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## ALEXANDER VI's CEILING FOR S. MARIA MAGGIORE IN ROME



Nearly from the time of its creation, the resplendent gilded coffering over the nave of S. Maria Maggiore has continued to be a subject of scholarly controversy owing to the lack of documentary sources. Indeed the ceiling's most enduring attraction for visitors to Rome stems from the legend popularized by Paolo de Angelis in the seventeenth century that the coffers were embellished with the first gold harvested from the New World, presented by Ferdinand and Isabella of Aragon to their compatriot, the Borgia pope Alexander VI<sup>1</sup>. Two papal stemme of the Borgia-Lenzuoli (Fig. 1), inserted in the end coffers over the east entrance and the triumphal arch, record the completion of the project before October 1503 when Pius III took office. A third coffer bearing the identical family arms appears in the center of the nave, while two other coffers symmetrically placed in the sixth and sixteenth rows enframe the bull on a blank escutcheon crowned by the tiara and keys of Rodrigo Borgia's uncle, Callixtus III (1455–1458) (Fig. 2). Since Onofrio Panvinio in the mid-sixteenth century, most historians of the basilica have putatively accredited the initial conception of a coffered ceiling to the earlier Borgia pope<sup>2</sup>. However Alexander's contribution – whether an entirely novel remodelling or

simply the restoration and completion of work begun forty years before – has never been clearly understood.

Traditionally Alexander has been regarded as a rather unenergetic patron of ecclesiastical building, preferring to repair preexisting foundations than to embark on new projects<sup>3</sup>. A contemporary humanist, Sigismondo dei Conti, criticized Alexander's diversion of offerings from the Jubilee year of 1500 intended for the upkeep of Christian monuments around the city<sup>4</sup>. Nonetheless dei Conti singled out for praise the commission in S. Maria Maggiore, by which Alexander was fulfilling his vow to the church assumed some time ago: 'Nam laquearia templi Beatae Mariae congnomento Maioris in Exquiliis, quod unicum ex eius piis operibus extat, voti multo ante concepti reus inauravit<sup>5</sup>.' Although reputedly the richest of cardinals second only to d'Estouteville, little is known of Rodrigo Borgia's patronage as archpriest of S. Maria Maggiore from 1483 to 1492<sup>6</sup>. On 27 February

1 P. de Angelis, p. 94: 'Alexander Sextus perfecit (et quidem si nonnullis credimus) ex primo auro quod Indiae transmiserint.' This version is repeated by A. Fascina (p. 34, cf. infra, n. 6) and in the supplemented reedition of A. Chacon's *Vitae et Res Gestae Pontificum Romanorum* ... (Rome, 1676), tom. III, col. 162.

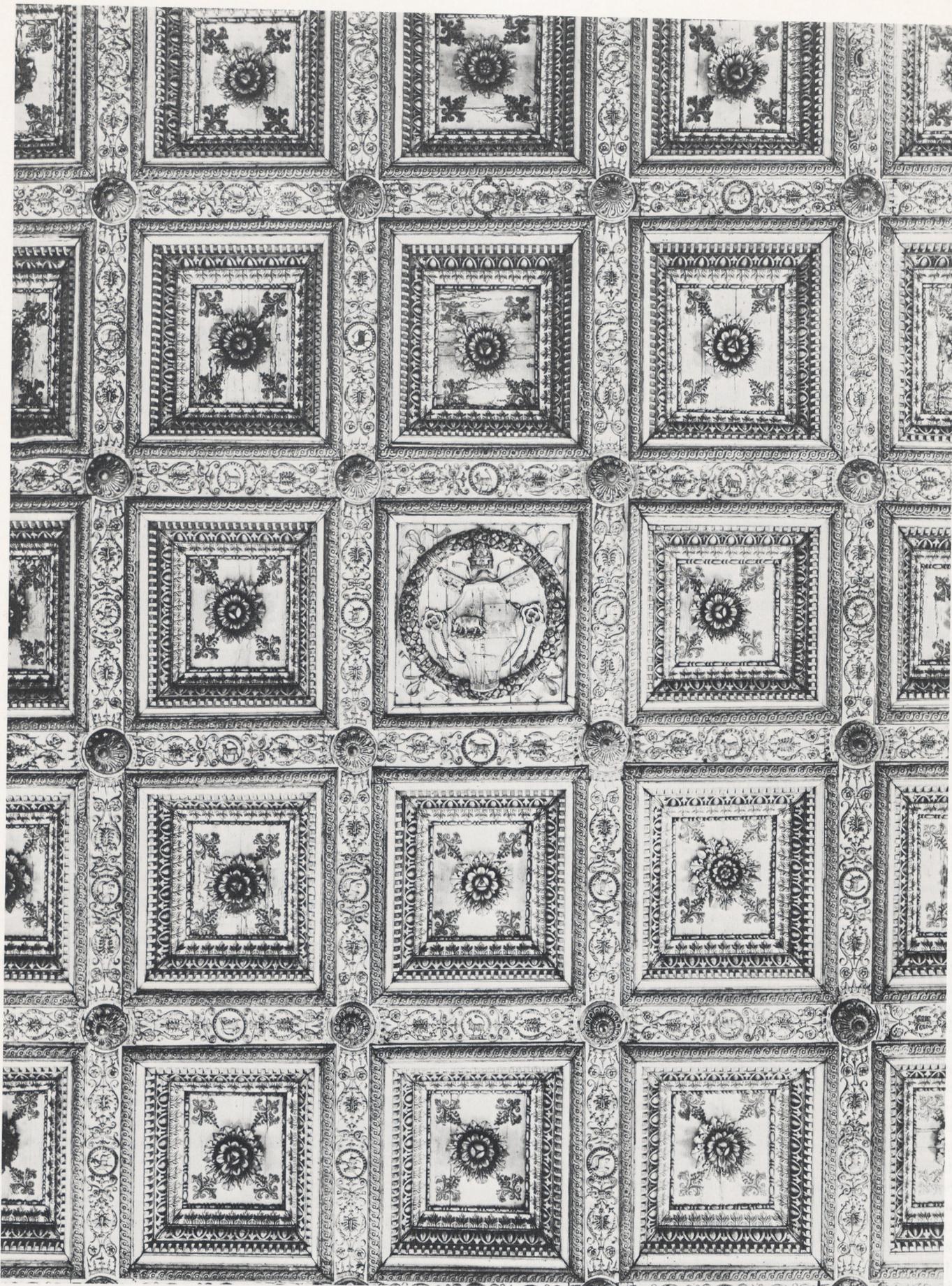
2 Panvinio's description of the basilica (Cod. Vat. Lat. 6781, ff. 151<sup>r-v</sup>) includes two discrepant references to the ceiling: 'Tectum majoris navis auratum, opera Calixti III: superius ligneum, imbricatum'; whereas on the verso: 'Tectum inceptit Callixtus, persolvit Alexander'. The text is published by A. Biasiotti, pp. 23, 36. This second account was sustained in Panvinio's later publication, *De praecipuis Ecclesiis* (Rome, 1570), p. 238: 'tectum basilicae laqueari ligneo aurato pulcherrimo Alexander sextus'. In the seventeenth century, De Angelis assigned the inception of the ceiling instead to Celestin III (1191–1198), followed by G. Severano, *Memorie sacre delle Sette Chiese di Roma*, vol. I (Rome, 1630), p. 699. However shortly thereafter, Fascina confessed to the uncertainty among contemporary authorities: 'Asceso al Papato (Alexander VI) vi fece fare (o come altri dicono) fece finire il Soffitto della Nave di mezzo, cominciato da Papa Calisto Terzo ...' A. Valentini, *La Patriarcale Basilica Liberiana* (Rome, 1839), p. 82, reaffirmed the combined patrimony of the ceiling between Callixtus and Alexander. Modern scholarship has remained equivocal on the early phase of construction, while suggesting the intervention of Guillaume d'Estouteville, archpriest of the basilica for some thirty years until his death in 1483. Cf. Biasiotti, p. 36, n. 5; C. Cecchelli, *I Mosaici della Basilica di S. Maria Maggiore* (Turin, 1956), p. 9; K. Schwager, 'Zur Bautätigkeit Sixtus' V. an S. Maria Maggiore in Rom', *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Hertzianae* (Munich, 1961), pp. 325–326. Further, see infra, p. 64.

3 Cf. E. Müntz, tom. III, p. 145; F. Gregorovius, *Geschichte der Stadt Rom*, vol. VII (Stuttgart, 1881), p. 650. Within Rome, Alexander's building campaigns were limited to the restorations of S. Nicola in Carcere, his first title church as Vicecancellarius, S. Giovanni in Laterano, S. Giacomo degli Spagnoli and possibly SS. Apostoli. In St. Peter's, Alexander continued the Benediction loggia begun under Pius II, restored the roof of the basilica and constructed a costly fountain in the piazza before the narthex. On Alexander's probable intervention in the choir of S. Maria del Popolo, see S. Valtieri, *Santa Maria del Popolo a Roma* (Rome, 1976), pp. 35 ff. Further, P. de Roo, *Materials for a History of Pope Alexander VI, his Relatives and his Time* (Bruges, 1924), vol. III, pp. 463 ff. The foundation of S. Maria in Monserrato beside the Spanish confraternity on Via Giulia, erroneously ascribed to Alexander by Armellini (*Le chiese di Roma dal secolo IV al XIX*, tom. I, Rome, 1942, p. 506) was not begun until 1518. A seventeenth-century 'Registro delle Fabbriche di Papa Alessandro VI' (Cod. Vat. Barb. Lat. 2451, f. 15<sup>r</sup>) makes no mention of ecclesiastical projects; see P. Pieralisi, *Archivio Storico Artistico Archeologico e Letterario* (Spoleto, 1880), vol. IV, fasc. 3, p. 141.

4 Sigismondo dei Conti da Foligno, vol. II, p. 218: '... magnamque inde pecuniam collegisset, nil tamen in aedes sacras, aut alios pios usus impendit.'

5 S. dei Conti, vol. II, p. 218. Müntz, tom. III, p. 146, n. 1.

6 On the palace constructed by Rodrigo Borgia and decorated by his heir, Don Pietro Borgia, later known as the Cancelleria Vecchia, see Gaspare da Verona, *Vita Pauli II*, Rerum Ital. Scriptores, tom. XVI, p. 38. On the Cardinal's collection of decorative arts, see L. Pastor, vol. III, p. 836. Fascina (*ibid.*) cites a 'cartella' with the inscription: 'Alexander VI Pont. Max. ante initium Pontificatum. huius archipresb. basilicae creatus lacunar affabre sculptum caelavit auro quod primo Catholici reges ex India receperant annuosq. proventus ad eximij conservationem operis adsignavit.' The passage is transcribed with minor variations by Bianchini, *Notizie storiche relative alla Fabbrica di S. Maria Maggiore*. Bibl. Vallicelliana, T. 80, f. 255<sup>r</sup>.



1. S. Maria Maggiore, Rome. Detail, coffered ceiling. Stemma of Alexander VI

2. *S. Maria Maggiore, Rome. Detail, coffered ceiling. Stemma of Callixtus III*



1493, only seven months after his election to the pontificate, Alexander paid a visit to the basilica with the specific purpose of inspecting the ceiling – ‘visurus quae pro structura illius ecclesiae sive supracaelo parata erant<sup>7</sup>.’ This description from the diary of Giovanni Burchard, the Master of Ceremonies, who attended the Pope afterwards during mass, probably referred to the preliminary framework onto which the coffers would eventually be installed. Though Burchard implies that construction is still in the preparatory stages, the grand scale of Alexander’s project must have been already evident, for less than a month later the bishop of Perugia, Juan Lopez, reported to a papal emissary Enrique Enriques in Gandia of the remarkable work being erected in S. Maria Maggiore<sup>8</sup>. Presumably Alexander continued to keep a close eye on the progress of the operation. Five years later, on 21 April 1498, the Pope entered S. Maria Maggiore a second time, as Burchard noted, ‘ad videndum opus supercoeli illius basilicae quod ibidem fieri ordinavit<sup>9</sup>.’

