Sacred–Political Imagery in Fifteenth-Century Florence

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Abstract

This thesis offers a new context for understanding three of Donatello’s statues—the marble *David* c.1408–12, and the bronzes of *David* and *Judith*, c.1450s. By weaving together art history, religious history, classical scholarship, and humanist learning, this study shows that the sculptures were part of a penitential tradition using violence in art to provoke ethical engagement and encourage its viewers to pursue virtue. Crucially for historians’ understanding of ‘propaganda,’ this interpretation challenges an overly secular approach to politics, suggesting that Donatello’s sculptures were emblems of the Florentine polis because they entwined spiritual and political values. It also demonstrates that a shift away from this way of thinking happened during Lorenzo de’ Medici’s time, much later in the fifteenth century than historians might expect.
# Contents

## I Interpretative Approaches

1 **Contesting ‘Propaganda’**
   1.1 The Political Image of Florence .................................. 3
   1.2 Present Problems ..................................................... 8
   1.3 Epistemological Fault Lines ........................................ 12
   1.4 Power and the Art of State ......................................... 30
   1.5 New Solutions ....................................................... 40
   1.6 A Note on Terminology .............................................. 54

2 **A New Nidus for the Political David**
   2.1 Introduction ......................................................... 56
   2.2 The *Book of Hours* David, a New Nidus .......................... 60
   2.3 The Penitential David ................................................. 69
   2.4 Private Chapels and the Technology of Guiding Souls .......... 73
   2.5 Conclusion ............................................................ 86

3 **A Period Eye for Violence**
   3.1 The Metaphor of Warfare ............................................ 89
   3.2 Victimhood ............................................................ 96
   3.3 Mutual Victimhood ................................................... 109
   3.4 Justifiable Killing ................................................... 130
   3.5 Virtue Vanquishing Vice ............................................. 147
   3.6 Conclusion ........................................................... 157
## II Core Works Reinterpreted

4 **The Marble David**

4.1 Introduction ........................................... 161
4.2 The Scholarship ....................................... 162
4.3 David as *Libertas* .................................. 170
4.4 An Iconographical Analysis .......................... 173
4.5 The *Psychomachia* .................................. 183
4.6 “Fight for Fatherland” in a Sermon ................. 192
4.7 Epideixis .............................................. 199
4.8 Conclusion ............................................ 209

5 **The Bronze David**

5.1 Introduction ........................................... 211
5.2 The Scholarship ....................................... 215
5.3 David as Triumph of Love ............................ 220
5.4 An Iconographical Analysis .......................... 223
5.5 *Cassoni* and Love of the *Trionfi* ................. 228
5.6 Exile and the Language of Selflessness .......... 239
5.7 San Marco, and the *Humiliatio* of a Statesman .. 240
5.8 Palmieri’s *On Civic Life*, an Alternative ‘Propaganda’ Model . . 247
5.9 The *Palazzo* Setting ................................ 255
5.10 Palmieri’s ‘public’ and ‘private’ .................. 259
5.11 Conclusion ............................................ 265

6 **The Bronze Judith**

6.1 Introduction ........................................... 268
6.2 The Scholarship ....................................... 276
6.3 An Iconographical Analysis .......................... 284
6.4 Trampling Vice ........................................ 295
6.5 The Story in the Book of Judith .................... 300
6.6 Sacred–Political Authority, Themes in the Book of Judith ........ 307
6.7 Judith as Petrarchan Chastity ....................... 309
6.8 Botticelli’s Judith as Virtue in Metamorphosis ...... 321
I leave croaking to the frogs, cawing to the crows, vanities to the vain.
Therefore I stay with logic, which fears not the ergo of death.

Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*
## List of Figures

1.2.1 Diagram showing two conceptions of liberty. ........................................... 11
1.5.1 Example of the ‘period eye,’ described by Baxandall in *Painting and Experience.* ................................................................. 42
1.5.2 *Speculum humanae salvationis*, c.1370–90, Chapter 38, a. Mary protecting the faithful under her cloak, b. Moses besieged the city of Saba and then fell in love and married Tarbis, daughter of its king, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS.43-1950, fol. 17v. .......................................................... 49
1.5.3 Tuscan examples of *Madonna della Misericordia.* ................................. 50
1.5.4 Diagram showing three types of liberty in Donatello’s statues of David and Judith. ................................................................. 52

2.1.1 *Book of Hours*, c.1370s–80s, left page, *David and Goliath,* and facing page, *David with a harp,* Italy (Florence), MS 5, ff.168v–169r, Syracuse University Library. ................................................................. 61
2.2.1 A comparison between Magdalene in Florentine *Book of Hours,* c.late-14th century, and Botticelli’s *Magdalene,* c.late-15th century, the latter with Florence painted in the background. .................................................. 63
2.2.2 *Book of Hours,* c.1370s–80s, a scene from Dante’s *Purgatorio,* Italy (Florence), MS 5, ff.168v–169r, Syracuse University Library. ................................................................. 65
2.2.3 *Book of Hours,* c.1370s–80s, *David and Goliath,* Italy (Florence), MS 5, ff.168v - 169r, Syracuse University Library. ................................................................. 66
2.2.4 *Book of Hours,* c.1370s–80s, *Man of Sorrows,* Italy (Florence), MS 5, Syracuse University Library. ................................................................. 68
2.3.1 Zanobi Strozzi, c.1445, *Book of Hours for the Use of Rome, David and Goliath,* tempera and gold on parchment, MS. W. 767, ff.169v-170r, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. ................................................................. 69
2.3.2 Zanobi Strozzi, c.1445, Book of Hours for the Use of Rome, David and Goliath (detail) .......................................................... 71
2.3.3 Book of Hours, c.1490s, MS M.14, f.104v. .......................... 74
2.4.1 Baroncelli Chapel altar wall & David as seen to the right of the altar. 84

3.1.1 Fra Angelico, c.1439–43, The Mocking of Christ (detail), Cell 7, Convent of San Marco, Florence. ................................. 90
3.1.2 Fra Angelico, c.1439, Christ Crowned with Thorns, Parrocchia di Santa Maria del Soccorso, Livorno. ................................. 92
3.1.3 Simone Martini, c.1333, The Carrying of the Cross, Musée du Louvre, Paris. ................................................................. 94
3.1.4 Agnolo Gaddi, c.1390–96, Crucifixion, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. 95

3.2.1 Speculum Humanae Salvationis, c.1470–1480, Marseille, BM, MS.0089, f.025 ............................................................... 99
3.2.2 Speculum Humanae Salvationis, c.1468, blockbook, Chapter 24, a. Christ hanging on the cross; and b. Nebuchadnezzar saw a tree in a dream. 101
3.2.3 Speculum Humanae Salvationis, c.1468, blockbook, Chapter 24, c. King Codrus gave himself to his destruction for his people; and d. Eleazar stabbing the elephant is crushed by it. 102
3.2.4 Examples of the account of Eleazar. .................................. 103
3.2.5 Diagram showing patriotism as a spiritual metaphor in the Speculum Humanae Salvationis. ................................................ 106
3.2.6 Domenico Beccafumi, c.1529–35, Codrus, Sala del Concistoro, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena. ......................................................... 108

3.3.1 Speculum Humanae Salvationis, c.1468, blockbook, Chapter 5, Jephtha sacrificed his daughter to God. .............................. 110
3.3.2 Speculum Humanae Salvationis, c.1468, blockbook, Chapter 23, d. King Moab sacrificed his son on the walls. .......................... 110
3.3.3 Speculum Humanae Salvationis, c.1468, blockbook, Chapter 22, a. Christ bore his cross, b. Isaac carries the wood for his sacrifice. 112
3.3.4 Example of mutual-victimhood, shared across both protagonists. 115
3.3.5 Further examples of mutual-victimhood. ............................. 117
3.3.6 Lorenzo Ghiberti, c.1401, *Sacrifice of Isaac*, Bronze relief, *Museo Nazionale del Bargello*, Florence. .................................................. 121

3.3.7 Filippo Brunelleschi, c.1401, *Sacrifice of Isaac*, Bronze relief, *Museo Nazionale del Bargello*, Florence. .................................................. 122

3.4.1 *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, c.1468, blockbook, Chapter 13, a. Christ was tempted by the Devil in three ways; b. Daniel destroyed Bel and killed the dragon. .................................................. 131

3.4.2 *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, c.1468, blockbook, Chapter 13, c. David overcame the Philistine Goliath; d. David killed a bear and a lion. .................................................. 131

3.4.3 *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, c.late-14th century, Italy (Florence), Chapter 13, a. Christ was tempted by the Devil in three ways; b. Daniel destroyed Bel and killed the dragon. .................................................. 132

3.4.4 *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, c.late-14th century, Italy (Florence), Chapter 13, c. David overcame the Philistine Goliath; d. David killed a bear and a lion, MS. 43-1950, Fitzwilliam Museum. .................................................. 133

3.4.5 *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, c.1350–400, Germany, probably Nuremberg, MS M.140, f.16r. .................................................. 134

3.4.6 Taddeo Gaddi, c.1330s, *David and Goliath* (detail), Capella Baroncelli, Florence. .................................................. 135

3.4.7 *Crusader Bible*, c.13th century, *David slays Goliath and cuts off his head*, Morgan Library. .................................................. 136

3.4.8 William Peraldus, c.1235–1250, *Summa de virtutibus et vitiis*, knight protected by the Shield of the Trinity preparing to do battle with the seven deadly sins, Harley MS 3244, ff.27v–28r. .................................................. 138

3.4.9 Leonardo di Ser Giovanni, c.1366–77, Altar (detail), silver on wooden base, *Museo dell’Opera del Duomo*, Florence. .................................................. 140

3.4.10 *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, c.late-14th century, Italy (Florence), Chapter 30, a. Mary defeats the Devil. b. Judith beheads Holofernes, MS. 43-1950, f.14v, Fitzwilliam Museum. .................................................. 141

3.4.11 *Speculum Virginum*, c.1140, Judith, *Humilitas*, and Jael, MS Arundel 44, f.34v., British Library, London. .................................................. 142

3.4.12 *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, c.1455, MS Hunter 60, Glasgow University Library, Bruges. .................................................. 143
3.4.13 Guariento, c.1349–1354, Judith slaying Holofernes (detail), fresco, Galilean Academy of Sciences, Padua. 144

3.4.14 Florentine images that reflect the same composition as Speculum texts. 145

3.4.15 Speculum Humanae Salvationis, c.late-14th century, Chapter 2, a. The Fall, and b. The Expulsion, Ms. lat. 9584, f.5 verso, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. 146

3.4.16 Triumph of Virtue over Evil, c.9th century, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence. 147

3.5.1 Speculum Humanae Salvationis, c.late-14th century, Italy (Florence), Chapter 29, a. Christ vanquishing the devil in Limbo through His Passion, b. Banaias stabs the lion with a lance, MS. 43-1950, f.14v, Fitzwilliam Museum. 149

3.5.2 Virtue Triumphant, c.1260s–70s, vestibule of the chapter house, Salisbury Cathedral. 150

3.5.3 Triumph of Virtue over Evil (detail), c.9th century, ivory, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence. 151

3.5.4 Virtues Triumphant, c.1280, façade, Strasbourg Cathedral. 152

3.5.5 ‘Trampling’ in Florentine images of St Michael vanquishing the Devil. 154

3.5.6 Buonamico Buffalmacco, c.1335–40, The Last Judgement (detail), fresco, Camposanto, Pisa. 156

3.6.1 Fra Angelico, c.1423–24, St Michael, tempera on wood, private collection. 158

3.6.2 Master Honoré de Amiens, c.1300, Somme le Roi, Cambridge, gold leaf, gold ink and tempera on parchment, The Fitzwilliam Museum. 159

4.1.1 Donatello, c.1412, David, marble, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence. 163

4.2.1 Paris Psalter, c.940–960, tempera and gold leaf on vellum, ff.449, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. 169

4.4.1 Donatello, c.1412, David (detail), Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence. 175

4.4.2 Examples of the ‘knot’ of Fortitude. 177

4.4.3 Donatello, c.1412, David (detail), Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence. 179

4.4.4 Examples of uomini e donne famosi. 183
4.5.1 *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, c.late-10th century to early-12th century, MS Cotton Cleopatra C VIII, Canterbury, f17, *Humilitas*, veiled, holds *Superbia’s* severed head by the hair; *Spes* (Hope), veiled, standing on the left, upbraids the dead Vice, British Library, London.

4.7.1 Master Honoré de Amiens, c.1300, *Somme le Roi*, gold leaf, gold ink and tempera on parchment, The Fitzwilliam Museum.

4.7.2 Diagram showing eye movement creating conceptual associations.

4.7.3 Master Honoré de Amiens, c.1300, *Somme le Roi*, gold leaf, gold ink and tempera on parchment, The Fitzwilliam Museum.

5.1.1 Donatello, c.1450s, *David*, bronze, *Museo Nazionale del Bargello*, Florence. 213

5.2.1 Donatello, c.1450s, *David* (detail).

5.3.1 Francesco di Stefano detto il Pesellino, c.1444, *Petrarch’s Triumphs*, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

5.3.2 Donatello, c.1450s, *David* (detail).

5.4.1 Donatello, c.1450s, *David* (detail), *Museo Nazionale del Bargello*, Florence.

5.4.2 Attavante degli Attavanti, c.1490s, *Book of Hours, David and Goliath*, Italy (Florence), vellum, MS. M.14, ff.104v, 105r, Pierpont Morgan Library.


5.4.4 Donatello, c.1450s, *David* (detail).

5.4.5 Francesco di Stefano detto il Pesellino, c.1444, *Petrarch’s Triumphs*, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

5.5.1 Apollonio di Giovanni, c.1461–65, (front panel shows the conquest of Trebizond in 1461), tempera and gold on panel, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

5.5.2 Domenico di Zanobi, c.1465, Petrarch’s Triumphs: Triumphs of Love, Chastity, and Death.

5.5.3 Domenico di Michelino, c.1442, Petrarch’s Triumphs: Triumphs of Love, Chastity, and Death.
5.5.4 Follower of Mantegna, c.1460s, Petrarch’s Triumphs: Triumphs of Fame,
Time, and Eternity (Judith with the head of Holofernes appears in the
foreground of the Triumph of Fame), Denver Art Museum. 236

5.5.5 Giovanni di ser Giovanni Guidi, c.1449, The Triumph of Fame; (reverse)
impresa of the Medici Family and arms of the Medici and Tornabuoni
Families, tempera, silver, and gold on wood, Metropolitan Museum of
Art, New York. 238

5.7.1 Fra Angelico, c.1438–40, San Marco altarpiece, tempera on wood, Museo
di San Marco, Florence. 241

5.7.2 Fra Angelico, c.1438–40, San Marco altarpiece (detail showing symme-
try), Museo di San Marco, Florence. 243

5.9.1 Palazzo Medici, c.1450s, Florence. 257

5.10.1 Francesco Botticini, c.1475–77, Assumption of the Virgin, National Gallery,
London. 264

6.1.1 Donatello, c.1450s, Judith and Holofernes, bronze, Palazzo della Signo-
ria, Florence. 270

6.1.2 Penitential versions of Judith and David in Florence. 272

6.2.1 Donatello, c.1450s, Judith and Holofernes, (base detail). 277

6.2.2 Donatello, c.1450s, Judith and Holofernes, (base detail). 278

6.3.1 The symbolism of trampling derived from medieval virtues and vices
imagery. 286

6.3.2 Donatello, c.1450s, Judith and Holofernes (detail, gilded sword). 288

6.3.3 Psychomachia, c.late-10th century, Men abandoning themselves to Lux-
uria, Anglo-Saxon illustrated manuscript. 292

6.4.1 Speculum Virginum, c.1140, Jael, Humilitas, and Judith, Arundel MS.
44, British Library, London. 297

6.4.2 Psychomachia, c.1000, Chastity Casting a Rock at and Beheading Lust,
British Library, London. 298

6.4.3 Psychomachia, c.1000, Chastity Casting a Rock at and Beheading Lust,
British Library, London. 299

6.4.4 Psychomachia, c.870–899, Latin 8085, fol. 61r, Bibliothèque nationale
de France. 301

xiii
6.6.1 Florentine, c.1465–69, Posthumous medal of Cosimo de’ Medici (1389–1464), Pater Patriae (obverse); Florence Holding an Orb and Triple Olive Branch (reverse), bronze, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

6.6.2 Niccolò Fiorentino, c.1490, Lorenzo de’ Medici, Il Magnifico (obverse); Florence under a Laurel(?) Tree, Holding Three Lilies (reverse), bronze, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

6.7.1 Maestro di Marradi, c.1480–1490, Judith and Holofernes, tavola, Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa.

6.7.2 Maestro di Marradi, c.1480–1490, Judith and Holofernes, detail.

6.7.3 Andrea del Verrocchio, c.1475–78, Giuliano di Piero de’ Medici, terracotta bust (formerly painted), showing breastplate with head of Medusa (costume of Minerva), National Gallery of Art, Washington.

6.7.4 Botticelli, c.1470s, The Return of Judith to Bethulia, diptych panel, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

6.8.1 Botticelli, c. 1470s, The Discovery of the Murder of Holofernes, diptych panel, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

6.8.2 Botticelli, c.1482, Pallas and Centaur, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

6.8.3 Botticelli, c.1490, Minerva, pen and bistre over black chalk on a pink ground, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

6.8.4 Depictions of Triumph of Chastity holding olive branch, Florentine. cassone images.

6.9.1 Donatello, c.1450s, Judith and Holofernes (detail, hair clasp).

6.9.2 After Antonio Pollaioulo, c.1470–80, mirror frame in the form of the Medici ring (Venus with Mars), painted and gilded stucco in a gilt wood frame, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

6.9.3 Botticelli, c.1483, Venus and Mars, spalliera panel, tempera on wood, National Gallery, London.

6.9.4 Changing power dynamics in late-century renditions of David and Judith.
To my husband, Patrick Griffin SC.
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Part I

Interpretative Approaches
1
Contesting ‘Propaganda’

1.1 The Political Image of Florence

This thesis conducts a meta-analysis of the political image of Florence expressed in the three sculptures of David and Judith by Donatello. The first was a marble statue of David and Goliath placed in the Palazzo della Signoria in 1416. The second was a bronze of David and Goliath, placed in the Palazzo Medici probably in the 1450s. The third was a larger bronze of Judith and Holofernes, placed in the Palazzo Medici garden as a symbolic partner to the bronze David, also likely from the 1450s. Each of these statues has been identified as ‘propaganda’ in so far as scholars believe they were designed to personify the Florentine polis, and relatedly, to express concepts about the republic and Florentine liberty.¹

¹It can be noted that the figures of David and Judith were employed in political iconography in other regions—one example is German imperial cities. See Martin Van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner. Republicanism: Volume 1, Republicanism and Constitutionalism in Early Modern Europe: A Shared European Heritage, volume 1. Cambridge University Press, 2005.
The construct that is found in the historiography on these statues is political. It places a ‘represented body’—that of David or Judith—together with a reference to city-republic, either explicitly or implicitly stated. In this way, the image of Florence presented in the statues has been assumed to personify the city. It has also been assumed to be ‘propaganda.’ But we must clarify the word ‘city.’ By ‘city’—città—I mean an urban space, but not one made of cobbles and streets. It is not simply the place where Bruni walked on his way to the Palazzo della Signoria more than five hundred years ago. The city to which I refer existed in Bruni’s and others’ minds. More specifically, it was a way of conceptualising a political community. It designated città as a metaphor, and as such, it stood for civitas. Thus, the image of David or Judith was, more precisely, the symbolism of a physical body abstracted to a social body of citizens.

This group of statues forms a thread that runs through the fabric of political representation in fifteenth-century Florence. The first of the sculptures, the marble David, was commissioned as I will argue to stand inside the government palace and placed there in 1416. The last, the bronze Judith, was moved to stand at the door of the same palace at the century’s close. During this time, the Florentine idea of self-governance altered, characterised by a shift from civic humanism in the early- to mid-fifteenth century, in the work of authors like Bruni and Palmieri, to the politics of Machiavelli in The Prince in the early years of the sixteenth century. This change is usually understood to have been influenced to some extent by the dominance of elites in Florence and, particularly, the Medici. The position of Donatello’s bronzes

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of *David* and *Judith* in the Medici palace has been interpreted by scholars as an attempt by the Medici to drape themselves in the mantle of *libertas* for the purpose of obscuring the family’s oligarchy. Similarly, the removal of those statues when the family was exiled and the bronzes’ then-placement, one inside the government palace and the other outside its entrance, has been interpreted as a temporary reversal of princely rule and a reassertion of the *Signoria*’s right to own and to display *libertas*.\(^4\)

The commissioning and placement of Michelangelo’s *David* is also often interpreted in this light, as a further underlining of this attempt and as a celebration of the republic.\(^5\)

Scholars treat the interpretations of these statues as interdependent, and thus the historiography has been shaped by a framework. In this framework, certain concepts have been linked together while others have been routinely overlooked or ignored. There is nothing exceptional in this, given that connections and omissions are inevitable while creating a particular interpretation. What is exceptional, however, is how single-minded this perspective has become, especially in light of the increasing attention scholars have paid to these statues in recent decades. One might expect that increased attention would give rise to a diversity of opinion, but the opposite has been the case. The results over the last 70 or so years have been largely unified; there is a cohesiveness in the explanations that seems unusual given that the statues’ influence spans a century.

Not only are ideas and language repeated in the historiography across studies,

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\(^4\)The view so prevalent that it permeates Medici scholarship, but for an example of how conclusive this idea has become, see Alison Brown. *De-masking Renaissance Republicanism*. In James Hankins, editor, *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections*, pages 179–199. Cambridge University Press, 2003. Brown’s argument about Medici “appropriation” of *libertas* appears from p. 189 onwards. Cogently argued, Alison Brown’s summation nevertheless rests on three interrelated assumptions which this thesis challenges: the first is that David and Judith primarily symbolised liberty, which as I will argue, relies on too simplistic an understanding of the statues’ function or of political expression; the second assumption is that the political function of David and Judith had become divorced from penitential connotations and sacred purpose when they were politically adopted; and the third is that the images of David and Judith were available for this kind of control and falsification, presumably because of the second condition.

but they appear to be, regardless of context, remarkably similar. The assertion that the statues are about liberty, for example, is routinely repeated with little examination. The related concepts with which the statues have been associated (humility, republic), and their central iconography of David with the head of Goliath, have similarly been treated in the historiography as though they were once-organic matter that has long ago hardened into a fixed state. The time span of one hundred or more years suggests variation, but the claims for the meanings and uses of the statues are comparatively static. Art historian, Jill Burke, provides a recent example of how this thinking is usually summarised:

That the Medici sought to argue they were protecting, rather than eroding, republican virtues was not only suggested in the subject of these sculptures [Donatello’s David and Judith], but driven home to a literate audience through inscriptions.6

The phrase “protecting, rather than eroding” represents the stark contrast historians have found, between the reality of Medici politics—eroding republican values—and the image that they have projected of themselves, or which their friends described in them—protecting the republic. In the phrase “driven home” is the implication of propaganda, of a message systematically and unambiguously conveyed in the service of partisan interests. And finally, in the phrase “literate audience,” there is a recognition of the complexity of ‘reading’ the sculpture’s many symbolic layers.

The wording of the inscriptions to which Burke referred has formed a large part of the basis for historians’ theories about the statues’ political usage. Donatello’s marble David presented a Romanised boy-hero, which was depicted in a partial contrapposto stance, with his left hand resting on his hip, gazing into the distance with the head of Goliath at his feet. David’s sling was resting on Goliath’s head and would have originally had a leather strap connecting it to David’s right hand, while a stone was shown embedded in Goliath’s forehead. The statue was accompanied by an inscription, no longer extant, which read:

PRO PATRIA FORTITER DIMICANTIBUS ETIAM ADVERSUS TERRIBILISSIMOS HOSTES DII PRAESTANT AUXILIUM.

To those who fight bravely for the fatherland the gods lend aid even against the most terrible foes.  

Donatello’s later bronze statue of David, mostly nude, was more obviously emulating classical statues. It had a seemingly more exaggerated contrapposto stance, although it must be noted that this would have appeared far less so when viewed from underneath the high column on which it likely stood. David was shown resting his left foot on the decapitated head of Goliath, while standing on a victor’s wreath. He held a stone in his left hand while he wielded Goliath’s sword in his right. The bronze was accompanied by an inscription, no longer extant, and similar to the one reported to have been with the marble:

VICTOR EST QUISQUIS PATRIAM TUETUR FRANGIT IMMANIS DEUS HOSTIS IRAS EN Puer GRANDEM DOMUIT TIRAMNUM VINCITE CIVES

The victor is whoever defends the fatherland. God crushes the wrath of an enormous foe. Behold! a boy overcame a great tyrant. Conquer o citizens!

Donatello’s bronze Judith and Holofernes, like the bronze David, was depicted in the round. This statue, however, was more narratively complex. It showed Judith physically grappling with a sleeping Holofernes as she raised his sword to decapitate him. The two figures were situated on a triangular base, which displayed different

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7Art historians do not have definitive evidence that the inscription was original to the statue in 1416; and some, like Janson, have argued that the use of the word “dii,” suggests that it was put there in later years. Maria Donato has made a convincing alternate case however, with which I am inclined to agree, that the inscription was contemporaneous with the statue’s original instalment in 1416. Maria Monica Donato. Hercules and David in the Early Decoration of the Palazzo Vecchio: Manuscript Evidence. Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 54:83–98, 1991. Cf. Horst W Janson and Jenö Lányi. The Sculpture of Donatello: Critical Catalogue, volume 2. Princeton University Press, 1957, p. 6.

bacchanalian scenes on each of its three sides. The statue was earlier accompanied by a further base, no longer extant, and which may have had separate authors or been placed on two distinct occasions. These read:

REGNA CADUNT LUXU, SURGUNT VIRTUTIBUS URBES: CAESA VIDES HUMILI COLLA SUPERBA MANU.

SALUS PUBLICA. PETRUS MEDICES. COS. FI. LIBERTATI SIMUL ET FORTITUDINI HANC MULIERIS STATUAM, QUO CIVES INVICTO CONSTANTIQUE ANIMO AD REM PUBLICAM REDDERENT, DEDICavit.

Kingdoms fall through luxury, cities rise through virtue, Behold the neck of pride severed by the hand of humility.

The salvation of the state. Piero de’ Medici Son of Cosimo has dedicated the statue of this woman to that liberty and fortitude bestowed on the republic by the invincible and constant spirit of the citizens.9

In all three cases, there is a distinct absence of documentary evidence about the statues’ original commissioning and purpose. The question is, therefore, how do we know what we know about these statues? How do we know, for example, that they symbolised liberty? The only persuasive answer, in the absence of documentation, ought to come from their iconography and, more importantly, from the pedigree of their iconography—the genetic matter from which images of David must have sprung. But for reasons related to how the historiography of these statues has formed, this work has not previously been done.

1.2 Present Problems

The historiography on Donatello’s statues, and more broadly, the relationship of this group to the representation of liberty or to propaganda, reflects a conversation

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between historians of ideas, art historians, and Renaissance historians. Each of these groups has affected the growth of the political image of Florence. Each of them shares approaches with the other, but as this chapter will show, they are failing to talk to each other on some crucial points, points that affect how the history of politics and political expression is being written.

The easiest example with which to demonstrate this is with the statue that scholars consider to be the originating point—the first time that David represented the Florentine state, in the marble David. Historians often claim that the statue was about Florentine liberty, but this is rarely defined further, nor does it have specific sources. At the same time, it is claimed that the Signoria’s acquisition of the statue was stimulated by the Florentine wars of independence. More specifically, it is usually said that Florence’s triumph over the Duke of Milan had prompted the statue’s placing in the government palace. This claim is based on the apparent

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11 It was art historian Frederick Hartt who initiated the idea of an association between the statue and defence of liberty and more specifically, the Duke of Milan, which had clearly been inspired by his adherence to Baron’s thesis and the same scholar’s identification of Donatello as significant. See, for example, Frederick Hartt. Art and Freedom in Quattrocento Florence. Institute of Fine Arts, 1964, p. 301; Christine M Sperling. Donatello’s Bronze “David” and the Demands of Medici politics. Burlington Magazine, 134:218–24, 1992; and Patricia Leach. Donatello’s Marble “David:” Leonardo Bruni’s Contribution. Notes in the History of Art, 12(3):8–11, 1993. Note that such references to wars of independence often also infer by context the former theme, liberty or freedom. Themes about liberty, tyranny, and defence of liberty, are treated in these works (listed in this and the previous footnote) as strands of thought continuously available in the political milieu. Art historian Roger Crum, Crum (2001), saw Sperling’s theory of warfare in respect to the bronze David too “restrictive,” hence he made his examination the more diffuse area of contemporary
correlation between the battle for Israel’s independence in the biblical account of David, and Florence’s continuing battles for its own independence against the Visconti. Thus, a reader of these studies infers that it was most likely *libertas* to which scholars refer when they assert that the statue was about ‘liberty.’ However, in placing the statue in the government palace, and accordingly by making the statue relevant to the daily business of the *Signoria*, the *Signoria* or the smaller group responsible for placing it must clearly have sought to address *libertà*—the lifeblood of *res publica*. At least, it is clear that the positioning of the statue ought to raise this question.

*Libertas* referred to freedom from foreign dominion, or in other words, it was independent sovereignty. *Libertà* was free, as in wide and equal, political representation and action within the *polis*; it referred to freedom from factional dominance or oligarchy. Both words are translated as a single word, liberty. Nevertheless, they were two very different conditions, the effect of which could almost be described as inside/outside—one was expressed or delineated from within the political body and one from without. Their obvious differences mean that they needed to be actively (historically) paired in order to be considered indivisible, which is, to some degree, what fourteenth-century humanists did. It would be more accurate to say that fourteenth-century humanists fitted one within the other—*libertà* within *libertas*—posing that *libertà* was the foundation of, and often the reason for, *libertas*.¹² If this thinking were to be seen as a diagram, it might look like something like the one below.

¹² It can be noted that whilst these terms are, in the first sense, synonyms in two languages—one in Latin (*libertas*) and the other in Italian (*libertà*)—they have been utilised here to demonstrate how historians can delineate the two different but interrelated conceptualisations of liberty in respect of Florentine political images. “The concepts of *libertas* and *libertà*,” as Quentin Skinner has noted in his *Foundations*, “came to be employed ‘almost as technical terms of Florentine politics and diplomacy’ in the course of the fourteenth century, and...they were almost invariably used in order to express the same ideas of independence and self-government.” In the present study, I employ *libertas* to distinguish the former and *libertà* the latter. Quentin Skinner. *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought: The Renaissance*, volume 1. Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition, 1978, p. 11; and Nicolai Rubinstein. *Florence and the Despots Some Aspects of Florentine Diplomacy in the Fourteenth Century*. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 2:21–45, 1952, p. 4.
Proponents of the theory that the marble David celebrated Florentine independence do not address whether or not the statue’s symbolism was weighted towards *libertas* over *libertà*, or why, or in what ways, it may have been intended to reflect on their interconnection. Perhaps historians sense it was both, but how so has rarely if ever been addressed. The diffuseness is created in part by the fact that the word ‘liberty’ has often been anglicised in historians’ analyses of representations of David and Judith. Thus, it remains unclear whether historians see *libertas* or *libertà* as the basis for the visual myth of Florence.

This is a key trait of the ‘image’ that has been constructed in the historiography: it has failed to explicitly state what kind of liberty the statues sought to create. Scholars have to some degree implied it, but it remains up to the reader to glean from the context what exactly it was. The implications of their arguments have also often vacillated between the two forms of liberty. This has happened across sculptures and authors, without consideration of the question whether a change in emphasis signified a change in political thought.\(^\text{13}\)

\(^\text{13}\) Generally it has only reflected a difference of scholarly opinion amongst art historians, and therefore little progress has been made as to how this symbolism may have evolved political thought (or vice...
versa) over the century.

It is important to consider the reason for such imprecision in a field where such distinctions usually matter. Do we assume, for example, that historians perceive the difference between libertas and libertà to have little practical relevance, at least in how they were employed in respect to artistic political representations? This is possible given that these two forms of liberty in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century humanism were often brought together or treated as interrelated. It is otherwise uncertain why scholars anglicise ‘liberty;’ at best it may be to assume a shared understanding like the one illustrated in the above diagram. There is a clear problem with this conception of liberty, however, which is how broad and unchanging it is and, as such, how removed it is from the different senses in which Florentines spoke about liberty. This has clearly affected the historiography on the Quattrocento, which has constructed a correspondingly broad and unchanging set of meanings for Donatello’s statues, the latter often interpreted as ‘propaganda.’ This notion of ‘propaganda’ I critique at length in the remainder of this chapter.

1.3 Epistemological Fault Lines

1.3.1 Piety vs Art History’s Case for Propaganda

These particular issues of methodology in respect to Donatello’s statues sit within a wider epistemological problem that relates to how the concept of propaganda has been used and understood in the fields of Renaissance history and Renaissance art history, and the fact that political and spiritual relevance is rarely treated together. Fifteenth-century Florentines were devout in the total sense, which meant that their piety encircled a philosophy of life, and a conception of the world entirely subject to its deity that was, in turn, intimately bound up in their affairs. Hence God participated in the city’s welfare, and its politics. He also sanctioned his emissaries to do so, in the form of the Virgin and the saints. Divine disapproval could be felt in a military loss, in famine or flood, or it could be seen in a lightning strike to the roof of a church. Similarly, divine approval could be found in successful territorial wins, good weather, or moments of factional accord or communal prosperity. This was what anthropologists would call—in the words of Renaissance historian Richard
Trexler in his *Public Life*—a “cosmology.”

Put into the words of Florentine contemporary, Marsilio Ficino, it meant that Florence was an intricately-wired apparatus, in which the divine and the temporal worlds melded into one. The slightest twitch of divine movement made the psychological and physical worlds of Florence flutter. Ficino, a philosopher of Plato sponsored by Cosimo de’ Medici, envisioned it thus in his *Platonic Theology*:

> We saw recently in Florence a small cabinet made by a German craftsman in which statues of different animals were all connected to, and kept in balance by, a single ball. When the ball moved, they moved too, but in different ways: some ran to the right, others to the left, upwards or downwards, some that were sitting stood up, others that were standing fell down, some crowned others, and they in turn wounded others. There was heard too the blare of trumpets and horns and the songs of birds; and other things happened there simultaneously and a host of similar events occurred, and merely from one movement of one ball.

The machine had appealed to Ficino as a metaphor for the intertwining of divine and human agency in Florentine living:

> Thus God through His own being, which is in reality the same as His understanding and His will, or is something entirely simple—the universal centre from whom (as we have declared elsewhere) the rest of things are drawn out like lines—has only to nod His head and everything which depends on Him trembles.

Cosimo too believed that God needed “only to nod His head and everything which depends upon Him trembles.” He chose much of his patronage accordingly, as Dale Kent argued in her book, *Cosimo de’ Medici and the Florentine Renaissance*, in which she described the extensive patronage of Cosimo as an “oeuvre.”

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work was large and comprehensive, but it also had a pointed argument, that Cosimo was pious like other Florentines. Her purpose was to reassert what she saw as a lost perspective on Cosimo, and relatedly, to raise questions about how historians define politics and political expression in Florence in respect to the Medici.\(^\text{18}\)

This was out of step, however, with how most historians portray Cosimo’s patronage of sacred objects and spaces. Art historians argue, overwhelmingly, that Cosimo conducted an extensive and strategic programme through the artworks and architectural restorations that he commissioned, in which he overlaid sacred imagery with a particular image of the Medici and Florence. Historians often classify this programme in terms of what they call “propaganda.” This characterisation was proclaimed most often in respect to San Marco and the Old Sacristy, and the commissioning of Donatello’s *David* and *Judith* but it has also often been found in other cases.\(^\text{19}\) Historian Ronald Weissman, for example, suggested in his *Ritual Brotherhood* that Lorenzo de’ Medici’s patronage of confraternities was largely undertaken as a means of trading in oligarchic influence.\(^\text{20}\) Art historians have made similar arguments about Cosimo’s patronage of confraternities, such as the *Compagnia dei Magi*.\(^\text{21}\)

Cosimo clearly intended his neighbours and peers to be impressed and pleased by his efforts to produce works of beauty, and by his personal support of their respective endeavours. Kent agreed with other historians that he would have used this impression to build personal relationships and to garner the political influence that arose out of such relationships.\(^\text{22}\) She drew the line at the idea, however, that

\(^{18}\)Dale Kent notes for example, that there was a “close association in Florentine minds between personal devotion and public salvation,” yet the images that express this are “now read often as political in the most reductive sense.” Kent (2000), p. 144.

\(^{19}\)In respect to Donatello’s bronzes, for example, art historian Sarah Blake McHam has argued that the Medici were creating imagery “that advertised the family’s stance as defenders of Florence.” They were, moreover, “knowledgeably converting to their own aggrandisement venerable historical precedents in addressing a simmering contemporary controversy. By so doing the Medici manipulated republican imagery to establish the family’s political propaganda, here subverting the charge of tyranny often levelled against them to their own purpose.” Blake McHam (2001), p. 43.


\(^{22}\)This reflects the work of many historians on patronage and kinship networks, by F W Kent and others. See, for example, F W Kent. *Palaces, Politics, and Society in Fifteenth-Century Florence*. *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 2:41–70, 1987; F W Kent, Patricia Simons, and J C Eade.
this was inevitably about ruling, or more specifically, calculated as a long-term strategy. She claimed that “to represent all this as a strategy of politico-cultural propaganda is going too far.”

Historians often trace a genealogical line of control backwards through time, from the centralised, courtly leadership of Lorenzo de’ Medici, back down through the generations to his grandfather, Cosimo. They discern a path carved with care, a family agenda of leadership ambitions that was begun decades earlier. This genealogy quickly led to the conclusion that power was a driving motivation for many of the family’s other social and cultural activities. The implied magnitude of the manipulation was at the core of Dale Kent’s critique; it was not so much the power relations in Cosimo’s patronage that Kent wanted to confront, as it was the implication of disingenuousness in the word, ‘propaganda.’ Use of that word too often “assumes that the patron manipulatively “used” art to convey messages about power.” Historians, moreover, often made this assertion with “little establishable relation to early fifteenth-century modes of thought.” Kent’s frustration was apparent when in a passage she quoted an observation made by Renaissance art historian, John Paoletti, that “[Cosimo’s] use of individual commissions as a means of social and political control is now a commonplace in discussions of his patronage.”

Whether or not one agrees with the assumptions regarding ‘propaganda,’ it is worth noting that Paoletti’s observation was entirely accurate: it is indeed now a commonplace. Kent has not been the only critic to express frustration with how spiritual intentions have often been pushed to the back of historians’ work on Medici patronage. Donald Weinstein for example, when reviewing Weissman’s Ritual Brotherhood in the early 1980s, commented that:

Weissman sees Lorenzo il Magnifico’s participation in several confraternities as a means of exercising patronage and earning the gratitude of his

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fellow citizens. But was it only or essentially that? Is it not pertinent to ask to what spiritual impulses Lorenzo was responding ... ?

In a work published ten years earlier, Weinstein had shown that the story of Florence was marked by two themes, one civic, the other sacred—Florence as the daughter of Rome, but also as a messianic centre of renewal and rebirth, with the city figuring as an agent of sacred history. There had been, moreover, a “dynamic interplay” between these two themes that had fed what Weinstein called the myth of Florence, a “mode of thinking” that Florentines used to understand their city. In respect to his review of Weissman’s study, Weinstein was suggesting “a more direct analysis of the spiritual and moral content” of confraternal piety:

Mendicant preachers who evoked avid responses among the laity presumably were tapping reservoirs of spiritual need or creating them; if not, it is impossible to explain how they moved their worldly Florentine audiences to compromise the deeply ingrained family and neighbourhood loyalties Weissman ascribes to them.

The problem of how to analyse spiritual and political content remains relevant because historians’ depiction of Florentine politics in the fifteenth century so often hinges upon how they perceive Medici strategies and Florentine responses to those strategies. Given that the aim of ‘propaganda’ was to move its “worldly audiences,” were Medici commissions “tapping reservoirs of spiritual need or [possibly even] creating them?” The relationship between spiritual and political need in what has been described as Medici propaganda has, however, frequently been overlooked in historians’ examinations. There is also a related problem, which is whether a concept of politics that fails to encompass its interaction with a spiritual cosmology is accurate for this period.

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29Weinstein (1983), p. 84.
Cosimo’s manipulation of voting and his stealthy and inexorable influence over government is usually offered as evidence of what an adroit politician he was. It then takes little effort to see his extensive patronage as further influence. Kent used the same circumstance to argue the opposite point, however; Cosimo’s electoral manoeuvrings were evidence of how much effort it took to accrue power. This power, moreover, remained fragile: Cosimo was required to participate in a form of mutual exchange in order to cultivate it, and he had to continually negotiate or cooperate with others in order to maintain it. This framework of exchange was characterised by its variability and inconstancy, rather than by an inexorable hegemony. 

Kent’s ultimate solution to this problem was to situate Cosimo’s piety inside contemporary texts and commentaries. This method presented a persuasive case on the one hand, in the context of his piety and patronage. On the other hand, it did not address why art historians have moved in the direction of identifying ‘propaganda.’ Nor did it give them a viable alternative to the notion of propaganda. Reviewers of Kent’s book on Cosimo, who represented both disciplines of history and art history, were thus unmoved. In their confidence that political manipulation eclipsed other motivations, they maintained that the pious view of Cosimo was “just a little too good to be true.” The rigorous arguments on Cosimo’s behalf they characterised as “defensive.” They pronounced his piety unconvincing, reasserting instead that his patronage and the art it yielded was evidence of the special privilege that wealth afforded him, and which allowed him to control the message or messages of his choosing.

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30 Kent wrote: “It makes no sense to assume that any “political messages” in Cosimo’s artistic patronage would be any more subtle or ambiguous or acceptable than his overtly political actions, or that art could constitute an instrument of “political and social control” which he was unable to assert in government or legislation. Throughout Cosimo’s lifetime Medici influence in Florence seems to have been increased gradually by an intelligently opportunistic response to such possibilities for the family to assert its leadership as presented themselves on the civic scene. It is within this framework that Cosimo’s patronage choices might be more realistically viewed.” She similarly commented elsewhere in the book that: “such flaunting of a superiority of means and of taste can in no sense be equated with a challenge to the constitutional authority of the government of the Florentine state.” See respectively, Kent (2000), p. 350–351, and p. 189.


33 See the aforementioned Rabb and Wright, and also Sharon T Strocchia. Cosimo de’ Medici
1.3.2 Modernism, its Anti-Thesis, and the Social Turn

Kent’s issue with propaganda did not as a consequence shake the convictions of art historians, not least because the idea had already in recent decades become so firmly established. Often art historians will use it as a general descriptor in the context of Renaissance art, defining it by context as images that promote an individual’s or a group’s concerns. This does not on the face of it seem particularly controversial. It is this apparent blandness, however, that has made the concept and the term virtually unassailable from art history’s point of view.

The disagreement between Kent and others on the question of how to characterise ‘propaganda’ was unexpected, moreover, in one other significant respect; it turned on a class-based analysis of history, one that Kent as part of a group of Renaissance historians in the 1970s and 1980s had been at the forefront of creating. Her close analysis of Cosimo’s electoral manipulations, for example, had formed a foundation from which many scholars would later confidently assert his privilege. There is no question that Kent was therefore acutely aware of Cosimo’s advantages and the degree to which he had utilised them, nor do I believe that her latest position on his piety was a softening of her stance towards it.

The dispute on propaganda had in fact erupted out of a greater point of tension that was pre-existing between historians and art historians of the Renaissance. This point of tension has rarely provoked comment and yet it is a cause for concern, particularly as it relates to political artworks, and more specifically for this study, Donatello’s statues of David and Judith. This tension is two-pronged, being made up of methodological approaches to macro- and micro-analysis on the one hand, and on the other hand, an epistemological approach to modernist and sociological

\[\text{and the Florentine Renaissance: the Patron’s Oeuvre. Renaissance Quarterly, 54(4):1593–1595, 2001. It should be noted that this was in part a response to what they saw as Kent’s mode of argumentation. Rabb also noted the “coherence of her vision.” He would have preferred at times more of “an embrace of ambiguity.” (Rabb (2002), p. 472). Strocchia likewise saw it additionally as a matter of method; the study was in her view “a deliberate return to the empiricism of earlier decades.” (Strocchia (2001), p. 1593).}\]

theories. It had its genesis with Jacob Burckhardt’s seminal work, *The Civilisation of Renaissance Italy*, and it was later stimulated by changes to the discipline of art history during the twentieth century that allowed art historians to move into the territory of historians. This was a move that they achieved with resounding success, making findings that have been invaluable to both disciplines. A brief recap will serve to illustrate how the two groups have arrived at such differing points of view on the question of propaganda and how they have achieved the epistemological and methodological disjunctions that this thesis identifies and attempts to address.

Renaissance history was by the early twentieth century, like many other disciplines, ordered along teleological and institutional lines. This meant that history had been shaped according to the economy, law, church, and military. It had also recorded the inexorable improvement of Western power and culture, punctuated by the accounts of individuals who had affected this course for better or worse. By the early sixties, a new generation of historians were feeling that this had given them “little conception of the evolution of human and family relationships or of the social factors which determine them.” For historian Keith Thomas and others, this meant that studies of medieval and early modern societies were “austere, disciplined and profoundly hostile to outside influence.”

This new awareness was supported by a rising social consciousness in the 1960s, accompanied by a new level of scrutiny towards modes of oppression and power. The way forward was to break down the historiographical barriers, and to employ the methodologies of sociology, anthropology, performance and literary theory in order to do so. This practice proved immensely popular at the time in many disciplines, including Renaissance history. It reached its zenith amongst Renaissance historians in the 1980s with Richard Trexler’s ground-breaking and ambitious, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*. The driving questions of Renaissance studies had transformed over those and succeeding decades. They moved from a focus on high culture,

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37 Thomas (1963), p. 3.
and a preoccupation with links between modernity and the Renaissance, towards a new social-cultural movement that placed a high value on the ordinary, and which fostered micro-analysis. In the context of this shift, the formative anthropological studies by Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner made a profound and lasting impression. Turner was concerned with the way that rituals supported and maintained social structures, Geertz with the relationship between symbols and culture. Together, their works have since made ‘ritual’ and ‘symbol’ dominant paradigms in Renaissance studies, and terms like ‘liminal’ or ‘liminality’ ubiquitous.

In art history, the social turn and its toppling of institutional walls was characterised by a loosening of focus on authorship and dating of artworks, or what art historians might describe as “the legibility of artistic style.” At the time, there was also a move towards analysing art as a social object. Art historians used their technical abilities to ‘read’ the form of artworks and, using their observations, to embed images in their social context or function. An example of a seminal work produced in this mode is Michael Baxandall’s *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Baxandall analysed Renaissance artworks in order to illustrate what he called the “period eye,” or what he also described as the “cognitive style” of contemporary viewers. Art historians also related changes in artistic technique to social change. The result of these methods proved insightful, opening up historians’ perspective and their understanding of both imagery and social practices. In Renaissance studies particularly, where art

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41This is Alison Wright’s phrase, from her review of Dale Kent’s Cosimo book. Wright (2001).

was suffused into social and political events, this transformed the way that historians conceptualised their subjects. It also made art highly relevant as a primary source, at a time when the effect of challenging the Renaissance’s link to modernity might have made it less relevant.

The social turn of the 1960s was, in part, a reaction to a long-standing scholarly perspective that had reached its peak during the nineteenth century, and which was epitomised by Jacob Burckhardt’s aforementioned work, *The Civilisation of Renaissance Italy*. Burckhardt had seen the Renaissance as the beginning of the ‘modern’ and Western world. Cultural artefacts produced in the Renaissance were treated as a point of origin for modern conditions—and here the term “Renaissance” denoted both a period of time elapsed, and a theory of cultural and social rebirth. It also included a political model that embraced democracy, an associated and increasing secularism, and a social structure that was based on the principle of individualism.

This early form of cultural history had, in turn, fostered the work of a group of art historians who are still esteemed today for the quality of their insights and methods, if no longer for their uncritical pride in modernity. Art historians such as Aby Warburg and his students, including Fritz Saxl and Edgar Wind, saw themselves as following in the footsteps of the early Renaissance scholars. They were tracing the lines of symbolism and meaning from the ancients through to the Renaissance, right through to the present day. These early-twentieth-century scholars saw the ability of Renaissance commentators to rationalise classical with Christian symbolism as distinctly modern. In pursuing this line, they frequently researched and presented a cross-cultural and cross-temporal perspective, a method that later became the province of their sociologist colleagues. It was therefore noticeably ahead of its time. The cross-cultural perspective was a method later adopted by many his-

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torians in the 1960s and since but in the 1920s and 1930s art historians were the pioneers of this approach.

Renaissance historians have in more recent times wound back many of Burckhardt’s conclusions. In doing so they have demonstrated that many late-medieval practices, cultural and social, did not stop or peter out, but continued well into the Renaissance period. This perspective was a legacy of social historians. As they did this work, they gradually and surely broke the cord that had formerly connected the Renaissance period to modernity. And as they did so, they called into question the very validity of the term “Renaissance.” In the course of these changes, the view of Renaissance society as moving towards a secular model in response to a classical revival, and as a precursor to the crisis of the Reformation, started to dissolve. Instead, Renaissance cities and towns, and Renaissance Florence, emerged as devout as ever, albeit it was now understood to have been grappling with the ways that sacred belief and practice played out in an increasingly sophisticated and agonistic urban environment.

By the 1990s, the historical landscape of Renaissance Florence was highly fragmented when viewed through the ‘windows’ of Renaissance historians. It showed many groups, all competing for prestige and resources, which had criss-crossing memberships, and which were prone to conflict and division. It was impossible to see them as unified, and yet historians recognised that Renaissance contemporaries spoke continually of unity and concord, perhaps precisely because of their disunity. It was a highly urban landscape, and yet still highly alien—definitely not modern, nor an antecedent of the modern.

Art historians, conversely, have been treated to views of a different landscape when looking through their metaphorical window, shaped as it has been by Renaissance artworks. This landscape clearly showed metamorphosis: a dramatic break

in the early fourteenth century, between contrived Byzantine figures and the newly fluid, three-dimensional and emotive figures that were rendered by artists such as Giotto. This transformation became a gradual but certain improvement in technique over the coming decades, led by numerous artists—many of them Florentine or working in Florence—emerging finally as a new and highly-delineated realism. This realism then collapsed gradually into increasingly stylised and romanticised images, evident through the latter fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

The transfiguration of art through the Renaissance period has given, and continues to give, a mandate to art historians to explain it. While history will naturally have a professional obligation to explain change, changes to art in this period were so fundamental to an understanding of art itself that art historians could be said to experience this obligation many times over. It is natural that art historians continue to see and to seek to explain sweeping change. The historical changes to their discipline described above have modified this endeavour, but they have also strengthened it. Given that the Medici influenced politics during a period that coincided with a prolific artistic output, and a seemingly inexorable slide towards a dukedom, it follows that art historians would look to artworks for early signs of political change.

Therein lies the basis for a disjunction in the disciplinary perspective between historians and art historians, one that has had serious repercussions for understanding what they identify as ‘propaganda.’ Renaissance historians who emphasise the continuities between the late-medieval and Renaissance periods tend to describe patterns over long stretches of time. An example is the ideas and beliefs that Dale Kent traced as a context for Cosimo’s patronage. In a kind of *quid pro quo*, however, this practice has often left historians unable to explain striking change. Their very methods, which lean towards close and exhaustive archival research, often militate against it. Alternatively, when art historians argue for theories of change, the response of historians may be to use their vast archival resources to pick apart the system or to show its weaknesses. This has, at times, been a bone of contention

47 This is at least art historian Adrian Randolph’s critique in his *Engaging Symbols*, in which he singles out the inability of Renaissance historians to explain change. In Randolph’s opinion, they have generally been more proficient in demonstrating the “power of continuity.” Adrian W B Randolph. *Engaging Symbols: Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence*. Yale University Press, 2002, p. 6.
between Renaissance historians and historians of Renaissance art, which is despite, or perhaps because of, their mutually beneficial relationship.

It is also true that, partly because artistic technique dramatically changed during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, art historians remain open to modifications of the modernity thesis. These modifications no longer rest on Burckhardtian assumptions. But they nevertheless often use modernist theories. They position art production in the fifteenth century, for example, as a beginning of a “mass media” and “consumerist” culture. This in turn has helped art historians to introduce sociological theories to the Renaissance that were originally designed to examine the effects of modernity. One example is the idea that art or cultural imagery might have amounted to propaganda, a twentieth-century phenomenon that relied on mass media for its dissemination and its influence. Another example is the theory that a new kind of political strategy, and a public sphere, emerged in Florentine art during the fifteenth century.

This has meant that as a concept in Renaissance Florence, ‘propaganda’ has usually been treated one of two ways. First, it has been treated as a tool of the elite, in line with the class-based analysis mentioned previously. The view was derived largely from the camp of Renaissance historians. It is a line of thinking, moreover, that easily becomes moralist. An example is provided with respect to the reviews of Kent’s book on Cosimo. Historians’ greatest objection to Kent’s argument about Cosimo’s piety was that, to use colloquial parlance, it ‘levelled the playing field’ for Cosimo as an historical figure, and hence it was expunging the record. Historian Sharon Strocchia, for example, wrote that, “the most troubling aspect of the proposal that Cosimo communicated in what was essentially a popular idiom is its failure to take into account glaring differentials in social and political power.” Cosimo’s wealth and the freedom that it had inevitably afforded him had, in

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48 It should be noted that the term ‘propaganda,’ derived from the Latin *propagare*, to propagate, and is much older—it was first used, in fact, shortly after the period under discussion, during the sixteenth century. ‘Propaganda’ was originally an invention of the Church to describe the concerted action of spreading the Christian faith to foreign peoples. I distinguish between this and later forms because it is the concept of propaganda more easily associated with political movements of the twentieth century that art historians employ. I go into this in greater detail shortly below.

49 A primary example related to the present discussion is Adrian Randolph’s work, which I discuss further below. Randolph (2002).
Strocchia’s opinion, fed the conflict and factionalism inherent in Florentine society. This should be foregrounded in any historical explanation in which he featured:

[Cosimo] was the richest man in Florence, whose unique position and tightening controls over communal elections led to considerable grumbling, covert street action, and ultimately to two failed coups against him and his son. Questions of power—economic, social, and political—are pushed to the background in favour of an overarching claim for piety. The result both diminishes the complexity of Cosimo’s motivations, and denies the realities of social conflict and competition endemic in Florentine life.

Art historian, Alison Wright, concurred with this opinion, while also making it an explicitly moral matter. She argued that it would be “damaging ... if [Kent’s] insistence on the importance of social exchange and the acknowledgement of a body of “shared ideals” was used to mask or diminish differences in power or the reality of social conflict.”

This criticism picked up on the concerns of historians in the 1960s who were newly conscious about power relations and disadvantaged social groups. History should reveal the “glaring differentials in social and political power.” It should not deny “the realities of social conflict and competition.” Or otherwise, it would “mask or diminish differences in power.” History must not foster, in other words, silences that embed oppression. Historians including Kent and her colleagues were still operating under these assumptions about social justice in the 1980s, and continue to do so to the present day. There would be few who would find fault with this stance on power, or history. There is, however, a question about the perspective that is often implicit in a conception of ‘propaganda.’ What does it tacitly assume about consensus, for example, or what Wright called in her article, “shared ideals”?

Consensus or unity, it seems by these analyses, may be part of the ‘mask,’ or the ‘mis-representing,’ that happens in propaganda—an oppressive tool of a powerful elite. This could be said to be compounded for the representations of David and Judith in Florence because of the conditions of humanism, which Renaissance historians have treated not only as propaganda, but as also having a negative influence
on the freedoms of a city-republic. Eminent Renaissance historian, John Najemy, for example, considered the question of whether civic humanism was rooted in the realities of Florentine politics. He concluded that it was essentially a “deeply conservative” and patriarchal construct that helped elites to establish “an intellectual foundation for conformity and surveillance.” The lack of congruence in retrospect, between the utopic precepts of humanism and the much harsher realities of present-day Florence, was apparently, according to Najemy, a strategy for political corruption.

The second way that the concept of ‘propaganda’ has been treated has conversely derived from art historians. In this guise it has been presented as a more progressive and flexible concept, although in my view no less problematically. This concept of ‘propaganda’ exists on a sliding scale in Renaissance art history. On the one end of this scale, it functions in its loosest sense, as partisan discourse. This can include any form of symbol or image that was of a political nature, or oftentimes, merely of a promotional nature. In the latter usage it may apply to an individual or a family commissioning cultural works that reified a narrative or that placed the family within a certain light, usually positive. On the other end of the scale, the word exists closer to a moralist idea described above. It denoted political content that was systematically conveyed to an audience, usually accompanied by an agenda to manifest power or to rule, and which can also therefore infer dishonest or oppressive tactics. It has often additionally implied a “public” audience, and

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51 In respect to Najemy’s comment, it should be noted that the studia humanitatis was directed toward the ‘vita activa,’ i.e., precisely against utopian views, while at the same time it embedded a profound critique of ‘elites.’ This view nonetheless remains prevalent in some quarters. See more recently, for example, W S Blanchard. Leonardo Bruni and the Poetics of Sovereignty. The European Legacy, 20(5):477–491, 2015. To provide a further example of misidentifying or overlooking the influence of a spiritual mentalité, intellectual historian, James Hankins, argues that virtue was far more central than studies indicate, an argument which this thesis supports. He attributes the imbalance to “new technologies of persuasion” in humanism, however, yet does not consider the older technologies of persuasion already in use in sacred imagery and imagining, which as I show in Chapters 2 and 3 had a close relationship to political persuasion. See James Hankins. Machiavelli, Civic Humanism, and the Humanist Politics of Virtue. *Italian Culture*, 32 (2):98–109, 2014, also James Hankins. Leonardo Bruni’s Laudatio florentinae urbis, Dante, and ‘Virtue Politics’. *Bullettino dell’Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo*, 119(8):333–358, 2017.
can also exist within a “public sphere.”\footnote{While these terms and ideas about the public sphere are from Habermas, they are in fact common terms in Renaissance art history for describing the effects of Italy’s “urbanisation” and an emerging “mass market culture.” John T Paoletti and Gary M Radke. \textit{Art in Renaissance Italy}. Laurence King Publishing, 2005, p. 16.} Propaganda has been presented on this spectrum effectively as an ahistorical phenomenon, but it is also inevitably modernist and postmodernist, because it requires a particular conception of power and its relationship to cultural products in order for it to be understood by its reader.

Art historians of the Renaissance who use ‘propaganda’ place it somewhere on this scale, but it moves according to the specific use required in the context of analysis. Often, it changes position on the scale depending upon the author. Definitions of propaganda from several points on the scale are also found in a single work. The change between points happens without signalling, but is apparent from the context. In one paragraph, for example, the term “family propaganda” may simply denote artworks that consistently presented a particular family image, one that portrayed the family in a favourable light. In another passage, the same word could denote “powerful image[s] of rulership.”

Alternatively, historians of ideas, for example Quentin Skinner, regularly use the term descriptively, and with more technical deftness. To take an example, Skinner described Alberto Mussato in his \textit{Foundations} as someone who “saw himself as a politician and propagandist as much as a scholar and poet.” Here, we take ‘propagandist’ to mean someone who seeks to persuade others to support an idea or a group. Although Skinner, like others, does not explain the term, it would seem to be centred on the activity of persuasion and it lies necessarily close to the practice of rhetoric. In this context, the additional inference that has often been included with the expression is omitted, so that ‘someone who seeks to persuade others’ does not necessarily infer achieving such a task ‘by giving inaccurate or misleading information’—on the contrary, the rules of rhetoric would preclude such an intention.

The meaning of ‘propaganda’ as it is used in the history of ideas is, however, either explicitly or implicitly political. It does not, for example, have the more selective and honed understanding of persuasion that applies in biblical iconogra-
phy. I say ‘selective and honed’ because as Chapters Two and Three will show, the technology of persuasion as far as it related to sacred imagery denoted not only a systematic treatment, but also a highly active and engaged viewer who was meant to undergo at some point a virtuous transformation. This viewer was construed for the purposes of penitence, moreover, not as a ruler, as the authors in Skinner’s work were oriented towards, but as an ‘everyman.’ The franchise of a penitential image was thus far broader, and yet the bar for intent and action set far higher, because of the theological framework that then sat around penitence. And if we were to continue the analogy and compare the conventional audience of political rhetoric to an audience of devotional rhetoric, we would find not only more similarities but also further inconsistencies. My analysis suggests that images about virtue and, more specifically, those that related to the representation of Florence such as the statues of David and Judith, had almost co-equal deliberative and demonstrative functions. A sacred or penitential image had a central deliberative element designed to explain the theology of pursuing virtue, but it was also meant to trigger an emotional experience akin to a viewer of a demonstrative performance, using the same rules of epideixis, structured conceptually by praise and blame.\footnote{The idea of ‘virtue’ found in the sacred-political imagery discussed here is derived from the Roman idea of \textit{virtus} which encompassed the four cardinal virtues: wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance (familiar from Aristotle’s \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}). But for the Renaissance Italians, and in the images with which I am concerned, the idea also included the idea of \textit{virtù} which, while evoking the cardinal virtues, also was tied to the idea of ‘virtuoso ability’ or excellence notoriously employed by Machiavelli; see for example, Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli. \textit{Machiavelli and Republicanism}, volume 18. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993}

The notion of propaganda in the Renaissance has often been treated as essential in these analyses, but it has also often remained nebulous, itself unanalysed. This is perhaps the least problematic in contexts that relate directly to rhetoric because there it can retain some technical clarity. But as noted above, even this becomes far less straightforward if we stretch rhetoric to include visual rhetoric, which biblical imagery was to a great degree. The various treatments have made the term ‘propaganda’ elusive and difficult to critique, even when one suspects that the concept may not adequately address or explain the shape of politics or political expression in fifteenth-century Florence.

It has of course not been uncommon to extrapolate the idea of propaganda back
into premodern and ancient periods. Many historians have done so because the advantages were clear. The term provided an associated language or method for investigating the relationship between power and culture. The drawback, however, as the author of *The Idea of Propaganda*, Stanley Cunningham, has pointed out, is that it makes it much harder to pin down its function or purpose:

The problem with these kinds of rear-view glimpses is that we run the risk of conflating a few features of influential images or texts with the modern whole-cloth phenomenon of propaganda; and this becomes more tenuous as we cross over vast historical and cultural boundaries.\(^{54}\)

Comparatively, propaganda today “is a fairly specific, isolable phenomenon, something we talk about, and that has a reality. Between it and the propaganda of earlier centuries, there are indeed points of comparison, but not an identity; and this is why it is such a difficult reality to define.”\(^{55}\)

It will be evident in this chapter and elsewhere that I have put single quotation marks around the term ‘propaganda.’ I have done so to signal that it is a contingent and questionable term for this period rather than a solid “identity.” Many of the problems that I identify in this thesis stem from this slippage, from what may be a useful but nonetheless problematic shorthand to assumptions about power dynamics.


\(^{55}\)Cunningham (2002), p. 18. The related point is that propaganda when discussed in these terms is assumed to be efficacious, but not necessarily multifaceted or hybrid, as it often was in the premodern period. Historian Nichole Hochner has also argued for a lack of coherence in early-modern political expression: “Artists, painters, sculptors, engravers, poets and authors are not commissioned within a deliberate, wide, programmatic ensemble or within the framework of a precise ideology; rather each one tries to please and win the protection of a patron in their own way. ... Metaphors, myths and allegories transmit a sense of the normative order that can be affiliated to varied and even contradictory political ideas. Thus political representations should be seen as a palimpsest that is not necessarily efficacious, and necessarily multifaceted or hybrid.” Nicole Hochner. Against Propaganda: The Juxtaposition of Images in Early Modern France. Reflections on the Reign of Louis XII (1498–1515). In Melissa Calaresu, Filippo de Vivo, and Joas Pau Rubié, editors, *Exploring Cultural History: Essays in Honour of Peter Burke*, pages 231–248. Ashgate Publishing, 2010, (pp. 236–237).
that are anachronistic.\footnote{56}

For this reason, I have preferred where needed to substitute the term ‘political expression,’ in order to separate it from certain uncritical assumptions that are usually carried in the term ‘propaganda.’\footnote{57} The mildness of the term will in fact be helpful. It is not nearly so value-laden. It does not assume, for example, that some form of intellectual oppression, coercion, or appropriation was in play. It doesn’t preclude it either. Instead it begs the question, what exactly was the ‘political’ that was being expressed? It infers a more searching and explorative frame of reference than ‘propaganda’ does if left unqualified. There may well be a valid argument to retain the term for ease of use, but at the very least its implications must be acknowledged and addressed.\footnote{58}

1.4 Power and the Art of State

One way that this can be achieved is to ask, for example, what the notion of ‘propaganda’ does to the notion of power in Florence. This question refers specifically to the fact that many of the artworks in Florence that art historians identify as political statements were also sacred or in sacred places. How do theories of propaganda or mass production relate to or explain the idea of “sacred” in these artworks? As I will show, sacred iconography was often designed to disrupt rather than to confirm temporal power. Its object was to persuade the viewer concerning the supremacy

\footnote{56}It is important not to assume for the purposes of analysis, for example, that propaganda is a communication process. It is, rather, a diminution of the normative communication process, because it inverts expectations. It does this by posing as knowledge. Cunningham (2002), p. 4. This is in direct contradiction with how contemporary Florentines understood sacred knowledge and expression, which was seen as one of the purest and most incorruptible forms of knowledge.

