

A FAILED PROJECT

Captions and Inscriptions for Giorgio Vasari's Medici cycle in the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence*



By Henk Th. van Veen

This article shows that there existed an advanced plan to provide the paintings by Giorgio Vasari and his helpers in the Quartiere di Leone X in the Palazzo Vecchio with captions and inscriptions. The article shows that some of the most renowned scholars of Florence were involved in this project and it discusses the problems it faced. It also goes into the question why eventually the project was abandoned. Finally, the article argues against rejecting the idea that Vasari's Ragionamenti (also) served as a guide to the paintings it comments on.

In 1554, immediately after joining duke Cosimo I de' Medici as court artist, Giorgio Vasari was commissioned to create richly decorated apartments on the two floors of the new south-east wing with which the duke had had the Palazzo Vecchio extended. In the upper apartment – known as the Quartiere degli Elementi – Vasari applied a series of paintings dedicated to the theme of the Genealogy of the ancient gods. In the lower apartment, the Quartiere di Leone X, he painted a cycle which had as its subject the feats of the most important Medici scions from Cosimo il Vecchio to Cosimo I.

Numerous studies have appeared over time on Vasari's paintings in these two Quartieri and in 2017 Fabian Jonietz published a monumental book on them, *Das Buch zum Bild: die Stanze nuove im Palazzo Vecchio, Giorgio Vasaris Ragionamenti und die Lesbarkeit der Kunst im Cinquecento*.¹ Since this book deals with almost every conceivable aspect of the paintings in question, it is striking that it pays only marginal attention to the initial, very serious plan to add inscriptions to Vasari's paintings in the Quartiere di Leone X, a plan that ultimately came to nothing. This plan is evident from Vasari's correspondence as well as the perfected drawings he made for the paintings on the ceilings of the various rooms of this Quartiere.

The inscriptions were made and delivered to Vasari by the Florentine humanist, philologist, publicist and translator Cosimo Bartoli (1503-1572). Bartoli, a prominent member of the medicean Accademia Fiorentina, was also responsible for the inventions for the paintings Vasari and his assistants made

* For Jan L. de Jong

¹ Jonietz 2017.

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in the Quartieri. An undated letter from Bartoli to Vasari contains inventions for the scenes that were to be installed in the rooms of Cosimo il Vecchio, Duke Cosimo and Giovanni delle Bande Nere.² The letter shows that by the time it was written the layout of the pictures over the ceilings had already been determined and no doubt the same was true for the ceilings of the other three rooms of the Quartiere, those of Lorenzo il Magnifico, Leo X and Clement VII respectively. The five vaulted ceilings and the one wooden (that of the room of Leo X) were each to be given five narrative scenes, one in the centre and the others surrounding it. The four surrounding scenes were flanked by allegories of virtues. Bartoli makes suggestions for the content of the scenes and indicates which pair of allegories of virtues should go with which scene. Since the scenes at the centre of the ceilings had no room next to them for separate allegories of virtue, Bartoli suggests that those allegories should then be integrated into the relevant scenes.³

For each of the scenes of a ceiling, Bartoli proposes a motto in Latin. The mottoes clarify how the corresponding allegories of virtues are executed in the scenes. For example, Bartoli suggests that the scene with Cosimo il Vecchio as church builder should be accompanied by *Diligentia* and *Religione* and suggests as mottoes DILIGENS IN RELIGIONEM PIETAS (caring dutiful piety) or DILIGENS IN DEOS RELIGIO (dutiful piety towards the gods).⁴

It is clear from Bartoli's letter no. CCXXXII that when he committed his mottoes to paper, no final decision had yet been made to add texts to the ceiling scenes in the Quartiere. Indeed, Bartoli writes: "et se lettere vi volete, vi metterei ..." (and in case you want inscriptions, I would put ...).⁵ Bartoli's epistle describing the scenes and the accompanying allegories of virtues that were to be painted on the ceiling of the room of Lorenzo il Magnifico doesn't mention the mottoes these scenes were to have.⁶ It is therefore quite conceivable that originally this writing was followed by a, now lost letter in which the scenes were again briefly resumed, but now with their mottoes attached, analogous to the way this is done in Bartoli's letter on the scenes for the rooms of Cosimo the Elder, Cosimo I and Giovanni delle Bande Nere.⁷ In the letter he wrote on the rooms of Clement VII and of Leo X, Bartoli gave

² Vasari 1923, No. CCXXXIV, 439-442.

³ Vasari 1923, 437.

⁴ Vasari 1923, No. CCXXXIV, 439.

⁵ Vasari 1923, No. CCXXXIV, 439.

⁶ Vasari 1923, No. CCXXXII, 437-438.

