

THE LANTERN OF MICHELANGELO'S MEDICI CHAPEL

by William E. Wallace

The Medici Chapel presents an unimpressive face to the streets of Florence (Fig. 1). Like its counterpart at San Lorenzo, the Old Sacristy by Brunelleschi, interest has generally been directed to the architecture and sculpture on the interior of the Medici Chapel. Indeed, the drab external skin is easily overlooked by the casual visitor distracted by the colorful open-air markets surrounding it. Thanks to new studies by Caroline Elam and Howard Saalman, the exterior fabric of the Medici Chapel has received more attention, albeit less for aesthetic than for what one may call archaeological reasons.¹ In general, one is hard-pressed to find much praise wasted on the exterior appearance of the Medici Chapel, yet it is surmounted by a jewel of Renaissance architecture — a marble lantern that warrants closer examination (Fig. 2).

The lantern is briefly noted by most writers on the chapel although attention is most often directed to the unusual polyhedron mounted on the peak of the conical roof.² The gilt bronze orb is approximately two feet in diameter, "circa un braccio"³ and has seventy-two facets. The polyhedron is a curiosity, and it is certainly the *capolavoro* of the little known goldsmith, Giovanni di Baldassare, called Piloto.⁴ However, this impressive and costly bit of metalwork⁵ is merely the culminating ornament of a finely detailed structure that is a fitting crown for the Medici Chapel, both architecturally and iconographically.

The lantern sits on a low stepped base which appears as a broad platform when viewed from above and as a crepidoma — the three steps of a temple base — when seen straight on (Figs. 2, 3). Around the base is a ring of long flat terracotta tiles ("comignoli") that, like a ruffled red collar, strikingly contrast with the smooth polish of the white Carrara marble. The rest of the hemispherical roof is covered with a scale-like skin of overlapping clay tiles ("enbrici" and "tegoli") which diminish in size as they approach the apex.⁶ Probably for this reason, numbers were scored on the tiles (Fig. 4), to assist the workmen in the complicated task of roofing the chapel. The graduated diminution of the tiles on the exterior of the chapel serves the same purpose as the diminishing coffers on the interior vault; it subtly accentuates the size and height of what is, in fact, a fairly small structure. Indeed, the lantern — at slightly less than seven meters — is equal to the height of the dome it surmounts (Figs. 1, 5).

The lantern consists of a circle of slender freestanding colonnettes with responding but barely visible pilaster strips. The unfluted colonnettes stand on tall rectangular plinths and support sections of a sharply projecting entablature.⁷ Each section of broken cornice is also a platform supporting a volute that appears to unroll from under the conical roof. Between each pair of volutes is an oculus window. Below the oculi, slim rectangular windows form a faceted eight-sided drum.⁸

The colonnette capitals are the delightful invention of an unidentified stonemason (Fig. 6). The ionic volutes have been transformed into flowering tendrils that spill from a shallow bowl held up on the tips of broad leaves. A rich sequence of crisply cut moldings articulate the stepped projections of the entablature. In contrast to the angularity of the marble structure, the concave roof appears almost soft. At the peak is the celebrated polyhedron surmounted by a cross (Fig. 7). In a letter to Pope Clement VII, Michelangelo wrote that he decided to have the ball made with facets in order to vary it from "the others", by which he probably meant



1 Florence, San Lorenzo. Medici Chapel, Exterior View.

the gilded orb on the Florentine Baptistry (Fig. 8), and the much larger and more famous one that crowns the cathedral (Fig. 9).⁹ Closer examination, however, reveals that there is more to this ornamental finial than merely its curious geometry.

The faceted ball rests on a tightly bound laurel wreath from which descend eight ribbon-like straps. The ends of these fastening straps are decorated with finely wrought gilt lion heads. As crowning ornaments of the Medici Chapel, these decorations are obvious allusions to two of the most famous members of that illustrious family: the laurel is a well known reference



2 Lantern of the Medici Chapel.



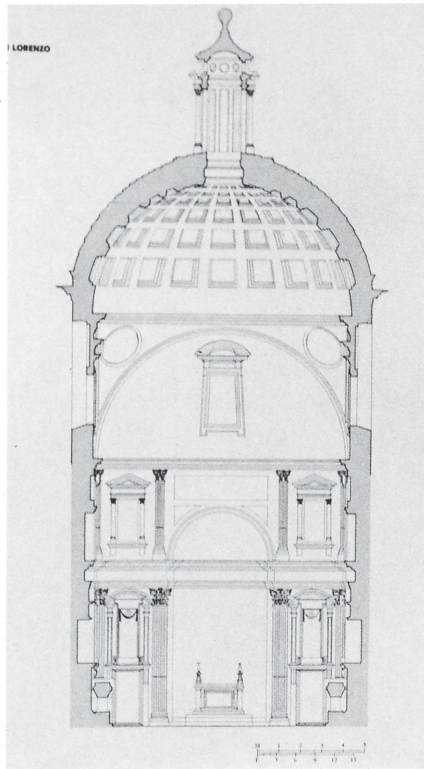
3 Lantern of the Medici Chapel.



