

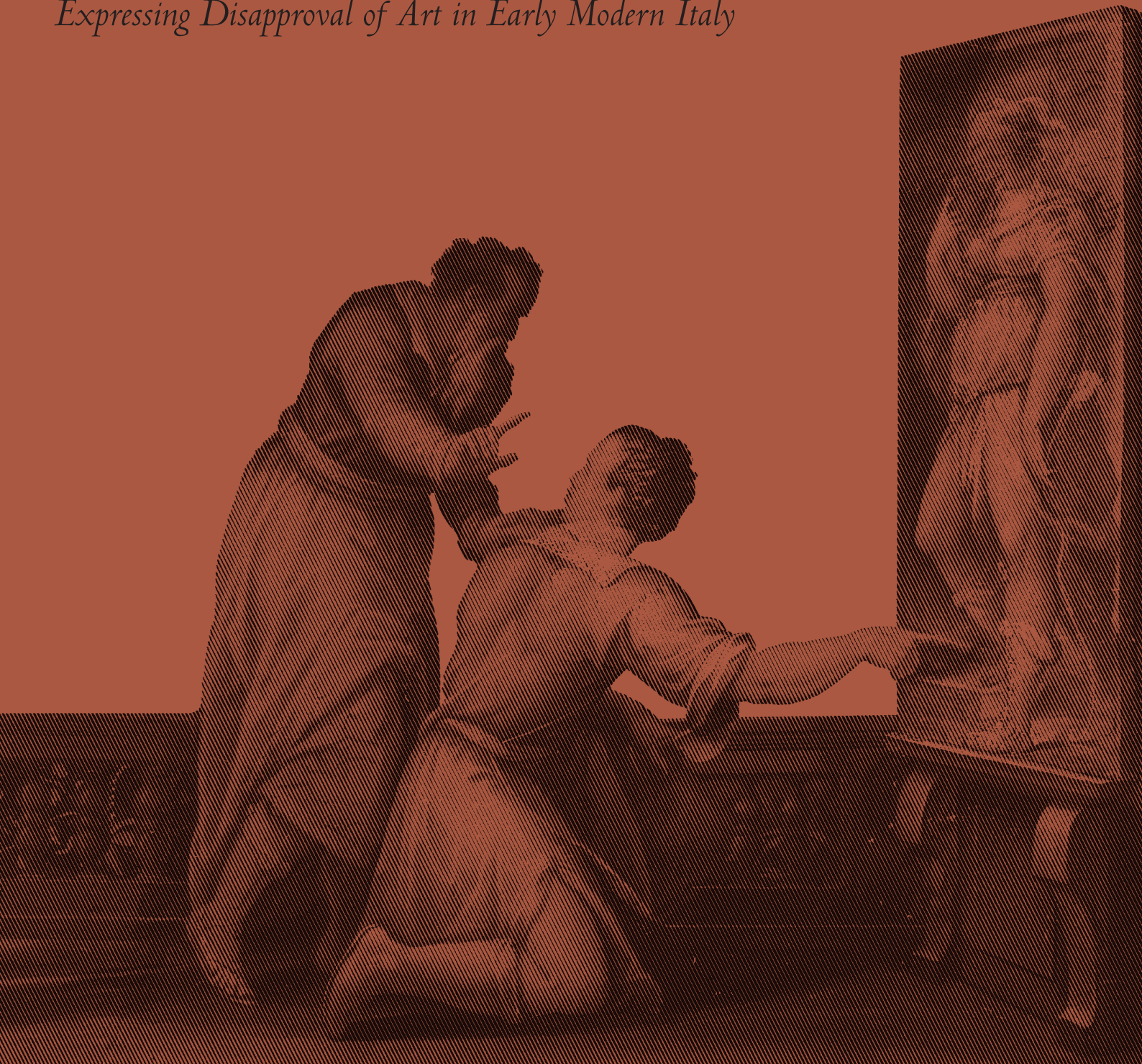
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Bad Reception

Expressing Disapproval of Art in Early Modern Italy



Bad Reception: Expressing Disapproval of Art in Early Modern Italy

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1 Michelangelo,
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EPISTOLARY CRITICISM, THE MINERVA *CHRIST*, AND MICHELANGELO'S *GARZONE* PROBLEM

Raymond Carlson

"I implore that you write me just one line; and don't believe my enemies, who lie."¹ So closes an anxious letter of late summer 1521 from the *garzone* Pietro Urbano to his master Michelangelo Buonarroti. The confident script in which Urbano had written previous missives and financial records is here unbridled with large lettering, ungracefully short descenders and ascenders, and decreased legibility from a neglect to lift the pen between strokes. Urbano's hastiness was earnest but strategic, meant to spur a reply that past letters failed to induce. Whereas Michelangelo was in Tuscany at work on projects for the basilica of San Lorenzo and the tomb of Julius II, Urbano was in Rome on assignment to ship, complete, and install a life-size marble sculpture of Christ in the basilica of Santa Maria sopra Minerva (Fig. 1). Following delays, unforeseen fees, and third-party complaints shared with Michelangelo, the situation was dire.

This letter marks a spectacular fall from grace for Urbano. He would soon be out of Michelangelo's employ, whereas three years prior he was at the height of success, having transported a model of Michelangelo's design for the façade of San Lorenzo from Florence to Rome to be shown to Pope Leo X and Cardinal Giulio de' Medici. He had lived with Michelangelo, knew his family personally, and gained enough trust to orchestrate the purchase and shipment of marble for Michelangelo's papal commission. How did a once-promising *garzone* acquire enemies, let alone find himself needing to mitigate remotely against their attacks?

The answer lies in the selfsame tool of Urbano's achievement and downfall: epistolary communication. Without Urbano's letters, together with his record-keeping, logistical planning, and transport of messages, Michelangelo would have struggled to meet commit-

¹ "Vi pregho mi scriviate solo uno verso; e non chredete a' mia nimici, che si me[n]tano" (*Il carteggio di Michelangelo*, ed. by Giovanni Poggi/Paola Ba-

rocchi/Renzo Ristori, Florence 1965–1983, II, p. 306). The editors rightly situate this undated letter between July and August 1521.

ments in Tuscany and Rome.² But epistles were also an ideal means for disparagement. Evidence of the kind of invectives mentioned by Urbano survives in coordinated missives sent to Michelangelo by three other artists in Rome, the painters Sebastiano del Piombo and Giovanni da Reggio and the sculptor Federigo di Filippo Frizzi, as well as letters from the patron Metello Vari de' Porcari. Much of this correspondence – particularly that by Sebastiano – is subtle in its deployment of analytical terms to discuss art, as Alessandro Nova has recently demonstrated.³ Crucially, several letters are also deliberate in using allusive and pointed language to attack Urbano for personal gain. Despite potential benefits to these men from Urbano's dismissal, their criticisms of his character, comportment, and workmanship have been broadly accepted together in scholarship as true.⁴ An exoneration of Urbano is neither possible nor productive, but a re-evaluation of relevant correspondence and the sculpture in question reveals how his declared failings were partly a rhetorical construct.

The epistolary blitz against Urbano and his work on the *Minerva Christ* was meant to strike at the core of his job as a *garzone*. Sometimes translated as 'assistant' or 'servant', this profession encompassed a range of obligations that grew more expansive within Michelangelo's Florentine workshop in this period, as he needed help contracting an extensive network of quarrymen, carvers, porters, and sculptors. The term *garzone* denoted both youth and the profession of a male laborer.⁵ While Michelangelo's records show he hired various *garzoni* for discrete tasks, Urbano is cru-

cially described in documents as *bis garzone*, indicative of permanent responsibilities.⁶ A shared resident of Michelangelo's home, Urbano could conduct affairs on his master's behalf, and in financial records and letters, Michelangelo repeatedly linked their persons by listing Urbano as being with him ("Pietro che sta meco"), just as Urbano did with reference to him.⁷ The significance of Urbano's job is overlooked in scholarship partly because Giorgio Vasari's *Vite* downplay Michelangelo's reliance on *garzoni* and Urbano's role in particular, likely to harmonize with the model of Michelangelo as a solitary genius.⁸ Autograph documents attest to the intense trust and intimacy between Michelangelo and Urbano, who addressed one another in personal terms and openly expressed feelings of frustration, regret, jealousy, and care for one other's well-being.⁹ Such closeness was not incompatible with the uneven power dynamics between an artist and his *garzone* in sixteenth-century Italy, as documents also show how Michelangelo sought control over the young Urbano in person and remotely. A *garzone* meant both a job and a state of being contingent upon age, and the absence of a boundary between the professional and personal fostered vulnerabilities that other men were poised to exploit.

The Garzone's Hand

While the patronage, iconography, and installation of the *Minerva Christ* have been well explored elsewhere, comparatively little attention has been paid to Urbano's role.¹⁰ This neglects the major onus

² On Urbano see William E. Wallace, *Michelangelo at San Lorenzo: The Genius as Entrepreneur*, Cambridge et al. 1994, pp. 67–69 (with bibliography).

