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The Christ in Michelangelo's Florentine *Pietà* (Fig. 1) is short one leg, and yet the missing limb is rarely missed, so well does the figure in its truncated state seem to work. Some even regard the lack of the other leg as an aesthetic gain.¹ It is to those who take this position or who for any reason whatever deplore the attempt to put back what Michelangelo had removed that I offer this consideration: Michelangelo certainly did not conceive a Christ with amputations. He planned a whole, and whatever that whole was meant to embody he lived with for some eight years until the mid-1550's when he destroyed the work. And any thought that Michelangelo entertained for nearly a decade is worth thinking again. Hence we may well ask how the missing member completes Michelangelo's group.

There is only one action possible for the missing leg. The left groin still shows a slot or socket for its insertion, presumably for a replacement to be cut from a separate block (Fig. 2). And a hollow place on the Virgin's thigh shows where it lay. It is indeed in this only possible pose that the leg appears in a number of painted and engraved reconstructions dating from the late sixteenth century (Figs. 3 and 4).² The left leg of Christ is slung over the Virgin's thigh. It forms a connection which in later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century art becomes a common and unmistakable symbol of sexual union.

The word *symbol* is crucial. Looking at a seventeenth-century genre scene of lovers linked in this pose, one might mistake it for something "taken from nature" (Figs. 5 and 6). But in fact, the scheme of two figures of opposite sex seated side by side, with the leg of one bridging the thigh (or both thighs) of the other, is a received convention. It is as a symbolic form that an artist such as Govaert Flinck or Jacques de Gheyn naturalizes it into his style.

During the seventeenth century this token gesture was finally vulgarized. By the mid-1600's it had come to seem no less appropriate to bourgeois than to divine lovers. Then, not before, does one find it performed by common soldiers and unbuttoned wenches besieging the Prodigal Son (Fig. 7). But in the decades that more closely concern us, one discovers—

tracing the motif backward in time—that the slung leg (its sex interchangeable and in Italy usually assigned to the woman) becomes progressively less profane, almost solemn in context. In the quarter-century that immediately follows Michelangelo's abandonment of the *Pietà*, i.e., before 1580, the slung leg occurs only in allegories, or in Biblical and mythological scenes (Figs. 8 and 9). By 1550 the motif is assimilated to scenes of Lot and his daughters—perhaps because the sexual act represented is at the opposite pole from trivial or private lust, being rather a desperate if misguided attempt to save the human race from extinction (Figs. 10 and 11). In a very few instances the slung leg motif occurs in Lesbian situations—once in a drawing by Giulio Campi where Jupiter, in Diana's person, seduces Callisto (Fig. 13); and once in a Fontainebleau print of *Women Bathing*, attributed to Jean Mignon after Luca Penni (Fig. 12). This engraving of the mid-1540's may well be unique in exhibiting the slung leg motif without a mythological pretext.

The slung leg in sixteenth-century art is invariably a token of marital or sexual union, of sexual aggression or compliance. As a conventional sign it is so unambiguous and legible, that when a given story calls for the awkward depiction of a nymph loved by a horse (as happens in the rare myth of Philyra and Saturn in equine disguise), it is the slung leg that conveys the message (Fig. 14).

Most relevant to this inquiry is the incidence of the motif from its first emergence before 1520 (Fig. 15) to about 1547 when Michelangelo's *Pietà* was begun. During this quarter-century the motif is extremely rare, confined to a few prints, drawings, and small cabinet pictures; and not only is it reserved for divine and heroic lovers but it tends to remain within a context of marriage.

The currency of the motif is established in the late 1520's and 1530's by engravings after Perino del Vaga and others of Raphael's circle, the subjects being the loves and nuptials of divine couples: Mars and Venus, Bacchus and Ariadne, Neptune (as suitor) and Thetis (Fig. 16). And finally, as the earliest significant occurrence of the motif in its *canonic form*, it ap-

1 Thus Henry Thode, *Michelangelo, Kritische Untersuchungen*, Berlin, 1908–1913, II, 278: "Für das linke Bein Christi ist gar kein Platz vorhanden. . . . Die einzige Möglichkeit es anzubringen wäre die gewesen es vorne über Marias Bein herabhängen zu lassen. . . . Dies aber hätte eine nicht nur unschöne, sondern unmögliche Stellung ergeben." Thode is followed by Herbert von Einem, *Michelangelo: Die Pietà im Dom zu Florenz*, Stuttgart, 1956, 6: "Rätselhaft ist das Fehlen des linken Beines Christi. Wir wissen dass es vorhanden gewesen ist . . .

Aber es ist keine Frage, dass sein Fehlen ein künstlerischer Vorzug ist. Sollten wir hier den Grund fassen können, warum Michelangelo das Werk aufgegeben hat?"

2 Engraving attributed to Cherubino Alberti, ca. 1580, Bartsch, VII, 23; Sabbatini, before 1576, altarpiece in the sacristy of Saint Peter's, Rome; a free copy of it by Antonio Viviani in Santa Maria dei Monti, Rome. Both described in Baglione's *Vite . . .*, Rome, 1642, 18 and 103.

pears in the *Isaac and Rebekah* fresco in Raphael's Vatican Logge (Fig. 17): "Abimelech, King of the Philistines, looked out at a window and behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah, his wife" (Gen. 26 : 8). We need hardly remind ourselves that the Old Testament scenes in "Raphael's Bible" refer by anticipation to Christ. So too Isaac's "sport with Rebekah" is a link in the chain of Christ's ancestry—which may explain such of the fresco's features as the fountain, the benediction of the great sun, and the brightness at the young patriarch's loins.

Variant forms of the motif appear shortly before 1520.³ Not all can be traced to Rome, nor to a single milieu. And this emergence of a purely symbolic gesture over a period of some ten years in various artistic circles suggests that one or several antique models had come to be known—by hearsay perhaps to some, by actual acquaintance to Raphael and his school. The presumed model, however, turns out to be strangely elusive. It is not found in antique *symplegmata*, the ancient name for groups of figures interlocked in combat or love. It does not appear among the countless vase and wall paintings of antiquity that depict sexual relations. I have located only one instance of it, and this a recent archeological find. It came to light in 1962 at Dherveni near Salonika in northern Greece, where six tombs of the fourth century B.C. were excavated.⁴ Their most spectacular yield was a splendid gilt bronze krater, containing cremated ashes. It stands three feet high and displays continuous relief decoration of satyrs and maenads dancing (Fig. 18). The dance centers upon a ritual action—the uncommon scene of the marriage of Bacchus and Ariadne. The scene is so rare, yet in this representation so precise and perfected, that it suggests the possibility that we are privy to a mimetic ritual such as may have formed part of the mysteries of Dionysus. The bride is seated and draped, her veil held out in the traditional bridal gesture. She turns towards her divine spouse, a naked god, his leg flung over her thigh.

Let me assume that some comparable image had become known in Rome before 1520. This would account for the multiple emergence of a purely symbolic action and for the close resemblance of the slung leg in Renaissance works to that of

Dionysus on the Dherveni krater. The model need have been no more than a small gem or cameo seen and understood by a handful of men. Present evidence indicates that a few Roman artists of the second and third decades of the Cinquecento knowingly adopted the slung leg as an antique symbolic form, implying a context of heroic or sacred love, or more exactly, of divine marriage.

The antique derivation alone may have lent the slung leg motif a dignity not normally associated with sexual sport. But only Michelangelo could reconceive this same pose as a consecration. As he meditates on the ancient gesture, death and love coalesce in it and the slung leg unites Mary and the crucified Christ in mystic marriage.⁵

I know of only one later artist who followed Michelangelo in making love and death converge in the slung leg motif. He is the Dutch sculptor Hubert Gerhard, who had studied in Florence in the 1580's. In his bronze *Tarquin and Lucrece* at the Metropolitan Museum, New York (Fig. 19), the rising leg of the ravisher is at once amorous and murderous. In Michelangelo's marble group the themes of love, death, and communion are more intimately interfused. There can be no question that he conceived the action of the left leg in perfect awareness of what it meant and what it contributed. Tolnay spoke with precision when he suggested that the Virgin's face was "transfigured by supernatural bliss," and that the essence of the *conchetto* was "a kind of ultimate spozalizio."⁶

Three things follow from the interpretation of the missing leg of the Christ: first, a closer pattern of symbolic and formal coherence for the entire group; second, a new way of thinking about Michelangelo's reasons for destroying the group; third, the possibility of identifying the slung leg motif in other classes of monuments. I shall treat each in turn.

