Drawing from Mantegna: Engaging with Engraving in Cinquecento Northern Italian Art

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Renaissance artists frequently derived inspiration from the designs of other masters, and the emerging art form of engraving encouraged them to consider prints as tools for subsequent pictorial creations. One of the most influential Italian Renaissance printmakers was Andrea Mantegna. The impact of Mantegna's engravings on artistic process in Cinquecento Northern Italy is exemplified in an early sixteenth-century drawing of *Saint Christopher,* which now resides in the Cleveland Museum of Art (Figure 1).[1] By examining the formal features of this object, it is clear that the draftsman was intimately aware of Mantegna's prints because specific elements from one of the master's late fifteenth-century engravings also appear in the drawing.[2] While the draftsman's choice to model his work after one of Mantegna's designs is not unique to the Cleveland image, what is noteworthy is his deliberate attempt to simulate the latter's engraving technique in a drawn composition. Using the *Saint Christopher* drawing as a point of departure, this paper explores how an artist in Mantegna's milieu engaged with engraving as a new source of emulation and visually responded to the stylistic innovations of the developing medium. By realizing a finished drawing that embodies the formal qualities of an engraving, Mantegna's follower created a technically novel image that appealed to elite collectors, and as a result he played a pivotal role in elevating the print medium into a distinguished art form in Cinquecento Northern Italian society.

The early sixteenth-century brown ink drawing represents a detailed portrayal of Saint Christopher with the Christ Child. Following iconographic convention, the patron saint of travelers is depicted standing ankle-deep in a pool of water while carrying the infant Christ upon his shoulder. He also grasps his standard attribute: a palm staff. In addition to rendering the basic outlines and features of the figures, drapery, and landscape, the draftsman included modeling on the surfaces of Saint Christopher, Christ, and the palm through a series of hatch marks. His use of hatching to portray shading demonstrates a desire to give the figures a sense of three-dimensionality. The level of refinement in the image suggests that the drawing did not serve as a preliminary sketch for a future composition, but instead should be recognized as a finished work of art that was intended for an audience outside of the workshop.

This proposal to consider the *Saint Christopher* drawing as a fully developed artwork is further supported by the object's provenance. The Cleveland image was originally mounted in an octavo album inscribed with Roman numerals, which date it to the sixteenth century. Furthermore, the *Saint Christopher* drawing was recorded in a document from 1672 that lists the objects in the personal collection of Count Lodovico Moscardo of Verona.[3] In Cinquecento Northern Italy, members of the upper classes of society often acquired finished drawings and preserved them in albums akin to the one that initially housed the CMA work. As will be discussed

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1 This drawing is currently attributed to Andrea Mantegna, but its authorship has been disputed in the past. In the 1966 CMA Handbook, the *Saint Christopher* drawing is listed as by Mantegna. See The Cleveland Museum of Art, *Handbook of the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Cleveland, OH: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1966), 87. In the 1991 CMA Handbook, the drawing is attributed to the "Circle of Andrea Mantegna." See The Cleveland Museum of Art, *Handbook of the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Cleveland, OH: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1991), 67. When the drawing was displayed in the museum galleries in the spring of 2016, the object label stated it was by Mantegna.

2 Although the attribution of Mantegna's engravings has been a contested subject in the past, current scholars agree that of all the prints designed by the master, seven were actually engraved by his hand. The seven prints are: *The Entombment*, *The Risen Christ between St. Andrew and St. Longinus*, *Virgin of Humility*, *Bacchanal with Silenus*, *Bacchanal with a Wine Vat*, and the double-sheet *Battle of the Sea-Gods*. For the purposes of this paper, the engravings listed above are considered authentic works by Mantegna. For more information about the artist's prints, see Ronald Lightbown, *Mantegna: With a Complete Catalogue of the Paintings, Drawings and Prints* (Oxford: Phaidon and Christie's Limited, 1986), 488-491.

3 Documents concerning the drawing's provenance are included in the object file for CMA 1956.39. For a further discussion about the provenance of this work see Edward J. Olszewski, "Catalogue 12," in *Drawings in Midwestern Collections: A Corpus Compiled by the Midwest Art History Society,* vol. I: *Early Works*, ed. Burton L. Dunbar and Edward J. Olszewski (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 65.

in this paper, the *Saint Christopher* image epitomizes the type of polished and innovative drawing that would have intrigued affluent collectors in sixteenth-century Northern Italy.

