

Perugino, Sassoferrato and a 'beautiful little work' in the National Gallery, London

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ON 4TH OCTOBER 1899 Mary Berenson recorded in her diary that she, accompanied by Roger Fry and his wife, Helen Coombe, had visited the Sienese forger Federico Joni. In the course of their excursion, Fry commented that the National Gallery had recently acquired a fake Perugino, at which point they all laughed and dug him in the ribs, assuming that he himself had sold it to the Gallery.¹ They were, however, wrong. The so-called 'Perugino' – a predella-like painting of the *Baptism of Christ* (Fig. 16) – had been bought by Sir Edward Poynter in 1894 during his first six months as Director. Although Poynter would always hold to the view that the 'beautiful little work' dated from 'the fifteenth (or quite early sixteenth) century', several eminent critics were of another opinion.² Damned as a 'detestable little production', the painting, its attribution and dating became the means by which the late Victorian and Edwardian art world expressed its dissatisfaction with the institution and direction of the Gallery.³ The conviction that the painting was a forgery effectively ensured that it received little critical attention for most of the twentieth century, during which time its dating shifted from the late fifteenth to the early nineteenth century. Yet, more recently these assumptions, and the politics that drove them, have come to be questioned. The National Gallery *Baptism* is now understood to be a sixteenth-century copy for reasons outlined below. To make sense of how its critical fortune could swing so widely, it is necessary to examine the differing perception of fakes and copies in the nineteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively.

Writing anonymously in the *Saturday Review* in early 1898, Herbert Horne lamented that since 'Sir Edward Poynter has assumed the directorship of the Gallery [in 1894] no picture of first-rate importance has been added to the collection'.⁴ The *Baptism*, bought four years previously, called 'for a more special examination' than other pictures acquired by Poynter, not only because Perugino was erroneously placed in the Venetian school, but because the 'most charitable view which one could take of

this worthless picture is to suppose it to be a late sixteenth-century copy of some lost original'. Its acquisition bore testament to the Director's incompetence: 'we can only conclude that here we have some indication of his knowledge of Early Italian Painting [. . . it] is a gross scandal to the administration of the Gallery, and the sooner it is consigned to the limbo of mistaken acquisitions the better for every one concerned'.⁵

Horne did, however, show himself to be sensitive to the difficult circumstances under which the painting was acquired. He opened his article by observing that Poynter's appointment had brought with it a change in the process by which paintings were procured. Whereas previously – since the time of Sir Charles Eastlake – the power to make purchases had rested on the shoulders of the Director, the so-called Rosebery Minute of April 1894 had transferred such Atlantean authority to a group of aristocratic Trustees.⁶ To make matters worse, the Treasury had reduced the Gallery's grant in the wake of the acquisition of two pictures from Blenheim in 1885.⁷ 'Whether this very radical change in the administration of the Gallery was intended as a censure upon the retiring Director [Sir Frederic Burton], or a want of confidence in the gentleman about to succeed him, we are not informed', Horne noted, before astutely recognising that it left both the Director and the Trustees absolved of responsibility.⁸ The Rosebery Minute would prove a great hindrance to Poynter, as would his cool relations with the Trustees, themselves dismissed and disregarded by the Treasury.⁹

The publication of the Gallery's *Annual Report* for 1898 prompted Horne to return to the subject, which had in the intervening period given rise to much comment from correspondents, among them Sydney Cockerell.¹⁰ A year later and Horne was again campaigning against misguided acquisitions at the Gallery.¹¹ Once more his subject was the 'Perugino', but now he had more substantial evidence. He realised that the picture was in fact a copy of Perugino's predella panel in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen (Fig. 17). Although the documents

We would like to thank Ken Reedie of the Canterbury City Museums, as well as our colleagues in the Archive, Conservation, Curatorial and Scientific departments at the National Gallery, London, for their help with this research.

¹ E. Samuels: *Bernard Berenson: The making of a connoisseur*, Cambridge MA and London 1979, p.253, citing Mary Berenson's diary for 4th October 1899, now in the Berenson Archive at Villa I Tatti, Florence; see also B. Strachey and J. Samuels, eds.: *Mary Berenson: A self-portrait from her letters and diaries*, London 1983, p.84; and G. Mazzoni: 'La cultura del falso', in *idem*: exh. cat. *Falsi d'autore: Iclio Federico Joni e la cultura del falso tra otto e novecento*, Siena (S. Maria della Scala) 2004, p.66. We would like to thank Caroline Elam for directing us to this entry and for subsequent references to Horne, and also Ilaria Della Monica, Archivist, Villa I Tatti.

² E.J. Poynter: 'A maker of old masters', *Athenaeum* 4137 (9th February 1907), p.174.

³ The author of this phrase is not known, although it is cited in several sources; see, for example, M.W. Brockwell: 'A maker of old masters', *Athenaeum* 4138 (16th February 1907), p.206; R.C. Fisher: 'Sir E. Poynter and the National Gallery', *The Times* (1st April 1907), p.9; and M.W. Brockwell: 'Sir E. Poynter and the National

Gallery', *ibid.* (8th April 1907), p.5.

⁴ Anon. [H.P. Horne]: 'The state of the National Gallery', *The Saturday Review* (26th February 1898), supplement, p.278. Horne's authorship is confirmed by D. Sutton: 'Herbert Horne: A pioneer historian of early Italian art', *Apollo* 122 (1985), p.131.

⁵ Horne, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp.275–76.

⁶ Since Gladstone's Minute of 1855, directors, beginning with Eastlake, had been solely responsible for the decision to acquire pictures. The Rosebery Minute shifted that power (and others) to the Board of Trustees, the Director only having one vote on the panel. The Lansdowne Resolutions of 1902 further restrained the Director's power to make acquisitions; see C. Saumarez Smith: *The National Gallery: A short history*, London 2009, pp.96–97 and 99; and J. Conlin: *The nation's mantelpiece: A history of the National Gallery*, London 2006, pp.95–98, 106 and 358.

⁷ A. Geddes Poole: 'Conspicuous Presumption: The Treasury and the Trustees of the National Gallery, 1890–1939', *Twentieth century British History* 16:1 (2005), p.8.

⁸ Horne, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.275.

