

Moses as Figure of the Pope. II. A Christological-political Topos, from Eugenius IV to Clement VII

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Abstract. Between the 15th and the 16th century, the Popes who emerged from the Western Schism and went through the conciliarist conflicts promoted their symbolic identification with Moses, a spiritual and temporal monarch, endowed with prophetic and imperial/legislative authority. Thus, Moses was not a generic symbol of the “Renaissance man” leaning towards divinization,² but rather a specific and traditional figure of the Pope, the sole holder of full divinely founded sovereignty, the absolute sacred head and supreme earthly princeps,³ whose *imperatoria maiestas* encompasses supreme theological *iustitia*, the foundation and source of the *leges*, and the sacred possession of *arma*, the instrument of protection and glorification of the *civitas Dei* on earth.⁴ Here I will schematically give some examples of the most eloquent and significant points of this trajectory, bringing into focus the relevance and pervasiveness of humanistic-Renaissance Papal ideology.

Keywords: Papacy, Theocracy, Secularization, Political Theory.

[it] Mosè come figura del papa. II. Un topos cristologico-politico, da Eugenio IV a Clemente VII

Riassunto. Tra il XV e il XVI secolo, i papi emersi dallo Scisma d'Occidente e in conflitto con le rivendicazioni conciliariste, promossero la loro identificazione simbolica con Mosè, monarca spirituale e temporale, dotato di suprema autorità profetica, legislativa, politica. Perciò Mosè non fu tanto un generico simbolo dell'“uomo rinascimentale” proteso alla divinizzazione, ma fu soprattutto figura specifica del Papa, unico detentore della piena sovranità divinamente fondata, assoluto *caput* teologico e supremo *princeps* terreno. La sua *imperatoria maiestas* comprendeva la suprema *iustitia* teologica, fondamento e fonte delle *leges*, e il possesso sacrale di armi proprie, strumento di protezione e glorificazione della *civitas Dei* sulla terra. Verranno schematicamente forniti alcuni esempi dei momenti più eloquenti e significativi di questo percorso, mettendo a fuoco la rilevanza e la pervasività dell'ideologia mosaica del papato umanistico-rinascimentale.

Parole chiave: papato; teocrazia; secolarizzazione; storia del pensiero politico.

Summary: 1. The bull *Moses vir Dei* of Eugenius IV and the antipapal invective by Lorenzo Valla. 2. Enea Silvio Piccolomini's *Oratio Moses vir Dei* and Pius II's Crusade. 3. The curial theological production from Eugenius IV to Sixtus IV. 4. The Pazzi Conspiracy: Lorenzo the Magnificent as the new Dathan against Sixtus IV the new Moses. 5. The theocratic iconography of the Sistine Chapel, the new Temple of Solomon. 6. Two rival Moses: Savonarola versus Alexander VI. 7. Julius II new Moses against the schismatic

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² In this sense, a very generalized and de-contextualized figure of Moses is presented in John H. Geerken, “Machiavelli's Moses and Renaissance Politics”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 4 (1999): 579-595. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3654109>. See 586-587: “Moses was part of the mind-set, a polyvalent – and one is tempted to say, omnipresent – cultural icon [...] Among the humanists Moses' images collectively rendered him a “Renaissance Man”: magician, mystic, warrior, lawyer, saint, liberator, theologian, artist, philosopher, and symbol – one even divine in his own right”. The same limit can be applied to other excellent essays on the theme: Riccardo Caporali, “Immagini di Mosè (in Machiavelli e Spinoza)”, *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics* 16, no. 1 (2014): 67-91. <https://www.openstarts.units.it/entities/publication/910e097a-48ca-43bb-b4df-5aadd6bcc99a/details>; Miguel A. Granada, “Maquiavelo y Moisés”, *Res publica. Revista de Historia de las Ideas Políticas* 20 no. 1 (2017): 141-156. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5209/RPUB.54896>; Alison Brown, “Moses, Machiavelli, and The Prince”, *Storia del pensiero politico* 3 (2020): 393-412. DOI: <https://www.rivisteweb.it/doi/10.4479/99607>; Raffaele Ruggiero, “Niccolò Machiavelli e “chi legge la Bibbia sensatamente”, *Nuova Rivista di Letteratura Italiana*, 23 no. 2 (2020): 20-30. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4454/nrli.v23i2.360>. Modest contribution in Steven Marx, “Moses and Machiavellism”, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65 no. 3, (1997): 551-571. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/65.3.551>.

³ Charles L. Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 5: “Moses, whose career and powers prefigured Christ's, served for Renaissance Romans as *typus papae*”. See the exemplary judgement in Kenneth Gouwens, “Ciceronianism and collective identity: defining the boundaries of the Roman Academy, 1525”, *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 23 no. 2 (1993): 173-195: “Scholars such as O'Malley, Charles Stinger, and John D'Amico have also made clearer the constructive purposes that Roman humanist rhetoric served for the Renaissance popes. As curial spokesmen, humanists to legitimate the papacy's increasing territorial claims within Italy and to dignify its spiritual lordship of Christendom. To this end, they created a new ideology emphasizing the papacy's role as heir both to the classical *Imperium* and to the Church's historical ecclesiastical prerogatives” (176).

⁴ On the *imperatoria maiestas*, which in Justinian's *Institutiones* is determined by being *armis decorata et legibus armata*, and referred to a sovereign who is venerable and just and therefore *religiosissimus*, see Diego Quaglioni, “Machiavelli e la lingua della giurisprudenza”, *Il pensiero politico* 32 (1999): 171-185, then in Id., *Machiavelli e la lingua della giurisprudenza. Una letteratura della crisi* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 57-75, in part. 62-65; Raffaele Ruggiero, *Machiavelli e la crisi dell'analogia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2015), 157-161.

conciliabulum of Pisa. 8. The orations of Giles of Viterbo, Thomas de Vio, Cristoforo Marcello at the Lateran Council V. 9. The apotheosis of Julius II: papal supremacy and the freedom of Italy in the Festa di Agone in 1513. 10. Michelangelo's Moses figure of Julius II and his beard. 11. The pope as new warrior Moses in the *Libellus ad Leonem X* by Querini and Giustiniani. 12. Rosso Fiorentino in Rome: Clement VII new Moses and new David. 13. Argos, Io and Mercury/David: the Pasquinade of 25 April 1526. 14. An encomiastic medal by Benvenuto Cellini: Clement VII in the figure of Moses. 15. The Papal Moses in the Last Erasmus. 16. Conclusion: The "Machiavellian" Papal Brief of 6 June 1525. 17. References. 17.1. Primary sources. 17.2. Bibliography.

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1. The bull *Moses vir Dei* of Eugenius IV and the antipapal invective by Lorenzo Valla

On the 9th of September 1439, in one of the first sessions of the Council of Florence, Eugenius IV, reacting to the increasingly radicalizing antipapal positions at the Council of Basilea, promulgated the bull *Moses vir Dei*⁵, inspired by the *defensor fidei*, the Dominican Juan de Torquemada.⁶ The ideology behind the bull is heir to the Medieval Papal theocracy, affirmed by Gregory VIII, supported by Gratianus and Bernard of Clairvaux, and finds its acme in the *De ecclesiastica potestate* of Giles of Rome and in Boniface VIII's *Unam sanctam*, then its early crisis in the capture and death of the vicar of Christ (which is aptly called into question by Machiavelli in a letter to Guicciardini on the 21 October 1525).⁷ In the Florentine bull, the Pope is exalted as the new and superior Moses,⁸ only head of Christianity against every kind of conciliarist temptations. The Conciliarist council is defined "*Basiliense*

latrocinium"⁹ and presented as the seditious schism of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, the three rebellious Levites who lead the Israelites' revolt against Moses and Aaron, and who affirmed the sanctity of the entire community. They were punished by God, to whom Moses had asked a terrible punishment, by being swallowed up by the earth, going down alive into the realm of the dead (Numbers 16:1-35). One of the main *memorabilia* from the Council taken by the Signory of Florence was the so-called *Cassetta Cesarini*, sculpted and painted by Neri di Bicci, in which, from 1454 onwards, the Papers of the Council of Florence were placed, with the *Pandects* and other codices. In the case Moses, the animals symbolizing the Four Evangelists and John the Baptist where painted in the tabernacle.¹⁰ If John the Baptist was the protector and symbol of Florence, Moses clearly represented the pontiff as vicar and image of Christ, indicated by the tetramorph. The strategic alliance between Cosimo's Florence and Pope Eugene IV would find an extraordinary recapitulation with the papal election of Giovanni de' Medici: in Leo X, Florence becomes Rome, the Baptist "is fulfilled" in the new Moses as the vicar of Christ.

The text of the bull had an immediate resonance. Already in the following year, the opposition between Moses and the rebellious Levites is attested by Valla's *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione*, a key text of Christian humanism, in which Erasmus' rational, critical, yet evangelical Christianity is anticipated:

O Romani pontifices, exemplum facinorum omnium ceteris pontificibus! O improbissimi scribae et Pharisaei, qui sedetis super cathedram Moysi, et opera Dathan et Abiron facitis! Ita ne vestimenta, apparatus, pompa, equitatus, omnis denique vita Caesaris vicarium Christi decebit? Quae communicatio sacerdotis ad Caesarem? Istane Silvester vestimenta sibi induit? Eo apparatu incessit? Ea celebritate ministrantium domi vixit atque regnavit? Sceleratissimi homines non intelligunt Silvestro magis vestes Aaron, qui summus Dei sacerdos fuerat, quam gentilis principis fuisse sumendas.¹¹

⁵ See Joseph Gill, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 312-316 and Joachim W. Stieber, *Pope Eugenius IV, the Council of Basel, and the Secular and Ecclesiastical Authorities in the Empire: the Conflict over Supreme Authority and Power in the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

⁶ See Michele Maccarone, *Vicarius Christi. Storia del titolo papale* (Roma: Lateranum, 1952).

⁷ On this see the helpful even if confessional report in Maccarone, *Vicarius Christi*.

⁸ See *Decretum concilii Florentini contra synodum Basiliensem "Moses vir Dei"*, 4 September 1439, in *Conciliarum Oecumenicorum Decreta*. Edited by Giuseppe Alberigo et alii (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, 1973, 1991, 2002), 529-534: "Moses vir Dei, populi sibi commissi salutem zelans timensque, ne ob seditiosum schisma Chore, Dathan et Abiron ira Dei in ipsum populum, si illos sequeretur, insurgeret, iussu Domini dixit ad plebem universam: "Recedite a tabernaculis hominum impiorum" (Nm 16,26) [...] Senserat enim ipso Domino inspirante, seditiosos et schismaticos illos ultionem gravissimam excepturos, sicut postmodum rei monstravit eventus, dum nec ipsa terra eos potuit sustinere, sed iusto Dei iudicio illos absorbit, ut descenderent in infernum viventes. Sic et nos [...] ad ipsum domini nostri Iesu Christi populum nobis creditum clamare pari voce compellimur: "Recedite a tabernaculis hominum impiorum", maxime cum longe amplior sit plebs christiana quam illa tunc iudeorum, ecclesia sanctior quam synagoga, et Christi vicarius ipso Moyse auctoritate et dignitate superior". The pope is the head of the universal Church, guarantor of its *unitas*, so against those who perversely try to divide and poison it, he makes his own the imperative of Moses, which he recapitulates in his identity as the vicar of Christ. On Eugenius IV as the new Moses, see George of Trebizond, *Oratio habita coram summo pontifice Eugenio Quarto de laudibus eius*, 1437, MS Napoli, Fondo Princip., VIII G 34, ff. 25v-26r; see on this John Monfasani, *George of Trebizond. A Biography and a Study of His Rhetoric and Logic* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 35; 50; 57; 89; 181.

⁹ *Decretum concilii Florentini*, 532.

¹⁰ Davide Baldi, "I "Documenti del Concilio" di Firenze e quasi sei secoli di storia", *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa* 53, no. 2 (2017): 287-374, 307: "Nel quadro di detto tabernaculo feci un Muisè e quattro animali de Vangelisti e nel frontone S. Giovanni Batista intorno al detto Muisè [...] e fatto e posto in luogo dove a stare cioè nell'Udienza de' Signori".

¹¹ Lorenzo Valla, *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione, 1440*, ed. Wolfram Setz (Weimar: Böhlau, 1976), XV, 49.

It is clear how Erasmus' *Iulius* in the tragicomic heir of Valla's fierce attack on the religious and moral perversion of the popes, in their claim of subsuming the ancient Rome in the Christian one, and therefore appropriating the will to power of the emperors, the irresistible hunger for war, glory and prosperity. Thus Valla implements the Biblical typology of Eugenius IV's bull, reversing the interpretation: Eugenius IV unduly sits on the "chair of Moses". This expression proves the symbolic recapitulation of the prophet, legislator, prince and Jewish warrior in the Roman pontiff. Valla addresses to the Roman pontiffs the accusation that Eugenius IV brought against the conciliarists, namely that they are the new Dathan and Abiron, to whom the future divine annihilation is announced. The ideal of the republican Rome is affirmed against the papal tyranny of Eugene IV: *libertas* against *servitium*.¹² To be sure, one should not forget that Valla was not able to be part of Eugenius' Curia; instead, he went into the service of Alfonso the Magnanimous, who was the true inspirer of the attack on the temporal power of the Pope and his claim of having a *ius novum*, given by God.

Written in Capua at the itinerant court of the Aragonese king, involved in taking over the city of Naples, supported by Eugenius IV, Valla's masterpiece proves how crucial the Mosaic symbolism was within the violent ecclesiological and legal debate to legitimize new principalities. It depends on Marsilius of Padua's *Defensor pacis* and the treatises of the conciliarist front of the Council of Basel, in particular Cusanus' *De concordantia catholica* (1433), which had anticipated the demonstration of the falsity of the *Donation*.¹³ Alfonso succeeded in conquering Naples in 1442 and was recognised as king by Eugenius IV in 1443; in the meantime, Valla was denounced in Naples as a heretic for his philosophical Epicureanism, his critical investigation of the *Apostolic Symbol* and his attacks on Eugenius IV in the writing on the apocryphal *Donation* (in which he accused the papal tradition of inventing and defending lies). For this reason, in 1444, Valla addressed an *Apologia pro se et contra calumniatores ad papam Eugenium IV* and composed an *Oratio ad Eugenium IV*, aimed at his return to Rome. This return was possible only in 1448 with Eugenius' successor, the learned Nicholas V; lastly, Callistus III appointed Valla apostolic secretary in 1455.

2. Enea Silvio Piccolomini's *Oratio Moyses vir Dei* and Pius II's Crusade

The future Pope Pius II, who had accompanied Frederick III to Rome for the imperial coronation, held an oration for the Pope Nicholas V to promote a crusade against the Turks led by the emperor.¹⁴ Inspired by Eugenius IV's bull, interpreted in a politically theocratic perspective instead than a merely ecclesiastical one, Piccolomini, after abandoning the conciliarist party, exalted the pontiff as *Moses vir Dei*, who held supreme spiritual, political and even military power, passing on the *imperium* to Joshua (figure of the emperor), who was however explicitly subordinate to the high priest Eleazar, son of Aaron. Moses as the figure of the Pope¹⁵ is, thus, the original and unitary source of both spiritual and political-military power; the latter being delegated to the emperor. After becoming Pope as Pius II, Piccolomini reposed the image of Moses as *typus* of Christ and the pontiff in the solemn proclamation of the crusade against the Turks at the Council of Mantua in 1459: "*Moses summi sacerdotis & Christi vicarii typum gessit*"¹⁶. The most insistent note in Pius' decree is the reference to the Papal Moses as the prince of war, quoting Exodus 17:8-16 where Moses held up his hands as a figure of Christ and provoked Joshua's military success against Amalek and Numbers 21:4-9 where Moses made a bronze snake, putting it up on a pole, *typos* of the cross (see John 3:14-15); the bronze snake healed from the poisonous bite of the snakes. This venom is now symbolized by the rise of Islam.¹⁷ The papal Moses, having overcome the conciliarist crisis by affirming the absolute theological-political power of the Vicar of Christ, tried in vain to unite the

¹² Valla, *De falso credita et ementita*, XXVIII,91. Pope Bonifacius VIII, who abolished the Romans' freedom, is compared to Tarquinius, who chopped the head of the poppies with his *virga* (an allusion to the Papal staff). See Marianne Pade, "ut iam non minus culpe sit penes hunc qui mala probat...". Lorenzo Valla on the Donation of Constantine", in *Congiure e conflitti. L'affermazione della signoria pontificia su Roma nel Rinascimento: politica, economia e cultura*, ed. by Myriam Chiabò et alii (Roma: Roma nel Rinascimento, 2014), 55-68.

¹³ See the excellent essays by Riccardo Fubini, "Conciliarismo, regalismo, Impero nelle discussioni tre e quattrocentesche sulla donazione di Costantino", in *Costantino il Grande fra medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. by Giorgio Bonamente, Giorgio Cracco, Klaus Rosen (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), 133-158 and Id., "Contestazioni quattrocentesche della Donazione di Costantino: Niccolò Cusano, Lorenzo Valla", *Medioevo e Rinascimento* 5, no. 2 (1991): 19-61.

¹⁴ Enea Silvio Piccolomini, (Pius II), *Oration "Moses vir Dei"* (24 April 1452, Rome), ed. Michael Cotta-Schönberg, (Hal [Archives-Ouvertes.fr](https://doi.org/10.5209/dmae.89073), 2019⁸), 32-85. For a remarkable analysis of the *Oratio*, see Elena Cerqua's essay in this special issue ("*In angulum Europae*: on Moses and Crusades in Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini's *Oration Moyses, vir Dei*", *De Medio Aevo* 12, no. 2 (2023): 277-289, *El papa, nuevo Moisés*. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/dmae.89073>).

¹⁵ Piccolomini, *Oration*, 1, 34: "*Moses vir Dei, beatissime Pater, maxime pontifex, cum sibi successorem ordinaret Josue, filium Num, divinam vocem ad se dicentem audivit*: "Si quid agendum erit, Eleazar sacerdos consulat Dominum; ad verbum ejus egredietur et ingredietur ipse et omnes filii Israel cum meo et cetera multitudo" (Num 27,21). Quibus verbis non populi solum, sed reges et principes admonentur magnis in rebus, etiam bellicis, summi sacerdotis et consilium quaerere et imperium sequi". Therefore, the Emperor, as the heir of Constantine, Theodosius and Justinian, is called to acknowledge the Pope as the "magni Dei vicarium, Christianae plebis sacrum caput, perfectum ducem, optimum rectorem, veracem magistrum consulendum, audiendum, et sequendum censuit, cujus providentia noscere, auctoritas monere, potestas implere possit, quod sit agendum" (2, 36-37).