One point of disagreement among later sources concerns the annual donation which Alexander conferred from funds

in the Camera Apostolica for maintenance of the ceiling<sup>10</sup>. The earliest reference to this allowance occurs in the accounts of the Cappella Musicale from the year 1555, in which a payment of 24 *scudi* is specified ‘per la riparazione del palco indorato ... tassato dalla Santa memoria papa Alessandro, autor et conditor del detto palco<sup>11</sup>.’ The entry makes no explicit mention of a preceding act, which in fact would have been payable in ducats and not *scudi*<sup>12</sup>. Two years later, the terms of this pledge were formalized through the auspices of the papal Camerlengo; and the subsequent remittance is registered with no particular frequency up to 1586, shortly before being suspended by Sixtus V on January 1, 1587<sup>13</sup>. The annuity was reactivated by Clement VIII by order of the Tesoriere Generale in September 1592, probably with the intention of redirecting these funds for their proper use<sup>14</sup>.

10 The following discussion owes in part to an unpublished note kindly communicated by Fr. Coste.

11 ACSMM, fondo Cappella Musicale, vol. ‘Cappella 1552–1570’, not pagin., under year 1555.

12 The scudo was not put into papal currency until 1530. See J. Delumeau, *Vie économique et sociale de Rome dans la seconde moitié du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1959), tom. II, pp. 656–658.

13 See ACSMM, fondo Cappella Musicale, vol. ‘Cappella 1582–’; under year 1586 occurs the following entry: ‘Gli infrascritti scudi 24 non si pagano piu’.

14 Chirograph of 19 September 1592. B. A. V., fondo S. Maria Maggiore 59. Decreta Varia, vol. I, f. 46<sup>v</sup>. The act refers explicitly to Sixtus’s renunciation of the donation on 1 January 1587 and sets the new annuity at 24 *scudi*.

7 G. Burchard, vol. II, pp. 43–44. Müntz, tom. III, p. 206.

8 ‘Labra en Santa Maria la mayor una muy insigne obra, aqui en el palacio de San Pedro, en la benedicion, en Campo formio, y en muchos otros lugares.’ Letter published by R. P. Fidel Fita, *Estudios Historicos. Coleccion de Articulos*, tom. VI (Madrid, 1886) p. 126. P. de Roo, *op. cit.*, pp. 463–464.

9 Burchard, vol. II, p. 459.

However during the succeeding pontificate of Paul V, the donation continued to be diverted for the costly construction of the Cappella Paolina. By July of 1622, when Gregory XV issued a *motuproprio* entrusting to the Cardinal Camerlengo Ludovisi the resumption once again of Alexander's pledge, the delapidated condition of the ceiling had become quite noticeable<sup>15</sup>. This was put into effect by a chirograph delivered by the Pope 'vivae vocis oraculo', which restituted the original amount of 24 ducats 'in talem fidem adhiberi, quae ipsi chirographo originali adhiberetur si chirographum ipsum originale exhibitum et ostensum foret'<sup>16</sup>. None of the records of payment over the course of nearly seventy years indicate when the donation was first instituted by Alexander. De Angelis was clearly relying on second-hand information in assigning the 'salarium perpetuum ducatorum viginti quatuor ... pro reparacionesuffictus aurei' to the second year of Alexander's pontificate<sup>16a</sup>. Agostino Fascina, writing thirteen years later, cited a 'cartella' commemorating Alexander's donation, though its inscription bore no date, which is unlikely had the author consulted the original chirograph<sup>17</sup>. Nonetheless in July of 1655, a payment of 24 *scudi* was entered in the Libro Mastro of the basilica for maintenance of the ceiling – 'in virtù del Chirografo della Santa Memoria di Papa Alessandro Sesto concesso nell'anno 1492<sup>18</sup> ...'. This date would appear equally arbitrary and, like De Angelis's notice, presupposes a sum was set aside in anticipation of completion of the gilded coffering. This question will be returned to after a more careful examination of the building chronology under Alexander's sponsorship.

A second issue of some uncertainty already in the sixteenth century regards the extent of Alexander's restorations to the pitched timber roof, which had been considerably rebuilt under Eugenius IV between 1437 and 1438<sup>19</sup>. In his *Opusculum* published in 1510, Francesco Albertini remarked suc-

cintly: 'Alexander vero VI laquearia posuit, supra quae hoc anno tua beatitudo (Julius II) tectum cum trabeis instauravit<sup>20</sup>.' In S. Maria Maggiore the coffers are not keyed to exterior cross beams, as was the convention in most Quattrocento buildings in Rome, but rather suspended on iron ties from the joists of the independent roof construction (Fig. 3). Conceivably by Julius's time, the added load of the ceiling revetment required structural reinforcements to the late medieval frame<sup>21</sup>. However the only evidence for this pope's intervention at S. Maria Maggiore is a stone plaque with the Rovere arms embedded in the lower east wall of the campanile. Later Andrea Fulvio, in his archaeological guide appearing in 1527, ascribed to Alexander the gilded coffering along with restorations to the roof and mosaics in the apse executed under Nicholas IV<sup>22</sup>. Vasari, while attributing the ceiling to Giuliano da Sangallo, similarly observed that repairs to the roof were first executed at Alexander's behest: '(Giuliano) andò poi a Roma dove a papa Alessandro VI restaurò il tetto di S. Maria Maggiore che ruinava e vi fece quel palco ch'al presente si vede<sup>23</sup>.' There are a number of reasons to doubt the accuracy of Vasari's account, most obviously chronological. Vasari assigned the project for S. Maria Maggiore following the conclusion of the cupola of the sanctuary of the Virgin in Loreto, which by Giuliano's own testimony was solemnly consecrated in May 1500<sup>24</sup>. According to Vasari, the ceiling in S. Maria Maggiore was still unfinished when Giuliano della Rovere was forced to flee Rome in disgrace, though this transpired much earlier in April 1494. Allegedly Sangallo followed the Cardinal in retreat to Savona then Avignon<sup>25</sup>, however Alexander, wishing to retain the services of his architect, charged the

15 Chirograph of 14 July 1622. B.A.V., fondo S. Maria Maggiore, Cart. 78, perg. 331 (Ferri, CCCLIV): '... in considerazione delle spese maggiori che Papa Paolo Quinto nostro Pred.<sup>re</sup> parimente faceva in quella chiesa da che è proceduto che sendo mancato l'assegnamento la Soffitta sia deteriorata et ogni di più vada mancando l'ornamento di essa ...'

16 *Ibid.*

16a De Angelis, p. 128.

17 Fascina, p. 34.

18 ACSMM, Libro Mastro, vol. VII (1655–1662), f. 162<sup>r</sup>.

19 Documents recording the delivery of wood, tiles, lime and roof timbers are published by Müntz, vol. I, pp. 48 ff. Bianchini, *op. cit.*, vol. T. 75, f. 35<sup>r</sup>, notes that a few of the rafters which collapsed during the restoration undertaken by Benedict XIII in 1724 were inscribed with the name of Eugenius IV. This pope's stamp also appears on a number of surviving roof tiles; see M. Steinby, 'Le tegole antiche di Santa Maria Maggiore', *Rendiconti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia*, vol. XLVI (1973–1974), pp. 117, 123.

20 *Opusculum de Mirabilibus Novae et Veteris Urbis Romae* (Rome, 1510), ed. A. Schmarsow (Heilbronn, 1886), p. 16.

21 The roof construction has undergone two major restorations since the repairs carried out during the eighteenth century – one under Benedict XV and Pius X and most recently in 1973. For a schedule of the size and centering of the roof members from the nineteenth century, cf. Fondo Lanciani, Bibl. dell'Istit. di Storia dell'Arte e Archeologia, Rome: Roma XI, vol. 46, f. 16.

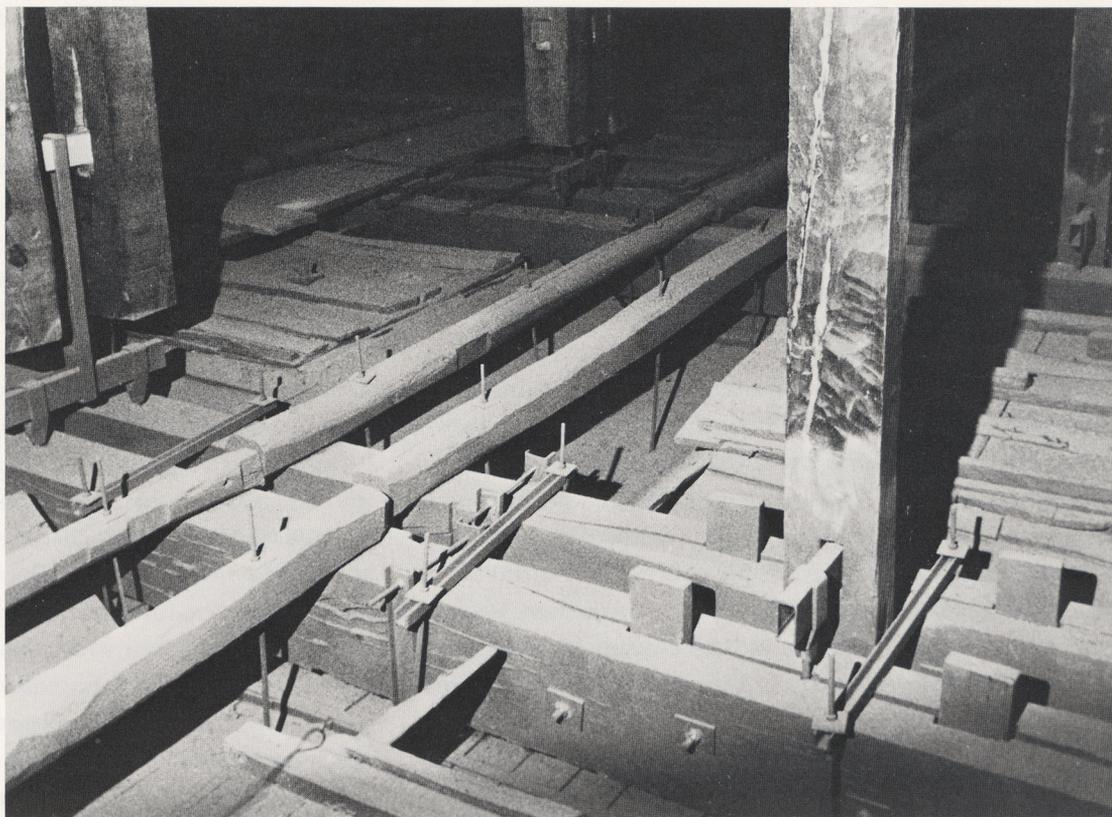
22 *Antiquitates urbis* (Rome, 1527), f. 30<sup>r</sup>: 'Laqueatis que tectis auro illitis/ac pictura ab alexandro vi nuperrime satis illustrata/instaurata que antea a Nicolao iiiii/ & Iacobo Columna/ ut in maiore abside ex speciosissimo musivo apparet.' Further, see Fulvio's poem, *Antiquaria urbis* (Rome, 1513), f. Gi<sup>v</sup>.

23 Vasari, vol. IV, p. 278.

24 See *Il Tacuino Senese di Giuliano da Sangallo*, ed. R. Falb (Siena, 1902), f. LI.

25 Giuliano della Rovere reached Avignon directly after a brief stop-over in Genova (Pastor, vol. III, p. 373). The sojourn in Savona, conflated in Vasari's *Vite*, is documented for Sangallo only three years later in February 1497 and again in January 1500, shortly before departing for Florence. See Müntz, 'Giuliano da Sangallo et les Monuments du Midi de la France', *Mémoires de la Société nationale des Antiquaires de France* XLV (1885), pp. 7 ff.

