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‘A Knowing Likeness: Artists and *Letterati* at the Farnese Court
in mid Sixteenth-Century Rome’

In October 1545 Titian went to Rome to paint portraits of Paul III Farnese and his close relations. In fact, according to the papal nuncio to Venice and Farnese insider, Giovanni Della Casa, the artist was ready to paint the entire family, even ‘down to the cats’.¹ In the event, Titian’s sojourn in the papal city was to last until spring of the following year, during which time he was given rooms at the Vatican and shown the sites by Giorgio Vasari.² Of the many portraits painted while he was there, that of *Paul III and his Grandsons* (Capodimonte Museum, Naples) remains one of the most iconic images of the Farnese pope, alongside the same painter’s portrait of Paul from 1543 (Fig. 1, also in the Capodimonte). And yet, Titian was not the only artist producing papal portraits at this time and it is another, rather different, portrayal that serves as the point of departure for the present study. Also probably dating to 1546, the bust of Paul shown in Figure 2 is one of three marble portraits of the pope made by Guglielmo della Porta, who was appointed *Plumbator Apostolicarum* in 1547.³ Given the timing of the bust, it seems likely that the artist was consciously measuring himself against contemporary painted likenesses of the pope – and his use of coloured marble in particular suggests a direct engagement with the *paragone* between painting and sculpture. This was a topic of courtly and academic debate that was very much in vogue during these years, with Benedetto Varchi giving his famous lecture *Della maggioranza delle arti* to the Florentine Academy in the spring of 1547.⁴ The fact that Varchi also solicited the views of painters and sculptors on the subject indicates that artists were key participants in the debate – and the highly erudite milieu of the Farnese court represented a particularly fertile environment for this kind of exchange. Indeed, whether or not Guglielmo’s bust was primarily conceived with the *paragone* in mind, it is likely that his contemporaries would have made the connection.

Giorgio Vasari certainly associates the use of coloured marbles in sculpture to the *paragone* in the second edition of his *Lives of the Artists* (1568). When describing the

¹ See Della Casa’s letter to Alessandro Farnese of 20 September 1544, cited in Roberto Zapperi, “Alessandro Farnese, Giovanni della Casa and Titian’s Danae in Naples”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 54 (1991): 159-171, at 171: ‘Messer Titiano.... È apparecchiato a ritrar l’Illustrissima Casa di Vostra Signoria Reverendissima *in solidum*, tutti fino alle gatte’.

² R. Zapperi, *Tiziano, Paolo III e I suoi nipoti. Nepotismo e ritratto di Stato* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1990), 31.

³ On Della Porta see, e.g., Werner Gramberg, “Guglielmo della Porta Grabmal für Paul III. Farnese in San Pietro in Vaticano”, *Romisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 21 (1984), 253-364; Carroll Brentano, “Guglielmo della Porta”, *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 37 (1989), 192-9; Christina Riebesell, “Guglielmo della Porta”, *Palazzo Farnese. Dalle collezioni rinascimentali all’ambasciata di Francia*, exh. cat. (Florence: Giunti, 2011), 255-61. Brentano argues that the Naples bust was carved in preparation for the effigy of the pope on Paul’s tomb; but the tomb commission dates from 1549, while Della Porta was already paid in December 1546 for ‘un ritratto del Papa’. It is highly likely that this payment relates to the marble bust in question, rather than to another, bronze, bust, given that a year later he was explicitly paid for a portrait in bronze. It is possible of course that this payment was for one of the other two marble portraits of the pope, but since they are all quite similar, the original commission probably dates to 1546. (See *Museo e Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte. La collezione Farnese, vol. III: Le arti decorative*, ed. Silvia Cassani (Naples: Electa, 1996), 102-103.)

⁴ Published together with the letters from artists in Paola Barocchi (ed.), *Scritti d’arte del Cinquecento* (Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1971-77), 3 vols, I, 493-544.

monument of Paul IV in Santa Maria Sopra Minerva (1566), which makes extensive use of these materials, Vasari says that the artists responsible were ‘with colour imitating painting in sculpture’.⁵ That is to say, by applying one of the key characteristics of painting, usually absent in sculpture, they were attempting to rival the imitative power of the sister art. Vasari praises this technique as a recent addition to the arts, invented by ‘ingegni moderni’. And while he fails to mention Della Porta by name, this new invention can be attributed directly to Guglielmo’s experiments for the Farnese in the 1540s. On coming to Rome in 1537, Della Porta was recommended to Sebastiano del Piombo, who soon introduced him to Michelangelo.⁶ According to Vasari, Buonarroti became fond of the younger sculptor, and helped him gain a foothold in the Farnese household, where he excelled as a restorer of ancient sculpture.⁷ The Farnese collections – which included those of Paul and of his grandsons, Cardinals Ranuccio and Alessandro – were unparalleled in Rome and were added to assiduously, through extensive excavations at the Baths of Caracalla and continuous acquisitions. And among the antique statues displayed at both the Orti Farnesiane on the Palatine Hill and at the Palazzo Farnese were numerous sculptures in polychrome marbles. At the entrance to the ‘Piazza del Fontanone’ on the Palatine, for instance, two kneeling Persians in *pavonazzo* marble and black *paragone* marble held two large plant vases; while the collection at the Palazzo included an Apollo in green basalt, two basalt Maenads, a Meleager in red marble and a statue of Roma in porphyry.⁸ These statues were all restored by Guglielmo,⁹ who in doing so must have made use of the extensive collection of coloured marble columns also listed in the Farnese inventories.¹⁰ These and other sources of ancient *spolia* would have been similarly plundered for the coloured marble fireplaces which embellished the Palazzo Farnese and for the lavish inlaid marble table now in the Metropolitan Museum.¹¹ These decorative pieces were joint projects by Guglielmo and the architect Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola,¹² and betray the broader taste for coloured marbles in Farnese circles, which finds its most public expression in the Tomb of Paul III (1549-1575). Another Della Porta project, the tomb incorporated many polychrome marbles,

⁵ Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*., ed. Gaetano Milanesi (Florence: Sansoni, 1906), VII, p. 551: ‘E così veggiamo questa giunta all’arte industrie degli’ingegni moderni, e che i scultori con i colori vanno nella scultura imitando la pittura.’

