

Raphael's 'Siege of Perugia'

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THE ATTRIBUTION TO Raphael of the drawing of the *Siege of Perugia* in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (inv.no.3856r; Fig.43), has been questioned in the past, but is universally accepted today.¹ It is usually said to depict an unidentified subject, although Vincenzo Farinella and Sylvia Ferino have cautiously proposed that it might represent a moment from Appian's 'bellum perusinum', and it has also been said to show 'les querelles de faction à Pérouse au début du XVI^e siècle'.² However, the drawing contains details that make it possible to identify the subject as an incident from the life of St Herculaneus, the sixth-century bishop and patron saint of Perugia.

The drawing shows eight nude men assaulting the walls of a city which is identified as Perugia in an inscription ('PERVIA AVGVST'). The camp of the besieging army is represented on the left, and the aggressors' tents are surmounted by crescent moons (difficult to see in reproduction, but clearly visible in the original). If the drawing is compared with one of Benedetto Bonfigli's frescos in the Cappella dei Priori at Perugia (Fig.44),³ painted 1455–79, it becomes clear that Raphael's drawing represents the capture of Perugia by Totila, king of the Ostrogoths (reigned 541–52).⁴ This event took place in 552 and was retold in the *Dialogues* of St Gregory the Great (c.540–04)⁵ and in numerous histories of Perugia. Crescent moons do not seem to be present in Bonfigli's fresco (it is not clear to me whether the damaged tops of his tent-poles are balls or crescents) but they identify Totila's Goths in Signorelli's frescos at Monte Oliveto Maggiore, which Raphael had apparently studied around 1502–03.⁶

St Herculaneus was the most important of Perugia's civic saints, famous for his patriotic exhortations to the local populace to resist Totila's siege for seven years (546–52). When the city was finally betrayed, Totila ordered that the bishop should be mutilated, beheaded and thrown from the city walls; but the miraculous discovery of his unblemished body at the spot where he fell forty days after he had been buried only boosted the esteem in which he was held by the Perugians, who subsequently held him to be their *defen-*

sor civitatis.⁷ As a result his feast day on 1st March became the most important civic feast, and the city's statutes obliged the captain and priors to honour the saint in various ways (including commissioning images of him that were processed on and just before his feast day).⁸

The drawing is usually dated c.1505–06, but it was probably made in 1505 when Raphael was still active in Perugia. Although he went on to deliver the Baglioni *Entombment* to the church of S. Francesco al Prato in 1507, Raphael's failure to complete his fresco in S. Severo – later dated 1505 – and the provisions for carrying the Monteluca altarpiece back to Perugia in his contract of December 1505 suggest that he had transferred his centre of operations to Florence by the end of that year.⁹ 1505–06 is also the date of the second of Raphael's paintings (the *Madonna Belvedere* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) for his most important Florentine patron, Taddeo Taddei (1470–1528), and it has been duly observed that the verso of the drawing includes an interpretative copy after Michelangelo's Taddei tondo, now in the Royal Academy, London, but probably known to Raphael in Taddei's palazzo in Via de' Ginori.¹⁰

Even without the evidence of a copy after a Florentine model, it was always clear that the *Siege of Perugia* represented Raphael's response to the great murals that had been commissioned from Leonardo and Michelangelo for the Sala del Consiglio of the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. The vigorous male nudes – so different from Raphael's earlier studies – find their counterparts in Michelangelo's *Battle of Cascina* cartoon, albeit with debts to Signorelli's frescos at Orvieto as well.¹¹ Vasari described how Raphael was attracted to Florence by reports of these battle scenes,¹² and the young artist's drawings show that he studied both the Florentine compositions, as well as Signorelli's frescos.¹³

What Raphael lacked before his arrival in Rome in 1508 was the opportunity to paint a fresco of comparable grandeur, and the *Siege of Perugia* and other drawings related to it represent – at the very least – his experimentation with grand figure compositions of this type. But everything we know of Raphael's practice as a draughtsman suggests that he drew with a purpose, and a number of possible commissions have been suggested in connection with the *Siege of Perugia*. Kurt Forster suggested that the drawing might have been intended for the predella of the Baglioni *Entombment* (Galleria Borghese, Rome), and Paul Joannides proposed that it might have been made for a small domestic work in Perugia.¹⁴ There is no

I am grateful to Sylvia Ferino Pagden for commenting on an early draft of this note, and to David Ekserdjian, who also noted the connection with Bonfigli's fresco. This note is for my fellow *Raffaellisti*, Hugo Chapman and Carol Plazzotta.

