Retooling Medievalism for Early Modern Painting in Annibale Carracci's *Pietà with Saints* in Parma

Livia Stoenescu

Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843, USA; stoenescu.livia@gmail.com

Abstract: Annibale Carracci (1560–1609) drew on the Italian Renaissance tradition of the Man of Sorrows to advance the Christological message within the altarpiece context of his *Pietà with Saints* (1585). From its location at the high altar of the Capuchin church of St. Mary Magdalene in Parma, the work commemorates the life of Duke Alessandro Farnese (1586–1592), who is interred right in front of Annibale's painted image. The narrative development of the *Pietà with Saints* transformed the late medieval Lamentation altarpiece focused on the dead Christ into a riveting manifestation of the beautiful and sleeping Christ worshipped by saints and angels in a nocturnal landscape. Thus eschewing historical context, the pictorial thrust of Annibale's interpretation of the Man of Sorrows attached to the *Pietà with Saints* was to heighten Eucharistic meaning while allowing for sixteenth-century theological and poetic thought of Mary's body as the tomb of Christ to cast discriminating devotional overtones on the resting place of the deceased Farnese Duke.

Keywords: Devotional Art; Reform of Art; Early Modern and Italian Renaissance Art

The *Pietà with Saints* (Figure 1) for the high altar of the Capuchin church of Saint Mary Magdalene in Parma articulates the increasing attention brought to the aesthetic qualities of the Man of Sorrows tradition and the value placed on creative imitation on the part of its maker, Annibale Carracci (1560–1609). An original exponent of the post-Tridentine sensibility, he explored new devices of visual rhetoric in a time ripe for re-evaluating sacred images to advance religious devotions and to broaden and enrich artistic traditions (Robertson 2019, pp. 19–32). Annibale produced this impressive work of art during his second visit to Parma in 1585, when he also convinced Cardinal Odoardo Farnese to become his most consistent patron. Count Carlo Cesare Malvasia and the papal diplomat Giovanni Battista Agucchi both recount that Annibale stopped for some time in Parma to study the Great Cupola by Correggio in the Cathedral of Parma, and had the occasion to make the works he produced for the Duke that were so well received that they opened his way to go to Rome under the protection of Cardinal Odoardo Farnese (Agucchi [1646] 1947, p. 240; Malvasia [1667] 1967, p. 403).

Annibale's *Pietà with Saints* represents the subject of Christ outside the tomb in a nocturnal landscape where angels are carrying a cross over the body of the Savior before His Resurrection. The saints participate in a vigil with gestures of increasing narrative animation as a means of emphasizing their attitudes as exempla of piety. St. Francis is kneeling with outstretched arms, St. Claire is holding the Eucharistic tabernacle, Mary Magdalene is engrossed in prayer, and St. John the Evangelist reacts to the swooning Virgin who props up Christ's head.

The gestures and facial expressions convey the passions of the mourning figures in a multifigured Albertian *istoria* that advances the sacramental significance of Christ's body. Annibale contributed to the expressive potential of the Italian Renaissance altarpiece by dramatizing the devotional through constant references to Raphael, Michelangelo, and Titian to suggest tragedy, transcendence, and redemption. The swooning Virgin, St. Francis, St. Claire, Mary Magdalene, and St. John the Evangelist enact in Annibale's *Pietà with Saints* functions that affirm their role of witnesses to an embodied experience of devotion. The Capuchin friars in concert with Venetian altarpiece traditions and the interests of

the Farnese House explored precisely this sense of the materiality of Christ's body when Annibale's altar painting became part of a funerary context.

Figure 1. Annibale Carracci, *Pietà with Saints*, 1585. Panel. Galleria Nazionale, Parma, Italy. Image Courtesy of Galleria Nazionale, Parma, Italy; https://useum.org/museum/Galleria-nazionale-di-Parma (accessed on 20 June 2021).

Within less than a decade of Annibale's completion of the *Pietà with Saints*, Duke Alessandro Farnese, the military leader of the wars against the Low Countries, died on

campaign in 1592. His body was transported back to his native Parma and buried in the Capuchin habit in the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in front of the high altar decorated with Annibale's *Pietà with Saints* (Robertson 2008, pp. 84, 101, 114, 128). The new historical function of the Capuchin church as sepulchral monument for the Farnese Duke revealed and at the same time reinforced the intrinsic properties of Annibale's *Pietà with Saints* to symbolize the presence of the mystical body through the human body of Christ. Such similarity of divine and human materiality affirmed the eternal life of the soul, in this case the memory of the Farnese Duke interred directly in front of the altar. It may not be simple coincidence that, after Annibale's *Pietà with Saints* became intrinsically associated with the Farnese house, Francesco Mochi (1580–1654) undertook the sculpting of an equestrian bronze statue in Piacenza in 1620–1625 as a fitting military tribute to the Duke. The *Pietà with Saints* must have had an enduring effect on Cardinal Odoardo Farnese, who began negotiations to bring Annibale and his brother, Agostino, to Rome to work in the Farnese Palace in 1593 (Robertson 2008, p. 84).

Annibale deployed noticeable borrowings from Correggio (1489–1534) in the *Pietà with Saints* in order to validate the Renaissance altarpiece tradition and at the same time to respond to the criticisms leveled against him by painters of his native Bologna. Both his *Crucifixion with Saints* (1583) and *The Baptism of Christ* (1585), which Annibale had painted in Bologna, had incurred scathing critique for being distinctly based on a mere imitation of nature, depicted with a bold and broad application of paint (Summerscale 2000, p. 93; Freedberg 1989, pp. 24–26). The Bolognese detractors, however, misread Annibale's use of brushwork and the material thickness of paint as an experimental means of exploring the pictorial field (Stoenescu 2010). With an unprecedented melding of talent and technical virtuosity, Annibale's *Pietà with Saints* manifests innovation alongside a respect for the altarpiece tradition. In capitalizing on the Italian Renaissance altarpiece and on its foremost exponent in Parma, Correggio, Annibale proved himself skilled in the manipulation of established styles (Sohm 2001, pp. 29–30). His brushstrokes astutely interpreted the stylistic differences among Raphael, Michelangelo, Correggio, and Parmigianino (1503–1540), articulating the relative merits of competing artistic approaches and simultaneously giving free rein to his originality to capture iconographic meaning with creative imitation.

