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An Intellectual Journey through the Four Elements in Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura

Konstantinos Gravanis

Abstract

The encyclopaedic iconography of the Stanza della Segnatura in the Vatican Palace (1508–11) is one of the most widely discussed yet elusive decorative schemes of Italian Renaissance art. This article reconsiders and expands Edgar Wind's reading of the room's ceiling as a coordinated programme of symbolic correspondences based on the structural and thematic device of the four elements. Contextual analysis and iconographic examination of Raphael's wall paintings as a unified set shows that his four faculties of knowledge (Theology, Poetry, Philosophy, Jurisprudence) are abstractly associated with the four elements of nature (Fire, Air, Water, Earth), a sophisticated conception of the room's intellectual microcosm as a reflection of the universal macrocosm.

Keywords

Stanza della Segnatura; Raphael; Iconography; Edgar Wind; The Four Elements

In memory of Edgar Wind

The Stanza della Segnatura (fig. 1) is one of the Stanze of Raphael, a suite of rooms that once served as the papal apartments in the Vatican Palace. Its conventional name derives from the mid-sixteenth century artist and art historian Giorgio Vasari (1511–74), who called it the 'camera della Segnatura',[1] but its ever-lasting fame is owed to the captivating fresco decoration of its walls by Raphael (1483–1520) between the years 1508 and 1511, representing a crowning achievement of Renaissance art and a timeless archetype of symbolic richness.

[1] Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. by Paola Barocchi and Rosanna Bettarini, 6 vols (Florence: Sansoni, 1966–87), IV, p. 166. During Vasari's time the Stanza della Segnatura had been used as the tribunal of the *Signatura gratiae* of Pope Paul III (r. 1534–49).

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Figure 1. Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican Palace, Vatican City. (Image in the Public Domain)

The practical purpose of the Stanza della Segnatura at the time of Raphael's decoration has been the focus of scholarly debate for nearly a century and a half. Now that the dust has settled, there can be little doubt that the room was originally intended to be the private library of Pope Julius II (r. 1503–13). John Shearman's analysis of contemporary documents has demonstrated that this short-lived library, which was visited and praised by the humanist Pietro Bembo in early 1513,[2] was almost certainly located on

[2] For English translations of Bembo's letter, see William Roscoe, *The Life and Pontificate of Leo the Tenth*, 4 vols (Liverpool: T. Cadell Jr. and W. Davies, 1805), II, pp. 157–60; and John Shearman, *Raphael in Early Modern Sources (1483–1602)*, 2 vols (London; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), I, pp. 167–68, doc. 1513/6.

the same level as the Stanza della Segnatura.[3] What is more, an examination of Raphael's frescoes in this particular room reveals the most bookish iconography in the history of Renaissance art: an illustration of nearly sixty books, many with titles, along with manuscript scrolls, notepads, letters and a multitude of portraits of authors, scribes and scholars in the act of writing, copying and debating. The unique literary decoration of this thinking space is complemented by images of globes,[4] zodiacs, mathematical devices, musical instruments and representations of education processes, indicating Raphael's intention to animate the Pope's microcosm of knowledge with various scientific symbols of learning.

The Iconographic Programme

The decorative scheme of the Stanza della Segnatura is established by four ceiling roundels that Raphael painted with allegorical female figures enthroned on clouds. Their attributes and epigraphic mottoes indicate that they stand for disciplines of knowledge, namely, Theology, Poetry, Philosophy and Jurisprudence,[5] a division of faculties that derived from a traditional system of book classification and decoration in medieval and Renaissance libraries. The frescoes on the major walls just below the ceiling areas, corresponding to the allegorical figures, serve as large-scale exemplifications of these concepts. They depict assemblies of famous representatives of each faculty. The contemplative theologians of the western wall's *Disputation of the Holy Sacrament*, commonly referred to as the *Disputa*

[3] For the almost entirely convincing argument that the Stanza della Segnatura was intended as the private library of Julius II, see Franz Wickhoff, 'Die Bibliothek Julius II', *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, 14 (1893), pp. 49–64; and John Shearman, *The Vatican Stanze: Functions and Decoration* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 13–17 and 44–50, nn. 84–105. For the nineteenth-century scholars who originated the hypothesis, see ibid., pp. 44–45, n. 86. For objections to the library theory, see ibid., p. 46, n. 90; and Bram Kempers, 'Ritual and its Images: Paris de Grassis, Raphael and the "signatures" in the Vatican Stanze', in *Functions and Decorations: Art and Ritual at the Vatican Palace in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. by Tristan Weddigen, Sible de Blaauw and Bram Kempers (Vatican City; Turnhout: Vatican Library; Brepols, 2003), pp. 80–83. For the identification of many of Julius II's original books, most of which are now in the Vatican Library, see Giovanni Morello, 'La Biblioteca di Giulio II', in *Raffaello e la Roma dei Papi*, ed. by Giovanni Morello, exh. cat., Vatican City (Vatican City: Fratelli Palombi Editori, 1986), pp. 51–67; and Tracy Cosgriff, 'The Library of Julius II and Raphael's Art of Commentary', *I-Tatti Studies*, 22 (2019), pp. 59–91, with an Appendix containing the surviving Julian inventories, now in Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV), MS. Vat. lat. 3966 (fols. 111r–115r).

[4] The depiction of a terrestrial and a celestial globe in the *School of Athens* (c. 1510–11), one of Raphael's frescoes in the Stanza della Segnatura, indicates that real globes may have been installed close to the painted globes or in the centre of this room. For the furnishing of important Renaissance libraries with globes, see Shearman, *Raphael in Early Modern Sources*, I, p. 228, doc. 1515–25/1.

[5] The inscription of Theology reads 'DIVINARUM RERUM NOTITIA' (Knowledge of divine things); of Poetry 'NUMINE AFFLATUR' (Inspired by divine spirit); of Philosophy 'CAUSARUM COGNITIO' (Knowledge of causes); and that of Jurisprudence 'IUS SUUM UNICUIQUE TRIBUIT' (Each is accorded his due). It has been demonstrated that potential literary sources for the four ceiling mottoes, as well as nearly all the titled books in the room's paintings, are included in the surviving inventories of Julius's books; see Paul Taylor, 'Julius II and the Stanza della Segnatura', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 72 (2009), pp. 109–14.

(1509–10), include Saint Augustine, Saint Jerome and Saint Thomas Aquinas; this assembly appears beneath the female allegory of Theology. Debating philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Socrates appear in the opposite wall's *School of Athens* (1510–11), just below Philosophy; the poet laureates of *Parnassus* (1511), most notably Homer, Virgil and Dante, are below the northern wall's Poetry; and the historic lawgivers of the tripartite *Jurisprudence* (1511), Justinian the Great and Pope Gregory IX (r. 1227–41), are painted below the allegory of Justice. All sectors are linked thematically through subjects in the angular surfaces of the lower ceiling that connect the faculties. The *Judgement of Solomon*, the famous biblical story of a wise king dispensing justice (a philosophical judgement) is painted between the fields of Philosophy and Jurisprudence; the *Original Sin of Adam and Eve*, an archetypal theological theme of human misconduct and divine punishment, links Theology and Jurisprudence; the *Harmony of the Spheres* relates the universality of Philosophy to the transcendence of Poetry; and *The Flaying of Marsyas after Apollo's Victory* narrates a poetic contest with theological implications, a story interpreted by Dante as a call for spiritual inspiration.[6]

The monumental subjects on the long walls also connect the faculties. Jurisprudence's subcategory of Civil Law (*Justinian the Great Receiving the Pandects*), a domain directed by human reason, is adjacent to Philosophy, while the 'divinely' inspired category of Canon Law (*Delivery of the Decretals to Pope Gregory IX*) is closer to Theology. Similarly, the Aristotelian side of the *School of Athens*, overseen by a statue of Minerva, conveys notions of rational prudence and empirical knowledge – philosophical methods of inquiry that relate to the legal science of Jurisprudence – whereas the Platonic side of the fresco, overseen by Apollo and adjoining the *Parnassus*, expresses intellectual states of abstract speculation and exalted inspiration. For similar reasons, the heavenly judge and key-holder Saint Peter appears in the *Disputa* next to Law and visionary theologians such as Saint Paul and Saint Augustine are closer to Poetry.[7]

The overall relationship between the Stanza della Segnatura and encyclopaedic decorative cycles of medieval libraries – most noticeably in the division of its sectors into four branches of knowledge – was inextricably tied to the room's intellectual character and usage as a library. Beyond that, though, Raphael's multiple textual and visual sources remain

[6] For the concept of interwoven faculties in the Stanza della Segnatura's ceiling, see Johann D. Passavant, *Raphael of Urbino and his Father Giovanni Santi* (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1872), pp. 87–88; Edgar Wind, 'Platonic Justice, designed by Raphael', *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 1 (1937), p. 70; Edgar Wind, 'The Four Elements in Raphael's "Stanza della Segnatura"', *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 2 (1938), p. 78; John Shearman, 'Raphael's Unexecuted Projects for the Stanze', in *Walter Friedländer zum 90. Geburtstag: eine Festgabe seiner europaischer Schuler, Freunde und Verehrer*, ed. by Georg Kaufmann and Willibald Sauerländer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co., 1965), p. 161; and Herbert von Einem, *Das Programm der Stanza della Segnatura im Vatikan* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1971), pp. 22–23. For Dante's interpretation of the Marsyas myth, see *Paradiso*, I: 20.

