

Acknowledgements

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I. Introduction

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio was a major Italian painter during the Baroque period who is known for his revolutionary methods of painting. Caravaggio proclaimed that he only painted after life and this was maintained by the writers of his time. Art historians have upheld the seventeenth century biographers' belief, which viewed Caravaggio as a radical artist who painted strictly from life and focused on the realistic nature of his paintings. Antiquity contributed greatly to Baroque art, however, I argue that Caravaggio studied not only the antique, but also Renaissance art. Caravaggio appears to have consulted antiquity for the poses of his models rather than solely painting from life. This study focuses on examining the various artistic sources he utilized and how he transformed them. By examining his sources, I seek to correct the notion that Caravaggio only constructed figures from nature.

II. Background

Preceding the Baroque, the Renaissance characterizes a transformative period for European countries that affected their ideologies and art production. Originating in Italy during the mid-fifteenth century, the Renaissance initiated a renewal or "rebirth" of artists' interest in Greek and Roman antiquity. Soon after, this invigorated interest in classical sculpture quickly spread throughout Europe and characterized the artistic sphere until the start of the seventeenth century. While the Italians for many years dominated the artistic scene, Northern regions, such as Venice, Germany, the Netherlands, and France also participated. The Renaissance prompted the variation of artistic style on a geographical basis, and these styles became classified as the North (Northern Countries) and the South (Italy). The Northern artists concentrated on depicting elaborate details, portraying highly emotional expressions, and representing the human body naturally (Naturalism). Alternatively, Italian artists focused on representing a three-dimensional space by using perspective techniques,

expressing the volume of figures through light and shadow, and producing an ideal nude body by conforming to a system of proportions and measurements.

The commonly applied date for the beginning of the Baroque period is 1600. Caravaggio, whose artistic formation occurred during the 1580s and 1590s, was at the forefront of the creation of the Baroque. He participated in this new style by heightening the drama of his subject matter, breaking the Renaissance rules of perspective, and using deep shadows and bright light.

III. Biography

In 1571, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio was born near Milan to Fermo Merisi and Lucia Aratori.¹ As a child, Michelangelo grew up in a small town called Caravaggio, where his father served as steward to Francesco I Sforza, the Marchese of Caravaggio. Although Caravaggio did not enjoy a wealthy or extravagant upbringing as a child, a commission receipt that bears his signature and lists that he owned books reveals that he probably attended grammar school.² According to Giovanni Pietro Bellori, one of Caravaggio's seventeenth-century biographers, Caravaggio's preliminary interest in painting began as a boy. "Bellori recounted that the boy, when helping his father with a building job in Milan, made glue for some fresco painters and decided to join them in order to study painting."³ Caravaggio later pursued art professionally at the age of thirteen when he traveled to Milan to complete an apprenticeship with the Italian painter Simone Peterzano from 1584-1587. Evidenced by a surviving contract generated between Battista Merisi (Caravaggio's older brother) and Simone Peterzano, "The notarial document stipulated four years' service in Peterzano's home and shop together with payment by Caravaggio of 24 gold *scudi*."⁴ Under his master's direction, Caravaggio learned the fundamentals of oil and fresco painting, which were the popular methods of

¹ Catherine R. Puglisi, *Caravaggio* (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), 15.

² Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 18.

³ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 21.

⁴ Walter Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), xxiii.

painting practiced during the Baroque. Unfortunately, no paintings or documentation of the projects Caravaggio completed with Peterzano during his apprenticeship have survived. Although Peterzano focused his apprentice's training on Lombard traditions, which favored naturalism and simplicity, Caravaggio probably encountered the antique through copies of marble sculptures that traveled to Milan.⁵

Thirty years before Caravaggio's birth, an artist named Francesco Primaticcio aided with the transfer of the antique statues to regions outside of Rome, such as Milan. In 1540, the King of France, Francois I, desired to possess his own collection of antique statues for his Fountainbleau Palace.⁶ Therefore, Francois I sent Primaticcio, his court artist, to Rome to sketch antiquities and negotiate the purchase of marble sculptures. While in Rome, however, Primaticcio obtained precious molds of famous antique statues from the city and delivered them back to France. Though plaster casting was not a new invention during the sixteenth century, copies produced from plaster molds were highly inaccessible to many due to their high price. Primaticcio's unique casting techniques used an ancient plaster-making practice, and he copied more antique sculptures than his predecessors. As a result of Primaticcio's devotion, a variety of copies became increasingly available to the public. By the end of his service to Francois I in 1547, Primaticcio obtained twelve plaster molds of famous statues from Rome and from these molds produced ten bronze reproductions.⁷ Famous antique statues he had cast included *Sphinxes*, *Satyrs*, *Cleopatra*, *Apollo*, *Laocoön*, *Venus*, *Commodus as Hercules*, and the *Tiber*. The two molds that did not yield bronze copies were portions of

⁵ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 24.

⁶ Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture, 1500-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 1-2.

⁷ Kelley Helmstutler Di Dio, "Leone Leoni's Collection in the Casa degli Omenoni, Milan: The Inventory of 1609," *The Burlington Magazine* vol. 145, no. 1205 (Aug., 2003): 573.

Trajan's Column and the statue of *Marcus Aurelius* on a horse. Additionally, during a later visit to Rome, Primaticcio also had molds taken from the *Nile*, *Mercury*, and *Antinous*.⁸

Primaticcio's casting techniques in France, improved the accessibility of antiquities, which eventually allowed for copies of ancient statues to travel to Milan. After King Francois I acquired numerous bronze copies for Fountainbleau, his collection inspired other elites to desire to own antique copies, such as Mary the Queen of Hungary. Leone Leoni, who was Mary's sculptor, managed to acquire Primaticcio's molds in the years after King Francois I's death in 1547.⁹ With Primaticcio's molds, Leoni desired to cast copies of ancient statues for the Queen's Italian palace in Binche (south of Brussels.) When Leoni brought back Primaticcio's molds to Milan, he also offered to make copies of the antique for Ferrante Gonzaga, the governor of Milan. While no clear evidence exists as to whether or not Leoni carried out his plans for Mary or Gonzaga, he did cast copies of the antique for his own private collection at his Milan estate.¹⁰ Giorgio Vasari, who was an Italian painter and wrote biographies of Italian artists, recognized Leoni's collection in his writing and described Leoni's private estate as follows:

To show his spirit and natural skill, Leone has at great cost built a house in the territory of Moroni, full of fancies and probably unique in all Milan. [. . .] The principal door leads through a passage into a court containing the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius in the middle on four columns, a cast of the one on the Capitol. [. . .] In addition to that horse (as has been stated elsewhere), there are, in that beautiful and most commodious house, plaster casts of as many carved and cast sculptures, ancient and modern, as he could obtain.¹¹

With Pope Pius V's permission, Leoni also produced copies from the ancient Roman statues and contemporary sculptures in the papal collection. Upon Leoni's death, several copies from his sculpture collection were relocated to Cardinal Borromeo's art academy in Milan.¹² Therefore, due to

⁸ Haskell, *Taste and the Antique*, 6.

⁹ Di Dio, "Leone Leoni's Collection," 573.

¹⁰ Di Dio, "Leone Leoni's Collection," 573.

¹¹ Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' piu eccellenti pittori, scultori, ed architetti*, ed. G. Milanesi, in Kelley Helmstutler Di Dio, "Leone Leoni's Collection in the Casa degli Omenoni, Milan: The Inventory of 1609," *The Burlington Magazine* vol. 145, no. 1205 (Aug., 2003): 573.

¹² Di Dio, "Leone Leoni's Collection," 573.

Leoni's efforts to secure Primaticcio's molds and his significant collection of bronze copies, Caravaggio most likely saw numerous antique statues in Milan before he relocated to Rome.

In late 1592 or 1593, Caravaggio traveled to Rome after tiring of work in Milan. Newly discovered evidence, however, suggests that Caravaggio may not have left Milan of his own free will, but may have been forced to leave after killing someone.¹³ In Rome, Caravaggio flourished and rose as a prominent artist. Rome was not only an artistic center for contemporary artists, but also home to many famous antique statues. Caravaggio would have observed numerous well-known antique marble statues, busts, and reliefs housed in the city. Additionally, at the time of his arrival in Rome, Pope Sixtus V supported a variety of urban projects in an effort to revitalize art in the city after the Reformation.¹⁴ Sixtus V's endeavors created a wealth of commissions during the late sixteenth century, which would have also made Caravaggio increasingly aware of contemporary artists' references to the antique in their work. Following Sixtus V's papacy, the induction of Pope Clement VIII in 1592 furthered the prosperity that artists like Caravaggio experienced in Rome at this time. While in Rome during Clement VIII's papacy, Caravaggio developed his reputation as an artist and attained financial stability through public commissions.

During his preliminary years in Rome, Caravaggio moved around frequently between various small jobs in order to secure living arrangements. After completing replicas of religious subject matter for monsignors and paintings for minor artists' workshops, Caravaggio received an opportunity to work in the workshop of the respected Cesari brothers (Giuseppe and Bernardino Cesari).¹⁵ Through Giuseppe Cesari's success, Caravaggio was introduced to a network of artists and was taught popular styles of painting. However, while employed in the Cesari workshop, the Cesari brothers restricted Caravaggio to paint only genre scenes, which included flowers and still-lives. In

¹³ Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 5.

¹⁴ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 44.

¹⁵ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 9-10.

his biography on the artist, Bellori recounted that Caravaggio grew tired of painting flowers and instead desired to paint the figure.¹⁶ After working eight months in the Cesari studio, Caravaggio moved on to pursue his own success. Once leaving the Cesari studio, however, Caravaggio struggled to make a living until an art dealer named Valentio sold his paintings to Cardinal del Monte. The Cardinal later became one of Caravaggio's most supportive and prominent patrons.

Born in 1549, Francesco Maria Bourbon del Monte descended from a noble family, who pushed him from an early age to receive the necessary training to become a member of the ecclesiastical order. In the 1570s Del Monte performed services to Cardinal Ferdinand de' Medici. When Cardinal Ferdinand de' Medici left the Sacred College in 1587 to assume the position as the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Del Monte took his place as Cardinal. In addition to his friendship with the Medicis, Cardinal Del Monte also held a significant role in the papal court, which promoted his regular travel to Florence and Rome. As a result of his close relationship with Ferdinand de' Medici and his high ecclesiastical position, Del Monte enjoyed a prominent status in society that secured him many connections and financial success. Beyond his work as a diplomat, Del Monte valued and supported music, the arts, and the sciences. Del Monte expressed his passion for the arts by commissioning contemporary artists and supporting new artistic developments. Becoming entranced by Caravaggio's work, Del Monte sustained Caravaggio's career by employing him as his personal painter and extending him a place in his palace in 1595.¹⁷

To Caravaggio, Del Monte was not only a supportive patron, but was also a personal friend, who promoted his art and protected him from negative encounters with the law. Although the public regarded Caravaggio as an exceptional artist, his behaviors fell far from the artistic norm. Both temperamental and argumentative, he regularly pursued fights and violated the law. Del Monte's relations in high places, however, helped Caravaggio avoid arrest and tough situations. For

¹⁶ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 51.

¹⁷ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 85-87.

example, Caravaggio enjoyed carrying around his sword openly in the streets of Rome even though the law forbade this act. When officers arrested Caravaggio for publicly displaying his sword, he was able to escape charges by distinguishing himself as Cardinal Del Monte's private painter.¹⁸

Throughout Caravaggio's life, Del Monte played an influential role in shaping Caravaggio's success by helping him secure significant commissions and using his high-ranking influence to prevent his imprisonment. However, Del Monte's close relationships with governing elite not only saved Caravaggio from negative situations, but also appeared to have affected his art.

As a Cardinal in Rome, Del Monte was acquainted with many prelates and professional elites, including the wealthy Genoese banker Vincenzo Giustiniani. Originally from the Aegean island Chios, Vincenzo relocated with his family to Rome in 1566 after the Turks occupied his homeland.¹⁹ While living in Rome, Vincenzo's father, Giuseppe Giustiniani acted as the financier to Vatican. Becoming one of the richest men in Rome due to his profession, Giuseppe supported his family until his death in 1600. Following in his father's footsteps, Vincenzo also became a successful banker. Throughout his life Vincenzo was especially close with his older brother, Benedetto, who became a Cardinal in 1586 and treasurer to the Vatican. Even though the Giustiniani brothers each individually attained financial success, they continued living together in the Palazzo at San Luigi dei Francesi, which had been their family's home since 1590.²⁰

Vincenzo and Benedetto reverently supported the arts, and their wealthy aristocratic status allowed them to amass a substantial collection that contained hundreds of antique sculptures and contemporary paintings. Through Del Monte, the Giustiniani brothers became acquainted with Caravaggio and admired his work when he completed commissions for the Contarelli Chapel in San Luigi dei Francesi from 1599-1602. When the French clergymen of the San Luigi dei Francesi

¹⁸ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 83.

¹⁹ Luigi Salerno, "The Picture Gallery of Vincenzo Giustiniani – 1: Introduction," *The Burlington Magazine* vol. 102, no. 682 (Jan., 1960), 21.

