

**Pinturicchio's Frescoes in the Sala dei Santi in the  
Vatican Palace:**

**Authorship and a new iconological interpretation of the 'Egyptian'  
theme**

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**October 2015**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
Birmingham City University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

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## Abstract

The frescoes of the Egyptian story of Isis, Osiris and the bull Apis that were painted by Pinturicchio and workshop on ceilings in the Vatican Palace in 1493 have attracted attention, particularly since the rooms were restored in the late 1890s. That they were commissioned for Rodrigo Borgia (1431–1503) for a room, the Sala dei Santi, in his private suite, the Appartamento Borgia, shortly after he became Pope Alexander VI in August 1492, has added to speculation as to how they should be interpreted. It has been widely held that they were inspired by Annius of Viterbo (1424–1502), a Dominican monk and fraudster, because a few years later he included a similar story in a genealogy of Pope Alexander VI. Leading interpretations have assumed Annius' involvement and have suggested that the story was chosen for these frescoes because the Borgia emblem incorporated a bull, or to reflect the Ottoman threat to the Church.

This thesis demonstrates that Annius could not have inspired these frescoes and thus challenges previous interpretations. By considering who else might have inspired this theme it proposes an alternative interpretation. The Venetian humanist Ermolao Barbaro (1454–1493) was well positioned to have been involved. In May 1490 he had visited Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) who had recently been translating the Neoplatonist Plotinus' works relating to *daímones*, intermediaries between man and the gods. Plutarch's account of the Isis and Osiris myth, knowledge of which would have been necessary to have specified the detail of the frescoes, casts Isis and Osiris as *daímones*. It is proposed that these frescoes depict an allegory of intermediation with the gods as part of a theurgical programme of syncretising Christianity with ancient religions, and that the central figure in the largest wall fresco in the room is a portrayal of Plotinus.

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# Chapter I: Introduction: Egypt in the Renaissance?

## I.1 Outline of the Thesis

### I.1.1 Description

Shortly after he was elected pope in August 1492, Pope Alexander VI, formerly Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia, chose to have his personal suite of rooms in the Vatican Palace painted. The chosen painter, Bernardino di Betto, better known as Pinturicchio, decorated six rooms over the following two or three years. Most of these rooms followed conventional themes such as the joys of the Virgin, or showed apostles, prophets and sibyls. In the third of these rooms, the Sala dei Santi, the walls depict a selection of saints (fig 1.1). These include a portrayal of the Visitation, Sts Anthony Abbot and Paul the Hermit together in the Egyptian desert, St Barbara, St Katherine disputing with Emperor Maxentius's wise men in Alexandria in Egypt (this fresco is known as the *Disputa*), and St Sebastian. Also portrayed on one wall are Susanna and the Elders. On the ceiling he painted a version of the Egyptian story of Isis, Osiris and Apis, derived from the writings of Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch and Tibullus.

This is believed to be the first visual depiction in the Renaissance of an ancient Egyptian narrative.<sup>1</sup> Between the two ceiling vaults the arch is decorated with five octagons displaying the story, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, of Jupiter seducing Io and turning her into a heifer.

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<sup>1</sup> Curran describes the ceiling frescoes 'As the first large-scale Egyptian mythological cycle since antiquity...' Brian Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance: the Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 107.

### 1.1.2 Context

The decades leading up to the painting of these frescoes were a time of upheaval politically, ecclesiastically and intellectually. In 1453 Constantinople had fallen to the Ottoman Turks marking a major blow to the Christian church in the east. The threat of Islam to the Catholic Church had been manifest in the Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula, which had just ended, and Turkish incursions into the Italian peninsula which had ended barely a decade before. The seat of the papacy had moved back from Avignon to Rome in the late fourteenth century, but the authority of the papacy within the Catholic Church was coming under scrutiny at a time when abuse of papal power was becoming more apparent.

The rediscovery of classical antiquity was gaining momentum in the fifteenth century, with great interest and activity amongst scholars of the city states in Italy.<sup>2</sup> In particular classical texts written in Greek were being translated into Latin, and the advent of moveable type in Western Europe led to their increasing dissemination. Research and analysis of texts written originally in Greek by authors from the Levant expanded, with great interest in the perceived wisdom of ancient Egypt.

Because of Pope Alexander VI's notoriety, within a few years of his death the rooms of his apartment were used for other purposes such as storage and the frescoes largely forgotten.<sup>3</sup> Since their restoration at the end of the nineteenth century some interest and much speculation have been made about their meaning. One of the themes running through much of the twentieth century analysis of these frescoes has been the possible involvement of Annius of Viterbo in their commissioning, largely based on the fact that a few years after the frescoes were completed he published a pseudo historical text which incorporated a similar story of Isis, Osiris and Apis and proposed that Pope Alexander VI was descended from Osiris.<sup>4</sup>

These analyses have suggested varying possible interpretations of the use of the Isis, Osiris and Apis theme, such as the connection between the Apis bull and the bull emblem of the Borgia family, or

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<sup>2</sup> Roberto Weiss offers a thorough introduction to this subject: Roberto Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity*, (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> Franz Ehrle, and Henry Stevenson, *Gli affreschi del Pinturicchio nell'appartamento Borgia*, (Rome, Danesi, 1897), pp. 26–29

<sup>4</sup> Various writers about these frescoes have used various terms, such as 'author', 'inspirer', 'librettist', 'inspiratore' or 'spiritus rector' to refer to the person who originated and proposed the theme for these frescoes. For consistency I use the term 'author'

Similarly Annius of Viterbo is variously named as Annio da Viterbo, Giovanni Nanni, Giovanni Nenni or Joannes Annius Viterb(i)ensis. Again for consistency I use the term 'Annius of Viterbo', or abbreviated to 'Annius'.

that Osiris personifies the Christian Church in its battle with the Islamic foe. These interpretations at best give only a partial account of the message that these frescoes were intended to convey.

### **1.1.3 Aim and methodology**

The aim of this thesis is to establish a new interpretation of the ceiling frescoes that will complement or supplant the existing accounts. Previous attempts provide unsatisfactory, partial or unconvincing explanations of why this Egyptian theme was chosen and how it should be interpreted. They fail to consider the potential for deeper meanings or more sophisticated readings and do not take into account contemporary developments in humanistic thinking.

In order to develop this new interpretation I take a different approach from previous authors. After considering the previous literature and the contemporary political, ecclesiastical and intellectual context I address each of the frescoes in the room in turn conducting a brief iconographical analysis in order to facilitate an iconological interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

I then look in more detail at who could have been responsible for authoring the narrative of the frescoes, considering their whereabouts at relevant times, their knowledge of the subjects portrayed and their access to the Curia. Having selected criteria against which to assess possible candidates I propose a more likely author. By considering more closely the intellectual endeavours of this proposed candidate and his associates in the years immediately preceding the commissioning of the frescoes I suggest an alternative interpretation for the ceiling narrative and show how some of the wall frescoes support this narrative.

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<sup>5</sup> Panofsky first introduced his interpretative system in his; Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, (New York, Harper and Row, 1939 reprinted 1972), pp. 3–31. This essay was amended and extended as: Erwin Panofsky, 'Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art', in *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, (Harmondsworth, Peregrine Books, 1970, reprinted from New York, Doubleday, 1955), pp. 51–81, in which he describes iconology as 'a method of interpretation which arises from synthesis rather than analysis' (p. 58).



## 1.2 Literature review

### 1.2.1 Primary sources

There are few primary sources relating to the decoration of the Appartamento Borgia. There is no extant documentation of the commission, nor any known references to it.

Peter De Roo researched the Vatican archives extensively for his proposed life of Alexander VI and provides extensive lists of the documents he used, but none relates to this commission.<sup>6</sup> Johann Burchard's encyclopaedic accounts of almost everything that happened relating to Pope Alexander VI mentions the rooms in passing, but makes no reference to their being painted or to Pinturicchio.<sup>7</sup> A contract dated 14<sup>th</sup> February 1495 confirms that he was by then contracted to work on the Fossi altarpiece in Perugia.<sup>8</sup>

A letter is known to have been sent by Pope Alexander VI to the priors of Orvieto Cathedral, dated 29<sup>th</sup> March 1493, saying that Pinturicchio is about to commence painting in Rome and is thus not available to complete his commission in Orvieto.<sup>9</sup> In December 1493 the *Camerarius Pontifici* Joumé Casanova wrote that Pinturicchio was at work in the rooms.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, vols. 1–5, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924).

<sup>7</sup> Johann Burchard, otherwise known as Johannes Burchart, was master of ceremonies to successive popes from 1483 to 1506. He kept a diary throughout this period, of which most is still extant. There has been inevitable speculation as to the content of the sections which are no longer extant. The 'new rooms' are mentioned in his account of the visit of Don Federigo to Rome in December 1492, but this was before they were painted: Johann Burchard, *At the Court of the Borgia, being an Account of the Reign of Pope Alexander VI written by his Master of Ceremonies*, trans. & ed. Geoffrey Parker, (London, Folio Society, 1963), p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> George Noszlopy and Susan May, 'Reflections on patronage, form, iconography and politics in Pinturicchio's "Fossi altarpiece" (parte I)', *Arte Cristiana*, vol. 842, 2007, p. 343.

<sup>9</sup> Lodovico Luzi, *Il Duomo di Orvieto*, (Florence 1866), p. 461, doc. Cxi.

<sup>10</sup> Ursula Paal, *Studien zum Appartamento Borgia im Vatikan*, (PhD dissertation, University of Tübingen, 1981), pp. 259, 260.

## 1.2.2 Critical review of previous interpretations

From the end of the fifteenth century until towards the end of the nineteenth century the Borgia apartments were not the subject of much study. The reputation of Pope Alexander VI for depravity and simony discouraged studies relating to his reign and access to the apartments was for great periods of time very difficult.<sup>11</sup> Vasari mentions Pinturicchio's decoration of the apartments, and the frescoes in the Sala dei Santi in particular, but primarily to decry and discredit Pinturicchio's technique.<sup>12</sup> August Schmarsow gives a descriptive account of the Sala dei Santi frescoes in his *Pinturicchio in Rom* in 1882, but it was when Pope Leo XIII in 1897 reopened the rooms following extensive restoration and refurbishment that Franz Ehrle and Henry Stevenson published their celebratory volume *Gli affreschi del Pinturicchio nell'appartamento Borgia*.<sup>13</sup> This volume is substantial in size but not in analysis.

In the several books that have been written since 1900 about Pinturicchio, his life and his works, the rooms are mentioned and the frescoes reviewed but the entries are largely descriptive rather than analytical.<sup>14</sup>

The first work to take an analytical approach to the frescoes was Karl Giehlow in 1915 who considered the images from a hieroglyphic point of view.<sup>15</sup> This work was to influence greatly later commentaries on the frescoes. The first significant work devoted entirely to the Borgia Apartments is Fritz Saxl's Lectures of 1957.<sup>16</sup> The first significant work devoted entirely to the Sala dei Santi is N. Randolph Parks' paper of 1979.<sup>17</sup> Frances Yates makes a brief but important contribution to the

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<sup>11</sup> See Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 2, Chapter 3.

<sup>12</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, trans. George Bull, (London, Penguin, 1987), vol. 2, p. 83.

<sup>13</sup> August Schmarsow, *Pinturicchio in Rom*, (Stuttgart, Verlag, 1882), pp. 34–61; Franz Ehrle, and Henry Stevenson, *Gli affreschi del Pinturicchio nell'appartamento Borgia*, (Rome, Danesi, 1897).

<sup>14</sup> e.g: Ernst Steinmann, *Pinturicchio*, (Bielefeld, Velhagen & Klasing, 1898), pp. 51–56; Evelyn March Phillips, *Pinturicchio*, (London, George Bell & Sons, 1901), pp. 64–96; Arnold Goffin, *Pinturicchio* (Paris, H. Laurens 1908), pp. 64–88; Joseph Archer Crow & Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, *A New History of Painting in Italy*, vol. 3, ed. Edward Hutton, (London, Dent, 1909), pp.263–298; Corrado Ricci, *Pinturicchio*, (Perugia, Bartelli, 1915).

<sup>15</sup> Karl Giehlow, 'Die Hieroglyphenkunde des Humanismus in der Allegorie der Renaissance', *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des allerhochsten Kaiserhauses*, vol. 32, 1915, pp. 1–229.

<sup>16</sup> Fritz Saxl, *Lectures*, (London, Warburg Institute, University of London, 1957), vol. 1, pp. 174–188.

<sup>17</sup> N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History* vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, pp. 291–317.

choice of the Apis myth in 1964.<sup>18</sup> In 1982 Joanne Cox wrote an MA dissertation on the iconography of the apartments.<sup>19</sup> Claudia Cieri Via in 1991 contributed a paper on the use of mythical figures in the Sala dei Santi frescoes.<sup>20</sup> Sabine Poeschel in 1999 wrote a book on the frescoes in the apartments.<sup>21</sup> Since 2000 Claudia La Malfa has written several works which make reference to the frescoes in the Borgia Apartments, especially her PhD thesis of 2003.<sup>22</sup> Brian Curran devotes a chapter of his 2007 book on the Egyptian renaissance to the apartment, its decorations and their origin.<sup>23</sup>

August Schmarsow's work of 1882 precedes the Pope Leo XIII restoration and is therefore of interest. He refers to the Sala dei Santi as the Sala delle Stampe, which accords with its then use, as mentioned by him, as part of the Vatican Library. Schmarsow comments on the circumstances surrounding the commission, but largely in terms of looking at the primary sources available which helps provide a date *post quem* for its commencement. His description of each fresco is meticulous, commenting on technique and colours. He suggests that certain of the figures in the fresco of St Katherine disputing with Maxentius' wise men, the *Disputa*, are portraits and he compares stylistic elements to other frescoes, such as Perugino's paintings in the Cambio in Perugia. He makes no comments on the origins or possible interpretations of the narratives displayed.

Less than two decades after the 1897 restoration of these rooms, Karl Giehlow's *Die Hieroglyphenkunde des Humanismus in der Allegorie der Renaissance* was published posthumously in 1915. Contrasting with Schmarsow's descriptive and narrative account, the underlying tenet of Giehlow's book is that humanistic interest in hieroglyphs was important in the development of Renaissance thought. He therefore looks at the *Hieroglyphica* ascribed to Horapollo from the fifth

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<sup>18</sup> Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, (1964; repr. London, Routledge, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Joanne Cox, *The Iconography of the Borgia Apartments*, (MA dissertation, Courtauld Institute, 1982).

<sup>20</sup> Claudia Cieri Via, 'Characteres et figuras in opere magico. Pinturicchio et la decoration de la camera segreta de l'appartement Borgia', *Revue de l'Art*, No 94, 1991, pp. 11–26.

<sup>21</sup> Sabine Poeschel, S, *Alexander Maximus: das Bildprogramm des Appartamento Borgia im Vatikan*, (Weimar, VDG, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Claudia La Malfa, *Pinturicchio's Roman fresco cycles re-examined, 1478–1494*, PhD thesis, Warburg Institute, 2003).

Claudia La Malfa, 'Dating Pinturicchio's Roman Frescoes and His Role in the Formation of a New All'Antica Style', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, LXX, 2007. pp 119–141.

Claudia La Malfa, 'Alessandro VI, Pinturicchio e il gusto antiquariale negli affreschi dell'appartamento Borgia' in: *La papauté à la Renaissance* eds. Alazard, F and La Brasca, F. (Paris, Champion, 2007), pp. 367–382.

Claudia La Malfa, *Pinturicchio a Roma. La seduzione dell'antico*, (Milano, Silvana Editoriale, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Brian Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance, The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007), Chapter 6.

century AD, but rediscovered in 1419, and at works of near contemporary authors such as Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and Annius of Viterbo's *Antiquitates*.<sup>24</sup> His account of the Sala dei Santi (which he writes is the new name for the 'Sala delle Stampe') takes as its starting point that Annius must have scripted the frescoes. He is dependent on Schmarsow for much of the descriptive matter, leading one to question whether he had actually seen the frescoes. Both Diodorus and Tibullus are identified as possible sources for the ceiling narrative, but again through Annius' *Antiquitates*.

The choice of the Pinturicchio frescoes in a book on hieroglyphs is a curious one, as there is no hieroglyphic lettering anywhere in the frescoes. It may be because of Annius' professed, but false, claim to understand Etruscan hieroglyphic inscriptions that Giehlow gives him so much attention.<sup>25</sup> Giehlow acknowledges that Annius was a fraudster but he is careless in his chronology. He asserts that Annius was well known to Alexander VI and the Curia before the frescoes were commissioned but there is no evidence for this. The meeting he refers to took place some months after painting had commenced.<sup>26</sup> Because Giehlow's work has not been greatly challenged, many later writers have attributed to Annius of Viterbo the script for the ceiling frescoes.

One of those who took Giehlow's attribution of the authorship to Annius of Viterbo unchallenged was Fritz Saxl. Following Giehlow's death, there was little analytical work published about these rooms, beyond some basic, descriptive accounts until 1957 when the Warburg Institute, of which Saxl had been Director until his death in 1948, published a set of lectures Saxl had given in 1945. One of these lectures was devoted to The Appartamento Borgia (and was so titled).<sup>27</sup> Saxl had a

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<sup>24</sup> In 1498 Eucharius Silber published in Rome: Annius' *Commentaria super opera diversorum auctorum de antiquitatibus loquentium*, commonly referred to as *Antiquitates*. This extended and at times rambling work in Latin purports to be a history, but much of the contents were invented by Annius. It includes a genealogy of Pope Alexander VI tracing his family back to Isis and Osiris, referring extensively to the Diodorus Siculus version of the tale. A useful and informative account of Annius of Viterbo is to be found in: Anthony Grafton, 'Invention of Traditions and Traditions of Invention in Renaissance Europe, the strange case of Annius of Viterbo' in Anthony Grafton & Anne Blair (eds), *The transmission of culture in early modern Europe*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), pp. 8–38.

<sup>25</sup> Roberto Weiss, 'An unknown Epigraphic Tract by Annius of Viterbo' in *Italian Studies Presented to E R Vincent*, (Cambridge, Heffer, 1962), pp. 101, 102.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Giehlow, 'Die Hieroglyphenkunde des Humanismus in der Allegorie der Renaissance', *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des allerhochsten Kaiserhauses*, vol. 32, 1915, p. 44. See section 5.2.1 of this thesis for analysis of the chronology of Annius of Viterbo's contact with Pope Alexander VI.

<sup>27</sup> Fitz Saxl, *Lectures*, (London, Warburg Institute, University of London, 1957), vol. 1, pp.174–188.

long-standing interest in astrological and mythological images and had published extensively on the subject.<sup>28</sup>

Saxl comments that previous published matter about the Borgia apartments focussed on the history of Alexander VI or discussed what use the rooms were put to or which of Pinturicchio's pupils painted which parts of the frescoes. He wishes to enquire at greater depth into the frescoes. After giving a brief description of the rooms and the frescoes therein, he chooses to focus on the Sala dei Santi. Here he questions the choice of saints depicted. Whereas most are amongst those to be expected, Susanna is an unusual choice and the combination of the choice of saints is difficult to explain. There is no correspondence of their days with key dates in the Pope's life. It is a surprise that St Nicholas is not included, since as a cardinal Pope Alexander VI had had St Nicholas on his seal.

Saxl postulates that the seven saints correspond to the seven virtues:

Visitation / St Elisabeth	=	Hope
St Anthony defeating demons	=	Faith
St Paul dividing bread	=	Charity
St Katherine defeating philosophers	=	Prudence
St Barbara and her tower	=	Fortitude
Susanna delivered from false accusation	=	Justice
St Sebastian	=	Temperance

Whilst this set of associations is feasible, there is little supporting evidence of such associations being portrayed elsewhere. St Barbara might be seen to be associated with fortitude, but so would most martyr saints. Faith might be attributed to many saints, but St Peter or the apostle Paul with his sword of faith might be more appropriate, Hope might be more normally associated with St James

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<sup>28</sup> Including: Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*. Revised with the collaboration of Raymond Klibansky, (London, Nelson, 1964); and Erwin Panofsky, 'Classical Mythology in Medieval Art.' *Metropolitan Museum Studies* 4 (1932–33), pp. 228–80; [Saxl major contributor]; *Verzeichnis astrologischer und mythologischer illustrierter Handschriften des lateinischen Mittelalters*, vol. I, (Heidelberg, C. Winter, 1915), vol. 2, (Heidelberg, C. Winter, 1927); vols. 3 and 4 issued in English: Fritz Saxl, Hans Meier, Harry Bober, Patrick McGurk, *Catalogue of Astrological and Mythological Illuminated Manuscripts of the Latin Middle Ages*, vol. 3 and vol. 4, (London, Warburg Institute, 1953–66).

the Great and Charity with St John the Evangelist.<sup>29</sup> Saxl admits that the association of St Sebastian with Temperance is a weak point.

One justification he claims for making these associations is the symmetry that would be realised amongst the rooms: twelve Prophets and twelve Apostles, seven Liberal Arts, seven Joys of the Virgin and seven Virtues. Much of the rest of the lecture is concerned with emblems, in particular the two emblems which are part of Alexander VI's crest, the double crown of Aragon and the bull. Apart from where it appears as part of the papal coat of arms, the double crown is most prominent in the final scene from the vaults showing the procession of the resurrected Apis, in the manner of a papal procession. In front of the bull is a boy blowing a horn with the double crown on it.

Saxl says that 'The Borgias were a family into which the blood of the kings of Aragon had been infused by marriage' and refers to 'A van de Put, *The Triple Crown of Aragon*, London 1910'.<sup>30</sup> Presumably he, or his posthumous editors, meant 'Albert Van de Put, *The Aragonese double crown & the Borja, or Borgia device : with notes upon the bearing of such insignia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries* (London, Gryphon Club, Bernard Quaritch, 1910)', a work which casts into doubt this aspect of the lineage of the Borgias.<sup>31</sup> The use of this device in both this fresco and Alexander VI's coat of arms suggests more about Alexander VI's aspirations and pretensions. It is notable that his uncle Pope Callixtus III's crest included the bull but not the Aragonese double crown, suggesting that Pope Alexander VI excelled his uncle in aspiration or arrogance.<sup>32</sup>

It is the emblem of the bull or ox which offers Saxl the opportunity to develop his argument about Alexander VI's conflation of pagan, Christian and Egyptian imagery. Bulls, Saxl points out, are ubiquitous in the Borgia apartments; 'two or three hundred is a low figure' but more particularly

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<sup>29</sup> George Ferguson, *Signs and symbols in Christian Art*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1961), p.101.

<sup>30</sup> Fitz Saxl, *Lectures*, (London, Warburg Institute, University of London, 1957), vol. 1, p. 178.

<sup>31</sup> Max Prinet, 'The Aragonese double crown and the Borja or Borgia device by Albert van de Put' (book review), *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes*, Année 1910, volume 71, Numéro 1 pp. 620–621.

Portigliotti goes to some length to consider the coat of arms and lineage of Alexander VI. He suggests that the true family name is actually Gil, that the use of the bull was common to many families based in areas of Spain beginning with Bo and that the double crown might be a corruption of sheaves of barley. Giuseppe Portigliotti, *The Borgias: Alexander VI, Caesar, Lucrezia*, trans. B. Miall, (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1928), pp. 20,21.

<sup>32</sup> See for instance the plate in the Victoria and Albert Museum, accession number C.7–1922 painted with the arms of Callixtus III.

prominent in the Sala dei Santi.<sup>33</sup> He notes the representations of bulls and oxen in various Borgia manifestations, comparing various pagan and mythological implications.

The renewal of the ceiling of Santa Maria Maggiore, started by Pope Callixtus III and completed by Alexander VI, incorporates the bull emblem, but directed by a winged Amor not an angel. The leather scabbard belonging to Cesare Borgia, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, shows several bulls, including one being sacrificed in the Roman manner. Alexander VI was referred to from the time of his coronation as the ox, and in Rome the ox was a symbol of fertility, from its being harnessed to the ploughshare.<sup>34</sup>

Saxl's account of the ox in the frescoes and in the frieze compares the different representations. In the frieze they are seen as pagan animals submitting to Christianity. In the trial of St Katherine he sees the emperor on the throne as the successor to Apis – Osiris, and the representation on the triumphal arch as the Christian successor of the Apis. There is a long history of the ox and bull in mythology, and the Apis could be seen as a clan totem. Saxl asks whether Alexander VI would have understood all this, and then suggests it needed someone like Annio of Viterbo to lay out all the meanings and implications. Annio was operating in a time when there would have been much humanistic acceptance of the idea, and Saxl quotes Marcilio Ficino's belief that Egyptian hieroglyphs were images of divine ideas.

Saxl acknowledges Giehlow as having written about Pinturicchio's Egyptian programme, but he takes with little questioning Giehlow's assertion that it was Annio of Viterbo who advised Pinturicchio and suggested the narrative. As will be explained in this thesis there is considerable doubt that this was the case. Nevertheless it could have been someone like Annio or, as will be argued later, a combination of people who were under similar humanistic influences.

'The Apis bull of Alexander VI is a Christianised animal and it is significant that it owes its rebirth to the efforts of the scholar'.<sup>35</sup> Saxl rejects the ideas that the bull motif was either a metaphor for how Alexander lived or a clan totem, but he sees Alexander as choosing to link Christian and pagan subjects, to link his family genealogy with the religious idea of primitive clans at a time when he was endeavouring to build his family's power.

Saxl's ideas are persuasive but incomplete. He offers no convincing argument for the choice of saints beyond the weak association with the seven virtues. There can be little doubt that there is some

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<sup>33</sup> Fitz Saxl, *Lectures*, (London, Warburg Institute, University of London, 1957), vol. 1, p. 180.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 180, 181.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

association between the choice of the Apis myth and the family heraldic emblem, but it seems insufficient to be persuasive. The dates of the availability of Diodorus's text in translation are suitable, as is the humanistic milieu at the time, but it seems unlikely that such a prestigious and high profile commission as the apartments of the new pope, in which important guests would be entertained and which would reflect the message that the new pope wanted to convey, would not have some more substantial basis.<sup>36</sup>

It was under Saxl's leadership that Frances Yates was able to join him at the Warburg Institute in London, giving her the opportunity to pursue her study of Renaissance mysticism. Saxl had been part of both the preservation of the physical elements of the Warburg Library in its exile from Hamburg to London, and the preservation of Aby Warburg's approach of considering the cultural and intellectual setting of graphical representations. In her *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* Frances Yates makes a brief reference to the Sala dei Santi ceiling frescoes in the context of Pico della Mirandola's interest in cabalistic magic.<sup>37</sup> Yates argues that the frieze of bulls in the *Sala dei Santi* represents them worshipping the cross.<sup>38</sup> She identifies the figure below the zodiac in the fresco of astrology in the adjacent Sala delle Sibille as Hermes Trismegistus and by comparison the figure to the right of the re-humanized Io in the last of the sequence of octagons in the Sala dei Santi also to be Hermes Trismegistus. Neither of these identifications should be accepted uncritically and this is discussed later in this thesis.

Most interesting is her identification of the theme with the recent areas of study of Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino. She goes so far as to claim that the reason for Alexander VI's choice of this theme was to proclaim that he was more open to ideas of magic and Cabala as aids to religion than was his predecessor Pope Innocent VIII.<sup>39</sup>

No significant commentary on these frescoes was then published until N. Randolph Parks' paper of 1979, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi'. This paper is the most thorough attempt to date to find an underlying theme or meaning to the frescoes in this room. Whereas Yates had focussed on some of the contemporary humanistic and mystical potential influences on these frescoes, Parks used his extensive knowledge of contemporary ecclesiastical matters to consider what matters in contemporary church affairs might have been relevant to this commission. He had clearly studied a number of papal bulls issued in the decades before the frescoes were

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<sup>36</sup> The use of these rooms in the time of Alexander VI is discussed in section 2.3.1 of this thesis.

<sup>37</sup> Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, (1964; repr. London, Routledge, 2002), pp. 122–129.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p.127.

<sup>39</sup> Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, (1964; repr. London, Routledge, 2002), p.129.



commissioned, and he uses this knowledge in his analysis.<sup>40</sup> He divides his work into four sections: I; the wall frescoes; II, the ceiling frescoes seen in their contemporary context; III, the ancient origins of the ceiling frescoes' narrative; and IV, a summary.

In his introduction he asserts that 'the existence of an underlying theme can be inferred – specifically, a theme which centres on the Church'.<sup>41</sup> His interpretation of the wall frescoes follows this approach, claiming that most of the saints portrayed are examples displaying that 'the Lord delivers His saints in times of difficulty' and their miraculous rescue 'symbolizes divine assistance to Ecclesia in her temporal guise'.<sup>42</sup> *The Visitation* does not immediately fit into this schema. Parks considers the then recent role of the Feast of the Visitation as a solicitation to the Virgin to visit the Church on earth to lend assistance in the Church's struggle against her heretical foes, in particular the Mohammedan Turks.

Susanna of Babylon would seem out of place in this schema, but Parks equates her with the Church imperilled, the garden around her referring to all the souls of the Church and the two Elders likened to the Jewish and Gentile nations hostile to the church. St Katherine disputing with the wise men of Maxentius is seen by Parks as a metaphor for the Church's dispute with the Mohammedan Turks, supported by the presence of figures in Turkish garb in the fresco.

In his account of the ceiling depictions of the story of Isis, Osiris, Apis and Osiris's murdering brother Typhon, Parks draws extensively on parallels with Annius of Viterbo's *Antiquitates*, whilst claiming that 'It is not, itself, the basis of the programme'.<sup>43</sup> In this he is akin to Giehlow, but does not rely on Giehlow. Whilst he is meticulous in his dating of when the frescoes could have been painted, he does not use the same diligence in considering the timing of Annius' involvement with Pope Alexander VI, describing him as a personal secretary to the Pope, a position he was not to fill until some years after the frescoes had been completed. For Parks, Annius used his *Antiquitates* to incite the new pope to imitate his uncle, Pope Callixtus III, in confronting the Turks, and Annius intended that the central episode of the story shown in the ceiling fresco should be re-enacted by Alexander.

Parks develops this theme of Osiris's battle representing the Church's battle with Islam, through his analysis of Diodorus' and Plutarch's versions of the tale. For Parks: 'Clearly, Osiris embodies

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<sup>40</sup> N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, pp. 291–317.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 292, 293.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

religious truth, Typhon, an evil and destructive agent.’<sup>44</sup> Osiris embodies the Church Militant, Isis refers to the Virgin and Typhon represents anti-Christian forces.

Parks concludes that his analysis may be but an approximation, but asserts that ‘Nanni [Annius of Viterbo] was probably the author of the programme’ and that the Sala programme ‘...forms, pictorially, the culmination of a forty year concern of the Vatican with the Turkish threat.’<sup>45</sup>

Parks’ analysis is imaginative, but not entirely persuasive. Apart from his relatively unquestioning assumption that Annius of Viterbo was the ‘author’ of the ‘libretto’ (to use Parks’ own terms) his fitting of the wall frescoes to his theme of the Lord delivering saints in peril, is at times Procrustean.

The key theme, that the whole room is dedicated to the battle between the Church and the Mohammedan Turks, can be challenged. Whilst it is true that Annius of Viterbo was vehemently anti-Turk, his involvement in the programme is not secure. By the time the frescoes were commissioned the vehemence of the Church’s own opposition to the Turks was beginning to abate, although enmity and distrust continued. Realistic attempts at raising another crusade had long been given up and the pope was by then being paid by the Turkish sultan to hold the sultan’s brother hostage in Rome. In the months before Pinturicchio commenced work on the frescoes the previous pope, Innocent VIII, had accepted a gift of the head of the lance that pierced Christ’s side, from the sultan as well as giving audience to the sultan’s envoy.<sup>46</sup> In contrast to a bellicose interpretation, Osiris is portrayed as the bringer of peace, and in the St Katherine fresco below the Borgia emblematic bull is a Borgia motto, ‘PACIS CULTORI’.

Some hostility to the Turks was still prevalent amongst the cardinalate and there may have been a move amongst them to fortify the new pope’s opposition to the Turks, but the frescoes are a mix of battle and peacemaking. To devote an entire room to allegories of the battle between the Church and the Turks seems unlikely at this stage, especially for a new pope who was to be more interested in peace.

Shortly after Parks’ paper was published, Joanne Cox chose these rooms as a subject for study. In her 1982 unpublished MA dissertation, Cox explores contemporary influences on all the rooms in the Appartamento Borgia, looking at several potential sources.<sup>47</sup> She also considers the use to which

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<sup>44</sup> N. Randolph Parks, ‘On the meaning of Pinturicchio’s Sala dei Santi’, *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, p. 300.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 303, 304.

<sup>46</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)*, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, p. 429.

<sup>47</sup> Joanne Cox, *The Iconography of the Borgia Apartments*. (MA dissertation, Courtauld Institute, 1982).

the rooms may have been put. She considers a number of different candidates for the role of scripting the themes for the rooms, and favours Alessandro Farnese, brother of Alexander VI's then mistress, and who was to become Pope Paul III. For reasons that will be discussed later, this is unlikely.

Claudia Cieri Via discussed the frescoes in these apartments in several papers, but it is her 1991 paper which sums up her findings.<sup>48</sup> Her approach veers back to consideration of mystical elements rather than following Park's consideration of ecclesiastical influences. She follows Giehlow closely in her commitment to Annius, and asserts that Annius was '...responsible for an 'ideological' arrangement for the cycle which interprets the Osiris myth as a Christological allegory.'<sup>49</sup> Her analysis embraces the thoughts of Pico della Mirandola but goes beyond Yates' work to the divination of 'Osiris-Soleil' in terms of pagan myths, consideration of zodiacal influences and Egyptian mysteries. This wide-ranging approach produces wide-ranging rather than focussed results and lacks a focussed conclusion. The whole is dependent on Giehlow's attribution of authorship of the theme to Annius.

Sabine Poeschel's 1999 book, *Alexander Maximus: das Bildprogramm des Appartamento Borgia im Vatikan*, is the most extensive description and account of the decoration of the Appartamento Borgia. Eschewing some of the more speculative approaches of some previous authors, she carefully looks at the evidence provided by the frescoes themselves and builds on the evidence in previous analyses. She considers at length the possible portraits of contemporaries which might exist in the fresco of the *Disputation of St Katherine* and she identifies a portrait of Alexander the Great in the window reveal in the room.<sup>50</sup> Her consideration of the underlying theme is extensive but not conclusive. She agrees that it must in some way represent the battle between the Catholic Church and the Mohammedan Turks, so her views accord with Parks to some extent.

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<sup>48</sup> Claudia Cieri Via, 'Mito, allegoria e religione nell'appartamento Borgia', *Le arti a Roma da Sisto IV a Giulio II* (Roma, Il Bagatto, Università di Roma, 1985), pp. 77–104.

Claudia Cieri Via, 'Bernardino Pinturicchio e la decorazione dell'appartamento Borgia in Vaticano', *Aspetti della tradizione classica nella cultura artistica fra Umanesimo e Rinascimento* (Roma: Il Bagatto, 1986), pp. 120–136.

Claudia Cieri Via, 'Sacrae effigies e signa arcana. La decorazione di Pinturicchio e scuola nell'appartamento Borgia in Vaticano', *Roma centro ideale della cultura dell'antico nei secoli XV e XVI. Da Martino V al Sacco di Roma, 1417–1527*. (Rome, 1989), pp. 185–202.

Claudia Cieri Via, 'Characteres et figuras in opere magico. Pinturicchio et la decoration de la camera segreta de l'appartement Borgia', *Revue de l'Art*, No 94, 1991, pp. 11–26.

<sup>49</sup> '...responsable d'une organisation « ideologique » du cycle qui interprete le mythe d'Osiris comme une allegorie christologique.' Claudia Cieri Via, 'Characteres et figuras in opere magico. Pinturicchio et la decoration de la camera segreta de l'appartement Borgia', *Revue de l'Art*, No 94, 1991, p. 19.

<sup>50</sup> Sabine Poeschel, S, *Alexander Maximus: das Bildprogramm des Appartamento Borgia im Vatikan*, (Weimar, VDG Verlag, 1999), pp. 149–155.

Poeschel considers who might have been the ‘Spiritus Rector’ (to use the phrase she chooses) behind the fresco programmes for the whole apartment and suggests both Francesco de Borgia and Paolo Cortesi as candidates.<sup>51</sup> (In another paper she had already suggested that Cortesi was portrayed in an adjacent room.<sup>52</sup>) Whilst she considers that Annius may have been involved and that his *Antiquitates* was probably derived from these frescoes rather than the other way round, she acknowledges that he did not have sufficient knowledge for all of the programme and was not, in 1492, well enough acquainted with the new Pope Alexander VI.<sup>53</sup> She therefore proposes that all three; Francesco Borgia, Paolo Cortesi and Annius of Viterbo were advisers to the painter.

Claudia La Malfa’s scholarship and knowledge of the works of Pinturicchio, particularly those completed during his time in Rome, are extensive. Her descriptions of the frescoes are meticulous. She does not attempt a new interpretation but acknowledges that ‘The Sala dei Santi is something of an iconographic puzzle still not thoroughly solved.’<sup>54</sup> She records, but does not challenge, the generally accepted view that Annius of Viterbo was the advisor behind the frescoes.

In several of her works, but most particularly in her 2007 paper and her 2009 book, she identifies how Pinturicchio was a leader in the pictorial revival of antiquity in the Renaissance, in his choice of subjects and his use of such techniques as stucco and stylistic elements such as grotesques.<sup>55</sup> She associates some of this with the opening up of the Domus Aurea, Nero’s Roman palace, in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>56</sup> Her explanation indicates why Pinturicchio might have been chosen to decorate these rooms: ‘His prolific employment of antiquarian elements in his painting appealed to patrons who were fascinated by antiquity and keen to identify papal Rome with the city’s glorious past.’<sup>57</sup>

Pinturicchio’s promotion of aspects of antiquity was discussed in substance by Jürgen Schulz in his 1962 paper, but in addressing this aspect La Malfa brings an important perspective which had not

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<sup>51</sup> Sabine Poeschel, S, *Alexander Maximus: das Bildprogramm des Appartamento Borgia im Vatikan*, (Weimar, VDG Verlag, 1999), pp. 249–252

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 146–154

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 249–252

<sup>54</sup> Claudia La Malfa, *Pinturicchio’s Roman fresco cycles re-examined, 1478–1494*, (PhD thesis, Warburg Institute, 2003), p. 159.

<sup>55</sup> Claudia La Malfa, ‘Dating Pinturicchio’s Roman Frescoes and His Role in the Formation of a New All’Antica Style’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 70, 2007, pp. 119–141, and Claudia La Malfa, *Pinturicchio a Roma. La seduzione dell’antico*, (Milano, Silvana Editoriale, 2009), pp.122–127.

<sup>56</sup> Claudia La Malfa, ‘The Chapel of San Girolamo in Santa Maria Del Popolo in Rome. New Evidence for the Discovery of the Domus Aurea.’ *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 63, 2000, pp. 259–270.

<sup>57</sup> Claudia La Malfa, ‘Dating Pinturicchio’s Roman Frescoes and His Role in the Formation of a New All’Antica Style’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 70, 2007, pp. 140, 141.

been considered in any detail by previous writers about these frescoes.<sup>58</sup> This offers a new insight into a better understanding of the subject matter.

Brian Curran's knowledge of the influence of Egyptian ideas in the Renaissance is wide-ranging. He wrote in 2003 about Giehlow and Annus of Viterbo and touched upon the Pinturicchio frescoes.<sup>59</sup> In that work he strongly identified Annus as '...the likely *inspiratore* of Pinturicchio's frescoes (the first large scale cycle of Egyptian imagery since antiquity)...'<sup>60</sup>

He devotes chapter six of his 2007 book to 'Alexander VI, Pinturicchio and Annus of Viterbo'.<sup>61</sup> He offers no new interpretation of the frescoes, but gives a good account of previous commentaries. Whilst acknowledging that 'there are no documents to tie him to the project' and that 'the commission seems a bit "early" to show the influence by his fully developed work', he offers no challenge to the thesis that Annus was the author.<sup>62</sup>

He is unhappy with Parks' assertion that Plutarch had significant influence on the ceiling frescoes. He recognises that 'Plutarchian influences cannot be dismissed out of hand, it seems to me that the allegorical and Platonizing implications laid out in his treatise are largely absent here.'<sup>63</sup> The main grounds for this appear to be that 'Plutarch's *Isiac* treatise had no 'discernible influence' on the work of Annus of Viterbo, whose fundamental importance for the Borgia frescoes is almost universally acknowledged.'<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Jürgen Schulz, 'Pinturicchio and the revival of antiquity', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 25, 1962, pp. 35–55.

<sup>59</sup> Brian A. Curran, 'The Renaissance Afterlife of Ancient Egypt' in P. Ucko and T. Champion, (eds.) *The Wisdom of Egypt; Changing Visions Throughout the Ages*, (London, UCL Press, 2003), pp. 101–131.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>61</sup> Brian A. Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance: the Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 107–131.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>64</sup> *Loc.cit.*

### 1.2.3 Weaknesses in previous interpretations.

Claudia La Malfa's description of the Sala dei Santi as '...something of an iconographic puzzle still not thoroughly solved' remains true.<sup>65</sup> Leaving to one side predominantly descriptive accounts of these frescoes, attempts at finding an analytical solution to this puzzle remain, so far, unsatisfactory.

Whilst previous interpretations have sought to situate the frescoes in their contemporary context, historical, political, ecclesiastical, intellectual or even mystical, in each case elements of these analyses may be relevant and contribute to our overall understanding, but none in themselves constitutes an overarching interpretation for the frescoes in this room.

For instance the motif and metaphor of the bull may be important but not substantial enough to merit an entire room and the accompanying complexity of images and themes. The situation of the Roman Catholic Church following the fall of Constantinople was clearly an important issue at this time, but the linkages between this issue and the images portrayed in these frescoes is at best tenuous. The results of these approaches have thus been incomplete and unconvincing.

There is merit in not only re-examining these contemporary influences in detail, but also in looking more closely at the ceiling frescoes to examine the antique sources on which they are based, going *ad fontes*, and attempting to understand why they were chosen and their relevance to contemporary thought. Giehlow touches on this in the context of Renaissance interest in hieroglyphics, although there is little presence of anything which might be considered a hieroglyph in these frescoes. Parks looks more closely at the antique literary sources but in the context of ecclesiastical events, and making little connection between the two. Looking in more depth at the antique sources is particularly relevant given the choice of Pinturicchio, a painter with a then emerging reputation for the pictorial revival of antiquity.

One key weakness underlies most previous interpretations, the assumption that Annius of Viterbo was the author of the fresco narrative. From Giehlow onwards this has been little challenged. Making this assumption limits interpretations to those within Annius' competence and interests, precluding other possible interpretations. Reconsideration of the authorship, and the competences and interests of putative alternative authors might lead to a better understanding of why particular antique sources were chosen and thus a better and more complete understanding and interpretation of the meaning of these frescoes.

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<sup>65</sup> Claudia La Malfa, *Pinturicchio's Roman fresco cycles re-examined, 1478–1494*, (PhD thesis, Warburg Institute, London, 2003), n. 43, p. 159.

### **I.3 Structure of the thesis.**

Chapter Two looks at the context in which the frescoes were commissioned and executed. It first examines the background, reputation and concerns of Pope Alexander VI. This merits some detail as not only was Alexander VI the patron who commissioned this work, but also from his position of power he was able to influence contemporary political and intellectual thinking.

There follows a section on the uses to which the rooms were intended to be put and then a short history of the rooms from the death of Pope Alexander VI to the present day. After briefly considering Pinturicchio's own progress and reputation up to the point where he was given this commission, I have then addressed in some detail the political, ecclesiastical, philosophical and humanistic issues which may have been relevant to the commission. This provides the context for any interpretation of the intended message to be conveyed by the fresco programme.

Chapter Three provides an iconographical and stylistic analysis of the wall frescoes, one by one. In this chapter I have also looked at other paintings where these subjects or themes have been used with a view to elucidating other meanings or interpretations.

Chapter Four offers an iconographical and stylistic analysis of the ceiling frescoes, commencing with the five octagons on the arch separating the two vaults and then looking at each vault in turn. This is where the core Egyptian theme is to be found and understanding of this is key to the interpretation of the whole room.

In Chapter Five I have considered a route to interpretation of the whole room. My approach was first to consider who might or could have been the author behind the theme. I established a set of criteria against which candidates for this role may be assessed. Previously proposed candidates were assessed against these criteria, in particular Annus of Viterbo but also others. I have then examined other potential authors using these same criteria.

Having established a more likely group of individuals for this role I have then examined the issues and areas of interest that were concerning them at this time. Having established what these were, I have then compared how the themes of the frescoes might relate to these areas of interest. From this I have then proposed a new humanistic interpretation for the frescoes.

The last chapter, Chapter Six, offers some conclusions. After summarising my findings, I have looked at the potential impact of them on modern scholarship in this and related areas. I have then assessed both the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments I have proposed. Finally I look at the further areas of research which logically would follow from this thesis.

## Chapter 2: Context

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter gives an account of the context in which the frescoes in the Sala dei Santi were commissioned and executed. The commissioning process may have been more complicated than the relatively straightforward painter/client relationship described by Baxandall.<sup>66</sup> On his election to the papacy Rodrigo Borgia's own money was transferred to the papal private treasury.<sup>67</sup> It is not clear whether building and decoration works would have come from this account or from other Vatican funds, and it is not clear whether the pope had sole discretion over disbursement of such funds. The specification of the content of the decorations may well have been proposed and elaborated by an adviser or advisers. However it is unlikely that the themes in these rooms would have been chosen without the consideration or at least approval of the Pope, so he must still be seen as the ultimate commissioner. Without attempting to provide a full biography of Pope Alexander VI this chapter looks at those elements in his background, his career, family, political and intellectual matters which might have had some influence on his reasons for commissioning the themes underlying these frescoes. He was not only the ultimate commissioner of these frescoes but also the spiritual guide to the Catholic world when these frescoes were painted, so it is important to examine his background, approach and inclination. To understand any visual references to Turks in these frescoes it is necessary to understand Pope Alexander VI's relationship with the Ottoman Empire and with Islam. As the *Disputa* contains alleged portraits of several of his children it is also relevant to be aware of his relationships with family member. The subsequent reception of these frescoes has been greatly influenced by his subsequent reputation.

This chapter then examines the evidence for the purpose the rooms in the Appartamento Borgia were used for during the pontificate of Alexander VI, and gives a brief account of what happened to them afterwards.

A short description of Pinturicchio's career and *oeuvre*, particularly in Rome, in the years leading up to these frescoes being painted, reviews the competencies, aptitudes and experience relevant to his being chosen to execute this commission. The political, ecclesiastical and intellectual background is described to outline the context in which the themes for the room were chosen.

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<sup>66</sup> Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 2, p. 304.



## 2.2 Pope Alexander VI and the Appartamento Borgia

### 2.2.1 Historiography of the Borgia family

The notoriety of the Borgias has meant that the histories of the family and its affairs over the centuries have been of particularly variable character and quality. There is little reason to cast doubt on the contemporaneous records of Johann Burchard, master of ceremonies to Pope Alexander VI as well as to popes Sixtus IV, Innocent VIII, Pius III and Julius II although the records covering Alexander VI's time are incomplete.<sup>68</sup> Given the salaciousness of some of what is retained there has been speculation as to what must have been excised. Immediately after the death of Pope Alexander VI in 1503 and his son, Cesare in 1507 rumour fed on scandal and such reports from those times are of doubtful use. The reputation of Pope Alexander VI was such that the Roman Catholic Church kept the *Regesta* of his reign hidden in the *Archivum Secretum* until the late nineteenth century. Pastor was allowed access in 1888 by Pope Leo XIII who also enabled the uncovering and restoration of the frescoes in the Appartamento Borgia.<sup>69</sup>

Even in the late nineteenth century the Borgia reputation continued to provoke polarised treatment. Pastor's account proffers no favours to the Borgia family and he describes the rehabilitation of Alexander VI as a 'hopeless task'.<sup>70</sup> By contrast De Roo's very extensive and detailed treatment at times borders on the fawning.<sup>71</sup> In the twentieth century the stories have attracted multiple retelling and in the twenty-first century renewed fictionalisation on both screen and page. Thus there is much material covering the life of Rodrigo Borgia in the period leading up to the commissioning of the frescoes, but the sources need to be treated with caution.

