



Introduction - Rosario Coppel Areizaga

Extract from Michelangelo's bronze Corpus documented in Seville 1597, rediscovered, by Carlos Herrero Starkie, IOMR, 2024

Technique and Cataloging of Bronze Sculpture ⁽¹⁾

Bronze is obtained through an alloy of copper and tin, to which lead and occasionally small proportions of zinc are added. Similarly, during the copper extraction process, infinitesimal amounts of impurities such as nickel, iron, silver, arsenic, and antimony may adhere, enabling the determination of its age and origin. Such was the case with the Crucifix in question, whose Fahlerz-type copper originates from Tyrolean mines which supplied Roman foundries during the first two-thirds of the 16th century.

In bronze work, the sculptor creates a model in wax or clay, and the caster then produces a plaster mold over the original to obtain a wax replica, known as the "intermediate model", thus preserving the original for further use. ⁽¹⁾ Once the piece is cast, it requires repair the work, which consist of removing the wires that held the model and core in place, as well as the channels used for the wax and gases to escape and for the liquid metal to enter. Finally, any defects or imperfections are corrected with various tools, such as a saw or a file. The sculptor who created the original model, or one of his most skilled assistants, is responsible for the cold finishing, refining the piece's details with a chisel.

Patina refers to the surface transformation that occurs over time due to wear, friction, or chemical treatments. There are natural patinas, caused by oxidation, and artificial ones, created by adding a superimposed layer to the cast object. "Fire gilding" was achieved by covering the surface with a mixture of gold and mercury, then removing the mercury through heat. In the case of the Crucifix under study, the patina is in an extraordinarily well-preserved state of condition, likely due to its use as a workshop model rather than as an object of worship.

For the cataloging of a bronze piece, visual analysis is crucial. This involves direct examination, assessing its weight, sound, and the quality of finish through touch; identifying holes, imperfections, patches, rough surfaces, and cold chisel work. Then the results are verified through documentary research, which may provide information about its origin (commissioner, history, and vicissitudes of the work), consulting relevant bibliography, and identifying the iconography and style. This research provides the necessary data to attribute the piece to a specific artist, workshop, or school.

The techniques used to study bronze include X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (XRF), which identifies the metal alloy used (distinct for each period, region, or even workshop), and radiography, which reveals wall thickness, interior features, whether it is hollow or solid, and any nails or other elements used for assembling different sections. These methods were applied to the newly discovered Crucifix, contributing to its scientific cataloging.

Finally, for the study and cataloguing of bronze sculpture, it is important to understand the terminology used. An autograph bronze is cast from the sculptor's original model and finished by the sculptor or an assistant under his supervision. A replica is cast from the same model and is identical in shape and size, except for any adjustments during mounting or finishing. In the 16th century, it was usual to produce two or three replicas of each autograph model. A signature inscribed in wax is found only on exceptional pieces. A variant is a bronze similar to another but cast from an independent model. It could be a second attempt by the sculptor or a new model based on the first. Meanwhile, after-cast involves using an existing bronze as a model for indirect casting. This process involves covering the bronze with a protective substance, creating a plaster mold, and proceeding with the indirect lost-wax casting method.

In this sense, the present study confirms, based on technological, iconographic, and artistic grounds, that the bronze Crucifix meets all the criteria to be considered cast from an original model by Michelangelo, by a highly talented goldsmith from the realm of the prestigious Roman "Gran Scuola", either during or shortly after the master's lifetime. However, its strictly autograph nature may be questioned, as there is no evidence that the Michelangelo directly oversaw its casting. This "Corpus Christi" seems more like a collaborative work between Michelangelo, who designed the iconic Christ model, and Guglielmo della Porta or one of his goldsmiths, who immortalized that model in bronze



Fig. A. *Crucified Christ*, after a model by **Michelangelo** (1538-41), bronze, cast in Rome, 1560-70, documented in Seville 1597, IOMR Collection, The Netherlands

Iconography of the Crucified Christ

In Christian iconography, the Passion of Christ is one of the most frequently depicted themes, beginning with the Agony in the Garden and continuing through fourteen subsequent episodes, culminating in the Resurrection. This cycle, meant for didactic purposes, faithfully follows the Gospel accounts.

In representations of the Crucifixion, Christ is shown nailed to the cross, sometimes alive, at the moment of speaking his last words, or already deceased. Each moment is depicted differently. Generally, the living Christ has his head turned upwards, with open eyes and mouth, expressing supplication, similar to when, semi-alive before expiring, he addresses the Father in his final words. In contrast, the deceased Christ's head droops fully onto his chest, with closed eyes and mouth. These three scenarios require an anatomical study, crucial in the case of Michelangelo's work, which must account for the body's posture, arms, and legs. The artist conveys tension through the firmness or laxity of the limbs. Additional signs, such as the position of the arms (more horizontal or vertical) or the hands (fingers outstretched, thumb and middle finger joined in blessing, or, less commonly, hands nearly closed with thumb and index finger touching), enhance the realism of the figure. After the Council of Trent (1545–1563), Counter-Reformation norms stipulated that Christ should be depicted as a divine figure, without emphasizing the suffering caused by his passion and death.

In the Crucifixion model by Michelangelo's unveiled in this publication, Christ is depicted dead, naked, with his head entirely slumped onto his chest, eyes and mouth closed, a furrowed brow, and a solemn, dignified expression. His arms are nearly horizontal, his legs crossed (left over right), and the anatomical study exquisitely reveals the sunken diaphragm, ribs, muscles, and tendons. The hands have the thumb and index finger joined but the most unusual feature is that Christ is nailed to the cross with four nails, in line with St. Bridget's vision. ⁽²⁾

The figure likely originally bore a crown of thorns or a halo of sanctity (now lost), as it features a hole at the crown of the head and another on the right side. On the side there is a wound and some raised drops of blood that emerge from it, an important detail for dating the Corpus. The face of classical beauty has delicate features, almond-shaped eyes, a small mouth, and meticulously chiselled eyebrows, moustache, and beard. Another distinctive feature is the hair, which does not fall forward but is neatly arranged over the shoulders in regular waves. Although designed to be mounted on a cross, the figure is modelled in the round, with the back as perfectly finished as the

front. The perizonium, attached with screws, was added after the wax model was cast in bronze. (Fig. A)



Fig. B. Leone Leoni, *portrait of Michelangelo*, bronze medal, Museo Arqueológico, Madrid

Michelangelo as a Bronze Sculptor

Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564) is considered the greatest sculptor of all time. Although his specialty was marble, documents confirm that he also created bronze sculptures, particularly in his early years. One of the Renaissance's earliest bronzesmiths was his teacher, Bertoldo di Giovanni, who may have provided Michelangelo with the necessary training and instilled in him a profound admiration for Donatello, Bertoldo's own mentor. ⁽³⁾ ⁽⁴⁾ Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574) was one of the first to note Michelangelo's activity as a bronze sculptor:

"The fame Buonarroti gained through his marble sculpture <the David, installed in the Piazza della Signoria in 1504> allowed him to model a beautiful David in bronze for the gonfalonier, which Soderini sent to France." ⁽⁵⁾

The bronze David was commissioned in 1502 by the Florentine Republic to be sent to France as a diplomatic gift. Pierre de Rohan, Maréchal de Gié, had requested a copy of Donatello's David for King Louis XII the previous year, but the project was never realized. After much deliberation, and through the intervention of the gonfalonier Piero Soderini, the commission for a new David was entrusted to Michelangelo. The statue was completed in 1508, with Benedetto da Rovezzano overseeing the final touches. It was then sent to France via Livorno. Unfortunately, the life-size statue (measuring about two and a quarter braccia) has not survived.