This paper argues that Annibale cast the worshipful attitude of the bystanders (the saints) in the *Pietà with Saints* with a medieval Christocentric emphasis on the relevance of Marian devotion to funerary altarpiece practice. Annibale directed devotional attention to the figure of Christ in order to retool what was by then an archaic altarpiece mode – the Lamentation (Humfrey 1993, pp. 73–76; Humfrey 1996; Prosperi 1997, pp. 21–26). His interpretation of the Lamentation scene as a transfigured space, in which all the elements work together to make Christ the center of narrative action, elevates to new levels earlier examples of Lamentation altarpieces. The originality of the *Pietà with Saints* thus lays bare an early modern altarpiece conception that reinforced archaic directions in religious art around 1500 (Van Os 1990, p. 204; Humfrey 1993, p. 64). This trend registers an acute awareness on the part of artists of the status and legitimacy of traditional Christian images in the years around 1500 as a characteristic of a self-conscious religious culture, one analyzed long ago by Erwin Panofsky (Panofsky 1953, pp. 250–58) and more recently by Hans Belting (Belting 1994, pp. 432–42), Bernhard Decker (Decker 1990), and Joseph Leo Koerner (Koerner 1993, pp. 80–126). An up-to-date evaluation of this trend in the sixteenth-century context of convergent humanist and reform thought points out that religious images exceeded a mere reversion to earlier practices. Alexander Nagel underscores the "medieval modern" aspect of archaism within forms of emphatically Christocentric imagery that restored a clarity and purity believed to have existed in the past (Nagel 2012, pp. 32–33). The religious culture to which Annibale's altarpiece belonged was structurally anticipated by earlier processes of spatiotemporal displacement, translocation, and translation from Byzantium to Western Europe that relayed the iconic devotional image of the Man of Sorrows to new generations of artists (Constantoudaki-Kitromilides 2013, pp. 147–90).

The task of prayer and supplication originally served by the Pietà resonated with the devotional practices of the Capuchin friars at the church of Saint Mary Magdalene in Parma. The Capuchins appeared to have revered the Man of Sorrows as significant to the passions experienced by the servant and to the explorations of the visual capabilities of the icon for a more immediate interaction with the supplicant in the afterlife (O'Kane 2005). The iconographical development of the Man of Sorrows helped the faithful to experience Christ's sufferings in individual terms, which not only awakened sorrow but also prepared the soul toward salvation (Decker 2008). Annibale's conception for the *Pietà with Saints* harkened back to older prototypes and devotional modes of the Italian Renaissance altarpiece tradition. It is noteworthy that Annibale never reprised the funerary context of the Pietà in any other altarpieces he painted. He took up work on another sepulchral altarpiece only late in his life, around 1604–1605, when he produced the *Madonna of Loreto* for the Madruzzi Chapel in Sant'Onofrio, Rome (Benati and Riccòmini 2006, p. 416). His health faltering at the time, he may not have executed this work himself but was evidently behind the archaic frontality of the composition, which revived the mode of the *Pietà with Saints* and also anticipated Annibale's last altarpiece, *Madonna and Child in Glory with Sts. Nilus and Bartholomew* (1608–1609), in the Founders' Chapel at the Abbey Church in Grottaferrata.

The *Pietà with Saints* depicts a Lamentation scene that intensifies the dominance of Christ's presence in the format of an icon. The figure of Christ, derived from the frontal configuration of the Man of Sorrows image, is the focus of devotional attention in a scene of vigil over His body before the Resurrection. The Italian Man of Sorrows tradition had been developing since the late fourteenth century with distinctive features borrowed from the Burgundian tradition that allowed for the introduction of God the Father or angels in the composition. Annibale developed the composition of the *Pietà with Saints* as a natural outgrowth from the Man of Sorrows prototype, expanding and introducing a distinct setting and additional figures. Christ is shown seated, His arms hanging open and body propped on a square (altar-like) block covered with a white (altar-cloth-like) winding sheet. This evocation of Christ's body as the consecrated Host beckons us to consider earlier altarpieces such as Agnolo Bronzino's *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, 1529 (Florence, Uffizi Gallery) and Andrea del Sarto's *Lamentation (Luco Pietà)*, 1523–1524 (Florence, Pitti Palace) that explored the properties of Christ's body as a subject relevant to the altars and chapels used for family burials. Bronzino's *Lamentation*, painted for the altar of the Cambi family in Florence's Santa Trinità shortly after completing his work at the Capponi Chapel, underscores the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist through explicit references to the chalice, the shroud on which Christ's body has been laid, and the officiating saints which are, just like in Andrea del Sarto's *Lamentation*, historically and theologically essential to the communication of the salvific sacrifice (Natali 2010, p. 45).

In Annibale's *Pietà with Saints*, a less conventional setting directs dramatic responses directly to Christ. The narrative quality of a nocturnal Lamentation and the great Cross carried by angels, which occupies the upper part of the image, breaks with the arrangement most commonly associated with traditional Lamentation scenes. Annibale captures the literal, material, and structural aspects of a real space, but presents them to the viewer as abstract, pictorial, and spatial entities in the painted altarpiece. In suppressing the internal consistency of the historical narrative commonly associated with the liturgical drama, Annibale places a higher degree of emphasis on the body of Christ.

Annibale's effort to distance Christ from the literal space of the image encapsulates his critical insights into devotional thought. New configurations of theological problems were taking shape before Annibale's eyes in the closing decades of the sixteenth century (Prosperi 2001, pp. 168–85). They included a proliferation of sacred environments, relics, and pilgrimages, and above all artistic modalities for representing the mystery of transubstantiation through the means of language (Jones 1995). The thirteenth session of the Council of Trent focused on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the way the conceptual body exists in a sublimated, yet real, substance that is rather elusive to

the literal sense of language (Waterworth 1848, session 13 chp. 1). The Venetian painter Paolo Veronese (1528–1588) chose to investigate the Dead Christ by enhancing its relevance to seventeenth-century Italian Renaissance practice in ways conducive to metaphor and transformation. Veronese's two altarpieces involving the theme, namely, *St. James*, c. 1581 in Venice's San Giuliano (commonly called San Zulian) and the Petrobelli altarpiece, c. 1563–1565 (Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada), creatively illustrate the Man of Sorrows adored by saints and angels not in a death or burial scene, but in a heavenly vision more immediately attached to personal religious meditation (Puglisi 2013, pp. 257–95).