³ Alessandro Nova, "I discorsi sull'arte di Sebastiano del Piombo", in: *Iconologie: studi in onore di Claudia Cieri Via*, ed. by Ilaria Miarelli Mariani/Stefano Pierguidi/Marco Ruffini, Rome 2016, pp. 217–229.

⁴ A few scholars have prudently noted that criticisms of Urbano's work were made "perhaps with some exaggeration" ("forse con qualche esagerazione"; *ibidem*, p. 220) and that he was "perhaps unfairly stigmatized" (Wallace [note 2], p. 69).

⁵ Tomaso Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, ed. by Giovanni Battista Bronzini/Pina De Meo, Florence 1996, I, pp. 680–682.

⁶ *I ricordi di Michelangelo*, ed. by Lucilla Bardeschi Ciulich/Paola Barocchi, Florence 2005, pp. 14, 107.

⁷ This was an established formula (cf. e.g. *ibidem*, pp. 65, 74).

⁸ Giorgio Vasari, *La vita di Michelangelo nelle redazioni del 1550 e del 1568*, ed. by Paola Barocchi, Milan/Naples 1962, I, pp. 119f., 124.

⁹ E.g. *Il carteggio* (note 1), II, pp. 183, 307.

¹⁰ A selection of recent scholarship on the *Minerva Christ*: Gerda Panofsky, *Michelangelos "Christus" und sein römischer Auftraggeber*, Worms 1991; Laura Agoston, *Michelangelo's Christ: The Dialectics of Sculpture*, PhD diss. Harvard University 1993; William E. Wallace, "Miscellanea Curiositae Michelangelae: A Steep Tariff, a Half Dozen Horses, and Yards of Taffeta", in: *Renaissance*

on a *garzone* to engage directly with patrons as well as to transport and complete the sculpture, details that merit reconstructing. The *Minerva Christ* began as a side project between papal commissions, promising Michelangelo cash, a use for excess marble, and a creative sculptural outlet after the Sistine Chapel frescoes. Metello Vari shared costs for the *Christ* with fellow members of the Porcari family, part of the Roman patriciate, and they paid their first installment for the sculpture in May 1513, likely expecting Michelangelo to complete it in Rome while executing the tomb of Julius II.¹¹ This was not to be. He abandoned an initial version upon reaching a black vein in the marble block and returned to Tuscany in 1516, soon consumed by his new commission for San Lorenzo.¹² It is in here that documents first securely locate Urbano, who may have worked for Michelangelo previously and became heavily involved in the San Lorenzo project.¹³ From afar, Vari's best inducements for Michelangelo were fulsome, prodding letters sent in rapid succession and a clause with his bank to withhold payment until their contract was fulfilled.¹⁴

As years passed, Michelangelo missed the commission's original deadline in 1518 and obtained a new marble block for the *Christ*. Vari's justifiable concerns about attaining a completed *Christ* led him to propose how work be delegated. On 26 July 1518, he wrote that a disciple could rough it out and continue work until Michelangelo put the final touches ("ultima mano").¹⁵ Vari did not let go of this idea, writing the next year of related options such as providing a different sculpture or Michelangelo coming to Rome to finish the abandoned original.¹⁶ Michelangelo continued to rebuff his patron, but by January 1520 Vari got word that he had nearly finished the *Christ*.¹⁷ Vari may have had misgivings about the unseen sculpture's appearance, as he pressured Michelangelo to send it before receiving money; but the patron acquiesced after a year, completing payment on 30 January 1521 without having seen it.¹⁸

Vari's hope that Michelangelo apply the *ultima mano* was frustrated when the master tasked Urbano to accompany and finish the *Christ*, which on 12 March was en route from the port at Pisa.¹⁹ Trav-

Quarterly, XLVII (1994), pp. 330–350; *idem*, "Michelangelo's *Risen Christ*", in: *Sixteenth Century Journal*, XXVIII (1997), pp. 1251–1280; Kerstin Schwedes, *Historia in statua: Zur Eloquenz plastischer Bildwerke Michelangelos im Umfeld des Christus von Santa Maria sopra Minerva zu Rom*, Frankfurt am Main et al. 1998; Irene Baldriga, "The First Version of Michelangelo's *Christ* for S. Maria Sopra Minerva", in: *The Burlington Magazine*, CXLII (2000), pp. 740–745; Silvia Danesi Squarzina, "The Bassano 'Christ the Redeemer' in the Giustiniani Collection", in: *The Burlington Magazine*, CXLII (2000), pp. 746–751; Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt, "The Body as 'Vera Effigies' in Michelangelo's Art: The *Minerva Christ*", in: *L'immagine di Cristo: dall'Acheropita alla mano d'artista [...]*, conference proceedings Rome 2001, ed. by Christoph L. Frommel/Gerhard Wolf, Vatican City 2006, pp. 269–321; Christoph L. Frommel, "Michelangelos 'Auferstandener Christus', seine erste Version, und der junge Bernini", in: *Artibus et Historiae*, XXXI (2010), 62, pp. 15–34; Dario Donetti, "Il ritorno a Firenze: il cantiere di San Lorenzo, il marmo e il *Cristo* della Minerva", in: *Michelangelo: una vita*, ed. by Patrizio Aiello, Milan 2014, pp. 147–162; Silvia Danesi Squarzina, "Michelangelo, un Cristo nudo per Santa Maria sopra Minerva: prima e seconda versione", in: *L'eterno e il tempo tra Michelangelo e Caravaggio*, exh. cat., Forlì 2018, ed. by Antonio Paolucci et al., Milan 2018, pp. 55–63. The fullest accountings for Urbano's engagement with the commission are in Panofsky and Wallace 1994, pp. 330–336.

¹¹ *I contratti di Michelangelo*, ed. by Lucilla Bardeschi Ciulich, Florence

2005, pp. 54f.; Rab Hatfield, *The Wealth of Michelangelo*, Rome 2002, pp. 32f., 273–277, 384–387, 394f., 401–405, 407, 417–420.

¹² Cf. Baldriga (note 10); Danesi Squarzina 2000 (note 10); Frommel (note 10).

¹³ Wallace (note 2), pp. 67, 217, note 438, crucially identified Urbano as Pietro d'Annibale de' Rossi. Urbano's exact age and start of employment for Michelangelo are uncertain. Mention of "Piero" in a letter of 1507 has been taken to refer to Urbano (Vasari [note 8], II, p. 391), but the referent is presumably Piero d'Argenta (*The Letters of Michelangelo*, trans. and ed. by E. H. Ramsden, London 1963, I, p. 26, note 3). On the possibility that Urbano was an unnamed *garzone* who worked for Michelangelo as early as 1505, which antedates documentation of their relationship from the next decade: William E. Wallace, "Michelangelo's Assistants in the Sistine Chapel", in: *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, CX (1987), pp. 203–216: 208, 216, note 60.

¹⁴ Hatfield (note II), p. 394.

¹⁵ *Il carteggio* (note I), II, p. 41. On Michelangelo and the *ultima mano*: Caroline Elam, "Ché ultima manol! Tiberio Calcagni's Marginal Annotations to Condivi's *Life of Michelangelo*", in: *Renaissance Quarterly*, LI (1998), pp. 475–497: 484–488 (with bibliography).

¹⁶ *Il carteggio* (note I), II, pp. 179, 184 (letters of 6 and 7 April 1519).

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 208 (letter from Vari to Michelangelo of 13 January 1520).

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 229–231, 271f.

¹⁹ *I ricordi* (note 6), p. 105.

eling overland while the statue moved by sea, Urbano reached Rome first, waiting as storms and a hefty port tax delayed its arrival.²⁰ Urbano countered any potential displeasures among the patrons over the delay with constant updates to Michelangelo about the sculpture, imbuing his notes with humor to claim authority and deflect blame.²¹ But Vari still had reason to hope for Michelangelo's arrival in Rome. Over the next months friends pressured Michelangelo to visit Rome with enticements such as lodging in the Cancelleria, and Giovanni da Reggio, who had seen the artist in Florence the year before, said Michelangelo was expected to come to Rome for the festival of All Saints on 1 November.²²

How the *Minerva Christ* looked on arrival in Rome is uncertain, but letters show that parts needed further carving. At a practical level, leaving some of the *Christ* rough-hewn prevented damage during shipment by sea.²³ Urbano reported in separate letters to Michelangelo that he began working on the sculpture upon its arrival, installing and finishing it to be shown on 15 August, the feast of the Ascension.²⁴ But the day before the planned unveiling, Vari penned a letter to Michelangelo with explosive charges against Urbano: he was nowhere to be found; an unnamed individual reported his theft of a ring worth forty ducats; he had tried to take and sell a horse that Vari meant as a gift for Michelangelo; he was selling Michelangelo's marble; and he had neither finished nor properly installed the *Christ*

as he claimed.²⁵ Such salvos against a *garzone* meant irrevocable breaches of trust and, together with the promised horse,²⁶ formed a bid for Michelangelo to transfer his faith to Vari.

