

A Visual Journey into the Bible  
*Mary*

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## Mary

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### *Introduction*

By far the most popular images of Christian art are pictures of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, the Madonna. The cult of the Madonna is particularly interesting and strange. The cult of a female is rare in religions that developed after or together with Christianity. But of course, the female element is strong in many cultures. The Virgin Mary added the female element to Christianity. The Madonna shown together with her son represented the importance of maternity in society, and the need to care for children. Maternity and fertility were some of the strongest representations in the art of archaeological times. Many early cults were based on the mother image, notably the ancient Egyptian worship of Isis and her son Horus. The Madonna can be considered to have been necessary for Christian religion to underscore the message of love, kindness and of course the continuance of the race. The cult of Mary had a soothing influence on civilisation, and started because there was a need for a more kind and tender element in Europe than in the original spirit of the Hebrew Testaments.

The history of the Nativity is told only in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Matthew even tells the birth of Jesus more from the standpoint of Joseph, Mary's husband, and his story is very short. The Gospels do not relate the early history of Mary: her own birth and childhood. Painters however were interested not just in the connection of Mary with her child, but in her own particular history as well. So they used scenes from apocryphal writings and from legends, such as the story of the meeting of her parents. Most of these legends were compiled in Jacobus de Voragine's 'Legenda Aurea' of the thirteenth century. The life and death of the Virgin, even her Assumption to the heavens and her Coronation are main spiritual themes in Italian and Flemish church panels of the Gothic Middle Ages and of the Renaissance.

The Gospels do not mention Mary much after Jesus's birth either. She is present in Matthew and Luke's texts of the Nativity. Mary finds Jesus in the temple. She is with Joseph and Jesus on the flight to Egypt. She is at the wedding of Cana where the first miracle is performed. And she is at Christ's death on Golgotha. For the rest of the stories she remains in the background. The Gospels of course concentrate on the message of Jesus, not on Mary.

Jacobus de Voragine wrote on Mary's genealogy in the thirteenth century. The 'Golden Legend' adored mysterious and royal lineages and the Virgin is told to be of royal blood. She took her origin from the tribe of Judah and the royal descent of David. David had many sons among whom Nathan and Solomon. In the line of Nathan, Levi begot Melchi and Panthar. Panthar begot Barpanthar. Barpanthar begot Joachim and Joachim was the father of the Virgin Mary. Nathan married a woman of the line of Solomon and of her begot Jacob. When Nathan died, Melchi married the deceased Nathan's wife and of her begot Heli. When Heli died, Jacob took Heli's wife and begot Joseph. Joseph married Mary. Joachim took a wife named Anna, who had a sister called Hismeria. This Hismeria had a daughter called Elisabeth and this Elisabeth was the mother of John the Baptist. Luke testifies that Elisabeth was of the daughters of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi. Mary thus had a bond with the kingly tribe of

Judah of Israel, the line of David, and also with the tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe of Israel. Mary was of both tribes. The 'Golden Legend' told that Mary was of royal descent and from that assertion stem many legends and pictures.

The cult of the Virgin became popular between the sixth and twelfth centuries. The Roman Catholic Church, that is all the Christians who adhered before the Reformation to faith in the message of Christ, needed a representation and a representative for a certain aspect of Jesus's Good News. Jesus had told that only enter the Kingdom of Heavens, close to God the Father, those men who could be like children. This did not mean being innocent or naïve. It meant those who could give without thinking, those who could forgive without afterthought. It meant the utterly pure of heart and the truly altruistic. Apparently this was not much of a male message. Even though the male saints testified to this kind of messages, their lives and martyrdom were still impregnated with violence, heroism, epics and hard courage.

The purest example of altruism and the finest example of love and kindness in humans were of course maternity. The best example was the altruism of mothers who gave birth in pain and continued to raise children. Mothers suffered bearing children, mothers forgot themselves for their children. We have here a clear message of the transcendence that Europeans sought after. Mothers give their lives; the gift of oneself being the highest altruistic offer a human can give. The gift was for an aim greater than oneself, hence a goal of transcendence. Rapidly, Mary, the Mother of the Church, personified the softer, sweeter, altruistic message of love of Christ. Mary represented the most beautiful and pure love that was asked in the message of Christ.

The Virgin Mary is represented in many themes of the pictorial arts. There are too many themes to all be commented in this text. We will start with the conception and birth of Mary. The major further themes are the Annunciation and the Visitation. Mary is represented with or without the child Jesus in various themes, of which we will only describe some like the crowning of the Madonna and the scenes called 'Humble Madonnas', *Umiltà's* or *Mater Amabilis*. A popular early theme was the 'Seven Joys and Seven Sorrows' of the Virgin. Mary was shown frequently inspiring the arts or being painted herself by Luke. Finally, we will talk of the death of the Virgin, then of her assumption and present images of her as the Immaculate Conception.

The paintings that we will show are examples of the main themes of the devotion to Mary. As no other themes these representations of Mary and her Child have their roots in Byzantine art, almost the beginning of the pictorial arts, as we know them currently in Europe. We will see pictures of almost every style of the art of painting because the devotion to Mary spanned the centuries. Indeed, the adoration of Mary continues till our days as testify the numerous pilgrimage sites and churches dedicated to her cult in Europe.