[7] For connections between Raphael's faculties, see Wind, *Platonic Justice*, p. 70; Sydney J. Freedberg, *Painting of the High Renaissance in Rome and Florence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 116–17; and Deoclecio Redig de Campos, *The 'Stanze' of Raphael* (Rome: Edizioni del Drago, 1963), p. 33.

largely elusive, the meaning of his paintings has yet to be thoroughly explained, and the identity of his iconographic adviser is unknown,[8] a situation that is all the more surprising given the massive and ever-growing body of literature dedicated to the Stanza della Segnatura.[9]

It is generally agreed that at least one humanist from the circle of Julius II provided Raphael with thematic prescriptions. Shearman described this iconographic scheme as 'the most sought-after of all Renaissance papers', adding that even if this document were somehow retrieved, the original programme (c. 1508) would have differed from the completed paintings (1508–11) due to the natural process of changing intentions and tastes.[10] The Warburgian school of art historians was even less optimistic about determining the original conception of the room. Erwin Panofsky, for example, described the iconography of the Stanza della Segnatura as 'a rigid theological or philosophical schema' but also forecasted endless debates about its meaning.[11] Edgar Wind, another close associate of Aby Warburg, demonstrated the sophistication of the ceiling's iconography, which he described as a network of 'extremely remote allusions revealing the playfulness of a humanist mind which rejoices in making itself understood only to a select and erudite circle'.[12] Unfortunately, though, Wind's intended publication on the intellectual sources of the *School of Athens* – the room's most erudite picture – never materialised.[13] The general difficulty of scholars in reaching solid ground led unavoidably to more reductive approaches and simplified solutions. Most notably, Ernst Gombrich opposed the idea that a rigid or systematic programme was behind the Stanza della Segnatura, using the room as a prime example of the limits of iconology and the elusiveness of pictorial meanings. In a subsequent discussion of Raphael's Stanza di Eliodoro (1511–14), Gombrich focused further on the problems of artistic intentionality and overinterpretation by iconographers

[8] For bibliographic references to proposed candidates for the role of Raphael's iconographic adviser, see Glenn W. Most, 'Reading Raphael: "The School of Athens" and Its Pre-Text', *Critical Inquiry*, 23 (1996), pp. 169–70, nn. 60–61; and Taylor, *Stanza della Segnatura*, pp. 103–04, nn. 1–12. The most commonly suggested humanists are Tomasso Inghirami, who was appointed Vatican librarian in 1510, and Egidio da Viterbo, the Augustinian Prior-General (1506–17) and favourite orator of Julius II.

[9] The size of its literature nearly equals that of the other Stanze of Raphael altogether (the Stanza di Eliodoro, Stanza dell'Incendio, Sala de' Palafrenieri and Sala di Costantino). The persistent art historical bias in favour of the Segnatura can be explained by the cultural significance and immense popularity of the room's encyclopaedic subjects, including a legion of unidentified historical figures and portraits.

[10] John Shearman, 'The Florentine Entrata of Leo X, 1515', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 38 (1975), pp. 139–40.

[11] Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1960), p. 191; and idem., *The Iconography of Correggio's Camera di San Paolo* (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1961), p. 98.

[12] Wind, *The Four Elements*, p. 76.

[13] A full transcript of Wind's original typescript 'The School of Athens' (1950) was published for the first time and commented on by Bernardino Branca in 2020; see Branca, *Edgar Wind's Raphael Papers: The School of Athens* (Wraclaw: Amazon Fulfillment, 2020). The original typescript is in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Edgar Wind Papers, MS. Wind 216, folder 4, fols. 1–121.

who do not know where to stop, and he came close to announcing an intrinsic scholarly incapacity of reconstructing such symbolic schemes of decoration.[14]

The interpretative difficulties with the Stanza della Segnatura derive in part from the allegorical character of its frescoes and the fact that these works were meant to be privately viewed and understood by an elite few. The message from the other side becomes even more obscure if we consider our limited familiarity with the symbolic language of the visual arts in Renaissance Italy. Hence, the subject matter of the cycle in question, including a legion of unidentified portraits, has long proved a paradise for speculative iconographic readings and learned displays of free associations. Interestingly, this treatment of the cycle originated with Giorgio Vasari, whose longest discussion of iconographic issues in the entire *Lives of the Artists* (1550–68) was dedicated to the Stanza della Segnatura.[15] The overwhelming range of interpretative possibilities has long become apparent from the variety of sources that have been proposed for the room's iconography (e.g. Neoplatonic ideas and humanistic texts of the fifteenth century, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Franciscan conceptions of Saint Bonaventure, Augustinian theology, Dominican doctrines, courtly panegyrics, illuminated manuscripts in the papal libraries), on which no consensus has been reached.

To complicate matters further, scholars have generally examined Raphael's wall paintings in isolation from one another, instead of as a unified four-fold set. Also, the initial ceiling frescoes of Giovanni Bazzi (1508–09) – a painter better known as Il Sodoma (1477–1549) – have been disregarded as fragments of an older scheme that was supposedly ignored by Raphael when the latter took over the decoration plan for the entire room.[16] The idea of a coherent programme from the ceiling down to the walls has been generally overlooked, which explains the absence of proposals for an underlying denominator or unifying theme that goes beyond the concept of four interrelated fields of knowledge.[17] As

[14] See Ernst H. Gombrich, 'Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura and the Nature of its Symbolism', in *Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance II* (London: Phaidon Press, 1972), pp. 85–101. For similar conclusions about the Stanza di Eliodoro, see Gombrich's *Topos and Topicality*, Annual Lecture of the Society for Renaissance Studies, delivered at University College, London, 10 January 1975, <https://gombricharchive.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/showdoc21.pdf> [accessed 6 October 2023].

[15] See Vasari, *Vite*, IV, pp. 166–74.

[16] The story of how Raphael took over the decoration of Julius's Stanze from previous artists derives from Vasari, *Vite*, IV, pp. 165–68. Despite Vasari's chronological vagueness, his reliability is verified by surviving ceiling frescoes of Sodoma in the Stanza della Segnatura (1508–09), those of Pietro Perugino (1446–1523) on the ceiling of the Stanza dell'Incendio (c. 1508), and those of Luca Signorelli (1441–1523) in the Stanza di Eliodoro (c. 1507–08).

[17] To quote Jones and Penny, 'certainly it has not been demonstrated how the four parts of the [Stanza della Segnatura's] decoration might be seen as a systematic proposition that amounts to more than a general assertion of the unitary purpose of all human thought'; see Roger Jones and Nicholas Penny, *Raphael* (London; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 52.

a matter of fact, though, Sodoma and Raphael collaborated for a short period of time,[18] and the principal iconographic programme may have been decided before even Raphael had arrived in Rome during the second half of 1508. In addition, the way that Raphael and/or the papal architect Donato Bramante (1444–1514) redesigned the room's ceiling – by removing the corner consoles, rounding off its sharp angles, extending the sail vault downward, unifying the vault's structure and preparing a brilliant illusionistic integration of painted and real architecture – created a remarkable spatial and thematic unity that calls for a unifying iconographic approach.[19]

To this author's knowledge, the only scholar who employed a comprehensive method of interpretation was Edgar Wind, who connected the room's walls to its ceiling by pointing to the four elements of nature as a structural and thematic device used by both Sodoma and Raphael.[20] The great iconologist further demonstrated that the interdisciplinary character of the Stanza della Segnatura's iconography reflected the humanistic ideal of the all-round education that the Greeks called *ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία* ('education working in a circle'). On that basis, Wind presumed that the author of Raphael's iconographic programme could have been Celio Calcagnini, a humanist polymath who had met Raphael in Rome and used the word 'encyclopaedia' to describe the interdependence and translatability of disciplines.[21] It is worth noting, though, that Wind was unaware that the Stanza della Segnatura was intended to be the private library of Julius II, a crucial piece of information that might have enabled him to revise and publish his typescript 'The School of Athens'.[22]

[18] This old proposal was confirmed during the most recent restoration of the frescoes in the Segnatura room, see Paolo Violini, 'Raphael in the Vatican between 1508 and 1514. Progress and development of artistic technique', in *Raphael in Rome. Style, Technique, Conservation*, ed. by Antonio Paolucci, Barbara Agosti and Silvia Ginzburg (Vatican City: Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 2017), pp. 29–33.

[19] For architectural interventions in the room's ceiling, probably by Raphael in collaboration with Bramante, see John Shearman, 'Raphael as Architect', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 116, no. 5141 (1968), p. 396.

[20] Wind, *The Four Elements*, pp. 75–79.

[21] Branca, *Wind's Raphael Papers*, pp. 106–19.

[22] Edgar Wind passed away in September 1971, only a few months before John Shearman's crucial publication on the functions and decorations of Raphael's Stanze. An awareness that the Stanza della Segnatura was intended to be a library would have provided Wind with a prime example of the Renaissance period that was relevant to his pedagogical preference for all-round education over strict specialisation. It would also have offered a case study relevant to his advisory role in the organisation and multidisciplinary orientation of the Warburg Library in London, whose physical arrangement of books was based on certain conceptual orders and 'the law of the good neighbour'; see Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, trans. by David Britt (Los Angeles, CA: The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), p. 52.

Allegories of the Four Times of Day and the Four Elements

A close examination of the room's ceiling (fig. 2) reveals a remarkably symbolic scheme structured according to four-fold sets of correspondences.[23] One often-overlooked detail is the octagonal *oculus* in the vault surrounding the coat of arms of Pope Nicholas V (r. 1447–55). Painted by Sodoma in 1508, its illusionistic representation of twelve *putti* divided into three tetrads under a fictive sky probably alluded to the months of the year or the signs of the Zodiac.[24] Another subtle pattern is the colouring of the clouds of Raphael's enthroned faculties in consonance with the four times of day: Theology sits on the dark clouds of Night, winged Poetry on the rosy clouds of Dawn, Philosophy on the purplish clouds of Dusk, and Justice, whose background is most brightly illuminated, on the white clouds of Day. The last invention – related to the Judeo-Christian concept of the Sun of Justice (*Sol Iustitiae*) – was probably inspired by the fact that real sunlight entered the Pope's library during midday through a newly manufactured window (c. 1507) in the sector of Jurisprudence.[25]

The cosmological meanings of the ceiling are further conveyed by eight small panels painted by Sodoma on the intersections between his central octagon and the later allegories

[23] For the complex four-fold structure and the symbolic role of tetrads in the Stanza della Segnatura's ceiling, see Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier, *Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura: Meaning and Invention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 43–58.

[24] The activities of the twelve *putti* constitute tetrads: four of them are holding the roundel of the papal *stemma* from a cord, four are sustaining its weight and the other four are still.

