The Thief of Michelangelo

MODELS PRESERVED IN BRONZE AND TERRACOTTA

by Michael Riddick

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A pair of crucified figures, known by examples in bronze and terracotta, are thought to preserve workshop models conceived by Michelangelo Buonarroti. The figures were first brought to the attention of art historians during the early 20th century when Wilhelm von Bode acquired a bronze fragmentary cast of one of the figures for the Kaiser Friedrich museum in Berlin, observing that it probably preserved a wax *bozzetto* by Michelangelo[1] (Fig. 01) and John Goldsmith Phillips, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET), acquired a bronze Crucifixion group, featuring two crucified thieves[2] accompanied by a figure of Christ, formerly with the art dealer Stefano Bardini (Fig. 02).[3]

The MET group was first published in 1899 during the sale of Bardini's collection, there described as the work of Zaccaria da Volterra.[4] The origin of this attribution is unknown although perhaps the cataloger mistook Zaccaria for Daniele da Volterra who was Michelangelo's friend and pupil responsible for a group of contemporary bronze portrait busts of Michelangelo.[5]

In recognizing that Berlin's fragmentary cast probably reproduced a *bozzetto* by Michelangelo, Bode considered the MET figures the product of a follower or disciple of the master. Phillips agreed

Fig. 01: Bronze cast of an impenitent thief, probably ca. 1850-75 (Berlin Museums), after a wax model attributed to Michelangelo, ca. 1520 (formerly in the Trivulzio collection)

Fig. 02: A bronze Crucifixion group, probably cast by Jacopo del Duca, ca. 1570, Rome, Italy (Metropolitan Museum of Art), after wax models attributed to Michelangelo, ca. 1520 (thieves) and ca. 1540 (corpus)

with this idea although suggested the MET group might alternatively preserve the models in a later state. Phillips also observed that the Christ of the MET group possibly recorded a signature work by Michelangelo, conceived in a different period or context than the thieves, and accounting for the contrast between their muscular fortitude versus the attenuated figure of Christ.[6]

A quantity of 16th century Italian sketches record the two crucified figures (see Appendix), notably a sketch at the Teylers Museum featuring the inscription, "*il ladrone di Michelangelo*" or "the thief of Michelangelo," indicating the figure was associated with Michelangelo at an early date and was thought to represent one of the two thieves crucified alongside Christ (Appendix fig. A).[7] The sketches exemplify the early esteem for Michelangelo's models among artists inspired by the master's ideas and designs. The various viewpoints recorded by the sketches also indicate a sculptural source as their model.[8]

The thieves may have originally served as preliminary models for what could have been an incomplete larger scale project by Michelangelo. Their creation would have conformed to the processes typical of Michelangelo's working routine through the creation of small models in preparation for a larger work.[9] However, no documented commission related to the thieves has been positively identified. Michelangelo may theoretically have employed the same models for a variety of purposes and projects, as he did with his sketches, noted in certain figural analogies between his Sistine Chapel ceiling fresco figures and early designs for the Tomb of Pope Julius II.[10]

Fig. 03: *Two studies of a crucified man, one tied to a tree, the other to a cross-beam*, attributed to Michelangelo, ca. 1508-12 (British Museum, Inv. 1859,0625.555)

An early origin for the thieves may pertain to a *Martyrdom of Ten Thousand*, known by surviving sketches of the subject thought copied after preliminary compositions by Michelangelo for a presumably aborted fresco. Paul Joannides suggests these preparatory studies, including one possible example at the British Museum (Fig. 03), were produced by Michelangelo during the first decade of the sixteenth century, thought to have influenced further copies or sketches of similarly themed subjects by Rosso Fiorentino and Alonso Berruguete.[11]

An annotated sketch for the cutting of large marble blocks, intended for a Crucifixion group is known in the archive of Michelangelo's sketches at the Casa Buonarroti[12] although the blocks appear better suited for a crucified Christ accompanied by statues of saints or mourners rather than an accompanying pair of crucified thieves.

Nonetheless, Michelangelo is thought to have developed figures for a Crucifixion group during the 1520s, evident by a compositional study at the British Museum that is stylistically dated to this period (Fig. 04). Johannes Wilde considered this sketch to have been preparatory for a small panel painting commissioned by Cardinal Domenico Grimani for his *studiolo*, although the Cardinal's sudden death in August of 1523 resulted in the cancellation of this commission.[13] Charles de Tolnay speculated the sketch may have been intended for the altar of the Medici Chapel,[14] while Michael Hirst considered it intended for a possible relief in bronze, commenting on its narrow depth as emphatic of this idea.[15]

In the sketch, the crucified figures are given more volumetric emphasis, probably due to the presence of physical models employed for reference.[16] Of more notable ingress is the analogous feature of Christ's proper left leg crossed over his right and his upward turned head peering over his left shoulder with a twisted gyration that conforms almost precisely with the MET's model of the bronze penitent thief (Fig. 05), suggesting the

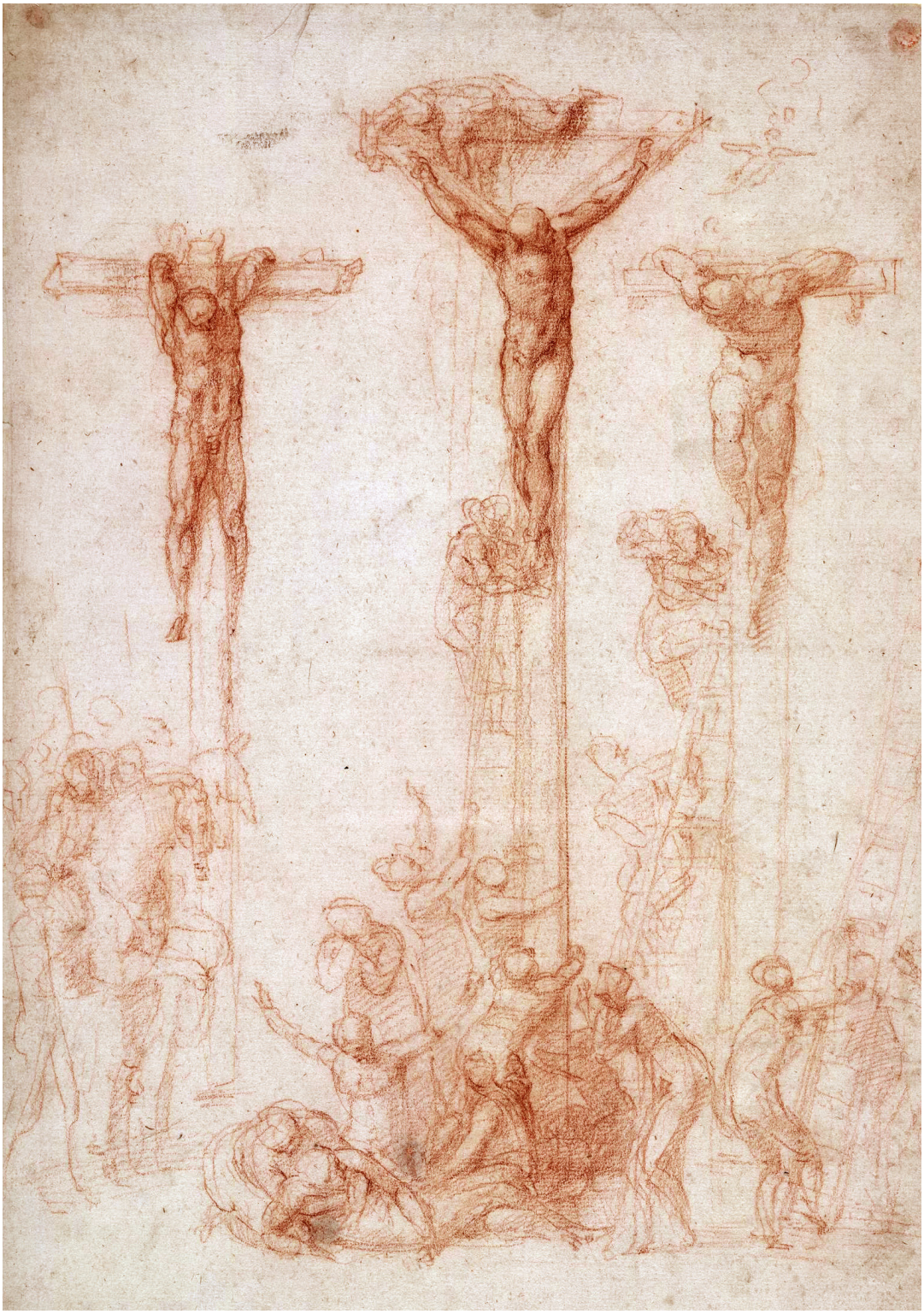

Fig. 04: *A Crucifixion / Three Crosses*, attributed to Michelangelo, early 1520s (British Museum, Inv. 1860,0616.3)

