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Conflicting Interpretations in Caravaggio's *Entombment*

Iconographic Tradition and Artistic Innovation

1. *The context of Caravaggio's* Entombment

Walter Friedlaender was the first scholar to draw a suggestive parallel between Caravaggio's new interpretation of religious subjects and San Filippo Neri's new kind of devotion. (Friedlaender 1955, 122–130; see also Chorpenning 1987) Friedlaender was fully aware of the difficulties of such a parallel since he emphasised that the Oratorians were part of „the religious situation which Caravaggio encountered when he came to Rome." I believe, Friedlaender also rightly stressed the continuity between *devotio moderna* and the Oratory, which was based on the practices of confraternities from the late Middle Ages.[1]

Caravaggio's *Entombment* – now in the Pinacoteca Vaticana (Figure 1), originally painted for the Pietà chapel of the Santa Maria in Vallicella – was to be part of the decoration of the church inspired by Saint Philip Neri. As the church was consecrated to the Nativity of the Virgin and Pope Saint Gregory the Great, the inscriptions legible above the three gates on the frontispiece refer to Mary. While the inscription above the central portal refers to Mary's divine motherhood (Deipare Virgini Sacrum), the two lateral inscriptions are taken from the *Song of Songs* 4:7 „Tota pulchra es amica mea" (on the left side) and „et macula non est in te" (on the right side). The programme of the altars of the interior follows the mysteries of the life of the Virgin as expressed by the Rosary, in con-

1 Saint Philip Neri arrived from Florence to Rome around 1533 and became member of a religious community in San Girolamo della Carità. See Ponelle–Bordet 1931, 35, 56, 115–130; Bonadonna Russo 2001.

sequence the Dominican spirituality was probably influent on Saint Philip and the Oratorians.[2]

The artists employed in the decoration reflected the stylistic orientations of the Roman painting by the end of the 16th century. Cesare Nebbia, Girolamo Muziano, Cristoforo Roncalli, Scipione Pulzone and Cavalier d'Arpino were masters of the Mannerism, while Federico Barocci attempted a new orientation towards naturalism with major success. (Ferrara 1995) Barocci was considered a favourite of the Oratorians, since Saint Philip often prayed before the *Visitation* painted by the great master from Urbino.[3] Due to his great success, Barocci also executed the altarpiece in the left transept of the church (also known as the Cesi chapel): the *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*.

Expenses of the decoration were covered by prestigious families of the Roman elite, some of them followers of Saint Philip. It should be added that a conspicuous number of learned personalities gathered around Saint Philip Neri, such as the historian Cesare Baronio, Cardinals Carlo and Federico Borromeo as well as the Bishop Gabriele Paleotti, but even Popes Gregory XIII, Gregory XIV and Clement VIII were his followers. (Muraoka 2015) The commissioners of Caravaggio's *Entombment*, the Vittrici originated from Parma and fulfilled a high office in the Papal court as „guardaroba" (keepers of the Papal household). As sources betray, Pietro Vittrice owner of the Pietà-chapel was Saint Philip's close follower, since he cured him from his disease. (Ponelle–Bordet 1933, 236) In case of Pietro's nephew and heir, Gerolamo Vittrice, who was most probably the commissioner of the *Entombment*, the relationship with the Oratorians is not as direct, yet Gerolamo was close to Caravaggio's friend, the painter Prospero Orsi, and even collected Caravaggio's paintings.[4] In my view, however, the fact that the commissioner of Caravaggio's *Entombment* was not Pietro Vittrice, and that the painting was executed after Saint Philip's death does not exclude an affinity between Caravaggio and the spiritual reform promoted by San Filippo Neri.

2 Graeve first argued that Alberto Castellano's treatise entitled *Rosario della Gloriosa Vergine Maria* (1567), owned by Saint Philip in his library inspired the programme of the altarpieces. (Graeve 1958, 223–238, 235–236) Sofia Barchesi called attention to some further possible sources also to be found in the Biblioteca Vallicelliana. (Barchesi 1995, 131–132)

3 Verstegen 2003, 65, n. 35 refers to Bacci's biography (1622), according to which Saint Philip often meditated in front of the altarpiece.