In earlier Lamentation scenes, the principles that connect the figure of Christ to the biblical event conformed to the prescriptions of the church fathers. In ecclesiastical understanding, a restrained gesture of lament rather than an unleashed dramatic sentimentality effectively helped the devotee to associate prayer with the redemptive character of the Passion narrative (Savonarola 1971, pp. 263–66; da Lucca 1527, 3v–4r). Lamentation scenes that combine an internal historical consistency with a significant degree of emotional restraint in the attitudes of the lamenting figures show a great measure of compliance with this concept. In Pietro Perugino's Uffizi *Lamentation* (1495) and in Sandro Botticelli's *Lamentation* (1499) in the Poldi Pezzoli Museum in Milan, a very refined sense of decorum responds to the theologically informed code of the Lamentation (Nagel 2000, pp. 41–43). In these works, the liturgical context of the altarpiece is stressed through explicit links between the historical worshippers and the prayerful practice directed to the altar.

Annibale's *Pietà with Saints* departs from the traditional coordination between the attitudes of the historical figures depicted in previous church altarpieces, the worshipful activity focused on Christ, and the devotee praying in front of the high altar at the Capuchin church. His tendencies registered the influence of reforming thought on the altarpiece painting created in Rome in the post-Tridentine decades, when the appeal of the traditional icon dovetailed with orchestrated efforts to improve the aesthetic outcome. Even though largely motivated by the transfer of theological thinking to altarpiece practice, the religious art produced during that period was recognized by Federico Zeri as art *senza tempo*, namely, outside of time, as exemplified by Scipione Pulzone, Marcello Venusti, Girolamo Siciolante, and Giuseppe Valeriano (Zeri 1957, p. 80). In Annibale's *Pietà with Saints*, while a variety of devotional gestures may still appear controlled by theological convention, an intense emphasis on the figure of Christ is brilliantly inscribed on the altarpiece. The arms of Saint Francis are stretched toward Christ with a rhetorical force most commonly associated with presentations and exhortations to worshippers to behold Christ and the objects of the Passion. In a number of Annibale's images of St. Francis, including a preparatory drawing (Figure 2) and the 1585–1586 painting *St. Francis Adoring the Crucifix* (Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice), the saint kneels in the right foreground with outstretched arms and turns his head to viewers, addressing and inviting them to direct their gaze to the Crucifix (Posner 1971, p. 13). The prominence of St. Francis and his turning toward the viewer are violations of the traditional narrative closure designed to make Christ the focal point of ritual and devotion.

A number of intentional disruptions of the internal historical consistency of the Lamentation scene reposition Christ as the fulcrum of devotional attention. A riveting focus on Christ connected the Lamentation scene to the heart and mind of the worshipper in ways that directly associated painting with the rise of the Eucharistic function of the altar in the post–Tridentine decades (Waterworth 1848, session 7, especially canons I and VIII). For example, similar principles are at work in Agostino Carracci's *Lamentation* of 1586, now in the State Hermitage Museum, and in Pietro da Cortona's *Pietà* from 1620–1625 in Santa Chiara, Cortona, which reveal a new set of formal solutions to the preeminence of Christ as fulcrum of Eucharistic significance in altar painting. Renaissance pictorial depictions of the Passion had persistent recourse to the art of the medieval period to reframe the unending search for Eucharistic theology and for a canon affirming the doctrine of transubstantiation, a search that occupied the second period of the Council of Trent (1551–1552) (Hsia 2005, p. 16).

Figure 2. Annibale Carracci, *St. Francis (Study for the Pietà with Saints)*, 1583–1585. Drawing. Image Courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, U.S. Rogers Fund, 1972; https://www. metmuseum.org/ (accessed on 20 June 2021).

Annibale sought to expand the traditional disposition of altarpiece conceptions of the Lamentation based on the highly creative idea that Christ was asleep but not dead in the Lamentation. This interest in penetrating the mysterious properties of the dead Christ transcended the mere narrative framework of the historical life of Christ. The iconic and devotional character of Lamentation, a devotional theme derived from the Gospel accounts of the Virgin present at the foot of the cross, of the deposition of Christ from the cross, and of the preparations of His body for burial, shared with the Pietà its capacity as visual counterpoint to prayers and meditation. Henry Maguire, who emphasized the literary origin of Lamentation, also noted the trend to combine the Lamentation and Entombment in one scene in paintings after the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in which Mary is the principal mourner (Maguire 1981, pp. 102–7). In Giovanni Bellini's *Lamentation* altarpiece (1491) for Santa Maria dei Servi in Venice, the Mother of God is duly honored and placed squarely in the image center to draw attention to the treatment of the passions (Wilson 2017, pp. 93–110). Raphael engaged the subject of the Lamentation over the Dead Christ in the altarpiece he painted in his young age for the convent of Sant' Antonio in Perugia, thus paving the way for a dramatic repertoire of gestures and motions directed toward Christ (Lingner 2003, p. 77). Annibale's process of innovation singled out for commemorative ends in Parma a notable position on the representation of the body of Christ.

The sixteenth-century theory of imitation in Italian Renaissance art required that the Lamentation hinge on the appropriation of Alberti's notion of *istoria*; namely, the consistency of narrative action and devotional gesture. Annibale challenged Alberti's *istoria* by depicting a living Christ seated before the tomb, thus claiming a decisively self-conscious approach to altarpiece development and earning recognition from most astute art critics. The antiquarian and humanist Giovan Pietro Bellori (1613–1696) gives us the most detailed description of the *Pietà with Saints* in his first extended biography of Annibale published in 1672 (Bellori 2005, pp. 72–73). Bellori also recorded Federico

Zuccari's praise for Annibale's talent of reviving the spirit of Correggio in ways that advanced the Lamentation altarpiece (Bellori 2005, p. 73). In his account of the *Pietà with Saints*, Bellori describes how the saints are symmetrically arranged around Christ, every figure establishing a separate and meditative relationship with him: St. Francis kneeling with outstretched arms; St. Claire holding the Eucharistic tabernacle; and St. Mary Magdalene praying on the right. Behind the scene, St. John the Evangelist looks at the disconsolate Virgin who is swooning on the tomb's rock and propping up Christ's head with her hand.