1. Does the marital symbolism of the missing leg enhance the coherence of the whole group?

The Virgin is not alone in being the Spouse of Christ. In Christian tradition, Christ as bridegroom is as multipresent as

3 See Appendix A dealing with the slung leg motif.

4 See J. Makaranos in *Archaiologikon Deltion*, 18 (1963), Athens, 1965. Summaries in German and English respectively appeared in *Du*, Oct. 1965, and in *Horizon*, Fall 1966. Most recent discussion in T. B. L. Webster, *The Art of Greece: The Age of Hellenism*, New York, 1965, 20–23.

5 Summaries of orthodox doctrine and poetry describing the Virgin as *Sponsa Dei*, and specifically as Bride of Christ, are contained in Yrjo Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine* (1909), Beacon Press edition, Boston, 1957, especially pp. 291ff. and the chapters "Annunciation" and "Incarnation." See also Henri de Lubac, *Méditations sur l'Eglise*, Paris, 1953, ch. ix, in English as *The Splendour of the Church*, Deus Books, Paulist Press, Glen Rock, N.J., 1963, 198ff.

6 Michelangelo: *The Final Period*, Princeton, 1960, 87.

7 Savonarola, *Tractato dello Amore di Jesu Christo*, Florence, 1492, unpaginated.

8 The medieval sources adduced in this and the following paragraphs are cited in Helen M. Garth's exemplary study, *St. Mary Magdalene in Medieval Literature*, Johns Hopkins, 1950.

9 The eroticism of the Magdalene's exclamation is implicit in its very form, which is a commonplace of love poetry. The lover envies whatever object is in contact with the beloved. Thus in Longus's *Daphnis and Chloe* (3rd cent. A.D., trans. Moses Hadas, New York, 1953, 25): "Would that I could become a pipe, so that he might breathe upon me!" Or Romeo in the Balcony Scene (Act II, sc. ii): "Oh, that I were a glove upon that hand, that I might touch that cheek!" But we may add to these Mary's farewell at the Entombment: "Oh most happy stone that dost now enclose the holy body which for nine months was hidden in my womb. I bless thee and envy thee . . ." (quoted in Hirn, *Sacred Shrine*, 338).

10 Compare Michelangelo's other attacks on the subject, notably in the reworked drawing for a Descent from the Cross, ca. 1545–1555, at the

is his body in the Host of the altar. The Church is his Bride. The human soul is his bride. The nun who has taken the veil is his bride. So is St. Catherine, whom he espouses with the same words from Canticles—"Come unto me, my fair love and my spouse"—which also welcome the soul of the Virgin. And so, for Savonarola, is Mary Magdalene, whom, in his fervent evocation of the Passion story he exhorts to weep ever more copiously for her "Sweet Spouse."⁷

This introduces the other woman, the Magdalene figure on our left. We do not much like looking at her because, after Michelangelo's destruction of the unfinished group and its subsequent restoration by Tiberio Calcagni, it was this figure that was most overworked, scaled down, pettified. Nevertheless, in the role he has made her play, as Magdalene and as counterpart of the Virgin, she is all Michelangelo's.

She is embraced. That she is truly embraced, not merely caught in the peripheral sweep of a circuiting rhythm, is confirmed by one small nuance. The drapery fold between the Magdalene's breasts that flows down her abdomen is not her own garment but the loose end of Christ's winding sheet. Released from his chest it presses gently against her body. The delegated caress of the shroud confirms the Magdalene as an object of love.

At this point a vast medieval tradition concerning the erotic association of Christ and the Magdalene becomes relevant.⁸ Thus Rabanus Maurus in the ninth century: "Mary Magdalene suffered as lovers are accustomed to suffer, and mourned inestimably concerning the corporeal absence of her beloved lover." Passion plays kept the tradition alive. In the *Noli me tangere* scene of a late fifteenth-century English play Mary exclaims: "O mine heart, where hast thou bee. / Come home again and live with me!" And in the anonymous fourteenth-century Italian Life of St. Mary Magdalene she cries out: "Oh, most blessed Cross! Would I had been in Thy stead, and that my Lord had been crucified in mine arms, my hands nailed against His, . . . so that I had died with Him, and thus neither in life nor death ever departed from Him."⁹

An erotic energy derived from these un-Biblical fantasies

invests Michelangelo's group. The Magdalene's approach to Christ's body betrays a sexual intimacy either uninterrupted or generated by death.¹⁰

But the Magdalene is not simply a paramour. She is here what she is to the whole patristic tradition—the sinner in the flesh, the forgiven harlot, repentant. And it is in this dual role, as lover and penitent, that she too inhabits what Tolnay called "the essential *concetto*." She is the counterpart of the Virgin in a bilateral scheme. "It is she whom he loved more than any other woman in the world, save the Virgin Mary," says the fourteenth-century Life. The two Marys are continually paralleled in the sermons. Both stand for the Church—the sinner turned, and the one without sin, personifications of Penitence and Immaculacy. Together, bracing and being embraced, they sustain the dead body like the heraldic supporters of an escutcheon. Both are, or were meant to be, folded within the limbs of Christ's body.

Finally, the secret intimacies that connect the two Marys and Christ help to define the unity of the entire group. Since the sculptor had planned to erect this image of Christ at his tomb, it is appropriate that he should have projected his likeness upon the Joseph of Arimathea, who, after the Descent from the Cross, received Christ in his sepulchre.¹¹ Between Joseph's unused tomb and Mary's unopened womb elaborate analogies had been drawn since St. Ambrose.¹² And St. Augustine closes his Sermon 248, "De sepultura Domini," with words that work like a commentary upon Michelangelo's group: "If indeed she received the Lord deep in her womb, he received him deep in his heart." They are at one, therefore, in the communion of grief. But the contrast is no less poignant, for the women serve—in a given visual corollary—to isolate the hooded mourner who bears Michelangelo's face. His only contact with Christ's body is with the arm that embraces the sinner, and his towering solitude contrasts with the communion of lovers under his hands.

2. Is it likely that the outright carnality of the symbolic slung leg helped to motivate the destruction of the *Pietà*?

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (see K. T. Parker, *Catalogue of the Collection of Drawings*, Oxford, 1956, II, 342, pl. xcii). Michelangelo here participates in one of the great minor themes of 16th-century art: the insinuated attachment of the Magdalene to Christ in scenes of *Pietà* and Entombment. Few subjects offered such challenge to ardor and ingenuity, indiscretion and tact.

11 The identity of the topmost figure is discussed by Wolfgang Stechow in "Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus," in *Studien zur Toskanischen Kunst*, Festschrift Heydenreich, Munich, 1964, 289–302. After an impressive accumulation of scholarly argument on both sides, the question remains undecided. But it appears to me, as I think it does to Prof. Stechow, that the weight of probability continues in Joseph's favor.

12 See Hirn, *Sacred Shrine*, ch. vii, esp. 337ff. Hirn quotes the Ambrosian Easter Hymn: "Thou who wast before born of a Virgin, art born now

of the grave"; and from Ephraim Syrus (ca. 306–378), who compares Christ's emergence from the sealed grave to the fact of Mary's anatomical virginity: "Thus didst thou show, O Lord, by thy resurrection from the grave, the miracle of thy birth, for each was closed and each was sealed, both the grave and the womb. Thou wast pure in the womb and living in the grave, and Mary's womb, like the grave, bore an unbroken seal." See also St. Augustine (Sermon 248, "De sepultura Domini," *PL*, xxxix, col. 2204): ". . . No less honor is due to the tomb which raised the Lord than to the womb of Holy Mary which brought him forth."

