



IRSA

---

Caravaggio and Vasari's "Lives"

Author(s): Sharon Gregory

Source: *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 32, No. 64, Special issue on the quincentennial of Giorgio Vasari's birth (1511-2011) (2011), pp. 167-191

Published by: IRSA s.c.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41479760>

Accessed: 02-02-2019 17:39 UTC

## REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/41479760?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/41479760?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents)

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

IRSA s.c. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Artibus et Historiae*

Sharon Gregory

## Caravaggio and Vasari's *Lives*

M

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610) has entered the popular imagination as an archetypal bohemian artist – a radical non-conformist all too familiar with the criminal courts, brawling in the streets with tennis partners and impetuously quarrelling with other painters. Until only a few decades ago, the assertion that Caravaggio read anything at all would have seemed completely outrageous. From the very beginning, writers approached his art and life almost as though he were unlettered, though in Rome he associated with a sophisticated and decidedly literary crowd.<sup>1</sup>

He was perceived by many of his contemporaries as an artist who had no theory, who painted exactly what he saw without regard for the great idealizing tradition of the High Renaissance. For example, the critic and early biographer of Caravaggio, Giovanni Pietro Bellori, writing in 1672, said that he “lacked invention, decorum, *disegno*, or any knowledge of the science of painting. The moment the model was taken from him, his hand and his mind became empty”, and “it seems that he imitated art without art”. He further complained that Caravaggio disdained the example of ancient statues and the great paintings of Raphael.<sup>2</sup>

For Bellori, Caravaggio was among a very select group of important painters, but one who also served as an object lesson in the dangers of following nature too closely. Bellori's negative comments are symptomatic of a decline in Caravaggio's

artistic reputation, which had already reached a low point in 1633, when the Florentine-born Spanish critic Vincencio Carducho wrote that Caravaggio “worked naturally, almost without precepts, without doctrine, without study [...] with nothing more than nature before him, which he simply copied. I heard a devoted follower of our profession say that the coming of this man to the world was an omen of the ruin and demise of painting”.<sup>3</sup> When in 1708 Roger de Piles created a numerical scorecard rating the work of fifty-seven earlier masters according to their handling of colour and their compositions, drawing and expression, Caravaggio ranked fifth from the bottom.<sup>4</sup>

It was really not until the early twentieth century that Caravaggio was rediscovered. In 1951, an exhibition in Milan of the work of Caravaggio and his followers sparked tremendous interest in his career among the general public, and led to many scholarly articles and monographs.<sup>5</sup> In *Caravaggio Studies*, published in 1955, Walter Friedländer advanced the idea that though Caravaggio was a rough-and-ready, combative, swash-buckling personality – and though he did promote a radical new sort of naturalism in painting – his work nevertheless reveals profound influences from the work of numerous earlier artists. Friedländer also saw in Caravaggio’s paintings deep echoes of the sombre mood of Counter-Reformation Rome.<sup>6</sup>

By the 1980s, scholars were beginning to warm to the idea that Caravaggio was a learned sort of painter. They argued that Caravaggio could and did read texts by contemporary theologians; writers of the ancient world including Philostratus, Pindar, Pliny, Plutarch, Petronius, and Virgil; and even the Gospel of St. Matthew in Hebrew.<sup>7</sup> In 1993, the publication of an inventory of Caravaggio’s possessions (which were seized in 1605 in lieu of payment for two years’ rent) seems to have proven that Caravaggio could certainly read: his belongings included a case with “twelve books inside”.<sup>8</sup> His brother Giovanni Battista at least must have had a thorough grammar school education, as he later attended the Jesuit Collegio Romano, and it is probable that Caravaggio himself had also received some schooling – enough to have had some familiarity with classical and vernacular literature.<sup>9</sup>

In light of this, I propose here that Caravaggio had a good working knowledge of an important sixteenth-century book dedicated to the visual arts: Giorgio Vasari’s *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects, from Cimabue until Our Own Time*.<sup>10</sup> Vasari’s book seems to have been widely read, and it helped give birth to further writing about the visual arts – in the form of other biographies, but also dialogues and treatises.<sup>11</sup> I intend to show how the *Lives* may also have inspired the subject matter of many of Caravaggio’s early paintings.

To understand why Vasari’s *Lives* was important for Caravaggio, it is worth briefly considering its purpose and structure. The book is a rich and complex one, full of information, anecdotes and critical commentary on the visual arts. It begins with

a general preface that gives information for the layman about terminology and techniques employed by painters, sculptors, architects, and craftsmen working in affiliated arts. The artists’ biographies follow, divided into three chronological sections, corresponding more or less to the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Each of these “ages of art” also begins with a preface; these prefaces provide an outline of the underlying themes of the book. Some of Vasari’s themes must have struck a sympathetic chord with the young Caravaggio, but others cannot have met with his full approval.

According to Vasari, artists of the First Age, such as Cimabue and Giotto, revived the visual arts through direct observation and imitation of the natural world. This emphasis on the imitation of nature is an especially important theme throughout the *Lives* – as it had also been in ancient commentaries on classical art, such as Pliny’s *Natural History*. Vasari even claims that “the origin of these arts was nature herself; and the precedent or model, the most beautiful fabric of the world”.<sup>12</sup> In the Second Age, artists including Masaccio and Donatello “sought to imitate that which they saw in nature, and no more, and thus their works became better planned and better conceived; and this gave them the courage to give rules to their perspectives and to foreshorten them [...] in a natural and proper way”.<sup>13</sup> They improved by observing nature and applying to what they saw “good rule, order, proportion, design and style”. However, artists of this period relied too much upon study and measurement and thus their works lacked spontaneity and gracefulness.<sup>14</sup> Artists of the Third Age, beginning with Leonardo and culminating in Michelangelo, benefitted by seeing graceful examples of antique sculpture, such as the *Laocoön*. These artists were able to advance the arts by employing a visual judgement that went beyond mere rules, as a result of their advanced skill in *disegno*. *Disegno*, though usually translated “drawing” or “design”, is for Vasari more than this: it is also a process of imitating only the most beautiful things in nature, and combining parts of several beautiful human bodies into one idealized figure. This figure then becomes the model for all the figures the artist subsequently creates.<sup>15</sup> The emphasis on this mode of idealization has a long history stemming from classical antiquity and the story of the painter Zeuxis, who when creating a painting of Helen chose to selectively imitate features of the most beautiful maidens in the city.<sup>16</sup>

Some scholars have seen an apparent discrepancy between Vasari’s emphasis on close observation of nature and his promotion of selective imitation that leads to idealization. But Vasari himself saw no inherent contradiction between these two aims: as he commented, “our art consists primarily in the imitation of nature but then, since it cannot by itself reach so high, in the imitation of things made by those whom one judges to be greater masters”.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the belief that nature in the raw needs improvement appears to have been exactly the assump-

tion that Caravaggio himself later questioned. Some of his contemporaries thought rather that Caravaggio was merely unskilled in the art of selective imitation, and that he "did not have much judgement in selecting the good and avoiding the bad".<sup>18</sup>

The most important aspect of Vasari's book is that it is a book of biographies. As a genre, biography was understood to be exemplary – to provide the reader with models of behaviour to be imitated.<sup>19</sup> Vasari's great innovation was to take the formula of exemplary biography and apply it to visual artists. Thus artists now became heroic figures, just like civic and military leaders, and equally deserving of imitation. In a sense, Vasari's book was, for artists, a textbook on fame and how to achieve it.

Among Vasari's readers was the Lombard painter Gian Paolo Lomazzo, who wrote a treatise on painting (*Trattato dell'arte della pittura*, Milan, 1584) that is at least in part indebted to the *Lives*, though its structure differs. It has a theoretical and historical preface, followed by seven books in which Lomazzo expounds on proportion, actions and gestures, colour, light, perspective, composition and form in painting.<sup>20</sup> Lomazzo was a member of the Milanese Accademia della Valle di Bregno – a sort of burlesque, quasi-rustic association of artists, writers, courtiers, and professionals – and was friendly with many other painters in Lombardy, including Simone Peterzano, whose work was praised in Lomazzo's poems.<sup>21</sup> There is some evidence that Peterzano too attended the academy's banquets.<sup>22</sup> One suspects that theoretical matters were frequently discussed in Peterzano's shop, where Caravaggio entered as an apprentice in April 1584.<sup>23</sup> At least some of Lomazzo's ideas seem to have made an impact on Caravaggio – for example, his having Leonardo say, in a dialogue with the ancient sculptor Phidias, that if he were painting his *Last Supper* now, he would show the apostles with long dirty hair, suntanned skin and dusty feet because that is the way they were.<sup>24</sup> It is likely that Caravaggio learned about Vasari's book while in Peterzano's workshop, where it must have been discussed, and it is also likely that the *Lives* helped to spark his own growing ambition.

Though Caravaggio probably executed paintings in Peterzano's shop, and perhaps even after he ceased working there in 1588, we know of no early work by him. When he left Lombardy and arrived in Rome in 1592, he was virtually penniless and without a patron. According to contemporary sources, he started out working in the house of Monsignor Pandolfo Pucci, making copies of cheap devotional paintings.<sup>25</sup> Later, as all Caravaggio's early biographers concur, he worked in the studio of a prolific artist with a large workshop, Giuseppe Cesari, who later was knighted as the Cavaliere d'Arpino. The Cavaliere's assistants worked in narrow specialties; Bellori says that for him Caravaggio painted "flowers and fruit".<sup>26</sup> In between these positions, and again after working with Cesari, Caravaggio was on his own, creating paintings for the open market, of still-life

arrangements and genre scenes.<sup>27</sup> Scholars have traditionally treated these as a group of images in which Caravaggio was trying to make a name for himself by importing ideas from Lombardy into Rome – and not initially meeting with much success.<sup>28</sup> I think there is quite a bit more than this to what Caravaggio was doing: he was deliberately competing on his own terms with artists whose fame was assured, and he was responding (at least in part) to passages in the book that helped to establish their fame: Vasari's *Lives*.

