

Florence, Charles Eastlake, and the Restoration of Renaissance Paintings

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Il saggio individua in Firenze uno dei principali centri di elaborazione delle competenze nel restauro dei dipinti nel corso dell'Ottocento, mettendone in relazione il ruolo con le attività collezionistiche del primo direttore della National Gallery di Londra, Charles Eastlake (1793–1865). La reputazione della città nel campo del restauro affondava le proprie radici in una lunga tradizione di pratiche, conoscenze tecniche e saperi specialistici. Per diversi dipinti acquistati da Eastlake a Firenze negli anni Cinquanta dell'Ottocento, la documentazione archivistica consente di ricostruire aspetti significativi della loro storia conservativa, evidenziando in particolare il ruolo svolto da Eastlake nell'indirizzo e nella supervisione degli interventi. Il saggio approfondisce inoltre il rapporto di committenza instaurato con il restauratore Ugo Baldi e i successivi restauri eseguiti sulle opere una volta giunte a Londra. Il restauro non solo agevolò la circolazione dei dipinti, ma contribuì anche a definirne l'aspetto visibile. Viene infine preso brevemente in esame il rapporto tra il manuale di restauro pubblicato nel 1864 da Ulisse Forni (1814–1864) e gli scritti di Eastlake sulla tecnica pittorica. Nel suo complesso, queste vicende storiche offrono spunti di riflessione ancora oggi rilevanti per la moderna pratica della conservazione.

This paper considers Florence as a center of paintings conservation expertise during the nineteenth century as this intersects with the collecting activities of the first Director of the National Gallery in London, Charles Eastlake (1793–1865). The city's renown for restoration was built upon a long history of practice. For several paintings that Eastlake acquired in Florence in the 1850s, archival documents allow the reconstruction of facets of their conservation histories, notably Eastlake's prescriptive role in directing the treatments. His patronage of the noted restorer Ugo Baldi and the subsequent restoration of works in London are detailed. Restoration facilitated the movement of these artworks and shaped their appearances. The essay briefly considers the relationship of the 1864 restoration manual by Ulisse Forni (1814–1864) to Eastlake's writings on painting technique. The historical situation contains lessons applicable to modern conservation practice.

Keywords: History of conservation/restoration, Ugo Baldi, Charles Eastlake, Ulisse Forni, Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo

open access

Published twice a year
ISSN 2784-9597 (online)

Received 26 January 2026 **Accepted** 11 May 2026
First Published June 2026

Citation Matthew Hayes, Florence, *Charles Eastlake, and the Restoration of Renaissance Paintings*, «La Diana», 11, 2026, pp. 63-82
DOI 10.36253/ladiana-4303

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Data Availability Statement

All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files

Competing Interests

The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest

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Introduction

At the middle of the nineteenth century, the city of Florence was an internationally renowned center of conservation expertise and a rich source of potential art acquisitions for its visitors. This paper considers the restorations of several paintings that were coordinated by the first director of the National Gallery in London, Charles Eastlake (1793-1865), as these relate to his collecting activities in Florence during the middle of the nineteenth century. The treatments are especially interesting for what they reveal about the intersections between the art market, the history of conservation, and the physical histories of artworks at a time when significant European collections were being formed.¹

A review of some background is perhaps useful. Our main protagonist, the painter, scholar, and arts administrator Charles Eastlake, became the Keeper of the National Gallery in London in 1843 (fig. 1).² Before this time, the Gallery's pictures had been maintained but not regularly restored, and must have appeared quite dark. Eastlake had several paintings cleaned, and these interventions brought accusations that they had been damaged.³ One of the fiercest critics was the amateur painter and art dealer John Morris Moore, whose public letter condemning the restorations at the Gallery appeared in the London «Times» on 29 October 1846, under the pseudonym of Verax. Morris Moore will reappear later in this account.⁴

Although Eastlake stepped down as Keeper in 1847, restorations and their critique both continued. In 1852, the British House of Commons convened a Select Committee to investigate the matter, documenting their inquiry in a monumental report.⁵ In the wake of their findings, the Gallery was reconstituted in 1855, and Eastlake named its first Director.

Florence and Restoration

Florence's position during the nineteenth century as a locus of restoration expertise was much connected with the prestige of its Grand-ducal collections and the experts who kept them in order.⁶ Two famous international inquiries illustrate this prominence: in 1823,



1. Leonida Caldesi and Company, *Sir Charles Eastlake*, early 1860s, albumen *carte-de-visite*. London, Wellcome Collection, no. 15210i. Credit: Wellcome Collection.

the Elector Frederick Augustus III of Saxony turned to Florence for advice on the conservation of Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* in Dresden. The detailed response by the Uffizi's Assistant Director, Antonio Ramirez di Montalvo, provides a snapshot of practice at the moment. The document is notable for its attention to preventive care, for the

importance it gives to the idea of patina, and for its remarks on the impossibility of returning a painting to its original state.⁷

