

*Andrew Butterfield: A SOURCE FOR MICHELANGELO'S NATIONAL GALLERY ENTOMBMENT**

Between the antique reliefs in the Camposanto and the works of Nicola and Giovanni Pisano in and on the Baptistery and Duomo, the cathedral complex of Pisa provides the richest *locus* for the study of antique and medieval sculpture in Tuscany.¹ It would not be surprising to discover that Michelangelo spent many hours there drawing after sculpture in the systematic and assiduous fashion with which he is said to have studied the frescoes of Masaccio at the Carmine.² Michelangelo's one-time instructor, Bertoldo, made a battle-relief in imitation of a sarcophagus in the Camposanto and no doubt encouraged the artist as a youth to copy antiquities in Pisa as he had in the Medici gardens.³ Certainly, by the time of Michelangelo's own battle-relief in c. 1492 he had already acquired a greater knowledge of antique figural composition than could have been derived from the sarcophagi preserved in Florence alone. But if Michelangelo indeed copied from sculptures at Pisa as a boy, he definitely continued this practice as a young man. At least two drawings, both of which are dated to the first years of the sixteenth century, reveal his study of sarcophagi at Pisa.⁴ Furthermore, as is well known, the pose of the *David*, 1501-1504, was inspired by Nicola Pisano's *Fortitude* on the Baptistery pulpit⁵, and the Christ Child in the *Bargello Tondo*, c. 1505, was modelled after a putto on the famous *Phaedra* sarcophagus in the Camposanto.⁶

It is the purpose of this note to adduce another instance of Michelangelo's borrowing from the sculptures at Pisa. Hirst⁷ once suggested that the bearer (now identified as St. John) at the viewer's right in the National Gallery London *Entombment*⁸ (Fig. 2) came from a classical sarcophagus. Indeed, its source was the Dioscurus just left of center in the Hunt of Meleager relief⁹ (Figs. 1, 4) in the Camposanto. Although Michelangelo reversed the figure, the resemblance of the Saint to the Hero is unmistakable. Both figures stand with their weight shifted strongly backwards and their shoulders turned to an angle oblique to the picture plane. Furthermore, the Saint's long, bent left leg with extended foot, the position of his right elbow and even the tension



1 Roman Meleager Sarcophagus, detail, printed in reverse. Pisa, Camposanto.



2 Michelangelo, *The Entombment of Christ*. London, National Gallery of Art.

of his neck closely follow the corresponding elements in the relief. The only differences are that Michelangelo lowered the position of the chin, completed the broken arm and clothed the figure. But even the fall of the belt on the back of the bearer St. John seems to have been suggested by the cloth across the Dioscurus's back.

Moreover, we know that on at least one other occasion Michelangelo copied from this sarcophagus. As pointed out by Tolnay and Meller¹⁰, the male at the left in the study of five nude and draped figures in Chantilly (Fig. 3) was derived from the bearded hunter at the left on the Meleager relief. Finally, not only was it common for Michelangelo to reverse his sources, as has been noted by both Gombrich¹¹ and Steinberg¹², we know he did so with studies he made at Pisa. Michelangelo's other extant drawing of a work in Pisa is a study derived from the Hippolytus on the *Phaedra* sarcophagus in the Camposanto.¹³ On this sheet the outline of the figure on the *recto* is traced on the *verso* in order to produce a mirror-image of his pose.¹⁴

Recently, widely different dates have been suggested for Michelangelo's execution of the bearer St. John in the *Entombment*. Gould has hypothesized on the basis of style and technique that most of the painting is from 1506 but that the St. John must date much later, possibly c. 1515-1516.¹⁵ On the other hand, Mancusi-Ungaro¹⁶, Hibbard¹⁷ and, most forcefully, Hirst¹⁸ have argued that the painting is to be identified with a commissioned altarpiece of 1500, work on which Michelangelo abandoned before the end of that year. Although this debate cannot be settled here, it is worth noting that all of Michelangelo's known references to monuments in Pisa appear in works generally dated to the beginning of the first decade of the sixteenth century. Hence, the Pisan source of the St. John is perhaps additional evidence for the earlier of the two dates proposed.

