

El Greco's Roman Period  
*and the Influence of*  
Guglielmo della Porta

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# The ‘Great School’ of Guglielmo della Porta

While a quantity of objects have been reasonably attributed to Guglielmo della Porta (1515-77), less attention has been given to the distinction of his collaborators. As a result, various artworks have doubtless been given Guglielmo’s signature authorship while they could instead be the workmanship of qualified assistants working from his models and designs.

In the survey of art historical literature, observing the distinction between individual craftsmen in a workshop has been an arduous undertaking with attributions debated for great lengths of time and few documents available to definitively confirm artistic authorship. Adding to this complexity are the diverse roles assumed by workshop assistants as well as the succession of ownership and diffusion of a workshop’s models which can make secure attributions virtually impossible.

We could compare this art historical maze with the past century of research invested in delineating the evident qualities that distinguish the workmanship of assistants operating in Giambologna’s (1529-1608) workshop: Antonio Susini, Pietro Tacca (1577-1640), Adriaen de Vries (1560-1626), *et al.* It is expected the artists active in Guglielmo’s workshop will be equally discussed in coming

decades, a process first initiated by Werner Gramberg and Ulrich Middeldorf who made great advancements in our understanding of Guglielmo’s output. It is the present author’s hope that the observations and ideas presented in this series of articles, tentative as they might be at times, may serve as a clarifying step in the course of understanding not just Guglielmo himself but also the distinct work of those with whom he collaborated.

Rosario Coppel commented, “A comparative study has yet to be made between Guglielmo’s documented works and those of his workshop assistants.”<sup>1</sup> It is this challenge of being categorical about the individual artists in Guglielmo’s circle that the present author adopts as the role of this series of articles concerning the “*Gran Scuola*” of Guglielmo.<sup>2</sup>

# El Greco's Roman Period and the Influence of Guglielmo della Porta

The conceivable influence of Guglielmo della Porta on the developing style of the painter Domínikos Theotokópoulos (El Greco) during his early period in Italy is one not yet adequately explored.

The common perception of El Greco is one of a misfit whose avantgarde approach and resistance to convention caused him both hardship but also long-term success. However, despite his boldness he equally preserved an openness to learn and gain from his engagement with the artistic milieu of Italy. This is especially evident with the impression Venice had upon him.

Around 1567 El Greco left his career as an icon painter in Greece to pursue an understanding of the new artistic developments taking place in Italy. Arriving in Venice, El Greco spent three years under the influence of artists like Jacopo Bassano, Tintoretto and Titian where he learned to adapt the vibrant use of color to augment his compositions and stir emotional responses from his work. It is in Venice that El Greco may have also learned to emulate the individuality Titian so effectively demonstrated throughout his artistic career.<sup>3</sup>

## THE POTENTIAL INTERSECTION OF EL GRECO AND GUGLIELMO DELLA PORTA

El Greco arrived in Rome and became a guest at the Farnese Palace due to a letter of recommendation received by Cardinal Alessandro Farnese from the esteemed miniaturist Giulio Clovio in 1570.<sup>4</sup> Later differences prompted El Greco's exit from the Palace between July and October of 1572.<sup>5</sup> In Rome, the Farnese Palace had been the summit of artistic and intellectual life and it is here that El Greco may have had an initial contact with Guglielmo.

Guglielmo was actively serving the Farnese family during this period, evident by a letter of praise Alessandro sent to Guglielmo for a crucifix in December of 1571.<sup>6</sup> If El Greco did not meet Guglielmo during this time he would have certainly become acquainted with the legacy of his work at the Palace since the 1540s where Guglielmo once lived and restored antiquities from Alessandro's collection.<sup>7</sup> If El Greco didn't encounter Guglielmo during his residence at the Farnese Palace it remains possible he still could have interacted with him prior to his departure for Spain.

There are several conditions that could have attracted El Greco to the personality of Guglielmo. Guglielmo was in his final years during the 1570s and while he was foremost revered as a sculptor he was more significantly a draughtsman and master of *disegno*, the chief glory of an artist in Italy at that time. It was typical of patrons to finance and commission not only an artist to execute a work but also its designer. Because of his creative talents and experience, Guglielmo managed to surround himself with several of the finest artists in their trades.<sup>8</sup> His designs were sought after and reproduced by artists in his circle while alive and posthumously.<sup>9</sup>

Guglielmo welcomed journeymen into his fold. Most notable is the sculptor Jacob Cornelis Cobaert who was contemporaneously referred to as Coppe Fiammingo (the Fleming), a nickname not unlike El Greco's own namesake (the Greek). Its possible Guglielmo may have found something unique about 'the foreigner' that reminded him of himself, taking pride in his work and being a dedicated artist with a sincere interest in art's tenets.<sup>10</sup> Guglielmo certainly had no aversion to uncharacteristic personalities, as Cobaert himself was described as an eccentric.<sup>11</sup>



El Greco experienced no major commissions while in Italy and his deficiency of success in this area may have also prompted his interest in Guglielmo's activity. Guglielmo had likewise experienced a series of set-backs for major commissions when his *Passion* series was unsuccessful in locating a significant patron.<sup>12</sup> During the late 1560s Guglielmo began translating this larger series of *Passion* reliefs into smaller formats, adapting them for plaquettes and paxes. The sustenance of his workshop, dedicated to servicing minor regional commissions from aristocratic families, churches and confraternities would have been the same network El Greco would have pursued in sustaining himself after his expulsion from the Farnese Palace. The paintings attributed to El Greco, ca. 1573-75, are indicative of the type of devotional paintings related to such minor commissions.<sup>13</sup> Guglielmo's early and continuing patronage

in Spain, inclusive of Phillip II, may have also encouraged El Greco's later departure for Madrid.