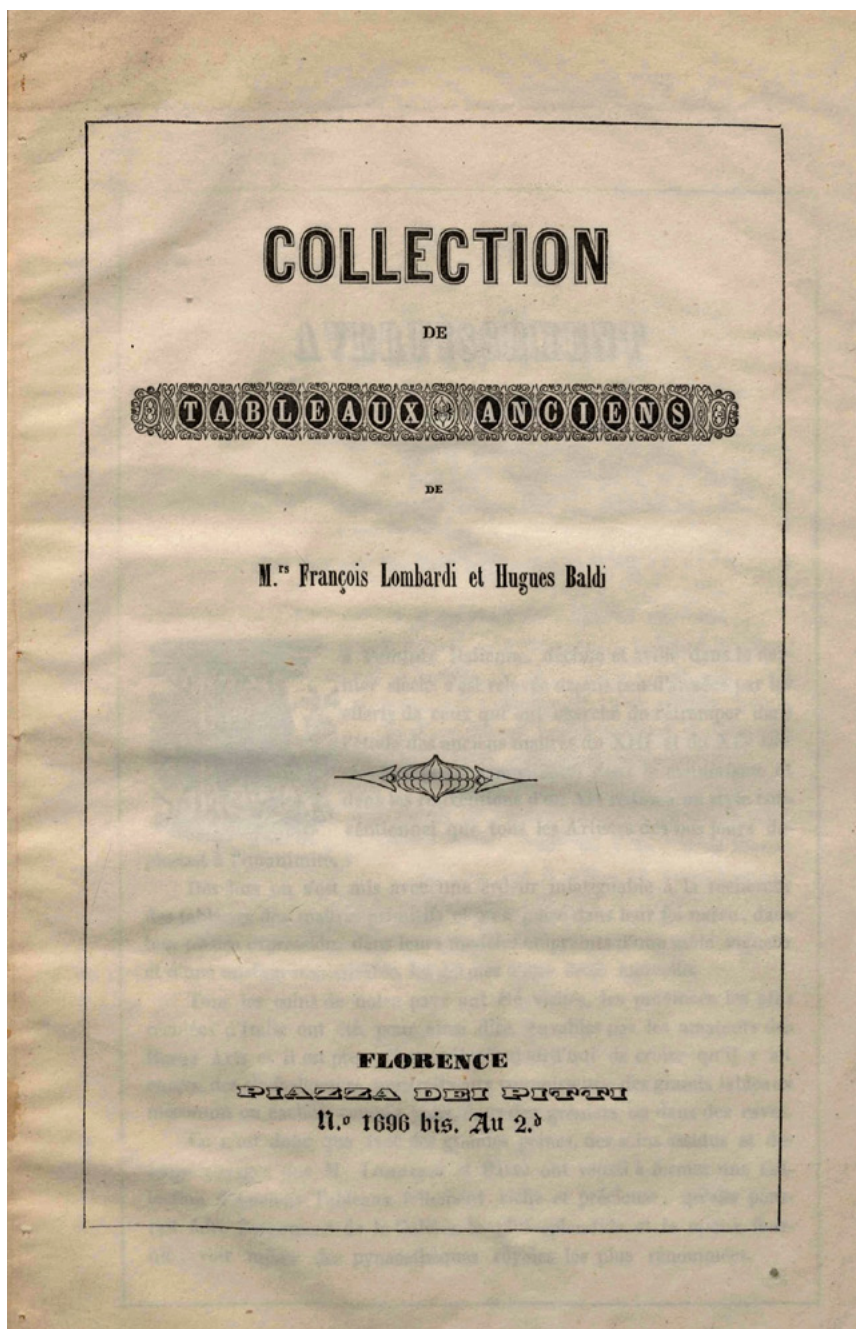
Equally telling is a survey made in 1853 by the National Gallery's Select Committee, with questionnaires sent to museums in European centers: Amsterdam, Belgium, Berlin, Florence, France, Haarlem, The Hague, Leiden, Munich, Naples, Rome, and Saint Petersburg.⁸ The Florentine Royal Galleries confirmed that the cleaning and restoration of paintings was regularly carried out, and briefly described how this was overseen.

Interviews of art world experts by the Select Committee shed further light on restoration in Florence, notably that with the painter and art dealer William Blundell Spence. Spence reported that the museum had salaried restorers who regularly cleaned paintings, and that the Florentine Royal Galleries had recently started using dammar varnish, a new material imported from Asia and first published upon in 1828, in Germany.⁹ He offered further «hints to amateurs, on buying and restoring, etc.» in his 1847 guidebook *The Lions of Florence*, noting, «Always entreat a restorer to do as little as possible, and only in places where it is absolutely necessary; a restorer in my idea, ought to be either a very first rate artist or else a mere stopper up of rents and holes, without presuming to go beyond his *crepidam*». In short, he recommended, «If you are to be hung get yourself hung by a first rate hangman».¹⁰

Beyond the Royal Galleries, there were also several noted restorers working independently in the city. They were mentioned for instance in the restoration manual written by Giovanni Bedotti, *De la restauration des tableaux*, which was published in Paris in 1837.¹¹ Also important were the freelance painter-restorers who worked on wall paintings, of whom Gaetano Bianchi would become the most famous. At the mid-century, Bianchi was just embarking on his career, on the rediscovered frescoes by Giotto in the Bardi chapel in Santa Croce.¹²

Another of these celebrated independent restorers was Ugo Baldi, who worked as a consultant for the Royal Galleries and whose prominent private commissions included Orcagna's *Strozzi Altarpiece* in Santa Maria Novella.¹³ In 1857, the National Gallery acquired a group of thirty-three early Italian paintings from Baldi and his business partner, the goldsmith and antiquarian Francesco Lombardi (fig. 2).¹⁴ Their hundred or so paintings had been described by Spence in his guidebook as «a large and highly interesting collection of works of the early Italian school, in capital preservation and chronologically arranged from the year 1000 to 1500». Baldi, of course, was responsible for the res-

torations; he was, according to Spence, «the first restorer in Florence of paintings in distemper».¹⁵ When the politician and collector Austen Henry Layard recommended the collection to Eastlake for purchase, he too affirmed that «the restorations had been conscientiously performed» and that especially the San Pier Maggiore altarpiece, then given to Orcagna, had been «very carefully cleaned and restored».¹⁶



2. The title page of the catalogue of the Lombardi-Baldi collection, published in 1845. Credit: Internet Archive.

Eastlake and Ugo Baldi: Restoration in Florence and London

It is interesting that already in the fall of 1855, two years before the acquisition of part of his collection, Eastlake engaged Baldi to restore three paintings recently bought in Florence: Benozzo Gozzoli's *Madonna and Child Enthroned among Angels and Saints* (NG283); the *Saint Jerome Altarpiece* now attributed to Francesco Botticini (NG227); and a tondo of the *Virgin and Child with Saint John the Baptist and Angels* from the Botticelli workshop (NG226). Eastlake believed Italians were the best restorers of Italian paintings, and he lamented the difficulty of having pictures treated in London; his restorer of choice was the *maestro* Giuseppe Molteni, in Milan.¹⁷ Yet we should remember what Eastlake meant by the term restoration. This was not just or even primarily preservation but artistic intervention, including those changes he deemed necessary to improve a painting for its presentation to the public – required to cultivate both morality and good design. Nonetheless, most of the repairs that were done for Eastlake, both the carefully circumscribed and the more painterly, were carried out in London. It seems likely that with Baldi, as later with Molteni, restoration was a way of offering these useful figures an added financial incentive,



3. Benozzo di Lese, called Benozzo Gozzoli, *The Virgin and Child Enthroned among Angels and Saints*, 1462, egg tempera on wood. London, The National Gallery, no. NG283. Early twentieth-century photograph, Università di Bologna, Fototeca Federico Zeri, no. 37760. Credit: Fototeca Federico Zeri - Università di Bologna.



4. Francesco Botticini, *The SSaint Jerome Altarpiece*, about 1490, egg tempera on wood. London, The National Gallery, no. NG227. Early twentieth-century photograph, Università di Bologna, Fototeca Federico Zeri, no. 40885. Credit: Fototeca Federico Zeri - Università di Bologna.

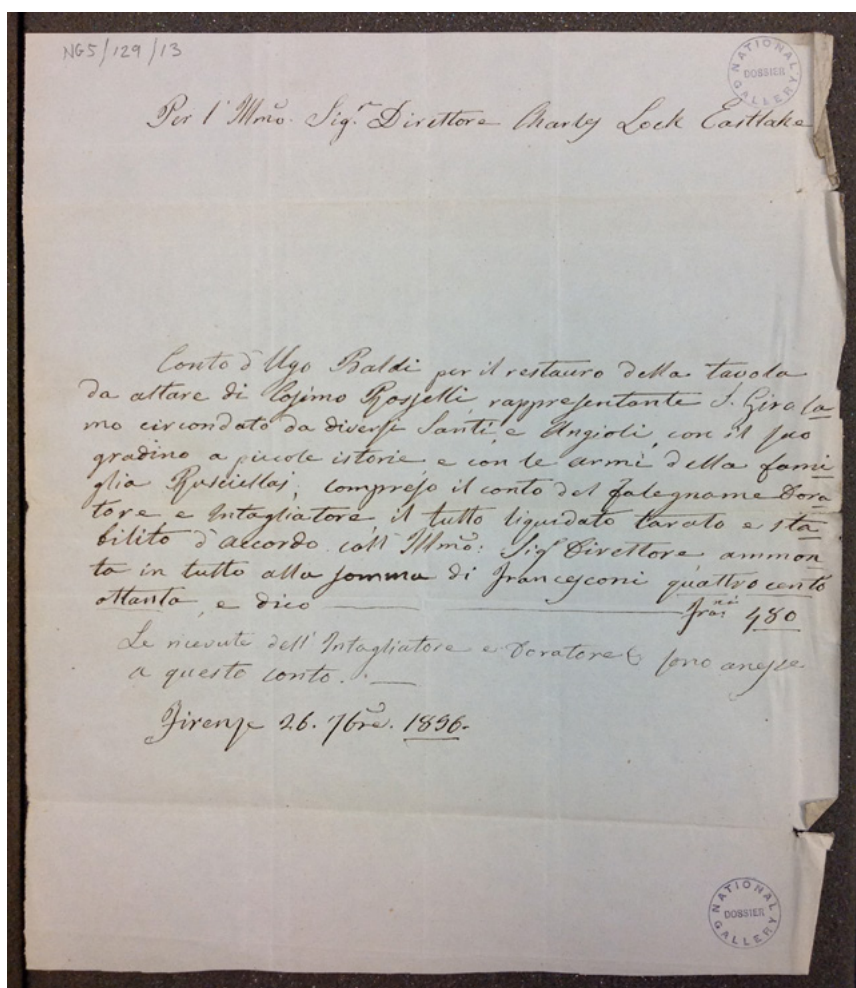
here to aid negotiations in purchasing a portion of a collection that its owners were reluctant to divide.

The Benozzo, painted in 1461 for a confraternity chapel in the Florentine convent of San Marco, was bought on 9 October 1855 from the Rinuccini estate for £137.16.8 (fig. 3). The conservation record in the National Gallery's handwritten Manuscript Catalogue, compiled beginning in 1855, notes that «Some slight injuries, caused by the opening of the wood, repaired by Sig. Ugo Baldi in Florence, in 1855–6». The entry registers the painting's good condition, but also that the trees restored by Baldi had «in some instances too modern a touch, though the general forms [were] preserved».¹⁸ Baldi was paid in August 1856 for conserving and framing the picture; the sum, £72.14.0, was more than half of the artwork's cost.¹⁹ This painting was last restored in 1885 but apparently without removing Baldi's trees, which the curator Martin Davies described in 1951 as «partly modern».²⁰

Some two months later, on 22 October 1856, Baldi was paid 480 Francesconi, or £89.09.00, for repairing and framing two pictures – though he probably just treated one work with two parts, Botticini's *Saint Jerome Altarpiece*, which was then attributed to Cosimo Roselli

(figg. 4–5).²¹ Originally painted for the Rucellai family for their chapel in the Eremiti di San Girolamo in Fiesole, the altarpiece had been purchased from the Ricasoli collection on 6 October 1855, for £114.17.0. Baldi's invoice suggests that he had discussed his work and its cost with Eastlake: «il tutto liquidato, tarato e stabilito d'accordo coll' illustrissimo Signore Direttore [everything settled, assessed, and agreed with the most illustrious director]». Baldi included with his bill those of the woodcarver and the gilder who had repaired and restored the original frame.²²

When the painting arrived in England that December 1856, Eastlake was dissatisfied with the result.²³ It appears on a *Memoranda respecting pictures, not yet placed in the Gallery, requiring more or less restoration, varnish &c.*, which gathers his instructions for work to be done by restorers in London. Of the Botticini, he observed:



5. Invoice sent to Eastlake from Ugo Baldi for the restoration of the *Saint Jerome Altarpiece*, dated 26 September 1856. London, The National Gallery Library and Archive, NG5/129/13. Credit: author.

The centre picture & the small figures above in both the side pictures need nothing more than toning (for which perhaps a brown wash in watercolour, well spread, would suffice). But the heads & hands of the larger figures in the left compartment particularly the hands of the monk on the left require revision. The hair & beard of the bishop are also too purple & cold. The half tints & lines of the faces are also too grey & cold & this applies also to the faces of the women, & in some degree to the small portraits. The draperies also of the side pictures (the larger figures) require a little precision in execution though the general arrangement is good. The predella also requires revision.²⁴

Eastlake made no secret of the source of these imperfections: «This picture was restored in Florence & the defects are in a great measure attributable to the restoration».

Baldi had gotten the tone wrong – Eastlake was likely concerned that its cool hues would bring allegations that the painting had been over-cleaned and its warm glazes scoured away. The restorer had also made too few revisions to the Quattrocento painter's designs, insufficiently following Eastlake's orders. He next assigned the work to John Bentley, a British restorer who regularly worked for the Gallery and who was charged with keeping its pictures in order generally.²⁵ Eastlake's instructions continue:

On the whole, I think that unless Mr Bentley can devote a good deal of time to this picture so as to bring it quite into harmony after the defects are remedied, it will be better not to hang it up – the state of Mr Bentley's health & his inability to do more than a certain amount of work will be a sufficient excuse.

