Re-thinking the myth of Perugino and the Umbrian School: A closer look at the Master of the Greenville's Jonas Nativity panel

Carrie Denise Baker
University of South Florida

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd

Part of the American Studies Commons

Scholar Commons Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.
Re-Thinking the Myth of Perugino and the Umbrian School: A Closer Look at the Master of the Greenville's *Jonas Nativity* Panel

by

Carrie Denise Baker

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Art History
College of Visual and Performing Arts
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Helena K. Szépe, Ph.D.
Giovanna Benadusi, Ph.D.
Elisabeth Fraser, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
April 12, 2007

Keywords: vasari, connoisseurship, patronage, workshops, methodology

© Copyright 2007, Carrie Denise Baker
Table of Contents

List of Figures ii

Abstract v

Introduction 1

Chapter One: Attributing the Jonas Nativity to an Artist in the Context of Vasari’s Biography, and the Influence of Perugino 6

Chapter Two: The Jonas Nativity in the Context of Perugia’s Patronage 33

Chapter Three: The Jonas Nativity in the Context of Collaboration in Fifteenth-Century Umbrian Workshops 52

Conclusion 73

Bibliography 76

Appendix A: “List of Works Attributed to the Master of the Greenville” 80
List of Figures

Figure 1. Master of the Greenville. *Jonas Nativity*, circa 1480-1520 (Saint Petersburg, Florida: Museum of Fine Arts). 2

Figure 2. Master of the Greenville. *Madonna and Child with Angels, sixteenth-century* (Greenville, South Carolina: Bob Jones University Gallery). 3

Figure 3. Hugo van der Goes. *Portinari Altarpiece*, center panel, 1475-6 (Uffizi: Florence). 9

Figure 4. Robert Campin. *Nativity*, circa 1425 (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon). 10

Figure 5. Attributed to Pietro Perugino. *Adoration of the Magi*, circa 1470 (Perugia: National Gallery). 18

Figure 6. Frontispiece, Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de Piu Eccelenti Architetti, Pittori, et Scultori Italiani* (Florence, 1550). 21

Figure 7. Hubert, Robert, *The Grand Gallery of the Louvre between 1794 and 1796* (Paris: Louvre Museum). 24

Figure 8. Julius Griffiths and Maria Cosway, *Raphael / Perugino arrangement, Transfiguration Bay, in the Louvre Museum* (Paris, 1806). 25

Figure 9. Raphael. *Transfiguration*, 1517-1520 (Rome: Vatican Museum). 26

Figure 10. Chart of the leading families and their place in Perugia’s political offices. In Blanshei, Sarah. “Population, Wealth and Patronage in Medieval and Renaissance Perugia.” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* IX:4 (Spring 1979), 612. 35

Figure 11. Pietro Perugino. *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints (Decemviri Altarpiece)*, commissioned 1485, finished 1496 (Vatican Museum: Rome). 38

Figure 12. Fiorenzo di Lorenzo. *Madonna and Child with two Angels*, detail of *Santa Maria Nuova Altarpiece*, 1487-93 (Perugia: National Gallery). 40
Figure 13. Fiorenzo di Lorenzo. *Saint Sebastian*, circa 1498 (Perugia: National Gallery).

Figure 14. Pinturicchio. *Gonfalone of Sant’ Agostino, Perugia*, 1499 (Perugia: National Gallery).

Figure 15. Pintoricchio. *Adoration of the Magi*, 1500-01, commissioned by the Baglione Family in 1499 (Spello: La Cappella Bella, Santa Maria Maggiore).

Figure 16. Pintoricchio. Detail, portrait of Troilo Baglione in black cloak, 1500-01 (Spello: La Cappella Bella Chapel, Santa Maria Maggiore).

Figure 17. Pietro Perugino. *Sant’Agostino Polyptych*, center panel, *Adoration*, 1502-12, commissioned in 1502 by the Church of Sant’ Agostino Perugia (Perugia: National Gallery).

Figure 18. Sandro Botticelli. *Adoration of the Christ Child*, circa 1475 (Florence: Uffizi Gallery).

Figure 19. Anonymous. *Presentation in the Temple*, commissioned by the Baglione family, late fifteenth-century (Tordandrea: Church of San Bernardino).

Figure 20. Detail, portrait of Baglione family member (Tordandrea: Church of San Bernardino).


Figure 22. Master of the Greenville. *Madonna and Child with Two Angels* (Modena: Galleria Estense).


Figure 26. Workshop of Bonfigli. *Gonfalone della Chiesa di San Francesco di Montone*, 1482 (Montone: Church of San Francesco).


Re-Thinking the Myth of Perugino and the Umbrian School: A Closer Look at the Master of the Greenville’s Jonas Nativity Panel

Carrie Baker

ABSTRACT

In 1959, Federico Zeri isolated an anonymous painter and named the artist the Master of the Greenville after the Madonna and Child with Angels tondo in Greenville, South Carolina. Through connoisseurship, scholars have since attributed over thirty-two works to the Master of the Greenville, unanimously categorizing the unidentified artist as a close Umbrian follower of Perugino’s style.

My research focuses on a Nativity panel attributed to the Master of the Greenville in the Museum of Fine Arts in Saint Petersburg, Florida. It is called the Jonas Nativity after its former owner, the late art collector Harriet H. Jonas. Writings on the Jonas Nativity are almost exclusively devoted to naming the artist of the panel whom either worked with Perugino, or was a close follower of his style. Although the Jonas Nativity is clearly indebted to Perugino, the emphasis on naming the artist has led to formal analyses that almost exclusively rely on connoisseurship. As a result, there is virtually no critical analysis on the Jonas Nativity outside the context of this method.

Pietro Scarpellini has argued that scholars place too much emphasis on Perugino’s stylistic influence when interpreting Umbrian art – he labeled this problem the “myth of Perugino.” Scarpellini asserts that the myth is a methodological emphasis on Perugino’s stylistic influence on Umbrian images. Scarpellini traces the origins of the myth to
Vasari, who wrote in Perugino’s biography that he established a significant stylistic following in Umbria. Later, Vasari’s account was interpreted by writers of the Romantic Period as an Umbrian School of Painting dominated by Perugino; this viewpoint has remained prevalent in critical interpretations on Umbrian art through today.

This study recognizes the general stylistic impact of Perugino on the *Jonas Nativity*, but shifts focus by shedding light on how the painting likely fit into the culture of late fifteenth-century Umbrian patronage and workshop practices. In doing so, I show how the *Jonas Nativity* can be read as a product of a patronage system largely dominated by Umbria’s ruling families during the late fifteenth-century. While Perugino’s art affected the stylistic qualities of the *Jonas Nativity*, the market demands of Umbria’s ruling noble patrons greatly dictated the structure and output of workshops in which the Master of the Greenville probably worked.

My investigation intends to expand the critical inquiry of the *Jonas Nativity* and in turn, enrich our understanding of the image. I hope to effectively lay the groundwork for a methodological balance between Perugino’s stylistic influence and the intrinsic cultural forces that shaped Umbria’s early modern images.
Introduction

This study examines a Nativity panel in the Saint Petersburg, Florida Museum of Fine Arts named the *Jonas Nativity* (Figure 1). The *Jonas Nativity* is named after its former owner, the late art collector and philanthropist, Harriet H. Jonas (b. 1884, d. 1974, New York, N. Y.). The panel is currently attributed to the Master of the Greenville, an anonymous painter whom scholars identify as a close Umbrian follower of Pietro Perugino.

Federico Zeri first isolated the Master of the Greenville in 1959 based on a tondo of the *Madonna and Child with Angels* located in Greenville, South Carolina (Figure 2).\(^1\) Since then, scholars and connoisseurs have collectively attributed over thirty-two works to the Master of the Greenville, agreeing that the painter practiced and carried out the *Jonas Nativity* in Umbria anytime between the late fifteenth to the early sixteenth-century. Everett Fahy added the *Jonas Nativity* to the Master of the Greenville’s oeuvre in 1976, just before the Museum of Fine Arts in Saint Petersburg’s acquisition.\(^2\)

Since Fahy attributed the *Jonas Nativity* to the Master of the Greenville, scholars have almost exclusively focused on attributing the work more specifically to one of a number of named artists thought to have worked with Perugino. The Museum’s object file is primarily comprised of extensive research centered around naming the Master of the Greenville based on Everett Fahy and Federico Zeri’s observations that the artist was

---

2. Fahy made this attribution while serving as Director of the Frick Collection. Letter dated May 17\(^{th}\), 1976 on file at the Saint Petersburg Museum of Fine Arts.
a “close Umbrian follower of Perugino.” In his biography of Pietro Perugino, Giorgio Vasari included a list of named artists (mostly Umbrian) who he claimed were followers of Perugino’s style. All of the proposed artists of the *Jonas Nativity* are from Vasari’s list of Perugino’s followers.

![Figure 1. Master of the Greenville. *Jonas Nativity*, circa 1480-1520 (Saint Petersburg, Florida: Museum of Fine Arts).](image)

---

3 Quote by Fahy. Opinions on file at the Saint Petersburg Museum of Fine Arts.
My goal is to suggest an alternate method of interpretation of the Jonas Nativity that does not challenge Perugino’s stylistic influence, but that shifts to examine the cultural framework in which this image was created. My re-directed shift relies heavily on Pietro Scarpellini’s argument that scholars almost exclusively interpret Umbrian images from
the viewpoint of Perugino’s stylistic influence.\(^5\) Scarpellini labels this methodological problem the “myth of Perugino.” Scarpellini traces the root of the emphasis placed upon Perugino’s influence to Vasari, when he wrote in his biography of Perugino that the artist established a significant, stylistic following in Umbria.\(^6\) Vasari’s account was eventually interpreted by writers of the Romantic period as a ‘School of Painting’ dominated by Perugino. Scarpellini argues that the idea of a School dominated by Perugino persisted through later literary periods; and as a result, has evolved, through today, into the primary method in which Umbrian images are understood. Although he does not contend with Perugino’s stylistic influence in Umbria, Scarpellini takes issue with the exclusivity of this method, which results in virtually omitting interpreting the cultural factors in which Umbrian images were produced.

My study argues how scholarship on the *Jonas Nativity*, which almost exclusively emphasizes Perugino’s stylistic influence, is an example of the methodological problem in Umbrian scholarship defined by Scarpellini. My study shifts emphasis from stylistic analysis on the *Jonas Nativity*, to a focus on how the painting fit into a cultural framework, specifically Umbria’s patronage and workshop practices. My study seeks to expand the discussion on the *Jonas Nativity* by recognizing Perugino’s influence on the image, but also opens a new line of inquiry into the cultural factors that also informed the image.

It is important to clarify that this study does not seek to challenge Vasari’s claim that Perugino established a strong following in Umbria. However, this study does rely on

\(^6\) Vasari wrote: “Pietro trained many masters in his style. None that were as pleasing as his.” *The Lives of the Artists*. Translated by Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella. Oxford University Press, 1991.
Hans Belting’s argument that it is important to discern that during the late fifteenth-century, images served a dual purpose. In what he labels the “crisis of the image,” Belting convincingly argues that the fifteenth-century marked an era when images were beginning to fulfill aesthetic tastes but all the while, were still created as functional elements of their culture. This study considers Belting’s argument and posits that the Jonas Nativity reflects Belting’s duality of the image. Scholars agree that the Master of the Greenville produced the painting during Belting’s “crisis of the image,” between the mid to late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century. The formal qualities of the Jonas Nativity, that is, Perugino’s obvious stylistic influence reflects the aesthetic taste of its period. On the other hand, the Jonas Nativity’s function as a public or private altarpiece reflects how images still played a critical role in Umbrian patrons’ cultural practices, in this case religious worship.