¹ For the bibliography associated with this drawing, see F. Viatte, in A. Chastel et al.: exh. cat. *Raphaël dans les collections françaises*, Paris (Grand Palais) 1983–84, pp.202–03; and D. Cordellier and B. Py: *Raphaël, son atelier, ses copistes*, Paris 1992, pp.45–47.

² S. Ferino Pagden: 'Raphael's Invention of "Storie" in His Florentine Drawings', in S. Hager, ed.: *Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael in Renaissance Florence from 1500–1508*, Washington 1992, pp.89–120, esp. pp.95–102; and Cordellier and Py, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp.45–47.

³ F.F. Mancini: *Benedetto Bonfigli*, Perugia 1992, pp.86–105, esp. pp.94–95.

⁴ S. Ferino Pagden: *Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia: Disegni Umbri*, Milan 1984, p.151, cautiously proposed that the drawing may have been preparatory for 'un ciclo di affreschi dedicato alla storia religiosa locale di Perugia e immaginabile come decorazione di una sala con funzioni politico religiose, del tipo ad esempio degli affreschi di Bonfigli nella cappella dei Priori di Perugia o della . . . cappella Maggiore di Sant'Ercolano' but did not make the explicit connection proposed here.

⁵ St Gregory the Great: *Dialogues*, III, 13, trans. O. Zimmerman, Washington 1959, pp.128–29. The *Dialogues* were published in various Latin editions (e.g. in Venice in 1492) and had been translated into Italian by Fra Domenico Cavalca in the fourteenth century. For early printed editions, see the *Short-Title Catalogue of Books printed in Italy and of Italian books printed in other countries 1465–1600*, London 1958, p.314.

⁶ Raphael's derivations from Signorelli's scenes from Gregory's *Dialogues* are to be found in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (PII510) and, at one remove, in the *Libretto Veneziano*; see T. Henry: 'Raphael and Siena', *Apollo* 160 (2004), pp.50–56, and Ferino Pagden, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp.40 and 50.

⁷ See P. Pellini: *Dell'Historia di Perugia*, Venice 1664, I, pp.106–09. For St Herculaneus's position in Perugia, see A.I. Galletti: 'Sant'Ercolano, il grifo e le lasche. Note sull'immaginario collettivo nella città comunale', *Forme e Tecniche del potere nella città (Annali della Facoltà di Scienze politiche)* 16 (1979–80), p.215 and *passim*; and E. Lunghi: 'Appunti per la storia urbanistica di Perugia negli affreschi della cappella dei Priori', in V. Garibaldi, ed.: exh. cat. *Un pittore e la sua città. Benedetto Bonfigli e Perugia*, Perugia (Galleria Nazionale) 1996–97, pp.96–105.

⁸ See, for instance, M. Salem Elsheikh: *Statuto del Comune e del Popolo di Perugia del 1342 in volgare*, Perugia 2000, I.46.1, pp.162–63.

⁹ For these unfulfilled commissions, see J. Shearman: *Raphael in Early Modern Sources – 1483–1602*, New Haven and London 2003, pp.86–92 and 712–14.

¹⁰ For Taddei, see A. Cecchi in M. Gregori, ed.: exh. cat. *Raffaello a Firenze*, Florence (Palazzo Pitti) 1984, pp.40–41. For Raphael's access to Taddei's collection and drawings after Michelangelo's marble tondo, see H. Chapman, T. Henry and C. Plazzotta: exh. cat. *Raphael: from Urbino to Rome*, London (National Gallery) 2004–05, no.61.

¹¹ For Bastiano da Sangallo's painted copy after Michelangelo's *Bathers* at Holkham Hall, see Chapman, Henry and Plazzotta, *op. cit.* (note 10), no.55. For the debts to Signorelli of the figure seen from behind at the base of the ladder, see T. Henry: 'Raphael, Signorelli and a Mysterious Pricked Drawing at Oxford', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 135 (1993), pp.612–19.

