

su Vite del
Francini

Vasari's *Vite* as a Collaborative Project*

Charles Hope

It is generally taken for granted that Vasari himself wrote almost all the text of both editions of the *Vite*, the Torrentiniana of 1550 and the Giuntina of 1568. Yet it is well known that he was given information by other people, especially for the second edition; and it is also very frequently pointed out that neither edition is written in a consistent style.¹ If they are discussed at all, the inconsistencies are normally either blamed on the intervention of various editors, such as Paolo Giovio or Vincenzo Borghini (although the usual role of editors is to make style more uniform), or they are seen as the result of a deliberate decision by Vasari himself. In favor of the notion that Vasari was the sole author is the fact that his name alone appears on the title page, and that, although acknowledging the help of friends in the preparation of both editions, he does not explicitly credit anyone else with writing any of the text, apart from Giovan Battista Adriani for the letter on ancient art added to the Giuntina, and a *gentiluomo* (actually Giovan Battista Cini) for the description of the *entrata* of Giovanna d'Austria, also in the Giuntina.² The argument is not very strong, since it was standard practice in the sixteenth century for books to appear under the name of a single author, and the role of collaborators was not generally acknowledged in the way that would now be considered appropriate. Fortunately, two fundamental tools now exist that allow us to investigate the text in new ways: one is the edition of

* The present article originally appeared in Italian (Hope, 2005). I am grateful to the Scuola Normale Superiore for permission to republish it here; and I have taken the opportunity to add a few references in the footnotes. Aspects of the argument have been developed by me in four other articles: Hope, 2007; Hope, 2008; Hope, 2010a; Hope, 2010b. For a negative response to the original article, and to Frangenberg, 2002, see Ginzburg, 2010, 21 ('A confermare l'opportunità di ragionare ancora sulle *Vite* sono anche i recenti tentativi di screditamento del loro valore e del loro significato, che seppure isolati non possono non destare preoccupazione per l'autorevolezza delle sedi da cui provengono'). Ginzburg dates the conception of the *Vite* to 1538–42, but does not explain how her ideas about Vasari's intentions in the early 1540s can be reconciled with the evidence contained in his book about the type of information that he was collecting before 1546.

¹ See esp. Scoti-Bertinelli, 1905, 157–223; Kallab, 1908, 429–454; Nencioni, 1954, 210–212. I owe this last reference to Michael Hirst.

² For Cini, see Lorenzoni, 1912, 62–69.

the *Lives* by Paolo Barocchi and Rosanna Bettarini, with the texts of the *Torrentiniana* and the *Giuntina* on the same page;³ the other is the Vasari program produced by the Scuola Normale.⁴ Without these tools I would not have been able to do the research whose conclusions are outlined in this chapter.

In his autobiography in the *Giuntina*, Vasari recalled that the idea of writing a collection of artists' lives had been proposed to him in Rome while he was painting the Cancellaria, that is to say in 1546.⁵ This account has often been questioned, mainly because some of those whom he claimed were present on that occasion were either dead or not in Rome, but also because, in the letter to the artists and readers in the *Torrentiniana*, and in a letter to Cosimo I written immediately after this edition was published, he stated that the book was the result of ten years' work.⁶ In a sense, both statements about the chronology of the book are true. The information that Vasari provided in the *Torrentiniana* about art in Bologna, Venice, and Naples must in part at least be based on his own knowledge of these cities, gained during visits to each of them of slightly less than a year between late 1539 and the autumn of 1545.⁷ Yet it is evident from what Vasari tells us in the *Torrentiniana* that at that time he could not have been carrying out systematic research for a collection of artists' Lives. His emphasis is on recording works, but he provides almost no biographical information, even when he could easily have discovered it, as in the case of Lotto, who was living in Venice when he was there in 1542 and who was a friend of Sansovino; and what little he tells us is usually wrong. Most of the works listed come from a small number of important churches; but subjects and precise location are seldom recorded completely and accurately, and there are many glaring omissions. Thus Vasari says virtually nothing about Venetian sculpture, and nothing at all about Venetian architecture. To judge from the text of the *Torrentiniana*, on his travels Vasari made notes about paintings that he had seen in public buildings, especially churches, sometimes just recording the name of the artist, sometimes noting a single striking figure. Given that there were no guidebooks for any of the cities he visited, this would have been a natural thing to do; and it had an obvious parallel with the notes that Marcantonio Michiel made for various cities he visited in North Italy.⁸ But if he had been planning to use these notes for a book—something for which, after all, there was no precedent—he would surely have been much more systematic and more diligent.