\footnote{57}One could substitute a variety of terms consistent with my critique, crafted to specific contexts, for example, political expression, rhetoric, etc. Nicole Hochner and Peter Burke have also expressed reluctance to use the term propaganda—see Hochner’s discussion of the alternative as ‘political representations’ in Hochner (2010).

\footnote{58}It may be surprising how often the term ‘propaganda’ is not needed, once the perspectives that I elaborate on in this thesis are factored in. As I cover in the Conclusion, having done this study I am persuaded that it may rarely be helpful for this period. Even where, for example, we want to use ‘propaganda’ to delineate a political process of persuasion, we can easily slip into not including or considering religious perspectives or techniques, which were so crucial to how political persuasion was conceptualised and practised in this period—in other words, we might create a dichotomy that is anachronistic. I argue that simply removing the term, or alternatively, keeping it as a continually contested one, forces us to make better and finer distinctions.
and utility of heavenly power, and to reveal the weaknesses of earthly power. This includes, crucially, images of David and Judith in Florence. Analysis of political artworks and theories of ‘propaganda’ in Florence, nonetheless, do not address this fact. This suggests that further exploration of the nature of sacred and political power in political artworks is needed. Such studies should also, preferably, be able to reveal, explain, or at the very least, to engage with the indivisibility of sacred and political metaphors.

Working in the tradition of Hans Baron with a sociological dimension, art historian Adrian Randolph has joined political theory to art production in fifteenth-century Florence in his work, Engaging Symbols.59 Here Randolph starts from the premise that a political state required representation in order to exist in the minds of its members; in this case, it was visual modes of representation. In explaining this idea, he quoted political theorist Michael Walzer, who has described politics as “an art of unification.” Walzer contended that:

The union of men can only be symbolised, it has not palpable shape or substance. The state is invisible; it must be personified before it can be seen, symbolised before it can be loved, imagined before it can be conceived.60

Walzer reminded scholars that the very act of symbolising the state was an act of unification, or at the very least and just as important for the present discussion, it assumed unification. Randolph built not on this aspect in his study but rather on the related idea of personification, showing that Florentines symbolised the state into existence during the fifteenth century using a range of media, including sculpture, painting, portrait medals, and engravings.

Randolph’s argument had two limbs. In the first, he traced the ways that Florentines personified the Florentine state using the human body. He analysed symbols that were: “Personifications or, better put, embodiments: symbols that render the state in human form, visualisations engaged with and within the body politic.”61

59Randolph (2002).
These “embodiments” Randolph particularised further with the “gendered” body. He showed how many of the images about the Florentine state were expressions of sex, love, and reproduction, what he has called “amorous discourses.” These discourses gave Florentines images and themes around which they could unite.62

Randolph’s notion of the Florentine state, and more specifically his understanding of power in this context, was also underpinned by sociological theory. This was the second limb of his argument, which was developed from a theory by German philosopher-sociologist, Jürgen Habermas. In Habermas’ historical-sociological model, a newly informed and engaged bourgeoisie invaded the traditional public sphere in the eighteenth century, transforming it in the process. In Habermas’ newly transformed public sphere:

“Private people come together as a public.” This public developed its own informal institutions such as coffee-houses, theatres and newspapers, especially in large cities such as London and Paris. Thanks to these institutions, an arena of debate emerged which encouraged critical and rational thought.63

Randolph argued that the artistic displays of elite families in Florence were akin to the informal institutions described by Habermas.64 Artworks worked like a salon, in which families asked for and won from their audiences political authority and legitimacy. Additionally, and as a consequence, patrons like the Medici changed civic symbols in this period. The purpose of civic symbols was not only to represent authority as it always had been, but it was also to “draw citizens into ideological

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62 For Randolph, “it is striking that fifteenth-century Florence produced a critical mass of public art that sought not only to mark places of power and to signal the presence of authority, but also to engage a differentiated public dialectically.” Randolph (2002), p. 11.


64 As Peter Burke has noted, there was a considerable delay between Habermas’ theory and when historians became interested in it. As historians developed the theory, they have also suggested other spaces in which the public sphere operated, for example, clubs and salons. Randolph’s interpretation of art can be seen as an innovative arm of this later development. Burke (2005), p. 80. As an example of how Habermas’ theory has been used by historians, see James V H Melton. *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
exchange." In Randolph’s opinion, this negotiation created a new public sphere. This was an antecedent of the later public spheres, and therefore, of modern Western political discourse.

Randolph described in this second limb of his argument the shift that he saw in politics during the fifteenth century in Florence from a previously “monologic” discourse to a “dialogic” discourse. These terms he took from Habermas. The first term, monologic, signalled a top-down approach to power and political messages common in pre-modern courts, for example, Louis XVI. Access to the public sphere in this period was restricted to a small elite. Randolph noted that this kind of political power had “represented itself ... to a generalised spectatorship. It did not entail exchange; it did not address a public.” The second term, dialogic, referred to the reciprocal relationship demanded by the bourgeoisie in Western Europe, who moved into the political sphere during the eighteenth century. Dialogic discourse anticipated both equality and deliberation. Randolph found this in Florentine “public” art, arguing it to be an early antecedent of what we now recognise as “modern” Western political discourse:

I would like to make the case, via Habermas, that in the nonfeudal yet quasi-seigniorial environment of Florentine civic life, we can witness the formation of sustained political and visual discourses that can be called political in the modern sense.

Hence also like Burckhardt but for different reasons, Randolph’s theory made a substantial and conscious link with modernity. It may perhaps be surprising that the modernity in his approach was not nearly as problematic as one might expect; Randolph presents a persuasive and well-argued case. There was a problem, however, in the character of the dialogic discourse, because it was effectively secular. The ‘back-and-forth’ was of the human and temporal worlds and did not conceptualise or recognise divine presence. To put it another way, it lacked a religious life, which

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66 Habermas saw this corresponding to the feudal stage of development in Karl Marx’ theory of capitalist development.
is a problem for a study about art in this period. Randolph’s frame of enquiry was the “body politic,” yet the body of Christ—the most pervasive body-symbol in this period, and additionally a symbol of political and religious foundation—was not addressed directly. The dialogic relationship that Randolph identified as the basis of Florentine political exchange was between patron (and, implicitly, artist) and audience. It thus belonged to the human world. It did not address the role of the divine world in Florentine life, nor its relationship to Florentine politics or political representation.

The proposition that artworks were a site of negotiation between the producers and viewers is historically accurate; Randolph assumed however, that such negotiation was a nascent version of the modern political process, which would preclude the recognition of divine presence. His theory did not recognise that the negotiation was part of a sacred process that was well-established over the preceding centuries in sacred art. It was a substantial gap, that in focussing on the intersection between art and politics with a particular interest in how families such as the Medici sought political legitimacy, that Randolph’s theory did not account for how sacred figures or sacred presence aided or complicated this task.

This oversight draws attention to the fact that present studies of political artworks are impaired to some degree by an adherence to the idea, often tacit, that a


70 It is interesting that Randolph does not address the role of the artist in making or shaping the messages of the artworks. The involvement of the artist is also a complicating factor in constructing a dialogic exchange, because as Baxandall has demonstrated in Painting and Experience, artists in this period had a great deal of knowledge of symbols and subject matter on which the patron was dependent. Cf. Baxandall (1972).

71 The other question is the degree to which dialogic discourse can engage with a contemporary understanding of rhetoric. I explore this question in the context of epideixis, which I address in Chapter 4.

72 See also Massimo Rospocher. Beyond the Public Sphere. Opinions, Publics, Spaces in Early Modern Europe (XVI-XVIII). Dunker & Huboldt, 2012, and the editor’s introductory essay, which more broadly provides a critique of both Habermas and scholars who have relied on his thesis.
categorisation or function of ‘political’ was distinct from ‘sacred.’ However, Richard Trexler, and other historians using ritual, had long ago broken historians free from this binary. Ritual as a paradigm and a methodology has largely passed out of scholarly fashion, having effectively exhausted its insights. This may be why its successful assault on conventional boundaries has faded.\(^{73}\) It is not my intention to revive ritual as a methodology, but I think it is worth briefly revisiting Trexler to examine how he managed to break down the conceptual barriers that continue to inhibit historians’ discussion of political expression in Renaissance Florence.

1.4.1 Sacred Agency in Art

Richard Trexler’s influential book, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, was published in 1980.\(^{74}\) It was built on the foundations and aspirations of the sixties’ social turn in Renaissance studies, as mentioned previously, but it was also the most ambitious fulfilment of these ideas, both then and since. The book had its own special quality born of its proclaimed mission, which was putting ritual at the forefront of historical explanation and making it the idea and practice around which urban life in Renaissance Florence turned.\(^{75}\) It also exhibited the verve of a newly-ordained convert; ritual, according to Trexler, was surviving in the 1980s-modern world “in the teeth of an unfriendly universe.” Yet, “Ritual lives. It is not simply a tribal or village phenomenon, but an integral part of established urban life.” Trexler’s study would, moreover, bring ritual to life: “It returns to the urban culture of the medieval and early modern period to study ritual before its efficacy was challenged: ritual

\(^{73}\)Interestingly, Trexler was known to and admired by Randolph, but he does not adopt his stance as I outline here. I also touch on this again at the end of this section.


with no questions asked.”\textsuperscript{76}

One of the more unique aspects of Trexler’s approach was not the large-scale use of the ritual perspective or its emphasis on performance. This was after all a signature to varying extents amongst the 1970s and 1980s generations of historians. What set Trexler’s book apart was how it used this perspective to present art in a new light. It argued that the image was a “sacred object,” comparable to holy relics in their religious efficacy.\textsuperscript{77} This method encompassed more than the idea that art was religious because it portrayed a sacred figure, or because it was designed for worshipping a sacred figure. The images of sacred figures in Florence were, in Trexler’s view, inseparable from the city’s concepts about politics and prosperity, and from the actions of Florentines in their striving towards these goals. He had therefore made a conceptual shift towards analysing art, in Habermas’ terms, not as monologic but as dialogic.

Florentines infused images “with the power and charisma necessary to individual and communal survival.”\textsuperscript{78} This attitude towards imagery brought images to life, quite literally:

An unstable, tense, and conflict-laden population thus looked to its supreme objects as living, vivacious incorporations of divine and human eros, and relied enormously upon their authority to preserve order: not the cold, bureaucratic order of the idol, but an order built upon caring images willing to facilitate communication between the social orders, and between individual groups.\textsuperscript{79}

\textit{Public Life} was presenting both a theory of art and the sacred. It substituted display in place of liturgy, and it placed the city on the same intellectual plane as those they worshipped.\textsuperscript{80} Florence could only “verify” its identity, Florentines

\textsuperscript{80}Trexler consciously set aside “liturgy;” he argued that action expressed belief. This was part of his commitment to imitating ethnography, by substituting the direct observation of an ethnographer with the historical fragments of contemporary observation available to a Renaissance historian. See for example his discussion of reconstructing the Florentine “cosmos,” pp. 46–6.
could only verify themselves, “by the excited public commitment of devotees to holy things.” This located the social and political power of the city-republic in its imagery, and particularly in its sacred imagery. Florentine types of display had “social as well as religious energy.”

Although historians would never be able to entirely follow the totality of Trexler’s methodology, it nonetheless set up a basis for them to explore the ways that art impacted the shape of Florentine sociability and politics. Equally importantly in the context of this discussion, Trexler’s approach had collapsed the usual distinctions that historians generally saw, between secular and religious, for example, or between human and divine. Furthermore, in collapsing these categories, the separation normally assumed between other, related concepts also collapsed, such as between ‘public’ and ‘private,’ ‘viewer’ and ‘viewed,’ or ‘sacred’ and ‘profane:

It is definitely necessary to break down the subject–object, viewer–artefact bias of Western studies. As Peter Brown has correctly insisted, it is impossible to understand what is happening in a work of art without giving attention to “the crowd beneath the mosaics;” neither can we analyse a festival or procession and ignore the audience.

This inevitably had an effect on how Trexler portrayed the political, which importantly, he described as existing on the same ideological plane as the spiritual. His conception of urban ritual and sacred imagery relocated the divine world to public spaces; the divine mixed with the human, and it informed the practices of politics and political expression:

It is just as important to refuse an artificially imposed divine–human or religious– secular dichotomy: The behaviours of one person kneeling

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81 Here in essence was the reason ritual in this unstable city played so large a role in transforming society as well as maintaining it. Because of both the spirit from which it sprang and the manipulative process of social ranking implicit in ritual communication, ritual was always a dialectic of social as well as religious energy.” Trexler (1970, reprint 1991), p. 128.

82 An example is Edward Muir’s work, which used ritual theory and terminology, but with greater transparency. See, for example, Edward Muir. Ritual in Early Modern Europe. Cambridge University Press, 1997, in which he made a similar argument to Trexler but without the immersive technique that had overwhelmed some of Trexler’s readers.

before the Christian image and another bowed before a secular ruler are symmetrical, and should be studied as such ... [Florentines] recognised the public utility of private devotion and the private effects of public processions. They knew that sacred and profane acts had profane and sacred implications, that the game could be ominous and the Mass frivolous, that pomp and intention were inextricable.84

This perspective had a profound effect on the character of art. On the one hand, it took art down from its pedestal, while on the other hand, it elevated its social importance. Civic rituals were religious rituals and vice versa; civic and religious expression was unified: it had no obvious boundary lines.

The popularity of ritual theory has of course since dwindled, while many of its insights nevertheless continue to inform historians’ understanding of society and culture in Renaissance Florence. Trexler’s greatest achievement in this regard was in the way that he conceived of interconnections between social, political, and religious efficacy. He was able to show in his Public Life how each of these perspectives did not merely relate to one another; the interaction between them formed Florentines’ idea of themselves, and of Florence. While Trexler recognised that the elite were the primary producers of art and what he sometimes called propaganda, he also showed art to be a highly active sphere with few of the rigid compartmentalisations that historians are apt to more lately rely upon.

Each of the perspectives described above in the work of Kent, Randolph, and Trexler—piety, dialogic discourse, and ritual—feature art as a central site of negotiation. Randolph in his Engaging Symbols was, moreover, aware of Trexler’s approach; and he consciously wanted to emulate it.85 Like Trexler’s streets, which were fluid and unstable because they were places where regulation was frequently resisted, circumvented, or reinvented, Randolph formulated the “public space” as autonomous, because it was “developed outside of the traditional urban loci of civic authority.”86 By merging his theory with Trexler’s, Randolph had also presented historians with

85 “Throughout this book I have ventured to frame visual culture within the boisterous performative so comprehensively described by Richard Trexler.” Randolph (2002), p. 16.
an optimistic version of Habermas’ theory of the public sphere, in which political discourse was still effectual. Where Randolph departed from T rexler, however, was in how he characterised divinity or sacred presence. Randolph presented it as a passive rather than as an active agent in political discourse. The “sacred power of images ... served to inflate the status accorded to embodiments of the state,” Randolph wrote, which was, in fact, a monologic and not a dialogic function. The capacity of a sacred presence to disrupt this calm manipulation of patron to image, therefore, was not acknowledged or explored.

Other studies have shown that sacred images were placed strategically on the streets to guide or to change the behaviour of Florentines, because the gaze of a sacred figure worked to inhibit immoral or disordered practices. Florentine apothecary Luca Landucci recalled a time, for example, when a painting of the Madonna had closed her eyes to express her displeasure with the activities she had witnessed there. Florentines had understood this miracle as an exhortation to do better. This points to the relative autonomy of sacred figures in art, or at least it points to a form of agency, and it begs a question: how did conceptualisations of the sacred disrupt or complicate the political authority that was being symbolised?

Historians would have us accept that in much of the art commissioned by powerful families, and especially in the case of the Medici, the authority being symbolised, surreptitiously, was their own. This was done through the city-state’s symbolism and in consequence it developed a particular mode of political expression. They generally do not explain however, how those patrons circumvented or negotiated with sacred authority in order to achieve this, for example in the case of images of David

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89 “13th November. In the evening, at about 24 in the evening (8 p.m.), at San Michele Berteldi, it began to be said that an image of Our Lady, which is over a door, had miraculously closed its eyes; the one opposite the door of the Stufa (Baths). It seemed as if she did not wish to see the sins that are committed there. Before a day had passed, numbers of candles were lighted, and great veneration was paid to it, so that a wall was built in front of it like a church.” Luca Landucci. A Florentine Diary from 1450 to 1516, by Luca Landucci, continued by an Anonymous Writer till 1542 with Notes by Iodoco del Badia. Translated by Alice de Rosen Jevis. J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1927, pp. 222–3.
and Judith, which theologically were prefigurations of Christ and the Virgin. More likely is that they did not achieve a circumvention of sacred authority or supplant it with their own because it was neither contemplated nor available—from a contemporary religious perspective, it was implausible for patrons to feign unachieved virtues or to pretend altruism using sacred imagery, because it involved an all-seeing God.

There is the example of chronicler Giovanni Cambi’s account of divine intervention by means of a storm in preparations for the feast of San Giovanni in 1500, for example, which Cambi interpreted as a comment on the political disarray at the time.90 These kinds of accounts present a problem, however, for interpreting artworks as ‘propaganda,’ at least in the sense of knowingly projecting a disingenuous image. Randolph in fact finished his book with Cambi’s account, noting that certain events were taken as omens or portents, and others were interpreted as heavenly intervention.91 He also noted that Cambi read the faltering of a giant dressed as Judith with the head of Holofernes as a portent, concluding it was due to “unpredictable dialogism”—or what he described elsewhere as “the fundamental slipperiness of the image.”92

If contemporaries interpreted an image as an extension of divine will, surely it suggests that patrons were, like their viewers, daily negotiating with sacred authority as a power in its own right, and doing so through imagery. It suggests, in other words, that images sat within the nexus between spiritual and political necessity. Any analysis of visual political expression should be able to address this condition.

1.5 New Solutions

My examination of Donatello’s statues of David and Judith suggests that their devotional content was crucial to understanding their function in political expression. In order to explore such a proposition however, a broader scope for political imagery was needed. The question was, on what basis could such an understanding be for-

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mulated? The deficiency of documentary evidence about the statues remained an issue, and the provenance of the latter was frequently vague. The integrated nature of T rexler’s “cosmos” was hard to achieve without the paradigm of ritual, and there was no suggested evidence of ritualistic relationships that viewers had with these images. The methodology most likely to be productive based on the paucity of the available evidence would be in the images themselves. The difficulty with this, however, was that the method for reading these images needed to be reformulated, given that the current interpretation rested on an assumption of a divergence between political and devotional purpose. In fact, historians accept, for the most part, that their methodologies will illuminate the function and meaning of an image either in terms of its political relevance or its spiritual relevance, depending on the particular context. Rarely are they treated as equally relevant; one aspect is usually assumed to have eclipsed the other in interpretive value. The other problem was in the way that historians’ understanding of representations of David and Judith had become divorced from the figures’ traditional iconography—this had compounded the situation described above, and it had also left scholars with very little means to correctly interpret the violent symbolism in the statues.

The first part of the answer is provided by the precedent developed by art historian Michael Baxandall in his influential book, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy.* In this work, Baxandall provided and analysed a range of Renaissance images in order to depict what he described as the “mental equipment” a contemporary Renaissance viewer would need in order to interpret a contemporary painting. The viewer Baxandall usually called in his own terminology the “beholder” of an image. He argued that both the painter and the beholder of a Renaissance painting would have already had a ‘cognitive library’ of images and symbols that he or she had accreted over time. He called this their “cognitive style.” These “visual skills and habits” were in painters and viewers alike; it directed the painter’s style, and it also allowed a viewer to ‘read’ the various layers of meaning in a painting. Such apparatus included a knowledge of the significance of pigments and pictorial skills.
Baxandall shed light on “the equipment that the fifteenth-century painter’s public brought to complex visual stimulations like pictures.” He also revealed how Renaissance painters were able to match concepts with pictorial style, and thereby to make art into a rhetorical performance which engaged audiences literate in visual rhetoric.\footnote{Baxandall (1972).} The following is an example of how Baxandall achieved this—by singling out and interpreting the “patterns, categories, inferences, analogies” in a painting. By doing so, he pioneered an approach that would inform many studies, including \footnote{Quotes in this paragraph are from Baxandall (1972), p.40.} \footnote{Rhetorical performance is my term in this context, and there is a nice circularity here in some respects with the fact that art history and art criticism began in the period under discussion as a form of rhetorical performance, and more specifically, panegyric. Later in this thesis, in Chapter 4, I shall expand on the relevance of demonstrative rhetoric to understanding political art. For a discussion of the relationship of art history to rhetoric, see Carl Goldstein, Rhetoric and Art History in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque, The Art Bulletin, 73(4):641–652, 1991.}
this thesis, because it provided a means of analysis that was previously only achieved by literary analysts with texts. The painting he describes is included in Figure 1.5.1.

Regarding knowledge of the story, if one did not know about the Annunciation it would be difficult to know quite what was happening in Piero’s painting; as a critic once pointed out, if all Christian knowledge were lost, a person could well suppose that both figures, the Angel Gabriel and Mary, were directing some sort of devout attention to the column. This does not mean that Piero was telling his story badly; it means he could depend on the beholder to recognize the Annunciation subject promptly enough for him to accent, vary and adjust it in rather advanced ways. In this case, Mary’s stance frontal to us serves various purposes: first, it is a device Piero used—to induce participation by the beholder; second, it counters on this occasion the fact that its position in the chapel at Arezzo causes the beholder to see the fresco rather from the right; third, it helps to register a particular moment in Mary’s story, a moment of reserve towards the Angel previous to her final submission to her destiny. For fifteenth-century people differentiated more sharply than us between successive stages of the Annunciation, and the sort of nuance we now miss in Quattrocento representations of the Annunciation is one of the things that will have to engage us later.96

This method for understanding Renaissance “visual activity” Baxandall called the “period eye.” As the above passage indicates, it was focussed on sacred images because as he noted, most Renaissance imagery was sacred or related to sacred figures. Awareness of this fact was key in any analysis of the mental framework that a contemporary viewer might use to read an artwork:

Most fifteenth-century pictures are religious pictures. This is self-evident, in one sense, but ‘religious pictures’ refers to more than just a certain range of subject matter; it means that the pictures existed to meet institutional ends to help with specific intellectual and spiritual activities.

96Baxandall (1972), pp. 34–36.
It also means that the pictures came within the jurisdiction of a mature body of ecclesiastical theory about images.\textsuperscript{97}

To demonstrate how viewers were trained in a cognitive style, Baxandall used a sermon given in 1492 by the Dominican preacher, Fra Michele da Carcano.\textsuperscript{98} Here Fra Michele explained that images of the Virgin and the saints were needed for three reasons. First, “so that those who are not able to read the scriptures can yet learn by seeing:

“For it is one thing to adore a painting,” the preacher expounded, “but it is quite another to learn from a painted narrative what to adore. What a book is to those who can read, a picture is to the ignorant people who look at it. Because in a picture even the unlearned may see what example they should follow; in a picture they who know no letters may yet read.”

Second, images:

“were introduced on account of our emotional sluggishness; so that men who are not aroused to devotion when they hear about the histories of the saints may at least be moved when they seem them, as if actually present, in pictures. For our feelings are aroused by things seen more than things heard.”

And third, images helped “unreliable memories.”

Translating the preacher’s points into specific instructions for paintings and viewers, Baxandall noted that it amounted to using pictures:

as respectively lucid, vivid and readily accessible stimuli to meditate on the Bible and the lives of saints. If you convert them into a brief for the painter, they carry an expectation that the picture should tell its story in a clear way ... in an eye-catching and memorable way ... and with full uses of all the emotional resources of the sense of sight, the most powerful as well as the most precise of the senses.\textsuperscript{99}

\textsuperscript{97}Baxandall (1972), p. 40.
\textsuperscript{98}Quotes from the preacher’s sermon in this section are all from Baxandall (1972), p. 41.
\textsuperscript{99}Baxandall (1972), p. 41.
Baxandall's book had one glaring omission, however, which made it an insufficient manual with which to read the statues of *David* and *Judith*. His lexicon of painting style omitted violent symbolism, and thus there was no ‘period eye for violence.’ With hindsight, this seems a significant exclusion given that much of the religious art of the period was also explicitly violent.\(^{100}\)

If one takes Donatello’s statues of *David* and *Judith*, however, it is clear that certain violent symbols—for example, the sword and the decapitation—were key to their representation, and therefore, accurately interpreting their violent symbolism is part of the task of understanding how their contemporary audience would have read them. Historians’ answer to this problem has been to compare the context of warfare in the biblical account of David with a contemporary experience of warfare. In the case of Judith, it has been to interpret it within the frame of gender roles or as a reference to tyrannicide. There are problems, as I explain above, and in Chapter 4 in respect of the marble *David*, with accepting on face value the explanation of a straight comparison of warfare. There is additionally a problem with reducing the interpretation of the symbolism of David or Judith to merely a reading of literal violence, as I explain below.\(^{101}\)

1.5.1 **Reading Violence**

Renaissance historians need a particularly acute and nuanced understanding of art, given its political and social influence in this period, but they also need a specific guide to interpreting its violence. An ability to ‘read’ violence would include being

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\(^{100}\)It should be noted that it was a compact book, taking a slice of painters and paintings as its focus, which is one of the reasons why it remains relevant these many decades later. It is possible that Baxandall took it as read that such a survey of violent symbolism was too big for his then-study, in light of the fact that the Crucifixion and its symbolism has always figured prominently in any such discussion. It can also be noted, however, that others have critiqued the ‘period eye’ in terms of overlooking other perspectives, such as gender. See for example, Jane Van Deuren. *Another Period Eye: Women’s Experience and Painting in Fifteenth-Century Florence*. PhD thesis, Queen’s University Kingston, 1999; and Adrian W B Randolph. *Gendering the Period Eye: Deschi da Parto and Renaissance Visual Culture*. *Art History*, 27(4):538–562, 2004.

\(^{101}\)Art historians Sarah Blake McHam and Allie Terry have read the decapitation in the statues in terms of a comparison to Athenian tyrannicides, in McHam’s case, and in a broader comparison to decapitation imagery in Terry’s case. They do not, however, contextualise decapitation in the most obvious sources for David and Judith—biblical iconography. Cf. Blake McHam (2001); and Terry (2009).
able to judge whether the violence contained in an image is there purely to reference the original act, or whether it connoted or denoted something different. This is an important distinction to make with any image, but especially I would submit in respect to violence, which tends to elicit assumptions about universal responses. A similar point has been made by James Watts, a Professor of biblical textual traditions, which is relevant to the present discussion because sacrifice is central to interpreting representations of the Crucifixion. Watts used rhetorical analysis to explore the motives behind writing Leviticus, a central book of the Torah and Pentateuch and an important source for New Testament authors’ understanding of sacrifice.\textsuperscript{102} Crucially, Watts contended that an approach to interpreting sacrifice in Leviticus must first make a distinction between the rituals themselves and the texts that referred to or described rituals. He maintained that most biblical scholars had become preoccupied with the sacrificial rituals themselves, and in so doing had forgotten that a text about a ritual was just that, a text. It was an entirely different creature in nature and function to the ritual or rituals upon which it was based. The same applies to the difference between a killing and a painting or a sculpture of killing—not only are they not the same, but a painting or a sculpture of killing had many new layers not in the original act, nor even necessarily related to that act.\textsuperscript{103} This is especially true for biblical iconography, which was connected to a complex web of theological thought, both written and spoken. This means that historians cannot use the same methods for deciphering a symbolic representation of violence in art that they would for interpreting a violent act or event; they need a technical method that allows them to see and to peel back the layers.


\textsuperscript{103}Italian art historian Luca Gatti makes a related point, that Renaissance Florentines would have additionally felt “uneasy” about committing themselves to a single meaning: “A citizen of Early Renaissance Florence that stepped out into the streets and entered the spaces of his civic world joined a concert of creative formal behaviors in which he was at once an actor and a spectator. His problem here was to interpret the complex web of overlapping, conflicting and simultaneous meanings he would have read in the actions and images by which the community directed him and represented itself, and find his own place and set his standing. On most occasions he would probably have elected for a state of suspension, a floating of multiple possibilities he was loath to precipitate in too stable a form: in ambiguity the citizen of Florence developed a richness of signification, and found a refuge.” Luca Gatti. \textit{Ambiguity and the Fixing of Identity in Early Renaissance Florence}. \textit{Diogenes}, 45(177):17–35, 1997, p. 17.
An ability to ‘read’ violence also extends to being able to argue a case, as Baxandall did for other symbolism, as to how it would have been received or interpreted. It may be, for example, that an explicitly violent image would shock or move its audience, but it cannot be assumed. How an audience reads violence, or if it reads it as shocking, is largely contextual and hence historical. How a viewer cognitively uses such shock, moreover, and what mental patterns are being habitually produced across audiences in response to such symbolism, is historically contingent. For fifteenth-century Florence, this meant that violent symbolism was not just particular; it had its own language, complex but also highly readable.

The methodology that I have developed to read the statues of David and Judith has utilised the premise of the ‘period eye’ as its basis, but it has set out to explain the violent symbolism that it contained. To do this, I have made comparisons to sermons and to other images. In the case of images, the survey has been wide-ranging, moving across Bible picture books, woodcut and illuminated prayer books and Speculum texts, such as the Speculum Humanae Salvationis and the Speculum Virginum, and the Horae, more commonly referred to as the Book of Hours. It must be noted in the case of Bible picture books, that many of these were known to have been popular in the Northern or French and Germanic regions but less in the Southern or Italian regions. I have justified their inclusion, however, on several counts.

The first and more general point is that it would not be possible to construct a ‘period eye for violence’ without a wide survey of biblical iconography. The texts noted above, along with other artworks in churches and chapels, constitute such a body of sources. The second and related point is that biblical imagery showed important regional differences, but it was also constituted by a set of formulas,

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104 This viewpoint, that violence in certain contexts was not considered disturbing or negative by its audience, has also been raised by Caroline Walker Bynum in the Introduction to her work, Wonderful Blood. Bynum noted that many scholars too readily assume a macabre or frightening tone in terms of either its intentions or its reception. Lauro Martines made a similar remark in his Civil Disorder, that historians must aim to put aside their own quite natural abhorrence towards violence in order to understand its historical significance. See Caroline Walker Bynum. Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007, and “Introduction: The Historical Approach to Violence,” in Lauro Martines. Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities, 1200-1500. University of California Press, 1972, pp. 3–18.
symbols, rules, and styles that repeated across texts and regions. This was in fact related to its contemporary purpose, which was to transmit ‘the Word’ and to aid the committing of its theoretical underpinnings and practices to memory.

The author of *Pictor in Carmine*, for example, which was an unillustrated work setting out hundreds of types and their antitypes for use by artists, was developed because, as its author lamented in his foreword, the poor choices in church decoration had led not to “decorations but rather aberrations.” He intended to create a template to follow whenever explaining the Old and New Testaments, so as to ‘propagate’ sacred knowledge without anomalies. Notably for this context, the word ‘propaganda’ comes from *propagare*, and later emerged specifically in the context of just such an intention for which the *Pictor in Carmine* was invented, which was to spread religious beliefs and theory.

The third point about including Bible picture books in my survey is that some recent evidence has emerged that the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, and specifically its images, originated in Bologna before travelling north of the Alps. There is also, importantly, evidence of several Italian manuscripts of the *Speculum*, including a Florentine one that is datable to 1390, which was in Bernard Berenson’s library and which I use in this thesis as evidence of the symbolism that I identify circulating in Florence.

The fourth and final point relates to the second, that there is much circumstantial evidence for the symbolism that I identify in biblical iconography circulating in Florence, because it was picked up and used by many artists and patrons throughout

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107 This will be addressed in Chapters 2 and 3, but see for example, Evelyn Silber. The Reconstructed Toledo *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*: the Italian Connection in the Early Fourteenth Century. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 43:32–51, 1980.

108 Montague R James and Bernhard Berenson. *Speculum Humanae Salvationis, being a Reproduction of an Italian Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century described and prefaced by M R James, with a discussion of the school and date by Bernhard Berenson*. The University Press, 1926.
the fifteenth century. The Florentine manuscripts show an interrelationship with motifs in Tuscan painting, for example, Madonna della Misericordia, see Figures 1.5.2 and 1.5.3. This more broadly included, importantly, the choice and arrangement of figures, and the many techniques that historians tend to ascribe to a Renaissance aesthetic, such as the co-mingling of contemporary and ancient details or perspectives, and the tiling of images next to one another such as on the Baptistery Doors in Florence.

Given that developing a new understanding of Donatello’s statues of David and Judith was my aim, I have marshalled my analysis of violent images around precedents for these figures in biblical iconography. I also make comparisons where necessary to other devotional iconography through the late medieval period, for example,
to illuminated manuscripts of the *Psychomachia*, which gained popularity from the tenth through to the late fourteenth centuries, and which was often illustrated in illuminated manuscripts or prayer books.

My analysis has revealed a lexicon of violence in sacred imagery. As I explain in Chapter 3, scholars tend to focus their analyses of violence in sacred art, quite naturally for the most part, on representations of the Crucifixion. This has left them with a mono-focus on sacrifice, however, and more importantly, a vacuum around images that were clearly sacred and yet did not portray the Crucifixion or sacrifice, such as portrayals of David and Judith.\(^{109}\) There is an obvious comparison, for example, between the sacrifice of Christ and the near sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham, but none between the sacrifice of Christ and the killing of Goliath or

\(^{109}\)This is one of the reasons that scholars have sought explanations for the violent symbolism in other, disparate sources (see for example, Blake McHam (2001); and Terry (2009).
Holofernes. The confusion is compounded when, as in the case of accounts of David and Judith, the sacred figure is the one doing the killing.

In my survey, however, I have been able to identify three types of killing that theologians and artists used to explain the sacrifice of Christ to laypeople. Two of these types—what I have called ‘victimhood’ and ‘mutual victimhood’—had an obvious correlation to Christ’s sacrifice. The third type—what I have termed ‘justifiable’ or ‘righteous killing’—had no obvious correspondence to sacrifice, but was nonetheless actively compared to the Crucifixion when the key meaning was penitence. Significantly, it was this third type that became the basis for the political representation of Florence in Donatello’s statues.

My analysis of this third type brings to light another understanding of liberty not previously considered by scholars in their summation of the meaning of Donatello’s three statues. It was an understanding of liberty, moreover, that combined sacred with political purpose. This previously unidentified conception was a spiritual abstraction of liberty that sat inside the other more obviously ‘political’ ideas of libertà or libertas. This notion might be called libertas privatus, or ‘personal liberty,’ because it was predicated on a belief that the self was constrained by, and needed to be freed from, a conflict between vice and virtue, or between reason and instinct. This was the Apostle Paul’s theory of virtue, but it was also how humanists understood the citizen and the potential obstacles to maintaining a city-republic. It was depicted in biblical iconography as ‘justifiable killing,’ as a physical struggle to the death between forces. The expectation that underpinned this iconography—more precisely, liberum corpus tuum—underpinned what I call a ‘penitential understanding’ for laypeople.

I argue that the penitential significance of David and Goliath was the basis of choosing its symbolism as an emblem of the Florentine polis. The technology of viewing images of David and Golaith provided an authoritative procedure for offering the pursuit of a virtuous life as a secure basis for both libertà and libertas.\footnote{The expression, “pursuit of virtue,” rather than only “virtue” is a deliberate distinction that this thesis is making for political images in Florence and perhaps also, more generally, virtue imagery in this period. The “pursuit of virtue” implied a process oriented towards virtuous transformation rather than merely a state of virtue. This contrast is the difference between a journey and a destination.}
From within a penitential perspective, political and spiritual victory was a shared metaphor. Spiritual liberty, defined as liberation of the self from the ‘tyranny’ of vice or uncontrolled instinct, was construed as the foundation of other political forms of liberty. If one wanted a visual analogy as to how these two more familiar ways of thinking about liberty fitted with a third, it would be as concentric circles, the centre point of which was personal liberty, see in the diagram Figure 1.5.4.

![Diagram showing three types of liberty in Donatello's statues of David and Judith.](image)

**Figure 1.5.4:** Diagram showing three types of liberty in Donatello's statues of David and Judith.

The bringing to light of a penitential context for Donatello’s statues has also revealed that the symbolism of virtue underwent a series of changes in Florence during the fifteenth-century, which historians have not previously identified. This shift will be traced and explained in the following chapters, the organisation of which has been split into two parts. The first three chapters in Part I deal with interpretative approaches—the present chapter with the approaches that have formed the biases toward ‘propaganda’ in understanding the statues, and the remaining two chapters with new interpretative approaches, including a new ‘period eye for violence.’ In Chapter Two, I will share the discovery of a *Book of Hours* image of David, which suggests that the politicisation of David started earlier than scholars believe. The chapter also confirms that the image emerged out of a penitential tradition in biblical iconography, which it examines. This iconography featured virtue’s battle with vice—and its ultimate victory—as a metaphor for living a virtuous life.

Chapter Three will go in a different but related direction to explore and explain how audiences would have read violent symbolism in sacred imagery, in order to address the previous oversight referred to further above. I reveal the different types
of killing that repeat in biblical iconography, and I will analyse these images in order to demonstrate how their viewers would have interpreted them on both theoretical and pragmatic levels.

Part II takes the interpretative approaches established in Part I and applies them to Donatello’s three statues, taken in the accepted order of their creation. Chapter Three addresses the marble *David*, which scholars previously thought to be the first time that David was politicised. A contemporary sermon delivered by popular preacher, Fra Domenico, demonstrates that the “fight” in the inscription on the marble *David* would have been read as a metaphor for virtue. In the marble, however, the symbolism of the late-medieval tradition, namely what I call ‘trampling,’ was foregone in favour of the symbolism of an ancient Roman rhetor, and fame emerged as a newly-emphasised theme. This chapter will demonstrate that, despite modifications, the earlier meanings of the penitential tradition in David’s iconography were substantially carried over into the political image of David in Florence.

In Chapter Five, I will show that Donatello’s bronze *David* was a self-conscious return to late-medieval biblical iconography, with the re-emergence of trampling and its further emphasis on the victory of virtue. It was therefore a much more conservative interpretation of the iconography than historians have previously understood. The theme of virtue’s victory was additionally enhanced in the bronze by reinterpreting David’s iconography in concert with themes and symbolism from Petrarch’s *Trionfi*, or *Triumphus*. David was intended to personify Petrarch’s Love.

In Chapter Six, I will show that the bronze *Judith*, like the bronze *David*, was intended in many ways to evoke a late-medieval penitential tradition, and it was also designed to have connotations of Petrarch’s Chastity who conquers Love. The inclusion of seduction and romance in the bronzes had been an influence, I believe, of Piero de’ Medici and his wife Lucrezia de’ Tornabuoni, both of whom had a great liking for the material of the *Triumphus* and its themes and symbols.

I also suggest in Chapter Six that the introduction of a romance motif had the effect of heightening the theme of virtue, but it also abstracted and altered it. This was not evident in the bronzes, but in the images that would follow them in the
1470s and 1480s. I argue that after the 1470s, the image of Judith was transposed to the image of Pallas and then Minerva, particularly in Medici imagery. This was an offshoot of the romance motif, but it also coincided with and expressed a different interpretation of virtue as wisdom. Poliziano’s *La Giostra* demonstrates that this changed the representation of virtue as a struggle or endeavour, which had been a pillar of the penitential understanding of virtue.

The images produced at the end of the fifteenth century reveal a waning and splintering of the symbolism of struggle, and thus a diminution of the former purpose of the statues of *David* and *Judith*. I suggest as a result that Michelangelo’s *David*, which scholars usually see as a watershed moment that symbolised a renewed faith in liberty after the exile of the Medici, was instead reflecting a loss of the victory of virtue and thus it was essentially the end of this kind of image of Florence, in which virtue was embedded in *libertà* and *libertas*.

### 1.6 A Note on Terminology

There is one last note about terminology before proceeding further. I have already made a case for eschewing the term ‘propaganda,’ unless its assumptions have been tested and qualified, and in lieu of that, I have suggested more generally replacing it with the terms like ‘political expression,’ at least where art is concerned. But there are other terms that I use that require clarification, such as the term ‘Christian,’ or where I have been critiquing conceptual binaries of ‘political,’ the terms ‘sacred’ or ‘spiritual.’

General terms are hazardous in analytical discussions, but in this case, I have tried to find designations that evoke a mode of thinking that was primarily not defined by its institutional boundaries but rather by its mental perspective and experience. The discussion above on Trexler was to demonstrate the point that there was in fifteenth-century Florence a form of ‘Christianity’ that was more like a common viewpoint or experience. This perspective was more than belief shaped by theologians; it was a form of cultural immersion, inducing and shaping experience. Art historian Timothy Verdon delineated this understanding of Christianity in his Introduction to the edited volume, *Christianity and the Renaissance*, and it is an
approach with which this thesis has much in common:

Christianity as used here means more than Christendom, the old term for the politico-social unit comprised by believing Western peoples, and much more than the Church, or Christian theology. The narrow concerns of ecclesiastical history and the history of dogma do not coincide with the scope of this volume, which aims at a more panoramic view of Renaissance religious experience ... The term Christianity, that is to say, is used anthropologically; it denotes a total systemic reality: what students of comparative religion call le spirituel vécu (“spiritual experience as it was really lived”), and what Annales historians call a mentalité (that is, the reconstruction of a specific sensibility as the context for social and artistic expression).¹¹¹

Where Verdon’s volume focusses on a spiritual vécu, however, my aim has been to try to depict the interaction between a spiritual vécu and its political counterpart. This thesis asks, in other words, how did a spiritual mentalité in Florence affect and shape its political mentalité? Were there places, images, spaces, texts, in which they were one and the same? It is my contention that these two spheres in fact created and shaped one another, and that an illuminating way to approach examining their relationship is through the imagery in which this was vividly expressed, in the statues of David and Judith.

2

A New Nidus for the Political David

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter critiqued the concept of ‘propaganda’ in respect to political expression in Florence and more specifically Donatello’s statues of David and Judith. This chapter will offer a new frame of reference for understanding the political image of David, demonstrating that the appeal of David as a symbol of the polis derived from his traditional role as a model penitent.

Most historians believe that the placing of Donatello’s marble David c. 1408-12 in the Palazzo della Signoria was the first time that David had been used to represent the Florentine polis. This chapter reveals, however, that David was politicised earlier than this. At least two and possibly three decades before the marble David was commissioned, David appeared in an illuminated image in a Florentine Book of Hours, made in the 1370s or 80s. This chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of this image and its contemporary interpretative context. It will raise new questions about the political image of David, suggesting that it had competing meanings not
before considered. The *Hours* image, along with the image of David and Goliath in the Baroncelli Chapel, provides evidence that a limb of late-medieval iconography about virtue vanquishing vice was reanimated in Florence during the fourteenth century, and it was this reanimation that became the basis for choosing David and Goliath as an emblem of the Florentine *polis*.

The previous chapter discussed Donatello’s three sculptures of David and Judith, which historians have identified as symbolising the city-republic of Florence. This group has been interpreted by historians as effectively secular in meaning and function. I have argued, however, that this assumption of a divergence between secular and devotional perception was contrary to contemporary understanding. This chapter begins to explore the latter by approaching the precedents for the image of David in biblical iconography prior to the Signoria’s commissioning of the marble *David*. This exercise is new, as historians have not before carried out a comprehensive analysis of precedents for the marble *David*. The purpose of this exploration will be to answer two questions: What was the relationship between a penitential David and the political image of David? And secondly, what was the meaning of the explicit violence in images of David and Goliath, and did this have a bearing on why it was chosen to represent the Florentine *polis*?

Normally in art history, particularly in respect to a subject of such longstanding in the scholarship such as Donatello’s marble *David*, which has been studied almost from the time of its inception, tracing the origins of its symbolism would have already been carried out many times over. This has not been done, however, primarily because historians have believed that the image of David—representing a single figure triumphant over his enemy—originated in Florence with Donatello’s marble. This representation of David, with legs standing astride on or above the body of his vanquished enemy Goliath, with David’s body facing the viewer, historians often refer to as ‘David Triumphant.’ The mode of depicting David as ‘David Triumphant’ would become a familiar sight in the fifteenth century in the context of political images, but before this time, the only other precedent known for this stance was in the Baroncelli Chapel, painted by Taddeo Gaddi between 1328 and 1333.

Art historian Horst Janson, who remains esteemed in Donatello scholarship for his *Critical Catalogue* of Donatello’s artworks published in 1957, raised the Baroncelli
David as a precedent for Donatello’s marble. Janson stated that, “The iconographic type of the victorious David as an isolated figure appears to have been coined in Florence during the early Trecento, to judge from the one example that predates our statue. This is the fresco of Taddeo Gaddi, of c. 1330 – 1335, in the Baroncelli Chapel of S. Croce. It was surely known to Donatello and may well have been the direct iconographic source of the marble David.”¹ Janson also noted that the precedent had been suggested by two other art historians with well-established reputations, Bertraux and Lányi. Janson saw few analogies, however, between Gaddi’s Gothic fresco and the ‘nascently-Renaissance’ marble David. No doubt taking into account the separation of some 80 years between the painting and the sculpture, Janson went on to effectively dismiss any comparison as pertinent, saying that “In detail, Taddeo Gaddi’s David offers few analogies with Donatello’s; he is standing on the prostrate body of his enemy, with a sword in his right hand and holding the head of Goliath by the hair with his left. Only the sling is similar in shape to that of our statue.”²

After Janson, the circumstance of a single extant image predating the marble led to a common assumption amongst historians that the image of David and Goliath, certainly of ‘David Triumphant,’ was barely known in Florence before its manifestation as a political figure early in the fifteenth century. Given the solidity of the scholarship in Janson’s Catalogue and the cautiousness with which he constructed his conclusions, he has been highly influential on scholars who have studied Donatello’s work after the 1950s. The related theme of penitence was thus not explored. Janson’s reference and dismissal was matched by historians who have studied the marble in the last fifty years, who tend to omit the context of penitence from their consideration of the meaning of political representations of David.³ Very few refer to the fresco of David in the Baroncelli Chapel, for example, and if they

²Janson and Lányi (1957), p. 6.
³The strength of the assumption about the marble’s iconographic novelty can be seen, for example, in the fact that historians rarely raise the problem that there was little that was warrior-like in Donatello’s marble David. The sling was evidence more of David’s lack of armour. The remainder of the martial interpretation effectively comes from the inscription no longer extant, and its reference to “fighting for fatherland.” The clear dissonance between the inscription and the lack of martial symbolism in the statue’s iconography will be addressed further in Chapter 4.
do it is to merely emulate Janson’s approach. It is consequently not uncommon in
studies of Donatello’s statues of David to find the claim that Donatello was respon-
sible for creating the ‘David Triumphant’ in Florence, or to infer this by claiming
that “almost every other representation of David [before that time] interpreted him
in other ways: as a king, prophet, writer of the Psalms, or ancestor of Christ.”

For these reasons, a history of the symbolism of David and Goliath in Florence
before the marble David has not been written. This chapter attempts the beginning
of such an exercise, revealing that an endeavour to give David a prehistory in Flo-
rence can be fruitful. A search for representations of David and Goliath prior to the
fifteenth century has brought to light other examples of ‘David Triumphant,’ that
were made both before and after the marble David, but which have never before
been considered in studies about the political meaning of the images of David and
Judith. Historians were aware that ‘David Triumphant’ was a common and popular
trope of Bible books and prayer books, and that this usually signalled a context of
penitence. The fight, or struggle, in which David engaged against Goliath worked as
an analogy for the struggle of virtue against vice, and thus, as a behavioural guide
for the viewer to pursue a virtuous life. This symbolism and its attendant meaning
was operating in Florence during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, including
prior to the commissioning of the marble David, but also afterwards, suggesting that
the two may be interlinked. This is evidenced not only by the appearance in the
Baroncelli Chapel of ‘David Triumphant,’ but also by similar images in Florentine

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4Art historian Sarah Blake McHam, who has written a number of articles and chapters on
Florentine sculpture, and Donatello’s two statues of David more particularly, was describing the
marble David: “The statue depicted David triumphantly standing with one foot on Goliath’s
decapitated head. David’s identity as a warrior has become so familiar to us through such later
sculptures as Michelangelo’s colossal David ... that we overlook the fact that before Donatello
created the characterisation, almost every other representation of David interpreted him in other
ways: as a king, prophet, writer of the Psalms, or ancestor of Christ.” Sarah Blake McHam.
Structuring Communal History through Repeated Metaphors of Rule. In Roger J. Crum and

5I discuss three examples of depictions of David and Goliath from Florentine versions of the
Book of Hours in this chapter. There is a considerable chance of there being others; I recently
found another David c.1500, for example, housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and
reproduced in John P Harthan and Richard Griffin. Books of Hours and their Owners. Thames
and Hudson, 1977, pp. 154–156. It shows a partially classical David, similar to the one discussed
in this chapter c.1490s.
Books of Hours that span the period from the late-fourteenth to the late-fifteenth centuries, at least one of which, in addition to the Baroncelli Chapel, predates the marble by some twenty or thirty years.

The remainder of this chapter will analyse images of David and Goliath made for Florentine versions of the Book of Hours during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, comparing them with the Baroncelli David. This comparison will also be made within a much broader survey of related biblical iconography, in order to demonstrate that there was a clear interplay between the penitential symbolism of David and Goliath in Florence and Donatello’s statues of David. It will be argued that components of late-medieval iconography of the ‘penitential David’ formed the pattern for the ‘political David.’ This new perspective promises to significantly alter scholars’ understanding of the political image of Florence because this earlier iconography required a kind of experiential gazing that was akin to a hearer of a rhetorical performance, meaning that a contemporary Florentine viewer would have read the image as an exhortation to pursue virtue. This discovery of a penitential context accordingly opens up new avenues of enquiry. It reveals, for example, that there was a typology of killing in biblical iconography, including at least three major types, and that the political statues were constructed from the third type, one that I have termed for the sake of identification, ‘justifiable killing.’ The symbolism of justifiable killing was used to depict the pursuit of virtue as an active rather than a passive endeavour. The question that this new context raises is whether, and to what degree, this earlier penitential mode carried over into expectations for the political image of Florence during the fifteenth century. It will be the purpose of later chapters to explore this question.

2.2 The Book of Hours David, a New Nidus

The illuminated manuscript depicted in Figure 2.1.1 is currently housed in the Syracuse University Library. This Florentine Book of Hours included a calendar, the Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Gospel readings, an Office of the Dead, the Penitential Psalms, a Litany and related prayers, an Office of the Passion, and the
Figure 2.1.1: *Book of Hours*, c.1370s–80s, left page, *David and Goliath*, and facing page, *David with a harp*, Italy (Florence), MS 5, ff.168v–169r, Syracuse University Library.

Office of the Cross. Each of these sections was largely standard for a *Book of Hours*, although it is worth noting that such books were often customised by their owners to some degree, because they were made and purchased in sections and then sewn together afterwards. Sections therefore reflected to a certain extent the preferences of their original owners, as did the choice of illuminations, which might also be requested.

The Florentine *Book of Hours* pictured had 241 leaves, and was written in Latin, in a Gothic script that showed the influence of the *littera Bononiensis*. Based on the script, scholars have dated the manuscript to the last quarter of the fourteenth century.\(^6\) The major parts of the decoration in the manuscript consisted of four sections.
miniature scenes and four historiated initials. At least two of these, the illuminations of Dante, and of David and Goliath, point to a Florentine owner, as does the inclusion of the feast of St. Reparata. The appearance of the illuminations, more specifically the development of the figures in comparison to figures in works before and after, refine this dating in my view to the earlier part of this period, sometime during the 1370s or 1380s. The manuscript was known to have been in the library of Cardinal Etienne-Charles Lomenie de Brienne (1727–1794), which was indicated by an inscription on the recto of the front flyleaf. Ownership of the manuscript prior to this, however, is unknown. It was common for a Book of Hours to be passed down in wills as precious objects, but also for them to be bought and sold and thus to change hands over time.\footnote{Museum of Art of Syracuse and Onondaga County, 1974, pp. 98–99. See also Syracuse University Libraries, \url{library.syr.edu}, viewed on 15 Feb 2017.}

The convention of the Book of Hours had developed out of Psalters, and it had gained its name from the fact that its lauds and prayers were designed to be recited at different times (or “hours”) of the day. The Book of Hours had been designed with the purpose of emulating monastic devotion, mirroring the inner meditation and reflection that came from the submersion in prayer that was common to members of mendicant orders. This connection to the spiritual world was reflected also in how the books were made, with many manuscripts illuminated by monks in a scriptoria, working in silent devotion.\footnote{Harthan and Griffin (1977), p. 33.} The Hours was from the outset, however, intended as a layperson’s book. Books almost always contained and started with an Office of the Virgin, and decoration frequently had a Marian focus, because of the belief that the Virgin Mary interceded on behalf of sinners.

It follows that the need to recite prayers at different times of the day would have caused their reader to revisit their Hours book many times during a single day, if it were to be used in the manner in which it was intended. This was a clear reason why a Book of Hours was also typically small and portable, so that it could be continually carried by the person who used it. Some owners even had belts made

\footnote{Laurence B Kanter. \textit{Painting and Illumination in Early Renaissance Florence, 1300-1450}. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994, pp. 3–14 (p. 3).}
with pouches for this purpose. Recitations from the Penitential Psalms for example, were designed to be said in churches or private chapels, as a way to do penance for oneself or one’s loved ones. These circumstances when taken together — the Book’s portability and the likelihood that it would have been consulted regularly in various urban settings outside the home of its owner — suggest that it would have the capacity to enhance its carrier’s reputation for devotion or for virtuous behaviour. It also suggests that as an object, and like many of the images examined in this thesis, the Book of Hours was capable of blurring the boundaries between ‘public’ and ‘private,’ or ‘civic’ and ‘sacred.’

A significant feature of a Book of Hours was its size, designed to be held easily in the hand and to be portable if necessary. It was not uncommon for example, for it to be worn on the body of pious people. This opens up interesting possibilities for how it would have been used to highlight the piety of its owner. It also would have traversed spaces, moving easily with its owner between domestic or private spaces and public or official spaces.

Figure 2.2.1: A comparison between Magdalene in Florentine Book of Hours, c.late-14th century, and Botticelli’s Magdalene, c.late-15th century, the latter with Florence painted in the background.
A *Book of Hours* could be owned and used by either men or women, although it is well known that it was particularly popular amongst women, who were also well represented amongst its patrons.\(^{10}\) It is evident that the original owner of MS.5 wanted to use the prayer book for penitence because all the illuminations focussed on this theme. The miniature scenes depicted were, in order of appearance: a *tableau* from Dante’s *Purgatorio* or *Inferno* (shown in Figure 2.2.2), David and Goliath (Figures 2.1.1 and 2.2.3), the Crucifixion with the instruments of Christ’s torment showing the lance and the vinegar-soaked sponge (Figure 2.2.4), and Mary Magdalene at the foot of the Cross (Figure 2.2.1 (a) above). Mary Magdalene embracing the foot of the Cross would more than a century later become iconically linked to Florence in Botticelli’s painting of the same subject, with Florence depicted in its background (Figure 2.2.1 (b) above).

David appeared twice at the beginning of the section on the Penitential Psalms: he appeared on a full page on the left-hand side as ‘David Triumphant,’ the young David standing victorious on the vanquished body of Goliath, and on the right-hand side in a smaller image of head and shoulders as the aged King with his harp. David’s appearance in respect to the Psalms was common, and it was also common to pair two episodes from David’s life in the manner of this Book, to show a larger scene opposite an illuminated initial, and in David’s case, to juxtapose the younger man and the elder statesman.\(^{11}\) Each illumination was selected from David’s theological biography, and in keeping with the theme of the Penitential Psalms, episodes selected emphasised either David’s sin or his capacity to overcome his vices. The scenes most often chosen showed David isolated and wandering in the wilderness or praying on his knees in the wilderness.\(^{12}\) They also showed David’s victory over Goliath, which was

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\(^{10}\)John P Harthan and Richard Griffin. *Books of Hours and their Owners*. Thames and Hudson, 1977; and 
bibentryburbridge2013matter.


\(^{12}\)“David was usually shown isolated ... Often, too, he kneels in a kind of valley or trench, a reference to the cave to which he retired, or, possibly, to the opening line of the sixth Penitential Psalm (129), “Out of the depths have I cried unto thee.” Wieck (1997), p. 93. See Wieck for examples of images referred to in this paragraph, pp. 93–95.
popular in Florence from the late-fourteenth to the late-fifteenth centuries. Another popular choice was David watching Bathsheba bathe. The smaller image in the initial at the start of the chapter would often provide the ‘key’ theme or a cue to reading the larger image opposite. Readers would know and be able to link the two images thematically. The account of Bathsheba, for example, had been the occasion for David’s penance in the wilderness.

If we focus on this image of David in MS.5 more closely (Figure 2.1.1), it is evident that it was a youthful David standing on the prostrate body of Goliath. He was, moreover, depicted mere minutes after decapitating his enemy. David was shown holding up the decapitated head of Goliath with his left hand, with blood spilling from its open wound in the left foreground (seen also in Figure 2.2.3). Go-
liath’s severed neck was evident in the right-bottom foreground, with blood trickling out to David’s discarded sling. David held in his right hand Goliath’s sword, and this too showed evidence of the recent act of final victory, with blood clinging along the edge of the blade. Lastly and importantly for the present discussion, both David and Goliath were dressed in contemporary armour.

An armoured or obviously military David was a feature of Florentine iconography during the fifteenth century, particularly those images of David that historians usually identify as symbolism of the republic. This Book of Hours would therefore seem to be the first known time that David appeared in the context of Florentine independence. Notably, this was at least twenty or possibly thirty years before the marble David was placed in the Palazzo della Signoria.

The manuscript in which this image appeared was published on the website of the University which presently holds it; it has not, however, previously been discussed in the context of David as a political symbol. It is accordingly revealed and analysed here in this chapter as a potentially significant breakthrough in analyses of Donatello’s marble David, or more expansively, in analyses of the statues by Donatello used to represent Florence. This is claimed not only because it predates by several decades what scholars have generally recognised as the beginning of this imagery in Florence, but also because, as I will explain below, the Hours David clearly worked within a penitential context that opens up new questions about how the sculptures in Florence of David and Judith should be interpreted.

If I were to analyse the Book of Hours David by following a method developed in previous scholarship, it would be to argue that the militarisation of David reflected contemporary conflict. In the case of the Hours David, this would suggest that
the original motivation for militarising David was either the *Ciompi* Revolt, or equally pressing for commentators through this period, related to protesting the use of mercenary troops in territorial expansion and defense. Writers around this time were expressing concerns about Florence’s reliance on mercenary soldiers. The redress, many argued, was the citizen soldier. Those who expressed views in this regard include Petrarch, Salutati, and Bruni. Historians in favour of the argument that the military symbolism in the political image of David in Florence was a literal comparison to Florentine warfare might argue, for example, that the *Hours* image was designed, in addition to its penitential meaning, to have expressed support for the idea of Florentine citizens defending the city-state’s *libertas*. Or, the timing might be supposed to potentially coincide with the period in which the *Ciompi* Revolt played out, and if so, it might be reasonably be assumed to have expressed, in addition to its penitential meaning, a focus on *libertà*. It can be noted that either one of these contemporary contexts constitutes potential triggers for militarising the image of David with the use of contemporary armour.

In the previous chapter, however, I noted that the method of associating individual statues with particular political circumstances revealed serious problems of interpretation. Concluding that the militarisation of David related to Florentine events should be tempered by the degree to which biblical and virtue iconography was martial, or the fact that knightly armour was frequently part of the symbolism for the virtue of Fortitude, a virtue that artists and writers frequently compared to David in respect of his defeat of Goliath. We can add to these difficulties of interpretation the problem of circularity. In the absence of conclusive documentation, linking images directly to contemporary events as a method for understanding their contemporary meaning is a self-fulfilling argument, as all such events related to Florentine governance or freedoms could be said to form a basis for choosing the tyrannicide performed by David or Judith, as many have been claimed to do so. It

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14 Related to the representations of virtue and Fortitude in art, see Adolf Katzenellenbogen. *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Medieval Art, from Early Christian Times to the Thirteenth Century*, volume 10. The Warburg Institute, 1939. Kraus Reprint, 1977, p. 54. See also the discussion in Chapter 4 of this thesis about patriotic and military symbolism in biblical imagery.
nonetheless does not advance historians further in understanding why David was specifically chosen, nor does it throw light on what particular work the symbolism of David was believed to achieve as opposed to other available symbolism.

The analysis of the Hours image of the political David performed in this chapter will pursue instead metaphorical interpretations. The effect of dressing David clearly as a noble, for example, tied a sacred figure who prefigured Christ to the Florentine elite. This might feasibly have been intended to express the belief that true nobility was found in someone who followed virtue. This definition of nobility had been maintained by Brunetto Latini in the Tresor, a text which had been highly influential amongst the educated classes. It was also professed by Dante, a fact which strengthens the viability of this interpretation given that the owner of the Book was clearly fond of Dante’s work and had sought an illumination from Dante’s Inferno.

We are in this case deprived of exploring how the illumination of David and Goliath related to its owner’s situation or aspirations for the Book of Hours under discussion, as no such documentation is known to exist. We can nevertheless infer a number of conditions from its context. More modest Books of Hours contained no illuminations, and historians have ample evidence of such books being made in Florence. The Book of Hours under discussion, by contrast, had not only illuminations but those using an extensive amount of ultramarine, an expensive colour, and used to a lesser extent, gold-leaf. This suggests that the patron was from a prominent or at least affluent family. Generally, a Book of Hours was as modest or as ornate as the patron’s means allowed, and the fact that this owner commissioned five illuminations suggests that he or she had funds to spend, as does the generous use of ultramarine blue and gold in the images. As these colours were achieved with real gold and lapis lazuli, the extent to which the colours were

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used points to a patron of means. It can be noted as a counterpoint that the skill of the artist or artists, however, was not always high. The rendering of the figures in the image of David and Goliath, for example was proportional, and showed a lifelike depth. The rendering of the Crucifixion shows an imbalance, for example, derived from a failure to achieve a realistic sense of depth with the skull in the foreground, and an awkward physiognomy of Christ (Figure 2.2.4). The latter was of key importance in Man of Sorrows images—to be able to convincingly show, and to make the reader or viewer feel, Christ’s sorrow.

2.3 THE PENITENTIAL DAVID

Figure 2.3.1: Zanobi Strozzi, c.1445, Book of Hours for the Use of Rome, David and Goliath, tempera and gold on parchment, MS. W. 767, ff.169v-170r, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

A subsequent search has revealed that an image of ‘David Triumphant’ standing on the vanquished body of Goliath was found in at least two other versions of a Book
of Hours made in Florence. These are dated respectively to the mid- and late-fifteenth century. The first, c. 1445 and shown above in Figure 2.3.1, was painted by acclaimed manuscript artist, Zanobi Strozzi. The Book contained a calendar, the Hours of the Virgin, the Hours of the Passion, the Hours of the Cross, the Seven Penitential Psalms, and the Office of the Dead. Given the skill of the artist, the borders are elaborate and frequently contain angels and putti. It had seventeen illuminations including initials, and illustrations included various scenes from the lives of the Virgin Mary and Christ, as well David and Goliath.

Similar to the earlier Book of Hours shown in Figure 2.2.3, in the mid-century Book, shown in Figures 2.3.1 and 2.3.2, David appeared in contemporary Florentine dress, standing on the armoured body of Goliath. He was shown holding his sling, still containing a rock, along with the bloodied sword of Goliath in his right hand. In his left hand, David held aloft his enemy’s decapitated head. It is apparent that this image, like the earlier one from the late fourteenth century, featured the violence of the killing—viscera was seen escaping from Goliath’s open neck, achieving a striking realism in spite of the miniature format. Goliath’s blood was shown flowing from the wound over his inert body, etching a path through the dirt in the foreground. The stone that had killed Goliath was clearly depicted, and as with the later marble David, lodged in the centre of his forehead. There was also blood flowing out of that wound to either side of his nose and down his cheeks. The artist’s skill is evident not only in the depth he achieved in the scene, with the hills and the city in the distant background stretching behind David, but also in the level of detail achieved in the small space, including the expressive shaping of the facial features of both David and Goliath.

The last image offered for comparison is from a Book of Hours c. 1490s in Figure 2.3.3, which was written and illuminated in Florence for a member of the Pitti–Taddei de’ Gaddi family. It had 226 leaves, and it contained thirteen full-
page miniatures and eight historiated initials. It was painted by Attavante degli Attavanti, with highly elaborate borders that included putti, figures, and smaller scenes. This Book contained an Office of the Virgin, Penitential Psalms, Hours of the Cross, Office of the Dead, and a calendar. Larger illuminations included the Annunciation, the Crucifixion, a hermit showing buried skeletons to conquering kings, and David and Goliath. The image of David (Figure 2.3.3) appeared opposite an historiated initial that showed the old King David kneeling in prayer.

