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## A Reappraisal of Donatello's Bronze *Judith and Holofernes*

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Donatello's bronze grouping, *Judith and Holofernes*, has been variously described as 'a metaphor for Medici rule', as a symbol of the female hero usurped by patriarchal agendas, and as a representation of the Florentine Republic. The relocations of the sculpture have given rise to much debate in terms of its changing roles, interpretations and significance as an adaptable icon for differing political agendas. In this presentation, I will place the sculpture in its original setting and seek to understand the psychological importance for the patron as I assert it to be. I will argue that the intention of Cosimo de' Medici was neither to present a statement of Medici rule, nor to implicate the family within the ideals of the Florentine state while simultaneously undermining the limited democracy of the republic. Rather, in keeping with the religious drives of the period and within Europe, in keeping with Cosimo's fear of damnation, his philosophical outlook and discussions and his expansive reading habits; I will look to re-examine and reposition the debates which surround the sculpture and allow for it to be viewed as a religious and spiritual engagement between the patron and the work in the setting in which it was intended to be seen and interacted with. I will explore Cosimo's attachment to the garden as a contemplative arena. The view of Alberti and Colonna that sees the garden as a "metaphorical and metaphysical" space where one can "commune with God" and the Christian tradition of the garden as a "spiritual, sacred" place lends additional weight to the argument that Cosimo did use this garden as just such a contemplative retreat within the confines of the city. The garden allowed him to both engage in his religious thoughts and his Neo-Platonic musings.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the connections that exist between Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* and biblical texts and commentaries, and writings on agricultural practice known to have been in the possession of Cosimo de' Medici. This approach suggests a redefined interpretation of the sculpture. Cato's *De Agricultura* (Brehaut, 1933) and Gregory's *De Moralia* along with the *Book of Judith* will form part of an examination of the sculpture that engages both with the texts and the original location of the sculpture. The location of the work and the various readings and issues which arise from this are reviewed in order to contextualise the proposal that the sculpture in the Palazzo's garden and the influence the patron's reading interest offer a new understanding of the relationship between the sculpture and its patron, accepted here as Cosimo de' Medici.<sup>1</sup> In limiting the examination of private,

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<sup>1</sup> These texts are available on-line and the versions referred to in this article are:

For *De Moralia*: <http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoraliaIndex.html>

*De Agricultura*: [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cato/De\\_Agricultura/A\\*.html#0](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cato/De_Agricultura/A*.html#0)

And for the *Book of Judith*: <http://www.drbo.org/>

religious concerns to the garden setting, an awareness of the patron's reading habits needs to be investigated. The line of enquiry being pursued here will call for a bringing together of Cosimo's literary and gardening interests with his penitential concerns and the text which the sculpture represents.

It is important to state from the outset that debate around themes of patronage and dating of the sculpture persist; it is equally important to state that the argument being presented here relies on the sculpture being in the garden of the Medici Palace prior to Cosimo de' Medici's death, in 1464, and that he is acknowledged as a possible candidate for the position of patron. The focus for this paper is the sculpture in the garden and the elements of Cosimo's character and traits that allow a nuanced and innovative approach to the sculpture's interpretation. The public role of the sculpture after its relocation to the Piazza del Signoria is outside the remit of the inquiry as in that location the reception and audience alters from that of the statue's original site.

Firstly, the discourse surrounding dating will be addressed. Firmly linked to the dating of the sculpture is the matter of patronage. Standpoints of various scholars will be reviewed in order to secure the contention that the sculpture can be located in the garden during the period in question. Secondly, the sculpture has been interpreted to conform to various twentieth- and twenty-first-century theoretical frameworks. While these provide a method for the interrogation of any work they also bring their own agendas to bear on the work itself and seek to mould interpretations to a modern viewer's demands and expectations. These positions will be outlined, not to dismiss them, as they are all valid as a means of academic enquiry, but rather that the reader can be aware of the context in which this project is operating. Thirdly, the location of the sculpture within the Medici Palace complex will be discussed. The relationships with which this project concerns itself will be influenced by the placing of the sculpture in the garden and excluded from the public eye or limited to an invited, close, coterie of the Medici associates. As with dating and patronage, location continues to attract debate, although there is a degree of consensus that has developed. Considering the vast corpus of writing which has evolved since Janson's *The Sculpture of Donatello*



*Judith and Holofernes*, Donatello, late 1450s (?), Replica outside the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Original located in Sala dei Gigli, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.

