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Melody L. Fitzgerald Date

Productive Collaboration: Duke Cosimo I de' Medici, Giorgio Vasari, and Porphyry Carving in the Parte Teorica of *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori*

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An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

Productive Collaboration: Duke Cosimo I de' Medici, Giorgio Vasari, and Porphyry Carving in the Parte Teorica of *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori*
By Melody L. Fitzgerald

The importance of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici to the second edition of Giorgio Vasari's *Le vite di più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri* (commonly known as the *Lives*) has long been recognized. However, the influence of the duke in the *parte teorica*, Vasari's technical treatises, which precede the body of the *Lives*, has often been ignored. This study examines Vasari's inclusion of the duke into the company of "artists" assembled in the fictive workshop of the *parte teorica*. Focusing on an anecdote concerning the carving of porphyry from "Della architettura," this study will argue that, for Vasari, the duke was essential for the perpetuation of artistic practices in Renaissance Florence.

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Table of Contents

In 1550, Giorgio Vasari published the first edition of *Le vite di più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri* (commonly known as the *Lives*), a work that described the lives and works of prominent Italian artists from Cimabue to Vasari's own time.[1] The book was divided into three sections, based on the ages of man, with each section receiving its own introduction. The *Lives* began with a dedication to Duke Cosimo de' Medici of Florence.[2] It also included three technical treatises concerning the production method of the three major arts: "Dell' architettura", "De sculptura" and "Della pittura." Vasari referred to these treatises as the *parte teorica*, the theoretical part of his work. These discussions of workshop practices, which were grouped together under the title "On Technique" in their English translation, have long been ignored by art historians. Translated into English for the first time in 1907, over two hundred years after the first English translation of the *Lives* in 1685, these theoretical treaties were, and often still are today, treated as mere guides to Renaissance workshop practices.[3] Art conservators working with Renaissance objects frequently utilized them as such.[4] Recent scholarship, which utilizes the *parte teorica*, has focused on the definition of disegno found in "Della pittura."[5]

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[1] The title changed in Vasari's second edition of the book, published in 1568, to *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti* perhaps as a reflection of the new role of *disegno* within Vasari's narrative.
[2] Vasari also mentions the newly elected Pope Julius III in this dedication, perhaps in hopes of securing two patrons or as a method of insurance in case the duke did not appreciate his work. Patricia Lee Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and History* (New Haven: Yale University, 1995), 403.
[3] Gerald Baldwin Brown, introduction to *On Technique: Being the Introduction to the Three Arts of Design, Architecture, Sculpture and painting, Prefixed to the Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, trans. Louisa Maclehose (New York: Dover Publications, 1960), 1-5.
[4] See articles like Maryan Ainsworth, "Northern Renaissance Drawings and Underdrawings: A Proposed Method of Study," *Master Drawings* 27, (1989): 5-38. See also Meryl Johnson and Elisabeth Packard, "Methods Used for the Identification of Binding Media in Italian Paintings of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," *Studies in Conservation* 16, (1971), 145-164.
[5] Didi-Huberman examines the way Vasari uses *disegno* to legitimatize his own position within Florentine society. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans., John Goodman (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 76-79. Belting examines Vasari's use of *disegno* and the changing role of the craftsmen within the narrative of the

By structuring his history of art as a completed progression Vasari wrote stagnation into the narrative of the history of art. Beginning with the rebirth and infancy of art, and then moving to the age of Masaccio—when the "rules" of art were being rediscovered and artists had to toil over their works—Vasari's narrative in the first edition of the *Lives* reached maturity and ended with the *Life of Michelangelo*. According to Vasari's account, Michelangelo was an artist sent down by the almighty himself to correct the errors of previous centuries in the creation of art.[6] Vasari's assertion of the perfection of Michelangelo's art created a problem within the metaphor of human progress. Implicit in Vasari's narrative and the position he assigns Michelangelo is the idea that no artist who worked after the famed Florentine could create truly innovative art.[7] Thus, Vasari denied all generative potential to future artists. Any artist who worked after Michelangelo had to content himself with mimicking the master's style. This progression was particularly problematic for Vasari, as he was, himself, an artist working after Michelangelo.

In the second edition of the *Lives of the Artists*, published in 1568, Vasari took measures to redress the halted progression that he had written into the first account of art history by greatly expanding the *parte teorica* and emphasizing his patron, Cosimo.

Lives. Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art?*, trans. Christopher S. Wood, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 76-79.

[6] Vasari writes, "…uno spirito, che universalmente in ciascheduna arte ed in ogni professione fusse abile, operando per sè solo a mostrare che cosa sia la perfezione dell'arte del disegno nel lineare, dintornare, ombrare e lumeggiare, per dare rilevo [sic] alle cose della pittura, e con retto giudizio operare nella scultura, e rendere le abitazioni commode e sicure, sane, allegre, proporzionate, e ricche di vari ornamenti nell'architettura. Volle oltra ciò accompagnarlo della vera filosofia morale con l'ornamento della dolche poesia, acciochè il mondo lo eleggesse ed ammirasse per suo singularissimo specchio nella vita, nell'opere, nella santità dei costumi, ed in tutte l'azioni umane." Giorgio Vasari, "Michelagnolo Buonarroti" in *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, ed Gaetano Milanesi (henceforth Vasari-Milanesi) (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1878-1885), 7: 135-136.

[7] Belting notes that Vasari is attempting to write a cyclical narrative of the history of art, based on a rebirth of ancient knowledge. Still, Belting maintains that Vasari fails and suggests a progression nonetheless. See Belting, 75.

Vasari also included members from the Accademia del Disegno and artists who lived and worked after the death of Michelangelo in the second edition of the *Lives*. This paper will focus on how and for what purposes Vasari introduced the figure of his patron, Duke Cosimo I de' Medici, into the company of "artists" assembled in the fictive workshops of the *parte teorica*. Focusing on an anecdote concerning the carving of porphyry that Vasari included in "Dell' architettura," I will argue that, for Vasari, the duke played a vital role in the perpetuation of artistic practice in Renaissance Florence. This role extends beyond the purely economic function of patronage. Vasari relies upon Cosimo to solve the problem of creative stagnation as it developed over two editions of the *Lives*. In the second edition, the duke provides the metaphorical spark that ignites the rebirth of future Florentine art.

Vasari's account of porphyry carving was also the starting point for Suzanne Butters's 1996 book, *The Triumph of Vulcan: Sculptors' Tools, Porphyry, and the Prince in Ducal Florence*, which delves deeply into the issues and science of metal forging in Renaissance Florence.[8] Butters focuses on the prestige gained by both Duke Cosimo and the artist Francesco Tadda's from the carving of porphyry statues, an ability that had been lost since the Roman Empire. Butters suggests that the duke merely acquired theoretical knowledge of the process of carving porphyry, however, Vasari himself assigns the duke a more complex and practical role.[9] I will explore the metaphor that Vasari created around this anecdote, which establishes the duke, the craftsman, and Vasari as designer, as possessing *virtù*.

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[8] Suzanne Butters, *The Triumph of Vulcan: Sculptors Tools, Porphyry, and the Prince in Ducal Florence* (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1996).
[9] Ibid., 266-67.

Before moving to a detailed examination of the porphyry-carving anecdote, however, it is necessary to provide some context for the expansion of the technical prefaces as a whole. The project will proceed in four parts. The first section will introduce Vasari and the two editions of the *Lives*. It will also discuss Cosimo and his collection, which displayed the position of importance that the duke hoped to achieve for himself and Florence. Next, I will examine Cosimo's use of cultural politics, in particular the role that the Academia del Disegno played in crafting the duke's new Florentine duchy. Then, after a brief discussion of the general importance of porphyry and its special significance to the Medici family, I will turn to the porphyry-carving anecdote. After this discussion, I will examine Vasari's use of the term *virtù* showing how Vasari fashioned a new definition of the word specific to himself and Cosimo.