Immediately following El Greco's departure from the Farnese Palace he is documented as registering with painters guild as a miniaturist. His profession as a miniaturist could be a misunderstood case of semantics but his friendship with Clovio could logically have cultivated a practice of the artform.<sup>14</sup> Of note is Guglielmo's incorporation of painted miniatures on his elaborately produced altar crosses and tabernacles, a production of which may have brought possible employment to El Greco between 1573-77. Though speculative, his departure for Spain in 1577 may have also come as the result of Guglielmo's death in that year.



Fig. 01: El Greco's *Adoration of the Name of Jesus*, ca. 1578-79 (left; Chapter House, Monasterio de San Lorenzo, El Escorial); Guglielmo della Porta's sketch of the *Conversion of St. Paul* (right)





Fig. 02: Detail of El Greco's *Adoration of the Name of Jesus*, ca. 1578-79 (left; Chapter House, Monasterio de San Lorenzo, El Escorial); detail of Guglielmo della Porta's sketch for the *Fall of the Giants* (above, right; Pierpont Morgan Library); detail of a gold repoussé relief of the *Fall of the Giants* by Cesare Targone after a model by Jacob Cornelis Cobaert after a design by Guglielmo della Porta (below, right; Bode Museum)

In addition to Guglielmo's concentration on the production of religious subjects, to which a former iconographer like El Greco would have been interested, Guglielmo's knowledge of classical art would have been equally appealing to El Greco considering his initiative to visit Rome was partly on account of an interest in absorbing Italy's classical past. Guglielmo was considered an expert in classical artworks, being an established collector and restorer of them.

Though rarely discussed, El Greco has also been lauded as a sculptor, or at minimum, a designer of sculpture. El Greco collected sculptural models for use in his studio, a tradition advocated by Italian painters and noted by

Francisco Pacheco who visited El Greco's workshop in Toledo in 1611. El Greco's use, preparation or collection of small models may also have inclined him to take an interest in Guglielmo's workshop where small-scale models were regularly produced and where Guglielmo's collection of classical antiquities would have presented the educational opportunities he sought. If skilled in sculpture, it is perhaps through an association with Guglielmo that El Greco could have learned the general talent required to execute works of reasonable quality such as the freestanding pair of *Pandora* and *Epimetheus* (Museo Nacional Del Prado) attributed to his design or workmanship.<sup>15 16</sup>



Possibly the most significant reason El Greco could have been drawn to Guglielmo was the environment cultivated by his “*Gran Scuola*,” being not simply a workshop for the serial production of goldsmith and sculpted works but one also conducive toward teaching the elements of design and artistic theory. C.D. Dickerson notes, “An important effect that Della Porta’s approach to drawing may have had on the goldsmiths and sculptors in his circle is that they were encouraged to give voice to their own creative impulses.”<sup>17</sup> Evidence of this can be observed in Guglielmo’s collaborator, Antonio Gentili da Faenza who was not only a creative designer himself, but was also well-versed on matters concerning art theory. El Greco, known to have developed his own critical theories and certainly his own talent in design,<sup>18</sup> would have enjoyed the expressive liberties in an environment like Guglielmo’s. El Greco’s fascination with Michelangelo’s sculptural output may also have attracted him to the next best vestige of that heritage through Guglielmo who was Michelangelo’s chief emulator in Rome after his death.<sup>19</sup>

While many of Guglielmo’s designs were restrained in their final state to meet the expected tastes of the era, several works belonging to artists from his school deviate from the conventions of Roman sculptural and goldsmith production from the last part of the 16th century. Tomasso della Porta’s underestimated but adventurous *Deposition from the Cross* is one example that Jennifer Montagu comments was “so bizarre, and so contrary to all expectations of Cinquecento sculpture, that one feels it ought not to have happened,”<sup>20</sup> while another is the group of extraordinary seated *Prophets* for the San Luigi tabernacle by Cobaert which Montagu further exclaims, “In the context of the history of art, they ought not to exist.”<sup>21</sup> We could think similarly of El Greco’s paintings, and it is for this reason that Guglielmo’s proposed influence may have left its indelible mark on El Greco, predominantly evident by his early Spanish paintings following his time spent in Rome.<sup>22</sup>



Fig. 03: Detail of El Greco’s *Adoration of the Name of Jesus*, ca. 1578-79 (above; Chapter House, Monasterio de San Lorenzo, El Escorial); detail of a bronze *Mount Calvary* by Antonio Gentili after a model by Guglielmo della Porta (below; ex-Coll & Cortés Fine Art)





Fig. 04: El Greco's *Baptism of Christ*, ca. 1608 (left; Hospital de Tavera, Toledo); Guglielmo della Porta's sketch of the *Flagellation* (right)

## GUGLIELMO'S POSSIBLE INFLUENCE ON EL GRECO'S STYLE

Guglielmo's creativity as a designer is most explicit in two surviving sketchbooks.<sup>23</sup> His sketches are emblematic of

his vivid imagination and assiduous creativity, wrought with an untamed energy that detonates on paper with writhing figures and anxious forms. While Guglielmo's sculptural output is largely conventional for the era, his drawings defied any sense of normalcy.



Guglielmo's expressiveness in design through an abstract use of form may have appealed to El Greco in the same way that the vibrant colors of the Venetian school appealed to him in equal measure. There is no apparent corollary to El Greco's stylistic development in Italy other than the potential influence of Guglielmo's innovative approach. Its possible El Greco may have been exposed to Guglielmo's sketches while in Rome during his tenure at the Farnese Palace or during his enigmatic period of activity thereafter, if not working with him directly.

