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Ut Poesis Pictura: the Transformation of the Roman Landscape in Botticelli's *Punishment of Korah*

ÉAMONN Ó CARRAGÁIN

This paper examines the symbolic functions played by the representation of the landscape in the *Punishment of Korah* (Fig. 1), the third and final fresco which Botticelli executed in the Sistine Chapel.[1] Ronald Lightbown has written a detailed and sensitive account of Botticelli's presentation of the landscape; it is worth quoting at length, as it raises many of the questions I shall subsequently consider:

> For all its complexity of narrative, the 'Conturbation of the Laws of Moses' is compositionally the most rhythmical and harmonious of the three frescoes. . . . So far as we know, it is Botticelli's first important architectural setting of the *quattrocento* type now known as a stage setting. Typically, it in no way evokes the desert of Sinai, where the scenes take place in the Bible. The foreground and middle-ground represent a paved Roman forum. On the right is a pillared classical ruin of the sort we have met in Botticelli's earlier works; but this one has been plausibly identified as the Septizonium of Septimius Severus, now destroyed, but then still in part surviving. At the rear the forum is enclosed by a splendid great grey arch, its reliefs and statues executed in gold, its inscription in gold letters on blue ground. It is a copy of the Arch of Constantine as it was in the fifteenth century – a faithful, but not, as so often claimed, a literal copy, for Botticelli has altered the figures in the friezes above the side arches, added palmettes to the great frieze and substituted trophies of arms for the figures on the bases of the columns. He chose to depict the north side of the arch, as viewed from the Meta Sudans, but changed the Valle Murcia of the real background into a lake or arm of the sea. The arch may well be present for symbolic reasons: it is shown again by Perugino in the opposite fresco and in both cases the allusion may be to Constantine as first Christian Emperor. . . .[2]

Lightbown recognises that Botticelli was not merely reproducing individual Roman monuments, but instead referred to a whole landscape, that of the Valle

Murcia which lies between the Palatine Hill and the Caelian Hill, to the south-east of the Arch of Constantine.[3] Botticelli's representation is in many respects the most accurate representation of the Arch of Constantine to have survived from the Renaissance.[4] Nevertheless, as Lightbown points out, Botticelli does not hesitate to transform certain aspects of the arch to suit his theme. He isolates the arch from the struggles going on in front of it by raising it above ground level on a marble platform approached by steps. He provides, instead of the Constantinian dedicatory inscription, a hortatory inscription which sums up the central theme of his fresco: 'NEMO SIBI . ASSUM/AT HONOREM . NISI / VOCATVS . ADEO . / TANQVAM ARON .' The inscription is based on a well-known text, Hebrews 5:4; as Lightbown shows, 'its words have been deliberately altered from the scriptural original, "Neither doth any man take the honour unto himself, but he that is called by God, as Aaron was", into the warning, "Let no man take the honour to himself but he is called by God as Aaron was".'[5] We are beginning to see in the fresco a general mode of procedure: what is imitated is also transformed. I shall argue that this principle provides a central key to its structure and meaning.

Lightbown seeks an explanation for Botticelli's transformation of the landscape in classical accounts of ancient paintings, and in decorative rather than thematically functional terms. He states that 'architecture and sculpture were for [Botticelli] little more than accessories to his art', but that he was much more inspired by 'what he could learn of the achievement of ancient painters'. Thus, Lightbown suggests,

> the magnificent ship moored in the water behind the arch may be there simply because Botticelli had read in Alberti that Heracleides of Macedonia was famous in antiquity as a painter of ships. Perhaps too in designing the whole background he had in mind Pliny's praise of Ludius, the Augustan painter who was the first to fresco walls with landscapes of villas and gardens, hills and groves, rivers and shores, with ships entering port and rustic folk. In any case, the landscape and lake are introduced as always to close the scene with an aerial prospect of delightful verdure and water. Yet here again Botticelli's obstinate preference for pictorial variety to all considerations of antiquarian or even narrative verisimilitude appears in the spired church on the left and in the steeples of the lakeside town on the right.[6]

I do not wish to challenge Lightbown's speculation that Botticelli may have wished to produce in the fresco modern versions of lost ancient paintings, so much as his hypothesis that the architecture and sculpture represented in the painting are primarily there 'simply' to provide classical literary references; or to function as decorative accessories, as part of an 'obstinate preference for pictorial variety'; or that they are introduced merely 'to close the scene with an aerial prospect of delightful verdure and water'. Instead, I wish to argue that Botticelli's transformation of the Valle Murcia is systematic, and that, however delightful in itself, it was carried out in order consistently to develop a theological and political theme. Modern scholars have arguably misunderstood Botticelli's transformation of the Valle Murcia because they have failed to

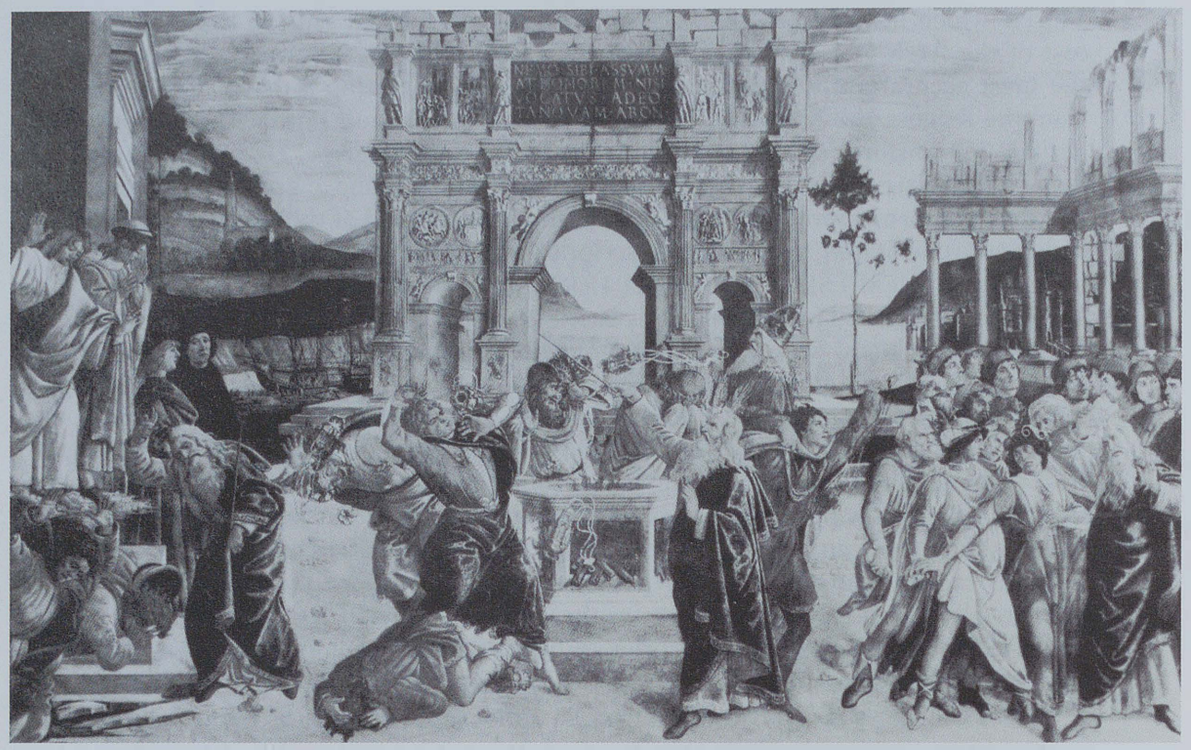


Fig. 1. Sandro Botticelli, The Punishment of Korah, Vatican, Sistine Chapel, 1481–2. (Photo: by permission of the Vatican Galleries)

recognise the literary and liturgical sources which inspired Botticelli's technique of consistent transformation.

The power of the fresco depends on its unity and coherence as a visual image. It is primarily unified by the light that floods into it. In all the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel walls, the light flows from a single imaginary source: as it were from the west, from the windows behind the altar, at the west end of the chapel (the windows later blocked up to provide space for Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*).[7] The light flows in from the right-hand side of Botticelli's fresco, and from a point somewhat in front. Thus the shadows of some of the human figures fall to their left, and somewhat behind them: so does the shadow of the sculpted human figure standing to the right of the attic of the triumphal arch.

Let us see, in simple terms, and without enquiring too deeply into possible sources, what the narrative of the fresco is about. The narrative must be read from right to left, as though it were a text written in Hebrew.[8] Like the other frescoes on the Sistine walls, we get three episodes at once, rather in the manner of a comic strip. On the right, Moses is being threatened by a group of his followers who want to stone him. Prominent among the attackers is a young man with a fashionable hat, and a stone in his right hand. He is being restrained by

another young man, who has been identified with Joshua.[9] To the rear of the group, at least eight men stand apart as onlookers, detached from the conflict. Their dress marks them out as fifteenth-century scholars and members of the papal court. It has been suggested, indeed, that the second figure from the right is a self-portrait by Botticelli. It is common in Renaissance painting to include portraits of contemporary figures as onlookers of past events, and we may safely assume that in the 1480s other members of this group of scholars would have been known to the audience of the fresco.[10] In the fresco, therefore, fifteenth-century scholars look upon the past, and presumably ruminate on its meaning for later ages and for the present.

As well as being unified by light, the fresco is unified by figures which recur from scene to scene. The most prominent among these figures is Moses, who is a central protagonist in all three scenes. In two of the scenes, the second and third, Moses holds a rod, symbol of his authority. The fresco is unified by its landscape: it is set in a valley between two hills, one to the left and one to the right. It is also unified by a striking progression in the age and condition of the monuments which provide the background to the action. To the right, we begin with a ruin, made up of pillars and slender arches, almost ready to fall. In the centre of the fresco, the light strikes the beautifully drawn late classical triumphal arch. The arch is in a much better state than the fragile ruin to its right. It is somewhat battered, but practically complete. As we have seen, the inscription refers to Aaron; there is therefore a clear connection between the inscription and the figure of Aaron, with his papal tiara, just in front of the arch. In this central scene, there are no onlookers, no figures in contemporary fifteenth-century dress. Moses and Aaron act together and successfully. Their gazes are exalted, indeed inspired: rays of light shine from Moses' forehead. Before Moses' raised staff, and Aaron's swinging thurible, wielded with a priest's professional dexterity, the group of richly dressed Jewish layfolk have to abandon their amateurish efforts to offer sacrifice at the altar in the foreground. They stagger and fall and, as might be expected of amateurish laity, they simply cannot handle their thuribles.[11]

The narrative ends abruptly on the left of the fresco, where the ground opens up to swallow two of the rebels. Two others are saved by a blue cloud which miraculously bears them aloft.[12] One of the saved pair gestures in alarm at the fate of his erstwhile companions, now heading abruptly for the underworld: by chance or design, his arms and hands assume a posture reminiscent of the ancient liturgical gesture of prayer, the *orans* posture. The other averts his eyes in horror; his hands, also raised in alarm, begin to approximate to the alternative gesture of prayer, the medieval gesture of joining the hands in submission.[13] This scene of condemnation and last-minute salvation takes place in close proximity to a brand-new façade. The elaborate marble trabeation-ornament above the door marks the façade as being in the latest fifteenth-century style.[14] The sun strikes upon this pink façade, and the narrative progression in the painting leads to it. We see little of the brand-new building itself: only its façade, and a small sliver of its side wall, kept in shade, so that nothing should distract us from the façade and its elaborate door.[15] Most of the building is, as it were, off stage. But the role of the façade in the structure of the fresco is striking: in the three stages of the narrative, we have

moved from a fragile ruin, on the right, past an ancient but well preserved arch, in the centre, to a brand-new façade in the latest style, on the left. Apart from the striking contrast between fragile ruin and brand-new façade, several other features unite the first stage of the narrative, on the right, with the final stage, on the left. The right arm of Moses, raised in alarm in the first scene, is echoed by his right arm raised in judgement in the last scene. In both scenes, his head is inclined to the left in a similar posture. The narrative is clearly intended as a cautionary lesson for a lay audience. Botticelli's fresco is in that part of the Sistine Chapel outside the choir, between the choir screen and the entrance door; it was originally the central fresco of three Moses frescoes outside the choir-screen.[16] It was therefore intended to be the central and most important fresco of the Moses cycle to overlook the area to which laymen, courtiers and ambassadors were admitted to assist at the long papal ceremonies conducted on the other side of the choir-screen. For lay officials, ambassadors and aristocrats who stood and waited while the ceremonies droned on, the fresco had some disturbing points to make. As the central scene in particular makes clear, the fresco represents the discomfiture of a group of well-off, well-dressed and articulate laity who challenge a divinely appointed hierarchy. Understandably, this issue was a major concern of the papacy in the fifteenth century, the age of the conciliar movement, which tried to subordinate papal authority to that of general councils.[17] Discomfited by the presence of God embodied in the piercing gazes and commanding gestures of Aaron and Moses, the rebellion of the laity falls apart around the altar. This is a man's world: women and children figure in the major scriptural source for the narrative (Numbers 16) and women and children recur in many of the frescoes on the Sistine walls. However, there is not a single woman in the whole fresco, nor in its companion-fresco on the opposite wall, Perugino's *Handing on of the Keys*, which we shall examine later (Fig. 6). These frescoes are, after all, about religious authority. In the Sistine Chapel such authority was in the fifteenth century a male prerogative.

