



**FONTES**  **Quellen und Dokumente zur Kunst 1350-1750**  
Sources and Documents for the History of Art 1350-1750

VASARI'S *CASTRATION OF CAELUS*: INVENTION AND PROGRAMME

**GIORGIO VASARI:**

**The “*CASTRAZIONE DEL CIELO FATTA DA SATURNO*” [1558],**

in:

*Ragionamento di Giorgio Vasari Pittore Aretino fatto in Firenze sopra le invenzioni delle storie dipinte nelle stanze nuove nel palazzo ducale Con lo Illustrissimo Don Francesco De' Medici primo genito del Duca Cosimo duca di Fiorenza, Firenze, Biblioteca della Galleria degli Uffizi (Manoscritto 11)*

and

**COSIMO BARTOLI:**

**„*CASTRATIONE DEL CIELO*“, 1555,**

in:

*“Lo Zibaldone di Giorgio Vasari”*,  
Arezzo, Casa Vasari,  
Archivio vasariano,  
(Codice 31)

edited with an essay by

**CHARLES DAVIS**

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PREFACE:

The *Ragionamenti* of Giorgio Vasari, describing his paintings in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, the Medici ducal palace, is a leading example of a sixteenth-century publication in which the author describes *in extenso* his own works, explicating the inventions and, at times, the artistry that lie behind them, as well as documenting the iconographic programme which he has followed. Many of the early surviving letters by Vasari follow a similar intention. Vasari began working in the Palazzo Vecchio in 1555, and he completed the painting of the Salone dei Cinquecento in 1565.

Vasari had completed a first draft of the *Ragionamenti* in 1558, and in 1560 he brought it to Rome, where it was read by Annibale Caro and shown to Michelangelo (“*et molti ragionamenti fatte delle cose dell’arte per poter finire quel Dialogo che già Vi lessi, ragionando lui et io insieme*”: Vasari to Duke Cosimo, 9 April 1560). Although in his autobiography, included in the *Vite* of 1568, Vasari still promised the publication of the *Ragionamenti*, his plans were delayed, and, in the event, the *Ragionamenti* were first published by Vasari’s nephew in 1588, after the death of the artist (Firenze: Giunti, 1588). Early re-editions were issued in 1619 (*Trattato della pittura del S. Cavaliere Giorgio Vasari*, Firenze: Giunti, 1619 – recycled books, printed in 1588, with a new frontispiece) and in 1762 (“SECONDA EDIZIONE”, Arezzo: Per Michele Bellotti, 1762). The work was republished subsequently (e.g., Pisa: Presso Niccolò Capurro, 1823), sometimes in conjunction with Vasari’s *Vite* (Firenze: Audin, 1823; ed. Milanesi, 1878-1885; ed. Anna Maria Ciaranfi, Firenze: Salani, 1927-1932, vol. 7, pp. 269-541) and sometimes in extract (*Spiegazione delle pitture del Gran Salone del Palazzo Vecchio di Firenze*, Firenze: Molini, 1819), and it has been translated twice (English: Jerry Lee Draper, Dissertation, Chapel Hill 1973; French: Roland Le Mollé, Paris 2007). Full text versions, without commentary, are found at SIGNUM: *La biblioteca delle fonti storico-artistiche* (<http://fonti-sa.signum.sns.it>) and at Memofonte ([www.memofonte.it](http://www.memofonte.it)). Both the first edition of 1588 and the “*edizione seconda*” (1762) are fully viewable at Google books. There is no modern critical edition of this important work, about which many questions remain unresolved.

The purpose of the present issue of *FONTES* is to draw attention to this text by examining its treatment of the central painting in the first room described. This painting depicts the Castration of Caelus. The work is described in the *Ragionamenti*, and from it are derived all the remaining paintings of the Quartiere degli Elementi on the upper level of the Palazzo Vecchio. In this instance unusually full information survives to clarify Vasari’s own initial ideas for the painting, the subsequent suggestions of a literary adviser concerning the subject, that is, the iconography of the picture, and the impact of these suggestions on Vasari’s work. This information is embodied primarily in two written sources: Cosimo Bartoli’s invention for the painting (“*Castratione del Cielo*”, 1555) and Vasari’s own account of the work in his description “LA SALA DELLI ELEMENTI” at the beginning of his *Ragionamenti*. These two texts are presented here as full texts. Thus for a case study there is available the full range of artistic invention: the work of art itself, the *Bilderfindung*, the *Bildprogramm*, to which it belongs, and a *Bildbeschreibung*, provided by the painter himself. This example illustrates one instance of just how deep the impact of iconographic counsel on the artist’s ideas and pictorial formulations could be.

As suggested above, the text of the *Ragionamenti* circulated to an extent in manuscript form long before it was published. In addition to Michelangelo and Annibale Caro, there were other readers, among them, Duke Cosimo, Vincenzo Borghini, and Jacopo Guidi. A

manuscript was also a book, and possibly Vasari hoped to illustrate his work. A few of the many surviving drawings for Vasari's paintings in the ducal palace agree more closely with some details of the text of his *Ragionamenti* than they do with the corresponding paintings, which, in turn, often do not agree completely with the printed descriptions. Some drawings exist in multiple versions. The many topical allusions and references discovered by Vasari in his mythological paintings in the Palazzo Vecchio have been challenged by recent scholarship, which, in a wider context, has sometimes been characterized by a programmatic intent to confirm positions established by E. H. Gombrich, especially in his paper, *Topos and Topicality in Renaissance Art* (London 1975). Counter indications contained in the ample documentation for the Palazzo Vecchio have been somewhat neglected. See the studies of McGrath (1985, *infra*) and Tinagli (1981, p. 209: "*L'idea di una concordanza tra i soggetti delle decorazioni dei due quartieri deve essere stata messa a punto in quei mesi [estate 1558]: infatti nelle invenzioni di Cosimo Bartoli per il Quartiere degli Elementi non si trova traccia di ciò che il Vasari chiama "il senso nostro", cioè la lettura di personaggi e fatti mitologici secondo un preciso senso mediceo*"; *infra*). The largest single element in Vasari's *Castration of Caelus* is the jewelled crown that occupies more than one half the breadth of the very large panel. Crowns do not all look alike, and only the blindest of contemporary visitors to the ducal palace would have failed to notice its extremely close resemblance to the *Corona Ducale* of Tuscany, at the time one of the most widely disseminated symbols of Cosimo de' Medici's dominion. The "*corona*" is essentially an enlarged portrait of the ducal crown, and, as such, it represents an inescapable topical allusion in this mythological painting.

The following introduction is based on an article published by the author in 1978: „The Pitfalls of Iconography, or how it was that Saturn gelt his father“, in: *STUDIES IN ICONOGRAPHY*, volume 4, 1978, pp.79-94. It has been corrected, modified, and amplified for the present context.



GIORGIO VASARI, *Castration of Caelus*  
 Florence, Palazzo Vecchio  
 Sala degli Elementi  
 (see *infra*)

*Introduction:*

THE INTERPLAY OF ARTISTIC INVENTION AND *PROGRAMME* IN VASARI'S DECORATION OF THE SALA DEGLI ELEMENTI IN THE PALAZZO VECCHIO: *THE CASTRATION OF CAELUS*

by Charles Davis

Ahistorical interpretations of Renaissance art will at times command the larger audience, so far are we removed in time. Indeed, it is an indubitable truth that the effects of consummate works of art are often quite independent of the intentions of their authors. Moreover, such works may be read illuminatingly in ways that would not always have seemed self-evident when they were created. Nevertheless, many of the now very popular subtle explanations of Renaissance images escape, usually silently, the possibility of historical verification. Most readers, however, will agree that some reference to historical possibilities is useful or, in any event, a point of interest.