Photo Credit: Caoimhín de Bhailís

(1963), it is only to be expected that there will be reappraisals of date, patronage, location and meaning. Finally, the remainder of this article will focus on the motivations of Cosimo de'Medici. This will deal with his religious and moral concerns and how these relate to the sculpture. This paper argues that these concerns are of great importance in any discussion of *Judith and Holofernes* and that they have been largely side-lined to focus on public, political and gender analysis of the work. It is crucial to note that in all discussion around the sculpture there is an acceptance that it was in the garden from the late 1450s to 1495. It is interesting that, given the efforts to make *Judith and Holofernes* comply with a public role, it is, it seems, invisible to the public eye during this period. The sculpture receives little mention from contemporary observers before 1495; however this may only be a result of non-exposure of archival evidence thus far.

If we follow the chronologies devised by scholars from archival sources relating to the sculpture's creation, a date in the late 1450s is one with which many are in agreement, (Even, 1992, p.10; Randolph, 2002, p.243; Wilkins, 2010, p.137). It is part of the enigma of the sculpture that there are still no clear and precise dates as there is no record of a contract for the commission; this may be due to its not having been discovered yet, it may have been destroyed or it may have been an unwritten contract between Cosimo and Donatello. Given the close relationship which existed between both men this is an option which should not be dismissed without evidence discovered to the contrary. However, there must also be recognition of the legal frameworks which operated in Florence around this time and the abundance of contracts that have been unearthed for other large works commissioned by other patrons. Wilkins (2010) constructed a list of work by Donatello for the Medici where the majority of the pieces are presumed commissions due to lack of contract. Wilkins further points out that Donatello's relationship with his patrons would have allowed him a certain amount of creative input which would have been hindered by specific contractual demands. It may well be the case, as Caglioti (2000) has suggested, that there is no evidence to place the sculpture in the garden until 1464. However, the position remains that if the statue is commissioned by Cosimo, as early as 1457, then the programme and intention, as is asserted here, still hold true.

In his *Life of Donatello*, Vasari (Bondanella, 1998, p.152) only mentioned *Judith and Holofernes* after it had been placed in the loggia of the Piazza della Signoria. He referred to the bronze *David* having been originally in the courtyard of the Medici Palace but does not include *Judith* in his observation. Current research has placed the sculpture in the garden between two definite dates: in 1495, when it is recorded as having been removed following the exile of Lorenzo de Medici's son, Piero II in 1494, and earlier than 1464, when it is recorded in the context of a letter of condolence to Piero de'Medici on the death of his father, Cosimo. This letter, while not referring to *Judith* directly, does include the wording relating to the first inscription found on the sculpture and, in a transcription of this letter, made in 1492,

Bartolomeo Fonzio states that these words are to be found on the column beneath the *Judith* in the Medici courtyard.<sup>2</sup>

There is also debate surrounding the actual making of the sculpture. Janson (1979) has argued that the sculpture was begun in 1457 for the city of Siena and that it was finished as a Medici commission; while Herzner (1980), agreeing with the date, has translated the same source document differently to conclude that it was a Medici commission from the outset, (McHam, 2001, n.5). The basis for dating the sculpture from 1457 lies in an order recorded in Medici and Donato account books that refer to payments for bronze and other materials in 1456 where *Judith* is mentioned (Bennett and Wilkins 1984, p.82-89). It can be concluded that, without definitive evidence, research points to the sculpture being in the garden from at least 1464 and possibly 1457 and remained there until 1495, with the patron most likely being Cosimo.

