"Terribile Disegno" and "Eroico Componimento": Mattia Preti's Artistic Practices and Their Reception in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy

by

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ABSTRACT

The following study examines the artistic strategies of the Italian Baroque painter Mattia Preti (1613-99) in conjunction with their early reception in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italy. In addition to studying the first descriptions of the painter's art and his early biographers' characterization of his style, Bernardo De Dominici's comprehensive "Vita del Cavalier Fra' Mattia Preti" is analyzed in order to establish Preti's place in the history of Neapolitan Baroque painting. In so doing, descriptions of the painter's art are compared and contrasted with those of his contemporaries. Following the investigation of the early sources and biographies, the painter's strategies are studied through selected paintings executed between circa 1650 and 1680. These include such works as the Aquila Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew, the London Wedding at Cana, the Naples Feast of Absalom, and the Siena Canonization of St. Catherine. The case studies highlight a number of practices the artist used to distinguish himself from his peers. In sum, this study argues that the early biographical accounts, while only partially conveying the breadth of the painter's art, function as a point of departure for accessing and comprehensively examining his representational strategies. Ultimately, this dissertation demonstrates that Preti was an artist who actively and continuously experimented with a range of pictorial possibilities.
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"generis" clearly communicates the complexity of his art and how it defied the sort of strict classification by which Caravaggio's followers were categorized. De Dominici's emphasis on the "forza così terribile" that was founded on the painter's "disegno", "chiaroscuro", and "componimento" distinguished Preti's art from Caravaggio's and that of the Caravaggisti despite some stylistic linkages between them. The earliest extensive description of Caravaggism as a style was recorded by the critic and connoisseur Giulio Mancini (1558-1630) in his Considerazioni sulla Pittura, written around 1618-21. Mancini's account of the Caravagesque style emphasizes a small number of important points: the artists' use of "lume unito che venghi d'alto senza reflessi" and "havendo i chiari e le ombre molto chiare e molto oscure, vengono a dar rilievo alla pittura" but in a manner that is not natural nor consistent with the means of illumination utilized by such earlier Masters as Raphael, Titian, and Correggio, among others. The Caravagesque school of artists painted in a manner that was "molto osservante del vero" and, as such, they would always paint while directly observing nature. Given this emphasis on painting directly from nature, Caravagesque artists painted "bene una figura sola" but were unable to compose historical narratives, which included a greater number of figures. Since the depiction of historical narratives was the ultimate and most noble goal of painting, the artists from this school failed to obtain great stature, according to Mancini, because their pictures, while having forcefully-depicted characters, did not communicate the necessary range of emotions ("affetti") required to differentiate between each figure within the overall painting. The Caravaggisti, then, were known for their single source of

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3 G. Mancini, Considerazioni sulla pittura, (eds.) A. Marucchi & L. Salerno, Rome: 1956-7, 2 Vols., Vol. 1, pp. 108-109: "Specific to this school is the desire to illuminate with a single light that comes from above without any reflections, as it would be in a room with one window with the walls painted black so that,
light that created a sharp division between the illuminated and shaded spaces – their *chiaroscuro*, in other words; their ability to highlight single-figures; their focus on painting directly from nature without using drawings; and their inability to compose historical narratives that were populated by multiple figures.

According to De Dominici, Preti excelled in *disegno* and *componimento*, and these distinguishing factors between his art and that of the Caravaggisti had indeed kept writers after Mancini from directly defining him as a Caravaggesque painter. Although Mancini does not mention that the Caravaggisti did not draw, he implies as much by stating that such artists painted directly after nature. Drawing or design and composition were generally seen as integral elements to pictorial representation by both artists and writers in the Early Modern era. While Mancini stated that Caravaggio and the Caravaggisti were unable to compose multi-figure narratives, Preti's use of design and composition distinguished him from his predecessors despite their similar emphasis on a sharp *chiaroscuro*. His art was, therefore, isolated from yet linked to Caravaggism: it reinterpreted Caravaggio's style at a time when it was no longer a central point of reference while simultaneously assimilating other contemporaneous artistic developments; it was "molto osservante del vero" yet emphasized *disegno*; and it continued Caravaggesque compositional structures yet was consistently ready to

having the lights and the shadows very bright and highly shadowed, they come to give relief to the painting, but however in a un-natural manner not completed nor thought out like those from other centuries or older painters like Raphael, Titian, and Correggio, among others. [...] This school in their method of working was very observant of nature, so much so that they always had it before them when working. They painted only one figure well, but in the composition of history painting and depicting the emotions, they fail by the imagination and not by the observation of the objects. By depicting nature which they hold before themselves, it seems to me that they do not assess it, being impossible to place in a room, many figures that represent the historical subject with this light from a single window, and having one figure that laughs or weeps or actively moves and remains firm so as to allow it to be copied, and thus their figures, while having force, lack movements, emotions, and grace, which remains in the manner of working as one says."
elaborate upon or temporarily reject them in order to harmonize his art with contemporary artistic currents. In sum, his art was characterized by a dimensionality that defied concise categorization, despite attempts by Early Modern writers and modern historians – including, among others, Roberto Longhi, Alfonso Frangipane, and more recently Maurizio Marini – to establish his position among a cohort of Caravaggesque painters that preceded him by at least a generation, namely Bartolomeo Manfredi (1582-1622), Jusepe Ribera (1591-1652), and Valentin de Boulogne (c. 1591-1632).

The potential linkages between Preti’s multi-faceted style and its description by Early Modern writers will be questioned in the research that follows. Style and the artistic strategies that informed it are central to this study. It is important to note that "style" is a quality that often defies the categorical definitions biographers attempted to establish when discussing the overall nature of an artist's oeuvre. The Early Modern fascination with age and the process of aging – as exemplified in a wide range of subjects as Giorgio Vasari’s (1511-74) notion that Florentine art evolved over three ages to representations of the Four Ages of Man, as in Valentin de Boulogne's circa 1629 painting (fig. 1) – affected perceptions of styles so that one could speak of a youthful

4 Roberto Longhi’s lengthy characterization of Preti’s style in the context of Seicento Caravaggism has, to the greatest degree, defined a century’s worth of research into the painter’s art and its linkages to that of Caravaggio. Longhi’s description, which concludes his 1913 essay "Mattia Preti, critica figurativa pura" (reprinted in: Scritti Giovani, 1912-1922, Florence: 1961, p. 44.), reads as such: "Sviluppare ad una estra potenza il senso novissimo dei piani instaurato da Caravaggio, piani di forma-luce i quali costruiscono il mondo sopra una nuova visione artistica che è più la plastoclineare dei fiorentini, ma la plastoclyminosa – costruire novellamente il quadro con il mezzo dello scorcio trasversale che ci fornisce altezza e longhezza e profondità con uno sviluppo di forma – esaltare lo strano e profondo lirismo pittorico del mondo riassunto di spigolo, da un foco rarissimo dove si rannodano le fila degli scarti più ardui di livello – ordinare nei piani luminosi con indifferenza sovrana non solo le dose ma l'umanità, e creare ad essa nuove pose astratte dall'importanza particolare del disegno di un corpo singolo – subordinare la plasticità, meglio la sodezza particolare della materie singole alla plasticità generale della materia pittorica adagiata nei piani – intervallare i piani di luce con piani di ombra continua – costituire anche l'atmosfera a piani lungo i quial la material si coagulga sempre più fiuromente – conservare i toni rotti e subordinate alla forma, ma ampliarne mirabilmente la scala tribuendo loro poco a poco un valore interno di sostanza e di corpo – imperiali spesso, raggiati, ad una nota fulminea dissonante nel centro della creazione; ecco le glorie capitali puramente figurative di Mattia Preti."
style, a mature style, and an old age style. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that some of the most prolific artists used Early Modern notions of aging as a means to push their style in new directions while others took the opportunity to revisit earlier styles. Style, regardless of one's age, was inextricably linked to artists themselves. Artists used style to define themselves within their cultural environment, meet the needs of a specific commission, or, among other factors, advertise their originality in a competitive art market. Preti's style was not simply one that evolved over time but was one that responded and adapted to specific functions and needs. For example, just as he frescoed the dome and pendentives at San Biagio in Modena (1651) in a grandiose and atmospheric Neo-Venetian style he simultaneously painted the Sacrifice of Isaac with its figural relief and chiaroscuro characteristic of Caravaggesque paintings (figs. 2 & 3).

His style, in other words, was chameleonic in nature. The co-existence of simultaneously distinguishable styles is the crux of the problem with respect to understanding what contributed to Preti's artistic interests. This problem has been partly exacerbated by Modern studies since only a small number of scholars from Maurizio Marini to John Spike to Mariella Utili have provided consistent and important analyses of the Calabrese's art and his career. By and large, their research treated his art and career by surveying his paintings in a monographic manner that provides a limited amount of space for some of their illuminating but brief investigations of individual works.

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following study takes into account the painter's artistic strategies and the conceptual framework that informed them in order to further our understanding of his creative motivations and how they were perceived by his contemporaries and successors.

Unlike the abundant documentary material outlining the careers of such Seicento artists as Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), Andrea Sacchi (1599-1661), or Pietro da Cortona (1596-1669), there is little extant documentary evidence that can be used to establish how contemporaneous cultural discourses informed Preti's artistic strategies and its underlying theoretical framework. Yet, the multi-faceted nature of his paintings and De Dominici's ability to communicate some of the traits provides one with a point of departure. His principle biographer provides some of the most colorful stylistic terminology in his descriptions of the Calabrese's paintings. One of the many vivid descriptions that appear in the "Vita del Cavalier Fra Mattia Preti" includes that of the circa 1665 Tomyris with the Head of Ciro (fig. 4). De Dominici describes the painting as such:

[The work is] un quadro in cui è figurata Tomiri che fa porre in una utre di sangue la testa di Ciro. Egli è dipinto con molta vaghezza di tinte ed ha una fascia sottilissima di color celeste a traverso il petto, dipinta con tal bellezza di colore, e leggerezza, e belle pieghe che sembra del nostro Solimena, e non del commendatore ch'era forte nel colorito e caricato ne' scuri.

M. Utili, "Lo 'Stile plasticoluminoso', eclettico, di Mattia Preti," Mattia Preti, tra Roma, Napoli, e Malta, (ed.) M. Utili, Naples: 1999, pp. 27-61. These are the most important studies of the last forty years, however, a number of scholars have made other important contributions while discussing individual works in essays or exhibition catalogues.


10 De Dominici has been highly criticized for his fantastical accounts of artists' lives over the last one-hundred and fifty years. More recent scholarship, however, has demonstrated the importance of his accounts and will be discussed in greater detail below.

11 DD, Vol. II, pp. 701-702: "[The work is] a painting in which Tomyris is represented placing the head of Ciro in a container of blood. She is depicted with 'molta vaghezza di tinte' [many very charming colors] and has a narrow azure band across the chest. She is painted with such 'bellezza di colore' [breathtakingly beautiful color], and 'leggerezza' [elegance], and 'belle pieghe' [beautiful draperies] that it seems to be by Solimena, and not the Knight, who is bold in color and heavy in shadows."
This painting and its description demonstrates the difficulty with which one is faced while attempting to categorize the multi-faceted nature of the painter’s style. The biographer uses many descriptive terms that belong to the vocabularies of artists, writers, poets, and patrons dating back to Quattrocento Florence and the Florentine humanist Leon Battista Alberti’s 1435 treatise entitled Della Pittura. De Dominici’s description stands out because the biographer referred to a painting that exhibited stylistic qualities that were consistent with those of a number of other artists and not necessarily those of Preti himself. Given the significant differences between such qualities as "vaghezza di tinte" (charming colors) and "leggerezza" (elegance) on the one hand and "forte nel colorito" (bold colorism) and "caricato ne' scuri" (heavy shadows) on the other, this painting and its description requires some scrutiny. The idea that the artist could easily paint a work that exhibited all these qualities at once seems to be fundamentally important because of the inherent opposition of these qualities. Consequently, several questions need to be considered: Did Preti want his work to communicate these diverse stylistic qualities? What do these qualities and their combination tell us about his artistic

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The Tomyris (fig. 4) – currently in a Private Collection in Milan – is the pendant to a Sofonisba Receiving the Cup of Poison (fig. 5), both of which are datable stylistically to the mid-1660s. For alternative perspectives regarding the actual painting to which the passage refers, see Utili’s entries in Mattia Preti, tra Roma, Napoli, e Malta (Naples: 1999, pp. 168-71) and John Spike's catalogo ragionato (1999, pp. 389-90). While Spike believes the passage describes a painting that is now in a private Neapolitan collection, I agree with Utili because there is no azure band around the Queen's body in the Naples version. Hereafter, Utili’s book and essays will be noted as: Utili, 1999.

12 It is noteworthy that Alberti’s treatise on sculpture (Della statua) and Leonardo’s originally unpublished treatise on the art of painting were jointly printed in Naples by De Dominici's publisher Francesco Ricciardi in 1733 at the same time as the biographer was writing his Lives of the Neapolitan Artists.

13 For lengthy etymological studies of the term "vaghezza" and its versatile meaning in the history of Italian literature and art writing, see: P. Sohm, "Gendered Style in Italian Art Criticism from Michelangelo to Malvasia," Renaissance Quarterly, Vol. 48, No. 4, 1995, pp. 765-73; Sohm, 2001, pp. 194-200; and most recently Stuart Lingo's Federico Barocci, Allure and Devotion in Late Renaissance Painting, (New Haven & London: 2008) in which he discusses at length the term and the representation of "figures of vaghezza" and the "colors of vaghezza" in both Barocci’s art and that of his successors.
strategies? Does De Dominici accurately describe the style of the painting or did he have an alternative idea in mind when he characterized the artist as being able to combine two distinctive stylistic modes – the charming colors of Titian and Venetian art and the bold design and delineation of Michelangelo's and Florentine art, for example? While all of these questions cannot be answered here, I shall, by way of introduction, briefly analyze the appearance of Preti's *Tomyris with the Head of Ciro*, its place in his overall *oeuvre*, its role as an example of the painter's assimilation of historical styles, and the nature of De Dominici's description.

The subject is taken from Herodotus' *Battle of the Persians* (*The History, Book I*). The painting contains three monumental figures in the foreground, including a cloaked man appearing from the left, a soldier presenting the severed head of the Persian King Cyrus, and Queen Tomyris of the Messagetai plunging the head of the defeated King into a vessel containing human blood. Preti's dramatic *chiaroscuro* is emphasized by the intense illumination, which clearly defines the half-length life-size figures that dominate the foreground and the largely shaded background. The luminously-colored figure on the left with his golden cloak is complemented by the radiantly-illuminated Queen who is dressed in her military costume on the right. Both the cloaked man and Tomyris dominate the composition because of their brightly-colored vestments. As such, the soldier and additional figures in the mid-ground, while centrally positioned, receive less attention due to the shadow cast over them. De Dominici's description of the painting, however, does not comment on the other figures but focuses solely on the appearance of the Queen who

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14 The debate between the powers of color and design or drawing has a long history that dates back through many spirited Cinquecento debates to Antiquity. For a review of the major Florentine and Venetian Renaissance writers, their arguments, and their treatises, including, among others, Alberti, Paolo Pino, Giorgio Vasari, Ludovico Dolce, and Federico Zuccaro, see: M. Hochmann, "La Littérature Artistique," *Venise et Rome, 1500-1600: Deux Écoles de Peinture et Leurs Échanges*, Geneva: 2004, pp. 43-91.
is the protagonist in the historical narrative. The only reference to Preti's broader
treatment of the subject with his deep *chiaroscuro* appears at the end when the biographer
is stating that the charming and colorful representation of the monumental Queen seems
more consistent with the art of Francesco Solimena (1657-1747). By strictly focusing on
qualities that emphasize the Queen's femininity, that is, the charm and elegance of her
colorful attire, as opposed to her monumental and quite masculine physique, the
biographer disregards an important aspect of her appearance. Even the comparison with
Solimena seems rather partial, if one considers, for example, Solimena's National
Gallery, London (c. 1725) and Museo del Capodimonte (c. 1735) representations of *Dido
Receiving Aeneas*, which depict the Queen as magisterial as opposed to elegant while she
awaits the notably monumental yet slightly effeminate figure of Aeneas. De Dominici's
attention to the bright red cloak, golden crown, and azure vest is understandable, since
Preti rarely depicted his female figures in such colorful vestments, especially those from
his Neapolitan period. The emphasis the biographer placed on the treatment of the
Queen's vestments exemplifies his difficulty in aligning his overall definition of Preti's
style, which is known more for being "caricato ne' scuri" than with the colorism
expressed here. Thus, De Dominici's partial description reveals how the Calabrese's
artistic strategy of fusing bold and brilliant color with a sharp *chiaroscuro* complicates
definitions of the painter's style and creative interests. Since there is little written
evidence documenting Preti's own ideas about his art and that of others, I will attempt to
uncover his artistic motivations behind such a multi-faceted style through a
comprehensive analysis of his pictures in close conjunction with their early descriptions.
Although numerous letters to patrons and contracts are extant, the bulk of the material that discusses Preti's art, practices, and theoretical interests is recounted by De Dominici while a number of connoisseurs, biographers, and poets provided short descriptions of his work during the latter half of his life and in the immediate decades after his death. That Preti was aware and to a certain extent engaged in artistic debates can be postulated by considering the contents of one of his letters to the prominent Sicilian collector Don Antonio Ruffo (1610-78), in which the artist comments on the importance of an original style and the role and function of imitation in achieving it:

Ciro è scolaro di Pietro da Cortona e seguita la sua maniera, avendo noi un proverbio che chi va appresso mai va avanti sempre al nome l'ha il primo inventore di quella maniera, Carluccio è parimente scolaro di Andrea Sacchi seguitando il maestro non lo arriverà sicuro, e chi non è originale sempre sara copia ne mai sì vede valentuomo con maniera di altri solo con la sua.  

However brief these comments may be, they cannot be discounted since artists – even if their main goal was the attainment of wealth and social status – certainly participated in the theoretical discourses that so deeply permeated the art world by the time Preti arrived in Rome in the early 1630s. While the letter replies to Ruffo's questions concerning the styles of the noted artists, the Calabrese's division of the artists into camps aligned to Cortona or Sacchi does not simply exemplify his attempt to provide his patron with a point of reference. His division may simply be arbitrary or it may have its origin in a debate that took place in Rome during the painter's formative years.

15 Mattia Preti, "Letter to Don Antonio Ruffo, 27 February, 1665," cited in: V. Ruffo, "Galleria Ruffo nel secolo XVII in Messina," Bolletino d'Arte, 1916, pp. 255-56: "Ciro is a student of Pietro da Cortona and follower of his style. We have a proverb that goes 'those who follow never proceed,' since the one destined to be remembered is the creator of that style. Likewise, Carluccio is a pupil of Andrea Sacchi. By following his master, he is never going to equal him and he who is not original shall always be a copyist, nor may we call skillful those who adopt a style from the others, not having their own." It is noteworthy that no scholar of Preti's art has ever considered this passage outside of the broader context of the artist's numerous letters and patronage via the Ruffo family and attempts to enter the burgeoning art market in mid-Seicento Sicily.
The Calabrese and his older artist brother Gregorio are first recorded in Rome in a 1633 papal brief indicating that they were required to make contributions to the construction of the church of Santi Luca e Martina – the church for the members of the Roman Academy of St. Luke. Both brothers are subsequently documented as artists working in the city according to the Accademia di San Luca's 1636 rolo de pittori. This is significant since both were in Rome when Cortona and Sacchi famously debated the nature of pictorial composition at the Accademia. In short, these painters and their peers had opposing perspectives on the nature of pictorial composition. The issue centered on the number of figures and the types of actions used to depict historical subjects. Cortona favoured the inclusion of a greater number since it could expand the narrative via the introduction of additional actions that broadened the storyline beyond a single point. Sacchi believed in using a limited number of figures in order to focus the attention on the emotion of the single event or action in the narrative being depicted. Notwithstanding these differences, both camps were united in their belief that paintings should be composed like poems and be read like poetry. They differed insofar as the former believed paintings could be composed of multiple actions like an epic poem while the latter argued that the image should focus on a singular action like a tragic poem.

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present during such a debate would have been central to the young painter's education in the dynamic discourses that permeated the Roman art world.

The letter to Ruffo can be interpreted in another way. Preti emphasizes the role and function of imitation in the development and progression of an artist's style. Originality was the *sine qua non* of every artist and according to the Calabrese one must judiciously develop their style in order to achieve that singularity that transcends the art of predecessors and contemporaries. Therefore, the inclusion of the proverb – "chi va appresso mai va avanti sempre il nome l'ha il primo inventore di quella maniera" – demonstrates his engagement in the ongoing debates over the role of imitation in artistic theory and practice. This debate was hotly discussed during the immediate decades prior to Preti's arrival in Rome in the cases of Domenichino's reinterpretation of Agostino Carracci's *Last Communion of St. Jerome* (c.1591-95) and Caravaggio's practice of painting directly after nature. The role and function of imitation in artistic practice continued to be a central argument throughout the seventeenth century and was prominently featured in Giovan Pietro Bellori's (1613-96) artist biographies, most notably by the inclusion of Nicolas Poussin's *Osservazioni sopra la pittura*, which was appended to the 1672 *Vita di Nicolo Pussino*.18 Preti, unlike many of his contemporaries, did not

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18 G.P. Bellori, "Vita di Nicolo Pussino," *Le Vite de’ pittori, scultori, e architetti moderni*, (ed.) E. Borea, Turin: 1976 [Rome: 1672], pp. 478-81 (This edition will hereafter be referred to as Bellori-Borea). The literature on imitation in the visual arts and particularly during the Early Modern period is too vast to summarize here. For a concise summary of some of the central ideas that contributed to the debate over Domenichino's painting and Poussin's *Osservazioni*, see Elizabeth Cropper's *The ideal of painting: Pietro Testa's Düsseldorf notebook* (Princeton: 1984) and her more recent *The Domenichino Affair* (New Haven: 2006). Emphasizing the importance of imitation, Poussin referred to the debate about Domenichino's painting by stating: "La novità nella Pittura non consiste principalmente nel soggetto non più veduto, ma nella buona, e nuova disposizione e espressione, e così il soggetto dall’essere commune, e vecchio diviene singolare, e nuovo. Qui conviene il dire della Communione di San Girolamo del Domenichino, nella quale diversi sono gli affetti e li moti dall’altra invenzione di Agostino Carracci ["Novelty in painting does not consist primarily in the subject that has never been seen, but in good and novel arrangement and expression, and in this way the subject that was common place and stale becomes singular and new. Here it
enter the ongoing debate over imitation—or other debates for that matter, including the *paragone* between painting and sculpture or *disegno* and *colore*—in as explicit a manner as Domenichino, Poussin, or his younger Neapolitan competitor Luca Giordano. Nonetheless, he certainly participated in these debates. In addition to the above letter to Ruffo, Preti did contribute some of his ideas via the rarely discussed painting of the *Allegory of the Arts*, datable to the late-1660s (fig. 6).¹⁹

The painting contains two young women and a partially visible bust.²⁰ The foremost woman is crowned by a laurel wreath and seen in three-quarters holding a paintbrush in one hand and presenting a canvas with a self-portrait of the artist in the other. She clearly symbolizes the art of painting. A second figure is positioned before the rear wall that contains a detailed drawing of a fortress and holds a compass in her right hand. With her left hand she subtly points towards a bust seen in profile and just emerging from the frame. This figure symbolizes architecture, as demonstrated by the compass and schematic, which may depict the battlements in the harbor in La Valletta.²¹ The two figures and the bust, which visibly symbolizes sculpture, come together to form the allegory of the arts, but an allegory that is designed in a hierarchical manner. Preti’s representation emphasizes painting and architecture over sculpture since the composition is based around the allegorical figures of painting and architecture and sculpture is only alluded to through the pointing finger and barely visible bust. While it is natural that he

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²⁰ E. Corace, ”*Allegorie della pittura, Architettura e Scultura,*” *Mattia Preti, dal segno al colore,* (ed.) E. Corace, Rome: 1995, pp. 38-39. Corace contends, without providing evidence, that the bust depicts Philip IV of Spain. This hypothesis is clearly incorrect since the King’s face is much longer than the round one represented by the sculpture.
²¹ Corace, Ibid.
would emphasize the art of painting, his *Allegory of the Arts* is also a pictorial manifesto of sorts, which outlines for the viewer the artist's theoretical beliefs – especially in the context of the debate over the representational superiority of painting versus sculpture. Most importantly, the presence of the roughly sketched self-portrait on the canvas indicates to the audience that he saw drawing as an integral if not the central tool that united all three arts.22

This brightly-colored painting is the only work in which he explicitly expressed a position in the theoretical debates that dominated Early Modern Italy. Given the absence of regular and direct commentaries on the arts, with the obvious exception of the 1665 letter to Ruffo and the above painting, one must consider his artistic strategies and stylistic development as a means through which one can access his broader perspectives on the arts. An analysis of Preti’s strategies in conjunction with descriptions of his style will shed the necessary light on how and to what extent he used his paintings to individuate himself while also expressing his position on a number of discourses, including the role and function of *imitazione*, the *paragone* between painting and sculpture, and the arguments over the proper means of composing and narrating a history painting. Such an analysis will establish how the Calabrese defined himself through the use of consistently distinguishable practices that facilitated the creation of the all-important original style to which he referred in the above letter to Ruffo. Studying the artist and his works on the one hand and the terminology used by the writers who documented them on the other will help to define the complex historical field within which the artist operated and within which his works were perceived. Striking a balance

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between his works and their descriptions is necessary because his paintings are the primary documents that demonstrate his own perspectives while the descriptive and critical terms used by De Dominici and others situate his paintings in the context of the above noted broader art-theoretical discourses. Since art-theoretical terms were widely used in Seicento Italy among critics, connoisseurs, collectors and artists alike, it stands to reason that Preti would have had a clear understanding of their meanings.23

In a number of his descriptions, De Dominici actually suggests that the artist's practices demonstrate his participation in broader art theoretical debates. Discussing the painter's circa 1667 Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine, for example, he recorded that the artist "volle far loro [Knights of St. John] conoscere che ben sapea colorir con vaghezza, ma che la perfezion del disegno e del gran chiaroscuro è la parte principale di un valentuomo, oltre all'ottimo componimento [...]."24 Although this passage partly serves as a description of the circumstances concerning the commission and appearance of the work itself, the biographer extended his commentary about the picture beyond it being painted with "vaghezza" – generally meaning charming, lovely, and/or alluring. Rather, he went on to indicate how such a quality is one of several that must be used to produce an excellent painting. Just as "vaghezza" is emphasized as the chief stylistic quality in this passage, Preti's "disegno" and "chiaroscuro" are given significant emphasis in others. As the second part of this passage indicates, such terms as "disegno" and "chiaroscuro" do not simply communicate stylistic qualities but had theoretical connotations for Early

23 It is important to remember that both De Dominici and Filippo Baldinucci were originally trained as painters and subsequently became writers and members of the courts of major collectors in Naples and Florence respectively (Chapters One and Two discuss their backgrounds in greater detail).
24 DD, Vol. II, p. 678-79: "[he] wanted to let them know that he knew how to color with charm, but that the central qualities of a great painter are perfection of drawing and bold chiaroscuro, in addition to optimal composition and the other parts that a history painting requires."
Modern Italian audiences. That is, for example, the use of *disegno* as an artistic practice indicated the artist's belief in its fundamental importance for the arts, which is, itself, the adoption of a theoretical position because such artists as Caravaggio were criticized for rejecting it.

Of all the major sources that address Preti’s art, only a few were written while the painter was alive. The majority of the source material – including the two biographies – was produced in the forty years following his death. The writers came from a range of professions, exemplifying the diverse origins from which Early Modern art writing developed. The painter's works were discussed by poets, connoisseurs, and churchmen while he was still alive. These include the Neapolitan poets Giuseppe Artale (1628-79) and Andrea Perrucci (1631-1704), Luigi Scaramuccia (1616-80) and the already noted Filippo Baldinucci (1625-96), and a small number of guide book writers such as the Neapolitan *letterato* and priest Carlo Celano (1625-93). Although Baldinucci was the first to write a biography in 1694, the Bolognese *letterato* Pellegrino Antonio Orlandi (1660-1727) quickly followed with a short biography in 1704. Baldinucci’s and Orlandi’s were then superseded by Lione Pascoli’s (1674-1744) and De Dominici’s accounts.

Among the sources used in this study, the most important – and certainly most controversial – is the lengthy and detailed collection of biographies written by De Dominici. The Neapolitan biographer's *Vite dei pittori, scultori, ed architetti napolitani* has been at the center of a scholarly controversy for well over one-hundred years. Indeed, the *Vite* and its author are more renowned for their controversial reputation than for the valuable information that is provided within. The biographer, known to historians of Italian Baroque art as *il falsario*, was the son of one of the Calabrese's Maltese pupils and
was reputed to have known the artist during his final years. While it is questionable as to whether De Dominici actually met the painter, the biographer began chronicling the lives of Neapolitan Baroque painters during the 1720s, only two decades after the death of Preti and Luca Giordano (1634-1705). De Dominici has been subjected to such severe criticism as to render his comprehensive biographies to the margins of relevant historical material. His *Vite* underwent intense scrutiny at the hands of such late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century scholars as Benedetto Croce.\(^{25}\) The 'new' positivistic art history adopted a highly critical perspective about the accuracy and significance of the *Vite*, which initiated a century long discourse that sought to methodically work through many of the biographies in search of erroneous anecdotes and falsifications.

Many of the 1970s and 1980s researchers were informed by this perspective, as is demonstrated by Domenico de Conciliis' and Riccardo Lattuada's, John Spike's, and James Clifton's publications.\(^{26}\) This is not to say that their focus on archival research has not enhanced the state of Preti studies and that of Neapolitan artists in general. Indeed, this dissertation relies on their pioneering work and important archival discoveries. Nonetheless, archival and documentary research can only provide a limited amount of information. Thomas Willette's and Judith Colton's more balanced and constructive view


of the Vite and its author has opened some new avenues of research. The biographies, however, are still used with much circumspection and are viewed with suspicion.\textsuperscript{27}

To say that the use of the Vite as an accurate source of information is problematic is not to say that the biographies cannot or should not be considered. Rather, the use of the Vite and the information therein requires a careful and clearly articulated rationale. It is possible to use the material within Preti's biography and those of other Baroque artists to other ends than the accurate chronicling of the events that determined the progression of the artists' lives.\textsuperscript{28} It has seemed to me that by putting De Dominici's Vite beside the texts of other writers belonging to the same tradition, one can assess the use of his descriptive terminology so as to come to a general consensus on the accuracy and credibility of his conception of artistic styles – be they of such renowned Renaissance artists as Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, and Veronese or of the most prolific members of the Neapolitan school, including Ribera, Stanzione, Giordano, and Solimena. The Vite represents the closing chapter in the history of Early Modern artist biographies initiated by Vasari's Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori (1550 & 1568).

Numerous descriptions of a work of art, an artist's style, and/or an artist's practices can be traced to earlier sources and eloquently demonstrate De Dominici's participation in a multi-century literary discourse. While not all of the ideas in his biography of Preti can be


\textsuperscript{28} This much has already been demonstrated by recent research into De Dominici's collection of drawings and ability to decipher the various graphic styles. The most recent studies include Andrea Zezza's "De Dominici e il disegno" (Le dessin napolitain, Rome: 2010, pp. 7-14) and Joachim Meyer's pioneering essay entitled "Le 'Vite' di Bernardo De Dominici e il disegno napoletano" (Ricerche sul 600 Napoletano, Milan: 1999, pp. 43-58). Zezza's and Meyer's studies of the biographer's detailed understanding of pan-European graphic styles provides insights into how one might also examine his knowledge of pictorial styles.
substantiated in this manner, a more accurate picture of the biographer's stylistic terminology emerges from such an approach. The *Vite*, thereby, provides scholars with a mountain of un-mined material. Through its analysis, a greater comprehension of Neapolitan painters as well as a deeper understanding of De Dominici's role in that multi-century discourse about artists and art can be established. It is this un-mined material that serves as the foundation for the contextualization of the Calabrese's biography and the case studies that constitute subsequent chapters.

The dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part summarizes, contextualizes, and analyzes references to and descriptions of the artist and his works during his lifetime and in the immediate decades after his death. This section takes into account the various types of Early Modern writings about Preti's art, paying particular attention to the characterization of his style in treatises and biographies. Chapter One focuses on the breadth of the sources and how they may be fruitfully used in the study of the Calabrese's paintings. Investigations of the numerous sources – specifically Baldinucci's and Pascoli’s biographies – constitute the principal basis for this chapter. The chapter, as such, examines the early sources as well as the biographers' terminology and description of Preti’s art in order to determine how it was perceived by these non-Neapolitan writers. Chapter Two studies De Dominici's "Vita del Cavalier Fra' Mattia Preti". This chapter is not a comprehensive summary of the biographer's reconstruction of the artist's life. Rather, it is an analysis of the biographer's descriptive terminology and how his characterization of the Calabrese's paintings fits into the broader narrative he is constructing in the *Vite*. Such an approach to the biography is wholly unique in Preti studies because art historians to date have focused specifically on connoisseurship,
archival research, and stylistic analysis as a means of determining the artist's place in the history of Neapolitan Baroque art. Chapter Two is specifically concerned with De Dominici's descriptive terminology and how certain terms demonstrate the biographer's intent to create a specific conception of Preti and his art, sometimes 'regardless' of its accuracy or applicability. This is not to say that he does not provide lucid observations about paintings, but rather that he does not methodically describe the details of a picture in the same comprehensive manner that Bellori did. In addition, this chapter examines how Preti's art is conceptualized in comparison to his Neapolitan predecessors and contemporaries, including Giovanni Battista Caracciolo (1578-1635), Jusepe de Ribera, Massimo Stanzione (1585-1656), Andrea Vaccaro (1604-1670), Bernardo Cavallino (1616-56?), and Luca Giordano. Comparisons with his predecessors and contemporaries establish the Calabrese's art in the context of the two poles of Seicento Neapolitan painting: that is, Caravaggesque on the one hand and a blend of Neo-Venetianism and Bolognese-Roman classicism on the other. Focusing specifically on Preti's and Giordano's styles, their paintings and the biographer's descriptions of them are considered so as to ascertain how each artist contributes to the formation of Francesco Solimena's style, the Neapolitan *caposcuola*, which represents the culminating point in De Dominici's grand narrative.

Part Two examines Preti's artistic strategies by analyzing selected paintings in detail and comparing them to De Dominici’s respective descriptions. Part Two contains three chapters, each of which explores the relationship between the painter's practices and

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29 M. Hansmann, "Con modo nuovo li descrive, Bellori's Descriptive Method," *Art History in the Age of Bellori*, (eds.) J. Bell & T. Willette, Cambridge: 2002, p. 225. Hansmann argues that Bellori's descriptive method does not rely heavily on earlier Cinquecento sources but rather on the descriptions of paintings that emerged from a wide range of literary genres during the first half of the Seicento, including those of such poets as Giambattista Marino and such connoisseurs and critics as Giovanni Battista Agucchi.
the biographer's description of them. Each chapter contains three case studies that have been selected because of the biographer's in-depth discussion of them. At the same time, the selected paintings also cover Preti's stylistic development between circa 1650 and 1675. This cross-section, then, allows for a thorough consideration of the artist's multidimensional style and its evolution over his central and most productive years. Some of the stylistic qualities that will be considered include Preti's "terribile disegno", his "eroico componimento", and his ability to paint in the "maniera vaga". Each chapter focuses on a specific typology, beginning with the horizontally-formatted history paintings, before moving on to the large banquet scenes, and concluding with an investigation of his altarpieces. In so doing, I will be able to establish what artistic strategies reoccur throughout the painter's works and determine whether, how, and to what extent they may be connected to various artistic discourses. Comparisons with preceding and contemporaneous examples of each subject as well as Baldinucci's, Pascoli's, and De Dominici's descriptions and terminology contribute to the analysis of each painting while also providing the grounds for the broader goal of determining the painter's perspectives and the conceptual framework that contributed to them.

The second section, as such, comprehensively examines Preti's artistic strategies and his style. Each case study is investigated by exploring the formal structure of his paintings. Such an approach facilitates a much needed examination of the painter's representational interests – that is, the formulae that informed his practices of transforming haptic forms into optic ones. The reader should note I recognize the limitations of this 'Wofflinian' method. I have taken this approach because Preti's art has yet to undergo significant and extensive formal analysis.
Fig. 1. Valentin de Boulogne, *Four Ages of Man*, National Gallery of Art, London, c. 1629.

Fig. 2. Mattia Preti, *Holy Trinity with the Virgin in Paradise and Carmelite Saints*, San Biagio, Modena, 1651-52.
Fig. 3. Preti, *Sacrifice of Isaac*, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna, c. 1651-52.

Fig. 4. Preti, *Tomyris with the Head of Ciro*, Private Collection, c. 1660-65.
Fig. 5. Preti, *Sophonisba Receiving the Cup of Poison*, Private Collection, c.1660-65.

Fig. 6. *Allegory of the Arts*, Private Collection, Naples, c. 1660s.
Chapter 2

Describing Mattia Preti and His Art in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy

The chapter deals with the earliest accounts of Preti's art in letters, artistic treatises, and biographies during the latter half of the seventeenth-century and first half of the eighteenth-century. This includes Luigi Scaramuccia's description of Preti's style, as exhibited in the frescoes completed for the Duomo and the churches of San Biagio and San Pietro in Modena (1674); Filippo Baldinucci's biography of "Cav' Fra Mattia Preti, detto il Pittor Calabrese" (1681-1728); and Lione Pascoli's "Vita di Mattia Preti" (1732). These sources provide Preti scholars with an invaluable resource when reconstructing his life, stylistic interests, and their perception. References to specific stylistic commonalities such as the importance of disegno in the Calabrese's art unite the perspectives of Scaramuccia, Baldinucci, and Pascoli. Prior to these contributions, a number of journal entries and letters from patrons sketch out the earliest perceptions of the painter's style. The diary entries of the Roman church of Sant'Andrea della Valle and a journal by the antiquarian and collector Cassiano dal Pozzo (1588-1657) document the early reception of the Calabrese's choir paintings for the main church of the Theatine Order (fig. 7). Additionally, letters written by Martin de Redin (1579-1660) – Grand Master of the Knights of Malta – in March and November of 1658 record the patronage

and reception of Preti’s painting of *St. Francis Xavier* (fig. 8) for the Chapel of Aragon, Catalonia, and Navarre at the Knights' Co-Cathedral of St. John.

The *Diario* for Sant'Andrea, for example, stated that:

A di 8 Aprile furono scoverti li tre grandi quadri del Choro dipinti dal sudetto Cavaliere fra Mattia Preti con molto applauso universal.31 (8 April, 1651)

While this indicates that the commission was unanimously praised, Preti left the contract unfulfilled – having not finished two frescoes perpendicular to the High Altar – and was engaged in a legal suit with his patrons at Sant'Andrea until the early 1660s.32 Around the same time as the unveiling of the frescoes and the above cited diary entry, Cassiano dal Pozzo provided the earliest critical assessment of Preti's art in comparison to his predecessors, namely Domenichino and Lanfranco. Dal Pozzo's letter included the following statement:

Le pitture nuove d'un tal cav. Calabrese, scoperte in S. Andrea della Valle, nella Tiburtina, havendo il paragone di quelle di Domenico Zampieri alias Domenichino, che li stan sopra e quelle della cupola del Lanfranchi, fanno contrasto tale, che i più non le stimano a proposito.33

Scholars are, thus, left with a contradictory understanding of the reception of the Sant'Andrea frescoes. Why would a Theatine diarist record that the frescoes were highly praised despite the fact that the painter left the contract unfulfilled? Additionally, if the

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31 Biblioteca dei Teatini, Roma, *Diario della Casa di S. Andrea della Valle* (1586-1660, ms. cod. 110, f. 239): "On the 8th of April three large choir pictures painted by the above said Cavaliere Fra Mattia Preti were unveiled with universal applause." c.f. Spike, 1998, pp. 74-75.
33 "The new paintings by a certain Cavaliere Calabrese, unveiled in the tribune of Sant'Andrea della Valle, in comparison to Domenico Zampieri alias Domenichino, which appear above them and those by Lanfranco in the cupola, are of such difference that many speaking of them, do not admire them." Cassiano dal Pozzo's comments are cited in Giacomo Lumbroso's "Notizie sulla vita di Cassiano del Pozzo, protettore delle belle arti, fautore della scienza dell'antichità nel secolo decimosettimo con alcuni suoi ricordi e una centuria di lettere," *Miscellanea di storia italiana*, Vol.15, Turin: 1875, p. 194.
paintings were universally applauded, what supported Dal Pozzo's critical assessment of Preti's frescoes? The lack of further documentary evidence has left scholars with Pascoli's and De Dominici's similarly contradictory accounts that the frescoes were not as successful as they could have been, since Preti was intimidated by Domenichino's and Lanfranco's works in the choir vault and dome above. In the absence of more specific and concrete critical information, formal analysis has dominated assessments of the Calabrese's work at Sant'Andrea della Valle.  

The series of letters from Martin de Redin to Padre Marcello Spinelli – a Jesuit father in Naples – provide a direct introduction to a patron's perception of Preti's style during the 1650s. The St. Francis Xavier – to which the letters refer – was the second of five paintings that the Calabrese executed for the Chapel of Aragon, Catalonia, and Navarre between circa 1656 and 1670. While Preti also painted the altarpiece of St. George on Horseback (c. 1656), the lateral painting of St. Ferminius (c. 1670), and the two lunette canvases of the Martyrdom of St. Lawrence and St. Lawrence Meeting Pope Sixtus III (c. 1665), the only archival documents concerning the Chapel's decoration refer to the 1658 painting of St. Francis Xavier. Six letters were exchanged between the Grand Master and Padre Spinelli and the Knights' receiver in Naples Giovanni Brancacci.

34 Alfonso Frangipane was the first to publish the diary entry and formally assess the paintings in his monograph: Mattia Preti, "il Cavalier Calabrese", Milan: 1929, pp. 56-57. C.f. Spike, 1998, pp. 71-77 (with reproductions of the documents); A typical example of the formal analysis is demonstrated by Claudio Strinati's "Pietro da Cortona e Mattia Preti intorno al 1650," Innocenzo X Pamphilj: Arte e potere a Roma nell'età barocca, eds. A. Zucchi & S. Macioce, Rome: 1990, pp. 131-62. Strinati sees Preti's investigation of classicist and coloristic qualities as the artist's first endeavor to assimilate Cortona's ability to bridge the divide between painting and sculpture, since the latter's style – nurtured on paintings that resulted from the study of sculpture – initiated the final episode in a transition towards living paintings (Strinati, 1990, p. 146). Strinati continues by comparing the forceful corporeality of Preti's paintings to that achieved by Rubens with his Madonna della Vallicella, which brought together the material power of an icon with the illusionistic power of a painting. None of Strinati's points clearly assess the factors that contributed to the Calabrese's conception, however.
35 See Spike, 1999, pp. 328-30, for details regarding the commission.
between March and November 1658. The most telling letters are the first and last, which clearly demonstrate the patron's expectations and delight with the final painting. The Grand Master's first letter, dated March 20, 1658, to Padre Spinelli reads as follows:

Io sono tanto desideroso di haver' un ritratto del glorioso S. Francesco Xaviero per metterlo nella Cappella di S. Giorgio, che la lingua d'Aragona ha in questa mia Maggiore Chiesa Conventuale di S. Giovanni che se ben' ho dato gli ordini di farlo fare al Commendatore Mastrillo, e di contribuire tutta la spesa, che bisgona; per haverlo nondimeno compierna mia sodisfatione, ho risoluto in questa congiuntura di esercitare la mia confidenza con Lei pregandola quanto più posso assistere alla fattura di esso acciò venghi primieramente lavorato dal più accreditato pennello, che hoggi sia in Napoli, e fatto poi nella stessa maniera, che comparve già al Padre Marcello Mastrillo che riesce in somma di quella perfettione Maggiore che sarà possibile […]..

It would seem that not only did the Grand Master succeed in acquiring the skills "dal più accreditato pennello che hoggi sia in Napoli" but that in commissioning such a painter he was able to fulfill his personal devotion to the Jesuit Order. Writing on November 27, 1658 to the Padre Generale of the Jesuits in Naples, Martin de Redin stated:

A V.P. Reverendissimo so che è noto il mio partialissimo affetto verso la sua Compagnia, e so ch'egli è riconosciuto pure da tutti i Padri di questo Collegio. Ma non restando io di ciò pienamente sodisfatto, risolvo di farlo palese al Mondo tutto col lasciarne herede per tutti i secoli anche mia Religione S. Feci dipingere in Napoli da pennello famoso in quadro grande il ritratto di S. Francesco Xavierio, et è riuscito di tanta sodisfazione, e ho risoluto di collocarlo in questa mia Maggior Chiesa Conventuale e di fondargli un Pontificale da celebrarsi ogn'anno il giorno dell'Ottava della sua festa […].

36 AOM 1434, Registro di lettere dal G.M. Redin 1658, ff. 166V-67; c.f. Spike, 1998, p. 111: "[...] Ad ogni modo, essendoci stato da lui consegnato, veduto che il Pittore medesimo vi ha fatto più fattica di quella che credevamo, aggiungendo all'Immagine del Santo tanti Angeli quanti ve [sic] ha posti, ci siamo contentati di riceverlo [Redin was "pleased to receive it" because Preti "completed more work than they expected, adding to the image of the saint many more Angels than asked."].

37 AOM [Archives of the Order of Malta, Valletta] 1434, Registro di lettere dal G.M. Redin 1658, ff. 57-57v; c.f. Spike, 1998, pp. 109-110: "I am very anxious to have a portrait of the Glorious St. Francis Xavier to put in the Chapel of St. George, which the Langue of Aragon has in my Great Conventual Church of St. John. For its adornment, I have given the order to the Langue to decorate it by Commendatore Mastrillo, and to contribute every expense that it requires. To have it, nonetheless, completed to my satisfaction, I have resolved in this situation to exercise my confidence with you, praying to you how greatly you may assist in the completion of this so that it comes to be made primarily by the most accredited brush, who is in Naples today, and painted then in the same manner so that it appears to Father Marcello Mastrullo that it succeeds entirely in the greatest perfection that is possible."

38 Ibid. c.f. Spike, 1998, p. 113: "To Your Very Rev. Father, I know that my particular fondness towards your Order [Jesuits] is noted and I know that it is recognized even by all of the Priests of this College [Jesuits in Naples]. I have resolved to make evident to all of whom I leave my inheritance for all the
The work of the "pennello famoso", "riuscito di tanta sodisfattione," facilitated Redin's desire to use the painting during the liturgy performed on the saint's annual feast day.

Given the Grand Master died in 1660, one is unable to determine if the pleasure derived from Preti's painting was further enhanced by its liturgical use. Nonetheless, the Grand Master's letters provide historians with the earliest accurate appreciation of the painter's style – on which much of his reputation came to be based by the Knights in the years leading up to his transfer to Malta and elevation to the position of Knight of Grace.

Despite the many financial documents linking Preti to some of the most important Italian and specifically Neapolitan patrons and the twenty-six letters the painter wrote to Don Antonio Ruffo – many of which were replies to the collector's inquiries – the next clear-cut example of the appreciation of the painter's art was written by Luigi Scaramuccia in his 1674 *Le finezze de' pennelli italiani*. The *finezze* recounts a pan-Italian trip between a master (the spirit of Raphael) and his pupil Girupeno (the author himself).