It was quite usual for Renaissance artists to imitate other masters, even in a very pointed way: the artist himself might engage in a personal intertextual dialogue with the prior work of art. Beyond this, the educated viewer was meant to recognize which other artwork was being referred to, and why. An example, expounded by John Shearman, is Parmigianino's *Madonna with the Long Neck* (1534–1540, Florence, Uffizi), which shows the Christ child reclining on his mother's lap in a manner that foreshadows his eventual death. It evokes Michelangelo's Roman *Pietà* (1498–1499, St. Peter's); Parmigianino pointedly refers to this statue through the unusual detail of the crumpled drapery and the diagonal strap that runs across the Virgin's breast. Parmigianino's reference was presumably meant to remind the educated viewer of Michelangelo's statue, and thus emphasize the impending death of Christ.<sup>29</sup>

Parmigianino's imitation of Michelangelo is, of course, not unusual. The entire sixteenth century seems to have been filled with artists quoting in obvious ways from the works of Michelangelo and Raphael. By the middle of the century, these two artists had been set up at opposite poles of Renaissance artistic debates about imitation and style. Artists were prompted to think deeply about the process of imitation because of a raging debate among literary figures concerning what constituted good style in written Latin: should one imitate only Cicero, the greatest Latin orator of them all, or many good masters? When the debate turned to the vernacular language, the same literary figures squabbled over whether they should imitate the elegant language of the graceful Petrarch or the more difficult, but intellectually lofty, language of Dante.<sup>30</sup> The humanists who debated these things recognized a parallel between the gracefulness of Petrarch's written and Raphael's painted style, and the *difficultà* of Dante's language was often compared to Michelangelo's complex figures.<sup>31</sup> Artists, including Vasari, were also embroiled in these debates. The second edition of the *Lives* includes many passages related to this ongoing debate about stylistic exemplars.<sup>32</sup>

Renaissance artists were also quite used to imitating written descriptions of works of art. Many turned to ancient descriptions, or *ekphrases*, and imaginatively recreated lost works by ancient painters. Two well-known examples will suffice to illustrate the practice. Botticelli's painting *The Calumny of Apelles* (c. 1497–1498, Florence, Uffizi) replicates the subject of a lost



1. Caravaggio, «Boy with a Basket of Fruit», c. 1593–1594, Rome, Galleria Borghese. Photo: Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività culturali / Art Resource, NY

2. Caravaggio, «Lute Player», c. 1595–1596, St. Petersburg, Hermitage. Photo: Scala / Art Resource, NY

painting by Apelles, described in the *Dialogues* of Lucian. Like Apelles's original, it is meant to be a scathing anatomy of slander: an innocent man is dragged before the tribunal of a judge, as he is stripped of both clothing and reputation. Truth, ignored, looks imploringly heavenward. Lucian's description had been cited since the early fifteenth century, and was used by Leon Battista Alberti in his treatise *Della pittura* (1435–1436) as an example of the sort of literary text from which artists should seek inspiration.<sup>33</sup> Botticelli's painting is but one of several in which artists were inspired by the popularization of the classical text.<sup>34</sup> Other ancient authors also provided fodder for Renaissance artists. Titian's *Worship of Venus* (1519, Madrid, Prado) was one

of a series of paintings commissioned by Duke Alfonso d'Este for the Camerino d'Alabastro in his palace in Ferrara. Alfonso aimed to create a great gallery of paintings, in emulation of the ancient one in Naples that had been described by the Elder Philostratus in the *Imagines*, the only surviving classical text concerned solely with the praise of painting. Titian's canvas follows very closely after Philostratus's description of a painting in which large numbers of Cupids collect and eat golden and red apples while others play, and Venus and the mothers of the Cupids look on.<sup>35</sup>

In recent years, some scholars have suggested that Caravaggio too was, in his early Roman paintings, pointedly imitating



2.

ancient descriptions of works of art.<sup>36</sup> One of the most convincing examples, proposed by Avigdor Posèq, is that Caravaggio's early painting of a *Boy with a Basket of Fruit* (c. 1593–1594, Rome, Galleria Borghese; Fig. 1) can be understood to reconstruct one of Pliny's descriptions of a painting. Pliny tells how Zeuxis had so successfully counterfeited the appearance of grapes that birds flew to the panel to peck at the fruit. His rival Parrhasius then painted a panel of a curtain so convincingly that Zeuxis tried to pull it back. After this embarrassment:

Zeuxis [...] painted a Child Carrying Grapes, and when the birds flew to the fruit with the same frankness as before, he strode up

to the picture in anger with it and said, "I have painted the grapes better than the child; if I had made a success of that as well, the birds would inevitably have been afraid of it".<sup>37</sup>

Franca Trinchieri Camiz subsequently pointed out a resemblance between the *Lute Player* (c. 1595–1596, St. Petersburg, Hermitage; Fig. 2), painted for Vincenzo Giustiniani, and a painting described in Philostratus's *Imagines*. This painting showed the youth Amphion, to whom Mercury had presented a lyre:

And what do you say Amphion is doing in this picture? Certainly he is keeping his mind intent upon plucking the lyre, and so he

shows his teeth a little, just enough for a singer [...]. His hair is lovely and truthfully depicted, falling as it does in disorder upon his forehead, mingling beside his ear with the downy beard, showing just a glint of gold. But it is lovelier still where it is held by the headband [...]. Amphion is seated, beating time with his foot and stroking the strings with his right hand. His left hand is also playing, with his fingers shown foreshortened, which I would have thought only the sculptor's art would venture.<sup>38</sup>

Nor did Caravaggio confine himself to the imitation of ancient texts about paintings. Despite Bellori's assertion that Caravaggio refused to imitate the ancients or great modern painters, it has become clear that he borrowed motifs from antique sculpture and from paintings by masters of the recent past. As Posèq has argued, some antique works provided Caravaggio with a gestural vocabulary and a repertoire of physiognomical types, though his paintings transform his original sources by direct reference to nature, so that they might be compared to "watching a classical drama in a modern setting".<sup>39</sup> For example, ancient reliefs of a hero carried from the battlefield, familiar to many Renaissance artists, provided the underlying composition of Caravaggio's *Entombment* (1602, Vatican, Pinacoteca), lending its humble figures stability and dignity.<sup>40</sup> Caravaggio also made pointed reference in his paintings to works by more recent masters – though in a manner that sometimes almost amounts to parody: such as his rather cheeky quotation from Michelangelo's *Sistine ignudi* and the statue of *Victory* (1519–1534, Florence, Palazzo Vecchio) in his painting of the *Victorious Cupid* (c. 1602, Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie).<sup>41</sup>

I am convinced that Caravaggio was not only imitating the work of recent famous artists, but that in some cases he was imitating things he had only read about in Vasari, rather than things he had actually seen. In his biographies of artists, Vasari often describes specific works of art, with an emphasis on their narrative qualities. He usually begins these descriptions by seizing on compelling details that make the story vivid. Through an accumulation of such details, the reader is invited to reconstruct the picture as a mental image, and to experience the emotional effect of viewing it.<sup>42</sup> Vasari's book and its descriptive passages are closer to what Caravaggio painted than are some of the ancient sources that have been proposed. There are, for example, records of still-life paintings that Caravaggio made, most of which apparently no longer survive. We can get an idea of what they might have looked like from the still-life props in later paintings, like the *Hermitage Lute Player* [Fig. 2] or *The Boy Bitten by a Lizard* (c. 1595, Florence, Fondazione Roberto Longhi; Fig. 3).<sup>43</sup> Bellori tells us that Caravaggio painted "a vase of flowers with the transparencies of the water and glass, and the reflections of a window of the room, rendering flowers sprinkled with the freshest of dewdrops".<sup>44</sup> John Moffitt believes that, in the *Lute Player*, Caravaggio imitated not only Philostratus's

description of the painting of Amphion (as Camiz suggested), but also another painting Philostratus describes of Narcissus, which had "such a regard for realism that it even shows drops of dew dripping from the flowers".<sup>45</sup> However, the flowers Philostratus describes are still living, planted by the reflective pool of water into which Narcissus longingly gazes. Bellori's words themselves more closely recall Vasari's description of a detail in a painting by Leonardo da Vinci, which showed "a vase full of water, with some flowers in it, in which, besides the marvel of its liveliness, he had imitated the dewdrops on top, so that it seemed more real than the reality".<sup>46</sup> This is one of several instances in which Caravaggio may have been imitating and competing with, not merely Leonardo, but with Vasari's *descriptions* of the works of great artists of the past – especially those passages in which artists are expressly praised for their imitation of the natural world. The closeness of Bellori's description to Vasari's suggests that he too was aware of the way in which Vasari had described Leonardo's painting, and saw Caravaggio's vase of flowers as an analogous exercise in naturalism. Bellori may even have recognized Vasari's passage as the original impetus for Caravaggio's still-life.

Another instance is presented by the convex, shield-shaped *Head of Medusa* (c. 1597–1598, Florence, Uffizi; Fig. 4), painted while Caravaggio lived in the household of Cardinal Francesco Maria Del Monte. The painting was sent by Del Monte to Ferdinando de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, probably in 1598. Vasari tells us that an unfinished painting by Leonardo of this subject was in the collection of his father, Duke Cosimo de' Medici. Caravaggio is unlikely to have seen it – and if it ever existed, it has long since disappeared.<sup>47</sup> Vasari says: "the fancy came to [Leonardo] to paint a picture in oils of the head of a Medusa, with the head attired with a coil of snakes, the strangest and most extravagant invention that one could ever imagine".<sup>48</sup> This imprecise description might seem to offer little grist for Caravaggio's creative mill. But it follows immediately after the lengthy description of another painting of a composite dragon-like creature or *animalaccio*, "most horrible and terrifying", that Leonardo made – on a shield – with the aim of frightening anyone who looked at it, "producing the same effect as once did the head of Medusa".<sup>49</sup> Again Caravaggio seems pointedly to be competing with the description of a painting, imaginatively recreating what Leonardo might have painted. He must immediately have recognized the suitability of the shield support to the subject of the beheaded Medusa. That it is easy to conflate Vasari's adjacent descriptions is evident even in modern scholarship; for instance, Catherine Puglisi asserts that Vasari describes Leonardo's Medusa as "blowing poison from her open mouth, smoke from her nose, and fire from her eyes" – in fact, this is how Vasari describes Leonardo's *animalaccio*, not his Medusa.<sup>50</sup> In creating his own Medusa shield, Caravaggio might also have been recalling Lomazzo, who had praised Leonardo's writings



3. Caravaggio, «Boy Bitten by a Lizard», c. 1595, Florence, Fondazione Roberto Longhi. Photo: Nimatallah / Art Resource, NY





on physiognomy, citing observations like the way the forehead wrinkles when the subject is in pain or shock.<sup>51</sup>

While it could be argued that, on this occasion, Caravaggio was persuaded by his learned patron to emulate Leonardo's painting or its description in Vasari, other examples of Caravaggio's apparent interest in Vasari's descriptions predate his contact with Cardinal Del Monte. In his *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* [Fig. 3], Caravaggio competes with a famous woman artist from

4. Caravaggio, «Head of Medusa», c. 1597–1598, Florence, Uffizi. Photo: Alinari / Art Resource, NY

his native region, or at least he takes his inspiration from her – Sofonisba Anguissola of Cremona. Roberto Longhi was the first to connect Caravaggio's subject to its precedent in a drawing by Sofonisba of a boy pinched by a crayfish (c. 1557–1558,

Naples, Museo di Capodimonte), noting that Caravaggio was clearly attracted to the drawing's subject as well as its attention to the physiological reaction of the boy.<sup>52</sup> It is unlikely that Caravaggio could personally have known this drawing, which was also then in Florence in the Medici collection.<sup>53</sup> The drawing had been sent by Sofonisba to Michelangelo, in response to a challenge. She had sent him a picture of a laughing girl, and he praised it, but also replied that depicting a crying boy would be more difficult. So Sofonisba sent him this second drawing, which Vasari describes as "a little girl laughing at a boy who cries, because, she having placed a basket full of crayfish in front of him, one of them bites his finger; and there is nothing more graceful to be seen than that drawing, nor more true to nature".<sup>54</sup> Caravaggio rises to the challenge, in this case adding the element of surprise: a lizard unexpectedly emerges from a basket of flowers to bite the boy's finger. The boy's expression of shock and dismay again owes something to Lomazzo's physiognomic descriptions, based on Leonardo. And again Caravaggio includes – as if in insistently pointed reference to Leonardo and his skill at rendering nature – a vase full of water, and flowers with drops of dew.