¹⁶ Pius II, *Decretum in conventu Mantuano editum de sacro bello in Turcas* (1459), in *Acta Conciliorum et Epistolae decretales ac Constitutiones summorum pontificum*, (Parisiis: Typographia regia, 1714) Tomus IX, 1443-1447, 1445c.

¹⁷ Pius II, *Decretum in conventu Mantuano*, 1445d: "Milites vero & bellatores ipso vivifico signo, quod Moyses in figura contra serpentem erexit, contra alterum vero serpentem diabolique ministrum Mahumetem volumus insignire".

entire West and recapitulate the supreme, universal political power in his person, by leading the Christian holy war against the Turks, to which the concluding appendix of the 13th book of the *Commentarii* of Pius IV is dedicated.

3. The curial theological production from Eugenius IV to Sixtus IV

Thus, the figure of Moses as *typus papae* became a privileged theme of the curial theological and humanistic production.¹⁸ The growing attention of the fifteenth-century Roman curia to the translations and theological-political interpretations of Philo's *De vita Moyses* and Gregory of Nyssa is revealing. For instance, George of Trebizond, in the preface of his translation of the work of the Nyssenius (1446), had exalted Eugene IV as the new Mose, identifying his Joshua as the very powerful Cardinal Ludovico Trevisan, a humanist and skilled politician and military commander of the Papal State.¹⁹ Pius II had entrusted his *Commentarii* not only with his highly original and multiform cultural, spiritual, and ecclesiastical journey, but also with his idealised political and military portrait, modelled on the figure of Caesar. Under the great pontificate of Nicholas V, a refined humanist, the exaltation of the pope as the new Moses would dominate the introduction, written by Lilio Libelli "Tifernate", Bessarion's secretary, to the Latin translation of the *Life of Moses* by Philo (around 1450).²⁰

¹⁸ See Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*, 203: "In defending the dignity and authority of the Roman Church and in emphasizing the powers of the papacy, the Roman humanists [Pietro del Monte, Flavio Biondo, Pomponio Leto] [...] found in Hebraic antiquity, particularly in the religious career of Moses, prefigurements of the priestly, legislative, and governing roles of the Roman pontiffs". See the excellent essay by Amedeo De Vincentiis, *Battaglie di memoria. Gruppi, intellettuali, testi e la discontinuità del potere papale alla metà del Quattrocento. Con l'edizione del Regno di Leodrisio Crivelli* (Roma: Roma nel Rinascimento, 2002), 110-126, where the 1326 Augustinus Triumphus's *Summa de potestate ecclesiastica* is studied (printed in Augsburg in 1473 and in Rome in 1479), reconstructing the definition of a theocratic theology that recapitulates in Christ, then in his vicars the functions of Moses (holder of the "imperial" and legislative power, prophet of God and his supreme interpreter) and of Aaron (bearer of the priestly power); the reconstruction of the theological-political curial conflicts between the pontificate of Pius II and that of Sixtus IV is remarkable. See John O'Malley, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome. Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in the Sacred Orators of the Papal Court, c. 1450-1521* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1979), 195-237.

¹⁹ See Emily O'Brien, "Arms and Letters: Julius Caesar, the Commentaries of Pope Pius II, and the Politicization of Papal Imagery", *Renaissance Quarterly* 62 (2009): 1057-1097. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/650023>.

²⁰ In his preface to Philo's *De vita Moyses*, "he [Livio Tifernate] draws the parallel between the Pope and Moses in the very first sentence and speaks of the three functions shared by them: *regnum, summum sacerdotium, legislation*, adding significantly that these have been bestowed on the Pope by Christ. Lilius returned to this point with almost obsessive insistence and in the preface to Philo's second book *De Mosayca legislation* his choice of terminology is significant. Moses not only held the three offices, but claimed the *primatus* in all of them. The papal patron, to whom again this introduction was

The theme will be theologically deepened by the remarkable treatise, *Contra impugnantes Sedis Apostolicae auctoritatem* (1450) dedicated to Nicholas V and written by Pietro del Monte,²¹ a Venetian very close to Eugenius IV, who had participated in the Council of Basel in the anti-conciliarist side, writing a treatise entitled *De summi pontifici, generalis concilii et imperialis maiestatis origine et potestate*. Under the pontificate of Sixtus IV, the thesis of the absolute papal primacy was reaffirmed in the *De Dei potentia infinita et de Christi vicarii potestate*, written by Domenico San Severino. This treatise is very important to understand the ideological message of the Sistine Chapel.²² The humanist Francesco Filelfo,

addressed, could be safely left to draw his own inference [...] Many treatises expounding the plenitude of papal power, the relevant papal bulls, Lilius's introduction to his Philo translation, and the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel illuminate each other, for they testify to the new vigour with which Eugenius IV and his successors had taken up the claim of the *primatus papae* [...] The pictures Sixtus IV had commissioned are not only a biblical narrative telling in symbolic language of man's salvation through Jesus Christ, they are at the same time an historical and political manifesto" Leopold D. Ettlinger, *The Sistine Chapel before Michelangelo. Religious Imagery and Papal Primacy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 117.

²¹ The treatise is transmitted in several copies, in particular autograph in cod. *Vat. Lat.* 4279, ff. 47-132; see David Rundle, "A Renaissance bishop and his books. A preliminary survey of the manuscript collection of Pietro del Monte (c. 1400-57)", *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 69 (2001): 245-272; Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*, 203-205; De Vincentiis, *Battaglie di Memoria*, 124-125. As emphasized by Stinger, in the treatise there is a lengthy discussion of the dreadful punishment of Dathan, Korah and Abiron of Num 12:1-16: by questioning the absolute primacy of Moses and Aaron, inherited by the Pope, they perversely violate the unity of the church. How common and enduring was the figural identification between Moses and the Pope was confirmed by Archangelus Ferrosius, *De potestate summi pontificis, et veneratione et cognominatione ac de iusto bello contra Florentinos* (1530ca.), ms. *Vat. Lat.* 4125 (online), which, referring to the Florentine republic that rebelled against the Medici government, calls on Clement VII to wage a just war against Florence, which had disobeyed the very will of God, who had first attributed power in both the spiritual and temporal spheres to Moses, and then to the pontiffs, the heirs of Peter, vicar of Christ: "Just as God had constituted Moses his vicegerent on earth, granting to him both spiritual and temporal jurisdiction, so the Pope exercises these same powers, since "Peter and all his successors are said to have followed in the succession of Moses" [*De potestate*, ff. 183v-185r]" (Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*, 215).

²² Domenico di San Severino, *De Dei potentia infinita et de Christi potentia et Christi vicarii potestate*, manoscritto *Vat. Lat.* 1007 (online): "*Tam Moyses ipse, qui ad regiam potestatem sacerdotalem magis quam Aaron, qui non vero vel Israelitico populo dux sed summus sacerdos fuit, Christi figuram gerebat*" (fol. 32v). In San Severino's view, "Moses prefigures Christ through the double role of king and priest, while Aaron had to fulfil only the functions of a high priest. This is a view we found clearly illustrated in the Sistine Chapel [...] Domenico's eulogy would not have been such an effective flattery if it had not reflected political and theological theories about the potestas papae which had again won general acceptance by the late fifteenth century. One point deserves particular notice. The author and others before him who had wanted to justify the plenitude of papal power were not satisfied with proofs drawn from the New Testament, the Fathers, and Canon Law; they pointed again and again to the significant and similar role of Moses as leader, lawgiver, and priest of the Israelites. While this interpretation was not new, it placed nevertheless a stronger emphasis on his place in history. No longer was Moses simply the liberator of the Jews and the founder of Judaism as well as an important *typus Christi*. To all those concerned

who had been studying the works of Philo and in particular his *Life of Moses* since 1428, completed in his later years the *Commentarium de Sacerdotio Christi*, printed in Florence in 1479 and in Rome in 1480, dedicated to Sixtus IV and showing the typological connection between Moses, Christ and the Pope.²³

4. The Pazzi Conspiracy: Lorenzo the Magnificent as the new Dathan against Sixtus IV the new Moses

In the *Florentine Histories*, the Pope della Rovere is indicated by Machiavelli as the first example of papal centaur, who was able to hide under his supreme sacral authority a very earthly nepotistic logic, interpreted as “natural” development of the recognised temporal prerogatives of the Pope.²⁴ Florence – governed by the *de facto* signory of Lorenzo de’ Medici and intent on preserving its power and extending it as far as possible – was the polemical target of the expansionist and nepotistic aims of Sixtus IV, allied with Federico di Montefeltro and the King of Naples Ferrante I, inspiring with them the bloody Pazzi Conspiracy (26 April 1478). Having killed Giuliano, Lorenzo survived and, after having suppressed the revolt with ferocity by executing the archbishop of Pisa, Francesco Salviati, he had to face – both ideologically and militarily – the attack of the Pope and his allies, who invaded Tuscany. On the brink of dis-

themselves with defining the functions of the Pope as absolute head of the Church and supreme ruler he was what we may call a *typus papae*. It is precisely for this reason that we find him figuring so prominently on the walls of the papal palace chapel, but in no other work of art of the same period” (Ettlinger, *The Sistine Chapel*, 115). See Marco Rizzi, “Plenitudo potestatis”: dalla teologia politica alla teoria dello stato assoluto”, *Annali di Storia moderna e contemporanea* 16 (2010): 153-164, which insists on the very high theological-political significance of the figure of Moses in the Sistine frescoes, emphasising the coincidence in the pontiff of the model of Moses, who was also a political-military “leader” and not only a spiritual-religious one, and his triple function of priest, king and legislator.

²³ See Francesco Filelfo, *Commentarium de Sacerdotio Christi* (1476), *Vat lat.* 3654, fol. 3v: “*Ut Moses populo Iudaeorum et regem sese et sacerdotem et legumlatorem secundum Philonem Iudaeum praestitit quasi Christi praenuntius quidam, ita Ihesus universo humano generi ad salutem et pro sacerdote et pro legumlatore et pro vero atque summo rege se habendum colendumque demonstravit*”. See Jeroen De Keyser, “The Poet and the Pope. Francesco Filelfo’s Common Cause with Sixtus IV”, *Schede Umanistiche* 26 (2012): 43-65.

²⁴ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Istorie Fiorentine*, in *Opere storiche*, ed. by Gian Mario Anselmi, Alessandro Montevecchi, Carlo Varotti (Roma: Salerno, 2010), vol. 1, VII, 22: “Fu questo pontefice il primo che cominciasse a mostrare quanto uno pontefice poteva, e come molte cose, chiamate per lo adietro errori, si potevano sotto la pontificale autorità nascondere. Aveva intra la sua famiglia Pietro e Girolamo, i quali, secondo che ciascuno credeva, erano suoi figliuoli; non di manco sotto altri più onesti nomi gli palliava. Piero, perché era frate, condusse alla dignità del cardinalato, del titolo di San Sisto; a Girolamo dette la città di Furlì, e tolsela ad Antonio Ordelaffi, i maggiori del quale erano di quella città stati lungo tempo principi. Questo modo di procedere ambizioso lo fece più dai principi di Italia stimare”.

aster, after secret negotiations and a trip to Naples (1479-1480), Lorenzo managed to obtain a separate peace with Ferrante I (March 1480), then the pardon of Florence by Sixtus IV, while the terror of the Turks spread after the Ottoman conquest of Otranto. The ideological war between Florence and Rome broke out during the attack and the start of military hostilities (1478-1479) saw Lorenzo trying to convene, with the help of his French ally, a council to depose the Pope as simoniacal and morally unworthy. The main documents of the conflict are the three anti-Laurentian bulls of Sixtus IV of June 1478;²⁵ the *Florentina Synodus* (August 1478), aimed at convincing the king of France to convene a council to depose the simoniac and criminal Sixtus IV, «*diabuli vicarius*»,²⁶ written on behalf of Lorenzo by Gentile Becchi, bishop of Arezzo and his intimate; finally, the *Dissentio inter Sanctissimum dominum nostrum Papam et Florentinos suborta*,²⁷ an anti-Florentine text produced in the Roman curia in the autumn of 1478 – the proposal of Daniels, who attributes it to the curial and great humanist Bartolomeo Sacchi “Platina”,²⁸ appears to be unconvincing –, later printed and disseminated beyond the Alps, testifying to its theological-political relevance.

²⁵ See Tobias Daniels, *La congiura dei Pazzi: i documenti del conflitto fra Lorenzo de’ Medici e Sisto IV. Le bolle di scomunica, la “Florentina Synodus”, e la “Dissentio” insorta tra la Santità del Padre e i Fiorentini*, (Firenze: Edizioni Firenze, 2013); then, Id., “The Sistine Chapel and the Image of Sixtus IV: Considerations in the Light of the Pazzi Conspiracy”, in *Congiure e conflitti*, 275-299. The three bulls are: *Ineffabilis et summi patris providentia*, published on 1 June, 1478, 105-112; *Inter cetera, quorum nos cura sollicitat*, published on 22 June, 1478, 115-116; *Ad apostolice dignitatis auctoritatem*, published on 22 June, 1478, 117-120. For a very intelligent and documented reconstruction of the Conspiracy, see Marcello Simonetta, *L’enigma Montefeltro. Intrighi di corte dalla congiura dei Pazzi alla Cappella Sistina* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2008, 2017²). For the Florentine reactions to the Conspiracy, in particular Poliziano’s account and the *Florentina Synodus*, and their historical context, an indispensable study is that of Marcello Simonetta, *Introduction and Notes to the texts of Angelo Poliziano and Gentile Becchi, La congiura della verità* (Napoli: La scuola di Pitagora editrice, 2012), 11-53; the volume includes the Latin text and Italian translation.

²⁶ Becchi, *Florentina Synodus*, in *La congiura della verità*, 90-168, in part. 92c. I quote the conclusive statement: «Ad alterum igitur lumen, ipsum scilicet Cesarem semper Augustum confugiemus; id enim Dominus, ut huic nocti preesset creavit; Chrystianissimum Francorum Regem, in cuius tutela Chrysti Ecclesia est, sub cuius alarum umbra populus Florentinus semper protectus est, invocabimus; omnes Principes et populos Chrystianos implorabimus, ut quando iam vident symoniace creatum Pontificem, templa, Cardinales et Missas ad homicidia fidelium exercere, Concilium ad quod appellavimus amplius non differant: sponsum illius, in cuius sanguine baptizati sunt, a tanta turpitudine liberent: dicimus Ecclesie, ut qui Ecclesia sunt, per Evangelium quod ita precipit, nos obdurato huic inauditos audiant. Dolenter, et eo impellente, id facimus». (cap. XIX, 162).

²⁷ The full text can be found in Daniels, *La congiura dei Pazzi*, 162-174.

²⁸ See Maria Grazia Blasio, “La controversia pubblicistica dopo la Congiura dei Pazzi e una difficile attribuzione”, *Roma nel Rinascimento* (2014): 53-58, in part. 57. Blasio, an authority in the field of Platina studies, argues that historiography, and Daniels in particular, has attributed an excessive role to Platina in the inspiration of iconographic programmes, and raises doubts about the attribution of the *Dissentio* to him.

Well, in the texts of Roman origin, «Old Testament characters and events are archetypal models, as demonstrated by Sixtus IV's continuous identification with David, Solomon and Moses».²⁹ Indeed, in his bull *Ad apostolice dignitatis auctoritatem* (22 June 1478), Sixtus IV proclaimed the interdict on Florence, condemning the tyrannical, impious Lorenzo de' Medici and his entire regime «*ea maledictione, qua maledicti fuerunt Chora, Dathan et Abiron, et Judas Scarioth traditor redemptoris nostri Jhesu Christi*».³⁰ Above all, the *Dissentio*, which invokes a series of biblical figures to interpret the theological-political conflict between Sixtus IV and the impious Lorenzo de' Medici, concludes with a solemn reference to Moses as *typus papae*. This precedes the immediate, terrible punishment of Core, Dathan, Abiron, asking God that the earth open to swallow Lorenzo and his entourage:

Nunc vero, ut malignus Florentinis illis in suspicionem incidit, quorum vita plurimorum labore sue beatitudinis subsistit, tu, qui Moysi locutus es in monte Synai, et tuae tunc vocis auctorem esse voluisti, et prodigiorum autorem, que in illo loco fecisti, et ad Egyptum properare iussisti, et his tuam innotescere voluntatem, qui Egyptiorum novisti felicitatem, et a servitutis vinculo eos liberasti Moysique Pharaonis potestatem demonstrasti, et in terram nescientibus itinera Iudeis pelagus convertisti, permixtumque mare Egyptiorum nece conturbasti, qui nudis armorum munimina contulisti, qui corruptos fontes nimis exitantibus potabiles fecisti, potumque Iudeis ex lapidibus produxisti, qui a terrenis cibis inopes maritimis satiasti, qui etiam cibum celestem primitus non inspectum prebuiisti, qui sacrarum legum cardines in lucem educens iudaice reipublice ordinem demonstrasti: Veni, Domine, omnium iuste iudex et verus testis, ad quem suffragia ulla non redimunt [...] Ostende nunc, quantum tua providentia omnia gubernantur, et nihil fortuito, sed tue voluntatis interpositione, proveniunt ad effectum, et quoniam humani generis geris curam, vindica Laurentii in vicarium tuum iniurias et eius complices, de insensibilitate illum contemnentis, quasi sua videatur arte compressi. Fac itaque apertum super ipsos iudicium descendere, sic contra gloriam sevientes, nec eos solito mortis genere et conditione e mundo migrari gaudere concedas, sed ut eos simul et generationem et omnem substantiam terra, quam conculcant, absorbent.³¹

Is it possible that the statesman Machiavelli did not know this text of violent condemnation of Florence launched by Sixtus IV against the father of Leo X? Indeed, in the *Florentine Histories* Machiavelli explicitly refers to the interdict and curse of the Florentines:

Since in Florence there had not been the change in government which the Pope and King Ferdinand wished, they determined that what they had been unable to do by conspiracy they would do by war [...] in

order that in addition to temporal wounds the Florentines should also feel spiritual ones, the Pope excommunicated and cursed them.³²

The exaltation of the pope as the new Moses and the curse of Core, Dathan and Abiron were therefore perfectly familiar to Machiavelli, who only twenty years later would become secretary of the second chancery. The three bulls of excommunication of Sixtus IV and the *Dissentio* were, in fact, politically burning and decisive documents for the history of the republic and the Medici family. They were precedents that could not be ignored when, in 1511, Machiavelli was engaged as secretary in a new violent theological-political conflict between Rome and Florence. During this conflict, under the threat of a new papal invasion, the convocation of a council to depose the reigning pope and the definition of international alliances vital to the survival of the republic will be called into question again.