While matters of dating and patronage are at issue, so too are meaning and interpretation. The position of this paper is that the sculpture was part of a contemplative holistic space. This is not to deny that there is purchase in the positions adopted by others but rather that the private, pious motivations of Cosimo have been neglected and that these characteristics of the patron provide a basis for this to be considered as a valid engagement with the work.

The *Book of Judith* lends itself to various interpretations. There can be no doubt that the story served a particular purpose suited to the demands of the time and that visual representations at different times through history have been seen to reflect the malleability of the tale. These flexibilities have been adapted to fit the agendas and programmes of not only patrons and artists but also the art historical community, as it seeks to interpret and reposition visual representations of *Judith and Holofernes* within certain theoretical viewpoints. It is important to briefly examine other approaches which apply themselves directly to the sculpture by Donatello.

As part of the development of gender based art history, examined by Welch (2000, pp. 201-216), Yael Evens (1991) tied *Judith and Holofernes* to a gender related programme that reflects the misogynistic nature of renaissance society by evaluating the relocating of the statue from its original site in the Medici Palace. Apart from its removal to the Piazza della Signoria the statue was later moved to the Loggia dei Lanzi, and it underwent further relocations within the Loggia before eventually

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<sup>2</sup> The sculpture can thus be located in the garden from as early as 1464. For further discussion on the dating of the sculpture see: Sperling, 'Donatello's Bronze 'David' and the demands of Medici Politics', *The Burlington Magazine*, 1992. In addition McHam discusses the documents referred to by Sperling in 'Donatello's 'David' and 'Judith': Metaphors of Medici Rule', *The Art Bulletin*, 2001, n. 2, Crum, without referring to documentation, states that "Donatello's Judith is generally dated to the mid-1450s", 'Severing the Neck of Pride: Donatello's 'Judith and Holofernes' and the Recollections of Medici Shame in Medicean Florence', *Artibus et Historiae*, 2001. While Caglioti produces a comprehensive compendium of the debates around dating and patronage with regard to *Judith* which includes both previously examined and new research to secure the sculpture in the garden, at least as early as 1464, this is based on the letters which Randolph and others also discuss. The dating of the sculpture has been dependent on letters containing references to the inscriptions on the base, as per the letter mentioned in the text. For more on the documents see Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance*, Yale, 2006, n.244-4, 247 and 253. Caglioti can also be consulted for his interpretations of the inscriptions on the *Judith*, in *Donatello e I Medici. Saggio di storia dell'arte sul David e la Giuditta*, Florence, 2000.

returning to the Piazza in the early twentieth century where it remains, albeit in the form of a replica.<sup>3</sup> That there is this gendering of the visual retelling of the biblical narrative is not surprising as this has also been pursued with examinations of the text within its biblical setting. Judith's transformation from a secluded widow in a domestic location to one of sexual assassin in the public domain and eventual return to her roof-top reflects an established patriarchal hierarchy, which is only temporarily usurped for the purpose of salvation by God, using the weapon of a woman's fatal flaw, the sexual temptress (Levine, 2004, p.208-223). The adoption of this approach to the text has been used as a basis to support a gendered reading of many visual representations of *Judith and Holofernes* including Donatello's. This narrowing of interpretation serves only to deny the richness of the theoretical reading that can be applied to the sculpture.

It cannot be denied, however, that the issue of gender relations has become a point of entry into examinations of *Judith and Holofernes*, whether as text or image. Randolph (2002, 247), in his viewing of Donatello's *Judith* in the garden setting, at once sought to distance himself from feminist readings while simultaneously arguing that the statue gained power from a gender related viewpoint. Indeed issues of gender and dating surrounding the other bronze in the Medici Palace, the *David*, continue to be debated as late as 2012. Randolph's appraisal of the 'consensus' agreeing to a political interpretation of the *David* is rebutted by Williams (2009), who sees the *David* as a sign "of human redemption" and Weller (2012), who concludes that the sculpture might be seen to represent political agendas but was primarily a sacred and sanctifying object. If it is the case that a pious agenda can be attributed to the *David*, which was located in a public space and with assertive statements of political intent, then, it is certainly the case that a programme of religious intent can be applied to *Judith and Holofernes* which is situated in a private space more readily associated with pious contemplation.