Although the final state of the Cleveland work represents a colored image that is comparable to a painting, it appears to have been initially designed as a monochromatic composition, and therefore correlates more with the visual character of an engraving. With the aid of a microscope, one discovers that the blue and green pigments that describe the sky and water were added after the principal design was completed because those colors traverse the brown ink lines (Figure 2). Furthermore, the uneven application of blue gouache around Saint Christopher and Christ suggests that the coloring did not take precedence and perhaps does not reflect the artist's original intention for the scene.[4] This is an important observation because it implies that the ink design was conceived on its own and that the colors were later additions that may have been executed by a different hand. The original draftsman likely rendered a monochromatic image through the use of brown ink on paper.

While it is uncertain who executed the *Saint Christopher* drawing, what is clear is that it has strong associations with Mantegna's late fifteenth-century engraving of the *Bacchanal with a Wine Vat* (Figure 3).[5] Saint Christopher's pose resembles that of the nude Bacchus, who rests his proper right hand on a cornucopia of grapes while he reaches for a crown of vines with his left. The god of wine stands in classic *contrapposto*; Saint Christopher is similarly arranged in the drawing. Although the damage on the lower edge of the paper makes it difficult to see the positioning of the saint's feet, it does in fact look like his proper left heel is raised slightly off the ground while his right leg and hip subtly project forward. There is also similar attention given to the muscularity of the legs of the two adult protagonists in each work. Both men are depicted with protruding calf muscles that extend sideways from the inside of their legs. Moreover, the shape of Christ's body somewhat mimics that of the arched figure who crowns Bacchus in the upper left corner of the print. Analogous to the contorted male nude in the engraving, the infant Christ sits upon the shoulder of another man. Although the drawing does not replicate the two characters in Mantegna's print, the parallels between their poses and those of Saint Christopher and the Christ Child are too striking to be merely coincidental. It appears that the draftsman transposed the basic features of the two males in Mantegna's *Bacchanal* and then altered them in subject and other details to portray an entirely new scene.

Not only do the *Saint Christopher* image and *Bacchanal* print share affinities in the positioning of their figures, but the draftsman also attempted to imitate Mantegna's engraving technique in his drawing. Like Bacchus, Saint Christopher's basic form is rendered with a bold outline. Additionally, as previously mentioned, parallel hatching was employed to construct the shadows along the saint's body and in between the folds of the drapery. The marks are relatively short and controlled as if to simulate the character of the lines produced when a burin sculpts into a metal plate (Figure 4). By closely examining Saint Christopher's proper left thigh, one notices that the hatch marks are interrupted by a reserve in the paper, which creates a kind of artificial highlight when juxtaposed with the brown ink outline. This paper reserve serves as a visible separation between the hatching and contour of Saint Christopher's leg. The shading is meticulously executed and reveals the artist's intention to very purposefully distinguish the hatch marks on the saint's thigh from those found on the exterior of his body.

A similar approach to creating the shading on Bacchus's leg occurs in Mantegna's print. There is a narrow white void in between where the hatching ceases and the outline of the god's leg begins (Figure 5). When comparing the type of hatch marks utilized in each image, one notices that in contrast to the strict parallel hatching on Bacchus, some lines on Saint Christopher's thigh slightly overlap as they end (Figure 4). Although a few of these marks briefly intersect, the draftsman did not apply proper cross-hatching. Instead, he appears to have first created a singular group of parallel lines that he subsequently reinforced, ultimately causing the second iteration of marks to cross over those underneath. Despite this nuanced detail, akin to Mantegna, the Cinquecento draftsman exhibited a preference for the legibility of the protagonist's form over the realistic rendering of a shadow hitting his leg, which should continue into the background without a break. If the Cleveland image represented an entirely new invention produced on paper for the first time, one would not anticipate such precision in the termination of each hatched line. Rather, one would expect the marks to extend past the contour of the figure's body in a much more fluid and uneven manner since the design is presumably an organic record of the artist's hand and mind at work in a given moment.