⁶ Vasari, *Vite*, VII, 545: ‘l’anno 1537 si condusse a Roma, dove da Giovan iacomo suo zio fu molto raccomandato a Fra Bastiano, pittore vinziano, suo amico, acciò esso il raccomandassi, come fece, a Michelagnolo Buonarroti.’

⁷ Ibid: ‘il quale Michelagnolo veggendo Guglielmo fiero, e molto assiduo alle fatiche, cominciò a porgli affezione, e innanzi a ogni altra cosa gli fece restaurare alcune cose antiche in casa Farnese; nelle quali si portò di maniera, che Michelagnolo lo mise al servizio del papa.’ Guglielmo’s skill at restoring ancient sculpture was much praised – his restoration of the Farnese Hercules, for instance, was so admired that when the original legs of the statue were found, those of Guglielmo were left in place for many years (see Philippe Senechal, “I marmi antichi della collezione Farnese”, in *I Farnese. Arte e collezionismo*, ed. Lucia Fornari Schianchi and Nicola Spinosa, exh cat. (Milan: Electa, 1995), 123-31, at 128).

⁸ See, eg., Senechal, “I marmi antichi della collezione Farnese”, 127.

⁹ Riebesell, “Guglielmo della Porta”, 257.

¹⁰ Senechal, “I marmi antichi della collezione Farnese”, 128.

¹¹ Olga Raggio (“The Farnese Table: A Rediscovered Work by Vignola”, in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, new series, vol. 18, no. 7, (March 1960), 213-3, at 219) points out that all the marbles for the table were of ancient origin, and that in 1547 the Farnese architects went to Ostia specifically to source marbles for the Palazzo.

¹² See, e.g., Christina Riebesell, “L’arredo architettonico del Palazzo Farnese a Roma: Vignola e Guglielmo della Porta”, in *Vignola e i Farnese*, eds Christophe L. Frommel et. al. (Milan: Electa, 2003), 35-59.

in addition to figures in both Carrara and bronze. In letters dating from 1551, Annibale Caro, who was overseeing the commission as a key adviser to Alessandro Farnese, praises the use of these costly materials as providing a lavish and worthy framework for the statues.¹³

The bust in Figure 2, which employs alabaster for the pope's vestments, must clearly be placed in this wider context of contemporary taste. Alessandro Farnese in particular, who was closely involved in the artistic patronage of his grandfather,¹⁴ and probably had a hand in commissioning the bust in question,¹⁵ is known to have favoured highly decorative works of art. In this he was following in the footsteps of his father, Pier Luigi, as well as Paul himself, and his collection included an impressive number of antique gems and cameos.¹⁶ The exquisite nature of the alabaster used by Della Porta is not only reminiscent of classical items from Alessandro's collection,¹⁷ but also of the engraved rock crystals that the cardinal commissioned from Giovanni Bernardi. These included several pieces based on designs by Perin del Vaga and Francesco Salviati, which were inserted into the famous *Cassetta Farnese*, in emulation of those carved for Pier Luigi after drawings by Michelangelo.¹⁸ Clare Robertson has suggested that the taste for the 'exquisite workmanship...and costly materials' on display in such works were important factors in maintaining the idea of a patron's *magnificenza*.¹⁹ Add to that the classical precedent of using polychrome marbles in sculpture and there seem to be ample motives for Della Porta's reintroduction of the technique into modern sculpture.

And yet, as suggested earlier, the intellectual sophistication of the circles in which Della Porta was working, and Vasari's overt allusion to the *paragone* in relation to coloured marble sculpture, make it highly likely that aesthetic considerations were not the only ones governing this particular project. For one thing, we know that Alessandro Farnese prized artists who could provide him with new and ingenious inventions. In 1543, for instance, Vasari painted an allegory of Justice for Alessandro at the prompting of historian Paolo Giovio, who was something of a mentor to the young cardinal.²⁰ The allegory, which involved highly original iconography,

¹³ Annibal Caro, *Lettere familiari*, ed. A. Greco (Florence: Le Monnier, 1957), 3 vols, II, no. 368, to Marcello Cervini, 102: 'Risolve ancora, se le piacciono i componimenti di mischio, o se volesse ogni cosa di marmo, benchè per campo de le figure di marmo e de le cornici, par che siamo benissimo, e facciamo la cosa ricca.' In a subsequent letter to Antonio Elio, Bishop of Pola (II, no. 372, 105) Caro writes that 'Si sono poi comprati per ornamento molti mischi bellissimi e di molto costo'.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Clare Robertson, *Il gran cardinale: Alessandro Farnese, patron of the arts* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 53-5.

¹⁵ The fact that Della Casa informed Alessandro of Titian's willingness to paint portraits of all the Farnese suggests that the cardinal had a particular interest in such matters, and he indicates in a letter of November 1547 to Giovanni Ricci that Della Porta had already at that time done 'many services for him' (Riebesell, "Guglielmo della Porta", 255). Alessandro would go on to be heavily involved in the commission for the tomb of Paul III, so it seems highly probable that he also had a role in the portrait busts.

¹⁶ Robertson, *Il gran cardinale*, 23-8.

¹⁷ See, for instance, a portrait head of Serapides in agate, which was listed in Ranuccio Farnese's inventory of 1566 and in Alessandro's studiolo in 1578 (*I Farnese. Arte e collezionismo*, 419-20).

¹⁸ Robertson, *Il gran cardinale*, 36-40.

¹⁹ Clare Robertson, "Colorno, Munich and Naples: Farnese Collecting", in *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 137, no. 1108 (Jul. 1995), 475-6.