4 Gerolamo Vittrice married Orinzia di Lucio Orsi, the sister of the painter Prospero Orsi who was Caravaggio's close friend. (Sickel 2001, 428) See also Federico Zuccari's catalogue entry in Costamagna 1995, 530–532.

Sacred representations often accompanied the meetings of the Oratory, these were performed sometimes as pantomimes inspired by the Holy Scriptures or lives of the saints.[5] To my knowledge, we possess no visual evidence for how exactly these theatrical representations looked like, yet it is worth noting that Caravaggio organizes his actors as if on a stage, and his figures do look like actors in a play.[6] A parallel between contemporary *tableaux vivants* and visual arts can be detected in case of sculptors such as Guido Mazzoni, Alfonso Lombardi and Antonio Begarelli, who, working in clay, often used even casts of living models. On life-size *Lamentation*-groups as by Begarelli in Modena, Sant'Agostino (1524–1526) and San Pietro (1544–1546), the actors' mouth are opened, their gestures are pathetic as in case of Caravaggio's *Entombment*. (Bonsanti 1992, 130–137, 204–207, and Veress 2017, 38–39) (Figure 2)

The context of Caravaggio's *Entombment* has radically changed during the past centuries, since the original painting is preserved today in the Vatican Museums, being supplanted by a copy in situ. However, the stucco decoration of the Pietà-chapel is telling since angels are holding the Holy Shroud from Turin, bearing the imprint the lying Christ, which further enhances the importance of the winding sheet so emphatically represented on Caravaggio's *Entombment*. (Barchesi, 1995, 138–139) (Figure 3) The evocation of archaic image-types endowed with miraculous origin was important in the period of the Catholic Reform. In 1575, during the Roman Jubilee *Veronica's veil* (the sudarium) was publicly shown, while the *Holy Shroud* was displayed in Turin in 1578. (Cormack, 1997, 123, and Stoenescu 2011, 427)

It was in this period that Caravaggio's Lombard master, Simone Peterzano depicted an altarpiece (1585–1590) for the Veronica chapel in the Santa Maria della Scala Church in Milan (today located in the San Fedele Church). The winding sheet or shroud is emphatically depicted on this monumental altarpiece, as is Saint Veronica who appears in the background, holding the sudarium with Christ's imprinted face. (Ferrario 2000 in Caroli 2000, 452; Facchinetti et al.

5 See Cesare Baronio's description about the meetings of the Oratory in Ponelle–Bordet 1931, 209–212. Music to accompany the meetings was composed by the Papal composer Animuccia, also devoted to Saint Philip. In 1592 the dramatic play entitled „Tobia" was performed in the house of Pietro Vittrici. (Cistellini as quoted by Ferrara 1995, 116)

6 For the parallel between *tableaux vivants* and Caravaggio's paintings see Bredekamp 2010, 95. We should add that *tableaux vivants* are efficiently evoked by Derek Jarman's suggestive film on Caravaggio (1986).

2020, 186–188) Furthermore, a highly suggestive example for the sculptural visualisation of the shroud or veil held by angels, conceived as a balustrade is visible in the *Spada Chapel* (1654–1659), in San Girolamo della Carità, the church in which Saint Philip Neri's congregation met for decades. (Rice, 2020) (Figure 03)

2. *The subject of the* Entombment: *what does it represent?*

Art historians such as Rudolf Berliner were truly convinced of the so-called ambiguity of the image, which is capable of expressing content in such a condensed way that words can only partially explain. The image, when understood only through a mental process instead of an emotional one, might appear misleading, heretical or at least paradoxical. According to Berliner one should rather consider the ideas ('Vorstellungen') and emotions ('Gefühlen') connected to the subject. (Berliner 1945)

From its origins, the theme of the *Entombment* has exhibited a conflict between narrative and iconic characteristics. Lowering Christ's body from the cross and transporting it to the sepulchre represent action (narrative), whereas mourning and contemplating the lifeless body avoid action and suggest a suspended moment in time. (Weitzmann 1961) According to Alois Riegl and Erwin Panofsky, contemplative absorption (*kontemplativen Versenkung*) is achieved by an impression of "stillness," different from the classical dramatic narrative which by its self-sufficiency treats the viewer as an outsider. (Riegl 1997, 19; Panofsky 1927, 269)