Scaramuccia's book discusses the works of many famous Baroque artists through the critical lens of Raphael and classicist art critical terminology. As such, it is not surprising to see that the Perugian author emphasizes the role of *disegno* in Preti's art. Discussing the Calabrese's works in the city of Reggio-Emilia, Scaramuccia states:

*Per ultimo poi delle cose publiche di quella Città [Reggio-Emilia] vollero riflettere ne Peducci della Cuppola di S. Pietri li quali restano dipinti di mano del Cavalier Mattia Preti detto il Calabrese Pittor moderno molto bravo disinvolti, e possessor di buon Disegno.*

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39 Scaramuccia, p. 179: "Finally then regarding the public works of that city [Reggio-Emilia] they wanted to consider the pendentives for the dome of San Pietro of which are paintings by the hand of the modern..."
Scaramuccia was mistaken about the location in which Preti's paintings were located, since San Pietro's pendentives are designed with relief sculpture. It seems more than likely that Scaramuccia confused Preti's paintings of the *Four Evangelists* on the pendentives of the Carmelite church of San Biagio in Modena with the church of San Pietro (figs. 2, 9, 10, & 11). The painter worked in two separate churches during his brief sojourn in Modena (1651-52) – that of San Biagio and in the Cappella delle Reliquie in the Duomo. In the former church he depicted the *Holy Trinity in Paradise with the Virgin and Carmelite Saints* in the dome, the *Four Evangelists* on the pendentives below, and a *Concert of Angels* in the choir vault. In the latter church, Preti painted the now lost fresco of the *Assumption of the Virgin*. Despite Scaramuccia's confusion, the writer singled out the most prominent artistic quality for which Preti became known – that is, his strong *disegno*. Indeed, every major Early Modern writer after Scaramuccia singled out the Calabrese's ability to manipulate *disegno* when discussing the most significant aspects of his style.

From Filippo Baldinucci's biography of the artist in his *Notizie dei professori del disegno* (c. 1695) to De Dominici's characterization of the San Biagio frescoes, the defining quality of Preti's art was perceived as its *disegno*. Prior to Scaramuccia, Dal Pozzo alluded to the failure of Preti's design by criticizing it in comparison to Domenichino's and Lanfranco's, as exemplified by the frescoes at Sant'Andrea della

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Valle. While other Early Modern writers pointed out a number of stylistic qualities including *disegno*, Scaramuccia's emphasis of this element in the San Biagio frescoes furthered subsequent conceptions of the Calabrese's art. De Dominici, for example, stated that both Francesco Albani and Giovanni Francesco Barbieri (Guercino) were asked by the Carmelite patrons at San Biagio to evaluate Preti's preliminary drawings and compositional design (oil sketches) for the commission. According to the biographer, both Albani and Guercino concluded that the Calabrese's ideas were "ben concepita, il componimento ben disposto, e 'l disegno ottimo, e in conseguenza attestarono a' frati che l'opera sarebbe ottimamente riuscita in pittura." There is no documentary evidence that Albani or Guercino were actually consulted, although patrons frequently assessed an artist's bozzetto in the company of recognized artists or connoisseurs.

If Scaramuccia isolated the central aspect of Preti's style and thereby decisively channeled his reputation in mid-Seicento Italy, Baldinucci's short biography and characterization of the painter's style and its range of attributes established a canonical set of criteria that contemporaneous and future writers and viewers used when considering the Calabrese's art. The Florentine artist, antiquarian, and biographer published the first part of his five volume *Notizie* in 1681. The subsequent four volumes were published in

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41 DD, Vol. II, pp. 608-609. The full quote reads as follows: "Li frati, curioso di saper che ne dicessero i maestri menovati, mandarono volontieri li sbozzi e disegni a' frati loro corrispondenti, e questi presentarono le pitture e disegni a Giovan Francesco, il quale essendo già dal cavaliere stato informato della dubbietà de' frati, e pregato a dir sinceramente il suo parer, considerate i disegni e veduti i bozzetti con altri virtuosi pittori suoi amici, fra' quali l'Albano, conchiusero esser l'idea ben concepita, il componimento ben disposto, e 'l disegno ottimo, e in conseguenza attestarono a' frati che l'opera sarebbe ottimamente riuscita in pittura [The friars, curious to know what the mentioned teachers would say, gladly sent them oil sketches and drawing to their corresponding friars, and they presented the oil sketches and drawing to Giovan Francesco – who having already been informed by the knight of the brothers doubts – and earnestly prayed to give his opinion. He considered the drawings and sketches with other virtuous painter friends, such as Albani among others, concluded that the idea was well-conceived, the composition was properly arranged, and the disegno was excellent, and consequently they testified to the monks that the work would be excellently rendered as a painting]."

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1686, 1688, 1702, and 1728. The latter two volumes were published post-humously by his son Francesco Xaverio. Mattia Preti's biography, while written in the early 1690s, was published in the 1728 volume, as attested to by the Florentine biographer's note that Preti was still alive in 1694 when "I write these things". Prior to the 1728 publication of this volume, De Dominici had already completed his biography of Luca Giordano and to a large degree that of the Calabrese, since the former painter's biography was included in the second edition of Bellori's *Vite de pittori, scultori, et architetti moderni* (1728). That his biography of Preti was mostly completed is attested by the fact that Francesco Xaverio Baldinucci's secretary Anton Francesco Marmi informed his employer in 1727 that De Dominici had recently contacted him about having a complete version of the Calabrese's life available. Although Francesco Xaverio did not publish volume five until 1728, it is more than reasonable to believe that the biography of "Cav. Fra Mattia Preti" was written by Filippo during the final years of his life (as testified to by himself above). Thus, the biography and its description of Preti's style are attributable to Filippo and his perception during the latter half of the Seicento.

Unlike the preceding writers, Baldinucci provides a general summary of Preti's youth, his travels, and the major works he completed prior to the 1690s. Baldinucci noted early on that the painter "traveled in Lombardy, particularly in the city of Parma and that of Modena, where he remained for a long time studying the stupendous paintings of

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Correggio and other illustrious men." After summarizing in detail the commission to paint the ceiling of the Co-Cathedral in Valletta, which was "accomplished with much satisfaction to the Grand Master and his venerable council," Baldinucci engages in a detailed summary of Preti's style. The biographer's characterization reads as such:

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Ha il cavaliere fatte opere moltissime, non pure per quella città, ma per diverse altre d'Italia, ove è giunta la fama dell'operar suo, che dicono risplendere per l'aggiustatezza del disegno, per la varietà e ricchezza dell'invenzione, per la forza del colorito, e per altre qualitadi, che si ricercano nell'ottimo artefice.
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Baldinucci's quote is vital to the late Seicento perception of Preti's art because he isolated four specific qualities that define the painter's style and thereby his reputation as an artist. These include his "aggiustatezza del disegno", "varietà e ricchezza dell'invenzione", "forza del colorito", and "ottimo artefice". By emphasizing his disegno, Baldinucci concurred with Scaramuccia's assessment. It is important to note that the biographer's characterization of his disegno does not simply refer to his act of drawing. Rather, as Scaramuccia had only implied, it also refers to the painter's artistic composition and the role of design in this process of creation. Baldinucci's references to "ricchezza dell'invenzione" and "ottimo artefice" reinforce the dual meaning of disegno as both a practical and intellectual measure.

In addition to writing the five volume Notizie, Baldinucci also published a dictionary of artistic terminology entitled Vocabolario Toscano dell'arte del disegno in

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44 Ibid., p. 572: "Si porto in Lombardia, dove, particolarmente nella città di Parma e di Modena, gran tempo si trattenne, studiando le stupende pitture di Correggio e di altri valentuomini [...]."

45 Baldinucci, V: "[...] la quale opera riuscì di tanta soddisfazione del gran Maestro, e del suo venerando Consiglio."

46 Ibid., p. 573: "The Knight has made many works, not though for this city, but for others in Italy, from where the fame of his works came, so that they say his works shine for the precision of his disegno [risplendere per l'aggiustatezza del disegno], for the variety and richness of his invention [per la varietà e ricchezza dell'invenzione], for the force of coloring [per la forza del colorito], and for other qualities, which search for optimal ingenuity."
1681. The *Vocabolario* explains the terminology associated with the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture, among all other subordinate arts that originated in the art of "disegno." This dictionary of artistic terminology was, according to Baldinucci, written, on the one hand, to inform the readers about the nature of the arts of design and, on the other hand, to clarify and expand upon the inventions in which all of the arts of design are applied.\(^47\) As such, it is here that one finds Baldinucci's multi-faceted understanding of the term "disegno" and how his definition contributed to the perception of Preti's art. Largely based on the *Vocabolario dell'Accademia della Crusca* (Venice, 1612) – the first systematic dictionary of the Italian language – Baldinucci provides his readers with an extensive definition of the noun "disegno" and the verb "disegnare". "Disegno" is defined in several ways, all of which overlap but directly apply to Baldinucci's definition of Preti's "aggiustatezza del disegno [precision of his disegno]" and the subsequent attributes of the painter's style. First, Baldinucci defines the term as a "dimostrazione con line di quelle cose, che prima l'uomo coll'animo si aveva concepite"; second, as "figura, componimento di line e d'ombre, che dimostra quello che s'à da colorire"; third, as "quello che rappresenta la figura di rilievo, è detto modello"; and fourth, as "saper ordinatamente disporre la invenzione, dopo aver bene, aggiustatamente delineata e contornata ogni figura, o altra cosa che si voglia rappresentare."\(^48\)

With each successive definition one finds how the term "disegno" in Baldinucci’s eyes reflects all of the qualities which he attributes to Preti's style. The Calabrese's ability to delineate figures in different media – including pen and ink, wash, red chalk, and black chalk – refers not only to the "dimostrazione con line di quelle cose" but also to the

\(^{47}\) F. Baldinucci, *Vocabolario Toscano dell' arte del disegno*, Florence: 1681, p. VIII.

capacity to create "aggiustatamente delineata e contornata ogni figura." Likewise, Preti's "varietà e ricchezza dell'invenzione" can be seen as corresponding to Baldinucci's notion that knowledge of disegno demonstrates "saper ordinatamente disporre l'invenzione."

And lastly, the biographer's emphasis on Preti's "forza del colorito" can be understood partly by his definition of representing "la figura di rilievo" as well as that which "dimostra quello che s'À da colorire." Given the linkages between the terms Baldinucci used to describe Preti's style and the biographer's multi-faceted definition of "disegno", one discovers that the Calabrese's style has been characterized according to the Tuscan-Roman conception of "perfect art", which, as Vasari emphatically stated in the preface to his third volume of the Vite, was founded on proper proportions, accurate design, and a perfected style. Indeed, Preti's art meets these criteria via the shining nature of his disegno (Vasari's disegno), the variety and richness of his invention (Vasari's style), and the ingenuity of his compositions (Vasari's proportion).49


Fu adunque la regola nella architettura, il modo di misurare delle articolaglie, osservando le piante degli edifici antichi, nelle opere moderne. L'ordine fu il divider l'un genere dall'altro, sì che toccasse ad ogni corpo le membra sue, e non si cambiase più tra loro il dorico, il ionico, il corintio ed il toscano: e le misura fu universal sì nella architettura come nella scultura, fare i corpi delle figure retti, dritti, e con le membra organizati parimente; ed il simile nella pittura. Il disegno fu lo imitare il più bello della natura in tutte le figure così scolpite come dipinte; la qual parte viene dallo aver la mano e l'ingegno, che rapporti tutto quello che vede l'occhio sul piano, o disegno o in fogli o tavola o altro piano, giustissimo ed a punto; e così di rilievo nella scultura. La maniera venne poi la più bella dell'avere messo in uso il frequente ritrarre le cose più belle, e da quell più bello o mani o teste o corpi o gambe aggiungnerle insieme, e fare una figura di tutte quelle bellezza che più si poteva, e metterla in uso in ogni opera per tutte le figure; che per questo si dice esser bella maniera ["I would like to define briefly these five qualities that I mentioned above [good rule, order, or proportion, design, and style] and discuss the origins of the excellence that has made modern art even more glorious than that of the ancient world. By rule in architecture we mean the method of measuring antiques and basing modern works on plans of ancient buildings. Order is the distinction made between one kind of architectural style and another, so that each has the parts appropriate to it and there is no confusion between Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Tuscan. Proportion is a universal law of architecture and sculpture (and also of painting) which stipulates that all bodies must be correctly aligned, with their parts properly arranged. Design is the imitation of the most beautiful things in nature,
Baldinucci's conception of Preti's style was most likely based on his knowledge of the painter's drawings, which were in the collection of Cardinal Leopoldo de Medici (1617-75) during the biographer's tenure as his secretary and primary art agent. At least six drawings from the Medici collection – currently housed at the Uffizi – contain Leopoldo's collectors stamp, including, among others, the monumental drawing of St. Jerome for the dome at San Domenico Soriano in Naples, several preliminary drawings for the Sant'Andrea frescoes, and a drawing of a yet to be identified Last Supper (figs. 12, 13 & 14). In addition, it is more than likely that Baldinucci traveled to Modena to see Preti's work at San Biagio and the Duomo, given his emphasis on the artist's lengthy stay in Parma and Modena while studying the work of Correggio and others. Between the drawings and the frescoes in Modena, Baldinucci would have undoubtedly perceived Preti's disegno through its consistencies with the drawings and the frescoes of such Bolognese-Roman painters as Reni, Domenichino, and Lanfranco.

Baldinucci's late-seventeenth-century description of the Calabrese's art is of fundamental importance for understanding how subsequent writers conceived of the painter's style. Although such subsequent biographers as Pellegrino Antonio Orlandi and Lione Pascoli reiterated some of Baldinucci's observations, none before De Dominici considered the Florentine writer's descriptive terminology in detail when discussing

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used for the creation of all figures whether in sculpture or painting; and this quality depends on the ability of the artist's hand and mind to reproduce what he sees with his eyes accurately and correctly on to paper or a panel or whatever flat surface he may be using. The same applies to works of relief sculpture. And then the artist achieves the highest perfection of style by copying the most beautiful things in nature and combining the most perfect members, hands, head, torso, and legs, to produce the finest possible figure as a model for use in all his works; this is how he achieved what we know as fine style (Vasari, Lives of the Artists: Volume I, (trans.) G. Bull, London: 1987, pp. 249-50)."

51 Leopoldo de Medici's collectors stamp can be found in Fritz Lugt's Les Marques de Collections.
specific paintings and Preti's overall style. Orlandi's short biography – published in his 1704 *Abecedario pittorico* (a compendium of artist biographies from Antiquity to Modernity) – merely states that Preti was "stimato scolaro di Lanfranchi" and that "Napoli e Roma furono i due poli principali dove girò la sua fortuna." With such a limited amount of information, the reader is inevitably forced to rely upon Orlandi's conception of Lanfranco's style in order to determine Preti's. Consequently, Orlandi's readers would have had a limited perspective on Preti's stylistic range, given the frescoes at Sant'Andrea della Valle, San Biagio, San Domenico Soriano, and the ceiling of the Co-Cathedral are the only works which approximate Lanfranco's brilliant Neo-Venetian colorism and the *di sotto in su* qualities of his frescoes, exemplified by the dome at Sant'Andrea della Valle and those of the Gesù Nuovo, the Cappella del Tesoro di San Gennaro, the vault of the Certosa di San Martino, and that of Santi Apostoli, Naples (figs. 15, 17, & 18). While these are monumental works that determined to a large part Lanfranco's reputation, both the Parmesan painter and Preti demonstrated largely opposing styles when working on canvas. Lanfranco, for example, was primarily a painter of altarpieces whereas the Calabrese was one of gallery paintings. However some similarities also exist between the painters' works on canvas, particularly the silver lighting and sharp chiaroscuro that defines the figures and pictorial space in Lanfranco's 1619-21 *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* and Preti's circa 1656 *Temptation of Christ* (figs. 19 & 20).53

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Readers of Orlandi's biography would have considered Preti’s style as being "franco, facile, Carraccesco e Correggesco, con bellissime pieghe, con nobile disegno, e con vago colorito [straightforward, light, Carraccesque and Correggesque, with beautiful folds, with noble drawing, and with charming coloring]" – a description that is largely based on that offered by Bellori's 1672 and Baldinucci’s 1688 biographies of the Parmesan painter – since these were the qualities attributed to Lanfranco’s style. When considering Orlandi's reference to Preti as a student of Lanfranco and his description of the latter painter's style, one is confronted by the fact that Baldinucci provided a far more comprehensive and well-rounded perspective on the Calabrese's stylistic attributes. Baldinucci’s emphasis on Preti's stylistic versatility, variety, and forceful coloring provided readers, however uninformed of his actual paintings, with a much more concrete conception of how the painter's art fluctuated between styles. Despite his well-rounded description, Lione Pascoli was determined to demonstrate the Florentine writer's account of Preti’s career was "inadequate" by writing a more comprehensive biography, which also sought to reject Orlandi's conclusion that many perceived Preti as being a "scolare di Lanfranco."

Pascoli began his assessment of the Calabrese's style and career by stating:

Certo è che niuno degli scrittori della vita del Lanfranco lo nomina suo scolare, e la maniera sembra ancor diversa parendo piuttosto, che abbia potuto imitare per lo bel suo rilievo quella del Caravaggio.

His assessment that Preti's style was different from Lanfranco's was largely influenced by his understanding of the term "rilievo", which was consistent with the sculptural qualities

55 Pascoli, p. 103.
56 Ibid.: "It is certain that none of the writers of the life of Lanfranco name him [Preti] as his student and his [Preti's] style seems different, appearing rather that he may have imitated that of Caravaggio for his great relief [rilievo]."
ascribed to the styles of Caravaggio and the Caravaggisti. His subsequent commentary, however, undermines this thesis. Pascoli’s descriptive terminology demonstrates how Preti had as much in common with Bolognese-Roman classicism as he did with Caravagesque chiaroscuro, manifest in the idea of “rilievo.” Like Baldinucci, Pascoli goes on to emphasize the Calabrese’s studies in Lombardy, Venice, Parma, and Modena, where the artist had the opportunity to study the work of Correggio, Titian, and Paolo Veronese – all Renaissance artists who played a significant role in Preti’s development, according to De Dominici. Nonetheless, he maintains that while studying the works of these artists, Preti did not "abbandonar mai la scorta infallibile del natural, e del vero ['abandon the infallible guide of nature and of reality'].” In so doing, the biographer reaffirms the perception of the Calabrese's art by using terminology that is directly linked to the critical writings on Caravaggio and Caravaggism. For all of Pascoli's significant

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57 Ibid., p. 105.
58 Baglione (Le vite de’ pittori, scultori, et architetti dal pontificato di Gregorio XIII fino a tutto quello d’Urbano VIII, (ed.) C. Gradara Pesci, Bologna: 1975-76 [1642], p. 138), for example, stated:

"Michelagnolo Amerigi fu huomo Satirico, e altieri; ed usciva tal’hora a dir male di tutti li pittori passati, e presenti per insigni, che si fussero; poiche a lui parea d’haver solo con le sue opera avanzati tutti gli altre della sua professione. Anzi presso alcuni si stima, haver’esso rovinata la pittura; poiche molti giovanni ad essempio di lui si danno ad imitare una testa del naturale, e non studiando ne’fondamenti del disegno, e della profondità dell’arte, solamente del colorito appagnasi; onde non sanno mettere due figure insieme, nè tessere storia veruna, per non comprendere la bontà di sì nobil'arte ["Michelangelo Merisi was a satirical and proud man; at times he would speak badly of painters of the past, and also of the present, no matter how distinguished they were, because he thought that he alone had surpassed all the other artists in his profession. Moreover, some people thought that he had destroyed the art of painting; also, many young artists followed his example and painted heads from life, without studying the rudiments of design and the profundity of art, but were satisfied only with the colors; therefore these painters were not able to put two figures together, nor could they illustrate a history painting because they did not comprehend the value of so noble and art."]."
contributions, including the documentation of a number of patrons and actual paintings Preti executed in Rome, Naples, and Malta, the biographer provides his readers with an astoundingly limited idea of what defines the painter's style. Discussing the commission for the choir frescoes at Sant'Andrea della Valle, Pascoli stated:

Spacciatosene dunque principiò i disegni, ma quando gli aveva condotti a fine non gli piacquero; e gli convene variare più d'una volta i pensieri finché si soddisfece, e si soddisfecero pure i professori suoi amici, e chi glie l'aveva ordinate.\(^{59}\)

Just as the biographer emphasizes the role of drawing in Preti's practice, he also creates an entirely new topos in discussions about the Sant'Andrea frescoes – that is, the Calabrese's sense of inferiority when he compared his own works with those of Domenichino's and Lanfranco's on the vault and dome above. Despite this sense of inferiority and Pascoli's claim that Preti's compositional outlines on the walls had been destroyed one night, the biographer commented that "rimessevi poi le mani lo compiè nel vago, e maestrevoli modo [he, putting his hands to work again, completed them in a charming and masterful manner.]."\(^{60}\) The idea that his designs for the frescoes were executed in a charming style ("vago") – qualities that are characteristic of Bolognese-

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\(^{59}\) Pascoli, p. 106: "Casting them off [numerous ideas] he began the drawings, but once he had completed them he did not like them, acknowledging the need to alter his ideas until they pleased him and even pleased his artist colleagues, for whom he had arranged them."

\(^{60}\) Ibid., p. 107.
Roman art – undermines Pascoli’s argument that the painter followed the infallible path of naturalism and the representation of reality. Pascoli, consequently, begins to contradict himself as he attempted to define the overall nature of the Calabrese’s style.

This problematic definition of his style – reflecting the sculptural relief and bold colorism of the Caravaggisti on the one hand and being based on disegno while also exhibiting the charming colorism regularly attributed to the Venetian Renaissance and Bolognese-Roman Baroque painters on the other – is furthered when the biographer discusses the paintings executed for several Sienese churches between circa 1673 and 1683. During these years, Preti produced the Canonization of St. Catherine of Siena (1671-73) for the Church of San Francesco, the Preaching of St. Bernardino (1673-75) for the Duomo, and the St. Ignatius in Glory (c. 1683) for the Jesuit church (figs. 21, 22, & 23). Among these three monumental altarpieces, Pascoli’s singles out the Canonization of St. Catherine and similarly describes it with a contradictory stylistic terminology:

Vedesene in quella de' Carmelitani un altro, che è veramente bellissimo, nel quale figurò la canonizzazione di S. Caterina avendo colla vivezza dell'espressiva, coll'armonia della composizione, e colla forza del colore fatto parer faciliissimo un soggetto cotanto difficile.

One finds again the combination of such concepts as "vivezza dell'espressiva" and "armonia della composizione" consistently used by writers describing such artists as

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62 Pascoli, p. 110: "One sees in the [Church] of the Carmelites another, which is very beautiful [veramente bellissimo], in which the Canonization of St. Catherine is represented having with it an expressive liveliness [vivezza dell'espressiva], a compositional harmony [coll'armonia della composizione], and a force of color [forza del colore] making seem easy a subject that is very difficult [to represent]." It is notable that De Dominici looked back to Pascoli’s description of the work while formulating his own (DD, Vol. II, pp. 674-75, n. 208): "Ma opera eccellentissima vien riputato il quadro [...], sì per la forza del chiaroscuro e gran disegno, come per lo gran componimento, e con la forza dell'espressiva arricchita con episodi ha fatto veder dipinto con facilità un soggetto che in se stesso è difficile per più ragioni che brevità si tralasciano."
Domenichino, Lanfranco, and, among others, Guido Reni. The "vivezza dell'espressiva" and "armonia della composizione" are qualities that correspond to the classical-idealistic perspectives on the representation of the affections and compositional harmony.\textsuperscript{63} Yet, the inclusion of "forza del colore" among the above concepts implies Preti's painting contained, on some level, qualities consistent with the Caravaggesque tradition. The combination of such terminology as "armonia della composizione" and "forza del colore" undermines, again, Pascoli's thesis that the Calabrese was not influenced by the work of Lanfranco or his peers. Consequently, the presence of a forceful colorism among the other qualities in the \textit{Canonization of St. Catherine} demonstrates that Preti's Neapolitan and Maltese paintings cannot be strictly classified according to one manner of painting or another. Contemporaneous Neapolitan and Maltese works demonstrate a similar blending of vividly painted and sharply illuminated colors in a largely shadowed pictorial field.

Preti's Palazzo Serra di Cassano, Naples, \textit{Judgment of Solomon} (1670-75) and his \textit{Samuel}.

\textsuperscript{63} Harmonizing expression and composition in Early Modern art was a central idea that permeated much of the art literature. Bellori, discussing the rules of the divine idea in the context of architecture, emphasized the need to harmonize design and composition with all decoration: "Quanto l'architettura, diciamo che l'architetto deve concepire una nobile idea, e stabilirsi una mente che gli servo di legge e di ragione, consistendo le sue invenzioni nell'ordine, nella disposizione ed ornamenti de gli ordini sia certo trovarsi l'idea stabilita, e confermata su gli essempi de gli antichi, che con successo di longo studio, diedero modo a quest'arte ["As for architecture, we say that the architect must conceive a noble Idea and establish an intellect to serve him as law and reason, and his inventions will consist in order, disposition, and the measure and harmonious proportion of the whole and its parts. But with respect to the decoration and ornaments of the orders, let him be sure to discover for himself the Idea that is established and confirmed by the examples of the ancients, who through the success of long study endowed art with style."]." Not unlike Vasari's opening statements in his preface to Part Three regarding the importance of harmony among all elements that informed the modern style (and not simply architecture), Bellori's conception of order was built on centuries of discourse that had a more practical grounding in Quattrocento theories of art, including Alberti's treatise on painting. Alberti, provided the most coherent description of the role and function of composition and what is achieved via the harmonization of all forms. In his 1435 \textit{Della Pittura}, for example, the letterato stated "composition is the procedure in painting whereby the parts are composed together in the picture. [...] From the composition of surfaces [all forms] arises that elegant harmony and grace in bodies, which they called beauty. [...] So in the composition of surfaces grace and beauty must above all be sought (L.B. Alberti, \textit{On Painting}, (trans.) C. Grayson, London: 1991, p. 71.)."
Anointing David (1670-75) in a private collection exhibit a similar blending (figs. 24 & 25).  

The outcome of the different biographers’ emphasis on specific stylistic traits or the combination thereof creates a scenario in which one is left with the idea that Preti's style cannot be strictly defined according to the available stylistic terminology that writers used to differentiate between Italian regional schools and styles of painting. Among the writers that have been discussed above, with the exception of Baldinucci, the Calabrese's style was conceived by emphasizing a number of qualities that are in some cases clearly demonstrated – such as his drawings, for example, which were already being collected by the late Seicento. Yet, attempts to reconcile such qualities as "disegno", "componimento", "forza del colore", "vaghezza", and, among others, "rilievo" in a single work proved to be difficult, particularly in two or three sentences. Orlandi's reference to Preti's style being esteemed for its similarities to Lanfranco's because of its "vago colorito" and Pascoli's assessment that the Calabrese's style was closer to Caravaggio's because of its "rilievo" clearly indicate the complexities of the painter's style. Preti's Sienese patrons, for example, must have been astounded by his range for in a matter of ten years they were introduced to an artist who could paint deeply shaded and sharply illuminated figures placed in expansive architectural spaces, as in the St. Catherine and the San Bernardino, to the glowing and brilliant, yet delicate depiction of the Virgin alongside the monumental figures of Ignatius of Loyola and Christ in the St. Ignatius in Glory. While Scaramuccia can be excluded from the group because he did not write a proper biography, Baldinucci's, Orlandi's, and Pascoli's endeavors demonstrate

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the difficulties with which they were faced when attempting to define his style. Unlike Olandi and Pascoli, however, Baldinucci was renowned for his connoisseurship and sophistication, which was most coherently communicated through the purchasing, organization, and indexing of Leopoldo de Medici's extensive books of drawings.65

Paradoxically, Baldinucci's biography provided readers with the most coherent conception of the artist's style and its range because he did not refer to any specific works. By focusing on style and not its manifestation in a specific work, he maintained the flexibility needed to define the painter's style while keeping himself from constructing rigid parameters. As such, he avoided the two elements that undermined Olandi's and Pascoli's biographies. Orlandi's brief biography placed Preti's art firmly among the artists working in a Bolognese-Roman manner – all of whose styles could be said to be "franco, facile, Carraccesco e Correggesco, con bellissime pieghe, con nobile disegno, e con vago colorito." Pascoli attempted to provide a broader perspective than his predecessors. His initial premise for writing the biography – rejecting the idea that Preti was a student of Lanfranco – established a perspective that could not be coherently argued. As Baldinucci's wide ranging definition indicated, the Calabrese's style was broader than that which could be classified using the terminology that was typically used to categorize artists and their art according to region and personality. Pascoli's comprehensive approach forced the biographer to discuss independent works that exhibited the painter's stylistic range. Consequently, he could not sustain a single narrative that dissociated Preti's style from Lanfranco's. Instead the narrative revealed (seemingly unintentionally) that Preti's art blended elements of Lanfranco's and his peers'

65 Goldberg, p. 66.
style with that of Caravaggio and the Caravaggisti. In so doing, the narrative clearly demonstrated the Calabrese's stylistic versatility, given his works emphasized *disegno* and appeared "vago" in nature while remaining faithful to the Caravagesque practice of painting after nature.

Establishing some definitive conception of the Calabrese's style in connection to his diverse oeuvre remained an issue when De Dominici began his biography in the 1720s. Given De Dominici had discussed Preti’s biography with Francesco Xaverio Baldinucci, it is not surprising that Filippo's conception of Preti’s style aided the Neapolitan biographer in constructing his own. But Filippo Baldinucci cannot be seen as the sole source for De Dominici's perspective nor for his comprehensive biographies. Rather, De Dominici developed a means of incorporating and expanding upon Baldinucci's description while also considering Orlandi's and Pascoli's perspectives in order to construct his biography.
Fig. 7. Preti, *Elevation, Martyrdom, and Deposition of St. Andrew*, Sant'Andrea della Valle, Rome, 1650.

Fig. 8. Preti, *St. Francis Xavier*, Chapel of Aragon, Catalonia, and Navarre, Co-Cathedral of St. John, La Valletta, 1658.
Fig. 9. Preti, *St. John*, San Biagio, 1651-52.

Fig. 10. Preti, *St. Mark*, San Biagio, 1651-52.

Fig. 11. Preti, *St. Matthew*, San Biagio, 1651-52.
Fig. 12. Preti, *St. Jerome*, Uffizi, Florence, c. 1655.

Fig. 13. Preti, *Last Supper*, Uffizi, Florence, c. 1635-75.
Fig. 14. Preti, *Elevation of St. Andrew*, Uffizi, Florence, c. 1650.

Fig. 15. Giovanni Lanfranco, *Heavenly Paradise*, Sant'Andrea della Valle, Rome, 1625-27.
Fig. 16. Lanfranco, *Heavenly Paradise*, Cappella del Tesoro, Duomo, Naples, 1641-43.

Fig. 17. Lanfranco, *Christ in Glory with Saints*, Monastery of San Martino, Naples, 1637-39.
Fig. 18. Lanfranco, *Apostles and Events in the Lives of the Saints*, Santi Apostoli, Naples, 1638-46.

Fig. 19. Lanfranco, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, Private Collection, 1619-21.
Fig. 20. Preti, *Christ’s Temptation by the Devil*, Carafa Chapel, Chiesa dell'Annunziata, Maddaloni, c. 1656.
Fig. 21. Preti, *Canonization of St. Catherine*, San Francesco, Siena, 1671-73.
Fig. 21. Preti, *Canonization of St. Catherine*, San Francesco, Siena, 1671-73.
Fig. 22. Preti, *Preaching of San Bernardino of Siena*, Duomo, Siena, c. 1673-75.
Fig. 23. Preti, *St. Ignatius in Glory*. San Vigilio, Siena, c. 1683.
Fig. 24. Preti, *Judgment of Solomon*, Palazzo Serra di Cassano, c. 1670-75.

Fig. 25. Preti, *Samuel Anointing David*, Private Collection, c. 1670-75.
Chapter 3

Interpreting Bernardo De Dominici's 'Vita del Cavalier Fra' Mattia Preti'

It is widely recognized that De Dominici's *Vite dei pittori, scultori ed architetti napoletani* (1743-45) was the closing chapter in a long discursive tradition that followed in the wake of Vasari's promotion of the merits of the Florentine-Roman school of artists in his *Vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori, ed architetti* (1550 & 1568). Yet the merits of the Neapolitan writer's book continue to be overlooked. Notwithstanding the chronological and archival inaccuracies, Ferdinando Bologna, Thomas Willette, and Judith Colton have discussed the merits of the *Vite* in a constructive manner. This chapter follows a similar approach. In the following pages, I examine the 'Vita del Cavalier Fra' Mattia Preti' in the context of De Dominici's motivations for writing the book and how he conceived of the Calabrese's life and art within it. After briefly summarizing the subjects recounted in the *Vita*, the biographer's conceptualization of Preti's art will be addressed in detail. The multi-dimensional nature of his art will be examined in order to indicate the points where De Dominici's characterization of the painter's style begins to fracture and how this affects our understanding of his stylistic diversity. In addition, the chapter will consider paintings with which the biographer was familiar and that apparently 'contradicted' the master narrative of his history of Neapolitan art. The noted but overlooked paintings include the circa 1656 *St. George and the Dragon* for the Co-Cathedral, the 1656 *Christ with the Woman from Cana* for Don Diomede Carafa (the Duke of Maddaloni), now at the Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart, and the 1659 *Holy Trinity with the Virgin Interceding on behalf of the Souls in Purgatory* for the Church of All Souls,
Valletta (figs. 26, 27, 28). This chapter is, accordingly, an essay in how one can interpret the information found within the *Vite* and Preti's biography specifically by analyzing the biographer's attempts to direct his readers' understanding of the Calabrese's role in the history of Neapolitan painting.

**Summary of the Vita**

**Preti's Early Life in Taverna**

Like Pascoli, De Dominici begins by tracing Preti's heritage to the Presbiteri family on his father's side, which, according to the writer, had been in Taverna since the time of Emperor Constantine, and the Schipani family on his mother's side. Consistent with other writers, the biographer then establishes a foundation of intellectual training by noting that Preti's early education in letters served him well, although he was far more interested in drawing and spent much of his time in school drawing instead of reading. This is a topos that occurs in many Early Modern biographies.

**The Roles of Guercino and Veronese in Mattia Preti's Artistic Development**

The foundation of De Dominici's conceptualization of Preti's art can be found in his descriptions of the works of Guercino (1591-1666) and Paolo Veronese (1528-88). For

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66 See Spike, 1999 (pp. 303, 308, 329-30, 332) for the provenance and bibliographical information on the paintings.
67 Frangipane included the baptismal records of his father's family and their forbearers' in his *Mattia Preti, Il Cavalier Calabrese* (p. 175, n. 1); For a detailed discussion of Preti's relationship with his mother's brothers, see Carlo Caporossi and Giuseppe de Vito's "Mario Schipani mallevadore di Mattia Preti," *Ricerche sul 600 Napoletano*, Milan: 2001, pp. 7-15.
68 DD, Vol. II, p. 592. De Dominici states that "the genius of Mattia was inclined towards drawing [il genio di Mattia era inclinato al disegno]" instead of arts and letters.
example, the biographer describes Guercino's 1623 St. Peter's Basilica altarpiece of the

*Burial of St. Petronilla* as follows (fig. 29):

Imperciocché comparve questo dipinto con tale forza di lumi ed ombre, con tinta così
di carne, con sì eccellente e corretto disegno ed ammirabile componimento,
ch'empì di stupor, non che di maraviglia anche i professori di prima riga, tanto esso
rimasero incantati ed attoniti a quella nuova maniera ed a quella magia di colori non più
veduta [...].

Apparently, Guercino's powerful style, "eccellente e corretto disegno" and "ammirabile
componimento" enchanted and astonished Preti so much, that he became obsessed with
this new style and manner of coloring. The readers are told that this fascination
facilitated the Calabrese's transfer to Bologna and then to Cento where he studied
Guercino's work for fifteen years. While working with the master, Guercino apparently
taught him the power to paint with a "strong understanding of the contours of color and
light and shade", as is exemplified by his first painting, which depicted Mary

*Magdalen.*

While traveling in Northern Italy Preti is said to have also gone to Venice to study
the work of Paolo Veronese whose paintings were the greatest examples of ideal

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70 DD, Vol. II, p. 595: "Because he observed this painting – with such forceful lights and shadows, with
colors so fresh and skinlike, with such excellent and correct disegno and comendable componimento – he
was filled with astonishment, not only that of wonder of first class artists too. He remained enchanted and
astonished by this new style and this magical color that is no longer seen [...]." On the altarpiece, its
commission, and reception, see: L. Rice "Gregory XV and the St. Pretonilla Altarpiece," *The Altars and

71 DD, Ibid.: "Egli sorpreso il nostro Mattia, e talmente ingombra la sua mente di quella maniera di
colorire."

72 Ibid., p. 596: "Essendo poi in età di 26 anni stimolato e sollecitato dal suo maestro colorì una
Maddalena, così ben intesa di contorni di colorito e di chiaroscuro." Preti was 26 in 1639 and thus the
production of his first work in that year does not correspond to his stylistic development and is moreover
placed too late in his early period to be his first, since he had been in Rome since at least 1631. c.f. Pascoli
(1736, p. 546) also notes the execution of this *Magdalen*, but refers to it as a copy after an original by
Veronese.
compositions. According to De Dominici, the Calabrese would not become a great artist if he did not study the work of Veronese. Only after studying Veronese's paintings did Preti's art appear "grandiose in composition and heroic in style with an optimal understanding of perspective, gradation of colors, and incredible lighting, not inferior to those of this grand master."

Preti in Rome

The artists's skill is said to have been developed by training with his brother Gregorio, by studying at the Accademia di San Luca with famous artists, and by copying great works.

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73 DD, p. 596. There is no actual documentation indicating he went either to Cento to study with Guercino or on to Venice. It is, however, highly likely that he saw the works by the most prominent Northern Italian artists in Roman collections if not on a short trip, which is consistent with the training of almost every painter in order to develop their sense of artistic styles. c.f. Spike, 1998; See Federica Piccirillo ("Note biographiche e documentarie," Mattia Preti, (ed.) E. Corace, Rome: 1989, pp. 52-56) for an excellent contextual analysis of the early documents and the Calabrese's activities during the 1630s and 1640s.

74 DD, Vol. I, p. 597: "Non si poteva divenir valentuomo ne' gran componimenti senza fare particolare studio su quello autore [Veronese] che in questa difficilissima parte non era stato superato né pareggiato da verun pittore." c.f. Baldinucci (1681-1728, V, p. 572) and Pascoli (1736, p. 546) also indicate that through his study of Emilian and Venetian artists – Correggio, Titian, Veronese, and Tintoretto, primarily – Preti was then able to comprehend why Annibale's paintings exhibited the masterful compositional structure and brilliant coloring consistent with Renaissance Venetian art.

75 Ibid. Preti sought to always imitate Titian, Tintoretto, and particularly Veronese, as one can see in his works "grandiose di componimento e di eroica maniera, con ottimo intendimento prospettico, degradazione di tinte, ed accidenti di lumi, niente inferiori a quel gran maestro." De Dominici's emphasis on Veronese's painting is not unique, given both Bellori (1672, p. 36) and Malvasia (1678, I, p. 368) discuss the importance of studying the Venetians and particularly Veronese in their respective biographies of Annibale.

De Dominici also uses such terminology in some of his descriptions of Neapolitan painters, specifically Cavallino (DD, "Vita di Bernardo Cavallino pittore," Vol. II, pp. 76-77). Discussing how Cavallino came to develop his own decorous and colorful style – via a synthesis of Reni's, Rubens', and Titian's stylistic qualities – the biographer describes Cavallino's art as follows: "Fu veramente Bernardo ammirabile nella tinta, e nel disegno eccellente, e come lo descrive Paolo de Matteis, gentile nelle parti, e nel dipingere, ma robusto nel colore. [...] Quindi è che egli comparisce eroico ne' suoi componimenti, ameno nel bel colore e robusto nella tinta, e nel chiaroscuro, imperocché imitando la gentilezza e nobilità di Guido, ed osservando l'ammirabile colore e gli eroici componimenti del Rubens, ne venne a formare una perfetta maniera, la quale accompagnata da una grazia, che in lui era naturale, rendeva l'opere sue compiute in tutti i numeri dell'arte [Bernardino was truly admirable in his hues, in his excellent design, and as Paolo de Matteis described him, careful in the details and in painting, but robust in his color. [...] Thus it is him who appears heroic in his composition, pleasant in beautiful color and robust in tints, and in chiaroscuro. Imitating the pleasantness and nobility of Guido and observing the admirable color and heroic compositions of Rubens, he came to create a perfect style, which was accompanied by a grace (which was natural to him) that rendered his works entirely complete in all types of art."

This summary of Cavallino's style parallels the stylistic description given by De Matteis, which De Dominici quotes at length.
of painting and sculpture – specifically Annibale's frescoes as well as the monumental antique sculptures in the Farnese Palace. The biographer goes on to explain that Gregorio was an artist "much loved by the citizens" of Rome and apparently introduced his brother to numerous patrons, including Cardinal Giulio Rospigliosi (1600-1669, future Pope Clement XI) and Paolo Borghese (1624-46), future husband of Olimpia Aldobrandini (1623-81) in the 1630s.

It is at times difficult to take the biographer at his word, given some of his statements seem incredibly improbable. For example, his summary of the artists with whom Preti studied and from whom he sought counsel, including Reni, Domenichino, Lanfranco, and Cortona, is highly unlikely since Cortona was the only artist consistently in Rome during the 1630s and 1640s. The biographer even stated that Domenichino briefly taught Preti the "proper rules of painting [buone regole della pittura]", which is more than likely false since the former artist spent the final decade of his life in Naples, beginning May 15th, 1631. De Dominici may have selected Reni, Domenichino, Lanfranco, and Cortona because he was able to discern certain elements of their styles in Preti's paintings.

Despite these inaccuracies about relationships and specific dates, the biographer obviously used preceding sources, as exemplified in his description of the Miracle of San

77 Ibid., pp. 592-594, n. 15, 17. Santoro and Zezza demonstrate that the biographer's reconstruction of Preti's early years does not easily correspond to the biographies of these supporters. Giulio Rospigliosi was only made a Cardinal in 1655 and elected as Pope Clement IX in 1667. Paolo Borghese was only made the Principe di Rossano in 1638 after his marriage to Olimpia Aldobrandini. Neither of these men had the influence the biographer attributes to them when the young Preti would have needed it. More still, the biographer may have been confused between which "Olimpia" was Preti's early patron (that is, Aldobrandini or Pamphilii; since Olympia Aldobrandini was only born in 1623 and Olympia Pamphilii in c. 1591 – the latter is the more likely patron, given Preti's work was in the Pamphilii collection).
While discussing the painting, originally placed on the high altar of the Roman church of San Pantaleone, he cited Francesco Titi's description in the latter's 1674 guide entitled *Studio di pittura, scoltura, et architettura, nelle chiese di Roma*, which emphasizes the picture's "straightforward and well understood manner."

Preti in Naples and Malta

From this point on, the biographer begins his catalogue of the Calabrese's works in Rome, Modena, Naples, Malta, Siena, and all of the churches in Taverna, paying specific attention to his Neapolitan patrons and his publicly displayed works in both Naples and Valletta. Among Preti's many influential and prolific Neapolitan patrons, the biographer includes: the merchants Bernardino Corrado, Gaspar Roomer, and Jan and Ferdinand Vandeneynden; the nobleman Diomede Carafa; and the lawyers Pompilio Gagliano and Antonio Caputo. The Neapolitan commissions that are given the greatest amount of attention include: Preti's work on the frescoes commemorating the 1656 plague on the seven City Gates (1656-59); his dome fresco at the Calabrian church of San Domenico.

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79 See Spike, 1999, pp. 211-12, for information regarding the commission and its placement on the high altar of the church.


81 DD, Ibid., pp. 632-639 (for a full list of these and many other patrons). While all of the other patrons are firmly documented in numerous sources, Antonio Caputo remains a largely unknown figure and may not have been the prolific patron described by De Dominici. An Antonio Caputo, however, served as a financial intermediary between the Banco del Popolo and San Lorenzo Maggiore with respect to the payments for Preti’s two Chapel paintings in San Lorenzo Maggiore (A.S.B.N., Banco del Popolo Giornale copia-polizze, matr. n. 32, anno 1660, 20 Maggio). *c.f. De Conciliis & Lattuada, 1979, p. 301; Clifton, & Spike, 1989, p. 58, n. 66; Spike 1998, p. 131. De Conciliis and Lattuada also note that a "Maestro Antonio Caputo, Razionale della Regia Camera della Sommaria" is recorded among several archival documents. While they question "is this a chance coincidence of names or is this the same patron", I would argue that it is undoubtedly the same patron, given the "maestri razionali" of the Sommaria were members of the finance committee that oversaw the minting of coins, taxation accounts, and the necessary customs and duties. Thus, the Antonio Caputo described as a "Razionale" would have been equally qualified to act as a financial intermediary between the painter and the San Lorenzo Maggiore patrons.
Soriano (c. 1656); the ceiling canvases depicting events in the life of St. Peter Celestine and St. Catherine of Alexandria (fig. 31 & 32) for the church of San Pietro a Maiella (1657-59); and a number of altarpieces, some of which will be addressed below (1653-60).

The Maltese works that received the most attention include: the choir vault and nave ceiling paintings depicting events in the life of St. John the Baptist (fig. 33) for the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem's Co-Cathedral of St. John in Valletta (1661-66); the altarpieces and additional paintings for the chapels of the Langue of Aragon, Catalonia, and Navarre, that of Castile and Portugal, that of Italy, and that of France, which face on to the side aisles of the Co-Cathedral (1658-69); the designing, construction, and decoration of the Immacolata or the Sarria Church in Floriana (1676-79); the Pauline cycle at the Cathedral of Mdina (1682-93); and innumerable altarpieces throughout churches in Valletta and the island, most notably that of the already noted Martyrdom of St. Catherine (fig. 34) executed for the Langue of Italy's high altar in the church of St. Catherine of Alexandria (1659).

De Dominici concludes his biography by returning to Naples to discuss some Neapolitan works that appear in private collections throughout the city. This section contains general descriptions of many extant paintings that do not deal with stylistic issues whatsoever. The biographer then moves on to a brief discussion of Preti's artistic practice before summarizing his style and outlining all of his faults as an artist, most notably his lack of decorum when it comes to representing the Virgin Mary.\(^{82}\) The

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\(^{82}\) DD, Vol. II, pp. 720, 724-25. Some of the biographer's criticisms of Preti read as follows (p. 720): "Quello che veramente in lui non può scusarsi è la rozza ed ignobile fisionomia dell donne e di altri soggetti, come altrove abhiam detto e massimamente ciò è da biasimarsi allorché si rappresentano sante
biography comes to a close with the *Brevissime regole che soleva isegnare il Cavalier Calabrese a' suoi discepoli* (his notes on the instruction of painting).

De Dominici's "Vita di Mattia Preti" and the Painter's Role in the *Vite*

To properly understand Preti's art, as perceived and communicated by De Dominici, one must read his *Vita* in conjunction with those of his Neapolitan predecessors and contemporaries, namely Jusepe Ribera's, Bernardo Cavallino's, Massimo Stanzione's, Andrea Vaccaro's, and specifically, Luca Giordano's, given the critical interaction between the two artists and their 'opposing' styles – Preti as the pseudo-Caravaggist and Giordano as the Neo-Venetian and Classicist. Juxtaposing the stylistic differences between such painters was consistent with the historiographical literature, as demonstrated by Bellori's opposition between the inspired Annibale and the crude Caravaggio and Vasari's similar opposition between the divine Michelangelo and the inferior Titian. 83 Unlike Vasari's survey of three centuries of Central and Northern Italian

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83 When referencing Titian's painting of *Danaë*, for example, Vasari juxtaposes Michelangelo's practices with those of the Venetian in much stronger language than he attributes to Michelangelo himself, who praises the painter (Vasari-Milanesi, "Tiziano Cador," Vol. 7, pp. 447-48.): "Andarono un giorno Michelagnolo ed il Vasari a vedere Tiziano in Belvedere, videro in un quadro, che allora avea condotto, una femina ignuda, figurato per Danae, che aveva in grembo Giove trasformato in poggia d'oro, e molto (come si fa in presenza) gliele lodarono. Dopo partiti che furono da lui, ragionandosi del fare di Tiziano, il Buonarrotto lo comendò assai, dicendo che molto gli piaceva il colorito suo e la maniera; ma che era un peccato che a Vinezia non s'imparasse da principio a disegnare bene, e che non avessero que' pittori miglior modo nello studio. Con ciò sia (diss'egli) che se quest' uomo fusse punto aiutato dall'arte e dal disegno, come è dalla natura, e massimamente nel contrafare il vivo, non si potrebbe far più nè meglio, avendo egli bellissimo spirito ed una molto vaga e vivace maniera. Ed in fatti così è vero, perciocchè chi non ha disegnato assai, e studiato cose scelte antiche o moderne, non può fare bene di pratica da sè nè aiutare le cose che si ritranno dal vivo, dando loro quella grazia e perfezione che dà l'arte fuori dell'ordine.
art, De Dominici's *Vite* focuses solely on the artistic evolution of Neapolitan art from roughly 1600 to 1730. Like Vasari, however, the Settecento biographer places a significant emphasis on artistic knowledge, skill, and practice as he describes how Neapolitan art developed over time. Preti's artistic accomplishments play a central role in this narrative, which culminates in the art of Francesco Solimena, the Neapolitan caposcuola and De Dominici's equivalent to Vasari's Michelangelo.