Where is the scene set? Clearly, at the level of narrative history, it is set in the desert of Sinai, a desert which here paradoxically includes a sea. But the reminiscence of the Arch of Constantine would have made it clear to a fifteenth-century Roman audience that this desert scene looks forward to Rome. The Arch of Constantine then stood beyond the inhabited city, in that large area within the Aurelian Walls known as the *disabitato*, the uninhabited area. To its left stood, and stands, the Colosseum. If it is surprising that there should be a sea and ships in the desert of Sinai, it is equally surprising that there should be a sea and ships in the Valle Murcia, which does not even have a stream running through it. It is with this paradox that we can begin our search for sources which might explain the transformations of the fresco.

The presence of the two ships drawn up to the shore to the left of the arch has driven art historians to that ingenuity which is usually the sign of despair. A hundred years ago Steinmann suggested that they might be a reference to the fifteen galleys which by treaty the republic of Florence had to supply to the Pope for the war against the Turks.[18] But those were oared vessels (triremes), while the two ships in the fresco are sailing ships. Carol F. Lewine is even more ingenious,

and accordingly even less convincing. She sees the ships and the sea itself as being suggested to Botticelli by a single simile in a single ancient historian. In the account of Korah's rebellion in his *Jewish Antiquities*, Flavius Josephus states that, when Moses was threatened with stoning, he urged the Lord to punish Dathan and Abiram; at this point, 'Suddenly, the earth shook . . . as when a wave is tossed by the violence of the wind'. Lewine suggests that 'Josephus's metaphor of the wind-tossed wave may help to explain the beached ships near the central axis of the *Korah* fresco'.[19] This is even less convincing than Lightbown's suggestion, quoted above, that the magnificent ship moored in the water behind the arch may be there simply because Botticelli had read in Alberti that Heracleides of Macedonia was famous as a painter of ships.[20]

We shall find a much more likely source for the sea and the ships if we turn back once more to the structure of the fresco. One of the features which the final scene shares with the first scene is that both of them incorporate detached observers dressed in the sober garments of contemporary humanist scholars and members of the papal curia. In the first at least eight of these stand in front of the fragile ancient ruin.[21] In the final scene there are only two detached observers, to the rear of the scene, directly in front of the brand-new façade.[22] These figures are particularly striking. The elder, dressed in the sober robes of a cleric and scholar, is the only figure in the whole fresco to gaze out straight at the observer (also through him and beyond him, to the Perugino fresco on the opposite side of the chapel). His pale face and calm sombre gaze are impossible to miss in the relative gloom of the Sistine Chapel. It is therefore natural for us to begin our search for sources with this figure, who intercepts the onlooker's gaze and draws him into the world of the painting. His gaze, and that of his young companion, form the final element in a whole network of gazes which links the various elements of the fresco and adds to the unity of the composition. In the opening group of eight scholars and humanists, on the right, the way in which individuals look in all directions indicates a certain confusion and loss of direction. The first two scholars, to the left of the group, look towards the fragile ruin behind. The third, an older scholar, gazes steadfastly towards the younger figure, dressed in black, on the extreme right. To the left of the pedestal of the third pillar of the ruin, the fourth figure faces towards the man in black, but his eyes swivel left, to gaze at the ancient ruin also. The next two scholars (the fifth and sixth figures in the group) look out upon the stoning of Moses in front of them. A young scholar, the seventh in the group, looks enquiringly at the man in black who is immediately to his left.[23] The gaze of the man in black is particularly striking: he gazes, calmly but seriously, beyond this opening scene towards the left of the fresco, as though already foreseeing the episodes to follow. Alone among the group, his gaze expresses courage, resolution and detachment from the conflict immediately in front of him. He seems a natural leader.[24] In the central scene Moses gazes towards heaven from which his inspiration comes (his exaltation symbolised by the golden rays of the horn on his forehead); and the tallest figure, Aaron, gazes out under his tiara, beyond that scene, towards the brand-new façade to the left of the painting. In front of that façade, the serious gaze of the older scholar invites us to look for the key to the fresco precisely here, where his young companion

ignores the scene of strife and judgement to his right, and instead looks out calmly, beyond present distress, to the distant perspective defined by the great calm inlet of the sea which fills the valley. Just in front of the young scholar, the two ships are drawn up on the shore as though they have come to the end of a voyage. But anyone familiar with the psalter could hardly miss the echo set up by the juxtaposition of the gazing figure and the harboured ships:

> They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters;
> These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.
> For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof.
> They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble.
> They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end.
> Then they cry to the lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.
> He makes the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still.
> Then they are glad because they be quiet; and so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. (Psalm 106:23–30)

In the psalter, this is the second of two psalms, each of which begins with the phrase 'Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever': Psalms 105 and 106 in the Vulgate. Both of these psalms tell of the wanderings of the Israelites in the desert. In the first, Psalm 105, there is a brief summary of the Rebellion and Punishment of Korah and his sons:

> They soon forgat his works; they waited not for his counsel:
> But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert.
> And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.
> They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the Lord.
> The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram.
> And a fire was kindled in their company; the flame burned up the wicked.

The passage that begins with the great phrase 'they that go down to the sea in ships' occurs in the second of the two psalms, Psalm 106. A recurring theme in this second psalm is that the Lord led Israel out of the desert into a city: 'And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation' (verse 7). Another major theme of the Psalm is that the Lord in the desert transformed the landscape:

> He turneth rivers unto a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground;
> A fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.
> He turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into watersprings.
> And there he maketh the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation;

> And sow the fields, and plant vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase. (Psalm 106: 33–7)

It is extraordinary that, as far as I know, no scholar has seen the relevance of these two psalms to Botticelli's fresco. But this is because no modern scholar has seen what must have been obvious to any fifteenth-century literate onlooker: that Botticelli had, like God, transformed the Valle Murcia, between the Palatine and the Caelian hills. He turned the wildness of the *disabitato* into a standing water, a calm sea in the background of the fresco, which contrasts significantly with the figures in front of the arch, or indeed with the largely confused scholars to the right of the painting. Both groups, literally or metaphorically, 'reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end'. Thus, even in the darkest days of the rebellion of Korah, the young scholar can look beyond that strife and punishment to the days in which the Lord will bring the people of Israel into their desired haven, and provide for his people a city of habitation: the city of Rome. The ships are beached at a wharf on which we can see mooring-poles and wooden frames on which the ships can be careened for repair – all the equipment appropriate to a port. It is in this context that the young man can be far-seeing and calm; like the resolute man in black to the extreme right of the fresco, and his mature companion who looks out at us and at the Perugino, he can see far beyond present conflicts to their final solution.

In front of the arch in the fresco a six-sided structure contains the fire for a holocaust; the fire and wood are visible, and smoke emerges from the top of the structure. So placed, this fire forms part of Botticelli's witty transformation of the landscape. For near this point, in front of the Arch of Constantine, there stood (until 1936) a famous fountain: the Meta Sudans (the name means 'the sweating cone' or 'the sweating boundary-marker' (Fig. 2)).[25] Botticelli has not only placed a calm sea behind the arch where, in the Valle Murcia, dry land should be, but in front of the arch he has also, like God, 'turned . . . watersprings into dry ground'.

Psalms 105 and 106 are quite a different kind of source from those proposed by Lightbown or Lewine. These scholars privilege classical references and private reading, assuming that Botticelli was inspired by his private reading, and that only the extensive reading of a modern scholar can reconstruct his sources. The weakness of the current theories is that they are individualistic and arbitrary; they pay no attention to the question, 'who in the fifteenth-century Sistine Chapel would have appreciated the literary references?'[26] The present hypothesis is an abrupt break with such approaches. Any reasonably intelligent and conscientious fifteenth-century Roman cleric would certainly have appreciated what Botticelli was doing with the Roman landscape. The Sistine Chapel was where the papal court, the body known as the *capella papalis* ('the Papal Chapel') sang the liturgy.[27] In the liturgy of the Papal Chapel, all the psalms were chanted every single week. Our two psalms, 105 and 106, were chanted one after the other every Saturday at Matins.[28] Saturday is the Jewish Sabbath; the name Sabbath is used for the day both in Christian Latin (*Sabbatum*) and in Italian (*Sabbato*). In fifteenth-century devotion and liturgy, Saturday was the day of the week particularly consecrated (like the Sistine Chapel itself) to the Blessed Virgin

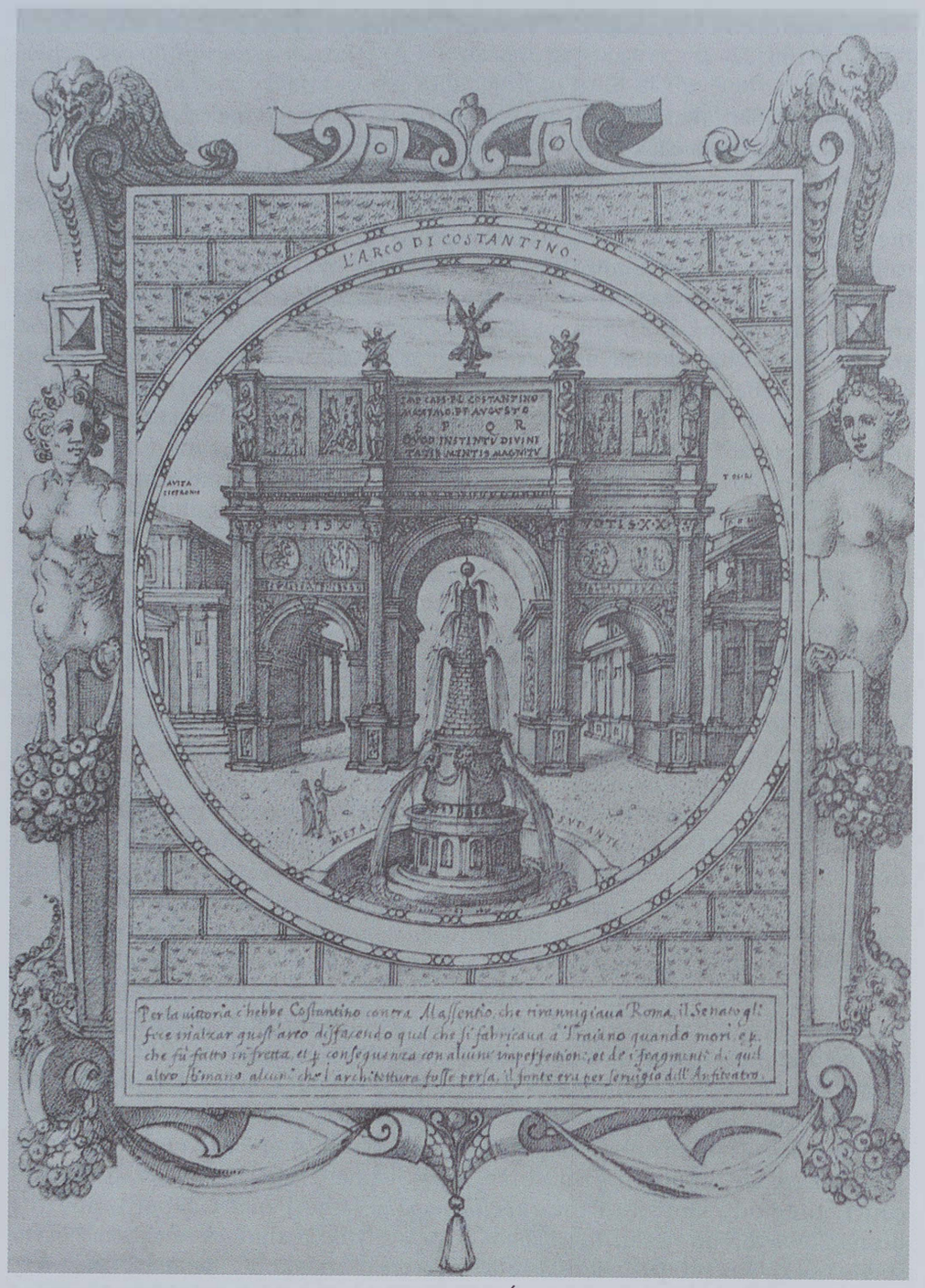


Fig. 2. Meta Sudans (foreground). (Photo: after Étienne du Pérac (1574))

