



Massimo Firpo
Pontormo's Frescos in San Lorenzo
 Heresy, Politics and Culture
 in the Florence of Cosimo I
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Pontormo's Frescos in San Lorenzo

Heresy, Politics and Culture in the Florence of Cosimo I

In the choir of the Basilica of San Lorenzo, a truly sacred temple of the Medici dynasty, Pontormo painted a grandiose cycle of frescos between 1545 and 1556, which were then unfortunately destroyed in the mid-18th century. Far earlier, Giorgio Vasari issued a severe judgment on them that lasted into the modern day. His was a dismissal motivated formally by artistic reasons, but it concealed other, more insidious, ideological and religious motivations.

On the basis of drawings, copies, paintings and literary sources, this study reconstructs the design and arrangement of the frescoes, revealing them to have been inspired by a contemporary heterodox text, one that was included in the *Index* in 1549.

From a dense web of Florentine religious, cultural and political life and its shifts in the middle decades of the century, the political motivations underlying Vasari's commitment to transforming the doctrinal heresy from which those grandiose paintings had drawn inspiration into an artistic heresy emerge. It was a commitment that, after the conclusion of the Council of Trent, risked reflecting upon the new Counter-Reformist structure of Medici power.

Massimo Firpo, a member of the Accademia dei Lincei, has taught Modern History at the Universities of Cagliari and Turin and finally at the Scuola Normale in Pisa. His research has focused above all on religious life in the 16th century, with a particular emphasis on heterodox and radical movements.

CONTENTS

- Preface
- Preface to the English Edition
- 1. The Frescos: Pontormo and the Choir of San Lorenzo
 - 1. The Medici basilica
 - 2. The destruction of the choir and the condemnation of the ancients
 - 3. The literary sources
 - 4. The frescos: structure, drawings, copies
 - 5. Pontormo and Michelangelo: the doubts of the moderns
- 2. Biblical Stories and Heresy
 - 1. Models and innovations
 - 2. Interpretations compared
 - 3. Juan de Valdés' catechism
- 3. The Text and the Images
 - 1. A history of salvation
 - 2. The Church
 - 3. The resurrection of the elect and the absence of Hell
 - 4. "Hidden treasures"
 - 5. Vasari and Pontormo
- 4. Pontormo "Has Cancered the Godliness of that Church": Baccio Bandinelli and the Choir of Santa Maria del Fiore
 - 1. The ducal commission
 - 2. The work on the choir
 - 3. The religious message
 - 4. Bandinelli and Pontormo
- 5. The Florentine Academy: Cultural Conflicts and Religious Ferment
 - 1. Pierfrancesco Riccio, ducal major-domo
 - 2. The Florentine Academy
 - 3. "True and living faith": Lasca, Bartoli, Gelli
 - 4. "Jesus Christ, who has freed us of all spiritual and temporal servitude"
 - 5. Pontormo and Bronzino
- 6. The Man of Letters: Benedetto Varchi
 - 1. The "Sermon at the Cross"
- 2. Academic lessons and spiritual sonnets: the "good Valdesio"
- 3. "Advance with the light of faith and seek no further"
- 4. The return to Florence
- 5. Academic conflicts and the commission of San Lorenzo
- 7. The Prince: Cosimo de' Medici Duke of Florence
 - 1. The ducal succession and the new principedom
 - 2. Pontormo and the Medici
 - 3. Cosimo I and Paul III
 - 4. The Council of Trent
 - 5. The Duchess Eleonora: "things of God" and "black gambling"
- 8. A Changing World: Cosimo I Grand Duke of Tuscany
 - 1. Savonarola and Luther
 - 2. Heresy and inquisition in Florence
 - 3. The trials of 1551-1552: Bartolomeo Panciatichi and Ludovico Domenichi
 - 4. "Punish the rebels of Jesus Christ with the rod and grease them with honey"
 - 5. From Julius III to Pius IV
 - 6. The grand-ducal crown
 - 7. Bronzino at San Lorenzo
- 9. Conclusion: The Meaning of the Images
 - 1. Valdesianism and the Italian Reformation: the question of sacred images
 - 2. Pedagogy and identity
- Bibliography
- Index of names