Large Bronzes in the Renaissance

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Let me first explain the title of this essay. In the end, there is really only one city, Rome, and in the end there is only one angel, the Archangel Michael (figs. 1, 2). These two supreme entities were celebrated together in a wonderful exhibition held in 1987, titled L'angelo e la città, at the Castel Sant'Angelo on the occasion of the restoration of the gigantic bronze figure of the archangel—9 braccia (5 m) high, the size of Michelangelo's David—by the Flemish sculptor Peter Verschaffelt (1710–1793), cast in thirty-five pieces and set atop the building in 1752.1 Verschaffelt's spectacular image was the last in a long series of such sculptures stretching back into the Middle Ages. My concern here is with a brief, abortive, but nonetheless pregnant moment in that millennial history of urban sacrality.

My purpose is to give twenty minutes of fame to a not unknown, but I think, still not fully appreciated project by Baccio Bandinelli, the sculptor who is by all odds the most reviled and underestimated artist of the Renaissance. He was also—and the two characteristics were often interrelated—one of the most inventive and intensely expressive artists of the Renaissance. The work in question, never executed, forms part of the endlessly tormented history of Bandinelli's life, character, and largely unfulfilled potential. The project is known from only two sources, a brief description by Vasari in his life of Bandinelli, and a sadly rubbed drawing in the Louvre, rediscovered and published thirty years ago by Maria Grazia Ciardi Dupré [fig. 3].2 Here is Vasari's account of the project, which originated when Clement VII, Giulio de'Medici, having crowned Charles V emperor in Bologna in October 1529, returned to Rome with Bandinelli in his entourage:

His Holiness resolved to fulfill a vow which he had made in the castle of St. Angelo to finish the marble tower in front of the Ponte a Castello, by placing seven bronze figures, six braccia high, lying in various attitudes and crowned by a bronze angel with a sword in its hand, to stand on a column of variegated marble. The angel was to be Michael, the custodian of the castle, who had released him from prison. The seven figures were the seven mortal sins, to show that with the help of the angel the Pope had overcome all his impious enemies. A model was prepared, and the Pope ordered Baccio to make the figures in clay of the proper size, to be afterwards cast in bronze. Baccio completed one of the figures in Belvedere, which was much praised. To pass the time, and as an experiment in casting, he made many small figures, such as Hercules, Venus, Apollo, Leda and others, which being cast in bronze by Maestro Jacopo della Barba of Florence succeeded excellently.3

Although it shows an abbreviated version with no column and only two defeated enemies of the angel, Dupré's association of the drawing with the Castel Sant’Angelo
project is certainly correct and has never been questioned.

To grasp the project's art-historical significance, one must first grasp its political significance, for it was conceived in response to one of the most disastrous and perilous situations in the entire history of the church. When Vasari says that it was commissioned by Clement in fulfillment of a vow, he can only refer to what Clement regarded as his miraculous escape from the Castello during the siege and sack of the city by the mercenary troops of Charles V in 1527. Having fled to Orvieto, where he had been able to recoup and regain control, Clement regarded this dramatic event as a veritable liberation of the church itself from the predations of secular power, and he conceived the sculpture as a commemoration of this act of divine intervention and as a warning to future enemies of the church.

The conception of this grandiose monument drew upon three distinct traditions pertaining to what might be called angelic intervention in the affairs of the church, of which Michael is the protector saint. The most obvious is the tradition that associated St. Michael with the city of Rome, from which the Castel Sant'Angelo derives its name, and the monumental figure of the saint that had replaced the bronze image of the Emperor Hadrian atop his mausoleum after it was converted into the stronghold of the papacy. This substitution of angelic for

1. Castel Sant'Angelo, tomb of emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117–138), Rome
Castel Sant'Angelo, Rome
2. Peter Verschaffelt, The Archangel Michael, 1747, bronze
Castel Sant'Angelo, Rome
imperial rule was accomplished by a famous salvific apparition of the archangel to Pope Gregory the Great in 590, according to The Golden Legend:

When Gregory had instituted the Greater Litany, and was praying devoutly that the people of Rome might be delivered of the plague, he saw an angel of the Lord standing upon the castle which was once called the Tomb of Hadrian; the angel was drying a bloody sword, and putting it up into its sheath. From this sign Gregory understood that his prayers were heard, and erected a church at that same place in honor of the angel, whence the Castle has since been called the Fortress of the Holy Angel. This apparition is commemorated on May 8.5