²⁰ Salerno, "The Picture Gallery of Vincenzo Giustiniani – 1: Introduction," 22.

rejected Caravaggio's *Saint Matthew and the Angel* (Fig. 1) due to Saint Matthew's indecorous appearance, Vincenzo bought the painting for his private collection.²¹ Later Vincenzo encountered Caravaggio's work when he served as the advisor for the Cerasi Chapel in the Santa Maria del Popolo.²² From 1600-1602 Caravaggio worked on a major commission for the Cerasi Chapel, which included the paintings the *Conversion of Saint Paul* (Fig. 2) and the *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* (Fig. 3). Having frequently encountered Caravaggio's art from public and private commissions, Vincenzo became a great admirer of his work and eventually one of his most fundamental patrons. Other than the rejected *Saint Matthew and the Angel* painting that he purchased, Vincenzo also commissioned Caravaggio on several occasions. A 1638 inventory published by art historian Luigi Salerno in 1960 lists that Vincenzo owned thirteen paintings by Caravaggio in his private collection; artworks included *Saint Matthew and the Angel*, *Christ in the Garden*, *Christ Crowned with Thorns*, *Saint Augustine*, *Saint Jerome*, *Mary Magdalene*, *Lute-Player*, *Victorious Cupid*, *Doubting Thomas*, *Portrait of a Famous Courtesan*, *Portrait of Cardinal Benedetto Giustiniani*, as well as portraits of Marsilio Sicca and "Farinaccio Criminalista."²³ Furthermore, Vincenzo also became a biographer of Caravaggio's life, documenting the progression of his artistic style.²⁴

Not only did Vincenzo Giustiniani's supportive patronage provide financial support for Caravaggio as an artist, but his substantial antique sculpture collection also seems to have directly influenced Caravaggio's art while he was in Rome. Conveniently, Del Monte's Palazzo Madama, where Caravaggio resided as Del Monte's private painter, was located across the street from Giustiniani's Palazzo at San Luigi dei Francesi.²⁵ Caravaggio's proximity to Giustiniani's residence and their personal relationship may imply that he regularly visited Giustiniani's collection of antique

²¹ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 143.

²² Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 119.

²³ Luigi Salerno, "The Picture Gallery of Vincenzo Giustiniani," *The Burlington Magazine* vol. 102, no. 682 (Jan., 1960), 21-27, 93-104, 135-148, quoted in Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 163.

²⁴ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 83.

²⁵ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 145.

statues, busts, and reliefs while he was completing paintings in Rome. Although art historians like Puglisi, claimed that Caravaggio fervently identified himself as a painter of nature, “that nature alone was his model,” Caravaggio’s connection to Giustiniani and his collection of antiquities reveal that Caravaggio probably also consulted the antique for his compositions.²⁶ Although unknown, the exact dates when Giustiniani acquired these pieces likely coincided with Caravaggio’s time in Rome. In many of Caravaggio’s paintings, his figures’ poses appear to be appropriated from some of the ancient statues that Giustiniani had in his collection. Additionally, Caravaggio’s Roman work bears the strongest resemblance to antique sources, which may be because he had access to Giustiniani’s collection while he resided in Rome. Paintings from his later travels to Naples, Malta, and Sicily also show references to antiquity, but they are not as apparent as in his paintings from Rome. This further emphasizes the idea that Caravaggio evoked antiquity in his Roman paintings because antiquities were readily available in Rome and would have been actively present in his mind as he painted.

Throughout Caravaggio’s artistic career in Rome, he completed an abundance of paintings, including works for private patrons and major commissions for churches that secured his popularity as an artist. During his Roman period, Caravaggio also painted some of his most recognized works, including *Self-Portrait as Bacchus*, *The Musicians*, *Martyrdom of Saint Matthew*, *Saint Matthew and the Angel*, *Calling of Saint Matthew*, *Conversion of Saint Paul*, *Crucifixion of Saint Peter*, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, *Death of the Virgin*, and *The Entombment of Christ*. Although Caravaggio became a highly sought-after artist, his provocative nature never dissipated. On May 28, 1606, a brawl broke out between Caravaggio and Ranuccio Tommasoni over bets on a tennis match that ended in Tommasoni’s death by Caravaggio’s sword.²⁷ While Caravaggio’s connections with elites such as Cardinal Del Monte, Marchese Sforza, and Giustiniani managed to secure his release from previous charges, he did not

²⁶ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 24.

²⁷ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 206.

escape the ramifications of Tommasoni's death. Descending from a prominent family, Tommasoni also acted as the captain of the local militia. Consequently, as a result of his victim's family's high social standing, Caravaggio fled from Rome. However, an important note must be made regarding the onset of the violent encounter between Tommasoni and Caravaggio. Recent scholarly research revealed that Caravaggio did not initiate the fight with Tommasoni as previously believed. Rather, Tommasoni and his friends ambushed Caravaggio when he was walking through the tennis courtyard near the Palazzo Firenze.²⁸ Recognized for his unpredictable actions, Tommasoni as a militia captain sought to protect high-class courtesans' reputations and personal interests. One such courtesan who caught Tommasoni's interests was Fillide Melandroni, whom Caravaggio previously painted. Presumably Tommasoni targeted Caravaggio due to his relationship with Fillide. Accounts from the Modenese ambassador and Giulio Mancini, an Italian art collector and writer, suggested that Caravaggio acted in self-defense to Tommasoni's surprise attack and therefore described Caravaggio as the victim of the fight.²⁹

After his flight from Rome, Caravaggio traveled to Naples, Malta, and Sicily, where he continued to receive requests to complete important public commissions for private patrons and churches. Compared to his earlier work from Rome, his post-Roman paintings feature darker canvases and violent subjects, which may embody his feelings of hopelessness and fear that arose during his plight to seek a papal pardon. In 1610, Cardinal Ferdinando Gonzaga finally arranged for Caravaggio to receive a pardon from the Pope Paul V (originally named Camillo Borghese) for his return to Rome. Eager to finally obtain his long awaited pardon, Caravaggio embarked on a boat from Naples to Rome in July 1610. However, he faced a difficult journey when the captain of the papal guards mistook his identity and arrested him.³⁰ As a result, Caravaggio's was jailed in Paolo, a

²⁸ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 257.

²⁹ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 257.

³⁰ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 366.

small port off the coast, for three days. After securing his release, Caravaggio faced more complications when he found out that the boat with his paintings for Cardinal Scipione Borghese already left port. Determined to acquire his possessions, Caravaggio began his journey from Paolo to Porto Ercole, where the boat presumably traveled. Given the time of year and location, Caravaggio experienced unpleasant circumstances as he traveled in the heat of July through a malaria-infested region. As a result of poor traveling conditions, Caravaggio contracted a fever upon his arrival in Porto Ercole and died on July 18, 1610, most likely from malaria or dysentery.³¹ Although Caravaggio's artistic career was short-lived, he made significant contributions as an artist who developed compositions with strong contrasts between light and dark, depicted highly expressive and emotional responses of figures, and revolutionized the spatial model for compositions that artists established in the Renaissance.

IV. Biographers

As a result of Caravaggio's fame and revolutionary painting techniques, his art attracted a group of biographers in the seventeenth century who wrote about his life and the progression of his painting style. Of his seventeenth-century biographers, Northerner Karel van Mander (1548-1606) and the Italians Giulio Mancini (1558-1630), Giovanni Baglione (1571-1644), and Giovan Pietro Bellori (1615-1696) are recognized most famously. These biographers' writings on Caravaggio are significant for understanding how the notion of Caravaggio as a naturalistic painter developed and why contemporary scholars understand Caravaggio as an artist who painted from life.

Karel van Mander's *Schilderboeck*, which was published in 1604, gives the earliest written account of Caravaggio's life. Though Van Mander's information relied on reports from his friend Floris van Dijck, who was in Rome at the same time as Caravaggio, his biography noted

³¹ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 366.

Caravaggio's popularity and notorious character at the beginning of the seventeenth century.³² Van Mander's biography also documented and recognized Caravaggio's claims that he only painted from nature:

For he is one who cares little for the work of other masters, yet will not praise his own openly. He holds that all works are nothing but bagatelles, child's work or trifles, whatever their subject and by whomever painted, unless they be done and painted after life and that nothing could be good and nothing better than to follow Nature. Whence it is that he will not do a single brushstroke without close study from life which he copies and paints. Surely this is no wrong way to achieve a good end. For to paint after drawings, even though they done after life, is in no wise as reliable as facing life and to follow Nature will all her different colors... It was this Caravaggio who, first among all Italians, diverted his studies from the old, traditional manners and toward the candid representation of nature from life. Therefore he was determined never to make a stroke except from life, and toward that end he placed before himself in his room in real life whatever he wished to depict until he had imitated it in his work to his satisfaction.³³

Van Mander acknowledged that Caravaggio painted his subjects from models and asserted that he openly rejected referring to other artists' work in favor of painting from life.

Giulio Mancini, who was a physician to Pope Urban VII in the 1620s, also briefly wrote about Caravaggio's life. Between 1617 and 1621 Mancini compiled a "Treatise on Painting" and attempted to record the paintings located in Roman churches.³⁴ Although he did not personally know Caravaggio, Mancini's friend Monsignor Melchiorre Crescenzi knew Caravaggio and supposedly had his portrait painted by him.³⁵ Mancini most certainly relied on Crescenzi to compile information for his short report on Caravaggio's early life. Although Mancini did not write about Caravaggio as a naturalistic painter, his writings are still significant for establishing Caravaggio's artistic progression.

Another biographer who documented Caravaggio's life and art was the Italian artist Giovanni Baglione, whose *Lives of the Painters* was published in 1642, though sections of this book on

³² Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, 229.

³³ Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, 260-264.

³⁴ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 7.

³⁵ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 7.

Caravaggio were probably written earlier. Friedlaender asserts that, “Since Baglione was a painter working in Rome at the same time as Caravaggio (like Caravaggio, Baglione worked for members of the Giustiniani family) he was in a position to have complete, firsthand information about the Roman artistic community to which Caravaggio belonged.”³⁶ Though Baglione and Caravaggio did not have the best relationship and viewed each other as rivals, Baglione’s biography provides a factual and serious account of Caravaggio’s art and endeavors. Baglione’s writings on Caravaggio, however, are limited in that they only documented Caravaggio’s artistic career in Rome. Despite Baglione’s focus on artists working in Rome, like Van Mander, he also recognized Caravaggio as a naturalistic painter. At the end of Caravaggio’s biography he wrote, “If Michelangelo Amerigi had not died so soon he would have done a great deal for art through his great ability to paint from nature.”³⁷ This statement further asserts Caravaggio’s seventeenth-century biographers’ belief that he painted after life.

Giovanni Pietro Bellori wrote about Caravaggio after the artist’s death and published his *Life* in 1672. Bellori’s biography presents similar information to Van Mander, Baglione, and Mancini’s biographies, but expanded to include information about Caravaggio’s post-Roman years. Hibbard recognizes that Bellori’s biography, however, “embodies a judicious assessment of the artist [Caravaggio], who is seen and criticized from the point of view of a learned seventeenth-century classicist whose ideas had been tempered by a long friendship with Poussin.”³⁸ Although Bellori took a critical approach in his biography, he also narrated that Caravaggio painted from models and that he outright refused to paint after ancient marbles and Renaissance masters. In his *Life*, Bellori wrote,

Demetrius, the ancient sculptor, is said to have been so eager to render the likeness of things that he cared more for imitating them than for their beauty. We have seen that the same is true of Michelangelo Merisi: he recognized no other master than the model and did not select the best forms of nature but emulated art—astonishingly enough—without art...He

³⁶ Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, 229.

³⁷ Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, 236.

³⁸ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 7.

not only ignored the most excellent marbles of the ancients and famous paintings of Raphael, but he despised them, and nature alone became the object of his brush. Thus when the most famous statues of Phidias and Glycon were pointed out to him as models for his painting, he gave no other reply than to extend his hand toward a crowd of men, indicating that nature had provided him sufficiently with teachers.³⁹

This passage presents Bellori, as one of Caravaggio's seventeenth-century biographers, also viewed the artist as a naturalistic painter and upheld the claims that he viewed nature as his model.

Van Mander, Baglione, and Bellori's writings on Caravaggio, which asserted he radically refused to paint from anything but nature, reveal where the notion that Caravaggio was naturalistic painter derived. Although contemporary scholars have upheld this belief, it is important to note that Caravaggio's seventeenth-century biographers may have been biased in their reports. During the seventeenth century the biographers of Caravaggio and other artists favored *maniera*, which was viewed as "a deliberate aesthetic mode aiming to divorce art from reality."⁴⁰ These writers also believed that copying antique works was an essential component of producing pleasing designs.⁴¹ Although Caravaggio appears to have constructed the poses of his models from antiquity, the seventeenth-century biographers were too distracted by his realistic portrayals of subjects, which would have been radical for the time since both writers and the Catholic Church favored a non-realist manner of painting during the Counter-Reformation. Bellori for example, according to Posèq, "believed that artists should imitate the sublime Idea of Beauty embodied in antique sculpture. In Caravaggio he saw an artist who, sadly lacking the necessary classicist training, portrayed only the ugliness and error abounding in empirical reality."⁴² The seventeenth-century biographers' idea of the proper representations of art during the Baroque would explain they focused primarily on recognizing Caravaggio as an artist who painted after nature.

³⁹ Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, 245-6.

⁴⁰ Avigdor W. G. Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique* (London: Avon Books, 1998), 10.

⁴¹ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 10.

⁴² Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 54.