In the past thirty years or so, analyses of this painting have focussed, sometimes obsessively, on its apparent eroticism. Donald Posner believed that the youth's off-the-shoulder shirt and facial expression (which, as he put it, "suggests a womanish whimper") were signs of Caravaggio's supposed sexual interest in young men and boys, and that the painting was meant at least in part to seduce or please Caravaggio's similarly-inclined patrons. For Posner the ultimate meaning of the painting is that "beauty sometimes conceals a cold heart, and that the young lover will find this a painful discovery".<sup>55</sup> While Posner explored the cold-hearted nature of lizards as expounded in sixteenth-century emblem books, John Moffitt has more recently attempted to explain the painting through the symbolism of salamanders – not lizards – as love emblems.<sup>56</sup> His interpretation too relies upon an acceptance of Caravaggio's homosexuality, and that of Cardinal Del Monte, even though Creighton Gilbert has reminded us that there is considerable room for doubt about the homosexual tendencies of either artist or patron.<sup>57</sup> This is not to say that interpretations such as these are not also possible, but it seems to me that Vasari's description, which includes the element of pain – and the detail of the bitten finger – may well have acted as the initial springboard for Caravaggio's imagination. Vasari concludes with a reference to the truth to nature of Sofonisba's drawing, a common thread in the descriptive passages that seem most to have appealed to the young Caravaggio. If we posit Caravaggio's knowledge of Vasari's description, we need not assume that Caravaggio had at this early stage already selected, or begun working for, the patrons he would later attract. Moffitt, for one, is forced to assign the painting a fairly late date, because he believes it was

painted for Cardinal Del Monte and reflects the patron's sexual interests.<sup>58</sup> As Richard Spear perceptively commented, we must "bear in mind the earliest information known about it, Mancini's report of about 1620, that young Caravaggio simply painted the picture *per vendere*, to sell on the open market (which he did, cheaply), and therefore without any patron in mind".<sup>59</sup>

Caravaggio attracted the attention of his first important patron – Cardinal Del Monte – when he painted two amusing pictures of people being cheated: the *Cardsharps* (c. 1595, Fort Worth, Kimbell Museum of Art) and the *Gypsy Fortune-teller* (c. 1595, Rome, Capitoline Museum; Fig. 5). For the *Cardsharps*, or at least for pictures of people playing cards, there are precedents in Northern Italian and Flemish painting.<sup>60</sup> Again, scholars like to point to Caravaggio's importation of fresh new naturalistic ideas from the North into Rome. But they run into some problems with the gypsy.<sup>61</sup> Barry Wind first noted a connection between the characters in these paintings and those in the *Commedia dell'arte*, a connection developed further by Mina Gregori.<sup>62</sup> Helen Langdon has recently argued that, with these canvases, Caravaggio was hoping to attract the attention of this very patron: Cardinal Del Monte was both a gambler and an avid patron of the theatre.<sup>63</sup> None of these authors can, however, identify any previous painting of a gypsy fortuneteller, though there had been other paintings that may have shown gypsies: such as Giorgione's *Tempest* (c. 1505–1510, Venice, Accademia), described by the Venetian diarist Marcantonio Michiel as "the little landscape on canvas with the storm with the gypsy and soldier".<sup>64</sup> Howard Hibbard flatly stated that "no artist before Caravaggio had painted a Gypsy fortuneteller as an exclusive subject".<sup>65</sup> This may be too bold an assertion; it is possible that several such paintings did exist, but have disappeared over time. It is, however, true that we know of none still surviving. But again we can find at least one precedent in Vasari's *Lives*, a painting, like Caravaggio's, consisting solely of two figures: "Agnolo, the brother of the Florentine painter Franciabigio, painted for the perfumer Ciano, a capricious man, respected by his kind, a shop sign, showing a gypsy woman who with much grace tells the fortune of a woman: this invention of Ciano's was not without mystic meaning".<sup>66</sup> Presumably, even if Caravaggio had been to Florence (and we have no evidence he had been there), this shop sign was long gone, but the tantalizing description remains in Vasari, where it must have caught his attention. This provides some indication of how closely and attentively he must have read the *Lives* – Agnolo the brother of Franciabigio can hardly be considered an exemplar of the same caliber as Leonardo, nor one as worthy of rivalry, but the subject matter he painted was nonetheless novel and attractive to Caravaggio. Bellori considered Caravaggio's painting a sort of manifesto of his claim to be devoted to nature alone as a model, and perhaps an indication of just how low he might stoop to imitate nature:

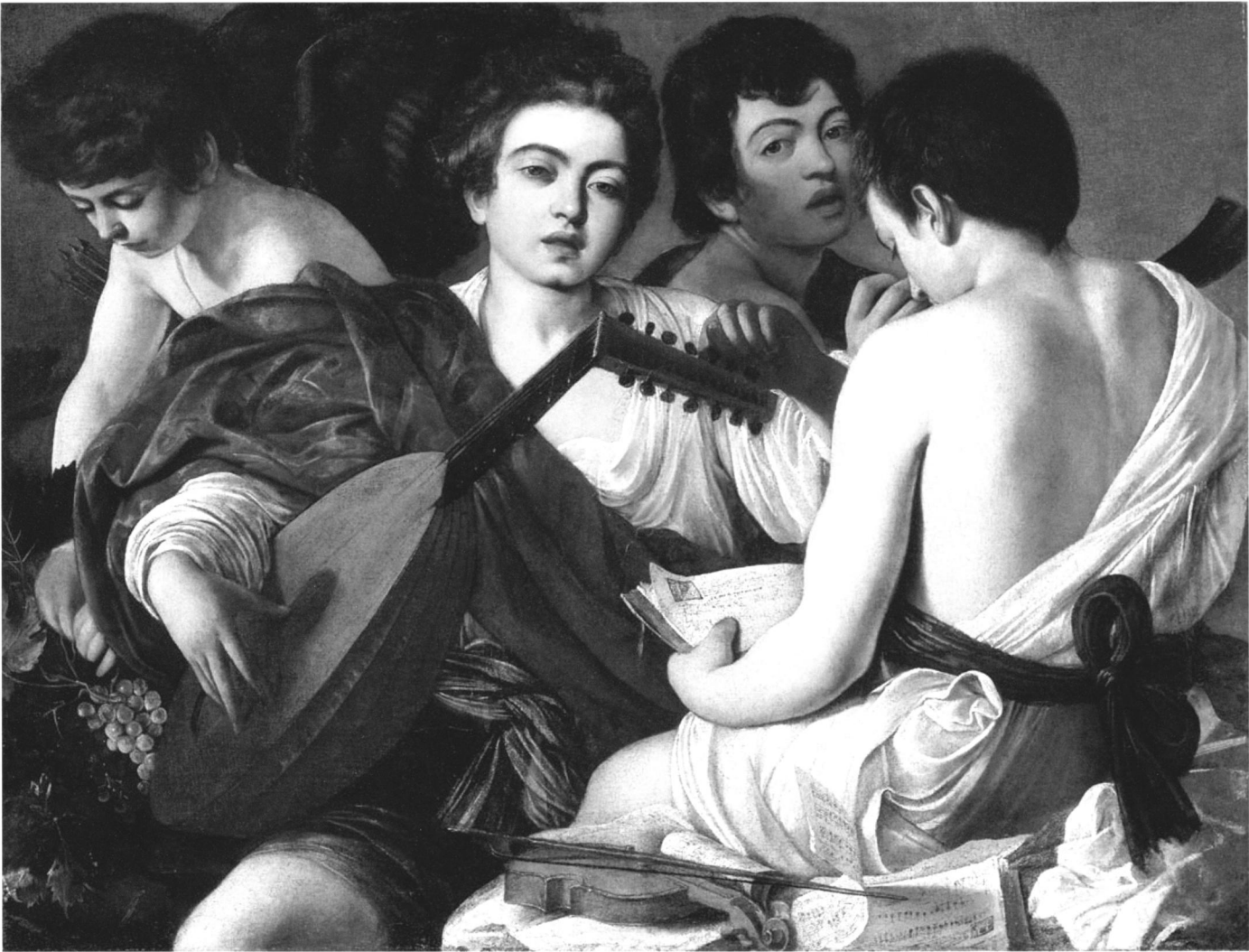


5. Caravaggio, «Gypsy Fortuneteller», c. 1595, Rome, Musei Capitolini, Pinacoteca Capitolina. Photo: Scala / Art Resource, NY

[W]hen he was shown the most famous statues of Phidias and Glykon in order that he might use them as models, his only answer was to point to a crowd of people, saying that nature had given him an abundance of masters. And to give authority to his words, he called a Gypsy who happened to pass by in the street and, taking her to his lodgings, he portrayed her in the act of predicting the future.<sup>67</sup>

In 1595, Caravaggio moved into the household of the Cardinal, who had purchased the *Cardsharps* and a version of the *Fortuneteller* from the dealer Costantino Spata.<sup>68</sup> The first

painting Caravaggio made while in Del Monte's employ was the canvas of *The Musicians* (c. 1595–1596, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art; Fig. 6). The subject is clearly related to his patron's love of music: Del Monte's posthumous household inventory reports that one room contained thirty-seven musical instruments, and he also owned other paintings of musical subjects.<sup>69</sup> Helen Langdon describes the composition as "rooted in Venetian art, in the concert pictures of Giorgione and Titian, and yet [...] disconcertingly novel".<sup>70</sup> The painting shows musicians in loose-fitting shirts, preparing for a concert. The lute-player tunes his instrument; the singer looks at his part in a musical



6. Caravaggio, «The Musicians», c. 1595–1596, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY

text; the cornetto player (probably a self-portrait) turns to look at the viewer. A winged Cupid, not noticed by the other three figures, plucks a grape. Again, Caravaggio appears to have been responding to the description of a painting in Vasari's *Lives*. Vasari writes that, in the Library of St. Mark in Venice, Paolo Veronese painted a prize-winning allegory of *Music* [Fig. 7], showing

three very beautiful young women, one of whom, who is the most beautiful, is playing a double bass, looking down at the fingerboard of the instrument, staying with her ear and the atti-

tude of her person and voice most attentive to the sound; and of the other two, one plays a lute, and the other sings from a book. Near the women is a Cupid without wings who is playing a harpsichord, demonstrating that Love is born from Music, or that Love is always in company with Music.<sup>71</sup>

One might object that Caravaggio had not necessarily read this description, but instead had seen the painting on an undocumented visit to Venice, or had heard it described by someone, perhaps Del Monte himself, who came from Venice. Veronese, however, presents his subject matter in a classicizing



7.