These multiple foci of devotion drew on the history of the narrative altarpiece. Already in the 1470s and 1480s, Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506) offered a new concept in his prints, specifically his *Entombment* engraving, that revolutionized the world of religious art by concentrating on disparate moments of narrative action. Mantegna scattered moments and dramatic attitudes across the image's field with the clear objective of achieving a sustained devotional mode throughout. The effect of Mantegna's structural reformulation of the traditional entombment scene was to move Christian worship beyond historical information to a ritual setting. Resistance to Albertian principles of *istoria*, namely, consistency of material, proportion, gesture, and theme, helped to accommodate Mantegna's narrative engraving of ideas as pictorial inventions (Nagel 2000, pp. 43–46). It is a well-known fact that the interests of Annibale and of the Carracci Academy in fusing art practice and creativity relied to an unprecedented degree on the engravings of many Italian and Northern Renaissance artists (Bohlin 1979, pp. 41–43, 58–59). In the *Pietà with Saints* Annibale's effort to adapt the Lamentation scene to the altarpiece conventions of symmetry and frontality established a continual dialogue with the experimental mode of Mantegna's *Entombment*. The key move came when Annibale coordinated the tradition of the *imago pietàtis* with inventive directions in Albertian *istoria* from prints. The resulting solution brought notable changes to the archaic associations of the Man of Sorrows to the Christian altar and to the mystery of the Eucharist. The role of prints, manuscript illuminations, sculpture reliefs, and monumental altarpieces circulated in the Venetian quarters, as well as the influence of Monte di Pietà and Holy Sacrament confraternities, reinforced the material link between the Man of Sorrows and the Eucharist in Sacramental altars (Humphrey 2013, pp. 219–56). The critical development of the Lamentation carried out by Annibale went hand-in-hand with equally significant reevaluations of the status of the altarpiece as a central possibility of Christian image making after the closing session of the Council of Trent (1563).

1. *Imago Pietàtis* in a Novel Altarpiece Context

While the historical characters in the *Pietà with Saints* strike new and dramatic gestures, the depiction of Christ betrays a concentrated study of illustrious Renaissance predecessors. Annibale registered the influential interventions of Rosso Fiorentino (1495–1540) and especially Michelangelo, who elaborated a new conception of the dead Christ in the arms of the Virgin Mary (Nagel 2000, pp. 155–58). In Parma, Annibale's receptivity to Correggio's *Lamentation* of 1524 (Figure 3) betrayed his interest in a range of meaningful sources from Modena and the narrative ideas of Cima da Conegliano's *Lamentation* (Figure 4).

During his first visit to Parma, Annibale made a copy of Correggio's *Lamentation*, originally in the Del Bono Chapel of the Church of St. Giovanni Evangelista. In a letter to his cousin, Ludovico, Annibale announced that he had arrived in Parma in 1580 intending to study, draw, and contemplate his favorite Correggio paintings: the *Madonna della Scodella* and the *Madonna of Saint Jerome* (Summerscale 2000, p. 95; Malvasia [1667] 1967, p. 365). It was during this first Parmesan sojourn, which also marks the beginning of his enduring interest in Correggio's legacy, that Annibale developed an ongoing preoccupation with the Lamentation narrative. In engravings of the subject of the Pietà such as the 1597 *Il Cristo di Caprarola* (Figure 5), Annibale demonstrates the degree to which he mused on the dramatic disposition of historical characters around Christ in Correggio's *Lamentation* (see Cristofori 2005, pp. 320–22).

Figure 3. Correggio, *Lamentation*, 1524. Oil on canvas. Galleria Nazionale, Parma, Italy. Image Courtesy of Galleria Nazionale, Parma, Italy; https://museum.org/museum/Galleria-nazionale-di-Parma/ (accessed on 20 June 2021).

Charles Dempsey has recognized in Annibale's preference for Correggio a persuasive force that advanced the pictorial tradition of their native Emilia toward personal expressive forms and at the same time refined his original use of *colorito suave* and the chiaroscuro he gleaned from Titian (Dempsey 2006, pp. 338–402). In order to rekindle earlier pictorial practice, Annibale studied Correggio to prepare himself for engaging the talent of Raphael. Countless artists of his generation strove to assert themselves in relation to the forces of taste and fashion that Raphael had established (Sohm 2001, pp. 29–30, 37). Annibale used Raphael to illustrate what Correggio had contributed to art, but emulated the softness of Correggio's modeling of forms and contours rather than Raphael's formal treatment in his investigation of devotional expression (Nagel and Wood 2010, p. 271).

Figure 4. Cima da Conegliano, *Lamentation over the Dead Christ with Sts. Francis and Bernardino*, 1495. Panel. Galleria Estense, Modena, Italy. Image Courtesy of Galleria Estense, Modena, Italy; https://www.gallerie-estensi.beniculturali.it (accessed on 20 June 2021).

Figure 5. Annibale Carracci, *Il Cristo di Caprarola*, 1597. Engraving. Image Courtesy of Archivio Libreria Antiquaria Bourlot, Torino, Italy.

An extraordinary Christocentric focus was for Annibale an irresistible opportunity to carry out experimental drawing and painting. It is not surprising to see in his conception of the sleeping Christ signs of an integration of drawing, painting, sculpture, and religion, which all refined and diversified the more traditional Lamentation scene. The figure of Christ in a preparatory drawing held in the Uffizi Gallery (Figure 6) served an idea to be fully explored in the *Pietà with Saints* (Posner 1971, p. 13). In this drawing, Annibale investigates the distinguishable type of Christ in a sitting position, his head and knees angularly bent, that signals borrowings from the highly poetic and imaginative sleeping Christ in Rosso Fiorentino's *Dead Christ with Angels* of 1525 (Figure 7). His adoption of a mystery-oriented approach to the dead Christ of the sort developed by Fiorentino, who once described his depiction specifically as a Christ "in forma Pietàtis", went hand-in-hand with Michelangelo's conscious return to the tradition of the *imago pietàtis* (Nagel 2000, pp. 156–58; Franklin 1989). Annibale intentionally connected his *Pietà with Saints* to Michelangelo's interest in penetrating the mysterious properties of the Man of Sorrows tradition in the realm of presentation drawing. As in Michelangelo's practice, Annibale endowed the figure of Christ with a sculptural feeling and a beautiful, pristine quality of body that reshaped the traditional Man of Sorrows on the model of antique sculpture. As Alexander Nagel convincingly argues, Michelangelo's interest in the figure of Christ was intrinsically bound up with the revival of antique figural formulas, a concern that he compellingly introduced in the arena of religious art (Nagel 2000, pp. 102–3). The impetus for artistic reform in the post-Tridentine decades supplied criticisms of the pagan nature of the classical authority, but revisionist approaches to older manifestations still allowed for various new styles to develop insights into the preservation of the ancient models in the artistic problematics of Trent's aftermath (Lingo 2019, p. 13).