Given that the Jonas Nativity simultaneously reflects the development of aesthetic tastes as well as its function in society, I suggest a balanced consideration of the Jonas Nativity that recognizes Perugino’s stylistic influence but also includes the cultural contributions of Umbrian patronage and workshop practices.

---

Chapter One

Attributing the Jonas Nativity to an Artist in the Context of Vasari’s Biography, and the Influence of Perugino

As sister city to Perugia, the city of Grand Rapids, Michigan had the first opportunity to educate the American public on the fifteenth-century art of this Italian city during the 1998 exhibition entitled: *Pietro Perugino, Master of the Italian Renaissance.*

This exhibition was the first of its kind in the United States that focused on the art of Umbria’s largest city during the fifteenth and early sixteenth-centuries; or as Joseph Becherer, Grand Rapid’s Museum Director noted, the first exhibition in America at all on the art of this important Central Italian region. The method that the museum chose to educate the public on these images lies partly in the exhibition’s title. The title contains the typical blockbuster catch terms often used to draw in the modern day museum viewer: ‘Master,’ and ‘Italian Renaissance,’ starring one of the period’s familiar masters, ‘Pietro Perugino.’ Although half of the pieces exhibited were by other Umbrian artists besides Perugino, the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue still centered on his work and repeatedly emphasized his pivotal achievement in the stylistic development of Umbrian art. Note the statement made by Ferdinando Salleo, the United States Ambassador to Italy at the time, “We may envisage a renewed appreciation of Perugino as the leading personality of the spread of the Florentine canon to all Central Italian workshops.”

---

10 Becherer, Joseph, 12.
Gianfranco Maddoli, Perugia’s Mayor wrote, “Our most beautiful churches and houses of nobility have all been rendered more precious by the presence of his artistic creations.”¹¹

As discussed in the introduction, this language is a recent example of Scarpellini’s claim that critical writings emphasize the formal characteristics of Umbrian images through a one-sided emphasis on Perugino’s stylistic influence in this region.

The 1998 Grand Rapids exhibition is a direct reflection of a modern day museum culture that measures the value of images based on their stylistic links to named masters like Perugino. Critical writings on the Jonas Nativity are no exception as the bulk of the work’s scholarship uses connoisseurship to make an attribution to an artist based on the idea that the Master of the Greenville was a follower of Perugino (Figure 1).

**Establishing Scholarship on the Jonas Nativity**

When Federico Zeri first isolated the Master of the Greenville in 1959, he did so primarily through his skills as a connoisseur by observing the stylistic characteristics in paintings he attributed to the artist.¹² Since Everett Fahy added the Jonas Nativity to the Master of the Greenville’s oeuvre, the Museum of Fine Art’s research initiated an active line of inquiry that relies heavily on the method of connoisseurship in order to identify the artist of this painting.

Scarpellini argues that the emphasis on Perugino’s stylistic influence on Umbrian art has led to an overwhelming focus on its formal aspects, resulting in a reliance on connoisseurship that plagues Umbrian scholarship. Although we can rightly argue that connoisseurship allows us to expand formal interpretations of the Jonas Nativity, the

---

¹¹ Becherer, 13.
Museum of Fine Art’s emphasis on attributing the painting to a named follower of Perugino is a reflection of how this method is used to determine a work of art’s value in today’s market as well as culture. For the Jonas Nativity in particular, the museum’s scholarship has sought to link the painting to Perugino, who has been championed as a familiar genius of Renaissance art.

Zeri stated that he was convinced that the Master of the Greenville, though the artist’s name is unknown, was one of the artists who assisted Perugino in the fresco cycle for the Sistine Chapel.13 After Everett Fahy added the Jonas Nativity to the Master of the Greenville’s oeuvre, Zeri agreed with Fahy’s attribution, and observed that the Jonas Nativity corresponded “perfectly” with the stylistic details of the first piece attributed to the Master of the Greenville: the Madonna and Child with Angels tondo in Greenville, South Carolina (Figure 2).14 Through the method of Morellian connoisseurship, which emphasizes anatomical details as the most important formal indicators of authorship, Zeri described these “idiosyncratic details” as “trademarks” of his work such as “the over-large oval head of the Madonna, the perfunctory manner in which the background figures are treated, the flat simplified folds of his drapery, and the borrowing of gestures from Perugino.”15

Fahy also reflected the emphasis on Perugino’s influence through his comments on iconography, in what he believed to be the work’s most significant element:

“The most important aspect of this panel is the composition of the Virgin and Joseph with a pair of adolescent angels, all kneeling in adoration of the Christ child whose head is propped up in a bundle of hay. This scheme seems to have

---

13 Opinion on file at the Saint Petersburg Museum of Fine Arts.
been invented by Perugino in his Albany Polyptych .....This type of derivation is
typical of close followers of Perugino, which is how I classify the Master of the
Greenville.”¹⁶

The iconographical parallel between the Christ’s head on a bundle of hay in the Jonas
Nativity (Figure 1) and Perugino’s 1491 Albani Polyptych certainly reinforces the
probable influence Perugino had on the formal aspects of the Jonas Nativity.¹⁷ However,
 writings on the Jonas Nativity have not recognized the common belief that the Northern
artists in Germany and the Low Countries, for example, had a particularly strong
influence on the art of Northern Italy, including Umbria. Scholars generally agree that the
design in Perugino’s Albani Polyptych of the kneeling Virgin and the Christ propped on
hay reflects the influence of Northern Nativity scenes such as Ghent’s Hugo van der
Goes’s Adoration in the famed Portinari Altarpiece (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Hugo van der Goes. Portinari Altarpiece, center, 1475-6 (Uffizi: Florence).

¹⁷ An image of Perugino’s Albani Polyptych was unavailable but can be seen at the Torlonia Collection in Rome.
The kneeling Virgin adoring the naked Christ on the ground (opposed to a seated Virgin with Christ in her lap or swaddled in a manger) comes from Bridget of Sweden’s fourteenth-century mystical treatise on the Nativity, in which she described the Virgin dressed in white, kneeling before the naked Christ lying on the ground, who extinguishes the light of Joseph’s candle through Christ’s gleaming holiness.18 Although artists depicted variations of Bridget’s treatise like van der Goes’s depiction of the Virgin in a blue robe opposed to the traditional white robe as seen in the Netherlander Robert Campin’s Nativity (Figure 4), it is generally accepted that this iconographical scheme was widely used by artists in the North.

Figure 4. Robert Campin. *Nativity*, circa 1425 (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon).

---

18 Bridget’s mystical treatise is widely discussed in the context of the Nativity in Northern Renaissance scholarship. For a definition see: Hall, James. *Dictionary of Subject and Symbols in Art*. Westview Press, 1979.
While the Master of the Greenville may have directly emulated Perugino’s adaptation in the *Albani Polyptych*, we should also recognize the origins of this iconographical influence in Umbria, which is most likely rooted in Northern Nativity scenes.

When the Saint Petersburg Museum of Fine Arts acquired the *Jonas Nativity* in 1976, they essentially picked up where Fahy and Zeri left off in terms of scholarship. Records show that the Museum’s curatorial staff researched diligently in order to name the Master of the Greenville. Former Director Lee Malone initiated an active line of inquiry into attributing the painting to an artist through letters and even visits to Perugia where he met with Pietro Scarpellini, Francesco Santi, (then Head of the Ministry of Culture for Umbria), and even Federico Zeri himself.\(^{19}\) All of the recorded correspondence with these individuals reflects inquiries solely comprised of who could have painted the work. The research done on the *Jonas Nativity* clearly focused on the attempt to attribute it to a named, known follower of Perugino.

Although the effort to name the artist was unsuccessful, the Museum still emphasized the proposed links to Perugino’s influence in their catalogue entry by pointing out attributions asserted by scholars during Malone’s correspondence.\(^{20}\) Lo Spagna, Francesco Francia, Eusebio da San Giorgio, and Andrea d’ Assisi were all posited as the painter of the *Jonas Nativity*.\(^{21}\) The Museum catalogue described them as “artists who worked in Perugino’s style….all of whom were skilled and talented painters.” The language reinforces Scarpellini’s argument that the skewed emphasis on

---

\(^{19}\) Malone corresponded with others as well. According to the Museum archives, the line of inquiry lasted almost ten years (1976-1984). On file at the Saint Petersburg Museum of Fine Arts.


\(^{21}\) All opinions on file at the Saint Petersburg of Fine Arts. Eusebio da San Giorgio was suggested by Susan Arcamone while she was at I Tatti. Andrea d’ Assisi, Lo Spagna, and Francesco Francia were suggested by Zeri.
Perugino’s stylistic influence is rooted in Vasari’s biography of Perugino. In his second edition of the *Vite*, Vasari published a long list of named artists who he claimed worked under Perugino in Umbria. As noted earlier, each artist named in the Museum catalogue was included in Vasari’s list of names. In other words, the starting point for understanding the *Jonas Nativity* commenced with attributing it to a named painter whom Vasari said worked under Perugino. Although the artist of the *Jonas Nativity* remained unnamed, the Museum emphasized its link to the influence of Perugino through language that measured the degree of success the Master of the Greenville achieved in emulating Perugino’s style.

Not only has the Museum’s research and subsequent publications re-enforced the emphasis of Perugino’s influence on the Master of the Greenville, but so have limited writings outside the scope of the Museum’s files. Filippo Todini’s survey of Umbrian painting, one of the few, follows the pattern. After the short entry on the Master of the Greenville that describes the artist as a close follower of Perugino, the *Jonas Nativity* is included in a list of works attributed to the artist. The structure of this publication, which is strictly comprised of short descriptions of the artists’ possible stylistic influences and where and when they worked, is an example of Scarpellini’s argument that the methodological problem in Umbrian scholarship exists in current writings. There is no critical information offered on the function, iconography, or social context of the *Jonas Nativity* here, only opinions that aid in shaping the Master of the Greenville’s identity in the context of Perugino’s influence.

---


In the aforementioned 1998 Grand Rapids Perugino exhibition catalogue, the *Jonas Nativity* was included in an essay that includes a list of paintings in America that are by what scholars describe as unnamed Perugino followers.\(^{24}\) Like Todini’s survey on Umbrian art, the Master of the Greenville is included in a list of painters described as being in the “School/Studio/Circle of Perugino.”\(^{25}\) Both the *Jonas Nativity* and the *Madonna and Child with Angels* tondo in Greenville, South Carolina are included with entries solely compromised of their history of attributions. Although Becherer notes that he hopes this list will elicit more study to understand Umbrian art better, he also pairs this comment with the need for “a more complete understanding of Perugino.”\(^{26}\) Linking these two comments inevitably suggests that we cannot properly interpret Umbrian images unless we do so in the framework of Perugino’s stylistic influence.