It is to be remembered that whatever is done to the picture the character of a work *in tempera* is to be preserved.²⁶

Bentley revised Baldi's restoration and varnished the painting, but these results were also disappointing. To compound matters, the painting was placed before the public prematurely. «Unhappily restored», noted the Gallery's Keeper and Eastlake's adjutant, Ralph Wornum, who had supervised its restoration and its installation in October 1857. Eastlake would later chastise Wornum for his management of the situation, writing to him in 1859 that, «When once in the Gallery nothing can be done. The defects in the restoration ... might have been easily rectified if you had delayed to hang it up» and adding «It is better to wait six months than to have it for ever condemned as a botched affair».²⁷ Aside from some blisters having been set down, the painting is unrestored since. One sees a similar re-treatment of several of the Lombardi-Baldi pictures on their arrival in London, in 1858.²⁸



6. Workshop of Sandro Botticelli, *The Virgin and Child with Saint John and Two Angels*, probably about 1490-1500, egg tempera on wood. London, The National Gallery, no. NG226. Late-nineteenth or early twentieth-century photograph, Università di Bologna, Fototeca Federico Zeri, no. 40641. Credit: Fototeca Federico Zeri - Università di Bologna.

The third painting to be restored by Baldi, the Botticelli tondo showing the *Madonna and Child with Saint John and Two Angels*, was bought in Florence from a grocer and banker called Brown on 8 October 1855 (fig. 6); the importance of Botticelli in the period is reflected in the picture's relatively high price of £331.13. It was given to Baldi to restore, but he never managed to do so. In 1856, Eastlake reported to the Gallery's trustees that the painting «had been covered with a varnish, which, though serving as a protection, had altered its character as a tempera picture; it was therefore placed in the hands of Signor Baldi [...] with directions to remove the varnish, if the operation could be performed with safety».²⁹ Baldi seems not to have started the project, and indeed would never work for the Gallery again. The painting was later brought to London and treated on its arrival by Bentley, who in September 1857 revised the old retouching and re-varnished the panel with mastic. It was placed in the gallery immediately. Of its condition, the Manuscript Catalogue notes that, «The whole has a tone imparted by former varnishings which disguise the material of tempera».³⁰

Given these observations, one wonders why Bentley did not clean the painting but merely improved its retouching. Eastlake believed that works executed in the egg tempera medium should have a matte surface, but all three of these tempera paintings were displayed after having been varnished. It may be that they were not yet behind glass, and the varnish offered protection from the damaging effects of the London air – a major and real concern in the period.³¹ Or perhaps, time was of the essence.

Pollaiuolo's Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian

Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo's *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* (NG292, fig. 7) offers a different model, in which restoration in London was foreseen from the start of acquisition. The painting was finished in 1475 for the Oratory of Saint Sebastian, the chapel connected to the church of Santissima Annunziata patronized by the Pucci family. As now, during the nineteenth century the oratory remained under the family's aegis.³² The National Gallery acquired the panel from Marchese Roberto Pucci in 1857, its importance reflected in its considerable cost of £3155.4.6.³³

Some of our insight into this incident comes from Eastlake's old enemy Morris Moore, who published an account of the episode the same year. Moore's prejudice makes him an unreliable narrator, but he does seem to have been informed about the case. According to him, the painting had been strongly cleaned using lye by an «ignorant person» at the end of the eighteenth century. The chapel was repaired in 1830, Moore writes, when the panel was carried to the nearby Palazzo Pucci, «and it was towards 1838 that the administrators gave Senor Antonio Garagalli the commission to restore it, and they settled the terms at 300 scudi».³⁴ Garagalli was another of the notable commercial painter-restorers working in Florence. In his 1837 treatise, the restorer Bedotti describes meeting Garagalli on his arrival to the city, recalling, «There I met a German artist named Mescher, as well as a certain Garagalli, his pupil. Their way of working seemed excellent to me».³⁵ Bedotti returned to their atelier many times to hear conversations with the artists who frequented it. Garagalli was also active elsewhere in Tuscany and beyond. His sensitive treatment of Andrea del Sarto's *Saint Agnes Altarpiece* in Pisa was praised in the 1832-38 Passigli edition of Vasari's *Lives*, edited by Giuseppe Montani and Giovanni Masselli, who observe that Garagalli «left the original painting in the condition to which time had reduced it, merely supplying certain parts which had scaled off» and that these latter were completed with precision, «scrupolosa esattezza».³⁶



7. Antonio del Pollaiuolo and Piero del Pollaiuolo, *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*, completed 1475, oil on wood. London, National Gallery, no. NG292. Photo before 1906 by Anderson, Rome, Università di Bologna, Fototeca Federico Zeri, no. 36600. Credit: Fototeca Federico Zeri - Università di Bologna.

Moore's narrative continued:

Accordingly he [Garagalli] put his hand to work, and, as an essay of restoration, he did half of the Saint's figure; in the opinion of artists having been consulted upon the system he proposed to follow in his work, and these having disapproved of it, on account of the damages on the painting being in great part being irremediable (*irremediabili*), he was so disheartened, that having found a way to disengage himself from his employers, the restoration was no further prosecuted. And the picture was ever afterwards seen at the house of Marchese Pucci in the state in which Garagalli had left it.³⁷

Eastlake, however, dates this treatment to 1852 and believed that Garagalli had nearly completed the restoration by the time of his

death, in 1856.³⁸ In any case, the Pollaiuolo remained in Palazzo Pucci with its restoration unfinished, and Eastlake was able to negotiate the purchase.