Extant documents cannot prove whether Urbano's misdeeds were fabricated, real, or somewhere in between (as the truth usually is). What is certain is that Vari could not risk damage to the sculpture. According to the contract signed in 1514, the *Minerva Christ* was meant to be completed within four years,²⁷ and therefore each year the commission remained unfulfilled publicly and spiritually dishonored his family and the ancestor for whom it was made. Vari was also under pressure from other members of the Porcari family, particularly a group of heirs who provided money for the final payment.²⁸ Given its price, the sculpture needed to reflect Michelangelo's handiwork,²⁹ and knowledge in Rome of his languishing papal commission and expansive network of carvers could easily have stoked concerns that the family's two hundred ducats were ill spent. It had been over fifteen years since Michelangelo had delivered a completed marble sculpture to a patron.³⁰ Vari concluded his defamatory missive by asking Michelangelo to send a letter stating which trustworthy artist should complete the *Christ*. While he phrased this as an open question, Vari guided Michelangelo toward a desired answer by praising the work of the sculptor Federigo Frizzi in the wake of Urbano's failure.

²⁰ *Il carteggio* (note 1), II, p. 280 (letter from Leonardo Sellaio to Michelangelo of 24 March 1521).

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 282, 305 (letters from 31 March and June/July 1521). On the latter, cf. Wallace 1994 (note 10), p. 334.

²² *Il carteggio* (note 1), II, pp. 250, 273, 280, 312.

²³ On practical strategies of marble carving to mitigate damage during shipment, see the discussion of Michelangelo's so-called *Prisoners* below, p. 136, as well as Kelley Helmstutler Di Dio, "Shipping Sculptures, Shaping Diplomacy: Gifts of Sculpture for Spain", in: *Making and Moving Sculpture in Early Modern Italy*, ed. by *eadem*, Farnham et al. 2015, pp. 167–190: 175–180.

²⁴ *Il carteggio* (note 1), II, pp. 307–309.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 310f.

²⁶ On this gift and Michelangelo's horses: Wallace 1994 (note 10), pp. 336–339.

²⁷ *I contratti* (note 11), pp. 54f.

²⁸ These debt-ridden heirs distrusted Vari (Panofsky [note 10], pp. 63f). Their dispute continued for a decade, during which Vari repeatedly requested from Michelangelo a *fede* as proof of payment for his work (*Il carteggio* [note 1], II, pp. 350, 364, 377, 385f.; III, pp. 219, 407, 415f., 423f.).

²⁹ This is evident in Vari's request that Michelangelo's *fede* outline payment received for "the figure of Christ made by your hand" ("la figura del Cristo qual fu fatta per man vostra", *ibidem*, III, p. 219).

³⁰ Michael Hirst, *Michelangelo: The Achievement of Fame*, New Haven, Conn., 2011, p. 175.

Frizzi was Vari's neighbor and acquaintance, as Michelangelo had assigned him the carving of a tabernacle for the *Christ* five months prior.³¹ Likely a generation older than Urbano, Frizzi was no *garzone*.³² Michelangelo acquiesced to Vari's prodding, bestowing authority to carve upon Frizzi in a letter that – like all his missives in this particular exchange – does not survive. In his reply of 7 September, Frizzi accepted Michelangelo's charge, asking whether to carve over Urbano's changes or simply to carve where he had not worked.³³ In the following letter of 14 September, he also exposed an untruth in Vari's earlier letter: Urbano never left Rome, a potential problem given that Michelangelo gave Frizzi the task believing his *garzone* to be absent. But Frizzi defended his right to move forward, saying everything else that Michelangelo had been told about Urbano was true.³⁴ Frizzi went on to finish the *Christ*, which Michelangelo himself had not seen in its completed form upon its unveiling in December of that year.³⁵ By then, Urbano was far gone from Rome.

Garzone as Competitor

To dismantle the faith Michelangelo had bestowed upon Urbano for years, Vari did not act alone. He had staunch allies in other artists, namely Sebastiano del Piombo, who paired epistolary skills with vitriol against *garzoni*. Sebastiano maintained special collaborations with Michelangelo, and over the span of the Minerva *Christ* project, he sought Michelangelo's help for major commissions including the *Resurrection of Lazarus* altarpiece and Borgherini Chapel.³⁶ This symbiotic arrangement became one of growing reliance, and Sebastiano's need of drawings and letters of support from Michelangelo



2 Sebastiano del Piombo, *Portrait of Ferry Carondelet with his secretaries*, ca. 1510–1512. Madrid, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza

gelo risked uncomfortable parallels to the unequal dynamic between a master and *garzone*. This was clear when Sebastiano sought Michelangelo's aid to compete against Raphael's *garzoni* for the commission to fresco the Sala di Costantino. In a letter to Michelangelo of 12 April 1520, Sebastiano ridiculed Raphael's *garzoni*, saying they bluster ("bravano") and desire to paint it in oil.³⁷

³¹ *Il carteggio* (note I), II, pp. 222f.

³² Urbano addressed Michelangelo in a mode that confirms a generational divide, but Frizzi addressed him as a friend ("amico"), implying coequality (*ibidem*, pp. 222, 317f., 326).

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 317.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 318.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 326, 338 (letters from Federigo Frizzi of 2 November and Leonardo Sellaio of 27 December 1521).

³⁶ See recently: Costanza Barbieri, "Visionaria e monumentale: Sebastiano, Michelangelo, e la cappella Borgherini in San Pietro in Montorio", in: *Artibus et Historiae*, LXXIV (2016), pp. 79–101; Matthias Wivel, *Michelangelo and Sebastiano*, exh. cat., London 2017; Claudia Echinger-Maurach/Mauro Mussolin, "Ein Konkurrenz-Projekt Michelangelos zu Raffaels *Transfiguration*?", in: *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch*, LXXX (2019), pp. 127–159.

³⁷ *Il carteggio* (note I), II, p. 227.

This claim upheld Sebastiano's talents in oil painting and flaunted his linguistic acumen with the verb *bravare*, which implies haughtiness without substantive skills to support it: an inverse *sprezzatura*.³⁸ But Sebastiano lost the commission to the *garzoni*, telling Michelangelo afterwards that the *sala* was not work for young men ("giovani").³⁹ Disparaging Raphael's *garzoni* as "giovani", the thirty-five-year-old Sebastiano, who operated a workshop nearly free of *garzoni*,⁴⁰ was irate to see the commission in the hands of youths including the twenty-one-year-old Giulio Romano.

Sebastiano's failure to win this commission was a blow to his artistic reputé and epistolary guile. He had become adept in rhetoric and the mechanics of letters through ties to curates and nobles in Rome, a center of the era's epistolary networks.⁴¹ Sebastiano was an ambitious painter keen to improve his status using all of his skills.⁴² He made portraits of high-ranking men in Rome that attest to his knowledge not only of how letters were relayed by private messengers, but also of the power his sitters held over subservient youths in their employ. His portrait of Ferry Carondelet (Fig. 2), for example, foregrounds the ambassador's control of his two secretaries who train supplicant, competing gazes upon him, one giving a note and the other receiving dictation.⁴³ Sebastiano knew how to comport himself with Michelangelo when it came to messengers. For example, when he dispatched a letter with a gentleman compatriot eager to meet the famously gruff sculptor, he praised the man's literary erudition and

left to Michelangelo's discretion whether to indulge the man's interest in seeing his artworks.⁴⁴ The elegant prose of Sebastiano's letters was a fair match for Michelangelo's own epistolary talent.⁴⁵ Further evidence of Sebastiano's postal wiles is evident in his use of a blank sheet as an envelope to keep secret the writing on a sealed message to Michelangelo of 6 September 1520.⁴⁶ Michelangelo learned from Sebastiano, as he later took advantage of this process when sending letters and drawings to Tommaso de' Cavalieri.⁴⁷

Sebastiano first used mail to meddle in the Minerva *Christ* commission in 1520 by claiming that Urbano was seen to displace Michelangelo's authorship of the sculpture, transforming Urbano from his own potential competitor into one against Michelangelo. Writing to Michelangelo that November, he said Giovanni da Reggio was spreading word in Rome that Urbano rather than Michelangelo had made the *Christ*, and it needed to appear by Michelangelo's hand to silence such rumors.⁴⁸ By putting such gossip in the mouth of Reggio, his avowed "compare",⁴⁹ Sebastiano leveraged their friendship against Michelangelo's bond with his *garzone*. Like Vari, Sebastiano likely wanted Michelangelo to come to Rome with the sculpture, which would improve his access to drawings and support. And like Vari, Sebastiano would have been disappointed to find Urbano in Rome with the *Christ* the next year, and he was unrestrained in his next opportunity to lambaste the *garzone*.

³⁸ Cf. Nicola Suthor, *Bravura: Virtuosität und Mutwilligkeit in der Malerei der Frühen Neuzeit*, Munich et al. 2010.