Additionally, even though Caravaggio may have proclaimed that he strictly adhered to nature, he appears to have done otherwise. Caravaggio's biographers also record that Caravaggio rejected the study of antique sculpture in favor of painting from life models, but this may not be completely true. Given Caravaggio's unruly attitude, he may have intentionally sought to assert himself as a radical artist going against popular portrayals in art at the time. This may shed light as to why he is said to have outright rejected antique and Renaissance models in favor of nature. Caravaggio may have proclaimed this statement, which is documented by Van Mander and Bellori in their biographies, to further emphasize himself as distinct from other artists of his time. Furthermore, Caravaggio may have proclaimed an avowed adherence to nature to distinguish himself from his namesake, the Renaissance artist Michelangelo, who created idealized representations of subjects. Despite Caravaggio's claims, he appears to have consulted antiquity for the poses of his models. Therefore, even though Caravaggio's biographers recognized him as a naturalistic painter and recorded that Caravaggio himself declared that he did not consult any sources besides models from life, a closer examination of his paintings demonstrates otherwise.

V. Analysis

To illustrate Caravaggio's employment of the antique, this analysis focuses mainly on examining the paintings he completed during his residence in Rome. This essay largely utilizes the *Galleria Giustiniana* for a vast collection of engravings.⁴³ These engravings document and illustrate the antiquities that Vincenzo Giustiniani possessed. Readers should note that in the absence of physical antiquities, references to the antique sculptures from the Giustiniani collection consult the *Galleria Giustiniana*. Sources examined in this paper include, but are not limited to, Italian Renaissance

⁴³ François Duquesnoy, et al. *Galleria Giustiniana del Marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani* (Rome: publisher not identified, 1631-1637).

paintings and sculptures, Northern Renaissance art, engravings, Roman copies after the antique, and Ancient Greek sculptures, reliefs, and busts.

The Musicians, 1595

After employing Caravaggio as his private painter, Cardinal Del Monte requested that he complete a painting titled *The Musicians* (Fig. 4) for his private collection. As a musician himself, Del Monte commissioned this piece to serve as an illustration of his passion for the arts and dedication to music. As an allegory of music, *The Musicians* illustrates four young boys engaging with various musical instruments and paraphernalia. By structuring the piece as a half-length horizontal painting, Caravaggio created a sensual atmosphere by painting a small and compressed space that delivers an intimate view of the scene. Furthermore, the characters' openmouthed expressions throughout *The Musicians* additionally accentuate the work's sensuality.

At the center of the painting, a handsome and naturalistically depicted young boy is shown in the process of tuning his lute, which he supports on his knee. As this youth stares out of the picture plane with an openmouthed expression, he appears to be more taken with the viewer than the task of preparing his instrument. From his gentle eyes a tear rolls down his cheek. Seeking an explanation for this tear, art historian Howard Hibbard proposes that, "Perhaps the music is meant as an antidote to disappointed love."⁴⁴ Behind him, another boy with dark brown hair appears to be the horn player of the musical troupe. At the right of the composition, his horn, which presumably sits on his lap, pokes out from the background. Mimicking the lute-player's expression in front of him, the horn player bears a similar suggestive appearance and gazes out at the viewer with slightly parted lips. Based on prior presumed self-portraits of Caravaggio, art historians believe that he painted the horn player as a self-portrait.⁴⁵ Although unclear as to why Caravaggio included his self-

⁴⁴ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 33.

⁴⁵ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 91.

portrait within the piece, he may have done so to serve as a reminder of his close friendship with Del Monte.

In the foreground, the third member of the musical triad's partially bare back faces the viewer. Supported on his lap he holds a musical score that he intently studies. Perhaps the violin that sits at his left is his instrument that he abandoned to examine the musical score. The positioning of the violin's handle at a diagonal, which extends beyond the picture plane, may also act as an invitation for the viewer to participate in the musical scene. At the left of the composition, the fourth and final figure of *The Musicians* sits away from the other three boys. Unlike the other youth, this boy does not seem to be a musician, as he bears no musical implements. Instead, this brown haired boy crouches over and intently picks grapes off a stem below him. Possibly the act of plucking grapes references wine and the merriment that this drink brings. Characterized by a bundle of golden arrows at his side and dark wings that sprout from his back, his appearance resembles the mythological god Cupid. Serving as the god who embodies love, a Cupid figure may be included in this musical genre scene to offer an allegorical meaning.⁴⁶ Considering the metaphorical meaning, Puglisi asserts, "The grapes Cupid picks intimate the intoxicating pleasures of music when combined with wine"⁴⁷ Given the popularity of genre scenes of performing musicians in north Italian art, Caravaggio probably knew these precedents and referred to them when constructing his naturalized figures.

When making this piece, Caravaggio may have referenced the traditional north Italian concert paintings that depicted contemporary men and women playing music. These genre scenes illustrated men playing instruments alone or engaging with women in musical activity and sought to portray allegorical meanings. From north Italian concert scenes, Caravaggio seems to have utilized their crowded half-length composition. Musical scenes like Giovanni Cariani's *A Concert* (Fig. 5),

⁴⁶ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 92.

⁴⁷ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 95.

which depicted men gathered together playing musical instruments, may illustrate the type of north Italian concert paintings Caravaggio might have considered for *The Musicians*.⁴⁸ Serving as another possible source for Caravaggio's *Musicians*, Giorgione's *Impassioned Singer* (Fig. 6) represents the Venetian and Lombard tradition of passionate males engaging with the viewer. Caravaggio may have recalled paintings of fervent men like Giorgione's for his lute and horn players' suggestive appearance.⁴⁹

Although *The Musicians* evokes north Italian traditions by its naturalistic representations of the youth, fruit, and musical implements within the piece, various elements of the painting also memorialize antiquity. Throughout the composition, the boys' dress, for example, finds sources in antiquity. Their loose white garments resemble Roman togas from the antique past. Additionally, the musical scene of young boys engaging with musical objects may recall classical scenes of young *putti* and satyrs animatedly playing musical instruments. Caravaggio's inclusion of a Cupid figure also directly recalls the mythological past. Although Caravaggio claimed that he strictly adhered to nature and studied the figure, the boy who resembles Cupid demonstrates otherwise. While Caravaggio may have studied feathers for a naturalistic depiction of the wings, an antique sculpture would have been important for understanding how they sprouted from the body. Additionally, the Cupid's pose in Caravaggio's *Musicians* appears to derive from an antique Eros sculpture owned by Vincenzo Giustiniani. While Caravaggio worked on *The Musicians*, he became acquainted with Giustiniani through Del Monte, and through this connection, may have seen the *Eros with a Bow* (Fig. 7) statue in Giustiniani's private collection. Caravaggio appears to have appropriated Eros's posture for his Cupid in *The Musicians*. Like the Eros statue, Caravaggio's Cupid tilts his head down and extends his arm in a similar fashion. While Caravaggio's Cupid does not hold a bow in his right hand as Eros does, his pose and collected expression appear to derive from Eros. Caravaggio possibly recalled

⁴⁸ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 91-92.

⁴⁹ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 95.

Eros with a Bow to set up the positioning of his model. Caravaggio may have used Giustiniani's Eros to structure his Cupid's stance because the statue would have been the closest representation he had of the mythological god of love. Therefore, while *The Musician* does include naturalistic elements, more lies beneath the surface, for Caravaggio appears to have used antiquity to structure his figures, like the Cupid in this painting.

Portrait of a Courtesan, 1598-1599

Caravaggio painted this portrait during his early years in Rome when he first began to paint religious subject matter. Scholars assert that the woman depicted in the *Portrait of the Courtesan* (Fig. 8) is Fillide Melandroni, a renowned courtesan who posed for Caravaggio on many occasions.⁵⁰ Represented in a half-length composition, Fillide appears to silently pose, but also to be distracted by something that lies outside of the picture frame. To her chest she daintily holds a bunch of flowers. Art historians have long debated the flowers' meaning. Originally thought to be orange blossom and bergamot, which served as a symbol of marriage, Hibbard later suggested that the flowers illustrated are jasmine, which are traditionally associated with beauty and sensuality.⁵¹ Jasmine seems more convincing based on the way she delicately holds the flowers to her bosom and looks off to the right into the distance, possibly at a suitor. Some scholars believe that Fillide is the same model Caravaggio used for the *Conversion of Mary Magdalene* (Fig. 9).⁵² However, unlike her possible appearance as the Magdalene, Fillide wears a contemporary detailed dress, pearl-like earrings, a bracelet, and an elegant up-kept hairstyle. Considering these details, *Portrait of the Courtesan* can be identified as a portrait rather than a depiction of a religious subject.

⁵⁰ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 131.

⁵¹ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 285.

⁵² Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 131.

Although the courtesan's outward appearance resembles Fillide, her pose appears to derive from antiquity. While Caravaggio employed models to illustrate his devoted adherence to nature and rejection of the ideal, he may still have looked at the antique statues to structure the stances of his models. In the case of the *Portrait of a Courtesan*, Fillide's left hand, which tenderly clasps an arrangement of flowers to her chest, recalls the pose of two antique sculptures of robed women that Giustiniani possessed in his collection. *Portrait of a Courtesan*, like Giustiniani's *Standing Robed Woman* (Plate 76, Fig. 10), illustrates a standing woman who raises her left hand to her bosom and holds her robe in her hand. With her head slightly tilted, she diverts her gaze off into the distance. Caravaggio seems to have utilized the *Standing Robed Woman's* left arm that she raises to her bosom and her diverted gaze for his portrait of Fillide. Though Fillide's hand appears slightly lower than the statue's, Caravaggio still may have been looking at this type of pose in antiquity and slightly modified it for his painting. Another statue that Caravaggio may have seen in Giustiniani's collection and referenced for Fillide's pose is the *Robed Woman Standing in Profile* (Plate 145, Fig. 11). Depicted in an engraving from a side view, the woman is shown clasping something, possibly her robes, to her chest. Resembling the *Standing Robed Woman's* posture, the *Robed Woman Standing in Profile* (Plate 145) also features a bent arm that raises a delicately held item in her left hand to her chest. Consequently, the positioning of Fillide's arm also appears to mimic the placement of the *Robbed Woman Standing in Profile's* arm. Therefore, further inspection indicates that Caravaggio seems to have had a particular interest in the left bent elbow and hand that delicately holds an object to the chest, which is seen in these antique robed women. Caravaggio appears to have adapted this motif from antiquity for Fillide's carriage.

Judith Beheading Holofernes, 1599

During his early years in Rome, Caravaggio painted *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (Fig. 12) for the banker Ottavio Costa.⁵³ Although Caravaggio completed several paintings for Costa, including *Mary Magdalene* and *Saint John the Baptist*, *Judith Beheading Holofernes* marks a fundamental shift in Caravaggio's artistic career, a time when he began to create dramatic contrasts between lights and darks in his paintings and to represent more violent subject matter. For the subject's story, Caravaggio consulted the Book of Judith from the Apocrypha. The Book of Judith narrates how Judith, a widowed Jewish woman, saved her people from the Assyrians who threatened to invade Israel. After she gained the trust of the Assyrian general Holofernes, Judith privately visited him in his tent one night and fed him alcohol until he became drunk. Once Holofernes lost his senses, Judith seduced him and deceptively approached his bed, but at the last moment she grabbed his sword and decapitated him. After eliminating the Assyrian threat, she secured Holofernes' head in a bag to present to her people as a symbol of their safety.

For Caravaggio's representation of the story, he chose to depict the bold moment of Judith decapitating Holofernes. Constructing the scene as a three-figure composition, Caravaggio was concerned with documenting how Judith executed the beheading, as well as portraying her and Holofernes' emotional response to the event. Setting the picture up in a half-length format, Caravaggio located the scene in the dark interior of the Assyrian general's tent, which is alluded to by the folded red curtain at the top of the composition and Holofernes' bed. Portraying the violent and tense moment of the beheading, Caravaggio depicted the main characters of the story, Judith and Holofernes, as well as Judith's old, haggard maid. Standing behind Holofernes, a youthful Judith is seen with one hand grabbing Holofernes' hair to restrain him, while the other tightly clasps his sword and slices through his flesh. Arching her back away from his body, Judith looks on

⁵³ Sergio Benedetti, "Classical and Religious Influences in Caravaggio's Painting," in *Saints and Sinners: Caravaggio and the Baroque Image*, ed. Franco Mormando (Chestnut Hill: McMullen Museum of Art, 1999), 218.

Holofernes below with a determined expression, which is accentuated by her creased brow. Despite her determined manner, Judith also looks upon the Assyrian general with uncertainty and distress. Lying below her on his bed, Holofernes' muscular body is depicted in a contorted position. Supporting his body with his right hand, his left hand clenches in a fist as he experiences the excruciating pain of the sword piercing his flesh. As his head slumps back, his mouth opens wide to let out what viewers can imagine is a bloodcurdling scream, while looking upon the face of his attacker. Adding to the horrific nature of the scene, from Holofernes' neck a stream of blood spurts out onto the pillow and sheets below as the sword slices through his flesh. Behind Judith, her old maid looks upon Holofernes with disgust, as she stands ready with a sack in her hands. Accentuating her sagging and wrinkled features to emphasize her old age, Caravaggio may have included this aged figure to highlight Judith's youthful and beautiful appearance. Hibbard proposes that, "the contrast between the old hag and the nubile Judith may show Caravaggio's awareness of a late Renaissance extension of the idea of *contrapposto*, which pointed up contrasts of position or, as here, of age and condition."⁵⁴ Though Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* does not accurately capture the physical strength required to perform such an act, he gives a faithful representation of the conflict and emotional strain Judith experienced. Later artists like Artemisia Gentileschi, who depicted a naturalistic scene (Fig. 13), sought to correct Caravaggio's painting by depicting a maid that helps Judith subdue Holofernes.