*Joachim and Anne***The Meeting of Joachim and Anne outside the Golden Gate at Jerusalem**

Filippino Lippi (1457-1486). Statens Museum for Kunst – Copenhagen. 1497.

Joachim and Anne were married for twenty years, but the marriage had remained childless. They fervently wanted a child. Joachim went to the Temple of Jerusalem to make offerings so that their wish for a child would be fulfilled. But Joachim was turned away by the priests. Since he was childless he was not allowed to stay with the others. Ashamed, Joachim took refuge with shepherds. Then an angel informed him that his prayers were answered and that Anne would give birth to a daughter who was to be the mother of God<sup>K1</sup>. The angel gave a sign to Joachim as a token of the truth of the conveyed message: Anne would be waiting for his return at the Golden Gate of Jerusalem. Joachim set off for the town and indeed, Anne was waiting for him at the indicated gate. She flung her arms around him and nine months later a daughter, whom they named Mary, was born.

There is no mention of either Joachim or Anne in the Gospels. But a second century apocryphal 'Gospel of James', which is not considered trustworthy by the Catholic Church, tells of the conception of Mary and also gives the story of Anne and Joachim. Thus, the interest in the cult of the Virgin Mary pulled also to the foreground the stories of Anne and Joachim. The main cycle of early paintings on the parents of Mary is probably the series of frescoes of Giotto di Bondone in the Arena chapel of Padua. Saint Anne is often represented in teaching Mary to read. She is also often shown in scenes of the Holy Family, together with Mary.

The embrace of Joachim and Anna at the Golden Gate symbolically conceived Mary. The life of the Virgin had to be mysterious in order to be attractive. So her life had to start with a miracle, with the conception by an elderly lady past fertility, who normally could not bear children anymore. The theme of the miraculous conception runs through many stories of the Bible, as well in the Old as in the New Testament.

So, Filippino Lippi has shown both figures in the middle of his painting. The parents are seen as already middle-aged, so they are somewhat bent. They were used to live together, so they even wear the same clothes. It is an occasion for Filippino Lippi to use the same colours as the cloak in which the Virgin Mary is traditionally dressed: the wonderful blue maphorion. The painting is structured around the two figures, which form the classical pyramid. This blue middle scene contrasts with the softer brownish colours of the shepherds and the bystanders. The bystanders seem to press on Joachim and Anne, forming of their embrace an even more solid block. Jerusalem is thought of as a Renaissance town with buildings reminding Roman and Greek columned halls. The tenderness between the subject figures is evident, as is the gesture of their hands that form a prayer. The meeting between Joachim and Anne is thus an allegory of the Immaculate Conception, predicting the conception of Mary<sup>K1</sup>. The painting describes a special event of the life of the Virgin: her Conception.

Remarkable in this painting is the emphasis on the shepherd. This underscores the message of Luke in which shepherds visit the child Jesus at his birth. Filippino Lippi has shown the rough shepherd to the right of the frame. The shepherd has obviously

travelled a long time together with Joachim. To the left Lippi represented the delicate, sophisticated life of the courts of the Renaissance city of Florence. For Filippino Lippi was proud of his town of Florence; he called himself on this painting 'Philippinus de Florentia'.

The 'Meeting of Joachim and Anne' is a happy picture. It was probably made in the same mood as Joachim might really have been, because it was painted in the same year the middle-aged Filippino Lippi married Maddalena di Piero Paolo Monti. Filippino would have three sons with Maddalena. Thus our series of pictures on the themes of the New Testament starts on a scene of love. Such scenes are rare. Joachim and Anne embrace in love after a long life that had hardships as well as pleasant moments. The two figures belong to each other. Joachim and Anne were accomplices in so many events and feelings. The scene of Joachim and Anne was always a theme of hope for better times, tenderly painted as here by Filippino Lippi around 1500. It is a scene of two people groping for each other, oblivious of their surroundings and communicating their emotions and aspirations. Communication also is between the author of a book and the reader and these are hence linked as the figures in Lippi's painting, also isolated from the rest of the world in the act of reading.

Filippino Lippi was the son of one of the first Florentine Renaissance painters, Filippo Lippi. Filippo Lippi's pupil was the famous Sandro Botticelli and when Filippo died, Sandro took in the boy Filippino or 'Little Filippo'. Filippo Lippi had asked his friend Fra Diamante, with whom he had worked much on frescoes, to take care of his son. But Fra Diamante placed Filippino with Sandro Botticelli who was regarded as a first-rate artist. The paintings of Filippino Lippi are very much influenced by Botticelli. But Filippino has added his father's sweetness and tenderness to the magnificent Botticellian scene. Indeed, one can feel the sophistication of Botticelli in the flowing clothes of the courtly ladies and in the pure colours of Joachim and Anne. But Filippino added the true and warm emotions that we sometimes miss in Botticelli. Filippino Lippi also generally took the style of Botticelli one degree further in complexity of the scenes and the landscape. We can feel however that his painting of Joachim and Anne came from his heart, probably as he made it in thanksgiving for his own late marriage. Lippi avoided here overloaded ornament to emphasise emotion. We know that the artist was sincere in his display of sensitivity and his emotions are depicted within the harmony and design of Florentine tradition.