³⁹ *Il carteggio* (note 1), II, p. 234 (letter of 3 July 1520).

⁴⁰ Piers Baker-Bates, "Workshop and Showroom in High Renaissance Rome: The Idiosyncratic Model of Sebastiano del Piombo", in: *Bulletin of the Society for Renaissance Studies*, XXIII (2005), I, pp. 1–6.

⁴¹ Clemente Fedele/Mario Gallenga, *Per servizio di Nostro Signore: strade, corrieri e poste dei papi dal Medioevo al 1870*, Modena 1988 (with bibliography).

⁴² Costanza Barbieri, "Fishing for Offices: Sebastiano del Piombo as Piombatore", in: *The Burlington Magazine*, CL (2008), pp. 35f.

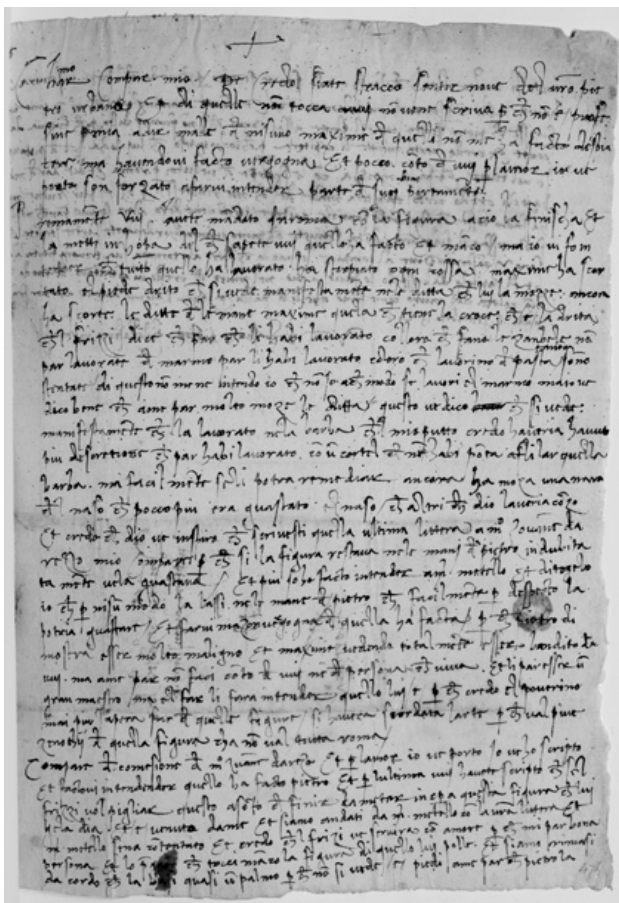
⁴³ Douglas Biow, *Doctors, Ambassadors, Secretaries: Humanism and Professions in Renaissance Italy*, Chicago et al. 2002, pp. 155–158.

⁴⁴ *Il carteggio* (note 1), II, p. 254 (letter of 4 November 1520).

⁴⁵ On Michelangelo's correspondence, see Deborah Parker, *Michelangelo and the Art of Letter Writing*, Cambridge et al. 2010.

⁴⁶ Florence, Casa Buonarroti, Archivio Buonarroti, inv. IX, 473.

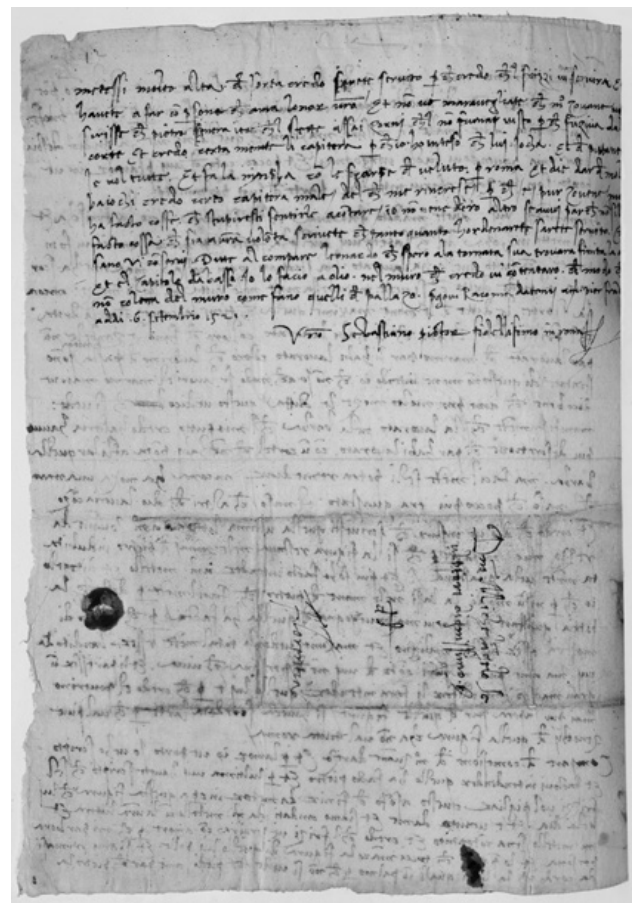
⁴⁷ Maria Ruvoldt, "Michelangelo's Open Secrets", in: *Visual Cultures of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe*, conference proceedings Los Angeles 2009, ed. by Timothy McCall/Sean Roberts/Giancarlo Fiorenza, Kirksville 2013, pp. 105–125.



3 Sebastiano del Piombo, letter to Michelangelo
of 6 September 1521. Florence, Casa Buonarroti,
Archivio Buonarroti, inv. IX, 478

Garzone as Baker

Sebastiano's attack came in the form of a letter dated 6 September 1521, an exceptional document that has received scant detailed analysis (Fig. 3).⁵⁰ Sent in response to Michelangelo's lost letter allowing Frizzi to finish the *Christ*, Sebastiano takes credit for having explained to Vari that the "very



malicious" ("molto maligno") Urbano was poised to ruin it.⁵¹ Sebastiano orchestrated this letter with others sent simultaneously from Giovanni da Reggio and Federigo Frizzi to buttress his claims, as they all purportedly examined the sculpture together.⁵² Sebastiano said Urbano mutilated the *Minerva Christ*, cutting short the right foot, toes, and cross-bearing

⁴⁸ *Il carteggio* (note I), II, p. 256 (letter of 4 November 1520).

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 252 (letter of 27 October 1520).

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 313–315. A recent exception is Nova (note 3), pp. 219–222.

⁵¹ *Il carteggio* (note I), II, p. 314.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 317, for the letter by Frizzi of 7 September. The letter by Giovanni da Reggio does not survive but is mentioned both in Frizzi's missive and in another one by Bertolommeo Angelini from the same day

hand.⁵³ Putting criticism in the mouth of Frizzi, Sebastiano deployed a vivid comparison to characterize Urbano's handling of Christ's digits:

Frizzi said it appears like they were worked by those who make doughnuts: they don't seem made from marble. It seems like they were made by those who work dough, they're so awkward.⁵⁴

Scholars have long struggled to reconcile such comments with the intactness of these features of the sculpture (Fig. 4).⁵⁵ Frizzi was no miracle worker, and in the abovementioned letter of 14 September he acknowledged that the work to be done was slight.⁵⁶ But hyperbole was just one of Sebastiano's tactics.

Sebastiano's doughy invective linked Urbano to the failure of his predecessor, who worked in Rome four years earlier while Michelangelo was in Tuscany. In a letter to Michelangelo of 1517 asking to return home, the *garzone* Silvio Falcone outlined his struggles in the Eternal City, explaining that he attempted to paint but was compelled to begin making donuts for want of other options.⁵⁷ Whether Falcone pursued this revenue stream or exaggerated, his letter shows the pitiable state of a *garzone* reduced to pastry production. The note ends with well wishes to Urbano, who Falcone says he hopes will not follow in his footsteps.⁵⁸ Sebastiano likely knew the hapless trajectory of Falcone, who was in Rome to buy paint, a task for

which Sebastiano would have been Michelangelo's obvious contact in the city.

Sebastiano's simile also denigrated Urbano's status via association with lower-level artisans. Sculptors in particular risked artisanal comparisons, as in Leonardo da Vinci's parallel of sculptors sporting marble dust to bakers caked in flour, as well as Agnolo Bronzino's likening of sculptors' physical exertion to that of farriers.⁵⁹ These insults provoked particular anxieties in an era when artists sought greater distinction from the mechanical arts. This was manifest in artists' workshops increasingly sealing themselves off from street life and assistants' tasks orienting toward indoor learning, as Christopher Wood has argued.⁶⁰ Michelangelo's newly built house-workshops in Florence and Rome, with which Urbano was involved, reflect this changing paradigm.⁶¹ As a *garzone* free to move about, Urbano sought to show Michelangelo his diligence by referencing work he did inside his house in Rome,⁶² while Sebastiano's letter portrayed Urbano roving the streets.