Eighteen years after the publication of the first version of the *Lives*, Vasari published a revised edition, in which he associated himself and his project more directly with Cosimo I. As Patricia Rubin observes, Vasari's voice is different in the second edition.[10] Vasari had become an established master and the client of a powerful duke.[11] Vasari officially entered into the duke's employment in 1554 and became instrumental in Cosimo's design of state imagery.[12] Cosimo was at this time just gaining power. He had been elected in 1537 after the assassination of his relative Alessandro de' Medici.[13] Some historians suggest that those with republican leanings, in hopes that Cosimo would be easily controlled, elected the young Medici.[14] Although inexperienced, the young

[10] Rubin, 197.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 200 and T.S.R. Boase, *Giorgio Vasari: The Man and the Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 59.
[13] Andrea M. Gáldy, *Cosimo I de'Medici as Collector: Antiquities and Archaeology in Sixteenth-century Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3.
[14] Ibid., 4.

duke proved himself to be an efficient, and somewhat ruthless leader. Upon his election, Cosimo began almost immediately to fashion a new princely image for himself and the Medici family.

To this end, Cosimo stressed his connection to the Medicean "golden age" of the early fifteenth century, particularly linking himself with his namesake, Cosimo Pater Patriae, also known as Cosimo il Vecchio.[15] Duke Cosimo put Vasari to work in 1554, employing the painter on decorations for the Palazzo Vecchio (or Palazzo Ducale), which the young duke had recently claimed as his personal residence.[16] In this decorative scheme Vasari worked to create a mythic and historical genealogy for the young Duke and promoted his connection to the Roman emperor Augustus.[17] As Andrea Gàldy writes, Cosimo was "expand[ing] the Florentine state, and us[ing] history and language to unify this new political entity within its newly established borders."[18] Cosimo's creation of the new Florentine state emphasized artistic propaganda. The duke used his new palace as the start of this cultural and artistic emphasis. Built originally to accommodate the republican government, Cosimo transformed the Palazzo Vecchio with his own art collection and commissioned decorations.[19] The duke's collection at first contained small

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[15] Ibid., xxv.
[16] Ibid., 8-10.
[17] This comparison, which continued throughout the duke's reign, appeared as early as the celebration of Cosimo and Elenora's wedding. See Claudia Rousseau, "The Pageant of the Muses at the Medici Wedding of 1539 and the Decoration of the Salone dei Cinquecento," in *"All the world's a stage..." Art and Pageantry in the Renaissance and Baroque* Pt 2 (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University, 1990) 423. The rediscovery of how to carve porphyry would have equated Cosimo and Augustus since Palladio had related that the Mausoleum of the ancient Roman had been topped with porphyry columns. See Butters, 72.
[18] Cosimo also worked to expand the land under Florentine control, gaining control of Siena in 1555 after over a year of fighting. The city-state was incorporated into the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. Gáldy, 5. For more on the inception of the Accademia del Disegno see Karen-edis Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State: The Disciple of Disegno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 27-32.
[19] Gáldy, 10.

anticaglie, antiques.[20] The collection grew more elaborate as the duke's ambitions for a grand duchy (or even a kingdom) grew. All of the objects were arranged with Cosimo in the center, reigning supreme in fictive environments. One such room, the *Sala delle Carte Geografiche*, had cabinets along the walls decorated with Ptolemaic maps of different areas of the world.[21] These cabinets, ideally, would have contained objects from these mapped areas and were surmounted by busts of kings and emperors who ruled them. With this invention, Cosimo, as the owner of all these objects, becomes the metaphorical ruler of all these areas.

The importance of Cosimo's collection and Florentine artistic production was noted by visitors to the city. Vincenzo Fedeli, ambassador to Florence from Venice in 1560-61, remarked on the importance of the duke's collection. In particular, Fedeli noted how much it cost for Cosimo to advance the arts and create a court culture at his palazzo.[22] He continued, writing that the duke's collection would bring Cosimo eternal fame. Like a collector who establishes himself and his identity within his *studiolo*, Cosimo created himself with the identity of his soon to be Grand Duchy. Cosimo did not confine his construction to a room within the palace, the duke crafted both his own persona and the identity of all of Florence.[23] After first establishing his connection to his

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[20] Ibid., 9.
[21] Ibid., 35.
[22] Fedeli writes: "Ama questo principe e stima assai li virtuosi in tutte le parti di professione, e si diletta, molto della varietà di' studi, e molto si compiace della scoltura e della pittura, e fa in l' una e l' altra lavorare di continuo uomini eccellentissimi per far cose rare e degne de' suoi tempi; ed al mio partire, nella condottura di un sasso solo, per far la sua statua, avea speso 12.000 ducati. Si diletta molto di gioie, di statue, di medaglie antique, ed ha tante di queste antiquità, che è un stupore; e di tutte queste cose fa grandissima professione e spende assai e ne lassarà memoria eterna. E l' istorie dei suoi tempi fa scrivere in lingua latina e Toscana, e fa fare li commentario della sua vita in una e l' altra lingua da uomini eccellenti, pagati per questo. Di modo che con la pittura, la scoltura, con le statue, con l' impronte e con il sempiterne carte si farà, dopo morto, eterno e glorioso." "Relazione di Messer Fedeli", as quoted in Gáldy, 33.
[23] Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 295.

patron the duke, Vasari then introduces the importance of the duke for the perpetuation of artistic creativity within his narrative of the history of art.

Vasari's second edition of the *Lives* was one of the instruments that the author and patron used in crafting Florence's new identity. It worked within what Rubin calls Cosimo's "diplomacy of taste," in which aspects of Florentine culture fell under the protection and supervision of the duke, particularly the arts and historical writing about the city.[24] As Karen-edis Barzman argues in her work *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State*, Cosimo I saw the potential in those existing organizations that worked to create a sense of cultural identity and social cohesion within the city of Florence.[25] An example of such an institution was the Accademia degli Umidi, a precursor to the Accademia del Disegno, which will be discussed later. Cosimo placed his own supporters into the Accademia degli Umidi, once simply a social group that met to debate the Tuscan vernacular, and thereby transformed it, "into an official organ of state."[26] Similarly, the Compagnia ed Accademia del Disegno, established in 1563, became an important part of Cosimo's cultural politics.

At its founding, the Accademia del Disegno stressed the reciprocal and beneficial relationship art has had with empires, as Barzman writes, "as arts were ennobled, so the prestige of the republics and empires that supported them increased."[27] Although, in his own narrative Vasari claims his preeminence in the founding of the Academy, it was actually founded by a group of individuals connected by patronage ties to Duke

[24] Rubin, 199.
[25] Barzman, 27.
[26] Ibid., 27.
[27] Ibid., 32.

Cosimo.[28] Their foundation emphasized its association with the Academy's predecessor, the *scuola di San Marco*, but also to the Accademia degli Umidi, which, in 1542, was renamed the Accademia Fiorentina and made a branch of the Tuscan University system.[29] At the founding of the Accademia del Disegno, fifteen of the forty-seven statutes referred to the duke and his authority, establishing it firmly under Cosimo's patronage and control.[30] The *Accademia* was full of court artists all working under direction of the person and position of the duke.[31] In the first meeting, its officers all gave authority over the Academy to Vincenzo Borghini, one of Cosimo's cultural advisers who also advised Vasari on the second edition of the *Lives*.[32]

In a speech to members of the *Accademia* at his inauguration, Borghini reminded the artists "how, much, after God, [you] are obliged to Your Illustrious Excellency."[33] As Barzman records, Borghini later referred to Cosimo as these artists' *supremo et principal capo*, supreme and principal head.[34] With the duke as its head, the artists gathered in the *Accademia*, by association, became his "progeny." As Barzman has shown, although the duke could not claim his family as dynastic rulers, he could turn to art, which was long associated with the Medici family and the area of Tuscany.[35] Cosimo I used the artistic superiority that Vasari claimed for Florence on the bases of its illustrious history to promote the present Florentine Duchy and to improve his own status.