The painting of 'Joachim and Anna outside the Golden Gate' is a picture of the great tradition of Florentine art. This was a very spiritual and intellectual art in which the intellectual design was expressed by clear lines and clean colour areas as in Filippino's picture. But we will see constantly that however much a painter was the product of his time, his individual genius modulated and transformed his art. Filippino Lippi introduced his special kindness and the happiness he felt at the particular event in his personal life. These emotions transformed a painting of outer splendour to an intimate image of tender love.

*Other paintings:*

### **The Meeting of Joachim and Anne at the Golden Gate**



Bernardo Vavallino. Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. 1460.

**The Meeting of Joachim and Anne**

Bernardo Daddi (1280-1348). Altarpiece of San Pancrazio. Gallerie degli Uffizi – Florence. 1336-1338.

**Joachim and Anna at the Golden Gate**

Konrad Witz (ca. 1400-1444/1446). Kunstmuseum. Basel. Ca. 1435.

**Joachim and Anna at the Golden Gate**

Hans Fries (ca. 1465-1523). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1512.

**The Life of the Virgin**

Master of the Life of the Virgin (active ca. 1460-1490). Alte Pinakothek – Munich.

**The Frescoes of Saint Anne**

Tommaso di Banco called Giotto (1330-1369). Church of Santa Maria Novella, the Friars' Cemetery. Florence.

**The Death of Saint Anne**

Andrea Sacchi (1599-1661). Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome.

**Scenes from the Lives of Joachim and Anne**

Gaudenzio Ferrari (ca. 1480-1546). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1541-1543.

*The Birth of the Virgin***The Birth of the Virgin**

Jusepe Leonardo (1601-1653). Museo del Prado – Madrid. 1640.

Jusepe Leonardo was a Spanish painter, born in 1601 in Calatayud and he died in Saragossa around 1653. He lived and worked in Spain's artistic Golden Century. This was the most famous period for Spanish art, which coincided and was made possible by Spain's highest wealth extracted from the overseas colonies that were dominated by the Habsburg emperors and the later kings of Spain. Leonardo has made a picture that reminds us of the great Flemish examples. The multiplicity of various scenes of one event was a tradition in medieval pictures. Leonardo applied this tradition to show various stages of the birth of the Virgin in one frame.

In the top left corner of the painting, Anne is in her bed just before the birth. She has called for the midwife and her bed is opened for the birth. In the lower corner then, in another scene, Anne has given birth and women are taking care of the newborn girl. This is a scene of happy colours, while the rest of the room is in the darker tones. These darker tones were a tradition of Spanish seventeenth painting called 'tenebrist naturalism'. Leonardo however has brought much brighter tones and more gaiety in his picture. By the show of emotions, this picture joins both Baroque in general and the typical tenure of Spanish tradition.

The structure of the picture has been cleverly composed. The scene with the newly born baby Mary is in the right lower corner. Two figures at least point to the upper left corner, where Anne lies in her bed as just before the birth. This line is in the diagonal of the frame. Finally, in the other corner – the upper right corner – Joachim as an elder man enters the door. He is only hinted at since this is a scene of women. Indeed, only women are around Anne and also only women do their best to lovingly serve the baby, as if they were well aware of the glory that this child would be.

The picture of Jusepe Leonardo joins a tradition of medieval painting based on folklore and legends. Pictures of the 'Birth of the Virgin' were quite popular since they reminded women of the important place they occupied in communal life. These scenes underscored the female line leading to Jesus. Saint Anne, Mary's mother had been a powerful figure as probably all grandmothers had been. Mothers are usually young inexperienced girls but grandmothers were strong women that had lived a life of hardships and disillusion and had grown tough in the process. Anne had outlived three husbands. She had married three times and had three daughters all called Mary. The devotion to Saint Anne was very strong in medieval times. The theme of the 'Birth of the Virgin' was popular with women because it was a theme entirely of women in which reference was made to two births: the one of Mary and also the birth of Jesus. Scenes like these were often painted for private devotion.

Magnificent frescoes of the birth of Mary were made in Italy, where the cult of Saint Anne was particularly popular. In Florence, in the church of Santa Maria Novella are frescoes of the 'Birth of the Virgin' made in 1485-1490 by Domenico Ghirlandaio, in which Anne is being visited by some of the most prominent ladies of the town led by Lodovica Tornabuoni. Jusepe Leonardo showed with his picture a century and a half

later that the tradition of painting these scenes had not died out. He made a narrative picture, aimed at illustrating scenes of the life of the most important people around Jesus and he chose a theme dear to women, thus rallying the larger part of the devotees who came to pray.