3. *S. Maria Maggiore, Rome. Undercroft of timber roof, with false construction of coffered ceiling*



completion of the ceiling to his younger brother, Antonio il Vecchio<sup>26</sup>. Vasari's narration again appears slightly out of historical sequence: 'Per il che lo fece finire per Antonio suo fratello; il quale, per avere ingegno buono e versatile, nel praticare la corte contrasse servitù col papa, che gli mise grandissimo amore, e glielo mostrò nel volere fondare e rifondare con le difese a uso di castello la mole di Adriano, oggi detta Castello Santo Agnolo; alla quale impresa fu preposto Antonio<sup>27</sup>.' It is generally accepted that a payment for 100 florins dated 7 November 1494 to one 'magistro Antonio florentino muratori pro mactonatura corritorii de palatio apostolico ad castrum Sancti Angeli' lends corroboration to Vasari's biography<sup>28</sup>. However the same name first

figures in the papal registers under Innocent VIII in August 1490, when 'Antonius Florentinus murator' paid 3 ducats and 50 bolognini to the Chapter of St. Peter's 'pro pensione domus<sup>29</sup>.' Precisely when and under what circumstances Antonio da Sangallo came to Rome is still unknown, though his first commission under Alexander's pontificate is probably to be documented in October 1493 during renovations to the papal fortifications at Offida and Tolfa, for which the architect is specifically referred to as 'civis Romanus<sup>30</sup>.' Du-

26 Already Müntz (tom. III, p. 164) reasoned the case for Giuliano's absence from Rome at the time of Alexander's commission, assigned to 1493–98. Müntz's attribution of the entire project to Antonio is followed by H. Heydenreich, in Thieme-Becker, *Kunstler-Lexikon*, vol. XXIX (Leipzig, 1935), p. 403. Adhering more literally to Vasari, G. Clause suggested the unlikely thesis that Giuliano, while still under the patronage of d'Estouteville, prepared a model of the ceiling realized by Antonio in the following decade. *Les Sangallo* (Paris, 1900), vol. I, pp. 196–197.

27 Vasari, vol. IV, p. 278.

28 A. S. V., *Intr. et Exit.*, vol. 527, f. 148<sup>r</sup>. Müntz, tom. III, p. 200. Construction on this passage under Alexander had begun perhaps already in 1492; see A. Guglielmotti, *Storia delle fortificazioni nella spiaggia romana* (Rome, 1887), 93 ff. Payments continued at least until October 1501. Cf. Pastor, vol. III, p. 454, n. 1; P. de Roo, vol. III, 474 ff.

29 The *locatio* referred to by Müntz (vol. III, p. 164, n. 1) is recorded twice in the Chapter Archives: B. A. V., Arch. Capit. di San Pietro, Censualia, Arm. 41–42, vol. 14, ff. 9<sup>r</sup>; part II, f. 30<sup>v</sup>.

30 A. S. R., Camerale I, Ufficiali Camerali, vol. 1716, f. 67<sup>v</sup> (unpublished): Die xviii Octobris 1493 Dominus Johannes Terce(?) S. d. n. pp. familiaris Arcis Offide Castellanus a S. D. n. deputatus per breve sub Datum xij octobris 1493. pont. suj. anno secundo de dicta arce custodienda iterum debitum prestitit et in forma solita iuramentum: et obligavit se ad penam xv. mil. ducatorum et in plenissima forma etc. Et D. Micael de Civita Castellana, Antonius de Canobio, et Magister Antonius florentinus Murator, cives Romani, fideiusserunt in solidum se obligantes iterum ad dictam penam et in forma approbante Rev. d. F. Borgia Thesaurario etc. et pro testibus dominis A. de Campania et N. de Castello. The fortress at Offida was begun shortly after 1487 by Innocent's architect and 'ingenierius universalis', Baccio Pontelli (Müntz, vol. III, p. 47). Under Alexander, work continued uninterruptedly from October 1492 (see A. S. R., *ibid.*, f. 63<sup>r</sup>). In the same act quoted above, Sangallo's services were guaranteed for the fortifications at Tolfa: Eodem instanti. Dominus Ludovicus de procida familiaris S. m. d. n. Castellanus Arcis Tulfevetaris similiter de Custodienda iterum dictam arcem

ring August of the following year, Sangallo took part in the logistics of Alexander's siege of the Rocca at Ostia, where his services may have included more than that of master mason<sup>31</sup>.

While Vasari's picture of the early career of Sangallo in the papal court is partly informed by historical fact, so too is his commentary on the building campaign in S. Maria Maggiore. This can now be confirmed by three unknown contracts for the fabrication of the ceiling drawn up respectively on 7, 8 and 9 April 1499, which stipulate Antonio da Sangallo's role as personal adviser to the Pope rather than actual capomaestro of the building *équipe* (see Appendix. 2, 3, 4). The principal contractor, Johannes Stasi de Florentia, while referred to as 'architettor', is undoubtedly the same 'Magistro Johannj Stasij Ingignerio' occupied in December 1489 'ad conficiendum pulveris per bombarderis et pro certis alijs rebus per eum pro camera factis ... in Camera apostolica<sup>32</sup>.' Stagi is probably also to be identified with one 'm.<sup>o</sup> Johanni Florentino Carpentario' paid in December 1487 for work on the catafalque ('pro Castro doloris') of Queen Charlotte of Cyprus<sup>33</sup>. In December 1493, Stagi received wages for various furnishings in Innocent's new wing of the Vatican palace<sup>34</sup>. In March of 1494, Stagi collaborated on the preparations for Alexander's coronation<sup>35</sup>. Stagi is last documented in March 1497, when he received payment 'pro factura cujusdam tribunalis et ba(l)nei pro Camera apostolica<sup>36</sup>.' Born around 1457, according to Milanese, Giovanni Stagi belonged to the family of sculptors originally from Pietrasanta, among whom the most successful were his brother Lorenzo

and nephew Stagio<sup>37</sup>. Otherwise Stagi's artistic training before settling in Rome is virtually obscure<sup>38</sup>. Apparently Stagi had a position of some prestige in the court of Alexander, for he made his home in the palace adjacent to S. Maria Maggiore and on 24 November 1498 he arranged for his testament to be prepared by the Apostolic notary, Baldassare de Rocca<sup>39</sup>.

On April 7, the initial conditions for delivery of materials and labor were established. Along with two witnesses from the Apostolic palace beside the basilica, presiding were Stagi, Antonio da Sangallo and the descendants of one 'Tyolini', deceased. The latter name is probably to be identified as the carpenter Alessandro da Tivoli, also called 'Tigulino', active in the Vatican palace under Innocent and Alexander and last documented six months earlier in November 1498<sup>40</sup>. The application of hammered gold was delegated between two German masters, Martinus Flosuin and Petrus Bocler, residents of the Parione district, who are to be paid in advance 200 papal carlenis and subsequently according to the schedule of work executed. The contract included an additional clause protecting these wages in case of inflation ('si ducatus aurei ascendunt, etc.')<sup>41</sup>. Following standard practice, the gold leaf was distributed at a specified ratio of seventy ducats to every one thousand sheets ('petiorum')<sup>42</sup>. As a guarantee to the *magistri battiloro*, a sample of the gold was to be placed on inspection before work got underway to judge if it was

debitum et in forma solita prestitit juramentum et obligavit se ad penam xij mil. ducatorum et in plenissima forma Camere etc. Et suprascripti d. Micael Antonius Canobi et Antonius florentinus pro dicto domino Johanne (Terce) obligantes fideiusserunt in solitum etc. iuraverunt etc. On previous renovations in March of 1489, see Müntz, 'Nuovi documenti. L'Architettura a Roma durante il pontificato d'Innocenzo VIII', *Archivio Storico dell'Arte* IV (1891), p. 470; A. S. R., *ibid.*, f. 7<sup>r</sup> (March 1482), f. 47<sup>v</sup> (August 1488), 36<sup>r</sup> (September 1484).

31 30 August 1494. A. S. V., Intr. et Exit., vol. 528, f. 191<sup>r</sup>. Müntz, tom. III, p. 164.

32 23 December 1489. A. S. R., Camerale I, Mandati, vol. 853, f. 187<sup>r</sup>. Müntz, 'Architetti e scultori durante il pontificato di Innocenzo VIII. Nuovi documenti', *Archivio storico dell'arte* IV (1891), p. 62.

33 1 December 1487. A. S. R., Camerale I, Mandati, vol. 526, f. 126<sup>r</sup>. Müntz, *ibid.*

34 16 December 1493. A. S. V., Intr. et Exit., vol. 526, f. 105<sup>v</sup>. Müntz's transcription (tom. III, p. 166, n. 1) is partially incorrect: ... ducatus viginti de carl. x pro duc. de mandato facto in praesenti die Magistro Johanni florentino Magistro ligniaminum pro pluribus operibus per eum in palatio factis.

35 18 March 1494, *ibid.*, f. 126<sup>r</sup>, again referring to Stagi as 'Magistro ligniaminum'.

36 24 March 1497. A. S. V., Intr. et Exit., vol. 530, f. 144<sup>v</sup>. Müntz, tom. III, p. 160, n. 1.

37 Vasari, vol. VI, pp. 104–106.

38 Though of Florentine citizenship, Stagi's name does not appear in the Matricolazione of the Silk Guild, to which *battiloro* belonged (A. S. F., *Arte della Seta*, vols. 1, 8 and 10).

39 ACSMM, Istromenti, vol. V, f. 64<sup>r</sup>. The text of the testament ('in folio mei protocolli') is omitted.

40 See Müntz, *op. cit.*, 1891, p. 370. A mandatum dated 21 May 1490 specifies 'Alexandro Tiburtino alias Tigulino' working under the supervision of Lorenzo da Pietrasanta (A. S. R., Camerale I, vol. 853, f. 222<sup>v</sup>). Under Alexander VI, this artist was paid 'pro valore tabularum et mercede laborerij' in the apartment of Cesare Borgia, perhaps referring to the ceiling (2 May 1496. A. S. V., Intr. et Exit., vol. 529, f. 186<sup>r</sup>. Müntz, tom. III, pp. 192–193). The last mention of 'Alexandri de Tiburtio', not recorded by Müntz, is dated 28 November 1498 (A. S. V., Intr. et Exit., vol. 531, f. 26<sup>r</sup>).

41 The gradual deflation during the fifteenth century of the papal ducat (of extrinsic value slightly higher than the ducat in 'oro di Camera') is tabulated by G. Garampi, *Saggi di osservazioni sul valore delle antiche monete pontefice* (Rome, 1770), pp. 52–54.

42 According to Biasiotti, p. 37, n. 5, the gold leaf is .960 parts pure species, yellow with a tendency towards green. The unit weight of .543 lb. was considerably bulkier than the specifications for the gilded coffering in S. Marco, executed by Fra Giuliano da Amadeis between May and November 1467 ('... ad rationem 8 flor. auri papalium pro quolibet miliare foliorum auri': Liber Mandatorum 1504, ff. 2<sup>r</sup>, 4<sup>r</sup>, 8<sup>r-v</sup>. Müntz, tom. II, p. 78, n. 1). As in S. Marco, the platens were originally painted in *antico azzurro* composed of green and blue ultramarine and *terra nera*, which was replaced under Benedict XIV by a *mezzatint* composed of black, yellow and white,

'recipiens', a technical term evidently signifying with minimal impurities of alloy. In addition, Stagi was obliged to provide a model in full scale and authentic materials ('petiorum aureorum longitudinis et qualitatis ipsorum'), which probably comprised one coffer with the corresponding strip of entablature.

On the following day, the specifications set forth in the previous contract were ratified by Antonio da Sangallo as papal intermediary with the additional stipulation that should Alexander die and the project be left discontinued, the two *magistri battiloro* may receive at least the first payment of 200 ducats and compensation for any further work, unless prearranged by an outside agent ('a banco seu commissario').

The third and final contract involves the negotiations between Stagi and one Johannes Thome of Madrid, a lumber supplier located outside Rome, for the delivery of lime-wood onto the building site<sup>43</sup>. One month earlier, on March 2, Stagi left twelve ducats in deposit with the guarantor, one Fatius Allegruti also of Madrid, pending the selection of planks of suitable size and quality (see Appendix. 1). The initial shipment approved by Stagi, to arrive within the following month of May, called for twenty-five planks in dimension 9 × 12 × ¼ palmi (= 2,01 × 2,68 × ,06 m). Part of these pieces were carved into rosettes (precisely 6 cm in depth) and part trimmed for the back platens of the coffers, later to be painted in 'buon azzurro.'

