

A detail from Raphael's fresco 'The Fall of Man' in the Vatican Museums. The scene depicts Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Adam is shown in the upper left, leaning forward and pointing towards the forbidden fruit. Eve is in the lower right, holding a large red banner. In the foreground, a group of soldiers and horses are gathered, some looking towards the figures in the sky. The background shows a landscape with trees and a distant city.

Raphael in Rome
Style, technique, conservation

EDIZIONI MUSEI VATICANI

Foreword

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In the papers developed for this volume, restorers and art historians propose the results of conservation and research focused on works that represent some of the most significant stages in Raphael's Roman period, beginning in 1508 and concluding with his death in 1520.

The restoration of the frescoes carried out in the Vatican's Stanza della Segnatura and Stanza di Eliodoro (figs. 1-2, 64-65), on the *Madonna del Divino Amore* in the Capodimonte Museum in Naples (fig. 233), and on *La Perla* and *Lo Spasimo* in the Prado in Madrid (figs. 247, 262), and the programme of technical investigations which has run alongside this work, has made a substantial body of documentary material available. New academic hypotheses formulated on the basis of these materials are here discussed by specialists in problems concerning Raphael and early sixteenth-century Italian painting.

The texts which follow address several steps in Raphael's technical and artistic development, which were already identified as crucial in the pages of Vasari (1568), starting with those which manifest themselves in the workshops of the first two Stanze and going on to those which mark the late results of the master's output in his relationship with his studio.

The close interweaving between material qualities and formal aspects, which is underlined by the essays collected here, confirms the strong coherence between technical choices and stylistic outcomes in the creative research conducted by the master from Urbino: and it is striking to see how the experimental solutions in Raphael's practice as a painter correspond precisely to the stylistic innovations already pointed out with extraordinary acuteness by Vasari in his analysis of the artist's development.

As Arnold Nesselrath and Paolo Violini explain here, the restoration of the *Parnassus* (fig. 46) and the remarks it aroused confirm the stylistic change already identified as canonical by Vasari himself and thereafter constantly investigated in the literature on Sanzio, which was prompted by his very first encounter with the vault of the Sistine Chapel, that Raphael had the possibility to see with the complicity of Bramante when the chapel was still in progress, while he was working on the Stanza della Segnatura. In fact, it was during the execution of the lunette of *Parnassus* that Raphael moved from painting with cross-hatched brushstrokes modelled on Perugino to a way of painting *a corpo* (figs. 48-51), supplying an evidence of his first attempt to imitate the technique adopted by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel ceiling. In parallel, in the same fresco the majestic figures of Sappho and her companion, the poet on her right, extend their leg and arm towards the viewer as examples of an early response to the expanded volumes of the Prophets and Sibyls on the Sistine vault.

1510-1511, when *Parnassus* was painted, are in fact, in Raphael's biography, the very years of the moment in which Vasari records his first reaction to the powerfully sculptural character of Michelangelo's painting. More thoughtful and complex reactions came one after the other.

Another example of technical evidence that came out (p. 38) during the restoration work could be analysed in its stylistic meaning, offering an important standpoint to understand a possible outcome for Raphael of Leonardo's stay in Rome from 1513 to 1516, the implications of which have still not been fully understood today. In the use of lime-based glazes adopted for the *Liberation of St Peter* to suggest the dense atmosphere of the night air (figs. 148-149), it does not seem inappropriate to read an echo of Leonardo's thinking and research when, at the same time as the fresco was being executed, he was living a few steps away, in Belvedere; and, still drawing on Vasari, he was absorbed in mysterious experiments on the application of paint in pictures which frightened Pope Leo X.

The examinations conducted during the restorations have given also concrete confirmation of Vasari's observations (1568, IV, pp. 180-181) about the special intelligence with which Raphael was able to foresee the effects of backlighting that would play a decisive role in the fresco of this wall (fig. 123). Here the window of the room is opened in the same wall and the artist transformed an objective limit into a challenge to cope with by recourse to more suitable resources of painterly practice: "This composition Raffaello painted over the window, where the wall is darkest; and thus, when you look at the picture, the light strikes you in the face, and the real light conflicts so well with the different lights of the night in the painting, that the smoke of the torch, the splendour of the Angel, and the thick darkness of the night seem to you to be wholly real and natural, and you would never say that it was all painted, so vividly did he express this difficult conception".

Another aspect of Raphael's stylistic development is given duly close consideration, one that has been the focus of attention for centuries and whose importance is highlighted at the start by Antonio Paolucci's essay (pp. 15-17): that is to say, the breakthrough to a different role for colour and light in the frescoes of the Stanza di Eliodoro. This innovation raises the problem of Sanzio's knowledge of Venetian painting, touched on by the first monographs on the artist (Passavant 1860) and since then an obligatory topic in literature, although its specific characteristics were not spelled out. Alessandro Ballarin (pp. 45-49) now puts forward explosive suggestions on this subject.

The deep assimilation of contemporary Venetian painting shown in the frescoes of the Stanza di Eliodoro, and in the group of moveable paintings executed during this period, such as the portrait of Julius II in London or the *Madonna di Foligno* (figs. 207, 58), now, after restoration, so blatantly obvious, has led to the supposition of a knowledge, not mediated through works by Giorgione or the young Titian which could have had found

their way to Rome, but direct, as the result of a possible visit made by Raphael to Venice, the details of which remain to be defined. This Raphael, the colourist acknowledged and celebrated unbrokenly from the sixteenth century onwards in the *Expulsion of Heliodorus* and the *Mass at Bolsena*, also emerges with irrefutable evidence in the scene of the *Meeting between Attila and Leo the Great* (figs. 152-155, 167-172), even though, over the past two centuries and above all during the twentieth century, studies have insistently expressed serious reservations about this work, in which it has often been seen a considerable intervention from Raphael's pupils. Nevertheless for Cavalcaselle and Crowe (1884-1891, II, p. 219), pioneers of the connoisseur tradition, the use of colour appeared to be a sign of Raphael's authorship: "Raphael was not without assistance in the execution of this work. The hand of Penni stands revealed in some of its subordinate parts. But in the main, the master's touch meets us at every turn, and the colours are used with the richness, the brilliancy and trasparenza of which he alone had the secret in that age".

