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 97-113, for a detailed discussion of circumscription.

Christ, representing only his circumscribable, human body in image, falling into Nestorian heresy; or they wrongly claimed to represent what both they and the iconoclastic writers agreed was unrepresentable, his divine nature.<sup>158</sup> A further and perhaps more important implication was that the image should function in the same way and with similar authority as scripture, as Germanos had earlier claimed in arguing for their equivalence. In order for an image to be legitimate or true (*alêthês*), the manner of its representation would have to conform to a truthful reflection of Christ's hypostatic unity. The debate concerning the cult of images had come full circle, to return to the nature of pictorial representation and the relation of icon to divine prototype.

In response, the Council at Nicaea, convened in 787, denounced Constantine, his iconoclast followers, and the *horos* of 754, reiterating the authority of Basil on the subject of veneration and Patriarch Germanos on the significance of the Incarnation for the imaging of Christ.<sup>159</sup> But icons were not defended primarily on essentialist grounds, but rather as a means to stimulate in the believer the memory of and desire for holy prototypes, an argument invoked both by Germanos and John of Damascus in their writings. Against the iconoclasts, the reverence (*proskynêsis*) due to icons was proclaimed to be equal to that accorded to the holy cross and scripture. Though later condemned by Leo V during the iconoclast Council of 815, Nicaea II effectively established a doctrine and cult of images that was reaffirmed at the Council of Constantinople in 843, which brought an end to over a century of iconoclasm.<sup>160</sup> However, as Ambrosios Giakalis and other

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<sup>158</sup> Gero, "Eucharistic Doctrine," 4.

<sup>159</sup> For recent scholarship on the significance of Nicaea II, see Ambrosios Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: the Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council*, revised edition, (Leiden, 1994). Parry places Nicaea II within the context of previous councils in 'Heresies and Church Councils,' Chapt. 14 of *Depicting the Word*, 131-44; Noble, *Carolingians*, 95-108, also provides an excellent discussion of the arguments.

<sup>160</sup> See the excellent summary by Brubaker, "Icons and Iconomachy," in *A Companion to Byzantium*, Liz James, editor (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.; Malden, MA, 2010), 323-37.

scholars have noted, Nicaea II did not entirely address the challenges put forth by Constantine.<sup>161</sup> With the re-imposition of an imperial ban on images in 815, new and sophisticated arguments were developed by iconophiles in direct response to iconoclastic claims.

### Icons, ontology and presence

As noted earlier, the most extensive reply to Constantine is found in Nikephoros' *Antirrhetici*, written circa 816-20, which is also our primary source for two of the *Peuseis*.<sup>162</sup> In constructing his defense, Nikephoros attempts to overturn the foundational premise of the iconoclast argument, dismissing the essentialist definition of an icon, further developing a position based upon visual resemblance or likeness (*homoiôsis*) and a distinction between circumscription and depiction. Here we are brought into an explicit discussion of presence:

In fact it is in circumscription [*perigraphê*] that presence [*parestin*] is necessary. In painting there is nothing of presence... for while a man is certainly depicted [*graphetai*] in his icon, he is not circumscribed there, only in the place proper to circumscription. And the means of these are clearly distinct. For one depicts a man through pigments and mosaics, as the situation demands, so producing his figure with varied and many means, and differing in brilliances. Never but never is it a question of circumscribing by these means, since it has been said that circumscription is something else again. Moreover, painting makes present the corporeal form [*to somatikos eidos*] of the one depicted, imprinting its contour and its sensible form and its likeness.... Thus the depiction has a relation in terms of likeness to the archetype....<sup>163</sup>

According to Nikephoros, only Christ himself, as the natural (*physikos*) image of God, is an icon in the sense of circumscription. In this respect, the author concedes that painted icons of Christ

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<sup>161</sup> Giakalis, *Images of the Divine*, 141.

<sup>162</sup> See note 87 above. A French translation is available: Nicephorus, *Discours contre les iconoclastes*, trans. M. J. Mondzain-Baudinet (Paris, 1989).

<sup>163</sup> PG 100, 357BCD. Translation quoted in Barber, "Transformation and Desire," 11. The passage is also discussed by Barber in "From Image into Art," 8. Likeness is a central concept for Nikephoros and forms the basis for the truth of icon itself. See also Gilbert Dagron, "Holy Images and Likeness," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, XLV (1991), 23-33 for discussion of other concepts of likeness, such as physiognomic, with regard to icons.

are incapable of capturing his spiritual presence, only his bodily form or likeness. In rejecting the essentialist definition of the icon invoked by Constantine, Nikephoros denied that the icon could function in the same capacity as relic or Eucharist, that is, as a container of divine presence. He also reasons conversely for an ontological distance between the icon of Christ and his person:

Thus, when an icon is destroyed, it is an offence against the formal, that is to say, visible, properties of the one shown. One does not destroy Christ when one destroys his icon, rather one destroys the possibility of his becoming available to vision.<sup>164</sup>

Whereas the iconoclasts argue that its essential relation guarantees the truth of an icon to a divine subject, according to this new “formalist” account of Nikephoros, the icon is ontologically distinct from its subject, bound only by resemblance. In this shift, Charles Barber sees a first attempt to claim for the image a primary status as a work of art.<sup>165</sup> That is to say, rather than a mediation or container of divine presence, the icon effects a distance between the image and its prototype, thereby closing off the possibility of idolatry. Inverting the claims of the iconoclasts, Nikephoros argued that icons were truthful precisely because they were artificial, not natural, images of the divine.<sup>166</sup>

While Barber’s reading of Nikephoros has introduced an important writer to a wider art historical audience, it also constructs a questionable opposition between Nikephoros’ arguments

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<sup>164</sup> Barber, *Figure*, 122. Discussions of the aesthetic theories of Nikephoros can be found in J. Travis, *In defense of the faith: the theology of Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople* (Brookline, 1984), 44-60; V. Bykov, "Die ästhetischen Anschauungen des Patriarchen Nikephoros," *Byzantinoslavica*, L (1989): 181-92.

<sup>165</sup> Barber, “From Image into Art.”

<sup>166</sup> Paul Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople*, (Oxford: 1958), 189-213; Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 107-23. Theodore of Stoudios, addressing the monastic community exiled for their resistance to the iconoclasm of the 9thC, reiterates the epistemic and orthodox value of the icon, furthering the formalist argument of Nikephoros. See discussion below.



and the earlier iconophile defense of John of Damascus.<sup>167</sup> While it is clear that Nikephoros seeks to undermine Constantine's definition of the icon as consubstantial with its prototype, it is not apparent that he attributes a similar essentialism to John, as Charles Barber claims. On the contrary, as Paul Alexander has demonstrated, Nikephoros borrows directly from John's writings.<sup>168</sup> The focus on the concept of likeness as the key to understanding the icon's relation to its prototype, also given further consideration by Theodore of Studios, is continuous with John's distinction between the natural (*kata physin*) and artificial (*kata teknên/thesis*) icon and its patristic basis.<sup>169</sup>

What is distinctive in Nikephoros' writings is his concentrated examination of the concept of likeness as a formal relation, and his extensive use of Aristotelian categories and methods. While John's *Dialectica* also reflects an interest in and engagement with Aristotelian logic, Nikephoros' work constitutes an original attempt to employ what might be termed scholastic argumentation in defense of images, one that differs substantially from the compilation-like style of John's *Orations*.<sup>170</sup> For the purposes of our study, what is significant are the distinctions Nikephoros makes between the concepts of depiction (*graphê*) and circumscription (*perigraphê*) with regard to the icon. By defining subtler categories of representation, Nikephoros not only obviates the iconoclast claim that the icon heretically attempts to circumscribe what is incapable

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<sup>167</sup> Barber, both in *Figure and Likeness* and "From Image into Art, in particular has made the essentialist view of John's defense central to what he claims is a shift between this and the subsequent formalism of Nikephoros and Theodore of Stoudios. However, this reading of the *Orations* is open to debate. In addition to note above, see Louth, *John Damascene*, and Noble, *Carolingian*, 92 for a more nuanced view of John's position.

<sup>168</sup> Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus*, 205.

<sup>169</sup> See Ladner, "The Concept of the Image," 16-8, who gives a brief genealogy of the *physis-thesis/mimêsis* distinction John employs.

<sup>170</sup> Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus*, 190-1. On the scholasticism of Theodore, see Barasch, *ICON*, 256-8. Barasch also notes that John's systematic formulation of arguments made him a model for Thomas Aquinas.

of depiction (*aperigraptos*).<sup>171</sup> He also preserves the Christological basis of the iconophile defense while considerably strengthening the position in new and more sophisticated philosophical terms.

The conveners of Nicaea II had sought to reply directly to the question of circumscription and the icon:

No one, of course, has thought to reproduce with colors his divinity, for No one, it says, has ever seen God. He is uncircumscribable, invisible, and incomprehensible, although circumscribable according to his humanity. For we know Christ to be of two natures, and in two natures, that is, a divine and a human one, without division. The one, therefore, which is uncircumscribable and the one which can be circumscribed are seen in the one Christ.<sup>172</sup>

Nikephoros had claimed that circumscription, unlike depiction, “is something else.” He proceeds with a more precise definition of the term as implying existence in time (*kronos*), place (*topos*), and in apprehension (*katalêpsis*). Given these parameters, the idea that an icon could circumscribe any being, let alone God, is an absurdity, for the two are substantially different. Here we return again to the *physis/mimêsis* distinction, but with an added existential dimension. Circumscription is not only a natural relation, but one that implies existence in the full sense of the word, as living being, while *mimêsis* implies only the imitation of form. What is presented in the icon is the visible and bodily shape of a person, not the person himself.

The further condition of circumscription as defined by Nikephoros is broadly cognitive: what is circumscribed is capable of being comprehended or grasped by the mind; it also implies the perception of something true or existent rather than fantastic.<sup>173</sup> In this sense, circumscription bears a close relation to knowledge, and brings us to a parallel discussion of a distinction that

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<sup>171</sup> In his *Refutio et eversio definitionis synodalis anni 815*. See Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus*, 199 and 251.

<sup>172</sup> *Acta*, 244B, quoted in Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 77.

<sup>173</sup> *Katalêpsis* is a concept central to Stoic philosophy.

takes on renewed significance in the arguments of the ninth century iconophiles.<sup>174</sup> When the iconoclasts had claimed that God was *aperigraptos* or uncircumscribable by icons, they objected to the idea that the eternal, invisible, and incomprehensible Godhead could be expressed by a temporal, visible, and knowable artifact, with the further criticism of the icon's status as a 'base' object crafted by human hands.<sup>175</sup> The iconophiles responded by drawing a finer distinction between the ideas of depiction and circumscription, claiming an ontological difference between them. But closely associated with this defense was a deeper philosophical distinction already present in patristic sources: between theology (*theologia*) and economy (*oikonomia*).<sup>176</sup> In order to understand the larger significance of iconophile thought regarding the image, indeed, what underlies its very basis, we must turn to their use of this distinction.

### **Icons, theology and economy**

Earlier we noted the close connection between Trinitarian and Christological ideas, articulated as doctrine during the Councils of the preceding centuries, in the conceptualization and defense of the icon. On account of this connection, many scholars have characterized the development of sacred image theory in Byzantium as a continuation of prior theological debates. Like John of Damascus, both Nikephoros and Theodore of Stoudios invoked the Incarnation as an historic moment that legitimized the making and veneration of icons. The icon was further defended as a memorial and witness to the truth of Christ's existence on earth, and a visible means by which

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<sup>174</sup> Elsner is among many scholars who see a shift from concerns with ontology to epistemology during the course of the debates; "Iconoclasm as Discourse," 376-77.

<sup>175</sup> Nikephoros rightly objects that if Christ is *aperigraptos*, then the Eucharist, an object "enclosed by lips and teeth," fails to be a true icon according to the iconoclasts' own definition. He also denies the scriptural basis for calling the Eucharist an image. See Gero, "The Eucharistic Doctrine," 8.

<sup>176</sup> Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 263-279. Mondzain, *Icon, Image, Economy* provides an important history and interpretation of economy with reference to the iconoclast debates.

the Christian viewer might know and return to God. While these claims certainly reflect an understanding of Christ's relation to God or theological beliefs, they also shift the significance of the icon, from its theological basis to an economic one.

The mystical theology which informs Byzantine thought of this period, particularly as expressed by Maximos the Confessor and the Cappadocian fathers of the fourth century, emphasized the fundamental incomprehensibility and unknowability of God, as a totality encompassing all of Being.<sup>177</sup> It is partly upon this tradition that iconoclasts based their claim that icons were incapable of circumscribing the Godhead, a belief that the iconophiles also upheld.<sup>178</sup> But the Greek fathers also distinguished between what could be said or thought or reasoned about God (*theo – logos*), with God's activity in the world, via the Holy Spirit and the incarnate Christ. In defending the icon, both Nikephoros and Theodore drew upon this distinction as a means to undercut the iconoclast position. For example, in his tripartite *Refutations of the Iconoclasts*, Theodore of Stoudios specifically states:

We are not talking about theology, in which there is no question of resemblance or likeness; but about the divine economy, in which we see the prototype and the copy, if indeed you confess that the Word assumed flesh and became like us.<sup>179</sup>

Regarding the relation between icon and prototype, Theodore reiterates Nikephoros' distinction between an essentialist and formalist definition. But he differs from Nikephoros in arguing more specifically that an icon truly depicts Christ's *prosopon* or person.<sup>180</sup> In an extended series of syllogisms in the third *Refutation*, Theodore reasons that insofar as Christ's human nature is genuine, he is capable of being depicted, just as any other person might be.

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<sup>177</sup> Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom*, 57-73.

<sup>178</sup> See for example Theodore, *Antirrhetici*, I.10.

<sup>179</sup> *Antirrhetici*, II.4; translation by Roth, *On the Holy Icons*, 45. For a description of Theodore's works and their significance to the iconoclastic debates, see Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 257-8.

<sup>180</sup> von Schönborn, *The Face of Christ*, 219.

Further, although such a depiction captures the particularity of his person, it does not thereby introduce another person into the Trinity, nor does it attempt to circumscribe Christ's nature as *Logos*. These were responses to specific objections of the iconoclasts. Theodore claims that the humanity of Christ has its existence in the *hypostasis* of the Word, and it is visible in his depiction as an individual.<sup>181</sup> Insofar as icons of Christ depict his *hypostasis* or person, they offer the possibility of participating in the grace and glory of God, albeit in a *relative* way (*kata skhesin*).<sup>182</sup> How far the icon may be said to manifest or mediate Christ's divinity, under this formalist account, is a question to which we will return.

Given Theodore's careful use of theological concepts, in what sense is his argument against the iconoclasts "economic"? Theodore's response assumes that icons, as visible likenesses of Christ's incarnation, necessarily fall into the realm of God's *oikonomia* as a means of accommodating our human condition. Like John of Damascus, Theodore reasons: "If merely mental contemplation were sufficient, it would have been sufficient for Him to come to us in a merely mental [i.e. theological] way."<sup>183</sup> The value of the Incarnation is superfluous or lost if Christ's visibility in the flesh has no deeper significance. While Christ maintains a likeness to God, it is Christ's likeness *to us*, as individuals made of flesh and blood, which enables us to recreate and redeem ourselves through the *mimêsis* or imitation at the heart of the icon. But only by maintaining the division between theology and economy is the icon and its veneration

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<sup>181</sup> *Antirrhetici* III. See also Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 108; Ladner, "The Concept of the Image," 16.

<sup>182</sup> Theodore employs the term *skhesis* to signify relation; see von Schönborn, *The Face of Christ*, 223-226. The concept of *skhesis* is also found in Gregory Nanzianzen, Athanasios, Gregory of Nyssa, and John of Damascus, though it is not examined to the same degree; see Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy*, 78.

<sup>183</sup> *Antirrhetici* I.7. Mondzain, *Image, Icon, Economy*, 76, argues further that "[t]he icon's defense was...no longer a simple defense of religion alone; rather, it had become a broader plea concerning the conditions and modalities of thought itself." She also attributes to Nikephoros the origination of a philosophical doctrine of the icon based upon the relational economy concerning images generally... (74), though she comes to a different conclusion regarding the icon's relation to presence, as I discuss below.

safeguarded from the threat of heresy or idolatry. As Parry notes, the iconophiles balanced the apophatic or “negative” way of approaching the Godhead through theology, with the positive doctrine of God’s economy. In his words: while our minds cannot grasp the divine transcendence, we may at least experience something of his presence.”<sup>184</sup>

### **Conclusion: icons and Real presence**

A recurrent theme of iconoclast argument is the “lifeless” nature of icons as mere matter. The presumption here is that inanimate materials are not only base in the scheme of the cosmos, and therefore unworthy; but because of their nature, they are particularly unsuitable as containers of divine spirit or presence. In distinguishing between the image of a man and his portrait, John of Damascus had conceded that the likeness of a man’s corporeal form could in no way contain his spiritual powers (*physikai dynamis*).<sup>185</sup> Theodore reiterated this distinction in response to the iconoclast claim that an icon of Christ wrongly sought to circumscribe His divine nature.<sup>186</sup> Yet for both iconoclasts and iconophiles alike, the Eucharist furnished a model of the possibility of matter imbued with spirit. In his highly influential *Mystagogy*, the Maximos the Confessor had written:

By adoption and grace it is possible for them [participants in the Eucharistic mystery] to be called gods, because all of God completely fills them, leaving nothing in them empty of presence.<sup>187</sup>

Because scholars have focused on the rejection of the iconoclast adoption of the Eucharist as the true or only icon of Christ, significant parallels between icon and Eucharist have been

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<sup>184</sup> Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 124.

<sup>185</sup> *Orations* 3.16.

<sup>186</sup> *Antirrhetici* 3A.34.

<sup>187</sup> PG 41, 697A; translation quoted in J. Stead, *The Church, the Liturgy and the Soul of Man: The Mystagoga of Saint Maximos the Confessor* (Still River, MA, 1982), 96. See discussion by Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 24.

largely overlooked in their interpretations.<sup>188</sup> Yet the iconophiles, even as they dismissed the Eucharist as an image of Christ, stressed the profound economic potential of icons as a means of grace that bears comparison to the Eucharist. Like the bread and wine of the Eucharist, icons, as manufactured objects, were capable of participating in divine power (*energeia*).<sup>189</sup> The doctrine of divine energies – that which infuses and connects the entirety of God’s creation – comes into play as a conduit that charges the created world and is revealed at moments to man’s perception. In the contemplation of an icon, the soul of the beholder is mystically reconnected to the originator or prototype of the image.<sup>190</sup> Far from inanimate or lifeless, then, icons are envisioned as dynamic instruments of God’s grace, central to the process of man’s deification. As such, they offered a special form of mediation between man and God, with the incarnate Christ operating as a unifying force between the invisible, eternal realm of the divine and the material world of the believer.<sup>191</sup> In this regard, icons offered a potential means of accessing Real or spiritual presence. Moving beyond the topos regarding the didactic function of sacred images, the iconophiles advanced a bolder claim concerning the role of icons in the process of *theôsis* or deification.<sup>192</sup>

The process of sanctification leading to *theôsis* is also reflected in discussion of an icon’s contemplative function.<sup>193</sup> As indicated earlier, iconophiles stressed the importance of beholding Christ in the full particularity of his human form and of his earthly activity as a means of

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<sup>188</sup> An exception is Pentcheva, who recently provides a compelling argument for rethinking icons as matter imbued with spirit or graced matter, along the model of the Eucharist. See *The Sensual Icon*.

<sup>189</sup> John of Damascus, *Orations* 1.16. The concept was less developed in Latin theology.

<sup>190</sup> Giakalis, *Images of the Divine*, 79.

<sup>191</sup> See Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 24-5.

<sup>192</sup> On *theosis*, see esp. Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 114-124; and Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 263-79 on the economy of salvation.

<sup>193</sup> Giakalis has a good discussion of the relation of soteriology and contemplation (*Images of the Divine*, 78-83).

memorializing and affirming the reality of the Incarnation. Icons functioned as indispensable testimonials to the historicity of Christ's life, confirming the truth of the gospels. But through their spiritual contemplation (*pneumatikê theoria*), icons also provided a means through which bodily sight (*somatikê theoria*) itself was hallowed, preparing the believer to receive God's grace.<sup>194</sup>

In the *Orations*, John had claimed that the grace of the Holy Spirit resides in the icons of saints just as it does in their relics; through them the saints might yet live and direct our spiritual formation.<sup>195</sup> From the origin of icons in the cult of relics, we have returned full circle to the question of the icon's relation to divine presence. While Barber and other interpreters of the iconophile writers have argued that the sacred image theory of the ninth century shifted away from the association of icons with presence, their conclusions should be weighed against the continued emphasis of these authors on the economic role of icons and the possibility of participation in divine energies.<sup>196</sup> Barber in particular has challenged Thomas Mathews' view of the transformative dimension of icons within Byzantine liturgy, advancing the thesis that the *Antirrhetici* of Nikephoros represents a formative attempt to definitively separate art and worship.<sup>197</sup> In this he has claimed an important role for Nikephoros in the history of image theory and of art. Barber concludes, along with Mondzain, that the iconophiles rejected the idea of presence in the icon to reformulate its definition in terms of an "absence that sustains desire for

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<sup>194</sup> John of Damascus, *Orations* 3.12. See also Pelikan, *Spirit of Eastern Christendom*, 120-1.

<sup>195</sup> John of Damascus, *Orations*, I.19.

<sup>196</sup> Specifically Mondzain, whose argument Barber seems to follow closely.

<sup>197</sup> See Barber, "From Transformation to Desire," esp. 11. Here one might disagree with his translation of the Greek *technê* as art in the modern sense of the term.



its prototype.”<sup>198</sup>

In response, Leslie Brubaker has cautioned against the broad application of theology to the interpretation of Byzantine religious practice. She rightly counters that a wealth of evidence, reflected in the writings of the iconophiles themselves, suggests a different attitude towards and experience of icons, in which they functioned as embodiments of “real presence.” Not only is this evidence of crucial importance to our understanding of the Byzantines; it is central to the way in which they defined and understood themselves.<sup>199</sup> While I agree with Brubaker, I believe the two points of view may be reconciled by the distinction I have emphasized between theology and economy. On the one hand, the iconophiles urgently sought to defuse iconoclast critique regarding circumscription by employing increasingly powerful rhetorical arguments that drew upon the philosophical subtleties of Aristotelian philosophy. From this philosophical and theological standpoint, the icon was conceded to be incapable of representing or approaching the essence (*ousia*) of the Godhead in any way. The Platonic and Neoplatonic model of participation regarding the icon, inherited by the Greek fathers upon which the iconophiles relied, was recast in a formalist vein. Yet within the divine economy, the icon could yet operate as a link to God through his activity (*energeia*) in the world, by means of the grace of the Holy Spirit and the redemptive sacrifice of his Incarnate Son.

In investing the icon with a fundamental role in spiritual life, these arguments approach a sacramental view of images as containers of divine spirit or grace, similar in kind to holy relics

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<sup>198</sup> Barber, “From Transformation to Desire,” 15; and Mondzain, *Icon, Image, Economy*, 88, who similarly claims that icons are a form of absence or withdrawal.

<sup>199</sup> Brubaker, “Icons and Iconomachy,” 337.

or the Eucharist.<sup>200</sup> In his writings on the Eucharist, John was to distinguish between icons and the deified flesh of the sacrament.<sup>201</sup> While not identical, the parallels between icon and the Eucharistic sacrament, as transformative agents within God's redemptive activity, are compelling and may be usefully situated within the broader context of a Christian anthropology. Beyond theology, the iconophile writings in defense of sacred images are significant for their illumination of the deeply psychological or affective dimension of icon veneration in Byzantine culture, the experience of which both fueled the desire for real presence and provided fleeting intimations of divine encounter. As Stephen Halliwell has argued, John's writings on the icon couple arguments about the ontological status of images with considerations of their psychological or devotional value based upon a "spiritual psychology of viewing."<sup>202</sup>

Thus, while carefully distinguishing in theory between the icon as representation (*mimema*) and its divine prototype, John nonetheless points towards charged moments when the boundary between them gives way. Quoting the earlier writings of iconophile Leontios of Neapolis, John describes the experience of seeming to hold Christ through the lifeless form of his

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<sup>200</sup> See Parry, *Depicting*, 24-5. In *Orations* I.36 (Louth), John writes that while material things in themselves demand no veneration, if the person represented is full of grace, the material partakes of grace by analogy. In *The Corporeal Imagination Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2009), Patricia Cox Miller presents compelling evidence of the investiture of matter with divine powers in the period from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>201</sup> John of Damascus, *Expos.* 86.115; Louth, *John Damascene*, 183. See also note 63 above on John's use of the term *metastoeichō* or transformation in the believer, which generally used to describe the change in the Eucharistic elements, the resurrected body, and the Incarnation. In an important essay, Annemarie Weyl Carr demonstrated the resurgence of tensions around icons and Real Presence in the 11thC under the Komnenian emperor Leo, in "Leo of Chalcedon and the Icons," in *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzman*, Christopher Moss and Katherine Kiefer, Eds. (Princeton University: Princeton, NJ, 1995) 579-84. Charles Barber demonstrates the continuing controversy over this issue in *Contesting the Logic of Painting: Art and Understanding in Eleventh-Century* (Leiden, 2007). Despite the general perception that the issue was settled by the Nicaea II, the role of icons in spiritual life would be subject to further examination over the course of centuries.

<sup>202</sup> Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts, Modern Problems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 339. Halliwell locates this psychology in a prior tradition of Greek philosophy.

image.<sup>203</sup> An anecdote from the life of John Chrysostom, who was perhaps the most outspoken patristic authority on the superiority of scripture over image, is adduced as further evidence of the icon's sacred power. During the trials of his physical infirmity, the golden-tongued orator would gaze and attend to an icon of St. Paul, speaking to him as if he were truly alive and present.<sup>204</sup>

To conclude, in what was to become a highly influential defense of images throughout Latin Christendom, John of Damascus' arguments invested the icon with renewed significance and potential. Drawing upon the Incarnation as the supreme exemplar – as the Icon of God made visible – his arguments charge icons as a whole with a foundational role in the sanctifying process of spiritual contemplation and transformation.<sup>205</sup> Further, the experiential component of this activity is revealed as one of intimate communion of the beholder, with a 'presence' imagined as real. In this regard, icons offered an important heuristic function for Byzantine viewers: opening the world of spirit to the believer, while simultaneously reflecting their deepest desires and spiritual progress. This is another sense in which the icon functioned as a vision "in a dark mirror and enigma." But rather than attained passively, as we imagine perception to occur, it was also a vision that required the activation of image by the viewer, as the following quotation from Maximus makes clear:

The Lord is sometimes absent, sometimes present. He is absent in terms of face-to-face vision; he is present in terms of vision in a mirror and in enigmas. To the active person, the Lord is present through the virtues, but absent to him who takes no account of the reason of virtue. And again, to the contemplative he is present through the true knowledge of the things that are but absent to him who somehow misses it.

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<sup>203</sup> John of Damascus, *Orations* III.87 (Louth).

<sup>204</sup> John of Damascus, *Orations* I.54-5 (Louth). The Acts of Nicaea II, 324C, include similar stories of Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom.

<sup>205</sup> See *Orations* I.36 and II.10 (Louth).

Maximos Confessor, *Capita theologica et oeconomica* 2.57-58.14<sup>206</sup>

The significance of this activation is explored in the following chapter, which examines the cultural translation of a Byzantine icon within the sphere of cult devotion in Italy.

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<sup>206</sup> Quoted in A. G. Cooper, "Maximus the confessor on the Structural Dynamics of Revelation," *Vigiliae Christianae* 55 (2001), 174-75.

## CHAPTER 2

### Reinventing a Byzantine Icon as Real Presence at Santa Croce in Gerusalemme

He was made flesh in effect to render us spiritual, he bowed down with good will to raise us up; he went out to bring us in, he appeared visible to show us the invisible [*per uisibilia inuisibilia demonstramus*].

Gregory the Great, *Homilies on Ezekiel*<sup>207</sup>

[H]ow many woodcuts with the vision of Gregory have been sold; and, in addition, everybody who recites 5 pater noster etc. to the weapons of Christ (which is even further idolatry) is granted 14,000 years of remission from purgatorial punishment. And this prayer must be said in front of the image of Gregory; otherwise (if it is not said in front of this idol) he will not receive the indulgence.

Hans Fiessli, *Antwurt*, 1524<sup>208</sup>

## Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined the dynamic interplay between Real and affective presence in iconic encounter, and the role of embodied response to images within an economy of spiritual transformation in Byzantine image theory. While the icon was defended on the grounds of what I have called an “incarnational aesthetics,” it also bore important parallels to the Eucharist, as a form of ‘graced’ or inspirited matter. As we will see, this Eucharistic meaning became implicitly associated with a particular Passion icon of Christ in Byzantium (*Akra tapeinosis*). This association is made explicit in the reinvention of a Byzantine icon as the legendary Eucharistic vision of Pope Gregory.

In this chapter, I turn to the cultural translation of a Byzantine icon of Christ as a famous cult image in Rome, where it becomes specifically associated with Real or Eucharistic Presence. The subject is a late thirteenth-century micromosaic icon of Christ *Akra tapeinosis* (“Utmost

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<sup>207</sup> Quoted in Herbert Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 2000), 121.

<sup>208</sup> *Antwurt eins Schnytzer Purens fiber die ungegründten geschrift Meyster Jeronimi Gebwilers, Schulmeisters zu Strasburg, die er zu beschirmung der Romischen kilchen and iro erdachten wesen hat lassen ufigon* (Zurich: Johannes Hager, 20 April 1524) fol. E 4a.

humiliation”) [Fig. 0.1], reinvented as the miraculous vision of Pope Gregory of Christ during the Mass.<sup>209</sup> While the Gregory legend had been circulating in various forms throughout the middle ages, reaching a wide audience through Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda Aurea*, its description as a vision of the Eucharistic Christ did not emerge until the fourteenth-century. The retrospective association of the new version of Gregory’s miraculous vision with the cult icon in its setting, at the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, brought both church and icon to a new profile in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century. But the widespread dissemination of highly indulgenced prints of the icon, as the original (*prime*) *imago pietatis*, also made the cult image a focus of Reformation critique.<sup>210</sup> Perhaps more than any other image in the West, the Mass of Gregory became consonant with conflict over the Real Presence and the corruption of the cult image.<sup>211</sup>

Therefore among the artifacts of Byzantine origin that have shaped devotional practice and cultural controversy in the Latin West, the small icon at the center of our study has played a significant role; yet the terms of its reinvention remain to be fully explored. Within the history of late medieval art, Erwin Panofsky was among the first to bring scholarly attention to it as a foundational Eastern prototype for the *imago pietatis*, perhaps the most reprised image in

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<sup>209</sup> The seminal study on the icon is Carlo Bertelli, “The *Image of Pity* in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme,” in *Essays in the History of Art Presented to R. Wittkower* (New York, 1967), 40-55; For a recent update, see Bertelli, “Attualità e nostalgia: ancora sull’immagine venerata in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme,” *Certose e certosini in Europa: atti del convegno alla Certosa di San Lorenzo* Padula, 22, 23, 24 settembre, 1998.

<sup>210</sup> The icon is designated the “*prime imaginis pie/tatis*” in an engraving (c. 1480s) by the Northern artist Israhel van Meckenem; see discussion below. An interesting parallel is 14thC micromosaic icon of the Virgin *Eleousa* (Mercy) currently in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. A late-fifteenth century inscription on parchment back date the icon to the 4thC; see discussion by Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 99.

<sup>211</sup> Joseph Leo Koerner, “The Icon as Iconoclasm,” in *Iconoclasm*, Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds. (Karlsruhe, Germany and Cambridge, Mass: ZKM / MIT Press, 2002), 40.

Christian art of the Latin West.<sup>212</sup> Panofsky's study was central to a seminal history of the development of this image-type by Hans Belting, who in turn inaugurated a highly influential study of the formative role of icons in the history of art in Italy and the West.<sup>213</sup> In the past decade, the icon has also featured in nearly every major exhibition of Byzantine art. Apart from its reception and influence in the Latin West, the icon is a rare example of the exquisite micromosaic technique, which briefly flowered during the late years of the Paleologan Empire in Byzantium, of which fewer than 50 examples survive.<sup>214</sup>

In recent years, the icon, which is doubly enclosed by a 4-inch silver frame and an unusual triptych reliquary in the shape of a cross [Fig. 2.1], has been part of several major exhibitions of Byzantine art that have brought it to wider scholarly attention.<sup>215</sup> However, despite the nearly canonical status of this artifact in scholarly literature and art historical surveys, the icon, poised between disciplinary boundaries, raises a number of potentially rich questions that still remain unanswered. These take immediate and compelling visual form when the object is encountered in an exhibition or catalog. What strikes the viewer is not the icon itself but the

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<sup>212</sup> Erwin Panofsky, "'Imago Pietatis': Ein Beitrag zur Typengeschichte des 'Schmerzensmanns' und der 'Maria Mediatrix,'" in *Festschrift Max J. Friedländer zum 60. Geburtstag* (Leipzig, 1927), 261–308.

<sup>213</sup> Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. M. Bartusis and R. Meyer (New Rochelle, NY: A.D. Caratzas, 1990) and Belting, *Likeness and Presence*.

<sup>214</sup> The most comprehensive study of micromosaics of this period is Edmund Ryder, *Micromosaic icons of the Late Byzantine Period* (diss., New York University, 2007).

<sup>215</sup> Recent exhibitions displaying the icon and frame with accompanying catalogs include *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, Martina Bagnoli, Holger Klein and C. Griffith Mann, and James Robinson, eds. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011) [Cleveland Museum of Art; The Walters Art Gallery; British Museum]; *Byzantium 330-1453*, Robin Cormack and Maria Vassiliki, eds. (London: Royal Academy Publications, 2008) [Royal Academy of Arts]; and Helen Evans, eds. *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557)* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) [Metropolitan Museum of Art].

relatively enormous triptych reliquary frame in which it is displayed, likely of Western origin.<sup>216</sup> That is to say, what the beholder encounters is not a Byzantine icon *per se*, but rather a striking object whose framing, I will argue, crucially shapes the conditions of its viewing and meaning.<sup>217</sup> Most explicitly in this regard, an inscription on the frame's aedicule refers to the image as the vision of Gregory (Fuit S Gregori Magni Papae), effectively announcing the icon miraculous status as a vision of Real Presence.

To date, there has been no attempt to interpret this influential icon within its reliquary frame or cultic setting. My aim in this chapter is to provide a new reading that brings together two largely separate considerations of the icon: its specific materiality as rare, Byzantine artifact, and its activation within these multiple and signifying frames.<sup>218</sup> To this end, I examine not only the reliquary and the relation of the icon to its spectacular structure, but also the extended frame of the physical space in which it was likely encountered in ritual devotion. In addition, the conceptual frame of the visionary imagination has a role to play, as the icon was purported to be the very image of Christ's Eucharistic presence. As Joseph Koerner has argued, such images became "meta-emblems" for all Christian images: "diagram[s of] divine presence at the altar,

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<sup>216</sup> On the reliquary frame, see the following catalog entries: 'Reliquario di S. Gregorio Magno,' in Sara Faulin, ed., *Splendori di Bisanzio: Testimonianze e riflessi d'arte e cultura Bizantina nelle chiese d'Italia* (Editore Fabbri: Milan, 1990), 110; and *Faith and Power*, cat. 131.

<sup>217</sup> While there is no study to date that examines this interaction, there are many excellent treatments of the activating role of frames, which I discuss in detail below. If, as Benjamin claims, "the uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition," then what of the work of art that is prised from its fabric or frame?" Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York, 1968), 223.

<sup>218</sup> On the importance of "framing" in art historical scholarship, the *locus classicus* is Jacques Derrida's "Parergon," in *Truth and Painting*, trans. G. Bennington and I. McLeod (Chicago, 1987), 37-55. More recently, see Paul Duro, ed., *The Rhetoric of the Frame: Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, (Cambridge, 2003), which contains seminal essays by Louis Marin and Martin Heidegger. For practices of Byzantine framing in particular and their signifying role, see Glenn Peers, *Sacred Shock: Framing Visual Experience in Byzantium*, (University Park and London, 2005), with extensive bibliography; discussed further below.



making explicit what both liturgy and sacred images themselves do implicitly.”<sup>219</sup> Yet while authenticating these powers, these images also brought about their own iconoclastic destruction. The ultimate transformation of the cult image in print culture – freed from its physical context into the unregulated sphere of commerce – brings into sharper view the role of ritual framing and embodied experience in the activation of the icon, and the potential of the icon for idolatrous transformation.

### History of the icon

The icon at the focus of our study is a rare miniature mosaic icon of Christ, thought to have originated circa 1300 from the luxury workshops of Constantinople.<sup>220</sup> Measuring less than 6 x 8 inches, the icon features a three-quarter length image of the crucified Christ, with the Greek inscription “BASILEUS TES DOXES” or “King of Glory” in gold still faintly legible above his head, and the bars of a cross visible behind his body [Fig. 2.2]. Both suggest that the image is based upon an icon of the Crucifixion.<sup>221</sup> The announcement of the icon’s status as Byzantine, by virtue of its Greek inscription, and its specific figuration of Christ positions it among a few rare instances of this type. Among them are icons currently in Tatarna and Kastoria [Fig. 2.3] in

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<sup>219</sup> Joseph Koerner, “The Icon as Iconoclash,” 40. Carole Walker Bynum provides a compelling interpretation of the Mass of Gregory images as interrogations of presence in the ways in which they draw attention to the problem of representation, calling into question its very possibility, in “Seeing and Seeing Beyond: The Mass of St. Gregory in the Fifteenth-Century,” in Jeffrey Hamburger and Anne Marie Bouché, eds., *The Mind’s Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2006), 208-40.

<sup>220</sup> Bertelli, “The *Image of Pity*,” developed the case for a Byzantine provenance.

<sup>221</sup> For catalog entries with images and up to date bibliography, see *Treasures of Heaven*, 201-2 and *Faith and Power*, 221-22. Otto Demus suggests that larger mosaic icons were copies of painted prototypes in the decorative programs of churches, in “Two Palaeologan Mosaic Icons in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 14. (1960), 87, 89-119. On the icon type, see the seminal study by R. Bauerreiss, “BASILEUS TES DOXES. Ein Frühes eucharistisches Bild und seine Auswirkung,” in *Pro Mundi Vita: Festschrift zum Eucharistischen Weltkongress* (München, 1960), 46-67.

Greece, and a famed Jerusalem prototype [Fig. 2.4], now known only by its jeweled extant frame.<sup>222</sup> This places the micromosaic among a very rare group of icons; its similarity to the Jerusalem prototype further enhances its status as tied to the Holy Land and the life of Christ. On the reverse of the icon, a painted image of St. Katherine [Fig. 2.5] in oddly Byzantinizing clothes was uncovered during restoration in 1960, and raises questions about the provenance or a possible intermediary location of the icon, which is believed to have been taken from the monastery of St. Katherine in Sinai.<sup>223</sup> Although Katherine's image is not visible in its current frame, it is possible that it once functioned as a dedicatory one or as part of double-sided icon.<sup>224</sup>

The figure of the dead, yet animated Christ, the wounds of his hands and side revealed to the viewer, represents a type which instantiates the central mystery of Christ's Passion that came to be known as *Akra Tapeinosis* in the East and the *imago pietatis* in the West.<sup>225</sup> Although already established in Byzantium by the 12<sup>th</sup>C<sup>226</sup> and in Italy by the 13<sup>th</sup>C, the figure grew in prominence as a much-copied and venerated prototype in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, where it

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<sup>222</sup> The Kastoria *Christ* is part of a double-sided icon dating from the 12<sup>th</sup>C; see catalog entry in Evans, *Glory of Byzantium*, 125; a much-effaced copy exists in a 12<sup>th</sup>C gospel book in the Leningrad Public Library, fols. 65v, 167v. For the Jerusalem prototype, known only by its 12<sup>th</sup>C gold frame and currently in the Treasury of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem, see Heinrich van Os, *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe 1300-1500*, exh. cat., Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (London: Merrell Holberton, 1994) 106, and Paul Heatherington, "Who is the King of Glory? The Byzantine Enamels of an Icon Frame and Revetment in Jerusalem: For Hugo Buchthal at 80," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 53. Bd., H. 1 (1990), 25.

<sup>223</sup> See Bertelli, "The Image of Pity," 45, who suggests that the painting may have been a later dedication of the icon to St. Catherine by its Italian owner, who purported to have stolen it from the monastery while on pilgrimage, as discussed below. A more in-depth study of the icon would pursue this and the parallel between Catherine's mystic vision of Christ and Gregory's.

<sup>224</sup> The significance of Katherine's image has not been fully examined. A particular line to pursue is a possible connection between the saint and Gregory as holy figures who both experienced a vision of Christ.

<sup>225</sup> Both descriptions find their origin in the Old Testament servant songs of Isaiah (" . . . a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief . . . " 53:2-4). The inclusion of the crossed hands of Christ mark this as unusual for the Byzantine type, but not without precedent.

<sup>226</sup> The 12<sup>th</sup>C Kastoria double-sided icon of Christ is discussed in Belting's "An Image and Its Function in the Liturgy: The Man of Sorrows in Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 34 (1980), 4.

came to be associated with a Eucharistic meaning.<sup>227</sup> Indeed, it has been thought that the Santa Croce icon in particular contributed in a unique way to the transmission of the Man of Sorrows typology in Germany, France, and the Low Countries, as an archetype that inspired numerous printed copies, based upon an engraving by Israel van Meckenem in the 1490s [Fig. 0.2].<sup>228</sup>

Hans Belting was the first to bring this icon-type into fuller consideration, when he proposed a functional explanation for the Byzantine figure of Christ as the *imago pietatis*, which has its basis in Byzantine rites of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>229</sup> The image developed as a synoptic expression of the Passion employed during liturgies of Holy Week, as these shifted to an expanded focus on the gospel's Passion narratives.<sup>230</sup> Belting provided compelling evidence that the image-type derives from the Byzantine *epitaphios* [Fig. 2.6], a fabric embroidered with an image of the dead Christ used in the burial processions of Holy Week and the Byzantine Passion liturgy.<sup>231</sup> Notably, the micromosaic icon of Christ under consideration shares with the

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<sup>227</sup> For the Byzantine association of the figure with the *prothesis* rite or preparation of the Eucharistic gifts, see most recently Sharon Gerstel, "An Alternative View of the Late Byzantine Sanctuary Screen," in *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West*, ed. S. Gerstel, (Washington, DC, 2006), 135-61, esp. 142; and Robin Cormack, "Living Painting," in *Rhetoric in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, Univ. of Oxford*, March 2001, 244-45; for the development of the Man of Sorrows in the West, see Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages*, as well as the seminal study by Erwin Panofsky, "*Imago Pietatis*".

<sup>228</sup> See the catalogue entry in *Faith and Power*, 356. Belting argues that the Man of Sorrows type was already well established by the time the Carthusians adopted the Gregorian image, and thus the icon could only have had a belated effect on the dissemination of the Man of Sorrows type. See Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages*, 36-38, 131. There remains a great deal of debate as to the origin of this form, but after Belting's recent work, some scholars argue it is no longer tenable to refer to the Santa Croce icon as the "Gregorian archetype." However, if we accept the evidence of its widespread dissemination through the engravings of van Meckenem, then there is an important sense in which it functioned as a prototype. For parallels, see Mitchell Merback's "Channels of Grace: Pilgrimage Architecture, Eucharistic Imagery, and Visions of Purgatory at the Host-Miracle Churches of Late Medieval Germany," in Sarah Blick and Rita Tekippe, eds., *Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 587-648.

<sup>229</sup> Belting, "An Image and its Function."

<sup>230</sup> Belting, "An Image and its Function, 4ff.

<sup>231</sup> See examples in Evans, *Faith and Power*, 315-17.

*epitaphios* the formal characteristics of Christ's arms crossed in a burial position, while other Byzantine examples omit this.<sup>232</sup>

Much of the scholarship pertaining to the micromosaic icon has concentrated either on its Byzantine facture or on its role in disseminating the Man of Sorrows typology throughout Western Europe.<sup>233</sup> In other words, the icon has primarily been viewed from the perspective of either Byzantine or Italian histories of art. As a result, these disparate spheres of interpretation have created a rupture between the icon as a Byzantine artifact and its afterlife in the West. To bridge this divide, I will focus on the particular circumstances of the icon's cultural appropriation and re-authentication, contextualizing the history of its *translatio*, in both a physical and conceptual sense, from the far reaches of the Byzantine Empire to the center of the Roman Christendom. I begin by first addressing its probable function and value in the context of late Byzantine art and religious practice, then shift to its reception in an Italian one. I then engage the more complex question of how an "Eastern" image was transformed into "Western" one, as it became a symbol that could be authoritative and spiritually efficacious during a particular historic moment in the Roman church, when the search for authentic images brought it into an unusual mode of reliance upon the artistic riches of Byzantine religious culture.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Evans, *Faith and Power*, 4. For the crossed-hands variant, see Amy Neff, "Byzantium Westernized: Two Icons in the *Supplicationes variae*," *Gesta*, 38, I (1999), 88-90.

<sup>233</sup> See note 7 above. For the question of the Byzantine influences on western art, see especially the seminal article by Ernst Kitzinger, "The Byzantine Contribution to Western Art of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," "The Byzantine Contribution to Western Art of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 (1966): 25-47, 265-266; and Otto Demus, *Byzantine Art and the West* (London 1970).

<sup>234</sup> See Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 331-48,

### The icon *Akra Tapeinosis*

The specific figuration of Christ in this icon, as well as the location where it came to function in liturgical settings, bear significance for its later Eucharistic association. To date, these have not been sufficiently examined, but arguably are important in understanding the translation of these meanings across cultures. Painted versions of the *Akra Tapeinosis* have been found in the sanctuary of late Byzantine churches, often located within a niche where they could be seen only by those allowed to enter that sanctified space. As such, they are particularly associated with the *prothesis* rite or preparation of the Eucharist gifts [Fig. 2.7].<sup>235</sup> From a theological perspective, the image of Christ *Akra Tapeinosis* had a requisite supra-historical quality that allowed it function synoptically, one distinct from historically-specific images of the Crucifixion, Deposition from the Cross, or Resurrection; none of these in isolation could adequately depict the mystery of Christ's redemptive sacrifice and his persistence beyond the boundaries of ordinary spatio-temporal limits.<sup>236</sup> As a multivalent representation of a narrative that came to be reenacted in every celebration of the liturgy, the icon took on even greater significance. This is particularly true in the late Byzantine period, with its liturgical and theological emphasis on the Incarnation of Christ as a touchstone of spirituality.<sup>237</sup> The visual presence of Christ's corporeal body, seemingly lifeless yet alive in spirit (*empsychos nekros*), partly "within" this world as

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<sup>235</sup> Gerstel, "An Alternative View of the Late Byzantine Sanctuary Screen," 143.

<sup>236</sup> Belting, "An Image and its Public," 4ff; see also Philip Francis, "Harness The Dying Breath: The 12th Century Kastoria Icon In The Christian Imagination," *Spiritus*, Vol. 4 No.2 (Fall 2004), esp. 215ff.

<sup>237</sup> See Robin Cormack, "Living Painting," in *Rhetoric in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, Univ. of Oxford*, March (2001), 242ff, and John Meyendorff's *Byzantine Theology: historical trends and doctrinal themes* (London, 1974), esp. 201-11. For the 14<sup>th</sup>C, "The Life in Christ" by the theologian Nicholas Cabasilas provides an important resource worth further examination.

human and “out” of this world as divine, as the truncated figure suggests, encouraged the worshipper to contemplate the paradox of Christ’s presence, both corporeal and spiritual.<sup>238</sup>

Celebrated in a discourse on the icon of the Crucifixion by Michael Psellos, the eminent Byzantine humanist of the eleventh-century, the figure of the dead but living Christ came to signify the paradox of the icon as *empsychos graphe*: an animated or inspirited image that acted with rhetorical and psychological force upon its viewers.<sup>239</sup> Simultaneous with the development of this idea was the emergence in the 12thC of the *templon* or sanctuary screen in Byzantine churches, where icons would have been revealed in climatic moments that brought the ‘presence’ of the prototype to life.<sup>240</sup>

Given the unique way in which this portrait of Christ captured in visual form the redemptive suffering and sacrifice of the Passion, we can understand why it gained in popularity as a devotional image that also lent itself to private contemplation. As the individual path to salvation was promoted in mystical writings such as those of Symeon the Theologian (949-1022) and hesychasts of the late Byzantine period, the private viewing of icons such as the *Akra Tapeinosis* also took on new meaning: as the “living image” of the icon that reenacted the central

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<sup>238</sup> On *empsychos nekros*, see Cormack, *Living Painting*, 244; also Francis, “Kastoria,” 212. The bust-length image, a synecdoche implying the whole person, is also a pictorial format derived from Roman antiquity. For the development of the genre as a Holy portrait and devotional image (*Andachtsbild*), see Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting*, second edition (Davaco: Doornsplijk, The Netherlands), 39-71.

<sup>239</sup> For edition, see P. Gautier, ed. and trans., “Un discours inedit de Michel Psellos sur la Crucifixion,” *Revue des etudes byzantines* 49 (1991): 5-66; English translation available by Elizabeth Fisher.

<sup>240</sup> On the *templon*, see Sharon Kalopissi-Verti, “The Proskynetria of the Templon and Narthex: Form, Imagery, Spatial Connection and Reception,” in Sharon Gerstel, ed., *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West*, (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2007), 107-134, and in the same volume, Gerstel, “An Alternative View of the Late Byzantine Sanctuary Screen,” 135-62.

events of the Christian mystery.<sup>241</sup> Indeed, as Robin Cormack suggests, the development of the form of the *Akra tapeinosis* attests to the “use and viewing of art as the expression of personal involvement with the living Christ.”<sup>242</sup>

### **Micromosaic icons in Byzantium**

Beyond its distinctive iconography, the facture and specific materiality of the icon also bear meaning for its reinvention in its Roman setting. Our knowledge of portable mosaic icons, both large and small types, is confined to only about fifty documented examples dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> through the 14thC, making them a rare class of objects among Byzantine artifacts.<sup>243</sup> We should consider that the chance of survival for mosaics was considerably greater than for other kinds of precious metalwork or jeweled objects, which were often subject to reuse, or for painted images that, by virtue of their constitution, were more prone to deterioration.<sup>244</sup> That there are so few remaining examples of mosaic icons therefore probably attests not only to losses, which may have been great, but also to their relative rarity at the time of their production.<sup>245</sup> They were evidently of a class of luxury goods reflecting a considerable investment of materials and skilled

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<sup>241</sup> See Robin Cormack, “*and the Word was God: Art and Orthodoxy in Late Byzantium*,” in *Papers from the Thirty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, University of Durham, 23-25 (March 2002), 113ff, and Cormack, “Living Painting,” 244; also John Meyendorff’s “Spiritual Trends in the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Century,” in *Byzantine Theology: historical trends and doctrinal themes*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), 95-106.

<sup>242</sup> Cormack, “Living Painting,” 244.

<sup>243</sup> For discussion of portable mosaics, see Carlo Bertelli, ‘Portative mosaics,’ in C. Bertelli, ed., *Mosaics* (Mondadore Editore: Milan, 1988), 225-56; Otto Demus, “Two Palaeologan Mosaic Icons in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 14. (1960), 87, 89-119; Robert Nelson, “The Italian Appreciation and Appropriation of Illuminated Byzantine Manuscripts, ca 1200-1450,” reprinted in R. Nelson, *Later Byzantine Painting: Art, Agency, and Appreciation*, (Burlington, 2007), 209-35.

<sup>244</sup> Demus, “Palaeologan,” 89.”

<sup>245</sup> Demus, “Palaeologan,” 91.

craftsmanship.<sup>246</sup> In the case of miniature mosaics, a genre which had a brief flowering in the 14thC, one can imagine the skill which the intricate work of setting the fine tesserae, most of which were half-millimeter square in size or smaller, would require. And while most of the tesserae were enamel, some of the colors would have been rendered by semiprecious stones, such as lapis lazuli and malachite, along with silver and gold, all of which would have contributed to the material value of the icon and the precious, visual effect that amplified the veneration of the beloved image.<sup>247</sup>

The micromosaic icon of Christ translated to Rome was likely crafted as one of the varied luxury arts with a center of production in Constantinople, following the reconquest of the imperial city by Byzantines in 1261.<sup>248</sup> Scholars have sought a basis for these arts in the revival of patronage under the Palaeologan emperors, a renewal which led not only to the large-scale rebuilding of deteriorating monuments and the initiation of elaborate fresco programs, such as in the church of the Chora, but to the development of precious metal and enamel work in revetments and liturgical objects,<sup>249</sup> and to new portable art forms such as miniature mosaic, silver, enamel and steatite icons.<sup>250</sup>

While large mosaic icons seem to have been copies of painted icons whose inscriptions they often bore, and therefore likely had a similar use in liturgical practice as prokynesis icons, it is not known precisely how their smaller counterparts were utilized.<sup>251</sup> Surviving inventories of

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<sup>246</sup> Arne Effenberger, 'Images of Personal Devotion: Miniature Mosaic and Steatite Icons,' in *Faith and Power*, 209ff.

<sup>247</sup> Demus, "Palaeologan," 91. See Bissera Pentcheva on the synaesthetic effect of icons, activated by light and sound, in "The Performative icon," *Art Bulletin*, (Dec 2006); and also Peers, *Sacred Shock*.

<sup>248</sup> Effenberger, "Images of Personal Devotion," 209ff.

<sup>249</sup> See Jannic Durand's "Precious-metal Icon Revetments," in *Faith and Power*, 243-51.

<sup>250</sup> Effenberger, "Images of Personal Devotion."

<sup>251</sup> Demus, "Palaeologan," 90; Kalopissi-Verti, "The Proskynetria of the Templon and Narthex," 119ff.



churches and monasteries of the period suggest that they were routinely kept along with precious liturgical objects in treasuries or *skeuophylaka*.<sup>252</sup> We do know that mosaic icons were exchanged as diplomatic gifts among high-ranking members of Paleologan society. A famous example is the elaborate Feast-Day diptych [Fig. 2.8], commissioned in 1394 for the Florentine baptistery of San Giovanni in Fonte in Italy by Nicoletta da Antonio Grioni, the Venetian widow of an official from the court of Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos (r.1347-54).<sup>253</sup> While we have little evidence of how small mosaic icons were used in the sphere of personal devotional practice, we can imagine the appeal of a portable icon whose precious, reflective materials metonymically reflected the grand mosaic programs of monumental church designs: a small piece of the sacred which could be kept at close range, handled, and venerated.<sup>254</sup> As scholars such as Cynthia Hahn have theorized regarding Western artifacts, precious miniaturizations encouraged a mode of encounter with the sacred that lent itself to intimate, transformative experience: what Peter Brown described as the effect of “inverted magnitudes,” linking the immensity of Heaven to small pieces on Earth.<sup>255</sup>

## Icon Revival in Renaissance Rome

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<sup>252</sup> Effenberger, “Images of Personal Devotion,” 210.

<sup>253</sup> Effenberger, “Images of Personal Devotion,” 209; Demus, “Palaeologan,” 95.

<sup>254</sup> Effenberger, “Images of Personal Devotion,” 210, for stories of the faithful keeping small icons under their pillows and placing them on the foreheads of their children, suggesting a belief in their power akin to that of a relic.

<sup>255</sup> See discussion by Cynthia Hahn in “What Do Reliquaries Do For Relics?” *Numen* 57 (2010): 284-316, esp. 299. In addition to Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: its rise and function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago 1981), 78, Hahn also draws upon the suggestive work of Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), esp. 137-8.

The renewed significance of Byzantine prototypes in the Renaissance gives a historical context for understanding why the micromosaic icon came to prominence in its new Roman setting.<sup>256</sup> While the greatest influx of Byzantine objects occurred after the Crusader invasions of Constantinople in the 13thC, icons, illuminated manuscripts, and liturgical instruments made their way to Italian cities throughout the 14thC and 15thC through the licit means of merchant or diplomatic exchange or more dubious channels.<sup>257</sup> Anthony Cutler has suggested three categories that enable us to make more nuanced distinctions concerning the transmission of Byzantine artifacts to the Italian peninsula, defined by historical periods during which the Italian reception of these objects shifted. “Loot” corresponds to the period between the Venetian conquest of Constantinople and the flowering of humanism in Italy; “splendor” describes the age of Medici rule in Florence up until the late 16thC; and “scholarship,” refers to the subsequent years when Italian scholars and humanists looked to their own collections for study of Byzantine culture.<sup>258</sup> For our purpose, we can usefully consider the mosaic icon as falling on the cusp of “loot” and “splendor,” as it seems to pertain to both categories.

By far the richest documented collections of portable mosaic icons are those of two prominent Italians, well known for their spectacular art acquisitions. The 1457 inventory of the Venetian Cardinal Pietro Barbo, who later became Pope Paul II (r. 1464-71), records a remarkable 25 examples. Among these are icons described as crafted of the smallest mosaic (“*cum musaico parvenissimmo*”), others finely ornamented with enamel or silver, and still others

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<sup>256</sup> See Carlo Bertelli, “Renaissance mosaics,” in *Mosaics*, 225-56.

<sup>257</sup> See Anthony Cutler’s, “From Loot to Scholarship: Changing Modes in the Italian Response to Byzantine Artifacts, ca. 1200-1750, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 49, Symposium on Byzantium and the Italians, 13<sup>th</sup>-15thC, (1995): 237-267. For a different view, see Holger Klein, “Eastern Objects and Western Desires: Relics and Reliquaries between Byzantium and the West,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004): 283-314.

<sup>258</sup> Cutler, “Loot,” 238ff.

containing relics.<sup>259</sup> The collection of Lorenzo de' Medici "Il Magnifico" (r. 1442-92), inventoried upon his death in 1492, also lists no fewer than eleven miniature mosaic icons,<sup>260</sup> and specifically describes a Byzantine icon of Christ as "precious" because of its mosaic technique. A mosaic icon of Christ, along with mosaic icons of three saints, were also displayed in the Palazzo Medici, a showcase for Lorenzo's collection of antiquities and a visual repertoire for Florentine artists under his patronage, whose works were also included among them.<sup>261</sup>

From the values attached to mosaics in the inventory of Pietro Barbo, we can surmise that these objects were esteemed more for their craftsmanship than for their materials, as they are given much lower values than artifacts with precious metal or jeweled settings.<sup>262</sup> However, whether this monetary index gives us a picture of the real value attached to devotional icons of the kind under consideration is open to question, for the following reasons. The first is that, with the exception of the *Twelve Feasts Diptych* given to the Basilica of San Giovanni in 1395, Byzantine miniature mosaics were almost unknown in Italy in the early part of the 15<sup>th</sup> C.<sup>263</sup> The art of wall mosaic decoration had been largely lost in central Italy during the late Middle Ages,

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<sup>259</sup> See Effenberger, "Images of Personal Devotion," 210. According to Cutler, "Loot," 251, the collection was described by a nineteenth-century historian as "the richest collection of works formed in Italy since the fall of the Roman empire." See also Demus, "Palaeologan," 96. For the Italian fascination with Byzantine luxury arts, see Kitzinger, "The Byzantine Contribution," 33. The Italian humanist Niccolò Perotti also describes a collection of "*molte cose di mosaici in tavolette*" (many mosaic panels); see G. Barucca, "I Reliquari da Niccolò Perotti a Sassoferrato," *Studi Umanistici Piacenti*, Vol. 12-13 (1992-1993), 16.