5. The theocratic iconography of the Sistine Chapel, the new Temple of Solomon

Only by considering these historical and textual antecedents, from the *Moyses vir Dei* proclaimed at the Council of Florence to the war between Sixtus IV and Lorenzo the Magnificent, is it possible to fully appreciate the ideological significance of the construction of the Sistine Chapel as a new Solomon's Temple³³ and the sumptuous decoration of its side frescoes (1473-1481). Heart of the Roman papacy, the frescoes were promoted by Sixtus IV and aimed at exalting the supreme power of the pontiff, through the figurative dialectic that shows the symbolic correspondence between the life of Moses and that of Christ, the pope becoming their living synthesis. The construction of the Sistine Chapel determined, by resolving a historical relationship of rivalry,³⁴ the symbolic displacement of the new, true Temple of God from the *Basilica del Santissimo Salvatore e dei Santi Giovanni Evangelista e Giovanni Battista* [= *San Giovanni*] (where the relics of the skulls of Peter and Paul were kept) to the *Basilica di San Pietro*,

²⁹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The History of Florence (=Istorie Fiorentine)*, VIII,10, in Id., *The Chief Works and Others*, tr. Allan Gilbert, 3 vols. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989⁵), 1025-1435.

³⁰ See Eugenio Battisti, "Il significato simbolico della Cappella Sistina", *Commentari* 8 (1957): 96-104; Maurizio Calvesi, *Le arti in Vaticano* (Milano: Fabbri, 1980), 58; Maria Cristina Fortunati, "La Cappella Sistina e l'eredità del Tempio di Salomone. Per una nuova ipotesi interpretativa circa gli archi costantiniani negli affreschi sistini", *Humanitas* 57 (2002): 620-641; more generally, see Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*, 222-225 (the chapter «Solomon and the Temple»).

³¹ See the interesting essay by Umberto Longo, "Dimensione locale e aspirazioni universali a Roma nel XII secolo: San Giovanni in Laterano come santuario e l'eredità dell'Antica Alleanza", in *Expériences religieuses et chemins de perfection dans l'Occident médiéval. Études offertes à André Vauchez par ses élèves*, ed. by Dominique Rigaux, Daniel Russo and Catherine Vincent (Paris: De Boccard, 2012), 121-137.

²⁹ Daniels, *La congiura dei Pazzi*, 91.

³⁰ Sisto IV, *Ad apostolice dignitatis auctoritatem*, 119; see 101-103.

³¹ *Dissentio*, 174.

built over the tomb of St. Peter. A very important document of the complex papal ideological construction is the *Descriptio Ecclesiae Lateranensis*,³⁵ summarised in the famous *Tabula Magna Lateranensis* (late 13th century). It is currently placed inside the *Basilica di San Giovanni* near the Sacristy, although Leo X himself had it placed behind the high altar, testifying to the very high symbolic value he attributed to the relics kept there. Indeed, the interior of *San Giovanni* and the nearby *Sancta Sanctorum* were believed to contain not only the most holy relics of the Gospels (the ampullae with the blood and water from the side of Jesus on the cross; a fragment of his cradle; Christ's seamless robe and cloak; his shroud), but also the most important relics of the Temple of Jerusalem, transported to Rome after its destruction by Vespasian and Titus, then transferred to *San Giovanni* by Constantine. They included the ark of the covenant with the two tablets of the Law inside; the Staff Moses used to draw water from the rock; Aaron's staff that miraculously blossomed; the golden thurible filled with incense; a golden urn with the desert manna; the Menorah, carried in triumph together with the table for the propitiation bread and the sacred vessels from a bas-relief in the Arch of Titus in Rome.³⁶ The most important of these relics

was supposedly kept under the high altar, where only the pontiff (the new High Priest who alone could have access to the new *Sancta Sanctorum*) could celebrate, together with wooden parts of the table of the Last Supper. In the sacred heart of papal Rome, under the altar that incorporated the table of the Last Supper, the staff of Moses that brought forth water from the rock and a sacred jar with manna from the desert, two of the four miraculous signs recalled by Machiavelli in *Princ XXVI* (dependent on Paul, 1 *Corinthians* 10:1-3), were thought to be preserved. The altar of *San Giovanni in Laterano*, therefore, eucharistically locates the Pauline *retractatio* of the great Mosaic miracles and the entire Old Covenant in the divine presence of Christ.

It is therefore understood that the pictorial Mosaic cycle commissioned by Sixtus IV, reaffirming the passing of the theocratic primacy from Moses to the Roman pontiff vicar of Christ, *transferred* the relics of the Temple of Jerusalem to the Vatican. The inscription on the two triumphal arches in Perugino's fresco, *Cristo consegna le chiavi a San Pietro*, confirms this: «*Imensv[m] Salomo[n]/ Templvm Tv / Hoc Quarte / Sacrasti // Sixte/ Opibvs / Dispar Religione / Prior*». The new Solomon's Temple is no longer the Lateran, but precisely the Vatican, whose Sistine Chapel is the new *Sancta Sanctorum*. Among the Sistine frescoes, Sandro Botticelli's *La punizione dei ribelli Core, Dathan e Abiron* (1480-1482) is ideologically fundamental since it is placed in front of *La consegna delle chiavi*. It depicts the golden thurible of Aaron with the papal triregnum (symbol of the pope's three theological-political, hence also temporal prerogatives: «*pater principum et regum, rector mundi, vicarius Christi in terra*») and Moses with his miraculous staff (reproduced twice, perhaps with a reference to Aaron's flowering staff), a sign of the divine origin of power, transmitted to the pope and reaffirmed through the annihilation of those who deny its supreme religious and political authority.³⁷

³⁵ See Longo, *Dimensione locale e aspirazioni universali*, 123-126. Between the mid-11th and mid-12th centuries, starting from the statements of Pier Damiani, Eugene III, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Nicholas Maniacutia, summarised in the *Descriptio ecclesiae lateranensis* (which has come down to us in three redactions, dating from around 1073 to 1181), there is an exaltation of the pope as *rex et sacerdos* and of the Lateran as the new Temple of God, which takes away the Ark of the Covenant and the entire Mosaic symbolism in its altar. «Il testo elenca le reliquie eccezionali che giustificano il fatto che la basilica *caput est mundi*; viene affermato infatti che nell'altare maggiore si trova addirittura l'Arca dell'Alleanza: et eiusdem ecclesiae ara principalis est arca foederis Domini [...] In altari vero, quod superius est ligneum de argento coopertum, atque sub eo inferius, est tale sanctuarium: septem candelabra, quae fuerunt in priori tabernaculo. [...] et mensa, et propositio panum, quae dicitur sancta; et aureum turibulum, et urna aurea habens manna, quod habuit secundum tabernaculum, quod dicitur sancta sanctorum. Et ibi virga Aaron, quae fronderat, et tabulae Testamenti; et virga Moysi, qua percussit silicem, et fluxerunt aquae» (125 and note 14).

³⁶ See the news reported by Onofrio Panvino: *De praecipvis Urbis Romae sanctoribusque basilicis, quas Septem ecclesias vulgo uocant Liber* (Roma: Blado, 1570), 146-147: «Multae & pene infinitae reliquiae sunt tam in hac ecclesia Lateranensi, quam in Patriarchio. In basilica autem inter multas hae sunt praecipue. Arca foederis, Candelabrum, Mensa, Propositio panum, quae dicitur Sancta, Aureum turibulum, Vrna habens manna, Virga Aaron, quae fronderat, Tabulae testamenti, Virga Moysi quae percusso silice aquae manarunt»; and 148: «Sub isto nempe altari est arca foederis: in qua sunt duae tabulae Testamenti: Virga Moysi & Virga Aaron. Est ibi Candelabrum aureum, & Thuribulum aureum thymiamate plenum: et urna aurea plena Manna. Item de panibus propositionum. Hanc autem arcam cum candelabro, & his quae dicta sunt, cum quattuor praesentibus columnis Titus & Vespasianus a Iudaeis asportari fecerunt de Hierosolyma ad Urbem». Panvino's account stems from the above-mentioned *Descriptio* and the section of the text of the *Tabula Magna Lateranensis*: «Sub isto nempe altari est Arca foederis in qua sunt duae Tabulae testamenti, virga Moysi & virga Aaron. Est ibi candelabrum aureum & turibulum aureum thymiamate plenum & urna aurea plena manna & de panibus propositionum. Hanc autem Arcam cum candelabro & hiis quae dicta sunt cum quattuor presenti-

bus columnis Titus & Vespasianus a Iudaeis asportari fecerunt Hierosolyma ad Urbem sicut usque hodie cernitur in triumphali fornice qui est iuxta Ecclesiam Sancte Marie Nove ad victoriam & perpetuum monumentum eorum a Senatu Populoque Romano positum». See Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier, "Michelangelo's Ignudi, and the Sistine Chapel as a Symbol of Law and Justice", *Artibus et Historiae* 17/34 (1996): 19-43, in part. 30-31. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1483521>. The author recalls the existence of «a tradition still alive in the Cinquecento that attributed the founding of Rome to Moses» (31) or to Solomon (see 41, note 90).

³⁷ See Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*, 201-221 (the chapter «Moses, *typus papae*»). In reconstructing sources and symbolism of the Sistine side frescoes, he points out: «Moses is presented as a *typus Christi*. It is noteworthy, however, that neither Moses nor Christ are presented primarily as miracle-workers. Rather they are shown as establishing the fundamental laws, the governing order, and the priestly powers of the religious community [...] As Vicars of Christ and the traits of the popes painted in the zone above the wall frescoes testify to the transmittal through time of the regal and sacerdotal powers of Moses and Christ. The wall decoration of the Sistine Chapel thus forms a coherent whole: the religious careers of Moses and Christ and the portraits of the early popes testify to the divine foundation and historical continuity of the *primatus papae* as the fundamental principle of God's sovereign plan for the salvation of mankind» (209). For a partial



Fig. 1. Sandro Botticelli, *Punishment of Korah, Dathan and Abiron* (1481-1482). Sistine Chapel, Rome



Fig. 2. Sandro Botticelli, *The Trials of Moses* (1481-1482). Sistine Chapel, Rome

forestatement of Stinger's work, see Ettlinger, *The Sistine Chapel*; in the wake of Stinger, Ottavia Niccoli, *La vita religiosa nell'Italia moderna* (Firenze: Carocci, 1998; Roma: 2008³), 83-91; Anne Leader, "Michelangelo's "Last Judgment": the Culmination of Papal Propaganda in The Sistine Chapel", *Studies in Iconography* 27 (2006): 103-156, in part. 131-132. On the burning references to the historical reality of the papacy of Sixtus IV and the Pazzi conspiracy, particularly in reference to Botticelli's fresco, see Heinrich W. Pfeiffer, *La Sestina svelata. Iconografia di un capolavoro* (Città del Vaticano-Milano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana-Jaca Book, 2007), 41-47; Simonetta, *L'enigma Montefeltro*, 233-239; Rona Goffen, "Friar Sixtus IV and the Sistine Chapel", *Renaissance Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (1986): 218-

262. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2862115>: while the analysis of the centrality of the figure of Moses here is effective, the underlying thesis in this last essay seems to me rather forced, since it ends up subordinating the absolutely primary purpose of the exaltation of the papal theological-political primacy to the exaltation of the order of the Conventual minors, whose general minister had been Francesco della Rovere. Finally, I would like to mention the remarkable synthesis by Niccolò Brandodoro, "Noster Moyses papa. Una metafora teologico-politica nel conflitto fra Sisto IV e i Medici", *De Medio Aevo* 12, no. 2 (2023): 301-312, *El papa, nuevo Moisés*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5209/dmae.89159>.

On the triumphal arch of Botticelli's fresco, there is a quotation from the *Letter to the Hebrews* 5:4, in an anti-Conciliarist perspective and exaltation of the absolute papal primacy: «*Nemo sibi assumat honorem nisi vocatus a Deo tanquam Aron*», text referring to the episode of Core, Dathan and Abiron.

6. Two rival Moses: Savonarola versus Alexander VI

Paradoxically, as mentioned above, the identification between the pope and Moses is confirmed *sub contraria specie* by Alexander VI's most violent, ambitious and stubborn opponent, perfectly known to Machiavelli, who devoted the greatest attention and critical admiration to him.³⁸ As I have dealt with this elsewhere,³⁹ I will limit myself here to recalling again the last, dramatic homiletic cycle of the Dominican friar committed to being recognised as an eschatological-Messianic figure, making Florence the new Jerusalem chosen by God. The *Sermons on Exodus* were delivered first in Santa Maria del Fiore, then in San Marco, between 11 February and 18 March 1498. In them, the Dominican had explicitly identified himself with Moses the true prophet and liberator of the chosen people,⁴⁰ opposing himself to the perverse Pharaoh, then to «the Egyptian», identified with the reigning pope Alexander VI. Thus, the Savonarolian claim to “replace” the papal Moses with the prophetic Mo-

ses is quite evident. Machiavelli heard at least two of these sermons from the living voice of the Friar: *Sermons* VI and VII, delivered on 2 and 3 March. He punctually reports on both in his famous *Letter of 9 March 1498*, his first political document that has come down to us.⁴¹ Almost certainly Machiavelli followed other sermons, unmissable because of their burning political decisiveness. However, the *Sermons on Exodus* were immediately printed by the Piagnoni, before the publication of the complete cycle in 1505/1508. The opposition between the losing *unarmed prophet* Savonarola and the winning *armed prophet* Moses, central to *Princ* VI, was thus known to him as the opposition between Savonarola and Alexander VI.

7. Julius II new Moses against the schismatic conciliabulum of Pisa

We have mentioned above the crisis of the so-called Pisa conciliabulum, supported by Louis XII, the involvement of Florence and the violent reaction of Julius II. Already in the bull *Extensio constitutionis a Pio II editae contra appellantes a Romano Pontifice ad futurum concilium, eorumque complices et fautores* (1 July 1509), the pontiff at war identifies himself with the new Moses. In line with Eugene IV, he declares that without papal authorisation, cardinals and clergymen who convene or participate in a council, being schismatics, are condemned to «*cum Dathan et Abiron partem et damnationem habere*».⁴² The very solemn *Indictio sacri Oecumenici Concilii Lateranensis Quinti et damnatio conciliabuli Pisani*, proclaimed on 19 April 1512, identifies the cardinals promoting the Pisa “conciliabulum” with the Levites of *Numbers* 16:1-35. It counterposes the papal «*plentudo potestatis*», heir to that of Moses and Aaron, to the «*schismatica conventicula synagogae Satanae et Ecclesiae malignantium per Dathan et Abiron*».⁴³ It is not surprising, then, to find in the “anti-Pisan” works of the Dominican general Thomas de Vio

³⁸ «Del Savonarola Machiavelli non era né seguace né “amico”, né, come oggi si direbbe, simpatizzante. Ma proprio perché, avversandone l'azione e non condividendone il pensiero, ne avvertiva la singolarità e l'importanza, tanto più ne studiava e ne meditava (e per tutta la vita seguirà a studiarne e meditarne) le opere» (Gennaro Sasso, *De aeternitate mundi* (Discorsi, II,5), in *Machiavelli e gli antichi e altri saggi*, I [Milano-Napoli: Ricciardi, 1987], 167-399, in part. 359); and among these, in particular, he read and meditated several times the *Sermons* (366). On the profound impact of Savonarola's preaching and political practice on some of Machiavelli's most difficult theses, see Alison Brown, “Savonarola, Machiavelli and Moses: a Changing Model?”, in *Florence and Italy. Renaissance Studies in Honor of Nicolai Rubinstein*, ed. by Peter Denley and Caroline Elam (London: Westfield College – University of London, 1988), 57-72, in part. 62-65: from Savonarola, Machiavelli would take the exemplary value of Moses as an armed prophet; the necessity of resorting to merciful cruelty, as opposed to cruel piety, because it is politically harmful; the legitimacy of «killing the sons of Brutus» if one aims at «a free state»; the pragmatic ability to adapt one's policy to changing fortunes; the intuition of the key-role of the orientation of public opinion in the political struggle. On the centrality of the confrontation with Savonarola throughout *Princ*, see John T. Scott, “The Fortune of Machiavelli's Unarmed Prophet”, *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 2 (2018): 615-629. DOI: [10.1086/696992](https://doi.org/10.1086/696992).

³⁹ See Gaetano Lettieri, “Lo «spiraculo» di Machiavelli e «le mandragole» di Savonarola. Due misconosciute metafore cristologico-politiche”, *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* 87, no. 1 (2022): 285-321.

⁴⁰ The homiletic cycle is characterised by the identification of the figure of Moses and that of Girolamo (Gian Carlo Garfagnini, *Girolamo Savonarola e il movimento savonaroliano*, in *Storia della civiltà toscana. II. Il Rinascimento*, ed. by Michele Ciliberto [Firenze: Le Monnier, 2001], 451-476, then in Id., *Da Chartres a Firenze. Etica, politica e profetia fra XII e XV secolo* [Pisa: Edizione della Normale, 2016], 329-263, in part. 371 and 350).