4 Clay Tiles on the Roof of the Medici Chapel.

to Lorenzo the Magnificent and the “leoni” refer to his son, Leo X, who, along with his cousin Giulio de’ Medici (the future Pope Clement VII), was the original patron of the chapel and was to have been buried there.¹⁰ Similar lion heads, but in marble, are found above the flanking niches on the exterior of the chapel of Leo X in the Castel Sant’Angelo — Michelangelo’s first architectural commission.¹¹

Charles de Tolnay identified a drawing in the Casa Buonarroti as an early plan for the lantern (Fig. 10).¹² Although the final design modified the sketch in many particulars, the essential idea of a faceted structure within a circular plan is here adumbrated. The circle is divided into eight sections and eight colonnettes are indicated on the perimeter. Eight is repeated throughout the lantern that was actually built — in the number of windows, colonnettes, oculi, volutes, and lion heads. The recurrence of the number eight is certainly related to the importance of this same number inside the chapel. There are, for example, eight doors, eight overdoor tabernacles, and eight windows in the intermediate zone. The seemingly unusual decision to include eight doors for such a small chapel, especially since only four of them are functional, has been noted before but only partially explained.¹³ Janet Cox-Rearick has associated the eight doors with the theme of the Resurrection to which the chapel is dedicated, since eight is the number symbolic of death, resurrection and immortality.¹⁴ The doors have further funereal associations since they recall a frequent motif in Etruscan tombs and on ancient sarcophagi; they are portals through which communication with the underworld is made possible.



5 Florence, San Lorenzo. Medici Chapel, Section.

Because of its position, its light-admitting function, and its numerical symbolism, the lantern extends the theme of death and resurrection metaphorically expressed in the architecture of the chapel.¹⁵ The lantern is the means by which the soul, rising from the earthly tomb below, is permitted to pass from this world to the next, from the darkness below to the light above, from death to the afterlife. The eight closed portals at the level of the earthly tombs become eight open windows in the dome of heaven. Of course, the lanterns on the Florentine cathedral and baptistry also have eight sides, but given that the Medici Chapel is a family mausoleum, I think we are justified in understanding a deeper significance to the number symbolism.

The orb and cross, traditional symbol of Roman and Christian *imperium*, is usually reserved, in architecture, for the central dome of a church, as at Sta. Maria del Fiore and St. Peter's.¹⁶ Here it surmounts the private burial chapel of the Medici family. The association of the orb and cross with the laurel wreath and lion heads is made explicit, the symbol of *imperium* resting directly on those referring to the Medici. Such an association, moreover, is appropriate considering that two members of the Medici family — Leo X and Clement VII — had risen to the papacy and both were to have been buried in the chapel. Discreetly but unmistakably, the Medici assert their position not only in the city of Florence but over the whole of Christendom. Thus the form, decoration, and symbolism of the lantern reiterate two of the most important themes of the chapel; namely that it was dedicated to the Resurrection and was intended to celebrate a family with dynastic ambitions.¹⁷



6 Detail of the Medici Chapel Lantern.



7 Detail of the Medici Chapel Lantern.



8 Florence, Baptistery. Detail of the Roof and Lantern.

The thoughtful design and refined execution of the Medici Chapel lantern is especially evident when it is compared to other examples of this little discussed architectural genre. The lantern, of course, owes a debt to those on the Florentine baptistry and the cathedral (Figs. 8, 9). Vasari relates that Michelangelo's friends asked him whether he shouldn't make the lantern very different from the one designed by Brunelleschi for the cathedral, to which Michelangelo replied that he could certainly make it different, but not better: "si può ben variare, ma migliorare no."¹⁸ The Medici Chapel lantern is much smaller, comparatively simple, and rather more classical than its famous predecessor. On the other hand, it is a larger and far more lavish structure than its counterpart at San Lorenzo, the lantern that crowns the dome of Brunelleschi's Old Sacristy (Fig. 11).

The Medici Chapel lantern is more modest and restrained than the lanterns over the minor domes of St. Peter's (Fig. 12) which James Ackerman suggested were inspired by it.¹⁹ Similarly, it is much smaller and simpler than the lantern that Michelangelo designed for the main dome of St. Peter's (Fig. 13). Yet the essence of these grander conceptions can be detected in the earlier Florentine design. In all three examples, a circle of freestanding columns on high plinths support sections of a projecting entablature which in turn support volutes that appear to unfurl from under the rounded lip of a concave roof.

