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MICHELANGELO, MOSES, AND THE “WARRIOR POPE” *

Irving Lavin

Institute for Advanced Study

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Over a century ago, in an all but forgotten newspaper article, a great historian of the Italian Renaissance, Alessandro Luzio, offered a remarkably perceptive and unexpected insight into the character of the great and fearsome “Warrior Pope,” Julius II (1503-13). Luzio had discovered a brief, incidental passage in a dispatch dated 1510, from Bologna, where the pope was in residence recovering from a near fatal illness: “While Our Father is steadily improving,” the report said, “he seems to be trying to become a Dante expert: every evening Dante is read and explained (to him) by Bramante, the most learned architect [of new St. Peter’s].” Luzio understood that this passing remark provided a rare glimpse of an inner, meditative, even devotional person within the notoriously aggressive and brusque successor to Peter as the vicar of Christ on earth. The disturbing implication was that Julius’s legendary autocratic fierceness may have been something more than a personality defect; Julius’s intimidating policies and conduct may have been a deliberate strategy intended, in a truly Machiavellian spirit of “it is better to be feared than to be loved,” to achieve quite noble and idealistic ends. And Luzio found proof of this elevated objective in Julius’s unrelenting efforts, throughout his reign, to mount and lead a crusade against the Turks to reclaim the Holy Land for Christianity. His stated goal was to expel the “barbarians” (the term Julius used for the French, Spanish, and German invaders) and unite Italy under the papacy, to make peace among the princes of Christendom, and to converge the unified forces of Catholic Europe on Constantinople—by then Istanbul—where he dreamed of celebrating a solemn pontifical mass in the church of Hagia Sophia.

The spectacle of the ailing Warrior Pope cogitating on the Divine Comedy with the brilliant designer of the new St. Peter’s revealed the profound and provocative

paradox of this awesomely gruff and belligerent individual, who was also the sponsor of one of the greatest cultural efflorescences in European history, which included the greatest works of Bramante, Raphael and Michelangelo, all at once. Often dismissed as an insincere mask for his personal, worldly political ambitions, Julius's total absorption in furthering and consolidating the Church's temporal power was subservient to a quite otherworldly, religious obsession with the ecumenical mission of Christianity. The physical and spiritual redemption of the Holy Land was the ultimate goal of a coherent program of action that governed Julius's reign from start to finish. In fact, as we shall see presently, the single-minded passion with which he pursued this theo-political platform, can best be understood in the light of a solemn vow he had taken when in 1503, as a Franciscan friar sworn to poverty, obedience, and chastity, he was elevated to the throne of St. Peter. Raphael seems to have focussed on this private, meditative aspect of Julius in his famous portrait of the Pope in the National Gallery in London, which was painted at the time of the illness mentioned in Luzio's letter (1511-12): one can well imagine Julius listening quietly and intently to Bramante, and meditating upon the arduous but glorious process of redemption envisaged in the Divine Comedy (**Fig. 1**).

Commissioned a few years earlier to make a monumental bronze statue of Julius II to be placed over the entrance to principal church of Bologna, that of S. Petronio, the city's patron saint, Michelangelo focused on the public image of the Pope—a larger-than-life portrayal of a larger-than-life *persona*. The bronze, which commemorated the pope's military victory over the ruling despot of Bologna, was installed in 1508, only to be destroyed in October 1511 when the Bentivoglio temporarily recaptured the city. Vasari describes the occasion that began the commission in a passage that provides a typical instance of the affectionate but volatile relationship between artist and pontiff, and a suggestive glimpse of the lost image itself. Having inadvertently given offense to the pope while working on the Sistine ceiling (1508-12), Michelangelo, with much trepidation, went to visit Julius in Bologna, where he was introduced by a certain bishop who felt called upon to makes excuses for the artist,

saying that such men are ignorant of everything except their art. At this the Pope waxed wrath, and striking the bishop with a mace he was holding, said "It is you who are ignorant, to reproach him when we say

nothing.” The bishop therefore was hustled out by the attendants and the Pope’s anger being appeased, he blessed Michelagnolo, who was loaded with gifts and promises, and ordered to prepare a bronze statue of the Pope five braccia high, in a striking attitude of majesty, habited in rich vestments, and with spirit, force, vigilance, and terribilità displayed in his countenance . . . and the question was raised of what to put in the left hand, the right being held up with such a proud gesture that the Pope asked if it was giving a blessing or a curse. Michelagnolo answered that he was admonishing the people of Bologna to be prudent. When he asked the Pope whether he should put a book in his left hand, the pontiff replied, “Give me a sword; I am not a man of letters.”

In considering this lost work, of which we have some knowledge through contemporary accounts and later reflections, it is essential to bear in mind that the bronze statue was preceded by another sculpture of Julius executed in stucco by an unknown artist and placed on the façade of the communal Palazzo degli Anziani on December 17, 1506, which showed the pope holding a key with his left hand and giving a blessing with his right. The two statues of Julius were clearly pendants, representing the pope respectively as ecclesiastical and secular ruler of the city, enthroned triumphantly over the portals of the principal facades on adjacent sides of the Piazza Maggiore.¹ This juxtaposition of complementary types explains why Michelangelo’s figure for S. Petronio was originally intended to hold a book in its left hand. The papal hegemony was thus complete, and unprecedented: rarely, if ever before had a ruler, secular or religious, imposed himself so conspicuously on both aspects of the urban landscape.

A striking reflection of Michelangelo’s design appears in a drawing by one of Michelangelo’s followers, Baccio Bandinelli, for the tomb of Clement VII (1523-34): the Pope’s raised right hand brandishes a blessing as if he were Zeus hurling a thunderbolt; his left hand holds a book (**Fig. 2**). In the end, Michelangelo obeyed the injunction: he gave Julius the ecclesiastical equivalent of the sword, that is, the key Christ had given to his vicar, St. Peter, as the symbol of the pope’s God-given authority—thus transferring also to the religious sphere at S. Petronio the symbol of the temporal power of the pope.

¹ Hans W. Hubert also understood the two statues as alluding to the temporal and spiritual power of the papacy: “Il progetto per il portale bolognese di Galeazzo Alessi,” in *Il restauro del Nettuno, la statua di Gregorio XIII, e la sistemazione di Piazza maggiore nel Cinquecento : contributi anche documentari alla conoscenza della prassi e dell’organizzazione delle arti a Bologna prima dei Carracci*, Bologna, 1999, 297-352, cf. 307.

This grandiose Bolognese image of Julius transformed the rigid, iconic tradition of papal portraiture into a powerful weapon of psycho-political propaganda.