⁴¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Lettera a un destinatario ignoto in Roma* [Ricciardo Becchi?] del 9 marzo 1498, in *Lettere*, n. 2, t. I, 14-21. The manuscript of the letter has no addressee, so it is merely a plausible hypothesis that the latter was Ricciardo Becchi. I recall that, until two months earlier, the anti-Savonarola Becchi had been the Florentine Republic's ambassador to the pope; see Michele Lodone, “Savonarola e Machiavelli: una nota su *Discorsi* I,11”, *Interpres* 30 (2011): 284-298, in part. 295-296; for a reconstruction of Becchi's positions, see Mario Martelli, *Machiavelli e Savonarola*, in *Savonarola. Democrazia Tirannide Profetia*, ed. by Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Firenze: Sismel/Edizioni del Galluzzo, 1998), 67-89, in part. 74-78. See the acute observations by Gennaro Maria Barbuto, *Machiavelli* (Roma: Salerno, 2013), 36-41. Also see Giuseppe Goisis, *Machiavelli e Savonarola: alcune considerazioni*, in *La filosofia politica di Machiavelli*, ed. by Giulio Maria Chiodi and Roberto Gatti (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2014), 149-158.

⁴² *Bullarium Romanum Diplomatum et Privilegiorum Sanctorum Romanorum Pontificum*, Torino, Dalmazzo, 1860, Tomus V, *Iulius II*, n. XXVII, 479-481, in part. § 6, 481.

⁴³ *Bullarium Romanum, Iulius II*, n. XXXIII, 499-509, in part. § 15, 504; see § 9, 503.

“Gaetanus”, Julius II’s trusted theologian and probable inspirer of the “anti”-Papal Council,⁴⁴ the reaffirmation of the theocratic primacy of the pope as vicar of Christ. «*Moyses dux populi*» is his figure, with the consequent condemnation of conciliarism and all enemies of papal absolutism presented as New Core, Dathan and Abiron.⁴⁵ As noted above, Gaetanus’s anti-conciliar treaty was certainly known to Machiavelli, who was instructed by the Florentine republic to follow the extremely dangerous Pisan crisis and remove the schismatic council from the territories subject to Florence, in order to avoid a new interdict or even a new military aggression by the pontifical Moses. The fact that the identification of the pontiff as the new Moses was known and widespread is also confirmed by popular literature, in particular the anti-papal pamphleteering. Similarly to what Savonarola had systematically proclaimed in his last sermon against Alexander VI, Julius II is condemned as «*sechondo pharaone*» in one of the sonnets printed and distributed among the population to greet the solemn entry into Bologna in 1512 of Cardinal Federico Sanseverino, one of the schismatic cardinals of the Pisan conciliabulum. In a mirror-image reversal, the anti-papal alliance centred in France, militarily irresistible, was propagandistically exalted as the heir to Roman warlike virtue and as capable of sustaining a council of radical reform, hailed as a new *Moses* called by providence to reform Christ’s divine kingdom («per riformar di Christo il divo regno»), thus to lead the church out of its *Egyptian captivity*.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ «In risposta al conciliabolo di Pisa, Giulio II, forse dietro suggerimento del generale dei Domenicani, Tommaso de Vio detto il “Caetano”, e del cardinale Antonio del Monte, decise a sua volta di convocare un concilio e di riunirlo in Laterano» (D. De Marchis, *Concilio Lateranense V (1512-1517)*, in *Storia dei concili ecumenici. Attori, canoni, eredità*, ed. by Onorato Bucci and Pierantonio Piatti [Roma: Città Nuova, 2014], 371-393, in part. 373).

⁴⁵ To the pope alone «spectat plena potestas supremi regiminis et assumptio illorum in partem sollicitudinis, ut patet Exodus XVIII [21-25], ubi Moyses dux populi ex consilio Iethro elegit et “constituit principes populi et millenos et centuriones et decanos”» (Tommaso De Vio Caietanus, *De comparatione auctoritatis Papae, & Concilii*, Roma 1511, then Mazocchi, Roma 1513, here cited in the edition of the *Opuscula Omnia* [Anversa: Keerbergium, 1612], Tomus I, 1a-9i, in part. cap. XIII, 9g); «Ex consequentibus vero ad esse extra fidem et Ecclesiam, multae afferi possunt auctoritates, dicentes ad statum extra fidem et Ecclesiam consequi: extra communionem fidelium, sine clavibus, sine potestate, sine honore, sine officio pascendi, oves fieri et esse. Procul a communione fidelium haereticos faciunt: imprimis Dominus Num XVI [26]: “Recedite, inquit, a tabernaculis impiorum”, Dathan scilicet et Abiron, schismaticorum. Constat enim omnes haereticos esse schismaticos» (cap. XVII, 11b). On the radicality of Gaetanus’s interpretation of papal primacy, which attributed to the pontiff and a council he approved the right to revoke conciliar decisions, then on his “negative” influence on Luther and his biblical fundamentalism as the only authentic criterion of ecclesiastical authority, see Nelson H. Minnich, “Luther, Cajetan, and *Pastor Aeternus* (1516) of Lateran V on Conciliar Authority”, *Bibliothek des Deutschen Historischen Instituts in Rom* 134 (2017): 187-204. On de Vio’s theocratic theory, see MacCarone, *Vicarius Christi*, 276-279.

⁴⁶ «Honora questo d’ogni laude degno/ Bologna dal pisan sinodo eletto./ Disposto a far di sé schutto chol pecto/ Per riformar di Christo il divo regno./ Chostui di forza d’animo e d’ingegno/ Harà la ghuerra vobate el suspeto/ rimosso e chonsequito eli usto effecto/ De trar quel

8. The orations of Giles of Viterbo, Thomas de Vio, Cristoforo Marcello at the Lateran Council V

The inaugural oration of the Lateran Council V delivered by Giles of Viterbo⁴⁷ is emblematic, considering the very high theological value of the opening text of the new, solemn conciliar proclamation of the papal primacy. Due to his spiritual depth, intellectual prominence and institutional authority, this Augustinian friar, prior general of the order and future cardinal, was a key figure of the Medicean pontificates. Exalting Julius II, victorious in war and capable of expanding the pontifical dominions (recovering from Venice territories already conquered by Cesare Borgia!), Giles compares him to Moses, who wins in battle only because he prays uninterruptedly.⁴⁸ Therefore, the pope draws his perfect dimension as the new Moses, spouse of the church and vicar of God on earth, capable of asserting himself as no other pontiff before him, in the convocation of the universal council, an instrument to annihilate the conciliarist heresy

tighre della sede indegno./ Urta frachassa nel chrudel nimicho/ col novo duce in arme un Scipione/ un altro Barbarossa el bon Fedricho./ L’è qui de Franza tiecho ogni barone/ non dubitar che Dio t’ha per amicho/ Strugi questo sechondo pharaone»; the sonnet is witnessed by Fiano Degli Ubaldini, *Cronica bolognese*, in Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna, ms 430, t. III (1492-1513), cc. 933v-934v, therefore highlighted and partially reported in Massimo Rospoche, *Il papa guerriero. Giulio II nello spazio pubblico europeo* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2015), 197.

⁴⁷ Egidio Antonini da Viterbo, *Oratio Prima Synodi Lateranensis habita* (3 maggio 1512), edited in Rome, Beplin, 1512 and in Nuremberg, Stuchs, 1512, with a short proemial epistle to Jacopo Sannazaro by Jacopo Sadoletto. The *Oratio* was reprinted in a collection edited by Antonio Maria Ciocchi del Monte, *Sa. Lateran. Concilium Novissimum, sub Julio et Leone celebratum* (Roma: Mazzocchi, 1521). The text has recently been republished in Egidio da Viterbo, *Orazioni per il Concilio Lateranense V* (Roma: Edizioni del Centro Culturale Agostiniano, 2012), 19-28; I will quote the pagination of this edition. The volume also collects the *Oratio habita post tertiam Concilii Lateranensis sessionem* (25 novembre 1512), 45-54; on this second oration, see Clare O’ Reilly, “Maximus Caesar et Pontifex Maximus”. Giles of Viterbo proclaims the alliance between Emperor Maximilian I and Pope Julius II”, in *Augustiniana* 22 (1971): 80-117, with the edition of the text on pages 100-112.

⁴⁸ «Ad quae si Synodi opera redibimus, ut armis non nostris inferiores aliquo hoste fuimus, ita nostris erimus omni hoste superiores. Veniat queso in mentem Mosis bellum, quod adversus Amalech regem gessit, videbis populum Deo charum gladiis fidentem vinci semper, contra semper vincere precibus supplicentem. Iosue exercitum in praelium ducebat, Aaron sacerdos cum Hur ac Mose montem ascendebant. Illi armato corpore ferebantur in hostem, hii Deum purgato animo praecabantur. Illi ensibus, hii votis agebant; illi ferro hii pietate pugnabant. Vidimus utraque arma, militiae scilicet ac religionis, sed iam quae nostra sint Deo rem ostendente cognoscamus. Dum Moses, inquit, manus attollebat noster vincebat exercitus, dum manus remittebat exercitus inclinabat (see Exodus 17,8-13). Ac (ne casu id factum suspicemur) in calce sermonis illius scribitur adversus Amalech, hoc est, in Ecclesiae hostem, Dei manum ac bellum esse in generatione et generationem (see Es 17,16). Quibus quidem verbis monet Deus utranque generationem atque utranque Ecclesiam, et Mosis et Christi, militiae armis vinci; pietatis studio vincere; superati telis decertando, sacra faciendo superare» (Egidio da Viterbo, *Oratio prima*, 25-26). Although the church only wins through faith and piety, these determine, if authentic, military and secular affirmation.

and reform the church. Julius II, in fact, is openly defined as «*maximus*» for secular glory and exalted because he was able to «*militiae (quod nemo antehac potuit) Ecclesiae arma magnis regibus metuenda facere*». ⁴⁹ Analogously, in the second oration held by Giles at the Lateran Council on 25 November 1512, dedicated to celebrating the signing of the agreement between Julius II and the Emperor Maximilian of Habsburg and to setting up an anti-Turkish army, ⁵⁰ the identification of the pope with Moses is once again central. Just as in Moses' description of the divine *Fiat lux* in the *Genesis*, Julius II, by summoning the Council, immediately dispelled the darkness that had enveloped the Church and Italy after the defeat of Ravenna. He has subdued the Council of Pisa, put the enemy armies to flight, and triumphed over the Egyptian Pharaoh, defeated by the piety and power of God, through his vicar, rather than by arms: «*Vicit Moses [...] Aegyptio Pharaone obruto*». ⁵¹ Note how, albeit “spiritualised”, the metaphor of the divine *Fiat lux*, hence of the conversion of darkness into light, is nonetheless attributed to Moses figure of the pope, the inspired author of the creation account and legislator of every earthly order. In fact, Giles comments, it is precisely God's creation from nothing that explains the mystery of a history providentially converted, by God's grace, from disaster to salvific liberation, which thus turns out to be a “catastrophe” of true *renovatio*:

Ea mihi nunc attigisse satis fuerit quibus significem anni huius incommoda, quae gravissima fuere, atque alia omnia non evertendi generis humani sed instaurandi gratia divinitus immitti. Verum enimvero instaurari omnia oportet eisdem ex quibus constant initiis. Initia vero condendi orbis diebus quibusdam complexus est Moses [...] Quamobrem et in rebus humanis instaurandis quibusdam velut diebus mundi natali similibus uti consentaneum est. At vero quemadmodum et Achademia, omnis et tam vetus quam nova lex consentit, omnis animorum instauratio, cuius gratia vivendum est homini, in eo vel praecipue sita est ut sese a tenebris vindicent et ad suum totis (ut aiunt) nervis assurgant et observandum et contuendum solem [...] Eisdem hos dies post noctem acceptae hoc anno cladis enarrabimus. Utque tunc natura rerum post aeternam noctem hos accepit dies, ita Ecclesia hoc anno post Ravennatis calamitatis tenebras totidem sibi illuxisse dies vidit. Etenim accepto acerbissimo nuntio nox omnium occupavit mentes, ac plus quam credi posset, animi omnium prope concidere. Unus tamen Iulius Pontifex Maximus firmissime suae arboris memor nunquam cessit oneri, nunquam concidit. Is Dei Optimi Maximi, cuius locum obtinet, esempla sectatus, “Fiat – inquit – lux” (Gen 1,3). ⁵²

⁴⁹ Egidio da Viterbo, *Oratio prima*, 24 and 25.

⁵⁰ See John W. O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform. A Study in Renaissance Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 176-178.

⁵¹ Egidio da Viterbo, *Oratio habita post tertiam Concilii Lateranensis sessionem*, 46-48.

⁵² Egidio da Viterbo, *Oratio habita post tertiam Concilii Lateranensis sessionem*, 46. Giles marks the passage from the darkness of the defeat of Ravenna to the light of Julius II's triumph, with the French

The biblical commonplace of the providential ability to transform the darkness of despair into the light of un hoped-for redemption, obviously retracted in the Christological dialectic between “exodus” in death and resurrection, finds one of its most relevant outcomes in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Ecclesiastical History*. He is the interpreter of the miraculous turning point of Constantine, that brought divine light into the world, freeing Christianity from persecution and the world from idolatry. ⁵³ The defeat of Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge is compared to the disaster of the Egyptian cavalry swept from the Red Sea thanks to God's intervention and Moses' mediation. ⁵⁴ Beginning with Julius II, this commonplace was widely revived ⁵⁵ (think of the fresco of the Constantinian victory and the drowning of Maxentius and his cavalry at Ponte Milvio in the Vatican Raphael Rooms, commissioned by Leo X in 1517 and realised by Raphael's pupils between 1520 and 1524), and was certainly also influential on *Princ XXVI*. Of course, the exaltation of the ontological and revelatory role of the Roman pontiff, a saviour charged with converting the world from darkness to light and being the universal mediator of order, becomes in Machiavelli a secularising metaphor of a merely earthly redeemer, of a familiar *princeps*, called to a limited and ephemeral power, albeit supported by the at least ideologically supreme power of the reigning pope.

The *Oratio De Ecclesia & Sinodorum differentia* delivered in June 1512 by Thomas de Vio at the second session of the Council is of great importance, for the relevance of its author's theological inspiration of Julius II in the conflict with the Pisan conciliabulum, and thus for the recapitulation of the theocratic doctrines proclaimed by Lateran V. ⁵⁶ Having restored the unique, indivisible «*respublica christiana*» as the heavenly Jerusalem descending from heaven (cf. *Revelation of John* 21), being the mystical body of Christ the Son of God, de Vio interprets the pontiff as the sole «*summus princeps et vicarius Christi*», hence «*caput*» of the historically congregated mystical body. ⁵⁷ Thanks to Eugene IV and the proclamation of papal supremacy at the Council of Florence, the Council of Pisa, a biased, sectarian and violent initiative, heir to the schismatic attempts repressed first at Constance, then at Basel, cannot boast of descending from heaven. On the contrary, it reveals its demonic

army retreating from Italy, in one week, showing the providential work of divine recreation *ex nihilo* of history.

⁵³ See Eusebio di Cesarea, *Storia ecclesiastica*, X,1,2-7; X,8,19-9,8.

⁵⁴ See Eusebio di Cesarea, *Storia ecclesiastica*, IX,9,1-11.

⁵⁵ Egidio da Viterbo, *Oratio habita post tertiam Concilii Lateranensis sessionem*, 46.

⁵⁶ Tommaso De Vio, “Caietanus”, *De Ecclesia & Synodorum differentia coram Iulio II in secunda sessione Concilii Lateranensis. 17 Calen. Iunii, Anno 1512*, in *Opuscula Omnia*, Tomus III, Tract. I, *De sex orationibus Romae habitis*, in part. *Oratio VI*, 139r-141v.

⁵⁷ «Nam sicut in Hierusalem illa quae in coelis est mater nostra, vnus tantum Dominus est Iesus Christus, ita in hac Hierusalem illius filia, quae Christi sanguine irrigata & matris est illustrata splendoribus, vnus tantum princeps est vicarius Christi, & Pontifex maximus» (140g).

and Babelic nature, attested by the metaphor of the ruinous fall, which once again recalls that of Moses' Levites plunged into hell.⁵⁸ Bernard's exegesis of the two swords of *Luke 22:38*⁵⁹ is, therefore, aimed at affirming the «*gladium*», i.e. both spiritual and temporal power in the hands of the pontiff, thus intended to justify Julius II's victorious war both on a military level (albeit through the defeat suffered at Ravenna), and on an ecclesiastical level.⁶⁰ The pontiff, in fact, «*summus princeps & caput omnium*», imitates both

⁵⁸ «Non igitur Pisarum synodus, synodus Hierusalem est, sed ciuitas ac turris Babel potius: quae in terra Sennaar confusionem fecit, & concordiam aedificantium disiecit [...] Quid enim tam nouum & inusitatum ac mirabile est, quam esse qui conentur efficere, vt miles duci, & filius patri, domino seruus impediret, oues pastori; denique pedes & caetera membra capiti [...] Eam, vero, quae a superiorum imitatio prolapse in praecipua, ab illis deflectit viam, non vtiq; de coelo descendisse, quin potius ab inferis ascendisse iudicabimus. Hoc quando ita se haber, non descendit de coelo [...] non descendit, inquam, sed ruit [...] Haec itaque nunc Pisana nouitas Constantiae tunc ortum habuit, & euanuit, Basileae repullulauit, & explosa est, atque his etiam temporibus (si vos viri eritis) interibit, quemadmodum sub Eugenio IV [...] Longe igitur ab hac Christi Pisarum ecclesia discrepat, haec enim fidelium est, illa cauillantium, haec domesticorum Dei, illa aberrantium, haec Christianorum hominum, illa vero eorum, qui Christi vestem conscindere, & a mystico Christi corpore mystica Christi membra seiungere non verentur» (Tommaso De Vio, *Oratio De Ecclesia & Sinodorum differentia*, 140g; 140h-i).

⁵⁹ See Bernardo di Chiaravalle, *De consideratione ad Eugenium papam* (1149-1152 circa), in *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, ed. by Jean Leclercq and Henri Rochais, Tomo III (Roma: Editiones Cistercienses, 1963), 393-493, in part. IV, III, 6, 454, ll. 11-14: «*Uturque ergo Ecclesiae, et spiritualis scilicet gladius, et materialis, sed is quidem pro Ecclesia, ille vero et ab Ecclesia exercendus. Ille sacerdotis, is militis manu, sed sane ad nutum sacerdotis et iussu imperatoris*». On the impressive and inconsistent theological-political tradition that branches off from this interpretation, see the remarkable volume by Melissa Giannetta, *Il potere che interpreta. L'eco dell'esegesi dei due gladii di Bernardo di Clairvaux nel pensiero politico dei secoli XIV-XVII* (Napoli: Guida, 2022). Unfortunately, the volume investigates from Bernard to the «autumn of the Middle Ages» (Ockham, Marsilio, Wyclif) and then jumps to Bellarmine, actually neglecting the 15th and 16th centuries.