The affinity between Annibale's Uffizi drawing and Michelangelo is not merely a matter of an archaic approach but also a structural investigation of specific formal choices. Annibale found in the sleeping Christ, and in the activities of unveiling and awakening, a number of thematic associations with his own interpretation of the Man of Sorrows tradition. The figure of Christ in the Uffizi drawing adapts the head and torso of Michelangelo's *Pietà* in St. Peter's, Rome, which was engraved by Annibale's brother, Agostino Carracci, in 1579. Michelangelo explored in his early Roman *Pietà* the mysterious force of Christ's body asleep and to this end gave the marble the radiance of the pristine, nude, and nearly woundless body. The marmoreal quality of the marble used in antique sculpture captured the transformation of Christ that took place in the interval between his death and Resurrection when life was latent and inseparably united to the body (Nagel 2000, p. 100).
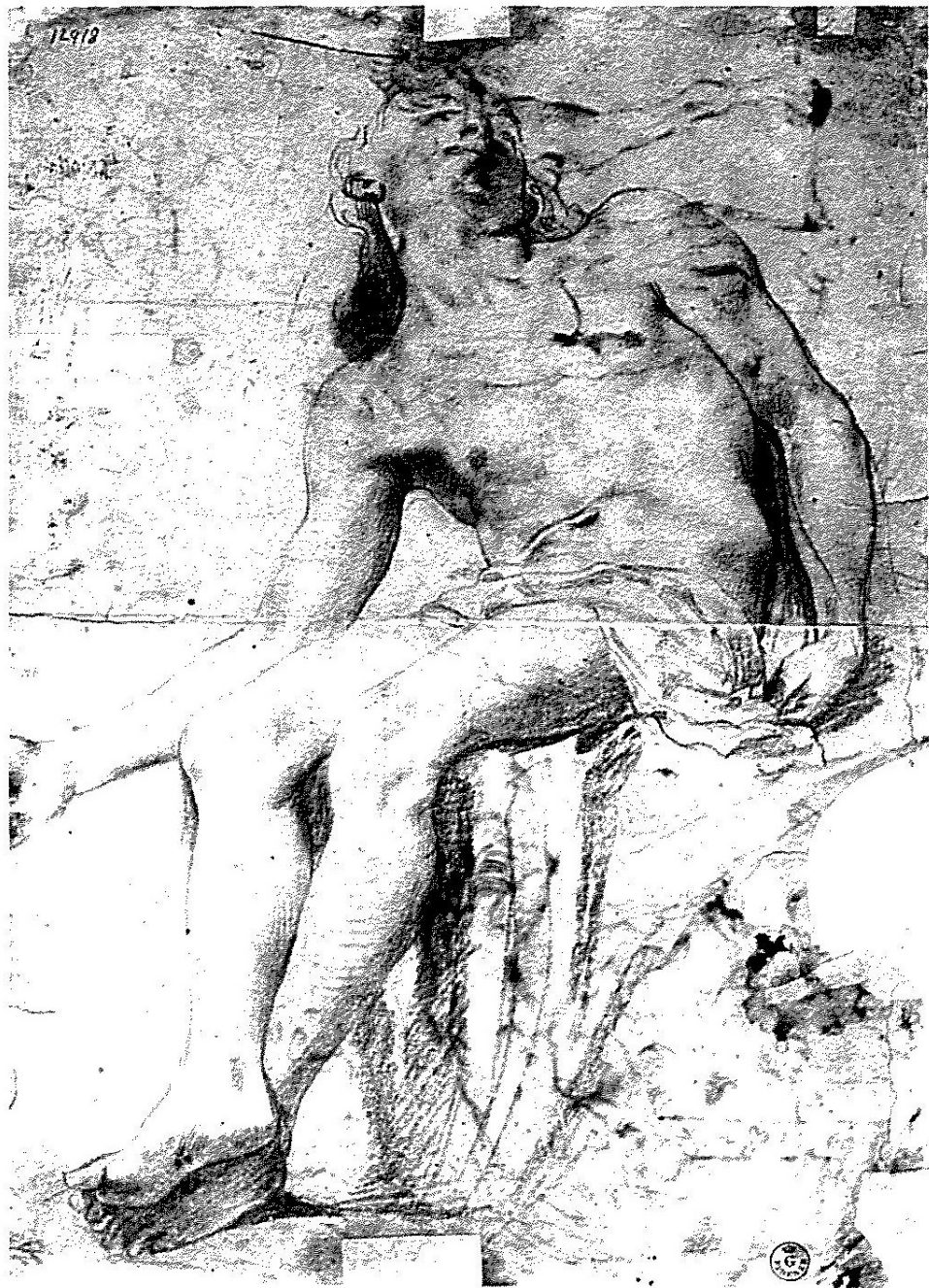
Figure 6. Annibale Carracci, *Christ (study for Pietà with Saints)*. Drawing. Uffizi Gallery, Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe, Florence, Italy. Image Courtesy of the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.