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<sup>68</sup> Johann Burchard, *Liber notarum : ab anno MCCCCLXXXIII usque ad annum MDVI*, ed. Enrico Celani, (Città di Castello, S. Lapi, 1907–42); and Johann Burchard, *At the Court of the Borgia, being an Account of the Reign of Pope Alexander VI written by his Master of Ceremonies*, trans. & ed. Geoffrey Parker, (London, Folio Society, 1963).

<sup>69</sup> Ludwig von Pastor, *The history of the popes, from the close of the Middle Ages. Drawn from the secret archives of the Vatican and other original sources*, (London, Routledge and K. Paul, 1898), vol. 5, p. vii.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. viii.

<sup>71</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, vols. 1–5, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924).

### 2.2.2 Chronology

Whilst there is some uncertainty and speculation about Rodrigo's genealogy it is generally accepted that he was born in 1431 in Xativa in Valencia into a family of landowners.<sup>72</sup> 'De Borja' (which became Italianised to 'della Borgia') meaning 'from the Borja area' (of Valencia), was taken from his mother's side of the family. Although there may be no substance to claims that Rodrigo was of royal descent, there were links between the family and Aragonese royal family, Valencia having been conquered by Aragon in 1237. Wishing to manifest this link, Rodrigo adopted the Aragonese double crown as part of his emblem, and this can be seen throughout the Appartamento Borgia from frescoes to floor tiles.<sup>73</sup>

Key to Rodrigo's direction and progress was his uncle, Alonso de Borja who was Bishop of Valencia at the time of Rodrigo's birth and who went on to become Pope Calixtus III in 1455. It was Alonso who in 1445, the year after he was made cardinal, appointed his fourteen year old nephew as sacristan to the Cathedral of Valencia. It was Alonso who, based in Rome since 1445, arranged for the bull from Pope Nicholas V in 1449 that allowed Rodrigo to keep his benefices in Spain whilst studying in Italy.<sup>74</sup> Throughout his life Rodrigo's maintenance of close support to members of the Borgia family is a recurring theme. Similarly his allegiance to Spain was amply demonstrated, not least by his appointment of his compatriots to the Curia once elected pope.<sup>75</sup>

Rodrigo came to Rome in 1449, or soon after, and studied initially under the humanist Gaspare Da Verona.<sup>76</sup> In the early 1450s he studied law at Bologna University, graduating in less than the five years that would have been customary. In March 1456 his uncle created him cardinal, still only aged 25.<sup>77</sup> His first task was to be sent as papal legate to Ancona where he acquitted himself so well in putting down an insurrection at Ascoli that on his return he was made a commander of the papal army.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Giuseppe Portigliotti, *The Borgias: Alexander VI, Caesar, Lucrezia*, trans. B Miall, (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1928), pp. 11,12

<sup>73</sup> Albert Van de Put, *The Aragonese double crown & the Borja, or Borgia device: with notes upon the bearing of such insignia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries*, (London, Gryphon Club, Bernard Quaritch, 1910).

<sup>74</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), p. 80.

<sup>75</sup> For example all four of the cardinals he appointed in 1496 were from Valencia; Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 3, p. 401

<sup>76</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), p. 81.

<sup>77</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 2, p. 31

<sup>78</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), p. 75.

At the same time, in 1457, Rodrigo was also made Vice Chancellor of the Church, a post he was to hold with notable success for 35 years, through the reigns of five popes. This post, second only to the pope, gave him the responsibility for running most of the day to day operations and affairs of the Church. He proved himself a most adept administrator, and was diligent in his attention to his responsibilities.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless Rodrigo took the opportunity to secure for himself considerable income and wealth.<sup>80</sup>

Ever an astute politician, in 1464 under Pope Pius II, Rodrigo used some of that wealth to fit out a galley for an aborted crusade, and accompanied the Pope to Ancona for the launch of the crusade.<sup>81</sup> Pope Pius II's stay in Ancona was later to be represented by Pinturicchio in the frescoes in the Piccolomini Library in Siena.

Rodrigo's links to Spain were exploited by Pope Sixtus IV who in 1472 sent him thence to seek support for another crusade. Whilst he may not have succeeded in that aim, the Spanish being preoccupied with their internal 'crusade' against the Moors, he was instrumental in bringing peace to warring Spanish factions and bringing together the crowns of Aragon and Castile.<sup>82</sup>

Adept though he was at handling Vatican politics, in 1484 he failed in his attempt to be elected pope. Giuliano della Rovere, nephew of the recently deceased Pope Sixtus IV, ensured that his preferred candidate Giovanni Battista Cibo was elected and became Pope Innocent VIII.<sup>83</sup> This rivalry with Giuliano della Rovere, later Pope Julius II, was to persist throughout Rodrigo's own pontificate. In the conclave of 1492 the contest became a head to head battle with Giuliano.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), p. 82.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82 ,83

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>83</sup> Ludwig von Pastor, *History of the Popes*, (London, Kegan Paul, 1911), vol. 5, pp. 236–239.

<sup>84</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 2, p. 330; Kenneth M. Setton, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, p. 432.

### 2.2.3 Attitudes to Turks and Moors

Rodrigo's expenditure to fit out a ship for the aborted 1464 crusade can be seen as proof of his commitment against the Turks, or as a reflection of contemporary attitudes.<sup>85</sup> Christian enmity towards the Moors and other Mohammedans reached a peak following the fall of Constantinople to Sultan Mehmet II in 1453. Mehmet had pursued his cause further into Europe, threatening Venice by attacking Istria and Friuli in 1477 and possibly threatening Rome by taking Otranto in 1480.<sup>86</sup> (The 800 local Roman Catholics slaughtered by the invading army were eventually canonised by Pope Francis in May 2013.<sup>87</sup>) The popes through this period spoke out against the Turks and made extensive attempts to raise money from across Christendom to finance the retaking of Constantinople, and Rodrigo gave them his support. The campaign against the Moors in his native Spain was also part of his inheritance, culminating in their surrender on the feast day of St Katherine (25<sup>th</sup> November) 1491 and their expulsion on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1492. Rodrigo supported the celebrations in Rome a few days later.<sup>88</sup> On his elevation to the pontificate, Alexander VI reasserted his commitment to continuing the efforts of his uncle, by supporting the Genoans against the Turks.<sup>89</sup> It would have been a great surprise to all around him had he asserted otherwise.

His deeds rather than his words suggest that his thoughts had evolved. With the death of Mehmet II there was the beginning of a slow rapprochement with the Turks under Mehmet II's elder son Sultan Bayezid II. Bayezid had immediately withdrawn Turkish troops from Otranto on his accession in 1481 and had executed their commander.<sup>90</sup> Under Pope Innocent VIII Rodrigo had been instrumental in furthering this rapprochement. In 1489 Bayezid's younger brother Djem arrived at the Vatican as a valuable hostage. Bayezid was paying 40,000 gold ducats a year to have him contained. Djem became a celebrity of the court, setting a fashion for wearing Turkish style clothes

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<sup>85</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), p. 87

<sup>86</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)*, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, pp. 327, 341.

<sup>87</sup> <[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130512\\_omelia-canonizzazioni.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130512_omelia-canonizzazioni.html)>, Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> February 2015

<sup>88</sup> N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, p. 301, n.33.

<sup>89</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 2, p. 400.

<sup>90</sup> It has been suggested that the depiction of the drowning of the Pharaoh and the Egyptian in the Sistine Chapel may also tell the story of this Turkish defeat, with Cardinal Bessarion possibly depicted by Moses' left shoulder: Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)*, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, p. 379.

and becoming a friend of Rodrigo's son Juan de Borja.<sup>91</sup> This fashion is reflected in the dress of many of the figures in the *Disputa* fresco in the Sala dei Santi. As a gesture of peace, in early 1492 Bayezid II sent Pope Innocent VIII the iron head of the Holy Lance (which was reputed to have been used to pierce Christ's side when he was on the cross) and Rodrigo was one of those in charge of its reception. Its delivery by the Turkish envoy on 28th May 1492 was accompanied by much ceremony and correspondence.<sup>92</sup> Once Rodrigo himself became pope, a further visit by a legation from Constantinople was received in June 1493 with much pomp, generosity and further ceremony.<sup>93</sup> Over the following three years several exchanges of letters occurred between Alexander VI and Bayezid, and when an invasion by King Charles VIII of France threatened it was to Bayezid that Alexander VI turned for financial assistance.<sup>94</sup> Alexander VI's motto 'Pacis Cultor', seen with variations both on a medal commemorating his restoration work at Castel Sant'Angelo and on a fresco in the Sala dei Santi, may be interpreted as an expression of a wish for a more peaceful relationship with the Ottoman empire.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)*, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, p. 440.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 428.

<sup>93</sup> Johann Burchard, *At the Court of the Borgia, being an Account of the Reign of Pope Alexander VI written by his Master of Ceremonies*, trans. & ed. Geoffrey Parker, Folio Society, London, 1963, pp. 60–64. This visit occurred on the same day that Rodrigo's daughter Lucrezia contracted her first marriage, at the age of thirteen.

<sup>94</sup> De Roo calls doubt on the authenticity of much of this correspondence, Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 4, pp. 118–126, but this reflects De Roo's fawning attitude to his subject. Setton examines and dismisses such doubts: Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)*, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, p. 457.

<sup>95</sup> The medal can be seen at Rossella Savio, ed., *I Borgia*, (Milan, Electa, 2002), p. 163.

#### 2.2.4 Family and nepotism

Rodrigo's devotion to his family was notable. His benefit from, and practice of, nepotism may also seem notable but it was both pragmatic and of its time. His uncle had sponsored two nephews, but Rodrigo had proved himself the better candidate and so received the greater preferment.<sup>96</sup> Rodrigo appointed the unexceptional Francesco Borgia, most probably Calixtus III's son, to the post of treasurer general in 1493 and subsequently cardinal in 1500.<sup>97</sup> Rodrigo looked after his sister's children, ensuring that his nephew Juan Borja Lanzol was made Archbishop of Monreale by Pope Innocent VIII, and then Rodrigo made him a cardinal as soon as Rodrigo was made pope. Such practices were normal and accepted. Giuliano della Rovere, later Pope Julius II, was advanced by his uncle Pope Sixtus VI. Rodrigo made Alessandro Farnese, brother of his mistress Giulia Farnese, a cardinal. Farnese went on to become Pope Paul III and in turn promoted his nephews as cardinals.<sup>98</sup> Between 1417 and 1503, five of the eleven popes had been the products of nepotism.<sup>99</sup>

Rodrigo's devotion to his eight or nine children is well known. Mallett divides them into three groups; those born before his visit to Spain in 1472, those born to Vannozza dei Cattanei between 1475 and 1481, and those born after he became pope.<sup>100</sup> It is to the four children by Vannozza he gave the greatest attention, and it has been speculated that they are portrayed in the frescoes of the Sala dei Santi.<sup>101</sup> His generosity to them was subject to a wider motive of establishing his family in Rome. An outsider, he was constantly aware of the power of the established Roman and Italian families and went to some lengths to ensure that his family would be endowed with sufficient property, power and connections to compete with them. Thus his children were also to be used as political tools.

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<sup>96</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), p. 82.

<sup>97</sup> There has been speculation that a figure in the Sala dei Misteri, next to the Sala dei Santi, is a portrait of Francesco, but this argument is difficult to sustain: Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), p.276, n. 7.

<sup>98</sup> Such nepotism was prevalent until the bull '*Romanum decet pontificem*' of Pope Innocent XII in 1692. See: Hanns Gross, *Rome in the Age of Enlightenment: The Post-Tridentine Syndrome and the Ancien Régime*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 44.

<sup>99</sup> Mary Hollingsworth, *Patronage in Renaissance Italy*, (London, John Murray), 1994, p 277.

<sup>100</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), p. 95.

<sup>101</sup> Phillips is one of the more speculative about this, offering suggestions that many of the figures in the room are portraits of Alexander VI's children, recycling suggestions by Schmarsow and Steinmann: Evelyn March Phillips, *Pintoricchio*, (London, George Bell & Sons, 1901), Chapter 5.

The youngest of the four children by Vannozza was Jofre, born 1481. By 1492 he had already been given some Spanish benefices by Innocent VIII and was Archdeacon of the cathedral of Valencia. Although originally destined for a life in the church, in 1493 it became politically expedient that he become engaged to Sancia, four years older than himself and the illegitimate daughter of Alfonso of Naples, thereby securing an alliance with the kingdom of Naples.<sup>102</sup>

Lucrezia, born 1480, was a favourite of Rodrigo, but this did not prevent her being used to secure various alliances, with her being married in succession to Giovanni Sforza in 1493, to Alfonso d'Aragona, half-brother of Sancia in 1498, and finally to Alfonso d'Este, Duke of Ferrara in 1502. Lucrezia's eldest brother Cesare had murdered Alfonso d'Aragona, for reasons of political expediency.<sup>103</sup>

Rodrigo lavished the greatest benefits on his second son by Vannozza, Juan, born around 1477, bypassing his elder son in making him Duke of Gandia, endowing him with Spanish estates, betrothing him to Maria Enriquez de Luna, cousin or niece of King Ferdinand II of Aragon, and putting him on the path to becoming a Spanish grandee. His life was notoriously dissolute, ending in his being murdered in Rome in 1497, possibly by his elder brother Cesare.<sup>104</sup>

Cesare, born 1475, was the eldest of the children by Vannozza and was originally destined for a church career. He was nominated as Bishop of Pamplona in 1491 shortly before being despatched to the University of Pisa to study law. On his election to the papacy, Alexander VI made Cesare Bishop of Valencia, and in September 1493 issued a bull declaring him to be the legitimate son of Vannozza and her husband, thereby enabling Cesare to be made a cardinal a few days later, the next step on a potential path to becoming pope. This career path changed on the death of Juan when shortly afterwards Rodrigo set Cesare up as a prince over territories taken from the Papal States. Cesare's reputation as intelligent, cunning and unscrupulous and his subsequent political and military career has been widely researched.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), p. 117.

<sup>103</sup> Lucrezia has attracted the attentions of several biographers. I have consulted various ones but have generally relied on Sarah Bradford, *Lucrezia Borgia. Life, Love and Death in Renaissance Italy*, (London, Viking, 2004).

<sup>104</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), pp. 140, 141.

<sup>105</sup> Machiavelli's high opinion of Cesare's political abilities, as expressed in *The Prince* needs to be seen in the context of his other behaviours. Sarah Bradford's account; Sarah Bradford, *Cesare Borgia, His Life and Times*, (London, Phoenix, 1976), is comprehensive and readable.

At the time of Rodrigo's elevation to pope, Lucrezia and Jofre had been living in Rome at the Palazzo Orsini under the care of Adriana de Mila, a third cousin of Rodrigo and stepmother of Orso Orsini, husband of Giulia Farnese, the 18 year old mistress of the 61 year old Rodrigo.<sup>106</sup>

### 2.2.5 Intellectual interests.

Whereas Alonso de Borja was esteemed for his knowledge of law, taking doctorates in both canon and civil law and becoming a lecturer at the University of Lerida, Rodrigo demonstrated no great aptitude for intellectual pursuits.<sup>107</sup> The uncertainty of his length of study at Bologna has led to speculation that his qualification was expedited by payment, although De Roo reports that he graduated with the accolade of 'most eminent and judicious Jurisprudent'.<sup>108</sup> Assessing his intellectual output is made the more difficult by a significant proportion of his writings being destroyed after his death. Based on the extant list of what he wrote, it would seem that much of it was learned but functional, relating to the efficient running of the Curia, a subject about which he was acknowledged as a master. It is reported that his oratory was elegant and effective, a skill necessary for him to carry out his duties as Vice Chancellor of the Church.<sup>109</sup> De Roo reports his contemporaries, including Poliziano, lauded him for his erudition, but much of this can be regarded a sycophancy promulgated in order to gain preferment.<sup>110</sup>

There is evidence of Rodrigo having respect for learning, both by surrounding himself with learned men and by his support for learned institutions. Whilst many of his entourage were from Spain, and his household language was Catalan, his household included Ludovico Podacatharo, a Greek scholar as his secretary and Lorenz Behaim, a German member of Pomponio Leto's Roman Academy of humanists, and who was for twenty years the superintendent of Rodrigo's household.<sup>111</sup> He was not blindly in thrall to the humanists in Rome, and upset a number of them when he resisted Pope

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<sup>106</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), p. 113.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 211.

<sup>108</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 2, p. 29.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>111</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin 1971), p. 94.



Pius II's plan to sell posts in the papal chancery to them, his resistance being on the grounds that it would lead to inefficient administration.<sup>112</sup>

Once elected to the pontificate Alexander VI significantly patronised learning. He supported many initiatives, safeguarding the rights and privileges of Masters and Doctors, eliminating examination fees for impecunious students and reducing the tariff on books imported into the pontifical states.<sup>113</sup> He supported the creation and development of many institutions of learning, including the establishment of the University of Aberdeen.<sup>114</sup> Most famous was his support for the Sapienza University in Rome, extending to both paying for new building and attracting quality staff.<sup>115</sup>

### **2.2.6 Support for and patronage of art and architecture<sup>116</sup>**

Compared to other cardinals in the quattrocento, Rodrigo gave little patronage to art. The Appartamento Borgia frescoes are one of the few examples of his commissioning paintings. When he had visited his diocese in Valencia in 1472 he had taken with him two Italian fresco painters, Francesco Pagano from Naples and Paolo da San Leocadio from Reggio Emilia.<sup>117</sup> These were engaged for work within the Cathedral of Valencia under a contract requiring them to complete within six years, subsequently extended to nine. Their frescoes of the Virgin Mary and angels on the ceiling of the apse were covered over between 1674 and 1682 and were only re-revealed in 2004.<sup>118</sup>

In 1473, the year after his visit to Valencia, he commissioned from Andrea Bregno the sculpting of a substantial marble relief for the high altar of the newly built Basilica of Santa Maria del Popolo,

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<sup>112</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin 1971), p. 87.

<sup>113</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 2, pp. 449, 455.

<sup>114</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 4, p.456.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 445–454.

<sup>116</sup> A fuller description of Rodrigo Borgia's support for art and architecture both before and after his elevation to the pontificate can be found at Felipe V. Garin Llombart 'Alessandro VI a Roma: Cultura e Committenza Artistica' in Rossella Savio, (ed) *I Borgia*, (Milan, Electa, 2002), pp. 119–129.

<sup>117</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin 1971), p. 89.

<sup>118</sup> J. Ballester, 'An Unexpected Discovery: The Fifteenth-Century Angel Musicians of the Valencia Cathedral' *Music in Art*, vol. 33, No. 1–2 (Spring–Fall 2008), City University of New York, pp. 11–29

replete with ostentatious Borgia emblems.<sup>119</sup> This church benefitted from the attentions of other cardinals, in particular Domenico della Rovere who later commissioned Pinturicchio to decorate the Chapel of San Girolamo.<sup>120</sup> The church also became a favourite of members of the Borgia family, with Vannozza dei Cattanei and at least one of Rodrigo's sons buried there.<sup>121</sup>

Rodrigo did spend extensively on building and rebuilding and on occasions this included accompanying decoration, but rarely any significant painting. His architectural investments included the rebuilding of the fortress at Subiaco in 1476, repairs to his titular church in Rome, St Nicholas in the Tullian Prison, and the creation of the episcopal palace in Pienza around the time that Pope Pius II built his own palace there.<sup>122</sup>

The largest and most visible display of his investment in buildings was that of his own palace in Rome beginning in 1458.<sup>123</sup> Built in the Vatican Palace style that was influenced by Alberti this was an opulent statement of his new position as Vice Chancellor, and an ostentatious display of his wealth. In a letter from Ascanio Sforza to Ludovico Sforza in 1484 the interior is described:

The palace is splendidly decorated; the walls of the great entrance hall are hung with tapestries depicting various historical scenes. A small drawing room leads off this, which was also decorated with fine tapestries; the carpets on the floor harmonised with the furnishings which included a sumptuous daybed upholstered in red satin with a canopy over it, and a chest on which was laid out a vast and beautiful collection of gold and silver plate. Beyond this there were two more rooms, one hung in fine satin, carpeted, and with another canopied bed covered with Alexandrine velvet; the other even more ornate with a couch covered in cloth of gold. In this room the central table was covered with a cloth of Alexandrine velvet and surrounded by finely carved chairs.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Mary Hollingsworth, *Patronage in Renaissance Italy*, (London John Murray, 1994), pp. 285, 286.

<sup>120</sup> Claudia La Malfa, 'The Chapel of San Girolamo in Santa Maria Del Popolo in Rome. New Evidence for the Discovery of the Domus Aurea.' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 63, 2000, pp. 259–270.

<sup>121</sup> Ferdinand Gregorovius, *Lucretia Borgia, According to Original Documents and Correspondence of Her Day*, trans. John Leslie Garner, (New York, D. Appleton, 1903), p. 354.

<sup>122</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 2, pp. 158 & 30.

<sup>123</sup> C.W. Westfall, 'Alberti and the Vatican Palace Type', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 33, No. 2 (May, 1974), p. 114.

<sup>124</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), p. 84. Rodrigo would pass this building on to Ascanio Sforza in 1492 when elected pope.

It is notable that there is no mention of any painting or paintings but there is mention of tapestries and other wall hangings. Tapestries in particular would have been substantially more expensive than fresco and thus more effective for the display of wealth more than taste or erudition.<sup>125</sup> A contributory factor to Alexander VI choosing to have his new apartments decorated with fresco might have been a temporary shortage of funds during his early weeks as pope.<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless when Don Federigo, younger son of King Ferdinand I of Naples, visited Pope Alexander VI on 24<sup>th</sup> December 1492, before the painting of the Appartamento Borgia could have been properly underway, Burchard relates:

So the prince could rest there overnight, the new apartments in the palace were assigned to him and most lavishly decorated—the third, fourth and fifth apartments were fitted out with tapestries of sky-blue velvet ...<sup>127</sup>

Once he became Pope, Alexander VI continued and extended his investment in buildings, particularly the Sapienza University, but painting generally continued to be a decorative adjunct rather than a project in itself.<sup>128</sup> He showed allegiance to Pinturicchio, paying him well and using him to paint frescoes, now lost, in the refurbished Castel Sant'Angelo. The Borgia arms appear in many of the places where he instigated or financed building works, including Castel Sant'Angelo and the coffered ceiling of the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore where he had been archpriest from 1483 to 1492.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Beth L. Holman, 'Domestic Arts', in Martin Kemp, ed., *The Oxford History of Western Art*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 162.

<sup>126</sup> De Roo tells us that Alexander VI's predecessor, Innocent VIII, had left papal coffers bereft: Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 5, pp. 131–135.

<sup>127</sup> Johann Burchard, *At the Court of the Borgia, being an Account of the Reign of Pope Alexander VI written by his Master of Ceremonies*, trans. & ed. Geoffrey Parker, (London, Folio Society, 1963), pp. 48, 49.

<sup>128</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 4, (pp. 445–455.

<sup>129</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 2, p. 233.

### 2.2.7 Rodrigo Borgia's posthumous reputation

Any interpretation of the frescoes in these rooms is affected by the evolving reputation of the commissioner over the intervening centuries, not least because it was that reputation which led to the frescoes being out of sight for much of that time. A reputation for simony, venality and licentiousness began almost immediately after his death when, following the four week pontificate of Pope Pius III, Rodrigo Borgia's old enemy Giuliano della Rovere was elected as Pope Julius II. This new pope attempted to distance himself from Alexander VI and his reputation. He even set about creating his own suite of rooms immediately above the Appartamento Borgia. Perhaps to outshine Borgia, he commissioned Raphael to decorate them, hence their current appellation, the Raphael Stanze.<sup>130</sup>

The historian Guicciardini wrote three decades after Rodrigo Borgia's death:

For Alexander VI (as the new Pontiff wished to be called) possessed singular cunning and sagacity, excellent judgment, a marvelous efficacy in persuading, and an incredible dexterity and attentiveness in dealing with weighty matters. But all these qualities were far outweighed by his vices: the most obscene behavior, insincerity, shamelessness, lying, faithlessness, impiety, insatiable avarice, immoderate ambition, a cruelty more than barbaric and a most ardent cupidity to exalt his numerous children; and among these there were several (in order that depraved instruments might not be lacking to carry out his depraved designs) no less detestable than the father.<sup>131</sup>

It suited the forces of the Reformation to accentuate the bad reputation of Pope Alexander VI. Jocelyn Hillgarth gives an excellent account of the reputation of Rodrigo and Cesare over the two centuries following Rodrigo's death.<sup>132</sup> It took until the restoration of the rooms under Pope Leo XIII in 1889 for the frescoes not to be so greatly overshadowed by the Borgia reputation.

There was little new in the financial practices, such as simony and venality, that Rodrigo Borgia indulged. What made him different was the professionalism, efficiency and extent of the way he indulged in exploiting these opportunities.

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<sup>130</sup> For a comparison see: Jonathan B. Riess, 'Raphael's Stanze and Pinturicchio's Borgia apartments', *Notes in the History of Art*, vol. 3, No. 4 (Summer 1984), pp. 57–67.

<sup>131</sup> Francesco Guicciardini, *The History of Italy*, trans. S. Alexander, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 10.

<sup>132</sup> Jocelyn N. Hillgarth, 'The Image of Alexander VI and Cesare Borgia in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 59, 1996, pp. 119–129.

Simony, the dealing in ecclesiastical preferments and benefices, was sufficiently well established by the late thirteenth century that Thomas Aquinas devoted question 100 of his *Summa Theologica* to the subject.<sup>133</sup> A benefice such as a bishopric has attached to it a stream of income from tithes, taxes and other dues. A stream of income has a value which can be capitalised and sold, much as in modern times mortgages continue to be bought and sold. Values and the trade in such capitalised instruments depend on the time value of money and the risk attached to the income stream.

Early in his life Rodrigo Borgia had settled on him a number of benefices in Spain by his uncle.<sup>134</sup> Although physical presence was meant to be a prerequisite for many benefices, hence the need for the 1449 bull allowing Rodrigo to keep the benefices while away studying in Italy, in practice it was possible to hold many benefices at the same time, 'plurality', whilst visiting few or none.<sup>135</sup> As a cardinal Rodrigo Borgia would also have been entitled to fees for attending papal consistories.

An example of how his financial matters were dealt with occurred in 1458. Rodrigo's uncle, Pope Callixtus III, was in need of money, having had to finance a fleet against the Turks. He directed that some redundant church buildings, the former papal mint, be sold to Rodrigo (the validity of this sale being confirmed by the two succeeding popes).<sup>136</sup> Rodrigo had already been given the previous year five expectatives in Spain, rights to benefices when the incumbent died, but now in need of ready money to restore and refurbish these buildings, Rodrigo was given seven more expectatives and several immediate appointments, including the commendam of the Cisterian monastery of Fossanova.<sup>137</sup> Ever the efficient administrator, he discovered that previous abbots at this monastery had estranged various properties, so he arranged in 1461 for Pope Pius II to issue a bull returning them.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (Raleigh, NC, USA, Hayes Barton Press, 1999), p. 2966.

<sup>134</sup> Until the Council of Trent in 1545, benefices could be conferred on someone from their seventh year: Benjamin Williams Mathias, *A Compendious History of the Council of Trent*, (Dublin, William Curry, 1832), p. 340.

<sup>135</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), pp. 80, 81.

<sup>136</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 2, p. 81.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82–83.

As Vice Chancellor he received an additional 6,000 ducats a year.<sup>139</sup> His portfolio of benefices included the archbishoprics of Valencia, the bishoprics of Cartagena and Majorca together with income from the abbey of Subiaco as well as of Fossanova.<sup>140</sup>

His appetite for money appears not to have been to fund an unusually extravagant personal lifestyle. Even Pastor accuses him of stinginess and Gregorovius describes him as a humble man.<sup>141</sup> Much of his expenditure went on buildings, and on the financing of a galley in the abortive 1464 crusade. In 1478 he had to lend considerable sums to Pope Sixtus IV, although the mortgages on papal towns and properties he received in return seem to have been a sound commercial judgement.<sup>142</sup>

There can be little doubt that he achieved his election in 1492 by 'the rankest simony' although the ever defensive De Roo attempts to refute this.<sup>143</sup> The more egregious suggestions of four mule loads of silver being sent from Rodrigo's house to that of Cardinal Ascanio Sforza during the conclave is supported by no evidence beyond Infessura's repetition of gossip.<sup>144</sup> What is clear is that bribery and simony in such circumstances were the norm, with Pastor recounting that France paid some 200,000 and Genoa some 100,000 ducats in an attempt to secure the election of Rodrigo's rival Giuliano della Rovere in the same conclave.<sup>145</sup>

Rodrigo's financial resources were thus depleted by the time he was elected Pope, but as he was obliged to renounce his worldly wealth on election, this was not an immediate major concern. Of greater concern was that his predecessor, Pope Innocent VIII, had left the papacy with debts in the order of 120,000 ducats, causing Rodrigo to have to leave his mitre with his creditors.<sup>146</sup> Rodrigo's coronation cost 3,000 ducats whereas his predecessor's funeral had cost 15,000 ducats.<sup>147</sup> It was in

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<sup>139</sup> Mary Hollingsworth, *Patronage in Renaissance Italy*, (London John Murray, 1994), p. 278.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

<sup>141</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 2, p. 295.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>143</sup> Ludwig von Pastor, *The history of the popes, from the close of the Middle Ages. Drawn from the secret archives of the Vatican and other original sources*, (London, Routledge and K. Paul, 1898), vol. 5, p. 385; Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 2, pp. 342,343.

<sup>144</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)*, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, p.435.

<sup>145</sup> Ludwig von Pastor, *The history of the popes, from the close of the Middle Ages. Drawn from the secret archives of the Vatican and other original sources*, (London, Routledge and K. Paul, 1898), vol. 5, p. 378.

<sup>146</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), p. 203; Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 2, pp. 304, 305.

<sup>147</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), p. 200.

this financial position he found himself when he commissioned the building of the Torre Borgia extension to the rooms built by Pope Nicholas V, and commissioned the decoration of the combined set of rooms to be known as the 'Appartamento Borgia'.

Once in position as Pope he used his years of experience to pay off the papal debts and build a considerable income which involved the extensive simoniacal sale of offices that he had previously tended to oppose as he did when Pope Pius II had sought to sell posts to finance the abortive 1464 crusade.<sup>148</sup> This income was also used to the benefit of his family, such as his daughter Lucrezia's dowries, but some of the heaviest expense was financing his son Cesare's raising of and maintaining armies to expand the family estates. At the same time his own household expenses were frugal, around 2,000 ducats a year.<sup>149</sup>

Just as Rodrigo Borgia's venality and simony were unexceptional for the times, other than perhaps carried out more professionally, Rodrigo's licentiousness reflected the habits of the times, was not greatly dissimilar to the practices of other popes and possibly less pronounced than that of some of his successors. It nonetheless suited many in the sixteenth century to accentuate and possibly distort the reports of this aspect of his behaviour, not least as part of the underpinning of the movement for reformation. The reports of incest by Rodrigo are an example of stories widely circulated but with little or no evidence to substantiate them.

It was apparent that in his prime he was attractive to women. Around 1449 his tutor in Rome, Gaspare Da Verona offered the following description:

He is handsome; with a most cheerful countenance and genial bearing. He is gifted with a honeyed and choice eloquence. Beautiful women are attracted to love him and are excited by him in a quite remarkable way, more powerfully than iron is attracted by a magnet.<sup>150</sup>

Even by the time of his election, then 61 years old he was evidently still in good physical form.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), pp. 87, 202

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204

<sup>150</sup> Gaspare Da Verona, *Le vite di Paolo II e Michele Canensi, volume 3, Part 16*, ed G. Zippel, Coi Tipi dell'editore S. Lapi, Citta di Castello, 1904, vol. 3, part 16, p. 39. Translation from Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), p. 81

<sup>151</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 2, pp. 267, 268

The most famous account of his licentiousness while a cardinal was in a letter sent to him by Pope Pius II, a man who had himself fathered two illegitimate children but admitted to have given up sex for drinking.<sup>152</sup> In 1460 on their way back from the Diet of Mantua, Pope Pius II went to take the waters in Petriolo leaving Cardinals Borgia and d'Estouteville to visit Siena. The Pope received reports that the two cardinals and their followers had spent a day in a walled garden alone with some ladies of Siena following a baptism service. What is less readily reported is the fact that three days later the Pope sent a follow up letter admitting to having overreacted to a rumour.<sup>153</sup>

The most famous account of licentiousness in the Vatican during his reign as pontiff is the 'Banquet of the Chestnuts'. One evening around All Saints' Eve, 1501, fifty courtesans were brought in to the Vatican, stripped naked and after dinner made to push chestnuts along the floor whilst the Pope, Cesare and Lucrezia watched on. Finally prizes were awarded to those who carnally got to know the courtesans.<sup>154</sup> That this event did occur seems likely since it was reported by, amongst others, the usually reliable Johann Burchard, although he was not present. De Roo once again comes valiantly to the Pope's defence suggesting that the story was a later interpolation by forces hostile to the Pope.<sup>155</sup>

The event was held by Cesare, in his own apartment, not by the Pope. There was no record of it in the Pope's household accounts, only that that night the Pope's household was fasting on fish. As with the steep rise in Rodrigo Borgia's need for money, this event occurred some years after he was made Pope and had commissioned the frescoes in the Appartamento Borgia, and was at the instigation of Cesare.

Rodrigo Borgia's predecessor as Pope, Innocent VIII, had two illegitimate children before taking holy orders.<sup>156</sup> His successor but one, Pope Julius II, had three illegitimate daughters after he had taken orders.<sup>157</sup> A few years later, Pope Leo X was, according to Guicciardini, rather than chaste

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<sup>152</sup> T. M. Izbicki, 'Reject Aeneas, Pius II on the errors of his youth', in R.W. M. Zweder, *Pius 2nd, "el Più Expeditivo Pontefice"* (Leiden, Brill, 2003), p. 287.

<sup>153</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 2, p. 123.

<sup>154</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), pp. 205,206.

<sup>155</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 5, (pp. 195 – 197.

<sup>156</sup> George L. Williams, *Papal Genealogy: The Families and Descendants of the Popes*, (North Carolina, McFarland & Co., Jefferson, 1998), p. 5.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.



'excessively given, and every day more shamelessly, to those pleasures which cannot honestly be mentioned.'<sup>158</sup>

In both his simony and his licentiousness, Rodrigo Borgia accorded with the customs of his time, but was at times more proficient at the former and more public about the latter, than were others. There is little doubt that Cesare's behaviour from 1498 onwards and consequent reputation also reflected adversely on Rodrigo, a case of the sins of the son being visited on the reputation of the father.

### **2.2.8 Pope Alexander VI and the Appartamento Borgia – summary**

By the time he became pope Rodrigo Borgia had established his reputation as a powerful force within the Catholic church, a consummately competent chancellor for many years and a man keen to promote the interests of his family. Whilst espousing his commitment to defeating the Turkish threat, as was shown by his contribution to the aborted crusade of 1464, he wanted to be seen as a bringer of peace, espoused in his motto *Pacis Cultor*, and was able to develop a tolerant relationship with the Turks, both themes which influenced these frescoes. His devotion to his children was marked so having them portrayed in this room would have fitted with his character. His intellect was not in the same league as, for instance, Sixtus IV, but he devoted resources to, and clearly respected, learning. His artistic patronage was not particularly adventurous. Rodrigo's posthumous reputation was not without foundation, but his behaviour was not radically different from his immediate predecessors and successors. However this reputation is relevant to how the frescoes have been viewed over the past five hundred years.

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<sup>158</sup> Francesco Guiccardini, *The History of Italy*, trans. S Alexander, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 362.

## 2.3 Use of the Appartamento Borgia

### 2.3.1 Use of the rooms during the pontificate of Alexander VI

The Appartamento Borgia look out on to the Cortile de Belvedere and the six rooms of the Appartamento Borgia are laid out in a linear sequence. (fig. 2.1 and fig. 2.2)

There are few contemporaneous references to the use of the rooms in the Appartamento Borgia, other than the Sala dei Pontefici which was used for papal receptions. Burchard's account of the reign of Alexander VI refers to this and other rooms in the Vatican palace but until the Pope's death not directly to the other rooms of the Appartamento Borgia. As mentioned earlier Burchard's diary notes that on Christmas Eve, 1492 the 'new apartment' was allocated to the visiting Don Federigo of Naples. As they were yet to be painted, they were decorated with tapestries.<sup>159</sup>

His account of the first wedding of Lucrezia Borgia in June 1493 relates the progress of events in the Sala Reale (Sala Regia) and the celebratory dinner in the Sala dei Pontefici, and on several occasions he recounts the use of the Sala dei Pappagallo for robing.<sup>160</sup>

In 1495 when King Charles VIII of France was in Rome Burchard records the Pope meeting his cardinals in 'one of the private papal apartments'.<sup>161</sup>

When Alexander VI left Rome in July 1501 to visit Colonna territories he left his daughter Lucrezia in charge, and Burchard relates that:

During his absence, therefore, she occupied the papal apartments and had the authority to open all letters sent to His Holiness.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> '...the new apartments were assigned to him and most lavishly decorated – the third, fourth and fifth apartments were fitted out with tapestries of sky blue velvet and the couches were covered in golden brocade, whilst the second was resplendent in crimson velvet trappings.': Johann Burchard, *At the Court of the Borgia, being an Account of the Reign of Pope Alexander VI written by his Master of Ceremonies*, trans. & ed. Geoffrey Parker, (London, Folio Society, 1963), p. 49.

<sup>160</sup> Johann Burchard, *At the Court of the Borgia, being an Account of the Reign of Pope Alexander VI written by his Master of Ceremonies*, trans. & ed. Geoffrey Parker, (London, Folio Society, 1963), pp. 64–67, 113.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

The most detailed, but still not very specific, mention of the rooms is Burchard's account of the death of Pope Alexander VI in August 1503. He records that the body was placed in

another room before the room where he died,<sup>163</sup>

Burchard records that then, having completed some preparations of the body:

...we carried the body through two rooms and the 'Sala dei Pontefici' and the audience chamber to the 'Camera Pappagelli' where we prepared a bier...<sup>164</sup>

By looking at the plan of the Appartamento Borgia, (fig 2.2) one can work out the progress of the body. It is possible that the pope died in Sala delle Arti Liberali, his body was placed in the adjacent *cubicula* (labelled VII on the plan) and then carried through the 'two rooms' of the Sala dei Santi and the Sala dei Misteri, then through the Sala dei Pontefici, the Galleriola (*camera audientiae*) and into the Camera Pappagelli, (Sala dei Pappagello). Setton interprets this differently, that he was laid out in the Sala delle Arti Liberali, suggesting therefore that he died perhaps in the Sala del Credo.<sup>165</sup>

Burchard also records that at the Pope's death, his son Cesare, who was also unwell, sent his henchmen into the 'place after the Pope's room' to seize the Pope's silver.<sup>166</sup>

Burchard's use of 'ante' and 'post' reinforce the idea of progression through the rooms and this fits with an interpretation of such apartments at that time being laid out so as to allow a linear sequence of privacy. Thornton gives a thorough exposition of this principle. He offers a specific order for use of such rooms (fig. 2.3).<sup>167</sup> He suggests that bedchambers were generally smaller rooms, making them more comfortable and easier to heat. Beyond the bedchamber would be service rooms

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<sup>163</sup> Author's translation of: 'Sine cauda erat et desuper rochetto, et posuerunt in alia camera ante salam in qua mortuus est super unam lecticam...': Johannes Burchardi, *Diarium sive rerum urbanarum commentarii*, (1483–1506), *texte latin publié intégralement pour la première fois, d'après les manuscrits de Paris, de Rome et de Florence* ed. L. Thuasne, (Paris, Leroux, 1885), vol. 3, p. 239.

<sup>164</sup> Author's translation of '...portavimus eum per duas cameras et aulam pontificiam et cameram audientie ad papagallum ubi paravimus mensam...': Johannes Burchardi, *Diarium sive rerum urbanarum commentarii*, (1483–1506), *texte latin publié intégralement pour la première fois, d'après les manuscrits de Paris, de Rome et de Florence*, (Paris, Leroux, 1885), vol. 3, p. 240.

<sup>165</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)*, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, p. 540.

<sup>166</sup> Author's translation of 'Illi intrantes ad invicem in locum post cameram Pape, acceperunt omnia argenta que invenerunt et duas capsas cum ducatis circiter centum millia.': Johannes Burchardi, *Diarium sive rerum urbanarum commentarii*, (1483–1506), *texte latin publié intégralement pour la première fois, d'après les manuscrits de Paris, de Rome et de Florence* ed. L. Thuasne, (Paris, Leroux, 1885), vol. 3, p. 239.

<sup>167</sup> Peter Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior 1400–1600*, (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), pp. 300 – 312.

including a *destro* or WC. Another of these adjacent rooms might be used as a private *studio*. Reception rooms leading up to the bedchamber would be a succession of *salotti* and *anticamere*, the closer to the bedchamber the more private. Such apartments could not always be laid out in a straightforward linear manner, but needed to accommodate the corners and parallel rooms of the buildings they were situated in.<sup>168</sup>

Two examples of apartments cited by Thornton and located in central Rome are the Palazzo Venezia (fig. 2.4) and the Palazzo di Penitenzieri. (fig. 2.5). Dating from the 1450s and built for the Venetian cardinal, Pietro Barbo, the Palazzo Venezia became a papal residence when he became Pope Paul II in 1464. Design of this building is usually attributed to Leon Battista Alberti, but there is little documentary evidence to support this.<sup>169</sup> The Palazzo Penitenzieri dates from the late 1470s, was built for Cardinal Domenico della Rovere and was also decorated by Pinturicchio.<sup>170</sup>

Based on Thornton's analysis and Burchard's accounts, it could be postulated that the Sala dei Santi was not used as the Pope's bedchamber nor even the immediate antechamber. The Sala del Credo is more likely to have been the bedchamber and its decorative theme of apostles and prophets perhaps appropriate to that role. The two *cubicula* could have been used as *guardaroba* and *destro*, and the 'Sala delle Sibille' as a *studio* or another *guardaroba* for possessions such as the Pope's silver (although the stairs access would not have been ideal for security).

The role of the Sala dei Santi would therefore have been as a reception room, not for general access but neither as private as the Sala delle Arti Liberali. Typically it might have been used as a private dining room or for semi-private meetings.

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<sup>168</sup> Peter Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior 1400–1600*, (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), in particular pp. 296–312. For an analysis of the layout and use of rooms in another near contemporary palace see Pasquale Rotondi, *Il Palazzo ducale di Urbino: la sua architettura e la sua decorazione*, (London, Tiranti, 1969).

<sup>169</sup> Robert Tavernor, *On Alberti and the Art of Building*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998), p. 48. Westfall identifies Alberti as having had significant influence on the design of palaces in Rome during the fifteenth century, and suggests that he influenced Pope Nicholas V on the building of the Vatican Palace that included the four rooms on which the Appartamento Borgia is based: Carroll William Westfall, 'Alberti and the Vatican Palace Type' *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 33, No. 2, May 1974, pp.101–121. Thornton comments that Alberti wrote of the linear layout of rooms progressing from public to private areas: Peter Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior 1400–1600*, (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), p. 301.

<sup>170</sup> The Palazzo Borgia, now known as the Palazzo Sforza-Cesarini, offers little guidance as to usage. There is little contemporary documentation and the building was significantly reconstructed in the eighteenth century.

### 2.3.2 Subsequent use of the rooms

After the death of Alexander VI in 1503, and after the twenty eight day papacy of Pope Pius III, Pope Julius II, formerly Giuliano della Rovere, moved in to the Appartamento Borgia, but began to arrange the preparations for his moving into the rooms in the floor above, now known as the Stanze di Raffaello.<sup>171</sup> He did not finally vacate the Appartamento Borgia until 1507. There is some evidence that he continued to use the rooms for reception purposes.<sup>172</sup>

Until the reign of Pope Sixtus V, which began in 1585, the rooms were used largely by papal nephew cardinals, other cardinals or secretaries. Pope Sixtus V commissioned the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican and thereafter the popes have lived there. The Appartamento Borgia then fell into decay, being used only occasionally, for instance housing cardinals during conclaves. The decay was commented on by Abbot Agostino Maria Taja around 1712 and continued during the French invasion at the end of the eighteenth century. As a result of the Peace of Tolentino the French returned art works to the Vatican and after 1816 the rooms were used for storing them. Thereafter through the nineteenth century the rooms were used for museum and library purposes, and access to the frescoes severely curtailed.<sup>173</sup>

Pope Leo XIII commissioned the restoration of the rooms in 1889, and they were reopened on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1897.<sup>174</sup> Since then they have been viewable at times by the public, and since 1973 they have been used to house the Vatican collection of modern Christian art. Since 2002, one by one the rooms have been undergoing further restoration.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Franz Ehrle, and Henry Stevenson, *Gli affreschi del Pinturicchio nell'appartamento Borgia*, (Rome, Danesi, 1897), pp. 21, 22.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 27.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>175</sup> Vatican Press Release < [http://mv.vatican.va/6\\_DE/pages/z-Info/Eventi/Eventi\\_2006\\_04\\_27.html](http://mv.vatican.va/6_DE/pages/z-Info/Eventi/Eventi_2006_04_27.html) > Accessed December 2014.

## 2.4 Pinturicchio<sup>176</sup>

The selection of Pinturicchio was important enough for the Pope to write to the priors of Orvieto Cathedral to release the artist from his obligations to complete a depiction of two evangelists and two doctors of the church in Orvieto Cathedral so that he might embark on the decoration of the Appartamento Borgia.<sup>177</sup> This suggests that Pinturicchio was already known to Pope Alexander VI and his advisers, and that his style or approach was acceptable for this purpose.

Although from Perugia originally, Pinturicchio's association with Rome dates from 1477–1479 when he was commissioned to decorate the chapel of San Girolamo in the church of Santa Maria del Popolo for Cardinal Domenico della Rovere.<sup>178</sup> His association with the papacy and the Vatican dates from around 1481 when the frescoes on the walls of the Sistine chapel were being painted. Vasari reports that Pinturicchio was working alongside Perugino in Rome, without specifying which project.<sup>179</sup> However Silvestrelli documents the evidence to show his involvement in the Sistine chapel frescoes, supporting stylistic evidence.<sup>180</sup>

He is next recorded as working on Cardinal Domenico della Rovere's palace, now known as the Palazzo dei Penitenzieri, in the first half of the 1480s. Around the same time he was also engaged on painting the Bufalini Chapel in the church of Santa Maria del Aracoeli in Rome.<sup>181</sup>

At some probably later point in the 1480s he is also believed to have worked on the frescoes in the chapel of Cardinal Girolamo Basso della Rovere in Santa Maria del Popolo. This cardinal was a nephew of Pope Sixtus IV, formerly Francesco della Rovere. In contrast, Cardinal Domenico della

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<sup>176</sup> The most comprehensive recent account of Pinturicchio's life and works is Pietro Scarpellini & Maria Silvestrelli, *Pinturicchio* (Milano, Motta, 2004.)

<sup>177</sup> N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, p. 316 n. 82.