In the verse from Crashaw's "Steps to the Temple," with which Hirn opens his chapter, Joseph of Arimathea is to Joseph of Nazareth as the sepulchre is to the womb: "How life and death in Thee / Agree! / Thou hast a virgin womb, / And tomb. / A Joseph did betroth / Them both."

Let us hear Michelangelo, as Vasari reports him, speak of this work. Since it was uncommissioned, it was, we are told, done as a pastime, for recreation, and "because the use of the mallet kept him [he was then seventy-five!] in good health."¹³ As an apology for an intended tomb monument such remarks seem evasive almost to the point of flippancy. We then learn that the work was destroyed. And Vasari, because he cannot imagine why, offers three reasons: The marble, he says, was marred by many flaws. (But Michelangelo himself speaks of only one troublesome vein in the stone, and furthermore this is not convincing ground for destroying a work nearly completed.) Second, says Vasari, the marble was hard, making the sparks fly from the chisel. (But though this might be reason for abandoning the work, it hardly explains the added labor of breaking it up; and furthermore, what remains of the stone shows Michelangelo equal to it.) Third and last, says Vasari, "the artist's standards were so high that he could never be content with what he had done." (But how should such general discontent explain a unique instance of mutilation? Though the Florentine *Pietà* is not the poorest of Michelangelo's works, it is the only one he took the trouble to smash.)

Elsewhere in Vasari's account, the sculptor himself being pressed to explain "why he had ruined such a marvelous work," he responds with a tangle of incongruous motives: "It was because of the importunity of his servant Urbino who nagged at him daily that he should finish it; and that among other things a piece of the Virgin's elbow got broken off, and that even before that he had come to hate it, and he had had many mishaps because of a vein in the stone; so that losing patience he broke it, and would have smashed it completely had not his servant Antonio asked that he give it to him just as it was."

The story ends with Michelangelo consenting to let a young pupil, Tiberio Calcagni, reassemble the group on behalf of a wealthy admirer who promises to pay two hundred ducats in gold to the servant Antonio, who now owns the pieces.

Here again are some patent evasions. Michelangelo says he has come to hate the work to the point of wanting it utterly smashed; but he attacked only that corner of the block which involved Christ's left leg and arm. He then allows the group,

including the arm, to be restored—but not the leg. And there is indication that he had broken this leg into fragments. For the inventory of his house taken in 1566 (after the death of Daniele da Volterra who had taken it over) includes "un ginocchio di marmo della Pietà di Michelangelo"—presumably from this work. A knee only was allowed to survive.¹⁴

One other incident points to the leg as the focus of special concern. It is a short anecdote which Vasari, at the end of his Michelangelo *Vita*, tells to illustrate an interesting character trait:

One night Vasari was sent by Pope Julius III to Michelangelo's house for a drawing. He found the master working on the marble *Pietà* which he broke. Recognizing the knock, Michelangelo rose and took a lantern. When Vasari had explained his errand, he sent Urbino [his servant] for the design and began to speak of other things. Vasari meanwhile cast his eyes upon a leg of the Christ which Michelangelo was working on and was trying to alter, and in order that Vasari might not see it, he let the lantern fall, and being now in the dark, called Urbino to bring a light; in the meantime, stepping out of the room where he had been, he said, I am so old that death frequently drags at my cloak to take me, and one day I myself will fall like this lantern and so the light of my life will go out.

A dark story, not the kind that yields real evidence. It contributes nothing to our purpose if we assume that Michelangelo kept open house in his studio, and that the *Pietà* was normally left exposed, so that Vasari would have known the *concetto* from previous visits. On the other hand, if Michelangelo was normally secretive about all or any of his unfinished works, and if, carving the *Pietà* by night, he normally kept it covered by day, then Vasari's story gains interest. The question cannot be wholly resolved.¹⁵ But it is worth recalling that Michelangelo's secretiveness was proverbial. Forty years after his death, Van Mander writes in his *Schilderboek* that Hendrik Goltzius never allowed unfinished works to be seen and that "in this as in many other things, he resembled the great Michelangelo." In the first (open house) alternative, assuming Michelangelo's friends to be familiar with the work he

13 Vasari-Milanesi, vii, 217: "... per dilettazone e passar tempo, e, come egli diceva, perchè l'esercitarsi col mazzuolo lo teneva sano del corpo." References to the work's destination as a tomb monument are on p. 218—"... egli avessi avuto animo che la dovessi servire per la sepoltura di lui"—and again in vol. viii, 377, in Vasari's letter of March 18, 1564, to Michelangelo's nephew: "... la faceva per la sepoltura sua." The same letter refers to the Joseph of Arimathea figure as an intended self-portrait.

For further references to the *Pietà* in Vasari see pp. 242ff. and 281f.

14 See E. Steinmann and R. Wittkower, *Michelangelo Bibliographie*,

Leipzig, 1927, No. 778: *Il Buonarroti*, ed. Benvenuto Gasparoni, i, Rome, 1866, 178.

15 See Appendix B for the supposed eyewitness testimony of Blaise de Vigenère.

16 "Sometimes the soul, through the penetrating alterations of love, enters the marriage bed of heavenly mysteries; . . . in which the soul tastes what it is to be almost translated into the profound and infinite abyss of God. It happens also that, in some unthinkable and most fervid act of love [*ferventissimo actu amoris*] in one glorious moment, a spiritual marriage with Christ is consummated." St. Bernardino of

had in hand, the sculptor's embarrassment on the occasion of Vasari's nocturnal call would be due to some fresh mishap in the carving, caused perhaps by the emery vein. In this hypothesis it is mere coincidence that the location of this vein coincides with that of the slung leg (whose eroticism, being merely symbolic, would hardly have caused the sculptor anxiety). A flaw in the marble becomes the sufficient reason for the destruction of the *Pietà*. Michelangelo would have been moved to destroy his work by a succession of accidents to the stone and the vexation that followed. The destructive act tells us nothing that is not technical about the work, nor about the artist beyond proving his irascible temper.

There is now another way of posing the problem. The Florentine *Pietà* employs a direct sexual metaphor on a scale unprecedented in Christian devotional art. Michelangelo's figurative use of the human figure recalls the poetic idiom of those earlier mystics and preachers who described the ultimate religious experience in figures of physical love. St. Bernardino of Siena for instance says sexual ecstasy when he means mystic transport, and there is nothing uncommon in this kind of wording.¹⁶ But poets and mystics had the freedom of figurative speech as an ancient charter. It was another matter to claim such poetic license in the concretions of palpable sculpture. Now, with the reformist atmosphere settling on Rome, Michelangelo may have felt certain resources of confidence failing: confidence that his intent would not be pruriently misunderstood, and confidence in the transcendent eloquence of the body—in the possibility of infinitely spiritualizing its anatomic machinery while still respecting its norms. Perhaps it was simply the vulgarization of his metaphorical idiom in the work of others that crowded and threatened his confidence. Or, more specifically, that the accelerating diffusion and coarsening of the slung leg motif during the very years of his work on the *Pietà* rendered the pose increasingly unacceptable. Such musings—for there seems no way to move them beyond conjecture—suggest alternative or additional motives for Michelangelo's destructive act. They keep open the possibility that he shattered his work not because he was vexed by a servant's nagging, and not because part of the Virgin's elbow had splintered off, but that he destroyed it in despair: that he saw himself

pushing the rhetoric of carnal gesture to a point where its metaphorical status passed out of control; that he felt himself crossing the limit of what seemed expressible in his art. His demolition then would be a renunciation, comparable to that which sounds again in the final lines of his sonnet:

To paint or carve no longer calms
the soul turned to that Love divine
Who to embrace us on the cross opens his arms.¹⁷

The date of the sonnet falls within the year of the destruction of the *Pietà*.