<sup>260</sup> Cutler, "Loot," 252.

<sup>261</sup> In the "*camera della sala grande detta di Lorenzo*," or the alcove; see Effenberger, "Images of Personal Devotion," 212. For a recent analysis of the collection, see Rembrandt Duits, 'Byzantine Icons in the Medici Collection,' in *Byzantine Art and Renaissance Europe*, 157-88.

<sup>262</sup> Cutler, "Loot," 251.

<sup>263</sup> See Cutler "Loot," note 89: "The only other mosaic icon firmly attested in Italy before 1453 is the Man of Sorrows, now enclosed in the so-called reliquary of St. Gregory the Great in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome." See also Italo Furlan, *Le Icone Bizantine a Mosaic* (Milano, 1979) for a history of mosaic icons in Italy.

and only revived by Greek mosaic artists in the latter half of the 11thC.<sup>264</sup> This made mosaics all the more prestigious during the Renaissance.

But second and importantly for our period, is the belief in and desire for ‘authentic’ religious artifacts from the East. Before and after the collapse of the Byzantine Empire, a wealth of icons, relics, and other precious devotional objects served as physical mediations of the Holy Land and the East.<sup>265</sup> The influx of treasures came in the wake of emigrants fleeing Constantinople for Italy, where they became the basis of eminent collections. The donation of manuscripts to the Republic of Venice by Basilios Bessarion, archbishop of Nicaea and later Roman humanist and cardinal is well known; he also donated seven mosaic icons to Saint Peter’s in Rome in the years between 1462 and 1467, among them micromosaics (*ex opera mosayco minuto*).<sup>266</sup> Mosaics, which Giorgio Vasari describes in his introduction to *The Lives of the Artists* as an “almost eternal art,” were almost certainly admired for their preciousness, durability and relation to antique forms of art.<sup>267</sup> Moreover, by their very construction as digital media that

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<sup>264</sup> Kitzinger, “The Byzantine Contribution,” 33. See also Per Jonas Nordhagen, “Byzantium and the West: with some remarks on the activity of Greek mosaic artists in Italy in the 14thC,” in *Studies in Byzantine and Early Medieval Painting* (London, 1990), 447-84; and Otto Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration* (London, 1947), 63ff and Bertelli, ‘Renaissance mosaics,’ in *Mosaics*, 225-56.

<sup>265</sup> See most recently the discussion by Nagel and Wood in *Anachronic*, esp. 22ff. Italian sermons as early as the 13<sup>th</sup>C reflect the idea of the authenticity of eastern images, as also noted by Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 332.

<sup>266</sup> Effenburger, “Images of Personal Devotion,” 210-11, and F. Lollini, “Bessarione e Perotti diffusori della cultura figurative bizantina,” in *Studi umanistici piceni XI*, Sassoferatro, 1991, 127-142.

<sup>267</sup> Vasari, Introduction to the *Lives* (Barocchi, 1550/1568 edition): “It is certain that mosaic is the most durable painting there is, for the other kind of painting is extinguished over time, but this kind of painting in being continually made is always ignited (*s’accende*). And whereas painting on its own is consumed, mosaic due to its long life can almost be called eternal.”

could undergo restoration without losing connection to their prototype, they were also exemplary forms of iconic images that could claim a direct connection to older, prestigious origins.<sup>268</sup>

### **Reinventing Icon as Sacred Vision**

The story of our icon's geographic translation from East to West is based upon documentary evidence compiled and researched by the Italian Byzantinist, Carlo Bertelli, who was also one of the first to closely examine the mosaic icon and its frames during the icon's restoration by conservators in the 1960's.<sup>269</sup> Until that time the icon, which had been in a state of considerable disrepair [Fig. 2.9], had been thought to be of Byzantine-Italian origin. Moreover, since it clearly was not contemporaneous with the life of the 6<sup>th</sup> century Pope Gregory, scholars debated whether it could have plausibly functioned as the legendary image associated with his vision.<sup>270</sup> Since the icon was nearly unreadable prior to its restoration, it is difficult to now determine whether Bertelli's attribution of a Byzantine provenance is correct, although most Byzantine scholars of the present generation seem to have been convinced by his assessment.<sup>271</sup>

Bertelli attempted to establish a likely origin for the icon in Byzantium by piecing together the story of its translation to the West through accounts regarding a prominent Italian military leader, Raimondello del Balzo. Raimondello, later the count of Lecce in Apulia on the southern coast of Italy, apparently made a pilgrimage to the monastery of St. Katherine's in Sinai

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<sup>268</sup> See discussion in Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic*, 128-30, who also note that the memorial to Giotto in Santa Maria de Fiorio, Florence depicts him as a mosaicist rather than a painter; also noted by Wolf, *Schleier und Spiegel*, Introduction, ix.

<sup>269</sup> Bertelli, "The Image of Pity."

<sup>270</sup> Bertelli, "The Image of Pity." See also Belting, *Likeness*, who claims that the origin of the icon could be hidden if a more prestigious one were invented, 337.

<sup>271</sup> These include for instance Belting, who cites Bertelli's evidence in *Likeness and Presence*, and the curators of the recent *Faith and Power* exhibition.

in 1380-81.<sup>272</sup> A collector of rare art objects and relics, the count is thought to have taken the icon from Sinai when he also purportedly stole an even more valuable artifact: the ring finger of the saint herself.<sup>273</sup> While the theft of the relic, which Raimondello claimed to have “torn from the saint’s hand with his teeth,” may seem outrageous as an act of piety, it can be understood within practices of *furta sacra* and sacred *translatio*.<sup>274</sup> As a parallel phenomenon in Byzantine culture, Michael Psellos, who describes himself as “a meticulous viewer of icons,” also claimed to have stolen icons from churches for private contemplation, and to have later denied these actions while under oath.<sup>275</sup>

Bertelli and others have based Raimondello’s appropriation of the mosaic icon in on the basis of his family coat of arms on the icon’s silver frame, visible in the lower right hand corner.<sup>276</sup> It is not clear why Raimondello might have later donated the mosaic icon to the Carthusian church of Santa Croce in Rome. But there is sufficient evidence of a relationship of patronage between the pope at that time, Urban VI, and Raimondello, for whom Santa Croce was his family church, to suggest that the nobleman gave the icon to the church a few years later. As he Raimondello was a philanthropist who built a hospital and church in honor of St. Katherine in Lecce, the latter as a shrine for his precious relic, he may have desired a prestigious location for the mosaic icon.<sup>277</sup> He may have also donated it for the remission of his sins, which were potentially great given his career as a military man.

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<sup>272</sup> Bertelli, “The Image of Pity,” 43-45. Another micromosaic icon of Christ is among the holdings of the church of S. Caterina d’Alessandria in Lecce for which del Balzo was the patron. See *Splendori*, 108.

<sup>273</sup> Bertelli, “The Image of Pity,” 45.

<sup>274</sup> Patrick Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>275</sup> Psellus, *Scripta Minora*, Epistle 194, 220.

<sup>276</sup> Bertelli, “The Image of Pity,” 43-4.

<sup>277</sup> Bertelli, “The Image of Pity,” 45-6.

The thread of the story picks up again with the arrival of the mosaic icon of Christ at Santa Croce in the 1380s, where it weaves into a tale of Carthusian monks keen to bring pilgrims to their church, which eventually was designated as one of the seven major basilicas in Rome for the veneration of holy images and relics.<sup>278</sup> As the image of a miraculous vision of a saint, the icon itself became endowed with miraculous powers, one that could compete with images that were themselves produced miraculously, or *acheiropoeiton*, “without human hands,” such as the Vera icon of St. Peter’s or the Mandylion, a point to which I will return.<sup>279</sup> The icon soon became one of the most famous and heavily indulgenced images in the Latin West. But the reasons why the icon became uniquely associated with Gregory’s mystical vision are not clear, as the event is more reasonably tied to the Roman church of San Gregorio Magno.<sup>280</sup> Perhaps Gregory’s life history, which included a role as ambassador to the court of Constantinople in 575, made the association of this particular Byzantine image of the Man of Sorrows with his legendary vision more plausible.<sup>281</sup> More likely, however, is the status of Pope Gregory as a central figure for the Roman church. The multiple images of Gregory in the *Sala di Costantino* in the Vatican Stanze, the rhetorical epicenter of the papacy, attest to his prominence in this regard. Among them, a fresco of a stone relief depicting Gregory celebrating Mass above the tomb of St. Peter [Fig. 2.10] effectively links the later Pope with the historic origin of the Roman church.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Bertelli, “The Image of Pity,” 46ff.

<sup>279</sup> The scholarship on the Mandylion is now extensive. For an overview within the context of other miraculous images, see Belting, *Likeness*, esp. 4ff and 329-48; Gerhard Wolf, “From Mandylion to Veronica: Picturing the ‘Disembodied’ Face and ‘Disseminating the True Image of Christ in the Latin West,” in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, 153-79, and more recently Peers, *Sacred Shock*, esp. 117ff.

<sup>280</sup> Bertelli, “The Image of Pity,” 50.

<sup>281</sup> According to legend, in 578 Pope Pelagius II ordained Gregory as one of the seven deacons of Rome and sent Gregory as ambassador to the court of Byzantium.

<sup>282</sup> Another image in the Sala di Costantino of Gregory, book in hand and thunderbolts at his side, signifies his role as learned reformer.

As the *Akra tapeinosis* or “Utmost Humiliation” in Byzantium, the icon represented the descent or *katabasis* of the majesterial Christ (whose epithet, “the King of Glory,” is inscribed on the *titulus* of the icon’s cross) to the human sphere of suffering. This descent of divinity is described in the Neoplatonic writings of Psuedo-Dionysius as the overflow of God’s love: the act that makes possible the reciprocal ascent of the human to the divine. As we will see, this spiritual economy of the image, which we have addressed in the context of John of Damascus’ writings on the icon, is an important point of connection between the icon’s cultural framing in Byzantium and its reception in Rome.

When the micromosaic was donated to Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in the late 14thC, the icon fell within the sphere of the resident Carthusians, a contemplative order known for their practice of affective piety and the production and dissemination of devotional writings.<sup>283</sup> Earlier in the 13thC, the Carthusian Hugh of Balma had written a work of mystical theology based on the Neoplatonism of Pseudo-Dionysius known as the *De theologia mystica*, for which over 100 manuscripts survive, including a vernacular Italian version from 1360.<sup>284</sup> Using Gregory the Great as a foundational source, Hugh heightened the devotional aspect of Gregory’s teaching within the mystical language and spiritual economy of Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>285</sup> What may

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<sup>283</sup> Emily Richards, ‘Writing and Silence, Transitions between the Contemplative and the Active Life,’ in Robert Lutton and Elisabeth Salter, eds., *Pieties in Transition. Religious Practices and Experiences*, c. 1400-1640 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 169-170.

<sup>284</sup> Jaspar Hopkins, *Hugh of Balma on mystical theology: a translation and an overview of his De theologia mystica*, (Minneapolis, MN: Banning, 2002).

<sup>285</sup> Hugh of Balma, Letter IX, 209; *Registrum epistolarum*, ed. Dag Norberg (CCSL 140-140A), 1982, 873-76. An expanded version of this chapter would consider the significance of Gregory’s writings on religious images, beyond the usual formula of “books for the illiterate.” See for example Michael Camille, “The Gregorian Definition Revisited: Writing and the Medieval Image,” in J. Baschet and J.-C. Schmitt, directors, *L’Image: Fonctions et usages des images dans l’Occident medieval*, Actes du 6e International Workshop on Medieval Societies, Centre Ettore Majorana (Erice, Sicile, 17-23 Octobre 1992): 89-107; and Herbert Kessler, “A Gregorian Reform Theory of Art?” in S. Romano and J Enckell, *Roma e la riforma gregoriana. Tradizioni e innovazioni artistiche (XI - XII secolo)*, (Rome, Viella, 2007), 25-48.



be described as a Carthusian theology of love centered upon the primacy of stimulating a powerful affective relation to God, prior to the contemplation of higher mysteries. It was an anti-Scholastic response that was to be developed later in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries by theologians such as Nicolas of Cusa. Hugh described this devotional movement of the soul as an upsurge of the “*affectus*,” which he defined as a passionate yearning for God’s presence, stimulated through a program of ascetism, prayer, and reflection on the life of Christ.<sup>286</sup>

It is within this context of affective theology that we should consider the reinvention of the Byzantine icon at Santa Croce. The Carthusians, an order dedicated to the instruction and care of souls, which it undertook primarily through book production and dissemination, apparently made copies of the icon for this purpose. A 15thC woodcut appears among books for a Carthusian charterhouse in Hull, England [Fig. 2.11].<sup>287</sup> Since the 14thC, the Carthusians had been allowed the use in their monastic practice of devotional images that had earlier been restricted to the laity. Among the most beloved of these were the portraits that presented the opportunity for an intimate, empathic connection to the suffering Christ.<sup>288</sup> The images appear to have played a similar role in Byzantium, where we see the icon of Christ depicted specifically in connection to monks, hermits, and saints. This practice is visualized in a painting of the death of St. Ephraim, who has the icon *Akra Tapeinosis* laid upon his chest in preparation for his passage to the next world [Fig. 2.12].

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<sup>286</sup> On the affective spiritual tradition of the Carthusian order, see introduction to *Pieties in Transition*, esp. 6-8. On precedents for a Christological theory of spiritual love (*spirituali affecti*) engendered by images of Christ “*secundem carnem*,” see Kessler on Gregory of Nyssa, Pope Hadrian, and Gregory the Great, in *Spiritual Seeing*, 21ff.

<sup>287</sup> Reproduced in Gillespie and Doyle, eds., *Catalogue of Syon Abbey*, 620; Campbell Dodgson, “English Devotional Woodcuts of the Late Fifteenth Century, with Special Reference to Those in the Bodleian Library,” Walpole Society, XVII, 94ff; see also Dodgson, *Woodcuts and Prints of the XV Century in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, pl. XXXI c.

<sup>288</sup> On the Carthusian dedication to the theme of the suffering Christ, see Richards, ‘Writing in Silence,’ 169-170 and Bertelli, “The ‘Image of Piety’,” 48-50.

We can only imagine the impact of such a rare icon on the Carthusians who received it.<sup>289</sup> Far from a dematerialized image, the tesserae in mastic and wax would have produced a remarkably flesh-like appearance, revealing a vision that mirrored the corporeal body of the Eucharistic Christ [Fig. 0.1].<sup>290</sup> As the legend of Pope Gregory's mystical vision of Christ was propagated in devotional literature and images, the Byzantine icon was reconceptualized within the frame of this narrative. By 1475, the icon was ensconced within its large reliquary frame, which is described in the church's history as belonging to Gregory himself.<sup>291</sup> Later, the apocryphal story developed that Gregory had made the mosaic from the bones of saints contained within the reliquary, a narrative that seamlessly united the Byzantine icon and its new Roman identity.<sup>292</sup>

### Framing sacred experience

The silver frame encasing the Gregory icon has been the subject of analysis and interpretation, as evidence of the icon's Italian owner in its appropriation from East to West.<sup>293</sup> Such revetments, at times embossed with images, gilt with precious materials, or decorated with enamels as this one, were a common means in Byzantine culture of expressing ownership and also devotional patronage. Their use begins in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries and carries over into the cultures in

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<sup>289</sup> Mario Sensei provides a useful context of Eucharistic devotion in the period to interpret the icon's meaning within the Carthusian community at Santa Croce, in "Dall'Imago Pietatis alle Cappelle Gregoriane, Immagini, Racconti e Devozioni per la 'Visione' e la Cristomimesi," *Collectanea Franciscana* 70 (2000): 93-104.

<sup>290</sup> The flesh-like effect is notable in micro-mosaic exemplars such the Forty Martyrs icon currently housed in the museum at Dumbarton Oaks. The Italian humanist Niccolò Perotti describes a micromosaic of similar facture, of St. Demetrios, as among his most valuable relics in a donation document of 1472, specifically noting its corporeal illusionism: "*la sua effigie in finissimo mosaico, ed in miniatura per le parti carnee visibili della persona.*" Quoted in Lollini, "Bessarione e Perotti diffusori della cultura figurative bizantina, 10.

<sup>291</sup> The reliquary and icon comes to be called the Altar of Gregory; see discussion below.

<sup>292</sup> Bertelli, "The 'Image of Pity,'" 41

<sup>293</sup> For the most recent discussion of its identifying enamels, see Sofia Di Sciascio, *Reliquie e reliquiari in Puglia fra IX e XV secolo* (Congedo Editore, 2009), 228-31.

which icons were later translated.<sup>294</sup> Within the context of Italian circles of icon collection in the Renaissance, exemplars such as the micromosaic icon of St. Demetrios give insight into the multiple and signifying functions of frames later fitted to icons [Fig. 2.13]. In this case, the frame is a hybrid amalgam of symbols and objects from the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries that indicate its sacred authenticity and potency. These include a clay pilgrim's ampulla fitted into its top, and an inscription in Greek impressed on the revetment that attests to the container's contents.<sup>295</sup> The ampulla, an unusual addition, refers to the holy *manna* or oil of the depicted saint, further contributing to his spiritual powers and 'presence' in the image. Taken together, the elaborated frame and the icon it encloses form a potent, unified ensemble that transcends its parts, working together dynamically in the authorization of the artifact as holy image. In a surviving inventory, the owner of this ensemble, Renaissance humanist Niccolò Perotti (1430-1480), describes it as the most valuable object among a collection of holy relics. That the icon is categorized in such a manner is significant for the icon under discussion, which also comes to be displayed among relics in its Roman setting, in essence becoming a relic itself.<sup>296</sup>

The frame encasing the Santa Croce micromosaic icon is no less complex, and by virtue of its constitution and scale even more spectacular [Fig. 2.1]. Yet to date it has received

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<sup>294</sup> For Byzantine practices in this regard, see for example Annemarie Weyl-Carr, "Donors in the Frames of Icons: Living in the Borders of Byzantine Art," *Gesta* vol. 45 (2006): 189-98. She notes the significance of increasing elaboration of frames in Late Byzantine art that serves to sustain the charisma of their iconic images, 189. For Byzantine examples, see Durand, "Precious-metal Icon Revetments."

<sup>295</sup> See catalog entries with images and bibliography in *Treasures of Heaven*, 200-1; *Faith and Power*, 231-33; *Splendori di Bisanzio*, 112-3.

<sup>296</sup> For the observation of a reciprocal relation between image and relic, see for example Erik Thunø, ed., *Image and Relic: Mediating the Sacred In Early Medieval Rome* (Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2002), 16, and Sally J. Cornelison and Scott B Montgomery, eds., *Images, Relics, and Devotional Practices In Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006).

surprisingly little scholarly attention.<sup>297</sup> Measuring approximately 98 x 63 cm. in its open form, the triptych structure is comprised of a central panel with two wings faced by a grid-like pattern created by strips of metal punctuated by small rosettes. The grid delineates nearly 200 miniature reliquary boxes, each containing a relic encased in paper and silk wrappings.<sup>298</sup> Writing in the form of *gotica rotunda* is visible through the small glass windows of their housing. While other gridded reliquaries exist, the scale and design of the Santa Croce exemplar make it a striking and highly unusual one.<sup>299</sup> The later addition of an aedicule and base gives the frame a distinctly cruciform dimension that resonates with its location in the Church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, notable for its precious relics of the True Cross. As noted, an inscription (*Fuit S. Gregori Magni Papae*) on the reliquary's curved pediment, likely an 18thC addition, makes explicit the icon's identity as the vision of Gregory.

Earlier I suggested that the reliquary frame is crucial to understanding the micromosaic icon's reinvention in its Roman setting. Recent scholarship has provided a rich ground for understanding the work of framing, beyond mere physical enclosure and display. In a seminal essay, Meyer Schapiro addressed the semiotic or signifying dimension of frames, an issue further elaborated in Jacques Derrida's study of the *parergon*.<sup>300</sup> The concept of '*parergon*' (Greek),

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<sup>297</sup> The reliquary is described by Onofrio Panvino, *De praecipuis Urbis...basilicis*, Rome, 1570, 221; Francesco del Sodo, *Compendio delle chiese con le loro Foundationi, Consecrationi, et Titoli* [after 1575], cod. Vat. Lat. 11911, fol. 32r; and Abbot F. Besozzi, *Storia della basilica di S. Croce*, Rome, 1750, 149. It is currently undergoing analysis by Simona Antonelli of the Soprintendenza per Beni Cultura in Rome, with report to follow. Most scholars agree to a dating of the end of the 14thC.

<sup>298</sup> According to Bertelli, who inspected the reliquary, there are 197.

<sup>299</sup> Triptych reliquaries in Italy are rare but include the famous *reliquario del libretto* in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in Florence; cited by Bertelli, "The 'Image of Pity,'" n8. An interesting *comparandum* is an icon of the Virgin and Child surrounded by similar gridded boxes currently in a Bulgarian collection; see Elka Bakalova, "Reliskata chudotrovna ikonarelikvarii," in *Konstantinopol I Mara Brankovich*, 229-31. I thank Rossitza Schroeder for this reference.

<sup>300</sup> Meyer Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Language-Signs," *Semiotica*, 1 (1969), 223-42; Derrida, "Parergon."

literally “the thing surrounding (*para*) the work (*ergon*)” – the frame or ornament – is deployed by Derrida in an epistemological vein with reference to Immanuel Kant’s discussion in *The Critique of Judgment* (1928). Here Derrida raises a challenge to Kant’s conceptualization of the frame as mere ornament, questioning how we delineate what is inner and outer, frame and framed, in the apprehension of the work of art. With this he raises the point that frames are also forms that do work themselves.<sup>301</sup> Beyond mere ornamentation or delimitation, they merge with the work of art, an observation that bears meaning for their function in the realm of sacred images. With regard to Byzantine practices, Glenn Peers has argued that “Byzantine viewers expected and received an interactive sense of presence from their art, that is, inhabitation, possession, and manipulation of art by divinity...Byzantine art is marked by its thoroughgoing reliance on the frame for generating meaning.”<sup>302</sup> Peers provides compelling evidence of the use of material splendor and physical effects to evoke spiritual presence, in which the frame acts as a threshold and bridge between natural and divine realms.<sup>303</sup> The silver revetment of the Mandylyon, a touch relic of the face of Christ created by an overflow of presence, serves to exemplify the activating operation of frames in this regard [Fig. 1.2]. When illuminated, the reflective metal surface of the revetment surrounding the icon dazzles the eye, evoking a sense of divine presence. At the same time, it also draws the viewer to contemplate the darkened, silhouetted face of Christ, which withdraws from view.<sup>304</sup> In this double movement, the

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<sup>301</sup> See discussion in Duro’s Introduction to *The Rhetoric of the Frame*.

<sup>302</sup> Peers, *Sacred Shock*, 7.

<sup>303</sup> Peers, *Sacred Shock*, 109.

<sup>304</sup> See Wolf, “From Mandylyon to Veronica,” 177, on the Vera icon as a “screen open to projections” and on the difficulty of seeing the image. As Peers notes in *Sacred Shock*, 130: “Dante wrote of the incomplete nature of seeing the Veronica in Rome, and likewise the Mandylyon can only be a partial completion of the Christian viewer, one that compels the exercise of desire for fuller similarity.” Dante’s *Purgatorio* is a key text for understanding the Roman stationary liturgy and its relation to purgatorial remittance. I discussed this in the context of Santa Croce in a paper delivered to the Renaissance Society of America in 2012.

ensemble of the Mandylion stages the dialectic of absence and presence central to icon theory.

Here we return to the interplay of affective and real presence described by John of Damascus: the Pauline formula of seeing as if in a dark mirror and an enigma that serves as a stimulus to spiritual desire on the part of the beholder.

Such dynamic interaction between frame and icon, in the activation of spiritual presence before the viewer, may be perceived in the Santa Croce exemplar as well. While light effects are not the source of its transformation into divine presence, scale, form, and material play a similar signifying and sacralizing role. We should first observe the careful fit of the micromosaic icon to its reliquary frame; this suggests that the supervening structure was specially altered or designed for its role as a medium of spectacular display. The grand structure enclosing the icon draws attention to the finely wrought, miniature form of the artifact at the center of vision, while simultaneously enhancing the image's physical mass.<sup>305</sup> The aggrandizing effect of the frame perhaps explains why the image of piety is described by William Brewyn, a fifteenth-century viewer of the icon, as a "large image of divine compassion at Santa Croce."<sup>306</sup>

The triptych form of the frame, a type that has its origins in Byzantium, also plays a performative role. The two-side wings have the capacity to both conceal and reveal the icon,

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<sup>305</sup> On the idea of a 'subordinating center' that increases power and sacred effect, a formula derived from antique triptychs, see Klaus Lankheit, *Das Tryptichon als Pathosformel* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1959), 19-26; cited in Lynn F. Jacobs, *Opening Doors: the Early Netherlandish Triptych Reinterpreted* (University Park, P.A.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 2. I thank Cynthia Hahn for referring me to Jacob's work. On the Renaissance association of the miniature with divinity, see the claim by Francisco de Holanda: "perfect works in miniature, whether in black-and-white or in color, appear as if they had not been painted by hand but by the divinely inspired intellect." Holanda, *Da Pintura Antigua*, Introduction and notes by Ángel González García (Lisbon, 1984), 200.

<sup>306</sup> From a 1470 Pilgrim's Guidebook, quoted in Flora Lewis, "Rewarding Devotion: Indulgences and the Promotion of Images," in *The Church and the Arts*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 186.

further enhancing its status as privileged object in the presentation of epiphanic vision.<sup>307</sup>

While housed in a different medium and form, the *vera* icon at the neighboring church of San Giovanni in Laterano, which competed with Santa Croce for pilgrims, stages a similar performance. Like the Mandylion, the Lateran icon was famed as an *acheiropoietos* or divine image made without human hands. A highly ornate silver revetment covers the entire image save its darkened face; the icon is further enclosed by a frame with two side wings [Fig. 2.14]. Housed in the *Sancta Sanctorum* or Holy of Holies, the icon was so venerable that it was treated as a sacred person, carried in procession to meet other cult icons in Rome during Holy Week.<sup>308</sup> Within the context of ceremonial display, the wings of its frame and the doors at the bottom of the revetment would open to allow for ceremonial veneration.<sup>309</sup>

In addition to its grand scale and triptych form, the materials of the Santa Croce reliquary play a significant role in the activation of the icon. In jeweled reliquaries, such as those which housed famed relics of the True Cross at Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, the preciousness and “eternal” durability of stone amplifies the perception of similar qualities of the less visible fragment contained within.<sup>310</sup> Stone and wood fragments are transformed in the process, becoming “vessels through which the divine could speak to humans.”<sup>311</sup> As Thelma Thomas has

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<sup>307</sup> On the revelation and concealment enacted by triptychs, see most recently Jacobs, *Opening Doors: the Early Netherlandish Triptych Reinterpreted*. Jacobs gives a useful synoptic history of the form in Byzantine and Western sources. She interprets triptychs along a model of doors of access that are related to the templon and the altar.

<sup>308</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 90-1 and 498-99 for a description of the processions.

<sup>309</sup> Peers, *Sacred Shock*, 125-7.

<sup>310</sup> For discussion of True Cross reliquaries, see Holger Klein, Ed., *Byzanz, der Westen und das 'wahre' Kreuz: die Geschichte einer Reliquie und ihrer künstlerischen Fassung in Byzanz und im Abendland* (Wiesbaden, 2004); the Trier reliquary Klein reproduces provides a parallel worth pursuing.

<sup>311</sup> Brigitte Buettner “From Bones to Stones—Reflections on Jeweled Reliquaries,” in *Reliquiare im Mittelalter* (Akademie Verlag GmbH, 2005), 47. For related discussion, see Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011). For the signifying dimension of reliquaries more generally, see Cynthia Hahn, “What do Reliquaries do

noted, reliquaries and even images of relics partook of the perceived potency of what they represented, evoking a “charged space...[or] signifying field to contain, represent, and otherwise manipulate sacred energies.”<sup>312</sup> With regard to the Santa Croce icon and its frame, mosaic stones and the bones of relics work together to dynamic, sacralizing effect. Here we may draw upon what Seeta Chaganti has usefully theorized as a “poetics of enshrinement:” the interplay of container and contained which provides “aesthetic and even epistemological structure...[and] the more complex effect whereby contained and containing are interchangeable, and the borders between them are indeterminate....”<sup>313</sup> In this way, the Body of Christ depicted by the Santa Croce icon becomes more than depiction within the Communion of Saints in the surrounding relics.<sup>314</sup> As mentioned earlier, in time legend grew that Gregory had made the miraculous icon himself from the bones of saints contained in the reliquary frame, seamlessly uniting icon and its later supervening structure.<sup>315</sup>

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for Relics?” in *Strange Beauty: Issues In the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400-circa 1204* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012); and Patricia Cox Miller, ““The Little Blue Flower is Red”: Relics and the Poetizing of the Body,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (1997): 213–36.

<sup>312</sup> Thelma K. Thomas, “Understanding Objects,” in *Reading Medieval Images: The Art Historian and the Object*, Elizabeth Sears and Thelma K. Thomas, eds. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 9-15, here extending the argument of Patricia Cox Miller’s excellent work.

<sup>313</sup> Seeta Chaganti, *The Medieval Poetics of the Reliquary* (New York, 2008), 19, 15. For the “poietic” dimension of Renaissance frames, see discussion by Rayna Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse: The Technology of Poetic Invention in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca and London, 2007), esp. 19,17; Kalas, 9, uses framing to chart a transformation in modern thought: from *poiesis*/poetic to technology (Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*: 2 modes of revealing: poiesis, a bringing forth, and “enframing,” (Ge-stell) of technology, preface xiii-xiv) or the ‘picturing’ that divorces interior from exterior rather than performs an active bringing into presence of matter in the world.” See also her observation, 36, that the pre-modern “engaged frame does not isolate the unique and precious object as much as it establishes adjacencies between things.”

<sup>314</sup> For the related idea that relic treasures represent a vision of the collection of saints that is the Heavenly Jerusalem, see discussion by Cynthia Hahn, “The Meaning of Early Medieval Treasures,” in *Reliquiare im Mittelalter*, 1-20, esp. 19.

<sup>315</sup> Bertelli, “*Attualità e nostalgia: ancora sull’immagine venerata in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme*,” 69. An interesting parallel is the micromosaic of the Virgin *Eleousa* currently in the Patriarchal Seminary of Santa Maria Salute in Venice. A parchment attached to the back of the icon attests that it was made centuries earlier and venerated as a relic by the Emperor Constantinople Emmanuel. Ryder, “Micromosaics in Late Byzantium,” 91-5.



Along with the narrative frame of the Gregory legend that conditioned the icon's viewing, the work of the reliquary in these varied dimensions would have provided a privileged moment of sacred revelation. Within the highly charged signifying field of its unique reliquary, the devotional encounter with the iconic image of Christ would have simulated that of the saint himself. Here the image becomes trans-historical in yet another sense: a window through which the viewer "sees" Christ as he was seen in the mystical moment of Gregory's vision. The flesh-like appearance of the body, as rendered by its micromosaic facture, would have not only symbolized, but actively staged, the Eucharistic vision of the transubstantiated Christ.<sup>316</sup> Moreover, given its size and possible placement on the altar, the reliquary and icon would have functioned as the "original" Altar of Gregory, a description that it carries to this day.<sup>317</sup>

As Cynthia Hahn has thoughtfully explored, reliquaries condition and circumscribe the approach of the believer to the holy. In particular, they propose a complex interaction of the senses and the imagination, originating a discourse on the holy that encompasses space, time, and performance. Hahn further notes that all reliquaries in some sense seek to reconstruct a form of sacred space that originates in a typologically conceived relationship to the Ark of the Covenant and the sanctuary of the Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>318</sup> The point is especially relevant to the

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<sup>316</sup> It is interesting to note in this regard that in German, the central part of an altarpiece is called the "*corpus*," as cited in Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse*, 4. For the symbolic associations of steatite (a medium closely related to micromosaic), drawing upon poetic sources, see Ioli Kalavrezou, *Byzantine Icons in Steatite* (Vienna, 1985).

<sup>317</sup> Bertelli, "The 'Image of Piety'" 40, notes that the base of the reliquary, a wooden, brass-covered pedestal, has holes that may have once held ornamental stones, which suggests that it could have been an altar. A notable parallel to the Santa Croce exemplar is in the Sala del Tesoro in Santa Maria in Campitelli in Rome: the so-called Altar of Saint Gregory of Nazianzos (the Byzantine church father) which was purported to have been brought by him from Jerusalem, and therefore also of relic-like status; it also contains a micromosaic icon. See description in Ryder, "Micromosaics in Late Byzantium," 75-78 and citation of the authenticating parchment attached to it, 78: "This is a portable altar brought by Blessed...orius Naziazenus from Jerusalem...full of many relics, of the Apostles, Confessors and the Virgin...."

<sup>318</sup> Cynthia J. Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues In the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400-circa 1204* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 9.

reinvention of the icon in its reliquary frame at Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, a place that sought to recreate the pilgrim's experience of the lost Holy Land through relics, images and strategies of mimetic substitution.<sup>319</sup> I now turn to the larger physical frames of site and experience that further contributed to the icon's cultic activation in this Roman setting.

### Santa Croce and "Jerusalem in Rome"

As its toponym suggests, the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme is a conscious imitation of Jerusalem. It was first constructed as a basilica on the site of the Sessorian palace owned by the mother of Emperor Constantine I, Helena [Fig. 2.15].<sup>320</sup> According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, Helena's *cubiculum* or private chamber was converted into a chapel for prayer and featured relics of the True Cross she carried with her to Rome from the Holy Land, along with earth from Mt. Calvary, the historic site of Christ's crucifixion.<sup>321</sup> The basilica became the traditional site for the Liturgy of the *inventio crucis* and legendary for the precious relics translated by Helena.<sup>322</sup>

Since at the 8thC, the basilica has also been part of the Stational Liturgy during Holy Week that includes a procession originating from the nearby church of the Lateran.<sup>323</sup> "*Sanctae*

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<sup>319</sup> On topomimesis or the imitation of topography through substitutive means, see for example Michele Bacci, 'Performed Topographies and Topomimetic Piety: Imaginative Spaces in Medieval Italy,' in Alexei Lidov, ed., *Spatial Icons: Performativity in Byzantium and Medieval Russia* (Moscow: Indrik, 2011), 101-18.

<sup>320</sup> On the church, see Richard Krautheimer, *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae*, vol. 1 (Vatican City, 1937), 165-97; Anna Cavallaro, *Santa Croce in Gerusalemme*, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato (Rome, 2009). Notably, the earliest reference to Helena as founder of Santa Croce is Flavio Biondo's *Roma Instaurata* 1444-1448. A crucial source which draws upon a now lost manuscript of 1475 is Abbott Besozzi, *La storia della Basilica di S. Croce in Gerusalemme, Roma* (G. Salomoni, Rome, 1750) and Onofrio Panvinio, *Le sette chiese romane*, Roma, 1570.

<sup>321</sup> Anastasio, *Liber Pontificalis* (Vita S. Gregorii, II), Thorin, 1884.

<sup>322</sup> On this history, see Sible de Blaauw, "Jerusalem in Rome and the *Cult of the Cross*", in *Pratum romanum*, Richard Krautheimer zum 100. Geburtstag, Ed. Renate Colella et. al. (Wiesbaden, 1977), 55-73.

<sup>323</sup> Cynthia Payne offers the most comprehensive study of the church and its renovations, "In the fullness of time': the vault mosaic in the Cappella Sant'Elena, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome" (Diss. University of Georgia, 2003), here 83ff. For history of the institution, Ugonio Pompeo, *Historia delle Stationi di Roma*, 1588;

*Crucis*,” as it was renamed in the twelfth century, is still the site of the papal celebration of Good Friday liturgy and veneration of the True Cross, as rendered in this archaizing depiction in the Sala Sistina in the Vatican Palace [Fig. 2.16].<sup>324</sup> Notable in this depiction and in descriptions of the church is a precious gemmed reliquary of the True Cross displayed on the central or high altar. As Sible de Blaauw has demonstrated, Santa Croce constitutes the oldest living *memoria* of the cult of the True Cross in Rome.<sup>325</sup>

With the fall of Acre and the loss of access to the Holy Land for Latin Christians, Rome in the 1300s emerged as a site that sought to replicate a spiritual itinerary of central importance to Latin Christendom. Pilgrim churches replaced the experience of travel to inaccessible holy places through innovative ritual, virtual and topographic strategies.<sup>326</sup> The layered history of Santa Croce in this regard is, I will argue, essential to understanding its reemergence in the Renaissance as a major pilgrimage site, and the reinvention of its icon within this context. For a similar concern with recreating an experience of the Holy Land, after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, motivates a significant renovation of the church from the 1480s to the early decades of the sixteenth century, when the micromosaic icon also came to prominence.

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John Baldovin, *The Urban Character of Christian worship: The Origins, Development, and meaning of the Stational Liturgy*, 1987.

<sup>324</sup> Matilda Webb, *The Churches and Catacombs of Early Christian Rome, A Comprehensive Guide* (Sussex Academic Press: Brighton, Portland, 2001), 54.

<sup>325</sup> de Blaauw, "Jerusalem in Rome and the *Cult of the Cross*."

<sup>326</sup> John Demaray has noted the interrelated significance of the Roman Stational liturgy and the Great Circle Pilgrimage – the penitential journey from Egypt, to Jerusalem, to Rome. Dante's *Purgatorio*, which takes these as a model, remind us how foundational the conceptual landscape of embodied movement is to the late medieval and Renaissance imagination, and a system and logic of penitential pilgrimage through spiritual topography that is quite foreign to us today. John Demaray, *Dante and the Book of the Cosmos*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, New Series, Vol. 77, No. 5 (1987), 1-114. Whether Dante took part in this phenomenon during the Jubilee year of 1300, as some scholars have argued, the imagined journey of the *Commedia* reflects the deep, historic significance of pilgrimage as a means of spiritual redemption.

Under the direction of Spanish Cardinals Pedro González de Mendoza (1478-1495) and Bernardino López de Caravajal (1495-1507; *in commendam* 1507-11), Santa Croce underwent extensive work that sought to restore the ancient and prestigious origins of the church.<sup>327</sup> Only recently have scholars noted the importance of this ambitious program in a wider sphere of cultural renewal in Rome.<sup>328</sup> In the apse of the main church, Antoniazio Romano's fresco cycle of the legend of Helena's discovery of the True Cross constitutes a remarkable artistic and technical invention, one of the few of its kind [Fig. 2.17].<sup>329</sup> A continuous narrative frieze of the story, with the insertion of Mendoza in this sacred history, spans a curved surface of colossal scale. But just as significant for renewing the status of Santa Croce was the chapel of Helena, situated underground below the main apse. Architecturally, the chapel is similar in design to Near Eastern models, and more specifically a martyrium erected by Constantine in Jerusalem to house a fragment of the True Cross, therefore typologically replicating that prestigious prototype.<sup>330</sup> Like the church, the chapel is also known by the name "*Hierusalem*." According to pilgrim accounts such as Pero Tafur's of 1435, "the floor and

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<sup>327</sup> The most extensive study of the church's history with emphasis on its renovations is Cynthia Payne, "In the fullness of time." See also C. Varagnoli, *S. Croce in Gerusalemme: la Basilica restaurata e l'architettura del Settecento romano* (Bonsignori Editore, Roma 1995). For the patronage of Mendoza, see most recently Felipe Pereda, "Pedro González de Mendoza, de Toledo a Roma. El patronato de Santa Croce in Gerusalemme," in Frédérique Lemerle, Yves Pauwels and Gennaro Toscano (dir.), *Les Cardinaux de la Renaissance et la modernité artistique*, Villeneuve d'Ascq, IRHiS-Institut de Recherches Historiques du Septentrion (Histoire et littérature de l'Europe du Nord-Ouest, n° 40, 2009), 217-243.

<sup>328</sup> Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 185-94, discusses Santa Croce in the context of parallel renovations in the Renaissance that sought to foreground their antiquity. The mosaics in the Chigi chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo are also relevant.

<sup>329</sup> Meredith Gill, "Antoniazzo Romano and the Recovery of Jerusalem in Late Fifteenth-Century Rome," *Storia dell'Arte* 83 (1995): 28-47; Christa Gardner von Teuffel, "Light on the Cross: Cardinal Pedro Gonzalez de Mendoza & Antoniazio Romano in Sta. Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome," in *Coming About...A Festschrift for John Shearman*, Lars Jones and Louisa Matthew, Editors (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Art Museums, 2001) 49-55, esp. 51.

<sup>330</sup> Krautheimer, *Corpus basilicorum*, vol. I, 194; on the substitutional process of transfer through architectural structure, see Krautheimer's seminal essay, "Introduction to an Iconography of Medieval Architecture," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942), 1-33.

everything else was made from the earth of Jerusalem, when St. Helena sent her holy relics to Rome.”

During the course of renovations of the church in 1492, another precious relic, which likely had been in the church all along, was “invented”: the *titulus* of Christ’s Cross, with inscriptions in Hebrew, Latin and Greek.<sup>331</sup> In the aftermath of this discovery, Santa Croce was raised to a new profile among pilgrim churches by Pope Alexander VI’s bull of 1496, which granted additional indulgences to those who visited the chapel and the relic.<sup>332</sup> Then, in the early 1500s, the mosaic vault of the chapel, with images dating from the time of Emperor Valentinian III (425-55) were subject to complete renovation, one of the few works of mosaic in Rome during the Renaissance and arguably an attempt to recall Byzantine precedents [Fig. 2.18].<sup>333</sup> The devotional experience of pilgrims who came to venerate the holy relics was further enhanced by the meticulously restored mosaic program that united, in a continuous history, the chapel’s origin and its present patronage under the Spanish cardinals.<sup>334</sup>

In the unusual sloping stairwell that descends into the Helena chapel, a majolica inscription produced under the Spanish cardinal Caravajal in the 1520s emphasizes the ancient origin of the site and reasserts the ancient claim that “the chapel itself and the whole basilica and

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<sup>331</sup> For discussion of the finding, see Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic*, 219-240.

<sup>332</sup> Sergio Rossi, “Roma anno 1500: Immagini per un Giubileo,” in *Homo viator nella fede, nella cultura, nella storia*, Ed. Boni Cleri (Urbino, 1997), 245-56, and Francisco Albertini, *Opusculum de mirabilibus novae et veteris urbis Romae* (Rome 1510), ed. August Schmarsow (Heilbronn, 1886), 7. Also of significance for this period was the upcoming Jubilee of 1500 and apocalyptic fears in the city following political unrest and the flood of the Tiber in 1495. For related cult icons in Rome, see for example Shelley Zuraw, “The Efficacious Madonna in Quattrocento Rome: Spirituality in the Service of Papal Rome,” in Andrew Ladis and Shelley Zuraw, Eds., *Visions of Holiness: Art and Devotion in Renaissance Italy* (Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, 2001), 101-21.

<sup>333</sup> Cavallaro, *Santa Croce*, 33-41. For the renovations, see Payne, “Lux Mundi: The Vault Mosaic in the Cappella S. Elena, S. Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome,” *Athano* 17 (1999): 35-43. Scholars differ on the attribution of the mosaics to Baldassare Peruzzi (Frommel, among others) or also Antoniazio Romano (Payne, “In the Fullness of Time,” 84).

<sup>334</sup> Payne, “Lux Mundi.”

all Rome deserved to be called a second Jerusalem [Fig. 2.19].”<sup>335</sup> Within the subterranean chapel, pilgrims venerating the Cross and other relics could walk across earth from Calgary that purported to contain Christ’s precious blood.<sup>336</sup> Painted topographical vistas of the Holy Land on the walls of the chapel worked in conjunction with this locative relic, as a means of virtual transport to the inaccessible pilgrim destination.<sup>337</sup>

By these material and visual substitutes, the “heavenly Jerusalem” of the church above was mirrored in the “earthly Jerusalem” of the chapel below [Fig. 2.20]. What we should note here is the retrospective and literal grounding of the identity and authority of the church by Helena’s small, underground chapel. As Alexander Nagel has argued, rather than a mere “visual replica, the constellation/installation initiates a process of activation. The potential for time-and-space travel is actualized in the experience of users who assemble the elements imaginatively and thus, for a time, inhabit a space ... linked to Jerusalem through real conjunctures – the relics and the earth.”<sup>338</sup> Within this chapel of substitutive experience, rich with relics from the life of Christ, the micromosaic icon was likely first venerated. Because pilgrim accounts specify its location as the altar “*Hierusalem*,” a toponym for both the chapel and the church as a whole, we cannot be entirely certain of its location throughout its history.<sup>339</sup> However, it is highly likely that

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<sup>335</sup> Illaria Toesca, “A Majolica Inscription in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme,” in Fraser, Hebbard and Lweine, eds., *Essays in the history of art presented to Rudolf Wittkower* (New York, N.Y. : Phaidon, 1969) 101-105.

Alexander Nagel, *Medieval Modern* (Thames and Hudson, 2012), 108, notes the destabilizing character of the descent to the chapel, which I discuss further below: the “undulating corridor, darkening as it descends, is a space of emergences and singularities, or what Deleuze and Guattari would call intensities and events.”

<sup>336</sup> Nagel, *Medieval Modern*, 110-12 discusses the earth of Jerusalem as special kind of relic: “a carrier of blood of a piece of displaced territory.”

<sup>337</sup> Nagel, *Medieval Modern*, on the Jerusalem chapel as a “spatio-temporal transport to Jerusalem,” 114. An interesting parallel of relics and images that aid a substitutional travel to the Holy Land is the reliquary box with stones and relics in the Vatican collection; see Bagnoli et. al., *Treasures of Heaven*, 36-37.

<sup>338</sup> Nagel, *Medieval Modern*, 100-101.

<sup>339</sup> Besozzi, *La storia della basilica*, 149, describes an “*apparuit in specie pastoris sub effigie pietatis beato Gregorio celebranti super altare Jerusalem in ecclesia s. Crucis*.” See Bertelli, “The ‘Image of Pity,’” 46ff, for discussion.

the Byzantine icon and its reliquary, as a treasured relic with ancient authority and of holy origin, would have found its home among Santa Croce's other precious relics displayed within the chapel. Within the archaizing Byzantine program of the mosaic chapel, the micromosaic icon would have taken on further resonance as an authenticating artifact.<sup>340</sup>

The complex experiential dimension of the Jerusalem chapel is key, I believe, in understanding the function of a parallel, and subsequently installed "Gregory chapel," which to date has not been subject to interpretation [Fig. 2.21].<sup>341</sup> Possibly this *antecappella* was originally conceived to enhance the flow of pilgrims to the more famous Helena chapel to which it connects. We have little evidence regarding the project, except for the 1575 testimony of an abbot of the church, Besozzi, based upon a now lost manuscript of 1475.<sup>342</sup> A sketch from the 1520s by Antonio da Sangallo reveals that the Gregory chapel was part of larger set of interventions in the church [Fig. 2.22]. Christoph Frommel sees in Sangallo's treatment an informed sensitivity to the site's ancient structure, particularly as it bears relation to an Etruscan temple.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Cynthia Hahn's observations on relic collections is relevant here: The "desire for Christ's body is precisely the element that structures and even impels the [relic] collection (perhaps explaining the prominence in the Late Middle Ages of the transformation of the Corpus Christi, the host into a relic). The assemblage of relics or *bricolage*, made up of imperfect and fragmentary parts, must both strive for and metaphorically indicate a more meaningful yet ultimately unattainable whole... the forever absent and unattainable body of Christ. Each of the relics in the series represents this body, but it does so only imperfectly and incompletely." Hahn, 'The Meaning of Early Medieval Treasures,' 11.

<sup>341</sup> For description of the chapel with images, see Cavallaro, *Santa Croce*, 55-63.

<sup>342</sup> The *cappella* is also mentioned in Ortolani, *Schede del Catalogo delle Opere d'arte contenute in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme*, Ministero della P. I., Direzione Generale della B. A., 1922, n6: "Si sa dal Besozzi che su questo altare di S. Gregorio – Cappella costrutta ex-nova nel 1520 dal Card. Caravaja (v. armi sulla volta) e da lui messa in comunicazione con l'altra di S. Elena per mezzo di un vasto corridoio, dopo d'aver ambedue collegato al transetto con due cordonate e porte (v. armi) v'era una tela assai detrita della Pietà...."

<sup>343</sup> Christoph Frommel, 'Progetto e archeologia in due disegni di Antonio da Sangallo il Giovane per Santa Croce in Gerusalemme,' in *Roma, della cultura dell'Antico nei secoli XV e XVI Da Martino V al Sacco di Roma 1417-1525*, a cura di Silvia Danesi Squarzina, (Electa, Milan, 1989) 382-389. 178 U899A recto (reproduced on 390) gives a hypothetical reconstruction of the structure underlying Santa Croce. The so-called anticappella

The so-called Gregory chapel, with its Roman vaulting, is deeply connected to a wider archaeological initiative to literally unearth the paleochristian origins of the Roman church during the Renaissance. We may place it in the same moment as the exploration of the catacombs, for instance, by the humanist Pomponio Leto (d. 1498) and his followers, and with structures such as the crypt of Bramante's Tempietto [Fig. 2.23], the presumed site of St. Peter's crucifixion. Jack Freiburg has demonstrated the significance of this retrospective moment at the Roman church of San Pietro in Montorio for Santa Croce, drawing a parallel between the creation of the Tempietto-stone and the discovery of the *titulus*.<sup>344</sup>

Geographically, a more immediate parallel to the Gregory chapel may be found in the neighboring Sancta Sanctorum of the rival church of the Lateran, which housed one of the most famous cult images in Rome, as we have earlier discussed. With new indulgences granted by Pope Sixtus V for the veneration of such *vera immagini* throughout the churches of Rome, it is likely that Santa Croce also sought to produce a miraculous image. The Carthusian's role in the dissemination of the prestigious icon is evident in this woodblock print from the 15thC, located in a manuscript distributed among its charterhouses [Fig. 2.11]. The print represents the most faithful extant record we have of the icon, down to its careful transcription of the Greek *titulus* above Christ's halo, a further resonance with the *titulus*-relic of Santa Croce.

A detail in Enguerrand Quarton's 1453-54 *Coronation of the Virgin*, commissioned for a Carthusian charterhouse in Avignon, depicts the vision of Gregory in a chapel that is generally

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was added in 1520 by order of Carvajal, according to a lost inscription; the occasion for the sketch; Frommel, 177. See also Cavallaro, *Santa Croce*, 42-47.

<sup>344</sup> See the excellent article by Jack Freiburg, "Bramante's Tempietto and the Spanish Crown," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 50 (2005): 162-205; see esp. 166. Both projects are connected by the patronage of Spanish Cardinals. While the parallel has not been noted, the discovery of the *titulus* in 1492 by Spanish Cardinals and its ideological use to affirm the Reconquista in Spain bears resemblance to the *inventio* of a relic of the True Cross in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre after the Crusader victory of 1099.



identified with Santa Croce in Gerusalemme [Fig. 2.24], furnishing another piece of visual evidence.<sup>345</sup> But by far the greatest diffusion of the icon and of the legend authorizing it specifically as Gregory's vision of Christ at Santa Croce was due to the German engraver, Israhel van Meckenem. In widely-disseminated prints from the 1490s, the period of renovation at the Church, the engraver claims to reproduce the exact image [*contrafacta*] of the vision of Gregory, which he further claims as the first *imago pietatis*, or the prototype for all images of piety.<sup>346</sup> Grounding the authenticity of his printed copies in the original cult icon in Rome, the artist grants the devotional viewer the ultimate virtual pilgrimage: indulgences of up to 45,000 years from Purgatorial suffering for prayer before this image.<sup>347</sup> The image of piety, with authenticating origin in the cult icon at Santa Croce, becomes the model of subsequent prints of the Gregory's legendary vision [Fig. 0.6]. By the end of the 15thC, the legend of the Mass of Gregory had come to such prominence that it contributed to a cosmology of purgatorial suffering and redemption, depicted in broadsheets that found a wide distribution [Fig. 2.27].

Given the identification of the *imago pietatis* of the vision of Gregory with the Santa Croce prototype, the freestanding reliquary came to be identified as the altar of Gregory itself. At some point in its history, the ensemble of icon and frame was installed in the chapel that came to

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<sup>345</sup> See discussion by Bertelli, "*Attualità e nostalgia*," 70-72. The oldest texts date from Germany at the beginning of the 15thC; see Bertelli, "Image of Pity," 46.

<sup>346</sup> Van Meckenem's inscription claims: "*Hec ymago contrafacta est ad istar et similitudinem illius prime imagines pie/tatis custodie in ecclesia S. Crucis in Urbe romana, quam fecerat de pingi sanctissimi Gregorius papa Magnus, post habitam ac sibi ostensam desuper visionem.*" On van Meckenem's invention as possibly the first European example to claim to be "*contrafacta*" (or an authentic reproduction of a prototype), see Peter Parshall, "*Imago Contrafacta: Images and Facts in the Northern Renaissance*," *Art History*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (December 1993): 554-79; for the image more generally, David Landau and Peter Parshall, eds, *The Renaissance Print* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 58; Gerhard Wolf, "Imago Pietatis-Israhel van Meckenems Konterfei eines Abbildes einer Erscheinung," *Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe, Tod*, ed. Christoph Geissmar-Brandi and Eleonora Louis, exh. cat., Kunsthalle Wien (2nd rev. ed. Klagenfurt: Ritter, 1995), 274-76.

<sup>347</sup> See Parshall, *The Renaissance Print*, 58, on these "bootleg versions," which were neither authorized by the Roman Church nor subject to review.

bear its name, upon an altar dedicated to Gregory behind a metal grate that also displayed relics [Fig. 2.22] The vaulting of this area was later frescoed with images to further visualize and substantiate Gregory's legendary, Eucharistic vision. As in Helena's chapel, the devotional experience of the viewer would be shaped by a propaedeutic descent through a dark stairwell, which might be usefully compared to the penitential ascent of pilgrims of the *Scala Sancta* to the Lateran's *Sanctum*, which also held a *vera icon* [Fig. 2.14]. In the case of the Gregory chapel, the associations of embodied movement would be given a different valence. While we tend to privilege spiritual elevation or ascent in religious experience, descent, going to ground, and underground, to subterranean or liminal spaces, also carried spiritual associations. In the movement required to access the Gregory chapel, the viewer would replicate, in ritual action, the purgatorial descent of Gregory, the savior of souls in Limbo.<sup>348</sup> Quarton's painting and images of the Mass of Gregory depict Purgatorial souls beneath the scene of the Saint's vision. Later, in the Decree on Purgatory of 1536 passed by the Council of Trent, the freeing of souls was explicitly linked to the Eucharist sacrifice Gregory had envisioned in the *imago pietatis*.<sup>349</sup> Specific indulgences and intercessions were granted during the celebration of Eucharist celebrated at Santa Croce. Gregory the Great, a figure who, from the Middle Ages to the Reformation, came to be especially associated with an entire economy of indulgences, and remission from purgatorial penance.

### **From icon to idol and iconoclasm: the Mass of Gregory**

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<sup>348</sup> Christian Hecht, "Von der Imago pietatis zur Gregorsmesse – Ikonographie der Eucharistie vom hohen Mittelalter bis zur Epoche des Humanismus," *Römisches Jahrbuch* 36 (2005), 43-4, notes Virgil as a model of the descent into the underworld associated in the Renaissance with Gregory's descent into Limbo.

<sup>349</sup> See Sensei, "Dall'Imago Pietatis," 129-130 for description of the later history of the Gregory chapel and its association of the Mass of Gregory and purgatorial remission.

As early as 1330, in a papal indulgence promoted by Pope John XXII at Avignon, it was stated that the image of piety be evoked during the Elevation of Offerings and before Communion, as if to re-enact Gregory's vision of Christ as the Real Presence.<sup>350</sup> Images of the Mass of Gregory, of which more than five hundred are extant, have been the recent subject of much scholarly interpretation.<sup>351</sup> While a few examples are found in Italy, such as this fifteenth century Florentine woodcut [Fig. 2.28], the greatest centers of their diffusion were in Northern lands, where they drew critique during the Eucharistic controversies of the Reformation. While at first glance such images appear to be didactic models of the doctrine of transubstantiation, they are in fact more complex. As Carole Walker Bynum and subsequent scholars have argued, the Mass of Gregory images are hybrid amalgams of iconic, mimetic and fantastical modes of representation that are not so easily read as ideological statements.<sup>352</sup> While a consideration of these images is beyond the scope of this chapter, I will conclude with a brief observation concerning the afterlife of the Santa Croce icon in this milieu, to reflect further upon the role of embodiment in cultic activation.

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<sup>350</sup> Colin Eisler, "The Golden Christ of Cortona and the Man of Sorrows in Italy, Part Two," *The Art Bulletin* 51(1969): 107-118, 233-246.

<sup>351</sup> For a description of medieval conceptions of pious viewing or *Schaufrommigkeit*, see David Morgan's *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1998), especially 59-73.

<sup>352</sup> As an initial set of sources, see the following with bibliography: J.A. Endres, 'Die Darstellung der Gregoriusmesse im Mittelalter', *Zeitschrift für christliche Kunst*, 30 (1917): 146-56; U. Westfeling, *Die Messe Gregors des Grossen, Vision – Kunst – Realität*, exh. cat. Cologne, Schnütgen-Museum 1982; Christine Göttler, 'Is seeing believing? The use of evidence in representations of the miraculous mass of Saint Gregory', *The Germanic Review*, 76 / 2 (2001): 120-142; Esther Meier, *Die Gregorsmesse: Funktionen eines spätmittelalterlichen Bildtypus* (Bohlau Verlag GmbH & Cie, Köln, 2006); Christian Hecht, *Von der Imago Pietatis zur Gregorsmesse Ikonographie der Eucharistie von Hohen Mittelalter bis zur Epoche des Humanismus* (München, 2006); Andreas Gormans and Thomas Lentjes, eds., *Das Bild der Erscheinung: die Gregorsmesse im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 2007); Göttler, 'Indulged Prints of Saint Gregory's Miraculous Mass,' in *Last Things Art and the Religious Imagination in the Age of Reform* (Brepols, 2010) 31-70. Images have been recently catalogued on website at the University of Münster: <http://gregorsmesse.uni-muenster.de/home.html>.