<sup>178</sup> La Malfa has produced the most detailed recent account of Pinturicchio's chronology in Rome, based on documentary and detailed stylistic analysis, particularly of his use of grotesques. Claudia La Malfa, 'The Chapel of San Girolamo in Santa Maria Del Popolo in Rome. New Evidence for the Discovery of the Domus Aurea.' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 63, 2000, pp. 259–270; and Claudia La Malfa, 'Dating Pinturicchio's Roman Frescoes and His Role in the Formation of a New All'Antica Style', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 70, 2007, pp. 119–141.

<sup>179</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, trans. George Bull, (London, Penguin, 1987), vol. 2, p. 82.

<sup>180</sup> Maria Rita Silvestrelli, 'Ai tempo di Sisto VI' in *Pinturicchio* by Pietro Scarpellini e Maria Rita Silvestrelli (Milan, Federico Motta Editore, 2004), p. 57.

<sup>181</sup> Claudia La Malfa, 'Dating Pinturicchio's Roman Frescoes and His Role in the Formation of a New All'Antica Style', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 70, 2007, p. 119.

Rovere was not related but was part of the della Rovere family of Piemonte with which Sixtus IV had claimed association, before his election.<sup>182</sup>

By 1487 Pinturicchio had received his first commission to work directly for a pope, the decoration of the Casino del Belvedere, to the north of St Peter's, for Pope Innocent VIII.<sup>183</sup> Lorenzo Mari Cibo, Pope Innocent VIII's nephew, possessed the chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo that is between the two della Rovere chapels. Lorenzo was made cardinal by his uncle and was among those who voted in the conclave to elect Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia as pope in 1492.<sup>184</sup>

By late 1492 Pinturicchio was a well-established and respected fresco painter, and he was known to work with collaborators.<sup>185</sup> He and his workshop were also producing panel paintings, both religious and portraits.<sup>186</sup> His clientele included several cardinals and the previous pope, so his name was well known in the Vatican.

Historical perception of Pinturicchio's abilities has been distorted by the account of Vasari who wrote: 'Pinturicchio of Perugia who...won a far greater reputation than his works deserved'.<sup>187</sup> Compounded with Pinturicchio's association with Alexander VI, his reputation has been as an old fashioned, unimaginative painter who never mastered the medium of oils.<sup>188</sup>

Stylistically, Pinturicchio's work can be seen to have evolved through this part of his career. One theme that can be seen to develop is his ground-breaking embrace of antiquarianism and in this he

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<sup>182</sup> Anne Dunlop, 'Pinturicchio and the pilgrims: Devotion and the past at Santa Maria del Popolo' *Papers of the British School at Rome*, volume 71, November 2003, p. 265.

<sup>183</sup> Claudia La Malfa, 'Dating Pinturicchio's Roman Frescoes and His Role in the Formation of a New All'Antica Style', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 70, 2007, pp. 119–141.

<sup>184</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)*, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, p. 432.

<sup>185</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, trans. George Bull, (London, Penguin, 1987), vol. 2, p. 79.

<sup>186</sup> For example his portrait of Giovan Piero Bufalini, son of Niccolo who had commissioned the Bufalini Chapel. V. Garibaldi, & F.F. Mancini, (eds.), *Pinturicchio*, (Milano, Silvana Editoriale, 2008), p. 238.

<sup>187</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, trans. George Bull, (London, Penguin, 1987), vol. 2, p. 79; Original can be found as: 'Pinturicchio da Perugia il quale... ebbe nondimeno molto maggior nome che le sue opere non meritavano.' Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' piu eccellenti pittori, scultori et architettori*, ed. G. Milanesi, (Florence, 1906), vol. 3, p. 493.

<sup>188</sup> Joseph Archer Crow & Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, *A New History of Painting in Italy*, vol. 3, ed. Edward Hutton, (London, Dent, 1909), p. 263; Bernard Berenson, *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, (London, Phaidon, 1952), pp. 118, 119.

can be seen as a pioneer in the visual revival of antiquity.<sup>189</sup> Most obvious, and well documented, is his use of grotesques, which derived from his acquaintance with the Domus Aurea.<sup>190</sup>

The Domus Aurea is a complex of rooms built by the Emperor Nero in the first century AD on the slopes of the Palatine Hill in Rome, but which was abandoned shortly after his death. It was then filled with earth and subsequently built over. In the fifteenth century it was rediscovered and it became a popular venture for locals to go underground and see the preserved Roman frescoes, the vaulted rooms and the stuccoed ceilings.<sup>191</sup>

The documentary evidence that Pinturicchio visited the Domus Aurea is no more than circumstantial, but stylistically he was clearly influenced by the paintings therein.<sup>192</sup> He started using grotesques, clearly derived from those in the Domus Aurea, from the beginning of his Roman period. In the della Rovere chapel he uses them in fictive architecture, adorning the fictive pilaster that surround the real pilasters, themselves adorned with stucco grotesques (fig. 2.6). When he painted the frescoes for the Basso della Rovere chapel he was beginning to use grotesque elements in the painting itself, for instance decorating the throne of the Virgin. In the della Rovere Palace, the Palazzo Penitenzieri, grotesques were used to handle the space in the vaults (fig. 2.7), and in the Bufalini Chapel extensive use of grotesques can be seen on the architecture within the picture. By the time of the Casino Belvedere Pinturicchio was using grotesques across the ceilings in a way that he did in several of the ceilings of the Appartamento Borgia (fig. 2.8).

His extensive use of grotesques and other classical motifs on the architecture within the fresco of the *Visitation* in the Sala dei Santi fits with this programme of progressive development of his *all'antica* style. He went on to make similar extensive use of grotesques in the Baglioni chapel in Spello and the Piccolomini Library in Siena.<sup>193</sup> Although there is clear progression in his use of grotesques, there

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<sup>189</sup> Much has been written about this subject. See for instance: Claudia La Malfa, *Pinturicchio a Roma. La seduzione dell'antico*, (Milan, Silvana Editoriale, 2009).

<sup>190</sup> See for instance N. Dacos, *La découverte de la Domus Aurea et la formation des grotesques à la Renaissance*, (London, The Warburg Institute, 1969), and Marguerite Bohn Joseph, *A catalogue of the grotesques of Pinturicchio*, (MA thesis, Philadelphia, Temple University, 1994).

<sup>191</sup> Irene Iacopi, *Domus Aurea*, (Milan, Electa, 1999).

<sup>192</sup> Anne Dunlop, 'Pinturicchio and the pilgrims: Devotion and the past at Santa Maria del Popolo' *Papers of the British School at Rome*, vol. 71, November 2003, p. 279 and Jürgen Schulz, 'Pinturicchio and the revival of antiquity', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 25, 1962, p. 47, n. 37.

<sup>193</sup> The use of grotesques is specifically called for in the contract for the Piccolomini Library: Jürgen Schulz, 'Pinturicchio and the revival of antiquity', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 25, 1962, p. 48.



is little development to be seen in the grotesques he uses.<sup>194</sup> He adheres to his conception of the classical grotesque.

Vasari suggests, with particular reference to the *Disputà*, that Pinturicchio did not understand perspective.<sup>195</sup> Pinturicchio clearly had a good grasp of linear perspective. He would have been closely aware of, and may well have worked on, the example of the *Giving of the Keys to St Peter* in the Sistine Chapel (fig. 2.8).<sup>196</sup> His command of linear perspective evolved. The examples of his portrayal of similar nativity scenes in the della Rovere chapel (fig. 2.6) around 1483, and in the Baglioni Chapel at Spello (fig. 2.11) around 1500–1501, shows this development, and his command of linear perspective in the *Visitation* fresco in the *Sala dei Santi* shows that by 1493 he was capable of using the technique when he chose. The use of elements of a more classical perspective, where the size of the figures reflects their importance more than their distance from the viewer, would be more in accord with his antiquarian aptitudes than his adherence to the contemporary fashion for linear perspective.

It is as a reviver of illusionistic decoration, of painted landscapes outside the viewer's room and of compartmentalised vaults that Pinturicchio was to have greatest influence. Although comparisons have been made with the second Pompeian style, much of these three elements can be traced back to the Domus Aurea. In his decoration of the Casino Belvedere these techniques were used to great effect, creating fictive architectural framing to landscapes of various parts of Italy.<sup>197</sup>

The ceilings of the Domus Aurea are barrel vaulted, whereas the ceilings of the Palazzo Penitenzieri, the Casino Belvedere and the Appartamento Borgia are more complex involving gothic rib vaulting and pendentives. Pinturicchio was able to adapt the compartmentalised decoration of the Domus Aurea to the intricate requirements of quattrocento architecture. Pinturicchio also adopted and

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<sup>194</sup> Claudia La Malfa, 'Dating Pinturicchio's Roman Frescoes and His Role in the Formation of a New All'Antica Style', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 70, 2007, p. 129.

<sup>195</sup> '...brought the objects to be seen as receding further forward than those that should be larger to the eye: a tremendous blunder in our art of painting.' Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, trans. George Bull, (London, Penguin, 1987), vol. 2, p. 83.

<sup>196</sup> Pietro Scarpellini 'Il primo periodo romano' in *Pinturicchio* by Pietro Scarpellini e Maria Rita Silvestrelli (Milan, Federico Motta Editore, 2004), pp. 74, 75. Pinturicchio was to use many elements of this fresco in his *Christ with the Doctors* in the Baglioni Chapel at Spello in 1500 – 1501.

<sup>197</sup> Vasari relates how these were executed '...in the style of the Flemings, which, rarely used till then, gave great pleasure'. Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, trans. George Bull, (London, Penguin, 1987), vol. 2, p. 82. Most of these frescoes are now damaged beyond repair, but Schulz gives a more detailed account of they relate stylistically to the paintings in the *Domus Aurea*. Schulz also shows how in the Casino belvedere, Pinturicchio reflects the classical approach to wall painting, in particular as it is described in Pliny's *Natural History*. J. Schulz, 'Pinturicchio and the revival of antiquity', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 25, 1962, pp. 35–55. The ceilings remain relatively intact.

adapted the extensive use of stucco in the Domus Aurea, which was to draw further scorn from Vasari.<sup>198</sup>

Pinturicchio led the way for those who later were to embrace classical revival. These included Raphael, whose decoration of the Stanze di Raffaello on the floor above for instance use many of Pinturicchio's fictive framing techniques and the utilisation of classical themes that Pinturicchio had pioneered.<sup>199</sup> Michelangelo's use of vault compartmentalisation in the Sistine Chapel, in particular by means of broad fictive stucco mouldings, owes much to Pinturicchio's innovation.

As Vice Chancellor under Innocent VIII, Rodrigo Borgia would have known of Pinturicchio and may well have met him during his work on the Casino del Belvedere. The Church of Santa Maria del Popolo was also a favourite of the Borgia family. Both Vannozza dei Cattanei and Rodrigo's eldest son Giovanni were later to be buried there so Rodrigo would have seen his frescoes at that church.

In choosing who should be appointed in 1492 to decorate the Appartamento Borgia, Pinturicchio was a most suitable choice. He was a well-established artist who had experience of working in the Vatican when assisting with the wall frescoes in the Sistine Chapel and who had executed a previous papal commission in the Casino del Belvedere. He was not only capable of working with others, but readily able to bring together and lead a team. This would be needed for the expeditious execution of a complicated and extensive commission. His ability to handle the by then dated gothic structure of the rooms built by Pope Nicholas V had been demonstrated elsewhere. At a time when the Renaissance revival of classical antiquity was approaching its zenith, Pinturicchio had not only demonstrated his ability to paint classical subjects and embrace classical illusionism, techniques and motifs, he was someone recognised as a leading innovator of the visual revival of antiquity.

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<sup>198</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, trans. George Bull, (London, Penguin, 1987), vol. 2, p. 83.

<sup>199</sup> Jonathan B. Riess, 'Raphael's Stanze and Pinturicchio's Borgia apartments' *Notes in the History of Art*, vol. 3, No. 4 (Summer 1984), pp. 57–67.

## 2.5 Political and ecclesiastical context

The dominating event in the previous 50 years had been the fall of Constantinople in 1453 to the Ottomans under the young Mehmet II. The political and religious consequences were substantial. Ottoman encroachment on Christendom increased as the Ottoman Empire came closer Rome. It came closest in 1480 with the invasion of Otranto, at which point Pope Sixtus IV is said to have laid plans for evacuation of the papacy back to Avignon, which it had left a century before.<sup>200</sup> Sixtus's wish to retake Otranto was at first impeded by the reluctance of Venice, represented in Rome by Zachariah Barbaro, father of the humanist Ermolao Barbaro (whose possible involvement in the commission of the Sala dei Santi frescoes will be discussed later), to support the move, but the forces of King Ferrante of Naples were deployed to achieve this end.<sup>201</sup> Mehmet's death in May 1481 led to a battle for succession, during which Otranto was effectively abandoned by the Ottoman leadership and thus fell to Christian forces.<sup>202</sup>

The importance of this retaking was reflected in the Sistine chapel fresco of the drowning of the Pharaoh, which is a metaphor for the rout of the oriental forces at Otranto, with Cardinal Bessarion depicted behind the left shoulder of Moses.<sup>203</sup>

The battle for succession to Mehmet produced a result with impact on the style and possibly content of the *Disputa* of St Katherine in the Appartamento Borgia. A prolonged series of battles between Mehmet's elder son Bayezid II and his younger son Djem, resulted finally in the latter's defeat.<sup>204</sup> Seeking protection, Djem and his entourage put themselves under the protection of the Knights Hospitaller who took Djem first to Rhodes and then to France. Bayezid was willing to pay whoever held Djem an annual ransom to keep him from returning and threatening Bayezid's position. Djem was transferred to Rome under the custody of Pope Innocent VIII in 1489 and became both a source of income for the papacy and a negotiating tool in discussions with the

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<sup>200</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)*, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, p. 364.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 367.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 371.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 379.

<sup>204</sup> Djem is variously spelt Cem, or Jem, but here Djem is used for consistency. His story up to the accession of Alexander VI is well described in Chapter 13 of Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)*, vol. 2, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978).

Ottoman Empire.<sup>205</sup> His presence in the papal court stimulated a fashion for a Turkish style of dress, reflected in some of the figures depicted in the *Disputa*.<sup>206</sup>

The fall of Constantinople again revived proposals to raise a new crusade, all of which failed, but this became a recurring theme for the papacy from 1453 to 1492. The abortive attempts were costly for all involved, popes, cardinals and countries to whom appeals were made. Having previously confronted the Ottomans without support from others, Venice was reluctant to commit to supporting these endeavours. Pragmatically Venice sought to promote its own trade with the Turks. As part of this reconciliation in 1479, through a Jewish envoy, Mehmet II requested Venice to send him 'un bon depentor che sapia retrazer' (a good painter who knows how to do portraits).<sup>207</sup> Gentile Bellini was chosen and spent fifteen months there.<sup>208</sup> As well as producing the portrait of Mehmet II now in the National Gallery in London, Bellini and his workshop came back with numbers of drawings, three of which were used by Pinturicchio and his workshop in frescoes in the *Sala dei Santi*.<sup>209</sup>

There had been a steady flow of Greek scholars migrating to Italy earlier in the fifteenth century, but the fall of Constantinople resulted in a further surge.

The rise of Islamic influence to the east of the Italian peninsula during this period was accompanied by a decline of Islamic influence to the west in Rodrigo Borgia's native Spain, culminating in the reconquering of Granada in 1492 after centuries of Islamic occupation and rule. The uniting of the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon by the marriage of Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon in 1469 brought about the creation of the kingdom of Spain and gave impetus to the move to end rule by the Moors. The capitulation took place on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1491, St Katherine's feast day which may have influenced Rodrigo Borgia's interest in devoting the largest wall of the *Sala dei Santi* to this saint.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), pp. 126, 127.

<sup>206</sup> See the commentary by Geoffrey Parker in: Johann Burchard, *At the Court of the Borgia, being an Account of the Reign of Pope Alexander VI written by his Master of Ceremonies*, trans. & ed. Geoffrey Parker, (London, Folio Society, 1963), p. 60.

<sup>207</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)*, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, p. 329.

<sup>208</sup> Deborah Howard, 'Venice, the Bazaar of Europe' in Caroline Campbell, Alan Chong, (eds.) *Bellini and the East*, (London, National Gallery, 2005), p. 12.

<sup>209</sup> Caroline Campbell and Alan Chong, 'Bellini in Istanbul' in Caroline Campbell, Alan Chong, (eds.) *Bellini and the East*, (London, National Gallery, 2005), pp. 98–105.

<sup>210</sup> N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's *Sala dei Santi*', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, p. 296.

The forty years from 1454 to 1494, from the Peace of Lodi and the resulting Italic League to the invasion by King Charles VIII, was a period of political equilibrium and relative peace through much of Italy. The peace of Lodi was initially an agreement between Milan and Venice but was soon joined by Florence then Naples and eventually the Papal States.

One complication during this period was the status of the Kingdom of Naples which had been part of the Kingdom of Aragon. Pope Eugenius IV had allowed Naples to be passed on to Alfonso of Aragon's illegitimate son Ferrante, on Alfonso's death. Pope Callixtus III, who had been born in Aragon and served previous kings of Aragon in his younger days, had been instrumental in bringing about this agreement with Eugenius. Once pope, Callixtus fell out with Alfonso and resisted this succession, but died before this could take effect.<sup>211</sup> Relationships between the papacy and King Ferrante of Naples continued to be strained, and in the 1492 conclave Ferrante backed Cardinal della Rovere against Cardinal Borgia.<sup>212</sup> Pope Innocent VIII had encouraged Charles VIII's claim on the throne of Naples and this meant that there was an ever present threat from the French king. This eventually resulted in Charles's 1494 invasion of Italy, including Rome, around the time that the decoration of the Appartamento Borgia was probably being completed.<sup>213</sup>

Rodrigo Borgia was elevated to pope at a time when the power of the papacy was high. Crusades were being talked of, but there had been no significant action since the abortive 1464 attempt. The authority of the Catholic Church was still broadly respected across much of Europe and the discontent that was to lead to the Reformation was not yet greatly manifest.

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<sup>211</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), p. 73.

<sup>212</sup> See the commentary by Geoffrey Parker in: Johann Burchard, *At the Court of the Borgia, being an Account of the Reign of Pope Alexander VI written by his Master of Ceremonies*, trans. & ed. Geoffrey Parker, (London, Folio Society, 1963), p. 37.

<sup>213</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)*, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, pp. 448–482 and N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, p. 316 n. 82.

## 2.6 Intellectual and humanistic context

The development of humanistic thought in the quattrocento was founded on the revival of antiquity.<sup>214</sup> Cicero used the Latin word *humanitas* to describe a set of cultural values that a good man should be equipped with, and would result from following the *studia humanitatis*.<sup>215</sup> Interest in ancient civilisations had been only slowly progressing but by the trecento a movement had begun to build some momentum.<sup>216</sup> Particularly in Padua and then Verona knowledge of Roman literature and poetry grew.

Petrarch has often been called the father of Renaissance humanism.<sup>217</sup> Educated in law in Bologna, where he came under the influence of Padua notaries, he spent the first half of his life in and around Vaucluse, close to Avignon where the Curia, the pope and above all the papal library were situated. He was devoted to Cicero, even unearthing and translating some hitherto unknown Ciceronian texts. It was Cicero who had praised Socrates thus:

Socrates however (was the) first (who) called philosophy down from heaven, and placed it in cities, and introduced it even in homes, and drove (it) to inquire about life and customs and things good and evil.<sup>218</sup>

This was one of the principles of the development of Renaissance humanism, the bringing of philosophy and ideas to a wider discussion based on human as well as religious values.

Interest in antiquity was not confined to academic circles. Particularly in Rome where classical Roman buildings, ruins and sites were ubiquitous, the public had sufficient awareness of classical times to support Cola di Rienzo's insurrection in 1347, his attempt to be appointed as the new Roman Tribune, his wish to unify Italy in a move to bring back the power and value of the Roman Empire. In this he was supported by Petrarch, but eventually defeated by the established families of Rome, in particular the Colonna. The popular interest in ancient Rome did not extend to an

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<sup>214</sup> For a fuller exposition see Roberto Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity*, (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1969).

<sup>215</sup> Nicholas Mann, 'The origins of humanism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* ed. Jill Krayer, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 1.

<sup>216</sup> Roberto Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity*, (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1969), p. 17.

<sup>217</sup> Nicholas Mann, 'The origins of humanism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* ed. Jill Krayer, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 8.

<sup>218</sup> 'Socrates autem primus philosophiam devocavit e caelo et in urbibus conlocavit et in domus etiam introduxit et coegit de vita et moribus rebusque bonis et malis quaerere.' Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* Liber V, 4, (10) : M. Tullius Cicero, *Tusculanarum Disputationum*, vol. 5, ed. Raphael Kühner, (Ianeae, Frommann, 1853), p. 399.

interest in preserving the Roman ruins, the decay of which was recorded by Petrarch and others. An appetite for things ancient was echoed in Alexander VI's coronation procession which included a depiction of Roma holding the papal tiara with a bull at her side.<sup>219</sup>

Petrarch's study of ancient material extended to coins but only to a nascent interest in epigraphy, despite the ready availability of extant inscriptions. Boccaccio's interest in inscriptions went beyond those in Latin to some in Greek.<sup>220</sup> By Petrarch's own admission he was 'deaf to Homer', that is he had no direct access to Greek, but relied on sparsely available competence in Greek translation.<sup>221</sup>

Until the quattrocento knowledge of Greek in Italy was broadly confined to areas in the south and to Sicily. One benefit which came from the East West schism, was that attempts at its reconciliation brought Greek scholars from Byzantium to Italy. At the Council of Basel–Ferrara–Florence (1431–1449) emperor John VIII Palaeologus's theological advisors included Marcus Eugenius and George Scholarius, who both returned to Constantinople, and Gemistus Pletho who, with Cardinal Bessarion, remained in or returned to Italy.<sup>222</sup>

Pletho, a strong advocate of Plato, became close to the Medici family in Florence and influenced the setting up of the Platonic academy there.<sup>223</sup> He bears some responsibility for the advance of Platonist thought in contrast to the Aristotelian based scholasticism which had so powerfully influenced late medieval thought and teaching. He also encouraged the study and translation of Neoplatonist thinking and thinkers, such as the Egyptian Plotinus, and opened the way for other influences on Christianity from pagan and natural magic.<sup>224</sup>

Pletho's student Bessarion was to have a more direct influence on the Catholic Church, and as a cardinal came close to defeating Callixtus in the papal conclave of 1455.<sup>225</sup> His *Oratio ad princeps*

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<sup>219</sup> Fritz Saxl, *Lectures*, (London, Warburg Institute, University of London, 1957), vol. 1, p. 181.

<sup>220</sup> Roberto Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity*, (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1969), p. 44.

<sup>221</sup> Mary Jaeger, *Archimedes and the Roman Imagination*, (Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 2008), p. 203 n. 14.

<sup>222</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)* (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, pp. 60–62.

<sup>223</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'The Platonic Academy of Florence', *Renaissance News*, vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn, 1961), pp. 147–159 and James Hankins, 'Cosimo de' Medici and the "Platonic Academy"', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 53, 1990, pp. 144–162.

<sup>224</sup> Henri D. Saffrey 'Renaissance Florence, 1492: The Reappearance of Plotinus' *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 49, No. 3, Autumn, 1996, p. 490.

<sup>225</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)*, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, p. 162.

*Italiae de periculis imminentibus* of 1471 explained the inevitability of the Ottoman threat.<sup>226</sup> A less forthright supporter of Plato than was Pletho, he nonetheless defended Plato against Aristotelian attack in *In Calumniatorem Platonis*.<sup>227</sup> His house in Rome became a meeting point for those interested in such matters and in Bessarion's library.<sup>228</sup> Bessarion's influence on the Florence Academy was far less than that of Pletho, but his bequeathing of his collection of Latin and Greek manuscripts to Venice was a significant contribution to the availability of Greek texts in Italy.<sup>229</sup>

Over the previous four centuries many universities had been established in Italy, notably at Bologna, Padua, Naples, Florence and the Sapienza in Rome. Development of humanistic ideas tended to occur more in groups of individuals meeting together in private houses, sometimes associated with universities, sometimes not, sometimes based around a particular individual, sometimes focussed on a particular theme.<sup>230</sup> These went under a number of different names, such as *sodalitia*, but were sometimes referred to at the time and are often referred to now as academies, with notable academies in Padua, Naples, Rome and Florence. Of particular potential relevance to the Sala dei Santi frescoes would be those at Rome and Florence.

In Rome Pomponio Leto established an academy with some of the attendees overlapping with the group which had attended Bessarion. Leto's academy organised poetry recitals and oratorical displays, but its members increasingly began to explore and engage in epicurean and pagan practices, leading to Pope Pius II closing down the academy in 1468 and arresting the members.<sup>231</sup> Bessarion defended Leto after his extradition and led the call for his reinstatement.<sup>232</sup> A less wayward, more religious, Roman Academy was re-established in 1478 under Pope Sixtus IV.<sup>233</sup>

It was the Florentine Academy which advanced humanistic and more specifically Platonic thinking more than any other academy, and which embraced ancient non-Christian influences on Christianity.

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<sup>226</sup> James Hankins 'Humanism and modern political thought' in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 123.

<sup>227</sup> James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*. vol. 1, (Leiden, Brill, 1990), pp. 217–263.

<sup>228</sup> James Hankins, 'Humanist academies and the "Platonic Academy of Florence."' in *Proceedings of the conference, "From the Roman Academy to the Danish Academy in Rome,"* ed. H. Ragn Jensen and M. Pade. *Analecta Romana Instituti*, (Forthcoming) pp. 6–9

<sup>229</sup> Roberto Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Antiquity*, (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1969), p. 79.

<sup>230</sup> James Hankins, 'Humanist academies and the "Platonic Academy of Florence."' in *Proceedings of the conference, "From the Roman Academy to the Danish Academy in Rome,"* ed. H. Ragn Jensen and M. Pade. *Analecta Romana Instituti*, (Forthcoming), pp. 1–33.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9–12

<sup>232</sup> James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*. vol. 1, (Leiden, Brill, 1990), p. 213

<sup>233</sup> Charles L. Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press 1998), p. 8.



Founded and supported by the Medici family, the programme of the academy was at first greatly influenced by the direction of Cosimo de' Medici.<sup>234</sup> It was he who encouraged the study of ancient writers, particularly Plato and the ancient Neo-Platonists, and who searched out, acquired and made available Greek texts. It was he who supported Marsilio Ficino's education and established him in a position to lead the Florentine Academy. Ficino's work of translation of Greek texts into Latin was initially directed by Cosimo's wishes as Cosimo acquired new texts.<sup>235</sup> Thus Ficino's translations of Plato were interrupted around 1463 so as to translate the Hermetic Corpus, which was purported to be of ancient Egyptian origin.

Ficino and his fellow academicians, who included Poliziano, Cristoforo Landino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, produced a range of exegeses and translations from the Greek of Platonic authors, but their interests encompassed wider subjects of ancient writers and mysteries. Ficino's own writings testify to his interest in astrology, natural magic and various ancient theologies.<sup>236</sup> Pico della Mirandola developed a profound knowledge of the Jewish Cabala.<sup>237</sup> The academy tried to reconcile these non-Christian views with Christianity rather than set them in opposition to each other. There was a belief in an underlying *prisca theologia* and that a syncretising of ancient mystical beliefs and Platonism with Christianity would strengthen Christianity.<sup>238</sup> The church at the time did not always concur.

Pico brought together a wide selection of these influences and in 1486 produced his 900 theses which he was prepared to defend against all who would argue with him. He published, as an introduction, his *De hominis dignitate*. Promulgating, as it does, systems of thought that the church considered bordering on heretical, these 900 theses attracted the attention of the church and Pope Innocent VIII had little choice but to set up a commission to look into them. Pico published an

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<sup>234</sup> Our main source of information on the history and early years of Ficino's Academy is Ficino's 1490 introduction to his translation of Plotinus's *Enneads*, a translation of which is in James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, (Leiden, Brill, 1990), vol. 1, pp. 150, 151. Hankins cautions against overreliance on this account.

<sup>235</sup> Henri D. Saffrey 'Renaissance Florence, 1492: The Reappearance of Plotinus' *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 49, No. 3, Autumn, 1996, p. 490.

<sup>236</sup> Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, (1964; repr. London, Routledge, 2002), Chapters 1–5.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 5.

<sup>238</sup> Henri D. Saffrey 'Renaissance Florence, 1492: The Reappearance of Plotinus' *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 49, No. 3, Autumn, 1996, p. 497.

apology in 1487 and the pope issued a bull condemning the theses and their publication, but exonerating Pico. Nevertheless Pico fled to exile in France, pursued by papal nuncios.<sup>239</sup>

Ficino's *De vita libri tres*, which was circulated in manuscript and then published in December 1489, was ostensibly about medical matters but included writings on astrology and magic. It was only by the intervention of his friends that he was protected from sanctions by the Curia and Pope Innocent VIII.<sup>240</sup>

An interest in Egyptian antiquity pervades much of the work of the Florentine Academy. This interest was in thought and writing in Egyptian antiquity more than in any physical remnants.<sup>241</sup> There were Egyptian antiquities on display in Rome but these seem to have attracted less attention from the academies. As well as the Hermetic Corpus and Plotinus the academy also translated and studied Porphyry and Iamblichus, both of whom were ancient writers on Egyptian religious and mystical practices. Writings about Egypt had been undergoing something of a revival over the previous century. Manuscript translations of Plutarch's *Moralia* (which included his *De Iside et Osiride*) had been circulating since the beginning of the century as had early translations of Diodorus Siculus's *Histories* (which had included his writings on Egyptian practices). Poggio's translation of the first five books of Diodorus was published in 1472 and two years later so was Valla's translation of Herodotus.<sup>242</sup>

One attraction of these subjects to the Florentine Academy was that some of the reported Egyptian practices fitted well with the academician's interest in ritual as a way of getting closer to God or gods. Their interest extended beyond theology, god knowledge or god talk, to theurgy, god working. This encompasses the use of elements of magic and magic ritual to procure communication with the gods and gain miraculous benefits. Much of the literature on Egyptian practices highlighted such activities and attempted to explain or justify them.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, (1964; repr. London, Routledge, 2002), pp. 90–121.

<sup>240</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'Marsilio Ficino and the Roman Curia' in *Journal of Neo-Latin Studies*, vol. 34a Humanistica Lovaniensia, Leuven, 1985, p. 94.

<sup>241</sup> See Saffrey's translation of Ficino's introduction to the Enneads: Henri D. Saffrey 'Renaissance Florence, 1492: The Reappearance of Plotinus' *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 49, No. 3, Autumn, 1996, p. 497.

<sup>242</sup> Brian Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance, The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 89.

<sup>243</sup> For example, Iamblichus and Porphyry corresponded about Iamblichus' support for, and Porphyry's opposition to, theurgy. On this subject see Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, trans. & ed. Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell, (Atlanta, GA., Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), p. xxxv.

## 2.7 Chapter summary

The commissioner of these frescoes, Pope Alexander VI, brought with him an allegiance to his Spanish heritage, elements of which were fabricated, a greater accommodation of the Ottomans and a commitment to the display and advancement of his own family. No great intellectual, he nonetheless supported learning and humanism and was more tolerant of less orthodox religious beliefs than were his predecessors. He was not a great commissioner of art, but took care to ensure that his own surroundings were pleasant to look at. There is some basis for his posthumous reputation for having led a licentiousness and simoniacal life, but this was not greatly out of the ordinary for the time. This reputation nonetheless contributed to these frescoes being hidden away and ignored for many years. During his life, the rooms of the Appartamento Borgia were used as his living quarters and for receiving more honoured guests.

Pinturicchio was most probably known to Rodrigo Borgia and to others in the Vatican, so his being commissioned would have been a natural choice. This commission came at a time in his stylistic development when he was innovating with the introduction of antique elements in his work.

Political and ecclesiastical matters at the time the frescoes were commissioned were dominated by the threat to the Catholic Church from the advance of the Ottoman Empire, which had only left the Italian peninsula in 1482. Attempts to reconcile the East-West schism in the church, particularly the Council of Basel–Ferrara–Florence, and the fall of Constantinople had both led to the greater availability of Greek texts and to a surge in interest in translating Greek into Latin.

Intellectual and humanistic matters at this time reflected heightened interest in ancient knowledge. A number of academies had been initiated over previous years, of which Ficino's Platonic Academy, created in Florence under the auspices of the Medici, was one of the most active. Ficino and his followers were engaged in translating ancient texts and looking at how this ancient knowledge could be syncretised with Christian thought.

## Chapter 3: Iconographical commentary on the wall frescoes

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the iconography of the frescoes on the six walls in the context of their relevance to the Egyptian theme on the ceiling. It seeks to find elements which may help in the iconological analysis of an overall theme to the room.

The decision to have a selection of saints in this room would seem unremarkable. The preceding room in the sequence shows the Joys of the Virgin and the subsequent room portrays the liberal arts. The Sala dei Santi may be seen as a transition between a purely Christian, New Testament, theme and an essentially humanistic rather than Christian theme.

The six walls show:

- St Mary, the mother of Christ, (*The Visitation*)
- Saints Anthony Abbot and Paul the First Hermit
- St Katherine of Alexandria (*Disputa*)
- St Barbara
- Susanna and the Elders
- St Sebastian

Poeschel has produced a plan that shows which saint appears on which wall (fig. 3.1)

Saxl, amongst others refers to these three rooms as showing the seven joys, the seven saints and the seven arts. In the Sala dei Santi showing seven saints in six frescoes is achieved by putting both St Anthony Abbot and St Paul the Hermit in one fresco, although it could be argued that the appearance of Saints Joseph and Elisabeth in the Visitation would raise the count to nine.

The four side lunettes, of St Anthony and St Paul, St Barbara, St Susanna and *The Visitation* have little apparent connection with the Egyptian theme so are not covered in great detail in this chapter. The larger frescoes of St Sebastian and St Katherine warrant greater attention and so are afforded greater length. The fresco of St Katherine in particular will be shown to have relevance to the Egyptian theme so is considered in more detail.

### 3.2 *The Visitation*

The fresco of *The Visitation* is the first lunette to be seen by a visitor entering the Sala dei Santi, it being on the wall opposite the entrance door (fig. 3.2).

Progress through the rooms would start from the Sala die Pontefici, a large reception room, through the Sala dei Misteri (room of the Seven Joys of the Virgin,) into the Sala dei Santi. The subject of the Virgin in the Visitation follows naturally from the previous room. Some versions of the Seven Joys of the Virgin include the Visitation.<sup>244</sup> Steinmann suggests that this fresco was left over from the Sala dei Misteri.<sup>245</sup>

The story of the Visitation is found in the Bible only in the Gospel of St Luke (Luke 1: 39–56). It was widely represented in the Middle Ages, usually as part of a narrative. It began to appear as the subject in a standalone altarpiece only towards the end of the trecento, for instance there is an example by Bartolo di Fredi (fig. 3.3). As well as being a story from the Bible, the Visitation was also a significant Marian feast celebrated on 2<sup>nd</sup> July. It has been celebrated by the Franciscans on the recommendation of St Bonaventure but had been instituted in the church calendar at the Council of Basel–Ferrara–Florence in 1441.<sup>246</sup>

Mary and Elisabeth are shown outside of the portico of a building, taken to be the house of Zacharias, husband of Elisabeth, whereas St Luke describes them as meeting indoors. Since medieval times few renderings of the Visitation have shown the meeting taking place indoors. Mary and Elisabeth are shown half embracing and holding hands, Mary's eyes downcast, fitting with her self-perception as of low estate according to St Luke. Elisabeth looks straight into Mary's eyes. In some later versions of this subject Elisabeth is shown kneeling, subservient to Mary. Ghirlandaio had executed a panel version of the Visitation in 1491 showing Elisabeth kneeling, (fig. 3.4) whereas between 1485 and 1490 he had shown her in a fresco standing (fig 3.5).

To the left of Mary is Joseph, his hands resting on his staff and a bag at his waist. The presence of Joseph is not mentioned by St Luke, but it is unlikely that Mary would have travelled without him. He

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<sup>244</sup> Madeline Pelter Cosman & Linda Gale Jones, *Handbook To Life In The Medieval World*, (New York, Infobase, 2008), p. 333.

<sup>245</sup> Ernst Steinmann, *Pinturicchio*, (Bielefeld, Velhagen & Klasing, 1898), p. 60.

<sup>246</sup> Helen Rosenau, 'A Study in the Iconography of the Incarnation' in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, vol. 85, No. 496, Jul., 1944, p. 179.

is shown as early as 1280 in a small panel by Deodato di Orlando now in the Gemäldegalerie (Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz), Berlin, but increasingly in the cinquecento he was present.<sup>247</sup>

To the right a figure stands in the portico reading a book, most likely Zacharias, husband of Elisabeth. He was a temple priest, struck dumb when the angel Gabriel announced to him that his elderly wife would conceive.

Looking down from a balcony on the portico are two female characters, one holding a distaff. These most likely represent the half-sisters of Mary, namely Mary daughter of Clopas and Mary daughter of Salome according to the 'Nativity of Our Lady' in the *Golden Legend*.<sup>248</sup>

The girl near the left of the fresco carrying a basket on her head, is executed in the style of Botticelli.<sup>249</sup> The fruit in her basket may represent the fruitfulness of the two wombs. Behind her is a group of six men wearing a variety of head wear, some of oriental nature. The leftmost of this group is paler than the rest and looking straight at the viewer, suggesting it might be a self-portrait of a member of Pinturicchio's workshop.

Through the portico can be seen two background scenes. To the right of the head of Zacharias is a scene of someone being killed. Between the heads of Mary and Joseph a group of figures are travelling with a young child. These two scenes would at first appear to be a portrayal of the Massacre of the Innocents and the Flight into Egypt, but Parks gives a more convincing explanation that the travellers are Zacharias, St Elisabeth and John the Baptist fleeing the soldiers of Herod.<sup>250</sup> If that is accepted then the violent scene on the right would be the slaying of Zacharias. These two events are to be found in the apocryphal Gospel of St James.<sup>251</sup>

Two animals can be seen in this lunette. First is a small dog with which a small boy is playing just in front of the group of women on the right hand side. Secondly, and prominently, there is a cat between Joseph and Mary, looking at the viewer and looking slightly misplaced. The significance of this cat is uncertain. There is some history of conflating the Egyptian cat god Bastet with Isis who

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<sup>247</sup> Ira Westergård, 'Which Narrative? The Case of the Narrative Subject in Fifteenth-Century Altarpieces' in 'The Travelling Concept of Narrative, vol. 1', ed Matti Hyvärinen, Anu Korhonen & Juri Mykkänen. *Collegium: Studies across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences 1*. (Helsinki University, 2006), p. 72.

<sup>248</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Caxton, ed. F. S. Ellis, (London, Dent 1900), pp. 97, 98.

<sup>249</sup> Pietro Scarpellini. 'L'infaticabile capocantiere' in *Pinturicchio* by Pietro Scarpellini e Maria Rita Silvestrelli (Milan, Federico Motta Editore, 2004), p. 180.

<sup>250</sup> N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, p. 306, n. 8.

<sup>251</sup> Loc. cit.,

features elsewhere in this room.<sup>252</sup> It may possibly be a reference to the *gatta della Madonna*, a tradition that in the stable of the Nativity a cat gave birth to a litter of kittens at the same time as Christ's birth although in no portrayals of the Nativity by Pinturicchio does the *gatta della Madonna* ever appear.<sup>253</sup> A third possibility is that working on this fresco was Bartolomeo della Gatta who put this in as a small self-reference. Vasari tells us that he was working with Signorelli and Perugino on the Sistine Chapel (around 1481) so would have been known to Pinturicchio. Bartolomeo's work as a painter is not well documented after 1487.<sup>254</sup>

The portico has four roundels, two with two horsemen. The capitals of the columns of the portico are in prominent gilded stucco relief as is the upper part of the entablature. The pillars are adorned with grotesques, the central pillar having the word 'ALEX' painted near the top.

Depictions of *The Visitation* were common in this period so the presence of this one in this room seems unexceptional, albeit there is no obvious logic for its presence. This version is slightly unusual for the large number of figures in the picture. There is no other record of Pinturicchio painting this subject elsewhere.

### **3.3 St Antony Abbot's Meeting with St Paul the Hermit**

Between *The Visitation*, and the *Disputa* of St Katherine is a portrayal of St Antony Abbot's meeting with St Paul the Hermit, (fig. 3.6). The lives of both saints are recorded in Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, but most knowledge of St Anthony derives from Athanasius of Alexandria's *Life of St Anthony*, dating from the early fourth century AD.<sup>255</sup> This meeting is described in the *Golden Legend* account of the life of St Paul the Hermit, but the fresco conflates some other elements from the life of St Anthony.<sup>256</sup>

As the 'Father of Monasticism', although not the first Christian monk, St Anthony and elements from his life had been extensively painted. Portrayals of the meeting with St Paul are less well known, but

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<sup>252</sup> R. E. Witt, *Isis in the Ancient World*, (Baltimore, John Hopkins University, 1997), p. 30.

<sup>253</sup> George Ferguson, *Signs & Symbols in Christian Art*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 14.

<sup>254</sup> Alberto Martini, 'The Early Work of Bartolomeo della Gatta' *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 42, No. 2 (Jun., 1960), pp. 133–141.

<sup>255</sup> A brief version of the key elements of the life of St Anthony is to be found in: Ellis K. Waterhouse, 'Sassetta and the Legend of St. Antony Abbot', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, vol. 59, No. 342 (Sep., 1931), pp. 108, 109.

<sup>256</sup> Jacobus De Voragine *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, (Princeton Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 84, 85.

the version by Sassetta/The Master of the Osservanza (Sano di Pietro?), (fig. 3.7), now in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, dates from around the mid-1430s.<sup>257</sup>

The two saints are seated together at the centre of the Sala dei Santi fresco, St Paul on the left and St Anthony on the right. They are seen breaking a loaf between them. To the left of St Paul are three devil women, temptresses in the form of young women but with horns, one woman with claw feet another with black wings. These temptresses are not specifically mentioned in either the *Golden Legend* or in Athanasius's *Life of St Anthony*, although Jacobus de Voragine does mention him being savaged by devils with teeth, horns and claws, and his overcoming the devils of incontinence.<sup>258</sup> The temptations of St Anthony was a common subject for religious paintings, with attractive women often featuring as in the case of Bosch and Patinir.<sup>259</sup>

Above St Paul and the temptresses flies away a raven which in the *Golden Legend* is described as having fed St Paul and later the two saints.<sup>260</sup>

St Anthony is clothed in a simple tunic with unusual basket weave parquet patterning and is clutching a closed book. To his right stands a bearded figure holding a Tau walking stick, an attribute of St Anthony. Behind this figure is another male figure, clean shaven and short haired, seemingly out of place. St Anthony's other attribute, a bell, hangs from the rock behind him.

The two saints are breaking a loaf, which is at slight variance with the *Golden Legend* account and could be a metaphor for Christ's breaking of bread at the last supper.<sup>261</sup>

There are tentative connections between this fresco and the two that flank it. Apart from the physical and temporal proximity of the events in this fresco and those in the *Disputa*, according to the *Golden Legend*, St Anthony used to follow the Christians being martyred by Emperor Maximian

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<sup>257</sup> John Pope-Hennessy, 'Rethinking Sassetta' *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 98, No. 643, Italian Paintings and Drawings (Oct., 1956), pp. 364–370. Pope-Hennessy discusses the identity of the painter of this cycle and whether it is the same as the Osservanza Master. The Washington National Gallery of Art identifies this panel as being by 'Master of the Osservanza (Sano di Pietro?)' < <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.436.html> > Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2014.

<sup>258</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Selections*, trans. Christopher Stace, (London, Penguin, 1998), p. 45.

<sup>259</sup> Joachim Patinir also, separately painted on panel a version of the meeting of St Anthony and St Paul. See: Robert Koch, 'Joachim Patinir's "Meeting of Sts Anthony and Paul in the Wilderness"', *The Burlington Magazine*, 138, March 1996, pp. 181–182. It was only much later that the likes of Dollman, Fantin-Latour, Cezanne and Dali used this as an opportunity to display female nakedness.

<sup>260</sup> Jacobus De Voragine *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 85.

<sup>261</sup> Loc.cit.



in the vain hope of being martyred himself. Maximinian was the father of Maxentius who is pictured in the *Disputa*.<sup>262</sup>

The proximity of this fresco to *The Visitation* has a precursor in Piero di Cosimo's panel painting of the Visitation from around 1490, now in the National Gallery of Washington (fig. 3.8). The theme of meeting is common to the adjacent frescoes of the St Anthony and St Paul, and of *The Visitation*.

### 3.4 *The Flight of St Barbara*

Facing the lunette of Sts Anthony and Paul is the lunette of St Barbara depicted in the story to be found in later versions of the *Golden Legend* and in Vincent de Beauvais's book *Speculum Historiale* (fig. 3.9).<sup>263</sup> She is shown in the left foreground, with halo, in front of the three windowed tower that is her attribute, fleeing but looking back and upwards. In the right foreground is her turbaned father, Dioscorus, holding the scimitar with which he will later behead her, looking in the opposite direction from her.

In the centre, just in front of the tower but set back slightly from the two protagonists, stand two men. One wears a helmet and some armour and is holding Dioscorus's blue cloak. The other wears a breastplate and holds a rod-like implement. It would seem reasonable to assume that these two are the servants in the employ of Dioscorus described in the story.

The tower shows the third window as an additional storey. The building has a substantial rent up one side. Just above the door to the tower is a small Borgia crest.

To the left of the tower and in the background is St Barbara being led by the hand by another female saint (her halo is showing). It is not clear who the saint is. St Juliana is reputed to have been martyred at the same time as St Barbara, part of the same persecution of Christians in Nicodemia by Maximinian, but the idea of her leading St Barbara away does not fit with the known stories of St Barbara and this figure does not display any of St Juliana's attributes. Crow and Cavalcaselle in their *History of Painting in Italy* write:

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<sup>262</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Selections*, trans. Christopher Stace, (London, Penguin, 1998), pp. 45, 46.

<sup>263</sup> Vincent de Beauvais, *Speculum Historiale*, (Liechtenstein, Hermannus, 1494), XII, 64

The wall to the left [of the *Disputà*] contains the Martyrdom of SS. Barbara and Giuliana, and St. Barbara flying from her father. A fountain in the former is raised and gilt. The St. Barbara in the latter is graceful, slender, and rather affected.<sup>264</sup>

However it is not clear whether they are suggesting that this figure is St Juliana or the depiction in the adjacent lunette, now generally accepted to be of Susanna and the Elders and with a raised gilt fountain, is of St Juliana.

The choice of St Barbara is intriguing. She is widely depicted around this time, often in Northern Europe and often with St Katherine.<sup>265</sup> In one example from around 1440/60 she is shown in the company of St Katherine, St Anthony Abbot and St John the Baptist, all of whom are to be found in the Sala dei Santi, albeit St John the Baptist is possibly just a minor background figure in the *Visitation* in this room (fig. 3.10). Some versions, such as Ghirlandaio's fresco of around 1471 (Church of St Andrea, Cercina) show her standing on a vanquished Saracen, assumed to be her father (fig. 3.11). St Barbara was one of the more venerated amongst the early Christian martyrs. Her life stood for fortitude and the tower stood for strength.<sup>266</sup>

Some stories suggest that St Barbara was born in Heliopolis, which would echo the Egyptian theme of the desert hermit saints, the *Disputà* and the ceiling frescoes.<sup>267</sup>

### 3.5 *Susanna and the Elders*

This lunette is directly above the door which connects with the preceding room, the Sala dei Misteri (fig. 3.12). Set just below the lunette it is a tondo of the Virgin and Child which some have suggested is the portrayal of the 18 year old Giulia Farnese, mistress of the Pope, mentioned by Vasari.<sup>268</sup> This suggestion is insecure.