3. Does the interpretation of the slung leg motif carry over to other classes of monuments?

There can be no doubt that the motif is sexual when it couples adults. The question arises whether we are to recognize the same symbolic charge in images of the Virgin and Child. In the early sixteenth century (in pictures by Raphael, Puligo, Andrea del Sarto [Fig. 20]; some half-dozen Michelangelo drawings, etc.) the motif of the infant's leg arched over the mother's thigh is so common as to suggest either that it is wholly innocent or that, being thoroughly understood, it was felt to be more safely assigned to the lively Child than to the Man. In Michelangelo's early marble tondo, the *Madonna Taddei*, as in Andrea del Sarto's *Madonna del Sacco* (1526), the Child's leg scaling the Virgin's thigh is presumably innocent; doubt on this score may even meet with resentment. On the other hand, the infant's pose may have been at first playful, athletic, striding forth, to become erotic only by a subsequent adaptation to the slung leg motif. One's faith in the abiding innocence of the motif is shaken on comparing certain works of slightly later date in which the Child seems cast in a similar role. Thus a remarkably similar pose is struck by the Christ Child in a Parmigianino design preserved in a seventeenth-century engraving by Schelte à Bolswert (Fig. 21).¹⁸ Here the "innocence" of the pose can no longer be argued, particularly when it is found, by comparing Giulio Romano's *Cupid and Psyche* (Fig. 22),¹⁹ that regardless of the boy's age this bestriding a woman's thigh is an unmistakable gesture of male appropriation. In Parmigianino's design the erotic tenor

Siena, *Opera omnia*, Florence, iv, 1956, Sermo LI, "De admirandis gratiis beatae Virginis," 549.

An Early Christian example of sexual metaphor relevant to the *Pietà* theme occurs in the *Symposium* of Methodius of Olympus (summarized in Herbert A. Musurillo, *The Fathers of the Primitive Church*, Mentor-Omega Books, 1966, 213): "Christ's final act was to sleep in the ecstasy of his Passion, during which he procreated through the virgin Mother Church all those who would be baptized in his blood."

17 Sonnet cxlvii—"Giunto è già 'l corso della vita mia"; sent to Vasari

on Sept. 19, 1554.

18 Catalogued under Bolswert in Hollstein, III, 77, 170, as "The Virgin with the Child on her lap, after Franc. Mazzuoli"; more accurately in Le Blanc, *Manuel de l'amateur d'estampes*, I, 15: "La S. Vierge adorant l'enfant Jésus qui monte sur ses genoux en s'appuyant sur un vase."

19 See Frederick Hartt, *Giulio Romano*, New Haven, 1958, I, Catalogue of Drawings, No. 139, and 88-89; and II, fig. 149. Hartt dates the drawing (Louvre 3497), which he connects with Giulio's first Mantuan period, 1526.

is further emphasized by the riper age of the Child: not a babe, but the young Saviour embracing with one hand the urn of his Passion while his other hand grasps Mary's shoulder. And this seizing a shoulder is another ceremonial gesture of possession-taking, whether it be Death laying hold of a youth, or Mars claiming Venus.²⁰

There is a wide frame of reference for these sixteenth-century images in which the nuptials of the heavenly spouse are prefigured in the approach of the Child. The emotions projected into such pictures may not always have been formal doctrine, but their part in the religious imagination of Mediterranean Europe was vital. A millennial procession of symbolic equations had left thought and feeling caught in a constellation of metaphors. Within it, subtle theological formulas and secret fantasies could equally find accommodation. The Old Testament's Song of Songs, which in the Rabbinical exegesis declared God's love for Israel, became, in the Christian translation, Christ's love for his Church. "It can be said frankly and safely," writes St. Gregory the Great, "that when in the mystery of the Incarnation the Father celebrated the wedding of his royal son, he gave him the Holy Church as his companion. The womb of the Virgin Mother was the nuptial couch of this bridegroom."²¹

But from the second century onward Mary herself becomes a type of the Church. Before long, the Church is figured in Mary as Mary is in the Church. Christ is the bridegroom of the one as of the other. By the twelfth century, *Ecclesia*, herself Virgin and Mother and Beloved of Christ, has become in every respect interchangeable with the Virgin. As in the doctrine of Perichoresis, which describes the two natures of Christ, Mary and Church wholly inhere in each other. "Everything that

is said of the Church," writes Honorius of Autun in his authoritative commentary on Canticles, "can also be understood as being said of the Virgin herself, the bride and mother of the bridegroom."²²

In the reading of Canticles, and in its pictorial complement, the Beloved embraced by Christ became and remained an ambivalent symbol. In illuminated twelfth-century Bibles, or in manuscript commentaries on Canticles, the initial O of the opening "Osculetur me oscula oris sui" may enclose lovers who share even their single halo; but the lady's identity, whether Virgin or Church, is undefined.²³

But another type exists which seems to demand a simple Marian interpretation. It occurs when the bridegroom of Canticles takes form as the newborn Christ—as in the Lyons Bible (Fig. 23).²⁴ Here the historiated initial which opens the "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" contains a Madonna and Child, the Child coming as bridegroom, as lover, as man, striding toward her, embracing, their cheeks sharing one contour so that their eyes touch and their coupled lips align as in a kiss folded out.

There is a tradition here which reaches both forward and backward. An engraving by Abraham van Merlen, a Jesuit illustrator of about 1600 (Fig. 24), shows the Madonna and Child over the legend "My beloved is mine, and I am his. . . . He shall lie all night betwixt my breasts" (Cant. 2:16, and 1:12). On the other hand, the Lyons Bible initial, painted by an unknown Byzantinizing illuminator, points back to the byzantine Madonna of "sweet love," the *Glykophilousa*. It is here and in its derivatives that one finds, in the tender contact between the Mother and Child, the first veiled erotic allusions to their mystic marriage.²⁵ The intent of countless later Ma-

20 With hand laid on shoulder Eros takes hold of Paris (Hellenistic relief, Naples), Hercules reclaims Alceste from Hades (Pompeian fresco and Christian catacomb painting, Rome, Via Latina), Death claims a youth (etching by the Housebook Master, Lehrs, 53), Mars seizes Venus (Marcantonio Raimondi engraving, B. 325), and Eve appropriates Adam (Ludwig Krug relief, 1514, Berlin-Dahlem). "And as I said this, I placed my hand on the shoulder of my man," boasts Aretino's courtesan Nanna. As a token of marital status, from Roman and Early Christian times onward the gesture is as common as it is self-explanatory.

In a drawing of the Lamentation at the British Museum, catalogued as by Michelangelo and datable in the late 1530's, the dead Christ, cradled in Mary's lap, lays his left hand on her shoulder (J. Wilde, *Italian Drawings in the British Museum: Michelangelo*, London, 1953, No. 64r).

21 Quoted in De Lubac, *Splendour*, 209, from St. Gregory, "Hom. xxxviii in Evangelia," No. 3, PL, 76, 1283.

22 ". . . Ipsa [Maria] gessit typum Ecclesiae, quia virgo est et mater. Virgo, quia ad omni haeresi incorrupta; mater, quia parit semper spirituales filios ex gratia. Et ideo omnia, quae de Ecclesia dicta sunt,

possunt etiam de ipsa Virgine, sponsa et mater sponsi, intelligi" (PL, 172, 494).

23 See, for example, St. Jerome, *Expositio in Canticum canticorum*; ms of the latter 12th century, Abbaye de Saint-Amand, Lat. 1808, fol. lv.

24 Lyons, ms 410, fol. 207v, second half of the 12th century; see *Bibliothèque nationale, les manuscrits à peintures en France du VIIe au XIIe siècle*, Paris, 1954, No. 330.