In the streets one met trouble. Not only were they violent, but Urbano could get swept into activities of lower-ranking artisans, including bakers, long associated with libidinousness. In Sebastiano's native Venice, for example, the donut makers – who worked on their namesake street (Calle del Scaletter) – were deemed notorious for sodomy, prompting a crackdown, punishments, and decrees in 1455 and 1457.⁶³ In Renaissance Florence, streets were a key

(*ibidem*, p. 316). A subsequent letter by Reggio of 22 September further attacks Urbano (*ibidem*, p. 319).

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 313.

⁵⁴ “I Frizzi dice che par che li habi lavorato colloro che fano le zanzele: non par lavorate de marmo, par li habi lavorato colloro che lavorino de pasta, tanto sonno stentate” (*ibidem*).

⁵⁵ E.g. Charles de Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, Princeton, N.J., 1945–1971, III, p. 90.

⁵⁶ *Il carteggio* (note I), II, p. 318.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, I, p. 311.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 312.

⁵⁹ Leonardo da Vinci, *Il paragone delle arti*, ed. by Claudio Scarpati, Milan

1993, p. 145; Benedetto Varchi/Vincenzo Borghini, *Pittura e scultura nel Cinquecento*, ed. by Paola Barocchi, Livorno 1998, p. 68.

⁶⁰ Christopher S. Wood, “Indoor-Outdoor: The Studio around 1500”, in: *Inventions of the Studio: Renaissance to Romanticism*, conference proceedings Chapel Hill, N.C., 2001, ed. by Michael Cole/Mary Pardo, Chapel Hill et al. 2005, pp. 36–72.

⁶¹ Clara Altavista, “Le dimore di Michelangelo a Roma: dalle prime abitazioni alla casa di Macel de’ Corvi”, in: *Michelangelo architetto a Roma*, ed. by Mauro Mussolin/Clara Altavista, Cinisello Balsamo 2009, pp. 58–71.

⁶² *Il carteggio* (note I), II, p. 308.

⁶³ Pompeo Molmenti, “La corruzione dei costumi veneziani nel Ri-

site for soliciting sodomy, and a substantial proportion of lower-level artisans (bakers among them) were convicted of this offense.⁶⁴ Bakers' confections were condemned in the Renaissance for inspiring this vice, and potent textual associations grew between sweetness and same-sex desire.⁶⁵ Lorenzo de' Medici wrote a canzone parodying the activities of young bakers through erotic intimations.⁶⁶ Such potential guilt-by-association was particularly keen for Urbano, who resided and worked in Michelangelo's home at Macel de' Corvi.⁶⁷ The house was near the street of the bakers, who had formed their own confraternity in 1500 and founded a church there dedicated to the Madonna of Loreto. While Sebastiano's pastry comparison taps a Renaissance tradition of using quotidian language to disparage artworks,⁶⁸ its further social allusions signal the multivalent potency of his insult.

Sebastiano followed Urbano's artisanal abasement by uplifting Frizzi as his replacement as well as promoting his own visual skills. His letter voices personal critiques of the *Minerva Christ*, explaining that while he is unfamiliar with marble, Christ's digits seem short.⁶⁹ Sebastiano's humility topos veils a bold claim to evaluate sculpture. As a painter who took cues from Michelangelo, Sebastiano needed to show his capacity to interpret plastic figures for his own work. For example, his friend Leonardo Sellaio wrote to Michelangelo that Sebastiano made a clay model of Christ while creating the cartoon for his frescoes in the Borgherini Chapel.⁷⁰ Similar motives explain Sebastiano's rousing comment closing the paragraph that Christ's



4 Michelangelo,
Christ, detail
of Fig. 1

nascimento", in: *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 5^a s., XXXI (1903), pp. 281–307: 297–299.

⁶⁴ Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence*, New York et al. 1996, pp. 134–161, 249f.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 21f.; Jeffrey Masten, "Toward a Queer Address: The Taste of Letters and Early Modern Male Friendship", in: *GLQ*, X (2003/04), pp. 367–384.

⁶⁶ Lorenzo de' Medici, *Tutte le opere*, ed. by Paolo Orvieto, Rome 1992, II, pp. 794–797.

⁶⁷ *Il carteggio* (note I), II, p. 309 (letter from Urbano to Michelangelo, between July and 15 August 1521).

⁶⁸ Maddalena Spagnolo, "Poesie contro le opere d'arte: arguzia, biasimo e ironia nella cirita d'arte del Cinquecento", in: *Ex marmore: pasquini, pasquinisti, pasquinate nell'Europa moderna*, conference proceedings Otranto/Lecce 2005, ed. by Chrysa Damianaki/Paolo Procaccioli/Angelo Romano, Manziana 2006, pp. 321–354: 322–328.

⁶⁹ *Il carteggio* (note I), II, p. 312f.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, I, p. 203.



5 Michelangelo, *Prisoner*,
ca. 1519–1523 (?). Florence,
Galleria dell'Accademia

knees are worth more than all of Rome.⁷¹ This overstatement affirms the high state of finish of the figure's knees when it was shipped, which accords with Michelangelo's process of bringing to different levels of completion the parts of sculptures meant for shipment from Florence to Rome, such as the so-called *Prisoners* (Fig. 5) with comely knees and more rough-hewn sections. It also shows Sebastiano's attention to Michelangelo's drawings, many of which brilliantly render the flexion of the genu and digits. A sheet that helped Sebastiano in painting his Viterbo *Pietà* contains de-

tails of interlocked fingers, as well as a study for an *ignudo* with polished knees (Fig. 6). Similarly, Michelangelo's drawing for the *Resurrection of Lazarus* (Fig. 7) has details of feet that guided the pose in Sebastiano's altarpiece. While it was a *garzone's* job to learn from a master, Sebastiano used his art and letters to prove his absorption of Michelangelo's graphic lessons, which echoed in Vasari's claim that Michelangelo made Sebastiano a conduit of his *disegno*.⁷²

Garzone as Draftsman

But if Sebastiano was like a *garzone* in his learning, what did Michelangelo's actual *garzone* learn? The parameters of Urbano's instruction are evident in a letter that his uncle, a priest, wrote to Michelangelo in 1517, saying that he would pray for Michelangelo in thanks for the virtues that he taught and continued to teach Urbano.⁷³ Mention of plural virtues implies that Michelangelo was held responsible for his *garzone's* artistic training and moral guidance. This accords with imperatives Michelangelo wrote to Urbano to design, attend communion and confession, avoid fights, eat abstemiously, and go out little.⁷⁴ Urbano knew these were standards for employment rather than suggestions, writing on different occasions that he drew, made clay figures, created a narrative in shallow relief, and sculpted in marble.⁷⁵

Proof of Urbano's graphic exercise seems sure to exist within the sizable corpus of drawings from Michelangelo's workshop, but following the claim in Vasari's *Vite* of 1568 that Urbano was lazy, there has been no systematic effort to recover his work as a draftsman. But is that even possible? The most secure drawing by Urbano was made for logistical purposes, a quick sketch of a block of marble in an autograph letter of 1519 (Fig. 8).⁷⁶ This is

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, II, p. 314.

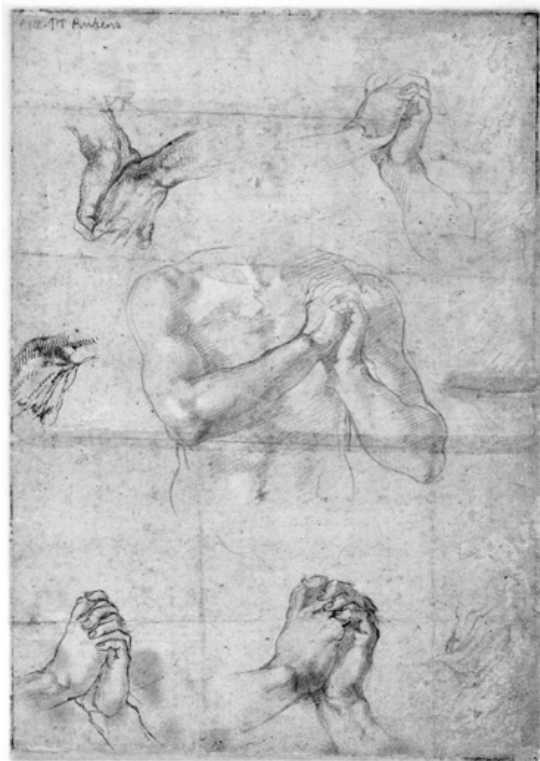
⁷² Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. by Rosanna Bettarini/Paola Barocchi, Florence 1966–1997, V, p. 88.

⁷³ *Il carteggio* (note I), I, p. 286.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, II, pp. 174f. (letter of December 1517).

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 73f., 285, 307f.