In another instance, the tomb project designed in 1505 for Pope Julius II included a bronze frieze above the cornice, which was never executed. Similarly, a second design in 1513 proposed three panels, either in marble or bronze, which also remained unrealized. ^{(6) (7)}

In 1506, Michelangelo received his most significant bronze commission: a seated portrait of Pope Julius II, a colossal statue (measuring between five and seven braccia, according to chronicles), to be placed above the main entrance of San Petronio in Bologna. Michelangelo created a full-scale stucco model, possibly executed by Alfonso Lombardi, known for his skill with this material. In 1507, with the wax model ready, Florentine founders Lapo d'Antonio, Ludovico di Guglielmo del Buono (Lotti), and Milanese Pietro Urbano were tasked with the casting. However, Michelangelo dismissed them due to dissatisfaction with their work and brought in a French master and Bernardino dal Ponte, a Florentine renowned for his artillery-making skills. The casting process was fraught with difficulties and left Michelangelo with a bitter experience. Both the statue and his stucco model met a tragic fate; they were destroyed in 1511 when the Medici were expelled, and the Bentivoglio family came to power. The bronze was sold to the Duke of Ferrara, who repurposed it into a cannon. ⁽⁸⁾

In his later years, Michelangelo was approached by Catherine de' Medici to create an equestrian statue of King Henry II of France, which he declined due to his advanced age, recommending Daniele da Volterra instead. The latter managed only to cast the horse, which was designed by Michelangelo (who also supervised the preparatory work). After Michelangelo's death in 1564, the horse became part of an equestrian monument to King Louis XIII in the Place des Vosges, Paris, created by Pierre II Biard between 1634–1639. This monument, too, was destroyed during the French Revolution in 1789. ⁽⁹⁾

Fig. C. *Samson and two Philistines*, after a model by Michelangelo, > XVI century, 36,8 cm., The Frick Collection

Despite these misfortunes, a few small bronze sculptures attributed to Michelangelo survive, among which the newly discovered bronze Crucifix under study. These pieces are linked to his sketches or ink studies, which he used to create small wax or clay models. There is evidence that he gifted a wax group of *Hercules and Antaeus* to Leone Leoni as a token of gratitude for a medallion Leoni had cast of Michelangelo's portrait in 1560. The medallion's reverse depicted a blind man guided by a dog. ⁽¹⁰⁾ (Fig. B) Once again Vasari provides further insight:

"Michelangelo was so impressed by that medallion that he decided to give Leone several of his drawings, as well as a wax effigy representing Hercules crushing Antaeus." ⁽¹¹⁾



The Small Bronzes

The small bronzes made from Michelangelo's models were generally cast at later dates. Among them are mythological themes such as *Resting Hercules*, 33 cm (original model 1493–1494), London, Victoria and Albert Museum; ⁽¹²⁾ *Captive*, 19.5 cm (original model 1513), Milan, Museo Poldi Pezzoli; ⁽¹³⁾ and *Fragment of a River God*, 31.3 cm (original model 1521), possibly cast by Alessandro Cesati around 1540. Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello. ⁽¹⁴⁾

One of the most widely reproduced small bronzes is the famous group *Samson and Two Philistines*, 37.2 cm, housed in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello. Its terracotta model (41 cm) has been dated to ca. 1530 (Florence, Casa Buonarroti Museum). ⁽¹⁵⁾ Several versions exist, the earliest cast around 1550, likely by Daniele da Volterra, such as the ones in the Berlin Bode Museum (36.5 cm) and The Frick Collection, New York (36.8 cm). ⁽¹⁶⁾ (Fig. C)

The publications of Paul Joannides are fundamental to the study of these works, as he has devoted much of his research career to Michelangelo's drawings and, more tangentially, to his activity as a bronzesmith. Joannides is also responsible for the attribution of a *Hercules Pomarius* figure in bronze (33 cm, ca. 1500), housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. ⁽¹⁷⁾

The *Calvary Group* in New York's Metropolitan Museum was one of the first small bronzes linked to a Michelangelo model, as will be explored in this study. ⁽¹⁸⁾

A separate case, bearing in mind it may be an autograph example, involves the *Pair of Bacchantes on Panthers* from the Rothschild Collection. After being temporarily exhibited at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, it was studied by various experts during the *Michelangelo Discovering Symposium*, led by Victoria Avery, who, along with Paul Joannides, proposed Michelangelo's authorship in 2015. ⁽¹⁹⁾ Three years later, the results of the research were published, featuring significant articles by specialists, a magnificent technical study, and excellent photographs. These two bronzes, measuring 91.2 and 90.2 cm in height respectively, are dated ca. 1504, preserved in magnificent condition, and showcase great plastic beauty. ⁽²⁰⁾



Fig. D. *Christ Crucified*, polychromed wood ca 1491, Michelangelo, > 1491, 142x135 cm., Church of the Santo Spirito, Florence

Models of the Crucified Christ created by Michelangelo

The earliest representation of a Crucified Christ by Michelangelo is a polychromed wooden sculpture, 139 cm tall, dated ca. 1493. It is preserved in the sacristy of the Church of Santo Spirito in Florence (Fig. D). According to early biographers Ascanio Condivi and Giorgio Vasari, the sculptor, still an apprentice at the time, created this piece as a gesture of friendship toward the prior, in gratitude for allowing him to perform anatomical studies on cadavers.⁽²¹⁾ In this youthful work, Michelangelo was inspired by Brunelleschi's *Crucified Christ* (1410–1415), a polychromed wooden piece (170 cm tall) housed in the Gondi Chapel of the Church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, which was the first depiction of a naked Christ.⁽²²⁾

Additionally, well-known drawings related to the Crucifixion theme are preserved in the British Museum (early 1520s) (Fig. E), Windsor Castle (1533), the Louvre, and the Teylers Museum in Haarlem, Netherlands.⁽²³⁾ These works are associated with the scholarly and religious circle of the Spaniard Juan de Valdés and Michelangelo's profound friendship with Vittoria Colonna, the Marchioness of Pescara, between 1536 and 1540—a topic further explored in this publication after analysing their correspondence.

A sketch of a Crucified Christ, carved from limewood (27 cm), is preserved in Florence's Casa Buonarroti Museum. It is dated ca. 1562, based on four letters written between August and October of that year by Lorenzo Mariottini (a tailor and confidant of Michelangelo) and Cesare Bettini (supervisor of the construction of St. Peter's), sent from Rome to Leonardo, Michelangelo's nephew in Florence. Another letter to Leonardo from the sculptor Tiberio Calcagni also references Michelangelo's wish to create a wooden Crucified Christ as a gift for his nephew.⁽²⁴⁾

Finally, a tabernacle featuring Passion scenes, commissioned by Pius IV for the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Rome, was designed by Michelangelo and cast between 1566 and 1568 by his last assistant, Jacopo del Duca. It is now housed in the Carthusian Monastery of Padula, Salerno, and is closely related to the model under study.⁽²⁵⁾