<sup>353</sup> See the important essay by Bynum, "Seeing and Seeing Beyond" and recent essays in Gormans and Lentjes, *Das Bild der Erscheinung: die Gregorsmesse im Mittelalter*, particularly by Falkenberg.

Within a very short period after the construction of the Gregory chapel in the 1530s, Gregory had become the pope most heavily condemned by Northern Reformers, blamed for the invention of Purgatory and an economy of images thoroughly corrupted by indulgences upon which printers of the image of piety and the Mass of Gregory had sought to capitalize.<sup>353</sup> Ironically, the historic Gregory had defended religious images not on the grounds of superstitious efficacy but rather as instruments of instruction. In an abraded panel attributed to a Master Seewald, we see the iconoclastic dismantling of the miraculous vision for which Santa Croce in Gerusalemme had provided an authenticating, physical site [Fig. 2.29].<sup>354</sup> While the *vera immagini* of Christ are visible to the painting's viewer, the viewers internal to the picture are denied such vision: their eyes have been gouged out.<sup>355</sup>

The cult icon at Santa Croce, freed from its original moorings and careful framing into the unregulated sphere of private devotion, was to have an enormous impact, inciting violence against images at the heart of Reformation controversy over the nature of the Real Presence. The replacement of ritual forms of embodied devotion, which included movement through space and the material experience of the sacred, by the highly condensed and attenuated forms of

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<sup>353</sup> Belief in the Eucharistic body or Host as a marker of cultural difference – and mechanism for persecution – has been the subject of extensive studies concerning Jewish-Christian relations in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, an important topic that also falls beyond the scope of this dissertation.

<sup>354</sup> On iconoclastic acts against representations of the Mass of Saint Gregory, see Norbert Schnitzler, *Ikonomiasmus-Bildersturm: Theologischer Bilderstreit und ikonoklastisches Handeln während des 15 und 16. Jahrhunderts* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1996), 224-30.

<sup>355</sup> The selective obliteration of the eyes, for example, in which the laity is spared, seems a specific condemnation of the clergy and institutional church. For discussion, see Götter, 'Indulged Prints of Saint Gregory's Miraculous Mass,' and Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, 101-2.

indulged prints, eventuated in their own undoing.<sup>356</sup> By mid-century, the once prolific images of Gregory's icon and vision in the Mass had all but disappeared. Van Meckenem's engraving of the icon, "*propter habitam visionem*," which claimed to record a saintly vision elevating image to the status of the *acheiropoetai* of Rome, was discredited as an image made by human hands, as an icon turned into idol.

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<sup>356</sup> Jonathan Sumpton gives an interesting historical overview of "pilgrimage without travel," indulgences and critique of these practices, in *Pilgrimage: An Image of Medieval Religion* (Rowman and Littlefield: Totowa, New Jersey), 295-302.

## CHAPTER 3

The doubling of cult and art: spiritual imaging in Rosso Fiorentino's *Dead Christ with Angels*

II. The sacrament is a sign that is separate in principle from the body of Christ, which it symbolizes, and can be confused with this body only by a Satanic fantasy.

III. The mind brought forth the idol; the hand merely executed it.

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536-59)<sup>357</sup>

It is a profoundly significant coincidence that the peak of realism in the history of Christian art...was exactly contemporary with the most fervent veneration of the Eucharist, since the mystical actuality of [Renaissance] art, so often explained in the Renaissance as the manifestation of magical, alchemical practices, in its own way offered a pictorial parallel of transubstantiation – the conversion of common clay into divine image.

Colin Eisler, "The Golden Christ of Cortona"<sup>358</sup>

### Introduction

As indulgenced prints of the *imago pietatis* at Santa Croce in Gerusalemme proliferated, bound together with Reformation controversy, Renaissance artists in Rome engaged in their own dialogue with legendary prototypes. This included the literal copying of prestigious icons by Antoniazio Romano, who had been active in the renovations at Santa Croce.<sup>359</sup> But there were other modes of artistic engagement taking place at a more sophisticated level during this period as well. Among these is Rosso Fiorentino's *Dead Christ with Angels* [Fig. 0.3], produced in Rome circa 1525 at the height of Reformation debate over the Eucharist and the status of cult

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<sup>357</sup> Quoted in Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, Appendix, 551.

<sup>358</sup> Colin Eisler, "The Golden Christ of Cortona," 273. The idea of pictorial transubstantiation is further explored in Heike Schlie's *Bilder des Corpus Christi Sakramentaler Realismus von Jan van Eyck bis Hieronymus Bosch* (Berlin, 2002), which argues that the realism of early Netherlandish painting was largely motivated by a cultural obsession with the body of Christ. Klaus Krüger's *Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren Ästhetische Illusion in der Kunst* advances a more complex thesis concerning the dialectic between pictorial illusionism and the experience of divine presence in religious painting of the late medieval and early modern period, invoking the metaphor of the veil as both a screen and a revelation of the invisible. Christopher Baidel earlier argued for a parallel between the development of pictorial realism in Italian and Netherlandish art and the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, in *Refiguring the real: picture and modernity in word and image, 1400-1700* (Princeton, 1993).

<sup>359</sup> Anna Cavallaro, *Antoniazzo Romano e gli Antoniazzi. Una generazione di pittori nella Roma del Quattrocento* (Campanotto, Udine, 1992), 110-11.

images.<sup>360</sup> If the ‘disembodied icons’ of print culture reflect the dangers of the cult image freed from physical frames of controlled spectatorship, Rosso’s painting foregrounds a different problematic. In its full-bodied, illusionistic rendering of a sensual and nude Christ, the painting brings into high relief the idolatrous potential of the sacred image as a “real,” physical presence.<sup>361</sup> As I will argue, Rosso’s unusual painting, which has been interpreted as a visual defense of a Catholic theology of the Real Presence, is a limit case of tensions that arise in the union of cult and art.<sup>362</sup>

Chapter 4 examines the complex and controversial transformation of the *imago pietatis* by Rosso, one of a number of artists in the circle of Michelangelo in Rome during early decades of the sixteenth century. Earlier I suggested that Rosso’s *Christ* is exemplary of the “doubling” of art and cult during a period in which Belting sees their historic separation, and therefore might serve as a model to articulate continuity in imaging between the art of the Italian Renaissance and the icons of Byzantium. On one level, the attempt of artists such as Rosso to bring their divine subjects “to life” before the devotional viewer effectively appropriated the fundamental operation, and authority, of icons.<sup>363</sup> But not only does the painting appropriate modes of imaging from iconic and cultic traditions. As I will demonstrate, it draws attention to innovative,

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<sup>360</sup> The work is presently in the European Gallery of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The painting is the subject of my MA thesis, titled “*Eros and Enigma in Rosso’s Dead Christ with Angels*” (Univ. of Richmond, 2007).

<sup>361</sup> As Peter Parshall notes in his prescient essay, “The Art of Memory and the Passion,” 470: “Because of their poignancy and the overdetermined character of their affective appeal, certain images of the Passion were bound to provoke a tension between the objectives of mimesis and more abstract spiritual understandings.” While his focus is late medieval rhetoric and devotional images, his argument concerning the problematic status of illusionistic imagery applies to the Renaissance as well.

<sup>362</sup> Sydney Freedberg was among the first to suggest a Eucharistic meaning for the painting, in S.J. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy 1500-1600* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993), 201. Regina Stefaniak provides an extensive argument for the idea in the “Replicating the Mysteries of the Passion: Rosso’s Dead Christ with Angels,” *Renaissance Quarterly* Vol. 45, No. 4 (Winter, 1992): 677-738; see discussion below.

<sup>363</sup> Stephen Campbell discusses Rosso and Michelangelo within this frame in “*Fare una Cosa Morta Parer Viva*,” *The Art Bulletin* 84, no. 4 (2002): 596-620.

self-reflexive artistic effects in the process, setting artistic practice on a par with the miraculous operation of divine prototypes with which it stands in relation.<sup>364</sup> Merging cultic and artistic performance, Rosso created innovative strategies for the persuasive, visual depiction of Christ's Real or spiritual presence, preserving and transforming Byzantine prototypes such as the cult icon at Santa Croce, but also destabilizing the distinction between them.

### Iconic-cultic presentation

Immediately striking in Rosso's composition is the effect of the tight, almost claustrophobic frame that shapes its viewing: condensing, amplifying and foregrounding the experiential dimension of the painting.<sup>365</sup> Within this unusual pictorial framing, Christ's heroic, sensuously rendered body nearly fills the entire screen of vision. Rendered in a state of ambiguous consciousness, the relatively enormous figure of Christ balances precariously on the tips of his toes, his massive legs jutting towards the viewer.<sup>366</sup> Confronted with a vision that fills nearly the entire frame, the beholder is allowed no respectful distance in relation to this figure, either physical or psychological. Here Rosso seems to intentionally traduce the traditional boundaries of the picture-subject relationship.<sup>367</sup> Indeed, Christ's body appears so close and precariously

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<sup>364</sup> For a study of the dialogue between artists in the circle of Michelangelo in Rome, focused on Giulio Clovio and Sebastiano del Piombo, and authoritative cult images, see Elena Calvillo's "Authoritative Copies and Divine Originals": Lucretian Metaphor, Painting on Stone, and the Problem of Originality in Michelangelo's Rome," *Renaissance Quarterly* 66 (2013): 453-508. Calvillo articulates the pictorial innovations of these artists that allowed for subtle differentiation along a hierarchy of image types: *acheiropoieta*, the *disegni* of Michelangelo upon which they were based, and their own inventions, which simultaneously called attention to the artifice of the images, safeguarding against idolatry. This last point in particular accords with what I have argued in the case of Rosso's *Christ*. See discussion below.

<sup>365</sup> Whether or not the original panel was cut down to its current size, which is a possibility, the total effect of the presentation remain compelling.

<sup>366</sup> Stefaniak, "Replicating the Mysteries of the Passion," 734.

<sup>367</sup> See Marcia B. Hall, *Painting in Central Italy in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 84, and also Freedberg, *Painting in Italy 1500-1600*, 201: "Even more in its psychological content than in its form,



balanced that it threatens to fall into the liminal space between panel and viewer where it might take on an overwhelming physical reality.<sup>368</sup> In this respect, Rosso brings the experience of the divine to the devotional viewer closer than any of his contemporaries, if we compare works along a similar them, for instance, Parmigianino's *The Vision of St. Jerome* [Fig. 3.1]. By contrast, in Rosso's composition there is no mediation of figures through which our experience of Christ mediated. Rather, we as beholders take on the role of the stupefied and admiring onlookers rendered pictorially in the other examples. By means of this deliberate aesthetic strategy, we are brought into "direct" relation with the body of Christ.<sup>369</sup>

Such is the rhetorical force with which Christ's body is presented before the viewer, a body also rendered by the artist to create the illusion of being physically present. If the reliquary frame of the Gregory icon enabled the devotional viewer to "see" Christ as the saint did, here we have a similar effect, created without the artifice of a supervening structure. That is to say, on purely visual grounds, Rosso's painting presents Christ to the viewer with the force of an icon, foregoing linear perspective and other techniques that would frame the subject and place it at a distance from us as a work of art. Instead of artificial distance, Christ's body – palpably and sensuously rendered as corporeal – is brought into intimate and inescapable relation to us. Charles Burroughs' description, in similar terms, of Botticelli's *Lamentation* [Fig. 3.2] (a panel Rosso would likely to have seen) is worth noting. In contrast to Albertian conventions of

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Rosso's image perverts the classicism of his exemplars, equivocating with brilliant irony-or effrontery perhaps."

<sup>368</sup> See Stefaniak, "Replicating," 734, who notes "the feeling that the slightest stirring of the body would result in the entire illusion slipping into the gap before the eyes of the viewer..."

<sup>369</sup> Burroughs' description of the art of Florentine mannerists applies to Rosso's work: here: "the often highly self-conscious and precious work [is]...marked by theologically motivated scruples about the imaging of the sacred and by the deployment of formal distortions and sophistications in an overall rhetoric of piety and awe." See "The Altar and the City: Botticelli's "Mannerism" and the Reform of Sacred Art, *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 18, No. 36. (1997), 30.

perspectival construction, Botticelli adopts “a mode of painting that closes off the effect of distance...heighten[ing] the drama of the narrative by projecting it forward as if into the beholder’s space.” In this, Burroughs sees an important precursor to Florentine mannerism.<sup>370</sup> As Alexander Nagel has recently argued with regard to Rosso’s painting, the relinquishing of perspective in the picture’s composition yields an experience beyond the visual or optical that might be described as “psychical.”<sup>371</sup>

John Shearman, who provided the first substantive art historical evaluation of Rosso’s *Christ*, was also the first to consider the unusual scene in which Christ’s “presence” is produced, and its departure from earlier precedents along a similar theme.<sup>372</sup> The tradition of the *imago pietatis*, while varied in its Byzantine and Renaissance expressions, is typically either without reference to time or place, or situated within a landscape which, once again, suggests a location outside the tomb.<sup>373</sup> Examining the visual tradition of related themes surrounding Christ’s Passion, we see how Rosso’s invention differs radically from traditional scenes of the entombment, where Christ is depicted as a figure either carried or lying supine at the entrance to the tomb.<sup>374</sup> It also seems unrelated to the genre of resurrection scenes, which generally take

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<sup>370</sup> Burroughs, “The Altar and the City,” 14. He further notes “the use and even citation of prestigious older models and examples of image making.”

<sup>371</sup> Nagel, *Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 100. On the characterization of Mannerist style with the “disassociation of figures and space,” see Helmut Wohl, *The Aesthetics of Italian Renaissance Art: A Reconsideration of Style* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge UP, 1999), 102.

<sup>372</sup> Shearman, “Dead Christ,” 152.

<sup>373</sup> See Shearman, “Dead Christ,” 152.

<sup>374</sup> For the novelty of Rosso’s invention, see Shearman, “Dead Christ,” 152: “Rosso, having no visual precedents for his subject, recalled the abundantly represented tradition of a cognate scene, the body of Christ supported by compassionate, weeping angels found in the works of Donatello, Bellini, Mantegna, Antonello and their followers.” The importance of del Sarto’s *Puccini Pietà* 1511-16, of which we have a record in Agostino Veneziano’s engraving, has been well discussed in the literature as a probable source for Rosso composition.

place at a location outside the tomb, for Giovanni Bellini's *Dead Christ Supported by Angels* (ca. 1465-70) furnishes a close model [Fig. 3.3].<sup>375</sup>

As Shearman notes, the visual exploration of Christ as seen *inside* the tomb, which Rosso has so carefully contrived, constitutes an important innovation.<sup>376</sup> What Shearman did not pursue are the cultic parallels that might be drawn from this unusual choice of setting. The apparent subject of the painting – the moment of Christ's resurrection in the tomb in the company of angels, is clearly a moment historically unavailable to the viewer. In this respect, Rosso's invention offers a privileged moment of viewing: Christ's appearance strikes with the force of revelation or epiphany, a vision augmented by the raking light that illumines his figure. Indeed, with respect to the darkness of the tomb and the revealed figure within it, the experiential effect of the painting resonates strongly with the encounter of the Gregory icon in the similarly dark, subterranean space of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. Given that Rosso's panel was likely designed for the church of Borgo San Sepolcro, the depicted space of the painting would also have resonated with the theme of its intended setting, Christ's tomb or sepulcher.

As noted earlier, we are invited into this intimate scene by the closeness and immediacy of the figure Rosso evokes pictorially: Christ's body is presented directly and completely for our apprehension, within an intimate space of viewing its setting implies. In addition, the on-looking and attentive angels in the picture's composition encourage our close inspection of this presented body. The composition of the whole scene, also absent of the distracting emotions or movements

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<sup>375</sup> While to my knowledge a connection between Rosso and the Venetian Bellini has not been noted by scholars, the *Dead Christ* bears close relation to Bellini's works of the same theme, a parallel that bears further investigation. Another relevant example is Andrea Mantegna's *Man of Sorrows with Angels*, Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst. Apparently Rosso did journey to Venice at some point before his sojourn in Rome.

<sup>376</sup> Though still within the *Man of Sorrows* tradition, I would argue, since Rosso himself describes the figure as "*in forma pietatis*." See discussion in Nagel, *Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 153.

of the mourners usually attendant upon scenes of Lamentation, Deposition, or Entombment, invites our lingering contemplation of the figure. It is as if the explicit and violent energy of Rosso's earlier portrayal of the Passion, the *Volterra Deposition* [Fig. 3.4], has been concentrated into the presentation of this extremely quiet and pregnant scene—dynamism rendered back into spiritual potency.

### **The spiritual image**

It is worth focusing further on the unusual scene that Rosso's painting depicts which Shearman once described as a "mystery" rather than a historical moment.<sup>377</sup> If indeed there is a mystery here, it is one that is formulated within the temporality of an unfolding event. There are a number of signs that indicate a careful concern on the part of the artist to communicate the "momentariness" of the scene. Rosso's masterful ability to simulate this unfolding is certainly part of what brings the scene so convincingly before the viewer's eyes. Most striking is the sense of emerging light, which illuminates the figures from a point high on the right, as if the entrance to the tomb has just been opened. The light gives a synesthetic sense of radiant heat—warmth we associate with life rather than death. Its glow is reflected from the body of Christ and visible on the flushed cheeks of the attendant angels. The flames of the candles, which seem to be melting in this heated atmosphere, bend in the same direction as the light, as if blown out or nearly extinguished by a sudden movement of air from the opening of the tomb [Fig. 3.5]. These

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<sup>377</sup> Shearman, "Dead Christ," 152.

movements of light and particularly of air – what is defined as *aria* in Renaissance art theory – serve to enliven the entire composition, as if it were infused with spirit.<sup>378</sup>

Other iconographic elements contribute to the simulation of this scene. The oversize candles or *doppiieri* framing Christ's figure replicate those used in burial liturgies.<sup>379</sup> Given the painting's subject matter of the Passion, they should also be associated with the candles of the Easter vigil, and give a clue to the moment which Rosso depicts: the quickening of Christ at the moment of Resurrection. This brings us to the issue of the status of Christ's body. It is not just the suggestion of the tomb's opening to light and an onrush of air that produces the sense of an event in progress. There are also signs that we are witnessing Christ's body in a mysterious state of transition from death to life.<sup>380</sup> In the tradition of the Byzantine *Akra tapeinosis* and the *imago pietatis*, Christ appears as both physically dead and spiritually alive. As with the choice of setting, Rosso's painting is in dialogue with these precedents and innovates upon them. The distinctive ways in which he does so provide the grounds for further exploration of the spiritual or iconic image.

As Regina Stefaniak once observed, the ambiguity of the body's status contributes significantly to the painting's extraordinary effect. Rosso renders Christ's body as palpably corporeal, muscular and weighty, yet it simultaneously exhibits a physics of near weightlessness as it poises gracefully on its toes.<sup>381</sup> Most telling is the body's posture: the figure sits upright,

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<sup>378</sup> As noted by Shearman and further explored by Stefaniak, "Replicating the Mysteries of the Passion." *Aria* as an indication of spirit in an image is further discussed below.

<sup>379</sup> David Franklin, *Rosso in Italy: The Italian Career of Rosso Fiorentino* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994), 146. According to Franklin, candles of this size were employed in funeral processions in Medici Florence.

<sup>380</sup> As noted by Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 150.

<sup>381</sup> Stefaniak, "Replicating the Mysteries of the Passion," 734.

apparently unsupported, in a kind of ecstatic swoon.<sup>382</sup> This is a striking departure from the tradition of *pietà* imagery in which Christ is either held by supporters or lies in the lap of the Virgin. A series of drawings of Christ by Michelangelo, including one now in the Louvre [Fig. 3.6], reveal the extent to which the dead, yet spiritually animate figure of Christ was a preoccupation among Rosso's contemporaries.<sup>383</sup> Here we recall the Pauline formula of the natural (*psychikon*) body raised as a spiritual (*pneumatikon*) body.<sup>384</sup> A later painting by Sebastiano del Piombo [Fig. 3.7], a colleague of Rosso's in Rome during this period, shows a very similar figure of Christ based upon this drawing, but emphasizes death and suffering more explicitly. By contrast, the radiance of Rosso's Christ suggests not his death but his resurrection.<sup>385</sup>

Because of the ambiguity of Rosso's figure in this regard, some critics have argued that rather than a "Dead Christ" (the somewhat misleading title that derives from Vasari's generic description of the painting) Rosso instead depicts a resurrecting one. But as consistent with the iconic tradition and *imago pietatis* to which it is clearly related, in the image signs of both life and death are necessarily present, to appropriately signify the divine mystery of Christ's Passion

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<sup>382</sup> For a reading of Rosso's Christ in a state of ecstasy, with reference to related exploration of the Passion by Michelangelo and Bacchic mysteries, see Nagel, "Christ in Ecstasy: The Passion According to Michelangelo and Rosso," in *Coming About--A Festschrift for John Shearman*, edited by John Shearman, Lars R. Jones, and Louisa Chevalier Matthew, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums, 2001), 243-250.

<sup>383</sup> See discussion by Nagel in *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 150-154.

<sup>384</sup> See Michael J. B. Allen for discussion of the Pauline spiritual body in the context of Marsilio Ficino, in "'*Quisque in Sphaera Sua*': Plato's *Statesman*, Marsilio Ficino's *Platonic Theology*, and the Resurrection of the Body" in *Rinascimento*, Seconda serie, Vol. XLVII (Firenze: Leo Olschiki Editore, 2013), esp. 28-29. On the resurrected body, see Marcia Hall, "Michelangelo's Last Judgment: Resurrection of the Body and Predestination," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (March, 1976), 85-92. Hall also refers to Reform debates concerning the immortality of the soul, 88-9.

<sup>385</sup> Ficino describes the soul as "like a sunbeam or ray of sunshine." See Allen, "'*Quisque in Sphaera Sua*,'" 34. The connection between Ficino's doctrine of the spiritual body and Rosso's invention deserves more investigation.

and Resurrection.<sup>386</sup> Though it has not been pursued, the fact that the painting was produced within a decade of Fifth Lateran Council of 1513, during which the doctrine of the immortality of the soul was reaffirmed by the Roman Church, is likely significant.<sup>387</sup> As Marcia Hall notes with reference to the resurrected bodies of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, this dogma was a significant point of difference between Reformers and Catholics, who held that the Resurrection was the raising of the soul in a body, and not the soul alone.<sup>388</sup>

There are further reasons for including signs of death and life simultaneously in Christ's body. As noted earlier in the discussion of the *imago pietatis*, the state of the figure is related to motifs of sleep and death from the Byzantine *epitaphios*, motifs that ultimately derive from pagan mysteries. As I will now explore, Rosso's painting effects a syncretic union of pagan and Christian motifs that extends the tradition of Christian devotional imagery, making an already complex theme even more richly resonant. But in affecting this synthesis, particularly in the evocation of a fully dimensional, corporeal, and sensual body, Rosso also brings the iconic image closer to the threat of idolatry.

### **The perfected body**

Rosso's unprecedented visual conception of a heroic, sensual Christ seems to press the boundaries of the tradition of *imago pietatis* as an image of "piety," with its dual connotation of pious worship and pity for the suffering Savior.<sup>389</sup> It also signals a departure from the artist's

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<sup>386</sup> See Nagel, "Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 79, No. 4 (1997), 665: "His death is a birth and his dead body ambiguously flickers with signs of life."

<sup>387</sup> See Allen, "'*Quisque in Sphaera Sua*,'" 25.

<sup>388</sup> Hall, "Resurrection of the Body and Predestination," 88.

<sup>389</sup> See Shearman, who questions whether this is a Man of Sorrows image because of the suppression of the wounds of the passion in "Dead Christ," 151. I agree with Franklin that the absence of blood does not

prior exploration of this figure, as exemplified in the abstract and attenuated Christ of the Volterra *Deposition* of 1521, which nonetheless shares the strange, ecstatic expression [Fig. 3.8].<sup>390</sup> The change in style must be attributed in part to Rosso's artistic development during his sojourn in Rome of 1524-1527. Vasari writes that the Florentine artist's arrival in Rome was fervently anticipated, due to his already growing reputation for draftsmanship. Whether the claim is exaggerated or not, Rosso's first commission could not have been less than propitious. According to Vasari, the initial result of this encounter was disastrous, and he attributed the failure of Rosso's frescoes for the Cesi family chapel in Santa Maria della Pace to the disorienting effect of the Florentine's encounter with the "air of Rome."<sup>391</sup> In addition, we know from Benvenuto Cellini's autobiography that Rosso lost the commission to continue the work for the Cesi chapel "because of his bad tongue while in Rome, he spoke ill of Raphael's works, such that his (Sangallo's) pupils wished to kill him in any way they could."<sup>392</sup>

In a rare surviving letter written by Rosso dated 1526, which takes the form of an apology to "the divine Michelangelo," we have evidence that Rosso openly disparaged the

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disqualify the figure as a Man of Sorrows image, though I will argue that Rosso pushes this in a novel direction. See Franklin, *Rosso in Italy*, 145.

<sup>390</sup> On this point see Shearman: "Rosso's antiplastic linearism did not survive in Rome; and it seems that it could not survive the impact of Michelangelo on the grand scale, and of antique sculpture in quantity." "Dead Christ," 161. Freedberg locates the precise meaning of *maneira* in the comparison between "the suave head of his Roman Christ and the horrifying, green-faced one from the Volterra Deposition." Freedberg, *Mannerism*, 65. What remains common to both is the enigmatic smile of Christ, which intimates a spiritual ecstasy rather than pain. For a reading of the *Deposition* in relation to its original religious setting, see Harvey Hamburger, "Rosso Fiorentino's Descent from the Cross in a Franciscan Context," *Sixteenth Century Journal* XIX, No. 4 (1988): 577-604.

<sup>391</sup> Vasari, *Le vite* (Gaetano Milanesi) Vol. 5: 161-62. While Rosso was preceded in his arrival in Rome by a reputation for excellence in *disegno*, probably based upon his drawing "Allegory of Death and Fame," he disliked working in fresco. Although to my knowledge it has never been conjectured, it is possible that Rosso's remark, that he "did not want to paint in the manner" [of Michelangelo], in part referred to his difficulty with painting *alla fresca*.

<sup>392</sup> Quoted in Eugene Carroll, *Rosso Fiorentino: Drawings, Prints, and Decorative Arts* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1987), 293. According to Vasari, the negative result of this incident almost reduced Rosso to starvation.



frescoes of the Sistine chapel ceiling as well.<sup>393</sup> This would have been written about the same time as the composition of the *Dead Christ*. Yet the impact of the artist's confrontation with the masterworks of Michelangelo, Raphael, and a rich repository of antique sources, is generally agreed upon by scholars as profoundly influential to Rosso's painting.<sup>394</sup> Thus, while outwardly Rosso asserted his difference from these exemplars, the Boston panel manifests a close relation to Michelangelo's work. Immediately striking in the central figure is its sheer monumentality, a development in form also apparent in the Cesi chapel frescoes. Rosso's heroic and "classicized" Christ is clearly inspired by figures from the very frescoes he had criticized, as well as much-copied antique fragments such as the Gaddi Torso [Fig. 3.9].<sup>395</sup>

Both Shearman and Franklin have adduced the significance of Michelangelo's Adam and *Ignudi* from the Sistine Chapel ceiling as formal sources for the figure of Christ. It is clear that Rosso, like many of his contemporaries and in his close association with Michelangelo, studied the frescoes carefully, and we have his drawings after the *Ignudi* as evidence.<sup>396</sup> Rosso's admiration of Michelangelo's recently painted frescoes on the Sistine Ceiling is clearly reflected in the muscular nude body of Christ. But it is worth noting that each of these, besides providing formal models, offer conceptual ones as well. Christ is the 'new Adam' who dies in order to save man from the mortal consequences of original sin; notably, Michelangelo's Adam, like Rosso's Christ, is also red-haired. To continue the parallel: the *Ignudi*, like the "dead" Christ,

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<sup>393</sup> For a discussion of this letter see Campbell's "Fare," 596-97. See also Paul Joannides "..."*Non volevo pigliar quella maniera*": Rosso and Michelangelo," in *Pontormo and Rosso*, Robert Ciardi and Antonio Natali, eds., (Marsilio: Venezia, 1996).

<sup>394</sup> In addition to Shearman, see Carroll: "...the direct experience of Michelangelo's Roman paintings and sculptures, and of Raphael's paintings, rather than causing Rosso to lose his way, gave it a new alternative direction that would serve him now and again for the rest of his life." *Rosso Fiorentino: Drawings, Prints, and Decorative Arts*, 68.

<sup>395</sup> Natali, *Andrea del Sarto* (Abbeville Press, 2000), 100.

<sup>396</sup> See especially the Chatsworth *Ignudo*, Devonshire Collection, n.900, reprinted in Carroll, *Rosso Fiorentino: Drawings, Prints, and Decorative Arts* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1987).

are liminal figures whose ontological status is also ambiguous. As liminal beings that appear to function on the boundary between personifications of human and divine, they are fitting symbols for the dual nature of the incarnate Christ. They are also evocations of the perfected body; rendered in a pure *figura serpentinata*, the flame-like form of Rosso's Christ connotes a similar perfection – a spiritual animation or grace.<sup>397</sup>

The creation of ideal beauty from the combination of different models was for Vasari the essence of the art of the *bella maniera*, a defining, and superior, characteristic of artists of the *terza età*, Rosso among them.<sup>398</sup> Although concepts of beauty have been fully explored in the realm of portraiture and mythological art of this period, until very recently there has been considerably less attention to their role in devotional art. Parallel to the development of the depiction of the Madonna as the most beautiful woman,<sup>399</sup> there emerged a similar tendency in Italian painting of the period, diverging from the Northern strain of the Man of Sorrows as wounded and despised,<sup>400</sup> to figure Christ as the ideal of male beauty.<sup>401</sup> The basis for this

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<sup>397</sup> On the *ignudi* and the *figura serpentinata* as forms of spirit or grace, see discussion by Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 69, 175.

<sup>398</sup> See Vasari, *Le vite*, (Gaetano-Milanesi) Vol. 4:8, for the foundational anecdote for the art of the maniera: “La maniera venne poi la più bella dall’aver messo in uso il frequente reitrarre le cose più belle, e da quel più bello o mani o teste or corpi o gambe aggiugnerle insieme, e fare una figura di tutte quelle bellezze che più si poceva, e merterla inuso in ogni opera per tutte le figure; che per questo si dice esser bella maniera.”

<sup>399</sup> See Stefaniak, “Amazing Grace: Parmigianino’s *Vision of St. Jerome*,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, Vol. 58, (1995), 227, for a parallel with Rosso’s contemporary in his depiction of a Madonna for the *Vision of St. Jerome*: “Eclectic composition offered a distinct opportunity to a young painter in the 1520’s. Might not the young Parmigianino through an unprecedented act of combinatories find a place for his own uniqueness within the classical tradition? Perhaps a way to outdo his predecessors?”

<sup>400</sup> This tradition finds its basis in the prophecy of *Isaiah* (53:2-5): “There is no beauty in him, nor comeliness: and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be desirous of him: despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity: and his look was as it were hidden and despised. Whereupon we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows: and we have thought him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our iniquities: he was bruised for our sins. The chastisement of our peace was upon him: and by his bruises we are healed.”

<sup>401</sup> See Gerhard Wolf, “Christ in His Beauty and Pain: Concepts of the Body and Image in an Age of Transition” in *The Art of Interpreting*, Papers in Art History from the Pennsylvania State University, Vol. IX

‘beautification’ of Christ is found in Psalm 44:3 where he is described as “*speciosus forma prae filiis hominum*”: in his appearance the most beautiful of men.<sup>402</sup> The biblical precedent was elaborated in the Italian tradition by artists such as Brunelleschi who described Christ as “*delicatissimo ed in tutte le parti il piu perfetto uomo che nacesse giammai*.”<sup>403</sup> Increasingly in the Renaissance, Christ’s *humanitas* as the incarnation of the divine was tied specifically to the figuration of his masculinity.<sup>404</sup> By using the many-model composite, Rosso created a subject not only supremely beautiful, but also more beautiful than any natural or individual man – an ideal reflecting the supernatural nature of Christ. Indeed, here beauty, as *grazia* or grace, comes to symbolize spirit itself.

Christ’s pristine and radiant body, with its smooth, gleaming limbs and muscular body, evinces a pure sculptural quality that also reflects the classical ideals of *all’antica* style, the standard of beauty for artists of the Cinquecento. Moreover, the relief-like modeling of the body, which suggests a figure from a Roman sarcophagus, makes the reference to the subject of the tomb of Christ, and the painting’s association with the Church of Sansepolcro, doubly resonant.<sup>405</sup> The likely prototype for the languishing figure of Christ, in particular the free-falling left arm which functions as a synecdoche for death, is the *Bed of Polycleitus*, a Roman

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(1995): 174: “In Italian art as well as in the expression of virtue and truth in the portrait of Jan van Eyck, in the classicizing idealisation and heroisation of his body, He (Christ) became a real embodiment of male beauty.” For “Die Schönheit Christi in Florenz,” see Wolf, *Schleier und Spiegel: Traditionen des Christusbildes und die Bildkonzepte der Renaissance* (München: M. Fink Verlag, 2002): 279-304. The concern with depicting the ugliness and woundedness of Christ was to be a vital part of Counter-reformation discussions of images of Christ, put forward explicitly by Gabrielle Paleotti, among others, as a necessary compendium to spiritual exercise.

<sup>402</sup> See Wolf, “Christ,” 166.

<sup>403</sup> As attributed to Brunelleschi by Vasari in his *Vite* and quoted in Wolf, “Christ in His Beauty and Pain,” 171, who sees this as a Neoplatonic adaptation.

<sup>404</sup> See Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Modern Oblivion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), on the importance of the *ostensio genitalium* as an indication of Christ’s masculinity and humanity.

<sup>405</sup> Current speculation is that the painting was for the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which was made famous by its relic of the tomb. See Franklin, *Rosso in Italy*, 142.

relief of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> century BCE [Fig. 3.10], a much-copied source in the Renaissance for a recumbent male figure, sleeping or dead.<sup>406</sup> Through the painting's suggestion of antique funerary monuments, we are reminded of the close relation between ancient depictions of the funereal or "Sleeping Eros" and Thanatos, the God of Death.<sup>407</sup>

The question of whether Rosso intends by this depiction a sleeping, dead, or resurrecting Christ, which has been a subject of disagreement among its interpreters, may be in part resolved by a consideration of these multivalent pagan sources. This multivalence is also reflected in the Christian tradition, where Christ's death is not truly death but merely a sleep from which he will eventually awaken.<sup>408</sup> That there are signs of all three states in the figure—sleep, death, and resurrection – is therefore consistent within the framework of both pagan and Christian mysteries. Moreover, the metaphor of the tomb as bedchamber, where one "sleeps the sweet sleep of Death,"<sup>409</sup> encourages the association of the figure not only with sleep, but with the passionate or erotic Christ of Origen's *Cantic of Canticles*: the Bridegroom who lies down on the bed of the cross to show his love for his bride, the Church. "I do not think one could be

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<sup>406</sup> See Shearman, "Dead Christ," 156: "Rosso, like other artists, notably Michelangelo, found a sleeping figure that could be adapted very appropriately as a Christ, dead or apparently so." See also David Rosand, "Titian and the 'Bed of Polyclitus'," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 117, No. 865 (Apr., 1975), 245: "Indeed, it is just this motif of the pronated arm, an expression of the lifelessness formulated in ancient art, that became for the Renaissance a sign, immediately legible in its affect, of death."

<sup>407</sup> The foundational study is Edgar Wind's, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968); see esp. 157-60. See also Joanne Snow-Smith, "Michelangelo's Christian neoplatonic aesthetic of beauty in his early oeuvre: the *nuditas virtualis* image," in Frances Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers, eds., *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 152: "Images of death are barely distinguishable from Eros, and the conflation of these personifications may explain the countless representations in Roman sepulchral art in which death appears as communion with a god through love, as, for example, Psyche and Eros, Endymion and Diana...."

<sup>408</sup> See Alexander Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 90-99 for his discussion of the "christening" of the pagan mysteries and the association of Christ's "death" with the pagan notion of divine "ecstasy."

<sup>409</sup> See Hans Belting, "An Image and its Function in the Liturgy," 11-12, for the interchangeability of Christ the Bridegroom and the "sleeping type."

blamed if one called God passionate love [*Amorem*]....” Origen writes. “Indeed I remember that one of the saints said of Christ: My Love [*Amor, Eros*] has been crucified.”<sup>410</sup>

### Religious meaning and controversy

Rosso’s enigmatic and, to modern sensibilities, shocking depiction of a fully nude, sensual Christ has been the subject disparate and seemingly incompatible interpretations, from heretical or ironic to doctrinally motivated. Taken as a whole, the critical reception of the painting over the last fifty years has offered a very mixed appraisal, with judgments of the work so disparate as to seem *prima facie* irreconcilable. Certainly part of the challenge in providing a univocal reading of the Boston Christ lies in the paradox of the artist himself—the “always enigmatical Rosso,” as Panofsky once described him, a characterization persisting in the literature today.<sup>411</sup> But a further obstacle is that we have almost no indication of how the painting was received in its own time. Apart from Vasari’s brief mention of the work in his *Life of Rosso*, in which he describes “*un quadro d’un Cristo morto, sostenuto da due angeli*,” there was no appreciable evaluation of Rosso’s *Dead Christ* while it was lost to public view for over 400 years.<sup>412</sup> The mystery of the painting, which never seems to have reached its intended destination, is tied to the intervening tragedy of the Sack of Rome in 1527, when Rosso was imprisoned in the palace of Cardinal della

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<sup>410</sup> Quoted in Stefaniak, “Replicating the Mysteries of the Passion,” 706. For Origen’s importance to Neoplatonism in the Renaissance, see also 703.

<sup>411</sup> See Erwin Panofsky, “*Mors vitae Testimonium*, The Positive Aspect of Death in Renaissance and Baroque Iconography,” in *Studien zur Toskanischen Kunst: Festschrift für Ludwig Heinrich Heydenreich zum 23 März 1963* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1963), 230. The *locus classicus* is Giorgio Vasari’s biography, in which the artist is described as serious in manner and “philosophical,” but also noted for his “*fieratezza*,” “*terribilità di cose stravaganti*,” jests, and fits of pique. Vasari, *Le vite* (Gaetano-Milanesi) vol. 5: 155-174. For a contemporary assessment of Rosso as an “anti-ideal” artist, one whose work resonates with contradictory and transgressive elements, see Campbell’s “*Fare una Cosa Morta Parer Viva*,” 596-620.

<sup>412</sup> Franklin, *Rosso in Italy*, 162. Whether or not Vasari actually saw the painting, which he describes as a figure with two angels rather than four, is unclear.

Valla.<sup>413</sup> Rosso's fate after the Sack we know from Vasari, the painting's from a legal document which describes Rosso's attempt, from Borgo Sansepolcro, where he had fled upon his release, to recover the painting and other of his possessions from the convent of San Lorenzo in Colonna in Rome. In the request, Rosso describes a panel painting, presumably the Dead Christ, representing a "*figura domini nostri Iesu Christi in forma Pietatis, cum quibusdam angelis circumcircha dicitam figuram.*"<sup>414</sup>

While Rosso's rendering of the dead Christ as a heroically-imagined, sensual, nude *imago pietatis* may seem to border on blasphemy, it is arguably exemplary of the artistic refinement and experimentation to which religious images were subject in the period of the Reformation in Italy, particularly by artists such as Rosso and others in the circle of Michelangelo.<sup>415</sup> Yet the extremes to which he takes this experiment are worth further examination. While the painting has been noted for its suavity and gracefulness, the overt sensuality of the central figure of Christ does raise the question of whether the motive of the painting is possibly ironic or, at the very least, problematic in its union of eroticism and religious intention.<sup>416</sup> While Shearman explicated the symbolic significance of the image as a representation of "mystery," a scene without historical or biblical precedent, and commented on the intricacy and ambiguity of the subject matter, he considered the aesthetic and religious qualities of the painting as primarily separate.<sup>417</sup> Sydney Freedberg, who subsequently claimed a Eucharistic interpretation for the image, questioned whether the aesthetic and religious motives

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<sup>413</sup> Since there are no surviving documents for the commission, there is some controversy over whether the painting was intended as an altarpiece for the Bishop's titular church in Sansepolcro or, given its size, a private chapel. See Franklin, *Rosso in Italy*, 142.

<sup>414</sup> Franklin, *Rosso in Italy*, 140-141, 309.

<sup>415</sup> These artistic experiments in their relation to religious and artistic reformation of the period are the subject of compelling analysis and formulation in Nagel in *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*.

<sup>416</sup> As suggested by Freedberg, *Painting in Italy 1500-1600*, 201.

<sup>417</sup> John Shearman, "The Dead Christ."

of the image were not only separate, but fundamentally contradictory. He further raised the question of whether the painting, produced as it was for a Bishop but steeped in sensuality, was evidence of a culture of morally cynical elite in Rome.<sup>418</sup>

More recent approaches have sought to contextualize the religious dimension of the painting and indeed even reevaluate the work as a defense of Catholic doctrine.<sup>419</sup> Our understanding of the painting and the context of its production have been considerably advanced by documentary evidence concerning the patron and the commission, presented by David Franklin in his monograph study of Rosso's Italian career.<sup>420</sup> Specifically the "piety" of the image, and by extension the motives of the artist, have been defended on the grounds of its commissioning by Leonardo Tournabuoni, a bishop of probable Reform tendencies, and by the reputed religiosity of its subsequent owner, Giovanni della Casa.<sup>421</sup> Another sustained interpretation, by Stefaniak, attempts to situate the work within the context of the theological controversies of the period. Stefaniak proposes not only a fundamentally pious meaning for the painting, but moreover argues for an interpretation of the image as a visual defense for a Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist during a time of particularly intense debate.<sup>422</sup> Nagel has further affirmed the assertion of the theological primacy of the meaning of the image. He places Rosso among a group of artists of the period, most especially Michelangelo, whose work reflects a shift

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<sup>418</sup> Freedberg, *Painting in Italy 1500-1600*, 201.

<sup>419</sup> Stefaniak, "Replicating the Mysteries of the Passion."

<sup>420</sup> Franklin, *Rosso in Italy*.

<sup>421</sup> See Franklin, 145-46: "That Rosso's intentions were sincere is supported by the documented piety of the patron of the work, Leonardo Tournabuoni. The early owner of the painting, Giovanni della Casa, appears also to have held orthodox religious beliefs: he was described by a contemporary as '*religiosissimo*', and such a statement should be kept in mind when considering the iconography of the panel."

<sup>422</sup> Stefaniak, "Replicating," 679-721. I agree with Stefaniak's fundamental assertion of a Eucharistic meaning for the image, particularly as the figure is set within the frame of candles and the tomb, both of which likely refer to an altar. Moreover, her argument is strengthened by Franklin's claim that the patron, Bishop Tournabuoni, had a particular interest in Eucharistic reform (though Franklin does not elaborate this point.) See Franklin, *Rosso in Italy*, 139.

toward a “Christocentric focus” on the mystery of the resurrection and artistic experimentation in the service of “reform-minded revisionism.”<sup>423</sup> Nagel goes so far as to claim that, far from licentious or transgressive, Rosso’s invention may be viewed as an exemplar of religious reform in painting, purposefully crafted in response to the theological crisis of the impending Reformation.<sup>424</sup> Most recently, Bette Talvacchia has argued that the “sensuous” character of religious painting in this period is fully in accordance with its Neoplatonic foundations.<sup>425</sup>

While these approaches present important perspectives that caution against an overly pessimistic or moralistic evaluation of the painting, and provide significant resources for understanding the painting’s commission and probable theological context, neither directly engages the very compelling question at the heart of the painting: the relation between its overt sensuality and its religious meaning.<sup>426</sup> While Marcia Hall posits a “religious-erotic-aesthetic”

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<sup>423</sup> Nagel, “Experiments,” 392. The relation of the depiction of Christ in the state between death and resurrection to particular theological ideas is developed in “Christ in Ecstasy: The Passion According to Michelangelo & Rosso,” in *Coming About...A Festschrift for John Shearman*, Lars Jones and Louisa Matthew, Editors, (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, 2001): 243-50.

<sup>424</sup> According to Alexander Nagel, Rosso’s *Christ*, “[u]nusual as it is, epitomizes efforts to reform religious art in early sixteenth-century Italy.” See “Experiments in Art and Reform in Italy in the Early Sixteenth Century,” *The Pontificate of Clement VII, History, Politics, Culture*, Kenneth Gowens and Sheryl Reiss, Editors, (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), especially 293-96. More recently, Nagel has explicated the painting in terms of syncretic thought and its inter-pictorial references to artistic imagination, a line of argument I earlier pursued in my MA and to which I return later in this chapter. For other interpretations of Rosso’s work within the context of the devotional thought of Reform circles in Rome, see Alberto Mugnaini, “*Feritas, Humanitas, Divinitas* nell’opera del Rosso. Il problema degli influssi religiosi, letterari e scientifici,” in *Pontormo and Rosso*, 128-136.

<sup>425</sup> Bette Talvacchia, “The Word Made Flesh: Spiritual Subjects and Carnal Depictions in Renaissance Art,” in Marcia Hall and Tracy Cooper, eds., *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 49-74, esp. 60. I explore this as a source for understanding Rosso’s painting below, but within the framework of a different argument than Talvacchia’s.

<sup>426</sup> See Franklin, *Rosso in Italy*, 145: “[S]uch a judgment reflects modern prejudices that fail to appreciate prevailing renaissance desires to mingle Christianity with the physically and intellectually seductive ideals of the antique. This type of negative view of Rosso’s painting is nearer to the Counter Reformation than it is to early sixteenth century criticisms....” See also Marcia Hall, *After Raphael: Painting in Central Italy in the Sixteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 84. While not the focus of her argument, Stefaniak notes that



continuum with regard to the painting and its time, and sees in Rosso a precursor of Bernini and the ecstatic tradition of Baroque religious art, the operation of the image in this bears further examination.<sup>427</sup>

### **The Transubstantiated Body as Eucharistic Image**

The period of Rosso's sojourn in Rome from 1524-27 places him at the epicenter of Reformation crisis, particularly contention regarding the Eucharist, a subject we have seen to be importantly bound to the cult icon at Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. The fully frontal presentation of the body is consonant with the *imago pietatis* tradition as a symbol of Eucharistic sacrifice. This symbolism forms the basis of further innovation on the part of the artist in his highly illusionistic rendering of Christ's presence.<sup>428</sup>

In a prescient essay, Colin Eisler made the following observation concerning the coincidence of pictorial illusion and sacramentality, which is worth quoting in full for its bearing upon Rosso's painting:

The extraordinary, probably unparalleled intensification of Eucharistic concerns in Christian art of the century before the Reformation has not, for all its obviousness and fundamental significance in the visual arts, yet received the attention it deserves. Both Catholicism and Protestantism drastically modified this imagery in subsequent centuries. Much of the drive toward increasing verisimilitude in the art of the early fifteenth century may be linked with the desired provision of visual "documentation" and recreation of the experience and articles of faith. It is a profoundly significant coincidence that the peak of

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this overt eroticism, when viewed as a part of Christian love, offers "an important alternative to the violent sacrificial metaphor of Christ's death" and suggests that "this gorgeous, naked Christ was surely the bridegroom of the Old Testament Canticle of Canticles, as he had been interpreted by Origen in his Neoplatonic commentary on the erotic epithalamium, with the soul or the church in the role of the bride of Christ." Stefaniak, "Replicating," 703-704. I take up these suggestions later in the paper. Stefaniak pursues a similar line of argument in relation to the figuration of the Madonna in "Amazing Grace: Parmigianino's *Vision of St. Jerome*."

<sup>427</sup> Hall, *After Raphael*, 84.

<sup>428</sup> Freedberg was the first to claim a Eucharistic meaning for the painting and that it "illustrates a vital dogma of the Church." See *Painting in Italy, 1400-1600*, 210.

realism in the history of Christian art – the art of Jan van Eyck – was exactly contemporary with the most fervent veneration of the Eucharist, since the mystical actuality of Eyckian art, so often explained in the Renaissance as the manifestation of magical, alchemical practices, in its own way offered a pictorial parallel of transubstantiation – the conversion of common clay into divine image.<sup>429</sup>

While Eisler here refers to Jan van Eyck in his assessment of the interrelation of painting and the Eucharist, his characterization fits Rosso's highly illusionistic pictorial practice as well. It has been conjectured that Rosso's painting, which is perhaps small for an altarpiece, might have been meant for a private chapel. If we can imagine the painting situated on an altar, we can visualize the way in which it might have functioned. The resonance of the body with the host as it is lifted during the ritual of consecration; the parallel framing of the candles; and the tomb as the altar upon which Christ is placed would have worked dynamically together to visualize the Real Presence in a mode more powerful than images of the Mass of Gregory could effect. Moreover, since the patron of Rosso's painting, Bishop Tornabuoni, apparently had an interest Eucharistic reform, the significance of a Eucharistic theme for the painting seems even more likely.<sup>430</sup> As Antonio Natali has rightly suggested, one motive for Rosso's many elaborations of the Passionate body of Christ is the centrality of contemporaneous debates concerning the Real presence.<sup>431</sup>

The second decade of the 1500s marked a period of intense debate concerning the status of the Eucharist as the Real presence of the body and blood of Christ that became an emphasis in sermons of the period.<sup>432</sup> In the wake of attacks by Martin Luther and other Reformers, noted humanists such as Lorenzo Valla and Cardinal Cajetan led the Catholic defense of the doctrine of

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<sup>429</sup> Eisler, "The Golden Christ of Cortona," 237.

<sup>430</sup> Franklin offers this tantalizing piece of information but does not elaborate.

<sup>431</sup> As Antonio Natali suggests, in *Andrea del Sarto*, 100.

<sup>432</sup> See Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy* (Cambridge UP, 2006) for a study of the Eucharist's relation to an "incarnational theology" during the period prior to the Reformation.

real presence during the period in which Rosso was working in Rome. At issue was the difficulty of reconciling the spiritual nature of Christ with the bodily: if Christ were present only as a sign in the Eucharist, then it made little sense to speak of eating his body and blood. On the other hand, if he was truly present as physical body, then the Roman rite amounted to a form of cannibalism.<sup>433</sup> The solution proposed by Cajetan was an elegant one: Christ truly is present in the Eucharist, while the host is received physically, but the sacramental body is received in faith.<sup>434</sup> What is bestowed upon the believer in the process is not natural sustenance but supernatural, that is to say, God's "grace." The term "Eucharist," which in Greek means "good grace," came to symbolize Christ "full of grace" as the fountain or source of redemption.

Rosso's Christ, with its exaggerated *grazia*, visually depicts the complexity of this mystery. The resolution of the theological conundrum of Real presence offered a new way of understanding the ontology of Christ, one that Rosso exploits in his visual elaboration of the concept. For, as noted earlier, the illusion of Christ's bodily presence before the viewer is carefully balanced with signs of Christ's incorporeality or status as spiritual or sacramental body. The apparent contradiction of the weightlessness of his massive frame, which seems to be suspended within the picture frame, alludes to this supernatural or spiritual presence.<sup>435</sup> In this regard, Rosso's painting stages, not only references, the mystery of Transubstantiation itself. The body is offered as the physical substance or vehicle for our viewing, yet its grace-filled effects seem to reach beyond ordinary paint and canvas. Moreover, there is an allegorical movement as

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<sup>433</sup> See Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness. Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, in 2 Volumes (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), Vol. 2, esp. 633-50, and Francis Clark, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation* (Oxford UP, 1967), 90-5, for an overview of the subject. Stefaniak, "Replicating the Mysteries of the Passion," 679-93, discusses in relation to Rosso's painting.

<sup>434</sup> Stefaniak, "Replicating the Mysteries of the Passion," 690.

<sup>435</sup> Elaborating on the equivocal nature of Rosso's Christ, Stefaniak argues that the artist's conception is a visual defense of the Eucharist parallel in structure to theological defenses of the period.

we are transported from the historic space of the tomb to the liturgical altar, where we are reminded of the invitation to partake of the sacrament itself. These effects on the viewer mirror the strategy of humanist sermons of the period which focus less on inculcating doctrinal concepts than on moving individuals to a “receptive and believing state of mind” regarding the sacraments.<sup>436</sup>

From the late *quattrocento* onwards, the emphasis in the visual arts on the body of Christ reflects the growing significance of devotion to the Eucharist and the festival of Corpus Domini, a Christocentric focus celebrating a theology of Incarnation and the sacramentality of Christ’s body.<sup>437</sup> Charles Burroughs notes the influence of the Eucharistic cult in relation to Florentine artists in the late fifteenth-century, among which we should include Rosso, who spent his formative years there.<sup>438</sup> As the Eucharist came to be understood as a propitiatory sacrifice, one whose grace-filled action had the power to vanquish sin and sustain life, its association with the original sacrifice of the cross became even stronger.<sup>439</sup> It is possible that this offers a further meaning for the triumphalism of the painting, as a victorious statement in the face of Reformation critique.<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, 649. The Eucharist is described as “the fountain of graces, those which give strength to our souls, which sustain life and render it victorious over vices and sins, which render souls quiet and tranquil.” Donato Acciaiuoli, from a sermon on the Eucharist, quoted in *In Our Image and Likeness*, 647.

<sup>437</sup> See discussion in Burroughs, “The Altar and the City,” 23ff.

<sup>438</sup> Burroughs, “The Altar and the City,” 23-4, 30.

<sup>439</sup> An interesting example of the power of this association is provided by Charles Burroughs in his discussion of Botticelli’s “Lamentation,” which reflects upon a similarly graceful depiction of Christ. Burroughs’ argument, that the body of Christ held a specific meaning for the culture of Florentine artists and humanists during a period of anti-Medicean republicanism, likely also bears meaning for Rosso and his patron. In 1494 and subsequent years, the Florentine flag that was a symbol of rebellion, replacing the Medici coat of arms, was a red cross on white ground: a combined symbol of the Passion and the Eucharist. See Burroughs, “The Altar and the City,” 23.

<sup>440</sup> Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, suggests that Rosso’s triumphant Christ represents a “reformed” Church.

In describing his painting in a notarial document as an image of Christ “*in forma Pietatis*,” Rosso indicated his relation to the tradition of devotional images with which we have been concerned. But he also substituted for “*imago*” the word “*forma*,” a term which signifies beauty as well.<sup>441</sup> It has been noted that Rosso departs from the tradition of *immagini pietatis* most strikingly in the near absence of wounds that are generally the focus of devotional contemplation. The emphasis on the beautiful body offered for sacrifice bears closest relation to the *pietàs* of Giovanni Bellini, but with the difference that the bodies of Bellini’s Christ’s are depicted as clearly broken by the Crucifixion or standing with the *effusio sanguinis* that signifies the blood of the Eucharistic sacrifice.<sup>442</sup> In his unusual depiction of Christ’s beautiful and perfected body, Rosso seems to “transubstantiate” the painted one of ordinary flesh and blood into a sacramental or spiritual one.

### **Sacred erotics and sublimation**

Thus far we have addressed Rosso’s image of Christ in elevated terms, as a ‘spiritual’ or ‘sacramental’ image. We can no longer avoid the issue of the figure’s full-bodied nudity. As mentioned earlier, the tradition of the *imago pietatis* that symbolized the Eucharist generally depicts a three-quarters length portrait of Christ. If as in the case of Mantegna and Bellini, Christ is presented as a full-length figure, his midsection is decorously covered, as befits his divine status [Figs. 3.3]. What sense can we make of this overt display of flesh, which seems to intentionally cast its subject in a decidedly erotic register? Certainly the difficulty in interpreting

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<sup>441</sup> The double valence of *forma* in the period is evident, for example, in the epithet on the obverse side of Leonardo da Vinci’s portrait, *Ginevra de’ Benci*.

<sup>442</sup> On Bellini’s *pietàs* and the tradition of icons, see most recently Alessandro Nova’s essay “Icona, racconto e dramatic close-up nei dipinti devozionali di Giovanni Bellini,” in *Giovanni Bellini* a cura di Mauro Lucco and Giovanni Carlo Federico Villa (Milano: Silvana Editoriale, 2008), 105-15, with extensive bibliography.

the meaning and the intention of Rosso's Christ is his bold experimentation in the tradition of religious painting. As Hall once noted, the painting might be said to "push the interpretation of orthodox Christianity to the limit."<sup>443</sup> Freedberg asserted that Rosso had in fact transgressed a boundary: that the sensuality of the figure overwhelmed any religious meaning the painting could bear, instead revealing an ironic or cynical motive.<sup>444</sup> While not wanting to diminish the sensual power of this display of flesh, we might also interpret it within the framework of certain conventions of the period, even as the painting puts pressure upon these conventions in respects illuminating to our study.

First we should recall that the nudity of Christ forms a long-standing part of the tradition of Man of Sorrows imagery, even a defining attribute of this devotional genre.<sup>445</sup> Nudity functioned as an expression of Christ's humility and his virtue: an 'uncovering of the human body that endured the wounds of sacrifice, and a visual revelation of the truth of his Incarnation. With the influence of classical forms of sculpture in the sixteenth century, the nudity of the male figure also became a means to reveal the ideal beauty of Christ's body, as mentioned earlier.<sup>446</sup> While unusual, Michelangelo's *Risen Christ* in Santa Maria sopra Minerva [Fig. 3.11], a sculpture that features a completely nude, standing figure of heroic and classical proportions, is an example upon which Rosso likely drew for his conception of Christ. While Michelangelo's display of Christ's genitals may seem somewhat shocking to the modern viewer, we know from documentary evidence that the contract for the commission of the sculpture specifically

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<sup>443</sup> See for example Hall, *After Raphael*, 84: "Confronting this altarpiece with knowledge of the pictorial tradition that preceded it, we cannot help but be astonished, if not shocked."

<sup>444</sup> Freedberg, *Painting in Italy, 1400-1600*, 201.

<sup>445</sup> Eisler, "The Golden Christ of Cortona," 244.

