

Introduction

The Stanza della Segnatura belongs as much to the history of ideas as to the history of art. Few inventors in any field have produced work of comparable scope. Yet the ideas reflected in its frescoes, painted between 1508 and 1511, and in their relationship to each other and to the space that they embellish have seldom been discussed. Little has been said, or imagined in print, about the lofty notions that inspired the powerful harmonies of thought that dominate this chamber. Nor has it been realized that their irradiative power betrays a utopian interpretation of culture so unified that its authority is exerted from the ceiling above and the pavement below as well as from the lateral boundaries of its four walls.

Exactly contemporaneous with the painting of the Sistine Chapel ceiling by Michelangelo, the Stanza della Segnatura represents, together with its distinguished neighbor, the apogee of High Renaissance painting in Rome. Of that there is no doubt. Yet in the over five hundred years that historians, connoisseurs, amateurs, and critics have studied and written about this elegant, stately chamber, the predominant tendency has been to demonstrate the extraordinary development of Raphael, the painter, and consequently, to provoke admiration for his stylistic genius. Because, in addition, students of Italian art history are assiduously urged to consider problems of style over the study of iconography – often considered a consolation to students of the painting of northern Europe, which did not experience such grand and venerated stylistic developments – the thematic material of this chamber has received insufficient attention.

Although at the time of his writing in the sixteenth century (or Cinquecento), Giorgio Vasari, the first art historian, suggested identifications for some of the characters of Raphael's frescoes, it is now realized that many of these were mistaken. Nonetheless, taking its cue from Vasari, the present state of iconographical analysis of the grand classical themes painted by Raphael has not

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progressed beyond the level of similar guessing games. Without supporting reasons that would link them to an ideological scheme, various identities have been bestowed on the figures represented in the four wall paintings. Indeed it would seem that Raphael eclectically drew from a mysterious reservoir of classical names. Even so, many figures have remained unnamed. Thus, the majority of the figures portrayed in this extraordinary chamber are still unknown, as are the reasons for their selection and the part they play in the overall plan. The recent works of Giovanni Reale continue the tradition of considering each fresco in isolation from the others.¹

Because the meaning of the program has not yet been understood, the authorship of the program for the Stanza della Segnatura has remained uncertain. Despite the unsubstantiated and tentative suggestions that have from time to time been offered, the inventor and his invention, so important for the history of art and ideas, have not yet come into recorded existence as the clear and inseparable guides who together accompanied Raphael in the creation of this majestic memorial to human intelligence. As a consequence of our lack of knowledge respecting the inventor of the program for the Stanza della Segnatura, this extraordinary room has come to be known, together with its adjoining chambers, subsequently also executed by Raphael, only for their painter, as “Raphael’s *stanze*.”

It is important to keep in mind what older authors saw in this chamber; their doubts and debates and questions have led us to where we stand today. It was, for example, Anton Springer, followed by Franz Wickhoff, who, in the face of the objections of Eugène Müntz, first proposed that the Stanza della Segnatura was designed to be the library of Pope Julius II.² Art historians of the late twentieth century have contributed very useful observations in particularized branches of learning. For example, the profundity of Raphael’s interest in architecture has been rediscovered and much discussed by Giuseppe Marchini, Stefano Ray, Christoph Frommel, and others.³ The relation of Raphael’s surviving drawings to the development of the final paintings has been explored by numerous writers, starting with Oskar Fischel and admirably continued in the work of Konrad Oberhuber, John Shearman, Paul Joannides, Matthias Winner, and others.⁴ The verve and the presumption of its painter to include his own portrait more than once in this most formal chamber of His Holiness the Vicar of Christ on earth has been accepted in the supposition that Raphael included his own image among the great poets of all time.⁵ The catalogue of Luitpold Dussler is still an invaluable tool, which has formed the background for more recent general studies of Raphael, including that of Roger Jones and Nicholas Penny.⁶ These contributions and many others have been immensely important. Yet a distance has remained between our present understanding of this room as a great showpiece of Raphael’s newly realized painterly genius and the original intent of its iconography, which in large part is what made Raphael a great painter when he arrived

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in Rome. Indeed, it was this thematic material, which translated great ideas into great images, that stimulated the painter of this room, the still very young Raphael, to capture the opportunity to achieve a brilliant new artistic language in making remarkable paintings that ideate mental activity.

