

Messages from Portraits in the *Del Lama Altarpiece* of Botticelli

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1. Introduction

In Western painting, the portrait is one of the simplest and most orthodox forms of expressing the 'Self'. Self-portrait is its most intense manifestation. We know well the self-portraits of Dürer, Rembrandt and van Gogh, for example. They show only the face, independently, much like a bust.

In Italy, independent portraits have appeared since the Renaissance. Prior to that time, portraits, in general, showed a donor who appears in a narrative scene or is accompanied by Christ, the Virgin Mary or a saint to whom the donor is making an offering. One example is the portrait of Enrico Scrovegni in the *Last Judgment* (Fig. 1) of the fresco cycle executed by Giotto in the early



[Figure 1: Giotto, *Last Judgment*, 1303-1306, fresco, Padova, Cappella degli scrovegni (<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/16/Last-judgment-scrovegni-chapel-giotto-1306.jpg>, access 2018/12/29)]

14th century in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua. His portrait appears on the inside wall of the façade, in the lower part of the scene. In the case of the *Quattrocento*, not only the donor, but also the artist, appears on the stage, as in the self-portrait of Filippo Lippi in the *Coronation of the Virgin*, known



[Figure 2: Filippo Lippi, *Coronation of the Virgin*, c. 1439-1447, tempera on panel, 220 × 287 cm, Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/80/Filippo_Lippi_-_Incoronazione_della_Vergine_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg, access 2018/12/29)]

as the *Maringhi Altarpiece* (Fig. 2). The painter is looking at us with his chin resting on his hand. In this type of painting, contemporaries other than the donor and the artist are often depicted.

The *Adoration of the Magi* by Botticelli, commonly known as the *Del Lama Altarpiece* (Fig. 3), is a prominent painting in which portraits are shown. It has been traditionally believed that members of the Medici family, the family that ruled the Republic of Florence in the 15th century, are represented here. This work was executed in the first half of the 1470s for the altar in the chapel of the Del Lama family in the church of Santa Maria Novella, one of the most important churches in Florence. It shows a scene commonly referred to as the Adoration of the Magi or, alternatively, the Adoration of the Kings, as narrated in the Gospel according to Matthew (Matt. 2, 1-12). According to the Gospel account, during the reign of King Herod, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, wise men (Magi) came from the East to Jerusalem to worship the Christ-child. The Magi, guided by a star, reached the Child and were given an audience with him, then offered gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The altarpiece shows the first King kneeling down to kiss the foot of Christ while the second and the third await their turn.

In this presentation, I reconsider the traditional hypothesis regarding the portraits in the *Del Lama Altarpiece* as representations of members of the Medici. I will then try to interpret the messages from the patron and the artist to the viewers on the basis of the proposed new identifications.



[Figure 3: Botticelli, *Adoration of the Magi* c. 1472-1473, tempera on panel, 111 × 134 cm, Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9d/Botticelli_-_Adoration_of_the_Magi_%28Zanobi_Altar%29_-_Uffizi.jpg, access 2018/12/29)]

2. Does the *Del Lama Altarpiece* Indeed Contain a Portrait?

The most ancient evidence suggesting the presence of portraits in Botticelli's altarpiece in Santa Maria Novella appears in a manuscript dateable to between 1530 and 1540: 'Et [in] santa maria novella dipinse una tavoletta di altare che è acanto alla porta del mezo, de' magi che vi sono più persone ritratte al naturale'.¹ However, this does not definitely establish that the portraits are of Medici family members. It was Giorgio Vasari, critic and painter in the 16th century, who asserted that the altarpiece contains portraits of some members of the Medici. According to the first edition of his *Lives*, published in 1550, the first King, who is about to kiss the foot of the Christ-child, is Cosimo il Vecchio; the second King is Giuliano de' Medici, father of Giulio, the future Pope Clemente VII.² In this first edition, Vasari did not refer to the third King. However, in the second edition, published in 1568, he noted that the third King is Giovanni, second son of Cosimo.³ Furthermore, in the *Cronica conventus Sanctae Mariae Novella*, compiled by frate Modesto Biliotti in 1586, it was recorded that some personages of the Medici were shown in the altarpiece.⁴