While appropriate to the furiously partisan political situation in Bologna, I believe the origin of Michelangelo's concept lay in Rome, in the paintings on the walls of the Sistine chapel, done in the generation before Michelangelo. The chapel was built by Julius's uncle, Pope Sixtus IV—hence the name of the chapel—who was also a Franciscan friar, and decorated on the facing long walls with two fresco cycles that parallel step by step episodes from the lives of Moses and Christ, the latter fulfilling the promise of the former. The carefully orchestrated program documents the history of the divinely ordained legislation that governs the world order, the *Lex Scripta* inscribed by God on the Tables of the Hebrew law, and the *Lex Evangelica* (from the Greek word for “good news”) preached orally by Christ and his disciples. The gesture of Michelangelo's bronze vision of papal rule over Bologna echoed Cosimo Roselli's vision of Moses giving the law to the Hebrews in the fresco on the south wall, opposite the scene of the Christ giving the Sermon on the Mount. Moses destroys the first set of Tables, but then, having pleaded with the Lord “face to face,” conveys to his people God's gift of the Decalogue (**Fig. 3**). Michelangelo's sculpture evidently combined the two episodes in a single action, confronting the factious Bolognese with his awesome, “Mosaic” pope as the arch-lawgiver whose deliberately ambiguous gesture, at once maledictive and benedictive, admonished and encouraged them to be “prudent.” At the same time, Julius's ironic remark about his own illiteracy may well have alluded to his role as Christ's successor in the forceful promulgation of the *Lex Evangelica*. The legacy of Julius's fearsome expression in the Bologna monument may be seen in the statue with which the jurist pope Gregory XIII, himself a native of Bologna where he studied law, established his hegemony over the Roman senate at the Campidoglio (**Fig. 4**). The sculpture, by Pietro Paolo Olivieri (1576-7), removed from the Senate to S. Maria in Aracoeli in 1876, is generally discredited as an inept emulation of Michelangelo's *Moses*; yet the relationship is an obviously deliberate and sophisticated cooptation of

Michelangelo's reference to the pope as the reincarnation of the powerful biblical lawgiver.²

Most importantly, Michelangelo's commanding papal image at Bologna evidently reflected one in particular of the creation scenes Michelangelo had painted in the vault of the Sistine chapel, just before going to Bologna: God commanding into existence the sun and moon, which Genesis calls "the two great lights" (**Fig. 5**); his ferocious dual action is explained by God's purpose:

16 And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.

17 And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,

18 And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. (Gen. 1:16-18).

That is, the two lights were created so that God might rule over them, and with the notion of dominion inherent in this very act of creation, the passage came to play an essential role in the legal framework of the ideology of authority. Identifying the firmament of heaven as the universal church, the passage was invoked to demonstrate papal superiority over other monarchs:

In the firmament of heaven, which is the universal church, God created two great lights, that is, two great dignitaries, the pontifical authority and the regal power. But that which rules the days, that is, in spiritual matters, is superior; that which rules the nights, that is, in carnal matters, is lesser. As much as between the sun and the moon may be recognized the difference between popes and kings.³

² This relationship was noted in a brilliant paper by Jack Freiberg, "Pope Gregory XIII, Jurist," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, LVII, 2009, 41-60, cf. 44.

³ "Ad firmamentum igitur coeli, hoc est universalis Ecclesiae, fecit Deus duo magna luminaria, id est duas magnas instituit dignitates quae sunt pontificalis auctoritas et regalis potestas. Sed illa quae praeest diebus, id est spiritualibus, maior est; quae vero noctibus, id est carnalibus, minor, ut quanta est inter solem et lunam, tanta inter pontifices et reges differentia cognoscatur," Friedberg, Emil Albert, ed., *Corpus juris canonici*, 2 vols., Graz, 1959, II, col. 198; cited by Matthias Winner, "Robur-Roma," in Paolo dal Pozzetto, ed., *I della Rovere, Piero della Francesca, Raffaello, Tiziano*, exhib. cat., Milan, 2004, 51-55, cf. 53, who invokes the theme of the two lights (duo luminaria) in relation to the Stanza fresco. The controversy over the text as an allegory of spiritual and secular rule is discussed by Dante, in *De Monarchia* (see Dante Alighieri, *Opere minori*, ed. Bruno Nardi, 2v. in 3, Milan and Naples, 1979-1988, II, 444-7).

Thus formulated by Innocent III in a letter appended to the Decretals of Gregory IX, the passage was incorporated in the body of canon law. This interpretation of Genesis 1:16-18 must have inspired both the pope and Raphael, who depicted Julius II in the guise of Gregory IX receiving the Decretals in the Stanza della Segnatura, in juxtaposition to the less imposing portrayal of his secular counterpart, the emperor Justinian receiving the Pandects (see **Fig. 12**).⁴

The darkness that lay upon the face of the deep in Genesis (1:2), dispelled by the two great lights, was traditionally associated with the expulsion of the fallen angels, envisioned in the terrible malediction of Isaiah (14:12-15):

12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

13 For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:

14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

15 Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

Lucifer is surely the invisible adversary envisaged by Michelangelo in the Lord's fierce expression and imperious gesture of command, the finger of God that Christ invoked to assure the people that salvation had come: "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Lk. 11:20). There can be no mistaking that the *persona* of God here was clearly echoed in the "spirit, force, vigilance and *terribilità*" described by Vasari in the visage of the great, new proponent of the divine ordinance that Michelangelo then created at Bologna.

When Michelangelo's bronze and the stucco figure of Julius were destroyed, respectively May 22, 1511, and December 30, 1511, the pope's adversaries showed ironically that his message had indeed been clearly understood. They replaced the stucco image at S. Petronio with a painting of God the Father inscribed with an excerpt from Psalm 99:3, as a reprisal for personally usurping the Lord's proper dominion:

⁴ On these scenes see most recently Joost-Gaugier, Christiane L., *Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura. Meaning and Invention*, New York, 2002, 136-46.

Scitote quoniam Dominus ipse est Deus (Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.)

The tragic loss of the bronze Julius II a few weeks after Michelangelo completed work on the Sistine ceiling, may have been a significant factor in his taking up in the following years (ca. 1513-15) essentially the same understanding of the *persona* of the pope for the image of Moses, the principal figure he completed for that other great tragedy of his life, the tomb of Julius (**Fig. 6, Fig. 7**). Commissioned in the spring of 1505, the tomb was planned as a huge three-storey structure to stand free in the basilica of St. Peter, with the effigy of the Pope at the top and figure of Moses placed at the right front corner on the second level, along with St. Paul at the left front corner, and with personifications of the Active and Contemplative life at the back corners. Following the pope's death in 1513, this titanic project, comprising more than forty statues, was progressively revised and reduced by Michelangelo and his assistants until it was finally installed, almost exactly forty years later in the church of S. Pietro in Vincoli, as a wall tomb with the figure of Moses as the center of focus.