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<sup>264</sup> Joseph Archer Crow & Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, *A New History of Painting in Italy*, vol. 3, ed. Edward Hutton, (London, Dent, 1909), p. 268.

<sup>265</sup> Stijn Alsteens, 'The mystic marriage of St Catherine', in *Man, Myth, and Sensual Pleasures: Jan Gossart's Renaissance: the Complete Works*, ed. Maryan Wynn Ainsworth, (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010), p. 318.

<sup>266</sup> Carmen Gomez-Moreno, 'Classical and Christian Symbolism: An Early Renaissance Female Saint from Augsburg', *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, vol. 19/20 (1984/1985), pp. 31–37

<sup>267</sup> George Ferguson, *Signs and symbols in Christian Art*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1961), p.107.

<sup>268</sup> Pietro Scarpellini, 'L'infaticabile capocantiere' in *Pintoricchio* by Pietro Scarpellini e Maria Rita Silvestrelli (Milan, Federico Motta Editore, 2004), p. 181.

The story of Susanna and the elders is to be found in the Book of Daniel in the Bible, but is considered by some to be a later addition.<sup>269</sup> The Protestant tradition considers it to be apocryphal. Doubts about the original language in which the story was written date back to the third century AD when Origen discussed the matter with Julius Africanus.<sup>270</sup> A key element of the story occurs when Daniel interrogates the two elders. Their accounts diverge in relating under which tree they claimed to have seen Susanna with her purported lover. One claims it to have been a mastic tree, the other a holm. This part of the story involves a convoluted pun which only works in Greek, however it has been suggested that this element may have been added by a translator.<sup>271</sup>

From the cinquecento onwards, this story has been used as an opportunity to display a naked or near naked female form. The story relates that Susanna was naked when seen by the elders and in her trial they demand that she be uncovered, so this and the story of David seeing Bathsheba naked gave biblical justification for the display of female nudity in situations where it might otherwise be deemed inappropriate. Two examples are by Lorenzo Lotto 1517 (fig. 3.13), and Orazio Samacchini, 1532–1577 (fig. 3.14).

Depictions of the Susanna story include the Lothair crystal from ninth century North West Europe, but around the middle to late quattrocento the subject became popular on *cassone* panels, perhaps appropriate for wedding *cassoni*.<sup>272</sup> Two examples by Domenico di Michelino (fig. 3.15 and fig. 3.16) provide an interesting contrast. The Avignon example, believed to have been executed around 1450 for a Strozzi-Bonsi wedding, shows Susanna near naked but with some diaphanous cloth about her and her breasts obscured whereas the Rutgers example show her entirely naked.<sup>273</sup> Of particular note in the Avignon version is the radiating halo around the head of Susanna, implying sainthood.

Approximately contemporaneous with the Sala dei Santi are two panels by The Master of Apollo and Daphne in Chicago (fig. 3.17) and Liverpool (fig. 3.18). In the Chicago panel Susanna is near naked in a pose reminiscent of the later *Birth of Venus*, circa 1486, by Botticelli, whereas in the Liverpool panel Susanna is largely covered up by a length of cloth, although an item of her clothing is to be seen on the ground nearby.

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<sup>269</sup> Alison Salvesen, 'The Growth of the Apocrypha' in J. W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 508, 509.

<sup>270</sup> Samuel Tobias Lachs, 'A Note on the Original Language of Susanna' *The Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series*, vol. 69, No. 1 (Jul., 1978), pp. 52–54.

<sup>271</sup> Frank Zimmermann, 'The Story of Susanna and Its Original Language' *The Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series*, vol. 48, No. 2, Dropsie College Jubilee Alumni Issue (Oct., 1957), pp. 236–24.

<sup>272</sup> C. L. Baskins, 'La Festa Di Susanna': Virtue on Trial in Renaissance Sacred Drama and Painted Wedding Chests. *Art History*, 14, (1991), pp. 329–344.

<sup>273</sup> See Dennis Geronimus, 'Arbitrating Artistry: The Case of Domenico di Michelino in 1483.' *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 144, No. 1196 (Nov., 2002), pp. 691–694.

Against these examples the Sala dei Santi version is intriguing. For a patron with a reputation for licentiousness it is at first surprising that Susanna is almost entirely clothed. Her discarded outer garment is highlighted in gilded stucco as are the architectonic elements on the fountain, a fountain that is impractical for bathing. This emphasis on her discarded garment suggests her disrobement rather than her disrobed state is important. In the background scenes the two elders are seen in a state of near nakedness prior to their execution.

The vulgate version of the text from Daniel, on which the painters might have been expected to rely, describes the siting of the events as behind closed doors in a garden or orchard (*pomarium*).<sup>274</sup> Other artists have shown a door or gate and fruit trees, neither of which is shown here. The varied fauna that are here represented, deer, rabbits, a hare, a monkey are unusual in representations of these events, although the Rutgers Michelino (fig. 3.16) does show one deer. Rabbits, hares and monkeys are used elsewhere to symbolise lust so here may be a commentary on the elders' actions.

That Susanna is here regarded as a saint is made clear by the halo she is accorded. Saxl suggest that 'Susanna as a saint is very rare in art, if not unique', but as the Avignon Michelino (fig. 3.15) demonstrates the Sala dei Santa portrayal of her as a saint is not unique.<sup>275</sup> The story is portrayed frequently in early Christian wall painting and sarcophagi mainly in the context of promoting marital chastity.<sup>276</sup> Other Old Testament saints were also venerated in early Christian circles.<sup>277</sup>

Nevertheless the choice of Susanna in this room is unusual and curious and there is no clear reasoning or justification for her inclusion. Parks' equation of Susanna with the Church imperilled, the garden referring to all souls in the church and the two elders representing the Jewish and Gentile nations seems Procrustean.<sup>278</sup> There are no apparent connections to any of the other frescoes in the room. It may be that as an image of chastity it was included to counter Pope Alexander VI's reputation at the time when he had just been elevated to the pontificate.

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<sup>274</sup> Vulg. Dan. 13: 4.

<sup>275</sup> Fritz Saxl, *Lectures*, (London, Warburg Institute, University of London, 1957), vol. 1, p. 177.

<sup>276</sup> Kathryn A. Smith, 'Inventing Marital Chastity: The Iconography of Susanna and the Elders in Early Christian Art', *Oxford Art Journal* vol. 16, No. 1 Oxford University Press (1993), pp. 3–24.

<sup>277</sup> Johannes Hahn, 'The Veneration of the Maccabean Brothers in Fourth Century Antioch: Religious Competition, Martyrdom, and Innovation' in *Dying for the Faith, Killing for the Faith*, ed. Signori, Gabriela. (Leiden, Brill, 2012), pp 79–104.

<sup>278</sup> N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, p. 294.

### 3.6 The Martyrdom of St Sebastian

The fresco of the martyrdom of St Sebastian is located on the northern wall of the Sala dei Santi (fig. 3.19). This thick wall is pierced by a deeply recessed window looking out onto the Cortile del Belvedere and beyond. The window recess also pierces the lower part of the fresco, but not quite centrally. This wall is on the right as one enters from the Sala dei Misteri, and is opposite the depiction of the *Disputa* of St Katherine. To the left is the fresco of the Visitation and to the right is the fresco of St Susanna. The vault above has the fresco of Osiris teaching the cultivation of the vine, the fourth image in the Isis, Osiris, Apis sequence.

There are two main sources for the story of St Sebastian, the *Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine and the account by St Ambrosius; the shorter *Golden Legend* account is probably the one used by Pinturicchio.<sup>279</sup>

Jacobus de Voragine describes how Sebastian was esteemed so highly by the emperors Diocletian and Maximian that they appointed him commander of the First Cohort, unaware that he was a Christian.<sup>280</sup> Sebastian converted a number of people in Rome to Christianity, upsetting Diocletian who ordered that he be shot to death with arrows. The arrows were insufficient to kill him so he

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<sup>279</sup> Taking the key section of text describing St Sebastian being shot with arrows, Ambrose reads as:

‘tunc posuerunt eum milites in medio campo, et hinc inde eum ita sagittis repleverunt, ut quasi hericius ita esset hirsutus ictibus sagittarum.’ – Saint Ambrose, ‘Admonitio in acta S. Sebastiani’ in *Patrologia Latina* Jacques-Paul Migne 1844-49 Paris vol. 17 pp. 1111–1150 (p. 1148).

<[http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0339-0397,\\_Ambrosius,\\_Acta\\_Sancti\\_Sebastiani\\_Martyris\\_%5BIncertus%5D,\\_MLT.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0339-0397,_Ambrosius,_Acta_Sancti_Sebastiani_Martyris_%5BIncertus%5D,_MLT.pdf)> (accessed 22 Nov 2014)

‘Then the soldiers put him in the middle of a field, and after that from where they were they filled him with arrows such that he looked like a hedgehog he was bristling with so many arrows.’ (author’s translation)

Whereas the Voragine text read as:

‘Tunc Diocletianus iussit eum in medium campum ligari et a militibus sagittari, qui ita eum sagittis impleverunt, ut quasi hericius videretur.’ – Jacobus (de Voragine), *Legenda Aurea*, ed. Johann Georg Theodor Grässe, (Impensis Librariae Arnoldianae, 1846), p. 112.

‘Then Diocletian ordered that he be tied up in the middle of a field and be shot at by soldiers who filled him with so many arrows that he looked like a hedgehog.’ (author’s translation)

Only in the Voragine version is he described as tied up, as he is in this fresco and in most depictions. There is nothing in the picture that requires the Ambrose version rather than the Voragine version.

<sup>280</sup> Diocletian split the Roman Empire in 285 AD between the eastern empire ruled by himself and the western empire ruled by Maximian. (The martyrdom of St Sebastian is generally given as taking place in 288 AD.) This diarchy was expanded to a tetrarchy in 293 AD with the two existing emperors elevated to the rank of Augustus and the appointment of two emperors of the rank Caesar, Constantius Chlorus assisting in the west and Galerius in the east. On the retirement of these two Augusti, in 305 AD the two Caesars were elevated to Augusti and two new Caesar emperors were appointed, Flavius Severus and Maximinus Daia. On Constantianus’s death in 306 AD Flavius Severus was elevated, and Constantianus’s son Constantine I became Caesar, and the following year Maximian’s son Maxentius appointed himself Caesar in Rome, deposing Severus. In 312 Constantine defeated Maxentius at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge to the north of Rome, and went on eventually to become sole emperor, the first Christian emperor of Rome and the founder of Constantinople.

returned to taunt the two emperors who then had him bludgeoned to death and thrown into a sewer whence his body was rescued by St Lucina, cleaned and given a proper burial.<sup>281</sup>

Veneration of St Sebastian was extensive. He was widely regarded as a protector against the plague, and is thus often portrayed alongside St Roch, the other great plague-protecting saint. His association with the plague derives from two possible reasons. It has been argued that the symptoms of the plague, buboes, resemble the wounds from an arrow.<sup>282</sup> The alternative connection is with Apollo who, according to the opening pages of Homer's *Iliad*, brought pestilence to the Grecian camp by firing numerous infected arrows.<sup>283</sup> The old belief that Apollo was protector against the plague was transferred to St Sebastian.<sup>284</sup> Voragine's account of St Sebastian recounts that St Gregory records an incident when the making of an altar to St Sebastian brought about the end of a bout of plague.

Protection against the plague in Rome was first attributed to St Sebastian in AD 680.<sup>285</sup> Churches dedicated to St Sebastian were later built either to protect against the plague or in gratitude for deliverance from the plague.<sup>286</sup> Whilst many paintings of St Sebastian were commissioned as protection from or in thanks for deliverance from, the plague, there is no reason to believe that this reason underlay the commissioning of this fresco. The most recent significant outbreak of the plague in Rome had been in 1449, although there had been an outbreak in 1489–90 in the Netherlands, and sporadic eruptions in Naples throughout the latter half of the fifteenth century.<sup>287</sup>

The association of St Sebastian with homosexuality has ancient roots, with the suggestion that this was why Diocletian appointed him to such high rank, and possibly was connected with his demise.<sup>288</sup> Associations of penetration of the male body may be relevant as might associations with a bound man being assaulted.

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<sup>281</sup> Jacobus De Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 100.

<sup>282</sup> Diane Zahler, *The Black Death*, (Breckenridge, Colorado, Twenty-First Century Books, 2009), p. 116.

<sup>283</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Lord Derby, (London, Dent, 1910), pp. 1–3.

<sup>284</sup> Joël Meyniel *Saint Sébastien et le symbolisme dans l'archerie traditionnelle*, (Fontaine, France, Éditions émotion primitive, 2005), p. 49.

<sup>285</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>286</sup> Meiss opines that the cult of St Sebastian was 'unimportant, however, at least in Tuscany, until after 1348.' Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 77.

<sup>287</sup> Joseph P. Byrne, *Encyclopedia of the Black Death*, (Santa Barbara, California, ABC-CLIO, 2012), pp. 315, 316.

<sup>288</sup> Joël Meyniel *Saint Sébastien et le symbolisme dans l'archerie traditionnelle*, (Fontaine, France, Éditions émotion primitive, 2005), p. 51.

Depictions of St Sebastian abound, with many artists called upon to paint him many times. One of the earliest that Pinturicchio would have seen was the seventh century Byzantine mosaic in the church of St Pietro in Vincoli (fig 3.20), depicting an old bearded man. Although there were the occasional representations of other scenes from the saint's life, such as his being nursed back to life, images of him pierced with arrows predominate. Even in the relatively unusual portrayals of cycles of his life, it is this scene which is to the fore, as in Giovanni del Biondo's c1370 altarpiece (fig. 3.21). This depiction is faithful to Jacobus de Voragine's and Ambrose's description of Sebastian representing a hedgehog or urchin as he was so full of arrows.<sup>289</sup> Later depictions, including this fresco, show only a desultory few arrows, although this could be excused on the grounds that they depict an early point in the martyrdom. Perugino painted St Sebastian many times and in some of these the Saint has a mere two arrows in him (figs 3.22 & 3.23), or in the case of the close up now in the Hermitage (fig 3.24) only one. This may be because the painter did not wish to sully an image of a nearly nude male. The stance of Pinturicchio's Sebastian, is very similar to the stance of Perugino's 1478 fresco in Cerqueto (fig 3.25)

Pinturicchio would most likely have been aware of Benozzo Gozzoli's panel in San Gimignano (fig. 3.26) and it is instructive to compare this stylised 1465 depiction with Mantegna's earlier 1459 painting (fig. 3.27).<sup>290</sup> Mantegna's painting situates the scene amongst ruins, as does the Pinturicchio, but the former shows broken statues which the Pinturicchio does not. Voragine's account describes how, when Sebastian attempts to cure Chromatius, the prefect of the city of Rome, it was necessary to destroy Chromatius's secret stock of pagan idols and the room wherein they were kept.<sup>291</sup> As with this Mantegna and a subsequent 1480 canvas of the martyrdom by the same artist, Pinturicchio has St Sebastian bound to a column rather than a tree, which one might more reasonably expect to find in the middle of a field, and is how the incident is depicted by several other artists including the Pollaiuolo brothers in their 1475 panel (fig 3.28) for the church of St Annunziata in Florence. Close inspection of the Pinturicchio reveals that originally there was a capital to the pillar, as in the Mantegnas, but around half way between the top of the saint's head and the top of the fresco.

Pinturicchio had the previous year executed an exquisite small panel of *Madonna del Latte in un Paessagio* (Fig 3.29) showing the martyrdom of St Sebastian in the background. In this he paints the

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<sup>289</sup> Jacobus (de Voragine), *Legenda Aurea*, ed. Johann Georg Theodor Grässe, (Impensis Librariae Arnoldianae, 1846), p. 112.

<sup>290</sup> An excellent account of Mantegna's three extant representations of St Sebastian and interpretations of the flora therein can be found at: Joan G Caldwell, 'Mantegna's St Sebastians: Stabilitas in a Pagan World', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 36 (1973), pp. 373–377.

<sup>291</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Selections*, trans. Christopher Stace, (London, Penguin, 1998), p. 51.

saint bound to a pillar that appears to be part of a ruined triumphal arch, bearing some similarities to the ruined arch in the background of the Pollaiuolo panel.

The Pinturicchio fresco was one of the first to situate the martyrdom of St Sebastian so clearly in Rome by showing the ruined Colosseum. By contrast the Pollaiuolo version shows the meandering Arno in the background. Signorelli used the same Colosseum idea in his later 1498 altarpiece at Citta di Castello (fig. 3.30). In this painting the archers are shown *déshabillé* or in close fitting tights which, whilst perhaps not as potentially homoerotic as some of Signorelli's portrayals of the *Flagellation of Christ*, are reminiscent of the archers in the Pollaiuolo. Pinturicchio's archers are more fully dressed, one even in a form of Roman military uniform. There would not seem any homosexual aspect to this Pinturicchio portrayal.

Poeschel draws attention to the way that Pinturicchio spaces out the archers symmetrically, rather than crowding them in close as in the Pollaiuolo and the Signorelli.<sup>292</sup> However this might be partially a function of the shape and breadth of wall available.

Poeschel also discusses the seated figure on the far right, derived from a Bellini drawing, now in the British Museum, of an Ottoman Janissary (fig. 3.31), suggesting that Pinturicchio might be trying to show the torture of a Christian under the direction of a Muslim.<sup>293</sup> She draws a parallel with the curious John Paleologus-like figure directing or watching on in Piero Della Francesca's *Flagellation of Christ*, 1458–60, Urbino. There is a similar voyeuristic Paleologus-like figure in Signorelli's 1502 *Flagellation of Christ* in the church of St Margaret in Cortona.

This thesis has merit and could be extended to suggest that Pinturicchio is depicting as a Muslim, Diocletian who ordered Sebastian's martyrdom. Since Diocletian governed the eastern empire from Byzantium, subsequently Constantinople, this could be seen as drawing a comparison between the actions of the regime in Constantinople at the time of the fresco, if not specifically of Sultan Bayezid II himself, with the Diocletian persecutions.

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<sup>292</sup> Sabine Poeschel, *S, Alexander Maximus: das Bildprogramm des Appartamento Borgia im Vatikan*, (Weimar, VDG Verlag, 1999), p. 139.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141. This drawing is one of several made by Gentile Bellini, or in some cases by his workshop, during a visit by Bellini to Constantinople/Kostantiniyye/Istanbul in 1479 as part of a Venetian attempt at trade rapprochement with Sultan Mehmed II. Pinturicchio used three other drawings from this series for figures in the *Disputà* of St Katherine, on the opposite wall.

This drawing depicts a Janissary, one of the elite military corps in the Ottoman Empire which also formed part of the Sultan's household. They were mainly recruited from amongst Christian families in conquered lands through a process of *Devşirme*, or Christian levy. These Christian boys would be converted to Islam and put through a rigorous training regime. See Godfrey Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, (London, Saqi Books, 2006), *passim*.



The birds in flight in Pinturicchio's painting recall those in Ghirlandaio's fresco of the *Calling of Peter and Andrew* in the Sistine Chapel (fig. 3.32). The similar incidence of miscegenous in-flight conjoining may have some specific meaning, but this is not at present apparent. Similarly the faint image of an owl in the square window in the ruins defies simple interpretation. The owl has been used elsewhere to symbolise wisdom, darkness, Satan, Minerva, and solitude, and has appeared in depictions of the Crucifixion as an attribute of Christ ('To give light to them that sit in darkness in the shadow of death....' Luke 1:79). Scarpellini suggests that the owl is there to give a mournful atmosphere, anticipating Guercino's *Notte* in the Casino Ludovisi.<sup>294</sup> This is not convincing, not least because of the small size of the owl and its indistinctness, although it may have been slightly more distinct originally.

Amongst the few plants to be seen at the foot of the ruins, close inspection reveals several strawberry plants in fruit. Although strawberries occasionally appear in pictures of the Virgin, and the heart like fruit has been associated with the concept of love, it is unusual to see it in a picture of Sebastian, one rare Northern European occurrence being in a 1487 picture by the Meister des Augustineraltars, now in the Germanischers Nationalmuseum, Nurnberg.<sup>295</sup>

The choice of St Sebastian for this fresco is curious in that although the image of St Sebastian trussed and filling with arrows was almost commonplace at the time, none of the usual reasons for the choice would appear to apply. Rome was not going through a period of plague.<sup>296</sup> With the exception of St Sebastian himself the figures are abundantly well clothed; none of the poses could be thought to be sensual. There is no history of association between Alexander VI and the veneration of St Sebastian, and there is nothing apparent in his life that would make 20<sup>th</sup> January, St Sebastian's feast day, especially relevant. Close examination of the frescoes reveals that the faces of the archers appear to have been painted *a secco*; none had been singled out for egregious attention or preparation *a buon fresco*, and consequently it would be reasonable to deduce that no particular portraits are to be found here.

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<sup>294</sup>Pietro Scarpellini, 'L'infaticabile capocantiere' in *Pinturicchio* by Pietro Scarpellini e Maria Rita Silvestrelli (Milan, Federico Motta Editore, 2004), p. 180.

<sup>295</sup> The strawberry was mentioned in Pliny's *Natural History*. In his *Castigationes Plinianae* published a year before Pinturicchio's fresco was painted; Ermolao Barbaro usually claims that he is not correcting Pliny, but correcting the transmission errors of the copyists who followed him. In the case of the strawberry he points out that Pliny had made an error in saying that the strawberry plant has five lobed leaves rather than three. See Ermolao Barbaro *Castigationes Plinianae et in Pomponium Melam*, vol. 4, ed Giovanni Pozzi, (Padua, Editione Antenore, 1974), p. 753. Ermolao Barbaro will be discussed later as having possibly had involvement with this fresco cycle.

<sup>296</sup> Twelve years later Alexander VI would die of a summer fever in a nearly adjoining room. See: Johannes Burchardi, *Diarium sive rerum urbanarum commentarii, (1483–1506), texte latin publié intégralement pour la première fois, d'après les manuscrits de Paris, de Rome et de Florence* ed. L. Thuasne, (Paris, Leroux, 1885), vol. 3, p. 239.

The two aspects that stand out about this picture are the emphasis on Rome, and the presence of the Janissary.

St Sebastian can be regarded as a 'Roman' saint if not specifically a patron saint of Rome. Although according to Voragine he was born in Narbonne, his martyrdom is firmly located in Rome.<sup>297</sup> For a non-Roman, non-Italian pope such as Alexander VI, identification with Rome was important. To have this saint depicted with identifiable Roman ruins, portrayed over a window looking out onto Rome and the countryside around Rome would be a step towards establishing his credentials as a Roman pope, particularly for an audience which would at times have included several members of powerful Roman families. To foreign visitors this would have helped place Alexander as someone who, like Sebastian, came from another country but was to be seen as committed to Rome.

St Sebastian and the six archers are amongst the only characters shown in the room which do not have some connection with the Orient, as Poeschel hints.<sup>298</sup> The addition of the Ottoman Janissary, slightly separated from the rest, is therefore doubly out of place. There are three other Bellini-derived figures in the room, on the opposite wall, closely surrounded by other Orientals, albeit some being portrayals of Italians in the guise of Orientals. Just as the prominent horseman looks onto the scene of the Disputa, so this Janissary looks on to the scene of the martyrdom. The comparison between Diocletian's persecution of Christians in general and Christian Romans in particular, and the perceived persecution of Christians, particularly the Church of Rome, by the then regime in Constantinople under Sultan Bayezid II, becomes a persuasive reason for this composition. Sultan Bayezid II is being compared to Diocletian. This might be seen as a small pictorial postscript to Pope Pius II's letter to Sultan Mehmet II, *Epistola ad Mahumetem*, and like that letter perhaps more to convey a message to a wider audience than just to the Sultan.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Selections*, trans. Christopher Stace, (London, Penguin, 1998), p. 50.

<sup>298</sup> Sabine Poeschel, S, *Alexander Maximus: das Bildprogramm des Appartamento Borgia im Vatikan*, (Weimar, VDG Verlag, 1999), p140. Almost all the other figures represented in the room are either biblical, or have connections with Egypt.

<sup>299</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)*, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, p. 233. Pope Pius II's letter sought peace between East and West, promised Mehmet II world dominion, but all only if he converted to Christianity.

## 3.7 The Disputation of St Katherine of Alexandria – the *Disputà*

### 3.7.1 *Disputà* – description

This is the largest fresco in the room, on the upper part of the wall facing the window (fig. 3.33). As the visitor enters the room it forms the dominating image. To the right is the fresco of the meeting of Saints Anthony and Paul in the Egyptian desert. To the left is the fresco of the martyrdom of St Barbara. Above is the first quadrant of the second, southern, vault wherein is depicted the murder of Osiris by his brother Typhon (also identified with the Egyptian Set). On the opposite wall is the fresco of the martyrdom of St Sebastian.

At the centre of the fresco is the depiction of the Arch of Constantine, surmounted by a golden bull and with the inscription 'PACIS CULTORI'. The arch is set against a background of Umbrian landscape with a small hill town in the distance, the sun setting behind another small town and four unidentified birds in the sky.

In the foreground to the left of the arch sits a regal or imperial figure on a rich gilt throne at the top of three gilded steps. Three open books lie on the steps. To the left and beyond is a group of about twenty figures. In the bottom left hand corner two children appear to be arguing over possession of a book. Two figures close to the throne stand out as larger and more finely detailed. In front of the left hand arch of the Arch of Constantine stands a young St Katherine. In front of the central arch stand two scholars or doctors arguing. In front of the right hand arch stands a doctor pointing to a passage in a book held by a pageboy. To the right is a group of about fifteen figures ranging in age from youth to long-bearded old men. Several of them hold books or scrolls in their hand by which we can identify this group as the scholars.

Further to the right and set back slightly up a hill are two figures on horseback. In the foreground is a dog, possibly a greyhound.

In the bottom right is the largest and most dominating figure in the whole fresco, a man in ornate Turkish dress with long flowing hair, a pointed beard and a slightly hooked nose wearing a large turban and astride a large all white horse.<sup>300</sup> Pinturicchio uses extensive gilded stucco relief in this

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<sup>300</sup> It has been suggested that a drawing in the Christ Church, Oxford collection is the model for this horse (see Francis Russell, 'Towards a Reassessment of Perugino's Lost Fresco of the "Adoration of the Magi" at San Giusto alle Mura' in *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 116, No. 860, (1974), p. 651 n. 19.) There is little evidence to support this idea.

fresco, this being the focus of Giorgio Vasari's ire in his life of the painter.<sup>301</sup> Mostly this is used for architectural and architectonic features such as the throne and the pilasters of the Arch of Constantine. However it is the golden cloak on the horseman which physically stands out more than any other gilded stucco feature in the fresco.

### 3.7.2 *Disputà* – literary tradition

The story of St Katherine has evolved over the centuries and has been described as a 'wonderful rigmarole'.<sup>302</sup> Possibly the earliest references to the story, without naming Katherine directly, originate in Eusebius of Caesarea.

15. One only of those who were seized for adulterous purposes by the tyrant, a most distinguished and illustrious Christian woman in Alexandria, conquered the passionate and intemperate soul of Maximinus by most heroic firmness. Honourable on account of wealth and family and education, she esteemed all of these inferior to chastity. He urged her many times, but although she was ready to die, he could not put her to death, for his desire was stronger than his anger.

16. He therefore punished her with exile, and took away all her property. Many others, unable even to listen to the threats of violation from the heathen rulers, endured every form of tortures, and rackings, and deadly punishment.<sup>303</sup>

The cult of St Katherine of Alexandria is believed to have been brought back to Europe in the eleventh century, possibly by Norman French travellers.<sup>304</sup> Ainard, a monk at Rouen is believed to have written a life of St Katherine around 1054.<sup>305</sup> Clemence, a nun at Barking Abbey, wrote her *Vie*

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<sup>301</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, trans. George Bull, (London, Penguin, 1987), vol. 2, p. 83.

<sup>302</sup> Sabine Baring-Gould, *The Lives of the Saints*, (London, John C. Nimmo, 1898), vol. 14, pp. 542. He also comments on the Eusebius account: 'On this slender foundation a marvellous romance has been founded which passes as the Acts of the Martyrdom of S. Catherine.' Ibid. p. 541.

<sup>303</sup> Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, trans. J. E. Oulton, (Cambridge Mass., Loeb, 1932), vol. 2, pp. 303–313.

<sup>304</sup> Possibly by Norman pilgrims see Christine Walsh, 'The role of the Normans in the Development of the Cult of St. Katherine' in Jacqueline Jenkins & Katherine Lewis, *St Katherine of Alexandria, Texts & Contexts in Western Medieval Europe*, (Turnhout, Belgium, Brepols, 2003), p23. A monk, Simeon of Treves, is said to have returned to Rouen in the 1020's following several years in the convent of St Katherine on Mount Sinai with a relic of the saint: Saara Nevanlinna and Irma Taavitsainen, *St. Katherine of Alexandria: The Late Middle English Prose Legend in Southwell Minster MS 7*. (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), p. 5.

<sup>305</sup> Phyllis B. Roberts, 'Stephen Langton and St Catherine of Alexandria: a Paris Master's sermon on the Patron Saint of scholars', *Manuscripta*, vol. 20, (1976), p. 100.

*de Sainte Catherine* around 1153–1175 and four other Old French versions followed in the thirteenth century.<sup>306</sup> The route to Rome of the cult may have been through Constantinople.<sup>307</sup>

The story of St Katherine varies in its details, such as whether it was the Roman Emperor Maximinus Daia who oppressed her, as recorded by Eusebius, or the Roman Emperor Maxentius, as recorded by many others. These two emperors were involved with the government of Alexandria at periods around AD 305–312, which provides an approximate date for St Katherine whose martyrdom is generally accepted to have occurred around 305 AD. The life of this saint most frequently referred to in the paintings of this, and subsequent eras, was that by Jacobus de Voragine (ca. 1229–1298) in his *Golden Legend*.<sup>308</sup> Voragine claims to have sourced his information from the writings of St Athanasius on whose life of St Anthony, the adjacent fresco, is most probably based. In Voragine's version Maxentius is the oppressor and Katherine is identified as being from the same lineage as the Emperor Constantinius. Constantinius's son who became the Emperor Constantine went on to defeat Maxentius at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, which triumph is commemorated by the Arch of Constantine reproduced at the centre of the fresco. He also founded Constantinople, the retaking of which was a major issue for the church at the time the fresco was painted.

According to Voragine, Katherine, daughter of the pagan governor of Alexandria, had converted to Christianity in her teens and had been baptised by a 'Brother Adrian', a hermit living in the desert outside of Alexandria.<sup>309</sup> As part of her early Christian experience she goes through a 'mystical marriage with Christ'. (St Katherine of Siena also went through a mystical marriage with Christ, which can provide opportunities for confusion). She had confronted the Emperor Maxentius during his pagan sacrifices and had attempted to persuade him of the truth of Christianity. Unable to confute her arguments he summoned the top fifty scholars and orators in the land to come to Alexandria for a meeting with her to defeat her. They failed to defeat her in their debate or 'Disputa':

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<sup>306</sup> Clemence of Barking *The Life of St. Catherine*, ed William Macbain (Anglo-Norman texts, 18), Published for the Anglo-Norman Text Society by B. Blackwell, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1964). See William MacBain, *De Sainte Caterine: An Anonymous Picard Version of the Life of St. Catherine of Alexandria* (Fairfax Va. George Mason University Press, 1987), p. viii.

<sup>307</sup> Christine Walsh, *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe*, (Farnham, UK, Ashgate, 2007), pp. 47, 48.

<sup>308</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Selections*, trans. Christopher Stace, (London, Penguin, 1998), pp. 333–338.

<sup>309</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend* trans. William Caxton [online text at Fordham University] <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/goldenlegend/GoldenLegend-Volume7.asp#Katherine>> Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

The young girl debated with the orators in the most learned fashion and refuted them with the clearest of proofs, until they were quite dumbfounded: they could find nothing to say and they stood there speechless. Their defeat absolutely infuriated the emperor, ...<sup>310</sup>

Katherine proceeded to convert the scholars, the emperor's wife and many of his household to Christianity, all of whom Maxentius condemned to death. Maxentius tried to seduce Katherine but she spurned him saying she was already married to God. He then decreed that Katherine be tortured to death by a machine of four wheels and razors or spikes, but the machine was broken by an angel. Thereafter she was beheaded and her body transported to Mount Sinai.

Uncertainty surrounding the stories of St Katherine resulted in celebration of her feast day, 25<sup>th</sup> November, being suppressed by the Roman Catholic Church in 1969, but restored as an optional memorial in 2002. Over the centuries her story may have been confused and conflated with that of Hypatia a female mathematician who lived in Alexandria around a century later and whose life is more firmly documented.<sup>311</sup> There has also been some confusion with the even less documented story of St Dorothea of Alexandria who has not been recognised by the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>312</sup>

Traditionally St Katherine has been venerated as the patron saint of students, philosophers, theologians and lawyers in consequence of her successful disputation with Maxentius's wise men.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend, Selections*, trans. Christopher Stace, (London, Penguin, 1998), p. 335.

<sup>311</sup> Maria Dzielska, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, trans. F. Lyra. (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 12, 21.

<sup>312</sup> Alban Butler, *The lives of the primitive fathers, martyrs, and other principal saints*, (Edinburgh, J. Moir, 1798), p. 75.

<sup>313</sup> David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford dictionary of Saints*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 69.

### 3.7.3 *Disputà* – visual tradition

The first identified image of St Katherine in Rome dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, a fresco of a figure with a halo and the legend 'CATERINA' in the Basilica of St Lorenzo al Verano.<sup>314</sup> The legend of St Katherine provides opportunities for many images, and there are some examples of portrayals of a sequence of incidents from her life, such as that by Donato and Gregorio d'Arezzo (fig. 3.34). The marriage of St Katherine with God is often a subject, and less often her final martyrdom, beheaded by a sword.<sup>315</sup> The attempt to break St Katherine on the wheel has led to a wheel, particularly a broken wheel, becoming her most recognised attribute and representations of this incident abound.<sup>316</sup>

Images of her disputation were in the quattrocento less common, although later this subject became more frequent as a means of alluding to the wisdom of the commissioning institution or individual. Two images of the *Disputà* of St Katherine, of which Pinturicchio may have been aware, were parts of cycles of the life of the saint. In Piacenza in the church of San Lorenzo in the 1390s an unknown artist included a simple fresco, now in the Museo Civico, Piacenza showing St Katherine confronting three or four philosophers (fig. 3.35).<sup>317</sup> Around 1425 Masolino depicted the saint arguing with eight philosophers in front of Maxentius, in a fresco in the St Catherine Chapel in the church of San Clemente in Rome (fig. 3.36).

In the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York there is a panel (fig. 3.37) by the Florentine artist Cenni di Francesco di Ser Cenni dating from around 1380 depicting St Katherine disputing with two of the fifty philosophers, identified by their red robes, their haloes signifying that she was disputing with them after their converting to Christianity. There is no reason to believe that this was part of a cycle, and the presence of donor portraits is unusual in portrayals of St Katherine.

The Sala dei Santi fresco appears to show the moment when, having defeated the scholars (judging from the open books lying around the steps of the throne, and the setting sun), Katherine again confronts Maxentius.

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<sup>314</sup> Christine Walsh, *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe*, (Farnham, UK, Ashgate, 2007), pp. 47, 48.

<sup>315</sup> James Hall, *Hall's Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, revised edition in larger format, (London, John Murray, 1996), pp. 58, 59.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>317</sup> In 1534–1535 Pordenone painted a stand-alone image of the *Disputà* in the cathedral in Piacenza. Charles M. Rosenberg, *The Court Cities of Northern Italy: Milan, Parma, Piacenza, Mantua, Ferrara, Bologna, Urbino, Pesaro, and Rimini*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 101, 102.

### 3.7.4 *Disputà* – analysis

#### 3.7.4.1 *Disputà* – choice of subject

The choice of a saint from Alexandria is apposite for a newly appointed pope who took the name Alexander. With St Sebastian portrayed on the wall opposite, St Katherine shares the distinction of being twice martyred, in that the method of martyrdom usually portrayed, St Katherine's wheel or St Sebastian's arrows, resulted in suffering but not death. In both cases they had to be finished off by other means, beheading in the case of St Katherine and stoning to death in the case of St Sebastian. Sebastian served under the Emperors of the diarchy, Diocletian and Maximinian. Maximinian was the father of Maxentius (see section 3.6 above). Both Sebastian and Katherine may be said to have suffered as a result of the Diocletian purges of Christians, Sebastian directly and Katherine indirectly.

By choosing the *Disputà*, rather than the more conventional images of St Katherine, it is possible to include portrayals of several individuals. These would identify the subjects with wise men, philosophers, and scholars who were to die for their Christian beliefs, so they would be favourable representations of individuals in the Curia, the court of Alexander VI or in the retinue of Pinturicchio. Crow and Cavalcaselle consider that 'Most of the heads seem portraits.'<sup>318</sup>

This compares with another *Disputà* by Pinturicchio, (fig. 3.38) that of the young Christ's disputation with the doctors in the temple in the Baglioni Chapel at Spello (1501).

In this most of the 'doctors' are undifferentiated, sometimes orientalist, Italians, with the exception of the two figures to the lower left, one in black holding a scarf and one in blue holding a bag of money, which are clearly portrayals of individuals. The former is identified as Troilo Baglioni, patron commissioner and subsequently bishop of Perugia.<sup>319</sup>

The *Disputà* of St Katherine also allows the possibility of showing Maxentius and thereby referring to Constantine and indirectly Constantinople, a topic very relevant to the Catholic Church at the time of the commission. The inclusion of the Arch of Constantine reinforces this connection. The validity of the Donation of Constantine, by which the Roman Catholic Church claimed much of its authority over Rome and the western empire, was under question in the late fifteenth century. Lorenzo Valla

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<sup>318</sup> Joseph Archer Crow & Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, *A New History of Painting in Italy*, vol. 3, ed. Edward Hutton, (London, Dent, 1909), p. 268.

<sup>319</sup> Maria Rita Silvestrelli, 'Il ritorno a Perugia (1495–1502)', in *Pinturicchio* by Pietro Scarpellini e Maria Rita Silvestrelli (Milan, Federico Motta Editore, 2004), p. 198.



had published his proof of its forgery around 1440 and Pope Pius II wrote a tract in 1453 accepting its forgery, but the church suppressed these arguments.<sup>320</sup> Constantine was nonetheless seen as a saviour of the church for having ended the persecutions of Diocletian, for having instituted Christianity as the official religion of the empire, and above all for being the first Christian Roman Emperor.

As to the choice of St Katherine for the overall theme, it may be relevant that her saint's day, November 25<sup>th</sup>, was the day of the capitulation of the Moors at Granada in 1491, only two years before the fresco was probably painted, and that Alexander always maintained close connections to his native Spain.<sup>321</sup>

#### **3.7.4.2 Disputà – images from antiquity**

The presence of the Arch of Constantine adds confusion to the location portrayed. The *Disputà* unequivocally took place in Alexandria, whereas the arch of Constantine is in Rome. This contrasts with the fresco of the martyrdom of St Sebastian on the facing wall which is clearly of an event taking place in Rome. In 1482 both Perugino and Botticelli had presented anachronistic representations of the Arch of Constantine in frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, with their respective *The Giving of Keys to Saint Peter* and *Punishment of Korah*. Perugino shows two approximate representations either side of the Church of Jerusalem in his *The Giving of Keys to Saint Peter* (fig. 2.10). The similarity of the central temple structure in this picture to that of the temple in Pinturicchio's Spello *Disputà* suggests that Pinturicchio was not averse to taking inspiration from this picture. Botticelli shows a more accurate representation of the arch in his *Punishment of Korah*, (fig. 3.39) again geographically misplaced.

The arch commemorates Constantine's victory over the Emperor Maxentius at the battle near the Milvian Bridge just to the north of Rome. It therefore represents the commemoration of a victory over Maxentius, within a picture representing another victory over Maxentius. The fall of Constantinople, named after Constantine, had occurred only forty years before the fresco was painted and that defeat was still of major consequence for the papacy.

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<sup>320</sup> Charles L. Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press 1998), p. 253.

<sup>321</sup> See section 2.2.5 above.

The addition of the golden bull can be seen as a direct reference to the Borgia family emblem. The inscription is a motto used elsewhere by Alexander VI, on a medal struck in 1494.<sup>322</sup> It can be seen as a proclamation by Alexander VI that he is to be the bringer of peace to relationships with the Ottoman Empire, following the collapse of efforts to raise a crusade after the fall of Constantinople. Alexander VI went on to develop a relationship with Sultan Bayezid II warm enough for the sultan to send him a substantial amount of money to help defend Rome against the French King Charles VIII in 1495.<sup>323</sup>

The portrayal of Maxentius appears to be more pattern book oriental type rather than any attempt at accurate representation. If anything in its pointed beard it resembles contemporary images of Mehmet II and Bayezid II, the Ottoman Sultans. Extant coins depicting Maxentius show a thick necked man with short hair and either a trimmed beard or no beard, rather than the figure with long beard and long hair in the fresco, (figs. 3.40 & 3.41). Images of the Emperor Maximinus Daia also show no similarity to the fresco, (fig. 3.42). Other records of the appearance of Maxentius such as busts held in the Louvre, in Dresden (figure 3.43) and Ostia (fig. 3.44) show a clean shaven face surmounted with varying degrees of curls, in accordance with John Malalas's description of Maxentius from around 540 AD.<sup>324</sup> The Ostia statue (fig. 3.44) has also been identified as Maximian.<sup>325</sup> The Pinturicchio version resembles none of these.

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<sup>322</sup> N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, n.29, p. 309.

<sup>323</sup> See section 2.2.3 above.

<sup>324</sup> See Cécile Giroir & Daniel Roger, *Roman Art from the Louvre*, (New York, American Federation of Arts, 2007), p.63 for a fuller account.

<sup>325</sup> From the so-called Sede degli Augustali (V, VII, 1–2) in Ostia. De Chirico originally identified the statue as either M. Quintillus (270 AD), or his successor, Aurelian, and later redated it to 4th century, identifying it as Maxentius. Niemeyer accepted this identification. Von Heintze accepted the 4th century date but not the identification. Facial features are a poor match for coin portraits of Maxentius, however they match a description given by the 5th century writer, Malalas (as reported separately by Cécile Giroire and R. Calza). Andreae identified it as Maximian. Laird proposed that man's stippled beard is a later recarving and should not be used to date the statue. L'Orange and W von Sydow proposed that the physical characteristics of the portrait and styling of the face and toga suggested an early 3rd century dating.

Refs: R. Calza De Chirico, *Ostia. Sculture provenienti dall'edificio degli Augustali*, (Rome, Notizie degli scavi di antichità, 1941), pp. 216–246; H. G. Niemeyer, 'Studien zur statuarischen Darstellung der römischen Kaiser', *Monumenta Artis Romanae* 7, Berlin (1968) 89, no. 27, pl. 8.2; B. Andreae, *The Art of Rome*, (London, Macmillan, 1978), fig. 149, Max Wegner, 'Die Bildnisse der Frauen und des Julian' in Hans Peter L'Orange, Unger Reingart, and Max Wegner, *Das spätantike Herrscherbild von Diokletian bis zu den Konstantin-Söhnen 284–361 n. Chr* (Berlin, Mann, 1984), pp. 34–35, 114, pls. 26–27, 66f, g; W. Helbig, *Führer durch die öffentlichen Sammlungen klassischer Altertümer in Rom*. vols. 1–4. 4th ed. (Tübingen, 1963–72); <<http://www.rome101.com/Portraiture/Maxentius/>> accessed 21 Nov 2014

The two figures close to the throne are direct, but slightly embellished copies of figures brought back in notebooks by Gentile Bellini from his trip to the court of Sultan Mehmet II in Constantinople/Istanbul in 1479–81.<sup>326</sup> For the figure to the left of the throne (fig. 3.45) there is a drawing from the workshop of Gentile Bellini now in the Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt, (fig. 3.46)

For the heavily turbaned figure on the right, (fig. 3.47) there is drawing from the workshop of Gentile Bellini in the Musée de Louvre, Paris, (fig. 3.48).<sup>327</sup> This latter figure is reproduced again by Pinturicchio in 1504 in his fresco of *Pope Pius II in Ancona Proclaiming the Crusade*, in the Piccolomini library in Siena, (fig. 3.49). The Piccolomini version is closer to the Bellini drawing. The Sala dei Santi version is more ornate and such details as the turban and the position of the hand and belt are a mirror image of the drawing.

### 3.7.4.3 *Disputà* – portraiture

As the dominant fresco in the room, this picture has been the subject of much speculation over many years as to whether the characters portrayed are images of real people in the circle of either Alexander VI or Pinturicchio.

It is a long held tradition that the central figure of St Katherine is modelled on Lucrezia Borgia, Pope Alexander VI's thirteen year old daughter (fig. 3.50).<sup>328</sup> The appearance tallies with a description of her by Niccolò Cagnolo of Parma, but Ricci protests that this is not a picture of a thirteen year old girl.<sup>329</sup> Other portraits alleged to be of Lucrezia show an older woman and are of dubious

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<sup>326</sup> See section 2.5 above.

<sup>327</sup> See Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton, *Global Interest, Renaissance Art between East and West*, (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 32 for attribution to Costanzo da Ferrara.

<sup>328</sup> See for instance; Evelyn March Phillips, *Pinturicchio*, (London, George Bell & Sons, 1901), p. 80; Giuseppe Portigliotti, *The Borgias: Alexander VI, Caesar, Lucrezia*, trans. B Miall, (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1928), p. 279–28; Maria Rita Silvestrelli 'Pinturicchio tra Roma e Perugia (1485–1495)' in *Pinturicchio* by Pietro Scarpellini e Maria Rita Silvestrelli (Milan, Federico Motta Editore, 2004), p. 120, and Pietro Scarpellini 'L'infaticabile capocantiere' in *Pinturicchio* by Pietro Scarpellini e Maria Rita Silvestrelli (Milan, Federico Motta Editore, 2004), p. 176; Christopher Hibbert, *The Borgias and Their Enemies*, (Orlando US, Harcourt, 2008), p. 85.

<sup>329</sup> 'She [Lucrezia] is of middle height and graceful in form. Her face is rather long, the nose well cut, hair golden, eyes of no special colour. Her mouth is rather large, the teeth brilliantly white, her neck is slender and

authenticity. The most 'well known' is that by Bartolomeo Veneto in the Städelsches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt am Main (fig. 3.51). Whilst there is some circumstantial evidence that Bartolomeo Veneto had cause to paint Lucrezia's portrait, possibly long after her death at the age of 39 and thus idealised, there is no evidence to confirm that this is the portrait and a copy of a portrait inscribed as by him of Lucrezia, and now in Nîmes, looks very different. The idea that such an eminent person, the daughter of a pope and the then wife of an eminent nobleman should be portrayed with a breast exposed would seem most unlikely.<sup>330</sup> It would seem more probable that this portrait is no more than that of a courtesan in the style of the goddess Flora, but the image fits with the Borgia reputation and so continues to persist in popular culture, even adorning the front covers of both Sarah Bradford's biography of Lucrezia and Mary Hollingsworth's 2011 book on the Borgia family, published at a time that coincided with the transmission of a television version of their story.<sup>331</sup> Recently a portrait of a woman by Dosso Dossi in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, (fig. 3.52) has been identified as of Lucrezia Borgia, but this identification may be regarded as at best tentative as yet.<sup>332</sup>

Almost a decade after the Pinturicchio fresco, a medal (fig. 3.53) was struck for Lucrezia Borgia's marriage to Alfonso d'Este. This might reasonably be supposed to be a true likeness, it being contemporaneous and most likely from life. This image is sufficiently similar to the Pinturicchio fresco, allowing for the subject having aged from 13 years old to 22, that it lends credence to the Pinturicchio fresco being a portrait of Lucrezia Borgia

Poeschel, repeating Carli, suggests that by comparison with the known self portrait of Pinturicchio in the Baglioni chapel in Spello, (fig. 3.54), one of the courtiers behind the throne is also a self portrait, (fig. 3.55).<sup>333</sup> The figure to the far left in red with a blue cloak over his shoulder, a heavy gold chain

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fair, the bust admirably proportioned. She is always gay and smiling.' Niccolò Cagnolo quoted in Sarah Bradford, *Lucrezia Borgia. Life, Love and Death in Renaissance Italy*, (London, Viking, 2004), p 11.