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[28] The artists who were part of the drafting committee included: GiovannAgnolo Montorsoli, Agnolo Bronzino, Francesco da Sangallo, Michele di Ridolfo Ghirlandaio Tosini, PieroFrancesco di Iacopo di Sandro Foschi and Vasari. Ibid., 29-32.
[29] Ibid., 27.
[30] Ibid., 34.
[31] Ibid., 32.
[32] Ibid., 35.
[33] Vasari refers to this speech in a letter to the duke on February 1, 1563. He writes, "Fù fatto poi dal reverendo signor spedalingho una bellissima oratione a tuttj, con molte lode della arte, con mostrar poi, doppo Dio, quanto siamo obligatj a V.E.I. […]", quoted in Barzman, 288.
[34] Letter from Vincenzo Borghini to Duke Cosimo January 1, 1566 quoted in Barzman, 34.
[35] Ibid., 33.

Both the expansion of the *parte teorica* and the inclusion of artists who had died since 1550, as well as living artists, like Vasari himself, in the 1568 edition of Vasari's *Lives* reflects the developments that lead to the foundation of the Accademia del Disegno as an organ of state. The Accademia del Disegno given an important role by Vasari in the second edition of the *Lives*.[36] Vasari connected the *Accademia* back to the fifteenth-century *scuola di San Marco*, effectively connecting the new Academy and Cosimo to the legacy of the *scuola* from the Medici "golden age."[37] Robert Williams sees the new progression of art in Vasari's second edition, "not as a preparation for Michelangelo, but as the perfection of the rules of art- rules to be passed on to a younger generation by the *Accademia del Disegno*."[38] Vasari's inclusion of more non-Florentine artists in the *Lives* worked to promote the supremacy of Florentine art through comparison. Throughout the *Lives*, Vasari constantly "proved" the superiority of Florentine art in reviving ancient artistic style and beginning the new era of art.

In the second edition, Vasari greatly expanded the *parte teorica*, adding the well-known definition of *disegno*.[39] Vasari also greatly expanded "Della architettura", perhaps as a reflection of his most recent work for Cosimo as architect for the Palazzo Ducale and the construction of the Palazzo Uffizi.[40]

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[36] Rubin suggests the new tone of *disegno* in the second edition is due to the ducal approval of the idea along with the creation of the Academy of Design to promulgate it. Rubin, 214.
[37] Barzman, 6-7.
[38] Robert Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy: From Techne to Metatechne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 53.
[39] As Williams describes, Vasari had been working on this definition since the summer of 1564. It is the only section of the *Lives* for which a draft survives. Ibid., 32.
[40] G. Galdwin Brown, introduction to *On Technique* by Giorgio Vasari, trans. Lousia S. Maclehose (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1960), 2-5.

Finally and unsurprisingly, the influence of Vasari's patron, Duke Cosimo I de' Medici becomes more explicit in the second edition of the *Lives*.[41] Together with his patron and other advisers, particularly Borghini, Vasari was involved in crafting a new Medicean and ducal Florence through art and literature.[42] Within the *Lives*, Cosimo I becomes a key figure in Vasari's effort to bypass the stagnation of Florentine art after Michelangelo.

In the introductory and framing texts of the second edition, Vasari locates the potential for generation of future art not with a singular artist, like Michelangelo, but within the duke. Vasari crafts Cosimo as the "beneficent father" of the arts.[43] In Vasari's narrative the duke harnesses his own *virtù*, which is both an intellectual and physical potential. This force enables Cosimo metaphorically to both design and craft works of art. By harnessing this *virtù*, Cosimo is able to help generate Florentine art, restarting Vasari's narrative. Cosimo establishes himself as the "father" of Florentine art through his power as patron and the creation of the Accademia del Disgeno. Through Vasari's narrative, Cosimo becomes the metaphorical creator of the objects crafted by his progeny in the Academy.

Porphyry is a hard purple stone that has been highly prized since ancient Egypt.[44] It was valued from antiquity onward for its rich color and rarity.[45] The Renaissance connected porphyry in popular thought with the Byzantine Empire whose church, Hagia Sophia, was known to have many columns made from the purple stone.[46] The stone was

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[41] Rubin, 200.
[42] Vasari-Milanesi, 1: 109-110.
[43] Cosimo is described as *benigno padre* to the arts in the *Accademia del Disegno*'s first regulations of November and December 1562, which were approved by the duke in January 1563. Rubin, 202.
[44] Butters, 35.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 44-45.

so popular that on his ascension to the papacy in 1585, Pope Sixtus V passed a law forbidding the excavation of porphyry around Rome unless the stone was to be used in a Roman church.[47] The stone held particular significance for Duke Cosismo because it connected him back to his ancestor Cosimo il Vecchio, who donated a slab of the blood colored stone for the high altar of San Lorenzo in Florence.[48] Also in San Lorenzo during Cosimo's reign, were three generations of Medici tombs all of which used porphyry in their decorations, each generation using more of the purple stone than the previous.[49]

These historical and specifically Medicean associations with porphyry made it particularly significant for Vasari when he set out to construct his metaphor concerning the duke's *virtù*. In an anecdote from the second chapter of "Dell' architettura"—the first and longest of the three technical treatises—Vasari discusses the carving of various types of stone. The author begins his account of porphyry by stating that the ability to carve the stone had been lost to modern artists: "A' dì nostri non s'è mai condotto pietre di questa sorte a perfezione alcuna, per avere gli artefici nostri perduto il modo del temperare i ferri, e così gli altri strumenti da condurle" (because our artificers have lost the art of tempering the chisels and other instruments for working [the stone]).[50] Vasari describes how the stone was still manipulated in his time by combining emery with water in order to cut columns of porphyry into slices, which were often used for floor

[47] Ibid., 43.
[48] Ibid., 52.
[49] Ibid., 64.
[50] Vasari-Milanesi, I: 109. English translation from Vasari, *On Technique,* 29.

decorations.[51] He claims that Leon Battista Alberti, was the first modern artists to begin experimenting with new processes to better carve the hard stone.

According to Vasari, Alberti, "non truovò fra molti che ne mise in pruova, alcuna tempera che facesse meglio che il sangue di becco" (did not find, among the many tempering-baths that he put to the test, any that answered better than goat's blood).[52] This mixture, although it "sfavillava sempre fuoco" (was always striking sparks of fire), purportedly allowed Alberti to carve the name "Bernardo Oricellario" on a piece of porphyry above the door of Santa Maria Novella in Florence.[53] As Butters has shown, the historical Alberti could not actually have carved this inscription, which dates to 1514, because the architect had died forty-two years prior.[54] Nevertheless, Vasari's insertion of this anecdote in the second edition of the *Lives* and his use of Alberti, in particular, as the protagonist is significant in several ways.[55]

Vasari concludes his story writing that, "con tutte queste diligenze, non fece però Leon Battista altri lavor: perch'era tanto il tempo che si perdeva, che mancando loro l'animo non si mise altramente mano a statue, vasi o altre cose sottili" (in spite of all of these efforts Leon Battista did not do any other works [in porphyry] because such was the time lost [in their execution] that, the spirit having fled from them, he did not go on to try

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[51] Vasari-Milaensi, 1: 109-110. Beginning in the twelfth century churches in Rome began to use such slices of the stone for pavements and eventually the stones took on a liturgical significance. Butters, 41.
[52] Vasari-Milanesi, 1: 110.
[53] See Butters, 134-35, for a discussion on the importance of porphyry to the Oricellario family and the punning on his name.
[54] Ibid., 141.
[55] The 1550 edition of the Lives ended with the assertion that contemporaries were still unable to create statues in porphyry, "[…] si riduce pur finalmente […] con fatica e tempo non picciolo, ma non già a forma di statue, che di questo non abbiam la maneria; […]". Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri nell'edizione per I tipi di Lorenzo Torrentino Firenze 1550*, ed. L. Bellosi and A Rossi (Turin, 1986), 21, quoted in Butters, *Triumph of Vulcan*, 144.