NOTES

*The ideas in this note were first presented in a different form in a paper written under the supervision of Prof. Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt at the Institute of Fine Arts in 1985. I would like to thank Prof. Brandt for her help with that paper. I am also indebted to Sir John Pope-Hennessy for his advice and suggestions.

- ¹ For the antique sculptures in Pisa, see P. Arias, E. Cristiani, E. Gabba, *Camposanto monumentale di Pisa, le antichità*, vol. I, Pisa 1977, and S. Settis (ed.), *Camposanto monumentale di Pisa, le antichità*, vol. II, Modena 1984. On Nicola and Giovanni Pisano, see J. Pope-Hennessy, *Sculpture I*, pp. 2-12, 169-180, with additional bibliography. For some major connections between the antique and medieval sculptures in Pisa see the brilliant article of M. Seidel, *Studien zur Antikenrezeption Nicola Pisanos*, in: *Flor. Mitt.*, XIX, 1975, pp. 307-372.
- ² *Vasari-Milanesi*, vol. VII, p. 144.
- ³ On Bertoldo's relief, see *Pope-Hennessy, Sculpture II*, pp. 304 and 359, with additional bibliography. The story of Bertoldo's supervision of Michelangelo's study of the Medici collection of antiquities is told by *Vasari-Milanesi*, vol. VII, pp. 141-142.
- ⁴ The drawings are Paris, Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, inv. no. 688r and v; and Chantilly, Musée Condé, inv. no. 29r. The drawing in Chantilly has been dated 1501-1503 by *Dussler, Michelangelo*, p. 50 and *F. Hartt, The Drawings of Michelangelo*, London 1971, p. 30. It was dated c. 1503 by *C. de Tolnay, Michelangelo, I*, pp. 183-184; *L. Goldscheider, Michelangelo's Drawings*, London 1951, pp. 28-29, and *J. Wilde, Italian Drawings in the Departments of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum, Michelangelo and His Studio*, London 1953, pp. 4, 13, 80. The drawing in Paris has been dated 1505 by *Berenson, Drawings*, cat. no. 1588, and *Hartt* (op. cit.), p. 63. It was assigned the date 1505-1506 by *M. Weinberger, Review of C. de Tolnay, The Youth of Michelangelo*, in: *Art. Bull.*, XXVIII, 1945, p. 71, and *Wilde* (n. 4), p. 25. It should be mentioned in passing that *P. Moreno, Il visibile nascosto, Ercole nel 'giudizio' ed altro antico in Michelangelo*, in: *Prospettiva*, XXXIII-XXXVI, 1983-84, pp. 150-155, believes that the pose of the lost Hercules was based on a mourning putto from a relief in the Camposanto. Moreno, however, has based his hypothesis on the reconstruction of the Hercules proposed by *P. Joannides, Michelangelo's lost Hercules*, in: *Burl. Mag.*, CXXX, 1977, pp. 550-554, without fully considering the important qualifications of his own theory Joannides made in *id.*, *A Supplement to Michelangelo's lost Hercules*, in: *Burl. Mag.*, CXXXIII, 1981, pp. 20-23.
- ⁵ This comparison is standard in every monograph on Michelangelo. To cite just one instance among many, see *H. Hibbard, Michelangelo*, London 1975, p. 57.
- ⁶ This observation was first made by *J. Wilde, Eine Studie Michelangelos nach der Antike*, in: *Flor. Mitt.* IV, 1932-34, p. 58.
- ⁷ *M. Hirst, Michelangelo in Rome: an altarpiece and the 'Bacchus'*, in: *Burl. Mag.*, CXXXIII, 1981, p. 588.
- ⁸ *C. Gould, National Gallery Catalogues, The Sixteenth Century Italian Schools*, London 1975, pp. 145-146, provides the basic catalogue information on the painting.
- ⁹ The sarcophagus served as the tomb of the medieval jurist Giovanni Fagioli until the end of the 18th century. See *Arias/Cristiani/Gabba* (n. 1), p. 150, and *G. Koch, Die mythologischen Sarkophage, VI: Meleager*, Berlin 1975, p. 94, cat. no. 27. For another possible re-use of a figure from this sarcophagus, see *A.C. Hanson, Jacopo della Quercia's Fonte Gaia*, London 1965, p. 66, who believes the pose of Meleager was possibly the model for the Adam in the Expulsion from the Garden of the Fonte. It should be noted that Michelangelo may have known another version of the Meleager sarcophagus in Florence. The execution of this relief, however, is far cruder and the Dioscurus does not resemble the Saint in Michelangelo's painting. For this sarcophagus, see *G. Mansuelli, Galleria degli Uffizi, Le sculture*, vol. I, Rome 1958, p. 229, cat. no. 246 and fig. 246.
- ¹⁰ This observation, first made orally by P. Meller, is reported in *C. de Tolnay, Corpus dei disegni di Michelangelo*, Novara 1975, vol. I, pp. 42-43.
- ¹¹ *E. Gombrich, A Classical Quotation in Michelangelo's 'Sacrifice of Noah'*, in: *Warburg Journal*, I, 1937, p. 69.
- ¹² *L. Steinberg, Michelangelo's Madonna Medici and Related Works*, in: *Burl. Mag.*, CXIII, 1971, pp. 145-148.
- ¹³ See *Tolnay* (n. 10), p. 38.
- ¹⁴ The authenticity of the drawing transferred from the *recto* to the *verso* has often been doubted following the opinion of *Berenson, Drawings*, vol. II, p. 208, cat. no. 1588, who believed the transfer was too mechanical for Michelangelo and must therefore be by one of his students. But see the comments of *Hartt* (n. 4), p. 63, cat. nos. 46 & 47, who accepts the drawing as a transfer made by Michelangelo himself.
- ¹⁵ For a full account of this thesis, see *C. Gould, The Second Phase - A Further Hypothesis*, in: *M. Levey,*