Instead of stressing the conflict between stillness and dramatic action, I prefer to emphasise the ambiguity of the image capable of inspiring opposing interpretations, a problem made apparent by the different analyses about Pontormo's *Lamentation* for the Capponi chapel in Santa Felicita, Florence (1525–1528). (Figure 4) Since Pontormo's painting is characterised by an undetermined space and time, we are not able to decide whether Pontormo's image is a narrative, or, more generally, what it is supposed to represent. There have been attempts from most erudite scholars to "explain" what is shown to us, but, though intriguing and stimulating, these interpretations must be considered purely hypothetical.[7]

7 For basic information about Pontormo's altarpiece see Costamagna 1994, 183–193. For two conflicting interpretations see Shearman 1971, and Steinberg 1974. While Leo Steinberg maintains that Christ's body is taken up by the angels to God the Father (once represented on the ceiling fresco), John Shearman argues that the body is lowered into the tomb which can be perceived as the chapel's real altarpiece.

Pontormo organises his actors around a central void: the autonomy of the space between the figures is, according to Alois Riegl, an efficient way to hold attention, to facilitate meditation, and to involve the viewer. In the centre there is the lifeless arm of Christ held up by two other hands and that of the holy woman (perhaps Veronica) who shows a piece of cloth – these motifs immediately assume a symbolic meaning. (Wasserman 2009, 49, 56–58) The gestures and roles of the figures can be understood or can at least be in some way linked to these central symbols: they express tenderness and help, as well as calling for the involvement of the viewer. The figures are not bound to each other; they are individuals and can be contemplated as such (in spite of having no portrait-character except for the artist's self-portrait on the Virgin's right).

Pontormo's composition has two emotional centres: the Mother and the Son, separated, but unlike in the case of Sebastiano del Piombo's Viterbo *Pietà* (1513 circa) where the rigidity of the vertical and horizontal makes their isolation painful, here, the oval form suggests their interaction, and we are able to link them emotionally through contemplation. The mystical experience is convincingly suggested through the eyes, and the tormented glances which express pain and have an emphatic character. (Hirst 1981, 40–48; Barbieri 1999, 131–159)

Pontormo's floating figures and undefined space return on Federico Barocci's unfinished *Lamentation* in Bologna, Archiginnasio (1600–1612), where Christ's delicate body is placed on an altar-like stone, his head lying on the Virgin's lap (Emiliani 1985 I, 151–166; Lingo 2008, 113–121) Yet, some young men, one of them identifiable with Saint John the Evangelist, are just about to raise the body enveloped in the winding sheet. The disciples are following the indication of Joseph of Arimathea situated in the background on the left pointing to the entrance of the tomb. Contemplating the lifeless body, the farewell from Virgin Mary and the initiation of the transportation to the sepulchre is suggested by the painting. Even in this case, as in case of Pontormo's altarpiece, we are not able to determine with exactitude, which was the exact moment chosen by the artist.

I believe that Caravaggio's *Entombment* shares a characteristic with Pontormo and Barocci, in that its subject matter is not easy to define, it resists traditional iconographical categories, nor are the actions and identity of the actors clearly explainable.[8] The majestic group of figures is situated against a dark back-

8 "In its composition, the Vatican picture [by Caravaggio – F. V.] conjures up and brings to a syn-

ground, possibly before the entrance of the tomb as suggested by the engraving by Guattani (1784) after Caravaggio. (Friedlaender 1955, 187) All participants stand on a huge block of stone, positioned angularly to the picture plane. As the slab is carved out of stone, one might suppose that should cover the entrance of the grave or sarcophagus. If Saint John the Evangelist (on the left, wearing a red cloak) and Saint Joseph or Arimathea (the man on the right) are lowering Christ into the tomb covered by the slab (as suggested by Rubens's copy), then why is there an entrance for the grave on the left side? Or did they just take off the body from the cross and are going to lean it on of the "stone of unction"?