Within the realm of iconographical studies the question of what is possible at a given time is usually satisfied by a general awareness of history and knowledge of symbolic traditions; immediately relevant historical evidence is not so often introduced to support an interpretation. While in such matters the accumulated experience of the critic is perhaps the most reliable guide, this experience can be broadened and brought into sharper focus. In the study of iconographical 'intentions' it seems advantageous to note and to collect, even systematically, instances in which a literary text elaborated for a work of art actually survives, along with other cases in which there is concrete historical evidence to cast light on the formulation of the literary side of paintings and sculptures. In point of fact, many such iconographical programmes survive from the sixteenth century onward, but they are not much consulted by iconographers in their efforts to discover meanings concealed in works of art. It must be admitted that these programmes are often uncongenial to the modern mind. Nonetheless, such examples will repay close study for they contain the promise of informing iconographical interpretations with a deeper sense for historical possibilities and with a more realistic awareness of how iconographical considerations actually come into play.

One such situation arises when the iconographical adviser who devised the programme of a work of art can be identified and when his actual role can be determined. In the lines that follow I examine a case that demonstrates with astonishing clarity just how deep the impact of iconographical counsel can go, how it can not only determine what is represented in considerable detail but also leave its impress indelibly on the very appearance of a painting.

With respect to the intervention of an iconographical adviser, our first illustration represents the *before*, and the second illustration, the *after*. The 'before' is a drawing in the Musée des Arts Decoratifs in Paris, where, as we shall soon see, it is correctly attributed to Giorgio Vasari, the painter from Arezzo, who in 1550 first published his still popular *Lives of the Artists*.<sup>1</sup> The 'after' is the central panel of the ceiling decoration Vasari painted in 1555 in the principal *salon*, called the „Sala degli Elementi“, of the upper level of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, then the ducal palace of Cosimo de' Medici. It shows Saturn's castration of his father, the god Caelus, who is better known as Uranus, an event that initiates the genealogy of the pagan gods depicted by Vasari in paintings on the walls of the same room and in the surrounding apartment.

Certain similarities are so immediately apparent that it is impossible to shake the impression that the two images are related: the old man who lies on the clouds in the middle of the composition, the scythe, the ominous suggestion of impending castration, with a ring of onlookers gathered around, to mention only the most obvious correspondences. The differences are equally striking. In the Paris drawing the main event is framed by a charming assembly of Olympian gods. In the Palazzo Vecchio the key is abruptly turned, and the notes of natural, traditional beauty and classical ease that remain are subsumed into what is, at a glance, a sixteenth-century version of „anno 2000“, full of recondite, uncanny occurrences and properties.

It happens that this strange painting in the Palazzo Vecchio is far easier to explain than Vasari's disarmingly simple drawing in Paris. In his *Ragionamento fatto in Firenze sopra le invenzioni delle storie dipinte nelle stanze nuove nel Palazzo Ducale*<sup>2</sup> Vasari patiently answers countless questions that the captivated boy prince, Francesco de' Medici, asks about the „*Castrazione del Cielo*“. And, in fact, in his painting Vasari faithfully follows a programme composed by his friend, Cosimo Bartoli, a prominent figure in Florentine literary and artistic circles in the 1550s. This programme is contained in a letter Bartoli wrote Vasari in 1555, which, by a stroke of luck, survives among Vasari's papers in Arezzo.<sup>3</sup> A close reading shows that much of Vasari's printed description of his own painting is simply copied from Bartoli's letter. But, what is more interesting, it affords an unexpected glimpse into the circumstances in which the Paris drawing was first made and then abandoned. And it allows us not only to substantiate our initial impression, but also to reconstruct the exact relationship between Vasari's two pictures of castration.

Bartoli begins by noting how much he likes the theme of Saturn's castration of the Heavens – „*la castrazione del Cielo fatta da Saturno grandissimamente mi piace*“ – which, it seems, was Vasari's own idea. Then Bartoli continues, plying Vasari with doctrines and learned details concerning the event. When he reaches what is to take place, as it were, on the sidelines of Saturn's castration of Caelus, Bartoli experiences a moment's hesitation. But he plunges on to correct a proposal Vasari has apparently put before him: „Now, since I find neither according to the Latins, nor the Greeks, nor the Hebrews that all the gods were present at the castration of Caelus, and considering that they did not yet exist, I would forget about making that Council of the Gods, and in their place I would put the things that really were present at the creation of the universe and at the castration of Caelus“. Then Bartoli prescribes exactly what Vasari, in the event, painted to go with the castration. We shall return to this, but first there is the matter of the „*concilio delli dei*“, which Bartoli advises against. Surely Vasari had not written Bartoli that he thought a council of gods would make a suitable, attractive accompaniment for Saturn and Caelus. Vasari was a painter by trade, and no doubt he formulated his conception in the way most natural to him, in a drawing, which he then submitted to his friend. It is equally certain that this drawing is the one now in Paris.<sup>4</sup> The celestial gods are assembled around Saturn and Caelus. Among the company, Jupiter with his eagle, armoured Minerva, caduceus-bearing Mercury, laurel-crowned Apollo, and Juno with her peacock are all instantly recognizable. Vasari's ultimate, and perhaps even his immediate source of inspiration for this divine council was Raphael's celebrated painting of the same theme at the Villa Farnesina in Rome. Indeed, Vasari labels Raphael's painting „*il Concilio degli Dei in cielo*“, and he praises it for artistic qualities observable in his own drawing: „*dove si veggono nelle loro forme molti abiti e lineamenti cavati dall'antico, con bellissimo grazia e disegno espressi*“.<sup>5</sup>

It is perhaps still possible to identify several reasons why Vasari turned to Raphael's assembly of the heathen gods for his composition of Saturn's Castration of the Heavens. The theme, which Vasari had already settled upon for the ceiling of the Sala degli Elementi, required only two figures, Saturn and Caelus. But the low and very broad format of his painting had been predetermined by the wooden framework of the ceiling, constructed before Vasari entered the Duke's service. Thus to complete the scene Vasari needed to surround the central event with a cast of supporting actors. It is not surprising that his mind turned to the Celestial Gods of Jupiter's select circle, and to Raphael's memorable picture of them, for they were the gods of the sky who assembled in the heavens, where Caelus' castration took place. Bartoli advised Vasari to show „*il Cielo*“, the embodiment of the Heavens, lying on a bed of clouds („*il Cielo, a giacere quasi che in su le nuvole*“), as, in the event, we see him in Vasari's finished painting.

Nonetheless, there was probably another reason, more closely allied with the requirements of the entire scheme of decoration forming in Vasari's mind, which led him to think to surround the castration with a council of heavenly gods. Saturn's castration of his father led directly to the birth of Venus from the foam-covered sea, an event Vasari portrayed on a side wall of the Sala degli Elementi. Thus the castration pertained to the genealogy of the family of celestial gods, „*gli Dei celesti*“, who gave their names to the rooms of the upper apartment of the Palazzo Vecchio, of which the Castration of Caelus forms both the symbolic and the actual centrepiece. In his *Ragionamenti* Vasari succinctly characterizes the programme of this apartment as the „genealogy of Father Heaven, from whom springs the branches whose fruit fill these rooms with diverse figures“ – „*la genealogia del padre Cielo, per il quale verranno i rami, che de loro frutti empieranno di mano in mano queste stanze*“.