The new insights that will be discussed here all point to the existence of a program that was unified not only in its concept but, even though changes were made in progress to perfect the scheme, also in every detail. Raphael worked according to a plan which, in terms of its specific thematic goals and programmatic authorship, has remained largely unknown to us. In this scheme, the ceiling, the four walls, and the pavement appear to have been intrinsically interconnected. A venture of this precocity in the first decade of the Cinquecento betrays an exceptional intellectual ingenuity and an adventurous spirit in defining the rich inheritance of the city of Rome. Such a project could not possibly have been devised by a newcomer to the city. It must, clearly, be linked to the inventive spirit of a humanist in Rome who, close to the Pope, was wrestling with the question of how to construct a definition of his new papacy and to present it as a paradigm for the newly emerging ideal of Rome as both a concept and a city.

The recent work of our colleagues in literature, philosophy, and religious and classical studies has made it possible to study Roman humanism or, in other words, Roman intellectual history. These include especially John W. O'Malley, Paul O. Kristeller, Eugenio Garin, John F. D'Amico, James Hankins, John Monfasani, Charles E. Trinkaus, Michael J.B. Allen, Gian Carlo Garfagnini, Leonardo Rombai, and Paul Grendler. In particular, the work of O'Malley on humanist orators at the papal court has been of fundamental importance for this research, which in places is very much indebted to his pioneering analyses.

The humanist tradition – that is, the recovery first of Latin texts and the literature of Roman civilization, then of Greek texts and their philosophical revelations – brought with it a new intellectual energy and excitement about the importance of classical antiquity. It is this aspect of the Roman Renaissance that, unexplored to date in relation to the Stanza della Segnatura, will help us to understand the context in which Raphael worked and to look at the works he produced upon his arrival in Rome in a different way, that is, as demonstrations of the intellectual foundation of Cinquecento Rome.

Humanism in Rome was different in many ways from humanism in other parts of Italy. Intricately related to the unique religious character of the city and dominated by its international interests and obligations as well as by the tremendously impressive archaeological environment of the former capital of the Roman Empire, the special character of humanism in Rome was closely connected with the papal Curia, the official bureaucratic structure of the Vatican. The Curia Romana required humanist talents to execute with perception and discernment the needs of the papal bureaucracy. In offering their literary expertise to satisfy these needs, the humanists established themselves in the religious fabric

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of the city and made their positions invaluable by bestowing the gift of immortality on their patrons. Roman humanism therefore offers an acute contrast with Florentine humanism, which stressed republican civic qualities in a city that had essentially taken form during the late Middle Ages.

Although Roman humanism was closely connected with papal needs and papal policies, because humanists were attracted to Rome from many centers – Bologna, Venice, Naples, Volterra, Parma, Reggio Emilia, Ancona, Modena, Mantua, and Calabria, for example, and even from such distant centers as Spain, Constantinople, and France – these scholars were not seduced by regional concerns, such as, for example, the Neoplatonism of Florence, which offered a comparatively narrow and restricted framework. Even Florentines, after the exhaustion of Neoplatonism in their city, were attracted to Rome, where the political, social, and archaeological ambiance was far more vast and complex. The mixed audiences of Rome allowed its humanists, primarily prelates and members of the papal Curia, to achieve a triumphant expression of the reinterpretation of classical antiquity applied to Christian values. Thus, Roman humanism allowed for a much more broadly based intellectual movement than that of Florence. This included such an orthodox view of archaeology that it was often criticized as “pagan” or “neopagan” and also included the study of Cicero, not only for his literary style or for the model provided by his orations for orators at the papal court, but also for his ideas. Cicero’s advocacy of Greek culture as the great model for Rome, and the study of all philosophies and cultures rather than just one (Plato or Aristotle), were very attractive goals in the highly charged atmosphere of the rebuilding of Rome in the early years of the Cinquecento. At the same time, it must be remembered that not all humanists in Rome were archaeological in their attitudes, nor were all Ciceronians.

Keeping this special cultural and intellectual pace of Renaissance Rome in mind, the important papal commissions of the High Renaissance may be viewed as products of a comprehensive intellectual vision, which, eminently suited to the portrayal of political as well as religious ideals, was largely propagandistic in its intent. The humanistic physiognomy of the Stanza della Segnatura, which will be discussed in the pages that follow, could not have been accomplished, or even dreamed of, in a center other than Rome or in a setting not surrounded by the throbbing pulse of the mass of surviving antique ruins. Although no comprehensive survey of Renaissance antiquarianism yet exists, valuable steps in that direction have been taken by Roberto Weiss, Philip Jacks, Phyllis Bober, and others. Many of these ruins have disappeared today. However, they gave rise to literary and historical discussions. The consequence of our inability to visually document the interplication of antique ruins with the growth of the Renaissance city has made it difficult for us to define the cultural need to accommodate the precious newly unearthed sculptured treasures, which vividly brought the past into contact with the present, with the goals of Christianity.