Because the job proposal stated explicitly 'pro toto palco, frasio, architrave et cornice', it must be concluded that both the entire one hundred and five coffers and ornamental entablature running along the top register of the nave were begun between April 7 and October 24, 1499, when the *magistri battiloro* formally received a copy of the instrumentum. This revision in dating would indicate that the intermittent repairs and new construction continuing for roughly six years were fairly extensive. As during this period there is no discussion of dismantling a preexisting ceiling, Burchard's term 'opus supercoeli' must have signified an open supporting grid on which the coffers could then be assembled from above (Fig 3)<sup>44</sup>. Presumably the twenty-five 'tabulas', which

with lillies painted over the corners. Already during the pontificate of Clement XI, extensive retouches to the coffers ('coloriti di ginapro e di torchino') and substitution of rosettes and sections of the dentel were administered by the architect L. Rusconi Sassi. ACSMM, fondo Giustificazioni, 'Conti di Lavori...' from 10 October 1718 to 1 July 1719, 101 ff. Reference Christopher Johns.

43 The framing of the coffers is made up chiefly of chestnut, alder and albuccio, while the restorations under Benedict XIV were carried out in sirmolo (Biasiotti, *ibid.*)

44 This type of 'waffle' construction was probably unprecedented in Roman building during the fifteenth century. In S. Marco, the fir platens and timbers were delivered together, after completion of

represented one fourth of the total operation, were even precut to an existing plan, since their measurements correspond within a few centimeters to the large platens for the coffers containing the stemma. However there is also evidence that various changes in the decorative program of the ceiling may have already been undertaken by this time, in particular the partial elevation drawing from Cod. Vat. Lat. 11257 (Fig 4)<sup>45</sup>. Curiously the discrepancy in the carved detail of the coffers in this sketch with those of the present state in the basilica has gone unnoticed, save most recently for Krautheimer<sup>46</sup>. The bands between coffers are articulated with an interlacing guilloche, a classical motive commonly found in mid-Quattrocento architecture, and joined by flat round bosses<sup>47</sup>. This scheme closely resembles the gilded coffering in S. Marco (Fig. 5), laid by Paul II from 1467 to 1469<sup>48</sup>, and may even reflect the original wooden ceiling in S. Cosimato, rebuilt by Sixtus IV between 1475 and 1482<sup>49</sup>. On the other hand, the draughtsman also carefully delineated an astragal molding on the inner border, where it appears in

the new roof (Müntz, tom. II, 74 ff.). From the undercroft below the rafters, the original assembly of the coffers can be seen to form a rigid construction framed by planks .055 m in width and spaced at .14 m intervals (platens average size 1.2 m<sup>2</sup>).

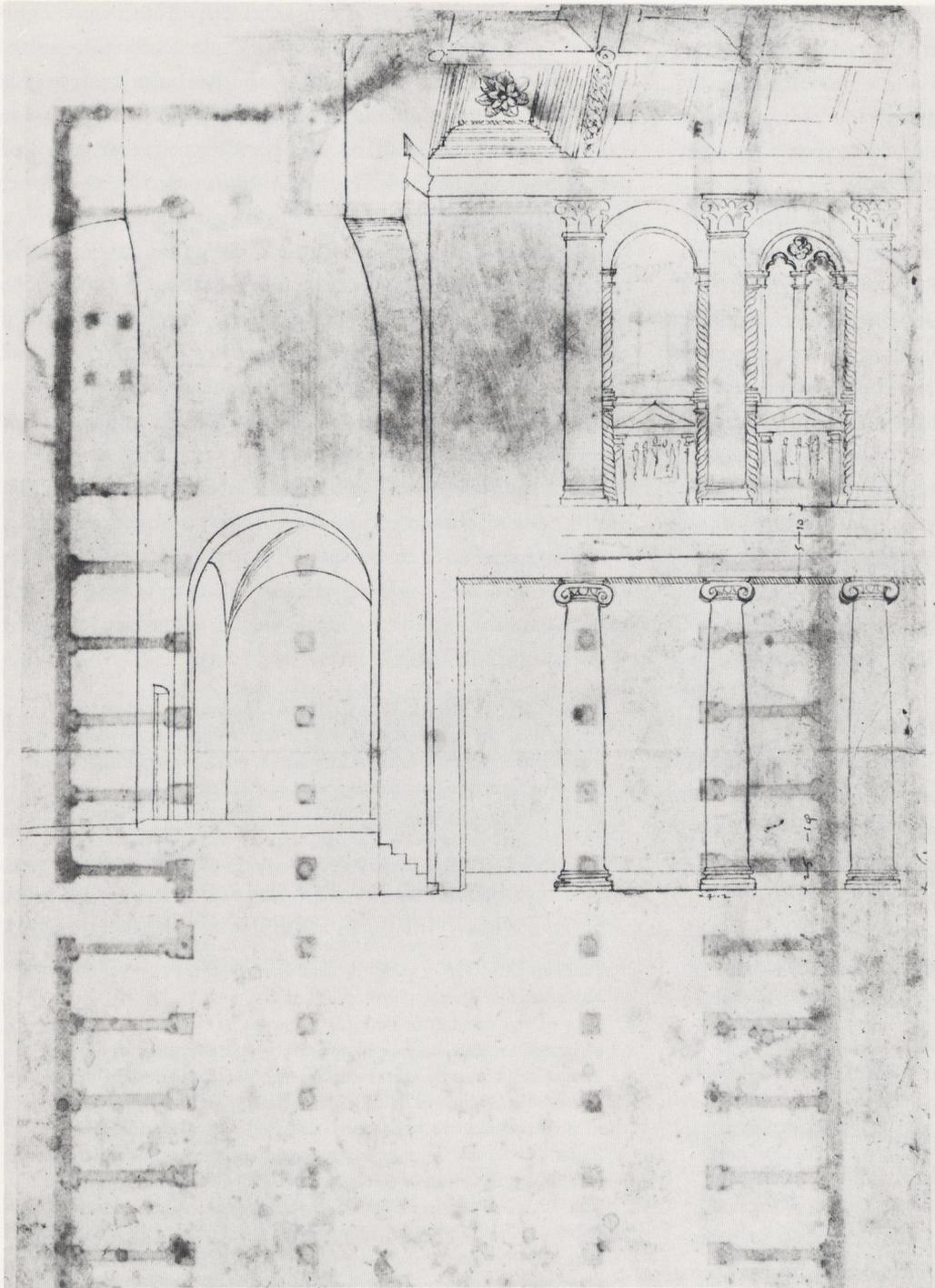
45 Folio 185<sup>v</sup> of this album, containing primarily seventeenth-century architectural designs by Virgilio Spada, was first published by R. Krautheimer, 'Some Drawings of Early Christian Basilicas in Rome: St. Peter's and S. Maria Maggiore', *Art Bulletin*, XXXI (1947), pp. 211–215, where the drawing is approximately dated 1510. Subsequently in the *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae*, vol. III (Vatican City, 1967), p. 5, the date is moved back to ca. 1480.

46 Krautheimer, *op. cit.*, 1967, p. 30, n. 3.

47 One of the most conspicuous examples of the guilloche could be observed on the soffits of the architrave in the pronaos of the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina (see the sketchbook, Bibl. Marciana Ms. Ital. IV, 149, f. 17<sup>r</sup> in Venice). In the Renaissance, this motive was falsely associated with antique coffering, such as in Palladio's reconstruction of the barrel-vaulted cella in the Temple of Venus and Rome (*I Quattro Libri dell' Architettura*. Venice, 1570. Lib. IV, p. 38) and in a detail drawing of the colonnade on the east flank of the Temple of Mars Ultor in the Taccuino Geymüller-Campello by one of the Sangallo (Uff. A 7880<sup>v</sup>), reproduced in A. Bartoli, *I monumenti antichi di Roma nei disegni degli Uffizi* (Florence, 1904), vol. I, fig. 143.

48 The ceiling in S. Marco has withstood two major restorations, the first from 1654 to 1657, however the detailing of the coffers is recorded in a sketch by Giovanni Colonna. See M.E. Micheli, *Giovanni Colonna da Tivoli: 1554* (Rome, 1982) Xenia Quaderni 2, p. 105, f. 90<sup>v</sup>. A close copy of this ceiling was used for the Sala Regia in Palazzo Venezia, probably completed within Paul's lifetime, and in the church of S. Maria in the monastery at Farfa rebuilt by Cardinal Orsini in 1492. My thanks to C. L. Frommel for permission to consult his forthcoming article, 'Francesco del Borgo: Architekt Pius' II. und Pauls II', Teil II, *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* XXI (1984).

49 On the sparse building history of S. Cosimato, see G. Urban, 'Die Kirchenbaukunst des Quattrocento in Rom', *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* IX/X (1961–1962), p. 172.



4. Elevation drawing of interior,  
*S. Maria Maggiore, Rome.*  
 Ca. 1492/1499. *Cod. Vat. lat.*  
 11257, fol. 185<sup>v</sup>

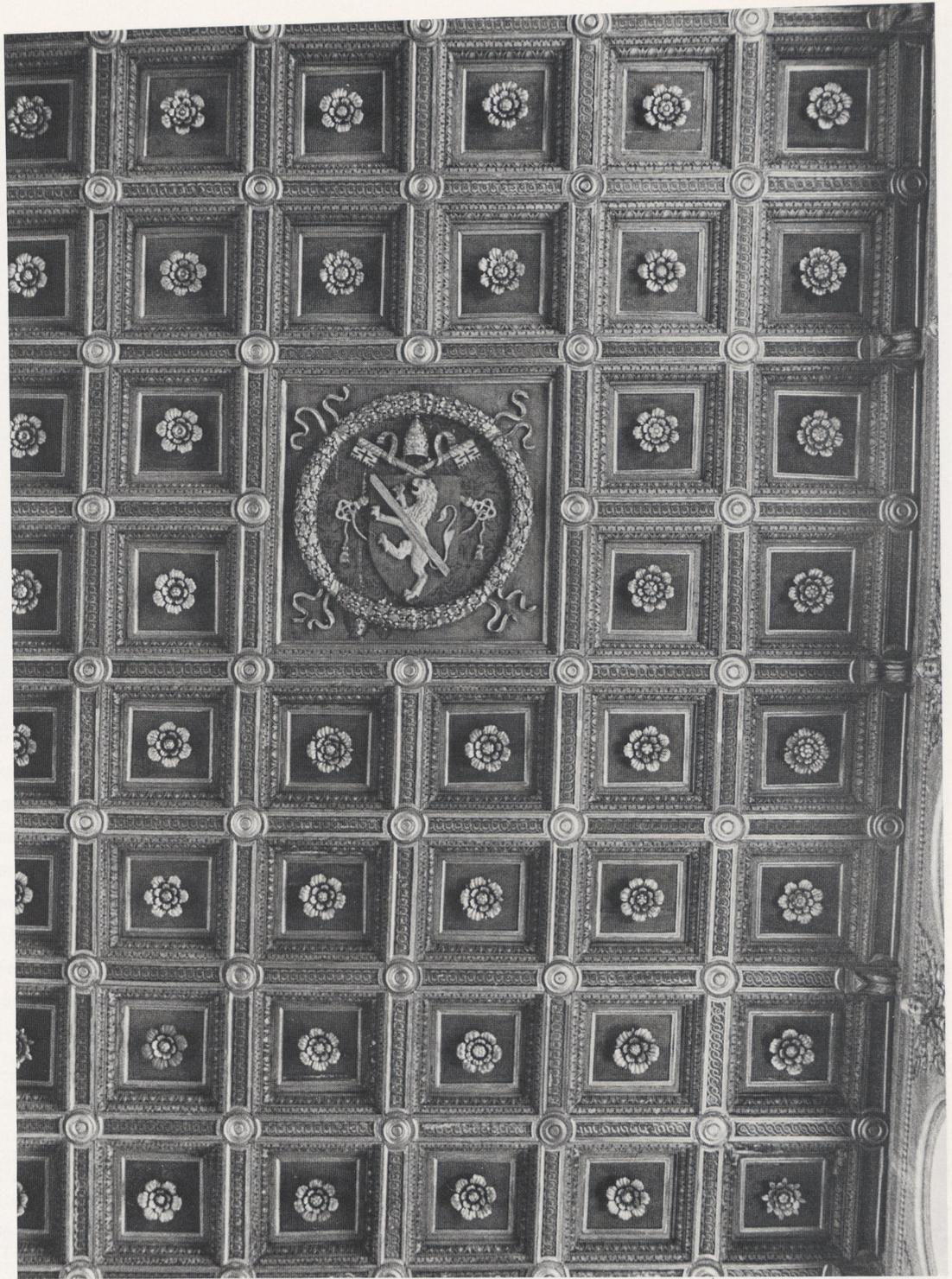
the actual coffers. Although the dating of this drawing is problematic, the differences in detail would suggest the partial undertaking of an earlier ceiling designed along traditional lines. The basis to associate such a project with Callixtus is certainly scant. While Callixtus continued the work of his predecessor, Nicholas V, on the refurbishing of the Apostolic palace on the Esquiline, the only evidence for his activity inside the church is a mandatum for payment to the architect Pietro Giovanni da Varese 'pro compensatione calcis per eum dimissae in opera et fabrica ecclesiae ...' from

August 1455<sup>50</sup>. As for d'Estouteville, who as archpriest of the basilica administered a number of major improvements, the text of his testament includes provisions specifically for the rebuilding of the choir and for the construction of groin vaults in the side aisles which were covered by newly installed rooves<sup>51</sup>. Had the Cardinal contributed to the begin-

50 4 August 1455. A. S. R., Camerale I, vol. 832, f. 46<sup>r</sup>. Adinolfi, vol. II, p. 170; Müntz, tom. II, p. 200.