Taken together, these three images of David and Goliath in Florentine Book of Hours manuscripts represent a century of penitential symbolism, from the late fourteenth century to the late fifteenth century. It will be evident from the last two examples that illustrations in the Book of Hours became increasingly more elaborate and more refined during the fifteenth century, and were treasured as objects of beauty. It is also clear that within the realm of biblical imagery there was a remarkable consistency achieved over time. This was related to the purpose of their symbolism.

The later Book of Hours image of David c. 1490s (Figure 2.3.3) may have been modelled in part on previous statues. The stance of resting the left foot on Goliath’s head brings to mind Donatello’s bronze David, for example, and the scant, classicised armour elicits an image of Verrocchio’s bronze David. The manuscript

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artist, Attavante degli Attavanti had studied under Verrochio, which explains his desire to choose one of his master’s works as his model here. But each of the three Book of Hours Davids also had a consistent symbolism related to David triumphing over vice. If we include the Baroncelli image in this comparison (pictured in Figure 2.4.1 below), it is evident that there was a consistent iconography for David in Florence in the context of penitence through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This featured David as an isolated figure, and it underlined his victory over Goliath by showing him standing or resting his foot on his enemy. It featured the violence of the killing, with the blood and viscera of Goliath’s decapitation in the foreground. It also at times presented David as armoured. The portrayal of David in these four images—what we might call for identifying it within its context, ‘the penitential David’—had a close visual association with what came to be later understood as the political version of David. The triumphal stance, for example, including the detail of resting a foot on Goliath’s head, was derived from the symbolism as depicted in fourteenth-century images of David and Goliath.

These images have ramifications for historians’ assumption that David Triumphant was novel for the fifteenth century, or effectively an invention within the political context. The principal issue for historians as I see it is more particularly their assertion that the marble David and the versions that followed it were martial because of the context of contemporary warfare, or more broadly, of connotations of defence of Florentine independence. This assertion has rested on the assumption that martial symbolism did not predate the marble and was thus incorporated as a reference to actual warfare or similarly, the need to defend libertas. The penitential David however, can be shown to have incorporated this symbolism at least as early as the late fourteenth century. The fact that the image of David Triumphant predated the advent of the political use of David, and continued to be relevant to the context of penitence in other Hours manuscripts shown above, despite apparently or possibly because of its growing political uses, is also highly evocative about

21 The student-teacher relationship between Attavanti and Verrocchio is also noted by Wieck (1997), p. 94.

22 The influence of the physical placing of the statue on historians’ theories has been discussed in Chapter 1, pp. 9 - 10. Here I seek particularly to isolate the reasoning related to the symbolism of warfare and the degree to which the former has become bound up with the latter.
the potential interplay between these two contexts, penitential and political. This interplay deserves exploration.

I begin such an exploration by asking what militarisation meant in the context of penitence. The question of whether or not there was an iconographical precedent for militarising David before he was made overtly martial in the late fourteenth century remains crucial to historians’ understanding of its function. It also goes to the heart of whether specific comparisons to political events have been hindering rather than helping the interpretation of the political image of David. The other question, which is raised by revealing images of David to have been relevant in the context of penitence, is how the martial symbolism would have been read within a devotional context. Given that there is a clear connection between the *Hours* images and the statues of David, this can be considered an equally compelling question for understanding his political use.

Both these questions are answered in the following analysis, but an exploration of how the penitential David would have been read within a devotional context is addressed first. The problem of how to interpret the ‘penitential David’ is approached from the perspective of private chapels, as it is this context that can illuminate penitence, and the related activities of purging and commemoration, that the *Book of Hours* was designed to assist. An analysis of penitence throws light on the specific mental condition of the viewer, or what Baxandall called the “cognitive style” of the “beholder” of penitential imagery. In the following examination of private chapels and commemoration, I aim to reveal the ‘technology’ of a penitential image, or how a viewer would have taken its static symbols and translated them into intellectual and behavioural cues.

### 2.4 Private Chapels and the Technology of Guiding Souls

By the beginning of the fourteenth century, Christians had come to believe that after death the soul needed to be purged before entering Paradise, commensurate with the sins committed during a lifetime.\(^{23}\) The perfect souls flew at once to heaven. Those

Figure 2.3.3: *Book of Hours*, c.1490s, MS M.14, f.104v.
who died immediately after being baptised, were martyred. Those who had perfected themselves during their lifetime, were free of both hell and purgatory.\textsuperscript{24} Conversely, the “very bad” would after death, “sink at once into the depths of hell.” At this time it was common for the sins in life to correspond to the punishments in Hell forever after, and there are many depictions of the Last Judgement which graphically demonstrate the cruel treatment that could befall someone there.\textsuperscript{25} Souls as wicked as these would never cleanse; the definition of hell was having no redemption offered. As Augustine expressed it, “If I knew my father was in hell, I would no more pray for him than I would for the devil.”\textsuperscript{26} All other souls, however, “the mediocre,” were those who were neither perfect nor evil and so could be expiated. It was “the mediocre” for whom purgatory existed.

According to the \textit{Golden Legend}, purgatory was located in different places and manifested in various guises according to the soul’s need of instruction. The \textit{Golden Legend} was one of the most popular works of the late-medieval period, completed around 1260 by Dominican Jacobus de Voragine.\textsuperscript{27} The work was about God’s dealings with humankind, and it surveyed the lives of the saints and the seminal episodes of the lives of the Virgin Mary and her son. Like the \textit{Speculum Humanae Salvationis}, the \textit{Golden Legend} contained complex historical and cultural perspectives; it compiled and reconciled some 130 sources written between the second to the thirteenth centuries, and it mixed the canon of Latin and Greek Fathers, and Jerome’s Bible.

\textsuperscript{24}“The Commemoration of All Souls,” (163), in Jacobus de Voragine. \textit{The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints}, translated by William Granger Ryan, with an introduction by Eamon Duffy. Princeton University Press, 2012, pp. 287–288. The version used here is translated by W G Ryan. Ryan has produced the first complete modern translation in English, basing his translation on the Latin text published by Th. Graesse in 1845. Graesse accepted 182 chapters or legends as Jacobus’s work, and added 61 by authors other than Jacobus, although Ryan did not include these 61 additional chapters in his translation.

\textsuperscript{25}It was believed that after death, the soul needed to be cleansed before entering Paradise thus it must first spend time in Purgatory commensurate with the sins committed during a lifetime. Le Goff (1986).

\textsuperscript{26}Augustine is quoted by Jacobus de Voragine, in “The Commemoration of All Souls,” (163), Voragine (2012). p. 288.

\textsuperscript{27}The \textit{Golden Legend} was likely the only book during the late medieval period more widely read than the Bible; today over 1,000 manuscripts survive. Its contents found its way into many sermons and paintings of the period, and its ideas and themes were more widely spread than rates of literacy during this period would suggest. Voragine completed the \textit{Golden Legend} when he was about thirty years old. He later became the archbishop of Genoa. He died in 1298. See W G Ryan, “Introduction,” in Voragine (2012).
with oral histories, sermons, apocrypha and miraculous report. Little is known about its original purpose, but as it was written in Latin, scholars agree it was probably designed for other clerics as a source for preaching to the laity. In the decades and centuries after its completion, the *Golden Legend* was used more and more by the worldly layperson for private reading and devotion. Artists similarly knew the *Golden Legend* well and frequently used its accounts to guide their depictions.

Purgatory was most often described in the *Golden Legend* as a place of suffering and “punishment.”28 The lighter punishment was simply being kept in darkness.29 But it might also be crafted to fit the deed more particularly. The *Golden Legend* related a number of stories about this, which were clearly intended to warn people of the consequences of failing to repent in their lifetimes. There was one man who had to serve continually in the public baths he had owned before his death, for example; and another who was atoning for wounding someone in a cemetery and stealing his cloak: “I have to wear the cloak all the time and it weighs me down more than a mountain would.”30 The purgatory of another man, who was in life a scholar, was to wear an unbearably heavy cloak constructed of his own sophisms: “The flames that flare inside it,” he told his still-living friend in a vision, “are the delicate, mottled furs I used to wear, and they torture and burn me.”31

Good deeds during one’s lifetime were believed to reduce the time spent in purgatory. Augustine described good behaviour and penance like indemnity for the afterlife; he noted that “a man of faith who has led a good life leaves this life secure;

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28 The *Legenda Sanctorum* surveyed the lives of Catholic saints, seminal episodes of the lives of the Virgin Mary and Christ, and it also supplied background to important liturgical activities, like the rites for principal feast days. It was compiled from some 130 sources written from the second to the thirteenth centuries, and mixed the canon of Latin and Greek Fathers, and Jerome’s Bible, with oral histories, sermons, apocrypha and miraculous report. It is generally recognised as the only book probably more widely read than the Bible during the late medieval period; today over 1,000 manuscripts survive. It was not only seen or read, moreover, but its contents found its way into many sermons and paintings of the period, and its ideas and themes were therefore more widely spread than manuscript circulation or rates of literacy during this period would otherwise indicate.


30 The author does not disclose the sin that corresponded to this atonement, however, public baths were often notoriously associated with sodomy. See for example, Michael Rocke. *Forbidden Friendships, Homosexuality and Male Friendship in Renaissance Florence*. Oxford University Press, 1996.

one who has done penance and is reconciled while in good health leaves this life secure: about those who repent only at the last moment I myself am not sure. Therefore take what is certain and leave what is uncertain.” Papal bulls offered reductions in a purgatory term, known as “indulgences,” in exchange for attending masses on feast days, for visiting particular churches or holy sites, and for donating money or property to the Church or to mendicant orders such as the Dominicans or Franciscans. A papal bull was issued in 1304, for example, which granted indulgences to visitors of the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua on the feasts of the Nativity, Annunciation, Purification, and the Assumption of the Virgin. Another papal bull issued in 1344, reduced a person’s term in purgatory by 515 days in exchange for attending mass on Thomas’ feast day at Santa Maria Novella in Florence. Cardinal Albert of Brandenburg calculated in the late fifteenth century that he had reduced his stay in purgatory by 39,245,120 years because of the indulgences he had earned.

Building a private chapel, as well as offering masses and prayers there in memory of its donor, were ways to purge a soul either in preparation for, or during its time in purgatory. The chapel itself was chiefly seen as a pious act on the part of the patron. It was a public service, a way to inspire piety in the donor’s community. The most common chapel space was formed like the Baroncelli Chapel, as an alcove in the interior of a bigger church. Having usually only three sides, the chapel opened out towards the centre of the church or cathedral, which gave it a presence and an impact on the viewer that made it decidedly public despite its family emphasis.

36Private chapels first appeared in the Roman Empire during the fourth century as a response to the growing acceptance of Christianity. They were used for Christian burial, to celebrate patron saints, and to memorialise the wealthy and prominent families who built them. For an early history, see Gillian Vallance Mackie. Early Christian Chapels in the West: Decoration, Function and Patronage. University of Toronto Press, 2003.
37People would have generally been prevented entering private chapels, which most likely would have been locked by a gate. The chapels and the mural decoration would have been appreciated by viewers, albeit generally from a distance, unless one belonged to the donor’s family. Nelson and
The communal aspect was reiterated in other ways, in cases for example where chapels were freestanding. Margareta Vitturi commissioned a chapel for her family to venerate the Virgin Annunciate at the Church of San Michele in Isola in Venice. Due to space considerations, it was built adjoining the main church. Margareta stipulated in her will that the chapel have an entrance both inside the church and one which would be always open to the street. Patrons who were unable to afford to build a chapel would often instead commission a work of art such as a funerary altarpiece. In these cases, the relationship between the donor, their city or town, and the artwork, was still evident. Around 1350 for example, Maria de’ Bovolini commissioned a large crucifix from the Paduan painter Guariento for the church of San Francesco in Maria’s home town of Bassano. In an inscription at the base of the cross, Maria stated that she “dedicated this herself to the piety of the people.”

For a chapel to be a pious act on the part of the patron, it must in part be able to be of public service. Florentine humanist Coluccio Salutati’s opinion was that charity “fosters the family, expands the city, guards the kingdom.” Similarly, the chapels and their frescoes were consciously directed towards inspiring the piety of the patron’s community. Today we might call the linking of a family’s name to a chapel ‘pride,’ but this is as an anachronistic idea in this context. Pride, on the one hand, was a sin during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; honour, on the other hand, garnered for family, neighbourhood, and city or town, was a legitimate and even laudable purpose. And honour necessarily had a public focus were it not to become pride. Penitential behaviour was then necessarily public. It was laudable because it imitated divine behaviour. The private chapel, crucially, also provided a receptive environment for the masses and prayers which were offered up to God for its faithful departed. Death was seen much less as an ending than a beginning of another journey that shared many similar characteristics to the life


38The full inscription was: “Emulatrix Bona Maria Bovolinorum Helen[a]e inventric[is] crucis et clavorum sanxit hanc ipsa pietate Bassanorum ut orent pro ea Cristum Dominum nostrum.” Francesca Flores D’Arcais, Guariento: tutto la pittura, Venice, Museo Civico, Bassano del Grappa; cited and translated by King (1992), (p. 373).

already experienced, and where one's fate continued to remain at God's mercy.

The *Golden Legend* described commemoration as an activity more proactive than memorialisation; it was a power which the living possessed to intervene on behalf of the dead. Commemoration covered a spectrum of activities, which the *Golden Legend* described as “sacrifices offered for the holy souls.” Sacrifices included fasting, giving alms on behalf of the deceased, and offering masses and prayers. These offerings assisted the deceased by purifying their souls while still in purgatory, expending their sentence faster and getting them to heaven earlier. If a person owed on his death, for example, a penance of two months in purgatory he could “due to the suffrages of others, be freed in one month.” The soul was only released however, when “the debt had been paid in full.”

Accounts in the *Golden Legend* describe commemoration as a way for the living to reach and to influence the dead. When two popes had been elected to the papacy at the same time, for example, a deacon called Paschasius had preferred one pope over another. He could not let it rest even when the other pope was finally appointed. A long time after Paschasius had died, a bishop went to take the baths for his health, and found the deacon there waiting to serve him: “Germanus was frightened at the sight of so holy a man and asked him what he was doing there. He answered that he was being punished there because in the case of the two popes he had held on too stubbornly to his opinion. “I ask you to pray the Lord for me,” he added, “and you will know that your prayer has been granted if you come back here and do not find me.” The bishop prayed for him, and when he returned to the place a few days later, Paschasius was no longer there.”

In a similar story, a woman had been tempted to sin by the Devil, who had promised to make her rich: “At length, when she was near death and her son begged her to confess her sins; she told him what the facts were and said that ... confession would do her no good. The son tearfully insisted and promised to do her penance for her ... but before the priest arrived, a swarm of demons rushed in upon her, and overwhelmed with fear and horror, she died.

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40Priests estimated what a person’s purgatory term would be but were not always accurate, as the *Golden Legend* explained. Some people had a stay in purgatory even when they had “completed the satisfaction imposed on them,” because “that satisfaction was not sufficient, due to the ignorance or carelessness of the priest who imposed it.” Voragine (2012), p. 281.

Her son confessed his mother’s sin and accepted and fulfilled a seven-year penance, and at the end of the seven years his mother appeared and thanked him for her deliverance.”

The advantage of purgatory was that a person’s fate remained open, flexible and negotiable. Clearly the disadvantage, or at least the crucial question, became how such a person was commemorated after death. This was one of the reasons for the All Saints feast day—to honour all saints universally, “in order to have them interceding for us all together and thus to obtain the mercy of God more readily.” This meant that “those who had no one to pray for them would at least share in the general commemoration.” The relative abundance or poverty of commemoration, conversely, reflected the social and spiritual capital of a layperson’s family and friends and their willingness to make commemorative offerings. In a vision experienced by the churchwarden of St Peter, for example, an angel had led the warden to see purgatory: “and showed him people of both sexes, some reclining on golden beds, others at tables enjoying delicious viands, still others naked and needy, begging for help. This place, the angel said, was purgatory. Those enjoying abundance were the souls for whom their friends provided plentiful aid, whereas those in need had no one who cared for them.”

Underlying the burial and commemoration stories in the *Golden Legend* was a principle of communal obligation. There was an inescapable interplay in narratives about purgatory or commemoration between individual and communal abundance, or between individual and communal salvation. They reflected the duty of giving and receiving aid that was similarly expected in contemporary social relationships amongst the living. One account for example, described a bishop who had suspended a priest for saying mass every day for the dead: “When the bishop was marching in procession with pomp and ceremony through the cemetery on his way to matins, the dead rose against him, saying: “This bishop gives us no masses and, more than that, has taken our priest away from us! But if he does not mend his ways, he will certainly die!” The bishop not only absolved the priest but thereafter willingly offered masses for the dead.” In another story, there was a man who never failed to

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recite *De profundis* for the dead whenever he walked through the cemetery: “Once, when he was running away through the cemetery with his enemies after him, the buried, each one armed with the tool proper to his craft, quickly rose and defended the fleeing man with might and main. His pursuers, terrified, retreated in haste.”

The other aspect of commemoration was its role in moral teaching. The dead routinely sought to warn or to teach the living through their experiences, passing on the lessons about virtue which they had only truly learned through death. There was the case of a knight who lay in bed and “while bright moonlight streamed through the window, [he] began to wonder why rational man does not obey his Creator whereas non-rational creatures do. Then he began to think disparagingly about a fellow knight, a companion now dead, when suddenly the dead man entered the room and said to him: “Friend, don’t have evil suspicions about anyone, and forgive me if I have wronged you in any way.” Asked about his present state, the man told his friend about his atonement in purgatory. After he had gone, “the knight changed his way of life for the better and fell asleep in the Lord.”

Florentines subscribed to the view that one’s deeds extended beyond the present and worked as a kind of continuing *quid pro quo*. Coluccio Salutati phrased it this way:

> Not that our works are the cause of salvation, but rather they contribute something as a measure according to which God repays us when He gives His divine mercy ... we ought therefore to do good deeds because they are good, because God commands that they be done, and because they are a measure of our retribution for glory if we are saved and for diminution of punishment if we will be reprobate.

Memorialisation in a family chapel should therefore not be treated as a passive reflection of the donor’s desire to be raised up in the afterlife or to be lauded in this life. Chapels and commemoration actively purged and purified. This was

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47 This was a wish that could be made explicit in chapel frescoes, as in the Holy Confessors Chapel in Santa Croce. Here, painted in two alcoves adjacent to each other, was the patron and
the underlying sense in the words of the chronicler Bernardino Scardeone, who in his history of Padua wrote: “Enrico Scrovegni, pious lord, in order to redeem his soul from the punishment of Purgatory and to expiate his sins, built a most beautiful temple in the Arena.” Additional to smoothing the expected journey in the afterlife, memorialisation in artworks was instrumental in constructing not only a patron’s inward purity but also their outward devotional identity. Private chapels were highly significant to both their patrons and their surrounding neighbourhood for this reason.

The social and cultural importance of family chapels was demonstrated in part by their prolific number, many of which still exist, but also by the extraordinary amount of time and money which a single chapel or commission could absorb. They might also take generations to complete. The funds raised from the sale of private chapels often made it possible to construct the larger churches or cathedrals in which they sat. Besides purchasing the space, the patron funded the chapel’s running costs. Caring for a chapel included engaging caretaking staff and undertaking the chapel’s decoration, the most extensive and expensive aspect of which during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was the painting of murals from floor to ceiling.

Christ. The patron was portrayed kneeling above his actual tomb, as though he had just risen from it, looking to God enthroned above. He was placed to the right hand of God, a position occupied by the Blessed in depictions of the Last Judgement. In the next alcove alongside it was an image that combined the conventional elements of the Deposition and Lamentation. It showed Christ being entombed by his relatives, a detail not often otherwise included in a depiction of the Lamentation. The visual association between the chapel’s donor and Christ was further strengthened by the inclusion of a female patron (likely the male patron’s wife) painted on the side of Christ’s tomb kneeling as her husband does in the adjacent image, and looking up towards Christ’s body. Luigi Passerini identified the donor as Gualtiero di Jacopo de’ Bardi in 1850, although scholars now do not universally accept this. See Jane C Long. Salvation Through Meditation: The Tomb Frescoes in the Holy Confessors Chapel at Santa Croce in Florence. Gesta, 34(1):77–88, 1995, (note 5, p. 85). The first fresco of the male patron is attributed to Maso di Banco, and the second of the Entombment of Christ, is attributed to Taddeo Gaddi, both c.1340.


50Mural painting was comparatively less expensive to produce than mosaic tiling, which had been the fashion in many parts of Europe until the late thirteenth century. In many areas, mosaic continued to be popular. Mural wall paintings were particularly a Tuscan fashion. Borsook (1979), p. 9.
Paintings were as lavish as the patron could afford and, because of the size and the fresco technique, it was customary for a chapel’s painting to take years.\textsuperscript{51} From the early fourteenth century, the phrase “as beautiful as possible” became a convention in contracts which commissioned paintings.\textsuperscript{52} The more skill the frescoes or paintings displayed, the greater their devotional value and hence the more likely that they would reflect well on their patron and, by extension, the city. Piety and the polis were undoubtedly linked in private chapels. Penance was tied to civic pride, and thus ritual purity linked with civic success.\textsuperscript{53} A document in Florence in 1322, for example, had spoken of the construction of Santa Croce and Santa Maria Novella, “as benefiting the soul and doing credit to the city.”\textsuperscript{54}

The religious purpose of chapels related to the everyday aspirations to live a better life, as the examples given above demonstrate. The paintings in family chapels grappled with questions such as God’s approval and disapproval of human action. They also pondered and answered related ideas, like what constituted spiritual purity, how it could be retained or recovered, and what distinguished virtuous behaviour from sinful behaviour. The chapels also offered a message that death and often substantial loss would lead to reform and recovery when it was related to the context of Christ’s sacrifice. This was a key reason for frescoes teaching the story of the salvation of humankind with episodes from the New and Old Testaments. Depending on the amount of space, this usually included episodes from both the life of the Virgin and the life of Christ. Decoration might also include a depiction of the Last Judgement. These were often large and detailed, as in the case of the Scrovegni Chapel, c. 1303 – 05.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{51}The word fresco denotes a particular painting technique, which involved painting onto wet plaster in sections. Not all wall paintings were made using this technique because it required considerable confidence and skill. Many were painted onto dry plaster in which case they were not true “frescoes.” Borsook (1979), p. 13.


\textsuperscript{53}For a discussion of the way that chapel decoration not only reflected but also helped to create the social and political imagination in Florence, see Nicholas S Baker. The Fruit of Liberty. Harvard University Press, 2013, particularly his Chapter 1, “Imagining Florence, The Civic World of the Late Fifteenth Century.”

\textsuperscript{54}“ad utilitatem animarum et decorum civitatis expedit,” cited in Borsook (1979), p. 10.

\textsuperscript{55}Scholarship on the Scrovegni Chapel, often also referred to as the Arena Chapel, is extensive. See for an example essays in respectively, James H Stubblebine. Giotto: The Arena Chapel Frescoes; with Source Material and Selected Critical Writings. Thames & Hudson, 1969, and more recently,
One of the ways that this was achieved was with naturalism, a newly discovered as an artistic technique in the early fourteenth century and revealed in the work of Giotto and his pupil Gaddi. This naturalism was characterised by close attention to perspective and anatomy, and scenes that were generally presented with a “remorseless clarity.”

An analysis of private chapels and their artworks has revealed that the images


were not a passive reflection of Bible accounts. Accounts were rendered with emotion, and this was tied to the intention of enabling the viewer to intimately connect with the depicted events. This included a layperson inserting herself or himself into the events, as contemporary devotional texts like the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* indicate. This activity of imagining sacred moments required a particular relationship between past, present, and future, expressed in conceptual places such as purgatory and the afterlife. Details of the present would blend with details of an ancient past and these were also projected onto and related to the future of the devotee or patron. This imagining was aided in the chapels by immersing the viewer in a physical version of the events. Immediately a viewer walked into a chapel like the Baroncelli Chapel she or he was immersed in a consubstantial time and space, in which ancient events blended with contemporary Florence.

The activities of commemoration were similarly active, and stretched across boundaries that would be seen by a modern audience as immutable but that were, to a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century audience, permeable—the boundaries between life and death for example, or between so-called ‘public’ and ‘private.’ The chapels suggest that distinctions between these categories, or trying to base historical analysis on such categories, would be misleading. Accounts of commemoration in the *Golden Legend* show commemoration to be a means for the living to impact souls in the afterlife, and vice versa. Analysis of the chapel spaces shows them to have been designed to engage with public spaces but also to blur the lines between what might be called private or public space. The other notable feature was that commemoration reflected the purpose of the chapels, which was the successful promotion of the patron to the Blessed in the Last Judgement. This larger or macro purpose was reflected in the microcosm of commemoration, which aimed to release or save family members from purgatory by the performance of penances on their behalf. This favour was returned by souls in purgatory, who were known to briefly return to warn their still-living friends or relatives about reforming their behaviours and pursuing virtue as a matter of urgency in order to avoid later suffering.

The activity of commemoration and the use and decoration of private chapels therefore indicate several key facts relevant to understanding how a viewer might interpret their frescoes. They reveal that the social group and its attendant responsi-
ibilities to guide one’s compatriots was not limited to life; the duty extended beyond death. They reveal that one of the primary purposes of the images, besides expressing the patron’s hopes for the afterlife, related to guiding contemporary viewers to live virtuously. The technology of this guidance, or how a viewer might break down images of sacred events in order to interpret their meaning, can be seen to have rested in part on an assumption that viewers would need to evoke these events in their imaginations in order to render them real, to meld them with details of their contemporary lives.

An interesting problem emerges however, when trying to interpret the Baroncelli David, or for that matter other Book of Hours images, in the context of its violent realism. An issue is quickly evident: if texts like the Meditations suggest that it was the violence of the Crucifixion with which devotees were meant to connect for a devotional benefit, why was the violence done to Goliath made explicitly available for the viewer in the penitential images of David? Was it this violence with which they were meant to connect? If so, with what purpose? This will be addressed in the next chapter.

2.5 Conclusion

What is evident from this survey of late-medieval imagery of David and Goliath, is that the battle with Goliath was usually depicted as realistically as the artist’s skill and the medium would allow. This was part of its convention, and it included life-like details of warfare such as the armour of Goliath, or of both Goliath and David. The purpose of providing life-like depictions was to validate the viewer’s expectation that the story had relevance as a life-model. It was, in rhetorical terms, using what was familiar to the audience as a way of creating a connection to the material. The viewer’s focus was deepened, additionally, when seeing the display of killing, because violence heightened the response, both in the present at the time of viewing, and also being memorable in the longer term. I have sought to show however, that the symbolism of battle was not merely a device to focus the audience’s attention on the topic; it also had a deliberative function, expressing a theory of virtue as an ‘either/or’ proposition that required considerable endeavour to achieve ‘victory.’
Respected art historians such as Horst Janson believed the Baroncelli David to have been a precedent for Donatello’s composition of the marble. The problem however, was that there was little reason beyond some iconographical similarities to connect the two works. Not only were they separated by a period of some eighty years, Gaddi’s David occurred in a context of personal and family penitence, having been featured to the right of the altar wall of a private chapel in the larger church. It was difficult to credibly link its position and function with the clearly political version in the Palazzo della Signoria.

What the existence of the Hours image does, however, is provide a thematic line, from the Baroncelli Chapel early in the fourteenth century to the marble David early in the fifteenth century. This is because the two images, spaced as they are over the fourteenth century, infer a development towards the politicisation of David in the context of Florentine independence that historians did not previously identify. The Hours image demonstrates that when David was put within the context of Florentine independence, he was still very much rooted in his traditional penitential context.

The discovery of the Hours image and its analyses in this and the following chapters addresses a previous weakness of the scholarship around the marble David, and hence in the scholarship of other works that are linked to it, such as Donatello’s bronzes. Placement of an image within its traditional iconography remains the best way to ground pictorial analysis and to test assumptions. The scholarship on David, however, was heavily influenced by Hans Baron’s thesis and it therefore characterised the political David as an invention with little relevance to former biblical or other convention. The tendency of scholars since Baron to continue this treatment, positing the marble David as the birth a new kind of political image, has meant that scholars generally do not place David’s political symbolism within the context of his earlier iconographical development. In the absence of local images with which to compare the marble David, scholars have fallen back on contemporary events to explain the invention of David as a political symbol, and in the process, they have overemphasised the theme of liberty in its interpretation, at the expense of other, equally important themes that are revealed in this thesis, such as virtue.

This chapter has undertaken an assessment of how the iconographical tradition and history of David affected its use in Florence. Such an analysis will establish a
gauge for seeing how and why David’s symbolism changed over time in its Florentine context, a study that will be developed in succeeding chapters. An additional omission that has followed as a result of the above is the absence of discussion on how viewers traditionally related to images of David and Goliath and whether, or how, this translated into the context of Florentine independence. This chapter has commenced this exercise, arguing that David (and related images such as Judith) evoked a specific form of ethical engagement in the viewer that was key to why they were desired as symbols of the Florentine city-republic during this period. The next chapter will further explore this idea of ethical engagement and the particular role for violent symbolism in encouraging such engagement.
The last chapter shared new images not previously considered as part of the history of David in Florence. These penitential images of David and Goliath appeared in Florentine versions of the *Book of Hours*, the first of which was created some twenty or more years before Donatello’s marble *David*. Such penitential images of David and Goliath revealed an interrelationship with Donatello’s statuary and suggested that the political use of David in Florence had a penitential dimension. This chapter will construct a ‘period eye for violence,’ in order to explore how violent symbolism in such imagery called for a virtuous transformation on the part of the viewer.

### 3.1 The Metaphor of Warfare

Descriptions and paintings of the Passion, and particularly the Crucifixion, underscored the humiliation and suffering that Christ endured, and the torment that his arrest and subsequent execution exercised upon his disciples and family. The human toll on Christ in the Crucifixion was an emotional perspective to which the
layperson was expected to connect. It was from this aspect that the paintings of the Passion, and texts like the *Golden Legend* and the *Meditations*, helped the layperson to visualise and to commit to their memories the pain and suffering of Christ.

Both the *Golden Legend* and *Meditations* described the tribulations of the Crucifixion in their chapters on the Passion, which was compared to “warfare” that was “replete with piercing pains, insults, mocking and torments.” These accounts crowded together all the physical and mental pain that Christ or his family endured, layering it in an assault on the reader’s imagination and senses. The *Meditations* author, for example, told his audience to “let your ears and eyes tell you in what kind of warfare and conflict he [Christ] was trapped.” The author then imagined for his reader the “assault” in great detail, walking her through its visualisation so that she could place herself there, as for example in the Mocking of Christ:

First one of them seizes him; a second one ties him up; another rushes him as another shouts out; still another shoves as someone else blasphemes; one more spits on him while another molests him; another dances menacingly around him; another interrogates him...then another blindfolds him as one punches his face and another slaps him; another leads him to a column; another strips him; another keeps hitting him ... Another screams at him...another crowns him with thorns. Someone else places a reed-sceptre in his hands, but another angrily snatches it back.
to strike his thorned head ... Another—but then so many others—take up the assault."\(^1\)

The *Meditations* description of the mocking brings to mind the many depictions of “The Mocking of Christ,” for instance in the cycle showing thirty-five episodes of the Gospels, which was painted by Fra Angelico between 1439 and 1443 for the San Marco monastery (Figure 3.1.1).

The *Meditations* reader was clearly meant to be caught up in strongly-imagined scenes. Images of the Man of Sorrows in churches, chapels, and prayer books, for example, which showed Christ surrounded by the instruments of his torture, replicated this collage of pain. Christ’s accusers were depicted in the *Meditations* swirling around him with scornful bows and salutes, leaning in to slap or spit at him. (Figure 3.1.1.) “My God!” exclaimed the *Meditations* author, “What is this? Does not all this seem to you like the harshest, most bitter kind of relentless war? Wait a little while and you will see even worse things.” The author described how Christ’s accusers placed the cross on which he was to be crucified, on “his already fractured and lacerated shoulders.”\(^2\) And later, finally, “most filthy and foul-smelling,” Christ arrived at Calvary: “It is crucifixion,” the author declaimed, “and a funeral bed of pain.”\(^3\) Fra Angelico’s *Christ Crowned with Thorns*, painted around 1439 was emblematic of this moment (Figure 3.1.2), in which the artist had depicted the human Christ close to collapse.\(^4\) It showed Christ facing towards the viewer so as to directly hold their gaze. His forehead was wrinkled in pain and distress, with blood dripping from his hairline and down his face. His mouth was slightly parted as if to speak, but it was his eyes that held the message: the whites of his eyeballs had turned red from the beatings.


It is well known why the Franciscan author told his mostly female audience to feel and hear, to effectively witness anew, Christ’s experiences. St Francis had sought to walk in Christ’s footsteps, and experiencing the emotions which arose from such a task was part of its aim. The Meditations author accentuated the violence and humiliation of the Crucifixion partly to render the reader present in the scenes.\(^5\) There was a matching emphasis on the Crucifixion’s violence in the Golden Legend. Divine knowledge was for the Dominicans less emotional and more intellectual, and yet while the Golden Legend author expressed himself differently, he made a similar effort to ‘illustrate’ the pain and violence of the Crucifixion. He described the five kinds of pain which the Passion had caused Christ, three of which were shameful, and two of which were bodily torments. The pain, for instance, “penetrated every part of his body, it smote all his senses,” and each of Christ’s bodily senses had magnified his suffering.\(^6\)

\(^5\)The author exhorted his reader to “notice every detail as if you were present.” Caulibus (2000), p. 239.

Painters during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries endeavoured to express this all-too-human cost. In “The Road to Calvary,” for example, painted by Simone Martini around the 1330s (Figure 3.1.3), Christ was shown being pulled violently by the guards, looking back over his shoulder to his mother standing in the path of another guard’s club, raised and ready to strike her. Mary, wedged into a tumultuous crowd that poured from the city’s gates behind her, only had eyes for her son. This sense of mental and emotional chaos was a common theme in depictions of the Crucifixion where a crowd was present. One such example painted by Agnolo Gaddi in the last decade of the fourteenth century for a church setting, showed people packed in tightly from one edge of the frame to the other, while Christ painfully gazed down upon a disorderly sea of humanity (Figure 3.1.4). Painters in their pursuit and execution of realism during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were reflecting the aim of texts to immerse their reader, or in the painter’s case, the viewer, in sacred events. The purpose of such vivid imagining was to generate a physical immersion, which would, in turn, give rise to a spiritual awakening.\(^7\)

Nothing in these texts and images, however, suggests if or how a reader or viewer was meant to relate to the suffering of Goliath in the victory of David, or Holofernes in the victory of Judith. On the contrary, we suspect that the viewer was meant to relate to David and to Judith, the ones who committed the violence. Yet sacred images in which the violence was not necessarily interpreted as suffering were often popular choices for illuminations and frescoes. This suggests that there was more than one conceptual position for the viewer to take in respect to violent symbolism, and that these other conceptual positions were not explained by texts like the *Meditations*. A survey of the scholarship reveals, however, that historians do not generally address how the viewers were meant to position themselves in relation to forms of violence in a sacred painting when the violence did not provide an obvious avenue to imagining martyrdom.\(^8\) There has been considerable recent work


\(^8\)Scholarship on violence in sacred art typically depends on an assumption of horror or pain. It

In respect of the Crucifixion, the expectation amongst historians is that the violence was useful for its shock-value. Art historian Mitchell B. Merback, for example in the preface to his work *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel*, expressed concern that images of violence could become trivialised from being too familiar and therefore too tolerable, compared with the past. He predicted that depictions of human cruelty and pain provoked “emotions ranging from fear and horror, through pity and guilt, to disgust and shame.” In this he expressed a confidence that the utility of violence stemmed from its capacity to elicit fear or coercion.

![Figure 3.1.4: Agnolo Gaddi, c.1390–96, *Crucifixion*, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.](image)

What is missing from the scholarship is an explanation of non-martyring violence in sacred art. Images of David and Goliath, as well as of Judith and Holofernes, fall into this category, as do many other accounts of violence that have been typologically tied to the Crucifixion in biblical iconography. There is presently no ‘period eye

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10 See two previous footnotes, but particularly Davies (2016) for an example of the breadth of violence studies. Merback is a good example of how the scholarship has been ordered around an expectation of suffering in sacred painting (Merback (1999), and more broadly, see also Tracy (2012).


12 Michael Baxandall has explained why what might be called an iconographical lineage is essential for correctly interpreting images from this period: “The painter was a professional visualiser of the holy stories ... practised in spiritual exercises that demanded a high level of visualisation of, at least, the central episodes of the lives of Christ and Mary ... The public mind was not a blank tablet on which the painters’ representations of a story or person could impress themselves;
for violence’ that provides scholars with a guide as to how to read these images as a genre. This is a factor in the comparison scholars have made between ancient and contemporary warfare to explain the statues of David and Judith. Warfare was in fact a common trope in biblical exegesis, as some of the quotes from the Meditations text above reveal, and it was also used extensively in biblical iconography as a means of explaining to the layperson the theory and practice of virtuous living taught in the New Testament. It is the aim of the following chapter to provide a framework for violence in sacred imagery as it relates to the political image of Florence in the statues of David and Judith.

3.2 Victimhood

As a basis for providing a survey of violence in sacred imagery I have focussed on a group of medieval picture books based on the Bible, which include the Biblia Pauperum, Bible Moralisée, Somme le Roi, Speculum Virginum, and the Speculum Humanae Salvationis. These texts represent the most common and most widely circulated books of the period under examination. Composed in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries and widely circulated during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, what are often referred to as Bible picture books featured events from the New Testament, relating to the lives of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ. They arranged these accounts alongside events from the Old Testament or other ancient sources. Biblical picture books also drew upon other texts that were highly popular and in circulation amongst the educated classes. These works were represented in Florentine libraries in the fifteenth century, and included Peter Comestor’s Historia Scholastica, Jacobus de Voragine’s Legenda Sanctorum, the works of St Thomas Aquinas, the De antiquitate judaica of Flavius Josephus, and Valerius Max-

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14 While the educated and elite classes were more likely to own and read such texts, the content became the basis for sermons and thus in one way or another they had a broad audience. Wilson and Wilson (1984).
The approach of these works was teleological, with the primary aim being to demonstrate a predetermined relationship between the ancient world and the events of the New Testament. This was done with a view to explaining to the layperson the relevance of these events as a guide to virtue.

The *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* is well known to scholars as one of the most widely circulated typological texts of the medieval period. The anonymous author of the *Speculum* made it clear that the intended audience of the work was wide, being both for the preaching clergy and the laity. It was written in Latin but also expressed simply, and large pictures catered to unlearned readers. Based on extant manuscripts, it is believed to have had its largest circulation in northern regions, mainly in Germanic and French territories. It can be noted therefore that it is not usually used by historians studying Italian art in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Historians have traditionally believed that the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* was based on the German *Biblia Pauperum*. Recent research has revealed, however, that it did not originate in Germany but, rather, Italy. The *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* was a Dominican text composed in Bologna, and most likely completed in 1324. Additionally, many of the *Speculum* manuscripts that ended up


17 The Prologue stated: “In order that the teaching should be available to both clerks and laymen I have endeavoured to write the book in fairly clear and simple language,” pp. 11–12.) Translation in Palmer (2009), p. 349.

18 This was argued by Nigel F Palmer, a scholar of Medieval German language and literature, in the previously cited Palmer (2009). In a precursor to Palmer’s argument that the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* had originated in Italy, art historian Evelyn Silber had contended in 1980: “If it is still thought that the *Speculum* originated in Germany, a single copy was probably the prototype for the sequence of Bolognese copies ... If, on the other hand, the *Speculum* originated in Italy during the first quarter of the fourteenth century, a single workshop might well have produced a number of copies, all closely related but incorporating precisely the kind of minor variations described in the Toledo, Vatican, and Selestat manuscripts.” Silber (1980).
in other regions, were first illustrated in Bologna in the early fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{19} There are two extant Italian manuscripts from the period 1380 – 1400, one from Florence, and the other possibly from Bologna.\textsuperscript{20} There are also three other known extant Italian manuscripts: a late fourteenth-century copy with miniatures (Prague, Metropolitan Chapter Library, MS A.137); an early fourteenth-century copy with Franco-Italian miniatures (Rome, Biblioteca Corsiniana, MS 55.K.28); and an early fourteenth-century Bolognese copy formerly in Toledo, Archivo y Biblioteca Capitulares, MS 10.8 (c.1320–40), which historian Evelyn Silber has reconstructed.\textsuperscript{21} Similarly, there were also Italian versions of Somme le Roi.\textsuperscript{22}

A brief perusal of any Speculum Humanae Salvationis manuscript quickly demonstrates just how much violence can be seen in its pages, and not only in chapters that were related to the Passion. Political assassinations and murders, military wars, state-sanctioned torture and executions, filicides and fratricides, human and animal sacrifices—all were displayed, often at the moment of death. In addition to these killings, other non-fatal acts of aggression were depicted. These actions were aimed at mentally or physically injuring their target, including, for example, spitting, slapping, bodily shoving or pulling, and beating or whipping. The first question such an array therefore raises is what this violent spectacle was intended to achieve. The

\textsuperscript{19}Silber (1980), (p. 47). It was typical for texts to be illustrated first, and the text to be added later.

\textsuperscript{20}An illustrated Speculum Humanae Salvationis, divided between: Paris, Biblioteque Nationale de France, MS. lat. 9584; and Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS. 43, Florence, dateable c.1390); parts reproduced in Montague R James and Bernhard Berenson. Speculum Humanae Salvationis, being a Reproduction of an Italian Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century described and prefaced by M R James, with a discussion of the school and date by Bernhard Berenson. The University Press, 1926. Another closely related copy is also in Paris, Biblioteque de l’Arsenal, MS. 593, Bologna, dateable c.1360–1390: LP 127.

\textsuperscript{21}Silber has argued that the Toledo manuscript is close in style and iconography to a famous copy of the Speculum Humanae Salvationis in Munich which was published in the influential study by Lutz and Perdizet of the Speculum Humanae Salvationis. Their opinion that the MS was Alsatian has been accepted by scholars, however, Silber argues that many scenes of the two manuscripts “permit comparison down to the last detail,” to the Bolognese MS and that they very likely had a Bolognese artist. She also notes a fifteenth-century copy of the Speculum Humanae Salvationis made in Hungary that was copied directly from an early fourteenth-century Bolognese Speculum: Vatican MS Reg. lat. 99. Silber (1980).

Figure 3.2.1: *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, c.1470–1480, Marseille, BM, MS.0089, f.025
answer can be considered at least three-fold: it was meant to induce mental anguish in the worshipper for the purposes of devotion; it was a rhetorical device, in the sense that to be arresting is to be memorable; and it was used to present a particular theory about rule and virtue, which was best expressed through the starkness of the choice that is presented in violence. This will be explained further but what immediately follows below is a more detailed demonstration of the Speculum and how it worked.

A chapter in the Speculum Humanae Salvationis was typically formed by four images arranged in pairs on two facing pages (see Figure 3.2.1). Each image appeared above a textual explanation, and was usually given an equal amount of space compared to its explanation below. It is clear, however, that the images could be ‘read’ on their own without the text; they were each carefully detailed, and they displayed the crucial aspects of an account, which would have allowed the viewer to absorb and recognise the story to which the image referred. The illustrator achieved this effect by either layering components of the narrative in the same frame, much like the Renaissance artists who came later, or splitting the frame to show several different moments in time. The principal theme of the chapter was always designated by the lead image, and the following three images thematically supported the key theme. All the images corresponded to each other in size, which gave them an equal visual weight. This meant that they could be compared thematically with their immediate neighbour, and additionally, to the other three images in the chapter, which became evident when the book was opened at a chapter.

The composition of four images was important to the viewer when interpreting a chapter; thematic meaning was gathered cumulatively, and gradually cohered as the eye roved back and forth across the various images in the quartet. The structure and arrangement allowed for a complex reading of all the images, which compared and combined different cultural and temporal perspectives. In the example chosen for the present analysis, the Crucifixion was the essential topic (Figure 3.2.2), which was related to three other accounts and images, two taken from the Old Testament and one from Roman historian and moralist, Valerius Maximus, and his Facta et dicta memorabilia (AD 31). It is worth noting that the Passion was usually dealt with across several chapters. This chapter related to the dying moments of Christ’s
mortal life.

The first image alongside the Crucifixion was an account taken from the Book of Daniel, which comprised a series of narratives from the court of King Nabuchodonosor. In this account, the king summons all his wisemen and “soothsayers,” to interpret a dream that has troubled him. No one can understand it, so the king summons Daniel. The king says he has dreamed a great tree, so strong and tall that it reached “unto heaven.” The king tells Daniel that he then heard a heavenly messenger telling him to cut down the tree. Pondering what the King has told him of the dream, Daniel tells the king that the tree symbolises his kingdom, and it is a prophecy that the king will lose his power unless he concedes, “that power is from heaven.” When the king fails to heed Daniel’s advice—and instead congratulates himself on his power and glory—God punishes Nabuchodonosor by confiscating his kingdom and making him live like a wild animal. The account ends noting that “them that walk in pride, [God] is able to abase.”

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The second and third images in this chapter of the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* (Figure 3.2.3) related two heroic and patriotic deeds, one from ancient Athens by way of Rome, and the other from ancient Israel. Valerius Maximus described the story of Codrus in Book 5 of his *Facta et dicta memorabilia*. This was a popular work amongst the Florentine elite; a manuscript was commissioned by Piero de’ Medici, for example, in the 1450s. In a chapter devoted to “Loyalty to One’s Country,” Valerius first described a number of Roman stories of patriotism, before proceeding to describe “foreign cases of the same conduct,” where he came to recount the story of the Athenian, King Codrus. The Dorians had invaded Peloponnesus, provoking a protracted battle with the Athenians. Finding his army being relentlessly destroyed, King Codrus consults the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, asking how “he could shake off that dreadful war.” Apollo replies that, “it would come to an end if the king died at the hands of the enemy.” News of this prophecy spreads and hearing it, the enemy commander orders that no one harm the Athenian king. Codrus upon realising this,

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24 Ames-Lewis (1978), p. 63, 121, pp. 284–285; the *Sayings* was noted in the 1456 inventory, see also p. 370.
takes off his royal insignia and puts on the clothes of a slave. He then approaches a group of enemy soldiers and provokes them into a fight. They readily kill him, believing that they are only rebuking a slave and not the Athenian king. This brings the prophecy to pass, and Maximus concludes that “the king’s death [had] ensured that Athens would not die.”

![Image of Speculum Humanae Salvationis](a) Speculum Humanae Salvationis, c.1460, Lyon, BM, MS.0245, f.144.  (b) Speculum Humanae Salvationis, c.1470–1480, Marseille, BM, MS.0089, f.025.

Figure 3.2.4: Examples of the account of Eleazar.

The third depiction in this chapter on the Crucifixion was another account of warfare taken from Machabees in the Old Testament, about an ancient Israelite warrior Eleazar. The Israelite army, led by Judas, was facing an overwhelmingly large and formidable enemy army from the Seleucid empire: “[the enemy] distributed the [elephants] by the legions: there stood by every elephant a thousand men in coats of mail, and with helmets of brass on their heads: and five hundred horsemen set in

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25Maximus (2004), Book 5, Chapter 6, pp. 187–188.
26The account of Eleazar is also in Josephus, *De Bellum Judaicum*, 1.31–1.47; both of Cosimo’s sons owned copies. B. Laur. 66, 8 and 9, see Ames-Lewis (1978), p. 185, and pp. 304–305.
order were chosen for every beast ... And upon the beast, there were strong wooden towers, which covered every one of them: and engines upon them: and upon every one thirty-two valiant men, who fought from above; and an Indian to rule the beast.” As the armies engage with the Israelites who are far outnumbered, an Israelite soldier named Eleazar sees one of the elephants has been harnessed “with the king’s harness ... and it seemed to him that the king was on it.” Eleazar immediately forms a plan to kill the king’s elephant, so as to confuse and disable the king’s army. He “runs up to the king’s elephant, “boldly in the midst of his legion;” then he goes between the feet of the elephant, puts himself under it and slays it, whereupon it falls to the ground upon him, and he dies there. Therefore like Codrus, Eleazar has “exposed himself to deliver his people and to get himself an everlasting name.”

Each of the three accounts which appeared alongside the Crucifixion in this chapter of the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* foreshadowed Christ’s sacrifice, which in the first instance explains why they belonged in such a chapter. Each image however, by adding further strands of meaning, helped to cumulatively create a more substantial interpretation of the Crucifixion. This had both theoretical and practical aspects for its audience. The first image of Nabuchodonosor’s dream, for example, presented a theoretical position on political power; earthly power was feeble in the face of divine power. This supported a theme of power reversal in the Passion, in which Christ was put to death by human rule but later resurrected by divine rule. Like the account in the Book of Judith, it demonstrated a paradox, which was that power only endured when it was founded on humility. It also demonstrated the consequences of failing to heed this conceptualisation of power.

The second image, in giving an example of a king who offered himself to save his people, built on this perspective of political power, by providing an antitype to Nabuchodonosor. Codrus assumed the guise of a slave to enact his death. This compared to the way that Christ in preparation for his sacrifice had been incarnated in the guise of human flesh. It also demonstrated that true power was in fact a kind of offering, and like other offerings, it had to be enacted with humility and willing submission in order to be “true” or effective. The third image about Eleazar’s death provided a further example of authentic offering, but it added another view

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27I Machabees 6: 33 – 46.
on power and submission. Eleazar’s account put a sword in the hands of the victim. Submission was thus an active and not a passive task, which was symbolised by committing, rather than receiving, the violence. This was an important addition to a perspective on offering and a distinctly Christian one, in that it only made sense in the context of a particular interpretation of sacrifice as a model for the layperson.

Consider how violence was defined by these images. At its narrowest, it was a physical force, the evidence of which was rupture. Rupture manifested itself as a breach of the human body’s membrane, in which event what had been encased (blood, viscera) escaped. It might also manifest itself as a breach of the social body’s membrane, in which event what had been encased (mutual good will, tension) escaped. The first represented the smaller or detailed picture, the individual body. The second represented the larger or relative picture, the social body. Violence was a way to make complex theoretical points simple. It communicated the fact that offering in the Christian formation of virtue was not passive but rather active submission; and it required active engagement on the part of the devotee or follower.

This analysis of the Crucifixion chapter in the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* demonstrates how the metaphor of warfare worked in biblical imagery. It was certainly a setting for the action, but it was not merely this, nor was it a simple comparison to the Crucifixion as “warfare” such as in texts like the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, although it could be both of these things. The metaphor of warfare in fact worked on other theoretical levels that allowed an audience to ‘think through’ the implications of the Crucifixion for their own behaviour. The diagram in Figure 3.2.5 provides an example of how this worked with respect to the chapter described above. The accounts on the first page in terms of their primary theme or message represented loyalty to God. The accounts on the second page represented loyalty to country. In juxtaposing the second page with the first page, a further allusion is made between loyalty to country and loyalty to God, where they are compared as forms of imitable behaviour. Similarly, when this comparison is made in reverse by the eye roving backwards and forwards, a further layer of interpretation is added; the two ‘lead’ images on the first page demonstrate the principle that divine will supersedes human will, while the next two images provide examples of submission.
1. God at top of political structure.
2. All have a rightful place but power moves/increases through willingness to relinquish power in favour of God or state.

Figure 3.2.5: Diagram showing patriotism as a spiritual metaphor in the Speculum Humanae Salvationis.
The submission and offering made by a king and a soldier for their people thus in turn becomes a metaphor for the offering of Christ on behalf of Christians. The two examples of Codrus and Eleazar, additionally, model submissive offering for the layperson. But interestingly, and crucially in respect to understanding Bible images used in a political context, the technology of viewing provides a model of power in which power adheres to a person the more it appears to be or is actually relinquished.

The chapter in the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* analysed above demonstrates a number of critical points for understanding biblical or sacred imagery. Terrestrial violence and warfare were metaphors for sacred violence, namely Christ’s sacrifice. Their overall pattern, which can be described as a death that saved a people, organised three themes into a consecutive order: the humility required for total offering; the context of this offering as killing; and the saving of a community, or *libertas*, as the outcome. Humility, offering, and *libertas* became allied concepts through the violent symbolism, and each of the concepts could be paired in a logical relationship, for example: *libertas* and sacrifice; or killing and humility; or offering and *libertas*. The notion of offering presented in sacred imagery was delineated by two sets of poles: power and weakness; and rupture and unity. The more that power was relinquished, the more it settled on the shoulders of those who relinquished it. Similarly, the rupture and violence done to one body led to the prosperity and security of a collective body. The evidence that these features were understood and used in a political context is provided by the example of Codrus, which was painted by Domenico Beccafumi for the Palazzo Publico in Siena in the early sixteenth century (Figure 3.2.6). In the centre foreground, Codrus is seen divesting himself of his royal costume, while his death is depicted in the upper right background. The link to sacrifice, and Christ’s sacrifice more particularly, was made clear by the inclusion of a bundle of sticks and a sword in the central background, the symbols of sacrifice used in biblical imagery as I will explain further below.

Importantly for the present chapter, where warfare appeared as a metaphor, there were frequently two models of violence being presented as related to one another: one in which violence was committed and one in which it was received.
Overall, there could be said to be three models of killing presented as analogies for the Crucifixion in Bible picture books. The first type placed a victim of violence in opposition to a person carrying out the violence. I deliberately refrain here from using the word ‘perpetrator,’ because it comes loaded with a connotation of harm or damage. As will become increasingly apparent in this chapter, connotations of harm or damage were not necessarily attached to violence in sacred imagery as they would be in other contexts. One might call this type of violence ‘sacrificial,’ or ‘victimhood,’ because the focus of the story was on the victim. It was also typically defined by a contrast between purity and impurity. The victim was humble and obedient, while the one committing the violent act or acts was uncontrolled and immoral. In this case, the death was often also constructed as necessary for the purposes of saving a collective body or polis. Typical examples of this kind of violence include Codrus and Eleazar described above.
3.3 Mutual Victimhood

The second type of violence used as an analogy for the Crucifixion duplicated the victimhood and shared it across both protagonists. From a modern perspective we might struggle most to understand this kind of account, because both the victim of the violence and the person who committed it were characterised as pure. Each was defined by their humility and obedience and hence in this kind of violence, each was holy or sanctioned. These were usually patricides, for example in the accounts of Jephtha and King Moab, who kill their children as blood sacrifices. I have called this type of violence ‘mutual victimhood’ for this reason, as it is thematically and theoretically connected to the first type of victimhood. Each participant was sanctified in death: one was sanctified by his or her willingness to die, and the other was sanctified by his (interestingly always his) willingness to kill. The most beloved of these mutual sacrifices in the Renaissance period was the account of Abraham and Isaac, frequently depicted in paintings and plays and notably in a sculpture by Donatello. Feo Belcari wrote a treatment of Abraham and Isaac for Giovanni di Cosimo de’ Medici, which was performed as a *sacra rappresentazione* in the 1440s.28 Below, Belcari’s play will be compared with Bible picture texts in order to demonstrate that the play and its conceptual structure corresponded closely to the ways that the sacrifice was typically displayed in drawing, painting or sculpture.

In both the *Biblia Pauperum* and the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, the Crucifixion was usually illustrated adjacent to images of the near ritual sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham. Images about Abraham and Isaac had been ubiquitous in art since early Christendom, and by the early medieval period the story had become the principal prototype of Christ’s death on the cross. The two most popular ways of presenting the story were to show Isaac carrying the wood for the sacrifice, particularly where a reference to Christ carrying his cross to Calvary was designated, or to depict the moment of the father nearly sacrificing his son.29 Both versions remained

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29 For summaries, see Alison Moore Smith. The Iconography of the Sacrifice of Isaac in Early
Figure 3.3.1: Speculum Humanae Salvationis, c.1468, blockbook, Chapter 5, Jephtha sacrificed his daughter to God.

Figure 3.3.2: Speculum Humanae Salvationis, c.1468, blockbook, Chapter 23, d. King Moab sacrificed his son on the walls.
common, however, there are a greater number of extant depictions of the moment that Abraham nearly sacrifices Isaac, which may suggest that the latter exceeded the former in popularity. In terms of the Biblia and Speculum, both versions were regularly depicted in relation to the Crucifixion, often in the same volume if events surrounding the Crucifixion were split over several chapters.  

For the purposes of a description in this chapter, I have taken a Latin manuscript of the Biblia dated from around 1460 (not shown here). The story of the near sacrifice of Isaac was depicted twice in relation to the Crucifixion. It was first introduced on the page which showed Christ carrying his cross. The large page was divided pictorially into three. Christ was depicted in the centre, while to the right was an image of a woman carrying two sticks. This alluded to a story in 3 Kings, in which the formation of the sticks was believed to have foretold the Crucifixion. To the left of Christ in this arrangement, was an image of Isaac carrying a faggot, which was to form the fire for his sacrifice. His father Abraham was shown walking in front of him, his sword hanging from his belt, and carrying a lit torch ready for the altar’s fire. On the following page of the Biblia manuscript, Christ’s Crucifixion was depicted again in the centre. On the right side was pictured Moses lifting up the serpent, a story from Numbers in which Moses was instructed by God to hang a brass sculpture of a serpent on a stake so that whoever looked at it would be rid of serpents. This was an analogy for those who would gaze on the crucified Christ and thereby be rid of the Devil. To the left of the image of the crucified Christ, the story of Abraham and Isaac was depicted again, at the moment of Abraham’s attempted sacrifice of Isaac. Abraham was shown raising his sword above his head,
his left hand resting on the shoulders of his obedient son Isaac, who was depicted kneeling on an altar with his head bowed. An angel was drawn in the left of the frame, reaching across to stay Abraham’s arm in the motion of its swing. The ram to be sacrificed in the next part of the story was also depicted in the foreground, as was the sheath for Abraham’s sword, and the wood for the altar fire. The sticks of wood had been formed into a shape of the cross, and the angle of the lifted sword mimicked the angle of the arm of Christ’s cross, thus underlining the story’s prefiguration of the Crucifixion. A very similar depiction from the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* is shown in (Figure 3.3.3), although the direction of the action is reversed so that it shows the angel to right of the frame. The convention of inserting visual clues such as the sticks crossing in both the 3 Kings image and in the image of Isaac’s sacrifice was typical of both *Biblia* and *Speculum* manuscripts, and was used to validate the relationship between the images.

Most historians would readily recognise the theme of prophecy, which was the basis for grouping the story of Abraham and Isaac with the death of Christ in the
Biblia and Speculum, and the obedience and faith expressed through two sacrificial killings, namely Isaac and the ram. There were three other important themes in the account of Abraham and Isaac, however, that can be discerned in their iconography in the Biblia and Speculum, and which suggest that the story was meant to yield more than merely a sacrificial typology: one, the humility required in making the offering; two, the symbols of the killing in sacrifice, which were linked back to both the humility and the offering; and three, the reward for the offering(s), which was nothing less than the safety and continuity of a whole community. Importantly, each of these themes were also featured in Belcari’s interpretation of the account.

Isaac’s impending death was presented as a humble offering from a number of perspectives. On the father’s side, God had seen how much the son was cherished by his father. This was underlined in the phrase “whom thou lovest.” And yet Abraham neither questioned nor protested when he was told: “Take thy only begotten son Isaac.” Without faltering, Abraham had risen out of his bed to carry out the instruction. Abraham’s willingness itself was a humility. This willingness was visually symbolised in the Biblia and the Speculum with the sword, shown raised high and ready to strike: “his father ... clutched the naked sword, not hesitating to slay his son.” 33 From the son’s side, Isaac was consistently depicted as obedient and acquiescent. When he asked his father where the sacrificial victim was, he demonstrated that he was capable of understanding the implications of its absence. But he did not question it further. When his father asked him to take the usual victim’s place on the altar, Isaac did not flee. Theologians as early as the end of the second century interpreted Isaac in these terms: “Isaac, however, remains silent, bound like a ram, not opening his mouth nor uttering a sound. For, not fearing the sword, unafraid by the fire and undismayed by the offering, he steadfastly bore the prefiguration of the Lord.” 34 The interpretation of Isaac’s submission remained popular in depictions, which showed Isaac kneeling or sitting on the altar, head often bowed and hands sometimes clasped in prayer, waiting for the blow of his father’s sword.

33 Taken from writings by Melito, bishop of Sardes: Excerptorum libri sex, Migne PG 5, 1216. Quote and reference provided in Van Deuren (1999), p. 216.
It is significant to the meaning of the story that even when the sacrifice of Isaac had been averted, the father and son continued with the sacrifice of the ram. There is no question that the second sacrifice was crucial to the story’s significance, because the ram appeared in almost every rendition of the story. The sacrificial context was deeply relevant to the whole. The ram was substituted for Isaac, which was a symbolic inversion of the sacrifice of Christ. However, Isaac’s deliverance from death was also the deliverance of a community: the sacrificing achieved communal welfare and prosperity. Abraham’s reward for his willingness to sacrifice was the assurance that his offspring would number “the stars of heaven,” that they would “possess the gates of their enemies,” and demonstrating continuing success, that because of them “all the nations of the earth” would be blessed. This established a scenario of cost and return in relation to sacrifice; something given up or offered would reap exponential reward. But it also expressed the reward in specifically social and political terms: reward was communal welfare and continuity, and domination of foreign territories (possession of “the gates of their enemies”). These rewards, moreover, came by way of virtuous behaviour like humility. It can therefore be said that the story of Abraham and Isaac had social and political messages bound in with its theological one: obey God but also, humility unifies and saves a community, and allows it to dominate its enemies. It is a challenging prospect to symbolise continuing social well-being, but the Speculum managed it by relational placement as demonstrated above, by placing accounts that had the same outcome to the account of Abraham and Isaac.

Like the best paintings of this period, an altarpiece was able to tell the viewer a great deal through a common visual lexicon that was constructed by placement, arrangement, angles, depth, symbol, and pattern. This lexicon was built over the preceding centuries, and it was passed down through viewing biblical images, aided by preachers’ sermons. The late-medieval period in particular was instrumental in terms of both the amount of images produced, but also in focusing on the function of the image as a teaching tool. Biblical images developed certain methods for achieving this, that were then repeated across contexts and regions, partly because the consistency of the message was key, but also because these methods were effective in compressing and then relaying complex belief. The placing of figures,
Figure 3.3.4: Example of mutual-victimhood, shared across both protagonists.
the components of a scene, who appeared and who did not appear, who was large and who was small, in what part of the frame they were placed—all these components helped to render complex theological thinking in a way that would be readily absorbed, and yet without losing important intellectual distinctions. Images were didactic because they were able to relay both theoretical and pragmatic information to the viewer, presenting both the behavioural model and the theoretical reasoning behind the behavioural model.

The depictions of violent torment in the Crucifixion, and of the mental and physical chaos present in a controversial public execution, were explained to their audience in part by the logic of sacrifice. As the author of the *Meditations* had pointed out in respect to the Passion, “the Father [God] unquestionably willed that [Christ] die,” and this was because “the redemption of all humanity ... cannot rightly be accomplished without the shedding of blood.” The sacrificial quality of this offering was noted in the *Meditations* in respect to the Last Supper. The author described how Christ took his place at the Last Supper, and “he decided to put an end to the sacrifices prescribed in the Law and to begin a new testament: he established himself as a new sacrifice.” The precedent of ancient Israelite sacrifice, or “the Law” to which devotional sources habitually referred at this time, had clearly tied the shedding of blood to a power to save or rescue: “[Christ] had decided to save his people and in like manner redeem them, not with corruptible gold and silver, but with his precious blood.” The painted depictions of the Passion thus often did emphasise Christ’s blood, picturing it pouring from Christ’s wounds, sometimes collected in bowls by angels.

The *Golden Legend* reflected the same idea, that the violent death of Christ was a sacrificial death which aimed to rescue any who required it. Quoting Anselm, the author asserted that there was “nothing more painful or difficult” than suffering death voluntarily, and yet “no man can give himself more fully than by surrendering himself to death for God’s honour.” The author continued: “So we read in Ephesians 5.2: “Christ delivered himself, an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odour of

sweetness.” ... [and] this sacrifice placated God and reconciled us with God.” In the chapter about the Passion of Christ, in which these quotes appeared, there were repetitive uses of the metaphor of ritual sacrifice, as a way of describing the power of Christ’s death to save Christians. The symbols of the priest as the sacrificer and the temple as a place of sacrifice were used to express the power of the death of Christ in this respect. The author wrote for example, “Speaking about how we were reconciled through Christ, ... Augustine says that Christ is the priest through whom we are reconciled, the sacrifice by which we are reconciled, God with whom we are reconciled, and the temple in which we are reconciled.” Christian theology had incorporated pain and suffering into the cost of becoming a sacrificial victim.