*Interpreting the Jonas Nativity in the Context of Vasari*

As noted, every artist that scholars have suggested painted the *Jonas Nativity* was included in Vasari’s list of painters who he wrote worked under Perugino. When Vasari published the second edition of the *Vite* in 1568, he added artists’ biographies from the regions of Venice, Rome, and Umbria, and made changes to existing biographies of the 1550 edition.\(^{27}\) Perugino’s is particularly significant when we look at the *Jonas Nativity* because he added this list of mostly Umbrian painters at the end of his biography, who

---

26 The Nativity is listed along with the *Madonna and Child Angels* tondo in Greenville, South Carolina. “Perugino in America: Masterpieces, Myths, and Mistaken Identities,” 101.
Vasari described as “pupils who never equaled either Pietro’s diligence or grace.”\textsuperscript{28} I recognize that Vasari’s list is valuable for many reasons; one being that it has provided critical insight into a region that unlike Florence is not well documented in terms of its artistic activity.\textsuperscript{29} On the other hand, the list has also been used in the manner that Patricia Rubin warns is the biggest mistake we can make when using Vasari to form critical interpretations of images: to consider him solely as a reliable historical source.\textsuperscript{30} Scholars have certainly exercised this method in the context of the \textit{Jonas Nativity} as they have used Vasari’s list as a source to make attributions to an artist from his list added to Perugino’s biography in the second edition of the \textit{Vite}. For example, Francesco Santi suggested Andrea d’ Assisi or Lo Spagna as possible painters of the \textit{Jonas Nativity} because “Vasari mentions them as followers of Perugino.”\textsuperscript{31}

To add to Rubin’s warning that we cannot use Vasari as a reliable historical document is Scarpellini’s argument that convincingly shows how the idea of a ‘School under Perugino’ in Umbria was fabricated by Enlightenment culture.\textsuperscript{32} He points out two texts by Annibale Mariotti in 1788 and Baldassarre Orsini in 1784 that were particularly critical to propelling the idea. They were especially influential because of their emphasis on attribution, particularly in the context of Perugino and Umbrian art.\textsuperscript{33} Scarpellini argues that Orsini’s publication, the first to attempt to name all known works by Perugino led to an inflated emphasis on attributing images to named artists and on Perugino’s

\textsuperscript{28} “The Life of Pietro Perugino, the Painter,” 267.
\textsuperscript{29} The copious amount of historical data on Florence’s artistic activity compared to other Italian towns during the Renaissance has been noted. See: Burke, Peter. \textit{The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy}. Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey, 1986.
\textsuperscript{31} Opinion on file at the Saint Petersburg Museum of Fine Arts.
\textsuperscript{33} Scarpellini gives a very detailed chronological bibliography of publications regarding Umbrian art since 1453, including these two works. See: \textit{Perugino}, 315-323.
influence in Umbria.\textsuperscript{34} Given this, it is easy to see how the scholarly emphasis on a School of Painting dominated by Perugino evolved. Scarpellini notes that Vasari never even used the term ‘school’ in his biography of Perugino, that he instead emphasized a widespread stylistic following and an active workshop practice.\textsuperscript{35} Note Vasari’s statement: “Pietro trained many masters in his style….many artisans from France, Spain, Germany, and other countries came to learn it.”\textsuperscript{36}

I should re-iterate that Scarpellini does not make this point on Vasari in order to argue against a stylistic following of Perugino in Umbria, but does question how the language of a School of Painting has evolved and been utilized in an almost exclusive fashion in Umbrian scholarship. Scarpellini goes on to trace the origins of the term ‘Umbrian School.’ He shows that Lanzi first implied it in \textit{Storia Pittorica della Italia} (1795-96) when he used the term “scuola romana” in order to describe what he claimed to be a set of collective stylistic qualities for Umbrian art.\textsuperscript{37} Through an extensive chronological bibliography, Scarpellini goes on to show how later writers carried on Lanzi’s idea, particularly the connoisseur Giovanni Morelli, whom coined the term ‘Umbrian School.’\textsuperscript{38} This set of collective stylistic qualities acknowledged in Umbrian art correlated directly with Vasari’s biography that describes Perugino’s significant stylistic following in Umbria. Vasari’s list of named Umbrian Perugino followers published in his second edition suddenly became a reliable historical document.\textsuperscript{39} Although I am not

\begin{footnotes}
\item[34] Scarpellini, 314.
\item[35] Ibid., 314.
\item[36] “The Life of Pietro Perugino, the Painter,” 267.
\item[37] Scarpellini, 9.
\item[38] Scarpellini’s bibliography begins in the fifteenth-century and includes all known publications on Perugino through the twentieth-century.
\item[39] Scarpellini discusses how this list was used to attribute works that were considered to be by other Umbrian artists besides Perugino, adding to skewed interpretations. See: “La Pittura a Perugia verso il 1470. Il Problema di Fiorenzo di Lorenzo,” 10-11.
\end{footnotes}
taking the position of questioning the proposed artists of the Jonas Nativity, I do argue that given how the idea of the School of Perugino evolved, it is important to re-consider how Vasari’s list has been used to support this idea, and in turn support its attributions to named artists who Vasari wrote worked with Perugino.

**Vasari’s Sources and Background on Umbrian Art**

In addition to Rubin’s argument that the Vite becomes problematic when “relied upon as a biographical dictionary,” she also cautions against interpreting Vasari’s text without understanding the sources that contributed to its development.\(^\text{40}\) When making interpretations of the Jonas Nativity in the context of Vasari’s biography of Perugino, it is important to not only consider his sources, but also take into account his lack of comprehensive, first-hand knowledge of Umbrian art. As noted earlier, Vasari had never visited Umbria until after he published his first edition of the Vite. Rubin points out that Vasari actually turned down an invitation to go to Perugia in 1537 and that his knowledge of Perugino in his 1550 edition came mostly from Florentine sources.\(^\text{41}\) It was not until Vasari set out to publish the second edition that he took a ‘tour’ of Italy. This tour did include Umbria for a total of about six days.\(^\text{42}\) This information is vital when we consider that scholars have chosen to understand the Jonas Nativity primarily through relying on concepts that originated from interpretations of Vasari’s text. For the Vite as a whole, Vasari cites three sources: Lorenzo Ghiberti, Ghirlandaio, and Raphael.\(^\text{43}\) Vasari vaguely


\(^{41}\) Rubin, 382.

\(^{42}\) See the details of this trip in Vasari’s biographical outline in Rubin, 18. Vasari visited Perugia, Assisi, Spoleto, and Foligno in 1566.

\(^{43}\) There are many studies that recognize Vasari’s emulation of classical sources, particularly the structure of Plutarch’s *Lives* and Pliny’s *Natural History*. Plutarch’s *Lives* was published in Florence in 1545, just five years before Vasari published his first edition. For an extensive look at Vasari’s sources, see Rubin: “In Another’s Profession: Vasari and the Writers of Histories.”
credits Ghiberti’s *Commentaries* as a source in his conclusion. In regards to Ghirlandaio, the source merely included some comments on fourteenth-century painters and Michelangelo’s training in his workshop. Finally, for Raphael, scholars think but do not know that Vasari took some information from the artist’s will and letters.

Rubin points out that the most important source for the *Vite* was a collection of personal memories on artists Vasari had begun as a youth. In the *Vite*, Vasari described them as “both a sort of hobby and as a mark of affection for the memory.” This highly individual method is consistent with an age when collecting and molding identity were interrelated. This not only applied to the collection of objects, but also of words, particularly in Florence. Domestic diaries, better known as *ricordanze* were unique to Florentine culture and had been around for at least three-hundred years before Vasari’s time. Although it is clear that much of Vasari’s writings are vindicated his goal was not historical accuracy; rather, we should question how Vasari has been interpreted in order to understand the *Jonas Nativity*.

The repeated emphasis on attributing the *Jonas Nativity* to an artist whom Vasari wrote worked with Perugino is just one example of how Scarpellini argues the majority of Umbrian art is understood. We can compare it to the long history of scholarship on the *Adoration of the Magi* in the Church of San Lorenzo, Perugia (Figure 5).

---

44 Rubin, 170.
46 107.
49 The literature criticizing the historical accuracy of Giorgio Vasari’s *Vite* is vast. For a reference to this see: Rubin, Patricia Lee. *Giorgio Vasari: Art and History*. 
Figure 5. Attributed to Pietro Perugino. *Adoration of the Magi*, circa 1470 (Perugia: Galleria Nazionale dell’ Umbria).
Vasari attributed the Adoration to Perugino when he wrote (in addition to another work), “Since these paintings are not of the same good quality as other works by Pietro, it is certain that they are among the first works he executed.”⁵⁰ Although there are no archival records on this work, only Vasari’s mention of it in Perugino’s biography, scholarship is flooded with polemical debates (spanning over one-hundred years) over who painted the Adoration. Laura Teza traces the debate to writers such as Orsini and Venturi, who posited Perugino; and Morelli and Berenson, who attributed the work to Fiorenzo di Lorenzo.⁵¹ Teza goes on to note that the debate on who painted the work continues through today. As with the Jonas Nativity, Teza argues that the focus on attributing the Adoration to a named artist has been the primary method for understanding this work. She also argues that because Vasari stated that it was probably one of Perugino’s early works, scholars use this image primarily to aid in the understanding of Perugino’s early stylistic development.⁵² Jeryldene Wood exemplifies this in her statement, “Vasari informs us that the Adoration of the Magi...in Perugia was one of Perugino’s first works.”⁵³ Wood then considers Perugino’s early development through a lengthy analysis of the Adoration’s formal qualities.⁵⁴

**Clarifying Vasari’s Literary Environment and Allegiances**

When Vasari was writing the Vite in the 1540’s, he was working within a well-established humanist framework. The philosopher Marsilio Ficino had established the Neo-Platonic Academy and the humanist Mirandola gave his epic oration “On the

---

⁵² Teza, Laura. “Sul Tema dell’ Adorazione dei Magi: Perugino Signorelli e Altri.”
⁵⁴ Wood, Jeryldene. The Early Paintings of Perugino, 50-55.
Dignity of Man” a full generation before Vasari’s birth in 1511. Patricia Rubin clarifies Vasari’s literary milieu by showing that the influential classical manual *Rhetorica ad Herennium* was Vasari’s primary model for the structure of his *Vite.* Vasari, well versed on the structures of rhetoric, followed the model of epideictic rhetoric outlined in this classical text. Rubin noted that according to the *Rhetorica ad Herennium,* this branch of rhetoric consists of a structure that includes an introduction, ancestry, birth, youth, life quests, comparison, and conclusion. This pattern is certainly clear in every biography of Vasari’s text, including Perugino’s. In fact, Vasari’s biography on Perugino is very familiar amongst scholars: his poor upbringing, his giving away by his father as an errand boy to a painter, his move away from Umbria to Florence to perfect his craft, and then ultimately bringing his art back to Umbria to teach many followers, particularly Raphael, whom Vasari wrote would ultimately surpass his ability. If we line the elements of the epideictic model up with Perugino’s biography, it is clear that it follows the developmental stages perfectly.

Vasari’s allegiance to Duke Cosimo de Medici was also a critical factor that contributed to the *Vite*’s development. Vasari entered the Duke’s service as an artist in 1555; in 1561, the Duke even granted him a residence in Florence. Rubin points out that when Vasari published the first edition, he sent one of his first copies to Duke Cosimo with a letter stating how he hoped that “his service of twenty-two years and devotion to the house of Medici” would bring “even the smallest favor or sign of pleasure from the

56 Rubin. *Giorgio Vasari,* 156.
58 Rubin, 157.
If the letter was not enough to solidify his allegiance, the frontispiece of Vasari’s *Vite* confirms it; the Medici family crest dominates the top of its decorative border (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Frontispiece, Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de Piu Eccelenti Architetti, Pittori, et Scultori Italiani* (Florence, 1550).