Jesus was born from the House of David, the royal House of the Jews, through Joseph. But this explanation had a problem since Mary had been a virgin. Yet, according to the 'Golden Legend', Mary also was of the House of David. Among David's sons were Nathan and Solomon. In Nathan's line were Levi, then Melchi, Panthar and Barpanthar. Joachim, the father of Mary, was a son of Barpanthar. Thus there was a straight line from Mary to David. Matthew gives the complete line of descent from David and his son Solomon to Joseph.

*Other paintings:*

**The Birth of the Virgin**

Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-1494). Church of Santa Maria Novella – Florence. 1485-1490.

**The Birth of the Virgin**

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618-1682). Musée du Louvre - Paris. 1555-1658.

**The Girlhood of Mary Virgin**

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882). The Tate Gallery – London. 1849.

**The Birth of the Virgin**

Pietro Lorenzetti (1280/1290-1348). Museo dell' Opera del Duomo – Siena.

**The Birth of the Virgin**

Nicolas Dipre. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1498.

**The Birth of the Virgin**

Andrea del Sarto (1486-1531). Fresco in the Church of SS. Annunziata – Florence. 1514.

**The Birth of the Virgin**

Domenico Beccafumi (1485/1486-1551). Galleria dell' Accademia – Siena.

**The Birth of the Virgin**

Jan de Beer (ca. 1475-1536). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection -Madrid. Ca. 1520.

**The Birth of Mary. Altarpiece of the Scottish Abbey.**

Anonymous. Museum im Schottenstift. Vienna. 1469.

**The Birth of the Virgin**

Hans Fries (ca. 1465-1523). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1512.

**The Birth of the Virgin**

Nicolò da Varallo (active ca. 1420-1480). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

**The Birth of the Virgin**

Albrecht Altdorfer (ca. 1480-1538). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. Ca. 1520.

**The Birth of the Virgin**

Francesco Cozza (1605-1682). Galleria Colonna. Rome. 1641.

**Eight Scenes from the Life of the Virgin**

Hans Holbein the Elder (ca. 1460/1465-1524). Alte Pinakothek – Munich. 1502.

**The Birth of Mary**

Sebastiano Filippi called Bastianino (ca. 1532-1602). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Ferrara. Ca. 1565.

**Scenes from the Life of the Virgin**

Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556). Church of San Michele al Pozzo Bianco. Bergamo.

**The Birth of Mary.** Giovan Francesco Caroto (ca. 1480-1555). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo. 1527.

**The Birth of Mary.** Vittore Carpaccio (1455-1525). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

*Saint Anne's upbringing of Mary***Saint Anne bringing the Virgin to the Temple**

Jacques Stella (1596-1657). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen. 1640.

Scenes of the life of the Virgin were frequent themes in religious paintings, even though the Gospels contain few anecdotes of her early years. Especially French court painters of the seventeenth century took up the theme, among which foremost Laurent de la Hyre, Jean Restout and Jacques Stella. We briefly show one of the many scenes of the upbringing of the Virgin by her mother, Saint Anne.

Jacques Stella was born in Lyon in 1596 from a family of Flemish painters. He first entered into the service of the Medicis in Florence, and stayed in Florence and Rome for about twenty years from 1616 to 1635. Later he was appointed to the position of Painter of the King of France. This happened in 1634 under Louis XIII. Stella died in Paris in 1657. Jacques Stella was much influenced by the classicism of Nicolas Poussin who, although French like Stella, worked mostly in Rome. Stella brought Poussin's classicism to its cool heights that pleased at the grand courts of the Kings of France.

The panel 'Saint Anne bringing the Virgin to the Temple' was commissioned for the chapel of the Saint-Germain-en-Laye palace by the French Queen, Anne of Austria, who wanted to give thanks for the birth of a male child, the dauphin and later Louis XIV<sup>F10</sup>. Jacques Stella made a picture, which is almost the example per excellence of French classicist art.

Saint Anne is wearing a green robe and blue cloak. She is almost a classical, Greek statue. The folds of her cloak are sculpted marble. She stands in front of a Greek marble column and she faces a Greek Ionic temple. Figures are talking like Greek philosophers on the stairs of the temple. In fact, this is a double scene in which the young Virgin is also presented in the temple. In the main scene, Anne is stepping down stairs, the stairs of the Old Law, and she is pointing to the new Law, to the Temple<sup>F10</sup>.

The painting is a magnificent example of sound French dignified taste of religious art. It is non-engaging, it contains no passion, and it only tells the story. It is a cold picture and the pure colours emphasise this effect, which was called later French 'Atticism' for the ancient name of Greece, Attica. Mary is the touching young child, but even in her Jacques Stella mainly expressed antique dignity in the way the child holds her robe and cloak. The woman and child are not the humble workers' family but Roman Patrician ladies or Greek noblewomen. This was probably the idea Jacques Stella had of an ideal Christian (French) civilisation such as the courts of the French kings Louis XIII and Louis XIV could create.

Although the seventeenth century was the age of exuberant Baroque, French painters who needed to distinguish themselves from their other European colleagues, returned to the elevated and solemn mind-images of painters like Pietro Perugino. But they used the way of expression as taught by the Carracci family of painters of Bologna and by the French precursors Simon Vouet and later Nicolas Poussin. The picture of

Jacques Stella is simple, limpid, in clear lines and colours. The verticality of the composition gives an impression of silent dignity in viewers. This art seems to appeal much to our modern tastes, and that probably more than the ostentatious display of emotions of Baroque.