In addition to gendered readings there has been much discussion around the theme of political meaning as the intended purpose of the sculpture. What follows are just two interpretations applied to the bronze grouping revolving around the political and dynastic agenda of the Medici family. McHam (2001) calls for a unified consideration of both the *David* and *Judith* because of their co-location within the Palazzo de' Medici and because of their iconographic similarities. For McHam (2001) the bronze pair functioned as evocations of 'republican themes', which held currency with the city, that were used to associate, and secure the Medici as part of the republic's anti-tyrannical identity. The *David* and *Judith* had been associated with each other prior to their installation in the Palazzo; they featured close to each other on Ghiberti's *Gates of Paradise*. Support for the coupling of both sculptures as having political intentions derives not just from their biblical roles as defenders of nations but from the inscriptions on the bases. The *David* carried the inscription:

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<sup>3</sup> The original is located in the Sala dei Gigli, inside the Palazzo Vecchio.

"The victor is whoever defends the fatherland. God crushes the wrath of an enormous foe. Behold! A boy overcame a great tyrant. Conquer, o citizens!"

This echoes a similar inscription associated with Donatello's earlier marble *David*:

"To those who fight strongly for the fatherland, God lends aid even against the most terrible foes." (Kent, 2000, p.283).

There are two inscriptions associated with the *Judith* both of which were present on the sculpture while it was present in the Medici garden:

"Kingdoms fall through luxury, cities rise through virtues. Behold the neck of pride severed by the hand of humility"

"The salvation of the state, Piero de'Medici son of Cosimo dedicated this statue of a woman both to liberty and to fortitude, whereby the citizens with unvanquished and constant heart might return to the republic." (Randolph, 2002, p.252).

It is clear that the inscriptions place *David* in the role of defender of liberty and the "fatherland" and securely link him with Florentine republican ideals. Through appropriation of both the image and the inscription, within the semi-private place of the Palazzo courtyard, the Medici aligned themselves with these ideals. In the second of the two *Judith* inscriptions it is evident that a similar attempt is being made by Piero to strengthen this Medicean assertion of their position as a dynasty with a symbiotic relationship with the commonwealth of the city at large. This politicisation of *Judith* is no more than a hiatus in her role. Lucrezia, Piero's wife reverses this when she writes of the Judith narrative in a private, moral mode (Adams & Pernis, 2006, 122-4) and Judith is cast once more in her traditional role.

It is evident that the inscriptions play a role in the interpretations associated with both sculptures. However, while the *David* wording cannot escape political connotation and the second *Judith* inscription is tied to an overtly republican agenda, the original statement attached to *Judith* might speak to additional motivations.

The first statement on the *Judith* can be linked with a moralistic and theological message in addition to that of Florentine politics. That is not to imply that there have been no interpretations which fasten the sculpture to a political drive (McHam being but one example) nor indeed is it to insist that there is a divide between the moral and the political, the private and the public in Florentine art and society. Crum (2001) argued that the use of *Judith* could have served to remind the Florentine populace of the need for humility to succeed above pride in order for harmony to prevail in the city and that the Medici had demonstrated their adherence to the virtue of humility. The use of the sculpture in the main square by the republic, where Donatello's marble *David* had once stood, is an overt adoption and revaluation of *Judith* as exclusively a public, political symbol rather than a private, moral, theological herald with political resonances. *Judith*, after the expulsion of the Medici and her transfer to the Palazzo in 1495, replaces the *David* as an exemplar of the

Florentine republic's virtuous role as defender against tyranny. Crum linked pride and humility with the city and political machinations. However, it is argued here that, for Cosimo *il Vecchio*, the demonstration of humility as victorious over pride had also a much more personal and religious significance.