In the narrative context of the *Pietà with Saints*, Annibale conflated a traditional Pietà with the Lamentation narrative, elevating the formal treatment of Christ's body to higher dramatic ends and showing His body gently twisted to one side with the head cradled in the Virgin's hand. This pictorial idea originated in Michelangelo's *Pietà* drawing of 1538–1544 for Vittoria Colonna (Figure 8), a renowned poet and his longtime friend, which offered a highly effective solution to the relationship between Christ and the Virgin by giving a yoke-like posture to Christ's body, falling under ground level and into the lower part of the Virgin's body (Nagel 2000, pp. 166–68). Annibale refashioned the life-giving emphasis embodied in the motif of maternal love that bound Christ and the Virgin in order to revive the theme of Christ's body in the interval after the death but before the Resurrection.
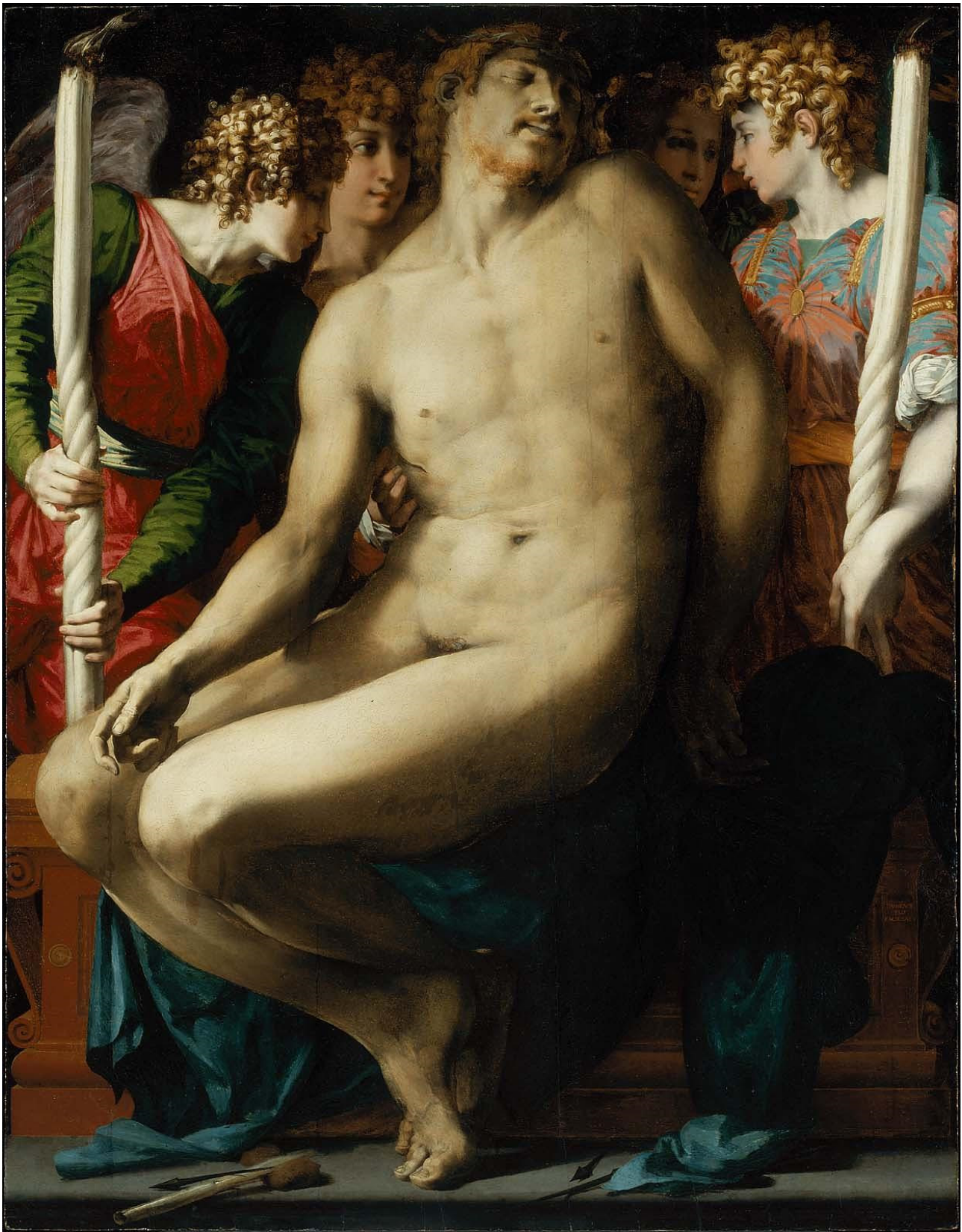
Figure 7. Rosso Fiorentino, *Dead Christ with Angels*, 1525. Oil on panel. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, U.S. Image Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S. Charles Potter Kling Fund.

Figure 8. Michelangelo, *Pietà for Vittoria Colonna*, 1538–1544. Drawing. Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, U.S. Image Courtesy of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, US.

The search for a quasi-animated life force in Christ's body prompted Annibale to develop Michelangelo's *Pietà* for Vittoria Colonna inside the underexploited subject of a nocturnal Lamentation focused on an image of the Man of Sorrows outside the tomb. An intense pictorial gravity around Christ's body in the interval after his death but before his resurrection is an enduring motif of Annibale's depictions of the Lamentation scene. The *Burial of Christ* (Figure 9), a painting on copper in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York, shows a significant degree of invention in the treatment of the sleeping Christ in a nocturnal scene rife with movements (Christiansen 1999). In it, Annibale expands the tradition of *imago pietàtis* inside the sepulchral cave, illuminated artificially by a lit torch. The interpretation of the *Burial of Christ* as a return to the *imago pietàtis* in early modern altarpieces inspired the full-scale altarpiece of Sisto Badalocchio for the Oratorio della Morte in Reggio Emilia, and the copy made by the young Guido Reni in 1594, after he left the workshop of Denys Calvaert and joined the Carracci Academy in Bologna (Christiansen 1999, p. 417).

The figure-centered focus of the *Pietà with Saints* brought religious painting quite concretely into dialogue with metaphors of a sleeping and beautiful Christ in early religious poetry (Belting 1994, p. 270). The work of the Council of Trent drew attention to the Christian past in order to prioritize theological thought from the early Church. The poetic epigrammatic inscriptions written on Crucifixion icons in the past complemented the visual argument of the icon painter that Christ did not suffer an ordinary death on the Cross. (Mango 1963, p. 317). The metaphor of Christ asleep that appears in several ninth-century Crucifixion icons from Mount Sinai advanced the notion of Christ's immortality and reunification with God (Weitzman 1976, p. 107). The insistence on the sleeping Christ originated with the icon painter who sought to make life visible in death and to outshine the weakness of mortal man with the beauty of Christ. The Metropolitan of Euchaita, John Mauropous, a poet, epigrammatist, and hymnographer in the circle of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine IX Monomachus (1042–1055), integrated the effigy of the sleeping Christ into the liturgical canons he wrote. His epigram poem on the Crucifixion celebration, one of the twelve great feasts of the Byzantine Church, describes Christ metaphorically as "sleeping" on the wooden Cross (Belting 1994, p. 270).

The reconciliation of life and death in the metaphor of sleep, which appears to have been widespread in early religious poetry, sustained the task of visual exegesis in icon painting. In his thoughts on the Crucifixion, the disciple of John Mauropous, Michael Psellus (1017–1078), commended the pictorial refinement of the painter who can preserve the highly dramatic description of the Crucifixion narrative without presenting the dead Christ disfigured or deprived of the signs of life. The beauty of Christ became for painters the recognizable sign of a continuation of life after death and the invocation of special forms of devotional attention recognized by religious poets. It is noteworthy that Psellus broke the rules of narrative consistency of time and action that allowed the icon painter to depict Christ as both alive and lifeless (*empsychos* and *apsychos*), thus setting the stage for challenges to Alberti's *istoria* in the fifteenth century and beyond. In counterpoint to Alberti, and in the context of early modern means of inducing a contemplative response to the figure of Christ, the presentation of Christ reemerged in the Italian Renaissance in forms borrowed directly from the visual tradition of the icon. After the poet and humanist Angelo Poliziano, artistic advisor to the young Michelangelo, recalled the dead Christ in his sermons, late Quattrocento painters adjusted this model to new investigations of the dramatic Passion narrative in the altarpiece (Nagel 2000, pp. 75–77).

Figure 9. Annibale Carracci, *The Burial of Christ*, 1595. Oil on Copper. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, U.S. Image Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, U.S. Edwin L. Weisl Jr. Gift, 1998; https://www.metmuseum.org (accessed on 20 June 2021).