Testimony that images of the Medici are shown in the Botticelli's altarpiece appears more than a half-century after the execution. However, as Rab Hatfield indicated in 1976, there is sound reason to believe that the altarpiece contains depictions of the Medici.⁵ In general, in the traditional iconography of the Adoration of the Magi, the three Kings are represented as follows: the first King is an old man with white hair and is richly bearded; the second is a man in his prime, with a beard; the third as a beardless youth.⁶ There are four other extant paintings executed by Botticelli with the same subject: (1) London, National Gallery, NG592; (2) London, National Gallery, NG1033; (3) Washington, National Gallery of Art; (4) Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi, inv. 1890 n. 4346, incomplete. With the exception of the last work stored in gli Uffizi, which was painted in the late period between the 1490s and the beginning of the 1500s and in which two Kings other than the King before Christ are indistinguishable from the crowd, the artist painted the three Kings quite distinctively, in accordance with the iconographic tradition cited above. These three works are stylistically dateable to before the mural decoration in the Sistine Chapel, or more specifically, in the 1470s. On the other hand, in the *Del Lama Altarpiece*, also painted in the 1470s, the features of the three Kings do not conform to this rule. The first and second Kings are barefaced and their hairstyles are unique. Based on this, it seems plausible that at least the two older Kings have the external characteristics of real persons, rather than being generalized iconographic figures.

3. A Reconsideration of the Identifications of the Portraits

3.1. The Conventional Identifications

What factors suggest that the images in the *Del Lama Altarpiece* are members of the Medici, as documents since the middle of the 16th century tell us? Of course, there is the oral history passed down from the time of Botticelli. However, the reason for this widespread belief is probably the striking likeness of the first King to Cosimo il Vecchio.

The head of the first King reminds us of two famous medals showing the profile of Cosimo, with an inscription on the front (Fig. 4). The inscriptions on the two medals differ slightly, but both include the title *Pater Patriae* that was conferred on Cosimo in 1465 by a decree of the Signoria of Florence after Cosimo's death on August 1, 1464. Therefore, the execution of the medals is after 1465, and the portraits on them are posthumous. The *terminus ante quem* of these medals must be 1469, which marks the death of Piero de' Medici, to whom was dedicated a manuscript in which one of the medals with the title *Pater Patriae* in the inscription is replicated (Fig. 5).⁷ It is difficult to determine with certainty whether Botticelli used this type of medal as a model for Cosimo's portrait, but it is completely plausible, as he painted a portrait of an unknown young man holding a gold medal with Cosimo's profile (Fig. 6), indicating that he certainly knew of the existence of the medal.



[Figure 4
left: Florentine 15th Century, *Cosimo de' Medici, Pater Patriae [obverse]*, c. 1465-1469, bronze, diameter: 7.44 cm.
right: Florentine 15th Century, *Cosimo de' Medici, Pater Patriae [obverse]*, c. 1465-1469 bronze, diameter: 7.83 cm.
Washington National Gallery of Art (Pollard 2007, pp. 296-297)]

[Figure 5: Aritotele, *Logica*, miniature of Francesco Rosselli, 1465-1469, Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Pult. 71.07, c. 2r, frontispiece (Langedijk 1981-1987, I, p. 391)]



[Figure 6: Botticelli, *Portrait of a young man with a medal of Cosimo il Vecchio*, c. 1475, Tempera on panel, 75.5 × 44 cm Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b1/Sandro_Botticelli_-_Portrait_of_a_Man_with_a_Medal_of_Cosimo_the_Elder.jpg),access 2018/12/30]

The portrait of the youth was supposedly painted in the mid-1470s, near the date of the *Del Lama Altarpiece*.⁸

With reference to the second King, Vasari identified him as Giuliano de' Medici, second son of Piero. However, this is not actually plausible. Giuliano was assassinated in 1478 at the tender age of twenty-five, during the Pazzi Conspiracy. To represent this man in the prime of life, as is the case for the second King in the painting, would seem quite unnatural.⁹ This second King, drawing on a crimson cloak backed with ermine, is described just like a sovereign. Hermann Ulmann indicated that the second King resembles two works: a bust executed by Mino da Fiesole around 1453-1454 that is now exhibited in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello in Florence (Fig. 7) and a medal that represents Piero (Fig. 8). Based on these facts, for the first time, he identified the second King as Piero.¹⁰ The bust in the Bargello wears a doublet called a *gironea*, with a line of diamonds ringing the armholes, an impresa of the Medici. An inscription is engraved in the lower part of the interior of the bust: 'PETRVS · COS[mi] · F[ilius]/ AETATIS · ANNO · XXXVII/ OPVS · MINI/ SCVLTORIS'.¹¹ The inscription indicates that the marble bust was of Piero at the age of thirty-seven. According to the inventory of Lorenzo de' Medici in 1492, the bust was in the Palazzo Medici.¹² The features of the marble bust—curled short hair, a somewhat long face, a large nose—are similar to the second King in the *Del Lama Altarpiece*.