⁷ Vasari 1923, No. CCXXXIV, 439-442. Therefore, contrary to Frey's opinion (p. 442), not No. CCXXXII will have formed a whole with No. CCXXXIV, but this later, no longer extant letter containing the mottoes.

his inventions for the five scenes for the one and the five scenes for the other room and makes suggestions for their mottoes.⁸ The wording of the letter shows that when it was written, the decision had actually been taken to provide mottoes for the scenes on the ceilings of the Quartiere di Leone X.⁹

Attached to the letter just mentioned are diagrams of the two projected ceilings (figs. 1 and 2). In the diagram of the ceiling of the room of Clement VII below the five scenes Bartoli inscribed their respective mottoes and above them added their titles in Italian. Four of the eight sections where Bartoli had imagined the allegories of virtues he proposed remained empty in this diagram and in the remaining four Vasari inscribed – in Italian – the titles of yet more scenes that remain unnamed in Bartoli's letter and that are not provided with mottoes.¹⁰

In the diagram of the ceiling of the room of Leo X below all of the nine scenes it contains Bartoli has captioned the corresponding mottoes and above these scenes another hand (Vasari's?) has added the titles in Italian. Remarkably, in this diagram all the allegories of virtues Bartoli mentions in his letter are ignored and the space of the sections where, according to Bartoli, these allegories should have been placed was devoted to four more scenes, scenes of which Bartoli makes no mention in his letter but for which he nevertheless provided mottoes. In the paintings as executed on the ceiling of Leo X's room, in accordance with the diagram for this ceiling, no virtue allegories were included.

For the ceiling decorations for the Quartiere di Leone X, except for that for the room of Clement VII, Vasari's finished studies have survived.¹¹ They can be considered a group as they are identical in size, technique and function. In the finished drawing for the ceiling of the room of Cosimo il Vecchio, the names of the allegories of virtues are given underneath them in Italian in specially designed oval cartouches.¹² As far as the themes for the five planned

⁸ Vasari 1923, nr CCXXXVI, 447-451.

⁹ Again, this argues against Frey's assumption that letter nr CCXXXIV formed one entity with letter CCXXXII.

¹⁰ As to allegories of virtues, Vasari writes the names *Concordia* and *Religione* (Bartoli had proposed *Fortuna* and *Constantia*) in the frame above the scene with Clement's return to Rome and the names *Salute* and *Prudentia* in the frame above the scene with Alessandro being appointed duke. It was apparently Vasari's intention to confine himself to mentioning the names of these virtues and not depict their allegories. In the paintings as executed on the vault of the room of Clement VII, the eight allegories of virtues proposed by Bartoli were returned to and additional sections were created for the four scenes that Vasari wanted to see added to Bartoli's invention.

¹¹ See Härb 2015, No. 240, 390 (Leo X); No. 255, 405 (Cosimo il Vecchio); No. 257, 408 (Lorenzo il Magnifico); No. 262, 414 (Cosimo I); No. 268, 421 (Giovanni delle Bande Nere).

¹² Härb 2015, No. 255, 405.

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scenes are concerned, Vasari followed Bartoli's suggestions, but remarkably enough only to a very limited extent where his mottoes are concerned. Underneath only two of the scenes, he placed the mottoes Bartoli had provided for them; the other three were left without any motto at all. The first of the two adopted mottoes is the one accompanying the central scene showing Cosimo's return from exile. On the frame below it is written: DVCE VIRTUTE COMITE FORTVNA (with virtue leading and luck as companion).¹³ The second is the scene with Cosimo in the midst of his *literati* under which the motto VBIQVE SEMPER (everywhere always) is inscribed. It is notable, however, that he does not place this motto directly under the scene in question, but under the medallion located below it, the medallion in which the portrait of Lorenzo il Magnifico was to be placed. This was probably not accidental because it had been Lorenzo who, as Vasari writes in his *Ragionamenti* (about which more will be said later), had added the motto SEMPER to the already older Medici impresa of the diamond with the three feathers.¹⁴ Because Vasari located the medallion with Lorenzo's portrait right above the entrance to the room, the impression is that he wanted the motto VBIQVE SEMPER to refer to the entirety of the scenes on the ceiling of the room.

In Vasari's finished drawing for the ceiling of the room of Cosimo I, four of the five scenes Bartoli suggested were adopted – amongst them the central scene – and of the mottoes he proposed, only the one for the central scene made it: CAELERI VIRTUTE (with swift courage). Instead of the allegories of virtues Bartoli came up with, the finished drawing gives allegories of cities dominated by Cosimo.¹⁵ Vasari's finished drawing for the ceiling of Giovanni delle Bande Nere's room shows an even more rigorous intervention. Bartoli's suggestions for the scenes were adopted, but none of his mottoes (though underneath the main scene, the title is captioned in Italian). The names of the allegories of virtues are mentioned though, in Italian, in cartouches drawn underneath them.¹⁶ Also in the finished drawing for the ceiling of Lorenzo il Magnifico's room, none of the mottoes proposed by Bartoli made it through.¹⁷ Underneath the central scene, Vasari gives its title, in Italian: "Presente del soldano e daltri principi" (Present of the sultan and of other princes). In this finished drawing, too, the Italian names of the allegories of

¹³ In the scene itself, as Bartoli had suggested, the formula PA/TRIE / PATER / SAL/VE was recorded on the banner on the left.

¹⁴ Vasari 1906, 25.

¹⁵ Härb 2015, No. 262, 414.

¹⁶ Härb 2015, No. 268, 421.

