JAMES COLLINSON, THE CAMPO SANTO, AND
THE BIRTH OF THE PRE-RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD

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He opened the portfolio; it contained views of the Campo Santo at Pisa. The leaves were slowly turned over in silence, the spectators partly admiring, partly not knowing what to think, partly wondering at what was coming.
                    – John Henry Newman, *Loss and Gain*

No single work is more often cited as the spark that ignited the Pre-Raphaelite movement than Carlo Lasinio's folio of engravings depicting the frescoes adorning the walls of the Campo Santo in Pisa. William Holman Hunt wrote that "it was probably the finding of this book at this special time which caused the establishment of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood" ("Pre-Raphaelite" 104) and William Michael Rossetti confirms that it was the inspection of these engravings one evening in August or September of 1848 that inspired the young artists to "make a new start" in the Pre-Raphaelite style (*Family Letters* 126).[1] Rejecting the artifice that they perceived to have infected painting since the era of Raphael, they sought to return to the purer style of the early masters, executed with true fidelity to nature and the "naïve traits of frank expression and unaffected grace [that] had made Italian art so essentially vigorous and progressive" (Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism* 1:130-31). Hunt describes how the Lasinio engravings crystallized their will and fostered in the three young men "the determination that a kindred simplicity should regulate [their] own ambition" (1:130). It was on this foundation that Pre-Raphaelitism was established and has endured (fig. 1).

Why did the "finding" of these engravings exert such a profound influence on the P.R.B., and by what route did they actually find their way to the Millais' house during the formative meeting of the Brotherhood? Could the supplier of these influential engravings have been James Collinson, one of the least-known Pre-Raphaelite brethren, and if so, how?