---

59 Rubin, 114.
It is also no secret that Vasari’s loyalty to the Medici meant allegiance to Florence, therefore resulting in his familiar glorification of Florentine art. Perugino was one of many artists that Vasari described as leaving their provincial hometowns for Florence in order to perfect their skills in the arts.\textsuperscript{60} Vasari was no exception to this transition; like Perugino, he left his hometown of Arezzo as a teenager and moved to Florence. However, Rubin noted that inside Vasari’s extant allegiance to Florence, there was another critical layer.\textsuperscript{61} The parallel between Vasari’s move and the many artists that Vasari claimed followed the same pattern is no coincidence. Rubin pointed out that Vasari’s personal motivations for accomplishment and status are clear in a letter to his companion Pietro Arentino: “Don’t doubt that….I will struggle to such a degree…..just as Arezzo, has flourished in arms and letters, could through me, make its breakthrough as I pursue the studies I have begun.”\textsuperscript{62} By the time Vasari published the first edition of the \textit{Vite}, he was well on his way to fulfilling his dreams; he was an active member of Florentine society serving on various civic boards and an active painter - his chief patron being the powerful Medici. For Vasari, it was not enough for him to leave his hometown as a humble man only to find glory in Florence. The artist’s biographies were a way to record his cause, ultimately establishing his legacy on paper.

\textit{Vasari, Umbrian Art, and the Opening of the Louvre Museum}

I have established that Scarepllini has located the origins of the myth of Perugino in Vasari’s biography, where Vasari wrote that Perugino returned to Umbria after training

\textsuperscript{60} This scenario also plays out in the Lives of Andrea Pisano, Antonio Viniziano, Ambrogio and Pietro Lorenzetti, Jacopo della Quercia, and Giovanni Lapolli.

\textsuperscript{61} Rubin, 50.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 62.
in Florence and instituted a large stylistic following. In addition, Scarpellini makes it clear that the idea of a School of Umbrian Painting dominated by Perugino materialized through literary cultures throughout history. Given this, in addition to measuring the Jonas Nativity’s scholarship against Vasari’s biography of Perugino, it is important to consider key historical periods that contributed to how we have come to emphasize Perugino’s influence in the Jonas Nativity and in Umbrian scholarship.

I argue that political factors surrounding the opening of the Louvre Museum in the nineteenth-century were key to propelling skewed interpretations of Perugino’s influence in Umbria. This is for two reasons; 1) By the 1790’s, Paris had become the most influential city of the arts in the western world by amassing the largest collection of art ever under one roof; 2) The classification system used to display this art was primarily based on the idea of schools, particularly Vasari’s master / pupil construction between Perugino and Raphael.

In 1792, the Bourbon monarchy collapsed, King Louis XVI was taken prisoner, and Paris was a Republic. Andrew McClellan argues how in a very complicated political period, the historic 1793 opening of the Louvre Museum became a symbol for both the triumph over recently defeated despotism of Louis XVI and of newfound liberty for Paris.63 During Vasari’s time, art was experienced primarily by a privileged few or religious worshipers; but the opening of Louvre Museum marked an important shift from the restricted viewer to a communal viewer. For the first time, all social classes could view works of art. Furthermore, the installation of art for this new viewing public created

a new medium for interpretation (Figure 7).\textsuperscript{64} The curators chose to install and display the art according to national schools. This arrangement was particularly significant for Umbrian art as it propelled the critical emphasis of Perugino’s stylistic influence that has lasted through today.\textsuperscript{65}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Figure 7. Hubert, Robert, \textit{The Grand Gallery of the Louvre between 1794 and 1796} (Paris: Louvre Museum).}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{64} This is by no means an in depth discussion of a most complicated political period. The acquisition of so much art from all over Europe, particularly Italy, primarily came from Napoleon and his troops’ booty. See: McClellan, \textit{Inventing the Louvre}.

\textsuperscript{65} This can be seen in the Perugino exhibition in Grand Rapids, Michigan. It was the first U.S. exhibition on Umbrian art in over one-hundred years and the arrangement revolved around this concept. See Becherer, Joseph Antenucci, Abbott, Katherine R. Smith, James R. Banker, Julia Conaway Bondanella, Peter Bondanella, Marilyn Bradshaw, Bruce Cole, Vittoria Garibaldi, and Rosaria Mencarelli. \textit{Pietro Perugino, Master of the Italian Renaissance}, exh. cat. New York: Rizzoli; Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids Art Museum, 1995.
McClellan argues that out of the many displays in the Louvre, the most important example of pedagogical influence was the Perugino / Raphael arrangement (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Julius Griffiths and Maria Cosway, Raphael / Perugino arrangement, Transfiguration Bay, in the Louvre Museum (Paris, 1806).

By the early nineteenth-century, Elisabeth Fraser discusses how French society perceived Raphael as the model artist. Fraser also points out that the primary source of this perception was Vasari. In Raphael’s biography, Vasari wrote that he was a student of

---

66 There is an interesting discussion here of the characteristics that supported Raphael’s reputation in comparison to Michelangelo’s. Parisians were less inclined to champion Michelangelo because they perceived him as the artist who broke the mold when Raphael followed a didactic model. See: Fraser, Elisabeth. “Choosing Fathers: Dante and Virgil,” in Delacroix, Art, and Patrimony in Post-Revolutionary France. Cambridge University Press, 2004, 12-38.

67 Fraser also notes includes Ascanio Condivi, Michelangelo’s biographer. See: Delacroix, Art, and Patrimony in Post-Revolutionary France, 187.
Perugino; however, Raphael eventually surpassed Perugino’s ability, becoming a genius in Vasari’s familiar hierarchy of painters. McClellen points out how the organizers of the Louvre embraced this didactic model as Paris’s critics described Raphael’s *Transfiguration* as “his masterpiece and that of all painting (Figure 9).” We can see in the Louvre’s Raphael / Perugino display that it was in fact the *Transfiguration* at the center, suggesting its place in the hierarchy between the Raphael and Perugino (Figure 8).

![Figure 9. Raphael. *Transfiguration* (Rome: Vatican Museum, 1517-1520).](image)

69 McClellan. *Inventing the Louvre*, 137
It is almost impossible to miss the intended suggestion of Raphael’s glory when we observe this dramatic arrangement in the Louvre. McClellan offers a justification for this arrangement when he argues that the decisions to display these images according to national schools symbolically supported the revolutionary cause.\(^7^0\) A new Republic must have role models and as McClellan point out, the pupil / teacher dyad between Perugino and Raphael was a visual example of how one could succeed through discipline and learning.\(^7^1\) McClellan noted that the pupil / teacher model was so important that the Louvre commissioners made requests to go to Perugia and find specific examples of Raphael’s early progress under Perugino.\(^7^2\) In the aforementioned display, Perugino’s works not only flank the *Transfiguration*, but the Louvre’s curators also strategically placed Raphael’s *Transfiguration* in the center to re-iterate how he eventually became superior in skill under Perugino’s guidance (see Perugino’s *Coronation* on the upper left and Raphael’s on the right, Perugino’s *Transfiguration* on the left with Raphael’s at center).

The source of this construction was certainly not coincidental and the *Vite* offered historical justification. Dominique Vivant-Denon, the Louvre’s Director, was responsible for the museum’s arrangement by schools. McClellan noted that his primary source for pinning artistic influence between Perugino and Raphael was Vasari.\(^7^3\) The *Vite’s* influence was spreading during this period; by 1803, a new French edition of the *Vite* was

---

\(^7^0\) McClellan, 141.
\(^7^1\) Ibid., 136.
\(^7^2\) Ibid.
\(^7^3\) Ibid.
Denon described the *Coronation* and the *Transfiguration* as examples of the “refined, precious, and delicate school where Raphael imbibed the principles of an art that he carried to the highest degree of perfection.”

I should point out that such literal interpretation of Vasari’s text was not isolated and should be considered in the larger picture of an emphasis on historicism in eighteenth-century Enlightenment culture. As Alex Potts points out, Winckelmann’s *History of Ancient Art* of 1764 was also a major influence for the progressive model in the History of Art. The didactic emphasis between Perugino and Raphael was a slice of a much larger cultural phenomenon that emphasized order and purpose. This arrangement transcended many elements of culture, including the classification of plants and animals. Art was no exception and as noted earlier, Pietro Scarpellini shows that the idea of the ‘School of Perugino’ was fabricated by this culture. Recall the two texts published by Annibale Mariotti in 1788 and Baldassarre Orsini in 1784 that were especially influential because of their influence on attribution, particularly that of Perugino. Given this, it is easy to see how the notion of the School of Perugino arose. Vasari’s aforementioned list of named Umbrian Perugino followers published in his second edition suddenly became a reliable historical document.

---

74 Ibid., 145. Rubin offers a chronological detail of publications of the *Vite* throughout history. See Rubin, 414-417.
75 McClellan, 145.
77 McClellan specifically points out the influential classification system of genus and species as introduced by Linnaeus which became the standard in the eighteenth-century and remains to this day. See: McClellan, 80.
79 Scarpellini gives a very detailed chronological bibliography of publications regarding Umbrian art since 1453, including these two works. See Scarpellini, 315-323.
80 Scarpellini discusses how this list was used to attribute works that were considered to be by other Umbrian artists besides Perugino, adding to skewed interpretations. See especially “La Pittura a Perugia verso il 1470. Il Problema di Fiorenzo di Lorenzo.” 10-11.
Vasari, Umbrian Art, and Connoisseurship in the Twentieth-Century

By the early twentieth-century, Vasari had been labeled as the world’s first Art Historian.\textsuperscript{81} Nineteenth-century texts on Italian art, especially J.A. Crowe’s and G.B. Calvacaselle’s 1864 \textit{A New History of Painting in Italy} (arguably one of the most influential texts on Italian art of its time), reinforced this by mirroring Vasari’s language of artistic progress and using him as a primary source.

In their discussion on Pinturicchio, Crowe and Calvacaselle described the artist as Perugino’s assistant and that “he had all of the qualities that should be sought in a subordinate.”\textsuperscript{82} Like Vivant-Denon when justifying his Perugino / Raphael arrangement in the Louvre, Crowe and Calvacaselle’s footnote to this statement cited Vasari as their source; in fact, their text is filled with footnotes that cite Vasari. The authors do make a point in their introduction that they attempted to make an accurate historical account and as a result, they point out many errors in Vasari’s text based on new research.\textsuperscript{83} Despite this, Crowe and Calvacaselle wrote on the familiar premise of Vasari’s evolution in art. In their discussion on Umbria, they repeatedly used the term ‘the Umbrian School’ and wrote their account based on Vasari’s original premise that Perugino stylistically led the way for other artists of this region.

\textsuperscript{81} Vasari is often referenced as the first Art Historian. See the opening quote by Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella written as recently as 1992. General encyclopedic references that almost always call him the ‘first Italian Art Historian.’ See the entry in \url{http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giorgio_Vasari}.


\textsuperscript{83} Crowe, J.A. and G.B. Calvalcaselle. Volume I, 8.
Using the *Vite* as a reliable historical document has had a domino effect that has lasted for centuries. By the twentieth-century, the literary trope of interpreting Umbrian images primarily through the context of Perugino’s influence was fueled by the modern day emphasis on genius, namely known, named artists of Renaissance Italy. I argue that this is nowhere more evident than in early twentieth-century America, when a burgeoning art market seeking ‘master works’ by named artists was directly dependent on the science of connoisseurship.