The event was often included in depictions of the life of St. Gregory and the deeds of the archangel (figs. 4, 5).6 In recollection of
the event and of the penitential procession in which the city celebrated it, Nicholas III (1277–1280) erected a great marble sculpture of Michael atop the castle. The figure seemed to reenact the heavenly apparition of the angel with his sword in its scabbard, signaling the cessation of God's just ire at man's sins, as the rage of the plague was always interpreted. The angel over the city was replaced several times, including a figure with copper wings and sword commissioned by Nicholas V in 1453, before a "statua dorata dell'angelo tenente la spada fuori del fodero" ("gilded statue of the angel holding his sword out of the scabbard") was destroyed by an exploding powder keg in 1497. Bandinelli's project was evidently intended to succeed this figure, which seems to be reflected in Raffaello da Montelupo's marble statue with bronze accoutrements, including the sword outside the scabbard, commissioned by Paul III in 1544 (fig. 6). This work stood on the Castello until it was replaced by Verschaffelt's monument. The pestilential deliverance was in fact twofold. The plague had also taken hold during the siege and there was danger from this quarter as well as from the Lutheran landsknechts who made up the bulk of the imperial forces. The providential liberation in the night of 6–7 December 1527 thus also echoed the original Gregorian episode that occasioned the baptizing of Hadrian's tomb as the Castel Sant' Angelo.

Bandinelli clearly intended to reiterate and magnify this traditional image of the
divine surveillance of the city of the popes. But the project also alluded to what might be described as the original instance of angelic intervention on behalf of Christianity; that is, the liberation of St. Peter himself from the Mamertine prison, which permitted Christ's first vicar to fulfill his mission of establishing the church in Rome. The most familiar illustration of the liberation of St. Peter was that by Raphael in the Stanza d'Eliodoro in the Vatican, where the angel is shown breaking Peter's chain behind bars, and leading him out of the darkness (fig. 7). Clement's reference to this apostolic event in relation to his own liberation was made explicit in a medal attributed to Cellini, in which the two episodes are melded into one image (fig. 8); the medal was issued in two versions with different inscriptions, one referring to the pope himself, "Misit Dominus angelum suum et liberavit me," the other to the city of Rome, "Misit Dominus angelum suum. Roma."12

The angel of the Gregorian legend was naturally shown scabbarding his weapon, but Bandinelli gave the papal and urban angelic tradition an entirely new aspect: the benign angel, harbinger of God's beneficence, has been transformed into the heroic champion taking vengeance on God's enemies. In this sense the figure recalls the traditional image of Michael defeating the devil, in which role he is the official guardian of the Church (fig. 9). Bandinelli's Michael is again quite different, however: shown virtually nude, unheard of for an archangel, he arches and twists his powerful body, brandishing the sword in an extreme cut above, over, and across his head.

Michael as conqueror of the seven deadly sins has a dual resonance, notably with the mighty fiery angel of the tenth chapter of Revelation, who came down from heaven holding an open book and roaring like a lion, whereupon seven thunders opened their voices, and he announced that the end of time had come.13 Ciardi Dupré quite properly identified the left-hand figure as the sin of Ire or Fury, symbolized by the roaring lion at his side. The attribute of the figure at the right is indecipherable, but I think it can only be Vainglory or Pride. Ire and pride are the two sins most appropriate to the fury of the brutal sack of the city and the arrogant
6. Raffaello da Montelupo,
The Archangel Michael,
1544, marble and bronze
Castel Sant’Angelo, Rome
photograph Alinari 19964
ambition of the pope's enemies to usurp his authority. In this context the project takes on an unexpected resonance and portentous significance, which had been adumbrated in the great fresco cycle of enthroned popes that accompany the narrative scenes in the Sala di Constantino of the Vatican, commissioned originally in 1519 by Clement VII's cousin Leo X (Giovanni de'Medici), to illustrate by the example of the first Christian emperor the historical basis for the superiority of papal over secular authority. The portrait of Gregory the Great had alluded to the same theme of righteous retribution (fig. 10). It has been shown that the allegory at Gregory's left, wielding a fasces of lightning and holding a book, must refer to the "Scourge of God" (the biblical plague of locusts), the pope's power and authority to punish those who persist in sin, and to the same "mighty angel" of the apocalypse (Revelation 10:2), who descended from heaven carrying an open book, traditionally interpreted as the divinely ordained power of the pope to coerce wrongdoers with the papal bull.¹⁴