Moreover, the *Saint Christopher* draftsman implemented another common method employed in engraving: the inclusion of hatching along the outside of a figure's body to illustrate a sense of perspective in the scene. Analogous to how diagonal lines surround Bacchus's body in the print, a group of hatch marks predominantly oriented in a diagonal direction are rendered along part of Saint Christopher's exterior. In a monochromatic medium like engraving, the play between light and shadow constructs the illusion of depth on a two-dimensional surface. It is apparent that the draftsman of the *Saint Christopher* image incorporated several related techniques utilized in Mantegna's engraving,

[4] It is unclear who added the gouache and wash to this work. Because the drawing exhibits such a high level of finish in comparison to the inconsistent coloring, I propose that another hand applied the paint to the image at a later date.

[5] Ed Olszewski calls the *Saint Christopher* drawing an "early-sixteenth-century pastiche" of Mantegna's *Bacchanal with a Wine Vat*. See Olszewski, "Catalogue 12," 66.

and therefore must have studied the print carefully in order to replicate those pictorial strategies. For these reasons, the drawing is not an entirely spontaneous record of the artist's imagination. Instead, elements of the image are derived from Mantegna's *Bacchanal*.

The explicit correlation between the Cleveland image and Mantegna's artwork has misled viewers to attribute the Cinquecento design to the master's hand. The dark brown Italian inscription near the upper left corner of the sheet states that the work is by the own hand of Andrea Mantegna.[6] Although one could argue that this text represents a type of signature, the penmanship and spelling of Mantegna's name do not match those features of the master's authentic autograph that is recorded in a 1506 letter sent to Isabella d'Este.[7] The unmistakable dissimilarities between the two scripts indicate that the writing on the CMA drawing is not by Mantegna. Rather, it appears to represent a later declaration of the drawing's presumed authorship, a misidentification that occurred because of the stylistic parallels between the *Saint Christopher* image and Mantegna's earlier engraving. The idea that this inscription signifies a subsequent assertion of the drawing's presumed author is also supported by the fact that the ink used for the text appears much darker than that of the principal drawing, indicating that a different material was employed to execute the writing. It does not only seem odd, but also inconvenient for an artist already working in one type of ink to switch his materials solely for the purposes of inscribing an image. Once again, microscopic analysis proves to be elucidating: the text was added after the posthumous blue gouache was applied as the ink stands out prominently from the background and there is no trace of the pigment on top of the lettering (Figure 6). Thus, another hand besides the original draftsman must have inscribed the sheet at a later date.[8] Re-examining the attribution of the *Saint Christopher* image reveals just how closely Mantegna's follower was able to replicate the master's manner of engraving in a drawn composition.

It is clear that Mantegna's imagery was successfully disseminated to other artists, and therefore, it is reasonable to contend that at the onset of the production of engraving in Italy, prints were primarily circulated among artists' workshops with the expectation that they served as models for future compositions. Visual analysis of a double-sided pencil and pen drawing attributed to the workshop of Giovanni Santi in Urbino reinforces this hypothesis.[9] The sketch represents a related set of figures to the group that carries the dead body of Christ to his sepulcher from Mantegna's late Quattrocento engraving of *The Entombment* (Figure 7). Depicted on the sheet's recto are the man and woman who transport Christ on a cloth. In the immediate background, the grieving Mary Magdalene throws her hands into the air. The verso portrays the man who pulls the fabric enveloping Christ's feet over the top of the tomb. The figures in *The Entombment* sketch share striking resemblances in their poses, physical details, and physiognomies to those in the print, suggesting that the draftsman from the Urbino workshop developed his image after Mantegna's artwork.