'E non raccolgono maggior fede coloro che pensano che Lucrezia Borgia sia rappresentata dalla santa Caterina, perchè, certo, questa non ritrae una fanciulla d' appena tredici anni!' C. Ricci, *Roma (Visioni e Figure)* (Rome, Formiggini, 1909), p. 41. ('Those who think that Lucrezia Borgia is represented by St. Catherine should not be build their confidence, because, of course, this does not portray a girl who is just thirteen years old!', author's translation).

<sup>330</sup> See A. de Hevesy, 'Some Portraits of the Borgias – Lucrezia', *The Burlington Magazine* vol. 61, no. 352, 1932, pp. 21, 24, 26 & 31 for a fuller account. The Nîmes portrait is mentioned on p. 31 as at that time belonging to 'Signor Nessi of Como', and is reproduced in the article as Plate II.

<sup>331</sup> Sarah Bradford, *Lucrezia Borgia. Life, Love and Death in Renaissance Italy*, (London, Viking, 2004), Mary Hollingsworth, *The Borgias: History's Most Notorious Dynasty*, (London, Quercus, 2011).

<sup>332</sup> < <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/col/work/3746> > accessed 21 Nov 2014.

<sup>333</sup> Sabine Poeschel, S, *Alexander Maximus: das Bildprogramm des Appartamento Borgia im Vatikan*, (Weimar, VDG Verlag, 1999), p. 149.

and clutching a rule, (fig. 3.56) has been thought to be a contemporary architect. Phillips offers Bramante, Andrea Bregno or the elder San Gallo.<sup>334</sup> Silvestrelli identifies him as Antonio da Sangallo.<sup>335</sup> The emperor has been identified as Cesare Borgia, son of Pope Alexander VI but, as Phillips suggests, this is unlikely.<sup>336</sup> The two younger figures to the front of the right hand group, the group that by their books would appear to be the scholars, have been identified as the Alexander VI's son Jofré and his fiancé Sancia but this too has little supporting evidence.<sup>337</sup>

Three identifications that deserve re-examination are those of the two figures based on the Bellini drawings and that of the prominent horseman on the right. Following Poeschel, Silvestrelli suggests that the Bellini-inspired figure to the left of the throne (fig. 3.56) is a portrait of Andrea Paleologo, despot of Morea.<sup>338</sup> This figure, described by Ricci as an Albanian, is a direct copy of the Bellini model down to the expression on the face, making it difficult to accept that it is a portrayal of anyone other than the figure that Bellini was portraying.<sup>339</sup>

Silvestrelli suggests that the turbaned Bellini figure to the right of the throne is of the Sultan Djem, younger brother of Sultan Bayezid then leader of the Ottoman Empire and son of Mehmet II, conqueror of Constantinople.<sup>340</sup> Djem was, at the time that this room was painted, held hostage at the papal court, against regular payments from his brother to prevent him being released.<sup>341</sup> He was a well-known figure, described at length by Burchard, and leader of a fashion for Turkish dress at the court. Although Poeschel, after much discussion, considers that this right hand figure is more probably one of Djem's courtiers than Djem himself, as Ricci had suggested, Silvestrelli bolsters the Djem argument by quoting a contemporary description of Djem having a particularly large turban, made with '30.000 canne di garza' according to Sigismundus de Comitibus's contemporary

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<sup>334</sup> Evelyn March Phillips, *Pintoricchio*, (London, George Bell & Sons, 1901), p. 84.

<sup>335</sup> Maria Rita Silvestrelli 'Pintoricchio tra Roma e Perugia (1485–1495)' in *Pintoricchio* by Pietro Scarpellini e Maria Rita Silvestrelli (Milan, Federico Motta Editore, 2004), p. 120.

<sup>336</sup> Evelyn March Phillips, *Pintoricchio*, (London, George Bell & Sons, 1901), p. 84. The face shows no similarity with known portraits of Cesare.

<sup>337</sup> Marion Johnson, *The Borgias*, (London, BCA, 1981), pp. 94, 95.

<sup>338</sup> Maria Rita Silvestrelli 'Pintoricchio tra Roma e Perugia (1485–1495)' in *Pintoricchio* by Pietro Scarpellini e Maria Rita Silvestrelli (Milan, Federico Motta Editore, 2004), p.120, and Sabine Poeschel, *S, Alexander Maximus: das Bildprogramm des Appartamento Borgia im Vatikan*, (Weimar, VDG Verlag, 1999), pp. 150–155.

<sup>339</sup> Corrado Ricci, *Roma (Visioni e Figure)* (Formiggini, Rome 1919), p. 41.

<sup>340</sup> Maria Rita Silvestrelli 'Pintoricchio tra Roma e Perugia (1485–1495)' in *Pintoricchio* by Pietro Scarpellini e Maria Rita Silvestrelli (Milan, Federico Motta Editore, 2004), p. 120.

<sup>341</sup> See the commentary by Geoffrey Parker in Johann Burchard, *At the Court of the Borgia, being an Account of the Reign of Pope Alexander VI written by his Master of Ceremonies*, trans. & ed. Geoffrey Parker, (London, Folio Society, 1963), p. 60.

account.<sup>342</sup> Again there is no reason to suggest that this is a portrayal of anyone other than the figure that Bellini was portraying. In this case Djem was nearby in the Vatican at the time of the painting and it might be expected that a portrayal of Djem would therefore be from life. Apart from contemporary descriptions of Djem, we also have access to contemporary portraits from life of Djem's father Mehmet II, (figs. 3.57 and 3.58). There is no similarity between the facial features of these portraits and those of the Bellini figure to the right of the throne.

There are however marked similarities between these contemporary portraits of Mehmet II and the features of the figure on the horse to the right of the picture, (fig. 3.59). This swarthy, hook nosed figure on the horse also wears a notably large turban, in accordance with the Sigismundus de Comitibus account. He is almost outside of the picture plane, looking in to the scene, more as an observer than as a participant. This figure has variously been identified as Djem or as Juan, Second Duke of Gandia and eldest of the children Alexander VI had by Vannozza dei Cattanei.<sup>343</sup>

Juan would have been aged 18 at the time of the fresco whereas Djem would have been 32 and this figure more resembles that of someone aged in their 30s. It would seem more reasonable to assume that the figure on the horse is a portrayal of Djem. In its facial profile this figure on the horse also shows some resemblance to Pinturicchio's depiction of Maxentius on his throne in this fresco. Steinmann, Venturi and Phillips all consider the figure on the horse to be a portrayal of Djem.<sup>344</sup>

Whilst the turbaned figure on horseback would thus appear to be a representation of Djem, there is no strong evidence to suggest that the two Bellini drawing inspired figures are portrayals of anyone connected with the court of Alexander VI.

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<sup>342</sup> Maria Rita Silvestrelli 'Pinturicchio tra Roma e Perugia (1485–1495)' in *Pinturicchio* by Pietro Scarpellini e Maria Rita Silvestrelli (Milan, Federico Motta Editore, 2004), p. 120.

<sup>343</sup> Evelyn March Phillips, *Pinturicchio*, (London, George Bell & Sons, 1901), 64–96; Arnold Goffin, *Pinturicchio* (Paris, H. Laurens 1908), p. 83; Mary Hollingsworth, *The Borgias: History's Most Notorious Dynasty*, (London, Quercus, 2011), p. 186.

<sup>344</sup> See N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, pp. 309, 310 n. 32; Evelyn March Phillips, *Pinturicchio*, (London, George Bell & Sons, 1901), 64–96; Arnold Goffin, *Pinturicchio* (Paris, H. Laurens 1908), p. 83.

### 3.7.5 Commentary on *The Disputation of St Katherine*

The visual impact of this fresco is important. It is the first and the largest image seen by any visitor, and may be interpreted as intended to convey the most important message to that visitor.

The dominating of the image by the triumphal Arch of Constantine is an immediately recognisable reference to triumph. That it is surmounted by the gilded Borgia bull identifies Alexander VI as both the victor and the bringer of peace.

The triumph described is twofold. It is the triumph of Katherine over Maxentius and his wise men, and their subsequent conversion, and it is the triumph of Constantine over Maxentius and his army and their destruction. It is worth considering the possibility that Maxentius may stand for Bayezid II.

Although the scene takes place in Alexandria, there is no Egyptian imagery in the fresco, even though Pinturicchio was surrounded in Rome by Egyptian artefacts he could have copied or made reference to. Such imagery as is identifiable is either Roman, as in the arch, or Turkish as in the images copied from Gentile Bellini's drawings made at the court of Bayezid II in Istanbul.

Portraying Turks as wise men creates a minor dichotomy. These may be infidels and the enemy but they are not stupid. It may be relevant that that oriental dress is predominant amongst the courtiers to the right of and therefore in front of Maxentius, whereas possible instances of portraiture occur to the left and behind the throne. Djem, if that is who is represented by the man on the horse, stands apart, almost out of the picture, an effect accentuated by the heavy use of stucco relief for this figure.

It might be reasonable to suggest that this fresco of St Katherine, on whose feast day the Moors were expelled from Granada, is intended to identify the newly elected pope as the man who will triumph over the Turks.<sup>345</sup> Such triumph may be achieved by force as Constantine, founder of Constantinople and first Christian Emperor of Rome, triumphed over Maxentius, if not by argument, as St Katherine triumphed over Maxentius's wise men.

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<sup>345</sup> N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, pp. 303, 304.

However this explanation does not fit with the 'PACIS CULTORI' motto on the Arch of Constantine and Alexander VI's tolerance of the Turks.<sup>346</sup>

Pictorially the largest and most central figure is the wise man pointing to the book held by a boy. (Although the book is open, there is no legible writing displayed.) There is clearly some message in this fresco about a wise man or philosopher from the era of St Katherine and associated with Alexandria. As yet it has not been clear what this message is, nor whom this figure might represent, but a candidate is postulated later in this thesis.

### 3.8 Chapter Summary

There is no obvious connection between this selection of saints, some well represented elsewhere such as St Katherine, St Barbara and St Sebastian, some less common, such as St Anthony with St Paul and one that is most uncommon, St Susanna.

Saxl explores potential connections, including possible links with the liturgical calendar, but only offers what he calls a tentative solution, that the saints represent the seven virtues. Were this to be true, it would accord with being between a room showing the seven Joys of the Virgin and a room displaying the Seven Liberal Arts. Saxl seems unconvinced himself of the seven virtues explanation.<sup>347</sup>

Parks contends that five of the six histories (he admits *The Visitation* does not immediately fit this analysis) represent the miraculous delivery of saints from adversities as an allegory of divine assistance to Ecclesia at a time when the Church was suffering adversity from internal threats such as the Great Schism, but more from threats external, mainly the Mohammedan Turkish threat following the fall of Constantinople.<sup>348</sup> The more convoluted Parks' explanation becomes the less credible it seems.

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<sup>346</sup> See section 2.2.3 above.

<sup>347</sup> Fritz Saxl, *Lectures*, (London, Warburg Institute, University of London, 1957), vol. 1, p.177.

<sup>348</sup> N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art history* vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, pp. 291–296.



It is difficult to determine that there is any general correlation between a theme for these lunettes and the Egyptian theme of the ceiling frescoes, other than the fact that both the lunette of St Anthony and St Paul takes place in the Egyptian desert and that of St Katherine takes place in the Egyptian city of Alexandria.

The frescoes of the *Disputà*, St Sebastian, St Barbara and St Anthony do have a slender common thread of association with the persecution of Christian martyrs around the second and third centuries AD by Roman emperors or their representatives, but this connection does not extend to *The Visitation* and St Susanna.

Poeschel comments on the presence of oriental types throughout the room.<sup>349</sup> These are mainly in the *Disputà* and the *Martyrdom of St Sebastian*, and are referred to in the previous sections of this chapter. Apart from the three figures, evidently copied from the Bellini notebooks, and the foregrounded figure in the *Disputà* identified as Djem, other oriental figures are generic and differ little from examples to be seen in Pinturicchio's other works, such as the frescoes in the Baglioni chapel in Spello.

Although the subject matters of the ceiling frescoes will be covered in more detail in Chapter 4, at this stage there is no clear correlation between the subject matter of each lunette and the vault fresco immediately above it:

<i>Disputation of St Katherine</i>	<i>Murder of Osiris by Typhon</i>
<i>St Antony's Meeting with St Paul</i>	<i>Isis gathers the parts of Osiris's dismembered body</i>
<i>The Visitation</i>	<i>Osiris teaches ploughing</i>
<i>Martyrdom of St Sebastian</i>	<i>Osiris teaches viticulture</i>
<i>Susanna and the Elders</i>	<i>Osiris teaches fruticulture</i>
<i>The Flight of St Barbara</i>	<i>Procession of the Apis</i>

The order in which the lunettes might be read also offers little guidance. In the preceding Sala dei Misteri there is a chronological sequence from *The Annunciation*, clockwise through to the *Assumption of the Virgin*. A parallel sequence in the Sala dei Santi would start with the *Disputà*, and run clockwise to the St Barbara, a sequence that defies any manifest logic.

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<sup>349</sup> Sabine Poeschel, S, *Alexander Maximus: das Bildprogramm des Appartamento Borgia im Vatikan*, (Weimar, VDG Verlag, 1999), pp. 155–157.

It is difficult to find a precedent for such a cycle of paintings of saints that bear any similarity to the selection seen in this room. Whereas other cycles more usually have a clear theme, often connected with a dedication or a donor, it is unusual to see such a disparate collection. One relevant factor may be that most other cycles of saints have some liturgical connection or purpose, whereas there is no evidence of this room having ever been used for anything connected with worship. The purpose of this eclectic selection might be seen to have a specific meaning associated with the new pope, a meaning which for the present eludes us.

The exception may be the *Disputà*. This relates to men of learning and in particular to men of learning from Alexandria in the early centuries AD, a time and place of the flourishing of Neoplatonism. As will be seen in Chapter 5, there is a related Neoplatonic aspect to the ceiling frescoes.

## Chapter 4: Iconographical commentary on the arch and ceiling frescoes

### 4.1 Introduction

It is in the ceiling frescoes that the main Egyptian theme resides. This chapter attempts an iconographical analysis of the frescoes in order to facilitate an iconological interpretation in the next chapter.

The arch that separates the north and south sections of the ceiling is closer to the viewer than the ceilings and leads the viewer's eye towards the ceiling frescoes, so the five octagonal frescoes on the underside of the arch are considered first. The late Gothic cross vaults on which the ceiling frescoes are painted are curved in such a way as to provide a challenge to the painters to depict the scenes, and a challenge to photographers trying to capture the frescoes. Each vault is divided in four and each quadrant contains an element from the Egyptian story of Isis, Osiris and the Apis.

The story starts in the northern vault. The first fresco in the sequence is in the southern quadrant of this vault, and thus adjacent to the arch and follows on from the narrative on the arch. The story progresses anticlockwise (seen from below) round the vault, continues from the southern quadrant of the southern vault, progresses anticlockwise and finishes in the western quadrant.

### 4.2 The five octagons, Io/Isis

The arch which separates the two main vaults is decorated with five octagonal frescoes set amongst profuse relief grotesques. These five images are at first sight straightforward, telling the tale of Io, Jupiter and Juno and closely following the version as told by Ovid in Book I of his *Metamorphoses*, a tale well known in the Middle Ages.<sup>350</sup>

Jupiter/Zeus spies Io, the beautiful daughter of the river god Inachus, and tries to seduce her. She runs away and he runs after her, turning day into night so as to entrap her, which he does and then

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<sup>350</sup> Ovid *Metamorphoses* Book I, lines 568–747, (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. David Raeburn, (London, Penguin, 2004), pp. 34–42.)

quietly rapes her. Juno/Hera, wife of Jupiter, is alerted to Jupiter's machinations by the sudden darkness so goes in search of him. Jupiter sensing her approach turns Io into a heifer which the suspicious Juno asks to be given to her. Jupiter is unable to refuse and Juno sets the hundred eyed Argus to keep watch over Io. Jupiter instructs his son Mercury/Hermes to murder Argus, which he does by soothing Argus to sleep with his pipe playing, and then cutting off his head. In Ovid's version Juno is furious and sends a demon to torment Io and chase her around the world until she arrives on the banks of the river Nile. At this point Jupiter is reconciled with Juno and she allows him to turn Io back into a woman and later Io gives birth to Epaphus.

Four of the five octagons represent incidents from this story, but the fifth is slightly more problematical. They are not displayed in narrative order. The first in the narrative sequence, situated at the apex of the arch, shows a young man seizing a resisting young woman. (fig 4.1). This could reasonably be interpreted as being the pursuit of Io by Zeus, and echoes the man pursuing woman themes in the St Barbara and Susanna frescoes. Adjacent to this octagon, on the western side of the room, is the next in the narrative sequence, (fig. 4.2). The man remonstrating with another woman, and with a heifer behind him, is the same as the man in the first octagon. This is a clear reference to the Ovid story.

Adjacent to this is the third in the narrative sequence, (fig 4.3). The multi-eyed Argus, with the same heifer behind him, is listening to a man, evidently Mercury/Hermes, playing the pipes. This same man is seen in the fourth octagon, located at the opposite end of the sequence, (fig 4.4). Here the image of Mercury/Hermes slaying Argus shows him using the curved sword described in the Ovid text:

not pausing, armed with a scythe like sword he maimed the nodding [victim] where the neck meets the head which fell splattering the rock with blood and staining the rugged cliff with gore: Author's translation.<sup>351</sup>

The last octagon, (fig. 4.5) which sits between the first and the fourth, presents something of an iconographic challenge. The central female figure seated on an elevated throne is dressed similarly to the figure of Isis on the nearby vault showing Isis's marriage to Osiris, so may be identified as Isis. This figure bears little resemblance to the image of Io in the first Octagon, which is adjacent to this one.

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<sup>351</sup> nec mora, falcato nutantem vulnerat ense,  
qua collo est confine caput, saxoque cruentum  
deicit et maculat praeruptam sanguine rupem.  
Ovid *Metamorphoses* Book I, lines 717–719.

Saxl and others conflate Io and Isis in these frescoes. Io had long been identified with Isis, possibly because of Isis' ancient identification with Hathor, the Egyptian cow goddess.<sup>352</sup> The similarities in their stories are notable.<sup>353</sup> However in ancient times they were given separate identities, with Isis depicted welcoming Io to Egypt, for instance, in a fresco in the temple of Isis at Pompeii, (fig. 4.7). Her son Epaphus is also sometimes conflated with Apis, or even with Horus.

In the Sala dei Santi octagon, this Io/Isis figure holds a pen in her right hand and is pointing at text in a book with her left hand. This is in accord with Isidore of Seville's claims that Isis, daughter of Inachus, brought writing to the Egyptians when she arrived from Greece.<sup>354</sup>

The figure to her left, generally identified as Moses, holds what may be a book, which would accord with Isidore of Seville's claim that it was Moses who brought Hebraic writing to the Jews.<sup>355</sup>

The figure to her right is more problematic. Yates claims that this is Hermes Trismegistus.<sup>356</sup> Just as Io has been conflated with Isis through history, Hermes/Mercury has occasionally been conflated with Hermes Trismegistus from at least the time of Cicero who writes of a Mercury who, having slain Argus, flees to Egypt giving them their laws and alphabet.<sup>357</sup> Yates quotes that this Ciceronian version had been repeated by Ficino and she also identifies Hermes Trismegistus in another octagon in the nearby Sala delle Sibille also in the Appartamento Borgia. (fig. 4.6).

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<sup>352</sup> Fritz Saxl, *Lectures*, (London, Warburg Institute, University of London, 1957), vol. 1, p. 182; Herbert Jennings Rose, 'Io' in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 549.

<sup>353</sup> 'Both Isis and Io are women who suffered while wandering around the world. Isis is Egyptian, but the Greek Argive Io also finally finds refuge in Egypt. Both give birth to royal sons (Horos and Epaphus). The initiates of Isis are transformed into human beings; Io is first transformed into a cow but, after she arrives in Egypt, is again transformed into a human being. ... Isis searches the world for her dead husband; Io searches for her stolen child. Both Isis and Io – and later their descendants rule Egypt.' D. L. Balch, 'The Suffering of Isis/Io and Paul's Portrait of Christ Crucified (Gal. 3:1): Frescoes in Pompeian and Roman Houses and in the Temple of Isis in Pompeii', in *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 83, No. 1, (Jan., 2003), p. 42.

<sup>354</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi: Etymologiarum Sive Originum*, Libri XX: Tomus I, Libros I–X, ed. W. M. Lindsay, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1911), Liber VIII, xi, 84

<sup>355</sup> Fritz Saxl, *Lectures*, (London, Warburg Institute, University of London, 1957), vol. 1, p. 182; Isidori op cit

<sup>356</sup> Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, (London, Routledge, 2002, first published 1964), p. 126. Hermes Trismegistus was regarded in the Renaissance as the author of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a body of work discussing ancient wisdom concerning gods, astrology and magic all of Egyptian and Greek origin. He was considered to have written these works around the time of Moses, but later analysis suggested that at least a considerable portion of these works were more likely to have been written closer to AD 300: Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, (London, Routledge, 2002, first published 1964), Chapter 1.

<sup>357</sup> Cicero, *De natura deorum*, Book 3, 56.

Her claim is that the presence of Hermes Trismegistus was all part of pope Alexander VI's rehabilitation of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola who had been effectively exiled by Innocent VIII.<sup>358</sup> Pico was known as a recent correspondent with Ermolao Barbaro (whose possible involvement in the commission of the Sala dei Santi frescoes will be discussed later) and had written to Alexander VI on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1492, immediately on his elevation to the papacy, asking for pardon. His exoneration came in 1493, but to have accepted his influence on these frescoes would have been a bold move, but not impossible.

This figure does not resemble the images of Mercury/Hermes in the two preceding octagons. Neither does it resemble the then recent portrayal of Hermes Trismegistus in the Siena Duomo pavement, circa 1488. (fig. 4.8) It is difficult to accept with any certainty that this is a portrayal of Hermes Trismegistus in the octagon, the evidence being at best circumstantial.

This sequence of five images acts as a bridge between the narrative of the wall frescoes and that of the ceiling frescoes (fig. 4.9). A logical progression of the eye as entering the room from the Sala dei Misteri would be first to see the *Visitation*, giving continuity of the theme of the Virgin Mary from the previous room. The eye moves to the left, guided by the possible flight into Egypt in the background of the *Visitation* fresco, to Egypt in the portrayal of Sts Anthony and Paul in the desert. Thence to the left is Alexandria for the *Disputa of St Katherine*, introducing a woman bringing Christian learning to the Egyptians. As the eye continues round the room it sees first a New Testament saint, Barbara, being pursued and escaping and then Susanna being pursued by the elders, seized and then escaping. The eye lifts to the centre of the arch in the centre of the room and sees another woman, Io/Isis, being pursued by Zeus/Jupiter. It follows the story until the last octagon showing Io/Isis having escaped her pursuer and now in Egypt in didactic discourse with probably Moses and possibly Hermes Trismegistus, bringing writing and learning to the Egyptians. This flows into the adjacent vault fresco of Io/Isis marrying Osiris, followed by Osiris bringing peace and the agricultural learning to the Egyptians.

These five octagons are an important element in the room. Saxl mentions them in passing, narrating the Ovid story. Parks does not mention them.<sup>359</sup> Poeschel dwells at some length on the role of Hermes Trismegistus without critically assessing whether it is Hermes Trismegistus in the image.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, (London, Routledge, 2002, first published 1964), pp. 127, 129.

<sup>359</sup> Fritz Saxl, *Lectures*, (London, Warburg Institute, University of London, 1957), vol. 1, pp. 181, 182; N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, pp. 291–317.

<sup>360</sup> Sabine Poeschel, S, *Alexander Maximus: das Bildprogramm des Appartamento Borgia im Vatikan*, (Weimar, VDG Verlag, 1999), p.170.

They provide the link between the Christian depictions in the wall frescoes and the pagan depictions in the ceiling vault frescoes, maintaining the theme of bringing peace and learning to the Egyptians.

## 4.2 The ceiling frescoes

Versions of the Egyptian myth of Osiris abounded in ancient Greek literature. John Gwyn Griffiths gives a good account of those who preceded Plutarch and on which Plutarch may have drawn.<sup>361</sup> Herodotus was not the first but he was one of those that identified Isis with Demeter and Osiris with Dionysus.<sup>362</sup> By 1492 there were several texts readily available from which to derive this story. Strabo's *Geographica* had been translated by Guarino da Verona and printed in 1469, although his references to Osiris are mainly just in relation to particular places in Egypt.<sup>363</sup> Poggio Bracciolini's translation of the first five books of the *Histories* of Diodorus Siculus were printed in 1472 and Lorenzo Valla's translation of Herodotus was published in 1474.<sup>364</sup> Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* was part of his *Moralia*, and this was not printed until 1509, in Greek, and a Latin version of *De Iside et Osiride* was printed in 1544, however manuscript versions had been in circulation since the early fifteenth century.<sup>365</sup>

The story as it is told in these ceiling frescoes is a specific version which has been identified with the narrative account by Diodorus Siculus and the interpretive account by Plutarch, but which also calls on a poem by Tibullus.<sup>366</sup> Some previous authors who have analysed these ceiling frescoes, such as Giehlow, Saxl, Parks and Curran, have assumed that the stories came from these ancient authors

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<sup>361</sup> J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride*, edited with an introduction, translation and commentary by J. Gwyn Griffiths, (Cardiff, University of Wales, 1970), pp. 33–100.

<sup>362</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, trans. Godley, (Heinemann, London, 1975), vol.1, pp. 347, 451

<sup>363</sup> Ryan E. Gregg, *Panorama, Power, and History: Vasari and Stradano's City Views in the Palazzo Vecchio*, (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Dissertation Services, 2009), p. 102. Guarino was also engaged in the translation of Plutarch's *Lives*.

<sup>364</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Diodorus of Sicily, The Library of History – with an English translation by C.H. Oldfather*, trans. C H Oldfather, vol. 12 (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1933), p. xxiii.; Rosaria Vignolo Munson *Herodotus: Volume 1: Herodotus and the Narrative of the Past*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 42.

<sup>365</sup> Brian Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance, The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 89

<sup>366</sup> N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, n. 39, p. 311.

through Annius of Viterbo and their analyses have been based to some extent on Annius' version, later published in his *Antiquitates*.<sup>367</sup>

Although some Egyptianising elements had appeared in art during the fifteenth century, these had mainly been reproductions of readily available Egyptian images, such as hieroglyphic motifs taken from obelisks, of which several were accessible in Rome.<sup>368</sup> This is the first significant representation of Osiris in Western Europe since classical times and the frescoes are the first substantive Egyptian narrative to have been depicted since classical times.<sup>369</sup>

#### **4.2.1 Northern vault (fig. 4.10)**

##### **4.2.1.1 Marriage of Isis and Osiris (fig. 4.11)**

Immediately adjacent to the five octagons depicting the story of Io, this fresco shows a woman, very clearly the same woman in the same clothes as the depiction of Io in the last of the octagons, being married to a man who is distinct from the others in the fresco by way of the spangling on his cloak. The figure in the spangled tunic wears no armour and to the left can be seen discarded armour, helmet and shield.

This accords closely with the Diodorus account: 'Some say that Osiris is also represented with the cloak of fawn skin about his shoulders as imitating the sky spangled with stars.'<sup>370</sup> In the same paragraph of this text, Diodorus relates how among the Egyptians a cow is held sacred to Isis. The discarding of arms is as referred to by Plutarch: 'Later he travelled throughout the whole earth

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<sup>367</sup> See section 1.2 above.

<sup>368</sup> For instance Brian Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance, The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 55.

<sup>369</sup> Brian Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance: the Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 107.

<sup>370</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Diodorus of Sicily, The Library of History – with an English translation by C.H. Oldfather*, trans. C. H. Oldfather, vol. 12, (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1933), I, 11, 4., p. 39.



civilising it without the slightest need of arms,...’<sup>371</sup> Diodorus refers to Osiris as ‘not warlike’.<sup>372</sup> A cherub like figure riding a swan leads anticlockwise to the next frame.

#### 4.2.1.2 Osiris teaches ploughing (fig. 4.12)

Within a tabernacle, the same Osiris figure sits on a throne supervising on one side a group of worshippers and on the other a man ploughing with two oxen. Above the throne is the figure of Judith with the head of Holofernes. Below the throne is the phrase:

SUSCEPTO REGNO DOCUIT EGIPTIACOS ARARE E(T) PRO DEO HABITUS

(Having assumed the throne, he taught the Egyptians how to plough, and they held him to be a god: Author’s translation)

Both Diodorus and Plutarch describe Osiris teaching the Egyptians the cultivation of crops.<sup>373</sup> In the case of Diodorus, specifically wheat and barley are mentioned, these having been discovered by Isis. Neither author mentions teaching the use of the plough, although this is intrinsic to such cultivation. Mention of teaching ploughing can be found in Tibullus.<sup>374</sup>

The idea that Osiris embarked on his benevolence only after he had been elevated to the throne, as indicated in the inscription, would appear to derive directly from a line in Diodorus: ‘...after Osiris married Isis and succeeded to the kingship he did many things to the social life of man.’<sup>375</sup>

Parks suggests that because the two bulls pulling the plough are one light and the other dark, this should be interpreted as being a representation of the bull Mnevis, mentioned by Plutarch as being

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<sup>371</sup> Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris, Moralia, with an English translation by Frank Cole Babbitt*, (Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 1936), vol. 5, 356b13, p. 35.

<sup>372</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Diodorus of Sicily, The Library of History – with an English translation by C.H. Oldfather*, trans. C. H. Oldfather, vol. 12, (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1933), 18. 5., p. 59

<sup>373</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Diodorus of Sicily, The Library of History – with an English translation by C.H. Oldfather*, trans. C. H. Oldfather, vol. 12, (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1933), 1. 14. 1., p. 49 and Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, 356b13, p. 35.

<sup>374</sup> Albius Tibullus, ‘Poems’, in *Catullus, Tibullus, Pervigilium Veneris* trans. J. P. Postgate, (London, Loeb, Heinemann, 1913), I.VII.29, p. 231.

<sup>375</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Diodorus of Sicily, The Library of History – with an English translation by C.H. Oldfather*, trans. C. H. Oldfather, vol. 12, (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1933), 1. 13. 5., p. 47.

black, together with the future Apis.<sup>376</sup> It is difficult to reconcile this with the definitive image of the Apis seen in the Southern vault, as Parks recognises.<sup>377</sup> Nevertheless Diodorus discusses Mnevis and Apis as being together associated ‘with every agricultural labour from which mankind profits’.<sup>378</sup> Thus Parks’ suggestion is possible but tenuous. The bulls appear to be light brown and dark brown rather than white and black, and Osiris is the dominant figure in this frame, pointing at the bulls but not yet transmogrified himself into a bull.

This frame is located above the wall fresco of *Susanna and the Elders*, within which a wide variety of plants and animals is displayed.

#### 4.2.1.3 Osiris teaches viticulture (fig. 4.13)

The following frame, located above the north facing window and the wall fresco of the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian, shows Osiris in his spangled cloak, teaching the cultivation of vines. Diodorus refers specifically to Osiris’s interest in viticulture, from his discovery of the vine through to the harvest of grapes and the storage of wine.<sup>379</sup> The identification of Osiris with the Greek god Dionysus would correspond with this interest.

Tibullus goes into slightly more detail, describing the attaching of vines to stakes as shown in the fresco.<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris, Moralia, with an English translation by Frank Cole Babbitt*, (Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 1936), vol. 5, 364b33, p.83, although Plutarch describes Mnevis as black, rather than the brown seen in the bull in this fresco.

<sup>377</sup> N. Randolph Parks, ‘On the meaning of Pinturicchio’s Sala dei Santi’, *Art History* vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, p. 311 n.39 and p. 313 n. 53.

<sup>378</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Diodorus of Sicily, The Library of History – with an English translation by C.H. Oldfather*, trans. C. H. Oldfather, vol. 12, (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1933), 1.21.11., p. 69.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, 1. 15. 8. p. 53.

<sup>380</sup> Albius Tibullus, ‘Poems’, in *Catullus, Tibullus, Pervigilium Veneris* trans. J. P. Postgate, (London, Loeb, Heinemann, 1913), 1.VII.29, p. 231.

#### 4.2.1.4 Osiris teaches fruticulture (fig. 4.14)

The next frame, above the wall fresco of the *Visitation*, shows the tabernacle with Osiris enthroned. This time the tabernacle is surmounted by David with his feet resting on the head of Goliath.<sup>381</sup> Below the throne, the legend reads:

LEGERE POMA AB ARBORIBUS DOCUIT

(He taught them to gather fruit from the trees: Author's translation.)

Just as the ploughing shown in the second frame and the binding of vines shown in the third frame are not specifically mentioned in the sources, this frame shows another activity not specifically mentioned in Diodorus nor Plutarch. The gathering of fruit shown in this frame is also to be found in Tibullus but not the other two authors. Giehlow, Saxl, and Parks, have suggested that the legend on the tabernacle is taken from the same poem by Tibullus, because of some similarity in the wording:<sup>382</sup>

Primus aratra manu sollerti fecit Osiris  
Et teneram ferro sollicitavit humum,  
Primus inexpertae comisit semina terrae  
Pomaque non notis legit ab arboribus.  
Hic docuit teneram palis adiungere vitem,

(It was Osiris' cunning hand that first made  
ploughs and vexed the young earth with the iron  
share. He first entrusted seed to the untried earth,  
and gathered fruits from unknown trees. He showed  
how to join the young vine and the pole.)<sup>383</sup>

This elegy by Tibullus was a birthday poem to his patron Messalla, a Roman general, celebrating his victory in Gallia.<sup>384</sup> In this elegy, Tibullus praises Messalla by comparing him with Osiris, so this is

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<sup>381</sup> Scarpellini suggests that the figure of David was painted by 'Pintoricchiesco timido' and discusses the identity of this individual. See: P. Scarpellini, P. & M. Silvestrelli, *Pintoricchio* Motta, Milano, 2003, p. 172.

<sup>382</sup> Karl Giehlow, *The Humanist Interpretation of Hieroglyphs in the Allegorical Studies of the Renaissance: With a Focus on the Triumphal Arch of Maximilian I*, trans. & ed. Robin Raybould, (Brill, Leiden, 2015), p. 91., Fritz Saxl, *Lectures*, (London, Warburg Institute, University of London, 1957), vol. 1, p. 182 n. 12., N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History* vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, p. 311, n. 39.

<sup>383</sup> Albius Tibullus, 'Poems', in *Catullus, Tibullus, Pervigilium Veneris* trans. J. P. Postgate, (London, Loeb, Heinemann, 1913), I.VII.29–33, p. 231.

not a learned work on Egyptian history but a poem written by someone with a knowledge of the relevant texts. It had been printed together with other works by Catullus, Propertius, and Statius in Venice in 1472 and so would have been readily available, and being in Latin easily accessible. Given that Tibullus mentions all three of the agricultural activities shown in the northern vault, it is quite possible that the author of these frescoes was acquainted with the Tibullus text.

Closer examination of the fruit being plucked from the tree suggests that they are approximately pear shaped. In his *De Iside et Osiride*, Plutarch writes:

Of the plants in Egypt they say that the perseae is especially consecrated to the goddess [Isis] because its fruit resembles a heart and its leaf a tongue.<sup>385</sup>

Although the modern *persea* genus includes the avocado pear, this Mexican fruit was not at the time known in Europe. There is some uncertainty as to what 'persea' may refer to. Pliny is known to have confused it with a peach.<sup>386</sup> The Egyptian perseae is believed to refer to *Mimusops schimperi*

*Mimusops schimperi* resembles a pear tree in general in leaf, flower and form, but is evergreen. The fruit is as large as a pear, oblong to almond-shaped, grass green in color, and has a stone like a plum.<sup>387</sup>

It would seem probable that those directing the subject matter of this fresco had some knowledge or interest in the subject of plants and natural history. This competence will be shown later in this thesis to be relevant in identifying possible authors of these frescoes.

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<sup>384</sup> George McCracken, 'Tibullus, Messalla and the via Latina', *The American Journal of Philology*, vol. 53, No. 4 (1932), Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 344.

<sup>385</sup> Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris, Moralia, with an English translation by Frank Cole Babbitt*, (Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 1936), vol. 5, 378c68, p. 159.

<sup>386</sup> John Gardner Wilkinson. *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians: Including Their Private Life, Government, Laws, Arts, Manufacturers, Religion and Early History: Derived from a Comparison of the Painting, Sculptures and Monuments Still Existing with the Accounts of Ancient Authors*, Second Series, vol. 1, (London, Murray, 184), p. 66.

<sup>387</sup> C. A. Schroeder, 'The Persea Tree of Egypt', *California Avocado Society 1977 Yearbook*, (Carpinteria, California Avocado Society, 1977), p. 59.

## 4.2.2 Southern vault (fig 4.15)

### 4.2.2.1 Assassination of Osiris (fig. 4.16)

This frame, located above the wall fresco of the *Disputa*, shows the murder of Osiris by his brother Typhon. Both Diodorus's and Plutarch's accounts relate this event, but the Plutarch version tells of Osiris being in a box before he was killed, so the version depicted accords more closely with the version by Diodorus.<sup>388</sup>

### 4.2.2.2 Isis brings together the body parts of Osiris (fig. 4.17)

Above the wall fresco of St Anthony Abbot and St Paul, this frame shows a woman collecting together the body parts of Osiris. This figure is not dressed as Isis/Io was in earlier frames, but in the Diodorus version of the story Isis had become queen before embarking on the task of finding Osiris's body parts.<sup>389</sup> This Diodorus account, however, describes Isis killing Typhon before becoming queen and locating the body parts, whereas the sequence of events on this ceiling follows Plutarch that Typhon was still alive after Osiris's body parts had been buried and funeral rites held.<sup>390</sup>

In the centre of the frame is a tabernacle containing an ornate and bejewelled pyramid. Above the tabernacle is a figure holding a trident, most probably Neptune, although Parks argues persuasively that this is Theseus.<sup>391</sup> Below the tabernacle is the legend:

UXOR EIUS ME[M]BRA DISCERPTA TANDEM INVENIT QUIBUS SEPULCRUM  
CONSTITUIT

(His wife finally found the dismembered limbs, for which she built a tomb: Author's translation)

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<sup>388</sup> J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride*, edited with an introduction, translation and commentary by J. Gwyn Griffiths, (Cardiff, University of Wales, 1970), 356b13, p. 139.

<sup>389</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Diodorus of Sicily, The Library of History – with an English translation by C.H. Oldfather*, trans. C. H. Oldfather, vol. 12, (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1933), 1, 21, 3–5, pp. 65–67.,

<sup>390</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Diodorus of Sicily, The Library of History – with an English translation by C.H. Oldfather*, trans. C. H. Oldfather, vol. 12, (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1933), 1, 21, 3, p. 65., J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride*, edited with an introduction, translation and commentary by J. Gwyn Griffiths, (Cardiff, University of Wales, 1970), 358a–358e, pp. 145–147.

<sup>391</sup> N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, p. 312, n. 43.

The pyramid, which reappears in the next frame adjacent to the Apis bull, would be that tomb, containing Osiris's body parts until Osiris was reborn as the Apis. Neither the Diodorus nor the Plutarch versions mention either such a container or any pyramid.

Filarete had in 1445 sculpted and cast the doors of the Porta Argentea, Old St Peter's Basilica (fig. 4.18). In his panel of the Crucifixion of St Peter there is shown a representation of the Meta Romuli pyramid and which is in its design very similar to the pyramids portrayed in these frescoes. The fresco pyramids have been ornamented with appliqué pieces of coloured glass, so bear no resemblance to any Egyptian original.<sup>392</sup>

#### 4.2.2.3 Appearance of Apis (fig 4.19)

Adjoining the arch which holds the five octagon of the story of Io/Isis, and thus linked to the bovine theme, this frame shows the ornately caparisoned bull, the Apis, with the stylised pyramid behind him and shows him being worshipped.

Both Diodorus and Plutarch discuss the veneration of the Apis in Egypt. This was a bull which was worshipped and on its death would be replaced by another bull, the new Apis. These manifestations of the Apis were sacred to Osiris.<sup>393</sup> Diodorus specifically suggests that on Osiris's death his soul passed into the Apis, whereas Plutarch refers to the belief that the Apis is the 'animate image of Osiris' and is the 'bodily image of the soul of Osiris'.<sup>394</sup>

The image of the caparisoned Apis is repeated in the caparisoned bulls that make up the frieze going around the Sala dei Santi at head height as well as being reproduced again in the Sala delle Sibille.

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<sup>392</sup> The Meta Romuli was one of several pyramids built in Rome in classical times, which were steeper than Egyptian pyramids. The pyramids in the frescoes show this steeper angle. It was located close to St Peter's basilica and was also known as the Vatican pyramid. Curran points out that according to the slightly later *Antiquare prospetichie romane*, the Meta Romuli was encrusted with "fine gems". Brian Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance, The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007), p 117. The Meta Romuli was demolished in 1499, ironically by Pope Alexander VI to make way for his new *Via Alessandrina*.

<sup>393</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Diodorus of Sicily, The Library of History – with an English translation by C.H. Oldfather*, trans. C. H. Oldfather, vol. 12, (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1933), I, 21.10., p. 69; Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris, Moralia, with an English translation by Frank Cole Babbitt*, (Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 1936), vol. 5, 380e73, p. 171.

<sup>394</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Diodorus of Sicily, The Library of History – with an English translation by C.H. Oldfather*, trans. C. H. Oldfather, vol. 12, (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1933), I. 85. 4., p. 291; Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris, 368b43*, p. 105; and Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris, 362d29*, p. 71.

Curran points out that the Apis image in the fresco fits with descriptions by several writers such as Herodotus and Strabo.<sup>395</sup> Parks suggests that the fresco Apis best fits the description in Plutarch.<sup>396</sup>

To the left of the frame stands a naked torso, with features similar to that of the killer Typhon in the frame of the assassination of Osiris, and with its limbs cut short. Whereas Diodorus reports the slaying of Typhon, Plutarch relates that Horus, the assistant and possibly son of Isis, removed Typhon's sinews to make a lyre and castrated him to deny him his strength.<sup>397</sup>

Among the worshippers is a female figure holding a standard. Parks identifies this as being Isis, but the combination of clothes she wears is unlike any of those worn by any other version of Isis in these ceilings.<sup>398</sup> The standard held by the figure displays a hawk which Parks suggests is the hawk of Osiris as described by Plutarch.<sup>399</sup>

#### 4.2.2.4 Procession of Apis (fig. 4.20)

Standing above the wall fresco of St Barbara, the final frame shows a tabernacle being carried by four bearers, and surmounted by the figure of Hercules. In the tabernacle stands a golden bull on a plinth. Below the plinth is the legend:

SACRA NO[N] PRIUS INITIABANT Q[UAM] POPULO OS(T)ENSUM BOVEM  
ASCENDERENT

(They did not start the holy rites until they raised the ox to show to the people; Author's translation.)

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<sup>395</sup> Brian Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance, The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 115 and p. 327, n. 35.

<sup>396</sup> N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, p.314, n. 58.

<sup>397</sup> Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris, Moralia, with an English translation by Frank Cole Babbitt*, (Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 1936), vol. 5, 373d55, p. 133. Parks suggests that the torso in the fresco lacks genitals. N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, p. 314, n. 58.

<sup>398</sup> N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, p. 314, n. 58.

<sup>399</sup> Loc. cit.

It is not immediately clear what rites this text refers to. The worship of the Apis has already taken place in the previous frame. Plutarch does describe the ceremonies associated with the burial of the Apis:

...the public ceremonies which the priests perform in the burial of the Apis, when they convey his body on an improvised bier, do not in any way come short of a Bacchic procession; for they fasten skins of fawns about themselves, and carry Bacchic wands and indulge in shoutings and movements exactly as do those who are under the spell of the Dionysiac ecstasies. For the same reason many of the Greeks make statues of Dionysus in the form of a bull; and the women of Elis invoke him, praying that the god may come with the hoof of a bull; and the epithet applied to Dionysus among the Argives is "Son of the Bull." They call him up out of the water by the sound of trumpets, at the same time casting into the depths a lamb as an offering to the Keeper of the Gate. The trumpets they conceal in Bacchic wands...<sup>400</sup>

There are some clear similarities in this frame to the scene described by Plutarch. This Apis is carried on a bier, one of the bearers carries a staff or wand, and the bearers are preceded by two figures playing a horn and a 'trumpet'.

Attached to the horn that is being blown is a pennant with the Aragonese double crown, an emblem that had been adopted by Rodrigo Borgia to complement his family emblem of a bull and to reinforce his supposed family connections to the kings of Aragon.<sup>401</sup> This celebratory scene might be interpreted as a metaphor for the celebrations of the enthronement of Pope Alexander VI.

The image of the golden bull echoes the golden bull that stands on the Arch of Constantine in the *Disputà* fresco, and the bull in this frame is heading down towards the *Disputà*.

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<sup>400</sup> Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris, Moralia, with an English translation by Frank Cole Babbitt*, (Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 1936), vol. 5, 364e35, p. 85.

<sup>401</sup> See section 1.2 above



### 4.2.3 Interpreting the ceiling frescoes

In the context of the recent elevation of Rodrigo Borgia to the papacy there are several approaches to interpretation to consider. The theme of death and resurrection has clear parallels with the story of Christ. The church militant and the church triumphant would fit with the eventual elevation of Isis and Osiris to the status of gods. Parks sees the ceiling themes as metaphors for the challenges facing ecclesia as it battles with the Mohammedan threat from the Ottoman Turks.<sup>402</sup>

The triumph of the Apis could provide a metaphor for the triumph of Alexander VI whose bull emblem he parades through the rooms and through his papacy. The bull in the Borgia coat of arms is to be found in the central boss in both these ceilings. Saxl sees this as core to interpreting these frescoes.<sup>403</sup> Curran sees parallels with Romulus's use of an ox and a cow to plough the boundaries of Rome when he was laying out his proposed city.<sup>404</sup>

Previous attempts to interpret these ceiling frescoes have assumed the involvement of Annius of Viterbo in their commissioning, so the resultant interpretive approaches have been made through Annius' description of the theme in his subsequently published *Antiquitates*.

Any interpretation cannot be purely in Egyptian terms. There is a marked lack of Egyptianising elements despite there being many examples of Egyptian iconographic elements in contemporary Rome.<sup>405</sup> In these ceiling frescoes there are just two Egyptian or quasi Egyptian elements. The tabernacle in the 'Osiris teaches fruticulture' fresco is held up by two, nemes wearing, sphinx-like figures. The box into which Osiris's body parts are placed is in the form of a pyramid, but even that is a Roman rather than an Egyptian pyramid.

From looking at the texts on which the frescoes are based it is possible to get some idea of what or even who was involved in the commission. The author of the theme was well acquainted with Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*. Parks suggests that the southern vault relied purely on Plutarch.<sup>406</sup> Most probably the author had some knowledge of Diodorus Siculus's *Histories* and it seems likely that he

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<sup>402</sup> N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, *passim* but especially pp. 302–304

<sup>403</sup> Fritz Saxl, *Lectures*, (London, Warburg Institute, University of London, 1957), vol. 1, pp.174–88.

