



**FONTES**  **Quellen und Dokumente zur Kunst 1350-1750**  
Sources and Documents for the History of Art 1350-1750

**GIORGIO VASARI:**  
“Allo Illustre, e Molto Magnifico M. Alessandro De’ Medici (...)”,  
Firenze, 6 February 1568, fol. [2]r, in:

*VITA DEL GRAN MICHELAGNOLO BUONARROTI. Scritta da M. Giorgio Vasari,  
Scrittore & Architetto Aretino. Con le sue Magnifiche Essequie stategli fatte in Fiorenza.  
DALL’ ACADEMIA DEL DISEGNO  
(Florenz 1568).*

**herausgegeben und kommentiert  
von  
CHARLES DAVIS**

FONTES 20

[19. Oktober 2008]

Zitierfähige URL: <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/volltexte/2008/639>

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DALL’ ACHADEMIA DEL DISEGNO.

*Con Licenza, & Privilegio.*

I N   F I O R E N Z A

Nella Stamperia de’ Giunti 1568.

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## THE TEXT

VITA DEL  
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IN FIORENZA

Nella Stamperia de' Giunti 1568. fol. [2]<sup>r</sup>

GIORGIO VASARI, "Allo Illustre, e Molto Magnifico M. Alessandro De' Medici (...)", Firenze, 6 February 1568 (Dedication), fol. [2]<sup>r</sup>, in:

VITA DEL GRAN MICHELAGNOLO BUONARROTI. *Scritta da M. Giorgio Vasari, Scrittore & Architetto Aretino.* Con le sue Magnifiche Essequie stategli fatte in Fiorenza.

DALL' ACADEMIA DEL DISEGNO. *Con Licenza, & Privilegio.* IN FIORENZA Nella Stamperia de' Giunti 1568.

The Text of *FONTES* 20 is brief, and it may serve a useful purpose to read the short dedicatory letter itself, before turning to a consideration of it. Renderings of the content of this text in English and German are given in two appendices (*infra*). These texts are more nearly paraphrases or restatements of the text than translations that closely adhere to the words of the text or to the manner in which thoughts are expressed, in an attempt to produce a linguistic equivalent. They are provided as an adjuvant resource for those less familiar with Italian, and are not proposed as substitutes for the original text.

Allo Illustre, e Molto Magnifico M. Alessandro De' Medici, Cavaliere dell'Ordine di Santo Stefano, Signor suo osservandiss[imo].

Haverebbono molti voluto de' nostri Artefici, e altri, che si dilettao delle cose del disegno, che io dopo la morte di Michelagnolo, havessi aggiunto quello, che egli operò da che io mandai fuori la vita sua l'anno 1550. insino al suo ultimo giorno; e l'havessi, già è buona pezza, publicato. Ma io non havendo potuto in ciò loro compiacere prima, che hora, per essere stato occupatissimo: Ho finalmente fatta tutta di nuovo la detta vita, e data alla stampa de' i nostri GIUNTI insieme con quelle di molti altri, che alle prime mancavano. Ma perché molti vorranno essa vita del Buonarruoto sola, e separata dall'altre, ci è parso per sodisfare a ciascuno; farne stampare alcun numero fuori di quelle, che sono nell'intero dell'opera: e si compiaccia a chi ò non vorrà, ò non potrà havere tutto il libro insieme. Il che fatto, ho pensato, che io, e non posso, e non debbo ad altro mio patrone, e signore indirizzarla, che a voi; il quale siete non pure figliuolo del Magnifico M. Ottaviano de' Medici (dal quale fui non altrimenti; che se io stato gli fussi figliuolo, allevato, amato, e al virtuosamente operare incaminato) ma una viva imagine, in cui risplende, e vedesi chiaramente, la bontà, la grandezza, e valor d'animo non pure di esso padre, ma ella ancora insieme de' vostri più antichi avoli, e genitore, la qual cosa tanto più debbiamo ammirare, et honorare, quanto più è vero quello, che disse il nostro Dante, cioè, che

*Rade volte discende per gli rami*

*l'humana probitate.* Accettate adunque il dono, che io vi faccio di questa vita ben volentieri e con lieto animo, perciocché non è gli picciola cosa per avventura: come forse molti farannosi a credere; conciosia, che sebene, come opera mia, è meno, che mediocre; ell'è però grandissima, per l'affetto, col quale io la vi dono, e per quello, che in se contiene: che sono l'opera egregie del più grande, nobile, eccell[ente]. Artefice: che forse sia stato ancor mai, il quale dono con le molte pitture, che sono di mia mano, e da me state fatte, ne' primi anni della mia giovanezza nel vostro palagio, faranno pure fede al mondo (non dico a voi, che ben sapete l'animo mio) che io in qualche parte riconosco, e sono grato de' beneficii. Di Firenze li sei di Febraio 1567 [= *stile fiorentino; stile comune = 1568*].

Di V[ostro]. illustre, e molto Mag[nifico]. Sig[nore].

Servitore affezionatiss[imo].

Giorgio Vasari

“*Rade volte discende per gli rami l'humana probitate*”: Cited in this form by Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito Livio*; cf. Dante, *Purgatorio*, Canto VII: “*Rade volte risurge per gli rami l'humana probitate; e questo vole quei che la dà, perché da lui si chiami.*”

## INTRODUCTION

VASARI, *IL GRAN MICHELAGNOLO*, AND ALESSANDRO DI OTTAVIANO DE' MEDICI

This rare opusculum, little known until it was listed by Ernst Steinmann and Rudolf Wittkower in their *Michelangelo-Bibliographie, 1510-1926* (1927, no. 1966, at p. 374, with bibliography), is of interest from several points of view, among them as a bibliographical curiosity for it is possibly the first off-print or *separatum* made following the invention of printing, or it numbers at least among the few earliest examples. Vasari had this 'estratto' made during the course of printing of second edition of his *Vite* in 1568 by the press of the Giunti in Florence. In 1930, Ugo Procacci discussed this publication in detail, basing his description on a copy in his possession ("Di un estratto della vita di Michelangiolo dall'edizione Giuntina del 1568 delle *Vite* del Vasari", in: *LA BIBLIOFILIA: Rivista di Storia del Libro e delle Arti Grafiche di Bibliografia ed Erudizione*, Anno XXXII (1930), vol. XXXII [Firenze: Leo S. Olschki-Editore 1931], Dispensa 11<sup>a</sup>-12<sup>a</sup>, pp. 448-450), and our treatment is much indebted to Procacci's text. The example owned by Procacci was exhibited in Arezzo in 1981, in an exhibition dedicated to Giorgio Vasari (*Giorgio Vasari*, ed. Charles Davis and Anna Maria Maetzke, Arezzo: Casa Vasari and Sottochiesa di San Francesco, 1981-1982; catalogue: Florence: EDAM, 1981, pp. 284-285, no. VIII, 44).