Immediately following this iconographical epitome, Vasari discloses, through a question Prince Francesco asks, his principal source of information about the pagan gods, Giovanni Boccaccio's *Genealogia deorum*, which had appeared in Italian translation only a few years before, in 1553.

It is a passage in the *Genealogia degli dei* that explains a striking anomaly in Vasari's drawing in Paris. Although Caelus' Castration is infrequently depicted, we nonetheless do not expect to see the scythe in his hands, but instead in Saturn's. It was Saturn's attribute and, in fact, it served him as the instrument of Caelus' gelding. So it is puzzling to see it held by Caelus, who is lying down, with his sons gathered at his side. The enigma of the scythe is, however, dispelled by Boccaccio, who, describing the birth of Venus, writes that Saturn practiced his cruelty upon his father, Caelus, „from whom he took the scythe and cut off his male parts“ („*Saturno usò crudeltà verso il suo padre Cielo: onde tolta la falce gli tagliò i membri virili, gittandoli in mare*“).<sup>6</sup>

Thus it is that on one wall of the Sala degli Elementi Saturn's action gives rise to the birth of Venus from the sea. But Boccaccio continues: „*Ma dicono, che la falce non lontano da Lilibeo promontorio di Sicilia fu gittata, onde diede il nome di Trepani à quel loco, perche la falce in Greco si chiama Drepani*“. And, in his own description of the Sala degli Elementi, Vasari writes: „and on the Isle of Sicily, after Caelus' castration, venerable Saturn's scythe fell from his hand onto where today is the city of Trapani, and they say that this island then assumed the form of Saturn's scythe, just as you see it in the scythe that I have painted falling down through the skies from Heaven above“.<sup>7</sup> Thus Vasari follows in Boccaccio's footsteps, and we could hardly hope for a clearer indication that Boccaccio was his authority for assigning the scythe first to Caelus, for once used against his father, Saturn casts it aside.

By representing in his Paris project drawing the moment immediately preceding the actual castration, Vasari avoided the gruesome aspects of his subject and could show an action that fit the happy spirit of his Olympian assembly. But behind this shift in moment there lies a second artistic model.

With the prospect of the Palazzo Vecchio decorations before him, no doubt an endless array of images crowded through Vasari's imagination, coloured surely by works of art he had seen in the course of his travels throughout Italy, works he had drawn, studied, and written about. With this vast, exceptional treasury at his command, when Vasari began to plan his *Castration of the Skies*, he doubtless took his pen in hand and began to draw. His many surviving drawings testify to his immense facility and almost instantaneous capacity for invention. Moreover, Vasari describes how he set about making free sketches to discover, as he drew, the actions of his figures and to determine the general disposition – „*gli schizzi (...) chiamiamo noi una prima sorte di disegni che si fanno per trovare il modo delle attitudini, ed il primo componimento dell'opera*“.<sup>8</sup>

The *Castration of Caelus* lacked a well-established pattern of representation, and as Vasari's pen circled his paper searching for a form to give his picture, it was only natural that elements of analogous subjects came to mind. We have already seen how the pattern of the assembly of the pagan gods appeared, but at the outset another pattern was more decisive. It was the *Drunkenness of Noah*, a theme long popular with Florentine artists. Ghiberti represented it on the doors of the Baptistery. One of Vasari's teachers, the sculptor Baccio Bandinelli, depicted it at least twice.<sup>9</sup> And, more importantly, Michelangelo painted it on the Sistine ceiling. „Nor can I describe“, Vasari writes of Michelangelo's painting, „how well expressed is the story of Noah, who is shown drunk with wine and exposed, in the presence of one son who is laughing at him and two others who are covering him up: a scene of beautiful artistry that sets its own standards“. Vasari's friend, Bindo Altoviti owned the cartoon by Michelangelo for this fresco and kept it in his Roman house, where Vasari lived for a time in the early 1550s. Furthermore, the entire ceiling had, in Vasari's estimation, „proved a veritable beacon to our art. (...) Painters no longer need to seek new inventions, novel attitudes, clothed figures, fresh ways of expression, different arrangements“, and all the rest.<sup>10</sup> Without being exactly the same, the general arrangement of Vasari's group of *Caelus* and his Sons in Paris strongly resembles Michelangelo's painting of Noah and his three sons. What is certain is that Vasari has remembered the pointing hand of Noah's son who mocks his father's nudity, for he repeats it in Saturn's gesture.

While Noah's drunkenness provided, in a crystallized format, a theme with obvious analogies to the castration of *Caelus*, there were even more specific points of contact between the two subjects. Like *Caelus*, Noah stands almost at the head of Genesis, the Book of Generations, of the Genealogy of God's chosen people; thus it is from Noah that the generations of Christ stem. And Noah's son, too, scorned his father's seed. Moreover, it happens that the story of *Caelus*' castration gives the pattern for and is often confused with, that of Saturn by Jupiter. Jupiter, as one well-informed eighteenth-century mythographer reports, “when he found *Saturn* almost drunk with Mead, he bound him and gelt him, as *Saturn* had gelt his father *Coelum* before with his Sickle”.<sup>11</sup> While it is not likely that Vasari ever ferreted out this tale, he doubtless intuitively sensed the inner correspondence of his theme to representations of Noah's drunkenness. Both subjects are fables of the son's deposition of the father, and the story of Noah may be perceived as a Christian, or Hebrew equivalent to *Caelus*' submission to Saturn, or to Saturn's deposition by Jupiter.<sup>12</sup>

It was almost predictable that Vasari's first invention should be formulated with as much regard for pictorial precedents as with an exacting concern for texts. Vasari always maintained that he was not a man of letters, but a painter who has his hands full with his brushes and paints – "*come ho io, più le mani ai pennelli che alla penna, e più il capo ai disegni che allo scrivere*".<sup>13</sup> This was a common pose adopted by artist-writers, but it was not without an element of truth. More than once in his description of the Sala degli Elementi Vasari explains that he has proceeded as a painter, unafraid to take necessary liberties with a text. Learning deserves respect, but at times one must do what seems best from the painter's point of view – "*che questa licenza l'usano i pittori, quando non hanno più luogo*".

The objection Bartoli lodged against Vasari's drawing was couched in terms of a mythological, or cosmological error – at the time of Caelus' castration the Olympian gods did not yet exist – so Vasari's invention represented an infraction of classical scholarship and, in a certain sense, of the classical unities as well. At best, Bartoli's was a finely drawn point in the labyrinth of Greco-Roman deities. With the modern iconographer's command of dictionaries, lexicons, and indices, Vasari doubtless could have justified his mistake, if not otherwise, on the grounds that it was 'functional' within the scheme of decoration he planned.

But he was taken by surprise by Bartoli's formidable, highly elaborate pictorial recipe, for despite Vasari's by no means undistinguished schooling he was abysmally defenceless in the face of his friend's literary trumpery. The impression that Bartoli was at least as interested in formulating his own invention as in 'correctness' is inescapable. With Vasari's attractive drawing spread out before his eyes, Bartoli announces, "*mi piace grandissimamente!*", and then he proceeds to tell the painter how it ought to be done.