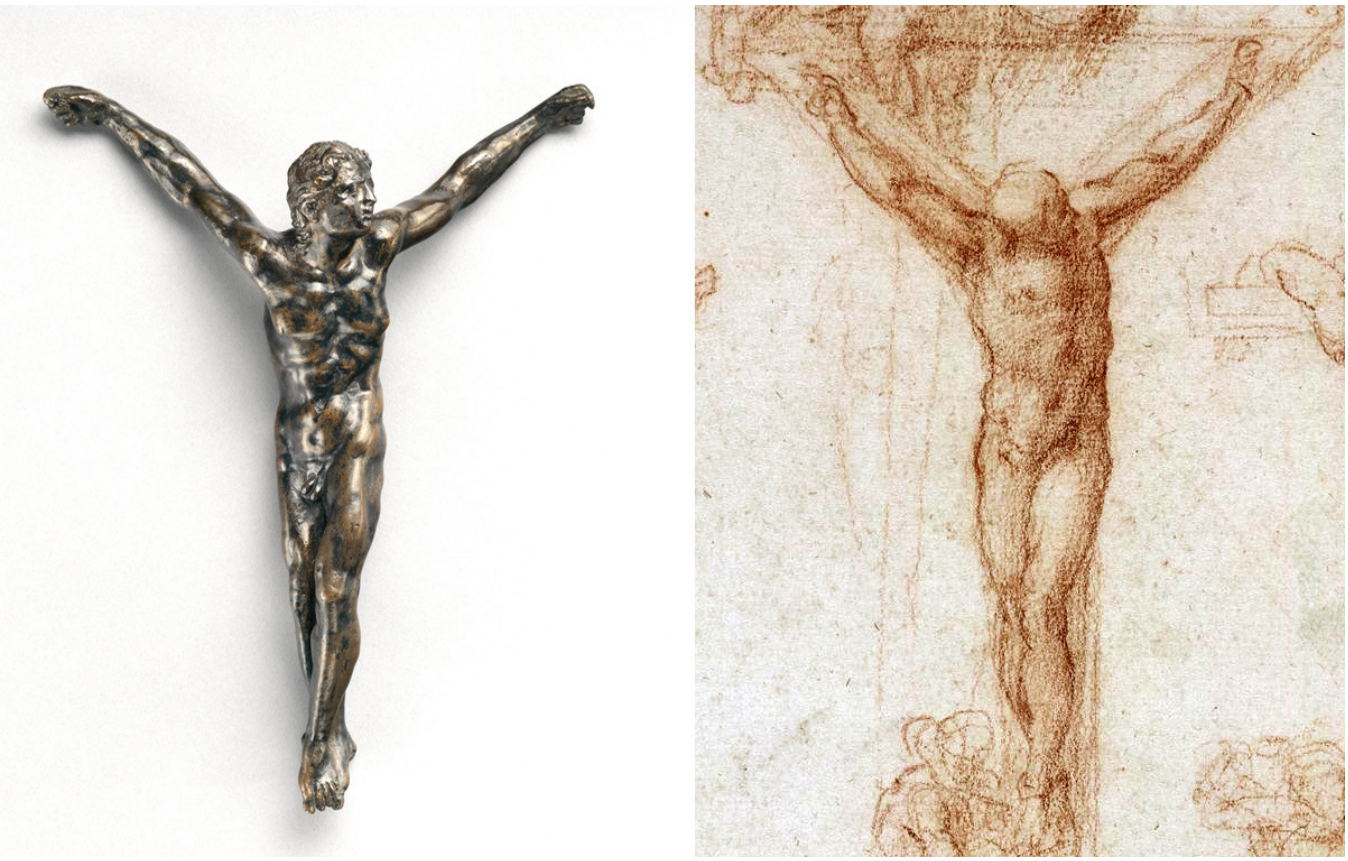

Fig. 05: A bronze penitent thief, probably cast by Jacopo del Duca, ca. 1570, Rome, Italy (Metropolitan Museum of Art), after a wax model attributed to Michelangelo, ca. 1520 (left); detail of *A Crucifixion*, attributed to Michelangelo, early 1520s (British Museum) (right)

MET figure may indeed preserve a modestly edited model from Michelangelo's workshop.

The possible appearance of one of the models is observed by a small sketch among Michelangelo's autograph writings at the Casa Buonarroti (Appendix fig. B)[17] and an anonymous late 16th century portrait of Michelangelo at his workbench, in the same museum, features a fragmentary wax figure closely resembling the impenitent thief, suggesting the model was an admired and recognizable attribute of the master at an early date (Fig. 06). The model is shown in reverse, increased-in-scale, but is not unlike the similar feature of a exagerrated model used as an attribute in a portrait of Michelangelo by Pompeo di Giulio Caccini.[18]

Additional Crucifixion sketches (Appendix figs. C-E) also show use of related models, indicated by their arrangement in a diorama that probably employed free adaptations of Michelangelo's thieves in congress with corpora resonant with the style of a later period, not unlike the terracotta group, to be discussed. That a sculptural diorama was referenced for these sketches is evident by

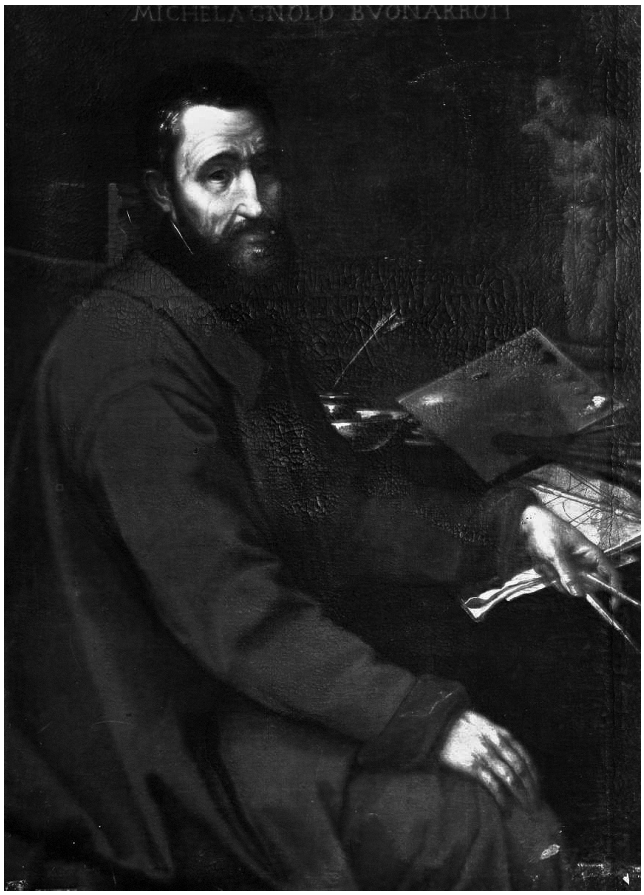

Fig. 06: *Michelangelo in His Workshop*, anonymous, late 16th century (Casa Buonarroti)

Fig. 07: *Prometheus*, Cristofano Gherardi, ca. 1542-52 (Apollo Room, Sala del Prometeo at Castello Bufalini in San Giustino), after an impenitent thief, after Michelangelo

the penitent thief's face awkwardly obfuscated by the horizontal beam of Christ's crucifix and the feature of the impenitent thief's bent knee which crosses in front of the opposing leg rather than alongside it.

Largely overlooked is Cristofano Gherardi's use of the impenitent thief as a model for *Prometheus* on a pendentive fresco in the Sala del Prometeo at Castello Bufalini in San Giustino (Fig. 07). The frescoes were worked on intermittently over an extended period between 1537-54.[19] Gherardi may have become familiar with the model by way of his regular collaboration with Giorgio Vasari, Michelangelo's friend and biographer.

Letters between Vasari and Pietro Arentino in 1535 reveal that Vasari owned the model for the head of one of the Medici saints for Michelangelo's New Sacristy of the Medici Chapel[20] and a letter between Cosimo Bartoli and Vasari, shortly after Michelangelo's death, suggests he owned even more models,[21] in addition to those noted elsewhere by Vasari that were in his possession.[22]

Gherardi was one of Vasari's favored assistants and the two painters collaborated in different locations in 1539, 1541 and 1546.[23]

Gheradi may also have encountered the model while in Rome in 1543 and 1546. It is thought the presence of Roman motifs in the frescoes, particularly those which copy Raphael's works in Rome, may have been the result of his time spent there, although this is not definite in consideration of the possibility that he could have also relied upon circulated prints made after Raphael's compositions. The Apollo Room, within which Gherardi's *Prometheus* is featured, was most likely completed between 1542-52, suggestive of a general *terminus ante quem* for the complete figure of the impenitent thief. Gherardi's *Prometheus* was later engraved in 1580 by Cherubino Alberti. Adam Bartsch, in cataloging this print, was apt to notice the feature of Michelangelo's "thief," cataloging it as a print by Alberti, after Michelangelo.[24]

The volume of the figure portrayed in Gherardi's fresco suggests a sculptural source was used as reference, apparently an example of the impenitent thief belonging to the Sforzesco-type, to be discussed (Fig. 10, right). Like the Sforzesco model, the depiction of the figure incorporates bindings around the wrists and ankles which may have inspired Gherardi's use of the model as the figure of *Prometheus* bound-to-a-tree or perhaps due to a possible earlier association of the model with a *Martyrdom of Ten Thousand*, previously noted.

While a relationship between the thief models and Michelangelo is established by the second half of the 16th century, additional correlations can be made between Michelangelo's firmly attributed models and the fragmented version of the impenitent thief already discussed (Fig. 01).