By the late nineteenth-century, the public accessibility of art that largely began in Paris with the Louvre had spread to America. A wealthy few feverously sought out and collected Italian ‘old master’ paintings, building astounding private collections and shaping the collections of new American museums through their donations. Like Crowe and Calvacaselle’s publication, these tastes were vital to further spreading current perceptions of Renaissance art, namely the glorification of artistic genius. In his influential article on “The Renaissance Conception of Artistic Progress,” E.H. Gombrich aptly stated, “And so the Italian journey became a necessity because here was the point of reference against all art was measured.” For twentieth-century American collectors, this was certainly the case as they prized pieces attributed to artists considered Italian masters such as Botticelli and Signorelli. For the art of Umbria, it was none other than Perugino, Pinturicchino falling a distant second, finally all of ‘the rest’ considered mere followers or students. It is no coincidence that this hierarchy mirrors Vasari’s rhetorical evolution. In

---

84 Two of the first major museums were in Boston and New York. Both competed for works by known masters and actively solicited collectors. There is a copious amount of material on this subject. For a detailed and recent bibliography on the topic, see: Schwarzer, Marjorie. Riches, Rivals and Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America. American Association of Museums, 2006
what would eventually become one of the world’s largest art markets, the *Vite* was being used to fuel a largely economic interest in genius in America.

By no twist of fate, Bernard Berenson, arguably the most influential connoisseur of the late nineteenth and twentieth-centuries, described Umbrian art much like that of aforementioned Louvre officials. In his 1897 *Central Italian Painters*, Berenson described Perugia as “the Umbrian capital, the town most destined to shelter the school of painting… the school which culminated in Raphael, the most beloved name in art.”

Although it is widely accepted that Berenson’s aesthetic theories were largely derivative and undeveloped, his work and publications on Italian art are noteworthy because he was working at a place and time when *who* painted it was much more important than the art’s cultural background. American collectors considered Berenson as the most reliable source not only for attributing Italian paintings to artists, but also for acquiring pieces that were only by named masters. As many wealthy collectors eventually donated these pieces to new American museums, this consultant / client relationship played a critical role in the development of some of America’s most famous collections to this day.

Given the literary and historical factors that contributed to the development of the methodological emphasis on Perugino’s influence over the centuries, it is no surprise that scholars have primarily interpreted the *Jonas Nativity* from this viewpoint. Scarpellini’s primary motivation behind dispelling the myth of Perugino is to encourage an epistemological balance between Perugino’s stylistic contributions and cultural factors that contributed to the outcome of Umbrian images. Thus far, scholars have not made this

---

87 Berenson was heavily involved in consulting collectors such as Joseph Widener and Isabella Stewart Gardner, whose collections eventually went to the National Gallery of Art, and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, respectively.
shift in discussing many Umbrian works including the *Jonas Nativity* as no critical writings cover interpreting the painting in its cultural context. Given my argument that *Jonas Nativity’s* scholarship is primarily devoted to interpretations based on Perugino’s stylistic influence, it is now timely to transform the way this image has primarily been interpreted. The following two chapters take a methodological shift away from stylistic observations in the context of Perugino by placing the *Jonas Nativity* into the cultural contexts of Umbria’s patronage and workshop practices in the fifteenth-century.
Chapter Two

The Jonas Nativity Examined in the Context of Perugia’s Patronage

Perugino was an exceptionally successful painter who received many prestigious commissions throughout Italy. Within eight years of registering with the Florentine painters’ guild in 1472, (which scholars usually mark the beginning of his career as an active artist), Pope Sixtus IV commissioned Perugino to paint frescoes in the Vatican chapel in Rome, now the famed Sistine Chapel.\(^88\) In addition to the Sistine Chapel, Perugino secured many more esteemed commissions throughout Italy for the duration of his long career, all the while maintaining an active workshop in Florence for over twenty-five years.\(^89\)

In his discussion on the Jonas Nativity, Federico Zeri posits through his shrewd connoisseur skills that the Master of the Greenville was probably one of the painters who assisted Perugino on the commissions for the Sistine Chapel frescoes.\(^90\) Yet this observation, though valuable for evaluating Perugino’s probable influence on the painter, is an example of how scholars have primarily focused on Perugino’s stylistic influence when examining this work. Furthermore, placing the Master of the Greenville in the context of this renowned commission shows his possible involvement in only one system.

---


\(^{89}\) Perugino is recorded having workshop in the old via San Giglio in Florence from 1487-1511. Scarpellini, Pietro and Maria Rita Silvestrelli. Pintoricchio, 286.

\(^{90}\) Opinion on file at the Saint Petersburg Museum of Fine Arts.
of artistic commissions during the fifteenth-century: that of powerful patrons who often sought out the services of well-known painters.

I am not able to specifically define the *Jonas Nativity*’s patronage, but want to place the work, along with many other Umbrian images, into the context of a less-glorified, yet equally important system of patronage than the Sistine Chapel. Sarah Blanshei’s argument that for political reasons, art patrons of late fifteenth-century Perugia displayed a preference for local artists (in other words, artists who were officially registered as citizens) is central to this chapter.91 She shows through tax registers and fiscal documents that a few noble families had infiltrated the city’s civic and religious systems and established an unofficial oligarchy (Figure 10).92 Their political status was unofficial because at mid fifteenth-century, Perugia was officially a papal state. It is worth quoting Blanshei’s statement: “Art patronage in the fifteenth-century in all its forms, collective, religious, and individual, was dominated by the nobles.”93

Given Blanshei’s argument that Perugia’s patrons preferred local artists during the mid-late fifteenth-century, I argue that the critical limits of examining the *Jonas Nativity* primarily as a product of Perugino’s stylistic influence can be shown when positioned in the context of these noted patronage practices.

---

93 Blanshei, 616.

Historians Blanshei and William Heywood claim there is a need to re-examine influences on Umbrian art from 1470-1500 because the effect of noble patronage has often been overlooked. William Heywood, who wrote one of the most comprehensive histories on Perugia, states in the opening sentence of his study, “For many people Perugia is simply the town of Perugino; yet the Umbrian school of painting is a product of the age of despots.”\footnote{Heywood, William. A History of Perugia. New York: G.P. Putnam Sons, 1910, 3.} In her article, Sarah Blanshei calls attention to an abundant

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{llll}
\hline
\textbf{1498} & \textbf{FAMILY} & \textbf{OFFICES} & \\
\hline
+ * & 1. Baglioni & 54 & 201 \\
+ * & 2. della Corgna & 17 & 51 \\
+ * & 3. Montesperelli & 14 & 60 \\
+ * & 4. Montemelini & 9 & 21 \\
+ & 5. Signorelli & 14 & 36 \\
+ * & 6. Montebibiano & 6 & 34 \\
+ & 7. Oddi Novelli & 5 & 22 \\
+ * & 8. degli Oddi & 4 & 12 \\
+ * & 9. Arcipreti & 6 & 22 \\
+ & 10. Ranieri & exile & \\
+ * & 11. Armanni & 7 & 25 \\
+ & 12. Alfani & 7 & 18 \\
+ & 13. Thei & 9 & 37 \\
+ * & 14. Ubaldi & 9 & 19 \\
+ & 15. Crispolti & 5 & 11 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Political Elite: Leading Family Clans of Renaissance Perugia}
\end{table}
period of activity during the mid to late fifteenth-century and argues that several artists shared equal stature, not solely Perugino.95

Perugia’s shaky status as an official papal state played a role in the preference by noble families to commission local artists. Although Perugia’s legal allegiance was to the Pope, by 1498, the city was almost entirely in the hands of an aristocratic oligarchy. Blanshei argues that the primary reason that the papal state tolerated this degree of autonomy was the value of the noble families as mercenaries.96 A few families gained substantial wealth fighting for the Papacy, Florence, and Venice. These mercenaries numbered among the same families that permeated Perugia’s civic and religious offices. Not only did Pope Innocent VIII grant official rule in much of the contado (surrounding areas of towns dependent on Perugia) in exchange for their work as condottieri, but by 1488, the Dieci dell’Arbitrio was also formed, which was allowed to conduct all powers of the State.97 Moreover, six out of the ten seats that formed the Dieci dell’Arbitrio consisted of the powerful Baglione family.98 This council not only held all of the powers of the State, but also had the authority to exclude the power of the priori, a remnant of Perugia’s previously thriving commune. By 1498, the top ten percent of the population controlled sixty-two percent of Perugia’s wealth.99 Consequently, because the government was the most important art patron during this period, the nobility within Perugia’s government largely controlled artistic commissions by the second half of the fifteenth-century.

96 Blanshei, 614.
98 Heywood, 305.
99 Blanshei, 608.
This period is critical when examining the *Jonas Nativity* because scholars generally posit that the Master of the Greenville could have been painted in Umbria roughly anytime from 1470-1520.\textsuperscript{100} Given that these are the years that fall into Perugia’s political status as an unofficial oligarchy, then we can also place the *Jonas Nativity* in the context of Perugia’s political situation.

We can validate this point further when we establish Perugino’s status as a Perugian citizen during this period. In 1472, Perugino became a citizen of Florence, and enrolled in the Florentine Company of Saint Luke, a religious confraternity that consisted mainly of artists, mostly painters.\textsuperscript{101} Though born in the region of Umbria in Castello della Pieve, Perugino did not become a citizen of Perugia until 1485.\textsuperscript{102} Becherer strengthens Blanshei’s argument that Perugian citizenship was essentially necessary for artists to obtain work, when he noted that Perugino probably took the initiative to become a citizen of Perugia in order to secure local commissions.\textsuperscript{103} This is evident in a 1483 commission for the Prior’s Palace Chapel. Originally, Perugino agreed to paint the altarpiece on November 28 (Figure 11). However, one month later, the magistrates discharged Perugino from the commission for leaving the city.\textsuperscript{104} Becherer notes that Perugino probably left because Bartolomeo Bartoli commissioned Perugino to paint a triptych in Rome.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{100} Opinions on file at the Saint Petersburg Museum of Fine Arts.
\textsuperscript{102} Vasari wrote that Perugino was born in Perugia, but this is incorrect. Records confirm that he was born in Castello della Pieve between 1445-1450. Becherer, 260.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 260.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
Figure 11. Pietro Perugino. *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints (Decemviri Altarpiece)*, commissioned 1485, finished 1496 (Vatican Museum: Rome).

Although some of Perugino’s Perugian commissions were more than likely limited by his status as a Perugian citizen for a period, this does not mean that he did not have a stylistic influence on the artists of this region. Yet the preference for local artists played a critical part in the activity of many Umbrian painters, who were established Perugian citizens. Fiorenzo di Lorenzo is a good case in point as Scarpellini noted that Fiorenzo di Lorenzo was “was a figure of major importance in the panorama of Perugian
art from 1470-1490.”106 Although Fiorenzo lived until 1522, his last surviving documented work is from 1491, which as Scarpellini points out, makes it difficult to trace Fiorenzo’s later works.107 However, from 1470-90, Fiorenzo is well documented and unlike Perugino, was a noted local painter. For example, from 1463 and 1469, he was on the register of painters in Perugia; in 1470, treasurer of the painters’ guild; and in 1472, he was elected as the guild’s prior.108 Unlike Fiorenzo, Perugino was not an active Perugian citizen during this period.; as noted, in 1472, Perugino instead became a citizen of Florence.109

Blanshei noted that when the city’s priors commissioned the main altarpiece for Santa Maria Nuova, they insisted that the artist be Perugian (Figure 12).110 Fiorenzo was chosen to paint the altarpiece; in addition, Scarpellini argued that Perugia valued Fiorenzo because of the high price the city paid him; the priori paid him two-hundred and twenty-five ducats, a substantial sum for this time.111

We can also see Fiorenzo’s activity in Perugia in his Saint Sebastian, originally commissioned by the Baglione family for the Church of Santa Maria Nuova (Figure 13). The coat of arms above Saint Sebastian’s head bears the mark of a branch of the Baglione’s and a portrait of the donor on the lower right. As Blanshei points out, by 1498, the Baglione along with other noble families had infiltrated the city’s government (Figure 10).112 In fact, the Baglione occupied the most offices in the city, revealing their

106 Scarpellini, Perugino, 20.
107 Scarpellini, 21.
109 Becherer, 256.
110 Blanshei, 617.
112 Blanshei,. 614.
overwhelming influence. The fact that they commissioned Fiorenzo, not Perugino to paint this panel further supports noble families’ preference for local artists.