There is one section of the *Torrentiniana* that does not fit with this theory, the *Life of Francia*, which is one of the most detailed, comprehensive and accurate biographies in the whole of Parts 1 and 2. Not only does it include several dates of individual works, something very unusual in the book, but it also incorporates the inscription on a medal as well as references to works of art that had been destroyed

long before Vasari ever visited Bologna. The biography is clearly based on detailed and diligent historical research. This could be explained in one of two ways: either Vasari himself was passionately interested in Francia, far more so than in any Florentine painter of the fifteenth century, and did the research himself; or else this section was supplied by someone else. The second alternative seems by far the more plausible, especially as this *Life* includes a number of expressions, for example that such-and-such a picture showed the Madonna with two saints "*per lato*," that appear nowhere else in the book; in other *Lives* instead, we find the expression "*da lato*." There are other passages in the *Torrentiniana* which must also have been provided by others, such as the long description of Palazzo Doria in Genoa, a city which Vasari never visited, and references to works by Pordenone and Bernardino Gatti in Piacenza.⁹

All this suggests that the project of the book did indeed arise in Rome in 1546, and that Vasari incorporated material that he had collected on his travels for another purpose since about 1540. This is consistent with what he says both in the autobiography and in the letter to the "artists and readers" in the *Torrentiniana*. But Kallab argued that there is so much about Rome in the *Torrentiniana* that Vasari would not have had time to assemble it in the summer of 1546, before his departure for Florence in October.¹⁰ Much of this information is contained in the *Lives* of Antonio da Sangallo, Giulio Romano, Sebastiano, and Perino. Antonio died at Terni on 28 September 1546, less than a month before Vasari's departure, and the other three after he had left. He therefore had no reason to collect information about Giulio, Sebastiano or Perino while he was in Rome, since the *Torrentiniana* only includes the *Lives* of artists already dead, apart from Michelangelo and the blind Benedetto da Rovezzano. This implies that the material about these three, and perhaps also about Antonio da Sangallo, was collected by someone else, after Vasari returned to Florence. Corroboration of this is provided by the fact that these biographies contain information that should have been included in the *Lives* of Michelangelo and Raphael, but was not. Thus the fact that Sebastiano prepared the wall of the *Last Judgment* for painting in oils comes only in the *Life* of Sebastiano; the competition involving Raphael's *Transfiguration* and Sebastiano's *Raising of Lazarus* is mentioned only in the *Life* of Sebastiano; and it is in this *Life*, and in that of Peruzzi, that we find a reference to Raphael's *Galatea*, a work not mentioned in the *Life* of Raphael himself.

If we exclude the *Lives* of Giulio, Sebastiano and Perino, together with that of Antonio da Sangallo, then the amount of information about Rome in the *Torrentiniana* is much more limited. There is a detailed description of the Sistine ceiling, which seems to be based, at least in part, on engravings, since not all the prophets and sibyls are identified, even though there is an inscription beneath each one. Likewise, there is a description of the Stanzas, which again is partly based on prints, and partly on direct observation.¹¹ The fifteenth-century stories in the

³ Vasari, 1966–87 (referred to below as Vasari-BB).

⁴ See <<http://biblio.cribecu.sns.it/vasari/consultazione/Vasari/indice.html>>.

⁵ Vasari, 1967, 8: 236–238; Vasari-BB, 6: 389–390.

⁶ Vasari, 1986, 915; Vasari-BB, 6: 409; Frey and Frey, 1923–40, 1: 270.

⁷ Vasari was in Bologna from July 1539 to March 1540 (Frey and Frey, 1923–40, 1: 101), in Venice from December 1541 to August 1542 (*ibid.*, 111), and in Naples from late October 1544 to September or October 1545 (*ibid.*, 133, 161).

⁸ Frimmel, 1888.

⁹ Vasari, 1986, 745 (Piacenza), 747, 865–868 (Palazzo Doria); Vasari-BB, 4: 430–401, 434, and 5: 137–142. The information was almost certainly provided by Anton Francesco Doni: see Hope, 2010b, 33.

