



# RAPHAEL

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Fig. s006  
*Disputa*, about 1508–9  
 Fresco  
 Vatican Palace, Vatican City

Florence for Rome.<sup>54</sup> This leads us to believe that the artist left abruptly, probably in the summer of 1508, since his letter of April had described good progress on the altarpiece as well as referring to the prospect of receiving a commission to paint ‘*una certa stanza*’ (‘a certain room’), which was almost certainly the Stanza della Segnatura. A hasty departure is also indicated by Vasari’s report that, when Raphael knew he was about to travel to Rome, he left a painting destined for Siena with his exact contemporary Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio (1483–1561), for him to complete a blue drapery (which suggests it may have been a Virgin and Child) and send it on to its destination.<sup>55</sup> The work in question has often been identified as the *Belle Jardinière*, but this is far from certain.<sup>56</sup>

Pope Julius II della Rovere was the greatest patron of his age. He set in motion the rebuilding of St Peter’s in Rome, he commissioned Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling, and he was Raphael’s initial patron in the Vatican Stanze. Raphael’s move to Rome was to transform his status as an artist. At some point around 1503–5, Julius decided to transfer the papal apartments from the second floor of the Vatican palace to the floor above, and he gathered a team of artists to decorate these Stanze, which simply means ‘rooms’ in Italian (see Arnold Nesselrath’s essay, pp. xxx–xxx). Raphael is first securely recorded in Rome on 13 January 1509, and the document in question concerns a payment for completed work in the Stanza della Segnatura, which was Julius’s private library.<sup>57</sup> On the vault of the room,



Fig. s008  
*Parnassus*, about 1510–11  
 Fresco  
 Vatican Palace, Vatican City

Raphael worked alongside or followed on from Giovanni Antonio Bazzi (Il Sodoma) (1477–1549), who painted the central octagon and some adjacent scenes, while Raphael was entrusted with the most important sections of the vault (fig. s005).<sup>58</sup>

The subject matter of the frescoes on the walls was determined by the traditional division of libraries into the four university faculties of Theology, Poetry, Philosophy, and Law or Jurisprudence (see Nesselrath, pp. xxx–xxx).<sup>59</sup> In consequence, each wall is governed by an appropriate allegorical personification on the vault, where four small narratives combine references to the allegories that flank them, so that – for instance – the *Judgement of Solomon* is located between *Philosophy* and *Law*.

There has been a great deal of debate about what Raphael painted first, but consideration of the substantial body of surviving drawings for the Stanza della Segnatura – and there must once have been many, many more – makes it hard to doubt that he started by planning the walls, not the vault, and began with the *Disputa* (fig. s006). The *Disputa*, or *Disputation on the Holy Sacrament*, depicts a gathering of the faithful on earth – a combination of identifiable saints and notables, such as Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), and anonymous figures – who are assembled around an altar, upon which stands the consecrated host in a monstrance. In the heavens above, the central axis is inhabited by the three persons of the Trinity, who are flanked by a dozen seated saints and Old Testament figures. A first idea in the Royal Collection



Matthias Wivel

# The Death and Life of Raphael

On Good Friday 6 April 1520, Raphael died. This came as a universal shock. He had developed a fever a week or so earlier, but no one expected him to die so suddenly, aged just 37. Contemporary reports tell us that Pope Leo X, the artist's most important patron, had followed his illness closely and was devastated at the loss.<sup>1</sup>

Raphael was the pre-eminent artist in Rome and among the most famous in Europe. He was the head of a thriving, multifaceted and multidisciplinary operation – much more than a workshop – and was set to transform the very fabric of the city and with it the way its citizens thought about themselves. This was but the latest phase in a meteoric career marked by constant change – a personal, creative evolution writ large onto the grandest stage in Renaissance Europe. Raphael's was a life abruptly cut short, but not before he had established himself in the collective consciousness with a presence that would become quintessential.

The youthful, protean figure of Raphael had already attracted idealist projection in his lifetime, and upon his death instantaneously passed into myth.<sup>2</sup> The fact that he died on the same day as the death of Christ is commemorated, and at a similar age,<sup>3</sup> prompted messianic echoes in initial reports of his passing. Stories circulated that the foundations of the Vatican palace, at the very centre of Christendom, cracked the moment he died – a clear parallel to the trembling of the earth and the rending of the veil in the temple of Jerusalem as Jesus expired on the Cross (Matthew 27: 50–1).