<sup>446</sup> Wolf, "Christ in His Beauty and in his Pain," 173: "Nudity has its own dialectic: on the one hand it can be the result of a *mis en nu* as a humiliating exposure; on the other it can be an uncovering, the naked truth revealed in the ideal beauty of the body."

stipulated the figure's nudity.<sup>447</sup> While there is a connection between nudity, beauty, and a certain eroticism in figurations of Christ during the period of the painting's production, nudity is also associated with concepts of virtue and purity, connected to both form and subject matter.<sup>448</sup>

But even within this cultural framework, one might still concede that the overt sensuality of Rosso's Christ is so provocative that it threatens to overwhelm its intended religious meaning. It is worth noting that during the period in which he painted the *Dead Christ*, Rosso was also drafting a series of erotic scenes from the loves of the Gods that survive in the engravings of Jacopo Caraglio [Fig. 3.12]. While these images, as explicit images of sex, are different not only in theme but in tone, there is nonetheless an overlap between the two. This is reflected in a painting by Rosso that was only attributed to the artist in 1984, the *Death of Cleopatra* [Fig. 3.13]. Whether because of stylistic affinities or its fame as a much-copied image in the seventeenth century, the painting was long considered to be a work of Titian.<sup>449</sup> In terms of understanding the Boston painting, the comparison with Titian is suggestive, not only because of the overt sensuality of the figure. Like Titian, Rosso strives to create not just a consummately graceful and beautiful figure for the viewer's contemplation, but moreover to simulate an erotic "presence" as well.

Earlier we have seen how the careful construction of the elements of the painting's composition yields the illusion of a moment unfolding before the viewer's eyes. The exquisite body of Rosso's Christ, carefully rendered with *sfumato* effects to appear almost palpably real and flesh-like, also contributes to this illusion. In period terms, it displays the consummate

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<sup>447</sup> Eisler, "The Golden Christ of Cortona," 243-244.

<sup>448</sup> Joanne Snow-Smith, "Michelangelo's Christian Neoplatonic Aesthetic of Beauty in His Early Oeuvre: The *nuditas virtualis* Picture", in Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers, eds., *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 1998), 147-62. Snow-Smith articulates the nudity of Michelangelo's early sculpture as reflecting the Neoplatonic ideal of the perfection of the body as a vehicle to Divine love.

<sup>449</sup> Franklin, *Rosso in Italy*, 148.

quality of *morbidezza* or softness of flesh so highly praised in the dialogue of Dolce's *L'Aretino*, where the representation of the "delicate and fleshy" nude of Titian is judged superior to the sinewy and muscular nude of Michelangelo.<sup>450</sup> In this regard, Rosso's painting may be understood in terms of the shared aesthetic concerns of his day: the preoccupation with illusionism, seduction and the tactility of painting which developed along with aesthetic theory that placed touch at the top of the hierarchy of the senses, such as evident in Mario Equicola's *Libro di natura d'amore*.<sup>451</sup> As Elizabeth Cropper has theorized, painting of this period was reenvisioned with a responsive, gendered viewer in mind as a form of visual pleasure.<sup>452</sup> But unlike Titian's *Venus of Urbino* [Fig. 3.14], which draws the viewer's gaze to "touch" the site of the depicted woman's *pudenda*, Rosso draws our attention to the angel's exploration of Christ's wounded side. The angel palpates the wound as if to signify not only the truth of Christ's Passion, that is to say, his wounded body. With this gesture, the reality of his flesh is made demonstrably present as well: a mirroring of Christ's palpable existence, brought miraculously before our eyes. The sensuousness of the body takes on an evidentiary aspect, as a form of verification. In our engagement with the narrative and the figures of the painting, touch and vision are united: the illusion of the painting invites a visual "touching" or communion with the body of Christ. Here we might also see in Rosso's rendering of the scene the sublimation of the

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<sup>450</sup> See especially the important essay by Elizabeth Cropper, "The Place of Beauty in the High Renaissance and its Displacement in the History of Art," in *Place and Displacement in Renaissance Art* (Binghamton: 1987), esp. 185. Subsequent discussions include Mary Pardo, "Artifice as Seduction in Titian," *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, ed. J. Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993); Fredrika Jacobs, "Aretino and Michelangelo, Dolce and Titian: *Feminina, Masculo, Grazia*," *The Art Bulletin*, (March, 2000), esp. 57. It is interesting to speculate whether Rosso, as a contemporary and associate of Aretino, who later helped Rosso to launch his career in France, was directly introduced to these aesthetic ideals by his friend.

<sup>451</sup> See Jacobs, "Aretino and Michelangelo," 55.

<sup>452</sup> Cropper, "The Place of Beauty," 200-201.



haptic dimension of veneration of icons – the embodied response of its devotional viewer – reenacted within the picture plane itself.<sup>453</sup>

The diminution of Christ's wounds is also worth noting, as it departs from Northern exemplars that emphasize these as visible testimony to the reality of the Passion. Stefaniak reads this lack as a means of feminizing the masculinity of Christ: a conscious strategy whereby Rosso displaces the violence of the Passion to appeal to the aesthetic sensibilities of the sixteenth century female viewer. In support of this claim, she evidences a relation between conceptions of the "wounded hero" and the female figure throughout history, to suggest the castrated Adonis as Rosso's model for Christ.<sup>454</sup> But arguably there are religious reasons we can draw upon for Rosso's figuration of Christ. We know that in earlier traditions of painting, the body of Christ was often conceptualized and represented as both male and female: as the wedding of human and divine qualities. The Passion was seen as an essentially procreative act by which he gave "birth" to the Church through the wound in his side.<sup>455</sup> This miraculous wound, which was represented separately as an object of adoration, suggests in its appearance the female vulva, another indication of Christ's femininity.<sup>456</sup> But as we have seen earlier in the Cinquecento period of Rosso's design, the depiction of Christ was increasingly and specifically tied to his masculinity,

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<sup>453</sup> We might also consider the difference between Christological and Marian imagery in this regard, based upon the different ontological statuses of their bodies after death. Images of Christ – especially those related to the *pietà* and Passion, tend to be more haptic. Mary, whose body was assumed into heaven, gives rise to a different tradition of imagery.

<sup>454</sup> Stefaniak traces the equation of femininity and woundedness and reads the figure of Rosso's Christ as an embryonic metaphor, also essentially feminine. See "Replicating the Mysteries of the Passion," 711-13. The suppression of the male genitalia – a seemingly significant departure from traditional figurations of Christ as a Man of Sorrows where the sex is generally present, albeit at times decorously concealed--is interpreted as marking a "radical masculine absence" that constitutes a further movement towards the feminization of Christ. The argument later moves in the direction of suggesting a connection between Rosso's Christ and the mythical figure of Adonis, but I do not think this is warranted.

<sup>455</sup> Wolf, "Christ in his Beauty and in his Pain," 173

<sup>456</sup> Wolf, "Christ in his Beauty and in his Pain," 173: "Indeed we can speak of the vaginalisation of the wound, as in the book of Hours of Jeanne de Luxembourg." For a reproduction of the image, see 195.

a re-conceptualization which led to the figuration of Christ as not only predominantly male, but the most beautiful of men. Given that Rosso seems to follow this tradition in other respects, what motive could he have for suppressing the most obvious sign of Christ's masculinity?<sup>457</sup>

The most plausible reason is theological: that the perfected, resurrected body of Christ is also a pre-gendered one.<sup>458</sup> While acknowledging the force of this argument, we might also adduce an aesthetic reason for the depiction of Christ as apparently de-sexed, given the tradition of visibly sexed figures. As Michelangelo's *Risen Christ* presents an obvious model of a fully nude Christ, Rosso's chosen depiction cannot be explained on the basis of decorum alone. Because the masculinity of Rosso's muscular and heroic figure is undeniable, the deliberate visual suppression of the genitalia likely constitutes another instance of artful ambiguity on the artist's part. In this case, both male and, by its noticeable absence, female, are represented. This indeterminacy of gender – the “*feminina masculo e masculo feminine*” – functioned in the Renaissance as a consummate model of beauty, a powerful tool of engaging the viewer of works of art in an erotics of desire.<sup>459</sup>

As I will argue, it is precisely by virtue of this quality and others that have been judged equivocal and therefore problematic in Rosso's painting that produces its highly charged effect. When understood within the framework of rhetorically persuasive, iconic presentation, and the dynamic of presence and absence that leads to the cultivation of proper desire for its divine

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<sup>457</sup> On the importance of the *ostensio genitalium*, see Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ*.

<sup>458</sup> See most recently Nagel, *Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 99, who traces the evidence from Plato to Philo and Origen, and its reception in the Renaissance by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Agrippa of Nettesheim, Leone Ebreo, among others.

<sup>459</sup> This union of genders became the standard of *grazia* for Equicola, as it was the standard of beauty for Dolce. See Jacobs, “Aretino and Michelangelo,” 52-9. I am more inclined to agree with Nagel's suggestion that the “soft, languid and nearly feminine qualities” are those often associated with Bacchus, a figure that better reflects the ecstatic condition of Christ in this context. See Nagel, “The Passion according to Michelangelo and Rosso,” 245.

prototype, the unusual characteristics of Rosso's invention become clear. In his complex and provocative depiction of this overtly sensual, graceful, and enigmatic figure, Rosso leads the Christian beholder from an erotic appreciation of the figure towards a contemplative one befitting the divine mystery of Christ. Attending more closely to these artistic strategies of equivocation, we may understand them anew within a dynamic of the viewer's movement from the sensual to the spiritual realm. For even as Rosso seems to invite an erotic appreciation of Christ's body, indeed to promote our passionate desire for this body, he suggests, precisely by the absence of genitalia, that this desire cannot be the natural or procreative *eros* that we associate with a fully-sexed individual. At the very moment of our visual consummation with Christ, which has up until now seemed the directive behind the painting, our natural form of desire is chastened. This is only the first in a series of equivocations that Rosso presents to viewer. We have reviewed the ambiguity of the status of Christ's body, which shows signs of sleep, death and reawakening. Further signs of ambiguity are implicit in the ontology of body itself, which reads as both physical and palpably real, yet is strangely poised before us: a huge body balanced on the tips of its toes, suspended as if weightless or incorporeal. The enigma of the body—which seems both physically present but now recognized as impossibly so—also effects a suspension of natural desire. For how can we have physical desire for something so existentially ambiguous?<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> Of course one could have desire to "possess" the painting, which presents a different kind of problem that is beyond the scope of this paper. For a discussion of the difficulties attendant upon the confusion of image and subject, see Stefaniak, "Replicating the Mysteries of the Passion."

Why should Rosso take such great pains to make the body of Christ palpably real for us, and fuel our desire by its erotic beauty, only to make it, upon closer inspection, disappear?<sup>461</sup> In a series of equivocations that have been interpreted as problematic, Rosso effects a two-fold movement in the viewer: through *eros*, we are invited to an intimate connection with the body of Christ, where his presence is made real by artful dissimulation. By the enigmatic status of Christ's body, desire is displaced and the viewer moved toward a higher realm of contemplation. This union of *eros* and enigma leads us toward an appropriate contemplation of the beauty of Christ, which is the understanding of the beauty of his redemptive sacrifice.<sup>462</sup> In other words, the new life of the Resurrection, made possible through Christ's suffering and death, is brought about not through the *eros* of procreation, but through the mystical power of divine love. Christ gives his body to us, not in a natural way, but in a supernatural mode that is recalled in this figuration of the Passion and the Eucharist. Through the suppression of what I have called natural *eros* for the contemplative *eros* of beauty, the painting pushes the viewer towards the contemplation of these divine mysteries.<sup>463</sup> This power of painting to arrest and suspend the viewer in a state of contemplation was compared by the fiery preacher of Rosso's Florence, Girolamo Savonarola to the force of love:

Love is like a painter. The works of a good painter so charm men that, in contemplating them, they remain suspended, and sometimes to such an extent that it seems they have

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<sup>461</sup> See Nagel who describes Rosso's *Christ* as a body that "disappears from one moment to the next" and finds an interesting basis for this in the depiction of painting in the Neoplatonic writings of Francesco Zorzi and Giulio Camillo. "Experiments," 394 and n31.

<sup>462</sup> See for example Vittoria Colonna: "Painting reveals to us death and what we are more gently than in any other way; it shows us the torments and dangers of Hell, and, in so far as may be, the glory and peace of the blest, and that incomprehensible image of the Lord our God.... It plunges our mind and spirit in ecstasy beyond the stars, in contemplation of that celestial glory..." In Francisco de Holanda, *Dialogos in Roma*, 81-2.

<sup>463</sup> For the Neoplatonic view of the distinction between natural *eros*, which is the desire to procreate, and the heroic *eros*, whose object is God, see Ioan Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, translated by M. Cook, (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1987), 67ff.

been put in an ecstasy and have been taken outside of themselves, and seem to forget themselves. This is what the love of Jesus Christ does when it is in the soul.<sup>464</sup>

In the philosophical description of the ascent of the Christian believer from the physical perception to the divine, the fifteenth century humanist, Marsilio Ficino, whose ideas Rosso almost certainly would have known, given their wide currency in the vernacular, claimed the “erotic furor” engaged and stimulated by physical beauty towards divine love as the preeminent means by which we return to God. This is the same cycle of recession and *theosis* we see operative in the Byzantine theology of icons, which were similarly understood by John of Damascus through the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, a shared source with Ficino.<sup>465</sup> As Ficino’s ideas became widespread in the Renaissance, especially through the transmission of the *De Amore*, the Platonic belief that man could return to the One through the divine contemplation of beauty merged with the Christian belief in salvation through grace.

Rosso’s invention may be viewed as an attempt to combine the erotic furor of love with the poetic furor of painting, as an aid to the viewer’s ascent to the divine. It is not unlikely that Rosso, who was, according to Vasari, “philosophically inclined,” was influenced by a Neoplatonic aesthetic, particularly if he was in collaboration or competition with Michelangelo. Furthermore, the Augustinian interpretation of these ideas, which stressed the redemptive power and mystery of the Incarnation, predominated in Rome through the sermons of Egidio da Viterbo

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<sup>464</sup> From Girolamo Savonarola’s sermon on the Psalm *Quam Bonus* of 1496; quoted in Nagel, “Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna,” *The Art Bulletin* 79, no. 4 (December 1, 1997): 647–68.

<sup>465</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, Speech VI, chaps. 18 & 19, translated by S. Jayne, (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1985). See also Anthony Levi’s exposition of Ficino in *Renaissance and Reformation: the Intellectual Genesis*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002), 174ff. The shared source between Byzantine and Renaissance thought in this regard are the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, in particular the Celestial Hierarchy. Ficino in particular refers to Pseudo-Dionysius throughout his writing, particularly in the *Platonic Theology*.

and others.<sup>466</sup> Arguably Rosso made use of these humanist ideas, not necessarily as part of a movement to reform the Church, as Nagel has suggested, but rather to bring his own artistic conception of Christ to enigmatic and moving form.

Although Rosso's subsequent work in the galleries of Fontainebleau in France as court artist to Francois I was to become increasingly esoteric, and, some would argue, evidenced an explicit interest in Neoplatonism, our understanding of the *Dead Christ* does not depend upon the claim that Rosso was a Neoplatonic artist, whatever that might mean. For such a claim would indeed be difficult to sustain, not least because of the variation in Rosso's style over the course of his career. Moreover, the critical practice of attributing a Neoplatonic meaning to erotic paintings in the Renaissance, in the cause of elevating their purpose, should be viewed with skepticism.<sup>467</sup> Nonetheless it seems likely that philosophical ideas such as those of Ficino and his interpreters, together with the aesthetic ideals of beauty and erotic appeal that were common artistic currency during the formative period of Rosso's career in Rome, were likely a point of departure and experimentation for the young artist, and ultimately provided the frame within which he so remarkably pushed the boundaries of religious painting.

As potential influences for Rosso's innovation, these seem more informative and persuasive than attempts to understand his painting primarily as an expression of moral cynicism or particular doctrinal concerns. In his study of Rosso, Carlo Falciani argues for the foundational role devotional figures such as Savonarola but also the artist's association with humanists such as

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<sup>466</sup> See John O'Malley, *Rome in the Renaissance: Studies in Culture and Religion* (London: Varorium, 1981) and Stephen Bowd, *Reform Before the Reformation: Vincenzo Querini and the Religious Renaissance in Italy* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

<sup>467</sup> See Preface to E.H. Gombrich's *Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, (New York: Praeger, 1972), vii-viii, in which the author cautions against the overuse of this interpretative strategy in the interpretation of mythological painting of the Renaissance.

Raffaele Maffei and the thought of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.<sup>468</sup> In a more recent reading of the painting, Nagel also draws upon this syncretic tradition, in particular adducing Pico's alchemical ideas as a means to think about the volatile and transforming body of Christ.<sup>469</sup> By engaging the painting from the perspective of this tradition of Neoplatonic thought or the syncretic tradition, we do not diminish the particular and unmistakable *ingegno* or genius at the heart of Rosso's striking invention. Instead we are moved from the negative judgment of our contemporary mores, or the wholesale rehabilitation of the artist as fundamentally pious, towards a consideration of how this genius found expression in its own time.<sup>470</sup>

By explaining the workings of Rosso's enigmatic painting, however, neither do we diminish its particular affective charge. The sensuality and eroticism of the beautiful and graceful figure remain nonetheless, even when pressed into the service of contemplative devotion.<sup>471</sup> Is this the reason for the linen cloth that covered the painting during its safekeeping in the convent of San Lorenzo – to decorously conceal it? According to a document requesting the return of the painting, the nuns refused to give it back, which suggests another motive. In the twelfth century, Pope Alexander III decreed that the icon of the Lateran Savior be covered with a triple silken

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<sup>468</sup> Carlo Falciani, *Il Rosso Fiorentino* (Olshiki, 1970), especially 92-5.

<sup>469</sup> Nagel, *Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 99.

<sup>470</sup> On the ambiguity of religiosity and syncretic thought in this period, we might turn to the observations of Manfredo Tafuri, who notes the skeptical humanism of figures such as Cardinal Adriano Castellesi of Corneto. See the brilliant *Interpreting the Renaissance: Princes Cities, Architects*, forward by K. Michael Hays, translation and preface by Daniel Sherer (New Haven, CT.: Yale UP, 2006), 164ff. Tafuri also usefully discusses what he describes as “a caesura between Albertian culture and evangelical one of Vives, Valdes, and Erasmus in Reformers desire for *revolutio*—a return to ecclesiastical origins and the interiorization of the divine. See Tafuri, *Interpreting the Renaissance*, 164.

<sup>471</sup> Alessandro Nova notes in his discussion of Rosso's painting an “irresolvable tension” between its orthodox religious message, the ideals of classical beauty and a culture of eroticism that solicits the viewer. See “Il Cristo *In Forma Pietatis* del Rosso Fiorentino,” in Christoph Luitpold Frommel and Gerhard Wolf, *L'immagine di Cristo dall'Acheropita alla mano d'artista: dal tardo medioevo all'età barocca* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 2006), esp. 334-35. As noted earlier, Vasari discusses the pitfalls of religious art that incites lascivious responses in their viewers.

cloth, because it was reputed that those who looked at it too intently were seized by tremors.<sup>472</sup> Like the cult icon, there is psychological power to Rosso's painting as well which strikes the viewer as well. But could such a painting function as a religious image within the context of the impending Counter Reformation?

The mystery of why the painting was never reunited with its presumed patron, Bishop Tournabuoni, after Rosso was reunited with his friend in Sansepolcro, leaves open the possibility that the painting was indeed problematic. In fact, the story of its trajectory and eventual placement with a private owner follows very closely Vasari's account of Fra Bartolomeo's painting of San Sebastian, which was so realistic and sensual a figure that it caused women to sin while admiring it.<sup>473</sup> We can reasonably conjecture, I think, that one of the reasons the *Dead Christ* was never displayed as an altarpiece, and essentially remained hidden from view in a private collection during the period of intense scrutiny of religious images during the Counter Reformation, was precisely its powerful sensuality. As one scholar has suggested in her appraisal of Roman religious painting of the 1500s, this ambiguity seems to be a "calculated feature" of a new genre, one that perhaps provides a specific basis for the anxiety and debates concerning decorum in the Council of Trent.<sup>474</sup> We have yet to come to terms with or fully understand the emergence of erotic religious art of this period.<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> Wolf, "Christ in his Beauty and in his Pain," 168.

<sup>473</sup> Vasari, *Le Vite*, vol. 4.

<sup>474</sup> See Jill Burke's "Sex and Spirituality in 1500s Rome: Sebastiano del Piombo's *Martyrdom of Saint Agatha*, *The Art Bulletin* Vol. 88 (Sept. 2006): 482-95.

<sup>475</sup> See discussion by Robert Gaston in an essay that deserves wider currency, "Sacred Erotica: The Classical Figura in Religious Paintings of the Early Cinquecento," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 2.2 (1995): 238-64.



### **The doubling of cult and art: transgression or reformation?**

Recently the argument has been made that the Byzantine icon is at the basis of the development of the genre of the portrait panel in Renaissance Italy. The portrait might be reinterpreted as a secular sublimation of the mediating powers of the icon that nonetheless recall and makes use of these to artistic effect.<sup>476</sup> As is often quoted from Alberti, such images hold the ability to make the absent person present. Extending that claim, I have argued that Rosso's portrait of Christ is exemplary of another kind of iconic transformation, which might be seen in the sublimation of the erotic body, doubling the powers of the religious image during a time when such persuasive force is called upon by religious exigency. Whether deliberately transgressive or a show of artistic bravura, the tensions so artfully balanced in the painting, like the red-haired figure threatening to break through the picture frame, ultimately call to mind the presence of the artist himself. By bringing the "dead" Christ so beautifully alive and present for the believer, Rosso effects a double incarnation: both of the cherished person and of himself, its "divine" animator.<sup>477</sup> The figure of Christ he depicts recalls the physiognomy of the artist as described by Vasari: the "imposing build, with red hair... in all his actions grave," and we are inclined, like the angels admiring the beauty of Christ, to marvel at the soul that could produce such a work.<sup>478</sup> But it is the figure's faint and enigmatic smile that perhaps most recalls the artist, yet another indication of "presence."

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<sup>476</sup> Nagel, "Icons and Early Modern Portraits," 424.

<sup>477</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, in his treatise *Della pittura* of 1436, Book II, writes of the divine power of painting not only to make the absent present, but to represent the dead to the living, so that painters "feel themselves to be almost like the creator." See also Campbell "*Fare una Cosa Morta Parer Viva*," which discusses this reanimation as the transgressive act which opens the possibility for religious art to enter the realm of the aesthetic, and Belting, *Likeness*, 0, which provides the *locus* for his discussion.

<sup>478</sup> Vasari, *Life of Rosso* (du Vere, 1996) vol. 1, 899.

This double effect, which may be interpreted as a form of irreverence or irony, is also form of artistic survival, the signature by which an artist is memorialized. The paradox and peril of representation, particularly heightened in the visualization of the divine, was that if it was done too well, it called attention to the artifice itself—and by extension the artist—threatening to overwhelm the religious meaning of its subject. Yet to effect the double presence of the divine subject and the artist had to be in some sense a goal of the artist, an aesthetic means by which a mortal craftsman could partake of the semblance of the divine.<sup>479</sup> Here is *aria* at work: the infusion of the artist's spirit into his creation.<sup>480</sup> The concept descends from Seneca via Petrarch, who describes painting as mixed with the artist's "own ingenium, his own talent and vision, his own spiritus, with what he saw in order to make it seem alive, and to make it true." As Summers notes, *aria* in this sense became in the Renaissance an aesthetic ideal, one that encompassed not only sublimated physicality or presence, but also sexuality.<sup>481</sup> "*Dolce aria*" was a phrase used especially to refer to the kind of "physical appeal" made by an image such as Rosso's, which combines both.<sup>482</sup>

In the case of Rosso and his Christ, presence is combined with pathos appropriate to the subject of the Passion the artist depicts. For we cannot look at this painting now without knowledge of Rosso's ordeal during the Sack of Rome of 1527, shortly after the completion of this painting. Along with many other artists of his generation, as well as clergy who were

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<sup>479</sup> This conflation of Christ and artist is evident throughout the Renaissance, notably in the works of Albrecht Dürer, Titian and Michelangelo, who is discussed in the next chapter. We might also compare a contemporaneous painting whose fame Rosso no doubt knew well, Raphael's *Transfiguration*, which was transported as part of his funeral bier and came to stand for the divine artist himself.

<sup>480</sup> For the importance of *aria* as an aesthetic goal of this period, see David Summers "ARIA II: The Union of Image and Artist as an Aesthetic Ideal in Renaissance Art," *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 10, No. 20 (1989): 15-31.

<sup>481</sup> Summers, "ARIA II," 26.

<sup>482</sup> See discussion by Gaston in "Sacred Erotics."

tortured by the merchant armies of the invading Charles V, Rosso suffered his own version of the Passion. According to Vasari, the artist was stripped of his clothes and possessions and imprisoned in the Castel Sant'Angelo.<sup>483</sup> The painting, in its quiet triumphalism, seems to record a moment of glory just prior to the ordeal of the Sack, when the world of Rome must have seemed full of possibilities to the young artist as he painted this panel for his friend. Is this perhaps the reason why, more than irony or cynicism, love itself seems palpably present in the image, reflected in the faces of the young and expectant angels? [Fig. 3.15] This affective dimension in Rosso's work never resurfaces in quite the same way after the artist's experience of the brutal events of the Sack. Notably his next painting, the *Deposition* of 1528 [Fig. 3.16], shows a much different Christ: his blackened body figured in the extremity of suffering and agony, and the attendants caught up in an ecstasy of grief and lament, as tragedy displaces triumph.

### **Conclusion: Idols of art and icons of piety**

In a provocative essay, Stephen Campbell argued that Michelangelo and his younger rival, Rosso, were formatively shaped by “an artistic culture that grappled with a tension between two modalities of the image: on one hand, as manifestation of divine authority and authentic object of devotion and, on the other, as emotionally affecting and illusory simulation of presence - including divine presence - created by human virtuosity.” The ascription of “divine artist” to Michelangelo was both celebratory and troubling, effecting critique by his rivals but also by the

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<sup>483</sup> Vasari, *Life of Rosso* (du Vere, 1996) vol. 1, 904.

artist himself in his late works, which seem to turn against the triumphalism of the former.<sup>484</sup>

With regard to Rosso, Campbell suggests that the artist's dissonant work often points towards meanings beyond a dominant one, indeed towards something "undivine."<sup>485</sup> Campbell focuses specifically on the power to animate artwork as indicative of this transgression. But one could also point to a significant artistic motivation as well. For artists of Rosso and Michelangelo's generation, the ability to enliven one's figures – imparting to them grace and movement – was considered a consummate skill, comparable to a divine quality which mirrored the creative and life-giving powers of God. Jacopo Pontorno, an artist within the same milieu, once described the goal of painting "to surpass nature in attempting to give spirit [*dare spirito*] to a figure and make it appear alive."<sup>486</sup> For this reason above all, Michelangelo was called the "divine artist" both by Vasari and others.<sup>487</sup> According to Vasari, Rosso also figured among the select canon of artists who like the masterful Leonardo da Vinci, "brought their figures to life" in their painting.<sup>488</sup> But to instill "live" figures with a sense of movement and animation would be one kind of achievement. What if one could bring "dead" figures – including the sacrosanct figure of Christ – to life in painting?<sup>489</sup>

While this may seem far-fetched as an interpretation of artistic motive, we should remember that Rosso, along with Michelangelo, both drew from anatomical models that involved the desecration of corpses. Painting the human figure, in its highest form, was thematized as a

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<sup>484</sup> Campbell, "Fare una Cosa Morta Parer Viva," 597-98. I discuss this critique on the part of Michelangelo in the next chapter.

<sup>485</sup> Campbell, *Fare una Cosa Morta Parer Viva*.

<sup>486</sup> Jacopo da Pontorno, Lettera a Benedetto Varchi (1549), in Salvatore S. Nigro, *L'orologio di Pontorno: Invenzione di un pittore manierista* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998), 77-9; cited in Campbell, "Fare una Cosa Morta Parer Viva," 605.

<sup>487</sup> See Campbell, "Fare una Cosa Morta Parer Viva," esp. 596-98.

<sup>488</sup> Vasari, *Le Vite*, (Gaetano-Milanesi), Vol. 4:8-9.

<sup>489</sup> In a recent reading of Rosso's painting, Nagel engages the image as a projection of fantasia, likening the space of the tomb to the inner chamber of the artist's imagination in *Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 98-100.

‘reanimation’ or reembodiment of the dead. Rosso’s Christ shows evidence of precisely this kind of training and approach. The raised veins delicately inscribed under the figure’s skin give evidence of pulsing life. We can safely assume that this signification is a deliberate act on Rosso’s part; given his interest in and knowledge of anatomy, he undoubtedly would have known that the veins of a corpse lie flat.<sup>490</sup> The language of animating the dead also became a trope in the art writing of the period. For example, Vasari describes the manner in which Michelangelo brings his sculpture of *Moses* to life out of stone as a “*resurrezione*.”<sup>491</sup> Most famously, Cellini, as he describes in his autobiography the process of bringing molten metal “back to life,” also used the topos of divine animation in order to elevate his own reputation and the craft of casting bronze, a genre that was viewed as generally inferior to sculpture in marble and to painting.<sup>492</sup> In the fierce competition among artists, what could be a greater show of artistic *virtù* than the animation of the “dead” Christ, as Rosso achieves in this painting? As it was a theme to which Michelangelo was to return throughout his life, we can also conjecture that the younger Rosso sought to emulate the master in this regard.

But here Rosso seems to go even further than Michelangelo: not only to create the illusion of a spiritually animate figure, one that we could admire for its union of aesthetic and theological qualities. He also summons a beautiful and palpable “presence” that stimulates devotional and artistic affection. As we have observed, Rosso’s striking depiction of Christ with flaming red-haired constitutes a self-reflexive reminder of the artist’s presence. A less obvious,

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<sup>490</sup> Vasari, *Vite* (Gaetano-Milanesi) 5: 166, describes Rosso’s practice of exhuming dead bodies for study while in Sansepolcro. See Campbell, “*Fare una Cosa Morta Parer Viva*,” 601-605, for a discussion of Rosso and the anatomical tradition within the context of his competition with Michelangelo, and Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 99.

<sup>491</sup> This and other metaphors of animation are discussed by Frederika Jacobs in *The Living Image in Renaissance Art*, esp. 172.

<sup>492</sup> See Michael Cole, “Cellini’s Blood,” *The Art Bulletin*, Vol., 81, No. 2 (1999): 215-35.

but compelling, indication of artistic presence has never been noted: the ingenious placement of the implements of the Passion at Christ-Rosso's feet, as if fallen from the subject's open hand above [Fig. 3.17]. The nails are as delicate as an artist's stylus, and the sponge with its handle echoes the form a painter's brush. Surely these implements are intended as double figurations: as instruments of Christ's Passion and the tools of the artist-painter. A comparable, more common, inter pictorial reference might be seen in the altarpiece of Rosso's contemporary and rival, Sebastiano del Piombo. The painting is yet another example of a sophisticated dialogue between art and cult in the Renaissance. In the *Ubedà Pietà*, a painting with overt Eucharistic symbolism that reprises Christ (decorously covered) in nearly the same pose as in Rosso's, the masterful rendering of Veronica's veil with anamorphic precision connotes the virtuosity of the artist in his re-creation of a *vera* icon [Fig. 3.18].<sup>493</sup> Taking the veil as his primary model, Klaus Krüger has theorized the oscillation between the perceived objecthood of an image and its status as illusion as productive of aesthetic alterity (*ästhetische Alterität*). In this doubled awareness, the viewer of religious images remains aware of the limits of representation, an experience fundamental to his or her movement from corporeal to spiritual vision in the process.<sup>494</sup> While Rosso's inter pictorial references operate with a greater degree of self-consciousness, they too may be understood

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<sup>493</sup> Sebastiano's composition, which appears to be based upon the drawing by Michelangelo (Albertina) discussed earlier, emphasizes the identification of Christ with the Eucharistic body in inclusion of iconographic elements such as the burial shroud with doubles as liturgical cloth. Tafuri (*Interpreting the Renaissance*, 199) views the dark composition as a "negation" of Rosso's. For discussion of the painting in its dialogue with cult prototypes, see Calvillo, "Authoritative copies and Divine Originals." Another subtext of the dialogue in Sebastiano's painting is the loss of the Veil of Veronica during the Sack of Rome, when it and many other religious artifacts were intentionally defamed, stolen or destroyed. Calvillo does not note the curious anamorphosis of the Veronica, a point that bears further reflection.

<sup>494</sup> See Krüger (*Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren*) whose focus is continuity between medieval images and those of Italian art in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and a shift he marks in the later painting of Caravaggio. Campbell had earlier discussed a similar idea in his characterization of a consciousness of art as "simulating surface" or "phantasmic veil of illusory life and presence." See Campbell, "Fare" 605.

within this frame. Like the iconic prototypes from which his image descends, Rosso's illusionism cultivates desire for the real seeing of God "face-to-face."<sup>495</sup>

In conclusion, while Belting locates a decisive historical shift from cult images to art precisely in the period of Rosso's painting, during the Reformation of the first decades of the 16thC, I have proposed reasons to challenge this claim. Specifically, Belting argues that in art of this period, "the new presence *of* the work succeeds the former presence of the sacred *in* the work."<sup>496</sup> But by calling attention to painting's status as illusion and the artist's hand that creates it, Rosso might be seen not to displace the cult image or its powers, but rather to appropriate and preserve these –specifically, from the threat of idolatry attendant upon viewing an iconic image of such affective power. Thus an idol of art and icon of piety exist together in a dialectical, if fragile, unity in Rosso's remarkable invention. As I have tried to show, it is the doubling of the two that gives the painting its specific power, as well as its potentially destabilizing, enigmatic, effect.<sup>497</sup> In the next chapter, we turn to a painting in which the legitimacy of this union of cult and art is implicitly interrogated, as an artwork stages an iconomachy or image debate over these tensions within the work itself.

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<sup>495</sup> Here the effects of the iconic image merge with those of Renaissance portraiture as described by Cropper, fueling desire for an absent beloved. See "The Place of Beauty in the High Renaissance," esp. 193.

<sup>496</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 459. Campbell's argument is in some agreement here, to the extent that he claims artistic simulation "seeks to displace historical and physical reality rather than merely represent it." See note above.

<sup>497</sup> For a discussion of artworks of the period that "make indeterminacy part of their rhetorical structure," merging iconographies and formats into something new, see Nagel and Lorenzo Pericolo, eds., *Subject as Aporia in Early Modern Art* (Burlington, VT.: Ashgate, 2010), esp. 2ff. Nagel sees this recontextualization particularly in the experiments of Italian artists during the Reformation.

## CHAPTER 4

### Reforming the Idol: Maarten van Heemskerck's *St. Luke and the Virgin*

#### Introduction

In *The Reformation of the Image*, Joseph Koerner demonstrated the paradoxical nature of religious images during the Reformation, as a dynamic interplay of iconoclastic and iconic impulses or “iconoclash,” in which iconophilia was both censored and preserved.<sup>498</sup> Drawing upon these insights, Chapters 4 and 5 advance them within a different realm of imagery, and toward different ends. If Koerner’s focus was the Protestant image intent on destroying or delegitimizing a Roman tradition of image-production and worship, my interest lies in works of art poised uncertainly between emerging lines of battle that would eventually divide these confessions and traditions. And while engaging Koerner’s idea of iconoclash – the slippage between making and breaking in the realm of images, I aim to retrieve an older concept from the first great epoch of image-destruction, according to which other modes of image-reformation, and their relation to the history of art, religion and early modern European thought, might be explored.<sup>499</sup>

As scholars have come to recognize, the Byzantine debates of the eighth and ninth centuries constitute the most sophisticated discussion of the nature and function of religious images of their time, and continue to offer compelling insights today. Indeed, it might be argued

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<sup>498</sup> Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) and “The Icon and Iconoclash,” in *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, eds. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Karlsruhe, Germany; Cambridge, Mass: ZKM; MIT Press, 2002), 164-213. Koerner’s focus is primarily the debate in Lutheran Germany. For recent discussion of this term in religious studies, see W. J. van Asselt, P. van Geest, D. Müller and T. Salernik eds. *Iconoclasm and Iconoclash, Struggle for Religious Identity*, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007), esp. 4-6.

<sup>499</sup> Bruno Latour has recently explored iconoclash as a model for intellectual critique more generally in “An Attempt Compositionist Manifesto,” *New Literary History* 41, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 471-490.



that an entire new and increasingly important field of image theory, *Bildanthropologie*, flows from an exploration of the iconic dimension of images first theorized during these historic debates. But whereas “iconoclasm” is usually invoked to describe the activity of this period, it is a term which in fact emerged much later in the history of the image, in the mid-sixteenth century during the Protestant Reformation.<sup>500</sup> This linguistic re-emergence indicates to some extent the relation between the two epochs. Notably, both Catholic and Protestant Reformers invoked Byzantine precedents on the image-question.<sup>501</sup> But the Byzantines themselves used a different word, one that characterizes more fully the argumentative dimension of their crisis – “iconomachy” (Greek *eikonomachia*), literally, image-struggle.<sup>502</sup> It is this sense of struggle and debate, encompassing both physical and discursive acts I aim to recover, in order to pursue new understandings of the image-wars of the Reformation.<sup>503</sup> Beyond physical violence against religious images and artifacts, or battles of image vs. text, or the tradition of cult worship vs. *sola scriptura* – the dominant frames according to which this conflict is generally viewed – I pursue lines of tension that emerge within a longer frame of struggle concerning the icon, idolatry and

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<sup>500</sup> Leslie Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm* (London, England: Bristol Classical Press, 2012), 3-4. For a detailed genealogy of this term between East and West, see the useful overview by Jan N. Bremmer, “Iconoclast, Iconoclastic, and Iconoclasm: Notes Towards a Genealogy,” *Church History & Religious Culture* 88, no. 1 (January 2008): 1-17. Bremmer, 9, notes the transmission of the rarely used word “*eikonoklastes*” (image-breaker) to the West via Anastasius’ Latin translation of Theophanes’ *Chronographia Tripartita*. Although the word “*iconoclasta*” shows up as early as 1420 in England, its variants are not adopted widely until the sixteenth-century; see page 10.

<sup>501</sup> For comparisons between the two eras of iconoclasm, see David Freedberg’s seminal article, “The Structure of Byzantine and European Iconoclasm,” in *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin, eds., (Birmingham: Center for Byzantine Studies, 1977), 165-77.

<sup>502</sup> See note 3 above.

<sup>503</sup> On the discursive aspect of Byzantine iconoclasm and an overview of the state of the field, see the important article by Jas Elsner, “Iconoclasm as Discourse: From Antiquity to Byzantium.” For recent scholarship that addresses iconoclasm in an expanded field, see note 4 above, and Boldrick, Brubaker, and Clay, *Striking Images, Iconoclasm Past and Present*; Boldrick and Clay, eds., *Iconoclasm: Contested Objects, Contested Terms* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007); James Simpson, *Under the Hammer: Iconoclasm in the Anglo-American Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Anne L. McClanan and Jeffrey Johnson, eds., *Negating the Image: Case Studies in Iconoclasm* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

works of art. To this end, rather than images that illustrate iconoclastic acts or idolatry from a critical view outside of them, my focus are artworks that stage or perform an internalized iconomachy or image-debate – from within.

### A defense of painting within painting

In a panel by van Heemskerck (1498-1574), likely composed for the guild of St. Luke in the 1550s but whose commission is unclear, a modern day saint paints a Madonna and Child from life as they pose in his studio [Fig. 4.1].<sup>504</sup> At the foot of the Virgin, a book with faintly visible images of moving figures and text in Greek – a compendium on human anatomy – lies open, along with another large volume below the saint, presumably a bible.<sup>505</sup> The evangelist-artist, who sits on a bull, his saintly attribute, is surrounded by symbols of humanist learning; notably an astrolabe and other medical treatises appear in an alcove above the Madonna's head.<sup>506</sup> In the

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<sup>504</sup> Maarten van Heemskerck, *St. Luke Madonna*, ca. 1550s, oil on panel, 205.5 x 143.5 cm., Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes. Signed *M[ar]tinus Heem[...] fecit*. For catalog entry with extensive bibliography, see Rainald Grosshans, *Maarten van Heemskerck Die Gemälde* (Berlin: Horst Boettcher Verlag: 1980), 195-201, pl. 108; Olivia Savatier Sjöholm, "Le Saint Luc peignant la Vierge du musée de Rennes," in *Heemskerck & L'humanisme: Une Œuvre À Penser, 1498-1576* (Rennes: Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes, 2010), 17-31; Francois Bergot and Sylvie Blottière, *Le Dossier d'un tableau: 'Saint Luc peignant la Vierge' de Martin van Heemskerck* (Rennes: Musée de Rennes, 1974). The painting is first recorded in 1711 as displayed in the town hall of Nurnberg (Grosshans, *Die Gemälde*, 195). As Ilja Veldman notes, an entry for the year 1550 or 1551 in the records of the Guild of St. Luke at Delft states that Heemskerck was paid for the delivery of a painting, presumably commissioned by the guild, but the Rennes painting cannot be identified as that work. Veldman, "Maarten van Heemskerck and St. Luke's Medical Books," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 7, no. 2 (1974), 98 and n. 27. See the similar assessment by Jeffrey Chipps Smith, "Netherlandish Artists and Art in Renaissance Nuremberg," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 20, no. 2/3 (1990-91), 162. Upon his return to Haarlem in 1536, Heemskerck joined the painters' guild of St. Luke and became dean in 1554.

<sup>505</sup> The treatise and books are discussed by Veldman in "St. Luke's Medical Books," 93 and more recently by William J. Schieck in "Glorious Imperfection in Heemskerck's Lukean Portraits of the Virgin," *Konsthistorisk tidskrift* 72, no.4 (2003): 287-97, which I discuss below. The book at Luke's feet is less legible. If it is a bible, it is one in which the text seems to have been effaced or diminished; if this is the case, perhaps the artist is here making a statement concerning the painted "incarnation" of the *Logos*. However, such an interpretation awaits closer inspection of the panel by this author.

<sup>506</sup> These are identified by Veldman, "St. Luke's Medical Books," 96, as works by Nikander and Dioscorides, again likely medical treatises. Veldman, 98, speculates that Heemskerck's use of these books originates from

background of this scene, a courtyard displays antique statues on pedestals and in niches along with a craftsman working on the ground among them. The scene is the courtyard of the Casa Sassi in Rome [Fig. 4.2], a venue drawn by Heemskerck during a formative sojourn twenty years earlier, to which he now returns.<sup>507</sup>

Hans Belting once described Heemskerck's panel as "a painted treatise on the theory and practice of painting" and an affirmation of the triumph of Italian art theory in particular, a view that aligns with most interpretations of this work.<sup>508</sup> Luke, the patron saint of painters, is styled as educated in the principles of art theory, skilled in the study of anatomy and painting after life.<sup>509</sup> At a meta-level, we see might see in Heemskerck's virtuoso rendering of the Madonna and Child an intensely sensuous and life-like confirmation of the artist's own mastery of these same principles.<sup>510</sup> The Madonna's anatomy is visible beneath her clothes, and the naked Christ child displays his own anatomical features to even greater effect. The exquisite coloring and

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his association with the physician and humanist, Hadrianus Junius, who was a friend and the town physician in Haarlem from 1552-1572.

<sup>507</sup> Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, pen drawing with wash, 230 X 215 mm. Signed MVan Heemskerck (M and H in monogram). Most of Heemskerck's Roman drawings are bound in two volumes now in Berlin (Inv. nos. 79 D2 and D2a). They are annotated and reproduced in a facsimile by Hülsen and H. Egger, *Die Römischen Skizzenbücher von Marten van Heemskerck in Königl. Kupferstichkabinett zu Berlin*, 2 vols. Berlin: J. Bard, 1913-16. Facsimile (Soest, Holland: Davaco, 1975). For the Casa Sassi drawing, see vol. I, 42-45 and pl. 81.

<sup>508</sup> Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago, 1994), 478, and more recently, Belting, "Macht Und Ohnmacht Der Bilder," *Historische Zeitschrift. Beihefte*, New Series, 33 *Macht und Ohnmacht der Bilder. Reformatorischer Bildersturm im Kontext der europäischen Geschichte* (Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag GmbH, 2002): 26-8. Veldman, "St. Luke's medical books," 100, also judges the painting "an exceptionally fine example of the implicit depiction of theories concerning the painter's art which, although they may have been current in Italy, were by not means common coin in the Netherlands of the day."

<sup>509</sup> On the importance of anatomy to artistic technique in works by Giorgio Vasari, Leonardo da Vinci, and Michelangelo, as probable sources for Heemskerck's affirmation of this practice, see Veldman, "St. Luke's medical books," 99.

<sup>510</sup> By contrast, Scheick sees deliberate anatomical distortions (in the feet of the Madonna and the body of the Christ child) and proposes reading these as signs by the artist of the *limits* of representing the divine. Such a reading is not incompatible with my own, which ultimately reads the painting as a defense of the iconic tradition (see below). "Glorious Imperfection," 288-89. While the feet of the Madonna are worthy of note, they were probably inspired by Michelangelo's figure of Isaiah in the Sistine ceiling; the Christ child looks much like others in Heemskerck's oeuvre.

graceful animation of the turning figures exemplify a commitment to the *maniera* of the Italian painting Heemskerck studied during his trip to Rome, when he encountered the works of Michelangelo, Giulio Romano and Raphael, among others.<sup>511</sup>

The panel also appears to stage a *paragone* between painting and sculpture or among the arts of *disegno*.<sup>512</sup> Scholars disagree as to whether the composition depicts a hierarchical or inclusive view in this regard. But there are strong reasons to see painting as triumphant. Painting's primacy is asserted in two ways that might be read in the dynamic between the scenes of the foreground and background. At the forefront of our visual attention, the humanist-artist Luke works with concentration at his craft, with an easy refinement evident in his clothes and bearing, and the delicate handling of his painter's brush. By contrast, in the courtyard behind him, an odd crouching figure, nearly naked, straddles and labors over a statue, a hammer poised above his head. The pointed comparison of craft recalls arguments for the superiority of painting over sculpture among the liberal arts, posed most famously by Leonardo da Vinci's in the *Libro di Pittura*.<sup>513</sup> The fact that Leonardo's praise of painting was formulated with Michelangelo as his imagined interlocutor is also relevant here. As we will see, the figure of the sculptor in

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<sup>511</sup> Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-boek*, Haarlem 1604, folio 245v, states that Heemskerck made drawings after Michelangelo and the antique. (For English trans., see Miedema, ed. 1994-97). On Giulio Romano and Heemskerck, see Veldman, *Maarten Van Heemskerck and Dutch Humanism in the Sixteenth Century* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1977), 32. Vasari, whom Heemskerck met during his sojourn, praises the Flemish artist for his Italianate manner, in the vita of Marc Antonio Bolognese; see Vasari, *Le Vite*.

<sup>512</sup> See the perceptive discussion by Irving Lavin in "David's Sling and Michelangelo's Bow: A Sign of Freedom," in *Past-Present Essays on Historicism in Art from Donatello to Picasso* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 43-45. Veldman, "St. Luke's Medical Books," 100, is among those scholars who see the art of printmaking also represented, in the nearly illegible image at the top left of the painting. But its inclusion seems negligible compared to the clear rendering of the other two arts.

<sup>513</sup> The so-called treatise or book on painting is a compilation of different manuscripts. For the view that "the sculptor undertakes his work with greater bodily exertion than the painter, and the painter undertakes his work with greater mental exertion," and so on, see *Codex Urbinas* 20r-21r. A good compilation in English is Martin Kemp, ed., *Leonardo on Painting* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1989), esp. 38-46.

Heemskerck's courtyard repeats an image associated with the artist.<sup>514</sup> If Michelangelo self-identified as *Scultore*, indeed *the* Sculptor to rival antiquity, Heemskerck was clearly "*Pictor*." In the frontispiece to the *Clades Judaeae Gentis*, a book of Heemskerck's drawings engraved in 1569, an inscription attached to a bust-length self-portrait among antique fragments identifies Heemskerck as the "another Apelles of our time [*alter nostri Saeculi Apelleo*]," a topos placing him within a tradition of moderns who rivaled and surpassed the ancients [Fig. 4.3].<sup>515</sup> In the Luke painting, we might see an indication of Heemskerck's rivalry with Michelangelo in this regard.<sup>516</sup>

A further argument for painting's superiority might be read in Heemskerck's inventive reuse of a statue from the background of the courtyard. Near the vanishing point of the composition, the seated antique statue in the center [Fig. 4.4, detail] is repeated in Heemskerck's figure of the Madonna.<sup>517</sup> In contrast to the monochrome statue, the painted Madonna appears vivid and life-like, attesting to painting's superiority in rendering living figures and also ones supremely beautiful, an ideal of art of the *terzà maniera*. The reference to the statue by the painter illustrates the importance of study after the antique, study that Heemskerck himself pursued assiduously in Rome, as his *Sketchbooks* from which the courtyard scene is taken

<sup>514</sup> Although Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 478, identifies the figure of the craftsman as Michelangelo, it is dressed in exotic garb rather than *all'antica*, as is generally the case, though no one to my knowledge has noted this. I discuss the significance of this below.

<sup>515</sup> Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin. Reproduced in Grosshans, pl. 161; Hülsen and Egger, *Skizzenbücher*, II, folio 1; and Ilja M Veldman, Ger Luijten, and F. W. H Hollstein, *The New Hollstein Dutch & Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, 1450-1700* (Roosendaal/The Netherlands: Koninklijke Van Poll, in co-operation with the Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 1993), no. 237.

<sup>516</sup> On the rivalry and the portrait, see M.P. Kemling, "Portrait of the Artist as Michelangelo: Maarten van Heemskerck's *Self-Portrait with the Colosseum*," *Athanor* 24 (2006): 15-21.

<sup>517</sup> For discussion, see Hülsen and Egger, *Skizzenbücher*, 43. In Heemskerck's time, the statue was thought to represent *Roma Triumphante*; it was restored in the eighteenth century as Apollo Citharoedus, and is currently in the museum in Naples. See Phyllis Bober and R. Rubenstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture. A Handbook of Sources* (London, England: H. Miller, 1986), 77f, as cited in Lavin, 'David's Sling and Michelangelo's Bow,' 45.

attests.<sup>518</sup> Heemskerck's valorization of that practice is further affirmed in his self-portrait of 1553 [Fig. 4.5]. The tripartite composition features a bust-length image of the artist juxtaposed with the even-larger ruins of the Colosseum, which one scholar perceptively describes as a "parallel ego," as a draftsman practices his craft at its base, a younger version of Heemskerck himself.<sup>519</sup> The two, plausibly contemporaneous, works – the St. Luke panel and this image – might therefore be read together as particular forms of self-portraiture, in which the practice of art as a study after the antique is visually inscribed.<sup>520</sup>

The reuse of the figure of the statue in the Madonna has long been understood in these terms.<sup>521</sup> But I would suggest there are a number of elements in its translation that open the possibility of a different reading, one that exceeds the inter-artistic dialogue which has been the focus of scholars. Broadly, Heemskerck's panel has been interpreted primarily with a view to his career as a humanist painter, much like the persona of St. Luke it depicts. The assessment of Heemskerck scholar Ilya Veldman may be taken as fairly representative in this regard:

The work of Maarten van Heemskerck occupies a special position in 16th century Netherlandish art. In addition to traditional religious themes, which he treated *as if*

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<sup>518</sup> On the Roman *Sketchbooks*, with extensive bibliography, see most recently Arthur DiFuria, "Maarten van Heemskerck's Rome: Antiquity, Memory, and the Berlin sketchbooks" (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2008).

<sup>519</sup> Oil on canvas, 42.2 x 54 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England, Inv. 103; Grosshans, pl. 112. See the suggestive essay by Helmut Puff, "Self-Portrait with Ruins: Maarten van Heemskerck, 1553," *Germanic Review* 86, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 262-76; on the "parallel ego," 263; and Arthur DiFuria, "Remembering the Eternal in 1553: Maarten van Heemskerck in Self-Portrait Before the Colosseum," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, no. 59 (2010): 91-108.

<sup>520</sup> Puff, "Self-Portrait with Ruins," 267-68. DiFuria, "Self-Portrait Before the Colosseum," rightly interprets the image as an advertisement of the artist's Italianate style and specific expertise in topographic studies of Rome, motivated by commercial reasons during a period when such expertise was in demand by Netherlandish clients.

<sup>521</sup> Against this canonical reading and particularly Veldman's view, Scheick questions whether the Madonna's odd feet and the body of the Christ child are deliberate distortions on the part of Heemskerck by which he is "interrogating the limits of representing divine subjects," in "Glorious Imperfection," 288-90. See note 14 above. While this is worth considering in the context of the present study, other aspects of his argument – such as the idea that the worn state of the treatise at the Madonna's feet indicate possible frustration with it on the part of the artist, are less convincing; additionally, the article is plagued by a number of mistakes.

*unaffected by the Reformation*, Heemskerck's oeuvre is remarkable for the many subjects of a humanistic nature.<sup>522</sup> [*it. mine*]

While not denying a humanistic reading of Heemskerck's Luke-Madonna and of his artistic practice, the painting's likely production in the 1550s – during a period of intense debate concerning iconoclasm in his resident city of Haarlem, as religious images were being destroyed elsewhere, is surely significant, as I will attempt to show.<sup>523</sup> Moreover, regarding Heemskerck's humanism, there are reasons to question an easy separation of its practice from the religious image-debates of the period, given the highly influential example of Erasmus, as well as myriad lesser-known figures with similar inclinations within Heemskerck's milieu.<sup>524</sup>

### **Humanism, iconoclasm and the Reformation**

Despite the testimony of the great historian of Flemish and Dutch art, Karel van Mander, who described and condemned the iconoclasm that resulted in the loss of so many works, few scholars have considered the relation between the Dutch artist Heemskerck and the Reformation

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<sup>522</sup> Veldman, "Maarten van Heemskerck and Hadrianus Junius: the relationship between a painter and a humanist," *Simiolus: Netherlands quarterly for the History of Art* 7, no.1 (1974), 35, 9, n8. See also Veldman's later gloss on the issue, "Maarten van Heemskercks visie op het geloof," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 35, no. 3 (1987): 193-210, with summary in English at 267-79.

<sup>523</sup> As another indication of Heemskerck's interest in contemporary issues, we might adduce his series on Charles V on the Sack of Rome of 1527. Indeed it might be argued that the violence of the Sack, at the hands of German *Landsknechte* and Spanish soldiers, constituted a preview of Reformation iconoclasm in the Netherlands, as countless religious and artistic treasures were destroyed. I discuss Heemskerck's image below.

<sup>524</sup> On this point, I am indebted to David Freedberg's illuminating discussion, "Art and iconoclasm, 1525-1580: The case of the Northern Netherlands," in *Kunst voor de beeldenstorm*, W. Th. Kloek, Willy Halsema-Kubes, and Reinier Baarsen, eds., (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1986), 69-84, esp. 69 and 80. I take this up in more detail below. See also David Cast, "Marten van Heemskerck's 'Momus Criticizing the Works of the Gods': A Problem of Erasmian Iconography," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 7, no. 1 (1974): 22-34. On Erasmus' views on art, Erwin Panofsky's "Erasmus and the visual arts," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 32 (1969): 200-27 is a useful overview. It is worth recalling that 'humanist' reuse of pagan motifs was often condemned as a form of "spiritual idolatry" and therefore was not separate from the controversy of the Reformation. See for example Louis Richeome, *L'idolatrie huguenote figurée* ....(Lyon: Pierre Rigaud, 1608), a2r and passim. Cited by Michael Cole, "Perpetual Exorcism in Rome," in *The Idol in the Age of Art: Objects, Devotions and the Early Modern World* Cole, ed. Rebecca Zorach (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 5.

turmoil unfolding around him.<sup>525</sup> But as Peter Parshall claimed in a seminal essay, “the question cannot be whether such a relationship existed, but rather what that relationship was.”<sup>526</sup> In conjunction with an exhibition of art and iconoclasm in the Netherlands from 1525-1580, David Freedberg demonstrated the thoroughgoing involvement of artists of this period with the struggle over images that erupted in the events of 1566 and their aftermath. He further noted a high degree of “critical self-consciousness” in this period concerning the status of art and its place in society.<sup>527</sup> With regard to Heemskerck in particular, Freedberg described a divide within the artist’s works (and possibly self) over these issues that warrants further investigation.<sup>528</sup> Yet to a great degree, scholarship has focused on art only after the watershed events of 1566. Eleanor Saunders had earlier drawn attention to Heemskerck’s close relation to prominent liberals active in the government in Haarlem on this issue, notably Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert (1522 – 1590),

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<sup>525</sup> Eleanor Saunders noted this lack of attention in her important article, “A Commentary on Iconoclasm in Several Print Series by Maarten van Heemskerck,” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 10, no. 2 (1978), 59, discussed below. Along with the exhibition of 1986, a special issue of the *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* (note 26 above) was dedicated to this question, with especially pertinent and compelling contributions by Peter Parshall, David Freedberg and Ilja Veldman which I will discuss in more detail in the next version of this paper. Scheick interprets both versions of the Luke-Madonna as registering a concern with the image question and the problem of representing the divine in the context of Reformation iconoclasm, in “Glorious Imperfection,” esp. 291-93. Other studies which engage this question include Horst Bredekamp, “Maarten van Heemskercks Bildersturmzyklen als Angriffe auf Rom,” in *Bilder und Bildersturm im Spätmittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Bob Scribner (Otto Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 1990), 203-47, also discussed below. Important early studies include Freedberg, “Art and iconoclasm, 1525-1580,” 69-84; *Iconoclasm and Painting in The Netherlands, 1566-1609* (New York: Garland, 1988), 244-45; “The problem of images in Northern Europe and its repercussions,” in *Hafnia: Copenhagen Papers in the History of Art*, (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, Institute of Art History, 1976), 25-45, esp. 35-7; and Keith P.F. Moxey, “Pieter Aertsen, Joachim Beuckelaer and the rise of secular painting in the context of the Reformation” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1974); Moxey, “Reflections on some unusual subjects in the work of Pieter Aertsen,” *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 18 (1976), pp. 70-76; Karel van Mander’s *Het Schilder-boeck* of 1604 describes in detail the many losses of art due to iconoclasm, including innumerable works by Heemskerck. For van Mander’s condemnation of Reformation iconoclasm, as well as the loss of Heemskerck’s art to the Spanish, see Freedberg, “Art and Iconoclasm,” esp. 76-8.

<sup>526</sup> Peter Parshall, “Kunst en reformatie in de Noordelijke Nederlanden – enkele gezichtspunten,” in *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 35, no.3 (1987), 165.

<sup>527</sup> Freedberg, “Art and iconoclasm, 1525-1580,” 69-84 and “Aertsen, Heemskerck en de crisis van de kunst in de Nederlanden,” *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 35, no.3 (1987), 272.

<sup>528</sup> Freedberg, “Aertsen, Heemskerck en de crisis van de kunst in de Nederlanden,” 272.