Mary, who in her great canticle the Magnificat (sung daily at Vespers) associated the honour done to her with the mercy done to 'thy servant Israel' (Luke 1:54). On Saturday at Lauds (sung just after Matins), the Old Testament canticle was the second canticle of Moses ('Audite Caeli', Deuteronomy 32).[29]

But the transformation of the Arch of Constantine and of the Valle Murcia is not the only transformation in the fresco. Art historians have noticed that the fragile structure to the right is reminiscent of the ruins of the Septizonium of Septimius Severus, which until 1589 stood at the edge of the Palatine Hill and formed an ornamental façade for the imperial palace (Fig. 3).[30] The Septizonium stood to the right of the Arch of Constantine, but far off behind it to the south-east, some half a kilometre down the Valle Murcia near the Circus Maximus. Its relative position to the Arch of Constantine can be seen on the top left-hand corner of a detail from Étienne du Pérac's bird's-eye view of Rome published in 1577 (Fig. 4). I therefore agree with the consensus among scholars that this fragile structure refers, in some sense, to the Septizonium of Septimius Severus.

What no art historian seems to have noticed, however, is that Botticelli has fundamentally transformed the Septizonium. It is clear from all the surviving renaissance drawings that the Septizonium had a solid wall at its rear and corinthian pillars. But it had no arches. Botticelli's structure, on the contrary, is open; through its three fragile arches the sun and moon could, at certain parts of the imaginary day and night, have shone. Why has Botticelli transformed the Septizonium? His reasons may be related to popular legends of what the Septizonium meant. In the *Mirabilia* tradition the Septizonium was repeatedly identified, from the twelfth century to the fifteenth, as '*Templum solis et lunae*', the temple of the sun and moon.[31] By opening up the structure so that the light can shine through it, Botticelli can be said to have revealed its destiny as a temple of the sun and moon.[32] But this was by no means the only association which the structure had. Up to the end of the fourteenth century, it was known not only as *septizonium* but also by at least three names which punned on the concept 'seven': *septasolis, Septem Solia, Septem solium.*[33] From the beginning of the fifteenth century such punning names on 'seven' begin to be used to connect the structure with learning, through the seven liberal arts. Thus the anonymous humanist author of a *Tractatus de Rebus Antiquis et Situ Urbis Romae* (*c.* 1411) stated that 'at the *Septem solia* was the seat of all the seven branches of knowledge [*septem scientiarum*], although it must be acknowledged that others consider it to have been the temple of the Sun, or the house of the African [Emperor] Severus: but its derivation is "seven ways", that is, the house of all the seven branches of knowledge [*septem scientiarum*] . . .'.[34] The English Benedictine pilgrim John Capgrave, who visited Rome for the Holy Year of 1450, was told the same story in an embellished form by the monks of S. Gregorio al Caelio. According to their traditions, St Gregory the Great himself had founded a sort of university in the building, with its seven chairs.[35] To associate the tradition that learning took place in the building with St Gregory the Great was a natural *pietas* on the part of St Gregory's monastery, who owned the site.[36] But others were beginning, at just this period, to associate the tradition with an even greater name. About 1490 the anonymous author known as the Prospettivo Milanese recorded the tradition in

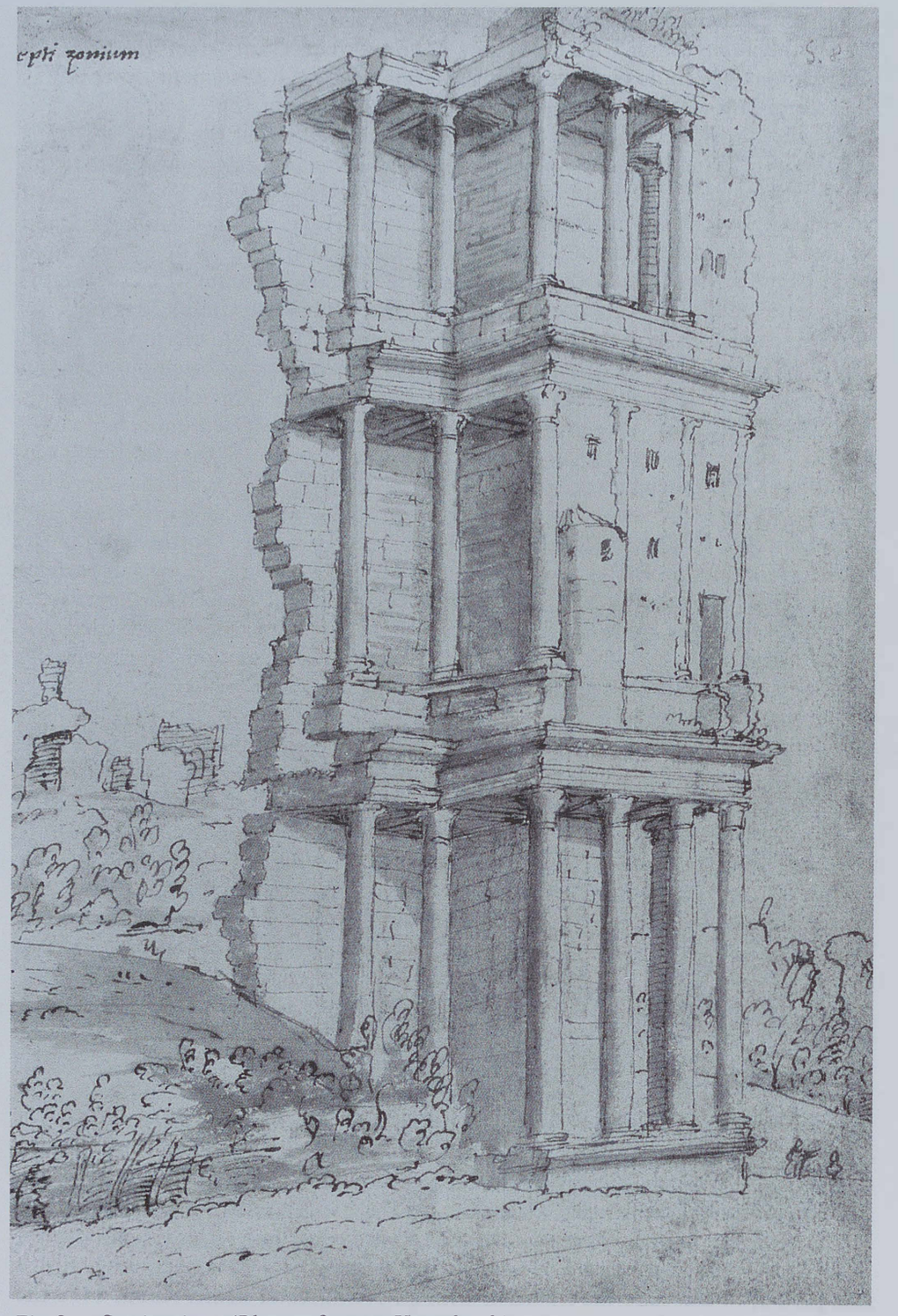


Fig. 3. Septizonium. (Photo: after van Heemskerck)

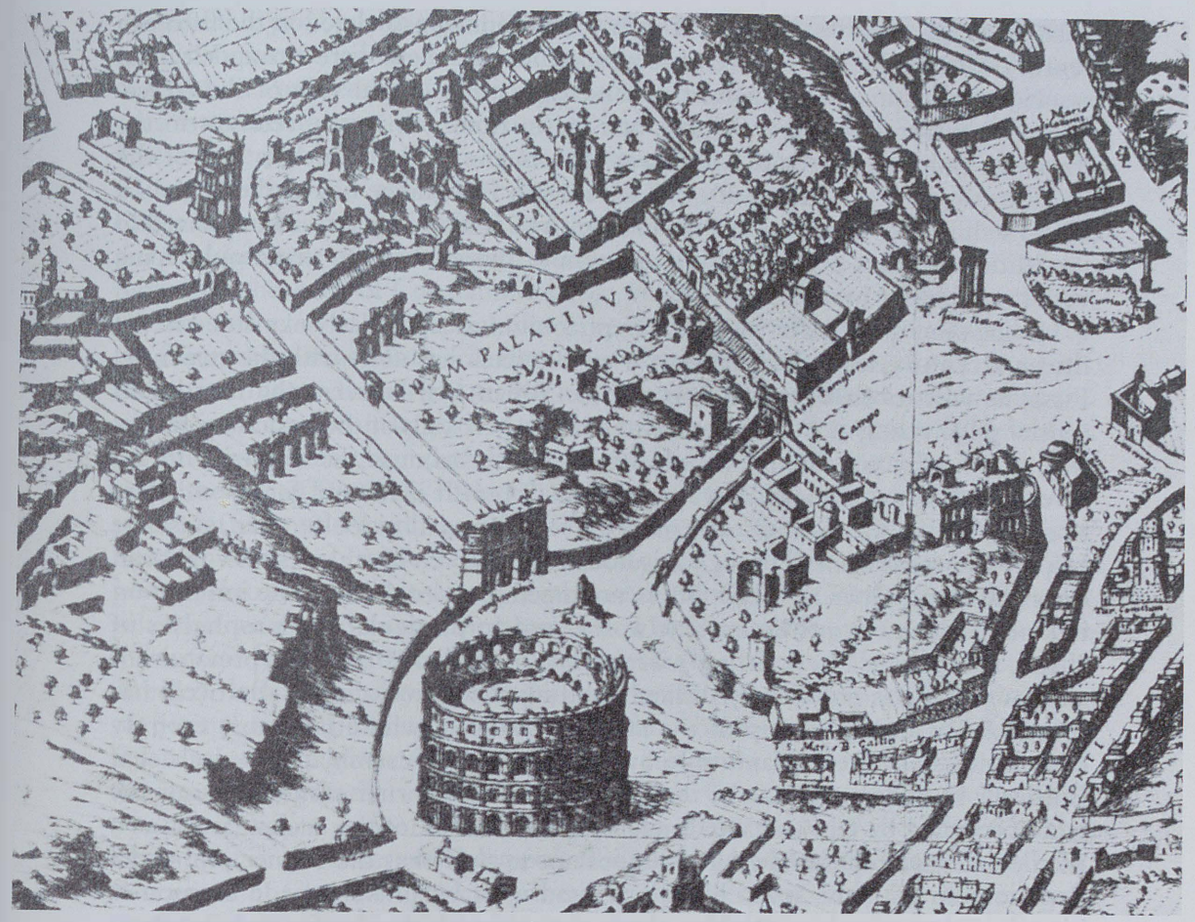


Fig. 4. Bird's-eye view of Rome. (Photo: after Étienne du Pérac (1577))

its usual form: 'Here Virgil had an academy, built as well as any building in Rome. Vines are grown all around it. At the very top of the building were seven schools, and fine columns all around its circumference, and three conduits carrying water. Each [school] had its own branch of knowledge for itself'; there follows a long description of which liberal art had its place on each storey.[37] It is likely, therefore, that Botticelli knew that the Septizonium was associated not only with the seven liberal arts but also with the greatest possible master of these arts, Virgil.

