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Animate profiles in Michelangelo's full scale template drawings at San Lorenzo

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In an often cited passage from *Le Vite*, Vasari praises Michelangelo for introducing novel cornices and column base profiles, having finally "*rotti i lacci e le catene*" of common use, Vitruvius, and ancient precedent. This paper opens an inquiry into Michelangelo's unusual, yet highly ordered, exercise of the classical vocabulary through a close examination of the drawings used to communicate his intentions to the stone carvers. Eight of his full-scale, cut template drawings, or *modani*, remain in the care of the Casa Buonarroti and provide a wealth of clues as to how Michelangelo conceived of the elasticity and anatomical potential of the classical vocabulary. Far from capricious inventions, his extraordinary implementation of architectural profiles appears, in fact, to have had a close relationship with his unusual practices in template-making.

Unlike *modani* from his contemporaries such as Antonio da Sangallo il Giovane and Bartolomeo Ammannati, Michelangelo's *modani* exhibit no evidence of the use of compass or rule, a realization that has led scholars to conclude that he drew them free-hand; relying, as it were, exclusively on the "*guidizio dell'occhio*". However, new observations reveal that his *modani*, while lacking the traditional tools of constructing profiles, were nevertheless constructed by means of a deliberate and highly ordered working method linked through cutting and tracing. Under this narrative, a parent *modano* provided the initial profile measures with the use of black chalk, a straight edge, and a pair of dividers. This parent was subsequently cut along its profile edge, signaling its availability to act as a drawing template for the next iteration. Before being traced, the cut profile line would undergo any number of adjustments in black or red chalk, ink, or even further cuts. This process would be repeated and combined with other templates, creating entirely new and unexpected profile edges.

Although Michelangelo did not directly rely on instruments of geometry or mathematics, such as the compass and rule, manipulative tracing (as opposed to tracing as rote copying) nevertheless generated a sequential order of guide marks, ticks, and smears. While tracing, he would freely shift, rotate, or flip the template, trace only part of it, or combine it with other sketches or tracings. Although more free to engage his inner eye, the tracing method dictated that his *modani* still remained bound to a lineage of measured, tooled lines; meaning that, if a parent *modano* were produced with a compass and straightedge, the offspring would retain its geometrical intention even as it lacks a direct geometrical construction.

Conditioned partially by his working methods, the formal order of the profiles thus related to animating, non-rationalized practices directly adopted from sculpture and fresco transfer. Included as "additions" to the 1602 edition of Vignola's *Regola*, Michelangelo's profiles were finally formalized into an ordered system, largely concealing what was during the moment of conception a highly dynamic process of figuration. These new findings show that his *modani* provided support for these animating intentions to enter his cornices, tabernacles, and column profiles.

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