51 B. A. V., fondo S. Maria Maggiore, Cart. 74, n. 246 (Ferri CCLII): 'pro edificio chori et pro tectis et voltis in duabus alis et pro variis

5. *S. Marco, Rome. Detail, coffered ceiling. Stemma of Paul II.*



ning of a more lavish project for the central nave, surely the expenses would have been recorded. A more plausible hypothesis is that the coffering represented in the Vatican sketchbook may have been started by Alexander himself, who ultimately opted for a more innovative solution on a grander scale.

paramentis aureis et sericeis'. Published in J. Marx, 'Quatre documents relatifs à Guillaume d'Estouteville', *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'École Française à Rome* XI (1915), p. 51.

Further light on the chronology of Alexander's remodeling in S. Maria Maggiore is revealed by the selection of Borgia insignia. Filling the enframing panels between coffers (Fig. 2) is an ornate stucco appliqué in the form of two stylized palmettes. In the center appear roundels bearing the Aragonese double-crown, prancing Borgia bulls (some mounted by winged amors) and the umbrella and keys. This last device, which recurs nearly forty times across the full length of the ceiling, is noteworthy given its absence from the myriad of family emblema in the Vatican apartments,

essentially completed by December 1495<sup>52</sup>. The umbrella (or pavillon) and keys, often used as a symbol for the sede vacante between pontificates, in the sixteenth century still signified more generally the temporal authority of the Church. Its first known use as such occurs on an embossed seal of Alexander's illegitimate son, Cesare, during his sojourn in Rimini from October 1500<sup>53</sup>. On the ground-story arcades in the cortile of the fortress at Civita Castellana, four of the keystones in the groin vaults bear the Borgia-Lenzuoli stemma (Fig. 6) split down the middle by the umbrella and keys. These arms were adopted by Cesare as cardinal, to which were added three fleur-de-lys after his return from France in September 1499<sup>54</sup>. Exactly when Cesare took possession of the Borgia citadel is uncertain; however the inception of building activity under Alexander is well documented. In October 1499, as assembly was commencing on the ceiling in S. Maria Maggiore, the Pope appointed Antonio da Sangallo to direct the renovation of the fortifications in Civita Castellana and Nepi<sup>55</sup>. Sangallo's presence at the Rocca of Civita Castellana is recorded in November 1500 and April 1501, during which time he may have had occasion to supervise the work proceeding in S. Maria Maggiore<sup>56</sup>. In all likelihood, the coffering was already fully in place, or nearing conclusion, by the summer of 1503. In August of that year, less than a month before the Pope's death, a tri-monthly stipend of 4 ducats and 60 *bolognini* was allocated to a presbyter of the basilica, 'Leonardus theutoni-

cus', for oversee of the ceiling<sup>57</sup>. Perhaps this payment now obviated the annual maintenance subsidy, which appears to have expired with the passing of Alexander's pontificate. For in March 1527, Clement VII delegated a permanent custodian, one Giovanni Mangoni da Caravaggio, for upkeep of the ceiling with a ten-month salary of twenty gold ducats<sup>58</sup>. Twelve years later, on 19 April 1539, the first major repairs were undertaken at a cost of two *decime* by decree of the Cardinal Camerlengo Ascanio Sforza, which as an emergency measure was taxed directly on the Canons of the basilica, rather than appropriated from the Camera Apostolica<sup>59</sup>.

For all their wealth of technical information, the contracts give no clue to the authorship of the model for the coffers. Antonio da Sangallo, trained like his elder brother as *legnaiuolo*, would appear the obvious candidate. Two years earlier, on 12 February 1496, Antonio presented a wooden model of the ceiling for the new chamber of the Gran Consiglio in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence<sup>60</sup>. A careful description of the hall is given by Vasari, who in the course of enlarging the Sala dei Cinquecento sixty years later thoroughly altered the Quattrocento ceiling, which he deemed 'ordinario e semplice e non ben degno di quella sala<sup>61</sup>'. By contrast, Vasari showed his appreciation for the structural ingenuity of the roof, utilizing iron chains to stabilize the deflection of the cross timbers anchored in the masonry walls of the palace<sup>62</sup>. According to Vasari, this invention of bracing 'cavalli' owed to Simone del Pollaiuolo (il Cronaca), who afterwards installed the coffers in equally expedient fashion<sup>63</sup>. Again Vasari's attribution is only partially correct. While in July 1495 the

52 F. Ehrle & H. Stevenson, *Gli Affreschi del Pinturicchio nell' Appartamento Borgia* (Rome, 1898), p. 20. The iconography of Alexander's emblema is discussed by F. Saxl, 'The Appartamento Borgia', *Lectures I* (London, 1957), pp. 178 ff. Further, see G. Biasiotti, 'Araldica Borgia nel soffitto della basilica di S. Maria Maggiore', *Rivista del Collegio Araldico*, fasc. Sept., 1915, pp. 5-8. In S. Maria Maggiore the double crown, besides appearing in the roundels, is skillfully incorporated around the *borchioni* of the coffering. On its fourteenth-century origin, see A. van de Put, *The Aragonese Double Crown and the Borgia or Borja Device* (London, 1910), 33 ff.

53 B. B. Heim, *Coutumes et Droit Heraldique de l'Église* (Bruges, 1949), p. 69. Illustrated in C. Yriarte, *Autour des Borgia* (Paris, 1891), p. 13. The identical coat of arms appears on the frontispiece of a manuscript, Vat. Lat. 5025, containing *Poema de gestis C. Borgiae* by the later humanist F. Speruli. W. H. Woodward, *Cesare Borgia. A Biography* (London, 1913), pp. 397, 438.

54 Woodward, *op. cit.*, p. 396. On the heraldic grotesques glorifying both Cesare and Alexander in the fortress at Civita Castellana, painted by Pier Matteo d'Amelia between 1502 and 1504, cf. A. Callavaro, 'Un Ciclo BORGIANO a Civita Castellana', *Il Quattrocento a Viterbo*, exhib. catalogue (Rome, 1983), pp. 273-284.

55 5 October 1499. A. S. V., Capit. X, Instrumenta Camere 1487-1496, ff. 332-333 (Arm. 34, n. 13). Published in Müntz, *Arte e Storia*, XI (1892), pp. 33-35. At Nepi, Sangallo joined the team of Cola da Caprarola 'lignarius' and Perino da Caravaggio as *capomaestri*.

56 See O. Speciale, 'Antonio da Sangallo il Vecchio: il Cortile della Rocca di Civita Castellana', *Annuario dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Arte. Università degli Studi di Roma*, I (1973-1974), pp. 200-202.

57 13 August 1503. A. S. V., Intr. et Exit., vol. 532, f. 151<sup>v</sup>.

58 5 March 1527. A. S. R., Camerale I, Mandati, vol. 861, f. 197<sup>v</sup>. Adinolfi, vol. II, p. 170, n. 4.

59 B. A. V., fondo S. Maria Maggiore, 59. Decreta Varia, vol. I, f. 1<sup>v</sup>, which refers to a public plea delivered 'vivae vocis' by Paul III. Reference J. Coste.

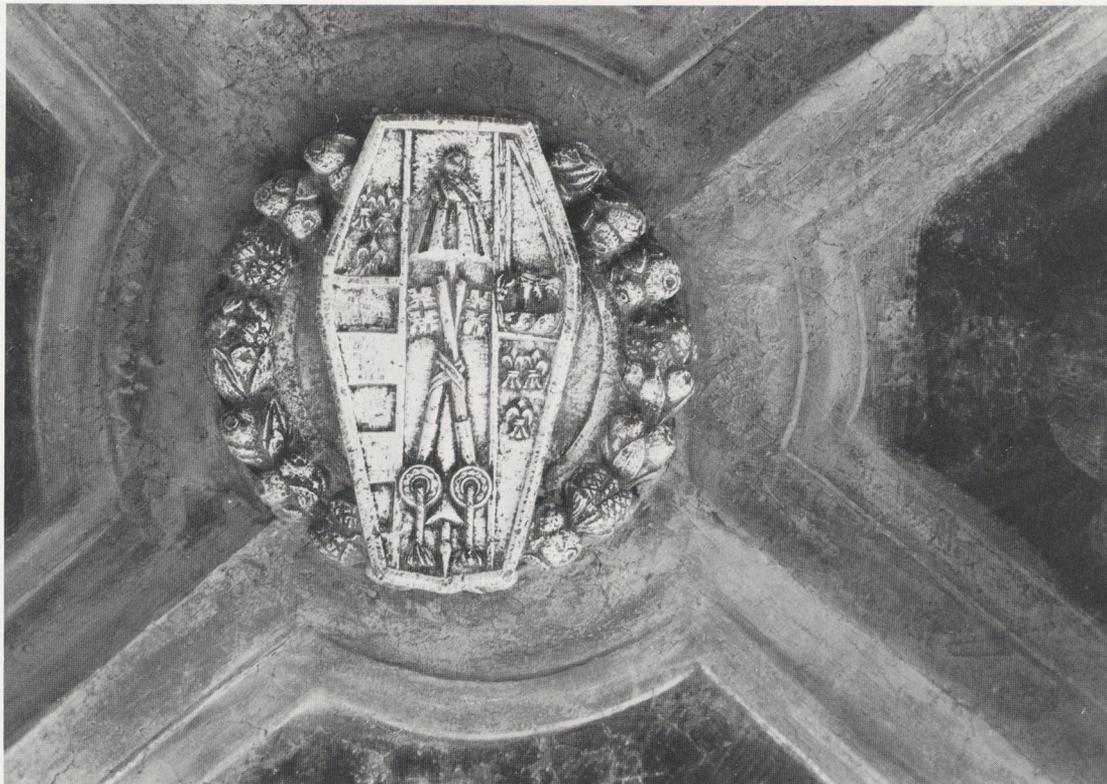
60 A. S. F., Deliberazioni e Stanzamenti degli Operai del Palazzo, vol. 6 (Stanz. III, Arm. II), f. 16<sup>r</sup>. The date transcribed by Gaye, vol. I, p. 585, is incorrect: '... teneantur laborare et facere dictum palchum et quadros predictos eo modo et forma, prout et sicut est modellum, portatum per Antonio da S. Gallo dictis magistris etiam laborantibus per totum mensem Aprilem proxime preteriti pro futuri 1496 (l. c.)'

61 Vasari, vol. IV, p. 449.

62 This is specified in a clause (omitted by Gaye) from the initial contract of February 1495: 'ad laborandum et faciendum ad omnes expensas lignaminis ferractorum pontium et casej dictorum operatorum.'

63 Vasari, *ibid.*: 'Tirati su questi cosi fatti cavalli e posti l'uno lontano dall'altro sei braccia, e posto similmente in brevissimo tempo il tetto, fu fatto dal Cronaca conficcare il palco; il quale allora fu fatto di legname semplice e compartito a quadri, de' quali ciascuno per ogni verso era braccia quattro, con ricignimento a torno di cornice e pochi membri.'