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The violence and the personal cost of the Passion were expressed definitively in terms of pain and suffering, and because this death was also categorically interpreted as a sacrifice, theologians blended violence and pain together with sacrifice. They used violence as a basis for connecting with the lay experience, as a basis for exciting a layperson’s interest and emotions, and as the basis for revelation. But this depended on a specific reading of the violence as requiring and using a victim, one with which the devotee was meant to then reverently relate. Historian of religion, Caroline Walker Bynum, has shown that the theology of sacrifice was in a large way responsible for the growth of blood cults in the late medieval period, which as the name suggests centred on the blood of Christ. In reviewing the debates amongst theologians in this period, Bynum reveals that they were preoccupied with the question of killing and violence implied in Christ’s sacrifice. The negative connotations of suffering posed a conceptual danger to theologians, who saw problems in the potentially polluting aspects of a violent death. As Bynum noted, “late medieval theology pulled back from exactly the element of destruction it understood to be implicit in sacrifice.” Even while theologians had explored and even emphasised “the killing and violation” in Christ’s sacrifice, there was a definite move, antithetically, to obscure it. Even while theologians had explored and even emphasised “the killing and violation” in Christ’s sacrifice, there was a definite move, antithetically, to obscure it.\textsuperscript{39} This move was ultimately a conflicted retreat however, because “the paradoxical assertion that life lies in, is made present by, is given by, death was never rejected. Blood encapsulated, represented, asserted, enacted it—bloodshed and living, drops and flow, moment and eternity, violation and salvation.”\textsuperscript{40}

The difficulty with defining the violence in sacrifice not only perplexed theologians but it has also perplexed Renaissance scholars as well. An example is the analysis of early-fifteenth-century bronze sculptures made in 1401 for the Baptistery Doors in Florence. The following discussion will demonstrate how the absence of a ‘period eye for violence’ has created problems for interpreting Renaissance art, before it will go on to demonstrate a third type of killing that has been made analogous with the Crucifixion in biblical iconography, a category to which David and Judith belonged.

The images of Abraham and Isaac in Bible picture books were akin to the many

\textsuperscript{40}Bynum (2007), p. 255.
Italian versions of the Abraham and Isaac story that appeared in churches and other places where holy stories appeared. The moment of sacrificing Isaac had appeared on sarcophagi in Rome, Italy, and Gaul as early as the fourth century.\textsuperscript{41} The story of Abraham and Isaac was also chosen for church interiors and façades. The identifying traits of this Italian tradition were exemplified by the wall paintings in the interiors of the Old Saint Peter’s and Saint Paul’s in Rome painted in the fifth century, known to historians through seventeenth-century sketches. In these sketches, Abraham was draped in flowing robes—his sword was held in his right hand and raised above his head, while his left hand bowed his son’s head. Isaac was shown kneeling on a box altar, naked and facing his father. Abraham gazed upwards, towards God’s hand or the angel messenger.\textsuperscript{42} This composition exercised a great influence on versions of the story created throughout Italy right through to the latter twelfth century.\textsuperscript{43} One can see, for example, a composition very similar to the Saint Paul mural in the Upper Church of Assisi, painted by Pietro Cavallini. Here Abraham was depicted with his sword raised in his right hand, his left hand resting on his son’s head. Isaac was shown bound and sitting on the altar with the fire already lit underneath, and both father and son were shown turning to look upwards to the hand of God.

The preference for presenting the sacrifice of Isaac in the manner described above prevailed at least into the fifteenth century. Examples that are well-known to art historians are the bronze plates sculpted for the doors of the Baptistery in Florence. These were made as a kind of \textit{Biblia-in-bronze} in the early decades of the fifteenth century. Fortunately there were several that historians can analyse: the two extant bronze reliefs from the competition held in 1401 to select the second sculptor for the

\textsuperscript{41}Van Deuren (1999), (p. 223). Alison Moore Smith had previously suggested that the sacrifice was not generally popular in art until after the eleventh century, after which it had a “renewed and widespread popularity” through to the fifteenth century. See Smith (1922), p. 169.

\textsuperscript{42}Lost fresco of \textit{San Paolo fuori le mura}, Rome. Drawing in Vat. Cod. Barb. 4406. Reproduction of the drawing and reference provided in Van Deuren (1999), pp. 214 - 255 (Fig. 8, see also p. 226).

\textsuperscript{43}Van Woerden made this claim “down to the time of Pietro Cavallini,” which was the late thirteenth century or early fourteenth century. She added that Garber had traced the same tradition through to Assisi. On my own observations however, which are substantiated in this chapter with reference to several Italian works of art, I think the same tradition prevailed several centuries longer, at least until late into the fifteenth century. See Van Deuren (1999), p. 226. Also Josef Garber. \textit{Wirkungen der frühhchristlichen Gemäldezyklen der alten Peters-und Pauls-Basiliken in Rom}, volume 1. Julius Bard, 1918.
Baptistery doors, made respectively by Filippo Brunelleschi and Lorenzo Ghiberti, and the sculptures in Ghiberti’s finished Gates of Paradise door made roughly twenty years later. There is also the marble statue carved by Donatello around the same time of Ghiberti’s door in 1421. This was made for one of the niches in the Duomo’s campanile, which faced the Baptistery from across the street. It provides a useful comparison for several reasons: its proximity both in age and physical location, but also because like the Baptistery, the Duomo had a high value in terms of the local culture both in spiritual and political terms.

The Baptistery was so called because it was dedicated to St John the Baptist, and it was also the single place for baptism in the city. Building began around 1050. The eight-sided structure was domed, and had large double-doors facing north, south, and east. The façade was eventually dressed in dark green and white marble, while the dome and the chancel had glittering mosaics. From its earliest days, the construction and decoration of the Baptistery had been supervised by one of the most influential and wealthy guilds in Florence, the Arte dei Mercatanti di Calimala, which indicates its importance to the city. In 1330, the first set of bronze doors was begun. Commissioned and cast by Andrea Pisano, they were completed in 1336 and showed eight seated Virtues and twenty scenes from the life of St John the Baptist. The door was set on the south gate, facing the approach from the Piazza della Signoria. This was one of the most populated piazze in Florence, home to the city’s town hall and a frequent stop for processions and gatherings. By 1401, the Calimala had announced a competition to find a sculptor for the remaining two doors. Seven artists were invited to present a trial piece in bronze within two years, the subject being the sacrifice of Isaac. The winner would receive a commission to make the first door with an option on the second. Only two of the entries received now survive: that of the winner, Lorenzo Ghiberti, and another, most likely the second finalist, made by Filippo Brunelleschi.44

44Ghiberti began his commission in 1404 with the door which now stands at the north gate, and which tells in twenty episodes the story of Christ taken from the Gospels. This work took roughly twenty years, being set in its place in the Baptistery in 1424, when Ghiberti was in his mid-forties. The following year Ghiberti was commissioned to do the final door, to depict important episodes from the Old Testament including Abraham’s sacrifice. See Richard Krautheimer. Ghiberti’s
Figure 3.3.6: Lorenzo Ghiberti, c.1401, Sacrifice of Isaac, Bronze relief, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.
Figure 3.3.7: Filippo Brunelleschi, c.1401, *Sacrifice of Isaac*, Bronze relief, *Museo Nazionale del Bargello*, Florence.
The entries were so similar in displaying the elements of the story that many historians believe the competition committee stipulated a specific set of requirements. In keeping with the convention for depicting the story that I describe above, the relief represented the moment in which Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac. Less commonly they also included in the lower foreground the two servants who had come with Abraham and Isaac on their journey with their donkey, rendering the Genesis story more visually complete. Abraham in both versions wore flowing robes, and like Nanni di Bartolo and Donatello’s statue made in 1421, held a dagger rather than a sword. In Brunelleschi’s version, the dagger was pointed into Isaac’s throat and Isaac’s body was shown facing sideways so that his upper body and neck were twisting around towards his father and the angel above. Isaac was also partially clothed. In Ghiberti’s version, the dagger was poised level with Abraham’s cheek, and Isaac’s entirely naked body faced towards the viewer, making Isaac turn rather than twist his head sideways to see his father and the angel.

Both Isaacs were on box altars with decorations on their sides, although Brunelleschi’s altar was more practical, in the sense that it showed a space underneath for the wood, and a fire depicted in the bronze relief already licking up the altar’s sides. In Brunelleschi’s depiction, the angel was more prominent, a large figure that competed with the other protagonists, and shown flying down to stay Abraham’s arm. In Ghiberti’s depiction the angel was less intrusive, a smaller figure shown reaching down above Abraham. The figures in Brunelleschi’s foreground were more conspicuous in relation to the whole, while in Ghiberti’s they melded more with the landscape. On balance these were all relatively subtle differences, but in total they gave Brunelleschi’s version a sense of a movement arrested, while Ghiberti’s version presented more of a classical display, a *tableaux vivant*. Interestingly, the final sculpture of this scene which Ghiberti completed around twenty years later for the actual Baptistery door was even closer to *Biblia* or *Speculum* scenes because the dagger had been replaced by a sword, and the servants and donkey had been omitted. In this relief, father and son were shown on a rocky outcrop. Isaac was depicted kneeling on a box altar facing away from his father and almost side-on to the viewer, his hands bound and his head bowed. Abraham was shown raising a sword in his right

hand while holding Isaac’s hands with his left. The angel was shown flying in from the right of frame, holding Abraham’s sword to arrest its path.

The context into which historians would normally place the Baptistery images of Abraham and Isaac relate to their significance for the transition from Gothic to Renaissance style. The two competition reliefs have been seen as experiments in breaking with older, more gothic painting traditions, and in light of the failure of one artist over another as being related to their ability to embrace a newer style. As art historian Krautheimer put it: “two artists [Ghiberti and Brunelleschi] could hardly be more different in style, technique, personality, and background. Together they vividly illuminate the divergent artistic trends in Florence at the beginning of the fifteenth century.” Krautheimer expressed his view in the 1950s, but it remains today the principal interpretation. Jules Lubbock for example, devoted a chapter to Ghiberti’s Baptistery doors in his 2006 work, Storytelling in Christian Art from Giotto to Donatello. The chapter, titled “The Second Baptistery Doors: Ghiberti and Brunelleschi,” began as Krautheimer had done fifty years earlier, with a comparison between the two competition reliefs and a similar claim about their usefulness to art history.

Another art historian in the nineties encapsulated this view: “This competition is a microcosm of the tendencies in Florentine art at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and historians have always pointed to it as a watershed between the old and the new.”

In making this argument, art historians have tended to side with, and try to

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124
explain, the original competition committee’s decision by resting on their own assumptions about the portrayals’ violence. They have for example, particularly relied on what they contend was an emphasised violence in Brunelleschi’s depiction as opposed to the ‘grace’ of Ghiberti’s. Krautheimer and Lubbock have surmised, for example, that Ghiberti had presented an “interplay of movements and glances, [and] psychological differentiations ... with the greatest possible ease.” His relief had “sophistication ... dramatic subtlety and...psychological richness.” Brunelleschi’s relief instead had “brutal directness.” His protagonists’ poses were “violent” according to Krautheimer, while for Frederick Hartt and David Wilkins, “Abraham twists Isaac’s head to expose his neck, while the angel has to rush in and physically restrain him ... [and] Abraham’s brutal treatment of Isaac suggests that he has suppressed the knowledge that he is about to sacrifice his only child.” Lubbock described the action of the angel as exerting an equal and opposite force to Abraham’s. Hartt and Wilkins suggested that while Brunelleschi’s relief showed “physical strain ... his jagged movements are replaced in Ghiberti’s work by poses as graceful as those of dancers.”

None mention that on the Gates of Paradise door, Ghiberti later depicted the angel rushing in to physically stop Abraham, as Brunelleschi had earlier done and as had many artists before him. Lubbock went so far as to suggest that Brunelleschi “drives home the horror of what Abraham is prepared to do,” because “Isaac screams, tortured both by the prospect of death as well as by the heat of the flames beneath forcing him into contortions to support himself.”

Evidence shows however, that the knife-thrust shown by Brunelleschi was part of the long-established convention for presenting the episode. In an appendix to her 1961 article, “The Iconography of the Sacrifice of Abraham,” for example, Isabel

49Quotes are respectively: Krautheimer and Krautheimer-Hess (1956, reprinted 1970), pp. 47 - 8, Frederick Hartt and David G Wilkins. History of Italian Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture. Thames and Hudson, 1987, reprinted 2007, pp. 178 - 9, and Lubbock (2006), p. 155. The views of art historians are remarkably congruent on this point. It is hard to find an analysis of the two reliefs does not contrast them in these kind of terms, even when the brutality of Brunelleschi’s version is not explicitly stated but rather inferred. Kenneth Clark for example stated: “The trial pieces ... leave us in no doubt that the judges had made a good decision. The Brunelleschi is in some respects the more serious work, but its very sincerity had made it somewhat awkward and deprived it of rhythmic unity, whereas in the Ghiberti the whole episode is dominated by a flow of movement which even he never surpassed.” Kenneth Clark, David Finn, and George Robinson. The Florence Baptistery Doors. Thames and Hudson, 1980, p. 8.

50Lubbock (2006), respectively p. 155, p.152.
Speyart Van Woerden provided a list of monuments detailing the “iconographical particularities” of each, from the early Christian period through to thirteenth century. In these lists, the “knife thrust” was identified frequently, including in a mosaic in the nave of the Capella Palatina in Palermo. Van Woerden also noted that the altar as a kind of oven through which flames emerge was part of the prototype for Italian church painting. An example of this was the fresco by Pietro Cavallini in the Upper Church of San Francesco in Assisi already mentioned above, and with which many contemporary artists including Brunelleschi would have been familiar. In the Assisi painting, the flames were shown licking the altar’s opening, upon which Isaac was shown sitting, hands bound, and twisting to look up, presumably at the angel’s arrival—although the condition of the fresco makes it difficult to delineate the angel, its presence can be extrapolated from the consistency of its presence in other versions. The elements of Isaac twisting to look around, having his hair pulled or head controlled, and most importantly, of Abraham’s seeming force or appearance ready to strike, were all firmly established conventions of the genre. They were crucial moreover, to the reading of Abraham as a victim equal to Isaac’s victimhood—to their mutual victimhood. As Feo Belcari’s play demonstrates, the pain and suffering of Abraham was depicted with equal pathos to that of Isaac.

Lubbock went the furthest, claiming that in order to create this “the ‘knife-edge’ between life and death,” Brunelleschi “manipulated” both the Bible text and the conventional depiction. Most historians do not read the implication of violence this far, but they are nevertheless aligned with Lubbock in their general agreement that Brunelleschi intended a more forceful and even aggressive presentation.

Donatello’s marble statue of Abraham and Isaac has given rise to similarly erroneous assumptions but for inverse reasons. This statue showed a naked Isaac kneeling, his hands bound, and turning to look downwards and through this motion, exposing his neck to his father. Abraham was depicted robed, standing behind his son and resting a foot on the bundle of wood for the sacrificial fire, his right hand on a dagger held to the base of Isaac’s throat, and his left hand holding Isaac’s

52 Feo Belcari wrote a treatment of Abraham and Isaac for Giovanni di Cosimo de’ Medici, discussed further below.
hair. Abraham was shown looking up, which according to the iconography must surely have implied looking towards the angel. Scholars have tended to interpret the gesture of resting the dagger at the end of Isaac’s neck as a slack grip, and putting this together with the restful expressions on the faces of Abraham and Isaac, have found that Donatello likely intended to portray not the moment of sacrificing his son but instead the moment of their reprieve. Acceptance, however, was key to the offering being made by both father and son. When one removes the assumption of artistic difference, the Brunelleschi and Ghiberti reliefs do not represent obviously different approaches, either to each other, or to the relatively prescriptive way that this story had been represented in art until this time. It is similarly doubtful that Donatello’s sculpture had strayed from the convention of depicting the moment of sacrificing Isaac. More likely is that Italians were participating in, and in their own ways, replicating during the fifteenth century what continued to be a relatively stable set of methods for depicting sacrifice.

Feo Belcari (1410 – 1484), Florentine humanist, writer, a member of the Arte della Lana, and a protégé of the Medici, wrote a number of sacre rappresentazioni, including a play about Abraham and Isaac. The author took care to elaborate on Abraham’s experience of sorrow in being asked to sacrifice his son. Much in the manner of the author of the Meditations on the Life of Christ, Belcari dwelt on the emotional suffering that Abraham endured in order to carry out the command. In describing Abraham’s first reaction to God’s instruction, for example, Belcari wrote: “Consider for a moment just the words of this commandment and what it involved. There was no need to add after the words “Isaac, your only son ... whom you do love” except to make his pain harder to bear, by opening the wounds that rent his heart ... God doesn’t say to kill him right away, but makes him take a journey of three days so that ... he felt his heart consume itself with pain.” Belcari also has Isaac comment on his impending death, saying that God “will reward us for this great martyrdom,” thus including his father in the claim.

Belcari additionally made the play relevant to contemporary Florentine life in a number of ways. He added a perspective on the experience of Sarah as wife and mother. Belcari described her finding her husband and son gone in the middle of the night, “engulfed with woe” about the prospect of what might befall them. The
author also had Abraham believing that God would bring Isaac back to life. This explained in part how Abraham rationalised his part in carrying out the instruction. It had the effect of connecting the father and son’s plight with the Florentine experience of death and the afterlife described above. Belcari described Abraham, for example, as “believing that Isaac will rise from the dead but not knowing the time of his resurrection,” and in preparing Isaac for the death-blow, he tells him that God “will make you greater than before because he’ll resurrect your mortal flesh.” The preparations for Isaac’s death follow a process with which Florentines would have been familiar in the Art of Dying, such as for example, when Isaac asks forgiveness for his sins and asks for benediction.54

Belcari’s play frequently made asides about the lessons of Abraham’s and Isaac’s experiences, with a focus on living a virtuous life. The “moral” or “buon construtto” of the story Belcari explicitly said was for the play’s audience to keep their “hearts free from the stain of sin,” because “Those who serve God with purity of heart live happy lives and are saved when they die. Though virtue is less pleasing to the senses when people first begin to practise it, their souls, that feel its true and immense joy, find consolation then within their hearts.” The narration paused frequently at intervals to reiterate this message. On asking his son to carry the sticks up the mountain for his own sacrifice, Belcari made Abraham tell Isaac, “Set your heart willingly on doing good for goodness once is done is never lost.” After their reprieve and as father and son embrace, Isaac comments that:

God doesn’t give these joyful gifts of grace to those who do not serve him with pure hearts. False sages with their multitudes have all great longing to receive blessings like this, but they believe that intellect’s enough, rather than serving God with purest love. And likewise those who set out to seek wealth, honour and pleasures sensual and worldly, can never savour sweetness such as this because the world can’t offer such great wealth. The truest radiance and the highest joys are given by our Lord to faithful hearts.

54 Several versions of a popular fifteenth-century work called Ars moriendi (Art of Dying) are in the Bodleian Library, see http://bav.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/news/ars-moriendi-the-art-of-dying. See also Don C Skemer. Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the Princeton University Library. Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University, 2013.
Later Isaac in telling his mother of his experience after returning home comments, “How mad and foolish, blind and ignorant is he who seeks to find bliss outside God! What is more brutish than to be a boy trapped by the world and all the devil’s woes?”

Although the play was a sacra rappresentazione, and was clearly designed to reveal a holy “mystery,” Belcari also created or used political allusions, blending them with the sacred ones to make the holy mystery directly relevant to the city’s greatness. He first created for Isaac a connotation of Florence. After Isaac reconciles himself to his sacrifice, for example, Abraham tells him, “you’re a lily, cool and fresh, that gives off perfume, good and sweet and full.” The lily was, of course, a symbol of Florence. Then, having received their reprieve from the angel, Abraham prepared to sacrifice the ram while saying, “We give our thanks to you most peaceful God who gave to us the gift of fortitude.” It was also political because the willingness to follow divine rules rewarded Abraham with libertas: “Your seed take possession of the gates of all their enemies ... for you’ve acted perfectly and subjected your son to a cruel death and yet he remained strong, and he’ll receive great wealth and great dominion in the land.”

The idea amongst scholars that sacrifice expressed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries an experience of pain and distress principally comes from the way that sources talked about the Crucifixion. But this set of interpretations also had a structure that associated killing with humility and with collective welfare. This has been demonstrated in this chapter by identifying a typology of violence that revealed two related types of killing in accounts made analogous with the Crucifixion, what I have called ‘victimhood’ and ‘mutual victimhood.’ There was also a third type, to which the accounts of David and Judith both belonged. This type I have called ‘justifiable killing’ because it breaks away from the expectations of a ‘victim’ in the first two types, and it constitutes an understanding of virtue as part of domination. This type included equating political and spiritual fealty with one another.
3.4 **Justifiable Killing**

Examples of this last type are highly familiar to the reader as the accounts of David and Goliath and Judith and Holofernes, and appeared in the Bible picture books explicitly linked to overcoming temptation. In these accounts, there was a binary of good versus evil, but it was reversed so that the protagonist committing the violence was pure, and the one receiving the violence was polluted or immoral. This was ‘righteous’ or ‘justifiable killing,’ because the violent person was presented as humble and obedient while inversely, the victim was construed as uncontrolled and full of vice. Hence, killing was characterised as necessary to control the victim and to establish peace. Chapter 13 of the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, for example, deals with this theme in a chapter about Christ being tempted by the Devil. Illustrations of this chapter have been included below using both the blockbook version and also the manuscript produced in Florence in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, dated to the same period as the *Book of Hours* in which the militarised David appeared. In the first frame, Christ’s resistance of the Devil’s temptations was depicted. This was compared with and related to three accounts: Daniel kills Bel and slays a dragon (Figures 3.4.1, and 3.4.3); David kills Goliath; and David slays the lion and the bear (Figures 3.4.2, 3.4.4, and 3.4.5).

The account of Daniel killing Bel and the dragon were once two narratives that in the Apocrypha in the Book of Daniel were told as one continuing the other, and therefore were frequently in late medieval books merged into one. Both related to the destruction of idols.

In the third image, David was shown overwhelming Goliath, which in blockbook and manuscript versions was typically shown with David wielding Goliath’s sword, and in the case of the Florentine manuscript, striking a blow that draws blood from Goliath’s skull (Figure 3.4.4). The last image showed David killing a bear and a lion, which came from the account of David’s battle with Goliath, and referred to a speech that David gave to Saul beforehand in which he compares the Philistines to a lion or a bear that would attempt to take one of his flock; his method of treatment in that case was to slay them, and he proposed to do the same to Goliath. This
Figure 3.4.1: *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, c.1468, blockbook, Chapter 13, a. Christ was tempted by the Devil in three ways; b. Daniel destroyed Bel and killed the dragon.

Figure 3.4.2: *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, c.1468, blockbook, Chapter 13, c. David overcame the Philistine Goliath; d. David killed a bear and a lion.
Figura 3.4.3: Speculum Humanae Salvationis, c.late-14th century, Italy (Florence), Chapter 13, a. Christ was tempted by the Devil in three ways; b. Daniel destroyed Bel and killed the dragon.

The simile used by David was usually depicted in Bible books as an actual killing, and might also include David standing on that which he had slayed, as in the case of the Florentine manuscript shown in Figure 3.4.4.

The reason that David was featured so heavily in a chapter about Christ overcoming the Devil was that biblical exegesis had compared David’s triumph over Goliath to Christ’s defeat of the Devil, and relatedly, to virtue conquering vice. Ambrose, for example, had described David as a man who had freed himself from “corporis vinculis,” the “flammas libidinum,” and more generally, from the “cupiditas mundi.” Ambrose had, following Paul, assumed that there was a state of conflict in the human condition, and that the human soul was riven with conflict between
Figure 3.4.4: *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, c.late-14th century, Italy (Florence), Chapter 13, c. David overcame the Philistine Goliath; d. David killed a bear and a lion, MS. 43-1950, Fitzwilliam Museum.
virtue and vice. This made the victory of virtue necessary. Penitence was the means of that victory. It was through penitence that David redeemed both himself and his people.

To present this analogy in visual form required certain conditions. It will be evident from the images of David and Goliath provided that while they varied from illustrator to illustrator, they were also highly consistent on certain points. Two of these were the setting, which situated David and Goliath’s war in the contemporary world. This was done through costume, usually for both David and Goliath, and also setting. The second point was that all illustrations emphasised the labour of the battle, showing the physical efforts of David. This meant that even though the point of the Bible account was the divine assistance that David was given in overcoming his enemy, illustrations featured David’s participation in this process as
highly proactive, focussing on the moment that he succeeded in physically dominating Goliath. This had the effect of emphasising divine will—through which David won his battle—while also featuring David as a model for the layperson, who was meant to understand the pursuit of virtue as an arduous endeavour. English literature historian, Rosemond Tuve, who studied the symbolism of virtues and vices in late-medieval texts, has observed that allegorical images were valued because they “think out something in front of us,” and offered “a direct and sharp-eyed pursuit of thought.” The language of victory in the images—the symbolism of the killing, the standing on the vanquished body (Figure 3.4.6), the holding aloft of the enemy’s sword—when provided in the context of ‘living detail,’ provided a way for the viewer to ‘live’ the victory in their imagination, to experience it while attaching it to the concept of virtue as an outcome of a struggle between virtue and vice. The technique of temporal and cultural elision was done to create an immediate and compelling mental connection between the contemporary viewer and the ancient events depicted, as a basis for internalising the ideas that were expressed in the image.

The illumination (Figure 3.4.7) of the battle between David and Goliath in the Crusader Bible, c. 13th century, provides another example. This faithfully depicted the events described in the Bible account, while placing it wholly within a contemporary context. All protagonists of both images, including and most importantly, David and Goliath, were depicted in contemporary dress, with prominent architectural details also creating the context of a courtly theme in the decorative frame. Battlefield details of chain-mail, sword, scabbard, shields, lances, were also rendered as realistically as possible. This served to situate the event powerfully and memorably in the viewer’s mind, with the soldiers in contemporary armour infusing it with the kind of urgency that would have accompanied a fight for territory against a formidable enemy. It was done skill-
Figure 3.4.7. Crusader Bible, c.13th century. David slays Goliath and cuts off his head. Morgan Library.
fully, displaying costume detail as well as a limited but nonetheless convincing use of depth to achieve this effect. The realism extended to the work of decapitating Goliath, by showing David kneeling on his enemy’s torso in order to achieve leverage to sever the neck. The image drew attention to the size difference between the bodies of the combatants, David’s shoulders hunching with the effort of pushing the sword through the thick viscera of Goliath’s throat and spine.

The deliberative function of images of David’s defeat of Goliath can be seen more clearly in versions of the *Somme le Roi*, pictured in Figure 3.6.2. What can also be seen is how image placement or arrangement supported the audience’s cognition, pictured in the accompanying diagram in Figure 4.7.2. The *Somme le Roi*, or *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, was a highly influential moral treatise written in 1279 to help penitents prepare for confession. The page that featured David and Goliath was divided into four, featuring virtues and vices next to accounts that demonstrated their example and types of behaviour. David’s battle with Goliath was featured below the virtue of Fortitude (*prouesse*), and alongside Labour. This arrangement allowed David to be diagonally opposed to Labour’s antitype, which was Sloth or Idleness (*paresse*).

As the diagram in Figure 4.7.2 shows, the technology of viewing this kind of violence involved being able to relate and to compare it with other accounts, symbols, or themes. The positioning was based on dichotomies, but it was also designed to be consumed multi-directionally. It directed the eye vertically, horizontally, and diagonally. It also allowed for a number of meanings to occur at once across the images. This built theoretical complexity, as each comparison between pairs accumulated one upon the other. The grid pushed and pulled the eye back and forth, and up and down, until it gathered many layers of connotation for the viewer to absorb. The ideas were structured as comparisons and oppositions, types and antitypes.
The reading of knightly armour in respect to representations of David and Goliath needs to be understood partly in the context of how frequently virtues were armed in biblical imagery (see Figure 3.4.8). Armour can be similarly understood in terms of the symbolism of Fortitude. The association that theologians made between David and the virtue of Fortitude was specifically associated with his ability to deliver his people. This capacity to redeem was seen as a prefiguration of Christ’s sacrifice—and significantly for an understanding of how the political image worked in Florence—as a reference to David’s fortitude in being able to ‘strongly’ act out the victory of virtue over vice. Ambrose, Augustine, and Hugh of St Victor each underlined the sacrificial nature of David’s deliverance of Israel, and connected it to his ability to overcome cupiditas mundi.55 The placement and associations in the Florentine Book of Hours show a similar rationale, which would have been an association understood by its readers.

David’s skill on the harp was another way that he had delivered Israel. David

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was offered to the layperson as a successful example of a reformed sinner, which the
events of his life illuminated, for example his lust for Bathsheba, or his greed and
pride in numbering his people. His ability to overcome these flaws was symbolised by
other events in his life, such as his defeat of Goliath, or in the figural presentation
of him as a musician. The harp carried “suggestions of victory through sacrifice
because of associations such as Psalm 115, “Tibi sacrificabo hostiam laudis,” using
the traditional interpretation of the harp as a symbol of the Crucifixion.56 This was
the meaning of the relationship between the two images that were presented to the
reader of the Florentine Book of Hours as facing each other—here were two forms of
fighting and deliverance, each an allegory for the book owner’s own endeavour for
living a virtuous life.

In light of the apparent choice of Medici to place Judith alongside David in the
Palazzo Medici, it is worth noting that biblical picture books usually featured Judith
as an analogy of the Virgin Mary defeating the Devil, and therefore as a counterpart
to the theme of Christ defeating the Devil in the Speculum. In the case of Judith, she
appeared second in the three stories that were linked with the Virgin (see Figures
3.4.10, 3.4.12). As the illustrations of these scenes demonstrate, such chapters led
with an image of Mary, surrounded by the instruments of the Crucifixion. In the case
of the Florentine Speculum manuscript, it showed Mary additionally standing on the
Devil while she drove a lance into his mouth. The symbolism of ‘trampling’ was also
featured in the Speculum Virginum (Figure 3.4.11), in which Judith was featured
alongside the heroines, Jael and Tomyris, which reflected their typical grouping
in the Speculum Humanae Salvationis with the Virgin Mary. All three of these
accounts, Judith, Jael, Tomyris, shared the theme of a female killing a male in the
context of territorial warfare, and thus were associated with the Virgin’s defeat of
the Devil.

It is evident from an initial examination of these images that killing was key to
the iconography, and in cases where it applied in the account, the decapitation of the
enemy. The scenes were explicitly violent, as with scenes of David and Goliath, and

Figure 3.4.9: Leonardo di Ser Giovanni, c.1366–77, Altar (detail), silver on wooden base, Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Florence.
Figure 3.4.10: *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, c. late-14th century, Italy (Florence), Chapter 30, a. Mary defeats the Devil. b. Judith beheads Holofernes, MS. 43-1950, f.14v, Fitzwilliam Museum.
Figure 3.4.11: *Speculum Virginum*, c.1140, Judith, *Humilitas*, and Jael, MS Arundel 44, f.34v., British Library, London.
for similar reasons. Each account worked as an allegory for virtue’s defeat of vice. The images featured contemporary details that situated the accounts as relevantly and as recently as possible. In the hands of an artist of some skill, the realism could be near overwhelming, and it was with some care that Judith was situated as contemporary. This is clear in the painting by Guariento, for example, included as Figure 3.4.13, who painted the scene of Judith killing Holofernes in Padua early in the 1350s showing the accurate anatomy of the interior of Holofernes’ sliced neck. It should also be evident that in Italian versions which were painted in Florence during the fifteenth century (and this statement extends to those depictions addressed in later chapters), there was a close parity to versions in the late medieval biblical texts under discussion here. The Renaissance-Florentine Judith was, in other words, effectively a reprise of the late-medieval Judith in biblical picture and prayer books. It is also worth noting that Tomyris and Jael appeared in Florence, in *Uomini e Donne Famosi* scenes and as examples of virtue on the arches of the Baroncelli Chapel, diagonally opposite to the portrayal of David and Goliath. As I cover in Chapter 6, fifteenth-century images of Judith were remarkably consistent with the
way that the story had been recounted for more than 150 years.

It may be evident from the above discussion that biblical iconography was widely circulated and yet relatively stable across regions, and across a long period of time. Biblical imagery that historians more usually associate with other regions also in many cases shared a great deal in common with Florentine iconography during the fifteenth century. Examples that further illustrate this point are provided in Figures 3.4.14 and 3.4.15. This comes from the second chapter in the Speculum Humanae Salvationis, which featured the fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from heaven. For comparative purposes, these have been set beside well-known fresco versions in fifteenth-century Florence, made respectively for the Green Cloister in Santa Maria Novella, and for the Brancacci Chapel in Santa Maria del Carmine. The obvious resemblance of arrangement and appearance leaves the strong impression that Florentine artists were probably familiar with these texts and their illustrations, and that biblical picture books were thus reaching and influencing a far wider audience than the few extant Florentine manuscripts would indicate.
Figure 3.4.14: Florentine images that reflect the same composition as *Speculum* texts.
Figure 3.4.15: *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, c.late-14th century, Chapter 2, a. The Fall, and b. The Expulsion, Ms. lat. 9584, f.5 verso, *Bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris.
The similarity between images can additionally be seen as an example of how stable biblical iconography was, meaning that it fulfilled the first use of the term ‘propaganda’ early in the sixteenth century as something that could be carried across regions and cultures. The word ‘propaganda’ is from the Latin, propagare, to propagate, which in its original sense was botanic. This plant-derived meaning became a metaphor for the Church spreading doctrine in the context of exploration and colonisation of foreign territories through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and in response to the increasing hold of Protestantism. By 1622, the administrative response to this challenge was titled the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide. The similarity of the images across centuries makes it a challenge to historicise, but not impossible, as the analysis in this chapter and thesis demonstrates. Moreover, the confluence between the first use of ‘propaganda’ in an ideological sense, and the ability of these images to work in this way is evocative. It suggests a different way of looking at the term ‘propaganda’ for this period.

3.5 Virtue Vanquishing Vice

The above section provided an analysis of violence in biblical imagery, which identified three types: victimhood, mutual victimhood, and justifiable killing. The last category was the one in which the imagery of David and Goliath and Judith and Holofernes occurred. The analysis has demonstrated certain key points. One, it was a feature of the iconography of justifiable killing, and specifically David and Goliath, that contemporary details were included, including contemporary armour. This usually showed Goliath in armour and it also preserved the shepherd’s dress of the Bible account for David’s costume. Two, it featured the act of killing. David was often depicted in the act of

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killing Goliath, and/or the act of decapitating Goliath. The representation of violence was, moreover, achieved as realistically as technique and medium would allow. This desire for realism extended to presenting the world in which the act occurred as a contemporary war, and to including detailed depictions of armour to situate the event within present-day warfare. Three, the featuring of the killing suggests that the theme of ultimate victory, namely the victory of virtue, was important to the iconography. Four, it must be noted that representing the battle or victory rarely if ever included the symbolism of standing on or ‘trampling’ on the vanquished enemy. There were images in biblical picture books of David leaning on or climbing on Goliath in order to sever his head from his body, for example in the Crusader Bible, but these appear to have been intended to show the relative size imbalance between the combatants. It can be noted that these images often appeared alongside an image of David killing the bear and the lion, certainly in Speculum Humanae Salvationis manuscripts, in which David was pictured standing on the animals that he had vanquished, and that these images worked as allegories of David’s defeat of sin. Despite the suggestiveness of the related images of David’s killing of the bear and the lion, however, it nonetheless leaves us with the continuing search for where the symbolism of David ‘trampling’ Goliath came from in the context of Florentine penitential imagery and later, Donatello’s bronzes of David and Judith.

From where did the symbolism of what I have called ‘trampling’ derive? The answer, in part, is shown in images of Mary standing on the Devil as a demonstration of his defeat, which usually appeared, as explained above, as a partner to Judith killing Holofernes. This is merely an associative explanation, however, and not a causal one. For the clearest and most persuasive explanation of the symbolism of trampling, I had to look elsewhere, hinted at in the aforementioned Florentine Speculum image of Mary standing on the Devil while she drove a lance into his mouth. This came from another arm of devotional iconography that appeared most notably in statuary on the façades of churches—the iconography of virtues vanquishing vices, which was symbolised with isolated pairs of personified virtues and vices.58

58Based on new evidence discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the Baroncelli David can be now understood as being part of a tradition in penitential imagery in Florence for showing David trampling on Goliath, or as I also call it here, the iconography of virtues vanquishing vices. See for example my discussion on pp. 57–59 and pp. 72–73.
The virtue triumphant tradition was closely related to the broader category of virtues and vices, but it was also different in one significant respect—it not only paired virtues with vices, but it also foregrounded the conflict inherent in the oppositional relationship. This might be termed ‘virtue triumphant’ imagery, as it featured an armoured virtue. The virtue was typically shown standing legs astride on the body of a vice, just as David was shown to do in the Hours and Baroncelli Chapel images. The iconography of the ‘virtues triumphant’ was thus militaristic, showing a virtue ‘trampling’ on a prostrate and conquered vice. The virtue was often armed, in which case it was also often shown killing the vice.
In the carving from Ambronay Abbey (Figure 3.5.3), Virtue was depicted as a Carolingan soldier, and dressed in the mail byrnie typically used by Carolingan soldiers to protect their torso, upper arms, and groin. Virtue “carries the required circular and concave shield, with a large, heavy boss and decoration as seen in several other contemporary illustrations. His weapon is a wooden spear, its long tapering iron spearhead resting on the neck of his captive, Evil.”59 Biblical imagery demonstrates a reliance on accounts and images of warfare, which provided a way to illuminate and delineate virtue. Additionally, a key method was using loyalty to country as a metaphor for spiritual loyalty, and to explore an individual’s obligations to the polis, with polis being defined both politically and spiritually.

This imagery suggests a strong precedent for two features of the penitential David in Florence, and later the group of the three statues of Donatello, which was the gesture of standing on the vanquished, along with the inclusion of armour or the accoutrements of war. It also provides a possible explanation for the monumental aspect of this particular political image and more generally its medium of sculpture, which was first alluded to in the Baroncelli David, and then brought to full expression.
Figure 3.5.4: *Virtues Triumphant*, c.1280, façade, Strasbourg Cathedral.
in the marble David, continuing with the bronze David and Judith. It does not however, provide historians with any Florentine precedents of virtues standing on vices, unless one turns to images of the archangel Michael, which were popular during the fourteenth century. These images represent the last piece of the puzzle in putting together the precedent for the militarisation of the Florentine Book of Hours David.

In the fourteenth century Hours image discussed in the previous chapter (Figures 2.1.1 and 2.2.3), David appeared as a contemporary Florentine knight, replete with details of plate armour common in Italy at the time. Depictions of St Michael standing on the Devil, pictured in the guise of a dragon, appear very similar to the way that David was shown standing on Goliath in the Florentine Hours image. It is worth noting that depictions of St Michael’s armour in the examples provided below—for example, in Paolo Veneziano’s St Michael painted in 1350 (Figure 3.5.5), and Fra Angelico’s painting c. 1423 – 24 (Figure 3.6.1)—show marked similarity to the appearance of the Hours David, not only in respect to the skirt, belt, and mantle, but also in the stance. David’s armour was well detailed in the Book of Hours versions; it showed clearly a cuirass, otherwise known as a breastplate, on his torso, spaulders or plates to protect his shoulders, and similarly, poleyns or otherwise plates for his knees. He might also be wearing greaves and sabatons, which respectively were protection for his shins and feet. This can be compared with contemporary illustrations of armour contained in fourteenth-century paintings of St Michael in Florence. Depictions in an altarpiece by Leonardo di Ser Giovanni c. 1366 – 1377 (Figure 3.4.9), for example, and in a painting by Buonamico Buffalmacco (Figure 3.5.6), show spaulders and poleyns of a comparable design, with a fringe dropping from the knee-plate made up of leather or plate. Similarly, armoured figures in depictions of St Michael wore a cuirass, which became widespread in the fourteenth century prior to the development of full plate armour. They each also had a decorative belt where the breastplate met the articulated plates that formed

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60 The frescoes executed by Buffalmacco included The Triumph of Death, the Last Judgement, and Hell. The Camposanto was begun in 1278, and its building and decoration were overseen by the magistrates of Pisa with input from local Dominican preachers, who played a key role in selecting the imagery.


**Figure 3.5.5:** ‘Trampling’ in Florentine images of St Michael vanquishing the Devil.
the skirt. Many of these versions appear a close match to the Hours David and suggest that versions of St Michael may have been a model for his costume. The precedence of St Michael’s armour offers a further connection with the context of penitence, as Michael was the archangel who helped to choose and guide the Blessed to heaven in the Last Judgement.

A comparison between the Hours image of David and other, earlier late-medieval imagery reveals that David and Goliath was understood not merely as an account, nor were images of David and Goliath understood merely as representations of an account. David would have been perceived as a *figura*, meaning that his symbolism operated within a system of typology. A *figura* involved “more than the incarnation of a pre-existent content in visible form:”

The [visual] form is part of the content. Typology in itself provides a way of thinking in formal terms, according to a particular, flexible set of rules, and its implications often become manifest only after they have been worked out in the visual parallelisms that images made both possible and palpable.61

Biblical art was ‘a meaning-making activity,’ which is to say that it did not only seek to present knowledge already known, but it also created newly-made connections in the reader’s or viewer’s mind during the activity of reading the images. It could in this sense be said to have much in common with an audience of a rhetorical performance, which is asked to rehearse known knowledge in their minds as a basis for making new connections in their deliberations. The ‘types,’ or *typoi*, and the ‘figures,’ or *figurae*, that typology produced were intended to stimulate a dynamic process in which the reader or viewer came to know something, or to newly understand a previously-known concept or concepts.62 Typology was, in other words, “an

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activity or a cognitive skill one used in an exploratory way,” a visual rhetoric.\(^63\)

Whereas historians have in the past tended to see typology as working parallel
with and even as subordinate to narrative in late-medieval art, more recent studies
suggest that it was more like an epistemology in itself, akin to Augustine’s \textit{forma intellegendi}—a way of knowing or a structure of knowledge. This activity was ordered
by rhetorical restraints, but it was also a way of ‘thinking across’ boundaries that we
now from a modern standpoint readily perceive as fixed or immutable.\(^64\) In many
ways the Florentine political image bears the marks of this typological inheritance.
Fifteenth-century artists would later ‘turn the dial up’ on these rhetorical methods,
as well as push out its frontiers, but it was an amplification or alteration of a pre-

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure3.5.6.png}
\caption{Buonamico Buffalmacco, c.1335–40, \textit{The Last Judgement} (detail), fresco,
Camposanto, Pisa.}
\end{figure}

\(^{64}\)Hughes called it an “intuitive tendency” to “think figuratively across what we think of as boundaries.” Hughes (2006), p. 136.
existing system of meaning-making. Without an understanding of this pre-existing system, it is possible to misunderstand how or why an image of David worked as an allegory for a city-republic, or importantly, how it was altered over time. It is this typological system that provided an overarching framework of logic for the choice and use of David and Judith in Florence.

3.6 Conclusion

The above ‘period eye for violence’ demonstrates the purpose of violence in biblical imagery extended beyond merely eliciting emotional catharsis. Complexly, it blurred the separation between the cause of violence and the victim, and in doing so it created a victimless violence in which suffering was not always the primary focus. This ‘other’ violence reflected not the power of dying but the power of killing, and through this perspective it revealed lessons about the costs and rewards of social responsibility. The Speculum demonstrates that victimhood was only one of three ways to understand and to use sacred violence in relation to the Passion. These types I have termed ‘victimhood,’ ‘mutual victimhood,’ and ‘justifiable killing.’ All three types can be found in Florentine sacred art during the fifteenth century, but it is the last—justifiable killing—that is most relevant to Donatello’s statues of David and Judith.

From the above discussion it should be clear that the theme of virtue vanquishing vice was key to the political use of David. A comparison between the illuminated image revealed in Chapter 2, which was in the Book of Hours and painted sometime between the 1370s and 1380s, and the fresco in the Baroncelli Chapel, indicates that there was a consistent interpretation of what I call the penitential David operating in imagery in Florence during the fourteenth century. The ‘penitential David’ utilised components of virtues triumphant iconography, and as the Hours image demonstrates, this same iconography was used to form the basis of symbolising the Florentine polis. The evidence for the fact that this transposition of the penitential context into the political context was deliberate, exists in the iconography of what I call trampling, which was key to the iconography of virtue vanquishing vice, and which remained in the political image of David and Judith in Florence until towards
the end of the fifteenth century.

The features identified in the Florentine penitential David were compared with biblical iconography in order to postulate how a contemporary Florentine would have read the statues of David and Judith. On the basis of this analysis, we can conclude that the monumental-realist tone achieved in such images was intended to connect with the viewer on an intimate level as a model for living. The penitential context functioned as a means of communicating this intent to the viewer, and for transposing the endeavour of living a virtuous life, into the context of living in, contributing to, or ruling a city-republic.

The discovery of the Hours image and its analyses in this and the previous chapter addresses a previous weakness of the scholarship around the marble *David*, and hence in the scholarship of other works that are linked to it such as Donatello’s bronzes, which was the lack of an iconographical heritage. This will be further addressed in the remainder of this study, which will undertake an assessment of how the iconographical tradition and history of David affected its use in Florence. The result of such an analysis will establish how and why David’s symbolism changed over time in its Florentine context.

The next chapter will explore whether or how penitential meaning discussed in Part I was continued or altered in Donatello’s marble *David*. It will reveal that David continued in the early fifteenth century to be read as an allegory for the pursuit of virtue, but that Donatello’s marble also included some iconographical alterations that would increasingly have more influence on how virtue was understood and expressed in Florence later in the century.

Figure 3.6.1: Fra Angelico, c.1423–24, *St Michael*, tempera on wood, private collection.
Figure 3.6.2: Master Honoré de Amiens, c.1300, *Homme le Roi*, Cambridge, gold leaf, gold ink and tempera on parchment, The Fitzwilliam Museum.
Part II

Core Works Reinterpreted
4.1 Introduction

A number of narrators, including Vasari, mention seeing “a most beautiful marble David” made by Donatello in the Palazzo della Signoria during the sixteenth century.¹ The David had been installed in the Palazzo della Signoria late in August 1416 after the Signoria had made an urgent request to have it transferred to the Palazzo from the Opera workshop. Many scholars assume that Donatello had completed it seven years earlier in 1409, when the Operai had commissioned a David to be placed on the north transept of the Duomo. A committee led by Cristoforo Bernardi had assessed the commissioned statue in that same year, but it was never placed on the façade. The Signoria may have been planning a presentation as part of an upcoming event or visit in 1416, but the reason for the Signoria’s haste is presently unknown. Unfortunately, historians also know nothing further about the

commissioning of the marble statue or its timing. What we do know is that early in August 1416, porters carried two marble consoles into the Palazzo in readiness for the statue. Donatello was “adapting” and “finishing” the marble David with the help of his assistants, and a few weeks later, the statue was carried across the city to the Palazzo della Signoria. On the day that it was placed in situ, just outside of the Sala dei Gigli, an artisan named Master Nanni di Fruosino decorated both the pedestal and the statue with gold leaf.2 The gold leaf was likely used to fill an inscription carved into the base, which an observer later noted as having read,

PRO PATRIA FORTITER DIMICANTIBUS ETIAM ADVERSUS TERRIBILISSIMOS HOSTES DII PRAESTANT AUXILIUIM

To those who fight bravely for the fatherland the gods lend aid against even the most terrible foes.3

A few days later on 20 August, the last decoration for the statue was completed: Giovanni di Guccio painted the wall behind the statue blue, and on this blue background, he illustrated a group of lilies.4

4.2 The Scholarship

Scholars usually treat the marble statue of David as a watershed moment in political imagery in Florence, although Chapter 2 of this thesis now suggests that it was not for the first time that David was politicised. The mention of patria in the statue’s inscription created a clear link between the David and the city-state of Florence. Additionally, as the present chapter will show, contemporary commentators were

2 Because Nanni di Fruosino was paid for the materials and labour (noted in Poggi’s documents, Il Duomo di Firenze, p. 79, doc. 427, cited in Janson and Lányi (1957), p. 3.), it is assumed for the purposes of discussion that it was Fruosino who completed the decoration, although historians do not have any way to substantiate this fact.
3 Sources in this paragraph are in Janson and Lányi (1957), p. 3.
Figure 4.1.1: Donatello, c.1412, *David*, marble, *Museo Nazionale del Bargello*, Florence.
known to use a flower or flowers, and often specifically lilies, as a metaphor for Florence. These two features — along with the statue’s position within the government palace — indicate that the prophet David in 1416 was adopted by the Signoria as an emblem of the Florentine polis. Scholars have read political themes in the marble David, and as mentioned in Chapter 1, they have tended to do so with one or both senses of liberty in mind—libertà and libertas.\(^5\) Scholars rarely if ever to my knowledge either name or distinguish between the two forms of liberty, but their use of the anglicised word might be assumed to refer to the ideological and practical forms of liberty necessary for a republic to assume its political identity. Donatello’s marble statue of David is thus implicitly seen to be about sovereignty, or where it related more specifically to a Roman idea of liberty, to infer the freedom to rule oneself. This is where the statue evidently connects to contemporary Florentine patriotism. How and why David came to be chosen to symbolise this form of independence, however, is a question that historians have not been able to answer.\(^6\)

On the question of the provenance of the marble David, due to the scant and inconclusive documentation, there is an unresolved debate amongst art historians as to origins. This has resulted in two different arguments, which are mutually exclusive. The first has been described in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. It refers to a theory that the statue was originally commissioned by the Operai del Duomo, planned as one of the prophets adorning the Duomo façade. This would normally have called for an aged David, to provide a focus on his role as a prophet. The documentation indicates that an Isaiah was also planned around the same time, and much of scholars' supposition has been shaped by comparisons between the marble

\(^5\) For clarification of the difference between libertas and libertà for the purposes of this discussion, see footnote 12 on p.10.

David and what they believe is the extant statue of Isaiah. The provenance of the Isaiah is also not entirely certain, but because the latter statue was comparatively youthful, scholars have argued that the Operai were intending to create a youthful pair. No reason has been offered as to why a change in preference happened towards representing youth, or why it centred around these two prophets. Mitigating against this reasoning of pairing the statues in any case are the Baroncelli chapel frescoes, which show that the two prophets could be paired when one was older and the other youthful.

Those who believe that the marble David was originally commissioned for the Duomo suggest that it was not placed on the Church because it was ultimately rejected by the judging committee. Historians surmise that it was therefore left unfinished and placed in a workshop storage space. There it allegedly remained until the urgent request came from the Signoria to have the statue placed in the Palazzo della Signoria. At this point, we have documentation that shows the Signoria’s request that a statue of David be finished quickly so that it could be placed — but it referred to “a statue” without further identification, and therefore we do not necessarily know it was this particular sculpture. It also referred to a small amount of money to be given to Donatello for finishing the statue. There is no detail, moreover, as to the work accomplished. All we know is that Donatello was paid 15 florins for the work. This can be compared against the original total of 100 florins that the artist was paid for sculpting the statue. Fifteen per cent of the original commission suggests an appreciable amount of work and yet not onerous; records

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7 This theory was cemented in recent scholarship—for example, Janson and Lányi (1957), Frederick Hartt. *Art and Freedom in Quattrocento Florence.* Institute of Fine Arts, 1964, Hartt (1974). Many scholars cite Janson without further examination, because of an absence of documentation. For a discussion of the Isaiah statue, see Paoletti and Radke (2005), pp. 210–211.


9 Kauffmann and Lányi, as cited in Janson and Lányi (1957), p. 4.
indicate that Donatello and his assistants were able to finish it in a few days.

Documentation also shows, however, that during this time there was a second statue of David commissioned from Donatello. Its subsequent whereabouts are unknown. Reference to another statue relates to a second theory about the marble David argued by scholars more recently, that it was this second statue that became what we know today as the marble David.\textsuperscript{10} It is feasible, for example, that the documentation requesting Donatello to finish a statue for placing in the Palazzo della Signoria was related to this statue. Historians have very little information about this second statue however, save for its existence. Seemingly, it had a single patron and thus if it were the marble David, it could mean that it was conceived from the first for the Signoria; then it would also follow that its symbolism was intended for the setting of the government palace and not the Duomo.

Those scholars who subscribe to the first theory, that a statue commissioned and rejected for the Church façade was Donatello’s marble David, argue that the work requested of the artist was the conversion of the prophet into a statue befitting the Signoria’s wishes. Art historian Horst Janson has been the most expansive in imagining what this work might have entailed, which he argued in his 1957 catalogue, The Sculpture of Donatello. Janson surmised that one of David’s hands had originally held a prophet’s scroll, which in the process of altering the sculpture for the Signoria had been removed.\textsuperscript{11} This explained for Janson the unusual placing of David’s hands and the set of the curling fingers on David’s right hand. He also acknowledged that in this case, however, the head of Goliath must have also been part of the original sculpture because it could not have been encompassed in the small amount of work done to finish the statue for the Signoria.

The theory of a converted church statue has prevailed amongst Renaissance art historians, particularly those who visit the marble as part of a broader study. The currency of this interpretation is possibly because the documentation for the church statue provides more context for historical reasoning. Additionally, it was Janson who argued for the statue’s conversion. Although his catalogue raisonné is now com-

\textsuperscript{10}Olszewski (1997), also Paoletti and Radke (2005), pp. 210–211.
\textsuperscript{11}Janson was expanding on a theory about a scroll first suggested by Lányi, see Janson and Lányi (1957), p. 5.
paratively dated, it remains one of the definitive studies for historians on Donatello’s works—nothing as complete has succeeded it. Consequently, Janson’s opinion carries weight, and this has been amplified with so many other respected historians uncritically accepting his word about the marble David. A closer examination of the iconography of David, however, suggests that a more cautious approach to this particular conclusion is warranted.

The problem is one of iconographical precedent. Janson’s theory of transfiguration relied on the assumption that the marble David had been conceived first for a church commission and then altered for the Signoria. The resultant hybrid figure had referenced David’s status as a prophet by including a scroll, but it had also incorporated the prophet into the youthful form of the victorious David, including Goliath’s head. This was supposedly an invention of Donatello’s. Such a proposition is not viable, however, when considered in light of previous biblical iconography of David. Janson would have known that such a figure lacks precedent; he was conversant with earlier iconography, and as covered elsewhere, he raised the Baroncelli fresco of David as a possible precedent for the marble. His overestimation of the degree to which the statue was novel can be explained by the fact that Janson was at the time much taken with Hans Baron’s theory about the effect of civic humanism on art. This likely persuaded him to consider the statue as something overtly ‘new.’ It is clear that in his analysis, Janson was, as others were at the time, searching for evidence of “the heroic, patriotic aspect of David.”

Baron had appealed to art historians because he specifically featured art in his argument. His theory about civic art had also been in tune with a periodisation with which art historians were very familiar—a transition from Gothic understanding and technique to a Renaissance one. The marble David c.1416 sat at the fulcrum of this

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12“The iconographic novelty of our statue consists of a bearded king with harp or psaltery, and there is reason to believe that this daring idea was conceived by Donatello.” Janson and Lányi (1957), p. 6.

13Janson and Lányi (1957), p. 4.

14Baron characterised this shift in the case of both humanism and art as a “turning away from an indiscriminate interest in an abundance of insignificant details,” and a “delight in what is rational, symmetrical.” Influenced by the need to defend its freedom, it pushed Florence “beyond parochial pursuits.” Florence had “learned to shake off parochialism and to adopt the methods of interregional power politics which the aggressor had introduced.” Hans Baron. *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and*
change. Baron had featured art, however, without ever analysing it, in effect leaving this work for art historians. When he explained his theory about the relationship between civic humanism and art, Baron usually referenced just three architects or artists, casting them as a “holy trinity” of the civic-minded cultural change: these were Brunelleschi, Masaccio, and Donatello. It was art historian Frederick Hartt who explored Baron’s theory further, in an essay written and published in the mid-1960s titled, “Art and Freedom in Quattrocento Florence.” Hartt was a particular friend of Jorst Hanson and it is clear that through the 1950s and 1960s they were both greatly persuaded by Baron’s interpretation of liberty as a theme in artworks early in the fifteenth century, as many historians were at the time. In Janson’s case, it had clearly coloured—or guided depending on one’s choice of words—his interpretation of the marble David.

Driving historians’ conviction that the statue was innovative was the way that it combined Roman symbolism with biblical symbolism in both the inscription and in David’s appearance. Janson, and others after him, assumed that the Roman symbolism was requested by the Signoria to have the statue better fit the theme of civic patriotism. There was, however, a precedent for combining Roman with biblical symbolism in David, and it had long been part of the orthodox and penitential understanding of David and Goliath (see Figure 4.2.1, for example). The focus on Donatello’s artistic innovation has fed into an idea that the political symbolism or ideas expressed in the statue were a new or innovative approach, but it was in fact highly compatible with the traditional application of David. I maintain that this traditional perspective, moreover, was crucial to understanding the political

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15The first generation of Quattrocento artists, “Brunelleschi, Donatello, and Masaccio,” were “roughly coeval” with “Niccoli, Bruni, and Poggio.” These two groups changed the ‘Trecento mind’ “so profoundly indeed that, in the history of Humanism no less than in the history of art, the beginning of the new century coincides with the emergence of the full pattern of the Renaissance.” Baron (1956, revised 1993), p. 3.

16In a book about Donatello published in the 1974, Hartt wound back his views on the marble David, or was at least he was clearly more conscious of a need to justify his claims, likely in response to questions that were subsequently raised about Baron’s thesis. Hartt nevertheless remained faithful not only to his theory about the marble and its conversion, but also to his friend Janson, whom he specifically mentioned and whose catalogue and work he extolled. Hartt (1974).
application of David in Florence.

It might be tempting to see Donatello’s skill or inventiveness as a sufficient explanation for the unconventionality of the iconography that Janson suggested. But however innovative Renaissance artists could be, they were still working outwards from convention and precedent, and always within a recognised ‘language.’ Combining a scroll with Goliath’s head, for example, would have been unduly clumsy. It was also, more tellingly, unnecessary because as previous chapters have demonstrated, contemporary audiences were versed in using one identity of a biblical figure—for example, the youthful David—to call up another identity related to the theology of that figure—for example, the aged prophet—and they would have been expected to draw mental pictures and parallels without such awkward signposting. Readers and viewers were tutored in such associations. The Book of Hours was a prime example of this where David is concerned. Hence, although Janson carried out his analysis of the symbolism of the marble David with his usual care, it is not a compelling argument for a transition from one statue to another, and this seems in hindsight to have been likely influenced by his favouring of Baron’s theory of civic humanism.
If a final nail is needed in the ‘coffin’ of the argument for a converted church statue, it is the fact that the marble *David* was too coherent, too unified in its appearance, to have been achieved as two separate projects. This is a subjective assessment which I advance in this chapter. The marble *David* certainly showed elements of both Gothic and Renaissance technique and appearance, which is accounted for in this period. But it so deftly achieved a balance between complexity and intelligibility that it was likely executed from the outset as a single project. This balance between complexity and intelligibility, and its capacity to tell a particular story about Florentine identity, will become evident shortly when I analyse the statue’s iconography in more detail.

**4.3 David as Libertas**

Without knowing what the *Signoria* requested of the artist for the marble *David*, it has obviously been difficult for scholars to judge its intent or interpretation. In this vacuum, historians have focused their attention on the evidence that most reliably reflected the *Signoria*’s intentions—if it was indeed contemporary with the statue’s early years—which was the inscription. Historians see the inscription as an attempt to appeal to the viewer’s patriotism which had been stirred by recent wars, to evoke the notion of Florentine liberty. As liberator of the ancient city-state of Israel, David might ably become a metaphor for the political freedom of another. A comparison between Israel and Florence may have been a natural comparison for a Florentine viewer because the theme of a lesser power fighting larger and more stronger powers was consistent with how contemporary sources usually characterised Florence in relation to her adversaries.

The idea that the statue was meant to call to mind Florence’s recent struggles with Milan and Naples as a basis for its patriotism was first proposed by the aforementioned Frederick Hartt in the 1960s, and it was directly inspired by Baron’s

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17The first confirmed report of the inscription dates to 1592. Janson and others have speculated that it was added later, due to the classical reference to “gods” rather than “God.” Maria Donato has made a convincing case for the quotation to have been developed early, as part of the *Signoria*’s intent for the statue. Donato (1991). In providing contextual evidence for the quotation this chapter adds to the case for it being original.
Hartt suggested that the *David* was commissioned to symbolise Florentine *libertas*. Since then, historians’ assumption that David and liberty were co-symbols has been maintained. Scholars generally make the connection between David and the *Signoria* through the situation of war, comparing the biblical account with the contemporary needs of defending a city-republic against foreign attempts at subjugation.

There are some clear problems with this theory, however. While *libertas* would have undoubtedly resonated for viewers of the marble *David*, as a primary theme it is unable to explain why David was chosen above other suitable heroes, including Greco-Roman heroes. The fashion for cycles of *uomini famosi* had been established for some decades in Florence before the turn of the century, and indeed, the *Palazzo della Signoria* had such a cycle by the early fifteenth century, with inscriptions authored by Coluccio Salutati. Why was a prefiguration of Christ preferred to Hercules, for example, who was then on the Florentine seal? Historian Maria Donato has argued that a sculpture of Hercules likely already existed at this time in the *Palazzo della Signoria*. Why, then, was David needed at all?

The other problem is that historians’ theory about the statue’s relationship to contemporary war should be supported with some evidence of martial symbolism in the statue. We now know that the previous iconography of David and Goliath contained a great deal of martial symbolism. It frequently incorporated contemporary armour and weapons, for example, and it often staged the contest between the combatants as a contemporary battle. The marble statue nevertheless contains little or no martial symbolism, with the exception being a reference to “fighting” for *patria* in the inscription. It is argued in this chapter that in light of this, the more persuasive explanation is that the “fighting” was a metaphor for virtue—and that along with the sacred-blue background and the image of lilies—it specifically

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18Hartt (1964).
signalled an exhortation to its viewers to “fight for fatherland” by turning towards virtue and away from vice.

This chapter will show that the marble David expressed a popular notion of virtue that came from an iconographical tradition developed for David from the late fifth century onwards, in a Christian-Roman work called the *Psychomachia*. This explained the account of David and Goliath as a martial victory, but crucially, the martial victory was a metaphor for the victory of virtue over vice. The interpretation therefore operated on two levels for the layperson, the theoretical and the practical. On the theoretical level, David and Goliath helped to explain the logic of virtue to the layperson with reference to sacred power and time. David’s success required not only his own efforts but also divine intervention, and it was this partnership—the need for external judgement and approbation—that gave virtue its political and cultural authority. On the pragmatic level, it was intended to demonstrate to laypeople how to emulate virtue in daily life, to become a virtuous self. The conflict was a metaphor for the struggle waged in a Christian body, between reason and unruly instinct.

Equally crucially, when the account of David and Goliath was interpreted in this way, it was defined by its expectation of cooperation between sacred figures and laypeople. It demanded ‘inter-reactive’ participation, meaning that the images mediated between viewer and divine presence. It was, from its inception in the *Psychomachia*, a visual tradition, and in the late medieval period the relationship between visualisation and penitence was developed further, with images increasingly being designed to trigger emotion in the viewer as a basis for reform and virtuous transformation.

The expectation of full and engaged participation merely from viewing such an image meant, moreover, that the notion of virtue presented by this tradition was essentially egalitarian. It placed all viewers on the same plane, demanding of them the same moral requirement of effort, regardless of class or faction. Besides the fact that David and Goliath was always a political tale from the time that it was featured in the *Psychomachia*, this made it good material for the Florentine *polis*, because it helped to shore up the logic of the city-republic while at the same time it purported to give citizens the parameters for political inclusion.
4.4 An Iconographical Analysis

The iconography of the marble David reveals both confluence with, and departures from, the traditional iconography of David and Goliath. Both are telling about the intent for the statue. In sum, signature aspects of traditional iconography that were omitted from the marble statue included:

- no ‘trampling,’ i.e., David was not standing on the body of Goliath (this is noted while making allowances for the limitations of a sculpting commission);

- little or no martial symbols;

- a retained emphasis on victory over Goliath, but with the theme of victory translated into a conspicuously Roman language of fame using the inclusion of an amaranth wreath on David’s head; and

- other Roman language not previously incorporated into the iconography of David, which related to oratory.

Aspects of the marble’s presentation that were notably in agreement with the previous iconography, and that are equally telling for their continuation in the marble David, included:

- the mixing of contemporary and ancient details — creating a temporal ‘soup’ so that periods and cultures intermingled and blurred into one another;

- including the knotted cape, the most recognisable symbol for the virtue of Fortitude in this period (and which was inherited directly from late-medieval virtues and vices iconography);

- retaining of David’s gaze—which in traditional iconography alluded to divine presence—but which in the marble was reversed in direction, which will be explained shortly, which makes it noticeably more secular and is perhaps further support for why it was not ever a church statue; and
• retaining of David’s mantle, which was featured in Florentine Davids painted in the fourteenth century, but which in the marble was changed to create a partial Roman toga or an obvious allusion to a toga.

These confluences and departures were related to a deliberate method, I argue, that derived from the intent to present two versions of David as relevant to one another—the traditional, penitential David, and the Roman rhetor. This will be examined below with further iconographical analysis.

The marble David was dressed in a simple jerkin, which was a costume of a shepherd boy as he was described in the biblical account, but it was also of contemporary Florentine design. The severed head of Goliath lay at his feet, while the two stones that felled Goliath were shown, one embedded in his forehead, and the other still resting in David’s sling. This was common in traditional iconography of David and Goliath, to show several stages of the narrative within one emblematic scene. Additionally, the marble David’s gaze was shown lifted towards a distant point. This was evocative of personifications of Faith in virtue iconography, or depictions of saints with eyes cast upwards to indicate contemplation of the divine. In this sense the stance of David’s head was usually read in his iconography as part of the story—that in realising his ambition of felling Goliath, David was compelled to contemplate proof of divine intervention and power. This was the way that contemporary viewers were expected to interpret David’s victory, which was confirmed in the inscription on the marble statue that explicitly directed the viewer to the theme of divine aid.