[25] For Bramante's new windows in the Stanza della Segnatura and the Stanza di Eliodoro, see Shearman, *The Vatican Stanze*, pp. 13, 25, n. 5, and 43–44, n. 83; and idem., 'The Apartments of Julius II and Leo X', in *Raphael in the Apartments of Julius II and Leo X*, ed. by Roberto Caravaggi (Milan: Electa, 1993), p. 26. The pre-existing north-northwest windows of the two rooms did not receive direct sunlight at all, apart from a limited amount during summer sunsets (on-site observation by this author). The admittance of sufficient illumination in these spaces was made possible by the construction of two windows that face south-southeast. A *terminus ante quem* for these exposures is provided by a keystone painted by Luca Signorelli in the Stanza di Eliodoro (c. 1507–08) and Raphael's earliest paintings in the Stanza della Segnatura (1508–09), all of which are notionally lit from the southern windows. Ancient architect Vitruvius and Renaissance humanist Paolo Cortesi had advised that libraries should face east because their function requires morning light; see Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, 6.4.1; and Kathleen Weil-Garris and John F. D'Amico, 'The Renaissance Cardinal's Ideal Palace: A Chapter from Cortesi's "De Cardinalatu"', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 35 (1980), pp. 78–79. The decision of Julius and Bramante to install a south-southeast window in the Stanza della Segnatura is linked to the room's intended use as a library. Direct sunlight enters this room between around 10.00 and 14.00, but for a longer time and in greater quantities during winter than summer (on-site observations by this author). Bramante would have calculated that the maximum amount of illumination would enter the Stanza della Segnatura when the winter sun (in the Northern hemisphere) was following a lower and more southerly path, and the light was most needed. Less light would enter during the scorching summer when the sun traced a much higher orbit.

by Raphael.[26] They were convincingly identified by Wind as four pairs of mythological scenes and episodes from Livy's *History of Rome* that allegorised the four elements conquered by virtues.[27] The fiery forge of Vulcan is matched with the fearless Mucius Scaevola who puts his hand in a flame (fire); the scene of Amphitrite sailing in strong wind accompanies the image of the crowning of an emperor by a winged Victory (air); a Nymph and Amor being pelted with water by satyrs on a beach and playing with marine creatures is paired with the battle between Romans and Sabines near a swamp (water); and an elderly Giant, the offspring of Gaia (Earth), defeated and fettered on rocky ground, is matched with Junius Brutus's dispensation of justice (earth).[28]

Figure 2. Raphael and Sodoma, ceiling of the Stanza della Segnatura, 1508–10, frescoes, Vatican Palace, Vatican City. (Image in the Public Domain)

[26] Vasari described the ceiling of the Stanza della Segnatura as 'the sky of that room' ('*Ma finita oramai la volta, cio è il cielo di quella stanza*'), see Vasari, *Vite*, IV, p. 170. Conceptions of a ceiling's pictorial space as a heavenly dome or sky simulation were commonplace in late medieval and early modern schemes of interior decoration. The very word 'ceiling' may have derived from the Italian word for heaven and sky ('cielo'). For the representation of heaven in vaulted forms used by different cultures and religions, see Karl Lehmann, 'The Dome of Heaven', *Art Bulletin*, 27 (1945), pp. 1–27.

[27] See Wind, *The Four Elements*, pp. 75–79.

[28] Ibid., pp. 75–77. One detail that further verifies Wind's reading is that the representation of the protagonists of the four mythological stories follows a traditional pattern in the iconography of the four elements: Vulcan and Atlas, the representatives of fire and air (elements moving upward), are looking upward, whereas the Nymph and the Giant, related here to the terrestrial elements of water and earth (elements moving downward), are reclining and facing downward, respectively.

The symbolism behind each pair of Sodoma's panels was also linked by Wind with the adjacent faculties by Raphael: the winged figure of Poetry, who bears the inscription *numine afflatur* ('moved by divine spirit = wind/air'), is related to the element of Air, Theology to Fire, Philosophy to Water and Jurisprudence to Earth. Wind then proceeded to associate the four elements with Raphael's major wall paintings as well: the *Disputa* with Fire, *Parnassus* with Air, the *School of Athens* with Water and *Jurisprudence* with Earth.[29] This interpretation, though, lacked iconographic justification. Wind confined himself to remarking that the coordination of sciences with elements of nature and celestial bodies followed traditional schemes such as Marsilio Ficino's association of the Pythagorean disciplines with a four-fold cosmological hierarchy: 'so that, proceeding step by step, they [the Pythagoreans] may descry the divine light, first in moral matters as on earth, second in scientific matters as in water, and third in mathematical matters as in the moon; and fourth see it clearly and beneficially in metaphysical matters as in the sun'.[30]

The Elements in the Keystones and the Four-Coloured Garment of Philosophy

Wind's hypothesis about the overall role of the four elements was endorsed by André Chastel, who identified related imagery on the four keystones of Raphael's major frescoes. Chastel also spotted an error in two symbolic correspondences, which he attributed to a thematic modification or an oversight during execution.[31] A cupid with a cornucopia is represented on the keystone of Jurisprudence's wall as a reference to the abundance of the earth, while the cupid of Philosophy holds a seemingly mobile globe suggestive of water. Strangely, though, the child of airy Poetry holds a torch with fire, and the child of fiery Theology holds a dove (symbol of air), the opposite of what one would expect. This iconographic slip has been taken as an indication that Raphael was not responsible for the vault's programme and that his intervention occurred only after the room's decoration had begun.[32] In any event, the most likely justification for the keystone arrangement is that Raphael perceived the dove as a more appropriate symbol for the theological *Disputa* since it was the scriptural manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

[29] Ibid., pp. 78–79.

[30] Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, trans. by Michael J.B. Allen, ed. by James Hankins with William Bowen, 6 vols (Cambridge, MA; London: The I-Tatti Renaissance Library; Harvard University Press: 2001–06), IV (2004): Bk. XIV, ch. X, p. 305: '*sed gradatim progredientes lumen divinum in moralibus primo tamquam in terra prospiciant, secundo in physicis tamquam aqua, tertio in mathematicis tamquam in luna, quarto in metaphysicis tamquam in sole perspicue salubriterque perspiciant*'.

[31] André Chastel, *Arte e umanesimo a Firenze al tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico: Studi sul Rinascimento e sull' umanesimo platonico* (Turin: Einaudi, 1964), pp. 488–90.

[32] See ibid., p. 489; and Marco Marinacci, *Raffaello e la biblioteca di Giulio II: un'esegesi della Stanza della Segnatura* (Genova: Marietti, 2010), p. 55.

A second error of Raphael, possibly related to the first, is found in the four-coloured garment of the allegory of Philosophy, rightly identified by Vasari with the four elements.[33] The brown field of earth at the bottom of the garment contains oak leaves and acorns (the family emblem of Pope Julius II); the green domain of water is filled with marine animals; the red zone of fire shows flames; and the blue domain of air at the top is filled with stars. The region of fire, though, was typically imagined and represented higher than air, therefore Raphael should have painted the red zone above the blue. It is unclear whether the keystone of Theology was painted before or after the roundel of Philosophy, so what may have happened is that Raphael initially understood air as the highest element in the cosmic order.[34] Alternatively, he may have purposefully placed blue colour above red in order to avoid the incompatible visual merging of air's blue and water's green, as Mary Quinlan-McGrath plausibly proposed.[35]

The Four Elements as Abstract Principles and Cognitive Ideals

The main argument of this article is that Wind's general proposal was correct: the four faculties of Raphael's wall frescoes were matched with the four elements according to a Neoplatonic scheme of symbolic correspondences – an intellectual journey, as it were, in both ascending and descending order. The thematic role of the ceiling's elements was expanded by Raphael and his adviser to the major walls as an appropriate decorative device for a library room whose physical shape nearly formed a square and whose intellectual purpose and design reflected the macrocosmic universe. The whole concept was visualised abstractly on the Julian-era floor of the Stanza della Segnatura (c. 1508–11), a fine neo-cosmatesque marble pavement laid in the *opus sectile* technique and inspired by medieval models.[36] The largest part of the extant pavement was executed for Julius II, whose name is inscribed all over it,[37] and its design can be admired in its entirety on a beautiful floor plan (c. 1710–15) by John Talman (figs. 3–4).[38] Its four-fold subdivisions and patterns, especially the four spheres on the inner and outer circles, probably had a symbolic meaning

[33] Vasari, *Vite*, IV, p. 168.

[34] For the identification of air with heaven in humanist commentaries on classical authors, see Wind, *The Four Elements*, p. 76, n. 7.

[35] See Mary Quinlan-McGrath, 'Raphael's "School of Athens": Theologians Reconciling Philosophy and Astrology', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 61 (2016), p. 167, n. 20.

[36] For this floor, see Shearman, *The Vatican Stanze*, p. 15; Joost-Gaugier, *Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura*, pp. 147–52; Angela Dressen, *Pavimenti decorati del Quattrocento in Italia* (Venice: Marsilio, 2008), cat. A54, pp. 334–35; and Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), pp. 190–91.

[37] The original commission of this pavement was associated by Arnold Nesselrath with Pope Nicholas V (r. 1447–55); see Nesselrath's catalogue entry in Giancarlo Alteri et al., *Carlo Magno a Roma*, exh. cat., Vatican City (Rome: Retablo, 2001), pp. 161–63, no. 26. The traditional early sixteenth-century dating of the pavement was supported by Angela Dressen on stylistic and contextual grounds; see Dressen, *Pavimenti decorati*, cat. A54, p. 335. An intervention on behalf of Pope Leo X (r. 1513–21) is attested to by the Medici mottoes 'GLOVIS', 'SEMPER' and 'SUAVE' inscribed on sections of the floor near the two windows.