The work is a complete reprint of the "Vita di Michelagnolo Buonarruoti" contained in the third volume of the second edition of the *Vite* which Vasari printed with the Giunti Press in Florence in the year 1568, beginning with fol. 715 (signature: Ssss1<sup>r</sup>; in the extract, as in the volume of the *Vite*, the page is numbered erroneously fol. 717) and ending with fol. 796, after which was added a page with the register, the *impresa* of the Giunti and the date February 6, 1567. This is an old style date, "a uso Fiorentino". One copy is recorded with this date changed to 1568 to conform to the title imprint and colophon. In the Florentine calendar the year began on March 25.

The text is preceded by an added bifolium of which the first leaf is the frontispiece, with the insertion of a new title, but otherwise the woodcut image employed is identical to the frame which, in the first volume of the 1568 *Vite*, surrounds the authorial portrait of Vasari himself. That is to say that it is without the second surrounding woodblock used for the title page of the complete *Vite*. This same re-use of the inner border block of the 1568 *Vite* recurs in Vasari's very rare re-edition of the artists's portraits in the 1568 *Vite*, also issued separately in the course of printing the *Vite* (*Ritratti de' piu eccellenti pittori Scultori Et Architetti Contenuti nelle vite di M. Giorgio Vasari Pittore, & Architetto Aretino*, Firenze: Giunti, 1568).

The second leaf of the new bifolium contains the dedication to Alessandro di Ottaviano de' Medici, the son of Ottaviano de' Medici (and later Pope Leo XI, in 1605), which is the subject of this number of *FONTES*. This letter, of 6 February 1568, is not included in the comprehensive edition of Vasari's correspondence compiled and edited by Karl Frey (München: Müller 1923-1930, 2 vol.) and continued by Frey's son, Hermann-Walther (Burg b. M.: Hopfer 1940, vol. 3). Frey published Vasari's letters in the original language, Italian, and his commentaries are in German. An Italian translation of volume 1 was published, and a

partial translation of volume 2 (1563-1565, ed. Alessandro Del Vita; large parts of volume 2 were republished in the periodical, *Il Vasari*, where the commentary is translated into Italian).

Frey's transcriptions have been severely criticised by Italian scholars, perhaps unduly. It was Frey's acquisition of publication rights to the Vasari papers belonging to the Rasponi Spinelli family and their temporary transfer out of Italy that led to very considerable acrimony. This controversy has engendered a very considerable literature, much of which, distant in time, appears rather futile. In any event, hopes for a new Italian edition of Vasari's letters, often expressed, have never been realized, and Frey's commentaries to the letters are invaluable, much more so than those of the recent edition of Michelangelo's *Carteggio*, where even the commentaries of Frey in his *Sammlung ausgewählter Briefe an Michelagnolo Buonarroti* (Berlin: Siegismund 1899) are often ignored. The Rasponi-Spinelli archival papers were eventually deposited in Arezzo at the Casa Vasari (1921), where they remained many years. Microfilms of this material are at the Archivio di Stato in Arezzo. In 2008 the Rasponi-Spinelli heirs (Festari) have attempted to regain possession of these papers, with, it is feared, a possible intention to sell the archive.

The absence of Vasari's dedicatory letter to Alessandro di Ottaviano de' Medici in Frey's standard edition of the *Vasari Nachlass* has meant that this letter, along with a certain number of others, has remained a largely invisible component of Vasari's correspondence, which owing to the very, very large number of surviving letters has an independent value, quite apart from Vasari's own history, as a testimony to a typical artist's life and activity in sixteenth-century Italy. Other letters 'not in Frey' are printed in the catalogue of the 1981 Vasari exhibition, and others are found elsewhere.

The date of this letter, 6 February 1567, that is in 1568, following the modern calendar, permits correcting a probable error in the complete edition of the *Vite* (1568) (cf. Breslauer, 1957, p. 403). In fact, the dedicatory letter of all of the *Vite*, addressed to Duke Cosimo de' Medici, carries the date of 9 January 1568 (modern calendar: 1569). Unless one attempts to maintain that this letter was printed when the rest of the work was already published, the date of the letter needs to be corrected to 9 January 1567 (modern calendar: 1568). This is because the off-print of the Michelangelo *vita* would otherwise be prior to the full edition of the *Vite*.

In 1930, Ugo Procacci writes:

“Infatti, la lettera dedicataria di tutte le *Vite*, indirizzata al granduca Cosimo, porta la data del 9 gennaio 1568 (stile moderno 1569). Ora, a meno che non si voglia ritenere questa lettera stampata quando già tutto il resto dell'opera era pubblicato, la data dovrà essere corretta in 9 gennaio 1567 (stile moderno 1568); e questo sia perché l'estratto risulterebbe altrimenti anteriore all'opera intera, sia perché la lettera di Giovan Battista Adriani, datata 8 settembre 1567, si sa esser giunta troppo tardi, quando il primo e il secondo volume delle *Vite* erano già stampati, in modo che fu possibile collocarla soltanto al principio del terzo volume; per quanto quindi si possa pensare che sia stata consegnata al Vasari molto tempo dopo la data che porta, non si potrà però logicamente pensare a un ritardo maggiore dei primi mesi del 1568, di quando appunto data la lettera premessa all'estratto della vita di Michelangiolo.”