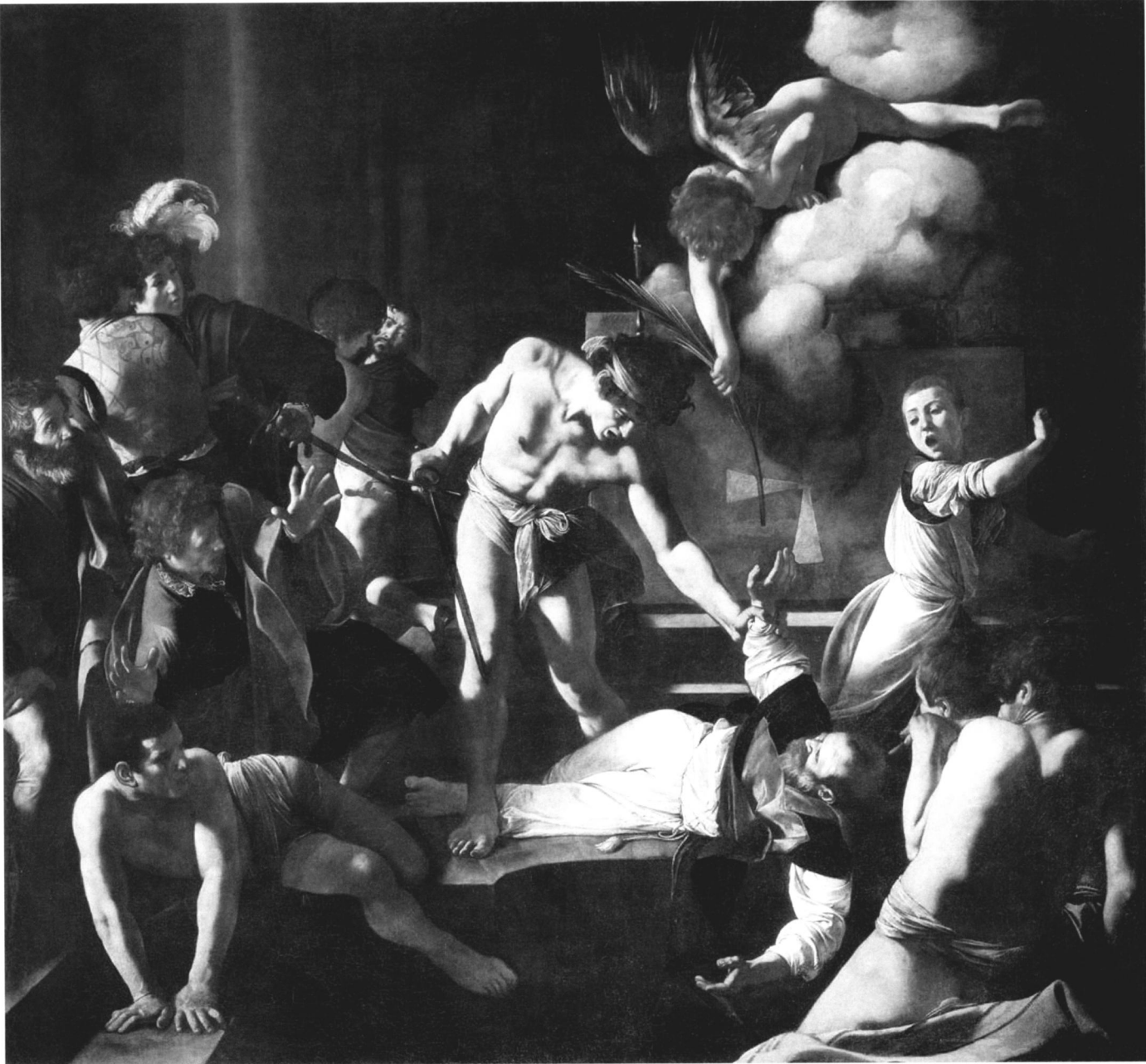
Renaissance style: the female figures are highly idealized, as would be expected of allegories; Cupid is seen from the back; classical statuary looms above; and the entire arrangement is shown *di sotto in sù*. Caravaggio's composition is much closer to Vasari's descriptive passage than to Veronese's actual painting. As Creighton Gilbert has observed, the novelty of Caravaggio's picture lies in its expression of allegory in the form of modern (and therefore male) presenters, transforming the noble into the real.<sup>72</sup>

Caravaggio's whole *modus operandi* as a painter – his apparent refusal to make drawings – may also owe something to Vasari. Vasari was a constant promoter of drawing, and he frequently criticized artists outside central Italy for their failure to learn to draw correctly. Artists thus abused include Albrecht Dürer, Titian, and Giorgione.<sup>73</sup> We know that all these artists drew, because drawings by their hands survive, but Vasari actually claims that Giorgione did not draw at all:

7. Paolo Veronese, «Music», 1556–1557, Venice, Libreria Sansoviniana (di San Marco). Photo: Cameraphoto Arte, Venice / Art Resource, NY

8. Caravaggio, «Martyrdom of St. Matthew», 1600, Rome, S. Luigi dei Francesi, Contarelli Chapel. Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY

He began to give to his works more softness and greater relief with a beautiful manner; nevertheless he used to set himself before living and natural things and counterfeit them as well as he knew how with colours, and spatter them with tints crude or soft according to what real life showed, without doing any drawing, holding it as certain that to paint only with colours themselves, without any other study of drawing on paper, was the true and best method of working, and the true *disegno*.<sup>74</sup>



8.

All the early sources insist that, likewise, Caravaggio did not make preparatory drawings, and that this really was revolutionary.<sup>75</sup> We know of no surviving drawings by him, despite his training in the workshop of Peterzano, who made drawings and taught his pupils to do so.<sup>76</sup> Detailed technical studies of Caravaggio's paintings have shown that Caravaggio frequently

incised lines freehand into the wet ground, and Keith Christiansen has argued that this is an indication that he was working from the model directly onto the support, just as Giorgione was said to do.<sup>77</sup> It seems likely that Caravaggio must, like other artists, have made some preparatory drawings, particularly for his later, complex religious paintings.<sup>78</sup> But if this is the case, they have

subsequently been destroyed, and they seem to have been unknown even to his contemporaries, suggesting that he chose to suppress any drawings he made. One is reminded of how, according to Vasari, Michelangelo destroyed his own drawings so that nobody would know how hard he had had to work.<sup>79</sup>

One painting that does contain evidence of Caravaggio's having tried to work things out directly on the support, with limited success, is the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* in the Contarelli Chapel, in San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome [Fig. 8]. The narrative paintings in this chapel, completed in 1600, are Caravaggio's first attempts at large-scale, multi-figure compositions. X-rays have revealed his initial attempt to paint smaller figures in the foreground of the *Martyrdom*, in front of a grand architectural backdrop. Eventually he painted over top of it a new composition, with larger figures.<sup>80</sup> In designing the final version of this complex composition, Caravaggio turned to the work of earlier masters for aid. The figures of the reclining St. Matthew and the young acolyte running away at the right closely resemble figures in Titian's renowned altarpiece, then in SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Venice, of the *Martyrdom of St. Peter Martyr*, which had been reproduced in engravings.<sup>81</sup> The nude executioner seems to derive from the work of an artist in whom Caravaggio had as yet shown little interest: Raphael. His pose is very close to that of one of the nude soldiers in the *Massacre of the Innocents*, a collaborative work by Raphael and the engraver Marcantonio Raimondi.<sup>82</sup> Richard Spear has also argued that, when Caravaggio here made the transition from genre to religious narratives, he relied on the example of Raphael's *Transfiguration* (1521, Vatican, Pinacoteca), which showed how chiaroscuro can be used to give relief to the figures while also unifying the composition.<sup>83</sup>

In 1602, Caravaggio was called back to the chapel to paint an altarpiece of the evangelist St. Matthew. The altarpiece now in the chapel is the second version he painted. The first version (destroyed by fire in Berlin in 1945; Fig. 9) was rejected; the early sources complain that "it pleased no one", and that it lacked decorum, showing St. Matthew as being vulgar and coarse, with his legs crossed and his feet sticking out.<sup>84</sup> He seems to be looking with astonishment at the text that miraculously appears before him, whose import he struggles to understand. His clumsy hands may hold the pen, but it is the angel who guides it – as if Matthew himself were functionally illiterate.

This first version of the altarpiece has inspired a tremendous amount of commentary in the past forty years. The passage that Matthew is writing can be clearly seen in photographs of the painting; it is written in Hebrew. In 1974, Irving Lavin pointed out that the text Matthew so painstakingly transcribes is based on Sebastian Münster's Protestant version of the gospel (the 1582 reprint, precisely, which has the same typography). But, Lavin says (failing to mention any scholarly adviser), Caravaggio corrects Münster's Hebrew grammar, making his transcription

closer to the version in the sanctioned Catholic text, the Latin Vulgate.<sup>85</sup> Lavin discusses the cross-legged pose that irritated the earlier commentators, pointing out that it was not unusual in depictions of the evangelists writing. For example, he cites an engraving by Agostino Veneziano, after Raphael, of St. Matthew himself, with crossed legs and bare feet.<sup>86</sup> He adds that, unlike the general pose, the coarseness of Matthew's physical type is not usual. Some scholars think it deliberately evokes the values of simplicity and humility that were promoted by contemporary theologians such as Filippo Neri.<sup>87</sup> Troy Thomas proposes that Matthew's physiognomy reflects Caravaggio's knowledge of the tradition of the lower-class origins of the Apostles; he cites St. John Chrysostom, who described the Apostles as humble people divinely inspired by God: "for how else could the publican, and the fisherman, and the unlearned, have attained to such philosophy?"<sup>88</sup> Lavin on the other hand, like Friedländer, connects Matthew's appearance to ancient depictions of Socrates, who was famously bald and ugly – a likeness that had been revived by Raphael in the *School of Athens*.<sup>89</sup> Lavin goes perhaps a bit too far when he suggests that Caravaggio must have known a text by the early Greek Christian apologist Theodoretus of Cyrrhus: *On the Maladies of the Ancient Philosophers*. This author asserts that Hellenophiles should not reject the Gospel as coming from an uncultivated source, when after all Socrates was the illiterate son of a stonecutter.<sup>90</sup>

Herwarth Röttgen seems to have been the first to note the general resemblance of Matthew to the figure of Pythagoras in Raphael's *School of Athens*. This group of figures had also been reproduced, as he notes, in an engraving [Fig. 10].<sup>91</sup> The engraver, Agostino Veneziano, turned them into *The Four Evangelists*, perhaps to make the print more marketable. Vasari knew this engraving; it was, as Bellori had realized in 1695, the chief reason he got confused when he described the *School of Athens* as a fresco in which ancient philosophy and astrology are reconciled with theology.<sup>92</sup> Vasari describes the grouping of these figures as follows:

Nor can one express the beauty and the goodness that one sees in the heads and figures of the Evangelists, to whose faces he gave a certain attention and precision very true to life, and especially to those who are writing. Thus, behind St. Matthew, who is copying the characters from the tablet wherein are the figures, held before him by an angel, and writing them down in a book, he painted an old man who, having placed a piece of paper on his knee, is copying all that St. Matthew writes down, and while he remains intent on his work in that uncomfortable position, it seems that he twists his jaws and his head according to the movements of the pen.<sup>93</sup>

Röttgen commented that Caravaggio had taken from Agostino's print only the rustic head of the saint and the configuration



9. Caravaggio, «St. Matthew», 1602, destroyed in World War II (formerly Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Gemäldegalerie). Photo: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY





10. Agostino Veneziano, after Raphael, «The Four Evangelists», 1524, London, British Museum.  
Photo: © Trustees of the British Museum



11. Annibale Carracci, «The Butchers' Shop», c. 1582, Oxford, Christ Church Picture Gallery. Photo: By permission of the Governing Body of Christ Church, Oxford

of his hand writing in the book. Vasari's description is in many ways more evocative of some of the elements that scholars have found so troubling in Caravaggio's first version of the altarpiece. Matthew is intent on what he writes. He is not really writing the text all by himself, but with considerable help from an angel. He is writing in a book propped on his knee, in an awkward and uncomfortable position, and we can almost see him twisting his jaw and head with the sheer effort of writing – as if he were not particularly used to the activity.

Caravaggio is almost always described as a revolutionary innovator – which in many ways he is. But when his work is considered more carefully, the attentive viewer also becomes

aware of the depth of his debt to an earlier tradition – one that is as much literary as it is visual. In addition to well-known ancient texts, he appears to have been inspired – or challenged – to paint what he did by his reading of Vasari's *Lives*.