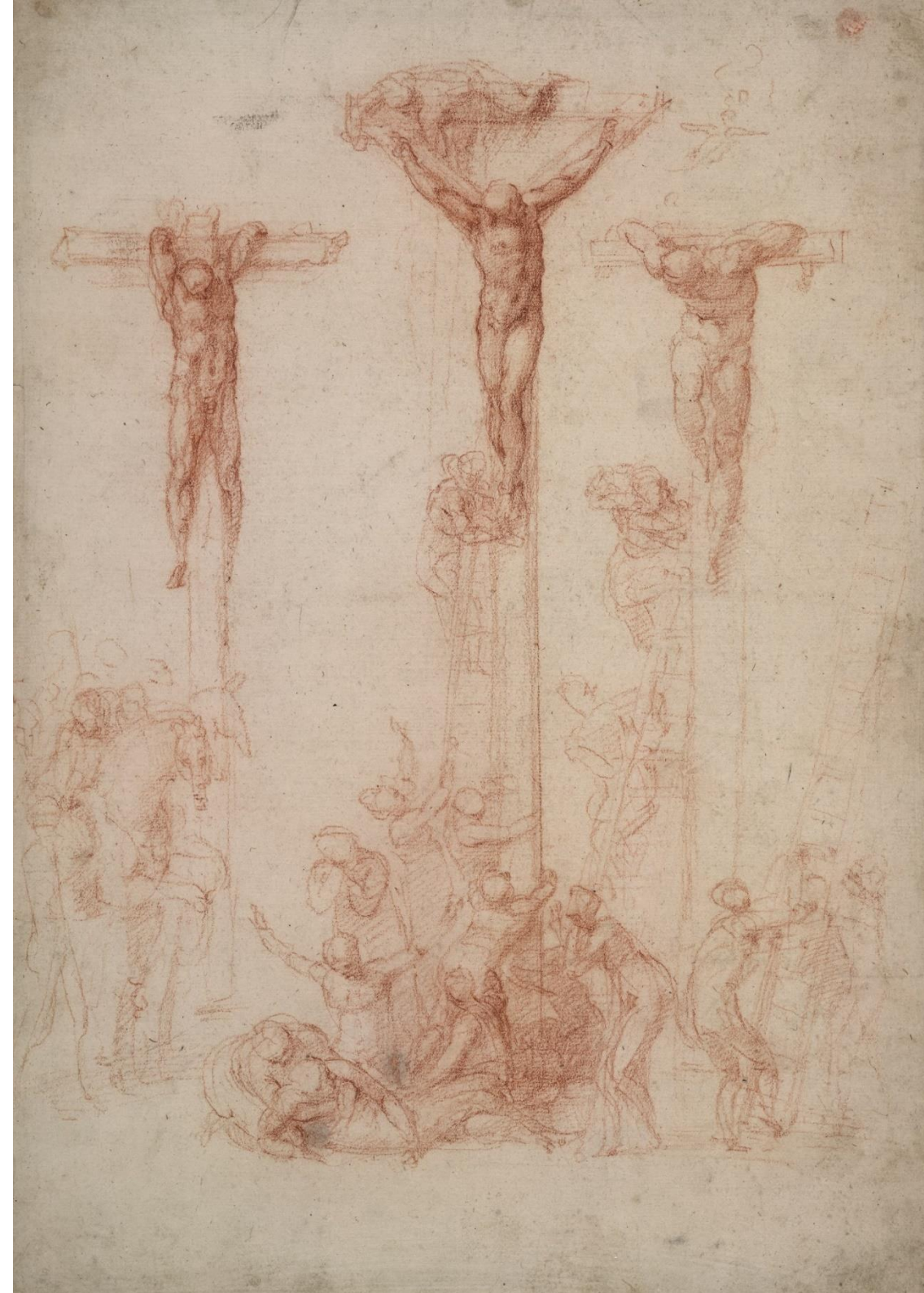


Fig. E. *Crucifixion*, Michelangelo, drawing, > detail, early 1520, British Museum

The Bronze Crucifix and Guglielmo della Porta. The Roman "Gran Scuola"

The bronze Corpus Christi we are studying was cast from Michelangelo's wax model under the close supervision of Guglielmo della Porta by one of his most talented goldsmiths.

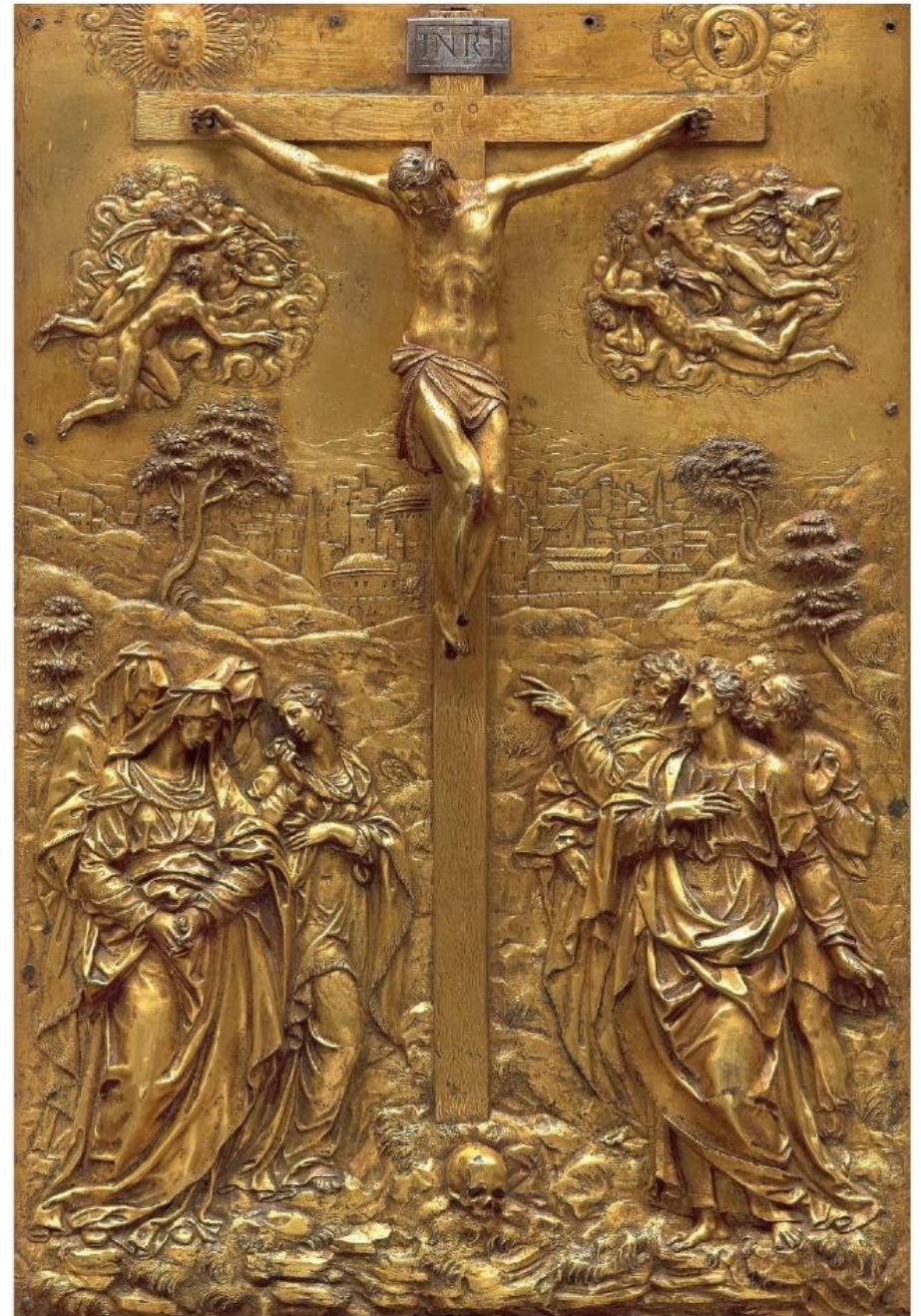
Guglielmo della Porta worked in Rome from the early 1540s until his death in 1577. Thanks to Michelangelo's recommendation, with whom he maintained a close friendship until they came into conflict over the tomb of Paul III in 1549, he was appointed *Custode del Piombo* (Keeper of the Papal Seal). He was responsible for portraits of Paul III and his most ambitious work, the mausoleum installed in St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City. His privileged position allowed him to maintain a large workshop and create a series of original models that were highly successful. In his early years in Rome, he worked for the Farnese family, restoring classical statues and producing copies to complete their sought-after antiquities collections. ⁽²⁶⁾

After the Council of Trent (1563), when his activity shifted toward religious art, Guglielmo adapted secular themes to meet the new spiritual demands, creating images of Christ, the Virgin Mary, Saint John, Mary Magdalene, and other saints in small formats. These works showcased his originality and the technical perfection he achieved.