⁹ For the ill will and 'controversies' between Poynter and his Trustees, particularly



16. *Baptism of Christ*, after Perugino, here attributed to Sassoferrato. Second quarter of the seventeenth century. Canvas laid onto panel, 32.5 by 59 cm. (National Gallery, London).

pertaining to the Rouen picture (and the other elements from the dismantled altarpiece) were only published in 1931, Horne pointed both to its quality as a sign of authenticity and its mention by Vasari. It had been commissioned in 1495 as part of the high altarpiece for the Benedictine house of S. Pietro, Perugia.¹² But Horne did not condemn the National Gallery picture outright, as did connoisseurs writing eight years later. Instead, he suggested that it dated to 'a period at least a hundred years later'.¹³ Horne's perspicacious insight went unheeded among critics intent on berating the Gallery and it took more than a century to prove his supposition correct.

Fry, too, was quick to realise that the National Gallery's new acquisition was not all that it purported to be. Writing in *The Pilot* in 1901, two years after his visit to Joni, he was concerned to show how the purchase of the 'poor copy' after Perugino was symptomatic of a greater malaise in the Gallery's administration

and expertise.¹⁴ He worried that works were bought as examples of important 'names', rather than for their inherent quality; much as 'the *nouveau riche* orders his books to fill the shelves of his library, we appear to buy our pictures – the object in each case being that the names in the catalogue may impress the visitor with admiration for our cultivated taste'.¹⁵

Yet the criticisms of Horne and Fry appear to have had little effect on Poynter or the Trustees. True, the attribution to 'Vannucci' in the catalogue of 1898 was changed the following year to read 'ascribed to Vannucci', but the picture remained on view, and no official statement justifying the acquisition was forthcoming. Tired, and evidently unpopular, Poynter finally left his post in 1904, to be replaced by Sir Charles Holroyd in 1906 after an interregnum of over a year during which time the Treasury deliberated on whether or not to appoint Fry. The unresolved issue of the 'Perugino', however, had not disappeared. It

Lord Lansdowne, see the memoirs of C. Holmes: *Self and partners*, New York 1936, p.320; Geddes Poole, *op. cit.* (note 7), pp.1–28; and Saumarez Smith, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.97.

¹⁰ Anon. [H.P. Horne]: 'The state of the National Gallery: The report of the Director for the year 1897', *The Saturday Review* (6th August 1898), pp.171–72. For correspondence, see, for example, D.P. Sellar: 'Correspondence: The National Gallery', *ibid.* (12th March 1898), pp.359–60; *idem*: 'Correspondence: The state of the National Gallery', *ibid.* (26th March 1898), p.432; and anon. [H.P. Horne]: 'Correspondence: The state of the National Gallery', *ibid.* (2nd April 1898), p.467. Cockerell observed that it was impossible for anyone to adequately perform the roles of Director of the National Gallery and President of the Royal Academy simultaneously. 'The Director [. . .] should be able to take the first train to Venice or Madrid and get there before the Berlin people or any other public or private rivals; and this is not easy for a man with all the engagements of a P.R.A.'; S.C. Cockerell: 'Correspondence: The National Gallery', *ibid.* (12th March 1898), p.360.

¹¹ H.P. Horne: 'An inquiry into two pictures recently acquired for the National Gallery', *The Magazine of Art* (1899), pp.241–43.

¹² The panel was removed from the church in 1798 and accessioned by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen, in 1803. For the other elements of the altarpiece and for the provenance of this work, see P. Scarpellini: *Perugino*, Milan 1984, pp.93–95, nos.74–88. The documents relating to the commission were published by F. Canuti: *Il Perugino*, Siena 1931, II, pp.176–83. For the most recent reconstruction of the altarpiece, see C. Gardner von Teuffel: 'Carpenteria e macchine d'altare: Per la storia della ricostruzione della pale di San Pietro e di Sant'Agostino a Perugia', in V. Garibaldi and F.F. Mancini, eds.: exh. cat. *Perugino il divin pittore*, Perugia (Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria) 2004, pp.141–53.

¹³ Horne, *op. cit.* (note 11), p.241.

¹⁴ R.E. Fry: 'Recent Acquisitions in the National Gallery', *The Pilot* 45 (5th January 1901), pp.10–11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.10. Fry also bewailed that this maladroit system had permitted such important works as Titian's *Europa* to leave British shores. Concern for the loss of great pictures to foreign (generally American) buyers is a leitmotif of these articles and would eventually lead to the establishment of the National Art-Collections Fund in 1903.



17. *Baptism of Christ*, by Perugino. 1495–1500. Panel, 39 by 68 cm. (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen).

flared-up again in winter 1906–07 and once more provided the pretext for an attack on the Gallery's direction. The publication of a new edition of the catalogue of the foreign schools, which maintained the association with Perugino, prompted Maurice Brockwell to write three articles for the *Athenaeum*.¹⁶ They provoked a series of letters and articles, both in the weekly itself and subsequently in *The Times*, all written with the polite deference typical of the period, thinly disguising the vitriol. Such was the response that the editor of the *Athenaeum* was forced to add an exasperated plea on 16th February 1907, entreating his readers that 'Further correspondence on this subject is not invited'. These articles are marked by their insistence that the painting was a modern forgery, completely rejecting Horne's suggestion that it could be an early copy. The position adopted by their authors was political: their desire for the painting to be a fake was used to justify a low opinion of Poynter's expertise.

Brockwell complained that the high standard in cataloguing that had been set by Eastlake and Wornum in 1855 was not being maintained.¹⁷ In the third of the articles, he drew attention to the 'Perugino', expressing the same view as Fry that too often the Gallery sought big names.¹⁸ The result, he concluded, of allowing cataloguing to 'degenerate' to such a degree was 'a general disposition in certain quarters to treat it as a subject for badinage'. But there was hope, there was a feeling in artistic circles that

everyone should 'combine loyally to support the recently appointed Director [Charles Holroyd], who has taken up his duties at a not very favourable moment in the Gallery's history, and has already made his presence felt'.¹⁹ Brockwell was evidently shrewd in complimenting the Director and in demanding a higher standard of catalogues, for within a few years he found himself assisting Holroyd in rewriting them.²⁰

Response to Brockwell's articles was immediate. Richard C. Fisher – a magistrate sitting on the Midhurst Bench who was also the son of Richard Fisher, the scholar of Renaissance prints – wrote to the editor of the *Athenaeum* claiming that the *Baptism* was 'not even an old copy, but [. . .] a modern work, by Michele Micheli, of Florence, painted in the first half of the nineteenth century'.²¹ Fisher seems to have known a fair amount about this forger, now forgotten, having collected information on him in Florence during the 1880s. Micheli apparently died in September 1848 and had copied Raphael, Perugino and Lorenzo di Credi among others. According to Fisher, many of his works were masquerading in English collections. He wished to publish more extensively on him, but for the fact that his information had been attained in confidence. His purpose in writing, however, was not simply to denounce the painting as an outright forgery and unveil its author, but to make an accusation of incompetence against the former Director. Fisher claimed that

¹⁶ *Descriptive and historical catalogue of the pictures in the National Gallery: Foreign schools*, London 1906, p.600.