In reality, a construction error had caused Raphael's former mentor Donato Bramante's smoothly paved *cordonata* staircase leading from the Damasus Court to the Sala dei Chiaroscuro (about 1509–17) to crack a few days before, rendering passage to the papal apartments temporarily unsafe.<sup>4</sup> The analogy endured, however: addressing Raphael's influence in 1590, the artist and theorist Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo (1538–1592) stressed how his features approximated those with which most artists portrayed Christ.<sup>5</sup>

## TRANSFIGURATION

Raphael's own, final painting of Christ watched over his body as it lay in state, apparently in the place where he had worked.<sup>6</sup> Somebody with a sense of occasion placed his bier in front of his monumental *Transfiguration* altarpiece (fig. s015), recently finished or almost so: 'and the sight of his dead body and this living painting filled the soul of everyone looking on with grief', wrote the artist-biographer Giorgio Vasari in his 1550 *Life of Raphael*. He framed the painting as an artistic testament, noting that 'the essence and godly nature of all three Persons of the Trinity [are] closely united in the perfection of Raphael's art'.<sup>7</sup>

Fittingly, it is a picture of transcendence. Christ's divinity is confirmed in airborne transfiguration over Mount Tabor at the centre of a glowing nimbus, accompanied at his sides by the floating apparitions of the prophets Elijah and Moses, and below by three of his apostles, lifted in the updraft as they

Fig. s015  
*Transfiguration*, about 1519–20  
Oil on wood, 405 x 278 cm  
Pinacoteca Vaticana, Musei Vatican