<sup>404</sup> Brian Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance, The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 111.

<sup>405</sup> Curran provides many examples of Egyptian monuments then in Rome, from hieroglyph covered obelisks to lions and sphinxes. Brian Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance, The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007), particularly chapter 2.

<sup>406</sup> N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History* vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, p.114, n. 58.

had at least an acquaintance with the *Elegies* of Tibullus. It would seem that any interpretation of these frescoes must have at its core Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*.

#### **4.4 Chapter summary**

The five octagons describing the story of the god Io and her temporary transmogrification into a heifer, act as a bridge between the wall frescoes and the ceiling frescoes. Based on the story as related by Ovid they introduce a pre-Christian narrative, the bovine theme and the conflated concept of Io and Isis.

The ceiling frescoes narrate a version of the Isis, Osiris, Apis story that derives from Plutarch, but include references to a poem by Tibullus which uses the story as a metaphor for the addressee of the poem. The Diodorus Siculus version of the story may be relevant but this is not certain.

Above the tabernacle frames can be seen small depictions of Judith, victorious over Holofernes, David, victorious of Goliath, Hercules and a figure that might be Neptune or his son Theseus.

There are some clear references to the Borgia emblem of a bull, but it is not evident that this is the sole purpose of using this narrative. The Egyptian aspect of the story is not dominant. There is a need for a more considered interpretation for the Isis, Osiris, Apis theme being chosen to be displayed.

## Chapter 5 The programme of the Sala dei Santi – iconology <sup>407</sup>

### 5.1 Introduction.

A purely iconographical analysis of the frescoes in this room is a necessary precursor to a fuller iconological exegesis. As Saxl has made clear, the bull motif is important in this room. It is also important to observe that although there is a clear theme from antiquity, the story of Isis, Osiris and the Apis, there is a paucity of antique motifs or images beyond the purely decorative grotesques.

For five of the frescoes, those of St Barbara, Susanna, St Sebastian, *The Visitation* and the fresco of Sts Anthony Abbot and Paul the Hermit, there is nothing immediately apparent which links them to any great deeper iconological programme. Although there may be some minor linkages, such as the Egyptian aspect and setting of the fresco of Sts Anthony and Paul, these five scenes would appear to be conventional hagiographical representations of saints and two scenes from the Bible. There may also be other significances, such as St Sebastian's connection with Rome on a wall with a window looking out onto Rome, for a non-Italian pope who was establishing a Roman base for his family. However there is no immediately apparent connection between them or between them and the other frescoes on the arch and in the vaults in this room.

The *Disputà* is clearly more complex, situated so as to dominate the room and replete with more elements with greater complexity and with more portraits than the other wall frescoes. It is in the ceiling frescoes that the greatest challenge to interpretation of the room's theme is to be found. Previous authors who have attempted an iconological explanation, such as Saxl, Parks and Cieri Via have sought to explain the room through consideration of the ceiling frescoes.<sup>408</sup> In attempting an iconological exegesis of the frescoes in this room I have followed others in focussing on the ceiling frescoes and the *Disputà*.

By presupposing, and not challenging, the assumption that Annius of Viterbo was the author of the frescoes the scope for understanding this room is unnecessarily limited. By re-examining the authorship of the frescoes there is the opportunity to uncover wider possibilities of understanding.

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<sup>407</sup> For a definition of iconology as used here see Erwin Panofsky, 'Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art', in *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, (Harmondsworth, Peregrine Books, 1970, reprinted from New York, Doubleday, 1955), pp. 51–81. See note 5 above.

<sup>408</sup> Fritz Saxl, *Lectures*, (London, Warburg Institute, University of London, 1957), vol. 1, pp.174–88; N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979; Claudia Cieri Via, 'Characteres et figuras in opere magico. Pinturicchio et la decoration de la camera segreta de l'appartement Borgia', *Revue de l'Art*, No 94, 1991, pp. 11–26.; Claudia Cieri Via, 'Mito, allegoria e religione nell'Appartamento Borgia in Vaticano', in *Le Arti a Roma da Sisto IV a Giulio*. (Rome, Bagatto, 1985), pp. 77–104.

This section of the thesis therefore establishes a set of criteria against which candidates for the role of author might be assessed, tests Annius of Viterbo against these criteria and then tests other possible authors.

There are many contemporaries both humanists and clerics, who, *prima facie*, may be considered to have been influencers on this commission. There were several academies active in Italy at this time with a range of humanistic and philosophical subjects under study. Within the church were many eminent thinkers. Most can be, and have been, swiftly eliminated after a brief review because they so manifestly fail to meet at least one of the criteria. The alternatives to Annius of Viterbo presented and considered here include those suggested by other writers about these frescoes. Also included are others known to have been in the circles of these suggested alternatives. Other contemporary thinkers who were active in related areas but who cannot immediately be eliminated are included. These selected candidates are examined in more detail and the findings assessed against the four criteria.

The last few weeks of 1492 and the first few months of 1493 is the time when the candidate must have been in a position to exercise this influence, and around this time there was interest in the possibility that ancient Egyptian mythology might be relevant to a *prisca theologia*. It would be logical to look amongst those showing particular interest in this area of humanistic thought to find likely possible authors. Figure 5.1 shows a timeline for the candidates to be considered, the red vertical bar marking the years 1492 and 1493 when the frescoes were commissioned.

Having propounded a more likely contender for the role of author I then look at the influences and interests of that individual in order to elucidate a new interpretation of the frescoes.

## 5.2 Criteria for assessing likely authorship of the fresco programme

In looking for and assessing potential authors of the themes in this room, four criteria are used. These are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for the individual to have been the author:

1. Location: Was the candidate in the right place to be able to exert any influence when the work was being commissioned or carried out?<sup>409</sup>
2. Access: Was the candidate in a position of stature or influence to have been able to contribute any guidance to the commissioner or the artist?
3. Knowledge: Did the candidate know the material embodied in the work well enough to have been the one, or one of those, who helped specify the work?
4. Motivation: Is the theme consonant with the areas of interest of the candidate at the time of the commission?

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<sup>409</sup> The work was carried out so rapidly that it is unlikely that correspondence alone would have sufficed to effect such a complex set of narratives and such detailed execution.

### 5.2.1 Annius of Viterbo, 1432–1502

Assessing Annius of Viterbo as possible inspirer or author of these frescoes against these four criteria is revealing. Determining the timing of the commission is relatively straightforward. The dating of the frescoes in the Appartamento Borgia is well documented. The *terminus post quem* can be defined as being between 17<sup>th</sup> November 1492 when Pinturicchio is recorded as still working on a fresco in Orvieto, and 9<sup>th</sup> December 1492 when the chapter of Orvieto received notification that Pinturicchio had appealed to the Apostolic Camera over a matter of his being paid by them.<sup>410</sup> The *terminus ante quem* is given by his signing in February 1495 in Perugia the contract for the Fossi altarpiece.<sup>411</sup> Parks argues convincingly that Pinturicchio most probably commenced the painting of the Sala dei Santi in approximately May 1493.<sup>412</sup> Logistically Pinturicchio and his team must have spent 1493 working on the early rooms in the sequence, as the Torre Borgia was still being built, precluding the two rooms therein being painted at this time and making it very difficult, if not impossible, to paint the immediately adjoining rooms. The two rooms in the Torre Borgia have the date 1494 inscribed in them, confirming such a chronological sequence.<sup>413</sup>

The whereabouts and activities of Annius of Viterbo, particularly around this time, are well documented by Roberto Weiss.<sup>414</sup> Annius was living in and active in Viterbo from 1490, and on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1491 he published *De Viterbii viris et factis illustribus*, dedicated to Ranuccio Farnese.<sup>415</sup> Specifically he was in Viterbo during the visit by Pope Alexander VI in December 1493. It was during this visit that Annius met the Pope, and in the presence of the Pope and the papal court unearthed some ancient statues of figures from the mythical history of Viterbo.<sup>416</sup> Weiss hypothesises that this was the occasion when he came to the attention of Pope Alexander VI, who then went on to call on

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<sup>410</sup> N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art history* vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, p. 316, n. 82. – quoting Ricci.

<sup>411</sup> Loc. cit. – again quoting Ricci.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 316, 317, n. 82, although Parks is in error in dating the visit of Prince Federigo of Naples to three months after Alexander's letter of March 1493 to the canons of Orvieto cathedral. Burchard records the Prince's stay in the rooms as commencing on Christmas Eve 1492. Johann Burchard, *At the Court of the Borgia, being an Account of the Reign of Pope Alexander VI written by his Master of Ceremonies*, trans. & ed. Geoffrey Parker, (London, Folio Society, 1963), p. 49.

<sup>413</sup> Claudia La Malfa, *Pinturicchio's Roman fresco cycles re-examined, 1478–1494*, (PhD thesis, Warburg Institute, 2003), p. 67, n. 27, and p. 155.

<sup>414</sup> R. Weiss, 'An Unknown Epigraphic Tract by Annius of Viterbo' in *Italian Studies Presented to E R Vincent*, (Cambridge, W. Heffer, 1962), pp. 101–120.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.* p. 102.

<sup>416</sup> It should be mentioned that these statues, together with some inscriptions which he had previously unearthed nearby, had been created by Annius and buried by him earlier. Roberto Weiss, *A Renaissance Forger's Progress*. Text of a lunch time lecture at UCL 1962. Typescript dated 'Henley on Thames 25 January 1962.' Currently in the library of the Warburg Institute, London, p. 10.

him to assist in the specification of the decoration of the Sala dei Santi, citing Giehlow, Saxl and Iversen.<sup>417</sup> This visit occurred in December 1493, whereas it is almost certain that the painting of the room was at least underway, if not completed, earlier in the year.

There is no evidence that Annus had, at the time of the commissioning of these frescoes, any significant access to the Curia or the pope. Although the city of Viterbo is only around 100 kilometres from Rome, and thus but a few days ride away, there is no evidence of any contact between Annus and the papal court, including correspondence, let alone contact with Pope Alexander VI himself before this visit. Annus was eventually appointed to the office of Master of the Sacred Apostolic Palace, but this was in early 1499.<sup>418</sup> At the time that the frescoes were commissioned there is no evidence that Annus had the access that would have been necessary to have influenced the frescoes.

Annus had some knowledge of the authors and works underlying the Isis, Osiris and Apis theme in the ceiling frescoes. To have specified the theme of the ceiling of the Sala dei Santi, Annus would have needed to have been well acquainted with Diodorus Siculus, Tibullus and Plutarch.<sup>419</sup> That he was acquainted with the Osiris myth by this time is confirmed by his dedication to Ranuccio Farnese in 1491 of the *De Viterbii viris et factis illustribus* in which he traces the Farnese line back to Osiris. In a tract which Weiss dates to either 1492 or 1493, *De marmoreis Volturrhenis tabulis*, Annus writes of

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<sup>417</sup> “Fu probabilmente in questa occasione che Annio riuscì ad attrarre su di sé l'attenzione di Alessandro VI. Non è quindi strano che papa Alessandro si rivolgesse proprio ad Annio quando si trattò di tracciare un programma al Pinturicchio con le storie di Iside ed Osiride e del bue Api per gli affreschi di una delle sale dell'appartamento Borgia in Vaticano.” (‘It was probably on this occasion that Annus had succeeded in attracting the attention of Alexander VI. It is not therefore surprising that Pope Alexander actually turned to Annus to get him to draw up a programme for Pinturicchio with the stories of Isis and Osiris and the Apis bull for the frescoes in one of the rooms of the Appartamento Borgia in the Vatican.’ Author’s translation.) Roberto Weiss, ‘Traccia per una biografia di Annio da Viterbo’, *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, vol. 5, 1962, p. 434. He references in the same paper, *ibid* p. 434, n.6, are to Karl Giehlow, ‘Die Hieroglyphenkunde des Humanismus in der Allegorie der Renaissance’, *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, vol. 32, 1915, pp.1–229; Fritz Saxl, *Lectures*, (London, Warburg Institute, University of London, 1957), vol. 1, pp.174–88, and Erik Iversen, ‘Hieroglyphic Studies of the Renaissance’, *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 100, no. 658, 1958, pp. 15–21.

Weiss is more specific in this assertion in the talk he gave in 1962 – ‘Accordingly, acting on the Pope’s instruction, Annus drew up a programme for the painter. A bull happened to figure in the Borgia coat of arms. Hence Annus devised a series of stories connected with Isis and Osiris and the ox Apis, which were duly executed by the painter on the ceiling of the hall of the saints in the aforesaid apartment, to the greater glory of the Borgias.’ Weiss, *Forger’s progress*, pp. 10, 11.

<sup>418</sup> Roberto Weiss, ‘Traccia per una biografia di Annio da Viterbo’, *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, vol. 5, 1962, p. 436.

<sup>419</sup> Parks’s analysis shows in some detail why it would have been necessary to have been acquainted with all three, and in particular looks at Plutarch’s allegorical interpretation. See N. Randolph Parks, ‘On the meaning of Pinturicchio’s Sala dei Santi’, *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, p. 300, p. 311, nn. 38, 39, and p. 314 n. 58.

six inscriptions, the last description being *De ultima herculean Osidiris tabula* in which he refers to Diodorus Siculus, thus demonstrating his acquaintance with this writer.<sup>420</sup> Tibullus wrote in Latin and his texts had been printed in 1472 by Wendolin of Speyer in Venice, so was easily accessible. Much of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* had been translated into Latin by Leonardo Bruni, Guarino da Verona and others earlier in the fifteenth century, and Annius was clearly, if at times confusedly, acquainted with sections of it.<sup>421</sup> The *editio princeps* of the *Moralia*, which contains *De Iside et Osiride*, was not published until 1509 by Aldus Manutius and Demetrius Ducas in Venice, and Annius' limited competence in Greek may have limited his awareness of *De Iside et Osiride*. Annius' *Antiquitates* does not rely on any knowledge of Plutarch, so there is some doubt whether he was equipped with the knowledge necessary to have prescribed the theme for the ceilings.<sup>422</sup>

In considering what might have motivated Annius to have come up with these ideas for the frescoes it is necessary to consider the other frescoes in the room beyond just the Isis, Osiris and Apis story on the ceiling. The Egyptian theme on these ceiling vaults echoes Egyptian elements on the wall frescoes, the two Egyptian hermit saints and the scene of the *Disputà* of St Katherine at Alexandria. As discussed in section 3.7.4.3 above, dominating the foreground of the *Disputà*, standing slightly

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<sup>420</sup> That this tract includes sections in Greek shows that he read something of the language. However Weiss suggests that 'Annius doubtless used the Latin version of Diodorus by Poggio, first printed in 1472.' Roberto Weiss, 'An unknown Epigraphic Tract by Annius of Viterbo' in *Italian Studies Presented to E R Vincent*, (Cambridge, Heffer, 1962), p. 119, n. 50. Fumagalli is again dismissive of Mattiangelli's evidence of Annius' acquaintance with Diodorus 'Penso in modo particolare a quanto scrive a proposito della traduzione di Diodoro eseguita da Poggio << un incunabolo del 1481, contenente anche il *De situ, moribus et populis Germaniae* di Tacito, si trova a Viterbo, con alcune pastille marginali probabilmente di Annio>> (p. 280). In nota Mattiangeli specifica che si tratta di un volume della Biblioteca Comunale, segnato M.s H.F.6.33, ma le riproduzioni fotografiche, gentilmente inviatemi dal direttore professor Carosi, dimostrano che le postille, del resto scarse e prive di interesse, sono bensì di mano quattrocentesca, ma certo non di Annio.' (I am thinking in particular of what she writes about the copy of Poggio's translation of Diodorus, "an incunabulum of 1481, which also contains the 'De situ et moribus Populis Germaniae' of Tacitus, is located in Viterbo, with some marginal annotations, probably by Annius" (p.280). In the note Mattiangeli specifies that this is a volume in the Biblioteca Comunale, marked Ms. H.F.6.33, but the photographic reproduction, kindly sent by the Director, Professor Carosi, shows that the annotations, the remainder being poor and uninteresting, but rather are of fifteenth-century hand, but certainly not of Annius.' Author's translation), Edoardo Fumagalli, 'G. Baffioni-P.Mattiangeli, Annio da Viterbo. Documenti e ricerche. Book Review', in *Aevum*, 56.3, 1982, p. 551.

<sup>421</sup> Anthony Grafton, 'Invention of Traditions and Traditions of Invention in Renaissance Europe, the strange case of Annius of Viterbo' in Anthony Grafton & Anne Blair (eds), *The transmission of culture in early modern Europe*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), p. 15.

<sup>422</sup> Annius did acquire some knowledge of Greek later in his life: Roberto Weiss, 'An unknown Epigraphic Tract by Annius of Viterbo' in *Italian Studies Presented to E R Vincent*, (Cambridge, Heffer, 1962), p. 105, n. 12. Parks points out that Annius' account of the myth in his *Antiquitates* did not require knowledge of Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*. N. Randolph Parks, 'On the meaning of Pinturicchio's Sala dei Santi', *Art History*, vol. 2, no. 3, September 1979, p. 311 n. 41. That he also disliked Greek culture, which is documented in E.N. Tigerstedt, "Ioannes Annius and Graecia Mendax" in *Classical Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies in Honor of Berthold Louis Ullman*, vol. 2, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome, 1964, pp. 293-310, must have limited his interest and access to much of the humanistic development then in process.



outside of the picture, looking in and executed with much gilded stucco relief, is a markedly Turkish figure on a horse, probably a representation of Djem, the younger brother of Sultan Bayezid II.

Annius was vehemently opposed to the Turks. In 1480, the year in which the Turks landed at and took Otranto, he published two tracts against the Turks, *De futuris Christianorum triumphis in Turcos et Saracenos* and *Tractatus de imperio Turcorum*. It seems unlikely that Annius would have contemplated the portrayal of Turkish figures in these frescoes in such a good light, nor would his anti-Turkish views necessarily have been popular with a pope who was in correspondence with Sultan Bayezid II and who in the following year turned, successfully, to Bayezid for assistance when Rome was threatened with attack by Charles VIII.<sup>423</sup> Annius' bellicose stance towards the Turks does not accord with Pope Alexander VI's stance as a bringer of peace.

The absence of any real, or even falsified, hieroglyphics in these rooms additionally counts against the involvement of Annius. Epigraphy was Annius' great interest, particularly around this time when he was digging up so-called ancient inscriptions, which he had made and buried. He claimed to be translating Etruscan hieroglyphics, although subsequent study has shown that his translations were invented. It might be expected that had he been asked to contribute to the decoration of this room, he would have wished to display his erudition in this area, not least as part of his campaign of self-advancement. It is therefore remarkable that nowhere in this room is there any trace of any of Annius' so called Etruscan hieroglyphics or of any Egyptian hieroglyphics. The absence of the latter is the more remarkable because of the ready access to genuine examples in Rome at that time, for instance the various obelisks then in Rome and on the plinth of the Lion of Nectanebo I.<sup>424</sup> In this room Pinturicchio and his team made ready use of grotesques, based on the designs recently uncovered in Nero's Domus Aurea so they were ready to incorporate locally viewable ancient imagery, but not hieroglyphics.

Against the four criteria suggested earlier Annius is unlikely to have been the inspirer or author of the fresco themes in the Sala dei Santi. He may have had some, but possibly not all, of the knowledge required to suggest some of the themes, but there is little apparent reason or motivation why he

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<sup>423</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)*, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, pp. 453–455. The Sultan's financial contribution was stolen by agents of Giovanni della Rovere en route.

<sup>424</sup> Brian Curran, *The Egyptian Renaissance, The Afterlife of Ancient Egypt in Early Modern Italy*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 28 and 100.

Pinturicchio had painted more than one sphinx amongst the 63 images on the ceiling of the Sala de Semidei in the Palazzo di Domenico Della Rovere in 1490. The absence of Egyptian images in the Sala dei Santi, other than the highly stylized pyramids towards the end of the Apis myth ceiling fresco, is notable.

should have chosen them. More importantly at this time he was neither geographically close enough nor did he have the access which would have enabled him to have influenced the commissioning of the decoration of this room. It is possible, conversely, that Annius used these frescoes as inspiration for his *Antiquitates* some years later.

Annius of Viterbo's candidature for authorship does not meet criteria one and two. It also does not meet criterion three because of his lack of knowledge of Plutarch. There is no evidence for him succeeding against criterion four.

### **5.2.2 Julius Pomponius Laetus, 1425–1498**

As founder and leader of the Roman Academy, Pomponius should have been geographically well positioned to be involved with this fresco programme. Something of a maverick, he had come from a background of poverty, through learning as a disciple of Lorenzo Valla, to becoming a professor at the University of Rome, an institution which was to benefit greatly from Alexander VI's attention.<sup>425</sup>

Following in Valla's footsteps, Pomponius was in the main a philologist with a deep interest in ancient texts and ancient practices so it might be expected that he would have an interest in ancient Egypt. His interest was, however, confined to ancient Roman activities and ancient Latin works. He refused to learn Greek, lest it should mar his knowledge of Latin. There seems no good reason why Pomponius would have been well acquainted with, let alone would have advocated a text by Diodorus or Plutarch.

His relationship with the Roman Catholic Church was variable, but rarely good. A believer in a Creator, he despised Christianity and was accused of advocating, not a syncretisation of Christianity with other ancient religions, but its displacement. The Roman Academy came under investigation in 1468, under Pope Pius II, for possible heresy and later there were accusations of sodomy. Pomponius fled Rome. Although he returned later, his standing with the Church was irreparably harmed.

Pomponius fulfils criterion one, is unlikely to fulfil criterion two but does not meet criterion three and possibly four.

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<sup>425</sup> The source for information in this section is predominantly: Ludwig von Pastor, *The history of the popes, from the close of the Middle Ages. Drawn from the secret archives of the Vatican and other original sources*, vol. 4, (London, Routledge and K. Paul, 1906), pp. 41–46.

### 5.2.3 Francisco Borgia, 1441–1511

Sabine Poeschel puts forward Francisco Borgia as a possible candidate for *spiritus rector* of the decoration of the whole suite of rooms.<sup>426</sup> This Francisco, not to be confused with St Francis Borgia, was probably a cousin of Rodrigo and a son of Pope Callixtus III.<sup>427</sup> There is little recorded about him until the later 1490s when he rose to the level of cardinal, but it is known that in September 1493 he was appointed as treasurer general, so he may have been in the right place at roughly the right time.<sup>428</sup> There is no evidence to suggest he had any great influence, and Giuseppe Portigliotti indicates that, to the contrary, he had very little influence.<sup>429</sup> There is no evidence that he had any aptitude for or interest in Greek, in Egyptian mythology or in many of the matters relating to the Sala dei Santi frescoes. He may thus have been amongst those who approved the choice of theme, but in the absence of evidence it is unlikely that he would have been or could have been the inspirer of the Egyptian theme.

Because he does not meet criteria three and four, Francisco Borgia cannot be considered as the author of these frescoes.

### 5.2.4 Adriano Castellesi, 1458/60–1521/22

Adriano Castellesi would at first sight appear to be well positioned and well placed to have influenced any decisions concerning the new pope's apartments. He had a learned and classical education and was well versed in Latin Greek and Hebrews so would have had few problems with understanding the texts of Tibullus, Diodorus Siculus and Plutarch, although he expressed the view that writers should shun Greek based words in favour of Latin.<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> Sabine Poeschel, S, *Alexander Maximus: das Bildprogramm des Appartamento Borgia im Vatikan*, (Weimar, VDG Verlag, 1999), p. 250.

<sup>427</sup> Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), p. 67.

<sup>428</sup> Pinturicchio was later, in 1497, to paint a portrait of Francisco Borgia as part of picture of the Virgin: *Madonna with Writing Child and Bishop*, 1497, Oil on wood, 158 x 77.3 cm., Museu de Belles Arts de València. It has also been suggested that it is Francesco who is portrayed in the fresco of *The Assumption* in the preceding room the Sala dei Misteri, but this figure seems very much younger than the Valencia portrait and unlikely to be that of someone aged 61. Michael Mallett, *The Borgias*, (London, Paladin, 1971), p. 276, n. 7.

<sup>429</sup> Giuseppe Portigliotti, *The Borgias: Alexander VI, Caesar, Lucrezia*, trans. B Miall, (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1928), p. 15.

<sup>430</sup> John F. D'Amico, 'The Progress of Renaissance Latin Prose: the case of Apulæianism', in John F. D'Amico, *Roman and German Humanism 1450–1550*, ed. P. F. Grendler, (Aldershot, Variorum, 1993), p. 382.

His entry into the Curia was facilitated by the then Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia, so he was amongst that group of men, including Paolo Cortesi, who would be in a position to advise each pope.<sup>431</sup> That it was Rodrigo Borgia who gave him his preferment, and who as Alexander VI would continue his advance, eventually to becoming a cardinal, would suggest that the new pope would be particularly ready to listen to his advice.

His career with the Curia reflected his oratorical and literary skills, including being appointed as papal scriptor, an apostolic secretary and an apostolic protonotary. He was sufficiently well regarded by Pope Innocent VIII to be asked represent the Church's interests on special missions to England (where he was collector of Peter's pence and was appointed to the sees of Hereford and of Bath and Wells) and to Scotland where he was legate to King James II.<sup>432</sup> This journey to the British Isles commenced in 1489 and he did not return until summer 1494, thus he was not in the right location to have had any influence on the commissioning of these frescoes.<sup>433</sup>

Castellesi does not meet criterion one.

### 5.2.5 Paolo Cortesi, 1465–1510

Poeschel identifies Paolo Cortesi as the figure prominently depicted in the fresco of *Rhetoric* in the Sala delle Arti Liberali in the Borgia Apartments, and suggests him as the advisor to the decoration of the rooms.<sup>434</sup>

Educated in Rome, San Gimignano and Pisa, Cortesi was acquainted with the humanist traditions of both Rome and Florence.<sup>435</sup> From a well-connected Curial family, he entered papal service as a scriptor at the age of sixteen and rose through the ranks to apostolic protonotary and was later

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<sup>431</sup> Sabine Poeschel, 'A Hitherto Unknown Portrait of a Renaissance Humanist', *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 1, Spring 1990, p. 151–152.; John F. D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome*, (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 16.

<sup>432</sup> John F. D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome*, (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 17.

<sup>433</sup> Sabine Poeschel, 'A Hitherto Unknown Portrait of a Renaissance Humanist', *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 1, Spring 1990, p. 151.

<sup>434</sup> Sabine Poeschel, S, *Alexander Maximus: das Bildprogramm des Appartamento Borgia im Vatikan*, (Weimar, VDG Verlag, 1999), p. 252, and S. Poeschel, 'A Hitherto Unknown Portrait of a Renaissance Humanist', *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 1, Spring 1990, p. 151.

<sup>435</sup> This and subsequent comments on Cortesi are derived from John F. D'Amico, 'Cortesi' in *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation*, volumes 1, ed. Peter G. Bietenholz and Thomas Brian Deutscher, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 345, 346.

made apostolic secretary by Pope Alexander VI. He was a friend of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Poliziano, and after Pomponius Laetus's death led the informal Roman Academy.

Cortesi was very much a Ciceronian, with a focus on emulating the style of Cicero and on vernacular poetry.<sup>436</sup> There is no evidence of him showing interest in Greek writings or Egyptian myths. Thus he had the opportunity, being in the right place and having access, but his knowledge may not have been appropriate and there is no apparent reason why he should want to adopt this topic.

In the criteria for assessing likely authorship of the Sala dei Santi frescoes, Paolo Cortesi does not meet the third and there is no evidence that he fulfils the fourth.

### 5.2.6 Alessandro Farnese, 1468–1549

Alessandro Farnese, later elected Pope Paul III, would appear to have had the opportunity to have been influential on this fresco programme and has been proposed as its author by Cox.<sup>437</sup> He was made apostolic protonotary by Innocent VIII, and treasurer general to the apostolic chamber on September 6<sup>th</sup> 1492, by Alexander VI who then appointed him cardinal on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1493 at age 24.<sup>438</sup> He was educated under Pomponius Laetus in Rome, at the Medici court in Florence and at the University of Pisa.<sup>439</sup> He was acquainted with Ficino, Poliziano, Lascari, Pico della Mirandola and Lorenzo Pucci. He also corresponded with Annius of Viterbo in 1491 and was the grandson of Ranuccio Farnese, Annius' dedicatee for *De Viterbii viris et factis illustribus*.<sup>440</sup>

He was only 24 years old when the painting of the frescoes commenced. His rapid elevation was due in part to the close relationship with the Farnese family required by the Borgias, and it was Cardinal

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<sup>436</sup> John F. D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome*, (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 105.

<sup>437</sup> Joanne Cox, *The Iconography of the Borgia Apartments*. (MA dissertation, Courtauld Institute, 1982).

<sup>438</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)*, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, p. 444.

<sup>439</sup> Ludwig von Pastor, *The history of the popes, from the close of the Middle Ages. Drawn from the secret archives of the Vatican and other original sources*, ed. Ralph Francis, Kerr. vol. 11, (London, Kegan Paul, Trenc, Trubner, 1923), p. 17.

<sup>440</sup> Roberto Weiss, 'Traccia per una biografia di Annio da Viterbo', *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, vol. 5, 1962, p. 106, n.16.

Rodrigo Borgia who had sponsored his advancement in the Curia. This progress under Innocent VIII was not helped by that pope's disapproval owing to recent temporary imprisonment as a consequence of some family quarrel. Once Rodrigo Borgia became pope his advancement became more rapid, not least because Alessandro's younger sister, Giulia, although married to a member of the Orsini family, was at that time Alexander VI's mistress.<sup>441</sup>

Alessandro Farnese's education under Pomponio would have been focussed on Latin rather than Greek, see section 5.2.2 above. As Pope Paul III he was to show some disfavour to the Greek community in Italy.<sup>442</sup> There is no extant evidence of his having any interest in Greek authors nor especial knowledge of Diodorus or Plutarch. Although some opportunity was there, his influence would seem small and there is no apparent motivation for him to have specified a story about Egyptian mythology, even were he to have been acquainted with it.

Farnese fulfils criterion one and possibly two. He does not meet criterion three and there is no evidence for his fulfilling criterion four.

### 5.2.7 The Platonic Academy in Florence

There is one group of scholars who had the requisite knowledge and motivation, the members of Ficino's Florentine Academy. One of the main activities of Ficino was the translation of Greek texts into Latin, so the writings of Diodorus Siculus and Plutarch would have been available to him and his academy before they were published in Latin translation.<sup>443</sup> Poliziano, another member of the academy, was engaged in translating works of Plutarch, such as his *Erotica* and his *Roman Questions* into Latin.

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<sup>441</sup> Ludwig von Pastor, *The history of the popes, from the close of the Middle Ages. Drawn from the secret archives of the Vatican and other original sources*, ed. Ralph Francis Kerr. vol. 11, (London, Kegan Paul, Trenc, Trubner, 1923), pp. 14–19

<sup>442</sup> Molly Greene, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants: A Maritime History of the Early Modern Mediterranean*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 69.

<sup>443</sup> James Hankins, 'Cosimo de' Medici and the "Platonic Academy"', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 53, 1990, pp. 145, 150, 157.

### 5.2.7.1 Poliziano (Angelo Ambrogini), 1454–1494

A native of Montepulciano, pupil of Ficino, tutor to Lorenzo de Medici's children and holder of a post at the University of Florence, Poliziano (or Politian) was born in the same year as Pinturicchio. His knowledge of Greek was such that at the age of fifteen he translated book two of Homer's *Iliad* into Latin hexameters, dedicated it to Lorenzo Medici and published it.<sup>444</sup>

An examination of his *Enarrationes in Fasti di Ovidio*, written in 1481 shows that he was well acquainted with the Isis (fourteen mentions), Osiris (five mentions) and Apis (four mentions) myth as well as Diodorus (referred to thirty-one times) and Plutarch (referred to eighty-eight times).<sup>445</sup> He was well placed intellectually to provide this story for the ceilings.<sup>446</sup>

However, he was not so well placed geographically and politically. He was firmly in the Florentine camp and the Florentine area and no great connections to the Curia at this time.<sup>447</sup> There is no record of his spending much time in Rome around 1492/3 and no evidence of any close relationship with Alexander VI.

Poliziano does not meet criteria one and two.

### 5.2.7.2 Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, 1463–1494

Curl asserts that the frescoes were directly or indirectly the result of the work of one particular member of the academy, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.<sup>448</sup> His writings would indicate that he had knowledge of the Latin and Greek works necessary to have originated this fresco programme. His opportunity to influence the commissioning of these frescoes was limited because in 1486 his publication of his 900 theses had led to Pope Innocent VIII's condemnation of him and to his flight to France. By 2 July 1492 he was in Ferrara, whence he sent a letter to his nephew. On 16 August

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<sup>444</sup> Alice Levine Rubinstein, 'Imitation and Style in Angelo Poliziano's *Iliad* Translation' in *Renaissance Quarterly* vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 48–70, 1983.

<sup>445</sup> Poliziano, *Commento Inedito ai Fasti di Ovidio*, ed. Francesco Lo Monaco, (Florence, Olschki, 1991).

<sup>446</sup> For a short comment on Poliziano's interest in the Egyptian gods see Ermanno Arslan, *Iside: il mito, il mistero, la magia*, (Milan, Electa, 1997), p. 603.

<sup>447</sup> He did at one time express interest in the Vatican librarianship. Alexander VI appointed three Spanish non-humanists as papal librarians, one of whom was his personal physician. See: John F. D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome*, (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 36,

<sup>448</sup> James Stevens Curl, *The Egyptian Revival*, (London, Routledge, 2005), pp. 88, 89.

1492, a few days after the elevation of Cardinal Borgia to the Papacy, Pico wrote from Ferrara a letter to Alexander VI as a first step towards rehabilitation.<sup>449</sup> With the help of Paolo Cortesi, this was achieved in 1493 when on 18<sup>th</sup> June he was absolved of charges of heresy.<sup>450</sup> His access and opportunity were therefore restricted at the time of the commissioning although his knowledge was more than adequate. However his motivation to promulgate a portrayal of Egyptian mythology at this point is questionable. There is evidence that around the time the frescoes were being commissioned Pico was in the process of moving away from Egyptian and Chaldean influences and moving more towards orthodox Christianity under the influence of Savonarola.<sup>451</sup>

Because Giovanni Pico della Mirandola does not meet criteria one and two, he cannot be considered as likely to be the author of this fresco programme. Against criterion four, his commitment and motivation are questionable.

### 5.2.7.3 Marsilio Ficino, 1433–1499

Marsilio Ficino had learned Latin at an early age, and at the age of 23 had begun learning Greek. His patron Cosimo de' Medici commissioned him in 1462 to translate Plato and subsequently the *Corpus Hermeticum* of Hermes Trismegistus, into Latin.<sup>452</sup> Later he was to translate the Neoplatonic writings of Plotinus and Iamblichus, writers associated with Egypt and Egyptian religion, into Latin. He thus had the skills and the knowledge, and a long-held interest in Egypt and Egyptian based magic.

As to Ficino's location and access, if he ever visited Rome it was once in 1469.<sup>453</sup> His relationship with the Papal Curia varied. In 1489 he was accused of magic before Pope Innocent VIII, but through

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<sup>449</sup> L. Dorez, 'Lettres Inedites de Jean Pic de la Mirandole (1482–1492)', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 24, 1895, p. 355.

<sup>450</sup> See: John F. D'Amico, 'Cortesi's Rehabilitation of Pico della Mirandola' in John F. D'Amico, *Roman and German Humanism 1450–1550*, ed P.F. Grendler, (Aldershot, Variorum, 1993), pp. IV, 37–51, and Rosella Savio, (ed.) *I Borgia*, (Milan, Electa, 2002), p. 90.

<sup>451</sup> See: Eugenio Garin, *Portraits from the Quattrocento*, trans. V. A. Velen and E. Velen, (New York, Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 206–7; Eugenio Garin, *Italian Humanism*, (New York, Praeger, 1967), pp. 108–13; Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'Pico: Introduction' in Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, John Hermann Randall, eds., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, (Chicago, Phoenix Books, 1956), p. 216; Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1964), pp. 68–69.

<sup>452</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'The Platonic Academy of Florence', *Renaissance News*, vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn, 1961), p. 149.

<sup>453</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'Marsilio Ficino and the Roman Curia' in *Journal of Neo-Latin Studies*, vol. 34a Humanistica Lovaniensia, Leuven, 1985, p. 86.



the intervention of contacts such as Ermolao Barbaro was let off.<sup>454</sup> His relationship with Alexander VI may have been better, but his opportunity to exert influence was limited by his physical distance from Rome and his limited access to the pope.

Ficino had the knowledge required by criterion three and if could be argued that his interest in ancient religions offered the motivation required by criterion four, but his geographical distance from Rome, and his lack of contact with the Curia and with Pope Alexander VI means that he does not meet criteria one and two.

Members of the Florentine Academy were acquainted with the areas of knowledge, the writings of Diodorus Siculus and Plutarch, necessary to have originated the ideas underlying the frescoes in the Sala dei Santi. It is possible that they could have been motivated to disseminate the results of their research and translation, but it is difficult to see how they could have been in a position to exercise the required influence on the commissioning body given their distance from Rome and their uncertain relationship with the Curia. They therefore do not meet the criteria of both location and access.

Were there to be someone with access to their knowledge as well as access to the new pope and to his advisers around the end of 1492 and early 1493 then he might be in a position to exert such influence.

### **5.2.8 Ermolao Barbaro (Hermolaus Barbarus), 1454–1493.**

Ermolao Barbaro, the Venetian humanist, had passed through Florence in May 1490 on his way to Rome to take up his post as Venetian ambassador to the Vatican, and had spent time with his contacts in Ficino's academy.<sup>455</sup> He was duly received in Rome by Pope Innocent VIII, contrasting with that pope's relationships with both Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. On 6 March 1491 Innocent VIII nominated him to the patriarchate of Aquileia, but as Venice considered such appointments required their approval, Barbaro was exiled from Venice, and his place as ambassador taken by his

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<sup>454</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'Marsilio Ficino and the Roman Curia' in *Journal of Neo-Latin Studies* Bd. 34a Humanistica Lovaniensia, Leuven, 1985, p. 94.

<sup>455</sup> Branca tells that 'he was given a warm welcome by Lorenzo the Magnificent and his court of humanists (Politian, Pico and Ficino were amongst his admirers). Vittore Branca, 'Ermolao Barbaro and Late Quattrocento Humanism', in J.R. Hale, *Renaissance Venice*, (London, Faber, 1973), p. 239.

friend Girolamo Donato.<sup>456</sup> It is therefore known that he spent from 1490 to July 1493 (the month of his death) in Rome, close to the Curia. On 25 August 1492, two weeks after Pope Alexander VI was elected, Barbaro dedicated his new extensive work, *Castigationes Plinianae*, to the new pope.<sup>457</sup> Barbaro was in the right place at the right time and was closely involved with the right people; he matches the criteria of both location and access.

As to his knowledge of the relevant material, Barbaro was well versed in the study of ancient texts, both Latin and Greek.<sup>458</sup> A brief analysis of his *Castigationes Plinianae* shows sixty one references to the work of Diodorus, fifty-four references to the works of Plutarch, and three references to Tibullus. This work was a series of corrections to Pliny's *Natural Histories*. The preface of the original Pliny includes the words: 'apud Graecos desiit nugari Diodorus et Βιβλιοθήκης historiam suam inscripsit' and chapter 46 of the eighth book of the *Natural Histories* is devoted to the cult of the Apis in Egypt.<sup>459</sup> The detailed acquaintance with the flora described in the *Natural Histories* would also have equipped him with the recondite knowledge of pears and pear trees to have specified the detail in the ceiling fresco of Osiris teaching fruticulture described in section 4.2.1.4 above.

Barbaro was in frequent communication with Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola and Angelo Poliziano and also corresponded with Lorenzo de' Medici.<sup>460</sup> With Pico della Mirandola he had a famous exchange of letters about the primacy of language over content.<sup>461</sup> From the correspondence with the members of the Florentine Academy it can be seen that Barbaro exchanged ideas, experiences and knowledge.

Barbaro meets the requirements of all four criteria for authorship of these frescoes set out at the beginning of section 5.2.

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<sup>456</sup> Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204–1571)*, (Philadelphia, The American Philosophical Society, 1978), vol. 2, p. 425.

<sup>457</sup> Ermolao Barbaro, *Epistolae, Orationes et Carmina*, ed. V. Branca, (Florence, Bibliopolis, 1943), pp. 78–80.

<sup>458</sup> Vittore Branca, 'Ermolao Barbaro and Late Quattrocento Humanism', in J.R. Hale, *Renaissance Venice*, (London, Faber, 1973), pp. 238–239, gives a good short biography of Barbaro.

<sup>459</sup> 'Diodorus was [the first] among the Greeks to do away with worthless [titles] and called his histories "Library"' (author's translation), original to be found in Diodorus Siculus, *Diodorus of Sicily, The Library of History – with an English translation by C.H. Oldfather*, trans. C H Oldfather, vol. 12, (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1933), p. xvii, n. 1.

<sup>460</sup> Vittore Branca, 'Ermolao Barbaro and Late Quattrocento Humanism', in J.R. Hale, *Renaissance Venice*, (London, Faber, 1973), p. 239.

<sup>461</sup> Jill Krave, 'Pico on the relationship of Rhetoric and Philosophy' in *Pico della Mirandola: new essays*, ed. M.V. Dougherty, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 13–36.

### 5.3 The iconology of the ceiling and *Disputà* frescoes

To understand how the subject matter of the frescoes might fit with the interests and aspirations of the Florentine academy at this time, it is helpful to look more closely at the wider fresco programme in the Sala dei Santi.

Dominating the room by its location and size is the fresco of the *Disputà* of St Katherine. Opposite the window, this wall is what attracts the attention of a visitor to the room, the other frescoes being smaller and subordinate. Representation of the *Disputà of St Katherine* was sometimes used as an opportunity to show portraits of learned or wise men. Ostensibly this is the disputation of St Katherine with the wise men, but the largest figure in the fresco, as central as is the portrayal of the saint herself and slightly nearer to the viewer, is the image of the leading wise man, pointing to a text held by a young acolyte (fig 5.2). The fresco is as much about the wise men of Alexandria as it is about St Katherine, and there is a case to be made that the central wise man in the *Disputà* is Plotinus.

Wise men of Alexandria, in particular the Alexandrian Neoplatonists, were the subject of scholarly interest by several humanists at this time. Ermolao Barbaro's visit to Florence had been at a most interesting point in the development of Ficino's ideas and works. Ficino's translation of Plato's dialogues had been published in 1484 and since then he had been working on the translation and exegesis of Plotinus's *Enneads*. Plotinus, an Egyptian had studied under 'the most highly reputed professors to be found at Alexandria', according to his pupil and biographer, Porphyry, and would have been a near-contemporary of the hermit Saints Antony and Paul.<sup>462</sup> In 1486 Ficino had broken off from this to embark on the study and translation of a series of other Neoplatonic texts, including: *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* by Iamblichus, and part of *De Abstinencia* by Porphyry. Porphyry had been a student of Plotinus and Iamblichus a student of Porphyry.<sup>463</sup> The full title of the key work by Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum, Chaldaeorum, Assyriorum*, was Ficino's and the work ostensibly deals with elements of Egyptian and Chaldean myths. The original text had been circulated in Iamblichus' time as a 'Response to a Letter to Anebo' purporting to be a response from Abamon, an Egyptian priest, to a letter from Porphyry to Anebo, a disciple of Abamon. It was in reality a response from Iamblichus to his teacher's, Porphyry's, condemnation of theurgical practices.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> Porphyry, 'On the life of Plotinus and the arrangement of his work.', in Plotinus *The Enneads*, trans. S MacKenna, (London, Penguin, 1991), p. civ.

<sup>463</sup> Maude Vanhaelen, 'Renaissance scholars and their demons: on Ficino and Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*', Lecture, Society for Neo Latin Studies, University College London, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2012, p. 3.

<sup>464</sup> Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, trans. & ed. Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell, (Atlanta, GA., Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), pp. xxvi–xxxvii.

Ficino completed the translations and commentaries on these texts in 1489 (they were eventually to be published in 1497) and returned to his work on Plotinus' *Enneads*.<sup>465</sup> Barbaro was well acquainted with Plotinus, judging by the reference to him in a letter of his to Ficino in 1488.<sup>466</sup>

Ficino's journey through translating and commenting on Plato, Hermes Trismegistus and the Neoplatonists, amongst others, had allowed him to build up a deep interest in ancient theologies and their relationship to Plato and to Christianity. Egyptian myths were an important element running through this interest. Plato was reported by Diogenes Laertius to have spent five years in Egypt studying Egyptian wisdom.<sup>467</sup> Ficino identified the Egyptian use of the cross as a portent of the coming of Christ,<sup>468</sup> and Yates argues that the frieze of bulls in the Sala dei Santi represents them worshipping the cross.<sup>469</sup> Reconciling an Egyptian *prisca theologia* with these other elements would have enabled a syncretism which he believed would have strengthened Christianity by giving it a wider and firmer base. His interest in these matters extended beyond theology, god knowledge or god talk, to theurgy, god working.<sup>470</sup> This encompasses the use of elements of magic and magic ritual to procure communication with the gods and gain miraculous benefits such as divination and prophecy.<sup>471</sup> Such communication might be through, or in conjunction with, *daimones*, intermediate spirits beneficent or otherwise. Ficino's *Liber de vita coelitus comparanda*, 1489, is a commentary on a work of Plotinus and covers much Neoplatonic theurgy.<sup>472</sup> Porphyry was vehemently anti-Christian and had written a work *Against the Christians* in fifteen books, so Porphyry's own works would be inimical to Ficino's cause. Iamblichus' defence of theurgy provided a welcome contrast. In *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum*, Iamblichus also brings together strands of Plato, Egyptian thought as related in

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<sup>465</sup> Maude Vanhaelen, 'Renaissance scholars and their demons: on Ficino and Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*', Lecture, Society for Neo Latin Studies, University College London, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2012, p. 2.

<sup>466</sup> 'They say that Plotinus overcame a force contrary to his nature. I think it became possible for him to overcome it although it was not granted to him by the heavens to do so.' Marsilio Ficino, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*: ed. Clement Salaman, (London, Shephard-Walwyn, 2009), vol. 8, p. 51. This is possibly a reference to Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV,8,1 and V,8,11.

<sup>467</sup> Clement Salaman 'Echoes of Egypt in Hermes and Ficino' in *Marsilio Ficino; His Theology, his Philosophy, his Legacy*, edited by Michael J. B. Allen and Valery Rees, with Martin Davies, (Leiden, Brill, 2002), p. 116.

<sup>468</sup> Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, (1964; repr. London, Routledge, 2002), p. 77.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.* p. 127.

<sup>470</sup> Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, trans. & ed. Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell, (Atlanta, GA., Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), p. xxix.

<sup>471</sup> Maude Vanhaelen, 'Renaissance scholars and their demons: on Ficino and Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*', Lecture, Society for Neo Latin Studies, University College London, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2012, p. 1.

<sup>472</sup> Daniel Pickering Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic: From Ficino to Campanella*, (Pennsylvania, Penn State Press, 2000), p. 62.

the *Corpus Hermeticum* and elements of Chaldean thought from the *Chaldean Oracles*.<sup>473</sup> In 1488 Ficino's translations of Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum*, were being circulated and in 1492 his translation of Plotinus's *Enneads* was printed in Florence.<sup>474</sup>

Maude Vanhaelen offers an analysis and a persuasive explanation of Ficino's interests during this period.<sup>475</sup> The point Ficino had reached in 1486 in his reading and translation of Plotinus's *Enneads* was where Plotinus embarks on discussions pertinent to the subject of *daímones*, or daemons. The texts he at that stage diverted to deal largely with daemons and the broader subject of theurgy. Vanhaelen shows that Ficino's restructuring of *De Mysteriis* and the headings he gave to the sections indicate a close interest in what these writers had to say about *daímones*.