Even though the workshop sketch of *The Entombment* and the Cleveland drawing of *Saint Christopher* demonstrate that the two Cinquecento artists were actively looking toward the master's engravings as points of departure for their own designs, they ultimately pursued different goals in their emulation of the prints. While *The Entombment* drawing relates directly to Mantegna's image in subject, the draftsman from Giovanni Santi's workshop did not aim to replicate the former's engraving style in an exacting way. This is evinced by the use of cross-hatching to form the shadows along the drapery folds of the woman carrying Christ. Cross-hatching is not present in *The Entombment* engraving; Mantegna only employed parallel marks to create his shading. The draftsman from the Urbino workshop was more interested in reproducing the figural types from the print rather than the master's precise technique. This may be because the drawing served as a study for a later painting. The compositional arrangement of the figures in the sketch likely inspired elements in Raphael's *The Entombment* from 1507 (Figure 8).[10] For example, the general positioning of the man who carries Christ's upper body on the left of the picture resembles that of the male figure in the drawing. Moreover, because the sketch belonged to the workshop of Raphael's father, the High Renaissance master would have had access to the study and utilized the sketch to help him devise the scene for his future painting.

In contrast to the Giovanni Santi workshop sketch, the drawing of *Saint Christopher* portrays an original composition that adheres more closely to Mantegna's technique. As exhibited by the similarities between the shading on Saint Christopher's and Bacchus's respective legs, the draftsman of the Cleveland image showed a strong preference for emulating Mantegna's engraving style over any other element in the print. Additionally, if the brown ink design of Saint Christopher and Christ was conceived on its own, as

6 The Italian inscription reads: "di propria mano de mi[a?] andrea matenga," sometimes transcribed with a macron above the first "a" of "matenga."

7 Olszewski has also noted that the penmanship and spelling of Mantegna's name on the drawing are different from his recorded signatures. See Olszewski, "Catalogue 12," 66n2. For a reproduction of Mantegna's letter to Isabella d'Este see figure 8 in David Chambers, Jane Martineau, and Rodolfo Signorini, "Mantegna and the Men of Letters," in *Andrea Mantegna*, ed. Jane Martineau (New York, NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), 26.

8 Olszewski also conjectures that a later sixteenth-century hand executed the inscription. See Olszewski, "Catalogue 12," 66.

9 This drawing is reproduced as figure 13 in Evelyn Lincoln, *The Invention of the Italian Renaissance Printmaker* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 19.

10 Ibid., 20.

has been suggested, then this provides further evidence that the draftsman originally intended to produce a monochromatic image that transposed some of the compositional and stylistic features of the *Bacchanal* into a drawn design. In the case of this particular Northern Italian drawing, Mantegna's engraving inspired the formal characteristics of the object as opposed to the subject it represents. Yet, the draftsman's deliberate choice to transform the pagan subject of the *Bacchanal* into a Christian image should not go unnoticed. Akin to Mantegna's *all'antica* composition, which is both innovative in its content and method of production, the *Saint Christopher* drawing is comparably inventive because it "Christianizes" a profane subject and simulates the technique of an engraving in a different medium. Evidently, Mantegna's prints served as important models for artists who wished to translate the appearance of the master's engraving style into finished, unique works of art.

Although the reproductive art form of engraving offered artists like Mantegna a revolutionary way to disseminate their imagery to diverse audiences, prints were still relegated to the modest viewership of an artist's workshop during the nascence of Italian printmaking. However, the collecting of highly developed drawings was already an established phenomenon among the upper classes in Northern Italian society by the beginning of the sixteenth century. In his 1466 will, Paduan humanist scholar, Felice Feliciano refers to his collection of "drawings and pictures on paper by many excellent masters of design."[11] Feliciano's will indicates that the Northern Italian aristocracy sought to obtain drawn compositions by contemporary masters. In the Renaissance, finished drawings were considered visual manifestations of an artist's invention, and were therefore deemed worth preserving in personal collections. By replicating the appearance of the formal qualities of engraving into a refined drawing, the *Saint Christopher* draftsman created a technically innovative work that would have intrigued a wealthy, cultivated individual like Count Moscardo of Verona. Furthermore, the unequivocal emulation of Mantegna's style in the Cleveland image would have surely increased its visual appeal in Northern Italy. The draftsman's imitation of distinct features from the master's engraving thereby established an association between the new medium and the high-status character of a polished drawing. As Michael Bury has suggested, Cinquecento Northern Italian collectors of drawings would become the connoisseurs of engravings around mid-century. He posits that prints would later attract these erudite collectors because they also embody an artist's creative genius and provide the same kind of visual pleasure as finished drawings.[12] Thus, in producing the *Saint Christopher* image, Mantegna's follower augmented the aesthetic and cultural value of engraving.

