

УДК: 7.034...6

ББК: 85.14

DOI: 10.18688/aa2111-06-50

O. A. Nazarova, R. R. Gaynullina

On Meaning and Function of the Painting *Apparition of the Sibyl to Emperor Augustus* by Paris Bordone

Until now, the painting *The Apparition of the Sibyl to Emperor Augustus* by Paris Bordone (Ill. 137) in the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts has been approached mainly from the standpoint of formal stylistic analysis. [24, pp.96–99] The painting's meaning and function have been addressed only sporadically. D. Ekserdjian linked the choice of the subject to the city of Augsburg, as the name of the emperor Augustus refers to the Latin name of this city. The scholar suggests the cardinal of Augsburg as the commissioner, and describes his motives as a wish to honor the city and underscore its ancient origin [10]. However, the large size of this painting, the unusual choice of the subject, the grand scale of its architectural decoration that subordinates and oppresses its small figures still require explanation. This paper provides another interpretation of the painting's meaning, and reconsiders the possible commissioners and the motives behind this commission.

The story of the apparition of the Tiburtine Sibyl to Emperor Augustus goes back to the *Golden Legend* by Jacopo da Voragine. In the chapter on the Nativity of Christ, the author draws the image of the pious emperor Augustus, “*that he was much desired of his council and of his people, that he should do men worship him as God. For never had there been before him so great a master and lord of the world as he was. Then the Emperor sent for a prophetess named Sibyl, for to demand of her if there were any so great and like him in the earth, or if any should come after him. Thus at the hour of mid-day she beheld the heaven, and saw a circle of gold about the sun, and in the middle of the circle a maid holding a child in her arms. Then she called the Emperor and shewed it him. When Octavian saw that he marvelled over much, whereof Sibyl said to him: Hie puer major te est, ipsum adora. This child is greater lord than thou art, worship him. Then when the Emperor understood that this child was greater lord than he was, he would not be worshipped as God, but worshipped this child that should be born. Wherefore the Christian men made a church of the same chamber of the Emperor, and named it Ara coeli*” [20, p. 13].

In medieval texts and art on both sides of the Alps, the principal message of this story was that of the prefiguration of the Immaculate Conception and the Advent of the Savior. As such, the story accompanied Nativity scenes as in the *Bladelin Altarpiece* by Rogier van der Weyden, or made part of a wide range of Old Testament prophecies of the Savior's birth, as in *Speculum humanae salvationis* altarpiece by Konrad Witz. In late medieval and Renaissance Italy, the story of the Tiburtine Sibyl had specific Franciscan connotations as the Santa Maria Araceli church in Rome, built upon the site where Augustus was shown the vision, was custodied by this monastic order. This scene thus sometimes accompanied franciscan cycles as in the frescoes by Domenico Ghirlandaio in the Sassetti chapel in Santa Trinita, Florence.

Obviously, these narrative contexts are not relevant to the painting by Paris Bordone. First, its subject is autonomous and self-sufficient. Second, the vision itself, i.e. the image of the Madonna and Child takes up surprisingly little space; it is barely visible in the clouds at the top of the picture; preeminence is given to the architectural decoration. The architectural vista clearly prevails over the painting's characters, claiming to be the main object of this painting, this is by no means necessary for a traditional artistic representation of this scene in its prophetic meaning. The specific iconography and its size and format imply that the painting was not destined for a church space.

The architectural setting of the painting has been studied by Tatiana Fomicheva [13]. She discovered that Bordone directly borrowed his architectural details from Book I of the treatise on architecture by Sebastiano Serlio. The arcaded two-storied building with an arcaded gallery and a lodge on the left side, and the wooden structure on the top of it, originate from the *Comic Scene*, Vol. II of Serlio's *On Perspective*, 1545 [33]. From the *Tragic Scene* he borrowed the obelisk towering over the space of perspective, and the triumphal arch, which in a slightly modified form appears in the painting in precisely the same point of the composition, as in Serlio's illustration, on the left foreground. The compositional structure of the painting with its stage grouping of the architectural elements, also follows Serlio's engraving.