*Daímones* had originally been seen as intermediate spirits neither particularly benign nor malign. They are mentioned in Plato's *Symposium* where Diotima describes their function.<sup>476</sup> Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* gives extensive analysis of their role and utility. Their perception as predominantly evil spirits, demons, dates back to early Christianity, in particular St Augustine who in *City of God* used Porphyry's arguments against theurgy.<sup>477</sup>

Plutarch showed a great interest in *daímones* throughout many of his writings, a subject written about by Guy Soury and more recently Frederick Brenk.<sup>478</sup> *De Iside et Osiride*, a work written

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<sup>473</sup> Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, trans. & ed. Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell, (Atlanta, GA., Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), p. xxxi.

<sup>474</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, ed. Clement Salaman, (London, Shephard-Walwyn, 2009), vol. 8, p. 96.

<sup>475</sup> Maude Vanhaelen, 'L'entreprise de traduction et d'exégèse de Ficino dans les années 1486–89 : Démons et prophétie à l'aube de l'ère savonarolienne', *Humanistica* 4/1 2010 , pp. 125–136, and Maude Vanhaelen, 'Renaissance scholars and their demons: on Ficino and Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*', Lecture, Society for Neo Latin Studies, University College London, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2012.

<sup>476</sup> 'To interpret and convey messages to the gods from men and to men from the gods, prayers and sacrifices from the one, and commands and rewards from the other. Being of an intermediate nature, a spirit bridges the gap between them, and prevents the universe from falling into two separate halves. Through this class of being come all divination and the supernatural skill of priests in sacrifices and rites and spells and every kind of magic and wizardry. God does not deal directly with man; it is by means of spirits that all the intercourse and communication of gods with men, both in waking life and in sleep, is carried on. A man who possesses skill in such matters is a spiritual man, whereas a man whose skill is confined to some trade or handicraft is an earthly creature.' Plato *Symposium* 202E (translation: Plato, *Symposium* trans. W. Hamilton, (London, Penguin, 1951), p. 81.)

<sup>477</sup> Maude Vanhaelen, 'Renaissance scholars and their demons: on Ficino and Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*', Lecture, Society for Neo Latin Studies, University College London, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2012, p. 6.

<sup>478</sup> G. Soury, *La Démonologie de Plutarque. Essai sur les idées religieuses et les mythes d'un Platonicien éclectique*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1942 and F. Brenk, ' "A Most Strange Doctrine." Daimon in Plutarch', *The Classical Journal*, vol. 69, No. 1, (Oct.–Nov., 1973), pp. 1–11.

towards the end of Plutarch's life, expounds upon the role of *daímones*. Whereas Diodorus's account of the Isis and Osiris myth is mainly descriptive, Plutarch is more openly allegorical.

...so the present myth is the image of a reality which turns the mind back to other thoughts.<sup>479</sup>

He identifies Isis and Osiris as daemons:

Better, therefore, is the view of those who take the stories about Typhon, Osiris, and Isis, to be the experiences neither of gods nor of men, but of great daemons [δαίμόνων]. These are said by Plato, Pythagoras, Xenocrates and Chrysippus, following the early theologians, to be stronger than men in power to surpass greatly our nature, although they do not possess the divine element in a pure and unadulterated form, ...<sup>480</sup>

Referring to Plato's comments in the *Symposium* 202.E, Plutarch states:

Plato calls this species [daemons] one which interprets and serves, being intermediary between gods and men, since it sends up thither the prayers and requests of men and bears from there to us revelations and gifts of blessings.<sup>481</sup>

Throughout *De Iside et Osiride* Plutarch uses the Isis and Osiris myth as a vehicle for looking at similarities between the metaphysics of Plato, particularly his structure and origins of the cosmos in his *Timaeus*, and the cosmological ideas of Egyptian, Chaldean, Greek, Roman and Zoroastrian beliefs.

Thus, just following a time when Ficino and his academy were occupied with studying the contributions to be made by theurgy and *daímones* to the syncretisation of ancient Egyptian religions and other philosophies with Christianity, the new Pope Alexander VI had the ceilings of one of his private apartments decorated with an ancient Egyptian myth. The room chosen was one with events from lives of saints shown on the walls. In Christianity, saints have been seen as intermediaries between supplicants and god, and in the Eastern Orthodox Church there is a tradition of

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<sup>479</sup> J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride*, edited with an introduction, translation and commentary by J. Gwyn Griffiths, (Cardiff, University of Wales, 1970), 359a20, p. 149.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, 360e25, p. 155.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, 361b26, p. 157.

representations of saints, in the forms of icons, to be seen as intermediaries between the supplicant and the saint.<sup>482</sup>

The myth chosen was one used by Plutarch as a vehicle for his own syncretic ideas and in which the main characters, those of the title, are themselves identified as *daimones*. Under the previous pope, Innocent VIII, such ideas would have been considered as bordering on heresy. The arrival of a new pope gave the opportunity to discuss and promulgate these ideas more openly.<sup>483</sup>

#### 5.4 Ermolao Barbaro's motivation

That Ficino and his academy would have wanted to have taken an opportunity to advance their ideas is understandable. Barbaro had the knowledge the opportunity and the access to enable their ideas to influence the commissioning of these frescoes, but it is less clear why he should have wanted to do so. His interests were more in philology, natural history and Aristotle than in theurgy, *daimones* and Egyptian myths, although his interest in divination is manifest in his correspondence with Ficino.

For Barbaro this opportunity came at a providential point in his personal, intellectual and professional development. By 1492 Ermolao Barbaro had reached a turning point in his career. Regarded as one of the greatest humanists to come out of Venice, Barbaro had, partly through his knowledge of Greek and his passion for philology, become a leading exponent and proponent of the writings of Aristotle. His correspondence with Ficino evidences that Barbaro and the Florentine Academy held each other in high regard and that astrology was a subject of great mutual interest.<sup>484</sup>

Barbaro combined these interests with following in his family tradition by a career as a diplomat on behalf of Venice. He was in Bruges in 1486 with the Emperor Frederick and the Emperor's son Maximilian, and in Milan with Lodovico il Moro in 1488 and 1489, during which time he was able to prepare his essay *De Officio Legati*, a guide to diplomacy.<sup>485</sup> On 11<sup>th</sup> October 1488 Ficino wrote to

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<sup>482</sup> Donald Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy Through Western Eyes*, (Louisville, KY., Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 105.

<sup>483</sup> Yates suggests that Pope Alexander VI chose this theme for this room because he 'wished to proclaim the reversal of the policy of his predecessor.' Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, (1964; repr. London, Routledge, 2002), pp. 127, 128.

<sup>484</sup> See Marsilio Ficino, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*: ed. Clement Salaman, (London, Shephard-Walwyn, 2003, vol.7, pp. 77, 79, and Marsilio Ficino, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, ed. Clement Salaman, (London, Shephard-Walwyn, 2009), vol. 8, pp. 7, 8, 49–53.

<sup>485</sup> G. Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, (Penguin, London, 1965), p. 102.

Barbaro expressing surprise that Barbaro was able to practise philosophy so keenly in the midst of his ambassadorial duties, attributing this ability to astrological reasons.<sup>486</sup> Seventeen days later Barbaro replied ‘...official business occupies me too little since I get through all that in those odd times of inactivity that I have.’<sup>487</sup>

But in 1491 this career had been cut short when he had to make the choice of being exiled by Venice and being deprived of his property if he accepted becoming patriarch of Aquileia, or excommunication by Pope Innocent VIII if he refused the appointment. He chose to stay in Rome where he completed the prodigious work of 5000 corrections to errors of transcription of Pliny’s *Natural Histories* that was published in 1493 as *Castigationes Plinianae* together with *In Pomponium Melam*.<sup>488</sup> At the end of 1492 he had no diplomatic role or career, but he had the income from Aquileia. What was to be the greatest work of his humanistic career had just been completed.

By the time Barbaro’s patron Pope Innocent VIII lay dying in 1492, Barbaro had spent two years in and around the papal Curia, observing the comings and goings of those cardinals who stood to succeed Innocent as pope. The successful Rodrigo Borgia, to whom Barbaro was to dedicate his new *Castigationes Plinianae* so swiftly after his becoming pope Alexander VI, was not a theologian of the calibre of Sixtus IV but he was a man with some commitment to the advancement of knowledge. He was to go on and invest extensively in the rebuilding of the Sapienza, Rome’s University, as well as supporting a number of other institutions of learning, including establishing the University of Aberdeen.<sup>489</sup> At the age of sixty-one, when he was elevated to the pontificate, he was aware of the need to leave a legacy that was more than a reputation for debauchery and simony.

The suite of six rooms of the Appartamento Borgia was to be used at times to entertain important guests. In December 1492, just before their painting commenced, they were assigned for the use of Don Federigo of Aragon, younger son of King Ferrante of Naples, during his visit.<sup>490</sup> Their subsequent decoration would signify the learning and aspirations of the pope which he wished to

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<sup>486</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, ed. Clement Salaman, (London, Shephard-Walwyn, 2003), vol. 7, p. 79.

<sup>487</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*: ed. Clement Salaman, (London, Shephard-Walwyn, 2009), vol. 8, p. 51.

<sup>488</sup> Vittore Branca, ‘Ermolao Barbaro and Late Quattrocento Humanism’, in J.R. Hale, *Renaissance Venice*, (London, Faber, 1973), p. 239.

<sup>489</sup> J. Wasserman, ‘Giacomo della Porta’s Church for the Sapienza in Rome and Other Matters Relating to the Palace’, *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 46, No. 4, Dec., 1964), p. 501; Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 4, p. 456.

<sup>490</sup> Johann Burchard, *At the Court of the Borgia, being an Account of the Reign of Pope Alexander VI written by his Master of Ceremonies*, trans. & ed. Geoffrey Parker, (London, Folio Society, 1963), p. 49.



demonstrate to selected visitors and would serve as reminder and inspiration to the pope's family, inner circle and to the pope himself.

As Cardinal Borgia, Alexander VI had been well acquainted with Lorenzo de' Medici, making his son Giovanni a cardinal on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1489.<sup>491</sup> Lorenzo wrote and thanked Borgia. Alexander VI's sympathies with the work of the Florentine Academy are reflected in the ease with which he pardoned Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in 1493, so would have been receptive to the ideas of Ficino.

As vice chancellor of the Roman Catholic Church, running the papal financial office, Rodrigo Borgia would have been acquainted with many of the humanists close to the Curia, and well acquainted with Ermolao Barbaro. It was natural that he should turn to Barbaro, in conjunction with Ficino, to take the lead in advising on the decoration of such an important room.

For Barbaro, disowned by Venice and looking to his next endeavour following the completion of the *Castigationes Pliniana*e and *In Pomponium Melam*, a substantial task, the opportunity to become involved with the commissioning of the decoration of the new pope's apartments was an opportunity to develop a new future for himself. With a pope sympathetic to contemporary humanistic endeavours it made sense to choose the themes which are displayed in the rooms, and with a pope who had chosen the name Alexander,<sup>492</sup> it was natural to choose a theme for one of the most important of the rooms which embraced Alexandria, and the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria. That the new pope's crest was based on a bull offered an opportunity to make use of an important text that highlights the bull Apis, and which describes daemonic intermediaries.

Rowland has proposed that Alexander VI was trying to create a new 'Alexandria on the Tiber' on his election to the pontificate.<sup>493</sup> This may have been the intention of Barbaro. It would have been a milieu in which he would have thrived, sponsored by a powerful pope and linked to the greatest contemporary thinkers in Italy. The Neoplatonic syncretism of Ficino and his academy would have

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<sup>491</sup> Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 2, p. 263.

<sup>492</sup> His choice of the name Alexander may have been driven by a wish to model himself on Pope Alexander III who had demonstrated the independence of the church from kings and princes. Peter De Roo, *Material for a History of Alexander VI his Relatives and his Time*, (Bruges, de Brouwer, 1924), vol. 2, p. 377.

<sup>493</sup> Ingrid D. Rowland, *The Culture of the High Renaissance: Ancients and Moderns in Sixteenth-Century Rome*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 42–67.

been endorsed by the new pope, with Ermolao Barbaro as its representative in Rome, had this future not been truncated by Barbaro's death from the plague in July 1493.

Barbaro fulfils the four criteria proposed to assess potential candidates for the one who inspired the themes in the Sala dei Santi. He was in the right place at the right time, embedded in the Curia in 1492 and 1493. He had the right access and was in communication with the new pope. He had the requisite knowledge of the subject matter. The themes chosen would fit with his having the intent to promote Ficino's syncretic agenda in Rome under the new papacy.

## 5.5 Chapter summary

A case has been made for Ermolao Barbaro, rather than Annio di Viterbo, to have been the author of the fresco programme in the Sala dei Santi, working either in conjunction with, or having been influenced by Marsilio Ficino. This is based on his being in the right place at the right time, having had appropriate access to have influenced the scheme and having had the requisite knowledge necessary to have created the theme and on the theme fitting with his interests and possible aspirations at the time.

Christianity is based on the life and teachings of an individual who flourished in the Levant nearly 1500 years before the painting of these rooms, but has its roots in preceding religions such as Judaism. At the time these frescoes were commissioned there was an interest in finding an ancient single theology, a *prisca theologia*, which underlies all religions, a better understanding of which would help the better understanding of Christianity. From reading ancient writers such as Plato, Hermes Trismegistus, Plotinus and Iamblichus it seemed apparent or possible to Ficino and his circle at the Platonic Academy in Florence that communication with gods can be facilitated with intermediaries. Christian practice encompassed praying to the Virgin and other saints to intercede with God. By displaying the story of Isis and Osiris, two characters shown by Plutarch to have been well regarded intermediaries, *daímones*, with the gods, the frescoes promote the consideration of other intermediaries, besides saints, for the better communication with God, and can be seen as precursors of the saints that are portrayed on the walls of this room.

## 6 Conclusions

### 6.1 Summary of findings

Until this research it had been widely accepted that Annius of Viterbo, a fifteenth century Dominican monk known for his fabrications of both texts and archaeological ‘discoveries’, was the inspirer behind the theme underlying the frescoes in the *Sala dei Santi*. Previous attempts to find an interpretation of this room have tended to rely on this authorship and have suggested that the theme might relate to the Borgia emblem of the bull, or the church’s contest with the Ottomans.

The ultimate commissioner of the frescoes, Pope Alexander VI, has a formidable reputation, primarily for his licentious personal behaviour. This reputation has been coloured by early attempts to discredit him and 500 years of repetition. His behaviour was not excessively different from those who proximately preceded and succeeded him, and does not appear to have impacted on this commission. For instance paintings representing Susanna and the Elders were often used as an opportunity to display naked female flesh even in religious situations, but here Susana is unusually well clothed.

The suite of rooms, now known as the Borgia Apartments, were to be used as the private living quarters of the Pope, but it was usual at this time for there to be gradations of privacy from public reception to private bedroom. The Sala dei Santi was used for receiving visitors, so the audience for its decoration would include these visitors. After the death of Pope Alexander VI the moves to discredit him resulted in the rooms being much less used and falling into some decay until the end of the nineteenth century when under Pope Leo XIII they were restored and research into their decoration commenced.

A competent and experienced administrator, Alexander VI did not have the intellectual depth of such predecessors as Pope Pius II, but he did demonstrate a commitment to encouraging academia as was demonstrated by his commitment to enlarging the buildings of the Sapienza, his favourable treatment of learning, and his surrounding himself with some people with academic competence. He was also more tolerant of non-canonical interpretations of Christianity than was his immediate predecessor, Pope Innocent VIII, and readily rehabilitated Giovanni Pico dell Mirandola who had been effectively exiled for publishing work which sought to embrace elements of other ancient theologies into Christian thought.

Amongst the issues facing Alexander VI on his election to the papacy in August 1492, a few weeks before the *Sala dei Santi* frescoes were commissioned, one perceived to have been the greatest was dealing with the Islamic threat provided by the Ottoman forces taking Constantinople in 1453 and the subsequent Ottoman incursion to the Italian peninsular at Otranto. The contest with the Mohammedans was a deep running issue for the Church, the basis of the centuries of crusades. As a cardinal, Rodrigo Borgia had committed his own funds to support the abortive crusade of 1464, but as Pope Alexander VI he took a more conciliatory position towards the Ottomans than did his predecessors. That he sought better relations with the Ottomans would suggest that the battle against them was not of sufficient importance to have substantially influenced the subject matter of the frescoes in his apartment.

The decades immediately leading up to the commission of these frescoes was a time of greater access to, reading of, and exegeses of, newly discovered or translated ancient texts. The Council of Basel–Ferrara–Florence in 1438/39 had brought many Greek speakers to Italy as part of a push to end the East West schism. The downfall of Constantinople brought many more Greek speakers to Italy so access to Greek texts and the ability to translate them were much enhanced. The works of Plato, Aristotle and Hermes Trismegistus became more readily available. Groups of scholars were formed in various Italian cities, but notable were Pomponius' Academy in Rome and Ficino's Academy in Florence. The Medici family had sponsored the translation of many works of ancient philosophers from the Greek. Ficino was charged with much of the translation work, but he also wrote many exegeses of these works in which he took the opportunity to promulgate his own thoughts and views. These included extensive exploration of syncretising the ancient theologies, *prisca theologia*, with Christianity, together with ancient philosophies such as Neoplatonism. Thus astrology and ancient routes to communicating with gods were explored, but such propositions were deemed by the then papacy as close to heresy.

The story of Isis and Osiris and how Osiris is metamorphosed into a bull is shown in the ceiling frescoes. This story was readily accessible to the learned of the time, Ficino refers to it in book three of his *De Vita Libri Tres*. As portrayed in these frescoes much of the story can be derived from the *Histories* written by Diodorus Siculus which had been translated into Latin and published in 1472, but to account for the entire story the inspirer for these frescoes would have needed to have been aware of Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*. This work was available in Greek, but was not published in Latin until 1509, so the inspirer of the ceiling frescoes would have needed a good command of Greek. The ceiling frescoes also include two quotations derived from Tibullus.

The series of five octagons on the arch between the two parts of the room offer a path through a story of Ovid to the ceiling frescoes, making prominent the Borgia emblem of the bull which is to be found in the frieze relief around the walls and in the *Disputà*.

The saints selected to be portrayed on the walls of the Sala dei Santi have little in common and there is no obvious uniting theme, except that the Sts Anthony Abbot and St Paul were roughly contemporaneous with, and geographically not far from St Katherine. The fresco of the *Disputà* of St Katherine is important to understanding the room because of its size, its position and its prominence. It contains more figures, more portraits and more references to the Borgia family than do the other wall frescoes.

Details of the flora portrayed in the ceiling frescoes suggest that someone involved with its commission or execution must have been well acquainted with plants, possibly with Pliny's *Natural Histories* and possibly with references to pears in Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*.

It is also noticeable that although the ceiling frescoes portray a story that took place in Egypt there is no Egyptian imagery in the room other than a highly stylised small pyramid which occurs twice in the story of Apis the bull. There were many examples of ancient Egyptian artefacts available in Rome at the time the frescoes were painted, but these were not made use of, suggesting that the reason for painting these frescoes may not be purely the connection with the Egyptian origin of the story.

By examining against four criteria, a number of candidates for being the inspirer or author of the frescoes have been assessed and most eliminated. Annius of Viterbo does not meet, to differing degrees, any of these four criteria. In particular a detailed study of his whereabouts in the months leading up to the commission reveals that he was not in a position to have influenced the commission. Among the other humanists considered, Ficino clearly had the necessary detailed knowledge as well as possibly the motivation, but he too was not in the right place, nor had the necessary influence. However the Venetian humanist Ermolao Barbaro was both in the right place at the right time and had access and influence in the senior echelons of the Curia and had just dedicated his *Castigationes Plinianaë* (corrections to Pliny's *Natural Histories*) to the new Pope Alexander VI. Barbaro had been a frequent correspondent with Ficino and had visited him two years before the frescoes were commissioned. Barbaro is therefore proposed as the one responsible for authoring the theme of the ceiling frescoes, based on the knowledge that Ficino had shared with him.

A closer examination of Ficino's interests at the time leading up to when Barbaro had visited him reveals that he had been deeply involved in translating the works of the Neoplatonist Plotinus. Plotinus was an Egyptian who lived in Alexandria for some years before moving to Rome, shortly before the time that St Katherine is reputed to have lived and to have been martyred in Alexandria.

Ficino had broken off from his translations of Plotinus when he reached the section of his works which dealt with *daímones*, the intermediaries between mankind and the gods which are referred to in Plato's *Symposium*. He then spent some time translating other works that dealt with *daímones*, before resuming his translation of Plotinus. One of these other works was Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum* which deals at length with theurgy, a system of magic to procure communication with the gods. The subject of intermediation between the gods and man by means of talismans or *daímones* is to be found in various works by Ficino, but it is evident that this was of particular concern to him around this time.

Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* identifies Isis and Osiris as *daímones* in the Platonic sense. This work looks at the similarities between Platonic ontologies, particularly that in his *Timaeus*, and those of Egyptian, Chaldean, Greek, Roman and Zoroastrian origins.

The core finding of this research is therefore that the ceiling frescoes were inspired not by Annius of Viterbo, but by Ermolao Barbaro, based on the work of Marsilio Ficino. The theme is not an Egyptian theme, but is a theme which uses a story based in Egypt as a vehicle. The theme is one of intermediation between man and the gods, based on the portrayal of a story of characters identified by Plutarch as intermediaries between man and gods, and set in a room depicting saints which generically in Christianity have been regarded as interlocutors with the Holy Trinity. The theme was painted shortly after Ficino had spent time translating and writing about Egyptian Neoplatonist works on the subject of intermediators between gods and man. It is proposed that the central figure in the dominant wall fresco, the *Disputà*, may be a portrayal of Plotinus, the great Egyptian Neoplatonist.

The reason for choosing to depict this theme may have been an attempt to initiate a more relaxed acceptance by the church of syncretism of Christianity with ancient religious thought, following the election of a pope more amenable to such a possibility than his immediate predecessor. This may have been part of Pope Alexander VI's willingness to allow the possible development of an intellectual milieu in Rome that mirrored the Neoplatonist movement in third century Alexandria, creating an 'Alexandria on the Tiber'.

## 6.2 Impact on modern scholarship

The Sala dei Santi has been held up as an icon of Egyptian influence in the Renaissance. Curran devotes a whole chapter in his 2007 book *The Egyptian Renaissance* to these frescoes. The present research implies that these frescoes exhibit not primarily an interest by their creators in ancient Egyptian matters, but rather in another, Neoplatonic, subject. An ancient Egyptian story as related by Plutarch is used as a metaphorical route to exemplify the subject, which was one also written about by a Neoplatonic philosopher, Plotinus, who was born in Egypt and who studied in Alexandria for eleven years. The frescoes in the Sala dei Santi may in future be regarded less as an example of Renaissance interest in Egypt, and more as an example of Renaissance interest in Neoplatonic matters.

Scholarship on Annius of Viterbo has frequently used his being the inspirer of these frescoes as an example of his interest and his influence. This research may suggest that in future these frescoes might be cited as an influence on Annius of Viterbo and possibly the inspiration behind the relevant sections in his later *Antiquitates*, rather than an original product of his.

As to reconsidering the identities of people portrayed in the *Disputà*, it is to be hoped that this research will put to rest some of the less well founded attributions, but it is recognised that it may fuel further speculation.

These findings may lead to some reassessment of the role of Ermolao Barbaro, both in his influence on church matters after he had been removed as Venetian ambassador, and in his interest in Neoplatonic thought in contrast to what has been considered his greater interest, the works of Aristotle.

Marsilio Ficino's interest in matters theurgical may now be reassessed in the light of this research, showing his interest in influencing the direction of Christian thought. Whereas Ficino's work in the 1490s had been thought to be directed primarily towards the publication of his translations and exegeses, it may now be time to reassess his relationship with the church following his problems with Pope Innocent VIII before 1491.

These findings do not have any impact on our understanding of Neoplatonism per se, but they may have some impact on our understanding of the reception of Neoplatonist thought in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.

### **6.3 Assessment of strengths and weaknesses of the argument**

The findings are coherent and offer a credible alternative to previous interpretations of these frescoes.

The detailed analysis of the whereabouts of Annio di Viterbo around the time that these frescoes were commissioned is surprising only in that there is little evidence of it having been done before. The findings are consonant with a number of contemporaneous factors including:

- Ficino's intellectual endeavours at the time, in particular his development of Neoplatonic thought
- Barbaro's whereabouts, interests and possible aspirations.
- Pope Alexander VI's interests in supporting the development of humanist thought and the toleration of a syncretic acceptance of ancient thought.

The main weakness of the argument is that it lacks specific documentary evidence surrounding the commissioning, such as a contract, to support it. For five centuries historians have looked for documentation surrounding the commissioning of these frescoes and none has been found in that time.

There are no extant letters from Ficino to Barbaro specifically advocating theurgy, but our knowledge of Ficino's correspondence is tightly circumscribed by the letters that Ficino chose to have published in 1495. These were selected by Ficino and part of the basis for selection would have been how Ficino wished to see himself portrayed for posterity. Although the present findings posit a gradually increasing greater acceptance of theurgical thought at this time, Ficino may well have considered that it would still have been too much of a risk to have published the detailed thinking behind the planning of the theme behind these frescoes. Thus the fact that no such letters were published does not preclude the possibility that such correspondence was conducted between Ficino and Barbaro.



## 6.4 Logical progression for further research

Broadly, there are two main directions for further research, latitudinal and longitudinal.

Latitudinally, there are four other rooms in the Appartamento Borgia with frescoes painted just before and just after the frescoes in the Sala dei Santi. Their subjects, the seven joys of the Virgin, the liberal arts, the twelve apostles and twelve sibyls, may not immediately lend themselves to analysis in a Neoplatonic context, but then neither initially did the subject of an ancient Egyptian myth. It would seem reasonable to suppose that while there may not be a direct link between the subject matters of these rooms and that of the Sala dei Santi, there would be some commonality in their origins and genesis.

It is therefore suggested that further research would be justified into attempting to establish whether there are any other links between the fresco programmes in these other rooms and developments in Neoplatonic thought at the time, or more specifically the works of Ficino and to a lesser extent Barbaro. This may establish whether Barbaro was involved in the commissioning of the themes of the other rooms.

Longitudinally, three main areas for further research are suggested:

Firstly, a closer analysis of further details of the frescoes may provide more evidence to substantiate the present interpretation. In particular further analysis of the flora and fauna represented may reveal more about the commission. That the findings of this research propose the close involvement of Ermolao Barbaro who had just completed the *Castigationes Pliniana*e, would suggest that the choice of flora and fauna displayed would not be arbitrary, but based on detailed knowledge of plants and animals provided in Pliny's *Natural Histories*.

For the ceiling frescoes the possible deeper significance of the pear trees shown being harvested has already been discussed in this research. The examples of flora shown in the frescoes representing viticulture and ploughing may have other significances that should be explored.

In the fresco of the martyrdom of St Sebastian there are some other examples of flora beyond the strawberry plants discussed in this research. These would merit further examination.

The fresco of *Susanna and the Elders* displays a considerable variety of fauna and flora. Closer examination for their possible significance is suggested.

Secondly, the reasons for the choice of saints portrayed in this room remain unclear. Although in the Christian tradition saints have been cast generically as interlocutors with God, these particular saints are not particularly noted for their role as interlocutors. In the light of the theurgical theme in the room which this research has proposed, it is suggested that the stories and traditions associated with these saints be re-examined for any possible theurgical connections. The fresco of *Susanna and the Elders* offers a particular challenge in this context.

Thirdly, the core finding of this research is the correlation with particular aspects of Ficino's research and writings around the time the frescoes were painted. This focusses on his interest in *daímones*, other matters theurgical and his interest in the works of Plotinus and Iamblichus. It is suggested that a wider and deeper analysis of Ficino's writings, in particular those on ontological matters, may provide more information about how his thoughts on syncretising a *prisca theologia* with Christianity were developing. His analyses of the *Timaeus* and the *Symposium* together with his translation and analysis of Plotinus, in particular *De Vita Coelitus comparanda*, the third of his *De Vita Libri Tres*, may yield insight into how he saw these texts relating to Christian doctrine.

Recent research on the works of Plutarch and the reception of Plutarch in the Renaissance tends to have focussed on his *Parallel Lives*. In comparison, relatively little has been published recently on *De Iside et Osiride* since Gwynn Griffiths' 1970 translation and commentary. This research has suggested a closer interest in *De Iside et Osiride* by Ficino than had been previously assumed. It is proposed that further research on Ficino's interest in *De Iside et Osiride* may yield greater insight into his evolving interest in *daímones* and theurgy.

Ficino had been translating Plotinus's *Enneads* shortly before these frescoes were commissioned. This work included a biography of Plotinus by his pupil Porphyry in which it is related that whilst in Rome he acted as guardian to young children. This might be contributory support for the central figure in the *Disputa*, (see fig. 5.2) who is a 'wise man' reading a text held by a young boy, to be identified as a portrayal of Plotinus. Further research would be needed to confirm or reject this hypothesis.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I should like to thank my supervisors, Prof Ken Quickenden, Dr Sue May and Dr Peter Windows, for their guidance, wisdom and forbearance. They have supported and advised beyond what might reasonably have been asked. I have relied extensively on the facilities of the Warburg Library for this research and should like to thank the directors of the Warburg Institute for allowing me access and their library staff for their tolerance and assistance. Professor Arnold Nesselrath and his staff at the Vatican Museums have my thanks for facilitating access to the Sala dei Santi and to the frescoes, especially during the recent restoration.

My greatest debt of gratitude is to the late Professor George Noszlopy, my inspiration and my mentor, who first entranced me with the subject of this thesis. Had I listened to him more closely I should have saved a great deal of time and effort in its completion.



# **Pinturicchio's Frescoes in the Sala dei Santi in the Vatican Palace:**

**A new iconological interpretation of the 'Egyptian' theme**

## **Illustrations**



Figure 1.1 Pinturicchio and assistants, frescoes in the Sala dei Santi, 1493, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.

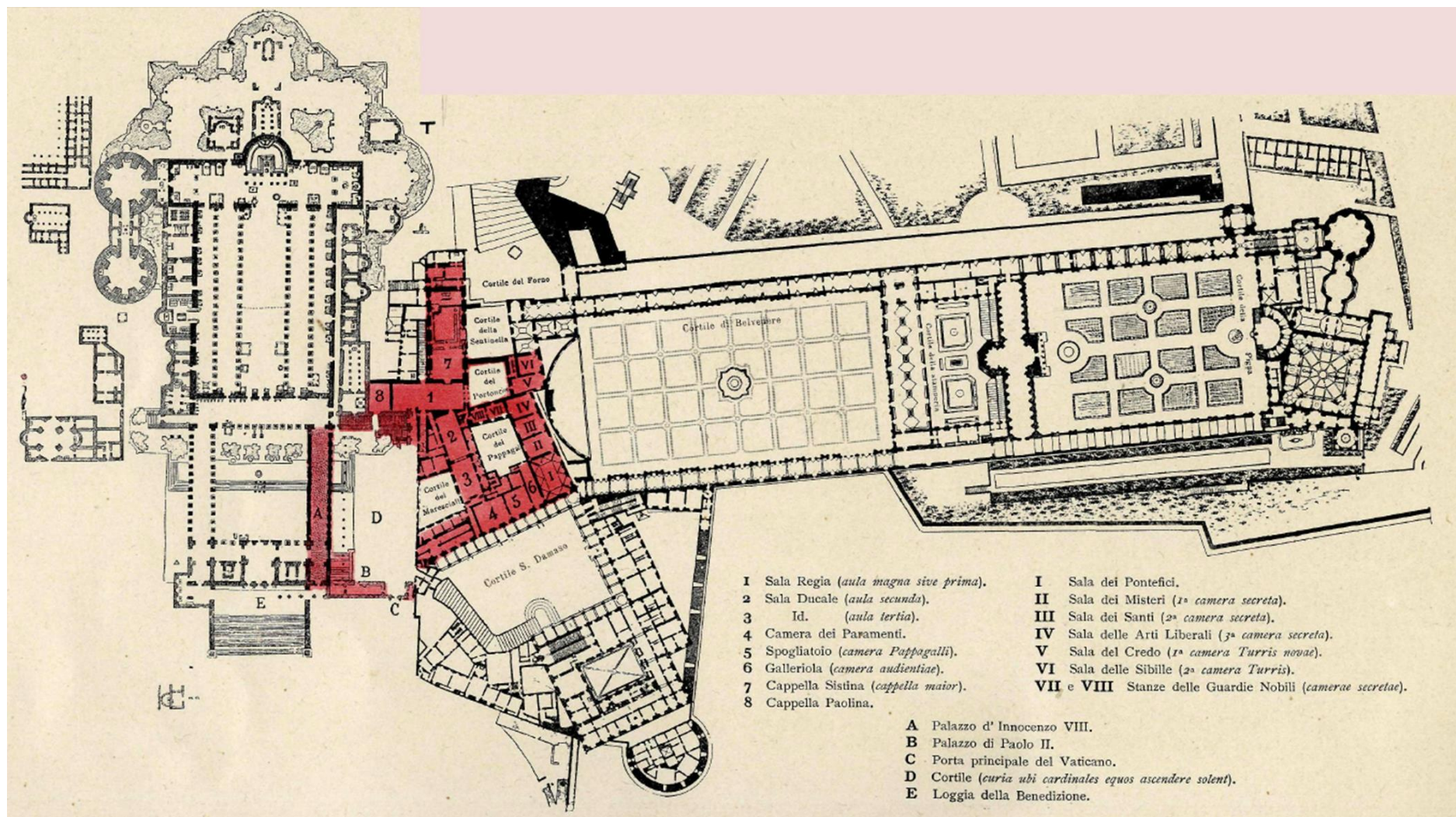


Figure 2.1 Plan of the Apostolic Palace around 1500. From: Ehrle, F. & Stevenson, H., *Gli affreschi del Pinturicchio nell'appartamento Borgia*, (Rome, Danesi, 1897), p. 10.

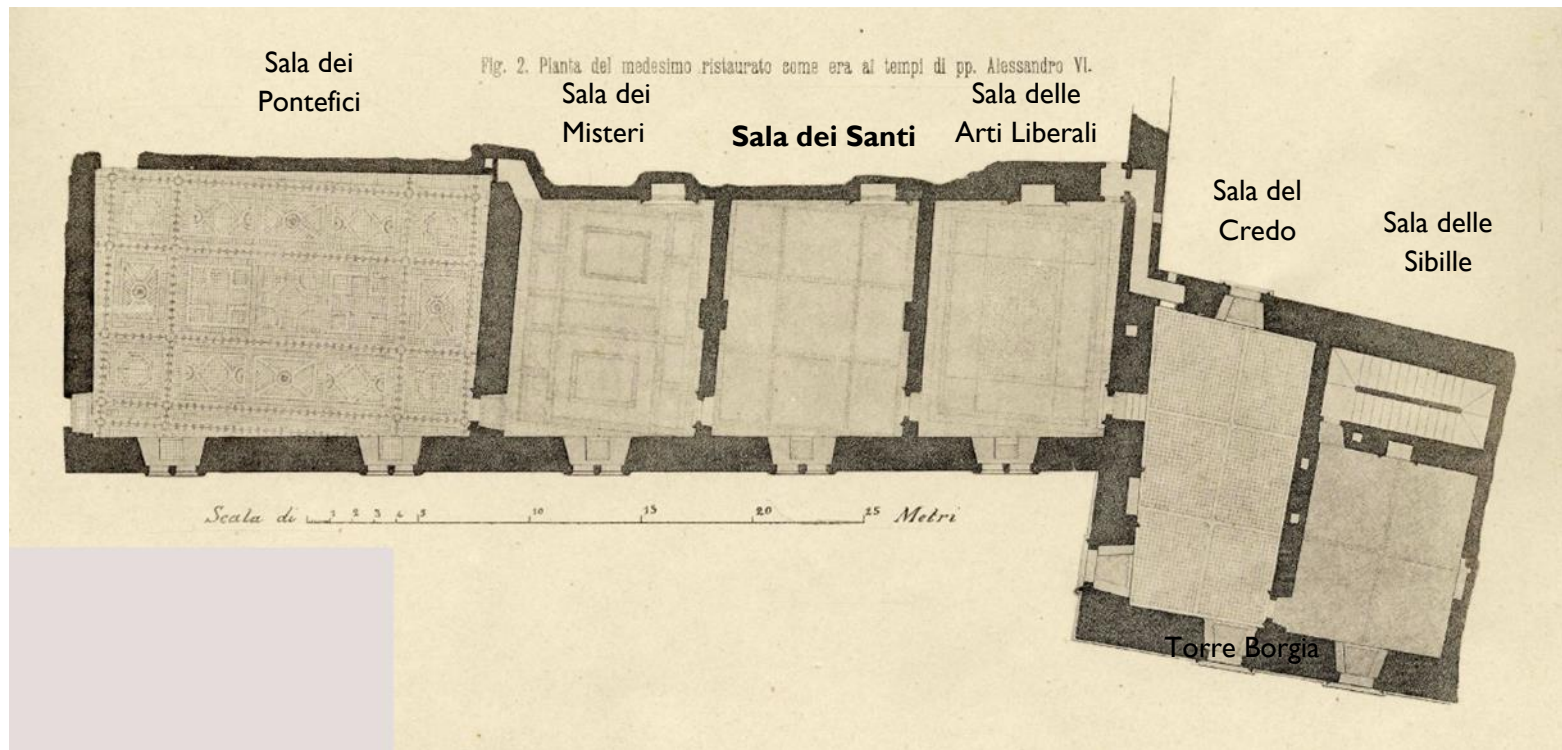
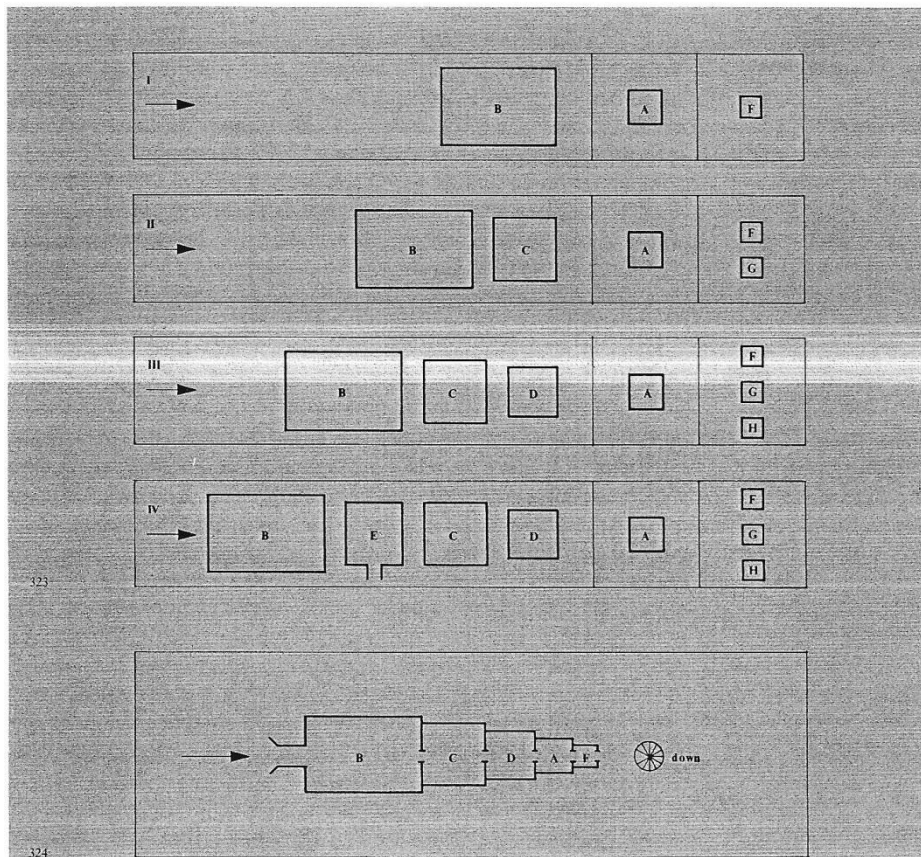


Figure 2.2 Plan of the *Appartamento Borgia* around the time of Pope Alexander VI.

Adapted from: Ehrle, F., & Stevenson, H., *Gli affreschi del Pinturicchio nell'appartamento Borgia*, (Rome, Danesi, 1897), Tavola A.



### 323 Room sequence development

→ Visitors' direction of approach from front entrance.

- A Bedchamber [*camera*]; owner's bedroom
- B Main hall [*sala*]; dining and reception
- C Private dining-parlour [*salletta/salotto*]; for owner's greater privacy
- D Antechamber [*anticamera*]; associated with the bedchamber
- E Audience chamber with private access/exit
- F Closet [*studio*]
- G&H Other small rooms associated with the bedchamber

### 324 The principle of the apartment

Controlled linear approach of visitors into areas of increasing privacy.

- A Bedchamber [*camera*]; owner's bedroom
- B Main hall [*sala*]; dining and reception
- C Private dining-parlour [*salletta/salotto*]; for owner's greater privacy
- D Antechamber [*anticamera*]; associated with the bedchamber
- F Closet [*studio*]

Service stairs at back also serve as a private route for owner – and escape, if need be.

Figure 2.3 Sequential rooms in a Renaissance apartment. From Thornton, P., *The Italian Renaissance Interior 1400–1600*, (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), p.302.

The fully-developed apartment in a papal residence.

- A Pope's bedchamber and private audience chamber (*Sala del Papagallo*)
- B Pope's antechamber; assembly room for cardinals (*Sala dei Paramenti*)
- C-E Chief reception rooms
- C Innermost chief reception room (*Sala del Mappamundo*)
- D Second *sala*; used for consistories, etc.
- E Main *sala*
- F Main staircase, from entrance
- G *Loggia*
- H Service corridor links all reception rooms to stairs (L) down to kitchen
- J Entrance from street on ground floor leads to stairs (K) up to Pope's audience chamber (A)
- K Stairs up from kitchen and entrance J
- L Guard-chamber controlling access to Pope's rooms and service corridor
- M Pope's private bedchamber
- N Pope's closet and a second small room?
- P Pope's other private rooms including strong-room
- M-P This area lies within thick walls supporting a tower which thus both materially and symbolically defines its special status

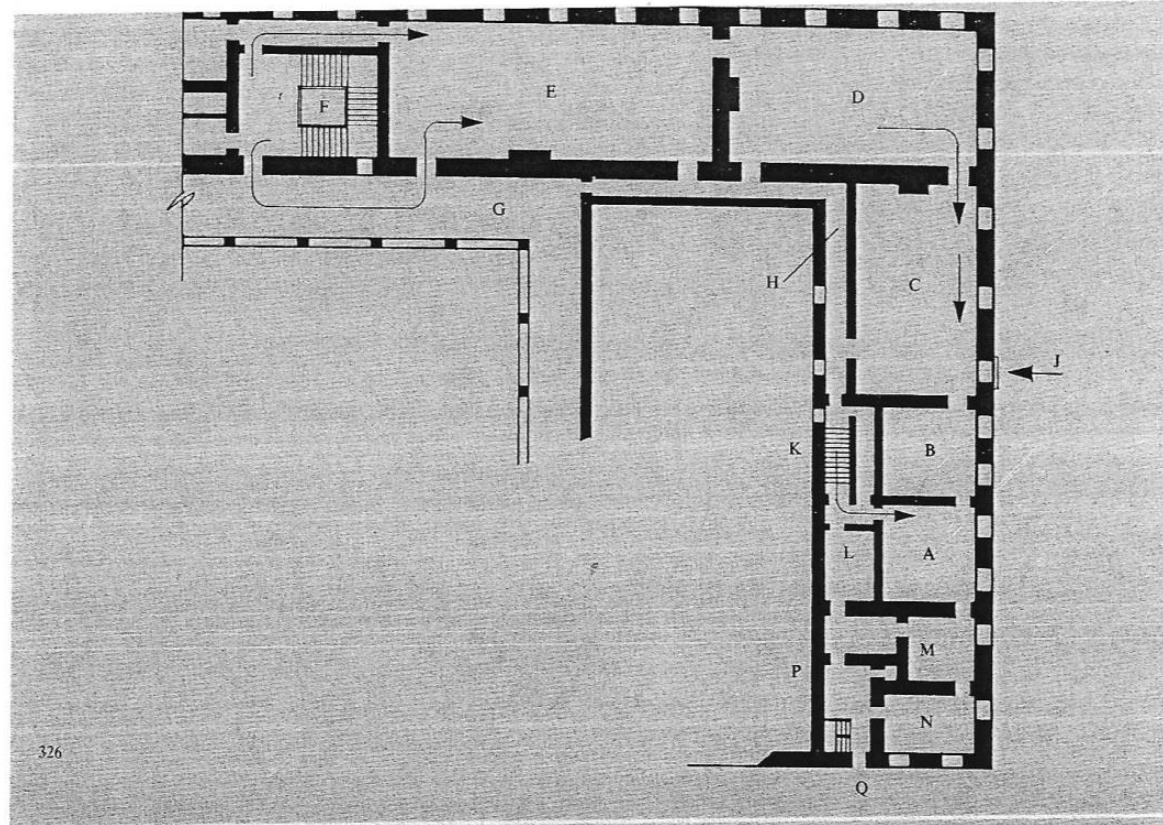
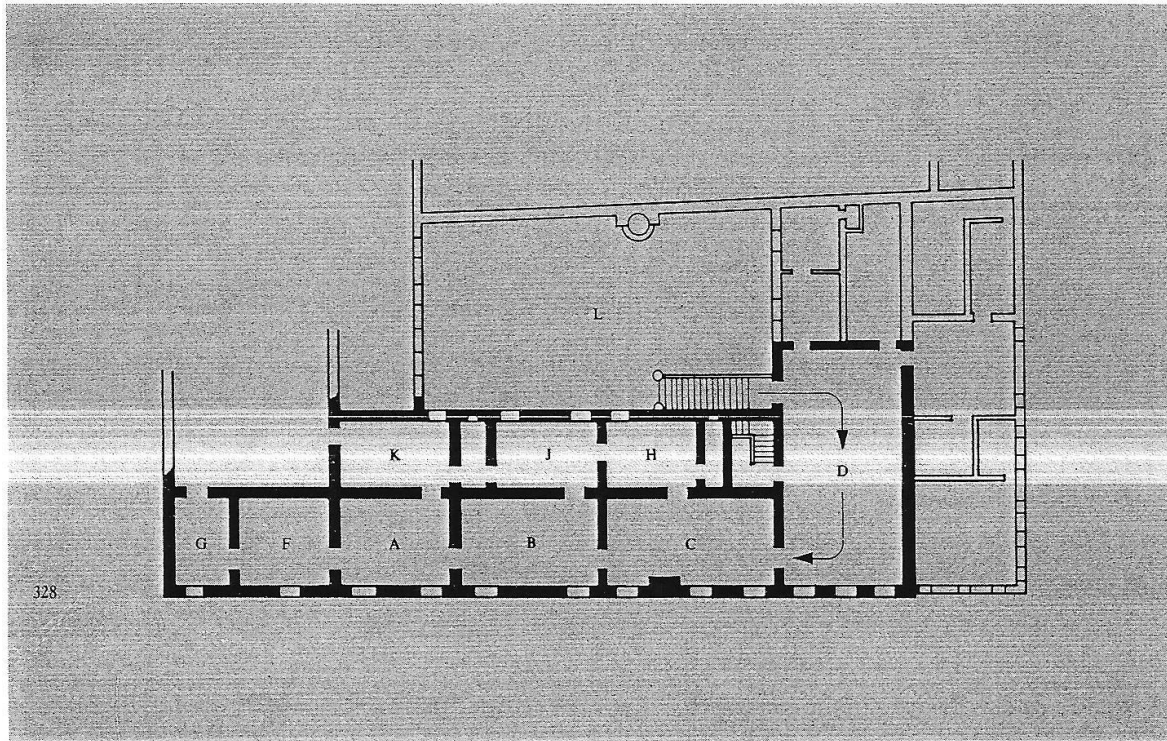


Figure 2.4 Plan of apartment in Palazzo Venezia, Rome 1478. From Thornton, P., *The Italian Renaissance Interior 1400-1600*, (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), p.303.