¹⁷ Härb 2015, No. 257, 408.

virtues are inscribed, again in cartouches underneath. In the finished drawing of the ceiling of the room of Leo X four of the suggestions for scenes made by Bartoli in his letter to Vasari were adopted, but no mottoes were inscribed. The latter also applied to the four corner scenes that replaced in the diagram the virtue allegories that Bartoli had put forward in his letter. Under the central scene, the title was captioned: “La Cacciata d’Franzesi a Milano”, and some of the other scenes were also provided with brief indications of their respective themes.¹⁸ The finished drawing that Vasari must undoubtedly have made for the ceiling of Clement VII’s room has not survived. Judging by the finished drawings for the ceilings in the other rooms, it can be assumed that in the finished drawing for this ceiling Vasari also omitted all or almost all of Bartoli’s mottoes.

Although at some point it was decided to add mottoes to all the scenes on the ceilings in the rooms of the Quartiere di Leone X, this decision was apparently called into question again in a follow-up stage of the design phase, as Vasari’s finished drawings show. In these, as we saw, only three of the mottoes Bartoli had composed for the scenes in the Quartiere di Leone X appear to be inscribed, two of them for central scenes. Perhaps Vasari retained the corresponding mottoes for these last two scenes because he had ignored Bartoli’s advice to include the allegories of virtues that the latter had suggested for them in the scenes in question themselves.¹⁹ By ignoring this advice Vasari made it extremely difficult for the viewer to fathom which virtues these central scenes exemplified. As to the absence in the perfected drawings of mottoes in the case of the scenes that surround the central scenes, was the thought maybe that the viewer would be sufficiently helped on his way by the allegories of virtues by which these were flanked, and which were identified by their names. Yet, by omitting their mottoes, the accessibility of these scenes was considerably impaired, and this omission would have taken its toll especially on the ceilings in the rooms of Leo X, Clement VII and Cosimo I, where all or almost all of the allegories of virtues were cancelled.

¹⁸ See for these indications Härb 2015, 390.

¹⁹ However, as the painted panel in question shows, also in the case of the room of Cosimo il Vecchio Vasari ignored Bartoli’s suggestion to include the two allegories of virtues (i.c. *Virtus* and *Fortuna*) in the central scene. See Vasari 1923, no. CCXXXIV, 439. The same goes for the central scene on the ceiling of the room of Giovanni delle Bande Nere, for which Bartoli had suggested *Marte* and *Victoria* as allegories of virtues. As for the central scene in the room of Lorenzo il Magnifico, ‘The Sultan’s gift to Lorenzo il Magnifico’, Vasari did incorporate the two allegories of virtues proposed by Bartoli, *Prudentia* and *Magnanimità*, into the painted scene itself. Jonietz 2017, 120, points out that *Magnanimità* is depicted as *Fortezza*, with column namely. Vasari did this because he was recycling an earlier work of his here.

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At some point, construction and decoration work in the rooms of the Quartiere di Leone X had progressed to the point where it had to be decided what to do with the mottoes. Vasari's correspondence shows that, of all six rooms, this moment presented itself first to that of Cosimo il Vecchio. On 13 November 1556, Vasari writes to duke Cosimo that this room is nearing completion.²⁰ Only Il Grasso [Mariotto di Francesco], who is applying the gold leaf, has not quite finished, but in a few days everything will be completed (this turned out to be wishful thinking, by the way).²¹ Vasari continues: "Vero è che le lettere, che vanno a quelle storie et nella fascia di pietra, dove la volta si posa intorno alla stanza, le desiderei finire, prima che si calassi il palco dove si lavora; accio con più comodità si dello averle a intagliar' nella pietra come avere à scriverle col pennello negli ornamenti delle storie, ... (to complete the inscriptions that come with that *storie* and in the stone band, where the vault rests on the walls, before taking down the scaffolding on which they are working; if the scaffolding remains, it will be easier to both chisel the inscriptions into the stone and write the mottoes with the brush in the ornaments of the *storie* ...)." ²² Vasari writes to Cosimo that he didn't know "se queste, che io ho, son di quella bonta che contentino et V.E.I. et chi intende ... (whether the inscriptions he has are of such a quality that they can satisfy Cosimo and those who know about them). Hence Vasari has decided to send the captions to Cosimo, so that if they please him he will either formulate them in his way or let Vasari know that the latter will let them rest until Cosimo will have returned and thus the ceiling will not be spoiled, which Vasari would regret.²³ The captions Vasari says he has and that he intends to send to Cosimo can hardly be other than the mottoes Cosimo Bartoli had sent him. At this stage, the intention was apparently still to apply all the mottoes supplied by Bartoli for the ceiling. The mottoes were to be applied by brush to the ornamental frames of the panels (and apparently cartouches were therefore provided for this purpose), but there is remarkable mention of inscriptions that were also to be chiselled all around into the pietra serena architraves of the ceiling vault. There was no mention of these inscriptions in the inventions provided by Bartoli.

Vasari thus felt uncertain about both the mottoes and the four inscriptions, and he assumed Cosimo still wanted to interfere with all this personally. In a

²⁰ Vasari 1923, No. CCXLIII, 456-458.

²¹ Vasari 1923, No. CCXLIII, 456

²² Vasari 1923, No. CCXLIII, 456.