Moore also claimed that Eastlake exported the work illegally.³⁹ He would certainly have had reason to do so. Eastlake had recently been foiled in acquiring Domenico Ghirlandaio's altarpiece of the *Sacra Conversazione degli Ingesuati* by Tuscany's strict export laws.⁴⁰ Whether or not Moore's claim has merit, his description of the packing, in which the Pollaiuolo panel was secured in its crate beneath an inconsequential canvas (showing *Moses Defending the Midianites*), matches Eastlake's instructions for unpacking the crate that he sent to London.⁴¹

Here again it was John Bentley who treated the painting following Eastlake's instructions, which read:

The lower part of the fronting, stooping crossbowman is evidently incomplete & will be the first thing to attend to. In the body of the St. Sebastian the half tint below the ribs, on his right side, left of the spectator, is rather too dark, & the partial lightening of that part will be an improvement. The head (hair) of the stooping crossbowman with his back turned wants to be a little more relieved from the background. This may be done by slightly lightening part of the ground next the head. Some of the joinings of the boards in the panel will require to be better concealed. The whole when done may receive a thin coat of varnish.⁴²

For this early painting in the oil medium, Eastlake was especially concerned with the relationships between light and dark that produced the figures' relief and the spatial depth. One assumes that his directions were carried out, though we cannot be sure – the painting was restored again in 1885, when it was found to be in a «dirty state».⁴³ Still, it is tempting to wonder whether some of the non-original layers observed during its later treatment during the 1950s, including toning in the figure of St Sebastian and repainting in the hair, come from adjustments made by Garagalli or Bentley to compensate for the earlier strong cleaning.⁴⁴

As the original frame remained on the altar in the oratory at Santissima Annunziata, a new one was ordered from Florence, arriving in July 1857. Though it fit «perfectly well», as Eastlake noted, there was some need to dampen the effect of the new gold: «The overpowering bur-nishing of the Pucci frame must certainly be reduced», he enjoined. Wornum concurred, observing, «overburnished but a magnificent design and perhaps the finest frame in the gallery». Regilding was done in London.⁴⁵

Eastlake and Forni

After this Tuscan focus during the early period of his directorship, Eastlake's collecting activities moved northward, where in Austrian-controlled Lombardy it was easier to remove paintings. In Milan his friend, the restorer Molteni, was on the commission that approved exports. But remaining in Florence, we can recall Eastlake's many returns to the city, nearly every year until his death in 1865.⁴⁶

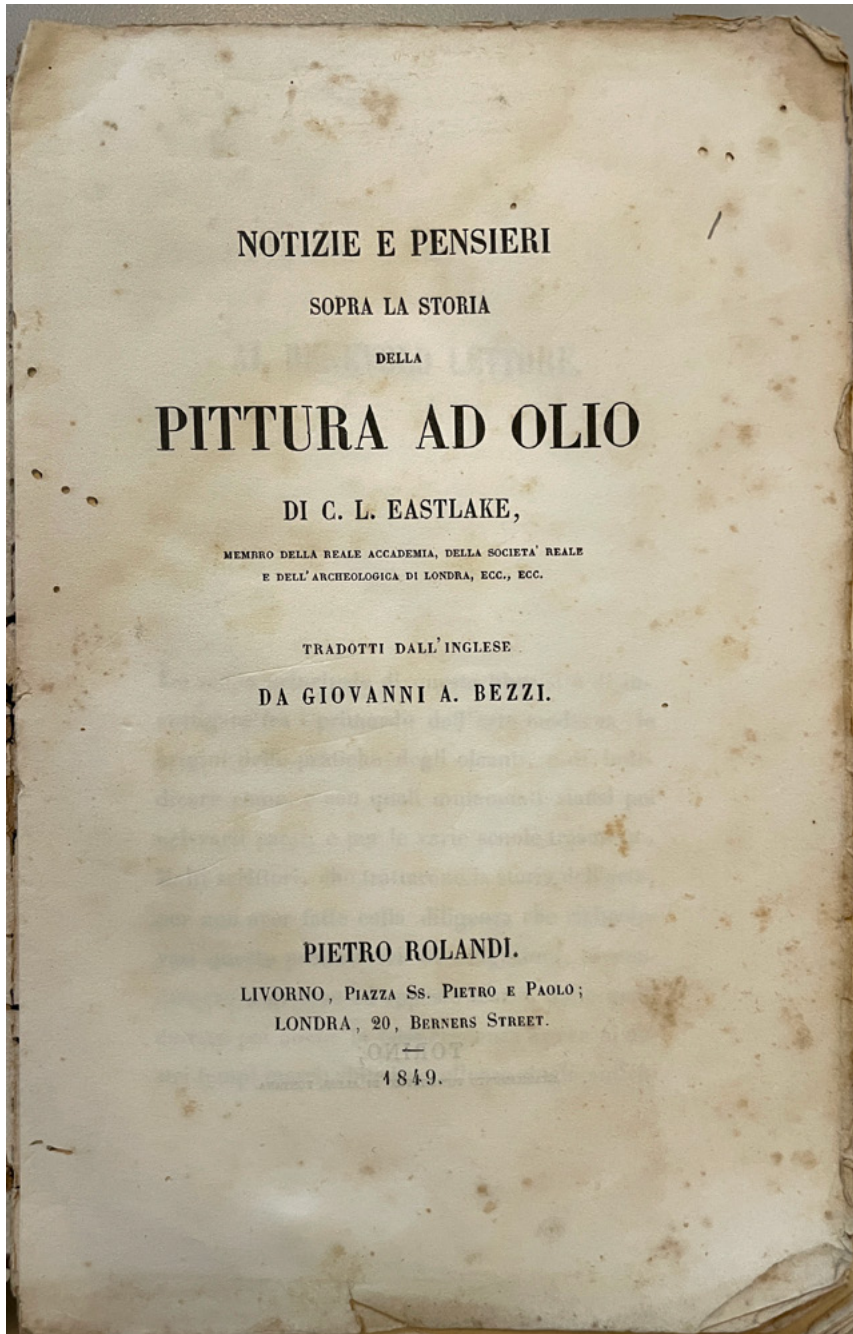
It was around this same time that Ulisse Forni, who ultimately became the First Restorer at the Royal Galleries, was collecting material for his seminal *Manuale del Pittore Restauratore* (1866) – one of the century's most important texts on restoration.⁴⁷ Like Eastlake, Forni was familiar with the recent art technical literature. Though there is no evidence of the two having met, Forni was aware of Eastlake's scholarship, notably his *Materials for a History of Oil Painting*. The book was available in Italian translation at Eastlake's own request, and is among the books that Forni cites (fig. 8).⁴⁸

Forni praised the National Gallery building as the «most perfect model of modern galleries», as well as the expertise of its catalogue by Wornum and Eastlake. For him, however, Eastlake's volume was most useful for practical matters, particularly the historically proven methods that could inform modern preservation, which are included in the second, materially-focused section of Forni's manual. He notes a practice of covering the back of oak panels with gesso, glue, and tow, observed on Van Eyck's *Arnolfini Wedding*, which kept the support flat and prevented woodworm. Most of Forni's attention, however, concerns Eastlake's instructions for purifying drying oils, some derived from the Mayerne manuscript.⁴⁹ Now so valued for its scholarship, here we see Eastlake's text used as a kind of workshop reference. The interest resonates with a modern conservator's concerns regarding the quality and stability of the materials they employ.