328 Palazzo dei Penitenzieri,  
Rome; *piano nobile*, about  
1478

Built for Cardinal Domenico della Rovere.

- A Owner's bedchamber
- B Antechamber
- C Private dining-room (called *salotto* on 1563 plan)
- D *Sala*
- F *Postcamera*? or private bedchamber?
- G Closet
- H Chapel
- J & K Associated rooms
- L Courtyard

Based on 1563 plan reproduced by Frommel

Figure 2.5 Plan of apartment in Palazzo dei Penitenzieri, Rome 1478. From Thornton, P., *The Italian Renaissance Interior 1400–1600*, (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), p.304.



Figure 2.6 Pinturicchio, *The Virgin and the Nativity with St Jerome*, 1477–79, fresco, Santa Maria del Popolo, Chapel of San Girolamo, Rome, commissioned by Domenico della Rovere.





Figure 2.7 Pinturicchio, spandrel from the vaults of the Palazzo Colonna, Rome, 1485–90. From: Schulz, J, 'Pinturricchio and the revival of antiquity', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 25, 1962, plate 6.



Figure 2.8 Pinturicchio and assistants, painted ceiling, Vatican Gardens, Casino del belvedere, Loggia, Rome, 1487–1492. From: La Malfa, C., 'Pinturicchio's Roman Frescoes and His Role in the Formation of a New all'antica Style', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, LXX, 2007, p. 134.



Figure 2.9. Pinturicchio and assistants, painted ceiling, 1494, Sala del Credo, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome. From: La Malfa, C., 'Pinturicchio's Roman Frescoes and His Role in the Formation of a New all'antica Style', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, LXX, 2007, p. 134.



Figure 2.10 Perugino and assistants, *Giving the Keys to St. Peter*, 1481–1482, fresco, Sistine Chapel, Vatican Palace, Rome.



Figure 2.11 Pinturicchio, *Nativity*, 1500–1501, fresco, Baglioni chapel, Spello.

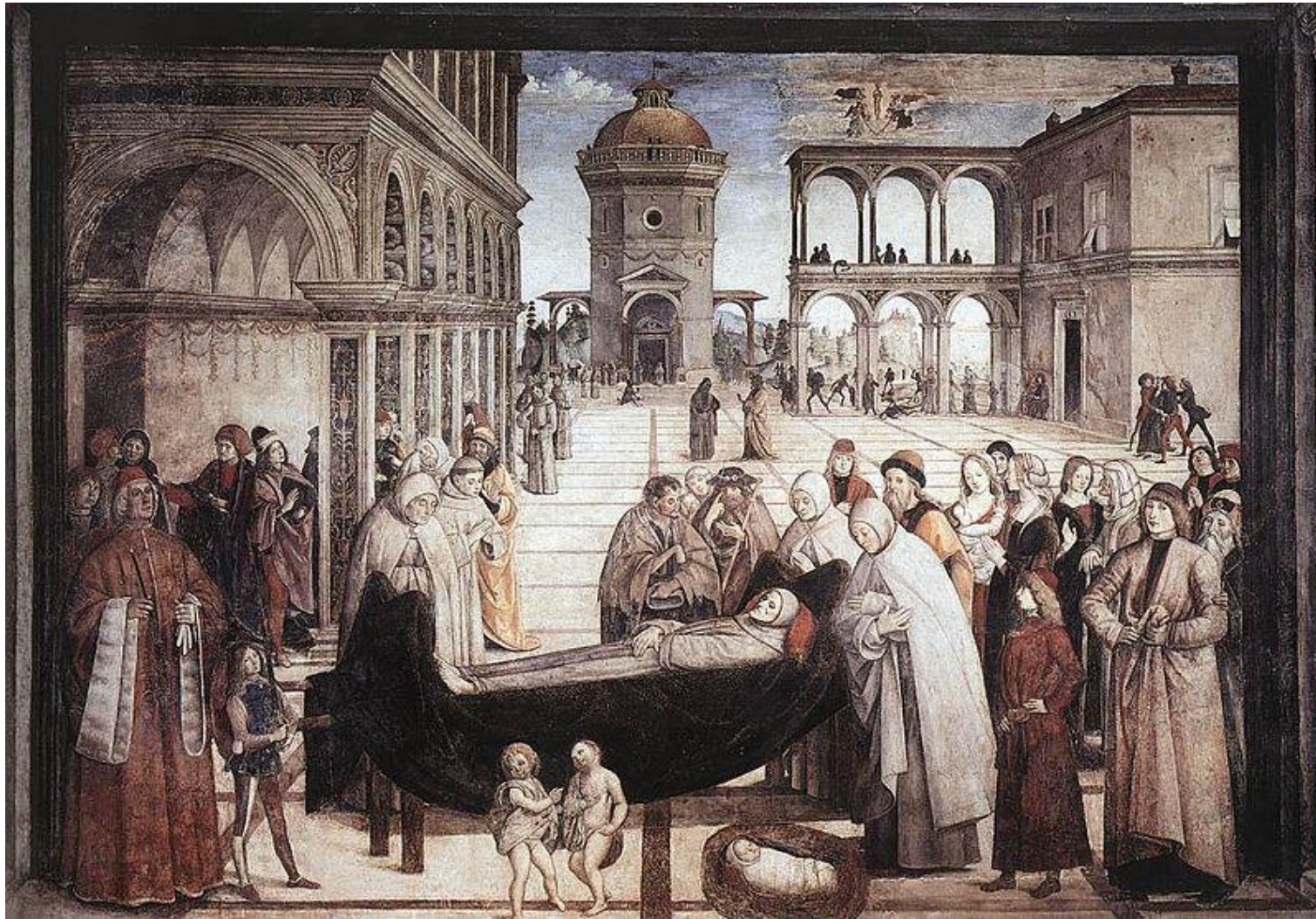
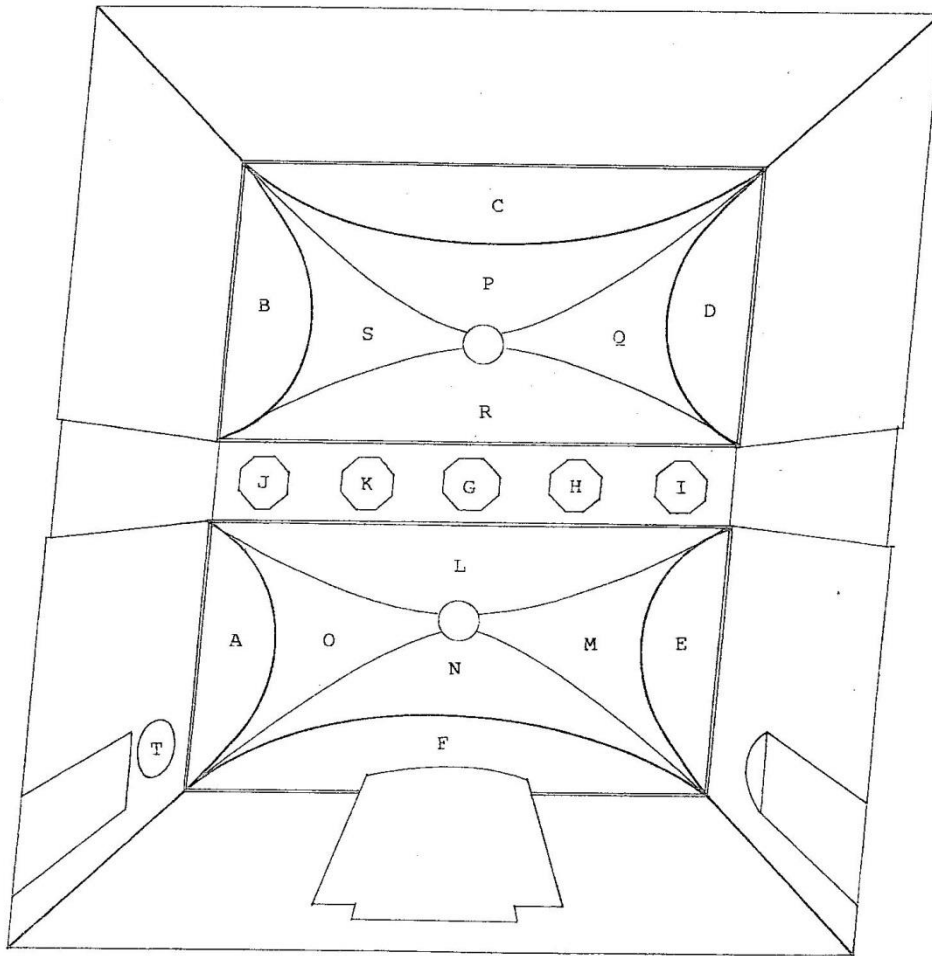


Figure 2.12 Pinturicchio, *Funerals of St. Bernardino, with donor*, first half of 1480s, fresco, S. Maria in Aracoeli, chapel of S. Bernardino, Rome.



- |   |                                      |   |                                  |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| A | Susanna and the Elders               | L | Wedding of Isis and Osiris       |
| B | The flight of St Barbara             | M | Osiris teaches agriculture       |
| C | The disputation of St Katherine      | N | Osiris teaches viticulture       |
| D | Meeting of St Anthony and St Paul    | O | Osiris teaches fructiculture     |
| E | The Visitation                       | P | Murder of Osiris                 |
| F | Martyrdom of St Sebastian            | Q | Isis gathers the parts of Osiris |
| G | Jupiter and Io                       | R | Appearance of the Apis           |
| H | Jupiter, Juno and Io                 | S | Procession of the Apis           |
| I | Mercury and Argos                    | T | Tondo of Virgin and child        |
| J | Mercury kills Argos                  |   |                                  |
| K | Io-Isis, Moses & Hermes Trismegistos |   |                                  |

Figure 3.1 Layout of the frescoes in the Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome. Derived from Poeschel, S, *Alexander Maximus: das Bildprogramm des Appartamento Borgia im Vatikan*, (Weimar, VDG, 1999), fig. 72, p. 347.

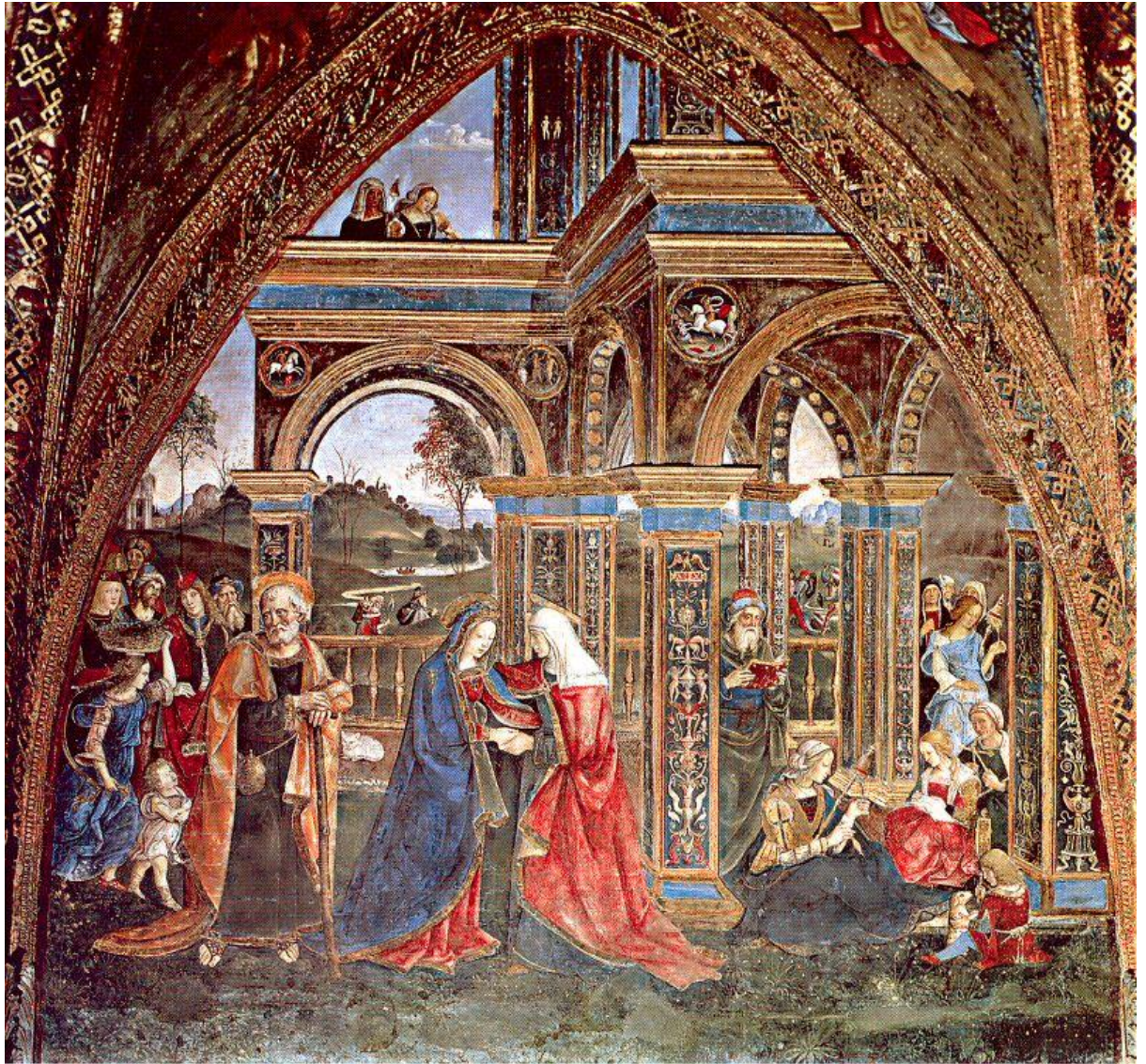


Figure 3.2 Pinturicchio and assistants, *The Visitation*, 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.



Figure 3.3 Bartolo di Fredi, *Altarpiece of the Trinity*, 1397, tempera on wood, originally from Siena but currently in Musée de Beaux Arts Chambéry.



Figure 3.4 Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Visitation*, c.1491, tempera on wood, 172 cm. x 165 cm., Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Figure 3.5 Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Visitation*, 1486–90, fresco, Cappella Tornabuoni, S Maria Novella, Florence.





Figure 3.6 Pinturicchio and assistants, *The Meeting of St Anthony Abbot and St Paul the Hermit*, 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.

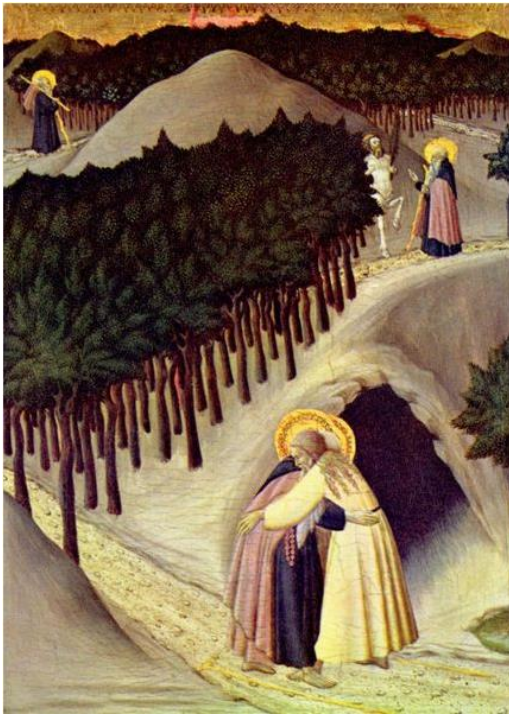


Figure 3.7 Sassetta/Master of the Osservanza (Sano di Pietro?). *The meeting of St Anthony and St Paul*, c.1430/1435, tempera on panel, 46.5 cm. x 33.4 cm., national Gallery of Art, Washington.



Figure 3.8 Piero di Cosimo, *The Visitation with Saint Nicholas and Saint Anthony Abbot*, c.1489/1490, oil on panel, 184.2 cm. x 188.6 cm., National Gallery of Art, Washington.



Figure 3.9 Pinturicchio and assistants, *The Flight of St Barbara* 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.



Figure 3.10 (Follower of) Robert Campin, *Madonna and Child with Saints in the Enclosed Garden*, c.1440/1460, oil on panel, 119.8 cm. x 148.5 cm., National Gallery of Art, Washington.



Figure 3.11 Domenico Ghirlandaio, *St Barbara Crushing her Infidel Father*, c.1471, fresco, Parish Church of Sant'Andrea, Cercina.



Figure 3.12 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Susannah and the Elders*, 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.



Figure 3.13 Lorenzo Lotto, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1517, oil on panel, 66 cm. x 51 cm., Uffizi Gallery, Florence.



Figure 3.14 Orazio Samacchini, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1555-1570, oil on wood, 34.5 cm. x 29 cm., Uffizi Gallery, Florence.



Figure 3.15 Domenico di Michelino, *Susanna and the Elders*, (detail), 15th century, oil, 43 cm. x 170 cm., Avignon, Musée du Petit Palais,



Figure 3.16 Domenico di Michelino, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1460-1475, oil, 40.5 cm. x 38.0 cm., Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University.



Figure 3.17 Master of Apollo and Daphne, *Susanna and the Elders in the Garden, and the Trial of Susanna before the Elders*, c.1500, tempera on panel, 64 cm. x 159 cm., Art Institute, Chicago.



Figure 3.18 Master of Apollo and Daphne, *Susanna and the Elders*, mid-1490s, tempera on wood panel, 58.5 cm. x 163.2 cm., Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.



Figure 3.19 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Martyrdom of St Sebastian*, 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.





Figure 3.20 Unknown, *St Sebastian*, circa seventh century, mosaic, St Pietro in Vincoli, Rome.

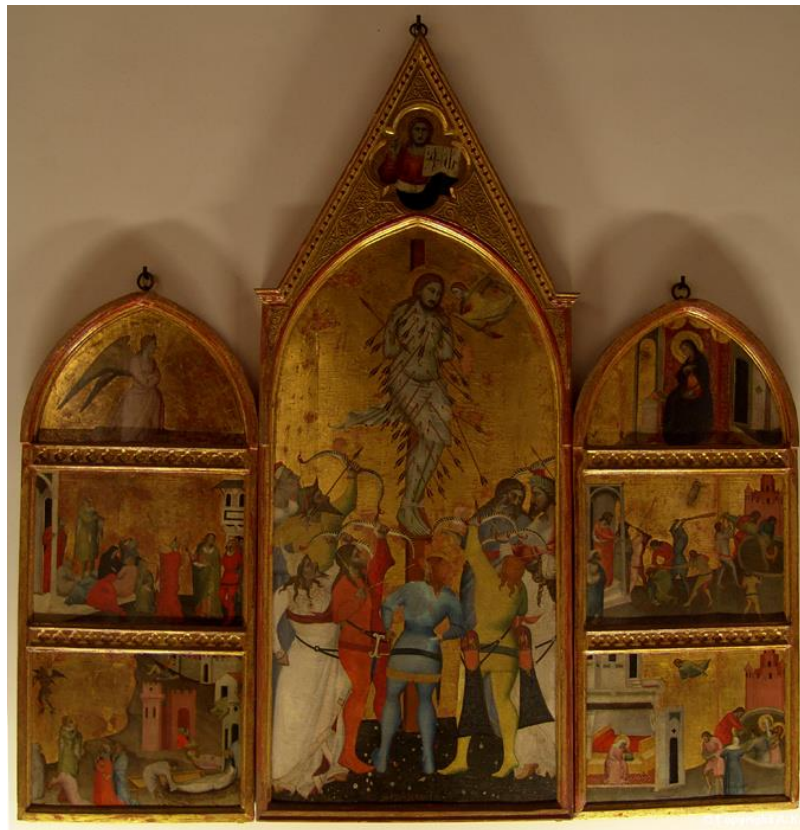


Figure 3.21 Giovanni del Biondo, *Martyrdom of St Sebastian and scenes from his life*, c.1370, wood panel, 224 cm. x 89 cm., Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence.



Figure 3.22 Pietro Perugino, *Martyrdom of St Sebastian*, c.1495, oil on wood, Louvre, Paris.



Figure 3.23 Pietro Perugino, *Martyrdom of St Sebastian*, c.1505, fresco, Oratory of San Sebastiano, Panicale.

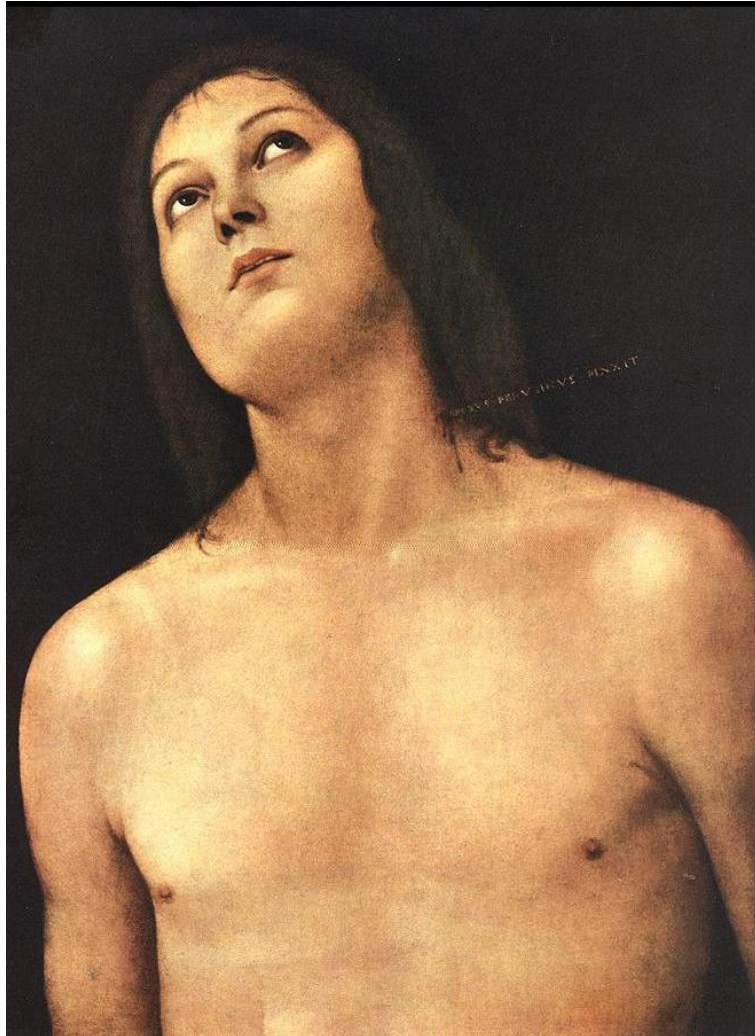


Figure 3.24 Pietro Perugino, *Martyrdom of St Sebastian*, c.1493-4, tempera, Hermitage, St Petersburg.



Figure 3.25 Pietro Perugino, *St Sebastian with St Roch and St Peter*, c.1478, fresco, St Maria Assunta, Cerqueto.

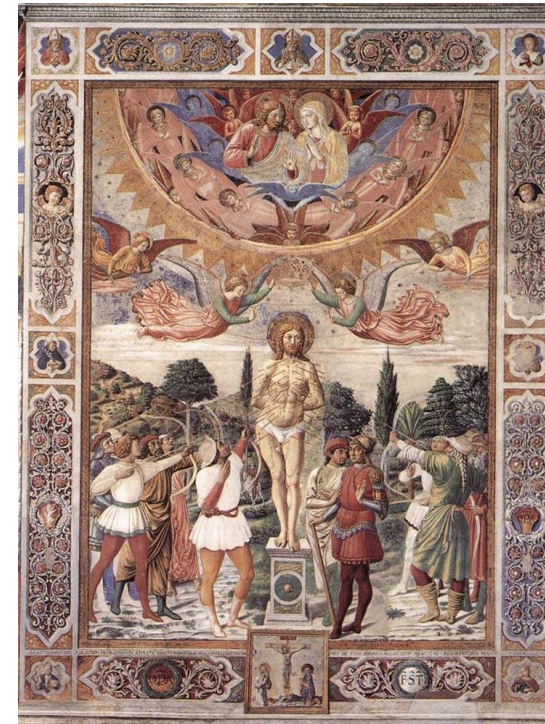


Figure 3.26 Benozzo Gozzoli, *Martyrdom of St Sebastian*, 1465, fresco, Collegiata, San Gimignano,



Figure 3.27 Andrea Mantegna, *Martyrdom of St Sebastian*, 1457-58, oil on wood, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

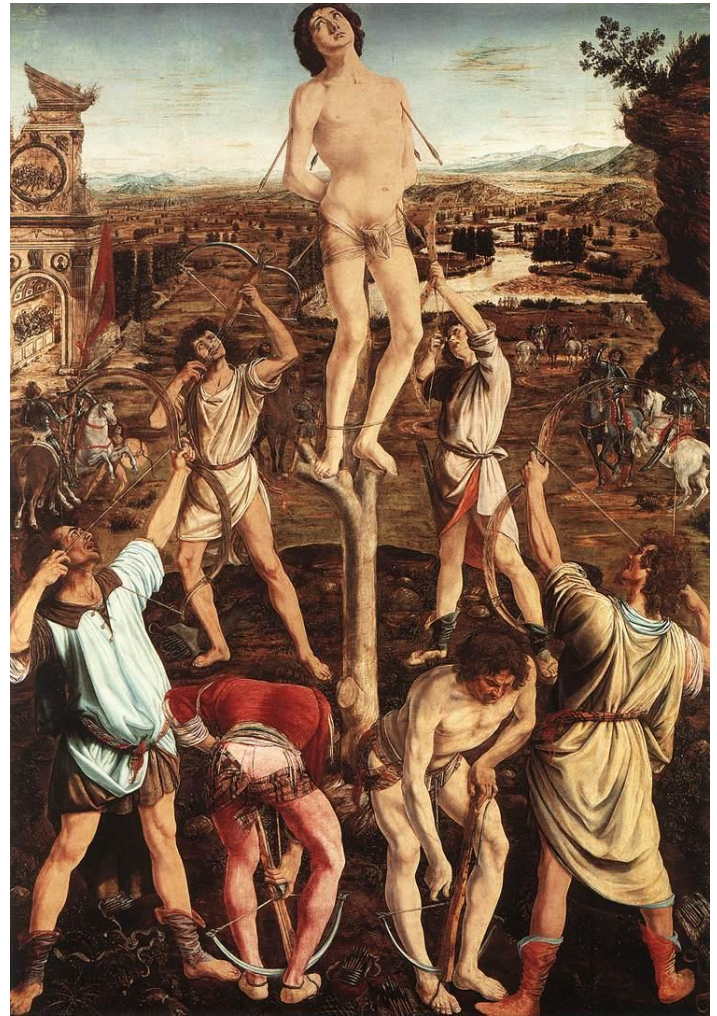


Figure 3.28 Antonio & Piero Pollaiuolo, *Martyrdom of St Sebastian*, 1475, oil on wood, National Gallery, London.



Figure 3.29 Pintoricchio, *Madonna del Latte in un paesaggio*, 1492, tempera on panel, 29.3 cm. x 21.6 cm., Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston.



Figure 3.30 Luca Signorelli, *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*, 1498, oil on wood, 288 cm. x 175 cm., Pinacoteca Comunale, Città di Castello.



Figure 3.31 Gentile Bellini, *Seated Janissary*, 1479–81, pen in brown ink, 21.5 cm. x 17.5 cm., British Museum, London.



Figure 3.32 Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Calling of the Apostles*, 1481, fresco, Sistine Chapel, Vatican palace, Rome.



Figure 3.33 Pinturicchio, *Disputa of St Katherine*, 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi. Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.





Figure 3.34 Donato and Gregorio d'Arezzo, *Life of St Katherine*, c.1330, tempera on panel, 39 3/8 in. x 67 in., John Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.



Figure 3.35 Unknown Italian, *St Katherine with the Philosophers*, 1390s, fresco, Museo Civico, Piacenza.



Figure 3.36 Masolino da Panicale, *St Katherine with the Philosophers*, 1425, fresco, San Clemente, Rome.



Figure 3.37 Cenni di Francesco di Ser Cenni, *St Katherine Disputing and Two Donors*, c.1380, tempera on wood, gold ground, 21 ¼ in. x 16 ¾ in., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 3.38 Pinturicchio, *Christ Disputing with the Doctors*, 1501, fresco, Baglioni Chapel, Spello.



Figure 3.39 Sandro Botticelli, *Punishment of Korah*, 1482, fresco, Sistine Chapel, Vatican Palace, Rome



Figure 3.40 *Maxentius*, AV Medallion. (21.36 g., weight of 4 Aurei), Rome mint, AD 307-312.



Figure 3.41 *Maxentius*, Follis, Ticinum Mint, AD 306-312. Obv: IMP MAXENTIVS PAVG.



Figure 3.42 *Maximinus*, Follis, Heraclea mint, AD 310-31. Obv: IMP C GAL VAL MAXIMINO PAVG.



Figure 3.43 *Emperor Maxentius*, stone, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Skulpturensammlung, Dresden.



Figure 3.44 *Emperor Maxentius*, stone, Museo Archeologico Ostiense, Ostia Antica, (Ost Helbig 3058).



Figure 3.45 Pinturicchio and workshop, *Disputa of St Katherine*, 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican palace, Rome, detail – ‘Albanian’?



Figure 3.46 Workshop of Gentile Bellini, *Standing Man*, pen in brown ink, 28 cm. x 18 cm., Late 15<sup>th</sup> century. Frankfurt, Städelsches Kunstinstitut, (3957).



Figure 3.47 Pinturicchio, *Disputa of St Catherine*, 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican palace, Rome, detail – ‘Standing Turk’.



Figure 3.48 Workshop of Gentile Bellini, *Standing Turk*, pen in brown ink, 29.9 cm. x 20.3 cm., late 15<sup>th</sup> century, annotated: *Giovan Bellin venetus*, Musée de Louvre, Paris, (4655).



Figure 3.49 Pinturicchio & workshop *Pius II in Ancona to proclaim the Crusade*, 1502-5, fresco, Libreria Piccolomini, Duomo, Siena,



Figure 3.50 Pinturicchio, *Disputa of St Katherine*, 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome, detail – Lucrezia Borgia?



Figure 3.51 Bartolomeo Veneto, *Courtesan*, early 15<sup>th</sup> century, oil on panel, 44 cm. x 34 cm., Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt, (1077).



Figure 3.53 Mantuan School, *Medal for Alonso d'Este & Lucrezia Borgia*, 1502, bronze, dia. 58mm., Museo Civico Archeologico, Bologna, (22767).





Figure 3.54 Pinturicchio, *Annunciation*, 1501, fresco, Baglioni Chapel, Spello, detail.



Figure 3.55 Pinturicchio *Disputa of St Katherine*, 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome, detail – self portrait?



Figure 3.56 Pinturicchio *Disputa of St Katherine* 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome, detail - Antonio da Sangallo?



Figure 3.57 Turkish (after Constanzo di Moysis), *Bust Portrait of Mehmet II*, c.1478, watercolour and gold on paper, 26 cm. x 21 cm., Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul, (H2153, fol.145v).



Figure 3.58 Turkish, *Mehmet II smelling a rose* ( the so called 'Sinan' Portrait), c.1480, Watercolour on paper, 39 cm. x 27 cm., Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul, (H2153, fol.10r).



Figure 3.59 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Disputa of St Katherine*, 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome, detail – Djem?



Figure 4.1 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Zeus pursues Io*, (Octagon 1), 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.



Figure 4.2 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Zeus, Hera and Io*, (Octagon 2), 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.



Figure 4.3 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Hermes lulls Argus*, (Octagon 3), 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.



Figure 4.4 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Hermes slays Argus*, (Octagon 4), 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.



Figure 4.5 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Isis with Moses and Hermes Trismegistus(?)*, (Octagon 5), 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.

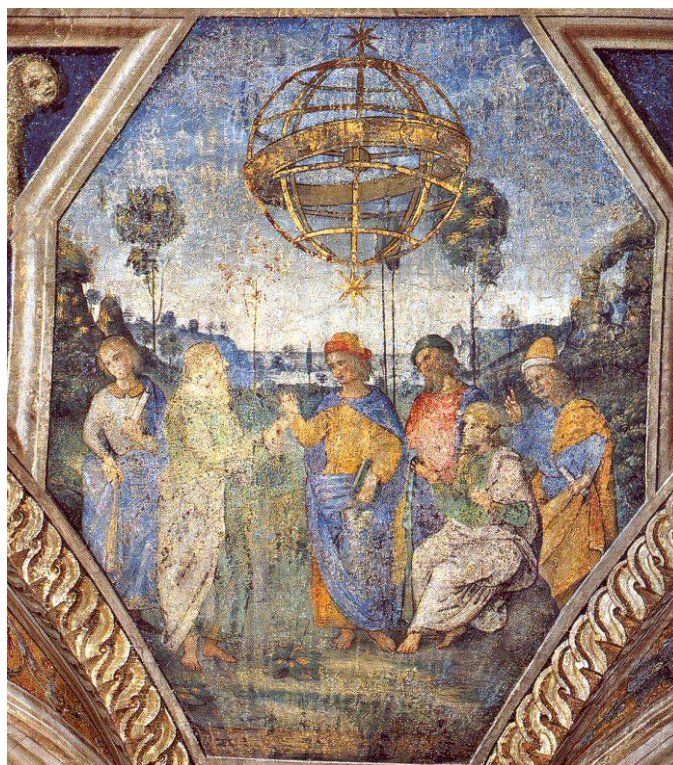


Figure 4.6 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Hermes Trismegistus(?) with the Zodiac*, 1493, fresco, Sala delle Sibille, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.



Figure 4.7 *Io welcomes Isis*, fresco, 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, Naples (9558), originally in the Ekklesiasterion, temple of Isis, Pompeii.



Figure 4.8 *Hermes Trismegistus*, c.1488, floor mosaic, Siena Cathedral



Figure 4.9 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Wedding of Isis and Osiris*, (adjacent to the arch octagons), 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.





Figure 4.10 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Northern vault*, 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.



Figure 4.11 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Marriage of Isis and Osiris*, (N. vault), 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.

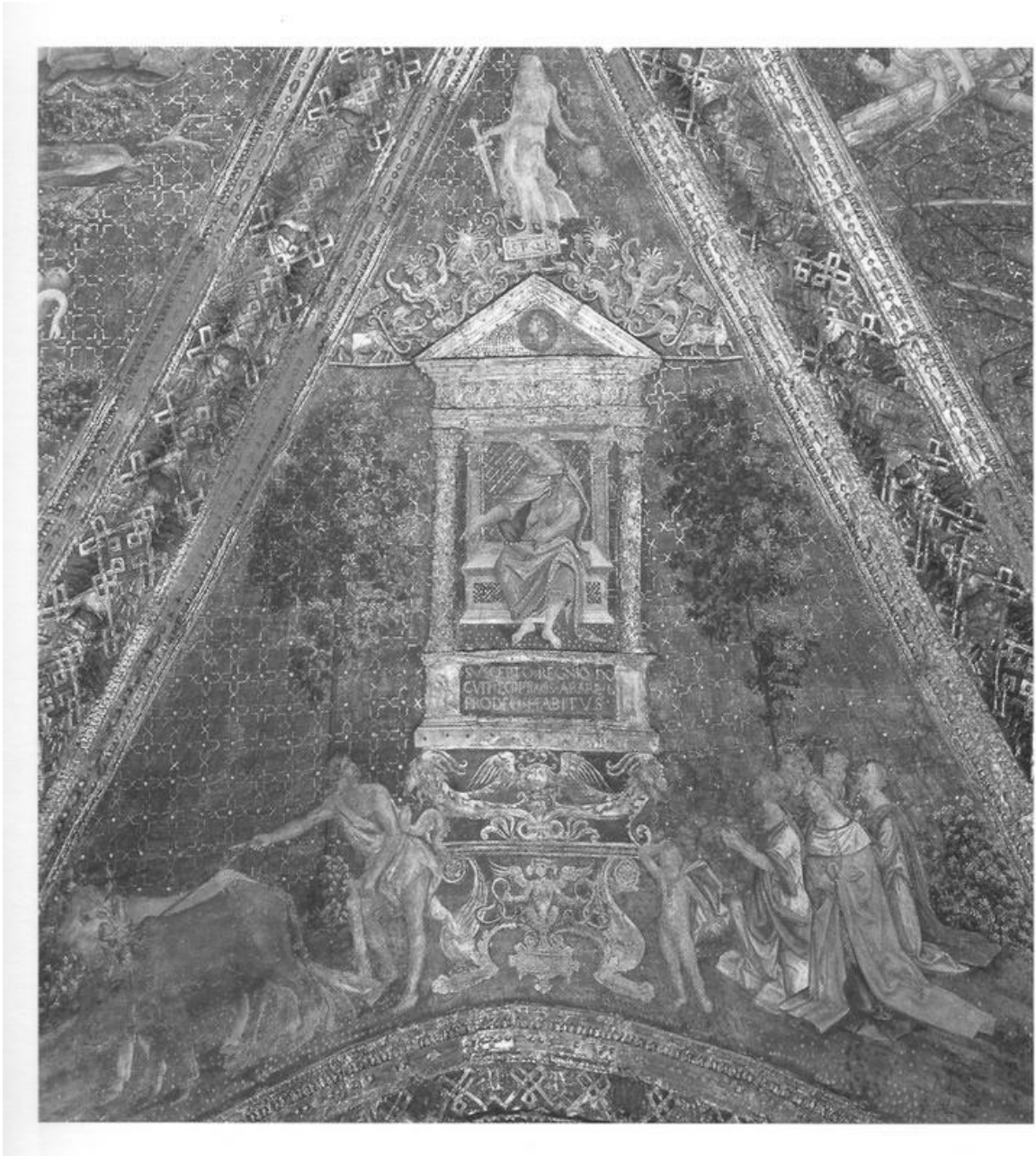


Figure 4.12 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Osiris teaches ploughing*, (N. vault), 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.

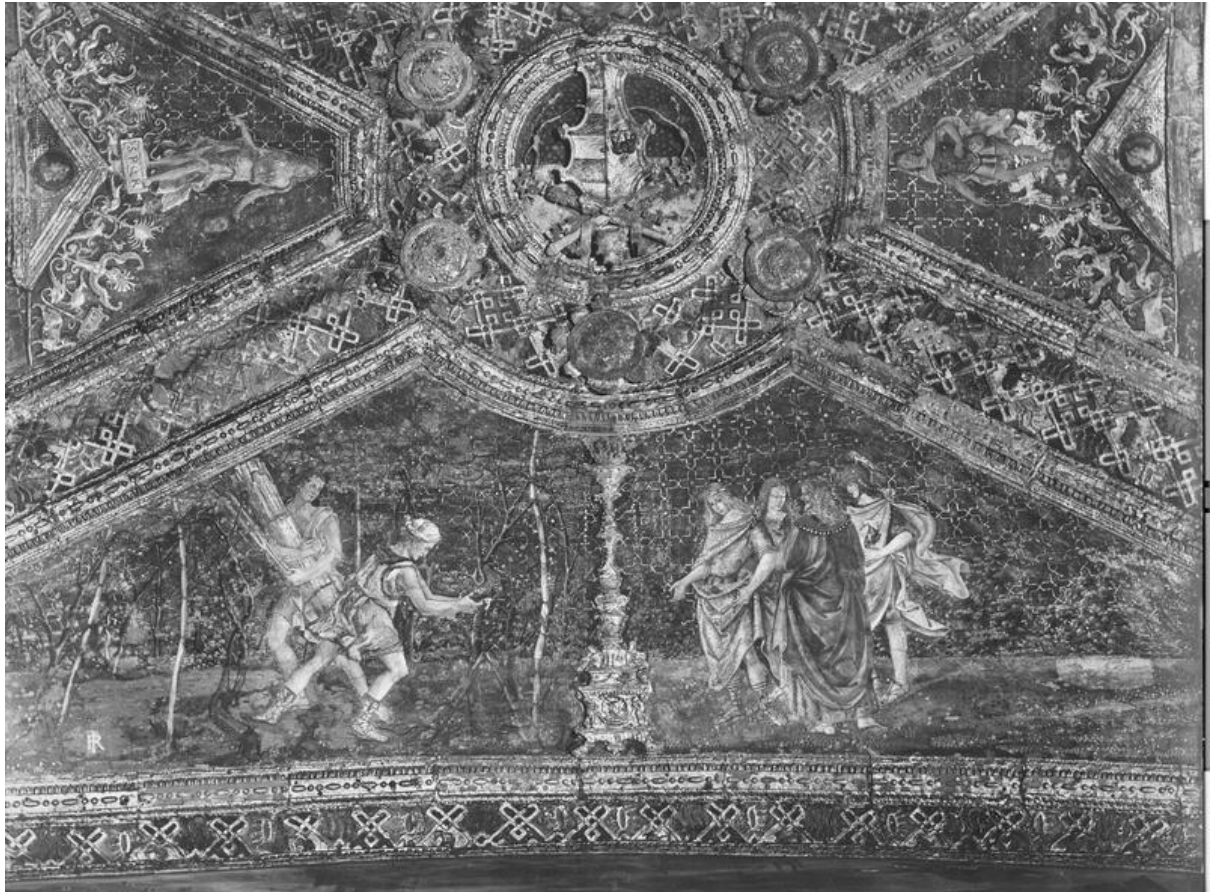


Figure 4.13 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Osiris teaches viticulture*, (N. vault), 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.



Figure 4.14 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Osiris teaches fructiculture*, (N. vault), 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.



Figure 4.15 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Southern vault*, 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.



Figure 4.16 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Assassination of Osiris*, (S. vault), 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.



Figure 4.17 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Isis brings together the body parts of Osiris*, (S. vault), 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.





Figure 4.18 Filarete, *Martyrdom of St Peter*, *Porta Argentea*, 1445, bronze relief, St Peter's Basilica, Vatican, Rome.

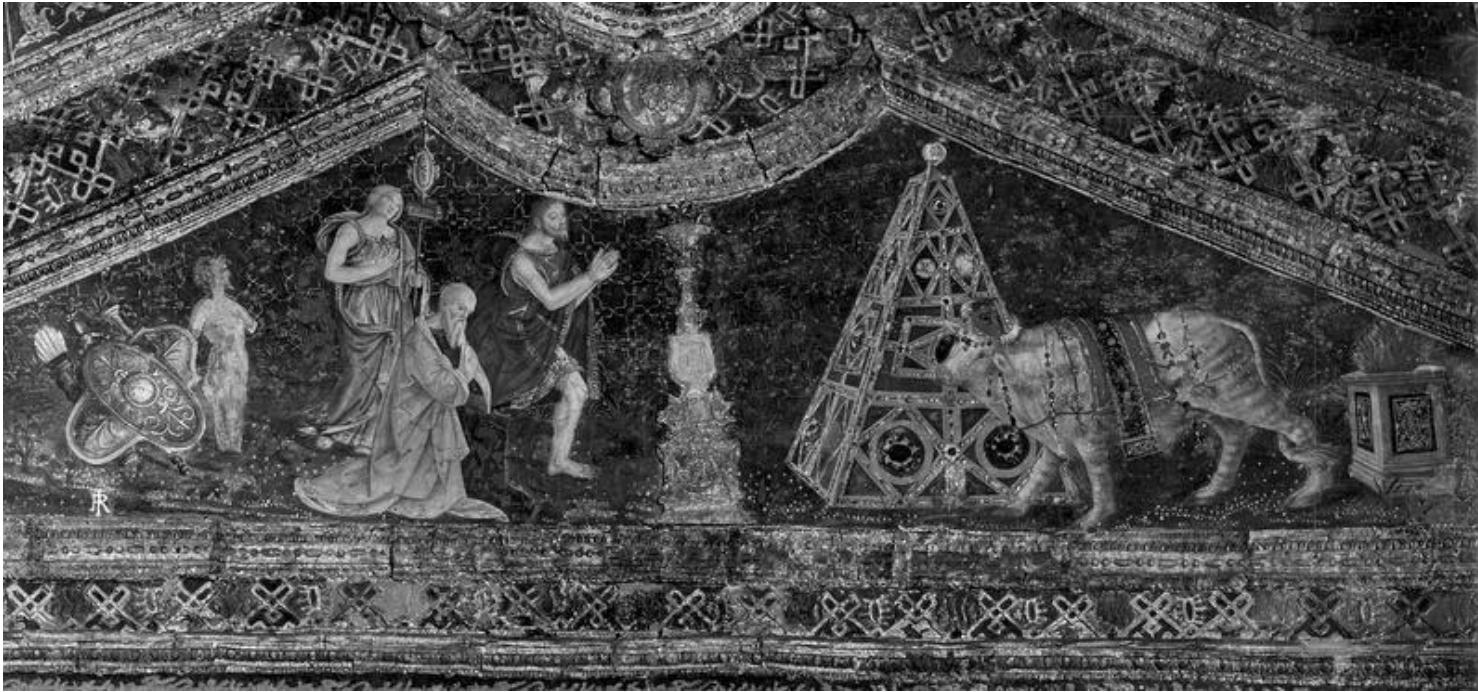


Figure 4.19 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Appearance of the Apis*, (S. vault), 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.



Figure 4.20 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Procession of the Apis*, (S. vault), 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome.

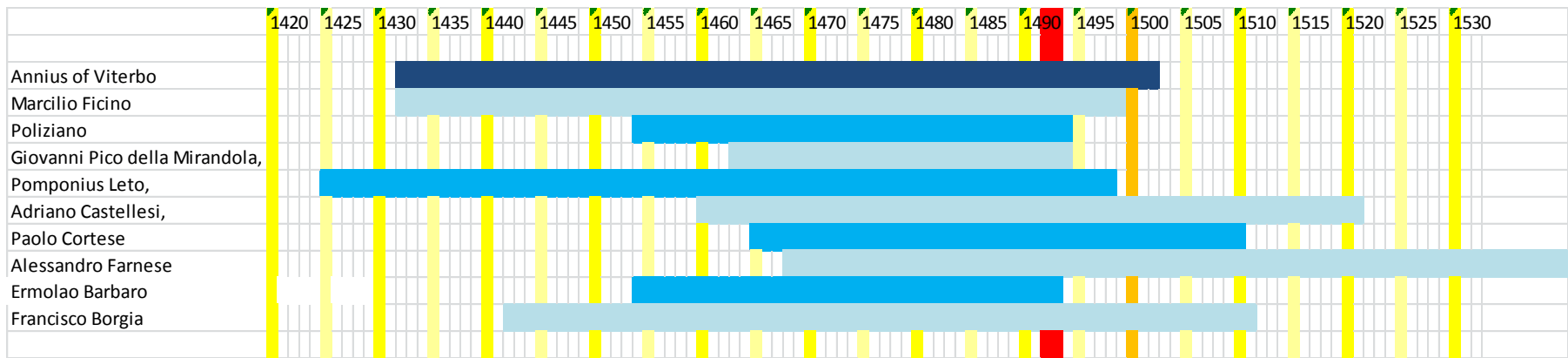


Figure 5.1 Timeline of possible candidates for the role of author of the fresco programme in the Sala dei Santi.



Figure 5.2 Pinturicchio and assistants, *Disputa of St Katherine*, 1493, fresco, Sala dei Santi, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican Palace, Rome, detail – showing the ‘philosopher’.