Judith was a popular subject depicted by Italian artists during the Renaissance, and therefore had many precedents when Caravaggio was painting his Judith; however, antique sources stand as more credible for the emotive responses of Caravaggio's characters. From antiquity, Holofernes' pose and expression appear to be modeled after the Hellenistic sculpture *Laocoön and His Sons* (Fig. 14). On January 14, 1506, the Laocoön sculpture was found on the Esquiline in the vineyard of Felix

⁵⁴ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 67.

de Fredise.⁵⁵ Pope Julius II, who was an admirer of antiquities, sent antiquarian Giuliano da Sangallo and Michelangelo to examine the statue. Presumed to be the same statue praised by the Roman art historian Pliny the Elder, Pope Julius had the Laocoön sculpture brought to the Vatican and installed in the Belvedere Court Garden, where it still remains on display today.⁵⁶ Recognized as a monumental antique find during the sixteenth century, the statue became recognized by artists and affected Italian Renaissance art.

Laocoön and His Sons portrays a tragic scene from the Trojan War that Virgil described in the *Aeneid*. Laocoön, who was a Trojan priest to Neptune, warned the Trojans that the wooden horse left on the beach by the Greeks may be a trap. He advised his fellow Trojans not to receive the gift inside their gates. Seeking to expose the ruse, Laocoön even beat the Trojan Horse with his spear, but to his dismay the Trojans still did not heed his warning. Angered by Laocoön's attempt to expose the Greek's ruse, Athena, who supported the Greeks in war, sent two sea serpents to kill Laocoön and his two sons for Laocoön's interference. The sculpture shows the moment when Laocoön and his sons, Antiphantes and Thymbaerus, are being attacked by the serpents. Highlighting the agony of the moment, Laocoön's body tenses as he struggles in his attempt to expel the serpents that entangle his body. His bulging forehead, thrown back head, and open mouth from which he cries out in anguish, all accentuate his panicked and painful expression. *Laocoön and His Sons* became a popular sculpture that artists flocked to see in Rome. Copied by Italian Renaissance artists in their sketches, the *Laocoön* also became known to artists living outside of Rome. For Renaissance artists and later artists, the *Laocoön's* highly expressive response to pain became the prototype for representations of agony and horrific human suffering in their art.

⁵⁵ Phyllis Pray Bober and Ruth Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists & Antique Sculpture: A Handbook of Sources*, Second Edition (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2010), 165.

⁵⁶Bober and Rubinstein: *Renaissance Artists & Antique Sculpture*, 165-166.

Caravaggio certainly was familiar with the *Laocoön and His Sons*, given the sculpture's reputation, and knew of it as a prototype of human agony. Therefore, Laocoön's highly emotive response to suffering makes the antique sculpture a likely and fitting source for Caravaggio's Holofernes', who also experiences tremendous pain. From the antique statue, Caravaggio appears to have appropriated Laocoön's muscular figure for Holofernes, whose body is also depicted with budging muscles and veins on his biceps. Additionally, Holofernes' right arm that supports his body imitates Laocoön's left arm that grabs hold of the snake. Holofernes' expression, however, appears as the most convincing evidence in the argument that Caravaggio referenced the *Laocoön* as his model. Caravaggio appears to have adapted Laocoön's contorted expression and agony he experiences by utilizing the raised eyebrows and protruding forehead for Holofernes (Fig. 15). Caravaggio, however, heightened the anguish of Laocoön's expression in his figure by depicting Holofernes' mouth further opened and adding more folds to his creased forehead (Fig. 16). Therefore, like artists before him, Caravaggio seems to have recognized the *Laocoön* as a prototype for human agony and adapted the great pain the sculpture portrays for Holofernes' emotive response.

Holofernes is not the only figure in Caravaggio's painting that resembles characters from antiquity. Judith also appears to draw affinities to a *Hunting Diana* sculpture (Fig. 17) from Giustiniani's collection.⁵⁷ Caravaggio's Judith appears to recall Diana's bold manner and heroic stance. Like Diana, who stabilizes her feet and outstretches her hands to presumably pull back the string of her bow, Judith also stands confidently and extends her arms to perform the beheading. Furthermore, Judith's erect nipples that are visible through her thin tunic resemble Diana's nude torso (Fig. 18).⁵⁸ Art historian Sergio Benedetti notes that an X-ray analysis showed that Caravaggio

⁵⁷ Benedetti, "Classical and Religious Influences," 218.

⁵⁸ Benedetti, "Classical and Religious Influences," 218.

initially painted Judith with naked breasts and added the white blouse to cover them later.⁵⁹ The fact that Caravaggio originally painted his Judith nude reveals the likelihood that the bare-breasted Diana was his model. Presumably Caravaggio altered Judith's appearance to appease his patron Costa, who may have disapproved of Judith's erotic depiction.

Additionally, Judith's old maid may also have an antique source. According to Hibbard, art historian Richard Spear indicated that the old woman was probably based on a Roman Republican portrait bust.⁶⁰ If Caravaggio did consult a Roman portrait bust for the old maid's features, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's *Marble Bust of a Man* (Fig. 19) serves as a possible example of the type of Roman Republican busts that he may have observed in Rome. Here the old woman's sagging and wrinkled face appears to mimic busts from the Roman Republic that also possessed aged skin and worn lines (Fig. 20). Despite the naturalistic depiction of the old woman and Holofernes – her wrinkles and sagging skin and his noticeable veins and creased forehead – Caravaggio appears to have consulted antiquity for the figures' emotional responses and appearance.

Saint Matthew and the Angel, 1602 (destroyed 1945)

In 1602, Caravaggio received his first major public commission to complete three large-scale paintings for the Contarelli Chapel in San Luigi dei Francesi. Established as a church to serve the French community that resided in Rome, the French Cardinal Matteu Cointrel, known as Matteo Contarelli in Italian, was designated to oversee the church's decoration. Before Caravaggio was commissioned to complete the painting for the Contarelli Chapel, the beautification of the chapel had an extensive and complicated history. In 1565, Contarelli initially contracted the Italian painter Girolamo Muziano to complete paintings in the Contarelli Chapel that would feature Contarelli's patron saint, Matthew. However, after Contarelli died in 1585 and Muziano also passed away in 1592

⁵⁹ Benedetti, "Classical and Religious Influences," 218.

⁶⁰ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 66-67.

without starting the commission, Contarelli's executors, the Crescenzi family, took over the project. The Crescenzi then hired the respected Giuseppe Cesari to complete the walls and vault of the chapel, but after Cesari only completed three small frescoes on the vault in 1599, the frustrated clergy assigned Fabbrica di San Pietro to take responsibility of the chapel. According to Baglione, after Fabbrica assumed responsibility for the chapel's decoration, Del Monte persuaded him to give the commission to Caravaggio, who would paint the altarpiece and laterals in the Contarelli Chapel. Caravaggio's contract stipulated that he would complete three paintings for the chapel, the *Calling of Saint Matthew* (Fig. 21) and the *Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* (Fig. 22) for two side walls and *Saint Matthew and the Angel* above the altar.⁶¹

After completing the *Calling of Saint Matthew* and the *Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* in 1600, Caravaggio did not begin work on *Saint Matthew and the Angel* (Fig. 1) until 1602 due to prior engagements to paint the *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* and the *Conversion of Saint Paul* for the Cerasi Chapel at Santa Maria del Popolo. Designated in the contract that the final painting in the Contarelli Chapel would hang over the altar, *Saint Matthew and Angel* approximately measures to nine and a half feet tall and six feet wide. As a subject, the *Saint Matthew and the Angel* illustrates Saint Matthew writing the Holy Gospel with an angel's guidance. Although customary guidelines from the Catholic Church called for moralistic representations of saints, Caravaggio placed prominence on representing the communication within the piece, rather than illustrating a decorous Saint Matthew. To do this Caravaggio set up the scene in an enclosed space to emphasize the physical touch of the figures by their close proximity to one another. Placing the figures in an unidentifiable location, Caravaggio also darkened the background to draw the attention to the angel and Saint Matthew, whom he brightened with a strong light.

⁶¹ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 144-145.

Adopting a two-figured composition, Caravaggio seated the old Saint Matthew in an elegant chair with the Gospel resting on his bare left knee. Underneath the book, Caravaggio depicted Matthew with burly legs that are positioned in a crossed manner and matched them with strong muscular arms that the rolled up sleeves of his tunic reveal. Illustrating Matthew with one foot steadied on the floor, Caravaggio arranged the other hovering above the ground in a pointing upward position, which exposed a layer of dirt underneath. In a hunched over position that draws the viewer's attention to his bald head, Matthew is seen strenuously working to write out the text of the Gospel in Hebrew. Further emphasizing Matthew's perplexed expression, Caravaggio painted him with a furrowed brow and wide-eyed look. To Matthew's right, a young angel appears as the second figure in the composition. Materializing before him to help the saint in his struggle, the angel guides his hand to inscribe the text. Contrary to the old decrepit Matthew, the angel is youthful and handsome and thus seems to lower Matthew's appearance and prestige. Clothed in a sheer garment that clings to his body, the angel also seems to bring a sensual element to the painting. The angel's partially parted lips and closeness to Matthew as he reaches over the book to touch Matthew's hand, further illustrate the suggestive tone of this figure. Overall, Caravaggio's indecorous representation of the saint with dirty feet and his emphasis on the physical communication between the saint and angel became regarded as an unconventional depiction of *Saint Matthew and the Angel* in the seventeenth century.

During the Counter-Reformation, The Council of Trent held artists who completed paintings of saints in a church to a high standard and required that artists make the painting spiritually believable to viewers. Puglisi describes the origins of saint paintings in churches and the proper portrayal of saints in religious imagery as follows:

As declared at the last session of the Council of Trent in 1563, religious images taught the faithful how to invoke saintly intercession, and so honor and veneration were due to them, especially in ecclesiastical paintings of saints. The Tridentine decree reiterated the role of the saints as reminders of God's grace as virtuous exemplars of pious conduct and devotion to

God. The Council therefore charged bishops to ensure that representations of saints in the churches, as well as those of God and the Virgin Mary, should not be lewd or unbecoming, irreverent or disrespectful.⁶²

While Caravaggio completed commissions in Rome, Pope Clement VIII enforced the Tridentine decree by censoring ecclesiastical art to defend decorum and protect the depictions of saints and biblical stories.⁶³ Acknowledging the proper standards of representing a saint during the early seventeenth century, the clergymen of the church became displeased by Caravaggio's undignified depiction of Matthew. To the clerics, Matthew's poor appearance and dim expression, as well as the over sensuality of the angel, failed to present a respectful portrayal of the saint writing the Gospel. Horrified by Caravaggio's depiction of Saint Matthew with dirty feet, the clergy asserted that the muddy feet associated the saint with the status of a lowly peasant. Additionally the painting's proposed location over the altar would have projected Matthew's dirty foot, which the clergymen described as "unbecoming," out at the viewer.⁶⁴

The clergy also voiced concerns over Caravaggio's seeming portrayal of the saint as illiterate. Recalling the literary tradition for the angel's role in the writing of the Gospel, Hibbard relays that, "Since Matthew's Gospel was thought to be the first, and the source of the others, it had to have been divinely inspired – hence the dictating angel – and it had to have been written in Hebrew, God's language."⁶⁵ Though this tradition accounts for the customary image of an angel overseeing Matthew's writing of the Gospel, the San Luigi clergy believed that Caravaggio overemphasized the dictating nature of the angel. They asserted that Caravaggio's portrayal of Saint Matthew with an ignorant expression made the saint appear too dimwitted to write the text without the angel's help.⁶⁶ Moreover, the angel's active touching of Matthew's hand to help him inscribe the text seemed to

⁶² Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 180.

⁶³ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 45.

⁶⁴ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 183.

⁶⁵ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 139.

⁶⁶ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 183.

further represent the saint's illiterate nature. Finally, the suggestiveness of the angel, which was highlighted by his closeness to the saint and scant clothing, also made the clergymen uncomfortable with the composition. Displeased with the indecorous representation of Saint Matthew, the clergy rejected Caravaggio's preliminary version of *Saint Matthew and the Angel* and required that he paint a new rendition that would depict the saint in a more dignified manner. Following the clergymen's rejection, Caravaggio produced a respectful depiction of the saint (Fig. 23) and Vincenzo Giustiniani acquired the first *Saint Matthew and the Angel* painting for his private collection.

Though the clergy voiced concerns over Matthew's bare feet and lowly appearance, Caravaggio appears to have acquired these details from artistic precedents, many of which came from paintings of Saint Matthew. For Matthew's cross-legged pose and bare feet, Caravaggio may have been inspired by his old master, Simone Peterzano's *Inspiration of Saint Matthew* fresco (Fig. 24).⁶⁷ Caravaggio's *Saint Matthew and the Angel* appears to have adopted Peterzano's composition, which depicts the Saint Matthew sitting with the angel hovering close by to his right-hand side. From Peterzano's fresco Caravaggio seems to have utilized the evangelist's crossed legs, bare feet, and raised foot pose for his own Saint Matthew. Appearing even more closely related, engravings after Raphael's *Jupiter and Cupid* (Fig. 25) and *Inspiration of Saint Matthew* (Fig. 26) seem to be even more convincing prototypes.⁶⁸ From Cherubini Alberti's reverse engraving of Raphael's *Jupiter and Cupid*, Caravaggio appears to have adopted the closeness of Jupiter and Cupid and the physical act of touching for his Saint Matthew and the angel. Caravaggio also may have used Jupiter's cross-legged positioning that reveals the bottom of his bare foot for his painting. Additionally, Raphael's rendition of Saint Matthew writing the Gospel (now known by Agostino Veneziano's engraving from 1518 after Raphael) depicted Saint Matthew seated with burly legs and with one leg crossed

⁶⁷ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 142.