God, they say, is in the details, and my purpose in the remainder of this talk is to focus still more narrowly on a detail at the center of this perhaps all too familiar work, where there is to be found, if not God, then certainly much more indeed than meets the eye. I refer to Moses's extraordinary beard and the still more extraordinary drama that takes place in and around it. There have been two important studies of beard-pulling in the history of art, one by H. W. Janson, called "The Right Arm of Michelangelo's Moses" (1968), is devoted specifically to the precedents and meaning of this striking motif, providing art historical background and rationale for the gesture that Freud famously explained in Freudian terms. The second study, by the Israeli scholar Zehava Jacoby, "The Beard Pullers in Romanesque Art: an Islamic Motif and its Evolution in the West," (1987) stressed the Near Eastern heritage, very important indeed, as we shall see. The material gathered by these two authors makes it clear that instances of beard-pulling fall into two distinct categories, one-handed and two-handed beard-pullers, and these have two distinct meanings. Two-handed beard pulling is always associated with disputation, battle, conflict. At least one hand always pulls someone else's beard; no one

ever pulls his own beard with two hands. Romanesque monster-capitals often depict such altercations in grotesque forms that intimate their diabolic origin. We still say in English of people engaged in idle disputation that they are “pulling each other’s beards.” By contrast, no one-handed beard-puller ever pulls his own beard in anger. Rather, the motif expresses surprise, confusion, consternation, meditation, puzzlement, even sudden illumination. Jews are often portrayed as beard-pullers because they are defeated, confused, confounded, bewildered, especially by the wonder of the crucifixion. The Jew figured in this way in Nicola Pisano’s *Crucifixion* on his pulpits in Pisa Baptistery must have been one of Michelangelo’s primary inspirations, not just for the beard-pulling motif, but for the generally awesome and awe-inspiring conception of the Hebrew patriarch with his venerably ample growth. Conversely, the same kind of spontaneous reaction can suggest a positive motive, in the form of awe and wonderment, as when John the evangelist is inspired to write his gospel. A small bronze dating from the late twelfth century demonstrates that the motif was long since associated with Moses, and that, as the heavenward gaze shows, in displaying the Tables of the Law, he is inspired by God (**Fig. 8**). What is also clear, as Jacoby suggests, is that there was then, as there is today, a strong association of the beard in these contexts with the east, or rather the Middle East, notably with Jews and Muslims. Muhammad himself instructed his followers to grow their beards.

It is often overlooked that Michelangelo’s Moses engages his beard not with one but with both hands; and he does not pull his beard, but touches it gently, entwining it in the fingers of his right hand, and enveloping it in those of his left, in a kind of loving, one might even say reverent embrace. In part, I think the action signifies exactly what one might suppose, that Michelangelo alluded to both aspects of the beard-pulling tradition in his portrayal of the Lawgiver. Understanding this central, conspicuous detail entails a corresponding understanding of the figure itself, which has been the subject of markedly contrasting interpretations. A traditional view of the Moses sees him in extroverted terms of the biblical narrative, aggressively expressing his anger at his people for relapsing into worship of the Golden Calf. An alternate view, following the philosophical tradition in which Michelangelo was steeped, sees him as intensely but passively experiencing the

furor poeticus of the Neo-Platonists, inspired by and reflecting his awesome vision of God.

In this respect, too, both notions are reinforced in part—the aggressivity of the one, the mystic inspiration of the other—by what must without any doubt have been the direct model for Michelangelo’s conceit. I refer to one of two famous medals acquired in 1402 by the Duc de Berry from a Florentine merchant then living in Paris. One represents Constantine the Great on horseback with a symbolic scene on the reverse, and the other, the one with which we will be most concerned, shows the eastern Emperor Heraclius in profile on the obverse (**Fig. 9**) and processing in a chariot on the reverse. Although their authorship is unknown, these extraordinary objects have played an important role in the history of European culture, partly because until well into the sixteenth century they were thought to be authentically ancient. In their day, they became very famous; toward the end of the fifteenth-century they were copied in the great series of marble numismatic portraits of the Roman emperors at the base of the facade of the Certosa at Pavia. Early in the sixteenth century, the Heraclius medal was first published in a treatise on Roman emperors by the Viennese humanist Johannes Cuspinianus (1473-1529), who thought it was authentically ancient, and actually owned an example; and later in the century the same image was inserted in the walls of the courtyard of the Palazzo Antici-Mattei in Rome.

Apart from their art historical importance the significance of the Berry medals lies in their subjects and purpose. They commemorate the two world-historical imperial victories in the name of Christianity, Constantine’s over Maxentius in 313 which established the new religion, and Heraclius’s over the Persian King Chosroes II in 628-9, which rescued the True Cross and recaptured Jerusalem from the heathen invaders. On the obverse of the Heraclius medal, the emperor looks up toward an incoming stream of light rays while grasping his luxurious beard with both hands—the only known precedent for Michelangelo’s motif; the inscriptions and crescent moon below make it clear that his victory over the infidel was divinely inspired; the scene on the reverse depicts the emperor’s triumphal “entry” into Jerusalem bearing the cross.

I first became fascinated, and ultimately obsessed by the significance of this astonishing and clearly deliberate relationship between Michelangelo’s great sculpture in

Rome and the quasi- (not pseudo-) antique Heraclius medal when I discovered that, in fact, Heraclius's beard was itself, in its time, a major and famous phenomenon. Numismatists have discerned three distinct portrait types of this great figure not only in Byzantine but also in European history. The Emperor appears on his coinage, which was of course the chief medium for political propaganda, initially with a short beard, until suddenly there was a prodigious explosion and it becomes an elaborate breast-length growth for which there was no precedent in Christian imperial tradition (**Fig. 10**). In Persia, by contrast, among the Sassanian kings, such magnificent displays of manliness were a long-standing, ubiquitous, indeed sacral sign of sovereignty. Heraclius evidently appropriated the physiognomic symbol of Iranian power in commemoration of his victory over Chosroes II, which in turn emulated the original victory over Maxentius by Constantine, who subsequently founded the eastern branch of the Roman empire, which became Byzantium. In 630 Heraclius ceremoniously entered Jerusalem and set up the Holy Cross, concluding victoriously what has been called "the first great holy war of Christendom." These events are commemorated in both the Eastern and Western churches in the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (September 14), the liturgy of which the Berry medals reflect in multiple ways.