Conclusions

By the mid-nineteenth century, Florence was already an international hub where restoration played a critical role in the life of artworks presented in publicly accessible galleries and on the art market. The practice facilitated the movement of objects and the creation of collections. The city's famed conservation expertise was built upon a long history of such activity.

It can be difficult to generalize about restoration and indeed, much of what is compelling about the cases presented here is the extent to which specific knowledge is possible. Artworks were regularly treated



8. The title page of Eastlake's *Notizie e pensieri sopra la storia della pittura ad olio*, translated by Giovanni Aubrey Bezzi, published by Pietro Rolandi in 1849. Credit: author.

and mis-treated in the past, but rarely do we find the thoughts and wishes of the actors preserved as eloquently and extensively as they are for Charles Eastlake. In each case the artist and artwork, materials and techniques, condition and restorer, and the context of purchase all played crucial roles in final appearance of the object. Within these variables, Eastlake instructed how these paintings were to look.

The examples above allow us to trace his concerns regarding materials, composition, form, color, patina, harmony, and surface gloss. That he was regularly dissatisfied with the outcomes of these treatments reveals how particular such aesthetic concerns were, as indeed they remain. Looking more broadly, one would find a similar diversity of approaches within the city and even in the same institution. There was equal variety of practice outside of Florence – across Italy and throughout Europe. For instance, in answering the British House of Commons Select Committee's 1853 survey, the Naples gallery reported that «as a rule, it is not advisable to attempt restoration», while in Rome the practice was «to do as little as possible»; in Berlin the paintings were «restored upon the principle that the original be preserved as much as possible», with the work done by the «good experienced conscientious restorer» on staff.⁵⁰ A comprehensive study for this region and period remains to be undertaken.

Nonetheless, there is opportunity for retrospection. Eastlake's involvement with the work of restoration can seem capricious today but was both pragmatically formalist and highly scholarly. It was informed by the study of comparative works throughout Europe and an engagement with art historical literature, including primary sources and contemporary writing, as well as his sense of the National Gallery's role in the formation of public taste and his desire to avoid scandals over the cleaning of paintings. The restorations he directed allowed the acquisition of damaged pictures and their presentation before the public in an ideal, intact state. Eastlake's interventions might give us pause, particularly considering a trend in contemporary painting conservation toward greater compensation for loss. Like Eastlake's, our work is normally informed by research but inevitably subjective; the parallels with nineteenth-century practice should disavow us of any modern hubris. The 1847 assessment of William Blundell Spence remains relevant: «The great secret in this art of restoration consists in knowing when to leave off».⁵¹

Another detail that emerges from this study is the difference in status between the craftspeople who carried out this work. At least some Florentine restorers enjoyed a prestige not shared by their colleagues in London, which was reflected in the high prices paid for their work. Eastlake ultimately chose to have his paintings restored closer to home, at lower cost and where he could exercise greater control. Such discrepancies and dynamics continue to exist in the art world.

Naturally, restorations still influence the experience of works of art, which are inevitably damaged and which we view and interpret

through modern or older layers of added material. Some paintings still bear their nineteenth-century restorations, and many others traces of these. As these restorations are gradually redone, they offer opportunities (too seldom taken) to study past treatments and hence to document this aspect of historiography.⁵²

For all its gains in professionalization and popularity, modern conservation likewise remains under-discussed and recorded. The public, and even scholars, are often unaware of the condition of the artworks they see, the prior conservation interventions that have occurred, and their underlying rationales. Nor should this situation surprise us: in a moment when so much knowledge is freely available, conservation documentation remains largely sequestered in its archives. Information on conservation should be far more accessible, in all its exquisite detail.

¹ This text is based on a talk prepared for the *Convegno Internazionale di Studi «Firenze-Londra 1850 e dintorni: mercato, critica, conservazione»*, held on 27–28 November 2024 at the Dipartimento di Storia, Archeologia, Geografia, Arte e Spettacolo (SAGAS), University of Florence and organized by Mattia Barana, Roberto Bartalini, and Davide Lacagnina. I am grateful to Mattia for inviting me to speak and for encouraging the publication of my talk.

² On Charles Eastlake, see Susanna Avery-Quash and Julie Sheldon, *Art for the Nation. The Eastlakes and the Victorian Art World*, National Gallery, London, 2011; specifically on conservation, Matthew Hayes, *The Renaissance Restored: Paintings conservation and the birth of modern art history in nineteenth-century Europe*, Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles, 2021, chapter 3; and Susanna Avery-Quash, *The Art of Conservation II: Sir Charles Eastlake and Conservation at the National Gallery, London*, «The Burlington Magazine», CLVII, 2015, pp. 846–854. On the history of the National Gallery more generally, see Jonathan Conlin, *The Nation's Mantelpiece. A History of the National Gallery*, Pallas Athene, London, 2006.

³ The first Keeper of the National Gallery from 1824, William Seguer, was also a restorer. On him see Alastair Laing, *William Seguer and advice to picture collectors*, in *Studies in the History of Painting Restoration*, edited by Sarah Staniforth and Christine Sitwell, Archetype, London, 1998, pp. 97–120; also Seguer's entry in Jacob Simon, editor, *British Picture Restorers, 1600–1950*, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/research/programmes/directory-of-british-picture-restorers/restorers-s?>. Accessed June 2026.

⁴ Verax [John Morris Moore], *The National Gallery*, «The Times», 29 October 1846, p. 6. See also John Morris

Moore, John Ruskin, and A. G., *The Abuses of the National Gallery with the Letters of «A.G.»*, of «The Oxford Graduate», the Defence of Mr. Eastlake, in «The Daily News», &c. &c. and Remarks upon them by Verax, William Pickering, London, 1847.