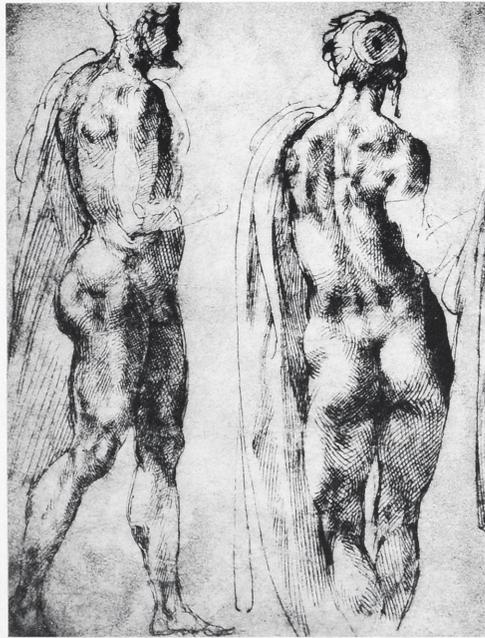
C. Gould, J. Plesters, H. Rubemann, Michelangelo's Entombment of Christ, Some New Hypotheses and Some New Facts, London 1970, pp. 9-19, and C. Gould, Michelangelo's 'Entombment': A Further Addendum, in: *Burl. Mag.*, CVI, 1974, pp. 31-32.

¹⁶ H.R. Mancusi-Ungaro Jr., Michelangelo: The Bruges Madonna and the Piccolomini Altar, New Haven and London 1971, p. 7.

¹⁷ *Hibbard* (n. 5), pp. 48-50.

¹⁸ *Hirst* (n. 7), pp. 581-593.

Photo Credits: KIF: Figs. 1 - 4.



3 Michelangelo, Study of Five Nude and Draped Figures. Chantilly, Conde Museum, 29r.



4 Roman Meleager Sarcophagus. Pisa, Camposanto.