As I will try to demonstrate, all these actions are indeed suggested by the painting, but none of these proves to be conclusive, and I will argue that there is no definitive conclusion in such matters. As for the holy women, we are certain only about the identity of the Virgin of Sorrows – an aged woman, wearing a nun's habit, extending both her arms in a protective gesture. The name Mary Magdalene can be applied either to the young woman pressing her hand against her face or to the other young woman in the background raising her arms in a desperate gesture.[9] Finally, is Jesus completely dead as we are suggested by the hand of Saint Joseph opening his side-wound, or is there a slight sign of life in the pale body as indicated by the fingers bent and the mouth open?

3. *The significance of the stone and the shroud in Caravaggio's painting*

A prominent stone slab appears in Caravaggio's *Entombment*, the visual and compositional role of which is puzzling. All the actors stand on it, the stone supports the whole group of figures, while it stretches across the surface of the picture as some kind of bridge over a dark abyss. Giving its prominent position and visibility in the foreground, the symbolic connotations of the stone become dense and manifolded. Some of these I would like to expose, however abstaining myself from fully explaining it, because this would inevitably narrow down the manifoldness of Caravaggio's message.

thesis a three-pronged iconographic tradition: that of the Deposition, the Lamentation, and the Entombment." Pericolo 2011, 348.

9 For Caravaggio's models see Frommel 1971, 21–56.

It has been suggested that the slab is a „cornerstone" symbolising faith, on which according to Saint Matthew (21:42) the church was founded: „*The stone, which the builders rejected, the same become the head of the corner.*" (Friedlaender 1955, 127–128) Inspired by iconographic prototypes, Graeve argued that it is the „stone of unction," a precious relic from the Holy Land, venerated in Constantinople. (Graeve 1958, 228)[10] Wright emphasised the compositional importance of the tomb-slab, maintaining that its unpredictable form suggests a projection through the picture plane and is consequently appealing to the viewer, marking the horizon or eye level of those who stand above it. (Wright 1978) In my view, however, it is precisely the unusual form and position of the stone slab that efficiently evokes symbolic meaning.

In case of Fra' Bartolomeo's *Lamentation* (1511–1512) in the Palazzo Pitti, Florence, the figure of Christ is seated on the altar-stone, covered by a white drapery, while the Virgin, Saint John and Mary Magdalene appear in a quasi-sculptural compactness. (Figure 5) During the Seicento the background of the painting was darkened, and only recent restoration has revealed the figures of the apostles Peter and Paul who add a new breath and iconographic dimension to the scene. (Fischer 1988, 14) The artist was successful in trying to make the theological concept of the *corpus mysticum* visible in a human, easy to understand form, the Church being represented by the apostles as Christ's mystical body. The artist might have known these ideas from the sermons of Girolamo Savonarola, who as prior of San Marco, was his spiritual master.[11]

10 Graeve, 1958, 228. The „lapis purpureus" and the scene of the anointment appears on Alessandro Allori's small *painting* on copper (before 1593), originating from the Medici-collections, now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. Here Christ's seated body is placed on a large, red cushion richly embroidered with jewels, while two angels are dressing Him in sumptuous garments. In the foreground we see the crown of thorns and the nails placed somewhat heraldically, while in the background there is the altar with the chalice – as stated in Tátrai 1983, 36. For a similar arrangement of Christ's distressed body on a white winding sheet with vessels in the foreground, see Bernardo Strozzi's *Lamentation* from around 1615–1617 in Genova, Museo dell'Accademia; Giulio Sommariva: catalogue entry. In Giannotti – Pizzorusso 2009, 271–272.

11 There is a passage from a sermon about the mysteries of the mass which seems especially pertinent. After the elevation, the priest breaks the Host in three parts symbolising the mystical body of the Church, and its members in the heaven, on earth and in purgatory: "*Infatti l'ostia viene spezzata in tre parti che rappresentano i tre stati della chiesa: alcuni infatti sono nella gloria, alcuni in Purgatorio e alcuni in questo campo sulla terra.*" *"In fact, the Host is broken into three parts to represent the three forms of the Church, the members of which are in Heaven, in Purgatory or in this world."* Savonarola 1998, sermo XI (21th of December, 1490)