¹⁷ Anon. [M.W. Brockwell]: 'The National Gallery: Foreign catalogue – I', *Athenaeum* 4129 (15th December 1906), p.80.

¹⁸ Anon. [M.W. Brockwell]: 'The National Gallery: Foreign catalogue – III', *Athenaeum* 4134 (19th January 1907), pp.81–82. The second article appeared as Anon. [M.W. Brockwell]: 'The National Gallery: Foreign catalogue – II', *Athenaeum* 4131 (29th December 1906), pp.838–39.

¹⁹ Brockwell 1907, *op. cit.* (note 18), p.82.

²⁰ Brockwell's time at the National Gallery is not documented since he did not appear on the pay roll. It is mentioned, instead, in his obituary in *The Times* (8th December 1958), p.15. However, it must date to around 1909–11, when he published two works related to the collection; M.W. Brockwell: *The National Gallery: Lewis bequest*, London 1909; and *idem: The 'Adoration of the Magi' by Jan Mabuse formerly in the collection of the Earl of Carlisle*, London 1911.

²¹ R.C. Fisher: 'A maker of old masters', *Athenaeum* 4135 (26th January 1907), p.110. Relatively little is known about Fisher, but some information can be gleaned from his obituary in *The Times* (5th March 1928), p.9. Some of his papers are held by the West Sussex Record Office among the Richard Cobden Papers and in various

additional manuscripts (in particular Add. MSS. 14,810–14,840). However, there would appear to be no reference to Micheli among them. An article in *The Atlantic Monthly* claimed that one of Micheli's fakes – a 'Raphael' – 'long graced the Imperial Gallery of Russia', see J.J. Jarves: 'Italian Experiences in collecting "Old Masters"', *The Atlantic Monthly* 6/37 (November 1860), pp.578–86.

²² Fisher, *op. cit.* (note 21), p.110.

²³ Canterbury City Council Museums and Galleries (CANCM 4030). In a letter dated 28th December 1929, now in the dossier in Canterbury, de Zoete notes that his painting had 'for a time [. . .] hung on [the National Gallery's] walls'. De Zoete claimed that it had been rejected 'only on the worthless criticisms of Mr Fisher'; letter from de Zoete to Poynter, 6th March 1907, National Gallery Archive (cited hereafter as NGA), 7/323/1907.

²⁴ NGA, Minutes of Board Meetings, 19th February 1907 and 7th May 1907, 7/323/1907. The two photographs and two letters presented to the Board on these occasions survive at NGA, 7/319/10 (photographs); 7/323/11–13 (letters).

²⁵ E.J. Poynter: 'A maker of old masters', *Athenaeum* 4137 (9th February 1907), p.174. Fisher replied to Poynter, acknowledging his mistake and the existence of two pictures, but regretting that he could not 'agree with him as to its genuineness'; see R.C. Fisher: 'A maker of old masters', *ibid.* 4138 (16th February 1907), pp.205–06.



18. *Baptism of Christ*, after Perugino. Probably late sixteenth century. Canvas laid onto panel, 36 by 60.5 cm. (Canterbury City Council Museums and Galleries).

the 'Perugino' had already been offered to the Gallery, less than a decade before Poynter acquired it. He had personally inspected it with Burton, which was when he first identified the dissembling hand of Micheli. Burton was consequently forced to return the painting to its owner. 'I was much surprised', Fisher quipped, 'some years later when I found the picture hanging on the walls of the National Gallery as a Perugino, and I need hardly mention that Sir F. Burton was not then the Director'.²²

Fisher's revelation was only half wrong. A near-identical painting, thought to be by Timoteo Viti, had been presented to the nation by Gerard Frederick de Zoete in 1887 (Fig. 18). It was returned to him by Burton in exchange for a *Virgin and Child* by Luis de Morales (NG 1229), but it seems to have hung on the walls at Trafalgar Square for a short period. In 1905 de Zoete sent the picture to the Royal Museum in Canterbury instead, where it was accepted and where it has remained.²³ There were, then, two copies by different hands derived from Perugino's prototype in Rouen.

The scandal was sufficient for the Trustees to discuss the matter twice. At their meeting on 19th February 1907, the new Director, Charles Holroyd, laid before them two photographs to demonstrate that NG 1431 and the painting in Canterbury were, in fact, different, while correspondence from de Zoete and Poynter was presented on 7th May.²⁴ Although in retirement,

Poynter wrote to the editor of the *Athenaeum* to clarify the matter, but not before Brockwell lent his support to Fisher.²⁵ Vexed by these attacks, by the fact of being named and by the biased selections published in the *Athenaeum*, Poynter finally wrote to *The Times*.²⁶ His lengthy letter was intended as much for circulation among the Trustees as it was for general consumption. In it, he detailed the research he had undertaken in advance of purchase, particularly the comparisons he had made with paintings in the Vatican Gallery. But instead of evoking the name of Perugino, Poynter met his adversaries by upping the attribution to the young Raphael. He had long suspected that it was by the Urbinate painter, but was impelled to publish his opinion as the same suggestion had recently been forwarded by a French authority, Emile Durand-Gréville.²⁷

Why Poynter waited until 1907 to answer his critics is a difficult question to answer and one on which the archives are silent. It is probable that the renewed controversy had hurt his pride. Now away from the Gallery, he could freely respond to those Trustees and critics who had caused him so much difficulty. It is just possible, too, that by 1907 the character of the vendor was becoming known in London. The *Baptism* had been acquired from a dealer in Rome called Godfrey (von) Kopp, whom Poynter had met on his Continental Trip in autumn 1894.²⁸ Where Kopp acquired the picture is unknown; indeed

Brockwell noted that had Poynter only read the Gallery's *Annual Report* for 1855, 'he would have realized that the picture bought by him in 1894 could at the best be only a replica of one of the Rouen panels', agreeing with Fisher that it dated to the early nineteenth century; see M.W. Brockwell: 'A maker of old masters', *Athenaeum* 4136 (2nd February 1907), pp.140-41. The *Annual Report* was instituted by Treasury Minute on 27th March 1855, and employed - by chance - the S. Pietro altarpiece as an example to illustrate correct cataloguing (pp.6-7). There was a further letter from Brockwell, *op. cit.* (note 3), on 16th February 1907, p.206.