his hand at statues, vases or other fine things.)[56] Here Vasari draws attention to the large amount of time and effort that the artist must expend in order to create an object out of the hard stone. It is a theme found elsewhere in the *Lives*. As Vasari writes in the introduction to the second era, the era to which Alberti belongs, these artists must toil diligently to create their still less than perfect works.[57] They do not enjoy the ease that comes to those in the third era.[58] By inserting the Alberti story, Vasari emphasizes the

[56] Vasari writes: "E sebbene si sono in diversi tempi provati molti begli ingegni per trovare il modo di lavorarlo che usarono gli antichi, tutto è stato in vano: e Leon Battista Alberti, il quale fu il primo che cominciasse a far prova di lavorarlo, non però in cose di molto momento, non truovò fra molti che ne mise in pruova, alcuna tempera che facesse meglio che il sangue di becco; perchè, sebbene levava poco di quella pietra durissima nel lavorarla e sfavillava sempre fuoco, gli servì nondimeno di maniera, che fece fare nella soglia della porta principale di santa Maria Novella di Fiorenza le diciotto lettere antiche, che assai grandi e ben misurate si veggono dalla parte dinanzi in un pezzo di porfido; le quali lettere dicono BERNARDO ORICELLARIO. E perchè il taglio dello scarpello non gli faceva gli spigoli, nè dava all'opera quel pulimento e quel fine che le era necessario, fece fareun mulinello a braccia con un manico a guisa di stidione, che agevolmente si maneggiava, appuntandosi uno il detto manico al petto, e nella inginocchiatura mettendo le mani per girarlo: e nella punta, dove era o scarpello o trapano, avendo messo alcune rotelline di rame, maggiori e minori secondo il bisogno, quelle imbrattate di smeriglio, con levare a poco a poco e spianare, facevano la pelle e gli spigoli, mentre con la mano si girava destramente il detto mulinello. Ma con tutte queste diligenze, non fece però Leon Battista altri lavori: perch'era tanto il tempo che si perdeva, che mancando loro l'animo, non si mise altramente mano a statue, vasi, o altre cose sottili. Altri poi, che si sono messi a spianare pietre e rappezzar colonne con medesimo segreto, hanno fatto in questo modo. Fannosi per questo effetto alcune martella gravi e grosse, con le punte d'acciaio, temperate fortissimamente col sangue di becco, e lavorate a guisa di punte di diamanti; con le quali picchiando minutamente in sul porfido, e scantonandolo a poco a poco il meglio che si può, si riduce per finalmente o a tondo o a piano, come più aggrada all'artefice, con fatica e tempo non picciolo; ma non già a forma di statue, chè di questo non abbiamo la maniera; e se gli dà il pulimento con lo smeriglio e col cuoio, strofinandolo, che viene di lustro molto pulitamente lavorato e finito. Ed ancorchè ogni giorno si vadino più assottigliando gl'ingegni umani, e nuove cose investigando, nondimeno anco i moderni, che in diversi tempi hanno per intagliare il porfido provato nuovi modi, diverse tempre ed acciai molto ben purgati, hanno (come si disse di sopra), infino a pochi anni sono, faticato invano." Vasari-Milanesi 1: 110-111. This English translation is from Butters, 143, who points out the error in Maclehose's translation, which attributes the lack of spirit to the artist as opposed to the stone.

[57] Vasari writes, "Ora poi che noi abbiamo levate da balia, per un modo di dir così fatto, queste tre arti, e cavatele dalla fanciullezza, ne viene la seconda età: dove si vedrà infinitamente migliorato ogni cosa; e la invenzione più copiosa di figure, più ricca d'ornamenti; ed il disegno più fondato e più naturale verso il vivo, ed inoltre una fine nell'opre condotte con manco pratica, ma pensatamente con diligenza; la maniera più leggiadra, I colori più vaghi: in modo che poco ci resterà a ridurre ogni cosa al perfetto, e che elle imitino appunto la verità della natura." Vasari-Milanesi, 3: 103.

[58] Vasari writes, "Ma quello che importa il tutto di questa arte è, che l'hanno ridotta oggi talmente perfetta, e facile per chi possiede il disegno, l'invenzione ed il colorito, che dove prima da que' nostri maestri si faceva una tavola in sei anni, oggi in una anno questi maestri ne fanno sei: ed io ne fo indubitatamente fede, e di vista e d'opera: e molto più si veggono finite e perfette, che non facevano prima gli altri maestri di contro." Vasari-Milaensi, 4: 13.

ease with which artists of the third era are able to design and carve the stone with the help of the duke.

The Alberti anecdote, in which stone is heated by means of blood, takes its inspiration from a tradition dealing with the carving of gemstones recorded in a tenth-century poem of recipes, *De coloribus et artibus Romanorum*, written by an Italian monk known as Heraclius.[59] In *De coloribus*, Heraclius suggests soaking a precious stone in blood of a goat to make it easier to carve, a technique the author says he learned from Pliny the Elder's *Natural Histories* and diligently tried himself.[60] This advice is echoed in the medieval treatise *De Artibus diversis* (*On Divers Arts*), written by an author known as Theophilus, which advises the reader, "If you want to carve a piece of rock crystal, take a two- or three-year-old goat and bind its feet together and cut a hole between its breast and stomach, in the place where the heart is, and put the crystal in there, so that it lies in its blood until it is hot. At once take it out and engrave whatever you want on it, while this heat lasts. When it begins to cool and become hard, put it back in the goat's blood, take it out again when it is hot, and engrave it. Keep on doing so until you finish the carving."[61] As in Vasari's story concerning Alberti's attempt at carving porphyry, the blood soaked stone becomes magically heated, making it easier to carve. The process that Theophilus describes is also labor and time intensive. The stone is placed in the blood repeatedly until the carving process is complete.

These carving processes, which include blood, mirror the stones that they are used to carve, as both precious stones and the hard porphyry had connections to blood.

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[59] William Eamons, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 35.
[60] Pliny, Natural History 27.59, quoted in ibid., 35.
[61] John G. Hawthorne and C.S. Smith, trans., *Theophilus: On Divers Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 189-190.

Porphyry was associated with the sacrificial blood and, in ecclesiastical contexts, the blood of Christ.[62] Since blood is often equated with the seat of spirit, the porphyry's loss of spirit in the Alberti story can be understood as a loss of life-blood in the stone.[63] According to Vasari, Alberti did not attempt to create any other porphyry objects and the ability to create a sculpture with any fine details out of the stone was still unknown in Vasari's time.

Vasari continues his account of the rediscovery of a method to carve porphyry, writing that in 1553 Pope Julius III desired that an ancient, damaged porphyry basin be restored for placement in his vineyard.[64] In order to accomplish this, he consulted many artists including Michelangelo but none were successful in restoring the basin. Vasari writes, "E Michelagnolo, pur arvezzo alla durezza dei sassi, insieme con gli altri se ne tolse giù, neè si fece altro." (Michelangelo, moreover, even though accustomed to the hardness of stones, gave up the attempt, as did all the others, and nothing more was done.)[65] It is at this point in the story that Vasari begins to insert the duke and to stress Cosimo's importance for Florentine art. The more divine than earthly artist, Michelangelo, could not recover the knowledge that had at one time been known by the ancients, and had to give up his attempt.