Heemskerck's collaborator on prints from ca. 1547 onwards. Coornhert publicly condemned the violent iconoclasm occurring in other cities, effectively preserving Haarlem from a similar fate.<sup>529</sup> Though we lack direct written testimony of the precise contours of Heemskerck's own religious convictions as a Catholic in the Netherlands, the complexity of his response to the controversies of his time might be seen in the works he produced, when placed within the context of this evidence.<sup>530</sup>

In addition to his religious paintings and drawings after the antique, Heemskerck directed considerable energy toward the production of approximately 300 drawings of Old Testament scenes, which were engraved by artists such as Hieronymous Cock (1510-1570), Philips Galle (1537-1612) and Cornelis Cort (1533-1578).<sup>531</sup> Taken as a whole, the series constitutes the largest group of works of their time devoted to these scenes outside the tradition of biblical illustration.<sup>532</sup> Notably, Heemskerck's approach to these compositions – as typological forms that view the present through the past, differ significantly from the historical reportage of contemporary artists such as Frans Hogenberg (1535-1590) or the allegories of Marcus Gheerarts, the Elder (c. 1520 – c. 1590).<sup>533</sup> Within Heemskerck's milieu, such engagements were sites of moralizing critique across media – from the writings of Erasmus, to paintings by humanist contemporaries Pieter Aertsen and Quentin Massys, and popular plays.<sup>534</sup> What makes

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<sup>529</sup> Saunders, "Commentary on Iconoclasm," 69-71.

<sup>530</sup> Saunders, "Commentary on Iconoclasm," 60.

<sup>531</sup> For the most in-depth study of these, see Saunders, "Old Testament Subjects in the Prints of Maarten van Heemskerck: 'Als een Clare Spiegele der tegenwoordige Tijden'" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1978).

<sup>532</sup> Saunders, "Commentary on Iconoclasm," 62.

<sup>533</sup> Saunders, "Commentary on Iconoclasm," 59. As *comparanda*, see Hogenberg's engraving for Michael Aitsinger's *De leone Belgico* (Cologne 1588) and Gheeraerts *Allegory of Iconoclasm* (c.1566–68). For a brilliant discussion of the *Allegory*, see Koerner, "The Icon and Iconoclasm," 164-6.

<sup>534</sup> Saunders, "Commentary on Iconoclasm," 62.

them distinctive is that Heemskerck's ideological position in these works, while seemingly critical of idolatry, is less easily subject to definition, for reasons we will now explore.

The drawings of biblical scenes that depict the violent destruction of pagan idols function as a site of displacement of the image question and contemporary concerns regarding idolatry and iconoclasm onto scenes of the past.<sup>535</sup> Given the emphasis on the Bible in the Reformation with regard to the controversy over images, these historic reimaginations would have held an extra charge. Exemplary in this regard is a series of drawings that depict the apocryphal story of Daniel and the destruction of the Babylonian idol, Bel, along with his temple and priests (*Dan.* 14:2-21).<sup>536</sup> According to the story, King Cyrus asked Daniel to worship Bel as a "living" god, since he appeared to eat and drink each day. Daniel refused, replying that Bel was not living but merely an idol made of clay, covered by bronze. He reveals to the King the deception according to which Bel was made to seem alive by the priests, after which Bel, the Temple, and the priests are destroyed. Heemskerck's 1564 depiction of Bel's destruction, preserved in an engraving by Galle from 1565 [Fig. 4.6], just a year before the momentous iconoclasm in the Netherlands, serves to introduce the complexity with which this highly-charged subject was negotiated by the artist.<sup>537</sup> On a surface reading, the image appears to provide a strong parallel for the iconoclasm of Heemskerck's day, for the Reformers often drew upon the biblical injunction against idols in

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<sup>535</sup> Although Saunders, "Commentary on Iconoclasm," 60, does not use the language of displacement, her reading accords with this view. As Freedberg, "The Problem of Images," 35, notes, the prints "come very close to representing (in pictorial representation alone) a biblical version of contemporary iconoclasm."

<sup>536</sup> See Saunders, "A Commentary on Iconoclasm," 63 and discussion by Bredekamp, "Bildersturmzyklen als Angriffe auf Rom," 204-205. On Heemskerck's invention and its reproduction in stained glass, see Jeremy D. Bangs in "Maerten van Heemskerck's Bel and the Dragon and Iconoclasm," *Renaissance Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (Spring, 1977): 8-11. The story is not part of the Protestant canon, but was included in the King James Version.

<sup>537</sup> Engraving from *The Story of Daniel, Bel and the Dragon*, plate 6, 20.3 x 25 cm. Heemskerck made preparatory studies for the *History of Bel and the dragon*, engraved the following year for the Antwerp editor Hieronymus Cock; Saunders, "A Commentary on Iconoclasm," 63.

their critique of the Roman cult of images.<sup>538</sup> As an indication of the close association in Heemskerck's time between the Bel story and Reformation controversy, we might note that in 1533, a Chamber of Rhetoricians in Amsterdam was censured for performing a play based upon the Bel story. Presumably because it was interpreted as critical of the Roman church, they were forced to undertake a pilgrimage to Rome as reparation.<sup>539</sup>

Certain details in the composition of the drawing suggest an alignment on the part of the artist with the Reformers. For example, the priests of Bel wear what appears to be monks' clothing and are tonsured, suggesting an anti-monastic theme.<sup>540</sup> Moreover, Heemskerck's drawings visualize idolatry as a gross abuse and deception, so that iconoclasm that is depicted seems justified.<sup>541</sup> Yet other subtleties in the scene's composition trouble reading them straightforwardly in an iconoclastic vein.<sup>542</sup> Saunders, who has undertaken an extensive study of the biblical series as a whole, notes that the destruction of idols and temples depicted in these scenes is always carried out with a king and his priests or a prophet directing the events.<sup>543</sup> As this is a curious detail without biblical foundation, its inclusion seems significant.<sup>544</sup> She reads this as a subtle commentary by Heemskerck on the practice of image-destruction: that it be undertaken only by the proper authorities, with Church and State acting in harmony; that is to say, in much the same way advocated by Coornhert in Haarlem.<sup>545</sup> Whether such a position brings Heemskerck closer to Catholic or Protestant views concerning iconoclasm, however,

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<sup>538</sup> For example, John Calvin's *A homily against peril of idolatry* (London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1873), part I. See also discussion in Freedberg, "Art and iconoclasm," 69-72. Chipps Smith, "Netherlandish Artists and Art in Renaissance Nuremberg," 10, also notes this point.

<sup>539</sup> Freedberg, "Art and iconoclasm," 71.

<sup>540</sup> Chipps Smith, "Netherlandish Artists and Art in Renaissance Nuremberg," 9.

<sup>541</sup> Freedberg, "Art and iconoclasm," 79.

<sup>542</sup> Freedberg, "Art and iconoclasm," 79-80.

<sup>543</sup> Saunders, *Old Testament Subjects in the Prints of Maarten van Heemskerck*.

<sup>544</sup> Saunders, "A Commentary on Iconoclasm," 67.

<sup>545</sup> Saunders, "A Commentary on Iconoclasm," 80.

remains unclear. While agreeing with Saunders, we might question whether a dichotomy between confessions does justice to the Erasmian humanism of Dutch culture with which Heemskerck was plausibly allied.<sup>546</sup> Rather than closure on the question of Heemskerck's religious convictions, these images open further lines of question on this issue.<sup>547</sup>

### **The statue as idol and art**

As we will see, a further set of connections between these biblical scenes and other works by Heemskerck reflect a broader and ongoing engagement with the themes of idolatry and iconoclasm, both in the past and present. Building upon the observations of Freedberg and Saunders, Horst Bredekamp proposed reading the Bel series with a view towards Heemskerck's formation and artistic production in Rome rather than in Haarlem. Specifically, Bredekamp engages the themes of idolatry and iconoclasm within the cult and culture of ruins Heemskerck encountered during his visit of 1532-36.<sup>548</sup> Within this frame, another illuminating dimension of the image of the destruction of Bel might be seen: it is one in a series that render biblical idols as Greco-Roman antiquities, many of which repeat motifs from Heemskerck's Roman *Sketchbooks*. By engaging iconoclasm in this expanded field – to include the ruined monuments of antiquity from which the artist derived inspiration, Bredekamp draws the following conclusion. For Heemskerck, there is a hierarchy of image-destruction, according to which iconoclasm by God or Nature is granted the greatest legitimacy. The violence wrought by humans only accelerates what will occur in any case, with time.<sup>549</sup> Thus he sees Heemskerck adopting a wider view of the

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<sup>546</sup> See notes 26 and 28 above.

<sup>547</sup> Freedberg, "Art and Iconoclasm," 80.

<sup>548</sup> Bredekamp, "Bilderstrumzyklen als Angriffe auf Rom," 203-47.

<sup>549</sup> See Bredekamp, "Bilderstrumzyklen als Angriffe auf Rom," 16: "Vor diesem römischen Erfahrungshintergrund stellte sich das Problem der Bewertung des Ikonoklasmus durch van Heemskerck

iconoclasm of his day, through the lens of his experience of ruins in Rome. In the form of the ruin [*Ruinenform*], pagan statues and other antiquities, which formerly were subjects of idolatry, develop their “inherent artistic and philosophical dimension” [*die ihnen eigene künstlerische und philosophische Dimension*].<sup>550</sup> With regard to this aestheticizing process, whereby the ruin is cleansed of its dangerous pagan associations and powers, we might invoke similar claims by Aby Warburg concerning the *Nachleben* of antiquity in Renaissance art.<sup>551</sup> As compelling as this argument is, however, one wonders whether Heemskerck’s deployment of these fragments, in addition to scenes of violent destruction and ruination, might be “neutralized” in this way. Heemskerck’s emphatic representation of cataclysmic violence, as particularly evident in the *Clades Judææ Gentis* series, suggests an awareness of the fragility of civilization itself at a time of anxiety concerning Papal and Imperial threats in both Italy and the Netherlands.<sup>552</sup>

To pursue the possibility of a critical attitude in these works, let us examine the substitution of Roman motifs for biblical idols in more detail. There is a nexus of relation between legends of antiquity, antique remains, and Heemskerck’s imaginative depictions in these Old Testament scenes. Observing more closely the broken remains of Bel after the idol’s dismantling [Fig. 4.7, detail], we see that the torso is borrowed from Heemskerck’s drawing of

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neu. Auf Saunders wäre zu antworten, das für van Heemskerck nicht die Obrigkeit, sondern Gott selbst in Form der natürlichen Zerstörung der höchste, legitime Ikonoklast ist. Auch menschlicher Bildersturm konnte demnach gottgefällig sein.”

<sup>550</sup> Bredekamp, “Bilderstrumzyklen als Angriffe auf Rom,” 216.

<sup>551</sup> Bredekamp’s view is indebted to the seminal work of Christ of Thoenes. See especially “St. Peter as Ruins: On some *vedute* by Heemskerck,” reprinted in Michael Cole, ed., *Sixteenth-Century Italian Art*, (Malden, MA; Oxford, UK; Victoria, Aus: Blackwell, 2006), 25-39.

<sup>552</sup> On the *Clades* series, see the excellent article by DiFuria, “Self-Fashioning and Ruination in a Print Series by Maerten van Heemskerck,” in *Culture figurative a confronto tra Fiandre e Italia dal XV al XVII secolo: Atti del convegno internazionale Nord/Sud. Ricezioni Fiamminghe al di qua delle Alpi. Prospettive di studio e indagini tecniche*, eds. M. Galassi and A. De Floriani (Milan: Cinisello Balsamo, 2008), 117 – 25, esp. 120 & 127. DiFuria’s argument here accords with similar concerns regarding cultural preservation I take up in the context of the *Sala di Costantino*; see discussion below.

antique sculpture (and Michelangelo's *Bacchus*) in the Garden of the Casa Galli [Fig. 4.8].<sup>553</sup>

Among the dismembered parts of the idol, the left hand holding an orb depicts a fragment still preserved today in the Capitol.<sup>554</sup> During the Renaissance, the hand was thought to belong to a colossal idol of Apollo, parts of which Heemskerck also drew.<sup>555</sup> The idol Apollo was thought to be located in the Colosseum, which figures in the history of idolatry and Christian iconoclasm: the ancient structure was believed to be covered with a dome decorated inside with astrological works that could lead recently converted Christians away from religion.<sup>556</sup> The destruction of both the roof of the Colosseum and its idol is attributed to St. Sylvester's verbal battle with the pagan statue.<sup>557</sup> Notably, Heemskerck's rendering of the temple of Bel, with its similar round shape and open-air setting, recalls this post-iconoclastic structure,.

At the engraving's bottom right, the decapitated visage of Bel repeats an earlier drawing by Heemskerck from the *Sketchbooks*: the head of the *Laocoön* sculpture, one of the most valued antiquities in Renaissance Rome and source of artistic emulation [Fig. 4.9].<sup>558</sup> In its transposition to the biblical scene, the head of the priest Laocoön is singled out for particular abuse: it is

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<sup>553</sup> Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin, *Skizzenbucher*, 79D2, vol. II, fol. 72r; also noted by Bangs, "Bel and the Dragon of Iconoclasm," 10.

<sup>554</sup> As observed by Bangs, "Bel and the Dragon of Iconoclasm," 10. But another possible source for the colossal hand with an orb is Heemskerck's drawing of Phidias' sculpture of Zeus/Jupiter, part of a series of the Seven Wonders of the World, reproduced in Grosshans, pl. 221. Given the reuse of Jupiter throughout Heemskerck's works, the connection is worth further investigation.

<sup>555</sup> Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin, *Skizzenbucher* 79D2, fol. 53v. See Bangs, "Bel and the Dragon of Iconoclasm," 10; also noted by Bredekamp, "Bilderstrumzyklen als Angriffe auf Rom," 210.

<sup>556</sup> Bangs, "Bel and the Dragon of Iconoclasm," 10.

<sup>557</sup> As recorded by John Capgrave, *Ye Solace of Pilgrimes, A Description of Rome, circa A.D. 1450*, ed. C.A. Mills (London: Oxford, 1911), 33-6. Cited by Bangs, "Bel and the Dragon of Iconoclasm," 10. Another image of destruction of a temple, whose roof is in the process of being destroyed, is Phillip Galle's engraving of Heemskerck's *Destruction of the Temple of Astarte*, no. 5 in the series *History of Josias*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

<sup>558</sup> Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin, *Skizzenbuch*, 79D2, vol. II, fol. 39r.

subject not only to dismantling but to scatological desecration [Fig. 4.7, detail].<sup>559</sup> What characterizes the reuse of the motif here is arguably more than artistic imitation or emulation; it is also a *translatio* by which its status is called into question. In the substitution of the famed *Laocoön* for the depicted idol, the words of Heemskerck's Dutch compatriot, Pope Adrian VI (1522-23) come to mind. When shown the *Laocoön*, the "barbarian Dutchman," vilified by Giorgio Vasari and Italian humanists such as Piero Valeriano as a bitter foe of the arts, comparable to the Goths, the Pope responded "*sunt idola antiquorum*."<sup>560</sup> Given Heemskerck's admiration not only for the sculptures Adrian is reported to have despised, but also for artists such as Giulio Romano, whom the Pope nearly "destroyed," the possible resonance with the Pope's words is a curious one.<sup>561</sup> A further, close connection between Heemskerck and Adrian may be drawn by way of Adrian's court artist, Jan van Scorel (1495-1562), with whom Heemskerck earlier studied.<sup>562</sup> Once again, these connections raise a question regarding the artist's view of the statue/idol and the iconoclasm of his time.<sup>563</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> The scatological desecration prefigures that of *sans culottes* towards monuments destroyed in the French Revolution.

<sup>560</sup> For Adrian's attitudes towards art, see the excellent essay by Sheryl Reiss, "Adrian VI, Clement VII, and Art," in *The Pontificate of Clement VII: History, Politics, Culture*, Kenneth Gouwens and Sheryl E. Reiss, eds., (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005), 339-62. There was a concern that Adrian would enact an iconoclasm similar to Pope Gregory's (which I take up below): "*Et essendoli ancora mostrato in Belvedere il tonte per una cosa eccellente, et mirabile, disse 'Sunt idola antiquorum' .... Di modo che dubito molto un di [sic] non faccia quell che dice haver fatto già San Gregorio....*" *Lettere di principi*, i: c.96r; Reiss, 347 and n41. Vasari, in his *Life* of Giulio da Sangallo, criticized Adrian in the harshest terms, comparing his campaign against art to the iconoclasm at the hands of the Goths: "all the arts and talents were so crushed down that if the governance of the Apostolic See had remained long in his hands, that fate would have come upon Rome that fell upon her on another occasion, when all the statues saved from the destruction of the Goths...were condemned to be burned." See citation and discussion in Reiss, 340.

<sup>561</sup> Vasari, in the *Life* of Giulio Romano (du Vere, 1996) vol. 2: 120-21, writes that Giulio [Romano], Giovanfrancesco and all other excellent craftsmen, almost perished and were dispersed, but Pope Adrian's timely death and replacement by Giulio de'Medici saves them and all the arts of design in a single day.

<sup>562</sup> For Scorel as court painter under Adrian, see Reiss, "Adrian VI," 351-353, with bibliography, and note 65.

<sup>563</sup> See discussion of Heemskerck and Adrian in Bredekamp, "Bilderstrumzyklen als Angriffe auf Rom," 213-14.

In sum, when ranged against Heemskerck's "humanist" works of drawings after the antique, the biblical scenes register an ambiguous view of the statue, in its double potential for idolatry and positive, artistic emulation. By extension, the interplay of substitutions in these works also renders Heemskerck's attitude towards iconoclastic destruction less than clear. The fallen and broken idols look very much like the antique fragments in Rome the artist depicted in a similar state of tumble-down decay, at times perhaps ironically, but also with seeming affection and great care. So powerful was the association of these ruined fragments with Heemskerck, whether as a "parallel ego" or a source of artistic emulation, that his self-portrait from his book of *Inventions* depicts him as an antique bust nestled among them [Fig. 4.3].<sup>564</sup>

Further ambiguity regarding the statue/idol is brought out in another work, Heemskerck's *Landscape with the Good Samaritan* (1550) [Fig. 4.10], so-named because a scene at bottom right appears to depict the biblical story within a view of the Roman countryside.<sup>565</sup> Ernst Gombrich once drew attention to a strange detail in this painting: in the center, a Pope and his entourage are retrieving, by means of a winch, a giant statue of Jove/Jupiter buried in the ground.<sup>566</sup> The very same statue figures in the background of the Luke painting; in addition, the image is reprised in several of the artist's compositions, including a print of *The Children of Mercury* [Fig. 4.11] and another landscape, now only preserved by a photograph.<sup>567</sup> Gombrich questioned whether the depiction of this archaeological activity in the *Good Samaritan*

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<sup>564</sup> See note 23 above and discussion by Bredekamp, "Bilderstrumzyklen als Angriffe auf Rom," 216: "Auf der rechten Seite des Titelblattes der Clades-Serie weisen die gestürzten Werke der Antike auf das Selbstportrait des Künstlers, dessen reflexiver Gestus die Botschaft der ruinösen Antike auch hier nichts als ein Modell der Vanitas, sondern als ein Konzentrat der schöpferischen."

<sup>565</sup> Reproduced in Grosshans, pl 88.

<sup>566</sup> Ernst Gombrich, "Archaeologists or Pharisees? Reflections on a Painting by Maarten van Heemskerck," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 54 (1991): 253-56; see also interpretation by Bredekamp, "Bilderstrumzyklen als Angriffe auf Rom," 213.

<sup>567</sup> Grosshans, pl.219 and pl.89, respectively. See Gombrich, "Archaeologists or Pharisees?" 9.



effectively constituted an indictment or an affirmation of the papacy. Was it an act of rescue akin to the Samaritan's or of wrongful attention to a work of art? In reflecting upon this question, Gombrich rightly suggests that Heemskerck's humanism "need not exclude a certain ambivalence towards the cult of ancient statues."<sup>568</sup> Another enigmatic landscape, which scholars have interpreted as a depiction of the Golden Age in Rome, merits comparative investigation in this regard.<sup>569</sup> Above this otherwise "neutral" scene of pagan frivolity, unidentified figures, riding on a storm cloud, appear poised to assert their wrath on the "idolaters" below.

A final work may be added to our consideration of Heemskerck on iconoclasm, before pursuing this subject with respect to the Luke panel. This is his drawing of the Sack of Rome of 1527, part of a series celebrating the triumphs of Emperor Charles V [*Divi Caroli V Imperatoris...victoriae*], engraved by Theodore Galle (1571-1633) [Fig. 4.12].<sup>570</sup> Arriving to the city just five years after that catastrophic event, Heemskerck must have been fully aware of the trauma from which the city was only slowly recovering, and the tremendous artistic losses in its wake. Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), whom Heemskerck met during his visit to Rome, wrote extensively on its deleterious effects, which the papal official Marcello Alberini described as turning the city into a "sacred ruin" [*sacra ruina*].<sup>571</sup> Insofar as Protestant invective concerning

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<sup>568</sup> Gombrich, "Archaeologists or Pharisees?" 284. He adduces the example of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who condemned the paganism he encountered in Rome, as evident in his sermon on the expulsion of Venus, prompted by reflections on the famed collection of antiquities in the Belvedere Garden at the Vatican. G. F. Pico della Mirandola, *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, Rome 1513; cited in Gombrich, 285, note 14. See also Ulrich von Hutten's diatribe on the pagan iniquities of Rome of the same period, also excerpted in Gombrich, 285.

<sup>569</sup> Grosshans, pl. 89. Noted by Gombrich, although he does not interpret the storm clouds. "Archaeologists or Pharisees?" 253-54.

<sup>570</sup> See André Chastel: "The destruction wrought by the *landsknechte* in the shrines of Rome itself was minor compared with the iconoclastic fervor that swept central Europe from the early 1520s." See Chastel, *The Sack of Rome, 1527* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 58. For the prints, see Bart Rosier, "The Victories of Charles V: A Series of Prints by Maarten van Heemskerck, 1555-56," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 20, no. 1 (1990 - 1991): 24-38.

<sup>571</sup> Quoted in Puff, "Self-Portrait with Ruins," 269.

Rome as the new “Babylon” fueled the violence against religious artifacts and persons, including artists whom Heemskerck emulated, the Sack must have been a preview for Heemskerck of the Reformation iconoclasm to come.<sup>572</sup> His depiction of the event is interesting in this regard. Notably free of violence, it is envisioned instead as a tense moment of confrontation, but not between persons, as we should expect. At the base of the fortress of Hadrian where the Pope is imprisoned, the invading German *Landsknechte* direct their attention to statues of Peter and Paul that stand guard at its entrance. Here the statues on their pedestals, a common formula for the idol, are clearly meant to be “idolatrous” for the implied viewer. But from another point of view, they also register a commanding authority and disdain for their invaders, as well as animation, as if alive.

Taken together, these examples begin to sketch the complexity of Heemskerck’s position as a Catholic artist and humanist who valorized the study of the antique but nonetheless grappled with the potential of the statue for idolatry and with the image-violence of his day. In these multivalent, imaginative compositions, grounded in his experience of both *Roma eterna* and the more problematic Rome of the Reformation, the past becomes a lens through which to view the present and vice-versa. With regard to the inherent ambiguity of *The Good Samaritan*, Gombrich did not, in the end, attempt to define Heemskerck’s position in doctrinal terms. But he believed this might be possible upon the basis of further textual evidence.<sup>573</sup>

Given the ambiguity of many of Heemskerck’s works, which often resist explanation in terms of patrons or implied viewers, we might wonder whether it is indeed possible to adjudicate

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<sup>572</sup> On Rome as Babylon, see the seminal work by Chastel, *The Sack of Rome, 1527*; also Charles T. Davis, “Rome and Babylon in Dante,” in *Rome in the Renaissance: The City and the Myth, Papers of the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, State University of New York at Binghamton*, ed. P. A. Ramsey (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1982), 19-40.

<sup>573</sup> Gombrich, “Archaeologists or Pharisees?” 256.

Heemskerck's position on these matters. Rather than force such adjudication here, I want to further pursue the possibility that his works function as sites of internalized debate or iconomachy concerning them. As a prolific and accomplished painter of altarpieces, Heemskerck clearly had a profound personal stake in safeguarding the tradition of religious images from the iconoclasm of the Reformation.<sup>574</sup> But his works also register a persistent concern with idolatry, suggesting an awareness of the complicated status of the religious image as historically continuous with a pagan past and its practices, a complexity I will now further unfold.

### **Reforming the statue/idol: iconomachy on the stage of painting**

Even among scholars attendant to these ambiguities, the consideration of tensions in Heemskerck's artistic production have focused primarily on his biblical works. With regard to his religious paintings, which were commissioned primarily by Catholic patrons, Freedberg expressed a canonical view when he described them as "marvellous stylistic innovations...[but] doctrinally and thematically sound."<sup>575</sup> While not denying this assessment, I would like to put pressure on this view. To address the issue of iconoclasm and idolatry with regard to the 1550s panel, we might begin by comparing it to an earlier version of a Luke-Madonna painted by Heemskerck in 1532, before he left for Rome [Fig. 4.13].<sup>576</sup> Commissioned by the guild of St. Luke as an altarpiece for the church of St. Bavo, where he became *Keerkmeester* or deacon in

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<sup>574</sup> Saunders provides additional evidence, which I have yet to assess, to argue that Heemskerck "accepted many controversial aspects of Catholic practice and that he undoubtedly did not support a position inimical to church art." See "A Commentary on Iconoclasm," 77.

<sup>575</sup> Freedberg, "Art and iconoclasm," 79.

<sup>576</sup> Oil on panel, 168 cm x 235 cm, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, cat. 18; Grosshans, pl. 19 and 108-16 for bibliography and discussion. Scheick compares the two panels according to different strategies of representing divinity, in "Glorious Imperfection."

1553,<sup>577</sup> the painting is almost parodic in its celebratory, syncretic assimilation of pagan figures and motifs to holy figures.<sup>578</sup> In comparing the two paintings, Veldman noted the substitution of poetic *furor* as Luke's inspiration in the early version, by treatises and other evidence of scientific learning in the latter.<sup>579</sup> There are other iconographic shifts we could point to as well. The bull upon which Luke sits in the later portrait was earlier represented in pictorial form, as the *Rape of Europa*, the subject of another painting by the artist. The figures in the 1550s panel are also more austere. Rather than a Netherlandish painter, St. Luke has been reenvisioned as a kind of priest-humanist, in dress similar to a Roman cleric's. Whether the later picture is more "Catholic" or not, it has been "Romanized" in certain respects.<sup>580</sup> How we are to square the look of the tonsured and cassocked saint with the similarly dressed idolators of the Bel scene, however, is not altogether clear.

Beyond these iconographic substitutions, there is another significant change between the two versions. Scholars have noted the careful perspectival structure of the painting, which reflects Heemskerck's mastery of the artistic principles celebrated in the work.<sup>581</sup> While the earlier composition is rendered on one plane, the latter version is marked by a separation of foreground and background scenes. We might observe that in the background of the later composition, the pagan statues stand at a clearly defined remove from the Christian figures, and are also less vivid. Rendered in monochrome, they appear to inhabit a different ontological

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<sup>577</sup> K. van Mander, *Het Schilderboek*, f. 247r. Cited in DiFuria, "Remembering the Eternal," 93.

<sup>578</sup> Apparently the panel is derided as a product of a youthful artist imitating Italian style, by Bengt Cnattingius, *Maerten van Heemskerck's St. Lawrence Altarpiece in Linköping Cathedral: Studies in its Mannerist Style* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1973), 49.

<sup>579</sup> Veldman, "St. Luke's Medical Books," 99.

<sup>580</sup> On Netherlandish "Romanism," outside the context of this painting, see DiFuria, "Remembering the Eternal," 105, note 11.

<sup>581</sup> See Bergot and Sylvie Blottière's *Le dossier d'un tableau*, which provides an overlapping transparency to make visible this perspectival arrangement.

realm, as if already part of the historic past.<sup>582</sup> The statues are also displayed in niches and pedestals, replicating their display in the Casa Sassi, as if to emphasize their status as a collection, that is to say, as works of art rather than of religion. Here we might compare a similar drawing from Heemskerck's *Sketchbooks* of the collection of Cardinal Valle, with a subtitle that describes his "preservation" of antiquities [Fig. 4.14].<sup>583</sup> Projecting further forward in history, the sequestering of these statues in the background forecasts the movement of troublesome images into the neutralized precinct of the museum, an effect of the Reformation iconoclasm to come.<sup>584</sup>

To return to the 1550s panel and its repetition of the figure of antiquity as the holy Madonna: the differently instantiated figures – sculptural and painted, old and new – suggest a dialogue or dialectic between them. As noted earlier, there is an inter-pictorial argument at work concerning the superior powers of painting to render its subjects more life-like. In the context of Luke's act of painting the Madonna, the differing capacities of painting and sculpture extends also to the distinction between icons and pagan statues. The reuse of the figure implies continuity between them, but perhaps also hierarchy and supersession. This comparison takes on additional, more-highly charged meaning when considered within a longer religious debate concerning the "dead" statue/idol (Bel) and the "living" image or icon. In other words, returning to the *primary* subject matter of the painting and not just its allegorical meaning, we should recall that it is not only painting and its animating powers that are celebrated in Heemskerck's panel, but first and

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<sup>582</sup> On Heemskerck's careful use of foreground and background perspective in his drawings of the construction of the new St. Peter's amidst the ruins of the old, see Thoenes, "St. Peter as Ruins: On some *vedute* by Heemskerck." A similar attention to powerful changes effected by altering foreground and background in perspective, within the context of the post-Reformation church-scapes of Pieter Sanredam, including Heemskerck's Bavokerk, is brilliantly explored by Celeste Brusati in "Reforming Idols and Viewing History in Pieter Saenredam's Perspectives," in Cole and Zorach, *The Idol in the Age of Art: Objects, Devotions and the Early Modern World* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 31-56.

<sup>583</sup> Hülsen and Egger, *Skizzenbucher*, vol. II, fol. 128; the inscription reads: *Haec visuntur Romae, in horto Card. A Valle, eius beneficio, ex antiquitatis, reliquiis ibidem conservata.*

<sup>584</sup> For compelling discussion of this movement, see James Simpson, "Iconoclasm and the Enlightenment Museum," in Boldrick, *et al.* eds., *Striking Images*, 113-28.

foremost the Christian icon, the subject of this historic scene. As if to further emphasize the iconic significance of the image, the large artist's canvas Luke holds in the earlier composition has been markedly changed in the 1550s version. Here it is rendered on a scale that more faithfully replicates an icon, and the image on it is far more humble. Not only painting, but also the iconic tradition, which Luke here inaugurates in an authoritative way, is seen to be triumphant over the historically problematic pagan statue in the background, and, by extension, the idolatry it potentially gives rise to.

Collapsing temporal and geographical boundaries, Heemskerck's inclusion of the courtyard in the composition effectively locates the legendary moment of Luke's painting of the Virgin, invoked through the centuries as divine approval for sacred images, within the sphere of the artist's own practice.<sup>585</sup> To be sure, much like the self-portrait at the Colosseum, the Luke painting functions as an advertisement of the artist's specific expertise in rendering the antiquities of Rome. But in addition to that role, the panel also defends the modern profession of religious image-maker. St. Luke functions as an alter ego in this regard: a figure of apostolic succession.<sup>586</sup>

### **Sculptor as creator/destroyer: a myth of origin for Christian art**

If Heemskerck's Luke-Madonna instantiates a myth of origin for the Christian image and a defense of the modern religious painter during a particularly fraught period of the Reformation, it is an origin bound up with the works of pagan antiquity, in particular the statue/idol. To

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<sup>585</sup> For a compelling study of the temporalities of Northern art, see Christopher S. Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). With regard to Heemskerck and time, see Puff, "Self-Portrait with Ruins," esp. 272-74 and DiFuria, "Remembering the Eternal."

<sup>586</sup> He is recorded as a *vinder* (head man) of Haarlem's guild of St. Luke from 1551 to 1553 and as its *deken* (deacon) in 1554, as noted by DiFuria, "Remembering the Eternal," 92.

demonstrate how complex this issue had become in Heemskerck's time, let us return now to the small image in the courtyard, in which a figure is seen to be working on the giant statue of Jove/Jupiter that lies on the ground [Fig. 4.15, detail]. The image represents a notable addition to Heemskerck's otherwise faithful rendering of his original drawing of the Sassi collection. Therefore its intentional inclusion, like the Pope's discovery of the Jupiter statue in *The Good Samaritan*, is worth further consideration. The statue in the painting, which Heemskerck drew in its broken state in the garden of the Villa Madama [Fig. 4.16],<sup>587</sup> is Jupiter Capitolinus, "father of the pagan gods and chief deity of Rome."<sup>588</sup> The work was praised by contemporaries as the one of the largest and most beautiful statues ever discovered.<sup>589</sup> But while the identity of the statue may be clear, as Gombrich notes, what Michelangelo is doing to it is not.<sup>590</sup> Rather than "putting the finishing touches to a recumbent stone figure," as Veldman once described this, the artist appears poised to strike at the figure's groin, as if to castrate it.<sup>591</sup> This action is rendered more clearly in a similar depiction in a print of *The Children of Mercury* [Fig. 4.11].<sup>592</sup> Moreover, the figure is not dressed *all'antica*, as one would expect within the context of statues from Greco-Roman antiquity, but rather in an exotic style much like the idolaters of his Old Testament scenes.<sup>593</sup> This small transformation on the part of the artist again renders the figure's status, and

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<sup>587</sup> *Skizzenbucher*, 1 fol. 46r. Reproduced in Hülsen and Egger, 47. On the Jupiter statue, see C.M. Brown, "Martin van Heemskerck. The Villa Madama Jupiter and the Gonzaga Correspondence Files," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 41 (1979): 49-60.

<sup>588</sup> As noted by Lavin, 'David's Sling and Michelangelo's Bow,' 46.

<sup>589</sup> Lavin, 'David's Sling and Michelangelo's Bow,' 46.

<sup>590</sup> Gombrich, "Archaeologists or Pharisees?" 254.

<sup>591</sup> Veldman, "St. Luke's medical books," 91. In Lavin's reading, 46, the sculptor is creating a "gigantic idol of the most exalted imperial divinity, whose power would be broken and replaced by St. Luke." As the statue is depicted by Heemskerck as broken in the Villa Madama, there is also the alternative possibility that the craftsman is *repairing* it. Again, I would suggest there is ambiguity here.

<sup>592</sup> Gombrich, "Archaeologists or Pharisees?" 254.

<sup>593</sup> As I mention in note 18 above, this oddity has not been noticed; the assumption throughout is that the figure is meant to be Michelangelo.

by extension the work he attends to, ambiguous. As in *The Good Samaritan*, the question is raised of whether this image is meant as a critique or an affirmation of what it portrays.

A 1527 woodcut by Sigismondo Fanti of the same figure atop a statue [ 4.17] identifies Michelangelo as the sculptor in this pose.<sup>594</sup> But it is similarly ambiguous in its meaning. In the woodcut, Michelangelo, who is depicted under the astrological influence of the Sphere of Jove, sits astride a recumbent female statue that resembles *Dawn* from the Medici chapel in Florence. The image also refers to the mythological story of Mithras slaying the Bull [Fig. 4.18], which Heemskerck painted during his career. While we might substitute sword for hammer and the potency of the mythic King for sculptor, Michelangelo's activity – chisel fixed on the figure's chest with hammer held above, as if ready to deal a deathblow – seems the very antithesis of the creative act.<sup>595</sup> To further pursue the destructive dimension of this image, and its double valence as creation-destruction, we will turn to the likely prototype for Fanti's woodcut.

### Iconoclasm as internalized critique

Fanti's image was almost certainly derived from a fresco by Giulio Romano and Giovanfrancesco Penni in the *Sala di Constantino* (1520-24) [Fig. 4.19], one of the rooms of the celebrated Vatican *Stanze*.<sup>596</sup> The *Sala's* monumental fresco program, begun by Raphael and completed by Giulio Romano and his workshop from 1520-24, depicts the life and deeds of the

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<sup>594</sup> *Sphera di Iove*, from Sigismondo Fanti's *Triumpho di Fortuna* (Venice, 1527), carta xxxviii recto. See Geraldine A. Johnson, "Michelangelo, Fortunetelling & the Formation of Artistic Canons in Fanti's *Triumpho Di Fortuna*," in *Coming about...a Festschrift for John Shearman* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Art Museums, 2001), 199-205, esp. 200-01.

<sup>595</sup> Kim, "Creative Iconoclasm," 75. Although Johnson, "Michelangelo, Fortunetelling," fails to read this as potentially destructive, she does register its potential violence in gendered terms; see note 31. Interesting in this regard is the larger significance of Mithras' slaying, which initiates the cosmic strife between Good and Evil.

<sup>596</sup> For the genealogy, see Johnson, "Michelangelo, Fortunetelling," 201.



Emperor Constantine I during the Christianization of Rome. As such, it functions as the rhetorical epicenter for the Church's triumph over the pagan past, and more specifically the transfer of temporal authority of the city from Emperor to Pope, its spiritual head. It is reasonable to assume that Heemskerck once studied this fresco cycle while in Rome, as he is known to have copied scenes from the *Stanze*.<sup>597</sup>

Located in a window embrasure on the north wall, the image that supplies Fanti's figure of a sculptor is rarely reproduced in studies of the *Sala* major scenes; therefore its significance has been largely overlooked.<sup>598</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, this obscure image, standing to the side of these scenes as commentary, might serve as a key to understanding a crucial rhetorical argument in the program.<sup>599</sup> In this now much-abraded image, a bearded figure in *all'antica* dress raises a hammer above the head of a statue. Other broken statuary fragments frame the scene. Most prominent, at bottom right, is the relatively over-sized, helmeted profile of Athena, the traditional protectress of the arts, a detail to which we will return. Tall, sinuous statues loom above, presumably the targets of the sculptor's earlier destruction. Although decapitated, their bodies are depicted by the artist as still moving, animated, even sensual. A half-clad Venus gestures with her hand towards a headless Hercules, who leans forward slightly, club in hand. To

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<sup>597</sup> See DiFuria on Heemskerck's interpretation of Raphael's designs from the *Stanze*: "Maerten van Heemskerck's Helioborus Driven from the Temple: Translatio and the Interrogative Print," in *Imago Exegetica: Visual Images as Exegetical Instruments, 1400-1700*, eds. Walter S. Melion, James Clifton, and Michel Weemans. (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

<sup>598</sup> Kim, "Creative Iconoclasm," 67. Brief mentions are found in a seminal article from which I have learned a great deal: Tilmann Buddensieg's, "Gregory the Great, The Destroyer of Pagan Idols: The History of a Medieval Legend Concerning the Decline of Ancient Art and Literature," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965): 63-64 & fig. 7a; see also the still definitive study of decorative program of the *Sala di Constantino* by Rolf Quednau, *Die Sala di Constantino im Vatikanischen Palast: Zur Dekoration der beiden Medici-Päpste Leo X. und Clemens VII* (New York; Hildesheim: Olms, 1999), 91 and fig. 28; the excellent article by Philipp Fehl, "Raphael as Historian: Poetry and Historical Accuracy in the Sala di Costantino," *Artibus et Historibus* 14, no. 28 (1993), 53; and André Chastel's, "Les 'idoles' à la Renaissance," in *Roma centro ideale della cultura dell'antico nei secoli XV e XVI* ed. Silvia Danesi Squarzina (Milan: Electa, 1989), 468-76, fig. 11.

<sup>599</sup> Kim, "Creative Iconoclasm."

her left, a small, headless Cupid readies to take flight, while a mysterious figure on the far right, severed at the waist, pirouettes away from the viewer.<sup>600</sup>

From its context within this room, the dream-like image has been interpreted as illustrating the destruction of pagan idols at the origin of Rome's Christianization under Constantine. But the dream-like image of a craftsman destroying antique sculptures – perhaps unique in Renaissance art – offers a vision less easily read than the famous iconoclastic image that crowns the ceiling of the room. Installed six decades later, Tommaso Laureti's *Triumph of Christianity* (ca. 1582-85) strikingly depicts a broken antique statue at the foot of a crucifixion, which replaces the fallen idol on its pedestal [Fig. 4.20].<sup>601</sup> Unlike Heemskerck's courtyard of classical statuary, the niches in the background of Laureti's have been emptied of their contents. As a comparandum, a contemporaneous cycle of frescoes, painted by Francesco Salviati for the chapel of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese in the Palazzo della Cancelleria, depicts the deeds of St. Lawrence in which idols are pulled from their niches and destroyed.<sup>602</sup> In Laureti's eerily austere vision, it is notably a statue of Mercury who is broken, the mythological Father of the *Children of the Arts*.

In contrast to the overdetermined, Counter-Reformation symbolism of Laureti's painting,<sup>603</sup> the meaning of its more obscure counterpart is more complex, and so is its role within the room. On the one hand, according to the theme of the fresco cycle, we know that the

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<sup>600</sup> Kim, "Creative Iconoclasm," 67.

<sup>601</sup> Tommaso Laureti, *The Triumph of Christianity*, ceiling fresco, Sala di Costantino, Vatican Palace. For a discussion of the complex cultural status of idols, both Christian and pagan, in the period of Laureti's painting and Sixtus IV's papal interventions with regard to antique statues and monuments, see the brilliant discussion by Cole, "Perpetual Exorcism," and esp. 58-9 on Gregory the Great as model for Sixtus IV.

<sup>602</sup> Patricia Rubin, "The Private Chapel of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese in the Cancelleria, Rome," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 50 (1987): 82-112.

<sup>603</sup> On this "overdetermination" and its distorting effects on the Sala's interpretation, as well as a useful discussion of the iconography of pagan idols in the Renaissance, see Christopher Kleinbub's, "Bramante's Ruined Temple and the Dialectics of the Image," *Renaissance Quarterly* 63, no.2 (2010), esp. 421-23 and 452-53.

image of a sculptor destroying his statues represents the advent of Christian iconoclasm against the idols of pagan religion. In the Renaissance, humanists and artists concerned with the contemporary destruction of monuments by Popes and others rehearsed medieval versions of this myth, which blamed iconoclasm as the historical cause for the ruin of antiquities.<sup>604</sup> As I have argued, within this cultural context, the scene functions as a memorialization of destruction, which acknowledges this past but also serves as warning or prophylactic against future losses.<sup>605</sup>

The further role of the image in this regard is understood when placed in dialogue with the *Donation of Constantine* it borders [Fig. 4.21]. In this crucial scene of transfer of power over the city, the artist depicts the Emperor presenting the Pope with a statuette rather than the document of the Donation we would expect to see.<sup>606</sup> The statue of the Palladion, Athena, is the same figure represented so prominently in the image of the craftsman destroying his statues. A protectress of cities but also of the arts, she is frequently depicted with Prometheus, the craftsman who formed/shaped the first human [Fig. 4.22].<sup>607</sup> As Constantine places the statue of the Rome into the hands of Pope Sylvester, who symbolizes the current pope, Clement VII, he seems to entrust to him not only temporal authority over the city, but care of its artistic patrimony as well. The scene becomes an allegory and a plea for preservation: under wise papal patronage, the inheritance of pagan art, purged of idolatry, might be fully restored, just as the statue of Athena has been made whole.<sup>608</sup>

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<sup>604</sup> As documented in Buddensieg, "Gregory the Great, the Destroyer of Pagan Idols."

<sup>605</sup> Kim, "Creative Iconoclasm," 77-8.

<sup>606</sup> Kim, "Creative Iconoclasm," 68-71, 77.

<sup>607</sup> On Prometheus as a model of artistic transgression in the Renaissance, see the excellent discussion by Jacobs in *The Living Image*, 120-26.

<sup>608</sup> Kim, "Creative Iconoclasm," 77. Unlike the looming, vaguely sinister "idols" in the iconoclast's workshop, the statuette looks more like a collector's item. Indeed, similar figures would be used in Renaissance portraiture to symbolize the commodified artwork.

In my reading of the *Sala's* program, iconoclastic image and discourse serve as a mode of self-reflexive or internalized critique: a creative use of iconoclasm with prophylactic effects, in contrast to the “externalized” violence of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>609</sup> As a parallel to this internalized process, I briefly consider Fanti’s inversion of the iconoclastic figure of the sculptor to represent a paragon of art. As noted before, the very same image of pagan-turned-Christian destroying his works is reused by Fanti to depict Michelangelo as sculptor *creating* one. In its redeployment, its valence has changed: there is a slippage between creation and destruction.<sup>610</sup> It is this ambiguity between image making and breaking, and the iconomachy or struggle between them in the realm of Christian image practice, to which I will now turn.

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<sup>609</sup> Kim, “Creative Iconoclasm,” 66, 78.

<sup>610</sup> Kim, “Creative Iconoclasm,” 75.

## CHAPTER 5

### From Idol to Icon: Iconoclasm in Michelangelo's *Rondanini pietà*

We know, for the Apostle has said so, “that our old man is crucified with Him” (Rom. 6:6). But we should not be freed from oldness, if He had not been crucified in weakness. For He came for this purpose, that we should be renewed in Him: because it is by desiring Him and by imitating his Passion, that we are renewed [*passionem eius imitando renovamur.*]

Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmos XXVII*, 27<sup>611</sup>

...because painting comes from shade, and sculpture from idols.

Anton Francesco Doni, *Disegno*<sup>612</sup>

## Introduction

At first glance, the *Rondanini pietà* (c.1550s – 1564) [Fig.0.5] seems an unlikely work to culminate a study of iconic images, not only because it is a work of sculpture, a medium historically associated with idolatry.<sup>613</sup> It also seems the very antithesis of Rosso's painting of a heroic, radiant Christ, the subject of Chapter 3. Apart from differences in medium, the sculpture's strangely attenuated figures and rough, broken forms appear as a negation of the sensuously embodied and perfectly executed figures of Rosso's composition. The figure of Christ in particular seems to belong to a wholly different world, both stylistically and conceptually. And yet it is in this figure that we might trace a vital connection between the two.

The two *pietàs* are comparable in their presentation of the figure of Christ to the

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<sup>611</sup> *Corp. Christ., Ser. Lat.* XXXVIII, 400: Scimus dicente apostolo “quia vetus homo noster confixus est cruci cum illo” (Rom. 6:6). Non autem careremus vetustate, nisi crucifigeretur in infirmate. Ad hoc enim venit, ut renovemur in illo: quia desiderando eum et passionem eius imitando renovamur. Quoted in Gerhard Ladner, *The idea of reform: its impact on Christian thought and action in the age of the Fathers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 155.

<sup>612</sup> Anton Francesco Doni, *Disegno* (1549), fol. 11r.

<sup>613</sup> The most up to date bibliography on the *Rondanini* is now *L'Ultimo Michelangelo Disegni e rime attorno alla Pietà Rondanini*, a cura di Alessandro Rovetta (Milano: Silvana Editoriale, 2011); see also the adjudication of scholarly debates on the *Rondanini* in Frank Zöllner, Christoph Thoenes, eds., *Michelangelo The Complete Works*, (Taschen, 2014), esp. 403. On the results of recent conservation, see now M. T. Fiorio and L. Toniolo, eds., *La pietà Rondanini: Il Michelangelo di Milano, conoscenza e conservazione* (Milan: Museo d'arte antica del Castello Sforzesco di Milano, 2006).

viewer, in a front-facing mode of presentation that is a feature of iconic images and cultic veneration.<sup>614</sup> Moreover, there is a shared genealogy between the two within the tradition of images we have been exploring. Setting the sculpture within the context of earlier drawings, painting and sculpture, we can trace an arc that places the *Rondanini* as the culmination of Michelangelo's lifelong investigation of the *imago pietatis*, effectively connecting the image to the authoritative cult icon at Santa Croce in Gerusalemme.<sup>615</sup> Beyond a link between the two in the history of the form of the image type and their shared mode of pictorial presentation, scholars have described the *Rondanini's* attenuated figure of Christ in particular as suggestive of a Byzantine icon.<sup>616</sup> As John Paoletti notes, "Michelangelo's transformation of the body of Christ from its initial heroic form to the emaciated figure which now exists brought it closer to the icon of the Imago Pietatis in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome."<sup>617</sup>

Like Rosso's *Dead Christ*, Michelangelo's *Rondanini pietà* is an enigmatic work that has been subject to radically disparate interpretations. As the last sculpture the artist undertook before his death, it has, moreover, taken on a heavily freighted status. The *Rondanini* has been described as a ruin and an art historical tragedy, due to the apparent destruction of what might

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<sup>614</sup> While I will not be discussing the *Rondanini's* Eucharistic valence, it is worth noting that other scholars have made this connection. Beyond the frontal presentation common to Eucharistic images, John Paoletti draws a parallel between the encompassing cloak of the sculpted Christ and the humeral veil used by the priest to hold the Eucharist. I am indebted to his excellent article, upon whose initial argument I attempt to build: "The *Rondanini Pietà*: Ambiguity Maintained through Palimpsest," *Artibus et Historiae* 21, no. 42 (2000): 53-80.

<sup>615</sup> See Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 212. If Michelangelo did make a pilgrimage to the basilicas of Rome, as has been thought, he might have encountered the icon in the Church itself or through its legendary association with the church, as described in Chapter 3.

<sup>616</sup> In Maria Fiorio's words, with this figure of Christ, Michelangelo had "renounced its heroic beauty and transformed the Christ of his last *Pietà* into the suffering figure of an emaciated Byzantine Christ." *The Pietà Rondanini* (Milan: Electa, 2005), 33.

<sup>617</sup> Although he does not pursue the iconic aspect of the sculpture, he does raise the possibility that Michelangelo sought to create a *vera imago* or true image; the suggestion is made as an aside. See Paoletti, "Ambiguity Maintained through the Palimpsest," 71.

have been a very beautiful sculpture.<sup>618</sup> But it has also been interpreted as a spiritual testament of the artist in the last decades before his death. Charles de Tolnay once described the sculpture as reflecting the artist's deep piety and a final "state of beatitude," an interpretation shared by Frederick Hartt.<sup>619</sup> The work has further been seen as evidence of Michelangelo's religious convictions, unsettled by the tumult of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>620</sup>

In this chapter, I aim to show how the *Rondanini* might be newly understood in relation to the iconic images of Christ this dissertation examines. Within this history, we might see that it is both exemplary of the transformation of the Byzantine icon into Italian art, but it also provides the ground to move this investigation further. Like Rosso's panel, the *Rondanini* employs iconic principles as an aesthetic strategy that merges artistic performance with religious devotion and purpose. But whereas in Rosso's painting we might discern the full, if fragile, integration of these aspects in a manner that employs the beauty of Christ as a figure of spiritual desire (as a body made phenomenologically present to the beholder, but sublimated within a painting that calls attention to its artifice), in Michelangelo's work we witness the intensification of this aesthetic-devotional strategy, and moreover its interrogation. That is to say, if Rosso's Christ exemplifies what the phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion calls a "radiant idol" of art or the

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<sup>618</sup> The main proponents of the "tragic view" are most notably Wilhelm Worringer, "Die Pietà Rondanini," *Kunst und Künstler* 7 (1909): 335-59; George Simmel, "Michelangelo: Ein Kapitel der Metaphysik der Kultur", reprinted in "Logos," (1910-11), 207-27 (Milan: L. Perucchi, 2003); and Henry Thode, in *Michelangelo und das Ende der Renaissance*, 3 vols., (Berlin: G. Grote, 1912-20) vol. 3, 685-95. Nagel, in *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 202, sees in the *Rondanini* a historical meditation on the part of the artist regarding the fate of the religious artwork. Nagel's reading, though compelling and subtle, is in certain respects continuous with the idea of earlier scholars that in this last work, Michelangelo reaches a point of failure in the realm of what religious sculpture can achieve, which is arguably a tragedy of one kind.

<sup>619</sup> Charles de Tolnay, *Michelangelo: Sculptor, Painter, Architect* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 157.

<sup>620</sup> Antonio Paolucci usefully canvases additional interpretations in *Michelangelo: Le Pietà* (Milan: Skira, 1997), 140-43; see also bibliography in Paoletti, "Ambiguity Maintained through Palimpsest," n2 and, most recently Maria Fiorio, *The Pietà Rondanini*.

inherent capacity of the icon for idolatry, the *Rondanini* constitutes not only an image that redirects desire towards spiritual purpose. As I will explore in this chapter, it also instantiates an internal iconoclasm or image-struggle that anticipates, and reverses, the movement of icon towards idolatry.<sup>621</sup>

As Paoletti once observed, the *Rondanini* is remarkable among Michelangelo's sculptural works insofar as it inscribes a palimpsest of shifting artistic choices. While a visual record of such changes is a feature of drawing and painting, in which *pentimenti* are often visible, these traces are generally hidden in sculpture, as the emerging form effaces the successive stages of carving.<sup>622</sup> Michelangelo's sculptural choices, in their radical departure from previous artistic convention, take on heightened significance when read against the backdrop of spiritual crisis in an era of profound religious upheaval. While I will consider the *Rondanini* within the Reform milieu of its production, particularly through the evidence of the changing reception of his works and themes in his poetry that connect artistic process and spiritual reform, mapping a precise relation between Reform beliefs and Michelangelo's own convictions is beyond the scope of this chapter. Indeed, I will indicate why attempts to do so are largely unsatisfactory in evaluating the significance of this work.

My own approach differs from those of scholars who attempt to directly read the changing iconography of the sculptural group in ideological terms. I examine instead what I demonstrate to be a dynamic relation between sculptural process and spiritual reformation, a dynamic I cast within the larger frame of the icon, idolatry and iconoclasm. Far from unrelated phenomena, these are arguably of key historical importance to the period of the Reformation in

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<sup>621</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion's 'The Idol or the Radiance of the Painting,' In *Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 54-81.

<sup>622</sup> Paoletti, "Palimpsest," 57ff. See also A. Perrig, *Michelangelo's Drawings: The Science of Attribution* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1991), 56.



which the work was produced.<sup>623</sup> Attending to the severely attenuated figures, broken limbs and textured surfaces of the sculpture, and the distinctive, processual character of its facture, I argue that the *Rondanini* stages neither a tragedy of art historical loss nor an expression of Reform belief. Rather, the sculpture stages an internalized iconoclasm or iconomachy, directed toward idols of art, self and the imagination. Within a dynamic that links sculptural process and self-reform, evident in the sculpture and Michelangelo's writings, I chart a process whereby an "idol" of art is changed into religious icon. In this regard, the *Rondanini* brings our study full-circle, as a passionate *mimesis* or imitation that enacts spiritual presence and transformation.

### Reception history and contextualization

By the time of the *Rondanini pietà*, what we think is the final sculpture Michelangelo worked on up until his death in 1564, the artist was 86. The sculpture is rightly considered the culmination of a life-long investigation of a sacred subject that spanned more than 60 years. Those decades also witnessed seismic shifts in the religious landscape in which Michelangelo sought a foothold: in which he was lauded as *il Divino* or an artist divinely-inspired, but also criticized as blasphemous after completing the aptly named *Last Judgment*, which fell on the wrong side of the Counter-Reformation.<sup>624</sup>

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<sup>623</sup> I give a preliminary sketch of Michelangelo as iconoclast sculptor in "Creative Destruction in Renaissance Italy," 75-6. I plan to explore this in more detail in an expanded version of this chapter.

<sup>624</sup> For discussion of the ascription of divinity or divine inspiration to Michelangelo and the critique and defense of this claim, see Campbell, "Fare," esp. 596-598. Although the characterization becomes a topos, the discourse of the period suggests that Michelangelo took seriously the weight of such a claim to truthfully depict his religious subjects. The *Last Judgment* was considered sacrilegious, and Cardinal Carafa and Monsignor Sernini campaigned to have the fresco removed or censored. Pietro Aretino famously criticized Michelangelo's artistic intentions, claiming that the inappropriate nudity and pagan themes could be witnessed by all, but only the learned could access the deep allegories they concealed. Lodovico Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura di Lodovico Dolce* (Lanciano: Carabba, 1913), 71-73. At the Council of Trent, in the year prior to

From the perspective of the total *oeuvre* of the artist's religious sculpture, from its beginning to its end, there couldn't be a greater distance between the smooth, polished surfaces of his first *pietà* [Fig. 5.1] and the rough, uncertain textures of the last; between the perfection of forms in the Vatican group that are relinquished or destroyed in the Rondanini; but also between the contemplative Mary of the first version, who willingly offers the body of her son to the viewer, and the near fusion of Mary and Christ in the last version, as she tenderly holds him back, indeed, seems to enfold him within the protective arc of her curved frame.

Given this stylistic rupture, we can appreciate why the *Rondanini* has long been interpreted as signaling a decisive break with the prior, classicizing aesthetics of which Michelangelo was the chief proponent. This has at times been read as a shift to an austere, "spiritualized" Gothic style, as earlier scholars such as Wilhelm Worringer notably claimed.<sup>625</sup> Other scholars have explained the change as an artistic response that reflects Michelangelo's disavowal of his earlier art, a change that belies a sympathy with tenets of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>626</sup> While acknowledging Michelangelo's departure in the *Rondanini* from the monumental style of his earlier works, there are grounds to challenge both of these interpretations and to open up other paths of explanation. First, *pace* Worringer and the related arguments of scholars, Michelangelo's debt to the art of the North or Gothic is already evident in

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Michelangelo's death in 1564, Daniele da Volterra, his apprentice, was commissioned to obscure the genitalia of the figures.

<sup>625</sup> Wilhelm Worringer, "Die Pietà Rondanini." The view of the Rondanini as Neo-Gothic is also expressed by Paolucci in *Michelangelo Le Pietà*, 141. A related view sees in the work a return to the "crude and rough images of the earliest times;" see Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 214, and Paul Joannides, "'Primitivism' in the Late Drawings of Michelangelo: The Master's Construction of an Old-age Style," in *Michelangelo Drawings* ed. Craig Hugh Smyth and Ann Galkerson (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1992), 245-61.

<sup>626</sup> Jean-Pierre Barricelli provides the most thorough attempt to read the Rondanini in Reformation terms in "Michelangelo's Finito: In the self, the Later Sonnets and the Last Pietà," *New Literary History* 24 (1993): 597-616. Paoletti gives a useful summary of scholarship that attempts to link Michelangelo to either Protestant or Catholic reformers in "Palimpsest," n61.

his early works, such as the Vatican *pietà*. As has been noted, the face of Christ resembles an engraving by Martin Schongauer, an artist whose work, the *Temptation of St. Anthony*, Michelangelo is known to have copied.<sup>627</sup> Second, the iconography of the *Rondanini*, in which Mary takes on new prominence as the figure bearing up Christ, seems to trouble an explanation according to Reform beliefs, given the Reformer's strenuous critique of the worship of the cult of the Virgin.<sup>628</sup> For this and other reasons, as we will see, I believe the *Rondanini* resists any simple reduction to ideological terms.<sup>629</sup>

Taken together, the unexpected strangeness of the *Rondanini* and the lack of definitive accounts concerning its production explain why the sculptural group was not attributed to Michelangelo until well into the nineteenth century, when its reception was less than unenthusiastic. In 1807 at the Palazzo Rondanini, where it was first displayed, it was mistakenly described as a "modern group, roughed out and said to be the work of Michelangelo."<sup>630</sup> Perhaps of all works of the Italian Renaissance, the *Rondanini* is strikingly modern in its sensibility: an artwork out of time, defying art historical contextualization. Its current location, at the end of the rooms of the museum of the Castello Sforzesco, cordoned off from other works of Renaissance and Medieval art, reflects its position as an historical cul de sac: it seems to break radically with

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<sup>627</sup> Hartt, *Michelangelo: The Complete Sculpture*, 85.