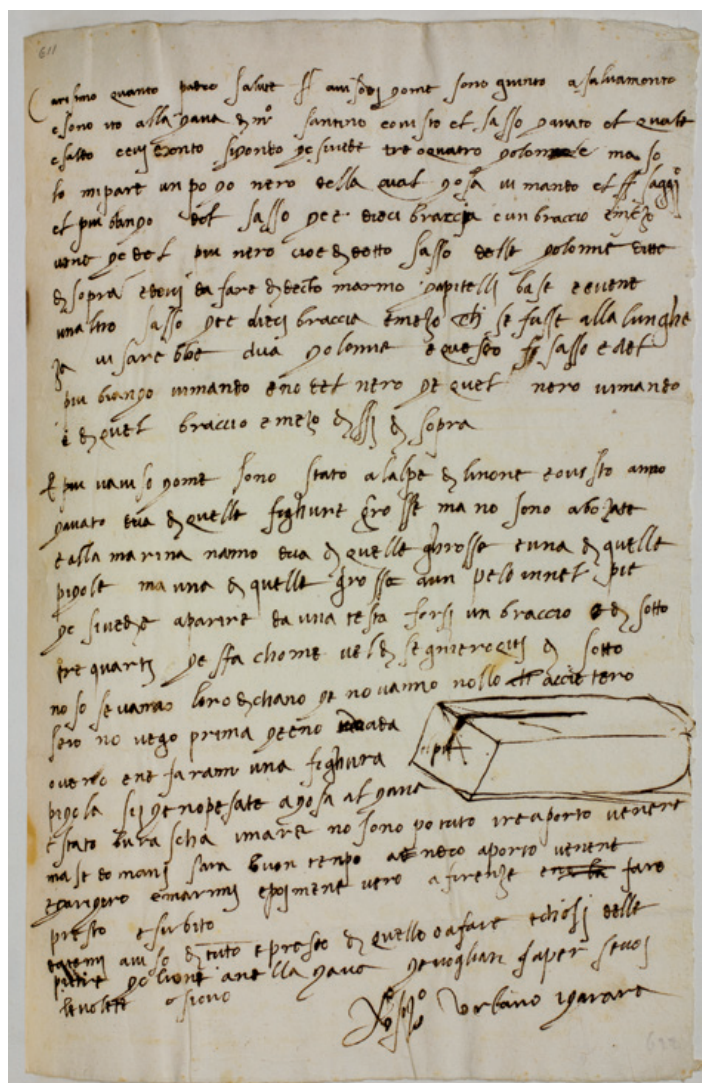
⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 196f.



6 Michelangelo,
Ignudo (recto),
studies for the *Pietà*
(verso), ca. 1510-
1512. Vienna,
The Albertina
Museum, inv. 120

7 Michelangelo,
studies for the
Resurrection of
Lazarus, ca. 1518.
London,
The British Museum,
inv. 1860,0714.2

8 Pietro Urbano,
letter to Michelangelo
of 19 August 1519.
Florence, Casa
Buonarroti,
Archivio Buonarroti,
inv. X, 622



not enough to anchor other attributions, although scholars have named Urbano as a possible maker of drawings of a face, drapery, the San Lorenzo façade, and figures (likely from models).⁷⁷ To understand drawings' role in Urbano's multifaceted job as a *garzone*, the best means is a drawing in Berlin first asso-

ciated with him in 1905 (Fig. 9).⁷⁸ This little-studied sheet, which contains a set of *ricordi* in Urbano's hand from 28 March to 2 April 1519 on its verso, has never been published in color. Urbano's authorship of the text on the verso helpfully connects him to the sheet, but it does not guarantee that he drew the rec-

⁷⁷ Paola Barocchi, *Michelangelo e la sua scuola*, Florence 1962–1964, III, pp. 125–127 (with bibliography); Caroline Elam, “Drawings as Documents: The Problem of the San Lorenzo Façade”, in: *Studies in the History of Art*, XXXIII (1992), pp. 98–114: 106–108; Paul Joannides, *Michel-Ange*,

élèves et copistes, Paris 2003 (Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins: inventaire général des dessins italiens, 6), pp. 190–198.

⁷⁸ Matthias Winner, “Ein Dokument zu Michelangelos Itinerar von 1519 auf einer Zeichnung im Berliner Kupferstichkabinett”, in: *Schloss*



10 Raphael, study for *Apollo*,
ca. 1516–1518. Vienna,
The Albertina Museum, inv. 218

9 Pietro Urbano and Michelangelo,
*Figure seen from behind and sketch
of a pulley system*. Berlin,
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,
Kupferstichkabinett, inv. KdZ 5132r

to; Michelangelo notably reused another letter from Urbano for sketches and calculations.⁷⁹

The figure on the Berlin sheet is made in assured pen strokes over black chalk. It has gone unnoticed that the pose approximates a drawing of Apollo by Raphael for the *Wedding feast of Cupid and Psyche* in Rome (Fig. 10),

and the chalk lines below the figure's left arm in the Berlin sheet recall the position of Apollo's lyre. Raphael's figure is similar to an ancient marble *Apollo* from a Roman collection that inspired other artworks.⁸⁰ The drawings could share a sculptural prototype, although the Berlin sheet's derivation from Raphael's design is

Charlottenburg, Berlin, Preussen: *Festschrift für Margarete Kühn*, ed. by Martin Sperlich/Helmut Börsch-Supan, Munich 1975, pp. 301–305 (with bibliography); Carmen C. Bambach, *Michelangelo: Divine Draftsman and Designer*, exh. cat., New York 2017, p. 328, note 87.

⁷⁹ *Il carteggio* (note I), II, p. 282; Barocchi (note 77), III, pp. 55f.

⁸⁰ Michael Kwakkelstein, "The Model's Pose: Raphael's Early Use of Antique and Italian Art", in: *Artibus et Historiae*, XXIII (2002), 46, pp. 37–60: 54f.

also possible. The figure on the Berlin sheet has received varying attributions to Michelangelo or an assistant. The use of a chalk underdrawing and Michelangelo's potential to impart skills to a *garzone* mean Urbano's authorship has much to recommend it, although the confidence in the loose pen strokes affords the possibility of Michelangelo's authorship.⁸¹ The figure could also be a copy of a drawing by Michelangelo, and there is precedent for a drawing not by Michelangelo's hand alongside *ricordi* from his workshop in this period.⁸²

The part of the drawing apparently made second is located in the lower right corner: a system of four pulleys with curved lines to show its rigging. Clarifying how to secure this to a vertical surface, the draftsman used the figure's right thigh as support for a small rectangular mechanism. This diagram relates to the shipping of marble for San Lorenzo, as Matthias Winner suggested,⁸³ and letters between Michelangelo and Urbano enable further reconstruction of its use. The *ricordo* on the sheet's verso notes a payment to transport Michelangelo's marble from Signa to Florence after it was unloaded from the Arno river for overland travel. In a letter to Urbano in Florence of early April 1519 Michelangelo asked him to collect bespoke pulleys.⁸⁴ Urbano replied on 6 April, saying he would go to Signa to load the pulleys as Michelangelo requested.⁸⁵ Given this information and the diagram's hasty strokes, the most likely scenario is this: Michelangelo drew the diagram for Urbano after ordering the pulleys, knowing he would be away when they would need to be used. He likely accompanied his sketch with a verbal explanation, given the ambiguity of the mechanism at the

left of his pulley diagram. The drawing was so precious to Urbano that he transcribed the *ricordi* on the reverse onto separate paper upon which to continue subsequent *ricordi*.⁸⁶ This sheet thereby distills Urbano's tasks as a *garzone* and his privileged access to Michelangelo's graphic knowledge, which surely galled Sebastiano.⁸⁷

Garzone as Nymph

With this in mind, it is worth returning to Sebastiano's letter, which closes with a battery of assaults on Urbano's personhood – character assassination as coup de grâce. It claims that Urbano gambles, chases prostitutes, “does the nymph with velvet shoes throughout Rome” (“fa la ninpha con le scarpe de veluto per Roma”), and is spendthrift.⁸⁸ Of these four charges, three invoke squandering money, a problem for a *garzone* trusted with finances. Injurious for other reasons is the barb “do the nymph”, which has been translated as “flits”, “prances”, and “sich als Galan gefällt”.⁸⁹ But these renderings do not capture this phrase's complexity. The female gender of the noun *ninfa* implies effeminacy and invokes the extensive literary history of nymphs as sources of desirability. The phrase had particular resonance in early sixteenth-century Rome, which saw a poetic outpouring over ancient statues of sleeping nymphs and the famous *Coryciana* dedicated to the nymph Corycia.⁹⁰ Pietro Aretino likely had this in mind when defining the phrase in the 1534 edition of his comedy *La cortigiana* about men seeking carnal delights in Rome. In it, the naive Sienese visitor Messer Maco asks the streetwise Maestro Andrea: how does one “do the nymph”?⁹¹ Andrea responds by describ-

⁸¹ Bambach (note 78), p. 328, note 87, importantly maintained Urbano's making of the sheet. Having weighed an attribution to Urbano, Matthias Winner (note 78), p. 305, suggested that the possibility of an attribution to Michelangelo should remain open.