Since, as Vasari writes, "no other thing in our days was lacking to the perfection of our arts," a way to carve porphyry had to be rediscovered.[66] Although it partakes of

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[62] Butters, 50-51.
[63] This loss of spirit might even refer to a loss of color in the stone, which would relate the story to the columns of ruined porphyry, which the Florentines took from Siena in 1117 and later displayed on the Baptistry's east façade. See Butters, 42. For more on blood as spirit see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 147, 162.
[64] Vasari-Milanesi, 1: 111.
[65] Ibid..English translation from Vasari, 32.
[66] Vasari-Milanesi, 1: 111.

rhetorical hyperbole, Vasari's claim implies that the discovery of a way to carve porphyry would bring a new perfection to art, surpassing that achieved by Michelangelo. Vasari goes on to describe how duke Cosimo did just that. He writes:

> Avendo, l'anno 1555, il signor duca Cosimo condotto dal suo palazzo e giardino de' Pitti una bellissima acqua nel cortile del suo principale palazzo di Firenze, per farvi una fonte di straordinaria bellezza, trovati fra I suoi rottami alcuni pezzi di porfido assai grandi, ordinò che di quelli si facesse una tazza col suo piede per la detta fonte; e per agevolar al maestro il modo di lavorar il porfido, fece di non so che erbe stillar un'acqua di tanta virtù, che spegnendovi dentro I ferri bollenti, fa loro una tempera durissima.[67]
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> (In the year, 1555, Duke Cosimo, wishing to erect a fountain of remarkable beauty in the court of his principal palace in Florence... ordered a basin with its pedestal to be made for the said fountain from some large pieces of porphyry found among broken fragments. To make the working of it more easy to the master, he [the Duke] caused an extract to be distilled from an herb, the name of which is unknown to me, and this extract had such virtue, that red-hot tools when plunged into it acquired the hardest possible temper[.])[68]

Through the use of this process the metal became hard enough to carve the porphyry. Vasari writes that after the tools had been forged Francesco Tadda, a carver from Fiesole, executed Vasari's design for the fountain. After its completion, the fountain was placed in the courtyard of the Palazzo Vecchio.[69]

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[67] Vasari-Milanesi, 1: 112.
[68] Vasari, 32.
[69] See Butters, illustration 40.

In Vasari's story, the duke does not physically temper the metal or carve the stone but he has the knowledge of an *artificio*, or artisan. The metaphor of the duke as an artisan is not limited to Vasari's writing alone, in fact, in 1544, when discussing the duke, Benedetto Varchi, a Florentine historian, wrote that Cosimo's knowledge and study of metals was distinguished among the duke's virtues.[70] This knowledge becomes an important part of the patron's *virtù*. Cosimo's knowledge of the tempering process showed his intellectual equality with antiquity. Since the ancients knew the process of carving porphyry, it had to be known in Cosimo's new city-state.[71] For Vasari, Cosimo's "perfection of the arts" through the knowledge he brings, does not result in stagnation. Not only does Cosimo revive a lost art form, but he also participates in the creation of a new fountain from the broken discarded remains of antique stones. This symbol of potency set within the center of Florence acts as a metaphor for the duke's creation of a new Medicean Florence and the establishment of the Duchy of Tuscany from the "broken stones" of the surrounding countryside.[72]

The generative properties of Cosimo are further emphasized through Vasari's word choice within the text. He writes, "fece di non so che erbe stillar un'acqua di tanta virtù, che spegnendovi dentro i ferri bollenti fa loro una tempera durissima." The mixture Vasari describes is made from *erbe* (herbs), which he had distilled to make *un'acqua di tanta virtù* (a water of much virtue). Vasari's cloaks the knowledge used to solve the carving problem in mystery. Unknown herbs are used to make a special water, which the

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[70] "… e molto clementissimo Duca Cosimo Signore… nel quale insieme con tante altre singolarissime doti, quasi chiarissimi fregi della incomparabile bontà et ineffabili virtù sue risplende ancor questa della cognizione, e dello studio de' Metalli…" Benedetto Varchi, *Alchimia* (1544) quoted in Butters, 460. See also Michael W. Cole, *Cellini and the Principles of Sculpture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 60.

[71] This need for Florence to rival and equal antiquity can be seen as part of Cosimo's continual comparison of himself to Augustus. See Rousseau , 423.

[72] Gáldy, 17-18.

duke contributes to the process of carving. Vasari, writing as a trained artist about the processes necessary to create works of art, does not have the crucial knowledge—the name of the herbs and the distilling process—required to be able to temper the metal. Instead, that knowledge is contained within the person of the duke.

Virtù, translated in the above story as "virtue", is a more complicated word than this translation suggests. T. S. R. Boase writes that for Vasari "Virtù is an all-important and untranslatable word, meaning a man's true exercise of his gifts."[73] Vasari's trusted friend and frequent adviser for the second edition of the *Lives*, Vincenzo Borghini, described *virtù*, saying:

> La virtù nell'uso commune è molto generale, e pare che *virtuoso* e *virtù* importi cosa buona congiunta coll'eccellenza e si distenda a molte cose, perchè non solo nelle affezioni dell'animo, giustizia, prudenza, e altre morali, ma agli abiti dell'intelletto, come sono le scienze, si distende, e non solo a queste ma alla pratica delle cose ancora; e così si dice *virtuoso* un casto e temperato, un filosofo e dottore, uno architetto e musico. L'uso commune <<imparare o darsi alle virtù>> è apparare qualche arte d'ingegno come lettere, musica, ecc...[74]
>
> (Virtù, to follow the common use of the term, is a very general thing: it seems that virtuoso and *virtù* denotes any good thing conjoined with excellence, and that it pertains to many things. It pertains not only to the affections of the spirit, to justice, to prudence, and to other moral things, but also to intellectual habits, such as the sciences. It refers, moreover, not only to these things, but also to practices – thus one calls virtuoso a chaste man and a temperate one, a philosopher and a

[73]Boase, *Giorgio Vasari*, 4.
[74] Vincenzo Borghini, *Storia della Nobiltà Fiorentina*, edited by J. R. Woodhouse (Pisa: Marlin, 1974), 44.

wise man, an architect and a musician. The familiar phrase *imparare or darsi alle virtù* means 'to learn some art of *ingegno*,' such as letters, music, etc…)[75]

Borghini's multi-level definition can be used to unravel the sense of Vasari's use of the term in the porphyry-carving story. The duke's "affections of the spirit" are virtuous, he personifies the rule in Florence and his desire that no artistic ability be unknown in Florence spurs his creation of the tempering bath. This mixture is in equal parts: intelligence, knowing the correct herbs, and practice, applying it to the metal. The *virtù* of the duke relates to all of his person.

Virtù derives from the Latin *virtus*; it is often defined as manliness or manly excellence, which comes from its root, *vir*, or man.[76] When used in the genitive in Latin the word came to mean excellence, goodness, and virtue.[77] In the writings of Cicero the word takes on a moral connotation, while Caesar and Livy use the term to describe valor, bravery and courage.[78] These heroic connotations of the word were revived by Renaissance humanists and again in the nineteenth century.[79] By using the term *virtù*, Vasari refers to these moral connotations, pointing to the "manliness" of the duke. Yet Vasari also alludes to a more specifically bodily understanding of the world.

For Vasari, as for his contemporary Benvenuto Cellini *virtù* as creative potential carried associations with sexual potency. This point is vividly illustrated by an episode recorded in Cellini's autobiography. According to that account, when Cellini was in Rome working on a chalice for Pope Clement VII (1523-34), Cellini was stricken with

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[75] English translation from Cole, 119.
[76] *Cassell's Latin Dictionary*, 5th ed., s.v. "Virtus."
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.

"the French disease," syphilis.[80] Although the doctors did not want to acknowledge that he had the disease, Cellini self-administered the cure, *lignum vitae* against their orders.[81] During the period of his illness the goldsmith was forced to remain abstinent. He claims that, "e' quali in cotesta astinenzia io feci le più belle cose e le più rare invenzione che mai io facessi alla vita mia" (in this period of abstinence I produced the most beautiful and rarest things I had ever created in my life)."[82] The implication is that by remaining abstinent the artist channels the full force of his virility into his art, thus producing surpassingly beautiful things in his life.