# Raphael and Tapestry Design

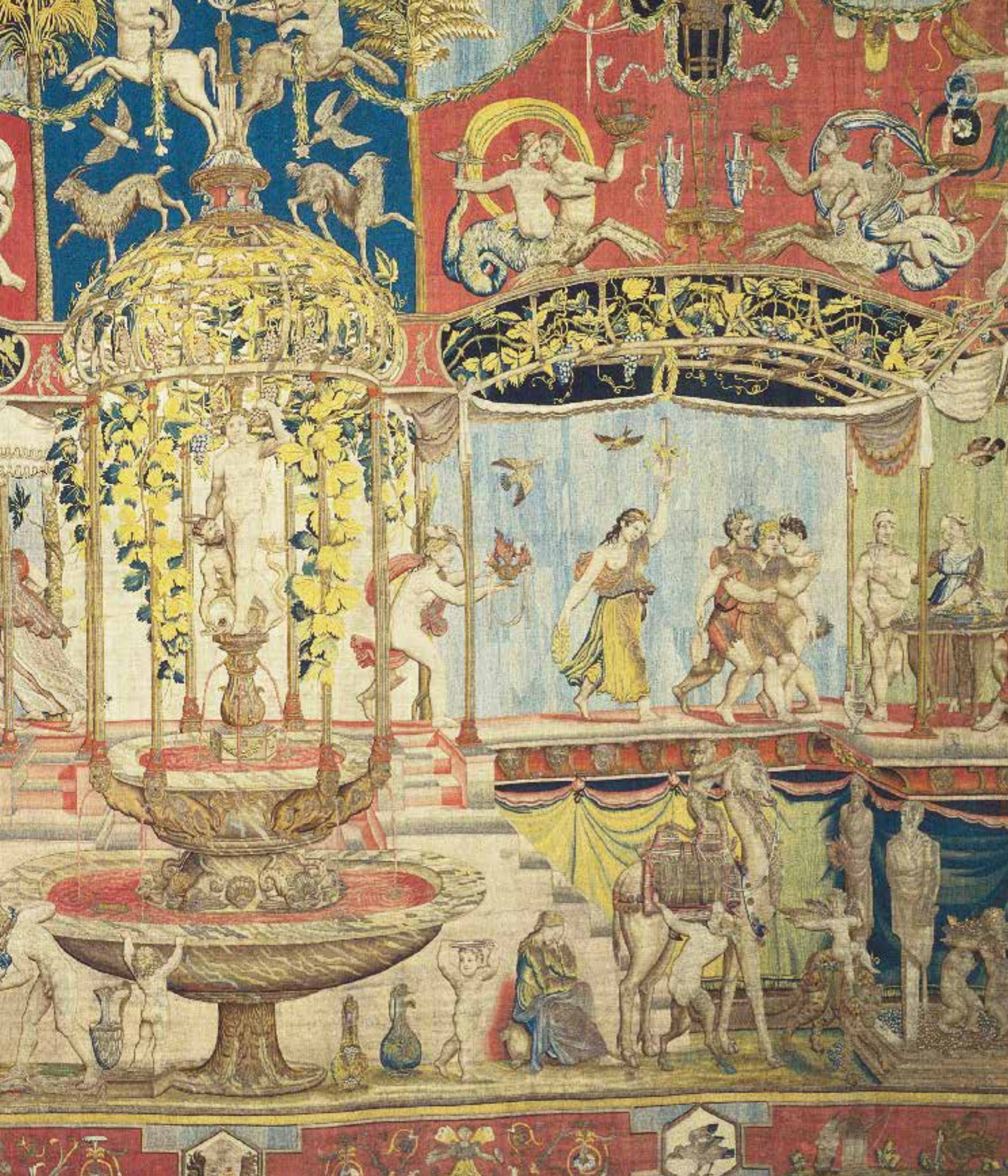


Fig. s128 (detail)  
 The *Triumph of Bacchus* from Henry VIII's set of the *Triumphs of the Gods*  
 Tapestry design by Gianfrancesco Penni (1496?–1528) and Giovanni da Udine (1487–1564), about 1517–20  
 Tapestry woven in Brussels, about 1540–2  
 Wool, silk and gilt-metal-wrapped thread, 470 x 745 cm  
 The Royal Collection, Hampton Court Palace, RCIN 1362

## THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

In July 1517 Antonio de Beatis visited Brussels in the retinue of his employer, Cardinal Luigi d'Aragona (1474–1519). Writing of his visit he recorded, 'Here ... Pope Leo is having made xvi pieces of tapestry, it is said for the Chapel of Sixtus which is in the Apostolic Palace in Rome.' He noted that each tapestry cost 2,000 gold ducats and that they were woven largely in silk and gold. He concluded, 'We were on the spot to see them in progress, and one piece of the story of the Donation of the Keys, which is very fine, we saw complete.'<sup>1</sup> This is the first eyewitness account of the *Acts of the Apostles* tapestries that Pope Leo X had commissioned from Raphael about three years earlier. Considering the scale and intended location of the set, it was in many ways the most prestigious commission the artist received in his lifetime. Seven of the cartoons used in the production process survive today at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, while all ten of the tapestries known to have been made are at the Pinacoteca Museum at the Vatican, along with two narrow border sections.<sup>2</sup>

Brussels was the centre of high-quality tapestry weaving in the Low Countries and the merchant to whom Pope Leo X assigned the commission, Pieter Coecke van Aalst, was the leading tapestry supplier of the day. He had provided sumptuous tapestries to the Burgundian court since the 1490s, and during the early 1500s he became the official supplier to the Spanish and English courts as well.<sup>3</sup> Van Aalst owned a compound with several large buildings near the city centre and it was presumably here that Raphael's *Charge to Peter* tapestry was displayed.<sup>4</sup> As the Roman visitors viewed the tapestry fresh from the loom, its colours bright, its gilt-metal thread untarnished, it must have been clear that it was unlike anything that had been attempted before in this medium (fig. s121 and see also cat. X10153).

Tapestries were copied from full-scale cartoons, most of which were painted by Flemish artists who specialised in this work, expanding on smaller designs also by local artists. The predominant style of Flemish tapestry design was dense and decorative, with groups of static figures arranged close to the front plane and with additional narrative scenes in the background.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Raphael's *Acts* portrayed life-size figures engaged in dramatic moments of action, in clearly defined landscapes and architectural spaces (figs s124, s125). The patterned costumes of contemporary Flemish design were replaced by simple robes that provided a foil for the facial expressions and rhetorical gestures of the protagonists. In effect, the designs embodied the heightened realism and grand manner that Raphael and his assistants had realised in fresco at the Vatican in recent years.<sup>6</sup>

Based on the scale of the commission and the time required to weave the first tapestry by July 1517, design work must have begun sometime late in 1514, although the only surviving payments to Raphael date from June 1515 and December 1516.<sup>7</sup> That such a major commission came so early in Pope Leo's reign reflects his ambition to match the patronage of his predecessor, Pope Julius II, and its most conspicuous manifestation, Michelangelo's

Catalogue



## The Procession to Calvary

about 1504–5

Oil on poplar, 24.4 x 85.5 cm  
The National Gallery, London, NG2919



This painting formed the centrepiece of the predella of Raphael's Colonna Altarpiece of around 1504–5 (fig. s044), originally in the church of the Franciscan convent of S. Antonio in Perugia, a work whose main panel of the *Madonna and Child with Saints Peter and Paul, Cecilia and Catherine*, together with a crowning lunette of *God the Father between Two Angels* (cat. xxx?), is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The predella was in the main given over to a sequence of narrative scenes from the Passion of Christ. The National Gallery panel was preceded by the *Agony in the Garden* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and followed by the *Pietà* (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston), together with representations of Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Anthony of Padua (Dulwich Picture Gallery, London).