⁶⁸ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 142-143.

over the other. Caravaggio may have appropriated Matthew's bare muscular leg that thrusts toward the picture plane from Raphael's *Inspiration of Saint Matthew*.

Previous artists also depicted Saint Matthew as a man of low social status in their paintings. Gerolamo Romanino's *Saint Matthew and the Angel* (Fig. 27) portrays Matthew in a simple brown tunic and with uncovered feet. Caravaggio may have been familiar with this modest representation of the saint when he painted Matthew's rugged appearance.⁶⁹ Even though artists previously portrayed Saint Matthew with bare feet and as a rustic type, clergymen of the San Luigi dei Franchesci rejected Caravaggio's *Saint Matthew and the Angel* for his unorthodox portrayal of Matthew's dimwitted expression.

Although the clergymen rejected Caravaggio's painting for providing an overly naturalistic and un-saintly depiction of the Saint Matthew, Caravaggio may have consulted an antique bust for Matthew's portrayal besides Renaissance and Lombard sources. Upon further examination, many of Matthew's facial features look to resemble those belonging to the famous philosopher Socrates.⁷⁰ The inventory of Giustiniani's collection reveals that Giustiniani owned a bust of *Socrates* (Fig. 28), which would have been easily accessible to Caravaggio, who resided in Rome while painting *Saint Matthew and the Angel*. Caravaggio's close relationship with Vincenzo Giustiniani further adds to the likelihood that he may have consulted the *Socrates* bust for Matthew's features. Represented in an engraving, which presents a side view of the antique bust, *Socrates*' hair and facial features exhibit similarities with Caravaggio's *Saint Matthew with an Angel*. Like *Socrates*, Matthew sports a burly beard and dons a receding hairline that reveals his bald head (Fig. 29). *Socrates*' forehead is also characterized by some folds and slightly raised eyebrows that illustrate him in thoughtful contemplation. Drawing inspiration from *Socrates*' features, Caravaggio seems to have appropriated and modified his expression for Matthew by exaggerating the saint's scrunched forehead. Instead of

⁶⁹ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 183.

⁷⁰ Benedetti, "Classical and Religious Influences," 218.

using a peasant as his model, Caravaggio may have based Matthew's features on *Socrates* to elevate the evangelist's prestige as a Gospel writer. Rather than associate Matthew with an illiterate peasant, Caravaggio may have sought for viewers to associate the saint with the intellectual Greek philosopher Socrates by utilizing this antique source.

The Entombment of Christ, 1602-1604

Caravaggio painted *The Entombment of Christ* (Fig. 30) for the altar of the Vittrice Chapel in Santa Maria Church in Vallicella (also known as the Chiesa Nuova). Pietro Vittrice, a keeper of Pope Gregory XIII's wardrobe, founded the Vittrice Chapel. After Vittrice died in 1602, his nephew Girolamo Vittrice became responsible for decorating the chapel and commissioned Caravaggio to complete the *Entombment*.⁷¹ For Caravaggio, receiving a commission for the Vittrice Chapel was very honorable and ushered him into a prestigious community of artists. Well-known contemporary artists, such as Scipione Pulzone, Giuseppe Cesari, Girolamo Muziano, Federico Barocci, and Cristoforo Roncalli, completed altarpieces at the Chiesa Nuova. The Chiesa Nuova's dedication to commissioning religious scenes in which the Virgin appears caused Vittrice to select the *Entombment* as the subject of the altarpiece. The story of Christ's burial also aligned with the chapel's devotion to the *Pietà*, which in art depicts a sorrowful Mary holding Christ's dead body after his removal from the Cross.⁷²

Previously scholars believed that Caravaggio's *Entombment* illustrated the carrying of Christ's body to be buried in the tomb, but now art historians assert that the painting actually portrays Nicodemus and John carrying Christ to the Anointing Stone before his burial.⁷³ Whether or not Caravaggio structured the scene to represent the burial or anointing of Christ, the composition

⁷¹ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 171-172.

⁷² Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 171-172.

⁷³ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 172; Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 173.

depicts a highly expressionistic view of the figures mourning the deceased Christ. Setting up the painting as a diagonal composition, Caravaggio staggered the overlapping figures on an imaginary slanting line that begins with the woman in the upper right and gradually descends down to Christ at the left-hand side. Overall Caravaggio was concerned with depicting humans' emotional response to death and therefore emphasized each character's individual reaction to death by illustrating a range of expressions and gestures. At the upper right corner Caravaggio placed the first of the three Marys in the composition. Responding outwardly to Christ's death, she throws up her hands in grief and looks up to the sky. To her left, a second Mary presents a quieter response to death, as she lowers her head to weep into a cloth. Standing over Nicodemus and John, an old Madonna stretches her arms out in disbelief as she gazes upon Christ's dead body with a solemn expression. Below the three women, Nicodemus and John are shown carrying the weight of Christ's lifeless body. Contrary to the women's vivid expressions of mourning, the two men present more of an introverted response to the death of Christ. Stabilizing his weight on the stone below, Nicodemus slightly bends over to grasp Christ's knees with both of his arms. As he holds Christ's legs, Nicodemus turns his head and looks out at the viewer with darkened eyes and a grief-stricken expression. To his left, John the Evangelist supports Christ body with one hand under Christ's armpit and the other at his ribs. As he holds up Christ's body, his fingers draw attention to the open wound on Christ's side. Contrary to Nicodemus, John looks down upon Christ's face in shock as he stands over his body.

The last figure in the composition is the deceased Christ whose horizontal corpse mimics the rigid stone below. Presenting a natural rendition of Christ, Caravaggio accentuated the veins in Christ's limp arm and fleshy nude body that is covered only by a thin white shroud tied around his waist. As his left arm falls to his side and touches the stone below him, his head imitates the lifelessness of his arm and slumps back. Like Saint Matthew's foot that breeches the picture plane in

Saint Matthew and the Angel, Caravaggio implemented a similar spatial device in the *Entombment*, but decorously chooses the corner of the slab to project out at the viewer.

Appearing as a popular subject depicted throughout history, Caravaggio would have seen many prototypes of Christ's burial. Based on the devotion of the Vittrice Chapel to the *Pietà*, Caravaggio most likely referred to Michelangelo's *Pietà* (Fig. 31), which would have been a sculpture he certainly knew.⁷⁴ Like his previous history of responding to Michelangelo's work, Caravaggio's figures in his *Entombment* appear to correct Michelangelo's depiction of the Virgin and Christ. Contrary to Michelangelo's unconventional depiction of the Madonna as young, Caravaggio kept her extended arms and lowered head, but adapted her appearance by portraying his Mary old, as she would have been when Christ died. Puglisi stipulates that in positioning his Christ in a similar pose to Michelangelo's, Caravaggio modified his idealized body in favor of "a broad physique and accentuated the raised veins on the hanging arm and the prominent hipbone."⁷⁵ Although Caravaggio possibly based Saint John's supportive hand under Christ's armpit from Mary's hand in the *Pietà*, Saint John's hand directly touches Christ's skin. In this way, Caravaggio rejected the customary tradition of handling Christ's body with a shroud in an effort to not touch his skin. Additionally, Caravaggio highlighted Christ's imperfections by calling attention to the gash underneath John's fingers. Overall, by utilizing Michelangelo's *Pietà*, Caravaggio sought to depict a more accurate representation of Mary and Christ in accordance with nature. Although Michelangelo's *Pietà* appears to be the most obvious model, Caravaggio's composition also recalls a popular woodcut from the 1530s (Fig. 32).⁷⁶ Like the woodcut, Christ's limp arm and slumped position, as well as the woman's outward gesture of throwing her hands up in grief, relates to

⁷⁴ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 175.

⁷⁵ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 91.

⁷⁶ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 176-177.

Caravaggio's figures in the *Entombment*. While Caravaggio possibly used antiquity to construct the figures of his composition, he was also aware of contemporary precedents for Christ's Entombment.

Though Puglisi asserts that Caravaggio sought to improve Michelangelo's depiction by using "the ultimate model, nature herself," Caravaggio's composition is also found in antique sources.⁷⁷ Most notably, Hibbard asserts that Christ's positioning is found in a number of Roman reliefs that show a dead or wounded protagonist carried from battle, and he acknowledges that all Renaissance artists would have known this motif.⁷⁸ A prime example of one of these Roman reliefs that Caravaggio may have modeled his *Entombment* altarpiece from is the *Death of Meleager* (Fig. 33).⁷⁹ In the relief Meleager is shown being carried off the battlefield by his comrades as women in the upper right corner violently grieve his death, which is accentuated by their outward gestures and expressive features. Possibly inspired by this relief, Caravaggio constructed Christ's body in a similar position to Meleager, whose head tips back and right arm hangs at his side. Additionally, Caravaggio's Mary in the upper right, who raises her hands up to the sky in grief, draws affinities to the expressive gesture of the woman at the right of the relief who stretches her arms above her in a similar manner. Furthermore, Benedetti recognizes the soldier who sulks and raises his hand to his face in the Roman relief as the source for the Mary standing directly behind Nicodemus.⁸⁰ The *Entombment's* inclusion of the highly dramatic responses of the women in the marble relief sustains that Caravaggio observed this type of relief for his composition.

Other antiquities besides *Meleager's Companions Carrying His Body* also depict a fallen soldier carried from battle, providing the pose for Caravaggio's Christ. Though the dramatic female figures are absent, the Capitoline Museum's Fragment of Meleager Sarcophagus (Fig. 34) and Perrier's engraving after a Roman relief *Carrying Meleager's Body*, (Plate 23, Fig. 35) which depict a hero being

⁷⁷ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 175.

⁷⁸ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 175.

⁷⁹ Benedetti, "Classical and Religious Influences," 213.

⁸⁰ Benedetti, "Classical and Religious Influences," 213.

carried from battle, also serve as sources for the *Entombment*. From these antiquities, Caravaggio appears to have appropriated Meleager and the hero's limp pose for his deceased Christ (Plate 23, Fig. 36). Furthermore, Hibbard even notes that Caravaggio's depiction of Christ with a hanging right arm "reproduces a formula for pathos dating back to the reliefs of antiquity."⁸¹

In addition to constructing Christ's corpse from the readily available prototype of a fallen body carried off the battlefield, Caravaggio's Mary who lowers her head to weep (Fig. 37) also appears to be inspired by a recurring motif in antiquity. When Caravaggio resided in Rome, the *Weeping Dacia* (Fig. 38) was a commonly copied Roman relief by contemporary artists. Because the *Weeping Dacia* served as a prototype of a mourning woman, engravers started to copy this relief during the sixteenth century. Caravaggio, therefore, probably knew this subject by engravings even if he did not see the original marble relief (Fig. 39). The relief panel of the *Weeping Dacia* served as a pedestal for a seated statue known as Roma (Fig. 40). According to Haskell, "The female figure of this relief was described by [Ulisse] Aldrovandi as a personification of the province Dacia, and it has generally been called this ever since, although it was sometimes known simply as Province and occasionally identified as Germania."⁸² Aldrovandi was a Bolognese historian who wrote about private antique collections in Rome in his book *Di tutte le statue antiche*. The *Weeping Dacia* relief illustrates a grieving woman who supports her head with her hand against her cheek, while the other remains covered in the folds of her tunic. Caravaggio appears to have used the *Weeping Dacia* as the source of his mourning Mary, who like Dacia, bows her head and raises her hand to her cheek. The *Weeping Dacia* in the Palazzo dei Conservatori courtyard serves as example of the type of marble relief Caravaggio may have observed with this motif (Fig. 38).

⁸¹ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 175.

⁸² Haskell, *Taste and the Antique*, 193.

Additionally, the *Weeping Dacia* figure also became incorporated into various Roman sarcophagi that represented funerary scenes.⁸³ Sarcophagi like *Meleager's Funeral*, which is depicted in an engraving by Perrier (Plate 21, Fig. 41), usually include a grieving woman who resembles the *Weeping Dacia* motif. Therefore, Roman sarcophagi serve as another possible antique source from which Caravaggio may have also appropriated the *Weeping Dacia* for his Mary figure in the *Entombment*. Consequently, despite the naturalistic details that led biographers to believe he painted directly from a model, further analysis reveals that Caravaggio appears to have constructed many of his figures' poses and expressions in his *Entombment* from antique sources, such as reliefs of *Meleager* and the *Weeping Dacia*.

Saint Jerome in Meditation, 1605

During the Renaissance and the Baroque, representations of Saint Jerome became popular in art, and in 1605, Caravaggio also took up the subject and completed several paintings of Saint Jerome for private collectors. In 1605, Scipione Borghese commissioned Caravaggio to complete a painting of Saint Jerome for his private collection.⁸⁴ For Borghese's *Saint Jerome*, Caravaggio illustrated Jerome as an elderly man in his studio actively engaged in translating the Greek and Hebrew Bible into Latin (Fig. 42). Caravaggio also completed several other depictions of Saint Jerome besides the one for Borghese. Dated to 1605, Caravaggio's *Saint Jerome in Meditation* (Fig. 43), which was previously rejected by art historians who attributed the painting to Ribera, is now credited to Caravaggio.⁸⁵ Scholars believe that *Saint Jerome in Meditation*, which is currently located in the Museum of Montserrat, may be the same one Caravaggio painted for Vincenzo Giustiniani. Recent evidence found in a 1638 inventory of Giustiniani's collection documents that he owned a Saint

⁸³ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 66.