The Septizonium was not the only building at the eastern end of the Palatine Hill to be popularly associated, in the late medieval period, with Virgil. On the left of the path which led up from the Arch of Constantine to the Arch of Titus and the Roman Forum, there stood a medieval tower, built in the eighth century, which at one period belonged to the Frangipani family. In the late Middle Ages it came to be called the *Torre Cartularia* because in it papal archives were stored (it is clearly visible in Du Pérac's bird's-eye view, Fig. 4). The *Torre Cartularia* was also known as the Torre di Virgilio, the Tower of Virgil: clearly the side of the

Palatine facing towards the Valle Murcia was becoming associated in the fifteenth century with Virgil. For a fifteenth-century audience there were strong Virgilian associations behind the transformed landscape on the right side of the fresco. Topographical references to Virgil's activity in Rome were very relevant to the theme of Botticelli's fresco. Virgil was seen in the Middle Ages as one of the greatest prophets of Christianity.[38] In his Fourth Eclogue he linked the birth of a friend's child with the return of the Golden Age. This eclogue was interpreted in the Middle Ages as a prophetic description of the golden age that would come with the birth of Christ.[39]

Having seen the ways in which the Septizonium was popularly explained in the fifteenth century, let us look again at what Botticelli has done with the structure. First, he ensures that just seven corinthian pillars can be seen, the fourth and central pillar acting as a corner-stone to join the two walls of the structure. In this way, it is hardly possible for an educated onlooker to miss the reference to the seven pillars of wisdom, in Proverbs, chapter 9:1–6. It is natural for the scholars to cluster at the foot of the seven pillars of wisdom, and to look to her house for help in their confusion. Through this house of the seven liberal arts, the light can enter the scene. Open as it is, it offers no impediment to the sun; the implication is that the learning of the ancient world, and in particular the prophecies of Virgil, can at times be a fitting *praeparatio Evangelica*.[40] But interpretation of ancient wisdom is notoriously difficult, and its conclusions fragile. Botticelli has placed three arches on top of the structure, one of which is almost entirely broken. The other two stand only by a miracle: close examination reveals that Botticelli has deprived each of the two arches of its corner stone. Without the truths revealed by Christ, the cornerstone, the wisdom of the ancient world is a fragile and uncertain guide.[41] It is important to note that the connection of the Septizonium with the seven liberal arts and with Virgil were made in popular legends and popular etymologies – the sort of thing which pilgrims and visitors to Rome were interested in, but which the most eminent humanists and scholars were by 1480 rejecting as fabulous.[42] In referring to images found in the psalter and Roman topographical legends, Botticelli's fresco was anything but arcane and mysterious.

The fragile arches of the ancient house of wisdom visually foreshadow the much more solid arches of the Constantinian arch (with its Pauline inscription from Hebrews) at the centre of the fresco. Constantine, the first Christian emperor, was believed to have been baptised in the Lateran at the top of the Caelian Hill, and to have then given authority over western Europe to the papacy, by means of the document known as the Donation of Constantine. No matter that the Donation of Constantine had been shown to be spurious forty years before, in 1440, by Nicholas of Cusa and Lorenzo Valla.[43] In Botticelli's fresco the essential principle of the Donation of Constantine, that authority is given to those divinely called by God and to no one elsè, is seen as already inscribed, a thousand years before Constantine, on a monument in the desert of Sinai, a monument already old in the time of Moses, but which nevertheless looks forward both to Constantinian and also to fifteenth-century Rome. In this fresco in the *Capella Magna*, the idea behind the forged Donation of Constantine is now made into an

unshakeable principle in world history, valid in human affairs since time began.[44] In this ancient brooding stone monument, one is reminded of the famous passage in which St Paul sees the Christian present as already foreshadowed in the rock of ages that accompanied the Jews in their wanderings through the desert of Sinai.[45] The iconography of the Arch of Constantine has in the fresco been transformed so as to echo the central action of the painting. The two parts of the Constantinian frieze visible from the Meta Sudans did not suit Botticelli's purpose because they were static scenes organised around a dominant central figure (on the Arch of Constantine itself, we have Constantine's allocution in the Forum to the left of the central fornix; to its right, his distribution of largesse in the Circus Maximus). Botticelli therefore substituted two scenes, in each of which the action moves from right to left. This right–left movement, and the drama which increases with it, provides a clear echo of the structure of the central narrative in the foreground of the fresco, the Punishment of Korah.

To the left of Botticelli's fresco, the rebels are punished and the repentant are saved, in front of a brand-new façade in the latest fifteenth-century style. Light floods towards this façade. Here again the Roman landscape is transformed. What we expect to get, the Colosseum, north-east of the Arch of Constantine, we do not get; what we do get is surprising and new. The façade is an important element in the fresco: it is the structure towards which the thrust of the whole action is directed. It may possibly have had a function in the narrative itself. Lightbown suggests that the building may represent the tabernacle of Korah and his sons, before which the whole family of Korah is condemned.[46] But the importance of the façade suggests that it refers instead, at the level of the narrative progression, to a much more important tabernacle: the Tabernacle of the Alliance, the forerunner in the desert of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.[47] If so, it is also the forerunner of Christian churches where, in the Eucharist, God was seen as even more real a presence than he had been in the Jewish Holy of Holies.

Once their Roman associations are understood, the three main architectural features of the fresco vastly expand its historical range. They imply a vast historical pattern behind the rebellion of Korah and its defeat. This pattern is also to be read from right to left, like the narrative in the foreground. The right side of the fresco would correspond, in terms of the transformed image of the Valle Murcia, to the Palatine Hill where the emperors had once had their palace. At the foot of the transformed Palatine, the open arches of the School of Virgil allow the light to shine through. The symbolism is clear: at times, classical rhetoric and ancient Roman poetry and prophecy can help the present audience (like the eight humanist scholars at the foot of the pillars) to understand the wider implications of Old Testament events: but their testimony is fragile and liable to fall, badly in need of a key or a keystone. The triumphal arch, as we have seen, proclaims already, a millennium before Constantine, that all authority comes from God. In terms of the transformed Valle Murcia, the left side of the fresco corresponds to the Caelian Hill. If the Palatine Hill was associated with the imperial past, the Caelian Hill was associated with the papal and clerical present. On the Caelian stood, and stand, a whole series of important basilicas: San Clemente; San Gregorio Magno; SS Giovanni e Paolo; Santo Stefano Rotondo;

Santa Maria in Domnica and Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. All these basilicas, and others, were outposts of the papal quarter on the Caelian centred on San Giovanni in Laterano. This tabernacle façade looks forward to the Christian churches that were one day to flourish on the Caelian Hill, and in particular to San Giovanni in Laterano. Even as Botticelli painted, the architects and builders of Sixtus IV were rebuilding and replanning a new Rome, Christian and papal, the splendours of which would rival those of the ancient world. A church door was the proper place for judgement, after all: in the late Middle Ages executions still took place outside San Giovanni in Laterano.[48] In addition, paintings of the Last Judgement regularly occurred just inside the entrance doors of late medieval churches, in Rome and elsewhere.[49] In the context of this artistic tradition, Botticelli may have worked another witty transformation, bringing his painted scene of judgement from inside the entrance wall of his church-like structure to just outside its façade. But there seems also to be a further local reference implied in the façade. Once, in the desert of Sinai, the ark of the covenant had dwelt within the tabernacle. But all of fifteenth-century Rome knew that the ark of the covenant itself, and the rods of Moses and Aaron, were nowadays to be seen and admired in a chapel on the left side of the *porticus* of San Giovanni in Laterano (at the original entrance, at the east end of the nave). This was the papal sacristy of the basilica, the ancient *secretarium* or reception hall, now known as the Chapel of St Thomas.[50]

Every transformation of the Valle Murcia contributes to the universality of the scene. While the physical structure of the landscape (a valley between two low hills) refers to the Palatine Hill and the Caelian Hill, the depiction of the buildings in the distance on these hills is certainly not based on the actual Roman landscape. As some perceptive art historians have remarked, the buildings behind the columns of the School of Virgil on the 'Palatine' side of the valley are not Roman but Gothic and Northern.[51] So also is the little church surrounded by trees on the 'Caelian' side of the fresco, between the triumphal arch and the new façade on the left. In terms of the topography of the Caelian Hill, the position of the church would roughly correspond to the Basilica of San Gregorio Magno. But unlike either of these Roman basilicas on the Caelian Hill, the church has a distinctly Gothic and northern-looking spire. These transformations are significant. Botticelli was painting some thirty years after the fall of Constantinople, and ten years before the discovery of America. This was the last decade in which the universal Christian Church could be identified with Europe and with Christendom. Botticelli may have included northern and Gothic architecture in his landscape in order to make his fresco refer not only to the history of the Christian Church but also to its geography: to northern Europe as well as to Italy.

Botticelli has thus consistently transformed the Valle Murcia with one end in view: to emphasise the universal implications of his Old Testament story. In this aim, Botticelli was faithful to the standard interpretations of Psalms 105 and 106. In the commentaries of Augustine and Cassiodorus the historical events retold in these two psalms are seen as foreshadowing the schisms and victories of the Church throughout history. In his commentary on Psalm 105, Augustine says that

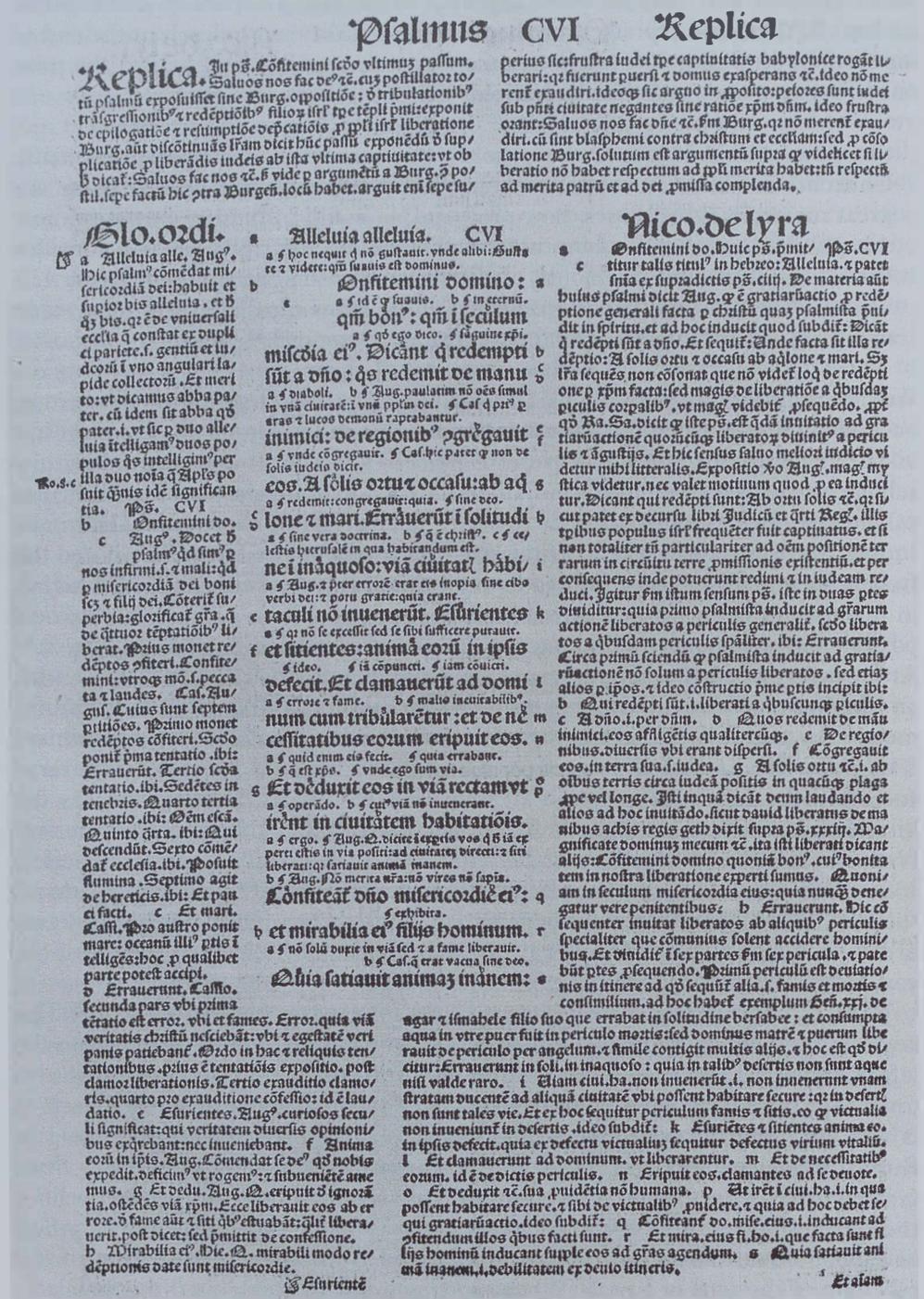
'both Dathan and Abiram were equally concerned in a most sacrilegious schism'.[52] Augustine expresses the theme of universality most clearly at the end of his sermon on Psalm 106, when commenting on verse 41, 'and helped the poor out of beggary, and made him households like sheep':