25 The Child touching the Virgin's chin is a common feature of the *Glykophilousa* type. As a tender gesture, expressing a love at once child-like and faintly precocious, it passes into the Italian Trecento. But the motif had been known since Greek vase painting, where the suitor would caress the chin of the *eromenos*, the beloved. With this charge of adult eroticism the motif appears in French Gothic art and reappears in the Renaissance (e.g., Giulio Romano's *Jupiter and Olympias* at the Palazzo del Te; Hartt, *Giulio Romano*, fig. 263). Thereafter, a 16th-century Virgin whose chin is held or chucked by the Child is unmistakably the object of fullblown masculine devotion (e.g., Cornelis van Cleve's *Madonna*, Detroit; Burgkmair's *Madonna and Child* woodcut, B.vii, 8; Giovanni Francesco Rusticci, *Virgin and Child with St. John*, marble tondo, Bargello). Is this eroticizing of the chin-chuck-

donna and Child confrontations in art is to reveal the Child Jesus as fully the Christ and fully man who, having chosen his mother, now chooses her for his Virgin bride.

Nowhere were such thoughts more compellingly realized than in the preaching of Savonarola, which Michelangelo heard in his youth. In Savonarola's remarkable expostulation for the pregnant Virgin, his "Sponsa Jesu," Mary yields dramatically as mother and bride to the awaited Bridegroom. Addressing herself to the Father, she pleads that he vouchsafe her a delivery as hurtless as the conception had been: ". . . così come io lo ho concepito senza pudore e senza violamento della mia verginità, così ora per tua grazia lo partorisca senza dolore perseverando vergine e illibata."²⁶

So far we are on traditional ground. Savonarola merely presents as dramatic monologue what earlier Fathers, such as Andrew of Crete (ca. 700) had expressed by apostrophe: "Your chastity, O Virgin, has remained as it was at the beginning, inviolate. For Christ the sun, like a bridegroom from the bridal chamber, has come forth from you."²⁷ But the traditional evocations of sun and bridegroom, derived from the Psalms, grow strangely sensual in Savonarola's lines for the Virgin as they turn into direct address: "Come forth then, my Son, even as the bridegroom from his bridal chamber. Issue forth from my womb, . . . Gladden your handmaid's soul, fulfill at last your mother's desire, my soul has desired you and desires you continually, Jesus mine, I can wait no more, I am consumed, I melt, I languish in love. . . ."²⁸

For Savonarola the delivery of the Christ Child was not only, as it had seemed to earlier visionaries, quick, painless, and without lesion; it was pleasurable, and the pleasure ecstatic. And the Infant Bridegroom who came forth in such sheer virility must be tremendous and ardent.

In sheer virility he appears in Michelangelo's *Madonna Medici*, ca. 1525–1531 (Fig. 25). The Christ Child is an infant Hercules, sitting forward, straddling his Mother's thigh. His upper body swerves through an astonishing 180 degrees, and he appears to be nursing. But his left hand, grasping the Virgin's shoulder, leaves infancy as far behind as does the precocious athleticism of his physique.

Why the crossed legs of the Virgin? Perhaps Michelangelo was alluding to an old Medicean image. In the cortile of the Medici Palace, the frieze decoration consists of relief tondi in which ancient gems from the Medici collection are monumentalized. One of these shows a nude child turning toward a seated woman, draped, her legs crossed; it represents the wedding procession of Eros and Psyche: divine love and the human soul about to be married in heaven.

Tolnay suggested that the Madonna's legs were crossed so as to elevate the Child "to bring it closer to the bosom." But in three surviving Michelangelo drawings that anticipate the *Madonna Medici* (Fig. 26)²⁹ the Child is already fast at the breast though the Mother's legs are uncrossed; it is rather her lofty shoulder that is out of reach. What the crossing of the Madonna's legs accomplishes is to lift the Child far above her breast level; evidently the literal contact here was dispensable since the mere direction of the Child's turn would suffice to suggest suckling. But with the Madonna's legs crossed, the Child rides the high crest of her thigh.³⁰ Now all his body, his straddling seat and his grip on her shoulder, reveal in the Child the divine lover electing his spouse.

Anatomy, said Freud, is destiny. In Michelangelo's hands it became theology.*

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ing motif an effect of Gothic and Renaissance gallantry, or was the erotic meaning, even though veiled by the hieratic manner, always implied?

26 *Sermoni e prediche di F. Girolamo Savonarola*, Prato, 1846, I, Sermo XIX, "Della nativita di Cristo," 485.

27 Andreas Cretensis, *Canon in Beatae Mariae natalem*, PG, 97, 1323.

28 "Egrederere igitur, fili mi, tanquam sponsus de thalamo suo. Esci del ventre mio, . . . Letifica l'anima dell'ancilla tua, adempie oramai il desiderio della madre tua, l'anima mia t'ha desiderato e desidera continuamente, Gesù mio, io non posso più aspettare, io mi consumo, io mi sento tutta liquefare, io languisco d'amore."

29 The three drawings—in the Louvre, the Albertina, and the British Museum—are reproduced in Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, v, figs. 98, 99, 101.

30 Michelangelo may be invoking yet another Medicean image, Mantegna's little *Madonna delle Cave* in the Uffizi, mentioned by Vasari among the pictures of Don Francesco de' Medici (*Andrea Mantegna: Catalogo della mostra*, Mantua, 1961, No. 24). It has not so far been possible to establish the date of the picture, nor how early it entered the Medici Collection. In this small masterpiece certain features seem

to anticipate the *Madonna Medici*: the Child's straddling seat; the Virgin's projecting foot with its tip hovering in mid-air; and the placement of her hand as if to protect the place which will receive the thrust of the lance.

* The conclusions of this article were initially presented in somewhat different form in a longer paper entitled "The Metaphors of Love and Birth in Michelangelo's Pietàs," which was read in April 1967 at the Institute for Sex Research, Indiana University, and which is to be published during 1969 by Basic Books, Inc., in a collection of papers on erotic elements in art commissioned and edited by the Institute. To the indefatigable Cornelia V. Christenson, who conceived and organized the project, I extend my warm appreciation. My many thanks are due to Professor Kathleen Weil-Garris Posner, Professor Irving Lavin, Professor David Kunzle, Mrs. Marie Tanner, Miss Ruth Campbell, and more of my colleagues and students who have helped inestimably with criticisms and suggestions. A small timely reference sent by a friend—beyond enriching or correcting what one has in hand—can change one's day as the poet said music did: "Who hears music feels his solitude peopled at once."

APPENDIX A: THE SLUNG LEG

The attempt to construct a "history" of the slung leg motif is somewhat foolhardy, since a single find may modify or even upset the structure, and examples are bound to keep turning up. But to forestall an undue expansion of the inventory, let me redefine what I consider the chief limiting feature of the motif. Pairs of lovers of whom one sits on the lap of the other, or on one thigh within his lap, are ruled out. The "canonic form" requires that each partner maintain his own seat, so that the leg that is thrown across becomes a gesture toward the other, a wooing or claiming, an action that visibly changes a relationship or establishes a condition. Whereas the settled intimacy of the lap-sitting pose, even though it include a slung leg, suggests the condition itself. (E.g., the Michelangelesque *Adam and Eve* drawing at the Musée Bonnat, Bayonne; see Jacob Bean, *Catalogue of Italian Drawings*, 1966, No. 66.)

Ruled out on another count are seated couples with elaborately intertwined legs, as in Robetta's *Allegory of Envy* engraving of ca. 1520 (B. XIII, 24; A. M. Hind, *Early Italian Engraving*, London 1938–1948, D.II,31 and pl. 294) or as in Mabuse's picture *Hercules and Dejanira*, 1517, in the Barber Institute, Birmingham. (See H. Pauwels, *Jan Gossaert, genaamd Mabuse*, Rotterdam Exhibition Catalogue, 1965, pl. rv.) I would call these the "hearsay type," since they suggest a knowledge of the symbol but not of its authentic form. In the work of Mabuse, who sojourned in Rome during 1508–1509, the motif appears twice more in similarly unorthodox fashion: in a drawing of Adam and Eve at the Albertina, dated 1525 (Rotterdam Catalogue, 61), and most significantly in his early woodcut of ca. 1515, *Hercules and Dejanira*. In both of these it is the husband's leg that crosses the wife's. The woodcut has further importance as a likely source for Rubens's *Shepherd and Shepherdess* in Munich.