This paper has aimed to demonstrate the effect that Mantegna's prints had on artistic process and production in Cinquecento Northern Italy. The *Saint Christopher* drawing reveals that Mantegna's *Bacchanal* served as a source of inspiration for the early sixteenth-century draftsman as he replicated specific compositional and stylistic elements from the master's print. The translation of the formal qualities of an engraving into a finished drawing like the CMA image signifies that prints introduced a new objective for the method of emulation in Renaissance artistic practice. Artists working from Mantegna's engravings no longer intended to merely reproduce his subject matter in their own works, but they also became interested in simulating the technical features of the new medium itself. In creating an image such as the *Saint Christopher* drawing for elite consumption, Mantegna's follower helped to promote the taste for engraving, and subsequently encouraged the collection of prints in Northern Italy as the sixteenth century progressed.

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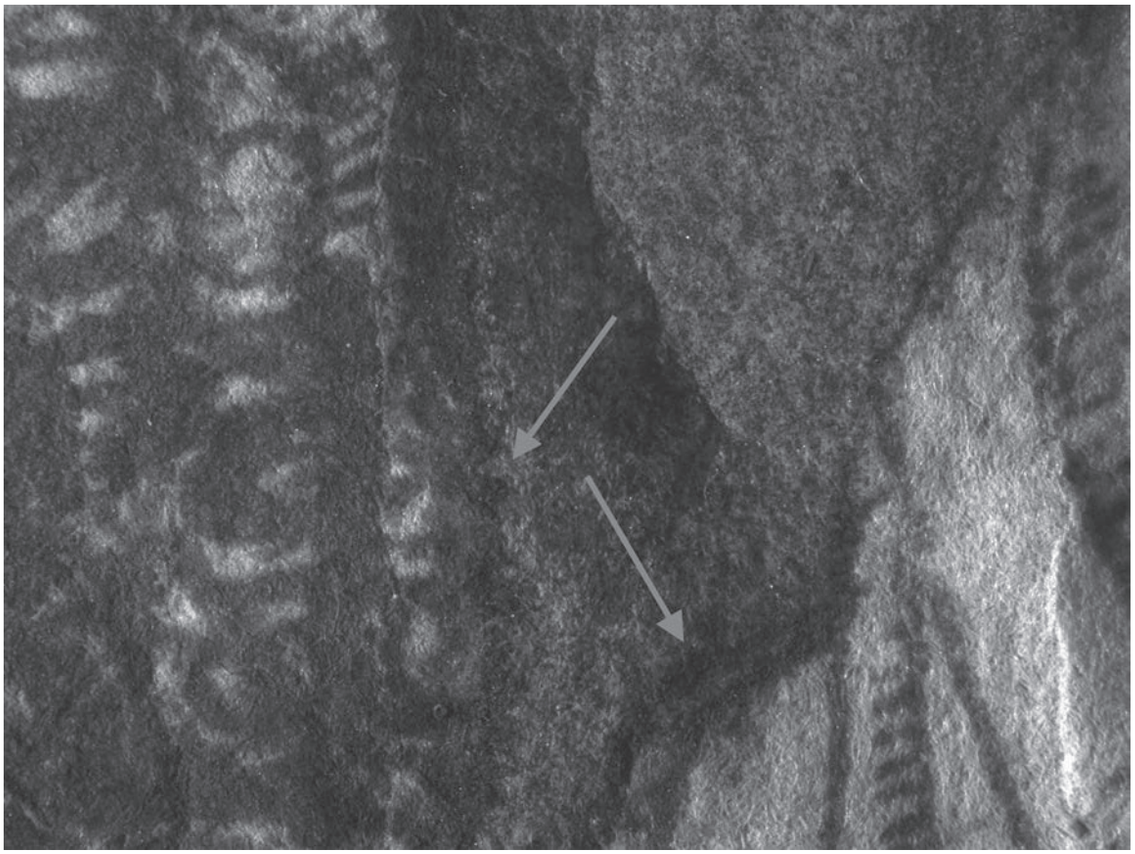
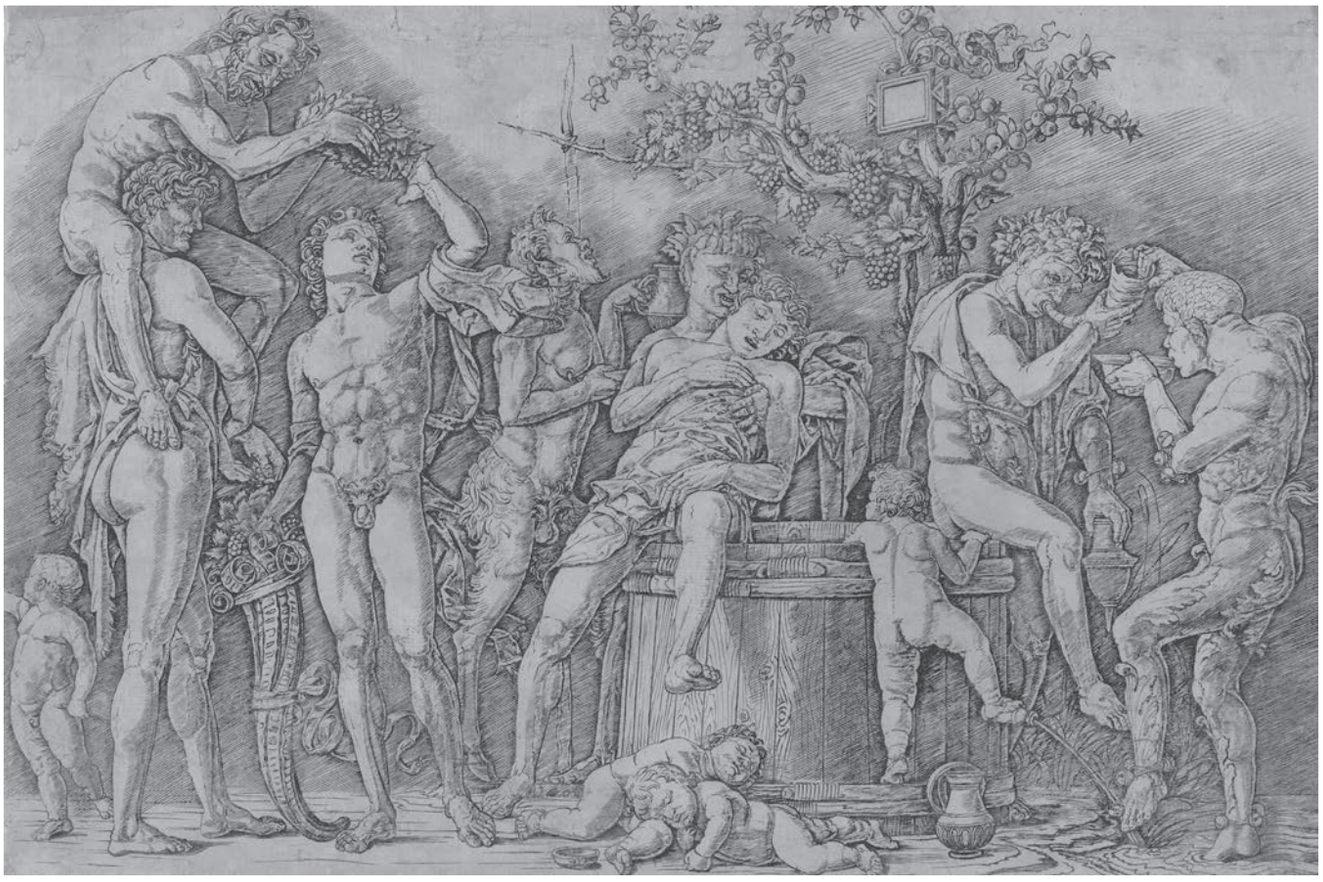
[11] Francis Ames-Lewis, *Drawing in Early Renaissance Italy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 4.

[12] Michael Bury, "The Taste for Prints in Italy to c. 1600," *Print Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (Mar. 1985): 22.