The function of the stone-slab can be further highlighted if we consider it in relation with the shroud, which so emphatically falls on it. In Caravaggio's *Entombment*, the winding sheet appears as a bright cloth held by Saint John the Evangelist and Saint Joseph of Arimathea together with Christ's body. Its brightness undermines the paleness of Christ's body and its curves are in contrast with the rigidity of the corpse. While one end of the winding sheet disappears under Saint Joseph of Arimathea's arms and knees, the other falls on the slab, catching the eyes of the viewer. On Andrea del Sarto's *Pietà di Luco* (1524) in Galleria Palatina, Florence, the identical unity of the tomb slab and the altar is once again suggested. (Figure 6) The stone is covered with a white cloth on which Christ's body rests while a chalice and a host appear in the foreground of the composition. As Andrea's painting was originally on the high altar of the Camaldolese convent in Luco di Mugello (near Florence), such a parallel between gravestone and altar appeared most efficient. (Freedberg 1963, I, 68–69; Shearman 1965, I, 100–101; Natali–Cecchi 1989, 96)

While Fra' Bartolomeo and Andrea del Sarto's Florentine works were probably unknown to Caravaggio, he could have been inspired by some of the paintings made by the excentric Northern genius, Lorenzo Lotto. As it has been pointed out, Lotto used a great variety of textiles, shrouds and veils which constitute an efficient vehicle „to move through physical towards spiritual vision." (Hills 2013) In his early *Madonna and the Infant with saints* (around 1508, Cracow, Muzeum Narodowe) Lotto uses a shroud hanging from the Virgin's arm that sustains the sleeping Child in a way to evoke the Pietà. (Figure 7) The edge of the white cloth falls on a cubic stone that serves as a kind of throne for the Virgin. Some years later, in a *Deposition* (Jesi, Pinacoteca Comunale) Lotto employed a winding sheet painted with nuances of violet which is the color for altar draperies during Lent. Several examples can be cited for the virtuoso use of drapery on Lotto's altarpieces that could inspire Caravaggio.[12] In fact, the color and texture of the windings sheet on Caravaggio's *Entombment* are echoed by the veil of the Virgin.

12 I am referring to solutions such as the baldachin of the *Pala di San Bernardino* (1521, Bergamo, San Bernardino), or the drapery wreathing around the standing resurrected Christ on the *Polittico di Ponteranica* (1522, Ponteranica, Parish Church), or the *Trinity* (1523–1524, Bergamo, Chiesa di Sant' Alessandro della Croce). Such solutions are comparable to the drapery around the angel on Caravaggio's *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* (1596–1597, Galleria Doria Pamphilj, Rome) and the red curtain appearing on the great altarpieces such as the *Madonna del Rosario* (around 1607, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna).

I also find highly suggestive the way the white shroud interacts with the red mantle on Caravaggio's *Entombment*. Saint John the Evangelist's red garment falls on the stone slab as emphatically as does the white linen cloth. The two draperies crossing each other are visual counterparts and I believe that they suggestively evoke the dual nature of Christ's existence: divine and human, also suggested by the water and blood that sprung from the Saviour's side-wound (John 19:34–36). At this point we might recall Sandro Botticelli's *Pietà* originally in Santa Maria Maggiore, Florence, today in the Museo Poldi-Pezzoli, Milan (1490's), which is a proof of a similar concern with the winding sheet. (Mesnil 1914; Lightbown 1978, I. 112, II. 74–75, 92–93) (Figure 8) The lifeless body of Christ is placed on the lap of the Virgin of Sorrows, while two holy women hold Christ' head and feet enveloped by the winding sheet. The fainted Virgin is supported by Saint John the Evangelist wearing a red mantle, red is also the color of the Virgin's dress and it appears on the holy women's robes, too. Thus, the red colour of garments efficiently interacts with the white linen cloth on Botticelli's painting.