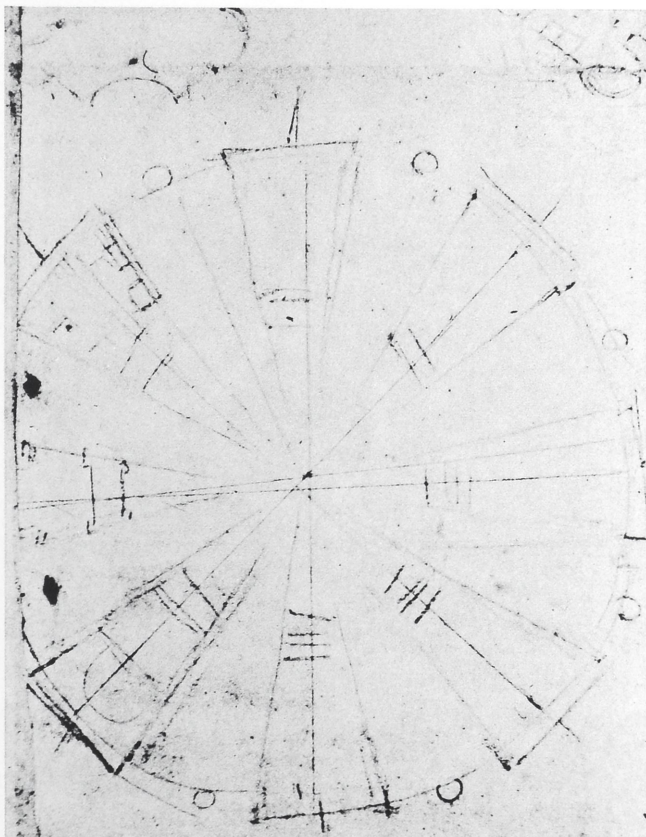


9 Florence, Sta. Maria del Fiore. Lantern.

Some lanterns (Fig. 14) seem unrelated to the domes that support them, and others merely miniature reflections (Fig. 15) or heavy appendages (Fig. 16) of the buildings they surmount. Sad are the lanterns that never were built, such as those that were intended for the tribunes of the Florentine Cathedral.²⁰ Bleakest of all is the absence of a lantern on the Cappella dei Principi, the next door neighbor to the Michelangelo's Medici Chapel. This massive building thrusts its bald pate high above the roofline of Florence but appears awkward without a lantern crowning its dome.

In comparison with many of these examples, the lantern of the Medici Chapel is a beautifully proportioned structure and a graceful culmination of the building it surmounts. It is moreover, all marble and prominently situated at the juncture of several busy streets where it overlooks an open square. The lantern was intended to attract attention, as it surely must have when it stood alone — before it was dwarfed by the Cappella dei Principi and the eighteenth-century campanile constructed alongside it.²¹ Except for the crossing of San Lorenzo, the lantern was once the highest point of the church. Constructed of marble, relatively ornate, and conspicuously expensive, the lantern was urbanistically prominent and suitably magnificent.

While Michelangelo was surely responsible for the lantern's design, it was largely carried out by his trusted *capomaestro*, Stefano di Tommaso Lunetti. Though not a key figure in the history of architecture, Stefano was Michelangelo's long-time professional associate and his chief assistant during the construction and decoration of the Medici Chapel. Born in Florence around 1465, he was trained as a miniaturist before turning his attention to architecture in 1497.²² Stefano is first documented in connection with Michelangelo in April 1521, when he was left in charge of the chapel construction while Michelangelo was in Carrara obtaining marble for the tombs.²³ Among other tasks, he supervised the erection of the *pietra serena* membering in the chapel and was responsible for overseeing the raising and stuccoing of the vault. He continued in Michelangelo's employ until his death in 1534, and appears regularly in documents and correspondence during those years.²⁴



10 Florence, Casa Buonarroti, 70A r.



11 Florence, San Lorenzo. Old Sacristy, Cupola and Lantern.



12 Rome, St. Peter's. Lantern and Minor Dome.



13 Rome, St. Peter's. Lantern.



14 Florence, Sto. Spirito. Cupola and Lantern.



15 Florence, San Marco. Lantern of the Salviati Chapel.

While the lantern was being erected in 1524, Michelangelo was preoccupied with the sculptural decoration within the chapel, including construction of a full-scale wooden model of one of the tombs and full-scale models of the tomb figures.²⁵ At the same time, he was regularly corresponding with Rome concerning the design of the Laurentian Library as well as a plan to include papal tombs in the Medici Chapel.²⁶ He was, moreover, still under contract for the tomb of Julius II, and was routinely hounded by the pope's heirs to fulfill this obligation, especially after the election of Clement VII in late 1523. Michelangelo was so busy that his correspondent in Rome, Giovanni Fattucci, recommended that in order to save time Michelangelo should buy an account book and have his *garzone* or Stefano di Tommaso keep his records.²⁷ Pope Clement VII was constantly requesting drawings, yet frequently suggested that Stefano make them so as not to distract Michelangelo's attention from his principal concern, the sculptures for the Medici tombs.²⁸ At one point, Michelangelo wrote that Stefano should make the requested drawing since, he protested, architecture "non sia mia professione".²⁹