Figure 1. Follower of Andrea Mantegna, *Saint Christopher*, *c.*1500, pen and brown ink, blue gouache with brush, green wash, traces of orange gouache, and white gouache highlights, 28.7 x 17.6 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Dudley P. Allen Fund 1956.39.





◀ Figure 2. [*facing page, top*] Follower of Andrea Mantegna, detail of blue gouache applied over brown ink lines from *Saint Christopher*, *c.* 1500, pen and brown ink, blue gouache with brush, green wash, traces of orange gouache, and white gouache highlights, 28.7 x 17.6 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Dudley P. Allen Fund 1956.39. Photo credit: Dean Yoder, The Cleveland Museum of Art.

◀ Figure 3. [*facing page, bottom*] Andrea Mantegna, *Bacchanal with a Wine Vat*, *c.* 1475, engraving, 27.8 x 42.2 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, Gift of W.G. Russell Allen 1941.1.5.

▶Figure 4. [*right*] Follower of Andrea Mantegna, detail of hatching from *Saint Christopher*, *c.* 1500, pen and brown ink, blue gouache with brush, green wash, traces of orange gouache, and white gouache highlights, 28.7 x 17.6 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Dudley P. Allen Fund 1956.39. Photo credit: Dean Yoder, The Cleveland Museum of Art.

▼Figure 5. [*bottom left*] Andrea Mantegna, detail of hatching from *Bacchanal with a Wine Vat*, *c.* 1475, engraving, 27.8 x 42.2 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, Gift of W.G. Russell Allen 1941.1.5.

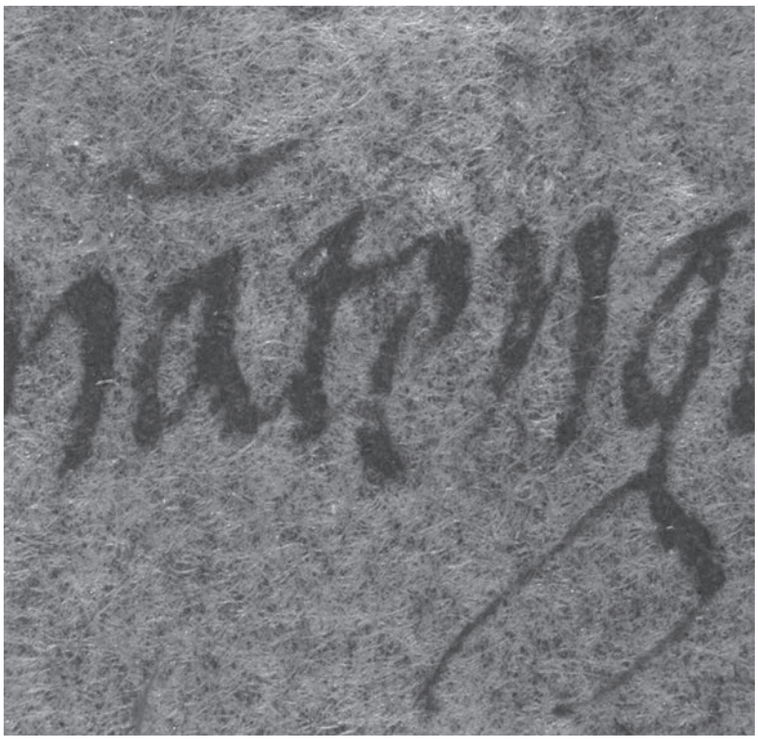


Figure 6. Follower of Andrea Mantegna, detail of the inscription from *Saint Christopher*, *c.* 1500, pen and brown ink, blue gouache with brush, green wash, traces of orange gouache, and white gouache highlights, 28.7 x 17.6 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Dudley P. Allen Fund 1956.39. Photo credit: Dean Yoder, The Cleveland Museum of Art.

Figure 7. Andrea Mantegna, *The Entombment*, *c.* 1465-1470, engraving, 31.1 x 45.5 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, Rosenwald Collection 1955.1.1.

Figure 8. Raphael, *The Entombment*, 1507, oil on panel, 184.0 x 176.0 cm. Galleria Borghese, Rome.