²⁰ Giovio refers to Alessandro in his letters affectionately as 'Hephaiston', (see, e.g., Giovio, *Lettere*, ed. G. G. Ferrero, 2 vols (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1956-58), II, 21; 163), an epithet which related to the cardinal's *impresa* of a thunderbolt (see Paolo Giovio *Dialogo delle imprese*, ed.

apparently devised by the artist himself,²¹ pleased the cardinal greatly and led to Vasari being asked to decorate the *gran salone* of the Palazzo della Cancelleria. Painted over the summer and autumn of 1546 – the rapidity of execution leading to its subsequent label of the Sala dei Cento Giorni – the programme is full of complex and sophisticated imagery, invented by Giovio, with input also from Vasari.²² When it came to commissioning an altarpiece for his private chapel in the Cancelleria in 1548, meanwhile, Alessandro chose Francesco Salviati, an artist described by Giovanni Battista Armenini as having a ‘very refined intellect’ and by Vasari as capable of ‘ingenious inventions’²³. The resulting painting, and the decorative programme (devised by Caro) into which it is inserted, incorporates imagery not only from the Old and New Testaments, but also from Patristic and Classical sources, in a display of erudition that mirrors the interests of the cardinal’s inner circle.²⁴ Alessandro actively surrounded himself with artists who had intellectual pretensions, and with men of letters who had a genuine interest in art.²⁵

Guglielmo too seems to have been intimate with poets and *letterati*, claiming in a letter of 1567 to Bartolomeo Ammanati that he had an *impresa*, which was invented for him by Caro. This personal symbolic device consisted of an image with the shield of Aeneas and the motto ‘Unum omnia contra’. Its meaning, according to Guglielmo, was that he used his art to defend himself against his critics, just as Aeneas had used his shield.²⁶ By recounting this episode the sculptor is keen to demonstrate not only

M. L. Doglio (Rome: Bulzoni, 1978), 127-8). In a letter of August 1550 to Giovio in Florence, Alessandro tried to convince him to return to Rome, saying ‘In somma questa vostra assenza della Corte non si può più soffrire’ (Giovio, *Lettere*, II, 256).

²¹ See the letter from Giovio to Alessandro of 21 January 1543 (Giovio, *Lettere*, I, no. 158, 303-305) and the letter to Vasari of November 1544 (*Ibid.*, I, 1958, no. 197, 3).

²² See, e.g., Clare Robertson, “Paolo Giovio and the ‘invenzioni’ for the Sala dei Cento Giorni”, *Atti del convegno Paolo Giovio: il Rinascimento e la memoria* (Como: Societa Villa Gallia, 1985), 225-37.

²³ Giovanni Battista Armenini, *De veri precetti della pittura* (Ravenna: Francesco Tebaldini, 1587), book 1, 16-17: ‘[Salviati era] d’animo nobile, e di grande spirito, e vivendo, e vestendo alla Signorile... più che mediocrementemente nelle buone lettere instrutto, si discopriva continuamente co’ grandi grave, e di sottilissimo ingegno, e in molte scienze universale... bellissimo parlatore era’; Vasari, *Vite*, VII, 33: ‘Al cardinal Riccio da Montepulciano dipinse... una bellissima sala... piena di grazia, di bellissime fantasie e di molte capricciose ed ingegnose invenzioni.’

²⁴ Patricia Rubin, “The Private Chapel of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese in the Cancelleria”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 50 (1987), 82-112.

²⁵ There are numerous letters from Giovio, Caro and other *letterati* in Farnese circles which attest to their close friendships with artists; in his letters to Vasari in Florence, for instance, Giovio always asks him to say hello to other artist friends, including Pontormo, Bronzino and Salviati (see, e.g., a letter of April 1547 in *Der literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris*, ed. Karl Frey (Munich: George Muller, 1923-40), 3 vols, I, 196-7) and his evident affection for Vasari himself is borne out in many letters (see, e.g., a letter of November 1547 in *Frey*, I, 206-207, where he asks for a portrait of ‘vostra testa riccia’). Caro’s letters are likewise full of references to artist friends and on the 28 June 1543, for instance, he writes to Francesco Maria Molza saying that he was lunching with Pirro Ligorio and miniaturist Giulio Clovio when Molza’s last letter arrived (Caro, *Lettere familiari*, I, no. 200, 274-6); and in another letter of 1549 he calls the engraver, Alessandro Cesati, ‘amico e più che fratello’ (*Ibid.*, II, 86). Bronzino, meanwhile, wrote verses in defence of Caro in the latter’s dispute with Castelvetro (Tiziana Temperini, “Percorsi di invenzione manieristica nelle lettere di Annibal Caro” in *Annibal Caro. Lettere familiari e le traduzioni patristiche*, ed. Stanislao Tamburri (Civitanova Marche: Comune di Civitanova Marche, 1997), 1-47, at 26).

²⁶ See Guglielmo’s letter to Ammanati cited in Werner Gramberg, *Die Düsseldorfer Skizzenbücher des Guglielmo della Porta* (Berlin: Mann, 1964), I, 122-7, at 125: ‘Cav. Caro mi diede già per impresa lo scudo di Enea con questo motto UNUM OMNIA CONTRA, volendo significare, che si come un solo scudo fabricato già da Vulcano faceva schermo ad Enea contra l’arme di tutti i Latini, così io con le

that an eminent man of letters had devised an *impresa* for him, but that other leading *letterati* associated with the Farnese court had also discussed the device with him. Among those he lists as having given him their opinion on the *impresa* are Giovio, Pietro Bembo, Giovanni della Casa, Francesco Maria Molza and Claudio Tolomei.²⁷ In the same letter, Della Porta claims that he is writing a book on art in Rome, pointing to an interest in theory shared by many of the artists working for the Farnese, including Vasari, Vignola and Federico Zuccaro, who all set pen to paper.²⁸