6. Forte Borgiana, Civita Castellana. Detail, key-stone of groin-vault in ground-floor courtyard



Signoria appointed il Cronaca to head the team of woodworkers soon to include Antonio himself, already by May 1497 Sangallo was promoted to *capomaestro*. In this capacity Sangallo was required to furnish new models for the ceiling joists ('cavalletti'), coffers and entire room of the Sala Nuova<sup>64</sup>. Apparently not until August of this year were the first coffers completed; and it may be surmised that the lengthy deliberation was necessitated by various problems in engineering the extreme span, for which Sangallo's particular expertise was called upon. By January 1498, with Sangallo still in the position of *capomaestro*, the ceiling and balustrades communicating to the Sala dei Ducento were nearing completion<sup>65</sup>. Strangely only four months later, Sangallo had returned to the status of *legnaiuolo*, executing the chapel in the Sala Nuova according to another artisan's model<sup>66</sup>. Sangallo's name continues to figure in the ledgers of the Operai del Palazzo until January 1499, however by this time supervision of the project had been delegated to one Bartolommeo Angeli 'deputatum ... in capomagistrum muraglia supra sala nove Consilij<sup>67</sup>.

64 19 May 1497. A. S. F., *ibid.*, vol. 6, f.: 'Antonio Francisci Bartoli, legnaiuolo de sangallo, flor. auri in auro pro modello cavalletti et modello palchi salae nove, et pro modello presentis sale nove et pro mercede unius eius factoris.' Gaye, vol. I, p. 588.

65 13 January 1498. A. S. F., *ibid.*, vol. 8, f. 8<sup>r</sup>.

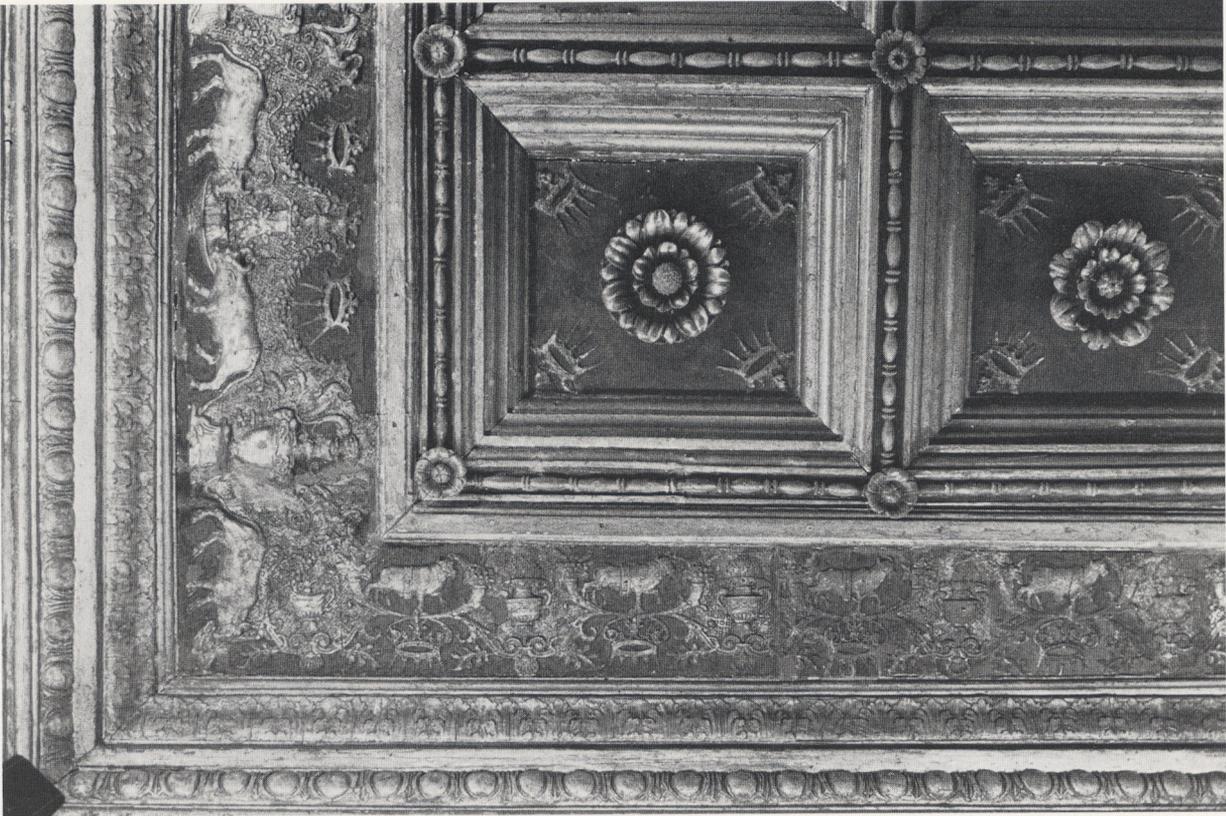
66 18 May 1498. A. S. F., *ibid.*, vol. 8, f. 17<sup>r</sup>. The date is again mistaken by Gaye, vol. I, p. 588.

67 9 January 1499. A. S. F., *ibid.*, vol. 8, f. 26<sup>r</sup>.

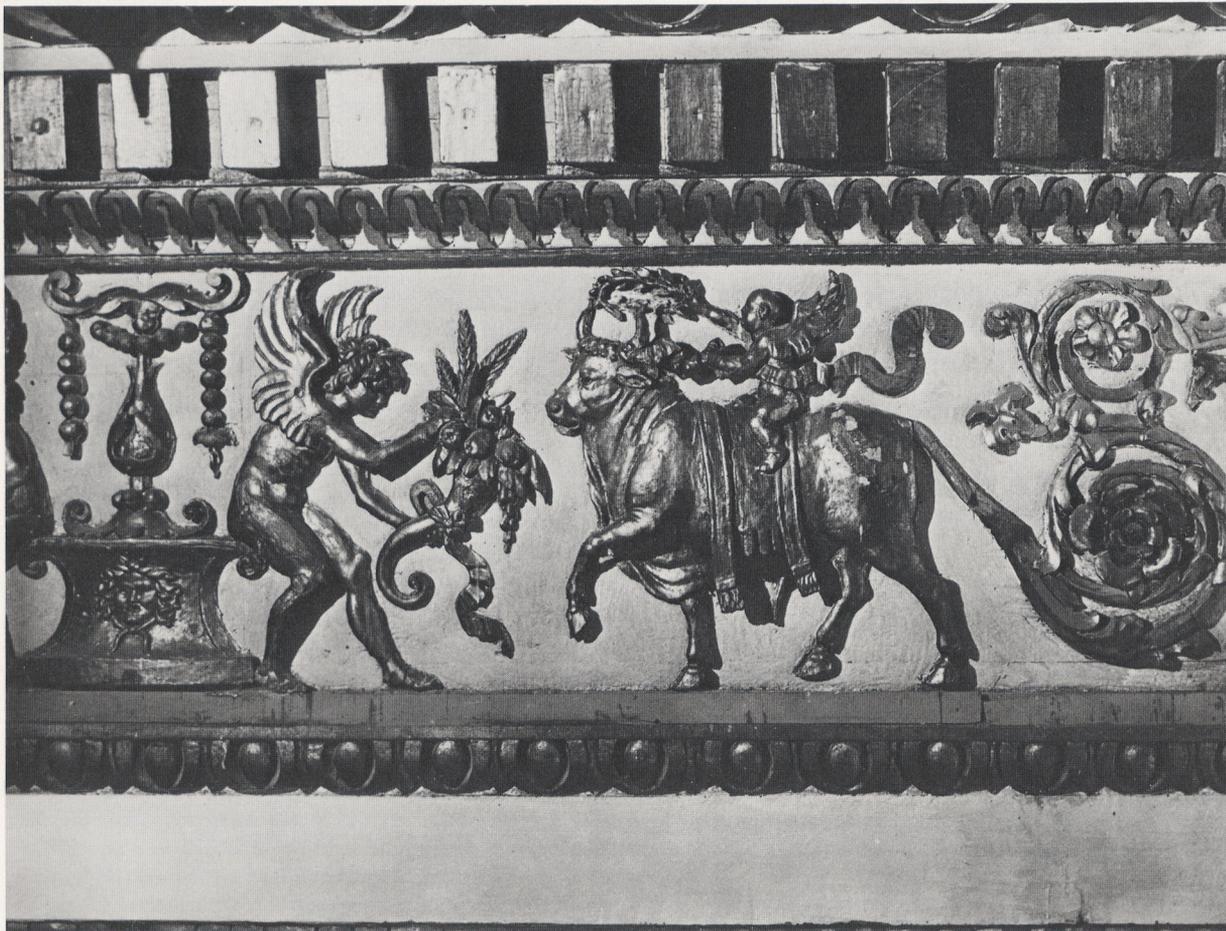
Whatever Alexander's personal affection for Antonio, as observed by Vasari, the architect's recent experience in the Palazzo Vecchio would naturally have recommended him for the task in S. Maria Maggiore in the coming months. The two projects corresponded roughly in scale and arrangement. The gilded coffers of the Sala Nuova were four braccia square (2.33 m<sup>2</sup>), numbering one hundred and probably divided in five columns<sup>68</sup>. In S. Maria Maggiore, the coffers extend twenty-one rows and five across, with rectangular apertures averaging 2.5 × 2.3 m (from the inner border of the guilloche). At the time of this commission, Alexander's taste for architectural decor had shifted considerably from the illusionistic experiments *all'antica* painted by Pinturicchio and his school on the vaults of the Sala delle Sibille and Sala del Credo in the appartamento Borgia<sup>69</sup>. Only the Sala dei Pontefici, probably the last of the rooms to be completed,

68 The central coffer was filled by a tondo delegated to Bernardo del Tasso, featuring the arms of the Popolo (A. S. F., *ibid.*, vol. 8, f. 18<sup>r</sup>). See A. Lensi, *Palazzo Vecchio* (Milan, 1929), pp. 81–83.

69 J. Schulz, 'Pinturicchio and the Revival of Antiquity', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* XXV (1962), 46 ff., has stressed the artist's acquaintance with Neronian vault decoration. In the Sala delle Sibille, the earliest of the rooms to be frescoed, the *finto* coffering composed of roundels interconnected on a square grid possibly derives from a well-known design by Giuliano da Sangallo for the stuccoed barrel-vault loggia in the Medici villa at Poggio a Caiano dating to ca. 1490 and later imitated by the Maiani for the *piano nobile* of the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence.



