



# *Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali*

*Soprintendenza Speciale per il Patrimonio Storico, Artistico ed Etnoantropologico  
e per il Polo Museale della città di Firenze*

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## PRESS RELEASE

# Medici Chapels: Michelangelo's "crown" back on display today

**The original "crown" of the lantern which Pope Leo X commissioned Michelangelo to design and which sat atop the dome of the New Sacristy in the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Florence until 2002, will be on display again as of today, in the crypt of the Medici Chapels.**

With a view to its subsequent – and very necessary – conservation in the museum's indoor environment, the "crown" was removed during restoration work on the dome and immediately consigned to Ludovica Nicolai for a delicate restoration job. At the same time, its place was taken on top of the dome by a faithful copy produced by Andrea Fedeli.

Henceforth the "crown" **is to be displayed inside the Medici Chapels, where it will be one of the most important items in an exhibition on "Medici Splendour. Pope Leo X and Florence" from March to October of this year. The exhibition, which is part of the "Un anno ad arte 2013" programme, is curated by Nicoletta Baldini and by the museum's director, Monica Bietti.**

And that is not all. Today's presentation to the media of the now perfectly restored "crown" will add a new dimension to visitors' enjoyment of the historical and artistic heritage on view in the Medici Chapels because **they will now finally be able to get a "close-up" view of one of the least known products of Michelangelo's creative genius, discovering its details and its salient features, and there is even a link between some of Leonardo da Vinci's geometrical drawings and Michelangelo's design.**

"We can finally admire from close up what Vasari called a 'seventy-two-sided ball' but which in fact turns out to be a regular solid of complex and sophisticated construction, embellished with triumphant civic symbols such as the crown of laurel and the 'Marzocco' lions," said **Soprintendente Cristina Acidini**. "It is a splendid invention by Michelangelo, but it should also stimulate scholars to take a fresh look at Piloto, an excellent artisan but something of an eccentric and cranky personality, if it is true that his fondness for bad-mouthing people proved to be his final undoing."

### MICHELANGELO'S IDEA

The "crown" of a dome or chapel usually consists of a sphere (symbolising the world) surmounted by a cross. Michelangelo, on the other hand, now an adult, planned to top the lantern of his New Sacristy, to complete the tombs of the young Medici princes, with a "crown comprising several elements, the most spectacular of which is an almost spherical solid. In actual fact it is composed of two hemispheres faceted in small triangles, surmounted by a heavy box-constructed cross resting on a decorated knot – in the shape of a ring - beneath which lies a thin tapering metal sheet acting as the hub for eight rays terminating in lions' heads".



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The polyhedron, which Vasari described as having "seventy-two facets", has in fact only sixty, they are triangular, and they rest on the corners of a dodecahedron, forming a solid with twelve pentagon-based pyramids. This structure is known as a *duodecedron elevatus solidus*.

Leo X, the first Medici pope, commissioned the work from Michelangelo in 1520, but the "crown" was actually produced during the pontificate of Clement VII, the second Medici pope, who was elected in 1523. In January 1525 Michelangelo wrote to Pope Clement VII that "*Stefano has finished erecting the lantern for this chapel in said church of San Lorenzo, and when he revealed it, everybody was pleased with it, and Your Holiness will be too. Let's have the ball made, it will be about a yard tall, and to make it different from the others I have thought of making it faceted, which I think will make it look graceful, so that is how we are going to make it*".

These few words betray Michelangelo's desire to embellish the lantern, which "everybody was pleased with" already, by producing an object that would be one of a kind, to complement the unique nature of the space below it, the New Sacristy.

The composition in gilded copper was produced by Giovanni di Baldassarre, known as "Piloto", a Florentine goldsmith about whose career we know relatively little, but who certainly worked with Michelangelo (also in Venice and in Rome) and with Perin del Vaga. He was also a friend of Benvenuto Cellini.

"The 'crown' going on display in the Medici Chapels as of today", said **Monica Bietti**, the museum's director, "embodies numerous elements of continuity in the history of the Medici family and in that family's bond with the church and the city. For instance, there are eight lions' heads at its base, symbolising both the city (the Marzocco symbol of Florence) and the name of Leo X, the first Medici pope. Each lion is slightly different from the next, and the sophisticated technique used to produce them reveals the immense skill of this goldsmith, 'Piloto', who as of today is no longer quite such a dark horse".

## THE TIE BETWEEN MICHELANGELO AND LEONARDO

"A polyhedron of this kind is depicted in a manuscript by Fra Luca Pacioli entitled *De Divina Proportione*", said **Vincenzo Vaccaro**, a functionary with the Soprintendenza per i Beni Architettonici who has been studying the significance of this singularly unique shape for years now and whose findings are due to be published in the catalogue of the exhibition devoted to Leo X. The catalogue will also contain sixty drawings based on originals by Leonardo. The drawing of the *duodecedron elevatus solidus* produced by the genius from Vinci, being built with equilateral triangles, bears a striking resemblance to a mace, but in actual fact it consists of twelve pentagonal pyramids concealing the dodecahedron's pentagonal faces: in other words, the strength in the ether, in the space symbolised by the dodecahedron, as it attempts to expand, to break out in all directions. But this image is too distant from the familiar and reassuring image of a sphere that enfolds and embraces everything. **Michelangelo, however, subscribes to the image of strength and expansion contained in the original drawing by Leonardo**, yet he conceals it by using isosceles triangles which impart less height to the pentagonal pyramids and cause the polyhedron to resemble a crystal that amplifies the light and breaks it down".

With the approval of the Soprintendente

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