The symbolism of the gaze in the iconography of David and Goliath related to the intervention of God and the exercise of divine will in the outcome, underpinning the theoretical aspect of the account about earthly versus divine power. This was typically expressed in penitential images with the gaze, which was confirmed in the head’s direction—the right side being significant in signalling divine presence. This came from knowledge about placement of figures in artworks based on ideas about the ‘right hand of God.’ This placing was consciously emulated by painters.

21 Examples are in Bible picture books, such as the Bible Moralisée, and the Speculum Humane Salvationis, analysed in the previous chapter.
during this period, as depictions of the Last Judgement attest, which always placed ‘the Blessed’ to God’s right side. The ‘right’ gaze was a feature of depictions of David and Goliath through the medieval period. It should be understood as significant, therefore, that the marble David was portrayed looking into the distance with his head inclined towards his left shoulder, as though it was a conventional portrayal reflected in a mirror. Thus while the gaze itself was preserved in the marble David, consistent with the iconography of David and Goliath, it was inverted. This effectively retained its relevance, while releasing David from purely heavenly contemplation, allowing space for more worldly concerns.

Similarly, the sweeping and voluminous mantle that was a feature of the two Florentine images was retained but it was also given an additional function of a toga, formal wear for ancient Roman male citizens and orators. The garment was shown sweeping down to the floor, surrounding the limbs but opening to reveal bare legs and feet, and tucking in or catching at the waist, while it swept around the back, and importantly for evoking the appearance of a Roman orator, it was caught over the left wrist of David’s arm while his hand rested on his left hip. The hands and fingers of David were also unusually mobile and expressive (Figure 4.4.1), as noted previously, a fact that can be explained as an attempt to evoke the orator’s skill or artform, described by Quintilian at length in his Institutes of Oratory. Quintilian takes some time over an orator’s hands and the “art of gesture” in Book XI. Such was the faith in the ability of the hand to speak, that Quintilian saw its movements as a “universal language:”

Do we not use them to demand, promise, summon, dismiss, threaten, supplicate, express aversion or fear, question or deny? Do we not employ them to indicate joy, sorrow, hesitation, confession, penitence, measure,

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Figure 4.4.1: Donatello, c.1412, David (detail), Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

22 A popular work amongst the elite in the Quattrocento; there was a copy, for example, in Piero de‘ Medici’s library. Francis Ames-Lewis. The Library and Manuscripts of Piero di Cosimo de’ Medici. PhD thesis, University of London, 1978, p. 261.
quantity, number and time? Have they not power to excite and prohibit, to express approval, wonder or shame? Do they not take the place of adverbs and pronouns when we point at places and things? In fact, though the peoples and nations of the earth speak a multitude of tongues, they share in common the universal language of the hands.\textsuperscript{23}

Although Quintilian noted that it would be "scarcely possible to describe the variety" of gestures, he attempted to note the ones most commonly used by skilled orators, particularly in argument, and also those that should expressly be avoided. The specificity of gesticulation that Quintilian described was for two purposes: it required not only a precision in forming the hands and moving the limbs to make speaking gestures, but it also called for precision in how these would be coordinated with both the orator’s words and meaning to form a unified whole.\textsuperscript{24} The focus on the physical appearance of an orator had at its core a moral idea, that appearance and substance were linked, and that to be transformative, an idea had to appear to be decorous or seemly. The voice of an orator, his comportment, his gestures, were the physical manifestations of his intellect and spirit. The reason that the appearance of an orator was so scrutinised was that it was believed to relate directly to the substance of his character, and so to the substance of his argument, and hence to the ability of the listener to be moved. The art of oratory was therefore implicitly tied to virtue. It was also by extension tied to governance in a free society, because being ruled was an act of will, and the will was moved in response to good argument or reason.

The symbolism of trampling, which was so clearly significant to medieval versions of David, like the gaze, was similarly foregone in Donatello’s marble \textit{David}. The necessity of Goliath’s head, however, was retained. This can be explained by the need to create a form—neither entirely David nor entirely an orator—that had elements of both figurative types. The reason that this was not a function of converting the


When all these disparate and inventive pieces were brought together, it represented a kind of visual language that invited the viewer to put alongside one another certain distinct but related themes, much in the same way that viewers of Bible picture books had been asked to do. Thus, Fortitude, oratory, ancient Rome, and Florence, all registered as important themes merely by way of how David was comported. By bringing them together, however, the statue additionally emulated the late-medieval way of presenting David as an exhortation to his viewer to pursue virtue, while also building on this with an interpretation of ancient Roman virtue that had been made specific to the context of Florence.

The symbolism of Rome and the citizen was additionally provided in the cut
of David’s hair, styled close to his head, and with use of the laurel preserved for conquering heroes and triumphal occasions.\textsuperscript{25} It is worth noting that this would have offered the viewer not merely a simple comparison—for example, an allusion from one ancient victory to another. Instead, it carried the complex iconographical layering described above and that was achieved elsewhere in the statue’s appearance. The crown, for example, was made of amaranth. Amaranth, a reddish-purplish flower that was a symbol for fame was an apposite choice for David’s feat in killing Goliath because it was used in ancient Rome to celebrate heroes. Amaranth was also a flower used for Christ, moreover, to symbolise eternity. Thus, while the symbolism of the amaranth made David’s connection to the ancient world evident, it also created an allusion to the sacred creation story and its message of salvation. The biblical role for David in exegesis was as a prefiguration of Christ. In the context of his conquering of Goliath, David more specifically prefigured Christ’s sacrifice and its capacity to allow laypeople to conquer the Devil, and more abstractly, of the ability of good to subjugate evil, or of virtue to overcome vice.

Art historian Andrew Butterfield is one of the few historians to previously dispute the dominant interpretation of the marble \textit{David} as being primarily about political liberty. In an article written in 1995, he suggested that it was instead related to a “complex of universally recognized political goods,” which, he noted, included: divine aid, patriotic defense, right of conquest, justice, prosperity, and civic harmony.\textsuperscript{26} Butterfield achieved his argument with a reading of the \textit{Benedictus Dominus} psalm, proposing it as a relevant source overlooked by scholars in reading political images of David. The psalm celebrated, for example, “the special relationship of David with God and the blessings both in war and peace that this covenant brings to David and his people.” It opened with praise to God for his aid in war: “Blessed be the Lord, my strength, who trains my hands for battle and my fingers for war, my mercy and my fortitude, my aid and my deliverer, my shield and he in whom I have hoped.”\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{25}The laurel is worn close to the head and appears on the statue intertwined with David’s hair. See Figure 4.4.3 for detail.

\textsuperscript{26}Butterfield (1995).

\textsuperscript{27}Butterfield (1995), p. 119.
Figure 4.4.3: Donatello, c.1412, David (detail), Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.
As Butterfield explained, the Psalms had traditionally been interpreted primarily in Christological terms. “According to Augustine, for example, Christ was the real subject of the psalter, and the psalm “represented the victory of Christ over the devil and of humility over pride.” Butterfield saw this as ending with Nicholas of Lyra, who had “redirected study of the psalms so that their literal, rather than allegorical, sense became the fundamentum of interpretation. Nicholas had said, moreover, that David was an exemplum who should be imitated by all Christians, especially princes, magistrates and prelates, which can be seen as an explanation for the Signoria’s depiction of David in Florence. Nicholas de Lyra had changed the way that Benedictus Dominus was understood, in Butterfield’s opinion, but this precluded an understanding of David as an especially Florentine symbol, or one that related to the republic.28 Butterfield concluded that “the psalm suggests instead that [David’s] symbolism was, in origin, independent of republicanism; it was rooted in a broadly held interpretation of David and the Bible, not in a uniquely Florentine theory of history and government.”29

Butterfield presented the biblical interpretation of David as mutually exclusive from David’s function in government symbolism. Raising the Benedictus Dominus psalm helped to show the need for a broader interpretation of David in Florence. In spite of that, Butterfield devised it as opposing any argument for a relationship between the figure of David and a “uniquely Florentine theory of history and government,” declining to explore the possible relationship between spiritual and political “goods.” In contrast, as this chapter shows, arguing for David’s importance in traditional exegesis as a moral exemplar does not preclude a political focus, nor does it preclude an attempt by the Signoria to enhance David’s traditional role further with a more specific Florentine reading.30

30Art historian, Luca Gatti, has made this point in respect of related symbolism: “When the spectator gazed at the segni defining Florence’s communal identity, nothing distinguished the lions of civic heraldry from those set in a religious frame. The conflation of meaning thus achieved was certainly convenient, for much of the power was given to the image of the Lion from its close associations and frequent identifications with the supernatural world. Images of the Lion really were the focus of devotional attitudes: one of the Priori most clearly made the point when he compared the Florentine Lion crowning civic edifices to the Cross of churches and bell-towers.” Luca Gatti. Ambiguity and the Fixing of Identity in Early Renaissance Florence. Diogenes, 45

180
The reason that the kind of visual–symbolic blend in the marble *David* described above would have been attractive to its patrons and artist is that the visual language of David in the context of virtue was so well established that it did not need to be made familiar to its audience, nor did its case need to be argued. It was already accepted as a truth. This followed one of the rules or conventions of deliberative rhetoric—that to make an argument palatable or to persuade its audience, it was better to ‘dress’ it in familiar clothes. Not only should it have a familiar appearance, but it should call on an authority that the audience was unlikely to doubt. Biblical imagery, and more specifically the imagery of David and Goliath, achieved this.

The theme of fame in the amaranth wreath was important because, while it enhanced the biblical account and presented a version of David and Goliath that was in keeping with its traditional iconography in certain recognisable ways, it also reinterpreted the figure as an ‘*uomo famoso*,’ in keeping with a popular genre at the time for the decoration of government and private palaces. This was one of two interrelated genres, one literary and the other artistic, both of which were specifically Florentine, and both of which its audience would have therefore been familiar.

The *viri illustri* literary genre was epitomised by Petrarch’s *De Viris Illustribus*, a collection of biographies modelled on the Roman demonstrative tradition that had singled out figures for praise or blame and thus had presented to its reader models to follow or avoid. These accounts typically focussed on a difficult feat that either elicited or displayed certain virtues (or in the case of what to avoid, vices). In the visual tradition, this was interpreted by patrons and artists as painted or sculpted cycles of *uomini famosi* (Figure 4.4.4). In keeping with an emphasis on biography, such images depicted a series of single figures chosen by the patron, and usually shown holding or accompanied by symbols of their deed. This had the effect of telling the story in an image. In this sense, the visual mirrored or imitated the literary, both structured as a series of individual episodes or figures that were chosen for the extent to which they could illuminate a certain virtue or vice.

Both genres took ancient Rome and Greece as their models, but they were also informed and shaped by the medieval tradition of virtues and vices iconography, and

saints iconography, which was structured along similar lines and for similar purposes. The latter usually featured a single figure accompanied by symbols of martyrdom that told their story, and they were often evoked to emphasise or teach a certain virtue or vice.\textsuperscript{31} One such \textit{uomini famosi} cycle we know had been painted for the \textit{Palazzo della Signoria} in the years before the marble \textit{David} was installed. This cycle no longer exists, but there is documentation of Coluccio Salutati in the late 1380s authoring the captions for the figures—another aspect of the convention.\textsuperscript{32} An extant version with which many scholars would be familiar was painted for the Villa Carducci (Figure 4.4.4).

It should be evident from the above discussion that the consistency in Florentine images of David that I described in previous chapters as occurring during the fourteenth century was abandoned to some extent in the marble \textit{David}, or in other cases, it was retained but deliberately altered. This ‘enhancement’ of David did not revolve around his militarisation, as one might expect given scholars’ theory about the relevance of contemporary warfare. Much of the militarisation of David that had been a core of fourteenth-century versions had, in fact, fallen away in the marble’s iconography early in the fifteenth century. This omission was chosen, in my opinion, to provide a sound basis for portraying David as a Roman orator—with no loss to his penitential significance, given that care was taken to retain the significant parts of this tradition. But if so, this raises more questions—why did the \textit{Signoria} think that oratory was suitable to David and Goliath, or, more importantly, why might a contemporary audience have been expected to find the association between oratory and David intelligible? The answer I believe is provided by two different but nonetheless related sources, a poem by the Roman poet Prudentius called \textit{Psychomachia}, and a sermon given in the \textit{Duomo} in 1406 by a Dominican preacher, Giovanni Dominici.

\textsuperscript{31}Historian Francesco Caglioti has suggested that the bronze \textit{David}, for example, was originally displayed in the old Medici palace, and probably in a room with a \textit{uomini famosi} cycle. Francesco Caglioti. \textit{Donatello e i Medici. Storia del David e della Giuditta}. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2 vols., 2000.

4.5 The *Psychomachia*

Aurelius Prudentius Clemens was a Roman writer and poet whose life spanned the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Late in life, he wrote a number of Christian apologist texts, including the *Psychomachia*. The latter became his most famous work because it engendered a highly popular and enduring tradition in Christian iconography of personifying the virtues, presenting them as triumphant over their corresponding vices. This genre was at its peak during the late medieval period, which is evidenced by the numbers of extant manuscripts.\(^{33}\) The *Psychomachia* was set on a classical field of war and it described a series of battles, with each confrontation given close and realistic detail. The battle for a ‘man’s soul’ had been

made into a military campaign: “we must watch in the armour of faithful hearts, and that every part of our body which is in captivity and enslaved to foul desire must be set free by gathering forces at home ... The way of victory is before our eyes if we may mark at close quarters the very features of the virtues and the monsters that close with them in deadly struggle.”\textsuperscript{34} The protagonists were personifications of virtues and vices, each being personified in female form, and the violence and bloodshed was vividly drawn in an epic style.\textsuperscript{35} The action of the poem was driven by the successive battles between each virtue and its opposing vice, and each of the virtue’s victories advanced towards peace, with Concord prevailing in the final battle. The order of the battles were presented as follows:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Fides (Faith) and Veterum Cultura Deorum (Worship of Old Gods),
  \item Pudicitia (Chastity) and Sodomita Libido (Lust of the Sodomite),
  \item Patientia (Patience) and Ira (Anger),
  \item Mens Humilis (Humility) and Superbia (Pride),
  \item Sobrietas (Soberness) and Luxuria (Indulgence),
  \item Operatio (Good Works) and Avaritia (Avarice),
  \item Concordia (Concord) and Discordia (Discord).
\end{itemize}

One can see that the virtues were arranged by what Roman Christians then felt were pressing concerns, with chastity or purity being dominant. The poem idealised Rome and Rome’s past, and the victory of virtue—Christian virtue—was presented as a way to recover the lost glory of Rome. There was therefore a sense of Roman fame, as a once ‘great’ republic in need of recovery. Like Augustine’s \textit{City of God}, the poet presented the ultimate aim of virtue as civic harmony, and Faith was therefore presented as a necessary partner to Concord.

It is worth noting in terms of the choice in Florence to focus on Judith and David that both featured as \textit{exempla} in the \textit{Psychomachia}, and that besides Abraham, who featured in the opening passage, it contained no other biblical figures. David and Judith were therefore effectively emblematic of the entire battle between virtue and vice. David was, moreover, described as “flourishing courage” (\textit{florentes

\textsuperscript{34}Thomson (1949), pp. 277–278; 280–281.
\textsuperscript{35}By the tenth century, manuscripts started illustrating a gendered division, with the virtues depicted as female and the vices male.
animos). It is evocative that the Latin for the phrase used to describe David was florentia, flourishing. We know that this wordplay or overlap—between ‘flourishing,’ and its related ‘fiore’ / ‘fiorenze’—was noticed by Florentines, and was frequently mentioned in their treatises as a need ‘to flourish’ as the basis of the citizenry of their city-republic. It is also evocative that late-medieval illustrations of this scene used expressive hands to show Hope’s speech—they used in other words, orator’s hands (Figure 4.5.1).

![Figure 4.5.1: Psychomachia of Prudentius, c.late-10th century to early-12th century, MS Cotton Cleopatra C VIII, Canterbury, f17, Humilitas, veiled, holds Superbia’s severed head by the hair; Spes (Hope), veiled, standing on the left, upbraids the dead Vice, British Library, London.](image)

David was evoked following the battle between humilità and superbia, which culminates with Pride’s decapitation. In the aftermath of Humility’s victory, Hope immediately upbraids the dead superbia, and in doing so, evokes David as an example of humilità:

Greatness falls; the bubble bursts; swollen pride is flattened. Learn to put away disdain, learn to beware of the pit before your feet, all ye that are overweening. Well known and true is the saying of our Christ that the lowly ascend to high places and the proud are reduced to low degree. We have seen how Goliath, terrible as he was in body and in valour, fell
by a weak hand ... wild man of war as he was, fell to a lad of tender years. That day the lad, in the ripening of his valour, followed me; as his spirit came to its bloom \[florentes animos\].

David was mentioned in the poem a second time as an example to ‘wake the spirit’—when Sanctimonia was trying to rally her fellow virtues who had become distracted by Luxuria from undertaking battle. In rousing the virtues, Sanctimonia says, “Let the renowned David, who never rested from the troubles of war, awake your noble spirits.” Prudentius’ invention was to pick up an idea about a clash between virtue and vice that had been introduced by Tertullian, and expand it into an epic battle that also incorporated David and Judith. This was following a tradition that had already begun in the fourth century, using David as a political and spiritual model.

There were three conceptualisations of battle that were expressed or represented in Prudentius’ *Psychomachia*: 1. a Paulian idea of virtue as visceral warfare; 2. the role of territorial warfare in preserving peace and hence political liberty; and 3. the use of a philosophical dialectic as a clash of oppositions that yielded truth. Prudentius’ idea of virtue was located in all three conceptualisations of battle. While combat formed the main action of Prudentius’ poem, it also did the work of communicating the ideas behind the work. The combat was a rhetorical device, in the sense that it had the capacity to capture and hold attention, to move an audience to heightened emotion and also, potentially, to action.

It can additionally be understood as a rhetorical device in the sense that the dialectical structure of the violence formed the basis of the ideas of the poem. The

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37 Cosimo de’ Medici had a number of texts by Tertullian. Ullman and Stadter (1972).
38 “Beginning in the fourth century, European rulers had regularly used Davidian iconography to express the divine basis of their governments and the electedness of their people.” The Carolingian emperors, for instance, often styled themselves as David, as in the presentation page of the Vivian Bible from c. 845 where the illumination of Charles the Bald is accompanied by a text that refers to him as David. Indeed, David was so important as a model to the French monarchy that the coronation ceremony in France contains the lines, “May he who raised up David and delivered him from Goliath protect the king of France and raise him up like David”. This iconography was still very much alive in the fifteenth century. In addition to the French kings who were still often likened to David, both King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary, and Bartolomeo Colleoni, the Venetian condottiere (imperator in Latin), were compared to David in art and oratory.” Butterfield (1995).
combat in Prudentius’ poem represented in broad outlines a philosophical dialectic, a mode of reasoning that sought truth by way of discussion. The personified abstractions were each other’s conceptual opposite, or alternatively, thesis and antithesis. The point of the ‘clash’ was that it was a battle to the death; what ‘died’ in a dialectic was what was untrue or the least wanted part, and what was left—the victor as it were—was truth and virtue. Hence, each battle and corresponding victory in Prudentius’ poem revealed a ‘truth’ about virtue as an intellectual perspective. The truth revealed by the battle between humility and pride for example, was that “greatness falls;” it established the ultimate folly of power or pre-eminence for its own sake. Each battle, moreover, gave way to a fresh proposition and a new battle, which moved the ‘debate’ towards an ultimate resolution. The resolution was a partnership between Faith and Concord, from which the reader could conclude that spiritual and political strength were mutually dependent or supporting.

Relishing their victory and relaxing after battle, the virtues build a platform on elevated ground to hear a speech by Faith and Concord:

To this projection mounts honest Faith and, with her Concord, sisters sworn in holy alliance in the love of Christ. Then the sacred pair, dear to each other, take their stand together towering above the lofty platform, for their authority is equal; and from their prominent place on the summit of the rising ground they bid the people attend them in their numbers.

We can therefore say that the ultimate objective of debate in the poem was not precisely the righteousness of virtue winning over vice, despite the fact that it governed the action of the poem. The battle between virtue and vice was the method of argument, but its synthesis was the ultimate victory of virtue—peace.

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39 I refer here to “dialectic” as a term of Greek philosophy, and not in its varying and numerable meanings it subsequently assumed. The poet would have been conversant with a number of Greek writers, but the approach to the Psychomachia seems to have been particularly influenced by Tertullian.

40 I borrow the terms “thesis” and “antithesis” (and also, at times, “synthesis”) from Hegel without the import of his theories or of Hegelian philosophy.

and that they knew and quoted Prudentius’ *Psychomachia*. We can also see from
the context of the poem that ‘peace’ was purported to be the outcome of *libertas* and
*libertà*: peace “depends on good will,” for example, “in field and town,” (*libertà*),
while division or discord “at home ... means faltering abroad.” (*libertas*).

What was being debated, therefore, in the *Psychomachia* was a question: what
forms the basis of successful self-government? This was confirmed by Concord’s
speech at the denouement of the poem. Having ascended the platform, Concord
spoke first. Congratulating the virtues on their victory and the consequent protec-
tion of their “holy city,” she proceeds then to warn them of the need to protect their
newly-won peace:

> But the nation’s peace depends on good will between its citizens in field
> and town. Division at home upsets the common weal and difference
> within means faltering abroad. Therefore be on the watch, my soldiers,
> that there be no discordant thought among our sentiments, that no
> foreign faction arise in us from the occasion of hidden quarrels; for a
> divided will creates disorder in our inmost nature, making two parties in
> a heart at variance. Let our understanding be united by love, our life be
> in accord in a single aim; where there is separation there is no strength.
> ... Peace is the fulfilment of a virtue’s work ... it is peace that is the
> perfection of merit.\(^{42}\)

The poem’s conclusion was infused with the poet’s esteem for ancient Rome,
but it also elaborated on a sacred–political theory that sat at the base of the poem’s
purpose. The object of the poet was not only to present Christian virtue as a goal
in its own right but to also, in effect, clinch his argument about its value by pointing
out its utility in supporting self-government.

Peace in Prudentius’ *Psychomachia* was conceptualised as cohesion—the state of
not being divided, of being whole. This state of cohesion was the basis of successful
self-government, and also of dominance abroad. Not only was cohesion a form of
liberty—and this was *libertà* and *libertas*—but it also constructed personal liberty

\(^{42}\text{Thomson (1949), p. 333.}\)
or purity (virtue) as a foundation for political success (republic). Peace therefore worked in the *Psychomachia* on macro and micro levels: on the macro level, ‘peace’ was a descriptor for the act or acts of full political expression, in this context, *libertas* and *libertà*. On the micro level, ‘peace,’ or more rightly unity, was a descriptor for the act or acts of full spiritual expression, in this context, ‘merit.’ The two conceptual levels were connected and interdependent: “for a divided will creates disorder.” And “will” was simultaneously the personal ‘will’ but also the ‘will’ of the people—“Peace is the fulfillment of a virtue’s work ... it is peace that is the perfection of merit.”

The poet confirmed the indispensable partnership between Concord and Faith when Concord referred to a superficial wound that she had received from Discord, who comes sneaking into the group as they return to their camp. Discord was able to land a glancing blow before she is once again subdued. Making a speech shortly after this last victory, Concord refers to her freshly bleeding wound, and when the virtues cry out in distress, Faith says:

Nay, let there be no cry of sorrow in our hour of victory. Concord has been hurt, but Faith defended. Indeed Concord has been saved, and standing by her sister Faith, laughs at her wounds. She is my sole salvation; with her rescue there is nought to cast me down.\(^{43}\)

Prudentius’ poetry, and particularly his *Psychomachia*, has traditionally been underrated by scholars. Initially, this was because the Romantic point of view in the nineteenth century was affronted by the luridness of the violence delivered with such guttural ferocity. The preference for beauty in poetry at the time incurred a blindness to the kinds of nuances described above, and an underestimation of Prudentius’ achievement that lingered well into the twentieth century.\(^{44}\) This has been compounded in Renaissance studies by an underestimation of the influence of Prudentius’ work in Florence, particularly in the fifteenth century. I have not found any reference to a copy of his work in Medici libraries, which perhaps suggests that

\(^{43}\)Thomson (1949), p. 335.

while ancient authors were popular, Prudentius had been superseded by authors such as Petrarch. With this acknowledged, it is nonetheless clear in Quentin Skinner’s survey of late-medieval writers, for example, that Prudentius was highly familiar to most political and humanist thinkers, and that he was often quoted in the context of justifying the basis for self-government. The reliance on Prudentius and more particularly the *Psychomachia* in the context of writing about the foundation of successful city-republics suggests that Prudentius was a set text in *ars rhetorica* lessons over successive generations throughout the fourteenth century. His influence in the *ars rhetorica* beyond this period is therefore also viable.

What must also be taken into account, just as importantly, is the effect of Prudentius’ *Psychomachia* on artists and artworks. The rediscovery of his poem in the late-medieval period and its conversion to an artistic genre during the 10th and 11th centuries had a profound effect on the structuring and symbolism of sacred art, particularly in respect to the theme of virtue and vice. This was initially manifested as a great enthusiasm for illustrated texts of the *Psychomachia*, made into prayer books, which were also often portable like the *Hours*. There are an extraordinary amount of extant texts that testify to their popularity across all classes. By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, this preference had given birth to a virtues and vices iconography structured by opposition. Prudentius’ dialectic was clearly still having effect in Giotto’s work in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, for example, painted in the early years of the fourteenth century, which featured along the side walls of the chapel, a series of virtues and their opposing vices. It was additionally still shaping the composition of Andrea Mantegna’s *Triumph of the Virtues* painted in 1502. The fact of Prudentius’ text being either present or absent in Florentine libraries is only one aspect to judging its relevance and influence to fifteenth-century symbolism.

The above analysis indicates that the *Psychomachia*—and in other words, the inception of virtues and vices iconography—was both political and spiritual in concept and purpose. This was partly why the metaphor of a battlefield on which

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45That noted, further work is needed in the inventories of other private libraries in Florence (e.g., Palla Strozzi) or those of large convent libraries in Florence (Santa Maria Novella, Santa Croce) to see how many copies of Prudentius appear.
one’s country was defended, and the iconography of battle more generally, was so apt—because defence of country was a politically-defining act. It founded liberty—defined not only as an undivided commonwealth, but also as a commonwealth able to dominate in other regions—on the virtue of its citizens.

Prudentius’ *Psychomachia* also demonstrates how violent symbolism, such as fighting but also more specifically killing and bloodshed, worked on several conceptual levels. Crucially, it was not only used for its shock value, or more moderately, its ability to arrest the audience’s attention. The explicit nature of the violence in the poem had a two-fold purpose: it identified the poem as part of an epic genre, which connected it to an ancient idea of fame as an immortalisation of great deeds, and it also provided the basis for a dialectical structure that constructed a theological and political argument about what deserved fame. Any possible ‘shock value’ of the violence in either a contemporary or late-medieval audience was to a large extent in service of this broader context and its objective. Similarly, David’s victory over Goliath in artworks was not intended for something as simple as making a comparison between two wars. The like-for-like comparison was merely a starting point for a much more complex conceptual exercise.

The key lesson, of which fourteenth-century humanists were cognisant, was the relationship between political and spiritual virtues in the context of Rome’s great republic. This was a relationship still in the minds of Florentine commentators at the beginning of the fifteenth century. The *Psychomachia* presented—or even created—three kinds of liberty: domestic (*libertà*), foreign (*libertas*), and internal to the self (*meritatio*). Further, it presented these three kinds of liberty in a causal chain, or more accurately, a causal tree, with *meritatio* forming the base of, and branching out to, both *libertà* and *libertas*. The two more external and public forms of liberty, *libertà* and *libertas*, were placed on equal footing with one another, in that they were considered to be interdependent, while the internal form of liberty, *meritatio*, or what I have also called elsewhere personal liberty, was elevated in importance because it was identified as underpinning the other two. The question is whether, having been part of the tradition of virtues and vices literature, the third form of liberty was in the early-Quattrocento conception of the ideal politician that we see constructed in the marble *David*. This is where Dominici’s sermon is pertinent.
4.6 “FIGHT FOR FATHERLAND” IN A SERMON

Fra Giovanni Dominici is a preacher in which historians have begun to take a greater interest in recent decades. He has been placed within the tradition of civic preaching in Florence, which began with Remigio de’ Girolami in the fourteenth century and which reached its apotheosis in Savonarola at the close of the fifteenth century. Dominici was born in Florence in 1356. Having been educated by the Dominican order at Santa Maria Novella, he preached in a number of places, including Pisa, Lucca, and Venice, at one point moving to Venice. In 1399, he returned to Florence when he was invited by the Signoria to preach in the city. Dominici was popular, which was evidenced by the fact that he preached in Florence’s largest and most significant venues, including both the Santa Maria Novella and the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, the Duomo. He taught theology at the Florentine studio, and became a spiritual guide to prominent Florentine families, including Francesco Datini and Bartolomea degli Alberti. In 1403, Coluccio Salutati who was then Florentine Chancellor, asked the master general of the Dominicans if Giovanni Dominici could remain in Florence for a further five years. Dominici continued preaching and in 1405, established the Monastery of San Domenico in Fiesole, where amongst his pupils was the future Archbishop Antoninus. For Dominici, as well as for the preachers who followed him including Antoninus, there was a causal link between the virtues of Florentine politicians and their ability to govern well.

What concerns us here is a sermon which the friar delivered in the Duomo in 1406, as part of the city’s celebrations to mark the conquering of Pisa. Dominici repeatedly in sections of his sermon used the phrase “fight for your fatherland,”

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or “*pugnare pella patria.*”\(^{49}\) The recent territorial battles or the victory over Pisa were very likely the inspiration, but it is interesting for understanding the context in which the marble *David* would have been read that Dominici gave “fighting” a much broader connotation than merely military engagement, one that combined political and spiritual objectives. Dominici used war as a metaphor for the spiritual battle in which, in his opinion, Florentines were then enjoined. At stake in this battle was not only the spiritual health of Florentines, but also and as importantly, Florentine state health. The path to both spiritual and political health was virtue. I suggest that Dominici’s sermon offers scholars a possible source for the inscription on Donatello’s marble *David.* More generally, it may be useful to historians as a basis for understanding the themes that contemporary Florentines might have discerned in the statue and the statue’s inscription.

Following the fall of Pisa, 1406 was a year in which Florentines would have felt an enhanced confidence in their ability to self-govern, and a surge of patriotic feeling towards their city. The victory had reinforced a sense of ‘being Florentine’ that likely circumvented the smaller groups, neighbourhoods, and factions that usually shaped daily life. The experience of rallying against a territorial rival was a moment to savour for its sense of unity and triumph. It offered a way to liberate the city from its usual criss-crossing binds of daily loyalties—to transcend them, if only momentarily. There were many celebrations held in the city that year that expressed this sense of unity under a triumphant Florentine identity—processions, festivals, and Masses on important occasions that drew large crowds to hear the words of famous preachers.

One such occasion was a sermon delivered on Ash Wednesday by Fra Giovanni Dominici, a day which commenced Lent, and which was a brief period of abstinence intended to give worshippers a time of reflection. The sermon delivered on Ash Wednesday was preached to a large crowd in the *Duomo.* Dominici clearly embraced the occasion as an opportunity to tell Florentines about the condition of their souls, but more importantly for this discussion, how their way of life had shaped and would shape the identity of ‘Florence.’ Dominici introduced the subject of what it was to

\(^{49}\) A manuscript containing forty-seven sermons that Dominici preached in Florence, in *Santa Maria Novella* and *Santa Maria del Fiore* between 1400 and 1406, survives as MS. 1301 in the *Biblioteca Ricardiana* fols. 15r–177r. Parts reprinted in Debby (2002).
be a Florentine, where he first described his male listener’s identity as a triad:

Se se’ huomo, se se’ Christiano, se se’ fiorentino. “Be a man, a Christian, and a Florentine.”

It must have been arresting to hear such an exhortation ring out in the Duomo. The energetic command was intended as a challenge, calculated to “wake the spirit.” The record of the sermon gives the reader a sense of Dominici goading his listener, using alternately an insulting and abrasive tone to arrest attention. The effect of such a gambit would have been amplified because of the mixed audience; on such an occasion there would have been as many female as male listeners; for the Lenten Mass in the Cathedral, virtually ‘all of Florence’ would have been present. By challenging the men in front of other witnesses, perhaps even implying that he was making this challenge on behalf of these other witnesses, Dominici had set the conditions to stimulate a reaction from his audience. He additionally claimed an exalted destiny for his listener if they were prepared to take up his challenge, because he had linked the (sacred) duty of a Christian to the (civic) duty of a Florentine citizen.

Having caught their attention, Dominici pursued the idea of what it was to be “fiorentino:"

Ricordavati il terzo nome, et questo che se’ chiamato fiorentino. Et se non vuol esser hypocrito, guarda l’origine tua, la ’timologia la ensegna. Se tu guardi l’origine tua, tu vedrai che se’ isceso d’alto in basso. O quanto, pensando questo, tu humeleresti! Disceso di romani tanto nobili tanto fioriti in virtu! Se tu sse’ adunque fiorentino fa che tu fiorischa et none ogni cosa sia marcio. Ponti mente ove sono i fiori. Sappi che una della cagioni perch’ebbe nome fironze fu perche questo terreno era copiosissimodì fiori et di gigli. Ove sono le tue operazioni fiorite? Ogni cosa marcio.

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50Ricc. 1301, *Predica* 13, line 165.

51These passages are from Ricc. 1301, *Predica* 13, lines 258-72, printed in Debby (2002), p. 25, as translated in Lesnick (1990), pp. 219–220.
Chi mi vuole uccidere per dire il vero, si il benvenuto! Et mi stto detto che troppo discendo a vituperare i cittadini per dire pure di questi vizi, et che io potrei predicare delle virtù chome de vitii. Io per me di questo mi schuso, che volere predicare delle virtù de fiorentini, io prima non saprei dove m’inchominciare; de’ viti mi pare sapere, tanti mi putono. E però ti dicho: se’ ypocrito, non se’ fiorentino, non fiorischi. Se fossi fiorentino, sai bene se’ tenuto pugnare pella patria et none rubare il comune, non usuraio, non sodomito. Quanto ci arebe a dire! Et quando tu penserai bene, se tu se’ fiorentino, l’onore fai all tua patria, t’uscirà la vana gloria.

Remember your third name and that you are called a Florentine. And if you do not want to be a hypocrite, look at your origins. Etymology teaches it. If you look at your origins, you will see how you have descended from top to bottom. Oh, if you reflect on this, how humbled you are! You whose origins are from the Romans, most noble, most flourishing (fioriti) in virtu! If you are a Florentine, make yourself flourish (fiorischa), so everything will not rot. Notice where the flowers are. And know that one of the reasons that Florence is called fiorenze is because this land was full of flowers and lilies. But where do your deeds flourish (fiorite)? Everything is rotten!

If someone wants to kill me for telling the truth, he is welcome! It has been said that I stoop to abusing the citizens since I preach about their vices and that I could just as easily preach about virtue as vices. If I wanted to preach about the virtue of Florentines, I first would not know where to begin: when it comes to vices, I know many that stink. So I tell you: if you are a hypocrite, you are not a Florentine, you do not flourish. If you were a Florentine, you would fight for your fatherland, you would not rob the commune, be a usurer or a sodomite. How much there is to say! And if you think carefully, if you are a Florentine, bring honour for [to] your fatherland and abandon vainglory.

If the first part of this sermon quoted above were to be expressed or seen in visual terms, it would appear as a tightly wound spiral with “marcio,” or “rotten,” at
its centre. At the entrance to the whorl-shaped labyrinth that Dominici presented was the name, “fiorentino.” Then quickly the listener encountered the concept of “ypocrito,” which served to undermine the validity of the Florentine identity first presented. Immediate momentum was created by the opposition between these two ideas, fiorentino/ypocrito, while the concept of “marcio” was hinted at but not yet revealed. The listener was then additionally presented with the idea of “fiorite,” or “flourishing,” which was raised in the context of Florentine origins (diceso di romani). Urgency was provided by the oscillation between opposites, and in presenting the “flourishing,” or “blossoming,” of Florentines as either a present lack or desperate need. Circling tighter as the preaching proceeded, the concept of blossoming in the sermon built to flowers and then to Florence. A play on words between fiori/fiorenze created not merely a comparison between the words “fiori” and “firenze,” but a conceptual building of “firenze” on and from “fiori:” Florence had been built in a valley formerly blooming with lilies, and it was built from flourishing through glorious action. The city was something beautiful that, like its name, must bloom and prosper. The shadow that would always haunt the bloom, however, was that it must also die and rot, and this is where Dominici finished the passage, with the damning and absolute phrase, ”Ogni cosa marcio,” everything is rotten. The preacher had began by introducing a concept of which the Florentine listeners were inevitably proud, their name, and in a gradually tightening curve he had closed this pride around them until they were trapped by the idea that their name was hollow, and about to collapse with decay.

Dominici then had released his audience momentarily with an extravagant gesture aimed at impressing his listeners. He referred to the fact that he may have put his life in danger by exposing the truth, but that he did not care—Chi mi vuole uccidere per dire il vero, si il benvenuto! Then he returned relentlessly to the theme, this time giving more specificity to the idea of “rot” with an account of the vices of Florentines. He finally arrived at his point with several appeals to his listener to rise to meet the lofty name of “fiorentino.” He presented this as a call to arms; he threw down the gauntlet before his listener with the phrase, “If you were a Florentine, you would fight for your fatherland!” He immediately expanded on this metaphor by identifying some of the biggest obstacles to the virtue of Florentine citizens:
“[If you were a Florentine] ... you would not rob the commune, be a usurer or a sodomite.”

The confrontation between the oppositional forces of virtue and vice in Dominici’s sermon was given a greater sense of haste by a grammatical technique of using at certain key moments the “tu” form of address. To complement his confronting and insulting manner, Dominici caught his listeners’ attention by addressing them not only directly but also informally, in phrases such as, “tu guardi l’origine tua,” and “tu humelierestil!” When Dominici said “look to your origins,” he used the ‘tu’ form. While the incivility gave his words a sense of cruciality, it also claimed intimacy, like a parent’s advice to a child, or a friend’s warning to another friend. There were, moreover, two distinct meanings in the verb “guardare” that complemented one another in the speech’s context: to observe; and to watch over, or to protect. The phrase, “tu guardi l’origine tua,” meant to ‘take heed of,’ or to pay attention. It also clearly implied a warning that something was about to fall or be lost; ‘Attento!’ Dominici was using the “tu” form of address in these phrases, therefore, to highlight vitally important material or ideas. Other effects of this rhetorical tool were that it presented the preacher as prescient, because he was predicting or warning, and it also presented the listener with his own, personal responsibility to take action.

If the intimate and heckling tone of Dominici’s sermon was the rhetorical ‘clothing,’ the series of oppositional pairs that the preacher established under the rubric of “fiorentino” was the ‘body’ of the speech: alto / basso; origine / [presente]; fiorite / marcio; virtù / vizio. Dominici depicted the identity of Florence as being in the grip of straining between such oppositional forces, symbolised most by a tension between Roman origins and the present. Rhetorical opposition signified a battle on two levels. On a personal level, it represented a daily choice between virtue and vice. Above this and on a wider level, it alluded to a tension between the political and cultural destiny of Florence, which was to “blossom” or to otherwise succumb to her much more conflictual and “rotten” reality. Clearly, for Dominici, the collective identity called “Florence” was yielded through this tension between the virtuous actions, or otherwise, of its citizens.

Even though Dominici’s sermon and the marble David were separated by a
number of years, their correlation is suggestive. The source for the phrase “fight for fatherland” that appeared in the marble David’s inscription is presently unknown, but the sermon offers two possibilities. One is that the phrase was commonly used in that period, and as such, it was adopted and used by the preacher to make a specific point about the correlation between purity and politics—in doing so he was reflecting a point long-made by fourteenth-century humanists, some of whom would have educated Dominici. The other related possibility is that the virtuous connotations of the phrase gained its own currency in Florence in the early years of the fifteenth century, and if Dominici used it on more than one occasion, that it was encouraged by Dominici’s interpretation.

Dominici had given the word “patria” a dual meaning and purpose—it was both a spiritual and a geographic homeland, with its sacred and its civic objectives intertwined. His exhortation to “be a man, a Christian, and a Florentine,” was explained as a duty to seek virtue for Florence. Placing David in the government palace had achieved a similar aim. The story of David killing Goliath was the perfect act of both religious and political dedication. David’s fight had the capacity to shame its Florentine audience—in the Bible, David had shamed his older and much stronger compatriots by his courage and purity of conviction, while in a Florentine setting, the image of a boy wiser than his contemporary viewers had the capacity to do the same. This would have also stemmed from the fact that David in his guise as tyrant slayer had always represented penitence. Dominici’s sermon points to the fact that in the early fifteenth century, commentators saw the rise of the professional politician as a threat to Florence as much as they saw it as an asset.52 While stability was welcomed, there would be a need to negotiate the tensions caused by cementing the place of a ruling elite, particularly as it had the potential to undermine the ideal of a republic. An idea of virtue that blended spiritual and civic perspectives offered a way to support but also to circumscribe the political ambitions of the Florentine elite.

52Debby has noted that Dominici “presented an ambivalent attitude toward Florentine civic ideals. On the one hand, he supported such ideals as the active life and Florence’s descent from the Roman republic. On the other hand, he criticised humanist rhetoric and the rise of the professional politician, central values in the civic world of Florence in the opening years of the fifteenth century.” Debby (2002), p. 21.
Identifying a possible source for the phrase “fight for fatherland” in the marble David’s inscription has significant implications for scholars’ understanding of the statue. Dominici’s construction of the idea of “fiorire,” or “blossoming,” and his more specific comments to “look where the flowers are,” directed his listeners to think about the connection between the idea of ‘Florence’ and their daily actions. He presented this as an acute political need. The Signoria placed the marble statue of David in front of a wall painted with an image of lilies, and the lily—a symbol of both the Virgin and of Florence—evoked the idea of “flourishing” in virtue. There is also the fact that Dominici linked the apogee of ancient Rome with an ability to “flourish in virtue.” He highlighted the fame of Rome and its “nobility,” both of which as I’ve noted earlier in this chapter, were evoked by the wreath of amaranth on David’s head. Dominici had characterised Rome and Roman virtues as the origins against which Florentines must measure their political aims. The marble David could thus be said to represent the pattern of excellence to which Dominici directed his male listeners as a political model. The sculpture stood in the path of officials in the course of their daily business. Positioning the statue in such a way surely meant that viewers were expected, as Cicero once described it, to meditate on David’s “pattern of excellence.” Or, to put it in terms that Dominici might have, that David was intended to silently urge each viewer as they passed him: “fa che tu fiorischia!”

4.7 Epideixis

Dominici’s use of oppositions identifies his sermon as being structured by the principles of epideixis, or demonstrative rhetoric. The central technique of demonstrative rhetoric included a series of oppositions; it was performed to allow the audience to be moved to like or dislike examples proposed for praise or blame, and to be persuaded to essentially follow them as models thereafter. The method of demon-

53 How many pictures of high endeavour the great authors of Greece and Rome have drawn for our use, and bequeathed to us, not only for our contemplation, but for our emulation! These I have held ever before my vision throughout my public career, and have guided the workings of my brain and my soul by meditating upon patterns of excellence.” Neville H Watts. Cicero: The Speeches with an English Translation. Loeb Library, 1964, p. 21, cited in Brian Vickers. Epideictic and Epic in the Renaissance. New Literary History, 14(3):497–537, 1983, p. 535.
strative rhetoric was often biography and it was often openly one-sided, in that the perception of good or bad was predetermined before the speech. It related to the present, but it also joined with the past and the future. Dominici referred to his character at one point, and his bravery for speaking the truth, because the persona of the rhetor is important in epideixis. The means of persuasion was necessarily more emotive. The audience was asked to effectively put its faith in the character of the speaker, who in choosing and explaining the model, its presentation, or what was included or omitted, made a statement about ethos.\(^54\)

Because of an early association with the sophists, its effusive expression, and its ability to present each side of a case with equal force, demonstrative rhetoric has earned a conventional reputation of superficiality. Scholars of rhetoric have in more recent decades, however, debunked the idea that demonstrative rhetoric lacked substance or a purpose no higher than entertainment. They have done so by exploring the ways in which demonstrative rhetoric was used to support civic politics and, more specifically, to create or maintain civic identity.\(^55\) Demonstrative discourse was able to reinforce “adherence to certain values (e.g., liberty, charity, hard work),” because it was often able to reinforce a pre-existing “disposition toward action.”\(^56\) We can explore this briefly by using an example of the account of David and Goliath in late-medieval iconography.

Late-medieval images of David and Goliath described the values that readers or viewers were required to see proved in the account. These were broken down systematically in virtue iconography, as Rosemond Tuve has demonstrated, as a virtue, a quality, and an action or example.\(^57\) A case in point is the representation


Figure 4.7.1: Master Honoré de Amiens, c.1300, Somme le Roi, gold leaf, gold ink and tempera on parchment, The Fitzwilliam Museum.
of David and Goliath illustrated in Figure 4.7.1 from the Somme le Roi, in which the page was divided into four, interrelated images. The virtue of prouesce—which can be translated as prouesse and therefore as ‘prowess’ or ‘feat’ appears as a crowned woman in the top-left compartment, standing on a symbolic animal, the bull, and holding an orb encircling a lion. The lion is symbol of Fortitude and thus the relationship between the virtues is evoked. Prouesce is looking towards the figure in the opposite section, which is also sin of paresse (or accidia)—idleness or laziness. This is depicted as a man lying or sleeping in the fields near an idle plough. It will be noted that all the figures are dressed in contemporary clothing to situate the events and their importance in the present. Sitting below paresse is labeur—Labour, or hard work—another man, but he sows seeds in a field. This sits below Labour and thus presents a simple opposition to the sin above the opposite of idleness, which is made clear by the contrast between the activity of the lower quadrant versus the stillness and inactivity of the upper quadrant. But there is also a relationship invited on the diagonal plane, by allowing the eye to run between the virtue of Prowess and the gift of Labour, as one nourishes the other. Lastly, there is David depicted in battle with Goliath. The fight with Goliath was like Samson’s lion—killing was a common example under Fortitude, because it acted as an exempla of both Fortitude and Prowess.

The same applies to the page on which Judith and Holofernes appeared, which is pictured in Figure 4.7.3. On this page, chastée (chasteté or sobrietas)—Chastity—appears as a crowned woman standing on the symbolic animal, the boar, holding an orb which encircles a bird. Next to her appearing as a woman taken with her finery was luxe (luxe or luxuria). Below Luxury appeared the example of Potiphar’s wife, who is shown grasping at Joseph’s mantle and thus demonstrating an action arising out of the sin of Luxury. Finally, Judith was shown decapitating Holofernes in his bedchamber. These “show notable cases of the good or bad actions that come ‘under’ the virtue or vice above ... The luxuriousness of Potiphar’s wife, shown grasping at Joseph’s mantle, demonstrates the vice through a case in point—the nature of example as a figure. Judith killing Holofernes in the tent exemplified the ‘root’ idea of chastity—fidelity, here incorruptible loyalty in service of the true God.”

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58Tuve (1964), (Vol. 27, p. 50).
It is important to note that the quadrant formation of the images would have created conceptual associations that arose out of the viewer’s eyes’ movement across the image. Their eyes would have moved in at least three different directions—up and down, laterally across, and diagonally—and in all cases would have garnered from this movement additional information (see diagram below). The up-and-down movement created an analogical comparison between Chasity and Judith, or between Luxury and Potiphar’s wife. The lateral movement across would have elicited either a comparison between Chasity–Luxury, or between Judith–Potiphar. And finally, a movement across the diagonal plane would evince a more complex comparison between the allegory and the corresponding virtue or vice, so that Holofernes was further equated with Luxury, while Chastity was shown to be what Potiphar’s wife should have aspired to instead of Luxury.

Values were not only connected with the biblical account but with its exposition, hence the phrase “proved in or by the account,” because readers were not merely asked to accept the values presented in such imagery. Rather, the image was a
rhetorical performance in itself, arguing the values’ validity by means of comparison with certain aspects of the account, highlighting or evoking qualities of a virtue or vice or displaying actions arising out of a virtue or vice. For example, the virtue of Fortitude and one of its actions, in this case Labour, were placed next to the killing of Goliath. Owing to this placement, an aspect of the account, which was the size difference between the boy and the seasoned soldier, becomes a basis for drawing attention to David’s expended effort in battling or decapitating the enemy, and thus provides another layer to the understanding of the conceptualisation of effort connoted by the virtues of Fortitude and Prowess. The common knowledge amongst the audience that this battle was not only divinely sanctioned but had also resulted in the prosperity of David’s larger, political and religious community would have added a further layer of understanding and argumentation. Thus, a causal connection was established between intention, action, and outcome in David and Goliath. By means of juxtaposition, this demonstrated a basis for choosing labour and for eschewing laziness.

If the grid method of exposition were to be further analysed using the concept of rhetoric, the matrix might be said to perform a logical function: it invited the eye to move in certain predetermined directions, and from this movement the viewer was invited to draw conclusions about the relationship between the concepts presented. This then became the foundation for further logical deliberation, during which further details not contained in the images (for example, the pre-existing knowledge of a biblical or another ancient account) was brought to bear to build on the concepts and their desired relationship. Thus the visual arrangement was *logos*.

The single most important structuring technique of epideictic or demonstrative rhetoric was opposition, as it was designed to typically uphold something or someone for either praise or blame. The second feature of rhetoric was its sense of time, which Aristotle described as rooted to and concerned uppermost with the present, but which also, as needed, drew comparisons or made references to past and future time. This made it ideal for underpinning ideology. It was also important to how to structure the audience’s (or in the case of a painting or sculpture, the viewer’s) experience. Communications scholar, Thomas Frentz, in discussing the relationship between rhetoric and moral action, has shown how rhetoric can give an
audience an experience in contrast to diurnal time (or what Frentz calls ‘encounter time’). Demonstrative rhetoric has the capacity to allow for past and future to be experienced in the present as “an historical unity:”

When conversations transcend ‘encounter time,’ the participants experience time on the ‘form of life’ level. As its name implies, ‘form of life’ is an historical concept—fusing past and future in the present. When agents experience the temporal holism of a form of life all at once, in the consciousness of the present in an ongoing conversation, they place themselves in a narrative context in which past and potential conversations are experienced as an historical unity emerging in the present—a unity whose evolving direction can be determined in part through cooperative action. By experiencing time in this way, agents are compelled to rediscover two preconditions to moral action: the unity of their individual lives as actors in a dramatic story, and the moral tradition within which the present narrative is being acted out.59

Renaissance historians may recognise what is described above as a form of ‘liminality,’ referring to the middle phase of ethnographer Victor Turner’s theory of ritual. Turner argued that ritual was typically constructed of three phases through which a person would pass: a separation phase; a liminal phase; and a reintegration phase.60 The liminal phase was a fluid state in which the ritual recipient was temporarily released from complying with social norms and strictures. The rituals which typically followed this pattern, Turner argued, were designed to strengthen social bonds and hierarchies, because having experienced the liminal phase, the recipient was reintegrated back into the social structure, enhanced by the ritual experience. Renaissance historians made great use of the concepts of ritual and liminality through the 1970s and 1980s, focussing particularly on the ability of certain social and cultural rituals to enhance social adherence by providing controlled settings in which norms could be transgressed. But it is worth noting that liminality

in terms of Turner’s usage was broader. It put the ritual participant, for example, into a direct experience with *communitas*, which was Turner’s name for the experience of community in its purest form of collectivity and cooperation. It achieved by controlled ritual, in other words, what was also achieved in epideixis, which seeks to give the audience a direct experience of the purest parts of *communitas* as part of its performance, in order to attach the audience all the more securely to its ideals.

The third characteristic of epideixis was the persona of the rhetor, because in epideictic oratory the rhetor had the difficult task of presenting a necessarily one-sided case. At the same time, the rhetor had to achieve credibility without seeming either biased or cynical. This was done, moreover, without recourse to objectivity, as it might have been in deliberative or forensic oratory. A certain subjectivity, or a dependence on the perception of the orator in selecting the *foci* of demonstrative oratory, was intrinsic to the exercise. *Logos* had a role to play in presenting reasons why a person or thing was good or bad, and thus, if the reasons were good enough, to infer that the rhetor was credible, but it was necessarily secondary.

The fourth feature of demonstrative rhetoric may be apparent from the above, and that is that it presented models for its audience to either emulate or to avoid. It therefore sought to teach its audience, or to model that which should be upheld as an ideal. The audience’s reliance on the orator had the capacity to open a ‘liminal space’ between orator and audience: “Our acknowledgement of the epideictic speaker’s ethos is a joining with him, as he has already joined with what is, in order that we too may go to an encounter with Being, to behold that which is excellent in a spirit of loving attention.”

The implication of divine mystery is often a deliberate effect: “One can almost call such a place sacred, for it is the place where the educative and celebratory functions of epideictic take place, the place where the continuing ideology of an orthodoxy is given birth in a new generation and rebirth in those who already dwell within the tradition.”

This function to teach, or more specifically, to establish a model for imitation

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Figure 4.7.3: Master Honoré de Amiens, c.1300, Somme le Roi, gold leaf, gold ink and tempera on parchment, The Fitzwilliam Museum.
or avoidance, should be taken into account in establishing an understanding of how David or Judith worked in Florentine political imagery, for two reasons. The first reason is the ethos—the character of the rhetor, or in the context of political imagery, the character of the patron. The second is the reception by its audience. The very act of seeking to relay a model for adoption or avoidance allowed the patron to present him- or herself as a person of good will (eunoia), good sense (phronesis), and additionally, of good moral character (arete).63 Good sense could be said to be roughly equivalent to the Renaissance understanding of ‘prudence,’ good moral character to ‘fortitude,’ and good will to ‘justice.’ Thus in presenting a model for one’s compatriots to follow or to avoid, one could demonstrate knowledge of ideal citizen behaviour, but also and more impressively, one could at the same time emulate it in an obviously altruistic rather than self-interested manifestation. Choosing where to focus epideictic praise, or in other words, on what or whom the demonstrative spotlight was shone, enhanced the ethos of the patron.

In respect of the reception of teaching or such modelling, the audience was necessarily engaged with deliberating upon the value of what had been chosen for attention, but it was also being moved, by a combination of logos and pathos, to emulate that which was shown to be superior. This purpose is best summed up by Cicero. In his speech in defense of the poet Archias, in a passage that encapsulates the whole function of literature and art in the vita activa, Cicero pays eloquent tribute to the benefit he derived, and passed on, from reading about the deeds of heroes:

Had I not persuaded myself from my youth up, thanks to the moral lessons derived from a wide reading, that nothing is to be greatly sought after in this life save glory and honour, and that in their quest all bodily pains and all dangers of death or exile should be lightly accounted, I should never have borne for the safety of you all the brunt of many a bitter encounter ... All literature, all philosophy, abounds with incentives to noble action, incentives which would be buried in black darkness were the light of the written word not flashed upon them. How many pictures of high endeavour the great authors of Greece and Rome have drawn for

our use, and bequeathed to us, not only for our contemplation, but for our emulation! These I have held ever before my vision throughout my public career, and have guided the workings of my brain and my soul by meditating upon patterns of excellence.64

4.8 Conclusion

This thesis has sought to identify a number of perspectives that are lacking from the understanding of the political image of David in Florence. In this chapter, one of these is demonstrative rhetoric and its role in both spiritual literature and political literature. The context of epideixis explains the accounts of David and Judith, their use in biblical iconography, and their use in Florentine political iconography. It is a common thread that runs through both sacred and political expression, and it also provides an explanation for the jump that David made in Florence from the sacred to the political, more convincingly than any specific contemporary event could. It was in fact pre-made to some degree as a natural fit. The question still remains why it happened at this particular juncture rather than any other, but I believe that the context of penitence, and more specifically Dominici’s sermon, provides an answer. Dominici’s sermon shows that it was not only the relationship with Rome that was increasing in importance during this period, but that this concern had a penitential slant. The imperfection of Florence compared with Rome drove a need for expiation, or reform, in order to reach the same political heights while at the same time avoiding the same mistakes. Penitence was the basis of the motivation for choosing David as a symbol of the Florentine polis.

It is argued that it was not just the account of David that was carried into the political context but also the expectations for that genre of iconography as well. This genre anticipated ethical engagement. It depicted a broad, theoretical landscape in order to engage a layperson. It worked as an exhortation to the viewer, but also as a kind of ‘road map’ to virtue as well. This has important implications for how we understand the image of David to have been read or used in Florence in those early years.

What is striking about the marble David once we are conversant with the iconographical conventions of David and Goliath, is what happens to the theme of victory. Traditionally, this was typically communicated in medieval images with the symbolic use of trampling, which was to show David standing on a part of Goliath’s body. This may have been too difficult to achieve with this marble sculpture, or more likely it was deliberately foregone in favour of creating a specific interpretation of virtue, as I have argued. In either case, the theme of victory was communicated in the marble David not with the use of trampling but with the wreath placed upon his head. This did something significant to the theme of victory which is vital to interpreting the statue accurately; it tipped it towards the theme of fame, or fama. Not only was fama suggested in the wreath itself—worn by conquering heroes to mark and celebrate their feats—but in its particular genus, which was the amaranth bush and flower, it was symbolic of everlasting fame and thus the choice confirmed the statue’s place in the umini famosi collection in the palace’s decoration.65

Most scholars read the marble David as a relatively modest beginning of the political use of David, hemmed in by its Gothic hangover and later ‘ramped up’ by the entrenchment of humanism and, more particularly, the voracious ambition of successive Medici men. This thesis argues, however, that the marble statue—in its conception of a partially-secular David—represented a break from the medieval that was in fact temporary and transitory. By the time that David was adopted by the Medici—and then amplified with the introduction of Judith—the objective of its symbolism in Medici hands was to take it backwards to a safer and more obviously spiritual context. It would be further altered again by the Medici’s love of Petrarch’s Trionfi. This will be explored in the next chapter with the first of two Medici commissions, the bronze David.

65It also retained the sacred connotation of David’s link to Christ, as previously noted. Frederick Hartt has additionally made mention of the fact that “The amaranthine crown is held out in the New Testament as the ultimate reward of the faithful.” Hartt (1964), p. 301.
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The Bronze David

5.1 Introduction

The first known reference to Donatello’s bronze David was by Piero Parenti, who having attended the wedding of Lorenzo de’ Medici and Clarice Orsini in 1469, described what transpired there. He noted that tables were set out in the middle of the courtyard, around “the beautiful column on which stands the bronze David.”\(^1\)

The bronze David was 158cm, but based on Parenti’s description, historians estimate that its base would have been around head-height and therefore the David likely

\(^1\)Delle nozze di Lorenzo de’ Medici con Clarice Orsini nel 1469; informazione di Piero Parenti fiorentino, Florence, 1870, nozze di Florestano ed Elisa dei Conti De Lardarel (edited anonymously; a description of wedding festivities based on the eyewitness account of Cosimo Bartoli, from Strozzi MS. XXV, 574, now MS. II, iv, 324, in the Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence; Alfred Von Reumont. Lorenzo de’ Medici, 2 vols. Leipzig, 1874, cited in Janson and Lányi (1957), p. 77. “There were no pantry tables for the silverware, only tall counters covered by tablecloths in the middle of the courtyard around the beautiful column on which stands the bronze David, ... ” Ames-Lewis has speculated on the column design, see Francis Ames-Lewis. Donatello’s Bronze “David” and the Palazzo Medici Courtyard. Renaissance Studies, 3(3):235–251, 1989.

211
stood between 1.8 and 2.4 meters tall.\(^2\)

The *David* executed by Donatello in bronze offered a lifelike depiction of a young boy, paused in reflection. He was naked save for his hat and sandals, which did not have a clear precedent in the iconography of David and Goliath.\(^3\) His locks were long, curling and touching his shoulders. He wore a shepherd’s hat, and it was loosely strung around its crown with a garland, as if to suggest the addition to the hat of a laurel. In David’s right hand he held Goliath’s sword, while in his left hand he held one of the rocks that he had used to fell Goliath. This statue was therefore relying on the style of biblical iconography that sought to tell stages of the story in one ‘frame’. David’s left hip was tipped inwards and his right hip was correspondingly jutting out to the right, creating a *contrapposto* stance. The movement of the left leg was made realistic and unselfconscious by the fact that it derived from the position of David’s left foot, which rested on the decapitated head of his enemy, while his right foot rested in part on one of the wings projecting out from the top of Goliath’s helmet, on its right side. The other wing was much larger and longer, shooting up from the left side of Goliath’s helmet, and by reason of how David was standing, sweeping along the inside of David’s leg, with the wing tip finishing near David’s groin. This, along with David’s supple and nubile body gave the statue an appearance of sensuality, and possibly pointed to the topic of sex or sexual appetite. Finally, a large victor’s laurel encircled the head of Goliath and the feet of David, and formed the base on which the young victor stood.

There was an inscription reported to have been on its base, which read:

\begin{verbatim}
VICTOR EST QUISQUIS PATRIAM TUETUR FRANGIT IMMANIS
DEUS HOSTIS IRAS EN PUER GRANDEM DOMUIT TIRAMNUM
VINCITE CIVES.
\end{verbatim}

The victor is whoever protects [guards, upholds] the fatherland. An all powerful God crushes the angry enemy. Behold, a boy overcame the


\(^3\)It seems in part inspired by an early precedent of presenting David as a Roman soldier, likely because of his connection to the *Psychomachia*. This depicted David in a short tunic with sandals. An example of this kind of presentation is included in Chapter 4, see Figure 4.2.1.
Figure 5.1.1: Donatello, c.1450s, David, bronze, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.
The theme of the victory had been featured in the earlier, marble David, as I have addressed in the previous chapter. But here it was much less ambiguously brought to the fore by use of symbol and repetition. The lines of the inscription started and ended with “victory:” commencing with a “victor” and finishing with a rousing, “Vincite cives.” The theme of a victory following battle was further underlined in the statue’s iconography by including military equipment—a sword for David, a helmet for Goliath. David was similarly given a laurel for his hat, and made to stand on a large victor’s wreath.

There is a clear similarity between this inscription and the one reported to have been on the marble David. Both featured “fighting for patria,” or in this case, protecting patria. The difference is not usually remarked upon by scholars, but the use of the verb “tueor” above is significant, and should be understood as an indication that the bronze was not designed to merely evoke the marble, but that it was taking its own direction with the interpretation of David. T “tueor” was much more equivocal and affective than the solidity implied in the noun "dimicantibus”—combat, fight—from the inscription on the marble David. The verb "tueor" certainly can mean ‘defend’ or ‘protect,’ and in that sense it was a close cousin to ‘fight,’ but it could also signify ‘to watch’—which could convey in turn either ‘to guard,’ or merely ‘to regard,’ or even, ‘observe.’ T “tueor” could also denote ‘to preserve,’ which could then be further defined as ‘to maintain,’ or more strongly, ‘to support,’ and even more heartfelt still, ‘to uphold.’ Each of these values might have registered and applied to patria, as the sermon of Fra Dominici in the previous chapter demonstrated. Such multivalence signalled to the reader to allow for figurative rather than literal interpretations of words. It was likely intentional as well as intentionally poetic, in

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that it was probably designed to work with the meanings of the statue’s iconography, and in particular its poetic allusions.

5.2 The Scholarship

The bronze *David* has attracted considerable attention from art historians because it was the first, free-standing, nude bronze made since antiquity. There are other circumstances that have promoted its study, including: the statue likely being a Medici commission; the seeming link to the marble *David* established by the similarity between the inscriptions, pointing to the inspiration for the bronze *David* coming from the existence of the marble *David*; and the inferences that can be subsequently drawn from the facts about ‘appropriation,’ or ‘propaganda’ in Medici art. Many assume that the bronze *David* was Cosimo’s commission, but this is largely underpinned by their assumptions about the political utility of the marble *David*, considered alongside what they assume to be Cosimo’s desire to draw a veil over his political dominance.

Patronage and dating of the statue are related questions, with no definitive answers. For the patron, we only have the report of the statue having been there in the *palazzo*’s courtyard, as mentioned, in 1469 for Lorenzo de’ Medici’s wedding. From this scholars have extrapolated backwards and assumed it was from its origin a

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Medici commission. Vasari speculated that it was Cosimo who commissioned it, but this was solely based on the fact of the statue’s presence in the palazzo and nothing more. As Horst Janson has pointed out in his *catalogue raisonné* on Donatello, Vasari’s “trustworthiness here is especially suspect since he confuses the exile of Cosimo with that of Piero di Lorenzo.”⁶ Art historians since Tschudui have dated the *David* to the 1430s, while others, following Kauffmann, believe it commissioned for the newly-constructed palace, thus dating it to the 1440s or 1450s.⁷ Christine Sperling and Pope-Hennessy have argued that the *David* was commissioned late in 1440 or early in 1441, to commemorate the victory of the Battle of Anghiari.⁸

As I noted in Chapter 1, historians generally use an anglicised and singular ‘liberty’ in interpretations of these statues without specifically addressing to which kind of liberty they believe the work was directed, or whether indeed it related to both. For the most part, historians seem to treat libertà and libertas as though they were poles and then gravitate to one more than the other in respect of their analysis.⁹ Scholarship on the marble *David* has suggested that it was about libertas, and I have traced this line of argument from Hans Baron, through art historians Horst Janson and Frederick Hartt, continuing through the work of those that followed. I demonstrated that even when scholars had diverged from the implications of Baron’s thesis they essentially retained the same conclusion for the marble *David*, that it was about liberty, which from the context of their arguments I inferred was being defined as libertas rather than libertà.