The inscription at the left of the Heraclius medal gives in Greek letters the Latin name of the sun god, Apollo, and the rays from on high suggest that Heraclius's face does indeed reflect the glory of the Almighty—as did the face of Moses when he descended from Mount Sinai with the tables of the law (this episode was the origin of the famous pair of horns, actually rays of light, protruding from Moses' head. The occasion for this divine inspiration is evident from the Latin inscription on the crescent moon below, "on our darkness I will make war on the heathen," an obvious reference to Heraclius's Persian Zoroastrian enemy, whose crescent moon symbol by 1400 had passed to contemporary Islam.

Beyond the ecumenical Christian spirit displayed by inscribing the medal in both Greek and Latin, the designer of the Heraclius medal appropriated another universal Islamic tradition. Just as Heraclius had appropriated the enemy's proud beard as a trophy of his triumph, so our medallist co-opted what was then is still today Islam's most sacred and solemn form of commitment, to swear by the beard of the Prophet. He also

combined the one and the two-handed traditions of beard-pulling, so that Heraclius is here—already in allusion to Moses, I am convinced—not only divinely inspired but also divinely aggressive. The motivation for this unprecedented conflation surely lay in the message the medals were intended to convey: the eastern and western churches were urged to “join hands” under God, take up the Cross together, and follow Moses and Heraclius in the struggle against a common enemy.

This motivation may be understood from the circumstances in which the medals were created. They were made—by a very great artist who has yet to be identified securely—in connection with a famous visit to Italy, France, and finally, Paris in 1400-02, by the reigning Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus. The purpose of the visit, was to promote a reunification of the eastern and western churches, and to solicit help in the epochal struggle against the ever more invasive Turks. Manuel II was an altogether remarkable man—poet, student of author of important texts in philosophy, theology, and the intellectual debate with Islam, and much beloved ruler of his threatened state. Manuel was described as exceedingly handsome, adorned with a prolix beard (*barba prolixa undique canis ornate*), and he made an indelible impression in Paris, evident in the many illuminations in the manuscripts painted for the Duc de Berry by the Limbourg brothers, where the emperor and his entourage are reflected, perhaps actually portrayed, as has been suggested: The Exultation of the Cross in the *Belles Heures* repeats almost verbatim the scene on the reverse of the medal of Heraclius; in the illustrations of the months of the liturgical year in the calendar miniatures of the *Tres Riches Heures* the emperor in his wagon actually appears transmogrified as Phoebus-Apollo, preceded as if inspired by the golden disk of the sun.

Whoever designed and executed the Berry medals, I am convinced that Emperor Manuel II himself was the inspiring genius: he alone had the requisite knowledge, intelligence and humanistic spirit they embody. It is no coincidence that the date of purchase of the Berry medals was November 2, 1402, and the Emperor left Paris to return to Constantinople—quite empty-handed from his futile appeal—on November 21 of the same year.

Manuel II was neither the first nor the last Byzantine emperor to offer the western powers political and ideological concessions in exchange for financial and military

salvation. This diplomatic strategy to counter the Islamic threat began in the 13th century, and continued through the 14th and 15th centuries, always with the same, negative, result. The urgency of a coordinated east-west counterattack on Islam continued to grow in the following decades, and in 1438-9 a great council was convened in Florence, with Manuel's son, John VIII Paleologus, in attendance. The Berry medals now inspired a new pair of commemorative medals, the first true, modern—that is to say, Renaissance—medals in the ancient tradition, by Antonio Pisano, called Pisanello. This pair complemented one another in much the same way as the Berry medals, and for much the same reason. Again they combined inscriptions in both Greek and Latin. Both bore the famous portrait of John VIII wearing his Paleologan hat. One version shows him as an equestrian on the reverse, not as the proud conqueror, however, but as a pilgrim traversing an arduous landscape to worship humbly before the cross. The companion medal displayed on the reverse an emblem of two hands, representing the Greek and Latin churches, joined in holding aloft the cross. This version is now lost, but its emblem was later taken as his personal insignia by John Bessarion, the representative of the Byzantine church at the Council, who was a zealous promoter of reunion and crusade. While in Florence Bessarion converted to Roman Catholicism and almost immediately was made cardinal, but never gave up his eastern dress or his long Greek beard. He was a signatory to yet another document of agreement between east and west which was again short-lived. And as the European princes again failed to come together in a crusade, Constantinople fell to the invading Turks in 1453. It cannot have been coincidental that after Bessarion became its Cardinal Protector in 1458, the Franciscan order adopted its now familiar device showing the crossed arms of Christ and St. Francis with a cross between. Cardinal Bessarion moved to Rome, whence as papal emissary he traveled throughout France, Germany and Austria, trying to form a consolidated fighting force—always to no avail except that he kept the religious and political significance of the mission alive with his heraldic device of the two-handed “crusader motif,” as in a portrait of him in which he pretends with both hands as a palladium of his campaign a relic of the True Cross that had been saved from the lost Constantinople—very much the spirit in which Heraclius grasps his beard in the Berry medal (**Fig. 11**) .

With Cardinal Bessarion the traditions we have been following were firmly established in Rome. But the person perhaps most likely to have been directly responsible for transmitting them to Michelangelo and Julius was Bessarion's successor in many ways, Giles of Viterbo, friar of the order of the Augustinian Hermits, theologian, historian, master of languages including Hebrew and Greek. Giles has been singled out as the inspiring intellectual genius behind many of the Julius's projects, including the Sistine ceiling of Michelangelo. Above all, Giles was a celebrated preacher and served throughout Julius's reign as his chief spokesman and speechwriter. On numerous occasions he delivered sermons in which he propounded the crusade against the Turks as a justifiable *casus belli*. It is of some interest in our context that Giles also sported a long flowing beard in the Greek manner, and doubtless in emulation of Bessarion. It is particularly interesting in our context, however, that an elaborate antiquarian geneological study had convinced Giles that he was actually a member of the Paleologan family, the last ruling dynasty of Byzantium, which was supposed to have originated in Viterbo in the thirteenth century. Giles called himself Aegidius Paleologus, and this Byzantine heritage contributed to his appointment, after he had been made Cardinal, to succeed Bessarion as Patriarch of Constantinople.