16 Florence, San Frediano in Cestello. Cupola and Lantern.

There appears to have been a fairly clear division of labor between Michelangelo and his *capomaestro*, with Stefano responsible for much of the day to day work on the architectural fabric of the Medici Chapel.³⁰ When the lantern was being erected in 1524, Stefano already had been working on the chapel for nearly four years. It appears that Michelangelo was more than willing to allow his experienced *capomaestro* to direct the work on the lantern and perhaps even to contribute in a creative manner to its overall form and many of its details. Indeed, Michelangelo gave Stefano credit for executing the lantern in the letter he wrote to Pope Clement VII reporting its completion in early 1525: “Stefano has finished putting up the lantern of the chapel and has unveiled it, and it pleases everyone, and similarly, I believe it will please your Holiness when you see it”.³¹ Considering the long relationship and respective roles of the two men, I think we can take Michelangelo’s statement at face value. Other projects, such as the Laurentian Library and Reliquary Tribune, were carried out in exactly the same manner — by talented assistants, oftentimes with only minimal supervision by the master.³²



17 Jacopo da Empoli, *Michelangelo Presents his Plans for the Laurentian Library to Pope Leo X*. Florence, Casa Buonarroti

In a painting by Jacopo da Empoli in the Casa Buonarroti (Fig. 17), Michelangelo is shown presenting a plan for the Laurentian Library to Pope Leo X.³³ The posthumous painting is intended to celebrate the memory and achievements of a great artist: it is truthful in a rhetorical rather than a documentary way. But, one may ask, what inspired the artist to include the bearded man and young boy just behind Michelangelo approaching the pontiff carrying a model of the cupola and lantern of the Medici Chapel? The painting is unwitting testimony of a fact that we too rarely acknowledge today: Michelangelo had many assistants, was skillful in employing their talents, and frequently entrusted important tasks to them. The lantern of the

Medici Chapel is one small example of a type of collaborative endeavor that I would maintain was characteristic of Michelangelo's work throughout much of his career, especially in architectural commissions and particularly in 1524 when he regularly employed upwards of twenty persons at San Lorenzo. This labor force was soon to increase to well over a hundred when construction began on the Laurentian Library. Recognition of the role played by assistants does not diminish Michelangelo's achievement as an artist. Rather, it provides a fuller understanding of his working methods and the nature of the collaboration that was necessary to carry out the complex building operations at San Lorenzo, thereby permitting Michelangelo the time to carve the sculptures that are the glory of the Medici Chapel.

NOTES

I am grateful to Washington University for a Faculty Summer Research Grant which supported my research. I would like to express my special thanks to Alessandro Parronchi for obtaining permission to mount to the roof of San Lorenzo to study and photograph the lantern and to Bruno Santi for granting us that permission. Alessandro Parronchi cheerfully accompanied me and has assisted me in countless ways for which I am extremely grateful. An early form of this paper was read at the Central Renaissance Conference, Lawrence, Kansas in April 1986.