Like Vasari, Cellini was both a practing artist and a prolific writer. He wrote about architectural theory, penned two discourses on *disegno* and an essay on pedagogy. He also composed poems, volumes of letters and an all-encompassing *Vita*.[83] As recounted in his *Vita*, the artist's life ran the spectrum of fortunes, as Cellini transitioned from goldsmith to monumental sculptor and back to goldsmith again.[84] Like Vasari, Cellini was obsessed with the question of *virtù* as it pertained to artistic creativity. However, unlike Vasari, Cellini's *virtù* is based on individual feats of greatness, extending from his exacting and deadly use of the artillery cannon during the fall of Rome to his single bronze pour in creating the *Perseus*.[85] His presentation of his own individualistic *virtù* in his autobiography both contrasts with and brings into relief the type of *virtù* that Vasari describes within the technical prefaces to the *Lives*. As will become apparent below, Vasari presents *virtù* as creative potential that has been

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[80] Benvenuto Cellini, *Vita*, ed. Ettore Camesasca (Milano: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1985), 228.
[81] Cellini's assertion that the doctors would not acknowledge his disease allowed the artist to act as own savior and thus further establishes Cellini's independent excellence.
[82] Cellini, 228.
[83] Cole, 8.
[84] Ibid., 4.
[85] For Cellini's control of artillery at the Castel Sant'Angelo during the siege of Rome see Cellini, 164-168. For Cellini's bronze pour of the Perseus see Cellini, 575.

harnessed to make it socially acceptable and constructive, and which manifests itself in the relationships of Cosimo to his artists. Cellini, however, did not have a stable relationship with his patrons. His Vita tells the story of an artist who was constantly forced to travel to different cities for new patrons. His need for individualistic *virtù* was not generative of a relationship like the one that Vasari enjoyed with Cosimo.

It remains to introduce one final connotation of the word *virtù* that is relevant to Vasari's story. The term *virtù* appears in the fourteenth century to describe the therapeutic properties of plants.[86] In this context *virtù* is a property derived from the health and strength of some types plants that is then used to alter other objects.[87] The duke distills a plant with water to transfer its strength to the metal tools then used to carve the porphyry. Vasari's understanding of the term stems from the writings of Pietro de' Crescenzi, a fourteenth-century horticulturalist who wrote a number of treatises on the properties of plants, many of which were widely available in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[88]

In Vasari's time the problem of tempering metal was actively discussed, for example, a German book *Von Stahel und Eysen* (On Steel and Iron) printed in 1532, explains the techniques for hardening the two metals.[89] This text records different combinations of materials and waters, which can be used to affect the metals. Tempering baths, such as the goats's blood purportedly used by Alberti are suggested in the text. All of these recipes require a certain amount of hands-on knowledge. Plunging the metal too

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[86] This tradition stems from the "Crescenzi vulgar" which appears to be the writings of Pietro de' Crescenzi, a fourteenth century horticulturalist who wrote a number of treatises. There were over 12,500 printed copies of *Liber Cultus ruris* on market between 1471 and 1564. See *Dizionario etimologico della lingua italiana*, s.v. "Virtù."
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Eamons, 119.

quickly into cold water could turn it brittle instead of strengthening it.[90] Cosimo's ability to understand these discussions and apply them to a creative practice establishes his position within Vasari's text as an artisan—a bearer of "secret knowledge"—by illustrating the practical application of his *virtù*. His understanding of tempering techniques suggests that the duke had hands-on experience with the crafting of metal. In the porphyry-carving anecdote Cosimo not only enters the realm of the workshop and legitimizes it practices, he becomes an *arteficio*.

Vasari's claim that the creative process to which Cosimo contributed resulted in tools that could be used in future creative acts is also significant, especially in light of Vasari's earlier description of Alberti's abortive attempts to carve porphyry. A comparison of the two processes is instructive. For Alberti to carve the hard stone, the blood of a goat had to be shed and the artist had to toil continuously for a small result that eventually damaged the stone, causing it to lose its spirit. The knowledge applied in this case evidently had not future potential. Unlike the goat's blood, which had to be replenished over and over again to treat the stone, each time it was to be carved, Cosimo's *acqua di tanta virtù* physically changed the strength of a metal and created a tool that could then be used to carve the stone with detail. This tool could, presumably, be used repeatedly. Whereas the knowledge that Alberti brought to the process ultimately drained the stone of its life, the knowledge that the duke brought to the process in the form of the *acqua di tanta virtù* was generative. It both revived the ancient art of porphyry carving and gave it a future.

In this important anecdote Vasari effectively tied that future to the person of the duke. Even though the physical task of tempering the metal could be repeated without

[90] Ibid., 120.

bloodshed, the intellectual and practical knowledge required to make the *acqua di tanta virtù* is accessibly only through the duke. This makes Cosimo the symbolic center of any porphyry carving pursuit and, by extension, essential for the continuation of Florentine art.

It needs to be said, however, that the duke did not actually carve the hard stone. According to Vasari, it was the sculptor Francesco Tadda that executed a carving based on Vasari's design[91] Tadda was an important part of Cosimo's circle of artists and, from 1563 on, received a stipend from the duke.[92] His work was so highly regarded that Cosimo sent examples of it to Michelangelo, the emperor and important church cardinals.[93] In Vasari's narrative, Tadda is given the role of a craftsman alone. Along with Vasari, who provided the design, and the duke, whose knowledge made the fountain possible, Tadda was part of a symbiotic relationship that resulted in the carving of porphyry. Within this group, Cosimo holds the prominent position since, according to Vasari, it was the duke who discovered the *acqua di tanta virtù*, an accomplishment that required both intellectual and artisanal knowledge.

In Vasari's account of the tempering of metal for carving the porphyry the duke's actions take on a ritual significance, of the sort that Michael Cole describes in his work on Cellini. As Cole explains; "Sometimes, artistry itself could assume something like a ritual significance; making an object in the right way could be a question of devotion and of proper form."[94] In Vasari's narrative, Cosimo, by tapping his *virtù*, is able to restart a stalled progression, allowing the creation of art to flourish. This act, furthermore, linked

[91] In fact, some accounts, including in Cellini's *Vita*, claim that Tadda was responsible for tempering the tools that allowed porphyry to be carved. Butters, 150.
[92] Ibid., 153.
[93] Ibid., 154.
[94] Cole, 14.

Florence to antiquity. Cosimo, as the ruler of the city-state, displays the same intellectual capabilities as the ancients. As they had done, so he too discovers the correct method to carve the stone. Here one must recall the artistry that the duke utilizes—his own *virtù*. Vasari depicts Cosimo as a craftsman who works to prompt the artistic production and liveliness of the city of Florence as a *benedetto padre*. The material the duke works with is his own *virtù*, from his body. If the tempered chisel was the tangible product of the process described by Vasari in the porphyry anecdote, the duke's *virtù* had other, equally significant, offspring in the artists assembled under the duke's auspices in the Accademia del Disegno.

As a writer and an artist, Vasari constructs his own *virtù* like that of Cosimo in the porphyry-carving story. Vasari was responsible for both the invention and the execution of numerous artworks and two volumes of the *Lives*. For these works, Vasari would have created the design (using intellectual capabilities) and executed it with his artisanal skills. In this way, his *virtù*, like Cosimo's has two different components. Throughout the *Lives*, while constructing a metaphor for Cosimo's *virtù*, Vasari's also worked to formulate his own.