Thanks to extensive documentation, Guglielmo della Porta's personality has been reconstructed, especially through his *Album of Drawings* (dated 1555–1560), published in a facsimile edition by Werner Gramberg. This valuable repertoire is at present housed in Düsseldorf's Museum Kunstpalast. ⁽²⁷⁾

Guglielmo's connection to Spain began before his move to Rome. From his family workshop in Genoa, he and his brother Gian Giacomo della Porta created tombs, such as that of Bishop Baltasar del Rio in Seville Cathedral and the Marquis of Villanueva del Fresno in the Convent of Santa Clara, Moguer, Huelva. ⁽²⁸⁾ This connection illustrates the prestige Guglielmo della Porta had attained, not only in Italy but also in Spain. One of his most valuable works, a gilded silver relief of *Calvary*, gifted by Pope Gregory XIII to Grand Duchess Bianca Capello, was sent to Philip II in 1585 as a diplomatic gift. It is preserved in El Escorial Monastery, ⁽²⁹⁾ with a magnificent bronze-gilt version (48 cm tall) in a private collection. ⁽³⁰⁾ (Fig. F)

Fig. F. Guglielmo della Porta and Antonio Gentili da Faenza, >
Calvary, Rome c1570-1575, private collection



The iconography of the Crucifixes sculpted by Della Porta is inspired by Michelangelo's model, revealed to us through drawings and bronzes such as the bronze Corpus subject of this study. It was created in accordance with the new guidelines dictated by the Counter-Reformation.⁽³¹⁾ Some of these models were cast by his assistant Bastiano Torrigiani, the goldsmith who worked most frequently with him in the 70s. Among his external collaborators were Manno Sbarri, the author of the *Casseta Farnese* and Antonio Gentili da Faenza, who worked in Rome between 1572–1609 as the craftsman responsible for silver castings.⁽³²⁾ The most representative examples include the Crucifix of Maximilian II, in gilded silver, measuring 23.8 x 24 cm and preserved in Vienna's Geistliche Schatzkammer, and the version, also attributed to Della Porta, of the Cross for the high altar of St. Peter's Basilica, which was donated by Cardinal Farnese in 1582. In the workshop inventory drawn up after his death in 1577, as many as 58 metal crucifixes in various stages of completion are recorded, 55 of which were made of bronze, some with dimensions similar to ours.⁽³³⁾

Among his assistants, Jacob Cornelisz Cobaert, known in Italy as Coppe Fiamingo (Enghien, Flanders, 1535–Rome, 1615), stood out for being the first and the most talented goldsmith until Torrigiani's entry in the work-shop during the early 70s. He arrived in Rome between 1552 and 1555, at around 20 years of age, and immediately became Guglielmo's chief assistant, creating models in clay, chalk, plaster, and wax, in addition to handling the casting and chiselling of bronze models. He remained in the workshop until his master's death in 1577. According to the biography published by Baglione in 1642, Cobaert specialized in small-scale works:

"Coppe was a Flemish sculptor, and in small-scale work, he was excellent, creating some very graceful and beautiful models."⁽³⁴⁾

Jacob Cobaert served his master as a goldsmith, executing numerous precious metalworks, including a *Descent from the Cross* (now lost) and a series of oval plaquettes on the theme of *The Bacchanals* and *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, designed by Guglielmo della Porta between 1550–1560 and modelled in clay by Cobaert under his supervision. Magnificent examples of this series can be found in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, The Metropolitan Museum in New York, and the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. These pieces enjoyed widespread popularity in Northern Europe in the late 16th and early 17th centuries.⁽³⁵⁾ In terms of the alloy of the bronze used and the meticulous technique, the bronzes reliefs of the *Bacchanals* are fundamental in dating and attributing the cast of the Crucifix from Michelangelo's model that we present here.

A work attributed to Cobaert, due to both, model and excellent craftsmanship, that had a similar impact to that of our Crucifix is a rectangular plaquette in gilded bronze depicting *The Pietà in a Landscape* (18.5 x 12.8 cm), cast in Rome around 1569 and preserved in The National Gallery in Washington. It features the Virgin holding Christ's lifeless body in full scale, with the city of Jerusalem in the background.⁽³⁶⁾ Recently, I identified a replica of exceptional quality (still unpublished) in a private Spanish collection, also in gilded bronze, with slightly larger dimensions of 19 x 13 cm, suggesting it could be the first cast of the original model.⁽³⁷⁾ (Fig. G)

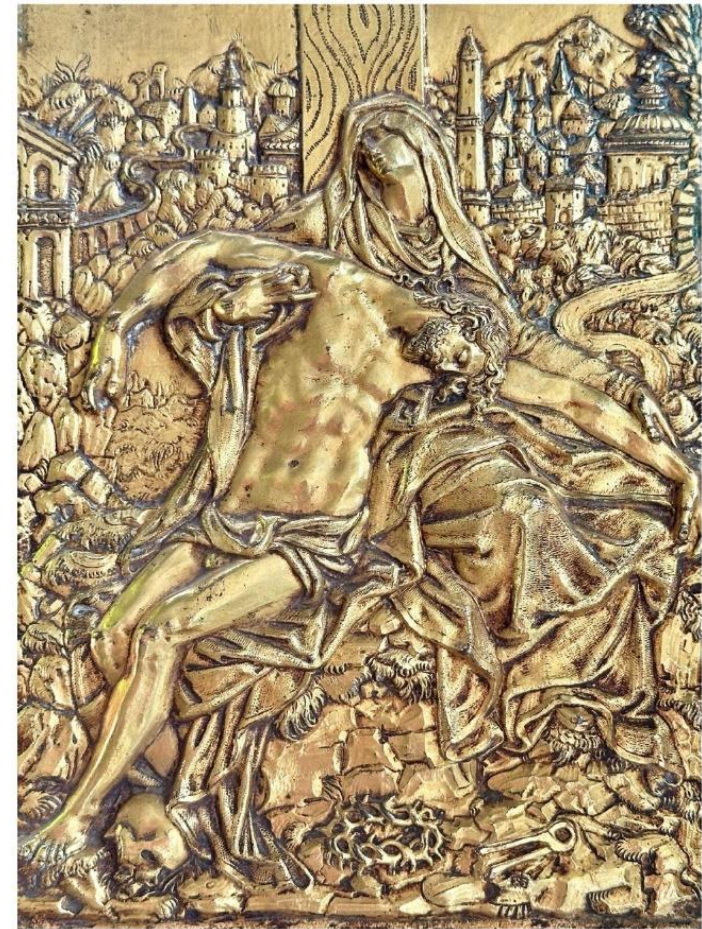


Fig. G. Jacob Cornelisz Cobaert, *Calvary*, gilded bronze, Rome, 1569, 19x13 cm, private collection

The distinctive alloy of the bronze Corpus introduced here compared to the Bacchanal plaquettes and the fact that Jacob Cobaert was already known for the perfect and detailed finishing of his works in the 60s, when, according to its unique iconography and particular alloy, our bronze likely might have been cast, lead me to maintain that Jacob Cornelisz Cobaert is the only goldsmith in Guglielmo della Porta's workshop capable of achieving this level of technical and plastic virtuosity between 1560 and 1570. In this sense, it is not likely that Bastiano Torrigiani, the other possible candidate and brilliant goldsmith, cast the bronze Corpus, as there is no documentary evidence that he worked with Guglielmo della Porta's during this period; more that Guglielmo itself did it, even though, no doubt, he had a supervisory role, because the level of meticulousness shown in the work can only correspond to the hand of an extremely refined goldsmith and by then della Porta had become more of a designer. Furthermore, it is reasonable to think that he did not want to directly cast a model made by an artist with whom he had a conflict at that time and, if he had contributed anything, it might have been to give it a Nordic, expressive, and somewhat nervous touch—qualities absent in our Crucifix, which exudes a Michelangesque serenity.

Spain. Historical and Artistic Context

The profound religiosity experienced in Spain during the reign of Philip II was reflected in the Monastery of El Escorial. It is not surprising that the image of Christ crucified became the most venerated in religious iconography, symbolizing humanity's redemption through the death of the Son of God on the cross⁽³⁸⁾. In 1576, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo II, sent a Crucifix sculpted by Benvenuto Cellini for his own tomb between 1559 and 1562. This marble sculpture, larger than life (180 cm), was installed behind the choir of the church. Pompeo Leoni, the Italian sculptor at the Spanish court, considered the nudity inappropriate, so it was soon covered with a fabric loincloth.

A few years later, in 1583, Philip II received another valuable gift from the Tuscan court: a small bronze Crucifix, 44 cm in height. Despite its size, it was no less significant, as it was crafted by the most renowned sculptor of the time, Giambologna. According to a letter from Simone Fortuna dated April 9, 1583, one of the Crucifixes made by the artist was destined for the King of Spain⁽³⁹⁾. A year later, on January 22, 1584, Francesco I wrote to the Spanish monarch, stating that he was sending him an ivory Crucifix: *"piccolo per tener a capo al letto"* (small to place at the head of the bed)⁽⁴⁰⁾.