[38] Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, inv. no. WA.OA343.

of cosmological character, as Christiane Joost-Gaugier has already proposed.[39] Also, one cannot help observing the striking similarity of its design to that of the thirteenth-century Cosmati pavement of Westminster Abbey. The design and technique of this magnificent work are Italian in origin, and its four-fold spherical patterns reference the archetypal macrocosm and probably also the four elements.[40]

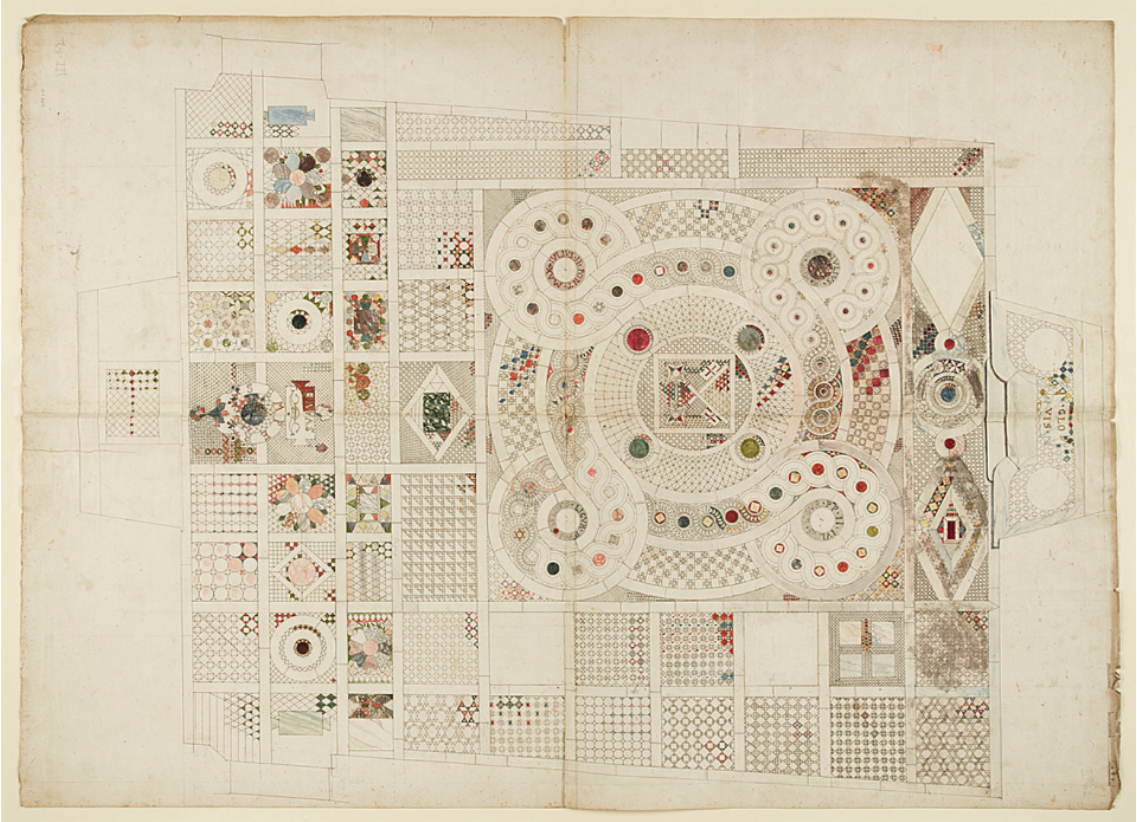

Figure 3. John Talman, plan of the marble floor of the Stanza della Segnatura, watercolour, c. 1710–15, Ashmolean Museum. (Image in the Public Domain)

[39] Joost-Gaugier, *Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura*, pp. 147–52.

[40] Two damaged riddle-like inscriptions around the central alabaster roundel of the Westminster Abbey's sanctuary pavement were reliably recorded in the fifteenth century by the Westminster monks Richard Sporley and John Flete. The second text ends with the phrase 'SPERICUS: ARCHETIPUM: GLOBUS: HIC: MONSTRAT: MACROCOSMUM' (this spherical globe shows the archetypal macrocosm). The content of these Latin inscriptions, especially the rarely used word *macrocosmum*, points toward the papal and curial culture of the medieval period; see Paul Binski and Claudia Bolgia, 'The Cosmati Mosaics at Westminster. Art, Politics, and Exchanges with Rome in the Age of Gothic', *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana*, 45 (2021/2022), pp. 37–38 and 43–44. The sole medieval interpretation of the pavement was given by Richard Sporley, who explained the 'spherical globe' of the inscription as 'the round stone (in the middle of the pavement), having in itself the colours of the four elements, fire, air, water and earth', see Richard Foster, *Patterns of Thought: The Hidden Meaning of the Great Pavement of Westminster Abbey* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), p. 77.

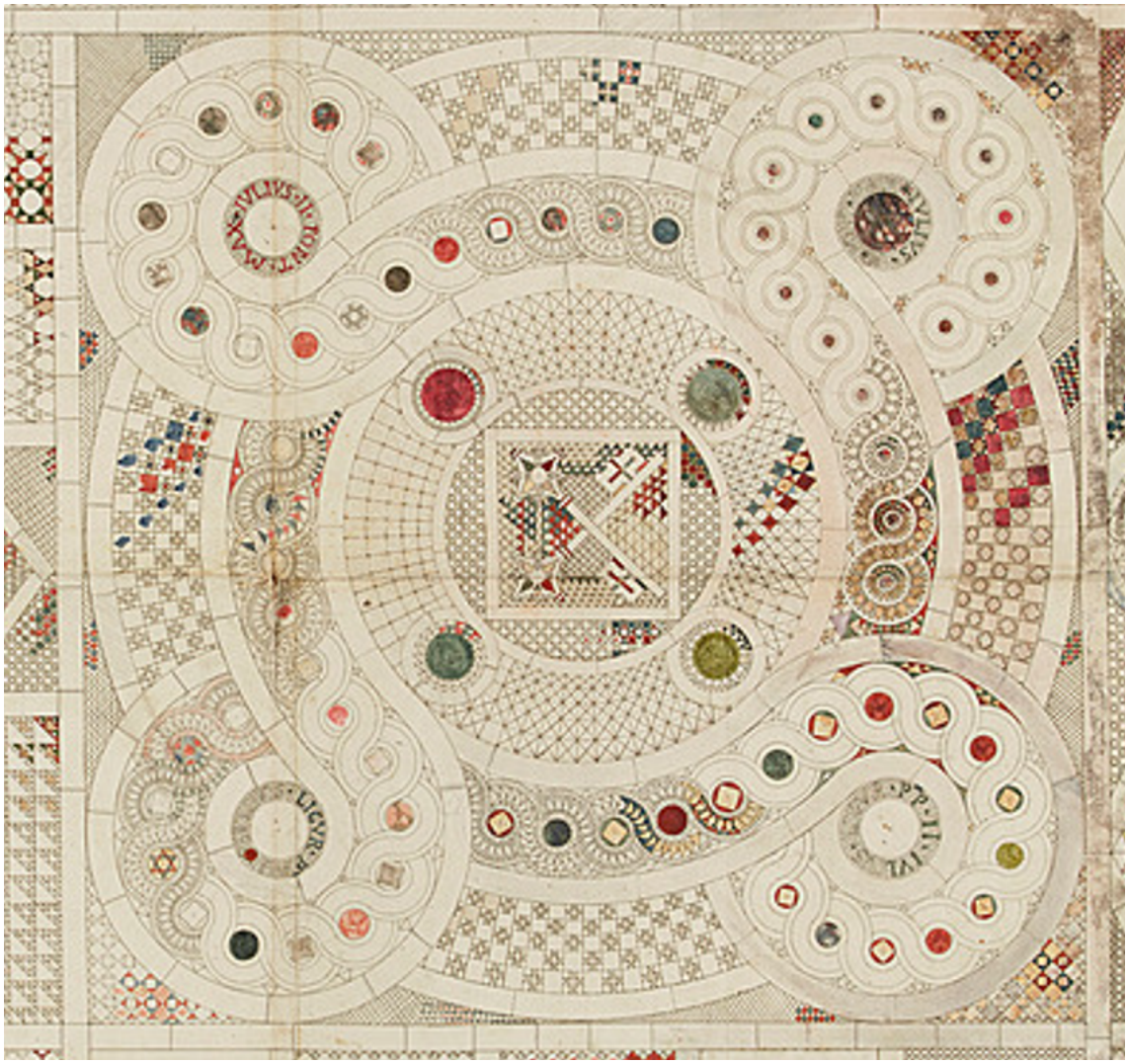

Figure 4. John Talman, Detail of Figure 3, showing plan of the marble floor of the Stanza della Segnatura with the name of Julius II. (Image in the Public Domain)

Ficino's Pythagorean theory of knowledge, mentioned previously, shows that associating natural elements and celestial spheres with intellectual processes and faculties of the mind was not unusual in the Renaissance.[41] The difficulty, though, in deciphering the programme of the Stanza della Segnatura is less the hermetic intentions of its deviser than our limited familiarity with the visual vocabulary of Platonic humanism, not to mention the misleading nomenclature of the titles of Raphael's frescoes. The four building blocks of Creation – a Platonico-Pythagorean conception of the four elements exemplified in the *Timaeus*, the book held by Plato in Raphael's *School of Athens* – were meant to be understood by visitors to the papal library as abstract ideals linked to domains of knowledge. This hierarchical network was arranged circularly with the following subjects:

[41] See note 30 above.

Vision of the Empyrean (Theology-Fire), *Breath of Divine Inspiration* (Poetry-Air), *The World's Diversity and Flux* (Philosophy-Water) and *The Return of Justice on Earth* (Jurisprudence-Earth).

The 'inharmonious harmony' of the four elements, a relationship often described in ancient texts by the term *discors concordia* (or *discordia concors*),[42] was applied to the faculties of the Stanza della Segnatura: each is both in harmony and discord with the others. Just as air, hot and moist, is linked to fire by their common quality of hotness but opposes fire's quality of dryness, or earth is cold like water but does not have its moisture, so each faculty of knowledge relates to and opposes its neighbours to create perfect harmony. At the same time, Raphael signalled the hierarchy of the elements and the faculties by using a variety of expressive devices and compositional effects. For example, the allegory of Philosophy, flanked by wingless *putti*, is looking toward the winged figures of Poetry and her *putti*, implying that the sublimity of poetic inspiration ranks higher than philosophical reason. Poetry herself is looking toward the divine revelation of Theology, the superior allegory flanked by winged *putti*, who is looking back at Poetry while pointing to the heavenly *Disputa*. In a similar spirit, since the lighter elements of fire and air share a hot quality and upward movement, Raphael represented the *Disputa* and *Parnassus* with immaterial, open-air settings, predominantly vertical axes and upward movements that convey an exalted state of mind. In contrast, the tripartite *Jurisprudence* (earth), with its heavily material structure, and the *School of Athens* (water), with its formal effects of flowing motion and horizontality,[43] are both conceived in imposing architectural settings.

[42] For example, Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book I, 428–33: 'For when moisture and heat unite, life is conceived, and from these two sources all living things spring. And, though fire and water are naturally at enmity, still heat and moisture produce all things, and this inharmonious harmony is fitted to the growth of life' ('*Quippe ubi temperiem sumpsere umorque calorque, concipount, et ab his oriuntur cuncta duobus; cumque sit ignis aquae pugnax, vapor umidus omnesres create, et discors concordia fetibus apta est*'); see Ovid, *Metamorphoses, Volume I: Books 1–8*, trans. by Frank Justus Miller, rev. by George Patrick Goold, Loeb Classical Library 42 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916).

[43] Christian Kleinbub contrasted the *School of Athens*'s formal horizontality and groundedness to the heavenward movement and spiritual impulse of the *Disputa*. He interpreted the former as a metaphor for the investigation of earthly issues, with a symbolic conception of depth leading the eye to a horizontal exploration of space and time; see Kleinbub, *Vision and the Visionary in Raphael* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2011), pp. 47–50.

Vision of the Empyrean – Fire

The all-important composition of Theology (fig. 5), characterised by a monumental vision of Heaven and the Holy Trinity, was a high-priority task of Raphael.[44] An astonishingly large number of surviving drawings for its subject (about fifty in number) testifies to the artist's preoccupation with it, not least because this was the first painting that visitors entering the Pope's library would see.[45] Its theme was programmatically matched with the highest element in the cosmic order, fire, as suggested by its gold-toned illumination and colouring, especially the pyramidical emanation of divine golden light in the form of celestial rays.[46]

The supernatural concept of heavenly fire was typically distinguished from the physical element of fire. Theologians and poets like Dante, for example, had conceived the fiery heavens as regions of eternal light governed by love, as opposed to the icy, frozen regions of the lowest Hell.[47] The assumption that divine fire occupied the world's highest realm, the so-called Empyrean Heaven, was a medieval commonplace that offered ground to the Platonized Christianism of Marsilio Ficino. To the humanist's syncretic mind, the beginning phrase of Genesis (1.1), 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth', was essentially repeated by Plato, who wrote that 'In beginning to construct the body of the All, God was making it of fire and earth' (*Timaeus*, 31b), thus Ficino identified Plato's 'fire' with 'heaven'.[48] Fire and earth were the primary substances of the Platonic

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[44] For the preeminent role of Theology among the four faculties, especially in comparison to its pendant, Philosophy, see Wickhoff, *Die Bibliothek Julius II*, pp. 53–54 and 63; Matthias Winner, 'Disputa und Schule von Athen', in *Raffaello a Roma. Il convegno del* 1983, ed. by Christoph L. Frommel and Matthias Winner (Rome: Edizioni dell'Elefante, 1986), pp. 29–45; Timothy Verdon, 'Pagans in the Church: The "School of Athens" in Religious Context', in *Raphael's 'School of Athens'*, ed. by Marcia B. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 114–30; Taylor, *Stanza della Segnatura*, pp. 120–35; and Kim Butler-Wingfield, 'Networks of Knowledge: Inventing Theology in the Stanza della Segnatura', *Studies in Iconography*, 38 (2017), pp. 174–221. For the stylistic primacy of the *Disputa* as the first monumental fresco of both Raphael and the High Renaissance, see Redig De Campos, *The 'Stanze' of Raphael*, pp. 12–14. For the chronological priority of Raphael's design process for the *Disputa*, see David Ekserdjian, 'La Stanza della Segnatura: dal disegno al dipinto', *Atti e studi: Accademia Raffaello*, 18, no. 1/2 (2019), pp. 9–34. Even if the *Disputa* fresco was completed later than the *School of Athens*, it was certainly started first; see Violini, *Raphael in the Vatican*, pp. 29–34.

[45] Shearman speculated that Raphael made approximately 300 drawings for the *Disputa*, but this may be an underestimate; see Shearman, 'The Organization of Raphael's Workshop', *Museum Studies* (Art Institute of Chicago), 10 (1983), p. 44.

[46] For the intensity of divine light in the *Disputa* and the abundance of devices delineated in gold-coloured paint such as golden rays and circular mandorlas, see Kleinbub, *The Visionary in Raphael*, pp. 30–34. For the symbolic function of golden light and colour in the *Disputa*, see Butler-Wingfield, *Inventing Theology*, pp. 194–96.

[47] Dante, *Paradiso*, I: 74: '*S'i' era sol di me quel che creasti novellamente, amor 'che ciel governi, tu 'l sai, che col tuo lume mi levasti*'. The Ninth Circle of Hell, which had Satan's dwelling in its central zone, was described by Dante as eternally frozen (*Inferno*, XXXII–XXXIV).

[48] Marsilio Ficino, *All Things Natural: Ficino on Plato's Timaeus*, trans. by Arthur Farndell (London: Shepheard-Walwyn, 2010), ch. 24, p. 40.

Creation, making the world's body visible and tangible, respectively, so the former was consistently identified by Ficino with the divine realm:

> But let us not be troubled by those who […] doubt that the heavens are fiery […] Nor should it be claimed that heat is the property of fire, since the less it is mingled with extraneous matter the less it burns. Rather should it be said that light is the property of fire, for the greatest its purity, the greater its brightness […] fire has its abode in the heavens, and there, by divine power, the fiery heat of the heavens is rendered harmless […] the heavens are indeed the true fire.[49]

Figure 5. Raphael, *Theology*, c. 1509–10, fresco, Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican Palace, Vatican City. (Image in the Public Domain)

Ficino followed Plato in describing the fiery Form as the heavenly kind of gods,[50] and the inflamed soul as reaching up to heaven to be absorbed in God[51] – ideas that had been already expressed by Dante in his monumental vision of the Empyrean Heaven inflamed with divine Love (*Paradiso*, XXX–XXXIII). Raphael may not have been familiar with the

[49] Ficino, *Ficino on Plato's Timaeus*, ch. 25–26, pp. 41–42.

[50] Plato, *Timaeus,* 39e–40a.

[51] Ficino notes that 'The goal of fire is the vault of highest heaven' ('*Finis ignis est ultimi caeli concavum*'), see Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, I (2001): Bk. II, Ch. VI, p. 11.

ideas of Ficino, but if he had engaged in discussion with theologians like Egidio da Viterbo, the most eminent Platonist in Julian Rome,[52] he might have become aware of the symbolical association between the geometrical body of the pyramid, the element of fire and the divine love that issued from the Father and the Son.[53] Both Marsilio and Egidio had followed Plato in relating the element of fire to the sense of vision, light rays and the geometrical pyramid. Such abstract associations are ubiquitous in late medieval texts, with a range from Beatrice's speech to Dante (*Paradiso*, V: 1–15), in which she refers to the 'fire of love' in which she burns and the never-ending light of love that now shines in Dante's intellect,[54] to the humanist Leon Battista Alberti's theory of the visual pyramid of sight.[55]

It has been often suggested that the two portraits of Dante in the Stanza della Segnatura, in which he is represented as a theologian and a poet, along with the sonnets that Raphael wrote on some of his studies for the *Disputa*, show that the painter was inspired by Dantesque ideas of light, vision and love.[56] In support of this opinion, the allegorical figure in Theology's *tondo* was surely inspired by Dante's Beatrice,[57] the idealised love of the author, who described her as crowned with olives and dressed in the symbolic colours of the theological virtues: a white veil that referred to the pureness of faith, a

[52] For the proposal that Egidio da Viterbo advised Raphael on the iconography of the Stanza della Segnatura, see Heinrich S. J. Pfeiffer, *Zur Ikonographie von Raffaels Disputa. Egidio da Viterbo und die christlich-platonische Konzeption der Stanza della Segnatura* (Rome: Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1975); Bram Kempers, 'Staatssymboliek in Rafaels Stanza della Segnatura', *Incontri: Rivista di Studi Italo-Nederlandesi*, 2 (1986/87), pp. 15–16; Most, *Reading Raphael*, pp. 169–71; Nicholas Temple, *Renovatio Urbis: Architecture, Urbanism and Ceremony in the Rome of Julius II* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2011), p. 233ff; and Butler-Wingfield, *Inventing Theology*, pp. 174–78 and 192–96. For Ficinian influences in the room's decoration, see Chastel, *Studi sul Rinascimento*, pp. 494–98.

[53] The Greek word *πυραμίς* ('pyramid') begins with the word *πυρ* ('fire'). In the *Timaeus*, Plato associated fire with the sense of vision (45b–c), and he assigned to it the geometrical form of the pyramid (56b). In a letter to Gabriele Della Volta from 1507, the humanist Egidio da Viterbo wrote: 'You know that the Pyramid is associated with fire by Plato, you know that divine love issues from the father and the son; when God is established above all other princes of the earth, he will fill them with love, which is the parent of all virtues; therefore Fire is correctly attributed to the Pyramid: in the first place so that it may penetrate the souls both of princes and of all other mortals, and secondly so that it will not simply cause divine matters to move, but will truly excite flagrant firestorms of love'. For a transcription and English translation of Egidio's letter (now in Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, MS. Cod. lat. 688, fols. 21v–22), see Ingrid Rowland, 'Render Unto Ceasar the Things Which are Ceasar's: Humanism and the Arts in the Patronage of Agostino Chigi', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 39, no. 4 (1986), pp. 710–11, n. 126.

[54] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by Allen Mandelbaum (London: Everyman's Library, 1995), *Paradiso*, V: 1–9.

[55] Leon Battista Alberti, *Della Pittura* (1435–36), Bk. I.

[56] See Martin Kemp, 'In the Light of Dante: Meditations on Natural and Divine Light in Piero della Francesca, Raphael, and Michelangelo', in *Ars naturam adiuvans; Festschrift für Matthias Winner*, ed. by Victoria von Flemming and Sebastian Schütze (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1996), pp. 169–70; Joost-Gaugier, *Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura*, pp. 70–71; and Butler-Wingfield, *Inventing Theology*, p. 203.

[57] A generally accepted idea originating from Passavant, *Raphael of Urbino*, p. 85.

green cape representing blissful hope, and a flaming red dress denoting loving charity (*Purgatorio*, XXX: 31–33).[58]

Overall, Raphael's conception of the heavenly *Disputa* as a revelation of Divinity in pyramidical form, with the central ray descending from the singular Godhead toward the Host and the Holy Trinity manifested in homocentric circles of divine light, was an essentially Dantesque revelation of the Divine. Yet the composition's main vertical axis, with its spectacular effect of upward movement, a true 'soaring upward as of a smoke offering',[59] conveyed with great success the heavenward impulse of the soul toward the immaterial realms.

Finally, but most importantly, it should be emphasised that the word '*focho*' (fire) was used nine times by Raphael – much more often than any other word – in the surviving drafts of sonnets that he wrote on various drawings for the *Disputa* (c. 1509–10), not to mention his use of words like '*sole*' (sun), '*luce*' (light), '*ardo*' (burn), '*ferventia*' (fever) and '*marzial furore*' (martial fury).[60] Such linguistic evidence demonstrates vividly Raphael's preoccupation with the element and conceptual qualities of fire during the design of this particular work. Even if the artist had a real woman in mind when he wrote his inner fire and burning love sonnets, his struggle to articulate his fiery passion ('*mio gran focho*'), as well as the comparison of his exalted, but concealed thoughts with the unutterable secrets that

[58] Dante's first encounter with Beatrice marks the moment of his transition from Purgatory to Paradise. The awed poet laments over the sudden departure of his guide, Virgil, a pagan who could not ascend with him to Paradise. At the same moment, he envisions Beatrice, a sublime allegory of theological revelation and love, who is about to guide him throughout the Heavens and toward the Empyrean: the dwelling-place of God.

[59] See Oskar Fischel, *Raphael*, trans. by Bernard Rackham, 2 vols (London: Kegan Paul, 1948), I, p. 232; see also note 43 above.

[60] The passages in question are the following: '*Tal che tanto ardo che ne mar ne fiumi spegniar potrian quell focho, ma non mi spiace poiche 'l mio ardor tanto di ben mi face ch' ardendo ognior piu d'arder me consumi*' (So that I burn so much that neither the sea nor the rivers could put out that fire, but I do not mind because my ardour does such good to me that by burning more and more it consumes me); '*E se quello altero almo in basso cede, vedrai che non fia a me ma al mio gran focho qual piu che gli altri in la ferventia esciede*' (And if this noble soul gives in below, you will see that it is not me (?) but my great fire that burns with fervour more than the others), the drawing with both verses is now in Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, inv. no. WA1846.187v; '*Adunqua tu sei sola alma felice In cui el cel tuta beleza pose che'l tien mio cor come in focho fenice*' (So you are the only happy soul in which the heavenly beauty is placed (?) so that you hold my heart as in a phoenix fire); '*che 'l mio cor arde qual nel focho fenice*', (that my heart burns like a phoenix in the fire), the drawing with both verses is now in Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, inv. no. WA1846.188 (the phrase '*vedrai che non fiamme ma al mio gran focho*' reappears in the same sheet as a reworking of a previous draft); '*Ma io restai pur vinto al mio gran focho che mi tormenta*' (But I still remained overcome by my great fire that torments me), the drawing with this verse is now in London, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, inv. Ff. 1–35. All translations were made by this author. Another verse, crossed out by Raphael, repeated the term 'fire' three times, but its meaning is unclear ('*E s'alcun tenp el focho portai ascoso el focho hor questo qui fia noto e 'l focho ascoso*'), Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, inv. no. WA1846.186. For full transcriptions of the original drafts and extensive commentary, see Shearman, *Raphael in Early Modern Sources*, I, pp. 130–43, doc. 1509–10/1. Also published online, <https://irds-project.org/doc/2023/>, <https://irds-project.org/doc/2029/>, <https://irds-project.org/doc/2031/>, <https://irds-project.org/doc/2033/>, <https://irds-project.org/doc/2034/> [all accessed 1 October 2023].

Saint Paul obtained during his ascension to the heavens (2 Corinthians 12: 2–4),[61] indicate Raphael's effort to convey the theological essence of the *Disputa* as an ascension to the fiery realms of divine light and love. And although the abundance of surviving drawings for his composition reveal that its iconography underwent modifications, Raphael's intent to convey an apocalyptic vision of heavenly hierarchies in pyramidical form was clear from the earliest stage of the design.[62] The final version, in which the addition of the monstrance on an altar resolved the compositional and thematic problem of unifying the realms of heaven and earth, further emphasised notions of devotional vision and theological revelation: various saintly figures raise their eyes or hands toward the Trinity, while Pope Gregory I (r. 590–604) (a disguised portrait of Julius II) and Pope Sixtus IV (r. 1471–84), the uncle of Julius II, are both dressed in gold vestments and fix their gaze between the Holy Spirit and the Host.

Breath of Divine Inspiration – Air

As the domain of Air was traditionally imagined below Fire, so the faculty of Poetry followed Theology in Raphael's scheme. A first symbolic clue is that the cheek of a winged *putto* in the ceiling roundel of Poetry is puffed up as if filled with air, a motif not to be found in the other three roundels. The inscriptions of the two *putti* of Poetry read *numine afflatur*, a motto inspired by the Cumaean Sibyl's evocation of prophetic inspiration in Virgil's *Aeneid* (VI: 50): *Adflata est numine quando iam propiore dei* ('since now she feels the nearer breath of deity'). Raphael's *numine afflatur* was translated by Herman Grimm as 'touched by the breath of God' and by Edgar Wind as 'moved by divine spirit/wind', the latter associating the faculty of Poetry with the element of air, as mentioned above.[63] The corresponding composition of *Parnassus* (fig. 6) forms a sublime soundscape centred around the divine music played by Apollo and the epic verses sung by Homer. Both figures are depicted with skyward postures that denote an audible form of divine inspiration. The emphasised blindness of Homer highlights his acoustic transcendence, as well as his

[61] '*Como non podde dir d'arcana dei paul como disceso fu dal cello, cusì el mio cor d'uno amoroso velo a ricoperto tuti i penser mei*', Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, inv. no. WA1846.187v. For a transcription, see Shearman, *Raphael in Early Modern Sources*, I, p. 132, doc. 1509–10/1; <https://irds-project.org/doc/2031/> [accessed 1 October 2023].

[62] The earliest surviving study for the *Disputa* is now in Windsor, Royal Collection Trust, inv. no. 12732 <https://www.rct.uk/collection/912732/a-study-for-the-left-half-of-the-disputa> [accessed 15 October 2023]. A second stage of design is documented in a sheet now in Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, inv. no. WA1846.183 <https://collections.ashmolean.org/collection/search/per_page/25/offset/75/sort_by/relevance/object/38067> [accessed 15 October 2023].

[63] For translations of *numine afflatur*, see Herman Grimm, *The Life of Raphael*, trans. by Sarah Holland Adams (Boston: Cupples and Hurd, 1886), p. 116; Joseph A. Crowe and Giovanni B. Cavalcaselle, *Raphael, His Life and Works*, 3 vols (London: John Murray, 1882–91), II (1890), p. 23; Wind, *The Four Elements*, p. 78; Bram Kempers, 'Words, Images and All the Pope's Men: Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura and the Synthesis of Divine Wisdom', in *History of Concepts: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by Iain Hampsher-Monk, Karin Tilmans and Frank van Vree (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), p. 154; and Taylor, *Stanza della Segnatura*, p. 112.

mastery of the oral tradition, while the nine Muses accompanying Apollo further convey states of ethereal lightness and audio ecstasy. Thus the essentially aural natures of poetry and music were translated visually by Raphael into an image of unparalleled harmony, pushing the limits of pictorial representation to new heights and to what could be described as a synesthetic experience of painted sounds and heard images.

Figure 6. Raphael, *Poetry*, 1511, fresco, Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican Palace, Vatican City. (Image in the Public Domain)

As the element of fire had been traditionally related to vision and sight, so air was related to hearing and sound. Plato and Aristotle had agreed that sounds are transmitted through the air and that the instrument of hearing consists of this particular element, a conclusion mentioned by Ficino who noted in a letter that 'the followers of Plato, in their scheme of the senses, match sight with fire, hearing with air'.[64] The idea probably dated back to Homer who had described the words of his protagonists as 'winged verses' (*ἔπεα πτερόεντα*),[65] not merely a poetic metaphor but rather a literal description of words as self-

[64] Marsilio Ficino, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, Vol. 7: *Being a Translation of Liber VII*, trans. by members of the Language Department of the London School of Economic Science (London: Shepheard-Walwyn, 2003), Letter 76, p. 85.

[65] Homer, *Iliad*, I.201; V.871; X.163; XXIII.557; *Odyssey*, I.122; II.363; XVI.7; XXII.311.

existent entities flying from the speaker's mouth to the listener's ears through the medium of air.[66] The whole concept was analysed by Ficino who consistently referred to the idealised aspect of air as musical melody and song.[67] He related hearing, acoustics and the medium of sound and music with the movement of air, and his theory of music's healing effects to body, mind and soul was inseparable from his conception of air and spirit.[68] In his most famous comparison of music with divine 'spirit', in the Commentary of Plato's *Timaeus*, Ficino recalled the Muses and Apollo, whose harmonic melodies and hymns seize the soul through hearing:

> Musical harmony is produced in the middle element [air] and it reaches the ears through movement […] harmony moves the body through the airy nature which has been set in motion; through the purified air it strikes the airy spirit which knits soul and body together; through its influence it affects the sense at the same time as the soul; through its meaning it acts upon the mind; finally, through the very movement of the subtle air it strongly penetrates; through its tempering power it sweetly soothes; through a similar quality it pervades with a wonderful pleasure; through its nature, animate as well as material, it simultaneously seizes and draws to itself the whole man. And certainly if someone presented harmonies to the hearing with as much of the art and diligence of the Muses as there is natural art and care in the presentation of flavours to the taste or of soft things to the touch, we would undoubtedly recognize that Apollo seizes the soul by melody much more than Bacchus seizes the taste by wine or Venus the touch by wantonness. Moreover, when Plato represents the Maker of the world as one who speaks both by reasoning with himself and by commanding everything else, he considers the utterance itself, like the highly musical hymn of Apollo, to be the origin both of the world soul and of the body. He also believes that the soul which is born therefrom strikes the heavenly lyre with the same musical rhythm.[69]

Back to Raphael's *Parnassus*, the scene's airy loftiness has garnered scholarly praise through the centuries. Vasari saw the beauty of its figures as conveying 'a true breath of divinity', adding that 'one almost sees the leaves of the trees quivering in the sweetest auras'.[70] The seventeenth-century art theorist Giovanni Pietro Bellori noted that 'Apollo […] is softening the air with his sweet sounds',[71] Gombrich characterised the composition as an ideal visualisation of *numine afflatur*,[72] and Oskar Fischel described it as set in soft, rarefied air,

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[66] See Paolo Vivante, 'On Homer's Winged Words', *The Classical Quarterly*, 25 (1975), pp. 1–12.

[67] Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, ed. and trans. by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998), Chapter III, XXIV, p. 30.

[68] Ficino, *Ficino on Plato's Timaeus*, ch. 62, p. 143: 'Sound is a vibration of air, flowing through the ears into the veins that proceed from the head to the liver, and this is how hearing occurs. A swift movement strikes the hearing strongly with a high note, while a slow movement soothes it with a low note'.

[69] Ficino*, Ficino on Plato's Timaeus*, ch. 29, pp. 52–53.