²³ "Onde mi risolvo à mandarle a Quella, accio piacendovi, le formi a modo Suo o mi si mandi a dir, che io le lassi così fino al ritorno di Quella senza guastare il palco, il quale mi da noia ...".

rescript from Cosimo, his secretary Lelio Torelli let Vasari know: “Habbiamo inteso tutto; e sulla lettera delle iscrition’ diciamo quello Ci occorre” (We have understood everything and about the words of the inscriptions we will say what we think is right).²⁴

That there was a problem with the mottoes and inscriptions to be applied in the room of Cosimo il Vecchio becomes implicitly clear from some letters from Vasari’s correspondence a year later. On 8 October 1557, Vasari writes from Florence to Cosimo’s secretary Jacopo Guidi in Pisa. What this letter makes clear is that by that time the situation around the mottoes and inscriptions for the room of Cosimo il Vecchio had reached a precarious stage. Apparently, Vasari had indeed sent Bartoli’s mottoes to Cosimo but had not yet had a response. He did not dare to burn his fingers on it any further. Strikingly enough, however, in the meantime an alternative set of texts, written in Italian – presumably for both the mottoes and the inscriptions – had been produced by Jacopo Guidi, no doubt in close consultation with Cosimo. In Italian, because presumably Guidi’s and Cosimo’s knowledge of Latin fell short. Vasari had wanted to have this set translated into Latin by certain ‘signori dottori’, but they wisely declined: they were even more afraid of it than of the disastrous flood (‘piena’) that had hit Florence in the same year. In the extreme, Guidi’s mottoes and inscriptions were to be affixed in the room of Cosimo il Vecchio just as they were.²⁵

One of the ‘signori dottori’ mentioned by Vasari was undoubtedly Piero Vettori, the greatest humanist and Latinist Florence had at that time. A letter from Vasari to Guidi dated exactly one month later, i.e. 8 November 1557, shows that for Vettori it was not so much a matter of unwillingness or apprehension to convert Guidi’s Italian texts into proper and appropriate Latin. Vettori had simply not succeeded doing it, and then Vasari had stopped reminding him and left it at that and reported back the situation to Cosimo.²⁶ Since Vettori had failed to come up with the required translations, Vasari had, probably in desperation, on 7 November 1557, enlisted the help of his good

²⁴ Vasari 1923, 459.

²⁵ See Palli d’Addario 1985, 370-71 (No. 3): “non ci è nessuno di questi signor dottori che mi abbia ancor voluto dare nessuna traduzione delle volgari iscritioni della camera di Cosimo Vecchio et credo che loro eccellentie aranno più paura delle dette che della piena, si gli trovo smarriti, onde mi son risoluto rimandare a vostra signoria i vostri et insieme con questa mia salutarlo et pregarlo che non si smarrischa quegli che io vi mando, a ciò ci possa pur metter qualcosa.”

²⁶ Palli D’Addario 1985, 374 (No. 5): “... come il Vettori che à fuggito la scuola, che non ò auto forza farli un segno; credo forse che non gli è parso coi primi che e’ fecie satisfar a suo modo; basta che io me ne son tolto giù. Hora io ho scritto per ciò al Duca ,..”.

friend, the learned philologist and historian Vincenzo Borghini.²⁷ But now that Vettori with all his expertise had given up, it was not surprising that Borghini too, as he confesses to Vasari, had not really been able to resolve things. He sends Vasari “come interviene delle cose cattive, raddoppiati et interzati” (as it goes with bad things: duplicated and inserted [words]). He has great sympathy for the view of ‘sua eccelentia’, with whom Borghini presumably means Vettori, that, with regard to the texts for the room of Cosimo il Vecchio, one should “reduce specific cases to general concepts”, but he is not sure whether he has managed to capture this premise in the words he proposes.²⁸ Vettori’s view, which Borghini so approvingly quotes here, may have implied the criticism he – and thus also Borghini – had of Bartoli’s mottoes, which then caused Guidi to compile an alternative set. Borghini continues his letter to Vasari by saying that for the purpose of the mottoes, he had formulated written texts above and below each other, of which it remains to be seen which will be most pleasing to the person who will read the words.²⁹ Some specific insight into Borghini’s interference with the mottoes for the ceiling of the room of Cosimo il Vecchio offers his comment regarding the scene “Cosimo il Vecchio reveals his lineage to Santi Bentivoglio so that he may govern Bologna”. Apparently, the Italian texts by Guidi that Vasari had forwarded to him mentioned the existence of *amicitia* between this Medici and Santi. Borghini suggests something to do with the word *patroni* here, as this better reflected the nature of the relationship between Cosimo and the much younger Santi.³⁰

²⁷ Jonietz 2017, 112, assumes that the letters Nos. CCXXXII and CCXXXIV were not written by Bartoli but by Borghini. However, this is unlikely. In that case, Vasari would have expressed (in No. CCXLIII) his doubts to Cosimo about his best friend’s creations, which is unlikely. It is also unlikely that Borghini started translating new Italian motti into Latin after the Latin motti he had previously supplied had been set aside. Nor does Borghini’s letter to Vasari of 7 November 1557 show that he had previously been involved in making motti for the chamber of Cosimo the Elder. Incidentally, Jonietz also observes that much: “Möglicherweise wird Borghini auch erst beteiligt, als Vasari nicht die erwünschte Hilfe anderer Personen erhält”.