[Figure 7 (left): Mino da Fiesole, *Bust of Piero di Medici*, c. 1453, marble, h. 54.5 cm, Firenze, Museo Nazionale del Bargello (*Eredità* 1992, p.43)]



[Figure 8 (right): Florentine 15th Century, *Piero de' Medici*. (Pollard 2007, 1, p. 294)]

The execution of Piero's medal, which has the inscription 'PETRVS MEDICES COSMI' P[atris] P[atriae] F[ilius]', is datable to between 1465 and 1469, as is the case with his father's medal.¹³ Piero's profile in the medal is more massive and rounder than that of Botticelli's second King. Nevertheless, on the basis of the peculiarities of the curled short hair and the large nose, one could recognise this second King rightly as Piero de' Medici. The painter idealised him as king and one of the central figures in the solemn scene. To this day, Ulmann's identification is accepted.

3.2. A New Proposal in Identifying the Portraits in the *Del Lama Altarpiece*

As we have seen, there is little doubt that the first and second Kings represent, respectively, Cosimo and Piero de' Medici. The identity of the third King is far less certain. Recent studies tend to identify the third King as Giovanni, the younger brother of Piero, and the youth with dark hair standing behind the second King as Lorenzo de' Medici, legitimate son and heir of Piero. Although this hypothesis is widely known, it has raised considerable scepticism.

To begin with, let us consider some of the problems with the third King. Vasari states in the second edition of *Lives* that the third King in Botticelli's *Adoration of the Magi* in Santa Maria Novella represents Giovanni de' Medici. This identification is now generally accepted.¹⁴ However, there are two contemporary portraits of Giovanni, one being a bust executed by Mino da Fiesole in the Bargello (Fig. 9) and the other a medal with the image of Giovanni (Fig. 10), neither of which bear a likeness to the third King in the altarpiece.



[Figure 9 (left): Mino da Fiesole, *Bust of Giovanni di Medici*, c. 1453-1456, marble, h. 52.5 cm, Firenze, Museo Nazionale del Bargello (*Eredità* 1992, p.45)]



[Figure 10 (right): Florentine 15th Century, *Giovanni de' Medici*, c. 1465-1469, bronze, diameter: 9.83 cm, Washington National Gallery of Art (Pollard 2007, 1, p. 295)]

The bust of Giovanni is similar in form to that of Piero, but, unlike Piero's bust, it has neither the inscription nor impresa of the Medici. Nevertheless, because its provenance is similar to that of Piero's bust,¹⁵ it is presumed that this bust is identified as the bust of Giovanni recorded in the inventory of Lorenzo in 1492 as 'una testa di marmo sopra l'uscio dell'anticamera di tutto rilievo ritratta al naturale di Giovanni di Cosimo de' Medici'.¹⁶ The stylistic similarity of the two busts suggests that they were created by the same hand and in the same period. Moreover, in a letter dated August 12, 1456 from Giovanni to the Duke of Milan, Francesco Sforza, Giovanni mentions that the sculptor Mino da Fiesole portrayed both Piero and himself.¹⁷ For these reasons, although there is no inscription, the bust in question must be the portrait sculpture of Giovanni, executed by Mino in the

same period as Piero's bust, and datable to between 1453, when Piero's bust was sculpted, and 1456, when the abovementioned letter was written.

On the other hand, the medal showing the image of Giovanni has the inscription 'IOHANNES MEDICES COSMI P[atris] P[atriciae] F[ilius]'.¹⁸ It is thought to have been cast between 1465 and 1469, as is the case with his elder brother's medal, most likely as a pair. Since Giovanni died in 1463, the medal portrait is posthumous, but not so distant from his death.

Returning to Botticelli's altarpiece, the third King does not resemble either of these portraits of Giovanni. His hairstyle is also different, unlike in the case of the two elder Kings. Nevertheless, Vasari portrayed Giovanni in fresco, clearly on the basis of Botticelli's youngest King, on the ceiling of the Sala di Cosimo il Vecchio in the Quartiere di Leone X in the Palazzo Vecchio (Fig. 11). The question is, why did Vasari select the figure of Botticelli's third King as a portrait of Giovanni?

[Figure 11: Giorgio Vasari, *Portrait of Giovanni di Cosimo de' Medici*, 1556-1558, fresco, Firenze, Palazzo Vecchio, Sala di Cosimo il Vecchio (Langedijk 1981-1987, II, p. 1008, Fig. 53.5e)]



In 1555, Vasari assumed the office of court painter and architect for the construction of the Palazzo Vecchio. He engaged in the work of decorating the ceiling of the Sala di Cosimo il Vecchio from 1556 to 1558. For this decoration, he needed to know the appearances of all the Medici related to Cosimo il Vecchio. At that time, the portrait medal of Cosimo must have been known widely, as numerous portraits that derived from the profile in the medal were produced by painters and sculptors throughout the 16th century.¹⁹ Thus, it is supposed that Vasari selected the profile on the medal for his portrait of Cosimo. With regard to Piero's appearance, Vasari is likely to have found the marble bust of Mino da Fiesole in the Palazzo Vecchio, since the portrait of Piero in fresco in the Sala (Fig. 12) is clearly based on Mino's sculpture.²⁰ The sculpture was transferred from the Palazzo Medici to the Palazzo Vecchio in 1495 and recorded in the Guardaroba in the inventory of