Figure 12. Fiorenzo di Lorenzo. *Madonna and Child with two Angels*, detail of *Santa Maria Nuova Altarpiece*, 1487-93 (Perugia: National Gallery).
Scarpellini argues that besides Fiorenzo di Lorenzo, another major local figure was Bernardino di Betto better known as Pintoricchio.\textsuperscript{113} Although scholars recognize that he was an exceptionally active and stylistically influential painter, Scarpellini points out that his influence is compromised because of Vasari’s account that describes him as a close, subordinate follower of Perugino.\textsuperscript{114} This certainly should be questioned because Perugino and Pintoricchio were contemporaries, born only four years apart and unlike

\textsuperscript{113} Scarpellini, 11.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 30.
Perugino, the latter was born in Perugia and was a member of its painters’ guild by 1481.\footnote{Scarpellini, Pietro. “Pintoricchio,” in Grove Art on-line. http://www.groveart.com.} By the time Perugino completed the Priori altarpiece in 1495, the increase in payment for his work indicates that he had obtained more fame as an artist; however, Pintoricchio also received prestigious Perugian commissions. For example, in 1498, the confraternity of Saint Augustine commissioned Pintoricchio to paint their \textit{gonfalone} (Figure 14). The surviving contract specifically stipulated that their “maestro Pintoricchio” execute the altarpiece.\footnote{Scarepllini, Pietro and Maria Rita Silvestrelli. \textit{Pintoricchio}. Milano: Electa, 2004.} This specific request for Pintoricchio not only indicates that Perugia’s patrons valued his work, but because Pintoricchio was a native Perugian, the request also supports the patrons’ preference for local artisans.

![Figure 14. Pintoricchio. \textit{Gonfalone of Sant’Agostino, Perugia, 1499 (Perugia: National Gallery).}](image)

By 1500, both Perugino and Pintoricchio had achieved notable commissions, particularly in Rome with the Sistine chapel frescoes and the complex of the Borgia apartments, respectfully. Becherer noted that after their Rome commissions, that the artists had become rivals. Although Perugino was a well-known painter, he was fully aware that he was working in a competitive environment among other well-known artists like Pintoricchio to receive commissions. Documents show that Perugino often solicited potential patrons for future commissions. In other words, although Perugino had achieved fame as an artist, he was keen enough to realize that patrons’ desires played a critical role in his success.

The Perugian nobility adhered to their choice to hire local artists when the Baglione family commissioned Pintoricchio to paint La Cappella Bella in Santa Maria Maggiore in Spello (Figure 15), a town that was part of the contado. As I noted earlier, the papacy granted control to noble families over much of the contado in exchange for their service as mercenaries. Pope Innocent VIII granted authority over Spello to the Baglione family in 1488; therefore giving the family control over artistic commissions in this outlying town to Perugia. Although Perugino had become a citizen of Perugia in 1485, the Baglione probably favored Pintoricchio because he was a native and also resided there. Though a citizen of Perugia, Perugino married a Florentine in 1493 and instead owned two homes in Florence as well as kept a studio there. Pintoricchio was

---

117 Becherer, 248.
118 Perugino often wrote to possible patrons in order to solicit his availability for upcoming works. See: Canuti, Fiorenzo. Il Perugino: I Documenti. Siena, 1933 (reprinted 1983).
120 For Perugino’s annotated chronicle, see: Becherer, 251-303.
not only a painter, but contributed to the economic vitality of Perugia through owning and renting properties out to citizens.\textsuperscript{121} It is easy to see how the nobility would want to establish a working patron-client rapport with Pintoricchio, who was much more actively involved in Perugia’s daily affairs.

Figure 15. Pintoricchio. \textit{Adoration of the Magi}, 1500-01, commissioned by the Baglione Family in 1499 (Spello: La Cappella Bella, Santa Maria Maggiore).

\footnote{121 Perugino’s annotated chronicle, Becherer, 282.}
In the preserved contract, the Baglione requested a Nativity scene complete with family portraits. Pintoricchio depicted the noble Baglione family emerging from the rocky landscape into the holy scene while carrying their coat of arms. On the opposite wall, the artist depicted a portrait of Troilo Baglione dressed in a black cloak (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Pintoricchio. Detail, portrait of Troilo Baglione in black cloak, 1500-01 (Spello: La Capella Bella Chapel, Santa Maria Maggiore).

Through these portraits and requests, we see the presence and control of noble families in the images of this period. In terms of stylistic qualities, Perugino’s Nativity from the *Sant’Agostino Polyptych* (Figure 17) serves as a strong comparison in terms of skill because both artists received these commissions during the same time and the commissions are the same subject matter. Both artists have an impressive command of implying deep space. Perugino’s achieves emphasis on perspectival space through the lines in the ground and the ordered architecture framing the scene, while Pintoricchio effectively achieves perspective through richly layered landscape. They both have obvious skill in depicting the human figure. For example, though Pintoricchio’s fresco contains more figures, both works show sensitivity to different postures and seem to depict them with ease. When we look at Pintoricchio’s exceptional skill and his notable commissions within and outside of his home city, it certainly provides solid grounds to question Vasari’s account that the painter was a successful, though inferior follower of Perugino. Note Vasari’s words on Pintoricchio, “….even though he executed many works and was assisted by many people, he enjoyed a much greater reputation than he deserved.” In fact, the question becomes even more valid when we consider the fact that essentially nothing is known about Perugino’s early influences or training outside of Vasari’s claim that an unidentified, unaccomplished Perugian artist was probably his first master. Moreover, Scarpellini points out that Pintoricchio operated his own workshop

---

123 The *Sant’Agostino Polyptych* was commissioned in 1502. See Becherer, 247.
125 Becherer notes in Perugino’s annotated chronology that there is no documentation as to whom or where he was trained. The ambiguity is heightened by Vasari’s statement that described Perugino’s first master as “an unaccomplished, unidentified artist probably from Perugia.” See Becherer, 254.
in Perugia, while as I noted earlier, Perugino chose instead to keep an established workshop in Florence for over twenty-four years.\(^{126}\)

Figure 17. Pietro Perugino. *Sant’ Agostino Polyptych*, Central Panel, *Adoration*, 1502-12, commissioned in 1502 by the Church of Sant’ Agostino Perugia (Perugia: National Gallery).

\(^{126}\) Perugino is recorded to have a workshop in the old via San Giglio from 1487-1511. Scarpellini, Pietro and Maria Rita Silvestrelli. *Pintoricchio*, 286.
The desire to commission local painters reveals an important social development outside of Perugino’s stylistic influence that affected the outcome of Umbria’s art. Furthermore, although altarpieces like the *Jonas Nativity* fundamentally carried a religious function, Perugia’s nobility used patronage to establish an influential presence through these religious images. In his essay on the Baglione family, Black stated that there was intense competition for power among the Perugian nobility during the fifteenth-century.\(^{127}\) Maturanzio, Perugia’s fifteenth-century chronicler, famously described the familiar rivalry between the two top ruling families, the Oddi and Baglione, “…I will only tell you that the whole class of gentlemen was divided into two parties, the Baglione and Oddi; and brother strove against brother; and son against father.”\(^{128}\) This pull for power surely resulted in the desire to establish a visual presence through artistic commissions. Given Blanshei’s argument that the nobility had infiltrated both civic and religious realms of authority in Perugia, this authoritative presence certainly would have a direct effect on commissioned altarpieces.

We can observe noble presence in many private and public altarpieces throughout Perugia.\(^{129}\) *The Servite Nativity* (Figure 5) discussed in Chapter One is applicable because as I noted earlier, scholars have almost exclusively focused on its attribution. However, as Laura Teza points out, scholars often overlook important aspects of patronage in this

\(^{127}\) Black, Christopher. “The Baglione as Tyrants of Perugia.”


\(^{129}\) A valuable reference for altarpieces throughout Umbria during this period is the aforementioned *Pittura in Umbria tra il 1480 e il 1540,* exh. cat. Milano: Electa, 1983. Although the scholarship centers on the influence of Perugino and Raphael, it is one of the few publications that deal exclusively with images produced throughout Umbria in the fifteenth and early sixteenth-centuries.
She notes that the magi’s cloaks in this altarpiece are the familiar red and green colors of the Baglione family. Teza also makes an interesting comparison to the *Adoration* completed for the Medici family in Florence by Botticelli (Figure 18). She notes the portraits of the Medici family present in this painting are very similar in terms of underlying motivations to the Baglione presence in this Adoration scene. In other words, both families were looking to make a statement of both power and piety.

![Figure 18. Sandro Botticelli. *Adoration of the Christ Child*, circa 1475 (Florence: Uffizi Gallery).](image)

We find the same noble presence in the little known *Presentation in the Temple* altarpiece in the Church of San Bernardino (Figure 19). Like *The Servite Nativity*,

---

131 There are several Medici family members in this painting although scholars argue as to their exact identities. However, scholars generally concur that the eldest king kneeling at the Christ child’s feet is none other than Cosimo the Elder.
scholars primarily discuss its attribution in the context of Perugino. However, the catalogue does briefly note portraits of the Baglione in this work (Figure 20). In other words, although they functioned as religious altarpieces, surely the Perugian viewer and the rivaling families would have received a visual message of power and dominance in these portraits.

Figure 19. Anonymous. *Presentation in the Temple*, commissioned by the Baglione family, late fifteenth-century (Tordandrea: Church of San Bernardino).

Like the *Jonas Nativity*, the *Presentation in the Temple* was produced during a period when, as Hans Belting argues, images were beginning to serve a dual purpose. Belting marks the late fifteenth-century as a critical time when images were beginning to contribute to aesthetic tastes, yet still were an integral element of religious and cultural

---

133 The short caption lists various attributions by Berenson, Crowe and Calvalcaselle and others throughout the century. It also discusses Perugino's possible stylistic influence. See: *Pittura in Umbria tra il 1480 e il 1540*, 122.

experience.\textsuperscript{135} Perugino’s celebrated commissions certainly reflect the growth of aesthetic
tastes that Belting argues came to the forefront in sixteenth-century art. Yet, the political
motivations behind Perugia’s ruling families defined Perugia’s patronage during the late
fifteenth-century and were certainly a reflection of the cultural factors that were integral
to the outcome of Umbria’s art.

Figure 20. Detail, portrait of Baglione family member in \textit{Presentation in the Temple} (Tordandrea: Church of San Bernardino).

This chapter attempted to reveal a critical historical link between the politics of
Umbrian patronage and its effect on the production of images. In doing so, I have
attempted to show that although Perugino’s art had a stylistic affect on Umbrian images,
that noble Perugian rulers played an authoritative, largely politically motivated role in
specifying local Perugian artists to carry out Umbrian commissions. The final chapter
will continue to transform how we look at the \textit{Jonas Nativity} by placing it into the nature
of Perugia’s workshop practices during the fifteenth-century.

\textsuperscript{135} Belting, Hans. \textit{Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art},
Chapter Three

The Jonas Nativity in the Context of Collaboration in Fifteenth-Century Umbrian Workshops

Given scholars’ overwhelming devotion to identifying the Master of the Greenville in the context of Perugino’s influence, it is interesting to consider just what sort of identity we are seeking. In other words, unless we discover archival documents that reveal the anonymous artist’s name, then I argue that the focus on naming the artist is most likely futile. I do recognize that connoisseurship is certainly a viable method for better understanding the formal qualities of the Jonas Nativity, however, the lack of confirmed attribution should not be a barrier to broadening our interpretations of the work.

