

An Altarpiece, a Bookseller, and a Confraternity: Giovanbattista Mossi's *Flagellation of Christ* and the Compagnia di San Giovanni Battista detta dello Scalzo, Florence

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Over thirty years ago, Werner Gundersheimer suggested that historians could benefit from taking a broad approach to patronage in the Renaissance, and that the application of “concepts derived from various social science disciplines” would allow scholars to see more clearly “the networks of mental attitudes and social connections” that comprised the “supportive structures” of patronage.¹ Gundersheimer also speculated that if historians directed their attention to “a quantity of less wealthy and prestigious patrons teaming up with minor clients or sponsoring the less ambitious works of major ones,” they would illuminate “aspects of social and religious history, the history of taste, the history of the organization of work in the arts, and related subjects.”² Gundersheimer conceded that “little of this so-called minor or decorative art, not to speak of the written record of its creation, has survived,” but he argued that what remained offered much potential for historical analysis.³ Near the end of his essay, Gundersheimer posited that by broadening our view of Renaissance patronage, social and cultural historians might “avoid the elitist bias that has been imposed on us by the accidents of survival and the preferences of connoisseurship.”⁴

As it happens, an altarpiece commissioned during the late sixteenth-century renovation of an auxiliary chapel at the oratory of a Florentine flagellant confraternity provides an example of a commission by less prestigious patrons for a work of art by a minor artist, a situation that closely fits Gundersheimer's hypothetical patronage model (Fig. 13.1). Fortunately, the records maintained

1 Werner L. Gundersheimer, “Patronage in the Renaissance: An Exploratory Approach,” in *Patronage in the Renaissance*, ed. Guy Fitch Lytle and Stephen Orgel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 4, 18–19.

2 *Ibid.*, 21–22.

3 *Ibid.*, 22.

4 *Ibid.*, 21.

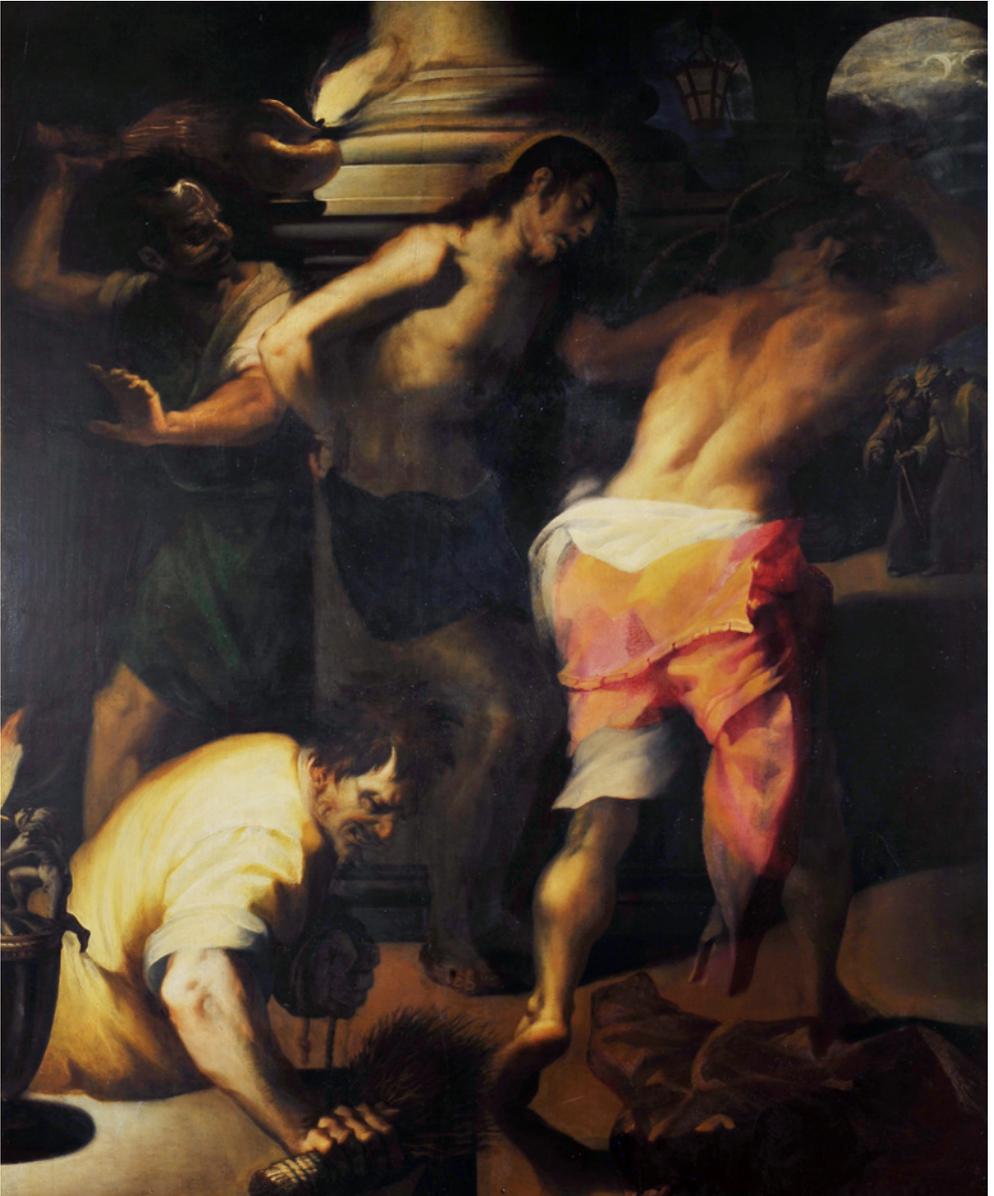


FIGURE 13.1 *Giovanbattista Mossi, The Flagellation of Christ, 1591, panel, Museo di Casa Vasari, Arezzo.* PHOTO: COURTESY OF IL MINISTERO DEI BENI E DELLE ATTIVITÀ CULTURALI E DEL TURISMO—SOPRINTENDENZA BELLE ARTI E PAESAGGIO PER LE PROVINCE DI SIENA, GROSSETO, E AREZZO. FURTHER REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED.