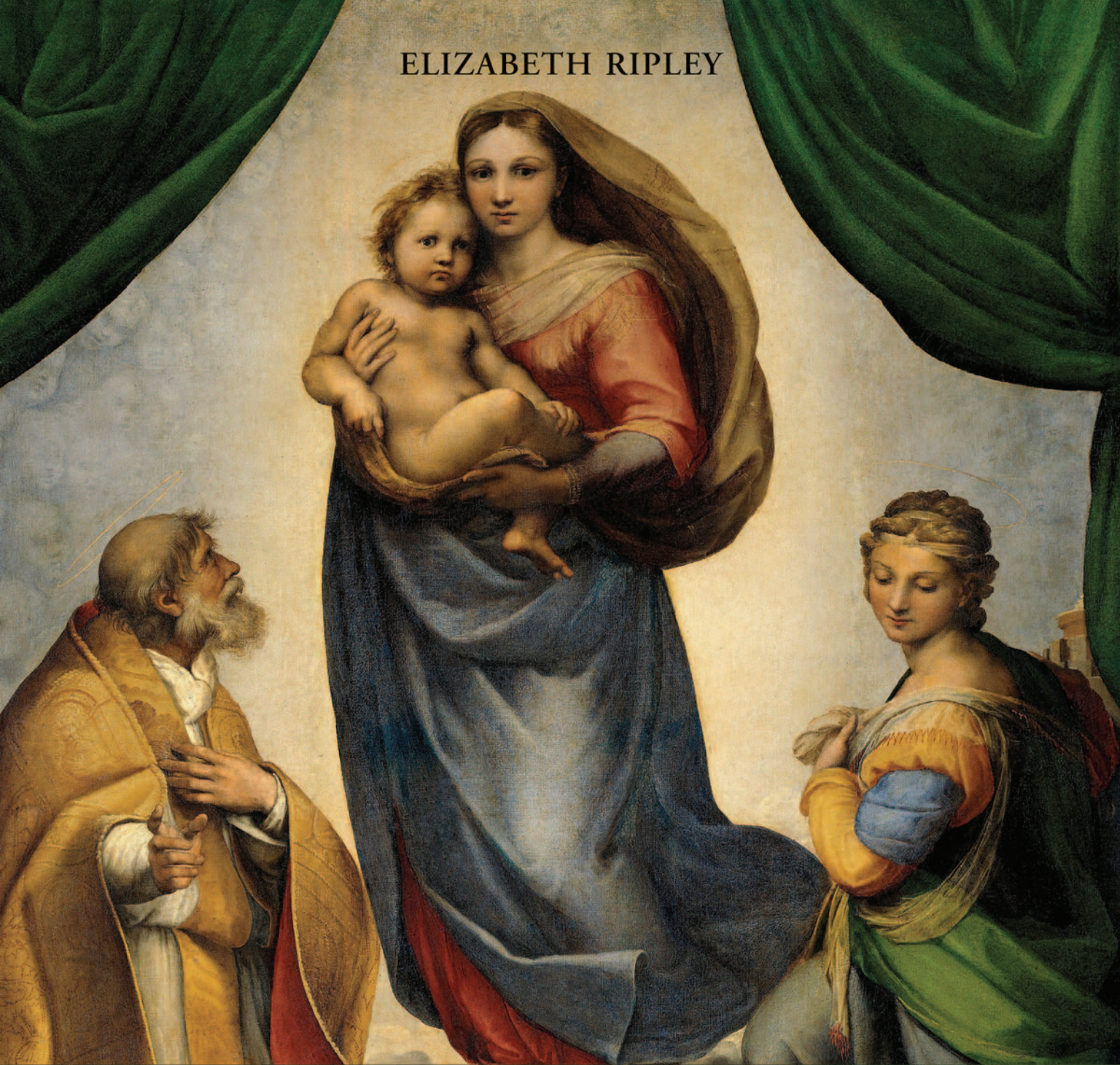


ELIZABETH RIPLEY



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RAPHAEL



RAPHAEL

A Biography by
ELIZABETH RIPLEY

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JUSTICE, c. 1509
Vatican, Rome

Title page: SAINT GEORGE AND THE DRAGON, c. 1503-1505, Louvre, Paris
Oil painting on wood by Raphael. Originally part of a diptych, using leather it was bound to a picture of Saint Michael with each painting measuring 12" x 11". King Louis XIV acquired both paintings in 1661; they are now housed in the Louvre.

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RAPHAEL SANTI held his father's hand as they climbed the narrow street leading from their house to the Duke of Urbino's castle. He could see the pointed caps of the castle's towers soaring into the blue sky. In a few days Duke Guidobaldo was to be married, Giovanni Santi told his son. He was on his way to discuss the pageant which the duke had asked him to design.

Father and son paused at the top of the hill to look out on overlapping mountains stretching to the sea. Then they walked through a gateway into the courtyard of the most beautiful palace in Italy. Giovanni led his son through rooms bright with gayly colored tapestries and paintings, until they came to the library where the duke sat reading. Guidobaldo rose to greet his court painter. He rested his hand on Raphael's curly head. This child was well named for the angel Raphael, he thought.

Raphael loved to visit the duke's castle. Sometimes Guidobaldo let him look at illustrated books, or he sat by his father while he painted a portrait of some lord or lady. He watched how Giovanni held his brush and how he mixed two colors together to make a third. Soon Raphael learned to paint little pictures of his own. Giovanni showed them to the duke, who was impressed by the child's talent.

When Raphael was eleven years old his father caught a fever. A few days later he died. The duke and duchess, saddened by the loss of their favorite court painter, were eager to help Giovanni's son to become an artist. They talked to the boy's uncle about his nephew's education, and one day in 1494 Raphael entered the workshop of Timoteo Viti. He learned quickly. The duchess was charmed by his peaceful little pictures painted in clear fresh colors. There was one of winged Saint Michael spearing the dragon, another of three dancing nymphs, and a third of an armored knight dreaming of the two lovely ladies standing beside him. One lady, offering him a book and sword, symbolized the active life; the other, holding flowers, offered a life of pleasure.



THE KNIGHT'S DREAM, c. 1503-1504
National Gallery, London

The name of Raphael of Urbino was now well known in Città di Castello. Many had seen the handsome young artist when he visited the city and more had admired his paintings, which hung in two of their churches. They were anxious to see the altarpiece commissioned for a third church, which Raphael was painting in Perugino's studio. The panel, nearly six feet high, showing *The Marriage of the Virgin*, would hang in Saint Joseph's chapel. Perugino had just finished a picture of the same subject for the cathedral in Perugia. Raphael knew the picture well, for he had helped his master paint some of the figures.

Following Perugino's plan, he grouped the figures in the foreground, placing the ring which Joseph offered to his bride in the center of the group. On the left stood Mary and her attendants. Joseph and his followers, carrying rods, stood on the right. One young man, a disappointed suitor, broke his rod because it had not blossomed. In the background a tiled pavement stretched to the horizon where a round temple reared magically against a blue sky. Above the central arch Raphael signed his name, RAPHAEL VRBINAS, and below on either side he wrote the date in Roman numerals.

Raphael examined the finished painting. The figures were posed in the graceful but affected manner of his master. He had opened up the background, letting light and air into the picture, but it seemed to Raphael that the spacious landscape and domed temple, so like the one in Perugino's picture, looked more important than the figures in the foreground. He realized that he had much to learn.

Perugino's pictures for the stock exchange were finished. The master had returned to his home in Florence, where he was busy filling commissions. Raphael longed to join him in this city where Italy's best artists lived and worked. He had heard about the battle scenes which Leonardo da Vinci and the young sculptor Michelangelo were painting for the Town Hall¹. He might even receive commissions in this prosperous city if the Duchess of Urbino would give him a letter to the governor of Florence.

1. Palazzo Vecchio



MARRIAGE OF THE VIRGIN, c. 1504
Brera Gallery, Milan

As Raphael's painting came to life Julius marveled that the walls of his library seemed to open out. How skillfully the young artist had divided up the space! How beautifully he had brought heaven and earth together by placing the altar which held the Holy Sacrament in the center of the picture. Poets, scholars, philosophers, and popes were gathered around the altar to worship this symbol of the Christian Church. Julius recognized the courtyard of Saint Peter's Church, which Bramante was designing. He recognized Bramante too, leaning on a railing at the left, as he explained what he was reading to his pupils. Some of his pupils pointed toward the altar, to show that the Christian faith transcended man's learning.

On the step above, another scientist had flung aside his book, while his pupils fell on their knees to worship the Trinity. On the right stood Julius' uncle, Pope Sixtus IV, who had built the chapel Michelangelo was decorating. Behind him was Italy's great poet, Dante, wearing a wreath of laurel. Saint Thomas Aquinas stood next to the altar pointing to the Trinity in heaven, where Christ sat enthroned between God and the Holy Ghost. On His right was the Virgin Mary and on the left Saint John the Baptist.

A bank of clouds swelled out to the edges of the domed heaven, and on these clouds sat the fathers of the church. On the far left sat Saint Peter next to Adam, then Saint John the Evangelist writing busily. Next came King David, Saint Lawrence, and, half hidden by a cloud, the prophet Jeremiah. Saint Paul sat on the far right next to Abraham, then Saint James, and Moses holding the tablets of the Ten Commandments. Next came Saint Stephen, and last Judah Maccabee in shining armor.

Julius followed the progress of the picture enthusiastically. Raphael was never too busy to discuss his plans. Long before the painting glorifying the church was finished, Raphael showed Julius the drawings he was making for the opposite wall.



DISPUTE OF THE HOLY SACRAMENT (DISPUTA), c. 1509-1510
Vatican, Rome

Leo and Raphael, standing in the Sistine Chapel, looked up at the ceiling Michelangelo had decorated. Here was the story of mankind from the creation of the universe to the birth of Christ. On the walls were pictures by other artists illustrating scenes from the life of Moses and of Christ. Only the lives of Christ's apostles were missing from this history of the Christian world. Leo pointed to the spaces under the wall paintings. Here he wanted tapestries which would picture scenes from the lives of the apostles. Raphael must find time to design these tapestries, which would be woven by skilled workmen in Flanders.

A few days later Raphael was hard at work making sketches to illustrate the acts of the apostles, while his pupils prepared enormous sheets of paper, ten feet high, which were overlapped and pasted together. Then Raphael and his pupils, using thick gouache, started to create paintings for the tapestries. He pictured the stories exactly as the Bible told them. One showed how Christ sat in Simon Peter's boat and told the fishermen to let down their nets:

“And when they had done this, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes.... But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, ‘Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’”

Leo was impressed by the grandeur and action of the figures, so like those of Michelangelo. He admired the rich colors: the gray birds in the foreground and the shimmering blue sea in the background. What a brilliant spot this tapestry would make on the chapel wall.

Much care was devoted to these paintings, an unusually large portion of the work appears to be in Raphael's own hand. He also designed borders for the tapestries, showing scenes from the life of Leo X. Soon the paintings were on their way to Flanders. Three years later the tapestries were hung in the Sistine Chapel. People marveled at these pictures woven in threads of bright reds, blues, and glittering gold. They were impressed by their enormous cost. But they did not know that Raphael's paintings, which remained in Flanders, were far more beautiful than the tapestries.



MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES

Tapestry Cartoon, c. 1515-1516
Victoria and Albert Museum, London