This chapter extends our interpretations of the Jonas Nativity by considering how the work may have fit into the fifteenth-century Umbrian workshop. Scholars have expressed frustration with the inability to attribute the Jonas Nativity to a specific artist because of the similar stylistic qualities that Fahy and Zeri described were “typical of Perugino’s followers.”¹³⁶ I argue that although the consistency in style to Perugino’s may hinder connoisseurs’ ability to attribute the Jonas Nativity to one artist, this uniformity in style may aid our ability to understand how it fit into Umbria’s workshop system. Anabel Thomas’s argument that the strong presence of collaboration was key to the success of

¹³⁶ Both Zeri and Fahy expressed this difficulty and noted that the consistency in style was typical of fifteenth-century Umbrian art. Opinions on file at the Saint Petersburg Museum of Fine Arts.
Renaissance workshops is important to interpreting the *Jonas Nativity*.\textsuperscript{137} Most fifteenth-century artisans belonged to a workshop system that strove to maintain a consistent style in order to meet client demands.\textsuperscript{138} Given Thomas’s argument, this chapter will also consider how the imitative subject matter of the Master of the Greenville’s oeuvre reflects workshop collaboration. With the exception of the *Jonas Nativity*, the bulk of the Master of the Greenville’s oeuvre is images of Saint Sebastian and the Madonna and Child (Figures 21 and 22).\textsuperscript{139} My attempt to place the *Jonas Nativity* in the context of workshop practice hopefully shows that despite anonymity, we can nevertheless interpret how the Master of the Greenville probably fit into the identity of Umbrian workshop practice.


\textsuperscript{139} See appendix A for a complete listing of works attributed to the Master of the Greenville.
When attempting to place an anonymous work like the *Jonas Nativity* into the framework of workshop practice, we should recognize that though celebrated artists like Perugino were working, so too were less recognized craftsmen. On the one hand, there were well known painters like Perugino, who carried out esteemed commissions all over Italy; on the other hand, there were less glorified painters who were also an integral part
of a thriving workshop system. Because of the emphasis on identifying the Master of the Greenville as a close follower of Perugino, the practice of the workshop craftsman is overlooked, while artistic genius comes to the forefront. Blockbuster exhibitions such as earlier mentioned 1998 Perugino exhibition re-enforce the idea of singular artistic genius. The catalogue’s title, Petro Perugino, Master of the Italian Renaissance, evoked the modern day well accepted definition of ‘master’ as genius at the highest level. In his essay on Perugino, Vittoria Garibaldi stated, “The level he achieved in his art….was in fact so well understood in his time that already by the end of the quattrocento he was unanimously regarded as the best painter in Italy.”

However, looking at what the term master implied in the fifteenth-century reveals distinct differences than how we construe it today. Thomas argued that although the Renaissance workshop had only one maestro, “it did not necessarily mean that the individual was highly distinguished, or that he was capable or aspired to any distinct artistic achievement.” She stated, “The defining characteristic of the master was the ability to sustain a workshop organization economically by generating a visible income through securing and dispatching business.” I should clarify that I am not using this comparison in order to argue Perugino’s exceptional level of success as an artist. On the contrary, I am attempting to bring out the idea that when we recognize Perugino’s extraordinary achievements that we should make it a point to realize that these achievements were, in fact, out of the ordinary. In other words, when we look at

---

141 The Painter’s Practice in Renaissance Tuscany, 2.
142 The Painter’s Practice, 2.
workshop practice, we must make this distinction between the ‘genius’ of Perugino and the equally important contribution of the less glorified craftsmen.

Geoffrey Crossick convincingly argued that modernity has “idealized the past artisan past the point of their original occupational role….the meanings of artisanship are thus embedded in a particular reading of the past.” Crossick’s argument is certainly applicable to interpretations of the Jonas Nativity; the emphasis on tying its identity to Perugino’s stylistic influence has led to the exclusion of considering how the Master of the Greenville might have fit into his occupational role as an artisan in Umbrian society.

Studies on Umbrian art certainly reflect Crossick’s argument that we have lost sight of the original occupational role of many fifteenth-century artists; most interpret the many unattributed works as problematic. Scholars exemplified the tendency to problematize anonymity in the 1982 exhibition Disegni Umbri del Rinascimento da Perugino a Raffaello. Sylvia Ferino Pagden noted that the major challenge of the exhibition was the many workshop copiers (collaboratore), who she described as followers of their master, Perugino (Figure 23). These copies, like most workshop sketches, have no signatures; as a result, Pagden expressed frustration due to the inability to attribute them to artists with certainty.

Zeri expressed similar frustrations on attributing the Jonas Nativity with certainty, “because the Nativity is probably the work of different hands, we will unfortunately probably never know who painted it.” He described the stylistic characteristics that support his theory, “Joseph was painted with exceptional mastery that the cartoon could

---

145 Pagden, Sylvia Ferino, ed. Disegni Umbri del Rinascimento da Perugino a Raffaello, 12.
146 Opinion on file at the Saint Petersburg Museum of Fine Arts.
have even been by Perugino himself….yet the drapery is inferior and was probably done by an assistant (Figure 1).”147 After Zeri keenly isolated the Master of the Greenville, the concentrated efforts I noted earlier to name the artist through connoisseurship certainly reflects the perception of anonymity as problematic. On the contrary, although anonymous, we can still identify the Master of the Greenville as part of a workshop structure that thrived on stylistic consistency and collaboration.


147 Opinion on file at the Saint Petersburg Museum of Fine Arts.
Scholars and connoisseurs have subjected the majority of the Master of the Greenville’s oeuvre including the *Jonas Nativity* to repeated, but never confirmed attempts at attribution in the context of Perugino’s influence through connoisseurship.\footnote{148}{The Frick Art Reference Library photo archive file includes images attributed to the Master of the Greenville by Dr. Everett Fahy. In this archive, each image file includes a long history of attribution. See: Frick Art Reference Files, photo archive stack: Master of the Greenville.} This long history of attribution suggests that scholars see the lack of confirmed attribution as problematic. In addition, scholars have expressed frustration with identifying the Master of the Greenville because of the repetitive subject matter of his attributed works; as noted earlier, the majority of the artist’s oeuvre is comprised of images of Saint Sebastian and of the Madonna and Child (Figures 21 and 22). Zeri expressed that the Master of the Greenville’s anonymity and repetitive images were typical in Umbrian art because of the many followers of Perugino’s style.\footnote{149}{Zeri, opinion on file at the Saint Petersburg Museum of Fine Arts.} In other words, it is difficult to make attributions because of the imitative style. Yet, although unattributed, the repeated subject matter of the Master of the Greenville’s works is certainly a positive indicator to understanding the artist’s role in the Umbrian workshop.

Although the stylistic characteristics of the artist’s oeuvre was more than likely influenced by Perugino, the repeated subject matter should also be viewed as a direct reflection of the Master of the Greenville’s probable awareness of market demands. Fifteenth-century patrons requested certain types of religious figures like the Virgin Mary; these requests were directly tied to religious practice stimulated by these familiar images.\footnote{150}{See: Baxandall, Michael. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy.* Oxford University Press, 1972.} We can observe this in an almost completely unknown image attributed to the Master of the Greenville of the *Virgin Praying* (Figure 24). The visual parallel between
this Virgin and the kneeling Virgin in the *Jonas Nativity* (Figure 1) reveals the common practice of workshop copying in order to meet the visual expectations of the patron.

Peter Burke has noted the discrepancies with how we look to define a Renaissance artist versus how society defined them during their time.\textsuperscript{151} *Artista* in the early fifteenth-century meant a university student with the seven liberal arts, which did not include painting.\textsuperscript{152} Artist in the modern day sense, of course, implies a person who creates images out of creative intuition. The emphasis on the Jonas Nativity's stylistic influences and implications of a lack of creativity through his ‘inferior drapery’ implies that we view him according to modern day standards of genius versus how the artisan functioned in the workshop. Because writings project twenty-first century expectations of originality onto the Jonas Nativity, it severely limits our understanding of how the artist actually worked. Thomas noted that like today, market trends existed in the Renaissance economy.\textsuperscript{153} She even suggests that trends in composition tended to go in and out of style, so to speak through decades.\textsuperscript{154} Therefore, the Master of the Greenville’s repetitive subject matter could have been a direct reflection of the artist positioning him and his workshop at an economic advantage.

An important social aspect of Umbria that encouraged a collaborative workshop practice was the importance of confraternities. James Banker notes how their sheer number had a direct effect on the economic vitality of Umbria.\textsuperscript{155} Their prolific presence directly affected production in Umbria’s workshops because of the many requests for gonfaloni (religious banners for confraternities). Because of their repeated iconographical

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{152}{Burke noted that these were comprised of rhetoric, grammar, logic, arithmetic, music, astronomy and geometry. See *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*, 55.}
\footnotetext{153}{*The Painter’s Practice in Renaissance Tuscany*, 234.}
\footnotetext{154}{*The Painter’s Practice*, 234.}
\footnotetext{155}{“The Social History of Perugia at the Time of Perugino,” in *Pietro Perugino: Master of the Italian Renaissance*.}
\end{footnotes}
scheme, these images are an excellent example of how market demands encouraged collaborative workshop efforts. Francesco Santi noted that gonfaloni, though common throughout Italy, were particularly abundant in Umbria. Santi stated that a major contributing factor to their demand was due to Umbria’s response to their many bouts of plague. Banker called Umbria’s plague episodes “chronic” and noted that they were hit in 1456, 1464, 1475-79, 1482, 1485, 1486, 1493-4, and 1499. Banker noted that confraternities responded with formal processions “to placate the wrath of God.” During these processions, the confraternities marched behind them with their gonfaloni.

The civic and religious meaning tied to these images inevitably required a specific iconographical scheme. Umberto Gnoli explained this detail in a gonfalone produced for the confraternity of Corciano by Benedetto Bonfigli’s workshop (Figure 25). The usual scene is comprised of an outstretched Virgin at center wearing a cresta di rose (red robe). A view of Umbria (sometimes showing the Umbrian countryside or the city of Perugia) is at the base of the banner as members of the confraternities surround the Virgin in pious gestures. Saint Sebastian, who was particularly important to the image because he symbolized the resistance of plague, is kneeling to the left of the Virgin’s feet. Another anonymous member of Bonfigli’s workshop depicted the same scheme in a gonfalone produced in 1482 (Figure 26). Gnoli noted that the Virgin’s cresta di rose was a hallmark of Bonfigli’s workshop. Bonfigli capitalized on the importance of these images to his region by creating a sort of trademark through the repeated red robe of the Virgin.

159 Ibid., 39.  
161 Ibid., 46.
addition, although the two examples have unknown attributions, looking at how the cultural factors unique to the region of Umbria contributed to the production of these images certainly clues us in on how they identified themselves as Umbrian artisans. Furthermore, we can certainly apply these conceptions to how we choose to identify with the Master of the Greenville.