*Other paintings:*

**Saint Anne instructing the Virgin**

Laurent de la Hyre (1606-1656). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen.

**The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple**

Tiziano Vecellio (ca. 1488-1676). Galleria dell'Academia – Venice. 1534-1538.

**The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple**

Jean Restout (1692-1768). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen. 1735.

*The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple***The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple**

Tiziano Vecellio (1489/1490 – 1576). Galleria dell' Accademia – Venice.

Mary's presentation in the Temple is detailed in a chapter on the birth of the Virgin in the 'Golden Legend'. When Mary was weaned at the age of three, Joachim and Anne brought her to the Temple with offerings. There were fifteen steps to the entry of the building. The 'Golden Legend' specifies that this corresponded to the fifteen Gradual Psalms. There was no other way to the altar, so the Virgin was set down at the lowest step and she mounted without help from anyone, alone, all the steps.

After the presentation, Joachim and Anne left their child in the custody of the Temple, together with other young maidens, to be devoted to praying and weaving. Mary stayed in the Temple until she was fourteen and ready to be married. Scholars have interpreted this story as the usual education of a girl of high Jewish rank.

The theme of the Virgin being presented to the Temple as a young girl going alone up monumental stairs was particularly popular in Venice. The great storyteller Vittore Carpaccio started the tradition of the subject being handled by the greatest masters so that even the greatest Venetian painter, Tiziano Vecellio, made a grandiose picture of it. The Galleria dell' Accademia thus acquired a very large painting by Titian, originally commissioned for the Scuola della Carità. This Scuola was one of the most important charity and solidarity houses of Venice.

The picture dates from between 1534 and 1539. It hung in a long wall above two doors. Thus, the scene is long and horizontal. Titian blended his picture with the architecture of the room so that he emphasised the long horizontal lines.

Mary is indeed around three years old, a very young girl. She is seen ascending the steps. She is enveloped in a halo of holiness as she reaches out for the high priest. Titian used an image for the high priest that was not unlike Pietro Perugino's priest of 'Lo Sposalizio' or of Carpaccio's earlier painting. The high priest is thus an imposing figure of dignity, maybe resembling the Doges of Venice, as he is waiting at the upper entry of the Temple. There are indeed fifteen gradations between the ground and the priest, exactly as told in the 'Golden Legend'. Below, Anne looks proudly at Mary. A Venetian court has assembled to accompany Anne and all witness the miraculous ascent of Mary.

Titian has given a lively scene of the dignitaries of the Scuola and added details such as a mother holding her baby and an old woman selling eggs, a true element of genre. Both Titian and Carpaccio needed a human element to fill in the space next to the stairs. Carpaccio used a young deer and a young boy as symbols of the sacrifice of Jesus; Titian however added a feature of everyday life. Thus he mixed aristocratic and common images, a feature that we feel often in the greatest art.

The overall impression one gets of his work is truly monumental due to the grand architecture of the Temple and its marvellous Greek columns. This architecture is

conserved in the left side of the picture by a more civilian but also columned building from where the figures seem to emerge. Between the buildings Titian has painted a landscape of high mountains to create a far view, which brings space into the picture and thus widens far the room and the scene.

The 'Presentation of the Virgin to the Temple' is an unusual theme for Titian who was less a decorator than a portraitist and an artist of dramatic classical and religious themes. Titian favoured more intimate scenes. He rarely sought the monumentality of his contemporary Venetians Paolo Veronese or Jacopo Tintoretto. This picture proves that he was neither the lesser decorator nor the lesser storyteller if he put his mind to the task. Like Veronese and Tintoretto, Titian added to the grandeur of the Scuola by showing a scene of ascension to the higher values of life.

Mary is leaving the worldly life for higher purposes. This was also the underlying message of the Scuole.

But the picture is immensely sad. The young girl is so frail and small while she is mounting the steps. She is courageous, but alone. She has left her parents behind and her loneliness is underscored by the figure of Anne who looks at her child yet makes no movement of regret or of pride. The high priest and his helper, who is dressed to resemble a monk, await her with sympathy. They did not help Mary for she had to do this alone in all dignity. They will now try to give Mary some of the love she left.

This also was a message of the Scuole. When ruined merchants were abandoned by everyone, or when a merchant died and his family remained destitute, solidarity and some empathy was delivered by the Scuola institution. And the ruined merchants could come in dignity to the Scuole, but also appeal for support in humility. They had to climb the steps to the temple alone.