While the scholarship on the marble *David* has been relatively uniform in this respect, gravitating to the pole of libertas, the scholarship on the bronze *David* has been split into two camps, pulled either towards libertas or conversely, libertà, as though they were disparate strands of thought. Those arguing for libertas, for example, have come to be treated as the ‘old guard’ because of the association with...

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⁶Janson and Lányi (1957), p. 81.
⁹For a clarification of the difference between libertas and libertà, see footnote 12 on p. 10.
Baron or the conclusions of his thesis. More recent scholarship—it can be noted that there was a wave of studies in the 1990s—saw itself as ‘balancing the ledger’ by refocussing on various themes, including on libertà over libertas. Scholars who placed themselves in this camp do not call it libertà, but rather, internal versus external politics. Both Crum and McHam made the argument that it relates to domestic politics. They argue that the statue was about presenting the Medici as purveyors of libertà when their actions said otherwise. The historians in this camp see themselves as redressing the arguments of Baron and Hartt by reframing the discussion to factional politics. Very similarly with arguments about libertas, however, historians have attempted to relate the statue’s argued theme of libertà to specific political events, moments of factional tension or skirmishes, and thus to date the statue, or to pinpoint its patron, by working backwards from external circumstances of conflict.

The second feature of the scholarship on the bronze David relates to a thesis about the alleged homosexuality of Donatello and the degree to which it affected the iconographical choices of the David. The sensuality of the bronze has created an interpretative dilemma for scholars, and because it had no obvious iconographical precedent, it has proved tantalisingly difficult to resolve. This has forced scholars towards broader explanations with varying degrees of success. One of the earliest and most problematic—almost contemporaneous with Baron’s theory about libertas, interestingly, but not related—was a theory that Donatello wanted to present a sexually-attractive David as an expression of his own desire. This was first suggested by Janson and then taken up by art historian Laurie Schneider (later Schneider Adams) in the 1970s. Schneider noted in 1973, for example, that “The most immediately puzzling quality of the statue is its effeminacy. Why ... should David, the symbol of Florentine liberty and a biblical hero of no little stature, be represented in this way?” The answer to her question Schneider found in the reputed homosexuality of the artist: “The way in which the statue’s effeminacy is openly and defiantly

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11 Crum (1996), and Blake McHam (2001). Dale Kent was also persuaded by this view, see Dale Kent. *Cosimo de’ Medici and the Florentine Renaissance*. Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 281–282.
exhibited indicates that Donatello consciously desired to display David, and indirectly himself, as a homosexual."\(^{13}\) Schneider later elaborated on this theory during the 1990s, at one point using psychological analysis to posit an Oedipal complex for Donatello.\(^{14}\)

Explanations that relate to Donatello’s homosexuality are unconvincing and remain controversial, despite studies like Michael Rocke’s which argued that homosexual practices were widespread.\(^{15}\) Pope-Hennessey has strongly repudiated the homosexual reading of the bronze, for example, as has Fulton and Weller.\(^{16}\) One of the more pragmatic reasons for rejecting the theory of same-sex desire is that the combined height of the statue and the column would have given a very different impression when compared to viewing the statue today. What appears to be, or could be interpreted as appearing to be, effeminate when examined at eye-level would not have had the same connotations when seen from below—the elongation of David’s buttocks, for example, would have been designed to counterbalance the foreshortening that happens when viewed from beneath.\(^{17}\) Similarly, the tilt of the hip that is part of a classically-invented *contrapposto* stance when viewed from below would have been unexceptional, and thus the exaggerated ‘hip-thrust’ that scholars have discussed has been miscalculated or exaggerated to some degree.

The argument about homosexual desire is anachronistic, surprisingly so, given the amount of leeway claimed not only for the artist’s wishes but also the intention to express a non-normative sexuality—surely a latter-day concern that has sprung from a comparatively recent, psychological understanding of sexuality and identity. We can assume that the patron and their audience would have been alive to the implications, and it is therefore implausible that same-sex desire would have been incorporated into a sacred figure without foundation.\(^{18}\)

\(^{13}\) Schneider (1973), p. 214.  
\(^{14}\) Adams (1996).  
\(^{17}\) Weller (2012), p. 54.  
\(^{18}\) This argument has also been made in Weller (2012), and Fulton (1997). The point made in Rocke’s study was that while homosexual desire and behaviour was widespread amongst men, it was not sanctioned. It also came with expectations that it would be abandoned after a certain
Other advocates have been less radical, but the thesis persists. While the suggestion about sexuality might be understood as very much ‘of its moment’ when it was first advanced in the 1950s, it has nonetheless endured in the teeth of the problems noted above largely because of the sensuality of the statue; one can debate the subjectivity of observing nubility in the stance, but one cannot fail to notice the feather travelling up the leg to the groin, which seems to be unambiguously sexual. Thus the sexuality or sensuality demands a context. In struggling to find an explanation for it, some scholars have continued to find the homoerotic explanation tempting.

The stumbling block rarely tackled in theories about the “sexiness,” however, besides the considerable problems noted above, is how it could be reconciled with other political aims that scholars claim for the David, which include protecting Cosimo’s reputation and defusing factional tension, in both cases by proclaiming the Medici as “protectors of Florentine liberty.” Adrian Randolph has recently attempted an argument that bestrides both perspectives, by arguing that the statue was deliberately sexually-alluring but also repressive, as a means of embracing but also denying masculinity, and thus by extension, of embracing but also denying the power of the Medici. It is not a particularly strong argument, and it implies a distinctly modern perspective that leaves one feeling it has much in common with Schneider’s and Janson’s in its implausibility.

It is not evident why an explanation of the bronze need be outlandish or posit a radical break in how sacred art was being employed. There is an explanation of the iconography of the bronze that explains how this statue was a renovation of, but also an elaboration on, the traditional penitential perspective on David. This leads to me to a final point on the scholarship on the bronze David, which is to note an overemphasis in historians’ studies on the secularisation of this David when compared with others in the group of statues. The homosexual desire theory, for example, is a worldly theory—for it to be valid, it assumes that David’s religious content had effectively no value; it would not be possible to incorporate such mate-

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19 Randolph (2002).
rial without the religious value having first been discounted. This does not accord with what we know about contemporary thought because regardless of the context of an antiquarian revival, humanists at that time were trying to reconcile theological and secular perspectives, not alienate them. Andrew Butterfield’s argument that I discussed in the last chapter—which used the *Benedictus Dominus* psalm to posit a devotional meaning for David in Florence—was an attempt to create a counterargument, but he precluded an explanation or meaning about liberty. He argued that themes in the psalm were mutually exclusive with the political interpretation. As I argue in this thesis, however, the political and religious meanings or symbolism were cooperating with one another, and accordingly, each side remains essential to the other in explanations of how statues of David and Judith were treated in Florence.

![Figure 5.2.1: Donatello, c.1450s, *David* (detail).](image)

### 5.3 David as Triumph of Love

My approach to the bronze *David* is based on a simple premise, that the sexualisation was conceived from within the traditional iconography of David, imagery which was, moreover, central to his penitential meaning. Florentines were inventive with their interpretation but they also were staying within the conventions—they were in
conversation with them. I will show in this chapter that this remained true for the bronze despite what appears at first examination to be problematic iconographical choices.

Part of David’s attraction as an exemplar for penitence, to theologians and laypeople alike, was his sinful past and his struggle with lust and temptation. David’s demonstrated capacity for reform is the reason that penitential books like the Book of Hours typically headed the chapter on the Penitential Psalms with an image of David taken from his younger life. I argue that the struggle between vice and virtue was the intended theme of the bronze David, but it was also given a Florentine gloss by being interpreted through Petrarch’s Trionfi, and more specifically, as the Triumph of Love in Petrarch’s poem. In so doing, the statue was elaborating on the conventional and penitential theme of virtue triumphing over vice. Petrarch was a patriotic choice for a Florentine, and one that also highlighted the patron’s classical and cultural tastes and learning. But its themes were also in keeping with the traditional iconography of David, in that the poem was about the pursuit—and ultimate victory—of virtue.

Figure 5.3.1: Francesco di Stefano detto il Pesellino, c.1444, Petrarch’s Triumphs, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.
The evidence for the bronze *David* having been conceived as the Triumph of Love exists in a number of areas that will be covered below. Interestingly, corroboration is offered in the one mystery that has bothered scholars the most about the bronze *David*, which is its apparent sensuality, and more provocatively, the large feather from Goliath’s helmet travelling up David’s leg. The so-called sexualising of David was intended, I believe, to evoke the winged Triumph of Love in Petrarch’s poem, who was described as enslaving souls by tempting them to succumb to their undisciplined instincts. In theological terms, this was described as vice, or in Neoplatonic terms, it was discussed as giving into base instinct over reason. In raising so pointedly the theme of triumph in the statue’s inscription and iconography, the statue was guiding the viewer to Petrarch’s *Trionfi* as an approach to this theme. The viewer would have been reassured of this direction by the nude body of David, which points to a reading as Love. This would have been confirmed by the large feather, because Love appeared in Petrarch’s poem winged. (See, for example, Figure 5.3.1, which comes from a pair of cassoni owned by Piero de’ Medici and Lucrezia Tornabuoni de’ Medici.) The feather was pointed to David’s groin because the Triumph of Love referenced the ruins of lust. In Petrarch’s poem, Love enslaved a soul, and Chastity (virtue) freed it.

Like Donatello’s marble *David*, his bronze *David* represented the triumph of virtue, but this was amplified with reference to Petrarch’s *Trionfi* by using certain iconographical cues, and as I will argue in the next chapter by also including Judith in the adjoining courtyard as a manifestation of Chastity. The matching of David with the *Trionfi* was first done by Petrarch but its introduction into David’s iconography in Florence through the bronze was a particular interpretation contributed by the Medici, and more likely by Piero de’ Medici, because records indicate he was a keen patron of *Trionfi* imagery.\(^{20}\) As the remainder of this chapter will show, this love for the *Trionfi* would endure, and its romance motifs would continue to effect how images of David and Judith would be represented. I will undertake an iconographical analysis to unpack some of this before discussing the popularity of the *Trionfi* in the Medici and elite circles, and the implications of the romantic motifs and, more broadly, the context of domestic imagery for an understanding of the

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\(^{20}\)This will be discussed shortly, but see for example, Ames-Lewis (1978), p. 123, 399.
political uses of David and Judith.

![Figure 5.3.2: Donatello, c.1450s, David (detail).](image)

### 5.4 An Iconographical Analysis

The first question to examine for Donatello’s bronze *David* is the degree to which it was intended to be read within the traditional iconography of David. This can be demonstrated principally in its use of the symbolism of what sources called ‘trampling,’ which was a signature of late-medieval versions of the ‘David Triumphant,’ including in Florence, as I have demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3. Trampling can be described as the action of stepping on one’s enemy as a symbolic gesture which displays full surrender and submission. It also adhered to the moralised high–low positioning in artworks that allowed for an ethical reading—high being occupied by the morally valid, and low by the morally bankrupt.²¹ Trampling was represented by the feet or a foot standing on or resting on the body of the vanquished (Figure 5.3.2), and it appeared typically in virtues and vices iconography, including in statuary. Virtues and vices imagery that showed the vanquishing of a vice with the symbolism of trampling usually also added a weapon in the hand of the virtue, typically a sword or a lance. The weapon was usually pointed towards or shown to

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be piercing the vice. Donatello had David’s left leg achieve most of the ‘trampling’ in the bronze David, with the foot shown stepping on Goliath’s face. The right leg was also involved in this motion, which was shown standing partly behind Goliath’s head, but also on one of the feathers that protruded from his helmet. Significantly for a reading within this tradition, the sword held by David was pointing towards Goliath’s head, and David’s index finger was lifted on the sword to draw the viewer’s attention to this motion (Figure 5.4.1).

Figure 5.4.1: Donatello, c.1450s, David (detail), Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

The evidence that Florentines were still using the symbolism of trampling lies in a Book of Hours produced for an elite family in Florence in 1445 and illustrated by the well-known illuminator, Zanobi Strozzi (Figure 5.4.3). This illumination, which I first revealed in Chapter 2, showed David as a Florentine boy, standing on the decapitated body of Goliath. David was shown holding both the sling and Goliath’s sword in his right hand, still bloodied from the decapitation, while holding Goliath’s head in his left hand. Goliath’s forehead clearly showed the wound where David’s deathblow had landed and there was viscera spilling from Goliath’s severed neck.

224
The scene was a contemporary one, from the clothing of David to the armour of Goliath, to the city sitting beyond the hills in the background. As I demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3, the symbolism of David standing on Goliath had developed in the context of showing his virtue triumphing over Goliath’s vice. The Book of Hours image below demonstrates that this symbolism not only remained current in Florence during the middle of the fifteenth century, but that it was functioning within the iconography of David and Goliath.

The iconography of ‘trampling’ is important for scholars’ understanding of the bronze David. Trampling symbolism alerted the viewer to a theme of victory or virtue’s victory; it was also explicitly penitential, telling the viewer to read the image from within a context of battling one’s lesser instincts. It suggests that political images of David were being conceived within, and functioning to some degree within, a penitential genre. Further evidence of this is found in later penitential images of David, which adopted aspects of the bronze David’s appearance. It is unlikely that this would have happened had the bronze been considered overly secular. See, for example, an image of David made in the 1490s, shown in Figure 5.4.2. This comes from the commencement of the Penitential Psalms in a Book of Hours made in Florence for an unknown elite family, and it clearly shows the influence of both Donatello’s bronze and possibly also Verrocchio’s David. The bronze seems to have the clearest influence in the symbolism of trampling. The illumination emulates the bronze by showing David use his left leg to stand on the face of Goliath. The iconography of this scene has plainly advanced over the century, so that there is a blend of contemporary and classical elements and an increasingly more ornate decorative style. The scene in the valley pictured in the background is of a contemporary city, and Goliath is dressed in contemporary armour, while David is given a treatment that evokes ancient Roman dress. He is also given long, flowing locks as in Donatello’s bronze David.

These two examples of David and Goliath illuminated in a Book of Hours demonstrate three, related points. First, they demonstrate that a contemporary audience had an available context for reading the bronze David from within the penitential genre of David and Goliath. Second, the penitential context was signalled in part
by David’s trampling of Goliath. And third, there was an interaction or interplay between the symbolism of the penitential David and the way that the political David was presented. In fact, there is an argument to suggest that they were being intentionally linked, not least because the penitential connotations of David were helpful in his appeal as a political model, and potentially even vice versa. The significance of a penitential genre is complex, but in broad outlines, it had two objectives. Firstly, its object was the virtue of its viewers; and secondly, it was designed to invite the virtuous transformation of the viewer. Related to the second objective, it was also designed to be experiential and it was, consequently, a necessary support to the vita activa.

As noted above, triumph was signalled in the iconography of the bronze David in a number of ways. We have noted that this included stepping on one’s enemy. Additionally, the theme of triumph was evident in the large victor’s laurel on which David stood. Where and how David was standing was a visual cue that pointed to two traditions at once. David stood not only on Goliath’s head but also on the
feathers protruding from Goliath’s helmet, evoking both the penitential meaning of
virtue triumphing over vice, and also offering Petrarch’s Triumph of Love as another
way to interpret virtue’s victory.

The Triumph of Love was also indicated in the bronze
by the inclusion of a frieze on the front of Goliath’s hel-
met (Figure 5.4.4), which showed a triumphal procession.
This was a “free variant” of an antique sardonyx identi-
fied as a triumph of love, or a triumph of Bacchus and
Ariadne, which eventually became part of the Medici col-
lection.”22 Love was described and often referred to in
the Trionfi as a “tyrant,” which provided another way to
read the phrase in the inscription, “the boy overcame a
great tyrant.” The Triumph of Love represented base in-
stincts in Petrarch’s poem and thus it was indeed a great
“tyrant,” which had enslaved many including David. The
Triumph of Chastity represented reason’s victory over
base instinct, and David had been named in the poem as
achieving such a victory.

Corroboration that a contemporary audience would
have understood the bronze David as a Triumph of Love
comes largely from the body of art produced by elite fam-
ilies during the fifteenth century on the topic of the Tri-
onfi. These were images on cassoni—furniture chests—
that showed each of the triumphs depicted by Petrarch in his poem. Petrarch’s
Triumphus was a popular subject for cassoni; the chests were large and made in
pairs, and therefore provided ample room to depict the full six triumphs contained
in the poem (see, for an example, Figure 5.5.1). It was typical to show the first
three triumphs on one cassone, and the last three on the other other. Historians

22Schneider (1973), p. 214. Schneider identified this in the same article in which she introduced
the argument about Donatello’s homosexuality. Perhaps because she used the frieze as foundation
for her theory of “Platonic love,” its significance to a reading of the statue has tended to be
overlooked or dismissed.
have numerous surviving examples, both still extant on cassoni and, in the case where the paintings were removed and preserved, of Trionfi cycles (examples pictured in Figures 5.4.5, 5.5.2, 5.5.3, and 5.5.4).

![Figure 5.4.4: Donatello, c.1450s, David (detail).](image)

The body of Love in Trionfi imagery was always depicted naked in these images, either as a young or cherubic boy, or as often and in Pesellino’s example below, as an adolescent boy (Figure 5.4.5). Where Love appeared as an adolescent, like the bronze David, he was shown with a contrapposto stance, and large, tall wings (Figure 5.3.1).

5.5 Cassoni and Love of the Trionfi

Cassoni were typically used to store clothes or linen in a married couple’s bedroom. Scholars often use the name ‘wedding chest’ to refer to these items, because it was common for cassoni to be commissioned by a prospective husband for his bride or as part of a bride’s dowry.\(^{23}\) The chests were initially commissioned from a wood

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Figure 5.4.5: Francesco di Stefano detto il Pesellino, c.1444, *Petrarch’s Triumphs*, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.
carver, and then later decorated by a painter. The convention was to use the flat areas on the sides and top for painted imagery, which given the size of the cassoni, allowed for elaborate and detailed scenes. Patrons usually chose patriotic topics, or themes related to romantic love. In the case of the former, it was common for chests to depict large battle scenes or decisive moments in war. These could be quite specific to local circumstances—the conquest of Trebizond by the Ottoman Turks, for example, on the Black Sea in 1461 had resulted in the ousting of the Venetians from Constantinople and the gift of their property to the Florentines (painted by Marco del Buono Giamberti)—see Figure 5.5.1. Other chests displayed ancient accounts of war—a pair of cassoni made for the wedding of Donna Vaggia di Tanai di Francesco di Nerli and Lorenzo di Matteo di Morello in 1472, for example, depicted Camillus Defeating the Gauls, and Horatius Cocles Defending the Bridge against the Etruscans (painted by Jacopo del Sellaio and Biagio d’Antonio). Romantic themes were often classical, for example the Story of Cupid and Psyche, which depicted the marriage of the mortal princess, Psyche, to the god of love, Cupid. Stories were designed to be didactic, and were aimed at reminding the newly married couple of their duties as husband and wife, and the role that their stable and healthy household played in sustaining the city-republic.

The Trionfi described the metamorphosis of the human soul in its progress from earthly passion toward fulfilment in God. Petrarch’s preface stated his objective, which was to point readers towards things either to be followed or to be avoided in
the pursuit of virtue. It was therefore expressly epideictic in nature and function, in accordance with the definition of epideixis discussed in Chapter 4. The transformation in a soul’s development was broken down into dialectical (teleological) stages by Petrarch and modelled on the ancient Roman triumphal processions, which were ceremonies designed to celebrate conquering heroes. The poem described the successive victories of Love, Chastity, Death, Fame, Time, and Eternity, and in a similar manner to Prudentius’ *Psychomachia*, each victory superseded the other, so that it represented the development of a hierarchy. On an architectural level, the *Triöni* could be described as staging Augustine’s teachings: “The triumph of Love is quashed by first the triumph of Chastity and then by that of Death. The triumph of Fame, in turn, seems to be cancelled by the triumph of Time, which nullifies any human glory ... Instead, the cumulative effect of the examples focuses attention on glory restored and celebrated.”

It should be noted that the first two Triumphs of Petrarch’s poem were written first and probably designed to be complete in themselves. At the time of writing the Triumph of Chastity, Petrarch likely had no intention of writing any additional Triumphs. The poem was never assembled as a finished whole in Petrarch’s lifetime. This means that the first two stages, Love and Chastity, “may well be considered as constituting a twofold poem, complete in itself.”

Petrachr commenced Part I of his second Triumph, the Triumph of Chastity, with a battle between Chastity and Love, and he described a group of Virtues coming to Chastity’s aid, along with many illustrious women who follow in her wake. The battle between Love and Chastity forms the centrepiece of the poem because it generates the soul’s journey towards heaven. The idea of battle between the figures clearly took as its model the battle between the virtues and vices from Prudentius’ *Psychomachia*, although it was not described in anything like the visceral detail of the *Psychomachia*. Instead, the *viri illustri* become a metaphor for the force of will needed to overcome vice, and the triumph of Chastity becomes a signature of the entire struggle. This gives the theme of battle in Petrarch’s *Triöni* a courtly air:

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24 F. Finotti, “The Poem of Memory (*Triöphii*),” in Kirkham and Maggi (2009), pp. 63 – 84 (pp. 73 - 4).
Chastity, That kindles pure desires within the heart, Fit for patrician, not plebeian, folk. There the fair victress spread her glorious spoils. And there she left the crown that she had won, The sacred laurel crown of victory.  

Falling in line with what Prudentius had accomplished in his poem, Petrarch similarly singled out David and Judith out as moral ideals. This was done several times in the *Trionfi*. David was mentioned both in the Triumph of Love and in the Triumph of Chastity. He was counted first amongst those enslaved by Love, as was Holofernes:

See then how love in evil cruelty Overcame David, leading him to a sin. He was to weep for in a dark retreat. See how the cloud of love likewise obscures. The clear fame of the wisest of his sons, Leading him far astray from the Lord above ... There too is Holofernes, overcome, In spite of swords and lances, by the words and the cheeks of a widow, and by love and sleep. And see her then, as with her serving-maid she bears on her return the dreadful head. In haste, at midnight, giving thanks to God.

David was then mentioned twice again amongst those freed from Love’s binds by Chastity:

Sudden as David’s hand the giant sped ... so dazed Lay the Philistine giant from whose might All Israel had fled, when he was struck By the first stone slung by the Hebrew boy ...

Judith was mentioned twice in respect of the Triumph of Chastity, first as “the Hebrew Judith, wise and chaste and strong,” and then in the context of slaying Holofernes: “Judith chaste and fair, but void of dread, Who the hot blood of Holofernes shed.” She was named again in the Triumph of Fame: “Among the

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26 *Trionfo della Pudicitia*, (I).
27 *Trionfo d’Amore*, (III).
28 *Trionfo della Pudicitia*, (I).
29 *Trionfo della Pudicitia*, (I).
Figure 5.5.2: Domenico di Zanobi, c. 1465, Petrarch’s Triumphs: Triumphs of Love, Chastity, and Death.
Figure 5.5.3: Domenico di Michelino, c.1442, Petrarch’s Triumphs: Triumphs of Love, Chastity, and Death.
names that I must disregard Shall not be that of Judith, widow brave, Who reft her foolish lover of his head."

The concept of triumph in the Trionfi worked on two levels, being literal and figurative. The literal was the ability of viri illustri listed by Petrarch to conquer their enemy or to perform their feats. This related to historical accounts; the sources for Petrarch’s viri illustri who followed in the train of Love, Chastity, and Fame, came from Roman, Greek, and biblical sources. Triumph also clearly worked on a figurative level. In the case of Goliath and Holofernes, for example, the victory symbolised a victory over the vices of superbia and luxuria, and therefore it represented the more general victory of virtue over vice. Martial victory here denoted the ability of each of the named illustri to make a greater impact through their deeds. The other way that the theme of triumph worked was as an overarching structural order that drove the narrative’s momentum. Each of the lead-concepts of the Triumphs—I say concepts because only one, Chastity, was a virtue—was overcome or controlled by another. The structure provided the impetus from both a moral but also from a narrative perspective.

The fact that Petrarch drew his viri illustri from a wide range of ancient sources for the purposes of drawing attention to their fame affected how time was represented in the poem. Roman figures were focussed upon most heavily in the Triumph of Fame, having been derived from revered pagan authors and following in their footsteps in singling out those whom they saw as heroes and heroines during that period. The Triumph of Fame, however, was superseded by the Triumph of Eternity in the order of the stages in the poem. Thus the poem reconciles Fame with Christian time, which included the expectation of resurrection in the afterlife as the greater reward. While the earlier Triumphs of Love, Chastity, and Fame, were full of the names of historical illustri, moreover, the Triumph of Eternity was devoid of personalities, even biblical or local ones. It was as though the Last Judgement could not be preempted or predicted; the decision was still unfolding.

There was a tension that Petrarch was therefore trying to reconcile in the Trionfi poem, between the cultural longevity of the pagan figures that he presented for his

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30 Trionfo della Fama, (II).
Figure 5.5.4: Follower of Mantegna, c.1460s, Petrarch's Triumphs: Triumphs of Fame, Time, and Eternity (Judith with the head of Holofernes appears in the foreground of the Triumph of Fame), Denver Art Museum.
reader, and the Christian belief that all pales to nothing before divine power. Both perspectives defined permanence as ethical, in that fame was based on good or bad action. The poem did not, however, free itself from the intrinsic contradictions of these two time perspectives of Fame and Eternity, one pagan and the other Christian. This can be seen in the way that Petrarch’s poem undercuts its own progressive character: first, by presenting the triumph of Fame as a whole in and of itself; and second, by creating a circularity in which certain characters who were defeated in one part of the poem were resurrected in another part; and third, by showing the heroes only triumphing, never defeated. “All these elements tend to lend the Trionfi a memorial and circular, rather than linear, structure.”31 This lack of linearity would later have an effect on how virtue was represented in Florence because the Trionfi’s themes and symbolism were incorporated into political images of David and Judith through Donatello’s bronzes.

The appeal of the Trionfi was likely founded on what we would now call its ‘intertextuality’—its ability to engage with other well-known texts and motifs—and “its imitative strategy or strategies.”32 Piero de Medici was extremely fond of the text, which is attested to in his patronage of manuscripts and artworks that related to the Trionfi. In 1444, for example, for his impending marriage to Lucrezia de’ Tornabuoni in 1445, he commissioned a pair of cassoni, on which he had painted the six triumphs described by Petrarch (Figures 5.4.5 and 5.3.1). He also commissioned several illustrated manuscripts. We still have a surviving letter between patron and artist about one of these manuscripts of the Trionfi being produced in 1441. The artist had written to consult Piero on the technical question of using powdered gold in the image that he was painting of the Triumph of Fame. This, it should be noted, is an indication of how much Piero was willing to spend on the manuscript and how beautiful he wanted it to be. The artist, Matteo de’ Pasti, wrote that his depiction of the Triumph of Fame would include four elephants drawing Fame’s chariot.

31Finotti in Kirkham and Maggi (2009), p. 76.
32Amilcare A. Iannucci, “Petrarch’s Intertextual Strategies in the Triumphs,” in Konrad Eisenbichler and Amilcare A Iannucci. Petrarch’s Triumphs, Allegory and Spectacle. Dovehouse, 1990, pp. 3 - 10. Piero de’ Medici generally had a great interest in history, as his library indicates, and more particularly classical history. He very likely enjoyed the way that Petrarch interwove ancient stories with a Florentine perspective. Regarding historical texts in Piero’s library, see Ames-Lewis (1978), pp. 111–122.
elephants were as Petrarch had described them. Given the timing and the fact that Matteo was a manuscript illuminator, it is likely that this decorated manuscript was one of the first commissioned by Piero in forming his library.\textsuperscript{33} We also know that Piero commissioned a desco da parto that was illustrated with the Triumph of Fame (Figure 5.5.5). Deschi da parto were so-called because they were typically made to celebrate the birth of a child, and Piero had commissioned this tray to commemorate the occasion of the birth of his eldest son, Lorenzo.\textsuperscript{34}

\textbf{Figure 5.5.5:} Giovanni di ser Giovanni Guidi, c.1449, \textit{The Triumph of Fame}; (reverse) impresa of the Medici Family and arms of the Medici and Tornabuoni Families, tempera, silver, and gold on wood, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.


5.6 Exile and the Language of Selflessness

Cosimo de’ Medici was living in exile in Venice in mid-November 1434, having been charged with sedition. He had escaped imprisonment in Florence and had temporarily lived in Padua before settling in Venice with a small circle of family and friends. A group of Paduan dignitaries were visiting and lamenting with Cosimo about his exile, and Francesco d’Antonio de’ Medici remembered at the time Cosimo’s response. He had told them: “that he has no enemies nor has he ever wished any man ill, and that he and all his have always defended the interests of their native city in every possible way, and now if it would set the city to rights, he would gladly remain not simply in Padua, but at the ends of the earth until the day he dies.”

The sentiment that to “set [his] city to rights, he would gladly remain ... at the ends of the earth until the day he dies,” was one which Cosimo by all appearances had arrived at gradually. Initially he had entertained hopes of a faster shift in the political climate and of sending at least some of his family home to Florence. He had eventually resigned himself to a more patient method, and had concluded that his return to Florence would be best achieved by demonstrating loyalty to the Signoria. Francesco de’ Medici, Cosimo’s cousin, had noted in a letter to his father that “when Cosimo first arrived here ... I got the impression that he intended that his young Giovanni and I should return to Florence, and Piero too, when he was better. But then later it began to seem wiser to think it over.” Earlier that year in January, Cosimo had quashed a conspiracy designed by his kinsman Mari de’ Medici, who had proposed that he force his return to Florence with the aid of the Duke of Milan. Cosimo subsequently denounced Mari to Florentine authorities, saying at the time that he “had no wish to return by any other means than that by which he had left,” by which he meant at the Signoria’s behest.

Cosimo’s total exile lasted less than a year, and although after his return to Florence he continued his political machinations, he seems to have also learnt a lesson about the appearance of selflessness. Henceforth, he increasingly strived to


be known as a man with only one aim, to aid and support his city-republic. Cosimo would naturally continue to have his detractors and enemies, but his friends and those who eulogised him did so in the terms in which Cosimo described himself to the Paduans. Contemporary historian Giovanni Cavalcanti for example, in his *Istorie Fiorentine*, described Cosimo as a man who “always sought to put the interest of the Commune above everything else.” He observed that Cosimo “used to say: Nature teaches us that for the sake of preserving the whole, the part must consider itself of no importance.”37 Tommaso Maffei, a Florentine Augustinian who wrote a defence of the magnificence of Cosimo’s palazzo in 1456-57, characterised the grandeur of the new palace as selfless: “And in his house he has not thought about what Cosimo wanted but what was consistent with such a great city as Florence.”38

For Cosimo and his patrician contemporaries, the act of building was seen as an important duty, attached to civic identity as well as to the patriarchal notion of provider. Partaking in this activity could greatly augment one’s personal and family honour. When done right, *parenti, vicini* and *amici* would have felt “embraced and uplifted by a show of magnificence,” with which they too could be identified. But it was not enough in terms of image that Cosimo made a *palazzo* that was “a worthy expression” of the “highest ideal of the Roman, Ciceronian and Florentine republican citizen’s obligation.”39 The understanding of honour placed the bar high; it demanded a corresponding degree of humility as well.

5.7 **SAN MARCO, AND THE *HUMILIATIO* OF A STATESMAN**

In the San Marco altarpiece, which had been painted by Fra Angelico in the late 1430s, Saint Cosmas was depicted genuflecting before the Virgin, using a gesture that would ordinarily signify Marian humility (Figure 5.7.1). The Medici family’s veneration of the Virgin was well known through their patronage during the fifteenth century. One example is the altar of the Madonna in the church of SS. Annunziata, a

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powerful shrine in Florence. Piero de’ Medici commissioned Michelozzo in the 1460s to build a tabernacle to house the revered image, and made arrangements to ensure continual devotion to the Virgin, including a yearly procession on the Annunciation feast day. Later, Lorenzo would continue this Medicean practice, planning a forum all’antica in the area in front of the church. The San Marco altarpiece was done shortly after Cosimo had returned from exile and while its political significance has been referred to before by scholars, I argue that it is a better indication than the bronze David of Cosimo’s thinking about humility and selflessness as it related to city-republic.

![San Marco Altarpiece](image-url)

**Figure 5.7.1:** Fra Angelico, c.1438–40, San Marco altarpiece, tempera on wood, *Museo di San Marco*, Florence.

The San Marco altarpiece was commissioned for and placed in a monastic setting, so it follows that its imagery was geared towards seclusion and sacred devotion. Its patron would have expected, for example, that in daily practice the altarpiece
would not have received wide viewing. Likewise he would have anticipated that it had little chance to prevail upon ‘public’ opinion, with the obvious and perhaps significant exception of feast days when this sort of venue would have opened its doors to a wider attendance. It is important to acknowledge, in other words, that the audience for the San Marco altarpiece was limited and it was also spiritually-minded. The Medici family’s association with the Dominicans, however, makes the San Marco site relevant to Florentine politics, not least because Cosimo funded much of its architecture and art, and oversaw the establishment of its library as a continuing project. Additionally, Dominican preachers were highly influential contemporary speakers in Florence throughout the fifteenth century, from Fra Dominici examined in Chapter 4, to his pupil, the future Archbishop Antoninus, to Savonarola. They frequently incorporated into their sermons comments that were pointedly directed towards Florentine politicians or politics. It is therefore unrealistic to suggest that because the audience was spiritual, the painting did not have political relevance. It is clear from contemporary comments that Cosimo’s patronage was a source of political capital. Being known to have funded a building or a painting that displayed great beauty or skill, one that would attract God’s approval and which, in adding to the reputation of Florence for great works, accrued further honour to the city, was the source of such capital. It might also be said that in seeking to influence the spiritual audience at San Marco, he was influencing some of the city’s more influential orators at their very source.

The gesture with which we might hypothesise that Cosimo wanted to be associated in the San Marco painting—in the guise of his patron Saint Cosmas—is one of his arms crossing and symmetrically resting across his chest. This was a gesture usually associated with depictions of the Virgin in the Annunciation, as for example in the earlier painting by Fra Angelico. This gesture was accompanied in the San

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41Cosimo had his patron saint, and the patron saints of his sons, represented in the painting. Most art historians agree, as Terry-Fritsch recently observed, that “the Medici saints were clearly legible proxies for Cosimo and the other members of the Medici family.” Terry-Fritsch (2012), p. 258.
Marco altarpiece by a slight bowing of the head and the face stilled in supplication. It is evident that the painter used certain techniques of arrangement to further underline the connection between Cosimo and the Virgin. Saint Cosmas’ head was tilted in a specular reflection of the Virgin’s: she held her head at an angle that directly inverted the angle of Cosmas’ head (shown in Figure 5.7.2). This evoked not only an association between the figures but between the respective states of mind. Their heads also appeared along a diagonal plane, which further joined the two.

![Figure 5.7.2: Fra Angelico, c.1438–40, San Marco altarpiece (detail showing symmetry), Museo di San Marco, Florence.](image_url)

There is consequently a sense in the San Marco altarpiece that Cosimo wanted

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to evoke a relationship not only with the Virgin, but also with her mental state and, more specifically, her humility in the Annunciation. This is given further credence by a ceiling of blue with gold stars, which was linked to both Cosimo and the Virgin Annunciata. A ceiling pictured with an intensely blue sky and studded with gold stars was part of the iconography of the Virgin Mary, appearing with her in many contemporary images; it is in Lorenzo Monaco’s Coronation of the Virgin, for example, commissioned in 1414 for the main altar of Santa Maria degli Angeli. Just such a ceiling also appeared in a poem written in 1458 to eulogise the Medici. The anonymous poet was describing what he had seen in Cosimo’s new palazzo, remembering that it was splendid “beyond description: There’s a ceiling such that to me it seems a sky of stars, / so decorated with blue, silver and gold / that I couldn’t tell of it with these verses.” The poet’s incapacity to enunciate what he observed was rhetorical flourish, and it compares to another, coincidently made by a preacher describing the Annunciation to his listeners: “What tongue could ever describe, indeed, what mind could contemplate the movement and style with which she set on the ground her holy knees?” The words were those of popular Franciscan preacher, Fra Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce, who travelled and preached in many cities during the 1440s and 1450s, including Florence.

Fra Roberto had distinguished three principal mysteries in the Annunciation. The third mystery, the angelic colloquy, suggests that the audience of the San Marco altarpiece would have read Saint Cosmas’s humble gesture as submissive, and an association with Cosimo as the same, which signalled the virtue of humility, or humiliatio. This is because Fra Roberto described Mary adopting precisely this gesture in the Annunciation, in order to express her yielding to God’s plan. But more interesting for a political reading, is that humiliatio was not a terminal or end state. It was transitory; it signalled a stage before another spiritual state, which was merit, or meritatio.


As Fra Roberto described it, the Virgin Mary passed through five cognitive states during the Annunciation: *conturbatio* (disquiet); *cogitatio* (reflection); *interrogatio* (inquiry); *humiliatio* (submission); and finally, *meritatio* (merit). The fourth condition, *humiliatio*, emphasised Mary’s obedience:

Lowering her head she spoke: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord.” She did not say “Lady”; she did not say “Queen”. Oh profound humility! oh [sic] extraordinary gentleness! “Behold”, she said, “the slave and servant of my Lord.” And then lifting her eyes to heaven, and bringing up her hands with her arms in the form of a cross, she ended as God, the Angels, and the Holy Fathers desired: “Be it unto me according to thy word.”

The words, ‘behold the handmaid of the Lord,’ and ‘be it unto me according to thy word,’ were also painted into Fra Angelico’s richest depiction of the Annunciation, accompanied by the Virgin’s arms making a gesture of a cross that was described by Fra Roberto. The depiction of Marian humility that comes from such paintings of the Annunciation—notably those that show her with her arms crossed—can therefore be characterised as emphasising Mary’s compliance with God’s will, encapsulated in the phrase, “Be it unto me according to thy word.”

Cosimo’s purpose in mirroring a gesture that audiences would have read as the state of *humiliatio* might have been to counterbalance the reality of his political dominance. What complicates such a suggestion, however, is the link with the Annunciation, and more particularly, its meaning from within the Annunciation. First, Fra Roberto’s sermon demonstrates that this signified total surrender. This was not an appearance of surrender; it was an expression of genuine and complete capitulation. From a contemporary religious perspective, such a position could not be feigned, which is a problem for interpreting the gesture as ‘propaganda,’ at least in the sense of projecting a disingenuous image. The prevailing view amongst historians is that the San Marco altarpiece was a form of political expression, but

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45 Fra Roberto as quoted here is take from Baxandall (1972), pp. 51–55. Baxandall argues that Fra Angelico’s paintings of the Annunciation were representative of *humiliatio*. 
in this case, it must also be able to incorporate a notion of religious authenticity. This would include the innate intellectual limits that come with such a notion of authenticity. Second, and perhaps more importantly for my argument that religious and political legitimacy were meant to interrelate, *humiliatio* was assumed to be a required state before transition to *meritatio*. The sermon suggests, therefore, that viewer of the San Marco altarpiece would have read Cosimo’s gesture not only as submission, but as the state prior to merit. Interestingly, these were also rhetorical states, or states of mind through which an audience of rhetorical performance were meant to pass in pursuit of the truth. It demonstrates that Cosimo was displaying his engagement with virtue as continuing in the present, happening in real time, rather than as something already completed.

While the knowledge amongst locals that Cosimo had commissioned the altarpiece would have enhanced the patron’s prestige, it remains an open question whether the nature of the image—that is to say the gesture of *humiliatio*—was widely discussed. It is preferable in these circumstances to retain a working assumption that the San Marco altarpiece was a genuine spiritual endeavour on the part of its patron, but to additionally ask what political activity or political ex-
pression was encompassed by conventional supplication. The question posed by *humiliatio* in the San Marco altarpiece, for example, is whether it can reveal to historians something about the relationship between spiritual and political expression in this period. Tellingly, one did not randomly enter or leave *humiliatio*. It was not so much a fixed state as an experience of passage or metamorphosis—or what we might have once called, when using ritual theory, ‘liminality.’ *Humiliatio* was a progression out of *interrogatio*—inquiry, and it was experienced before one entered *meritatio*—merit. Hence Cosimo was depicted not merely humble, but in the condition of moving between two other, relevant states. He did not claim merit for himself in this painting, but rather an attempt to pursue merit.

There was also meaning in the gaze of St-Cosmas-as-Cosimo directly finding the viewer’s gaze. This was a technique typically used in sacred paintings to guide the viewer’s attention towards significant themes or material in the tableau. Here, there was a definite expression of solidarity being communicated amongst devotees as fellow-sinners. The sad expression on Cosimo’s face seems to impart a foreboding of the Crucifixion that sits below him on the floor on which he kneels, and towards which his body was angled. This was underlined by his position on the floor, which aligned him with his fellow supplicants viewing the painting, and by the fact that he looked directly at them. All this served to underline the devotional equality between subject and viewer, based on supplication. There is an analogy between the sacred mindsets described above and those assumed during rhetorical performance, which will be explained further in the final sections of the chapter.

### 5.8 Palmieri’s *On Civic Life*, An Alternative ‘Propaganda’ Model

Matteo Palmieri’s *On Civic Life* presents a display of political and social authority performed as a philosophical dialogue. It explicitly blends political with ethical action, which makes it an ideal source for examining how the rhetoric in political expression and spiritual endeavour might have supplemented and supported one another. *On Civic Life* was designed, as Palmieri put it, to offer “advice on what steps
a person must take in civil life to prepare for worthy deeds and virtuous actions.”

Dedicated to Alessandro degli Alessandri, it was a treatise on how Florentine citizens should comport themselves in pursuit of political leadership. Palmieri wrote it between 1431 and 1438, during and after a tumultuous period of factional infighting in Florence, which amongst other things had led to the Medici exile. Cosimo, Palmieri’s friend and supporter, returned from his exile during this time, chastened by the need to demonstrate a commitment to the Florentine state.

*On Civic Life* was composed as a symposium, and set in a villa outside Florence during the plague crisis of 1430. Agnolo Pandolfini, and two youths, Francesco Sacchetti and Luigi Guicciardini, were gathered together for a discussion to help pass the time during their self-imposed isolation. The ensuing dialogue Palmieri arranged in four books. In these, the narrator Pandolfini postulated at length about how to live well in the urban society of their day, and the youths offered questions in reply. Palmieri placed this quest within a larger one, which was the struggle between virtue and vice, or as he put it, between reason and worldly desires:

Those who follow their desires, resist obeying the yoke of reason and are immoderate and devoted to worldly pleasures will not find the lessons of this book useful. But those who seek to restrain their desires and make them obedient to reason under the mind’s watchful eye will be certain to find abundant fruit in our precepts and much that will aid their good intentions.

Human nature was inherently divided for Palmieri between the rational and the irrational, between the mind and the body, and between celestial power and sensual power. The best possible relationship between these antinomies was one of subjugation; the mind must subjugate the body, making it “obedient” to “true” understanding:

The mind has two parts, one rational and the other irrational. Man’s principal fortitude is that which makes reason the empress and mis-

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tress of our desires and courageously masters itself, keeping our sensual impulses subordinated and obedient to our true understanding. Intelligence is a mental power which we share with celestial beings, but desire is a bodily power which we share with beasts.\footnote{Palmieri and Belloni (1982), in Kraye (1997), p. 155.}

The struggle between virtue and vice, or between reason and instinct, was important to Palmieri and his purpose in \textit{Vita Civile}, as he returns to this theme and reiterates it throughout:

- Let our principal fortitude, then, be self-control ... Let us shun all irrational desires.

- In every human spirit, nature has placed frail and abject fear, coupled with feeble and womanly infirmity, to which it is disgraceful to surrender ourselves. But reason, which rules our senses, is always vigilant and guides us towards higher motives: recognising perfect virtue, she oversees our weaker parts and makes them obey her. Thus, the virtuous person makes slaves of his desires, subduing them as befits a lord and master. But if reason fails, and weak and womanly impulses master a person, the wretch’s weaknesses will increase and multiply day by day. Like slaves, our desires out to be restrained under our mind’s custody.

- Moderation comprises the order and due measure by which we restrain shameful desires and behave appropriately in both words and deeds, observing such dignity that enhances our reputation and elegance. This virtue is defined as the stable and ordered rule of reason, which commands the obedience of any shameful desires while maintaining its own dignity. Its principal task is the decorous observance of what is honourable and appropriate in every aspect of life.\footnote{Palmieri and Belloni (1982), in Kraye (1997), respectively, p. 156, 157, and 158.}

The idea for Palmieri’s \textit{On Civic Life}, and its structure of a philosophical conversation, was based upon Cicero’s \textit{De Officiis}, several copies of which the Medici...
owned. In a similar way, *De Officiis* had examined a variety of ethical issues in politics, focussing on the topic of duty and honourable conduct. The heritage of Palmieri’s perspective was an important one, because philosophers such as Cicero used argumentation as a basis for their discourse. Implicit in this was a sceptical and critical mode of inquiry. The interpretation of an ethical concept did not exist before philosophical dialogue; it arose from it. Each “truth” was offered to the listener sequentially, but it also interacted with and modified the next “truth.” In a like manner, each claim could be interrogated and hence it remained open to challenge and change. No single speech was thus finalised or complete; it was contingent upon the next, and the next, until something—a higher truth or truths—emerged from within the dialogue itself.

Palmieri establishes how a monologue can be encompassed within a dialogue, and more importantly, how each ‘monologue’ nonetheless anticipated a contemplative and discerning engagement from its listener. He asked his reader to “consider these topics carefully,” for example, “for I am sure that they will prove pleasant and useful.” He framed Pandolfini’s monologues as wisdom, gifted to his youthful listeners. The speaker predicted adding to the listener’s understanding of life, evoking a future in which what they would have learned what is “useful.”

As Palmieri described it, *On Civic Life* offered “precepts” as a “sufficient rule for our actions.” This emphasised the free will of Palmieri’s readers, and Pandolfini’s listeners, but it was free will reined in by learning. It also telegraphed the context of demonstrative rhetoric, because it was predicated on offering behavioural models to follow. The monologues were addressed from present leaders to future leaders, and similarly, from elders to youths. “Noble and ancient elders” urged their listeners to “a life of integrity,” through their “teaching and praiseworthy example.” The monologue within the dialogue therefore cast the speaker in a teaching role, and as an *esempio* to his listeners. Additionally, the speaker offered other *esempii* to his listeners to demonstrate his points.

There were numerous works by Cicero in the Medici library, including a copy of *De officiis* inherited by Piero from his father Cosimo. Ames-Lewis (1978), p. 320.

“In what follows, we shall examine how one aspires to praiseworthy words and deeds. Where we were concerned earlier with proper education, we shall now concern ourselves with noble deeds.” Palmieri and Belloni (1982), in Kraye (1997), p. 151.
Palmieri’s speakers did not define political power as we might expect, which is to say as an experience in the present. Instead, it occurred in the future. “Good actions” were rewarded not in the Florentine present but in a heavenly future:

Let us recognise who we are and why we were born, how worldly things are ordered and how quickly they pass away. Let us judge what things are honourable and good, and devote ourselves to them ... [a courageous person] chooses death for virtue’s sake and places first duty, honour, glory and the general welfare, hoping to be rewarded among the blessed for his good action.\(^{52}\)

Pandolfini told his listeners that a good politician did not base his power on “worldly things,” because these were too transient. By contrast, a Florentine politician must be expected to be “rewarded among the blessed for his good action.” The elder’s monologue therefore established a religious idea of time, in which the temporal world was not one’s true home, but instead prepared the conditions for one’s true, spiritual home. Relatedly, real power was described as “glory,” which was something awarded beyond death: “Our life, like that of other animals, is short and leads inexorably to death, but the fame of virtuous deeds extends it and makes it glorious and immortal.” This idea of glory, which was bound up with the idea of fame, was a person in service of common welfare: “True virtue consists only in those things which we achieve by unusual effort and excellence and which, when possible, should serve our common welfare.”\(^{53}\)

The conventional understanding of ‘propaganda’ as discussed by scholars is generally assumed to be created in the temporal present, and more importantly, aimed at acquiring or maintaining power in the present or near future. These passages from On Civic Life show, however, that humanist political discourse displaced these expectations, not only delaying power but making it explicitly divinely sanctioned in the afterlife.

Palmieri’s perspective in his Vita Civile helps to explain why Cosimo, and other patrician families vying for authority, viewed sacred artworks and sacred places as a

natural venue for political negotiation. Virtue, and its related behavioural category of piety, was described as a viable and desirable power model.\textsuperscript{54} This was a model that emphasised commonality and equality, while it made glory (fame) the post-temporal expression of this shared power. Power was deferred, which made it safe in a social and political sense to pursue it in the present. This ethical perspective was a composite of philosophical and Christian principles, but it effectively created a political system in partnership with a spiritual system. Each side became stronger for its comparison to the other, while both emphasised partnership or consensus, and rewards in the future.

The intellectual partnership implied in a philosophical model, between speaker and listener, was not merely or only humanist spin. It actually structured the mode of communication; it dictated a dialogue. The dialogue elicited questions and interrogated assertions. It framed the listeners as recipients of wisdom that arose from such an interrogation. Importantly, the listeners helped to create this “truth.” The dialogic structure was hence expressive of its ultimate point: that society was a partnership between its members.

There is, it must be acknowledged, a ‘top-down’ power structure inferred by an instruction model. The teaching mode, however, obliged a contribution from its listener in return (even if it was at some future point beyond the present dialogue). Hence it changed or refined a ‘top-down’ structure. It pushed it towards exchange, and a lateral power dynamic. This is particularly the case when the conversation was based on a philosophical teaching method, in which there was an onus on the listener to actively exercise his judgement about the speaker’s viewpoint.

The philosophical dialogue model helps to refine the concept of ‘propaganda,’ because it particularises it in respect to fifteenth-century Florence. Both propaganda and philosophical dialogue had as their central aim the task of convincing listeners or readers to believe an idea or the “truth” of something. The difference, however, was in the way that the recipients were asked to treat their own judgement. Political propaganda, in modern parlance and as historians tend to presently use it,
infers appealing to the emotions of the viewer or listener, but with the expectation of negating to some extent their reason or better judgement. The anticipation was that propaganda first emotionally hooked its object, rendering them into a passive or receptive state, and thereafter persuading them by the disingenuous choice of using sacred art as a venue. Or perhaps the technology of persuasion in the conventional use of ‘propaganda’ was irrelevant; it is hard to be definitive because, as I have mentioned elsewhere, scholars do not presently analyse their use of the concept. It is feasible that historians using ‘propaganda’ in relation to sacred art have not necessarily expected the viewer or listener to be critically engaged—in modern propaganda for example, the blanketing of the message was key to creating a pervasive mindset.

In the fifteenth century, engaging the listener or viewer was central to its purpose. The recipient was assisted to engage—and this applied to all media that had been created using rhetorical teaching: painting, sermons, treatises, etc. The involvement of the audience was, moreover, a variable and not a fait accompli, because it promoted reasoning, and in the case of sacred figures or precepts, ongoing intervention. It anticipated and was built to handle a high degree of complexity. Thus while a rhetorical exchange was structured by rules, it was every time a ‘living’ process. The relevant analogy is a courtroom, which is a highly structured environment, almost stultifyingly so, but which by means of precedent and adversarial (dialectical) argument, is able to sift through the complexities of human behaviour and motivation to reach a balanced outcome—one arguably not achieved by other methods. From the outside it appears rigid, and is even experienced at times as such, but adhering to the rules yields flexibility and it also enables a great deal of conceptual ‘heavy lifting.’ This is not an apologist’s view; it is simply how it appears once it is seen from the insider’s perspective.

This raises a question that should be asked with respect to ‘propaganda:’ who holds the power in such an exchange? If a philosophical dialogue is the model, the answer would certainly be the speaker—for as long as he speaks, or to the degree that he persuades the listener. But it is also certainly the listener also—to the degree that he listens and allows himself to be persuaded. This kind of persuasion is by its nature is less predictable or assured than the kind that might usually be associated
with propaganda, because it depends on a partnership between speaker and listener that is built organically and repeatedly. Such accord was expressed in the language of Palmieri’s treatise, which frequently spoke through an “us,” “we,” “our,” “us,” and to an “everyone.” The speaker may have had the weight of wisdom on his side, and so seem to have a power advantage. The listener, however, was assumed to have the judgement to compare precepts, and to reach a conclusion of his own making. This impeded a simple notion of authority that rested with the speaker, and it created an emphasis on power that was negotiated into existence.

Many of the arguments about Medici patronage seem to imply that propagandistic messages were able to overwhelm or nullify the participant’s otherwise realistic truth or self-knowledge about what they believed to be true of the Florentine environment, replacing it with a sanitised version chosen by the Medici. In respect to a philosophical discussion, however—or as I mentioned, other products based on the rhetorical arts—the listener was asked to engage their knowledge, judgement, and reason, to critically participate in pursuing understanding. This anticipated a proactive listener, whose task it was to critically evaluate ethos—the authority of the speaker’s voice—as well as logos—the worth and validity of the speech. In a rhetorical performance, the speaker was assumed to some degree to be learned, or as having something to impart, but this authority remained open and contingent upon what the listener made of the speech. It was the listener’s task to test the strength of the speaker’s assertions.

Oratory initially established an authority, therefore, but at the same time it actively repudiated the concept of a monolithic authority—setting up in its place the authority of the collective voice that depended upon a collaboration between speaker and listener. This kind of mindset about political communication better suits the reality of an agonistic Florence, and it also throws light on artworks like the San Marco altarpiece. Most scholars focus on Cosimo’s capacity to have himself painted into the altarpiece as his chosen saint, and its implication of ‘propaganda.’ They

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55Historian Annalisa Ceron examines friendship as a subject of political theory, and contrasts Palmieri’s notion of friendship with Platina’s De optimo cive. She makes the point that Palmieri defined political unity in medieval terms as concord. See Annalisa Ceron. Political Friendship in Medicean Florence: Palmieri’s Vita civile and Platina’s De optimo cive. History of European Ideas, 41(3):301–317, 2015.
rarely if ever discuss why the Cosimo figure in the foreground presented a version of power that was markedly equivocal. Kneeling before and subjecting himself to the scrutiny of a crucified Christ, he had not achieved merit, as he portrayed it, but was journeying towards it; his success, or the judgement of his success, was subject to divine power.

5.9 The Palazzo Setting

At the time that Cosimo was building his new palazzo in 1445, he had been returned from exile for 11 years. The usual practice would have been to build a home on the remnants of pre-existing buildings. It was customary for families to have occupied for generations a certain building or part of the street, for example, and to buy or build space as the need arose. Family palazzi were therefore typically built on the remnants of the older, pre-existing buildings. Partly an economy and partly a deeply-held respect for their ancestry, it was unusual at the time for buildings to be levelled, or to start a palazzo on an empty site. The Medici, however, broke with, but also re-made, this tradition of linking with the past. Having purchased numerous buildings in his ancestral neighbourhood, which was also in the centre of the oldest and Roman part of the city, Cosimo razed the area to the ground. Neighbours watched in amazement as a completely new building rose from its foundations.

And yet the ‘newness’ of this building was counterbalanced by its architectural design, which contained noticeable references to both a recent and also an ancient

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56 Renaissance historian Bill Kent noted that new palaces were often built on ancestral foundations, and “were almost invariably inserted into neighbourhoods dominated by the builders’ paternal family.” Kent (1987), (p 48). Architectural historian Brenda Preyer has observed that this was such a strong instinct that it led patrons to sacrifice the visual impact of the palace just to fit it in the ancestral neighbourhood, as in the case of the palazzo built by Tommaso Spinelli. Brenda Preyer. Florentine Palaces and Memories of the Past. In Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin, editors, Art, Memory, and Family in Early Renaissance Florence, pages 176–194. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

past. The architect Michelozzo had created a stark cube with impressive rustication on the first floor of its façade. This was in common with civic palazzi at the time, and it had been based on a medieval interpretation of classical fortification. Internally, the palace was organised around a cortile, with a large courtyard in the centre, and a second garden courtyard beyond it. Each of these courtyards would set the stage for Donatello’s statues, respectively David and Judith. Around the sides of the centre and most important cortile was a colonnade, or what Florentines would have then commonly called a loggia (seen in Figure 5.9.1). Its design was based on Roman peristyles, a descendant of which was the monastic cloister. Like the palace façade, the Medici loggia echoed the design of a civic loggia. This is clear if one compares the loggia of the Palazzo del Podestà, for example, and the Palazzo Bardi-Busini.

The Medici palazzo was from its inception, therefore, a considered blend of contemporary and ancient worlds. The loggia was unusual, however, because of the spacing in the loggia columns. The arcades of the internal loggia met in the corners in a single column, meaning that the arcade did not come to a stop at each corner, but continued without a break in continuity. As the windows of the piano nobile were spaced according to the breadth of the underlying columns, the windows at each end of the piano nobile pressed uncomfortably close to the neighbouring window on the adjacent wall. It is hard to imagine why the spacing of the windows was so clearly sacrificed with such an accomplished architect as Michelozzo, unless it was in order to preserve the eloquence of the loggia’s arcade below. The necessity of the windows’ placing seems to come from the extraordinary breadth of the arches, and suggests that the loggia was designed to be as impressive and as open as possible.

The unusual emphasis of the Medici loggia should be contrasted alongside the fact that as an architectural feature, it was falling out of favour during the fifteenth century. The domestic loggia had begun to appear in the late thirteenth century, developing in Florence during the early fourteenth century. By the 1470s, however, their number had dwindled to about thirty. It was mostly amongst prominent families, for example the Rucellai and the Medici, that the tradition was upheld.  

58 Preyer (1990), p. 60.
The loggia would no doubt have had a particular appeal for these families, probably for a number of reasons. Principal amongst these was their association with ancient Rome. But in addition to merely associating the Medici with a classical past, I argue that the loggia directed a particular physical experience, which in turn was underpinned by philosophical principles. This is further supported by the choice of the biblical figures of David and Judith as focus points inside the loggia.

The loggia was typically open on one side, which in the Palazzo Medici was the side that faced Via Larga, now Via Cavour. Hence it communicated with the street and the city beyond. It did not merely communicate openness, however; it also invited entry. The openness of the loggia to the street meant that visitors could enter without impediment. It was this ease of entry that was symbolic of its purpose—to invite congregation. Written correspondence between Florentine friends and colleagues was plentiful, but business was preferred bocca a bocca, or face to face, and from early in the day, colleagues would have assembled in the loggia, milling about and waiting to speak about their business, trading the city’s gossip with their neighbours as they waited. Standing above them, gazing down in their direction and from time to time probably meeting their eyes, would have been
the bronze David.

The visitors gathering would have been visible to passers-by, and in this sense would have broadcast the importance of the family. But the loggia had other resonances for those admitted within. It also encouraged contemplation, animated by the works of art situated there. They mixed classical remnants with newly commissioned pieces, each focussed upon weighty and elevated questions about human nature and endeavour. They were also rendered with the highest level of skill, so as to most likely achieve a stirring of the emotions and hence the thinking of its viewers. From wherever a visitor might find himself standing in the loggia, he would have been able to see a work of art through the ‘frames’ of its arches. Created by the space between the columns, its arches worked to highlight symbolically-important material. The ability of the loggia to stage or to frame important subjects is attested to by the fact that it was used in Roman and monastic architecture for placing and highlighting paintings or sculpture. During the fifteenth century, the loggia was also frequently utilised in paintings for this purpose.

The presence of David in the palazzo courtyard may have been intended to declare the space around him holy, or it may have simply done so by default. Edward Muir has demonstrated how images of sacred figures were placed strategically on the streets to guide or to change the behaviour of Venetians and Florentines, and to inspire loftier thoughts or actions in their viewers.\textsuperscript{60} The gaze of the figure worked to inhibit immoral or disordered practices. The Florentine apothecary, Luca Landucci, recalled a time when a painting of the Madonna had closed her eyes to express her displeasure with the activities that she had witnessed there.\textsuperscript{61} Florentines had understood this miracle as an exhortation to do better. It is very likely that paintings and sculpture in palazzi had the same role, and that the David and Judith would have admonished those who lived in or who visited the Palazzo Medici to put aside prideful or sinful behaviour and to set their minds to do better.

The visual context of the statues was a crucial part of the way that Medici and


\textsuperscript{61}The full diary quote is provided in Chapter 1, note 85. Luca Landucci. \textit{A Florentine Diary from 1450 to 1516}, by Luca Landucci, continued by an Anonymous Writer till 1542 with Notes by Iodoco del Badía. Translated by Alice de Rosen Jevis. J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1927, pp. 222–3.
their contemporaries expected to ‘read’ them. The different places in which someone could stand, and then from that position see artworks in relation to others nearby, was an aspect of how Florentines would have anticipated their visual environment. The viewer was able to not only compare and contrast these elements, but they would have also accreted them in their mind to create a composite meaning or meanings, in a similar manner to Bible picture books described in other chapters, or the immersive experience of chapel frescoes. This meant that no artwork would realistically have been ‘read’ alone. It was instinctive during this period that an image belonged amongst other images and symbols, and derived meaning from their relationship to one another.

The act of image-making and meaning-making in Florence was a collective one, not only from the perspective of its maker but also from the perspective of the works themselves. The loggia thus provided two different, but interrelated, experiences—the physical experience of gathering in the loggia, which was based on a republican principle of collective rule—and the intellectual and emotional experience of being provoked by the questions or themes of the sculptures and artworks located there. The loggia can therefore be seen as an attempt to create an experience of the art of rhetoric: to invite and to gather an audience with the object of opening its members’ minds to a particular subject or subjects. It was intended to underline the fact that res publica was defined as much behaviourally as it was intellectually. The loggia, in other words, was intended to not just display but also to encourage the pursuit of merit.

5.10 Palmieri’s ‘public’ and ‘private’

Scholars have made much of the ‘public’ nature of the bronze David, which comes from the inferences drawn from the bronze material—previously used in public sculpture—and the inspiration for this David being taken from the marble David, and therefore being an attempt to present the family as paying homage to libertas or libertà. From the perspective of art history, this has at times been interpreted as

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‘appropriation,’ on the basis of ‘appropriating’ what was ‘public sculpture’ to a ‘private’ or domestic space. This private appropriation of public symbols and space has then been posited as important in the eventual disintegration of the republic and change in Florentine government to princely rule. The problem with these assumptions, however, is that they rest on unexplored and inadequate interpretations of the terms ‘public’ and ‘private.’

It must be noted that the bronze David would likely not have been visible to passersby on the street, given the calculated height of the bronze David with its column. Claims for the ‘public’ nature of this sculpture can therefore be said to have been exaggerated to some degree. The audience would have been a wide group, enough for the statue to have renown, but the numbers of people actually setting eyes on it would have been restricted as with the earlier marble. The second point to note is that the presence of David in the Book of Hours and, more generally, in penitential iconography, suggests that this iconography was partially private and domestic, as it was also public and political—in the same way that penance conceptually occupied both worlds. This leads to the third point and the main problem with this approach, which is its concept of ‘appropriation.’ This is defined in arguments about appropriation not as borrowing or copying, which applies to Renaissance imagery as a general principle, but as a territorial action of annexing. The capacity, for example, to take an image or symbols from the ‘public’ realm and display it in turn in a ‘private’ one, relies on a clear demarcation between these spheres.

Setting aside for the moment the fact that this goes against what we know about how sacred or penitential art operated, it would be helpful to know how contemporary sources shape these ideas of public and private. In general, they not only present

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63 This is prevalent in art history studies on the Medici statues; Adrian Randolph, for example, argued that the inscriptions on the two bronzes “blatantly coded the Medici palace as a public and political space.” Randolph (2002), p. 253. For an example of how the concepts of ‘public’ and ‘private’ have been used more extensively, see Roger J Crum, “Judith Between the Private and Public Realms in Renaissance Florence,” in Elena Ciletti, Kevin R Brine, and Henrike Lähnemann. The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies across the Disciplines. Open Book Publishers, 2010, pp. 291–306.

a more complex relationship between these concepts, but they can at times define it differently altogether. This is demonstrated through an analysis of how Palmieri used the concepts in *On Civic Life*.

It can be noted that Palmieri defined ‘public’ first in *Vita Civile* as anything related to government or official duties. He defined ‘private,’ conversely, as anything outside of this sphere. An example of this usage was contained in the phrase, “Magistrates in public office should at all times disregard their personal interest.” Beyond this, and more centrally, Palmieri addressed the meaning of public in three areas: counsel, benefit, and behaviour. He addressed these issues in his analysis of how a young man might model two of the four civic virtues, prudence and moderation. Palmieri’s analysis of prudence raised the question of unbiased counsel, and public and private benefit. His description of moderation raised the question of public and private behaviour. It was in this last respect that Palmieri expanded and challenged the more practical division of ‘public’ and ‘private’ on which he earlier relied. The result was at least two definitions of public within his work, one pragmatic and the other conceptual, or more specifically, ethical. What is interesting for historians’ use of the terms public and private in constructing what they have called Medici propaganda, is that they tend to confine themselves only to the pragmatic usage. Palmieri’s ethical definition, however, complicated the logic of the pragmatic usage, defining its boundaries instead according to merit.