Another question remains: did other artists read Vasari? We know that they did. Some surviving copies of the *Lives* contain marginal notations by other artists – for example, a copy at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, with annotations by Federico Zuccaro. Another copy in Bologna's Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio has copious marginal notes written by Agostino, Annibale and Ludovico Carracci. Many of their comments are outraged outbursts against Vasari's tendency to privilege Florence and Rome as centres of art.<sup>94</sup>

The Carracci were, like Caravaggio, also committed to a return to naturalism in painting at the beginning of their careers. In 1582, the brothers Agostino and Annibale, with their cousin Ludovico, established an academy of art in Bologna, intending



12. Giorgio Vasari, «Self-Portrait», c. 1570, Florence, Uffizi. Photo: Scala / Art Resource, NY

to rival the Accademia del Disegno in Florence and to provide an alternative to the prevailing style of art in Tuscany and Rome. As with Caravaggio, their contemporaries found the naturalism of their early paintings lacking in imagination and art, and too reliant on the copying of the live model.<sup>95</sup> One of the annotations in their copy of the *Lives* reveals the Carraccis' commitment to the study of nature, and the fact that they found it lacking in Vasari, for it complains that "[t]he ignorant Vasari is not aware that the ancient good masters took their things from the life, and he would have it instead to be better to copy secondary sources in the antique rather than the primary and principal things in life; but he does not understand this art".<sup>96</sup>

Annibale's painting from around 1582 of the *Butchers' Shop* (Oxford, Christ Church Picture Gallery; Fig. 11), has solicited many interpretations, but still among the most pervasive is that it represents, in the guise of the butchers, Ludovico Carracci (whose father actually was a butcher) and his cousins Agostino and Annibale.<sup>97</sup> The association of the family of painters with a genre scene of butchers may also reflect a sort of artistic motto: in his account of Annibale's life, the Bolognese writer Malvasia reported that the Carracci described their painting as "assolutamente [...] da viva carne", a term that simultaneously means "red meat" and "living flesh".<sup>98</sup> Charles Dempsey has pointed out that all the figures in the painting are in relaxed, natural poses, except for the halberdier on the left, who strains to reach his purse. He contorts himself into the stylish elegant pose favoured by so-called Mannerist artists, the *figura serpentinata*<sup>99</sup>, and he is wearing a costume that by this time was long out of date. Dempsey concluded that he is probably intended as a parody of the excesses of old-style Mannerist painting.<sup>100</sup> I would go even further, and suggest that the figure is a deliberate parody of Vasari – whom he closely resembles. The same long face, long nose with slightly flared nostrils, V-shaped fold above the nose, arched eyebrows, slightly receding hair and full beard can be seen in Vasari's self-portrait of c. 1570 (Florence, Uffizi; Fig. 12). Annibale may have been



13. Bartolomeo Passarotti, «Portrait of Giorgio Vasari», Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Kupferstichkabinett. Photo: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY

familiar with Vasari's likeness from a source such as a pen-and-ink drawing by an artist in the circle of Agostino Carracci's teacher, Bartolomeo Passarotti (Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett; Fig. 13).<sup>101</sup>

In the *Lives*, Vasari repeatedly insists that art was revived from near death only when artists referred back to nature as

a guide. But, as we have seen, he also states that artists need to select from nature what is most beautiful, forging a combination of many beautiful things to achieve an ideal one. Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo are particularly praised for their ability to selectively imitate the most beautiful aspects of nature. The composition of the *Butchers' Shop* is, interestingly, partly based on prototypes by both Michelangelo and Raphael<sup>102</sup>, but it is also completely redone from nature, unidealized, and replete with the mess and gore of the real world. *This*, Annibale seems to be saying, is what nature *really* looks like – while everything that Vasari stands for bears no resemblance to it.

Like the young Annibale Carracci, Caravaggio rejects the polished idealization he found in the paintings of the High Renaissance. He responds to passages in Vasari's *Lives* – passages where artists are explicitly praised for their naturalism – and paints all over again the paintings of famous masters such as Leonardo and Raphael. He competes with them, with the intention of surpassing them. This time, he seems to say, let's actually *do it* from nature. This is why his contemporaries, steeped in Renaissance art theory and debates about stylish style, saw him as a painter without theory, and complained that he "imitated art without art".

Previous versions of this paper were presented at the Universities Art Association of Canada Annual Conference, Calgary in 2002, and as a seminar at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland in 2007. I would like to thank, for their comments and advice, Carol Gibson-Wood, John Osborne, Louis Groarke, Brendan Cassidy, and Graham Smith. I am grateful for funding that has supported my research, from the Canada Research Chairs program and the University Council on Research at St. Francis Xavier University. Finally, I have greatly benefitted from many animated discussions, while we travelled together on the Caravaggio trail, with Murray Gibson, Sally Hickson, and Allison Sherman.

- 1 Aside from the learned patrons for whom Caravaggio worked after 1595, he associated with academicians and poets almost from his earliest arrival in Rome, see A. von Lates, "Caravaggio's peaches and academic puns", *Word & Image*, II, 1995, pp. 55–60; E. Cropper, "The Petrifying Art: Marino's Poetry and Caravaggio", *Metropolitan Museum of Art Journal*, XXVI, 1991, pp. 193–212; and H. Langdon, *Caravaggio: A Life*, London, 1999, pp. 58–68.
- 2 G. P. Bellori, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori e architetti moderni*, Rome, 1672; his Life of Caravaggio is conveniently excerpted and translated in H. Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, New York, 1983, pp. 360–374. Quotations from p. 371: "non erano in lui né invenzione né decoro né disegno né scienza alcuna della pittura mentre tolto da gli occhi suoi il modello restavano vacui la mano e l'ingegno"; p. 361: "pare che senz'arte emulasse arte".
- 3 V. Carducho, *Diálogos de la pintura*, Madrid, 1633. Translation from *Italian and Spanish Art 1600–1750: Sources and Documents*, ed. by R. Enggass and J. Brown, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1970, pp. 173–174.
- 4 R. de Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes*, Paris, 1708, pp. 489 ff. The vagaries of Caravaggio's reception are discussed in R. Spear, "The Critical Fortune of a Realist Painter", in *The Age of Caravaggio*, exh. cat. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1985, pp. 22–27.
- 5 R. Longhi, *Mostra del Caravaggio e dei Caravaggisti*, exh. cat. Palazzo Reale, Milan, 1951, Florence, 1951.

- 6 W. Friedländer, *Caravaggio Studies*, Princeton, 1955.
- 7 The connections made between Caravaggio and these authors will be discussed in more detail below.
- 8 M. Marini and S. Corradini, "Inventarium omnium et singulorum bonorum mobilium di Michelangelo da Caravaggio 'pittore'", *Artibus et Historiae*, no. 28, 1993, p. 162: "Item un'altra cassa con dodici libri dentro".
- 9 Langdon, p. 21, notes that Caravaggio's family had been associated with a noble household, and that thus he likely would have gone to grammar school at least briefly, gaining reasonable knowledge of classical and Italian vernacular literature. There exists also an autograph receipt by Caravaggio, so we know he could write as well; see R. Barbiellini Amidei, "Della committenza Massimo", in *Caravaggio: Nuove Riflessioni (Quaderni di Palazzo Venezia, VI, 1989)*, p. 47.
- 10 The most useful edition of Vasari, as it contains both the 1550 and 1568 editions, is G. Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori nelle redazione del 1550 e 1568*, 6 vols., ed. by R. Bettarini and P. Barocchi, Florence, 1966–1987. All references will be to this edition, and all translations from it are my own. The quotations appear in both editions, unless otherwise stated. For the genesis and historical project of Vasari's *Lives*, see P. Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and History*, New Haven and London, 1995.
- 11 We know little about the print runs of sixteenth-century books, and as yet no documents have been found to clarify exactly how many copies of Vasari's *Lives* were printed, but its impact was considerable. Within the century or so following the publication of the *Lives*, similar biographical histories of art appeared in Italy, such as: Giovanni Baglione, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori, et architetti...*, Rome, 1642; Bellori's *Vite*; Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice. Vite de' pittori bolognese*, Bologna, 1678; and Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie de' professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua*, Florence, 1681–1728. Such works also appeared in other countries: including Karel van Mander, *Het Schilderboeck*, Haarlem, 1604, and Joachim von Sandrart, *Teutsche Academie*, Nuremberg 1675–1679.