The date of Vasari's dedication to Alessandro de' Medici, 6 February 1568, means that it is very nearly contemporary with Vasari's letter describing the '*apparato*' in the Florentine Baptistery of circa 29 February 1568, addressed to Monsignor Guiglielmo Sangalletti in Rome (Giorgio Vasari, *Descrizione dell'apparato fatto nel Tempio di S. Giovanni di Fiorenza per il battesimo della Signora prima figliuola* [...], Firenze 1568; see *FONTES* 6).

The dedicatory letter of the *Gran Michelagnolo* is of particular interest for the light it sheds on Vasari's readers, at least as the author himself saw them and chose to represent them, and, as we shall see, it records specific reader responses to the first edition of the *Vite*. The opening lines of the dedication explicitly identify Vasari's potential readers, his public. It is the same public which Vasari foresaw for the *Vite*: artists, to whom the book was dedicated, and “*altri, che si diletmano delle cose del disegno*”, that is a double public of (1) artists and (2) laymen, with variable levels of interest and expertise in the arts of design – *dilettanti, intendenti, conoscitori, amatori* – amateurs, experts, connoisseurs, lovers of art. Thus the author himself has thrust his readers to the forefront, as has modern *Rezeptionästhetik* in the field of literary theory and criticism, an aspect of the literature of art that has, in the larger picture, been relatively neglected. In this Vasari almost seems to anticipate the active interest that his readers, in the course of history, have taken in his book, artist-readers and others readers as well. Possibly for no other work of *Kunstliteratur*, as for Vasari's *Vite*, have the ‘*postille*’ [‘*Randglossen*’; ‘marginal comments’], underlinings, and other graphic traces left in the book by owners and readers, very many of them artists, been so actively noted, collected, and studied, and so many annotated examples found – a very recent example being an copy of the *Vite* owned by Vincenzo Scamozzi, densely annotated by a reader who left behind very many traces of his reading of this book, and of many others (see Lucia Collavo, “L’*esemplare dell’edizione giuntina de Le Vite di Giorgio Vasari letto e annotato da Vincenzo Scamozzi*”, in: *Saggi e memorie di storie dell’arte*, 29, 2005 (2007), pp. 1-213; *eadem*, “Di Vincenzo Scamozzi lettore e critico di Giorgio Vasari scrittore e architetto dall’esperienza di analisi del postillato H.P.K.; per la recezione de Le Vite nella cultura veneta tra XVI e XVII secolo”, in: *Arezzo e Vasari: vite e postille*, ed. Antonio Caleca, Foligno: Cartei & Bianchi, 2007, pp. 199-250).

*Reader-response*: Vasari writes that he is issuing the *vita* of Michelangelo as a separate publication because of requests from fellow artists and of others interested in the arts, not only to have an up-dated life of Michelangelo, but also to be able to acquire just the *vita* of Michelangelo, that is the *vita* alone and without the lives of the other artists. What Vasari writes suggests that he has acted to satisfy an existing demand of the book market. This may be true, but one may ask how large this demand was, and if it is the sole explanation of Vasari's unusual step of publishing an extract from his *Vite*, a venture that might seem to undermine the sale of the whole work, as its centrepiece was being offered separately, allowing potential purchasers to pick the cherry from the middle without buying the whole tart – a not entirely rational *politica editoriale*, if not an inconceivable one, in that human behaviour not infrequently pursues contradictory aims. First, Vasari says that there were printed “*alcun numero*” of the separatum, which does not suggest a large edition. And, secondly, the separatum is always described bibliographically as “*rarissimo*”, extreme rarity again suggesting a small public. But with increasing numbers of published library catalogues of sixteenth-century books and with the increasing accessibility of online public access library catalogues, the very small number of recorded examples of the work may be expanded. A list of located copies, hastily assembled, is as follows: Cambridge, Harvard University Library (2 examples); Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale; Firenze, formerly owned by Ugo Procacci; Firenze, Kunsthistorisches Institut (fairly recently acquired); London, British Library; Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute Research Library; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art; Paris, Bibliotheque des Arts Decoratifs; Reggio Emilia, Biblioteca Panizzi; Roma, Biblioteca dell’Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana; Udine, Biblioteca Bartoliniana. This list is doubtless expandable. An example of the separatum was sold recently at Christie's (London, King Street, Sale 7399, *Valuable Manuscripts and Printed Books*, 6 June 2007, Lot 194) together with an edition of Michelangelo's *Rime* (1623) for

£8,160 (\$16,263) against an estimate of £1,500-£2,000 (\$2,900-\$ 3,986). A further partial index of the rarity of the work is its absence in the collection of the Bibliotheca Hertziana and that formerly of Leopoldo Cicognara, now in the Biblioteca Vaticana. These indications are not entirely conclusive, but they do suggest a very limited print run for the *Vita del gran Michelagnolo*.

Besides satisfying the demands of the book market and the wishes of his readers, Vasari may have had other motives. These may have related to the publication of a separate *vita* of Michelangelo in 1553 by Ascanio Condivi in 1553, which was composed with Michelangelo's cooperation and published apparently with his blessing, with the aim, in part, to refute and correct, to Vasari's embarrassment, elements of Vasari's biography of the master published three years earlier. This work also seems to have had a limited press run, and, more importantly, it challenged the account of Michelangelo's life published by Vasari in 1550 in the first edition of his *Vite*. A separate printing by Vasari of his revised and updated *vita* of Michelangelo was a more effective response to Condivi, if it was not 'buried' in the three long volumes of his new *Vite*, and the parallel format of the life of a single artist made it essentially the same 'item' as Condivi's *vita*, inviting comparison with Condivi and emphasizing the function of the *Gran Michelangelo* as a reply to and correction of Condivi, and asserting Vasari's much longer *vita* as the authoritative account for all times. To the extent that readers wanted to own both *vite*, the volumes of Vasari and Condivi, devoted exclusively to Michelangelo, formed a bibliographic, or perhaps bibliophilic pair, likely to find a place beside one another of the bookshelves of their owners. From this perspective the *Gran Michelangelo* appears as pawn in the Vasari-Condivi rivalry, in which the stakes for Vasari were much higher than for his modest rival. In any event, Vasari did not follow a policy of *separata*, and no other separatum from his *Vite* was issued. The separate life of Jacopo Sansovino, issued in Venice after Sansovino's death in 1570, was, despite a contrary affirmation made twice in the printed text, compiled and printed without even a minimal participation on the part of Vasari, doubtless without his knowledge and possibly after Vasari's death in 1574. This work belongs not to the history of the *Vite*, but to its fortune, its reception. And, perhaps to an even greater extent, it belongs to the reception of the *Vita del Gran Michelagnolo*, the format of which directly inspired it, for it was issued by Francesco Sansovino, the sculptor-architect's son, and hence issued from a family who for many years was extremely attentive to Michelangelo's fame and fortune, in life as in death, as is testified by their many printed responses to Michelangelo's new public image as an artist, at once mortal and divine.