- ¹ C. Elam, *The Site and Early Building History of Michelangelo's New Sacristy*, in: *Flor. Mitt.*, XXIII, 1979, pp. 155-186, and H. Saalman, *The New Sacristy of San Lorenzo before Michelangelo*, in: *Art Bulletin*, LXVII, 1985, pp. 199-228, which includes an extensive photographic survey of the exterior of the building. In addition, see J. Wilde, *Michelangelo's Designs for the Medici Tombs*, in: *Warburg Journal*, XVIII, 1955, pp. 54-66; J. S. Ackerman, *The Architecture of Michelangelo*, London 1961, rev. 1964, vol. I, pp. 21-32, vol. II, pp. 22-30; A. Parronchi, *Una ricordanza del Figiovanni sui lavori della cappella e della libreria medicee*, in: *Opere giovanili di Michelangelo*, vol. I, Florence 1968, pp. 165-187; H. Burns, *San Lorenzo in Florence before the Building of the New Sacristy: An Early Plan*, in: *Flor. Mitt.*, XXIII, 1979, pp. 145-153; P. Dal Poggetto, *I disegni murali di Michelangiolo e della sua scuola nella Sagrestia Nuova di San Lorenzo*, Florence 1978.
- ² See references in *Barocchi*, *Michelangelo*, vol. III, p. 793. A. Bertini (in P. Portoghesi and B. Zevi eds., *Michelangelo Architetto*, Turin 1964, p. 128) offers the fullest description of the lantern, although both *Ackerman* ([n. 1], vol. I, p. 26) and *Saalman* ([n. 1], pp. 217-218) describe it and are sensitive to its beauty.
- ³ *Il carteggio di Michelangelo*, ed. P. Barocchi and R. Ristori, 5 vols., Florence 1965-83, vol. III, pp. 131-132.
- ⁴ Piloto (d. 1536) was a Florentine goldsmith and sculptor who was a friend of Perino del Vaga and the gemcutter, Valerio Belli, as well as the "amico suo fedele" of Michelangelo (*Vasari-Milanesi*, vol. VII, p. 198, and *Thieme-Becker*, vol. XXVII, p. 46). Piloto is mentioned frequently in the correspondence and *ricordi* of the master and appears to have worked with him on a number of projects including the windows Michelangelo designed for the Medici Palace (the famous "finestre inginocchiate"), for which Piloto made perforated metal shutters: "le gelosie di rame straforato" (*Vasari-Milanesi*, vol. VII, p. 191). Piloto also may have been one of the two persons who accompanied Michelangelo to Venice when he fled in September 1529, just prior to the beginning of the siege of Florence (*Vasari-Milanesi*, vol. VII, p. 198).
- ⁵ The total cost of the gilt orb, 1,090 lire and 5 soldi, was more than twice the 70 ducats that Michelangelo initially asked for the Doni tondo, and more than three and half years wages paid to one of the scarpellini who worked for Michelangelo in the Medici Chapel (the sum is noted in the documents published by G. Gronau, *Dokumente zur Entstehungsgeschichte der neuen Sakristei und der Bibliothek von San Lorenzo in Florenz*, in: *Jb.d.preuss.Kslgn.*, Beiheft, XXXII, 1911, pp. 66, 72, 75, 80). In the archives of the Salviati bank, I located a series of payments made by Giovanni Spina, the paymaster and Salviati bank official, to "Giovanni detto il piloto orafo" which permit us to follow more completely Piloto's work in the orb. He first received money "sopra il costo della palla che si fa per la cupola" in April 1524 (Gronau, p. 66), but was still working on the orb a year later. Between 6 April and 1 May 1525 he received 116 florins and 15 soldi in five payments of progressively diminishing amounts (35, 35, 30, 15 florins, and lastly, 1 florin 15 soldi) which suggest the work was brought to completion by the latter date: (Archivio Salviati, Pisa: Banco di Firenze 746, Campione 1524-28, fol. 41 lf. and rt.).