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At the time of his arrival in Rome in 1508, the young Raphael, 25 years of age, was unprepared for the task of forging a humanist scheme that would immortalize the Pope in his domain. Raphael's early years in Urbino and Perugia had inspired him to become a painter and had given birth to a precocious interest in architecture. His last four years before his arrival in Rome had been spent in Florence, where he had demonstrated an instinctively intelligent reaction to the work of his more mature contemporaries Leonardo and Michelangelo in an admirable series of Madonna paintings. There was little in his background to provide him with the knowledge and skills he would need in Rome. Whereas in early 1508 Raphael was still focused on the figural problems presented by small panel paintings of holy subjects, mostly Madonnas, by late 1508 he had entered a new world.

Not only was the humanist inventor of the Stanza della Segnatura Raphael's collaborator. Very likely he also was the one who aroused Raphael's new interests in antiquity and classical subject matter. The intelligence of Raphael's reactions to the tutelage he received is evident in the much discussed change of style achieved in his paintings after his arrival in Rome. Not only did his inspirator offer views of Rome as the eternal secular and religious "kingdom," but he also showed Raphael, using Cicero as his guide, that the greatness of Greece served as the guide to ancient Rome. So also was he eager to promote a world view that epitomized the concord between the ancient, Hebraic, and Christian worlds. At the same time, he understood very clearly the obligations of his position as a sensitive and astute defender of his patron, Julius II, who without the assistance and protective interpretation he provided, might be far less respected today as a great patron of art. In this sense, the inventor of the program of the Stanza della Segnatura may be regarded as the fabricator of the most prominent triumphal space of the High Renaissance in Rome. Yet his raw material was a library, a simple room irregular in dimension, not very large, darkly lit, and personal in its function. The private librarian of the Pope was in an ideal position to provide this inspiration.

The aim of this book is to propose a new way of looking at the Stanza della Segnatura. In order to understand the meaning of this room, it is necessary to keep in mind not only the very great diversity of the humanistic ideas that were available at this time in the Eternal City, but the distinctive characteristics of the humanism that filtered to Raphael from his mentor and guide. From the perspective of its iconographical inventiveness, the connections of the Stanza della Segnatura to a distinct strain of Roman humanism are clear. Through the process of discovering the unified program of this esoteric chamber, the intellectual personality of its humanistic adviser becomes clear. The name of Tommaso Inghirami, familiar to those who know Raphael's works, has meant, until now, little more to art historians than a face in a famous portrait. Dazzling as it was in early Cinquecento times, the scope of Inghirami's humanistic wisdom is understood

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by few today, as are the circumstances of his life, which are interplated in curiously interesting and significant ways with the content of this chamber.



An initial chapter briefly describes the early history of the Stanza della Segnatura, its commission, and its purpose. Chapter 2 considers the state of interest to date in the inventor of its scheme, whereas Chapter 3 is devoted to the pope's librarian, Tommaso Inghirami, here proposed as the author of the program. Latinist, actor, orator, curial entrepreneur, poet laureate, and diplomat, as well as papal librarian, Inghirami's intellectual and spiritual concerns, though shaped by particular admiration for Cicero and Pico della Mirandola, were intimately connected with papal policy and the cultural environment of papal Rome. Despite his distinguished position in the Curia and his popularity in Rome, surprisingly little has been published on Inghirami.⁷ Though often mentioned in the literature of Roman humanism, most of his writings remain unknown or unpublished. This chapter will offer, however tentatively, a general biography of Inghirami, which will include basic information about his life, career, interests, and works. It will be seen that this corresponds with and exemplifies the characteristics of the exalted scholarly thought demonstrated so coherently in this visual monument of humanist culture. The relationship between the wide scope of Inghirami's interests, as seen in his published orations and many surviving unpublished works, and that found in the frescoes will, it is hoped, be clear.