A man of many callings and of no true calling at all, Bartoli was not quite an artist, and he probably would not have cared to be one, although he did try his hand unsuccessfully at architecture. Nonetheless, he had a passion for planning pictures and persuading painters to execute his *libretti*, or, as Bartoli called them, his "*capricci*". The responsibilities he assigned the painter were exceedingly limited: the colours, the disposition, the appearance of the figures, their poses – all this was "*pittura*", delectation to the eye. But it was nothing compared to the higher delight invention affords the mind.<sup>14</sup>

When invention is all, the length and detail of Bartoli's programme for Caelus's Castration – nearly one thousand words long – comes as no surprise. Stripped of esoteric digressions, Bartoli's advice to Vasari is to abandon the council of the gods and to replace it with what actually existed when the universe was created and Caelus castrated, in a word, with the ten "*potenze*" or attributes that theologians ascribe to God – *Corona, Sapientia, Prudentia, Clementia, or Bontà, Gratia or Severità, Hornamento, Triumpho, Confessione di Lode, Fondamento, and Regno*. To symbolize each quality Bartoli outlines a pictorial, or poetical formula – "*le dipignerei in questa maniera poeticamente*". For instance, the ninth attribute of God, "*Fondamento*" (Firmament), cannot be more clearly represented than by an immense squared stone slab which supports the remaining attributes – and set before this *machina* is to be Caelus *in nubis* and Saturn wielding his scythe. And so it is, *pari passu*, in Vasari's painting. Further details of Bartoli's invention, and indeed of Vasari's definitive painting, need not detain us. They can be read later, for they are all explained, first by Bartoli's letter, and then again by Vasari in his *Ragionamenti*.<sup>15</sup>

What is essential is that in Vasari's final version the general format remains the same. Comparing the Palazzo Vecchio painting to Vasari's ill-fated *ballon d'essai* we see that the circle of gods has simply been replaced by what he labels a chorus of figures that surrounds



Caelus and Saturn, „*questo coro di figure che circondano questo cielo e questo Saturno*“. Put thusly the change sounds elementary. But its visual consequences were enormous.

We have already noted the natural and traditional character of the Paris drawing. In their glimmering, sunlit celestial home the gods good-humouredly assist, with unalarmed surprise, at the unfolding of Caelus' destiny. Thus we turn to Vasari's finished picture with wonder. The unison of action and expression that marked Vasari's Olympian assembly has been rent into the silent fanfare of a Never-Never Land chorus of disjunctive voices riding cloud-borne on a peculiarly abstract stone carpet between silvery mountain peaks. An ancient Daedalus models statues in clay. Higher up, in the air, a white-bearded God blows life into the earthen statue of a youth. Two fabulous kneeling girls raise their arms and eyes into the sickly, glaring half-light. Another peels a veil from her face, which shines with the flashing fixity of solar rays („*razzi solari*“). Above, a fair-haired girl, half-covered by a fluttering garment, suddenly materializes out of the darkening sky. Looking whence she came, she bears happy green omens, palms and laurel crowns, honorific gifts without destinations. Below sit two more female allegories. One waits distractedly at the edge of the clouds and empties her basin of jewelled crowns and knightish chains and swords. The other reclines on her cushioned, fruit laden cornucopia throne. Her languorous milky nakedness shines like a beautiful nocturnal pearl, and, her gaze averted to the glowing zenith of the sky, she squeezes her breasts between her fingers in a stylish twin gesture that elicits a milken spray.

Very, very close we see Saturn's naked back, Saturn who, unobserved, silently turns his scythe upon Caelus, who in the whiteness and serenity of his years has sailed beyond the boundaries of time. In the centre, the immense astral sphere, the globe, and the other old instruments now evoke a dusty corner of an antiquated scientific chamber. Above, a gigantic jewelled crown suspended motionless in mid-air dominates the mute chorus. It looms like a dark encircling band against the sudden flare of light that filters from high overhead down through the metallic rings of the giant armillary sphere.

The mythical event shown in Vasari's Paris drawing has, in the Palazzo Vecchio painting, been transmuted into a cosmic happening. We now witness something strange and almost supernatural, which, at a glance, appears as a wordless rebus. The figures of the chorus are, like hieroglyphs, each withdrawn into its self-contained puzzle. Even before reading Vasari's explanations we realize that we have plummeted into the breathless atmosphere of Genesis I, „*And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep (...)*“.

The reader must turn to the description of the painting in Vasari's *Ragionamenti* to learn the answers to riddles his figures pose and to see just how faithfully he has implemented Bartoli's prescriptions. Nevertheless, the total transmutation of Vasari's initial invention is not fully explained by the cumulative effect of Bartoli's separate suggestions. As we saw, Vasari has transplanted them onto the framework of his initial conception, and, in the process, he gave each allegory a human, or visual form according to his own lights. The arrangement, the expression, the physiognomies, the lighting, and much else are all his. But it is remarkable that Bartoli's advice provoked a so radical reorientation in Vasari's thinking about the picture he was planning to paint. His picture has simply changed in kind, and in many respects it is quite unlike anything Vasari had painted before. Certainly under the impact of Vasari's ideas the pictorial content has assumed a dramatically new tone.

Vasari's first idea, the Paris drawing, is undeniably more accessibly, more beautiful, more pleasing in a traditional sense, and it doubtless would have led to an artistically more successful painting. But the picture that Vasari did paint fires the imagination more. Apart

from the exact details of Bartoli's allegorical prescriptions, the imagery, quite literally the *iconographia*, has become vastly more original, more singular, and from an intellectual point of view richer and more interesting. There is an almost unheard of sense of mystery and excitement, and, even if it is fitful, Vasari's picture, within the domain of Renaissance creations, may be welcomed as something new.

From this point of view Bartoli's intervention cannot be counted all bad. But, as we saw, neither was his impact so all-encompassing as his own distinction between *pittura* and *invenzione* suggested. In reality, Bartoli (who need not be cast in the role of the *éminence grise* of Vasari's artistic regime) invariably couched his iconographical suggestions in conditional terms, often including alternative formulations to be used at Vasari's pleasure and with frequent flattering references to Vasari's own long experience. And, for his part, Vasari executed Bartoli's programmes introducing many departures from the *libretto*.

In Vasari's definitive version of Caelus' Mutilation in the Palazzo Vecchio the almost romantic aspect of the picture provides an aesthetic screen of unreality that veils the grisly agony of castration. In this it is analogous to Vasari's first version, where, as we saw, he circled the problem, representing an earlier moment. But more important than the Palazzo Vecchio painting's atmosphere of romance is the de-dramatization of the event. Not only is it framed by a chorus of isolated allegories, but the castration itself is withdrawn into an allegorical existence. Indeed, Vasari writes of the gods in his Palazzo Vecchio cycle, „under their names are hidden allegorically the concepts of philosophy”. On a mythical plane the castration initiates the generation of the goddess Venus, and on the plane of present applications, what Prince Francesco repeatedly refers to as „*il senso nostro*“, that is the meaning in terms of the Medici dynasty, the entire picture alludes to the beneficent regime of Cosimo de' Medici over the Duchy of Tuscany.

Immediately adjacent to the Sala degli Elementi, on the ceiling of the Terrace of Saturn, Vasari was faced with the task of showing another grotesque event, Saturn devouring his children. Again Vasari transforms myth into allegory. An ancient Saturn, his scythe in hand, two small wings at his temples and two giant ones on his shoulders, becomes the figure of Time, „*Padre Tempo*“, who consumes all. Ops, who deceives her husband by offering him a large stone in Jupiter's stead to save the life of her son, stands for generation and, in the particular instance, for the renewal of the illustrious Medici house through the continuing birth of male heirs. And, once again, Saturn's infernal meal takes on an air of unreality. Enveloped in shadow and lost in deep and resigned melancholy, Father Time motionlessly, monotonously eats away at his children. So slow is his action that time stops, and we can only read it as we are intended, as a figure of something else.