7. *Saletta Borgia, Vatican Palace. Detail, coffered ceiling with stucco border relief*



8. *S. Maria Maggiore, Rome. Detail, frieze in wood and gilded stucco over clerestory of nave*

9. Temple of Antoninus and Faustina, Rome.  
Detail, entablature

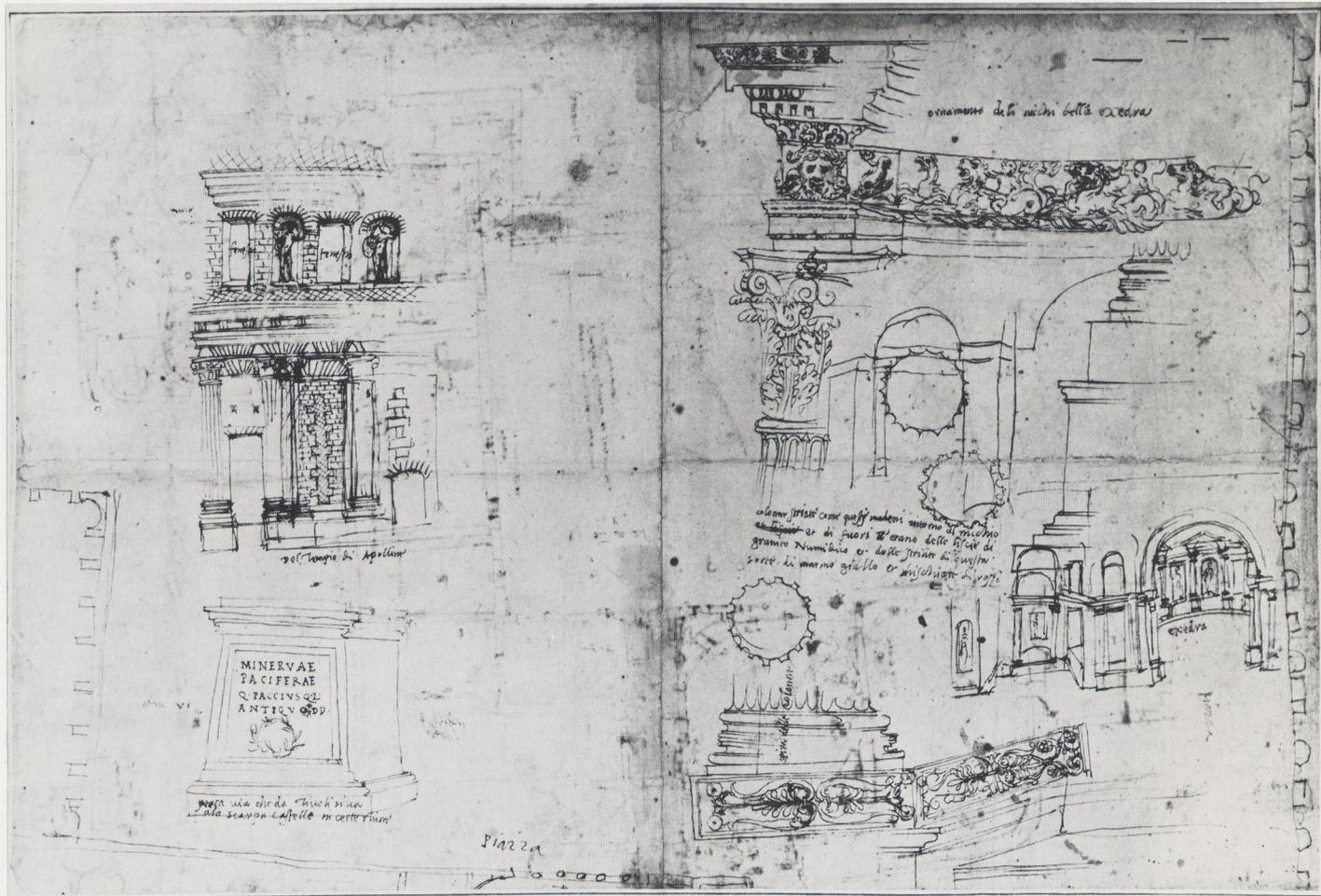


was covered by a flat wooden ceiling, partially rebuilt following the collapse of two beams in June 1500 which nearly fatally injured the Pope<sup>70</sup>. Three smaller coffered ceilings executed in wood with heavy stucco incrustation still survive in the two Salette looking onto the cortile Borgia from the east and above the landing of a small intermediate staircase leading to the Stanze. Their function as well as date is unknown, however the more ornate of these suites, communicating with the Sala di Credo by an exterior catwalk, has often been proposed as Alexander's private study or bedchamber<sup>71</sup>. In the second room to the south (Fig. 7), the treatment of the ceiling is more austere, with a simple astragal outlining shallow-set coffers. By contrast, the animated relief encircling the ceiling, showing the familiar bulls in proces-

sion and sipping from fountain basins, takes up the theme earlier sculpted on the marble frieze in the Sala dei Santi. Clearly this combination of classicizing coffers and heraldic frieze would have provided the antecedent for the felicitous parade across the nave of S. Maria Maggiore (Fig. 8). The crouching winged genii, proffering cornucopiae before the Borgia beasts, recall similar figures in the relief spandrels on the ceiling of the Sala delle Scienze e Arti Liberali. In the basilica, however, Stagi and his artisans reinterpreted Alexander's ubiquitous insignia in a new antique guise, probably inspired by the imposing frieze on the east and west flank of the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina in the Roman Forum (Fig. 9). Here the griffons are rigidly posed in mid-gait, back-to-back, with their tails gracefully transforming into lush vine scrolls, like the bulls in the long repeating Borgia frieze. In Quattrocento Rome, a number of palaces reutilized this ancient source more directly, such as in the painted frieze of the Sala del Concistoro in the Palazzo Venezia, the main salone of Burchard's house near the Torre Argentina, and on the sculpted portal of the Palazzo Fonseca

<sup>70</sup> Burchard, ed. Celani, vol. II (Città di Castello, 1911–1913), p. 235. S. dei Conti, vol. II, p. 269. *I Diarii di Marino Sanudo*, vol. III (Venice, 1880), p. 477. Cited in Ehrle & Stevenson, *op. cit.*, 17 ff.

<sup>71</sup> F. Mancinelli, 'Il cubiculo di Giulio II', *Bollettino dei Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie*, III (1982), 85 ff. with further bibliography.



10. Pirro Ligorio, drawing of piazza d'Oro and other ruins in Villa Hadriana, Tivoli. Royal Library, Windsor, no. 10733<sup>v</sup>

(later Simonetti) in via della Pigna<sup>72</sup>. Half a century later, Ammannati boldly reproduced the Temple frieze on the second-story exterior of the Palazzo Manelli-Riccardi in Florence, which later took the name 'dei Griffoni'<sup>73</sup>.

The coffering in S. Maria Maggiore, on the other hand, betrays only a vague affinity to the well-known examples surviving from ancient Rome, such as the Basilica of Maxentius, the Temple of Venus and Rome, the Pantheon, the Severan residences on the southeast corner of the Palatine, the soffits of the exterior arcades in the Colisseum, the triumphal arches of Titus and Septimius, or the converted church of Sant'Urbano along the Via Appia. These vaulted monu-

ments in stucco and *opus caementicium* could readily be imitated for contemporary architectural designs, as demonstrated in Florence by Giuliano da Sangallo's octagonal-coffered *androne* surrounding the cortile of the Palazzo della Scala built around 1482, and in Rome by the barrel-vaulted vestibule of the Palazzo Venezia executed between 1467 and 1469<sup>74</sup>. However, except for the deteriorated ruins of the Septizonium, there were few direct prototypes from antiquity for solving the technical difficulties of a flat coffered ceiling in wood<sup>75</sup>. As for the floral pattern enframing the coffers in S. Maria Maggiore, Sangallo turned to a Grecian ornamental motive – the palmette – an example of which could be found

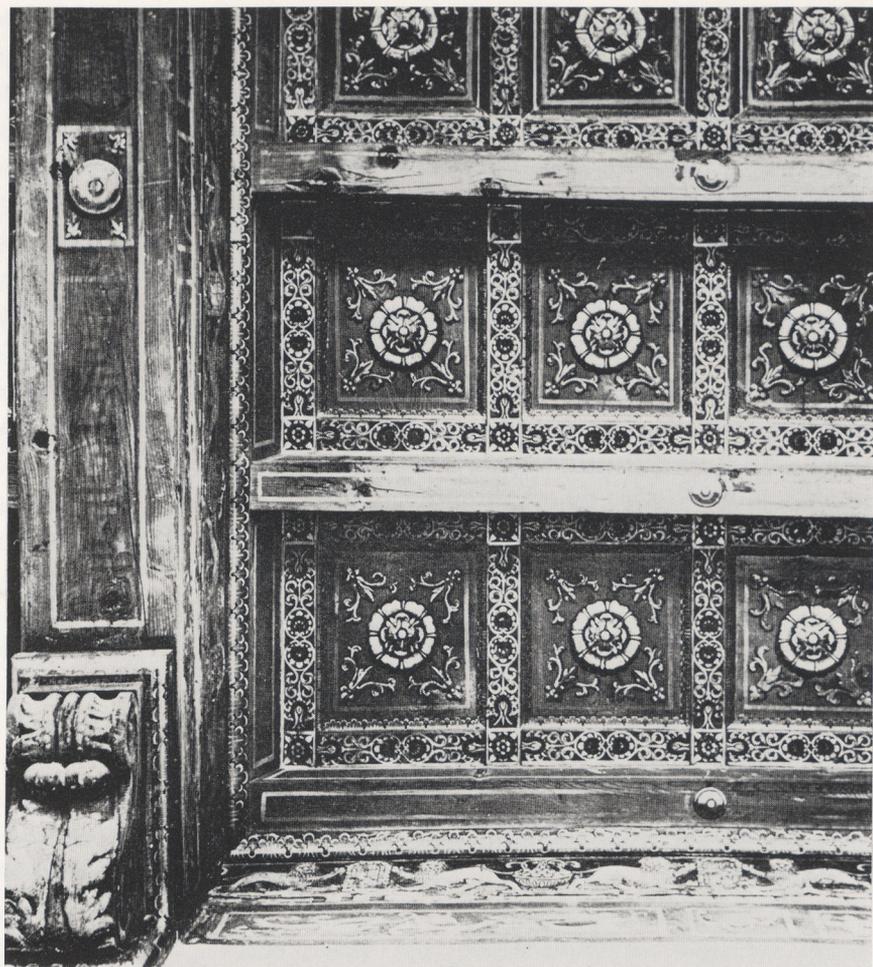
72 The frieze in the Sala del Concistoro, now in the process of being restored, was covered by an inscription during alterations to the Palazzo Venezia in 1924. See *Palazzo Venezia. Paolo II e le fabbriche di S. Marco*, exhibition catalogue (Rome, 1980), p. 170.

73 Another spirited variation on the Antonine temple frieze occurs in two drawings by Dosio, Uff. A. 2879 and 2699, for the arcade elevation of an unidentified project. Here the griffons are transfigured into lambs carrying standards, perhaps a civic symbol of Florence. See F. Borsi et al., *Giovanni Antonio Dosio. Roma Antica e i Disegni di Architettura agli Uffizi* (Rome, 1976), pp. 390–391.

74 See P. Sanpaolesi, 'La Casa Fiorentina di Bartolommeo Scala', *Studien zur toskanischen Kunst. Festschrift für L. H. Heydenreich* (Munich, 1964), 287 ff. P. Foster, *A Study of Lorenzo dei Medici's Villa at Poggio a Caiano*. Garland Series (New York–London, 1978), 143 ff., 199 ff.

75 The sole basis for a reconstruction of the coffering on the upper stories of the Septizonium is a leaf in the Venice sketchbook, Bibl. Marciana, Ms. It. IV, 149, f. 9<sup>v</sup>, published by H. Stevenson, 'Il Settizonio Severiano e la distruzione dei suoi avanzi sotto Sisto V', *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma*, ser. 3, vol.

11. *Palazzo Portinari-Salviati, Florence. Detail, sixteenth-century coffered ceiling decoration, piano nobile*



on the reliefs of a column base remaining from the vestibule of the Piazza d'Oro in Hadrians's villa at Tivoli. Though today only a fragment survives, the detailing of the base was carefully rendered in situ by Pirro Ligorio in a drawing from the mid-sixteenth century now at Windsor (Fig. 10)<sup>76</sup>. This transposition of classical vocabulary would seem characteristic of Antonio's rather individual interpretation of the antique, comparable for example to his later readaptation of the Doric order in the Basilica Aemilia for the sanctuary of S. Biagio outside Montepulciano<sup>77</sup>. A similar license has been taken with the frieze (Fig. 8), where the proper cymation has been substituted by a second egg-and-dart moulding, though

XVI (1888). This quadripartite format may have provided a rough model for the coffered ceiling in the room beside the Sala dei Semidei in Domenico della Rovere's palace by the vicolo Scossacavalli, now known as the Palazzo dei Penitenzieri, built between 1484 and 1490.

<sup>76</sup> Windsor, Royal Library, no. 10377<sup>v</sup>. The remains of this base are illustrated by P. Gusman, *La villa imperiale de Tibur* (Paris, 1882), p. 248, fig. 316.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. P. Lehmann, 'The Basilica Aemilia and S. Biagio at Montepulciano', *Art Bulletin* LXIV (1982), 127 ff.

this already appears on the main portal of S. Marco thirty years earlier. While the ornamental scheme of the coffers in S. Maria Maggiore was unconventional for Quattrocento architecture, the palmette in particular became a standard motive on sixteenth-century ceilings, such as in the Palazzo Portinari-Salviati, Palazzo Medici-Riccardi and Palazzetto Horne in Florence (Fig. 11)<sup>78</sup>. In ecclesiastical architecture, Sangallo's design was reworked by Antonio il Giovane for the richly carved and painted coffering over the nave of S. Maria della Quercia near Viterbo, begun in 1518<sup>79</sup>.