Botticelli's fainted Virgin probably inspired Lorenzo Lotto's *Pietà*-altarpiece (1545) for the Dominican nuns in Treviso, today in the Brera, Milan.[13] Furthermore, an earlier *Pietà* by Botticelli executed for the San Paolino Church in Florence (now in Munich, Alte Pinakothek) is echoed by Rosso Fiorentino's *Lamentation* in the Louvre (1530's). (Scailliérez 2004) Although different in format and stylistic character, Botticelli's *Pietà*s reflect the austerity of the artist's late period influenced by Girolamo Savonarola. (Cornini 1984; Joannides 1995; Dombrowski 2008) In the 1490's Savonarola dedicated a series of sermons to the significance of the Mass and he also compared the lovers of the *Song of Songs* to the Virgin Mary and Christ. Thus, the Virgin says in one of Savonarola's sermons: „*Dilectus meus candidus est propter divinitatem et rubicundus propter humnitatem*."[14]

13 Lotto's *Libro delle spese diverse* is quoted by Mauro Lucco who also points to the possibility of a visit to Florence by Lotto and his relationship with Botticelli. In Zeri 1990, 168 –170. See also Humfrey 1997, 144 for a sensible analysis.

14 Sermon pronounced on Good Friday (March 24), 1497. Ridolfi 1955, II, 335. For the interpretation of the Mass see Savonarola 1998, 153. I do not wish to maintain that Savonarola's text influenced Caravaggio, as the color of the dress was rather determined by the iconographic tradition known to the master from Lombardy. However, a careful reading of the details is able to throw light on a particular interplay and significance of colors. See also Didi-Huberman 1991, 31–42.

The Sacerdotal position of the Virgin wearing a heavy blue cloak, red robe and white veil convenient for nuns is suggested by Botticelli's *Pietà*s. On Rosso Fiorentino's *Pietà* the Virgin Mary extends both her arms imitating the form of the cross and her gesture also returns on Caravaggio's *Entombment*. In Caravaggio's interpretation however, the gesture lacks the despair (compared with that of the young women in the backstage), Mary rather embraces the whole group, extending to them the protection of the Mother Church. Significantly, the Virgin also wears the robes of the nuns on Caravaggio's painting, who by the employment of the austere vestment pays respect to tradition.[15]

It might be surprising to discover Girolamo Savonarola's impact on the „Oratorian orbit" and the Florentine community in Rome during Saint Philip Neri's lifetime, yet we have documentary proofs of it. During his formation in Florence, Saint Philip frequented the convent of San Marco, where the memory of Girolamo Savonarola remained alive. (Ponelle–Bordet, 1931, 8–9, 17) Later, in Rome he paid visits to the Dominican convent of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, where the Eucharistic miracle happened. It was in 1559 that Pope Paul IV Caraffa entrusted a group of theologians to examine the works by Savonarola, and if heretical to include them in the list of prohibited books, the Index. As Saint Philip and the Dominicans defended Savonarola's works, Philip was praying ardently and was found in extasy before the monstrance in the cells of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva. He later confessed to the Dominican prior that he saw the Man of Sorrows appearing to him: *„...in carne ... dal mezzo in sù."* (Ponelle–Bordet, 1931, 72–73; Fenlon 2018) The scene is recorded by an engraving made by Luca Ciamberlano, included in the *Vita di San Filippo* by Pietro Jacopo Bacci (1622).[16]

In Rome, Saint Philip and the Oratorians were inseparable from the Florentine community, as in 1563 Philip accepted to delegate some of his disciples, Cesare Baronio included to reside in San Giovanni dei Fiorentini and to celebrate mass there. Saint Philip was asked to send some of his followers there by leading figures of the Florentine community such as Pier Antonio Bandini and Giovanni Battista Altoviti. (Ponelle–Bordet, 1931, 203–204) In exchange, some important

15 Graeve rightly stressed the Virgin's role as *corredemptrix* as well as Her protective and sacerdotal function. (Graeve 1958, 236–237)

16 Barbieri 1995, 68–69. It should be added that saying mass was an exceptional spiritual source for Saint Philip Neri, who in his final years obtained a special permission from Pope Gregory XIV to celebrate mass in his private chapel in order to avoid curiosity aroused by his mystical experiences. (Ponelle–Bordet 1931, 74–76)

members of the Florentine community, such as the banker Pier Antonio Bandini contributed to the construction of the Santa Maria in Vallicella.[17] The most prominent figure of the Florentine community in Rome was Michelangelo Buonarroti who produced designs for the church San Giovanni dei Fiorentini and who donated his *Florentine Pietà* (c. 1496–1562), left unfinished and partially completed by Tiberio Calcagni to his friend, the banker Francesco Bandini. (Wallace 2000)