²⁶ E.J. Poynter: Letter to the Editor, *The Times* (30th March 1907), p.4. The proofs, dated 13th March 1907, survive in both manuscript and typescript at NGA, 68/29/3 and 5. For the editor's reply, see 'Sir E.J. Poynter and the National Gallery', *Athenaeum* 4145 (6th April 1907), p.417. His letter prompted responses from each of the chief protagonists. De Zoete wrote to expose the 'incapacity' of Fisher, but equally to vent his spleen against the authorities at the Gallery. 'If Directors [. . .] must call in the assistance of art critics, the least the nation expects is, that, before its paintings are removed from the walls of the National Gallery, the reasons and authority for so doing should be made public'; see G.F. de Zoete: Letter to the Editor, *The Times* (4th April 1907), p.6. Brockwell reasserted his position and mentioned by name Horne, Bernard Berenson and Claude Phillips as of the same view; Brockwell, 8th April

1907, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.5. See also Fisher, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.9. Letters in support of Poynter from de Zoete (7th April 1907) and Fred White of 170 Queens Gate (31st March 1907) were not published, but instead survive in manuscript; NGA, 68/29/6 (de Zoete); 68/29/4 (White).

²⁷ E. Durand-Gréville: 'Le baptême de la National Gallery', *Bulletin de l'art ancien et moderne* 9 (1907), pp.70-71. The Rouen panels have also sometimes been attributed to Raphael by, among others, Eugène Delacroix; see A. Joubin: *Correspondance générale de Eugène Delacroix: 1838-1849*, Paris 1936, II, pp.23 and 58.

²⁸ On 25th November 1894 Poynter wrote to Kopp on paper bearing Kopp's address at 20 Piazza di Spagna, Rome, offering him £400 for the picture. Kopp replied, writing on the same letter, that Loraine Cox would deliver the painting to him in exchange for a cheque. The Board approved Poynter's acquisition retrospectively at their meeting on 18th December 1894. Cox signed a receipt on 4th January 1895, which was presented to the Board on 6th February 1895. The archive also preserves a visiting card from Giuseppe Pierantoni (13 Piazza Rosa, Rome) dated 21st December 1894 and mentioning a letter from Mr Evans; it is not known what role these two individuals played in the acquisition, although it may relate to the shipping of the picture; NGA, 68/16/19 (Poynter to Kopp), 68/16/20 (visiting card), 68/17/16 (receipt); NG *Minutes of Board Meetings*, 18th December 1894 and 6th February 1895.



19. *Virgin and Child with the Infant Baptist* (The Garvagh Madonna), by Sassoferato, after Raphael. 1625–50. Canvas, 47.8 by 38.5 cm. (Musée du Louvre, Paris).

its provenance before this date is a mystery, unless it can be identified with the work listed in the inventory of the collection of Cavaliere Francesco Maria Azzi in Perugia in 1788 ('A copy of the Baptism of Pietro Perugino, that is in the sacristy of S. Pietro').²⁹ Kopp, however, is less of a mystery. Born Gottfried rather than Godfrey, he was the son of a Swiss pastry chef. After going into partnership with Charles Wakefield Mori, however, he aggrandised himself by anglicising his name and elevated himself to an Austrian baronetcy. Trading in both Paris and Rome, he found a lucrative market for fakes. But his ambition was far grander, and he rose to become one of the most celebrated fraudsters of his generation, counting the fraudulent 'sale' of the Arch of Constantine to the Chicago restaurateur

John R. Thompson among his more infamous achievements.³⁰ He was sufficiently well known by 1898 for Henry Duveen to write to the American architect and decorator Stanford White to warn him against any dealings with Kopp, who was in his opinion 'capable of almost anything [. . .] he] is a very dangerous person and you should be very careful to keep away from him'.³¹ Were Kopp unmasked by the time the articles went to press in the *Athenaeum*, then Poynter would surely have been eager to defend his judgment and clear the Gallery of involvement with such an unsavoury individual.

The scandal eventually died down. Under the new Director, the picture no longer served as a battleground to rally forces against Poynter. For the first time, the 1913 catalogue designated the painting as 'after' Perugino, presumably on the advice of Brockwell.³² But recent scientific investigations have reopened the debate, calling into question the assumption that if a 'Renaissance' painting is not of its period, then it must by default be a nineteenth-century fake. Nine pigment samples, first taken in 1970 and re-examined last year, have established beyond doubt a *terminus ante quem* for the picture in the mid-eighteenth century.³³ The work contains no modern pigments or Prussian blue (known from about 1710) and most tellingly employs a lead-tin yellow type pigment in the draperies which fell out of use during the first half of the eighteenth century. While Perugino is known to have re-used figures extensively in his paintings, it was rare – if not unknown – for him to repeat entire compositions. He also tended to use better quality ultramarine.³⁴ It is far more likely that the painting is the work of a seicento copyist. This conclusion is borne out by the presence of antimony in addition to lead and tin in the yellow pigment, which not only suggests a date in the seventeenth century, but points to a Roman painter. Lead-tin-antimony yellow has only been identified in a small number of instances, all by painters with some connection to Rome, including Pietro da Cortona, Salvator Rosa and Sassoferato.³⁵ The other pigments accord with these findings. The dark green in the foliage at the top right-hand corner contains an artificial form of azurite (blue verditer), a pigment not unknown in Perugino's time, but common in the seventeenth century, while natural azurite, which occurs in some of the blue drapery, disappears after c.1700.³⁶ The finely ground ultramarine in the sky is also typical of seventeenth-century practice. Together with the pinkish-brown *imprimitura*, the pigments point to a work produced in that century.³⁷

Perugino's panel in Rouen and the National Gallery copy correspond in colour and scale, suggesting that the copyist had direct

²⁹ 'Una copia del Battesimo di Pietro Perugino, che sta nella sagrestia di S. Pietro', cited by E. Gardner: *A bibliographical repertory of Italian private collections*, Vicenza 1998, p.57. We would like to thank Antonio Mazzotta for directing our attention to this reference.