[Figure 12: Giorgio Vasari, *Portrait of Piero di Cosimo de' Medici*, 1556-1558, fresco, Firenze, Palazzo Vecchio, Sala di Cosimo il Vecchio (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/52/Giorgio_Vasari_-_Piero_de%27_Medici_called_the_Gouty_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg, access 201812/30)]

the Palazzo Vecchio in 1553.²¹ On the occasion of the transfer, Giovvani's bust was also transported to the Palazzo Vecchio along with the bust of Piero. Absent information from an inscription that would have established the bust as that of Giovanni, the bust was mixed in with ancient works recorded in the Guardaroba, since Giovanni's bust was dressed in an ancient costume.²² Consequently, Vasari could not have helped but look to other sources for clues concerning the still unknown features of Giovanni. This other source is the *Del Lama Altarpiece*, which shows the well-known profile of Cosimo, *Pater Patriae*.

Lacking valid visual clues indicating Giovanni's resemblance to the third King in the altarpiece, why did Vasari believe that Botticelli's third King represented Giovanni? After 1555, Vasari, seeking to learn the appearance of important figures belonging to the elder branch of the Medici family for his fresco in the Palazzo Vecchio, must have discovered that the second King was Piero, not Giuliano, based on Mino's marble bust. This is supported by the fact that for Giuliano's portrait in the Sala di Lorenzo il Magnifico dated from 1556-1558 (Fig. 13), Vasari did not choose the second King, whom Vasari himself had referred to as Giuliano in his *Lives* in 1550. In any event, once he was convinced that the first King was Cosimo and the second was Piero, it is no surprise

[Figure 13: Giorgio Vasari, *Portrait of Giuliano di Cosimo de' Medici*, 1556-1558, fresco, Firenze, Palazzo Vecchio, Sala di Lorenzo il Magnifico (Langedijk 1981-1987, II, p. 1075, Fig. 60.18)]



that Vasari would think that the third was also a Medici. In addition, this third King exchanges glances with the second King kneeling at his side, suggesting to Vasari a close relationship, possibly a blood relationship, between the two.

So, if the third King is not Giovanni, then who is he? According to the traditional iconography of the three Kings, in general, a person in this position can be of the third generation. In this case, it could be Lorenzo or Giuliano, Piero's sons. However, Vasari quickly excluded the possibility that it was Lorenzo. As we can see in the fresco decoration in the Sala di Lorenzo il Magnifico (Fig. 14), Vasari believed that Lorenzo's features were similar to those that Vasari had used to portray Lorenzo in a painting for Alessandro de' Medici in 1534 (Fig. 15). He also excluded the possibility of the third King being Giuliano. As the fresco in the Palazzo Vecchio suggests (Fig. 13), while he was working on this decoration, he came to believe that the youth with dark hair standing behind the third King was actually Giuliano. Then, who is the third King? Vasari, searching for a figure who

was a direct descendant of Cosimo and younger than Piero, but neither Lorenzo nor Giuliano, finally concluded that it was Giovanni, the younger brother of Piero.

[Figure 14: Giorgio Vasari, *Receiving gifts from various princes*, 1556-1558, fresco, Firenze, Palazzo Vecchio, Sala di Lorenzo il Magnifico
(https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/60/Giorgio_Vasari_-_Lorenzo_the_Magnificent_receives_the_tribute_of_the_ambassadors_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg, access 2018/12/31)]



[Figure 15: Giorgio Vasari, *Portrait of Lorenzo il Magnifico*, 1534, oil on panel, 90 × 72 cm, Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi
(<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/48/Vasari-Lorenzo.jpg>, access 2018/12/31)]

However, as already discussed, this identification of Vasari is not especially persuasive. Firstly, Botticelli's third King resembles the extant portraits of Giovanni neither in hairstyle nor in visage. Secondly, if it follows the tradition of the three Kings, the third King must be a figure of the third generation. Moreover, it is not credible that Giovanni would be represented as such a youth, since he died in 1463 at the age of forty-two.²³ Despite these reasons, recent studies still tend to support Vasari's interpretation that the third King is Giovanni. Perhaps behind this acceptance is the idea that the three Kings in the *Del Lama Altarpiece* represent three deceased Medici in the 60s—Cosimo in 1464, Piero in 1469, and Giovanni in 1463.²⁴ This may be a valid theory; however, in my opinion, the representation of the third King seems not to be a portrait of a specific individual, but rather a figure abstracted from Sandro's repertoire. When the third King is compared with, for instance, the young man holding a sword in his hand in the foreground of *The Discovery of the body of Holofernes* in the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence (Fig. 16), or the young man placing his hands