A satisfying example of the correlation between Guglielmo's sketches and El Greco's paintings can be observed in El Greco's *Adoration of the Name of Jesus*, ca. 1578-79 and Guglielmo's sketch of the *Conversion of St. Paul* (Fig. 01).<sup>24</sup> El Greco has essentially translated Guglielmo's style of sketching into paint, blended marvelously with his virtuosity in the use of color to suggest form and elicit drama. In his painting, El Greco appears to have already digested Guglielmo's artistic essence and the genius of his design process which finds its painted parallel in the hasty and tenuous forms capturing Guglielmo's nervous



Fig. 05: El Greco's *Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, 1588 (left; Iglesia de Santo Tomé, Toledo); Guglielmo della Porta's sketches of the *Nativity* (above, right) and a detail of the *Entombment* (below, right)





Fig. 06: Detail of El Greco's *Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, 1588 (above; Iglesia de Santo Tomé, Toledo); detail from Guglielmo della Porta's sketchbook (below; Gramberg No. 165)

and supernatural arrangements and elevating them to new heights through a remarkable use of color. The furious array of contorted characters in the jaws of Hell recall the tumultuous maelstrom of bodies observed in Guglielmo's sketches and reliefs like those executed for his *Fall of the Giants* (Fig. 02). Also comparable are the swirling assembly of angels found recurring in El Greco's other paintings<sup>25</sup> which echo those also portrayed among Guglielmo's sketches and translated also in his bronze panel of *Mount Calvary* (Fig. 03).

The elongated, spirited forms of El Greco have most often been considered due to the influence of Tintoretto while the crowded activity of his compositions have other times been credited to the influence of Titian's late works. However, it is equally possible El Greco could have adapted these stylistic traits through an influence from Guglielmo. His vibrantly seething works like the *Baptism of Christ* reproduce the elongated characters and nervous vitality of Guglielmo's sketches such as those prepared for his scenes of Christ's *Flagellation*<sup>26</sup> (Fig. 04) or the intensely animated *Betrayal of Christ*<sup>27</sup> and *Resurrection of Christ*.<sup>28</sup>

Certain ideas represented in El Greco's paintings may also have a genesis in the study of Guglielmo's designs. A primary example of this is observed in El Greco's *Burial of the Count of Orgaz* whose composition is an amalgam of scenes separated in altarpiece-like vignettes whose narrative largely recalls his Cretan-era *Dormition of the Virgin* from before 1567.<sup>29</sup> The lower register depicting the handling of the Count's body appears to draw ideas from Guglielmo's *Entombment* sketches while the upper register recalls the active dynamism observed in Guglielmo's sketch of the *Nativity* (Fig. 05).<sup>30</sup> The undulating, sweeping and thick draperies also recall the same exaggerations observed in Guglielmo's sketches and reliefs while the densely packed figures which recede into a vanishing point are also features commonly found in his designs (Fig. 06). Even the nimbly held keys of St. Peter which dangle loosely



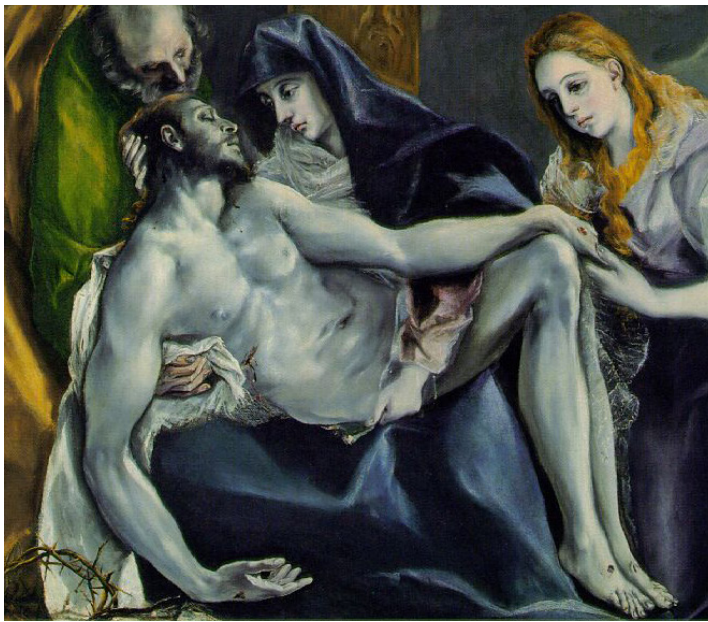


Fig. 07: Detail of El Greco's late *Pieta*, ca. 1592 (left; private collection); detail of Guglielmo della Porta's sketch of the *Body of Christ* (right)



Fig. 08: *The Holy Trinity* by El Greco, 1579 (left; Museo Nacional Del Prado); details of sketches by Guglielmo della Porta of the *Entombment* (above) and the *Body of Christ* (below)





Fig. 09: El Greco's early *Pieta*, ca. 1575 (left; Hispanic Society of America); a bronze plaquette of the *Pieta*, ca. 1569, by Jacob Cornelis Cobaert, after a design by Guglielmo della Porta (right; Metropolitan Museum of Art; Inv. 38.152.7)

from his hand have an antecedent in a sketch of *St. Peter* by Guglielmo.<sup>31</sup>

El Greco's late *Pieta*, ca. 1592, recalls Guglielmo's sketch of the *Body of Christ*<sup>32</sup> and suggests its potential use as a reference for Christ's twisting abdomen (Fig. 07). The legs, unrelated to the sketch, appear awkwardly fitted to Christ's torso whose problematic representation is disguised by the perizonium. El Greco has evidently based the arms and legs of this painting on Michelangelo's marble Bandini *Pieta* in Rome at the time, though Guglielmo also developed sketches based upon this sculpture.<sup>33</sup>

While visual sources for El Greco's *Holy Trinity* of 1579 for the altarpiece in the church of Santo Domingo el Antiguo in Toledo has most recently been examined by Albert Boesten-Stengel,<sup>34</sup> not noted is the specific modeling of Christ's lifeless arms and hands which are borrowed directly from Guglielmo's aforementioned sketch of the *Body of Christ*.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, the position of God the Father, supporting Christ's body, is borrowed from Guglielmo's sketch of the *Lamentation of Christ with the Instruments of Suffering* (Fig. 08).<sup>36</sup> More parallels might be inferred from the attendant figures in the latter sketch with its adjacent mourning Marys.