⁸² Charles de Tolnay, *Corpus dei disegni di Michelangelo*, Novara 1975–1980, I, p. 96.

⁸³ Winner (note 78), p. 304.

⁸⁴ *Il carteggio* (note I), II, p. 178. Cf. Wallace (note 2), p. 56.

⁸⁵ *Il carteggio* (note I), II, p. 183.

⁸⁶ *I ricordi* (note 6), pp. 77f.

⁸⁷ Urbano lived amidst paper stacks in Michelangelo's house, having once found a letter under his master's drawings: *Il carteggio* (note I), II, p. 140.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 314.

⁸⁹ Linda Murray, *Michelangelo: His Life, Work and Times*, London 1984, p. 104; Wivel (note 36), p. 233; Panofsky (note 10), p. 215.

⁹⁰ Kathleen Christian, *Empire Without End: Antiquities Collections in Renaissance Rome, c. 1350–1527*, New Haven, Conn., et al. 2010, pp. 134–142 (with bibliography).

⁹¹ Pietro Aretino, *Teatro*, ed. by Paolo Trovato/Federico Della Corte, Rome 2005–2010, I, p. 252.

ing a wannabe courtier: “This you’ll be taught by every crappy, scavenging courtier, who is from one vesper to the next as if in absolution to purify himself in a cloak and a tunic made with curly wool, and he consumes the hours before a mirror giving himself curls, and applying oil to his antique head, and through Tuscan speech, and with a *Petrarchino* in hand, with a ‘yes, indeed’, with an ‘I swear by God’, and with an ‘I kiss the hand’, he thinks to be the *Totum Continens*.”⁹² Time devoted to such activities could not be spent sculpting.

A similar image of an effeminate courtier deserving avoidance is found in Baldassarre Castiglione’s *Il cortegiano*, which structures courtly masculinity through gendered rivalries.⁹³ Effeminate courtiers and nymphs alike required virile counterparts to define them, and Sebastiano’s upholding of the sculptor Frizzi should be understood within such gendered terms, with Frizzi a masculine alternative to nymphlike Urbano. But a *garzone* is not a courtier. Sebastiano’s letter thereby alleges a transgression of both status and gender. Rich men had the privilege of easily weathering insults of “doing the nymph”, for which a Roman pasquinade mocked the cardinal who received Sebastiano’s *Saint Agatha* panel of 1520.⁹⁴ In Urbano’s case, Michelangelo’s instructions had given way to such men’s tutelage, recalling that Aretino’s character is told he would be *taught* to do the nymph. To stress

Urbano’s contact with wealthy men, Sebastiano specifies that he does the nymph with velvet shoes.⁹⁵ This fabric implied expense, not necessarily effeminacy.⁹⁶ Pairs of black and white velvet shoes are documented among the belongings of Lorenzo di Piero de’ Medici, and Castiglione reports a gift by Clement VII to a court buffoon of a full velvet outfit, including shoes.⁹⁷ The production and trade of velvet, a luxury cloth normally made with silk fibers, flourished in Renaissance Italy after it was introduced through Eastern trade networks.⁹⁸ Velvet footwear was fashionable and impractical, as the fabric was often given a fuzzy texture that made it a magnet for dirt and debris. Such shoes were for flaunting, not sculpting.

To the extent that Sebastiano’s comment invokes a turn of phrase, the specific mention of velvet shoes begs the question of how Urbano might have acquired lavish clothing. Theft or wanton spending were two options, but gifting was also likely. Within the Renaissance gift economy, shoes were routinely given as amorous tokens, whether for a bride’s trousseau or among lovers.⁹⁹ In Aretino’s *Ragionamento* of 1534, the prostitute Nanna recounts how she secured from her besotted lover his own clothing for carnival, as well as new bespoke velvet shoes for herself.¹⁰⁰ In Urbano’s case, this carried the implication that he presumably received shoes from a man, an insinuation reinforced

⁹² “Questo ve lo insegnerà ogni cortigianuzzo furfantino, che sta da un vespro all’altro come un perdono a farsi nettare una cappa et un saio d’acottonato, e consuma l’ore in su gli specchi in farsi i ricci et ungersi la testa antica; e col parlar toscano, e co’l petrarchino in mano, con un ‘sí, a fe’, con un ‘giuro a dDio’, e con un ‘bascio la mano’ gli pare essere il Totum Continens” (*ibidem*). The term *Totum Continens* refers to a phrase in Thomas Aquinas’s commentaries on the writings of Aristotle (e.g. *Physics*, IV, 7, no. 4).

⁹³ Gerry Milligan, “The Politics of Effeminacy in *Il cortegiano*”, in: *Italica*, LXXXIII (2006), pp. 345–366.

⁹⁴ Jill Burke, “Sex and Spirituality in 1500s Rome: Sebastiano del Piombo’s *Martyrdom of Saint Agatha*”, in: *The Art Bulletin*, LXXXVIII (2006), pp. 482–495: 491, 495, note 87.

⁹⁵ Sebastiano’s phrase “fa la ninpha con le scarpe de veluto” suggests Urbano wore velvet shoes, but it could also refer by synecdoche to velvet-shod men with whom Urbano cavorted.

⁹⁶ Timothy McCall, “Brilliant Bodies: Material Culture and the Adorn-

ment of Men in North Italy’s Quattrocento Courts”, in: *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, XVI (2013), pp. 445–490.

⁹⁷ Carole Collier Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, and Fine Clothing*, Baltimore et al. 2002, p. 316; Baldassarre Castiglione, *Lettere famigliari e diplomatiche*, ed. by Guido La Rocca/Angelo Stella/Umberto Morando, Turin 2016, II, pp. 853f.

⁹⁸ Roberta Orsi Landini, “Il trionfo del velluto: la produzione italiana rinascimentale”, in: *Velluto: fortune, tecniche, mode*, ed. by Fabrizio de’ Marinis, Milan et al. 1993, pp. 20–49; Lisa Monnas, *Merchants, Princes, and Painters: Silk Fabrics in Italian and Northern Paintings, 1300–1500*, New Haven et al. 2008.

⁹⁹ Michelle O’Malley, “A Pair of Little Gilded Shoes: Commission, Cost, and Meaning in Renaissance Footwear”, in: *Renaissance Quarterly*, LXIII (2010), pp. 45–83.

¹⁰⁰ Pietro Aretino, *Sei giornate*, ed. by Giovanni Aquilecchia, Bari 1969, pp. 130f.

by the fact that doing the nymph held notions of sexual promiscuity. In Renaissance Florence, shoes and other objects of clothing were given by men to younger males with the expectation of sexual reciprocation.¹⁰¹ By juxtaposing his reference of Urbano's doing the nymph to his pursuit of prostitutes, Sebastiano was not obscuring the possibility of Urbano's engagement in such acts but heightening it through implied licentiousness. Sebastiano's language is efficient and deliberate. In the Middle Ages sodomy was considered an unspeakable vice (*vitium nephandum*),¹⁰² and the decorum of epistolary discourse meant that Sebastiano could not name it outright. He therefore concluded his charges against Urbano with the rhetorical tool of apophasis, saying he would not detail Urbano's shocking actions, goading Michelangelo to connect the dots.¹⁰³

Word of Urbano and fancy footwear would have stung Michelangelo by usurping his responsibility of clothing his *garzone*. This was an established practice for Renaissance artists but became increasingly vexed by the sixteenth century, as artisans used dress to claim status.¹⁰⁴ Tuscan artists with large workshops such as Neri di Bicci had purchased clothing for assistants, while the Venetian Lorenzo Lotto pledged to provide boarding and clothing for his *garzone* upon hiring him.¹⁰⁵ Sodoma also paid for a *garzone's* shoes, although he spent more on velvet ones to complement a matching outfit for himself.¹⁰⁶ Even more lavish was

Leonardo da Vinci, who extended his largess to his *garzone* Salai, as manuscripts record Salai's possessions such as a coat with black velvet cuffs as well as payments to him for a length of velvet, a silver vest, and rose-colored stockings.¹⁰⁷ While Michelangelo's biographers stressed his unkempt appearance, he spent heavily on clothing for himself and Urbano, as shown in a receipt of 28 April 1518.¹⁰⁸ A veritable shopping spree soon after the contract for the San Lorenzo façade was signed, the receipt records a list of many expenses for Michelangelo's vestments (including a black velvet doublet) mixed together with those for Urbano (including a black twill doublet). The two even got a pair of hats.¹⁰⁹ Bestowing authority on Urbano to conduct business in his stead, Michelangelo controlled his *garzone's* appearance by dressing him similarly if slightly less opulently.

Clothing another man could also be highly intimate, as Michelangelo explored in poetry. In a sonnet traditionally thought to be for Cavalieri, the narrator removes his bestial skin to vest his beloved's body parts.¹¹⁰ The tercets proclaim the wish for his hairy skin ("irsuta pelle") to be made either into a shirt to sheath his beloved's chest or into footwear: "the slippers [*pianelle*] / that make on that day their base and column / which I would carry at least two ounces [*oncie*]." ¹¹¹ The opaque phrasing stems from Michelangelo's combination of a Petrarchan conceit with technical terms rooted in the poetry of Burchiello,

¹⁰¹ Rocke (note 64), pp. 165–168.