Regardless of the debates surrounding the sculpture, it is accepted that both the *Judith* and the *David* were present in the Medici Palace at the same time and this can be ascertained from the records of their removal by the republican government in 1495. Although it can be securely claimed that both sculptures were in the Palace, records do not exist, or at least have not been revealed as of now, to demonstrate that they were commissioned to co-exist in the space. Issues of co-location thus do not imply that a single, motivation existed to impart a direct relationship between the two sculptures other than that which can be derived from their moral and narrative similarities within a biblical and religious context. While there is an acceptance that debate around meaning will jointly consider the sculptures as a result of their narrative similarities, this does not demonstrate that, at the point of conception, the two works are tied to a unified programme of functionality. As Turner (1997, p.156) suggested, given the separation in date of their making, "[...] the iconography linking them may be an afterthought arrived at when the second sculpture was executed."

As there is no evidence to suggest a joint programme then there is no compunction to address the sculptures as part of a single decorative drive by the patron. Neither can it be confidently asserted that the collocation inside the Medici Palace occurred in a shared space. The different locations of the sculptures conspire to separate their unity as a single programme. The *David* was situated in the courtyard whose portal opened up onto the main thoroughfare running from San Marco to the Cathedral along which the *Confraternita dei Magi* walked in procession on the Feast of the Epiphany, and of which Cosimo was a member (Kent 2006, p.158). The *David* was therefore viewable from a main axis of the city when the gates were open and so may be considered to be part of the public aspect of the building. Additionally, the courtyard acted as a waiting area for those seeking audience with the Medici family or those invited to participate in occasions organised by the Medici in their household. The courtyard contained loggia with benches set into them, allowing people to sit and wait to petition the Medici. Triboaldo de' Rossi remarks that, on one occasion, there was a large group of Florentines in the courtyard waiting to see Lorenzo de' Medici (Preyer, 1998, pp.357-8). As such, the *David* became a feature in the main foyer of the building, greeting those visiting the Palace. *Judith* was located further into the building complex and separated by a wall in which an arched opening allowed access. In this garden space that offered views of another object of Medicean patronage, the church of San Lorenzo, (from the upper galleries and walkways located above the western entrance on the Borgo San Lorenzo), *Judith* is denied the full public access of the *David* and is secreted behind enclosing walls in the garden setting (Looper, 1992, 257). The *David* is not only separated from *Judith* by the walled enclosures but acts as a separating device by obscuring the line of vision from the Via Larga to the garden. The archway between the two spaces was also smaller than the present opening and



would have caused a reduction of the visual access from the main street to the rear garden.<sup>4</sup>

Further questions regarding the exact location and function have been raised by Caglioti (2000) who dismisses the notion that the sculpture functioned as a fountain due to there being no internal piping in the statue. He suggests that the holes in the corner of the pillow on which *Holofernes* lies were probably sockets that contained decorative tassels rather than outlet spouts. This may be the case but this does not discount the proposal, from Ames-Lewis (1989, 240-1, n.10), that *Judith* may have been installed on an existing fountain. This suggestion is also dismissed by Caglioti due to the sculpture's size. Both Ames-Lewis and Caglioti suggest that the *Judith* was not on the central axis from the Via Larga, at the front of the Palazzo, to the Borgo San Lorenzo, at the rear, with Caglioti moving the sculpture to the northern section of the garden (McHam, 44, n.8). This proposal that the sculpture was removed from a direct line of sight from the surrounding streets adds credence to the view that the bronze grouping was intended for a private role within the garden.

Ames-Lewis (1989, p.251) has said of the bronze *David* that any new interpretation serves to demonstrate its ambiguities; this is even more true of the *Judith*. The biblical source for *Judith* is open to a variety of interpretations and thus any visual representation will have opportunities to express this narrative in a freer manner but with a further layering of interpretive strata. It is because of this multivalency that it becomes clear that the sculpture, within the original setting of the Palazzo Medici garden, operates nearer the conceptual framework of the patron.

There have been examinations of *Judith's* relationship with the surrounding garden and the dialogue that takes place between Cosimo and the sculpture and its private location. Looper (1992), for example, investigated *Judith* and the garden and the meanings that could be extracted from an investigation of garden imagery and its associations with Paradise. However, the conclusion that Looper reached is again one of political and princely intention and reception. As we are dealing, then, with an Edenic setting, and given the significance of such during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance for private contemplation, it seems that there should also be an engagement with this aspect of the sculpture's significance in the garden setting. As Cosimo's religious and moral concerns, and his reading habits show an intense interest in moral interpretation of the bible, it is argued here that to fully expound upon the role of the sculpture's many aspects then the private, personal import of the statue must also be addressed.