Despite some of these possibly superficial comparisons, it is apparent El Greco didn't simply emulate Guglielmo's style but drew from it the creative mechanics of his own approach. This significance suggests El Greco wasn't just an observer of Guglielmo's sketches but may have witnessed his creative process first-hand and learned the essence of Guglielmo's creative faculty, absorbing the way he approached and solved visual problems as a designer. This experience is apparent in El Greco's later works in which he is fully capable of executing works according to his own unconventional designs.

### EL GRECO'S REPRODUCTION OF GUGLIELMO'S MODELS

While no document has been located confirming a relationship between El Greco and Guglielmo there is

evidence El Greco was familiar with Guglielmo's models and he reproduces or elaborates on them in several of his paintings.

El Greco's early *Pieta* paintings, known by examples in the Hispanic Society of America and Philadelphia Museum of Art, have traditionally been thought inspired by Michelangelo's Bandini *Pieta* group and his drawing of the *Pieta* for Vittoria Colonna which was widely circulated by the 1570s through engraved and sketched copies. However, not sufficiently emphasized is Guglielmo's influence on the painting. As the subsequent foremost Roman sculptor and emulator of Michelangelo, Guglielmo had already drafted compositional ideas based around Michelangelo's Bandini *Pieta* and formulated them into his own novel designs which El Greco borrows from, most notably a successful *Pieta* plaqueette produced in Guglielmo's workshop (Fig. 09).



Fig. 10: El Greco's early *Entombment* (left; Alexandros Soutzos Museum); detail of a bronze tabernacle door depicting the *Entombment*, after Guglielmo della Porta (right; private collection)





Fig. 11: Details of El Greco's late *Entombment* (left; ex-Giancarlo Baroni collection); details from Guglielmo della Porta's *Entombment* sketches (right)

El Greco's *Pieta* paintings have been dated to the period following his expulsion from the Farnese Palace, between 1573-75. Plaque scholars have occasionally speculated if Guglielmo's *Pieta* might have been influenced by El Greco's *Pieta* paintings though the contrary is more plausible, suggesting El Greco instead adapted Guglielmo's probably earlier invention.<sup>37</sup>

Another of Guglielmo's well-circulated designs is observed by a quantity of surviving bronze plaques depicting the *Entombment*. Though more tenuous of a suggestion, El Greco may have been aware of it while preparing his early *Entombment*. However, the perspective of the scene is altered and while the figures in the background depend upon an engraving by Parmigianino<sup>38</sup> the figural form of

Christ and the apostles supporting his body could be due to a familiarity with Guglielmo's *Entombment* relief or his lost preparatory sketches of the subject (Fig. 10). El Greco's *Entombment* is currently placed in his Venetian period, ca. 1568-69, though his potential reference to Guglielmo's model might suggest a very early Roman date unless having been exposed to the relief while in Venice<sup>39</sup> or via another source manipulating earlier models like those from which Guglielmo derived his version.<sup>40</sup>

Another later version of the *Entombment* by El Greco, known by four examples on panel, also shares an influence from Guglielmo's *Entombment* sketches. While Leo Steinberg pointed out El Greco's dependence on Michelangelo's Bandini *Pieta* for the figure of Christ,<sup>41</sup> El Greco appears to have also adapted some ideas from Guglielmo's *Entombment* sketches for this version (Fig. 11).

Another artist, Giambologna, was also influenced by Guglielmo's *Entombment* designs. In 1571 Giambologna is thought to have met with Guglielmo when he visited Rome that year with Giorgio Vasari and Guglielmo's mutual friend Bartolomeo Ammannati.<sup>42</sup> Giambologna later developed his 1579 *Entombment* panel for the Grimaldi Chapel based upon a clear influence from Guglielmo's designs.<sup>43</sup> Giambologna's probable exposure to Guglielmo's *Entombment* sketches in 1571 indicates Guglielmo may have been sharing them openly with other artists, suggesting El Greco could likewise have been exposed to them while in Rome at that time.

Also dated to El Greco's Roman period or shortly thereafter are a group of *Crucifixion* paintings depicting the figure of Christ set against an atmospheric backdrop.<sup>44</sup> Marcin Fabiański first observed El Greco's use of a bronze crucifix as a model for the figure of Christ in the painting.<sup>45</sup> The crucifix is of a type serially produced in Guglielmo's workshop during the early 1570s. El Greco remains entirely faithful to the model while translating it in paint (cover



Fig. 12: Detail of El Greco's *Crucifixion* (left; Christian Levett collection); bronze cast of a crucifix after Antonio Gentili after a model by Guglielmo della Porta (center; Mullany Haute Epoque Fine Art)



Fig. 13: Detail of El Greco's *Standing St. Francis in Prayer* (left; Joslyn Art Museum; Inv. 1942-2); bronze cast of a crucifix after Antonio Gentili after a model by Guglielmo della Porta (center; Mullany Haute Epoque Fine Art); detail of El Greco's *St. Dominic in Prayer* (right; ex-Gustav Rau collection)

image, Fig. 12). It is possible he could have acquired an example of the crucifix while in Rome although examples also are likely to also have reached Spain on account of Guglielmo's connections there.<sup>46</sup> Although speculative, it is to be wondered if he may have polychromed his own example for reference while executing the *Crucifixion* paintings.<sup>47</sup> El Greco's Spanish contemporary, Francisco Pacheco, documents how he polychromed bronze crucifixes and subsequently used them as models for *Crucifixion* paintings.<sup>48</sup> If El Greco adopted such a practice when first arriving in Spain it could suggest the painted *Crucifixions* may not have been executed in Italy but instead during his early Spanish period as some scholars have suggested.<sup>49</sup> Its noteworthy the wooden crucifixes El Greco invents for the paintings have less in common with Italian types than with those found in Spain. Spanish crucifixes of the period tend to feature unhewn rounded beams with a *titulus* plate