This conception of Michael as the avenging angel of the apocalypse may help to explain another remarkable feature of Bandinelli's design. It is noteworthy that Clement chose as the site for the new archangel not the Castello itself but the great Torrione that Antonio da Sangallo had built for Alexander VI (1492–1503), immediately in front of the Castello, to guard the passage to the Vatican from the Ponte Sant'Angelo (see fig. 5). This had been the crucial point of the papal defense during the siege;¹⁵ the
composition seems to indicate that the sculptures were to be placed between two crenellations, so that the figures would be perceived as if on the verge of precipitating into the abyss below. Seen thus, Bandinelli's composition may indeed be understood as a sort of visual synecdoche for a much larger theme taken up around the same time by Domenico Beccafumi for an altarpiece representing St. Michael defeating Lucifer and the Rebel Angels, commissioned for the church of the Carmine in Siena. A first version of the picture [fig. 11] was abandoned before it was finished, replaced by a new composition that was installed in the church, where Vasari reports seeing it in the company of Baldassare Peruzzi, who, we know, left Siena for Rome in 1535 [fig. 12].

The fame of these works procured for Domenico a commission to do a panel for the Carmine of St. Michael subduing Lucifer. Being a man of ideas, he thought of a new treatment of this theme to prove his ability. Thus he began a shower of nude figures, representing Lucifer and his followers driven out of heaven, though they were rather confused owing to the labour he bestowed on them. The picture remained unfinished, and after Domenico's death it was taken to a room near the high altar at the top of the stairs in the great hospital, where it may still be seen. It is remarkable for some nude figures finely foreshortened. In the Carmine, where it was to have gone, another was placed representing God upon the clouds, surrounded by angels. In the middle is St. Michael in armour, pointing as he flies to Lucifer, who is driven to the centre of the earth amid burning walls, falling rocks and a flaming lake, with angels in various postures and nude figures swimming about and suffering torment, the whole done with such style and grace that the place...
10. Giulio Romano, Pope Gregory the Great. 1524. Fresco
Sala di Costantino, Vatican, Rome. Photograph Alinari 7939
11. Domenico Beccafumi, St. Michael Defeating the Seven Deadly Sins, c. 1524/1525, oil on panel, Pinacoteca, Siena, photograph Siena, Soprintendenza 11170
12. Domenico Beccafumi, 
St. Michael Defeating the Seven Deadly Sins, 
c. 1528/1530, oil on panel 
San Nicola al Carmine, Siena; photograph Siena, Superintendent

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seems illuminated by the fire. Baldassare Peruzzi, the great Sienese painter, could never praise the work enough. One day, when I was passing through Siena, he took me to see it, and I was greatly struck by it, and also by the beauty and judgment displayed in the five little scenes of the predella, done in tempera.\(^\text{17}\)

Beccafumi's archangel and the prominent pair of agonizing bodies flanked symmetrically down below closely resemble the corresponding figures in Bandinelli's design. The relationship to Bandinelli's project and the true significance of its subject are underscored by the fact that the predella of Beccafumi's altarpiece included a panel showing the episode of the angel appearing above Castel Sant'Angelo, where Michael performs the traditional act of scabbarding his sword ([fig. 13]).

Beccafumi's picture provides some wholly unsuspected evidence for another unexecuted, but also seminally important project of this period, which elucidates his concept as well as Bandinelli's. In the 1568 edition of the *Vite*, Vasari gives the following account of the genesis of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel:

Just as Michelangelo was proposing to begin the statues of the Medici chapel in Florence, the Pope [Clement VII] was seized with a desire to have the walls of the Sistine Chapel painted with a Last Judgement, to show the powers of the art of design, and on the opposite wall he wanted to have Lucifer cast down from heaven with the rebel angels. Michelangelo had made sketches for these ideas long before ... one of which was executed in the Trinità at Rome by a Sicilian painter who had served Michelangelo many months and ground his colours. This work in the crossing of the church at the chapel of St. Gregory, although badly executed, possesses a certain wonderful power in the varied attitudes and groups of nudes raining from heaven, and converted into terrible devils on reaching the earth, a curious fancy.\(^\text{18}\)