The architectural elements borrowed by Bordone from Serlio for his vista are the distinctive marks of the triumphal architecture, both in ancient Rome and in Renaissance Italy. Ephemeral triumphal arches, columns, and obelisks were widely used to decorate solemn processions held on the occasions of official entries, inaugurations and weddings of the Renaissance rulers [26, pp. 26–27]. Serlio's treatise, especially Book III *On Roman Monuments*, had a significant impact on this type of the festive architecture [32].

The introduction of ancient Roman triumphal forms to the Renaissance ephemeral architecture paved the way to establish visual links between modern rulers and Roman Emperors and to draw parallels between contemporary festivities and the triumphal entries of ancient emperors [14; 27]. These parallels could be the means to assign power and majesty to the contemporary sovereigns, and to impose the idea of their succession from ancient authority [26, pp. 26–27]. All of the above allows us to suggest that the subject of Bordone's painting is not purely religious, but alludes to contemporary people and events.

The Renaissance rulers frequently identified themselves with heroes of ancient myths and history, making this aspect a significant part of their political ideology. Many 16th-century rulers in Europe identified themselves with the Emperor Octavian Augustus — the protagonist of Bordone's painting *Apparition of the Sibyl to Emperor Augustus*. Among them the figure of Charles V of Habsburg, Holy Roman Emperor, stands out. In a number of poetic and visual works, certain parallels between the imperial representation of Charles V and the image of Octavian Augustus can be found. For example, in the *Martia terque quater* motet composed by an unknown author on Charles V's arrival to Augsburg in 1530, after his coronation in Bologna, Charles is assigned with the mission to restore Octavian Augustus's Golden Age [12, p. 238]. In the 1532 edition of his *Orlando Furioso*, Ludovico Ariosto added to Canto 15 a prophetic speech by Andronica to Astolfo, in which she describes the upcoming Golden Age of prosperity and justice under the rule of Charles V [1, p. 282–283]. Ariosto draws parallels between the two emperors, and claims the superiority of Charles over Octavian Augustus. [23, pp. 32–35]. The

Spanish poet Francisco Núñez de Oria in 1581 praises Charles V as New Augustus in his poem *Lyrae heroycae libri quatordecim* [8, pp. 316–318; 30].

The same approach was used in the visual arts. In the fresco cycle of Sala dei Conservatori in Modena (1546), Nicolò dell'Abate painted the scene of the Second Triumvirate based on Ap-pian's *Roman History*. The choice of the subject was determined by the desire to accentuate the ancient origins of Modena, as well to present the contemporary events under the disguise of the ancient ones. The Roman triumvirs in fact represented Charles V as Octavian Augustus with an eagle next to him, the emblem of the Habsburg; Francis I as Marcus Antonius, as the latter was the ruler of Gallia, and Pope Paul III as Aemilius Lepidus. As Erika Langmuir explains it, the frescoes were created to celebrate the three sovereigns who met on the 18th of June 1538 to sign the Truce of Nice [21, p. 193]. Another example of a similar historiated representation of a 16th-century ruler is Leone Leoni's sculpture of *Charles V and the Fury* (1551–1555, Prado) (Ill. 138). This triumphant image of the emperor overcoming the Fury, closely follows the traditional iconography of statues of Roman emperors, and refers to the verses in Virgil's *Aeneid*, in which Augustus is assigned the role of a peacemaker, under whose rule the "gates of War will be closed" [36, p. 19]. Leoni's sculpture thus represents Charles as New Augustus, who restored peace in Europe [22, p. 28–30] and alludes to his victory over the Protestants at Mühlberg.