Venice was a town in which social institutions developed in direct line with the teachings of Jesus who had preached charity. Venice always remained a republic whereas other Italian cities all became for long periods of their history the prey of dictators. The town thus jealously and fervently defended its principles of charity and mutual support, which had led it through a turbulent history. The forefathers of the Venetians had fled after a war to an island in a lagoon in order to be able to stand firm for their ideas of communal life. Venice was a tolerant city overall, anyway more tolerant than any other community in Europe. It refused the excesses of the Inquisition to become dominant. It had merchant houses for very many foreign traders. It was tolerant for the Jewish community and it was to protect this community that the Doges ordained the Jews to live in a separate quarter called the ghetto. Venice had the trading associations organised the Scuole, maybe the first kind of social security institutions on a massive scale in Europe. These ideas became an inner power that inspired Venice to further expansion in the Adriatic Sea until the republic dominated entirely that part of the Mediterranean. A strong community in which laudable feelings of solidarity were so prominent had become a conquering state.

In the 'Presentation of the Virgin' the high priest waits at the top of the stairs with open arms, as a Venetian Doge. The community elected the Doges. They always cared for Venetians in ways that were probably still inadequate, but even so exemplary for the other Italian cities. Venice was indeed one of the towns that were



most tolerant to immigrants, to Jews and other minorities, and one of the towns with the best organised charity institutions.

*Other paintings*

**The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple**

Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-1494). Church of Santa Maria Novella – Florence. 1485-1490.

**The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple**

Vittore Carpaccio (ca. 1455-1526). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

**The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple**

Nicolas Dipre. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1498.

**The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple**

Jacopo Tintoretto (1518-1594). Santa Maria dell'Orto – Venice. 1551/1552.

**The Presentation of the Virgin to the Temple**

Master of the Life of the Virgin (active in Köln ca. 1460-1490). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. Ca. 1460-1465.

**The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple**

Laurent de la Hyre (1606-1656). Musée Magnin. Dijon. Ca. 1645-1648.

**The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple**

Sébastien Leclerc II (1676-1763). Musée Magnin. Dijon.

*The Marriage of Joseph and Mary***The Marriage of Joseph and Mary**

Pietro di Cristoforo Vanucci called Il Perugino (1448-1523). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Caen. Around 1499-1504.

**The Betrothal of the Virgin**

Raffaello Sanzio called Raphael (1483-1520). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan. 1504.

Pietro Perugino's 'Marriage of Joseph and Mary', also called the 'Sposalizio', is a masterpiece of idealised representation. Perugino has created in this painting, as in other pictures of his hand, an ideal world of crystallised emotions in which only beautiful people live happily together.

A priest is bringing the hands of Joseph and Mary to touch. All is order and symmetry in this painting. Few people seem to live in this imaginary urban setting; the stairs and the parvis of the temple are almost devoid of humans. Here, one can walk in silence without being disturbed by others. The spirit is free in this ample space so that fresh and original thoughts come quickly to mind. The mind is uplifted by the grandeur of the scene. The temple is open to that same grand space that pervades the scene on all sides. It is a structure where the air can flow through, swift as ideas. It is huge, yet light. Lightness of spirit and modesty are the general themes of the scene.

The building is very symmetrical. Symmetries are also to be found in the group of people and in the colours. The priest is in green. Mary is dressed in a classical robe of warm red for affection, and in her blue maphorion cloak. This blue is reverted in Joseph's robe. His cloak is a luxuriant gold. This gold is reflected in the robe of the woman next to Mary. Then further from Mary we find back again her own colours of red and blue. These are not the harsh red and blues, but wonderfully soft hues. On Joseph's side stand the men, to balance the women of Mary's side. The green of the priest is found back on the left, together with the same red and blue colours of the women. The robes and cloaks of the spouses and of the bystanders could be considered of any age, so also of the Renaissance or of biblical origin. The way their hair is done, however, and their headdresses are fantasies. So is the hexagonal temple in front of which the ceremony takes place.

The picture of Pietro Perugino contains three bands. The lower band of the marriage is like a frieze on an ancient temple. The next, smaller band is set at some distance, in perspective, with the people quite smaller than in the lower band. Yet, since they are all at the same distance, they form a distinct layer. The final band is the temple. The picture itself forms an architecturally constructed whole in which three-dimensional space is easily generated. Perugino has added receding lines in the marble of the temple parvis to create powerful perspective. The picture gives an immediate impression of wideness and of open space. The viewer's eye goes deep into the far. This is an effect rarely generated in pictures in such an obvious and forceful way. The viewer forgets readily that he or she is looking at a flat canvas.

The painting was ordered first to Pinturicchio in 1489 for the Chapel of the Holy Lamb in the cathedral of Perugia<sup>F11</sup>. Finally, Pietro Perugino received the commission for his hometown in 1499 and he finished the panel around 1504. His picture is a

religious theme, but it is treated almost as a cool classicist theme of antiquity, along the ideas of the new Renaissance. Perugino positioned his figures in a strange world, not an alien world but an idealised one, which could be his personal idea of heaven or his individual view of an ideal world for humans.

When the French revolutionary armies entered into Italy, the 'Sposalizio' was taken away by the Commissaire Tinet with the complicity of the French painter Gros and transported to France. The painting was a 'Saisie Révolutionnaire', deposited at the Louvre never to return to Perugia. When the Louvre distributed pictures to fifteen university towns of France, the representative of Caen, a professor of the Drawing School of the Calvados called Fleuriau, preferred this sublime masterpiece of Pietro Perugino to a landscape by Salvatore Rosa<sup>F11</sup>. It was a lucky choice. Due to his good taste, the Museum of Fine Arts of the town of Caen now possesses one of the major masterpieces of Italian art.