²⁸ Palli d’Addario 1985, 383 (No. 12): “El giuditio di sua eccelentia, nel senso che vi vuole mi piace sommamente: di ridurre i casi particolari a concetti generali; ma non so come harò saputo mantenere il suo concetto con le mie parole”.

²⁹ Palli d’Addario 1985, 383 (No. 12): “dove è più d’una voce, l’una sopra l’altra, vo’dire che l’una voce e l’altra si può usare, qual più a chi leggerà”.

³⁰ Palli d’Addario 1985, 383 (No. 12): “al 3., mi occorreva mettervi in consideratione che ho aggiunto un terzo motto “patroni” etc., a questo fine, che quella voce “amicitia” non potre’ parere a qualchuno che non cadessi neben nella persona di Cosimo il Vecchio et di Santi, troppo giovane, però andatela un poco considerando anche voi che l’amicitia è proprio infra li equali, ma fra l’inequali è servitù, osservanza, cleintela et simili, secondo i rispetti.”

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In this same letter Borghini also makes mention of “L’ultima fascia che comincia ‘memoriae’” (the last band which begins with ‘memoriae’). He is probably referring here to a subsequent paragraph in the proposals he makes. However, it is notable that Vasari, in his letter to Cosimo of 13 November 1556, refers to the architrave in which the inscriptions were to be carved as *fascia*. If Borghini does indeed mean that architrave here, then his suggestion for the inscriptions to be carved into it was to seek inspiration from “certain public memoriae from the time of Diocletian or slightly earlier” that Borghini had seen in Rome. This way of expressing oneself, according to Borghini, can be called sensible and good.³¹ Borghini was obviously referring here to inscriptions that could be found on public Roman buildings or monuments, commemorating their builders and the glorious deeds they had performed. Applied to the architrave of Cosimo the Elder’s room, such a *memoria* would not so much have specifically commemorated his building activity, but more generally his deeds and virtues, in what would apparently be a kind of summary of what the scenes, allegories of virtues and mottoes on the ceiling of this room conveyed.

At the end of the letter, Borghini confided to Vasari that what he had touched upon herein were all things better judged by Vettori (“sua eccellentia illustrissima”) “che in queste cose per experientia et dico de cuore che ha ottimo giuditio, talché nelle cose mie volenterissimo me ne porterei al giuditio suo” (who has experience in these things and – I say it from my heart – excellent judgment, so I am very happy to comply with that judgment).³²

Already the day after receiving Borghini’s suggestions, Vasari forwards them to Guidi. The accompanying letter reveals more concretely what challenge Vettori’s wish that “specific cases should be reduced to general concepts” had posed for Borghini when faced with translating and editing Guidi’s Italian texts. Vasari writes: “Ora mi scade per obbligo e promessa mandarvi in mano quel che à fatto lo Spedalingho degli Innocenti con tutte quelle fatiche che à potuto interpretare sopra: ‘l’invidia della virtù’ et ‘la pietà nella religione e la gloria nella eternità’” (Now I am obliged to you and have promised you to send into your hand the interpretations the Administrator of the Ospedale degli Innocenti [Borghini], with all the effort he was capable of,

³¹ Palli d’Addario 1985, 383 (No. 12): “L’ultima fascia che comincia ‘memoriae’ etc., questo modo l’ho veduto in Roma in certi (sic) memoriae publiche, ma non antichissime, credo circa a’tempi di Diocletiano (o poco prima), ma il modo del dire è ragionevole e buono”.

³² Palli d’Addario 1985, 383 (No. 12).

gave of [the phrases] ‘the enviousness of virtue’ and ‘piety in religion and the glory in eternity’).³³

Together with Borghini’s Latin mottoes, Vasari sent Guidi back the Italian mottoes Guidi had made, to which Borghini, as we saw in the case of the scene with Cosimo il Vecchio and Santi Bentivoglio, had made some changes during translation. To Guidi the request to send everything to Cosimo for review, so that thereafter either Borghini’s Latin mottoes and inscriptions or Guidi’s Italian ones would finally be placed “dove àno a stare et che presto mi si dia l’ordine che si ponghino, perché alla stanza ora non manca altro che questo, ve gli raccomando” (where they should be and [I hope] I will soon be instructed to place them, for this is the only thing missing from the room and I recommend this to you).³⁴ However, Vasari would never get that assignment. Borghini’s labour was set aside by Cosimo and nothing was done with Guidi’s Italian texts either. This happened not only in the room of Cosimo il Vecchio, but also in the other rooms of the Quartiere di Leone X. This much becomes clear from Vasari’s finished drawings for the ceilings of those rooms. The drawings show that Bartoli’s mottoes were reverted to anyway, albeit extremely sparsely and with many hesitations.³⁵ According to the drawings, as we noted earlier, those mottoes would only be used where the central scenes were concerned, and in the rooms of Giovanni delle Bande Nere and Clement VII they even would not be used at all. The rooms as they were executed show that a radical decision was finally taken: inscriptions, mottoes and titles were abandoned altogether.³⁶

Even the cartouches underneath the allegories of virtues were no longer filled with their names, but with small scenes referring to those virtues. The ultimate reasons for this remarkable decision are difficult to gauge. Perhaps a factor was that during the design phase, the initially followed system of scenes flanked by virtue allegories was increasingly broken (i.e. in the rooms

³³ Palli d’Addario 1985, 374 (No. 5). “La pietà nella religione” was clearly based on what Bartoli had proposed for the central panel of the ceiling of the room of Cosimo il Vecchio (DILIGENS IN RELIGIONEM PIETAS or DILIGENS IN DEOS RELIGIO) and in the “gloria nella eternità” Bartoli’s VBIQVE SEMPER was accounted for. Borghini’s Latin interpretations of Guidi’s phrases are not included in this letter.