Thus, the connection between Emperor Augustus and Emperor Charles V was firmly established in the 16th-century culture. At the same time another important connection was obvious to the contemporaries, that between Emperor Charles V and the Tiburtine Sibyl. Beside the text of the Legend of Sibyl, known from Jacopo da Voragine, there was another 4th-century eschatological text, the Prophecy of the Tiburtine Sibyl, which was widely disseminated during the Middle Ages. This text describes the nine generations of rules that lead mankind to decline, and especially emphasizes the role of the Last Emperor, who would come at the end of times to fight with Antichrist and to bring the Golden Age of peace and prosperity. His main goal would be to defeat the enemies of Christianity. Despite the invasion of Gog, Magog, and Antichrist, the Last Emperor would go to Jerusalem, where he would surrender his authority to God. It is not difficult to see the development of the image of the righteous Emperor Augustus in this prophecy, which we saw in the main text of the Legend of the Tiburtine Sibyl [34; 19, pp. 21–25]. The story of the Last Emperor also can be found in the text of *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* (7th century) [4, pp. 28–50].

Tiburtine Sibyl's prophecy of the Last Emperor became widely popular in the beginning of the 16th century in the context of the eschatological expectations, and the 1519 Imperial elections of Holy Roman Emperor. There were two main candidates, Charles I, Archduke of Austria and King of Spain (the future Charles V), and Francis I of France. Each candidate exploited the myth of the Last Emperor in his campaign, representing himself as God's chosen monarch, and the ideal Christian ruler. In the first edition of *Mirabilis Liber* in Paris, composed of various legends and prophecies with an intent to support the election company of Francis I, the texts of the prophecy of the Tiburtine Sibyl and of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* were placed next to each other, as parts of one story, obviously alluding to the French king as the Last Emperor [5, pp. 126–127]. The supporters of Charles V used the same line of persuasion. Mercurino di Gattinara, the Grand Chancellor of the Holy Roman Empire likened Charles to the Last Emperor in

his speech addressed to the future Emperor as early as 1516. He pointed out that Charles' goal as an emperor was to bring the Golden Age, as the Last Emperor's duty [4, p. 49].

Charles V had additional reasons to regard the prophecy of the Tiburtine Sibyl as referring to himself. There was a literary tradition that traced the Austrian branch of the House of Habsburg back to Hector, the son of Priam, who allegedly crossed Austrian lands on his way towards the Rhine. The Tiburtine Sibyl was also called Cassandra, which opened the way to personify her as the daughter of Priam. Thus, the Austrian Habsburgs and the Tiburtine Sibyl were related by family ties. These implications laid the foundation for a new, specifically Habsburg reading of the sibylline legend [28, p. 144]. Just as the pious and mighty Emperor Augustus found himself on the verge of a new era, proclaimed in the prophecy of the Sibyl and marked by the birth of the Divine Child, so the Habsburgs, first Emperor Maximilian I, and then Charles V felt themselves at a turning point in history. At this point, they were endowed with a special mission to resist the Antichrist, to act as defenders of the faith, to unite the empire with the church, and to create the ultimate empire and the church, preparing humanity for the End of days.

Indeed, other Habsburg artworks decorated with the representation of the story of the Sibyl and Augustus has been known to us. There is an engraving on this subject by Antonio da Trento based on Parmigianino's drawing, produced in Bologna around 1530. Maria Faietti links it to the imperial coronation of Charles V of 1530 in Bologna by the Pope, and considers the engraving as a means to present the legitimacy of Charles's claims to the imperial crown and mission [11, pp. 457–460]. In the 1560s, for Charles's son and heir Philipp II, in Milan a bronze shield was embellished by the depiction of the same story. The meeting of the Sibyl and Augustus is thus used as an emblem of the Habsburg house [28, p. 144]. It can be assumed with all the probability that the painting by Paris Bordone also alludes to Charles V. It must have been conceived as an allegory of his historical mission as New Augustus and the Last Emperor. This interpretation sheds light on the specific representation of the Augustus and the Sibyl in the painting. The Emperor is shown in modern armor under a brown cloak, kneeling before the Sibyl as if a vassal is before his lord in dedication. It looks like the Sibyl not only points to the vision in heavens, but also endows him with the Last Emperor's mission.