4. Caravaggio's Entombment – *between tradition and innovation*

According to some scholars, Caravaggio's admiration for Buonarroti and his *Florentine Pietà* was so great as to include his hidden portrait into the *Entombment*.[18] Caravaggio's homage paid to Michelangelo's early *Pietà* in Saint Peters' (1497–1499) is sustained by formal and iconographic solutions. It is the rendering of the right arm hanging down, as well as the position of the fingers touching the edge of the stone slab to recall Michelangelo early *Pietà*.[19] The slightly bent fingers and Christ's open mouth on Caravaggio's painting do suggest the presence of life, yet the rigidity of the bust is quite different from the flexuous pose of Buonarroti's marble Christ. Even if the memory of Buonarotti's work is present on Caravaggio's painting, the Lombard master's interpretation is naturalistic, his direct, even cruel rendering of the legs and the side-wound is far from the Michelangelo's idealised Christ who gives the impression of a young man asleep whose wounds are barely visible. This is especially true if we compare Caravaggio's interpretation to that of his master, Simone Peterzano, today in San Fedele, Milan (around 1585–1590), already mentioned above. The memory of the *Vatican Pietà* by Michelangelo is present in the position of Christ's head, his right arm hanging lifeless, as well as in his ideal torso with a discreet side-wound. Christ's left arm is gently held by a kneeling penitent woman dressed in rich garments. The Virgin of Sorrows is an aged woman wearing a nun's habit, characterised by theatrical gestures. The rhetoric adopted by Peterzano corresponds to the iconographical tradition exemplified by Perugino's and Botticelli's *Lamentation*s.

17 Ferrara 1994, 110. Antonio's son, Cardinal Ottavio Bandini was Philip's close follower, whose name appears also in the documents of Philip's process of canonisation.

18 According to this interpretation, the portrait-like features of Saint Joseph of Arimathaea (or Nicodemus) recall Michelangelo Buonarroti. (Pericolo 2011, 362–373)

19 Weil-Garris 1987, 77–119. See also my interpretation based on texts by Girolamo Savonarola, Veress 2010. For further consultation, see Lavin 2013, and Jurkowlaniec 2015.

In many respects, Peterzano's altarpiece is paralleled by Bernardino Campi's *Lamentation* (1574) in the Brera, Milan, originating from the Carmelite church of Santa Caterina in Cremona (Miller, in Gregori 1985, 154–156). Michelangelo's influence is also present here in the representation of Christ's youthful and idealised, lifeless body as well as in the habit of the Sorrowful Virgin holding her Son on her lap. Caravaggio was most probably familiar with the Campi's works, such as *Pietà with the Virgin and Saint Francis of Assisi* by Antonio Campi (Bernardo's brother) in Cremona Duomo (1570–1575).[20] (Figure 9) Christ is represented here in a frontal, seated position, his legs protrude into the viewer's space, while the Virgin and Saint Francis appear on both sides, though their position in respect to Christ is different, Saint Francis being closer to us.

What should we say about Saint John the Evangelist's right hand opening the wound on Caravaggio's *Entombment*? The gesture of the beloved disciple is so different from that of the silent and youthful Virgin on Michelangelo's *Pietà*, who dares to hold the bust only with *manus velata*? Caravaggio's choice proves to be radical even if we recall a series of works from different artists, who also represented the gesture of touching the wound. I would like to highlight just one of these: Santi di Tito's *Lamentation* (1575–1585) in San Biagio church, Scrofiano. (Spalding 1982, 329–330) Santi is often regarded as a kind of reformer of Florentine art, a representative of the passage from Mannerism to Baroque. However, if we look at his interpretation, differences from Caravaggio become salient: Saint John and the Virgin contemplate the wound reverently, avoid touching it, even though their hands are close to it.