⁸⁴ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 238.

⁸⁵ Mina Gregori, "Saint Jerome in Meditation" in *The Age of Caravaggio*, ed. Ellen Shultz (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1985), 300.

Jerome painting by Caravaggio and that the painting was similar in size to the *Saint Jerome in Meditation*.⁸⁶ Given these findings, some art historians propose that this painting of Jerome meditating represents the one owned by Giustiniani.

Overall, Caravaggio's paintings of Jerome identify that he was actively engaged with the pictorial tradition and studied other artists' works for his rendition of the scholarly saint. Traditionally artists portrayed Jerome as a scholar in his study translating the Hebrew and Greek text from the Bible into a Latin version. Puglisi narrates, "Inspired by a vision in which God commanded him to put aside Cicero for Christian texts, Jerome withdrew from society to live the life of an ascetic penitent and to devote himself to biblical study."⁸⁷ During the seventeenth century, however, depictions of Saint Jerome became replaced by a different type, which portrayed him as a penitent hermit hearing an angel trumpeting the Last Judgment from the clouds. Straying from Baroque artists' interpretations of Jerome as a hermit, Caravaggio instead chose to abide by the earlier artistic tradition of Saint Jerome as a scholar for his portrayal.

Caravaggio's *Saint Jerome in Meditation* followed Renaissance precedents by adopting a half-length for the composition, which focused on a partially nude Jerome who sits in a vacant space. Determined on representing a studious portrayal of Jerome, Caravaggio consulted a literary description from *The Golden Legend*, which narrated the saint's "long years of tireless labour on the Scriptures, day and night, until he died at the age of ninety-eight."⁸⁸ Adhering to *The Golden Legend's* narrative, Caravaggio depicted Saint Jerome as an old wrinkled saint with sparse gray hair sitting in contemplation. Rather than depict Jerome's cluttered study filled with worldly possessions, Caravaggio abandoned these contemporary representations of the saint and instead focused on portraying Jerome's intense devotion to biblical scholarship. The *Saint Jerome in Meditation*, however,

⁸⁶ Gregori, "Saint Jerome in Meditation," 298.

⁸⁷ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 239.

⁸⁸ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 242.

does not depict Jerome translating the Bible into Latin, but instead focuses on representing themes such as asceticism and the inevitability of death.⁸⁹ Caravaggio illustrated the theme of death in *Saint Jerome in Meditation* by including a skull on the table in front of Jerome. Appearing as his only companion in the room, the skull functions as a *memento mori* – as a reminder of the inescapability of death and transience of life. Caravaggio depicted Jerome in the process of deep thought and with a slightly hunched-over pose, with one arm bracing the table to support his weight, while his other hand strokes his beard in deliberation. Darkened eyes further accentuate the saint’s introspective nature, as the saint disregards the viewer and looks down at the table. Additionally, Jerome’s forehead wrinkles as he likely ponders his certain death. Acknowledging the skull as a symbol of death in relation to Jerome’s body, the saint’s frail arms, sagging skin of his belly, and balding head depict that even a saint cannot escape the inevitability of death.

By utilizing the skull to allude to Jerome’s imminent death, Caravaggio probably was inspired by the seventeenth century Northern *vanitas* tradition. *Vanitas*, which means, “all things are in death,” became a popular allegorical component of Dutch still-life paintings. *Vanitas* still lifes commonly portray a collection of objects including flowers, skulls, and ephemeral possessions that stand as symbols of death and represent the fleeting pleasures of human life. Additionally, Northern artists began to construct the Saint Jerome subject as a *vanitas* by depicting the scholar sitting at his desk with worldly trappings, which according to Hibbard, “transformed the image into a symbol of vanity.”⁹⁰ Unlike his contemporaries who placed Saint Jerome in outdoor scenes, Caravaggio depicted his Jerome sitting at a desk inside his study like the Northern portrayals of Saint Jerome.⁹¹ Although he simplified the composition by only including the skull as a symbol of death, Caravaggio would have been familiar with the popular *vanitas* genre scenes and may have taken their theme of

⁸⁹ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 194.

⁹⁰ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 194.

⁹¹ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 194.

the inevitability of death for his *Saint Jerome in Meditation*. Caravaggio's placement of Jerome in a shadowed interior also finds precedents in Renaissance art. Moretto's *Saint Jerome* (Fig. 44), which depicts a half-nude elderly Jerome sitting at his desk in a darkened room, serves as a possible Italian Renaissance source.⁹² Caravaggio most likely knew of this common portrayal of the saint from the Renaissance and consulted pictures like Moretto's for his representation of Jerome as an elderly semi-nude man, who is portrayed in an unspecified setting.

While Caravaggio may have looked at contemporary artists' renditions for his *Saint Jerome in Meditation*, an antique statue of a *Seated Philosopher* (Fig. 45) from Giustiniani's collection serves as a more convincing source.⁹³ Appearing to have acquired the *Seated Philosopher's* pose for his Jerome, Caravaggio tilted the saint's head down and raised Jerome's hand to his face to depict him in contemplation. Caravaggio's Jerome, like the philosopher, also extends his left arm out in front of him. Yet Caravaggio also adapted the antique source by repositioning Jerome's hand slightly, so that it rests underneath his chin instead of his cheek. Despite Caravaggio's slight modifications, his composition overwhelmingly resembles the *Seated Philosopher*. Additionally, Jerome's appearance parallels the elderly philosopher's, who is also old, semi-nude, and balding. Caravaggio, however, toned down Jerome's body from the *Seated Philosophers'* robust physique in order to better align the saint with asceticism. Saint Jerome's identity as a scholar also attests to the appropriateness of Caravaggio's selection of an antique sculpture of a philosopher as his model. Caravaggio may have chosen to construct Jerome's posture after the *Seated Philosopher* to further emphasize the saint's dedication to his biblical studies, just as Greek philosophers devoted themselves to rational thinking and reasoning. While Caravaggio probably did use a model to paint Saint Jerome's naturalistic features, given that a man with similar features also appears in his *Saint Matthew and the Angel* (second

⁹² Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 239.

⁹³ Benedetti, "Classical and Religious Influences," 218.

version) and *Sacrifice of Isaac* (Fig. 46), Saint Jerome's affinities with the *Seated Philosopher* suggests that Caravaggio consulted the antique statue for his model's pose in this painting.

Death of the Virgin, 1605-06

In 1601, Caravaggio's esteemed reputation from previous work in the Contarelli and Cerasi chapels secured him a contract to complete another altarpiece for a church in Rome. While Caravaggio was working on paintings of Saint Peter in the Cerasi Chapel, lawyer Laerzio Cherubini commissioned Caravaggio to complete a large altarpiece for his funerary chapel in the newly built Santa Maria della Scala.⁹⁴ Upon the Santa Maria della Scala's completion, the Carmelites, who were the brotherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary, were entrusted with the church's upkeep. For the Carmelite church, Cherubini logically stipulated in the contract that the altarpiece would depict the *Death of the Virgin* (Fig. 47), in order to evoke the Carmelite's devotion to the Virgin and specific fascination with her death.⁹⁵ For the altarpiece, which became the largest altarpiece Caravaggio completed in Rome, he decided to depict a traditional Byzantine representation of the Virgin's death known as the Dormition.⁹⁶ The Dormition considered the course of the Virgin's ascent into heaven over a three-day time period and presented that the Virgin died a natural death. Caravaggio's decision to depict the Dormition, however, was uncommon during the Baroque when the Catholic Church began to recognize the Virgin's death as the Assumption, which depicted a supernatural representation of her death.⁹⁷ Paintings of the Virgin's Assumption illustrated the Virgin rising up into heaven after her death. The Catholic Church wished artists to depict the Virgin's death as such to satisfy the changing theological views that emerged during the Counter-Reformation.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 198.

⁹⁵ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 56-57.

⁹⁶ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 202.

⁹⁷ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 67.

⁹⁸ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 202.

Additionally, Caravaggio consulted the Apocrypha as a religious text for this altarpiece, which declared that the apostles miraculously convened at the Virgin Mary's bedside to witness her death and ascension into heaven. Unlike traditional illustrations of the Virgin's death, however, Caravaggio delivered an unusual portrayal of Holy Mother of Christ that violated traditional standards of decorum.

For the *Death of the Virgin*, Caravaggio illustrated the scene in a high ceilinged room and accentuated the depth of the space by a dramatic red curtain that hung over the Virgin's body and the mourning figures below. The compositional lighting that creates a diagonal on the far wall further emphasizes the expansive interior space and directs the viewer's attention to the Virgin's body. The light source, which seemingly pours in from an unidentifiable window at the left, also highlights the apostles' heads, who gather closest to the Virgin body and express the most grief. Contrarily, the group of apostles at the back appear to be unmoved by the Virgin's death and are cast in shadow as they converse amongst themselves. In the background, a bearded apostle ignores the commotion, as he watches another apostle exit the room under the red curtain hanging from the ceiling. To associate the painting with the barefoot Carmelites, Caravaggio depicted the apostles with bare feet.⁹⁹ At the foreground of the composition the woman in the chair, who appears to be the Mary Magdalene, expresses the deepest physical response to the Virgin's death as she places her head into her lap in grief. At her feet, a washbasin recalls the traditional task of washing the dead, which the Magdalene seemingly abandoned in her misery.

For the overarching subject of the *Death of the Virgin*, Caravaggio represented an unconventional rendering of the Holy Mother. In front of the crowd of apostles, the Virgin's body lies sprawled out on the bed. Contrary to other artists, who depicted Mary as an unflawed Virgin, Caravaggio's Virgin looks like a regular middle-aged woman with little allusion to her holiness.

⁹⁹ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 202.

Adding to the indecorous nature of her representation, Caravaggio illustrated the Virgin with bare feet that hang over the edge of the table, a slumped back head, and sprawled arms, which show that her hands fail to join together in prayer. Additionally, the sheet that is haphazardly thrown over part of her body, further alludes to the careless attention given to her corpse. Caravaggio also took an uncommon approach to this subject by portraying the Virgin already dead. The only allusion to the Virgin's supernatural quality is the barely visible thin halo above her head that fades into the background; besides this feature, the Virgin is hardly distinguishable from the figures around her. In the end, Caravaggio's undignified portrayal of the Virgin caused the Carmelites to reject the painting. Caravaggio's biographers noted the possible causes for rejection by reciting common beliefs about Caravaggio's model. According to Mancini, Caravaggio used a whore as the model for the Virgin. Baglione and Bellori, on the other hand, asserted that he used a deceased, swollen corpse for Mary's depiction.¹⁰⁰ Overall, Caravaggio's undignified rendition of the Virgin disturbed the Carmelites and led them to pass the commission on to Italian painter Carlo Saraceni. Although Caravaggio encountered another rejection after having his *Saint Matthew and the Angel* refused by the clergy at the San Luigi dei Francesi, collectors and artists admired the painting. After the painting's rejection, artist Peter Paul Rubens, who saw the *Death of the Virgin* while he was in Rome, praised the painting and convinced Vincenzo Gonzaga, the Duke of Mantua, to buy this picture for his private collection.¹⁰¹

Even though the clergy of the Santa Maria della Scala did not appreciate Caravaggio's *Death of the Virgin*, contemporary artists admired the naturalistic quality of the painting that depicted a range of individualized reactions to death. Despite the naturalism of the figures' expressions and gestures and the Virgin's realistic body, Caravaggio may have consulted antiquity for the Virgin and her mourners' poses. The Virgin's tranquil position on the bed draws affinities to the *Sleeping Nymph*

¹⁰⁰ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 186.

¹⁰¹ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 204.

(Fig. 48) sculpture owned by Giustiniani. The Virgin resembles the *Sleeping Nymph's* relaxed head that leans predominantly on one side, and she also closes her eyes. Mary's slightly frowning lips and folds of her neck further mimic the nymph's sleep-like manner. While the Virgin's right arm that extends to the edge of bed does not find precedent in the nymph's arm, her left hand that rests on her abdomen recalls the nymph's hand on her stomach. Overall, Mary's slumped body resembles the *Sleeping Nymph*, rather than the weighted and more precarious positioning of a real corpse. Caravaggio's proximity to Giustiniani's private sculpture collection would have also made the *Sleeping Nymph* more available to consult, rather than an actual dead body, especially since Caravaggio did not make any preparatory drawings. Therefore, Caravaggio may have referred to the nymph's sleeping pose for the Virgin to suggest that she died a peaceful death, instead of Baglione's, and later Bellori's, assumption that he used a real corpse as his model.