A diametrically opposed course was taken in what must be the most famous of all representations of Saturn devouring his progeny. In Goya's *Pinturas Negras* for the *Quinta del Sordo* Saturn is stripped of his mythological-allegorical camouflage and shown in an image of pure horror as an archetypal hangman bent on carnage. Goya's Saturn stretches the outer limits of his theme, but it offers a touchstone to measure the Palazzo Vecchio paintings, an outpost planted on the far side of Vasari's experiments in cosmogonic allegory.

## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> The Paris drawing (Inv. 946, brown ink and grey wash, 11,4 x 22,8 cm) was first reproduced and discussed in: Davis, 1978 (*supra*), p. 80, fig. 1, and subsequently reproduced in: Ettore Allegri and Alessandro Cecchi, *Palazzo Vecchio e i Medici: Guida storica*, Firenze: SPES, 1980, p. 71 (17/1). See note 4 *infra*.

<sup>2</sup> This is the title of the manuscript of Vasari's *Ragionamenti* in the library of the Uffizi (Vasari-Milanesi, vol. 8, pp. 5-225). Much of what follows, including all of the quotations not otherwise identified, comes from the first forty pages of this edition of Vasari's *Ragionamenti*. Most translations are those of the author, and, when original texts are widely available, translations are not always literal. Vasari-Milanesi = Giorgio Vasari, *Le opere*, ed. Gaetano Milanesi, 9 volumes, Firenze: G. C. Sansoni Editore, 1906 (first edition: 1878-1885; reprinted: 1906, 1973, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> See *infra*.

<sup>4</sup> The drawing is also given by Cecchi (note 1 *supra*) as autograph. Photographs expose certain weaknesses in the drawing, and, in a studio where copies were a way of life, this possibility cannot be entirely excluded. But in the present context autography is of negligible significance, for the drawing clearly documents Vasari's original design. The narrow oval ornamental frame may have been added by a later collector („JCR“ is John Charles Robinson; cf. drawings assigned, sometimes questionably, to Vasari's *Libro de' disegni*).

<sup>5</sup> Vasari-Milanesi, vol. 4, p. 367. In the early 1550s Vasari's art fell under the spell of Raphael.

<sup>6</sup> Cited from the edition, Venezia 1564, fol. 54 *verso*.

<sup>7</sup> Compare Boccaccio, 1564, fols. 54 *verso*-55 *recto*, especially: „*Alcuni vogliono la falce essere stata gittata via appresso Trapani, affine, che si dimostri, si come la falce s'adoperò d'intorno l'origine di Venere, così l'abondanza delle biade; delle quali poi si fanno i cibi, molto d'intorno ciò vagli (...)*“.

<sup>8</sup> Vasari-Milanesi, vol. 1, p. 174.

<sup>9</sup> A lost painting (Vasari-Milanesi, vol. 6, p. 139) and a small marble relief (Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence).

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the cartoon for Michelangelo's fresco of the Drunkenness of Noah belonged to Vasari's friend and patron, Bindo Altoviti, in whose house Vasari often lived when in Rome in the early 1550s (Charles Davis, „Per l'attività romana del Vasari nel 1553“, in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, vol. 23, 1979, 1/2, pp. 197-224; *Ritratto di un banchiere del Rinascimento: Bindo Altoviti tra Raffaello e Cellini*, ed. Alan Chong, Donatella Pegazzano, Dimitrios Zikos, Milano: Electa, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> [François Pomey and] Andrew Tooke, *The Pantheon representing the fabulous histories of the heathen gods and most illustrious heroes, in the sixth edition*, in which the whole translation is revised, and much amended (...) by Andrew Tooke, Part II, Chapter I, section 1 (edition London 1787, p. 140), citing Statius and Claudian. At one point in his *Ragionamenti* Vasari slips and says he has mentioned Jupiter in discussing „*padre Cielo*“ (Vasari-Milanesi, vol. 8, p. 33).

<sup>12</sup> Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi di amore*, in the edition: Venezia 1572, fol. 153 *recto*, identifies Noah with Janus on the ground that „*Iano in Hebraico vuol dir vino*“. Tooke, in his best selling mythographic compendium, cited above, reviews more than twelve time-honoured parallels between Saturn and Noah (pp. 144-147): „The Historical Sense of the Fable: By Saturn is meant Noah“. See *infra*.

<sup>13</sup> Vasari-Milanesi, vol. 7, p. 727 (cf. the somewhat longer text in the 1550 edition).

<sup>14</sup> Bartoli receives an entry in the *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*. I have discussed his activities vis-à-vis art and artists on several occasions, for instance in the *North Carolina Museum of Art Bulletin*, vol. 8, No. 4, 1976, where additional references concerning Bartoli are given. Bartoli's extreme differentiation between „*pittura*“ and „*inventione*“ is clearly outlined in a striking theoretical passage in his *Ragionamenti accademici sopra alcuni luoghi difficili di Dante*, Venezia 1567, but written much earlier, fols. 22 *verso*-23 *recto*. Bartoli's inventions are subsequently treated in: *Giorgio Vasari*, ed. Charles Davis, Annamaria Maetzke, exhibition catalogue, Arezzo 1981-1982, Florence: EDAM, 1981, pp. 133-151 *et passim* (with further literature). In Judith Bryce's monographic treatment of Bartoli (*Cosimo Bartoli: 1503-1572; the career of a Florentine polymath*, Genève: Droz, 1983) the treatment of Bartoli's inventions for artists is somewhat inadequate and incomplete.

<sup>15</sup> See *infra*.

*SATURN AND NOAH: The Pantheon Representing the fabulous Histories of the Heathen Gods and most illustrious Heroes*, by Andrew Tooke, 28th edition, London 1787, pp. 144-146.

Part II. Of the Terrestrial Dieties.

Section IV. The Historical Sense of the Fable. By Saturn is meant Noah.

Although it is generally said, that Saturn was Nimrod, the Founder of the Empire of Babylon, yet I am more inclined to believe the Opinion of Bochartus, who maintains that Saturn and Noah were the same. These Reasons, which he brings, seem persuasive.

1. In the Time of Noah the whole Earth spoke one Language; and the ancient Mythologists say, that the Beasts understood this Language. And it is said, that in Saturn's Age there was but one Language, which was common to Men and Brutes.

2. Noah is called, in the Hebrew Language, a Man of the Earth; that is, an Husbandman, according to the usual Phrase of Scripture, which calls a Soldier a Man of War; a strong Man, a Man of the Arms; a Murderer, a Man of Blood; an Orator, a Man of Words and a Shepherd, a Man of Cattle. Now Saturn is justly called a Man of the Earth, because he married Tellus, whose other Names were Rhea and Ops.

3. As Noah was the first Planter of Vineyards, so the Art of cultivating Vines and Fields is attributed to Saturn's Invention.