How the interior of S. Maria Maggiore would have appeared at the time Alexander initiated the present ceiling in 1499 is a question which, from the documents at hand, must be left open. Nevertheless the inclusion of the Borgia stemma may have signified nothing more than a token of Alexander's familial devotion. It was Callixtus who obtained for his

<sup>78</sup> M. Bucci, *Palazzi di Firenze*, vol. I (Quartiere di Santa Croce) (Florence, 1971), p. 122, figs. 66, 67, 108.

<sup>79</sup> For the stylistic dependence on S. Maria Maggiore, see G. Giovannoni, *Antonio da Sangallo il Giovane* (Rome, 1959), vol. I, p. 305.

nephew the cardinalate, and their respective arms appeared side-by-side with that of Pier Luigi, Duke of Gandia, in a plaque inscribed 1458 on the Ponte Milvio<sup>80</sup>. Shortly after his election, Alexander returned the honor by recalling the memory of his ancestor in an inscription across the facade of the old Porta Viridaria in the Borgo S. Spirito: 'ALEXANDER VI. PONT. MAX. / CALLIXTI III P. M. NEPOS NATIONE HISPANVS / PATRIA VALENTINVS GENTE BORGIA<sup>81</sup> ...' Whatever the contribution of his predecessors, it is clear that from the very start of his pontificate Alexander gave an unusual personal attention to the project and was determined to spare no costs in making this basilica, his former parish, a splendid testimony to his promotion of ecclesiastical art. To this aim, in fact, already in March 1497 Alexander issued a chirograph charging the canons of the basilica with a beneficiary of the extraordinary sum of 325 gold ducats for the refurbishing of the Sacristy<sup>82</sup>. Of course, contemporary visitors to S. Maria Maggiore could hardly have overlooked the Borgia emblema amidst all this lustre. The effect must have been just as vainglorious for pilgrims to the church of S. Giovanni in Laterano, where over the Porta Santa Alexander commissioned none other than Bramante to fresco a colossal *stemma* for the opening of the Jubilee<sup>83</sup>.

#### APPENDIX

The following transcriptions were prepared by Jean Coste, archivist of the Archivio Capitolare di S. Maria Maggiore, Rome.

1. A. C. S. M. M., Istromenti, vol. V, ff. 77<sup>r-v</sup>.

*die Sabatis secunda Martij 1499*

*In presentia mei Notari et testium subscriptorum etc. personaliter etc. sponte etc. providus vir Johannes Thome de Matrite habuit presentialiter etc. a magistro Johanne Stasi Carpentario de florentia presenti et consignanti ducatos duodecim de carlenis in depositum nomine veri et puri depositi etc. post quod receptum etc. Vocavit etc. renuntiavit etc. et custodire etc. et dictus Johannes matritis promisit*

80 See Woodward, *op. cit.*, p. 395, pl. IV, n. 1.

81 V. Forcella, *Iscrizioni delle Chiese e d'Altri Edifici di Roma* (Rome, 1869), vol. VI, n. 103; C. d'Onofrio, *Castel Sant'Angelo* (Rome, 1971), p. 208.

82 6 March 1497. B. A. V., fondo S. Maria Maggiore, cart. 30, perg. 49 (Ferri CCLX).

83 Vasari, vol. IV, pp. 153–154. Bramante's fresco is recorded in a drawing by Borromini (Vienna, Albertina, Arch. 388) executed before his restoration of the nave. Above the Borgia-Lenzuoli arms sit the keys and pontifical tiara on a canopy; still at this date, according to Vasari 1500, the umbrella does not appear among Alexander's insignia.

*hinc et per totum mensem Maij proxime futurum portare et portari facere ligna tigli videlicet tabulas et calces hic in Urbe de silvis et cum portatum fuerit antequam de illis lignis et tabulis aliquid disponat teneatur ostendere et monstrare dicto magistro Johanni Stasi in totam quantitatem: et si ipse magister Johannes velit habere omnia ligna iusto pretio convenendo inter eos quod tunc ligna sint ipsus magistris Johannis et solvat pretium computatis dictis XII ducatis habitis in depositum ut supra. Et si nolit habere ligna nisi pro dictis XII ducatos capiat tantum legnamen quod ascendet ad dictam summam et ubi nollet ligna, promisit consignare depositum XII ducatorum per totum mensem maij ut supra et de inde etc. presenti magistro Johanni et stipulanti pro se suisque heredibus etc. et ita partes hinc convenerunt etc. Et ad preces dicti Johannis Thome presentis et petentis personaliter etc. sponte providus vir Fatius Allegrutj de Matrite promisit et se principalem constituit pro dictis XII ducatis ut supra cum omnibus conventionibus et conditionibus antedictis et voluit ut principalis teneri: et conservare indempnem etc. pro quibus etc. obligaverunt sese in solidum in forma camere pleniori etc. constituerunt etc. juraverunt etc. rogaverunt etc.*

*Actum Rome in Regione Montium in palatio Apostolico domini nostri pape sito in sancta Maria maiore in camera solite habitationis ipsius magistri Johannis Stasi presentibus hiis videlicet discretis viris magistro Francisco Venditti Martinj florentino et Innocentio Johannis Alberinj de urbe carpentarijs ad predicta etc.*

2. Ibid., ff. 81<sup>v</sup>–82<sup>r</sup>.

*Die 7 Aprilis 1499, Indictione II<sup>a</sup>*

(in margin:) *Pro Magistro Johanne Stasi et sociis, magistris battiloro. (second note in margin added later:) Dedi copiam magistris battiloro sicut in libro, die 24 Octobris 1499.*

*In presentia mei notarii et testium subscriptorum etc. personaliter etc., sponte etc., magister Johannes Stasi de Florentia, pro se magistro Antonio et haeredibus quondam Tyolini quatenus habeant interesse ac aliis etc. pro quibus de rato promisit etc. et quod ratificabunt omnia etc. ex una, et magister Martinus Flosuin thetonicus ac magister Petrus Bocler etiam alemanus in Urbe morantes in regione Parionis battiloro partes ex altera. Hinc est: quod praefati magistri Martinus et Petrus promiserunt laborare dare et consignare dicto magistro Johanni Stasi presenti et stipulanti ut supra, pro toto palco, frasio, architrave et cornice laborerii Sancte Marie Maioris de Urbe, aurum baptitum ducati de auro recipiens et bonum, ad rationem septaginta ducatorum de carlenis pro quolibet miliario petiorum dicti auri baptiti, hoc modo solvendum v<sup>x</sup>.: praefatus magister Johannes primisit solvere per totum cras eisdem magistris ducatos eisdem magistris ducatos ducentos de carlenis pro parte dicti laborerii et successive, secundum currit tempus laborerii, adeo quod ipsi magistri Martinus et Petrus teneant in eorum manibus pecunias semper in creditum. Item voluerunt partes et convenerunt si ducatus aurei ascendet in maiorem partem quam nunc sunt, teneantur magister Johannes et sotii solvere eisdem illud plus quod multiplicarent dicti*

ducatus. Item dixerunt dicte partes fecisse motellum petiorum aureorum longitudinis et qualitatis ipsorum, et qualibet ipsarum partium habet suum modellum et ita debet dare et consignare. Item voluerunt partes predictae quod antequam aurum ponatur in opera videatur per expertos si est recipiens, alias non teneantur refacere postquam positum fuerit in opera. Et si contigerit quod ipse magister Johannes et sotii caperent aurum ab aliis praeterquam ab eis pro huiusmodi laborerio, tunc et ea causa ipsi magistri Martinus et Petrus non tenantur ulterius eis finire nisi pro pecuniis receptis dumvero non stet per eos magistros Martinum et Petrum et ita convenerunt etc. pro quibus obligaverunt sese in forma Camere pleniori etc. in forma sollempni et clausulis etc. et constituerunt etc. satisfacient etc. iuraverunt etc. rogaverunt etc.

Actum Rome in palatio apostolico Sanctae Mariae Maioris loco habitationis ipsius magistri Johannis, presentibus hiis vꝛ. Johanne Antonio Pauli de Bononia et Johanne Baptista magistri Antonii de Mediolano ad praedicta etc.

3. Ibid., ff. 82<sup>r-v</sup>.

Die lune 8 Aprilis 1499, Ind. II<sup>a</sup>

(in margin:) Ratificatio magistri Antonij

In presentia mei notarii et testium infrascriptorum etc. personaliter etc. sponte etc. magister Antonius de San Gallo florentinus ratificavit omnia gesta et stipulata in praecedenti contractu per magistrum Johannem Stasi super conventum auri battit cum conditionibus infrascriptis vꝛ. quod si papa vel commissarius velit dare partem seu totum dicti laborerii alicui quam ipsis magistri Martino et Petro ad laborandum aurum battitum quod nunc et ea causa non teneantur neque obligati iuxta instrumenti tenorem nisi in quantum ipsi habeant eorum ratam et si papa moreretur et non sequeretur laborerium minime tenerentur nisi in quantum laborerium sequeretur et ubi promisit per totum hodie solvere ducentos ducatos nolat teneri nisi recipiant a banco seu commissario et illis habetis teneri. Voluit vero Antonius et etiam solvere promisit pecunias prout ipse recipiet in futurum, praesentibus dictis magistris Martino et Petro et ita acceptantibus in aliis consensit etc. pro quibus etc. iuravit etc. rogavit etc.

Actum Rome in palatio Apostolico Sanctae Mariae Majoris in camera habitationis ipsius magistri Antonii presentibus hiis vꝛ. magistro Francisco Venditti et magistro Rafaele Antonii de Florentia ad praedicta etc.

4. Ibid., f. 83<sup>r</sup>.

Die nona Aprilis 1499, Indictione II<sup>a</sup>

(in margin:) Pro magistro Johanne Stasi et Johanne Thome

(second note in margin:) Dedi fidem infrascriptam magistro Johanni

In presentia mei notarii et testium infrascriptorum etc. personaliter etc. sponte etc., Johannes Thome de Matrite principalis habuit et recepit praesentialiter et in contanti a nobili viro magistro Johanne Stasi architector de Florentia praesenti et solventi ducatos viginti de carlenis, postquam quidem receptos etc. vocavit se solutum etc. et promisit conducere et portare in Urbem lignamina tigli et illa ligna consignare praefato magistro Johanni Stasi pro pretio inter eos conveniendo et voluerunt ipsi partes ubi essent discordes de pretio quod magister Antonius San Gallo sit iudex et tertius in iudicando pretium vel stare iudicio experti hinc inde et per totum mensem maii proxime futurum et inter cetera ligna portare et consignare viginti quinque tabulas novem palmorum longitudinis duorum palmorum canne largitudinis et quatuor canne largitudinis et quatuor digitorum grossitudinis et ad preces dicti Johannis Thome personaliter etc. sponte etc. Dominicus Berardi de Matrite fideiussit et promisit praedicto Johanni Thome, penes et apud dictum magistrum Johannem praesentem et stipulantem etc. ut principalis teneri voluit etc. et conservare indemnem etc. et ubi non consignarent dictum lignum tenantur restituere dictas pecunias una cum expensis, damnis et interesse etc. pro quibus obligaverunt sese et sua bona etc. in forma Camere pleniori et cum clausulis solitis et consuetis etc. constituerunt etc. renuntiaverunt etc. et iuraverunt etc. et rogaverunt etc.

Actum Rome in palatio Apostolico posito prope domum maiorem de Urbe in Camera solite habitationis dicti magistri Johannis Stasi praesentibus hiis videlicet Philiberto Enrici theutonico et Martino Sinafirute (?) florentino carpentariis ad praedicta etc.

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*Photos:* Alinari 1; Anderson 9; Author 2, 3, 5–7; Bibl. Vat. 4; GFN 8; Windsor, Royal Library (by Gracious Permission of Her Majesty the Queen) 10; from M. Bucci, I palazzi di Firenze 11.