2. The Funerary Altarpiece and Church Altar

Annibale's respect for archaic poetic license made him formally receptive to this highly imaginative Christ. This quality of a perfectly harmonized line between narrative development and early sacred image was well-suited to the task of commemorating the life of Duke Alessandro Farnese, whose death occurred after less than a decade after the completion of Annibale's work. As a funerary altarpiece, the *Pietà with Saints* lent itself to a conception of religious art utterly interpretative and at the same time highly permeated by the function historically served by icons.

An entire sequence of events lends credibility to the idea that the Farnese family diligently planned their sepulchral place in the Capuchin church. The Capuchins, who appear to have been the first commissioners of the *Pietà with Saints*, were the favorites of the Farnese family (Chvostal 2001, pp. 177–80). Duke Ottavio Farnese, the second Duke of Parma and Piacenza, had obtained the church of St. Mary Magdalene and the adjacent convent for the Capuchin order in the early 1570s. After the death of Maria of Portugal, the wife of Alessandro Farnese, the church of St. Mary Magdalene was decreed the burial place of the Farnese family. Upon his death in 1592, Duke Alessandro Farnese's body and the remains of Maria of Portugal were interred in the crypt, which thereafter became known as the final resting place of the Farnese (Chvostal 2001).

We are left in no doubt that Annibale's ideas linking prayer to the altarpiece traditions of the Man of Sorrows attracted the attention of the House of Farnese. A late fifteenth-century tradition in Parma related the term *pietàs* to the essential role played by the Virgin in the episodes of the deposition, lamentation, and entombment (Humfrey 1983, pp. 126–27). Annibale must have found in the Parmesan environment an outlet for his ideas of reinforcing the sacramental interpretation of the figure of Christ through the Marian associations with Michelangelo's drawing for Vittoria Colonna. The drawing explicitly interpreted the Virgin's body as tomb, an idea Vittoria Colonna herself expressed when she said that "the Virgin had made of her nearly dead body a sepulcher in that hour" (Nagel 2000, p. 184; Colonna 1860, p. 171, sonnet 21). The *Pietà with Saints* revealed in a funerary context Christ's death as the source of regeneration, and thus implicitly illustrated how the commemoration of the deceased Duke might partake in a divine mystery.

Annibale culled from the rich history of the Renaissance altarpiece to accommodate his beautiful, pristine Christ adapted from the Man of Sorrows tradition to a funerary context. The *Lamentation over the Dead Christ with Sts. Francis and Bernardino* (1495) by Cima da Conegliano (1459–1517) was originally planned for the funerary chapel of Alberto Pio (1475–1531), Cima's most illustrious patron (Humfrey 1983, p. 33). Pio, an enthusiastic supporter of humanist scholarship and a papal delegate, commissioned Cima to paint a Lamentation for the high altar of the Franciscan Observant Church of St. Nicolò in Carpi. Peter Humfrey has drawn attention to the melding of private devotional function and funerary context in Cima's work (Humfrey 1983, pp. 33–34). Cima created an image that Pio first enjoyed in his lifetime as a devout Christian and subsequently took to Rome when he became imperial ambassador to the pope in 1512. While keeping with the private devotional function, the painting is unusual among Cima's works in more than just its emotional character. Cima must have been aware of the discussions of the Virgin's participation in the events of the Passion, which in Pio's theological circles concentrated on the term *pietàs* (Humfrey 1983, pp. 33–34). Mary's swooning pose in Cima's *Lamentation* illustrated the link between her body and Christ's tomb (Hirn 1958, pp. 162–63). The inclusion of St. Francis, the exponent of the Franciscan Observant doctrine of the co–redemption, and of St. Bernardino of Siena, were equally reflective of the continued significance of this medieval narrative conception. According to Henk van Os, the association of the Virgin with funerary art spawned an altarpiece direction of significant innovative substance (Van Os 1990, pp. 113, 163).

Cima paid attention to small-scale landscape details and the casting of light on textures, fabrics, and the surrounding complement of lamenting figures–St. Mary Magdalene, St. John the Evangelist, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, St. Francis, and St. Bernardino–all of

whom direct their prayers to Christ. A full range of minutely described plants and stones in the foreground perfectly correspond to the Magdalene's costume with sparkling jewels. It has been noted that the example of Cima's religious painting initiated a trend toward *pietà* altarpieces with settings of pure landscape that was to become increasingly popular (ibid, pp. 16, 35). In Albrecht Dürer's *Feast of the Rosegarlands* of 1505 (National Gallery, Prague), and continuing with major works by Palma Vecchio and Titian, this feature advanced the *pietà* setting not as a real space but as a transfigured or figural space, all the elements of which work together to convey a mystical experience.

The location of Cima's *Lamentation* in close proximity to Parma gives us insight into the pictorial goals of Annibale's *Pietà with Saints*. Cima's compositional principles and the placement of figures close to the picture plane heightened the required feature of truthfulness of representation in altarpiece painting derived from the icon. On the other hand, the pictorial realization of the *Pietà with Saints* refuses to remain in the late fifteenth-century of Cima's *Lamentation*. The closeness of Mary Magdalene to the picture plane and the action of St. Claire holding the Eucharistic tabernacle make the *Pietà with Saints* one of Annibale's first religious compositions in which the action is determined by exhortatory development and eucharistic ritual.

3. New Trends of Archaism after Trent

The *Pietà with Saints* demonstrates how Annibale's creative force captured the Eucharistic significance of the church altarpiece in the post-Tridentine decades. His interpretation broke the mold of merely reprising the Lamentation iconographic type, thus superseding the archaic-oriented ideas of ecclesiastical reformers and theorists. It was characteristic of the historical principles of Tridentine Rome to place a premium on images of Christ inspired by early Christian models. The evolution of the post-Tridentine period as a time of enduring continuity with early Christian art not only fostered a new synthesis of canonical models but also fomented creative views of truth and cultural authority (Locker 2019, pp. 2–12). Altarpieces derived from these models combined a significant degree of historical reflection with a distinct awareness that the frontal presentation embodied a truthful link to the icon and to traditional modes of attention and worship (Lingo 2008, pp. 6, 78, 216).