The gesture of Saint John the Evangelist on Caravaggio's *Entombment* is as indiscreet as Saint Thomas' in *The incredulity of Saint Thomas* (Potsdam, Schloss Sanssouci). (Figure 10) As it has been emphasised, Christ is like the Pelican who sacrifices himself opening his wound, while his disciples seem to be motivated by some kind of obtrusive curiosity. (Ivanoff 1972) Yet, in case of the *Entombment*, touching Christ's body also recalls the tradition of the adoration of the holy wound as the source of grace. This theological concept is developed by Saint Augustine who maintained that the Church and its sacraments grew from Christ's side wound just as Eve was created from the side rib of Adam. (Gurewich 1957, 359) Some mystics were allowed to touch Christ's wound, like Saint

20 Antonella Gioli, catalogue entry. In Caroli 2000, 380. Even the Caracci employed this iconographic type, as Annibale Caracci's *Dead Christ* (around 1590) in Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie shows.

Catherine of Siena drinking Christ's blood as depicted by *Francesco Vanni* (1594, Siena, San Girolamo).[21]

The complexity of Caravaggio's approach to tradition becomes apparent by comparing his *Entombment* with Federico Barocci's interpretation. Barocci's *Entombment* painted between 1579–1582 (Senigallia, chiesa del Santissimo Sacramento, Figure 11) is a reconsideration of the problem of narrative proposed by Raffaello in his *Entombment* from 1507 (Rome, Galleria Borghese). Barocci knew Raphael's painting at that time in the church of San Francesco al Prato, Perugia (now ruined). (Cooper 2001) Unlike Fra' Bartolomeo and Andrea del Sarto who preserved the silent, iconic characteristics of the mourning scene, young Raphaello gradually turned away from the conservativism of his master Perugino and was rather attracted by the narrative (the *storia*) appraised by humanists, such as Leon Battista Alberti.[22] This approach, however, brought him into conflict with the traditional altarpiece-function dedicated to the sacrament. Barocci reconsidered the problem in the Senigallia *Entombment,* where he employed an efficient narrative, expressed by the motion of the figures, however the body of Christ „displayed over the altar remains the still center in this confusion, the eternal, present for contemplation and for the perpetual reenactment of the Passion that is the core of the mass." (Lingo 2008, 119)

I have already mentioned Barocci's unfinished *Lamentation* (1600–1612) painted for the Dome in Milan, now in Bologna, Biblioteca dell'Arciginnasio, which upholds the conflict between silent meditation and dramatic action as does Pontormo's *altarpiece* in Santa Felicita, Florence. Barocci's aetheric figures, floating garments and undefined space disappear in Caravaggio's *Entombment*, where figures appear as giants who stand on a stone-slab supporting them. We can touch Christ's side-wound together with Saint John, thus grace originating from Christ's sacrifice is guaranteed to us. Still, we are uncertain about the resurrection, suggested by Barocci's Senigallia *Entombment*, although the light coming from above seems to allude to hope and salvation.[23] However, the Virgin's

21 Michele Occhioni, catalogue entry. In Giannotti–Pizzorusso 2010, 289–290. Saint Catherine's family house is Siena was transformed into an oratory and decorated almost at the same time as the church Santa Maria in Vallicella, see Kirwin 1972.

22 See Meyer zur Capellen 2001, I. 41–44: "The great care Raphael took with his studies for the Baglioni altarpiece is probably due to his high aim: he intended to change the principally devotional character of the altar painting into a narrative one, where action plays a prominent part."

23 Lingo sustains that the foreground of the Senigallia *Entombment* is not darkened by the clouds

protective gesture, as well as the strong physical presence of the disciples comfort us: we are not alone, we are members of a community.

The young Rubens, when working for the Oratorians in Santa Maria in Vallicella copied Caravaggio's *Entombment*, yet his painting (Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, Figure 12) emphasises primarily a dramatic episode of the Passion. (Judson 2000, 242–245) By contrast, Caravaggio's work is a synthesis: his scene evokes several episodes of the Passion without giving predominance to a specific moment, and for this reason it defies traditional iconographic categories. Caravaggio's actors are real, through their gestures of touching and holding, the appeal to the believer's senses is unprecedented. All these characteristics reoccur in some masterpieces by Velázquez and Rembrandt, who were the true heirs of Caravaggio's legacy.

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visible in the background, but is strongly lighted, and this alludes to salvation. See Lingo 2008, 108. We might add that the three crosses against a sunset sky might also be viewed as signs of a triumph over death.

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