- 12 Preface to Part One, Vasari, vol. II, p. 11: "il principio di questi arte stata l'istessa natura e l'innanzi o modello la bellissima fabrica del mondo".
- 13 Preface to Part Two, Vasari, vol. III, pp. 18–19: "così cercaron far quel che vedevono nel naturale e non più; e così vennon ad esser più considerate e meglio intese le cose loro, e questo diede loro ardimento di metter regola alle prospettive e farla scortar appunto, come facevono di rilievo, naturali e in proprio forma".
- 14 Preface to Part Three, Vasari, vol. IV, p. 3: "Veramente grande aumento fecero alle arti [...] quelli eccellenti maestri che noi abbiamo descritti sin qui nella Seconda Parte di queste Vite, aggiugnendo alle cose de' primi regola, ordine, misura, disegno, e maniera", and p. 6: "quel certo che, che ci mancava, non lo potevano mettere così presto in atto, avengaché lo studio insecchisce la maniera".
- 15 Preface to Part Three, Vasari, vol. IV, p. 4: "Il disegno fu lo imitare il più bello della natura in tutte le figure, così scolpite come dipinte, la qual parte viene dallo aver la mano e l'ingegno che rapporti tutto quello che vede l'occhio in sul piano [...]. La maniera venne poi la più bella dall'aver messo in uso il frequente ritrarre le cose più belle; e dal quel più bello, o mani o teste o corpi o gambe, aggiugnerle insieme; e far una figura di tutte quelle bellezze che più si poteva, e metterla in uso in ogni opera per tutte le figure".
- 16 For the popularity of the story of Zeuxis in the Renaissance, see D. Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, Princeton, 1981, pp. 186–199. The story is mentioned in several ancient sources including Pliny, *Natural History*, XXXV, 64.
- 17 Preface to Part One, Vasari, vol. II, p. 12: "[...] l'arte nostra è tutta imitazione della natura principalmente e poi, per chi da sé non può salir tanto alto, delle cose che da quelli che miglior' maestri di sé giudica sono condotte".
- 18 G. Baglione, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori, et architetti...*, Rome, 1642, pp. 136–139; excerpted and translated in Hibbard, pp. 352–356, quotation from p. 356: "egli nel rappresentar le cose non avesse molto giudizio di sciegliere il buono, e lasciare il cattivo". For Caravaggio's own polemical devotion to the direct imitation of nature, particularly in his early works, see J. Varriano, *Caravaggio: The Art of Realism*, University Park, PA, 2006, pp. 53–60.
- 19 On epideictic as a model for Vasari, and the exemplary nature of his biographies, see C. Goldstein, "Rhetoric and Art History in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque", *Art Bulletin*, LXXIII, 1991, pp. 641–652; and Rubin, pp. 148–186.
- 20 Lomazzo also wrote a shorter but more complex treatise, the *Idea del tempio della pittura*, Milan, 1590. Mina Gregori emphasized Lomazzo's importance for Caravaggio in *The Age of Caravaggio*, pp. 36–39. One indication that Lomazzo read Vasari was pointed out by Richard Spear, "Leonardo, Raphael and Caravaggio", in *Light on the Eternal City* (Papers in Art History from the Pennsylvania State University, II), 1987, reprinted in *From Caravaggio to Artemisia: Essays on Painting in Seventeenth-Century Italy and France*, London 2002, p. 139: Vasari praised Leonardo for contributing to painting a certain darkness which enabled him to give vigour and relief to figures, and Lomazzo later praised Leonardo (and Raphael, Gaudenzio Ferrari and Cesare da Cesto) for using a dominant light and deep shadows to give force and liveliness to paintings.
- 21 J. B. Lynch, Jr., "Lomazzo and the Accademia della Valle di Bregno", *Art Bulletin*, XLVIII, 1966, pp. 210–211. Poems praising Peterzano's paintings were published in Lomazzo's *Rime*, Milan, 1587.
- 22 See von Lates, pp. 55–60, especially n. 8.
- 23 Peterzano may himself have had a reputation as a fairly learned artist: he was referred to in a contract of 1580 as "pictor non ineruditus", for which see Friedländer, p. 35.
- 24 Pointed out by Marcia Hall, *After Raphael*, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 194, 280. G. P. Lomazzo, *Scritti sulle arti*, 2 vols., ed. R. P. Ciardi. Florence, 1973–1975, vol. I, p. 101. Leonardo's comment is in Lomazzo's *Libro de Sogni*, which Ciardi dates to 1563.
- 25 The early sources for Caravaggio's life include biographies by the physician Giulio Mancini (*Considerazioni sulla pittura*, manuscript of c. 1617–1621), Giovanni Baglione, and Giovanni Pietro Bellori. The relevant excerpts, translated into English, can be found in Hibbard's Appendix II, pp. 343–387.
- 26 Bellori in Hibbard, p. 361.
- 27 The early sources provide some confusing and contradictory information about Caravaggio's early period in Rome. According to the reconstruction of this period in the recent biography by Langdon, Caravaggio was in Pucci's household in 1592. After leaving Pucci, he lived on his own and then in the studio of one Lorenzo Siciliano, a painter, for whom Caravaggio painted heads. Later, he worked in the studio of Antiveduto Grammatica. He joined Giuseppe Cesari's studio probably in the second half of 1593, staying there for about eight months. After leaving Cesari's shop, he stayed with one Asdrubale. Around 1595 he moved to the palazzo of Monsignor Fantin Petrigiani, and then probably later that same year to the house of Cardinal Del Monte.
- 28 For example, Roberto Longhi, in article published in *Pinacoteca*, V–VI (1929), reprinted in Longhi, *Me pinxit e Quesiti Caravaggeschi 1928–1934*, Edizione delle Opere Complete di Roberto Longhi, vol. IV, Florence, 1968, who sees these early paintings as examples of direct naturalism, modelled after genre paintings by Lombard artists such as the members of the Campi family who worked in Milan and Cremona. Friedländer, pp. 79–87, discusses the market for genre pictures in Rome and Caravaggio's precedents in Northern art. B. Wind, "Genre as Season: Dosso, Campi, Caravaggio", *Arte lombarda*, XLII/XLIII, 1975, pp. 71–72, compares Caravaggio's *Boy with Basket of Fruit* to genre paintings by Dosso and Campi evoking the season of Autumn. Hibbard, too, pp. 15–23, presents Caravaggio in these early years as a genre painter out of his depth in papal Rome, pursuing a local market for genre scenes and pagan subjects.
- 29 J. Shearman, *Only Connect...: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance*, Princeton, 1992, pp. 233–238. As Shearman remarks, p. 232, imitation of this kind requires "a sufficiently recognizable reference and a sufficiently cultured spectator who knows how to read it".
- 30 For the debates about the *questione della lingua*, see E. Battisti, "Il concetto d'imitazione nel Cinquecento. I: Da Raffaello a Michelangelo; II: Dai Veneziani a Caravaggio", *Commentari*, VII, 1956, pp. 86–104, 249–262; and I. D. Rowland, *The Culture of the High Renaissance: Ancients and Moderns in Sixteenth-Century Rome*, Cambridge and New York, 1998, pp. 193–215.
- 31 For a brief discussion of the association of Raphael with Petrarch, and Michelangelo with Dante in contemporary thought, see Rubin, pp. 392–393.
- 32 S. Gregory, "The Unsympathetic Exemplar in Vasari's Life of Pontormo", *Renaissance Studies*, XXIII, 2009, pp. 1–32.

- 33 L. B. Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. J. R. Spencer, New Haven and London, 1966 ed., pp. 90–91.
- 34 For the popularization of Lucian's text, and for several paintings inspired by it, see E. Capretti's entry on a version by Franciabigio of the *Calumny* (c. 1513–1515, Florence, Galleria Palatina) in *Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and the Renaissance in Florence*, ed. by D. Franklin, exh. cat. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 2005, pp. 162–163.
- 35 Philostratus, *Imagines*, I.6. Carlo Ridolfi first noted the connection between Titian's *Worship of Venus* and Philostratus, in *Le meraviglie dell'arte*, Venice, 1648, ed. D. von Hadeln, Berlin, 1914–1924, vol. I, p. 160.
- 36 In 1982, Lynn Fedele Orr ("Classical Elements in the Painting of Caravaggio", PhD diss., University of California at Santa Barbara, pp. 131–132), proposed that, in his painting of a *Basket of Fruit* (Milan, Ambrosiana), Caravaggio may have been evoking a *xenia*, or painting of foodstuffs intended as a gift. She noted that Philostratus terminates each book of the *Imagines* with a description of a *xenia*. Other scholars have followed, including A. Posèq, "Caravaggio and the Antique", *Artibus et Historiae*, no. 21, 1990, pp. 147–167; J. F. Moffitt, *Caravaggio in Context: Learned Naturalism and Renaissance Humanism*, Jefferson NC and London, 2004, pp. 63–78; and Varriano 2006, p. 26.
- 37 Posèq 1990, p. 149. Pliny, *Natural History* XXXV, 66, translation from H. Rackham, *Pliny, Natural History* IX, London and Cambridge MA, 1952, p. 311. C. Gilbert, *Caravaggio and His Two Cardinals*, p. 250, notes that Lomazzo remarked in 1584 that "everybody knows" the story of Zeuxis's Boy Carrying Grapes. Hibbard, pp. 17–18, also noted that Pliny had described a painting of a boy with a basket of fruit, but then suggested, instead that "more to the point for Caravaggio, perhaps, was a new vogue for still life and genre in sixteenth-century Lombardy".
- 38 F. T. Camiz, "Per prima cosa guarda la lira, per vedere se è dipinta correttamente...": Quadri a soggetto musicale all'epoca di Caravaggio", in *La natura morta al tempo di Caravaggio*, exh. cat. Musei Capitolini, Rome, 1995, p. 75. The passage is from *Philostratus the Younger/the Elder, Imagines; Callistratus, Descriptions*, ed. A. Fairbanks, London, 1969, I.19, pp. 40–45. For the probable identity of the model for the lute player, a castrato in Cardinal Del Monte's household named Pietro Montoya, see Camiz, "Music and Painting in Cardinal Del Monte's Household", *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, XXVI, 1991, pp. 213–227.
- 39 A. Posèq, *Caravaggio and the Antique*, London, 1998, pp. 13–14. Posèq, in his article of 1990 and in this book, has proposed numerous ancient sculptural prototypes for Caravaggio's paintings, some more convincing than others.
- 40 Hibbard, pp. 174–175.
- 41 The subject of the *Victorious Cupid* has been connected to Virgil's *Eclagues* (X, 9): "Love conquers all: let us, too, yield to love", for which see Mina Gregori in *The Age of Caravaggio*, p. 277. Friedländer proposes throughout his book numerous recent predecessors and contemporaries as sources for Caravaggio's paintings, including Dürer, Michelangelo, Raphael, Signorelli, and Titian. He remarks, p. 92, concerning Caravaggio's adaptation of Michelangelo's *Victory in the Victorious Cupid* that it "lends an air of uncompromising travesty to the Platonic implications of Michelangelo's tragic masterpiece". John Varriano 2006, p. 22, suggests that Caravaggio's quotations in the *Cupid* from Michelangelo (and two antique statues owned by Giustiniani) are used "as a counterpoint to the sexually provocative and anti-intellectual tone of the picture itself [...]. [They] help to forestall any accusation that the unidealized frontal nudity of the *ragazzo* violated the prevailing notions of decorum".
- 42 S. Alpers, "Ekphrasis and Aesthetic Attitudes in Vasari's *Lives*", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXIII, 1960, pp. 190–215, first discussed some of these descriptions as rhetorical set-pieces. Rubin, pp. 275–276, has pointed out that Vasari would probably not have recognized the category of *ekphrasis* as such; rather he worked within the Ciceronian western tradition, and wrote according to notions of *descriptio*, *illustratio*, and *effictio*.
- 43 The only surviving painting of a simple still-life that is probably by Caravaggio's hand – though this is frequently contested – is the *Basket of Fruit* (Milan, Ambrosiana, c. 1597–1599), once owned by Cardinal Federico Borromeo.
- 44 Bellori in Hibbard, p. 361: "Dipinse una caraffa di fiori con le trasparenze dell'acqua e del vetro e coi riflessi della finestra d'una camera, sparsi li fiori di freschissime rugiade". Baglione (see Hibbard, p. 352) also describes this carafe of water in which one can distinguish reflections of a window and other objects in the room, and mentions the flowers with fresh dew – but states that the carafe is the one in the *Lute Player*. However, there exists an inventory of paintings in Cardinal Del Monte's collection that includes a "Caraffa del mano del Caravaggio", see C. L. Frommel, "Caravaggios Frühwerk und der Kardinal Francesco Maria del Monte", *Storia dell'arte*, IX–X, 1971, p. 31.
- 45 Moffitt 2004, pp. 143–144, quoting Philostratus, *Imagines*, I.23.
- 46 Life of Leonardo, Vasari, vol. IV, p. 23: "contrafece una caraffa piena d'acqua con alcuni fiori dentro, dove, oltre la meraviglia della vivezza, aveva imitato la rugiada dell'acqua sopra, sì che ella pareva più viva che la vivezza". Hibbard, pp. 61–62 and p. 84, n. 22, was the first to note that Caravaggio's carafe might have been inspired in part by Vasari's description.
- 47 The existence of the painting, which disappeared by the end of the sixteenth century, seems to be confirmed by reports besides Vasari's. There is an account of it in the 1540s' *Il Codice Magliabechiano contenente notizie sopra l'arte degli antichi e quella de' Fiorentini da Cimabue a Michelangelo Buonarroti scritte da Anonimo Fiorentino*, ed. C. Frey, Berlin, 1892, p. 111: "Dipinse [...] una testa di Megera con mirabili et rari aggruppamenti di serpi"; and in Raffaello Borghini, *Il riposo*, Florence, 1584, pp. 369–370 (whose account is almost certainly based on Vasari's). John Varriano notes the existence of some ancient prototypes in "Leonardo's Lost *Medusa* and Other Medici Medusas from the *Tazza Farnese* to Caravaggio", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, CXXX, 1997, pp. 71–80. He argues that Caravaggio may have known Cornelis Cort's engraved *Head of Medusa*, made between 1565–1578, in which Medusa has a vivid grimace (and which he thinks may be based on Leonardo's lost painting).
- 48 Life of Leonardo, Vasari, vol. IV, p. 23: "Vennegli fantasia di dipignere in un quadro a olio una testa d'una Medusa, con una acconciatura in capo con uno aggrupamento di serpe, la più strana e stravagante invenzione che si possa immaginare mai" (1568 ed. only).
- 49 Life of Leonardo, Vasari, vol. IV, p. 21: Leonardo took the shield to a woodturner to make it smooth, then "comincio a pensare quello che vi si potesse dipignere su, che avesse a spaventare chi le venisse contra, rappresentando lo effetto stesso che la testa già di Medusa. Portò dunque Lionardo per questo effetto ad una sua stanza [...] lucertole, ramarrì, grilli, serpe, farfalle, locuste, nottole et altre strane spezie di simili animali, da la moltitudine de' quali variamente adattata insieme