> this poor man is now many households, this poor man is many nations; many Churches are one Church, one nation, one household, one sheep. These are great mysteries, great types, how profound, how full of hidden meanings; how sweetly discovered, since long hidden. Therefore, 'the righteous will consider this, and rejoice: and the mouth of all wickedness shall be stopped' [verse 42]. That wickedness that doth prate against unity, and compelleth truth to be made manifest, shall be convicted, and have its mouth stopped.[53]

We have hitherto been examining texts and topographical legends which seem to have inspired Botticelli and his patrons. But the psalm commentaries suggest a visual analogue for the structure of Botticelli's fresco. If a fifteenth-century scholar wished to know how the Fathers of the Church interpreted a particular psalm, the obvious thing to refer to was a manuscript of the Glossa Ordinaria. Indeed, the Glossa had recently (in 1480, over a year before Botticelli painted the fresco) been published as a printed book by Adolf Rusch of Strasburg.[54] Whether in manuscript or in printed form, the layout of the Glossa provides the closest possible visual analogue to the conceptual structure of Botticelli's fresco (Fig. 5).[55] At the centre of each page, the text of the psalm is presented in large letters, with an interlinear gloss. The commentaries of the Fathers (in the case of the psalms, mostly Augustine and Cassiodorus) are given in dense columns of small script which (in the case of those verses which had attracted most commentary) surround the scriptural texts on all four sides. Similarly, Botticelli places the historical narrative of the Punishment of Korah in the foreground of the painting. Near the first and third episodes (but not the second, central episode), contemporary scholars contemplate, and no doubt ruminate on the meaning of, the first and third episodes of the narrative. Behind the scholars, on the margins of the painting as it were, the ruins and the transformed Valle Murcia suggest the vast historical implications of the central narrative.

But why are there no scholars in the fresco to interpret the central scene? The key, I suggest, is again to be found in the serious gaze of the mature scholar to the left of the arch. His gaze looks beyond us to the Perugino opposite, but it also invites us, the audience, to involve ourselves in the interpretation of the fresco. It is only we, after all, who can see the fresco as a whole. It is only we, living in Rome, who can recognise how our familiar Roman landscape has been systematically transformed. Only we can truly see the universal patterns behind the Old Testament events. The audience in the Sistine Chapel form a third group of scholars meditating on the patterns behind Botticelli's presentation of the rebellion of the sons of Korah. When the fresco was first exhibited this scholarly audience must first have included Pope Sixtus IV himself.

But the serious gaze of the mature scholar does not only involve the audience in the action; it also invites us to turn away from the Botticelli towards the other


Psalmus CVI Replica

Replica. Ju pſ. Cõfitemini ſcõ vltimuz paſſum. Saluos nos fac dñe ꝛc. cuz poſtillator tũ pſalmũ expoſuiſſet ſine Burg. opoſitiõe: õ tribulationib⁹ ꝛ tribꝛeſſionib⁹ ꝛ redẽptiõib⁹ filiox iſrl tpe tẽpli pmit exponit de epilogatiõe ꝛ reſumptiõe depcatiõis. p pli iſrl liberatione Burg. aũt diſcõtinuãs ſkam dicit hũc paſſũ exponẽdũ õ ſupplicatiõe p liberãdis indeis ab iſta vltima captiuitate: vt ob õ dicat: Saluos fac nos ꝛc. ſ vide p argumẽtũ a Burg. ſ poſtil. ſepe factũ die ꝓtra Burgeñ. locũ habet. arguit enĩ ſepe ſuperius ſic: fruſtra iudei tpe captiuitatis babylonice rogãt liberari: qz fuerunt puerſi ꝛ domus exaſperans ꝛc. ideo nõ merenť exaudiri. ideoqꝫ ſic argno in ꝓpoſito: peiores ſunt iudei ſub pñti ciuitate negantes ſine ratiõe xpm dñm. ideo fruſtra orant: Saluos nos fac dñe ꝛc. ſm Burg. qz nõ merenť exaudiri. cũ ſint blaſphemi contra chriſtum et eccleſiam: ſed p cõſolatione Burg. ſolutum eſt argumentũ ſupra qꝫ videlicet ſi liberatio nõ habet reſpectum ad pñs merita habet: tñ reſpectũ ad merita patrũ et ad dei ꝓmiſſa complenda.

Glo. ordi.

a Alleluia alle. Aug⁹. Idic pſalm⁹ cõmẽdat miſericordiã dei: habuit et ſupioz bis alleluia. et b ꝗz bis. qz ẽ de vniuerſali eccliã q̃ conſtat ex duplici pariete. ſ. gentiũ et iudeoꝝ i vno angulari lapide collectoꝝ. Et merito: vt dicamus abba pater. cũ idem ſit abba qõ pater. i. vt ſic p duo alleluia ſtreligam⁹ duos populos ꝗs intelligim⁹ per illa duo noĩa q̃ Apl's poſuit ꝙnis idẽ ſignificantia. Pſ. CVI

b Onfitemini do.

c Aug⁹. Docet b pſalm⁹ q̃d ſim⁹ p nos infirmi. ſ. ꝛ mali: q̃d p miſericordiã dei boni ſcz ꝛ filij dei. Cõterit ſuperbia: glorificať gr̃a. q̃ de ꝛtuoz tẽptatiõib⁹ liberat. Primo monet redẽptos cõfiteri. Confitemint: vtroqꝫ mõ. ſ. peccata ꝛ laudes. Caſ. Auguſ. Cuius ſunt ſeptem ptitiões. Primo monet redẽptos cõfiteri. Scõ ponit ꝓma tentatio. ibi: Errauerũt. Tertio ſcõa tentatio. ibi. Sedẽtes in tenebꝛis. Quarto tertia tentatio. ibi: Oẽm eſcã. Quinto ẽrta. ibi: Qui deſcendũt. Sexto cõmẽdat eccleſia. ibi. Poſuit flumina. Septimo agit de hereticis. ibi: Et pauci facti. c Et mart. Caſſi. Pzo auſtro ponit mare: oceanũ illi⁹ ptis ĩ telligẽs: hoc p qualibet parte poteſt accipi.

d Errauerunt. Caſſio. ſecunda pars vbi ꝓma ẽtatio eſt erroꝛ. vbi et fames. Erroꝛ. quia viã veritatis chriſtũ neſciebãt: vbi ꝛ egeſtaẽ veritatis patiebanť. Modo in hac ꝛ reliquis tentationibus. ꝓius ẽ tentatiõis expoſitio. poſt clamoꝛ liberationis. Tertio erauditio clamoris. quarto ꝓo erauditione cõfeſſio: id ẽ laudatio. e Eſurientes. Aug⁹. curioſos ſecuſi ſignificat: qui veritatem diuerſis opinionibus exꝙrebant: nec inueniebant. f Anima eoꝝ in ipſis. Aug. Cõmendat ſe de⁹ qũ nobis expedit. deficim⁹ vt rogem⁹: ꝛ ſubueniẽdo ame mus. g Et dedu. Aug. Ꝙ. eripuit õ ignoꝛãtia. oſtẽdẽs viã xpm. Ecce liberauit eos ab erroꝛe. õ fame aũt ꝛ ſiti q̃b⁹ eſtuabãt: q̃liť liberauerit. poſt dicet: ſed ꝓmittit de confeſſione.

h Mirabilia ei⁹. Idie. Q. mirabili modo redẽptionis date ſunt miſericordie.

Eſurientẽ

Alleluia alleluia. CVI

a ſ hoc nequit q̃ nõ guſtauit. vnde alibi: Guſtate ꝛ videte: q̃m ſuauis eſt dominus.

b Onfitemini domino: a

c a ſ id ẽ q suauis. b ſ in ceerniũ.

q̃m bon⁹: q̃m i ſeculum

a ſ qõ ego dico. ſ q̃ quine ẽpi.

miſcõia ei⁹. Dicant q̃ redempti b

ſũt a dño: q̃s redemit de manu c

a ſ diaboli. b ſ Aug. paulatim nõ oẽs ſimul in vnã ciuitatẽ: i vnã pplm dei. ſ Caſ. q̃ pr⁹ p eras ꝛ lucos demonũ rapꝛabantur.

inimici: de regionib⁹ ꝛgrẽgauit c

a ſ vnde cõgregauit. ſ Caſ. hic pater q̃ non de ſolis iudeis dicit.

eos. A ſõlis ortu ꝛ occaſu: ab aq̃ d

a ſ redemit: congregauit: quia. ſ ſine deo.

lone ꝛ mari. Errãuerũt i ſolitudi b

a ſ ſine vera doctrina. b ſ ſ ẽ chriſt⁹. c ſ ce/ leſtis hieruſalem qua habitandum eſt.

nei inąquoſo: viã ciuitat⁹ habi/ i

a ſ Aug. ꝛ ꝓter erroꝛẽ erat eis inopia ſine cibo verbi dei: ꝛ poꝛu gratie: quia erant.

taculi nõ inuenerũt. Eſurientes k

a ſ qz nõ ſe excelſe ſed ſe ſibi ſufficere putauit.

et ſitientes: anima eoꝝ in ipſis l

ſ ideo. ſ iã cõpuncti. ſ iam cõuicti.

defecit. Et damauerũt ad domi l

a ſ erroꝛe ꝛ fame. b ſ malis inceaſabilib⁹.

num cum tribularẽtur: et de nẽ m

ceſſitatibus eoꝝ eripuit eos. n

a ſ operãdo. b ſ cui⁹ viã nõ inuenerant.

irent in ciuitatem habitatiõis.

a ſ ergo. ſ Aug. Q. dicite ĩ exẽplis vos q̃ ſ iã ex/ perti eſtis in via poſiti: ad ciuitatez direct: ꝛ ſiti liberati: qi ſatiauit animã inanem.

b ſ Aug. ſ Nõ merita nr̃a: nõ vires nõ ſapia.

Cõfiteãť dño miſericordie ei⁹: q

ſ exhibita.

et mirabilia ei⁹ filijs hominum. r

a ſ nõ ſolũ duxit in viã ſed ꝛ a fame liberauit.

b ſ Caſ. q̃ erat vacua ſine deo.