³⁰ E. Fowles: *Memories of Duveen Brothers*, London 1976, p.27. The dubious dealings of Kopp are discussed by C. Simpson: *The partnership: The secret association of Bernard Berenson and Joseph Duveen*, London 1987, pp.94–101; and W. Craven: *Stanford White: Decorator in opulence and dealer in antiquities*, New York 2005, pp.37–40.

³¹ Henry Duveen to White, London, 10th June 1898; Stanford White Papers, New York City, Columbia University, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, cited by Craven, *op. cit.* (note 30), p.38.

³² The design was still being given to Perugino as late as 1923 by U. Gnoli: *Perugino*, Spoleto 1923, p.55.

³³ See our forthcoming article in *The National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 31 (2010), pp.78–95.

³⁴ For Perugino's technique, see D. Bomford *et al.*: 'Three panels from Perugino's Certosa di Pavia altarpiece', *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 4 (1980), pp.3–31; and

the various essays in B.G. Brunetti *et al.*: *The painting technique of Pietro Vannucci, called il Perugino*, Florence 2004.

³⁵ A. Roy and B. Berrie: 'A new lead-based yellow in the seventeenth century', in A. Roy and P. Smith, eds.: *Painting techniques, history and studio practice*, London 1998, pp.160–65; C. Sandalinas and S. Ruiz-Moreno: 'Lead-tin-antimony yellow, historical manufacture, molecular characterization and identification in seventeenth-century Italian paintings', *Studies in Conservation* 49 (2004), pp.41–52; and C. Seccaroni: *Giallorino, storia dei pigmenti gialli di natura sintetica*, Rome 2006.

³⁶ Blue verditer has recently been identified in what are thought to be original paint layers in Giulio Romano's *The nurture of Jupiter*, painted in the mid-1530s; see L. Keith: 'Giulio Romano and "The Birth of Jupiter": studio practice and reputation', *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 24 (2003), pp.38–39. This is a very early occurrence of the artificially produced copper carbonate pigment which became common in the seventeenth century; see R. Harley: *Artists' Pigments c.1600–1835*, 2nd ed., London 1982, p.50.

³⁷ J. Dunkerton and M. Spring: 'The development of painting on coloured surfaces in sixteenth-century Italy', in Roy and Smith, *op. cit.* (note 35), pp.120–30.

access to the original. The former was still at S. Pietro in the seventeenth century, although it had been moved to the sacristy in the wake of the Counter-Reformation, when the high altar was dismantled. Sassoferrato was closely involved with the monastery during the second quarter of the seventeenth century, so there is the distinct possibility that the National Gallery painting is by his hand, especially when stylistic similarities are taken into consideration. Sassoferrato is one of the few painters known to have used lead-tin-antimony yellow.

Giovan Battista Salvi, generally called after his native town Sassoferrato, specialised in producing copies of sacred images. He seems to have found ready patrons, of various social levels, for these replicas; indeed, he might even have created a niche market. Born in 1609, he was certainly in Rome by 1641, when he received the commission for the ceiling painting of *The Blessed Virgin appearing to St Francis of Paola* for the Minim friars of S. Francesco di Paola. Two years later he painted his best-known work, a large altarpiece for S. Sabina. It is alleged to have replaced a painting attributed to Raphael, which had been offered to Cardinal Antonio Barberini, although it does not appear to be a copy. By this date, it would seem that Sassoferrato had already made a name for himself as a talented copyist, replicating Raphael with such skill that eighteenth-century historians thought they were contemporaries (Fig. 19). His *œuvre*, however, ranged far wider, from free adaptations to direct imitations.³⁸

There was, of course, nothing unusual in copying, or even faking, during the seventeenth century, especially after works by Raphael.³⁹ Some artists seem to have made it their career. In his *Life of the painter Terenzio Terenzi*, called Terenzio da Urbino or il Rondolino, Giovanni Baglione observed that 'he was one of those painters who want to pass off modern paintings as ancient ones. He went to obtain old panels, and frames all worked *all'antica*, blackened by smoke and corroded by wood worms, where there might have been some figures, although coarse and badly executed'. Having painted over the old panels, 'he darkened them with smoke, and covered them with certain varnishes mixed with colours, that they appear as images of about a hundred years earlier'.⁴⁰ It is significant that Terenzio sought to fake Raphael, for there was also a healthy market in honest reproductions of his works. And Raphael was not unique: the same is probably true of those artists of the preceding generations – 'of about a hundred years earlier' in the words of Baglione – who were thought to have possessed God-like abilities and who were often given the epithet 'divine'. Their

³⁸ The bibliography dedicated to Sassoferrato is not extensive. His *œuvre* was constructed in large part by F. Macé de Lépinay: 'Archaïsme et purisme au XVII^e siècle: les tableaux de Sassoferrato à S. Pietro de Pérouse', *Revue de l'Art* 31 (1976), pp.38–56; *idem*, in conjunction with J.-C. Boyer: 'The "Mignardes", Sassoferrato and Roman classicism during the 1650s', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 123 (1981), pp.69–76; *idem et al.*, eds.: exh. cat. *Giovan Battista Salvi 'il Sassoferrato'*, Sassoferrato (S. Francesco) 1990; and *idem*: 'Sassoferrato (1609–1685) au Louvre: une réhabilitation', *La revue des musées de France. Revue du Louvre* 2 (2004), pp.62–73. Other contributions have been made by F. Russell: 'Sassoferrato and his sources: A study in seicento allegiance', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 119 (1977), pp.694–700; F. Zeri: *Sassoferrato copista*, San Severino 1986; and S. Caldarigi: *Giovan Battista Salvi 'il Sassoferrato': Aspetti e problemi*, Sassoferrato 2003.