For Palmieri, good counsel was a natural and welcome product of prudence. But good counsel must be “free” in two respects, public and private:

Privately, one must be careful that the truth is not hindered by one’s particular interests. Publically, in choosing what is clearly the best course, one must not be swayed by fear of arousing enmity, by hope of winning friendships or by dread of powerful people.\(^6\)

The term “free” was defined from within the context of a Florentine’s most important relationships and considerations. Concerning him and his reader were “one’s particular interests.” These were clearly anything that gave personal advantage or benefit, as opposed to public benefit, which is to say, self-interest. A Florentine was

someone who fears enmity and who hoped to win new friends in the course of his public life. Liberty was therefore defined from within the framework of the benefit of these relationships, both public and private, whilst evading their undue influence.

Palmieri does not, however, make ‘public and private benefit’ mutually exclusive, as historians tend to assume in respect of Medici art. On the contrary, he assumed that the two were well suited to one another, as long as either pursuit was “useful.” One of the great mistakes of striving to act prudently, he pointed out, was to give time and effort to “obscure” or unnecessary things. What was prudent, alternatively, was anything that “contribute[d] to the private or public good.” Private benefit was therefore laudable if it was useful, and hence it would not undermine public good.

To demonstrate moderation, or more specifically moderate behaviour, Palmieri used the body as his metaphor and guide. For a guide to moderation, Palmieri advised men to “follow the order and example of nature:”

For nature has clearly shaped the human body according to a careful design and placed out in the open all its members which serve decent functions, with no display of unseemliness. But the other essential parts of the body, whose appearance and function are in part base or unseemly, nature hid in secret, placing them in remoter parts, so that their appearance would not disturb the beauty of the other members.67

Palmieri proposed here to equate openness with what was “decent.” Conversely, he identified secrecy as what was hidden because it was naturally “base.” These distinctions became the basis for understanding what was appropriate for behaviour in public and in private. That which was out in the open (public) was considered the most ordered or beautiful, and that which was hidden (private) was unseemly or not fit for viewing. This definition of public/private was consistent with the interpretations of the terms as official and domestic, but over and above that, it blurred the distinction between them. Rather than rely on duties as a basis for the distinction between public and private, for example, any demarcation was dependent upon a value judgement as to what was fit to be seen. Ultimately, ‘public’ and

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262
‘private’ from this perspective related to what was beautiful and what was not, or put another way, what had merit and what did not have merit.

When Palmieri identified official contexts as a basis for a concept of ‘public,’ moreover, he described and analysed two different kinds of speech: “lofty eloquence,” and “familiar discourse.” Eloquence was to be used in assemblies, councils, and “large groups”—hence it was public in its official and pragmatic sense of that word—while familiar discourse was for “private conversations.” However, Palmieri used the discursive styles as a basis for describing the human (and Florentine) struggle between reason and baser instincts. Thus while he continued to define public as “official,” and private as anything which was not official, he overlaid this with an ethical definition of ‘seemly’ and ‘unseemly.’ The second framework effectively challenged or undermined the logic of the first, because unseemly behaviour was anticipated in official contexts, while seemly behaviour was expected in all areas of Florentine life.

When Palmieri came to summarise his analysis of moderation, the ethical position he took effectively exploded how historians conventionally think of ‘public’ and ‘private:

Philosophy, our guide in life, gives us two main precepts as a sufficient rule for our actions. First, no one should believe that his actions can be hidden from God. Second, one should never do anything that he is ashamed to confess to others.

What was ‘private’ could thus not be hidden or secret, as it was visible to God. Similarly, a virtuous Florentine should extrapolate this further and not do anything in private that he or she would be ashamed to confess in public. This effectively erased the previous distinction that Palmieri had made between public and private. In sum, he defined the notion of ‘public’ as an ethical rather than physical place, which was delineated by a visual order of beauty and merit, but which still had fluid boundaries because it was subject to an external—both Florentine and divine—judgement of merit.
Towards the end of his life, Palmieri commissioned a depiction of the Assumption of the Virgin for the church of San Pier Maggiore, where the Palmieri family had its chapel (Figure 5.10.1). It showed Palmieri and his wife on a hillside, seen in the left and right foreground respectively, kneeling in the supplicant’s position. They faced a coffin bursting with lilies, and above them hovered a grand, heavenly scene depicting the Virgin’s Assumption into Heaven. Behind them in the background lay the Tuscan hills, and over Palmieri’s shoulder sat Florence nestled in her valley, with the distinctive roof of the Duomo visible. The painting illuminates the point made above about the fluidity of the concepts of public and private: is this a public or a private painting? Was it devotional or about a city-republic? Was it about its patron’s penitence, or was it patently political? Palmieri has depicted himself protected by, but also seeking protection from, divine power, and because Florence was depicted in the background, it too was ostensibly protected but also seeking protection—both man and city were subject to sacred time and authority.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to read Donatello’s bronze David from within a context of a drawn-out change to the political image of Florence that happened during the fifteenth century. In doing so, it has brought to bear two new perspectives on the bronze David—one perspective on the traditional iconography of David, contextualising the bronze David from within that tradition, and the other that reinterprets the bronze through the lens of Petrarch’s Trionfi. The penitential meaning of David, and the theme of virtue’s victory over vice, was also the theme of Petrarch’s Triumphus, more specifically the first two triumphs in Petrarch’s poem, which were evoked in the Palazzo Medici courtyard through the statues of David and Judith. The bronze David evoked ‘virtue victorious,’ but it also placed this theme within a Petrarchan frame—a gesture that was arguably additionally patriotic, and which made the statue pertinent to a domestic setting because of the popularity of Trionfi imagery at the time for domestic decoration. Most historians have assumed that emphasising a theme of victory in the bronze David related to external circumstances, defined as either warfare or internal factional hostilities. There have been different theories about conflicts that the David was meant to address, but they tend to ascribe its meaning to political events, as with the marble David. While different contemporary events may well have resonated with the viewers of the statue for obvious reasons, I have argued that this was not its main purpose, nor does it sufficiently encapsulate how viewers would have read the David. The theme of triumph would have been read as an exhortation to virtue, from within two traditions that were related to one another in the statue: the conventional penitential reading of David, and a reading of David as the Triumph of Love.\textsuperscript{70}

The interrelationship between the penitential understanding of virtue and the philosophical understanding presented a dynamic idea of virtue. The three concepts—of humiliatio in Fra Roberto’s sermon, of virtue in Petrarch’s Trionfi, and of reason in Palmieri’s Vita Civile—each described a transition that required active engage-

\textsuperscript{70}Historian Francesco Caglioti has also dealt with a number of the issues touched on in this thesis; in regards to the present discussion, see particularly his Chapter 6, in which he argues that the bronze David and Judith were symbols of virtue. Francesco Caglioti. Donatello e i Medici. Storia del David e della Giuditta. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2 vols., 2000.
ment through dialectical struggle. The transition from *interrogatio* to *meritatio* described by Fra Roberto interpreted through a rhetorical lens could be said to be equivalent to a dialectical argument that led to ‘truth’ and thus to merit. Merit was the terminus, but humility and inquiry were the stages that preceded it.

It has been demonstrated that Florentine political expression in art was heavily indebted to a religious conception of community, time, and reward. Such symbiosis deserves further analysis because of what it can reveal about the development of political ideas. The *San Marco* altarpiece complicates historians’ understanding of political expression, because the *humiliatio* it represents was a transition—it presented not merit but the pursuit of merit. While a transition was more self-assured than merely a state of flux, and the presence of a future state of merit may have inferred superiority, in showing the middle (or ‘liminal’) stage as the present, the future was suspended or deferred. This is why the power the altarpiece represented was more fluid, contingent, and equivocal than historians generally suggest. There is a tendency to focus on the known outcome and infer things to have been colonised or ‘appropriated’, rather than to grapple with what the choice of religious symbolism is telling historians about how politics was conceptualised and communicated. Religious language, at least during this period, must always contend with divine knowledge and intervention, and thus it must always attempt to subordinate earthly power. It follows that its political utility increased in situations in which the subordination of earthly power, or at least the professing of a desire to subordinate earthly power, was central.\(^71\)

If the political interpretation of the bronze *David* is ultimately to be convincing, it should be able to at least encounter, but hopefully also explain, the sexualisation of the figure of David. In the past however, the two readings have tended to be argued as separate strands, or the explanations for the sexuality in a political context have

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\(^71\)This mutual relationship has also been noticed by art historian Luca Gatti: “*Libertas*, and its complementary concepts of *Amor Patriae* and Charity, were very closely interwoven ideas being used by the regime to define its political identity. In the process by which this identity was represented, an association with religious or cultural values was consistently operated so that the ideas of *Libertas* should be seen to transcend party interests and the course of actions advocated by the political leadership should be endowed with an unquestionable universality.” Luca Gatti. Ambiguity and the Fixing of Identity in Early Renaissance Florence. *Diogenes*, 45(177):17–35, 1997, p. 24.
been unconvincing. The explanation given here provides a plausible reading as the Triumph of Love. The key point about Petrarch’s Trionfi, besides the fact that it provides an explanation for the sexualisation of David while still explaining the political and social utility of the statue, was that it introduced a romance motif into the political image of David. While the Trionfi upheld a conventional and penitential understanding of David as representing the victory of virtue over vice, its romantic mode effectively softened the traditional iconography of struggle. This would have a longer-term effect on the political images of David and Judith in Florence, and more generally on how virtue was portrayed in artworks. Such change was seen and felt increasingly into the latter part of the fifteenth century, which will be addressed in the next chapter. A blossoming of the ‘romance effect’ can be traced in a change from a focus on Judith to Minerva and Pallas.
6
The Bronze Judith

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined Donatello’s bronze David, the first of two bronze statues made by Donatello and displayed in the Palazzo Medici during the latter half of the fifteenth century. The bronze represented the theme of virtue’s victory, which was maintained from the earlier marble David. It also intensified this theme, with a return to more traditional forms of iconography such as ‘trampling,’ made more fashionable by reinterpreting it through Petrarch’s Triumph of Love. The incorporation of Petrarch’s poem Triumphus had two primary effects for representing David in Florence. It introduced romance into the iconography of virtue’s victory. It also softened the connotation of struggle to attain virtue, retaining the dichotomy on which the iconography of struggle was based—vice and virtue—but recasting it using seduction. I also argued that ‘trampling’ iconography was evidence of a continuing relationship between the penitential understanding of David and its political use in Florence. The penitential context crossed boundaries between public and private,
political and domestic, or, perhaps more accurately, it simply didn’t recognise them in practice—thus circumventing the implications of ‘appropriation’ of ‘public’ art.

In this chapter, I argue that the bronze Judith (6.1.1) was an even clearer return to late-medieval iconography, by featuring not the triumph over Holofernes but the struggle to subdue him. The statue highlighted two antonymic pairs of virtues and vices as late-medieval exegesis had done, and it used the symbolism of ‘trampling’ that was typically associated with medieval iconography. The emphasis on the struggle to attain virtue, and thus the idea of personal agency, presented an essentially egalitarian idea of virtue to its audience. In creating allusions to the Triumph of Chastity from Petrarch’s Triumphus, however, the bronze Judith could, like the bronze David, be ‘read’ within Petrarch’s poem, which as this chapter will show, would have significant implications for how the political image of Florence would be developed by the Medici in the coming decades.

The evidence for reading the statue as a gloss on Petrarch is provided by Lucrezia Tornabuoni de’ Medici’s play about Judith, which incorporated a romantic device in the narrative. Tornabuoni enhanced the dealings between Judith and Holofernes with a Renaissance seduction, magnifying their roles as Chastity and Lust. Further evidence for a Petrarchan reading of Judith is provided by Botticelli’s diptych of Judith and Holofernes. Scholars believe that the diptych was painted in the 1470s. However, they know very little of its commission or its patron. A new interpretation is offered in this chapter, in which I argue that Botticelli’s Judith presented two figures in one: Judith as biblical heroine, and Petrarch’s Chastity. Botticelli achieved the merging of the two figures by incorporating the branch in Judith’s hand, a common feature of Chastity in cassoni images of the Trionfi. On the basis of confluences between Lucrezia de’ Tornabuoni’s play about Judith and the diptych, I also suggest that Botticelli’s patron, so far unknown, was Lucrezia de’ Tornabuoni or someone close to her. In any case, Botticelli’s Judith is able to demonstrate that the Trionfi reading had become part of the iconography of Judith in Florence, and it suggests that one of the effects of incorporating the Petrarchan leitmotif was to make the older, penitential reading of Judith more popular.

Finally, I provide evidence in this chapter that the romance and seduction mo-
Figure 6.1.1: Donatello, c.1450s, Judith and Holofernes, bronze, Palazzo della Signoria, Florence.
tifs introduced into the presentation of virtue caused a shift after the 1470s, which represented a change of taste in Lorenzo de’ Medici’s generation. Judith was reinterpreted as Minerva in La Giostra in the 1470s and similarly as Pallas in paintings, for example in Botticelli’s Pallas and Centaur in the 1480s. This change has not been traced by historians before; it has been revealed in this thesis by analysing the symbolism of David and Judith from within the context of previous penitential iconography. The struggle between virtue and vice, or what was increasingly interpreted as the struggle between reason and instinct, was reinterpreted in these later works as an awakening to wisdom. The gradual abstraction of virtue that had occurred through the introduction of romantic symbolism would therefore devolve further—the emphasis in the concept of awakening altered virtue, which increasingly became an idea of ‘innateness’ rather than something earned. In line with this shift, the symbolism of struggle in political paintings about virtue devolved into a symbolism of seduction. This devolution noticeably lessened the importance of victory in the image of Florence presented by David and Judith, while it also made it courtlier and more stylized.

Donatello’s statue of Judith depicted an imminently victorious figure. Rather differently to the two statues of David that had preceded her, the Judith depicted a story in the round, with two life-sized figures. Judith was shown grappling with Holofernes’ comatose body as she tried to decapitate him. Standing astride the torso of her enemy, Judith was seen stepping on his right hand with her left foot, twisting his head with her left hand while she raised the sword above her head with her right hand. The apparent tautness of Judith’s action was contrasted with the slack and yielding pose of Holofernes, who was depicted collapsing into the plush cushion beneath him with his legs dangling over the sides of the base. His arms and head hung loosely, while his neck and upper torso leaned against Judith’s leg. The statue captured the moment in the Bible account when Judith was left alone with Holofernes in his bedchamber, ostensibly to be seduced by him, but in which Judith instead turns the table on her drunken enemy to kill him in his sleep.

Judith had been sculpted in relief for the Baptistery Doors in Florence (Figure 6.1.2), perhaps before this bronze but very likely during the same period. The Baptistery Judith was on the East Doors, otherwise known as the Gates of Paradise,
which were made between 1425 and 1452. She was shown in a victorious pose: facing the viewer and looking heavenwards, holding Holofernes’ sword aloft in her right hand as she clutches his decapitated head in her left hand. A long length of fabric winds around Judith’s hips and the hand that holds Holofernes’ head, and sweeps over her head forming above her a kind of diadem. This fabric was most likely intended to portray the part of Holofernes’ bedsheets that Judith had taken to disguise the head while leaving the Assyrians’ camp. It was deeply symbolic that what was to be the instrument of Judith’s seduction became the symbol of her victory and her chastity. The sheet was usually featured in biblical versions of the account, and also in Florentine depictions of Judith killing Holofernes produced during the fifteenth century.

![Image of Judith](image1)


(b) Lorenzo Ghiberti, c.1425–1452, *David and Goliath*, East Doors, Baptistery, Florence.

Figure 6.1.2: Penitential versions of Judith and David in Florence.

This image of Judith on the Baptistery Doors had appeared in a border frame next to a scene depicting David’s decapitation of Goliath. Each main scene had a subsidiary image including a prophet or a saint as a further means of reading the
primary image. The Doors therefore provide evidence that Florentines used the two accounts to reflect on one another: Judith by reason of her placement next to David was offered as a way to deepen the understanding of the triumph depicted in the main frame. The Baptistery doors showed the different stages of the account of David and Goliath but, interestingly—particularly for arguments in this thesis about the relationship between images of David and earlier penitential iconography—it featured in the central foreground the moment in which David decapitated Goliath. The focus on Goliath’s decapitation was a common way, as I’ve shown, to depict the account of David and Goliath in medieval Bibles and picture books. Similarly, while the killing of Goliath was typically understood as an allegory for overcoming vice, the killing of Holofernes was also typically used in biblical imagery as an allegory for the Virgin’s vanquishing of the Devil. The choice to pair the figures of David and Judith, and to use one to read the other, was therefore not only highly familiar, it would have also had a distinctly penitential context.

Donatello’s statue of Judith was tremendously detailed and realistically rendered. This would have augmented its visual impact, as would Judith’s costume, which in its chemise under the bodice, the separate skirt, and the detachable sleeves, might have elicited reminders of a contemporary Florentine elite matron. Accentuating a sense of lifelike movement, Judith’s wimple and skirt folded, turned, and curved to replicate the way that cloth draped and followed the body. The sleeve of her dress appeared to fall back along her lifted arm, and it showed the creases of the fabric as it hung from her limbs. Holofernes’ curling and long hair was gathered up and bunched by Judith’s fingers, while some of his locks were shown to escape and drop over his shoulder. His toe curled, his arm hung loose and free in a state of unconsciousness, and the cushion on which Holofernes sat showed soft dents, suggesting the opulence of down and velvet. Lavishness was also emphasised by tassels that would have originally hung from each of the four corners of the cushion.

On each of the three sides of the triangular base on which the cushion rested were classical scenes depicted in detailed relief. These were crowded with putti and winged young men at leisure: frolicking, drinking, playing music, reclining, some stepping out of a bath. Each of these settings were framed by classical columns. They were also portrayed with depth, having figures occupying foreground and background in
intelligible layers. The scenes seem to be bacchanalian, raising associations with festivals for the Roman god Bacchus and his Greek counterpart, Dionysus, but remaining generic enough to suggest no obvious source. Holofernes was modelled on barbarians from classical Roman sculpture, while his medallion, depicted askew and falling down his back, was also Roman.¹

Donatello’s *Judith and Holofernes* was large—from the bottom of the base to the top of Judith’s head, it was nearly two and half metres in length.² This set a precedent in regard to decorating family *palazzi*, because statues of this size were more usually found in a *piazza* or *civic palazzo*. The bronze material was also significant; it was expensive, which increased the honour for both artist and patron, and it also connected the statue with the ancient history of Rome and Greece, in which large sculpted bronzes—of gods, heroes, statesman and philosophers—had populated public spaces.

Donatello’s statue was unusual on a number of fronts. It was the first time that the account of Judith and Holofernes had been portrayed in three dimensions, and more particularly in a sculptural group. It was additionally the first and last time that Judith was to be sculpted in life-size, or in which sculpture was used to show the killing of Holofernes. The group was technically challenging because of this, and because it was executed in a single column. It expressed a narrative over time like other biblical iconography, which needed to be sensible from numerous points of view. The fact that it was carefully rendered from every angle suggests that the *Judith* was designed for circular viewing, as its position in the garden-courtyard of the *Palazzo Medici* would have required.

Dating and the original patronage of the statue are uncertain because there are no surviving documents relating to its commission. Most scholars believe that Cosimo had the statue produced for his new *palazzo* in the 1450s, after having either commissioned or purchased the smaller bronze *David* that sat in the adjoining courtyard.³ The first definitive document on the placing of the *Judith and Holofernes*

³Janson and Lányi (1957), p. 198 and pp. 201–202; and Joachim Poeschke. *Donatello and his
was made many decades later, when the *Signoria* recorded the contents of the Medici *palazzo* as it took possession of the palace after the Medici exile in 1494. Most historians have assumed that the bronze *Judith* occupied the same position in the garden courtyard through the latter half of the fifteenth century.\(^4\)

Under the statue’s present base would have been a further pedestal, which was reported to have previously carried two inscriptions for the contemporary viewer:

Kingdoms fall through luxury, cities rise through virtues. Behold the neck of pride severed by the hand of humility.

The salvation of the state. [*Salus Publica*] Piero Son of Cosimo Medici has dedicated the statue of this woman to that liberty and fortitude bestowed on the republic by the invincible and constant spirit of the citizens [*cives invicto constantique animo*].\(^5\)

Most scholars claim that Cosimo chose the first inscription, while the second inscription was put there by his son, probably after Cosimo’s death. This remains a working hypothesis and derives from the fact that historians have surmised that the tenor of the two inscriptions were notably different from one another, the first being more obviously about virtue and the second about liberty. This theory infers that

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scholars formulate the meaning of the statue differently according to its contemporary owner—for example, when it was Cosimo’s, its owner interpreted it as being about virtue, but after it passed to Piero, he saw it in terms of liberty. Given that themes of liberty and virtue were interrelated for much of the century, as this thesis demonstrates, it should be noted that nothing precludes them having had the same author, for example, Piero de’ Medici, with both perspectives having been stressed potentially either on the same occasion or at different times.

6.2 The Scholarship

Scholars of the pre-war generations have tended to use the reliefs on the base of the statue in their interpretations of the Judith, given that it was as far as scholars know always part of the statue and therefore contemporaneous with it when it was in the Medici palace. The bacchanalian symbolism depicted a classical interpretation of indulgence, illustrating submersion in sensual delights. Donatello’s rendition therefore served to highlight Holofernes’ surrender to bodily pleasures and the role this played in his ultimate downfall. Art historian Edward Wind, mentioned in the Chapter 1 of this thesis as a student of Warburg, addressed Donatello’s Judith in a brief article written in the 1930s, drawing attention to the fact that it featured not only the umbrella concept of ‘virtue,’ but also, more specifically, two virtues and their corresponding two vices: humility (humilitas), prudence (sobrietas), pride (superbia), and indulgence (luxuria). The oppositional pair of Humility and Pride were focused upon in the first inscription, while a second oppositional pair, Prudence and Indulgence, were clearly indicated in the stark visual contrast between the moderation and immoderation, respectively, of Judith and Holofernes.

Edgar Wind’s article was written as a response to art historian Kauffmann’s interpretation, which at the time had placed an undue emphasis on pride to the exclusion of extravagance (luxuria) in finding the key to Donatello’s intent. Wind’s

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7Wind (1937).

8Janson and Lányi (1957), p. 203.
article therefore provided an important correction up until that point. It remains a respected position. Wind had argued that in pairing the two vices with their corresponding virtues, and by placing them in obvious battle, the statue was harking back to late-medieval virtue and vices iconography, including the *Psychomachia*, in which each of these virtues and vices both appeared to do battle with one another. Wind had also quoted the theologian Durandus, arguing that the same interpretation was in Donatello’s mind when designing the bronze. The bronze thus offered an interpretation of Holofernes as a metaphor for two, related forms of moral turpitude—*luxuria* and *superbia*. Durandus had named Holofernes as being emblematic of these two vices, and the inscription on Donatello’s statue had similarly singled them out; Wind had offered Durandus on this basis as a way to understand the statue’s intended meaning.

Wind briefly noted that the interpretation of Holofernes as both *luxuria* and *superbia* also helped to explain the bacchanalian scenes on the base: they represented the principle of ‘incontinence,’ which has been vanquished by humility.
Wind also noted that each of the two virtues and vices identified in medieval virtue iconography—*humilitá / sanctimonia*, and *superbia / luxuria*—were also represented in the visual symbolism of the statue: “Holofernes lying half-naked on a soft cushion is the perfect embodiment of *luxuria*; and the long veils and heavy garments of Judith which cover even her forehead and her arms up the wrists, clearly emphasise ‘sanctimoniousness.’”

Given the prominence of the bacchanalian scenes on all three sides of the base, it would seem to be offering the viewer a way to interpret the underlying themes of the statue, but scholars in recent years have frequently overlooked it in their analysis of the bronze, possibly because the symbolism is generic and therefore hard to decipher conclusively. It blended *putti* with classical figures, making it difficult
to reach a conclusive interpretation. The putti appeared frequently in Florentine art, and usually where there was a sacred subject; the Roman festival of Bacchus, however, was distinctly classical.

The case for the relevance of a late-medieval context in interpreting the statue’s iconography has effectively been lost in the intervening decades. Previous scholars like Wind did not use their virtue thesis to evaluate political expression, while the latter has been a strong focus in recent scholarship. From around the 1970s, the number of studies on the Judith has been steadily growing, resulting in a spate of articles and chapters from art historians who have endeavoured to develop their theories about what they frequently call “propaganda” and, more specifically, Medici propaganda. Studies have most often concentrated on humility or pride, or tyrannicide, and historians have been united by the conviction that Donatello’s bronze was foremost intended to help the Medici manipulate their peers.¹¹ Historians who perform a feminist reading of Judith, have tended to interpret the circumstances of Donatello’s statue having been moved from the front of the Palazzo della Signoria, making way for Michelangelo’s David, as a result of patriarchal preferences for a male subject.¹² This undervalues the degree to which Judith performed a role as a guide for male as much as female behavior. Lucretia, one of Boccaccio’s heroines in his De mulieribus claris, for example, was recommended by Boccaccio as “a leading example of Roman modesty,” even more so because her suicide simultaneously restored her “purity” while it “led ultimately to freedom for Rome.”¹³

Historians have generally argued that the purpose in commissioning and displaying the statue of Judith, for example, was to counterbalance negative opinion

¹¹See Crum and McHam as previously cited in this chapter, also next note.
amongst Medici detractors, particularly the notion that their power undermined the republic and was in fact a sort of tyranny; the Medici instead presented the humble Judith as their symbol—Judith who personified humility and who fought for the liberty of her people. The missing link is the way that medieval iconography existed and worked within a penitential framework. It is usually assumed that this framework had, by this time, fallen away, however my research indicates the opposite.

Scholars interested in the statue’s possible factional relevance have tended to focus on the words of the first inscription—on the comparison between humility and cities, and its opposition to pride. This arises from the fact that pride was an accusation often levelled at political opponents in the wrangling between factions. Historians often tie the statue to one or more particular factional flare ups. Hence, treatment of the bronze Judith in terms of virtue has pushed scholars for the most part towards considering libertà to have been a principal focus compared to libertas, although this is my drawn inference because as noted before, ‘liberty’ is usually anglicised and not analysed further.

In 2001, two articles were published tackling this question from different perspectives, positing respectively the concepts of pride and tyrannicide as the principal focus of the Judith. Roger Crum interpreted the bronze in relation to the problem of unity within the Medici party during the 1450s. In exploring whether the story had a particular meaning for the Medici circle, Crum noted that the story “could have represented the defense of republicanism against foreign tyranny,” but that more specifically, the first part of the statue’s inscription suggested that the meaning of the statue “would seem to hinge on the issue of pride.” He argued that Judith was meant to remind Medici party members retroactively of the disruption caused by the Albizzi in the 1420s, when continuing factional unrest culminated in the Medici being forced out of Florence in 1434.

Crum discussed the different meanings to Florentines of the word “pride,” in-

\[14\] Crum (1996), (2007), and (2010), and McHam (2001), (2007), and (2010), as previously cited.

\[15\] Crum (2001). Crum had also written previously, see Crum (1996), and subsequently, in Ciletti et al. (2010).

cluding using Dante’s *Purgatorio* as a possible source. Those who had committed the sin of pride populated the first terrace of Dante’s purgatory. Dante encountered among them a group of sculptures representing pride brought low, one of which depicted the death of Holofernes. Crum pointed out that the author had populated his *Purgatorio* with references to Florence and Florentines, and associated the terrace of pride with Florence, because in leaving it Dante had described crossing the Arno and climbing the hill to *San Miniato al Monte*. Crum concluded that Donatello’s *Judith* “possibly embodies a Dantesque formula for success based on the remembrance of Albizzi defeat.” While acknowledging that the statue did not overtly refer to the Albizzi, Crum argued that had it done, “it would have exposed the Achilles heel of the Medici.”

Art historian Sarah Blake McHam has argued similarly that the bronze *Judith* was generated as a response to factionalism, but her theory was that the statue was designed to create a conscious connection to early Athenian statues that had depicted famous tyrannicides.  

McHam compared the iconography of Donatello’s *Judith* to classical statues of heroes, and suggested that along with the political tract *Politricraticus* written by twelfth-century English theologian John of Salisbury, this classical statue group were the inspiration for the bronze statues of both *David* and *Judith*. She has noted that the *Judith* was inspired by the genre of virtues and vices iconography, including Prudentius. McHam did not see the genre as central, however, and she did not analyse the statue in light of this stated heritage. Her argument instead focussed on John of Salisbury’s theory of unlawful rule. He had advocated killing tyrants as a duty to God, and had used Judith as an example.

McHam argued that Donatello’s two bronzes of *David* and *Judith* were a consciously-designed pair that worked primarily within a programme about tyrannicide. In taking the statues of *Judith* and *David* together, McHam took into account Christine Sperling’s findings in a manuscript of the inscription located on Donatello’s *David*.

\[17\text{Crum (2001), pp. 24–26.} \]
\[18\text{Blake McHam (2001). McHam wrote subsequently, in Blake McHam (2007), and in Ciletti et al. (2010).} \]
\[19\text{Blake McHam (2001), note 23, p. 44. Janson and Wind have also noted the relevance of the *Psychomachia* to the representation of Judith in Donatello’s statue. Janson and Lányi (1957), and Wind (1937).} \]
\[20\text{Blake McHam (2001), pp. 40–43.} \]
discussed in the previous chapter, which had been found near to a copy of the inscription on the Judith. McHam’s argument that the Medici statues were related to the Athenian celebration of tyrannicide was based on the phrase “a great tyrant” from the David inscription, and she agreed with Sperling that Judith was another, female version of the same idea.\(^{21}\)

Both McHam and Crum present well-argued cases, and McHam’s particularly is extensively researched. The weaknesses may be apparent, however, in choosing such disparate sources to explain the statues. Dante, for example, remained popular during the fifteenth century, but many of the views he expressed around pride were conventional and widespread. As a consequence, Dante is unpersuasive as the genesis for the statue’s focus on pride. Similarly, John of Salisbury’s reference to Judith as an example of tyrannicide was customary, and due to its long-standing, had been emulated in popular discourse during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.\(^{22}\) These sources and definitions are most persuasive as examples of what a contemporary audience may have been able to associate with the statues, rather than serving as a way of explaining their primary achievement or message. These studies tend to share a common trait with the scholarship on Donatello’s statues of David and Judith, which in trying to explain why biblical narratives were chosen as an image of Florence’s political identity, is to persistently—and counterintuitively—move away from biblical iconography as a means of explanation.

It is debatable whether in such a charged environment the Medici would have wanted to use the accusation of tyranny that had been levelled against them, even

\(^{21}\)Sperling argued that based on evidence regarding the likely dating of the inscription, the David “was commissioned in 1428 or shortly thereafter by the Medici, probably by Cosimo, to celebrate the family’s role in the defeat of the imperialistic Visconti.” Sperling claimed that this upheld Janson’s early dating, which at the time of writing recent scholarship had sought to overturn. Sperling (1992), (p.222, and 224). It should be noted that most scholars now refute Sperling’s earlier dating, including McHam, see Blake McHam (2001), see note 2, p. 43, and note 15, p. 44.

\(^{22}\)As an example of how enduring and pervasive this discourse was, take for example a letter written in 1347 by Cola di Rienzo. The letter was sent to leaders of Florence and other Italian cities, expressing Rienzo’s anger against the nobles who had opposed his republic in Rome, and saying that his enemies would be dispatched as Holofernes had been by Judith: “Et ecce iterum a Judith alter occiditur Olofernes, ita quod infra viii. dies inimici sint omnes aliqui occisi, aliqui miniose conflicti.” Cola di Rienzo, Epistolario, edited by Annibale Gabrielli, (Rome, 1890), p. 84; cited in Frank Capozzi. The Evolution and Transformation of the Judith and Holofernes Theme in Italian Drama and Art before 1627. PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1977, p. 22.
if to invert it. These interpretations do not address the unpredictable nature of showcasing tyrannicide in the factional context. The patron must have expected, for example, that the theme of removing a tyrant might as easily arouse detractors as it would supporters. McHam nonetheless concluded that the Medici were creating imagery in the *David* and *Judith* “that advertised the family’s stance as defenders of Florence,” but also and to a greater degree, Cosimo and his son Piero were “knowledgeably converting to their own aggrandisement venerable historical precedents in addressing a simmering contemporary controversy. By so doing the Medici manipulated republican imagery to establish the family’s political propaganda, here subverting the charge of tyranny often levelled against them to their own purpose:”

More recently, Adrian Randolph in his *Engaging Symbols*, which has been analysed at greater length in Chapter 1 of this thesis, argued that artworks in Florence during the fifteenth century, including Donatello’s *Judith*, were creating and laying claim to a ‘public’ domain, one in which political power had to be sought and won from a ‘public’ audience. Randolph investigated political symbols in the visual arts, and concluded that not only did they “demarcate or announce authority,” but “they also sought to engage a public whose consent to authority could no longer be taken for granted.”

In summary, recent art scholarship has attempted to use the connotation of humility for a political analysis, but this approach has been ineffective in explaining how the connotation of temperance served a political purpose. Earlier art scholarship had performed a more complete analysis of the theme of virtue, understanding Donatello’s bronze *Judith* as a personification of two virtues, humility and temperance. The previous scholarship did not, however, understand virtue as performing a political function. Recent studies have seen the bronze *Judith*—either implicitly but increasingly explicitly—as a form of “propaganda.” Moreover, when such anal-

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24 Adrian W B Randolph. *Engaging Symbols: Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence*. Yale University Press, 2002, p. 17. I critique such a stable definition of public and private in Chapter 5, see particularly my discussion on “Palmieri’s ‘Public’ and ‘Private.’” For a broader discussion about the ‘dialogism’ of Donatello’s *Judith*, see Randolph’s Chapter 6. He links the bronze *Judith* to some degree with Petrarch’s Chastity, but not the bronze *David*. 283
yses employ words like “manipulated,” and “subverting,” there has often been an ominous sense of ‘propaganda’ as thought-oppression.25 There has been, relatedly, an assumption in scholars’ discussions of the statue’s relevance to politics that piety and civic themes were mutually exclusive meanings for the Judith. It is characteristic of the political thesis, for example, to see the mention of Judith’s chastity immediately followed by a qualifying statement such as, “Donatello’s Judith, however, signifies civic virtue more than she does Christian piety,” as though one must choose (or as though a contemporary audience must have had to choose) between the two meanings.26

The question is whether the present political analysis of Donatello’s Judith is viable in light of what I have revealed in previous chapters, and what I will demonstrate below. I will argue that the purpose of the statue of the biblical heroine was far more interesting than an exercise in simple reversal or camouflage. Donatello’s Judith represented an elaboration on the political image of Florence that had been inspired by and based on traditional biblical iconography, but which also combined elements from Petrarch’s Triumphus. This exercise of combining and overlapping the biblical representations of virtue with early humanist thinking was achieved on the basis of portraying the pursuit of virtue as a foundation for social and political authority. The seduction motif absorbed from Petrarch would, however, ultimately alter the iconography of virtue and the political image of Florence portrayed using David and Judith. I will demonstrate this by first analysing the bronze statue of Judith as an extension of virtues and vices iconography, before exploring the ways that Medici poetry and painting further shaped its direction, carrying it into the next generation not as Judith but as Minerva and Pallas.

### 6.3 An Iconographical Analysis

Some scholars have begun more recently to advocate for the bronzes of David and Judith to be studied together, as they likely were compared by audiences during the

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25See for example, Ciletti (1991), (p. 58); Blake McHam (2001) (p. 43).

fifteenth century. This approach of treating them as a pair has been accomplished to date in the context of theories about factionalism. It has not yet been able to explain, however, why the David was rendered so differently from the Judith—why, for example, was the David so obviously sensual, but otherwise shown with the head of his enemy, in other words, in a victor’s pose, while the Judith depicted the struggle with Holofernes? I propose to do this work by exploring the context in which the statues more obviously related and compared, in respect of the penitential construction of virtue as struggle. The context of Petrarch’s Triumphus will explain the different appearances of the statues, because the poem cast David and Judith respectively as Love and Chastity. What tied these, the biblical and Petrarchan interpretations, together and what also suggests that they were conceptualised as a pair with a related theme of virtue, is a detail so far little noted in studies of the bronze Judith: the way that her left foot is shown to stand on the supine right hand of Holofernes (pictured in Figure 6.3.1).

The choice of having Judith step on Holofernes needs to be explained because it was not described in the Bible, nor was it found in other descriptions of the scene from late-medieval or Renaissance sources. Lucrezia de’ Tornabuoni de Medici, spouse to Piero de’ Medici, wrote a poem about the account of Judith during the 1470s. This was largely a conventional telling, in which she described how Judith knelt to pray to God for strength and resolve in the seconds before she killed Holofernes:

> Once she had said her prayer Judith rose, her heart resolved, and in one hand she grasped a sword she had found leaning against a column or the wall, and so well did the young woman brandish it, it would have been fitting for a strong and sturdy man; she struck him twice, with force, and his head rolled away from his shoulders.\(^\text{28}\)

The death of Holofernes was typically described in this manner in sources, including in the Bible, and illuminations and paintings of the scene usually showed the same—Judith leaning over a slumbering Holofernes to decapitate him.

\(^{27}\)Blake McHam (2001).
The detail of ‘trampling’ in fact only makes sense from within the iconography that had been developed from Prudentius’ *Psychomachia*, and which appeared in church sculptures and personal devotional books. These images developed a language in which illustrated pairs of vices and virtues fought to the death. The fight was often shown at the conclusion of the battle and, therefore, at the moment that the vice was slain. In the case of other related images and sculpture, virtues were shown standing on or trampling on the body of their enemy, as I have shown elsewhere. In the case where a virtue was shown to trample their enemy, the virtue was often shown to stand on or rest their feet on the vice’s head. There was usually a weapon in the hand of the virtue in these cases, a sword or a lance, which pointed towards or pierced the vice. This particular “trampling” format lent itself nicely to sculpture, because it allowed for a compact and singular form, with the virtue standing on top of the vice. Examples were given in Chapter 3, which showed images respectively of the façades of Salisbury and Strasbourg Cathedrals, see Figures 3.5.2 and 3.5.4.

Dealing with similar themes, the poem written by Prudentius, entitled *Psy-
chomachia, described the conflict in a human soul between virtue and vice.\textsuperscript{29} I have already dealt with the Psychomachia in Chapter 4 in respect of the marble David. I will elaborate a little further on it here, however, where it relates to Judith, and in order to explain the meaning of trampling in Donatello’s statue. To recap, the poem described a series of battles between paired combatants, between the heavenly virtues and the “monstrous” vices. Prudentius described the visceral detail, the blows and the hits, to evoke a witness account of battle. The virtue Faith was the first to take the field, quickly followed by Chastity, “shining in beauteous armour.” Chastity’s fight was particularly ferocious; she locked in battle with Lust, winning her struggle “with a sword-thrust [as] she pierces the disarmed harlot’s throat.” Prudentius then had Chastity recall Judith’s killing of Holofernes as a metaphor for her victory:

A hit! cries the triumphant princess ... the breath of life that was extinguished in thee, after the severed head of Holofernes soaked his Assyrian chamber with his lustful blood, and the unbending Judith, spurning the lecherous captain’s jewelled couch, checked his unclean passion with the sword, and woman as she was, won a famous victory over the foe with no trembling hand, maintaining my cause with boldness heaven-inspired.\textsuperscript{30}

Prudentius gave Chastity a long speech, in which she evoked the Virgin and elaborated on the availability of purity to Christians after the Incarnation. Prudentius expanded upon the symbolism of the sword in this speech, which became the symbol of Christian wisdom in seeking to overcome vice and baser instincts. The author described Chastity after “rejoicing in the death of Lust,” wanting to clean her sword in the River Jordan, “for a red dew of gore had clung to it and befouled the bright steel.” As Chastity dipped her sword into the river’s waters, she watched as the blood “that came from her foe’s throat” was dispersed by the river’s flow. Feeling then that she could not “sheathe the purified sword, lest rust unseen engross


\textsuperscript{30}Prudentius, Thomson (1949), p. 283.
Figure 6.3.2: Donatello, c.1450s, *Judith and Holofernes* (detail, gilded sword).
the clean,” she instead decided to “dedicate it by the altar of the divine spring in a Catholic temple, there to shine and flash with unfading light.”

It is worth noting that Florentine versions of Judith feature this part of the description and its focus on the sword. Botticelli’s *Judith*, for example, painted in the 1470s showed the “red dew of gore” still clinging to the sword of her conquered enemy and which she brandished before her (Figure 6.7.4). Donatello’s *Judith* had the sword gilded in gold—the remnants are still visible (Figure 6.3.2)—to ensure that the sword would indeed have “shone and flashed with unfading light” in the Medici garden.

The *Psychomachia* author’s focus on washing the sword in “the waters of Jordan” connoted Christian virtue that had been made possible by baptism. It referred to its ability to wash away sin. This was confirmed in another of Prudentius’ poems, *The Daily Round*, in which he elaborated on this meaning of the Jordan. At the same time, Prudentius reflected on the inevitable contest between purity and lust that occurred in the human struggle between wiser and baser instincts, and as I showed Fra Dominici did in his sermon given after the fall of Pisa, he used fighting as a metaphor for the struggle to be virtuous:

> Look into our thoughts, and examine our whole life; many stains are there to be cleansed by thy light ... bid us shine when we were dipped in Jordan’s stream and our uncleanness was done away ... It was under the dusk of night that Jacob, wrestling boldly with the angel, toiled hard in unequal fight until the light arose. But when the beam shone forth his ham gave way and he was lamed, and being overcome in the infirmity of his thigh he lost the strength to sin. His loins were wounded and enfeebled, that baser part of the body, far below the heart, which nurtures fearful lust. These figures teach us that man, sunk in darkness, if he yield not to God, loses strength.\(^{32}\)

In the notion of “Christian” described in sources like the *Psychomachia*, there was a body that physically struggled with its urges, its mind toiling to prevail over its

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corporal longing for untamed pleasures. This struggle was experienced in the flesh, but it was also a metaphysical idea: it represented a much broader fight between notions of wisdom, beauty, purity, and the unfettered, untamed human experience of raw living. In the Book of Judith and the Psychomachia, territorial warfare expressed this duality of the physical and metaphysical, encapsulating perfectly the tensions that exist between personal and communal benefit. It also established a version of authority that was sacred-political, in which the politics might be both Christian, and of the republic.

Prudentius moved freely between metaphors of territorial expansion and spiritual endeavour, conceiving chastity as a form of loyalty to both God and country. The battle between virtue and vice in the Psychomachia had been waged explicitly in terms of territorial warfare. “We must watch in the armour of faithful hearts,” he wrote, “that every part of our body which is in captivity and enslaved to foul desire must be set free by gathering forces at home.” The warfare against vice was symbolised with “proud” kings—hence, the concept of ‘kingdom’ was made to stand for the kind of turpitude that undercut city-states. In introducing the battleground, Prudentius had set the scene with Abraham’s fight to recover Lot, using trampling as a metaphor for independent sovereignty:

[Abraham] draws the sword and being filled with the spirit of God, drives off in flight those proud kings, weighed down with their booty, or cuts them down and tramples them under foot ... Abraham, having scattered his enemies in triumph, returns in the glory of recovering his brother’s son so that wicked kings should not keep a descendant of the faithful stock under their violent power.

Prudentius connected Abraham in this passage to the same metaphors used in the Book of Judith. Abraham—like Judith—was “filled with the spirit of God.” The sword drawn in attack was a symbol of righteousness, of an ability to fight for Israel’s independence against the “violent power” and “pride” of its enemies, defined as a sacred duty. Finally, Abraham had “scattered his enemies in triumph,” returning home in victory, which was claimed not for Abraham but for the “faithful stock.”

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The detail of trampling, and all that it typically signified in biblical imagery, would have triggered penitential reflection in the viewer of Donatello’s *Judith*. The encouragement towards ethical reflection was further reinforced in a number of ways in the statue’s composition. Judith’s head was tilted in contemplation and her gaze was similarly focussed on a distant point. The abstracted and contemplative gaze suggested being momentarily turned toward inner and divine reflection. It might have also brought to mind the stance of Faith, sculpted for example by Nicola Pisano in the Pisa Baptistery.

The clearest method by which to draw the viewer’s attention to ethical reflection was provided in the way that Donatello’s *Judith* turned Holofernes’ face towards the viewer, as though to expose him to examination, which was a gesture made all the more effective by the fact that Holofernes’ body would have been closest to the viewer’s position while Judith towered above them both. This directing of the viewer to examine Holofernes’ errors would have been further underlined by his dangling arm, which extended from his exposed face down to the scene below the cushion upon the base, as though tracing a line for the viewer’s eye to follow, down to the Bacchanalia below. The symbolism at the base conjured a dreamlike vision of classical indulgence, illustrating submersion in sensual pleasures. Holofernes’ ‘base’ instincts thus literally formed his base or foundation.

The statue’s bacchanalian scenes to which Holofernes was pointing highlighted his surrender to luxuria and the degree to which this had played a role in his downfall. It is evocative in this case that the base of the statue bore a resemblance to images from the *Psychomachia* that symbolised luxuria (Figure 6.3.3). Judith was the personification of sobrietas, a chaste matron of the patrician class, while Holofernes’ nakedness evoked a sensual wantonness. Additionally, Donatello’s rendition had specifically placed Judith and Holofernes within the context of Rome. Details which accomplished this included the classical decorations of urns on Judith’s dress, and Holofernes’ loose and ample hair, which had been borrowed from Roman portrayals of Barbarian kings. The meaning in the second line of the statue’s inscription, which drew attention to the dangers of “luxury,” and which posited “virtue” as a model for political success, had, like Prudentius’ *Psychomachia*, characterized kingdoms as the antithesis of freedom and of virtue: “Kingdoms fall through luxury, cities rise
Renaissance artists often used a figure’s physical stance to convey ethical content. Solidity conveyed a firm character to a Renaissance audience. Conversely, a weak or unbalanced stance was equated with a weak character. The virtues and vices tradition that was prompted using the symbolism of trampling was further underlined in the statue by drawing attention to the oppositional nature of the two protagonists, which was morally coded in their bodies. Significantly, Holofernes was positioned well below Judith. His body was soft and yielding, with no control over its limbs. The plump and dimpled cushion over which Holofernes’ limbs dangled magnified this sense of laxness. The comparative heights of Judith and Holofernes, moreover, the couple’s apparent strength and weakness, their displayed restraint and abandon in appearance, all these contrasts accentuated the confrontation between sobrietas and luxuria.

There was also an ethical function in choosing a sculpture as the form of display through virtue.”

Figure 6.3.3: Psychomachia, c. late-10th century, Men abandoning themselves to Luxuria, Anglo-Saxon illustrated manuscript.

rather than a painting. The sculpted medium, as we know, would in part have been chosen to imitate antique forms of civic display. Sculpture was additionally powerful, however, because it showed by doing: the ‘doing’ being all the more influential because it was rendered life-size, or bigger than life size, and in three dimensions. It was the closest an artist could come at that time to rendering the state of things as they actually were. Renaissance reasoning was such that the more that artistic expertise and innovation could achieve verisimilitude, the more it could and would reveal a truth. The sculpture was thus in itself a claim to teach, a claim to reveal a truth to its viewers.

The above analysis points to the fact that historians must grapple with the religion in the politics of Judith in order to understand fully its appeal to the Medici. The story of Judith was a demonstration of how politics attached itself to sacred authority and how it was all the more credible to its contemporaries for this partnership. Judith was entirely driven by the prospect of leading her town to its own salvation—she had put herself forward for glorification through such a deed—but instead, this was seen to express her duty to God. Thus the social danger in such ambition was inverted to become social power in the context of the pursuit of virtue. Florentine sources confirm that this was the way that Florentines, and certainly the Medici, understood Judith. Lucrezia Tornabuoni de’ Medici’s play, for example, opened by addressing Christ directly, as well as invoking the Virgin, in several of its opening stanzas. Tornabuoni, like Judith, had sought God’s aid, in writing the poem:

I found her story written in prose, and I was greatly impressed by her courage: a fearful little widow. She had your help, and she knew what to do and say; Lord, you made her bold and helped her plan succeed.

35I am referring, for example, to the relationship between nature and ideas in Leon Battista Alberti’s treatise On Painting (c. 1435) and the perceived ability of pictorial forms to depict abstract realities. See Leon Battista Alberti. On Painting, volume 175. Yale University Press, 1966, and the discussion in Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde. A Companion to Art Theory. John Wiley & Sons, 2008, pp. 9 – 13. It should also be noted here that there are studies which argue that pictorial abstraction rather than naturalism best communicated certain truths. Georges Didi-Huberman, for example, has argued that Fra Angelico’s paintings attempted to challenge rather than reinforce verisimilitude. He used semiotics to treat the artist’s paintings as virtual configurations of theological thought. See Georges Didi-Huberman. Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
Would that you could grant such favour to me, so that I may turn her
tale into rhyme, in a manner that would please.\textsuperscript{36}

Tornabuoni placed Judith’s victory in the penitential context, which is to say
in the context of Christ defeating the Devil, and therefore in the context of virtue’s
opposition to and defeat of pride. She further elaborated on this by constructing
the defeat of the Devil as having stemmed from his lust for glory, thus opening it
up to a political connotation:

How much the sin of pride angers you can be seen by us from numerous
signs, starting first with that audacious man who was the handsomest
in your triumphant kingdom. He did not know how to enjoy true peace,
he wanted to be a lord even worthier than you; because he wished to be
the greatest of all princes, he was the first to know suffering in hell.\textsuperscript{37}

Tornabuoni had used the opening stanzas of her poem about Judith to instruct
the audience in how to interpret the account of Judith and Holofernes. She advised
her reader to learn the lesson of Judith in two, interrelated senses: in terms of the
struggle between humility and pride, and in terms of reason’s battle with lesser
instincts:

Thus did he [the Devil] lose that joyful glory that he has never been able
to regain. This is what happens to all who revel in pride; similar things
will befall them. He who goes about without reason and does not follow
God is brought low; he who acts without reason finds—as one sees—that
many things befall him that try his belief.\textsuperscript{38}

In incorporating these two perspectives, Tornabuoni had presented the old and
new thinking on virtue, while also hinting at a spiritual-political conception of civic
duty in the ominous reference to those who are “brought low” after revelling in their

\textsuperscript{36}Lucrezia Tornabuoni de’ Medici, “The Story of Judith, Hebrew Widow,” in Lucrezia
Tornabuoni de’ Medici. \textit{Sacred Narratives, edited and translated by Jane Tylus}. University of


\textsuperscript{38}Tornabuoni de’ Medici (2001), p.124.
The opposition between humility and pride was typically the one in which medieval exegesis was most often interested, as the virtue of humility was treated as the root of all other virtues, and pride the root of all other vices. It was thus emblematic of the fight between Christ and the Devil, or between virtue and vice. The emphasis on reason came from Ficino and a Neoplatonic understanding, which described the triumph of reason in the same terms as other sources had described the triumph of virtue. In the following analysis, I will examine each of these perspectives to highlight how they fed into the personification of Florence in portrayals of David and Judith and into the notion of citizenship that was founded on the pursuit of virtue. The first will be handled in the section immediately below, while the second will be picked up in later sections.

6.4 Trampling Vice

The way that virtue’s struggle operated in the medieval iconography of Judith and Holofernes is perhaps best demonstrated with the example of an illumination in a *Speculum Virginum* manuscript dated 1140 (Figure 6.4.1). The central figure was of a female personification of *humilitas*, depicted standing on a male personification of *superbia*. As noted previously, the *Psychomachia* had cast virtues and vices both in a female gender, but medieval iconography had shifted to casting the virtue as female and the vice as male. In the image below, *humilitas* was flanked on her left and right with two other biblical heroines, Jael and Judith, who had each killed their enemy to deliver Israel. These enemies were, respectively, Sisera and Holofernes. The choice of Jael and Judith signalled a penitential context. Each of these women worked in medieval iconography as allegories for the Virgin’s defeat of the Devil, and/or—the same meaning—for virtue’s victory over vice. In copies of the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, for example, in which three accounts of valourous killing appeared in

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the chapter in which the Virgin mother defeats the Devil using instruments of the Crucifixion, Judith, Jael, and usually, Tomyris, who had been described in several ancient sources as defeating Cyrus, appeared as analogous with the Virgin’s victory.

It will be evident in the *Speculum Virginum* image shown here that each of the women were depicted as standing on, or what at times may have called ‘trampling,’ their enemy. *Humilitas* was depicted with a single foot on the torso of *superbia*, while Jael and Judith stand on the bodies of those whom they vanquished, with one foot stepping on their enemies faces. The particular detail of the foot touching or resting on the face—which as we also know re-emerged in Donatello’s bronze *David*—was one of the most visceral and efficient ways to communicate to its audience the full submission and defeat of a person, or the vice which they represented.

It is also worth noting that the way that *humilitas* stakes the upper chest of *superbia* with her sword in the image in the *Speculum Virginum* derived from depictions of the *Psychomachia* and the various ways in which the virtues were shown to have dispatched their victims. The sword had many reverberations of meaning in imagery during this period—from a key symbol of the cardinal virtue of Justice, as seen for example in Lorenzetti’s *Allegory of Good Government*, to spiritual purity or chastity described elsewhere in this chapter. From within the context of the *Psychomachia*, the sword was the weapon of choice of certain virtues, and thus specifically associated with their victory over corresponding vices. This was certainly the case for the two virtues associated with Judith in the *Psychomachia*—Chastity and Humility. Chastity was shown in illuminations of the *Psychomachia* either driving the sword through the head of Lust or beheading her, as Judith had beheaded Holofernes (Figures 6.4.2 and 6.4.3). Similarly, Humility in the *Psychomachia* vanquished Pride with a beheading (Figure 6.4.4). The medieval depiction shows Humility grasping the hair of a fallen Pride in order to behead him, and is suggestive of Donatello’s depiction of Judith clasping Holofernes’ ample hair in order to behead him.

Finally, it is important to note how in the *Speculum Virginum* image, Jael and Judith were each given a branch or palm to hold as they stood victorious on their enemy. The palm was a symbol of victory, common in both biblical and other ancient sources. It is key to an understanding of how Judith was understood in Florence.
Figure 6.4.1: Speculum Virginum, c.1140, Jael, Humilitas, and Judith, Arundel MS. 44, British Library, London.
The image of virtue standing victorious with a lifted palm shown here early in the twelfth century was picked up by Petrarch, who had his Chastity wrest the palm of victory from Love’s grasp. The branch wielded by Chastity was a feature of Florentine paintings of Petrarch’s *Trionfi* commissioned during the fifteenth century. These typically depicted Chastity either sitting or standing on her triumphal chariot holding aloft a palm or an olive branch much in the manner shown in the *Speculum Virginum*.

Lucrezia de’ Tornabuoni had used the same high–low placement that Donatello had employed in positioning Judith and Holofernes, which as I have demonstrated was also tied to how Humility had killed Pride in the *Psychomachia*. This positioning had been underscored in the inscription on Donatello’s *Judith* by contrasting the “rise” of cities through virtues, with the “fall” of kingdoms through succumbing to *luxuria*, the vice that flourished in the absence of *sobrietas* or temperance. Chastity was a key behaviour that emanated from the root-idea of temperance. Tornabuoni
Figure 6.4.3: Psychomachia, c.1000, Chastity Casting a Rock at and Beheading Lust, British Library, London.
had singled out temperance, or “moderation” as she called it, as a lesson taught by Judith:

Now listen carefully to what I tell you, and be sure to keep in mind this warning: for whoever leaves moderation so far behind merits only damnation and derision. For him [Holofernes], one great victory was not enough; our appetite is never satiated. Thus he sought to usurp glory even from God, his mind blinded and full of presumption, King Nabuc completely lost his senses. Observe this strange and disrespectful work, and note that one cannot do worse in this world than try to equal or be greater than God.  

In comparing the King’s insatiable appetite for power to “usurping God’s glory,” Tornabuoni was comparing luxuria to superbia, showing them to be interrelated and at the foundation of dysfunctional political power, the same relationship displayed in Donatello’s Judith.

6.5 The Story in the Book of Judith

A detailed look at the Book of Judith demonstrates that sacred and political authority was linked through the theme of virtue. Its principal message was that humility signified worthiness to rule. Pride in the face of God, however—defined as lust for power and earthly pleasures—disqualified a person from power. Judith’s feat had come from a story incorporated into the Bible by Jerome as the Book of Judith, which Jerome had found in the first popular Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. The account began with the Assyrian King Nabuchodonosor con-

42 Judith more accurately belonged to the Books that were not in the Hebrew Bible, to which Jerome gave the name “Apocrypha,” meaning the hidden or secret books. These Books remained in popular versions of the Christian Bible until the King James version of 1611, after which time they
Figure 6.4.4: Psychomachia, c.870–899, Latin 8085, fol. 61r, Bibliothèque nationale de France.
triving to control the territories surrounding his kingdom, particularly those that had previously flouted his authority.

The king calls his governors and counsellors of war together and he tells them of a plan “to bring all the earth under his empire.” Once he determines that this plan meets with his counsellors’ approval, he summons his army general, Holofernes, and he tells him: “Go out against all the kingdoms of the west, and against them especially that despised my commandment. Thy eye shall not spare any kingdom, and all the strong cities thou shalt bring under my yoke.” The powerful Assyrian army pursue their mission with appetite; the Bible describes them covering “the face of the earth, like locusts.” Town after town falls to the king’s army. Led by their general Holofernes, they force their enemies to capitulate and viciously destroy anything of value: “[Holofernes] carried away all the children ... stripped them of all their riches ... all that resisted him he slew with the edge of the sword. And after these things he went down into the plains of Damascus in the days of the harvest, and he set all the corn on fire, and he caused all the trees and vineyards to be cut down.”

Israel is the last line of defense in the conquered territories, and it finds itself forced into a war with the Assyrians in order to protect itself from domination. The heart of the account begins with the town of Bethulia; a town in a mountainous area that stood between the Assyrians and Jerusalem. It is also where the Hebrew heroine Judith happens to reside. The people of Bethulia make provision for war, and together with surrounding towns, they fortify the mountains. Holofernes cuts off their water supply, aiming to force the Israelites out from behind their buttresses

were gradually dropped due to Puritan disapproval. Jerome likely based his version of the Book of Judith on the Septuagint version, which was the most ancient translation of the Old Testament, and made into popular Greek before the Christian era. While rejecting in theory those books that he did not find in his Hebrew manuscript, Jerome consented to translate Judith because “the Synod of Nicaea is said to have accounted it as Sacred Scripture,” and the Church Fathers reckoned Judith among the canonical books. Hugh Pope. Book of Judith, in The Catholic Encyclopedia. http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08554a.htm, 1912, viewed 18 Nov 2018.

43Book of Judith, 2: 2–6.
44Book of Judith, 2: 2–6.
47The Bible described Judith as exceedingly beautiful and rich, but particularly loved among her townspeople as a holy woman. Book of Judith, 8: 7–8.
through thirst. The Israelites in Bethulia hold out for twenty days, all the while praying and fasting in a plea for divine aid.\textsuperscript{48} With all their water reserves exhausted, however, the people of Bethulia start to falter in their faith and to contemplate surrender. “It is better that being captives we should live and bless the Lord,” they say to each other, “than that we should die and be a reproach to all flesh.”\textsuperscript{49} One of the town’s elders suggests that they wait five days more, but should God not come to their aid, that they should then surrender. Hearing of their doubts, Judith upbraids the elders and her townspeople for their confusion in the face of such trials: “who are you that tempt the Lord? This is not a word that may draw down mercy, but rather that may stir up wrath, and enkindle indignation.”\textsuperscript{50} Judith tells them that the war between the Assyrians and the Israelites is a struggle between their pride and “our” humility, while also explicitly making humility a signature of independent sovereignty that has been sanctioned by God:

... as our heart is troubled by their pride, so also we may glorify in our humility. Let us humbly wait for his consolation, and the Lord our God will require our blood of the afflictions of our enemies, and he will humble all the nations that shall rise up against us, and bring them to disgrace.\textsuperscript{51}

Judith reminds the townspeople of others who were tested by God, such as Abraham, but who being tested remained faithful. She tells them that she has a strategy to defeat Holofernes and that she will bring it about during the next five days. She asks them not to act until then. Judith’s reputation as a holy woman lends her words authority, and the town’s elders acquiesce, telling her “to take revenge of our enemies.”\textsuperscript{52}

Judith returns home to prepare. She then prays to God. The words of Judith’s prayer in the Bible were reflected in the inscription on Donatello’s Judith in terms of the references to fortitude and pride being cut down by Judith’s hand. It is also

\textsuperscript{48} Book of Judith, 4: 2–16; 6: 14–21; 7: 1–16.
\textsuperscript{49} Book of Judith, 7: 16.
\textsuperscript{50} Book of Judith, 8: 11.
\textsuperscript{51} Book of Judith, 8: 11–20.
\textsuperscript{52} Book of Judith, 8: 23–34.
in the material of the sculpture itself, in the symbolism of Judith’s raised arm as divine power, and the work of the sculpture as a “monument” to the same. Judith says of her impending campaign:

Lift up thy arm as from the beginning, and crush their power with thy power: let their power fall in their wrath, who promise themselves to violate thy sanctuary, and defile the dwelling place of thy name, and to beat down with their sword the horn of thy altar. Bring to pass, O Lord, that his pride may be cut off with his own sword. Let him be caught in the net of his own eyes in my regard, and do thou strike him by the graces of the words of my lips. Give me constancy in my mind, that I may despise him: and fortitude that I may overthrow him. For this will be a glorious monument for thy name, when he shall fall by the hand of a woman.53

Judith then asks her maid to help her dress in her finest clothes. Until the recent meeting with the elders and more usually, she dressed in penitent’s clothes. Now Judith “clothed herself with the garments of her gladness, and put sandals on her feet, and took her bracelets, and lilies, and earlets [sic], and rings, and adorned herself with all her ornaments.”54 Artists into the sixteenth and into seventeenth centuries often portrayed Judith as a sexual temptress. Florentine artists during the fifteenth century, however, invariably depicted Judith’s clothing as fine but chaste, emphasising Judith’s virtue. The Bible similarly underscores that it is her virtue that enlivens her beauty, and God’s approval of her actions: “And the Lord also gave her more beauty: because all this dressing up did not proceed from sensuality, lent from virtue: and therefore the Lord increased this her beauty, so that she appeared to all men’s eyes incomparably lovely.”55 Tornabuoni achieves the same by describing Judith in several places as an “angel.”56

54Book of Judith, 10: 1–5.
55Book of Judith, 10: 1–5.
56Tornabuoni de’ Medici (2001), p. 147, 153. She also describes her as a “goddess,” p. 148, and a “flower of all beauty,” p. 153, with the latter epithet possibly constructing Judith as a metaphor for Florence.
Once in the countryside, Judith and her maid quickly find by an Assyrian watchman who escorts them to Holofernes’ camp. Judith persuades Holofernes that she has defected from Israel, and she promises him that she can make the Israelites surrender without any loss to Holofernes’ army. Holofernes is persuaded, and Judith is invited to stay as his guest. It is arranged that she will be allowed to leave the camp briefly each day to walk into the hills to make her prayers to God. Judith and the maid have also brought their own food with them that complies with Israel’s food laws. Several days pass, and Holofernes becomes transfixed with the urge to seduce Judith. He tells his servant to go and ask Judith to come to his bed, “For it is looked upon as shameful among the Assyrians, if a woman mock a man.” Judith understands this as the opportunity that she has been waiting for, and she accepts the invitation, saying that she expects to first dine with Holofernes.57 Tornabuoni somewhat diffuses the inevitability of impending violation by making it an invitation to dinner from the outset, with a connotation of anticipated seduction. She also where possible draws out the inference of Judith’s deftness and intelligence in navigating the circumstances.58

At dinner, Holofernes is “burning with the desire of her,” and he is carried away by these feelings, giving himself up to the sensualities of food and drink.59 He drinks more than he has ever before and by the end of the dinner he is entirely intoxicated. The servants dispatch Holofernes and Judith to his bedchamber and depart, while Holofernes lies on the bed but promptly falls asleep. Judith sees her moment and tells her maid to stay outside and keep watch. Judith stands before the bed and looking at Holofernes’ prostrate body with tears in her eyes, she prays to God saying: “in this hour look on the works of my hands, that as thou hast promised, thou mayst raise up Jerusalem thy city: and that I may bring to pass that which I have purposed, having a belief that it might be done by thee.” Judith then takes down Holofernes’ sword hanging on the bedpost; she grasps Holofernes’ hair saying once more “Strengthen me, O Lord God, at this hour,” and she strikes at Holofernes’ neck twice with his sword, severing his head from his body.60

57 Book of Judith, 12: 10–11.
Judith tears away the bed canopy as she rolls away Holofernes headless body. She calls out to her maid to bring the bag in which their food is usually stored, to use as a receptacle. Judith puts Holofernes’ head in this bag, and together she and her maid leave the Assyrian camp. The soldiers standing watch believe that Judith and her maid are taking their daily journey into the hills for their prayers and so they do not try to stop them. Judith arrives at Bethulia’s town gates, carrying the head of Holofernes and the bloodied canopy of his bed as proof of Israel’s triumph. She calls out to the watchmen that God and Israel have prevailed, and the watchmen scatter to raise the townspeople from their beds. The people of Bethulia gather around Judith, who reveals the head of Holofernes from its satchel and holds it aloft for them to see. She says:

Behold the head of Holofernes the general of the army of the Assyrians, and behold his canopy, wherein he lay in his drunkenness, where the Lord our God slew him by the hand of a woman.