Significantly and scarcely known, the original wax model for the impenitent thief has survived into the 20th century where it formed part of a private collection in Florence with a provenance descending from the Trivulzio family in Milan.[25] Another wax fragment of a male torso, identical-in-scale, shares the same provenance. Both models are known by corresponding bronze casts at the Louvre,[26] thought to preserve fragmentary models for a Crucifixion although the second model is more aptly recognized as a reclining figure, possibly a *River God*.[27] The Louvre cast of this latter wax is the only reproduction of it known, although Eric Maclagan cites a cast group of fragmentary thieves from the Alfred Stevens collection that might denote a second pair, although they remain untraced.[28]

The two bronzes entered the Louvre in 1881 from the collection of Legs Jacques-Edouard Gatteaux.[29] In addition to the Louvre's cast of the impenitent thief model there is the example in Berlin (Fig. 01), already discussed, and another at the Museo Poldi Pezzoli in Milan.[30] The similar quality of these collective casts may indicate an origin in the same foundry. The examples at the Louvre are heavy, apparently solid casts, with a possible high concentration of iron and are quite likely modern

Fig. 08: A male torso in wax by Michelangelo, ca. 1516-18 (left) and a male torso in terracotta attributed to Michelangelo, probably ca. 1516-18 (right) (Casa Buonarroti)

19th century casts.[31] It is to be wondered if Gian Giacomo Poldi Pezzoli could have commissioned these casts during the third quarter of the 19th century, perhaps with intent to preserve examples of the waxes which may have formed part of the collection of his mother, Rosa Trivulzio, to whose family the provenance of the original waxes are indebted.

In her scrupulous census of Michelangelo's models, Jeannine O'Grody attributes the Trivulzio waxes to Michelangelo and notes how the wax is pinched off at the extremities, suggesting the models were intentionally made fragmentary rather than damaged over time.[32] In particular, the unfinished state of the wax impenitent thief model is reflective of other models firmly attributed to Michelangelo, like his clay *bozzetto* of *Samson and the Philistine*,[33] a forward-leaning clay torso with similarly sagging pectorals[34] or the inherent torsion observed on a torso in wax,[35] all located at the Casa Buonarroti (Fig. 08). Three 16th century sketches also record the wax model in its original state (see Appendix figs. F-H).

Fig. 09: A bronze male torso cast by Alessandro Cesati, ca. 1530s-40s, after a wax model by Michelangelo, ca. 1521 (left) and a bronze *River God*, anonymous, after Michelangelo's model, second-half of the 16th cent. (right) (Museo Nazionale del Bargello)

While Michelangelo's use of models wasn't novel for his time, it was his persistence in using them successfully across all media, whether drafting, sculpting or painting, that elevated his unique celebrity as a frequently solicited modeler and designer.[36] His prolific use of models bolstered the valuable function of models among his peers and followers. This value provided the natural impetus for the preservation of Michelangelo's models in bronze and terracotta.

An example of this during Michelangelo's own lifetime is the bronze cast of a "river god" at the Bargello,[37] prepared from a wax model conceived by Michelangelo in 1521 as preparatory for the tomb of Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, for the New Sacristy of San Lorenzo. The cast is thought to have been made by Alessandro Cesati during the 1530s-40s and appears in the Medici inventory of 1553. Its facture indicates an early desire by collectors to preserve wax and unbaked

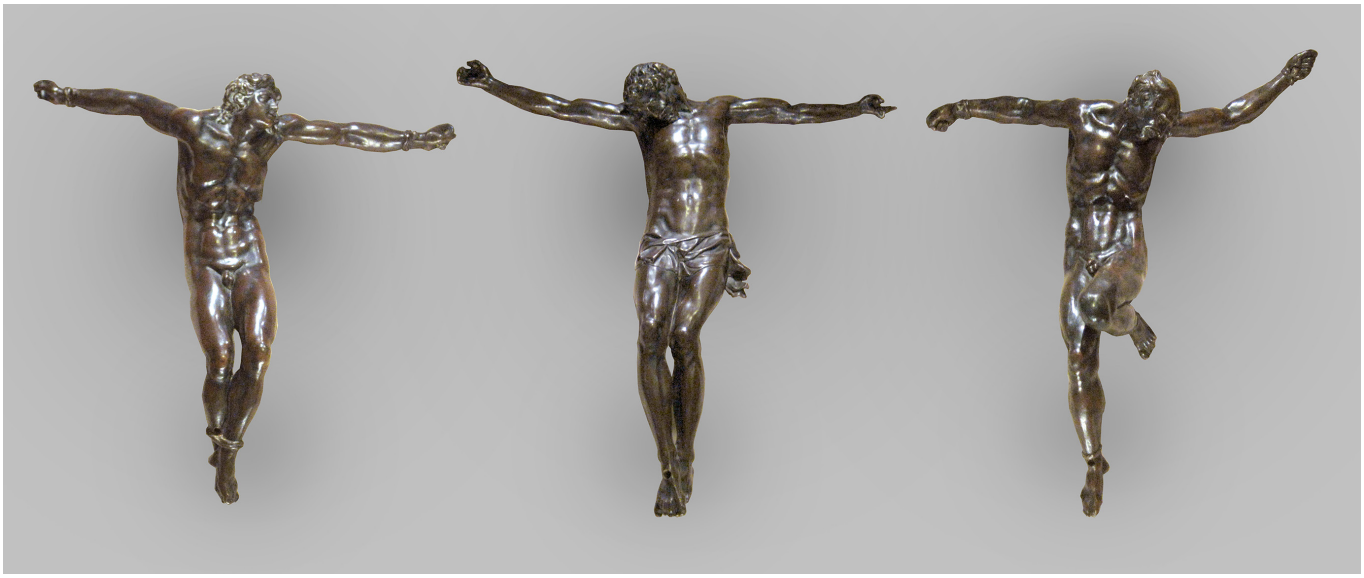

Fig. 10: A bronze Crucifixion group, perhaps by Raffaello da Montelupo (?), ca. 1540, Rome, Italy (Castello Sforzesco, Milan), the thieves after a wax model of an impenitent thief attributed to Michelangelo, ca. 1520

clay models by Michelangelo for sake of long-term preservation.[38] The existence of a more iconographically complete late 16th century version of the model in bronze, also at the Bargello, indicates how other sculptors would modify and work upon Michelangelo's preserved models (Fig. 09).

Although the date of its casting is unknown, another, probably contemporaneous preservation of Michelangelo's models in bronze is observed in a statuette at the Museo Poldi-Pezzoli[39] depicting a model of Michelangelo's *Captive Slave* of 1513, one of several small wax figures incorporated with others on a lost wooden workshop model made in preparation for the Tomb of Pope Julius II.[40] The cast is the only known example of the model although a painted *Portrait of a Young Collector* by Bartolomeo Passarotti, ca. 1560, records a gilt version of it held by the sitter.

Michelangelo's model of the impenitent thief, representing only a torso and crudely finished head, indicates the face, hair, arms and lower legs found on complete figural casts of the subject are the intervention of other sculptors working upon Michelangelo's *bozzetto* as a point of departure for a fully sculpted figure.[41]

There are two significant versions of the thieves: the pair forming the MET group (Fig. 02) and another bronze group at the Castello Sforzesco, featuring an alternate version of the penitent thief and a unique figure of Christ, altogether the work of a single artist, to be discussed (Fig. 10).

Bode initially considered the MET group a freer version after Michelangelo's models while Phillips argued for the opposite.[42] This latter opinion will be endorsed in the following observations, suggesting that the MET group is more faithful to

Michelangelo's original models while the Sforzesco group introduce dramatic edits yet were probably cast and circulated at an earlier date than the MET group.

One distinguishing characteristic supporting Phillips' claim is the stance of the penitent thief whose figural pose is faithfully reproduced in the British Museum Crucifixion sketch. The rawness of the casts, with peened afterwork, unconsciously imitates Michelangelo's *non finito* expressiveness in marble while the unpolished torsos retain the wax-like quality of the original models, contrasting with the more refined finishing and afterwork evident on the Sforzesco group. The details of the thieves' faces differ between both groups, with a more contrite expression on the MET cast of the penitent thief than on the Sforzesco example. Additionally, the treatment of hair on the MET's impenitent thief has more volume than the Sforzesco cast whose hair is simplified yet more windswept. The proper left forearm on the MET example is lowered and the proper right arm is arched. The proper right leg bows inwardly to compensate for weight in contrast to the straight extended leg of the Sforzesco impenitent thief. The thieves of the MET group also lack the bindings cast integrally on the wrists and ankles of the Sforzesco group and other corollary casts.

The treatment applied to Michelangelo's models in the MET group may also offer a clue about their possible maker. Foremost is the model of Christ accompanying this group, also thought to reproduce a model by Michelangelo.[43] The MET Christ is itself a manipulated, cruder version of a finer original rarely discussed (Fig. 11, left), although twenty-eight other examples of varying quality and manipulation are identified by the present author.[44] The MET example is distinguished from the original corpus model with changes introduced to the position of the head, turned further toward Christ's proper left, and the arms raised and hands remodeled (Fig. 11, center). Only one other example of this uniquely modified corpus is known, cast integrally on the door panel of a bronze tabernacle at the Church of San Lorenzo in Padula, executed by Michelangelo's assistant, Jacopo del Duca (Fig. 11, right). Jacopo, a sculptor and specialist in bronze casting, was Michelangelo's assistant at the time of his death and inherited several projects of the master.[45]

The MET corpus represents an intermediary stage of the model, with Jacopo introducing further changes to the corpus in order to conform it with the predetermined space of the relief panel. For example, a 1573 summary of the tabernacle describes the specifications for the size of the relief panels, originally intended to be square. However, a decision to heighten them was abruptly made during Jacopo's negotiations to sell the tabernacle to King Phillip II of Spain.[46] In further editing the corpus, Christ's proper right leg is drawn upward, causing his left foot to sink lower than the right and an integral perizonium is introduced in keeping with the artistic regulations instituted by Pope Pius V after the year 1566.