⁵ House of Commons [Great Britain], *Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery; together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of evidence, appendix and index*, H.M. Stationers Office, London, 1853. On this episode, see also Jaynie Anderson, *First Cleaning Controversy at the National Gallery, 1846–1853*, in *Issues in the Conservation of Paintings*, edited by David Bomford and Mark Leonard, Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles, 2004, pp. 441–53 [First published in *Appearance, Opinion, Change: Evaluating the look of paintings*, edited by Stephen Hackney, UKIC, London, 1990, pp. 3–7].

⁶ See especially Gabriella Incerpi, *Semplici e continue diligenze: Conservazione e restauro dei dipinti nelle gallerie fiorentine nel Settecento e nell'Ottocento*, Edifir, Florence, 2011.

⁷ See Incerpi, *Semplici e continue diligenze*, cit., pp. 121–123; Giuseppina Perusini, *Il manuale di Christian Koester e il restauro in Italia e in Germania dal 1780 al 1830*, Edifir, Florence, 2012, pp. 93–101.

⁸ House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee*, cit., Appendix VII, pp. 752–757.

⁹ Spence was interviewed on 22 July 1853. Ivi, pp. 707–712.

¹⁰ Crepidam from *Ne supra crepidam*, «not beyond the shoe» – today the English speaker might say «stay in your lane!». Spence identified the principal restorers in Florence as «Garagalli, Botticelli, Gagliardi, Ugobaldi [*sic.*], Fineschi, Ussi, etc. etc.». An Artist [William Blundell Spence], *The Lions of Florence and its Environs*, Felix Le Monnier, Florence, 1847, p. 66.

¹¹ On Bedotti and his treatise, see Valentina Parodi, *Giovanni Bedotti, Il Restauro dei Dipinti*, Edifir, Florence, 2010 [The treatise originally published as Giovanni Bedotti, *De la restauration des tableaux, traité spécial sur la meilleure manière de rentoiler, nettoyer et restaurer les tableaux anciens et modernes*, Chez l'auteur, Paris, 1837].

¹² On Bianchi, see Hayes, *Renaissance Restored*, cit., chapter 1.

¹³ On Baldi, see the contribution in this volume by Mattia Barana.

¹⁴ On the Lombardi-Baldi collection, see Martin Davies, *The Earlier Italian Schools*, National Gallery, London, 1951, Appendix I, pp. 435–347; David Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake and the Victorian Art World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1978, pp. 124–125 and *passim*; *Collection de Tableaux Anciens de M.rs François Lombardi et Hugues Baldi*, Piazza dei Pitti, Florence, 1845.

¹⁵ Spence, *Lions*, cit., p. 37.

¹⁶ Austen Henry Layard to Charles Eastlake, 18 April 1855. National Gallery Library and Archive, NG5/114/2.

¹⁷ See Jaynie Anderson, *Giuseppe Molteni in correspondence with Giovanni Morelli: The restoration of Renaissance painting in mid nineteenth-century Milan*, Edifir, Florence, 2013.

¹⁸ Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake*, cit., p. 298; National Gallery Library and Archive, *Manuscript Catalogue*, NG10, vol. 2, no. 283.

¹⁹ On 5 August 1856, a payment of £72.14.0 is recorded: «Mssrs. McCracken, disbursements on account of the Trustees of the National Gallery, to Signor Ugo Baldi of Florence, for repairing and framing a picture by Benozzo Gozoli, No 283». National Gallery Library and Archive, *Cash Book 1855–1866*, NG13/1/3.

²⁰ Davies, *The Earlier Italian Schools*, cit., p. 57.

²¹ Payment of £89.09.00 is recorded on 22 October 1856: «To Messrs Mc-

Cracken on account of a payment made to Signor Ugo Baldi of Florence for repairing and framing two pictures, and their own charge as per voucher». NG13/1/3, cit.

²² Ugo Baldi's invoice for 480 Francesconi for the restoration of NG227 (attributed to Cosimo Rosselli), dated 26 September 1856, National Gallery Library and Archive, NG5/129/13. Baldi included the invoices from the carpenter Ranieri Bardi (dated 27 September 1856, for 30 Francesconi) and the gilder Giovanni Bioni (also 27 September 1856, for £440 or 66 Francesconi) who repaired and regilded the frame, respectively, NG5/129/14-15. Many thanks to Francesco Caruso for help with the translation of Baldi's invoice.

²³ Record of the painting's arrival on 9 December 1856 in Ralph Wornum's diary, National Gallery Library and Archive, NGA2/3/3/1.

²⁴ Undated (ca. 1857) in Charles Eastlake's hand, *Memoranda respecting pictures, not yet placed in the Gallery, requiring more or less restoration, varnish &c.*, National Gallery Library and Archive, NG5/242/2.

²⁵ See the entry by Jacob Simon, *John Bentley 1820–1867, John and Edward Bentley 1869–1878, Edward Bentley 1879–1883*, in *British picture restorers, 1600–1950*, cit. https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/research/programmes/directory-of-british-picture-restorers/restorers-b/?_gl=1*14gwfid*_up*MQ.*_ga*MTewOTY4MTM4OS4xNzY3NDY1Nzcy*_ga_3D53N72CHJ*czE3Njc0NjU3NzEkbzEkZzEkdDE3Njc0NjU4NzgkajE0JGwwJGgw#BE. Accessed June 2026.

²⁶ Eastlake, *Memoranda*, cit. The Gallery's account books do not record a specific payment to John Bentley for this restoration work; perhaps it formed part of the £46.10.0 paid to him on 12 January 1858 «For restoring nine pictures in the National Gallery». NG13/1/3, cit.

²⁷ Ralph Wornum's diary for 1 October 1857, National Gallery Library and Archive, NGA2/3/3/1. Charles Eastlake to Ralph Wornum from Milan, 14 September 1859, National Gallery Library and Archive, NGA2/3/3/65.

²⁸ In addition to the Botticelli and the «Rosselli» restored by Baldi, the works from the Lombardi-Baldi collection re-treated in London included NG564 Margarito d'Arezzo; NG566 Duccio; and NG584, then given to Andrea di Castagno, the latter extensively restored by Henry Merritt for £21. See NG13/1/3, cit.; a letter from the restorer Henry Merritt to Ralph Wornum, 29 July 1858, is in the conservation file for NG584 Tuscan School/Pratovecchio Master.

²⁹ House of Commons (Great Britain), *Copies of a Treasury Minute, dated the 27th day of March 1855, Re-constituting the Establishment of the National Gallery; And, of the Annual Reports of the Director to the Lords of the Treasury from the above Date to 1864 inclusive*, H.M. Stationer's Office, London, 1867, p. 25.