The environment around the Farnese pope and his grandsons, then, was one in which intellectual exchange between artists and *letterati* was encouraged – and we know from Vasari that the *paragone* between painting and sculpture was one of the topics discussed. In his letter to Varchi on the subject, Vasari says that when he was in Rome not long before, ‘two of our courtiers of [Cardinal Alessandro] Farnese had had a dispute on this very topic’ and had asked his opinion.²⁹ What is more, we know that this was an environment in which the *paragone* stimulated artistic as well as theoretical responses, as is borne out by the famous example of Daniele da Volterra’s *David and Goliath*, painted for Giovanni della Casa. According to Vasari, the work was devised specifically to help Della Casa consider the rivalry between painting and sculpture for a book that he was writing.³⁰ Since Della Casa was in Rome in the early 1550s, participating in discussions that would feed into his *Galateo* on ideal courtly behaviour, it is likely that the idea for the painting was conceived at this time.³¹ Daniele meanwhile had been working at Palazzo Farnese since 1547, the year he started working on the Sala Regia for Paul III, and he remained close to both Alessandro and Caro in the years that followed.³²

Daniele’s painting for Della Casa addresses the *paragone* from a number of angles – quite literally, as it was painted on two sides of a slate panel, so as to show the same scene from different viewpoints. The ability of sculpture to represent more than one viewpoint, while painting could show only a single view, was one of the main arguments cited in defence of sculpture in *paragone* literature³³ – and something that

opere mie haverci potuto difindermi da tutti gl’emuli, che m’insurgevano contra et nel vero grande animo.’

²⁷ Gramberg, *Die Dusseldorfer Skizzenbucher*, I, 125: ‘ho poi conosciuto esser veriss[im]o quell che sopra il medesimo scudo sollevano dirmi il Tibaldeo, il Molza, il Giovio, il Sadoletto, il Bembo, il Serleti, il Casa, il Tolomei et molt’altri chiarissimi et divini ingegni.’

²⁸ Vignola’s *Regola delli cinque ordini* was written in 1562, while Zuccaro’s *L’Idea de’ pittori, scultori ed architetti* dates from 1607.

²⁹ *Scritti d’arte del Cinquecento*, I, 493: ‘E per dirvi, ritrovandomi in Roma, dove si fece scommessa fra dua nostri cortigiani di Farnese della medesima, in me tal cosa rimessono’.

³⁰ Vasari, *Vite*, VII, 61: ‘Avendo monsignor messer Giovanni della Casa, fiorentino ed uomo dottissimo... cominciato a scrivere un tratto delle cose di pittura, e volendo chiarirsi d’alcune minuzie e particolari dagli uomini della professione, fece fare a Daniello, con tutta quella diligenza che fu possibile, il modello d’un Davit di terra finito; e dopo gli fece dipignere, o vero ritrarre in un quadro, il medesimo Davit, che è bellissimo, da tutte due le bande, cioè il dinanzi ed il di dietro, che fu cosa capricciosa.’

³¹ Roberto Paolo Ciardi, “Daniele da Volterra e la concorrenza delle arti”, in R. P. Ciardi and Benedetta Moreschini, *Daniele Ricciarelli. Da Volterra a Roma* (Milan: Federico Motta Editore, 2004), 4-44, at 32. Vasari does not specify a date, but does place it in the papacy of Julius III (1550-55).

³² Vittoria Romani, “Daniele da Volterra nella camera di Bacco e del liocorno”, *Palazzo Farnese*, 73-9, at 73. Vasari, *Vite*, VII, 56: ‘Adunque, oltre all’affezione che gli portava il cardinale, lo favorì di maniera il signore Annibale Caro appresso i suoi signori Farnesi, che sempre l’aiutarono.’

³³ See, e.g., Francesco Sangallo’s response to Varchi (*Scritti d’arte del Cinquecento*, I, 512): ‘a ogni volta d’occhio la statua tonda diventa un’altra, in modo che lo pittore [d’]una sola vista da una sola figura, e lo scultore in una sola figura ne fa olte rispetto all’olte viste.’

painters often sought to refute, by showing multiple views of the same episode, or by using mirrors to simultaneously show the back and front of a given figure.³⁴ But Daniele was also addressing another key topos of the *paragone* debate through his choice of slate as a support: the question of durability. Almost everyone who contributes to the debate in the sixteenth century touches on this issue, with the argument put forward that sculpture lasts much longer than painting, and is therefore more useful.³⁵ As Varchi says in his *Lezzione*, the evidence of this is provided by the fact that many more sculptures survived from antiquity than paintings – a powerfully evocative argument for a culture so committed to studying and collecting the remains of the classical past.³⁶ Most commentators, including Varchi himself,³⁷ answer this point by repeating the refutation first made by Leonardo, whose writings were crucial for this whole debate: that it is not the ‘arte’ of sculpture itself that affords its durability, but the materials used.³⁸ Leonardo goes on to say that if painters merely used longer lasting materials, they could equal sculpture in this respect.³⁹ By the mid sixteenth century, this challenge had helped to fuel an important new trend, of which Daniele’s painting was just one example: that of paintings on stone.

The invention of painting in oil on a stone support was credited to Sebastiano del Piombo, in two separate sources from 1530. One of these, the contract for the artist’s altarpiece for the Chigi Chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo, specifies that he is to paint on *peperino*, in a new technique of his own making;⁴⁰ and this technique is also mentioned in a letter of the same year to Pietro Bembo, written by Vittorio Soranzo.⁴¹ Referring to an *Ecce Homo* that Sebastiano had painted on marble, Soranzo, who was privy chamberlain to Clement VII, says that through the union of paint with stone, the

³⁴ One famous example of multiple views was the painting of Bathsheba by Salviati in the Palazzo Sacchetti from the early 1550s.