[Figure 16: Botticelli, *Discovery of the body of Holofernes*, 1468-1470 circa, tempera on panel, 31 × 25 cm, Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi
(https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/52/Sandro_Botticelli_-_La_scoperta_del_cadavere_di_Oloferne_e_il_ritorno_di_Giuditta_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg, access 2018/12/31)]

over his heart in a half-crouching position in the foreground of the *Adoration of the Magi* in the National Gallery of Art in Washington (Fig. 17), these figures have their heads leaning at a similar

[Figure 17: Botticelli, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1476-1478 circa, tempera and oil on panel, 68 × 102 cm, Washington National Gallery of Art
(https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2c/Sandro_Botticelli_009.jpg, access 2018/12/31)]



angle and the forms of their nose and lips are analogous. Therefore, these figures are likely derived from the same dessin. Moreover, it was conventional from the *Trecento* to depict the two younger Kings talking to one another while waiting for their order of audience; such a friendly atmosphere thus does not necessarily imply that the two are related by blood. When Sandro painted his altarpiece for Guasparre del Lama, Cosimo and Piero had already died, but Lorenzo and Giuliano, third generation Medici, were still alive. For this reason, it is likely that the client or the painter wanted to avoid depicting a person still living as a saint.²⁵

Do the two sons of Piero appear in the painting? As mentioned above, previous studies tend to identify Lorenzo as the youth with dark hair standing behind the youngest King.²⁶ The young man is dressed in a red *farsetto* and a short black *giornea*, typical costumes among the youth in the *Quattrocento*. He holds in his hands a dark hat with a gold design. The hypothesis that this young man is Lorenzo, however, is inconsistent with the fact that the features of the young man are strikingly similar to the young man in a series of portraits representing Giuliano de' Medici, also



[Botticelli, *Portrait of Giuliano de' Medici*, 1478-1480 circa, tempera on panel

Figure 18 (left): 75,5 × 52,5 cm, Washington National Gallery of Art

(https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/df/Sandro_Botticelli_-_Giuliano_de%27_Medici_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg, access 2018/12/31)

Figure 19 (centre): 59,5 × 39,3 cm, Bergamo, Accademia Carrara

(https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5e/Botticelli%2C_ritratto_di_giuliano_de%27_medici_bergamo.jpg, access 2018/12/31)

Figure 20 (right): 56,8 × 38,5 cm, Berlin Gemäldegalerie

(https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c9/Sandro_Botticelli_-_Giuliano_de%27_Medici_-_WGA2795.jpg, access 2018/12/31)]

executed by Botticelli. There are three extant portraits of Giuliano attributed to Botticelli or to his workshop, evidently derived from the same dessin or prototype. These three works are conserved, respectively, in the National Gallery of Art in Washington (Fig. 18), in the Accademia Carrara in Bergamo (Fig. 19), and the Gemäldegalerie of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Fig. 20).

Obviously, of the three, from a compositional viewpoint, the work in Washington is more elaborate and iconographically more significant. Along with the sitter, it portrays a turtledove perched on a dead branch extending across a painted frame. Behind the sitter is a window with a half-opened door through which the sky is visible. In the *Tre-Quattrocento*, in general, the turtledove was a symbol of eternal constancy and sincere mourning. Here, it must imply the grief and mourning for the premature death of Giuliano, who was assassinated in the Pazzi Conspiracy.²⁷ In addition to the complexity of the composition and the iconography, the painting in Washington (75.5 cm × 52.5 cm) is larger than the other two (Bergamo: 59.5 cm × 39.3 cm; Berlin: 56.8 × 38.5 cm), and its provenance is more important. On the back of the Washington painting, a red seal which belongs to Ferdinand I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, is preserved. Thus, it is traceable to the Medici collections.²⁸ These facts suggest that the Washington painting may be a prototype of the other two or closest to an unknown prototype of the three works.

The young man with dark hair standing behind the third King in the *Del Lama Altarpiece* has many features in common with a series of Giuliano's portraits, including the curled dark hair, lowered gaze, square jaw, and broad forehead. The face of the youth in the altarpiece is more rounded and seems to be younger than the person in the group of the half-length portraits, but this may simply reflect the difference in the date of execution. The Pazzi Conspiracy happened in 1478, while the altarpiece was painted in the first half of the 1470s. Giuliano was roughly twenty years old when the *Del Lama Altarpiece* was being executed and it would be quite natural that his portrait in this work would appear to be much younger than his half-length portraits.

Some scholars still insist that the young man in the altarpiece is Lorenzo, in spite of the similarity to the half-length portraits of Giuliano. According to their argument, the young man is prominent in the group at the right of the painting and the laurel (lauro/laurus) above him implies that it is Lorenzo (Laurentius). However, laurel is often painted together with the Virgin Mary or other subjects suggesting the Resurrection, as a symbol of victory, immortality, and chastity.²⁹ Therefore, the laurel does not necessarily indicate that the figure is Lorenzo.