[70] Vasari, *Vite*, IV, p. 170: '*ne' quali si conosce per la loro verdezza quasi il tremolare delle foglie per l'aure dolcissime* […] *nel quale pare che spiri veramente un fiato di divinità nella bellezza delle figure*'.

[71] Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Descrizzione delle Imagine Dipinte da Rafaelle d'Urbino nelle Camere del Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano* (Rome: G.G. Komarek, 1695), p. 23: '*Ecco Apolline stesso, che distende l'arco su le fonore corde, e molce l'aure co' foavi accenti*'.

[72] Gombrich, *Stanza della Segnatura*, p. 91.

with its figures enjoying an 'airy' free movement reminiscent of Mount Purgatory with its *aura dolce* (*Purgatorio*, XXVIII: 7) in Dante's earthly Paradise.[73] One further observes that the garments and hair of three Muses are blown by a sweet mountain breeze, most spectacularly the garment of the Muse Melpomene who barely touches the ground next to Homer – her figure was initially designed by Raphael as literally floating in the air.[74] The ethereal effect of *Parnassus* was initially also conveyed by flying *putti* who are distributing laurels while spiralling in the air, an abandoned idea that survived in an engraved composition by Marcantonio Raimondi (c.1480–c.1534) after Raphael.[75] What is more, the northern window framing *Parnassus* allowed fresh breezes to enter the Stanza della Segnatura from Mount Vatican, a sacred site where Apollo had been imagined to prophesise and play his lyre in antiquity. Renaissance scholars perceived northern air as light and pure, therefore Raphael used this condition to create a sensational interplay of natural effects and to enhance the informed visitor's contemplation of the archetypal elements and faculties in the library of Julius II.

The World's Diversity and Flux – Water

Whereas the upward-reaching and invisible elements of Creation were allegorised by Raphael through immaterial settings in the open air, the downward and heavy elements of water and earth were abstractly conceived within remarkable material structures. What distinguishes the so-called *School of Athens* (fig. 7) formally and thematically from the other three compositions is the minimal number of static figures and the overall effect of buzzing activity, flowing motion and harmonic discord. Most of its figures engage in cognitive and physical activities: rushing into the scene or exiting from it, climbing stairs or reclining on them, gesturing intensely, debating and arguing, an overall extraordinary variety of human mindsets and emotions. This remarkable fluidity of form and content culminates in the rather comical figure of the Cynic philosopher Diogenes depicted in the middle of the scene in the pose of a reclining river god.[76] More importantly, heaven-bound Plato points his finger to the sky, connecting his poetic philosophy and noble frenzy to airy *Parnassus*, whereas earthbound Aristotle makes a restrained downward gesture that relates the rational sobriety of his theories to the earthy *Jurisprudence*. This reading of the central figures of Plato and Aristotle was an ingenious insight by Edgar Wind, who demonstrated Raphael's visualisation of *Concordia Platonis et Aristotelis* through the interconnectedness of

[73] Fischel, *Raphael*, p. 88.

[74] Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, inv. no. WA1846.182.

[75] See <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/345269> [accessed 3 October 2023]. Vasari's description of *Parnassus* (*Vite*, IV, pp. 170–71) relied partly on a print after this composition. Examination of the engraved subject shows that it was based on an early composition of *Parnassus* (c. 1509–10); see Shearman, *Unexecuted Projects for the Stanze*, pp. 158–59.

[76] The centrality of Diogenes is even more pronounced in the surviving Ambrosiana cartoon of Raphael for the *School of Athens* (c. 1509–10) due to the initial absence of the figure of philosopher Heraclitus.

faculties and elements of nature.[77] Essentially the same idea was further conveyed by Raphael's choice of cool colours for the clothes of Aristotle (brown and blue) in juxtaposition to the warm colours of Plato (light purple and red).

Figure 7. Raphael, *Philosophy*, c. 1510–11, fresco, Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican Palace, Vatican City. (Image in the Public Domain)

Unlike the saintly figures in the *Disputa*, with their cognitive consensus, the figures in the *School of Athens* represent a pluralistic diversity of human natures and opinions. Astonishing as it may sound, the personality types and attitudes that Raphael depicted in this fresco have been never specified: they include argumentative discourse and aggression, scholarly melancholy and envy, secrecy, sloth, elderly fatigue and youthful enthusiasm. Further inspection of how the figures are grouped reveals a homogeneous distribution of the traditional four humours and temperaments: the arguing, war-like figures on the top left, led by an irascible Socrates, are conceived of as hot-blooded cholerics, while the elderly and sluggish philosophers on the top right, including the Cynic Diogenes, are indifferent, chilled phlegmatics. The secretive scholars of the Pythagorean circle in the left

[77] See Branca, *Wind's Raphael Papers*, pp. 68–80.

foreground are sunk in melancholy poses of deep study and contemplation, whereas the youthful, extrovert and courtly figures at the right bottom are sanguine, the most desirable of the four temperaments. Last, the symmetrically grouped Plato and Aristotle, the most dignified philosophers centred between the extremities of human nature, represent the ideal of well-tempered individuals without humoural excesses.[78]

As water is the most dispersed and fluid element, the *School* conveys a state of natural diversity and flux. This worldly realm of humoural passions can be only moderated by the calming harmony of Apollo's music and the prudence of Minerva's intellect (these two pagan deities oversee the composition). The defects of nature are further highlighted by the aquatic subjects of the *School*'s lower fictive reliefs: a triton raping a water nymph and sea monsters attacking a man.[79] A third relief depicts a battle of men, and all of these scenes are overshadowed by the aforementioned fictive statues of Apollo and Minerva, which represent the power of reason over the passions of the soul.[80]

It is also worth noting that Plato described water as the most complexly structured element,[81] and Ficino associated scientific matters with water, as above mentioned.[82] The latter association can be explained by the fact that the world of science investigates the natural causes,[83] a mutable realm characterised by contradiction and inconsistency. One might then argue that Raphael's thematic intentions for the *School of Athens* may have been misunderstood from the outset. To the early modern mind, the *School* glorified the ideals of classical antiquity and pagan wisdom, but Julius II and his curial humanists could have seen it as an intellectually vain realm of contradictory ideas and unresolved disputes.[84] This proposal was made by Paul Taylor who also noted that the reading loans from the Vatican Library for the period 1475–1547 show that Vatican scholars had surprisingly little interest

[78] Further discussion of this issue exceeds the purpose of this article. For Raphael's innovative humoural scheme in the *School of Athens*, see Konstantinos Gravanis, 'Sources, Functions and Meaning of Raphael's Imagery in the Vatican Stanze' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Kent, 2022), pp. 120–41.

[79] The identification of sea monsters in a fictive relief below Minerva was made during the latest restoration of the *School of Athens* in 1995–96; see Arnold Nesselrath, *Raphael's School of Athens* (Vatican City: Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 1996), p. 91, fig. 70.

[80] For this interpretation, see Bellori, *Descrizzione*, p. 21.

[81] Plato, *Timaeus*, 55 a–e.

[82] See note 30 above.

[83] The inscription held by the *putti* of Raphael's Philosophy reads 'CAUSARUM COGNITIO' (Knowledge of causes).

[84] Paul Taylor argued that the *School of Athens* was meant to mock rather than celebrate Philosophy. Given the superiority of the saintly *Disputa* over the human morals of the *School*, the latter's expressive figures may have been intended not as idealised exemplars of human wisdom but as foolish exemplars of human presumption. In other words, the *School* should be seen from the perspective of medieval theology rather than Neoplatonism; see Taylor, *Stanza della Segnatura*, pp. 132–35. The plausibility of this interesting hypothesis is weakened by its overemphasis on Julius II's possible role in the formation of Raphael's complex iconography, as well as by the purely theological reading of the *School of Athens* that overlooked its Platonico-Pythagorean aspects.

in philosophy during the time of Julius II, a fact which contradicts the seeming celebration of Philosophy in Raphael's *School of Athens*.[85]

The Return of Justice on Earth – Earth

The remarkably animated world of Philosophy adjoins the static realm of Jurisprudence (fig. 8), a tripartite composition painted on a window wall that faces the upper south façade of the Pappagalli Courtyard. The naturalistic subjects of Jurisprudence are wholly contained in painted architecture and they relate to foundations of law and justice. These concepts are further exemplified by two grisaille episodes under the window embrasures (c. 1511): the *Judgement of the Lawgiver Zaleucus* and *The Doctrine of the Two Swords* (Luke 22:38). The main wall's lunette depicts three of the Cardinal Virtues (Fortitude, Prudence, Temperance), over whom stands the roundel's fourth and greatest Virtue, Justice. The lower walls represent the *Delivery of the Decretals to Pope Gregory IX* (the first collection of canon law for the Catholic church) and *Justinian the Great Receiving the Pandects* (the codification of Roman law). These landmarks of legal history are the only subjects in the room that depict historical episodes and realistic portraits of contemporary members of the papal court instead of idealised settings and otherworldly divinities.[86]

Although earth was regarded as the lowest element and body in the cosmic order, it was also perceived as the unmoving centre of the universe, hence, *Jurisprudence* can be

[85] The records of book loans in the Vatican Library from the period of Sixtus IV (r. 1471–84) until that of Paul III (r. 1534–49) are today in BAV, MS. Vat. lat. 3964, 3966; see Maria Bertòla (ed.), *I due primi registri di prestito della Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana: codici latini 3964, 3966* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1942). A statistical comparison of scholarly interests per faculty during eight different pontificates indicates that interest in philosophy (especially Platonic philosophy) was at its lowest during the pontificate of Julius II (r. 1503–13). For example, no books of Plato, Proclus or Porphyry were borrowed from the Vatican Library during that period; see Taylor, *Stanza della Segnatura*, p. 103, n. 10 and p. 119, n. 142; and idem., 'Adriano Castellesi and the "School of Athens"', in *Mantova e il rinascimento italiano: Studi in onore di David S. Chambers*, ed. by Philippa Jackson and Guido Rebecchini (Mantua: Sometti, 2011), pp. 180–82. That said, the incomplete inventories of Julius's volumes (BAV, MS. Vat. lat. 3966, fols. 111r–115r) include quite a few philosophical works, namely, Latin versions of Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*, a commentary on Aristotle's *On the Soul*, the *Lives of the Philosophers* by Diogenes Laertius, two ethical treatises by Cicero and one by Seneca, a Platonist work by Maximus of Tyre, a philosophical work on kingship by Thomas Aquinas and a collection of philosophical dialogues by Petrarch; see Taylor, *Stanza della Segnatura*, p. 118.