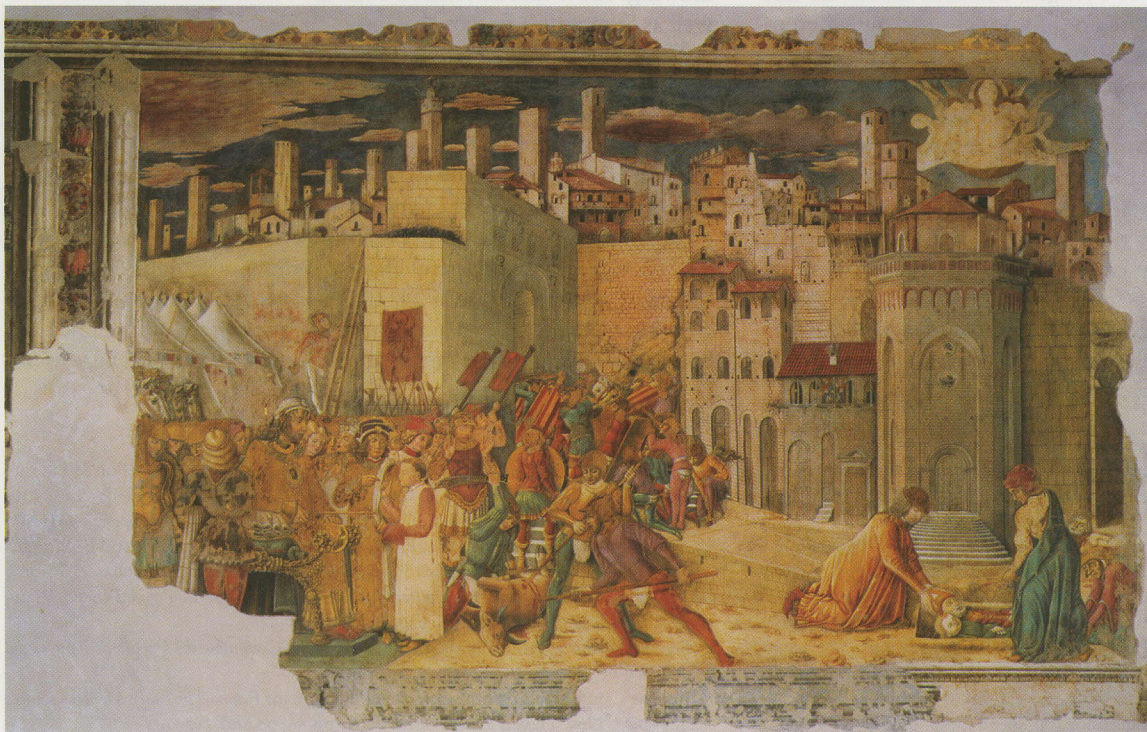
¹² G. Vasari: *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, ed. R. Bettarini and P. Barocchi, Florence 1966–87, IV, p.159.

¹³ See Chapman, Henry and Plazzotta, *op. cit.* (note 10), no.57 and fig.20.

¹⁴ See K. Forster's review of J. Pope-Hennessy: *Raphael*, New York 1970, in *Art Quarterly* 35 (1972), pp.425–27, esp. p.427; P. Joannides: *The Drawings of Raphael with a Complete Catalogue*, Los Angeles and Oxford 1983, no.93.



43. *Siege of Perugia*, by Raphael. c.1505. Pen and brown ink, 26.6 by 40.6 cm. (Musée du Louvre, Paris).



44. *Storming of Perugia*, by Benedetto Bonfigli. 1455–79. Fresco, 270 by 285 cm. (Cappella dei Priori, Perugia).

evidence for the former hypothesis (and the altarpiece's predella in the Vatican weighs heavily against the possibility), and the latter also seems unlikely, especially given the effort put into elaborating the design and the grandeur of the composition, both of which seem more likely to indicate a large-scale commission (despite Joannides's arguments that the scale of the figures would have been inappropriate). Ferino's suggestion that it might have been destined for a cycle

of frescos in Perugia with a religious and political function seems much more likely to be correct,¹⁵ and is bolstered by identifying the subject and noting the parallels with Bonfigli's frescos in the chapel of the Palazzo dei Priori in Perugia.