The 'Golden Legend' tells that when Mary was fourteen, she was still reared in the Temple. The high priest announced that the maidens should return home to be legally joined with their husbands. But Mary refused because she had vowed to virginity for God. The high priest then consulted the Lord and a voice said to him that each unmarried but marriageable man from the house of David should bring a branch to the altar. One of the branches would bloom and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove would perch upon its tip. Joseph was of such an age already that he thought it incongruous to bring forward his branch. So, nothing happened when all the suitors came. The high priest consulted the Lord a second time. The voice responded that the only man who had not brought forward his branch was the right one. Therefore, Joseph now came to the Temple. Joseph's rod blossomed and a dove came from heaven to perch upon it<sup>G49</sup>.

This was a sign from heaven that Joseph was the chosen one. The flowering rod is a symbol of fertility; only from Joseph could Mary have offspring. In Perugino's painting reference is made to this old legend. Joseph is depicted with a flowering rod. A suitor next to Joseph is breaking his infertile rod and so are some of the suitors in the background. The Council of Trent condemned this theme in the sixteenth century, even though some of the tale was attributed to Jerome<sup>G41</sup>. We see here again miraculous stories, the flowering of the rod and the sign of the dove, as were associated with Mary.

Pietro Perugino was born in Città delle Pieve, close to Perugia around 1445 and he died in Fontignano in 1523. Perugia lies in Umbria, close to Tuscany. He was a student of Piero della Francesca and of Andrea del Verrocchio and himself a master of Raffaello Sanzio called Raphael. These are some of the most famous names of Italian art. Perugino was called after his hometown. When still a young man the Pope asked him to come to Rome to work at the frieze of the Sistine chapel, where he made for instance the 'Handing over of the Keys to Saint Peter'. This fresco of 1481 contains the same temple and the same perspective view over the marble parvis as the ones in the 'Sposalizio'. The strong perspective Perugino used he must have learned from his master Piero della Francesca, who studied geometric perspective and mathematics and who even wrote a treatise on the theory of perspective. Pietro Perugino worked mainly in Perugia, also some in the Provence, the southern region of France. He must have known the books and ideas of Alberti, the Renaissance writer on architecture. He

also knew the art of perspective very well and used both elements of rigorous symmetrical architecture and of space-creating perspective in many of his paintings. By doing this he created ideal worlds that could be the right picture of humanist towns as only the Renaissance could imagine.

Pietro Perugino created the purest form of idealised, spiritual painting. His 'Sposalizio' is a picture of the mind, of an intelligence whose vision was one of order, of symmetry and of composition ruled by geometry. Perugino's figures are drawn in strict lines, and static poses are dominant. His pictures are the finest examples of the exaltation of spiritual figurative art. But is the 'Sposalizio' a religious painting? Its aims and commission certainly were. But we feel another objective too. Perugino painted an aristocratic world with imaginary people and the 'Marriage' of figures of the Bible is only an occasion for the artist to express a very personal vision. If Perugino painted a view of an ideal world as he would have liked to live in or as he imagined the spiritual characters could best be depicted. Whereas paintings of the previous periods such as of the fourteenth or thirteenth centuries were purely religious representations of Jesus or of the Virgin, Pietro Perugino already subverted the religious theme to a very personal expression and representation of humans and their new aspirations of the Italian Renaissance. Even though his representation remained in an ideal, elevated setting Perugino took one step further in the evolution away from purely religious images.

### *Raphael*

Raffaello Sanzio's picture of the 'Betrothal of the Virgin' is almost a copy of Perugino's. Raphael's canvas is signed 1504 so it is somewhat later than Perugino's. In 1504 Raphael was twenty-one years old and we should not forget that his master was the same Perugino. Raphael has used the same figure of the high priest as Perugino and the same scene in front of the wide marble square and temple. Raphael may have seen his master make the Sposalizio and tried his own skills in a copy of his master.

Raphael's colours are somewhat warmer. The young painter has used other colours than Perugino, less bright blues but deeper yellow tones, reds and greens. Thus the blue robes of Joseph and Mary are now darker, softer green. Raphael inverted Joseph and Mary and the figures are somewhat more dynamic. Thus the high priest inclines his head to look at the wedding ring that Joseph is about to put around Mary's finger and a suitor is seen in the foreground to the right, breaking his useless branch in an energetic movement that is entirely absent from Perugino's picture. Raphael here also inverted the figures since such a suitor and similar scene is on the other side of the priest in Perugino's picture, there more in the background.

Raphael's polygonal temple is more elegant. Renaissance decorative elements have been added around the cupola and the building is more on a human scale, less imposing and lower.