The triumphal rhetoric of the unusually rich architectural decoration of the painting can be paralleled with the ephemeral architecture of Habsburg's traditional triumphal entries further supporting this interpretation. The Habsburgs, and especially Charles V, were among the main contributors to the development of the Renaissance triumphal ephemera that decorated the routes of the ruler's solemn processions through cities. European monarchs eagerly followed their examples. The vast scholarship on the well documented triumphant entries of Charles V to various cities across Europe has revealed the wide use of triumphal arches adorned with fictive sculpture, painted facades and interior decoration, and allegorical *tableau vivant* performed on the streets and squares [31, pp. 206–207]. The ephemera followed programs composed by humanists and inspired by political ideology, which were aimed at glorifying Charles as the universal Emperor, as the defender of Christian faith, and as a just and legitimate ruler [31].

From the very first inaugural entries, Charles used imperial images of antiquity that combined classical forms and themes from the Holy Scripture to express civil and sacred meanings. In 1515, in Bruges, the triumphal arches and the *tableau vivant* represented Alexander the Great, prompted by his father Philip the Great to expand the empire's possessions [2, p. 80].

Entering Genoa in 1533, Charles V was welcomed by a girl dressed as Victory with a palm branch in her hand in front of the triumphal arch [17, p. 321]. In Genoa, Charles resided in the villa of Andrea Doria, his admiral and the main ally in Italy. There, in the Hall of Jupiter, which served as Charles's official reception room during his stay, there was a fresco depicting Jupiter, full of references to Charles's victory over the Turks. The villa interiors were decorated by tapestries based on Virgil's *Aeneid*, obviously referring to the dynastic myths of the Habsburgs [16, pp. 23–27]. The visual and ideological affinity between the Moscow painting and the decorations of Charles V's triumphal entries can be further supported by the astonishing similarities of the grisaille reliefs at the base of the arch on the left of the painting to the reliefs in the drawing by Perino del Vaga (1533, pen and brown ink with brown wash on pale buff laid paper, Samuel Courtauld Trust, London) (Ill. 139) designed for the entry of Charles V into Genoa in 1533. Both show battle scenes that imitate the ancient victorious battles and triumphs over the vanquished foes, and similar in proportion and composition.

Although there is no historical evidence of the direct connection between Emperor Charles V and Bordone's career, it can be established through the Imperial city of Augsburg, where the Diets were held. Bordone had many commissioners in this city. Vasari noted in Bordone's vita that "At Augsburg, in the Palace of the Fugger family, he executed many works of the greatest importance, to the value of three thousand crowns. And in the same city he painted for the Prineri, great men in that place, a large picture wherein he counterfeited in perspective all the five Orders of architecture, which was a very beautiful work; and another chamber-picture, which is in the possession of the Cardinal of Augsburg." [35, p. 181]. Pietro Aretino in a letter, dated December 1548, sent from Venice to Paris Bordone in Milan mentions various works by the painter, seen by Aretino in the house of Christoph Fugger in Augsburg [29, p. 33]. The portraits of Augsburg citizens Thomas Stachel (Stachel, 1540, Musée du Louvre, Paris) and Conrad Pentinger (1543, Städtische Kunstsammlungen, Augsburg) by the painter, confirm a steady demand for Bordone's art in the Bavarian city in the 1540s. The artist definitely continued to paint for the citizens of Augsburg in the 1550s. K. Garas suggested that Bordone executed a series of six mythological paintings (possibly wedding epithalamia) for a room in the palace of one of his Bavarian patrons around 1550–1560 during his stay in Bavarian city (*Venus and Cupid* and its pendant *Diana the Huntress with Nymphs*, both ex-Gemäldegal., Dresden; *Venus, Mars, Cupid and Victory*, and *Mars Taking Cupid's Bow with Venus and Flora*, both Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum; *Apollo, Midas and Pan* (Dresden, Gemäldegalerie) [15, pp. 74–78].