I am convinced that Michelangelo and Julius understood everything there was to understand about the famous medal, and that in this case the meaning is exactly what meets the eye: Michelangelo's Moses portrays the Pope as a new Heraclius, a militant, righteous lawgiver inspired by God. I am also convinced that Michelangelo was inspired to emulate the medal by Julius himself, who, during the same illness that found him listening to Bramante expound Dante, grew a monumentally thick and prominent beard, most famously recorded in Raphael's great portrait. The beard was positively scandalous: it astounded all and dismayed many of his contemporaries, partly because it seemed unclean, and partly for its notorious association with the Greeks and Muslims. He grew the beard after October 1510, during the illness at Bologna that found him listening to Bramante expound on Dante, and kept it until he was seen clean-shaven again, March 16, 1512. A variety of explanations were offered: as a vow during his illness; because he was in pain; because of his anger in battle; his anger at the French; revenge at having lost Bologna; or simply to take on the Greek manner. His growth also

had an ancient model in a famous action of his imperial namesake Julius Caesar who having suffered defeat in battle, had grown a beard as a sign of his devotion to his followers and his determination to recuperate the loss. Diverse as they may seem in some respects all these opinions have a common denominator. Like everything else he did, Julius grew his beard for a purpose, to demonstrate his determination to defend the church against its enemies, to cleanse it of those who doubted its doctrine and abused its privileges, and to propagate its hegemony.

In fact, Julius had made a formal, indeed a sacred pledge to exactly these terms from the moment of his election in 1503. There had long been a tradition in the papal curia of a sort of pre-election contract, formulated and agreed before the voting began, to which all the cardinals were foresworn to adhere. The document, called a Capitulation, stipulated as many as fifty *capitula* designed to circumscribe the absolute power the pope enjoyed in ecclesiastical theory as Christ's vicar on earth. The purpose was to protect the private interests of the cardinals against the predatory tendency of some popes and to assure to them collectively an important role in church affairs. One of the chief provisions defined the future pope's mission with the following words: "Since it is desirable for the peace among Christians, the reformation of the church, the reduction of many taxes, and the expedition against the infidel hordes, quickly to convene a general Council, he promises, swears and vows to proclaim one within two years of his creation." The cardinals took the oath unanimously, and on his election, Julius had duly reconfirmed, again under oath, his allegiance to the election-capitulations.

Needless to say, election-Capitulations had often been honoured in the breach, and this is exactly what Julius did, except that his reasons for doing so led to one of the greatest crises in the history of the church, on the very eve of the Protestant reformation. It is often supposed that Julius disregarded one of the most important mandates imposed by the Capitulation, to call a council within two years, in order to avoid interference from the Episcopal hierarchy as he pursued his own personal, egomaniacal, expansionist goals. Avoiding opposition, certainly; but it is amply clear that in fact Julius spent his whole reign and prodigious energy in pursuing the very goals the Capitulation stipulated, albeit in radical, even revolutionary new directions. The goals he set himself in fulfilment of his oath were essentially three: to drive out foreign occupiers,—the French, the Spanish,

and the Holy Roman emperor—and suppress the independent Italian city states—Bologna, Milan and Venice—so as to unify all of Italy as a single state, an ideal that was not achieved until the nineteenth century; to bring about peace among the secular rulers of Europe; and to reform and renovate the church, cleansed of the endemic abuses and corruption of which it was widely and justifiably accused—typically, he began by grasping the problem at the jugular, eliminating the practice of simony—selling you vote—in episcopal elections that made financial and other personal considerations a traditional and essential part of the negotiations among the Cardinals for the choice of a new pope. Although he pursued all these “domestic” ends simultaneously, Julius regarded them as necessary preliminary steps toward the ultimate goal, a crusade in which the western powers would cease battling among themselves and join forces—led by the pope as the head of a unified papal state—he intended to conduct the campaign himself—to retrieve the Holy Land for Christianity.

Inevitably, Julius’s policies encountered fierce resistance from some of the most powerful forces in Europe, and their representatives among the cardinals. Hence Julius’s procrastination with calling the council, and hence the equally inevitable reaction of his opponents: when Louis XII of France decided to add to his attack on the temporal supremacy of Julius, an attack also on the spiritual supremacy, he and a small group of like-minded cardinals called a council of their own, to which Julius would either yield or be replaced by another pope, on the grounds of Julius’s neglect to fulfill his commitments. The schismatic Council of Pisa was proclaimed on May 16, 1511. In effect, the crisis was one of the most dramatic episodes, and the last, in the long history of the struggle for hegemony over the church between pro-active popes and the college of cardinals. Julius’s response was predictably forceful and unyielding: on July 18, 1511, he immediately convoked a far greater, general council, the Fifth Lateran Council, from which the excommunicated, anathematized schismatic cardinals were excluded. The Council was still in session when he died (February 21, 1513).

At the nadir of his political fortunes, in desperately poor health, under attack for not calling a Council, Julius, I think, grew his beard to reaffirm publicly the solemn pledge that expressed the fundamental values of his reign and his own personal *raison d’être*. These, after all, are also the values that underlay the scenes that include the pope

in the Stanza of Raphael, in all of which the pope appears full-bearded: the *Mass at Bolsena*, in which the doubts of a wavering German priest were miraculously countered by the pope's presence; the *Expulsion of Heliodorus from the Temple*, at which the pope presides and the *Consignment of the Decretals* in which Julius assumes the *persona* of Gregory IX, the pope who canonized St. Francis in 1226 (**Fig. 12**). In sum, Julius's beard, like that of Heraclius, was the visual equivalent of a sacred vow. I suspect that the medal of Heraclius, the great warrior for Christ, in which precisely the same vow is portrayed as a passionate, deeply personal embrace of a divinely inspired ideal, may have inspired Julius himself, no less than Michelangelo.

Other aspects of the Michelangelo's sculpture may be understood in the light of Julius's particular impersonation of Moses the lawgiver. Moses sits on a cubic block of stone. This unusual support does not simply allude to Michelangelo's calling as a sculptor, nor simply to Christ's chosen vicar, St. Peter, Petrus-petra, the rock upon whom he would build his Church. Here, under the lawgiver, the block is also the *sedes sapientiae* whence, descending from God through Moses to Peter and the pope, all truth is promulgated. Speaking of the papacy, the great twelfth-century bishop of Chartres, Pierre de Celles, also a renowned architect, described the relationship between Moses and Peter as: "This is the seat of Peter, the stone on which Moses is enthroned, the immaculate law of God converting souls that strikes and dashes the fragile councils of the heretics." I have no doubt that this astonishingly apt statement was known to both Julius and Michelangelo.