It cannot be over emphasized that the Calabrese's biography is unique among almost every one devoted to a Neapolitan painter, especially since he was not Neapolitan by birth and only worked in and around the city for six or seven years. The biographer's extensive summary of his career and description of the stylistic qualities he assimilates are undoubtably based on his own observations and those made by his contemporaries, who are represented in large part by the painter Paolo de Matteis (1662-1728) and the ideas he supposedly put forward in an otherwise undocumented treatise. De Dominici

*della natura, la quale fa ordinamente alcune parti che non son belle* ["Then one day Michelangelo and Vasari went along to visit Titian in the Belvedere, where they saw a picture he had finished of a nude woman, representing Danaë who had in her lap Jobe transformed into a rain of gold; and naturally, as one would do with the artist present, they praised it warmly. After they had left they started to discuss Titian's method and Buonarroti commended it highly, saying that his coloring and his style pleased him very much but that it was a shame that in Venice they did not learn to draw well from the beginning and that those painters did not pursue their studies with more method. For the truth was, he went on, that if Titian had been assisted by art and design as much as he was by nature, and especially in reproducing living subjects, then no one could achieve more or work better, for he had a fine spirit and a lively and entrancing style. To be sure, what Michelangelo said was nothing but the truth; for if an artist has not drawn a great deal and studied carefully selected ancient and modern works he cannot by himself work well from memory or enhance what he copies from life, and so give his work the grace and perfection of art which are beyond the reach of nature (G. Bull, p. 455).]."

84 While De Dominici begins his history of Neapolitan art in the Cinquecento, the narrative concerning artistic innovation begins with the *Vita* of Battistello Caracciolo. Battistello's paintings are compared and contrasted to the works and overall styles of Caravaggio on the one hand and Annibale Carracci on the other. Battistello's awakening to Annibale's use of *disegno* and *componimento* facilitated a transformation in the Neapolitan painter's art. This alignment with either Caravaggio's naturalism or the classicism of Annibale and his pupils or those of the Carracci in general (Domenichino and Reni, for example) creates the framework through which the major Neapolitan artists were perceived, particularly Battistello, Ribera, Stanzionale, and Cavallino – all of whom played central roles in the years preceding Preti's arrival in Naples. 85 Paolo de Matteis' *Notizie* are a biographical account of Neapolitan painting supposedly executed for a French patron, which never seems to have existed in written form. De Dominici's relationship with De
quotes at length from De Matteis in many of his biographies, including Ribera's, Cavallino's, and Stanzione's. In Preti's case, De Matteis makes five important points, which echo many of those that De Dominici himself had made about the artist. First, he imitated Paolo Veronese in his "composizione pittorica"; second, he was a "grande imitatore del nudo semplice" and did not complete the "studio delle statue antiche"; third, he considered nature as his model, which made his painting "facile, e piazzoso" and consequently his works are without much "nobilità di contorni graziosi, né mai le sue fisionomie sono gentili"; fourth, his art was unrivaled in its time because of the "grandezza dello stile manieroso" from which grew his "chiaroscuro" which "non credo che sin ora abbia avuto compagno"; and fifth, the Calabrese's compositional strategies and pictorial skills facilitated a style that "si diede naturalmente a trattar soggetti tragici e funestri," including representations of martyrdoms, especially when they are accompanied by his "forte colorito e fierezza di crudeli fisionomie e barbare caricature" that produce "l'effetto della tragedia, la quale spaventa il guardo e cagiona compassione a chi la mira." 86 De Matteis' analysis is used as a means of supporting De Dominici's own comments and conclusions, which were offered in the paragraphs preceding the above points. The biographer's summary of Preti's style, as noted in the introduction, reads as follows:

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Matteis has yet to be investigated in detail. It is generally believed that the Notizie were fabricated by the biographer for the purposes of offering support for his own conclusions.

È la maniera del Cavalier Calabrese di forza così terribile che al suo confronto l'opera di altro pittore convien che resti abbattuata, dapoiché ella è fondata su d'un correttissimo disegno e perfettissimo chiaroscuro, con grandezza di parti nobilmente ideate, ed ha in sé tutto l'eroico che si può desiderare in una pittura grandiosa e magnifica, e massimamente ne' soggetti tragici, che furon con particolar genio da lui dipinti, ed ove veramente consiste il carattere eroico di un componimento. Nell'espressione poi riesce così perfettamente compiuto che movendo le passioni atterrisce gli spettatori, come ben di lui scrisse il nostro Paolo de Matteis [...] e questa è la ragione ch'egli ha quasi dell'impossibile l'imitarlo.\textsuperscript{87}

The description serves a twofold purpose: first, it summarizes the artist's style, and second, the rich descriptive vocabulary clearly situates Preti within the broader narrative and allows De Dominici to position his art in relation to that of his predecessors, contemporaries, and successors.

The 'Holy Trinity' of the Calabrese's style is formed by his disegno, chiaroscuro, and componimento, which singles him out amongst his predecessors and contemporaries, for these combined qualities cannot be linked to other artists. While Ribera is said to have merged the "fierenza del Caravaggio" with the "bel colore della scuola lombarda" in addition to considering the best from nature, De Dominici is constantly attempting to differentiate between the crude Caravaggesque qualities and Ribera's enlightened naturalism, which combines the best parts of nature with the Bolognese-Roman practice of studying ancient sculpture and Raphael.\textsuperscript{88} In the end, however, Ribera was described as a "discepolo di Michelangelo Amerigi da Caravaggio" and one who focused on the "perfetta imitazione della natura semplice" and whose style lacked the "grazia dell'antico,

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., p. 720: "The style of the Cavalier Calabrese is of such monumental force that upon comparison to the work of other painters one agrees that they remain surpassed, since his is founded on accurate disegno and perfect chiaroscuro, with a greatness of parts that are nobly conceived, and has in all of itself the desirable heroism in a grandious and manificent painting, and especially for tragic subjects, which were painted by him with a particular genius, where the heroic nature of composition truly lies. In expression, his art perfectly archieved its end by moving the passions it terrifies the spectators, as our Paolo de Matteis clearly writes of him [...] and this is the reason why it is almost impossible to imitate his art."

\textsuperscript{88} DD, Vol. II, p. 11.
o, vogliam dire, dell'ottime statue." Stanzione and Cavallino were similarly categorized by the biographer. From his earliest years Stanzione is said to have been mesmerized by the brilliant chromatic qualities of Guido Reni's paintings and unified them with the classical design of Annibale's and Domenichino's. It was Stanzione's "gagliarda maniera" that gained him the title of the "Guido Reni napoletano", which was apparently coined by the wealthy merchant and collector Gaspar Roomer. Despite Stanzione's pictorial interests in *chiaroscuro* and primary hues, De Dominici places him in the context of Reni's silver illumination and chromatic brilliance – qualities which contribute to the radiant secondary hues that truly dominate Reni's palette, including the pink, blue, purple, and golden shades. Cavallino would not escape a partial characterization either because his talent was one that fluctuated between Rubens' "bella e viva maniera", the "perfetassima maniera" of Titian, and the "gentilezza e nobilità" of Reni. Cavallino, having a "bella ed erudita maniera" which seemed to be all at once, "dolce, gentile, e delicata, ma con grande arteficio di chiaroscuro, e con grandi sbattimenti di lumi e di ombre", was both himself and everyone else, for it was his erudition and ability to assimilate the work of others that characterized his style.

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89 Ibid., p. 36: "Il cavalier Giuseppe di Ribera [...] fu discepolo di Michelangelo Amerigi da Caravaggio, appresso lo stile, e la perfetta imitazione della natura semplice, e senza nessuna grazia dell'antico o, vogliam dire, dell'ottime statue, passò in Roma, ove disegno qualche poco dall'opere di Rafaello, ma con poco profitto [The Knight Jusepe de Ribera [...] was a disciple of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. He was close to his style and the perfect imitation of simple nature without the grace of antiquity or, as we say, of great sculpture. He passed through Rome where he drew a few works by Raphael, but with little profit.]." It is noteworthy, however, that Ribera was praised for his strong "impasto di colore", which became a defining quality of his style.


91 Ibid., pp. 65-66: "Unendo perciò a quella [of Rubens] la maniera di Massimo [Stanzione], [Cavallino] venne a comporre la sua bella ed erudita maniera, che ad un tempo istesso sembra dolce, gentile, e delicata, ma con grande arteficio di chiaroscuro, e con grandi sbattimenti di lumi e di ombre, grave e
Preti avoided both strict categorization and a vacillating one since the unique characteristics of his art are not easily linked to any one artist or group of artists. As will become evident, this was not De Dominici's 'intention' and did not serve his goal in writing the *Vite*. Upon finishing Preti's biography, one is left with a view of an artist's work that was based on the unconventional blending of a bold *disegno*, with a strong *chiaroscuro*, and a focus on *componimento*. Terminologically, these qualities distanced his style from the Caravaggesque Ribera, the "Guido Napoletano" that is Stanzione, and from Cavallino, the masterful unifier who assimilated Rubens, Titian, Reni, and Stanzione all in one. Despite the fluidity of such terms as *disegno*, *chiaroscuro*, and *componimento*, De Dominici needed to position Preti somehow in order to clearly juxtapose him with other artists and establish his role in the evolution of Neapolitan art. He would do so by creating a dialectical relationship between Preti's and Giordano's styles. De Dominici also referred to his paintings as being known for their "maniera forte e naturale", qualities which seem to be more in line with Bellori's view of Caravaggio – that is, the Lombard's use of "nero per dare rilievo alli corpi" and his reputation as the "unico imitatore della natura."93 Through the use of categorization and juxtaposition, De Dominici was able to continue with his narrative towards the introduction and discussion of Solimena's supremacy.

While there is no lengthy stylistic description of Giordano's art detached from that of a specific commission, the painter's style is regularly praised for a number of qualities

most definitively communicated in the now destroyed cupola painting for the church of
the Pietà de Turchini, Naples. De Dominici describes the marvelous qualities of the work
of the Assumption of Christ and the True Cross into Paradise in the following statement:

Nell mezzo della scudella, o sia cupoletta, di detta chiesa dipinse in un tondo Nostro
Signore che tiene abbracciata la Croce, in atto di salire al Cielo, accompagnato da
dellissimi putti [...]. Questa opera è di tanta bellezza, sì per lo disegno, mossà di figura,
bel colore, ed intelligenza di sotto in su, che basta a far comprendere ella sola il valore di
Luca Giordano. [...] Stupì nel considerare tutti i contorni formati da grossi tratti
serpeggianti, i lumi sul panno azzurro dati a colore di vaga carnatura, e con tratti di
pennello più grossi e con tale artificio che la distanza unisce ed accorda l'opera a
perfezione ed attira l'occhio con una bella unione e vaghezza di armonioso colore. Il
sotto in su è rigorosamente eseguito, e ben si scorge che Luca osservesse rigorosamente i
precetti della prospettiva in quello scorto, che ardisco dire non potrebbe farsi migliore
dall'incomparabile Antonio Allegri da Correggio ottimo maestro del sotto in su.94

De Dominici's description of Giordano's style emphasizes the stupefying union of
charming colors that come together in such a harmonious manner that one can
conceivably compare him to the "incomparable" Correggio. Notwithstanding the account
that Preti and Giordano were equally reliant on the Venetians and particularly Veronese's
coloring and compositional strategies, the painters were able to develop highly
individualistic styles that are coherently expressed and observantly juxtaposed by the
biographer. Preti's defining qualities – the powerful "disegno", "chiaroscuro", and
"componimento" along with the "maniera forte e naturale" – are starkly different than

94 DD, Vol. II, p. 790: "In the middle of the bowl, or rather the cupola, of the said church he depicted in a
tondo Our Savior who holds with closed arms the Cross, in the act of assuming towards Heaven,
accompanied by beautiful putti [...]. This work is of such beauty, as much for its disegno, movement of
figures, beautiful color, and cleverness of sotto in su, that it alone completes one's understanding of the
valor of Luca Giordano. [...] One is astonished when considering all of the outlines made by strong
serpentine strokes, the light on the blue cloth that contributes to a charming skin color, and with the boldest
brushstrokes and such artifice that the distance of the work unites and orders the painting to perfection and
entices the eye with a joyful union and charm of harmonious color. The sotto in su is rigorously executed
and one clearly sees that Luca rigorously observed the precepts of perspective from this view, which dares
one to say that it could not be better designed in comparison to Antonio Allegri da Correggio – the greatest
master of sotto in su."; c.f. O. Ferrari & G. Scavizzi, Luca Giordano: l'opera completa, Naples: 2000, 2nd
Ed., 2 Vols., Vol. 1, p. 384. Ferrari and Scavizzi note that the painting was in fact a circular canvas as
opposed to a fresco, which is implied by the biographer's use of the term "cupola" in which the painting
was found prior to its partial destruction in the 1731 earthquake and total destruction during World War II.
Giordano's, which are defined by his ability to "attract the eye" with luminous colors. Other defining qualities that are not included in the above summary but are regularly reiterated throughout Giordano's Vita and are central to understanding the painter's art include his "bella invenzione," his "freschezza del colore," and his delightful union of Titian's, Veronese's, and Tintoretto's art with the "bel colorito del Cortona." The outcome of this assimilation produced Giordano's "tanto bella, vaga, ed armoniosa maniera." De Dominici's positioning and characterization of Preti and his perception of his paintings is more clearly understood when the reader considers the biographer's observations in contrast to the defining stylistic qualities of Giordano's art. When considered together, both painters are positioned as the key players that represent alternative poles in the overall narrative of the Vite dei pittori, scultori, ed architetti napoletani.

Having been polarized by De Dominici, Preti's and Giordano's works served as the cornerstones of artistic developments in Seicento and early Settecento Neapolitan painting. Both painters' respective styles contained the qualities that functioned as the foundational pillars in the biographer's vision of Solimena's art and his role as the Neapolitan caposcuola and pinnacle of artistic achievement. Solimena's works were praised in the Vite as an example of the greatest style in the history of Neapolitan painting because his art had the following origin:

95 DD, Vol. II, p. 759
96 As John Spike ("Rapporti Fra Mattia Preti e Solimena," Angelo e Francesco Solimena due culture a confronto, (eds.) V. De Martini & A. Braca, Naples: 1994, p. 160) has observed, the art-historical contest De Dominici creates between Preti and Giordano was actually a battle fought between Giordano and Solimena, since both artists were competing against one another in the final quarter of the seventeenth-century. In De Dominici's historical imagination – certainly informed by Solimena's perceptions – Preti's competition with Giordano on stylistic grounds and on being the caposcuola functioned as the perfect instrument through which Solimena could battle Giordano and surpass his reputation. Yet, there is truth in De Dominici's account that the Settecento painter looked to Preti (an artist trained in a number of styles) in order to compete with Giordano, since Solimena's oeuvre from the 1680s onwards reveals many debts to Preti's pictorial and compositional approaches (see Spike, 1994, pp. 160 ff. for details).
È la maniera del Solimena fondata sul buon disegno del Cavalier Lanfranco e del Cavalier Calabrese, da cui più che da tutti ha osservato il perfettissimo chiaroscuro, e nel bel colorito del gran Luca Giordano, e nelle belle idee e piegature de' panni ha osservato il celebre Carlo Maratta.⁹⁷

Upon reading De Dominici’s descriptions of Preti’s, Giordano’s, and now Solimena’s respective styles, one can see that the author views excellence in the visual arts from the perspective of having a solid understanding of "disegno", "chiaroscuro" and "colore", as well as "componimento" and "invenzione." That De Dominici attributes all these qualities to Solimena demonstrates that he was considering his works from a pan-Italian perspective, which took into account the chief qualities attributed to the three dominant

⁹⁷ DD, Vol. III, pp. 1170-71. The entire description of Solimena's style and its development from his youth until his maturity reads as follows: "È la maniera del Solimena fondata sul buon disegno del Cavalier Lanfranco e del Cavalier Calabrese, da cui più che da tutti ha osservato il perfettissimo chiaroscuro, e nel bel colorito del gran Luca Giordano, e nelle belle idee e piegature de' panni ha osservato il celebre Carlo Maratta. Nella sua prima giovanezza imitò molto la maniera del padre, indi con molto studio quella bellissima di Pietro da Cortona, su lo stile del quale ha molte cose dipinto insino all'anno 32 di sua età, nel qual tempo si fece la sua propria maniera ricca di componimenti di perfetto disegno, di vaghissimo colorito, e forse più del Giordano, di mirabile studio e bellezza nel panneaggiare, di somma grazie di 'volti, mirabile, anzi maravigliosa nella variazione delle fisionomie ne' gran componimenti, parte difficillissima nella pittura, e insomma difficile nell'unione di un fortissimo e perfetto chiaroscuro con una incomparabile tenerezza; compiuta poi nell'elezione de' siti, di belle mosse, o siano azioni, di belle glorie, e di arie, di terreni, e di tutti quelli accidenti di lumi, con sbattimenti di riverbi ed ombre, che con loro bellezze e intelligenza del tutto costiscuono un gran pitore. Quindi è che nelle sue opera si osserva un carattere grande d’eccezzentissimo, ed al a segno che anche le copie de' suoi quadri, sebben siano fatte da' suoi infimi scolari, hanno una armoniosa magia di colorito, di chiaroscuro perfetto, e di mirabile accordo del tutto assieme [The style of Solimena is based on the good design of the Cavalier Lanfranco and Cavalier Calabrese, from which more than all he observed the most perfect light and shade, and in the beautiful coloring that of the great Luca Giordano, and in the beautiful ideas of folds of clothing he observed the celebrated Carlo Maratta. In his early youth he often imitated the style of his father and then with much study the beauty of Pietro da Cortona, in whose style he painted many things until the thirty-second year of his life, in which occasion he developed his proper style of rich compositions with perfect design, of charming color, and perhaps more than Giordano, of incredible study and beauty of drapery, in addition to the graceful faces, wonderful, rather marvelous in the variation of facial features in the grand compositions – a highly difficult part of painting – and in some a difficult combination of a forceful and perfect chiaroscuro with an incomparable tenderness. He then completed the selection of the locations for the movements, or rather being actions of great glory, and expression and environment, and of all the splashes of light with reflections and shadows, with such beauty and knowledge of everything that constitutes a great painter. It is in his works that one sees a most great and excellent character, and a sign that even the copies of his paintings, although they are completed by his poorest of followers, have a harmonious and colorful magic, and perfect chiaroscuro, and a marvelous accord between all the parts.]." On De Dominici’s conception of Solimena’s style and the painter’s role in the Vite, see: R. Cioffi, “Francesco Solimena e Bernardo De Dominici. Alcuni riflessioni sulle Vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architetti Napoletani e sull’ Arcadia Napoletana,” Angelo e Francesco Solimena due culture a confronto, (eds.) V. De Martini & A. Braca, Naples: 1994, pp. 119-27.
schools of painting throughout the Cinquecento and their later reinterpretations. These schools include the Tuscan-Roman school renowned for its "disegno", the Venetian school renowned for its "colore", and the Lombard school for its "grazia" and "chiaroscuro." While Solimena is characterized as bridging the regional divide between the Tuscan-Roman, Lombard, and Venetian schools, Preti is positioned as representing the Lombard school and Giordano the Venetian's – the former, to a certain degree, epitomizing the Caravaggesque tradition and the latter the Neo-Venetian tradition in Naples.

Preti's role in representing the Caravaggesque tradition was further emphasized by the biographer when he was ascribing 'Pretian qualities' to Solimena's monumental painting of the Arrival of the Ashes of St. John the Baptist for the Senate Chamber in the Palazzo Ducale, Genoa. The extant bozzetto does not reveal any likeness to a painting by Preti and it is highly unlikely that De Dominici saw the completed painting in Genoa or the bozzetto either. Nonetheless, indications that the mature Solimena reinterpreted some of Preti's compositions and assimilated his chiaroscuro and boldly designed muscular figures is exemplified by his bozzetto for the ceiling canvas of the Massacre of the Giustiniani for the same Senate chamber (fig. 35). Such linkages were sought by De Dominici to further establish Preti's role as the representative of the Caravaggesque tradition. Discussing Solimena's treatment of the Arrival, the biographer stated:

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98 The wall painting depicting the Arrival of the Ashes of St. John the Baptist along with the additional works of the Massacre of the Giustiniani for the ceiling and the other wall painting of the Disembarkment of Columbus in the West Indies were painted between 1710 and 1720 and were destroyed by a fire in 1777. 99 The bozzetto of the painting is in the collection of the Museo del Capodimonte, Naples. For a discussion of the commission and all relevant literature concerning the painting of the Massacre, see: N. Spinosa, "Massacro dei Giustiniani a Scio," Dipinti del XVIII secolo, la scuola Napoletana, (ed.) N. Spinosa, Naples: 2010, pp. 139-40.
In questo quadro fece veramente apparire quanto egli avesse studiato e profitto su l'opere del Cavalier Calabrese, dapoi ch situò avanti una barca con marinari nudi di sopra, dipinti con terribil disegno e forza di chiaroscuro ad imitazione di quel grand'uomo. Anzi che nelle fisionomie di quegli uomini grossolani vedeansi propriamente quelle di fra Mattia, cui egli ha seguitato nella grandezza dello stile, e ne' vari accidenti di lume, nell'elezione del sito, con i parti presi da quell'ammirabile pittore, moderando però alcune caricature di parti, e fisionomie spiacevoli, che nella maniera del Calabrese fan buono effetto, perciocchè son elle accompagnate da tutte l'altre parti che costituiscono la tragedia, e con ciò partoriscon le sue pitture orrore ed ammirazione ne' riguardanti; laddove quelle del Solimena essendo nobilitate, massimamente ne' volti delle donne, recano a chi le mira maraviglia e diletto, e da ciò avviene ch'egli sia definito l'epiteto del Cavalier Calabrese nobilitato, come è detto nella sua Vita.100

De Dominici began by describing Solimena's treatment and the similarities with Preti's style before critically assessing the Calabrese's art. While Solimena freely assimilates the "terribil disegno e forza di chiaroscuro", he alters "alcune caricature di parti e fisionomie spiacevoli" – which in the Calabrese's style contribute to the overall tragic effects – because he recognized their indecorousness, as exemplified by the faces of the female figures. Although De Dominici recorded that Solimena improved the figures and is therefore known as the "Cavalier Calabrese nobilitato", Ferdinando Bologna has argued the application of Pretian stylistic terminology to the artist's paintings is anachronistic because Solimena's practices were starkly different.101 Whereas Preti frequently worked alla prima, Solimena emphasized the academic model, especially after 1700 when his drawings and entire compositional strategy was founded on the rigorous practices he

100 DD, Vol. III, p. 1123: "In this painting he truly demonstrated how he had studied and profited from the works of the Cavalier Calabrese, because he positioned, before the boat with nude seamen on it – painted with "terribil disegno" and "forza di chiaroscuro" in imitation of this great man. In the physiognomy of these crude men one specifically sees clearly those of fra Mattia, whom he followed in the grand style and in numerous splashes of light, in the selection of the location, with parts close to this admirable painter – modifying, however, numerous aspects of the parts, and unpleasant facial features, which in the manner of the Calabrese create a good effect because they are accomplished by all the elements that make up a tragic painting. With these qualities, his paintings create fear and admiration among his viewers, while those of Solimena are ennobled, particularly in the faces of the women, causing marvel and delight for those who contemplate them, and from this the epithet of the Ennobled Cavalier Calabrese came to be and was defined, as is said in his Vita."

instituted in his academy. The above passage, more than anything else, was intended to establish different positions for both Preti and Solimena. Notwithstanding the merits and profitable qualities De Dominici attributes to him at the beginning of the passage, Preti was known for "fisionomie spiacevoli" while Solimena triumphed by ennobling these figures. Consequently, Preti is positioned in the camp of those painters, like Caravaggio, who were known for their fidelity to nature when representing the ignoble aspects of the human figure. Solimena, by studying Lanfranco, Preti, Giordano, and Maratta, was able to bridge the historical divide not only between regional schools but also the division between Annibale's and Caravaggio's artistic practices. The idea of bridging Vasari's divide between the Tuscan-Roman school and those of Lombardy and Venice had been achieved already in the late Cinquecento and early Seicento by such artists as Federico Barocci, the Carracci, and Giovanni Lanfranco and was later discussed by such Seicento writers as the Modenese doctor and connoisseur Francesco Scannelli (1616-63) and the Venetian printmaker and critic Marco Boschini (1613-1705). The divisions that the

103 It is important to recall that Vincenzo Giustiniani considered Annibale and Caravaggio to be of equal skill in representing historical events, despite Agucchi's, Mancini's, Baglione's, and, among others, Bellori's deep criticism of Caravaggio's practices and those of his followers. In a letter to his friend Theodor Ameyden, Giustiniani recounted how twelve styles of painting were practiced in the modern period (reprinted in: O. Bonfait, Roma 1630, il triunfo del pennello, Milan: 1994, pp. 241-42.). Noting that the twelfth method was the greatest, Giustiniani stated: "Duodecimo modo, è il più perfetto di tutti; perché è più difficile, l'unire il modo decimo con l'undecimo già detti, cioè dipingere di maniera, e con l'esempio avanti del naturale, che così dipinsero gli eccellenti pittori della classe, noti al mondo; ed ai nostri di il Caravaggio, i Carracci, e Guido Reni, ed altri tra i quali taluno ha premuto più nel naturale che nella maniera, e taluno più nella maniera che nel naturale, senza però discotarsi dall'uno, né dall'altro modo di dipingere, premendo nel buon disegno, nel vero colorito, e con dare lumi propri e very [The twelfth method is the most perfect of all, since it is the rarest and most difficult. It is the union of the tenth with the eleventh method, that is to say, to paint di maniera [painting from one's imagination] and also directly from life. In our time, this is the way that Caravaggio, the Carracci, Guido Reni, and other world-famous painters of the highest rank painted. Some of them were inclined more toward nature than the maniera and some more toward the maniera than toward nature, without however abandoning either method and emphasizing good design, true colors, and appropriate realistic lighting.]."
104 Scannelli – a doctor at the court of Francesco I Este, Duke of Modena – published the rambling Il Microcosmo della pittura (Cesena: 1657). The book largely deals with the theory and criticism of art,
artists surpassed but many of the writers reinforced, especially those of Roman heritage, certainly informed De Dominici's positioning of Preti and Solimena.

That the biographer was well versed in the preceding century's art literature can be determined from a number of facts, namely the incorporation of his *notizie* on Giordano into Baldinucci's unpublished biography of the painter and the inclusion of his completed biography of Giordano in the second edition of Bellori's *Vite de' pittori, scultori et architetti moderni* in 1728.\(^\text{105}\) In addition to Baldinucci and Bellori, De Dominici refers to other writers throughout the *Vite* including Carlo Ridolfi's 1648 *Le maraviglie dell'arte, ouero, Le vite de gl'illustri pittori veneti*, Luigi Scaramuccia's 1674 *Le finezze de' pennelli italiani*, and Carlo Cesare Malvasia's 1678 *Felsina pittrice: Vite de pittori bolognesi*. Moreover, his correspondence with the younger Baldinucci as well as his Neapolitan contemporaries verifies that the biographies of Preti and of Solimena existed in some form as early as 1725.\(^\text{106}\) Scholars have consequently determined that the *Vite* as a whole began with the biographer's initial notes on Giordano's, Preti's, and Solimena's art and each artist's role in the evolution of Neapolitan painting. What has yet to be examined is how De Dominici's vision of Preti's chiaroscuro-based naturalism and Giordano's luminous colorism do not strictly reflect both artists' stylistic tendencies, since both worked and experimented beyond the confines of the biographer's structures. Given focusing on the three schools of painting and specific works by artists belonging to those schools, including Michelangelo, Titian, Correggio, Raphael, and the Carracci. Boschini published his lengthy dialogue titled *La Carta del navigare pitoresco* (Venice: 1660) and his *Ricche minere della pittura Veneziana*, which includes a prefatory treatise summarizing his arguments from *La Carta* titled *Le Breve instruzione* (Venice: 1674). Boschini's *Breve Instruzioni* emphasized the importance of the ideal artist using *disegno*, *colore*, and *invenzione* together in order to produce the ideal work of art.


\(^\text{106}\) Bologna, 1987; Willette, 1986.
the preceding section established how and why De Dominici created a specific role for Preti in the *Vite*, the following sections discuss how the biographer's attempts to establish the Calabrese as a one-dimensional artist are easily fractured not only by himself but also by considering how he managed to discuss Preti's equally "bella, vaga, ed armoniosa maniera" without referring to these qualities in detail.

**Paintings as Practice and Composition without Style**

There are two accounts of Preti's art in De Dominici's biography of the painter. First, there is the author that praises most works and emphasizes the painter's "grande maniera", that is, his *disegno*, *chiaroscuro*, and *componimento*, and second, there are the points of view attributed to the Calabrese's Neapolitan contemporaries and successors. While the comments on Preti's art attributed to Giordano, Vaccaro, Di Maria, Solimena, and, among others, De Matteis are clearly contentious in nature, they offer both criticism and acclaim. With the exception of Solimena, the vast majority of the comments De Dominici paraphrases are critical of Preti's art, particularly the Neo-Venetian works, including the now destroyed fresco for the dome of San Domenico Soriano, Naples.\(^{107}\) The biographer's role in communicating the stylistic attributes of his Neo-Venetian works is more complex, however. On some occasions De Dominici praises Preti's style, especially

\(^{107}\) Clifton & Spike, 1989, pp. 52-53, n. 36. Given the dome was completed in 1655, Clifton and Spike have proposed that the fresco was painted in 1656, at the height of the painter's activity among the Calabrian community in Naples. De Dominici praises the frescoes, although he also paraphrases contemporary artists' strong criticisms (DD, Vol. II, pp. 645, 647). The fresco represented Christ, the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalen, and St. Catherine carrying an image of San Domenico towards heaven surrounded by other saints and singing angels. The biographer recorded that Preti executed the fresco in his "dolcissimo stile," which draws parallels with Giordano's colorism. Subsequent references to the depicted saints describe how they are "situai in difficolt, ma graziose maniere, e disegnati eccellentemente, e sono anche ammirabili alcuni vecchi santi ivi dipinti." After extensive discussions, local artists said Preti's style was "troppo dolce" since he sought to imitate "il dolce colorito usato nella gran cappella del Tesauro dall'incomparabile Domenichino." Others, noted that the Calabrese's figures were physiognomically "ignobili, e massimamente quelle delle donne, non eccettuandone nemmeno quella della Beata Vergine, alla quale non aveva dato quella speciosa bellezza che si conviene alla Gran Madre di Dio (p. 647)."
those canvases executed while he was still in Naples. When his style expressed similar qualities as Giordano's delightful colorism, the biographer adopts a new descriptive strategy. With the exception of the 1656 *St. George and the Dragon*, De Dominici began to describe Preti's paintings by outlining the compositional structure without referring to any specific stylistic qualities (fig. 26). Had he described many of the works produced during the 1660s and 1670s in significant detail, his one-dimensional perspective of the painter would have immediately fractured the overall narrative that permeates the biography and contributes to defining Preti's role in the history of Neapolitan painting. Consequently, such monumental works which the biographer certainly saw firsthand, including the 1659 *Holy Trinity with the Virgin Interceding On Behalf Of The Souls in Purgatory*, are discussed in an unanimated and frequently cursory manner (fig. 28). Yet, he also struggles with how he should describe the paintings which bridge the strong *chiaroscuro* and the Neo-Venetian colorism, including the 1656 *Christ and the Woman from Cana* (fig. 27). An analysis of the biographer's means of describing these paintings reveals how he struggled to maintain the one-dimensional conception of Preti's art without revealing the painter's truly multi-dimensional style.

*Disegno and Colore in the St. George and the Dragon*

De Dominici's description of the *St. George* is the first occasion when the biographer discusses a work in direct contrast to the contemporaneous style of Giordano. As the

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108 The *St. George* was painted as the altarpiece for the chapel of the Langue of Aragon, Catalonia, and Navarre in the Co-Cathedral of St. John (Spike, 1999, pp. 328-30). It was likely the first work Preti completed for the Knight's shrine prior to his permanent transfer to Malta in 1660 (Spike, 1998, pp. 109-111) records that the Grand Master Martin de Redin was directly involved in the commission prior to his death.). De Dominici also relates a similar story as that of the *St. George* when discussing the circa 1667 *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*, completed for the chapel of the Langue of Italy. In both cases, Preti's *colore* is characterized as a quality that is perfectly deployed but ultimately inconsistent with his overall style (see Chapter 5 for a full discussion of the *Mystic Marriage*.)
biographer's description indicates, the Calabrese's painting took his Neapolitan audience by surprise:

[Пreti] dipinse il santo guerriero […] con tal vaghezza di colore condotto che a prima veduta sembra di Luca Giordano, fatto però con studio nel disegno e nel chiaroscuro. Laonde avendo esposto il quadro in occasione d'una festa per udire ciò che avessero detto i pittori di quella maniera vaga tutta opposta all'altra sua, molti furono i pareri, e molti i discorsi che se ne fecero, e gli stessi contrarii del Cavaliere, parziali del Giordano, ingannati del colorito dissero che Luca Giordano avea voluto dimostrare il suo valore nel disegno, e nel chiaroscuro, facendo quell quadro così perfettamente disegnato e dipinto. [...] Luca Giordano fu udito con maraviglia encomiare quell'opera, confessando esser ella ottima nel disegno, bella nel mossa del cavallo, e della figura, e perfetta nel chiaroscuro.\footnote{DD, Vol. II, p. 652: "Preti painted the warrior saint […] with a manner of such charming colors that upon first sight it seems to be by Luca Giordano, depicted however with knowledge of disegno and chiaroscuro. Hence, to hear what the painters had to say of this charming manner, totally opposite his other one, he exhibited the work on an occasion of a feastday. Many impressions and debates were brought forward, and the same critics of the Cavalier, supporters of Giordano, were deceived by the color and said that Luca Giordano wanted to demonstrate his skills in disegno and chiaroscuro, making this picture so perfectly designed and painted."}

After having established himself among Neapolitan patrons with numerous Caravagggesque paintings that exhibit the "maniera forte e naturale" to which De Dominici regularly refers, the \textit{St. George} is the first fully 'Neo-Venetian' canvas that the painter produced and apparently exhibited before an audience. The bright primary hues that illuminate the figures and their vestments are set against a spacious background that is not obscured by the painter's heavy chiaroscuro. Such color and spaciousness amplifies the sense of delicacy and grace that is primarily reflected by the saint's and angels' expressions. Consequently, it is not surprising that some viewers would have been astonished and puzzled if they were told it was by Preti. Yet the description of the painting serves a greater purpose than revealing the Calabrese's ability to paint with "tal vaghezza di colore." His achievement and demonstration of stylistic versatility is overshadowed by the apparent belief that the painting was by Giordano and was executed
with the intention of demonstrating his skill with *disegno* and *chiaroscuro*. Preti is said to have deceived audiences while the thought of Giordano's achievements are emphasized, since his supporters and followers believed the painting was by him and celebrated it for its color, design, and shadowing – all qualities which made it "perfectly designed and painted." Giordano's own assessment praised the picture, but did not highlight the Calabrese's skillful and charming use of *colore* but rather his *disegno* and *chiaroscuro* – the very qualities that De Dominici emphasized time and again.

The description of and reaction to the *St. George* also introduces the readers to the *disegno* versus *colore* debate that was initiated and proliferated by Vasari's *Vite*. Given Vasari positioned Michelangelo as the greatest artist ever and the chief exponent of the artistic center of Italy, his limited discussion of Lombard, Venetian, and Southern Italian art and artists demonstrated his particular bias towards Florence and the Florentine emphasis on *disegno*, which was considered to be the foundation of all three arts.\(^{110}\)

While such a perspective was unwelcomed by the artists and writers active in other Cinquecento Italian centers, the debate did not have as much practical significance in early- and mid-seventeenth-century Rome and Naples, where artists had largely surpassed such biases and recognized the benefit of each for the purpose of enhancing a paintings' expressive potential. Writers and biographers, however, continued to exploit and reinforce such differences regardless of artistic practices, since Vasari’s original juxtaposition served as an instructive tool for differentiating between personal and regional styles. Consequently such Roman writers as Bellori and Passeri emphasized the importance of Raphael and thereby the foundational role of *disegno* and its superiority

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\(^{110}\) See my investigation of Preti's *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* in Chapter Five for a detailed discussion of the *disegno* and *colore* debate as well as its historical backdrop.
over *colore* in a hierarchy of artistic practices. This is not to say they did not praise the skilful use of *colore*, but rather that the mastery of *disegno* was the motivating factor behind Raphael and the classicist school of artists leading up to Carlo Maratta (1625-1713).

De Dominici’s entire juxtaposition of Preti and Giordano, as exemplified by the anecdote about the *St. George*, is founded on his knowledge of the *disegno* and *colore* debate. Stating that the painting demonstrated the Calabrese’s intention to paint with charming colors and that it was perceived as Giordano’s attempt to exemplify his skills as a draughtsman polarizes both artists’ practices and stylistic versatility in order to differentiate between and position them within the broader narrative De Dominici creates. In so doing, the biographer transformed Preti’s first major Neo-Venetian painting into an excursus on Giordano’s attempt to express his skill as a draughtsman and the overall perfection of the painting, which De Dominici judged according to its figural design and not Preti’s use of charming colors. Consequently, the reader is reminded of the Calabrese’s skill set, which, in turn, reinforces the narrative in the *Vite*. This descriptive technique demonstrated how the biographer dealt with the ineffable coloristic qualities in Preti’s painting. De Dominici was not the sole writer to implement such a practice. Since the rise of biography as the major historiographic genre chronicling artists and artistic styles, writers used polarities as a means of structuring their narratives. Oppositional relations not only clarify the writer’s narrative but also provide researchers with the key to understanding how and why they discuss art and artists in terms of oppositions.111

Ambiguity, the *non so che*, and the *Christ and the Woman from Cana*

The *Christ and the Woman from Cana*, painted for Don Diomede Carafa (Duke of Maddaloni), was one of Preti's first large Neapolitan canvases that exhibits a similar monumentality to his 1653 Caravaggesque *St. Nicholas of Bari* but is infused with a chromatic brilliance that signals the painter's interests in Neo-Venetian colorism (fig. 36).112 The painting, along with a number of others produced during the latter half of the 1650s, exhibits the Calabrese's ability to fuse his strong chiaroscuro with boldly illuminated and brightly colored figures positioned within an atmospheric space. In so doing, he presents his audiences with a painting that does not fit into De Dominici's simplified conception of his style. Given the painting was one of four monumental works completed in an identical style and depicting events in the life of Christ for the Duke, the biographer could not simply ignore them since Carafa had one of the larger collections of Preti's paintings in Naples. Consequently, De Dominici resorted to the conventional technique of describing an ineffable work by using ambiguous terminology. He begins with a brief outline of the composition and placement of the monumental figure of Christ reaching down towards the kneeling, benevolent, and richly-adorned Canaanite and her maid. Behind the Saviour and receding into the pictorial space are two apostles, the one turbaned and the other not. The only detailed reference to this picture focuses on how the old man behind Christ is "maravigliosamente dipinta [wonderfully painted]." He then continues:

112 See Chapter Five for a full discussion of the *St. Nicholas*. 

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La bellezza di questo quadro non è facile ad esprimere con parole, dico perché manchino a tutti gli altri quadri di Fra Mattia un vero talento, e che non sia più chiaro vita le figure rappresentate, oltre alla grazia e all'espressione superiore a tutte le altre opere del suo pennello.113

Perhaps De De Dominici was unable to easily describe this painting with words – considering it surpasses the painter's other works with their grazia and espressione – because it exists in that boundary space between the biographer's notion of Preti's Caravaggism and Giordano's Neo-Venetianism. If so, the biographer's statement that the painting cannot be clearly explained with words invokes the notion of the non so che – that special quality which implies an appealing yet ineffable and indeterminate element.

Frequently used by Early Modern writers on art, the non so che, as Philip Sohm has explained, results from contradictory, incompatible, or opposing styles.114 When writers invoke this concept they endow their subject with a certain eminence – given the implication that the subject, be it a painting or a poem, exhibits a quality that is beyond rational understanding – while also asking their readers to meditate upon the subject at hand in order to determine its meaning.

De Dominici, however, is not at an entire loss for words when he describes the painting, for he is able to state that it somehow surpasses all of Preti's other works due to

113 DD, Vol. II, p. 700: The full description of the painting reads as: "Nel quadro compagno è rappresentata la Storia della Cananea che, inginocchiata avanti il Redentore, lo prega concedergli la grazia domandata, e dietro a lei è una vecchia meravigliosamente dipinta, come dalla parte del Signore sono gli apostoli, ed in lontananza altre figure con accompagnamento di architettura mirabilmente accordata, figurandosi l'azione fuori la porta della città. La bellezza di questo quadro non è facile ad explicar con parole, dico perché manchino a tutti gli altri quadri di Fra Mattia un vero talento, e che non sia più chiaro vita le figure rappresentate, oltre alla grazia e all'espressione superiore a tutte le altre opere del suo pennello."[The story of the Canaanite is represented in the accompanying painting. The Canaanite, kneeling before the Redeemer, prays to him to concede his grace, and behind him is a marvelously painted old man. To the Lord's side are the apostles and in the deep background other figures are accompanied by wonderfully connected architecture. The action itself is positioned outside the doors of the city. The beauty of this painting is not easy to explain with words, since if all of the other pictures by Fra Mattia were painted, this one is real, and it seems that the depicted figures radiate life, beyond the grace and the superior expression to all of the other works by his brush.]"

the figures’ lifelike radiant qualities. Although the biographer is invoking the idea that there is a quality of the painting that is beyond rational discourse, he does not go on to suggest how or in what ways the figures, their actions, or the overall composition require such a description. This is where De Dominici’s invocation of the non so che differs from other writers. The biographer invokes this notion rarely throughout his biography of Preti – notable exceptions are the circa 1665 Liberation of St. Peter and the 1680-85 Martyrdom of St. Ursula – and consequently it cannot be considered as a reoccurring topos (figs. 37 & 38). Rather, its application to the Christ and the Woman from Cana exemplifies one of the occasions in which the biographer conceals the multi-dimensional nature of the Calabrese’s style in order to maintain his narrative structure. Such concealment becomes a strategic necessity for the biographer, as Preti transformed his style from the Caravaggesque tenebrism of his early Neapolitan works to the Neo-Venetianism of his later works – a style which exhibits the colorful brilliance and sotto in su compositional-elements demonstrated by Lanfranco in his Roman and Neapolitan frescoes and altarpieces, including the 1645 Sts. Peter and Gennaro Introducing Cardinal Filomarino to the Virgin (fig. 39). De Dominici’s method of stylistic concealment does not truly require the use of the non so che, for a complete shift in his description of the paintings facilitates this process instead.

115 Sohm (2001, pp. 191-92) provides a concise and critical review of how such writers as Vasari, Dolce, Mancini, Boschini, and, among others, Malvasia invoked the notion when discussing Renaissance and Baroque painters’ works.
116 DD, Vol. II, pp. 680, 705-706. De Dominici, however, offers reasons as to why the Liberation and the Martyrdom cannot be solely explained with words and therefore his use of the non so che provides his readers with an idea of some of the emotions that they may experience through his description of the stylistic and compositional features of the paintings. See Chapter Three for a detailed discussion of the Liberation of St. Peter and Spike, 1999, pp. 339-41 for the St. Ursula.
Concealing Style in the *Virgin Interceding on Behalf of the Souls in Purgatory*

Among the large number of luminous Neo-Venetian paintings Preti completed and that De Dominici mentions, the 1659 *Virgin Interceding On Behalf Of the Souls in Purgatory* was one of the first the artist painted during his initial visit to Malta.\(^{118}\) The painting would have been visible not only to De Dominici as an adolescent but also to many parishioners, since it sat above the high altar in one of the wealthiest churches in Valletta, given it ministered to the international community that inhabited the island.\(^{119}\) Like Stanzione's circa 1638 *Virgin Interceding On Behalf Of the Souls in Purgatory* for the high altar of Santa Maria dell' Anime del Purgatorio, Naples, the Calabrese's composition is structured so that the souls in purgatory grasp for the Virgin and the descending angels, as flames roar up from below (fig. 40).\(^{120}\) Preti's interpretation, however, includes the Holy Trinity of God the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit aloft in the upper register addressing the ascending Virgin who implores them for mercy. This monumental canvas with its engaging, melancholic, and benevolent figures is painted with such flair that the drama of the event is entirely masked by De Dominici's reserved description. Simply outlining the general composition, the biographer states:

Nel maggiore altare della chiesa dell'Anime del Purgatorio vedesi un gran quadro [...] ove è dipinta la Santissima Trinità e la Beata Vergine, con molti angeli e santi, che priegano per l'anime purganti, le quali fra le fiamme si veggon chieder misericordia ed in varie bellissime azioni pietose.\(^{121}\)

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\(^{118}\) Spike, 1999, pp. 303-304.

\(^{119}\) Spike, 1998, p. 129. Preti was paid an astonishing 298 scudi for the three meter high altar piece – one of the largest he ever executed and certainly the greatest sum he received for an altar painting.

\(^{120}\) Schütze & Willette, p. 204; DD, Vol. II, p. 87. See Andor Pigler's *Barockthemen*, Budapest: 1974, 3 Vols., Vol. 1, pp. 543-47, for a discussion of the extensive treatment of the theme, which included paintings by Jacopo Palma, Annibale Carracci, Guercino, and Pier Francesco Mola in Central and Northern Italy and versions by Caracciolo and Vaccaro in addition to Stanzione’s in Naples.

\(^{121}\) DD, Vol. II, p. 680: "On the high altar of the church of the Anime del Purgatorio you see a large painting [...] where the Holy Trinity with the Blessed Virgin is depicted with many angels and saints who pray for the souls in purgatory, whom, among the flames, ask for mercy in various beautiful and pious actions."
The reserved description conceals the power of the painting's true appearance. De Dominici's only reference to a stylistic element in this picture is the representation of "bellissime azzioni". By focusing specifically on the composition, the biographer conceals the multi-faceted nature of the painting's style. On the one hand, the painting is vibrant and richly colored, as exemplified by the golden and silver light carving out Christ's muscular features as it descends from the upper left to highlight the Virgin's transparent yellow veil, blue shawl, and red dress. On the other hand, the lively expressions and dynamic gestures of the figures praying and grasping heavenwards from the dark depths of the nearly flame-embroiled purgatory animate the entire painting by engaging the otherwise divine solemnity of the Virgin's intercession with Christ and God the Father. When these two aspects are combined in the overall painting, the viewers would have been faced with a powerful combination of stylistic elements that are purposefully overlooked by the biographer who simply identifies the subject, the number of figures, and addresses the nature of the composition in a cursory manner. As such, one is introduced to an early example of how De Dominici altered his descriptive technique to meet the needs of his master narrative.

With the exception of a small number of Maltese paintings, including the monumental canvas of the *Martyrdom of St. Ursula* and the 1689 *Martyrdom of St. Lawrence*, such works as the 1659 *Martyrdom of St. Catherine* for the church of Santa Caterina, Valletta, the 1667 *Conversion of Saul* for the Chapel of France in the Co-Cathedral, and the circa 1665 *Massacre of the Innocents* for the Neapolitan merchant Bernardino Corrado – all of which would have been more familiar to Italian and specifically Neapolitan eyes given their prominent locations – are summarily described or
discussed in the context of composition without referring whatsoever to style (figs. 41, 42, & 43). For example, the location of the Martyrdom of St. Catherine for the high altar of Santa Caterina is confused with the circa 1667 Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine for the Italian Langue's Chapel in the Co-Cathedral and then is referred to only as being yet another work "del nostro egregio pittore [by our excellent painter]" (fig. 44). The Calabrese's majestic Neo-Venetian depiction of the Conversion of Saul is summarily described as being "egregiamente dipinto [excellently painted]." In both cases, his artistic excellence is referred to by simply associating each painting with an amorphous and entirely concealed concept of Preti's skills as a painter known not for his Neo-Venetian style but his disegno and chiaroscuro. De Dominici's treatment of the Massacre of the Innocents is the most telling example of concealment, however. The biographer describes the painting as follows:

In casa del Marchese di Grazia è la Strage de' santi fanciulli innocenti di bella inventione, perciocché sono figurati di prima veduta e principali molti corpi trucidati di quei bambini, ed una madre che fugge tenendo stretto al seno un putto per involarlo alle barbarie de' manigoldi; altra infelice madre piange dirotta il suo, svenato da quei crudeli ministri, e in lontananza sopra di un portico è rappresentato l'uccisione di altri santi innocenti con varie ingegnose azioni, e il tutto è accordato con nobilissima architettura messa in buona perspettiva.