The two earliest instances of the motif in its canonic form both occur in rare Italian engravings with obscure subjects. First, the *Faun Family* by the still unidentified Bolognese Master I.B. with the Bird (B. XIII, 248, No. 7; Hind, v, 256, No. 6, and pl. 837). The Master I.B.'s activity is documented from 1500 to 1506 but probably extends for two decades longer. In the *Faun Family* a Leonardesque nymph lays her leg over the thigh of a laurel-crowned wildman.

Next comes an Agostino Veneziano engraving of 1516 (Fig. 15; B. XIV, 241)—after a Bandinelli design, according to Bartsch. Bartsch's title, "The News Brought to Olympus" (retained in Passavant, *Peintre-Graveur*, VI, 57, No. 60) is a confession that the subject is unidentified. The pattern of the amorous group in the sky seems to anticipate both Raphael's Isaac fresco and some of the action of Michelangelo's Christ.

Raphael's fresco of 1520 (probably executed by Perino del Vaga) is followed in 1527 by the Caraglio engravings after Perino's designs

(B. xv, 11 and 14), and by one undescribed and undated engraving of Venus and Mars, attributed to Giorgio Ghisi after Giulio Romano (illustrated Bartsch, vol. 15a, unpublished; Institute of Fine Arts library, New York University). That these prints were chiefly responsible for the diffusion of the motif is confirmed by a majolica dish at the Metropolitan Museum, New York, dated Urbino 1542, and attributed to the shop of Orazio Fontana. Here the Caraglio-Perino *Neptune and Thetis* (B. 11) is adapted to a *Story of Venus and Mars*. The dispersion of prints may also account for the occurrence of the motif in two Venetian pictures of the 1530's: Bonifazio's *Lot and His Daughters* in the Walter P. Chrysler Collection, New York, and the *Mythological Scene* in the London National Gallery (No. 1123), formerly given to Bonifazio, now catalogued as "Venetian School." The set of engravings by Bonasone entitled *Loves of the Gods* (especially B. 151 and 155) again displays our motif, but cannot be dated with certainty before the mid-century. The earliest Italian sculpture to display the motif may be Riccio's small bronze *Satyr and Satyress* in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

If the above listing reads like a random sampling from a great store, I have defeated my purpose. I have cited every instance of the motif before about 1540 that I, with the help of friends, have been able to find.

APPENDIX B: VIGENÈRE'S CREDIBILITY

The chief witness for the "open house" theory is the French *littérateur* Blaise de Vigenère (1523–1598), who visited Rome in 1550. In his annotated translation of Philostratus, Vigenère claims to have known Michelangelo and to have watched him work. His description of the aged sculptor plying hammer and chisel is significant on three counts. First, it describes Michelangelo's attack on a marble block as all fury and impetuosity—sufficient to explain any subsequent accident, mutilation, or failure. Second, it challenges as a romantic legend the tradition of Michelangelo's secretiveness; if a young visiting foreigner had such easy access to Michelangelo's atelier that he could stand by for a quarter-hour while the master worked, then the traditional view needs drastic modification. Third, Vigenère's testimony seems to furnish the *terminus ante quem* for the inception of the Florentine *Pietà*, for it is with this work that the marble observed by Vigenère has been identified. (H. Thode, *Michelangelo und das Ende der Renaissance*, Berlin, 1912, II, 690: "Den Beginn der Arbeit, . . . lernen wir durch Blaise de Vigenère kennen: mit ungestümen, leidenschaftlichen Hammerschlägen sucht der Meister dem Block, ihn formend, sein stürmisches Seelenleben



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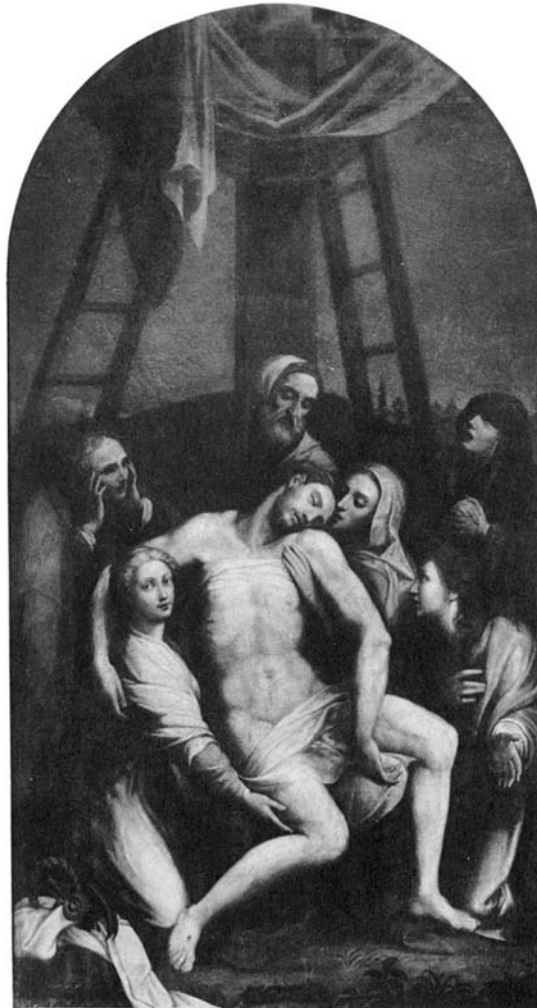
MICHELANGELO

1. *Pietà*. Florence, Duomo (photo: G. Giusti)

2. *Pietà* (detail). Florence, Duomo (photo: Alinari)



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3. Cherubino Alberti, after Michelangelo, *Pietà* (photo: Albertina)

4. Sabbatini, *Deposition*. Rome, Saint Peter's (photo: Anderson)

7. Teodor van Thulden, *Story of the Prodigal Son*

5. Govaert Flinck, *Lovers*. Paris, Louvre (from W. Bernt, *Die Niederländischen Zeichner*, I, 232)

6. Jacques De Gheyn, *Cross-Bowman and Milkmaid* (detail). Cambridge, Fogg Art Museum

8. Pieter Pourbus, *Allegory*. London, Wallace Collection



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9. Vincenzo De Rossi, *Paris and Helen*. Florence, Boboli Garden (photo: G. Giusti)

12. Jean Mignon, *Women Bathing* (photo: British Museum)

10. Frans Floris, *Lot and His Daughters*. Vienna, Albertina

11. Aldegrever, *Lot and His Daughters*

13. Giulio Campi, *Jupiter and Callisto*. New York, H. Shickman Gallery (photo: Feist)



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14. Giulio Bonasone, after Giulio Romano, *Saturn and Philyra* (photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whittelsey Fund, 1959)

16. Caraglio, after Perino del Vaga, *Neptune and Thetis* (photo: British Museum)

17. Raphael, *Isaac and Rebekah*. Rome, Vatican Logge (photo: Anderson)

15. Agostino Veneziano, after Bandinelli, *The News Brought to Olympus* (detail) (photo: British Museum)

18. Bronze Krater from Dherveni, ca. 320 B.C. Salonika, Archeological Museum



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19. Hubert Gerhard, *Tarquin and Lucrece*. New York, The Metropolitan Museum, Edith Perry Chapman Fund, 1950