⁶⁰ «Summum principem & caput omnium appellamus: Te, Pater beatissime, obsecro atque obtestor (tua enim post Deum maxima est potestas, tuum est imperium, tua reipublicae gubernatio, Christianae fidei defensio) obsecro inquam & obtestor, hoc omni studio cures atque efficias, vt haec synodus Lateranensis per te congregata, quemadmodum ecclesia qua refert, de coelo descendit vti Ioannes vidit [see Revelation 21], ita cum illa rursus ascendat in coelum, hoc enim uniuersi totis deuotisque animis deprecamur. Assequetur autem hoc te volente, teque imperante, si tu ipse pater sancte, omnipotentis Dei cuius vices in terris non solum honore dignitatis, sed etiam studio voluntatis gerere debes potentiam, perfectionem, sapientiamque imitaberis: Atqui vt in primis potentiam imiteris, accingere, Pater sancte, gladio tuo, tuo inquam accingere, binos enim habes, alterum tibi reliquisque huius mundi principibus communem, alterum tibi proprium, atque ita tuum, vt illum alius nemo nisi a te habere possit. Hoc itaque gladio tuo qui ecclesiasticae potestatis est accingere potentissime, & accingere super femur tuum, id est, super vniuersas humani generis potestates. Cumque accinctus fueris, tum intende contra errores, contra haereses, contra dissensiones, denique contra inferni portas, errorum, haeresum, & dissensionum auctores, nec intende solum, sed etiam procede & regna. Procede in primis, & prospere procede, gentes quae bella volunt dissipando, tum regna sacerdos & rex quae pacis sunt cogitando, inquirendo, persequendo. Is namque idem quem imitare debes, & Rex regum est, pacisq; princeps & Dominus dominantium rexque pacificus». (Tommaso De Vio, *Oratio De Ecclesia & Sinodorum differentia*, 141a-c),

the regal/warlike aspect of Christ king of kings, indeed supreme *princeps*, and the peaceful, hence merciful aspect of the Redeemer, head of the mystical body of the church. Therefore, guided by the pontiff, its unique and universal historical «*caput*», the church is the *peregrine* Jerusalem. Contrary to the ruinous fall into hell of the Pisan conciliabulum that shattered in rebellion against the only salvific *caput*, the church ascends to heaven after having genetically descended from it.⁶¹

While Giles insists on the prophetic-religious, spiritual aspect, rather than the military feature of Moses-Julius II,⁶² and while Gaetanus focuses on the ecclesiological aspects that pit the true heavenly Jerusalem of the pontiff universal *caput* against the schismatic conventicles, the theocratic device, which presupposes the pontiff perfectly reuniting spiritual and temporal power in himself, is still the same: both the *auctoritas* of *princeps*, *caput*, legislator and military leader of Moses, and the *auctoritas* of High Priest of Aaron. To confirm this, we need to turn to another conciliar *Oratio*, that of Cristoforo Marcello, who was to become an intimate interlocutor of Clement VII, to see an exaltation of the tremendous pontiff as «*tantae reipublicae unicus atque supremus princeps [...], cui summa data potestas, ac diuinum inunctum imperium*».⁶³ Many passages in this *de*

⁶¹ «Sic namque hoc sacrosanctum Concilium in coelum ascendet, cum Catholica ecclesia quam refert, & quam Ioannes ciuitatem esse, sanctam esse Hierusalem nouamque esse, atque de coelo descendisse contemplatus est» (Tommaso De Vio, *Oratio De Ecclesia & Sinodorum differentia*, 141f-g).

⁶² However, immediately after the Sack of Rome, the “peaceful” Giles personally enlisted an army of 2,000 men to try to free Clement VII imprisoned in Castel Sant’Angelo; the initiative was never pursued.

⁶³ See Cristoforo Marcello, *In quarta Lateranensis Concilii sessione habita Oratio* (Roma: Mazzocchi), then in *Acta Conciliorum et epistolae decretales ac constitutiones summorum pontificum*, IX, Ab anno MCCCXXXVIII ad annum MDXLIX (Parigi: ex Typographia Regia, 1714), 1647-1651, in part. 1649-1651: «De opibus praeterea, de bello & pace debet agere princeps; eo quod si nullae sint opes, civitatem tutari non potest, neque bellum indicere, neque pacem servare, neque seipsum intra moenia custodire [...] Quemadmodum tu, Pater sancte, in tam iustissimo adversus potentissimos hostes suscepto bello ita gessisti, ut ardentissimos aestus, acerbissima frigora, noctes insomnes, adversas valetudines, omnia vitae incommoda, & fere mortem ipsam non tantum intrepide tuleris, sed quasi sponte tua obiectis [...] Ex quo omnis Italiae locus, omnis populus, omnis civitas, omnis respublica, omnes denique privatim & publice gaudent, jubitant, exsultant, teque omnis aevi, omnium saeculorum, omnium gentium principem & caput appellant [...] Cum igitur tantae reipublicae unicus atque supremus princeps fueris institutus, beatissime Pontifex, cui summa data potestas, ac diuinum inunctum imperium; tuum est, quemadmodum oppressam armis erexisti, amplificasti, ita moribus depravatam ecclesiam reformare, corrigere, illustrare [...] Ipsa vero respublica, ipsa ecclesia derelinquitur, & derelicta conqueritur, & languet, & plorat. Eam namque a nonnullis integritatem ejus lacerare volentibus angustiam videmus, mirum in modum cruciari [...] Vae mihi miserae & infelici [...] Terras & maria circuiui, & nullum praeter te, Juli Pontifex beatissime, qui me magis diligeret, dignitatemque meam & salutem magis curaret, inveni. Tua sub ditione defensa sum, protecta, mirum in modum aucta. Tuis viribus & auctoritate intestini cesserunt hostes, seditiosa turba recessit, a tyrannide liberata Italia. Ad te igitur supplex tamquam ad verum principem, protectorem, Petrum & sponsum accedo [...] Tu enim pastor, tu medicus, tu gubernator, tu cultor, tu denique alter Deus in

principe pontificio, exalting the warrior pontiff, military triumphant and liberator of Italy from the barbarians (where the pope's heroic front-line military efforts and progressive conquest of the cities of central Italy are extolled in the midst of the Council) resonate deeply with the biblical-providentialist form and political substance of *Princ XXVI*. In fact, the pontiff's «*virtus*» is exalted as the providential force capable of succouring and redeeming the «*respublica*» of the *patiens* church. The latter is languishing, derelict, prey to wolves disguised as lambs, but dominated by pride and *libido dominandi*. The schismatic cardinals of the Pisa Council are compared to centaurs and satyrs, and the overlap between the identity of the universal church and that of the Italian nation is revealing: «*Tuis viribus & auctoritate intestini cesserunt hostes, seditiosa turba recessit, a tyrannide liberata Italia*». ⁶⁴

9. The apotheosis of Julius II: papal supremacy and the freedom of Italy in the *Festa di Agone* in 1513

A historical fact of great importance is not sufficiently appreciated:⁶⁵ the masked triumph in honour of Julius II organised in Rome, two weeks before the pontiff's death, on the occasion of Carnival Shrove Thursday on 6 February 1513.⁶⁶ The exaltation of Julius II is both sacred and political: through a parade of allegorical floats that crosses Rome from Testaccio to Castel Sant'Angelo to arrive in Agone (Piazza Navona), the pope is celebrated as the military liberator of Italy. He is depicted as a new Moses/Aaron capable of crushing the Core revolt of the Pisa conciliabulus and raising the salvific bronze serpent (remember Michelangelo's fresco in the Sistine Chapel), after having annihilated the power of the Egyptians

terris. Adverte igitur, clementissime Pater, si sponsam tibi deditissimam amas, si justitiam, pietatem, modestiam, aliasque virtutes amplecteris; si velut es optimus ac praestantissimus princeps, ita principis artem & officium optime calles [...] Ad hoc enim is tibi a Deo concessus est principatus, ut totius Christianae reipublicae dignitas, salus, vita, libertas, omniaque fortunae bona tuae sapientiae & potestati sint credita».

⁶⁴ «Ipsa vero respublica, ipsa ecclesia derelinquitur, & derelicta conqueritur, & languet, & plorat. Eam namque a nonnullis integritatem ejus lacerare volentibus angere videmus, mirum in modum cruciari. Quam etiam penitus lacerassent, nisi tuis viribus obstitisses, invictissime Pontifex. Videmus multiformem centaurorum satyrorumque choream, qui reipublicae hujus formam quotidie immutata, alterant atque perturbant; qui seditiones parant, fovent, enutriunt. Videmus simulatores undique, sophistarumque sophistas, quos Dominus in evangelio rapaces lupos appellati, qui ovium vestimentis induti, quibusdam pietatis & religionis praestigiis mortales cunctos illudunt; in quibus omnis impietas & libido viget, ambitio, livor, rapacitas, tumor saevitia dominatur [...] Tuis viribus & auctoritate intestini cesserunt hostes, seditiosa turba recessit, a tyrannide liberata Italia» (Cristoforo Marcello, *Oratio*, 1650-1651).

⁶⁵ See Rospocher, *Il papa guerriero*, 162-163.

⁶⁶ The coeval celebration of the Medici triumphal carnival in Florence has been described in the first part of this study: Gaetano Lettieri, "Moses as Figure of the Pope. I. The Papal centaur in Machiavelli's *Prince*", *De Medio Aevo* 12, no. 2 (2023).

and thrown fire on the unholy schismatic priests and their perverse liturgies (the thurible). The procession celebrates Julius II as the new Moses/Aaron, *armed prophet*, king and high priest, exterminator of the impious "Core, Dathan, Abiron" burnt alive by divine fire. Julius' theological-political triumph also allows Rome to return to the imperial, artistic, cultural splendour of antiquity. For its relevance, it is appropriate to quote ample excerpts from Battista Stabellini's letter describing this veritable apotheosis of Julius II (the exact negative of the Erasmian *Iulius*), turning the testimony of an anonymous acquaintance of his to the Marquise Isabella Gonzaga.⁶⁷

Mosaic typology becomes, therefore, a public celebration, a ceremonial commonplace. The pontiff's magnetic power unites Mosaic with classical typology (Apollo the lightning bolt, the procession of Roman heroes), heralding the arrival of the Golden Age under the hegemony of Julius' pontificate. The eminently Roman triumphal procession of the conquered/liberated Italian cities as heresiologist is striking. Both the re-enactment of Ambrose the Heresiologist, the bishop at whose feet Emperor Theodosius had knelt to ask forgiveness, and the depiction of the Della Rovere's oak, with Julius II at the top and Emperor, King of France and King of England at his feet, are witnesses of the *primatus papae* also at the temporal level. The correspondence with the triumphant Medicean carnival is remarkable: we understand how natural it was for Machiavelli (as it will be for Vasari with his mistake regarding Pontormo) to reconfigure the Florentine celebration of the Medici in 1513 as a papal celebration, once Cardinal Giovanni became Leo X on 11 March. Imprisoned and tortured immediately after that carnival, amnestied precisely because of the election of the Medicean pope, as soon as the ex-secretary was free he began to write to Vettori to be "used" by the papacy and to conceive the *Princ*, the *enchiridion* of the new *armed prophet* «head of the redemption» of Italy: the papal and Medicean Moses of chapter XXVI corresponds to the

⁶⁷ Battista Stabellini, "Lettera alla Marchesa Isabella d'Este Gonzaga del 20 febbraio 1513", in *Federico Gonzaga ostaggio alla corte di Giulio II*, ed. by Alessandro Luzio, *Archivio della R. Società Romana di storia patria* 9 (1886): 509-583, in part. 577-582. Stabellini makes a copy of a letter he received from an acquaintance of his and sends it to the Marchesa Isabella Gonzaga. The letter describes the magnificence of the feast held in Rome that year, even more «superb» than the previous ones: chariots, armour, trophies; Moses holding a rod; Julius II celebrated as «*Pont. Max. Italia Liberatori et Scismatis Extinctori*». We also have a description of the Julian triumphal carnival of 1513 from an octave poem by Gian Jacopo Penni, *La magnifica et sumptuosa festa facta dalli S.R. per il carnouale MDXIII*, printed in 1514 in Rome and dedicated to Leo X: the text can be found in Alessandro Ademollo, *Alessandro VI, Giulio II e Leone X nel Carnevale di Roma. Documenti inediti (1499-1520)* (Firenze: C. Ademollo e c. Editori, 1886), 41-69. See Julian Klaczko, *Rome and the Renaissance. The Pontificate of Julius II* (New York-London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1903), the chapter «The last Carnival (feb. 1513)», 360-366; Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*, 216; 490-491; Raimondo Guarino, "Carnevale e festa civica nei ludi di Testaccio", *Roma moderna e contemporanea* 20, no. 2 (2012): 475-497, in part. 490-491.

warrior Moses, liberator of enslaved Italy and heir to Roman glory, of Julius II's triumphal parade.

10. Michelangelo's Moses figure of Julius II and his beard

As is well known, Michelangelo's grandiose Moses was sculpted for the tomb of Julius II, idealising the likeness of the venerable and terrible pontiff.⁶⁸ The placement of the pontiff's tomb in San Pietro in Vincoli reinforces the hypothesis that Michelangelo's statue was intended to celebrate, through the Hebrew *typos* of the vicar of Christ as the foundation of the Roman primacy, Julius as the new Christian Moses, celebrated by Aegidius of Viterbo himself at the opening of Lateran V. The Della Rovere pope had revealed himself to be, by divine grace and his own virtue, a religious and political leader, the liberator of the Church and Italy from schismatics and barbarians, the *princeps* of a providential redemption.⁶⁹ In

⁶⁸ «Contemporaries readily perceived in the second Della Rovere pontiff's martial leadership and fierce *terribilità* an identity with Moses, the liberator of the Chosen People from bondage. From its inception, a statue of the ancient Hebraic leader figured prominently in the plans for Julius's tomb, and it has frequently been suggested that Michelangelo's *Moses* with its tremendous inner dynamic force bears an idealized likeness to the warrior pope» (Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*, 217-218). For an acute analysis of the theological-political symbolism of the pope as a new Moses, capable of recapitulating in himself the source of all power, sacred as well as secular and imperial, in the perspective of a military liberation of Italy from the barbarians and of Jerusalem and Constantinople from the Turks, see Irving Lavin, "Michelangelo, Mosè e il "papa guerriero", in *Il ritratto nell'Europa del Cinquecento. Atti del Convegno (Firenze, 7-8 novembre 2002)*, ed. by Aldo Galli, Chiara Piccinini and Massimiliano Rossi (Firenze: Olschki, 2007), 199-215. Also see this interesting annotation by Brett Foster, "Types and Shadows". Uses of Moses in the Renaissance", in *Illuminating Moses. A History or Reception from Exodus to the Renaissance*, ed. by Jane Beal (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 353-406: «Moses' role as liberator endowed the location of Michelangelo's statue with typological syncretism: San Pietro in Vincoli was Julius II's titular church, but it is so called because it houses the chains by which Herod imprisoned St Peter. A medieval guidebook calls for a solemn massa annually, "and as Saint Peter was freed by the angel, so may the Roman people depart with blessing, freed from their sins» (398). Julius II, therefore, saw himself as a prisoner like Moses and Peter, and, at the same time, as *caput* and *princeps* liberator (from a spiritual, ecclesiastical, political and national point of view).

⁶⁹ Condivi and Vasari, illustrating Michelangelo's statue of the "Mosaic" Julius II, insist on his dimension as a political leader, describing him respectively as «duce and captain of the Hebrews», capable of «inducing love and terror at the same time», and «holy and most terrible prince» (Ascanio Condivi, *Vita di Michelangelo Buonarroti* [Firenze: SPES, 1998], 47-48). «Fini un Moisè di cinque braccia di marmo [...], avvenga che egli con gravissima attitudine sedendo, posa un braccio in su le tavole che egli tiene con una mano e con l'altra si tiene la barba [...]; et inoltra alla bellezza della faccia, che ha certo aria di vero santo e terribilissimo principe, pare che mentre lo guardi abbia voglia di chiederti il velo per coprirti la faccia, tanto splendida e tanto lucida appare altrui. Et ha sì bene ritratto nel marmo la divinità che Dio aveva messo nel sacratissimo volto di quello [...] che Moisè può più oggi che mai chiamarsi amico di Dio» (Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori et scultori italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri* [Firenze: Torrentino, 1550, then Torino: Einaudi, 1986], Vol. II, Terza Parte, «Michelange-



Fig. 3. Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Moses*. Tomb of Pope Julius II (1506-1516). San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome

Julius II not only the Jewish-Christian elective greatness is recapitulated, but also the greatness of Roman civilisation to which his name alluded. This is symbolised by his beard, recalling both the «Aaron's beard» of *Psalms* 132(133) – on which God sends down his blessing as precious oil, assuring life forever – and the beard that Julius, in imitation of Caesar, had grown as a sign of penitence and a desire for vengeance, determined to free Italy from the barbarians. It is precisely the beard, in fact, that attracts the greatest attention due to the extraordinary care given by Michelangelo in sculpting it. Moses' hands, whose fingers are engaged in intertwining with the beard, rather than being clasped on the tablets of the Law that he holds beside it, highlight its symbolic relevance.⁷⁰ It was therefore his *alter ego* Moses who

lo Buonarroti Fiorentino Pittore Scultore et Architetto», 880-914, in part. 890-891).

⁷⁰ On the symbolic value of Julius II's beard, see Mark J. Zucker, "Raphael and the Beard of Pope Julius II", *The Art Bulletin* 59, no. 4 (1977): 524-533. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3049707>: «Like Pope Julius, Julius Caesar was normally clean-shaven except on one occasion in his life. After a defeat of his soldiers, according to Suetonius [*De vita Caesarum, Divus Iulius*, 67,2], Caesar allowed his beard to grow as an expression of grief until they should be avenged» (527); «The elderly pontiff had begun [in 1510-1511] to grow a beard, which he retained as symbolic of his determination to drive the French from Italy [...] Giles of Viterbo, however, compared Julius's beard to Aaron's, and this high priestly identity seems uppermost in

watched over the pontiff's remains, represented reclining in a statue placed in the centre of the grandiose architecture of Michelangelo's tomb (albeit nowadays much scaled down): «the duce and captain of the Hebrews» («il duce e capitano degli Hebrei»), the «holy and most terrible prince» («santo e terribilissimo principe») eternalised the sacred dimension and temporal greatness of Julius, terrible duce of the Christian armies, liberator of Italy's new Israel, redeemer of the church from schismatic impiety.