³⁵ See, eg., Baldassare Castiglione’s comments on the matter in *Il libro del cortigiano*, ed. V. Cian (Florence: Sansoni, 1947), 124 ‘per esser le statue più durabili, si poria forse dir che fussero di più dignità; perchè, essendo fatte per memoria, satisfanno più a quello effetto perchè non fatte, che la pittura’ (Book 1, chapter L).

³⁶ *Scritti d’arte del Cinquecento*, 532: ‘Argomentano ancora della lunghezza del tempo, dicendo che la scultura è quasi perpetua, non essendo sottoposta ne a piogge, ne a fuoco et altri accidenti a gran pezzo quanto la pittura; il che apparisce nelle statue antiche, delle quali se ne truovano infinite, dove delle pitture non è rimasta in piè nessuna, se non alcune nelle grotte di Roma.’ This echoes the sentiment expressed by Tullio Lombardo in a letter of 1526 where he states that ‘la scultura è molto più senza comparatione, et non da parrangonar con pittura per niun modo, perchè da antiqui se ritrova fino alli nostri tempi de le sue sculture, con pitture veramente nulla si pol vedere’ (cited in C. Barbieri, ‘“Tu, che lo stile con mirabil cura pareggi col martello”. Fortune e sfortune di Sebastiano”, in *La Pietà di Sebastiano a Viterbo. Storia e tecniche a confronto*, eds C. Barbieri, E. Parlato and S. Rinaldi (Rome: Nuova Argos, 2009), 50-66, at 55).

³⁷ As Varchi puts it: ‘I pittori... dicono questo non venire dall’arte, ma dal subbietto dell’arte’ (*Scritti d’arte del Cinquecento*, I, 532). And Paolo Pino, writing in 1548, says: ‘ma tal cosa non si contiene nell’arte, e che così sia, la scultura non è quella pietra, ma la scultura s’intende quella figura scolpita’ (Paolo Pino, *Dialogo di pittura*, eds Rodolfo and Anna Pallucchini (Venice: Edizioni Daria Guarnati, 1946), 137).

³⁸ Leonardo, ‘Il pittore e scultore’, in *Scritti d’arte del Cinquecento*, I, 477-8: ‘questa tal cosa non fa dignità nello scultore, perche tal permanenza nasce nella material, e non dall’artefice.’

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 478: ‘...la qual dignità pò ancora essere nella pittura, dipingendo con colori di vetro sopra i metalli o terra cocta...’

⁴⁰ Cited in Anne-Laure Collomb, *La peinture sur Pierre: splendeurs d’Italie a la Renaissance* (Tours: Presses universitaires Francois-Rabelais de-Tours, 2012), 89, n. 20: ‘Seb debbe depingere la detta tavola in detta cappella quale e hogi di pietra de peperino murata et ha da essere dipinta a olio in quell nuovo modo et inventione de lui per sua lunga factica et esperienza ha acquistato’.

⁴¹ Cited in Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 124.

Venetian artist was creating images that were ‘almost eternal’.⁴² These remarks were clearly made with the *paragone* debate in mind, and Varchi uses very similar terminology to single out Sebastiano’s contribution to the issue of durability in painting.⁴³ As part of his discussion, Varchi also quotes the verses written on Sebastiano’s famous portrait on slate of Giulia Gonzaga, which was painted for Ippolito de’ Medici in 1532. The poems, by Francesco Molza and Gandolfo Porrino, refer explicitly to the painter’s ability to rival sculpture, and serve to further demonstrate the currency of *paragone* ideas in Roman literary circles.⁴⁴ Molza and Porrino corresponded with Varchi and were part of the same intellectual milieu in Rome as Caro and Giovio, frequenting the Accademia della Virtù and joining Alessandro Farnese’s household in the later 1530s.⁴⁵ So it is not surprising that it was in these circles – of *letterati* and their patrons, including Ippolito de’ Medici and the Farnese – that one finds a penchant for paintings on stone through the middle years of the sixteenth century.

Apart from the many religious works on stone supports,⁴⁶ including Sebastiano’s *Madonna of the Veil*, which hung in Alessandro’s private chamber,⁴⁷ and Salviati’s Cancelleria altarpiece, painted on *peperino*,⁴⁸ the most notable type of image to exploit this technique was the portrait. Painters such as Salviati, Girolamo da Carpi and Jacopino del Conte produced numerous portraits on stone,⁴⁹ while Sebastiano painted depictions on slate of both Clement VII and Paul III (Fig. 3, Parma, Galleria Nazionale). These were executed during his tenure as *Plumbator Apostolicarum*, and it has been suggested that the adoption of a stone support might have lent them an

⁴² Ibid.: ‘Dovete sapere che Sebastianello nostro Venetiano ha trovato un segreto di pingere in marmo a olio bellissimo il quale darà la pittura poco meno che eterna. I colori... si uniscono col marmo in maniera che quasi impetriscono.’

⁴³ *Scritti d’arte del Cinquecento*, I, 532: ‘I pittori... dicono che si può dipingere ancora nei marmi, e così saranno eterne a un modo, allegando l’esempio di fra’ Bastiano.’