³⁴ Palli D’Addario 1985, 374 No. 5 (8 november 1557). Evidently Borghini’s attempts were not resubmitted to Vettori.

³⁵ Unlike for the virtue figures, no text cartouches are provided on the finished drawings for the scenes.

³⁶ In a letter to Cosimo, dated 12 May 1558, regarding the proposed marriage of Cosimo’s daughter Lucrezia to Alfonso d’Este, Vasari describes the rooms of Cosimo the Elder, Lorenzo il Magnifico, and Cosimo I as “finite et dipinte sino in terra” (finished and painted from top to bottom). Vasari 1923, No. CCLXVI, 502. It must therefore have been decided before this date not to apply names, mottoes and inscriptions to these rooms.

of Leo X, Clement VII and Cosimo I) and hence also the system of mottoes and names. Hesitations about language may have played a role as well. During the problems that arose with the Latin translation of the mottoes and inscriptions, the option of applying them in Italian to the chambers was left open. Remarkable in this respect is that in the finished drawings (and on the diagram of Clement VII's room) the names of the allegories of virtues are consistently inscribed in Italian.³⁷ The same goes for the titles inscribed above the scenes in the diagrams of the ceilings of the rooms of Leo X and Clement VII. A more far-reaching problem that may have come up concerned the identification of the scenes. The allegories of virtues that the scenes exemplified would be identified by their names, but what exactly were the deeds by which these virtues were demonstrated? Viewers who belonged to the Medici family itself or to their intimates, will have recognized these, because they must have been aware of the highlights of the family history. Although even with them one might wonder whether they would have known about, for instance, the various feats of arms of Giovanni delle Bande Nere, feats of arms about the course of which Vasari had to consult still living eyewitnesses before he could paint them.³⁸ For the somewhat wider circle of visitors presumably intended to be targeted it must have been especially difficult to understand what all those scenes in the *Quartiere di Leone X* represented, no matter how much effort Vasari had made to render them as historically accurate as possible. This wider circle of visitors would have appreciated titles to the narrative scenes, and the fact that titles (in Italian) are appended to all of the scenes in the two diagrams and to some of them in the perfected drawings indicates that Vasari and his advisers thought of providing this service. However, the question they must have asked themselves was whether adding titles would really help the visitors understand the connection between the mottoes and what was presented. Even those who did not need a title to see what was depicted would struggle to fathom in exactly what deeds the virtues extolled in the accompanying mottoes were expressed. Indeed, there was a gap between what the mottoes extolled and what the scenes showed. The mottoes referred to deeds and events that were to remain unexhibited in the epic concentration to which the painted scenes had to resort. It was as if they were emblems whose *anima* could not adequately cover their *corpus*. A good example to illustrate this is the scene in the room of Cosimo il Vecchio that shows the protagonist going into exile. For this scene, Bartoli had proposed as motto: FORTES PRVDENTIA FATI

³⁷ Incidentally, they are so too in Bartoli's letters.

³⁸ Jonietz 2017, 150.

NECESSITATEM SVPERANT (the strong overcome their destiny by prudence). By destiny is here meant that Cosimo's enemy Rinaldo degli Albizzi would have ensured that he was sentenced to death. *Prudentia*, flanking the scene on the left, refers to the tact and prudence with which Cosimo managed to get the death sentence commuted to exile and the apparent obedience he showed by going into exile. *Fortezza*, on the right side of the scene, referred to the strength Cosimo showed on his return from exile, when, in a new guise, he rewarded his friends and chastised his enemies. All this we learn from Vasari's *Ragionamenti*.³⁹ Looking at the scene in question now, we merely see Cosimo leaving the city on horseback and with a small retinue. A way out of the dilemma of the incongruity between motto and image might perhaps have been what apparently Vettori had in mind and which Borghini made a futile attempt to do, namely "di ridurre i casi particolari a concetti generali". However, if the mottoes had been generalised even further than Bartoli had already done, there would have been little point at all in creating different mottoes and different scenes to extol the virtues of the Medici. All these dubitations may have prompted the radical decision to dispense with texts altogether in the Quartiere di Leone X, accepting the fact that the cycle became considerably less accessible to the unprepared and even to the prepared visitor. But then, there had been, as we saw, hesitations about applying text to the paintings right from the very start of the project.⁴⁰

About the paintings in the Quartiere degli Elementi and the Quartiere di Leone X, Vasari wrote a fictional dialogue between himself and Prince Francesco de' Medici, entitled *Ragionamenti sopra le invenzioni da lui dipinte in Firenze nel palazzo di loro altezze serenissime*. Vasari began writing this work in 1558 and he never quite finished it. His nephew completed it and published it in 1588 with a dedication to Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici. The genesis and intent of this work has been much debated by art historians.