The sudden efflorescence of these related themes can hardly be coincidental. Beccafumi's work strongly evokes Vasari's account here of the Defeat of the Rebel Angels that Clement wanted Michelangelo to paint on the entrance wall of the Sistine chapel. The painting at Trinità dei Monti was destroyed in the eighteenth century, but the relevance of Beccafumi's composition gains support from the adoption in the eighteenth century

\[\text{13. Domenico Beccafumi, ''Apparition of St. Michael to Gregory the Great.''}\]
14. Domenico Corvi, 
St. Michael Killing the Dragon, c. 1750, oil on canvas
Trinita dei Monti, Rome, photograph ICCD E39434
by Domenico Corvi of a similar pose for his figure of Michael defeating two demons in the altarpiece of a nearby chapel in the same church (fig. 14). Beccafumi's apocalyptic drama also foreshadows and elucidates certain features of Michelangelo's Last Judgment itself (fig. 15). The marked similarity in pose and position between the Archangel and Christ suggests that St. Michael's appearance in the planned depiction of the Defeat of the Rebel Angels may have motivated his extraordinary and otherwise enigmatic omission from the Last Judgment. Lucifer, after all, envied God's power, whereas the archangel embodied it: even Michael's name meant "who is like unto God," so that "both by his name and by his works he showed that what no other can do, the power of God can accomplish," and "when Lucifer sought to be equal to God," Michael "came forward, and cast the rebels out of heaven." By virtue of his God-like omnipotence and victories over sin, the devil, and the plague, Michael was the savior of Rome, protector of the pope, and patron of the universal church.

The frescoes facing across the Old and New Testament cycles on the walls and ceiling of the chapel would have illustrated the equivalence of God's two chief agents in the perennial struggle against evil, beginning with Michael's prelapsarian victory over the devil and ending with Christ's victory over death at the end of time. The foreordained fate of the enemies of the church portrayed in the scene of the Defeat anticipated their ultimate fate on Judgment day. It may also be significant in this context that Bandinelli's project for Clement showed Michael defeating not the rebel angels but the seven deadly sins, who return in the fearsome debacle Michelangelo juxtaposed with the seven trumpeting angels of the Apocalypse. Vasari's description recalls his account of Bandinelli's project:

At the feet of Christ are the seven angels described by St. John, with the seven trumpets, the sound of which makes the hair rise, so terrible are they to see. There are two angels, each holding the Book of Life, and hard-by are the seven mortal sins in the shape of devils dragging souls to Hell, in fine attitudes and admirably foreshortened.

The underlying theme and compositional scheme evidently became a sort of leitmotif at the Vatican: striking analogies appear later
in a series of drawings by Michelangelo for an otherwise unrecorded depiction of Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple, which has been dated to the 1550s and may have been intended for the entrance wall of the Pauline chapel (fig. 16).2

We cannot be quite certain of the relative chronology of these works, but the coincidence of dates we do have is extraordinary: Bandinelli's project about 1530; Beccafumi's altarpiece certainly in existence by 1535 but normally dated some years earlier, the Last Judgment commissioned in the fall of 1533. Vasari's cryptic remark that Michelangelo had planned a Fall of the Angels "molti anni innanzi" suggests that the idea may have originated in the project for the Sistine Chapel. But it is a sobering thought that the visitor to the holy city would first have encountered Bandinelli's powerful conflation of the Archangel Michael as protector of Rome, as victor over Lucifer and his cohorts, and as victor over the seven deadly sins. The work's threefold political function was explicitly defined by Vasari himself, for whom the angel represented "the custodian of the castle, who had released him from prison," and the figures of the seven mortal sins were "to show that with the help of the angel the Pope had overcome all his impious enemies" [see p. 309 above].

Perhaps most intriguing is the possibility that Clement VII's projects may have been coordinated. Bandinelli's huge bronze group formed part of a major reorganization of the Ponte Sant'Angelo itself, which included placing at its entrance two monumental statues of Saints Peter and Paul bearing inscriptions that testify to a wholly new conception of the entrance to the Holy City as a kind of topological metaphor for the eschatology of salvation (figs. 17, 18). According to Vasari:

The Pope had observed that during the fighting at the Castle of St. Angelo two marble chapels at the end of the bridge had proved harmful, because they had been occupied by arquebusiers who from their vantage ground killed all who exposed themselves on the walls. He resolved to remove the chapels and set up two marble statues on the site on two pedestals. One was a St. Paul, by Paolo Lavin
Romano, spoken of elsewhere, the other a St. Peter, was given to Lorenzo, who acquitted himself well but did not surpass his rival.25

Under St. Peter is written: “HINC HUMILIBUS VENIA” (“Here forgiveness to the humble”); under St. Paul: “HINC RETRIBUTIO SUPERBIS” (“Here retribution to the prideful”). With Bandinelli’s St. Michael appearing in his vengeful mode on the bastion beyond, proleptic of the two scenes that would await the visitor in the Sistine Chapel, the passage to the Holy City and the sanctuary of the popes became a veritable pilgrimage of penitence, recapitulating the history of salvation from the beginning to the end of time.

