Robed in Martyrdom: The Flaying of St Bartholomew in the Laudario of Sant’Agnese

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St Bartholomew is the most prominent flayed Christian martyr, perhaps best known in Michelangelo’s rendition on the Last Judgement wall of the Sistine Chapel (1534–41). In this High Renaissance work, the saint holds the instrument of his martyrdom – a knife – in his right hand and his flayed skin, draped like an old coat, in his left. The figure holding his skin is, inexplicably, also wearing his skin. That is, he demonstrates his grisly martyrdom and simultaneously defies both its gore and its finality. Such a presentation of Bartholomew is common, particularly in iconic, rather than narrative, images, where the clothed saint holds his attribute and yet his skin remains intact. Two hundred years before this, the Florentine artist Pacino di Bonaguida (active c.1303–c.1347) created a complex composition to present this unsettling figure and his martyrdom. His strikingly different Bartholomew appears on a folio of the fragmentary Laudario of Sant’Agnese, a book of Italian hymns produced for the Compagnia di Sant’Agnese (Confraternity of St Agnes) (c.1340, Fig. 6.1). The manuscript was disbound in the nineteenth century and only


2 One such example from early fourteenth-century Florence by Jacopo del Casentino depicts St Bartholomew seated and surrounded by angels and holding a book and a knife in his left hand (Florence, Galleria dell’Accademia, No. 440). This panel likely formed a portion of an altarpiece from the church of San Bartolommeo dei Pittori, now destroyed, the only church in Florence dedicated to St Bartholomew. See: Walter Paatz and Elisabeth Paatz, *Die Kirchen von Florenz: Ein kunstgeschichtliches Handbuch* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1955), pp. 333–6. Roughly two decades before the Laudario, Pacino di Bonaguida painted an iconic, half-length figure of St Bartholomew on panel, in which the saint holds a book and the knife of his martyrdom (Philadelphia, The Barnes Foundation, BF 838).