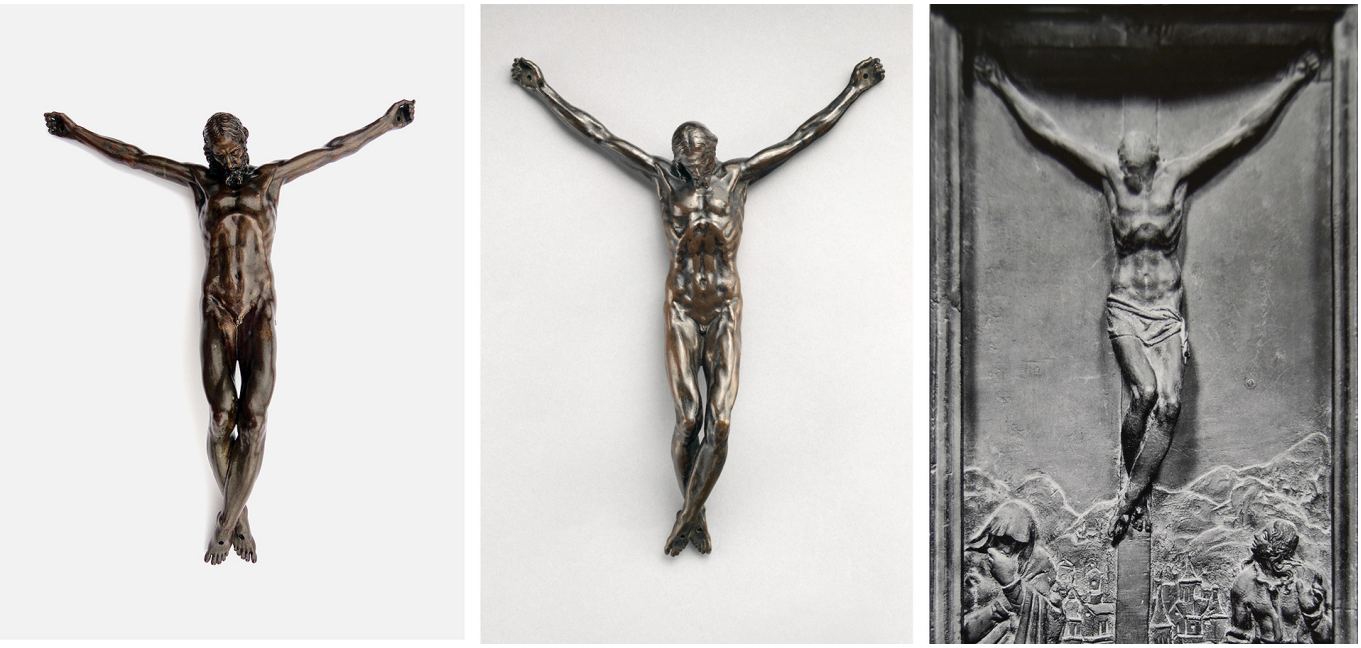

Fig. 11: A bronze Christ, probably cast by Guglielmo della Porta or Sebastiano Torrigiani, ca. 1570s, Rome, Italy, faithfully from a wax model attributed to Michelangelo, ca. 1540 (private collection, © GCF) (left); a bronze Christ, probably cast by Jacopo del Duca, ca. 1570, Rome, Italy (MET), after the same model attributed to Michelangelo (center); a figure of Christ for a bronze Crucifixion panel on a tabernacle at the Church of San Lorenzo in Padula, Italy by Jacopo del Duca, 1573-74, after designs by Michelangelo (right)

The sale of the tabernacle to Spain was shortly thereafter aborted and Jacopo subsequently made hasty negotiations to sell it to the Carthusians of Padula, completing the panels haphazardly on what was probably a limited budget, and accounting for the raw, unfinished character of the relief panels which, left unfinished, contrast with the more highly finished and earlier cast bronze framework.[47]

A *terminus ante quem* for the corpus is identified by a date etched in wax residue on the back of the tabernacle's Crucifixion panel, dated 27 January 1574.[48] Jacopo therefore had access to this model before this date and may have cast the intermediary version of the corpus, with accompanying thieves, sometime before or during this period, resulting in the distinctive MET group.

Further, there is a superficial correspondence between the articulation of the hair and faces of the MET thieves which also relate favorably with the characters featured on the Padula tabernacle relief panels by Jacopo. In consideration of these observations, the MET group is probably indebted to Jacopo, particularly in consideration of his access to the master and his talents in bronze casting.

The bronze group at Castello Sforzesco (Fig. 10) is thought descendant of the collection of the art historian and painter, Giuseppe Bossi, who

died in 1815.[49] The corpus accompanying this group features a perizonium and lacks bindings around the wrists and ankles, distinguishing it from its accompanying nude thieves.[50] The corpus is apparently the unique creation of the group's maker, who has consciously chosen to retain the original state of the thieves' nudity, suggestive of their lineage to Michelangelo's inventiveness. The group appears also to have been cast collectively judging by their parallel quality and finish.[51]

Due to its Lombard provenance and stylistic tendencies Hans Weihrauch suggested a possible attribution of the Sforzesco group to Annibale Fontana,[52] which, though tenuous, is a reasonable estimation. There are similarities between the softer features of some of Fontana's work comparable with the unique facial characteristics of the group. Clelia Alberici, however, dismissed the suggestion of Fontana in favor of Guglielmo della Porta as a producer of the Sforzesco group.[53] However, in the present author's opinion, the modeling of the faces is alien to Guglielmo's anxious, yet monumental personality in small sculpture.

Janice Shell later suggested the author of the MET and Sforzesco groups had access to different sketches or casts, indicative of evolutionary stages of the composition.[54] This idea has merit particularly considering the Sforzesco models appear to have evolved independently of the MET group.

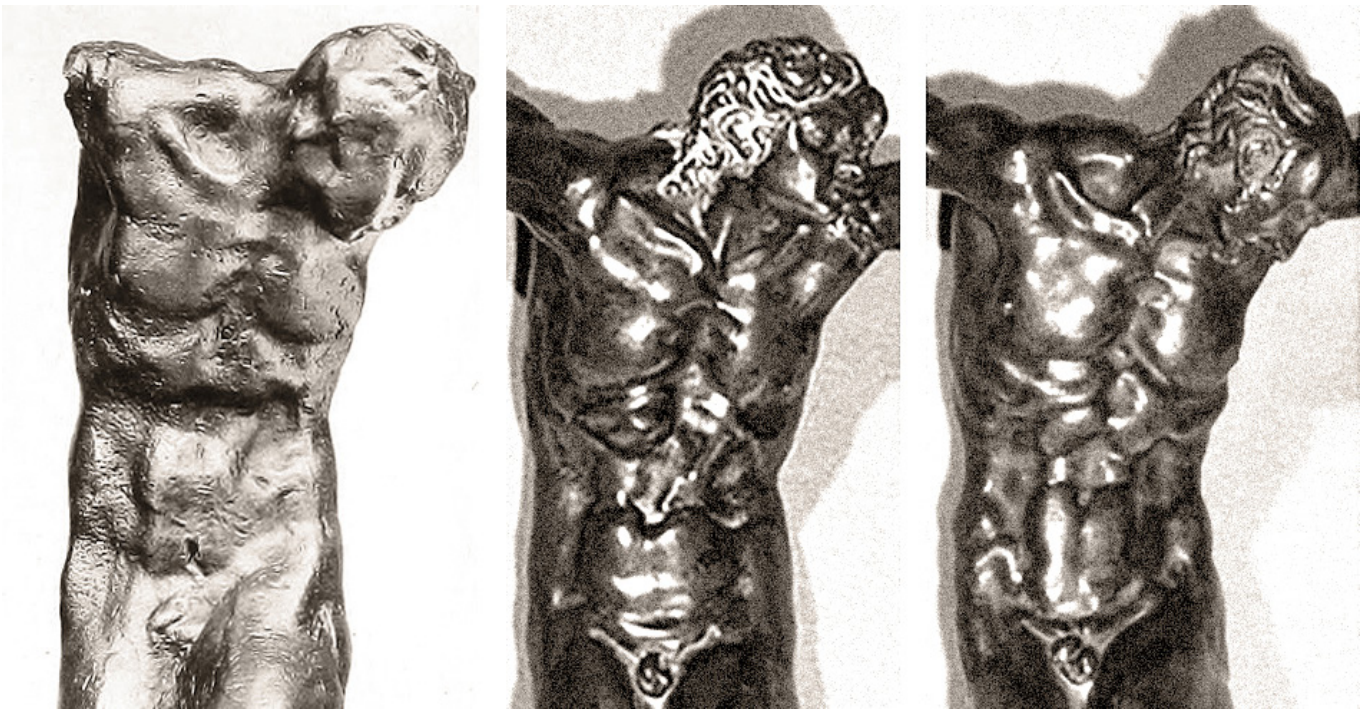

Fig. 12: Details of a bronze cast of an impenitent thief, probably cast ca. 1850-75 (Berlin Museums), after a wax model attributed to Michelangelo, ca. 1520 (left); a penitent and impenitent bronze thief from a Crucifixion group, perhaps by Raffaello da Montelupo (?), ca. 1540, Rome, Italy (Castello Sforzesco, Milan), both after a wax model of an impenitent thief attributed to Michelangelo (center, right)