In 1603, the Countess of Lemos, sister of the Duke of Lerma, received a magnificent gift from Ferdinando de Medici: a Crucifix and four Evangelists by Giambologna, cast in gilded bronze and completed the previous year by his chief assistant, Antonio Susini. This Crucifix is preserved in the church of the Monastery of Las Descalzas Reales in Madrid. In 2001, I found a replica was located in a private Spanish collection. Two of the Evangelists are in the Museo de la Fundación Lázaro Galdiano; the other two remain missing⁽⁴¹⁾.

In 1612, Maria Magdalena, wife of Cosimo II de Medici, selected one of her most cherished Crucifixes as a wedding gift for Infanta Doña Ana, daughter of Philip III and Margaret of Austria. The future Queen of France gifted it to the Duke of Lerma, who was present at the ceremony. The event was documented as follows: *"That crucifix was presented to the Queen of France as I wrote, and because it seemed a beautiful and curious item, and perhaps the Duke of Lerma desired it, I understand that His Most Catholic Majesty made him a gift of it."*⁽⁴²⁾

These events highlight the prominence of representations of Christ crucified in Spain, crafted in various materials and sizes, as precious objects, admired for their beauty and artistic perfection achieved by the finest sculptors of the time.

Fig. H. Alonso Sánchez Coello (atrib), *Seville during XVI century*, oil on canvas, Museo de América, Madrid



Seville, a "New Rome"

The publication by Jonathan Brown in 1978, along with those by Vicente Lleó Cañal in 1985 and 2012, remain the starting point for studying the Renaissance in Seville, which at that time had become a prosperous city as the port of the Americas, and therefore a destination chosen by aristocrats, merchants, foreign artists, and expatriates.⁽⁴³⁾ This was how Venetian ambassador Andrea Navagero defined it in 1526 when he stated that Seville “resembles Italian cities much more than any other city in Spain.”⁽⁴⁴⁾ (Fig. H)

As early as the beginning of the century, when in 1503 Seville gained the monopoly on trade with the Indies, a vibrant cultural scene emerged in the city, with key figures such as Antonio de Nebrija, Ambrosio de Morales, and Antonio Agustín. This is evidenced by the creation of Hernando’s Library—Hernando being Christopher Columbus’s son— and the collection of the first Duke of Alcalá, Perafán de Ribera at the Casa de Pilatos.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Later, Francisco Pacheco’s academy, where intellectuals, poets, and painters gathered, played a fundamental role in shaping artists. It was a literary salon attended by humanists such as Juan Mal Lara, Juan de Arguijo, Rodrigo Caro, Argote de Molina, Fernando Herrera, Pablo de Céspedes, and Fernando Enríquez de Ribera, the third Duke of Alcalá.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The latter was one of the few collectors of small bronzes in Spain, a collection formed during his stays in Italy as ambassador in Rome and as Viceroy of Naples and Sicily.⁽⁴⁷⁾

Francisco Pacheco (1564–1644), painter and art theorist, is historically well known as Velázquez’s teacher and father-in-law, as well as for his literary works, *Libro de retratos de ilustres y memorables varones* (Seville, 1599),⁽⁴⁸⁾ and *Arte de la pintura*, completed in 1641 (posthumously published in 1649)⁽⁴⁹⁾ where he provided data that constitute one of the pillars of the present publication.

As will be seen, Pacheco referred in his treatise three times to a bronze crucifix, providing information about the date of its arrival in Seville from Rome in 1597 and the person who brought it, a silversmith named Juan Bautista Franconio. He specified that the crucifix was nailed to the cross with four nails and attributed to Michelangelo. He continued by stating that, around the year 1600, Franconio made several casts from the original brought from Rome: the first in bronze (suggesting that he may have

polychromed several), which he himself polychromed on January 17, 1600 (Fig. I), and others in silver, all considered first-generation casts. Finally, Pacheco provided an intriguing detail: the original crucifix brought by Franconio from Rome was donated by the silversmith to Pablo de Céspedes.⁽⁵⁰⁾

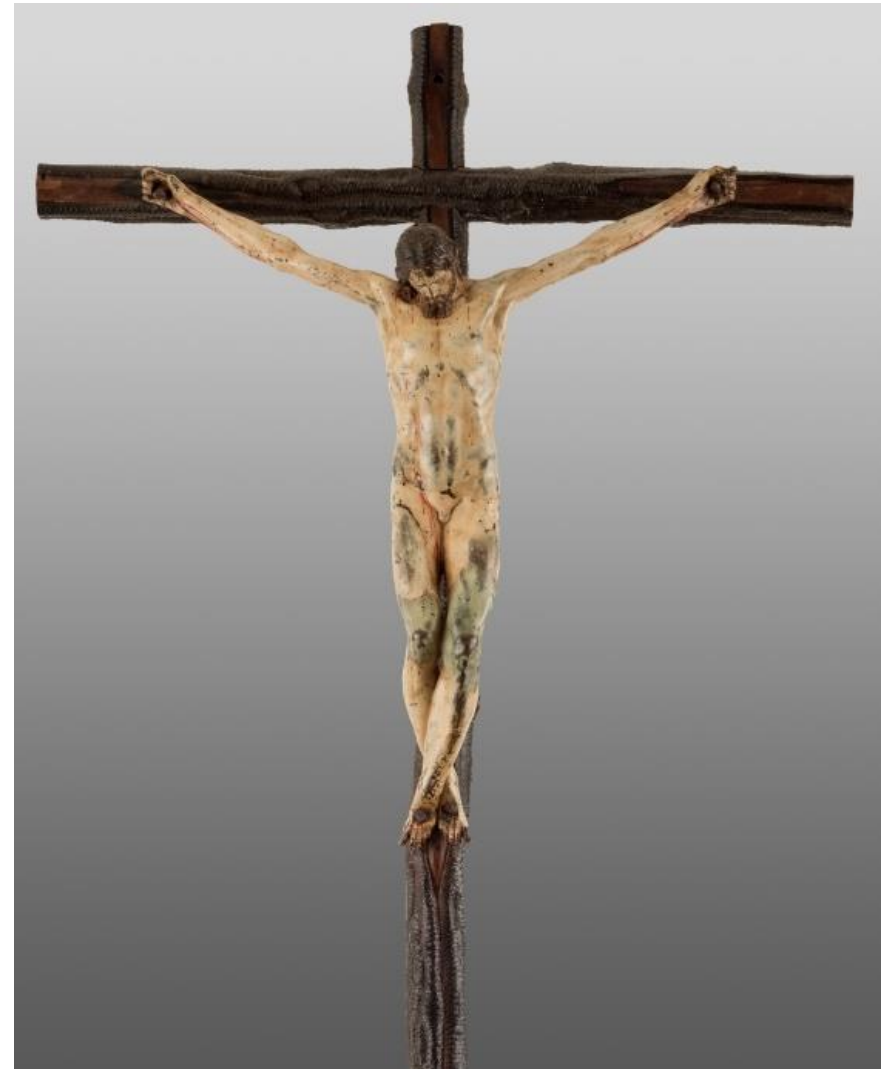


Fig. I. *Bronze Crucifix* after a model by Michelangelo, cast by **Juan Bautista Franconio** ca. 1597-1600, painted by **Francisco Pacheco**, ca. 1600, private collection

Little is known about Franconio's biography, except for a brief note published by Ceán Bermúdez referring to him as "a highly regarded silversmith in Seville around 1630 and a friend of Francisco Pacheco."⁽⁵¹⁾ Since he left Rome a year after the death of Torrigiani (1596), who had been the heir to Guglielmo Della Porta's workshop, it is very likely, as Michael Riddick has suggested, that he worked for him and that the closure of the workshop facilitated the acquisition of the bronze crucifix, its transfer to Seville, and its use as a mold for the largest series of metallic crucifixes with four nails ever known.