- ⁶ While construction of the chapel vault and erection of the lantern were completed by early 1525, the roof may not have been tiled until some years later. In a little known *ricordo* recently sold at auction, Michelangelo made a final payment on 26 January 1532 to a kilnmaster (Papi di Giovan Batista "fornaciaio" of Impruneta who already had received payments for tiles on October 28 and November 20, 1531; see: *I ricordi di Michelangelo*, ed. L. B. Ciulich and P. Barocchi, Florence 1970, p. 271) for 1200 clay tiles (600 "enbrici" and 600 "tegoti") as well as for 33 ridge tiles ("comignoli") which are probably the long flat tiles surrounding the base of the lantern (*ricordo* formerly of the collection of Mrs. Philip D. Sang sold at auction, Sotheby's, New York, February 14, 1986, Lot no. 498). The number of tiles mentioned in the *ricordo* approximately corresponds to the number of tiles covering the dome of the Medici Chapel.
- ⁷ *Ackerman* ([n. 1], vol. I, p. 26) noted that this is one of the first instances of a common architectural motif, "giving a dramatic impression of a radiating cornice in the form of a cogwheel casting varied shadows."
- ⁸ On 9 November 1524, Michelangelo paid Baccio di Puccione and the laborer Piero for window frames and eight sheets of oiled paper to cover the windows of the lantern "because it was raining" (*Ricordi* [n. 6], p. 160). This *ricordo* provides a *terminus ante quem* for the completion of the architecture of the lantern and it argues in favor of 1525 rather than to 1524 as the date of Michelangelo's letter announcing its unveiling (see Carteggio [n. 3], vol. III, p. 132 with references to other opinions concerning the date of the letter). Some years later, problems developed with the roof and windows leaking, as we learn from a letter of Stefano di Tommaso to Michelangelo dated 16 November 1532 (Carteggio, vol. III, p. 439).
- ⁹ "... e io ho pensato, per variarla dall'altre, di farla a faccie, e così si fa" (Carteggio [n. 3], vol. III, p. 132). The orb surmounting the cupola of the cathedral, commissioned from Andrea del Verrocchio, is approximately eight feet in diameter (four braccia) or twice the size of the orb on the Medici Chapel lantern, and was much admired by contemporaries (see *Vasari-Milanesi*, vol. III, p. 365).
- ¹⁰ Lorenzo the Magnificent is buried in the chapel and, at the time the lantern was erected, there were plans to include the tombs of Leo X and Clement VII (e.g. Carteggio, [n. 3], vol. III, pp. 78, 80, 84; *C. de Tolnay*, *The Medici Chapel*, Princeton 1948, rpt. 1970, pp. 76-80, and *Portoghesi / Zevi* [n. 2], pp. 866-868).
- ¹¹ See E. Gaudio, *Michelangelo e l'edicola di Leone X*, Rome 1976, figs. 1, 18.
- ¹² *Tolnay* (n. 10), p. 203, no. 50; Florence, Casa Buonarroti 70A r. (*P. Barocchi*, *Michelangelo e la sua scuola: I disegni di Casa Buonarroti e degli Uffizi*, 2 vols., Florence 1962, no. 68; *C. de Tolnay*, *Corpus dei disegni di Michelangelo*, 4 vols., Novara 1975-80, no. 207).
- A further drawing in the Uffizi (inv. no. 18724Fv; *Barocchi*, no. 237; *Tolnay*, no. 317v) may contain a first sketch for this groundplan. On a sheet filled with various designs there is a small and lightly drawn plan in black chalk — a circle with a square inscribed within it. Marks on the perimeter of the circle may be indications for colonnettes, and several line segments at the right may suggest the draftsman faceting the circle to create an octagon. Two other sheets in the Casa Buonarroti contain drawings that may relate to the lantern of the Medici Chapel rather than to the dome of St. Peter's as is generally assumed (*Casa Buonarroti* nos. 117, 118; *Barocchi*, nos. 155, 156; *Tolnay*, nos. 586, 587). These two sheets were once a single folio, as P. Joannides noted in: *Art Bulletin*, LXIII, 1981, p. 686). This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that both sheets include plans for the Altopascio house (c. 1518-20?); see *Ackerman* (n. 1), vol. II, p. 21; *Portoghesi / Zevi* (n. 2), pp. 846-847, and studies for a portal and other architectural elements that appear related to Michelangelo's drawings for the Laurentian Library (see also R. Wittkower, *Zur Peterskuppel Michelangelos*, in: *Zs. f. Kgesch.*, II, 1933, pp. 359-361).
- ¹³ E.g. *Tolnay* (n. 10), pp. 64-65; see also C. Gilbert, *Texts and Contexts of the Medici Chapel*, in: *Art Quarterly*, XXXIV, 1971, pp. 398-402.
- ¹⁴ J. Cox-Rearick, *Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art: Pontormo, Leo X, and the Two Cosimos*, Princeton 1984, p. 43: "In the chapel, this theme [Resurrection], is signaled only by the pelican-phoenix candelabra, signifying Christ's sacrifice and resurrection, and by the doors number eight — the number symbolic of death and re-birth." She further notes (p. 43, n. 6) that the numbering may also allude to the eighth house of the zodiac which is the house of death and regeneration. In addition, the decoration of each of the eight carved wooden doors consists of ten octagons arranged in two vertical panels (my thanks to Cynthia MacCollum for pointing this out to me). Thus, on each door, the ten octagons are composed of eighty facets and there is a total of eighty octagons decorating the eight doors of the chapel. For the symbolism of the number eight, see V. F. Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism: Its Sources, Meaning and Influence on Thought and Expression*, 1938, New York 1969, pp. 77, 85, 199-200; H. Meyer, *Die Zahlenallegorese im Mittelalter. Methode und Gebrauch*, Munich 1975, *passim*, but esp. pp. 139-141; V. Kirkham, *Painters at Play in the Judgment Day (Decameron VIII, 9)* in: *Studi sul Boccaccio*, XIV, 1983-84, pp. 274-275 (my thanks to Victoria Kirkham for the latter two references).

Concerning the number of facets of the polyhedron, the number 72 is the sum of 8×9 . The significance of eight has been demonstrated, and nine, since it is the sum of 3×3 , was considered a perfect number: "Of all the number symbols of the Middle Ages, few were so specifically meaningful as the number 9, which is always, first and foremost, the angelic number" (*Hopper*, p. 138. I am grateful to Michael Sherberg for

this observation). Seventy-two was also believed to have been the number of languages in the world (*ibid.*, p. 115), but more significantly the number of hours in three days which was the time between Christ's death and his resurrection (*Meyer*, p. 168).

It is possible that the octagonal form of many late antique mausoleums in Rome such as Sta. Costanza and the two rotundas at St. Peter's, Sta. Petronilla and Sta. Maria della Febbre (with octagonal interiors), contributed to the conception and iconography of the chapel and lantern. Sta. Petronilla, built as a mausoleum and still functioning as a burial chapel in the Renaissance, may have been a particularly relevant precedent since Michelangelo designed the Vatican *Pietà* as a funerary monument for one of its eight niches. Thus, perhaps from an early date, Michelangelo was sensitive to an association between octagonal forms, funerary architecture, and the symbolic value of the number eight.