It is therefore worth considering whether a civic commission along these lines might have been planned in these years. As Forster noted, the subject of a city under siege was of particular relevance to

¹⁵ See Ferino Pagden, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.151.

¹⁶ See N. Rubinstein: *The Palazzo Vecchio 1298–1532*, Oxford 1995, pp.73–75, and

P. Fortini Brown: *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio*, New Haven and London 1988, pp.272–78.

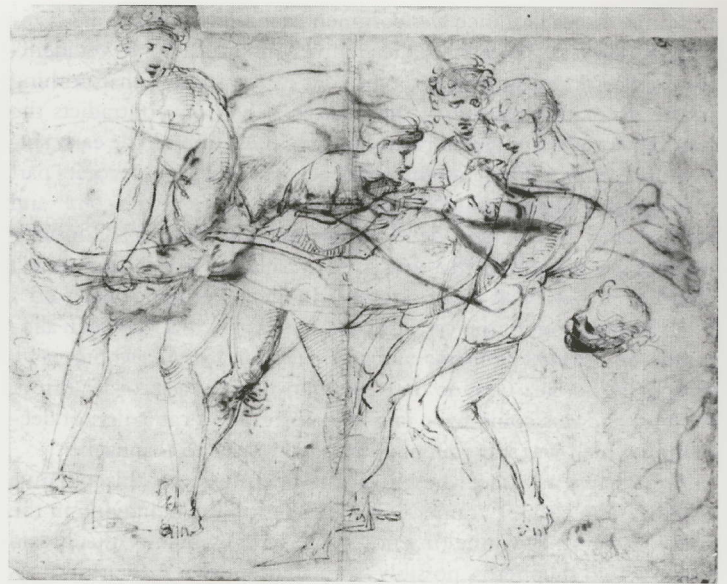


45. *Two nude men and a dead lamb*, by Raphael. c.1506-07. Pen and brown ink, 28 by 16 cm. (Musée Bonnat, Bayonne).

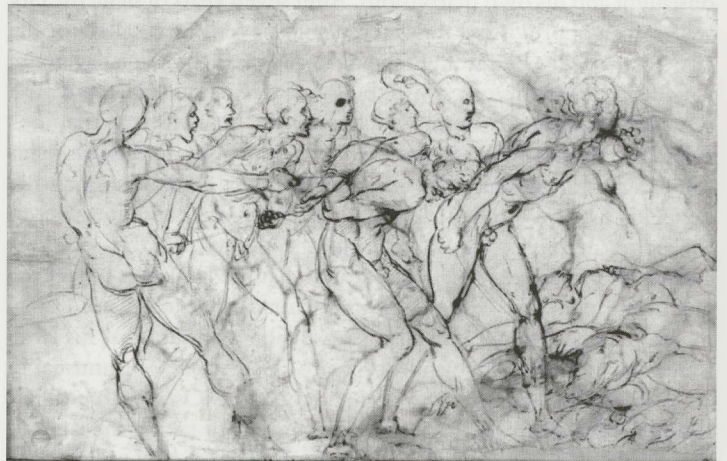


46. *Two kneeling men supporting the body of a third; studies of heads, and of an arm and a head*, by Raphael. c.1506-07. Pen and brown ink, 26.5 by 33 cm. (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).

Perugia in the early years of the sixteenth century. Moreover there seems no reason to doubt Vasari's statement that word had spread of the battle scenes that Soderini had commissioned in Florence to reinforce civic pride, and the political elite in Perugia could also



47. *Death of Adonis*, by Raphael. c.1506-07. Pen and brown ink, 26.5 by 33 cm. (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).



48. *Two battle scenes with prisoners being pinioned*, by Raphael. c.1506-07. Pen and brown ink over black chalk, 26.8 by 41.7 cm. (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).