Many of Bordone's patrons in Augsburg were closely connected to Charles V. The most significant of them is the "Prince of Merchants" Anton Fugger, the head of one of the biggest banks in Europe. Fuggers financed Charles' election for Holy Roman Emperor in 1519, and later they were interconnected by tight economic and political relations [18, pp. 68–98, 149–172]. During his 1533 Triumphal entry into Augsburg, Charles V stayed in the Fugger's house. Another closest associate of Charles V was the cardinal of Augsburg, Otto Truchsess von Waldburg, who owed Charles V his return to Augsburg and the ranks of bishop and cardinal. Von Waldburg had connections in Venice, and corresponded with Aretino [29, pp. 31–33]. Both Anton Fugger and Otto Truchsess von Waldburg can be suggested as possible commissioners for Bordone's *The Apparition of the Sibyl to Emperor Augustus*.

In the literature, Bordone's painting is dated back either to the 1540s [6, p. 148], or to the 1550s [25, pp. 96–99]. Two Imperial Diets, those of 1548, held after the Battle of Mühlberg, and that of 1555 correspond to these dates. However, Charles V was not present at the 1555 Diet, preparing for his abdication, and the atmosphere of that period was not consonant with the triumphant spirit of Bordone's canvas. The painting fits much better to the circumstances and spirit of the years around the victorious 1548, and finds parallels in the imagery created in this period, i.e. Leone Leoni's sculpture of *Charles V and the Fury* [22, p. 28].

It can be suggested that the painting by Paris Bordone was created for Augsburg, and, most likely, was part of a complex palace decoration, commissioned by the supporters of Charles V on the occasion of his triumphal entry to Augsburg after the victory at Mühlberg. The choice of the subject *The Apparition of the Sibyl to Emperor Augustus*, and its architectural setting were aimed to glorify him allegorically as New Augustus and the Last Emperor, the Defender of the Faith and the peacemaker, and finally as the fulfillment of the Sibylline prophecy.

Curiously enough, a connection between Charles V and the painting by Paris Bordone, has been suggested, though on quite a different basis. Sir Robert Walpole, who owned the painting in the 18th century, claimed in his description that the central figure depicts Charles V “*who is prompted by Religion to ask Pardon of the Virgin (above in the Clouds) for having so ill treated the Pope*”, the figure sitting on the steps is “*certainly Aretine*” (Pietro Aretino), while the man behind the prison bars is Marc Antonio (Raimondi) [25, p. 98]. According to Sir Walpole, Bordone depicted in this painting those who had committed offences against the Pope. Charles V did so by the Sack of Rome in 1527, whereas Aretino and Raimondi by publishing *Putana Errante* with erotic engravings. Though this ingenious and attractive hypothesis cannot be taken as plausible any more, it probably reflects once existing awareness about the relations between the painting, and the figure of Emperor Charles V, awareness that inspired Walpole's interpretation.

If the suggested interpretation of *The Apparition of the Sibyl to Emperor Augustus* is correct, the painting falls into a very specific and yet understudied genre of political allegory popular at the 16th-century European courts. The characteristic features of this genre are the relatively large scale of panels depicting scenes from the Bible or from the history of ancient Rome; the elaborate and extended vedutas on their backgrounds that prevail over the small foreground figures; the architecture of the vedutas composed in large part of the triumphal forms, i.e. of vocabulary of ephemeral architecture. The contextual research of some of these paintings has revealed that they were intended to commemorate contemporary political events, or to celebrate contemporary sovereigns.