Quia ſatiauit animaz inanem: s

Nico. de lyra

a Onfitemini do. Quic pſ. ꝓmit/ titur talis titul⁹ in hebꝛeo: Alleluia. ꝛ patet ſnĩa ex ſupꝛadictis pſ. ciiſt. De materia aũt huius pſalmi dicit Aug. qꝛ ẽ gratiarũactio. p redẽptioñe generali facta p chriſtũ quaz pſalmiſta ꝓuidit in ſpiritu. et ad hoc induxit quod ſubdit: Dicãt q̃ redẽpti ſint a dño. Et ſequit: Unde facta ſit illa redẽptio: A ſolis oꝛtu ꝛ occaſu ab aq̃lone ꝛ mari. Sz iſta ſequẽs non cõſonat que nõ videť loq̃ de redẽptione p xpm facta: ſed magis de liberatiõe a q̃buſdaꝫ piculis corꝙalib⁹. vt magꝫ videbit ꝓſequẽdo. ꝓpt qõ Ra. Sa. dicit qꝛ iſte pſ. eſt q̃dã inuitatio ad gratiarũactionẽ quoꝛũcũqꝫ liberatoꝝ diuinit⁹ a periculis ꝛ ãgꝛſtijs. Et hic ſenſus ſaltem meliozi iudicio videtur mihi litteralis. Expoſitio ẽo Aug⁹. magꝛ myſtica videtur. nec valet motiuum quod ꝓ ea induciꝛ tur. Dicant qui redẽpti ſunt: Ab oꝛtu ſolis ꝛc. qꝛ ſicut patet ex decurſu libꝛi Judicũ et ĩrti Regꝫ. illis tpibus populus iſrl frequẽter fuit captiuatus. et ſi non totaliter tñ particulariter ad oẽm poſitionẽ terrarum in circũitu terre ꝓmiſſionis exiſtentiũ. et per conſequens inde potuerunt redijnt ꝛ in iudeam reduci. Igitur ſm iſtum ſenſum pſ. iſte in duas ptes diuiditur: quia ꝓimo pſalmiſta inducit ad gr̃arum actionẽ liberatos a periculis generalit. ſeõ liberatos a q̃buſdam periculis ſpãliter. ibi: Errauerunt. Circa ꝓimũ ſciendũ qꝛ pſalmiſta inducit ad gratiarũactionẽ nõ ſolum a periculis liberatos. ſed etiaz alios q̃ ipos. ꝛ ideo cõſtructio ꝓme ptis incipit ibi:

b Qui redẽpti ſũt. i. liberati a q̃buſcunqꝫ piculis.

c A dño. i. per dñm. d Quos redemit de mãu inimici. eos affligẽtis qualitercũqꝫ. e De regionibus. diuerſis vbi erant diſperſi. f Cõgregauit eos. in terra ſua. ſ. iudea. g A ſolis ortu ꝛc. i. ab oĩbus terris circa iudeã poſitis in quacũqꝫ plaga ꝙpe vel longe. Jſti inquã dicãt deum laudando et alios ad hoc inuitãdo. ſicut dauid liberatus de manibus achis regis geth dixit ſupra pſ. xxxiij. Magnificate dominuz mecum ꝛc. ita iſti liberati dicant alijs: Cõfitemini domino quoniã bon⁹. cui⁹ bonitatem in noſtra liberatione experti ſumus. Quoniam in ſeculum miſericordia eius: quia nunq̃ denegatur vere penitentibus. h Errauerunt. Dic cõſequenter inuitat liberatos ab aliquib⁹ periculis ſpecialiter que cõmunius ſolent accidere hominibus. Et diuidit i ſex partes ſm ſex pericula. ꝛ patebũt ptes ꝓſequendo. Primũ periculũ eſt deuiatio/nis in itinere ad qđ ſequiť alia. ſ. famis et mortis ꝛ conſimilium. ad hoc habeť exemplum Heñ. xxj. de agar ꝛ iſmahele filio ſuo que errabat in ſolitudine berſabee: et conſumpta aqua in vtre puer fuit in periculo mortis: ſed dominus matrẽ ꝛ puerum liberauit de periculo per angelum. ꝛ ſimile contigit multis alijs. ꝛ hoc eſt qđ dicitur: Errauerunt in ſoli. in inaquoſo: quia in talib⁹ deſertis non ſunt aque niſi valde raro. i Viam ciui. ha. non inuenerũt. i. non inuenerunt vnam ſtratam ducentẽ ad aliquã ciuitatẽ vbi poſſent habitare ſecure: qz in deſertis non ſunt tales vie. Et ex hoc ſequitur periculum famis ꝛ ſitis. eo qꝛ victualia non inueniunť in deſertis. ideo ſubdit: k Eſurientes ꝛ ſitientes anima eorũ in ipſis defecit. quia ex defectu victualiuꝝ ſequitur defectus virium vitaliũ.

l Et clamauerunt ad dominum. vt liberarentur. m Et de neceſſitatib⁹ eoꝝ. id ẽ de dictis periculis. n Eripuit eos. clamantes ad ſe deuote.

o Et deduxit ꝛc. ſua. ꝓuidẽtia nõ humana. p Vt irẽt i ciui. ha. i. in quas poſſent habitare ſecure. ꝛ ſibi de victualib⁹ ꝓuidere. ꝛ quia ad hoc debet ſequi gratiarũactio. ideo ſubdit: q Cõfiteanť do. miſe. eius. i. inducant ad cõfitendum illos q̃buſ facti ſunt. r Et mira. eius fi. ho. i. que facta ſunt filijs hominũ inducant ſupple eos ad gr̃as agendum. s Quia ſatiauit animã inanem. i. debilitatem ex deuio itineris.

Et alam

Fig. 5. Glossa Ordinaria, Adolph Rusch, 1498. (Photo: by permission of the Librarian, Boole Library, The National University of Ireland at Cork)

wall of the Sistine Chapel, the wall towards which he gazes so seriously. While Botticelli was painting his *Punishment of Korah*, Perugino was presumably working just across the chapel on *The handing of the keys to Peter* (Fig. 6). It is likely that both artists collaborated relatively closely on the designs, because the two frescoes are united by many cross-references, apart from their matching *tituli*.[56] If Botticelli presented a forum in the desert, Perugino presents a forum in the city of Jerusalem. Christ himself now faces the *conturbatio* once suffered by Moses: there is a clear link between the stoning of Moses on the right foreground of Botticelli's fresco, and the stoning of Christ on the right of the middle-ground of the Perugino. At the centre of the Perugino fresco stands a glorious representation of the Temple in Jerusalem, clearly reminiscent of the Dome of the Rock.[57] Like Botticelli's triumphal arch opposite, the Temple is raised above the surrounding forum on a platform approached by steps. The motif of the 'structure with three arches', which we have seen twice in the Botticelli painting, is now triumphantly resolved. In Perugino's temple, three porches are visible: they make of the temple itself a three-arched structure. On either side of the Temple are two further triumphal arches, brand-new ones this time. Once more, both arches are clearly modelled on the Arch of Constantine.

Unlike Botticelli's Constantinian arch, these structures are all brand-new. But they are presented at the moment at which the Temple is about to be superseded. The triumphal arch in Botticelli's painting affirmed that no one should assume honour unless called by God. In the foreground of Perugino's fresco, Christ, whose resurrected body was in the New Testament to replace the Temple cult (John 2:19–22),[58] hands the keys to Peter among the apostles. Once more, to right and left, scholars and courtiers are present, as power is exercised and passed on. The verse inscriptions on Perugino's flanking arches comprise an elegiac couplet (i.e. a hexameter and a pentameter). The couplet adds up to a single statement, which has to be pieced out between its two lines:

> [Left-hand arch:] IMENSV SALOMO / TEMPLVM TV / HOC QVARTE / SACRASTI
> [Right-hand arch:] SIXTE OPIBVS / DISPAR / RELIGIONE / PRIOR

> 'Solomon [consecrated] a vast temple:[59] you, the Fourth, have consecrated this one, Sixtus:[60] you do not match him in riches, but you come before him in religion [i.e. in form of religious life].'

The vocative case and the personal name in this inscription are unique in the Sistine Chapel. If the Botticelli fresco had reached beyond itself, to involve the audience in its argument, by means of the serious gaze of the mature scholar, now the Perugino fresco actually names and calls out to one member of that audience, the Pope himself. The verse is not primarily concerned to contrast Solomon's Temple and the Sistine Chapel,[61] but rather to emphasise that Sixtus, who lived a Franciscan religious life committed to poverty (in order to follow Christ who was himself poor), could, precisely because of that lifestyle, be seen as 'behold, a greater than Solomon here' (notwithstanding all the riches, *opibus*, of Solomon).[62]



Fig. 6. Pietro Perugino, The handing on of the Keys, Vatican, Sistine chapel, early 1480s. (Photo: by permission of the Vatican Galleries)

One way of understanding how Perugino completes and resolves the issues proposed by Botticelli is to attend to two pairs of puns (each pair at once verbal and visual) incorporated in the paired frescoes. We entered the Botticelli fresco via the inviting gaze of the mature scholar to the left of the Constantinian arch. He and his companion stand between a port (*portum*) and the façade of the tabernacle-church, a façade centred on its door (*portam*). The pun between *portum* and *portam* was famous: it formed the climax of the Passiontide hymn by Venantius Fortunatus, the 'Pange lingua, gloriosi proelium certaminis'. There the poet addresses the Holy Cross (I provide an interlinear translation, to make it clear how the pun controls the transition between lines two and three) as follows:

x. Sola digna tu fuisti ferre pretium saeculi,
You alone were worthy to carry the ransom of the world,

Atque portum praeparare nauta mundo naufrago,
and, like a sailor, to bring the shipwrecked world to a safe refuge,

Quem sacer cruor perunxit fusus agni corpore.
which the sacred blood has anointed, poured from the body of the lamb.

The last line of the stanza can only be understood when we appreciate that, between the second and last line, *portum* has become *portam*. In Botticelli's fresco the two ships in port in front of the younger scholar are curiously arranged. They are drawn up on the shore so that broad side or waist of the ship on the right lies alongside the poop of the ship on the left. Thus we can see not only the mast but the cross-beam of the ship on the right: we can see that its mast and beam, together, form a cross. This ship has been brought to its safe port, its city of habitation, under the ancient Christian symbol of the cross-mast.[63] The two ships are arranged so that between them they form a T-shaped pattern, a *tau*. The *tau* was the most famous Franciscan symbol. The earliest lives of St Francis tell us that he had adopted it as his personal symbol. The Franciscan Sixtus IV would have been particularly sensitive to any reference to the *tau*.[64] In the Hebrew alphabet, the *tau* recurred as the final letter: it stood (like the Greek *omega*) for the completion and fulfilment of history. These ships have completed a symbolic voyage that has spanned time as much as space. Worn out, they have reached a safe port and a city to dwell in, now in the last age where, before the Judgement, all things approach fulfilment.

Botticelli has paid a wonderful compliment to the two scholars between the port and the door. The mature scholar is old enough to be the scholarly father of the younger. A fifteenth-century Roman humanist audience would not have missed the Virgilian echo of such a fatherly scene on the seashore: it was Aeneas himself who, famously, brought his young son Ascanius safely to the shores of Italy.[65] In a wider sense, these two Virgilian scholars stand between an arch and an ark (*inter arcum et arcam*), between the great Constantinian arch which we can see, and the ark which, though not visible, is implied by the associations (which we have established) between the church façade and the Tabernacle, which in turn looks forward to the Lateran, where the ark was, in the fifteenth century, believed to be kept. Awareness of such puns enables us to appreciate how the Perugino fresco resolves the issues proposed by Botticelli. The veiled Franciscan reference in the *tau*-ships is answered by the explicit reference to Franciscan poverty ('*opibus impar, religione prior*') in the Perugino inscription. In the Perugino, the ark is still invisible, but by implication it is now central: it is hidden, now, on the central axis of the fresco, not only behind the central arch in front of the temple (the fifth of a row of nine *arcus* in the painting!) but also behind the temple's closed door (*portam*). The temple itself is eight-sided: and the most famous Constantinian building in the Lateran area was the eight-sided baptistery where (it was retold in the Life of Pope Silvester) Constantine himself had been baptised by the Pope. The Perugino fresco, as well as the Botticelli, is thus centred on an architectural structure which clearly refers to the Constantinian establishment of the Church. But, for all its splendour, the temple is a closed and provisional structure, destroyed by Titus in the first century (as the Arch of Titus continually reminded all Romans). Its hidden meanings and possibilities will be opened up only in Rome, not only at the Lateran, with its life-giving eight-sided baptistery and its own relic of the ark of the covenant, but at the Vatican, where St Peter holds the keys to all meanings, the power to open and shut all closed doors. St Peter has been given these keys by the Word himself, the Wisdom of God in

whom all foreshadows and symbols become real. In the Botticelli fresco we had a clear reference to the Lateran (in the church façade). But in the Perugino we have balanced images not only of the Lateran (implied in the temple) but also of the Vatican (implied in the handing on of the keys).