- cavò uno animalaccio molto orribile e spaventoso, il quale avvelenava con l'alito e faceva l'aria di fuoco, e quello fece uscire d'una pietra scura e spezzata, buffando veleno da la gola aperta, fuoco dagl'occhi e fumo del naso sì stranamente ch'e pareva monstuosa et orribile cosa affatto". Friedländer, p. 87, Hibbard, pp. 61–62, and Langdon, p. 121, note Vasari's description of Leonardo's painting. The latter two authors think that Caravaggio (perhaps at the request of his patron, Cardinal Del Monte) may have been deliberately emulating Leonardo's painting itself. This is also the opinion of Z. Wazbinski, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549–1626*, Florence, 1994, I, pp. 96–97. Yet none of these authors seems to think that Caravaggio may have been responding expressly to Vasari's description, as opposed to the actual painting. A. Posèq, "Caravaggio's Medusa Shield", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 113, 1989, p. 172, comes closer to recognising Vasari as a source for Caravaggio, but he thinks Vasari's description of Leonardo's painting was known to Del Monte, who encouraged Caravaggio to attempt to rival it. Posèq seems to conflate the two Leonardo paintings that Vasari describes, as he refers only to a single painting of a "Medusa-like monster". He says that Vasari saw the painting in the collection of the Duke of Milan: this must then refer to the shield with the dragon or *animalaccio*, for Vasari states that the unfinished *Medusa* itself was in the collection of Duke Cosimo.
- 50 C. Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, London, 2000, p. 109. Also, see above, note 49, for Posèq's confusion as to who owned these two paintings.
- 51 As remarked by Mina Gregori, *The Age of Caravaggio*, pp. 37–38. Lomazzo discusses these expressions in *Trattato dell'arte della pittura*, Book 2, Ch. XVI.
- 52 Longhi made the connection in 1929, in an article reprinted in Longhi 1968, p. 124.
- 53 The drawing was given by Michelangelo to Tommaso de' Cavalieri, who in turn gave it to Duke Cosimo, as Vasari notes in the Life of Properzia de' Rossi, Vasari, vol. IV, p. 405 (1568 ed. only). Friedländer, pp. 55–56, thought it possible instead that Caravaggio obtained a copy of the drawing, perhaps from Sofonisba's teacher Bernardino Campi.
- 54 Life of Properzia de' Rossi, Vasari, vol. IV, p. 405: "messer Tommaso Cavaliere [...] mandò al signor Duca Cosimo [...] un'altra carta di mano di Sofonisba, nella quale è una fanciullina che si ride di un putto che piagne, perché, avendogli ella messo inanzi un canestrino pieno di gambari, uno d'esse gli morde un dito: del quale disegno non si può veder cosa più graziosa né più simile al vero" (1568 ed. only).
- 55 D. Posner, "Caravaggio's Homo-Erotic Early Works", *Art Quarterly*, XXXIV, 1971, pp. 304–305.
- 56 Moffitt 2004, pp. 142–156. Moffitt's interpretation also relies on passages from Pliny, Alciati, Pierio Valeriano's *Hieroglyphica*, and an anonymous Tuscan Bestiary. Gilbert, pp. 252–253, first fully described the possible connection to one of Martial's *Epigrams* (14, no. 12): "Oh treacherous boy, spare the lizard/Creeping toward you; it wants to die in your fingers". Martial's epigram extrapolates from a sculpture of an *Apollo Sauroctonos* (lizard killer) by Praxiteles. Hibbard, p. 44, mentioned the epigram, but without explaining the matches between painting and text.
- 57 Gilbert, especially Ch. 12, "Reports on Sexuality". D. Carrier, "The transfiguration of the commonplace: Caravaggio and his interpreters", *Word and Image*, III, 1987, pp. 55–58, also noted the problematic nature of attempting to interpret Caravaggio's paintings as evidence of sexual proclivity.
- 58 Moffitt 2004, p. 147, dates the painting 1595–1597. Posner also implied that the *Boy Bitten By a Lizard* was painted later, as his sequence would place it after paintings known to have been made for Del Monte, such as the *Musicians*. The sequence he suggests, p. 313, is *Boy Peeling Fruit*, *Boy with Basket of Fruit*, *Musicians*, *Lute Player*, *Uffizi Bacchus*, *Boy Bitten by a Lizard*. But Mia Cinotti (*Caravaggio: La vita e l'opera*, Bergamo, 1991), places at least one of the two versions of *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* (the Fondazione Longhi version) earlier, to c. 1595, just before Caravaggio entered Del Monte's household. Mancini (in Hibbard, p. 347) states that, while living with Pucci, Caravaggio "fece per esso [Pucci] alcune copie di devotione che sono in Recananti, e, per vendere, un putto che piagne per esser stato morso da un racano che tiene in mano", indicating that the painting predates Caravaggio's association with Del Monte. Gilbert, pp. 201–207, has effectively refuted the assumption that Cardinal Del Monte was part of a homosexual circle in Rome.
- 59 Spear in *The Age of Caravaggio*, p. 27. For Mancini, see note 58 above.
- 60 For example, two compositions of *Card Players*, dating from c. 1510–1515, were painted by Lucas van Leyden (Salisbury, Wilton House, Collection of the Earl of Pembroke; and Washington, National Gallery of Art). Barry Wind ("Pitture Ridicole: Some Late Cinquecento Comic Genre Paintings", *Storia dell'arte*, XX, 1974, p. 34), proposes as a potential source Hans Sebald Beham's 1512 woodcut of *Gamblers*, which like Caravaggio's *Cardsharps* also includes the two-fingered signaling gesture of one of the protagonists.
- 61 For the activities of gypsies and their reception by other Europeans, see J. Moffitt, "Caravaggio and the Gypsies", *Paragone (Arte)*, LIII, nos. 623–625 (Jan.–March 2002), pp. 129–156, and Moffitt 2004, pp. 41–62.
- 62 Wind 1974, pp. 25–35; Mina Gregori in *The Age of Caravaggio*, pp. 215–220.
- 63 Langdon, pp. 87–88. She notes that Del Monte may have been responsible for the presence of the theatre troupe the *Gelosi* at the 1589 wedding of Ferdinando de' Medici (Del Monte's patron) and Christine of Lorraine. They performed Gigio Artemio Giancarli's 1545 comedy, *The Gypsy*. Mancini (Hibbard, p. 349) reported that Caravaggio's first version of the *Fortune Teller* (Paris, Louvre) sold for the very low price of 8 scudi; thus Del Monte's version was probably a copy, likely that now at the Capitoline Museum in Rome. The Louvre version of the composition probably was owned by the Roman gentleman Alessandro Vittrice, as noted by Mancini (Hibbard, p. 350). Scholars still disagree over which version of the painting Del Monte owned.
- 64 M. Michiel, *Notizie d'opere di disegno*, ed. G. Frizzoni, Bologna 1884, p. 218. For other Renaissance representations of gypsies, see P. Holberton, "Giorgione's *Tempest* or 'little landscape with the storm with the gypsy': more on the gypsy, and a reassessment", *Art History*, XVIII, 1995, pp. 383–404. Langdon, p. 88, notes "Caravaggio's theme was unprecedented in Rome, and has only shadowy forerunners in northern Italian and north European art".
- 65 Hibbard, p. 25.
- 66 Life of Franciabigio, Vasari, vol. IV, p. 514: "Fece il medesimo Agnolo a Ciano profumiero, uomo capriccioso et honorato par suo, in un'insegna di botega, una zingana che dà con molta grazia la ventura a una donna: la quale invenzione di Ciano non fu senza misterio" (1568 ed. only).
- 67 Bellori in Hibbard, p. 362: "essendoli mostrate le statue più famose di Fidia e di Glicone, accioché vi accommodasse lo studio, non diede altra risposta se non che distese la mano verso una moltitudine