Another representation of the *The Tiburtine Sibyl and Emperor Augustus*, by French court painter Antoine Caron (Musée du Louvre, Paris), was created, as F. Yates convincingly argues, on the occasion of the wedding of the French king, Charles IX, and Elisabeth of Austria, daughter of Emperor Maximilian II Habsburg, in 1571. The painting includes precise quotations of the architectural forms that decorated the triumphal entry held on that occasion of Elisabeth's coronation, and preserved in the Festival Book (British Library), which was published in Paris in 1572. According to Yates, Charles IX is represented here allegorically in the guise of Emperor Augustus [37]. According to F. Beemon, Lucas de Heere's painting *King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* (St. Bavo cathedral, Ghent), where Solomon's throne appears against the triumphal

arch, was commissioned on the occasion of the annual meeting of the Order of the Golden Fleece in 1559 in Ghent. The figure of Solomon here alludes to Philip II of Habsburg, bearing his portrait features, while the figure of the Queen of Sheba should be taken as an allegory of the Netherlands, willingly submitting herself to the power of the King. The Latin inscription on the frame clearly announces these identifications of the Bible characters. The ultimate meaning of this painting is to serve as propaganda presenting Philip II as the wise, legitimate and God-given ruler of the Netherlands during the period of utmost discontent with the Habsburg policies in the Netherlands [3].

The same approach to historical subjects can be seen in the group of paintings created in France in the second half of the 16th century, where scenes of the so-called *Massacre of the Triumvirate*, originating from Appian's *Roman Wars*, became widely popular in panel paintings and prints, where they were presented against the background of ancient architectural decorations. According to J. Ehrmman, this story was perceived as an allegory of the cruel religious policy approved by Henry II against the Protestants. Ehrmman found documentation confirming that the roles of triumvirs were assigned to Henry II's associates, Anne de Montmorency, Jacques d'Albon, Senor de Saint-Andre, and the Francois Duke de Guise [7; 9].

This list of examples, which could be further extended, provides a new and valid context for the Bordone's *The Apparition of the Sibyl to Emperor Augustus*, thus reconfirming its function as a political allegory.

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Authors. Nazarova, Olga Alekseevna — Ph. D., associate professor. National Research University Higher School of Economics, Myasnitskaya ul., 20, 101000 Moscow, Russian Federation. olgalnazarova@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0003-1143-0463

Gaynullina, Regina Ravilevna — postgraduate student. National Research University Higher School of Economics, Myasnitskaya ul., 20, 101000 Moscow, Russian Federation. rrgaynullina@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0002-1127-0351

Abstract. This paper reconsiders the meaning and function of the painting *The Apparition of the Sibyl to Emperor Augustus* by Paris Bordone by examining its subject in the light of the medieval interpretations of Tiburtine Sibyl's prophecy to Octavian Augustus. These interpretations expressed in an array of texts, have been molded by the world view at the beginning of the 16th century into an eschatologically endowed concept of the Last Emperor, a spiritual and political leader, who, like Emperor Augustus, stands at the turn of the era, and is supposed to prepare mankind for the end of the world. This concept influenced the political ideology of the time in that European sovereigns were identified with the Last Emperor. Among them Emperor Charles V Habsburg stands out, who was addressed by his contemporaries both as New Augustus, and as the Last Emperor, especially after his victory over the Protestants at Mühlberg. The striking visual affinity between the architectural setting of the painting and the decorations of Charles V's triumphal entries, the multiple historical connections between Charles V, the city of Augsburg, and Paris Bordone's career support the hypothesis, that the painting is an allegorical representation of Charles V as New Augustus, and the Last Emperor, and was commissioned in Augsburg to celebrate his triumphal arrival to the 1548 Imperial Diet of Augsburg.