Having long been regarded as essentially a guide to the paintings it discusses, since the appearance of Elizabeth McGrath's seminal article "Il senso nostro: the Medici allegory applied to Vasari's mythological frescoes in the Palazzo Vecchio" (1985), the tendency has been predominantly to see the *Ragionamenti* more as disconnected from the paintings.⁴¹ Paola Tinagli

³⁹ Vasari 1906, 88-90.

⁴⁰ In connection with Vasari's paintings in the Salone dei Cinquecento in the Palazzo Vecchio, Cosimo wrote Vasari: "oltre che son necessarie ancora in ogni historia qualche motto o parole, per maggiore espressione del figurato." Vasari 1923, No. CDI, 735: Cosimo to Vasari, 14 March 1563. See also Jonietz 2017, 125. in the case of the Quartieri di Leone X, Cosimo apparently thought otherwise in the end.

⁴¹ McGrath 1985. See also Jonietz 2017, 253.

related Vasari's initiative to start writing the *Ragionamenti* to his construction that year of a wooden model in which he made the whole of his work in the palazzo Vecchio comprehensible to the duke ("accordare tutto il palazzo insieme"). Tinagli wants to "collegare a questo momento di riflessione sulla qualità ed importanza dei lavori, e a questo nuovo corso, la decisione di elaborare significati celebrativi inizialmente non contemplati nei programmi, 'accordando' insieme i due appartamenti in senso programmatico e non solo architettonico, e di rendere pubblici sia la materia che i significati (connect to this moment of reflection on the quality and importance of the work, and to this new course, the decision to elaborate celebratory meanings that were not initially contemplated in the programmes, 'tuning' the two apartments together in a programmatic sense and not only architecturally, and to make both the material and the meanings public).⁴² According to Tinagli, the *Ragionamenti* should be regarded as part of the historical literature that was being produced in Florence in those years as a panegyric on Cosimo and his regime.⁴³ Agreeing with Tinagli, Steven Stowell states that: "the *Ragionamenti* appears ... to be a literary work that to some degree stands alone from the paintings and is in essence a kind of celebration of the Medici and of Vasari's work."⁴⁴ Jonietz argues that Vasari wanted his *Ragionamenti* to immortalise his paintings in the Quartieri – and thus himself – by erecting a literary monument to them.⁴⁵ Jonietz also compares the *Ragionamenti* to the descriptions that were made of apparati of solemn entrances at the time and aimed at preserving their memory for posterity.⁴⁶ However, it seems wise not to completely abandon the assumption that the *Ragionamenti* were also written down with the intention of guiding the viewer through the paintings. Indeed, it is hard to deny that an important purpose of the *Ragionamenti* was to fill the comprehension gap that arose when, in 1558, the plan to provide the paintings with texts was finally abandoned. Now that it had been made difficult for visitors to the Quartiere di Leone X to gather what precisely the Medici's rhetorical praise there entailed, this was explained to them in the *Ragionamenti*.

⁴² Tinagli Baxter 1985, 87.

⁴³ See Tinagli 2000 and Tinagli 2001.

⁴⁴ Stowell 2015, 320-21.

⁴⁵ Jonietz 2017, 168.

⁴⁶ Jonietz 2017, 197 and 198.