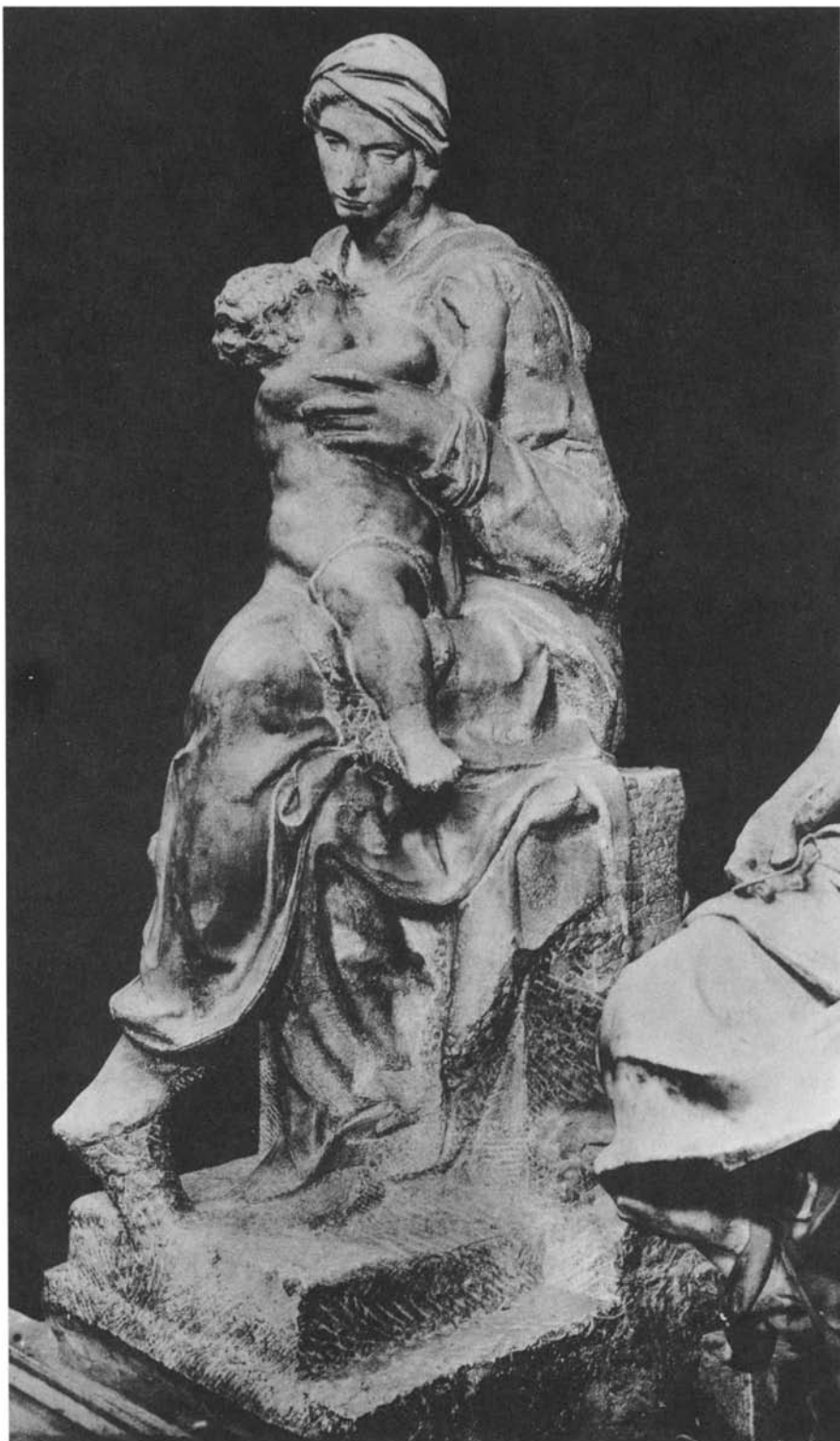
20. Andrea del Sarto, *Holy Family*. Florence, Pitti Palace (photo: G. Giusti)

22. Giulio Romano, *Cupid and Psyche*. Paris, Louvre

21. Schelte à Bolswert, after Parmigianino, *Madonna and Child*

23. Lyons Bible, *Virgin and Child*. Lyons, ms 410, fol. 207v

24. Abraham van Merlen, *Madonna and Child*



25



26

MICHELANGELO

25. *Madonna Medici*. Florence, San Lorenzo (from Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, III, pl. 52)

26. *Madonna and Child*. Vienna, Albertina

aufzuzwingen." Denyse Métal, author of *Blaise de Vigenère: Archéologue et critique d'art*, Paris, 1939, 93, concludes, on mistaken grounds, that the marble block observed by Vigenère "est la Pietà du Dôme de Florence, seul groupe que Michel-Ange ait sculpté dans sa vieillesse." And so Herbert von Einem, "Bemerkungen zur Florentiner Pietà Michelangelos," *Jahrbuch der preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, 61, Berlin, 1940, 77: "1550 hat der Franzose Blaise de Vigenère Michelangelo an einer Gruppe mit solchem Ungestüm arbeiten sehen, dass er in Angst war, sie würde in die Büche gehen, vermutlich handelt es sich hier um die florentiner Pietà."

The importance of Vigenère to Michelangelo studies derives above all from the personal contact he claims to have had with the master. It is because he twice reports opinions heard directly from Michelangelo's lips that his recollections are ranked as primary sources. "Vigenère a personnellement connu Michel-Ange, il en parle . . . en évoquant ses propres souvenirs. Ce qu'il dit a la valeur d'une source" (Métal, 238). Against this prevailing opinion, I maintain that Vigenère speaking on art is not a credible witness and that his references to Michelangelo are practically worthless.

Before citing the texts, a few words about the author in general. He is an enthusiastic student of antiquity, including Hebrew and Greek, and a prolific translator and annotator of the Latin historians. His interests range remarkably wide, from a history of Poland (1573) to a treatise on occult signs (1586). The very year 1578 in which he published *Les Images . . . des deux Philostrates*, also saw the publication of his treatise on comets and of his Lamentations of Jeremiah in verse. His literary manner, however, tends to be rambling and uncritical, and his memory is cavalier: "Les souvenirs de Vigenère ne sont pas très précis," says his devoted biographer (Métal, 90). As for his reliability, the best she can adduce in his defense is that he never misleads the reader on purpose: "Lorsqu'il trompe le lecteur c'est qu'il se trompe lui-même" (Métal, 81).

Nowhere does Vigenère sound more remote and naïve than in discussions of art. Clearly, he entered the field only because Philostratus's descriptions of pictures had become a literary monument. When dealing with the art of his own period, he records remembered hearsay and makes it his own by exaggeration. Thus, for example, his earliest reference to Michelangelo declares the *Torso Belvedere* to have been "l'escolle principale de Michel l'Ange, où il se façonna tel qu'on l'a vu depuis en ses ouvrages de relief et de platte peinture." (See Vigenère's translation from the Latin version of 1556 of Chalkondylas's Turkish history: *L'Histoire de la Décadence de l'Empire Grec et établissement de celui des Turcs, . . . par Nicolas Chalcondyle, Athénien*, Paris, 1577, fol. F.III v.)

Following are Vigenère's two recollections of Michelangelo's sayings. (Note that in both of them Michelangelo is made to speak in unison with another party.)

The first occurs in Vigenère's translation of *Les Décades de Tite-Live*, 1583. The Capitoline Hill is under discussion and Vigenère remarks: "Là est encore pour le jourd'huy un petit satyre de marbre tout rompu et repiecé, mais l'un des plus belles excellents chefs d'oeuvre qui se puisse voir, comme mesme je l'ay ouy autrefois de la bouche propre de Michel Lange et d'un maistre Jacques natif d'Angoulême qui l'esgalloit en la statuaire. . . ." Of this mysterious Jacques, whom Vigenère believed to be Michelangelo's equal, no trace has been found. Vigenère must have been his loyal friend, for he speaks of him at greater length in the *Philostratus* (ed. 1614, p. 855), where we hear that in 1550 the young sculptor Jacques d'Angoulême prevailed over Michelangelo in a competition "for the model of an image of St. Peter."