4. As Noah was once overcome with Wine, because perhaps he never experienced the Strength of it before; so the Saturnalians did frequently drink excessively, because Saturn protected drunken Men.
5. As Noah cursed his Son Ham, because he saw his Father's Nakedness with Delight; Saturn made a Law, that whosoever saw the Gods naked should be punished.
6. Plato says, that Saturn and his Wife Rhea, and those with them, were born of Oceanus and Thetis: And thus Noah, and all that were with him, were in a manner new born out of the Waters of the Deluge, by the Help of the Ark. And if a Ship was stamped upon the ancient Coins, because Saturn came into Italy in a Ship; surely this Honour belonged rather to Noah, who in a Ship preserved the Race of Mankind from utter Destruction.
7. Did Noah foretel the Coming of the Flood? So did Saturn foretel that there should be great Quantities of Rain, and an Ark built, in which Men, and Birds, and creeping Things should all sail together.
8. Saturn is said to have devoured all his Sons, but these three, Jupiter, Neptune, and Pluto. So Noah, the Pastor and Prophet, and as it were the Father of all Mortals, may be said to have condemned and destroyed all Men, because he foretold that they would be destroyed in the Flood. For, in the Scripture-Phrase, the Prophets are said to do the Thing which they foretel shall be done hereafter. Thus when the Prophet says, when I came to destroy the City; he means, when I came to foretel, that the City should be destroyed. But as Saturn had three Sons left to him not devoured; so had Noah three, Sem, Cham, and Japhet, who were not destroyed in the Flood.

Furthermore, these Reasons may persuade us that Noah's Son Cham is Jupiter: 1. His Hebrew Name Ham is by many called Cham, from whence it is plain, the Egyptians had the Name (...) [Amoun] and the Africans, Ammon or Hammon. 2. Cham was the youngest Son of Noah, as Jupiter was of Saturn. 3. Jupiter is feigned to be Lord of the Heavens; thus Cham had Africa, which Country is esteemed nearer the Heavens than other Countries, because it has the Planets vertical. 4. Jupiter gelded his Father, which Stones seem to be taken from the twenty-second Verse of the ninth Chapter of Genesis, where it is written, and Ham saw the Nakedness of his Father, and told; or, and cut off; for so it might, by Mistake, be read in the Hebrew Tongue, by altering only one or two Vowels.

FULL TEXT OF THE  
 “CASTRAZIONE DEL CIELO FATTA DA SATURNO”  
 IN VASARI’S RAGIONAMENTI:

The text follows the publication of the *Ragionamenti* by Gaetano Milanese in volume 8 of Vasari-Milanese, pp. 5-225: 19-22. Milanese transcribes Vasari’s original manuscript found in the Biblioteca della Galleria degli Uffizi (Ms. N. 11), *Ragionamento di Giorgio Vasari Pittore Aretino fatto in Firenze sopra le invenzioni delle storie dipinte nelle stanze nuove nel palazzo ducale Con lo Illustrissimo Don Francesco De’ Medici primo genito del Duca Cosimo duca di Fiorenza* (vol. 8, p. 8: “Questo codice, di scrittura contemporanea, è senza dubbio quel medesimo fatto scrivere in buona forma dal Vasari [...]”).

For the Uffizi manuscript, see Milanese (pp. 7-8) and Paola Tinagli Baxter, in: *Giorgio Vasari*, 1981 (*supra*), VII, 27, pp. 210-211. The first edition of the *Ragionamenti* was published posthumously in 1588, fourteen years after Vasari’s death in 1574. The editor, Vasari’s nephew, who bore his uncle’s name, made many changes in the text (“*Da capo a fondo, dove più, dove meno, è rifatto e rimutato dalla mano del primo editore*”; Milanese, p. 8). In addition to changes in spelling and syntax, Paola Tinagli notes, “*Vi sono (...) anche dei cambiamenti di passaggi storici e teologici che potevano essere considerati controversi*”, and she further observes, with regard to Milanese’s publication of this text: “*il testo del Milanese presenta però molte imprecisioni, sia nella punteggiatura, che a volte cambia il senso originale, sia nell’ortografia, e perfino in diverse dimenticanze nella trascrizione dell’originale.*” A critical edition of Vasari’s *Ragionamenti* that systematically examines the transformation of the Uffizi manuscript in the first printed edition of 1588 remains an important desideratum of iconographical and Renaissance research.

“LA CASTRAZIONE DEL CIELO FATTA DA SATURNO”

*Principe:* Comincio già a scorrere parte della materia; ma, per vostra fè, di grazia ditemi un poco che cosa è questa che è in questo quadro grande di mezzo, dove io veggio tante femmine ignude e vestite?

*Giorgio:* Questa è la castrazione del Cielo fatta da Saturno. Dicono, che avanti alla creazione del mondo, mentre era il caos, il grande ed ottimo Dio deliberando di creare il mondo, egli sparse i semi di tutte le cose da generarsi, e poi che gli elementi fussono tutti ripieni di detti semi, ne venissi il mondo per quelli a diventare perfetto. Ordinato il Cielo e gli elementi, fu creato Saturno, che dal girar del Cielo si misura; il quale Saturno castrò il Cielo, e gli tagliò i genitali.

*Principe:* Benissimo, seguitate.

*Giorgio:* Quel vecchione adunque, ignudo a giacere con quello aspetto sereno, sì canuto, è figurato per il Cielo; quell’altro vecchio ritto, che volta le spalle e con la falce gira, è Saturno, il quale taglia con essa i genitali al padre Cielo per gettarli in mare.

*Principe:* Fermate un passo: che vuole significare questo tagliargli i genitali, e gittarli nel mare?

*Giorgio:* Significa che, tagliando il calore come forma, e cascando nella umidità del mare come materia, fu cagione della generazione delle cose terrene caduche e corruttibili e mortali, generando Venere di spuma marina.

*Principe:* Passiamo pure innanzi; questo coro di figure che circondano questo Cielo e questo Saturno, disfiniteci di grazia che cosa sono?

*Giorgio:* Queste sono le dieci potenze o gli attributi che i Teologhi danno all'Iddio, che realmente concorrono alla creazione dell'universo.

*Principe:* Mi piace; ma non hanno nomi? veggo pur loro intorno ed in mano cose che debbono avere significato.

*Giorgio:* Hanno significato, signore, ed hanno nomi, e più nomi ha una cosa sola; e chi l'ha descritto in un modo e chi l'ha dipinto in un altro, e chi più e chi meno oscuro; ma io ho cerco farle per essere inteso più facile, riservando la dottrina loro.

*Principe:* Incominciamo un poco, quella cinta, o corona ch'è nel più elevato luogo: che cosa è?

*Giorgio:* L'Eccellenza Vostra l'ha chiamata per nome; quella è quella corona, che i Teologi tengono il primo delle potenze, attribuito a Dio, che è quel fonte senza fondo, abbondantissimo in tutti i secoli; però l'ho fatta grande ed abbondante e ricca di pietre e di perle.

*Principe:* Sta benissimo. Quello scultore che fa quelle statue e quelle città, paesi, e cose simili, che cosa è?

*Giorgio:* È il figliuolo di Dio, cioè la possibilità di creare tutte le cose, che è la Sapienza, ed è in aria il medesimo volando, che è figurato per la provvidenza che ha Dio nell'infondere lo spirito a tutte le cose create, e però soffia in quelle statue che Vostra Eccellenza vede, e quelle del color della terra pigliano quello di carne, che rizzandosi mostrano da esso aver la vita.

*Principe:* Seguitate.

*Giorgio:* La Clemenza, che è la quarta: questo è attribuito a esso Dio per la sua bontà e clemenza, come dissi prima; la quale apparisce maggiore, quanto più si estende in nutrir tutte le cose create, e però l'ho figurata ignuda, e più bella che ho possuto, spremendo a se stessa le poppe, e schizzando latte per nutrimento di tutte le cose animate.

*Principe:* Oh quanto mi piace questa storia! dite, su.