Other than the references to the foreground mothers' actions and emotional responses as well as the background figures' actions, one is left without understanding how the picture is painted and truly appears. De Dominici's description provides his readers with the

122 DD, Vol. II, p. 679; see Spike, 1999, pp. 115-16, 332-33, for details concerning the St. Lawrence and the Conversion of Saul and Chapter Three below for a comprehensive discussion of the Massacre.
124 Ibid., p. 701: "The massacre of the innocents is in the house of the Marchese di Grazia and is a great invention because there are represented in the foreground principally many slaughtered bodies of the babies. A mother who flees holds tight to her breast a boy to sneak him away from the barbarism of villains. Another unhappy mother mourns for her child, cruelly bled by those soldiers, and in the distance above a portico the murder of other saintly innocents is represented by various ingenious actions, and everything is arranged with noble architecture put together in good perspective."
modern equivalent of a black and white photograph when one is discussing a picture that is dominated by yellow, orange, red, ocher, and golden hues. As in his description of the *Virgin Interceding On Behalf Of the Souls in Purgatory*, the biographer outlines the composition and hints towards its monumental nature by referring to the "bella inventione" and "ingnegnose azioni." Nonetheless, the painting is stripped away from the descriptive equation at the expense of emphasizing the composition. One is not even provided with an idea as to how intense Preti’s *chiaroscuro* might be or whether or not his figures are designed and delineated in such a manner as to demonstrate his prowess in *disegno*. Just as the painting is depicted with warm hues, De Dominici's description is cool and reserved – stripping, thereby, the Calabrese of both his reputation as a great designer of compositions while simultaneously concealing his ability to produce grandiose and colorful paintings.

The biographer's descriptions of the *St. George*, the *Christ and the Woman from Cana*, the *Virgin Interceding on Behalf of the Souls in Purgatory*, and the *Massacre of the Innocents* adopt a system based on inversion, ambiguity, and concealment as a means of maintaining a narrative centered around the concept of a painter who is known for three skills: *disegno*, *chiaroscuro*, and *componimento*. These skills are not exclusive to Preti’s Caravaggesque or tenebroso paintings, including such works as the 1653 *St. Nicholas of Bari* or the circa 1656 *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew* discussed in Part Two. Rather, the use of *disegno*, *chiaroscuro*, and *componimento* is equally important when designing paintings that are more colorful and atmospheric in nature as opposed to deeply shadowed. Nonetheless, he could not be a master of both *disegno* and *colore* because that role was reserved for Solimena and his unification of the two dominant pictorial modes in
Naples. As such, the latter half of De Dominici’s biography of Preti is filled with numerous descriptions of paintings and an eloquent void of stylistic perspectives. Indeed, the comprehensive summary of pictures completed for Neapolitan and other Italian collectors between circa 1655 and 1675 that fills the final quarter of the biography is impressive rather in its breadth than in its depth of analysis, for many significant works including the 1668 *Feast of Absalom* and the 1673 *Canonization of St. Catherine of Siena* are listed only by name or by their brief descriptions.\(^{125}\) In order to better understand the multi-dimensional nature of Preti’s paintings between the early 1650s and late 1670s – arguably the Calabrese’s most experimental years – Part Two will examine the painter's pictorial and compositional evolution as represented in a number of selected private and public works.

\(^{125}\) Both the *Feast of Absalom* and the *Canonization of St. Catherine of Siena* are discussed in Part Two.
Fig. 26. Preti, *St. George and the Dragon*, Co-Cathedral of St. John, Valletta, c. 1656.
Fig. 27. Preti, *Christ and the Woman from Cana*, Staatsgalerie, Stuttgardt, 1656.
Fig. 28. Preti, *Holy Trinity with the Virgin Interceding on behalf of the Souls in Purgatory*, Church of All Souls, Valletta, 1659.
Fig. 29. Guercino, *Burial and Assumption of St. Petronilla*, Pinacoteca Capitolina, Rome, 1623.
Fig. 30. Preti, *Miracle of St. Pantaleone*, Private Collection, c. 1640s.

Fig. 31. Preti, *Entrance of St. Peter Celestine and Charles II of Anjou into Aquila*, San Pietro a Maiella, Naples, 1657-59.
Fig. 32. Preti, *Elevation St. Catherine*, San Pietro a Maiella, Naples, 1657-59.

Fig. 33. Preti, *The Life of St. John the Baptist*, Co-Cathedral of St. John, Valletta, 1661-66.
Fig. 34. Preti, *Martyrdom of St Catherine*, Church of St. Catherine’s, Valletta, 1659.

Fig. 35. Francesco Solimena, *Massacre of the Giustiniani*, Museo del Capodimonte, Naples, 1710-20.
Fig. 36. Preti, *St. Nicholas of Bari in Glory*, Capodimonte, 1653.
Fig. 37. Preti, *Liberation of St. Peter*, Akademie der Bildenden Kunst, Vienna, c. 1665.

Fig. 38. Preti, *Martyrdom of St. Ursula*, Church of St. Ursula’s, Valletta, c. 1680-85.
Fig. 39. Preti, *Sts. Peter and Gennaro Introducing Cardinal Filomarino to the Virgin*, Capodimonte, 1645.
Fig. 40. Massimo Stanzione, *Virgin Interceding on Behalf of the Souls in Purgatory*, Santa Maria delle Anime del Purgatorio, Naples, c. 1638.

Fig. 41. Preti, *Martyrdom of St. Lawrence*, Collegiate Church, Birgu, Malta, 1689.
Fig. 42. Preti, *Conversion of Saul*, Chapel of France, Co-Cathedral of St. John, Valletta, 1667.

Fig. 43. Preti, *Massacre of the Innocents*, Private Collection, c. 1665.
Fig. 44. Preti, *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*, Chapel of Italy, Co-Cathedral of St. John, Valletta, c. 1667.
Chapter 4

Martyrdoms, Massacres, and Liberations: Preti’s *Gran Maniera* and Paintings for the Neapolitan *Mecenati*

The most prominent Neapolitan painters consistently depicted a small number of subjects such as the Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew, the Massacre of the Innocents, and the Liberation of St. Peter.\(^{126}\) While such subjects as the Judgment of Solomon, the Inspiration of St. Jerome, the Martyrdom of St. Sebastian, and the Adoration of the Kings were also regularly represented, the former subjects received particular attention.\(^{127}\) Such subjects as the Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew and the Liberation of St. Peter were particularly popular among Caravaggesque painters while the Massacre of the Innocents was more broadly represented and could be linked to Seicento depictions of saints interceding on behalf of the plague-ridden.\(^{128}\) Preti depicted the Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew at least ten times, the Massacre of the Innocents only once, and the Liberation of St. Peter at least six times. The purpose of this chapter is not to conduct a statistical review of the Calabrese's representations of the above subjects, however. Rather, its purpose is to establish how his interpretations of them reflect an approach to

\(^{126}\) Pigler (*Barockthemen*, Vol. 1, pp. 253-60) demonstrated that the Massacre of the Innocents was one of the most frequently represented subjects dating from Raphael to Tintoretto to Annibale Carracci and throughout the Seicento with examples not only by Guido Reni and Peter Paul Rubens but also leading up to Giovanni Battista Gaulli (Baciccio).

\(^{127}\) For a breakdown of subject matter and the number of times it was depicted – as recorded in Seicento inventories – see, G. Labrot, *Collections of Paintings in Naples, 1600-1750*, Munich & New York: 1992, pp. 581-83, and for a pictorial history see, N. Spinosa, *La pittura Napoletana del ’600*, Milan: 1984 as well as Spinosa’s *Pittura Napoletana dal barocco al rococo*, Naples: 1988, for a continuation of the iconographic history and the transition from the work of the late Giordano and Solimena to mid-Settecento Solimenismo and painting during De Dominici’s final years.

\(^{128}\) Pigler, Vol. 1, pp. 497-99. Examples include paintings by such prominent artists as Guido Reni, Francesco Albani, Guercino, Carlo Maratti, and Baciccio.
depicting the idea of the “terrible” (as characterized by De Dominici) and to what extent his paintings vary from the conventions developed by such painters as Caracciolo, Ribera, Cavallino, Stanzione, Vaccaro, and, among others, Giordano, with whom the Calabrese's pictures would have been directly compared. Instead of analyzing all of his pictures of the above stories, this chapter concentrates on three specific works that exemplify the unique nature of Preti’s interpretations while also examining how his stylistic 'fluctuation' between the early 1650s and late 1660s informed these representations and their perception. The three paintings are the Museo Nazionale, Aquila, Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew (c. 1656), the Massacre of the Innocents (c. 1665) now in a private collection, and the Liberation of St. Peter (c. 1665), currently in the Akademie der Bildenden Kunst, Vienna (figs. 45, 43, & 37).129

The Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew

According to De Dominici, Preti depicted a Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew along with a painting of the Four Evangelists shortly after his arrival in Naples for Don Antonio Caputo (figs. 45 & 46).130 As recounted by the biographer, Don Antonio appreciated these paintings so much that he invited friends, dilettantes, and other artists to admire "la grandezza della maniera" and "il perfetto disegno" exemplified in these works. The provenance of the St. Bartholomew now in the Museo Nazionale, along with the pendant painting of Job Visited by His Friends, can be traced back to the collection of Carlo Garofalo in Naples and later made its way into the Dragonetti-Capelli collection in

Aquila (figs. 47).\textsuperscript{131} Notwithstanding discussions about its original patron, the painting dates from Preti’s mid-Neapolitan career, likely sometime around 1656.\textsuperscript{132} The painter completed at least three versions of the subject while in Naples, including one documented in the Vandeneynden collection as part of a series which also included pictures of the \textit{Martyrdom of St. Peter} and the \textit{Martyrdom of St. Paul}. Another version is recorded in the Corsini family collection as of 1750 and likely dates from the 1650s as well (figs. 48 & 49).\textsuperscript{133} These paintings will serve as the primary points of comparison, given their relative temporal proximity to the Aquila painting and similarities in compositional design.

Recounted in Jacobus de Voragine's \textit{Golden Legend} (c. 1260), St. Bartholomew's martyrdom resulted from offending Astyages, the brother of the King of Greater Armenia. Having travelled to India with the Gospel of St. Matthew and converted the natives, cured the sick, and cast down idols, Bartholomew moved on to Armenia where

\begin{footnotes}

\textsuperscript{132} Despite Mariani's proposal that the painting was executed in Malta – given its similarity to the central figure in the lunette painting of \textit{Martyrdom of St. Lawrence} in the Chapel of the Langue of Aragon, Catalonia and Navarre – Refice Taschetta and Utili both suggest the painting dates from the Neapolitan period, however, neither goes into detail as to why. The Neapolitan dating has conventionally been suggested because De Dominici noted that it was one of the first paintings Preti executed upon arriving in the city. Notwithstanding the documentary evidence that indicates other paintings were completed first, the design of the arms and body and shading of the figures of St. Bartholomew and the bottom left executioner are consistent with the figures of St. John in the Palermo \textit{Four Evangelists} and the Capodimonte \textit{St. John the Baptist} (c. 1653) while also containing a similar lighting and background as the Toronto \textit{St. Paul the Hermit} (c. 1655-56), among other Neapolitan paintings (see Utili, 1999, pp. 140-43.)

\end{footnotes}
he succeeded at similar efforts, with the exception of Astyages who disapproved of the
destruction of pagan idols and conversion to Christianity. The saint was, subsequently,
condemned to death by being flayed alive.¹³⁴ Like such subjects as the Martyrdom of St.
Sebastian, the Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew was given special attention in Italian
Baroque painting, primarily because of his role as an apostle but even more so because he
was an Early Christian martyr whose death came at the hands of a pagan ruler. The
emphasis on the torture and martyrdom of the earliest Christians was directly related to
the rediscovery of the Roman catacombs and the study of Early Christian paintings
among such post-Tridentine scholars as Cardinal Cesare Baronio (1538-1607) –
renowned for his martyrology entitled the Annales Ecclesiastici, published between 1588
and 1613. There is no indication that Preti was a particularly learned artist, however. His
knowledge of the subject and the manner in which it should be represented was likely
based on conventional representations of the scene rather than familiarity with
hagiographical sources.

While the precise circumstances of Preti’s commission cannot be definitively
established, the central concern here is how his "doloroso componimento esprimeva assai

¹³⁴ J. De Voragine, The Golden Legend, (ed. & trans.) W.G. Ryan, Princeton: 1993, 2 Vols., Vol. 2, p. 112-13. There are different stories about Bartholomew’s death according to Voragine. The primary story which he describes in detail reads as follows: "He [King Aystages] ordered the apostle to be beaten with clubs and flayed alive." Following this account, Voragine notes that St. Dorotheus stated: "Bartholomew preached to the people of India. He also gave them the gospel according to Matthew written in their own language. He died in Albana, a city of Greater Armenia, being crucified head downward." He then records St. Theodore's description of Bartholomew's martyrdom, which states that the saint was flayed alive. Given the disparity between the stories of his death, Voragine concludes that "this disagreement can be resolved by saying that he was crucified, then, before he died, taken down and, to intensify his suffering, flayed alive, and finally had his head cut off." Notwithstanding the textual complications, painters, as early as the fourteenth century, were appealed by the graphic violence underscoring the martyrdom. It was not until the naturalism of the Renaissance was fully operative that artists began to exploit the most gruesome aspects of the martyrdom, which was the most frequently depicted event ("Bartolomeo, apostolo, santo," Bibliotheca Sanctorum: Enciclopedia dei Santi, Rome: Istituto Giovanni XXIII della Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1961-70, 13 Vols., Vol. 2, 1962, pp. 864-65, 877. The Bibliotheca Sanctorum is hereafter referred to as BS.).
bene la tragedia del di lui martirio" and achieved the "grandezza della maniera" which De Dominici emphasised in his description.¹³⁵ A careful analysis of the painting will also aid in understanding the biographer's perception of the artist's style as well as what compelled secular and sacred patrons in Naples to favour the painter. The Aquila St. Bartholomew is designed along a strong horizontal plane that accentuates the figures who occupy the foreground (fig. 45). The saint's life-size legs, torso, and arms are positioned in such a manner that they have a sense of dynamic motion, which is created by diagonal axes. These axes run from Bartholomew's legs, torso, and head on the one axis and from his right to left arm on the other. Running from the bottom left to the upper right and from the lower right to the upper center, these axes cross along the saint's chest. By extending the figure's limbs, as such, Preti created a sense of dynamic grandeur, which is aided by the characters' life-size scale. The viewers are also subtly invited to participate in the composition via the forward reaching left arm that descends towards the dog and third torturer brandishing a blade. The "doloroso" quality of the painting that inspires the work's "terribile" nature is furthered by the flaying of the extended left leg and that of the elevated right arm – both of which provide the spectator with a clear view of the torturers' peeling Bartholomew's skin back from his limbs. Among the numerous figures that populate the scene, the centrally-placed torturer plays a central role by gazing out towards the viewer as he peels the saint's skin back. In so doing, Preti approximates the effects Ribera achieved in his circa 1630 painting of the same subject where the left-hand executioner pulls Bartholomew's legs downwards so as to emphasize the flaying (fig.

Like Ribera, he depicted his central torturer in a similar manner by dressing him with the same ragged clothes and white headband while also positioning him so he directly engages the audience with an unswerving stare. Despite the similar angular descent of Bartholomew's body in Preti's and the Spaniard's pictures, the former artist emphasizes the flaying by broadening his illumination of the pictorial space in order to fully reveal the gruesome removal of the saint's skin, which is concealed by the heavy *chiaroscuro* in the latter's.

As in the Calabrese's Corsini version, Bartholomew's torso, arms, and face are brightly illuminated in order to convey the pain from which the saint is suffering. The Corsini painting, however, focuses the viewer's attention directly on the saint and his suffering by cropping the composition and arranging it vertically so that the torturers can

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136 On Ribera's painting, now in the Palazzo Pitti, Florence, see: A.E. Pérez-Sánchez, "The Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew" *Jusepe de Ribera, 1591-1652*, (eds.) A.E. Pérez-Sánchez & N. Spinosa, New York: 1992, pp. 84-86; N. Spinosa, *Ribera, l'opera completa*, Naples: 2003, p. 269. Ribera's influence on the development of the iconography of the Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew in early- and mid-Seicento Naples cannot be over emphasized. The painter completed at least nine versions between 1620 and 1650. His influence, however, was not limited to his painted works, for he also produced a number of prints and drawings that were highly influential, most notably his 1624 engraving of the subject and a subsequent drawing that is undoubtedly linked to Giordano's earliest interpretation of the story, which will be discussed below (figs. 51, 52, & 53). In the context of Preti's three versions, Ribera's 1634 *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew*, at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, may have been a source for Preti's Corsini version, given the almost identical positioning of the figure (fig. 54). The most noteworthy difference is the elevated positioning of the saint found in Preti's interpretation of the subject.

137 Nonetheless, the description of the Aquila painting does not compare in graphic effect to Ribera's version, which, as the biographer describes, takes into account the naturalism of Caravaggio in order to depict every detail of the flayed human body: "Così dunque Giuseppe accoppiando alla fierezza del Caravaggio lo scelto del naturale, ed il bel colore della scuola lombarda, ne compose la maniera che fu sua propria; e fa veramente maraviglia il veder come col suo impasto così denso di colore egli facesse girare non solamente i muscoli del corpo umano, ma eziando le parti minute dell'ossa delle mani e de' piedi, i quali si veggono finiti con diligenza e maestria inarrivabile. Laonde così fondato nel disegno, nel colore, e nel naturale più nobile, espose con occasione [...] un quadro [...] che rappresentava un San Bartolomeo scorticato, ove nella persona del santo espresso una divota costanza, e in quella de' carnefici la perfidia e la crudeltà [Thus Jusepe, matching the valiant nature of Caravaggio, chose the naturalism and the beautiful color of the Lombard school, which was the way he created his own style. It's truly marvelous to see how, with the mix of his dense coloring, he did not just move the muscles of the human body, but also the small parts of the bone in the hands and feet, which are seen finished with diligence and unmatched skill. Founded in *disegno*, *colore*, and the most noble nature, he, thus, exhibited on an occasion [...] a painting [...] that represented a flayed St. Bartholomew, where the person of the saint expressed a devout constancy and wickedness and cruelty in the executioners.] (DD, Vol. II, p. 11)."
barely be seen along the sides and in the background. Such a compositional design places the audiences' attention on the saint's passions as opposed to the actions that are causing them. This is not to say that the figure in the Aquila version does not communicate the same sense of emotion. Rather, Preti expands the scene so as to demonstrate how the affections represented in the tightly cropped picture can be amplified by orienting the composition horizontally and representing the physical act of the flaying, executed in plain sight for the spectators. When comparing the Aquila and Corsini paintings one finds that there are three linkages: the first is the silver light that shines down upon Bartholomew's face, which illuminates the flayed right arm and his impassioned expression; the second is the ordering of the figure within the pictorial space so that his limbs push against the frame; and third, both represent the saint from the left-hand side with an elevated right hand and descending left hand. The combination of these features activates the saints' suffering, which is downplayed, instead, in the contemporaneous version for Ferdinand Vandeneynden, now in the Currier Gallery of Art (fig. 48). Like many Caravaggesque painters that depict martyrdoms – almost all of whom consistently employed the angular light descending from the upper left – Preti strategically employs the light in these paintings so as to represent God's intercession and the saint's subsequent ascension into heaven. The conventional presence of an angel descending with the martyrs' palm frond, often introduced by contemporary painters working in Rome, is substituted here by the bright illumination towards which Bartholomew looks.  

138 Two Roman examples with which Preti would have been familiar include Domenichino's circa 1612 fresco of the Martyrdom of St. Cecilia in the Polet Chapel in San Luigi dei Francesi and Pietro da Cortona's 1646 Martyrdom of St. Lawrence on the high altar of San Lorenzo in Miranda (figs. 55 & 56).
Among Preti’s most renowned versions of the subject (all completed between 1653 and 1660), each picture is executed according to a different compositional format. Notwithstanding these changes, he does not deviate from depicting life-size figures. While maintaining the scale of his figures, he experimented with how the scene could be depicted via the repositioning of the protagonists. The Aquila picture, for example, stands out because he includes a clearly defined architectural element which does not interfere with the narrative of the story or distract the viewer from the physical act of the saint's torture and martyrdom. The expansive background in the Aquila painting could have easily been filled with structures that alluded to the narrative behind Bartholomew's martyrdom, as one can see in the picture for Vandeneynden. Like Ribera's circa 1630 St. Bartholomew, the Vandeneynden painting includes symbolic elements related to the saint's acts and death. Ribera, for example, depicted the remnants of a marble sculpture in the foreground that Bartholomew had cast down. Preti, similarly, alluded to these circumstances by using an amorphous architectural backdrop that is clearly topped by monumental sculpture, referring to the idols that the saint cast down while he was spreading Christianity. The absence of such a central narrative element in the Aquila picture does not affect its ability to communicate the storyline or its theatricality. Rather, the storyline and theatricality of many of Preti's martyrdom scenes is communicated by his strategic use of lighting as well as the foregrounding of the protagonists.

The Calabrese's understanding of Caravaggio's achievements in representing personages that are meant to be seen as inhabiting the real world and not existing behind the pictorial plane is demonstrated by the figures' scale, their presentation in the foreground, and depiction from the waist up. The notion that a picture's protagonists
should be depicted in life-size and should have real presence in the sense of figural relief ("rilievo") was a perspective that preceded Caravaggio's compositional experiments and promotion of half-length figures. Nonetheless, Caravaggio's experiments with such paintings as the *Supper at Emmaus* at the National Gallery, London, and the *Betrayal of Christ* at the National Gallery, Dublin, served as central examples for the generation of artists that reinterpreted and emphasized the affective power of half-length figures in a sharply-illuminated and heavily-shadowed pictorial space (figs. 57 & 58). In so doing, painters targeted their viewers by employing a representational system that broke with the notion of the bounded image and forced the viewers to conceive of the personages as if they were placed within their own vicinity. De Dominici saw such a representational system at work in Preti's paintings. Like his Caravaggesque predecessors, the Calabrese's overall style with its "forza così terribile" and "perfettissimo chiaroscuro" was not only effective in its projection of the figures into the viewers' vicinity but was, according to the biographer, particularly suited for representing tragic subjects because of the painter's ability to design impassioned compositions.

Given the tragic nature of Bartholomew's martyrdom, a "doloroso componimento" was not only needed but was frequently emphasized by Preti's Neapolitan predecessors and contemporaries. As noted, no other painter was as influential as Ribera in the development of the iconographic standard for depictions of the story. Despite the similarities between the Calabrese's figures of Bartholomew and the torturer, Ribera's many paintings of the subject were not as influential on Preti's representations of pain.

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140 Ibid., p. 153.
Although the Spaniard's iconography played a significant role in Cavallino's, Salvator Rosa's, and Giordano's interpretations of the subject, Vaccaro, like Preti, produced one of the most unique compositions (figs. 59, 60, 61, & 62). Vaccaro's painting, like the Aquila picture, is structured according to a strong horizontal format, although his figures are tightly cropped and forced into the foreground in such a fashion that it emphasizes the protagonists actions in a wholly new manner.\textsuperscript{141} Given the painting was completed between 1630 and 1635, Ribera's early pictures can be seen as the potential sources for Vaccaro's disturbing interpretation, particularly if one compares the torturer ripping Bartholomew's chest open with similar details in the Spaniard's Galleria Pallavicini and Osuña paintings from the early 1620s (figs. 63 & 64).\textsuperscript{142} Vaccaro's depiction of the narrow incision being torn open is, however, far more aggressive in nature than the torturers' actions in Preti's Aquila painting, which incorporates elements of Ribera's 1624 engraving of the subject (fig. 52). Ribera's 1624 print, which was widely circulated and copied throughout the Seicento by Northern artists traveling to Italy, certainly influenced the Calabrese's interpretation. With the exception of the Pallavicini and Osuña paintings, the Spaniard frequently concealed the skin being torn away and the exposed bloody limbs by placing the knife or the incision behind one of Bartholomew's arms and legs or by shading his composition in such a manner that the blade and limbs of the saint are not brightly illuminated so as to spotlight the red blood and pink flesh. Preti was not concerned with exposing the saint's arms and depicting the swathes of flesh being torn


\textsuperscript{142} Spinosa, 2003, pp. 50, 260.
away – albeit in a gentle fashion when compared to Vaccaro's approach – since such exposure magnified the "doloroso" nature of the subject.

The concise flaying and removal of the saint's skin in the Aquila painting can also be seen as a reinterpretation of Roman and Neapolitan depictions of Apollo Flaying Marsyas – a subject popularized by Titian's circa 1570s painting and depicted by a number of Baroque painters, including Manfredi, Guercino, Reni, and Ribera (figs. 65, 66, 67, & 68). Ribera, like his contemporaries, only magnified the details of a figure being flayed in such subjects as Apollo flaying Marsyas or those of Tityus or Prometheus being devoured by an eagle. The savage and potentially indecorous representation of Bartholomew only appears in the 1624 print. Although decorum was always an issue for large-scale religious paintings, Preti's patrons were evidently willing to question its limits, as the Calabrese adapted the fully flayed arm and dangling flesh in Ribera's print for his Aquila painting. In so doing, he depicted the morbid aspects, which had previously been most graphically expressed in prints. However, concealing the most visually anguishing actions in depictions of Bartholomew's martyrdom continued in Naples throughout the century, as did the practice of amplifying the torturous nature of such scenes as Apollo flaying Marsyas. Giordano's numerous paintings of the mythological subject, for example, demonstrate how only in his final versions did he adopt and clearly illuminate the element of dangling skin evident in Ribera's print and

143 Pigler, Vol. II, pp. 31-34.
144 Ibid., pp. 223-25. Prometheus Bound was equally popular as Apollo flaying Marsyas, as is demonstrated by a wide-ranging number of paintings, including those by Titian, Luca Cambiaso, Jacopo Palma, Annibale, Reni, Pietro Testa, Salvator Rosa, and Rubens.
Preti’s painting (figs. 69, 70, 71, 72, & 73). The 1695 Escorial painting of *Apollo and Marsyas* moves away from the conventional slicing open of the satyr’s skin in favor of depicting the fully flayed arm, carving knife, and dangling skin that was visualized in the Spaniard’s print and Preti’s Aquila painting of Bartholomew.

The positioning of Bartholomew in Ribera’s print was the central compositional element that was assimilated by artists in early- and mid-Seicento Naples. As such, the iconographic history demonstrates that the graphic depiction of physical torture was ancillary to maintaining a level of decorum. For example, Cavallino’s circa 1635-40 painting rotates Ribera’s saint leftward so that the figure is in profile and his flaying is not in full view, although one can see the small knife of the torturer held against the saint’s left wrist while his flesh is being pulled away. The profile perspective, the spot-lit body, the extension of the saint’s legs towards the lower right, and positioning of the second torturer – placed on the center-right pulling the rope that binds Bartholomew’s legs – distracts the audience from fully focusing on the flaying. In addition, the multiple onlookers, including a self-portrait of the artist as a soldier on the far left, and architectural elements contribute to the composition by distracting the viewer from the most gruesome aspects of the event. Rosa’s representation of the subject, similarly, disguises the flaying by depicting the torturers stretching the saint’s legs downward and pulling his arms upward. The physical action that they exert becomes the central focus of

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145 Although the early versions reveal torn flesh, clearly exemplified by the Museo Bandini painting, the gruesome nature of the flaying is not fully revealed because the flesh is positioned alongside deep shadows as opposed to the illuminated background evident in the Escorial painting.


the narrative as opposed to the flaying of the saint. Rosa's painting, like Giordano's from the early 1650s, alludes to Bartholomew's subsequent ascension to heaven by including softly painted angels in the background sky. His interpretation of the narrative, as such, steps over the monstrous event of the flaying by emphasizing the action that preceded the flaying and the saint's subsequent ascension. Giordano's early painting alludes to the gruesome nature of the subject by depicting the executioner with his blade in hand (fig. 61).\(^{148}\) Bartholomew's heavenward focus on the descending angel with crown and palm frond, likewise, move the viewer beyond the sight of incised knives, dangling skin, and the exposed flesh – the very elements that refer to saint's passions and those that distinguished Preti's painting from other Baroque interpretations of the subject. The inversion of iconographic conventions in the Calabrese's Aquila picture sets it apart from those of his peers. Such a process is similarly replicated in his *Massacre of the Innocents*, which, for numerous reasons, is unparalleled among Seicento depictions of the subject.

**The Massacre of the Innocents**

After events in the life of Christ and scenes of early Christian martyrs, the Massacre of the Innocents, as noted, was one of the most frequently and broadly depicted subjects in Baroque Italy. Besides the historical significance of the subject – the account of King Herod ordering his troops to massacre every baby in Jerusalem upon hearing of a forthcoming Savior (Matthew 2: 16-18) – the story was represented in numerous ways. Nonetheless, the vast number of depictions emphasized the murderous intentions of the King through the vicious actions of his soldiers. While the gruesome nature of the subject contributed to its popularity, the publication of Gian Battista Marino's *La Strage degli* 

Innocenti – printed posthumously in 1632 – certainly enhanced its appeal among artists and patrons. Circulated throughout Naples in manuscript form during the final year of the poet's life (1624-25), the poem would have been known among the painters who were closely associated with the members of the Accademia degli Oziosi. The generation of painters who came of age during the late 1620s and throughout the 1630s were the ones who demonstrated the myriad number of ways in which this brief yet biblically significant passage could be depicted. Preti had, upon arriving in Naples, numerous examples from which he could develop his interpretation, including those by Stanzione, Cavallino, Pacecco de Rosa, Nicolò De Simone, Vaccaro, and Giordano (figs. 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, & 79). In addition to interpretations by these artists, the Calabrese was undoubtedly acquainted with Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving after Raphael's drawing, Tintoretto's 1585 painting for the Scuola Grande di San Marco, such important Bolognese and Roman precedents as Reni's 1611 version for the Berò Chapel in the church of San Domenico, Bologna, and Poussin's circa 1630 painting for Vincenzo Giustiniani, as well as Rubens' circa 1636 monumental picture (figs. 80, 81, 82, 83, & 84). This preliminary summary demonstrates the extensive iconographic tradition from which the Calabrese developed his unique design.


150 Paintings by other notable artists include those by Domenico Gargiulo and Giacomo Farelli. This list, however, is not a comprehensive summary of all of the paintings depicting this subject completed by Neapolitan artist during the middle of the century.

151 Pietro Testa's picture in the Galleria Spada from the 1630s is another significant Baroque painting that may have contributed to Preti's interpretation.
According to De Dominici, Preti's *Massacre of the Innocents* was in the collection of the Marchese di Grazia – likely Pietro de Castro Figueroa, Marchese di Grazia Reale (c. 1735) – but conforms in size to a painting of the same subject recorded in the collection of Bernardino Corrado in 1671 and Pompilio Gagliano (heir to the Corrado estate) in 1699.\(^\text{152}\) The Corrado inventory notes that the painting was the pendant picture to a *Christ Handing the Keys to St. Peter*, which is now in a private collection in Palermo (figs. 43 & 85).\(^\text{153}\) Stylistically, scholars have dated the painting to the mid-1660s, likely around 1663-65, given the Neo-Venetian coloring consistent with other early Maltese paintings, including the circa 1667 *Assumption of the Virgin* and the ceiling paintings for the nave of the Co-Cathedral of St. John (figs. 86, 87, & 88).\(^\text{154}\) Unlike the *Christ Handing the Keys*, however, the Massacre's composition is unprecedented. The organization of the figures, the actions, the reactions, and the architectural backdrop are worked together in such a manner that Preti's configuration of the event breaks with the nearly two-hundred-year-old convention of foregrounding the Massacre with a greater or fewer number of characters.

The painting is organized so that the foreground is dominated by the wounded, bleeding, and trampled bodies of Bethlehem's babies along with two mothers elevating their children in the lower left. With tears running down her face, the foremost mother picks up her wounded baby revealing the large puncture in her child's stomach. The other mother elevates her baby to her breast and frightfully looks rightward, fearing that the soldier on the right-hand side may cross the pile of slaughtered babies and attack them.

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\(^\text{152}\) For brief biographies of Bernardino Corrado and Pompilio Gagliano as well as a list of the contents of their inventories, see: Labrot, pp. 120-23, 196-201.
This soldier is preoccupied as he attempts to grasp the shoulder of another who frantically turns away from his raised sword. The mid-ground is largely unpopulated with the exception of the right-hand side where mothers hurriedly lower their children from the elevated piazza above. These actions seem to be the only examples of those who may actually save their children, since there is no indication that the mother elevating her child to her breast in the foreground is carrying a living baby. Preti’s definitive break with iconographic conventions is exemplified by his placement of the massacre itself in the background, which is populated by murderous soldiers, struggling mothers, and dying babies. According to pictorial conventions, the actions depicted in the background should be represented in the foreground so as to directly engage the viewer by revealing the remorselessness of the soldiers’ actions and the traumatized expressions of the fleeing mothers. Likewise, the figure of King Herod perched upon the balcony in the left mid-ground directing his soldiers to murder the children is similarly unique to Preti’s interpretation.

De Dominici does not provide a lengthy description and analysis of the painting but does provide some idea of how it may have been interpreted by noting Preti’s "bella invenzione" – a judgment that was substantiated because of the presence of "molti corpi trucidati" in the foreground. He continues by stating:

Una madre che fugge tenendo stretto al seno un putto per involarlo alle barbarie de' manigoldi; altra infelice madre piange dirottamente il suo, svenato da quei crudeli ministri, e in lontanza sopra di un portico è rappresentato l'uccisione di altri santi innocenti con varie ingegnose azioni, e il tutto è accordato con nobilissima architettura messa in buona prospettiva.  

155 DD, Vol. II, p. 701: "A mother who flees holding tightly to her breast a child to take away from the barbarism of the soldiers. Another unhappy mother cries ceaselessly on her child, stabbed by those cruel mercenaries, and in the distance the murder of other saintly innocents is represented above a portico with various ingenious actions and all of it is arranged with noble architecture and positioned in proper perspective."
It is important to note that the biographer singled out the "varie ingegnose azioni", since these actions are consistent with the all-encompassing masses of struggling figures that can be found in Tintoretto's, Rubens' and Pacecco's paintings of the subject. Taken as a whole, however, the entire picture, including the intertwined masses struggling in the background and the piled corpses in the foreground, breaks with the preceding Italian Baroque iconography – established to a significant degree by the interpretation of Marc Antonio Raimondi's print and Reni's and Poussin's paintings. The only motifs that Preti borrowed from other painters are the centrally-placed soldier in the background holding down a mother and the mothers in the mid-ground lowering their children to safety. On the one hand, the soldier suppressing the mother with his left arm and raising his blade with his right is a direct reversal of the same group that can be found in Stanzione's circa 1632 painting. Stanzione does not position this figure type in a mass of struggling men, women, and children. Rather, the painter isolates him so as to maximize the affective power of the soldier thrusting his blade downward, much in the manner of a similar figure in Reni's painting. On the other hand, Preti reinterprets elements of Tintoretto's painting, which similarly includes a mother lowering her child as others struggle above and behind her. In addition, his representation of the heap of dead babies in the foreground derives from depictions of rotting bodies as seen in Peste scenes – when piles of corpses are depicted one on top of the other awaiting incineration. Preti was already an expert at painting the bloated and dead bodies of the babies and other figures, since he

156 Schütze (Schütze & Willette, pp. 100, 105) argues that Reni's version played a significant role in Stanzione's formulation of the scene, however, one cannot forget Poussin's role as well, since the Neapolitan interpretation is an ideal synthesis of the figurative elements emphasized by Reni and Poussin, particularly in the latter's 1630 painting.
had executed several Peste scenes while working in Rome and frescoed the seven city gates of Naples with ex-voto images depicting rotting corpses piled one on top of the other before they were dragged away (figs. 89 & 90).\textsuperscript{157}

It should be noted that Seicento pictorial conventions dictated that the figures be either engaged in a single struggle – as seen in Poussin's, Stanzione's, and Testa's versions – or grouped as an ensemble in which all of the living figures were massed and depicted in the foreground while the dead and trampled babies were peppered throughout this mix – as exemplified by Reni's, Rubens', Cavallino's, Pacecco's, and, among others, Vaccaro's pictures. The massing of soldiers, mothers, and babies intertwined together and struggling to complete their actions along a horizontal plane is, by and large, consistent with the iconography of the subject in Naples. For example, Vaccaro's, Pacecco's, De Simone's, and Giacomo Farelli's interpretations of the subject juxtapose the violent actions in the foreground so that the soldiers, mothers, and struggling and slaughtered babies are intertwined (figs. 76, 77, 78, & 91). Preti's composition stands out in comparison to these two dominant modes of representation. Among Neapolitan artists, however, the configuration of Stanzione's and Cavallino's pictures provide the greatest grounds for demonstrating the Calabrese's compositional achievement. The former reduces his subject to a four figure composition with one dominant character and the

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\textsuperscript{157} Preti depicted at least nine scenes featuring dead and pest-ridden corpses prior to executing the \textit{Massacre}. While his two Peste scenes from the early 1640s (Spike, 1999, p. 176; Utili, 1999, pp. 106-107) may have been inspired by Poussin's 1630 \textit{Peste of Ashdod}, the commission to fresco the seven city gates with scenes of San Gennaro, San Francesco Xaverio, and Santa Rosalia interceding on behalf of the plague-ridden citizens of Naples during the 1656 plague provided Preti with the opportunity to visualize the atrocious and sickly effects. (On the commission, the extant \textit{bozzetti}, and the plague itself, see J. Clifton, "Mattia Preti’s Frescoes for the City Gates of Naples," \textit{The Art Bulletin}, Vol. 76, No. 3, pp. 479-501). Paintings of Peste scenes became more prevalent throughout the late Cinquecento and during the Seicento and perhaps nowhere else than Naples where a number of painters depicted the crudest aspects of daily life and the consequences of the plague itself, as dead bodies were dragged, piled, and burnt in the \textit{Piazza Marcatello} and outside the city gates.
latter spreads the massacre out so that it occurs throughout the foreground and mid-ground, where mothers struggle up the steps escaping the carnage below and before them. The Calabrese’s compositional design demonstrates an attempt to assimilate aspects of the two dominant typologies. He includes the dynamism of the intertwined figures along a strong horizontal plane in the background while emphasizing the results of the carnage in the foreground by piling the dead corpses one on top of the other beside the two prominent mothers. In so doing, he depicts two points in the story's temporal development so that the results of the carnage occurring in the background are fully reflected in the tortured corpses that appear in the foreground. Such a structure breaks with the conventional means of narrating a story, as it was exemplified by Raphael's 1512 fresco of the Fire in the Borgo (Vatican Apartments) and most coherently expressed by such painters as Annibale, Domenichino, and Poussin during the early- and mid-Seicento.158

158 Since the time of Alberti, artists and writers came to understand that paintings should chronicle significant historical subjects. It went without saying that paintings did not depict an isolated moment but rather a point along an historical continuum. Fundamental to history painting was the notion that there are both past and future episodes connected to that which is depicted. The first means of narration resulted from the rediscovery, critical interpretation, and application of Aristotle's Poetics and Vitruvius' treatise on architecture to painting. Artists' pictorial interpretations of their theories formed the basis of architecturally structured pictorial fields populated by many figures. Such a format communicated temporal events by using individual groups of figures to symbolize the different episodes in the unfolding narrative, thereby communicating the preceding cause, the present effect, and the future resolution of the circumstances. This mode, which can be titled the "theater stage format," was popularized by Raphael and reaffirmed in frescoes and canvas paintings by Domenichino and Poussin (c.f. K. Badt, "Raphael's Incendio Del Borgo,": The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, Vol. 22, No. 1.5, 1959, p. 43, 52; Unglaub, pp. 172-75).

The second means of narration depicted one episode within a longer narrative in the foreground while including one or more preceding or succeeding episodes in the background. Veronese, among other Renaissance painters, implemented this strategy in several historical and mythological paintings. This means of composition can be titled "perspectival multiplicity," since separate events were depicted according to a hierarchy of pictorial planes (c.f. D. Rosand, "Theater and Structure in the Art of Paolo Veronese," Painting in Cinquecento Venice, New Haven: 1982, pp. 173-76). The third means of narration, which can be titled "symbolic narrative", focused on depicting the climactic episode in a highly charged manner and in a tightly framed environment with a limited number of figures. In such compositions, artists amplified the gestures of one individual so that their action would serve as a temporal symbol of events in the past and those that will follow in the future. Caravaggio's gallery paintings, for example, demonstrate
Conventionally, painters designed their compositions so that the viewer could move from one side of a painting to the other and see actions or emotional states of being that alluded to past events before moving on to observe the present events and then the actions that foreshadow that which will occur in the future. Preti reorients this means of narration by having the viewers consider the future outcome of the massacre before they move into the pictorial space and see the events transpiring in the background, which were commonly depicted in the foreground so as to emphasize the present action. Instead, his interpretation provides a means of reading the narrative backwards so that the viewer begins by observing the concluding event before moving back into the past to observe the massacre itself, which, as demonstrated, was repeatedly depicted throughout the foreground. It is this notion of backward reading that distinguishes Preti's painting from all others. While every painter provided a unique interpretation of the subject by rearranging the figures and depicting it according to their particular style, the Calabrese broke with conventions and restructured the entire means by which a viewer reads a painting. Ultimately, his composition emphasizes to a greater degree the virtuous death of this type of narrative mode (c.f. L. Pericolo, "Visualizing Appearance and Disappearance: On Caravaggio's Supper at Emmaus," The Art Bulletin, Vol. 79, No. 3, 2007, p. 532).

Artists utilizing these modes of narration were particularly concerned with activating a potentially static space. Consequently, the theater stage, the perspectival multiplicity, and the symbolic narrative formats resulted from artists' attempts to come to terms with the notion that paintings should communicate temporal developments. These strategies were uniquely deployed since the artists implementing them often adhered to subjects that effectively expressed their preferred means of narration. Annibale's painting of Perseus Confronting Phineus with the Head of Medusa from the Galleria Farnese (D. Posner, Annibale Carracci, A Study in the Reform of Italian Painting around 1590, London: 1971, 2 Vols., Vol. 2, pp. 139-40 (Vol. 2), 123-25 (Vol. 1) is an early precedent for many Seicento narrative paintings that focus on the transformative aspect of the subject matter, since Perseus' holds the head of Medusa so that Phineus and his cohorts are transformed into stone as the narrative progresses. Giordano's 1680 and Ricci's 1705 paintings take Annibale's explicit reference to Phineus's transformation to a new level by reorienting the composition so that the physical transformation is depicted with greater subtlety, as the living figures with colorful skin slowly transition to become grey sculptures (figs. 92, 93, & 94).
the innocent babies – the first Christian martyrs – instead of highlighting the actions of
the cruel tyrant and his soldiers that brought about their deaths.

His composition, then, cannot be directly linked to Marino's poem since the
painter does not represent the "pregnant image of the soldier crushing the child
underfoot", as Poussin's or Stanzione's paintings have. The crushing of a child was a
motif that was repeated either directly or indirectly in almost every painting produced
during the early- and mid-Seicento. Direct examples of the stance of the soldier include
Rubens' circa 1611, Poussin's circa 1630, Testa's circa 1630s, and Giordano's circa 1670s
pictures (figs. 95, 83, 96, & 79). The peppering of dead babies – who may at any moment
be crushed by the forceful step of a soldier – throughout the foreground plane of the
paintings by almost every other Seicento artist alludes to this motif but allows the
audience to piece together the possibility of such an occurrence. Since the Massacre is
only a minor episode in the Gospel of Matthew, painters could be flexible when it came
to representing the subject and, like writers, were challenged to explore potential
combinations of the soldiers' violent actions, the beautiful mothers' defensive and
sorrowful reactions, and the overall sense of tragic pathos that the subject inspired.

Given the depiction of gruesome soldiers alongside beautiful maidens – a juxtaposition
rarely seen in religious imagery – many paintings can be interpreted by considering them
alongside Marino's poem of the same subject, given the emphasis the poet placed on the
overall barbarism of the attacking soldiers, the soldier crushing a child with his foot, and
the beautiful mothers. Preti's painting defies such an analysis at first because there is only

159 E. Cropper, "Marino's 'Strage degli innocenti', Poussin, Rubens, and Guido Reni," Studi Secenteschi,
one passage that connects his interpretation with the poem. The passage – which does not contain the "pregnant" element of the murders – from the *Strage degli Innocenti* that is strikingly similar to the Calabrese's painting describes the mourning and tearful mother and her dead baby. Marino describes this emotional state as such:

La madre il prende e se l'accoglie al petto  
Peso che già le piace e or l'aggrava,  
E i freddi spiriti e 'l volto pallidetto  
Con lacrime di cor riscalda e lava.  
Ella sì nel sembiante e ne l'aspetto  
A l'estinato fanciullo egual sembrava,  
Che distinguera lui mal si potea,  
Se non forse però ch'ella piangea.\(^{161}\)

Unlike his peers and predecessors, Preti clearly expressed the content of this passage via the depiction of the mothers in the foreground, the one taking her child and bringing him to her breast and the other – "Ella sì nel sembiante e ne l'aspetto" – who is tearful and haggard like her dead baby. Given the many editions of the poem published between 1632 and 1675, it is highly unlikely that the Calabrese did not know Marino's poem first hand and was simply introduced to the subject through his knowledge of paintings, drawings, and prints. The similarity between Marino's description of the mothers and Preti's conception of them in his narrative is too strong to argue that the painter was unaware of the contents of the poem. Yet, his representation does not reflect the same level of intertextuality visible in Poussin's, Testa's, and Giordano's paintings.