However, information about Pablo de Céspedes (c. 1538–1608) is abundant. He was a close friend and companion of Pacheco, who included him in the *Libro de retratos*,⁽⁵²⁾ and a cleric, canon of the Cathedral of Córdoba, humanist, painter, sculptor, architect, poet, and art theorist, according to what Ceán published in his *Discourse on the Comparison of Ancient and Modern Painting and Sculpture*.⁽⁵³⁾ During his stay in Rome between 1570 and 1577, Céspedes lived at the home of the Bishop of Zamora, became a member of the Academy of Saint Luke, worked with Daniele da Volterra, and interacted with Tommaso Cavalieri. In his discourses, he praised Michelangelo's Vatican *Pietà* and stood out as a collector by describing ancient Roman monuments.⁽⁵⁴⁾

It seems logical that Michelangelo's original bronze crucifix would end up in the hands of Pablo de Céspedes, who admired the Master and held him in such high esteem that, according to Pacheco, he wore it around his neck—something possible due to its small size and lack of a cross. The Corpus is also referred in his testament as "Christ of metal without a Cross in a leather box". Upon Céspedes's death, it was inherited by Juan de Peñalosa y Sandoval (Baena, 1579–Astorga, 1633), a priest, painter, altarpiece designer, and poet who had trained and lived in his household. Later, he became a canon of Astorga Cathedral. Upon his death, an auction inventory of his belongings dated 1533 mentions "a craft of a Christ without a Cross very good in a box"⁽⁵⁵⁾, hence the abundance of four-nailed crucifixes in northern Spain.

The bronze crucifix served as inspiration not only for sculptors like Martínez Montañés in the *Cristo de los Cálices* (1603, Seville Cathedral), but also for painters such as Pacheco himself, who in 1611 created an oil-on-panel crucifix for the parish of Nuestra Señora de la Consolación in El Coronil (Seville); Alonso Cano (*Christ Crucified with Four Nails*, 1630, Madrid, Academy of San Fernando); and Velázquez, in the *Portrait of the Venerable Mother Jerónima de la Fuente* (1620), where the crucifix depicted in the painting corresponds to the one polychromed by Pacheco (Prado Museum) (Fig. J) Ribera and even Goya depicted four-nailed crucifixes, contributing to

the success of this model in Spain and South America. The series of metallic four-nailed Christs in silver or bronze later produced in various Spanish workshops, mainly in the North of Spain, also bears witness to this.

One of the most notable artists associated with casting Franconio's model is Lesmes Fernández del Moral (Burgos, c. 1550–Madrid, 1623). A silversmith and sculptor who married in 1592 Germana de Arfe, daughter of the renowned goldsmith Juan de Arfe, with whom he collaborated on reliquary busts for El Escorial. He also worked with Pompeo Leoni in El Escorial on the cenotaphs of Charles V and Philip II; the praying statues of the Dukes of Lerma for the Church of San Gregorio, now the National Sculpture Museum in Valladolid; and that of Archbishop of Seville Cristóbal de Rojas, housed in the Collegiate Church of Lerma, Burgos.⁽⁵⁶⁾ (Fig. K)



Fig. J. Portrait by **Diego Velázquez** of *Jerónima de la Fuente holding the Crucifix* cast by **Juan Bautista Franconio** and polychromed by **Pacheco**, 1620, Museo del Prado

Critical Reception and scholarly Research

John Philips Goldsmith published the group of bronze crucifixion figures from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, linking them to a model by Michelangelo.⁽⁵⁷⁾ As such, it was featured in an exhibition held in Montreal in 1992.⁽⁵⁸⁾

The earliest publications on Michelangelo's crucifix in Spain are attributed to Manuel Gómez Moreno, followed by Francisco Javier Sánchez Cantón, José María de Azcárate, and the Marqués de Lozoya.⁽⁵⁹⁾ These researchers brought attention to examples found in the Ducal Palace of Gandía, Seville Cathedral, the Royal Palace of Madrid, and the Pública Andaluza Rodríguez-Acosta Foundation, as well as others located in the cathedrals of Cuenca (Fig. L), Valladolid, Córdoba, Granada, and the Caja de Ahorros de Segovia (originating from the collection of the Marqués de Lozoya), among others.

Juan Carlos Brasas Egido cataloged seventeen versions of these crucifixes in Spain in his studies on silversmithing.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Later, Anselmo López Morais published a remarkable example in Astorga and another in a private collection in Ourense coming from the Marques del Toro Collection.⁽⁶¹⁾ Meanwhile, Fernando Llamazares Rodríguez examined a silver processional cross in the parish of Castro Tierra de Valduerna (León), now housed in the Museum of Caminos de Astorga. This cross was crafted in 1631 by the Valladolid silversmith Andrés de Campos Guevara. However, the gilded silver crucifix it bears, with a superimposed bronze perizonium, corresponds to Michelangelo's four-nailed model and probably predates the Cross⁽⁶²⁾ (Fig. M)

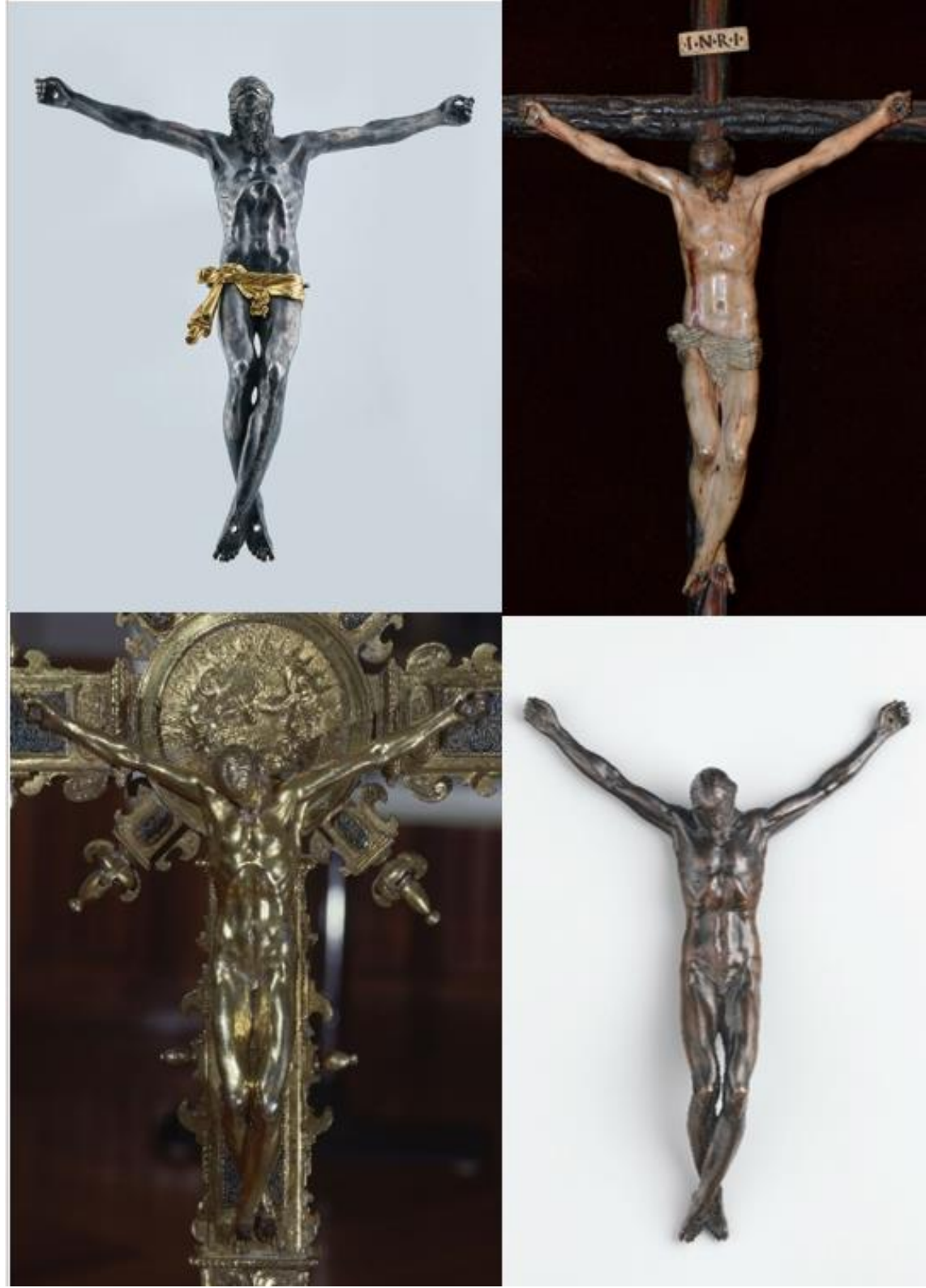


Fig. K. *Silver Crucifix* after a model by JB Franconio, cast by Lesmes del Moral, > circa 1630, Marqués de Toro Collection