The beginnings of Vasari's career in Florence from the early 1530s were highly dependent – as Vasari's dedicatory letter testifies – on the favour of the dedicatee's father, Ottaviano de' Medici (*infra*, q.v.), and Ottaviano's support of Vasari continued for many years. Vasari doubtless knew Ottaviano's son, Alessandro, from the latter's earliest childhood. In a letter of 1547 (Vasari-Frey, *Nachlass*, vol. 1, p. 201), Vasari greets the young Alessandro, his mother, Francesca, and his brother Bernardetto. The other fairly numerous occurrences of Alessandro de' Medici in Vasari's letters are rather later than 1568. Also in 1547, Vasari painted a head of Christ in a "*quadretto piccolo*" for the twelve-year old Alessandro de' Medici (*Ricordo* 172: "*Ricordo, come a di 6 di Agosto 1547 io feci una testa di Cristo in uno quadretto piccolo per Alessandro di messer Ottaviano de' Medici; et così un quadretto d'una Nostra Donna piccolo per la Costanza, figliuola di detto messer Ottaviano*"; *Nachlass*, vol. 2, p. 866). In the *Vite* (G II, 843) Vasari describes Medici as "*messer Alessandro suo figliuolo, giovane, oltre la nobiltà e chiarezza del sangue, di santissimi costume, letterato e degno figliuolo del magnifico Ottaviano e di madonna Francesca figliuola di Iacopo Salviati e zia materna del signor Duca Cosimo*". In his lists of friends of Michelangelo, Vasari names "il magnifico

messer Ottaviano de' Medici suo compare, che gli battezzò un suo figlio”, which, at first glance, suggests that Ottaviano de' Medici sponsored the baptism of a son of Michelangelo, but it is apparently a son of Ottaviano who is intended. Ottaviano had two sons, Bernardetto and Alessandro, and possibly the “figlio” Michelangelo stood for the baptism of, Alessandro, a circumstance perhaps spoken for by Vasari's dedication (see Giovanni Papini, *Vita di Michelangelo*, Milano: Garzanti, 1950, p. 311; *G II*, 775; *Vasari-CdL*; vol. 7, p. 230). Alessandro's mother was the daughter of Jacopo Salviati [cf. *FONTES* 12, p. 6]). Michelangelo's participation may have been, as Papini suggests, by proxy or ‘procura’.

One testimony to a possible special interest in Michelangelo's art on the part of Alessandro di Ottaviano de' Medici lies in two engravings of 1591 by Cherubino Alberti of two nude figures extracted from Michelangelo's *Ultimo Giudizio*, both bearing, in a large medallion just beneath the superior border, large dedicatory inscriptions to Cardinal Alessandro de' Medici (“ILL.<sup>MO</sup> ET R.<sup>MO</sup> D. ALEXANDRO MEDICES S. R.E. CAR. AMPLISS.”): the naked John the Baptist, inscribed “NVDA VERITAS”, and a blessed soul lifted to heaven, inscribed “PETIT AETHERA” (a classical citation). For these prints, see: *The Illustrated Bartsch*, 34 (formerly 17/1), *Italian Artists of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Sebastian Buffa, New York: Abaris Books, 1982, pp. 187-188, B. 67-68; Kristina Herrmann-Fiore, *Disegni degli Alberti*, Roma: De Luca, 1983, no. 10, pp. 50-52; Christopher Witcombe, “Some Letters and Some Prints dedicated to the Medici by Cherubino Alberti”, in: *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 22, 1991, pp. 641-660).

Alessandro de' Medici was not yet thirty when Michelangelo died in 1564, and although he visited Rome with his friend and cousin “di secondo grado”, Duke Cosimo de' Medici, in 1560, meeting Filippo Neri, and, at which time Cosimo formally met with Michelangelo in a long prearranged encounter, Alessandro's life was essentially spent in Florence, until, in 1569, he was named the Medici's ambassador to Rome, beginning a very long Roman presence which, however, post-dated Michelangelo. Alessandro's father knew Michelangelo well; Vasari describes Michelangelo as “compare di detto Messer Ottaviano”, whom he gave a portrait of Pope Clement VII by Sebastiano del Piombo (Barocchi-Vasari, *Michelangelo 1550-1568*, vol. 1, p. 242-243; see also vol. 1, pp. 118, 248, 258, 282, vol. 4, pp. 1739, 1861, 2138). Vasari reports a number of indications of Ottaviano's interest in and admiration for Michelangelo's art, and his dedication of the Michelangelo biography to Ottaviano's young son may reflect this fact. It was Ottaviano who enabled the young Vasari to gain entrance into the “Sagrestia nuova di San Lorenzo” to study Michelangelo's works, “essendo egli di quei giorni andato a Roma”.

But the dedication letter is addressed to Messer Alessandro de' Medici as a “Cavaliere dell'Ordine di Santo Stefano”, and this relatively new order (founded 1561) may have elicited Vasari's interest as well. Its new church in Pisa, Santo Stefano dei Cavalieri was currently under construction to Vasari's designs. In the *Vite*, Vasari mentions various works of art “nelle mani di messer Alessandro”, the son of Ottaviano (*Vasari-CdL*, 1962-1966, vol. 6, p. 161; cf. pp. 177-178, 454).