11. The pope as new warrior Moses in the *Libellus ad Leonem X* by Querini and Giustiniani

The famous *libellus* delivered to Leo X by the Venetians Vincenzo Querini and Tommaso Giustiniani in July 1513 is considered a key text for appreciating the pre-Lutheran humanist and spiritual projects of Catholic reform.⁷¹ It re-proposes the symbolic identification between the pontiff and Moses and a reference to the divine *mirabilia* that favoured the victories of Israel. It is, however, within a fully theocratic and courtly perspective, and strongly characterised by the focus on the authentic military mission of the papacy *caput* of Christendom:⁷²

Cum enim per semetipsum possit Deus has impias gentes solo voluntatis eius nutu delere a facie universae terrae, ut tamen Tibi, et his, qui tecum in hac expeditione futuri sunt, aeternae vitae praemia, caelestisque felicitatis gloriam cumulatus tribuat, hanc Tibi, tuisque promerendae illius Beatitudinis viam aperuit, laboresque proponit, ut mercedem omni labore imparem suscipias. Meminit enim sublimitas tua, Sanctissime Pater, quoniam cum ad delendas Cananaeorum, et reliquorum Imperiorum gentes Moysem, atque Iosue post eum elegerit Dominus, omnes demum in eorum manibus tradidit. Nec Te latet, quae, et quanta mirabilia supra omne id, quod ab humano ingenio excogitari, humanisque viribus perfici potuisset, praestitit illis Deus, cui non erat difficile in magno, aut in parvo

numero vincere, cum unus ex illis mille hostium viros persequeretur, cum ad clamorem populi, clangoremque tubarum firmissima moenia dilaberentur, cum lapides de Caelo ad instar grandinis illos interficerent, qui manus militum Domini effugissent. Sed minime diffidendum est, quoniam si vero Dei zelo pia Tibi voluntas aderit, facultas Tibi a Domino deesse non poterit, quo auxiliante, etiamsi solus cum fratribus tuis inermis contra has impias gentes procederes, de victoria minime diffidendum esset.⁷³

Leo, new Moses, «*alius David*», «*Beatissime Pontifex, qui Christi vices geris in terris, dux, princeps et pastor*»,⁷⁴ is then called upon to emulate the great Leo I, whose name he chose to share, liberator of Rome, redeemer of Italy and “victor” of the Huns by the power of words alone.⁷⁵ But the reference to Joshua shows how weapons, armies, the slaughter “guaranteed” by God Himself (capable of raining down a shower of stones on Israel's enemies and a lesser army) are the necessary modality for the annihilation of all enemies («*huius gentis expugnatio, Mahumetanae penitus perfidiae destructio*»)⁷⁶ and the triumph of the true faith in the world. Indeed, although the pope is called upon to pacify the Christian powers, the *Libellus* insists on the need to wage a holy war against the Muslims, as well as a decisive policy of economic and social persecution against heretics and Jews.⁷⁷ In continuity with the theological-political primacy proclaimed by Pius II, the prospect of the crusade against the infidels at the same time allowed the papal temporal policy to be justified and a logic of infra-Christian pacification and holy war to be reaffirmed, events through which the *primatus papae* would be “concordantly” recognised.

Against enemies who do not convert, the call to arms and the courtly exaltation of Giuliano de' Medici, the pontiff's close associate and *alter ego*, *alter Leo*, hailed as the duce of the papal army ready for war and victory, are continuous.⁷⁸ This datum is his-

the Heliodorus fresco» (Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*, 220). On the identification between the end of the Renaissance and the sack of Rome, thus on the traumatic transition from the cultural splendour and expansionist ambitions of the Renaissance papacy to an era of penitence, see André Chastel, *The Sack of Rome* (Washington [D.C.]: Trustees of the National Gallery of Art, 1983), the interesting paragraph «The Pontiff's Beard», 184-188.

⁷¹ Within the huge bibliography, too often idealising in recognising the *Libellus* as a text of the highest spirituality and radical will to reform, without highlighting its belonging to the context of the Renaissance papacy, I will only refer to Giuseppe Alberigo, “Sul *Libellus ad Leonem X* degli eremiti camaldolesi Vincenzo Querini e Tommaso Giustiniani”, in *Humanisme et Église en Italie et en France méridionale: 15. siècle-milieu du 16. siècle*, ed. by Patrick Gilli (Roma: École Française de Rome, 2004), 349-359.

⁷² «Te enim vere hodie constituit Dominus super gentes, et Regna, super gentes scilicet universas, quae sub Caelo sunt, et super omnia Regna Mundi huius, ut tuo arbitrio evellas et destruas disperdas et dissipas, et aedifices et plantas» (Vincenzo Querini and Tommaso Giustiniani, *Libellus ad Leonem X* (1513), in «*Annales Camaldulenses*», vol. IX, (1755-77), 612-719, in part. 617).

⁷³ Querini and Giustiniani, *Libellus*, 633-634.

⁷⁴ Querini and Giustiniani, *Libellus*, 716 and 714.

⁷⁵ «Non enim oblitus es, quomodo saevissimum Christiani, Romanique nominis hostem, qui tam ingenti exercitu, furoris plenus, victoriis exultans ad desolandam Urbem procedebat, ille Sanctus Pontifex, cuius Tu Tibi nomen delegisti, inermis obvis procedens paucis verbis terruerit, frerit, superaverit, Urbem, Italiamque servaverit, captivos redemerit» (Querini and Giustiniani, *Libellus*, 634).

⁷⁶ Querini and Giustiniani, *Libellus*, 654.

⁷⁷ See the lucid essay by Serena Di Nepi, “Un'anticipazione del ghetto? Modelli di conversione e strategie di proselitismo nel *Libellus* del 1513”, in *Conversos, marrani e nuove comunità ebraiche in età moderna*, ed. by Myriam Sylvera (Firenze: Giuntina, 2015), 93-109.

⁷⁸ «Ille [God], qui nihil Tibi omnino ad haec magna, aliaque maiora conficienda deesse voluit, alterum Teipsum Tibi tribuit Iulianum, Maximum, magnanimum, vereque magnificum Fratrem tuum, quem nonnisi ad maxima huiuscemodi natum credimus. Hic enim cum et consilio, et rerum prudentia polleat, et animi fortitudine, atque incredibili virtute praestet, Fideique pietate ferveat, et nullos pro Religionis zelo labores suscipere, ulla pericula subire formidet; et ut virtutum eius, quae numerari per singula non possunt, summam paucis verbis concludamus, cum Tibi in omnibus persimilis sit, nihil aliud in hac vita optare videtur, quam Christiana arma contra impios Christi hostes primus omnium movere. Hic Tibi a Domino, qui cunc-

torically of the utmost importance: in 1513, just like the *Princ*, even the “spiritual” *Libellus* identifies in the virtuous and pious Giuliano de’ Medici (Machiavelli will replace him with Lorenzo in the final redemption of the treatise) the prince of providence, called to a languishing *respublica* redemptive war. The Medicean scion is exalted by the former secretary as «the head of the redemption of Italy» and by the *Libellus* as the head of the theological-political redemption of Christendom. In both cases, he is presented as the secular arm of the Leo X/Medicean lay prince dyad. Given the identification of the pontiff with Moses, that of Julian with Joshua follows quite naturally. Moreover, the providentialistic frenzy of the *Libellus* on the need not to postpone the call to spiritual and temporal arms is striking: in full harmony with the concluding exhortation of the *Princ*, this is the opportune time willed by God, the «*ocasio*» must be virtuously grasped, the extraordinary Mosaic «*mirabilia*» are recalled to spur the House of Medici to action. According to the *Libellus*, the family is capable of making Christianity triumph and has full freedom of “temporal” action in Italy, if aimed at such a high spiritual end!⁷⁹

Leo is, then, repeatedly invoked as *Medicus* of the languishing church, whose «*membra*» await «*salus*» from his institutional and charismatic «*caput*». ⁸⁰ With very precise metaphorical and theological-political correspondences with *Princ* XVIII and XXV, he is

ta Divina Sapiencia moderatur, praeparatus est, ut Tu a Beata illa Apostolorum Sede non discedens, neque pastorem Fidelium sollicitudinem relinquens, alterum Te habere possis, cui intrepide omnia, quae contra infideles illas nationes agenda decreveris, committere valeas, ut sic et Fideles Leonem Summum Pontificem in Apostolica Sede residentem habeant, et Infideles Leonem alterum Summi Pontificis Fratrem Iulianum, contra se exercitum ducentem, pugnantemque sentiant. Quae vero sit Viri illius praestantia, Tu Beatissime Pater, optime intellegis, scisque nihil omnino tam magnum, tam arduum committi Iuliano posse, quo ipse multo maior animi virtute, sapientia, et fortitudine non inveniatur. Tacemus Iulium religiosissimum, prudentissimumque virum consobrinum tuum, aliosque plurimos, quos Tibi paratos a Domino ad haec negotia perficienda Te cognoscere non dubitamus». (Querini and Giustiniani, *Libellus*, 652-653). Note how Giulio de’ Medici himself is envisaged, as an alternative to Giuliano, as the new Joshua, temporal and military arm of the pontiff.

⁷⁹ «Cum igitur ea omnia praeparata Tibi sint a Domino, quae ad hanc expeditionem optare Tibi potuisses, non est, cur minoribus Te occupari permittas, aut differre hoc maximum a Domino Tibi oblatum negotium patiaris. Et quamquam dici solet minime auferri, quod differtur; veritatem tamen illam Poetae sententiam credimus: semper scilicet nocuisse differre paratis. Nam cum saepe saepius opportuna se nobis offerat occasio, si in aliud tempus differatur, eam a nobis auferri videmus. Quando enim Tibi, ut cetera omnino taceamus, continget, armatos iamiam instructosque Christianorum omnium Principum exercitus habere, et hostes de Imperio inter se dissidentes invenire? Quoniam autem et Christianis pacem, quam citius fieri potest, Te reddere velle credimus, et has paratas Tibi a Domino occasionem nequaquam amittere: utcumque rebus Italiae compositis (nulla enim iniqua conditio est, qua nobis ad maiora, melioraque perficienda occasio praestatur) absque dilatione exercitus, Classesque Christianorum Principum contra impios hos Christianae Fidei, Christianaeque Libertatis hostes Te missurum iudicamus». (Querini and Giustiniani, *Libellus*, 653).

⁸⁰ See Querini and Giustiniani, *Libellus*, 656; 692; 708-710 (where it is also recommended that periodic councils be convened).

called upon to defend the «*respublica*» of his Flock by annihilating its wolves,⁸¹ awakening Christendom from a guilty idleness or from internal conflicts that prevent it from waging war and annihilating the infidels.⁸² Moreover, projecting *ad extra* the imperialistic will to power of the European «*principes*» fighting for the possession of Italy is indicated as a possible liberation of Italy from disagreements, wars, and therefore from foreign occupation⁸³ (in analogy with the Machiavellian interpretation of Roman power as expansive dynamism capable of mediating and converting internal social conflict into imperialistic greatness, compacting the state into unity). The more distant the experiences, values, and perspectives of the pious Camaldolese and the unscrupulous newly deposed Secretary are, the more the pragmatic convergences and shared providentialism of the perfectly coeval *Libellus* and *Princ* are impressive. In fact, they testify to the irresistible historical attraction of the theological-political magnetism of the Mosaic

⁸¹ «Et totum hoc Christianae Reipublicae corpus, quod languidum, infirmumque, et morti vicinum, Tibi, tamquam peritissimo Medico, a Domino commissum est, sanitati, salutique restitues, et antiqui decoris, et pulchritudinis eius stola ornatum ostendes» (Querini and Giustiniani, *Libellus*, 671); «Tu vero, Beatissime Pater, solus es, qui quasi peritissimus medicus a Domino ad familiam suam curandam vocatus, has a Christiana Tibi commissa Republica pestes amovere potes; et qui solus hos Christianae fidei hostes, quasi saevissimos intra Dominicum Tibi commissum ovile ab adversario immissos lupos, non sicut mercenarium fugere, sed debellare, et ad nihilum reducere debes, si veri, legitimeque Pastoris, non nomen tantum, sed munus in hac peregrinatione implere, et praemium in aeterna patria possidere desideras» (675); see 622; 625; 651; 664; 669-671.

⁸² Querini and Giustiniani, *Libellus*, 651: in a vibrant call for holy war against the infidels, Rhodes is cited as an example of courage and military virtue shown against the Turks, as opposed to the cowardly inertia and fratricidal hatred prevailing among Christians, «otio languescentes, aut impiis odiis sese invicem lacescentes, atque dilacerantes». See 636: «Christiana arma, quae huc usque in proprio sunt foedata sanguine, in propriis grassata visceribus, convertite in impiorum Fidei, Religionisque, ac Libertatis Christianae hostium caput; nulla enim alia ratione ad pacis condiciones suscipiendas commoti Christianorum Principum animi facilius inter se convenire poterunt, quam si, Te auctore, Te Duce contra infideles has pessimas nationes eorum rabies convertatur».

⁸³ «Si enim, Te admonente, quae sint Infidelium divitiae, Christiani milites, qui praedae cupiditate in nostrae Religionis populos saepissime grassantur: si quam ingentia sint eorum Imperia Christiani Principes, qui sola dilatandi Imperii ambitione Italiam alter alteri quam avidam rapere gestiunt, Te docente, cognoverint: ea animi alacritate haec contra impios Mahumetas bella aggredientur: ea strenuitate in illis exercebuntur, ut facilis, et cita innocuaque Christianis omnibus victoria sit futura. Congrega Tu modo Sapiencia, auctoritateque tua Christianos Principes, et quae in propriis visceribus convertenda iam paraverunt arma, illa eadem in saevas et Christiani Sanguinis sitibundas Belluas convertite. Nunc enim quando inter se dissident Infideles, et non modo gentes contra gentem, Rex contra Regem; sed et Frater contra Fratrem maximis odiis saevissima bella exercent, facilius Tibi victoria promittitur. Regnum enim in seipsum divisum, extraneo superveniente hoste, diutius stare non potest, sed facillime desolatur». (Querini and Giustiniani, *Libellus*, 636-637). «Et quamquam Christiani Principes omnes universum Italiae Imperium, aut ex animo optare, aut suasionibus quibusdam sperare videantur, si tamen ditiora, et ampliora Europae, Asiaeque Imperia ipsis proposueris, si huius sanctae expeditionis facilitatem declaraveris, nemini dubium esse posse credimus, hos omnes pacis, indutiarumque condiciones suscipere velle, et arma contra impios Fidei nostrae inimicos convertere». (672).

Medicean pontiff (the declared recipient of the first treatise and the last of the second), capable of acting in such different directions precisely because of the equivocal dimension of the Renaissance papacy. The fact that this occurs in both texts *in figura Moysis* shows how the *armed prophet* was universally, almost automatically recognised as a symbol of the pontiff. In the same Medicean and Roman Catholic orbit, the *Libellus* is the religious reverse of the secular faith of the *Princ*.

12. Rosso Fiorentino in Rome: Clement VII new Moses and new David

In his *Vite*, Giorgio Vasari praises the very high quality of two paintings by Rosso Fiorentino,⁸⁴ a painter welcomed and admired by Clement VII since 1524.⁸⁵ According to Vasari, one of these paintings was commissioned by Giovanni Bandini, a courtier, diplomat and man of arms in the service of the Medici, who was in close contact with Machiavelli and Filippo Strozzi (he was also a member of the Compagnia della Cazzuola). Bandini, as a matter of fact a) was one of the few owners of a manuscript of the *Discorsi*, as evidenced by a letter dated 1530ca. from Claudio Tolomei to Antonio Allegretti.⁸⁶ The latter was a humanist in the service of Giovanni Gaddi, dean of the Camera apostolica and promoter of the first printed edition of Machiavelli's major works in Rome by Blado (1531-1532). b) He collaborated closely with the author of the *Princ* during the Cognac War, as witnessed by the last Machiavellian document that has come down to us, co-written with Bandini and addressed from Civitavecchia to Francesco Guicciardini a couple of weeks after the sack of Rome. The document, which referred to talks with Andrea Doria, planned possible initiatives of the League's army to free the pope imprisoned in Castel Sant' Angelo.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ See Vasari, *Le vite*, Vol. II, Terza Parte, «Il Rosso», 744-761, in part. 751. Rosso is said to have a) painted for «Giovanni Bandini un quadro di alcuni ignudi bellissimi, storia di Mosè quando egli ammazza lo Egizio», almost certainly corresponding to the painting *Mosè difende le figlie di Jethro*, now in the Uffizi, and b) made another painting for «Giovanni Cavalcanti quando Iacob piglia 'l bere da quelle donne alla fonte». Of the latter, only a copy exists, in the Museo Nazionale in Pisa. It depicts Rebecca and Eliezer at the well. On its side, a stylised portrait can be glimpsed: according to Peluso, it would represent Clement VII.

⁸⁵ See Chastel, *The Sack of Rome*, chapter 5, «The «Clementine» Style», 149-178, which reconstructs the constitution in Rome, starting in 1524, of a new «elective» circle of Tuscan artists. Of this circle, Rosso Fiorentino and Parmigianino are Clement VII's favourite creative spearheads, notwithstanding the centrality of Sebastiano del Piombo; in part., on Rosso, see 149-151.

⁸⁶ «Hor potete a modo vostro dar fuore i discorsi del Macchiavello; la prima copia n'ha partorite de l'altre [...] Hanne una Francesco Bandini, Baccio Cavalcanti n'ha l'altra, M. Emilio Ferretto ha la terza» (Claudio Tolomei, «Lettera ad Antonio Allegretti, 1529-1530?», in *De le Lettere di M. Claudio Tolomei Lib. Sette* [Venezia: Gabriele Giolito de' Ferrari, 1547], Libro V, 150v).