With regard to the *Meeting between Attila and Leo the Great* (fig. 150), the restoration, and the change of taste which allows us to appreciate the colourist Raphael also in its more specifically and precociously "mannerist" expression in the Stanza di Eliodoro (and it is not by chance that this fresco was studied assiduously by Francesco Salviati throughout his career), now lead us to establish a viewpoint on the Urbinate artist's experimentation in the field of colourism beyond a new stage in comparison with Michelangelo.

It is symptomatic that admiration for the sumptuousness and chromatic freedom of the *Attila* is at the centre of the judgement expressed in the seventeenth century by the school of criticism which in our own time we call classicist. It was Andrea Sacchi, returning from his journey to Northern Italy in 1636 who commented on the frescoes during a visit to the Stanze, lauding their Venetian and Lombard components in the presence of Giovan Pietro Bellori and the young Carlo Maratti; and it was very much the case with Bellori (1672), who made one of the seventeenth century's most passionate celebrations of Raphael's colourism, which only seems strange today because of a misinterpretation of the school of thought we call classicist. Worried that he might not find this feature satisfying any longer on going back to the frescoes of the Stanze after the experience of his sojourn in Northern Italy ("because his eyes had grown accustomed to the coloring of Lombardy"), Sacchi was surprised to find instead "the most beautiful combination of Titian and Correggio and the worthiest color of Lombard brushes, added to which, last of all, he found moreover what is more important, Raphael's own knowledge. We wanted to repeat this here on account of those who are so unjustly bent on impugning the coloring of Raphael [...] (Bellori 1976, p. 558)".

The contribution by Michela di Macco (pp. 99-115) concentrates on the part played by Maratti, following the footsteps of his teacher Sacchi, in restoring the Vatican cycle, and on subsequent, less known chapters in the story of the frescoes' conservation, and hence on the fortunes of the Roman Raphael.

The studies of graphic material and of the activity of Raphael's studio carried out during the second half of the twentieth century by connoisseurs in the Anglo-Saxon tradition (thinking specifically of the seminal reference *Raphael and his Circle* by Philip Pouncey and John Gere, 1962), followed by the crucial work of John Shearman, have opened up paths hitherto unknown in research on this artist, which has struggled to achieve a new perspective on the late period under Leo X, generally perceived as the start of a slippery slope leading to Mannerism (Romani 2007). On the other hand, the full critical rehabilitation of Raphael's late phase, in which the tireless scientific journey of Konrad Oberhuber has been decisive, has advanced in step with the proliferation of investigations into the work and personalities of Raphael's pupils, with important repercussions for the master's catalogue as well as for the one of those he trained. These are signposts and threads in the historiography of Raphael, among which Sylvia Ferino-Pagden's essay helps us to orient ourselves, with indications of method and with the reconstruction of some highly noteworthy case studies (pp. 19-27).

The problems concerning the organisation of work in the studio and the division of roles between Raphael and his collaborators, with the consequences deriving from this, which affect the relationship between preliminary drawings and painted execution, are variously analysed in this volume by the contributions of Angela Cerasuolo (pp. 65-77), Vittoria Romani (pp. 79-85), and Ana González Mozo (pp. 87-97).

Extreme prudence is necessary in assessing the degree of delegation to collaborators, as is shown by the examples of drawings and paintings examined: the *Petite Sainte Famille* executed for Cardinal Bibbiena and today in the Louvre with its cover (figs. 283-284), the *Perla* and the *Spasimo* (figs. 247, 262), painted respectively for Ludovico di Canossa in Verona and for the church of the Spasim in Palermo, and the *Madonna del Divino Amore* (fig. 33) created for Leonello Pio da Carpi; in other words, works belonging to the very end of Raphael's career and the object of constant oscillations of attribution between master and pupils.

The *Princeton Raphael Symposium* of 1983 (Shearman – Hall 1990) was dedicated to making known findings from restorations and technical analyses carried out on this artist's works. In introducing them for publication in 1990, Shearman asked for an exchange of information between art historians, restorers and lab analysts, and at the same time invited caution in the checking and interpretation of data. However, that was a different season in the relationships between the relevant disciplines: the volume bore a subtitle, *Science in the service of art history*, which would, unfortunately, be unacceptable to most people today, unless the order of the two terms was reversed. Indeed, in the short passage of time between the fifth centenaries of the artist's birth and death, together with the substantial increase in information available on the technical front, we have a measure of how increasingly urgent it is the effort to combine the analysis of material data and the analysis of stylistic elements, checking interpretative hypotheses against the sources in

order to avoid the risk of distortion, so prevalent today, which leads to the ascription of an objective character to technical evidence that is often inappropriately contrasted with the presumed subjectivity of evidence of a formal kind.

The fruits of the dialogue between art historians and restorers, the texts and the sensational photographic documentation that we have the honour and responsibility of presenting, allow us to look with new eyes and from a previously unexplored angle – but one which in some cases, as we have seen, boasts very early precedents – at the grand unfolding of stylistic development and inspired inventiveness in Raphael's technical researches.

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