Figure 26. Workshop of Bonfigli. Gonfalone della Chiesa di San Francesco di Montone, 1482 (Montone: Church of San Francesco).
The practice of copying in the workshop was also critical not only for the artists to develop their skills, but also to achieve the stylistic collaboration that was necessary for images like the *gonfaloni*. Burke noted that during training, copying was essential to the success; on the average, apprentices trained for about thirteen years.\textsuperscript{162} Thomas supports the importance of achieving stylistic constancy through collaboration in a fifteenth-century contract for Raphael to paint a *Coronation* in Perugia.\textsuperscript{163} The patron specifically requested that Raphael copy Ghirlandaio’s *Coronation* (Figures 27 and 28).\textsuperscript{164}


\textsuperscript{162} Burke, Peter. *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*.
\textsuperscript{163} Thomas, Anabel. *The Painter’s Practice in Renaissance Tuscany*, 214.
\textsuperscript{164} *The Painter’s Practice in Renaissance Tuscany*, 214.
Given the many images of Saint Sebastian attributed to the Master of the Greenville, the artist, like Raphael, more than likely was given specific requests to copy from another work. It was necessary for artists to exercise the practice of copying in order to preserve the symbolic meaning it had for the viewer. The previously discussed Umbrian drawing exhibition included two drawings attributed to anonymous Perugino collaborators (Figure 29). Pagden expressed the difficulty with these and the many other Umbrian practice drawings because they are almost impossible to attribute to specific artists. However, they reveal the importance of copying to workshop practice.

Figure 29. Attributed to Perugino’s Collaborators. Drawings of Socrates

---

166 Disegni Umbri del Rinascimento da Perugino a Raffaello, 12.
In other words, connoisseurs can scrutinize the minute visual details in these drawings in order to posit attributions to named artists; yet emphasizing their formal qualities in the context of Perugino does not offer a balanced interpretation of the images. The slight variations in style show the teamwork between artisans, and I would argue further that with or without a confirmed attribution to an artist, these images equally contribute to broadening our understanding of Umbrian art.

Because of the overwhelming focus on Perugio’s influence in Umbrian art, most scholars limit their interpretations to paintings, as this was the trade of Perugino. Yet this limits our interpretations of artists workshop practices because as Thomas points out, many artists were involved in a variety of trades. Thomas warned against “establishing a hierarchy of trade by championing painters and posits that there is a lot of evidence that suggests that Renaissance painters were not elevated in social status, nor were they better off than other craftsmen.” Thomas Banker pointed out that in Umbria, leather artisans and painters even shared the same workshops (Figure 30).

Museum exhibitions like the previously discussed: Pietro Perugino: Master of the Italian Renaissance only included paintings and preparatory drawings solely attributed to the School of Perugino or to Perugino himself. When we compare the works exhibited in 1998 Perugino exhibition to what was exhibited in the aforementioned L’Arte Umbra alla Mostra di Perugia, it reveals quite a contrast. Organized ninety years earlier in 1908, this exhibition not only included paintings, but also reliquary objects, sculpture, architectural fragments, manuscripts, and fabrics.

---

168 Ibid., 62.
169 “The Social History of Perugia at the Time of Perugino.”
In the 1908 catalogue, Umberto Gnoli discussed archival documents that reveal how many fifteenth-century artists crossed trades.\textsuperscript{170} Gnoli referred to a ‘miniature roll,’ a record of manuscripts that shows that many Umbrian painters were also miniaturists.\textsuperscript{171} Gnoli noted that the roll included an artisan’s statute, with some names of participating miniaturists, including Benedetto Bonfigli.\textsuperscript{172} Recall that Bonfigli was one of the most active producers of Perugia’s gonfalonii, but this roll also shows that as a miniaturist, he and his workshop produced more than just paintings. In addition to Bonfigli, Giovanni Caporali who was a member of Bonfigli’s workshop produced paintings as well as miniatures (Figure 31).

\textsuperscript{170} Gnoli, Umberto. \textit{L’Arte Umbra alla Mostra di Perugia}, 70.
\textsuperscript{171} The document was called a matricole miniate della corporazioni perugine. See Gnoli, \textit{L’Arte Umbra alla Mostra di Perugia}.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 70.
Bonfigli and Caporali were no exception; many artisans crossed trades, which, in turn was probably a further motivation for collaboration. By strengthening the variety of their skill set, the artists positioned themselves and their workshop at an economic advantage. Understanding the collective nature of artisan production shows that anonymity is not a barrier. In the efforts to name the artist, we have overlooked the idea that the Master of the Greenville was probably an active participant of a working class system of many trades.

In addition to crossing trades, interdependence amongst trades was an integral part of Umbria’s artistic life. Thomas provides an example of this in her discussion on the supportive relationship between the fifteenth-century panel painter and the woodworker.¹⁷³ This relationship was primarily necessary for the production of altarpieces, in which the woodworker provided the panels. The many economic connections existed in the artistic community certainly should enlighten us on the manner in which we interpret the Jonas Nativity. Because it is an altarpiece, we could consider the collaborative relationship between the painter and the woodworker in order to broaden our cultural understanding of the Jonas Nativity. Just as the panel painter needed the woodworker, many interdependent relations existed such as the miniaturist and the parchment maker (Figure 32).

In his discussion on the ‘Renaissance problem’ in historiography over how scholars should identify this period, Erwin Panofsky argued that essentially, we cannot gauge Renaissance individuality, but we can only study and propose collective identities.\footnote{Panofsky, Erwin. “Renaissance-Self-Definition or Self-Deception”? in Renaissance and Renascenses in Western Art. Harper and Row, 1972.} Given this, we should not view the Master of the Greenville’s anonymity as a critical barrier. On the contrary, the artist and his works were, even with Perugino’s
stylistic influence, a reflection of a collaborative workshop system that was vital to molding Umbria’s artistic identity.
Conclusion

My own provenance research revealed that when the *Jonas Nativity* was in the private collection of the late collector and philanthropist Harriet H. Jonas, it was attributed to Pintoricchio (the provenance prior to this date is unknown and not researched). Ms. Jonas exhibited the work in a 1953 exhibition at Greenwich House entitled, *Four of New York’s most Distinguished Art Collections*. The exhibition literature included a breakdown of works in Ms. Jonas’s Fifth Avenue home. The Pintoricchio *Nativity with Saint Joseph and Angels* (now known as the *Jonas Nativity*), hung in her entrance hall. It was listed in the exhibition ‘tour guide’ that included many works by familiar ‘masters;’ a Degas in the sitting room, a Modigliani in the hall, and a Van Gogh in the bedroom.

I discuss the twentieth-century provenance in order to pose a question: Would Ms. Jonas have even acquired the Nativity if it had its current anonymous attribution to the Master of the Greenville? The nature of the contents of her collection, filled with famed masters from various periods, supports the familiar argument discussed in Chapter One that private collections propelled the desire for masterpieces in America through their quests for works by ‘original masters.’ The concentrated efforts made by the Museum of Fine Arts to attribute the *Jonas Nativity* to a named artist working under the ‘master’ Perugino shows how the pursuit for original masterpieces translates into museum culture. Even though scholars generally agree that connoisseurship peaked during the twentieth-
century partly due to the advent of private collections, it plays a critical role in museum culture today in order to justify value for their public collections.

Scarpellini’s argument that the scholarly emphasis on Perugino’s influence has resulted in a focus on attribution in Umbrian art is important partly because the methodological focus on attribution is not unique to this period. The quest for naming artists or attributing works in the context of a well-known master is so prevalent that scholars have devised a precise system of attribution for anonymous artists in relation to known ones. In the 1995 *Rembrandt not Rembrandt: Aspects of Connoisseurship* exhibition catalogue, the scheme is explained:

“circle of Rembrandt identifies the artist responsible as advanced pupil who probably worked closely with the master…follower of Rembrandt indicated either a pupil or an independent artist who was associated temporarily with the master who drew inspiration from him, *studio copy after Rembrandt* is a copy produced by a student in the master’s studio.”

Although this system is no doubt valuable for stylistic interpretation, I have attempted to show how it has dominated critical scholarship on the *Jonas Nativity*.

To conclude, I have attempted to show how scholars’ critical interpretations on Umbrian art are dominated by Perugino’s stylistic influence. Through a cultural analysis of Umbria’s patronage and workshop practices, I have attempted to show how stylistic analyses, though valuable, limit how the *Jonas Nativity* is understood. I have not attempted to argue Perugino’s stylistic influence on Umbrian art, nor encourage the exclusion of formal analyses; rather I have tried to broaden our critical approach for a more complete understanding of the image.

Furthermore, this study brought in works by other Umbrian artists besides the Master of the Greenville in an attempt to support Scarpellini’s argument that the
emphasis on Perugino’s influence permeates Umbrian scholarship. The methodological problem is not unique to the *Jonas Nativity*, and I suggest that we can find a balance between analyzing stylistic characteristics and placing images in the cultural framework of Umbria’s fifteenth-century patronage and workshop practices.

Because of the Master of the Greenville’s anonymity, it is certainly intriguing to ask the question, “To what extent can we determine the artist’s identity?” I have noted how Federico Zeri isolated the Master of the Greenville through his keen skills as a connoisseur. One day, scholars may confirm that the artist was in fact a named Umbrian painter from Vasari’s list of Perugino’s followers like Eusebio da San Giorgio or Lo Spagna; however, it is unlikely. Given this, I have attempted to elucidate an artistic identity vis a vis Umbria’s patronage and workshop practices, and show that it is quite discernable without any recourse to any historical detective work.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


Archives


Bibliography


Canuti, Fiorenzo. *Il Perugino, I Documenti, Tomi 1, 2*. Siena, 1931 (reprinted 1983).


_______. *Pittori e Miniatori nell’ Umbria*. Spoleto, 1923.


Appendix A: List of Works Attributed to the Master of the Greenville
From the *Bob Jones University Collection of Religious Paintings*, Greenville, South Carolina, 1984, 54.

The following list was compiled by Dr. Everett Fahy in a letter dated December 5, 1983:

Frankfurt am Main, Stadelsches Kunstinstitut, no. 867. *The Virgin and Child*.

Greenville, South Carolina, Bob Jones University Collection of Sacred Art. *The Virgin and Child Adored by Two Angels Tondo*.

Modena, Pinacoteca Estense, no. 352. The *Virgin Adoring the Child With Two Music Making Angels in a Landscape* (photo: Frick Art Reference File 24280).

Zagreb, Strossmayer Gallery, no. 32/93. *The Virgin and Child in a Landscape*.

In a letter to the Kress Foundation dated December 1966, Fahy attributed these works:

Brussels, private collection (sold Sainte-Gudule, June 29030, 1922, lot 152). *The Virgin and Child with the Young Baptist and Two Angels Tondo*.

London, Spink (1925). *The Virgin and Child with Two Angels Tondo*.

New York, Blakeslee Galleries (sold, American Art Association, April 21-23, 1905, lot 14). *The Virgin and Child with Saint John the Baptist and Angel Octagon*.


**Fern Rusk Shapely (Paintings from the Samuel L. Kress Collection: Italian Schools XV-XVI Century, 1968, 100-101)** added the following:


**Federico Zeri made the following additions in Italian Paintings in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, 1976, 179:**

Baltimore, Maryland, Walters Art Gallery, 37.506. *The Holy Family with the Young Baptist*. 

Gmunden, Austria. *The Virgin and Child Between John the Baptist and Julian.*

London, Laurence Harvey (ex) (in 1982, Mrs. Perego d’Alfonso, Lugano). Fragmentary Panel: *The Virgin in Prayer* (same cartoon as the *Jonas Nativity*).

Pancole, Santa Cristina. The *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Four Saints and a Male Donor* (photo: Soprintendenza Firenze 97216).

Venice, Ca d’Oro. *The Virgin and Child with Two Angels Tondo.*

**Fahy believes the following may be added to the Master of the Greenville’s Ouevre:**

Avignon, Musee du Petit Palais, no. 20172. *The Virgin and Child with the Young Baptist.*


London, (sold Sotheby’s, April 21 1982, lot 77). *The Virgin and Child with Saint Jerome and John the Evangelist.*