In comparison to Caravaggio's previous adherence to dramatic emotional gestures and grievous expressions in response to Christ's death in his *Entombment*, he did not represent outward expressions of mourning in the *Death of the Virgin*. Instead, Caravaggio inverted the apostles' anxiety and portrayed their sorrow with discreet gestures. Given Cherubini's legal background, it is not unreasonable to assume that he gave Caravaggio specific guidelines to uphold religious decorum. Posèq even suggests that Cherubini may have instructed Caravaggio to use an appropriate model, such as classical reliefs of funerary subjects to construct the figural gestures in the *Death of the Virgin*.¹⁰² Bartoli's engraving of the antique relief *Roman "Luctus" Ceremony* (Fig. 49) and Perrier's etching after an antique relief of *Meleager's Funeral* (Plate 21, Fig. 21) provide two examples of classical funerary scenes that Caravaggio may have utilized as a visual model. Validating the "*Luctus*" *Ceremony's* popularity and accessibility to Caravaggio, Bellori praised the relief and acknowledged it in

¹⁰² Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 56-62.

his analysis of respected Roman antiquities.¹⁰³ The “*Luctus*” *Ceremony* illustrates a dead woman on a couch, who is surrounded by her mourning family. The pose of the rightmost apostle, who stands over Mary’s head, bears affinities with a figure from the Roman reliefs. This apostle, who possibly resembles Saint John, silently conveys his sorrow by lowering his head and resting his left hand on his cheek as he internally processes the Virgin’s death. In the “*Luctus*” *Ceremony* funerary relief, Saint John’s pose seems to derive from the woman at the left of the composition. From the antique woman, Caravaggio seems to have taken her bent arm, as well as her lowered head that her left hand supports. Saint John bears a similar solemn expression as he also diverts his gaze to floor like the woman in the relief. In *Meleager’s Funeral* (Plate 21, Fig. 21) the woman to the left appears as another example of the grieving figure in antiquity, who lowers her head and supports her cheek with one hand. This woman in *Meleager’s Funeral*, therefore, serves as another example of a figure Caravaggio may have referred to when constructing Saint John’s reaction to the Virgin’s death.

From the “*Luctus*” *Ceremony* Caravaggio may have also appropriated the pose of the weeping mother, who sits in a chair next to her deceased daughter, for his Mary Magdalene. Like the mother, who sits in a chair and grieves her daughter by leaning forward with her hand on her cheek, Caravaggio also situates the mourning Mary Magdalene in a chair next to the Virgin. Unlike the antique prototype, however, Caravaggio heightened Mary Magdalene’s outward emotional response to the Virgin’s passing by having her completely bend forward and rest her head in her lap.

The *Weeping Dacia* Roman relief (Fig. 38) also appears to be used by Caravaggio for the pose of the Mary Magdalene in the *Death of the Virgin*. The *Weeping Dacia* as a figure is portrayed as a seated young woman whose sorrowful expression is accentuated by her head bent forward, left hand supporting her head, and right arm resting close to her body. This relief was a prevalent motif represented in funerary scenes. Because of these scenes’ greater presence, they may have served as

¹⁰³ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 62.

precedents for Caravaggio's Magdalene. Consequently, Caravaggio may have referred to the *Weeping Dacia* motif to construct the poses of his St. John and St. Mary Magdalene in the *Death of the Virgin*. Due to the emotional response of his figures, antique sources like the Roman "Luctus" Ceremony, *Meleager's Funeral*, and the *Weeping Dacia* that portray humans' responses to death serve as convincing sources that Caravaggio may have consulted rather than a model alone.

Saint Mary Magdalene in Ecstasy, 1606

Scholars believe that after facing arrest for the murder of Ranuccio Tommasoni, that Caravaggio painted *Saint Mary Magdalene in Ecstasy* while he was fleeing from Rome.¹⁰⁴ Upon his escape, Caravaggio found shelter with Marzio Colonna, Prince of Palestrina and Zagarolo. Possibly seeking to thank Colonna for his generosity, Caravaggio may have completed this painting of the Magdalene as a gift for Colonna. Although the painting was later lost and was previously identified as a copy, this picture has recently been reattributed to Caravaggio. Art historians question the authenticity of the painting; however, the picture does give an idea of what Caravaggio's painting would have looked like and a representation of the expressive quality of Magdalene's repentance and supernatural visions, even if the painting is a copy.¹⁰⁵

Saint Mary Magdalene in Ecstasy (Fig. 50) depicts Mary Magdalene as a young woman in a state of unrest as she is shown arching her head back and clasping her hands together. Overcome by an invisible force, her face is marked with delirium. As the saint undergoes a supernatural experience, her garments are shown sliding off her shoulders, leaving the left completely bare. Her auburn hair cascades down her shoulders and she rests her weight on her right elbow. Earlier in his career, Caravaggio created another portrait of Magdalene, but in his 1598-1599 painting, he represented the saint's enlightenment (Fig. 9). By portraying the Magdalene with no worldly objects, which he

¹⁰⁴ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 70-71.

¹⁰⁵ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 71.

exemplified by positioning her in a barren room, Caravaggio alluded that he was instead illustrating the saint's life after her conversion experience.¹⁰⁶ During the Counter-Reformation, the believability and spirituality of the painting became important for the depiction of religious imagery. Caravaggio exaggerated the credibility of the Magdalene experiencing an unseen vision by capturing the physical toll the divine encounter had on her body. Caravaggio portrayed this physical and emotional toll by depicting her with an elated expression as she leans back in the chair to support her weight. The Magdalene's parted mouth, slightly opened eyes, raised forehead, and clasped fingers that may represent a praying gesture, all lead to the believability of this painting representing a saint undergoing a spiritual experience.

Made during the same year that Caravaggio completed his *Death of the Virgin* painting, the Magdalene's posture bears similarities to the *Sleeping Nymph* antique sculpture that Giustiniani owned (Fig. 48). Like the *Death of the Virgin*, Caravaggio painted this Magdalene after his exile from Rome; therefore, Caravaggio may have composed this figure from antiquity because of his limited opportunity to acquire a living model. From the *Sleeping Nymph*, Caravaggio appears to have utilized the nymph's slackened torso, which is supported on the rock behind her, for the Magdalene's slumped posture. The Magdalene's right arm that tucks into her side specifically recalls the nymph's reclined pose and the positioning of her arm. Additionally, the Magdalene's flung back head resembles the nymph's reclined head that rests on the rocky bed underneath her. Similarly, the flesh of the Magdalene's neck also creases and folds like the nymph's as her head leans backward. Although the nymph is sleeping, as depicted by her closed eyes and relaxed pose, Caravaggio constructed the Magdalene's facial expression with slight variation. Instead of illustrating her with completely closed eyes, Caravaggio painted the saint's eyelids barely cracked open and depicted her eyes rolling back into her head to express that the vision had a physical impact on her body.

¹⁰⁶ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 246.

Additionally, her lips that pull down at the corners into a partial frown resemble the nymph's similar expression. To relay the ecclesiastical moment, Caravaggio dramatized the Magdalene's expression by parting her lips and depicting her strained forehead. As a result, Caravaggio modified the nymph's expression for the *Saint Mary Magdalene in Ecstasy*, instead of utilizing the nymph's tranquil appearance. Although Caravaggio may have consulted the *Sleeping Nymph* as a source for the Magdalene, he made slight alterations to her face to make the supernatural, as opposed to sleepy, aspect convincing.

Concerning the emotional fervor of the saint, Caravaggio may have derived this motif from another antique source. According to Posèq, artists appropriated postures from mythological scenes on Roman sarcophagi that were often exaggerated, and they even unnaturally distorted the postures for their veristic scenes.¹⁰⁷ Recognized as a popular subject during the Counter-Reformation, the story of Mary Magdalene derived from *The Golden Legend*. From the text two common representations formed. The first depicted the Magdalene enjoying worldly pleasures as a sinner, and after her conversion experience, becoming an active follower of Christ and living a solitary life. The second type depicted the Magdalene with her identifying attributes – the jar with which she anointed Christ, a skull, and loose hair – and portrayed her in dramatic postures that recalled her miraculous visions and repentance. Titian in the Renaissance combined these two depictions of the saint and added a sensual quality to the Magdalene that promoted an erotic Magdalene type.¹⁰⁸ Although Caravaggio commonly depicted lots of his subjects with a sensual allure, he abandoned this when portraying the *Saint Mary Magdalene in Ecstasy*. Caravaggio may have strayed from a sensual representation of the saint to appease Colonna, whose relationship with the Catholic Spanish court and his Cardinal brother demanded that he conform to Tridentine decree for a moralistic depiction

¹⁰⁷ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 69.

¹⁰⁸ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 72.

of saints.¹⁰⁹ Aside from antiquities' strong dramatic expressions, Colonna may have even directly instructed Caravaggio to consult an antique statue for the Magdalene's pose. Colonna's large collection of antiquities and participation in archaeological digs also supports that he may have asked Caravaggio to select a classical statue or relief as a prototype.¹¹⁰ Given Caravaggio's relationship with Giustiniani, he may have selected a relief from his collection to serve as his model. Besides the *Sleeping Nymph* in Giustiniani's collection, the figures in his Roman sarcophagus relief the *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* (Fig. 51) also bear a resemblance to the Magdalene's pose.

The *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* relief depicts the abduction of King Leucippus' daughters, Phoebe and Hilaeira, by the twin brothers Castor and Pollux. The relief emphasizes the panic and helplessness of Leucippus' daughters as they are carried off against their will. The daughters' heads arch backwards as they cry out and their clenched limbs further call attention to their defenselessness. In the chaos of the kidnapping, the daughters' hair cascades behind them and their garments fly partially or completely off their shoulders. Although Caravaggio illustrated a different narrative in *Saint Mary Magdalene in Ecstasy*, he may have drawn from the emotional scene of the *Daughters of Leucippus* to construct the Magdalene's intense posture as she undergoes a mystical experience. Like Leucippus' daughters, the saint's thrown back head and exposed shoulders mimic the daughters' gestures and appearance. From the *Daughters of Leucippus* relief, Caravaggio appears to have acquired the intense bodily expression and emotional response to their abduction. Caravaggio presumably structured his model in the pose of Leucippus' daughters, but he also made some slight alterations. Unlike the Leucippus' daughters, Caravaggio's Magdalene clasps her hands tightly against her chest. Posèq speculates that Caravaggio may have adopted this motif from Renaissance scenes of the Lamentation of Christ, where the Magdalene was portrayed interlinking her fingers and pressing

¹⁰⁹ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 73.

¹¹⁰ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 73.

her palms together.¹¹¹ Overall, the expressiveness of Caravaggio's *Saint Mary Magdalene in Ecstasy* finds inspiration from the emotional motifs and gestural responses of Leucippus' daughters. Caravaggio may have referred to the daughters' dramatic postures in order to construct Magdalene's supernatural visionary encounter with an air of believability. Considering that Caravaggio had no real models to examine a saint undergoing a miraculous vision, antiquities like *The Rape of the Daughters' of Leucippus* provided him with a prototype to represent a powerful emotional response for the Magdalene's experience.

Sleeping Cupid, 1608

After fleeing from Rome and subsequently traveling to Naples, Caravaggio journeyed to the Mediterranean island of Malta on July 12, 1607. Located on the island, the Knights Hospitallers of Saint John inspired Caravaggio's move to the island in his quest to become a knight of this order. Although knighthood was reserved for those of noble descent and prohibited membership to anyone convicted of murder, Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt recognized Caravaggio as an honorary knight and dubbed him a Knight of Obedience under the esteemed Knighthood of Justice. Corresponding with Caravaggio's knighthood aspirations, Wignacourt also relished in the idea of securing a famous artist for his court; the prospect of having a recognized artist like Caravaggio as his painter may have even pushed Wignacourt's conferment of Caravaggio as a knight. Following his receiving the knighthood, Caravaggio went on to complete several paintings for Wignacourt, including a portrait of Wignacourt, the *Beheading of Saint John the Baptist*, and *Saint Jerome* during his stay in Malta. One such painting that Caravaggio may have completed for Wignacourt and that pursued a mythological subject was his *Sleeping Cupid* (Fig. 52).¹¹²

¹¹¹ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 75.

¹¹² Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 277-284.

Somewhat of an unusual subject for Caravaggio's later years due to his primary focus on painting religious imagery, as Puglisi identifies the *Sleeping Cupid* was the last known mythological subject that Caravaggio painted.¹¹³ A letter written in 1609 by Fra Francesco Buonarrotti, a Knight of Malta, confirms that an inscription on the back of the painting states that Caravaggio completed the *Sleeping Cupid* in Malta in 1608.¹¹⁴ According to Puglisi, "Fra Francesco announced to his brother that Dell'Antella had just shipped 'a painting by Michelangelo da Caravaggio, with a sleeping Cupid' from Malta to Florence and mentioned having been shown the painting and a sonnet dedicated to it, adding that he was eager to display the picture in Florence."¹¹⁵ Francesco's excitement and letter seem to solidify that the Cupid is sleeping contrary, to art historians' belief that painting depicts a dead infant. Hibbard asserts that when compared to Caravaggio's *Amor Victorious* (Fig. 53), the *Sleeping Cupid* may mark a sad end to the sexuality and excitement of his previous Cupid.¹¹⁶ Consequently, Posèq asserts, "The *Sleeping Cupid* can be viewed as a *memento mori* [reminder of death], implying not only the artists' renunciation of his former behavior but also his many revivals of the antique themes."¹¹⁷

The *Sleeping Cupid* features a strong *tenebroso* illumination that brings attention to a stark contrast between the dark black background and illuminated flesh of the Cupid. Bearing the typical attributes associated with the pagan god – wings, arrow, and bow – he is portrayed in a reclined, twisted pose as he rests on the feathers of his left wing. Adorning a prominent belly and revealing two gleaming teeth as he dozes off, Caravaggio's *Sleeping Cupid* illustrated an unromantic version of the classical god compared to his contemporaries. Caravaggio possibly had Michelangelo's sixteenth century *Eros* (now lost) in mind when painting his *Sleeping Cupid* and may have painted his veristic

¹¹³ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 294.