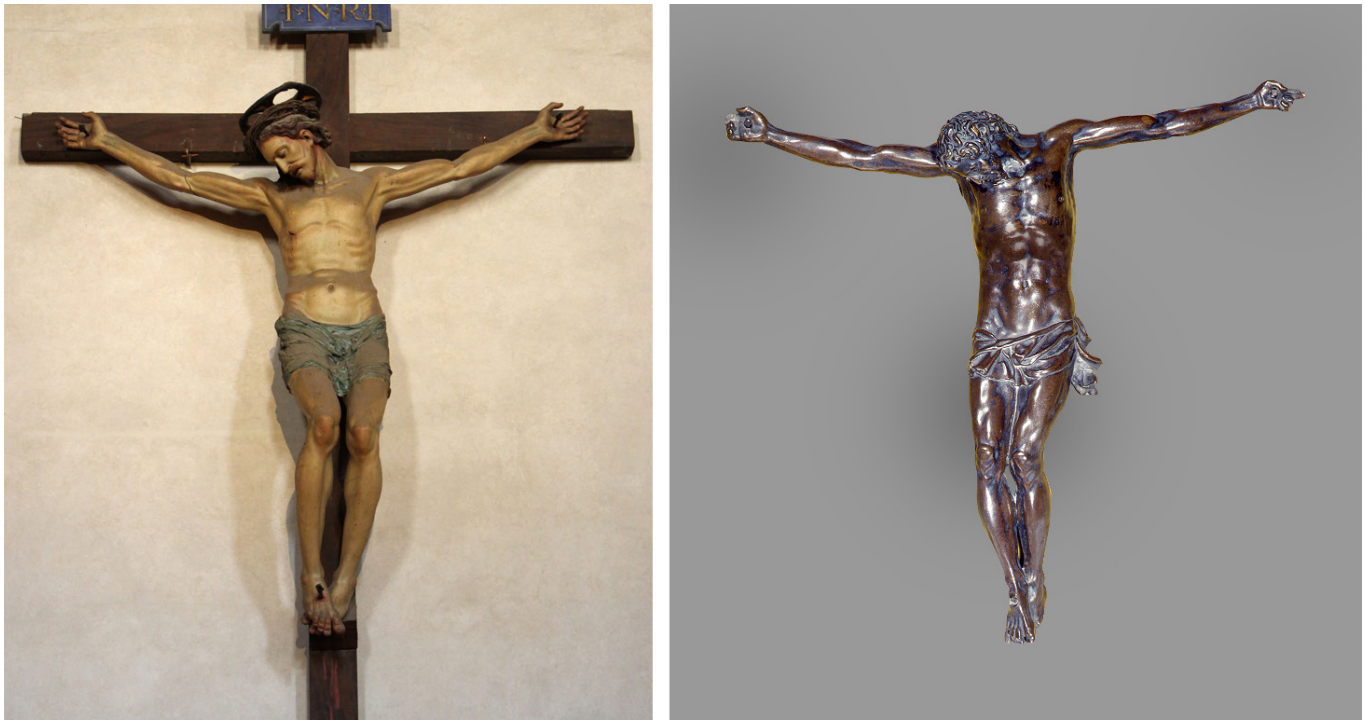

Fig. 13: A wood Christ by Raffaello da Montelupo, ca. 1537-40 (Museo di Cenacolo di Sant'Apollonia) (left); a bronze Christ, perhaps by Raffaello da Montelupo (?), ca. 1540, Rome, Italy (Castello Sforzesco, Milan) (right)

The Sforzesco-type are the most widely reproduced. An additional cast of the impenitent thief is at the Museo Bardini in Florence, and a bronze Calvary group incorporating the two thieves is found in the Diocesan Museum of Hildesheim (Fig. 15). Two terracotta groups of the models also survive, to be discussed.

Of the Sforzesco group and its corollary casts, the torso of the impenitent thief is recycled for use on the penitent thief (Fig. 12). The group's maker appears to have been witting of the original model for the penitent thief, as observed on the MET version (Fig. 05, left), seeking to emulate the turn of his head and character of his face, but entirely dismissing the torsion of his body. This intentional dismissal may have been due to the way in which the figure would have been mounted to a crucifix, requiring either a taller crucifix than the impenitent thief or one realized with a truncated upper beam in which the penitent thief would have hung awkwardly lower than his counterpart.[55] The choice to borrow the other thief's torso, yet still retain some of the character of the original model of the penitent thief appears to be an intentional choice by the sculptor responsible for conceiving the Sforzesco group. With torso exchanged, the penitent thief is more ably fixed to the cross with arms spread horizontally and in visual harmony with the impenitent thief when displayed in a Golgotha setting.

This recycling of the impenitent thief's torso may also account for the slightly sharper casting of the impenitent thief whose torso has slightly more mass. This observation also resonates with

Volker Krahn's suggestion that the penitent thief of this group was possibly altogether invented by a follower.[56]

Although speculative, the present author proposes the Sforezesco group shares an affinity with the sculptural production of Michelangelo's occasional assistant, Raffaello da Montelupo.[57] In particular, the corpus of the Sforzesco group relates favorably with Montelupo's wooden corpus realized for the Florentine nuns of Sant'Apollonia between 1537-40 (Fig. 13).[58] There is a similar muscular physiognomy with the sinewy arms pulled taught, sharp decline of the biceps at the inner elbows, bulbous toes with knobby joints and ankles, dramatically tucked upper abdomen beneath the ribcage, slightly pinched yet constricted upper chest exposing a diamond-shaped recess at the base of the sternum and similarly lowered head of Christ who expresses the same quiet austerity. The overall formula is stiffer than the figural form of the thieves, exacting a contrast that distinguishes the figure of Christ within the group.

Further comparisons can be made with Montelupo's other works, such as the similar facial type and hair styling of his *St. Damian* for the New Sacristy of San Lorenzo in the Medici Chapel in Florence, based on Michelangelo's designs or the similar noble expression of the Christ in relation to his monumental *St. Michael*. The wavy hair of the thieves as well as the straight, equally defined moustaches are comparable as are their expressions which follow the rather plain unassuming character of his other monumental marbles. However, the oddly elated face of the penitent thief recalls the calm inquiring expression observed on a putto attributed to him (Fig. 14).

Particularly corresponding is Christ's perizonium on the Sforzesco corpus which follows the stylistic signature of Montelupo's approach toward drapery. The sticky, tightly conforming folds overlap smooth surfaces sculpted with drama, yet in very low-relief that conceals contrast.

Maintaining this notional idea, Montelupo may have copied or had access to Michelangelo's thief models while assisting him at the New Sacristy of San Lorenzo in 1533-34, where, according to Vasari, Montelupo worked from Michelangelo's *bozzetti*.[59] An unpublished sketch of the impenitent thief in a private collection, tenuously connected with Montelupo on account of its apparent execution by an ambidextrous draughtsman (for which Montelupo was known), may show a potential experimentation with the model whose head is rendered alternatively facing dexter (Appendix fig. I).

Although Montelupo's bronze work is inadequately explored, Vasari notes how he began working with wax, clay and bronze during his youth. He may have gained additional expertise during his tenure in the workshop of Michelangelo Viviani Bandinelli[60] and an early indication of Montelupo's experience with bronze is identified between 1523-27, while assisting Lorenzetto on various projects, including finishing bronze panels for the Chigi Chapel in Rome, as described by Montelupo in his autobiography.[61]

Fig. 14: Detail of *St. Michael* by Raffaello da Montelupo, 1536, for the top of Castel Sant'Angelo, Rome (upper, left); detail of a bronze Christ, perhaps by Raffaello da Montelupo (?), ca. 1540, Rome, Italy (Galerie Sismann, Paris) (upper, center); detail of *St. Damian* by Raffaello da Montelupo, ca. 1534, after designs by Michelangelo for the New Sacristy of the Basilica di San Lorenzo (upper, right); detail of a bronze penitent thief, perhaps by Raffaello da Montelupo (?), ca. 1540, Rome, Italy (Castello Sforzesco) (lower, left); detail of a marble cherub attributed to Raffaello da Montelupo, mid-16th cent. (Christie's auction, 2011) (lower, right)

If Montelupo or another sculptor in Michelangelo's ambit authored the full-bodied thieves during the late 1530s or early 1540s, this would account for their gradual dissemination and later adoption by Gherardi for his depiction of *Prometheus*. That Gherardi's *Prometheus* features similar bindings on the wrists and ankles suggests the Sforzesco impenitent thief model was already known by the 1540s. If not through Vasari, Gherardi may have discovered the model in Rome in 1543 where Montelupo was active at-the-time. Its presence suggests another instance, apart from Cesati, of Michelangelo's models being worked upon and cast during his lifetime by collaborators or acquaintances.

Joannides has also pointed out an oil-on-slate painting of the *Deposition* by Simone Peterzano, ca. 1572-75, which also features the two thieves, bound by wrists and ankles, to their wooden crucifixes and reproducing the Sfrozesco-type. The penitent thief is shown frontally while the

Fig. 15: A bronze Calvary group, anonymous, South German, early 17th century, with thieves after models possibly by Raffaello da Montelupo (?), after Michelangelo (Diocesan Museum of Hildesheim)