Vasari accompanied the young cardinal Giovanni de' Medici to Rome in March 1560, writing to Duke Cosimo, “Io sono in viaggio per Roma col Reverendissimo et Illustrissimo Cardinale de' Medici Vostro; et perche scrissi a Quella quanto mi bisognava per quelle cose che ho da trattare, per avere il parere di Michelagnuolo, avrei avuto desiderio, che Quella mi avessi mandato una letterina di due parole al Buonartoti, che mi udissi et consigliassi per tutte quelle cose che avrò a negoziar seco per conto di Vostra Eccellenza Illustrissima.” (*Frey-Vasari*, 1, no. 297, p. 547; cf. pp. 551, 554, 559). On 9.04.1560, Vasari reports to Duke

Cosimo, that, in Rome, “*andai immediatamente a trovare il mio gran Michelagnuolo, il quale non sapendo la mia venuta, con quella tenerezza che sole ai vecchi, ritrovando i figliuoli inaspettamente smarriti, mi si avento al collo con mille basci, lacrimando per dolcezza. Mi vedde tanto volentieri, et io lui, che non ho avuto contento maggiore da che io sono al servitio di Quella, quantunque molti io ne abbia per mezzo di Vostra Eccellenza Illustrissima provati. Ragionammo assai sopra le grandezze, il governo et li miracoli, che il grande Iddio ha mostrato et mostra giornalmente sopra di Lei, dolendosi egli che egli non possa [servirla] con le forze, così come egli è pronto con l’animo, a ogni suo cenno (...)*” (p. 559). Vasari claims to have been with Michelangelo every day, and relates further details of the conversations and common undertakings (cf. pp. 562, 564).

In any event, the historical figure of Alessandro de’ Medici has been effectively eclipsed by what was essentially little more than an insignificant postscript to his life of seventy years, by, that is, his brief twenty-seven day pontificate as Pope Leo XI, spent entirely in Rome in the month of April 1605. But the to-be pope Alessandro de’ Medici belongs perfectly to Vasari’s second class of readers, the “*altri, che si diletmano delle cose del disegno*”. Alessandro di Ottaviano de’ Medici: ‘*committente*’, ‘*mecenate*’, ‘*collezionista*’, ‘*conoscitore*’ – all these labels fit him like a glove. Some of these parameters are reflected in Alessandro’s letters from Rome preserved in the Florentine Archivio di Stato (e.g., Firenze, Archivio di Stato, Mediceo 3289 and 3474; cf. Robert Gaston, “Pirro Ligorio, the Casino of Pius IV, and Antiques for the Medici: Some New Documents”, in: *Journal of the Courtauld and Warburg Institutes*, vol. 47, 1984, pp. 205-209). Cardinal Medici may have been participant in a minor neo-Byzantine, neo-medieval revival in Roman and Florentine art in the years before and around 1600. In Rome he owned an important collection of classical statues, and he owned a small fourteenth-century triptych that had once belonged to Mary, Queen of Scots. Giovanni Balducci, called “il Cosci”, was one artist particularly supported by Medici (see the cycle of frescoes in the Oratorio dei Pretoni, via San Gallo, Firenze, 1588-1590, and his Roman works after 1590). For Balducci, see: [www.kubikat.org](http://www.kubikat.org) and *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 5, Roma 1963, pp. 536-537; SAUR *Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon*, vol. 7, 1992, pp. 434-435; Grove-Macmillan *Dictionary of Art*, 1996, vol. 3, pp. 101-102. Very many drawings by Balducci survive, and many are found in recent catalogues of drawing collections and sales. Another artist employed by Alessandro de’ Medici was Johannes Stradanus: see the Cappella del Palazzo della Gherardesca, Firenze, 1585-1587 (Alessandra Baroni Vannucci, *Jan Van Der Straet detto Giovanni Stradano*, Milano: Jandi Sapi Editori, 1997, cat. no. 49; Dorine van Sasse van Ysselt, “Il Cardinale Alessandro de’ Medici committente dello Stradano”, in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, vol. 24, 1980, pp. 203-236, including a partial profile of Medici as a patron and collector). For Medici and the painter Stefano Pirri, see: Vasari-Barocchi, *Vita di Michelangelo nelle redazioni del 1550 e del 1568*, vol. 4, p. 2211 (Rome), and he employed other artists such as Giovannantonio Dosio, Santi di Tito, Giambattista Naldini, Agostino Ciampelli. See further: Cristina Acidini Luchinat, “Il cardinale Alessandro de’ Medici e le arti”, in: *Paragone (Arte)*, 529-533, pp. 134-140; Alessandro Zuccari, *Arte e committenza nella Roma di Caravaggio*, Torino: RAI, 1984, ‘Alessandro de’ Medici’ *ad Indicem*; Vasari-CdL, vol. 6, pp. 161, 161 (3), 177, 178, 454.

*BIBLIOGRAPHY:*

Ernst Steinmann; Rudolf Wittkower, *Michelangelo-Bibliographie, 1510-1926*, Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1927, p. 374 and pl. 7b

Ugo Procacci, “Di un estratto della vita di Michelangiolo dall’edizione Giuntina del 1568 delle *Vite* del Vasari”, in: *LA BIBLIOFILIA: Rivista di Storia del Libro e delle Arti Grafiche di Bibliografia ed Erudizione*, Anno XXXII (1930), vol. XXXII [Firenze: Leo S. Olschki-Editore 1931], Dispensa 11<sup>a</sup>-12<sup>a</sup>, pp. 448-450

Bernard H. Breslauer, “The Origin of Offprints”, in: *The Book Collector*, vol. 6, 1957, p. 403

Giorgio Vasari, *La vita di Michelangelo nelle redazioni del 1550 e del 1568*, ed. Paola Barocchi, Milano: Ricciardi, 1962, vol. 1, p. xxxix

Julius Schlosser, *La letteratura artistica*, ed. Otto Kurz, 3rd ed., Firenze 1964, p. 333

Ruth Mortimer, *Italian Sixteenth-Century Books* (Catalogue of Books and Manuscripts, Harvard College Library), Cambridge, 1974, vol. 2, pp. 715-716

Lisa Pon, “Michelangelo’s Lives: Sixteenth-century books by Vasari, Condivi, and others”, in: *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 27, 1996 (1997), pp. 1015-1037

### THREE COMMENTARIES:

JOHAN DOMINIK FIORILLO, *Geschichte der zeichnenden Künste*, Göttingen 1798, vol. I, p. 375:

Vasari hat das Leben seines Lehrers mit den übrigen Lebensbeschreibungen, aber auch besonders unter folgendem Titel herausgegeben:

Vita del gran Michelagnolo Buonarroti, scritta da M. Giorgio Vasari, Pittore et Architetto Aretino. Con le sue magnifiche esequie, state gli fatte in Firenze dall'Accademia del Disegno. Con licenza e privilegio. In Firenze nella Stamperia de' Giunti 1568. 4°.