Finally, there is another, material sense in which Bandinelli’s project is also proleptic, for unless I am mistaken, it took up a technical theme that had sounded like a kind of basso profondo through the history of Italian sculpture since the early Renaissance. I refer to the challenge of executing large and complex works without piecing them together.26 The marble sculpture carved ex uno lapide (the phrase used by Pliny in praise of such outstanding examples of bravura, both manual and intellectual) had achieved almost mystical stature since Michelangelo succeeded, where others had failed, in carving the David from a gigantic block originally quarried in 1466 for a figure to be placed...
adopted fifteen years later, when, as he reports in his autobiography, he made his famous bust of Duke Cosimo as an experiment for the one-piece casting of his five-braccia-high figure of Perseus—"the biggest single-piece bronze the world had known," as it has neatly been described by Michael Cole (fig. 19). Cellini had of course lived through the Sack of Rome in Castel Sant'Angelo and was there in the city while the older sculptor—his bitter and invidious rival—was planning his archangel, so Cellini certainly knew all about the project. When they are juxtaposed, it seems clear that there is more than a family resemblance between these two savior-protector-avenger figures, one pagan and secular, the other Christian and ecclesiastical. The Perseus was endowed with an unequivocal moral and political message, as a warning to the actual and potential enemies of Duke Cosimo de' Medici, liberator and defender of the Florentine Andromeda. Standing before the city of Florence, Cosimo-Perseus wields his sword in his right hand, and with his left brandishes aloft his ultimate weapon. The work incorporates clear references to Rome, the Sack, and the subsequent alliance between Clement VII and Charles V that established the dynastic rule of the Medici—with the menacing force of the Emperor himself. Indeed, the image must have served Cosimo as a chilling reminder to his republican opponents of Dio Cassius' recollection of the Emperor Commodus' gory "beaux gestes" toward the senators assembled to admire his prowess in the arena at Rome:

And here is another thing that he did to us senators which gave us every reason to look for our death. Having killed an ostrich and cut off his head, he came up to where we were sitting, holding the head in his left hand and in his right hand raising aloft his bloody sword; and though he spoke not a word, yet he wagged his head with a grin, indicating that he would treat us in the same way.

Cosimo, I suspect, also had his papal relative's Roman project in mind.
NOTES

In memory of Bruno Contardi [1933–2000]: admired scholar, good friend, inventor, and guiding spirit of L'angelo e la città


se n’andò a stare a Luca. Quivi s’intrattenne fino a tanto che Carlo V imperatore venne a ricevere la corona in Bologna; di più fattosi vedere al Papa, se n’andò seco a Roma, dove ebbe al solito le stanze in Belvedere.

Dimorando quivi Baccio, penso Sua Santità di satisfare a un voto, il quale aveva fatto mentre che stette rinchiuso in Castel Sant’Angelo. Il voto fu di porre sopra la fine del tormento tondo di marmo, che è a fronte al ponte di Castello, sette figure grandi di bronzo di braccia sei l’anu, tutte a giacere in diversi atti, come cintie da un Angelo, il quale voleva che posasse nel mezzo di quel tormento sopra una colonna di micio, et egli guasse di bronzo con la spada in mano. Per questa figura dell’Angelo intendeva l’angelo Michele, custode e guardia del Castello, il quale col suo favore et aiuto l’aveva liberato / e tratto di quella prigione, et per le sette figure a giacere poste significava le sette peccati mortali, volendo dire che con l’aiuto dell’Angelo vincitore aveva superati e gittato per terra i suoi nimici, uomini scelerati et empi, i quali si rappresentavano in quell sette figure de sette peccati mortali. Per questa opera fu fatto fare da Sua Santità un modell, il quale essendole piaciuto, ordinò che Baccio cominciasse a fare le figure di terra grande quanto avevano a essere, per gittarle poi di bronzo. Cominciò Baccio e finì in una di quelle stanza di Belvedere una di quelle figure di terra, la quale fu molto lodata. Insiemne ancora, per passarsi tempo e per vedere come gli doveva riuscire il getto, fece molte figurine alte due terzi e tonde, come Ercole, Venere, Apolo, Inde et altre sue fantasie; e fattele gittar di bronzo a maestro Iacopo della Barbera fiorentino, riuscirono ottimamente. Dipoi le dono a Sua Santità et a molti signori: delle quali orane sono alcune nello scrivito del duca Cosimo, fra un numero di più di cento antiche, tutte rare, e d’altra moderne.