As already mentioned, Vasari himself, who insisted that Giuliano was the second King in the second edition of *Lives*, retracted his words and adopted the features of this dark-haired youth in Botticelli's altarpiece for his portrait of Giuliano in the fresco decoration in the Sala di Lorenzo il

Magnifico (Fig. 13). As in the case of the portrait of Piero de' Medici, Vasari, in the process of seeking the portraits of some in the elder branch of the Medici for the fresco decoration in the Quartiere di Leone X, must have found a portrait of Giuliano. Based on the newly found portrait, he must then have noticed the youth standing behind the third King was Giuliano. Although the inventory of 1492 does not refer to any portrait of Giuliano, the inventory redacted in 1503 after the death of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, and his younger brother, Giovanni, records a picture representing the head of Giuliano: '1^o quadro colla testa di Giuliano de' Medici'.³⁰ In addition, the inventory of 1553 refers to Giuliano's portrait in parchment: 'Uno quadretto pittovi la testa di Giuliano di Piero de' Medici in carta pecora, cornice dorate'.³¹ Although we do not know whether the Washington painting was the first,³² portraits of Giuliano certainly existed in the Medici collections, and presumably Vasari had looked at them.

If the youth standing behind the third King is Giuliano, then Lorenzo, who had succeeded to his father's position a few years before and was recognised as an important figure at that time, must be portrayed somewhere in the painting. In fact, Ronald Lightbown indicates that Lorenzo must be the figure standing behind the first King and dressed in a blue toga who is observing the audience of the Christ-child being granted to the first King.³³ Although this proposal of Lightbown has not been widely supported, from a compositional viewpoint, it is very convincing. The young man in the blue toga and the youth in the black *giornea* stand symmetrically with respect to the ray of light from the star, and the former takes the position of honour. In addition, the young man in the blue toga has a strong resemblance to a portrait of a young Lorenzo in armour incised on a medal that was likely cast on the occasion of the *giostra* held in the Piazza Santa Croce in 1469 (Fig. 21),³⁴ when Lorenzo won the championship and was awarded a silver helmet with a figure of Mars on the top by Lucrezia Donati.³⁵ Moreover, the hypothesis that the figure, who stands right behind Cosimo il Vecchio, is Lorenzo is supported by the appearance of an ornament on the reversed brim of his hat. There, on a red background with a golden design, six pearls glisten, encircled by four smaller pearls. These six pearls are very likely a hidden sign of the coat of arms of the Medici, which is comprised of six balls (Fig. 22).

[Figure 21: Florentine 15th Century, *Lorenzo de' Medici*, c. 1469, bronze, 8.015 × 5.745 cm (oval), Firenze, Museo Nazionale del Bargello (*Eredità* 1992, p.65)]



[Figure 22: Andrea del Verrocchio, *Tomb of Cosimo de' Medici*, c. 1467, Firenze, cripta in San Lorenzo (Covi 2005, Fig. 23)]

3.3. A Representation of ‘Self’

The reason that the *Del Lama Altarpiece* is famous is not only that some members of the Medici are portrayed in the painting. This work is well known also because it contains a self-portrait of Botticelli, author of fascinating mythological paintings such as the *Primavera* and the *Birth of Venus*. In 1893, Ulmann identified for the first time the rightmost figure in an ochreous coat as the painter himself. This figure is staring at us in a very confident way. Of course, Botticelli is not the first to boldly include a self-portrait in his work. For example, we know of the fresco of Benozzo Gozzoli in San Gimignano. In 1903, Jacques Mesnil identified the old man with white hair in the group on the right—the only figure with white hair except for the first King—as the donor, Guasparre del Lama, who at age 60 or more commissioned the altarpiece. These identifications are widely accepted.

Botticelli and Guasparre belong to the same side of the work, Botticelli as the author and Guasparre as the donor who paid for the work. It is interesting that these two, who were instrumental in executing the altarpiece and who are thus ‘Self’ according to the theme of this workshop, are both looking at the viewer. While nearly all the attendants of the three Kings are watching the Kings’ audience in the centre, the painter and the donor are focused on the outside world. In this way, evidently, the ‘Self’ is distinguished from the ‘Others’.