49. *Funeral of a bishop*, by Raphael. c.1505-08. Pen and ink, 24.7 by 39.2 cm. (Graphische Sammlun, Munich).

have known of the similar emblematic battles being painted in the Sala del Maggiore Consiglio in Venice, not least because of Peruginò's involvement in this commission.¹⁶ It would make perfect sense for Perugia to commemorate its heroic resistance to Totila's siege at

this time, just as Florence was commemorating its victories at Cascina and Anghiari. Research in the archives of Perugia might yet identify a civic commission of this type, but it may be said that nothing in the decorative history of the Palazzo dei Priori contradicts the possibility that plans were drawn up along these lines in the early sixteenth century.¹⁷ There might have been a project to redecorate part of the palace before Julius II stayed there in September 1506,¹⁸ and redecoration of the Sala dell'Udienza and the Sala del Consiglio became necessary later that year as the result of a fire.¹⁹ The project could even have had earlier origins. In 1475 Perugino was paid a small amount, out of the vast sum of 1,000 florins that had been allocated, for '*certarum picturarum in nostro palatio in sala Magna Superiori*', that is, in the Sala Grande del Consiglio of the Palazzo dei Priori, Perugia; and this could have initiated a protracted campaign of decoration which was subsequently intended to pass to Raphael.²⁰

As it happens other drawings can be related to this putative scheme. The clearest connection is to be found in a drawing in the Musée Bonnat, Bayonne (inv.no.1706; Fig.45) which is usually said to show two shepherds, possibly from an unknown Adoration.²¹ As later reported in the histories of Perugia, local legends embellished St Gregory's account of Herculaneus's role in the city's resistance with a story of how his attempt to trick Totila provoked the final onslaught and his own martyrdom. After seven years of siege the city was starved of provisions, but Herculaneus nevertheless called for the city's granaries to be carefully swept to gather every last ear of grain. To the consternation of the populace, Herculaneus had them feed these last morsels to a lamb, which was then thrown from the ramparts. The dead lamb was recovered by Totila's men and taken to his camp, where it initially had the desired effect of discouraging the besieging army, who deduced that the Perugians had enough corn to feed to their livestock, and enough meat to jettison the occasional lamb.²² Subsequent betrayal revealed that the lamb was in fact the city's last hope, and Perugia fell to the attack that followed. Looking at Raphael's drawing it seems reasonable to argue that his lamb is dead (which would be appropriate to this subject, but unusual in an Adoration), and the two figures could be Ostrogoth soldiers falling for the fake profligacy of the Perugians, or taking the lamb to their leader. There is no reason why the drawing should not be close in date to the *Siege*, and both drawings are lit from the left.

The death of the corn-fed lamb could reasonably have appeared in the same work as the *Siege of Perugia* (as it does in Bonfigli's fresco, albeit with the alternative iconography of an ox instead of a

lamb),²³ but if the original scheme was a cycle and involved more than one scene, then other drawings can be considered. One in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (PII531; Fig.46), showing a haloed figure being placed in (or removed from) a shallow grave, might have been preparatory to the scene of Herculaneus's burial or translation (both represented by Bonfigli), rather than the Baglioni *Entombment* to which it is usually related for no very good reason (it is strikingly different in conception to all the other phases of the evolution of this design).²⁴ One should also consider whether the so-called *Death of Adonis* (or *Meleager*) also in the Ashmolean (PII539r; Fig.47) could show the saint's body being moved from its original resting place to the church of S. Pietro where it was reburied.²⁵ It is also worth asking whether the drawing of a bearded prisoner and his captors in the Ashmolean (PII538v; Fig.48) could represent Totila's captain, with the sword, asking his leader what he was to do with his saintly captive (as noted above, the shocking response was to mutilate, decapitate and cast his body from the ramparts).²⁶

It is also possible that, in even closer emulation of Bonfigli's frescos, Raphael was considering a cycle which included scenes from the life of St Louis of Toulouse. A faint and not entirely convincing drawing in Munich (Graphische Sammlung, inv.no.2457; Fig.49) shows the funeral of a bishop, which can be compared with Bonfigli's *Funeral of St Louis* in the Cappella dei Priori.²⁷ This drawing is normally dated slightly later, but there is no reason why a project of this type might not have been under consideration for several years. It might even be the case that when in c.1507–08 Raphael asked Domenico Alfani to send him '*le istranboti de Ricciardo di quella tenpesta che ebbe andando in un viaggio*' (argued to be Luigi Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*, XX.31–32),²⁸ he was considering how to represent the storm that resulted in the shipwreck shown in the background of another of the miracles of St Louis that Bonfigli represented in the chapel.²⁹