Fig. L. *Silver Crucifix*, polychromed pewter, XVII century, Catedral de Cuenca >

Fig. M. *Gilded silver Crucifix*, after a model by JB Franconio cast by Andrés del > Campo, circa 1630, Museo de los Caminos de Astorga

Fig. N. *Bronze Crucifix* after a model by Michelangelo, (1538-41), Metropolitan > Museum, New York

Giancarlo Gentilini, in an article on crucifixes, introduced a drawing by Giulio Clovio dated 1540, housed in Windsor's Royal Collection, depicting Christ with crossed feet. He linked this depiction to small metal crucifixes, including the one at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which he tentatively attributed to Jacopo del Duca. ⁽⁶³⁾

Juan Nicolau Castro and Antonio José Díaz Hernández have unveiled three new examples in Toledo that are connected to Michelangelo's model. ⁽⁶⁴⁾

Paul Joannides recently published a study on a bronze group of *Christ and the Two Crucified Thieves* (27.3 x 20.3 x 4.6 cm) housed at the Metropolitan Museum in New York (Fig. N). He cataloged it as designed by Michelangelo Buonarroti and cast by a follower, dating it to 1560–1570. He compared it to a similar group held at Milan's Castello Sforzesco Museum, ⁽⁶⁵⁾ whose Christ figure belongs to a different model probably also by Michelangelo.

Finally, Michael Riddick has identified a bronze crucifix of the same four-nailed model in a private American collection. Measuring 23 x 21.8 cm, its high quality indicates it was cast from the original wax model, albeit with less detail than the version under study as it lacks the dotted pattern of the eyebrows. Furthermore, the lack of drops falling from Christ side attest probably being cast a bit later, at some point after 1570. According to Riddick, the *perizonium* (loincloth) suggests it was cast, in the last quarter of the 16th century, raising the hypothesis that it may have been a later addition, as with Guglielmo della Porta's statues of *Minerva* and *Prudence* in the tomb of Paul III. ⁽⁶⁶⁾ Riddick also possesses a polychromed crucifix in Rome, which, based on its quality, is most likely a first-generation cast and potentially a second bronze crucifix polychromed by Pacheco, given the remarkable craftsmanship evident in its image.

The Publication

The aim of Carlos Herrero Starkie's publication is to present a bronze four nailed crucified Christ, 23 cm in height, and identify it as the one documented in Seville in 1597, cast from an original wax model by Michelangelo and brought from Rome by the silversmith Juan Bautista Franconio. To achieve this, the author conducted a rigorous investigation and technical study, but most importantly, he recognized from the outset the exceptional quality of the piece, distinguishing it from other versions and maintaining that it could be the lost original of the famous Crucifix.

The first chapter outlines the steps of the investigation. It begins with the description of the Crucifix based on visual analysis, enabling a detailed understanding of the bronze, its technical perfection, and the beauty of the model. It proceeds to demonstrate that this is the bronze mentioned by Pacheco, brought from Rome to Seville by Franconio, and used as the mold for the first generation of four-nailed metal Crucifixes. This conclusion is supported by a technical study conducted at the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC) in Madrid, which provided evidence for the attribution and dating of the work ⁽⁶⁷⁾.

The alloy, with very high copper content and typical impurities, as well as the results from X-rays, correspond to the *modus operandi* of a skilled bronze worker or goldsmith, using advanced techniques in Rome before 1597. This is consistent with the references given by Pacheco and aligns with the methods employed in the workshop of Guglielmo Della Porta in Rome before 1570, as evidenced by the casting's current sealed hole in the head, its three-piece construction and the movable *perizonium* added to the model. The alloy, patina, and cold finish resemble the Bacchanals reliefs designed by Della Porta and cast by Jacob Cobaert between 1550–1560. The old silver alloy of the *perizonium* added to cover the nudity corresponds unmistakably to Della Porta's designs. Finally, remnants of wax and plaster on the bronze Crucifix definitely confirms that the bronze under study was used as a model for casting other examples.

The second chapter undertakes a comparative analysis with the other surviving versions in order to identify those cast by Franconio in Seville around 1600, which the author calls the "first generation". These include two bronzes, polychromed by Pacheco on January 17, 1600—one in the Ducal Palace of Gandía and the other in a private collection in Italy. The silver versions are found in Seville Cathedral, the Royal Chapel of Madrid's Royal Palace, and the Pública Andaluza Rodríguez-Acosta Foundation. The chapter also covers the "second generation of casts," made in various parts of Spain, mostly in silver and in the North of Spain. It delves into describing the original bronze Crucifix prototype cast from Michelangelo's wax model and justifying its identification based on its technical excellence, contrasting it with the first-generation cast made in Spain. Furthermore, it is compared to another bronze cast recently published by Michael Riddick, made in Rome in the latter half of the 16th century, with the same model and quality and to the example housed in the Metropolitan Museum of New York, slightly larger (27 cm). The conclusion is that none match the minute precision of this Corpus, such as the detailing along the eyelids or the definition of eyebrows and nipples, but most important, none reveal in such high way this

ultimate expression of pathos and serenity stamped in Michelangelo's canon of spiritual beauty.

The third chapter explores the iconographic model of the four-nailed Crucifix created by Michelangelo, including comparative photographs of related drawings and sculptures. It addresses the physiognomic features, anatomical study, and expression of peaceful sleep, characteristic of Michelangelo. Additionally, the text analyses his correspondence with Vittoria Colonna (1538-1541), which sheds light on an "unfinished" Crucifix that Michelangelo gave her. The author publishes extracts of the letters which refers to this unfinished though perfect Corpus. He meticulously interprets these letters, supporting with new arguments Riddick's thesis that this correspondence reveals a gift or commission of a three-dimensional Crucifix, rather than a drawing, as traditionally believed. Finally, Herrero Starkie examines the bronze Crucifix's style (Fig. A, Fig. O), comparing it to Michelangelo's marble works, such as the *David* at the Accademia, the *Pietà* in the Vatican (Fig. P), *Bacchus* at the Bargello (Fig. O, Fig. P), and Giuliano de' Medici's portrait in the San Lorenzo sacristy, with comparative photographs of details illustrating their similarities.

The fourth chapter attributes the cast to a goldsmith under Guglielmo Della Porta's supervision and dates it, based on technical analysis, taking into account that the alloy and casting methods match those used in Rome in the third quarter of the 16th century. The iconography is analysed with comparative photographs of drawings and sculptures, emphasizing that the depiction of the bleeding wound confirms a date before 1566 consistent with the alloy tests. This year, Pope Pius V, applying Counter-Reformation doctrines, ordered the suppression of blood drops from side wounds (while allowing the wound itself). At this time, nudity was covered for decorum, as evidenced by the silver *perizonium* designed and cast in Della Porta's workshop to cover the wax model's nudity.

In the fifth chapter, the author develops the theory that Michelangelo's wax model had limited influence in Italy, with only a few known versions—Jacopo del Duca's for the Tabernacle of Padula, the one published by Riddick in a private collection, and the one studied here. Herrero Starkie contrasts this fact with the widespread influence of Michelangelo's *Samson and Two Philistines*, which exists in numerous bronze versions and inspired artists like Giambologna and Bernini.