4. The history and art-historical repercussions of the Sack of Rome have been explored with magisterial scope and acumen in Chastel 1977.


6. A valuable survey will be found in Rome 1987, 1.


10. For the payments to Montelupo, whose angel was later restored by Bernini, see D’Onofrio 1978, 280, 305, 314, 322.

11. On the plaque during the siege, see Cesare D’Onofrio, Roma val bene un’aburza (Rome, 1976), 233-258.

12. On the two liberations and the medal, see Chastel 1977, 190-191.


14. Rolf Queffulau, Die Sala di Costantino im vatikanischen Palast. Zur Dekoration der beiden Medici-Püste Leo X. und Clemens VII. [Hildesheim and New York, 1970], 301-308, citing Cesare Ripa, Iconologia ovvero descrittione di diverse imagini cavate dall’antichità, o di propria invenzione [Rome, 1603], 165:

Il fulmine è segno del castigo di coloro, che ostinarono perseverarono nel peccato, credendosi alla fine della vita agevolmente a datare da Dio perdono. Significa etiando il fulmine la caduta d’alchim, che per vie torte in ingiusti sono ad altrissimi gradi della gloria perenni, e quando più superbanemente siedono non altrettanto, che folgore percipitosi, cascano nelle miserie, et clamite. Per le locuste, che riempiono il campo, & alla terra s’intende l’universale castigo, che liddio manda alle volte sopra i popoli, accidendosi l’istoria de’flagelli d’Egitto, mandati per cagione della pertinacia, et ostita voglia del Faraone.

And Nicolas de Lyra, Biblia sacra, 6 vols. [Venice, 1588], V.3:32D: “Et vidi altum angelum fortem . . . et iris in capite eius.” Moralist autem potest exponi de summo pontificie bono, qui imperiali pileo coronatur, & dictur angelus fortis propter magnitudinem potestatis. & descendens de coelo, qua datur a Deo.
15. Also the weakest, because the attackers were able to shoot with impunity from the chapels on the other side of the bridge, shown in figure 5, which Clement then replaced by the statues of Peter and Paul discussed below.


Dopo, essendo allogata a Domenico per la fama di queste opere una tavola che doveva porsi nel Carmine, nella quale aveva a far un San Michele che uccideisse Lucifero, egli andò, come capriccioso, pensando a una nuova invenzione per mostrare la virtù et i bei concerti dell'animò suo. E così, per figurar Lucifero co' suoi segui cacciati per la superbia dal cielo nel più profondo a basso, cominciò una pioggia d'ignudi molto bella, ancora che per esservi molto affaticato, ella paresse anzi confusa. Ecco la tavola, essendo rimasta imperfetta, fu portata dopo la morte di Domenico nello Spedale grande, salendo una scala che è vicina / all'altare maggiore, dove ancora si vede con maraviglia, per certi scorti d'ignudi bellissimi, e nel Carmine, dove doveva questa esser collocata, ne fu posta un'altra, nella qual è sito il più alto un Dio Padre con molti Angeli intorno, sopra le nuvole, con bellissima grazia, e nel mezzo della tavola è l'angelo Michele armato, che volando mostra aver posto nel centro della terra Lucifero, dove sono muraglie che ardoni, anteri rovinati et un lago di fuoco, con Gabrieli in varie attitudini et anime nude, che in diversi atti nuotano et si struggono in quel fuoco. Il che tutto è fatto con tanto bella grazia e maniera, che pare che quell'opera maravigliosa, in quelle terrebrè scure, sia lumeggiata da quel fuoco; onde è tenuta opera rara: e Baldassarri Petrucci sanese, pittoresco eccellente, non si poteva saziare di lodarlo: et un giorno che io la vidi seco scoperta, passando per Siena, ne restai maravigliato, si come feci ancora di cinque o si storie che sono nella predella, fatte a tempera con bella e giudiziosa maniera.