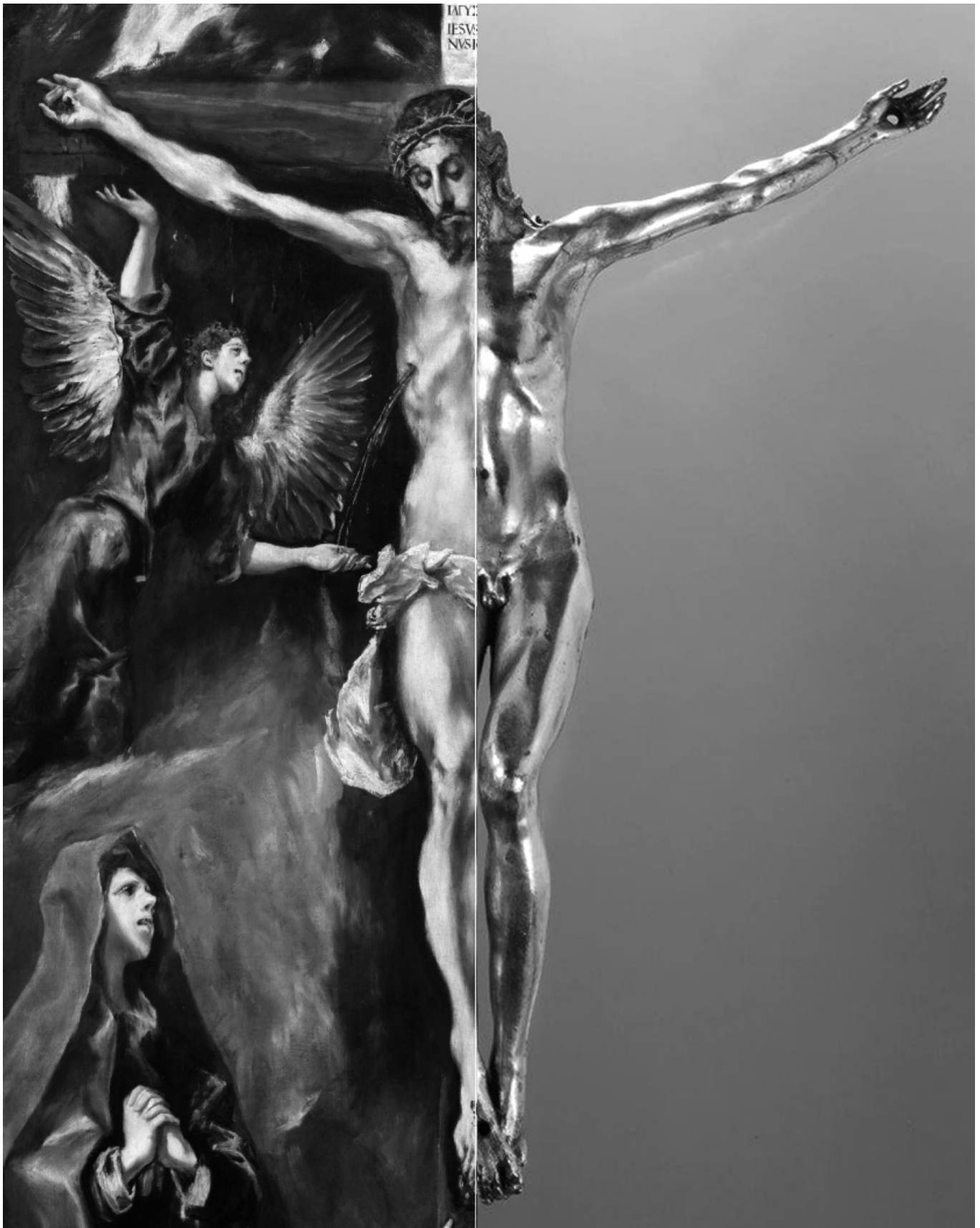


Fig. 14: Juxtaposed details of El Greco's *Crucifixion*, ca. 1597-1600 (left; Museo Nacional Del Prado) and a bronze crucifix here attributed to the circle of Sebastiano Torrigiani, b. 1598 (right; private collection)



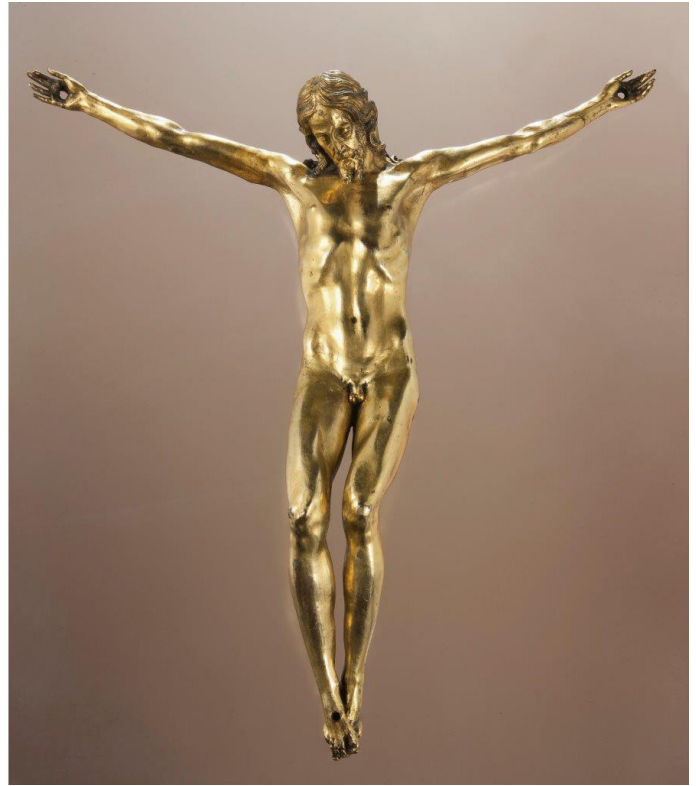


Fig. 15: Detail of El Greco's *Crucifixion*, ca. 1597-1600 (left; Museo Nacional Del Prado); a bronze crucifix here attributed to the circle of Sebastiano Torrigiani, b. 1598 (right; private collection)