³⁹ The phenomenon is, however, relatively understudied, with the exception of the work of R. Spear: *The 'divine' Guido: Religion, sex, money and art in the world of Guido Reni*, New Haven and London 1997, pp.253–74; and the essays by Spear and J.M. Muller in K. Preciado, ed.: *Retaining the original: Multiple originals, copies, and reproductions*, Washington 1989, pp.97–99 and 141–49.



20. *Annunciation*, by Sassoferrato. c.1430. Black and white chalk on grey-green paper, 39.8 by 27 cm. (Royal Collection, copyright 2010 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II).

paintings had acquired canonical status, and copies seem to have been commissioned either because the originals were unobtainable, or to replace the originals when they had been removed from the altars they once decorated. But among these divine practitioners, Raphael was Olympian, not least because of the model he provided to those young artists pursuing a classicising style. Malvasia attributed Guido Reni's early success in part to his copy of Raphael's *St Cecilia with saints* (sometimes identified as the painting in the Polet Chapel, S. Luigi dei Francesi, Rome); while the copyists that Poussin oversaw for Paul de Chantelou in the 1640s were similarly replicating Raphael, including paintings in the Palazzo Farnese, the *Transfiguration*, then in S. Pietro in Montorio, and the *Madonna di Foligno*, then in S. Francesco, Foligno.⁴¹

These images were not fakes. They were recognised for what they were, and inventories, for example, often carefully distinguished between them. That of Francesco Maria del Monte, drawn up in 1627, singles out works that are '*di mano di*' or '*copiata*

⁴⁰ 'fu pittore di quelli, che le lor pitture moderne volgiono per antiche spacciare. Egli andava procacciando tavole vecchie, e cornici all'antica lavorate, dai fumo annegrite, e da'tarlor corrose, ove fosse stata qualche figura, benchè grossolana, e mal condotta [. . .] e dopo esser dipinte le appiccava al fumo, e con certe vernici misti con colori, che sopra di loro dava, faceale parere immagini per tratto di centinaia d'anni al tempo avanzate'; G.B. Baglione: *Le vite de' pittori, scultori, architetti, ed intagliatori*, rev. ed., Naples 1733, p.149. Terenzio was by no means the only painter involved in such duplicitous activity. Balducci mentioned Cesare Aretusi and Andrea Comodi as involved in similar work, while John Evelyn wrote in his *Diary* on 6th May 1645 that Antonio della Cornia 'has such an addresse of counterfeiting the hands of the ancient masters so well as to make his copies passe for originals'; see Spear 1997, *op. cit.* (note 39), pp.273 and 383, note 137. Giulio Mancini, writing around 1620, provides much evidence of the same problem; G. Mancini: *Considerazioni sulla pittura*, ed. A. Marucchi, Rome 1956–57, I, p.134.

⁴¹ For Poussin's copies for Chantelou, see C. Jouanny: *Correspondance de Nicolas Poussin*, Paris 1911, pp.189–204; and T. Green: *Nicolas Poussin paints the 'Seven Sacraments' twice*, *Watchet* 2000, pp.173–82. We would like to thank Sheila McTigue for directing us to these references.



21. *St Flavia*, by Sassoferrato, after Perugino. 1625–50. Canvas, 63 by 50 cm. (Monastero di S. Pietro, Perugia).

del'.⁴² Yet within this broad market, Sassoferrato stands alone, for not only did he copy, but he created an aesthetic based on emulation and imitation. In this sense, he was unique.

But Sassoferrato can also be differentiated from other seicento copyists by the fact that, on occasion, he turned his attention to fifteenth-century painters, most notably Perugino. In what might be one of his earliest commissions, he seems to have been set to copy a fifteenth-century fresco of the *Annunciation*, variously attributed to Giovanni Antonio da Pesaro or Antonio da Fabriano, in the church of S. Chiara in Sassoferrato. A drawing for it survives in Windsor (Fig.20), as does a copy on canvas, whose authorship is debated.⁴³ It is unknown if a cult was attached to this image, but it is the type of work that would have been venerated locally.

Similar circumstances surround the next commission of any certainty. In 1643 a venerated fresco of the *Madonna del Giglio*, attributed to Giovanni di Pietro, 'lo Spagna', was detached from the wall of a small chapel at Villa di Valliano, near Perugia, and solemnly processed to its new location in the chapel of the Holy Sacrament in the Benedictine abbey of S. Pietro, Perugia.⁴⁴ The dedication was a typical Counter-Reformation move; the Clementine transept added to S. Giovanni Laterano, Rome, in time for the Jubilee year 1600 was dedicated to the Eucharist.⁴⁵ The abbey was locked in disagreement with successive bishops of Perugia over Episcopal jurisdiction and turned increasingly to powerful figures in Rome for succour.⁴⁶ Unsurprisingly, then,

⁴² C.L. Frommel: 'Caravaggio Frühwerk und der Kardinal Francesco Maria del Monte', *Storia dell'arte* 9/10 (1971), pp.30, 31, 34 and 35. This point was first made by Spear 1997, *op. cit.* (note 39), p.268, who also observed that the inventory of Cardinal Federico Borromeo's collection, drawn up in 1618 on the donation to the Ambrosiana, designated certain works as '*copie fatte con diligenza*'.

⁴³ A.F. Blunt and H.L. Cooke: *The Roman Drawings of the XVII & XVIII Centuries in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle*, London 1960, p.106, no.906. For the debate over the attribution of the canvas, compare Russell, *op. cit.* (note 38), p.695; and Caldarigi, *op. cit.* (note 38), p.80.

⁴⁴ For the painting by 'lo Spagna', see F.G. Sabatini: *Giovanni di Pietro detto Lo Spagna*, Spoleto 1984, I, pp.299–300. In addition to her archival references, see Perugia, Archivio di S. Pietro, Cassetto II^o, 6: 'Fasciolo di memorie relative all'oratorio della Madonna del Giglio [. . .] spese fatte', for a rare description of the translation of the image.