⁴⁴ *Scritti d’arte del Cinquecento*, I, 532: (Molza): ‘Tu, che lo stile con mirabil cura/ pareggi col martello, e la grandezza/ che sola possedea già la scultura/ ai colori doni e non minor vaghezza./ si che superba gir può la pittura./ sola per te salita a tanta altezza/ col senno, onde n’apristi il bel segreto./ Muovi pensoso a l’alta impresa e lieto.’ (Porrino): 533: ‘E con quell’arte, di che solo onori/ il secol nostro e lo fai chiari e bello./ con nuovo uso agguagliando i tuoi colori/ alle forze d’incude e di Martello./ or coronata di novelli fiori./ or col fianco appoggiata a un arbuscello./ E ’n mille altre maniere, e ’n treccia e ’n gonna./ forma l’altera e gloriosa Donna.’ On the subject of literary celebrations of Sebastiano’s paintings see Costanza Barbieri, “Sebastiano’s portraits in *paragone*: sculpted paintings, praise through images”, in *Sebastiano del Piombo 1485-1547*, exh cat., Roberto Contini et al. (Milan: Federico Motta Editore, 2008), 53-7.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Caro’s letters to Molza and Porrino of 1538, where he talks about meeting Giulia Gonzaga and cites Porrino’s verses on her (Caro, *Lettere familiari*, I, 98-90 and 94-8). Caro was very close to Varchi (see, e.g., Tiziana Temperini, “Percorsi di invenzione manieristica nelle lettere di Annibal Caro”, 1), while Varchi stayed with Molza on his way to Venice in 1536 (Salvatore Lo Re, “Chi potrebbe mai, a questi tempi, badare a lettere?” Benedetto Varchi, Pier Vettori e la crisi fiorentina del 1537”, *Studi storici*, anno 43, no. 2 (Apr-Jun, 2002), 367-409, at 378). On the Accademia della Virtù, see, e.g., Robertson, *Il gran cardinale*, 21; Patricia Simons and Monique Kornell, “Annibal Caro’s After-Dinner Speech (1536) ad the question of Titian as Vesalius’ illustrator”, *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 61, no. 4 (Winter 2008), 1069-1097.

⁴⁶ There are many altarpieces painted on stone in Roman churches dating from the middle years of the sixteenth century (see, e.g., *Pietra dipinta: tesori nascosti de ’500 e del ’600 da una collezione privata Milanese*, exh cat. ed M. Bona Castellotti (Milan: Federico Motta, 2000), 24; Collomb, *La peinture sur Pierre*, 67-73).

⁴⁷ *I Farnese. Arte e collezionismo*, 192; Vasari, *Vite*, V, 574.

⁴⁸ Rubin, “The Private Chapel of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese in the Cancelleria”, 92-3.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Collomb, *La peinture sur Pierre*, 99-114.

authority akin to papal seals and bulls.⁵⁰ While this may be rather speculative, it is true that the *Plumbator* – an office held by both Sebastiano and Guglielmo – was responsible for the ‘official’ likeness of the pope. More to the point for our purposes, the contemporary description of Sebastiano’s paintings on stone as ‘almost eternal’ strongly indicates that such portraits constituted a theoretically-engaged attempt to create likenesses that would withstand the test of time in a way that could rival sculpture. The issue of durability was of course especially important for portraiture, given its potential for perpetuating the memory of the sitter. As Armenini put it: ‘making a true likeness from some material that will last, will go a long way to preserving their name for posterity, since it is in this way that their virtues are known and made manifest for many centuries’.⁵¹

The role of portraiture as an enduring encapsulation of the deeds and personality of exemplary men was much discussed in the circles around the Farnese court, where variations on the type were explored by Giovio, Caro and others. Portrait medals were given complex *riversi* that would add to knowledge of the sitter’s character, while *imprese*, which were first theorized by Giovio, were extensively employed as sophisticated badges of identity.⁵² The interest in conveying both likeness and significance was also central to collections of portraits such as that of Giovio himself, housed at his *Museo* at Como.⁵³ To bequeath to posterity as complete a portrait as possible of the sitters depicted, Giovio added inscriptions underneath the paintings, which were published in two volumes of *Elogia* (1546 and 1551). The function of both the portraits and *Elogia* to provide an immortalizing record of their subjects was made explicit by Pietro Aretino, in a letter to Giovio of April 1546, where he responds to a request for a portrait of himself. He says there that he would consider himself a nonentity without Giovio, who through his *Elogia* made worthy men ‘immortal’, and brought ‘the dead back to life’.⁵⁴ Giovio himself expresses a similar sentiment when urging Vasari later that year to continue with the *Lives of the Artists*, ‘for there is nothing better than to live after death’.⁵⁵ While both Giovio and Aretino were

⁵⁰ Elena Calvillo, “Authoritative Copies and Divine Originals: Lucretian Metaphor, Painting on Stone, and the Problem of Originality in Michelangelo’s Rome”, in *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (Summer 2013), 453-508, at 492.

⁵¹ Armenini, *Dei veri precetti*, Book 3, 189 ‘contrafacendosi l’effigie vera con quelle materie, le quali siano per durar qualche tempo, si provvede in gran parte al nome, et alla posterità di quelli, perch’egli e tale, che per ciò si conoscono, et si manifestano le virtù loro per molti secoli’.

⁵² See, e.g., W. Thompson, “Antonfrancesco Doni’s “Medaglie””, in *Print Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Sept 2007), 223-38 at 229-31; D. Caldwell, *The Sixteenth-Century Italian Impresa*, (New York: AMS Press), 2004, 7-14.

⁵³ See Linda Susan Klinger, *The portrait collection of Paolo Giovio*, PhD thesis, (Princeton, 1991).

⁵⁴ Cited in Paolo Procaccioli, “Pietro Aretino e Sebastiano del Piombo. Un’amicizia a termine e l’ombra di Michelangelo”, in *utrumque paratus: Aretino e Arezzo, Aretino a Arezzo: in margine al ritratto di Sebastiano del Piombo. Atti del Colloquio per il 450 anniversario della morte di Pietro Aretino, Arezzo, 21 October 2006*, ed. P. Procaccioli (Rome: Salerno, 2008), 133-166 at 136: ‘Mi terrei certo un non nulla, se la penna con cui fate eterno chi n’è degno, non mi facesse parer qualche cosa. Due vite hanno gli uomini illustri al di d’oggi, e una morte a gran pena essi vivano in virtù di natura, e per vostra; ma s’avanza il potere di voi, sopra il suo imperochè date al nome, ciò che non pò dar ella a la carne. Onde l’essenza, che viene da voi, non pur manca nel mondo di quelli che deriva da lei, ma risuscita coloro che si moiano non altrimenti che il vostro calamo fusse lo Iddio de la immortalità che ci perpetua.’