¹⁰ Kallab, 1908, 436–437.

¹¹ Wood, 1988.

THE ASHGATE RESEARCH COMPANION TO GIORGIO VASARI

Sistine Chapel are identified by subject, but not described in any detail. Beyond that, there are references of an unsystematic kind to works of art in about eleven churches in central Rome, which seem for the most part to have been based on direct observation, although some information was available in written sources accessible to Vasari, such as Albertini's guidebook and the notes of the Anonimo Magliabechiano, and there is a long list of facade frescoes in the centre of the city, mostly in the Life of Polidoro and Maturino.¹² All this material could easily have been assembled by someone walking around Rome, with a notebook, over a period of two or three days. Equally significant are the omissions. Vasari did not record anything at Santa Maria Maggiore or the Lateran, and he did not even take detailed notes, for example, at St. Peter's.

In short, everything confirms that Vasari, as he implies in the autobiography, began systematic research for the book no earlier than the summer of 1546, and that the writing of the text was begun after his return to Florence in October. The bulk of it had been written when he went to Rimini around the end of September 1547.¹³ The *Torrentiniana* amounts to almost 300,000 words. If Vasari wrote it himself, it would mean that, while continuing to work as a painter, he wrote about nine times as fast as a diligent UK doctoral student with a computer, about fourteen times as fast as Cellini, and about twenty times as fast as Bellori. For someone who had no experience as an author, this is surely unrealistic.

If one examines the text in detail, the idea that it is by one author becomes even harder to accept, because the individual Lives are so different from another, in style, historical approach, descriptive method, and knowledge. The unevenness of the style is underlined by the fact that many Lives were heavily revised for the Giuntina, even though the content was unchanged, while others, such as that of Raphael, were left virtually untouched. If one author had written the whole text, one might expect inconsistencies in style, but one would not expect to find some Lives written in very polished and literary Italian and others written without any skill at all. Again, in the discussion of cycles of narrative subjects, in some Lives, such as those of Ghiberti, Ghirlandaio, and Michelangelo, every subject is described in detail, while in others, such as those of Giotto and Masaccio, there is virtually no indication of subject-matter, and at most a few isolated figures are singled out for praise. Some Lives, notably those of Sarto, the Sangallo, and Perino, include many dates of historical events as well as dates of individual works of art, while others include no information of this type. Some Lives reveal knowledge that is missing in other Lives: thus the fact that Torrigiano broke Michelangelo's nose is mentioned

only in the Life of Michelangelo, while in the earlier Life of Torrigiano we are only told about his hostility to Michelangelo, with no reference to the later biography; and it seems unreasonable to suppose that this was because of a wish to avoid repetition. Likewise, different Lives contain different, and inconsistent, information about the Garden at San Marco; and so on.¹⁴

All this leads to one conclusion. The Lives were not written by one author, but by several. Some of these authors took the trouble to look at the works they were writing about, while others did not. Some sections can realistically be attributed only to Vasari himself, such as the very imprecise description of the supposed frescoes by Giotto in Rimini, which he must have seen when he was working there in late 1547, and a very similar description of a fresco by Taddeo Gaddi in Arezzo.¹⁵ These reveal very little literary skill, and very little careful observation; but, to judge from his autograph letters, Vasari was incapable of writing correct or even coherent Italian.¹⁶ What seems to have happened is that he returned to Florence in October 1546 with the task of writing up the information contained in his travel notes, as well as the material already circulating in Florence in texts such as the *Libro di Antonio Billi* and the *Commentari* of Ghiberti. He must have asked friends for advice, one of whom seems to have drafted the first few Lives in Part I, which are remarkable in their coherence, clarity, and intelligence; in fact, they are clearly the most remarkable example of art-historical writing ever produced in Florence up to that time, far superior, for example, to the near-contemporary collection of artists' Lives by Gelli.¹⁷ On this basis, Vasari then entrusted many of the other Lives to other friends. Given that his expertise was in his knowledge of art, not in writing Italian, one would assume that the most accomplished Lives, those of the most famous artists, such as Donatello, Raphael, Leonardo, and Michelangelo, would have been entrusted to those with literary skills. Others seem to reflect specialized knowledge which Vasari is most unlikely to have possessed; thus he can hardly be responsible for the two Sangallo Lives, which are among the best informed in the entire book, including many references to works that Vasari had never seen. To judge from the sections that can most confidently be attributed to Vasari himself, such as the description of the Giotto frescoes in Rimini, the Life of Lazzaro Vasari, and much of the material about Arezzo, he may well have written many of the shorter Lives of relatively obscure artists, which are often little more than a very dull list of works, recorded without any literary skill.

Vasari is also unlikely to have had much to do with the various prefaces and the introduction. The first preface, on the *paragone*, is very different in content and far more coherent than the letter which Vasari himself wrote on this topic to Benedetto

¹² To be precise, when compiling the first edition, Vasari did not use the text of the *Anonimo Magliabechiano* itself, but of a text on which the *Anonimo* is partly based: see Hope, 2010b, 34–35. The churches are the Pantheon, Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, San Pietro in Vincoli, Sant'Agostino, San Silvestro, Santa Maria della Pace, Sant'Eustachio, San Giacomo degli Spagnoli, Santa Maria dell'Anima, Santa Maria del Popolo, and Santa Maria d'Aracoeli. These are not the only churches mentioned; but the reference to the frescoes supposedly by Masaccio in San Clemente, for example, is so vague that Vasari had evidently not gone there expressly to see them (Vasari, 1986, 269; Vasari-BB, 3: 128). Further information about facade frescoes appears in the Lives of Vincenzo da San Gimignano, Peruzzi, and Perino del Vaga.

¹³ Frey and Frey, 1923–40, 1: 204; Vasari, 1967, 8: 239; Vasari-BB, 6: 390.

¹⁴ See Hope, 1999.

¹⁵ Vasari, 1986, 124–125, 162; Vasari-BB, 2: 109–111, 209–210.

¹⁶ Most of Vasari's early letters are only known through versions in the hand of Giorgio Vasari the Younger, preserved in Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, ms. Ricc. 2354. See the entry by Charles Davis in Corti, 1981, 206–208. For the only instance in which Vasari's own text also survives, albeit in printed form, see Frey and Frey, 1923–40, 1: 185–191. In his discussion of the letters up to 1550, Nencioni, 1954, 212, entirely overlooks the fact that of the 44 such letters of Vasari in Frey, 1923, only two, both drafts of memoranda for Vincenzo Borghini, are known to be autograph.

¹⁷ Mancini, 1896.

Varchi in early 1547;¹⁸ and it is very difficult to believe that he changed his style, his ideas or his method of presenting them so dramatically in such a short period. As for the prefaces to the three parts, these were evidently written after the Lives themselves. The tripartite historical scheme which they outline is only mentioned twice in the Lives, in both cases in passages which look like late additions.¹⁹ The crucial idea of rebirth to which they refer never appears in the Lives at all. The preface to Part I reflects an exceptional knowledge of ancient and medieval history, and a detailed understanding of Pierfrancesco Giambullari's *Il Gello* of 1546, so it is likely to be largely the work of Giambullari himself, who helped see the *Torrentiniana* through the press.²⁰ The preface to Part 2 includes a long, and unacknowledged, quotation from Cicero's *Brutus*, which Vasari himself cannot have read, since it had not yet been translated.²¹ The preface to Part 3 includes a list of famous ancient statues which were supposedly crucial for the creation of the modern style of art; but none of these statues is mentioned in any of the Lives themselves, although others are. Vasari probably had more to do with the technical introduction, but the style itself is not consistent with anything else that he is known to have written.

After he was asked to write his book in 1546, Vasari, recognizing his limited literary gifts and lack of experience as a writer, then immediately involved others in the project. These elaborated the material that he had collected and added new material of their own, especially for the artists of the sixteenth century. The completed manuscript was then taken by Vasari to Rimini. What happened there is described in the autobiography: in Rimini a friar made a fair copy, which an abbot corrected. The manuscript was then sent to Rome, where further changes may have been made. Subsequently, the prefaces and the introduction were added in Florence, as described above.

In the case of the *Giuntina* the direct evidence for the involvement of other authors is even stronger. Even without the sections by Cini and Adriani, it is about two and half times as long as the *Torrentiniana*, in other words about 96 percent of the length of the King James Bible. It is divided into three volumes, each with its own title page dated 1568. The first volume contains Parts 1 and 2; the second contains the first section of Part 3, up to and including the Life of Perino del Vaga; the third volume, with pages numbered continuously from the second, contains the remaining Lives, all of which, apart from that of Michelangelo, were new, together with the section by Adriani, which has unnumbered pages, and the section by Cini, which forms part of the combined Life of the Accademici del Disegno. Although printing only finished in early 1568, it was begun in about August 1564.²² The first volume, apart from the title page, dedication, and index, was printed

by January 1565, as we know from a letter of Vasari, and at that time the printers were at work on the second volume.²³ If the manuscript was sent to the printers in August 1564, the text was presumably finished at that time in some form, or at least almost finished. There is no reference to any event after 1564 in any of the Lives in the first two volumes. In the third volume, there are several references to the entry of Giovanna d'Austria in 1565, the first of which appears in the Life of Bandinelli.²⁴ All these references could have been added to the manuscript at a late stage. The only Lives that must have been entirely or largely written in 1566 or later are that of Garofalo and Girolamo da Carpi, describing Vasari's trip to North Italy in that year, that of Leone Leoni, describing his visit to Milan during his trip, those of Daniele da Volterra and Taddeo Zuccaro, and finally Vasari's autobiography. Although the Life of Titian contains a few sentences about Vasari's visit to Venice in 1566, there is clear internal evidence that most of it was written by late 1564 or early 1565.²⁵ Probably the delay in printing the third volume was mainly caused by the wish to include a description of the 1565 *entrata*, which Cini only supplied in 1567.

The second volume, containing the Lives in Part 3 up to Perino del Vaga, must have been printed before May 1566, when Vasari returned to Florence from his trip. The Life of Garofalo and Girolamo da Carpi, based on information collected at that time, includes much about other artists whose careers had been covered earlier in the book, such as Leonardo, Giovanni Bellini, Pordenone, Dosso, and Sofonisba. This material should have been included in the first two volumes, and the only possible reason why it was not put there was that they had already been printed. It follows that almost none of the new information about North Italy in the *Giuntina*, apart from what appears in the Life of Garofalo and Girolamo da Carpi and in the Life of Leoni, was collected by Vasari himself. The material about the artists of Verona was supplied by Marco de' Medici and Danese Cattaneo, whose contribution is

²³ Frey and Frey, 1923–40, 2: 144.

²⁴ Vasari, 1967, 6: 22; Vasari-BB, 5: 243; further references appear in the Lives of Mosca, Bastiano da Sangallo, Garofalo, Montorsoli, Zuccaro, Primaticcio, and Sansovino.

²⁵ Cosimo Bartoli, then Florentine envoy in Venice, had begun a "nota" of the works of Titian for Vasari by 15 December 1563 (Frey and Frey, 1923–40, 2: 14). It is stated in the Life of Titian that this artist painted "nella Scuola di San Fantino, in una tavoletta un San Girolamo in penitenza, che era dagl'artefici molto lodata, ma fu consumata dal fuoco, due anni sono, con tutta quella chiesa" (Vasari, 1967, 7: 321; Vasari-BB, 6: 161). According to the *Mariegola* of the Scuola, this fire occurred on 15 February 1562; but in this text dates are evidently given in Venetian style, so the modern date would be 1563 (Venice, Archivio di Stato, Scuola Grande di Santa Maria della Consolazione e San Girolamo, busta 2, registro "Mariegola," c. 1v). The passage in question was written in or not long after 1566 (*ibid.*, c. 1r). Bartoli could have been told this information in 1564 or 1565, depending on whether he was given the precise date of the fire in Venetian style, or in modern style, or had merely been told that it occurred "due anni sono." In the same Life it is said that Titian had "ultimamente" painted an *Adoration of the Magi* for Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, and had "ultimamente" sent a *Last Supper* to Philip II (Vasari, 1967, 7: 333, 337; Vasari-BB, 6: 166–167, 168–169). A courier was reimbursed for paying the cost of crating the *Adoration* on 7 October 1564 (Pacifi, 1920, 393). The *Last Supper* had reached Genoa by 6 March 1565 (Ferraro, 1975, 96, no. 127); it was dispatched from Venice some time after 9 October 1564 (*ibid.*, 92, no. 119).

¹⁸ Vasari, 1986, 7–17; Vasari-BB, 1: 9–30; Frey and Frey, 1923–40, 1: 185–191.

¹⁹ At the beginning of the Life of Antonello da Messina, in a section on the invention of oil painting, and at the very end of the Life of Giorgione, in connection with Titian (Vasari, 1986, 359, 560; Vasari-BB, 3: 301, and 4: 47).

²⁰ Garin, 1976, 262–263; on the role of Giambullari in the publication of the *Torrentiniana*, see Frey and Frey, 1923–40, 1, as indicated in the index; Hope, 1995; Frangenberg, 2002.

²¹ Gombrich, 1960.

²² See Vincenzo Borghini's letters to Vasari of 11 and 14 August 1564, in Frey and Frey, 1923–40, 2: 100–102, 268–270, with the letter of 11 August incorrectly dated to 1566.

partly acknowledged in the Life of Fra Giocondo.²⁶ In fact, Marco's contribution was probably even larger. A secretary of Cosimo I wrote to him in Bologna in early 1563, asking for information for the new edition, and it is likely that he supplied material about Bologna, Modena, Parma, and Mantua.²⁷ Vasari's friend Cosimo Bartoli, who was living in Venice from 1563, must have collected virtually all the new material about Venetian artists, while Giovan Battista Grassi was responsible for the artists of Friuli.²⁸ In fact, it is evident that the North Italian Lives were compiled by several people. This alone explains, for example, why Paolo Veronese is consistently called Paulino in the Life of Sanmichele, but Paulo Veronese or Paulo da Verona in those of Fra Giocondo, Garofalo, and Battista Franco; why Tibaldi is called Pellegrino Pellegrini in the Life of Garofalo, Pellegrino da Bologna in the Life of Daniele da Volterra, Pellegrino Bolognese in the Life of Primaticcio, and Pellegrino Pellegrini bolognese in the section "Di diversi."²⁹ It explains too why the spelling "Paulo" is used in some Lives and "Paolo" in others, even in passages about the same person, why the same works are discussed in different Lives, and why, for example, Tibaldi is said to have finished some frescoes in Ferrara in the Life of Garofalo, but is said to be working on them in the Life of Primaticcio.³⁰

One might argue that although the material about North Italy was collected by others, Vasari himself wrote it up when it was sent to Florence, mostly between 1560 and 1564. But there are obvious differences in language and format between, for example, the Lives of the Veronese artists and those of Venice. Moreover, Vasari had even less reason for writing the whole text of the *Giuntina* than of the *Torrentiniana*, because it was being compiled in the early 1560s, when he was busier than at any other stage in his life, working full-time on the decoration of the Palazzo Vecchio.

Besides incorporating new information about North Italy, three other types of work were also involved in the preparation of the *Giuntina*. First, most of the text of the *Torrentiniana* was revised to make the style more consistent; second, a great deal of new information about Tuscany and Central Italy was added, covering the period already discussed in the *Torrentiniana*; third, a substantial number of new biographies were included of Tuscan and Central Italian artists who had died after 1550 or who were still alive. The first of these tasks, the stylistic revision of the

²⁶ Although Marco and Danese are explicitly acknowledged only in the Life of Fra Giocondo (Vasari, 1967, 5: 120; Vasari-BB, 4: 599), the Life of Sanmichele is very similar in style, as is the section on Verona in the Life of Gentile da Fabriano; and in both Lives there are references to Marco (Vasari, 1967, 2: 517, and 6: 249, 259; Vasari-BB, 3: 367, and 5: 369, 375).

²⁷ See Marco to Jacopo Guidi, Bologna, 21 February 1563 (Palli d'Addario, 1985, 388–389).

²⁸ Bartoli is explicitly credited with a long description, in the Life of Fra Angelico, of a manuscript in Venice attributed to Attavante, but in the later Life of Bartolomeo della Gatta, this passage, which is unique in the *Giuntina* for its detailed color notes, is instead said to have been sent from Venice by "certi gentiluomini" (Vasari, 1967, 2: 402, and 3: 138; Vasari-BB, 3: 279, 467–468).

²⁹ The inconsistency of the naming of Veronese in the Lives of Fra Giocondo and Sanmichele, although both are evidently provided by Marco de' Medici and Danese Cattaneo, is presumably because each section on this artist was written by a different author.