The accounts in the various New Testament Gospels of

exactly what occurred on the road to Calvary are intriguingly different: Matthew and Mark imply the task of carrying the Cross was almost from the outset given to Simon of Cyrene, while Luke suggests he took over from Christ (Luke 23: 26: 'And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the Cross, that he might bear it after Jesus'), and John does not refer to Simon of Cyrene at all (John 19: 17: 'And he [Christ] bearing his Cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha'). In the visual tradition it was common to represent the moment when Simon of Cyrene took over the carrying of the Cross, and that is precisely what Raphael does. He shows Christ on his feet, preceded by two horsemen and surrounded by five foot soldiers, and followed by a group consisting of the swooning Virgin supported by the three Marys and accompanied by

Saint John the Evangelist. Conversely, in his much later altarpiece of the same subject in the Museo del Prado, Madrid, known as the *Spasimo di Sicilia* (see fig. s013), he followed the more dramatic German tradition exemplified by Albrecht Dürer, representing Christ fallen under the weight of the Cross and only then being relieved by Simon of Cyrene.

Even at this early stage in his career, however, Raphael was already interested in Dürer's prints, and specifically in his engraving of *Five Lansquenets and an Oriental on Horseback* of around 1495, which had previously inspired individual figures in the Vatican *Adoration of the Magi* from the Oddi *Coronation of the Virgin* altarpiece, and in a drawing connected with the fresco of the *Coronation of Aeneas Silvius* in the Piccolomini Library, Siena.<sup>1</sup> The same engraving was used a third time for the soldier with a pike seen from the rear in the present work, albeit with a degree of reversal, most

obviously in the position of the legs.

The panel is exceptionally wide in relation to its height, and also by comparison with its far squarer companion pieces. This may have inspired its spacious and almost meandering compositional mode, which has the advantage of allowing all the figures to be seen very clearly and involves unusually few overlapping forms. At the same time, our attention is artfully directed towards the central figure of Christ, the only person who looks straight out and meets our gaze. Infrared reflectograms reveal that the execution of the painting was preceded by an elaborate cartoon, whose main lines were transferred onto the panel by means of meticulous pricking and pouncing. DE

## The Madonna of the Pinks ('La Madonna dei Garofani')

about 1506–7

Oil on wood, 28.8 x 22.9 cm (painted area 27.9 x 22.4 cm)  
The National Gallery, London, NG6596

The *Madonna of the Pinks* was rediscovered by Nicholas Penny in the collection of the Dukes of Northumberland at Alnwick Castle in 1991. He recognised the panel as being by Raphael, publishing it the following year, and it was acquired by the National Gallery, London, in 2004. It has been almost universally accepted as an autograph work by the artist, and technical examination, especially in the form of X-radiographs and infrared reflectograms, leaves no doubt that it is an original creation, above all because there are minimal changes of mind between the underdrawing – its style characteristic of Raphael – and what can be seen on the picture's surface.

In the nineteenth century the invention was generally agreed to be Raphael's, and some commentators, notably the great art historian Gustav Friedrich Waagen (1794–1868), championed the Northumberland picture as Raphael's original among the many versions. However, in the twentieth century both the composition and the Alnwick picture were widely ignored. In view of the fact that Raphael is almost unique among Italian Renaissance painters in consistently having been regarded as among the very greatest artists of all time, it is remarkable (and by no means to the credit of art historians) that – prior to the reappearance of the original – the *Madonna of the Pinks* did not tend to feature as an important lost painting in recent general monographic surveys of his work. As has often been observed, the broad lines of the design were directly inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's *Benois Madonna* (fig. s051), although Raphael did not follow his prototype slavishly and countless details have been modified.

Leonardo had shown both the Virgin and Child studying a sprig of flowers, and this motif is repeated by Raphael, who represents Jesus gazing intently at a pair of pinks (or carnations) in his right hand, while his mother holds a second pair in her left hand behind his back. In the Renaissance, flower symbolism associated pinks with betrothal, which would have been entirely appropriate in the present context, since the Virgin was venerated as both mother and bride of Christ.

It is not known for whom the work was painted, but it may have belonged to Maddalena degli Oddi, whom Giorgio Vasari believed to have commissioned the Oddi *Coronation*



Fig. s051  
Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519)  
*The Benois Madonna*, about 1481–2  
Oil on wood, transferred to canvas, 48 x 31 cm  
State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg

*of the Virgin* (see cat. X10133), originally in the church of S. Francesco al Prato, Perugia, and now in the Pinacoteca Vaticana. Both its connection with the *Benois Madonna* and its style clearly place its execution after Raphael's encounter with Florence, and more precisely around 1506–7, not long before his move to Rome. DE