Donatello's *Judith* does not address the totality of the biblical narrative but rather remains in the stasis of one frozen moment in the story. It is an inter-climactic point between the first and second strokes that bring about the separation of Holofernes' head from his body. However, it is also in this one moment that the conquering of humility over pride is achieved. *Judith* had foretold this moment earlier in the *Book of Judith*, (9:12) when she prays 'that his pride may be cut off by his own sword'. It is also an action which is a glorious monument to God's aid in a time of

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.palazzo-medici.it/mediateca/en/schede.php?id\\_scheda=214](http://www.palazzo-medici.it/mediateca/en/schede.php?id_scheda=214)

need. The sculpture manifests itself both as a moment of action within the text and also a fulfilment of the prophecy of the text in becoming a monument to the word.

Cosimo was a man in need of God's aid; his banking practice aroused his concern for his soul due to a reliance on usury. His previous patronage of the Convent of San Marco had arisen from this anxiety (da Bisticci, 1997, pp.218-219). Besides the sin of usury, Cosimo would have been conscious of his father's advice on humility (Cavalcanti, 1838 cited in Ross, 1911, 6) and he knew that to preserve his earthly riches he would need 'to turn to pious ways' (da Bisticci, p.219). This desire to be penitential for his usury and his attempts to remain humble while being extremely wealthy are all given the opportunity to be meditated upon by the sculpture in the garden. It is also clear that the garden setting was of significance for Cosimo given his own history.

Cosimo participated in the farming practices on his estates outside of Florence and was involved in the laying out of the garden at San Marco, (da Bisticci, pp.224-225). This interest is not only supported by Vespasiano da Bisticci but also by Cosimo's reading practices. The records compiled by Ullman (1972) of the collection in the San Marco library, owned or acquired by Cosimo, provide ample evidence for Cosimo's reading around agricultural, as well as his interest in moral philosophy and religion. From this catalogue we learn that Cosimo had in his procession Cato's *De Agricultura* as well as Varro's *De Rustica*. What is extremely interesting for the purpose of exploring the holistic nature of *Judith and Holofernes* in the garden at Via Larga is that in the preface to his book on farming Cato immediately confronts the issue of usury. Not alone does Cato condemn the usurer as being worse than a thief but Cicero in his *De Officiis* further quotes Cato's attitude to usury, likening it to manslaughter. Cicero's book was amongst Cosimo's collection and would surely have been consulted by him. Further, Cosimo also held a copy of Plutarch's *Lives* that also recorded Cato, (Ullman 1972, pp.310,78,82 also Giannetto, 2008, p.34).<sup>5</sup> Cato's modest lifestyle and praise of farming and cultivation of the land in an ordered way would have had a direct and meaningful resonance with Cosimo. As a reflection of the values of republican Rome, both Cato and Varro espouse the connections that exist between the private, moral world and the duty to the republic. It must not be forgotten that Cosimo's ancestors came from a rural, farming background, (Giannetto, 2008, pp.13-14). Cosimo is, thus, rooted in the practical engagement with agriculture, accessing a moral code that can be extracted from pagan precedence that echoed his private and public duties. Vespasiano reminds of how Cosimo could find moral guidance, for both himself and others, in this immersion in horticultural practice. According to Vespasiano, Cosimo used to say "that in a garden there grew a weed which should never be watered but left dry up...This weed was that worst of all weeds, Envy", (da Bisticci, p.234).