The importance of Perugia to Raphael's career in the years 1504–08 has frequently been eclipsed by his activity in Florence in the same years. It is nevertheless the case that while he painted four altarpieces and accepted the commission for a fifth in the former city, he never completed his only altarpiece for the latter. Adding his unfinished fresco at S. Severo and apparently unexecuted commissions such as a *St Jerome* and this *Siege of Perugia* to his list of works for the city, encourages a root and branch revision of the traditional emphasis on these years as 'Raphael's Florentine period'.³⁰

¹⁷ For which see F.F. Mancini: 'La residenza dei priori: uso e decorazione degli spazi interni dal XIV al XVIII secolo', in F.F. Mancini, ed.: *Il Palazzo dei Priori di Perugia*, Perugia 1997, pp.279–335.

¹⁸ For Julius's visit, see *inter alia* the *Memorie di Teseo Alfani* published in *Archivio Storico Italiano* 16, no.2 (1851), pp.247–319, esp. p.249.

¹⁹ See Mancini, *op. cit.* (note 17), pp.292–97. Raphael's Perugian partner, Berto di Giovanni, also worked in the palace in 1508; *ibid.*, p.323, note 103.

²⁰ See F. Canuti: *Il Perugino*, Siena 1931, II, p.120, and Mancini, *op. cit.* (note 17), p.289.

²¹ For the drawing, see Joannides, *op. cit.* (note 14), no.184. It can be observed that the pose of the left-hand figure is developed from Raphael's study after Michelangelo's *David* – particularly in a well-known drawing in the British Museum, for which see Chapman, Henry and Plazzotta, *op. cit.* (note 10), no.58.

²² See F. Ciatti: *Delle Memorie annali et istoriche delle cose di Perugia*, Perugia 1638, II, p.65: '... fù essendo la Città ridotta ad estrema miseria, nè essendo in quella rimasto nè pure un grano di frumento ... egli [St Herculaneus] ... consigliò, che gli si portasse avanti tutto il grano, che dentro la Città si ritrovava ... onde doppo haver ricercato ogni granaro, gli portarono al fine una piccola misura di frumento. Indi (ne senza meraviglia e tacita indignatione del Popolo) fattosi portare un'agnello, che solo trovavasi vivo nell'oppressa Città, gli desse a mangiare quel grano; del quale bene pasciutosi & straordinariamente ripieno, il Santo Vescovo ascese sopra la più alta parte delle mura della Città, & a gran forza gettò a terra quell'animale, il quale sì per la soverchia ripienezza, come per l'alta caduta, venne à crepare; e partendo poi vennero

nel luogo ove l'agnello giaceva alcuni Gothi; i quali raccolto il morto animale, nel Campo lo portarono.'

²³ For Bonfigli's fresco and Gozzoli's drawing of the same subject, see Mancini, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp.96–97. In spite of this visual tradition there is no reason why Raphael should not have followed the legend as recorded by Ciatti.

²⁴ See K.T. Parker: *Catalogue of the Collection of Drawings in the Ashmolean Museum, vol.II. The Italian Schools*, Oxford 1956, no.531.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, no.539r.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, no.538v. For Herculaneus's death, burial and translation, see Ciatti, *op. cit.* (note 22), pp.67–69.

²⁷ For this drawing, see Joannides, *op. cit.* (note 14), no.192. For Bonfigli's fresco, see Mancini, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.92.

²⁸ For Raphael's request, see Shearman, *op. cit.* (note 9), pp.111–12. In Pulci's poem a violent sea storm is whipped up around the boat on which Ricciardo (or Ricciardetto) is travelling. My hypothesis is that Raphael may have wanted to call these strambotti (verses) to mind when contemplating another storm at sea: the miracle of St Louis and the shipwrecked merchant who found his lost fortune in a belly of a fish.

²⁹ For Bonfigli's fresco, see Mancini, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.88.

³⁰ For an expansion of this conclusion and discussion of these other Perugian works (with further bibliography), see T. Henry and C. Plazzotta: 'Raphael: from Urbino to Rome', in Chapman, Henry and Plazzotta, *op. cit.* (note 10), pp.23–34.