Ich muß hier erinnern, daß dieß gar nicht einmal ein verschiedner Abdruck von der in das große Werk eingerückten Lebensbeschreibung des Michelangelo ist, denn er fängt mit der Seitenzahl 717 an, und in der Zueignung an Alexander von Medicis vom 6ten Febr. 1567 gibt Vasari die Ursache an, warum er eine Anzahl Exemplare von diesem Leben besonders abziehen lasse. Sie sind aber äußerst selten geworden.

ERNST STEINMANN; RUDOLF WITTKOWER, *Michelangelo-Bibliographie, 1510-1926*, Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1927, p. 374 and pl. 7b

Nr. 1966a: Vasari, *Le Vite* [...], Firenze: Giunti, 1568:

[...] Die vita [von Michelangelo] erschien auch in einem äußerst seltenen Separatdruck unter dem Titel: Vita del Gran Michelagnolo Buonarroti. Scritta da M. Giorgio Vasari, Pittore & Architetto Aretino. Con le sue Magnifiche Essequie stategli fatte in Fiorenza. Dall'Achademia del Disegno. In Fiorenza, Nella Stamperia de' Giunti 1568 mit den fortlaufenden Seitenzahlen der Gesamtausgabe (S. 717-796), aber mit eigener Vorrede *Vasaris* vom 6. Februar 1567 an *Alessandro de' Medici* gerichtet. In dieser Vorrede (2 Seiten unpaginiert) wird die Berechtigung dieser einzigen Sonderausgabe aus sämtlichen Viten dargelegt. (Siehe *Tafel 7a.*)

Hierzu vgl. *Comolli* [Angelo Comolli, *Bibliografia storico-critica dell'architettura civile ed arti subalterne*, Roma, Stamperia Vaticana, 1788-1792, 4 vol.] II, S. 320, der schreibt: „Gli esemplari così separati di questa edizione sono rarissimi, e quello, ch'io tengo [...] è il solo, che finora ho veduto“. Bibliographisch ausführlich behandelt von *Fiorillo*, *Geschichte der zeichnenden Künste* 1798. I. S. 375.

In dieser zweiten Auflage wurde die vita von Vasari bis zum Tode Michelangelo fortgeführt und unter Benutzung der 1553 erschienenen Biographie *Condivis* umgearbeitet und beträchtlich erweitert. C. Frey (*Le vite di Michelangelo Buonarroti*. Berlin 1887. S. 1-228. Siehe Nr. 1967) hat die vita *Condivis* dieser zweiten Ausgabe gegenübergestellt und in Anmerkungen die erste in extenso gegeben. A. Ilg hat in einem besonderen Kapitel (Nr. 496 [Condivi, Das Leben (...), tr. Rudolph Valdek, Wien 1874 = Quellenschriften, VI], S. 112-142, Vergleichung der 1. und 2. Ausgabe der Vite des Vasari mit Rücksicht auf *Condivi*) in einzelnen die Veränderungen festzustellen versucht, die Vasari in seiner 2. Auflage unter dem Einfluß *Condivis* vorgenommen hat. Neuerdings wurde dieses Thema eingehend behandelt von *Giuseppe Rossi*, *La Rinascenza dell'Arte nel Piceno*. Macerata 1925. S. 133-202 (Siehe Nr. 1684).

RUTH MORTIMER, *Italian Sixteenth-Century Books* (Catalogue of Books and Manuscripts, Harvard College Library), Cambridge, 1974, vol. 2, pp. 715-716  
Mortimer, II, pp. 715-716:

[*Description:*] „Architectural title-border with putti and grotesques, the Medici arms in the upper part. View of Florence and cartouche with the first line of the imprint set into the lower part of the border. Type ornaments with the title. This is the inner border block from the title-page of the 1568 *Vite* (No. 515). Woodcut medallion portrait of Michelangelo within the architectural border from the *Vite* at the head of the text on leaf Ssss1<sup>f</sup>. Type-ornament headpiece and initial H with hunters for the dedication. Type-ornament tailpieces. Foliated initial in the text. Giunta fleur-de-lis device with cherubs (Fernanda Ascarelli, *La tipografia cinquecentesca italiana*, Firenze: Sansoni Antiquariato, 1953, fig. 51) on leaf EEeee2<sup>v</sup>. Roman and italic letters.

„AN OFFPRINT from the 1568 *Vite*, with a title-page and dedication leaf added at front, and a new half sheet EEeee at the end. [...] The preceding signature in the *Vite*, Rrrr, is a half sheet so that the Michelangelo biography can begin with sheet Ssss. The new signature EEeee2 contains a new setting of the last two text pages from the *Vite*, with a type-ornament tailpiece added to EEeee1<sup>v</sup>, a register on EEeee2<sup>v</sup>. Otherwise, the setting is that of the *Vite* with page numbers and signature marks unchanged.

## OTTAVIANO DE' MEDICI:

Florence, 1482-1546. Ottaviano belonged to a cadet branch of the ruling Medici family. He was the guardian of the young Ippolito de' Medici and Alessandro de' Medici, and he became a trusted adviser of Duke Cosimo de' Medici. Vasari saw in Ottaviano's palace near San Marco a second home. His studies and first visit to Rome were supported by Ottaviano. He was also a friend of Michelangelo.