Turning our attention to another unknown figure in the painting, we can see that there is a man standing near the collapsed *loggia* and looking out at us. Vasari replicated this figure on the ceiling of the Sala di Cosimo il Vecchio as a portrait of Lorenzo di Giovanni di Bicci (Fig. 23) , younger



[Figure 23: Giorgio Vasari, *Portrait of Lorenzo di Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici(?)*, 1556-1558, fresco, Firenze, Palazzo Vecchio, Sala di Cosimo il Vecchio (Langedijk 1981-1987, II, p. 1132, Fig. 71.6)]

brother of Cosimo il Vecchio. To this day, we do not have any contemporary portrait of Lorenzo di Giovanni. Therefore, we have no way to determine whether this figure is truly his portrait. It is, however, less likely that this man is an important figure of the Medici, since his position is distant from the other Medici figures, who occupy the central space of the painting. In addition, the represented figures are shown concentrating their attention on the holy event in the painting’s centre, while this figure turns his gaze on the outside world, similar to the donor and the artist. These facts

suggest that the man belongs to the ‘Self’ side, probably a person associated with the donor Guasparre. The reason Vasari considered this to be Lorenzo di Giovanni likely stems from the fact that Vasari found it difficult to exclude a portrait of Lorenzo di Giovanni, founder of the younger branch of the Medici to which Cosimo I, Grand Duke of Tuscany, belonged, in the decoration of the Grand Duke’s residential castle, Palazzo Vecchio. Consequently, the court painter adopted the idea that Giovanni di Lorenzo was the person represented by the figure in Botticelli’s altarpiece, which was already known to include portraits of the Medici.

4. Concluding Remarks

Taking another look at the *Del Lama Altarpiece* on the basis of the newly proposed identifications of the portraits, one can notice the highly calculated position of the figures.

Firstly, we focus on the ‘Community’ in the painted world. While all the figures categorised as the ‘Self’ are looking to the outside world, the other figures, that is the ‘Others’, are concentrating their attention on the holy event in the painting. Here, a clear dividing line is drawn. Thus, the figures of the ‘Self’ group stand out sharply.

The donor Guasparre and the unknown person likely associated with Guasparre are arranged symmetrically with respect to the Holy Family. The first King is positioned on a line connecting them. As a result of my research regarding the names of the three Kings in *Tre-Quattrocento* Italy, I discovered that the first King had the same name—Gaspare—as the donor. Guasparre del Lama evidently had the painter portray Cosimo il Vecchio as the King bearing his (Gasparre’s) name and place the King’s head at the same level as his. These facts show the devotion of Guasparre, not only to his namesake saint, but also to Cosimo il Vecchio. Moreover, with respect to Piero’s position, the two sons, Lorenzo and Giuliano, are symmetrised, thus creating a beautiful and well-ordered composition in which the living Lorenzo and Giuliano witness the audience of Christ granted to the Kings, who represented their deceased grandfather and father. One can even infer as the brothers stand at the head of the two opposing groups in the painting an expectation that the new young leaders, Lorenzo and Giuliano, will solemnly guide the future of the Republic of Florence, succeeding their distinguished ancestors.

The group of the ‘Self’ in the painting ties the ‘Community’ in the painted world to the ‘Community’ in the real world. By exchanging glances with viewers, that is, the ‘Others’ in the real world, they invite the viewers into the painted world. In those days, the real world ‘Community’ of people who viewed the altarpiece, those who can be called ‘Others’ in this context, must have understood immediately the messages from the donor Guasparre del Lama, the ‘Self’—that he had

profound respect for Cosimo *Pater Patriae* and that he was proud to be one of the supporters who assisted the young Medici in leading the Republic of Florence.