<sup>628</sup> For a recent study that examines Michelangelo's imagery of Mary and his devotion to the cult of the Virgin, see Emily Fenichel, "Michelangelo and the Marian Imagination," (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2013). Fenichel interprets the *Rondanini* specifically in terms of a meditation based upon the Spiritual Exercises of the Jesuits, but there is no evidence to suggest that Michelangelo adopted this mode of prayer or that it influenced his art or belief.

<sup>629</sup> There is extensive literature regarding the question of Michelangelo's relation to Reform movement and thought, a topic which exceeds the scope of this dissertation but I address briefly below in the context of certain features of the *Rondanini*. See note 14 above.

<sup>630</sup> Fiorio, *The Pietà Rondanini*, 14.

all precedents, and nothing seems to follow from it, not perhaps until the sculpture of Rodin three centuries later.

The exceptionalism of the *Rondanini* foregrounds why Michelangelo's highly personal, devotional works from the last part of his life present a problem in the history of Renaissance art more generally, produced as they were not only during the Reformation, but in the decades of the Counter-Reformation that are often associated with a restriction of the artistic license that informs the creativity of the Renaissance. In this regard, Michelangelo was problematic even for Giorgio Vasari, whose *Lives of the Artists* placed the artist at the apex of a teleology of artistic progress. In particular, the *Torrentiniana* edition of the *Lives*, for example, begins with the idolatry of biblical history and ends with the Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, which is described as a culmination of all that art could possibly achieve. But while Michelangelo provided a supreme model of art making, he also broke the chain of its progression, as an artist who was inimitable.<sup>631</sup> In this regard, he was perhaps the first "iconoclastic" artist in the modern sense of this term.<sup>632</sup> After Michelangelo, there was no clear path for art to follow beyond the heroic, twisting figures that were the supreme expression of his artistic *furia*, except perhaps to multiply their formulation, as Gianbologna and others did.

It might be argued that Michelangelo himself had tested the limits of the twisting *figura serpentinata*, the S-like form that signified inherent movement and spiritual animation, in the extreme spiraling figure of the *Victory* (1532-34) [Fig. 5.2]. More relevant to our investigation is the *Florentine pietà* (1547-55) [Fig. 5.3], the multi-figure sculpture he began for his own tomb that bears comparison to the famed *Laocoön*. Here the extremity of Christ's

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<sup>631</sup> The emphasis in the later version of *the Lives* is on Michelangelo's works as the basis for the principles of the new Academies of art, rather than models to be emulated or surpassed.

<sup>632</sup> See Kim, "Creative Iconoclasm," 75-6.

suffering is mirrored in the pyrotechnic contortion of his body, which seems to push the limit of the movement that might be achieved in the medium of sculpture. At the apex of the group, scholars have seen in the figure of Nicodemus a self-portrait of Michelangelo, a common persona for artists, but one that Michelangelo invests with particular significance.<sup>633</sup> As the figure that holds the group together, Michelangelo-Nicodemus both gazes upon the works of his creation and inserts himself into the sacred scene.<sup>634</sup> The significance of this double position, which binds together realms of artistic practice and cultic veneration, is one to which we will return.

According to Vasari and Ascanio Condivi, the artist's Renaissance biographers, Michelangelo attacked the *Florentine pietà* in a rage and it would have been destroyed if an assistant had not intervened. Evidence of his assault on the sculpture is still visible at the left hip socket, where Michelangelo broke off Christ's leg, and other areas of removal that were later repaired.<sup>635</sup> According to one version, the motive for this destruction was a flaw in the marble that prevented him from fulfilling the perfection of form he desired.<sup>636</sup> Here it is useful to note

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<sup>633</sup> Paoletti, "Palimpsest," 71.

<sup>634</sup> The question of whether Michelangelo's self-imaging as Nicodemus, a figure that has been interpreted as a link to the Nicodemites, a group with Catholic reform sympathies, and the destruction of the *pietà* due to a changing climate of intolerance for such expression, is reviewed by Paoletti in "Palimpsest," 71. As scholars have noted, there is a long tradition of artists representing themselves as Nicodemus, who also figured in Passion plays of the period. See Paolucci for contemporary accounts of the sculpture's facture and fate, *Le Pietà*, 84-85.

<sup>635</sup> For the view of these actions as deliberate removals, see Jack Wasserman, *Michelangelo's Florence Pietà* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 84.

<sup>636</sup> "Either because of defects in the marble, or because the stone was so hard that the chisel often struck sparks, or because he was too severe a judge of his own work and could never be content with anything he did.... He gave the broken Pietà to Francesco Bandini. While it was still in Michelangelo's house, the Florentine sculptor, Tiberio Calcagni, inquired after a long discussion why he had destroyed so admirable a performance. Our artist replied that he had been driven to it by Urbino, his servant, who urged him every day to finish it. Besides, a piece had broken off the arm of the Madonna. This and a vein that appeared in the marble had caused him infinite trouble and had driven him out of patience. He would have dashed the group to fragments, if Antonio had not advised him to give it to someone, even as it was." Vasari, *Lives* (du Vere, 1996), 715-18.

that in characterizations of Michelangelo as a sculptor more generally, violence is thematized as a source of destruction, but also artistic creativity.<sup>637</sup> As described in contemporary sources, Michelangelo's *furia* is bound together with his legendary *terribilità*; both are multivalent terms.<sup>638</sup> The trait of *terribilità* particularly associated with the artist signifies both terror and awe. It is evident both in the violent outbursts that characterize his life and practice and in the wondrous (*deinos*) quality of his works. *Furia*, as artistic inspiration, becomes visible in the force with which he physically attacks his works. But beyond *forza* in this productive sense, we can also point to another kind of violence: the iconoclastic violence with which Michelangelo apparently attacked, and at time destroyed, his own works.

After the breaking of the *Florentine pietà*, Vasari writes, "it was necessary [for Michelangelo] to find a bit of marble, in order to pass each day carving."<sup>639</sup> What we might note here is not only Vasari's relative dismissal of the sculpture, which is described as a way to pass the time (*passatempo*), but also the implication that the sculpture was undertaken for no known purpose or patron; this is highly unusual for the period in question. Altogether we have little evidence concerning the sculpture, and we cannot be certain that the marble block Vasari refers to is in fact the *Rondanini pietà*. In an inventory at the time of Michelangelo's death, the sculpture we believe to be the *Rondanini* is described in a desultory fashion, as nothing more

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<sup>637</sup> According to the testimony of Blaise de Vigenère, a doctor who visited the artist's studio circa 1550, Michelangelo worked "*con tale impetuosità e furia da farmi temer che l'intera opera sarebbe andata in pezzi, e con un colpo solo faceva schizzare a terra....*" Quoted in Paolucci, *Le Pietà*, 80.

<sup>638</sup> On the diverse meanings of *terribilità*, see David Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 234-41.

<sup>639</sup> Vasari, *Le Vite* (Gaetano Milanesi) vol. 7: 244-45: "*fu necessario trovar qualcosa poi di marmo, perchè e potessi ogni giorno passar tempo scarpellando.*"

than “a statue of Christ and another figure above, attached together, roughed out and unfinished.”<sup>640</sup>

The *Rondanini pietà* has been described as a ruin and a tragedy, indeed, as “the last act in the tragedy of Christian sculpture.”<sup>641</sup> At first glance, the strangely hollow figures, fractured or missing limbs and incoherence of the group seem to affirm such an evaluation.<sup>642</sup> From the point of view of a Vasarian history of art as one of technical achievement, the *Rondanini* does look to be a loss, or at the very least, severely retrograde. Two beautifully formed legs and a dangling arm, remnants of a figure presumably destroyed by the artist, give a glimpse of what might have been created in its stead. As the subject is a highly unusual composition of a standing *pietà*, this would have been remarkable indeed. Moreover, given that the *Rondanini* is in all probability Michelangelo’s last sculpture, the unfinished, broken and roughly finished remains seem less a *capolavoro* than a capitulation; indeed, scholars have interpreted it as a form of resignation.<sup>643</sup> But from a different perspective, the visible forms of artistic conceptualization, generally hidden from view, that survive and are inscribed in these remains provide remarkable evidence of Michelangelo as artist-thinker. In particular, in the traces of loss, unresolved surfaces, and the

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<sup>640</sup> “un'altra statua principate per un Cristo ed un'altra figura sopra, attaccate insieme, sbozzate e non finite.” A. Gotti, *Vita di Michelangelo Buonarroti narrate con l'aiuto di nuovi documenti*, 2 vols., (Firenze: Tipografia della Gazzetta d'Italia, 1875), vol. I, 335-36. Cited by Alessandro Rovetta in *L'ultimo Michelangelo: Disegni E Rime Attorno Alla Pietà Rondanini* (Milan: Silvano, 2011), 42. See Fiorio for a more comprehensive overview of the reception history of the sculpture, in *The Pietà Rondanini*, 13-24.

<sup>641</sup> Most recently, Jas Elsner, “Art history as ekphrasis,” *Art History* 33 (2010): 10-27, has revived the interpretation of the *Rondanini* as a ruin that accords with the aesthetic of the antique fragment (17), a view that has earlier been aired. For a more nuanced reading, see Fiorio’s ‘Broken sculpture: Michelangelo and the aesthetic of the fragment,’ in *Genius of the Sculptor in Michelangelo’s Work* (Montreal, Quebec: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1992), 69-84.

<sup>642</sup> Dagoberto Frey was not alone in his estimation of the group as “a wild, despairing effort.” Quoted in Herbert von Einem, *Michelangelo*, trans. Ronald Taylor (London: Methuen, 1973), 248.

<sup>643</sup> Notably Simmel and Thode have viewed it as a form of resignation and failure due to the weakness of the aging artist. Simmel, “Michelangelo: Ein Kapitel der Metaphysik der Kultur” (It.ed., 48) and Thode, *Michelangelo und das Ende der Renaissance*, vol. 3, 689-90.

sculpture's aporetic forms, we might discern the artist's choices at the end of his life, as he attempts to give form to the mystery of Christ's Passion, a subject of life-long investigation that took a personal and urgent turn in the last decades before his death. In contrast to the *Florentine pietà* and the violence with which it was nearly destroyed, in the *Rondanini*, I will attempt to articulate iconoclasm at work here of a different, almost procedural kind: a breaking that is simultaneously a re-making, a re-making visible in layers of emerging and withdrawing forms and an unfolding of figuration, negation and re-formation.<sup>644</sup>

### **Sculpture as palimpsest**

Taking the idea of the sculpture as a palimpsest, we can begin to examine this process by reconstructing the probable stages of the *Rondanini's* facture and dismantling. It will be useful in this regard to turn briefly to the Oxford drawing generally associated with Michelangelo's first conception of the sculptural group [Fig. 5.4].<sup>645</sup> Here we see five sketches of variations on the theme of a standing *pietà*, with the second group from the left approximating how the *Rondanini* might have looked in the first campaign of carving.<sup>646</sup> This conception of the *pietà* is also linked to a longer history of Michelangelo's studies, beginning very early in his career with the London *Entombment* [Fig. 5.5 and continuing throughout his life in a series of drawings, including this one currently in the Albertina [Fig. 5.6]. These works are characterized by their attempt to probe the climactic, mysterious moment of Christ's suspended animation between death and

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<sup>34</sup> Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 213-15, suggestively describes the *Rondanini* as a reflective of a "slow iconoclasm" or artistic stripping, but does not pursue this the iconoclastic dimension further.

<sup>645</sup> For a detailed analysis of Michelangelo's carrying studies in their relation to the Florentine and Rondanini *pietà* see Nagel, "Observations on Michelangelo's Late Pietà Drawings and Sculptures," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 59, no. 4 (1996): 548-72.

<sup>646</sup> Here I follow Hartt's analysis of the differing stages of the *Rondanini's* facture, as described in *Michelangelo's Three Pietàs* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1975), 131-192. For discussion of the Oxford drawing, with comprehensive bibliography, see Alessandro Rovetta's entry in *L'Ultimo Michelangelo*, 102-5.



resurrection, notably employing the pictorial convention of a frontal, or iconic, presentation of his body before the viewer.

In the *Rondanini*, in what we believe was its first state of conceptualization, Michelangelo deftly balances the weighty, slumping postures of the Oxford drawing and the ethereal, grace-filled figure of the Albertina.<sup>647</sup> A reconstruction of how the original figure of Christ might have looked is seen when a bust is attached to Christ's body in the *Rondanini* [Fig. 5.7].<sup>648</sup> The crossed legs re-inscribe the posture and pain of the Crucifixion, and his muscular body falls heavily to the side, emphasizing his humanity. At the same time, his grace-filled body seems nearly weightless, poised on the tips of its toes. The conception of the figure and its conceptual meaning is therefore close to Rosso's *Christ*, which is also closely related to a drawing attributed to Michelangelo, and to Sebastiano del Piombo's *Ubeda Pietà* [Fig.3.12], as discussed earlier.

Michelangelo's studies along this theme also reflect an acute concern with rendering theological paradox in compelling aesthetic terms, a concern that parallels what we have now traced from the emergence of the icon of the *Akra Tapeinosis* in Byzantium. At issue was how to depict the natural, incarnate body of Christ – the one that endured the Passion – in conjunction with his mystical, spiritual nature.<sup>649</sup> In Italy under the pressure of the Reformation, with Counter-Reformers encouraging depictions of Christ that accentuated his battered body and the physicality of the Passion, the question took on renewed and highly-charged significance. In stylistic terms, Michelangelo's choice to render Christ's "dead" body as pristine, effectively

<sup>647</sup> See Fiorio on the *Rondanini*'s relation to earlier drawings in *The Pietà Rondanini*, 28-34.

<sup>648</sup> See description and discussion in Fiorio, "Respiens Finem: Michelangelo e il tema della *pietà*," in *L'ultimo Michelangelo*, 50 note 55.

<sup>649</sup> As discussed by Nagel and, more recently, Una D'Elia, "Drawing Christ's Blood," 90-129. D'Elia, focusing on Michelangelo's presentation drawings for Vittoria Colonna, argues for an "aesthetics of paradox" that produce such features as "a bloodless blood and tearless tears." See discussion below.

diminishing or even removing his wounds, may be viewed as a response to a tradition of imaging based upon the purity of pagan sculpture.<sup>650</sup> But like Rosso's *Christ*, Michelangelo's figure expresses the heroic nudity that also symbolized the perfected body of the resurrection, and the suprahistorical or synoptic meaning of the *imago pietatis*. Such an aesthetic might also be read in terms of a concept of spiritual reform, as a stripping away of disfiguration or corruption, a point to which I will return.<sup>651</sup>

In the sculptural group, the second, or carrying, figure standing behind Christ also embeds a duality, one that is not due to the synthesis of paradox but rather to a changing conception of the figure by the artist. As mentioned earlier, though the figure now looks to be Mary, an exposed leg suggests that the figure was initially a man [Fig. 5.8].<sup>652</sup> Indeed, the robe is similar to that of the Nicodemus figure of the Florentine *pietà*. This presents the possibility that Michelangelo, as in the sculpture intended for his tomb, again meant to insert himself in this sacred scene, this time in even closer proximity to Christ. Such a reading accords with Alexander Nagel's interpretation of the shared concerns of Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna, who, in their exchanges, emphasize the spiritual benefits received from an "animating physical contact" with the mystical body of Christ, a belief that brought new significance to the theme of the *imago pietatis*.<sup>653</sup>

Paoletti reads the ambiguities in this male-female figure of the *Rondanini* as generative of its meaning. Specifically, he views the later change of figure to Mary as reflecting an unresolved tension in Michelangelo's thought, between Catholic and Reformation ideals. He further argues

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<sup>650</sup> Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 17.

<sup>651</sup> See note 8 above. I address this idea in more detail below.

<sup>652</sup> Paoletti, "Palimpsest," 58-9, rightly argues that Mary or a female figure would never be depicted in this manner.

<sup>653</sup> Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 212.

that Mary, as Ecclesia, is shown to be a crucial medium of salvation, as would accord with Catholic belief. In apparent conflict with this symbolism, however, the sacrifice of Christ is also foregrounded, which Paoletti reads as a “symbol of redemption by faith alone,” a tenet of Protestant Reform.<sup>654</sup>

As scholars have demonstrated, there is sufficient evidence of Michelangelo’s relation to Vittoria Colonna and her circle of *spirituali* to warrant the supposition that Michelangelo had access to Lutheran ideas.<sup>655</sup> The artist’s dialogue with Vittoria Colonna in particular reveals a concern with the question of grace and salvation through faith, a question further pursued in the artist’s spiritual poetry. Yet the extent to which Michelangelo’s artworks can be explained in specifically Protestant or Catholic beliefs seems limited at best. First, we should recognize that the overlapping concerns of Italian reform circles and Protestant thought are not so easily divided. But the assumption that Michelangelo’s art might be reduced to ideological terms is also worth challenging. Here I agree with Una D’Elia that “in this rapidly changing climate of religious reform, Colonna and others in her circle did not articulate explicit and consistent theological positions, but wrote allusive, paradoxical, and occasionally cryptic letters, poems and meditations.”<sup>656</sup> She instead argues for an aesthetics of reform that reflects an emergent spirituality, but cannot be directly mapped onto it: “a complex amalgam of pathos and passion and intellectual distance.”<sup>657</sup> Finally, while we might explore how the artist was shaped by the religious conflict surrounding him, I would argue that more illuminating evidence for the effect of this controversy resides in changing attitudes towards the artist’s work and the profound

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<sup>654</sup> While entertaining this argument, Paoletti, also acknowledges the difficulty of directly linking Michelangelo to Reform beliefs; see “Palimpsest,” note 60.

<sup>655</sup> Barricelli, “Michelangelo’s Finito,” 601-2. See also E. Campi, *Michelangelo e Vittoria Colonna: un dialogo artistico-teologico ispirato da Bernardino Ochino e altri saggi di storia della Riforma* (Torino: Claudiana, 1994).

<sup>656</sup> Una D’Elia, “Drawing Christ’s Blood,” 64.

<sup>657</sup> D’Elia, “Drawing Christ’s Blood,” 125.

reflection it motivates on Michelangelo's part. In this regard, the *Rondanini*, as a highly personal work undertaken at the end of the artist's life and changing *fortuna critica*, gives special insight.

Therefore, while agreeing with Paoletti that the *Rondanini* holds various interpretive possibilities in tension, and that the exploration of these tensions provides insight into the work that might otherwise be overlooked, for the moment I want to resist this reduction of art to ideas by proceeding differently. Drawing upon the unusual opportunity that the *Rondanini* presents to us, not only as Michelangelo's final work but also as a palimpsest, I will draw out what insights its unique facture affords.<sup>658</sup> In articulating a dialogue and dialectic between prior and new conceptions, emerging forms and others that withdraw, my aim is to demonstrate an internal debate or struggle regarding the status of religious images that exceeds definition in ideological terms. While the *Rondanini* clearly constitutes a shift from an earlier, more animated style, we might also see that it enacts a new and equally powerful form of internal movement: a processual dimension that actively constitutes its meaning, animating and transforming dead stone into "*pietra viva*," a living image or icon.<sup>659</sup>

### **Sculptural process, materiality and spiritual imaging**

In the next major phase of work on the sculpture, Michelangelo radically changed the heroic body of Christ as it was initially conceived.<sup>660</sup> He demolished the head, right shoulder, upper arm and chest of Christ in its initial, classicizing form, leaving the severely diminished figure we

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<sup>658</sup> Paoletti also gives a close reading of certain aspects of the changing form of the sculpture, but focuses primarily on the Christ-Mary relation.

<sup>659</sup> Such a reading also challenges the interpretation of the *Rondanini* as "naturalistic," as recently, quizzically, argued by Elsner in "Art History as Ekphrasis," 16-7.

<sup>660</sup> Hartt, *Three Pietàs*, 162, dates this second campaign to the last year of the artist life.

encounter today. In what remains of this figure, the forward axis of the legs is still in position with the oddly suspended remaining arm, while the upper torso is held back, initiating a dialogue between prior and subsequent states [Fig. 5.9].<sup>661</sup> After this radical move on the part of Michelangelo, Christ's body is neither integral nor separate. By necessity, it physically shares the sculptural flesh of Mary from which it is carved, a flesh that arcs in a curve as it is hollowed out. In this new, poignant configuration, Son seems to withdraw towards his origin in her womb. If the figure of Mary was originally Nicodemus, then this withdrawal takes on a further, curious dimension, since it is Nicodemus who in the bible asks whether it is possible to return to the mother's womb in order to be reborn.<sup>662</sup>

As scholars have noted, the larval form of the sculpture, defined by Mary's curving, enveloping mantle, further encourages this sense of absorption [Fig. 5.10]. In a rare fusion of forms, of carrier and the carried, Christ and Mary are re-envisioned in a relation of the utmost intimacy.<sup>663</sup> The Virgin cannot possibly be carrying her Son; their bodies, as previously described, are merely "attached." Michelangelo, who had sought in a lifetime of study to express the divine within a language of natural, bodily relations, here suspends those laws.<sup>664</sup> The physics of such a relation suggests that what we are meant to witness here is not only Christ's physical body, but also his mystical or spiritual one. The change of the supervening figure, from Nicodemus to Mary, further supports what scholars have described as a "transformation from

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<sup>661</sup> As Paoletti notes, the "co-existing images of the body are not merely successive stages of some formal development, but exist in active dialogue with one another, playing what might have been against what is. Their contradictory formal properties, maintained consciously it would seem by the artist, must inform any interpretation of the sculpture. "Palimpsest," 58. I discuss this dialogue below.

<sup>662</sup> In the Gospel of John; see recent discussion of the significance of Nicodemus for Michelangelo as the legendary creator of the first wooden relief of Christ, the Volto Santo, in Zöllner and Thoenes, *Michelangelo, The Complete Works*, 402.

<sup>663</sup> Paolucci sees the merging of the two figures as "the poetic fulcrum of the work" and interprets this return to the womb in psychoanalytic terms, in Michelangelo, *Le Pietà*, 136.

<sup>664</sup> Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 213

historical narrative to *spiritual presence*” [it. mine] in the composition.<sup>665</sup> As Mary holds Christ through the intervening surface of her veil, we are also reminded of similar images of the *imago pietatis* from the realm of devotional images and the humeral veil by which the priest holds the Eucharist, the Real Presence of Christ.<sup>666</sup>

If signs of what I have earlier called “spiritual imaging” may be discerned in the work, it is worth noting that they are made available to the viewer not only through the dismissal of the materiality of the sculpture, but rather by means of it. In this regard, we might draw a connection between Michelangelo’s project and the earliest defenses of the icon with their emphasis on embodiment, both of the subject of depiction and of the bodily perception of the viewer that forms the gateway of its perception. The Incarnation and the Passion the sculpture depicts are both moments of divine condescension, parallel as models of the spirit’s descent to humanity. Notably the body, in its figuration, presentation and relation to other bodies, is the ground *par excellence* for this investigation of spirit. As Herbert Kessler and Caroline Walker Bynum have recently emphasized, it is a paradox of Christian art that spirituality is visualized and made accessible by means of overt materiality, when matter as such would seem to be an impediment to its discernment.<sup>667</sup> Arguably, such an aesthetic strategy is consonant with the very mysteries or paradoxes such art seeks to explore, a paradox of incarnational aesthetics evident in the *Rondanini* and given a richer ground of exploration in the physical medium of sculpture.

The materiality of the sculpture and its symbolic potential are foregrounded in other significant ways. Attending closely to the surface of the figure of Christ in the group, stone takes on a distinctly corporeal aspect in its appearance as skin [Fig. 5.11]. Its rough contours and deep

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<sup>665</sup> Paoletti, “Palimpsest” 70.

<sup>666</sup> See note 4 above.

<sup>667</sup> As discussed in the Introduction to the dissertation.

scars suggest an aging body in what should be Christ's youthful one. Taken together with the now-diminished figure, they suggest a self-image of the aged artist, an image that renders in visible form the physical toll exacted by a lifetime of sculpting marble.<sup>668</sup> In a sonnet (161), Michelangelo had compared skin to stone and the filing of his aging skin to casting off the mortal veil of the soul, merging themes of sculptural process with those of redemption.<sup>669</sup> Here Michelangelo expresses both a desire for soul to be liberated from body and the transformation of the self into one that is pleasing to Christ:

From what sharp biting file  
 Does your tired skin keep growing thin and failing,  
 O ailing soul? When will time release you from it,  
 So you'll return to heaven, where you were  
 Pure and joyful before,  
 Your dangerous and mortal veil cast off?  
 For even if I change my hide  
 In my final years, I cannot change my old established habits,  
 Which, as more days pass, weigh down and compel me more.  
 Love, I won't hide from you  
 That I envy the dead,  
 Being so confused and terrified  
 That my soul, while with me, trembles and fears for itself.  
 O Lord, in my last hours,  
 Stretch out your merciful arms,  
 Take me from myself and make me one who'll please you.<sup>670</sup>

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<sup>668</sup> Charles Seymour is among the many scholars who have seen in the figure of Christ an image of Michelangelo; in this case, he describes it as "a projection" of his own body on to Christ, as I pursue further here. Cited in Paoletti, "Palimpsest," note 62.

<sup>669</sup> Hartt, *Michelangelo, The Complete Sculpture*, 300, sees in this poem in particular, which is generally dated between 1538 and 1541, "the nucleus of the work." The overarching theme of the sonnet seems to be in dialogue with one by Vittoria Colonna, who casts the problematic layer in terms of error: 'Now let the wounded hand rend the veil/that still keeps me bound in this blind error/already twenty years through various tempers/so that the soul might no longer be held back or pushed away.'

<sup>670</sup> Translation by James M. Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 317-18. John Dixon, Jr., in *The Christ of Michelangelo: An Essay on Carnal Spirituality* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994), 14, describes Michelangelo's strange preoccupation "with his own skin, the limit of his body, dividing the imprisoned soul from full communion with others. In his poems the skin was often the bark, the husk, the confining, damaged, edge of his psyche."

In these and other writings of the artist, richly suggestive metaphors of skin, veiling and stripping become means to imagine linkages between body and soul and a spiritual transformation that finds visible parallels in works of art.<sup>671</sup> As Paula Carabell notes, Michelangelo refers equally to the *scorza* of marble and of skin as impediments that must be removed in the attainment of artistic beauty and personal salvation.<sup>672</sup> In the *Rondanini*, we might discern on the surface of Christ's torso a sculptural transformation of this mortal veil, here joined to the theme of purification through suffering. Deep scars give it the appearance of flaying, recalling Apollo's sacrifice of Marsyas, a figure who, in the Renaissance, became representative of the self-sacrifice of the artist and his metamorphosis [Fig. 5.12]. Michelangelo reprises the figure in his compositions of the Crucifixion [Fig. 5.13] and in an unusual wooden carving of Christ on the cross that even more strongly visualizes this connection [Fig. 5.14].<sup>673</sup>

The flayed skin of Christ's body also recalls the skin of Bartholomew by which Michelangelo had imaged himself in the *Last Judgment* [Fig. 5.15]. As Charles Burroughs notes, the saint is associated with Christian iconoclasm against pagan idols, an act that results in his martyrdom; the figure is therefore a resonant one in the context of Michelangelo's own acts of destruction.<sup>674</sup> In both Marsyas' and Bartholomew's skin, we witness the self-emptying of the

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<sup>671</sup> As interpreters of Michelangelo's poetry have noted, in his writings, artistic process—refinement of gold by fire, chisel on stone—serves as a metaphor for inward transformation. Just as the artifact comes into being, so the artist becomes something new in the process of its creation. See Robert Clements, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 273. And unfinished sonnet (152) to Vittoria Colonna, offers an interesting comparandum.

<sup>672</sup> Paula Carabell, "Image and Identity in the Unfinished Works of Michelangelo," 102.

<sup>673</sup> It has often been noted that Michelangelo's composition of Christ crucified on the cross resembles a well-known antique relief depicting the flaying of Marsyas. For period associations of Maryas with metamorphosis and artistic creativity, see Koch, "Michelangelo's Bacchus," 370, and Fredrika Jacobs, "(Dis)assembling: Marsyas, Michelangelo, and the Accademia del Disegno", *Art Bulletin* 84, no.3 (2002): 426-48, respectively. Additionally, see Beat Wyss, 'The Last Judgment as Artistic Process: The Flaying of Marsyas in the Sistine Chapel,' *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 28 (1995): 62-77.

<sup>674</sup> Burroughs, "The *Last Judgment* of Michelangelo: Pictorial Space, Sacred Topography, and the Social World," *Artibus et Historiae* 16, no. 32 (1995), 74-5.



artist but also a portrait: a form of withdrawal that simultaneously reveals his presence.<sup>675</sup>

Both images of flaying render in visual terms the sacrificial aspect of art. In particular, the empty skin of the *Last Judgment* and the severely diminished, flayed torso of the *Rondanini* call to mind a lifetime given over to making visible the truths of Christian belief, according to which sacrifice the artist's own body is spent, a toll Michelangelo specifically describes in his writings.<sup>676</sup> The sacrifice finds an ultimate parallel in the Passion of Christ the artist depicts in the *pietà* itself, a parallel that makes the artist's identification with the figure of Christ all the more resonant.

In traces that remain on the *Rondanini*'s torso, there is evidence of a delicate loincloth that was once covered Christ's lower parts but was later removed by the artist.<sup>677</sup> With regard to the figure as it now presents itself to the viewer, we cannot help but notice the conscious display of genitalia, which is both insisted upon and yet rendered so vulnerable.<sup>678</sup> On the one hand, this exposure seems a conscious decision to strip the body further of veils or intervening artifice. The move takes on further significance insofar as Michelangelo's art was described by contemporaries such as Pietro Aretino in the opposite terms: as a learned form veiling deeper truths.<sup>679</sup> From a theological perspective, as we have earlier discussed, the nudity of the figure is consistent with the iconography of a resurrected Christ and further visualizes the idea of the perfected or spiritual body. Michelangelo had imaged Christ in full nudity for the church of

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<sup>675</sup> Nagel describes the flayed skin as a form of defacement: "a Christian and penitential gesture," and "paradoxically, an iconoclasm assuming figural force;" *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 197.

<sup>676</sup> For a traditional reading of this image as a plea for salvation, see Carabell, "Image and Identity," n 90. In contrast, for an interpretation that links it to the Veil of Veronica in an ironic key of dissimulation, see Campbell "Fare," 63.

<sup>677</sup> As observed by Hartt, *Three Pietàs*, 154.

<sup>678</sup> For a reading that places Christ's nudity in an existential key, see Barricelli, "Michelangelo's Finito," 600.

<sup>679</sup> See note 14 above.

Santa Maria sopra Minerva in a sculpture that, by its inclusion of a cross, combines an image of the physicality of the Passion with the spiritual triumph of the Resurrection [Fig. 3.11].

Returning to the metaphor of physical stripping and self-emptying, enacted in and through the medium of sculpture, we can also chart a parallel, spiritual movement. As Nagel has argued, in Italy during the Reformation art underwent its own version of internal reform, a “soft iconoclasm” in response to the pressures of the Reformation.<sup>680</sup> At its basis was the idea that by stripping away layers of corruption, one might reveal, and restore, the originary principles of the Christian Church.<sup>681</sup> The Pauline image of “stripping off the old man and clothing oneself in Christ” found expression in contemporary devotional works such as the highly popular and influential *Beneficio di Christi*, a meditational tract particularly associated with Reform circles with which Vittoria Colonna and Michelangelo were involved. But the metaphor of stripping or refinement to describe an interior, spiritual reform was based upon a longer history. It is related to ideas found in Plotinus and Patristics, translated into the Renaissance by Marsilio Ficino, whose writings were a vital part of Michelangelo’s intellectual milieu.<sup>682</sup> Through authors such as Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and Petrarch, the Neoplatonic theory of ideal form inherent in matter from which it might be liberated, just as soul might be freed from body in death, became

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<sup>680</sup> Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*. The point is developed further with reference to Michelangelo in Kim, “Creative Iconoclasm.”

<sup>681</sup> Nagel discusses the humanist ideal of *repristinatio* in its relation to the artistic experiments of Michelangelo in *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 17: “In describing the reform of man and his restoration to the image and likeness of God, the Greek fathers continually compared it to a process of cleaning a painting that has been marred but not completely ruined by the unsuitable addition of colors and by the accumulation of dirt.” For the historical basis, see Ladner, “The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers.”

<sup>682</sup> Notably, Ficino translated and commented on Plotinus’ *Enneads*. *The locus classicus* is Plotinus’ discussion of beauty in *Enneads* 1.6.9: “How then can you see the sort of beauty a good soul has...just as someone polishing a statue which has to be beautiful cuts away her and polishes there and makes one part smooth and clears another until he has given his state a beautiful face, so you too must cut away excess and straighten the crooked and clear the dark and make it bright and never stop working on your statue until the divine glory of virtue shines out in you, till you see your self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat.”

the philosophical basis Michelangelo drew upon in his conception of the sculptural act.<sup>683</sup> In the case of Michelangelo, the insistence in his later years on a philosophical basis for his art – upon principles of a normative order rather than the free reign of *fantasia* or imagination – is arguably of a piece with the attacks of Counter-Reformation writers, who inveighed against artistic license in moral terms.<sup>684</sup>

### **Interlude: Sculpture, Sonnets and Self-Formation**

In the *Rondanini*, the process of sculptural refinement we see in Michelangelo's prior works moves beyond the liberation of ideal Neo-platonic form, to a further breaking and chastening of the body of Christ. How are to make sense of this destruction within an ideal of spiritual reform? I have suggested preliminary ways in which stripping or self-emptying in the realm of art might be understood in spiritual terms, in Michelangelo's self-identification with the Passion of Christ he depicts. In order to establish further grounds for understanding this dynamic, and the destruction I will describe as iconoclastic, we will consider the particular relation of Michelangelo's sculpture to the process of self-formation. As examined in the discussion of Rosso, art theory of the sixteenth century in Italy, particularly as it descends from Leonardo da Vinci, describes a genealogical link between artists and works in terms of the transmission of

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<sup>683</sup> It is not my intention to enter into the longstanding and thorny debate concerning Michelangelo's debt to Neoplatonism and in particular to the Christian Neoplatonism of Ficino. What constitutes Christian Neoplatonism in Ficino and in the period in question is in itself a complex issue, given the syncretism of many, and at times contradictory, sources, and also the development of Ficino's thought. What I pursue instead are ways in which a reading of the *Rondanini* might usefully be informed by the language and ideas of specific texts concerning the statue and sculpture that resonate in a variety of sources, from philosophy to poetry to Patristic writings. Augustine provides another important example of Christianity's complex relation to Neoplatonic thought. For a recent and comprehensive overview of this debate, see most recently Berthold Hub, "*...e fa dolce la morte*: Love, Death, and Salvation in Michelangelo's Last Judgment," *Artibus et Historiae* 26, no. 51 (2005), esp. 119-20 and n.6.

<sup>684</sup> This expands a thought made by Summers in *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 458.

*maniera* and *aria*.<sup>685</sup> Related to this tradition, there is a significant strand of cultural practice and thought in the Renaissance by which an author, artist or courtier represents or fashions the self by his works or other modes of performance.<sup>686</sup>

With regard to Michelangelo, Linda Koch traces humanistic concepts of self-fashioning that inform artistic creation in the period within syncretic sources that have been judged crucial to the artist's conception of his own work. These include Pico della Mirandola's idea of the inherent dignity of man as "*plastes et fctor*," and Ficino's adaptation of Plotinus' much-invoked metaphor from *Enneads* I, in which carving or molding one's interior statue is given an intellectual and moral dimension.<sup>687</sup> Although Koch limits her discussion to Michelangelo's classically-inspired works, focusing particularly on the early sculpture of the *Bacchus*, she demonstrates the thorough integration of this tradition with ideas of artistic self-formation and spiritual aims, and the unusually self-reflexive nature of Michelangelo sculpture in this regard.<sup>688</sup>

Paula Carabell is equally concerned with the self-reflexive dimension of Michelangelo's sculpture, particularly of his unfinished works, which she reads in richly psychic and existential terms.<sup>689</sup> Drawing upon sonnet 242, Carabell sees evidence for the view that Michelangelo consciously projects himself and his affective states onto his sculptures, which function, mirror-like, as sites of self-recognition and reflection.<sup>690</sup> In the *Rondanini*, she interprets the stripping of the outer layers of the sculpture as a deconstruction of this self: a loss of identity in a fusion of

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<sup>685</sup> See foundational work by David Summers in this regard, as discussed in Chapter 4 above.

<sup>686</sup> The locus classicus for this idea is Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>687</sup> On Plotinus, see also Linda A. Koch, "Michelangelo's *Bacchus*," 367.

<sup>688</sup> Koch, "Michelangelo's *Bacchus*," 368.

<sup>689</sup> The non-finito as artistic and human dilemma, see Barricelli, "Michelangelo's Finito," 86ff.

<sup>690</sup> Carabell, "Image and Identity," 93.

forms that results in a figure of “spiritual plenitude.”<sup>691</sup> What is compelling here is the insight gained into sculpture as a profoundly inter-subjective enterprise: the formation of the self is effected only in dialectical relation to the beloved. In the *Rondanini*, this culminates in a radical submission to the Other who might reconstitute it spiritually.<sup>692</sup> This dialectic bears comparison exemplary of the operation of the icon. Carabell’s reading of the *Rondanini* resonates deeply with the iconophile theory we have earlier examined, particularly John of Damascus’ emphasis on the affective desire that forms the basis of spiritual yearning, with the image as a mirror reflecting one’s spiritual state. The *kenosis* or withdrawal that I earlier described in aesthetic-religious terms may be understood in its most elemental aspect as a radical form of love. Here, the mediating role of the iconic image is pushed to its very limits, as boundaries between subject and object, artist and prototype, give way, transforming both sculpture and artist.<sup>693</sup>

Both sculpture and sonnet have been interpreted as privileged mediums for the artist’s entwined process of self-imaging, self-recognition and transformation.<sup>694</sup> At this juncture, it is worth drawing out further observations regarding this process, to articulate in more detail the dynamic between sculptural process and spiritual reformation I propose. In both realms of artistic endeavor, poetic and sculptural, refining or carving become a means of self-knowledge and spiritual reflection, states that are conditioned by the highly constrained forms in which they are enacted or described. Martina Lauster provides an insightful reading of the ramified significance of stone imagery in Michelangelo’s sonnets that might usefully inform our understanding of the

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<sup>691</sup> See also Paoletti, who sees the “fused corporality” of the figures as of a piece with Michelangelo’s late sonnets and a tradition of mystical poetry, “Ambiguity Maintained through Palimpsest,” 73.

<sup>692</sup> Carabell, “Image and Identity,” 98.

<sup>693</sup> See discussion in CH1 above.

<sup>694</sup> See for example the work of Laura Agoston, who provides a comprehensive overview of scholarship on this topic: “Sonnet, Sculpture, Death: The Mediums of Michelangelo’s Self-imaging,” *Art History* 20, no. 4 (1997): 534–55, 637.

*Rondanini*.<sup>695</sup> Drawing upon the seminal influence of Petrarch for the artist, she argues for a “destructive dynamism”<sup>696</sup> that we might see paralleled in Michelangelo’s “violence” against the figure of Christ/self.<sup>697</sup>

Scholars have interpreted Petrarch’s sonnets in a Christian-Neoplatonic frame, as a movement of erotic sublimation and spiritual ascent that is echoed in Michelangelo’s poetry. But Lauster suggests that this encasing of worldly desires in the stone-like form of the sonnet and its polished perfection cannot be the ultimate aim of either author. For such acts to be spiritually authentic and transformative, they must move beyond technical brilliance and the outward esteem such an achievement would receive. Equally untenable, a stoic sublimation that would free the poet/sculptor from the force of his animating passion would vitiate artistic process itself.<sup>698</sup> For without the animating “fire” of productive *eros*, the statue of the self and beloved would remain forever cold or dead. Hence the necessity for the artist to remain vulnerable to its more destructive tendencies, by which he may himself be destroyed.<sup>699</sup>

### **Idolatry, Iconoclasm and Spiritual Reformation**

There are other parallels we can draw between the two artists to illumine connections between Michelangelo’s sculptural and poetic works. In Petrarch’s creation of his beloved Laura, scholars

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<sup>695</sup> Martina Lauster, “Stone Imagery and the Sonnet Form: Petrarch, Michelangelo, Baudelaire, Rilke,” *Comparative Literature* 45, no.2 (1993): 146-74.

<sup>696</sup> Lauster, “Stone Imagery,” 70.

<sup>697</sup> The results of recent conservation on the sculpture in 2004 have revealed metal fragments on the chest of Christ that likely indicate the tips of tools that were broken due to Michelangelo’s vigorous carving. See Fiorio, *The Pietà Rondanini*, 112.

<sup>698</sup> Lauster, “Stone Imagery,” 150.

<sup>699</sup> Lauster, “Stone Imagery,” 155, 156-57. If, as Laura Agoston argues, death, like stone and sonnet, is another medium of Michelangelo’s self-imaging, then the hollowing out of the body of Christ/self might also be read in these terms. See Agoston’s reading of Petrarch’s sonnet 170 and Paul’s Letter to the Romans in “Sonnet, Sculpture, Death,” 637ff.

have seen a fusion of Petrarch's poetic "idol" and his fame (*lauro*) as poet laureate.<sup>700</sup> We might chart a parallel association in Michelangelo's life, in which his art and person were similarly idolized as "*divino*." In Michelangelo's case this identification proved highly problematic. On the one hand, in his monumental image of the *Last Judgment*, Michelangelo was praised for showing the beauty and perfection of the human body in every conceivable form, an achievement lauded by Vasari as the *telos* of an entire history of art. But he was also castigated for this display of artistic virtuosity, condemned for placing his own art above the Christian beliefs he sought to animate. In particular, the figure of Christ, which takes as its model the pagan statue of Apollo, came under censure.<sup>701</sup> Within the historical frame of art and idolatry, and the reception of Michelangelo's works during a period of condemnation of the idols of religious art, the artist's lament of the "idol" he made of his art takes on heightened significance as he reaches the final stage before death:

[Sonnet 285 – Oct. 1552-Sept. 1554]:  
 The voyage of my life at last has reached  
 across a stormy sea, in a fragile boat  
 the common port all must pass through, to give an accounting of very evil and pious  
 deed.  
 So now I recognize how laden with error  
 was the affectionate fantasy<sup>702</sup>  
 that made art an idol and sovereign over me,  
 like all things men want in spite of their best interests.  
 What will become of all my thoughts of love,  
 Once gay and foolish, now that I'm nearing two deaths?  
 I'm certain of one, and the other looms over me.

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<sup>700</sup> John Freccero, cited in Lauster, 149.

<sup>701</sup> For a reading of the Christ figure as modeled after the antique statue of the Apollo Belvedere, and of the *Last Judgment* as a plea to Christ/Apollo for artistic inspiration, see Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 529 n.16. See also Nagel's discussion of the imaging of Christ in the form of statuary and according to sculptural models, and the tensions which ensue, in "The Antique Statue of Christ," *The Controversy of Renaissance Art* (Chicago; London: Chicago University Press, 2011), 129-52.

<sup>702</sup> It is worth pursuing Marsilio Ficino's description of hell as the "kingdom of fantastic reason in the impious man." Cited in Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 45.

that Neither painting nor sculpture will be able any longer to calm my soul, now turned to  
divine love  
that opened his arms on the cross to take us in.<sup>703</sup>

There are a number of similar passages we might invoke here, such as this couplet from sonnet 282: “With so much servitude, with so much tedium/And with false concepts and great peril/Of the soul, to sculpt here divine things.” What I would specifically draw attention to is the association of artistic fantasy or imagination with error, which seems to take on a perilous dimension in the spiritual realm. Here we might turn to Summers’ description of the late devotional works of Michelangelo as “purges of the fantasy.”<sup>704</sup> Building upon this insight, the *Rondanini*’s physical breaking of the perfected body of Christ might be viewed as a “break” with the figure that came to signify an idol of art. Moreover, the self-identification of the artist with this Christ-figure, whose castigation can be read as a form of spiritual action, lends further weight to the notion of sculptural process as a form of reflective, inward-turning iconoclasm, directed towards the idols of *fantasia*.<sup>705</sup>

With regard to this “iconoclasm of the imagination,” as I have explored in a previous study, we may turn to Ficino’s *Platonic Theology* 9.3.2-5 for further insight.<sup>706</sup> In this passage, Ficino reprises a tradition that descends from a line of thought regarding statue magic and animation in the Hermetic corpus, in his account of the epistemological ascent of the phantasy

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<sup>703</sup> Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 466-47; see related sonnets in Petrarch and Colonna.

<sup>704</sup> Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 459.

<sup>705</sup> See “Creative Iconoclasm.” Given the root of *fantasia* in the Greek *phaos*, and its role in presentation as a bringing to light, one could pursue the difference between the artistic fantasy that leads to idolatry and the spiritual light of the icon. Paolucci, *Le Vite*, 143, also sees in the *Rondanini* Michelangelo’s overturning of “*l’affettuosa fantasia*’ che era stata l’ossessione di tutta una vita e che ancora è present, sia pure disincarnate e spiritualizzata.”

<sup>706</sup> Kim, “Creative Iconoclasm.”



towards an understanding of God.<sup>707</sup> In the first stage of this process, the phantasy, described as “too rash a teacher and artisan,” fashions a statue [*statuam*] from the materials of the physical senses to produce a sensuously captivating idol.<sup>708</sup> However, this initial, beautiful idol is a delusion that must be countered by reason, which then engages in a process of abstraction, stripping away the dimensionality of the idol’s form.<sup>709</sup> In seeking God, according to Ficino’s model, we must abandon the illusory beauty of our first conception of him, subjecting it instead to the light of rational illumination that ultimately derives from the contemplation of God’s radiance.<sup>710</sup>

As Michael Allen notes, Ficino develops the metaphor of the statue further in his commentary on the *Phaedrus*, granting it a more integral and legitimizing role in the disciple’s initiation into divine mystery.<sup>711</sup> Of particular interest to our investigation is Ficino’s description of the fabrication of an image (*ekeinon*) of the beloved as a statue located mysteriously within. According to Allen’s interpretation of this passage, in fashioning this statue, the lover also forms a complex conceptual one. It is not only a statue of the beloved, but a “threefold likeness: of himself as lover, of the beloved, and of the god whom they both worship.”<sup>712</sup> The statue in this

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<sup>707</sup> See Michael Allen, “To Gaze upon the Face of God again: Philosophic statuary, Pygmalion and Marsilio Ficino,” *Rinascimento* 48 (2008), 123-29, and also 134-35 for his assessment of how rich the idea of statue-magic, with its further expression in variations of the theme of the Pygmalion myth, had become in the Renaissance and particularly in Ficino. For the passage in the influential *Asclepius* that describes animating statues, see Brian P. Copenhaver, ed., *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English Translation, with notes and introduction* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 23.

<sup>708</sup> Allen, “To Gaze upon the Face of God again,” 125.

<sup>709</sup> Allen notes the parallel here to similar themes in Michelangelo’s sonnets (151, 152, 236, 237, and 239), as well as to the liberation of emergent forms in the *Slaves*. “To Gaze upon the Face of God again,” 133.

<sup>710</sup> Allen, “To Gaze upon the Face of God again,” 126-29. See also Ficino’s “Dialogus inter Deum et animam theologicus” in his *Lettere* ed. S. Gentile (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1990), 1.4.80-103; 15. Cited in Allen, “To Gaze upon the Face of God again,” 128.

<sup>711</sup> Allen, “To Gaze upon the Face of God again,” 129-30.

<sup>712</sup> See the interpretation of *Phaedrus* 252d7 by Summers, in *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 102: “The soul loves the image of the same god that it follows, and in working at the image of its beloved, it works at the

tripartite sense becomes a daemonic intermediary between the lovers and god (here envisioned as the daemon of Divine Beauty), but only if “animated” by love.<sup>713</sup> In the words of Allen,

“The statue for Ficino, at least in certain mystical or poetic contexts, is therefore the symbolic nexus between man and God, ironically so given its traditional associations with idolatry. Hence the divine imperative that we must, with purity of heart, fabricate statues of ourselves, of the world, of God himself; and that we must do this if we are ever to escape our own post-lapsarian limitations and isolation; ever to understand and participate in the nature of love.”<sup>714</sup>

I believe Ficino’s conception of the statue in its dual potency for delusional idolatry and for divine mediation, a duality inherent in Platonism which carries through Neoplatonic thought, provides crucial insight into the dynamic played out in the *Rondanini*.<sup>715</sup> In the long history of tension between art and divinity this dissertation has traced, the idol has stood not only for the physical images that replace or distort our relation to God.<sup>716</sup> As the Reformers emphasized, the idols of the mind or imagination were equally and perhaps even more dangerous; moreover, they were not so easily destroyed.<sup>717</sup> For the Byzantines, these “conceptual” idols were understood in image-like terms, as forms or *perigraphē* or circumscription. As Gregory of Nyssa wrote in his *Life of Moses*, every concept or *noema* originating in the imagination circumscribes the divine

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image of its own essential nature. This repeated the familiar Florentine maxim that every painter paints himself; but only as he might be. The love of beauty is possession by a god and longing after one’s true self. It was this that made art and ascent and the artist’s life a pilgrimage.”

<sup>713</sup> Allen, “To Gaze upon the Face of God again,” 130.

<sup>714</sup> Allen, “To Gaze upon the Face of God again,” 135.

<sup>715</sup> Although not focused on statues but rather images, Margaret Miles deftly explicates their dual significance and ambivalence in the Christian tradition, as it descends from Plato and Plotinus, in “*Facie ad Faciem*,” 43-58.

<sup>716</sup> For the condemnation of statue idolatry, see Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 8.23 and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3.104. See also Daniel P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 43.

<sup>717</sup> See Allen, “To Gaze Upon the Face of God again,” 135, for the view that the statue, for Ficino, informs “notions of philosophizing, of meditating, of prayer itself.”

nature, producing an idol of God.<sup>718</sup> At the heart of the iconoclast debates was the distinction between icon and its opposite, the idol, which was defined according to whether an image attempted to circumscribe what could not be captured. In Ficino, the doubly valent statue, both icon and idol, is the intermediary by which we might come know God. The process of attaining such a vision is ultimately one gained by God's mysterious sculpting of ourselves, as we face the "radiant darkness of God's unknowability."<sup>719</sup> The description closely approximates the apophatic withdrawal of the divine in the icon: the Pauline notion of seeing darkly as in a mirror and an enigma. To draw a parallel with Petrarch and Michelangelo, what we must pursue as the supreme object of desire is not the statue/idol of the perfected self or even of Beauty, but in the words of Allen, "the God of our idolatry and of our image-making and our image-breaking powers alike."<sup>720</sup>

### From Idol to Icon

Earlier I had suggested that in the iconoclasm of the *Rondanini*, we might witness a breaking that is a remaking, and the paradox of an idol of art turned into religious icon. In the last part of this chapter, I will return to where we began: with the distance between Michelangelo's first and last conceptions of the *pietà* as the frame to bring this transformation to light, within the context of historic tensions regarding the legitimacy of religious images that was brought to violent conclusion in the Reformation.

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<sup>718</sup> "Every concept (*noema*), as it is produced according to an apprehension of the imagination in a conception that circumscribes and in an aim that pretends to attain the divine nature, models only an idol of God (*eidolon theon*), without at all declaring God himself." Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Moysis*, II, par. 166, PG 44, 337b.

<sup>719</sup> In this overview I am condensing somewhat the progression of Ficino's conceptualization of the statue, with this last drawn from his commentary on Dionysius the Areopagite's *Mystical Theology*. See Allen, "To Gaze Upon the Face of God again," 134, who interprets Ficino, *Opera omnia*, cit., 1023.3-1024.

<sup>720</sup> Allen, "To Gaze upon the Face of God again," 136.

Two polished legs and a disjointed arm, tethered to the sculpture by a tenuous stone bridge [Fig.5.16], serve as a remnant of an earlier conception of the perfected body that Michelangelo destroyed. While Christ's legs were integrated into the new figure, the arm could never be rejoined. Why was it not removed? Did it serve as a reminder of *vanitas*, a visible symbol of what the artist had left behind, as some scholars have emphasized?<sup>721</sup> The results of recent conservation on the sculpture suggest that the arm might not be removed without threatening the physical integrity of the entire structure.<sup>722</sup> This material fact, far from diminishing the significance of the remainder, brings the stakes of this decision even more compellingly into view: it emphasizes the risk and vulnerability of Michelangelo's "break" with his prior concept, and that such reformation is not without irrevocable consequence.<sup>723</sup> Given the unifacial sculpting technique by which Michelangelo evinced form from stone, the second image of Christ he reverts to at this point could never be more than a shadow of the first.<sup>724</sup> It seems significant, therefore, that the artist continued working on the group rather than casting it aside,

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<sup>721</sup> Notably Dagoberto Frey, cited in Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 213.

<sup>722</sup> Fiorio, *The Pietà Rondanini*, 113.

<sup>723</sup> See Wallace on the limits of sculpture in contrast to poetry and Michelangelo's documented struggles in that material medium, in "Non ha la ottima artista alcun concetto," in Clare Lapraik Guest and Roy Eriksen's *Rhetoric, theatre and the arts of design: essays presented to Roy Eriksen* (Oslo: Novus Press, 2008), 20-9.

<sup>724</sup> For discussion of the difficulties and subtleties of this technique, described by Vasari and Cellini, see Carabell, who argues that the emergence of a singular form by this technique creates a surface that allows for reflective self-formation. "Image and Identity," 91-101. Both Carabell and Summers compare the carving of the St. Matthew sculpture to the Rondanini in Michelangelo's bringing form to figures through a process of emerging relief, see Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 98-100 and Carabell, 95-6. See also his differentiation of the results between the two, 459: "in the *Rondanini pietà*, he repeated the figure of Christ once again; but as he had done when he was young, when he carved the St. Matthew, he probed the stone, seeking out its life and grace, impossibly shifting figures in its dense mass, one last time trying to make life with his hands, God and his mother stuttering and dissolving as one great arc consumes the stone."

as he had done in previous works, such as the *Florentine pietà* and the *Risen Christ*, for reason of having failed to achieve the perfection of form he desired.<sup>725</sup>

According to legend, after Michelangelo had finished his first *pietà*, the work was praised as miraculous; but its authorship was unknown and the work attributed to another artist. He responded by inscribing the *cintura* or band across the Virgin's breast [Fig. 5.17], literally circumscribing her body with the following signature: "*Michael Angelus Buonarotus Florent[inus] faciebat....*"<sup>726</sup> Describing his achievement in these terms, Michelangelo invoked a Plinian topos that placed him in the company of Phidias and the greatest sculptors of pagan antiquity.<sup>727</sup> "*Faciebat*" implied that the work was unfinished or ongoing - that the sculptor could bring it to even greater perfection - a claim that takes on greater hubris if we consider the extreme refinement and polish of the work.<sup>728</sup> The "*non-finito*" became a term of artistic approbation for Michelangelo's many unfinished works and, as scholars have argued, a metaphor employed by the artist for the human condition itself.<sup>729</sup> Comparing the two *pietàs*, we can draw

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<sup>725</sup> See Vasari *Le Vite* (Gaetano-Milanesi) vol 7: 243, on Michelangelo's abandonment of his works: "...usava dire, che, se s'avessi avuto a contenere di quell che faceva, n'arebbe mandate poche, anzi nessuna, fuori; vedendosi che gli era ito tanto con l'arte e col guidizio innanzi, che come gli aveva scoperto una figura, e conosciuto un minimo che d'errore, la lasciava stare, e correva a manimettere un altro marmot, pensando non avere a venire a quell medesimo; ed egli spesso diceva essere questa la cagione che egli diceva d'aver fatto sì poche statue e pitture." As one of the only sculptural works held by the artist at the time of his death, the Rondanini might be compared to Leonardo's similarly enigmatic and profound Mona Lisa in its personal significance to its creator.

<sup>726</sup> See Vasari for an account of this episode in the 1550 edition of the *Le Vite* (Barocchi, 1962) vol. 2: 187: "Potè l'amore di Michele Agnolo e la fatica insieme in questa opera tanto, che quivi (quello che in altra opera più non fece) lasciò il suo nome scritto a traverse una cintola che il petto della Nostra Donna soccigne, come di cosa nella quale e soddisfatto e compiaciuto s'era per se medesimo."

<sup>727</sup> Pliny, *Natural History*, 1952, vol. 3, 35:80. In the contract for the *pietà*, Jacopo Galli requests that it be "*la più bella opera di marmot che sia hogue in Roma, et che maestro nisuno la faria migliore hogue.*" Cited in Paolucci, *Michelangelo's Le Pietà*, 14-5.

<sup>728</sup> Vasari particularly emphasizes the "*finitezza*" of the work. See note 105. Irvin Lavin provides a compelling interpretation of Michelangelo's act, which he reads as a form of piety, in "Divine Grace and the Remedy of the Imperfect," 278-316.

<sup>729</sup> For the non-finito as artistic and human dilemma in the period and in Michelangelo, see Carabell, "Image and Identity" and Barricelli, "Michelangelo's Finito."

a finer distinction between the *non-finito* that signals artistic mastery, and the unfinished, ongoing composition of his last work, where the attempt to “circumscribe” the divine in definitive or completed form is suspended in favor of an open-ended searching.<sup>730</sup>

In charting this shift, we might draw further upon a distinction made in the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion, based upon Byzantine iconophile theory. The idol, according to Marion, is “created by us and we are reflected in it; rather than a window beyond, it is a mirror satisfying the gaze.”<sup>731</sup> When Michelangelo laid claim to his first *pietà*, he did so in terms that recall Narcissus, a youth absorbed by his own reflection. In Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia* (1593), “*Amor di se stesso*” or self-love is illustrated by an image of Narcissus with the accompanying motto: “to love oneself is nothing less than with satisfaction and applause to admire oneself in one’s works.”<sup>732</sup>

Here we can also recall the earlier discussion of Michelangelo’s and Petrarch’s sonnets, in which the worldly esteem won by the perfection of form is seen as an impediment to authentic transformation; it is characterized instead by a constant refining and purification. In the polished surfaces of the first *pietà* and its praise, we see Michelangelo’s self-reflexive recognition as a great artist and the fame it presaged.<sup>733</sup> Those polished surfaces of self and sculpture are foregone in the *Rondanini*. Its rough and broken surfaces do not reflect any gaze, but instead

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<sup>730</sup> André Chastel also sees the Rondanini as left “deliberately open;” as cited in Barricelli, “Michelangelo’s Finito,” 606, note 3. Like other scholars, Barricelli sees the unfinished nature of the work as central to its meaning, but emphasizes its relation to Reform beliefs, 601.