⁴⁵ J. Freiberg: *The Lateran in 1600: Christian concord in Counter-Reformation Rome*,



22. *Judith*, by Sassoferrato. 1625–50. Canvas, 160 by 85 cm. (Monastero di S. Pietro, Perugia).

the transfer of the image – and presumably its cult – was officially sanctioned by Urban VIII, who commissioned a copy of the painting from Sassoferrato, according to an eighteenth-century account. So too did Cardinal Francesco Barberini, the Protettore della Congregazione Casinese and thus protector of the Benedictines at S. Pietro.⁴⁷ These paintings do not survive, but others do. Preserved in the church is a *Madonna del Giglio*, clearly by Sassoferrato, which may be among his earliest works. Eighteenth-century descriptions of the abbey state that it was produced for the abbot Don Leone Pavoni di Todi and hung in the chapel of his apartment. Further copies were dispatched to Benedictine houses under the control of the same abbot. Three survive respectively at S. Pietro in Assisi, S. Pietro in Reggio Emilia and S. Pietro in Modena.⁴⁸

There is no record of why the young Marchigian painter was chosen to replicate this damaged fresco, but evidently his skills were prized in disseminating the likeness of a holy image. Could it be that Sassoferrato, who was known as the '*pittore delle belle Madonne*' on his death in 1685, had developed an anachronistic style that resonated with the sacred function of these works?⁴⁹

Cambridge 1995, *passim*.

⁴⁶ C. Black: 'Perugia and post-Tridentine church reform', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 32/2 (1984), pp.429–51, esp. pp.447–49.

⁴⁷ For the copy in the Chapel of the Abbot's apartment, the transfer with the authority of Urban VIII and Sassoferrato's copy for the Pope, see P. Galassi: *Descrizione delle pitture di San Pietro di Perugia chiesa de' Monaci Neri di S. Benedetto della congregazione casinese e di quanto si vede in essa di più singolare, colle notizie de' loro autori*, 3rd ed., Perugia 1792, pp.47 and 80.

⁴⁸ Macé de Lépinay, Zampetti and Sassi, in Macé de Lépinay 1990, *op. cit.* (note 38), p.121, no.57.

⁴⁹ This sobriquet became commonplace in the eighteenth century, but it was already in use in his lifetime. See the 'Annales' for the year 1685 in the Archive of S. Pietro, in which it is noted that he was known in Rome '*sotto nome di Pittore delle belle Madonne*', cited in Macé de Lépinay 1976, *op. cit.* (note 38), p.53, Annexe 2.



23. *Entombment*, by Sassoferrato, after Raphael. 1625–50. Canvas, 115 by 125 cm. (Monastero di S. Pietro, Perugia).

Another of the instances of a seventeenth-century painter copying an early fresco was also one who is now classified as stylistically *retardataire*. In 1655–56 Carlo Dolci was commissioned by the Marchese Scipione di Piero Capponi to copy the much-venerated miracle-working fresco of the *Annunciation* in SS. Annunziata in Florence.⁵⁰ As with Sassoferrato's copy of the *Madonna del Giglio*, Dolci's must have been prompted by the sanctity of the prototype, which was reputed to have been painted by an angel. Such replication relates to a much older tradition, of which the copying, replacement and updating of Bernardo Daddi's altarpiece in Orsanmichele is probably the most famous instance. Sassoferrato's archaism might be thought, therefore, to refer as much to his style as to the function of his imagery.

The *Madonna del Giglio* was not Sassoferrato's only work for the community at S. Pietro, nor was it his only work for the abbey that made reference to earlier paintings. Galassi's guide to the church, published in 1792, recorded 'In the rooms [of the abbot] St Benedict, St Scholastica, St Maurus, St Placidus, St Flavia [. . .] in half-length figures. They are all beautiful copies taken from various originals of Raphael, Pietro Perugino and other illustrious men, by the same, the most accurate Sassoferrato'.⁵¹ In fact, ten paintings of half-length saints survive, four of which replicate figures from the predella of Perugino's high altarpiece, the same predella that inspired the National Gallery

⁵⁰ Florence, Palazzo Pitti, appartamenti monumentali, oggetti d'arte, no.839. Baldinucci records that he executed another copy of this fresco, now lost; see F. Baldassari: *Carlo Dolci*, Turin 1995, pp.129–30, no.102. For a copy made for Spain, see S. Salort and S. Kubersky-Piredda: 'Art Collecting in Philip II's Spain: the role of Gonzalo de Liaño, King's dwarf and Gentleman of the Bedchamber', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 148 (2006), pp.660–65.

⁵¹ 'Nelle stanze [. . .] *San Benedetto, Santa Scolastica, San Mauro, San Placido, Santa Flavia, Santa Maria Maddalena, Sant'Agnesa, Santa Caterina, Santa Barbara e Santa Apollonia in mezza figure, sono tutte bellissime copie tratte de vari originali di Raffaello, di Pietro Perugino e di altri valenti omini, dallo stesso, acuratissimo Sassoferrato*'; see Galassi, *op. cit.* (note 47), p.81.

⁵² On the reorganisation of the church in 1591, see F. Mezzanotte, ed.: *La basilica di San Pietro in Perugia intorno all'anno 1591*, Perugia 2003. There are no copies in the church of the narrative scenes from the predella, nor are any recorded. For the



24. Detail of trees in *The Virgin and Child embracing*, by Sassoferrato. 1660–85. Canvas, 97.2 by 74 cm. (National Gallery, London).

canvas. By the time Sassoferrato came to copy these figures the altarpiece had been dismantled, following the reorganisation of the church in 1591 by Valentino Martelli, and the predella panels, including the narrative scenes of the *Adoration*, the *Baptism* and the *Resurrection*, had been moved to the sacristy. Sassoferrato's copies after Perugino show *Scholastica*, *Maurus*, *Placidus* and *Flavia* (Fig.21).⁵² They are almost double the size of the original and on canvas rather than panel.⁵³ He evidently made careful preparatory drawings, one of which survives at Windsor (Fig.20), in such a precise manner that it would have been possible to produce a copy at some distance from the original, but for the similarity of the colouring. These pictures would seem to have served a private devotional function, hanging in the abbot's apartment and showing saints important to the community at S. Pietro, including the abbey's founder.