Chapters 4 through 9 explore the iconography of the ceiling, the first surface to be painted by Raphael, and offer new interpretations of the reciprocally interactive subject matter of the four walls below. Many of these thoughts have been published in earlier, tentative, form by me in recent years (in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, *Artibus et Historiae*, and *Renaissance Quarterly*) as I struggled to understand this exceptional space. Here they are recast in order to fit the larger conclusions of which I became convinced, that all parts of the chamber and of its component paintings constitute a continuously balanced and subtly interwoven unity. Subsequently, in Chapter 10 attention will be focused on the design of the mosaic pavement, never before considered a part of the program and the last part of the chamber to be completed.

Thus, each section of the chamber will be considered in a heretofore unexplored way as a part of the overall puzzle rather than as an end in itself. The addition of Roman humanist considerations to our existing knowledge about the function and development of these works will in turn underline the character of the deeply integrated program into which they fit. It is the singular qualities of this chamber as a unified composition that distinguish it from all others. The person who was in charge of the papal library, Tommaso Inghirami, was in a

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unique position to devise such a program, while its painter, Raphael, responded with breathtaking immediacy to devise appropriate visual solutions that were sensitive, perceptive, and imaginative.

The unity of this program will be the subject of the conclusion, Chapter 11. That chapter will devote special attention to the cultural and religious values that stimulated the formulation of the subjects and the manner of their realization. It will also consider the unique qualities of intellect, wit, and interpretation that strengthen the attribution of this program to this prominent and distinguished humanist.

This chapter will also suggest that the relation that developed between artist and humanist inventor during the progress of the commission and largely in the absence of its patron, who was frequently engaged on the battlefield, was so cordial and close that it had an immediate invigorating and stimulating effect on the receptive young Raphael. The closeness of this affinity between inventor and painter must be taken into account in viewing the Stanza della Segnatura as a means of understanding the intellectual foundation of Roman Renaissance painting. It will become clear that Raphael did not draw indiscriminately and eclectically from various sources, as has been previously suggested, but rather that he responded with verve to the enlivening inspiration of Inghirami's project. Thus he joined the most up-to-date contemporary intellectual traditions of the city. In visualizing this repertoire of ideals, he transformed it into a mellifluously adaptable and elegant visual language, which was a light-year away from the series of sweet Madonnas he had painted in Florence only a few years before. Chapter 12, an Epilogue, will speculate regarding Raphael's broader intellectual interests.

The material to be presented in this volume will seek to avoid repetition of well-established information and to restrict its offering to a commentary on the ideas that made this singular intellectual environment far more cultivated as a collective image than the tastes, experience, or education of its patron merited. Attention will be focused on the presentation of ideas not previously discussed by other authors, even by those few who took the first important steps in pondering the iconography of one or more of its frescoes, beginning with Giovanni Pietro Bellori in the late eighteenth century and continuing with Dioclezio Redig de Campos, Luisa Becherucci, Herbert von Einem, and others in the twentieth century. Twelve color plates are sequentially numbered to accord with the twelve chapters.

An inevitable consequence of bringing humanistic evidence into consideration is the need for an extensive broadening of our perspectives to allow for a philosophical approach. The need for a reassessment of our past assumptions that identification of the characters depicted in this chamber can be the product of out-of-context conjectures must, concomitantly, also be revised. What is proposed in the following chapters does not pretend to resolve all the issues connected with the ineluctably interlocked meanings and relations of the frescoes

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that adorn this chamber. In the absence of confirming documents, this view must remain tentative until new information is discovered. It is my great hope that, in suggesting the existence of a unified intellectual program based on a consistent philosophical theme for the Stanza della Segnatura, this volume will broaden the avenue of investigation of this unique and important space.

In addition to being a connoisseur of books and the organizer of the private library of Julius II, Inghirami thus appears to have been the person in charge of its visual articulation. Although they do not specifically mention the Stanza della Segnatura, his texts will, I hope, be studied in the future by a student of humanism in order to obtain a deeper knowledge of his literary acumen. Although the primary focus of this volume is the Stanza della Segnatura itself, further study of Inghirami and his relation with Raphael will, I believe, show the inevitable need to look to iconographical considerations in order to appreciate the meaning of the articulation of the chamber and its deep intellectual integrity.

Thus, this volume has a modest intention, to suggest a new path. Hopefully it will stimulate others to think of the Stanza della Segnatura in terms of the ideas that inspired the selection and arrangement of its heroes rather than to merely guess who they might be. The end of the road will not be found in these pages. It lies ahead.