Per che volendo Michelangelo far porre in opera le statue, in questo tempo al Papa venne in animo di volerlo appresso dì sé, avendo desiderio di fare le facciate della cappella di Sisto, dove egli aveva dipinto la volta a Giulio II suo nipote, nelle quali facciate volere Clemente che nella principale, dove è l'altare, vi si dipinssvi il Giudizio universale, accio potessi mostrarvi in quella storia tutto quello che l'arte del disegno poteva fare; e nell'altra ditimpano sopra la porta principale gli aveva ordinato che vi facesi quando per la sua superbia Lucifero fa dal cielo cacciato e precipitati insieme nel centro dello inferno tutti quegli angeli che peccarono con lui. Delle quali invenzioni molti anni innanzi s'è trovato che aveva fatto schizzi Michelangelo e vari disegni, un de' quali poi fu posto in opera nella chiesa della Trinità di Roma da un pittore siciliano, il quale dette molti mesi con Michelangelo a servirsi e macinar colori. Questa opera è nella croce della chiesa alla cappella di San Gregorio, dipinta a fresco, che, ancora che sia mal condotta, si vede un certo che di terribile e di vario nelle attitudini e gruppi di quelli ignudi che piovono dal cielo e de' cascati nel centro della terra, conversi in diverse forme di diavoli molto spaventose e bizzarre, et è certo capricciosa fantasia.


22. On Michael and his patronage, see Andrew A. Bialas, The Patronage of Saint Michael the Archangel [Chicago, 1944], and especially for Rome and the papacy, see Rome 1987, 194–118; Louise Rice, The Altars and Altarpieces of New St. Peter's. Outfitting the Basilica, 1621–1666 [Cambridge, 1997], 345, index.


Sono sotto i piedi di Cristo i sette angeli scritti da san Giovanni Evangelista, come le sette trombe e sonando a sentenza fanno arricchire i dipinti a chi gli guarda per la terribilità che essi mostrano nel viso, e fra gli altri vi sono due angeli che ciascuno ha il libro delle vite in mano; et appresso, non senza bellissima considerazione, si veggoni sette peccati mortali da una banda combattere in forma di diavoli e tirar giù allo inferno l'anime che volano al cielo con attitudini bellissime e scorti molto mirabili.


Perciò che avendo il Papa veduto, quando si combatte Castello Santo Agnolo, che due cappellette di marmo che erano all’entrare del ponte avevano fatto danno—perché standovi dentro alcuni soldati achiugiieri amazzavano chiunque s’affacciava alle mura, e con troppo danno, stando essi al sicuro, levavano le difese—, si risolve Sua Santità levar le dette cappelle, e ne’luoghi loro mettere sopra due basamenti due statue di marmo. E così fatto mettere sul San Paulo di Paolo Raman, del quale se è in altro luogo ragionato, fu data a fare l’altra, cioè un San Pietro, a Lorenzo, il quale si portò assai bene, ma non passò già quella di Paulo Raman; le quali due statue furono poste, e si veggono oggi all’entrata del ponte.


28. Benvenuto Cellini, The Life of Benvenuto Cellini, Robert H. Cust, trans., 2 vols. (London, 1910), 2:279-280: "And the first work that I cast in bronze was that large head, the portrait of the Lord Excellency, which I had fashioned in clay in the Golsmith’s Shop, whilst I had that malady in my back. This was a work which pleased me, and I did it for no other reason except to experiment in the clays for bronze casting." Benvenuto Cellini, Ope re di Benvenuto Cellini, ed. Giuseppe Guido Ferrero (Turin, 1971), 494: "E la prima opera che io gittai di bronzo fu quella testa grande, ritratto di Sua Eccellenza, che io avevo fatta di terra nell’oreficerie, mentre io avevo male alle steine. Questa fu un’opera che piaecce e io non la feci per altra causa se non per fare esperienza delle terre da gittare il bronzo."


30. On the Medicean political symbolism of the Perseus, see Wolfgang Brahmels, Benvenuto Cellini. Perseus und Medusa (Stuttgart, 1961), 3-7, and especially Corinna Maedel, "Perseus and the Medici," Storia dell’arte 87 (1996), 168-187, with references to the intervening literature. One wonders whether Cellini’s conception might in turn have engendered the other familiar traditions of heroic victors displaying the repugnant heads of defeated monsters: David with the head of Goliath, Judith with the head of Holofernes.