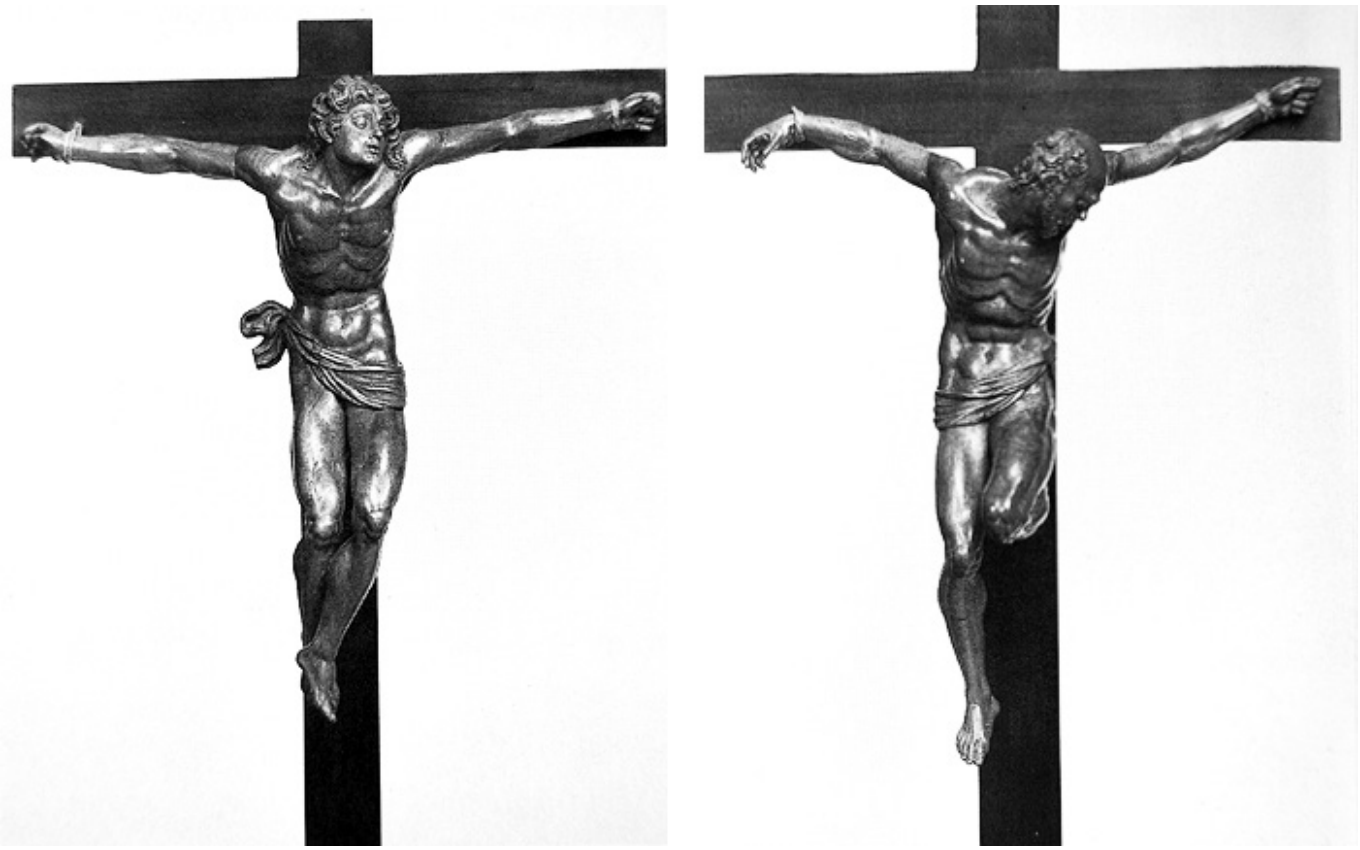

Fig. 16: A pair of boxwood thieves, probably South German, early 17th cent. (private collection), after models possibly by Raffaello da Montelupo (?), after Michelangelo

impenitent thief is seen at an oblique angle from the reverse. Peterzano's use of these models indicates their presence in Milan by that time.[62]

A third bronze group of the thieves at the Diocesan Museum of Hildeshiem Cathedral is displayed upon a Calvary hill and adds a central Christ flanked by Mary and John with a weeping Magdalene at the foot of the cross (Fig. 15). The group is documented in the cathedral inventory in 1881 and came from the 19th century collection of Bishop Eduard Jakob Wedekin. The thieves are exact casts following the Sforzesco-type while the other figures are slightly larger in-scale, suggesting an enterprising workshop gathered these figures together to complete a full composition. In cataloging the group, Krahn discussed the Italian origin of the thieves while suggesting the other figures had a probable South German origin during the second quarter of the 17th century, perhaps in the ambit of Hans Reichle.[63]

An awareness of the thieves in Germany is noted by a unique boxwood group that faithfully copies the models (Fig. 16).[64] Their added perizoniums suggest a later dating, perhaps in the early 17th century. Krahn also mentions copies in wood, although without references. An additional German presence for the thieves is also noted by a terracotta group at the Rosgarten Museum in Konstanz.

Fig. 17: A pair of bronze thieves, anonymous, probably a German sculptor active in Rome, late 16th cent. (Tomasso Brothers), after a model by Michelangelo

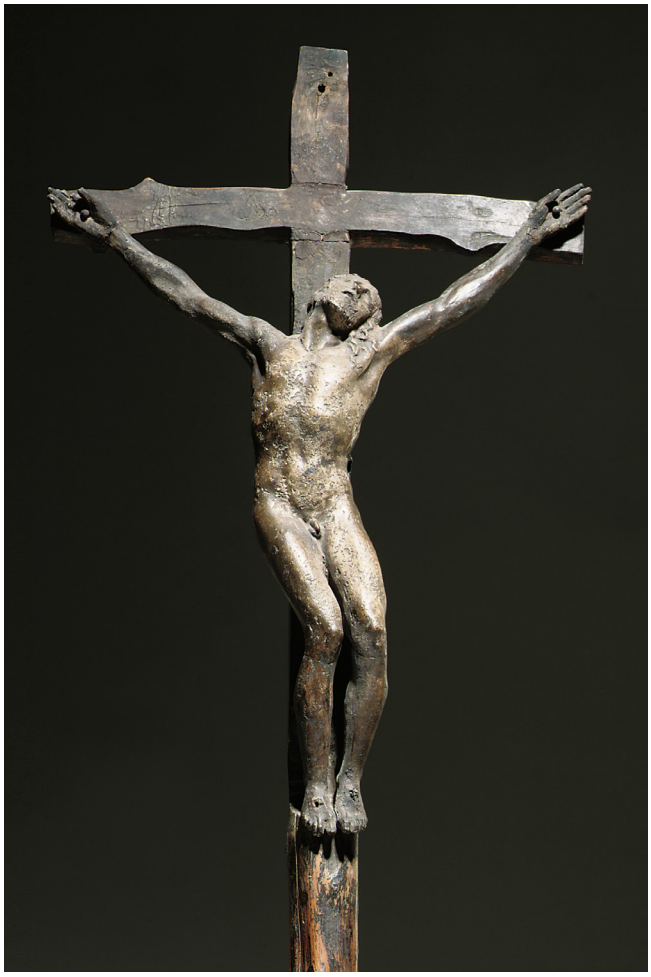

Fig. 18: A terracotta Christ from a Crucifixion group, ambit of Ercole Ferrata, 16th cent., Rome, Italy (private collection), with thieves after models perhaps after a model by Raffaello da Montelupo (?) after a model by Michelangelo (see cover photo for impenitent thief belonging to this group)

While the deeper history of these German examples is unknown, it is uncanny that these rare models should appear there and could suggest an early circulation of the models in Germany, perhaps due to journeymen active between Germany and Italy during the late 16th or early 17th century.

A fourth bronze pair of thieves was formerly with the Tomasso Brothers (Fig. 17). The group are likely a later iteration which borrow from the Sforzesco models yet distinctively substitute the thieves' heads for a contemporary style that corresponds with the individuality of their maker. The hulking size of their heads, almost out-of-scale with their bodies, are notably finer-in-quality than the less finished bodies which probably aim to preserve Michelangelo's originality.

The Northern character of their faces prompts consideration of a German sculptor's intervention. They also relate to the figural and stylistic language of the eponymous Ciechanowiecki Master, also dubbed the Master of the Fitzwilliam Museum,[65] once thought to be a sculptor of South German origin but most recently considered an Italian sculptor active in Rome during the late 16th century.[66] The sculptor's manipulation of other extant models is evinced in works like a seated Hercules based upon an original model by Manno Sbarri.[67] There is perhaps a superficial link between this sculptor and the presence of Michelangelo's thieves in Germany.

An additional terracotta group, reproducing the Sforzesco-type, is preserved in a private collection, featuring another unique figure of Christ with the less common iconography of being nude and nailed at both feet (cover, Fig. 18). The agonized features of this corpus distinguish it from the thieves who are less strained in their suffering. The corpus also lacks the bindings present on the casts of the thieves although the hands of the penitent thief have been remodeled and repositioned with possible modifications to the forearms. The unknown inventor of the corpus in this group shows a capable and expressive talent in league

with 16th and 17th century Italian Mannerism. It loosely corresponds with the figure of Christ in several of the Crucifixion compositions previously discussed (Appendix figs. C, D).

Although unconfirmed, the provenance of this terracotta group is thought to descend from a tradition of ownership beginning with its discovery by a 16th century sculptor near St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.[68] The group are thought to have been passed from master-sculptor to apprentice up until the end of the 19th century in Rome. It is to be wondered if the thieves in this group might relate to Ercole Ferrata's posthumous inventory in Rome which cites "*due corpuscoli di Michelangiolo in creta cotta*" or two figures by Michelangelo in terracotta.[69] Ferrata operated the most successful school for training sculptors in Rome during the later part of the 17th century and models like these would have been suitable workshop references.

The enterprising figure of Christ in this group may descend from the influence of Alessandro Algardi with its choice use of two nails to secure Christ's feet to the cross while a similar torsion and pathos can be observed in the corpora of Ferrata's pupils: Camillo Rusconi and Domenico Guidi.