<sup>731</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Crossing the visible*, James Smith, trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 190.

<sup>732</sup> “...perche amarse stesso non è altro, che vaghegiarsi tutto nell’opere proprie con sodisfattione, e con applauso.” See Louise Vinge, “The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century,” trans. Robert Dewsnap (PhD Diss., Lund: Gleerups, 1967), 143. Cited in Carabell, “Image and Identity,” n75. For a discussion of Michelangelo’s self-promotion through his art, focused on his early works in Rome, see Koch, “Art of Self-Formation,” 373-75.

<sup>733</sup> See notes 105 and 107 above. In his description, Vasari claims the impossibility of any artist to ever surpass the grace or design of this work or to cut or polish the marble with the skill displayed by Michelangelo.

offer surfaces of reflective contemplation on the limits of any human image to circumscribe the divine. In phenomenological terms, the multiple, dialogic surfaces of the figures shatter the intentionality of the gaze. The process of breaking might further be understood within a longer history of contemplative images that move towards their own effacement, and as a precursor for the iconoclasm that would follow from the Reformation, in the Enlightenment destruction of the “idols of the mind.”<sup>734</sup>

This brings me to another stage of the sculpture’s transformation – to the abstract, yet deeply affective, faces that Michelangelo carved for the two figures [Fig. 5.18]. As noted earlier, the carrying figure was first imagined as male, and it was later re-envisioned as Mary. A new face for Christ was then carved from her shoulder, and Mary’s, once turned outward, is focused along the same plane as her Son’s. As Frederick Hartt observes, the shift of Mary’s face and gaze presents a “spectacle less of grief than of...identification with each other, that dissolution of limits which prevent one personality from merging with another....”<sup>735</sup> At some point in the course of carving, the Madonna’s face was later brought into even closer proximity to her Son’s.<sup>736</sup> Adding to the argument for the identification of the artist and Christ, scholars have seen in these features a self-portrait of Michelangelo.<sup>737</sup> But it is also the indistinction of these faces, and their partial effacement as representations, that opens the possibility of a fusion of identities and identifications noted earlier: of Michelangelo with Christ, and of Mary with his beloved

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<sup>734</sup> See Kim, “Creative Iconoclasm.”

<sup>735</sup> Hartt, *Three Pietàs*, 172.

<sup>736</sup> Hartt, *Three Pietàs*, 176-78, attributes this last to a third and final carving campaign in which Michelangelo also sculpted Christ’s features.

<sup>737</sup> Hartt, *Three Pietàs*, 178: “Now in extreme old age, the artist identifies himself with Christ..., becomes the Lord he loves, merges his being with the divine.” The self-identification by artists with Christ was not unusual in the Renaissance (Albrecht Dürer is an obvious example) and was in fact encouraged by the highly influential religious work, the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, as Hartt rightly notes. The practice is explored extensively in Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

lady, Vittoria Colonna.<sup>738</sup> The second figure, as it stands now, with feminine and masculine attributes and as quasi-divine, accords with Michelangelo's description of Colonna in sonnet 235, as "*un uomo in una donna, anzi un dio.*"

A man within a woman, or rather a god  
 Speaks through her mouth, so that I,  
 By having listened to her,  
 Have been made such that I'll never be my own again.  
 I do believe, since I've been  
 taken from myself by her,  
 that, being outside of myself, I'll take pity on myself;  
 her beautiful face spurs me  
 so far above vain desire  
 that I see death in every other beauty.  
 O lady who pass souls  
 Through fire and water on to days of joy:  
 Pray, make me never turn back to myself again.<sup>739</sup>

In another sonnet [239], Michelangelo had promised to give immortal life to both himself and his lady in stone.<sup>740</sup> In the *Rondanini*, the last sculpture before his death, we might see Colonna, who had earlier been imaged as Mary in a presentation drawing gifted to her by the artist [Fig. 5.19], immortalized as the vital source of support she must have been for the artist in life. "Her" lifting of the artist's fragile and withered form parallels the spiritual ascent described in the sonnet. As figures fuse into one, and her "beautiful" face is brought into loving proximity

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<sup>738</sup> See Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt on Michelangelo's repeated obscuring of the face of Christ in his artworks, in "The Body as 'vera effigies' in Michelangelo's Art: the Minerva Christ," in *L'Immagine di Cristo: dall'Acheropita alla mano d'Artista dal tardo medioevo all'età barocca*, eds. Christoph L. Frommel and Gerhard Wolf (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 2006), esp. 269-70 and with specific reference to the *Rondanini*, 307-308.

<sup>739</sup> Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 398-99.

<sup>740</sup> It is believed that the *Rondanini* sculpture derived from an ancient Roman column, which gives it a pagan valence; its pedestal is a Roman funerary monument for husband and wife, which oddly mirrors the Michelangelo/Colonna relation and this monument to their love.



with his own, both artist and beloved are transformed in a figure of contemplative, spiritual love.<sup>741</sup>

Taken together, the conjoined and merging faces of the sculpture become an “interface,” as David Morgan has described an icon. The result is a mediation of the artist and Christ, Mary and Colonna, in an image that forms an “interactive boundary.” Morgan’s definition seems particularly apt here: “[an icon,] like a face...is both a surface and a depth, which combine to create a sense of presence, something that is there, yet not fully visible.”<sup>742</sup> Here we also see a parallel to Marion’s concept of the icon, as that which “summons sight in letting the visible...be saturated little by little with the invisible.”<sup>743</sup> The Pauline idea of seeing God in a “mirror and enigma,” crucial to the historic definition of the icon, might also be invoked in reading these faces.

This brings me to a further consideration of how the *Rondanini* as an icon – a mediation of presence - might be understood. The iconic dimension of Michelangelo’s art is evident examining a remarkable series of drawings from the 1550s, now known as the Crucifixion series [Fig. 5.20]. Like the *pietà* given to Colonna, these highly personal drawings were presumably made as images that combined an intimate, aesthetic attention with the practice of devotional contemplation.<sup>744</sup> The drawings are thought to have been produced near the time of Colonna’s

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<sup>741</sup> In drawing an analogy between poetry and sculpture, Robert Clements notes: “The katharsis accomplished by a noble love is similar to the creative process of sculpture.” *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 61.

<sup>742</sup> David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 89.

<sup>743</sup> Marion, *Crossing the Visible*, 190. On the medium’s capacity to “double” its prototype, enabling a relation of love that is prefigured in the myth of Pygmalion, see Carabell, “Image and Identity,” 88-90.

<sup>744</sup> For a study of these drawings that illumines their aesthetic qualities in relation to spiritual reform, see D’Alia, “Drawing Christ’s Blood.” Concerning a drawing of the Crucifixion given to her by Michelangelo, Colonna responded in a letter to the artist that she viewed the fine detail by examining it under light, with the aid of a mirror and a magnifying glass. *Il Carteggio di Michelangelo*, ed. P. Barocchi, G. Poggi and R. Ristori

death, at her request, which makes them all the more weighted with religious significance.<sup>745</sup>

In their private nature as gifts outside the economy of images, they function as critical, opposing models to the indulgenced prints of the *pietà* we have earlier explored.<sup>746</sup>

Scholars have long made a connection between the *Rondanini* and these last devotional works.<sup>747</sup> Beyond their mutual categorization by period and theme, we might draw a relation between their sculptural and drawing techniques, which both yield remarkably sensuous surfaces.<sup>748</sup> David Rosand has described Michelangelo's technique in the drawings, which are composed of repetitive and overlapping lines, as "carving relief surfaces out of paper."<sup>749</sup> As a result the drawings have an unusual tactile dimension, rendering their figures nearly sculptural. Ugo Pantiera da Prato (fl. 1295–ca. 1330), whose works underwent many editions in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, once described religious meditation in terms that resonate with Michelangelo's artistic experiment, as a move from the abstract to the concrete. Christ appears to the faithful first in writing, then outlined, then "colored and lifelike," and finally "sculpted in the flesh."<sup>750</sup>

In a letter to his contemporary, Benedetto Varchi, on the *paragone* or contest between sculpture and painting, Michelangelo had contrasted the technique of sculpture, "*per forza di*

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(Florence: S.P.E.S., 1983), vol. 4: 104. See also Nagel, "Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna," 655, note 36.

<sup>745</sup> As noted in Paoletti, "Palimpsest," 79, note 50.

<sup>746</sup> See Nagel, "Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna" for discussion of their significance as artworks functioning outside the usual parameters of patronage and other modes of valuation.

<sup>747</sup> See for example the exhibition catalogue, *L'ultimo Michelangelo*, 100-149. A working sketch of three blocks of marble for a Crucifixion group, ca. 1545-50, in the Archivio Buonarroti presents the possibility that these sketches may have been studies for sculpture. See Charles de Tolnay, *Michelangelo: Sculptor, Painter, Architect*, illustration 248.

<sup>748</sup> See Carabell, "Image and Identity," 101.

<sup>749</sup> David Rosand, *Drawing Acts* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 210-11.

<sup>750</sup> Quoted in Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, 116.

*levare*” or by force of removal with that of painting “*per via di porre*,” by means of addition.<sup>751</sup> Yet both are palimpsests that reflect a form of iconoclasm. Much like the processual carving of the *Rondanini*, in the Crucifixion drawings, a dynamic overwriting leads to an obscuring of the artist’s original line and form to produce a blurring of boundaries and figures. As Peter Parshall has noted with respect to images of the Passion, the graphic defacement of an image is a kind of iconoclastic overwriting that produces striking effects beyond the original.<sup>752</sup> In this case, what is lost in terms of one kind of visibility – of ideal form and authorial line – produces visibility of another type. In the very process of obscuring, the figures of the Crucifixion scene are animated or made present. They are “moving” in a double sense, of motion and emotion. Rendering spirit through material form, the figures of Christ and his mourners become “empsychos” images or living icons.

## Conclusion

In a sonnet (161) comparing the act of sculpting to the soul’s release in death, Michelangelo had written what appears to be a form of prayer:

O Lord, in my last hours  
stretch out toward me your merciful arms,  
take me from myself and make me one who’ll please you.<sup>753</sup>

In his final meditations on the Passion of Christ, as he turned away from the idols of artistic fantasy, Michelangelo had claimed that “neither painting nor sculpture will be able any longer to

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<sup>751</sup> “*lo intend scultura quella che si fa per forza di levare; quella che si fa per via di pore è simile alla pittura.*” Cited in *Scritti d’arte del Cinquecento*, ed. Paola Barocchi, vol. 1, 522-23. In comparing the two, it is interesting to note the observation by Anton Springer that Michelangelo, in his lightening of the sculptural mass of the *Rondanini*, treated the marble “as if it were a sheet of paper” [*wie ein leeres Blatt Papier*]; quoted in Fiorio, *The Pietà Rondanini*, 29.

<sup>752</sup> Peter Parshall, “The Art and Memory of the Passion,” 460ff.

<sup>753</sup> Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo*, 161.

calm my soul, now turned to that divine love that opened his arms on the cross to take us in.”

In thinking about Michelangelo in relation to Reformation controversy, it should be emphasized that despite his questioning of the role of art in salvation, rather than dismiss the power of the image to mediate one's relation to God, as Protestant Reformers did, he instead turned to sculpting this remarkable work in the last decades of his life. In this we might see one of the most powerful defenses and displays of the potential and necessity of the religious image.

Shortly after Michelangelo's death, in June, 1564, the artist Daniele da Volterra, his pupil, wrote: “Io non mi ricordo se in tutto quello scritto io messi chome Michelangelo lavoro tutto il sabbato della domenica di carnovale ellavoro in piedi studiando sopra quell corpo della pietà.”<sup>754</sup> The description is unusual and precise, but also suggestive. It suggests that, up until the very end, sculpture functioned as a site of study or exploration. Here we might draw upon Michael Allen's observation that the statue served the multiple function of informing Neoplatonic notions of philosophizing, meditating and prayer.<sup>755</sup> Through a reading of its surfaces and the evidence of his writings, we can only guess at the questions Michelangelo pursued in this regard, and whether they were answered. Given the near blindness of the artist at the end of his life, we cannot be certain what he saw in the mirror of his work.<sup>756</sup> Coming as it did at the end of his life, when he was facing death, the *Rondanini* takes on an eschatological dimension. Like the Pauline mirror and enigma and the Byzantine icon, we might see it as a preparation for seeing God,

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<sup>754</sup> For a complete transcript and discussion of the letter, see Elena Alberino, *L'ultimo Michelangelo*, 146-47. Also cited by de Tolnay in *Michelangelo V: The Final Period*, 155.

<sup>755</sup> Though Allen notes this specifically in regard to Ficino's work, “To Gaze upon the Face of God again,” 135, I believe it can be usefully applied here.

<sup>756</sup> Saslow gives an overview of evidence concerning Michelangelo's failing sight in his Introduction to *Michelangelo's Poetry*. It is not clear whether Michelangelo had much use of his hands at the end of his life either, according to a letter from December 1563. *Il Carteggio di Michelangelo*, vol. 5: 311-15.

whom the artist once more attempted to bring to life: a hallowing of spiritual sight in the failing of physical vision.

In this chapter, I have attempted to foreground the reformatory and open-ended nature of Michelangelo's sculpture, to describe a process by which an idol of art is restored into an icon, and the image's role as necessary mediation in this spiritual transformation. In its rough approximations and inward-turning iconoclasm, the *Rondanini* stages not a tragic ending in the history of the religious image, but neither does it inscribe a spiritual testament or triumph, at least one that can be easily read.<sup>757</sup> Instead it performs the endless work of spiritual *mimesis*, at once an impossibility, given our finitude, but also a sacred obligation, as Gregory of Nyssa once wrote.<sup>758</sup> The struggle to know God begins and ends with the self,<sup>759</sup> and how we, as broken images, might be restored - not only through refining and polishing our surfaces to mirror his Divine Beauty, but also in a further breaking of idols that is a radical re-making.<sup>760</sup> In drawing out connections between sculptural process and spiritual transformation in Michelangelo's last work, we might turn once more to Ficino on the necessary, if paradoxical, role of the statue. The

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<sup>757</sup> See note 44 above on the aesthetics of cryptic meanings and paradox. Thomas Mussio, "The Augustinian Conflict in the Lyrics of Michelangelo," 339-359, provides a compelling reading of Michelangelo's sonnets as reflections of a deeply divided will, resistant to grace, in the manner of the pre-conversion Augustine. Augustine, as mediated through Petrarch, seems a more informative source to begin an investigation of Michelangelo's relation to Reform beliefs, as an author shared by both sides of the confessional divide.

<sup>758</sup> Gregory of Nyssa wrote that desire to see God is unsatisfiable but necessary; essential was the desire to see his face. See also Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers*, 10ff on Gregory of Nyssa and patristics on the image and painting. If we were to place this in a purely psychological frame, as Carabell does, we might agree that the "gulf between art as continuing process and as *concetto* to be resolved...brought Michelangelo to the point of despair not only because he recognized the pictorial implications of the conflict, but because he saw in it existential tensions that defied solution;" see "Image and Identity," 36. And yet such a view fails to acknowledge the value of the *Rondanini* for Michelangelo, as a site of a combined artistic and religious searching that might lead to penitent transformation. Once complete, the sculpture could no longer function as such.

<sup>759</sup> Here we might turn to sonnet 151, in which Michelangelo describes the self as the last sculpture. See discussion in Agoston, "Sonnet, Sculpture, Death," 535-37.

<sup>760</sup> As Bernardino Ochino writes, it was not enough to consider the biblical stories as history, to think about Christ's birth and horrible torments on the Cross: "Instead you also need to break, tear, and attack those figures, those accidents, and those similes." Quoted in D'Elia, "Drawing Christ's Blood," 101.

final statue of God is the ultimate conceptual statue we strive to create. But even as we try to sculpt Him, He recedes. It is in the very process of attempting this impossible act of sculpture that He is mysteriously sculpting us.<sup>761</sup> Here Augustine, whose pre-conversion writings might yield a further key to understanding the questions at the heart of the *Rondanini*,<sup>762</sup> might also be invoked: “We, therefore, must after a fashion resculpt [the image] and reform it. But who would be able to do this, except if he were the artist who shaped it?”<sup>763</sup>

Here we should also note the dual meaning of “*pieta*,” which was the subject of the artist’s life-long investigation: it signifies compassion for Christ’s suffering but also piety, which demands a response.<sup>764</sup> Within this frame, I have argued that the *Rondanini* performs a dual act of mimesis: as a representation of Christ’s Passion but also of Michelangelo’s imitation of that passion. Through the image, body and soul are transformed in the very act of sculpting.<sup>765</sup> As the *Rondanini* inscribes the last work of Michelangelo’s hand, it also forecasts the final artistic and spiritual self-emptying, as the physical bodies of sculpture and the artist’s own are given up in the creation of a religious icon.

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<sup>761</sup> Allen, “To Gaze Upon the Face of God again,” 134.

<sup>762</sup> Mussio makes a compelling case for the influence on Michelangelo of key Augustinian ideas through the medium of Petrarch’s sonnets, in which he sees subtle distinctions between Paul and Augustine. See “The Augustinian Conflict in the Lyrics of Michelangelo.” Given the involvement of Colonna in the Reform circle of Egidio da Viterbo, there are other grounds to pursue the influence of Augustinian ideas in a larger study of Michelangelo’s spiritual belief.

<sup>763</sup> Augustine, *Sermon XLIII*, 3, 4, in *PL XXXVIII*, 255. Quoted in Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers*, 194.

<sup>764</sup> On the history of the word and image type, see Hartt’s Introduction to *Michelangelo’s Three Pietàs*, 19-24. The valence of the word in Michelangelo’s poetry seems to be pity.

<sup>765</sup> Ranier Rilke’s sonnet to another broken statue – the archaic statue of Apollo – is relevant here: “here there is no place that does not see you. You must change your life.”

St. Augustine, *Sermon XLIII*, 3, 4, in *PL* 38, 255: “We, therefore...must after a fashion resculpt [the image] and reform it. But who would be able to do this, except if he were the artist who shaped it?” Quoted Ladner, *The Idea of Reform, Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers*, 194.

### **Conclusion: Icons and iconoclasm, past and present**

The Byzantine icon has recently gained new prominence in fields as diverse as critical theory, sociology, phenomenology and anthropology. No longer the retrograde art form of a vanished culture, it serves as a critical conceptual model for understanding the power of images beyond representation: their capacity to affect and interact with viewers as real, living presences. My dissertation argues the relevance of Byzantine icons and image theory to Renaissance works of art. In contrast to art histories that privilege the rise of naturalistic representation, I explore confluences in spiritual imaging and religious controversy, bridging domains divided by geographical and disciplinary boundaries. To advance my argument, I examine key episodes in the history of iconic images from East to West, moving across cultures and art-historical divides to reveal underlying theoretical concepts, artistic strategies and religious concerns regarding the role of images in the mediation of Real or spiritual presence. My focus is the icon of Christ that became the *imago pietatis* in the Latin West, from its emergence after the Byzantine iconoclastic debates of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries to its cultic and artistic translation in Italy during the Reformation, when tensions regarding sacred images fired conflict that would shape modern day Europe. Encompassing diverse media of mosaic, painting, sculpture and print, my investigation articulates the role of embodied viewing, materiality, virtual bodies and spatial

activation in an aesthetics of iconic encounter, and the potential of this process for viewer transformation.

By reinterpreting the Italian Renaissance and its artworks within a different historical frame – of iconic imaging, idolatry and iconoclasm – my dissertation has broader implications. Taking this history as a foundation, I would propose to pursue two strands of research and argument. The first is the resonance between the internalized image struggle I articulate in case studies of artworks on the cusp of the Renaissance-Reformation, and an emerging model of critique in the early modern period. In their negotiation of religious tensions through sophisticated, self-reflexive means, works of Renaissance art produced under the pressures of the Reformation give insight into critical modes of inquiry that have not been subject to full examination. Specifically, as internalized processes of reform, they prefigure Enlightenment imperatives at the basis of rational inquiry: the destruction of the “idols of the mind.” Yet they differ significantly from Protestant counterparts by working within tradition, in particular, a tradition where religious images are valorized.<sup>766</sup> While the iconoclasm or idol smashing of the Protestant Reformation plays a central role in the story of the emergence of modernity – as the origin of secular society and thought – the varied “reformations” of the sixteenth century remain rich and open domains for investigation.<sup>767</sup> Moreover, as the humanities look to models of critical inquiry in defense of their contribution to society, and simultaneously weigh the limits of

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<sup>766</sup> In a parallel argument, James Simpson argues the relevance of Calvinist invective to Enlightenment idol-breaking in *Under the Hammer: Iconoclasm in the Anglo-American Tradition* (Oxford, 2010).

<sup>767</sup> On the legacy of the Reformation, see most recently Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).



critique, their study holds potential value beyond the art and cultural history of their time, to bear meaningful reflection for our own.<sup>768</sup>

The dissertation also suggests, in a preliminary way, how the icon might function as an aesthetic model for Renaissance art. This provides the potential groundwork for thinking anew about aesthetics, across the divide of sacred images and art, the Middle Ages and modernity. Prevailing notions of what constitutes aesthetic experience, and the value and relation of this experience to other parts of human life, are deeply shaped by the origin of aesthetics as a discipline in the eighteenth century.<sup>769</sup> In this regard, the legacy of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant continues to resonate; in particular, the characterization of the aesthetic as a form of ‘disinterested contemplation’ remains widely influential.<sup>770</sup> Recent scholarship has sought to challenge the primacy of this notion, on both art historical and anthropological grounds. These arguments have generally taken two tacks: they appeal to the failure of this picture to capture either the experience of contemporary works of art that take place outside the museum (itself a product of the Enlightenment and intimately bound up with aesthetics as a field of study), or the aesthetic experiences of everyday life.<sup>771</sup> Yet arguably in both challenges, there remains a tacit acceptance of the idea that aesthetics is best understood as a *modern* phenomenon and in distinctly *modern* terms. What is missing from current attempts to re-think the ground, scope

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<sup>768</sup> For recent scholarship on the limits of critique, see for example Bruno Latour, “An Attempt at a ‘Compositionist Manifesto,’” *New Literary History*, Volume 41, Number 3 (Summer 2010), 471-490, and Rita Felski, “Suspicious Minds,” *Poetics Today* 32:2 (Summer 2011), 215-34.

<sup>769</sup> As inaugurated by works such as Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten’s *Aesthetica* of 1750-58.

<sup>770</sup> An early and influential essay on this subject is Jerome Stolnitz, “On the Origin of ‘Aesthetic Disinterestedness,’” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XX, 2 (Winter 1961): 131-43. The more recent work of the philosopher Paul Guyer lends considerable nuance, and challenge, to the notion of ‘Kantian disinterestedness.’ See *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>771</sup> Arnold Berleant provides a useful overview in his Introduction to *Re-thinking Aesthetics: Rogue Essays on Aesthetics and the Arts* (2002). Berleant’s project to expand the field of aesthetics is motivated by contemporary art and artistic practices that fail to be captured by traditional accounts. In this respect, our motivations find their bases in opposing ends of the historical spectrum.

and, most importantly, larger significance of aesthetics is a consideration of the longer trajectory of pre-modern history. The dissertation lays the foundation for elucidating a pre-modern foundation for aesthetics, for which the icon would be exemplary. The following considerations give an indication of why this might be a promising avenue of approach.

### **The Iconic Turn - *Das neue Bild der Weltdescription*<sup>772</sup>**

If the linguistic turn was a notable feature of the intellectual landscape of the twentieth-century, that ground has been reshaped in the present century towards what W.J.T. Mitchell called the “pictorial turn” and, in more recent decades, what is described as an “iconic turn.”<sup>773</sup> If by ‘icon’ we mean a sign in the Peircean sense, in which one thing stands for another by virtue of resemblance, then the turn towards the ‘iconic’ would seem simply to be continuous with the linguistic.<sup>774</sup> But it is not the icon in this respect that forms the basis of the contemporary paradigm shift under consideration. As noted earlier, an iconic image not only represents its depicted subject, but also presents it. According to this definition, the Byzantine icon is arguably

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<sup>772</sup> This phrase appears as the rallying cry of a German research group: <http://www.hubert-burda-stiftung.de/en/foundation/burda-akademie-zumdritten-jahrtausend/iconic-turn/>.

<sup>773</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). In his more recent study, *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), Mitchell turns toward the iconic in his argument concerning the agency of images. The phrase “iconic turn” is generally attributed to Gottfried Boehm, who coined it in an essay titled “Die Bilderfrage,” in *Was ist ein Bild?*, ed. Gottfried Boehm (Munich 1994), 325–343. An exchange between Mitchell and Boehm regarding their nearly simultaneous adoption of these phases is published in G. Boehm & W.J.T. Mitchell, “Pictorial versus Iconic Turn: Two Letters,” in *Culture, Theory and Critique*, Vol. 50, Issue 2-3 (2009): 103-21.

<sup>774</sup> Although Peirce’s definition of icon underwent varying degrees of redefinition, the following seems stable throughout: the icon is “a sign which stands for something merely because it resembles it.” See “On the Algebra of Logic: A Contribution to the Philosophy of Notation,” 1:226, in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings. Vol. 1* (1867-1893), edited by Nathan Houser & Christian Kloesel (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Boehm views the ‘iconic turn’ along the model of the linguistic, substituting mimesis for semiosis. He locates initial stages of this shift in thinkers such as Nietzsche, Bergson, Freud, Husserl and Wittgenstein. See note 2 above. While I agree with his turn towards mimesis as an approach towards understanding of the iconic dimension of images, I do not find his results compelling.

exemplary of this phenomenon. How an iconic image makes its subject present, and how we might understand this presence, are some of the fundamental questions my dissertation aimed to address.

As I have touched upon, the question of an image's relation to presence – a relation that is structural to the operation of icons – has a long history with roots in antiquity. Scholars have traced the history of the icon to these origins, but never in the precise terms of this relation.<sup>775</sup> But neither is the relation of image to presence simply a matter of historical interest. Notably, it is subject that currently motivates inquiry in a variety of disciplines, beyond the history of art and religion, and very often without regard to these, a state of affairs I would aim to address. As the philosopher Alva Noë has recently argued, to grasp “the problem of presence in pictures” is to make a significant contribution to the understanding of perception and consciousness in general.<sup>776</sup> In my own approach to this question, I would draw upon the work of Noë and the phenomenological tradition from which his insights on the question of presence emerge, to bring this scholarship in relation to the history of the icon I have initially explored.

The larger cultural phenomenon of the ‘iconic turn’ gives an indication of what might be at stake in addressing this question. Here I will point to two cultural indicators of its significance. First is the ascendancy of a digital culture of images that saturates and informs contemporary experience at every level of society. It has been suggested that the specific character of this culture foregrounds, in a striking way, the function of images as visible mediations of invisible

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<sup>775</sup> The literature on the icon is extensive and will not be reiterated here, as I will be engaging it in the chapters to follow. But we can point to foundational and comprehensive studies such as Mosche Barasch's *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York and London, 1992) and Alain Besançon's *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (Chicago and London, 2000). Hans Belting's *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (translated into English as *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Age of Art*), which, according to its English title, would seem to be a prime contender in this regard, is discussed at length below.

<sup>776</sup> Alva Noë, *Varieties of Presence* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA and London, 2012).

persons and worlds, a function which is seen to be a feature of iconic images in particular.<sup>777</sup>

In the words of one research group dedicated to the study of our current milieu, the iconic turn is effectively ‘*Das neue Bild der Weltdescription*:’ a paradigm shift effected by new technologies which enable both the massive proliferation of virtual images and the visualization of heretofore ‘hidden’ phenomena in the sciences.<sup>778</sup>

The unprecedented digitization and globalization of images are arguably phenomena of fundamental importance to contemporary culture. Images are now the ground of universal communication, generating and disseminating information to a greater extent than ever before in human history. Yet the effects of the digital revolution on individuals and societies remain an open, pressing question. As David Summers observes in a recent essay, the flow of images from these sources is such that it seems to “recreate the flow of consciousness itself.”<sup>779</sup> Given the unprecedented degree to which we are subjected to this ‘image flow,’ the effects of which are still unknown, I would emphasize here the stakes concerning the autonomy of the individual in a society thus constituted. As Hans Belting notes, the interaction between physical images and mental ones – ‘the *imaginaire* of a given society,’ is still territory largely unexplored.<sup>780</sup> What we can be certain of is that a society so thoroughly mediated by virtual images is not a passive milieu in which we exist, but one that is actively shaping us.<sup>781</sup> We stand in need of a critical response to the new culture of images and interfaces in which we find ourselves, a response

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<sup>777</sup> See the description of the Swiss research group: <http://eikones.ch/eikones.html?L=1>

<sup>778</sup> As described by the following group: <http://www.iconicturn.de/>

<sup>779</sup> “Power is now centered in the control of media able to present images everywhere as if in the flow of consciousness itself.” David Summers, ‘Iconoclasm and Real Space,’ in *Idol Anxiety*, Josh Ellenbogen and Aaron Tugendhaft, eds., (Stanford University Press, 2011), 116.

<sup>780</sup> Belting, “Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology,” *Critical Inquiry* 31 (Winter 2005): 304.

<sup>781</sup> Here we might cite Mitchell’s observation: The “complex field of visual reciprocity is not merely a by-product of social reality but actively constitutive of it. Vision is as important as language in mediating social relations, and it is not reducible to language, to the sign, or to discourse.” *What Do Pictures Want?*, 47.

based upon clearer and fuller accounts of how, in Belting's words, images "work on us."<sup>782</sup>

A fuller understanding of the work of images – and one that yields insight into the present – might be gained through a combined historical and philosophical approach to the question I have set out in general terms: that is, the image in relation to presence, for which the icon is exemplary.

In its mediation of distant persons and worlds beyond vision, the icon arguably gives insight into our contemporary milieu and ethical condition, namely, our unprecedented relation to the virtual images and worlds of modern technology. By charting the historic attenuation of the richly physical dimension of this encounter by substitute forms, such as prints that commodify iconic vision, we might propose a new frame for addressing the challenge of the 'disembodied' image worlds of technological society. In other words, the icon – in its capacity to mediate physically distant worlds and persons – has potential heuristic value for critical reflection upon our modern, virtual world and ethical condition. While much scholarship is focused on digital culture, little has considered the specific work or force of images. My motivation is to understand the ethical implications of the intensified visual demand and seduction to virtual worlds of contemporary digital culture, as it presents a seemingly infinite horizon of information, choice and interpersonal connection. What are the new idolatries of our time, and how might they be understood within a longer history of the potency of images, and their potential dangers? In contrast to the idols of culture, the historic icon offers a model for images with the potential to bring us into ethical relation, through aesthetic experience and other modes of experiencing "presence."

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<sup>782</sup> Belting, "Iconology," 319.

The second cultural indicator we can point to regarding the specific character of the iconic turn and its effects is the following: it is the seeming paradox that even as we are intellectual heirs of the Reformation and the Enlightenment, we are today confronted not only by a surfeit of imagery, but also by images of enormous, seemingly archaic, power. This is the second strand of the ‘iconic turn’ that bears attention, particularly as the interest in the power of images, as inaugurated by David Freedberg’s seminal study, continues to gain force broadly across art historical, cultural, religious and visual studies.<sup>783</sup> Here the icon, as a sacred image, is also exemplary: as the mode of imaging that has been bound up in the greatest crises and controversies over the perceived authority and power of images. As Freedberg and other scholars have argued, it is precisely during such periods of crisis that otherwise hidden aspects of an image and its ‘work’ on individuals and societies come into view.

The inquiry would begin by recuperating an understanding of *aisthesis* in its originary, etymological sense – as connected not only to mind, but to breath, life and spiritual presence.<sup>784</sup> In addition to a return to the wider conceptual framework of *aisthesis*, what will be useful is also a revisiting of ancient concepts of mimesis, as found in Plato and Aristotle, and their development in Byzantine and Neoplatonic traditions of thought. In addition to mimesis as representation and performance, a distinction generally invoked in investigations of the work of sacred images, we can draw upon Paul Ricoeur’s idea of Mimesis<sup>3</sup> or ‘refiguration,’ to articulate

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<sup>783</sup> David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History of Theory and Response* (University of Chicago Press, 1989). Again, I will not reiterate the bibliography here, as I will be engaging many of these studies in the chapters to follow.

<sup>784</sup> Although he is concerned with literature, Paul Ricoeur’s remarks on the subject point to the dynamic and relational qualities of *aisthesis*: “A new element enriching poetics arises here out of an ‘aesthetics’...if we restore the term ‘aesthetic’ the full range of meaning of the Greek word *aisthesis* and if we grant to it the task of exploring the multiple ways in which a work, in acting on a reader, affects that reader. This being-affected has the noteworthy quality of combining in an experience of a particular type passivity and activity.” Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, III, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago University Press, 1988), 176.

the potentially transformative effects of iconic encounter.<sup>785</sup> Beyond hermeneutic understanding that mediates the world of images and our own, by the ‘transformative’ nature of iconic encounter I mean to extend the Plotinian notion that ‘we are what we desire and what we look at’: that the self (in ancient terms, the soul) is shaped by our active attention to and activation of images, which then open the potential for a transformative perception of the world.<sup>786</sup> This resonates with Noë’s argument that perception and consciousness, like understanding, are not passive, but achieved: that the world ‘opens up’ or becomes present to us in relation to what we bring to it.<sup>787</sup> By exploring these ideas and bringing together significant literature across disciplines, I hope to make a contribution to an aesthetics that operates beyond the boundaries of the museum and artworks, in the everyday “iconic” dimension of our lives.<sup>788</sup>

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<sup>785</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, III, 99-102. Related is the sense of mimesis as found in the thought of Greek patristics (Gregory of Nyssa and Origen), as a figuration that opens a hermeneutic engagement with things, the world and God, beyond an allegorical reading of images and their symbolic function. A compelling account of the phenomenological dimension of this experience is found in Niklaus Largier, “The Plasticity of the Soul: Mystical Darkness, Touch, and Aesthetic Experience,” *MLN*, Vol. 125, No. 3, April 2010 (German Issue), 536-51.

<sup>786</sup> Plotinus, *Ennead* 4.3:8. Margaret Miles provides compelling arguments regarding the transformative power of images, drawing upon Plato, Plotinus and Augustine, in “Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in St. Augustine’s ‘De trinitate’ and ‘Confessions,’” in *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Apr., 1983): 125-42.

<sup>787</sup> Noë, *Varieties of Presence*.

<sup>788</sup> Related arguments concerning the formative nature of iconic experience may be found in the work of the sociologist Jeffrey Alexander. See Alexander, “Iconic consciousness: the material feeling of meaning,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26(5) 782-94; and “Iconic Experience in Art and Life Surface/Depth Beginning with Giacometti’s Standing Woman,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 2008 Vol. 25 (5): 1–19. Work on developing an aesthetics of everyday life, as signaled by seminal contributions such as Gaston Bachelard’s *La Poétique de l’Espace* (*The Poetics of Space*, 1964) and Michel de Certeau’s *L’invention du quotidien* (*The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984) is currently gaining ground. See also Mitchell on our shared life/ontology with pictures: “The argument of this book is that there is no getting beyond pictures, to a more authentic relationship with Being, with the Real or with the World.... Whatever a picture is, we ourselves are in it.” *What Do Pictures Want?*, xiv, xvii. A recent essay that highlights the relational aspect of the encounter with Byzantine icon in terms that may bear wider consideration regarding an aesthetics of the icon more generally is Glenn Peers’ ‘Real Living Painting: Quasi-Objects and Dividuation in the Byzantine World,’ *Religion and the Arts* 16 (2012): 433-460.

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Fig. 0.1





Fig. 0.2



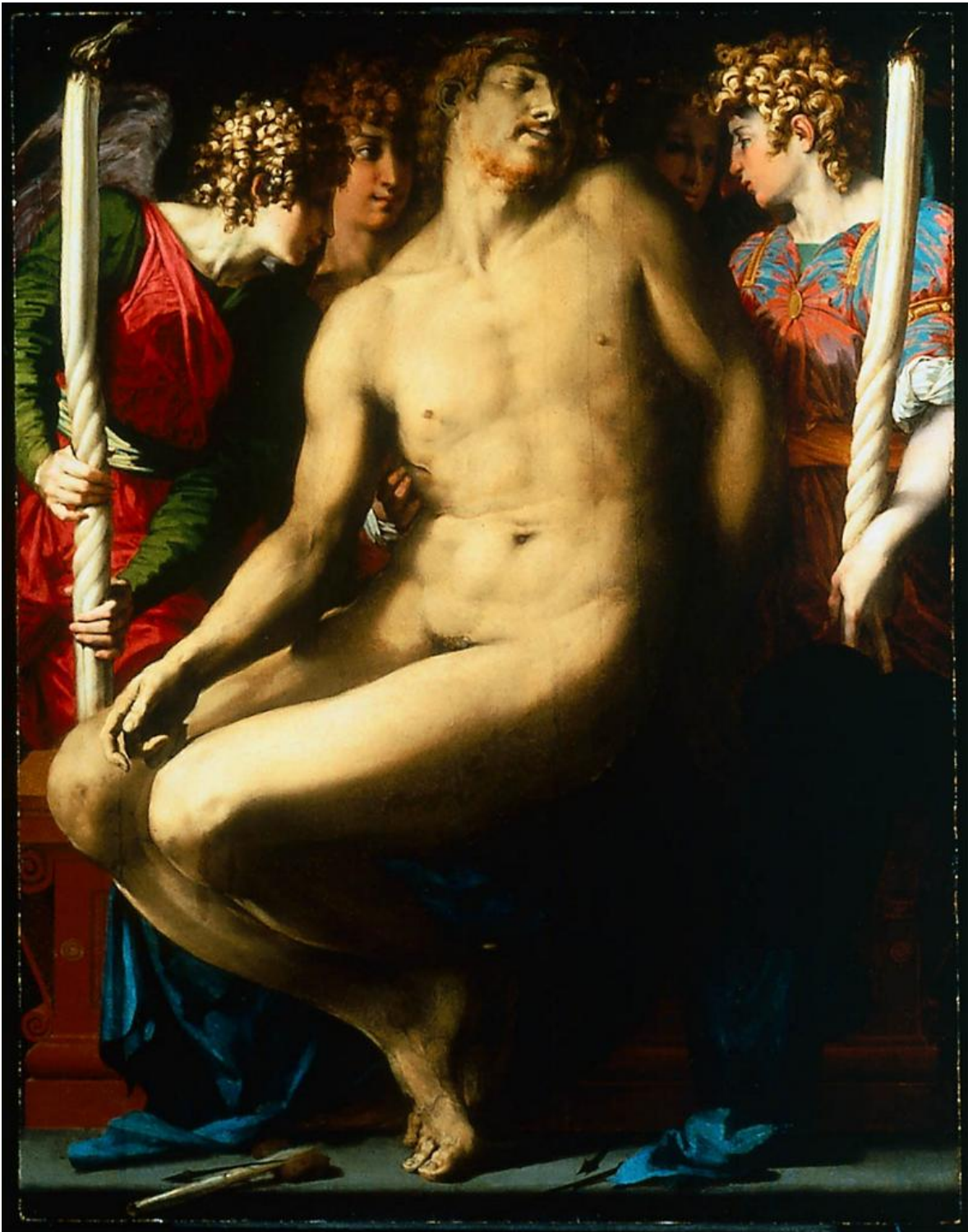


Fig. 0.3



Fig. 0.4





Fig. 0.5

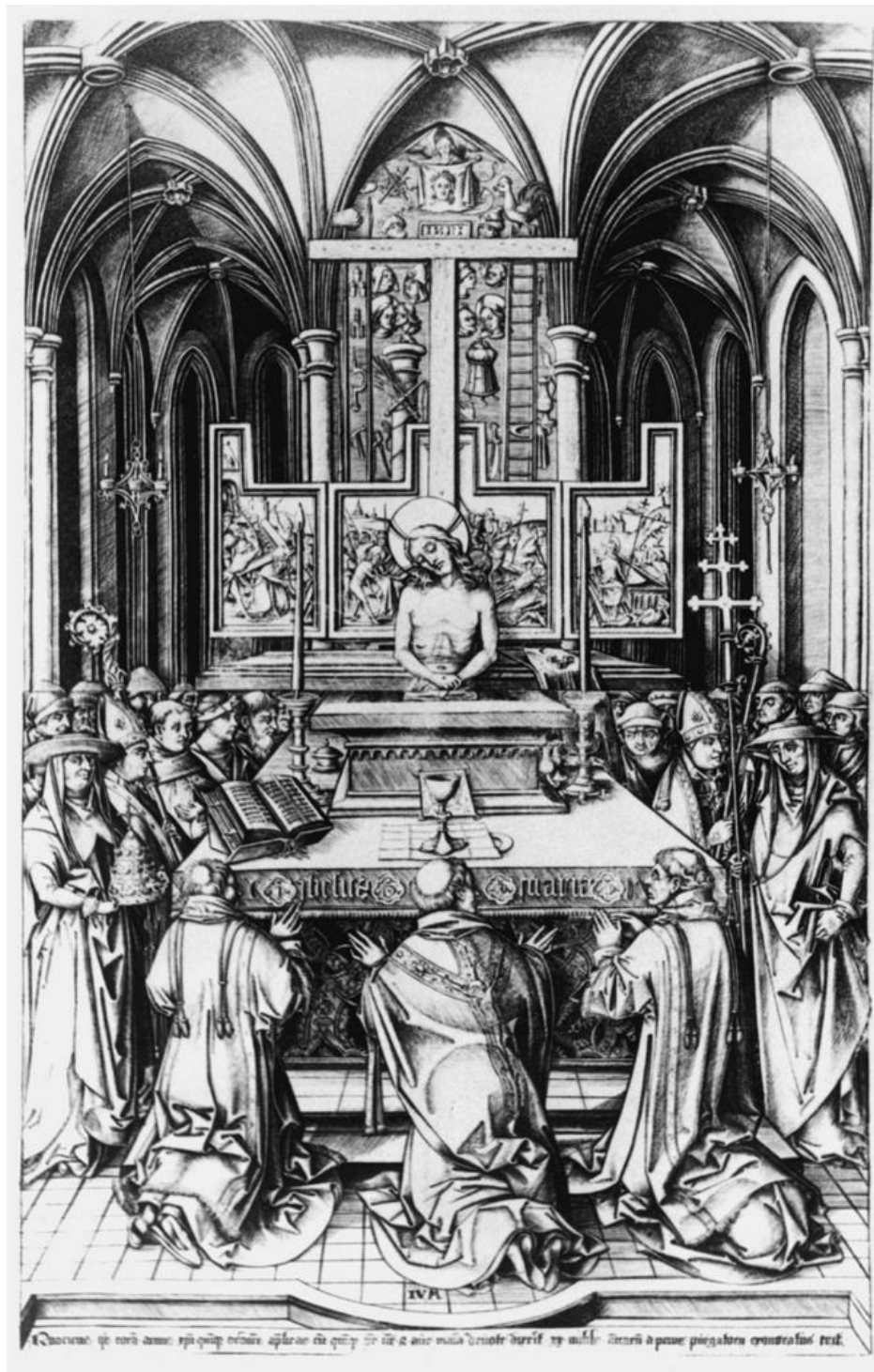


Fig. 0.6



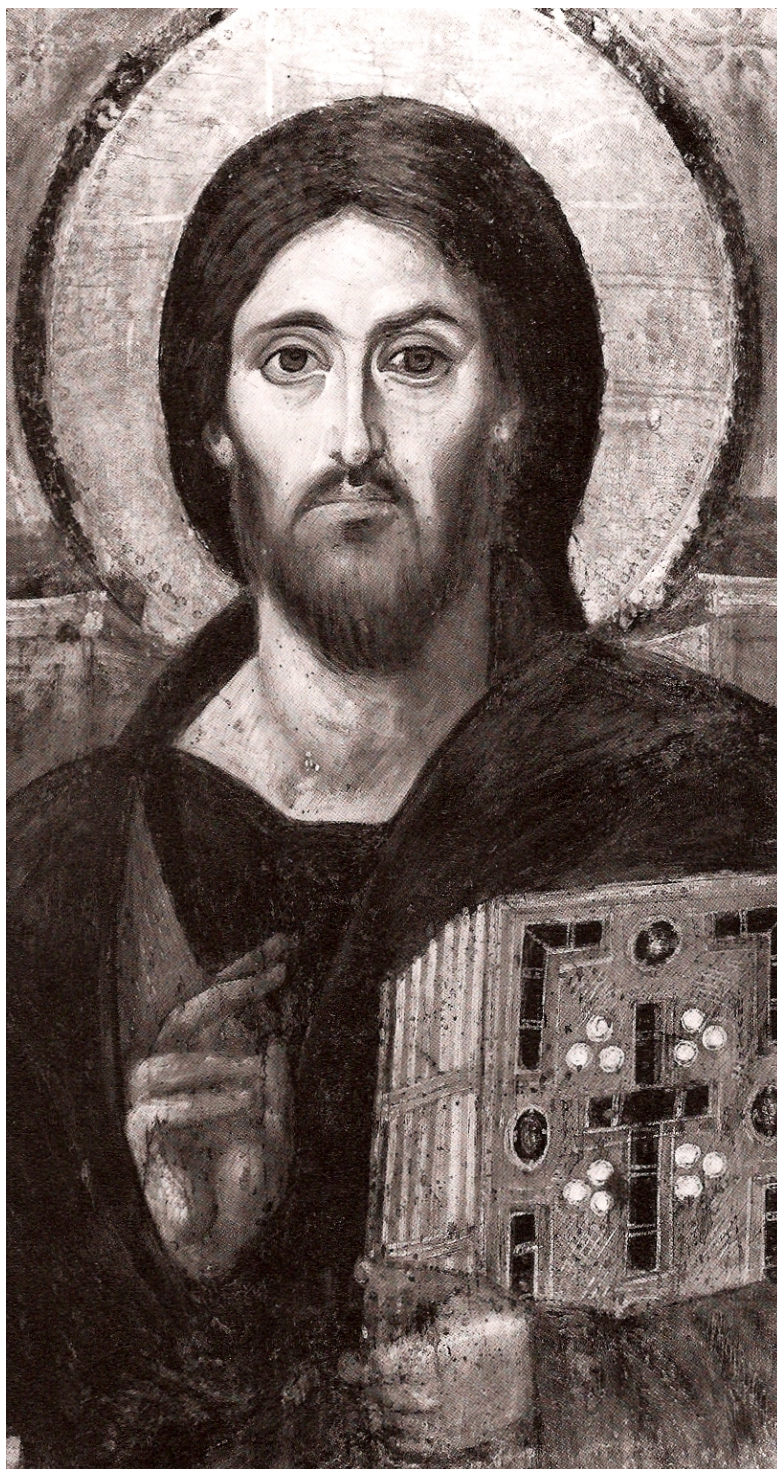


Fig. 1.1





Fig. 1.2







Fig. 1.4





Fig. 1.5





131

Fig. 2.1





Fig. 2.2

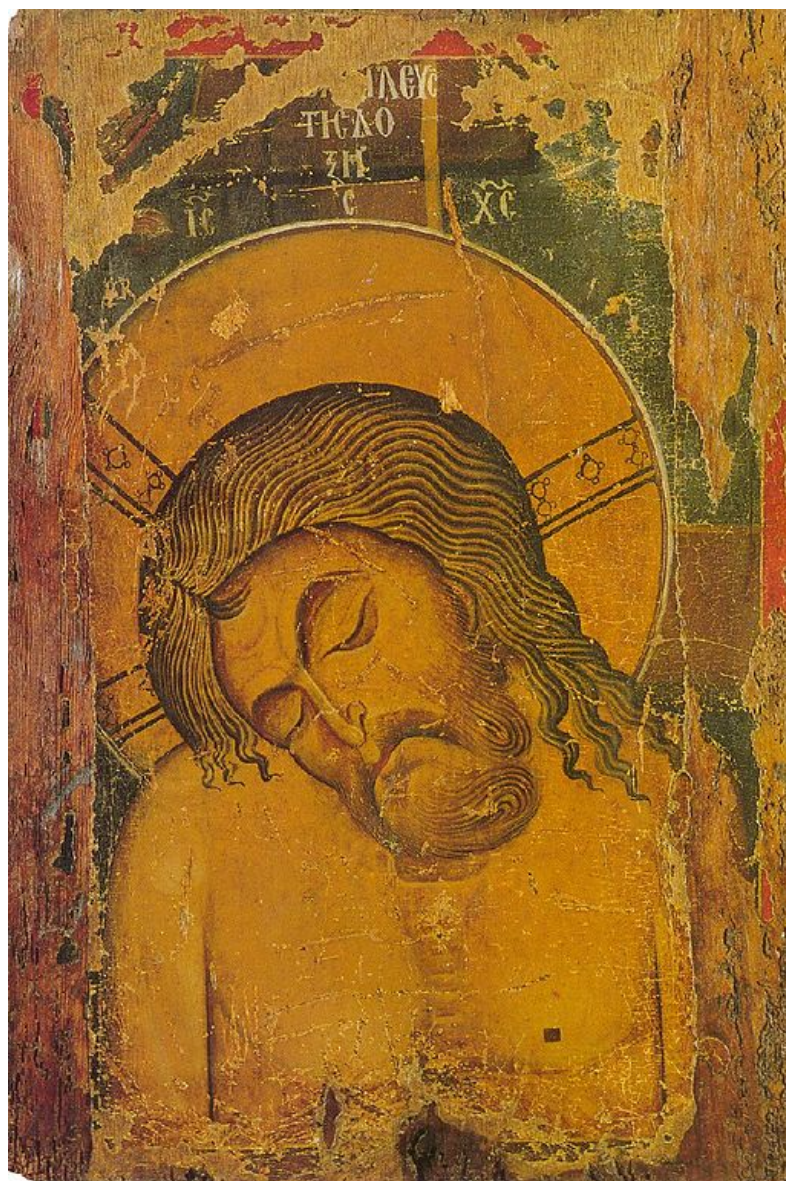


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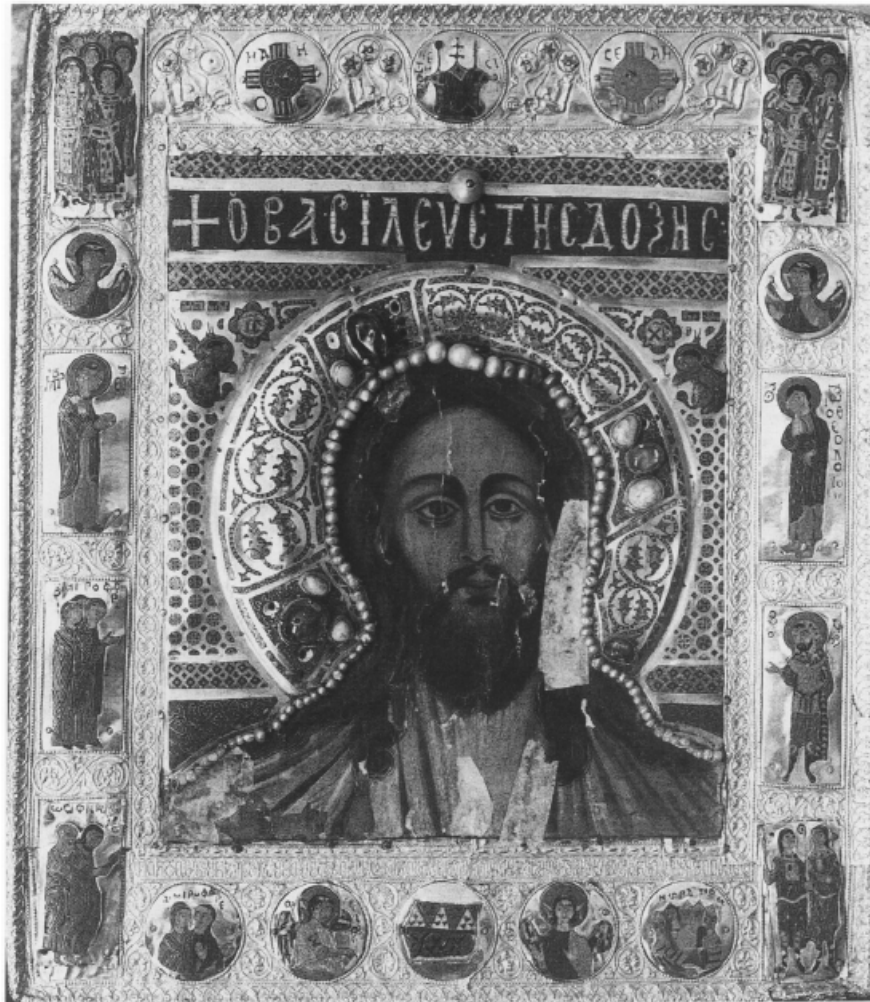