This memoir was published thirty-three years after the alleged event. Fourteen years later the second edition of *Les Images des Philostrates* (ed. 1597, p. 951) introduces Michelangelo as *paysagiste*: "L'escolle pythagoricienne . . . reduisoit les genres de couleurs à ces quatres: le noir et le blanc; le jaune et le rouge. Néanmoins j'ay ouy dire plusieurs fois à Michel l'Ange et à Daniel de Volterre qu'ils aimeroient mieux se passer du jaulne que du bleu à cause du ciel qui intervient en tous ouvrages presque. . . ."

The two longest references to Michelangelo are found again in the *Philostratus* (pp. 853–55), not however in the original 1578 publication, but only in the augmented edition of 1597, that is to say, one year before the author's death at seventy-five, and forty-seven years after the events recalled. We are given a conventional *paragone* dispute. Sculpture is more difficult than painting, rules Vigenère, witness the fact that Michelangelo, who excelled in both arts, could carve only one figure for every hundred he painted. We then hear of a Michelangelo undertaking of which no other rumor has reached us: "L'entreprise de Michel l'Ange estoit hautaine et fort hardie, sentent bien sa main assurée, lequel commença l'an 1550, que j'estois à Rome, un crucifiement où il y avoit de dix à douze personnages, non pas moindres que le naturel, le tout d'une seule pièce de marbre, qui estoit un chapiteau de l'une de ces huit grandes colonnes du temple de la paix de Vespasian . . . mais la mort qui le prevint empescha la perfection de ce bel ouvrage, selon sa coustume ordinaire. . . ."

There are two ways to read this account. Taken literally it is wild enough to be dismissed out of hand. No capital accommodates a lifesize Crucifixion, and no twelve-figure project begun by Michelangelo passes unnoticed. The alternative is to understand that Vigenère was again writing from hearsay, and that the inaccuracies in his story are slight, venial, and in character. His "Temple of Peace of Vespasian" is presumably the Basilica of Constantine. His "ten to twelve lifesize figures" is a hyperbolic expression for "many," and his "Crucifixion" is our *Pietà*, a complex group of

many figures which the sculptor was then carving from a single block and never completed. If Vigenère's "Crucifixion" refers to anything real at all, then it must be to the Duomo *Pietà*. But then it is also apparent that he never laid eyes on it, nor ever claimed to have seen it.

What he did claim to have seen he describes as follows: "Je puis dire avoir veu Michel l'Ange bien que aagé de plus de 60 ans, & encore non des plus robustes, abattre plus d'escalles d'un très dur marbre en un quart d'heure, que trois ieunes tailleurs de pierre n'eussant peu faire en trois ou quatre, chose presqu'incroyable qui ne le verroit: & y alloit d'une telle impétuosité & furie, que je pensois que tout l'ouvrage deust aller en pièces, abattant par terre d'un seul coup de gros morceaux de trois ou quatre doigts d'espoisseur, si ric à ric de sa marque que s'il eust passé outre tant soit peu plus qu'il ne falloir, il y avoit danger de perdre tout . . ." (p. 855).

What should one make of this oft-quoted passage, coming as it does from a garrulous *littérateur* who understands nothing of the sculptor's métier, remembers little, and exaggerates by routine? Every Michelangelo marble tells of the master's sense of its grain and density, of the responsive intuition of depth with which he cut every surface. It seems preposterous to impute frenzy and expressionist recklessness to Michelangelo's working process on the strength of Vigenère's naïve observation. If Vigenère did indeed watch Michelangelo carve for a quarter-hour, then what he saw was a block so rough-hewn that its figural composition was not yet discernible, at least not to him. This roughness and the boulder size of the chips being cut away suggest a preliminary operation which in sixteenth-century Rome would normally take place in the courtyard outdoors. And this indicates once again that Vigenère was not in Michelangelo's studio but was watching from some distance away, perhaps from a window. He was at any rate recording his recollection at a remove of forty-seven years.

To identify Vigenère's "manhandled marble" with his "Crucifixion," as Métral proposes to do, is unsound. When Vigenère speaks of the "Crucifixion," he does not claim to have seen it in progress; nor, when he comes to speak of the marble he saw, does he indicate any subject, origin, or destination for it. Though he describes the "Crucifixion" and the "manhandled block" on adjacent pages, he makes no connection between the two, and it is wholly unwarranted for the reader to make them the same.

But suppose we forget Vigenère's fabulous "Crucifixion" and simply identify the "manhandled marble" he saw with the Florentine *Pietà*, as Thode and Von Einem have done? This again seems arbitrary, since there are several other Michelangelo marbles that Vigenère might have seen in 1550. There was the large marble group which was eventually cut down to become the *Pietà Rondanini*. Vasari mentions yet another *Pietà* (" . . . un altro pezzo di

marmo dove era stato già abbozzato un'altra *Pietà*, molto minore"—Vasari-Milanesi, VII, 245), of which however nothing further is known. The location in 1550 of the architectural fragment from which the disputed *Pietà Palestrina* was carved is not known. But Michelangelo certainly had other marble blocks standing about, including an unfinished seated pope (St. Peter or Julius?), mentioned in the 1564 inventory of his estate, but of whose earlier history nothing is known (Thode, *Kritische Untersuchungen*, Berlin, 1908–1913, II, 283–84).

It is arguable that of all these candidates the Florentine *Pietà* is the least likely to have been seen by Vigenère. For Vigenère is not, as Métral believes, the essential source "faute duquel on ignorerait la date à laquelle le maître a commencé cette dernière sculpture" (p. 93). That date emerges more unequivocally from the first 1550 edition of Vasari's *Lives*: "E bozzato ancora in casa sua, quattro figure in un marmo nelle quali è un Christo, deposto di croce: la quale opera può pensarsi, che se da lui finita al mondo restasse, ogni altra opra sua da quella superata sarebbe per la difficoltà del cavar di quel sasso tante cose perfette."

Since Vasari's manuscript was finished by 1546–47, both Tolnay and Von Einem argue that the *Pietà* must have been under way by that time. And if begun before 1547, it is unlikely that after three or four years of constant labor ("lavorava Michelagnolo quasi ogni giorno per suo passatempo, intorno a quella *Pietà* . . ." Vasari-Milanesi, VII, 242–43) he would still be at a roughing-out stage in 1550.

Unfortunately the date for the beginning of the *Pietà* cannot be so precisely fixed. While it is true that Vasari's manuscript was written by 1546–47, the documents assembled by Wolfgang Kallab (*Vasari-Studien*, Vienna, 1908, 83) indicate that additions and changes were continually made until October 1549, when Duke Cosimo finally ordered the manuscript to go to press. Let us suppose that the *Pietà* was begun as late as, say, 1548; a "stop-press" reference to it may have been exactly what Vasari wanted. Since he was concerned to keep the *Lives* up to date, adding biographies of four artists who had died during 1546 and 1547, and since the entire historical structure he had devised culminated in Michelangelo, it is quite possible that he might have made the effort to mention that latest work of the supreme master which, surpassing all his earlier productions, promised to become the absolute pinnacle of world art.

Vasari had left Rome in the fall of 1546. And here again we face a dilemma. If we accept his reference to the roughed-out *Pietà* as the account of a personal visit, then the Florentine *Pietà* was indeed begun in 1546. But Vasari's description seems rather to be based on a verbal or written report, supported perhaps by a sketch. And in that case both the work's beginning and the (inserted?) mention of it in Vasari's manuscript may fall anywhere before the autumn of

1549. Later it cannot have been. In February 1550 Vasari arrived once again in Rome, but in the following month, March 1550, his *Lives* was delivered complete by the ducal printer in Florence.

The following conclusions seem justified: the Vasari material does not permit closer dating for the inception of the *Pietà* than 1546–1549. Nevertheless, there is no ground for believing that this was

the work which the visiting Vigenère saw as a roughed-out block in 1550. If Vigenère's story of a Michelangelo "Crucifixion" carved from an antique capital is a garbled reference to the *Pietà*, then it is certain that he never saw it. And there is no reason whatsoever to think that Vigenère ever saw the inside of Michelangelo's house.