Lastly, another individual thief in terracotta, whose location is unknown or lost, was formerly in the 18th century collection of Baron Philipp von Stosch, recorded by Ernst Steinmann in 1924.[70]

Appendix

Fig. A: *Sketch of an impenitent thief after a model by Michelangelo*, anonymous, 16th cent. (Teylers Museum, Haarlem, Inv. I 008)

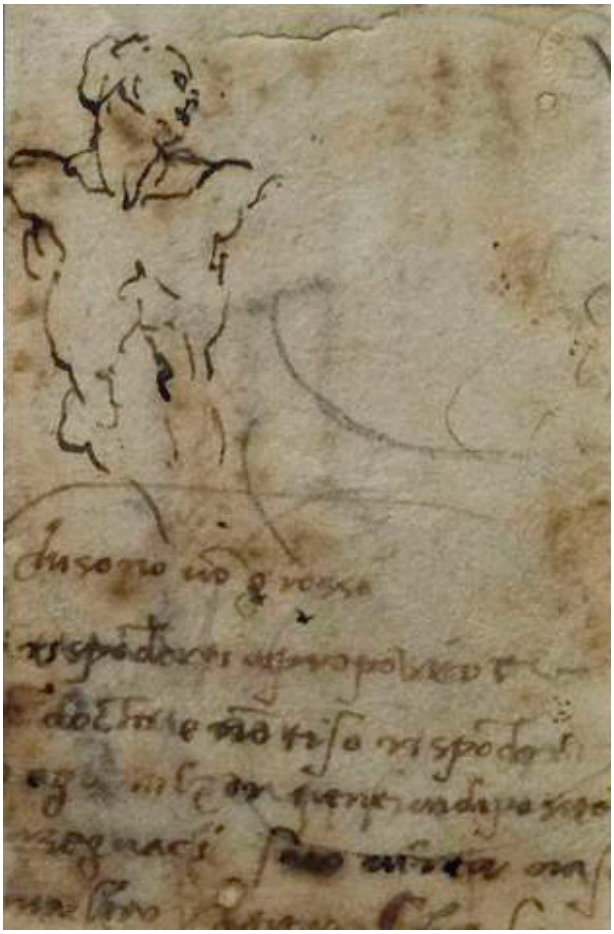

Fig. B: *Partial study of a Male Nude and autograph writings*, Michelangelo Buonarroti (Casa Buonarroti, Inv. 30F)

Appendix

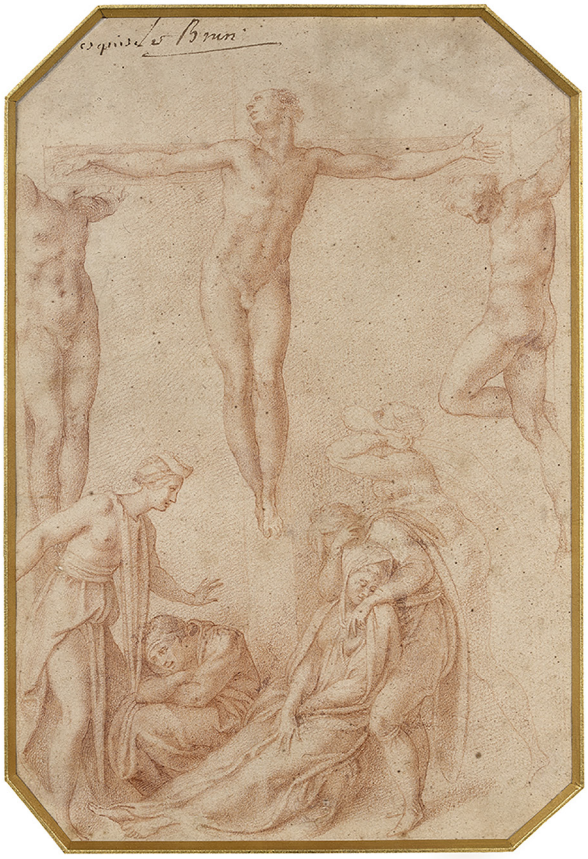

Fig. C: *Sketch of a Crucifixion*, attributed to Giulio Clovio, 16th cent. (private collection)

Fig. D: *Sketch of a Crucifixion*, school of Michelangelo, 16th cent. (Louvre, Inv. 389)

Appendix

Fig. E: *Study for a Crucifixion*, follower of Michelangelo, 16th cent. (Ashmolean Museum, Inv. WA1846-122)

Fig. F: *Studies of a wax model by Michelangelo*, school of Rosso Fiorentino, 16th cent. (Harvard Art Museum / Fogg Museum, Inv. 1932.139)

Appendix

Fig. G: *Studies of models*, Francesco Morandini, called Il Poppi, 16th cent. (Uffizi, Inv. 4273 F)

Fig. H: *Figural studies of models and a candlestick,* anonymous Florentine artist, 16th cent. (Uffizi, Inv. 18558 F)

Appendix

Fig. I: *Sketch of the impenitent thief,* follower of Michelangelo (Raffaello da Montelupo?), 16th cent. (private collection)

Fig. J: *Sketch of the penitent thief,* imitator of Michelangelo, 16th cent. (Louvre, Inv. 853 Recto)

Endnotes

1 The sculpture Bode acquired had been misattributed to Pietro Tacca when he purchased it for the museum. See Wilhelm von Bode (1908): *The Italian bronze statuettes of the Renaissance. Translated from the German by William Grétor*. H. Grevel & Co. and Bruno Cassirer, p. 16.

2 In the *Gospel of Luke* an impenitent thief mocks Christ while another, in penitence, asks for mercy, respectively identified as Gestas and Dimas in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*.

3 John Goldsmith Phillips (1937): A Crucifixion Group After Michelangelo. *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, vol. 32, no. 9*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, pp. 210-14.

4 Christies auction, 5 June 1899, p. 15, pl. 4; see also Thomas Ellis Kirby (1918): Deluxe Illustrated Catalogue of the Treasures and Antiquities Illustrating the Golden Age of Italian Art: Belonging to the Famous Expert and Antiquarian, Signor Stefano Bardini, of Florence, Italy. *American Art Association, NY, no. 108*. Afterwards, the Crucifixion group was acquired by the dealer Frank Schnittjer in New York and later sold to the MET in 1937.

5 A cast of the impenitent thief, also in Bardini's collection and today kept at the museum of his namesake in Florence, is still mislabeled as the work of Zaccaria da Volterra.

6 J. Phillips (1937): *op. cit.* (note 3).

7 On account of this association Charles de Tolnay suggested the models for the thieves were indebted to Michelangelo's authorship (see endnote 13). This idea has been generally accepted among scholars although Volker Krahn cautiously noted an attempt to prove the authorship of the models with Michelangelo based on drawings does not seem convincing (see endnote 31).

8 Jeannine Alexandra O'Grody (1999): *Un Semplice Modello: Michelangelo and His Three-Dimensional Preparatory Works*. PhD Thesis, Case Western Reserve University, Department of Art History, no. 12, pp. 273-76.

9 J. O'Grody (1999): *op. cit.* (note 8); see also Victoria Avery (2018): Divine Pipe Dreams. Mature Michelangelo and the mastery of metal. *Michelangelo: Sculptor in Bronze*. London, pp. 80-105.

10 Jeannine O'Grody (2002): Michelangelo: The Master Modeler. *Earth and Fire. Italian Terracotta Sculpture from Donatello to Canova*. Yale University Press, pp. 32-42.

11 Paul Joannides (1994): Bodies in the Trees: A Mass-Martyrdom by Michelangelo. *Apollo, 140/393, November*, pp. 3-14.

12 Casa Buonarroti Inv. Corpus 486.

13 Johannes Wilde (1953): *Italian Drawings in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum. Michelangelo and His Studio.* Trustees of the British Museum, London, no. 32, pp. 64-65.

14 Charles de Tolnay (1960): *Michelangelo. Vol. V. The Final Period*, Princeton University Press, no. 155, p. 172; see also C. Tolnay (1975): *Corpus dei disegni di Michelangelo.* Novara Istituto Geografico de Agostini, vol. I, no. 87.

15 Michael Hirst (1988): *Michelangelo and his Drawings.* New Haven and London, pp. 48-50; and Michael Hirst (1988): *Michelangelo. Draftsman.* Exhibition catalog, Washington, National Gallery of Art and Paris, Louvre, no. 24, p. 62.

16 M. Hirst (1988): *op. cit.* (note 15)

17 Casa Buonarroti Inv. 30f.

18 The portrait by Caccini is located, on loan, at the Casa Buonarroti .

19 Avraham Ronen (1967-68), Un ciclo inedito di affreschi di C. G. a San Giustino, in *Mitteilungen des Kunsthisthorischen Institutes in Florenz, XIII*, pp. 367-380.

20 Karl Frey (1923): *Der Literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris*. München. Vol. I, pp. 35-37.

21 J. O'Grody (1999): *op. cit.* (note 8), p. 103; see also K. Frey (1923): *op. cit.* (note 20), vol. I, p. 360.

22 Giorgio Vasari mentions owning the clay arms from the model of Saint Cosimo in Arezzo. The arms and head of the sculpture were by Michelangelo whereas the remainder of the sculpture was completed by Michelangelo's assistant, Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli. See Gaetano Milanesi (1906): *Le Opere di Giorgio Vasari. Firenze, vol. VI*, p. 632f.

23 In 1539 Vasari and Cristafano Gherardi collaborated near Bologna decorating the refectory of S. Michele in Bosco and again in 1546 on eighteen panels depicting Biblical scenes for the sacristy of S. Giovanni Carbonara in Naples. See A. Ronen (1967) *op. cit.* (note 19).

24 Adam Bartsch (1818): *Le Peintre Graveur. Vol. XVII*, 80.92, Vienna. The Uffizi preserves Cherubino Alberti's preparatory sketches for this print (Inv 93695-20).