*LITERATURE:* Anna Maria Bracciante, *Ottaviano de' Medici e gli artisti*, Firenze: S.P.E.S., 1984 (Firenze; tesi di laurea); *Dictionary of Art*, 21, 1996, p. 18, by Janet Southorn (a very brief entry); Giovanni Papini, *Vita di Michelangelo nella vita del suo tempo*, Milano: Garzanti, 1950 (1949), pp. 311-313 ("Il Magnifico Ottaviano"); *Cat. mostra Vasari*, 1981, 75-77.

The basic raw material for understanding Vasari's relationship with with Ottaviano de' Medici, is found in his *Vite* (Vasari-CdL: I: 6, 24; III: 392, 493, 494; IV: 89 (1), 236, 297, 311, 312, 316, 317, 324, 474, 490; V: 33, 321, 453, 458, 466; VI: 96, 97, 161, 171, 173, 177, 418, 439; VII: 230, 230 (2); VIII: 206, 206 (1), 207 (2), 208, 208 (1), 211, 212, 213, 213 (1), 218, 218 (4), 220, 222 (2), 225, 251; other references to Ottaviano may be found by searching online editions of the *Vite*) and in his letters and literary remains (Vasari-Frey, *Nachlass*, vol. 1, pp. 7, 8, 22, 25, 27, 30, 42, 62-63, 68-69, 77, 92, 94, 97, 99-100, 102, 104-105, 111, 125, 128-129, 133, 135, 138, 140-141, 143ff., 152, 167, 278, 299, 368, 380, 453; vol. 2, pp. 140, 852, 853, 855, 856, 857, 858, 862, 865, 868, 871).

Vasari-CdL = Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori*, ed. Paola Della Pergola; Luigi Grassi; Giovanni Previtali; Aldo Rossi, 9 vol., Milano: Edizioni per il Club del Libro, 1962-1966

Vasari-Frey, *Nachlass* = *Der literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasari*, ed. Karl Frey, vol. 1: München bei Georg Müller 1923; vol. 2, München bei Georg Müller 1930; vol. 3 (*Neue Briefe von Giorgio Vasari*, ed. Herman-Walther Frey), August Hoper Verlag Burg b. M 1940

*Cat. mostra Vasari* = *Giorgio Vasari*, ed. Charles Davis; Anna Maria Maetzke, exhibition catalogue, Arezzo 1981-1982, Firenze: EDAM, 1981

## ALESSANDRO DI OTTAVIANO DE' MEDICI (LEONE XI):

Florence, 2 June 1535-Rome 27 April 1605. Alessandro de' Medici's mother, Francesca Salviati, was the daughter of Jacopo Salviati and Lucrezia de' Medici, the sister of Pope Leo X. After being ordained as a priest, he was named the Medici ambassador to the papal court. Bishop of Pistoia in 1573; Archbishop of Florence, 1574; Cardinal, 1583. Elected to papacy in April 1605, he died within the month. Fifteen letters of Alessandro de' Medici addressed to Vasari's brother, Pietro, are preserved in the Archivio Vasariano in Arezzo (*Cat. mostra Vasari*, 1981, p. 86, no. IV, 22, in the *Zibaldone* of Vasari (pp. 269-289; see also Alessandro Del Vita, *Inventario*, pp. 82-87).

### LITERATURE:

*Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 64 (Roma 2005), pp. 523-527 (Matteo Sanfilippo)

Ludwig von Pastor, *Geschichte der Päpste im Zeitalter der katholischen Restauration und des Dreißigjährigen Krieges*, vol. 12, *Leo XI. und Paul V. (1605-1621)*; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1938 (1927), pp. 16-21 *et passim*

Vasari-Frey, *Nachlass*, vol. 1, p. 201; vol. 2, pp. 190, 319, 658, 721-722, 725, 761-762, 764, 765-766, 768-769, 773-774, 777, 779, 786-787, 794-795 (letter of Medici to Vasari, 1573: "D.V. S. molto magnifica, affetionatissimo come fratello"), 804, 807-808, 822-823, 866, 886; vol. 3, p. 2

*Giorgio Vasari*, ed. Charles Davis; Anna Maria Maetzke, exhibition catalogue, Arezzo, 1981-1982; Firenze: EDAM 1981, pp. 85-86, 203, 207, 283-285, 312, fig. 317

*La Villa Médicis*, ed. André Chastel; Philippe Morel, 3 vol. 1991-1992

*Wikipedia*: Leo XI; Leone XI

*Catholic Encyclopedia*: Pope Leo XI: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09166a.htm>

Lorenzo Cardella, *Memorie storiche de' cardinali della Santa Romana Chiesa*, vol. 5, Roma 1793, pp. 181-182

The Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, Biographical Dictionary, Pope Gregory III, Consistory of December 12, 1583: <http://www.fiu.edu/~mirandas/bios1583.htm>

Alfons Chacón, *Vitæ, et res gestæ Pontificvm Romanorum et S. R. E. Cardinalivm ab initio nascentis Ecclesiæ vsque ad Vrbanvm VIII. Pont. Max.*, 2 vol., Roma 1630, col. 1751-1752

Matteo Sanfilippo, "Leone XI", in: *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2000, vol. 3, pp. 269-277

See further: *INTRODUCTION* (*supra*)

## “MICHELANGELO-BIBLIOGRAPHIE”:

Modern attempts to assemble the entire bibliography for Michelangelo Buonarroti began with Ernst Steinmann and Rudolf Wittkower, *Michelangelo-Bibliographie 1510-1926*, Leipzig: 1927. The pre-history of Michelangelo bibliography – before Steinmann-Wittkower – is an interesting topic in and of itself, and it will be addressed in a future number of the *FONTES* series dedicated to sources and documents about Michelangelo. Although Steinmann-Wittkower was an exceptional achievement for its time, many early texts escaped notice. Some of these have entered the subsequent literature. By the early 1970s Eugenio Battisti had assembled a large number of additional texts, in a project to treat the early ‘reception’ of Michelangelo which never saw completion, owing, at least in part, to Battisti’s premature death.