*Giorgio:* Persuadendomi che la quinta sia la Grazia del grande Dio, la quale egli infonde in tutte le cose, e però ho fatto quella donna che ha quel vaso grande che lo rovescia in giù, pieno di gioie, danari, vasi d'oro e d'argento, collane e mitrie da papi, corone da imperadori e re, da duchi, cappelli da cardinali, mitrie vescovili, potestà di capitani generali, e scettri e altre dignità

*Principe:* Ditemi, mi par vedere il Tosone dell'imperatore; e quei fiori che significano?

*Giorgio:* Per le virtù, le quali sempre adorano e sempre parson belle. Il Tosone di Carlo Quinto: questo s'è fatto, perchè, oltre a tante dignità che da questa grazia di Dio son venute in casa Medici, che l'hanno illustrata, per li generalati delli eserciti, per le corone ducali, per cappelli di cardinali e per le corone reali ed i regni pontificali, mostra che anche il duca nostro Sua Maestà l'ha ornato meritamente di questo segno, per la sua fedeltà d'animo e di forze grandi. Vede Vostra Eccellenza quella femmina che si leva dalla faccia quel velo e che è ornata più di tutte ed ha intorno al capo tanti razzi solari?

*Principe:* Veggo.

*Giorgio:* Quella è l'ornamento del Cielo.

*Principe:* E quella femmina che vola in aria mezzo ignuda, che ha in mano quelle corone di lauro e quelle palme, per chi l'avete fatta?

*Giorgio:* Per la settima potenza attribuita a Dio che è il Trionfo; chè arei potuto fare carri trionfali, ma il poco spazio non me l'ha concesso, e però ho fatto questa figura sola. Seguita l'ottava, che è la Confessione della lode, che sono quelle figure ginocchioni che alzano le mani verso la corona, e mostrano con fede confessare reverentemente la lode sua.

*Principe:* Certamente che questo è uno intessuto molto bello e molto bene immaginato.

*Giorgio:* Quella pietra lunga, su la quale posano tutte le figure già dette, è finta per il Firmamento, che più apertamente non l'arei saputa figurare, che è la nona potenza del cielo.

*Principe:* Sta bene; ma ditemi un poco che significa quello [m]appamondo così grande nel mezzo della storia, con le sfere del cielo e col zodiaco con i dodici segni in mezzo, posato anch'egli in su la pietra o firmamento ch'io ve l'abbia sentito chiamare, e che ha sopra quello scettro?

*Giorgio:* Quello è fatto per il Regno, che è la decima e ultima potenza, e lo scettro è l'imperio del comandare a tutti i viventi: e questo è quanto alla storia del quadro di mezzo.

*Principe:* Questa invenzione mi piace certamente; ma ditemi, io veggo dentro a quella sfera grande la palla che è messa per la Terra, e Saturno, che con quella mano che abbassa e che tiene la falce, tocca nel zodiaco il segno del Capricorno: che significa?

*Giorgio:* Quello, come sa Vostra Eccellenza, è un corpo cosmo, che così è nominato dalli astrologi il mondo, che è dritto il nome del duca nostro signore, che è fatto patrone di questo Stato; e Saturno, suo pianeta, tocca il Capricorno ascendente suo, e mediante i loro aspetti fanno luce benigna alla palla della terra, e particolarmente alla Toscana, e, come capo della Toscana, a Firenze, oggi per Sua Eccellenza con tanta iustizia e governo retta.

*Principe:* Voi mi fate oggi, Giorgio, udir cose, che non pensai mai che sotto questi colori e con queste figure fussino questi significati, e mi è acceso il desiderio di saperne di tutto il fine: or seguitate addunque.

*Giorgio:* Dico, che da quello scultore che fa le statue, che dissi essere la Provvidenza, e l'altro in aria che spira loro il fiato, per la Sapienza, facendo l'anime generalmente per tutti gli



uomini, io ho voluto significare, che le fanno particolarmente per li principi grandi, i quali come sostituiti di Dio sono al governo di tutte queste parti del mondo, ed a ciò concorrono tutte le grazie celesti e terrestri, a cagione che con quelle possino esaltare e premiare le virtù, così ai vizi degli uomini tristi dar le punizioni: e perchè veggendo il duca nostro sì mirabili effetti, possa da Dio ricognoscere ogni cosa, quando guarda queste figure.

*Principe:* Sta bene.

*Giorgio:* Seguitando poi gli occhi del Cielo, che sono questi due quadri grandi, l'uno è il carro del Sole, l'altro quel della Luna.

*Principe:* Sta bene (...)

FULL TEXT OF COSIMO BARTOLI'S  
PROGRAMME FOR THE  
"CASTRATION OF CAELUS":

COSIMO BARTOLI,  
„CASTRATIONE DEL CIELO“

CASTRATIONE DEL CIELO [this indication is in Vasari's hand]\*

Messer Giorgio Carissimo.

Perchè la castratione del Cielo fatta da Saturno grandissimamente mi piace, vi dirò quello che circa ciò mi occorre.

Avanti alla creatione del mondo, mentre ancora era il Chaos di tutte le cose, et che Dio Optimo Grandissimo si deliberò creare il mondo, egli sparse i semi di tutte le cose da generarsi, et poi che tutti gli elementi furono totalmente ripieni di detti semi, onde il mondo ne havessi a diventare perfetto, ordinato il cielo et gli elementi, fu creato Saturno cio è il Tempo, che dal girar del cielo si misura; il qual Tempo overo Saturno dicono che castrò il Cielo, et gli tagliò i genitali et gli gittò nel mare, cio è cavò dal Cielo la possibilità et la facultà del generare. La quale mescolatasi col mare delle cose mondane, generò Venere, di spuma marina: Cioè essa facultà del generare si transferì nella actione del congiungersi insieme di tutte le cose creabili mediante il calore, per il quale si intendono i genitali, et mediante lo humore, per il quale si intende il mare; et la stiuma marina è presa per quello sfregamento et incitamento di lussuria nel congiungersi insieme il mastio e la femina, o volete dire, come sarebbe nelle piante il congiugnimento del calore et della humidità. Et perchè la stiuma del mare svanisce presto, presto ancora svanisce quel moto che si fa nel congiungersi insieme. Hora, perchè io non truovo ne secondo i Latini, ne secondo i Greci ne secondo gli Hebrei, che a questo castramento del Cielo ci concorressino tutti gli dei, atteso che ancora non erano, io lascerei stare di fare quel concilio delli dei et in quello cambio vi metterei quelle cose che realmente concorsono et alla creatione dello universo et alla castrazione del Cielo: Le quali secondo me furono le potentie, o vogliamo dire gli attributi, che i teologi danno a Dio, i quali sono dieci che comunemente son questi; ancor che de nomi i teologi talvolta variino poco in vero da questi si discostano.

Corona  
Sapientia  
Prudentia  
Clementia over bontà  
Gratia over severità  
Hornamento  
Triumpho  
Confessione di lode  
Fondamento et  
Regno.

Le quali potentie ò attributi i teologi dipingevano o intendevano in diversi modi; et a ciascuno di loro attribuivano particolarmente più nomi e più cose, che per essere molto oscure, io lascierei in dietro; et per esser più inteso, le dipignerei in questa maniera poeticamente:

*Corona* — I sacri teologi intendevano per la corona un fonte senza fondo, abbondantissimo di tutti i secoli, che è il primo attributo di Dio; et però io farei una corona nel più elevato luogo, grandissima quanto più potessi et ornatissima.

*Sapientia* — Intendevano di poi per la sapientia il figliuolo di Dio, cioè la possibilità di crear tutte le cose; et però io farei uno scultore che facessi statue, città, paesi et cose simili.