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Figures

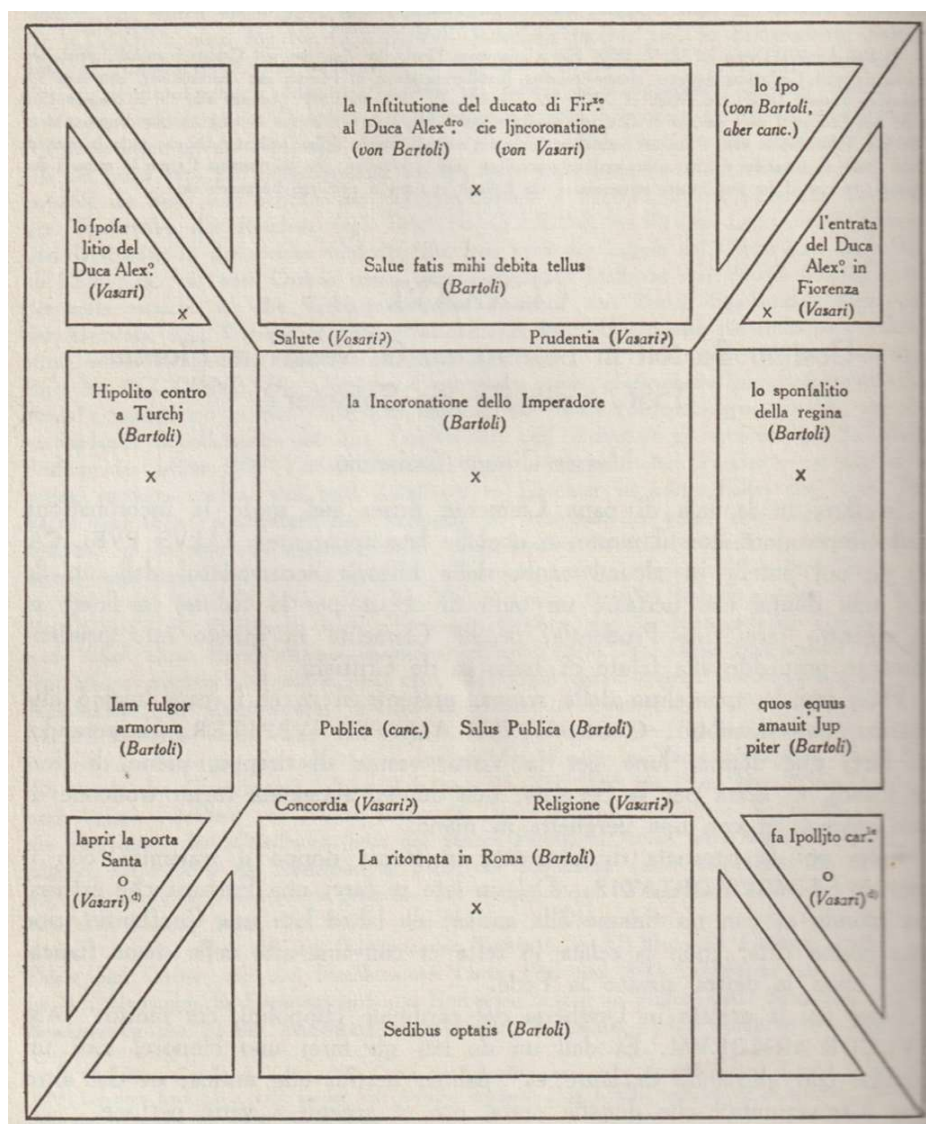


Fig. 1 Diagram of the design for the ceiling decoration of the room of Clement VII
Source: Vasari 1923, 448

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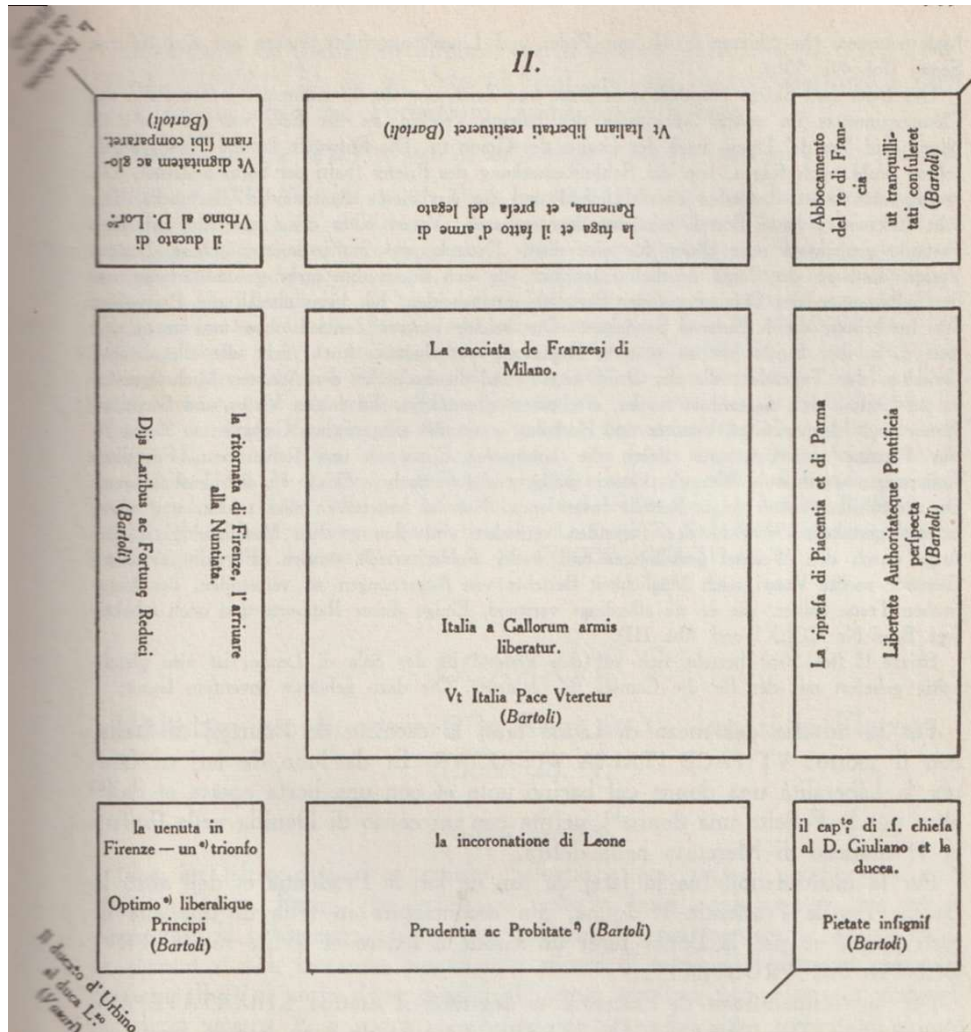


Fig. 2 Diagram of the design for the ceiling decoration of the room of Leo X. Source: Vasari 1923, 449