In the end, perhaps the most telling feature of Moses the lawgiver is that the Tables of the law are not open and displayed to the viewer as was normally the case and as Michelangelo himself seems to have intended in his early project for the Julius tomb. On the contrary, the drama of the beard displaces the traditional display of the Tables, which are conspicuously closed and held inconspicuously at Moses's side. The whole concept is paradoxical and to my mind it can only be understood in relation to Moses-Julius the lawgiver enacting his vow. In this sense he is indeed a menacing creature—and here I join those old timers who recognize the Moses as incorporating the attitudes and meaning of Michelangelo's earlier portrayals of intimidating, grimacing heroes, the military *St. Proculus* and *David*. Moses, however, does not threaten to break the Tables;

he withholds them and guards and protects them, while challenging those who have not seen the face of God, to see the light.

Many years later, following the vicissitudes of what Michelangelo's biographer called the "tragedy" of the tomb, it became obvious that Michelangelo would never be able to finish the project himself. In a contract of 1542 it was agreed that the tomb would be completed by other sculptors working under Michelangelo's supervision in its present, much reduced form. Michelangelo agreed personally to put the finishing touches on the portrait head of the effigy of the pope. Although Julius had worn it for little more than a year and had shaved it off a year before he died, the beard retained, at least in Michelangelo's eye, its mythic power.

Finally, I want to suggest that this great drama of interaction between the inner *persona* of Michelangelo's lawgiver and the outside world have played itself out in the location Michelangelo intended for the figure, which would have been seen from below at the front, right-hand corner of the upper register of the monument in the Cappella Giulia in the apse of Bramante's St. Peter's (**Fig. 13**). The approaching visitor would thus have seen Moses-Julius from below, turning to confront the north and the east. When one considers that in 1510-11, exactly when Julius grew his penitential beard, the Augustinian friar Martin Luther made his fateful visit to Rome and discussed his complaints with his brother in faith Giles of Viterbo, who was then Prior General of the Order; and that the invading Turks had then virtually reached the Adriatic, this was precisely the direction from which the greatest enemies of the church were coming. Seen in this way, the sculpture seems to reflect the very words of Julius in the first paragraph of the Bull of July 18, 1511, convoking the Lateran council (inspired I suspect by Giles of Viterbo, who delivered the opening speech). Julius anathematizes the enemies of the church in thunderous terms that echo again the same text of Isaiah we saw reflected in the face of God the Father in the Sistine ceiling as he dispels the forces of darkness: in the words of the prophet Julius inveighs against Lucifer who sought to raise his throne above God's own:

Isaiah 12-14:

12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!
how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

13 For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:

14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

15 Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.



Fig. 1 Raphael, Portrait of Julius II. National Gallery, London

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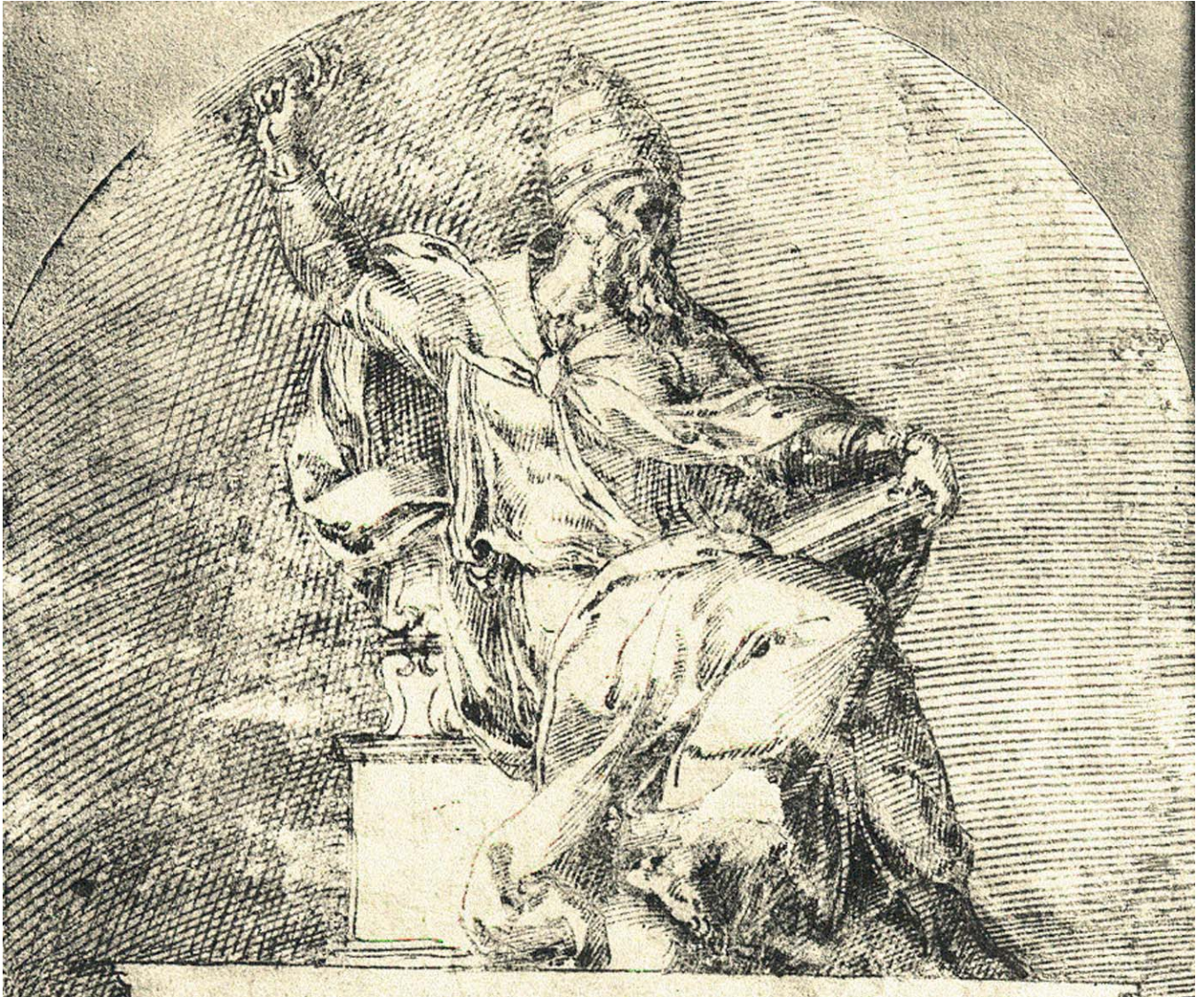