³⁰ Vasari, 1967, 6: 335–336, and 7: 297; Vasari-BB, 5: 418, and 6: 150.

text, was surely not done by Vasari, since it required literary skill which he did not possess. He was certainly more closely involved in the collection of new material for the period covered in the first edition. There are, for example, substantial additions about Assisi and Perugia which he compiled during a journey to Loreto in 1563.³¹ These passages show that he was more diligent than he had been before the publication of the *Torrentiniana*, although he was not especially systematic and he did not make much use of inscriptions. Yet much of the new material about Tuscany is evidently based on a careful study of inscriptions, notably in Part 1, and another important source of information was historical texts, such as chronicles.³² We know that some of the new information about inscriptions was collected by Vincenzo Borghini and Cosimo Bartoli;³³ and these two scholars are far more likely than Vasari himself to have consulted historical sources. It is improbable, in fact, that he would have seen the purpose of doing so. His own attitude to evidence such as dates can be seen in the first two Parts of the *Torrentiniana*, where dates of birth or death are given for most of the artists; a few of these appear on tombstones which were well known, such as that of Fra Angelico in Santa Maria sopra Minerva, or in texts that Vasari certainly knew. But none of the others have been confirmed by later archival research, and most are demonstrably wrong. Some were changed in the *Giuntina*; but in virtually every case the change was due to banal mistakes in converting the roman numerals of the first edition to the arabic ones of the second. The only reasonable explanation is that almost all the dates were simply invented; and it is difficult to see who could have done this apart from Vasari himself.

Vasari, then, contributed to the more extensive treatment of Tuscany and Central Italy in Parts 1 and 2 of the *Giuntina*, but as a member of a team, and not necessarily the most important one. This leaves the large collection of new Lives of Tuscan artists who had died after 1550. Here one might expect that Vasari's role would have been pre-eminent, given that he must have known many of the artists in question. Yet this is not borne out by an examination of the Lives themselves. Stylistically, for the most part they are of real distinction; and it has often been pointed out that in this respect they have little in common with Vasari's autobiography, or for that matter with the Life of Garofalo and Girolamo da Carpi, which must be in large part also by Vasari. It is clear too that they are rather different from one another. For example, the Life of Perino da Vinci has the most elaborate, Latinate style to be found anywhere in the *Giuntina*, and it is very unlike the Life of Rustici, with its long and rambling description of the gardens at Castello, and also unlike the Life of Montorsoli, with its remarkably complete account of this sculptor's work in many cities which Vasari never visited.

³¹ Thus new information about Assisi appears in the Lives of Cimabue ("a me, che l'anno 1563 la rividi, parve bellissima": Vasari, 1967, 1: 203; Vasari-BB, 2: 39), Arnolfo di Lapo, Nicola and Giovanni Pisano, Margaritone, Giotto, Agostino and Agnolo, Stefano, Buonamico Buffalmacco, Pietro Cavallini, Simon Sanese, Taddeo Gaddi, Tommaso Fiorentino, Michelozzo, Paolo Romano, Antonio and Bernardo Rossellino, Perugino, Pinturicchio, Verocchio, and Diversi artefici italiani.

³² Kallab, 1908, 306–374.

³³ For Borghini, see Williams, 1985; for Bartoli, see Frey and Frey, 1923–40, 1: 613–615.

An important feature of the new Lives, which they share with some of the Lives of the artists of North Italy, is the fact that Vasari himself is very frequently named, but almost invariably in the third person, whereas in the autobiography and the Life of Garofalo and Girolamo da Carpi he refers to himself in the first person. Only one explanation of this has ever been proposed, by Roland le Mollé, who suggested that Vasari used the third person to refer to himself as a painter, but the first person as the author of the Lives.³⁴ In fact, it is easy to find instances which do not fit the pattern.³⁵ The only reasonable explanation, I believe, is that when Vasari is named in the third person, the passage in question must have been written by someone else; and that would imply that most of the new Lives were not written by him at all.³⁶ Had Vasari chosen to write about himself in the third person, he surely would have done so consistently. Instead, he sometimes added first-person additions to Lives written by others, with the bizarre consequence that he can be named in both the first and the third person in successive sentences.³⁷ In short, the same procedure was used in the Giuntina as in the Torrentiniana. Vasari provided the basic idea, general artistic expertise, and perhaps some specific information, but most of the writing and much of the research was done by others. Given that he was so busy with the decoration of the Palazzo Vecchio in the early 1560s, I suspect that his personal contribution was rather small. That could explain why he says nothing about the writing of the Giuntina in his autobiography.