25 Unidentified author (1963): Proposte per Michelangelo. *II Vasari, XXI*, pp. 186-87, fig. LXVII.

26 Louvre Invs. OA9125 and OA9126.

27 The identity of the two models as thieves from a Crucifixion group was first published by Gaston Migeon, an attribution still retained in the Louvre collections. See Gaston Migeon (1904): *Catalogue des Bronzes & Cuivres du Moyen Age, de la Renaissance et des Temps Modemes*. Paris, Librairies Imprimeries Rennies, pp. 136-37, no. 116. However, O'Grody more convincingly suggests the bearded figure represents an early idea for a river god, bearing the same torsion and musculature, sans the age and folded skin along the stomach, observed on later models of the subject realized by Michelangelo. See J. O'Grody (1999): *op. cit.* (note 8), p. 151.

28 Eric Maclagan noted casts of the torsos of a penitent and impenitent thief that were at the Victoria & Albert Museum, from the collection of Alfred Stevens, although these do not appear in a cursory search of the museum collections and their location remains unknown. It is probable they are modern casts kin with the Louvre examples. See Eric Maclagan (1924): The Wax Models by Michelangelo in the

Endnotes

Victoria and Albert Museum. *Burlington Magazine, 44*, p. 15.

29 Philippe Malgouyres (2010): *Deux bronzes d'après Michel-Ange*. Exposition Pékin, CAFA.

30 Museo Poldi-Pezzoli Inv. 36/38 F.C.

31 Volker Krahn agrees with the notion the Berlin cast is later and Philippe Malgouryres suggested the same (private communication). See Volker Krahn (1991): *Schatzkammer auf ziet. Die Sammlungen des Bischofs Eduard Jakob Wedekin. 1769-1870. Katalog der Ausstellung des Diözesan-Museums Hildesheim*. No. 23, pp. 108-10.

32 J. O'Grody (1999): *op. cit.* (note 8), no. 11, pp. 273-76.

33 Casa Buonarroti Inv. 192.

34 Casa Bunoarroti Inv. 539.

35 Casa Buonarroti Inv. 542.

36 Irving Lavin (2009): Bozetto Style - The Renaissance Sculptor's Handiwork. *Visible Spirit: The Art of Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Volume II*. Pindar Press, pp. 1174-1233.

37 Museo Nazionale del Bargello Inv. 32m.

38 Eike Schmidt (2016): Michelangelo's bronze River Gods: perpetuation, germination and modification. Lecture from *A Michelangelo Discovery Symposium*, University of Cambridge, UK, 6 July 2016. See also V. Avery (2018) *op. cit.* (note 9), p. 91.

39 Museo Poldi-Pezzoli Inv. 85/68.

40 O'Grody notes that, "several of the contracts for the tomb clearly show that models were carried out, but include little additional information. A letter of 1515 from Michelangelo to his brother indicates that he spent several months working on models for the sculptures" and "there is no evidence Michelangelo outsourced his model preparation with the exception of the labor involved in preparing the wood portion alone, of architectural models. See J. O'Grody (1999): *op. cit.* (note 8), pp. 73-74, 81, and footnote 47.

41 Krahn was apt to comment on this in his discussion of the bronze group of the thieves in Hildesheim, questioning whether the figure of the thieves was originally complete or if they were simply torsos completed by successive artists. See V. Krahn (1991): *op. cit.* (note 31).

42 J.G. Phillips (1937): *op. cit.* (note 3), footnote 7, p. 212.

43 The association of this corpus with Michelangelo was first brought to attention by Manuel Gomez-Moreno who studied the wider circulated casts identified throughout Spain. The attribution to Michelangelo was subsequently followed by John Goldsmith-Phillips and again by Charles de Tolnay. See Manuel Gomez-Moreno (1930): Obras de Miguel Angel en Espana. *Archivo Espanol de Arte y Arqueologia, 17*. Centro de Estudios Historicos (Spain); pp. 189-198; M. Gomez-Moreno (1933): El Crucifijo de Miguel Angel. *Archivo Espanol de Arte y Arqueologia, 26*. Centro de Estudios Historicos (Spain); pp. 81-84; J.G. Phillips (1937): *op. cit.* (note 3); and C. Tolnay (1960): *op. cit.* (note 14).

44 This corpus will be discussed in a forthcoming paper by the present author. This census does not include a group of 12 additional modern silver casts of the corpus made in 1940 for the Seville Cathedral by Señor Seco after an early 17th century cast already in the cathedral's treasury museum.

45 The Padula tabernacle may have had an early impetus in plans for Michelangelo's aborted tabernacle for the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Rome.

46 Philippe Malgouyres (2011): La Deposition du Christ de Jacopo Del Duca, chef-d'oeuvre posthume de Michel-Ange. *La Revue des Musees de France: Revue du Louvre 2011-5*. RMN-Grand Palais, Paris, pp. 43-56; see also Jennifer Montagu (1996): *Gold, Silver & Bronze: Metal Sculpture of the Roman Baroque*. Princeton University Press, NJ, pp. 24-28.

47 A date, 30 May 1572, etched in wax along the interior base of the Padula tabernacle indicates its framework was cast prior to the reliefs while negotiations to sell the tabernacle to Spain for *El Escorial* were underway. The finish work of the bronze panels must have been skipped on account of the costs involved in such laborious work.

48 Gonzalo Redín (2002): Jacopo del Duca, il ciborio della certosa di Padula el il ciborio di Michelangelo per Santa Maria degli Angeli. *Antologia di Belle Arti, 63-66*, pp. 125-138.

49 Maria Grazia Albertini Ottolengthi (2011): Una crocifissione e una deposizione da Michelangelo al Castello Sforzesco. *L'ultimo Michelangelo. Disegni e rime attorno alla Pietá Rondanini*. Silvana Editoriale, pp. 228-31.

50 An additional unpublished example of this corpus is with Galerie Sismann in Paris.

51 A circular plug on the back of the impenitent thief is probably a remnant of where the pouring cup or gate was fixed to the mold before pouring the bronze. This is usually masked in a completed bronze but because the caster knew this would be set against a cross, it was left unfinished and was perhaps strategically located there so the completed cast would require less finishing. This is different from reverse of the bronze impenitent thief belonging to the corresponding casts of the thieves in Hildesheim which feature an unsealed gate along the buttock and an opening along the back, presumably for the removal of core material and indicating it was likely cast by an entirely different founder than that responsible for the Sforzesco group. A patch is observable along the lower left back of the Sforzesco corpus, where the pouring of the bronze took place. It is to be wondered if Christ's head is flung so low on this sculpture to help encourage the passage of the bronze to the extremities of the face. The location for such a pour is unusual since most

Endnotes

gates were fixed at the top-of-the-head on corpora during the latter part of the 16th century, intended to ease finishing of the bronze by converting it into a threaded hole for mounting a nimbus. Commensurate with the impenitent thief, the gate of the penitent thief is further along the middle-spine of the figure. This last characteristic indicates a nimbus was not intended to accompany the corpus and the style of casting may also suggest a production earlier than the last part of the 16th century.

52 Hans Weihrauch (1967): *Europäische Bronze-Stauetten 15.-18. Jahrhundert*. Brunswick, pp. 171-72.

53 Clelia Alberici (1976): *Grandi collezioni di arte decorativa nel Castello Sforzesco*. Banca popolare di Milano, pp. 14, 22.

54 Janice Shell (1992) (ed. Pietro Marani): *The Genius of the Sculptor in Michelangelo's Work*. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, pp. 254-60.

55 The 19th century base upon which the MET group was originally mounted, now in storage at the MET, solves this unusual problem by awkwardly binding the penitent thief's arms to its cross at the elbows rather than wrists.

56 V. Krahn (1991): *op. cit.* (note 31).

57 Raffaello da Montelupo served as Michelangelo's assistant at the Medici Chapel in 1533-34 and again for the tomb of Pope Julius II in 1542.

58 The crucifix is preserved in the former dining hall of the church, now the small Museo di Cenacolo di Sant'Apollonia.

59 Giorgio Vasari (1568): *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*. Translated by Gaston Du C. De Vere. Macmillian, London, 1913, vol. V, pp. 41-45.

60 G. Vasari (1568): *op. cit.* (note 59).

61 Gaetano Milanesi (1906): *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori scritte da Giorgio Vasari, pittore aretino, con nuovo annotazioni e commenti di Gaetano Milanesi.* G.C. Sansoni, Firenze, vol. 4, p. 558.

62 P. Joannides (private communication, August 2020). Peterzano's *Deposition* is thought to have probably been commissioned by the Milanese nobleman, Gerolamo Legnani. The painting is located at the Beaux-Arts in Strasbourg.

63 V. Krahn (1991): *op. cit.* (note 31).

64 Christies auction, 5 December 1989, Lot 60.

65 Certain stylistic idiosyncrasies relating the Tomasso bronze group to the Master of the Fitzwilliam Museum include the manner in which the heads sit upon the body, the full-bodied, wavy hair bunched into spiraling tufts, modestly incised pupils, moustaches that curl beneath the lower-lip and chasing to delineate pubic hair absent on the original models.

66 Manfred Leithe-Jasper and Patricia Wengraf (2004): *European Bronzes from the Quentin Collection*. The Frick Collection, NY, p. 250.

67 Charles Avery (1998): *Sculture: Bronzetti, Placchette, Medaglie: La Spezia Museo Civico Amedeo Lia (I cataloghi del Museo civico Amedeo Lia)*. Silvana Editoriale, Milan, no. 96 pp. 157-61.

68 See endnote 62.

69 J. O'Grody (1999): *op. cit.* (note 8), p.290.

70 Ernst Steinmann (1924): Michelangelo-Modelle. *Der Cicerone, 16*, pp. 991-93.