[86] The *Delivery of the Decretals to Pope Gregory IX* includes portraits of no less than three Popes: Julius II, Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici (later Leo X) and Cardinal Alessandro Farnese (later Paul III). The last two are shown as throne assistants to Julius II; see Vasari, *Vite*, IV, p. 173.

viewed as the conceptual centre of the room's decoration.[87] Earth was the 'centre' of the world, but the centre of the earth, according to the Catholic worldview, was none other than the Pope himself, a fixed point of supreme authority and the guarantor of world order through the emperor's execution of the Pope's God-given judgement. The hierarchical predominance of the Pope on the earthly plane was apparently conceived by Raphael as a reflection of the heavenly order of the adjacent *Disputa*. Also, canon law was believed to have divine origins, so these two points explain why the seated Gregory IX (portrayed by Julius II) is orientated toward the *Disputa*.

Figure 8. Raphael and collaborator, *Jurisprudence*, 1511, fresco, Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican Palace, Vatican City. (Image in the Public Domain)

[87] To quote Michael Rohlmann, 'the Justice wall is the conceptual centre of the whole decoration […] it is about the just ruler who has at his side the wisdom of philosophers, the inspiration of poets, and the knowledge of theologians' (English translation by this author); see Julian Kleimann and Michael Rohlmann, *Italian Frescoes: High Renaissance and Mannerism*, trans. by Steven Lindberg (New York: Abbeville Press, 2004), p. 133. For the central role of Justice in the Stanza della Segnatura, see also Nancy Rash-Fabbri, 'A Note on the Stanza della Segnatura', *Gazzette des Beaux-Arts*, 94 (1979), pp. 97–104; Michael Rohlmann, 'Raffael und die Tugenden Julius' II', in *Leitbild Tugend. Die Virtus*-Darstellungen, ed. by Thomas Weigel and Joachim Poeschke (Münster: Rhema, 2013), pp. 179–83; and Cosgriff, *The Library of Julius II*, pp. 84–89.

As far as compositional planning was concerned, the disruptive window in the southern wall forced Raphael to sacrifice the unity of *Jurisprudence* by splitting it into three parts. This demotivating situation also led him to delegate the problematic left sector to a collaborator or an assistant,[88] hence, *Jurisprudence* is the least aesthetically appealing of the room's main frescoes. Nevertheless, its iconography forms a fundamental part of Raphael's four-fold programme and signifies its conclusive meaning, namely, a visual celebration and unification of all knowledge in the service of justice.[89] The notional correspondence between the faculty of Jurisprudence and the element of earth is denoted by the cornucopia on the keystone, a symbol of abundance, as well as by the figure of Julius II sitting on a throne under the image of Lady Justice. This arrangement seems to imply the fulfilment of the Virgilian prophecy (*Eclogue* IV: 6) of the return of the maiden of Justice on earth (*Iam redit et virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna*) and the establishment of a new golden age of Saturn under the ecclesiastical and legislative authority of Julius II.[90] In this supposedly providential era, the second Julius (Ceasar) would combine the roles of a Pope and a Ceasar by uniting and presiding over all acts of jurisdiction in the monumental Palace of Justice, a contemporary project that Bramante was designing for Julius but which was abandoned in 1511.[91]

Thus Raphael and his iconographic adviser(s) composed a monumental concord of four faculties of knowledge in notional correspondence with the four elements of nature, an admirable conception of the papal library's intellectual microcosm as a reflection of the archetypal macrocosm.[92] In the hands of a lesser painter, such a didactic and elaborate scheme could have gone awkwardly wrong, but Raphael had by now become a great master of monumental narrative painting; an artist capable of making such a 'universal' programme almost not looking like a programme at all.

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[88] For an attribution of *Justinian the Great Receiving the Pandects* to Lorenzo Lotto (1480–1556), see Arnold Nesselrath, 'Lorenzo Lotto in the Stanza della Segnatura', *The Burlington Magazine*, 142 (2000), pp. 4-12.

[89] See Rash-Fabbri, *Stanza della Segnatura*, pp. 98–101.

[90] For the interpretation of Raphael's *Jurisprudence*, and of the Stanza della Segnatura as a whole, as the return of a golden age of justice in Julian Rome, see Rash-Fabbri, *Stanza della Segnatura*, pp. 101–03. For a proposal that *Jurisprudence* was inspired by the concept of justice in Plato's *Republic*, see Wind, *Platonic Justice*, pp. 75–79.

[91] For Bramante's Palace of Justice and the promotion of Julius's rule as a new golden age of justice and peace, see Rash-Fabbri, *Stanza della Segnatuta*, p. 103; and Temple, *Renovatio Urbis*, pp. 94–125. For the concord of canon law and civil law in Raphael's Jurisprudence, see Joost-Gaugier, *Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura*, pp. 136–46.

[92] A not dissimilar philosophical journey through the four elements was proposed by Erwin Panofsky as the subject of the iconographic cycle of Antonio da Correggio (1489-1534) in the Camera di San Paolo, Parma (c. 1518–19): 'the journey through the four elements which was so often thought of as a kind of purgatory enabling the soul to ascend to higher spheres. 'TRANSIVIMVS PER IGNEM ET AQUAM' we read on one of Gioanna da Piacenza's own fireplaces […] (which) describes the purification by air and water, earth and fire'; see Panofsky, *Camera di San Paolo*, p. 99.

The Unity of Raphael's Scheme and His Early Designs for the Stanza di Eliodoro

The four parts of the Stanza della Segnatura cannot be studied in isolation from one another, since the removal of one element causes the whole conception to fall apart. Every single part of Raphael's *opera grande* is related to and engaged in dialogue with the others, reflecting a unified pictorial conception that produced 'a symphony of four movements, attuned to one another and sounding as a single whole'.[93] For this very reason, I must address the still popular but entirely erroneous idea that the invention of the tripartite *Jurisprudence* was a last-minute addition to Raphael's scheme after the return of Julius II to Rome (26 June 1511) wearing his famous beard.

Marielene Putscher first proposed that a Raphaelesque drawing of the *Opening of the Seventh Seal* (Revelation 8: 1–6) featuring a beardless Julius II – a long-familiar composition that had always been related to Raphael's plans for the adjoining Stanza di Eliodoro – may have been intended instead for the southern wall of the Stanza della Segnatura.[94] This hypothesis, which undermined Neoplatonic interpretations of the Stanza della Segnatura as a whole, was endorsed on stylistic and iconographic grounds by Shearman, who persuaded the majority of scholars that a discarded Last Judgement project had been intended for the Segnatura but was replaced in mid-1511 by *Jurisprudence*.[95]

A decisive piece of evidence against Shearman's conjecture was provided by the publication of two drawings in 1983: the back side of the *Seventh Seal* drawing in question, not visible since the late nineteenth century, revealed an early sketch of Raphael for the Stanza di Eliodoro's *Mass of Bolsena* (c. 1512) featuring a beardless Julius II;[96] and the copy of an early version of the Stanza di Eliodoro's *Expulsion of Heliodorus from the Temple* (c. 1511–12) revealed another beardless portrait of Julius II.[97] These sheets documented that Raphael's design process for the frescoes of the Stanza di Eliodoro started before 26 June 1511, the day that Julius appeared in Rome with a beard. Consequently, in a revised treatment of functions and decorations of Raphael's Stanze, Shearman went silent about the *Opening of the Seventh Seal*,[98] a mute acknowledgement of his error that has yet to deter scholars from recycling it.

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[93] Fischel, *Raphael*, p. 79.

[94] See Marielene Putscher, *Raffaels Sixtinische Madonna. Das Werk und seine Wirkung* (Tübingen: Hopfer, 1955), pp. 83 and 225. This drawing is now in Paris, Louvre Museum, Department of Graphic Arts, inv. no. 3866r.

[95] See Shearman, *Unexecuted Projects for the Stanze*, pp. 164–66.

[96] See the catalogue entry on this drawing by Françoise Monbeig-Goguel, in André Chastel, Sylvie Béguin and Françoise Viatte (eds.), *Hommage à Raphäel*: vol. II, *Raphael dans le collections françaises,* exh. cat., Paris (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaeux, 1983), no. 86.

[97] Paris, Louvre Museum, Department of Graphic Arts, inv. no. 3924; see the catalogue entries on this drawing by Monbeig-Goguel, in *Hommage à Raphäel*, no. 125; and Dominique Cordellier and Bernadette Py, *Raffaello e i suoi: Disegni di Raffaello e della sua cerchia*, exh. cat., Rome (Paris: Academie de France Carte Segrete, 1992), p. 167, no. 59.

[98] See Shearman, *The Apartments of Julius II and Leo X*, pp. 15–37.

It has been long demonstrated that the window frame of the *Seventh Seal* drawing not only matches with the southern window of the Stanza di Eliodoro but also is incompatible with the much more disruptive southern window of the Stanza della Segnatura, especially with the disconnected sector at the bottom-left area of this wall.[99] In addition, the dramatic narrative and devotional function of the drawing's subject are entirely appropriate to the Eliodoro stories of Raphael but strikingly dissimilar to his more static and intellectual paintings in the Segnatura room. Its subject is certainly not bookish, nor it is related to the faculty of Jurisprudence as Shearman had proposed,[100] which explains why scholars who denied Shearman's library hypothesis happily endorsed his proposal for an abandoned Segnatura episode of the Apocalypse.[101] Last, Raphael would not have conceived two theological subjects for the four faculties of Julius's library, let alone compose two different compositions (the *Disputa* and the *Opening of the Seventh Seal*) that were partially inspired by the Last Judgement.[102]

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[100] As noted by Jones and Penny, the distinction between canon and civil law in Raphael's two historical scenes is already implied by the roundel above with two winged *putti* and two wingless *putti*, see Jones and Penny, *Raphael*, p. 80.

[101] See Kempers, *Rafaels Stanza della Segnatura*, pp. 9–10; and Vincenzo Farinella, *Alfonso I d'Este, le immagini e il potere; da Ercole de' Roberti a Michelangelo* (Milan: Officina Libraria, 2014), pp. 361–63.

[102] For the reliance of the *Disputa*'s upper half on previous images of the Last Judgement with Christ in the centre, see Gombrich, *Stanza della Segnatura*, p. 98; and Jones and Penny, *Raphael*, p. 60.

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