Unlike the above painters' interpretations, the Calabrese's picture conceals his repertoire of visual precedents, as has already been sketched out and will be further

\(^{161}\) G. B. Marino, *La Dicerie Sacre e la Strage degli Innocenti*, (ed.) G. Pozzi, Turin: 1960, Vol. III, p. 547: "The mother took him and clasped him in her breast/ A weight that once pleased her is now a burden./ With his cold state and pallid little face/ She warms up and washes with tears from the heart./ In her countenance and in her appearance/ She so resembled her dead child/ That she could hardly be distinguished from him/ Except perhaps for the fact that she was weeping."
addressed below. It is instructive to consider how Poussin's, Testa's, and Giordano's paintings differ from Preti's, however. His concealment is in direct opposition to what was described as Poussin's "reflective understanding of the poem." The same might be said for Testa's and Giordano's approaches, for both painters produced images that clearly demonstrate both their knowledge of the details of the poem and their familiarity with iconographic precedents. Considering Testa's friendship with Poussin, he would have certainly known the French painter's version executed for Vincenzo Giustiniani. Between his familiarity with Renaissance conventions and Poussin's painting, his decision to depict the same climatic point as the Frenchman did, but with greater brutality – when, as Marino wrote, a soldier steps on a baby while fending off the mother and attempting to drive his blade through the child – demonstrates a similar reflective approach to composing the painting. Giordano's painting can similarly be read as a reflection upon the poem and Rubens' circa 1636 picture (figs. 79 & 84). Like Rubens, Giordano depicts both mothers protecting their children by twisting away from the bare-chested muscular soldiers while others savagely tear at the soldiers' faces and limbs in order to fend off the carnage that is occurring around them. His painting, unlike Poussin's and Testa's,

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162 Cropper, 1992, p. 147. Cropper argues that the graphic details of Marino's narrative did not attract artists, given the long-standing iconographic history. They were, instead, attracted by the poet's "unique combination of lyrical beauty with tragic horror – qualities they combined with the visual history (p. 149)." Despite Poussin's suppression of the most horrific scene, as described by Marino in detail, other painters were more than willing to depict the blades piercing the babies while blood spilled out of their corpses – see, for example, Testa's, Stanzone's, Pacecco's, and Giordano's. I suggest that a broader assessment of depictions of the subject during the mid-Seicento would demonstrate that artists were attracted by the details of Marino's violent narrative and such violence could not be extricated in order to simply focus on the combination of "lyrical beauty with tragic horror." Considering the following passage in conjunction with the severity of some depictions of the Massacre could serve as a point a departure: "Da sublime Palagio Erode mira/ De la strage crudel l’orrida scena;/ Lo stuol, ch’infellonito il ferro gira,/ Altri sbrana, altri pesta ed altri svena./ Trafitta nel figliuol piange e sospira/ E dimostra ogni madre amara pena;/ Lasciata il re crudel l’eccelsa reggia,/ Su gl’innocenti uccisi empio passeggia [From a lofty palace Herod watches/ The horrible scene of the cruel massacre;/ The felonious gang, brandishing the iron,/ Rends some, crushes others, and bleeds still others./ Each mother, torn with her infant, weeps and sighs./ And displays a bitter grief;/ The cruel king, having left the royal palace,/ Walks ungodly over the slaughtered innocents] (Marino, III)."
certainly benefited from the widespread circulation of Paulus Pontius' 1643 engraving after Rubens' painting (fig. 97).\(^{163}\) Despite the emphasis on the mothers' reactions and the piled corpses of punctured babies, Preti's interpretation does not exclude the carnage that is vividly portrayed by the vast majority of artists. As noted, he positions the struggling mothers and savage soldiers in the background. In so doing, he does not eliminate the spectator's opportunity to consider the carnage that dominates both Roman and Neapolitan representations and Marino's verses. Rather, the massacre is carefully framed by positioning the carnage along a central plane that is bordered by steps on the left and columns on the right. Additionally, the Neo-Venetian yellow, orange, and ochre hues that dominate the sky and open space easily allows Preti to allude to the golden-haired mother to which Marino refers when he states "*che l'aureo crin s'ha intorno al braccio avolto.*"\(^{164}\) This combination of the mothers and corpses in the foreground and the centrally framed massacre in the background distinguishes the Calabrese's version from the vast majority of the paintings completed by other artists, who, by and large, design their pictures by reflecting on a long iconographic history while also interpreting the "tragic horror and lyrical beauty" of Marino's poem. At the same time though, Preti's references to iconographic precedents and Marino's verses contribute to the overall "terribilità" of the painting.


\(^{164}\) Marino, III, p. 547: "Una ve n'ha, che del bel fianco ignudo,/ Misera! E del bel petto e del bel volto,/ Come può meglio, al caro sua fa scudo,/ Né soffrir sa, che le sia morto e tolto,/ Ma le sta sovra uom minaccioso e crudo,/ Che l'aureo crin s'ha intorno al braccio avolto,/ E del crespo e fin or le bionde pompe/ A scossa a scossa le divelle e rompe [There was one that had a beautiful naked side/ Poor one! And with beautiful breast and beautiful face/ As best she could made a shield for her dear one,/ Nor is she enduring that her dear one shall be dead or taken away./ But over her stood a threatening and cruel man/ Who had wrapped her golden hair around his arm/ And the curling and fine gold of her blonde splendor/ with jerk after jerk he is uprooting and braking.]."
The final aspect of Preti’s *Massacre* that needs to be considered is how the image – like so many others from the Neapolitan period – reflects the pictorial qualities that were "così terribile" and demonstrated "il terribile della tragedia" that De Dominici used to describe his style.\(^\text{165}\) According to the biographer, these qualities were generally communicated by the depiction of life-size figures, the forcefulness of their actions, their expressions, and the theatrical role they played in the overall composition. It is also important to note that such a quality as "terribilità" and its derivative "terribile" are also intertwined with the spectator's reaction to the emotional tenor of a painting. The awe-inspiring or "terribile" nature of a work, for example, has an irreversible impact on the audience. Thus, De Dominici's use of the term "terribile" is directly linked to the affective power of Preti's paintings. Through the figures' scale and their actions and reactions, the viewer is led towards the frightening and awe-inspiring quality demonstrated by the "molti corpi trucidati" seen in the *Massacre of the Innocents*. But the Calabrese, unlike so many other painters, uses corpses to convey the monumental quality instead of life-size soldiers struggling in the foreground.

Despite De Dominici's limited description of the *Massacre*, his overall emphasis on the painter's forceful style provides the grounds for reading the painting as a "terribile tragedia." Beyond the expressive force represented by the corpses and tearful and fearful mothers, the actions of the executioners in the background provide the context for a sub-reading of the painting's affective force. If we compare Preti's interpretation of the subject and his use of specific figure types with Stanzione's and Vaccaro's paintings, one can understand how a viewer with a comprehensive knowledge of Neapolitan painting would

have perceived these characters and their actions as being "terribile" (figs. 74 & 78). The central figure of the executioner in Stanzione's painting is nothing but "terribile" in nature, given his aggressive gestures and demeanor as he raises his blade above a struggling mother and child. Just as the crouching soldier in the center background with his dagger raised reinterprets Stanzione's figure by rotating him leftwards, the left-hand soldier in Preti's scene – holding the child high in the air while a mother struggles to save her baby – reinterprets Vaccaro's centrally placed executioner, who, likewise, raises the child high in the same manner. Like Stanzione's soldier, Vaccaro's figure magnifies not only the "terribilità" of the subject depicted, but all of the qualities that constitute a "terribile" figure – that is, scale, action, and demeanor. The embellished thrust of the baby skywards enhances the intensity of the action while the impassioned mother struggles with the soldier. This action contains the necessary emotional tenor to engage the audience. Preti's interpretation includes the very same actions with the exception of rotating the mother's position from the right side of the soldier to his left. The Calabrese's figure similarly benefits from the position in which he has been placed in comparison to the architectural space that surrounds him. In addition to using a strong source of illumination, Vaccaro use the edges of the building to emphasize his soldier's position and gesture. Preti's placement of his figure at the very end of the elevated piazza isolates and highlights the soldier so the audience can fully distinguish his role. Positioning and posture are vital here, since the soldier is in the deep background and is not as prominently placed and sharply lit as Vaccaro's figure. De Dominici's statement that Preti depicted "varie ignegnose azioni" among the figures in the background accurately

characterizes the aggressive actions of the soldiers and confirms that the painting contains similarly powerful qualities as those found in preceding paintings. Nonetheless, the picture is far more complex than the biographer would have us believe, given Preti's experiments with narrative structure and the painting's relation to Marino's poem. Like the complexities of the Massacre, the Liberation of St. Peter contains more than a general ability to amaze its viewers.

The Liberation of St. Peter

The Liberation of St. Peter was particularly popular among Caravaggesque painters in Naples with paintings by Caracciolo, Ribera, Pacecco, Francesco Guarino, Cavallino, Pietro Novelli, and Giordano. Artists hailing from Emilia and Rome as well as the Low Countries including Domenichino, Francesco Albani, Guercino, and Pier Francesco Mola and Hendrick ter Brugghen and Gerrit van Honthorst, respectively, also represented the subject during the first half of the seventeenth century (figs. 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, & 105). Preti would have undoubtedly been familiar with a number of these works, since he spent his formative years in Rome. The Calabrese, while treating the subject at least five times throughout his career, produced his largest version (181 x 301 cm) around 1665 for the relatives of the Commendatore Parisi, in whose inventory the painting was listed in 1742 (fig. 37). Recounted in Acts (12: 6-8), the story accounts for Peter's escape from prison before King Herod could execute him. The night before Peter's trial, an angel miraculously appeared in his cell – flanked by sleeping soldiers and sentries – intending to free him prior to his execution. The subject required a limited number of

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168 For the relevant literature on the painting, see: Spike, 1999, p. 335; Utili, 1999, p. 184.
figures and allowed for innovative compositional adjustments. As such, the central actions of the angel appearing, the guards sleeping, and Peter escaping provided artists with the opportunity to dramatize the story by using sweeping gestures and brilliant light. Such an opportunity was not lost among painters interested in Caravaggio's *chiaroscuro*. Extant versions of the subject by Southern and Northern Baroque painters emphasize three compositional structures that derive from the Lombard's achievements: First, depicting the sharply illuminated Peter and the angel alone while much of the remaining space is partially or completely hidden in the shadows; second, depicting the saint and the angel in a brilliantly illuminated cell, which reveals the room in which Peter is incarcerated; and third, depicting the saint as he emerges from the cell and flees along with his liberator past the sleeping guards.

Preti's 1665 painting incorporates all of the details of the biblical account. Unlike the versions by many of his predecessors and contemporaries, he was able to insert references to each point in the narrative ranging from the incarceration, to the bright light that illuminates the cell upon the arrival of the angel, the sleeping guards and sentries, and Peter's subsequent escape. His interpretation exemplifies an ability to focus the viewer's attention on a monumentally-depicted single-figure while also communicating the roles of the ancillary participants in the narrative. De Dominici does not communicate the complexity of the Calabrese's composition and narrative strategy, although the biographer provides his most extensive description of a painting while discussing the *Liberation*. Moving around the composition while also analyzing its style, the picture was carefully described as follows:
Questo quadro [...] rappresenta san Pietro che dall'angelo vien liberato dalla prigione, e son le figure alla grandezza del natural, ma insino al ginocchio. [...] Succede a questa la figura [il soldato armato] di san Pietro che vien guidato dall'angelo ed ha nella mano sinistra le chiavi, e la destra stende verso gli spettatori in atto di maraviglia. Bellissima è la figura dell'angelo, che nella bianca veste riceve tutto il lume maggiore, che si diffonde nella figura di san Pietro e termina nel soldato che dorme, essendo dipinto questo quadro a lume mancino. [...] La bellezza e bontà di questo quadro è inespicabile, laonde dirò solo, per non istancare più lungamente il lettore, che egli è dipinto sulla vera maniera, e con le proprie tinte del Guercin da Cento, e con una espressione, e con un rilievo mirabile, sicché sembra di mano di quel gran maestro, e per ultimo dico ch'egli è lo stupore di chiunque lo mira.  

While this description delves into greater detail than others, the arguments that follow focus on the representational aspects he did not discuss. That is, how Preti’s compositional strategy demonstrates his understanding of how narrative techniques can be deployed with the highest degree of effectiveness. By comparing and contrasting the Vienna painting with his 1650-55 Liberation of St. Peter, in the Gemäldegalerie, Dresden, and those by Caracciolo, Guercino, Ribera, and Giordano, the Calabrese’s compositional strategy will be considered in the context of an ever-shifting spectrum (fig. 106). The above artists' paintings provide a range of examples of how one could interpret the subject by focusing on specific details, or by emphasizing individual parts of the narrative, or by representing the progression of the story as a whole.

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169 DD, Vol. II, pp. 705-706: "This painting [...] represents St. Peter who through the angel came to be liberated from prison. The figures are life-size, but only seen from the knees. [...] Passing this figure [the sleeping and armed soldier], that of St. Peter, who came to be guided by the angel, has in his left hand the keys and extends his right towards the spectators in a marvelous action. The figure of the angel, who, in the white vest is beautiful, receives the majority of the light. This canvas, being painted with a leftwards light spreads itself over the figure of St. Peter and ends at the sleeping soldier. [...] The beautiful and excellent qualities of this painting are inexplicable, therefore, I only say, to not bore the reader further, that it is painted according to the true maniera and with the colors proper to Guercino, and with an expressiveness, and with a marvelous relief, such that it seems to be by the hand of this great master, and lastly I say that it is astonishing for whomever looks upon it."

Preti’s Vienna St. Peter unites form and content in such a manner that there is little he has left out of the painting when it is compared with the biblical account. For example, the biblical narrative describes the presence of four guards (two soldiers and two sentries), a sharp leftward light that enters the cell, the angel's miraculous appearance and invitation to escape, and Peter and his deliverer's flight past the guards and out of the prison. His painting includes all of these elements with the exception of reducing the number of guards from four to three and depicting the apostle already unshackled. Despite these minor exclusions, the painter's remarkable faithfulness to the narrative is amplified by his pictorial strategies that dramatize the event while also explaining the broader temporal development of the story. That is, the lighting of the figures, their actions and expressions, and the space in which they are represented come together to provide a fluid account of Peter's imprisonment, the angel's arrival, and their subsequent escape. Beginning with the lighting, one immediately notices the strong and descending "lume mancino" that illuminates the angel, the apostle, the sleeping guards, and the architectonic walls of the prison. What isn't immediately noticeable is the descending frontal light that illuminates the scene ever so subtly so as to fully outline the figures' positions as well as the space in which they are placed. This secondary light does not function in the same manner as the hidden or partially exposed internal source of illumination frequently used by the Northern Caravaggisti, as is exemplified by Honthorst's 1615-16 Denial of St. Peter, in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes, and Matthias Stomer's 1630-32 Arrest of Christ, in the National Gallery, Ottawa (figs. 108 & 109).¹⁷¹ Had Preti relied solely upon the descending leftward source of illumination the

¹⁷¹ On the Honthorst Denial and the Stomer Arrest, respectively, see: G. Papi, Gherardo delle notti, Gerrit
brilliant appearance of the leftward guard's shining armor would not be visible nor would
the leftward wall against which the background guards lean. By using both descending
frontal and leftward lighting, the Calabrese emphasizes Peter's position at the center of a
vector established by the two points of illumination. In addition, the rightward descent of
the vector provides the viewer with a sense of spatial depth by indicating where the left-
hand receding wall meets the background wall. The subtlety of the frontal lighting is also
exemplified by the strong shadow that remains in the cell's doorway. Likewise, the
foreground column at the right-hand side of the composition receives no light
whatsoever, thereby providing the audience with a foreground barrier that signifies the
exit through which the apostle and the angel will flee.

The action in the picture squarely rests on the figure of Peter and the angel beside
him. Despite the monumental figure of the sleeping guard in the left foreground, the saint
retains the most significant position in the composition. This is due to his direct
engagement with the viewer through eye contact as well as his sweeping motion
rightward – amplified by the tilt of his head and his blue and yellow robe – and extended
arms, which De Dominici noted by singling out its movement "verso gli spettatori in atto
di maraviglia." The descent of the leftward light also contributes to the dynamic nature of
Peter's actions, since the illumination carves his head, torso, and arms along with the
sculptural nature of the yellow drapery out from the background and surrounding figures.
A sense of Peter's thrust rightward is, likewise, provided by the frontal light as well as the
angular recession of the left-hand wall along with its defining shadow. Beyond the
similarly bold motion of the saint's thrusting left arm – clasping the key to his cell – the

*Honthorst in Italia*, Soncino: 1999, pp. 77, 137-38; B. Nicholson, "Stomer Brought up to Date," *The
angel subtly, but nonetheless soberly, pulls Peter rightward with his right hand and gestures invitingly with his left hand. These gestures do not have the same sense of marvelous action that De Dominici ascribes to Peter, despite of the angel's apparent beauty. This is one area in which Preti's contemporaries placed greater emphasis, for Domenichino's, Ribera's, and Giordano's paintings represent the angel with curly golden locks and delicate features, which endow the figure with a greater sense of "vaghezza" than the "espressione" and "rilievo mirabile" that De Dominici attributes to the Calabrese's angel. Indeed, the "rilievo" of the painting – particularly that of the figure of Peter and his angelic companion – endows it with the same sense of "terribilità" that is generally characteristic of Preti's style and which was boldly visualized by the presence and scale of the protagonists in the *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew*.

The spatial setting is the final element that contributes to the Calabrese's communication of the temporal narrative. Peter's motion rightward plays a significant role in communicating movement, however, without the proper setting such movement is not clearly communicated. Preti's decision to broadly illuminate his setting while maintaining a strong but not obfuscating differentiation between light and shade facilitates the audiences' perception of the narrative as a whole. This distinguishes it from many preceding and contemporaneous representations of the subject. The architectonic setting strongly supports the narration of the event, as it is indicated by the figures' actions and reactions, and immediately places the painting in the category of the "theater-stage format" of pictorial narration – albeit, in a much more compressed manner than that favored by Raphael, Domenichino, or Poussin. The Calabrese's painting has three clearly defined spaces in which the different episodes in the narrative occur. These spaces
include the shaded cell on the left-hand side, the central space in which the guards, St. Peter, and the angel are positioned, and the doorway through which the illumination enters the stage and towards which the saint and his companion move. The shaded doorway of the cell represents the starting point in the narrative when the imprisoned saint is awakened by the sharp light that enters from the right-hand side. The central space in which all of the figures are placed serves as the present temporal point in the narrative. And the illuminated space to the right into which the angel already moves signifies the future episode when the saint emerges from prison and reunites with his fellow apostles.

A greater understanding of the temporal development is achieved when the spectator considers the three spaces or locations of temporal episodes in conjunction with the placement of the figures and Peter's and the angel's actions. For example, the central space in which the present action occurs contains figures and objects that – through their positioning – allude to specific temporal points. The leftward decline of the foreground and mid-ground guards are complemented by the leftward decline of their spears and axes, which – while necessarily positioned against the wall for support – enhances the general indication leftward towards the cell from which the saint emerged. Peter's motion rightward is deceiving, for he is also tilting back towards the cell. The angular tilt of the spears and the guards’ reclining postures complements the apostle's conflicted movement, thereby amplifying the idea that he emerged from the dark space and is moving across the pictorial plane. The backward tilt of his head and body is therefore juxtaposed with the forward movement of his arms – providing the viewer with a sense of both the past and the future. The emphasis placed on Peter was not solely done to communicate his central
role in the action, since the manner in which he is illuminated and the gravity of his
gestures demonstrate how he was also designed to facilitate the temporal development of
the narrative. By illuminating the scene with a strong leftward light that reveals the
rectangular bricks out of which the prison is constructed, Preti was able to emphasize the
apostle's rightward movement since his motion is complemented by multiple horizontal
lines between each level of brick. Similarly, the angular recession of the bricks into the
background and the corresponding division between light and shade enhance the apostle's
leftward tilt and the appearance of the two guards and their weapons. Lastly, the right-
hand column in the foreground provides a subtle but necessary barrier because it frames
the pictorial space while also indicating the next location or temporal point into which
Peter's flight will take him. While not immediately noticeable, this column plays an
important role since the angel's left wing is already behind it. As such, it references to the
next episode in the narrative while the audiences’ attention is still focused on the present
central space and point in time.

In comparison to Preti's Dresden version, the Vienna painting provides a more
cohesive composition since it deals with the central details of the biblical narrative
without focusing on a single point only. The Dresden painting depicts two sleeping
guards in the foreground while an angel flies above and directs Peter – seen in the left
mid-ground facing the viewer – to flee into the streets. This painting compresses the
entire biblical narrative into the single point when Peter emerges from the gates of the
prison.\textsuperscript{172} There is no reference to the strong light that illuminated the saint's cell nor are

\textsuperscript{172} On the Dresden painting, which Spike attributes to Preti, see: Spike, 1999, p. 380; M. Minozzi, "La
in my mind that the painting is by Preti, since Peter's gestures are characteristic of the painter as is the
there explicit indications as to where Peter is fleeing – something about which he seems reluctant, given the static position in which he is placed and the uncertain look upon his face. The Vienna painting, by contrast, provides no sense of doubt from where the apostle has come and as to where he is going, since Preti clearly comprehended that a more cohesive composition was central to communicating the narrative. His Vienna painting does not leave the audience asking where Peter might go next, as one does in the Dresden painting, given the open yet largely shadowed background. Nonetheless, the Dresden painting does demonstrate the beginning of the painter's evolution away from the frequently static compositions that are exemplified by Caracciolo's, Guercino's, Ribera's, and Giordano's interpretations of the subject. As such, a consideration of the Vienna painting in conjunction with Caracciolo's 1615, Guercino's 1622, Ribera's 1639, and Giordano's circa 1660 representations will shed light on why the Calabrese's work caused "Io stupore di chiunque lo mira." \(^{173}\)

Caracciolo's painting for the Neapolitan church of the Pio Monte della Misericordia – placed alongside Caravaggio's renowned 1606 *Seven Acts of Mercy* – employs a similarly sharp *chiaroscuro* that almost entirely obscures the pictorial space. The central figure of Peter and the angel passing four sleeping guards, one of whom is prominently placed in the foreground, are the only figures that are illuminated (figs. 98 &

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\(^{173}\) Guercino is a notable exception, which I have included since De Dominici not only refers to the painter's influence throughout the biography but even in Preti's execution of the Vienna painting itself.
His picture was the first monumental interpretation of the subject undertaken by a Neapolitan Baroque painter. Given its location beside Caravaggio's prominent painting, the artist undoubtedly felt a need to produce a composition that rivaled the Lombard's. While Caracciolo's opportunity to experiment was restricted by the fact that he was painting an altarpiece (which required a specific format and degree of decorum) as opposed to the liberty afforded when producing a gallery picture, the Liberation demonstrates his typical approach to compositional design. The figures appear to be frozen in time as opposed to aggressively moving away from the prison. The vertical orientation of the altarpiece understandably limited the space in which the painter could represent the entire story, which was more amenable to a composition that could space the figures out across a horizontal pictorial plane in order to achieve the temporal development communicated by the Vienna painting. This is not to say that Caracciolo's painting does not demonstrate action, for Peter is clearly moving leftwards. The apostle's reflection downwards – demonstrating a sense of apprehension and almost fear – halts the motion leftwards (as does the angel's indecisive expression) and thereby creates the static quality that defines his composition. Peter's placement in the mid-ground as opposed to


175 While De Dominici does not discuss the Liberation in his biography of the painter, referring to a lost painting of the Baptism of Christ, the biographer states the following with respect to Caracciolo's adoption of Caravaggio's style: "Veduto questo quadro in quel tempo che tutti correvano dietro l'orme del Caravaggio, piaque oltre modo, tutto che la figura del Cristo e del San Giovanni più per facchini che nobili [...]; come ancora, servendosi dello stesso grossolano modello per natural, come ben si conosce da chi è pratico delle nostre arti, inciampò nello stesso errore allorché volle effiggiare que' spiriti celestiali [...]; benché ne' loro volti abbia cercato di dargli più aria nobile di quella sola dare alle sue figure, o mondane, o divine, il suo nuovo maestro Michelangelo [One saw this painting at the time that everyone followed after the footsteps of Caravaggio, favored over others, so much so that the figure of Christ and of St. John appear more like porters than noblemen [...]; as again, using nature as the same crude model, as is well known by those skilled in our art, he fell into the same mistake when depicting the heavenly spirits [...]; Although in their faces he sought to give them more noble expression than those his new master Michelangelo gave to his figures, worldly or divine.] (DD, Vol. I, p. 972)."
the foreground also limited the painter's ability to convey the sort of transitional actions exemplified by Preti's apostle. The heavy shadow, while paralleling Caravaggio's, entirely obscures the setting of the event. This eliminates the painter's option of using props and architecture as a means of communicating other details of the narrative. Caracciolo's painting, however, does, by comparison with subsequent interpretations, focus on the apostle's flight as opposed to the dramatic yet arrested nature of Guercino's, Ribera's, and Giordano's pictures.

Dating from his early Roman period (1621-23), Guercino's painting is tightly cropped in such a manner that the three figures in the picture, including the angel, the saint, and the guard, do not actually represent the flight from prison (fig. 104).\footnote{L. Salerno, "Liberazione di San Pietro," I Dipinti del Guercino, Rome: 1988, p. 172.} Rather, Guercino focuses on a single point in the narrative by highlighting Peter's sudden awakening to the presence of the angel who directs the saint towards a space beyond the awkwardly positioned guard along the right-hand side of the picture. Like much of Guercino's early oeuvre, the painter focuses on the intimate interaction of the central figures as opposed to emphasizing the temporal development of the narrative. According to Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, Guercino's early paintings demonstrate "the artist's tendency increasingly to exclude viewers from active mental participation in the narrative." His pictures, instead, implement a compositional strategy that places the viewer before a "self-enclosed world."\footnote{S. Ebert-Schifferer, "'Ma c'hanno da fare i precetti dell'oratore con quelli della pittura?' Reflections on Guercino's Narrative Structure," Guercino, Master Painter of the Baroque, (ed.) D. Mahon, Washington: 1992, p. 91.} This "self-enclosed world" eliminates the viewer's ability to discern the setting. Such a practice focuses more on the affective power of the figures' interactions as opposed to temporal development. None of Preti's interpretations of the
subject demonstrate such a restricted approach to compositional design. Thus, when De Dominici stated that the Vienna Liberation was painted with "le proprie tinte del Guercin da Cento, e con una espressione, e con un rilievo mirabile, sicché sembra di mano di quel gran maestro" he was not referring specifically to Guercino's 1622 picture, but rather indicating that the Calabrese's general compositional strategy – populated by half-length gesturing figures placed within a horizontal space – parallels the Emilian painter's preferred format. That is, Preti's chiaroscuro, regular use of the horizontal pictorial format, and half-length or three-quarter-length-figures gesturing in a rhetorical manner, correspond to many of Guercino's paintings. Their respective interpretations of the Liberation of St. Peter are not similar on either stylistic or compositional grounds.

De Dominici's attempt to link the painting to Guercino's style and compositional strategies reflects the biographer's perception that both Preti's and Guercino's paintings contain figures with "espressione, e con un rilievo mirabile." This similarity is generally true of Guercino's early works but his post-1630 classicizing style and compositions have little in common with Preti's, with the exception of the occasional picture of half-length-figures. The Calabrese's representation of Peter, however, exhibits a strong sense of figural expression that is amplified by the captivating rhetorical gestures, engaging facial expressions, and bold illumination. Unlike Preti, Guercino's interest in rhetorical gestures and dramatic facial expressions stemmed from his reading and reinterpretation of the numerous paintings from Torquato Tasso's epic poem entitled the Gerusalemme Liberata.\(^\text{178}\) The Calabrese only executed two pictures based on Tasso's poem – his circa 1640 Rinaldo and Armida and 1648-50 Clorinda Liberating Olindo and Sofronia. His

interests in gesture and expression derived, instead, from his early experiments with Caravaggesque and Bolognese-Roman representational strategies. The Vienna Liberation clearly demonstrates the outcome of his experiments and situates it as one of the foremost representations of the subject in mid-Seicento Naples. Indeed, the Calabrese's interpretation was only paralleled in Neapolitan painting by Ribera and Giordano – both of whom produced scenes that were similar in design.

Both Ribera and Giordano focus on the angel's arrival in Peter's cell and the saint's dramatic response to his deliverer (figs. 99 & 102).\(^\text{179}\) As such, both painters depicted a single moment in the narrative, but used the positioning of the angel, his gestures, and the expanded pictorial space as a means of signaling that there is a broader temporal period in which the liberation occurs. Unlike numerous predecessors, their expansion of the pictorial field includes details of the prison and the apostle's position within it. Like Guercino's painting, however, both focus on Peter's awakening to the angel's presence. Ribera's painting positions Peter extended horizontally across the pictorial plane turning rightwards towards the elegantly-attired angelic deliverer who ever so slightly gestures towards a space beyond the frame – hence indicating the avenue of Peter's escape. Like preceding interpretations, Ribera's painting includes an unshackled saint who is as much mystified by the fracturing of his shackles as he is by the silver and gold light that shines through the barred window in the upper left. Between the light that

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\(^{179}\) Spinosa, 2003, pp. 154, 317-18; A.E. Pérez-Sánchez, "Liberation of St. Peter," Pérez-Sánchez & Spinosa, pp. 135-39. Ribera's Liberation of St. Peter, currently at the Prado, Madrid, was purchased by Don Jerónimo de la Torres sometime between the painting's completion in 1639 and its presence in the De La Torre inventory in 1658. It was produced as the pendant to a Dream of Jacob, which is signed and dated the same year. Ribera painted another version of the Liberation, likely for the Conte di Monterrey, along with a pendant painting of St. Francis and the Angel during the early 1640s – both of which are currently in the Gemäldegalerie, Dresden (Spinosa, 2003, p. 326). The Dresden painting is similarly structured, but is softer in tone than the Prado painting with its harsh chiaroscuro that defines Peter's body and haggard face.
enters the cell, Peter's rotation rightwards, and the angel's incline rightwards, Ribera provides an early example of how to incorporate several narrative elements into a scene that is by all extents and purposes minimalist in nature, given it only includes two figures. Honthorst's 1616-18 painting, executed for the Giustiniani, pioneered a similar approach, although there is no indication Ribera saw the Northerner's picture during the winter and spring of 1616, before he left Rome for Naples.

Ribera's painting, undoubtedly, served as the model for Giordano's composition.\(^{180}\) He similarly positioned Peter lying on the ground and reacting to an angel who gravitates above the apostle while also indicating the avenue of their escape with his left arm. Unlike Ribera's interpretation, however, Giordano has included a sleeping guard in the background and enlivened Peter's response by endowing the figure with the gnarled physiognomy characteristic of Ribera's apostles, philosophers, or prophet types. Additionally, Giordano emphasizes Peter's gestural reaction, as exemplified by the left hand thrusting forward towards the spectator. The angel's direct engagement with the apostle – demonstrated by the gentle placement of his right hand on his left arm – and the latter's theatrical reaction has much in common with Preti's version, especially if one were to expand Giordano's pictorial field to include room for additional guards as well as indications of the size of the cell and the corridor through which the protagonists will escape. Since the figures are tightly cropped, the gestures indicating the escape route are not fully capable of providing the necessary temporal indications that are

\(^{180}\) C. Ruggero, "Liberation of St. Peter," Spinosa & Mirandel, pp. 174-75. Possibly originating in the collection of the Doria princes, Ruggero argues that the painting is a "virtual grafting of Pietro da Cortona's language on to the teachings of Ribera." While such an observation is accurate for many of Giordano's paintings from the late 1650s, 1660s, and 1670s, Ruggero is inaccurate in the above characterization, as the Liberation also demonstrates the painter's blending of Ribera's naturalistic vein and the theatrical yet softly colored figures evident in Rubens' late mythological and pastoral paintings.
present in the Calabrese's broader and clearly demarcated pictorial field. Nonetheless, the transition from Caracciolo's to Ribera's to Giordano's paintings demonstrates how Neapolitan painters were experimenting with the subject and different means of communicating the development of the narrative. Preti's painting was certainly the climactic point in these experiments, given the dramatically-illuminated expansive pictorial space, the inclusion of almost every character in the biblical story, and the clear indication of three separate areas that refer to temporal points in the narrative. Although De Dominici did not praise Preti's painting explicitly for these accomplishments, his lengthy and praiseworthy description of the picture is almost unparalleled in the entire Vite. As such, the painting must have spoken louder to audiences than the words the biographer could use, as he freely admits by stating that "la bellezza e bontà di questo quadro è inesplicabile."

Among the three paintings discussed in the above sections, one dominant feature begins to resonate throughout: Preti consistently broke with iconographic precedents in order to design compositions that engage the audience on an entirely different level than his Roman and Neapolitan contemporaries. The common factor that unites the compositional approach demonstrated in his Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew, Massacre of the Innocents, and Liberation of St. Peter is his intention to push the boundaries of design in an attempt to transform a frequently depicted subject in such a way that it alters the spectator's perception of the event. Whether it was breaking with the decorum of depicting Bartholomew in as tormented a state as possible, inverting the narrative in the Massacre so as to magnify the gruesome outcome of the slaughter, or by literally blowing the cell wide open in the depiction of the Liberation in order to broaden the composition
and clearly communicate the transitional nature of the apostle's incarceration, his encounter with the angel, and his subsequent liberation, the Calabrese consistently considered conventions and conceived of pictorial means through which he could break them entirely. A strong sense of design and ordering of figures within the pictorial field informs Preti's "grandezza della maniera", his ability to attribute "terribilità" to his figures, and his skill at producing pictures that astonished the audience. The act of composition was not only a process of figuration but rather one in which he sought to use as many devices as possible to psychologically affect his spectators through an inventive and experimental reinterpretation of pictorial precedents and complete re-reading of iconographic traditions in order to achieve his end of delighting and theatrically engaging the viewer. Given De Dominici's biography does not analyze these aspects of the Calabrese's art in any detail, the above assessments do indicate, however, that he was correct when he remarked that there was something unique about Preti's "disegno" and "componimento." The chapters that follow will further probe the nature of his compositional and pictorial practices.
Fig. 45. Preti, *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew*, Museo Nazionale, Aquila, c. 1656.

Fig. 46. Preti, *Four Evangelists*, Galleria Regionale, Palermo, c. 1656-60.
Fig. 47. Preti, *Job Visited by Friends*, Museo Nazionale, Aquilla, c. 1656.

Fig. 48. Preti, *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew*, Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, c. 1655.
Fig. 49. Preti, *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew*, Galleria Corsini, Rome, c. 1653-60.

Fig. 50. Jusepe Ribera, *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew*, Palazzo Pitti, Florence, c. 1630.
Fig. 51. Ribera, *Flaying of St. Bartholomew*, British Museum, c. 1624.

Fig. 52. Ribera, *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1624.

Fig. 53. Ribera, *Flaying of St. Bartholomew*, Pierpont Morgan Library, c. 1649.

Fig. 54. Ribera, *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew*, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 1634.
Fig. 55. Domenichino, * Martyrdom of St. Cecilia*, Polet Chapel, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome, c. 1612.

Fig. 56. Pietro da Cortona, * Martyrdom of St. Lawrence*, San Lorenzo in Miranda, Rome, 1646.
Fig. 57. Caravaggio, *Supper at Emmaus*, National Gallery, London, c. 1601.

Fig. 58. Caravaggio, *Betrayal of Christ*, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, c. 1603.

Fig. 59. Bernardo Cavallino, *Martyrdom of Bartholomew*, Capodimonte, c. 1635.
Fig. 60. Salvator Rosa, Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew, Graf Harrach’sche Gemäldegalerie, Vienna, 1630s.

Fig. 61. Luca Giordano, Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew, (formerly) Derek Johns, London, 1650-55.

Fig. 63. Ribera, *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew*, Galleria Pallavicini, 1620s.

Fig. 64. Ribera, *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew*, Museo Parroquial, Osuña, 1620s.
Fig. 65. Titian, *Flaying of Marsyas*, Archbishop’s Palace, Kromeriz, c. 1576.

Fig. 66. Bartolomeo Manfredi, *Apollo and Marsyas*, St. Louis Museum of Art, c. 1616-20.

Fig. 67. Guercino, *Apollo and Marsyas*, Palazzo Pitti, Florence, 1618.

Fig. 68. Ribera, *Apollo Flaying Marsyas*, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1637.
Fig. 69. Giordano, *Apollo and Marsyas*, Capodimonte, 1655-60.

Fig. 70. Giordano, *Apollo and Marsyas*, Private Collection, Naples, 1655-60.

Fig. 71. Giordano, *Apollo and Marsyas*, Private Collection, 1660-65.

Fig. 72. Giordano, *Apollo and Marsyas*, Museo Bandini, Florence, c. 1660.

Fig. 73. Giordano, *Apollo and Marsyas*, El Escorial Palace, c. 1695.
Fig. 75. Bernardo Cavallino, *Massacre of the Innocents*, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, c. 1645.

Fig. 74. Massimo Stanzione, *Massacre of the Innocents*, Graf Harrach sche Familiensammlung, Schloss Rohrau, c. 1632.

Fig. 76. Pacecco de Rosa, *Massacre of the Innocents*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, c. 1640.

Fig. 77. Nicolò de Simone, *Massacre of the Innocents*, Capodimonte, c. 1665-70.
Fig. 78. Vaccaro, *Massacre of the Innocents*, Palazzo Reale, Naples, c. 1650.

Fig. 79. Giordano, *Massacre of the Innocents*, Private Collection, Naples, 1670s.

Fig. 80. Marc Antonio Raimondi after Raphael, *Massacre of the Innocents*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, c. 1513-15.
Fig. 81. Tintoretto, *Massacre of the Innocents*, Scuola Grande di San Marco, Venice, 1585.

Fig. 82. Guido Reni, *Massacre of the Innocents*, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna, 1611.

Fig. 83. Nicolas Poussin, *Massacre of the Innocents*, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Chantilly, c. 1630.
Fig. 84. Peter Paul Rubens, *Massacre of the Innocents*, Alte Pinakothek, Vienna, c. 1636.

Fig. 85. Preti, *Christ Passing the Keys to Peter*, Private Collection, Palermo, c. 1665.
Fig. 86 Preti, *Assumption of the Virgin*, St. Andrews Parish Church, Luqa, c. 1667.

Fig. 87 Preti, *Events in the Life of St. John the Baptist*, Co-Cathedral of St. John (vault), Valletta, 1661-66.

Fig. 88 Preti, *St. John Preaching in the Desert*, Co-Cathedral of St. John (Bay 3, Right Side), Valletta, 1661-66.
Fig. 89. Preti, *Bozzetto of Virgin and Sts. Gennaro, Rosalia, and Francis Xavier Interceding for the Plague-Ridden*, Capodimonte, c. 1656.

Fig. 90. Preti, *Bozzetto of Virgin and Child, St. Rosalie and San Gennaro*, Capodimonte, c. 1656-58.
Fig. 91. Giacomo Farelli, *Massacre of the Innocents*, Landesmuseum, Hannover, 1660s.

Fig. 92. Annibale, *Perseus Confronting Phineas with the Head of Medusa*, Galleria Farnese, Rome, 1597-1601.

Fig. 93. Giordano, *Perseus Confronting Phineas with the Head of Medusa*, National Gallery, London, c. 1680.
Fig. 94. Sebastiano Ricci, *Perseus Confronting Phineas with the Head of Medusa*, Getty Museum, Los Angeles, c. 1705.

Fig. 95. Rubens, *Massacre of the Innocents*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, c. 1610-12.

Fig. 96. Pietro Testa, *Massacre of the Innocents*, Galleria Spada, Rome, 1630s.
Fig. 97. Paulus Pontius after Rubens, *Massacre of the Innocents*, British Museum, 1643.

Fig. 98. Giovanni Battista Caracciolo, *Liberation of St. Peter from Prison*, Pio Monte della Misericordia, Naples, 1615.
Fig. 99. Ribera, *Liberation of St. Peter*, Prado, Madrid, 1639.

Fig. 100. Pietro Novelli, *Liberation of St. Peter*, Galleria Regionale, Palermo, c. 1634.

Fig. 101. Cavallino, *Liberation of St. Peter*, Private Collection, New York, c. 1640-45.
Fig. 102. Giordano, *Liberation of St. Peter*, Private Collection, Naples, c. 1660-65.

Fig. 103. Domenichino, *Liberation of St. Peter*, Formerly, Staatliche Schlosser, Potsdam, 1604.

Fig. 104. Guercino, *Liberation of St. Peter*, Prado, Madrid, 1621-23.

Fig. 106. Preti, *Liberation of St. Peter*, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden, 1650-55.
Fig. 107. Preti, *Liberation of St. Peter from Prison*, Thyssen-Bornemisza Foundation, Madrid, c. 1645.

Fig. 108. Honthorst, *Denial of St. Peter*, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes, 1615-16

Fig. 109. Matthias Stomer, *Arrest of Christ*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, c. 1630-32.
Fig. 110. Caravaggio, *Seven Acts of Mercy*, Pio Monte della Misericordia, Naples, 1606.
Chapter 5  

Murder and Other Mystical Events at the Dinner Table

During the middle years of his career Preti painted at least twelve large-scale paintings that represented dinner or banquet scenes. The subject matter varies but was largely drawn from biblical sources, including, among other renowned stories, the Feast of Herod and the Wedding at Cana. By and large, these works are confined to the years between the late-1640s and 1670s. Over this period of roughly thirty years, the painter would revisit and revise several subjects in monumental paintings that depicted the richly adorned figures in life-size, seen mainly from the waist up, and situated around dinner tables that were positioned on a porch or balcony framed by classical architecture. This combination of elements contributed to Preti’s unique manner of framing and focusing the viewers’ attention on the events. This chapter will explore his techniques by studying the two versions of the Wedding at Cana (figs. 111 & 112), his two versions of the Feast of Herod (figs. 113 & 114), and his monumental pendant scenes of the Feast of Absalom and Belshazzar’s Feast (figs. 115 & 116).\(^\text{181}\)

Wedding at Cana

The two versions of the Wedding at Cana, now housed in the National Gallery, London, and the church of San Domenico Maggiore, Naples, respectively, are separated by

\(^{181}\) For all provenance and bibliographical material on the above paintings beginning with the Wedding at Cana, see: Spike, 1999, pp. 159-60, 214-15; Utili, 1999, p. 172-73; Spike, 1999, pp. 151, 300-301; Utili, 1999, pp. 136-37; Spike, 1999, pp. 115-16; Utili, 1999, pp. 174-75, 176-77. These were not the only banquet and/or feast scenes executed during these years. Additional paintings include the Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Antica Lazarus at the Rich Man’s Feast (c. 1655); The Revenge of Procne (c. 1645), located in the Museo Civico, Carpi; the Feast of Herod (c. 1675) from the Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna, Milan; and the Supper in the House of the Pharisee (c. 1673-76), located in San Domenico Maggiore, Naples, and likely the pendant to the Wedding at Cana commissioned by Fabrizio Ruffo.
approximately twenty years – the first was apparently commissioned by Gaspar Roomer around 1655 and the second by Fabrizio Ruffo (1619-91) during the mid-1670s and recorded in a 1692 inventory.\textsuperscript{182} While the second version of the scene appears in the Ruffo inventory, De Dominici also noted that Preti executed a painting of the same subject for the "signori Parrelli" who apparently "hanno del Cavaliere Calabrese molti quadri."\textsuperscript{183} Both extant versions demonstrate some of Preti’s most innovative compositional experiments. This is primarily exemplified by the break with the


There has been no consensus among scholars as to whether the first \textit{Wedding at Cana} (National Gallery, London) was that which De Dominici described, given the biographer noted that the painting’s dimensions were 16 x 12 palmi. Since a Neapolitan palmi is equivalent to 26.4 centimeters, the painting De Dominici describes would be – while taking into account the potential for inaccurate measurements – approximately 300 x 400 centimeters (a scale on which the painter rarely worked when producing gallery paintings). Clifton and Spike (1989, p. 58; Spike, 1999, pp. 159-60) suggested on stylistic as well as documentary grounds that the National Gallery painting is likely the one that De Dominici discussed because of the stylistic similarities with three martyrdom scenes commissioned by Roomer’s business partner Ferdinand Vandeneysen during the same time period.

Gabrielle Finaldi ("Nozze di Cana," Utili, 1999, pp. 172-73), however, argued that the London painting could not be that which was produced for Roomer given the significant disparity between the dimensions – being approximately 4 x 7 palmi smaller than De Dominici’s description. While Erminia Corace (\textit{Mattia Preti, dal segno al colore}, Rome: 1995, p. 196) noted without explanation that the London painting was not produced for Roomer, Utili as well as Refice Taschetta (1970, p. 70) considered the London painting to be that which De Dominici describes. I am inclined to believe that the London painting was produced for Roomer since Preti’s Neapolitan paintings revealed his greatest reliance on Venetian prototypes; because the painter received 300 ducats from the collector in December 1655 (Spike, 1998, p. 83); and because his depiction of the husband and wife as well as the male servants dealing with the containers of wine in the London picture are directly linked to the same figures in Veronese’s two versions of the subject – the 1571-72 version for the Coccina family (Gemäldegalerie, Dresden) for the bride and groom and the 1563 version for the refectory of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice (now in the Louvre) for the servants. In addition, biographers, chroniclers, and notaries were not always accurate when recording the dimensions of paintings, as is demonstrated by the 1688 inventory of Ferdinand Vandeneysen’s collection (Ruotolo, 1882, p. 33). The \textit{Wedding at Cana} – inherited along with ninety other paintings from Roomer prior to and upon the collector’s death in 1674 – is recorded as being 14 x 10 palmi instead of the above 16 x 12 noted by De Dominici. As such, I will be treating the London painting as that which De Dominici actually saw.

\textsuperscript{183} DD, Vol. II, p. 702. The Perrelli family may be that of Paolo Perrella, who is discussed in the biography of the painter, sculptor, and architect Lorenzo Vaccaro (c. 1655-1710) – father of the Settecento Neapolitan painter Domenico Antonio Vaccaro (p. 910). Eduardo Nappi ("Catalogo delle pubblicazioni edita dal 1883 al 1990, riguardanti le opere di architetti, pittori, scultori, marmorari ed intagliatori per i secoli XVI e XVII, pagate tramite gli antichi banchi pubblici napoletani," \textit{Ricerche sul 600 Napoletano}, Milan: 1992, p. 93) discovered a 1676 document that noted a Francesco de Simone purchased a \textit{Wedding at Cana} by Preti from the heirs of Giovanni Antonio Melone. The exact dimensions and location of this painting are unknown and it cannot be verified as to whether it was an original or a copy of one of the above listed paintings.
conventional placement of the table in a central and horizontal position. To properly investigate the significance of his experiments and their evolution, each painting will be studied in comparison to the other as well as representations of the same subject during the Cinquecento and Seicento.

In Preti's paintings we see the moment when the water is miraculously transformed into wine while the wedding guests respond in disbelief and amazement. The event is scripturally significant because it represents one of Christ's first miracles performed while in Galilee. The story of the wedding is told in John (2:1-11):

On the third day, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee: and the mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also was invited, and his disciples, to the marriage. And the wine failing, the mother of Jesus said to him: 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her: 'Woman, what is that to me and to you? My hour is not yet come.' His mother said to the waiters: 'Whatsoever he shall say to you, do.' Now there were set there six water pots of stone, according to the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three measures a piece. Jesus said to them: 'Fill the water pots with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. And Jesus said to them: 'Draw out now and carry to the chief steward of the feast.' And they carried it. And when the chief steward had tasted the water made wine and knew not whence it was, but the waiters knew who had drawn the water. The chief steward calls the bridegroom, and said to him: 'Every man at first sets forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse. But you have kept the good wine until now.' This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee and manifested his glory.

In the London painting the Virgin Mary and Christ sit opposite the bride and groom in the foreground at a table that recedes leftward into the background. Christ does not preside over the bride and groom and the servants from a central position along the table as was conventional among many dinner scenes in which the Savior was depicted. Rather, he is positioned on the right hand side completing the miracle of transforming the water into

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184 Pigler (Vol. I, pp. 372-73) lists a number of artist that executed paintings of the subject, many of whom followed the centralized dinner table format established by Veronese. Among the twenty paintings listed, Pigler cites a picture by Vasari in the old sacristy of the church of Monte oliveto, Naples. This may have been confused with his feast in the house of Simon in Sant Anna dei Lombardi.
wine, as one servant pours liquid from one vessel into another. Despite his prominent placement, Christ's gesture and the guests' reactions to it are subtly represented. Neither the bride nor groom seem to be aware of the Savior's action, regardless of the bride's apparent observation of the miracle. Several understated actions by guests in the mid-ground focus the viewer's attention on the miracle, however. These include the bearded man alongside the Virgin rising from his seat to observe the pouring of the wine. The gesture of his left arm indicates a certain amount of surprise despite the lack of amazement expressed by his face. Similarly, the figure standing and walking into the background directly above the Virgin recognizes that something important is occurring in the foreground, as is indicated by his arrested reaction and sharp leftward turn towards the area where the bride, groom, Virgin, and Christ sit.

The San Domenico painting situates Christ and the Virgin in the center mid-ground. By comparison, Christ's role is minimized by the presence of monumental figures in the foreground and the rightward recession of the table into the mid-ground. In addition, this painting is characterized by a broader and more open space in which the classical columns, buildings, and decorative elements draw the eye away from the figures and central event. Both paintings demonstrate the Calabrese's use of an unconventional compositional structure in so far as the groom, the servants pouring the wine, and the reacting guests observing the event dominate the foreground and center of the composition. While the silver light and receding table in the London painting may derive from Tintoretto's 1561 version at Santa Maria della Salute, Venice, Preti foregrounds the action and, in so doing, emphasizes Christ's miracle despite his unconventional position (fig. 117). Italian Cinquecento and Seicento examples of banquet or dinner scenes
frequently represent such subjects as the Marriage at Cana, the Supper at Emmaus, and the Last Supper. Examples ranging from the Venetian Renaissance Masters to the artists in Seicento Rome include Veronese's 1563 *Marriage at Cana*, Caravaggio's 1601 *Supper at Emmaus*, and Valentin de Boulogne's 1626 *Last Supper* (figs. 118, 57, & 119).