- ¹⁵ See especially *Tolnay* (n. 10), pp. 63-75; *E. Panofsky*, *The Neoplatonic Movement and Michelangelo*, in: *Studies in Iconology*, 1939, rpt. New York 1972, pp. 183ff; *id.*, *Tomb Sculpture*, ed. H. W. Janson, New York 1964, pp. 91-92, and *J. Pope-Hennessy*, *Sculpture III*, pp. 16, 22-25; see also *K. Lehmann*, *The Dome of Heaven*, in: *Art Bulletin*, XXVII, 1945, pp. 1-27. On the symbolism of light in the chapel, see *Tolnay* (n. 10), pp. 63-75; *H. von Einem*, *Die Medicimadonna Michelangelos*, in: *Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaft*, CXC, 1973, pp. 7-30; *L. D. Ettlinger*, *The Liturgical Function of Michelangelo's Medici Chapel*, in: *Flor. Mitt.*, XXII, 1978, p. 301; *C. L. Frommel*, *S. Eligio und die Kuppel der Cappella Medici*, in: *Stil und Überlieferung in der Kunst des Abendlandes: Akten des 21. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte in Bonn*, 1964, vol. II: *Michelangelo*, Berlin 1967, pp. 41-54; *R. C. Trexler* and *M. E. Lewis*, *Two Captains and Three Kings: New Light on the Medici Chapel*, in: *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, N.S., IV, 1981, pp. 93-177, esp. pp. 124-141; *L. Mendelsohn*, *Propaganda in Paradise: Michelangelo's New Sacristy Revisited*, paper presented at the annual meeting of the College Art Association, San Francisco 1981, and *K. Weil-Garris Brandt*, *Renaissance Europe: Intentionally Directed Light?*, paper presented at the annual meeting of the College Art Association, New York 1986.
- ¹⁶ See *E. B. Smith*, *Architectural Symbolism of Imperial Rome and the Middle Ages*, Princeton 1956, esp. pp. 107, 120.
- ¹⁷ Frederick Hartt offered a sustained interpretation of the Medici Chapel as a dynastic monument and allegory of princely power in *F. Hartt*, *The Meaning of Michelangelo's Medici Chapel*, in: *Essays in Honor of Georg Swarzenski*, Chicago 1951, pp. 145-155; see also *E. Tietze-Conrat*, *The Church Program of Michelangelo's Medici Chapel*, in: *Art Bulletin*, XXXVI, 1954, pp. 222-224; *Ettlinger* (n. 15), pp. 287-304; *Trexler / Lewis* (n. 15), pp. 93-177, esp. pp. 93-123. *Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt* has pointed out the numerous Roman triumphal elements in the chapel (On Pedestals: Michelangelo's 'David', Bandinelli's Hercules and Cacus, and the Sculpture of the Piazza della Signoria, in: *Röm. Jb.*, XX, 1983, p. 400, n. 109; see also her remarks in: *Comments on the Medici Chapel and Pontormo's Lunette at Poggio a Caiano*, in: *Burl. Mag.*, CXV, 1973, pp. 641-649).
- ¹⁸ *Vasari-Milanesi*, vol. II, p. 192. Michelangelo's admiration for Brunelleschi's lantern was reiterated years later when he wrote to his nephew Leonardo for exact measurements of the dome and the lantern of Sta. Maria del Fiore shortly after he was charged with completing St. Peter's (Carteggio [n. 3], vol. IV, pp. 271-272).
- ¹⁹ *Ackerman* (n. 1), vol. I, p. 26.
- ²⁰ *M. Trachtenberg*, *Brunelleschi, Ghiberti, and 'L'occhio' minore of Florence Cathedral*, in: *JSAH*, XLII, 1983, pp. 249-257.
- ²¹ In a letter to Giovan Francesco Fattucci of December 1525 (Carteggio [n. 3], vol. III, pp. 189, 191), Michelangelo noted that San Lorenzo sorely needed a campanile; however, he might not have wished it placed immediately next to the Medici Chapel where its height and great bulk overshadow the comparatively small chapel (although this was in fact the location of the old campanile before it was demolished shortly before 1484; see *Saalman* [n. 1], p. 207).
- ²² *Vasari-Milanesi*, vol. III, pp. 241-243, and *Thieme-Becker*, vol. XXIII, Leipzig 1929, p. 471.
- ²³ *Ricordi* (n. 6), p. 106.
- ²⁴ In addition, Stefano played a prominent role in the design and construction of the Florentine fortifications under Michelangelo's direction in 1529-30. For example, he accompanied Michelangelo on an inspection tour of the fortifications of Pisa and Livorno (*Ricordi* [n. 6], pp. 251-252), and in July 1529, he was paid ten florins "per suo servizio di duo mesi per disegnatore sopra a bastion]" (*R. Manetti*, *Michelangiolo: le fortificazioni per l'assedio di Firenze*, Florence 1980, pp. 45-46).
- ²⁵ For Michelangelo's detailed records of the construction of the tomb and figural models (January-April, 1524), see *Ricordi* (n. 6), pp. 113-124.
- ²⁶ *Tolnay* (n. 10), pp. 76-80, 170-174; *id.*, *Michelangelo*, in: *Thieme-Becker*, vol. XXIV, p. 520; *Ackerman* (n.1), vol. II, pp. 28-29. Pope Clement VII actively participated in the design process, especially with regard to the Laurentian Library, offering suggestions and comments on drawings sent to Rome by Michelangelo. See the evidence for this relationship in the regular exchange of letters between Rome and Florence in which