Between them, the two frescoes express a coherent vision of how in the course of history sacrality, and direct communication with the divine, was transferred from country to country: from the desert under Moses, to Jerusalem; and from there, by Christ's handing on of the keys, to Peter and so to the Vatican (where Peter's body lies).[66] The frescoes, with their groups of humanist onlookers, emphasise the need for reflection and debate on the shape of sacred history and its significance for the present. Such reflection and debate can only be continued by the audience themselves, as they stand in the Sistine Chapel between the frescoes. Standing there, they supply to the Botticelli fresco another group of contemporary scholarly onlookers, the group needed to interpret the central episode in the Desert Forum (the struggle for sacral authority around the altar). As Roman onlookers, they can appreciate how the spiritual descendants of those who once wandered in the desert have found in Rome 'their desired haven' and their 'city of habitation'.[67] Courtiers proclaimed that, under Sixtus IV, the golden age prophesied by Virgil had returned. Prior Jacopo de Horetis, one of Sixtus' courtiers, addressed him in Virgilian hexameters, and in the very terms of the Fourth Eclogue:

Tu pater es populi, tu dux, tu pastor Apollo.[68]

If Roman monuments, on the other sides of the central action, supply visual glosses for that central action, the Perugino fresco across the Sistine Chapel itself provides the fourth side of that gloss. Between the two frescoes, able to turn from one to the other, the scholarly members of the papal court in the Sistine Chapel can participate imaginatively in the great moment in Perugino's Temple Forum in Jerusalem when Peter, receiving the keys, also receives the pastoral care which will lead to his Roman martyrdom and to his great basilica on the Vatican Hill. By means of the vocative inscription on the triumphal arches in the Perugino fresco, the painters courteously invite the patron of the cycle, Sixtus himself, to lead the first stages of the scholarly interpretation of each of the frescoes: to recognise the *tau* in one, to interpret the inscriptions in each. After all, Sixtus must have particular insight into what the frescoes mean. Sixtus is sure that he has been called by God as Aaron was; that he justly wears the tiara, as in Botticelli's fresco Aaron also does. Perugino, no doubt speaking in the name of Botticelli and the whole team of artists Sixtus had attracted from other cities to Rome (even as the Queen of Sheba once came to Jerusalem), now in his inscribed elegiac couplet tells Sixtus explicitly that in his form of religious life he is greater than the famously rich Solomon the Wise. One wonders how Sixtus reacted to such a wonderful compliment, and such a courteous invitation to initiate the audience participation in, and interpretation of, the frescoes. One later figure who may well have appreciated the rich symbolic progression between the two frescoes was Michelangelo Buonarotti. On the part of the ceiling which spans the space

between our two frescoes, he placed his own first great Sistine meditation on guilt and judgement. Michelangelo's fresco included, like Botticelli's, a problematic sea: the fatal sea of 'Noah's flood'. In Michelangelo's fresco, condemnation and death are the fate of most men and women (who, to disturb us, movingly await death by drowning in the foreground, and in the middle-ground struggle in vain to enter the ark); while salvation is given to a few (who, invisible within the closed ark, sail on their appointed voyage away from their doomed and struggling fellow-humans, as though they foreshadowed Aeneas leaving Dido and Carthage). In the smaller painting which flanks the 'Flood' on the altar side, the eight happy survivors (Noah and his sons, actively helped by their wives) in gratitude for their salvation successfully offer sacrifice.

NOTES

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1. For the sequence of Botticelli's work in the chapel see J. Shearman, 'The Chapel of Sixtus IV; the fresco decoration of Sixtus IV; Raphael's tapestries', in M. Azuma (ed.), *The Sixtine Chapel: Michelangelo rediscovered*, London, 1986, pp. 22–91, at pp. 45–7: the decoration of the walls was begun by summer 1481, and the final stage of the decoration, including the *Punishment of Korah*, was completed by the end of August 1482.
2. R. Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 2 vols, London, 1978, 1, pp. 66–7.
3. In this, Lightbown follows the classic work of E. Steinmann, *Die sixtinische Kapelle*, 2 vols, Munich, 1901–5, 1, at pp. 497–8, who already saw the references to the Valle Murcia in the fresco: 'so sieht man, dass Botticelli als Schauplatz seiner Handlung sich ursprünglich dieses Trümmerfeld in alten Rom erwählt hat'.
4. F. Magi, 'Il coronamento dell'Arco di Costantino', *Atti della pontificia Accademia romana di archeologia*, series 3, *Rendiconti* 29, 1958, pp. 83–110.
5. Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 1, p. 65.
6. Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 1, p. 67.
7. On the light, see Shearman, 'The Chapel of Sixtus IV; the fresco decoration of Sixtus IV; Raphael's tapestries', pp. 42, 49.
8. See C.F. Lewine, *The Sistine Chapel walls and the Roman liturgy*, Pennsylvania, 1993, pp. 107–9.
9. On the scriptural sources of the episode, see R. Salvini and E. Camesasca, *La capella Sistina in Vaticano*, Grandi monografie dell'arte, 2 vols, Milan, 1965, 1, p. 165; L.D. Ettlinger, *The Sistine Chapel before Michelangelo: religious imagery and papal primacy*, Oxford, 1965, p. 70.
10. For surveys of the various attempts to identify figures in the painting with contemporary persons, see Salvini and Camesasca, *La capella Sistina in Vaticano*, 1, p. 165; G. Mandel, *The complete paintings of Botticelli*, Harmondsworth, 1965, p. 94.
11. On the scriptural sources of this scene, see Ettlinger, *The Sistine Chapel before Michelangelo*, pp. 67–8.
12. Ettlinger, *The Sistine Chapel before Michelangelo*, pp. 69–70, convincingly demonstrated that the source of this detail was Nicholas of Lyra's *Expositiones in Pentateuchum*, Rome, 1471: in his commentary on Numbers 26:10, Nicholas of Lyra mentions a Hebrew gloss to Psalm 45 which says that, when the earth opened up and swallowed Korah and many others, his sons remained standing in the air by divine power until the earth closed again; and that, in gratitude, they composed Psalm 45.
13. On this gesture and its feudal significance, see M. Bloch, *Feudal Society*, London, 1965, 1, pp. 146–7, and pls II–III opposite p. 115.
14. Just how close the elaborate entablature over the door was to the style favoured by the court of Sixtus IV can be appreciated by comparing the façade in the fresco to the façade of Paradise in the contemporary fresco in the hospital of Santo Spirito in Sassia which shows St Peter bringing Sixtus IV into Paradise: reproduced in L. Partridge, *The Renaissance in Rome 1400–1600*, p. 10, fig. 2. For other examples of fifteenth-century doorframes with frames and entablature, see G. Urban, 'Die Kirchenbaukunst des Quattrocento in Rom', *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 9–10, 1961–2, pp. 75–287, at p. 88, esp. fig. 78, the western door of S. Onophrio, of 1448. There is a fine illustration of the door of the Sistine chapel itself, with its elaborate entablature, in Azuma, *The Sistine Chapel*, p. 39, but this must be treated with some caution, as the eastern wall of the Sistine Chapel collapsed in 1504, see Azuma, *The Sistine Chapel*, p. 32.
15. This side wall, at the extreme left of the fresco, appears to be parallel to the front of the triumphal arch: it was not realistic, therefore to place the side wall in shade when the sun strikes the front of the triumphal arch. The anomaly, however, has the effect of concentrating our attention on the façade of the new building.
16. To the right of the 'Korah' fresco, towards the altar, is 'The Descent from Mount Sinai' by Cosimo Rosselli; to its left, towards the door of the Sistine Chapel, is the 'Testament of Moses' by Luca Signorelli. These three frescoes of the Moses cycle are conveniently illustrated together in Azuma, *The Sistine Chapel*, pp. 48–9; the corresponding three frescoes of the Christ cycle are illustrated at pp. 50–1.
17. The relevance of the conciliar controversy to the painting was first demonstrated by Steinmann, *Die sixtinische Kapelle*, 1, pp. 262–73; there is a concise and authoritative survey of the question in Salvini and Camesasca, *La capella Sistina in Vaticano*, 1, p. 165. See also the fine survey in C.L. Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*, Bloomington, 1985, pp. 201–26.
18. Steinmann, *Die sixtinische Kapelle*, 1, p. 498.
19. Lewine, *Sistine Chapel Walls*, pp. 79–80.
20. Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 1, p. 67.
21. Eight whose faces we can see: but two red hats, visible between the heads of the first and second figures from the right of the fresco, indicate that Botticelli intended to suggest a group larger than eight. One should thus be cautious in seeking any numerological significance in the number eight.
22. Steinmann, *Die sixtinische Kapelle*, 1, p. 52 and fig. 24, with further discussion at p. 510, identified the mature scholar as the humanist Pomponius Laetus. Steinmann, *Die sixtinische Kapelle*, 1, p. 511, fig. 235, identified his young companion as Alessandro Farnese, the future Pope Paul III, then aged fifteen. These identifications have been followed by many art historians, but by no means by all. There is a good survey of the various proposed identifications in Salvini and Camesasca, *La capella Sistina in Vaticano*, 1, p. 165. See also Mandel, *Botticelli*, p. 94.
23. Steinmann, *Die sixtinische Kapelle*, 1, p. 506 and fig. 233, identifies this young man with Botticelli himself.
24. Steinmann, *Die sixtinische Kapelle*, 1, p. 509 and fig. 234, argues that he represents Clemente Grosso della Rovere, the sister's son of Sixtus IV. Like Sixtus, he was a Franciscan, he was consecrated bishop by Sixtus, and was a close friend of the cardinal-nephew Giuliano della Rovere, who as Pope Julius II was to make him cardinal on 29 November 1503. For other identifications, see Salvini and Camesasca, *La capella Sistina in Vaticano*, 1, p. 165.
25. There is an imaginative reconstruction by Etienne du Pérac, 1574, of what the Meta Sudans might have looked like in classical times; see R. Wittkower, *Le antiche rovine di Roma nei disegni di Du Pérac*, Milan, 1990, fol. 36v, pl. 57, p. 112. Steinmann, *Die sixtinische Kapelle*, 1, p. 497, already noticed that the Meta Sudans 'etwa dort steht, wo Botticelli den Altar errichtet hat'. On the Meta Sudans, see S.B. Platner and T. Ashby, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, Oxford, 1929, pp. 340–1; E. Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, 2 vols, New York, 1981, 2, pp. 61–3; and L. Richardson, *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, Baltimore, 1992, p. 253. D. Manacorda and R. Tamassia, *Il piccone del Regime*, Rome, 1985, pp. 181–94.
26. Lewine, *Sistine Chapel Walls*, pp. xiii–xviii, 10–19, does at least raise the question; however, she concentrates on the yearly cycle of the liturgy, particularly the Lenten readings, and thus examines reminiscences in the 'Korah' fresco of the readings for the last two weeks in Lent and for papal conclaves, pp. 74–82.
27. On the liturgical importance of the *capella papalis*, see S.J.P. Van Dijk and J.H. Walker, *The Origins of the modern Roman liturgy: the liturgy of the papal court and the Franciscan order in the thirteenth century*, London, 1960; J.W. O'Malley, *Praise and blame in Renaissance Rome*, Duke monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 3, Durham, NC, 1979, pp. 7–35.
28. R. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West: the origins of the divine office and its meaning for today*, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1986, pp. 136–7, 312; V. Huonder, *Die Psalmen in der Liturgia Horarum*, Studia Friburgensia, new series, 74, Freiburg Schweiz, 1991, p. 175: the psalmody for Saturday at Matins comprised Psalms 97–108.
29. On the dedication of the Sistine Chapel to the Assumption, see R. Goffen, 'Friar Sixtus IV and the Sistine Chapel', *Renaissance Quarterly* 39, 1962, pp. 218–62, at pp. 28–30; Lewine, *Sistine Chapel Walls*, pp. xvi, 18–19; on the dedication of Saturday to the Blessed Virgin Mary, see P. Jounel, 'Sunday and the Week', in A.-G. Martimort (ed.), *The Church at Prayer*, vol. 4, *The Liturgy and Time*, London, 1985, pp. 9–29, at p. 27; for the singing of the second Canticle of Moses on Saturday, see F. Cabrol, *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, 2 Part 2, 1925, cols 1975–94 and 1978, 1982 and 1984; T. Fry (ed.), *The Rule of St Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1981, pp. 209, 393.
30. Steinmann, *Die sixtinische Kapelle*, 1, p. 497; followed by many others, including Salvini and Camesasca, *La capella Sistina in Vaticano*, 1, p. 165; Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 1, p. 66, quoted above; and Lewine, *Sistine Chapel Walls*, p. 75. On the Septizonium, see Platner and Ashby, *Ancient Rome*, pp. 473–5; Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, 2, pp. 302–5; and Richardson, *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, p. 350.
31. See the oldest version of the '*Mirabilia Urbis Romae*', in R. Valentini and G. Zucchetti (eds), *Codice*

topografico della Città di Roma, 4 vols, Rome, 1940–53, vol. 3, p. 58/3–4: 'Septizonium fuit templum Solis et Lunae, ante quod fuit templum Fortunae'; for later references, see vol. 3, p. 479, index.