Keywords: Paris Bordone, social history of art, Apparition of the Sibyl to Emperor Augustus, renaissance architectural perspective, imperial iconography, representation of power, triumphal entries, Charles V

Название статьи. О смысле и назначении картины Париса Бордоне «Явление Сивиллы императору Августу»

Сведения об авторах. Назарова Ольга Алексеевна — кандидат искусствоведения, доцент. Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики», Москва, ул. Мясницкая, 20, Российская Федерация, 101000. olgalnazarova@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0003-1143-0463

Гайнуллина Регина Равильевна — студент магистратуры. Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики», Москва, ул. Мясницкая, 20, Российская Федерация, 101000. rrgaynullina@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0002-1127-0351

Аннотация. В статье предлагается новая интерпретация смыслового содержания картины Париса Бордоне «Явление Сивиллы императору Августу» из ГМИИ имени А. С. Пушкина и выдвигается гипотеза об обстоятельствах её создания. Сюжет картины рассматривается в свете средневекового пророчества Тибуртинской Сивиллы о Последнем Императоре, духовном и политическом лидере, который подобно Императору Августу принесет мир и процветание человечеству, а также подготовит его к концу времен. В начале XVI в. на фоне эсхатологических ожиданий эпохи, образ Последнего Императора приобрёл особую актуальность в европейской политической идеологии. С ним отождествляли себя многие правители и, в первую очередь, Карл V Габсбург, в котором современники видели Нового Августа и воплощение пророчества о Последнем Императоре. Особенно часто эта параллель проводилась после победы Карла V над протестантами при Мюльберге. Поразительное сходство богатой архитектурной декорации московской картины с эфемерной архитектурой Габсбургских триумфальных въездов, многочисленные исторические связи между Карлом V, имперским городом Аугсбургом и карьерой Париса Бордоне подтверждают гипотезу о том, что полотно Бордоне является аллегорической репрезентацией Карла V. Картина представляет императора Карла V как Нового Августа и Последнего Императора, и, вероятно, была заказана аугсбургскими сторонниками императора по случаю его триумфального въезда в город в 1548 г. после победы при Мюльберге.

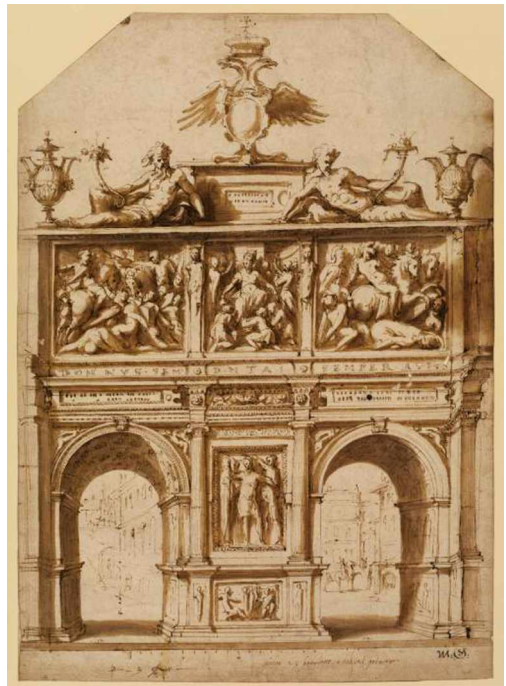
Ключевые слова: Парис Бордоне, социальная история искусства, Явление Сивиллы императору Августу, архитектурная перспектива Возрождения, имперская иконография Возрождения, репрезентация власти, триумфальные въезды, Карл V



Ill. 137. Paris Bordone. The Apparition of the Sibyl to Emperor Augustus. Oil on canvas, 165×230 cm. The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow. Available at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paris_Bordon_-_Sibilla_davanti_ad_Augusto_-_Museo_Puskin_-_Mosca.jpg



Ill. 138. Leone Leoni. Emperor Carlos V and the Fury. 1551–1555. Bronze. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. Available at: museodelprado.es



Ill. 139. Perino del Vaga. Design for a Triumphal arch in via San Benedetto built for the entry of Charles V into Genoa in 1533. 1533. Pen and brown ink with brown wash on pale buff laid paper, 42,8 × 30,3 cm. Samuel Courtauld Trust, London © The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London