⁵⁵ Giovio, *Lettere*, II, 55, no. 240: ‘Voi attenderete al vostro libro... poi che altro non c’è che campare doppo la morte.’ This theme is picked up on by Michelangelo when praising the *Lives* in a letter to Vasari of August 1, 1550: ‘sendo voi risuciatore duomini morti, che voi alungiate vita a vivi.’ (Frey, I, 289-90.) And Caro also alludes to the ability of the *Lives* to encapsulate memory, in a letter to Vasari of December 1547: ‘M’avete dato la vita a farmi vedere parte del commentario ch’avete scritto de gli

referring more specifically to literary portraits, it is clear that Giovio considered these as in many ways analogous to painted portraits, stating in the dedication to his *Life* of Leo X, for instance, that in it he had ‘expressed a portrait of true likeness [of the pope]... having imitated in this the practice of painters’.⁵⁶ That said, he clearly deemed images on their own to be insufficient, given his addition of inscriptions to the portraits in his own collection, and his criticism of *imprese* without mottoes.⁵⁷ He is furthermore explicit in his concern for the transitory nature of painting in a letter of November 1547, where he tells Vasari that it is the writing of the *Lives* that will render him immortal, rather than his painted works, which will be ravaged by time and eaten by worms.⁵⁸

This preoccupation with lasting forms of commemoration, not to mention concerns about the vulnerability of painting might well have underpinned the popularity of portraits on stone among the educated circles of Rome. And yet, these portraits did not constitute the end of the debate surrounding durability, and not everyone was convinced that stone supports were practical. Writing in 1549, for instance, Anton Francesco Doni, a great friend of Giovio’s, suggests that ‘the method of painting on stone is corruptible and transitory’,⁵⁹ while concerns about the fragility of slate in particular were raised by the agent charged with overseeing the commission for Sebastiano’s Ubeda *Pietà*.⁶⁰ Vasari meanwhile recounts that Sebastiano’s paintings on stone were so heavy that they were hard to move.⁶¹ Given the ongoing nature of the discussion, it seems likely that different artistic solutions were also posited. Which brings us back to Guglielmo. Using a technique which Vasari would later describe as ‘imitating painting in sculpture’, Della Porta was surely making his own foray into the disputed territory of the *paragone* by adding colour to the tried and tested memorializing type of the portrait bust. The possibility that his portrait of Paul III was understood by others in this light is intriguingly suggested by Vasari himself, in his letter on the *paragone* to Varchi. Arguing for the superior ability of painting to render likeness, Vasari cites the example of a portrait of the Farnese pope – presumably one of those by Titian – which was so lifelike, that when it was placed outside for varnishing, passersby mistook the effigy for the pope himself and took their caps off to him.⁶² Not only is it interesting that Vasari chose a portrait of Paul III to make this point, but he underlined it by asserting that a sculpture would never have elicited such a reaction. Given that Vasari must have been aware of Guglielmo’s bust when making

artefici del disegno, che certo l’ho letto con grandissimo piacere, e mi par degno d’esser letto da ognuno, per la memoria che vi si fa di molti uomini eccellenti.’ (Caro, *Lettere familiari*, II, 50, no. 319.)

⁵⁶ Cited by Klinger, *The portrait collection of Paolo Giovio*, 30: ‘ho espresso la effigie di vera somiglianza...havendo in cio...imitato il costume de pittori.’

⁵⁷ See, e.g., *Dialogo delle imprese*, 60.

⁵⁸ Giovio, *Lettere*, II, 196-7 (2 April 1547): ‘La vostra lettera/ ettutta da filosofo; come spero, che sarete in compilare il bel libro delli famosi pictori, qual vi fara al certo immortale; Perche in fatto, le cose, che havete fatto a Mont Holiveto in Napoli... alla fine fine saranno chachabaldole, consumate dal sanito e dale tarle; ma quello che scriverete, non lo consumerà il ladro tempo.’

⁵⁹ *Scritti d’arte del Cinquecento*, I, 582: ‘I modo di colorire in pietra sia corruttibile e transitorio, perche le pietre sono umide’.

⁶⁰ Calvillo, ‘Authoritative Copies and Divine Originals’, 485.

⁶¹ Vasari, *Vite*, V, 579: ‘Ben è vero che, finite, non si potevano... muovere nè trasportare, se non con grandissima difficulta.’

⁶² *Scritti d’arte del Cinquecento*, I, 497: ‘Appresso, li ritrare le persone vive di naturale, somigliando, dove aviamo visto ingannar molti occhi a’ di nostri: come nel ritratto di papa Paolo terzo, messo per vernicarsi in su un terrazzo al sole, il quale da molti che passavano veduto, credendolo vivo gli facevon di capo; che questo a sculture non veddi mai fare.’

these comments, it is tempting to see them as a deliberate – and decidedly negative – appraisal of the sculptor’s attempts at rivaling painting. If this were indeed the case, it conjures the possibility, already touched upon, that the *paragone* in many ways constituted an ongoing dialogue between practice and theory, where contributions were made through both word and image, by both artists and theorists. And while Giovio, for instance, never overtly commented on the *paragone*, he clearly had an opinion on the relative merits of painting and sculpture in relation to portraiture. On the subject of the profile heads adorning the façade of Tommaso Cambi’s palace, for which he designed the programme, Giovio insists that these be done in stucco, with a coloured ground, because in his eyes, marble sculpture was no good for achieving a ‘true likeness’.⁶³