Fig. 2 Baccio Bandinelli, Blessing Pope, ink drawing, detail. Musée du Louve, Paris

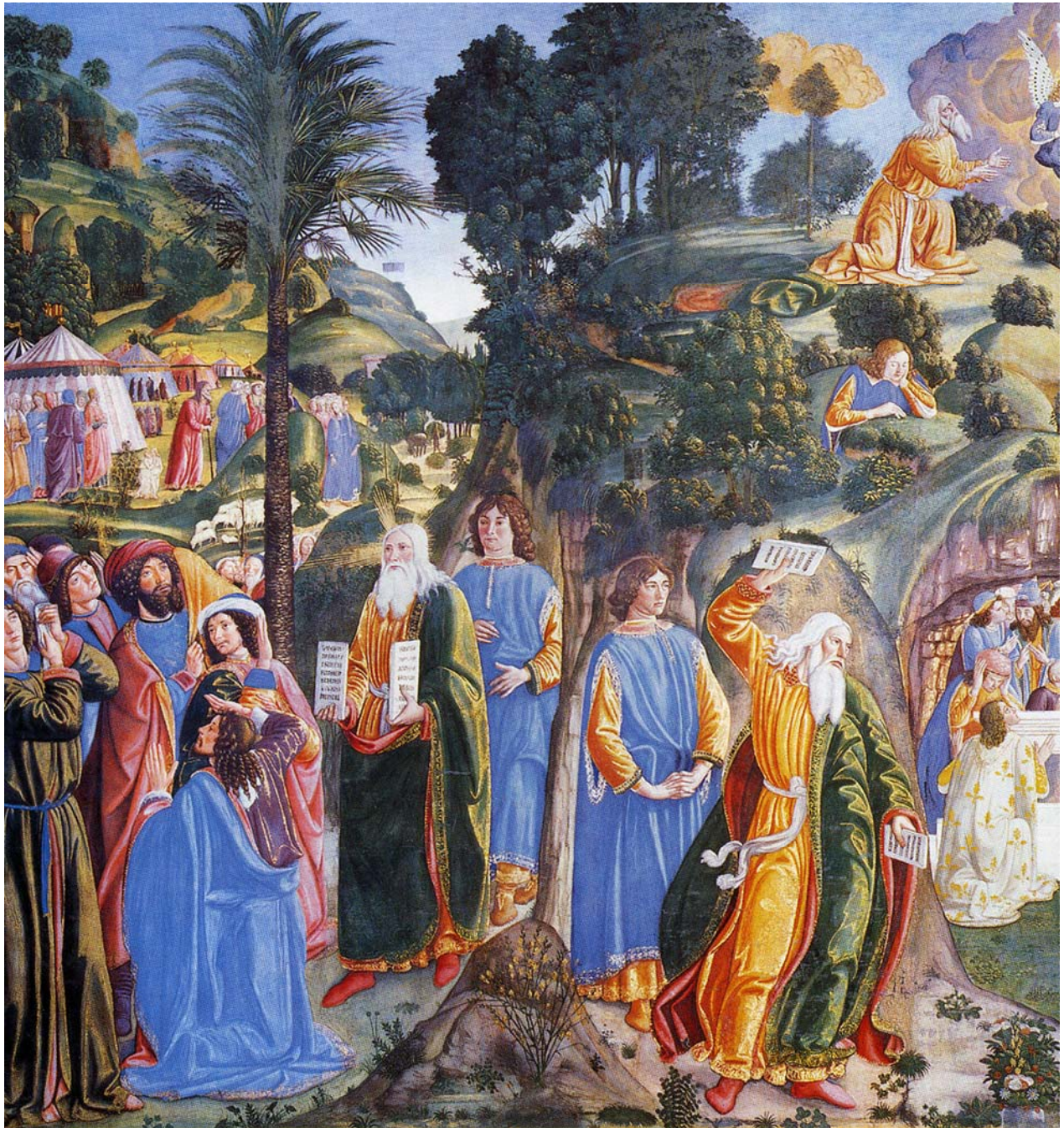


Fig. 3 Cosimo Rosselli, Story of Moses, detail. Sistine Chapel , Rome



Fig. 4 Pier Paolo Olivieri, Gregory XIII. S. Maria in Aracoeli, Rome

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Fig. 5 Michelangelo, Separation of Light and Darkness, detail. Sistine Chapel, Rome



Fig. 6 Michelangelo, Moses. S. Pietro in Vincoli, Rome

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Fig. 7 Michelangelo, Moses. S. Pietro in Vincoli, Rome

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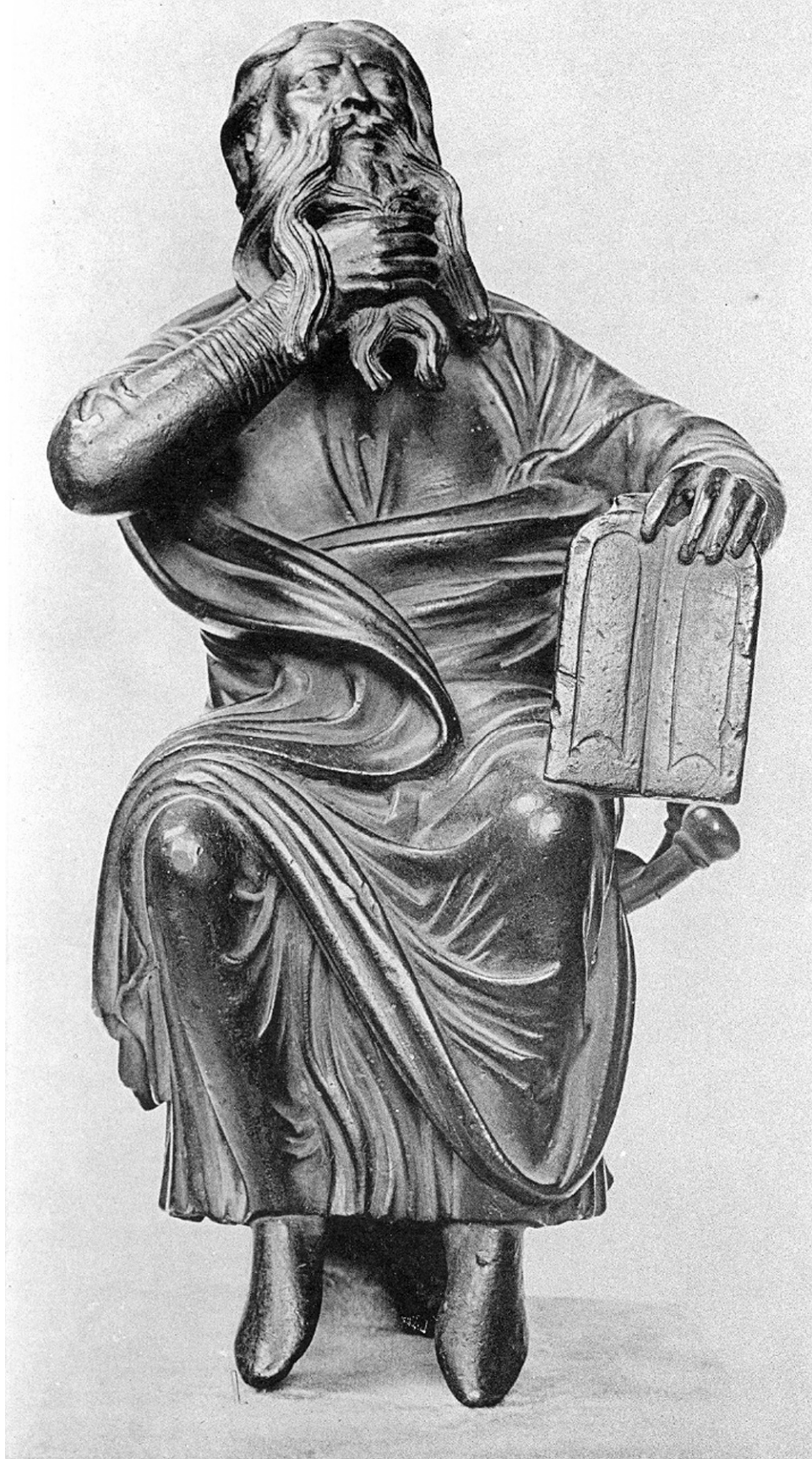