Fig. 16: Detail of El Greco's *Crucifixion*, ca. 1597-1600 (left; Museo Nacional Del Prado); detail of a bronze crucifix here attributed to the circle of Sebastiano Torrigiani, b. 1598 (right; private collection)



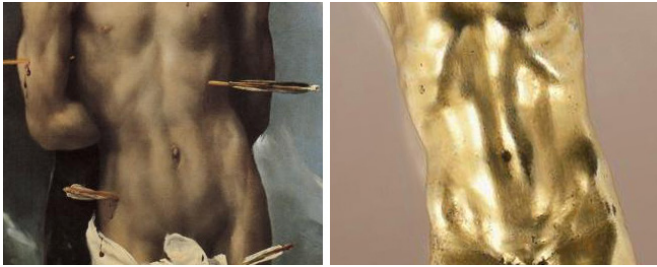


Fig. 17: Detail of El Greco's *St. Sebastian*, ca. 1600 (left; private collection); detail of a bronze crucifix here attributed to the circle of Sebastiano Torrigiani, b. 1598 (right; private collection)



Fig. 18: Detail of *Laocoön* by El Greco, ca. 1610-14 (left; National Gallery of Art; Inv. 1946.18.1); detail of a sketch for the Tomb of Pope Julius III by Guglielmo della Porta (right)



Fig. 19: Detail of *Laocoön* by El Greco, ca. 1610-14 (left; National Gallery of Art; Inv. 1946.18.1); detail of a bronze crucifix here attributed to the Circle of Sebastiano Torrigiani, b. 1598 (right; private collection)

mounted directly above the horizontal beam and featuring Christ's name in Hebrew, Greek and Latin as featured in El Greco's paintings of the subject, as opposed to the hewn, squared beams and *tituli* plainly featuring the acronym INRI on Italian crucifixes of the era.

Further evident that El Greco kept a model of this crucifix in his studio is his continued reproduction of it in other paintings. El Greco's successful series of *St. Francis in Devotion* reproduces Guglielmo's crucifix as the devotional cross of the saint in both the *Standing* and *Kneeling* editions of the painting. His painting of *St. Dominic in Prayer* also makes use of the crucifix (Fig. 13).

Unfortunately, given the wide diffusion of the crucifixes and reliefs emanating from Guglielmo's workshop, it's impossible to determine if El Greco was familiar with them by way of owners of these works or through Guglielmo himself. The modifications he presents to Guglielmo's *Pieta*, at minimum, suggests a potential familiarity with what could have been Guglielmo's preliminary designs for the composition.

By practice, El Greco adopts another later Italian bronze crucifix for use as a model in his paintings. The crucifix is scarcely known<sup>50</sup> but can be confidently dated from before 1598 when Pope Clement VIII gave an altar cross featuring this crucifix as a gift to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in that year.<sup>51</sup> The crucifix almost certainly comes from the circle of Sebastiano Torrigiani, the assistant of Guglielmo whom adopted his son, later married his wife and managed his workshop following his death in 1577.<sup>52</sup> Clement VIII had made Torrigiani Head of the Papal Foundry<sup>53</sup> in 1591, a position he served until his death in 1596.<sup>54</sup> The crucifix is loosely based upon a wax model by Michelangelo that was preserved in bronze,<sup>55</sup> one of which was likely in Torrigiani's workshop where it was slightly embellished, recast and later successively produced in Spain to much acclaim.<sup>56</sup> As an admirer of Michelangelo's sculpture, El Greco may have naturally been drawn to the Gonzaga crucifix-type for its Michelangelo-like qualities.



El Greco first reproduces the crucifix in his *Crucifixion* painting for the Retablo de la Iglesia del Colegio de la Encarnación of doña María de Aragón in Madrid, dated by scholars to a period between 1597-1600, commensurate also with the Gonzaga crucifix-type (Figs. 14, 15). El Greco seems to have also depended upon the crucifix for the face of Christ (Fig. 16) as he did likewise on his reproduction of Guglielmo's earlier crucifix. The nude figure of the crucifix suited especially well as a model for painting and allowed El Greco creative liberty to model his own draperies without the interruption of an integrally cast perizonium as featured on the earlier Guglielmo crucifix.

El Greco appears to continue using the crucifix as a model in several of his other later paintings, especially borrowing from Christ's torso. His painting of *St. Sebastian* is one example eloquently highlighting the way in which light plays upon the sculpture (Fig. 17). Other paintings making similar use of this model could include his *St. Jerome* (National Gallery of Art), *Vision of St. John* (Metropolitan Museum of Art), *et al.* El Greco also references the crucifix in his unusual painting of *Laocoon and his Sons*. Laocoon's elder son on the left shares some of the figural form of the crucifix while also superficially recalling a sketch of figures for the Tomb of Pope Julius III by Guglielmo (Fig. 18).<sup>57</sup> However, El Greco's imaginative depiction of the younger son, reclined, recalls the tucked legs of the crucifix when lain flat, adding to this his own embellishment of slight torque and impressive foreshortening (Fig. 19).

