Raphael Sanzio’s fame is such that he is known by his first name. Along with Michelangelo Buonarroti and Leonardo da Vinci, he formed the apex of the Italian High Renaissance. They made the act of studying and reviving the art and architecture of the defunct Roman Empire into a radical project to change the status quo of late Gothic culture. Raphael distinguished himself from the others in part because of his greater role in protecting ancient buildings. Born in Urbino, Italy, in 1483, the son of a painter to the ducal court of Montefeltro, Raphael began his career as an artist with commissions from the Urbino court, and altarpieces in nearby Città di Castello and Perugia, as well as compositional drawings for Bernardo Pinturicchio. He then worked in Florence, painting portraits and a devotional series on the Holy Family, from around 1504 to 1508, when Pope Julius II summoned him to Rome. He worked for popes in the adornment of the Vatican for the rest of his life, notably frescoes for the *stanze* including the Stanza della Segnatura (1510-12). Julius II was an enthusiastic classicist and collector of ancient sculptures. When the Laocōon sculpture was unearthed in 1506, Julius II immediately acquired it and called a competition to restore its famous missing arm. Raphael and Michelangelo were members of the jury, and were active in most debates about how to restore ancient artworks. Ancient buildings were not as highly regarded. Some buildings, like the Coliseum, were owned by guilds, and other constituencies with enormous political power, who made money selling their carved stones as *spolia*, and treating the less valuable walls as quarries for new construction. Raphael, set out to change that cannibalistic building culture, but he faced formidable political opposition. Things began to change slightly in 1513, with the election of Pope Leo X, whose interest in ancient literature made him appreciate the inscriptions on ancient buildings. But at the same time, the papal administration was involved in the systematic destruction of ancient Roman ruins to build the new St. Peter’s Basilica. In 1514, the Pope appointed Raphael architect of St. Peter’s upon Donato Bramante’s death (1444-1514), then in 1515 he also named him Prefect of Marbles and Stones, with the double charge to select the best ancient building materials for use in St. Peter’s, and to save those stones with valuable inscriptions or carvings from the mason’s hammer. All new excavations of antiquities and quarries in Rome and its surroundings had to be reported to Raphael within 3 days. He had the ear of the Pope, and tried to educate his client to expand his appreciation of ancient culture beyond literature and sculpture, to include ancient architecture. It was a delicate subject, with important economic ramifications, which explains why he co-authored his letter with his friend Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529), Ambassador of Urbino to the Pope, author and soldier, whose diplomatic leverage offered Raphael political cover. Raphael and his assistants documented of ancient ruins in measured drawings, but not systematically. Raphael’s position is the precursor of governmental preservation administrations, and it evolved to become the post of Papal Prefect of Antiquities, held by Johan Joachim Winckelmann two and a half centuries later.

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