- di uomini, accennando che la natura l'aveva a sufficienza provveduto di maestri. E per dare autorità alle sue parole, chiamò una zingara che passava a caso per istrada, e condottola all'albergo la ritrasse in atto di predire l'avventure".
- 68 Baglione (Hibbard, p. 352) says that after he left Cesare's studio, Caravaggio lived in extreme poverty, until he was rescued by a dealer he calls Valentino. S. Corradini and M. Marini, in "The Earliest Account of Caravaggio in Rome", *Burlington Magazine*, CXL, 1998, pp. 25–28, showed that this dealer was Costantino Spata.
- 69 Langdon, pp. 104–109. Also see F. T. Camiz, "La 'Musica' nei quadri del Caravaggio", in *Caravaggio: Nuove Riflessioni (Quaderni di Palazzo Venezia*, VI, 1989), pp. 198–221 and Camiz 1991.
- 70 Langdon, p. 109.
- 71 Life of Michele da Sanmichele, Vasari, vol. V, p. 378: "et il quadro che diede la vittoria et il premio dell'onore fu quello dove è dipinta la Musica, nel quale sono dipinte tre bellissime donne giovani, una delle quali, che è la più bella, suona un gran lirone da gamba, guardando a basso il manico dello strumento, e stando con l'orecchio et attitudine della persona e con la voce attentissima al suono; dell'altre due, una suona un liuto, et l'altra canta a libro. Appresso alle donne è un Cupido senz'ale che suona un gravecembolo, dimostrando che dalla Musica nasce Amore, overo che Amore è sempre in compagnia della Musica" (1568 ed. only).
- 72 Gilbert, pp. 114–121. Gilbert thinks that the Cardinal at least might have known Veronese's painting, which won a gold chain for the best work by a young artist in Sansovino's Library (a fact noted by Vasari). The judges were Sansovino and Titian. Gilbert considers that it may be significant that Titian, Sansovino and Pietro Aretino were the godfathers of Cardinal Del Monte, who was born in Venice in 1549. He wonders, p. 120, if Del Monte may even have owned a copy of the painting. He also notices, pp. 118–119, the Vasari connection, and states that Del Monte or Caravaggio may have gotten the description from Vasari, but on the whole he seems to favour knowledge of the actual painting by artist or patron. Hibbard, pp. 33–34, quoted Vasari's comment "Love is always in the company of music", as an analogous theme, but did not connect Caravaggio's composition more closely to Vasari's description of Veronese's painting. He compares the Veronese to the Caravaggio, stressing the change from female to male figures as part of his argument that the painting has homoerotic overtones.
- 73 Dürer's *disegno* was generally praised by Vasari, except for what he perceived as Dürer's lack of ability in drawing the nude, as in the Life of Marcantonio Raimondi, Vasari, vol. V, p. 4 (1568 ed. only). Vasari has Michelangelo praise Titian in a backhanded way, in the Life of Titian, Vasari, vol. VI, p. 164: "ragianandosi del fare di Tiziano, il Buonarruoto lo comendò assai, dicendo che molto gli piaceva il colorito suo e la maniera, ma che era un peccato che a Vinezia non s'imparasse da principio a disegnare bene" (1568 ed. only).
- 74 Life of Titian, Vasari, vol. VI, p. 155: "Giorgione da Castel Franco [...] cominciò a dare alle sue opere più morbidezza e maggiore rilievo con bella maniera, usando nondimeno di cacciar si avanti le cose vive e naturali, e di contrafarle quanto sapeva il meglio con i colori, e macchiarle con le tinte crude e dolci, secondo che il vivo mostrava, senza far disegno, tenendo per fermo che il dipignere solo con i colori stessi, senz'altro studio di disegnare in carta, fusse il vero e miglior modo di fare et il vero disegno" (1568 ed. only).
- 75 Mancini, Bellori, Baglione, and other early sources all say that he worked "alla prima". For a summary of their remarks, see K. Christiansen, "Caravaggio and 'L'esempio davanti del naturale'", *Art Bulletin*, LXVIII, 1986, pp. 421–422.
- 76 For a discussion of Peterzano's drawings and his workshop practice, see G. Bora, "Da Peterzano a Caravaggio: un'ipotesi sulla pratica disegnativa", *Paragone (Arte)*, LIII, no. 623–625 (Jan.–March 2002), pp. 3–20. He proposes a few drawings from the circle of Peterzano that might hypothetically be attributed to the young Caravaggio. M. Calvesi, "Simone Peterzano: Maestro del Caravaggio", *Bollettino d'Arte*, XXXIX, 1954, pp. 114–133, also showed how Peterzano's workshop practice relied extensively on drawing. For further arguments on the likelihood that Caravaggio did draw, see A. Moir, "Did Caravaggio Draw?", *Art Quarterly*, XXXII, 1969, pp. 354–372. M. Marini, "Disegnato da Caravaggio", *Quadri e Sculture*, VI, no. 29, 1998, pp. 41–44, has attributed to Caravaggio a drawing at the Uffizi that may be a preparatory sketch for the composition of the *Calling of St. Matthew* (1600, S. Luigi dei Francesi, Contarelli Chapel).
- 77 Christiansen, pp. 421–444.
- 78 Varriano 2006, p. 14, has commented that the relative absence of *pentimenti* in most of Caravaggio's multigure compositions suggests that he was not altogether an *alla prima* painter. L. Keith, "Three paintings by Caravaggio", *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, XIX, 1998, pp. 37–44, has noted that the still-life in the London *Supper at Emmaus* contains a brushed underdrawing of some detail. As Keith remarks, p. 44, "The compositional complexity of the picture, the evidence of local brushed underdrawing in the still life, and the economical application of paint suggests a fairly elaborate local preparation (at least on the canvas), and therefore a more flexible attitude toward the use of drawing than might be expected. The composition was clearly carefully laid out prior to painting; there is only one *pentimento* of any consequence [...] and in general the painted forms do not overlap each other and were therefore precisely arranged on the canvas at an early stage of the painting process".
- 79 Life of Michelangelo, Vasari, vol. VI, p. 108: "io so che, innanzi che morissi di poco, abruchio gran numero di disegni, schizzi e cartoni fatti di man sua, acciò nessuno vedessi le fatiche durate da lui et i modi di tentare l'ingegno suo, per non apparire se non perfetto" (1568 ed. only). Moir, pp. 362–363, proposes other possible reasons for the lack of surviving Caravaggio drawings, such as their being discarded during his restless travelling, and his lack of appeal to collectors due to his diminishing critical reputation during the seventeenth century.
- 80 For the evidence of the x-rays, and the various stages of the composition, see Friedländer, pp. 110–114 and 179–180.
- 81 Friedländer, p. 113. Caravaggio may never have seen the painting, but Titian's composition was well-known, thanks in part to reproductive prints, e.g. a 1560 engraving by Martin Rota. The altarpiece (painted c. 1526–1530) was destroyed by fire in 1867. Friedländer notes too that Caravaggio may have based aspects of his design on Girolamo Muziano's painting of the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* in the Mattei chapel in S. Maria in Aracoeli, Rome. Friedländer, p. 112, also suggested that Caravaggio's initial design (which he painted over) relied in part on Raphael's fresco of *The Battle of Ostia*.
- 82 Orr, p. 45, noted the similarities between Caravaggio's central figures in the *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* and those in Marcantonio's *Massacre of the Innocents*. Christiansen, p. 432, thought the compositions of this print as a whole, with its complex movement across and into space, was also important for Caravaggio's initial design. Langdon, p. 174,

- also connects the revised composition to Raphael, but to the *Transfiguration*, from which she thinks the fleeing boy is derived.
- 83 Spear 1987 (reprinted in 2002), pp. 140–141.
- 84 Baglione (Hibbard, p. 353) claimed that it “non era a veruno piacciuto”; and Bellori (Hibbard, p. 365) commented: “avendo egli terminato il quadro di mezzo di San Matteo e postolo su l'altare, fu tolto via da i preti con dire che quella figura non aveva decoro né aspetto di Santo, stando a sedere con le gambe incavalcate e co' piedi rozzamente esposti al popolo”. The painting was then acquired by Vincenzo Giustiniani.
- 85 I. Lavin, “Divine Inspiration in Caravaggio's Two St. Matthews”, *Art Bulletin*, LVI, 1974, p. 66. Hibbard, p. 139, later proposed that Monsignor Melchior Crescenzi might have helped Caravaggio with the Hebrew text.
- 86 Lavin, p. 61. E. Maselli, “Da una cartella romana del Caravaggio”, *Spazio*, II, no. 5, 1951, p. 11, first drew attention to the resemblance to the Agostino Veneziano engraving. Hibbard, pp. 141–142, agreed that this served as a prototype for the composition, and added as another prototype Peterzano's frescoed *St. Matthew* (c. 1578–1582, Milan, Certosa di Garegnano). See also Gilbert, p. 172, for the commonality of the crossed-leg theme, which also appears, for example, in Raphael's *Transfiguration*.
- 87 Friedländer, pp. 97, 123–126, connected Matthew's clumsy appearance to San Filippo Neri's ideas of simplicity. For Caravaggio and Neri generally, see pp. 117–135. For the mixed reception of Friedländer's argument, see J. F. Chorpennig, “Another Look at Caravaggio and Religion”, *Artibus et Historiae*, no. 16, 1987, pp. 149–158.
- 88 Troy Thomas suggested the connection with St. John Chrysostom, in “Expressive Aspects of Caravaggio's First *Inspiration of St. Matthew*”, *Art Bulletin*, LXVII, 1985, p. 640, and also reinforced aspects of Caravaggio's awareness of the importance of the concept of humility, that can be connected to Neri and the Oratorians, pp. 641–652.
- 89 Friedländer, p. 125. Lavin, pp. 72–74, proposes a series of reasons for the relevance of Socrates to Christianity, and proposes that one of Caravaggio's visual sources was an illustration of Socrates guided by a daemon in Achille Bocchi's emblem book *Symbolicarum quaestionum de universo genere quas servio ludebat libri quinque*, 1574 ed.
- 90 Lavin, pp. 74–75. He notes that Fulvio Orsini, who had been a friend of Matthieu Cointrel, made annotations in a manuscript copy of Theodoretus's treatise.
- 91 H. Röttgen, “Caravaggio Probleme”, *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, XX, 1969, p. 154.
- 92 Life of Raphael, Vasari, vol. IV, p. 166: “Raffaello [...] cominciò nella camera della Segnatura una storia quando i teologi accordano la filosofia e l'astrologia con la teologia”. G. P. Bellori, *Descrizione delle immagini dipinte da Raffaello d'Urbino nelle Camere del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano* (Rome, 1695, reprinted: Westmead, Farnborough, 1968), p. 15. Bellori also comments that Vasari's interpretation of the *School of Athens* conflates its subject with that of the *Disputa*. In Agostino's engraving, one figure holds up a tablet inscribed with a passage from the Gospel of Luke. Vasari identified him as St. Matthew.
- 93 Life of Raphael, Vasari, vol. IV, p. 167: “Né si può esprimere la bellezza e la bontà che si vede nelle teste e figure de' Vangelisti, a' quali ha fatto nel viso una certa attenzione et accuratezza molto naturale, e massimamente a quelli che scrivono. E così fece dietro ad un San Matteo, mentre che egli cava di quelle tavole dove sono le figure i caratteri tenuteli da uno Angelo e che le distende in sù un libro, un vecchio che, messosi una carta in sul ginocchio, copia tanto quanto San Matteo distende, e mentre che sta attento in quel disagio, pare che egli torca le mascelle e la testa secondo che egli allarga et allunga la penna”.
- 94 M. Fanti, “Le postille Carraccesche alle ‘Vite’ del Vasari: il testo originale”, *Il Carrobbio*, V, 1979, pp. 148–164; Ch. Dempsey, “The Carracci Postille to Vasari's *Lives*”, *Art Bulletin*, LXVIII, 1986, pp. 72–76.
- 95 See Ch. Dempsey, “The Carracci Reform of Painting”, in *The Age of Correggio and the Carracci*, exh. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1986, pp. 237–254.
- 96 Dempsey, “The Carracci Postille”, p. 76.
- 97 This interpretation seems to have been first recorded in the anonymous guidebook, *London and its Environs Described. Containing an Account of whatever is most remarkable for Grandeur, Elegance, Curiosity, or Use, in the City and in the Country Twenty Miles round it*, London 1761, vol. III, p. 25.
- 98 C. C. Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice. Vite de' pittori bolognesi* (Bologna, 1678), ed. G. Zannotti, Bologna, 1841, p. 357.
- 99 On the *figura serpentinata*, see D. Summers, “Maniera and Movement: The *Figura Serpentinata*”, *Art Quarterly*, XXV, 1972, pp. 269–301.
- 100 Dempsey in *The Age of Caravaggio*, p. 111. Other interpretations of the painting have been offered. For example, it has been proposed by Barry Wind (“Annibale Carracci's ‘Scherzo’: The Christ Church Butchers' Shop”, *Art Bulletin*, LVIII, 1976, pp. 93–96) that the painting is a humorous reference to the licentious excesses of Carnival. Roberto Zapperi believes the painting might have been made for an actual butcher's shop, perhaps that of Vincenzo Carracci, in *Annibale Carracci. Ritratto di artista da giovane*, Turin, 1989, pp. 45–65.
- 101 Scholars are still undecided as to the authorship of the Uffizi portrait, which may be by Vasari or by a follower. I had hoped to be able more definitively to identify Vasari on the basis of what is usually called a hat badge worn by the figure in Annibale's painting. It is in fact not a hat badge, but a quickly-painted obverse of a humanist medal showing a slightly caricatured bearded man in profile, with painted squiggles representing an inscription around its circumference. I am most grateful to Jacqueline Thalmann, Curator of the Christ Church Picture Gallery, for allowing me to examine the detail at close quarters in 2005. At a certain point, many such profile portraits on medals begin to look alike, but it may be worth noting that a medal of Vasari was cast by Leone Leoni some time before Vasari's death in 1574. See G. F. Hill, *Portrait Medals of Italian Artists of the Renaissance*, London, 1912, p. 68 (no. 50).
- 102 Among the sources for the composition were frescoes of the *Sacrifice of Noah* by Michelangelo (1508–1512, Vatican, Sistine Chapel) and Raphael (1518–1519, Vatican Loggia): J. R. Martin, “The Butchers' Shop of the Carracci”, *Art Bulletin*, XLV, 1963, pp. 263–266.