- drawings were sent, returned, and discussed (e.g. Carteggio [n. 3], vol. III, pp. 17-18, 24, 30-31, 34, 35-36, 37, 39-40, 41-42, 62, 64-65, 71-72, 78, 80, 84, 86-87, 101, 114, and 124-125 in which, as in other letters, Fattucci reminds Michelangelo to write often and inform the pope of all that he is doing).
- ²⁷ Carteggio (n. 3), vol. III, pp. 22-23.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, III, p. 31; see also letter of August 13, 1524, in which drawings were requested but only if Michelangelo had time to make them (Carteggio [n. 3], vol. III, p. 101 and n. 32 below).
- ²⁹ Carteggio (n. 3), vol. III, p. 20. I discuss this aspect of their relationship at greater length in *W.E. Wallace*, Two Presentation Drawings for Michelangelo's Medici Chapel, in: *Master Drawings*, XXV, 1987, pp. 242-260.
- ³⁰ Michelangelo placed Stefano in charge of the workmen in the chapel in spite of some tension that had developed between the two (Carteggio [n. 3], vol. III, pp. 27-28).
- ³¹ Carteggio (n. 3), vol. III, pp. 131-132.: "La lanterna qua della chappella di decto San Lorenzo, Stefano l'ha finita di mecter sù e schopertola, e piace universalmente a ogni uomo, e chosì spero farà a Vostra Santità quando la vedrà." And since he supervised construction of the lantern, it was Stefano who was responsible for carrying out the wishes of the pope ("la volontà del Papa circha alla lanterna") and for repairing the leaks in the roof and windows in 1532 (Carteggio, vol. III, p. 439 and n. 8 above). The problem with leaks may be related to the tiling of the roof which appears to have been undertaken only in early 1532 (see n. 6 above).
- ³² We note, for example, that Baccio Bigio was placed in charge of work on the Laurentian Library so that Michelangelo could devote his attention to the marble sculpture in the chapel: "voi [Michelangelo] avete dato la cura a Baccio Bigio, il quale è tutto nostro; e voi potresti con più agio attendere alle figure" (letter of Fattucci to Michelangelo, 17 September 1524, Carteggio [n. 3], vol. III, p. 106). The Reliquary Tribune in San Lorenzo is a further example of the collaborative relationship between Michelangelo and his assistants who were left to carry out the work almost entirely on their own (see my article, *W.E. Wallace*, Michelangelo's Project for a Reliquary Tribune in San Lorenzo in: *Architectura*, XII, 1987, pp. 45-57).
- ³³ A. W. *Vliegenthart*, *La galleria Buonarroti: Michelangelo e Michelangelo il Giovane*, trans. G. Faggin, Florence 1976, pp. 112-115.

RIASSUNTO

La Sagrestia Nuova, pur così poco appariscente nella sua veste esterna, è sormontata da una lanterna in marmo di raffinato disegno. A quest'opera architettonica, minore eppure non insignificante, gran parte della letteratura dedica appena qualche cenno, con particolare riferimento all'inconsueto poliedro dorato, trascurandone quasi del tutto la storia o l'iconografia. Adesso, in parte grazie a una nuova documentazione fotografica, è possibile apprezzare dettagli architettonici e ornamentali mai osservati fino ad ora, e affrontare il problema del simbolismo della lanterna, collegandolo alla decorazione interna della cappella. Oltre che nel contesto storico dell'attività di Michelangelo a San Lorenzo, l'opera trova una precisa collocazione nell'ambito delle lanterne rinascimentali, genere peraltro scarsamente indagato.

Photo Credits:

Author: Figs. 1-4, 6-8, 12, 13, 15, 16. - *From Portoghesi/Zevi (n.2)*, fig. 157: Fig. 5. - *Alinari*: Figs. 9, 11, 14. - *Barocchi (n.12)*, pl. CIX: Fig. 10. - *Broggi*: Fig. 17.