As mentioned earlier, in the sixteenth century, in part through Vasari's own writings, *virtù* comes to describe excellence particularly in art.[95] This use of the term can be seen in Vasari's second dedication in the second edition of *the Lives*, which begins "Eccellenti e carissimi artefici miei" (my excellent and beloved craftsmen).[96] In this dedication, which occurs after the dedication to Duke Cosimo, Vasari describes the amount of work that he has devoted to the writing of his *Lives,* declaring that the history

[95] Boase, 4.
[96] Vasari-Milanesi, 1: 9.

of art should be written to remind men of the great virtue, *tanta virtù*, of artists.[97] According to Vasari artists, like their patron Cosimo I, have generative *virtù.* Here Vasari endows artists with the humanistic and classical connotations of the term. He does not however, place the artists on precisely the same ground as the duke. While the artists he remembers in the Lives physically make objects: architecture, sculptures, and paintings, the duke is not literally depicted as a maker, even if his knowledge suggests that he has somehow partaken of the physical processes necessary to gain such knowledge. Cosimo is distinguished as the "ultimate craftsman," the one who makes the accomplishments of other craftsmen possible.[98]

Those other craftsmen include Vasari's prospective readers whom he addresses as, "Eccellenti e carissimi artefici miei".[99] One of his goals in writing the technical prefaces was to provide the reader with the knowledge that an artisan gained through practice. As Patricia Rubin notes, "Just as he made artists more like gentlemen, he made the *amatori* more like artists as they read. The *parte teorica* was a mediator between two types of training and experience. With it he apprenticed his reader to the arts and gave them material grounds for respecting those arts."[100] Furthermore, Vasari carefully intertwines the creative *virtù* of the artist/craftsman with that of the duke and the noble readers.

Still, the duke's craftsmanship is different from that constructed by Vasari for the readers of the *Lives*. Unlike the passive reader who collects the information needed to

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[97] Ibid., 10.
[98] In this instance, the Christological associations of porphyry should be considered. Since Cosimo has the knowledge to control this stone, which was associated with Christ's blood, is Vasari also crafting his patron as a Christ figure for the city of Florence?
[99] Vasari-Milanesi, 1: 9.
[100] Rubin, 406.

understand the narrative, and the creative process of the artist, the duke is a craftsman proper, albeit not of a particular artwork. He is the artisan of the new Florentine state, its history and its art production. In this regard, Vasari's account undoubtedly reflectes the vision of Cosimo himself, who fused his own political vision with artistic enterprises, as he crafted Florentine excellence. Vasari's was not the only pen engaged in this enterprise. In 1546, Cosimo commissioned Benedetto Varchi to rewrite the history of Florence before the duke's reign.[101]

Following Varchi's pattern of rewriting Florentine history to emphasize Medici patronage, in the second edition of the *Lives* Vasari rewrote key moments of the artists' lives to emphasize the importance of the Medici family for his history of art. For instance, he modified his discussion of Masaccio's frescoes for Santa Maria del Carmine in order to suggest a connection between those paintings and Cosimo il Vecchio. In this later version of Masaccio's "Life", Vasari has Masaccio travel back to Florence from Rome after hearing that Cosimo il Vecchio had returned from exile. After his return to Florence, Masaccio created his Carmine frescoes. Vasari gives Cosimo il Vecchio indirect credit for these paintings (though he was not the patron) claiming that it was the return of Cosimo to Florence that convinced Masaccio to return to the city.[102] In this version of the story the frescoes that secured the artist's fame are connected to the fortune of the Medici and specifically to the ancestral father figure, Cosimo il Vecchio. Similar episodes proliferate the second edition of the *Lives*, establishing Duke Cosimo in a lineage of *virtù*—spreading patrons.

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[101] Ibid., 200.
[102] Ibid.

Clearly Vasari and Cosimo worked together to refashion the image of Florence. The artist sought to ennoble his profession while the duke, as Henk Th. Van Veen writes, worked to, "refashion Florentine republican memory in terms of ducal display."[103] For this refashioning Cosimo utilized the skill of many artists although none were given as privileged a position as Vasari. Cosimo Bartoli wrote to Vasari from Venice in 1569, a year after the second edition of the *Lives* was published in full, pointing to Vasari's fortune with such a patron.

> Dio ci ha dato il Duca Cosimo per conservatione et aumentatione et exaltatione di Fiorenza et li ha dato poi voi altri, che come sue braccia et mani, possiate metter ad esecutione gli honoratissimi, comodissimi et lodevolissimi concetti di Sua Altezza. Godete felici dunque di un tanto Padron. Esercitatevi lietissimamente a honorar' et Sua Altezza et voi stessi et a far vera la voca che Fiorenza non solo sia la piu bella citta di Italia, ma che vadia ogni hora vincendo se stessa di bellezza.[104]
>
> (God has given us Duke Cosimo, for the preservation, increase and edification of Florence and He has given you [i.e., Vasari and Borghini] who, as though you were his arms and hands, are capable of carrying out the honorable, extremely appropriate and very praiseworthy *concetti* of His Highness. Rejoice therefore in such a Patron. Do enthusiastically your best to honor His Highness and yourselves and to let what is said become reality, that namely Florence is not only

[103] Ibid., 203. See also Henk Th. Van Veen, *Cosimo I de' Medici and His Self-Representation in Florentine Art and Culture*, trans., Andrew P. McCormick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 6, who points out that both Borghini and Vasari attest to the fact that Cosimo determined the program for the decoration of the *Sala Grande* and *Sala Ducale*. This shows that while relying on Vasari's artistic ability and Borghini's creative inventions, Cosimo was in control of crafting the program for his ducal seat and the artistic program of Florence at large.

[104] Cosimo Bartoli to Vasari, May 28, 1569, quoted in Henk Th. Van Veen, 191.

the most beautiful city in Italy but that she will further outdo herself still every hour in beauty.)[105]

Bartoli describes Vasari and Borghini as the arms and hands of their patron Cosimo as they craft the city of Florence into the duke's vision. Vasari envisioned just such a relationship in the porphyry-carving story. In Vasari's narrative, the duke is the head and Vasari and Tadda act as the body, enabling artistic generation within the city.[106] However, not all patron-client relationships at the time were as fertile as that Vasari enjoyed and imagined for himself with Cosimo.

In the *Vita* that he claims to have dictated on his deathbed, Cellini records patronage relationships that contrast significantly with those envisioned and evidently enjoyed by Vasari. While Cellini boasts of close relationships with his patrons, including Duke Cosimo, those relationships are anything but stable. His *Vita* tells the story of an artist who was constantly forced to travel to new cities for new patrons. Throughout his interactions with his patrons, Cellini accomplishes individual feats of artistic greatness. The artist claims to only care that he has increased the acclaim of his family and not for the monetary rewards.[107]

Like Vasari, Cellini was concerned (even obsessed) with establishing his own *virtù*. Throughout his *Vita*, Cellini claims to have been extolled as a virtuous and honest

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[105] Ibid., 7.
[106] Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 202.
[107] Cellini writes that when he was creating a jewel setting for Madonna Porzia, he attempted to leave without payment—as his only want was to please his patron—but that Porzia insisted he take a handsome reward. Cellini, 122-23. In another instance, Cellini claims to have made a medallion for some unnamed gentlemen who praised it greatly. Cellini, again, refused payment for his work but was later rewarded by the patron. Cellini, 155-156.

man by various noblemen, cardinals and popes.[108] This praise usually comes after Cellini has finished an object for his patron, no matter what the object be it a coin die or a golden chalice.[109] However, as Cole explains, the stakes are significantly raised, "at the moment of Cellini's transformation from medal maker to monumental sculptor."[110] At this point the evidence of Cellini's *virtù* became tied to his control of liquids and specifically his ability to pour molten bronze. Cole notes in this regard that "casting is [for Cellini], as it was with Michelangelo before him, a scene of *virtù* confronting *fortuna*, this time with the artist triumphant."[111]

Unlike Vasari's *virtù* or that of the duke, which precisely accomplishes its task, in the carving of porphyry, the creation of art, and generation of a city-state, Cellini's *virtù* manifests itself in potentially explosive situations. The primary illustration of Cellini's various brushes with disaster occurs in his account of the casting of the statue of Perseus for Cosimo I. Determined to create his *Perseus* with a single pour, Cellini averts his first near-disaster, when his apprentices almost allow the metal in the furnaces to clot.[112] The sculptor has to rush in and re-liquefy the molten metal. Appealing to the writings on the living properties of metal by Cellini's friend, the alchemist Antonio Allegretti, Cole agues that we should understand Cellini's re-liquefying of clotted bronze as something more akin to reviving the dead, allowing the material to "show its hot and lively

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[108] One such instance, Cellini writes, occurred when the artist admitted to have stolen some gold from Pope Clement VII during the Sack of Rome, 1527. In Cellini's narrative, the Pope not only forgives the artist but exclaims that Cellini, like his father, is a virtuous man. Cellini, 191.
[109] Cellini created coin dies for the mint in Rome under Clement VII as well as golden chalice, which does not survive to the present day.
[110] Cole, 39.
[111] Ibid., 48.
[112] Cellini, 572.

virtue."[113] It is this saving of the "lively virtue" of the metal, and the single pour of the statue, that Cellini provides as evidence of his virtue.