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<sup>5</sup> Plutarch's *Lives* is available at :

[http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Cato\\_Major\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Cato_Major*.html)

[http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cicero/Cato\\_Maior\\_de\\_Senectute/text\\*.html#R15](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cicero/Cato_Maior_de_Senectute/text*.html#R15)

[http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cicero/de\\_Officiis/home.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cicero/de_Officiis/home.html)

We can see that the dichotomies that are inherent in the *Judith and Holofernes* narrative of vice and virtue, humility and pride find their way into Cosimo's quotidian life as he struggled to maintain an image fitting the Florentine republic's expectations of a wealthy citizen maintaining a moral position that did not encourage envy or fall prey to the temptations of vainglory. His escape from this clash of humility over pride, display and suppression could be achieved within a secluded, private space.

Envisaging the garden within the Palace as an enclosed space, it operates as "a spiritual place in which the human spirit can commune with God" (Venturi, 1991, pp.88-91). The walls, which enclosed the garden in the Palazzo, and the separation of the garden from the courtyard point towards the use of the garden for this very purpose. Like mendicant communities that operated within the broader society and retained spaces of private contemplation, Cosimo echoes this in his active public life and his private piety in enclosed spaces such as his cell in San Marco and the garden in the Palazzo. The layout of the garden is close in design to monastic cloister enclosures; for example a comparison can be made between San Marco and the Via Larga garden. The cloistered life was a means for the religious, monastic communities to isolate themselves, or temporarily retreat, from the profane world. Honorius states that "the solitude of the cloister truly exhibits an image of heaven" (Comito, 1978, p.48), and the decision to create such an environment within the Palazzo, a building with public, although invited, access reinforces the notion that Cosimo was seeking such an escape from his temporal concerns. The sculpture participates in this environment by providing a focal point for Cosimo's meditations on the sins of pride and envy and acts as a counterbalance to his practice of usury, as indicated by Cato in his preface. Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* (Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1947, 1518), also in the San Marco library (Ullman, 1972, p.170), discusses the sin of usury at length and how it must be seen as a sin. As Cosimo negotiated with Pope Eugenius IV for an expiation of his sins through the patronage of San Marco, he brings the same matters of conscience with him to the sculpture and the garden (da Bisticci, p.218).

The garden creates a space for theological reflection but the narrative of the *Book of Judith*, as reflected in the sculpture, is precise in the sins which it wishes to address. Pride is a theme which runs through the biblical story and this would surely have found purchase in Cosimo's thoughts. This must be especially true given his father's advice on maintaining a low profile and not arousing envy (Ross, 1911, p.6). The sin of pride is mentioned directly four times in the *Book of Judith* (6:15, 8:17, 9:12 and 13:28) and the *Summa* (1947, pp.1854-1861) addressing the sin of pride with reference to St. Gregory's *De Moralia*. Da Basticci (1997, p.225) informs us that Cosimo read all the books of *De Moralia* over a six-month period. The *Judith*, both iconographically and narratively, demonstrates similarities between the *Book of Judith* and *De Moralia*.

Throughout *De Moralia*, we find references which are reflected in the *Book of Judith*, Donatello's bronze, and in the earlier of the inscriptions, "Kingdoms fall through luxury, cities rise through virtues. Behold the neck of pride severed by the

hand of humility”<sup>6</sup> Pride, for Gregory, and reflected in Aquinas, is one of the principal vices and “pride and vain glory render obedience to the will of Satan”<sup>7</sup> Holofernes is equated with the Devil and his temptations by Wind (1937, pp.62-63). Further, in Gregory, the neck is mentioned with pride on more than one occasion: “the sinner scorns to obey the precepts of the Lord, when he erects the neck of pride, and shuts the mind’s eyes to the light of truth” (11:15), and explicitly, “As the sight is used to be denoted by the eye, so is pride by the ‘neck.’” Thus “the neck is brought down to the mire, when every proud man is humbled in death, and the flesh that was lifted up rots in corruption.”(11.43). It is worth noting that the horse was taken to be a symbol of superbia, or pride, and the medallion which hangs from Holoferne’s neck depicts a horse (McHam, 2001, p.35). (The issue of the medallion is the subject of further research being addressed in the thesis this paper forms part of.) If, then, Holofernes is Pride and Judith the representation of Humility which overcomes him, we can assert that the vice against which Cosimo’s father spoke out on his deathbed, (and which the writings of Gregory and Aquinas denounced), is represented in the form of the sculpture based on the *Book of Judith*. Removed from the public arena to the private secluded garden space, it is clear that the sculpture in this setting acts as a focal point of pious contemplation and reflection around these concerns.