Vasari probably wrote less than half of the first edition and a much smaller proportion of the second; and while he provided much of the historical information for the Torrentiniana, his contribution to the Giuntina was also proportionately rather less. He was certainly not responsible for many of the passages concerned with the historical development of Italian art and the more strictly critical sections for which he is now so much admired. To ask why the true extent of his role was not recognized, or at least publicized, at the time would be, in a sense, anachronistic. The authorship of the individual biographies did not matter to sixteenth-century

³⁴ Le Mollé, 1988a.

³⁵ Thus in the Life of Titian Vasari is usually mentioned in the third person. But near the beginning there is a first-person anecdote about the woodcut of the *Triumph of Faith*: "e mi ricordo, che fra Bastiano del Piombo, ragionando di ciò, mi disse che se Tiziano in quel tempo fusse stato a Roma et avesse veduto le cose di Michelagnolo, quelle di Raffaello e le statue antiche, et avesse studiato il disegno, avrebbe fatto cose stupendissime" Later Vasari, as the author of the book, is named in the third person: "Quando il Vasari scrittore della presente storia fu l'anno 1566 a Vinezia, andò a visitare Tiziano come suo amicissimo e lo trovò, ancorché vecchissimo fusse, con i pennelli in mano a dipignere, et ebbe molto piacere di vedere l'opere sue e di ragionare con esso; il quale gli fece conoscere Messer Gian Maria Verdezotti gentiluomo veneziano ..." (Vasari, 1967, 7: 312, 339; Vasari-BB, 6: 157, 169–170).

³⁶ Hope, 2002.

³⁷ For example: "Ma tornando al ragionamento di sopra, finito che fu l'opera di Montorio e con molta mia soddisfazione, io tornai a Fiorenza per servizio del duca Cosimo, che fu l'anno 1554. Dolsi a Michelagnolo la partita del Vasari e parimente a Giorgio, avengaché ogni giorno que' suoi avversarii, ora per una via or per un'altra lo travagliavano: per il che non mancarono giornalmente l'uno a l'altro scriversi" (Vasari, 1967, 7: 196–197; Vasari-BB, 6: 87–88).

readers, given that the book was conceived as and is still used as a work of reference. That is why today, as then, almost no one reads the *Vite* right through. The name of Vasari on the title page served to guarantee that the specifically artistic material was based on the knowledge of someone with professional expertise.

Those who have written about the *Vite* in modern times have almost always concluded that Vasari must have been a man of remarkable literary and intellectual gifts, because they have found reflections of these qualities in the book itself. But these gifts are not evident in his autograph letters; and if he really was the sole author of the book—a point not confirmed by the clear testimony of his contemporaries—it is difficult to understand why he did not become a member of the Accademia Fiorentina. At this point, if anyone still believes that he was capable of writing sophisticated literary Italian, it is worth quoting part of a letter written by Giovanni Battisti Cini to Borghini on 15 April 1567, in connection with the Description of the 1565 *entrata*:

*Quando ragionamo con messer Giorgio mi parve che rimanessimo che egli direbbe che havendo un amico suo fatto questa descrizione, l'havere qui innestata che così essendo non occorrerebbe molto moderare quella anpollosità parlando alla latina che Vostra Signoria mi dice, la quale secondo me dà una certa dignità non poco necessaria a sì fatte cose che per se stesse rimangono alquanto basse ... Ma se Vostra Signoria o messer Giorgio si è pentito et vogliano che gl'esca al tutto come da lui fatta, io mi terrò basso quant'io saperrò, ma sarebbe forse meglio che facesse egli da se che ha ingegno una boza così corrente et io m'ingegnerai di riforirla quanto io giudicassi bene et dargli un po di suono un po di stile et un po di cosa così fatta, ma se ella vuol ch'faccia io al tutto, eccomi sbracciato et in capelli.*³⁸

³⁸ Lorenzoni, 1912, 63–64.