Sassoferrato's paintings for S. Pietro remain his most extensive commission. Beyond the works already described, there are other canvases that seem to have been intended for display in the church. Some, like the *Judith* (Fig.22), are original compositions; others, like the *Entombment* (Fig.23) and the *Annunciation*, are either direct or free copies after Raphael. Although undocumented, they were described in a guide to Perugia published in 1683, just two years before Sassoferrato died. There can, therefore, be no doubt as to his authorship. 'Around the church', wrote Giovanni Francesco Morelli, 'enclosed in stucco frames, one sees many pictures of which some are well copied from superb originals by the painter named after his homeland Sassoferrato and they are an *Annunciation*, a[n *Immaculate*] *Conception*, a *Dead Christ* carried to the Tomb and another with *Judith*'.⁵⁴

Beyond Sassoferrato's connection to the church, which housed the prototype for the National Gallery picture, there are

identification of St Flavia with Giustina in Perugino's original, see Gardner von Teuffel, *op. cit.* (note 12), pp.148 and 258, no.1.44.c, although the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documents refer to the saint as Flavia, which is why it is maintained in this article.

⁵³ NG 1431 is also on canvas, although it has been laid over a poplar panel that has the appearance of age. When this happened is unknown; it is quite possible that the worm-eaten panel was added at a later date to falsify the semblance of a predella by Perugino.

⁵⁴ 'Intorno alla chiesa, chiusa in cornici di stucco, veggosi molti quadri de quale alcuni sono copiate benissimo da ottimi originali dlla pittore cognominato dalla Patria Sassoferrato e sono una *Anunziata, una Concezione, un Cristo morto portato alla sepoltura e un altro con Giuditte*'; G.F. Morelli: *Brevi notizie delle pitture e sculture che adornano l'augusta citta di Perugia*, Perugia 1683, p.52. The *Immaculate Conception* is now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (inv. no.600).



25. *Holy Family*, by Sassoferrato. Canvas, 73 by 95 cm. (Sanssouci, Potsdam).

stylistic reasons for giving the latter work to him. The particularities of the copyist's hand are evident in small deviations from Perugino's original. These are most pronounced in the trees. Although the branches follow the general pattern of the original, the leaves are broader, as if they have been flattened against the surface. They bear comparison with other works by Sassoferrato: see, for example, the tree at upper left in the background of his *Virgin and Child embracing* (also in the National Gallery; Fig.24), or the trees in the *Virgin and sleeping Child* in the Galleria Estense, Modena.

The facial types have a sweetness entirely typical of Sassoferrato, developed from Raphael on the one hand and influenced by Pierre Mignard on the other.⁵⁵ On the whole, they are fuller and rounder than Perugino's. The face of the Virgin in the Potsdam *Holy Family* (Fig.25), or for that matter the painting of the same subject in the Fitzwilliam, Cambridge, are of the same general structure as the second from the left angel in the *Baptism*, or the two figures on the extreme left and right. In the figure on the far right, the line of the nose continues in a single arc to describe the eyebrow, while the point of the nose is squared-off, as in the Potsdam picture.

In Perugino's predella panel of the *Baptism* the clasped hands of Christ and two of the angels have their smallest fingers tensely pressed together – a trait typical of painters associated with the workshop of Verrocchio. In the National Gallery picture, by contrast, these are loosened and only gently touch one another. In the case of Perugino's Christ, the small fingers describe the two sides of an isosceles triangle, quite unlike the rounded form found in the National Gallery canvas. This is characteristic of Sassoferrato's copies at S. Pietro and is also seen in the *St Giustina* and *St Placidus* when compared with their respective prototypes (Figs.26 and 27).

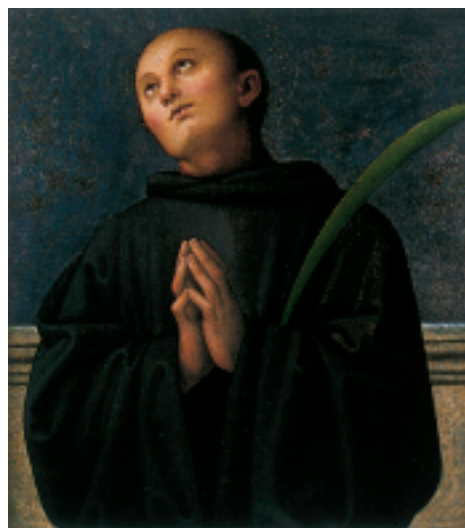
When Orsini wrote about the paintings in S. Pietro in 1784, it was not the direct replicas by Sassoferrato that he criticised, but rather those that displayed invention on the artist's part. He observed that in the *Annunciation*, 'he took his figures from the

⁵⁵ For Sassoferrato and Mignard, see Boyer and Macé de Lépinay, *op. cit.* (note 38), *passim*.

⁵⁶ 'Ha tolto le sue figure dall'istorietta di Raffaello, che è nella predella del quadro dell'Assunta in S. Francesco de' Conventuali, ma si è dimenticato di dar loro la grazia, e l'intendimento di Raffaello'; see B. Orsini: *Guida al forestiere per l'augusta città di Perugia* . . . , Perugia



26. *St Placidus*, by Sassoferrato, after Perugino. 1625–50. Canvas, 63 by 50 cm. (Monastero di S. Pietro, Perugia).



27. *St Placidus*, by Perugino. 1495–1500. Panel, 33.5 by 30 cm. (Monastero di S. Pietro, Perugia).

small histories of Raphael, that are in the predella of the painting of the *Assumption* in S. Francesco de' Conventuali, but he forgot to give them the grace and the understanding of Raphael'.⁵⁶ He also commented on the *Judith*: 'The genius of this painter is not exhibited in the making of histories of this taste, [but rather in the] fineness that one observes in his beautiful Madonnas. The pose of the Judith is cold, and without grace'.⁵⁷ It would seem that Sassoferrato's direct copies were appreciated for their capacity to convey piety through grace, a grace that was associated with the sacred art of the past. Such copying is a far cry from the fakery of which the National Gallery canvas stood accused in 1907. Had Poynter but possessed the technology to heed Baldinucci's advice that to assess originality in paintings, one should look 'in the laying in of the colours and tints [. . .] particularly in the fabrics', then one of the more scandalous moments in the Gallery's history could have been avoided.⁵⁸ He might not have bought a Perugino, but he did inadvertently acquire a 'beautiful little' Sassoferrato.

1784, p.36, note.

⁵⁷ 'Il genio di questo pittore non si mostra nell'istoriare di quel gusto, e finezza, che si osserva nelle sue belle Madonne. L'attitudine della Giuditta è fredda, e senza grazia, perchè non vi ha contrasto nelle membra principali . . .'; *ibid.*, p.27.

⁵⁸ Baldinucci, cited by Spear 1997, *op. cit.* (note 39), p.273.