In conclusion, El Greco's life gives the impression of one who reveled in being unique, priding himself on distinction whether to his benefit or not. He relished in his literal and figurative foreignness and it is perhaps not so much that El Greco was just an unusual man with unique vision, but rather was the sum of all his parts. That is, his valiant beliefs in artistic theory and taste coupled with his pride and unconventional boldness coalesced against the backdrop of his experiences which began in the institutionalized methodology of icon painting and rapidly revealed an individuality manifest through the color of the Venetian school and perhaps the experimental Mannerism of Guglielmo. El Greco's personal convictions appear continuous but the diversity of his choice exposure to certain artists developed him into one of the most peculiar artistic personalities of his time.



# Endnotes

- 1 Rosario Coppel (2012): *Guglielmo della Porta in Rome. Guglielmo della Porta, A Counter-Reformation Sculptor*. Coll & Cortés, pp. 28-57
- 2 For a discussion of the cultural environment within which Guglielmo's workshop operated see C.D. Dickerson III (2008): *The "Gran Scuola" of Guglielmo della Porta, the Rise of the "Aurifex Inventor" and the Education of Stefano Maderno. Storia dell'arte*, 121, pp. 25-71
- 3 For example, Andrea Donati discusses how El Greco's emulation of Titian's artistic independence was a model that didn't suit well for El Greco in Rome. See Andrea Donati (2015): *Il Greco a Roma, 1570-1575 circa. El Greco in Italia. Metamorfosi di un genio*. Skira, Milan, pp. 109-34
- 4 Clovio's letter was written to Alessandro on 16 November 1570. See A. Donati (2015): *op. cit.* (note 3)
- 5 A. Donati (2015): *op. cit.* (note 3)
- 6 In addition to the crucifix Guglielmo delivered to Alessandro in 1571, other objects were also provided to the Farnese family such as a group of secular statuary and busts purchased by Duke Ottavio Farnese in 1575 for the Farnese Palace. See R. Coppel (2012): *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 47. Guglielmo also drafted a proposal around 1574 to complete the Farnese Palace with an expansion to its gardens and loggia. See Werner Gramberg (1964): *Die Düsseldorfer Skizzenbücher des Guglielmo della Porta*, 3 vols., Berlin, pp. 100-02
- 7 R. Coppel (2012): *op. cit.* (note 1)
- 8 For a discussion on this topic see C. Dickerson (2008): *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 32-34
- 9 As a testament to the popularity of his designs, legal action was taken over their proprietorship after several of Guglielmo's models were stolen and sold illegally after his death. See R. Coppel (2012): *op. cit.* (note 1)
- 10 El Greco and Guglielmo were both averse to Giorgio Vasari's primacy of the Florentine tradition and both expressed dedicated interests in art theory. Both artists are also noted by contemporaries for the pride and dedication they took in their work.
- 11 Cobaert's behaviors could have placed him with certain obsessive-compulsive designations by modern standards. Baglione describes Cobaert's eccentricities especially in his older age (see Giovanni Baglione [1642]: *Le vite de' pittori scultori et architetti. Dal pontificato di Gregorio XIII del 1572. In fino a' tempi di Papa Urbano Ottavo nel 1642*, pp. 100-01). The remarkable way in which Cobaert finished bronzes to such detailed refinement might also suggest an obsession with perfectionism.
- 12 R. Coppel (2012): *op. cit.* (note 1)
- 13 A. Donati (2015): *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 121
- 14 El Greco joined the Roman painters guild on 18 September 1572. For a discussion on semantic issues concerning El Greco's designation as a miniaturist see Andrew Casper (2014): *Art and the Religious Image in El Greco's Italy*. Penn State Press.
- 15 Eike D. Schmidt (2008): *The Color of Life: Polychromy in Sculpture from Antiquity to the Present*. Getty Publications. No. 25
- 16 It is worth noting that El Greco's understanding of anatomy could also have been enhanced through the sculptural production of Guglielmo's workshop. While Guglielmo's anatomical depictions in sketched form are greatly exaggerated, his expertise in anatomy is absolutely evident in the modeling of his crucifixes.
- 17 C.D. Dickerson (2008): *op. cit.* (note 2)
- 18 José Riello (2012): El Greco, "Bizarro" but not so much. His annotations to Vitruvius and Vasari. *El Greco's Visual Poetics*. Tokyo, Japan., pp. 259-63
- 19 Charles Avery (2012): *Guglielmo Della Porta's Relationship with Michelangelo. Guglielmo della Porta, A Counter-Reformation Sculptor*. Coll & Cortés, pp. 114-37
- 20 Jennifer Montagu (2009): *Gold, Silver and Bronze – Metal Sculpture of the Roman Baroque*. Princeton University Press. p. 221, footnote 79
- 21 J. Montagu (1990): *op. cit.* (note 20), p. 42
- 22 While El Greco's Venetian influences are apparent in his work executed upon his arrival in Rome, his early Spanish period is thus reflective of his influences garnered in Rome.
- 23 *L'Arte del Disegno, e le vivezze dell'ingegno di Gvghlielmo Della Porta celebre scultore, et architetto... per seroigio dell'Ecma. Casa Farnese / The Art of Drawing and the lively imagination of Guglielmo della Porta, the celebrated sculptor and architect, ...made in the service of the Most Excellent House of Farnese*
- 24 W. Gramberg (1964): *op. cit.* (note 6), No. 117
- 25 Such as El Greco's *View and Plan of Toledo* (Museum of El Greco, Toledo), *Adoration of the Shepherds* (Museo Nacional Del Prado, Madrid), *et al.*
- 26 W. Gramberg (1964): *op. cit.* (note 6), No. 109
- 27 W. Gramberg (1964): *op. cit.* (note 6), Nos. 111-13
- 28 W. Gramberg (1964): *op. cit.* (note 6), Nos. 133, 137, 162
- 29 Robert Byron (1929): *Greco - The Epilogue to Byzantine Culture*. The Burlington Magazine, No. 55. London, UK, pp. 160-174
- 30 W. Gramberg (1964): *op. cit.* (note 6), No. 97
- 31 W. Gramberg (1964): *op. cit.* (note 6), No. 169
- 32 W. Gramberg (1964): *op. cit.* (note 6), No. 91
- 33 W. Gramberg (1964): *op. cit.* (note 6), No. 87
- 34 Albert Boesten-Stengel (2016): *Roman Reminiscences in Toledo – El Greco's Trinity. Art in the Time of El Greco*. Toruń, Katedra Historii Sztuki i Kultury, Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, pp. 89-101
- 35 W. Gramberg (1964): *op. cit.* (note 6), No. 91
- 36 W. Gramberg (1964): *op. cit.* (note 6), No. 79
- 37 The most thorough examination of Guglielmo's *Pieta* suggests an origin in or around 1569. See Michael Riddick (2017): *A Renowned Pieta by Jacob Cornelis Cobaert*. Renbronze.com (accessed September 2017)
- 38 Álvarez Lopera (2007): *El Greco, Estudio y Catálogo, Vol. II, Part I: Catálogo de Obras Originales: Creta. Italia. Retablos y Grandes Encargos en España*. Madrid., p. 79
- 39 In consideration of the sufficient diffusion of Guglielmo's *Entombment*, its probable examples could have reached other locales at an early date.
- 40 Other sources are probable since Guglielmo appears to have modeled his design partly after Giorgio Vasari's *Entombment* painting commissioned by Ippolito de' Medici in 1532.