At Judith’s insistence, the townspeople put Holofernes’ head on their walls. The Assyrians see this from a distance and become alarmed as to what it might mean. They go to wake their general to ask him what they should do, but they discover instead Holofernes’ decapitated body. Immediately they break down in grief and turmoil. They begin to flee their camp. At the same time, the Israelites who have taken up arms are travelling to the Assyrians’ camp, and they eventually siege it, breaking it up for their spoils.

The high priest shortly after travels from Jerusalem to visit with Judith and to congratulate her at the close of the account. He tells her:

Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honour of our people: For thou hast done manfully, and thy heart has been strengthened, because thou hast loved chastity, and after thy

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61 The Bible noted in the account that Judith and her maid had brought (effectively kosher) food with them; besides providing an ideal way to disguise Holofernes’ head, the bag signified the fact that Judith went to some effort to remain inviolate throughout her endeavour.

husband hast not known any other: therefore also the hand of the Lord hath strengthened thee, and therefore thou shalt be blessed forever.\textsuperscript{63}

Finally, Judith sings a canticle that relates the whole event and Israel’s divine victory. The Bible’s account ends by reiterating Judith’s renown throughout Israel, adding that she continues to be chaste and virtuous for the remainder of her life.

\subsection{Sacred–Political Authority, Themes in the Book of Judith}

At issue between the Assyrians and the Israelites in the Book of Judith was the conception of political power—whether it was chosen, sought and gained by human agency, or whether it was ultimately given and sustained by God. Nabuchodonosor had sought power for power’s sake, proclaiming himself “god of the earth.”\textsuperscript{64} Holofernes likewise “in the contempt of his pride despised the God of Israel.”\textsuperscript{65} The struggle between the Assyrian King Nabuchodonosor and Israel was therefore a struggle to retain God’s place at the top of the Israelite social and political structure. The Israelites could not contemplate this reversal of God’s place, which was confirmed by Judith in Chapter 9, when she prayed and asked God to “crush their power with thy power,” and later when she returned to Bethulia with Holofernes’ head, saying that God had “cut off [by her hand] the head of all the unbelievers.”\textsuperscript{66} Judith in victory had not only saved Israel, but she had also saved a particular relationship that had been previously established between Israel and God.

The biblical narrative thus comprised three levels of meaning for an audience in fifteenth-century Florence. One was primary and literal, and the remaining two were underpinning, and respectively, figurative, and pragmatic. The first level of meaning in the account aimed to establish the fact that political power on earth could not endure without a close and submissive relation to heavenly power. Judith’s

\textsuperscript{63}Book of Judith, 15: 9–11.
\textsuperscript{64}Book of Judith, 5: 29.
\textsuperscript{65}Book of Judith, 13: 28.
\textsuperscript{66}Book of Judith, 9 and 13: 27
victory meant that virtuous people “shall be mindful of the power of the Lord forever.” The account established this principle and the consequences of flouting it. This conception of power and God’s supremacy, moreover, expressed the motives of Nabuchodonosor, Holofernes, the Israelites, and Judith; it was the basis of their hostilities and the need for Holofernes to die by Judith’s hand. It was therefore, in narrative terms, the essential meaning of the account and its most primary and theoretical aspect. This was likewise reflected in Lucrezia de’ Tornabuoni’s telling, as described above.

The next two levels of the narrative’s structure branched out from this primary message in two directions. These were figurative, but one was designed to further illustrate the theory of power and the other was designed to draw from this theoretical position a practical lesson for Christian readers. The first can be identified as the repeated use of metaphorical contrasts and polarities to depict the paradox about God-given power—that humility was the foundation of ‘true’ rule: Judith, a woman, becomes “manly;” Holofernes, once manly, becomes effeminate—flaccid with sleep and drink; his pride is felled by humility; military victory is gained not by force but by submission; the ungoverned are conquered by the obedient; and a kingdom is humbled by a city-state.

The third level drew attention to an innate characteristic of God-given power: the need to practise an ethical life. The clash between virtue and vice, intrinsic to ethical endeavour during the fifteenth century, centred most upon Holofernes’ bedchamber and what transpired there. Holofernes’ lust met the power of Judith’s chastity. In the very circumstances of being able to take an otherwise powerful man in his sleep there was an ethical meaning for the Christian reader or viewer: the watchful will necessarily prevail over those who succumb to their vice or lesser.

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68 James Hankins has argued that premodern republics could be defined in numerous ways, including as either a city-state or a kingdom. Thus, in ancient and premodern sources, a city-republic (or non-monarchical republic) was not necessarily the antithesis of a kingdom (or non-elective monarchical rule). In identifying the city-republic as working within a metaphorical polarity here, however, I am reflecting the sources on Judith—for example, in the introduction to Prudentius’ Psychomachia, in which the city-state of Israel, personified in Abraham, defeats “proud” and “wicked kings.” James Hankins. Exclusivist Republicanism and the Non-Monarchical Republic. Political Theory, 38(4):452–482, 2010. Cf. Thomson (1949), pp. 276–277.
instincts. At the pinnacle of the ethical structure described in the account there was God; at the secondary figurative level there was a woman, an Israelite, and a city-state; and at the pragmatic level for the devotee, there was obedience, purity, watchfulness, and virtue. The same could be said for the political structure illustrated by Donatello’s Judith: first level, God; second level, city-state; and third level—the level of the citizen—virtue.

It can be noted, therefore, that if the statue of Judith was an attempt to engage in obfuscation about dominance, it was a far more complex form than historians have previously estimated, given that the Book of Judith in fact advocated dominance—albeit an ethical conceptualisation, which can otherwise be defined as command through virtue. Tornabuoni’s account makes it clear that Judith would not have succeeded, nor would she have gained divine assistance, had she not been a manifestation of virtue. Judith’s strength and her dominance were dependent upon divine approval. Likewise, Israel’s success was contingent upon the virtue of its members. Crucially, virtue was defined as an arduous endeavour, so that victory was not arbitrary but reasoned. The lesson was in the very setting of the account, which in its military nature pitted two sides against one another. In this last oppositional pair—between enemy and enemy in military battle—there was a solution offered to the moral dilemma of vice pitted against virtue: in war there can only be one victor. The victory of Judith against Holofernes not only featured these polarities, but it accordingly offered a way out of their circularity. It distinguished one side as superior to the other. Rather than expect its audience to disengage critical faculty, therefore, it did the reverse: it presented a theorised model of power and virtue, urging each viewer to reason the need for virtue, and to pursue it.

6.7 Judith as Petrarchan Chastity

The poem that Lucrezia Tornabuoni de’ Medici wrote about Judith was largely faithful to the Bible account, as we might expect, but it is also quite telling for what it chooses to stress. It reinforces pride as something to avoid. We can infer this
Figure 6.6.1: Florentine, c.1465–69, Posthumous medal of Cosimo de’ Medici (1389–1464), Pater Patriae (obverse); Florence Holding an Orb and Triple Olive Branch (reverse), bronze, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Figure 6.6.2: Niccolò Fiorentino, c.1490, Lorenzo de’ Medici, Il Magnifico (obverse); Florence under a Laurel(?) Tree, Holding Three Lilies (reverse), bronze, National Gallery of Art, Washington.
had a political connotation. The poem also strongly foregrounds spiritual purity in political contexts, because it reinforces at numerous intervals that anyone who made themselves equal or above God was inviting all forms of negative outcomes both political and social. Most importantly for the present analysis, Tornabuoni incorporates something that was neither in the Bible account nor could it have been sourced from theological writers, and this was an emphasis on the romantic aspects of Judith’s situation. Tornabuoni gave Holofernes’ attempted seduction of Judith a flavour of Renaissance romance. She described, in quite human and realistic terms, Holofernes’ lust when he first laid eyes on Judith, staging it as though it was happening contemporaneously or in a Renaissance play. This included the impression she made on Holofernes’ knights:

When Holofernes saw her, he was set aflame: that ferocious heart of his became human, and once he began to gaze at her lovely face he could not take his eyes away from hers. Those knights who were in the service of Holofernes all spoke among themselves: “Let us linger here no longer to give them grief; let us make peace with them at once! Look at this woman: she seems a goddess. If the others all resemble her, then, our worthy lord, make peace with the Hebrews so that we can stay here; we seek no other kingdom!”

Holofernes gave Judith “tender audience in turn, lavishing caresses as though he were her lover.” When he issued his invitation for Judith to dine with him (which was more instruction in the biblical version), the servant’s scene was delivered as though in a contemporary, romantic play: “O young woman of goodwill, while you linger here by yourself and so lonely, you make my lord suffer. Come dine with him now and have no fear; he loves you more than any creature in the world.”

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bring me something to wear, that short garment that fits me best, in which I look most handsome.” As dinner approaches, Tornabuoni even more lucidly evokes in Holofernes the Renaissance lover:

He awaited Judith in this fashion, neat and trim and richly adorned, and he wanders among his guests saying cheerful and happy little words to all. Throughout his pavilion he sprays pleasing perfumes, and it was not for nothing that he did so; and so with happy thoughts did he await her, fervently desiring that she join him.

In describing Holofernes as man “aflame” Tornabuoni shows him to be under the influence of Love. This was Petrarch’s personification of Love, which we have confirmed in the narrator’s voice when she noted in the passage that described their dinner and courtship, “It was springtime, when all of our hearts are inflamed with love, and Holofernes wanted it to be springtime forever so that winter would never come.” Springtime was typically associated with Love and Cupid.

Holofernes’ succumbing to Love and lust was, moreover, contrasted with Judith’s faith in divine love and reason. Judith played her part in the romance, but Tornabuoni makes it clear that she doesn’t succumb to it. She kneels to pray before going to dinner, seeking divine guidance and help. She also remains alert, and when she sees Holofernes “sending down drinks without restraint,” she notes to herself that “divine grace will surely assist me now.”

The romantic or seduction motif that Tornabuoni incorporated into her play was structured by these roles, fitting Judith and Holofernes into Petrarch’s Triumphus construct and casting them respectively as Chastity and Love. The effect for those who understood the reference would have been to enhance the connotation of virtue conquering vice, bringing it into the current century by casting it as Neoplatonic divine love triumphing over human love or lust. This also explains an unusual choice in Donatello’s Judith, which was to show the bodies intertwined and engaged in what is effectively an embrace.
Figure 6.7.1: Maestro di Marradi, c.1480–1490, *Judith and Holofernes*, tavola, *Museo Nazionale di San Matteo*, Pisa.
All the Florentine versions of Judith in the fifteenth century, whether sculpted or more usually painted, were remarkably similar and nearly of ‘one mind’ in their representation. In some cases, for reasons of space, renditions focussed only on the decapitation, while others showed the different facets of the story. An example of the latter is a particularly fine desco da parto (Figure 6.7.1), in which the scene of Holofernes’ decapitation appeared in the bottom left foreground (Figure 6.7.2, a). The tray additionally showed a series of moments in the account, presented in an integrated scene. It was possible to see, for example, the head of Holofernes displayed on Bethulia’s walls on a spike (Figure 6.7.2, b), which referred to what the townspeople did on Judith’s advice after she returned victoriously. It was also possible to make out groups of soldiers that reference different parts of the timeline; they can be seen guarding the camp before Holofernes meets his end, but after he meets his demise, they can be seen scattering in disarray.

Judith was chosen by numerous elite families who were decorating their homes through the middle decades of the fifteenth century. She appeared in at least one known instance on a cassone in Petrarch’s Trionfi, in which Judith was shown dressed as a contemporary Florentine widow and holding Holofernes’ head (this can be seen in Figure 5.5.4, in the previous chapter). In this case, she was positioned in the foreground walking amongst the viri illustri in the Triumph of Fame. Most featured in some way the significance of the assassination to Bethulia’s (more broadly Israel’s) salvation. Depictions also all tended to oscillate between ancient or classical allusions and contemporary details, the latter sometimes giving Bethulia the appearance of a city much like Florence.

Donatello’s Judith was singular and unique because, while it displayed the beheading like most, it was common to have the two figures of Judith and Holofernes barely touch, let alone to be entwined. Similarly, it was rare before this statue for Holofernes to appear naked. He was frequently shown under covers in late-medieval versions, with Judith leaning over him in order to sever his throat. Admittedly

73 Tornabuoni de’ Medici (2001), p. 152
many of these required more simplistic techniques for illuminations, or were unable to show fine detail because they were confined to a small amount of space, but they nonetheless opted to show Holofernes covered by bedclothing. Donatello’s version was much more seductive in the proximity of the bodies and in Holofernes’ nakedness. Additionally, and potentially relatedly, the statue presented an inverted power dynamic. The physical proximity, with its connotation of sexual intimacy, represented social disaster for a chaste and modest woman. This was in fact heightened in the statue, while it was made clear that Judith had preserved her chastity. This was further underlined by a reversal of the gender roles, in which Judith physically dominated Holofernes; she was seen standing over him, awake while he was asleep and undefended. The statue gave her power and dominance that was both physical and mental. Such unique features—the intertwined forms, the nakedness—were done for the same reason that Tornabuoni chose to draw out the romantic themes, in order to allude to the context of Petrarch’s *Trionfi* but, more particularly, to point to Chastity’s victory. In the bronze *Judith*, Judith was another Chastity who had
subordinated Love. This had the advantage of dovetailing with an interpretation of
David in the adjoining courtyard as Love, as was shown in the previous chapter.

The viewer was alerted to the importance of the embrace and its significance
to the reading of the statue by another surprising choice, which was to sacrifice the
realism of the beheading. Were Judith to complete the swing of the sword from
the position in which she stood, for example, with Holofernes resting against her,
she would have cut not only Holofernes’ neck but also her own leg. On the one
hand, compromising realism in this one respect may have been necessary, given the
complexity of intertwining the figures.77 On the other hand, we know that realism
was a critical attribute of the Renaissance aesthetic, and that Donatello was an artist
of exceptional skill. In these circumstances, what is to be made of such a disparity?
The likely explanation is that it was indeed an outcome of interlacing the figures
but that it was a sacrifice the artist was willing to make because the ‘embrace’ was
pivotal to the statue’s intended meaning. It thus speaks to the ambitiousness of
the commission from both a conceptual but also a technical perspective. Posing
them so as to make the decapitation non-realistic, however, also had the effect of
signalling a figurative and not a literal context for the violence. A woman subduing
a large, prone form might have given the viewer an agitated or urgent impression,
but instead it has a far softer quality. Having created a pause in the hiatus of the
swing, the statue instils a highly violent moment with a sense of stillness, and thus
opens up a space for contemplation. In effect, this invited an ethical interpretation.

In understanding David and Judith as a pair, it should be noted that the ac-
counts were fundamentally unalike in one crucial respect. This difference shaped
their respective narratives: David fought Goliath on the battlefield while Judith
took Holofernes under the guise of deception and in his sleep. The latter required
a particular kind of storytelling in order to make sense of the whole and to place
Judith in the correct light. On the one hand, the connotation of seduction endan-
gered the meaning of virtue; on the other hand, when compared with David’s victory
over Goliath, it provided a way to make a more nuanced and complex reading of

77As Janson noted, “The aesthetic effect of the statue has often been criticized ... To Schottmi-
iller, ... the way the figures are combined seemed “surprisingly unskillful,” an effect she attributed
to the inherent limitations of Early Renaissance art; not until the Cinquecento could a composi-
tional problem such as this be solved successfully.” Janson and Lányi (1957), p. 204.
virtue’s win over vice. Judith’s account provided many more points at which she must exercise judgement, wisdom, and restraint, in order to bring about the victory.

Cosimo de’ Medici had owned several copies of the Book of Judith, and a translation of Ambrose’ *De Virginibus*, which devoted a chapter to the account. Ambrose’s account focussed on the effect of wine on the body. He several times emphasised Judith’s “wisdom” in contrast to the men around her, both her countrymen, who Ambrose described as “men broken down by the siege, smitten with fear, and pining with hunger,” and also the Assyrian men, who had been too lax and careless in their warfare. This wisdom had allowed Judith to succeed. It had led for example to the inspiration to bring the head of Holofernes with her and to have it placed on her city’s wall, which roused the courage of Bethulia’s army. Ambrose proclaimed it likely that Judith might have slept with Holofernes had she too been intoxicated, thus her judgement opened the way before her. It was the men’s foolishness in allowing themselves to become inebriated that allowed Judith to behead Holofernes and then to leave the camp, unharmed by his army. All this was possible, Ambrose claimed, because of Judith’s “temperance and sobriety,” which had “not only subdued her own nature, but, which is far more, even made men more brave.” Afterwards, Judith had continued a life that “subdued” the “vices of the body.”

This brings us to the second of the two perspectives on virtue that Tornabuoni used in her poem to interpret the account of Judith, which was also elaborated upon in Donatello’s statue. This was the two, interrelated senses mentioned above—of a struggle between humility and pride (or more broadly, virtue and vice), and the theme of reason’s battle to overcome lesser or baser instincts. The latter was introduced in Petrarch’s *Triumphus* when he created a connection between the figure of Chastity and Pallas Athena, who symbolised wisdom. Petrarch had dressed Chastity in an *aegis*, or a breast-cloth or sometimes a breastplate, that was decorated with the head of Medusa. This was the signature costume of the warrior goddess Pallas


Athena, and highly evocative to Renaissance audiences as such, because they were familiar with versions of Athena or Minerva in such a costume. See the contemporary bust in Figure 6.7.3, for example, of Giuliano de’ Medici who is seen wearing a breastplate of Medusa.\textsuperscript{80}

I contend that an increasing fondness for the symbolism of Pallas, and her Roman counterpart Minerva—and, more specifically, a focus on Wisdom or Reason as the key to Chastity—leads the Medici to cross into representations of Pallas and Minerva in the coming decades. This causes them to effectively leave David and Judith behind. In other words, the symbolism of virtue was increasingly displayed in Medici artwork and literature not in the personages of David and Judith but as Minerva or Pallas. This has ramifications for scholars’ assumptions about the popularity of imagery about David and Judith at the end of the fifteenth century, which is generally inferred to have remained high. However, the way of representing the political image of David and Judith was undergoing significant change in the last decades of the fifteenth century, which can only be understood with reference to the Medici’s use of the figure of Minerva. This will be demonstrated in part using Botticelli’s \textit{Judith and Holofernes} c. 1470s, which will be combined with new contextual evidence to argue that Botticelli’s \textit{Judith} was likely commissioned by or for Lucrezia Tornabuoni de’ Medici. The change from Judith to Pallas and Minerva would have significant ramifications for how the image of Florence, and virtue, would be portrayed thereafter.

The final sections of the current chapter will show that Botticelli’s diptych of \textit{Judith and Holofernes} was metamorphic, containing elements of old and new ways of representing virtue. Botticelli’s diptych will be compared with the same artist’s \textit{Pallas and Centaur} painted in the 1480s, which historians believe was most likely commissioned by Lorenzo de’ Medici or his second cousin. These two paintings will be juxtaposed with Angelo Poliziano’s poem \textit{Stanze di messer Angelo Politiano cominciate per la giostra del magnifico Giuliano di Pietro de’ Medici}. The poem \textit{La Giostra} had been written in the mid-1470s about Giuliano de’ Medici’s victory

\textsuperscript{80}It should also be noted that the symbolism of Minerva and Medusa’s head ties in with emblems used in Medici jousting displays, which is also discussed in this chapter in the context of the symbolism evoked in Poliziano’s poem about Giuliano, \textit{Stanze per la Giostra}.
in a tournament to celebrate a peace treaty with Venice. It had been abandoned unfinished after Giuliano’s assassination in 1478. As with other works related to the personification of the Florentine *polis*, both Botticelli’s painting of Pallas and Poliziano’s poem each presumed that there was a dialectic between virtue and vice at the foundation of good citizenship. In each case, however, the artist and author reimagined the dialectic, using the metaphor of erotic subordination that Petrarch had employed in his *Triumphus*. They also refined Petrarch’s model, overlaying Chastity’s constraint of Cupid, with Venus’ restraint of Mars. Both Botticelli and Poliziano therefore converted in their works what was formerly displayed as a struggle for virtue’s victory to a kind of peaceful subjugation that suggested something more like innate virtue.

A change introduced to the imagery of David and Judith during Piero de’ Medici’s generation using Petrarch’s romantic motif therefore comes to fruition during Lorenzo de’ Medici’s generation. The latter causes a proper shift in rep-

Figure 6.7.3: Andrea del Verrocchio, c.1475-78, *Giuliano di Piero de’ Medici*, terracotta bust (formerly painted), showing breastplate with head of Medusa (costume of Minerva), National Gallery of Art, Washington.
Figure 6.7.4: Botticelli, c.1470s, *The Return of Judith to Bethulia*, diptych panel, *Galleria degli Uffizi*, Florence.
representations of virtue, previously announced but not until this time fully seen or felt. This formed a break in the understanding and the representation of virtue in political expression—in works like the *Pallas and Centaur* or *Stanze per la Giostra*, virtue was presented much less as an endeavour and much more as a discovery of inborn nobility. The alteration that scholars frequently identify as happening during Cosimo’s generation with the adoption of David—which they say employed David, and later Judith, as a means of invoking princely rule—in fact happened much later and much closer to the collapse of the republic, during his grandson’s generation. The evidence is in the shift from Judith to Minerva in Medici art.\(^{81}\)

### 6.8 Botticelli’s Judith as Virtue in Metamorphosis

Important versions of Judith commissioned in Florence during the fifteenth century included a diptych painted by Botticelli, probably in the 1470s, which is now nearly as famous as Donatello’s bronze (Figures 6.7.4 and 6.8.1). Almost in direct contrast to the bronze however, the diptych was small and delicate, and therefore originally intended for private reflection and display. There were no records known to historians about its commissioning or dating. I believe, however, that Lucrezia Tornabuoni either commissioned it from Botticelli, or it was perhaps commissioned on her behalf by a close relative, shortly after the occasion of her widowhood in 1469.

In the absence of documentation, any case for the diptych’s patron is a matter of conjecture, but there are a number of circumstantial points which suggest that this was the case. More generally, we know that Botticelli was an artist from whom the Medici frequently commissioned art in the latter part of the fifteenth century and that he was part of the Medici circle during this period. Additionally, we know that Lucrezia was more than familiar with the account of Judith, as she authored a series of long poems about Hebrew heroines, probably in the same period that the diptych was made, and one of them was about Judith’s conquest of Holofernes as

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\(^{81}\)Given the demonstrated link between the political David and penitential versions produced in Florence during the fifteenth century discussed in Chapter 2, it is evocative that Lorenzo de’ Medici’s *Book of Hours*, c. 1485, featured David in prayer in the Penitential Psalms chapter, and not David and Goliath as had other Florentine versions produced during and after this period. Images from Lorenzo’s *Book of Hours* are reproduced in John P Harthan and Richard Griffin, *Books of Hours and their Owners*, Thames and Hudson, 1977, pp. 138–141.
already described. In the figure of Judith, Lucrezia might well have always seen a laudable model, but more recently in her newly-widowed status she might also have sought further consolation in her example.

More specifically, the diptych seems to display a number of personal references either to Lucrezia’s family or to Lucrezia’s poem. First of these, and perhaps most significant, was the prominent placement of a laurel tree in the right foreground that depicted Judith returning triumphant to Bethulia (Figure 6.7.4). The Italian word for laurel (lauro) lay close to Lucrezia’s son’s name, Lorenzo, and it was a play on words often used in Florentine sources around this time, for example in Marsilio Ficinio’s *Theologia platonica*, which had been dedicated to Lorenzo and written between 1469 and 1474. Ficino had referred to a time “sub lauro,” which could be translated either as “when the bay was flourishing” or “in the time of Lorenzo.” It was also used in Angelo Poliziano’s *La Giostra*, written sometime in the 1470s: “And you, well-born Laurel, under whose shelter happy Florence rests in peace, fearing neither winds nor threats of heaven, nor irate Jove in his angriest countenance: receive my humble voice, trembling and fearful, under the shade of your sacred trunk.” One can see this incorporated into Lorenzo’s political iconography in his personal medal seen in Figure 6.6.2.

The laurel tree in Botticelli’s painting of Judith was at the height of its bloom, and it sheltered not only Judith, but also the contemporary city depicted in the right-

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82It has also been literary scholars who, in recent years, have noted a resemblance between Tornabuoni’s play and Botticelli’s diptych, namely Jane Tylus and Gerry Milligan. Cf. Tylus (2007), pp. 62 – 64; and Milligan (2011) (p. 545). In each of these cases, however, the comparison does not extend to include a visual analysis as might usually be conducted by an art historian and which has been included in this chapter.


84The full passage was: “E tu, ben nato Laur, sotto il cui velo Fiorenza lieta in pace si riposa, ne teme i venti o ’l minacciar del cello o Giove irato in vista più crucciosa, accogli all’ombra del tuo santo stelo la voce umil, tremante e paurosa; o causa, o fin di tutte le mie voglie, che sol vivon d’odor delle tuo foglie.” “And you, well-born Laurel, under whose shelter happy Florence rests in peace, fearing neither winds nor threats of heaven, nor irate Jove in his angriest countenance: receive my humble voice, trembling and fearful, under the shade of your sacred trunk; o cause, o goal of all my desires, which draw life only from the fragrance of your leaves.” Angelo Poliziano, *Stanze per la Giostra*, Book I, 6; in Poliziano (1979), p. 5.
Figure 6.8.1: Botticelli, c. 1470s, The Discovery of the Murder of Holofernes, diptych panel, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.
background. Confirming that the tree was not merely a coincidence of staging but rather an important key to the painting’s meaning, Botticelli in fact depicted Judith pointing to it. This she did with a lifted finger from her left hand outstretched, a hand in which she also held an olive branch.\footnote{It is argued in this chapter that the olive branch in Botticelli’s Judith was primarily intended to evoke Trionfi versions of Chastity. It is worth noting, however, that the viewer may have been invited to view the olive on a number of levels, and that there were several connotations pertinent to the Medici or Florence. A posthumous medal of Cosimo de’ Medici (shown in Figure 6.6.1), for example, displayed a personified figure of Florence holding an olive branch in her right hand. The olive also worked as a referent to Palm Sunday, a feast day in which it was common to substitute branches of olive if palms were not available, and which celebrated victory over the flesh or earthly trappings and the resurrection of Christ. According to Psalm 91:13, “Justus ut palma florebit,” the palm symbolised victory over one’s enemies. The olive was also often associated with longevity because the olive tree took a generation or more to bear fruit. An association with longevity was likely desirable for Lorenzo or for his mother at a time when the mantle of power had been passed to her son. In relation to the palm, see F Mershman. Palm Sunday in The Catholic Encyclopedia. \url{http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11432b.htm}, 1911, viewed 6 Mar 2007. For the meaning of the olive more generally, see John Boardman. The Olive in the Mediterranean: its Culture and Use. Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological Sciences, 275 (936):187–196, 1976.} Judith was additionally pointing directly at the tree using the sword held out in her right hand.

Second, the olive branch shown in Judith’s left hand in Botticelli’s painting was unique in depictions of Judith (in this or any other era). It may have been intended as a reference to pace or peace, as some historians have suggested, but equally if not more likely is that it was a direct reference to the figure of Chastity in Florentine versions of Petrarch’s \textit{Triumphus}.\footnote{Art historians do not always speculate on the meaning of the olive, but Barbara Deimling, for example, has surmised it may have been a reference to peace. See Barbara Deimling. \textit{Sandro Botticelli, 1445–1510}. Taschen, 2004, p. 16.} Chastity was depicted holding a branch in paintings about the \textit{Trionfi} (Figure 6.8.4). This was in some versions a palm but more frequently in Florentine versions it was an olive branch. Lucrezia owned just such a depiction of Chastity as part of the series of Triumphs depicted on two cassoni commissioned by Piero de’ Medici when he married Lucrezia. The way that Botticelli’s Judith was seen to hold the olive branch—in her left hand as she turned her head slightly to the right—resembled the figure of Chastity painted for Lucrezia on her cassone (shown in Figure 6.8.4).

The olive branch was likely chosen for depictions of Chastity because it also
Figure 6.8.2: Botticelli, c.1482, *Pallas and Centaur*, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.
worked as a reference to the warrior goddess Pallas Athena or her Roman manifestation as Minerva Pacifica. Chastity was one of her signature virtues, which was why Petrarch had associated Chastity with Minerva in his *Triumphus* poem. We also know that Botticelli painted Pallas for the Medici family in 1480. In his *Pallas and Centaur* (shown in Figure 6.8.2), Pallas was seen entwined with olive branches. The evidence that the symbolism and meaning of Judith and Minerva lay close to one another through this period is also indicated in the fact that Botticelli would eventually utilise one as a model for the other. Botticelli made the sketch of Minerva pictured in Figure 6.8.3, for example, in 1490 in preparation for a tapestry being made for Comte Guy de Baudreuil, who became abbot of Saint-Martin-aux-Bois in 1491. One can see that he put to use his earlier Judith from the 1470s, replicating the figure in all the principle ways including the stance of her head and body, the appearance of her dress, and the gesture of holding the olive branch in her left hand. This drawing additionally showed a remarkable correspondence to a Roman medal of the goddess Minerva designed by Laurana, which raises the possibility that Botticelli had it in mind already when he painted Judith in the 1470s.87

Third, there is a series of confluences between Tornabuoni’s poem and the composition of Botticelli’s *Judith and Holofernes*. These include, for example, the way that Holofernes was shown lying across the bed with his headless shoulders falling over the bed and to the side. This was precisely described by Tornabuoni in her poem: “He had hardly fallen into his bed when very loudly, he began to snore; his head was dangling off to the side so that it did not even rest on a pillow.”88 Tornabuoni also described the wrapping of the decapitated head in the bedding and giving it to the maid to carry, the result of which was shown in Botticelli’s painting: Judith “took [the head] carefully in her hands and she gave it to her handmaiden, and she said to her, “Say nothing”; and from the curtain encircling the bed, she tore a piece of fabric and bundled into it only the head, which she intended to carry away.”89 Botticelli’s painting shows Judith and the maid hurrying away from the

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Assyrians’ camp, the head wrapped in this fabric. Once they return to Bethulia and the death is discovered, Tornabuoni described Judith’s townspeople pouring out of the city gates to plunder the enemy camp. The detail of the looting was mentioned in the Bible, but the numbers were Tornabuoni’s invention. Tornabuoni wrote: “More quickly than lightning they seize their weapons, and instantly they go to assault the camp; the road from the city was so full of men there are not more grains of sand on the shore.”

The “road from the city so full of men” was depicted in the background of the first painting in the dyptych. It should be noted that Botticelli’s version was the first and last time that this ‘sea of men’ was depicted as part of the account.

Fourth and finally, we might also consider the highly unusual choice of dividing the story into two parts to form a diptych, a division which as Botticelli devised it, also operated along masculine and feminine lines. One image was occupied by males—represented by a group of male figures closely clustered around Holofernes’ body in one painting—and the other females—the two female figures of Judith and her maid returning through the countryside to Bethulia in the other painting. This gendered division was not based on the Bible account but it elicited theological interpretations such as the one I previously described in Ambrose in Cosimo’s collection. The overt gendering in Botticelli’s version makes sense when viewed in this light. The choice of the diptych format, which foregrounded this gendered division of wisdom was very likely devised as a complement to Lucrezia’s poem, which had also escalated the gendered division implied in Ambrose’ account.

This is not to suggest that either Tornabuoni or Botticelli had reason to use the story to present a kind of ‘battle of the sexes,’ which would be far too anachronistic. What is more likely is that certain concepts relevant to virtue and its portrayal

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91 Literature historian Jane Tylus argues that both Tornabuoni and Botticelli provided a portrait that was designed to humanise Judith, in line with Tornabuoni’s agenda to give Judith a “more complicated psychological portrait” than typical masculinised heroines would normally allow. Tylus (2007), p. 64.
were already gendered, and this is what the diptych was attempting to evoke in the viewer’s mind: Petrarch’s protagonists of Chastity and Love, for example, had been gendered. This had been following in the footsteps of medieval versions of the *Psychomachia*, in which the virtues had been cast as female and the vices male. Petrarch accordingly cast the wisdom of Chastity as feminine and Love’s disordered ways as masculine. The struggle between them Petrarch had staged as a battle, which political commentator Matteo Palmieri had similarly made analogous to the struggle between two parts of the mind, one rational and the other irrational. Palmieri’s definition of ‘reason,’ which he too gendered, was defined as “keeping our sensual impulses subordinated and obedient to our true understanding.” This made Reason—like Judith, Pallas, or Minerva—“the empress and mistress of our desires.”

92 Ficino had gendered the concept of the ‘divine life’ in his *Theologia platonica*. The “highest” and most “divine life” for Ficino was one in which reason triumphs. In describing reason’s conquest, Ficino used metaphors of dominion and control, describing ‘reason’ as “queen over the unique world body,” “handmaid of the highest God,” and perhaps most aptly for the present discussion, as “the most sublime and most fecund of all, whom Orpheus calls the Pallas born from the head of Jupiter.”

93 We are aware of Ficino’s fondness for mysterious language, but the first two metaphors for the divine life were in fact painterly, meaning that they would have called to the reader’s mind specific and familiar images. “Queen” and “Handmaid of the Lord” were terms habitually applied to the Virgin Mary and depicted in paintings, while Pallas and Minerva also worked as symbols for the Virgin during the late-medieval period because of their virginity and chastity. A seal of the chapter of Notre Dame at Noyon dated 1296, for example, showed the head of Minerva with the legend, “Ave Maria gratia plena.”

To demonstrate that the use of Pallas as a metaphor for the Virgin and divinity was a wide understanding, we find it in the Florentine context and in the period

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**Figure 6.8.3:** Botticelli, c.1490, *Minerva*, pen and bistre over black chalk on a pink ground, *Galleria degli Uffizi*, Florence.
under discussion in Poliziano’s *La Giostra*. The author made a similar comparison, which he put into the mouth of his protagonist Julio, Guiliano de’ Medici. Julio, having conquered Cupid as Chastity had in Petrarch’s *Triumphus*, goes on to petition Minerva, calling to her in terms usually reserved for the Virgin Mary, and beseeching her to show him the way to virtue:

Vergine santa, che mirabil pruove Mostri del tuo gran nume in cielo e ’n terra, Ch’ e’ i valorosi cuori a virtù infiammi, Soccormi or, Tritonia, e virtù dammi.

Holy virgin who show wondrous proof of your great divinity in heaven and on earth, You who inflame valorous hearts to virtue, now help me, Tritonia, give virtue to me.

Before we look at the effect of how Poliziano constructed virtue in *La Giostra*, or Botticelli in his later paintings, it is worth briefly concluding the argument in respect of Botticelli’s *Judith and Holofernes*. To summarise, Botticelli’s diptych included several unique features that can be explained in one of three ways, as a reference to Lucrezia Tornabuoni de’ Medici’s poem about Judith, as a reference to her son, Lorenzo, or as a reference to other paintings and themes that Lucrezia was known to appreciate with her husband. For these reasons, it is likely that either Lucrezia, or someone close to her, commissioned the painting from Botticelli. It should be noted that it is not necessary to prove this in order for the present analysis to be useful to the argument explained in this chapter. Botticelli’s *Judith and Holofernes* was raised here because the diptych formed a bridge to a new phase of portraying virtue that was meant to underpin the Florentine political identity. This new phase was begun with the hybridisation of Judith–Minerva. Just as the *Hours* image of David was important for its capacity to demonstrate the roots of the political image of David in penitence, the Botticelli image of Judith is important for its capacity to demonstrate how this understanding (and perhaps need) had changed by the 1470s. More specifically, it shows how Petrarch’s Love–Chastity motif, which had been introduced in Donatello’s bronzes of *David* and *Judith*, would eventually open up new ways to interpret the understanding of virtue that had formed the foundation of the image of the Florentine *polis* in David and Judith. The romance motif initially
expanded the expression of virtue; this was now about to explode and splinter. This can be seen and demonstrated more clearly in the paintings that quickly followed Botticelli’s diptych—his *Pallas and Centaur* c. 1480, and shortly after, his *Venus and Mars* c. 1483.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 6.8.4:** Depictions of Triumph of Chastity holding olive branch, Florentine. *cassone* images.

### 6.9 Sleep, Awakening, and the Fragmentation of Virtue

Historians generally believe that Botticelli’s *Pallas and Centaur* was commissioned either by Lorenzo de’ Medici, or by his second cousin, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici (Figure 6.8.2). We know that Pierfrancesco was a patron of Botticelli later in the century, and that all three of Botticelli’s so-called ‘mystical’ paintings—the *Primavera*, *Birth of Venus*, and *Pallas and Centaur*—were located with the family as early as the sixteenth century. The link with the Medici family at least is certain, because of the repeating pattern of three, interlinked diamond rings that

decorate Pallas’ dress, which was known to be a Medici symbol. The painting of the *Pallas and Centaur* was likely chosen as a decoration for a *camera*, a key room in a *palazzo*.

The image showed Pallas taming a centaur, which was signalled in her grasping the locks of his hair with her right hand. The goddess Pallas typically symbolised the virtues of wisdom and chastity, while the centaur was often used in ancient literature to signify lust and uncontrolled passions. The allusions created by the centaur were underlined by the fact that he held a bow and a back quiver with arrows. These were the instruments of Cupid, which were used to ‘inflame’ the heart and distract the soul. Angelo Poliziano’s *La Giostra*, for example, had featured a centaur hunted by Julio. The centaur in Poliziano’s poem had clearly stood for lack of control:

... the ferocious Centaur goes to hunt through the snowy forests of Pelion or Haemus, chasing every beast from its den: now he kills the bear, now menaces the lion; the braver the beast the further within the woods it hides, blood turns to ice inside each heart; the woods tremble, and every plant gives way, he beats down or uproots the trees, or shatters their branches.

There was an obvious comparison being made in Botticelli’s *Pallas and Centaur*, between the themes of virtue overcoming vice, and of wisdom overcoming instinct. This was, perhaps, also consciously linked to Donatello’s *Judith and Holofernes*. Pallas was seen in Botticelli’s painting to turn her gaze to a distant point, as with versions of Chastity in the imagery of the *Trionfi*, and with Donatello’s statues of David and Judith. I have indicated elsewhere that this gaze signified contemplation of the divine; it was a method to paint divine presence by showing the effect on the person’s state of mind. There was also a clear visual link between the way that Pallas held the centaur’s hair and the way that Judith had grasped Holofernes’ hair in Donatello’s statue (shown in Figures 6.8.2 and 6.9.1). Both were known to be subduing untamed lust. Perhaps in mirroring the gesture, the painter had intended to link—or just as viably, he had been asked by his patron to link—this figure with Donatello’s.
The olive branches seen in Botticelli’s painting, which formed a wreath on Pallas’ head and encircled her upper torso and arms, were one of her symbols. Minerva was the Roman manifestation of the virgin Greek goddess, Athene or Pallas Athena, who had sprung from Zeus fully formed and armed, ready for battle. She was known as a martial protector of heroes, and amongst other things, was believed to have invented the olive tree. In her Roman guise as Minerva, she frequently appeared armed with a breastplate and helmet. While the helmet was absent in Botticelli’s painting, the breastplate was alluded to in the formation of the branches on her upper chest. She was also holding a halberd (other times a lance), which was a symbol of her wisdom, able to penetrate and to subdue untamed urges. The lance or halberd also intimated a battle and the subsequent victory. In Botticelli’s painting, the struggle was suggested in the way that her opponent deferred to her power. It was clearly absent of the gore or the explicitness of imagery described in previous chapters.

The implication of hand to hand combat continued in Pallas and Centaur, in the allusions to armour and weaponry, preserving the sense of opposition between virtue and vice. The links to the iconography of the Pyschomachia were consequently evident in these allusions. It is worth noting, however, that there was no vanquished creature in this image, human or otherwise. There was no decapitation
or violent breach of the enemy’s body, no trampling, no high–low placement that ethically encoded the pair or their struggle. Botticelli’s \textit{Pallas and Centaur} therefore represented a significant reordering of virtue iconography, and I would argue, at this point, a significant reordering of the image of the Florentine \textit{polis} that appeared in its imagery, particularly the image associated with Judith and David. We have noted that the holding of the centaur’s hair signified subjugation, but it was clearly an ambivalent kind—so much so that some historians have viewed it as peaceful, or even as pacification.\footnote{Wittkower (1939), p. 200.} Pacification is not likely to be how a contemporary audience would have read the tension. This is because pacification can be found mutually or by various means, whereas subjugation implied bringing under dominion or control. The latter inference was still crucial to an understanding of virtue during this period, at least for a little time yet. Ficino was still using military metaphors, for example, to describe the means of pursuing virtue: “Often the heart quakes in the face of perils, but to defend our native land reason orders it into battle, whence though unwillingly, it marches out against the foe.”\footnote{Ficino (2001), Book IX, III, 6.}

Three features therefore identify the \textit{Pallas and Centaur} as an extension of personifying the \textit{polis} of Florence: the theme of virtue’s victory, albeit a more softened version; the links to virtue iconography described above, though modified and reduced compared to earlier in the century; and having Pallas use the same gesture to tame the centaur that Judith had used to position Holofernes for decapitation in Donatello’s statue. These attributes made a self-conscious link to the iconographical heritage of portraying David and Judith as a political identity. Around this time, however, the expression of virtue was also changing.

The ways of characterising virtue in Florentine art were multiplying during the 1470s and had started to complicate a formerly simple expression of conquest. This multiplication and complication would eventually be seen in the opacity of Michelangelo’s \textit{David} c. 1504. A dialectic had either been represented or implied in the sculptures of David and Judith during the fifteenth century. The dialectic had featured a tangible struggle between virtue and vice, and/or relatedly, a focus on a physical, concrete, victory of virtue. Michelangelo’s \textit{David} was, instead, highly abstract in
its nature and symbolism. Historians have tended to assume that Michelangelo’s statue nonetheless belongs in the group of political statues about David, which is based on its subject matter, or on a combination of its subject matter and location outside of the Palazzo della Signoria. The c. 1504 David should not necessarily be assumed to have been conceived in the same interpretive frame as previous statues, however, or to have been read by viewers in the early years of the sixteenth century in the same light as the previous century. In fact, there is an argument to say that Michelangelo’s David was a radical break with previous thinking and with the representation of virtue as it related to David or Judith. This was because it presented its viewers with a figure of uncertain timeframe and thus uncertain victory. There was no opponent evident, vanquished or otherwise, and the dialectic—the conceptualisation of struggle and virtue earned—was moot or defunct. Historians need a better case for Michelangelo’s David to be included in the sacred–political group of statues made during the fifteenth century because, at best, it offered its viewers the most ambivalent depiction of virtue related to the state in the previous 100 years.

The dialectic between virtue and vice had been reimagined using erotic subordination in Pallas and Centaur; the effect was to render a much more uncertain representation of virtue than previously seen. I have mentioned that the virtue–dialectic was continuing to operate in Ficino’s Platonic Theology because it reflected thinking in Prudentius’ Psychomachia and the related virtues and vices iconography. The difference for Ficino, and those writers and artists who followed, was that the fighting metaphor was no longer the only way to think about virtue, and other ways of symbolizing virtue had begun to fragment its formerly simple dialectical or oppositional structure.

Poliziano in his La Giostra, for example, utilised not only Cupid as a metaphor for untamed pleasures, as Petrarch had, but he also used a centaur as a symbol of

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97 This was evident when, as mentioned above, Ficino wrote about Reason ordering “the heart into battle, whence ... it marches out against the foe [to “defend our native land,” i.e., the body].” Ficino (2001), Book IX, III, 6. Note that this is very similar to the central idea of Prudentius’ Psychomachia: “We must watch in the faithful armour of our hearts, and that every part of our body which is in captivity and enslaved to foul desire must be set free by gathering our forces at home.” Thomson (1949), pp. 277–279.
Figure 6.9.2: After Antonio Pollaioulo, c.1470–80, mirror frame in the form of the Medici ring (Venus with Mars), painted and gilded stucco in a gilt wood frame, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
Figure 6.9.3: Botticelli, c. 1483, Venus and Mars, spalliera panel, tempera on wood, National Gallery, London.
moral disorder. Additionally, there were two other figures representing a form of chaotic intervention in Florentine life in *La Giostra*—Fortune, with which Renaissance readers were very familiar, and Venus. Both Cupid and Venus denoted Love, moreover, but they each expressed Love quite differently—Cupid was the mischief-maker taken from Petrarch’s *Triumphus*, requiring tying to a tree by Chastity. Venus represented the more complex ‘love,’ which might conspire against Julio with Cupid at one moment, and the next, *per contra*, inspire Julio to his *l’alta victoria* of eternal fame. In these two very different portrayals of human emotion the reader was given at least two constructions of virtue. These two understandings about virtue roughly corresponded to the old and the new ways of understanding virtue’s victory in the political image of Florence. The old way was founded on the opposition of forces, and thus it featured personal agency and effort in consummating the victory of virtue. The new way gave greater room to the idea of a virtuous nature, but it also made virtue’s victory open to other forces and thus increasingly more question-able. The new way of expressing virtue would therefore ultimately deconstruct the political image of Florence which had prevailed for the better part of the fifteenth century, rendering it effectively obsolete by the century’s close. The hesitancy in how to define the pursuit of virtue under these conditions can be seen in Michelangelo’s *David*, which had clearly detached personal liberty, which was defined in a penitential sense, from *libertas* and *libertà*.

The painting by Botticelli of *Venus and Mars* painted in 1483 (Figure 6.9.3) appeared on a large panel that was likely destined for domestic decoration of a *palazzo*, probably in a *camera* and possibly for the Vespucci family. It showed the protagonists reclining in a wooded glade. Venus was awake and clothed, while Mars was naked. The contrast of chastity and lust by means of clothing echoed Judith and Holofernes in Donatello’s bronze and Botticelli’s *Pallas and Centaur*. It can be noted, however, that in such previous depictions, lust was symbolised in a single masculine protagonist, for example, Holofernes or the centaur. In the case of Botticelli’s *Venus and Mars*, the connotation of lust was shared between Mars and the satyrs. Mars lay opposite Venus in a deep asleep, while the satyrs in

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the background seized the opportunity afforded by his inattention to play with his armour. Ancient Roman philosopher, Lucretius, had described the scene, and it is such a close portrayal of Botticelli’s painting that it strongly suggests that Lucretius had been at the forefront of the patron’s and painter’s minds:

Meanwhile let the fierce activity of war on sea and land everywhere be laid to rest. For you [Venus] alone can bring quiet to mortal men; powerful Mars, who rules the savagery of war, often throws himself into your lap, vanquished by the eternal wound of love; and thus, gazing upward, his handsome neck curved back, fixing his hungry eyes upon you, he feeds them on love; prostrate, his breath hangs upon your lips. Wind your sacred body about him [tuo recubantem corpore sancto circumfusa super], glorious goddess, as he lies recumbent, and let your lips speak sweetly, imploring a tranquil peace for the Romans.99

Scholars have typically regarded the spalliera panel of Venus and Mars as comparatively straightforward in terms of representing sensual but chaste love.100 They have further taken into account the likely influence of Neoplatonism in choosing the subject of Venus and Mars.101 The painting has been examined in this thesis for a different purpose and context, however, which is an example of how virtue becomes associated during the 1470s and 1480s with sleep, or its obverse, awakening. The satyrs were depicted mockingly taking on the accoutrements of war—some wearing respectively his helmet and cuirass, while others his lance. The breastplate, helmet,
and lance in such paintings, for example in renditions of Minerva or Pallas, were used to symbolise wisdom and chastity. Significantly in this depiction of Mars, the symbols of wisdom and chastity had been captured from inattention.

Botticelli’s *Venus and Mars* shows that the use of sleep and awakening as metaphors for virtue was a result of incorporating the romance motif. This was reflected in other sources. In Poliziano’s *La Giostra*, for example, Julio was given a dream on the instruction of Venus, in which he sees his love, Simonetta, dressed in the armour of Chastity. Simonetta-as-Chastity overpowers Cupid. Julio then sees the figure of Glory descend, stripping Simonetta of the armour and giving it to Julio, who then goes into battle and subsequently returns triumphant. Julio awakens from his dream, “burning with love and a desire for glory [d’un disio di gloria ardendo].”\(^{102}\) The metaphor of sleep expressed the pursuit of virtue but portrayed it as a passive exercise, in which Julio awakens to his own nature with the help of the gods. The subsuming of the sleep and awakening into the depictions of virtue can thus be seen as a further devolution of the conceptualisation of virtue.

The dialect had of course not completely disappeared. It should be acknowledged, for example, that there were alongside these radical breaks a continuing of traditional renditions during the 1480s and 1490s. A notable example with which scholars are very familiar is the frescoed depiction of David in *Santa Trinità*, next to the entry of the Sassetti Chapel, painted by Domenico Ghirlandaio in 1485. The fresco showed a martial David standing on a long, ornate column. There is also another a panel, similar to Ghirlandaio’s version in that David also appeared standing atop a very tall column, which was painted by Botticelli in a depiction of the ancient account of the *Rape of Lucretia*, possibly for a cassone (details shown in Figure 6.9.4). It is worth noting that in both cases, David had been placed far above and distant from the layperson or citizen; David presents in these images less like an exemplar and more like a Roman emperor.\(^{103}\)

\(^{102}\)Poliziano (1979), Book II, 38 – 39, p. 87.

Historians tend to focus on the fact that Donatello’s bronze statue of Judith was likely placed in the Palazzo Medici in the middle of the fifteenth century and that it remained there until the end of the century, hence they assume that it was being utilised by the Medici for political imagery during a period of some fifty years. They also point to the fact that it was confiscated and put in front of the government palace as a basis for a claim that the bronze statue had at this point the same meaning that it had always had in the previous 50 years—opposition to tyranny—only in the 1490s it was reversed and instead of being cast as the victors, the Medici were being cast as the slain. My analysis in this chapter suggests that the relevance of Judith falls away during Lorenzo’s generation, when the meaning about the victory of virtue over vice was increasingly displayed using the imagery of Minerva and/or Pallas. Scholars are well aware of this latter imagery and its place in the artistic
expression of Lorenzo’s generation, but they have not previously placed it as an evolution that stemmed specifically from Donatello’s bronze *Judith* or that evolved as an arm of political imagery. However, this chapter suggests that there was a progression being made between the two generations, from representations of David and Judith to Minerva and/or Pallas.

In Donatello’s *Judith*, the symbolism of struggle had been brought to the fore. It presented not only a triumphant figure with a decapitated head, but also a fight to the death—the moment in which the enemy was slain. Struggle was therefore clearly foregrounded. The theme of virtue was additionally emphasised in the statue’s inscription and in its iconography: the chasteness of Judith contrasted with the laxness and nudity of Holofernes. These features connected it firmly to the late-medieval tradition about virtue’s victory over vice, presenting a tension between vice and virtue that could only be resolved by force or a fight to the death—this formed what I have called a virtue–dialectic. Use of a virtue–dialectic in images of David and Judith was increasingly complicated by the blending in these artworks with themes and symbolism from Petrarch’s *Triumphus*. Donatello’s statue additionally interpreted Judith as Chastity who opposes Love. Lucrezia Tornabuoni de’ Medici accordingly portrayed Holofernes to be under the influence of Love in her poem about Judith, a state also described by Petrarch in his poem.

The struggle between virtue and vice represented by the killings respectively of Goliath and Holofernes was portrayed in Donatello’s bronzes, but it was also interpreted as a struggle between Chastity and Love. In the latter scenario, the concept of Love becomes a substitute for the concept of vice, while Chastity signifies the pursuit of virtue and the impulse to subdue lower instincts. The second Triumph in Petrarch’s *Trionfi* opens with a fight between Chastity and Love, with Chastity the victor. This device had been modelled on Prudentius’ *Psychomachia*, but Petrarch circumvented violent descriptions, focussing on Chastity’s triumph and the train of the *viri illustri* who support her and who also follow in her wake. As we also noted in the previous chapter, Petrarch’s use of the theme of romance in the fight between Chastity and Love managed to retain the theme of contest and even military symbolism, but it also softened the symbolism of combat, blurring the lines between conflict and seduction. The effect was to diffuse the dialectic in displays of
virtue in artworks, which had formerly depended on clear opposition. The fight to the death had a clear victor, and hence a logical outcome, or rather, the surety of the outcome was inferred in the struggle—a fight to the death can only end with a victory and one victor. Petrarch’s *Triumphus* was comparatively so contrived that it relied on the construction of listing *illustri* to demonstrate triumph.

A sense of manufacture in both the *Psychomachia* and Petrarch’s *Trionfi* had made them obvious candidates for artistic conversion and display. Once the struggle was elided into seduction, other methods were required to show the logic of virtue. This gave depictions of virtue after the statues of David and Judith a strong sense of manufactured display that the violence of the *Psychomachia* had previously solved.
Conclusion

THE PURSUIT OF VIRTUE

This thesis has offered a new interpretive approach to three statues made by Donatello during the fifteenth century—the marble David c.1408–12, and the bronzes of David and Judith, c.1450s. It has given the figure of David an iconographical heritage in Florence prior to the marble David, tracing its lines of symbolism through the artworks produced in the fifteenth century. Such an examination showed that the emblem of the Florentine polis had, in large part, worked within a penitential tradition which had aimed to persuade and encourage its viewers to pursue virtue. This was intensified in the two bronzes, by incorporating Petrarch’s Trionfi into their symbolism. The romance theme from the Trionfi heightened the theme of virtue, but it also, ultimately, abstracted it. This was not evident in the bronzes, but in the images that would follow them, in versions of Minerva and Pallas produced in the 1470s and after.

This study has addressed a number of gaps in the scholarship on these statues. Chapter 1 critiqued the concept of ‘propaganda’ presently used by Renaissance historians, more generally in respect to political expression in Florence, but also more specifically, in respect of Donatello’s statues of David and Judith. An overly secular approach to ‘propaganda’ has inhibited historians’ understanding of these statues. For example, much of what is now designated as political art in Florence was also sacred art, and the latter was typically defined by its expectation of cooperation between sacred figures and laypeople. This art stimulated ‘inter-reactive’ participation, in which images played a central role. The present understanding of ‘propaganda’ does not acknowledge or address these conditions. The way forward
was to establish an iconographical heritage for David and Judith in Florence, which helped historians read the images from within their biblical context. Chapter 2 revealed a series of illuminations of David from Florentine versions of the *Book of Hours* produced before, during, and after Donatello’s statues of David and Judith were commissioned. These images provided a new frame of reference, by demonstrating that the political image of David as a symbol of the *polis* was derived from David’s traditional role as a model penitent.

The illuminations of David and Goliath had never before been considered in the context of political imagery in Florence, and yet they displayed much of what is usually claimed for the political David—a depiction of David standing victorious with or on the slain Goliath, a connection made to the contemporary urban and political environment in the setting, or in the clothing, of the protagonists, and a reference to Florentine military engagement in their contemporary armour, the latter for David becoming more classicised as the century progressed. The first of such images was painted at least twenty years before Donatello’s marble *David*. Crucially for this study, this earlier David suggested that the political image of David was derived from a traditional penitential context which evoked a specific form of ethical engagement in the viewer. Such ethical engagement was demonstrated through an extensive iconographical analysis to have been key to why David was desired as a symbol of the Florentine city-republic.

Chapter 3 explored the idea of ethical engagement in penitential images of David and Goliath. It constructed a ‘period eye for violence,’ which demonstrated how violent symbolism encouraged ethical engagement. It also showed that the political image of David featured what sources called ‘trampling’—a key to the late-medieval iconography of virtue vanquishing vice. Trampling had been foregrounded in the political image of David and Judith in Florence during the fifteenth century. The sources from which the political understanding of David developed characterised the virtue of the citizen—or more specifically, and perhaps more importantly, the citizen’s *pursuit* of virtue—as the foundation of *libertas* and *libertà*. Each was the building block of the other: virtue founded *libertà*, and both virtue and *libertà* founded *libertas*. The idea of liberty, therefore, as it related to the statues of *David* and *Judith*, was not a duumvirate as scholars have previously assumed, but a tri-
umvirate. It posited the pursuit of virtue as the foundation stone of libertà and libertas. It was this foundation that Donatello’s statues sought to portray. The sculptures of David and Judith were thus about virtue; and they were about the need to pursue virtue if Florence was to have a right to, or to be rewarded with, the other forms of liberty.

The discovery of the Book of Hours images, and their analysis in comparison with Donatello’s statues, addressed two previous weaknesses in the scholarship. The historiography had not yet been able to provide a local iconographical tradition from which the marble David had derived, and historians had therefore not previously considered how the interpretive conditions of the previous iconography had affected the statues. Similarly, scholars had been unable to examine how viewers traditionally related to images of David and Goliath and whether, or how, this had translated into the context of Florentine independence. Much of what scholars believed was new in the image of David created by Donatello, which they saw as a basis for interpreting it as a humanist or a civic Florentine invention, had not only been in the genre since its inception but was also related to its central purpose of providing virtue as a model; the militarisation of David and Goliath, for example, setting the battle in a contemporary urban environment, the Romanisation of David or of the battle, all of these had a specific function in breaking down virtue and the pursuit of virtue for the layperson. Chapters 2 and 3 compared the features identified in the Florentine penitential David with biblical iconography in order to suggest how a contemporary Florentine would have read the statues of David and Judith. The monumental-realist tone achieved in Donatello’s sculptures was intended to connect with the viewer on an intimate level as a model for living. The penitential context functioned as a means of communicating this intent to the viewer, and for transposing the endeavour of living a virtuous life, into the context of living in, contributing to, or ruling a city-republic.

Part II of this study addressed each of the three Donatello statues in turn, in Chapters 4 through 6, identifying a number of perspectives that have been lacking from the understanding of the political use of David and Judith in Florence. One of these perspectives was demonstrative rhetoric and its role in both spiritual and political expression. Chapter 4 revealed a sermon by preacher Fra Dominici as a
possible source for the phrase “fighting for fatherland” in the marble David’s inscription. Dominici’s sermon shows that it was not only the relationship with Rome that was increasing in importance during this period, but also that this concern had a penitential slant. The imperfection of Florence compared with Rome drove a need for expiation or reform, in order to reach the same political heights, while at the same time avoiding the same mistakes.

Chapter 4 argued that it was not only the account of David that was carried into the political context but also the expectations for that genre of iconography as well. The penitential genre depicted a broad, theoretical landscape in order to engage a layperson. It worked as a kind of ‘road map’ to virtue. This has important implications for how we understand the image of David to have been read or used in those early years. The theme of victory was communicated in the marble David not with the use of trampling, however, but with the wreath placed upon his head. This did something significant to the theme of victory which is vital to interpreting the statue accurately; it tipped it towards the theme of fame. This tied the marble David to the uomini famosi tradition, and laid the groundwork for a new interpretation in the bronze David. Hence, while the marble David carried much of the penitential expectations into the political context, it also represented a break from the medieval period that was in fact temporary and transitory. By the time that David was adopted by the Medici—and then amplified with the introduction of Judith—the objective of its symbolism in Medici hands was to take it backwards to a safer and more obviously spiritual context.

Chapter 5 examined the bronze David, arguing that the sexualisation of David which has so perplexed scholars was conceived from within his traditional iconography. It showed that the theme of virtue’s victory was featured in the bronze, but it was also given a Florentine gloss by being interpreted through Petrarch’s Trionfi, and more specifically, as the Triumph of Love in Petrarch’s poem. The statue was thus elaborating on the conventional trope of virtue triumphing over vice, with the symbolism of ‘trampling’ in the bronze helping to reestablish a relationship with the penitential (and late-medieval) understanding of David. This was made more fashionable by creating allusions to Petrarch’s Trionfi.

Chapter 5 also addressed how the concept of virtue portrayed in the images
under discussion was a dynamic concept of virtue; it described a transition or transformation that required active engagement through dialectical struggle. The analysis of Cosimo de’ Medici’s portrayal in the San Marco altarpiece made an important distinction between virtue and the ‘pursuit of virtue.’ Pursuit of virtue referred to seeking, or the intent to seek, the virtuous transformation which was modelled in penitential imagery. The term transformation refers to the fact that virtues were presented in most cases as part of hierarchies. Humility was often seen, for example, as the ‘gateway’ virtue to other virtues. Prudentius similarly ordered his virtues, starting with *Fides* and ending with *Concordia*. Most importantly, the *humiliatio* gesture of Saint Cosmas (or Cosimo-as-Cosmas) identified in the San Marco altarpiece was not a static state but rather a transitional state on the way to other states, ultimately to *meritatio*, or merit. Virtue was thus characterised in the political statues, at least for much of the fifteenth century, as a transition or a metamorphosis—incomplete, difficult to reach (a struggle), and ongoing—it was taking place in the art itself, playing out in front of the viewer or indeed in the viewer’s mind. It was something longed for, or it was underway. It was not achieved. When Cosimo had Fra Angelico present him as Cosmas to the San Marco viewers, specifically holding his arms in the gesture of *humiliatio*, it presented not an already virtuous person, or even one who was worthy of virtue. It displayed a person on the path to virtue, in pursuit of it. It is an important distinction to make for political expression—the former befits a prince, the latter, a republic.

Finally, Chapter 6 examined the bronze *Judith* and a group of paintings and images about Pallas or Minerva produced in the Medici circle in the latter part of the fifteenth century. It showed that the bronze *Judith* was an even clearer return to late-medieval iconography than the bronze *David*, because it featured the struggle to subdue Holofernes, in addition to using the symbolism of ‘trampling.’ In creating allusions to the Triumph of Chastity from Petrarch’s *Triumphus*, the bronze *Judith* similarly utilised romance or seduction as a metaphor for virtuous transformation. This would eventually change the imagery of virtue late in the century. Judith was reinterpreted as Minerva in *La Giostra* in the 1470s and similarly as Pallas in paintings, for example, in Botticelli’s *Pallas and Centaur* in the 1480s. The struggle between virtue and vice, or what was increasingly interpreted as the
struggle between reason and instinct, was reinterpreted in these later works as an awakening to wisdom. The effect was to diffuse the dialectic in displays of virtue in artworks, which had formerly depended on clear opposition. The gradual abstraction of virtue that had occurred through the introduction of romantic symbolism therefore devolved further—the emphasis in the concept of awakening had shifted virtue to an idea of 'innateness' rather than something earned—and in line with this shift, the symbolism of struggle in political paintings about virtue devolved into a symbolism of seduction.

‘Propaganda,’ or Propagare?

Taking the above findings into account, is the image of David and Judith produced in Donatello’s statues which represented the Florentine polis, propaganda? The answer is yes, perhaps, if we refer to a systematic kind of meaning-making. We must, however, ask what we mean by this term, and more importantly, what we gain and what we lose by employing such a concept in this period. Consider the term ‘propaganda,’ or more importantly, its root, which is propagare, meaning to propagate. This particular connotation has been available with respect to biblical imagery since early in the sixteenth century when it was invented by the Church. Then, it was related directly to the root meaning of propaganda—to cultivate, which was, more specifically, to spread The Word. If for a moment, and for the purposes of dissection, we set aside the darker aspects of the colonisation project that was the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, its genus can be seen to have been formed first as a conceptualisation of doctrine as botanical seed. The idea was that a unit of ‘propaganda’ contained all its genetic material. It thus could be carried to far-flung places and replanted. The art of the late-medieval and Renaissance periods tested and proved this conceptualisation of ‘propaganda,’ because it was able to replicate complex thought through images, across artists, regions, and even across centuries. In biblical imagery surveyed in Part I, for example, it is evident that despite clear advances in the technique of drawing and painting, there was a striking consistency nevertheless achieved between images, in terms of the components of illustrated accounts—in terms of the figures chosen, their stances, actions, and placement.
The allusion to ‘genetic material’ points to a different conceptualisation of “truth” than how we know it, or how we interpret knowledge today. Truth during the fifteenth century was considered natural and divine; it was born in nature. The original meaning of *propagare* was thus about appropriating symbols, but not as something improper, or akin to seizure or stealing. It was a system that ‘appropriated’ as a foundation for devotional imagining. One only has to think of the example given in respect to the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* in Chapter Three, in which readers were asked to imagine every detail of the Crucifixion as though it had happened in contemporary and familiar places; they were told, in effect, to ‘appropriate’ the Passion. Renaissance patrons, artists, and viewers not only copied and imitated as a matter of course, but they also created identity by owning or seeking out what was worthy of imitation. Art was one of the four “principle elements” that Palmieri and others had identified as leading to “true understanding,” which is to say, the highest form of understanding or knowledge. Palmieri placed art, for example, as being equal to intuitive reason, scientific knowledge, and wisdom.

What should also be taken into account, in historians’ approaches to political expression, are the available technologies of persuasion. For sacred art, such technologies were both of long standing and also highly sophisticated. Sacred imagery denoted not only a systematic treatment, but also a highly active and engaged viewer who was constructed as needing a virtuous transformation. This pre-conditioning of the viewer, and the frame of reference that they used to interpret sacred images, needs to be acknowledged and addressed in historians’ analyses of political artworks. This thesis demonstrates that when this is done, the political reading is more nuanced.
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357


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358


359


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