Views such as those expressed by Giovio and Vasari, key members of the Farnese court during the later 1540s, would surely have contributed to an underlying culture of rivalry. This may well have prompted a response from Guglielmo, particularly if one remembers that he was measuring himself not only against Titian with his portrait of Paul, but against Sebastiano, whom he succeeded as *Plumbator*. Indeed, it seems that Sebastiano, described by Giovio as ‘without peers’ as far as portraiture was concerned,⁶⁴ was still producing portraits on slate – which were explicitly discussed in terms of the *paragone*, as we have seen – right up to his death in 1547. The inventory of works left in his studio at that time includes many such paintings, along with numerous prepared pieces of slate ready for painting.⁶⁵ While his portrait on slate of Paul III was probably executed much earlier, it nonetheless represented the other side of the *paragone* coin to Guglielmo’s offering: the lifelikeness of painting, coupled with the durability of stone. But if Guglielmo could never rival Sebastiano’s verisimilitude, the addition of colour to his bust could approach another key attribute of painting, namely the ability to delight and ‘ornare’.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, slate could never really compete with sculpture as far as durability was concerned – as the numerous examples of antique portrait busts in Roman collections confirmed. Moreover, the role of sculpture in bestowing both perpetuity and a certain exemplary standing was generally acknowledged. Bronzino, for instance, in his response to Varchi, concedes that marble and bronze statues ‘give honour to illustrious men... and make those who see them want to emulate their virtuous deeds’.⁶⁷ This sentiment was echoed by Vasari in the *Proemio* to the *Lives*, when he said that sculpture is ‘better at conserving the name of those depicted’.⁶⁸ Given the ideas being voiced in Farnese circles at this

⁶³ ‘Sarebbe forse bene farle [le teste] di stucco in profilo, et colorir il campo, dico questo perche di marmo fatte a vera similitudine non si fornebbono in cento anni’ (Klinger, *The portrait collection of Paolo Giovio*, 57, n. 106).

⁶⁴ Paolo Giovio, “Raphaelis Urbinatis Vita”, *Scritti d’arte del Cinquecento*, I, 16-17: ‘Ante alios autem Sebastianus Venetus oris similitudines incomparabili felicitate repraesentat.’

⁶⁵ See the inventory of Sebastiano’s effects in Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, 154-6.

⁶⁶ See, e.g., Varchi in *Scritti d’arte del Cinquecento*, I, 531: ‘Argomentano ancora della vaghezza e dal diletto, che si cava maggiore della pittura che della scultura’; Castiglione, *Il libro del cortigiano*, 124: ‘Ma oltre alla memoria, sono ancor e la pittura e la statuaria fatte per ornare, ed in questo la pittura è molto superior.’

⁶⁷ *Scritti d’arte del Cinquecento*, I, 501: ‘Vogliono ancora innalzarla con dire la scultura esser molto magnifica e di grandissimo ornamento nelle citadi, perche con quella si fanno colossi e statue, si di bronzo e si di marmo e d’atro, che fanno onore agli uomini illustri et adornano le / terre e pongon voglia, negli uomini che le veggano, di seguitare l’opere virtuose per avere simili onori.’

⁶⁸ “Proemio di tutta l’opera” (*Vite*, I, 93): ‘la scultura esser tanto più nobile della pittura, quanto ella è più atta a conservare il nome di chi è celebrato da lei ne’ marmi e ne’ bronzi, contro a tutte l’ingiurie del tempo e dell’aria, che non è essa pittura’.

time regarding both memorialization and the rivalry between painting and sculpture, it seems likely that, whatever Guglielmo's intentions were with this bust, it had the potential to be incorporated into the debate.

The use of coloured marbles in sculpture was certainly an aesthetic that Della Porta would pursue, and one which would become particularly fashionable for tomb monuments – another type where durability was of paramount concern. Indeed Annibal Caro's own tomb would incorporate a coloured marble bust,⁶⁹ while the monument to Michelangelo in Santa Croce, designed by Vasari to include personifications of painting, sculpture and architecture, would also employ these materials. And, eventually, Guglielmo himself would proclaim on the rivalry between painters and sculptors, if not necessarily on the *paragone* as such. He seemed to take particular pleasure, for instance, in the fact that in 1567 his protégé, Giovanni Antonio Buzzi, had beaten Vasari to the commission for the tomb of Pius V; and one wonders whether this victory was not made that bit sweeter because his rival for the project was a painter.⁷⁰ This seems to be confirmed by Guglielmo's vitriolic attack around the same on Daniele da Volterra, for his pretensions to become a sculptor in later life. Comparing Daniele's move from painter to sculptor as something of a mythical 'metamorphosis', he points out that only Ovid could come up with that kind of transformation, and he had been dead a long time.⁷¹ This acerbic dismissal of Daniele probably stemmed from the fact that the painter had obtained an important sculptural commission (the monument to Henry II), through the agency of Michelangelo,⁷² but it seems to indicate that, for Guglielmo, artists – with the possible exception of Buonarroti himself – should know their trade and stick to it. Which did not mean they could not borrow elements from the rival art; indeed by using colour, perhaps Guglielmo thought he could beat painters at their own game.

⁶⁹ Caro's tomb monument (1567) is situated in Alessandro Farnese's titular church of San Lorenzo in Damaso and was designed by Giovanni Antonio Dosio.

⁷⁰ See Gramberg, *Die Dusseldorfer Skizzenbucher*, I, 122: 'S'indussero [Vasari] a mandar a N.S.re quell lor disegno, con ferma speranza, che non dovesse haver qua concorrenza che'l pareggiasse. Ma quanto se ne siano ingannati il prudente giudizio di S. Beat.ne et un giovane solo de la mia scuola, mediocre fra tutte l'altre, l'han dimostrato.' See my forthcoming article: "Grace and Favour: Pius V and Sepulchral Architecture in Counter-Reformation Rome", *Artibus et historiae*, no. 71 (2015).

⁷¹ See Gramberg, *Die Dusseldorfer Skizzenbucher*, I, 117-18: 'Discorso contro Daniello pittore, che s'arrogava di esser scultore e fonditore estimado, di professioni erroneamente... perchè hoggidi non si veggono più di queste trasformationi di persone, et Ovidio che gia le fece, è morto.'

⁷² See, e.g., Antonia Bostrom, "Daniele da Volterra and the equestrian monument to Henry II of France", *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 137, no. 1113 (Dec. 1995), 809-20.