*Prudentia* — Pigliavano la prudentia per quella potentia che ha Dio di infonder lo spirito in tutte le cose create; et però io farei il medesimo che soffiassi et inspirassi la vita in le statue già fatte et le rizasse di terra, dandoli la vita.

*Clementia* — Credevano, che la quarta potentia o attributo in Dio fussi la sua clementia ò bontà, la quale in cosa nessuna non appare maggiore, quanto che ella si distende in nutrire tutte le cose create; e però io farei una bellissima donna che con le mani si spremessi le poppe et ne facessi saltar fuori il latte per nutrimento delle cose.

*Gratia* — Persuadevansi, che la quinta potentia fussi la gratia o la severità, che Dio infonde nelle cose; et però farei io una donna con un bacino in mano, che facessi segno di votarlo: Il qual bacino io farei pieno di danari, di vasi d'oro et di argento, di corone da papi, da inperadori, da re, da principi, da duchi, da capelli da cardinali, di mitrie, di potestà, di capitani generali, di scettri et di fiori per le virtù et di cose onorate.

*Hornamento* — Aproprriavano la quinta [*sesta*] potentia allo hornamento per il quale io dipignerei un giovane o una giovane regalissimamente abbigliata et piena di splendore et di razi solari.

[Triompho] *Hornamento* (sic) — Tenevano per il settimo attributo di Dio il triompho, il quale io dipignerei, per non occupar con carri assai spatio, con un angeletto o più che scendessino, portando in mano palme e corone di lauro.

*Confessione di lode* — Volevano, che lo ottavo attributo di Dio fussi la confessione della lode; e però io farei una o più persone, che alzando le mani et facendo atti reverenti inverso la corona, mostrassino di confessare la lode sua.

*Fondamento* — Stimavano, che il nono attributo di Dio fussi il fondamento, il quale più apertamente non si può descrivere che per una grandissima pietra quadrata, su la quale fussino tutte le altre cose sopradette.

*Regno* — Per l'ultimo attributo di Dio intendevano il regno, per il quale io farei uno grande appamondo con una rete sopravvi del cielo et uno scettro, che apparissi posato in su la sopradetta pietra. Et nel mezzo di tutta la istoria farei dipoi uno vechione, intendendolo per il Cielo, ad iacere quasi che in su le nugole, come che egli si riposassi dallo aver creato il tutto, et un Saturno con la falce, che gli havessi tagliati i genitali, cioè havessi tratto da lui la facultà delle cose generabili.

Questo è quanto mi occorre circa alla historia presente per voler fare cosa che, secondo me, havessi del buono: Pur mi rimetto sempre al parer vostro et di chi più di me se ne intende. Della Venere poi et delle altre cose ne ragioneremo altra volta.

\* In Vasari's hand, „*Castratione del Cielo*“ (fol. 30 verso); also in his hand, „*Castratione di celio 1555*“ (fol. 29).

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The text is published in: *Il carteggio di Giorgio Vasari*, ed. Karl (Carlo) Frey, vol. 1, München: Georg Müller, 1923, pp. 409-412, no. 220 (also in the German edition: *Der Literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris*, München: Müller, 1923, no. 220), and in: *Lo Zibaldone di Giorgio Vasari*, ed. Alessandro Del Vita, Roma/Arezzo: Tipografia Zelli, 1938, pp. 74-78. The above text mainly follows Frey.

The letter is written in the hand of Cosimo Bartoli, which is generally recognizable. It is neither signed nor dated, but see Vasari's own indication of "1555" (*supra*). Frey dates the letter to the spring or summer of 1555 (May-June?). Vasari obviously relied on this text in writing his *Ragionamenti* some months later, copying with slight variation passages from it.

VASARI, *Ricordanze*, "1555":

„Ricordo, come a dì 15 di Dicembre del medesimo anno io tornai a Fiorenza; et si diede principio alle stanze del palazzo dell illustrissimo duca Cosimo. Et si cominciò la prima sala degli Elementi et particolarmente i quadri del palco, che erano nove a olio: 4 ottangoli, 4 quadri et una tavola, lunga braccia 8, per fare le facciate in fresco piene di storie (...)  
(Vasari, *Nachlass*, ed. Frey, vol. 2, München: Müller, 1930, p. 872).

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## BIOGRAPHY AND BIBLIOGRAPHY: VASARI AND BARTOLI

GIORGIO VASARI, Arezzo 1511-Florence 1574. See the discussion of biography and bibliography in *FONTES* 6.

COSIMO BARTOLI, Florence 1503-Florence 1572, was an Italian writer, diplomat, mathematician, philologist, and humanist. He worked and lived in Florence, Rome, and Venice. He was a friend of Vasari and helped him to prepare the *Vite* for publication in 1550 and in 1568.

Bartoli served as a secretary to Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici and as a diplomatic agent for Duke Cosimo I. Best known for his Italian translation of Leon Battista Alberti's Latin treatise on architecture (Florence 1550), Bartoli also wrote on mathematical, technical, historical, and literary subjects. His book, the *Ragionamenti accademici* (Venice, 1567, but written much earlier; at Google books), includes valuable notices about music and musicians as well as about art and artists. Here Bartoli emphasizes the importance of *invenzione* in the arts. He also published a collection of translations of works by Leon Battista Alberti under the title *Opuscoli Morali di Leon Batista Alberti, gentil'huomo fiorentino* (Venice, 1568). In this book, Bartoli's Italian translation of Alberti's *De Pictura* is dedicated to Giorgio Vasari: "COSIMO BARTOLI AL VIRTUOSO GIORGIO VASARI PITTORE & Architetto Eccellentissimo. – CHE potrei io dir di voi M. Giorgio mio, più di quel che ne dichino le infinite lodevoli opere vostre, & quanto alla Pittura, & quanto allo scrivere, & quanto alla Architettura?" (p. 306, at Google books).

*Literature:*

See *Dictionary of Art, Dizionario biografico degli Italiani, Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, ad vocem* 'Cosimo Bartoli', and the monograph: Judith Bryce, *Cosimo Bartoli 1503-1572: The Career of a Florentine Polymath*, Genève: Droz, 1983; Dissertation (Travaux d'humanisme et Renaissance, 191). Also see the forthcoming Acts of the „Convegno Internazionale di Studi, *Cosimo Bartoli (1503-1572)*, Mantova-Firenze (Centro Studi Leon Battista Alberti, Kunsthistorisches Institut, Villa I Tatti), 18-20 November 2009.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

## ILLUSTRATION ONE:



Giorgio Vasari, *The Castration of Caelus*, Florence, Palazzo Vecchio, Quartiere degli Elementi, Sala degli Elementi, oil on wood, 1555 (width: 4, 5 m circa)

See: „File:The Mutilation of Uranus by Saturn.jpg”, at: Wikimedia Commons

(Full resolution available):

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Mutilation\\_of\\_Uranus\\_by\\_Saturn.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Mutilation_of_Uranus_by_Saturn.jpg)

File links: The following pages on the English Wikipedia link to this file: Titan (mythology); Castration; Giorgio Vasari; Caelus; Cronus; Uranus (mythology).

## ILLUSTRATION TWO:

Giorgio Vasari, *Saturn; Caelus, and the Celestial Gods* („*Concilio degli Dei*“), drawing. Paris, Musée des Arts Decoratifs, brown ink and grey wash, Inv. 946, 11,4 x 22,8 cm.

Illustrated in: Allegri and Cecchi, *Palazzo Vecchio e i Medici*, Firenze: SPES, 1980, p. 71, no. 17, (1); also: Davis, 1978, fig. 1.

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