This remarkable identification with early Christian art was also the corollary of a revival in medieval practices of pilgrimage and relic veneration in the post–Tridentine decades. Cardinal Carlo Borromeo (1538–1584), a leading prelate and reformer, distinguished his agenda for Catholic reform through personal penitential example and by taking pilgrimages, often barefoot, to venerate miraculous images and sacred sites. Borromeo's pilgrimage to the Sacro Monte di Varallo, his promotion of relics, practice of meditation, and personal emulation of St. Francis of Assisi, culminated in his pilgrimage to the Holy Shroud, brought to Turin for him in 1578 and preserved thereafter in the ducal and royal chapel (Casper 2021; Wright 2005, p. 211). Borromeo also addressed matters of art in his influential treatise *Instructiones fabricae et suppelectilis ecclesiasticae libri duo*, completed in 1577, in which he held out the dignity of religious painting as integral to church reform (Voelker 1977, p. 229). Cardinal Borromeo's efforts to project a post–Tridentine prospect back into early Christian images were largely shared by ecclesiastical theorists. The age of early Christian history was increasingly associated with acts of relocation (translation) of the bones of early martyr saints to the recently restored churches of Rome (Ditchfield 1995, p. 85). Cardinal Cesare Baronius (1538–1607) initiated an entire campaign of harnessing the sanctity of these relics from the Apostolic past, and systematized his findings in ecclesiastical historiography, an emerging branch of Christian humanism (Brown 2001). His colleague, Fillipo Neri (1519–1595), the founder of the Roman Oratory, revived belief in the efficacy of prayer to the icons that populated Roman churches after they were brought to the Christian West in the thirteenth century and after the fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. Neri was determined to reinstate the practice of prayer and supplication of the Oratorians as well as the spiritual and sacramental function that icons had served in medieval theology.

Thus, notions of old media, formats derived from icon painting, and funerary portraiture were increasingly captured in innovative ideas in the altarpiece tradition. These interests were nonetheless based on ideas of style and decorum, or appropriateness to purpose (Gaston 2013, pp. 74–91). In their assimilation to church art, they reinforced the perception that the icon was particularly instrumental in asserting the contemporary authority of many religious images (Stoenescu 2011). It is noteworthy that early Christian artifacts drew the attention of early modern artists, whose works contributed to the structural restoration of a powerful Christocentric focus in the post-Tridentine Church. A revealing example is Annibale's *Pietà with Saints*, which demonstrates a deep engagement with the Man of Sorrows tradition for the purpose of highlighting the Eucharistic significance of the *Pietà* altarpiece. Remarkably, Annibale managed to reconcile the Eucharistic argument with his adaptation of religious concerns to fit a funerary altarpiece function that came after the completion of his painting, deriving inspiration from the reform ideas of Michelangelo's drawing and sculpture. The *Pietà with Saints* thus provides powerful testimony to an emerging theme in late sixteenth-century religious painting in which the artist draws attention to the aesthetic value of the icon as an object of artistic imitation. Unlike many ecclesiastical patrons and theorists who confined archetypal images to the evidentiary role of a historical continuum with the apostolic past, Annibale, and some leading contemporaries such as Federico Zuccari, Rubens, and the engraver Enea Vico, strove to uncover the artistic value of earlier images of Christ as a repository of models worth imitating (Stoenescu 2011, p. 427).

The reciprocal and active relationship between Christ and the saints in the *Pietà with Saints*, however, leaves no doubt that Annibale had more in mind than a historical image of devotion. Titian's final painting, a *Pietà* altarpiece he produced for his own tomb in Venice's Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, attests to the complexity of heritage and miraculous efficacy in the wake of the Reformation and the decrees of the Council of Trent (Nygren 2015). The integration into the altarpiece of an image of the real intercession between the saints and Christ elevated the icon of the Man of Sorrows to a new status as an aesthetic source for the Lamentation altarpiece. The body of Christ in the *Pietà with Saints* attests to Annibale's preoccupation with the Corpus Christi in a religious climate deeply invested in affirming the doctrine of transubstantiation. The rhetorical thrust of the altarpiece captures the theological content of the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. This measure of religious expressivity updated an archaic religious culture centuries after Patriarch Nikephoros defended the icon as an artistic object in 820. The original function of the icon–namely, to maintain the continual relationship between image and archetype while distributing the appearance of a historical person across time and space–is amplified in Annibale's *Pietà with Saints*, just as the boundaries of religious painting and the altarpiece were extended in the late sixteenth century.

Annibale's effort to include Christ "in forma pietàtis" in the *Pietà with Saints* was therefore more than an act of reaffirming the icon within modern painting. Here, the agency of the artist supersedes the deliberate archaism responsible for the conscious return to the tradition of the Man of Sorrows. The influence of Michelangelo and Rosso Fiorentino is not so immediate as to construe a simple act of imitation. While Annibale aligned his pictorial art with certain essential aspects of Renaissance art, he viewed Christ as integral to a repertoire of updated iconographic motifs that assuredly found its way into the *Pietà with Saints*.

In a comprehensive examination of the benefits of inserting the icon into religious painting in the late medieval and Renaissance periods, Sixten Ringbom underscores the sophisticated, dramatic close-up that combined the intimacy and frontal address of the icon with new narrative conceptions (Ringbom 1984, pp. 57–58). Ringbom cautions that the preservation of the icon format would allow for the accoutrements of narrative development to stray into secularism (Ringbom 1984, pp. 74, 124). Annibale's *Pietà with Saints* discussed here suggests a distinct awareness that the icon should serve a purpose higher than a merely decorous reiteration of the Lamentation scene. As envisioned by

Annibale, the highly imaginative Christ is something more than a conscious return to the tradition of the *imago pietàtis*. The figure of Christ appears in the truly archaic type of the Man of Sorrows with angels, or the *Engelpietà*, but Annibale directs the model to a renewed significance as a vehicle for the Eucharist and funerary function of the altar. Christ "in forma Pietàtis" is the generating force of narrative meaning, and not merely a conscious connection to the imitation of the Man of Sorrows tradition. By virtue of a poetic discourse integrated into the narrative framework of the Passion, the *Pietà with Saints* carries through the atemporal quality of the real presence of Christ.

Annibale traced back the formal and iconographical criteria of the *Andachtsbild*, the devotional image designed as an aid for prayer or contemplation, to principles that nourished the creation of dramatic compositions. In parallel with a rise in concerns over the efficacy and dignity of prototypal images, alternative modes of engagement with existing pictorial traditions prioritized the austere and solemn character of religious art. The intersection of art and devotion is paradigmatically evident in Annibale's formal and aesthetic choices that elevate the cultic significance of the altarpiece in the post-Tridentine decades. Annibale's *Pietà with Saints* is a revealing example in the substantiation of a continuum of Medieval and Renaissance art that redresses the imbalance between religious and aesthetic goals.

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