³⁰ National Gallery, *Manuscript Catalogue*, cit., vol. 2. The Manuscript Catalogue records the restoration's date as October; Wornum's diary instead records the painting's hanging on September 19, 1857. National Gallery Library and Archive, NGA2/3/3/1, cit.

³¹ See David Saunders, *Pollution and the National Gallery*, «National Gallery Technical Bulletin», XXI, 2000, 77–94; Avery-Quash, *The Art of Conservation*, cit.

³² On the recent restoration of the oratory, see Giannozzo Pucci and Idanna Pucci, editors, *L'Oratorio di San Sebastiano o Cappella Pucci alla SS. Annunziata a Firenze*, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, Florence, 2024.

³³ Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake*, cit., pp. 165–167, 304.

³⁴ John Morris Moore, *The National Gallery Purchase of a Pollaiuolo and Sir*

Charles Eastlake's Violation of Tuscan Law, John Edward Taylor, London, 1857, p. 4.

³⁵ Parodi, *Giovanni Bedotti, Il Restauro dei Dipinti*, cit., p. 95.

³⁶ Giorgio Vasari, *Le opere di Giorgio Vasari: Pittore e architetto Aretino*, 3 vols., Per David Passigli, Florence, 1832–38, vol. 1, p. 586, note 100; and Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, translated by Mrs. Jonathan Foster, 5 vols., Henry Bohn, London, 1850–52, vol. 3, p. 220.

³⁷ Morris Moore, *The National Gallery Purchase*, cit., pp. 4–5.

³⁸ Eastlake, *Memoranda*, cit., and National Gallery, *Manuscript Catalogue*, cit., vol. 2.

³⁹ On Morris Moore's claim that Eastlake violated Tuscan law and his description of the painting's packing, see Morris Moore, *The National Gallery Purchase*, cit., pp. 6–19, especially p. 16. Material related to the Pollaiuolo can also be found in the Uffizi's Archivio Storico: 1856, Filza LXXX, Parte 1^a, no. 11, *Antonio del Pollaiuolo. Suo quadro della cappella Pucci nella SS. Annunziata di Firenze rimesso per restaurarsi e premure perché sia rimesso a posto*; 1857, Filza LXXXI, Parte 1^a, *Pollaiuolo. Suo quadro che esisteva nella cappella Pucci nella SS. Annunziata di Firenze venduto all'Inghilterra. Chiarimenti richiesti e dati al R. Procuratore al Tribunale di prima Istanza di Firenze intorno al detto quadro*. The latter file preserves a copy of Moore's pamphlet.

⁴⁰ Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake*, cit., pp. 145–149.

⁴¹ Eastlake's *Directions respecting the unpacking of the case containing the Pollaiuolo*, dated 29 April 1857, are preserved in the painting's curatorial file: «Outside the pitched cloth the end of a cord will be found sealed with two seals. When the pitched cloth is removed the same seals will be found on the crossing of the cording on the case. The cover

being removed, bars of wood will be found above the picture. The picture is also fastened by means of three screws to the cross-stays at the bottom of the case. The picture should then be taken out. The picture on canvas representing *Moses Defending the Midianites* being removed there will be found, underneath, bands fastening a sheet of paper over the surface. Under that sheet of paper will be found a second, on the surface of the tavola».

⁴² Eastlake, *Memoranda*, cit. For the likely payment to Bentley, see note 27.

⁴³ The painting's conservation file records in 1885, «Cleaned and repaired by Dyer. Dirty state, cracks in several places». NG292, Conservation Record, p. 5.

⁴⁴ The painting was cleaned and restored in 1954 by Norman Brommelle. It is currently undergoing treatment by Alysia Sawicka and Hayley Tomlinson, slated to finish in May 2026.

⁴⁵ Eastlake to Ralph Wornum, 10 August 1857, National Gallery Library and Archive, NGA2/3/2/29. Ralph Wornum's diary, cit. Wornum records the frame's arrival from Florence on 31 July 1857. On 24 August, the burnish-

ing was «reduced by Mr. Crichfield by regilding – frame greatly improved».

⁴⁶ On Eastlake's travels see *The Travel Notebooks of Sir Charles Eastlake*, *The Walpole Society*, edited by Susanna Avery-Quash, vol. 73, 2 vols, The Charlesworth Group, Wakefield, 2011.

⁴⁷ See Ulisse Forni, *Manuale del pittore restauratore: studi per la nuova edizione*, Edifir, Florence, 2004 [Originally Successori Le Monnier, Florence, 1866].

⁴⁸ Charles Lock Eastlake, *Materials for a History of Oil Painting*, 2 vols., Longman, Brown Green & Longmanns, London, 1847–1869. The first volume was published in Italian translation as *Notizie e pensieri sopra la storia della pittura ad olio*, translated by Giovanni Aubrey Bezzi, P. Rolandi, Livorno, 1849. The translator, Giovanni Aubrey Bezzi, warrants study in his own right. A Piedmontese refugee to England, Bezzi was known to Eastlake from his native Plymouth, where he was a music master; he later assisted Eastlake in the Royal Commission on Fine Arts. He is perhaps most notable for his role as a founding member of the Arundel Society and for his role in the rediscovery of

Giotto's portrait of Dante in the Bargello, in 1840. See Giorgio Vasari, *Vasari in England, 2: Fra Angelico translated, 1850*, FONTES. Text- und Bildquellen zur Kunstgeschichte 1350-1750, edited by Charles Davis, vol. 76, 2013. DOI: 10.11588/artdok.00002180.

⁴⁹ Forni, *Manuale*, cit., pp. 67, 169, 236–240.

⁵⁰ House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee*, cit., Appendix VII, pp. 753–575. For an overview of painting restoration in nineteenth-century Italy, see Giorgio Bonsanti, *From Guizzardi to Cavenaghi: Nineteenth-century Italian conservators*, in *The Art of Conservation*, edited by Jane Martineau and David Bomford, Burlington Press, London, 2024, pp. 214–237.

⁵¹ Spence continues, «as delicate glazings may be mistaken for dirt by an unexperienced hand». Spence, *Lions*, cit., p. 66.

⁵² Recent disappearances of nineteenth-century restoration include the current treatment of the Prato Vecchio Altarpiece (NG584) and re-framing of Polaiuolo's *Saint Sebastian* (NG292) at the National Gallery, London.