While Preti's decentralization of Christ in the London picture breaks with the conventional religious dinner scene typology, his painting, nonetheless, emphasizes the physical transformation of water into wine, the pouring of the wine, and the reactions to the miracle. With the exception of the bald foreground servant pouring wine, the bride, and the two figures in the mid-ground on the right, the other eighteen that encircle the receding table do not react to the miracle. This aspect of the composition is consistent with Cinquecento Venetian representations of the subject including those by Veronese and Tintoretto. Preti's asymmetrical positioning of the protagonist in the London painting may have foreshadowed later Seicento interpretations of the subject, as demonstrated by Bartolomeo Murillo's 1672 Barber Institute, Birmingham, and Giuseppe Maria Crespi's 1681 Art Institute of Chicago paintings (figs. 120 & 121). Like Preti, these painters position Christ in the foreground or mid-ground on one side of the painting while the transformation of the water into wine occurs in the foreground on the other side. Similarly, the Savior subtly gestures towards the vessel so as to mildly conceal the miracle.

In the San Domenico painting, the Calabrese adopted a more conventional interpretation, only insofar as he reverted back to positioning Christ in the center of the composition, regardless of his less prominent mid-ground position. A possible Neapolitan precedent for such a compositional scheme may have been Massimo Stanzione's circa
1650 Last Supper in Sant Efremo, Naples, or his Wedding at Cana (now destroyed), which can be examined via the painter's bozzetto now in the Gerolamini (fig. 122 & 123). Like Preti's San Domenico picture, Stanzione's Wedding situates the scene within a large architectural space in which the servants, the food, and vessels of wine take up the foreground space. Nonetheless, the configuration of the protagonists in the San Domenico painting has more in common with Veronese's 1571-72 version for the Coccina family, given its shallow pictorial field, central placement of Christ and the Virgin Mary, and architectural embellishments (fig. 124). By comparison, Stanzione's multi-leveled composition contrasts with the framing of the event within a tighter space and depiction of half-length figures reacting to the pouring wine in Preti's picture. Despite the parallels with Veronese's painting, the Calabrese's composition breaks away again from the conventional banquet and dinner scenes by emphasizing the reactions of the figures instead of Christ or the miracle he performs. Furthermore, the foregrounding of the event and use of half-length figures has more in common with Caravaggio's 1601 Supper at Emmaus. The turbaned guest sitting on the left twisting to his right with his arms elevated and with a shocked expression on his face – characteristic of many figures, notably the man on the left in Preti's 1659 Martyrdom of St. Catherine – derives from Caravaggio's disciple who thrusts his chair back in response to Christ's revelation. The Calabrese's figure, however, does not force his way towards the viewer and out of the pictorial space as vigorously as Caravaggio's since he remains seated in his chair. The

185 Willette, "Le Nozze di Cana," Schütze & Willette, pp. 219, 339 (fig. 288). The bozzetto was a preparatory study for a large canvas situated in the transept of the church of the Santissima Annunziata, painted around 1640-42 but destroyed by fire in 1757. De Dominici describes the painting alongside its pendant of Christ Disputing the Doctors in the Temple as being praised for its "gran componimento, come per lo disegno, colorito, varietà di fisionomie, chiaroscuro, ricchezza di vestimenti, ed insomma per tutto quello che si apparteine nell'arte (DD, Vol. II, p. 90)."
expressions of the turbaned guest and the groom – exemplified by their rotation towards the centrally placed servant pouring wine – focus one's attention on the transformation of the wine as opposed to Christ and the Virgin Mary who calmly sit in the mid-ground, almost as if they are in stasis. This localization of the viewer's attention on the foreground action is amplified by the number and scale of the foreground figures, particularly in comparison to Giordano's contemporaneous picture.

Giordano's 1659-60 Wedding at Cana, commissioned alongside a Feast of Herod by the Prior of the monastery of San Martino, seems to bridge the configuration of Preti's two paintings (figs. 125 & 126). Like Preti in the London painting, Giordano decentralizes Christ's position and emphasizes the foreground figures – composed of servants and the back facing bride and groom. He, similarly, utilizes an angular table that recedes deep into the background. Unlike the London painting though, Giordano's figures are punctuated by their blue, scarlet, white, and yellow garments. He transforms the captivating chiaroscuro of Preti's painting into a brightly illuminated and atmospheric environment that emphasizes the miracle through the servant pouring the wine in the right foreground, the emphatically reacting guests, and golden halo around Christ's head. With the exception of the wine pouring servant and the scarlet costume of the groom in the center – aspects that echo Preti's London version – Giordano's painting seems to point rather towards the San Domenico version with its "L" shaped table, classical columns, open and atmospheric qualities, and positioning of Christ in the mid-ground. In addition, the gesture of the groom in Giordano's painting certainly informed that of the turbaned guest in Preti's San Domenico picture. Notwithstanding the similarities and differences

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between Preti's and Giordano's paintings, De Dominici's respective descriptions place greater emphasis on the former's picture. Describing Preti's *Wedding* in detail, the biographer states at length:

[...] impercioché oltre del terribil disegno, parte sua propria, rappresentò la storia di figure della grandezza naturale, con eroico componimento, con accidenti di lumi, sbattimenti e riflessi, e con tante varie azioni di coloro che ammiraro il succeduto miracolo del cambiamento dell'aqua in vino ch'è un incanto. Usò l'arte di figurare il convito sotto il portico di una loggia per dar lume e sbattimento alle figure de' convitati, e di coloro che servono, arricchendole con belli vestimenti, ad imitazione del gran Paolo Veronese, e collocando nel mezzo della mensa Nostro Signore con la Beata Vergine sua Madre, acciocché non solo venissero a stare nel miglior posto del quadro, ma, ricevendo gran parte del lume, avessero in tal situazione una tinta eziandio assai dolce ed armoniosa. ¹⁸⁷

In addition to praising the overall design, the figures' scale, the composition, and among other qualities, the direct light and strong shadows, extolling his imitation of Veronese situates the painting historically, stylistically, and hierarchically. Yet, as the biographer's description of Giordano's *Wedding* and its pendant of the *Feast of Herod* reveals, such praise can be fleeting. The San Martino *Wedding*, for example, is applauded for its "figure così ben messe insieme, e così ben disegnate e dipinte, che sembrano a' forestieri

¹⁸⁷ DD, Vol. II, pp. 639-40: "In addition, therefore, to the terribile disegno, an element proper to his style, he represents the story with life-size figures, with a heroic composition, with streaks of light, shadows and reflections, and with many different colorful actions of those admiring the miracle of the change of the water into wine, which is spellbinding. He employs the means of presenting the feast below the portico of a loggia so as to illuminate and shade the figures of the guests, and those which serve, adorning them with beautiful vestments in imitation of the great Paolo Veronese, and placing in the middle of the table Our Savior with his Blessed Virgin Mother so that they are not only placed in the best position of the painting, but would have, receiving most of the light, a very pleasant and harmonious coloring." De Dominici's description of the table being situated on a porch with a loggia as well as the placement of Christ and the Virgin Mary have been seen as potential reasons as to why this description does not conform to the composition of the London painting. Another point should be considered here. While the loggia is not visible, the shelved serving platters and plates – seen on both the right and left – would not have been placed outdoors without a roof above them. Therefore, their presence alone verifies that there would have been some ceiling above the table. Yet, the atmospheric qualities that De Dominici emphasizes as well as the positioning of Christ and the Virgin Mary "nel mezzo della mensa" and in the best position might indicate that the biographer was actually considering the San Domenico version instead, which also contains plates and platters stacked on either side.
In both cases, De Dominici celebrates the painters' designs and apparent imitation of Veronese's style. While Giordano's sharply colored figures, elongated table, and classical architecture echo qualities visible in Tintoretto's 1561 and Veronese's 1572 versions of the Wedding, De Dominici does not point out the actual similarities between Giordano's and Veronese's style. The biographer is more specific in Preti's case, however. Both of the Calabrese's paintings reveal that the bride is, indeed, similarly adorned to those of Veronese, particularly that in the Coccina painting. The gestures of the wine pouring servants in the Louvre painting are similarly reinterpreted in both of Preti's versions. Beyond these details, a comparison of the London and San Domenico paintings clearly demonstrates how he returned to the subject to revise his earlier version. In so doing, he restructured the entire design so as to enhance the affective power of the miracle visualized in the painting.

Preti's significant reorganization of the subject between the two versions and Giordano's numerous interpretations of the subject (six in total) reveal that the Wedding at Cana provided artists in the first place with an opportunity to experiment with the representation of an ornamental banquet scene within an architectural setting – as long as Christ was properly adorned and the miracle of water and wine was clearly indicated. A straight reading of the biblical account was evidently not required by some Neapolitan patrons, since neither Stanzione, nor Preti, or Giordano referenced the presence of the apostles, the explicit directions of the Virgin, or the presence of the chief servant. Preti's

188 Ibid., p. 766: "[the picture contains] figures placed together so well, and drawn and painted so well, that they seem to foreigners to be works by Paolo Veronese."
two paintings correspond to the conventions in this matter and emphasize only the primary action of transforming the wine, serving it, and reacting to the miracle.

**The Feast of Herod**

Unlike Preti’s versions of the Wedding at Cana, the two extant paintings of the Feast of Herod were produced within the same decade. The painting now in the Toledo Museum of Art has been identified with the *Feast of Herod* described by De Dominici – originally produced for Roomer, bequeathed to Ferdinand Vandeneynden in 1674, and catalogued by Giordano in the 1688 Vandeneynden inventory (fig. 113). Consensus on the dating of the Toledo painting has shifted back and forth in recent decades. In 1982 Utili noted the painting was closer in date to the Capodimonte *Feast of Absalom*, thereby placing it in the mid-1660s. Over the last thirty years Spike maintained that the painting was produced, instead, during the years immediately following Preti’s Modenese sojourn which concluded in 1652. Utili has since agreed with Spike by stating that the Toledo painting was produced during the mid-1650s, given the similarities between Herod’s turban and clothing with that worn by the same figure in the *St. John the Baptist Reproaching Herod*, commissioned by Ferdinand Vandeneynden around 1655 (fig. 127). Neither scholar has devoted much analysis to the second interpretation of the Feast, today housed in the Gemäldegalerie in Kassel (fig. 114). The provenance of the Kassel picture is unknown, and it has been incomprehensively marginalized by scholars despite the fact that the "work offers more penetrating portrayals of the actors represented

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192 Spike, 1999, pp. 300-301.
in this tragedy." Such marginalization seems unnecessary because the paintings are compositionally similar and reveal Preti’s revision and reassessment of the composition. As such, a detailed comparative analysis between the two paintings offers the opportunity to describe a remarkable shift in Preti’s representation of the tragic subject.

In the Toledo version, for example, Herod appears more dumbfounded than shocked. Likewise, Herodias and the man behind her seem to stare blankly, as the almost smirking Salome presents St. John’s severed head to those around the table. The only figures that truly reveal a sense of actual shock and amazement are the turbaned man and youthful servant to his right. In addition, the three figures behind Herodias in the mid-ground and background seem to be disengaged from the gruesome event – partaking instead in such household tasks as serving drinks and arranging the dishes. The three figures on the left behind Salome and the turbaned man appear to belong to the squad of executioners, since the leftmost figure’s helmet and lance tip forward into the pictorial space. Utili accurately characterizes this painting as being "completely devoid of drama," despite Spike’s assertion that the Toledo painting exhibits Preti’s success in producing a "tour de force" work. Notwithstanding these different interpretations, a comparison of the Toledo version with that in Kassel as well as other contemporary paintings of the same subject offer new insights into Preti's representational strategies.

In comparison to the Toledo painting, the Kassel version extends the narrative by including multiple events through the re-organization of the composition. While the Toledo picture is structured by the placement of the rectangular table in the foreground with figures behind it and on either side, the Kassel painting exhibits the same sort of

spatial innovations evident in the San Domenico *Wedding at Cana*. Herod is now placed in front of the table and seen in three-quarter view. With his back towards the audience, he rotates to his left and gestures in response to the presentation of the severed head with both hands. Depicted in half-length, his gestures and facial expression immediately enlivens the scene and strips away any semblance of the dumbfounded reaction visible in the earlier painting. Similarly, the characters of Herodias and Salome demonstrate a greater sense of animation. Herodias moves away with a sense of repulsion while her daughter seems to enjoy the presentation of the Baptist's severed head and staff on a gold platter. Salome's smirk is more pronounced than that in the Toledo version. Here, she almost seems to dance forward away from the executioners and collapsed corpse in the left background, swaying towards the table with a sense of pleasure and contentment. The two figures that bridge the first and second version of the subject are the centrally-placed capped man and youthful servant to his right, which substitute for the turbaned man and servant in the earlier painting.

Complementary figural actions further dramatize the Kassel painting. Herod's leftward look, gestures, and facial expression are amplified by that of the young servant to the King's right. Like the red capped man, this servant stairs with a sense of incredulity that perfectly parallels Herod's facial expression. The general incline running from the King's left hand to his face and elevated right hand accentuates Herodias' angular withdrawal from the table. In addition, the youth to Herod's right is strategically positioned so that once the viewer sets their eyes upon his gasping expression they are immediately directed back towards the platter supporting the Baptist's head, thereby reinforcing the visual rotation between viewing the presentation of the severed head to
observing the various characters’ reactions and then back again. Preti's bipartite construction of the composition, which opens the left-hand side of the painting to emphasize Salome's arrival with the severed head while framing the reactions on the right, is perhaps the most striking difference between the Toledo and Kassel versions. The former painting is static in design in so far as a central column leads directly down from the top through Herodias to the table, which is flanked on either side by two of the central figures. In the Toledo version Preti focused on creating an almost symmetrical alignment of the key figures, with the exception of the placement of the turbaned man and servant to the left. By eliminating two of the three columns, the ceiling of the porch, the architectural backdrop, and by adjusting the positioning of the dinnerware shelving in the Toledo painting, the Calabrese's restructured the composition so that Salome's actions and the reactions to them are given greater emphasis in the Kassel picture. Although the latter composition is still firmly divided by a centrally placed wall, this division and the subsequent openness that it creates facilitates an elongation of the narrative so that a chain of events is more clearly communicated from left to right and back to front.

The beheaded corpse of the Baptist and the executioners cleaning their weapons are now firmly visible behind Salome in the open background of the porch. Without a shadow created by the ceiling and an architectural backdrop, Preti can allude more fully to the chronology of events in the biblical story. Recounted in both the books of Matthew (14: 3-12) and Mark (6:17-29), the full sequence of events preceding the Baptist's decapitation – including Herod's organization of a banquet for his birthday, Salome's dance for Herod and the guests, and Herodias and her daughters conspiracy to facilitate the Baptist's beheading – are not alluded to by Preti in either composition. The
presentation is clearly the central topic in both paintings, but the Kassel version does not solely focus on the final event in the story, when Salome delivers the Baptist's severed head. Preti's expansion of the narrative is accomplished by reorienting the table so that it does not conceal Salome's approach and the space behind her in which the beheading took place. The beheading is removed from the prison, in which it is described by Matthew and Mark, and situated on the porch so that the drama of the event is enhanced by the still visible and bleeding corpse in the bottom left.

The adjustments and narrative expansion of the Kassel version have never been discussed. De Dominici, unfortunately, does not provide any commentary on the painting. Instead, he immediately compares the earlier version for Roomer with Rubens' famous *Feast of Herod*, purchased likewise by Roomer and brought to Naples during the late 1630s (fig. 128). 196 Most scholars have commented on the possible relationship between Rubens' work, now in the National Gallery, Edinburgh, and the Toledo painting. The presence of such a masterpiece in Naples certainly contributed to the large number of pictures completed in the subsequent decades, compared to the subject's relative rarity in Seicento Italy. The chronicler Carlo Celano described the painting as follows in 1692:

196 We know the painting was not in Roomer's already extensive collection in 1634 because Giulio Cesare Capaccio (*Il forastiero*, ed.) L. Torre, Naples: 1989 [1634], pp. 577-78) did not mention it among the "più bei tesori che potreste imaginari di pitture" that were in his Palace – including works by Ribera, Van Dyck, and Battistello.
Vi era un quadro di 12 palmi a traverso, nel quale sta espresso il pranzo di Herode con molti commensali, et Heriodade, che presenta la testa del santissimo precursore Battista, opera del famoso pennello di Pietro Paolo Ruben, e veramente è dipintura, che più non può portare di spirito, e di espressione, essendo che in ogni volto vi si scorge il suo affetto, non mi distendo a notarli tutti per non allungare queste notizie.197

Celano is the first to highlight the importance of Rubens' picture for the evolution of mid-Seicento painting in Naples. The picture was not only influential for scenes of this subject but that of other dinner scenes as well. In the decades following the arrival of the Feast of Herod, numerous paintings of the same subject were completed, including those versions by Caracciolo, Selitto, and Vaccaro.198 The Calabrese's Kassel interpretation is by far the most gruesome when compared with the decorative nature of Rubens' and Giordano's paintings. Despite the ornate clothing worn by Herod, Herodias, and Salome in Preti's paintings, both Rubens and Giordano surpass him through their use of a soft silver and golden light that shimmers on the clothing of their protagonists. Preti maintains a bolder chiaroscuro though, notwithstanding Herodias's golden gown and the decorative turbans worn by Herod and the guests.

Three qualities distinguish Rubens', Preti's, and Giordano's versions from one another. The Toledo painting continues the horizontal format employed by Rubens. Salome holds the platter as she moves towards Herodias and Herod. Rubens' version does not include the servants as part of the central composition nor does he emphasize the role of the architectural backdrop in the manner that Preti does. Rather, the Flemish painter's

197 Celano, Vol. V, pp. 164-65: "There is a painting of twelve palmi, in which the meal of Herod is expressed with many participants, and Herodias, who presents the head of the predecessor and saintly Baptist. As a work by the famous brush of Peter Paul Rubens, it is truly a painting that could not carry greater spirit and expression, as one can observe the affection on every face. To not elongate these notes, I will not expand to refer to everything." De Dominici, subsequently, described the painting as "opera certamente non mai abbastanza lodata, essendo dipinta col più vivo colore che mai adoperasse quell'ammirabil pitto (Vol. II, p. 643)." c.f. DD, Vol. II, p. 65.
198 Labrot, pp. 760-61.
composition adapts a format employed by Ancient and Early Modern relief sculptors. Figures are positioned tightly together along a horizontal plane so that their respective actions and expressions emphasize the central narrative – in Rubens's painting the presentation of the severed head to a delighted Herodias (ready with her fork) and a disturbed Herod. Preti, however, insists on foregrounding the composition and dramatizing the event with a series of strategically positioned half-length figures, which break away from Rubens' continuous frieze-like composition and invite the eye to jump from figure group to group. In the Toledo and Kassel paintings most figures are grouped in triangular formations while some key characters are isolated to emphasize their roles. For example, the turbaned and red-capped figures in the Toledo and Kassel versions, respectively, highlight the arrival of Salome and the exposed plate. By focusing on the Princess, they create a sense of astonishment that enhances her actions and the significance of the severed head via their facial expressions, gestural response, and descending motion towards the table. Such qualities are not as pronounced in Rubens' painting since the stunned reactions of each guest flow seamlessly from left to right reaching the point where Salome presents the severed head to her mother and the King. Preti's figures emphasize, instead, different states of shock, being speechless and dumbfounded, as opposed to the rather cohesive group response seen in Rubens' picture. Both artists have adopted different strategies in order to emphasize the central action – Rubens through a sweeping rightward motion and Preti through the isolation and framing of his figures.

If the Toledo version was Preti's first attempt to interpret the subject on canvas, he did so by adjusting the planimetric structure of Rubens' famous work. The Kassel version
departs from such a scheme and leads towards Giordano's 1659-60 interpretation. His 

*Feast of Herod* – the pendant to his *Marriage at Cana* for San Martino – assimilated both 

Rubens' and Preti's compositional innovations, particularly the latter's placement of 

Herod before the table and seen in three-quarter view. Unlike Rubens' painting, however, 

Giordano's *Feast of Herod* contains no rightward horizontal momentum but is composed, 

instead, by isolating independent groups of figures. Like Preti, he focuses on such 

individual reactions, but seems less successful in creating the necessary drama. All of the 

servants and guests, with the exception of the youth behind Herod, go about their tasks 

and dinner. Salome's presentation does not even faze Herodias, who is depicted in a 

shimmering silver gown. The King seems to be the only one to react in awe, but his facial 

expression betrays the drama initiated by the forward gesture of his arm. Giordano's 

Herod seems as much surprised as dumbfounded than distraught or legitimately shocked, 

as the King does in Preti's Kassel painting. Like its pendant, Giordano's *Feast of Herod* 

minimizes the dramatic potentiality by splitting the composition, limiting his figures from 

engaging in the central action since their backs are turning or facing away, and by 

opening the pictorial field to emphasize an undefined architectural backdrop. For all that 

is gained by using half-length figures, by foregrounding the event, and by positioning 

Herod on the viewers' side of the table, Salome's position in three-quarter view and semi-
concealment of the head on the platter, Herodias's total disengagement and the 

amorphous setting indicate that the painter was primarily concerned with adorning his 

figures in sumptuous robes that shimmer in the silver and golden light instead of focusing 

on composition and figural arrangement.
Giordano’s *Feast of Herod* spotlights indeed the successful aspects of Preti's Toledo painting, despite the King's dumbfounded reaction and Herodias' neutral response. The Toledo picture has several compositional features that demonstrate how Giordano could have learned from observing Preti's work in greater detail. For example, the architecture directs the viewer's attention to certain figures while framing others. As noted, the composition is divided by the central column that implicitly descends towards Herodias. A similar strategic positioning of the left of center column directs the focus on to the turbaned man. The wall in the right mid-ground isolates the central figure of Herodias from Herod, whose position is accentuated by the dark background and the shadowed golden tassels on the drape that descends directly to the center of the King’s torso. This shaded area and angular descent that emphasizes Herod's position is complemented by the exact step by step descent of the shelving unit – holding plates and vessels – from the center to the lower left. Although the complete descent is concealed by the onlooker, turbaned man, and youthful servant, exact measurements indicate that, if the stepped shelves were visible, they would continue downward on a path that directly intersects with the horizontal platter on which the Baptist's head lies. Thus, the vertical, angular, and horizontal features of the architecture and interior décor contribute to the spectatorial experience. Such architectural and decorative features close the spectatorial loop and redirect the attention back to the central event in the foreground. Given the subtle but important role that these features play, one needn't ask, are these strategically designed to enhance the composition?

An examination of a similar design process in the Kassel painting reveals the lengths to which Preti went to use architecture and perspectival recession to enhance the
positioning, actions, reactions, and expressions of his figures. Like the Toledo painting, several such features accentuate the actions in the Kassel picture. First, the composition is notably divided by the dark central wall that splits the reactions of the startled King, Queen, and youthful servant on the right from the mesmerized, red-capped guest and the smirking Salome carrying the platter. If allowed to continue its descent, the lengthy vertical division, while concealed partially by the mid-ground servant, intersects the horizontal axis of the table and the center of Herod's left hand. From here one's eye can either horizontally follow the white tablecloth leftward around the oval table to Salome and the platter or move to the right and focus on the receding Herodias or Herod, whose left arm directs one's attention upward. Should the viewer focus on Herodias' recline, it is important to note that the angle at which her neck and head tilt perfectly parallel the stepped angle of the shelving unit containing plates and vessels. Since this angle leads to the right-hand border, the eye is unavoidably guided back to the center of the composition, from where it may move left and back towards Salome. While contemplating the Princess holding the severed head, one cannot avoid engaging the figure with the red cap and the beige stone building behind his left shoulder. This building stands out because of the color contrast between the dark mid-ground wall and cerulean blue sky. If the viewer has already contemplated the action and the figures' reactions at this length – as I contend any Seicento artist and connoisseur would have – they would undoubtedly recognize the angular relationship between the perspectival recession of the beige building, the left-hand side of the red-capped guest's head, and the placement of the Baptist's head on the platter. Like other linear correspondences between the guests' reactions and the position of the architectural elements, there is an exact line
that connects the angular recession of the building, the line of the man's head, and the positioning of the platter. An acute angle is formed between the horizontal line of the platter, the bridge of the Baptist's nose, the left side of the guest's tilted head, and the receding beige building. Such correspondences are not accidents formed while working *alla prima*! Rather, they reveal a thought out and strategic means of emphasizing the central action by always redirecting the viewers' eye so that they inevitably return to it. This exemplifies a meticulous process that has just begun to be assessed in these pages.

These are not isolated examples in Preti's art. Many works completed between roughly 1645 and 1675 reveal an acute awareness as to how linear elements enhance the linkages between figures, their actions, and the architectural setting – all of which contributes to the spectatorial experience by leading the eye away and then back to the central event that is being depicted. Using such strategies in larger and more populated compositions such as the *Feast of Absalom* and the *Belshazzar's Feast* can be problematic, yet Preti does successfully focus the audiences' attention through the strategic use of figural positioning and cropping.

*The Feast of Absalom* and the *Belshazzar's Feast*

The largest feast scenes Preti depicted where the *Feast of Absalom* and *Belshazzar's Feast* – measuring 202 x 294 cm and 204 x 307 cm, respectively (figs. 115 & 116).

199 Less elaborate versions of the *Feast of Absalom* were executed in the early 1630s and 1660s, respectively, and copies were made of the original Capodimonte paintings for the Marchese della Valle Siciliana, Geronimo Ferdinando Alarcón de Mendoza (c. 1639-1703) or possibly his brother Gennaro (c. 1640-1715), heir to the Mendoza collection, which included five original paintings by the Calabrese painter and four copies. On the Alarcón de Mendoza brothers and their collection of paintings, see: Labrot, pp. 216-23, 275-77.

See Pigler (Vol. I, p. 158) for the iconographic history of the *Feast of Absalom* and such precedents as those by Lorenzo Lotto and Guercino and subsequent representations by Gaspare Treversi and Ubaldo Gandolfi. The extensive sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century iconographic history of
According to extant inventories and a survey of preserved works, neither of the subjects had lengthy iconographic traditions in Naples. Both subjects together were depicted fewer than ten times throughout the Seicento. The Calabrese, however, depicted the Feast of Absalom on three separate occasions. The version which will be addressed here is that from the Capodimonte and described by De Dominici along with the paintings of David Playing the Harp before Saul and the above noted Belshazzar’s Feast (fig. 130). All three paintings were in the collection of the Duke of Sanseverino in 1745 and subsequently in that of the Colonna di Stigliano. Although De Dominici states that the David Playing the Harp and the Feast of Absalom were executed as pendants, some modern scholars have considered that the Absalom and the Belshazzar were pendants

_Belshazzar’s Feast_ (Vol. I, pp. 213-16) includes notable paintings by such Southern and Northern European painters as Tintoretto, Veronese, and Ribera and Frans Franken II, Rembrandt, and Ferdinand Bol. Labrot, p. 744. Labrot discovered five versions of the Absalom and two versions of the Belshazzar in Seicento and early Settecento Neapolitan inventories, including the pictures by Preti. With the exception of Francesco Manzini’s copy of the Calabrese’s Capodimonte version, the others were listed as being executed by anonymous artists. Cavallino represented the subject in the 1630s. His painting – being significantly smaller at 103 x 121 cm – will be discussed in detail below. Such subjects as events in the life of Absalom, Belshazzar, and other Old Testament characters are not frequently represented in Baroque painting in Rome and Naples because of the Counter-Reformation emphasis on the events recounted in the New Testament. In addition to the events in the life of Christ, those of early Christian Saints, the Church Fathers, and patron saints dominate religious paintings.

201 Spike, 1999, pp. 201, 231, 367-68. Preti experimented with the subject – once in his early years according to Spike and again in the early 1660s – prior to executing the Capodimonte painting. The first version can be tentatively dated to sometime during the 1630s and is currently in a private collection while the second version, located in the National Gallery of Canada and apparently commissioned by Don Antonio Caputo, appears to be from the early 1660s (fig. 129). De Dominici describes the National Gallery painting as follows: "Ei dipinse il funesto convito in cui Assalone fece uccidere Ammone, violatore della sorella Tamar. Bellissima è la mossa di Assalone che, in atto di alzarsi dalla sedia in un canto del quadro tenendo la sinistra mano appoggiata alla mensa, e sta con la destra distesa ordinando l'uccisione dell'incestuoso fratello, il quale, atterrito ed incalzato da' fertitori, si butta sopra la tavola con mani aperte e con volto spaventato [...]. L'altre figure che assistono si veggono ritirarsi per lo spavento. Insomma ogni cosa è terrore ed orrore [He paints the said feast in which Absalom killed Amnon, the violator of his sister Tamar. The movement of Absalom is wonderful who, in the act of rising from his seat on one side of the painting placing his left hand on the table, and ordering with his outstretched right the murder of his incestuous brother, who, terrorized and pressed by his persecutors throws himself on the table with open hands and a frightened face. [...] The other figures that are present withdraw out of fear. Indeed, everything is horror and fear] (p. 634)." c.f. Spike, "Mattia Preti: the Feast of Absalom," _National Gallery of Canada, Annual Bulletin_, I, 1979, pp. 17-32.

because of their similar dimensions and subject matter. Frangipane was the first to consider the *Absalom* and the *Belshazzar* as pendants since they were both sold to the Museo Nazionale, Naples, from the Colonna di Stigliano collection in 1906.\textsuperscript{203} Just as Frangipane referred to the "celebri Conviti" together, Spike noted in 1979 as well as in 1999 that "the pair of banquet scenes" share "the same muted values of a selected few warm tones, principally darkened orange and pale red."\textsuperscript{204} Both the *Absalom* and *Belshazzar* are closely related with regard to their subject matter because they both depict stories that address acts in which man has offended the rule of God – Amnon in the case of the former and Belshazzar and his courtiers in the case of the latter. Preti's paintings, however, are stylistically incompatible because of the architecture, atmospheric elements, and colors that appear in the former and the sharp *chiaroscuro* and the silver and orange overtones in the latter. Utili has, consequently, maintained that the architectural and atmospheric similarities between the *David Playing the Harp* and the *Absalom* reaffirm De Dominici's original conclusion that they were executed as pendants, despite the difference in subject matter.\textsuperscript{205} Putting aside the debate over which picture was the pendant for the other, this section focuses on Preti's ability to transform the iconography of banquet scenes in order to emphasize the point at which the subject reaches its confrontational climax.\textsuperscript{206}

\textsuperscript{203} Utili, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{204} Frangipane, p. 81; Spike, 1999, p. 201; Spike, 1979, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{206} Angelo Conti's "Due Conviti di Mattia Preti," *Bolletino d'Arte*, 1908, pp. 19-24 (see, especially, p. 22) attempts to accomplish this, but fails due to the author's conformity to the contemporary readings of Preti's art, which largely used De Dominici's descriptive terminology and his juxtaposition of the Calabrese's art with Giordano's as a means of analysis.
His Capodimonte Absalom depicts the moment at which King David's son orders the execution of his brother Amnon for raping their sister Tamar. The story is recounted in II Samuel (13: 1-28). Absalom invites his father David and other courtiers to a feast to witness the execution of the incestuous brother. Suspecting Absalom had something planned, David rejected the invitation for himself as well as for Amnon. Nonetheless, Absalom finally succeeded in convincing his father to allow Amnon to attend. The unfolding of the story and the murder is recounted as follows:

And Absalom made a feast as it were the feast of a king. And Absalom had commanded his servants, 'saying take notice when Amnon shall be drunk with wine, and when I shall say to you strike him, and kill him, fear not for it is I that command you: take courage, and be valiant men.' And the servants of Absalom did to Amnon as Absalom had commanded them. (II Samuel, 13: 25-28)

Preti's monumental picture captures the moment at which Absalom is giving the order while his servants are driving their spears into Amnon's collapsing body. Wilhelm Rolfs aptly described the painting as the combination of a "Neapolitan murder and a Veronesian banquet scene."207 The painting not only demonstrates the Calabrese's complete ease at designing banquet scenes, the architectural environments in which they are located, and the interaction of numerous figures, but also a means through which one can insert the most gruesome action into a scene that would otherwise emphasize wealth and courtly splendor.

The Absalom builds on compositional experiments that Preti completed as he was designing his London Marriage at Cana and the Toledo and Kassel paintings of the Feast of Herod. He depicts the dinner in the foreground along a lengthy horizontally-positioned table, which is surrounded by figures on all sides. On the far right, one sees the golden-

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haired Absalom rising from his chair and indicating to his servants that they "strike him, and kill him." All of the surrounding figures respond with surprise and aversion to the centrally-placed servants aggressively driving their knives into Amnon's chest and throat. The central murderous action is framed by two descending columns and the vector created by the foreground guests who are backing away from the table and towards the viewer so as to avoid the pulsating blood, which can be seen on Amnon's right collarbone. The dark tonality and sheer size of these columns amplify the speed at which the executioners drive their weapons down into the collapsing body. Similarly, the void in the background created between the two framing columns emphasizes the left-hand executioner and Amnon's elevated right arm. The blue sky that can be seen beyond the dinner table was at one point meant to include a sculpture on a pediment that resembles a woman in motion. By eliminating the sculpture the painter has further emphasized the murderous act. The painting shows Preti's powerful capacity to amplify the biblical tale, which does not recount in detail Absalom's demand that his servants "strike him, and kill him."

Like both versions of the *Feast of Herod*, Preti strategically uses the figures' gestures and their positioning, as well as decorative and architectural details to frame and direct the viewer's attention towards the central actions. The two seated figures in the foreground, for example, serve the same role as the figure of Herod in the Kassel painting because they are positioned before the table and react with a sense of shock and aversion to the event before them. By moving away from the table and towards the barrier of the pictorial field, these figures challenge the audience to visually-engage the murder of Amnon. In addition, their movement to the left, on the one hand, and to the right, on the
other, directs the viewer towards the two dominant actions and highlights them: the execution, and Absalom commanding the murder. The figure in the left foreground wearing the striped shirt with bear arms moves away in such a manner that his angular positioning parallels Amnon's raised arm. Similarly, the jolting movement backwards of the figure in the center-right foreground wearing the dark, silver-accented jacket with the black hair unavoidably directs the viewer towards Absalom on the far right. Absalom's gesture leftwards, in turn, redirects the viewer's attention back to the execution.

As in the two versions of the Feast of Herod, the positioning of architectural details and the perspectival recession of buildings are plotted in such a manner that they emphasize the central actions of the blades and Absalom's leftward gesture. In addition to the central column, the receding lines of the left-hand shelves and the building in the left background lead directly to the foremost executioner's left hand – placed on Amnon's left shoulder so as to suppress him while also indicating the exact location in which the executioner's blade will puncture Amnon's body. The receding angle of the columned building in the right background – behind the arch – also leads directly towards the executioner's left hand and Amnon's left shoulder. The structural lines of sight demonstrate how Preti used, first, the most basic function of one point perspective to amplify the narrative force of his figures actions and, second, a calculated approach to organizing the personages in the pictorial space. With the exception of the Kassel Feast of Herod, such a focus on using the most intrinsic aspects of perspectival recession does not occur again in his known works. Many paintings include details that frame and reinforce the foregrounded figures, although the Capodimonte Absalom is unique in its strategic use of architecture and exploration of spatial depth. Two elements in particular
reinforce the location of the murder while also framing, albeit subtly, Absalom’s gesture. First, the line of the descending shelves on the right-hand side runs directly through the foreground figure in the silver-detailed coat and black hair to underline the angle on which he moves away from the table – thereby emphasizing his role in creating the vector in which the executioners' blades descend into Amnon's body. Second, the placement of the mid-ground vault highlights Absalom's role in the central action. While not immediately noticeable, the keystone of the vault is placed directly above Absalom's right finger. The vault, as such, serves to frame the action on which the biblical account focuses. Preti recognized that this detail could function as an important compositional element in so far as the sheer weight of an arch forces the eye downwards and therefore towards Absalom's pointing hand. Like the mid-ground and background details in the two versions of the Feast of Herod, the Calabrese's framing strategies redirect the viewers' attention towards the central action in order to complete the spectatorial circuit.

His painting also reinterprets several extant depictions of the subject that were likely known to him and his Neapolitan contemporaries, including versions by Cavallino, Niccolò De Simone, and Matthias Stomer completed between approximately 1630 and 1650 (figs. 131, 132, 133). Cavallino's version is one of his most Caravaggesque paintings and can be dated to the mid-1630s. The small gallery painting – less than half

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208 As far as I have been able to discover, none of the versions by these painters have been examined in detail by any scholar. Like Cavallino’s Banquet of Absalom in the Graf Harrach’sche Familienammlung, the De Simone and Stomer (formerly Marie Françoise Robert, Paris, 2010) paintings are located in private collections. No exhaustive study of the paintings' iconography and their origins can be attempted here, however. For the most expansive summaries of the artists' careers and activities in Naples and Southern Italy, see: Percy & Spinoso; I. Creazzo, "Alcuni inediti di Niccolò de Simone e altre precisazioni sul pittore," Scritti di storia dell'arte in onore di Raffaello Causa, (ed.) P. L. De Castris, Naples: 1988, pp. 223-32; M. Novelli, "Appunti per il pittore Nicolò De Simone," Napoli Nobilissima, Vol. 17, 1978, pp. 21-29; F. Fischbacher, Matthias Stomer: Die sizilianischen Nachstücke, Frankfurt: 1993; Nicholson, pp. 230-43, 245.
the size of Preti’s Capodimonte picture – contains full-length figures grouped around a
dinner table in a sharply-illuminated and heavily shadowed room. Absalom and two
fellow guests sit on the left side of an angular table while Amnon and the two
executioners are depicted on the center-right. Unlike Preti who foregrounds the event
with over a dozen life-size figures depicted from the waist up, Cavallino reduces his
subject to the key players as described in the Bible. While the latter's executioners are
suppressing Amnon by pulling him backwards, the painter does not go so far as the
former who represents them both suppressing the incestuous brother as well as indicating
that daggers are being driven into his flesh. Cavallino's construction of the interaction
between the executioners and Amnon, however, seems to have informed Preti's
representation of the subject. Like Cavallino's foremost executioner, the Calabrese's
corresponding character pulls Amnon down and backwards with his left hand to free his
right. Cavallino's second executioner garnishes a blade, which rests above the table
waiting for the order to plunge it in. Preti's representation of the upward thrust of
Amnon's right-hand could have been inspired directly by Cavallino's composition, as
neither De Simone nor Stomer emphasize such a gesture.

De Simone's representation corresponds largely to Cavallino's, while also adding
a Neo-Venetian tonality and atmospheric environment. The luxuriant tonality of the
painting as well as the classical arch on the right-hand side bridges the dark
Caravaggesque aspects of Cavallino's painting with the atmospheric qualities in Preti's
picture. The Calabrese made further adjustments by uniting bright colors and an open
background with half-length figures that are sharply illuminated. Dating from the early
1650s, the clothing of De Simone's figures, the dinnerware, and drapery demonstrate the
influence of Rubens’ *Feast of Herod* on Neapolitan dinner scenes while also pointing the way towards Preti's delicately adorned Absalom. While the chromatic brilliance of De Simone's painting almost distracts the viewer from the central action in which only one executioner raises his dagger above the falling Amnon, the combination of the elevated dagger in the executioner's right-hand, his subduing of Amnon with his left hand, and the insertion of architectural elements all come together to create the bridge between Cavallino's, De Simone's, and the Calabrese's paintings.

Stomer's version should be taken into account as well, despite the fact that the painter was living and working in both Palermo and Messina from the latter half of the 1630s onwards.\(^\text{209}\) Stomer's activities in Sicily did not keep him from shipping works to Naples after his departure during the late 1630s, and his *Feast of Absalom* probably dates from his Neapolitan years anyway, given the figural similarity between Amnon – seated on the right – and the *St. Sebastian*, painted in Naples and now in Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen.\(^\text{210}\) His composition is significant because of his use of four monumental half-length figures that impress themselves upon the pictorial plane. The foregrounding of figures, strategic use of gestures to emphasize actions and reactions, detailed adornment of David's sons, and subtle combination of bright colors with dramatically-illuminated and shaded characters all provide Preti with alternative compositional and pictorial techniques that were not employed by either Cavallino or De Simone. For example, Stomer uses the horizontal line of the table to amplify the gestures exhibited by the pointing Absalom and the thrusting executioners. When combined, these components not only draw the viewers' attention but also direct it immediately towards

\(^{209}\) Nicholson, p. 233.  
\(^{210}\) Ibid., pp. 232, 242 (fig. 11).
the startled Amnon. The placement of the executioners behind the table and the gesturing Amnon at its end may have also informed Preti's composition so that the two foreground guests engage the audience while the mid-ground executioners force the event toward the audience through the compelling nature of their actions. Beyond Amnon's gestural similarities with the apostles in Caravaggio's 1601 *Supper at Emmaus*, Stomer is one of the few painters to depict this subject by clothing Absalom in as ornate a manner as Preti. The Dutch painter uses the figure of Absalom as a means to endow a certain grace and elegance to the otherwise horrific action. The Calabrese continued this practice by highlighting the golden locks in Absalom's hair, the silver shimmer on his shoulder armor, and the elegant orange shirt.

Unlike the Cavallino and De Simone paintings, whose dimensions do not permit life-size figures, Stomer's life-size half-length figures create a sense of monumentality. Like the Dutch painter, Preti elected to continue with the life-size half-length figure format that characterizes much of his art produced between the 1640s and 1660s. Despite the fact that the dimensions of the Capodimonte *Absalom* could easily have been used to depict full-length figures, the Calabrese represented half-length figures to enhance the presence of his protagonists and engage the audience on their own level.  

Given the dimensions of the canvas, his painting was, indeed, likely hung so that the figures and the table around which they sit were consistent with the height of the tables and chairs found in the Sanseverino and Colonna di Stigliano palaces. Preti, then, took the representation of the murder and execution of Amnon to an entirely new level by expanding the size of

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211 It seems unlikely that he did do so simply because the characters were sitting down, as suggested by Sandra Gianfreda (*Caravaggio, Guercino, Mattia Preti: das halbfigurige Historienbild und die Sammler des Seicento*, Berlin: 2005, p. 66).
the figures in the Capodimonte painting. While depicting the servants with their daggers raised and ready to plunge into their victim was already a conventional iconographic element, Preti's composition is also informed by certain depictions of the Massacre of the Innocents produced throughout the first half of the Seicento. The executioners in the Capodimonte painting are visibly reinterpretations of Reni's left hand soldier in his 1611 Massacre of the Innocents and the foreground soldier in Stanzione's early 1630s Massacre, executed in Naples and copied five times in subsequent decades. Although Preti's foremost executioner adopts a similar stance and downward gesture as Stanzione's figure, he can just as easily be a reoriented version of Reni's left-hand soldier who raises his dagger in his right hand and forces his victims down with his left hand. The Calabrese's left-hand executioner, with the elevated right hand and downward angle of the body and forceful grip of the left hand over Amnon's shoulder, may derive from the aggressive soldier in Giacomo Piccino's 1633 frontispiece to Marino's Strage degli Innocenti (fig. 134). Regardless of the executioners' exact origin, Preti clearly had a particular interest in gruesome scenes. By carefully observing the many torturous representations of the Beheading of St. John, the Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew, and, among other subjects, the Martyrdom of St. Sebastian, he designed a painting that included the violent actions and pathetic reactions required to transform a monumental feast scene into a story of fratricide.

212 Schütze, 1992, pp. 203-204; D. M. Pagano, "Strage degli Innocenti," Spinosa, 2008, p. 221; For Reni's painting – which was on view in the Bero family Chapel in San Domenico, Bologna – and the most extensive analysis of the subject of the Massacre of the Innocents in Seicento painting, see: Cropper, 1992, pp. 155-62.
Belshazzar's Feast

The Belshazzar's Feast is a starkly different composition than the Capodimonte Feast of Absalom (fig. 116). While the Absalom is Neo-Venetian in its coloring and atmospheric in its open blue sky design, the Belshazzar in color and design recalls such early works as the monumental Galleria Doria-Pamphili Concert, datable to the late 1630s or 1640s (fig. 135).\(^{213}\) This was a phase when Preti was merging his interests in Caravagesque naturalism with the brilliant coloring and open air of Roman painters. Like the Doria-Pamphili Concert, the Calabrese composed the Belshazzar around a lengthy horizontal table where numerous figures sit, including an ornately dressed man at the head. The combination of the strong tenebroso palette with the addition of brilliant yellows and vibrant reds unites these two paintings of completely opposite subject matter. Similarly, the figures around the table demonstrate a variety of reactions to the events that are occurring – some looking towards one end of the table while others look in the opposite direction. The dynamic gestures of the figures in the foreground clearly distinguish the Capodimonte Belshazzar from the earlier picture, yet its compositional strategy does not correspond to his late 1650s feast scenes as well as those from the early 1660s, including the above noted Absalom as well as the Alexander the Great Kills Cleitus (c. 1668), now in a private collection in Rome (fig. 136).\(^{214}\)

The "aria quasi caliginosa", which makes the Belshazzar appear as if "reppresentata di notte" was, according to De Dominici, the result of leaving the painting

\(^{214}\) Spike, 1999, p. 271. The Alexander the Great Kills Cleitus demonstrates the same illumination, coloring, architectural setting, and dynamic actions and reactions that can be seen in the Feast of Absalom.
unfinished in the upper levels of the mid- and background.\(2^{15}\) Upon visual inspection, however, the painting is clearly complete, although Preti’s decision to design a night scene does not have any precedent in the biblical account. The book of Daniel describes how the goblets and golden and silver vessels, taken as spoils of war from the Temple of Salomon by Belshazzar’s father Nebuchadnezzar, were used for an elaborate feast in which the King and his courtiers desecrated vessels and goblets by drinking from them. Consequently, the King and the courtiers noticed that a hand began to write on a nearby wall the words "MANE, THECEL, PHARES," meaning: "God has numbered your kingdom, and has finished it; you are weighed in the balance, and are found wanting; your kingdom is divided, and is given to the Medes and Persians."\(2^{16}\)

De Dominici provides a lengthy description of the picture, in which he celebrates Preti’s debt to Venetian Renaissance painting:

Dirò solamente ch’ella è mirabilmente rappresentata in una gran tela per traverso, ove con istupore de' commensali appareisce la mano che scrive le funeste note del Mane, Techel, Fares, benché il Calabrese le abbia tradotte in volgare: Conto, Peso, Divisione. In questo quadro si veggono molti convitati assisi ad una mensa, la quale occupa tutta la larghezza, ed indi si allunga prospetticamente indentro, laonde vi stano così bene adatte le figure e così distinte da una parte e dall'altra, che meglio, e con più magnificenza e decoro, non potevano essere ideate dal gran Paolo Veronese. Siede dal destro l'effiminato re in mezzo a due donne, l'una dopo di lui e l'altra davanti che, situata di spalla, fa pompa della sua candidezza al paragone d'un morretino che tiene un bacino sotto del braccio, ed attonito si rivolge alla mano misteriosa, come la più parte de' commensali, poiché altri mirano il re che in atto maraviglioso addita ancor egli la mano, e questa figura del re con barba bionda, colore acceso, e con dolcezza di colore riesce di tutta perfezione, che la direste dipinta da Tiziano. [...] Insomma dirò che quest’opera sia eccellentissima al par di quelle de' più gran pittori, ed è uno stupore, anzi un terrore, de' medesimi professori.\(2^{17}\)

\(2^{15}\) DD, Vol. II, pp. 698-99
\(2^{16}\) Daniel, (5: 22-30).
\(2^{17}\) DD, Vol. II, p. 698: “I only say that it is admirably represented on a large horizontal canvas, where to the surprise of the fellow diners appears the hand that writes the unfortunate note of Mene, Techel, Fares, although the Calabrese translated them into the common language: Account, Weight, Divide. In this painting many diners are seated around a table, which occupies the whole width and then extends perspectively into depth, in a way that the figures are so well arranged and distributed from one side to the other that they could not be better conceived, and with greater magnificence and ornament, by the great
Like many of the pictures the biographer observed firsthand, this summary provides historians with an in-depth characterization of the painting. The references to Veronese and Titian provide some indication of Preti's models. For example, the depth of the composition and large number of figures that surround the receding table demonstrate his ability to depict spatially complex banquet scenes with the same ease as Veronese. De Dominici's statement that the King "con barba bionda, colore acceso, e con dolcezza di colore riesce di tutta perfezione, che la direste dipinta da Tiziano" can be seen as an instructive analogy if one compares such qualities in the late works of the Venetian painter. If one considers, for example, Preti's depiction of the King in comparison to Titian's 1557 Annunciation for the Pinelli Chapel in San Domenico Maggiore, Naples, – the primary work to which Preti and De Dominici were exposed in Naples – the biographer's perception seems tenable. The bright gold yet soft lighting that permeates the scene and rose-colored robes worn by Gabriel and the mild blue and red robes worn by the Virgin Mary are, indeed, consistent with Preti's subtle treatment of the yellow, red, and brown hues that elegantly merge throughout Belshazzar's shirt, cloak, beard, face, turban, and crown. As such, Titian's late paintings may have been the inspiration behind Preti's colorism.