The text highlights the success of Della Porta's own Crucifix model, which circulated widely in the Roman market and European courts. The question arises as to

why Della Porta did not use in a more open way Michelangelo's model. The reason may lie in the fallout between the two, following disputes during the construction of Pope Paul III's mausoleum and plagiarism accusations against Della Porta, due to similarities between his tomb designs and Michelangelo's Medici chapel models. This may explain why Michelangelo's model was stored in the workshop as a work material in the 1570s, leaving Della Porta's model as the one that survived after his death in 1577 and influenced artists like Antonio Gentili, Sebastiano Torrigiani, and Gaspar Mola.

The impact of this Crucifix in Spain was significant, owing to Francisco Pacheco's mention in his *Tratado de la Pintura* and Seville's prominence as a port for the Americas.

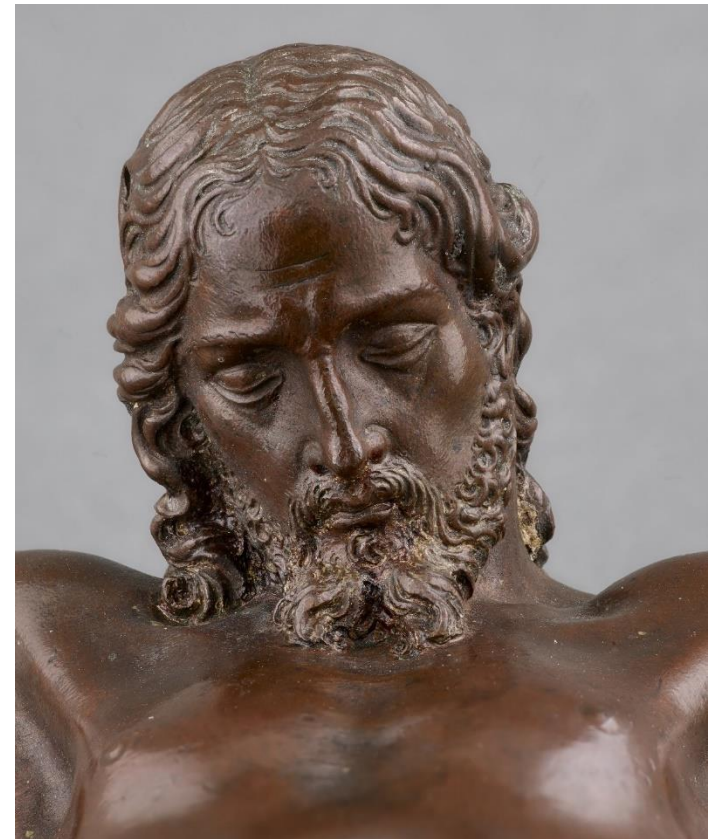


Fig. O. *Crucified Christ*, after a model by Michelangelo (1538-41), bronze, cast in Rome, 1560-70, documented in Seville 1597, detail, IOMR Collection, the Netherlands

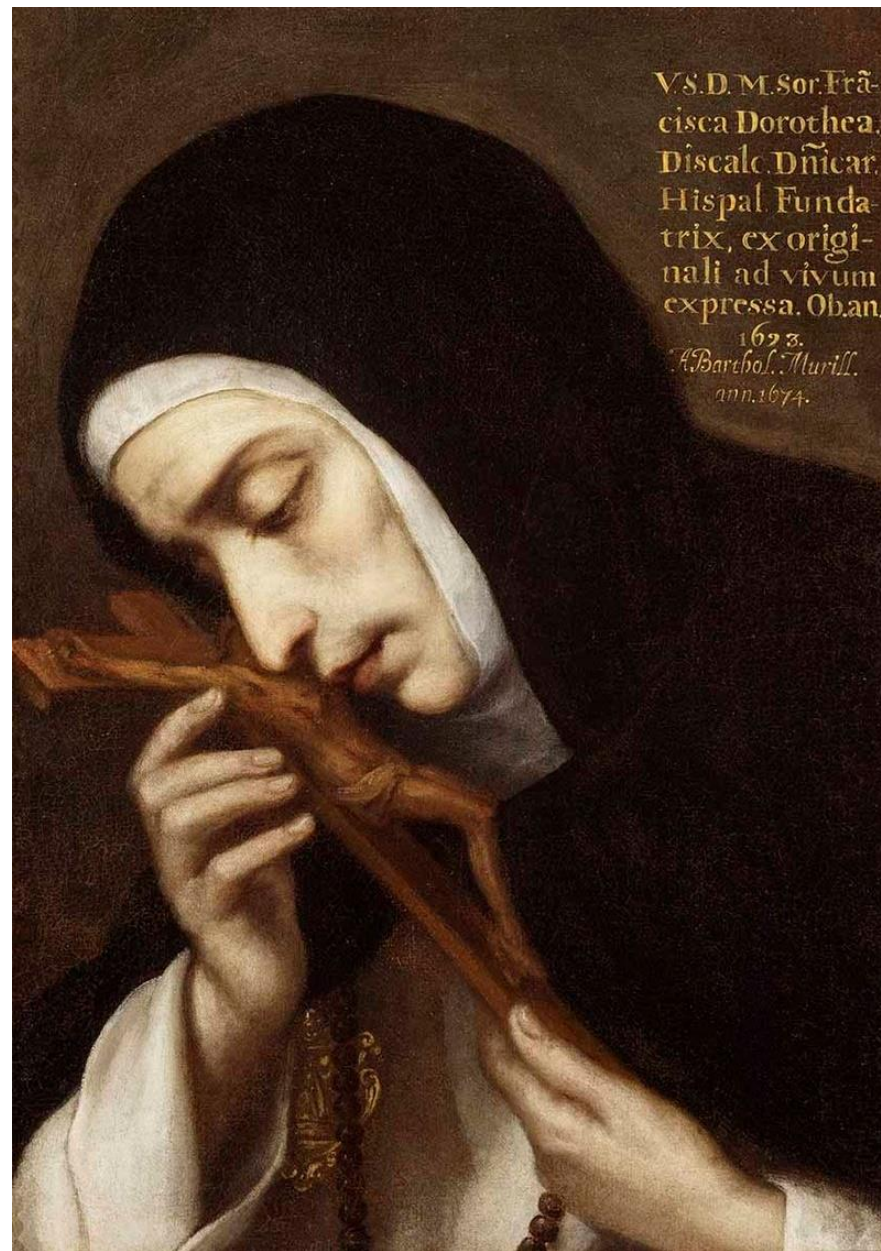
Conclusion

This text introduces us to the fascinating history of a bronze crucified Christ, conceived by Michelangelo, whose exceptional execution and dating between 1560-1570, confirmed by its alloy and iconography, identify it as the finest and earliest surviving version of his four-nailed Crucifix model. Its design stands out for its fully Renaissance yet heterodox character.

Having hold this bronze with my hands and personally inspected in flesh the wax's indelible trace on the surface of the Corpus, as well as compared its meticulous details to other most refined versions, I endorse the author's thesis: this is a bronze cast directly from Michelangelo's original wax model, in the context of the Roman *Gran Scuola* in the 1560s, by one of most talented Guglielmo della Porta's goldsmiths, in my opinion, Jacob Cornelisz Cobaert, under his close supervision. This, along with the evident wax and plaster remnants on its bronze surface and its Spanish provenance, strongly support the rediscovery of the long-lost four-nailed Michelangelo's Corpus, mentioned by Pacheco as brought to Seville by Juan Bautista Franconio in 1597 and last time documented in the auction of Juan de Peñalosa's estate, a disciple of Pablo de Céspedes (1633).



Fig. P. *Pietà*, detail of Christ, **Michelangelo**, 1498, Basilica di San Pietro in Vaticano, Rome



Bartolomé E. Murillo, *Sor Francisca Dorotea*, h. 1674, óleo sobre lienzo, 45 x 31 cm. Catedral de Sevilla

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67. The technical study has been carried out by Ignacio Montero, CSIC, Madrid 3 July 2023. The radiographic images by SGS Tecnos. The restoration was undertaken by Sara Cavero August, 2023. All the technical reports are included in the Annexes of the publication.