⁸⁷ See Nicolò Machiavelli and Francesco Bandini, [*Missione presso Francesco Guicciardini del 22 maggio 1527*, in *Legazioni, Commissarie. Scritti di governo* (Roma: Salerno, 2011), 231-232.

No painting by Rosso Fiorentino dedicated to Moses slaying the Egyptian has reached us, although it cannot be excluded that it existed. Most scholars prefer to hypothesise a mistake by Vasari, who actually kept a confused memory of another mosaic painting now in the Uffizi. Some scholars consider the Uffizi painting to be a copy of Rosso's original, originally destined for France and now lost. It depicts *Mosè che sopprime gli assalitori delle figlie di Jethro* (see *Exodus* 2:16-22), a very rare iconographic theme. Nonetheless, the painting has a revealing antecedent in a scene from Botticelli's fresco *Prove di Mosè* in the Sistine Chapel, where it is painted alongside those of the killing of the Egyptian and the flight from Egypt. In an interesting essay, John Peluso⁸⁸ convincingly demonstrates that the painting, which seem to display reminiscences of the Laocönte and works by Botticelli, Michelangelo, and Giulio Romano in the Vatican, must have been painted in Rome around 1525 (Rosso's first presence in Rome is attested in April 1524). He also parallels it with another contemporary painting of Old Testament subject matter, *Rebecca ed Eliezer al pozzo* (see *Genesis* 24:10-54), corresponding to what Vasari indicated as *Giacobbe al pozzo* (see *Genesis* 29:1-14); only a copy of this last painting has come down to us and is now in the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, in Pisa. Peluso also proposes identifying the figure portrayed on the side of the well with an image of Clement VII. The overall interpretation put forward by Peluso of Rosso's two Roman works, datable to around 1525, would return them as an allegory of the triumph of the arts, despised by the barbarian Adrian VI, but exalted by the new pope Clement.⁸⁹ I find this hypothesis completely misleading, especially considering the very violent character of the depiction of Moses slaughtering the shepherds, as well as the traditional metaphorical dimension of the well as a nuptial place, present in both of Rosso's paintings. Now, the wedding at the well alludes to the salvific covenant. The episode of Moses defending the daughters of Jethro from the violence of the shepherds is the prerequisite for the marriage of the *armed prophet* with the Midianite Zippora/Sephora, who is already in the Sistine Chapel a symbol of the people chosen by Christ. Similarly, the scene of Eliezer quenched by Rachel is intended to prefigure his marriage to Jacob/Israel, probably depicted in the image painted on the side of the well in the likeness of Pope Clement.

I would also like to highlight a detail I consider relevant: it has been noted that Rosso's mosaic paint-

⁸⁸ See John F. Peluso, «Rosso Fiorentino's Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro and Its Pendant: Their Roman Provenance and Allegorical Symbolism», *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 29, no. 1 (1976): 87-106, in part. 103. Also see Graham Smith, «Moses and the Daughters of Jethro by Rosso Fiorentino», *Pantheon* 35 (1977): 198-204.

⁸⁹ «The «well-face», then, is most likely a glorification of the Pope. It symbolizes his role in artistic rebirth as a source of life-giving patronage, while eulogizing his role as reviver and generous patron of the arts in contrast to the austere policies of his predecessor, Adrian VI, which are allegorized in Rosso's Moses [in the shepherds slaughtered by Moses]» (Peluso, «Rosso Fiorentino's Moses», 105).

ing is dynamically centred on Moses' genitals, placing them in strong evidence, and unfortunately specifying that this would be proof of the subversive Florentine painter "berbesque ribaldry".⁹⁰ I believe, on the contrary, that the highlighting of the genitals obeys a highly recognisable encomiastic motif: the balls were the universally known symbol of the Medici, who often played on the sexual significance of the metaphor. In this case, Moses' balls are doubly symbolic, referring to the Medicean pontiff and his theological-political virility⁹¹ (let us return, then, to the possible encomiastic and protractorial motif of Julius II as a young man raping his fortune in *Princ XXV*, a papal exhortation to "show oneself virile", to "grow a pair"). Therefore, dating these two works to the years 1525-1526 and understanding their theological-political character allows us to advance the hypothesis that they make encomiastic reference to Clement VII as Moses/Jacob at a time of very serious historical crisis, the one following the imperial triumph at Pavia that determined the Medicean pope's decision to prepare for and eventually fight the war against Charles V. Hence, the defence of the fountain of living water (See *Gospel of John* 4:10-14) is by no means that of the arts and the fortunes of its worshippers. It is, in a more radical and profound sense, the theological-political reaffirmation of Clement VII as the only authentic vicar of Christ against the false shepherds: against the emperor intent on asserting his hegemony over Italy and the church, and against the Protestant heresy, the enemies of Zip-pora as a figure of Rome, the church and Italy.⁹²

The thesis of a theological-political significance of Rosso's painting has in fact been proposed by Vivien Gaston. Still dating Rosso's mosaic painting to 1523, Gaston does not link it to the epochal crisis that, after Pavia, would lead to the war between pope

and emperor. However, Gaston has the great merit of not only proposing the identification of Moses with Clement VII (the painting would have been painted to greet his election), but even hypothesising that the painting's encomiastic intention might depend, thanks to Bandini's mediation, on a Machiavellian inspiration. The pope would be called upon to "respond" to the invocation of *Princ XXVI*, the secularised heir of Savonarolian invocation.⁹³ Therefore, Rosso and the commissioner Bandini would call Clement VII to reveal himself as an *armed prophet* like Moses:⁹⁴ the warrior liberator and redeemer of Italy from the slavery of the new Pharaoh of Egypt.⁹⁵



Fig. 4. Giovan Battista di Jacopo, known as Rosso Fiorentino, *Moses defends Jethro's Daughters* (1525-1527). Uffizi Gallery, Florence

⁹⁰ «Rosso and Berni shared a deidealizing view of the more elevated claims of their artistic professions, in which inspiration gives place to an ironic self-vilifying character and gestures of parody (of Bembo, of Michelangelo) supplant more reverential forms of imitation. Much of Rosso's religious painting places the body in a sexual register, either facetiously or as a personal elaboration of corporeal symbolism. His *Moses and the Daughters of Jethro* is a dynamic composition centered on the genitals of Moses» (Stephen J. Campbell, "Fare una Cosa Morta Parer Viva": Michelangelo, Rosso, and the (Un)Divinity of Art", *The Art Bulletin* 84, no. 4 [2002]: 596-620. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177286>. See in part. 616, n. 34).

⁹¹ See the remarkable essays by Yvan Loskoutoff, "Le symbolisme des *Palle médicéennes à la Villa Madama*", *Journal des Savants* 2 (2001): 351-391, in part. 356-367; Robin O'Bryan, "The Medici Pope, curative Puns, and a Panacean Dwarf in the Sala di Costantino", *Southeastern College Art Conference Review* 16, no. 5 (2015): 590-606, in part. 598-599, in which the image of a dwarf displaying his showy genitals is analysed and interpreted as an apotropaic and encomiastic motif. He then recalls a passage from a letter of 9 August 1530 to Marco Contarini, alluding to the violent determination with which Clement VII would certainly suppress the Florentine republican revolt: «Li arrabbiati abasseranno il colo al suave jugo de le clementissime Palle; *aliter* gustarano qual sia el dolore de' testiculi» (605, n. 62). On the sphere illuminated by the sun and the motto «*candor illesus*» as the emblem of Clement VII, see Chastel, *The Sack of Rome*, 136-137.

⁹² «The well in both paintings is therefore symbolic as a source of "life-giving" water and a rebirth» (Peluso, "Rosso Fiorentino's Moses", 105).

⁹³ See in part. Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sull'Esodo*, VIII, I, 230-233, where Moses is praised for the «great blows» given to the «lukewarm» shepherds.

⁹⁴ «The "armed prophet" epitomizes the primary quality for which Savonarola and Philo praised Moses: bold action as opposed to "effeminate" passivity» (Vivien Gaston, "The Prophet Armed: Machiavelli, Savonarola, and Rosso Fiorentino's Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 51 [1988]: 220-225. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/751278>. In part., see 223).

⁹⁵ «It is possible that Rosso's depiction of Moses, dated 1523, had a further political significance: to celebrate Giulio de' Medici's election as Pope on 18 November 1523. Bandini was later to fight in the service of Clement and win great favour at the papal court [...] Significantly, in his exhortatory last chapter of *The Prince*, Machiavelli calls on the Medici family to make itself the leader of Italy's "redenzione" and compares its task with that of Moses [...] Rosso's disturbingly violent contribution transforms the heroic image of Moses in the light of this Machiavellian ideal, the obscure incident at Midian now demonstrating political as well as spiritual strength» (Gaston, "The Prophet Armed", 225 and n. 30).

Neither Peluso nor Gaston connect Rosso's two Old Testament paintings with another contemporary work, a minor one, yet possessing some of the highest symbolic poignancy: a drawing by Rosso (probably influenced by his friend Baccio Bandinelli's *Mercury*, sculpted for the courtyard of the Medici palace in Via Larga in Florence),⁹⁶ certainly executed in Rome between 1525 and 1526. It depicted Mercurio Argicida, reproduced in an engraving by Giovanni Giacomo Caraglio of which only a few prints exist today, and was published between 1528 and 1530, between Salamanca and Rome. In Rosso's drawing, Mercury plays two long Pan flutes, while the severed head of Argos lies at his feet, with the bloody *cruciform* sword that decapitated him by his side. In two excellent studies, Luba Freedman has contextualised Rosso's *Mercurius Argicida* drawing not only from the fortune of the "moralised" and christianised reinterpretation established by Berchorius/Bersuire up to the height of the Renaissance, but also in relation to Rosso's contacts with the curial humanist circles, in particular with the apostolic protonotary, great humanist and mythographer Lilio Gregorio Giraldi.⁹⁷

With great finesse, Freedman proves how the Christian biblical typology, which interprets Old Testament characters as Christ figures, was extended to pagan mythology as well, so that Mercury becomes a figure of David beheading Goliath, a figure of Christ slayer of the devil.⁹⁸ This is proven, in Rosso's draw-



Fig. 5. Giovan Battista di Jacopo, known as Rosso Fiorentino (engraver Giovanni Giacomo Caraglio), *Mercury*, 1525

⁹⁶ On the probable dependence of Rosso's image on Bandinelli's statue of Mercury, see Detlef Heikampf and Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi, *Baccio Bandinelli. Scultore e maestro (1493-1560)* (Firenze: Giunti, 2014), 292-293; I recall how Bandinelli's *Mercury* was commissioned by the Medici around 1515 to replace Donatello's bronze *David* in the courtyard of the palace on Via Larga, requisitioned by the anti-Medicean republic in 1494-1495, requested back by Cardinal Giulio after the Medici returned to Florence, but then left in Palazzo Vecchio; see Stefano Pierguidi, "Mercurio a Firenze: da Lastricati a Giambologna", *Ricerche di storia dell'arte*, 109 (2013): 67-86, in part. 72; Stefano Pierguidi, "Il Mercurio di Bandinelli al Louvre: una scultura per il cortile di palazzo Medici a Firenze", *Arte Documento* 28 (2012): 122-129.

⁹⁷ See Luba Freedman, "Argicida Mercurius" from Homer to Giraldi and from Greek Vases to Sansovino", *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 59/60 (2014-2015): 181-254; in part. The chapter 11, «Argicida Mercurius by Rosso and Giraldi», 230-240. «Giraldi's gloss on Mercury can certainly be used to cast further light on the genesis and meaning of Rosso's image of Mercury since both the print and the fundamental basis for Giraldi's studies were products of the same milieu: the Roman (and Florentine) studies of ancient texts and images that came together during the humanist-friendly pontificates of the Medici popes» (237). See Lelio Gregorio Giraldi, *De deis gentium varia et multiplex historia, in qua simul de eorum imaginibus et cognominibus agitur, ubi plurima etiam hactenus multis ignota explicantur, et pleraque clarius tractantur* (Basilea: Oporinus, 1548), in part. the «*Syntagma nonvm. De Mercurio*», 408-427. On the symbolic relevance of Mercury for the Medici ideological construction, it remains fundamental Sonja Brink, *Mercurius Mediceus: Studien zur panegyrischen Verwendung der Merkurgestalt im Florenz des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Worms: Worms Werner, 1987); however, her work should be deepened and systematised.

⁹⁸ «In 1340, the Benedictine Pierre Bersuire (Petrus Berchorius), a friend of Petrarch and author of the *Repertorium morale*, wrote a moralized Ovid to illustrate the use of myths for preachers. In it he described how Mercury, interpreted *in bono* rather than *in malo*, could be cast as a figure of Christ who saves the soul from the devil.

ing, by the cruciform sword and the shadow that emphasises its symbolism.⁹⁹ A fundamental role in this process of biblical appropriation of classical symbols would have been played in 15th century Florence by Donatello's mercurial David (commissioned by Cosimo the Elder): the prophet king and messiah, decapitator of Goliath, was in fact a favourite figure of the Medici, who superimposed it over that of Mercury, decapitator of Argos, protector of commerce and medicine, psychopomp god figure of Christ for Berchorius himself (think of Bandinelli's *Mercury*,

Once both the Old Testament and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were subjected to the *interpretation christiana*, David and Mercury could take their place as forerunners of Christ in the battle against Evil [...] Renaissance images of Mercury with the head of Argus at his feet show that the *all'antica* depiction of the pagan god was done in imitation of an *all'antica* depiction David as the biblical hero. The appropriation of the typologically related biblical figure indicated that Mercury could be perceived, at least from the time of Petrarch, as foreshadowing Christ [...] The discussed artworks attest to the humanists' inquiry into typological parallels between biblical and mythological events, which had led to shaping *alla moderna* the image of Mercury» (Luba Freedman, "Mercury à la David in Italian Renaissance Art", *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, serie 5, 3, no. 1 [2011]: 135-157, in part. 157).

⁹⁹ «The visible part of the sword casts a thin, cruciform shadow on the space before the niche. The effect was no doubt intentional – Il Rosso would have been aware of the long-standing Christian tradition of biblical typological exegesis, in which David's victory over Goliath was read as prefiguring Christ's victory over Devil» (Freedman, "Mercury à la David", 154-155).

commissioned by Giulio de' Medici, or that of Giambologna, but also of Cosimo's promotion of the study of the *Corpus hermeticum*). Recalling that the patron saints of the Medici family were Cosmas and Damian, two doctors martyred by beheading, it would be interesting to analyse the centrality of the beheaded martyr Saint Mercury. The latter is an *alter ego* of the risen Christ and slayer of the apostate emperor Julian, in Lorenzo il Magnifico's *Rappresentazione di san Giovanni e Paulo* (1490-1491), known to Machiavelli and quoted in the *Discourses*, rightly defined by Martelli as a «little treatise on the prince» («piccolo trattato de principè»).¹⁰⁰ Finally, I recall that a portrait of Machiavelli has even been attributed to Rosso Fiorentino.¹⁰¹

13. Argos, Io and Mercury/David: the Pasquinade of 25 April 1526

And yet, Luba Freedman in her historical treatment of the Mercury/David *typos* overlooks a very important historical fact: Rosso Fiorentino's works find a perfect chronological (1525-1526) and thematic correspondence with the traditional pontifical Pasquinade, celebrated every 25 April and institutionally dependent on a cardinal protector. On 25 April 1526, the ancient Roman statue “of Pasquino” – a mutilated marble block from the Roman period representing Menelaus lifting the dying Patroclus, on which to post poetic compositions praising the pope – was disguised as Argos and Io. This disguise happened under the protection of Cardinal Antonio Maria Ciocchi del Monte, Machiavelli's “old acquaintance” and right-hand man of Valentino and then of Julius II. The theme of this pasquinade of war is deliberately ambiguous, polemical: it pits the authentic Panopticus, the pontiff who guards the flock of the faithful, against the false Panopticus, the emperor who keeps Italy and the church “imprisoned”. The false one, however, will soon be defeated in war and beheaded by the Medici Mercury/David, in an obvious Roman exaltation of the identifying symbol of Florentine freedom, which has become the freedom of Italy and the church.

I recall how Niccolò Machiavelli (certainly in Rome at the time) also participated in this pontifical Pasquinade, which preceded the formalisation of the Holy League “of Cognac” (22 May 1526) by less than a month. Benedetto Varchi (in the service of Giovanni Gaddi and certainly one of the editors of

the printed works of Machiavelli) attributed a sonnet to Machiavelli and copied it onto the cartoon of one of his codexes around 1532: *Sappi ch'io non son Argo, quale io paio*. I have elsewhere suggested that it is also possible to attribute four other pasquinades to Machiavelli, one anonymous, three others transmitted in a collection by Casio de' Medici and that, moreover, Machiavelli may have been the creator of the masquerade of Pasquino.¹⁰² Clement VII/Mercury/David is now hailed as ready for war, which will soon cause the closing of the eyes/political blinding, then the beheading of Charles V/Argo/Golia. The divinely inspired true shepherd, the one and only sacred Moses, groom and guardian of the Christian flock represented by Io (image of the church, of Rome, but also of Francis I already prisoner of the emperor), will annihilate the false shepherd, impious supporter of the Lutheran protest for mere reasons of theological-political hegemony. Even in the Medicean Rome on the brink of a fatal war, where Machiavelli committed himself spasmodically to the pope's side, the papal magnet continued to attract biblical and mythological figures: not only the redeeming Moses of *Princ VI* and *XXVI*, but also the decapitating David of *Princ XIII*, capable of winning by resorting solely to his own weapons (of which the decapitating Valentine of Remirro de Orco was indicated as an example in *Princ VII*).



Fig. 6.. Benvenuto Cellini, coin commissioned by Clement VII (1527/1534). Front: *Clement VII*. Back: *Moses strikes the rock, Ut bibat populus*, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence

14. An encomiastic medal by Benvenuto Cellini: Clement VII in the figure of Moses

Despite the disaster of the anti-imperial war, the identification of the pontiff with Moses was immediately revived. A commission from Clement VII to Benvenuto Cellini, who recalls it in his *Vita*, is of great significance. I recall the pope's long-standing intimacy with Cellini, who during the Sack was among the defenders of Castel Sant'Angelo. From its

¹⁰⁰ See Mario Martelli, “Politica e religione nella Sacra Rappresentazione di Lorenzo de' Medici”, in *Mito e realtà del potere nel teatro: dall'antichità classica al Rinascimento*, ed. by Maria Chiabò and Federico Doglio (Roma: Nuova Coletti Editore, 1988), 189-216, in part. 208-209.