The garden as a contemplative space would have been familiar to Cosimo from his involvement in San Marco. The Christian associations of the enclosed garden with Paradise would have been known to him through his reading and agricultural practices. Masson (1961, p.13) traces the Renaissance ideal of the garden as a contemplative space back to Plato’s Academy, and Petrarch, a century before Cosimo, believed the garden to be “the proper setting for a poet and a man of learning” (Masson, 1961, p.7). Cosimo’s Neo-Platonic translator and friend, Ficino, also recommends that “gardens and groves... [be of] constant companionship [for] agreeable men” (Ficino, 1988, 4:98). In the same letter, Ficino points out that greens and reds were of particular importance for meditation and we know, from Hatfield (1970, pp.232-249), of some of the flora present in the garden, described by a Milanese letter writer as an ‘earthly paradise’ (Hatfield). An anonymous poet wrote, around 1459, of “laurel, myrtle, orange and box...jasmine, violets, roses and lilies, and flowers blue, yellow, white and red” (Hatfield, p.234). If ‘box’ is the common European boxwood used in topiary then there is both green and red flora in the garden at this time. However, the colours of the plants hold further significance. According to Kent (2006, p.300) violets stood for humility and roses for the Virgin. *Judith and Holofernes* is thus located in a surrounding with multiple religious reference points external to the sculpture itself. The flora and the enclosing walls all point to an ‘earthly paradise’ and a meditative space. The garden and sculpture, with the symbolic connections to theological writings familiar to Cosimo and his concerns for his soul, conspire to present a holistic, religious experience in which he can participate.

<sup>6</sup> For examination of the inscriptions, see Crum, McHam, Caglioti, Kent and Ames-Lewis.

<sup>7</sup> Gregory, *De Moralia*, Book XIV, 64, <http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoralia/Book14.html>

In the *Book of Judith*, the heroine leaves her private dwelling to perform a public act as a result of the threat to her nation. She later returns to the private setting to contemplate and pray. She was forced into a public role to combat pride, but it is not a role in which she was destined to remain. Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* begins as a contemplative device in the garden setting but is forced into a public role by her removal from the Palace to the Piazza in 1495. Her role remains attached to the public and political drives that are reflected in the inscriptions placed upon the sculpture. It is the initial inscription that defines her intentional role within the garden setting and, as asserted here, at the point of conception for the patron. Attempts to usurp this private role failed in the secluded arena, as there are no public descriptions or commentaries about the sculpture until after its relocation to the public space. While scholarly research and debate continues to focus on a politicisation of the sculpture, based on the inscriptions and public reception, this public reception is limited while the sculpture is in the garden setting.<sup>8</sup> The religious motivations for the sculpture's commissioning does, however, provide its own justification by drawing on the demands of the private aspects of the individual to meditate on his pious concerns.

While this paper has omitted to investigate in a comprehensive manner the late-medieval and early Renaissance practices of gardening and the religious implications of such practices, it can be seen that Cosimo's reading did form a connection with both the garden and his religious concerns. The deeper meaning of the garden's role and its symbolic value for the contemplative life form part of the wider programme of research of which this paper is just a part. It is certain that much of the evidence to support this assertion is already available, yet it is directed towards conclusions which focus on public, political meanings that place the additional motivations of moral, private and religious concerns, (that were as important and closely attached to political statements and actions in Renaissance Florence), in a lesser, or non-role, in examining *Judith and Holofernes*. This paper hopes to have redressed this imbalance and to have created an environment for debate to include aspects that find greater sympathy with the mores of the individual in the early Renaissance and allow for examinations of *Judith and Holofernes* that explore private, moral concerns as much as public, political implications.

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<sup>8</sup> For further discussion surrounding the possible political messages attached to the sculpture, see Crum, McHam, Caglioti and Looper.

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