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Paolo Veronese. Seated on the right is the effeminate King between two women, the one behind him and the other in front, who, seated backwards, makes much of her whiteness (white skin) in comparison to the young Moor who holds a plate under his arm, and astonished turns towards the mysterious hand, like most of the dinner guests, while others look towards the King who, in a marvelous act, also points towards the hand himself, and this figure of the king with shiny blonde beard and soft coloring is achieved with total perfection so that you would say he was painted by Titian. [...] In sum, I will say that this work is truly excellent on the level of those of the greatest painters, and it is stupefying, even terrifying, to the same painters."

The picture seems to be iconographically without precedent in Naples. The most renowned representation of the subject was Rembrandt's 1636-38 Belshazzar's Feast (fig. 137).\textsuperscript{219} Although Rembrandt was known to Southern Italian patrons, namely the Ruffo, given the presence of his Aristotle with the Bust of Homer in their Messinese collection, it is highly unlikely that his work was known to Preti.\textsuperscript{220} Maria Utili has noted that the Belshazzar belongs to a new phase in Preti's approach to banquet scenes in which the painter elaborated upon the standard Veronesian format he had followed up to this point.\textsuperscript{221} Unlike the earlier banquet scenes and the pendant painting of the Feast of Absalom, the Belshazzar demonstrates the results of an "educated and absolutely personal style" founded on the in-depth reflection upon his own models as well as local pictorial developments. Preti brought together in a kind of synthesis many qualities that can be traced back through nearly twenty years of experimenting with banquet scenes. For example, the luxuriant dress and carefully braided and adorned golden hair of the foreground figure refers back to his earlier reinterpretations of Veronese's figures, including those in his two versions of the Marriage at Cana. Another feature that stands out prominently is the manner in which the rightward slanting illumination shimmers on the skin and white robes of the foreground figures, including the man sitting in a chair on the left, the servant reacting with astonishment in the center foreground, and the already noted courtesan to the King's left. These figure types recall similarly designed characters in the Capodimonte Absalom as well as the Kassel Feast of Herod while also pointing towards the innovations seen in the San Domenico Maggiore Marriage at Cana.

\textsuperscript{221} Utili, 1999, p. 176.
One does not find in this painting, however, as many compositional elements that
direct the viewer's eye to and from the characters' actions and reactions. While the strong
horizontal element of the table and coffered ceiling, the leftward gestures of the pointing
hands, and the gazing figures draw the attention to the central event depicted in upper
left-hand corner, only a few compositional elements contribute to the 'reversal' of
directions that is needed to close the spectatorial loop. These include the central mid-
ground figures' as well as the courtesans' rightward facing torsos and heads, moving as if
they seek to engage the King. Only one architectural feature can be said to play a
significant role in returning the viewer's attention to Belshazzar's dumbfounded face.
That is, the building in the right background, which rises from behind the table towards
the sky. The descending line of this building directly intersects the King's pointing hand
so as to emphasize his gesture. The receding line that divides the lower from the upper
half of the building is positioned just above the servant pointing leftward in the right mid-
ground, and intersects his index finger. If the line is followed through the composition,
one would notice that it is parallel to the angle along which the brightly-illuminated
foreground servant reclines. Despite Preti's implementation of such elements, one does
not find in this composition the descending columns and steps that direct the eye towards
the central event, as in the earlier feast scenes. One might state that such elements are
replaced by the foreground servant and courtesan, which play, indeed, a central role in
reversing the directionality of the many leftward looking faces.

Preti painted another version of Belshazzar's Feast (fig. 138) in the mid-1680s that
broke with the strict horizontal format and adopted a sharply foreshortened angular
composition. The dining table was situated in a similar manner as that in the London
Marriage at Cana, but included figures backing away from it in a manner similar to the Capodimonte Absalom. This was the last banquet scene he executed. Over a period of thirty years, then, Preti completed thirteen large-scale banquet scenes in which he experimented with a number of strategies. The six paintings discussed here in detail demonstrate how the painter strategically altered his positioning of the figures around diversely-shaped tables, modified the lighting, played with the coloring of his characters, experimented with the space in which the protagonists are depicted, and considered in detail how the architectural adornment of each scene could contribute to the overall dramatic effect. Through such experimentation Preti was able to move beyond conventional horizontal or angular compositional formats used by such Venetian Renaissance painters as Veronese and Tintoretto and such Baroque predecessors as Rubens and Cavallino.

\[222\text{ Spike, 1999, p. 396.}\]
Fig. 111. Preti, *Wedding at Cana*, National Gallery, London, c. 1655.

Fig. 112. Preti, *Wedding at Cana*, San Domenico Maggiore, Naples, c. 1675.
Fig. 112. Preti, *Wedding at Cana*, San Domenico Maggiore, Naples, c. 1675.

Fig. 113. Preti, *Feast of Herod*, Toledo Museum of Art, c. 1655.
Fig. 114. Preti, *Feast of Herod*, Gemäldegalerie, Kassel, c. 1655.

Fig. 115. Preti, *Feast of Absalom*, Capodimonte, c. 1668.
Fig. 116. Preti, *Belshazzar's Feast*, Capodimonte, c. 1668.

Fig. 117. Tintoretto, *Marriage at Cana*, Santa Maria della Salute, Venice, 1561.
Fig. 118. Veronese, *Marriage at Cana*, Louvre, 1563.

Fig. 119. Valentin, *Last Supper*, Galleria Nazionale, Rome, 1626.
Fig. 120. Bartolomeo Murillo, *Wedding at Cana*, Barber Institute, Birmingham, 1672.

Fig. 121. Giuseppe Maria Crespi, *Wedding at Cana*, Art Institute of Chicago, 1681.

Fig. 122. Stanzione, *Last Supper*, Sant Efremo, Naples, c. 1650-55.
Fig. 123. Stanzione, *Wedding at Cana*, Quadreria dei Girolamini, Naples, c. 1640s.

Fig. 124. Veronese, *Marriage at Cana*, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden, 1571-72.
Fig. 125. Giordano, *Wedding at Cana*, Capodimonte, 1659-60.

Fig. 126. Giordano, *Feast of Herod*, Capodimonte, 1659-60.
Fig. 127. Preti, *St. John the Baptist Reproaching Herod*, Nelson Shanks Museum, Andalusia, c. 1655.

Fig. 128. Rubens, *Feast of Herod*, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh, 1635-38.
Fig. 129. Preti, *Feast of Absalom*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, c. 1665.

Fig. 130. Preti, *David Playing the Harp before Saul*, Private Collection, 1665-70.
Fig. 131. Cavallino, *Feast of Absalom*, Graf Harrach’sche Familiensammlung, Schloss Rohrau, c. 1635-45.

Fig. 132. De Simone, *Feast of Absalom*, Private Collection, c. 1650.

Fig. 133. Stomer, *Feast of Absalom*, Private Collection, c. 1630-40.
Fig. 135. Preti, *Concert*, Galleria Doria-Pamphili, Rome, c. 1635-45.

Fig. 134. Giacomo Piccino, *Massacre of the Innocents*, (frontispiece to Marino’s poem), 1633.

Fig. 136. Preti, *Alexander the Great Kills Cleitus*, Private Collection, Rome, c. 1668.

Fig. 138. Preti, *Belshazzar's Feast*, Private Collection, Rome, c. 1685.
Chapter 6

The Evolution of the Altarpiece from Naples to Malta: Preti's Artistic Strategies in the *St. Nicholas of Bari*, the *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*, and the *Canonization of the St. Catherine of Siena*

It was not until the spring of 1653 and Preti’s arrival in Naples that the artist truly began to demonstrate his ability as an altarpiece painter. Although he had painted the *Miracle of St. Pantaleon* for the high altar of San Pantaleone and frescoed the choir in Sant'Andrea della Valle while in Rome, his Neapolitan years provided the artist with the opportunity to demonstrate his skills as an altarpiece painter on an unprecedented level (figs. 30 & 7). In addition to his large-scale public works and many paintings completed for private galleries, he painted at least five altarpieces during his seven-year stay in the city. He would go on to complete at least two dozen more for churches in Malta, Naples, Messina, Siena, and his hometown in Taverna between 1660 and 1685, not counting the many paintings that flanked the altarpieces in the family chapels and churches in which the works were placed. As his first altarpiece in Naples, the monumental *St. Nicholas of Bari in Ecstasy* for the Coscia family Chapel in the Calabrian church of San Domenico Soriano was completed prior to December 20th, 1653 – the date he received his final payment of 40 ducats (fig. 36).223 He would subsequently complete two altarpieces for his uncle and cousin Giovanni Tommaso and Marino Schipani in Sant Agostino degli

Scalzi and chapel paintings for the Franciscan Basilica of San Lorenzo Maggiore.  

Other altarpieces include the undocumented monumental *St. Sebastian in Ecstasy* (Museo del Capodimonte), which can be dated to circa 1655-56, and such documented pictures painted and exhibited in Naples but sent to Valletta as the 1656 *St. George and the Dragon* and the 1658 *St. Francis Xavier* (figs. 139, 26, & 8). 

Between 1653 and 1660 Preti's approach towards designing altarpieces underwent a significant transformation – moving from the brilliantly-illuminated yet deeply shadowed single-figure types to multi-figure compositions almost entirely dominated by a colorful palette of red, blue, and yellow hues and architectural elements that activate the pictorial space. This chapter focuses on the gradual transformation from the former to the latter type and the final assimilation of the two, as they can be elicited from studying, in an exemplary fashion, the strategies behind three of the Calabrese's altarpieces: the 1653 *St. Nicholas of Bari*, the circa 1667 *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* for the Chapel of the Italian Langue in the Co-Cathedral of St. John, and the 1671-73 *Canonization of St. Catherine of Siena* completed for the Piccolomini Chapel in the church of San Francesco, Siena (figs. 36, 44, & 21). Each painting characterizes a specific moment in Preti's career. By examining them in the context of both the artist's oeuvre and the works of his contemporaries, this chapter's aim is to discern what factors contributed to the evolution of Preti's style from the "maniera forte e naturale" of the *St. Nicholas* to the "maniera tanto vaga" of the *Mystic Marriage* before reaching a synthesis in the *Canonization*.

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225 For the provenance and additional details on these paintings, in the order as indicated above, see: Spike, 1999, pp. 207, 301-302; Utili, 1999, pp. 148-49, 150-51; Spike, 1999, pp. 328-29.
St. Nicholas of Bari in Ecstasy

Like the events in the lives of many post-biblical saints, the story of St. Nicholas of Bari was known to Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque artists mainly through Voragine's *Golden Legend*. Prior to the seventeenth century, depictions of the saint were frequently designed as an isolated standing figure or as one of several saints positioned below the Virgin and child in the *sacra conversazione* format popular during the Early and High-Renaissance, as in Raphael's 1505 *Madonna and Child with St. John the Baptist and St. Nicholas of Bari* (the *Ansidei Madonna*), now in the National Gallery, London, Lorenzo Lotto's 1529 *St. Nicholas of Bari in Glory* in Santa Maria dei Carmini, Venice, and Titian's 1563 *St. Nicholas of Bari* for the Crasso Chapel in San Sebastiano, Venice (figs. 140, 141, & 142). Saint Nicholas of Bari was particularly popular in Southern Italy since it was believed that his bones were moved from the city of Myra in Asia Minor (East of Rhodes on the Southern coast of Turkey) where he had been anointed Bishop, and transported after the conquest by the Moslem Turks to the Adriatic city of Bari. Following the arrival of the fourth century relics around 1100, Bari became a central pilgrimage city in Southern Italy and was thereafter known as the resting place of St. Nicholas of Bari. Depictions of the saint were popular in the South because he was one of several patron saints of the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily. In addition, St. Nicholas was renowned as the patron saint of impoverished children, sailors, and merchants. These social groups were particularly numerous in Renaissance and Baroque Naples, since the city was the largest trading point in Southern Europe and was populated by homeless families and vagrant children, as much as by international sailors and merchants.
Monumental depictions of the saint seem to appear in Naples only during the early Seicento. One of the first depictions was Filippo Vitale's *Madonna and Child with Saints Nicholas of Bari, Gennaro, and Severo* (c. 1610-18) from the Chapel of San Nicola di Bari in a now destroyed Gothic church in Pozzo Bianco, just north of Naples (fig. 143). Subsequent depictions include Pacecco's two altarpieces from circa 1635 and 1636 – the latter being commissioned for a side chapel in San Martino, Naples (figs. 144 & 145). The origins of Preti’s composition do not lie, however, in a reinterpretation of Raphael, Lotto, Titian, Vitale, or Pacecco, but seem directly based on the account in the *Golden Legend* as well as on the assimilation of Riberesque naturalism and Roman High Baroque sculpture, specifically François Duquesnoy’s (1594-1643) *St. Andrew* installed in the crossing of St. Peter's Basilica in 1640 (fig. 146). Voragine describes the saint's death and assumption as follows:

When the Lord wished to call Nicholas to himself, the saint prayed that he would send him his angels; and when he saw them coming, he bowed his head and recited the Psalm *In te domine speravi*; and coming to the words *In manus tuas commendo spiritum meum*, which means 'Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit,' he breathed forth his soul to the sound of heavenly music. This was in the year 343. He was buried in a marble tomb, and a fountain of oil began to flow from his head and a fountain of water from his seat. Even today a holy oil issues from his members and brings help to many. Preti's altarpiece shows St. Nicholas crouched upon clouds ascending with his arms extended outwards and face heavenwards as nine angels accompany him holding the

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228 Voragine, "St. Nicholas," *BS*, Vol. I, p. 25; On the life, cult, and iconography of St. Nicholas during the Early Modern Era, see: "Nicola, Vescovo di Myra," *BS*, Vol. 9, pp. 923-48. The Late Medieval and Renaissance iconography emphasizes the golden balls or alms while completely overlooking the vessels, which Preti included in his painting. Given the emphasis placed on the holy water and the oil that emerged from the saint's bones – praised for its ability to bring good health and facilitate miracles (*BS*, Vol. 9, p. 938) – the vessels likely refer to this aspect of the saint’s cult.
conventional attributes, including the bible, the golden balls, the bishop's cope, crozier, and mitre, and a decorative cylindrical container, which is more than likely filled with the holy water and oil (myrrh) that sprang from Nicholas' grave and "brings help to many." The painting seems to emphasize the saint's intense spiritual dialogue with God rather than the actual act of assumption. This is not to say that the assumption is not referenced, for the angels gravitating below, around, and above the figure of Nicholas clearly refer to it, but the focused illumination and chiaroscuro, areas of bold and solid color, and heavily shadowed background conceal the space into which the saint is ascending and underline his monumental physical presence. The dramatic, brilliantly-illuminated figure was undoubtedly meant to stupefy Preti's Neapolitan contemporaries, a sort of carte de visite that would advertise his pictorial abilities and immediately place him among the most prominent masters in his newly adopted city.

According to De Dominici, Preti achieved this much when the painting was displayed for a few days in San Domenico Soriano while it awaited its installation in the Coscia chapel. The biographer, noting that Vaccaro, Pacecco, Di Maria, Gargiulo, and Giordano came to see the painting, records the wonder and amazement of his contemporaries:

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229 Neither Spike nor Utili discuss the iconographic attributes in detail, however, Raffaella Morselli (1999, p. 182) discusses all of those that appear in the circa 1670 Pinacoteca di Fano painting of the subject with the exception of the two cylindrical containers that appear in the bottom left hand corner (fig. 147). The Fano painting depicts in the lower background a ship embarking to sea, which undoubtedly references St. Nicholas's patronage of sailors and merchants. Only one of Preti's numerous paintings represent, however, the most frequently depicted subject, which was the saint saving the noble boy from the feast of the unbelieving King – painted, for example, by Giordano in Santa Brigida, Naples, and by Giovanni Battista Beinaschi (1636-88) in San Niccolò al Molo, Naples (Pigler, Vol. 1, pp. 466-67).

Alla comparsa di questo quadro concorsero di nuovo i pittori a vederlo, ma rimasero storditi nel veder quel gruppo di figure così ben messe assieme e, mirandosi l'uno con l'altro, non sapean che dirsi, ammirati della mossa del santo, il quale inginocchiato sulle nubbi e con gli occhi rivolti al cielo è portato alla gloria dagli angioletti, imperciocché consideravano l'impasto del colore, la forza del chiaroscuro, e 'l tremendo disegno usato in quelle figure; sicché per non esser tacciati di malignità, ebbero a dargli quelle laudi, che gli davano i pittori più accreditati.  

The stunning means by which he emphasized the monumentality of the figure of St. Nicholas became almost immediately one of the trademarks of his style, which Baldinucci and De Dominici would later characterize as a unique fusion of colore, chiaroscuro, and disegno. The painting had such an impact that it was soon compared with Giordano's 1655 *St. Nicholas Saving the Child Cupbearer* for the church of Santa Brigida, Naples – one of the most renowned subjects, given the saint's miraculous appearance in order to save a young noble Christian taken prisoner by a pagan King.  

De Dominici described Giordano's painting as representing "molto popolo spettatore sullo stile del gran Paolo Veronese, collocando in alto trombettieri e sonatori, con accordo di magnifica architettura." At the same time though, he was convinced that it could not compete with Preti's "maniera forte e naturale" exemplified by the "gran pieghe de panni" in the San Domenico *St. Nicholas*. The paintings clearly demonstrate different stylistic interests upon comparison. In this, De Dominici is not incorrect. How were these effects realized, however? A deeper examination of the differences and

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231 DD, Vol. II, p. 647: "Upon the appearance of this painting, painters came again together to see it, but they remained stunned when seeing this group of figures so well placed together and, looking at each other, they did not know what to say to themselves being amazed by the movement of the saint which kneeling on the clouds and with his eyes turned heavenswards is carried in glory by the angels – since they were considering the application of color, the strength of the chiaroscuro, and the tremendous disegno used in these figures. So as not be criticized with malice, then, they granted him the same ovations, which the most recognized painters gave him."


234 Ibid., p. 648.
reasons why Preti’s art was perceived as being superior or rather apart is absent in De Dominici's comparison.

If his ability to work with bold colors, a penetrating *chiaroscuro*, and a perfect *disegno* distinguished him from his Neapolitan contemporaries, what facilitated Preti's ability to depict figures so that they appear to be physically carved into the pictorial space? At the core of his achievement was the propensity to experiment with different artistic features. His experiments with both Caravaggesque and Carraccesque representational practices distinguish him from other artists and are exemplified by his bold and localized color, sharp *chiaroscuro*, and the concise delineation of figures. Preti's distinction in Naples relied on his comprehensive study of Roman, Bolognese, and Neapolitan artistic practices. While Caravaggio and his interpreters were known for their isolation and naturalistic rendering of individual figures via the use of localized color and focused illumination, as exemplified in the Lombard's Santa Maria del Popolo *Martyrdom of St. Peter* (1601) in Rome or Ribera's Santa Maria della Monache *Inspiration of St. Jerome* (c. 1630) in Naples, Annibale Carracci’s style and that of his interpreters was known for its use of intense primary hues and clear delineation of the figures' contours, as exemplified in Annibale's Santa Maria del Popolo *Assumption of the Virgin* (1601) and Domenichino's famous fresco in Sant'Andrea della Valle with *St. John the Baptist Directing St. Andrew and St. Peter to Christ* (1621-1624) (figs. 148, 149, 150, & 151). Preti had the opportunity to observe in detail the stylistic qualities that defined these pictures prior to his transfer from Rome to Naples. Domenichino's acute delineation of St. Peter's and St. Andrew's robes is echoed by Preti's treatment of the Myrean bishop's cope, which is concisely cut between each fold, as the material gathers between his open
arms and crouching body.\textsuperscript{235} The Calabrese had much time to study Domenichino's frescoes for the choir vault as well as the four apostles in the pendentives of Sant'Andrea, while he was frescoing the lower walls of the choir in 1650-51. Preti's own figure of St. Andrew in his central fresco of the \textit{Martyrdom of St. Andrew} provides, indeed, a kind of prototype for the later figure of St. Nicholas in his San Domenico painting (fig. 7). The monumental St. Andrew is tied to the cross looking heavenwards but appears to be supporting himself instead of being suspended from the ropes of the crucifix. For the St. Nicholas of Bari, Preti would only slightly modify the gestures, reduce the heavenward look of the saint's head, and upward extension of his arms. The most significant difference is found in his \textit{chiaroscuro}. His transition from the balanced Carraccesque to the intense Caravaggesque \textit{chiaroscuro} clearly places greater emphasis on the single-figure. His delineation, or rather his \textit{disegno}, has not changed, since Nicholas' cope contains the same concise folds characteristic of the drapery in the Sant'Andrea frescoes.

Over the twenty year period that Preti spent in Rome he had the opportunity to observe some of the greatest collections of sculpture – notably those of the Farnese and Giustiniani – as well as to witness important developments in contemporary sculpture. Largely under the influence of Bernini and Algardi, Roman Baroque sculpture was characterized by the dynamism of Bernini's Borghese and Barberini commissions and the

\textsuperscript{235} A number of Roman sculpture collections, including that of the Farnese and the Giustiniani, were certainly available for Annibale and Domenichino as well as Caravagesque painters to consult. Indeed, part of the Farnese collection was housed in the Farnese Gallery decorated by Annibale and his assistants. For example, the \textit{Farnese Hercules} (Museo Archeologico, Naples) informs Annibale's depiction of the similarly muscular figures of \textit{Perseus} and \textit{Polyphemus} and the central figure of \textit{Bacchus} in the monumental \textit{Triumph of Bacchus} is a reinterpretation of the Farnese \textit{Dionysius} (Museo Archeologico, Naples) (figs. 152 & 153). The heavy and clearly delineated draperies in Domenichino's figures of St. Andrew and St. Peter or in his \textit{St. John the Evangelist} (National Gallery, London) have immediate parallels in the classical figure and heavily incised drapery of the Giustiniani \textit{Minerva} or the wet drapery effect seen on the renowned \textit{Apollo Belvedere} (figs. 154, 155, & 156).
solemnity and emphasis on classical *disegno* of Algardi's works. Preti's late Roman and Neapolitan paintings begin to demonstrate a fusion of the two, where Bernini's dynamic and grandiloquent figures are blended with Algardi's statuesque figures. Given Duquesnoy's *St. Andrew* already assimilated the chief stylistic qualities of these artists, the monumental sculpture became the Calabrese's ideal model for the *St. Nicholas*. The *St. Andrew* was designed by an artist that fastidiously studied both the art of antiquity and nature itself – so much so that he often suppressed emotional states in favor of representing a sense of classical calm. Nonetheless, St. Andrew's open arms and heavenward gaze – described by Bellori as "espressione di effetto e di amore divino nella gloria del suo martirio" – certainly exhibit the dynamism that Preti sought.\(^{236}\) These qualities were, indeed, incorporated into his painting, although the crouching stance of the Calabrese's figure distinguishes it from Duquesnoy's statue, which is standing in a *contrapposto* position. Bellori's description of St. Andrew's face as "alquanto dimagrato, ampia, e calva la fronte, la barba inculta, e aperte le labbra nell'affetto divino" echoes the similar traits that appear in the Calabrese's representation of St. Nicholas with his open lips and heavenward gaze.\(^{237}\) Preti returned to Duquesnoy's model when he painted his *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew* for Ferdinand Vandeneynden in 1655 (fig. 48).\(^{238}\)

Morselli already pointed out that the construction of the figure of St. Nicholas can be compared with antique and modern sculpture. However, neither she, nor Spike, nor Utili, have addressed the argument in any detail. In addition to the above points, the emphasis De Dominici placed on the "mossa del santo" and the "forza del chiaroscuro"

\(^{236}\) Bellori, 1672, p. 274.
\(^{237}\) Ibid., p. 275.
\(^{238}\) Wegner, p. 37.
provide another means of comparing the representation of the *St. Nicholas* with contemporary developments in sculptural practices. The monumental presence of the statuesque figure that is sharply-illuminated against a completely shadowed and undefined background might also be seen as Preti’s attempt to demonstrate the plasticity of his figure and his ability to convey the material presence of the saint. My point is more specific than that which has been generally made by many Caravaggio scholars when they have argued that the Lombard painter attempted to compete with the effects of sculpture by adopting a *tenebroso* palette. Preti’s dark and undefined background and brilliantly-illuminated figure simulate the same effects that a viewer would witness while standing in front of a life-size sculpture placed within a niche. The saint and his supporting angel seem to mimic the manner in which similarly designed niche sculptures appear when the light descends upon them from an elevated and angular point. More still, the apparent crevices that appear between each fold of the saint’s cope correspond exactly to the tangible crevices that characterize the draperies in a number of contemporaneous public sculptures, such as Bernini’s *St. Longinus* in St. Peter’s (1629-38), Algardi’s *St. John the Evangelist* and *St. Mary Magdalene* for the Bandini Chapel in San Silvestro al Quirinale (1628-29), or Duquesnoy’s *St. Andrew* (figs. 157, 158, & 159). The light and shade that define the physicality of sculpture is transformed by Preti into a tangible illusion. This was an accomplishment that conceivably "stunned" his Neapolitan contemporaries, for no Neapolitan painter up to that point, including Ribera, had so forcefully combined the plasticity of sculpture with the illusionism of painting. Preti’s *St. Nicholas* fuses representational elements of Baroque painting with those of sculpture by
uniting areas of bright colors and intensely-illuminated figures with clearly-delineated forms that activate the space in which they are represented.

After Preti's execution of several similar single-figure paintings, including the above noted *St. Sebastian*, Giordano responded with two strikingly different compositions of St. Nicholas that adopted entirely different artistic strategies. These include the 1655 *St. Nicholas Saves the Child Cupbearer* for the church of Santa Brigida and the 1658 *Assumption of St. Nicholas* for the Hospitalers Order at the small Baroque church of San Nicola al Nilo. In addition to differing from Preti's, both paintings are starkly different from one another in subject matter, composition, and palette. The illusion of the lightly gravitating saint and stunned onlookers – depicted in rich red, yellow, and blue robes – in the Santa Brigida version is replaced by a monumental and heavy figure in the San Nicola al Nilo painting, one which addresses the same subject as Preti's picture but with a number of additional figures. Giordano's Santa Brigida *St. Nicholas* is inspired by a number of sources including Barocci's compositions and coloring, the affective gestures of Annibale's late Bolognese and Roman paintings, and, Lanfranco's silver and golden lighting and gravitating figures represented in his altarpieces. The synthesis of these stylistic elements, along with a reconsideration of Ribesque naturalism and the adoption of architectural elements consistent with Venetian Renaissance masters, was taken to a new level with the San Nicola al Nilo

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239 On both paintings, see: Ferrari & Scavizzi, 2000, Vol. I, pp. 258-59; M. Utili, "St. Nicholas of Bari Saves the Child Cupbearer," Spinosa & Mirandel, pp. 84-85; Utili, "St. Nicholas in Glory," Ibid., pp. 96-97. *c.f.* As Pigler (1974, Vol. I, pp. 466-67) identified, the subject of the saint saving the child cupbearer was the most frequently represented subject. As far as I have been able to discover, St. Nicholas' assumption had a relatively limited iconographic history even in Naples, since Preti's and Giordano's paintings were not followed by scenes of the assumption but rather by those of Nicholas saving the child cupbearer. Later Seicento examples include Beinaschi's already noted painting and Solimena's ceiling frescoes for San Nicola alla Carità, Naples.
picture. In the 1658 painting Giordano moved away from the areas of bold primary hues to work with darker and lighter values that are enlivened and enriched through the use of a dominant silver lighting that descends translucently from the general area around the gravitating figures of Christ and the Virgin Mary.

Giordano's stylistic transition has been conventionally attributed to his competition with Preti's pictorial innovations during the mid-1650s. But, as Oreste Ferrari has argued, the relationship between Preti and Giordano – while certainly competitive – was also based on a mutual emulation of one another's innovations as well as an assessment of Lanfranco's extensive work in Naples during the 1630s and 1640s.

Unlike the lofty and atmospheric appearance of St. Nicholas in the Santa Brigida painting, the principle figures in Giordano's San Nicola al Nilo picture are substantial and weighty, particularly the saint himself. The airiness of the former is eliminated by the appearance of Christ and the Virgin Mary in the top left background and the massive figure of the saint who appears to have reached the highest point in his ascent. When compared with Preti's representation, one discovers that Giordano's assimilation of Cortona's silver lighting and open atmospheric compositions works against the monumentality with which the saint has been endowed. By incorporating an architectural backdrop and by placing Christ and the Virgin descending towards the same plane as Nicholas, Giordano created a downward thrust that was absent in the dynamic upward motion of the saint in his Santa Brigida picture. The assimilation of Cortona's silver lighting

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240 That Preti's pictorial innovations were the instigating factors behind Giordano's subsequent experiments is clearly stated by Spinosa ('Baroque and Classical Tendencies, 1650-1700,' Whitfield & Turner, p. 52) when he argued that: "Giordano's decisive break with Neapolitan traditions and his adoption of the Baroque style were prompted by Preti's arrival in Naples with his 'full-bodied thunderous Baroque, realistic and apocalyptic' (Longhi)." c.f. Ferrari & Scavizzi, 2000, Vol. I, pp. 26-27.

lighting does not create the effect that the Roman painter achieved in his paintings of saints in glory because he regularly excluded architecture and positioned those descending from heaven significantly higher than those ascending. Giordano's youthful approach to composition is demonstrated by the restricted range and static nature of the figures' actions in the *St. Nicholas in Glory*.

Preti's composition succeeded in creating such upward motion because his was not complicated by the actions of additional figures. The creative positioning of the heavily shadowed and elegantly and dynamically depicted angels below, beside, and above the central figure looking sharply heavenwards provokes a spectatorial response that recognizes the significance of upward motion. Additionally, the depiction of half-length angels rising upward and out of the shadows emphasizes Nicholas' role in the narrative. The darkness that surrounds Preti's saint, similarly, highlights his upward motion. Unlike Giordano's 1658 painting, there are no figures adoring the saint from the floor below nor is there an incandescently-illuminated architectural backdrop. Ultimately, the Calabrese's painting succeeded in conveying the ascent because of his simplified compositional structure and use of Caravaggesque shadowing. Indeed, Preti's San Domenico *St. Nicholas* benefited greatly from his study of sculpture and how sculptors magnified movement through simplified compositions, magniloquent gestures, and upward lines of sight. Had Giordano considered how sculpture could contribute to his painting, he may have achieved the necessary upward thrust he needed to accelerate Nicholas's ascent. In so doing, he would have more closely approximated Preti's achievements in both the 1653 *St. Nicholas* for San Domenico and the circa 1670 *St. Nicholas*, now at the Pinacoteca Civica in Fano. In both cases, the Calabrese focused on
upward motion and emphasized the saint's ascent by elevating his head, arms, and legs while making certain all of the accompanying angels were similarly portrayed. In many of the altarpieces from the 1650s and 1660s, Preti focused on endowing his figures with a sense of plasticity that characterizes the 1653 and circa 1670 paintings. This is equally visible in the Mystic Marriage, which he painted fifteen years after the San Domenico St. Nicholas.

*The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*

It is not surprising that Catherine's Mystic Marriage was frequently represented, since she was one of the most popular patron saints in Italy. Throughout the Cinque and Seicento the subject matter received its greatest attention from Lombard, Venetian, and Emilian painters. Such artists as Correggio, Lotto, Parmigianino, Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto, Ludovico Carracci, Annibale Carracci, Guercino, and Reni produced multiple paintings of the subject not counting those pictures depicting the holy family with St. Catherine. Correggio and Veronese produced at least three versions each, which standardized the iconography later painters would rely on. Preti's circa 1667 interpretation of the subject for the high altar of the Langue of Italy's Chapel in the Co-Cathedral of St. John is no exception. By the time he painted this picture, the theme of the Mystic Marriage was not as popular as it had been during the Renaissance. Baroque painters frequently depicted Catherine's martyrdom or the events directly preceding it – as exemplified by Caravaggio's 1599, Reni's 1606, Rubens' 1615, Guercino's 1653, and Preti's own 1656-58, 1665, and 1675 versions.

The life, acts, and martyrdom of St. Catherine of Alexandria are recounted in the *Golden Legend* like those of many other early saints. Born into a noble family during the
The reign of the Eastern Emperor Maximinus Daia during the late-third and fourth-century after Christ, Catherine converted to Christianity and spent her life converting others – an act for which she was eventually martyred, given she reproached the Emperor for his tyrannical behavior. The subject of the Mystic Marriage refers to the vision she had of being married to Christ before the Virgin Mary and angels following her conversion. Preti, like his predecessors, portrayed the saint as an elegant, beautiful young woman. His composition largely corresponds to Veronese's circa 1575 canvas for the high altar of the church of Santa Caterina in Venice (fig. 162). Veronese depicts the Virgin, surrounded by angels and St. Catherine, holding the Christ child on her knee at the base of two monumental columns that project skywards. The Venetian's vertical composition – with its emphasis on full-length figures, soaring architecture, and atmospheric qualities of the sky – is in direct opposition to Correggio's intimate representations of half-length figures situated in a landscape. Examples of Correggio's picture gallery compositions include the 1618 Capodimonte Mystic Marriage or the Louvre Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine with St. Sebastian from the late 1520s (figs. 163 & 164). Notwithstanding the differences between the genres, the central emotional connection between Catherine and Christ was always emphasized.

242 Voragine, "St. Catherine," Vol. II, p. 337. While there is no one specific passage in the Golden Legend that can be linked to Preti's painting and those of his Baroque and Renaissance predecessors, several comments that Voragine attributes to the saint provide the context, including Catherine's retort to the Emperor when he offers her riches and his virility: "'Stop saying such things,' Catherine answered, 'it is a crime even to think them! I have given myself as his bride to Christ, and he is my glory, see my love, see my sweetness and my delight. Neither blandishments nor torture will draw me away from his love!" Despite the fact the saint was born years after the Savior's death, the iconographic history going back to the Middle Ages emphasized the marriage to the Christ child, to which Preti remained faithful. Voragine's version of the events implies that Christ was already an adult and not the child that Christian iconography adopted. The notion of the "mystical marriage" does not refer to the literal notion of marriage but rather to the consummation of one's faith in the True Lord Jesus Christ and the faith one receives from him in return. In the latter sense, the notion of the "mystical marriage" – as it was represented by European artists – simply refers to one's union with Christ and Christian principles. c.f. "Caterina di Alessandria," BS, Vol. 3, pp. 955-58.
Although Preti's painting undoubtedly relied on the Veronesian tradition, it is difficult to determine whether he had Veronese's Santa Caterina altarpiece or one of the other versions in mind, particularly the Detroit Institute of Arts' *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* from the late 1570s (fig. 165). If we believe De Dominici's assessment that Preti's trip to Venice was foundational, he would certainly have had first-hand knowledge of the Santa Caterina altarpiece. Whether Preti ever saw the Detroit painting – located in the collection of Giuseppe Caliari, Veronese's nephew, according to Ridolfi – is difficult to determine since its size positions it as a gallery painting as opposed to a public work. Nonetheless, there are similarities between the statuesque and sculptural nature of Preti's representation of St. Catherine and the Detroit painting, which Pignatti and Pedrocco attest as being by the master's hand and not by his workshop. In order to determine how the Calabrese came to design his composition, his altarpiece will be examined in conjunction with Veronese's works as well as others that reinterpreted them. By considering the artistic impetus behind and conception of the *Mystic Marriage*, I will, then, be able to engage Preti's method much more directly by analyzing his strategies in conjunction with De Dominici's lengthy description of the painting.

Like Veronese's Santa Caterina painting, Preti placed the Virgin and child in the lower left, below three descending pillars, and directly opposite the young saint who delicately reaches towards Christ's hand holding the ring. Both paintings have similar dimensions – Veronese's measuring 337 x 241 cm and Preti's 361 x 203 cm – and a prominent architectural backdrop but are clearly differentiated by their lighting, palette,


244 Ibid., p. 507.
and narrative structure. Unlike Veronese's painting, the canvas in Valletta is semi-circular at its top, which limits the power of the large columns that ascend above the Virgin and Child. This feature, however, facilitates the arrangement of the dynamically-positioned angels, which rotate into the pictorial space along the edge of the frame. The *Mystic Marriage* was produced at a transitional point in Preti’s career, given he blends both silver and gold lighting. Such blending accentuates the chromatic differences between the foreground figures and the architecture and sky in the mid- and background. The silver lighting highlights St. Catherine's, the Virgin's, the Christ Child's, and the foremost angel's clothing and angelic white skin, which is punctuated by the delicate rose tonality around the figures’ cheeks. Their clothing, including the saint's silver gown and orange veil, the Virgin's deep pink dress, translucent yellow scarf, and blue shawl, shimmers forward and captures the spectator's eyes immediately. At the same time, the golden light in the mid- and background creates a warm ocher glaze that illuminates the architecture, figures, and clouds. The silver lighting creates a sharp transition from lighter to darker values – similar in nature to that in Veronese's painting – while the golden lighting hits the surfaces, figures, and clouds in such a manner that the transition to shade is softer and largely consistent with the effect of Lombard and Emilian *sfumato*. Given the combination of the two types of lighting, one discovers how the chromatic range and purity of the hues changes according to the color of the light.

In addition to the differences in lighting and hues, Preti’s composition of the central action is not as strictly organized according to the fore-, mid-, and background planes. That is, the Co-Cathedral painting utilizes three planes but limits the number of figures on each while also using specific strategies to unite them. Veronese follows a
strict planimetric organization where two angels appear in the foreground while the mid-
ground is densely populated by ten figures, which include musicians, onlookers, the
Virgin, Christ child, and St. Catherine, all coming together to emphasize the central event
of the mystic marriage. The background is barely indicated by a large and seemingly
deep sky in which angels and seraphim fly around in indeterminate planes. The Co-
Cathedral painting emphasized, instead, the depth of the illusionistic space and the
continuity among planes. Since St. Catherine faces the viewer in an almost frontal
position, she automatically alters the relationship between the figures in the foreground
and those in the mid-ground. By positioning her in a forward looking stance, Preti
endows the figure with the power of connecting the mystic marriage with the angelic
escort and celebration that occurs in the mid- and background. Veronese's leftward
moving saint is seen in profile and thereby emphasizes horizontal movement instead. The
foreshortened arms, the mild rise of her left leg, the elevation of her rose crown, and the
careful removal of her golden veil by the two angels behind Preti's St. Catherine all
emphasize her forward movement. On the surface, this may only seem to be a means of
reinterpretating the composition so that the Co-Cathedral painting is clearly differentiated
from the Santa Caterina picture. In practice, however, Preti's reorientation of the saint
serves as an indicator of his particular compositional interests to depict figures that
directly engage the audience either through their monumental presence in the foreground
or through forward motion as they proceed towards the viewer's space.

The Co-Cathedral Mystic Marriage, like many of his multi-figure altarpieces and
gallery paintings, reinforces the painter's ongoing interest in representing figures on
multiple planes. As seen in the already discussed Massacre of the Innocents, Wedding at
Cana, and, among others, Belshazzar's Feast, the painter had a specific interest in maintaining a connection between the actions depicted in the foreground and those on the other planes. Such a compositional strategy facilitated his expansion of the central event into a broader space in which a greater number of characters could be linked to the foreground action. This is perhaps the most important difference between the painter's Mystic Marriage and that by Veronese. Despite the significance De Dominici attached to Preti's study of Veronese, the latter was, by and large, less interested in emphasizing the role that background figures could play in the narrative. Many of his pictures solely emphasize foreground actions, irrespective of the fact that he almost always includes broad architectural backdrops or landscapes in his compositions. These backdrops, however, are rarely populated by figures and serve more as a means of contextualizing the space in which the event is occurring. Exceptions include Veronese's 1563 Supper at Emmaus (Louvre) and the late 1570s Rape of Europa (Palazzo Ducale, Venice), which integrate preceding or subsequent actions in the background to emphasize the broader temporal development of the narrative depicted (figs. 118 & 166). On the whole however, the Venetian painter's interests lie in depicting events with luxuriously adorned figures in richly decorated architectural spaces or deep verdant landscapes. Such qualities do not consistently appear in Preti's art, and it seems that the Calabrese's compositional approach to the Mystic Marriage resulted from his own experiments with composing actions that are foregrounded with significant force but include many figures and additional actions in the other planes. Interestingly, the Co-Cathedral painting is one of the few large-scale altarpieces for which the painter completed a preliminary compositional study (fig. 167).
The red chalk and wash drawing in the National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta, exemplifies the phases through which the painter went while he was designing his altarpiece. Tightly cropped, the composition does not include full-size figures of the Virgin or St. Catherine. Indeed, the elementarily outlined composition documents how Preti went from the compressed placement of the figures in the drawing to the spacious and atmospheric qualities of the painting. As the only extant drawing for this painting, it is impossible to determine whether he began with a composition that had more in common with Veronese's or whether he always envisioned reorienting the saint so that she progresses forward from the background. Although no documentary evidence firmly places Preti in Venice, it is highly likely that he saw the Venetian's painting in person. Additionally, he could rely on prints, including Agostino Carracci’s 1582 etching, or drawings he made in the Adriatic city (fig. 168). Preti might also have been aware of Annibale's 1588 *Madonna of St. Matthew* – itself a reinterpretation of Veronese's composition and acquired by the Duke of Modena during the mid-seventeenth century (fig. 169). While representing a different subject, Annibale's picture followed the asymmetrical composition by situating an elevated Virgin and child enthroned on the left with fluted columns projecting skywards. Annibale's *invenzione* may have been equally important for Preti's conception, since the Bolognese painter positioned several clearly delineated and sharply illuminated angels supporting the drapery above the Virgin and child. Such figures do not exist in Veronese's painting and may have contributed to

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245 Bellori, 1672, p. 30; Annibale's painting was originally executed for the Cappella dei Mercanti in the church of San Prospero in Reggio Emilia. Posner, pp. 45 (Vol. I), 20-21 (Vol. II); C. Robertson, *The Invention of Annibale Carracci*, Milan: 2008, pp. 85-86. Given Preti was working in Modena in 1651 frescoing the dome of the Duomo and San Biagio, it is highly likely that he would have seen Annibale's painting in the Ducal collection or in the church of San Prospero in Reggio Emilia itself, being just 30 km from Modena.

the Calabrese's conception, as exemplified by the angels gravitating above the Virgin and in front of the column in the drawing.

The completion of the preparatory drawing is also significant because it contributes to our understanding of Preti’s artistic practice and its interpretation by De Dominici. His lengthy description of the Calabrese's Mystic Marriage does not simply comment on the painter's style, but situates it in the context of the debate regarding the supremacy of disegno versus colore – to which I will return below. The biographer compares Preti’s artistic choices with those that informed Giordano's contemporaneous works – that is, the paintings which, according to the biographer, exhibited the "maniera vaga" and "dorata." As such, he provides an essential barometer for how one might interpret the two artists' styles during the late 1660s. De Dominici’s paragone between Preti and Giordano reads as follows:

[...] questo quadro è dipinto con maniera tanto vaga ch'è una maraviglia a volerlo considerar per opera del Calabrese, inchinato di sua natura più tosto all maniera forte, anzi terribile nel chiaro e scuro, che alla amena e condotta con vaghe tinte. Dicesi che lo dipingesse così vago perché alcuni cavalieri napoletani lodavano il bel colorito di Luca Giordano, il quale nella vaghezza era gionto a toccar l'ultimo segno, e che egli volle far loro conoscere che ben sapea colorir con vaghezza, ma che la perfezion del disegno e del gran chiaroscuro è la parte principale di un valentuomo, oltre all'ottimo componimento e l'altre parti che richieggonsi in una storia. Anche in questa bizzaria dee notarsi però il giudicio di Mattia, perché diè saggio del suo saper colorire vagamente dove il soggetto lo richiedeva, trattandosi di un'azion così tenera di persone nobili e delicate.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ DD, Vol. II, pp. 678–79: "This picture is painted in a very charming manner, which is marvelous to see considering it is a work by the Calabrese, inclined, by nature, instead toward the bold maniera, the force of the dark and the light, rather than the pleasant one with charming colors. It is said he painted it so charmingly because some Neapolitan Knights praised the beautiful color of Luca Giordano, who in this manner had achieved the highest level, and that he [Preti] wanted to make them understand that he knew how to color with charm, but that perfection of drawing and of strong chiaroscuro is the central part of a great man, besides excellent composition and other elements that are required for a history painting. In this peculiarity, also, one should nevertheless note the judgment of Mattia, because he gave an example of his knowledge to color charmingly when it was required by the subject, being such a tender action of noble and fine people."
The paragone between the two painters concludes with the idea that the "vaghezza" of Giordano's style is vital, but perfection in art is found in the combination of excellent drawing, chiaroscuro, and composition, which one finds in Preti's paintings more often than Giordano's. According to the biographer, then, the Calabrese's art was based on the Trinity of invenzione, disegno, and colore. Given he used his giudizio and invenzione to compose a perfect history painting, the Mystic Marriage was further enhanced by the marvelous colore, something for which he was already recognized in his earlier altarpiece of St. George for the Chapel of Aragon, Catalonia, and Navarre (fig. 26). Because the St. George was, ultimately, praised for its disegno and colore – as exemplified by Giordano's confession that its composition was "ottima nel disegno, bella nella mossa del cavallo, e della figura, e perfetta nel chiaroscuro" – Preti established himself as an artist who could not be categorized by excelling in either drawing and design on the one hand or coloring on the other. De Dominici's account of the Mystic Marriage and the St. George praises Preti's achievements, and links this paragone between the two foremost

248 When discussing the St. George, the biographer similarly emphasized his use of marvelous colore – something which astounded his Neapolitan contemporaries, given they had been familiar with his Caravaggesque canvases. De Dominici states that upon viewing the painting certain artists responded as follows: "[Preti] dipinse il santo guerriero [...] con tal vaghezza di colore condotto che a prima veduta sembra di Luca Giordano, fatto però con studio nel disegno e nel chiaroscuro. Laonde avendo esposto il quadro in occassione d'una festa per udire ciò che avessero detto i pittori di quella maniera vaga tutta opposta all'altra sua, molti furono i pareri, e molti i discorsi che se ne fecero, e gli stessi contrarii del Cavaliere, parziali del Giordano, ingannati del colorito dissero che Luca Giordano avea volute dimostrare il suo valore nel disegno, e nel chiaroscuro, facendo quell quadro così perfettamente disegnato e dipinto [Preti painted the warrior saint [...] with a manner of such charming colors that upon first sight it seems to be by Luca Giordano, depicted however with knowledge of disegno and chiaroscuro. Hence, to hear what the painters had to say of this charming manner, totally opposite his other one, he exhibited the work on an occasion of a feastday. Many impressions and debates were brought forward, and the same critics of the Cavalier, supporters of Giordano, were deceived by the color and said that Luca Giordano wanted to demonstrate his skills in disegno and chiaroscuro, making this picture so perfectly designed and painted.] (DD, Vol. II, p. 652)." Given the confusion about who painted the work, the biographer – borrowing a topos from Vasari's discussion of Michelangelo's Pieta (St. Peter's Basilica) – claims that Preti then affixed his name to it.

249 Giordano apparently praised the painting, as De Dominici recorded: "Giordano was then heard with pleasure praising this work, confessing that it was great in disegno, beautiful in the movement of the horse, and the figure, and perfect in the chiaroscuro (DD, Vol. II, p. 652)"
Neapolitan painters with the two-century-old debate over the supremacy of Florentine-Roman disegno and Venetian colore.