The bibliographical compilation of Steinmann-Wittkower was continued at several times and in several stages.

Hans Werner Schmidt, “Nachtrag und Fortsetzung der Michelangelo Bibliographie von Steinmann-Wittkower bis 1930“, in: Ernst Steinmann, *Michelangelo im Spiegel seiner Zeit* (Römische Forschungen der Bibliotheca Hertziana VIII), Leipzig 1930, pp.65-93

Paolo Cherubelli, „Supplemento alla bibliografia michelangelolesca, 1931-1942“, in: *Michelangelo Buonarroti nel IV Centenario del Giudizio*, Firenze: Sansoni, 1942, pp. 270-304 (bibliography based on the papers from the estate of Ernst Steinmann)

Paolo Portoghesi; Bruno Zevi, *Michelangelo architetto*, Torino: Einaudi, 1964 (very extensive bibliography)

Paola Barocchi, in: Giorgio Vasari, *La Vita di Michelangelo nelle redazioni del 1550 e del 1568*, Milano-Napoli: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1962, vol. 1, pp. 340-376 (in 5 vol.; a work invaluable for locating the literature concerning the life and works of Michelangelo and related topics and themes)

Peter Meller, “Aggiornamenti bibliografici”, in: *Michelangelo, artista, pensatore, scrittore*, ‘premesse’: Mario Salmi, 2 vol., Novara: De Agostini, 1965, vol. 2, pp. 597-606 (also in an English translation)

Herbert von Einem, review of Barocchi, 1962 (*supra*), in: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, XXVIII, 1965, pp. 262-263; cf. pp. 307-352: Christian Adolf Isermeyer, „Das Michelangelo-Jahr 1964 und die Forschung zu Michelangelo als Maler und Bildhauer von 1959 bis 1965“

In 1974 there appeared a cumulative Michelangelo Bibliography for the years 1927-1970:

Luitpold Dussler, *Michelangelo-Bibliographie 1927-1970*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1974

For the years after 1970 the researcher is dependent on general reference works, on printed and public library catalogues, including, increasingly, OPACs (Online Public Access Catalogues), such as [www.kubikat.org](http://www.kubikat.org). In addition an extremely large number of monographs about various aspects of Michelangelo’s life and works have been printed and continue to appear with regularity. Some of these works are of little value, but they are destined for varying audiences.

*General reference works:*

Charles de Tolnay, “Michelangelo Buonarroti”, in: *Enciclopedia Universale dell’Arte*, Venezia-Roma 1963, vol. 9, p. 306 (The same author, “K. Tolnai”, who became the leading Michelangelo scholar of his day, is responsible for the entry about Michelangelo in Thieme-Becker’s classic *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler*, vol. 24, 1930, pp. 515-526.).

The article, or articles, devoted to ‘Michelangelo’ in the Grove-Macmillan *Dictionary of Art* (London 1996), vol. 21, pp. 431-461, are limited by the declared editorial policy of this commercial encyclopaedic enterprise, marked by contradictions between scholarship and popularisation, between selectivity and comprehensiveness, and a very time-bound, by now almost dated conception of the history of art.

The entry ‘Buonarroti, Michelangelo’ in the *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (vol. 15, Roma 1972, pp. 161-178, Luitpold Dussler; Enzo Noè Girardi) belongs still to the earlier phases of this encyclopaedic undertaking which aimed at a full treatment of its subjects.

Although a great reliance on English language secondary literature in present-day writing about Michelangelo may be observed, no meaningful research on Michelangelo can be accomplished without an intensive consultation of the literature in Italian and of the contributions of German scholarship dating from the nineteenth century and later.

*Wikipedia* in its various language editions contain very extensive entries for ‘Michelangelo’.

An online biography of Michelangelo by Peter Dering with extensive bibliography is found at Bautz *Biographisches-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* (BBKL):  
<http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/michelangelo.shtml/> .

*THE TEXT: English version:*

To the illustrious and most magnificent Messer Alessandro de' Medici, Cavalier of the Order of Saint Stephan, his most highly regarded Lord

Many of our artificers [= *artists*], and others, who delight in the things of design [= *in the visual arts*], have wanted that I would have, following the death of Michelangelo, added the things that he did after I had issued his *vita* in the year 1550 up until the last days of his life, and that I would have published it already a good while ago. But I have not been able to satisfy them in this matter until now, because of being very, very busy. Now, finally having redone the said *vita*, I have consigned it to be printed by our press, the Giunti, together with the lives of many other artists who were not present in the first *vite*. But because many have wanted this *vita* of Buonarroti by itself, and separate from the other lives, it has seemed appropriate to us, in order to satisfy everyone, to have printed a certain number separately from the all the lives that are contained within the whole work: and thus there will be accommodated those who don't want to have the all of the book together, or who cannot [*afford*] to have it. Having done this, I have thought that I could not and ought not to address it to any other patron and Lord of mine than to you, who are not only the son of the Magnificent Messer Ottaviano de' Medici (by whom I was reared not otherwise than if I had been his own son – nurtured, loved, and virtuously set on the way to my life's work), but a living image, from whom shines forth and in whom is seen clearly the goodness, the grandeur, and the worthy soul not only of his own father, but that of his most venerable ancestors, and progenitors, that which we must the more admire and honour, as so much more it is true that which our Dante said, that is, that

*Rade volte discende per gli rami*

*l'humana probitate.*

Accept then this gift, that I make you of the *vita* most willingly and with a glad soul, because it is perchance no small thing, as perhaps many might wish to believe, as it may be that even if, as my work, it is less than mediocre, it is most great, for the affection with which I give it to you, and for that which it contains, the egregious works of the greatest, and most noble and most excellent artist that perhaps there ever was, this which I give with the many paintings from my own hand, made by me in the first years of my youth in your palace may give testimony to the world (and I am not saying, to you, who knows my soul very well) that I in part recognized my indebtedness and that I am grateful for the benefits I have received. In Florence the sixth of February 1567 [= *Florentine calendar*; = 1568, *modern calendar*]

Of Your illustrious and most Magnificent Lord,

His most affectionate Servant Giorgio Vasari