As opposed to Cellini's narrative, in which the artist must work alone to salvage the molten metal, the porphyry carved by a single artist in Vasari's anecdote loses its spirit. This comparison highlights the different definition of *virtù* that the two artists develop through their writings. For Vasari, it is only through the collaboration of three characters—the duke, Vasari, and Tadda—that the porphyry could be successfully carved without ruining the stone. What becomes obvious from the story of the bronze pour is that Cellini's *virtù* is unlike that of Vasari and Cosimo, which is subject to cooperation. In narrating the story of the creation of *Perseus*, Cellini writes that he left the pour to his founders and laborers, and went to bed only to be awakened a few hours later by an assistant who tells him that the pour was failing.[114] At this point Cellini recounts how, during the near disaster, he undertook the pour and, of course, accomplished it perfectly, all on his own.[115] While Vasari emphasizes the cooperative relationship between the duke and the artists, Cellini advertises his own *virtù*, claiming to have accomplished a difficult physical task without the assistance of others.

Cellini has neither a strong relationship with his patron nor a socially acceptable goal into which to channel his creative forces. Even when working for Cosimo on the

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[113] "…material dura e densa,/ Che tiene in sèrinchiuso il vivo spirito/ Ch'a le create cose infonde, e dona/ Egli solo la vita, il moto e 'l senso/ Dove mostrar le forze sue non puote/ Se da pronta virtù vivace e calda/ Fuor non e tratto ond'impedito giace" (a hard and dense material holding within it that living spirit which infuses all created things and which alone gives them life, motion and sense. It cannot show its forces until its hot and lively virtue is quickly freed from where it lies, encumbered). Antonio Allegretti, *De la trasmutatione de metallica*, ed. Mino Gabriele (Rome: Mediterranee, 1981), 52. English translation from Cole, 51.

[114] Cellini, 572.

[115] Ibid. As Michael Cole observes, Agnolo Bronzino describes the relationship of Cellini to his finished statue as a repetition of Jupiter and Danaë's act. Cole questions, "How literally is Bronzino imagining Cellini's repetition … [a]re we, then, directed to think specifically about Cellini's heated filling of the body with his own golden metal?" Cole, 58.

Perseus, Cellini's stubbornness and individuality threatens to destroy his art. Cellini almost lost control during the defining moment, the pouring of the bronze. Had the creation of the statue gone awry, the danger was not only the loss of material but a physical explosion. Vasari writes in his "De sculptura" of the dangers of improper bronze pours, which could result in injury or death to the master.[116] Cellini's *virtù*, which is explicitly connected to blood, fire and explosions, is only contained briefly in the creation of the *Perseus* for Cosimo. Although Cosimo commissioned other works from the sculptor, such as bronze relief panels for the pulpit of the Florence cathedral, Cellini's commissions were revoked when he was arrested in 1557 for sodomy.[117] The artist is unable to create a lasting relationship with a patron. Cellini's arrest as a sodomist can be seen as metaphorically connected to the artist's failing in this regard. In Florentine Renaissance law, sodomy was defined as any type of sexual activity that overturned the purpose of sex, procreation.[118] By focusing on his art solely for the propagation of his own *virtù*, Cellini did not act in socially productive manner. His art, unlike that of Cosimo, Vasari, and Tadda, could not be generative of a general Florentine excellence.

Cosimo's participates in the creation of a new way to carve porphyry in order that he could place a fountain in the courtyard of the Palazzo Vecchio. The same year, Cosimo also planned another fountain for the south end of the *Salone dei Cinquecento* in the same palace.[119] This fountain, commissioned from Bartolomeo Ammannati, mirrors some of the imagery designed for the duke's wedding sixteen years prior and displays a

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[116] Vasari, 158-59.
[117] Cole, 5.
[118] Margaret A. Gallucci, *Benvenuto Cellini: Sexuality, Masculinity, and Artistic Identity in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 24.
[119] Detlef Heikamp, "Bartolomeo Ammannati's Marble Fountain for the Sala Grande of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence," in Fons Sapientiae Renaissance Garden *Fountains*, ed. Elisabeth B. MacDougall (Washington D.C.: Stinehour Press, 1978), 117.

similar conception of Cosimo's *virtù*.[120] The *Salone dei Cinquecento* fountain compared the hoped for fruitful marriage of Cosimo and Eleonora to the union between the duke and his city-state.[121] This metaphor, like the porphyry carving anecdote, focuses on the generative potential of Cosimo. The figural statues of the fountain—Juno, Firenze and the Arno—showed the duke's dominion over his entire domain: air, earth and water.[122] This fountain was never completed and the pieces were later dispersed in the Boboli Gardens.[123] These generative symbols display an important concept of Cosimo's reign: all future potential had to be established first with the Duke. The expansion and success of the city-state was compared to the relationship between the duke and his wife, which was particularly fertile, as the couple had eleven children. Cosimo relied on art to symbolize the future potential of Florence and his own central role in its continuation.

This celebration of the pivotal role of Duke Cosimo is central to Vasari's narrative as well. In the first edition of the *Lives*, Vasari, by writing the history of art as a completed progression, effectively erased the future potential of Florentine art. In order to restart this narrative, and promote the continuing superiority of Florentine art, Vasari utilized Duke Cosimo to generate a new era for the creation of art. Vasari locates the potential to restart this progression within an anecdote concerning porphyry carving and describes it not as an individual feat of the Duke's *virtù* but rather as a collaborative process. In order for the stone to be carved, the patron, designer and craftsman had to work together. This relationship is both socially acceptable and generative, not only of a

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[120] Traces of the *invenzioni* for the pageants can be seen n the paintings for the ceiling of the Salone dei Cinquecento in the Palazzo Ducale. Gáldy, *Cosimo I de'Medici as Collector*, 17. For more on the wedding of Cosimo and Eleonora see Rousseau, 416-457. For more on Ammannati's fountain see Detlef Heikamp, 115-176.
[121] Gáldy, 17.
[122] Ibid., 18.
[123] Heikamp, 117.

completed sculpture but also, symbolically, of the new Florentine city-state. Within the *Lives*, Vasari constructs the duke as the "ultimate craftsman," whose *virtù* is both intellectual and artisan based. With this powerful *virtù*, Cosimo both shapes artistic production—through personal patronage and sponsorship of the Accademia del Disegno—and crafts a new Medicean history and culture for Florence. According to Vasari, using the duke's knowledge Vasari and Tadda were able to carve porphyry, which had not been easily manipulated since antiquity. This collaboration was unlike Cellini, whose obsession with individual *virtù* led only to disaster. By designing a definition of *virtù*, within the *Lives*, which relied on the Duke having craft knowledge, Vasari connected his own *virtù* more closely with his patron thus raising his own status, as well as that of all Florentine artists who worked after him.

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