¹⁰² Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*, Durham, N.C., 1999, pp. 105–112.

¹⁰³ *Il carteggio* (note 1), II, p. 314.

¹⁰⁴ Paula Hohti, "Dress, Dissemination, and Innovation: Artisan Fashions in Sixteenth- and Early Seventeenth-Century Italy", in: *Fashioning the Early Modern: Dress, Textiles, and Innovation in Europe, 1500–1800*, ed. by Evelyn Welch, Oxford/New York 2017, pp. 143–165.

¹⁰⁵ Anabel Thomas, *The Painter's Practice in Renaissance Tuscany*, Cambridge et al. 1995, pp. 73f.; Lorenzo Lotto, *Il libro di spese diverse*, ed. by Francesco De Carolis, Trieste 2017, p. 155.

¹⁰⁶ Roberto Bartalini/Alessia Zombardo, *Giovanni Antonio Bazzi, il Sodoma: fonti documentarie e letterarie*, Vercelli 2012, pp. 17f.

¹⁰⁷ Carlo Pedretti, "Il guardaroba di Leonardo e Salai", in: *Leonardo da Vinci: l'angelo incarnato e Salai*, ed. by *idem*/Margherita Melani, Poggio a Caiano 2011, II, pp. 391–393.

¹⁰⁸ *I ricordi* (note 6), pp. 30–33. Cf. Wallace 1994 (note 10), pp. 339–348.

¹⁰⁹ *I ricordi* (note 6), p. 31.

¹¹⁰ Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Rime e lettere*, ed. by Antonio Corsaro/Giorgio Masi, Milan 2016, p. 186.

¹¹¹ "[...] le pianelle / che fanno a quel di lor basa e colonna, / che pure porterei du' oncie almeno". For recent discussions of this sonnet and its language of materials, see Lorenzo Pericolo, "'Donna bella e crudele': Michelangelo's 'Divine Heads' in Light of the *Rime*", in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, LIX (2017), pp. 202–233: 218–220;

namely *pianelle*, open-toed, open-backed shoes, and *oncie*, a unit of measure.¹¹² By weaving competing vocabularies into his sonnet, Michelangelo knits lyric and artisanal intimacies: Petrarch's fantasy of amorous touch meets the realities of providing material for a tailor or shoemaker to fit another man's dimensions. Scholars have debated whether Michelangelo writes here of textile or leather, to which it is worth adding the possibility of velvet, as *velluto* was also an adjective meaning 'hairy' (in harmony with the *irsuta pelle*), and the poem opens with an apparent allusion to the narrator as a silkworm.¹¹³ Sebastiano's letter harnessed this erotic potential of men's shoes.

Urbano's betrayal, as Sebastiano structured it, thereby cut against the most intimate and practical features of his job. It was also public. Sebastiano's rejoinder that Urbano does the nymph "throughout Rome" implies visible enactment around the city. This taps into a concern about Urbano that Michelangelo voiced in a letter to his own father dated to that spring, in which he asked why his father did not tell him about unnamed actions of Urbano that brought unnecessary scandal.¹¹⁴ The intensity of Sebastiano's claims made retaining Urbano indefensible, and Sebastiano's letter foreshadows Urbano's departure by saying he is likely to reach a bad end, unfortunate because of his youth.¹¹⁵ Following such epistolary attacks and choreographed disapprobation, Urbano left Rome and Michelangelo's employ, prompting Sebastiano and his Roman colluders to stress that this was a just outcome. Michelangelo did not forget Urbano's Roman ruin, and it is likely for this reason that several decades later he evidently en-

couraged his future *garzone* Tiberio Calcagni to embrace abstinence.¹¹⁶

Garzone Gone

Michelangelo's *garzone* problem resulted from his physical remove from the *Christ* sculpture's installation while he oversaw sprawling workshop operations in Tuscany. Such remote work was facilitated by letters, which were not without complications. The episode of Urbano and the Minerva *Christ* reveals a culture of epistolary criticism in Renaissance Italy tied to the practicalities of moving artworks, letters, and employees. This was not unprecedented in the Renaissance: Shira Brisman has shown how Albrecht Dürer linked epistolary practices to the communicative function of images, especially in graphic media.¹¹⁷ In the case of marble sculpture, however, the precarious mobility of such objects and the use of a *garzone* to complete work amplified risks to artworks and reputations.

Far from straightforward reportage, epistolary criticism emboldened self-interested parties to establish trust by denigrating artworks and artisans. Urbano was an adept participant in this culture: while waiting in Rome for the arrival of the *Christ*, he wrote disparagingly to Michelangelo of Jacopo Sansovino's new *Madonna* in Sant'Agostino, a critique sure to be received favorably given the two artists' competitiveness.¹¹⁸ Letters were both a practical tool for artisanry and a vehicle for subterfuge. As a *garzone*, Urbano was meant to serve as his master's eyes and ears and hands in Rome, making him uniquely vulnerable to attacks on his conduct and workmanship. Through letters,

Christine Ott, "Michelangelos Handschuh: Zur Überlagerung heterogener Subjektentwürfe und literarischer Codes in *D'altrui pietoso*", in: *Italienisch*, XL (2018), 2, pp. 10–36.

¹¹² Buonarroti (note 110), p. 98I. That Michelangelo himself bought *pianelle* is well documented: *I ricordi* (note 6), p. 3I; *Il carteggio* (note I), II, p. 140.

¹¹³ Ida Campeggiani, *Le varianti della poesia di Michelangelo: scrivere per via di porre*, Lucca 2012, pp. 23–29 (with bibliography).

¹¹⁴ *Il carteggio* (note I), II, p. 275.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 314.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Elam (note 15), pp. 494f.

¹¹⁷ Shira Brisman, *Albrecht Dürer and the Epistolary Mode of Address*, Chicago/London 2016.

¹¹⁸ *Il carteggio* (note I), II, p. 282 (letter of 31 March 1521); Michael Hirst, "Addenda Sansoviniana", in: *The Burlington Magazine*, CXIV (1972), pp. 162–165.

artists including Sebastiano readily weaponized expertise for their own benefit. As Urbano's responsibilities as a *garzone* grew, so did the precarious nature of his position, revealing both the breadth and limits of freedom in this profession.

Aware of his increasingly fragile circumstances, Urbano had the foresight to prepare an exit strategy from Rome. The month after Sebastiano's incendiary letter, he reappeared in Naples, as reported in a subsequent letter to Michelangelo from Vittorio Ghiberti, with whom Urbano had brokered a marble shipment a year prior.¹¹⁹ Urbano's arrival in Naples shows keen leverage of his status as Michelangelo's *garzone*. Ghiberti wrote that Urbano fulfilled a commission of a sculpture of Saint Sebastian and would go to Spain. Likely in response to concerns from Mi-

chelangelo, Ghiberti added that he had observed Urbano for a month and could give a good report. What happened next to Urbano is uncertain, as this letter is the last known record of him. His enemies had won.

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¹¹⁹ *Il carteggio* (note 1), II, p. 331 (letter of 19 November 1521).

In the Renaissance, letters were a tool for conducting artistic affairs and a vehicle for creative disparagement. This article analyzes epistolary broadsides against Michelangelo's *garzone* Pietro Urbano, who was involved in the commission of a marble *Christ* for the basilica of Santa Maria sopra Minerva. Surviving letters show that Urbano was tasked with transporting, installing, and completing the sculpture in Rome while his master remained in Tuscany. The resulting denunciations of Urbano's workmanship and comportment have largely been accepted as true, but this article instead shows how they signal their authors' professional maneuvering. Indeed, the setup whereby Michelangelo and his *garzone* worked apart created weaknesses for others to exploit. Crucial invectives came from the painter Sebastiano del Piombo, who had collaborated extensively with Michelangelo and likely felt threatened by his long-distance arrangement with Urbano. Drawings were key to this conflict. Sebastiano relied on sketches from Michelangelo for his paintings, and Urbano had privileged access to his master's graphic knowledge, as exemplified by a little-studied drawing in Berlin discussed here. By evaluating Sebastiano's correspondence in its social, artistic, and literary contexts, the article reveals his strategies to denigrate Urbano, including in highly gendered terms. Urbano's vulnerability to such claims sheds light on the role of letters in Michelangelo's workshop practice as well as the uneven power dynamics between *garzone* and employer in Renaissance Italy.

Scala / Art Resource, New York: Figs. 1, 4. — © Fundación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid: Fig. 2. — © Casa Buonarroti, Florence: Figs. 3, 8. — Nimatallah / Art Resource, New York: Fig. 5. — © The Albertina Museum, Vienna: Figs. 6, 10. — © The Trustees of the British Museum: Fig. 7. — © Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Inv.-Nr. KdZ 5132: Fig. 9.

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