Fig. 8 Moses, bronze. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

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Fig. 9 Heraclius, Berry Medal, obverse, bronze. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.



Fig. 10 Heraclius with long beard and son Heraclius Constantinus, gold solidus.. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D.C.



Fig. 11 John Bessarion holding reliquary of True Cross. Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice

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Fig. 12 Raphael, Justinian receiving the Decretals (left) and Julius II as Gregory IX receiving the Pandects (right).
Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican Palace, Rome

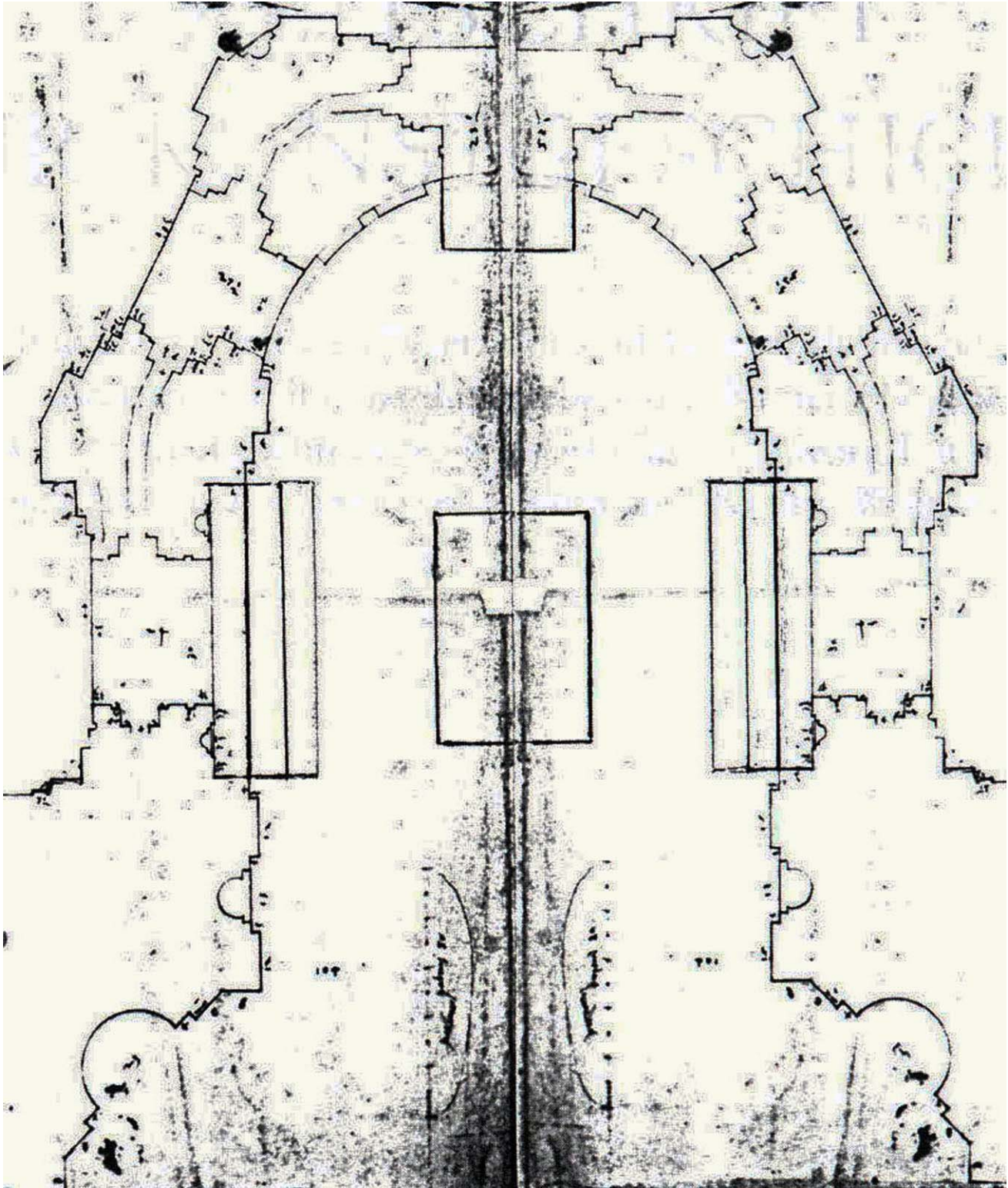


Fig. 13 Presumed placement of the Julius tomb, inscribed in a drawing by Antonio da Sangallo the Younger of Bramante's choir of St. Peter's (after Christoph Frommel, "Capella Iulia: Die Grabkapella Papst Julius' II in Neu-St. Peter," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, XL, 1977, 26-62, cf. fig. 5, p. 35)