Fig. 2.4



Fig. 2.5



Fig. 2.6





Fig. 2.7





Fig. 2.8





Fig. 2.9





Fig. 2.10





Fig. 2.11





Fig. 2.12





Fig. 2.13





Fig. 2.14

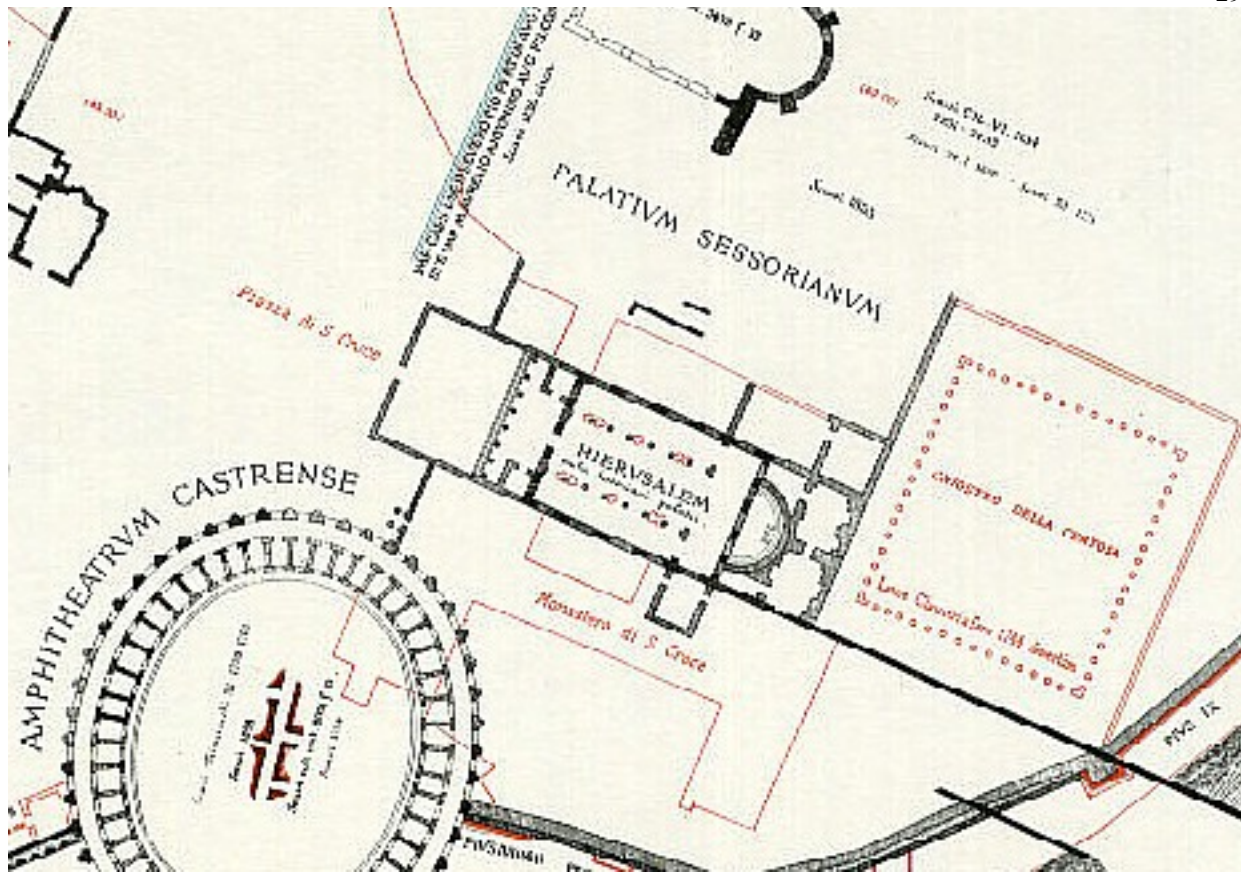


Fig. 2.15





Fig. 2.16



Fig. 2.17





Fig. 2.18



Fig. 2.19





Fig. 2.20



Fig. 2.21





Fig. 2.22



Fig. 2.23





Fig. 2.24



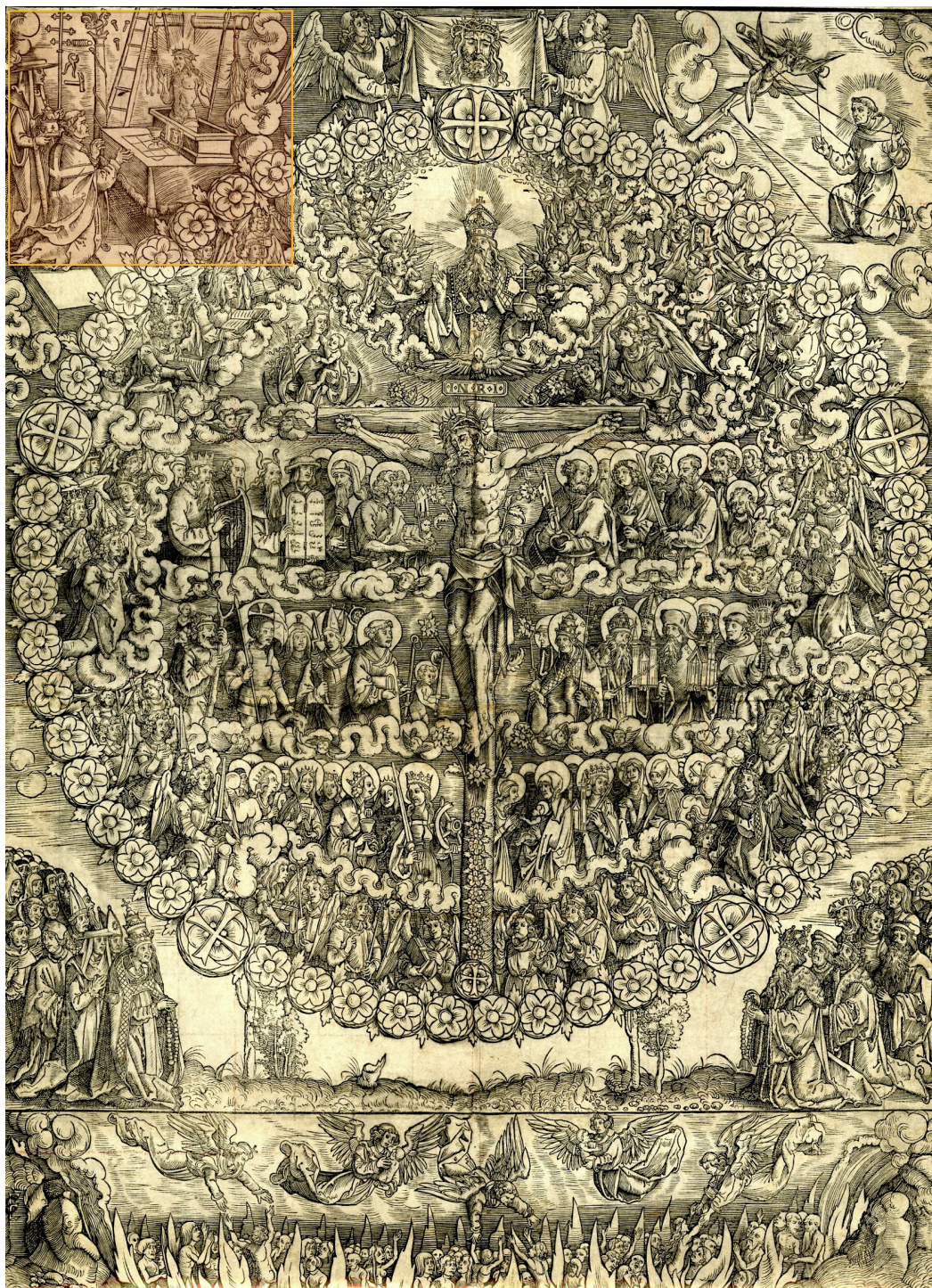




Fig. 2.27



Fig. 2.28





Fig. 2.29



Fig. 3.1





Fig. 3.2

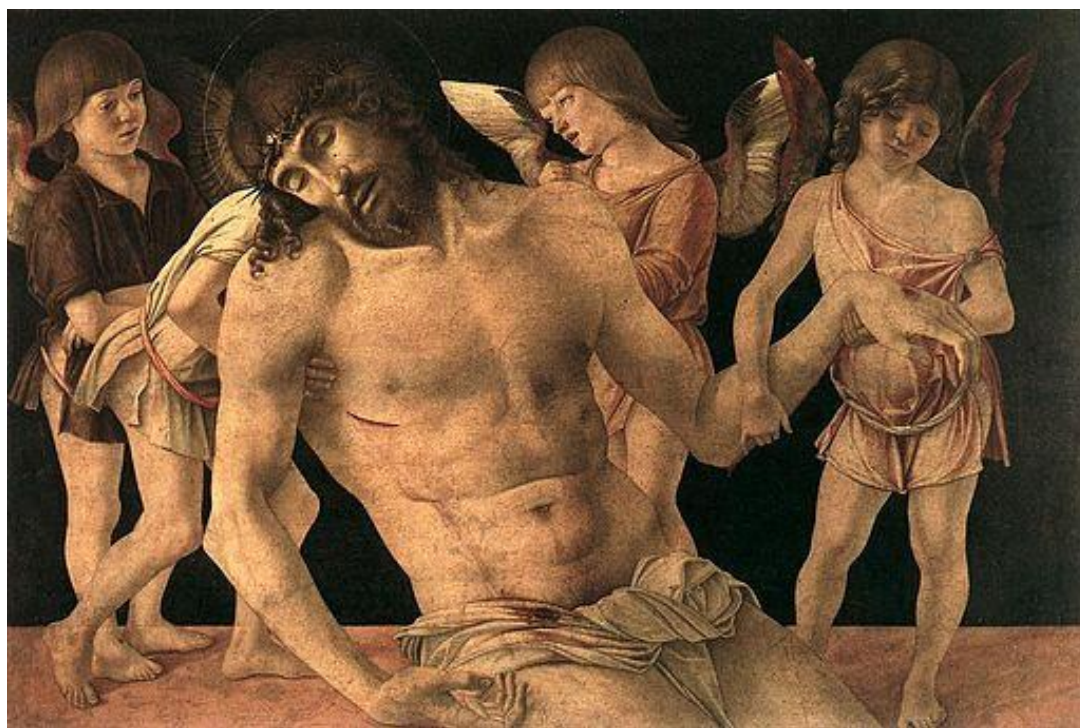


Fig. 3.3



Fig. 3.4



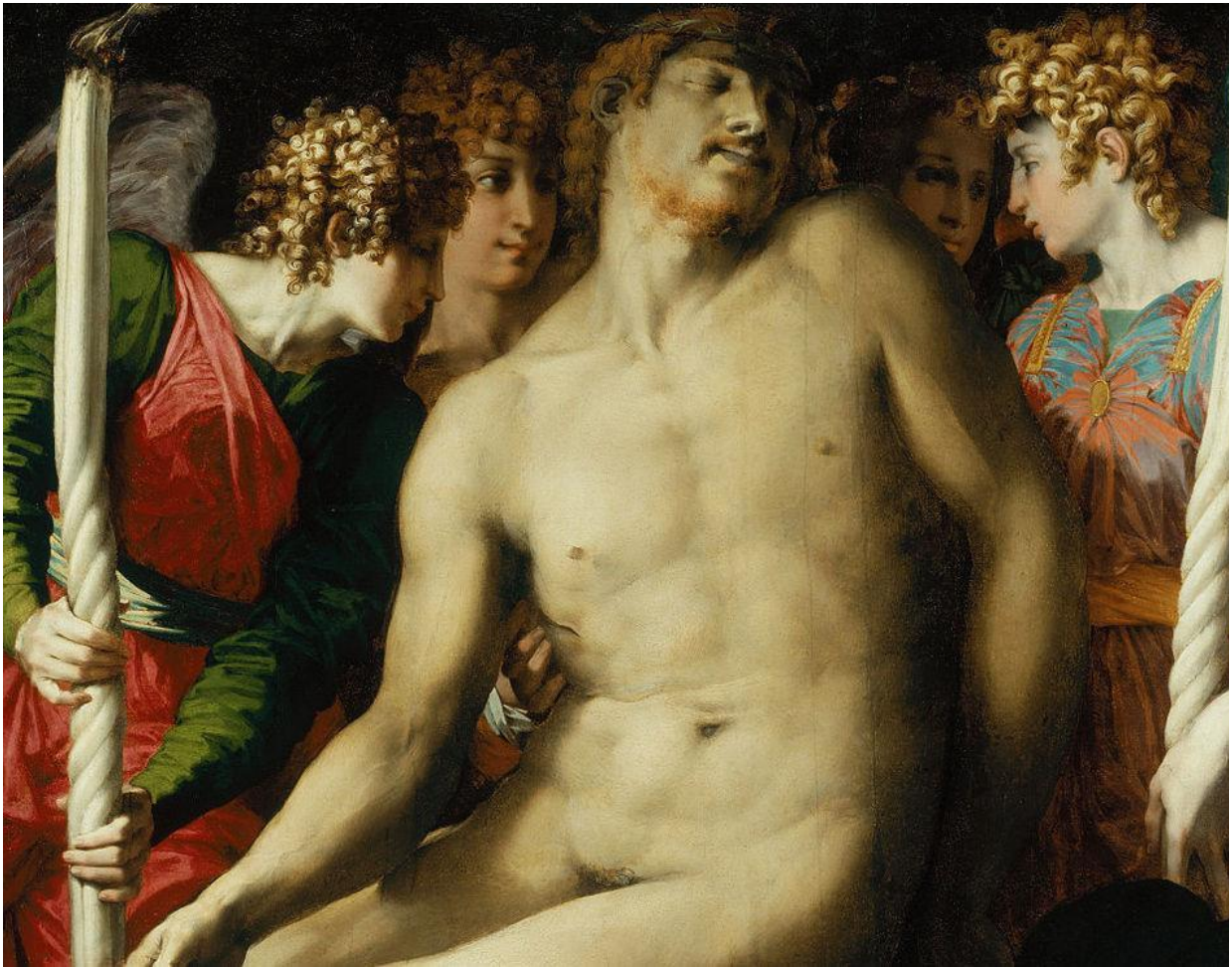


Fig. 3.5



Fig. 3.6



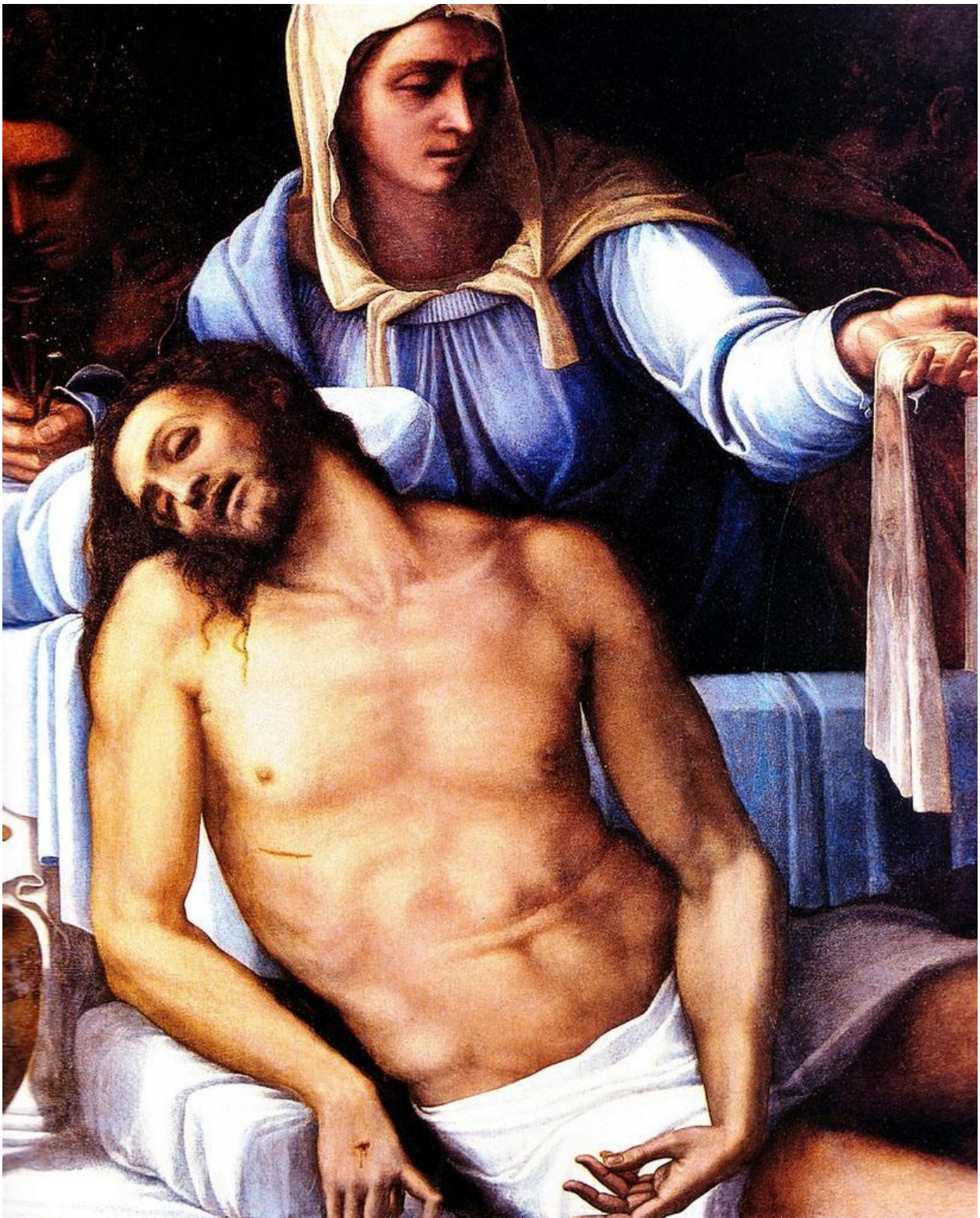


Fig. 3.7



Fig. 3.8 Detail of Fig. 3.4.

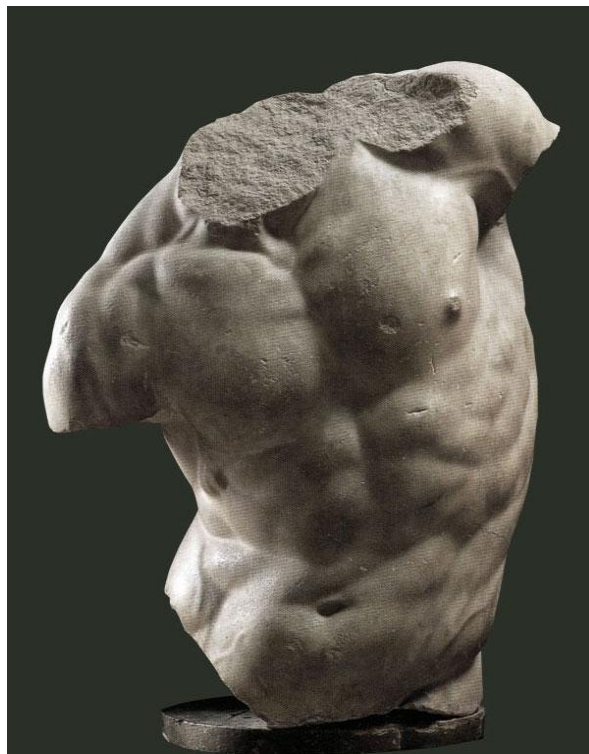




Fig. 3.9

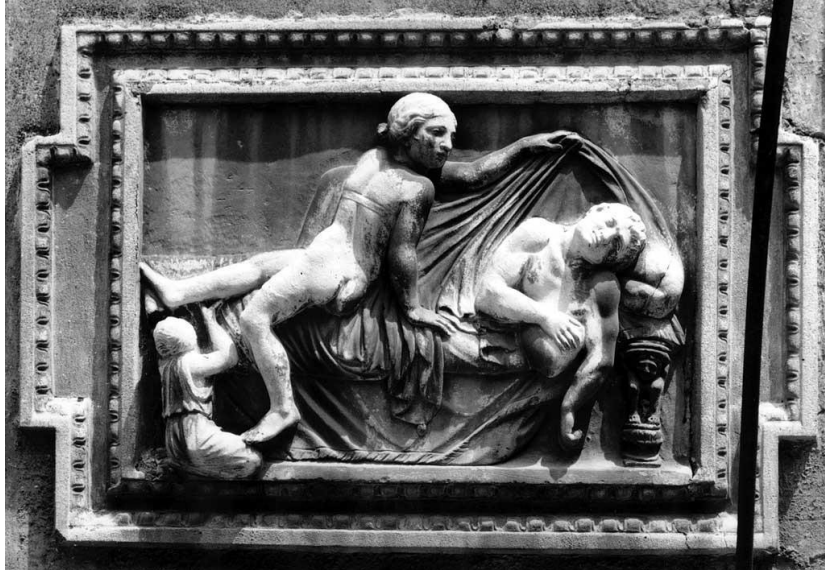


Fig. 3.10

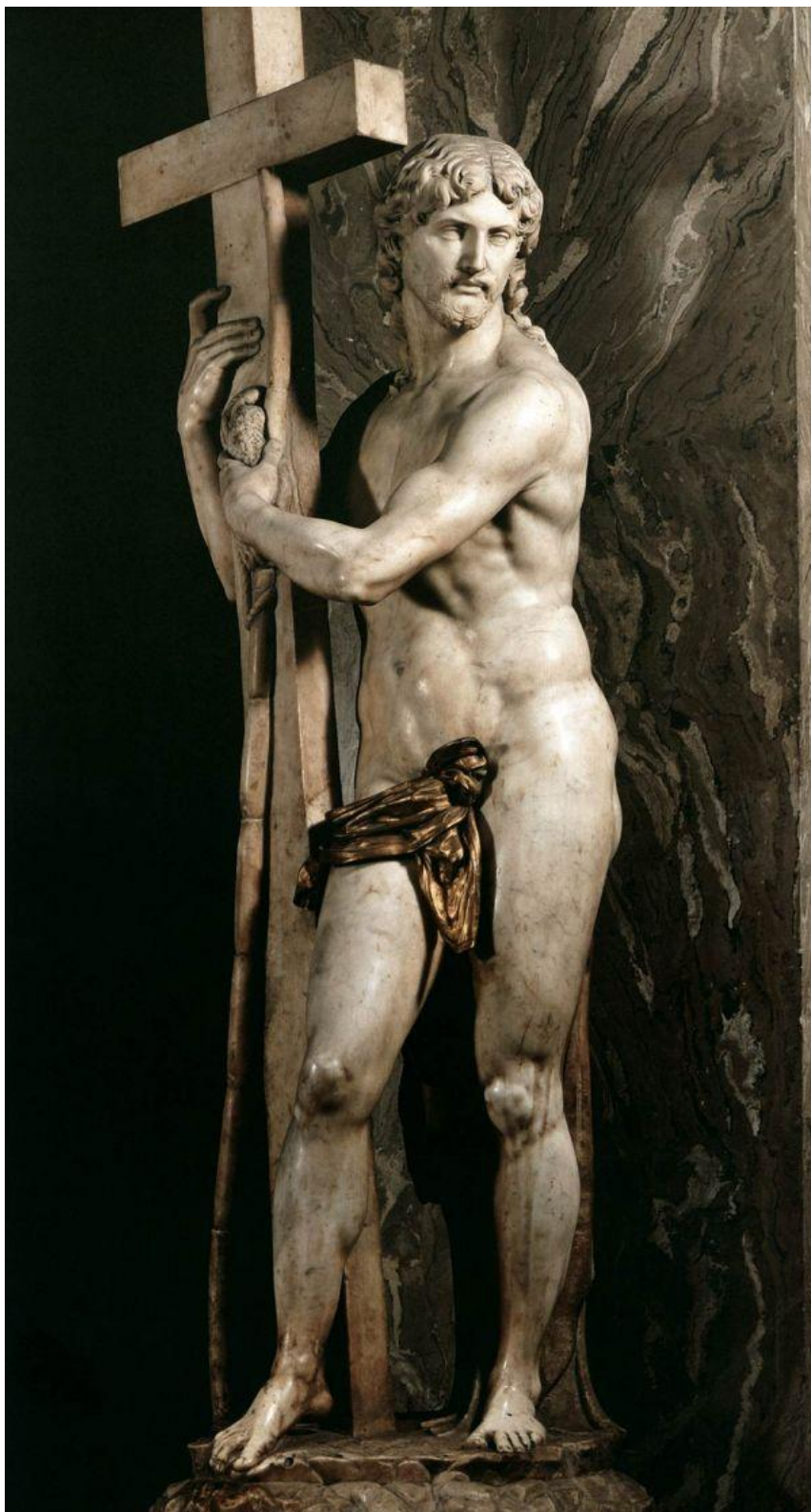


Fig. 3.11





Fig. 3.12



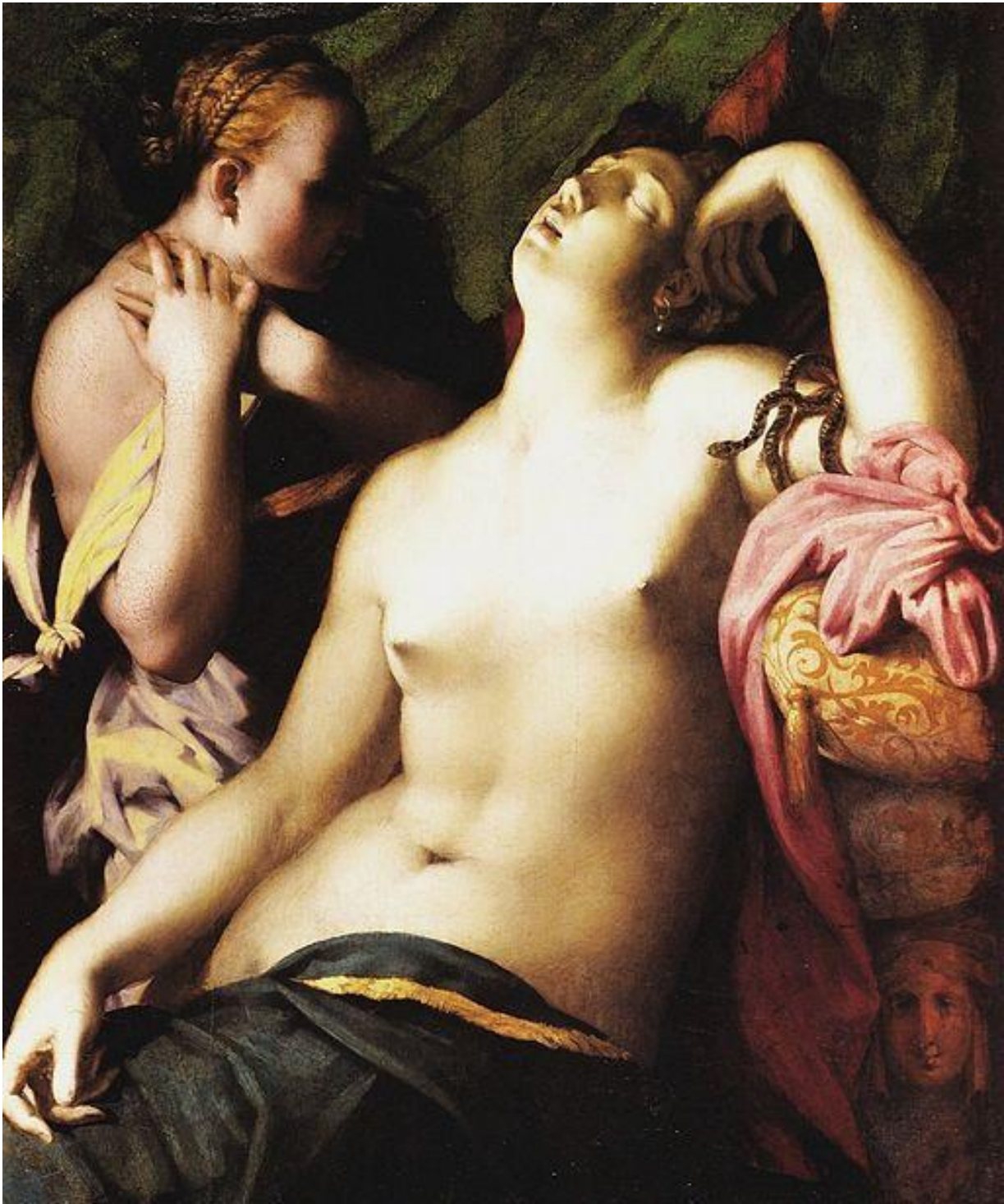


Fig. 3.13



Fig. 3.14





Fig. 3.15



Fig. 3.16



Fig. 3.17





Fig. 3.18



Fig. 4.1



Fig. 4.2





Fig. 4.3



Fig. 4.4 Detail of Fig. 0.3.





Fig. 4.5



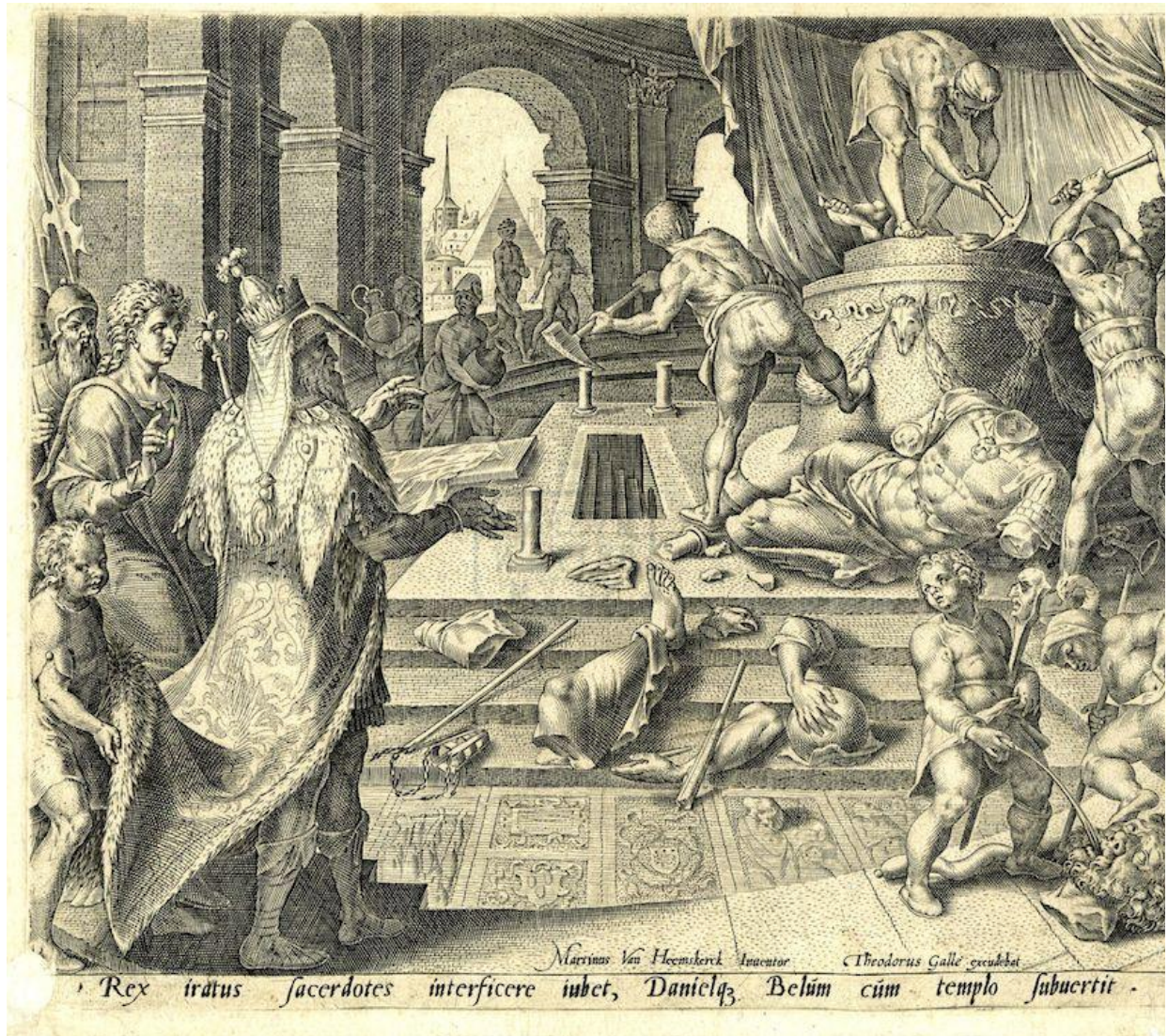


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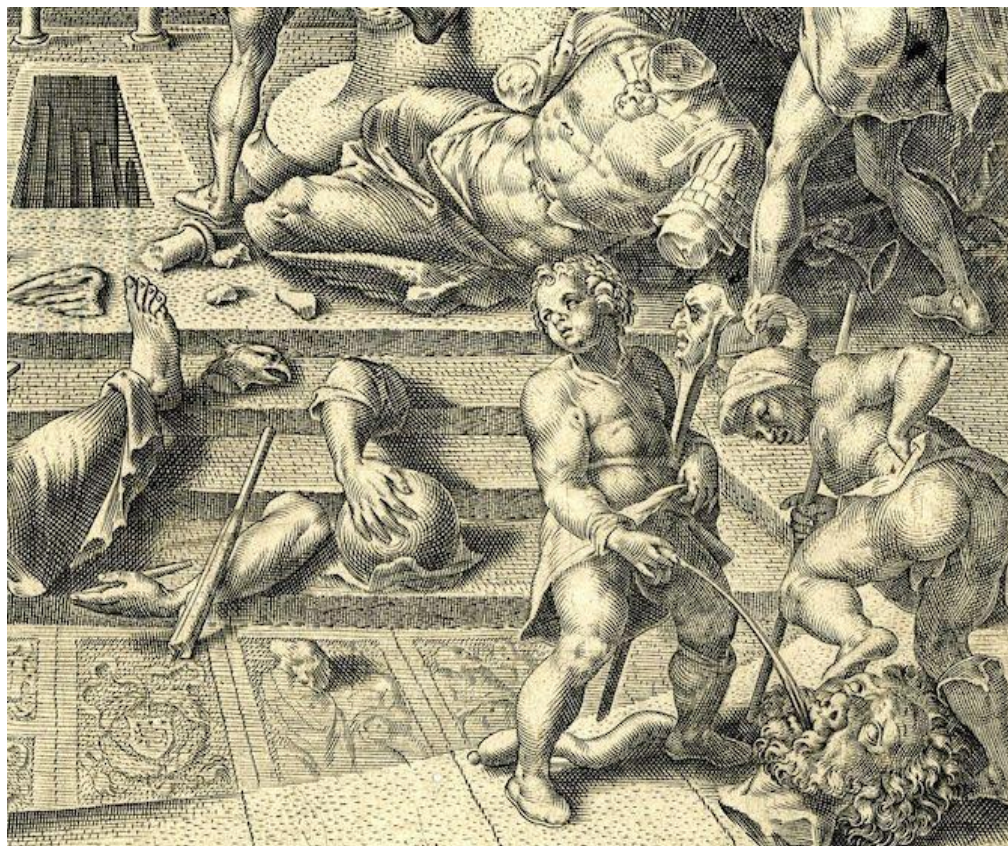


Fig. 4.7



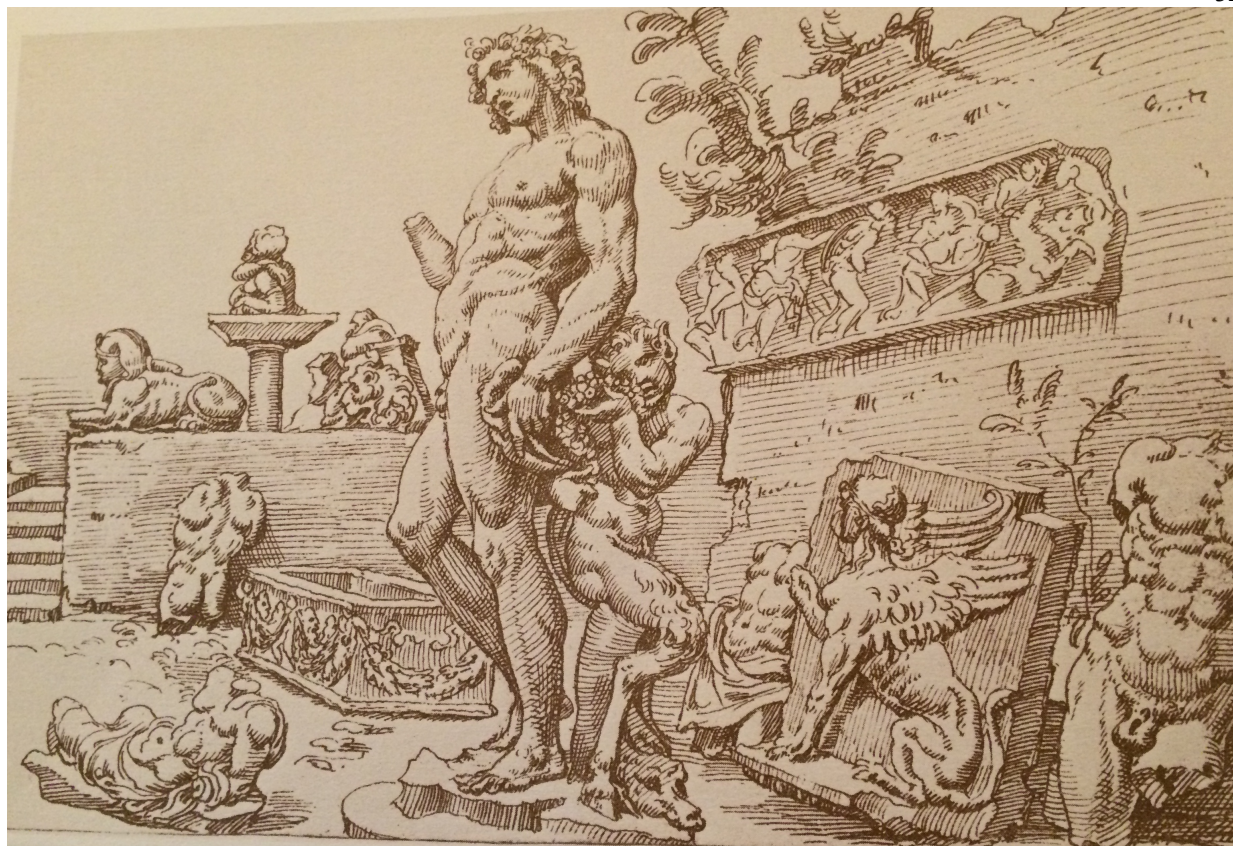


Fig. 4.8

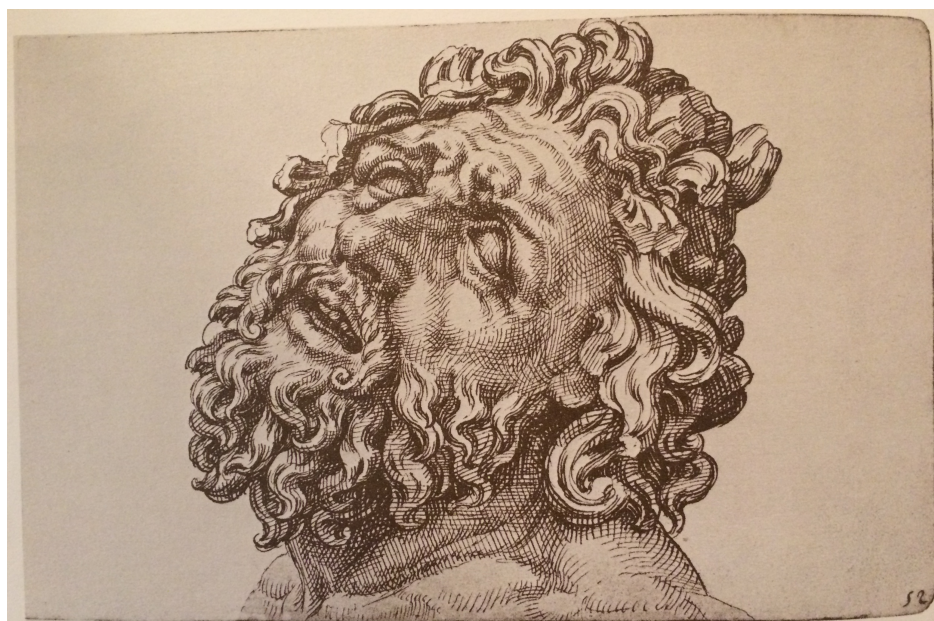


Fig. 4.9





Fig. 4.10





Fig. 4.11





Fig. 4.12



Fig. 4.13





Fig. 4.14



Fig. 4.15





Fig. 4.16









Fig. 4.18



Fig. 4.19





Fig. 4.20



Fig. 4.21





Fig. 4.22



Fig. 5.1





Fig. 5.2



Fig. 5.3



Fig. 5.4

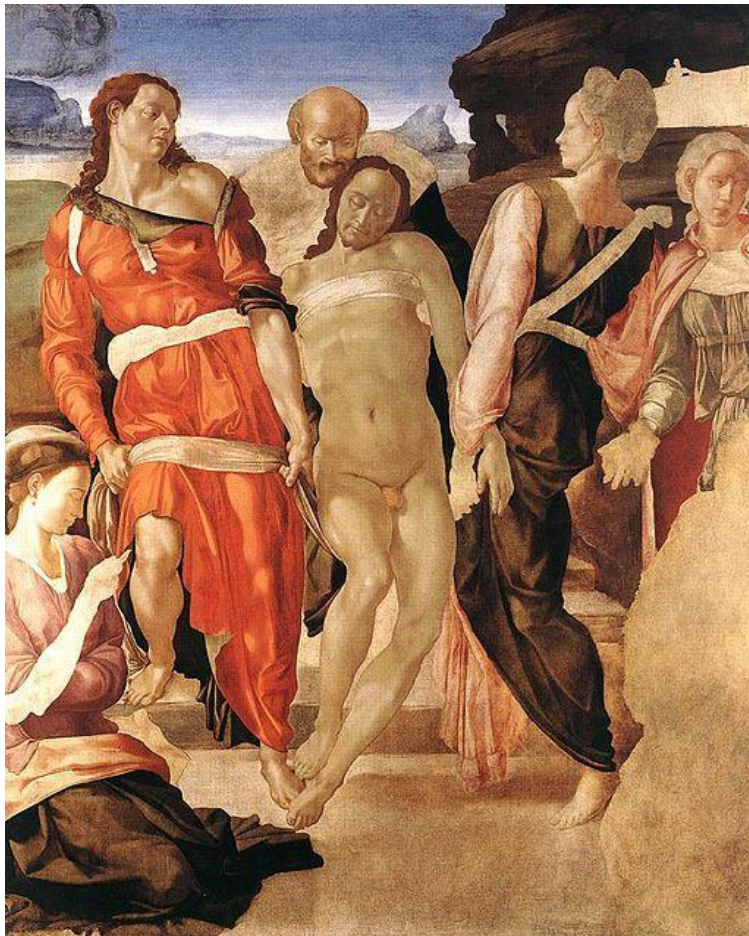


Fig. 5.5



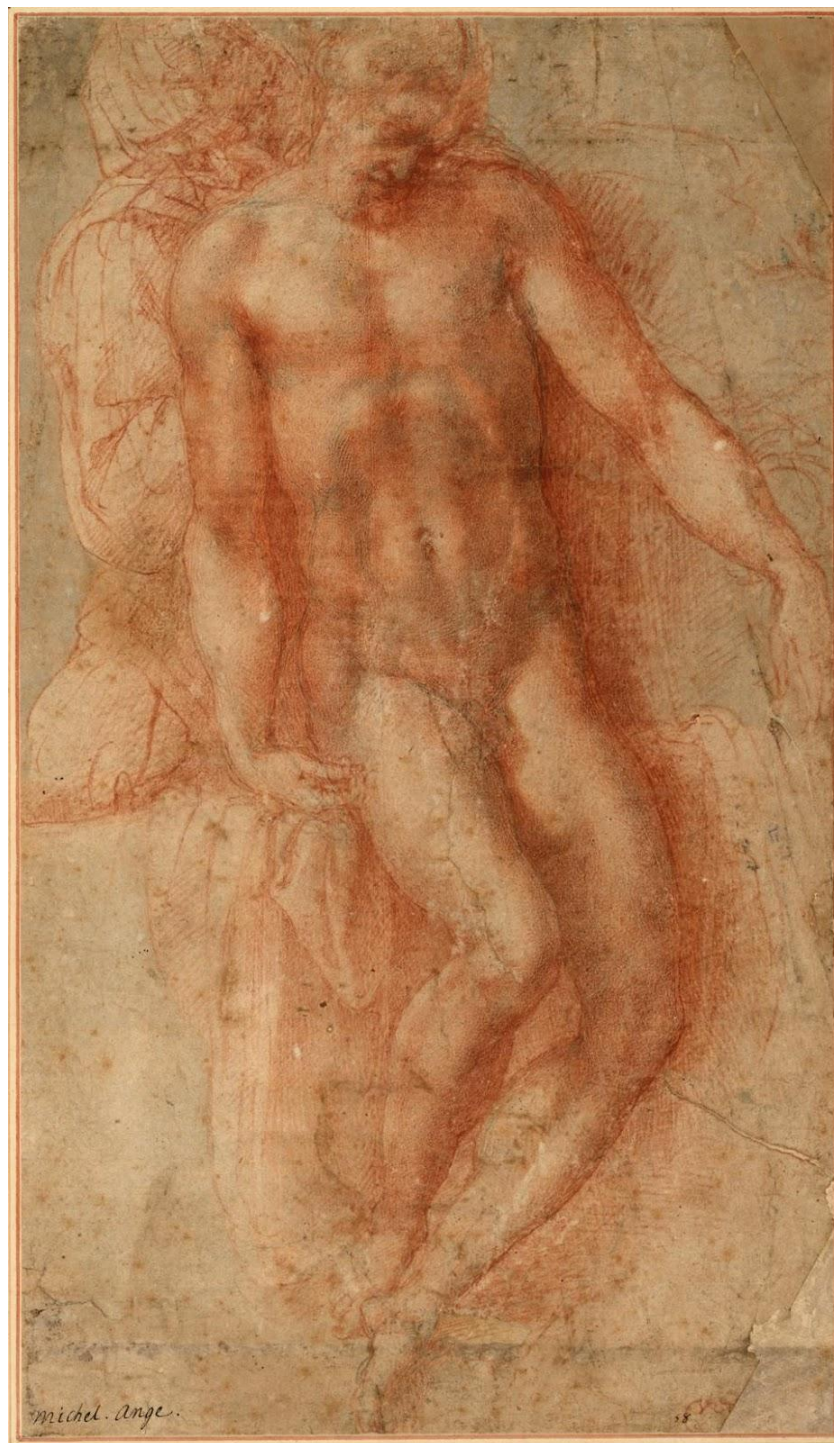


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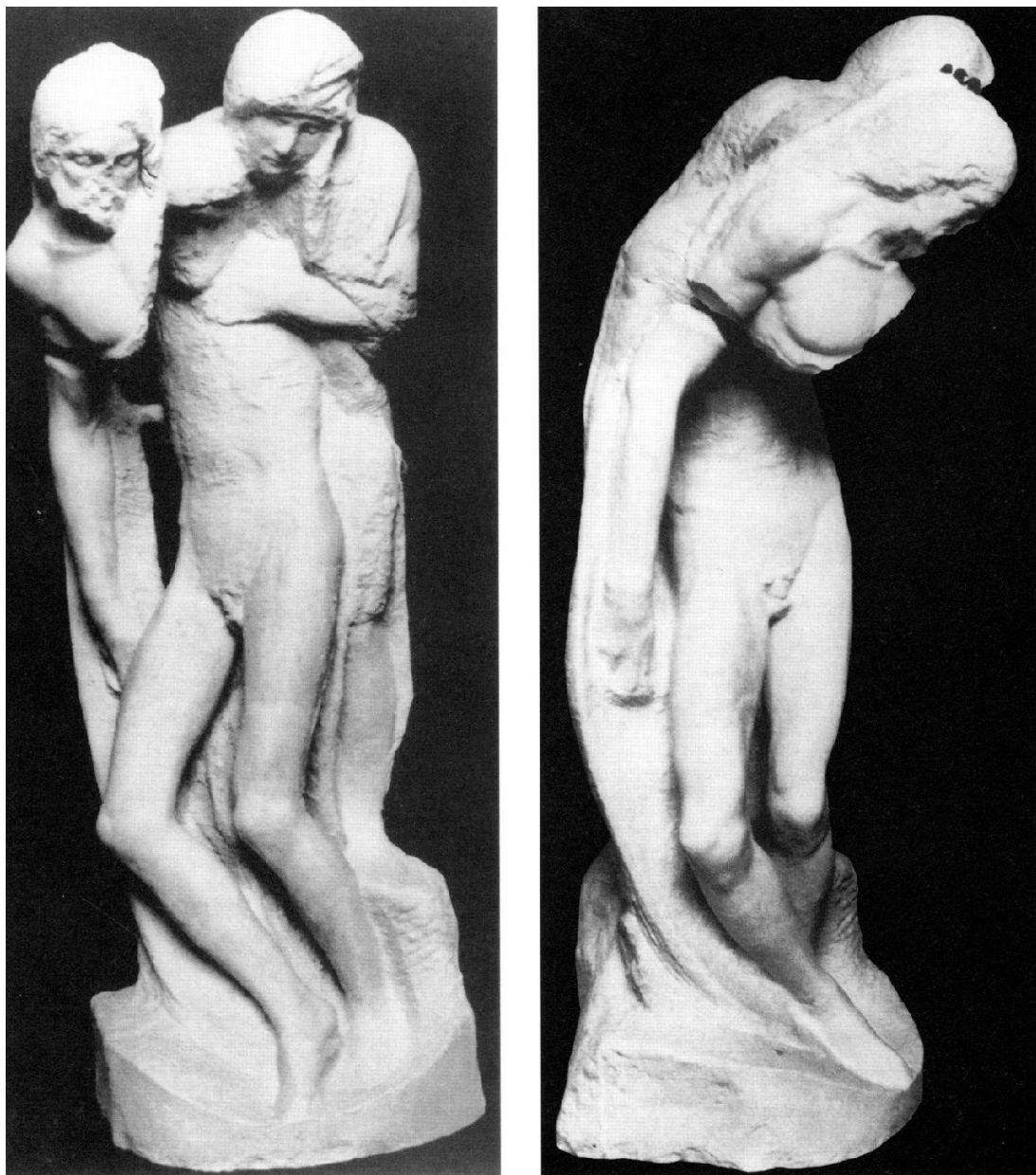


Fig. 5.7

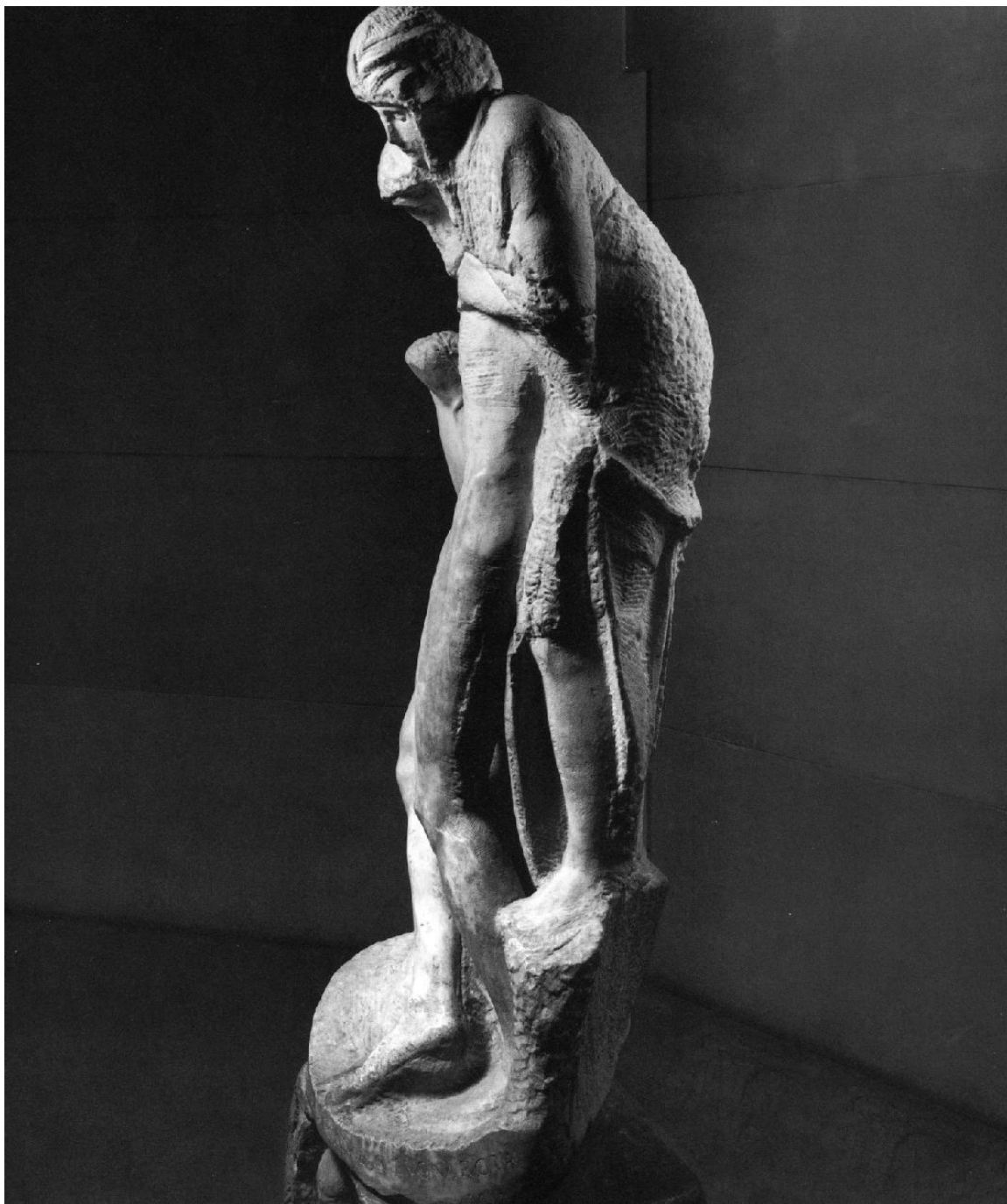


Fig. 5.8



5.9





Fig. 5.10



Fig. 5.11

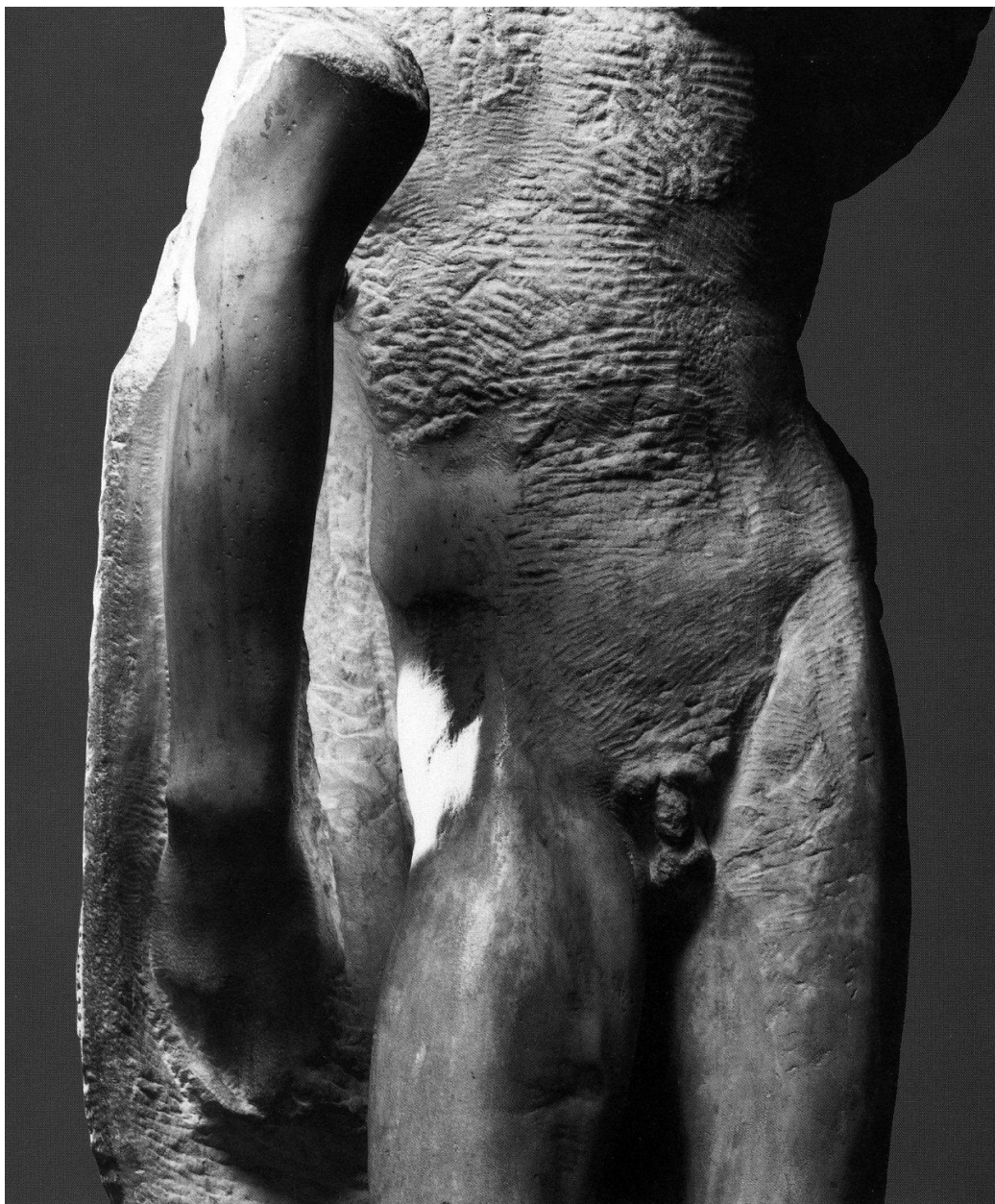


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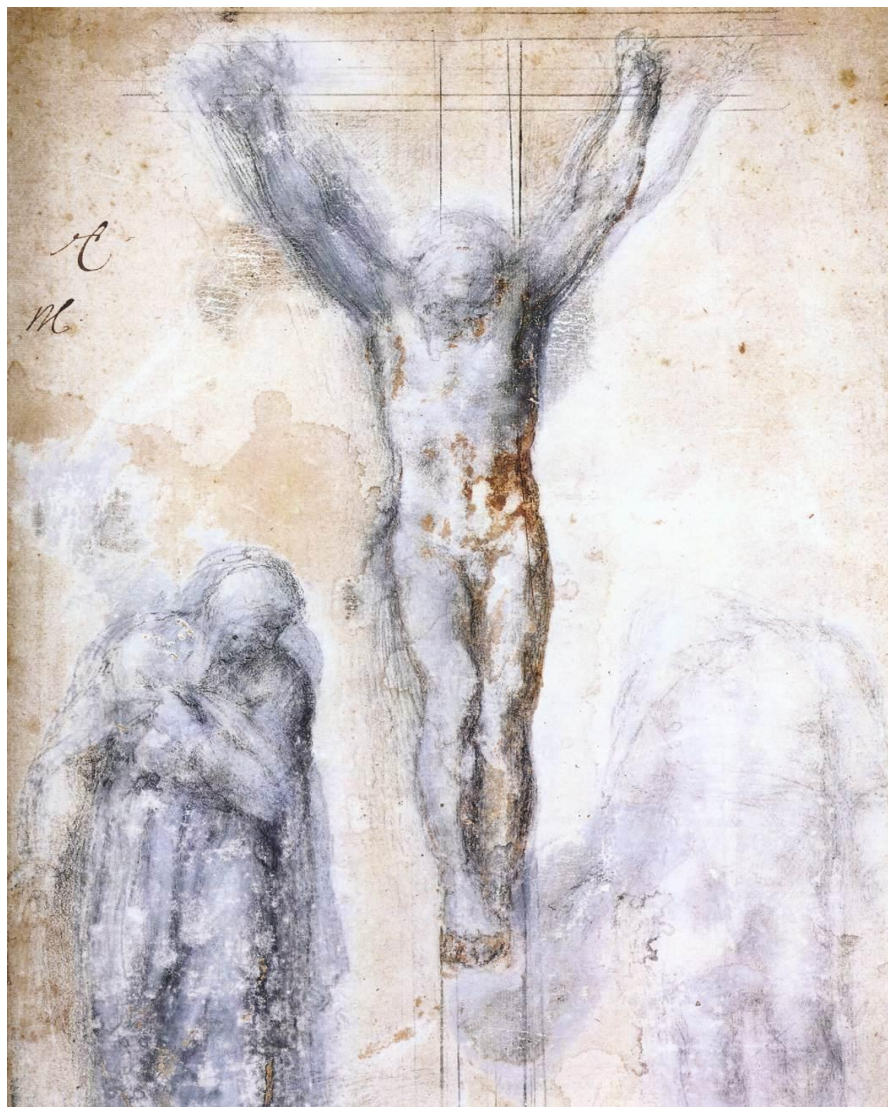


Fig. 5.13





Fig. 5.14



Fig. 5.15





Fig. 5.16



Fig. 5.17



Fig. 5.18

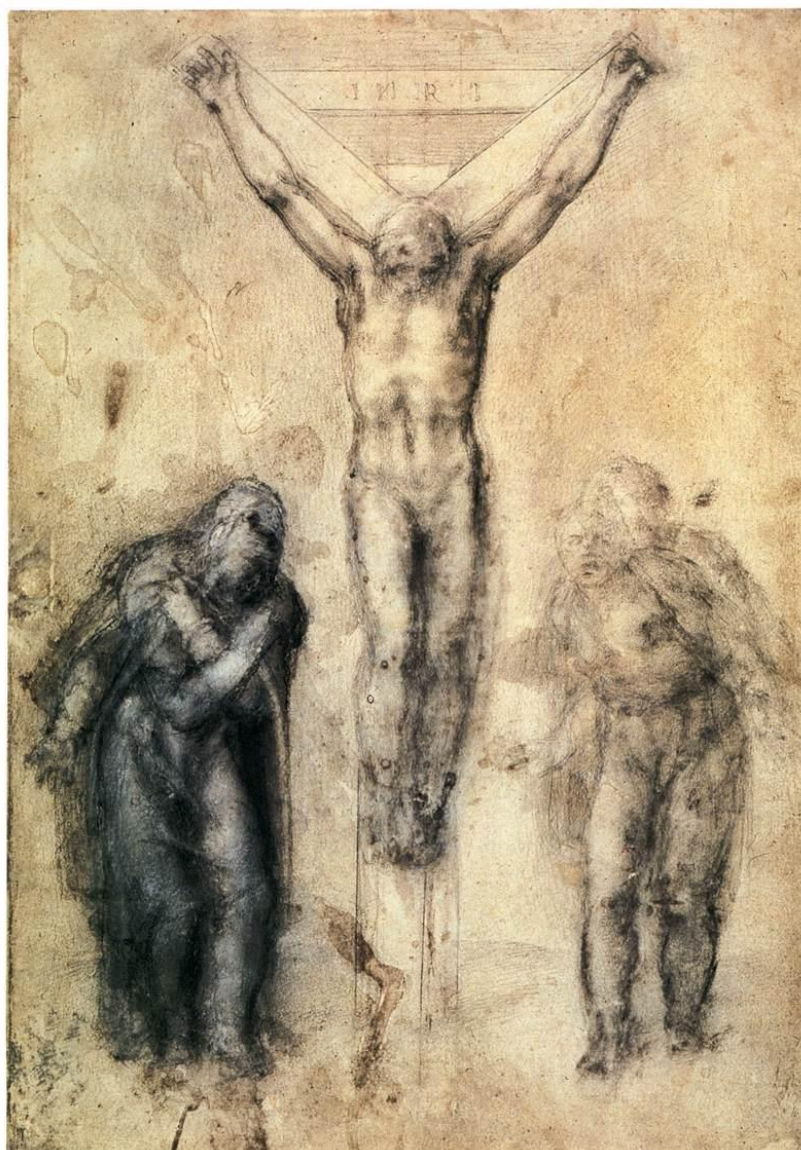


Fig. 5.19