Notes

- ¹ Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (BNCF), Magl. XVII, 17, c. 84r in Horne 1908, p. 344, App. II., Doc. II.
- ² Vasari 1550, ed. Bettarini-Barocchi 1966-1987, III, p. 515.
- ³ Vasari 1568, ed. Bettarini-Barocchi 1966-1987, III, p. 515.
- ⁴ Archivio del convento di Santa Maria Novella di Firenze (ASMNF), I.A.9, I, c. 17v: “In multarum figurarum vultibus primarios Mediceae domus viros ex sententia expressit”.
- ⁵ Hatfield 1976, p. 71.
- ⁶ Pseudo-Beda the Venerable, *Excerptiones patrum, Collectanea, Flores ex diversis, Quaestiones et Parabolae (Patrologia cursus completus. Series latina 94, 539D-560A)*. In Western literature, this text is one of the first writings in which the names and appearance of the three Kings are mentioned, that is, Melchior is as an old man with a rich white beard and hair, Caspar as a beardless youth and Balthazar as richly bearded. Kehrer 1908-1909, vol. 1, 1908, p.66. The sequence of their names changed, at least in Italy, between the fourteenth and the fifteenth century: Gasparre, the eldest; Baldassarre, in his prime; and Melchiorre, the youngest.
- ⁷ Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Pult. 71.07, c. 2r. Langedijk 1981-1987, I, pp. 15-16 and p. 390, 26.15. With regard to the medal, the figure on the reverse of Florence is wearing a veil as a sign of mourning, suggesting that the medal could have been made soon after the death of Cosimo, probably on the occasion of the conferment of the title “Father of the Fatherland” (Fiorenza Vannel Toderi and Giuseppe Toderi in *Eredità del Magnifico* 1992, p. 66 cat. 31). Some scholars hypothesise a later date, within 1475, believing, for chronological reasons, that it was commissioned not by Piero but by another of the Medici. See, Garzelli 1985, p. 176; Ceccanti 2009, pp. 408-409.
- ⁸ *Gli Uffizi* 1979, I, p. 176; Lightbown 1978, II, pp. 33-35, B22.
- ⁹ Horne 1908, p. 41.
- ¹⁰ Ulmann 1893, p. 58. Regarding the bust of Mino da Fiesole, see *Eredità del Magnifico* 1992, pp. 42-44 cat. 19. With regard to the medal, see Hill 1930, I, p. 236 no. 908; Pollard 2007, pp. 293-294.
- ¹¹ Francesco Caglioti in *Eredità del Magnifico* 1992, pp. 42-44 cat. 19; Zuraw 1993, II, pp. 474-479 cat.2.
- ¹² Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), MaP 165, c. 14r: “nella camera grande di detta sala, detta camera di Lorenzo [...], una testa di marmo sopra l’uscio dell’anticamera, della ‘mprompta di Piero di Cosimo’”. The rooms of Lorenzo previously belonged to his father Piero (Francesco Caglioti in *Eredità del Magnifico* 1992, p. 42).
- ¹³ Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Pult. 71.07, c. 2r e Pult. 84.01, c. 2r. Langedijk 1981-1987, II, pp. 1332 and 1335-1336, 98.9-10.
- ¹⁴ See Lightbown 1978, I, p. 45; Checchi 2005, p. 136; Nicoletta Pons in *Filippino Lippi* 2011, p. 112 cat. 13.
- ¹⁵ Regarding the provenances and the attributions of the two busts, see Zuraw 1993, II, pp. 474-479 cat.2 and pp. 485-490 cat. 4.
- ¹⁶ ASFi, MaP 165, c. 38v.
- ¹⁷ The letter is cited in Caglioti 1991, p. 45; Zuraw 1993, II, p. 475.
- ¹⁸ Hill 1930, I, p. 236 no. 907; Pollard 2007, I, p. 295 no. 278.
- ¹⁹ Cfr. Pontorno, *Portrait of Cosimo il Vecchio*, 1518-1519, oil on panel, 86 × 65 cm, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi (inv. 1890 n. 3574).
- ²⁰ Francesco Caglioti in *Eredità del Magnifico* 1992, p. 44.
- ²¹ ASFi, GM 28, c. 13: “13 teste di marmo col busto tra le quali è Julio Cesare, Appio Cieco, Antonino Pio, 2 Bruti, Piero de’ Medici et altre antiche”. Zuraw 1993, pp. 474-475.
- ²² Francesco Caglioti in *Eredità del Magnifico* 1992, p. 46.
- ²³ Horne 1908, p. 41.
- ²⁴ Lightbown 1978, I, p. 45.
- ²⁵ See Hatfield 1976, pp. 95-96. The three Magi, in Tre and Quattrocento, are haloed, considered to be saints.
- ²⁶ Hatfield 1976, pp. 78-79; Cecchi 2005, pp. 136-142; Nicoletta Pons in *Filippino Lippi* 2011, p. 112 cat. 13.
- ²⁷ Boskovits and Brown 2003, p. 171.
- ²⁸ See Boskovits and Brown 2003, pp. 170-171 and p. 174 note 2.
- ²⁹ Levi D’Ancona 1977, pp. 201-203.

³⁰ Shearman 1975, p. 26. It is most likely identical to a painting described as “1^a testa di Giuliano di Piero di Cosimo” enumerated in the inventory of 1516, which registered the portion of Giovanni di Giovanni (Giovanni dalle Bande Nere; 1498-1526) divided with his cousin Pierfrancesco di Lorenzo (1487-1525) (Lightbown 1978, II, p. 32).

³¹ ASFi, GM 28, c. 30. Langedijk (1981-1987, II, pp. 1063-1064, 60.4) hypothesises that the author of this parchment portrait is Botticelli.

³² Boskovits and Brown 2003, p. 174 note 2.

³³ Lightbown 1978, I, p. 45; *id.* 1989, pp. 66-68.

³⁴ Hill 1930, I, p. 243 no. 921; Pollard 1984-1985, I, p. 409 no. 225; Fiorenza Vannel Toderi and Giuseppe Toderi in *Eredità del Magnifico* 1992, p. 64 cat. 28.

³⁵ Hill 1930, I, p. 243; Fiorenza Vannel Toderi and Giuseppe Toderi in *Eredità del Magnifico* 1992, p. 64.

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