¹¹⁴ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 294.

¹¹⁵ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 294.

¹¹⁶ Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 262.

¹¹⁷ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 80.

Cupid to assert that the natural way is better than Michelangelo's ideal representation of the god. Although Caravaggio may have sought to emphasize a naturally rendered Cupid, the theme of the sleeping *putto* (a nude child or cherub) has ancient roots. Originating in the Hellenistic period, the antique statues depicted an idyllic nude Cupid lying asleep on a rocky surface. During the sixteenth century, the sleeping Cupid motif experienced a resurgence in art that many attribute to Michelangelo's expert rendering of a Cupid after a Roman copy that passed as an antique sculpture.¹¹⁸ While Michelangelo's *Eros* disappeared in the seventeenth century, the literature, which described Michelangelo's *Eros* lying asleep with his head resting on one hand, closely related his version to a Hellenistic version that was in the Medici collection.¹¹⁹ Though scholars are uncertain if Caravaggio observed the original sculpture or heard a description of Michelangelo's *Eros*, he probably knew of the sculpture and responded to his namesake's idealistic portrayal when making his painting.

Apart from the antique origin of the sleeping *putto* subject and reference to Michelangelo's *Eros*, Caravaggio may have recalled one of the many Roman copies of the sleeping Cupid that were available to artists since the Renaissance's revival of the subject. In Malta, Caravaggio would not have seen many antiquities; therefore, he probably recollected a Cupid sculpture from Rome. For his painting, Caravaggio used the idea of a sleeping Cupid rather than an ancient model. One such Cupid that stands in as a possible type Caravaggio may have observed is the Uffizi's *Sleeping Cupid*, which serves as a Roman copy of a Hellenistic original (Fig. 54).¹²⁰

Caravaggio may have also attached the subject to a deeper understanding of classical literary tradition and humanistic associations. In the Renaissance, artists associated the sleeping Cupid motif with depictions of Hypnos, the god of sleep, who appeared on Roman tombs to serve as an

¹¹⁸ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 294-296.

¹¹⁹ Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, 296.

¹²⁰ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 80.

evocation of a peaceful death.¹²¹ Though Cupid became associated with sleep because of Hypnos, he also became tied to death because depictions of Hypnos's twin brother, Thanatos, the patron of death, resembled Hypnos. As a result of Hypnos' and Thanatos' representations both as *putti*, viewers confused their imagery and Cupid became a representation of both sleep and death.¹²² This tainted history addresses why Caravaggio's Cupid may appear as sleeping *putto* to some and dead child to others. Caravaggio may have directly recalled connections of Cupid with Thanatos and Hypnos by depicting his *Sleeping Cupid* in a lifeless and dormant pose.

Additionally, Caravaggio may have utilized his *Sleeping Cupid* as an allegory to represent the death of a youth, which he may have supported with the classical narrative of Hynos' kiss that placed the young Endymion into an eternal slumber.¹²³ Tying together humanistic love and death, which are represented by suicidal lovers like Paolo and Francesca from Dante's *Inferno*, the painting appears to stand as a romantic allegory of death.¹²⁴ Commissioned by the Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt, Caravaggio's patron may have commissioned the painting to commemorate a deceased young page that Wignacourt had tender feelings towards. Caravaggio on a deeper level drew more affinities to the antique than meets the eye by recalling classical narratives and combining them with his overall portrayal of the *Sleeping Cupid's* nature. Commenting on this piece, Posèq concludes that "the veristic mode, which was meant to enhance the expressive appeal of the image, was also a part of its meaning. To achieve this aim, Caravaggio combined literary inspiration and the study of ancient sculpture with meticulous observation of Nature [as] the necessary complement of the classical tradition."¹²⁵ In other words, Caravaggio's study of antique sculpture played a role in the creation of his *Sleeping Cupid* as opposed to a particular ancient model. In this case, Caravaggio

¹²¹ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 81.

¹²² Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 81.

¹²³ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 81.

¹²⁴ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 81-82.

¹²⁵ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 83.

presented a highly naturalistic representation of Cupid, but without using antiquity as a physical model.

***David with Goliath's Head* (multiple versions: 1599, 1606, and 1610) and *Salome Receiving the Head of Saint John the Baptist*, 1609-1610**

Throughout history, the biblical story of David's battle with Goliath has captivated and inspired artists to create representations that sought to interpret the subject in a moral, theological, literal, and allegorical light. Caravaggio was also interested in depicting David's victory over Goliath and painted the subject on three separate occasions. The biblical story of David and Goliath recounts the tale of the Israelites' battle with the Philistines. Goliath, who was the Philistines' best warrior, challenged the Israelites to send out their finest soldier to fight him, in order to determine the battle's outcome. Although Saul, the King of the Israelites, was the appropriate opponent to stand up against Goliath, he refused to fight. Hearing of Saul's refusal to fight and Goliath's rejection of God, David, a young shepherd boy, volunteered to face Goliath in battle. Armed with only his staff, slingshot, and faith in God, David stood up against the Giant Goliath, who was equipped with strong armor and a javelin. Praising the Lord before battle, David took down Goliath with one stone from his slingshot that hit Goliath in the forehead. With Goliath knocked out, David took his enemy's sword and cut off the giant's head.

Fixated on the gruesome scene of the story, Caravaggio focused each of his *David* paintings on depicting the moment after David killed and beheaded Goliath, but each with slight variations. In his earliest portrayal *David Beheading Goliath* (1599) that is located in the Prado, the painting illustrates Goliath lying on the ground with David crouching over him and tying up Goliath's severed head (Fig. 55). Adhering to the traditional elements from the story, Caravaggio emphasized the wound on Goliath's forehead and the sword that David used to behead him. Contrary to the 1599 version,

Caravaggio's other paintings represented David in the same pose, but portrayed him with a different response to his victory. Caravaggio's second version of *David with Goliath's Head* (Fig. 56) is located in the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum and is dated to 1606, which was after Caravaggio fled Rome and moved to Naples. Setting up the piece up as a half-length composition, Caravaggio focused the attention to David, who is shown victoriously holding Goliath's severed head. In his right hand, David is seen carrying Goliath's sword behind his shoulders and wearing clothing that identifies him as a shepherd and follower of God. As he looks out into the distance, he triumphantly presents himself and wears a serious expression. The final *David* (Fig. 57) Caravaggio completed is housed in the Borghese Gallery in Rome and is dated 1610. Out of the three *David*'s, this last *David* is the only painting where the patron is known. Bellori wrote that Cardinal Scipione Borghese commissioned Caravaggio to complete this painting of David.¹²⁶ Given that the painting's location was documented as residing at the eponymous Roman gallery since 1613, which Borghese founded, scholars do not doubt Borghese's identity as the patron.¹²⁷ The attitude of the Borghese *David*, however, is fundamentally different from Caravaggio's previous representations of the David and Goliath subject. Unlike the Vienna *David*, who victoriously presents Goliath's head as a trophy, the Borghese *David* is shown quietly considering the giant's decapitated head with a remorseful expression. Additionally, Bellori wrote that "Caravaggio lent his own features to the head which David holds by its hair."¹²⁸ Though this psychoanalytic portrait may represent the inner turmoil Caravaggio faced as result of his misfortune in Rome, Posèq asserts that "Scipione Borghese, who sought to obtain Papal grace for Caravaggio, may have instructed Caravaggio to show himself as the one already punished to make the acquittal more effective."¹²⁹ Presenting himself as the one who is punished in this painting would have surely made Caravaggio appear remorseful for committing a

¹²⁶ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 109.

¹²⁷ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 109.

¹²⁸ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 111.

¹²⁹ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 112.

great sin (murder) and may have made the Pope view Caravaggio in a sympathetic light. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to assume that his plight may have been a motivation for how he depicted Goliath's decapitated head.

The solitary pose of a heroic figure exhibiting a severed head found precedents in antiquity. In the Vienna *David* and Borghese *David*, which feature the same pose for David, Caravaggio appears to have referred to the same antique sculptural prototype to construct the pose of his models. Caravaggio possibly consulted the antique marble sculpture of *Apollo with Flayed Skin of Marsyas* (Fig. 58) in Giustiniani's collection and appropriated Apollo's pose for his David.¹³⁰ Although Caravaggio was no longer in Rome, when he painted the Vienna and Borghese *David*'s, he may have remembered the Apollo sculpture from his previous visits to Giustiniani's collection. This antique sculpture depicts Apollo holding the head and the flayed skin of Marsyas. According to the myth, after Marsyas asserted that he was more musically skilled than Apollo, he challenged the god to a musical competition, but in the end lost. The defeated Marsyas paid a gruesome price and subsequently was skinned by the god and lost his life. Although Caravaggio's David adopted Apollo's Lysippean posture, he does not include Marsyas' flayed skin. David's arm outstretches and holds Goliath's head in the same positioning as Apollo, who dangles Marsyas' severed head in his extended arm. Additionally, both David and Apollo tilt their gaze and eyes down to focus on the severed head. The agony is evident in *David with Goliath's Head*. Perhaps Caravaggio identified himself with Marsyas, who was seen as a social outcast in antiquity, due to his own erratic behavior, which seemed unconventional to many artists.¹³¹ Furthermore, this antique pose from *Apollo with Flayed Skin of Marsyas* can also be observed in *Salome with the Head of Saint John the Baptist* (Fig. 59).

Painted in 1609-1610, Caravaggio's *Salome with the Head of Saint John the Baptist* tells the story of the saint's martyrdom as described in *The Golden Legend*. According to *The Golden Legend*, Saint

¹³⁰ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 117.

¹³¹ Posèq, *Caravaggio and The Antique*, 111-112.

John condemned Herod for his illicit marriage with Herodias, the former wife of his brother. Angered by Saint John's response, Herod imprisoned him. On Herod's birthday, Salome, Herodias' daughter, beautifully danced before him and he promised to give her whatever she desired. Seeking out her mother's advice, Herodias, who was still angered by Saint John's disapproval of her marriage, told Salome to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Although Herod was unwilling to behead Saint John, he had to uphold his promise.

Caravaggio's painting depicts the moment after Herod's executioner beheaded Saint John the Baptist. With an outstretched hand, the displeased executioner is seen placing the decapitated head of the saint on the platter Salome holds. As she receives the head of her victim, Salome is seen turning her head away and diverting her eyes off into the distance. Salome's youthful appearance is contrasted by her old maid's wrinkled and decrepit face, who looms closely behind her. As the old maid looks upon the decapitated head of the Baptist, she clasps her hands tightly beneath her throat. According to Hibbard, Salome looking away from the decapitated head finds a Leonardesque prototype (relating to the Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci's style).¹³² Like Luini's *Salome Receiving the Head of Saint John the Baptist*, Caravaggio's figures are pushed off-center, and he also features a young attractive Salome juxtaposed by her aged maid. Although Caravaggio's composition finds similarities to this Leonardesque prototype, the executioner's pose bears more affinities with the antique statue *Apollo with Flayed Skin of Marsyas*. Like Caravaggio's *Davids*, the servant's outstretched arm bearing Saint John the Baptist's head mimics Apollo's arm. Additionally, the servant introspectively looks upon the head of his victim as Apollo looks upon Marsyas. Caravaggio's inclusion of Apollo's Lysippean posture again in *Salome Receiving the Head of Saint John the Baptist* reveals that this particular pose may have been of significance to him. Caravaggio's *Salome Receiving*

¹³² Hibbard, *Caravaggio*, 250.

the Head of Saint John the Baptist also provides another example of a painting for which Caravaggio may have consulted the antique.

VI. Conclusion

As Van Mander described Caravaggio in his *Schilderboeck*, “He holds that all works are nothing but bagatelles, child’s work or trifles, whatever their subject and by whomever painted, unless they be done and painted after life and that nothing could be good and nothing better than to follow Nature.” Statements like this from Caravaggio’s seventeenth-century biographers have for a long time upheld Caravaggio’s claim that he strictly followed nature. Art historians today have maintained the seventeenth-century biographers’ claim and Caravaggio’s own claim that he strictly adhered to nature when making representations of figures. However, an examination of Caravaggio’s paintings in relation to Giustiniani’s antique sculpture collection and other antiquities housed in the city reveal that Caravaggio probably consulted the antique for figures’ poses. Certainly, when Caravaggio was working in Rome, antiquity’s influence would have been hard to escape given its significant presence and resulting presence in Caravaggio’s work. Therefore this study proposes that although many believe Caravaggio only strictly painted naturalistic representations of figures, he also appears to have consulted antique sources, as well as other sources.

This exploration is significant because many still view Caravaggio’s art primarily in a naturalistic light. Additionally, acknowledging the wide variety of sources he used allows for a more comprehensive view of the artist. This study covered only a portion of Caravaggio’s paintings that emulated antique sources. Readers should note that many more of Caravaggio’s works also appear to have antique precedents. Future research may want to consider paintings that have not been discussed in this paper. Further research on Caravaggio’s use of the antique may address whether or not Caravaggio’s followers also appeared to have consulted antiquity. Overall, the idea that

Caravaggio constructed his figures from the antique is novel and not widely shared; therefore, additional scholarship will dispel the notion that Caravaggio only painted from nature.

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