- 41 Leo Steinberg (1974): An El Greco Entombment. *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. CXVI, August 1974, pp. 474-477
- 42 R. Coppel (2012): *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 10, 47
- 43 Mary Weitzel Gibbons (1995): *Giambologna – Narrator of the Catholic Reformation*. University of California Press, pp. 137-43
- 44 Four examples reproducing this version of El Greco's *Crucifixion* are known: a signed canvas version in a private collection (Christie's auction, 31 January 1997, lot 217), a canvas version in the Christian Levett collection (Sotheby's auction, 5-16 July 2014, lot 6), an example on copper in a Texas private collection and an example on wood panel at the Caja Castilla La Mancha in Toledo.
- 45 Fabiański discusses the crucifix as the work of Giambologna (see M. Fabiański [2002]: El Greco in Italia: precisazioni su due quadri. *Paragone*, LIII, no. 46, November 2002, pp. 33-38). Later iterations also described the crucifix as by Giambologna (Sotheby's catalog *Contemplation of the Divine*, 5-16 July 2014, London and the Galleria Colonna exhibit: *El Greco in Italia Metamorfosi di un Genio in 2015-16*). However, the crucifix is not Giambologna's but rather Guglielmo's invention, and more specifically a worked-over model by his assistant Antonio Gentili (see Michael Riddick [2017]: *Reconstituting a Crucifix by Guglielmo della Porta and his Colleagues*. Renbronze.com [accessed August 2017])
- 46 Many examples of Guglielmo's crucifixes, plaquettes and paxes were exported to Spain. Some crucifixes were mistakenly attributed to Pompeo Leoni due to their Spanish presence but Italian manner. For a discussion of Guglielmo's crucifixes and other objects in Spain see catalog entries in R. Coppel (2012): *op. cit.* (note 1)
- 47 An impression of El Greco's workshop methods is noted by Francisco Pacheco when visiting El Greco's studio in Toledo in 1611. He describes how El Greco retained master paintings from which he and his workshop could produce further copies but Pacheco also notes a cupboard of sculptural models for use in executing his paintings.
- 48 Francisco Pacheco (2009): *Arte de la Pintura*. 3rd edition. Catedra, Spain. Originally published posthumously in 1638.
- 49 Various authors (2014): *El Greco arte y oficio*. Catálogo de la exposición. Fundación El Greco, Toledo
- 50 The present author counts only five identified casts of this crucifix-type but given their diverse embellishments more examples must be lost or undocumented.
- 51 Paola Venturelli (2012): *Vincenzo I Gonzaga, 1562-1612 - il fasto del potere*. Museo Diocesano Francesco Gonzaga, Mantova. No. 69
- 52 R. Coppel (2012): *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 56
- 53 *Fonditore della Camera Apostolica*
- 54 Steven Ostrow (2015): The Ludovisi St. Peter. A New Work by Bastiano Torrigiani in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. *The Eternal Baroque, Studies in Honour of Jennifer Montagu*. Skira, Milan. p. 419
- 55 For a discussion of Michelangelo's wax model of a crucifix preserved in bronze see Ludwig Goldscheider (1962): *A Survey of Michelangelo's Models in Wax and Clay including some bronze statuettes cast from his waxes*. Phaidon Press, London, fig. 59; John Goldsmith Phillips (1937): A Crucifixion group after Michelangelo. *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Vol.32, New York, September 1937, No. 9.; and Charles Tolnay (1960): *Michelangelo*. Princeton University Press. Vol. V., p. 173
- 56 A discussion concerning Torrigiani's modification to Michelangelo's crucifix model is forthcoming from the present author. For a discussion of Torrigiani's modification to Guglielmo's crucifix models see Riddick (2017): *op. cit.* (note 44). For the acclaim given to the receipt of Michelangelo's crucifix in Spain see Michael Riddick (2015): *A Bronze Crucifix Attributed to Michelangelo*. Renbronze.com, pp. 45-52
- 57 W. Gramberg (1964): *op. cit.* (note 6), No. 14