32. He may here be making another reference to Psalm 106, at verse 3: the Vulgate reads 'from the sun's rising and its setting', 'a solis ortu et occasu, ab aquilone et mari'; in the *Glossa Ordinaria*, the rising and setting of the sun was interpreted as the whole course of sacred history.
33. Valentini and Zucchetti (eds), *Codice topografico*, vol. 3, p. 475, index.
34. Valentini and Zucchetti (eds), *Codice topografico*, vol. 4, p. 146/13–17.
35. Valentini and Zucchetti (eds), *Codice topografico*, vol. 4, p. 334/4–16.
36. See A.M. Pedrocchi, *San Gregorio al Celio: storia di una abbazia*, Rome, 1993, p. 66.
37. Poem of the so-called Prospettivo Milanese, *c*. 1490–5, as quoted by C. Huelsen, 'Virgilio ed i monumenti di Roma nell'immaginazione del medio evo', *Studi medievali*, series 1, 5, 1932, pp. 139–44, at p. 143: 'Era ci di virgilio una cademia / Edificata nel più bel di Roma / Et hor dintorno allei vi si vendemia . . . / Erano septe scole allalto soma / De fin colonne alla circumferentia / Et hor vene son tre che aqua cola . . . / Ciaschuna havea per se la so scientia . . .'. The account of the places of the individual liberal arts follows in terzine 99–105.
38. The classic account is D. Comparetti, *Virgil in the Middle Ages*, London, 1966, pp. 96–103. On Virgil and the Sibyllan tradition, see now K. Prümm, 'Das Prophetenamt der Sibyllen in der kirchlichen Literatur mit besonderer Rücksicht auf der Deutung der 4. Ekloge Virgils', *Scholastik* 4, 1929, pp. 221–46, 498–533; K. Prümm, 'Die Heilserwartung der vierten Ekloge Virgils im Widerstreit neurer Ansichten', *Scholastik* 6, 1931, pp. 539–68; 7, 1932, pp. 237–57; B. McGinn, '"Teste David cum Sibylla". The significance of the Sibylline Tradition in the Middle Ages', in J. Kirschner and S. Wemple (eds), *Women of the medieval world. Essays in honour of John H. Mundy*, Oxford, 1985, pp. 7–35.
39. Virgil, Eclogue IV, lines 4–10: H.R. Fairclough (ed. and trans.), *Virgil*, 2 vols, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1965, vol. 1, pp. 28–9. For a contemporary application of this passage to Sixtus IV, by Jacopo de Horetis, see below.
40. On the attitudes of humanists at the Papal Court to the classics, see Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*, pp. 235–91; J.F. D'Amico, *Renaissance humanism in papal Rome: humanists and churchmen on the eve of the Reformation*, The Johns Hopkins University Studies in historical and political science, 101st series, vol. 1, Baltimore and London, 1983, pp. 144–211; C. Trinkaus, *In our image and likeness: humanity and divinity in Italian Renaissance thought*, 2 vols, Chicago and London, 1970, 2, pp. 553–774.
41. On the *topos* of Christ the cornerstone (which could be envisaged as the keystone of an arch as well as a foundation-stone) see R. Burlin, *The Old English Advent*, Yale, 1968, pp. 58–66.
42. As soon as the humanists determined that the structure had been built by Septimius Severus, who reigned AD 193–211, they had to abandon any idea that it had been the school of Virgil. Thus no references to the Liberal Arts or to Virgil are to be found, for example, in the accounts of the Septizonium by Flavio Biondo, *Roma instaurata*, 1446; instead, he rejects as absurd the idea that there once was an idol of the sun on top of the structure: Valentini and Zucchetti (eds), *Codice topografico*, 4:313/1–13. Pomponius Laetus in his *Excerpta*, after 1484, likewise avoids all mention of the legends in his account of the ruin, confining himself to a more cautious and scholarly etymology: 'In templo S. Luciae sub colle Sancti Gregorii est Septizonium Severi, ornatum columnis, dictum a .vii. zonis': Valentini and Zucchetti (eds), *Codice topografico*, 4:423/18–19.
43. For a survey of the polemic about the Donation of Constantine in the fifteenth century, see G. Antonazzi, *Lorenzo Valla e la polemica sulla donazione di Costantino*, Uomini e dottrine, 28, Rome, 1985.
44. On the association between the Arch of Constantine and Christian triumph, see A. Pinelli, 'Feste e trionfi: continuità e metamorfosi di un tema', in S. Settis, *Memoria dell'antico nell'arte italiana*, Biblioteca di storia dell'arte, new series, 1–3, 3 vols, Turin, 1984–6, vol. 2, 1985, *I generi e i temi ritrovati*, pp. 279–350, especially pp. 284–91, 'Christus triumphans'.
45. I Corinthians 10:1–6, especially verses 4–6: 'For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did.'
46. Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 1, p. 65: 'to the left is the punishment of Korah, Dathan and Abiram beside their pavilions, represented by Botticelli as a stately Renaissance house'.
47. As suggested by Steinmann, *Die sixtinische Kapelle*, 1, p. 497, followed by Salvini and Camesasca, *La capella Sistina in Vaticano*, 1, p. 165: 'Al lato opposto, una facciata rinascimentale: nell'economia della "storia", il tempio di Aronne'. See Numbers 16:18: 'and they stood at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting with Moses and Aaron'. At this point, the Vulgate has simply 'ad ostium tabernaculi', 'at the entrance to the tabernacle'.
48. Whether or not he saw actual executions in front of S. Giovanni, Botticelli is very likely to have known the paintings, by an unknown painter, commissioned by Cardinal Angelotto da Foschi between 1438 and 1440 for the right transept of the basilica. This transept led to the door facing the city centre; it was the area of the basilica closest to the actual place for executions. These paintings depicted in detail the ferocious execution on Thursday 11 September 1437, outside the basilica near the Annibaldi Tower, of Canon Nicola di Valmontone and his two nephews, for their attempted theft of jewels from the reliquary of the heads of Sts Peter and Paul over the high altar. The paintings were destroyed in 1592, but a late sixteenth-century copy, a paper drawing, survives: see A. Cavallaro and E. Parlato (eds), *Da Pisanello alla Nascita dei musei Capitolini: L'Antico Roma alla vigilia del Rinascimento, Roma, Musei Capitolini, 24 Maggio–19 Iuglio, 1988*, Milan and Rome, pp. 225–8.
49. See the surviving Last Judgement fresco over the entrance-door in the chapel of S. Silvestro, within the Convent of SS Quattro Coronati on the Caelian Hill: the fresco is discussed by J. Mitchell, 'St. Silvester and Constantine at the SS. Quattro Coronati', in A.M. Romanini (ed.), *Federico II e l'Arte del duecento italiano, Atti della III settimana di studi di Storia dell'arte medievale dell'Università di Roma [15–20 maggio 1978]*, 2 vols, Galatina, 1980, 2, pp. 15–32, figs 1–23; and for the Last Judgement scene by Pietro Cavallini over the entrance to S. Caecilia in Trastevere see P. Hetherington, *Pietro Cavallini: A Study of the Art of Late Medieval Rome*, London, 1979, pp. 37–58.
50. See S. De Blaauw, 'The solitary celebration of the supreme pontiff. The Lateran basilica as the new temple in the medieval liturgy of Maundy Thursday', in C. Caspers and M. Schneiders (eds), *Omnes circumadstantes: contributions towards a history of the role of the people in the liturgy presented to Herman Wegman*, Kampen, 1990, pp. 120–43, at pp. 130–1. The location of the chapel, to the left of the *porticus*, is shown on De Blaauw's plan on p. 123.
51. Salvini and Camesasca, *La capella Sistina in Vaticano*, 1, p. 165, are properly sceptical of the notion that the Palatine is represented realistically. They point out that the ruin to the right of the fresco is 'in ogni caso, un monumento romano nella zona del Palatino, che si credette di identificare con il colle visibile fra le colonne, nonostante il lago e la città gotica sulle sue rive'. So also Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 1, p. 67, quoted above, p. 493.
52. P. Schaff (trans.), *Saint Augustin; Expositions of the book of Psalms*, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 8, p. 529.
53. Schaff, *Saint Augustin: Expositions*, p. 535.
54. I have consulted the two copies in the British Library: IC.813, bound in five volumes and IC.814, bound in three volumes.
55. The beginning of Psalm 106 in the six-volume edition of the *Glossa Ordinaria with the Commentary of Nicholas of Lyra*, Basel: Johannes Petri and Johannes Froben, 1498, folio, vol. 3: National University of Ireland at Cork, Boole Library, Cathedral Collection. Although this edition was published some sixteen years later than Botticelli's fresco, the page gives a good idea of the usual layout of a heavily glossed page of scripture. There is another copy of this edition in the British Library, shelfmark IB. 37895.
56. Botticelli's, CONTVRBATIO . MOISI . LEGIS . SCRIPTAE . LATORIS .; Perugino's, CONTVRBATIO . IESV . CHRISTI . LEGISLATORIS.
57. E. Camesasca, *L'Opera completa del Perugino*, Milan, 1969, pls XII–XIII and p. 92.
58. Lewine, *Sistine Chapel Walls*, p. 67.
59. To make sense of the verse, we need to supply the implied verb 'sacravit' after the word 'TEMPLVM'.
60. The reversal of the vocative names for Sixtus is not required by the verse. It would have been as easy to write 'SIXTE . . . QVARTE'. The actual arrangement has the advantage of ensuring that the name 'SIXTE' begins the second inscription, the pentameter, even as 'SALAMO' comes near the beginning of the first, the hexameter. The intention was clearly to establish a clear contrast between the two names, Solomon and Sixtus IV.
61. If the couplet referred to the Sistine Chapel, the adjective 'prior' would have to be neuter, 'prius', to agree with 'hoc' [templum]: instead it is masculine, agreeing with 'Sixte'.
62. 'Et ecce, plus quam Salomon hic': Matthew 12:40, Luke 11:31. On Franciscan references in the Sistine Chapel walls, see Goffen, 'Friar Sixtus IV and the Sistine Chapel': on the present fresco, p. 255.
63. H. Rahner, *Symbole der Kirche, Die Ekklesiologie der Väter*, Salzburg, 1964, pp. 361–405.
64. See Rahner, *Symbole der Kirche*, pp. 406–31; and D. Vorreux, *Tau simbolo francescano: storia, teologia e iconografia*, Padua, 1988.
65. Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book 1, 2–7: 'exiled by fate, came to Italy and Lavinian shores; . . . until he should build a city and bring his gods to Latium; whence came the Latin race, the lords of Alba, and the walls of lofty Rome', ed. and trans. Fairclough, vol. 1, pp. 240–1.

66. Sixtus IV was clearly interested in the idea that some aspects of sacrality had been transferred from Palestine and the East, now definitively in the hands of the heathen, to Italy. His decisive action in this regard was to commit the Papacy in 1476 to ownership and patronage of the cult of the Holy House of Nazareth at Loreto, and to make the oratory of the Virgin there into a papal chapel, *capella pontificia*. For good recent discussion, with bibliography, see L. Scaraffia, *Loreto*, Bologna, 1998, at p. 19 on Sixtus IV and Loreto, and, on the concept of transfer of sacrality in general, pp. 33, 55–62, 65–70, 105. See also Goffen, 'Friar Sixtus IV and the Sistine Chapel', p. 229.
67. See Psalm 106: 'in portum voluntatis eorum', verse 30, and, 'in civitatem habitationis', verse 7.
68. Jacopo de Horetis, unpublished poem 'Divo Xysto IIII Pont. Maximo doctrinae humanitatis clementiae et liberalitatis exemplo dicatum carmen', Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ms. Ottob. lat. 1329, fol. 19r, as discussed by E. Schröter, 'Der Vatikan als Hügel Apollons und der Musen. Kunst und Panegyrik von Nikolaus V. bis Julius II', *Römische Quartalschrift* 75, 1980, pp. 208–40, at p. 220. The line quoted is clearly modelled on Eclogue IV, 10: 'tuus iam regnat Apollo'.