This debate between disegno and colore, initiated during the mid-Cinquecento between the writers Giorgio Vasari and Ludovico Dolce, was concerned with the different approaches to artistic production in Florence and Rome on the one hand and Venice on the other. The debate was broadly initiated by Vasari's juxtaposition of Michelangelo's and Titian's art – proclaiming the former artist was the supreme painter in modern times. Though Annibale and other Lombard painters already attempted to unite disegno and colore via the study of Correggio, Barocci, Titian, and, among others, Raphael, the debate was quickly revived in the early- and specifically mid-Seicento by

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250 Vasari-Milanesi, "Delle Opere di Tiziano," Vol. VII, p. 447: Having visited Titian's studio and observing him working on his much praised Danae, Vasari noted: "Dopo partiti che furono da lui, ragionandosi del fare di Tiziano, il Buonarruoto lo comendò suo la maniera; ma che era un peccato che a Venezia non s'imparasse da principio a disegnare bene, e che non avessono que' pittori miglior modo nello studio. Con ciò sia (diss'egli) che se quest'uomo fusse punto aiutato del arte e dal disegno, come è dalla natura, e nassimamente nel contrafare il vivo, non si potrebbe far più nè meglio, avendo egli bellissimo spirito ed un molto vaga e vivace manier [After they had left they started to discuss Titian's method and Buonarroti commended it highly, saying that his coloring and his style pleased him very much but that it was a shame that in Venice they did not learn to draw well from the beginning and that those painters did not pursue their studies with more method. For the truth was, he went on, that if Titian had been assisted by art and design as much as he was by nature, and especially in reproducing living subjects, then no one could achieve more or work better, for he had a fine spirit and a lively and entrancing style.]." While Vasari made similar references throughout his Vite to other Venetian artists and the Northern school, Dolce's reply in his Aretino demonstrated greater depth of thought and rationale that was not fuelled by nationalistic biases. Dolce, affirming that Titian was the supreme painter, argued that disegno was central to artistic practice and was, indeed, demonstrated by Venetian artists. In order to rebuke Vasari's championing of Michelangelo, Dolce turned to Raphael and argued that his disegno was superior to Michelangelo's and therefore the latter painter did not meet the standard required of being the best modern painter. By suppressing Michelangelo's role, Dolce was then able to argue that Titian was equally skilled at delineating his figures, differentiating between the sexes, and that he demonstrated equal command of figures in action as Raphael and therefore he should be considered to be as competent if not superior because of his inimitable command of colore (M.W. Roskill, Dolce's Aretino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento, Toronto, Buffalo, & London: 2000, 176, hereafter cited as: Dolce-Roskill; c.f. M. Poirier, "Disegno in Titian: Dolce's Critical Challenge to Michelangelo," Tiziano e Venezia, (ed.) N. Pozza, Vicenza: 1980, summarizes Dolce's critical position in greater detail).

such art writers as Agucchi, Mancini, and Bellori.²⁵² Reflecting upon the artistic innovations of Caravaggio and Annibale, these writers – criticizing Caravaggio's *alla prima* practice that apparently biased Northern *colore* over *disegno* – emphasized Annibale's approach since he supposedly surpassed all others with his *disegno* (not at the expense of *colore*, however). Thus, the critical distinction between Caravaggio's *alla prima* practice and Annibale's study of the human figure renewed the debate – which from a practical perspective had been already settled during the late Cinquecento when Annibale succeeded at unifying the style of Raphael with that of Lombardy.²⁵³

Annibale's achievements were based on the unification of Raphael's *disegno* – his idealized figures and clearly articulated compositional arrangements – with the rendering of brilliant hues and handling of light consistent with the *colore* of such Northern Italian painters as Correggio, Titian, and Veronese. Yet, Bellori, Annibale's most fervant Seicento biographer, was unable (or unwilling) to reconcile the twofold nature of these accomplishments, since his art-theoretical outlook focused on the painter's representation of ideal beauty. Bellori's art-theoretical framework was based on the Platonic notion that a perfect template for material forms existed and it was this template from which all physical objects derived.²⁵⁴ At the same time, however, no material form was as perfect as the original idea that informed its creation and therefore the representation of the natural forms required amelioration. Artists were thereby required to reflect on the superior idea and then project it upon nature so as to improve upon it.²⁵⁵ According to

²⁵² Robertson outlines the effects of Annibale's travels throughout Northern Italy in her "Travels in Northern Italy: The Studioso Corso" (Robertson, op. cit., pp. 45-67), focusing specifically on his Parmesan, Venetian, and potential Tuscan studies during the 1570s and 1580s.
²⁵⁴ Bellori, "L'Idea del pittore, dello scultore e dell'architetto," 1672, p. 3.
²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 4.
Bellori’s vision, Annibale was like Raphael because he succeeded above all other artists in achieving this state of idealization, which fundamentally required the artist's superior use of *disegno*. While the biographer recognized the painter's unification of Roman *disegno* and Lombard *colore*, he emphasized that it was only in Rome that Annibale truly effected the union, after studying the two greatest masters of *disegno* – that is Michelangelo and Raphael. This conception of Annibale reaching artistic supremacy after studying the *disegno* of Raphael in particular subtly reaffirmed the division between Northern and Central Italian artistic practices. The consequences of this reaffirmation can be seen in De Dominici's interpretation of Preti's style during the 1650s and 1660s.

The Neapolitan biographer's polarization of his artistic practice and overall style in the *Mystic Marriage* and the *St. George* with that of Giordano's contemporaneous works demonstrates the continuing legacy of the above debate. This may have resulted from the fact that upon the Calabrese's arrival in Naples he completed a series of naturalistic paintings such as the above noted *St. Nicholas of Bari*, directly tied to the legacy of Caravaggio's and Ribera's naturalism. De Dominici's *paragone* is complicated by the fact that he attributed an innate skill of *disegno* to the Calabrese prior to discussing his abilities as a colorist, in the vein of Giordano's works from the 1660s. He does not take the unyielding position Vasari did by firmly stating the superiority of one artist or another. Rather, the comparison between Preti and Giordano seems intended to affirm the former's superiority more subtly, since he was skillful in both *disegno* and *colore* whereas the latter painter is characterized, at least in the context of the *St. George*, as lacking the ability to successfully employ *disegno*. De Dominici seems to be considering Preti's art

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from the same perspective that Ludovico Dolce did when he argued that Titian was superior to Michelangelo. According to Dolce, Titian was superior because he, like Raphael, demonstrated the ability to design muscular nudes and clearly arrange them in space. Additionally, Titian surpassed both Raphael and Michelangelo because he excelled beyond both of them in his command of colore.\textsuperscript{257} As Poirier has noted, Dolce's "critical argument was within the realm of disegno" and was therefore directed against the "disegno of both Michelangelo and the Mannerists" (Vasari included).\textsuperscript{258} De Dominici’s argument was also located in one specific realm and that was the realm of colore.

In both discussions of Preti's paintings, the biographer emphasizes a specific kind of coloring that exhibited "vaghezza." The Calabrese's skill with disegno is implied in the first quote and emphasized in the second, while each focuses on colore and Giordano’s apparent skill working with it. In the discussion about the Mystic Marriage, De Dominici records that Preti not only sought to establish his equivalent skill with "vaghe tinte" but also to demonstrate his "saper colorire vagamente dove il soggetto lo richiedeva." He was therefore able to compete with Giordano, who, apparently, was praised by the Neapolitan Knights for his "bel colorito." In his account of the St. George the biographer clearly states that the Calabrese excelled beyond Giordano in his disegno – something which is only implied in the discussion of the Mystic Marriage by the statement that the artist sought to display his knowledge of marvelous coloring in addition to the perfection he already achieved in "disegno" and "componimento." His superiority is further emphasized because those partial to Giordano's style ("maniera vaga") were deceived by the combination of "vaghezza di colore" and studious "disegno" and "chiaro oscuro" –

\textsuperscript{257} Dolce-Roskill, p. 176.  
\textsuperscript{258} Poirier, 1987, p. 67.
qualities which were attributed to Giordano's desire to "dimonstrare il suo valore nel
disegno, e nel chiaroscuro." Like Dolce then, De Dominici had to establish that Preti and
Giordano were equal on the level of colore before he could go on to emphasize the
former painter's superiority in disegno. The Calabrese's disegno would be highlighted
again as a core quality of his artistic practice and style when the biographer discussed the
Canonization of St. Catherine of Siena.

Canonization of St. Catherine of Siena

This monumental canvas – one of the largest Preti produced, being 485 x 271 cm – was
the first of three large-scale altarpieces the painter sent to Siena between 1673 and 1683
(fig. 21). The painting demonstrates a move away from the Neo-Venetian hues that
characterize the Mystic Marriage and the St. George towards a balanced approach that
stresses the role of chiaroscuro in maintaining brightly illuminated colors in a moderately
shadowed pictorial space. Despite the pioneering work of Peleo Bacci (1931) and Helene
Trottmann's more recent study of the Canonization (1988), Alfonso Frangipane's
conclusion that the Sienese paintings remain a mystery continues to be largely
accurate. Trottmann's brief study of the Canonization addresses the archival
documents, the means through which the commission was obtained, the iconography, and
Preti's preparatory drawings. What follows is a detailed analysis of the painter's

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259 Spike, 1999, pp. 278-82. The other paintings were the Preaching of San Bernardino of Siena (1675) for
the Duomo and a St. Ignatius in Glory for the church of San Vigilio (c. 1683). Visual inspection verifies
that the area behind the Pope, as seen in the black and white image, is, indeed, visible.
No. 1, 1930, 71-84. c.f. P. Agnorelli, "Canonizzazione di Santa Caterina," Alessandro VII Chigi (1599-
1667). Il Papa Senese di Roma moderna, (eds.) A. Angelini, M. Butzek, & B. Sani, Siena: 2000, p. 482 (for
a summary of Bacci's and Trottmann's discoveries).
261 H. Trottmann, "La Canonizzazione di Santa Caterina da Siena di Mattia Preti: rappresentazione liturgica
representational strategies, consistent in nature with the preceding investigations in this chapter. His painting of the *Canonization* will also be juxtaposed with Pascoli's and De Dominici's descriptions of it in order to highlight the compositional and pictorial innovations in comparison to other representations of the subject. In addition, it is also important to consider other Seicento depictions of recently canonized saints, as they provide insight into contemporary representational conventions. These include depictions of Saints Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, and Philip Neri (canonized during the reign of Pope Gregory XV in 1622) as well as St. Thomas of Villanova, who was canonized by the Sienese Pope Alexander VII Chigi in 1658 – a Pope with whom Preti had close relations.

The painting depicts the Canonization of St. Catherine by the Sienese Quattrocento Pope Pius II Piccolomini. St. Catherine – the Medieval Dominican tertiary and patron saint of Siena – was renowned for her efforts to end the schism and return the papacy to Rome.262 Completed for the Piccolomini family of Siena around 1673, the painting was designed for the high altar of the family chapel in the reconstructed church of San Francesco, which had been almost entirely destroyed by a fire in 1655.263 Besides the entry of Augusto Piccolomini into the Order of the Knights of St. John in 1671, there is no evidence as to why the family chose the Calabrese painter, for he had never worked in Tuscany or had ties to the Sienese family.264 While Augusto's entry into the Order in 1671 might have provided the contact between the painter and the family, neither Bacci nor Trottmann have determined whether Augusto actually arrived in Valletta in 1671.

263 Bacci, p. 78.
264 Bacci, p. 80; c.f. Trottmann, p. 82.
alternative means of contact could have easily come through the office of Pope Alexander VII Chigi, since both Preti and the Piccolomini had direct contact with the Sienese Pope. On the one hand, the Pope's niece Virginia Chigi was the wife of Giovanni Battista Piccolomini and mother of the aforementioned Augusto. On the other, the Calabrese's good relations with Alexander VII are demonstrated by the Pope's decision to approve the painter's petition to be elevated to the rank of Knight of Magisterial Grace in 1660 – an elevation which was broadly opposed by the Knights and Grandmaster. Additionally, the Pope's authority allowed the painter, first, to receive pensions from the Italian Langue as well as dispensation from military duty and official residency in 1662 and, second, to receive pensions from every Langue in 1663. Given the Pope was directly involved in motivating the Sienese confraternities, nobility, and population to fund the reconstruction of San Francesco, it is conceivable that Preti's name was mentioned when possible artists were discussed, since Siena was not an artistic center and would have naturally looked to Rome for painters and craftsmen.\textsuperscript{265} Notwithstanding the means through which the commission came into being, the subject matter selected was exceedingly rare and would have therefore required clear directions from the patrons. Some contact with the Piccolomini, via Augusto or letters from his father Giovanni Battista, was essential since the Calabrese would have been familiar with the pictorial conventions of depicting the saint as part of a \textit{sacra conversazione}, in meditation, or in glory, but not in a scene, as Trottmann observed, that was both a liturgical representation and familial glorification.\textsuperscript{266}

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265 For the Piccolomini family tree, see: Bacci, pp. 80-81; Preti's exchanges with Pope Alexander VII are recorded by Spike (1998, pp. 130-31, 148-52,157-58).
266 Trottmann, p. 80.
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From the liturgical perspective, the painting accurately positioned the Pope high upon his throne on the right below a canopy with spiral columns in St. Peter's square – the location of the canonization ceremony on June 29th, 1461 (the feast day of Saints Peter and Paul). Receiving the faithful during the procession that followed the ceremony, the Pope is blessing a Cardinal who bows before him to kiss his feet – a ritual performed by all of the Cardinals, bishops, abbots, prelates, and nobility at the end of mass. The depiction of the Cardinals and priests around Pius II was included by Preti not merely as a means of amplifying the grandeur of the event, but as a reference to the actual ceremonial practices. Behind the bowing ecclesiastic, one encounters a bearded man leaning forward with a scroll – probably the canon lawyer that was always present at such ceremonies. The scroll is more than likely the papal bull detailing the nature and rationale behind the canonization, which, in the case of St. Catherine, was written by Pius...

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268 *Enciclopedia cattolica*, Città del Vaticano: 1949, 12 Vols., Vol. 3, p. 598 (hereafter cited as EC.) The canonization of saints was always conducted in St. Peter's Basilica, at least as far back as the fifteenth century (Ibid.). It cannot be determined, however, whether the painting actually depicts the standard procession during the Quattrocento since the first official book (*Caeromoniale Romanum*) dictating the liturgy and entire ceremony was compiled between 1483 and 1496 and published in 1516, after the canonization. Compiled by Agostino Piccolomini (1435-96) – a nephew of Pope Pius II who served as his personal secretary between 1460 and 1464 before going on to become Master of Papal Ceremonies from 1466 to 1483, after which he became Bishop of Piacenza and began compiling the *Caeromoniale Romanum*. Based on Medieval liturgical and ceremonial practices, which had changed over time, the *Caeromoniale* was a synthesis of previous documents outlining religious ceremonies. The liturgy and ceremony were further clarified during the reign of Pope Sixtus V, who instituted the Congregation of Rites in 1588. The Congregation's sole focus was outlining the procedures that were to be followed when investigating an individual for potential beatification or canonization as well as formulating the liturgy that would celebrate the elevation of the figure to sainthood. The organization and establishment of clear guidelines evolved, however, during the Counter-Reformation and was more completely established by the end of the reign of Urban VIII in 1644 (*EC*, Vol. 3, p. 591). For further details on the life of Agostino Piccolomini leading up to the compilation of the *Caeremoniale*, see: M. Dyckmans, "Le Vie de l'Auteur," *L'Oeuvre de Patrizi Piccolomini ou le Ceremonial Papal de la Première Renaissance*, Citta Vaticano: 1980, 2 Vols., Vol. 1, pp. 1-15.
himself. Immediately behind the kneeling cleric, one can see a bald Dominican monk in his black and white robes holding a large and ornately decorated candle with an image of the recently canonized tertiary on it. This feature is consistent with canonization ceremonies. Typical of grand ceremonies, feasts, and canonizations as well, one sees a large banner onto which the figure of St. Catherine has been painted. This banner would have been used in the procession that preceded and followed the mass. The banner served as the official image of the saint and could only be publicly worshiped after she had been approved for beatification. Lastly, the man in the foreground carrying the barrel and the youth before him uncovering a dish containing bread reference the wine and bread that would have been used in the mass as well as the presentation of gifts that were essential to this liturgical practice.

The painting, at the same time, celebrates the Piccolomini family in a number of ways. First, the very act of depicting Pius II executing the canonization of a Sienese patron saint glorifies the prominent humanist pope and his family. Second, according to Bacci and Trottmann, the Cardinal bowing before the Pope is his nephew Francesco Piccolomini, then Archbishop of Siena and subsequently Pope Pius III. Trottmann has further stated that this sub-plot celebrated the future investiture of the second Piccolomini Pope, by including the prominently placed Cardinal in a painting that is by all extents and

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270 Preti, himself, produced two similar banners during the late 1640s representing *St. Martin with beggars* on one side and the *Salvator Mundi* on the other for a procession during the Jubilee year of 1650 (Spike, 1999, pp. 275-76). In addition to living in Rome for twenty years, the execution of these banners demonstrates that Preti had an intimate familiarity with such ceremonial practices. The use of a standard in canonization ceremonies has been dated back to 1253, when St. Stanislao was canonized (*EC*, Ibid.).
272 Bacci, p. 84; Trottmann, pp. 81-82. Bacci's and Trottmann's hypothesis is likely correct, since Francesco was elevated to the College of Cardinals along with five other prelates in Siena on March 5th, 1460 – fourteen months before St. Catherine's canonization on June 29th, 1461 (Mitchell, pp. 214-15.).
purposes about the Canonization of the greatest Sienese saint. Third, Preti incorporated the family coat of arms (a cross with five moons) throughout the picture and identifiable in at least three places – on the lid of the barrel carried by the servant in the left foreground; on the pontifical bull held by the lawyer behind the kneeling Cardinal; and on the front of the large candle held by the Dominican monk. And fourth, the grand manner in which Pius is depicted obviously references the funerary monuments of Leo XI de’ Medici and Urban VIII Barberini in St. Peter’s, designed by Algardi and Bernini, respectively (figs. 170 & 171).

The Calabrese’s knowledge of such ceremonies at the papal court would have been based on his experiences between the 1630s and 1650s, when he received patronage from both the families of Urban VIII and Innocent X Pamphili. Consistent with contemporary practices, the painter produced a scene that included costumes not from the fifteenth but from the seventeenth century. The figure of Pius II, then, assumed the liveliness of a symbol of papal authority rather than an historical portrait. This liveliness was matched by the Pope’s imposing presence, stoic demeanor, and majestic action, which is consistent with the above mentioned, recently unveiled papal tombs Preti saw while he was in Rome. Assimilating the energy of Bernini’s heavy bronze of Urban VIII and the calm plasticity in Algardi’s marble of Leo XI, Preti infused his figure of the Piccolomini Pope with the same monumental presence. Yet, Preti was able to surpass the sculptural models by introducing warm colors and silver illumination into his otherwise

273 Trottmann, p. 81-82.
274 Bacci, p. 84; Trottmann, p. 81.
276 Bacci, p. 84.
strongly shaded composition. In so doing he not only mimicked the light and shadows that enliven the sculptures in their niches – producing similar effects as seen in the St. Nicholas of Bari – but endowed the Pope with a liveliness that can only be achieved through the use of color. The Calabrese was able to glorify the Piccolomini family by enriching their Quattrocento forbearer with the magniloquence of Baroque art.

Trottmann identified that only two earlier representations of the subject are currently known – the Perugian artist Pinturicchio's 1506 fresco in the Piccolomini Library in the Duomo, Siena, and the Sienese painter Francesco Vanni's 1600 fresco in the Oratory of Sta. Caterina in Fontebranda, Siena (figs. 172 & 173).277 Both painters approach their subject with a similar frame of reference – that is, to position the saint's deceased body before the Pope, along with a Congregation of Cardinals, clerics, monks, nobility, and onlookers who attend the event. In each painting, one finds a centrally placed St. Catherine lying on her back and elevated above those attending the ceremony. Similarly, each painter decided to depict the saint in profile. Besides the stylistic differences between Pinturicchio's and Vanni's paintings, both artists downplay the role of the Pope in the canonization, as he does not occupy the central position and lacks the magniloquent grandeur with which the Calabrese has endowed him. Vanni's painting seems to be a possible source of inspiration, since the Sienese painter included several figures in the foreground bringing forth gifts and offerings. He positioned Pius II elevated on the far right below a canopy, and crowned the event by depicting a number of angels that descend along with the Holy Spirit towards the main event. Given there is no record of Preti being in Siena, the structural parallels may have resulted from the instructions he

277 Trottmann, p. 80.
received from his patrons or possibly from a drawing or print – maybe by Vanni himself, since he was also known as a printmaker. More generally, the Calabrese may have considered the prints made and circulated after the canonization ceremonies throughout the first seventy years of the seventeenth century. The 1622 engraving by Jean-Baptiste Barbé of Ignatius of Loyola's canonization is a central example.

Prior to Preti's arrival in Rome, Pope Paul V Borghese canonized Carlo Borromeo (1610) while Pope Gregory XV Ludovisi canonized Teresa of Avila and Isidore in addition to the aforementioned Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, and Philip Neri in 1622. During the years leading up to the Piccolomini commission, successive popes canonized a number of other saints. Alexander VII canonized Thomas of Villanova in 1655 and Francis of Sales in 1665, Clement IX Rospigliosi canonized Pietro d'Alcantara and Santa Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi in 1669, and Clement X Altieri canonized Gaetano da Thiene in 1671. Preti would have certainly been familiar with paintings and prints of these recently canonized saints, especially Carlo Borromeo, Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, Teresa of Avila, Thomas of Villanova, and Gaetano da Thiene. Indeed, his combined years in Rome and Naples would you have introduced him to a wide range of depictions of these modern day saints by Reni, Domenichino, Lanfranco, Sacchi, Guercino, Cortona, and Giordano – including, for example, Giordano's circa 1658 St. Thomas of Villanova Distributing Alms for Sant Agostino degli Scalzi, Naples.

While Pinturicchio's, Vanni's, and Preti's paintings similarly emphasize vertical ascension and are capped by a semicircular frame – albeit a painted one in Pinturicchio's

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278 The only print representing this subject that I have been able to discover is Giuliano Trabellesi's c. 1770-75 (British Museum) engraving after Preti's painting.
fresco – the Calabrese's representation stands out since it magnifies the vertical thrust evident in the preceding versions. Despite the biographers' emphasis on expressiveness and composition, neither Pascoli nor De Dominici consider how these qualities contribute to Preti's intentions. Writing first, Pascoli stated:

Vedesene in quella de' Carmelitani un altro, che è veramente bellissimo, nel quale figura la canonizzazione di S. Caterina avendo colla vivezza dell'espressiva, coll'armonia della composizione, e colla forza del colore fatto parer facilissimo un soggetto cotanto difficile.²⁸⁰

It is noteworthy that Pascoli isolated the "vivezza dell'espressiva", the "armonia della composizione", and "forza del colore" of the painting. The biographer did not discuss any other painting by Preti in the Vita in such detail, and it is more than likely that his observations are based on first hand experience. The same cannot be said for De Dominici, however.

De Dominici was completely ignorant of the painting's appearance, according to Santoro and Zezza. They, consequently, classified his description as an invention. His account is obviously based on Pascoli's description, but emphasizes in addition the forceful chiaroscuro and bold disegno – qualities which are now synonymous with Preti's artistic practice.²⁸¹ De Dominici described the painting as such:

Ma opera eccellentissima vien riputato il quadro [...], sì per la forza del chiaroscuro e gran disegno, come per lo gran componimento, e con la forza dell'espressiva arricchita con episodii ha fatto veder dipinto con facilità un soggetto che in se stesso è difficile per più ragioni che per brevità si tralasciano.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ Pascoli, p. 110: "One sees in that of the Carmelites another painting, in which the canonization of St. Catherine is represented, which is truly beautiful, making through expressive liveliness, compositional harmony, and a forceful colorism the representation of such a difficult subject seem easy."
²⁸² Ibid., pp. 674-75: “The painting is considered to be a truly excellent work [...] as much for its bold chiaroscuro and strong disegno, as for its grand composition, and with the expressive power of additional episodes he has represented with ease a subject that in itself is difficult for numerous reasons that are omitted here for brevity.”
Santoro and Zezza’s point is supported by the fact that De Dominici stated that the painting was in the Carmelite church in Siena when it was, as Bacci demonstrated, actually in San Francesco. Given Pascoli made the same error, scholars have conventionally ruled out both descriptions and considered them unworthy of consideration. Notwithstanding these factual errors, I will argue, instead, that Pascoli’s and De Dominici’s descriptions should not be ignored. The lively expressiveness, compositional harmony, forceful use of color, *chiaroscuro*, and *disegno* that is attributed to the painting can be seen as distinguishing qualities. The Calabrese’s overall composition and pictorial approach differs significantly from contemporaneous works sent to Siena by such artists as Carlo Maratta and Ciro Ferri (figs. 175 & 176). A deeper consideration of the attributed qualities provides a means of analyzing Preti’s treatment of the subject and how the *Canonization* includes a number of elements – absent in the work of his contemporaries – that challenge the idea that a painting is a bound window looking into space.

Preti’s composition is both harmonious and monumental for a number of reasons. Most notable is the vertical thrust of the painting that begins with the large muscular servant leaning leftwards in the left foreground and the observing Knight leaning rightwards in right foreground. These figures serve two functions. Firstly, the muscular servant carrying the barrel leans forward towards the pictorial plane thereby engaging the

283 These paintings include Maratta’s 1664 *Flight into Egypt* for the Chigi Chapel in the Duomo, his circa 1670 *Immaculate Conception with the Archangel Michael, St. Thomas of Villanova, and St. Francis of Sales* for the church of Sant Agostino and Ferri’s circa 1680 *Vision of St. Theresa* for the church of the Santissima Annunziata (for information on these paintings, see: *Alessandro VII Chigi (1599-1667)*, pp. 191-92, 423-24, 481-82.

284 Victor Stoichita’s *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-painting* (trans. A.M. Glasheen, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.) is the standard text on the subject of Early Modern pictorial experiments regarding such notions as painting beyond the boundaries of the painting.
viewer. The Knight serves a similar function in so far as his left hand reaches out towards the spectator – a pictorial topos frequently used by Preti. Secondly, both figures, despite the outward-looking face and gesture, move inwards – the former carrying the barrel of wine towards the ceremony while the latter focuses his attention upwards so as to indicate the next place to which the spectator should direct their attention, towards the central event where the Cardinal kneels and the massive figure of Pius sits upon his throne. At this level and point in the mid-ground, the viewer is confronted by a number of personages and architectural elements that emphasize both the monumentality and dynamism of the scene. It is from here that the architectural features and additional figural elements in the mid-ground begin to take over and redirect the inward and outward and upward and downward motion of the figures in space.

The monumental spiral pilasters that rise upwards directly behind the Pope further highlight the vertical motion established by the multi-tiered composition. The arched colonnade behind him directs the viewer's attention into the deepest point in background. At the same time, however, the area above Pius' throne is capped by the baldachino around which angels gather. The descending angels that move forward and downward along with the symbol of the Holy Spirit then force the viewer's attention back towards the Pope and outwards towards the pictorial plane, given the prominent frontward motions of the angel on the left and the thrust of the dove. This downward and frontward thrust is enhanced by the Dominican monk carrying the ornate candle towards the ceremonial blessing. Furthermore, the standard depicting St. Catherine blocks the spectator's ability to fully view the background, given it is being pushed forward by a number of onlookers and attendees visible below the lawyer's outreaching hand. More
still, the arched pilasters invite the viewer to direct their attention upwards but only to a certain point since each arch forces the attention downwards again, towards the personages that populate the spaces in between, and, ultimately, back to those moving forward alongside the monk. By this means, Preti redirects the audience's attention back towards the kneeling Cardinal and blessing Pope. The compositional harmony to which Pascoli referred, and which De Dominici characterized as grand design, is governed by these elements along with the two foreground figures. Their symmetrical angular tilt towards the respective edges of the frame contributes to the vertical thrust while also reinforcing the compositional balance of the painting that is built on a system of inward-outward and upward-downward motions. Indeed, their symmetrical tilting alludes to the idea of a semicircular base. As such, their postures and gestures illusionistically complement the arched frame and create a cyclical motion between the lower and upper tiers of the canvas.

This cyclical compositional structure is consistent with his innovations, as discussed in the previous chapter. One last factor in Preti's composition needs to be considered, however. Like the use of the downward steps positioned in the background of the feast scenes, one finds similar compositional lines here. Returning to the symmetrically placed foreground figures, one notices that there is a direct line between the center of the servant's head and that of the Pope. Despite the servant's outward focus, the inward motion of his body reestablishes this connection and leads towards the Cardinal's cloak and kneeling position. The kneeling position, in return, directs the spectator's attention towards Pius II. This upward and inward motion towards the mid-ground is complemented by a further linear connection established between the
projecting tabernacle and the center of the standard representing St. Catherine. The receding line runs directly into the center of the ceremonial standard – almost at the very point where the saint clasps both hands. Given the standard is being brought forward, the inward motion established by the receding tabernacle is modestly reversed outward and back towards the kneeling Cardinal and Pope. Although other less obvious linkages can be established, these prominent examples contribute further to the inward-outward and upward-downward structure. The overall effect of this inward-outward and upward-downward structure is harmonious, on the one hand, yet creates a sense of tension, on the other. This tension is created by the projecting gestures of the Knight, descending angels, and the Holy Spirit, which, ultimately, challenges the boundary of the pictorial plane.

In addition, the Calabrese's coloring amplifies the positions and roles of the protagonists in the painting. In each of the central figures, including the servant and Knight and the Cardinal and the Pope, Preti uses localized colors to establish the figures' presence. The beige for the servant's skin, the grey for the Knight's armor, the red for the Cardinal's gown, and the light-ocher with bold golden accents in the Pope's ceremonial robes and tiara are enhanced by the shadows that, consequently, carve each figure out. Like many of the paintings from the 1670s, the Canonization demonstrates a blend of the silver lighting and dark shadowing of such earlier altarpieces as the St. Nicholas of Bari and the yellow and golden illumination that infuses his figures with rich warm hues seen in the gallery painting of the Massacre of the Innocents and the contemporaneous altarpiece of the Assumption of the Virgin (figs. 36, 43, & 86).285 The reintegration of silver lighting is magnified in the Canonization, since the light alters the colors used to

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285 See Spike, 1999, pp. 68, 164-65, for the Assumption of the Virgin, Parish Church, Luqa, Malta.
illuminate the protagonists by adding a silver tonality to the servant's skin – bleaching it mildly – sharpening the reflection on the Knight's armor, transforming the red of the Cardinal's gown into a red with pink highlights, lightening the ocher on the Pope's robes so that the gold trimmings are fully illustrated. At the same time, the Calabrese re-establishes his interest in a sharp division between light and dark spaces, which is revealed by his positioning of the figures so that the light only hits one side of their body.

The effects of the silver lighting and dark shadowing are clearly felt in the *Canonization* and contribute to the lively expressiveness and bold *chiaroscuro* alluded to by Preti's biographers. Strategically directed illumination that hits one side of the body only, or specific areas of it, defines the figures by optically carving out the raised details of their musculature or garments. Thus, the servant appears to be more muscular than he would in a more unified and broadly illuminated scene. The same can be said for the manner in which the silver light illuminates the Cardinal, the Pope, and the cleric above the Knight on the right-hand side. Each figure wears robes that are normally delicately pleated. Instead, the Calabrese's illumination carves out the folds between the Cardinal's red cassock and white surplice, the Pope's ornate silk surplice and cope, and the cleric's ceremonial cope. The directness of the silver lighting highlights the creases while creating deep dark shadows between them – qualities that are notably different from the delicately treated vestments depicted in such earlier paintings as Andrea Sacchi's 1625-26 *St. Gregory and the Miracle of the Corporal* and Guido Reni's 1625 portrait of Cardinal Roberto Ubaldini and more importantly between Maratta's 1670 *Immaculate Conception* and Ferri's 1680 *Vision of St. Theresa* (figs. 175 & 176). While Preti's *Canonization* does not reflect the same delicacy and attention to miniscule details, it perfectly expresses the
"forza del chiaroscuro", "vivezza dell'espressiva" and "gran disegno" his contemporaries so much admired. Although both Maratta's and Ferri's paintings were similarly meant to emphasize design, both are composed in a manner that flatten the pictorial space. That is, the figures actions do not exhibit inward and outward gestures in the manner that Preti's do.

Preti's picture was clearly a success, for the members of the Opera del Duomo in Siena commissioned him in 1673 to produce the equally large and monumental *Preaching of St. Bernardino of Siena* – a commission that resulted from their conclusion that his representation of the *Canonization* "lo fa conoscere per uno de' primi dipintori nel secolo corrente." *286* Following the *Canonization* and the *San Bernardino*, Preti would go on to experiment with the effects of both a silver and gold lighting producing altarpieces in Malta and gallery paintings he shipped to the Italian mainland, including the 1675 *Judgment of Solomon* and the 1679-80 *Madonna of Loreto with Sts. Gaetano and Francis de Paul* (figs. 24 & 177). *287* By the 1680s, however, the golden lighting and rich yellow, blue, and red hues had largely disappeared from his works. With the exception of the *St. Ignatius in Glory* for San Vigilio in Siena and the *Vision of St. Dominic* for San Domenico in Taverna, Preti's late paintings would, to a significant degree, reinterpret the coloring and illumination first pioneered in his early Neapolitan years.

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Fig. 139. Preti, *St. Sebastian in Ecstasy*, Capodimonte, c. 1655.

Fig. 140. Raphael, *Madonna and Child with St. John the Baptist and St. Nicholas of Bari*, National Gallery, London, c. 1505.

Fig. 141. Lorenzo Lotto, *St. Nicholas in Glory with Srs. John and Lucy*, Chiesa dei Carmini, Venice, 1529.
Fig. 142. Titian & School, *St. Nicholas of Bari*, San Sebastiano, Venice, 1563.

Fig. 144. Pacecco, *St. Nicholas of Bari*, San Nicolao, Milan, c. 1635.


Fig. 145. Pacecco, *St. Nicholas of Bari*, San Martino, Naples, c. 1636.
Fig. 147. Preti, *St. Nicholas of Bari*, Pinacoteca Civica, Fano, c. 1670.
Fig. 146. François Duquesnoy, *St. Andrew*, St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, c. 1629-40.

Fig. 147. Caravaggio, *Martyrdom of St. Peter*, Basilica, Vatican City, c. 1629-40.

Fig. 148. Caravaggio, *Martyrdom of St. Peter*, Sta. Maria del Popolo, Rome, 1601.

Fig. 149. Ribera, *Inspiration of St. Jerome*, Sta. Maria del Popolo, Rome, 1601.

Fig. 150. Annibale, *Assumption of the Virgin*, Sta. Maria del Popolo, Rome, 1601.
Fig. 151. Domenichino, *St. John Directing Sts. Peter and Andrew Towards Christ*, Sant Andrea della Valle, Rome, 1621-24

Fig. 152. *Farnese Hercules*, Museo Archeologico, Naples, c. 200 AD copy after c. 350 BC original.

Fig. 153. *Dionysius and Eros*, Museo Archeologico, Naples, c. 100-200 AD.
Fig. 154. *St. John the Evangelist*, National Gallery, London, c. 1625-31.

Fig. 155. *Apollo Belvedere*, Vatican Museum, Roman copy after c. 300 BC original.

Fig. 156. *Giustiniani Minerva*, Vatican Museum, c. 150 AD copy after c. 400 BC original.
Fig. 157. Bernini, *St. Longinus*, Saint Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, 1629-38.

Fig. 158. Algardi, *St. John the Evangelist*, San Silvestro al Quirinale, Rome, 1628-29.

Fig. 159. Algardi, *St. Mary Magdalene*, San Silvestro al Quirinale, Rome, 1628-29.

Fig. 160. Giordano, *St. Nicholas Saves the Cupbearer*, Sta. Brigida, Naples, 1655.
Fig. 161. Giordano, *St. Nicholas in Glory*, San Nicola al Nilo, Naples, 1658.

Fig. 162. Veronese, *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*, Sta. Caterina, Venice, 1675.

Fig. 163. Correggio, *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*, Capodimonte, 1518.

Fig. 164. Correggio, *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine with St. Sebastian*, Louvre, 1525-30.
Fig. 165. Veronese, *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*, Detroit Institute of Art, c. 1560s.

Fig. 166. Veronese, *Rape of Europa*, Palazzo Ducale, Venice, 1570s.

Fig. 167. Preti, *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*, National Museum of Fine Art, Valletta, 1660s.
Fig. 168. Agostino Carracci after Veronese, *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*, British Museum, 1582.

Fig. 169. Annibale, *Madonna of St. Matthew*, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden, 1588.

Fig. 170. Algardi, *Tomb of Pope Leo XI*, St. Peter’s Basilica, Vatican City, 1634-44.

Fig. 170. *Tomb of Pope Leo XI*, St. Peter’s.
Fig. 171. Bernini, *Tomb of Urban VIII*, St. Peter’s, 1628-47.

Fig. 172. Pinturicchio, *Canonization of St. Catherine of Siena*, Piccolomini Library, Duomo, Siena, 1506.

Fig. 173. Francesco Vanni, *Canonization of St. Catherine of Siena*, Casa di Santa Caterina, Siena, 1600.
Fig. 174. Carlo Maratti, *Immaculate Conception with St. Thomas Villanova and Francesco di Sales*, Sant’Agostino, Siena, c. 1670.

Fig. 175. Ciro Ferri, *Vision of St. Theresa*, Santissima Annunziata, Siena, 1680.

Fig. 177. Guido Reni, *Cardinal Roberto Ubaldini*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, c. 1625.

Conclusion

The arguments laid out in the preceding chapters sought to accomplish two goals: on the one hand, to critically assess the painter's style as established in the early sources and De Dominici's *Vite*; and, on the other hand, to meticulously analyze Preti's compositional and pictorial strategies in conjunction with those of his peers. The dissertation was, accordingly, divided into two parts. Part One summarized, contextualized, and analyzed Early Modern references to and descriptions of the artist and his paintings. This section paid particular attention to the characterization of his style in the biographies. Chapter One considered the breadth of the sources and how they may be fruitfully used to better understand contemporaneous perceptions of the Calabrese's paintings. The investigation of Baldinucci's and Pascoli's biographies constituted the principal basis for this chapter. By examining the early sources as well as the biographers' descriptive terminology, I established how Preti's art was perceived by non-Neapolitan writers. Chapter Two focused on De Dominici's "Vita del Cavalier Fra' Mattia Preti". Instead of comprehensively summarizing the biographer's reconstruction of the artist's life, I analyzed his descriptive terminology and how his characterization of the Calabrese's paintings fit into the broader narrative he constructed in the *Vite*. While the extensive examination of the biography was unique in Preti studies – given the emphasis on connoisseurship, archival research, and stylistic analysis – it provided the necessary means of determining the artist's place in De Dominici's history of Neapolitan art. The chapter was particularly concerned with the biographer's intent to create a specific conception of Preti's art – that is, one which was based on *disegno*, *componimento*, and *chiaroscuro*. In addition, this chapter examined how the Calabrese's contemporaries were
characterized and what stylistic qualities were attributed to such Neapolitan artists as Caracciolo, Ribera, Stanzione, Vaccaro, Cavallino, and Giordano. By considering his peers’ characterization, I established Preti's stylistic position in the context of the two poles of Seicento Neapolitan painting, which gravitated from the Caravaggesque to a blend of Neo-Venetianism and Bolognese-Roman classicism. Focusing on Preti's and Giordano's styles, the biographer's descriptions of them were considered in order to determine exactly how each artist contributed to the formation of Francesco Solimena's style – the Neapolitan caposcuola and exponent of the grand manner.

Part Two examined Preti's artistic strategies by studying selected paintings in detail. Containing three chapters, Part Two focused on paintings the biographer discussed and works by other Neapolitan artists of the same subject. The selected paintings covered Preti's stylistic development between circa 1650 and 1675 as well as specific typologies that reoccur during these years. Beginning with such horizontally-formatted history paintings as the Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew, the Massacre of the Innocents, and the Liberation of St. Peter, Chapter Three examined Preti's approach to depicting torturous subjects and narrating scenes by comparing his interpretations with the versions by his Neapolitan contemporaries. Chapter Four studied the large banquet paintings, including the two versions of the Wedding at Cana, those of the Feast of Herod, and the Feast of Absalom and Belshazzar's Feast. This chapter focused on the compositional structure of the paintings and how the placement of figures and representation of architecture affected the viewer's spectatorial experience. In each case, I discussed how linear connections were visible between the directionality of a figure's movement and the position of the tables, shelves, columns, and the receding buildings. After comparing each painting with
contemporaneous versions by other artists, I demonstrated how Preti methodically designed his composition so as to create a spectatorial loop. That is, he composed his paintings so that the spectator's eye is continually in motion, cycling from one part of the composition to the next. Chapter Five concluded Part Two by studying the evolution of the Calabrese's work as an altarpiece painter. Works from three separate decades (1650s, 1660s, and 1670s) were discussed in order to establish his development. In addition, De Dominici's terminology was examined so as to determine how he described the stylistically divergent paintings. When addressing the *St. Nicholas of Bari*, I highlighted how Preti's approach took into account the *paragone* debate between painting and sculpture and how the sculptural nature of the central figure distinguished the painting from the works of his contemporaries. This also provided a better understanding of the painting's early reception and why, if we believe De Dominici, his peers were astonished when they first saw it. The *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* was studied by considering Preti's reinterpretation of Veronese's famous altarpiece. At the same time, De Dominici's description was addressed at length because he discusses the painting in the context of the debate over the superiority of drawing or design and coloring. Concluding with the *Canonization of St. Catherine of Siena*, this chapter examined potential iconographic precedents and Preti's connection to the patrons before discussing how Pascoli's and De Dominici's descriptions compare to the compositional dynamics of the painting itself.

With the exception of the *Mystic Marriage* and the *Canonization*, the Calabrese completed two or more versions of each case study. While the case studies were selected because of their extensive descriptions, they also provide a thorough cross-section of the painter's multi-faceted style and its evolution over his central and most productive years.
De Dominici may have selected these paintings for that very reason, although his conclusions regarding Preti's style do not support this. Such paintings as the *St. George and the Dragon*, *Christ and the Woman from Cana*, and the *Feast of Absalom*, among many others he saw firsthand, clearly demonstrate *colore* played as significant a role in the Calabrese's Neapolitan and early Maltese works as *disegno*. By characterizing Preti's style with such terms as "terribile disegno", "eroico componimento", and "forza del chiaroscuro", the biographer demonstrates how his *Vita* only captured a segment of Preti's artistic abilities. The arguments in the second part of this dissertation sought to demonstrate that Preti's art was far more complex than Baldinucci, Pascoli, and De Dominici indicated and that their conceptualizations portray a partial or paradoxical view of the painter's art. Nonetheless, many modern conceptualizations continue to rely on the biographers' perceptions, as is exemplified by Claudio Strinati's definition of Preti's style:

Mattia Preti può essere visto come artista prettamente caravaggesco o come artista legato a principi di impronta classicista, facenti capo ai grandi bolognesi come Guercino, Domenichino e Lanfranco. E, in definitiva, bisogna ammettere come entrambe queste tesi abbiano un margine di legittimità e di fondamento critico.  

Strinati's view that Preti's art existed between divergent styles demonstrates his adoption of De Dominici's paradoxical conceptualization of the painter's works. According to this reasoning, Strinati, like De Dominici, must view the painter as representing both the peak of Caravaggism and Neo-Venetianism and Classicism in Naples. Thus, such contemporaneously produced works as the 1653 *St. Nicholas of Bari* and the 1656 *St. George and the Dragon* function as the "margine di legittimità" and provide his argument

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288 C. Strinati, "Introduzione," *Mattia Preti, dal segno al colore*, (ed.) E. Corace, Rome: 1995, p. 9: "Mattia Preti can be seen purely as a Caravaggesque artist or an artist connected with the principles of classicism, headed by such great Bolognese artists as Guercino, Domenichino and Lanfranco. Ultimately, it must be admitted that both these theories have a degree of legitimacy and critical foundation."
with some basis. Strinati's polarization of Preti's stylistic qualities reflects the same sort of simplified conception of the painter's art and the complexities of his representational strategies that Longhi did by strictly aligning him with the Caravaggesque movement. By strictly aligning Preti with Caravaggism, Longhi unnecessarily and misleadingly limited his interpretation of the painter's style.

While Longhi was correct about the "plastoluminoso" ["luminous plasticity"] character of the Calabrese's art, as is demonstrated by many of the Neapolitan and early Maltese paintings discussed throughout the previous chapters, his conception of the paintings' "eccletico" nature is, ultimately, flawed. Caravaggio and the Caravaggisti undoubtably served as an important example on how to create figural relief, yet it was through a broader experimental approach that Preti was able to combine the appearance of relief with swathes of pure color to produce the monumental presence and "terribilità" of his figures. Unlike many of the Caravaggisti, he clearly demonstrated that he could create sculptural figures that are defined by both the pure hues of their vestments as well as the strong shadows, all accomplished while standing against the open backgrounds behind them! Such experiments date back to the late 1630s but are most clearly and dramatically illustrated by the four paintings Preti painted for Don Diomede Carafa, particularly the Christ and the Woman from Cana and the Christ's Temptation by the Devil discussed above (figs. 27 & 20). These paintings contain dominant foreground characters that are successfully depicted in a sculptural manner through the manipulation of gesture, hue, light, and shadow. As such, a more appropriate definition of the Calabrese's style is one based on experimentalism. Aligning him strictly with the cavernous shadows and sharp lighting of Caravaggism or the enigmatic notion of an
eclectic style overly simplifies the complex development and exploratory nature of his representational practices. It is important to note, however, that his artistic experiments focused on the examination of different styles, subject matter, compositional structures, and figural motifs while not sticking with one for longer than several years before probing the potentialities of others. Such continuous research defined his artistic activities for nearly five decades and was especially potent between the late 1640s and the late 1670s.

The multi-faceted experimentalism that characterizes his style was one of the central reasons why De Dominici was unable to clearly define his art in the context of Seicento styles in Rome, Naples, and Malta. While the Calabrese was linked to the Caravaggesque tradition in order to establish his role in the formation of Solimena's art, the stylistic antitheses that arise in the Vita demonstrate the difficulty with which the Neapolitan biographer was faced when attempting to isolate the defining characteristics of Preti’s art. The only distinguishing factor that differentiated his artistic practices from those of Caravaggio was his use of disegno and experiments with colore. His focus on disegno was not a distinguishing factor among the Neapolitan Caravaggisti, since Caracciolo, Ribera, and Cavallino were all prolific draughtsmen. Neither Baldinucci, Pascoli, nor De Dominici clearly explained what informed the Calabrese's chiaroscuro and componimento or the vaghezza del colore nor did they identify specific figures in their descriptions of paintings that would explain what contributed to Preti’s style – one which, apparently, inflamed the passions of the audience because of the tragic subject matter he treated. Indeed, this was hardly a unique achievement, since every artist sought to arouse the passions of their audience through the depiction of tragic events.
The experimentalism that characterized his artistic progression and ultimately defined the nature of his art derived from the demand Early Modern artists felt to individuate themselves in a market where stylistic originality was fused with identity. Some artists established their stylistic identity early on in their careers while others did not reach it until a later point. Preti, unlike many artists, spent years exploring and did not reach a 'high style' that could be used to define his place in the history of Italian Baroque painting. Rather, his inclination to experiment continued into his 60s and 70s—well beyond the exploratory trajectories of many artists. While his use of color, lighting, and shadows vary continuously, his devotion to depicting half- to three-quarter-length figures prominently placed in the foreground feature time and again as he probed the compositional and pictorial potentialities of his subjects. The foregrounding of his figures—while characteristically Caravaggesque in design—cannot be strictly linked to that early Seicento style, since he depicted many paintings structured as such with bright and broadly diffused light, vibrant hues, and open spaces containing sculpture and architectural backdrops. This is clearly illustrated by the *St. John Reproaching Herod* and the Capodimonte *Feast of Absalom* (figs. 127 & 115). Preti’s decision to design many of his paintings according to the primary compositional tenets of one style, while also injecting wholly different elements, clearly establishes that experimenting, exploring, and probing visual possibilities determined his artistic decisions more than any other. Ultimately, his objection to consistently working in a singular style defined his role in Seicento painting as a continuously distinctive artist who defied stylistic categorization.
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