¹⁰¹ «Not only the patron [Bandini commissioner of the Rosso's *Mosè*] but also the artist may have been acquainted with Machiavelli, as indicated by a neglected portrait attributed to Rosso» (Gaston, “The Prophet Armed”, 225); the portrait in question is currently at Palazzo Strozzi in Florence.

¹⁰² See Gaetano Lettieri, “Nove tesi sull'ultimo Machiavelli”, in *Storia del cristianesimo e storia delle religioni. Omaggio a Giovanni Filoramo = Humanitas*, ed. by Rosa M. Parrinello 72, no. 5-6 (2017): 1034-1089, in part. 1081-1084.

terraces he had fired arquebus shots and, at least as we read in his self-celebrating *Vita*, shot dead Charles of Bourbon at the head of the Lansquenets. In 1534, after one of Cellini's recurring periods of eclipse of fortune due to his habitual acts of violence and even of murder, the pope forgave him and gave him audience, receiving some medals as gifts. The pontiff would then commission Cellini to engrave a medal issued in 1534 to celebrate the construction of St. Patrick's Well in Orvieto by the architect Antonio da Sangallo il Giovane (begun in 1527, the work would be completed in 1537). There are gold copies of this medal in the Vatican Museums, in the British Museum and two bronze copies in the National Museum in Florence. It has on the obverse a portrait of Clement VII, who grew the "penitential" and "warrior" beard of Julius II after the Sack. On the reverse Cellini engraved, at the explicit request of Clement VII, an image of Moses causing water to gush from the rock and the inscription «VT BIBAT POPULUS».¹⁰³ In Orvieto, the pope had taken refuge after having succeeded in escaping from Castel Sant'Angelo. The pope, then, remembered his exile where, by digging the famous well, he had been able to reactivate the miraculous mosaic sign, symbolising Israel's entry into the promised land. He could then return to Rome and guarantee the salvation of Christendom. The pope celebrated the resurrection of his power by relying on the figure of Moses, capable of transforming the abjection and crossing of the desert into glorification and entry into the holy land, hence into new sacred and political greatness. Note how the gushing of water from the rock struck by the staff of Moses/Aronne was one of the "eschatological" signs evoked by *Princ XXVI*, which Clement VII insisted on recalling as an inalienable pontifical ideological heritage even after the disaster of the Sack. A little over a month separates his death in Florence from Machiavelli's last writing, which with Giovanni Bandini informs Guicciardini of the pope imprisoned in Castel Sant'Angelo awaiting rescue. Moses, in short, returns to being the figure of the pontiff, therefore of God's chosen one, who, also thanks to the agreements with Charles V and his coronation in Bologna in 1530,

guarantees the salvation of his people and of Italy, as well as the dynastic fortune of a Medicean scion in Florence.

15. The Papal Moses in the Last Erasmus

The identification of the pope with Moses is surprisingly attested even by the author of the *Iulius*. In the late *De sarcienda ecclesiae Concordia* (1533), he solemnly condemns the Protestants as schismatics, resorting to the traditional example of the rebellious Core, Dathan and Abiron, who dared to divide the universal church and oppose Moses the figure of the pope, the only guarantee of unity in charity and the universality of the people of God.¹⁰⁴ Erasmus himself proudly recalls how the treatise had been highly appreciated by Clement VII and the great Cardinal Gaetanus¹⁰⁵. De Vio was a very authoritative anti-Lu-

¹⁰³ See Benvenuto Cellini, *La vita* [1558-1566], ed. by Guido Davico Bonino (Torino: Einaudi, 1973): «Mi disse che le medaglie erano bellissime, e che gli erano molto grate, e che harebbe voluto fare un altro rovescio a sua fantasia, se tal medaglia si poteva istampare con dua rovesci. Io dissi che si. Allora sua santità mi commesse che io facessi la storia di Moisè quando e' perquote la pietra, eh' e' n' escie l'acqua, con un motto sopra, il qual dicesi: *Vt bibat populus*» (chap. LXXI, 156); the episode was recalled by Benvenuto Cellini, *Trattato dell'oreficeria e della scultura* (Firenze: Panizzi e Peri, 1568), then ed. by Carlo Milanese (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1857), 118, where reference is made to a second medal with a portrait of Clement VII on one of its sides, «l'altro rovescio aveva figurato una Pace, cioè una figura bellissima con una facella in mano, che ardeva un monte di diverse armi, et a canto a questa vi era figurato il tempio di Jano con il Furore legato al tempio, con un motto di lettere all'interno, le qual dicevano: *Clauduntur belli portae*». Cf. Beth L. Holman, "For "Honor and Profit": Benvenuto Cellini's Medal of Clement VII and His Competition with Giovanni Bernardi", *Renaissance Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (2005): 512-575. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ren.2008.0732>.

¹⁰⁴ See Erasmus of Rotterdam, *De sarcienda ecclesiae Concordia=De amabili ecclesiae Concordia liber* (Basel: Froben, 1533), in ASD, V-III, ed. by Robert Stupperich (Amsterdam-Oxford: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1986), 258-313: «*Core, Dathan, Abiron et Hon conati sunt diuidere tabernaculum, quemadmodum heretici ac schismatici semper conati sunt ecclesias discindere; sed vt in illos praesens ira Dei desaeuit, ita qui moniti nolunt ab impiis sectis ac seditiosis conatibus respiscere, hos sine dubio manet gehennae incendium. Atque in simili rerum statu oportet [...] ab impiorum tabernaculis secedendum est, si non corpore, certe animorum dissensione; et si quid erroris per incogitantiam obrepsit, auscultemus Mosi et "moniti meliora sequamur": quo post exantlatos huius vitae labores, in monte Domini bibamus mustum "sempiternae laetitiae", et concorditer viuentes in tabernaculo Dei, quod est ecclesia, recipiamur in coeleste tabernaculum ecclesiae triumphantis [...] Contra impiorum, quoniam in religione ac fidei dogmatibus dissentiant, nullum est commune tabernaculum, sed impii cum impiis sic dissentiant, vt variis quidem modis ac nominibus, sed tamen pari impietate dissentiant a tabernaculo Dei [...] Horum tyrum gessit Dathan, Abiron et Hon. In suo quisque tabernaculo stabat paratus ad pugnam. Erant inter se diuisi, in hoc concordēs, vt Mosen expugnarent [...] Haereticorum autem dissidia figurabat Core, qui non recessit a tabernaculo Dei corpore, licet animo esset seiuunctissimus. Siquidem haeretici affectant videri verae religionis assertores, et quemadmodum ille conabatur Aaron a sacris submouere, ita isti persuadere conantur catholicae doctrinae sectatores esse tyrannos et hostes ecclesiae. Et quemadmodum vnusquisque haeresiaracha damat, "hic est Christus", non isthic, ita Core grex dicebat, "omnis multitudo sanctorum est", in ipsis est Dominus» (265-267, ll. 244-255; 273-276; 282-283; 286-294). See Ludovico Battista, "The Ambiguities of Erasmus' Religious Peace. A Reading of *De amabili ecclesiae concordia* (1533)", in *Narratives of Peace in Religious Discourses: Perspectives from Europe and the Mediterranean in the Early Modern Era*, ed. by Ludovico Battista, Maria Fallica, Beatrice Tramontano (Sheffield: Equinox, 2024). DOI: 10.1558/equinox.44439.*

¹⁰⁵ The event is recalled by Erasmus in *Epistola amicis lectoribus 20 februario 1536*, in *Opus epistolarum*, ed. by Percy Stafford Allen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941), t. XI, n. 3100, 287-290 = ed. Froben, 117-121, in part. 289 / 120-121: «*Cardinalis Caietanus aliquoties ad me scripsit; postremam illius epistolam his adiungere cupiebam, sed ad manus non venit. In litteris quas ad illum nouissimas dederam, questus sum de his qui libellum de Concordia mala fide tractarant. Eas Clemens pontifex legit. Libentius enim legunt ad alios quam ad ipsos scriptas, quod in illis credant esse plus veri. Rogauit, an eum libellum legisset. Ait. Ecquid probaret? Nihil, inquit, illic video mali. Eam vocem pontifex summa cum alacritate exceptit*». The missive in question is that of Erasmus, *Lettera a Tommaso de Vio del 23 luglio 1532*, in *Opus epistolarum*, t. X (1532-1534),

theran polemicist, and a little more than twenty years earlier he had been an apologist for the absolute papal primacy, then of the papal Moses against the conciliabule of Pisa, in a context in which Machiavelli carried out his very delicate diplomatic and theological-political mission between kings and cardinals. In short: in Erasmus we find the exaltation of the papal Moses, identified historically with the veteran of the lost war Clement VII and in reference to de Vio, the protagonist of the reaffirmation of the primacy of the Mosaic pontiff against the conciliabole of Pisa. This is a relevant sign of how in the magnetic orbit of the Medicean pontificate he and Machiavelli shared the same symbolism, albeit from a completely different interpretation of history and man, of Christianity and politics. Indeed, the Medicean orbit itself determined, as I have shown, an extraordinary alignment of planets, thus the dependence, mediated by Sadoletto, of Machiavelli's *Esortazione alla penitenza* (1525-1526) on the anti-Lutheran Erasmus' *De immensa Dei misericordia* (1524).¹⁰⁶

16. Conclusion: The "Machiavellian" Papal Brief of 6 June 1525

It has been shown how the commonplace of Moses *typus papae* characterised for a century the papal ideology and the history of relations between Rome and Florence. In fact, thanks to Cosimo de' Medici, Eugene IV was able to move the Papal Council from Ferrara to Florence, to pronounce his condemnation of the "resistant" Council of Basel with the bull *Moses vir Dei*; his nephew Lorenzo, victim with Giuliano of the Pazzi conspiracy, was the target of Sixtus IV/Moses redivivus's violent polemic against Florence, struck with the interdict and condemned to the fate of

Core, Dathan, Abiron, attested a few years later by the complex theocratic iconography of the Sistine Chapel; Savonarola identified himself as Moses, the new prophet of God sent to Florence for the liberation and redemption of Italy and the universal church, challenging Alexander VI, thus usurping the traditional typology of the papal Moses; identifying himself as the *armed prophet* liberator of the church and of Italy from the heretical barbarians, Julius II launched his curse against the Pisan conciliabulum, lashing out at Florence and, despite Machiavelli's diplomatic efforts, bringing about the fall of Soderini and the return of Giovanni de' Medici to Florence. As pope, he concluded that "universal" Council that the terrible papal Moses had convoked to reaffirm his absolute primacy in both the ecclesiastical and temporal spheres; the Florentine pope was hailed as the new Moses by Querini and Giustiniani's *Libellus*, that identified the first recipient of the coeval *Princ*, Julian, as the new powerful Joshua, called to lead the holy war against the infidels after having pacified Italy. Precisely because it was connected at root to the political and institutional history of Florence and to his own commitment as secretary of the republic, the typology of papal Moses could not be ignored by Machiavelli, nor by Clement VII, who embodied and promoted it; Erasmus himself recognised it.

Identifying such a coherent, hammering, ramified, pervasive attestation of the ideological symbolism of the papal Moses, capable of covering an entire century, leads us to believe that it was impossible for Machiavelli to neglect Moses' figurative value he was familiar with, in a work composed to be «used on behalf of Rome and the pontificate».¹⁰⁷ It is no coincidence that the dialectical example of Moses as an *armed prophet* is, in the *Princ*, immediately used to introduce the figure of Valentinus (*Princ* VII) «*instrumento*» of Alexander VI, i.e. the secular component of the Borgian pontifical centaur. It is employed, then, to open up the dialectic «prince of the church»/«prince» secular in the concluding *Exhortatio*, dedicated to the Medici «House», called to «make

n. 2690, 66-68. Even stronger are the expressions of favour from the cardinals and Clement VII attested by de Vio's secretary and close theological collaborator, Giovanni Danieli, *Lettera ad Erasmo del 16 maggio 1534*, in *Opus epistolarum*, t. X, n. 3100, 386: «Reverende mi domine, ambe epistole vestre fuerunt gratissime et cardinales et pontifici, et vterque est propensissime erga vos voluntatis. Et de cardinali quidem testificari possum ex visis et ab eo auditis, coram quo legi et litteras et libellum de amabili concordia. De Pontifice, cum hodie loquerer cardinales de negotio dicti libelli, inter cetera dixit mihi cardinalis, pontificem accuratissime perlegisse epistolam vestram ad cardinalem et exemplum illius alterius germanice, easque ei perplacuisse, et auditu testimonio cardinalis de libello totum exultasse et remansisse optime erga vos affectum». I recall how the *Epistola amicis lectoribus* closes the appendix of the humanist's last great work, still of an ecclesiological nature: Erasmus, *De Puritate Tabernaculi sivi Ecclesiae Christianae, cum alijs nonnullis lectu non indignis* [= *Enarratio Psalmi XIV*] (Basilea: Froben, 1536). In this appendix, Erasmus collects an anthology of letters exchanged with popes, cardinals, high prelates, the king of England, Charles V's chancellor Gattinara, and humanists, in which Erasmus' full loyalty to the Catholic Church is attested. In one of them, he comments ironically, but evidently pleased, on Paul III's proposal to make him a cardinal, which he declined for reasons related to age and health.

¹⁰⁶ See Lettieri, "Nove tesi sull'ultimo Machiavelli"; Gaetano Lettieri, "Machiavelli interprete antiluterano di Erasmo. L'*Esortazione alla penitenza* (1525) epitome del *De immensa Dei Misericordia* (1524)", *Giornale critico di storia delle idee* 2 (2017): 27-103.

¹⁰⁷ In addition to the above-mentioned *Lettera a Francesco Vettori del 16 aprile 1513*, in *Lettere*, n. 266, t. II, 927-932, in part. 931-932, cf. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Lettera a Francesco Vettori del 13 marzo 1513*, in *Lettere*, n. 221, t. II, 902-904, written immediately after release from prison: «Tenetemi, se è possibile, in memoria di Nostro Signore, che, se possibile, mi cominciasse a adoperare, o lui o' suoi, a qualche cosa, perché io credetti faro onore a voi e utile a me» (904); and of course the extraordinary *Lettera a Francesco Vettori del 10 dicembre 1513*, in *Lettere*, n. 242, t. II, 1067-1079: «Io ho ragionato con Filippo di questo mio opusculo, se gli era ben darlo o non lo dare; e, sendo ben darlo, se gli era bene che io lo portassi, o che io ve lo mandassi. El non lo dare mi faceva dubitare che da Giuliano e' non fussi, non ch'altro, letto, e che questo Ardinghelli si facessi onore di questa ultima mia fatica. El darlo mi faceva la necessità che mi caccia, perché io mi logoro, e lungo tempo non posso star così che io non diventi per povertà contennendo; appresso, el desiderio arei che questi signori Medici mi cominciassino adoperare, se dovessino cominciare a farmi voltolare un sasso» (1078). Decisive here is the restitution of the composition of the *Princ* as aimed at «being used» by the pontiff, who is obviously the last, decisive addressee of the treaty.

itself the head of this redemption», where the head is evidently two-faced. The recognition of the pontifical nature of Moses's figure reveals itself, then, as an important red thread that allows one to discern the peculiar ideological and encomiastic nature of the *Princ* as a secularising *enchiridion pontificis*. The pontiff is the theological-political magnet making pragmatically possible the secular politics of the Machiavellian prince, who spots the Renaissance papacy as the perfect context for deploying his subversive novelty in.

There is, however, a document of extraordinary historical value to appreciate how targeted and politically effective the *enchiridion* of the *Princ* had been, albeit some ten years later and with the second great Medicean pontiff. This is the Papal Brief of 6 June 1525, drafted by Jacopo Sadoletto, sent by Clement VII to Francesco Guicciardini and entrusted to Machiavelli himself as its bearer. In it, with expressions that echo *Princ* XXVI (the famous codex of the *Princ* of Carpentras was Sadoletto's property), the pope recommends welcoming his beloved Florentine son Machiavelli as the bearer of a proposal on which the salvation of Rome, of Italy, of the whole of Christendom would depend. This proposal was to organise an enlistment of the pope's *own army* in Romagna, with a view to the imminent anti-imperial war. The papal *enchiridion* of the *Princ*, summed up in the invitation

to equip themselves with the Davidic "dagger" of their own weapons to liberate Italy and make the Medici family great, was fully accepted by the pontiff, who sent Machiavelli himself to realise for the pontiff what he had achieved for the Florentine republic.¹⁰⁸ The initiative ran aground, due to Guicciardini's resistance and Clement VII's hesitation. Nevertheless, Machiavelli lived his last two years of life in uninterrupted contact with the pope, at his side in the preparation and conduct of the war: Clement VII had accepted to be the *armed prophet* himself, the Medici centaur *prince* destined by God or fortune to be the virtuous liberator of Italy from the tyranny of Charles V. But the head of Argos/Golia did not fall and the Florentine and papal Mercury/David had to content himself with making pacts with the emperor, to ensure his dynasty a merely regional power and the Catholic Church an identity that was no longer universal.

In short, the waters of the Red Sea did not open and Pharaoh's army overwhelmed the messianic dream of the papal Moses and his secularising Florentine herald. But Clement VII paid a high tribute to his brilliant courtier, testifying to the profound «affection»¹⁰⁹ and even gratitude he bore him: through the Dean of the Apostolic Chamber, Giovanni Gaddi, he promoted the first printed publication of *The Prince* at Blado in Rome in 1532, to which he granted the honour of papal privilege.

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¹⁰⁸ G. Lettieri, Sadoletto tra Erasmo e Machiavelli. *Il medius cattolico-romano*, Roma, Viella, 2023; For a detailed analysis of *Breve* by Sadoletto and a demonstration of the Sadolethian property of the Carpentras codex of the *Prince*, see Gaetano Lettieri, some theses in this regard have already been proposed in Lettieri, *Nove tesi*.

¹⁰⁹ Iacopo Salviati, *Lettera a Machiavelli del 5 novembre 1526*, in Machiavelli, *Lettere*, n. 342, t. III, 1574-1575, in part. 1378, he writes of the «affezione che vi porta Sua Beatitudine».

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