Overall one must admire the grace of the figures of Raphael. Perugino's figures seem squat, robust and rustic as compared to the refined elongated silhouettes of Raphael. Mary reclines her body in an elegance that Perugino misses. Joseph has an

aristocratic, refined stand. All faces are finer and nobler. Perugino's high priest is an old man, shown with hanging shoulders and sleepy eyes. Raphael made him a more active participator. Raphael has also placed fewer figures around Mary and Joseph than Perugino, thus creating space, rest and allowing more attention to the marrying couple.

Perugino had the idea and vision. Raphael completed the vision to a perfection of art, to the soft harmony of a gentler mind and a more sensitive soul.

Raphael's picture almost had the same fate as Perugino's. It was commissioned for the Saint Joseph chapel of the church of San Francesco at Città di Castello and it remained there until 1798. Then the city was ordered to give the painting to Giuseppe Lechi, a general of Napoleon. Through various sales it landed in the beginning of the nineteenth century in the Milanese Pinacoteca di Brera collection<sup>17</sup>.

*Other paintings:*

**The Betrothal of the Virgin**

Lorenzo Costa (1460-1535). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

**The Marriage of the Virgin**

Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674). ). The Wallace Collection – London. Ca.1644.

**The Marriage of the Virgin**

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682). ). The Wallace Collection – London. Ca.1670.

**The Marriage of the Virgin**

Bernardo Daddi (ca. 1280-1348). The Royal Collections – London. c.1335.

**The Betrothal of the Virgin**

Vittore Carpaccio (ca. 1455 – 1526). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

**The Marriage of the Virgin**

Rosso Fiorentino (1495-1540). Church of San Lorenzo. Florence. 1523.

**The Marriage of the Virgin**

Pietro Gigliardi (1809-1890). Church of Sant' Agostino. Rome. 1860.

**The Marriage of the Virgin**

Valerio Castello (1624-1658). Galleria Nazionale di Palazzo Spinola. Genua. Ca. 1645-1650.

**The Marriage of the Virgin**

Girolamo Marchesi da Cotignola (ca. 1481-1559). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

**The Marriage of the Virgin**

Master of Saint Verdiana (ca. 1390-1415). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

*Joseph***The Dream of Joseph**

Anton Raphael Mengs (1728-1779). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota (Florida). 1773.

**Saint Joseph, Carpenter**

Georges de La Tour (1593-1652). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Around 1640.

*Joseph*

Joseph is the forgotten man of the Holy family. He is described in very discreet words in the Gospels. Luke almost ignores Joseph so that Luke's Gospel seems to have been written from out of the view of Mary. The Gospel of Mark passes directly to the adult, public life of Jesus, and does not even mention Joseph. Matthew takes on more Joseph's view and makes him the central character in the birth and infancy of Jesus. Besides the principal source of the Gospel of Matthew, apocryphal narratives relate of Joseph. The 'Protevangelium of James' of the second century and more so the 'History of Joseph the Carpenter' of the fourth century present him very differently of Matthew's account. Joseph would have been a widower with children, and he would already have been old when he became betrothed to Mary. He might have lived over a hundred years. How Joseph died is in fact unknown, but his death may have come before Jesus's public life began since Joseph never appears in one of the miracle scenes or in other events of the Gospels except the Nativity. Maybe due to the influences of the apocryphal writings however, Joseph is usually represented as an older man.

The figure of Joseph was discovered late in the art of painting. Pictures of Joseph are very rare in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. The reason for this is probably that the church was at unease with the story of Joseph. What had happened to him was ambiguous. The church did not approve of marriage ceremonies in which the bride was pregnant, nor did it approve of marriages where the bride came in with children at her hand. Painters avoided the subject for their most prominent altarpieces. And of course, pictures were to teach the glory of God and of Jesus's life with the glorious role of Mary stressed, so that Joseph could remain in the background. Only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the painters handled their themes more freely and they were in quest for new religious subjects. Saint Joseph was rediscovered as a means and sign of audacious innovation.

Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they came to live together she was found to be with child<sup>G38</sup>. Her husband Joseph being an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace decided to divorce her informally. But when he had made up his mind to do so, an angel appeared to him in a dream and said: 'Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins'. When Joseph woke up he did what the angel had told him to do<sup>G38</sup>.

The dreams of Joseph are important in the Gospel of Matthew. When the Magi had left after Jesus's birth, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. This time the angel said: 'Get up, take the child and his mother with you and escape into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him'. So, Joseph took his family and left for Egypt.

After Herod's death, an angel appeared suddenly again in a dream to Joseph. Now the angel told: 'Get up, take the child and his mother with you and go back to the land of Israel, for those who wanted to kill the child are dead'.

Still later, and once more in a dream, Joseph was warned not to go to Judaea where ruled Archelaus who had succeeded his father Herod, but to withdraw to the region of Galilee. There they settled in a town called Nazareth.

### *Mengs*

Anton Raphael Mengs has probably painted the second dream of Joseph. It is a masterpiece of a mixture of Baroque art and classical, academic representation. Joseph is sleeping in a chair. He is a tired man with a thick beard and the many riddles in his face show what a hard-working man he was. Light falls from the left on his face, emphasising the traits of the labourer, and his solidity. Solidity is also the impression we receive of the rest of Joseph's body with the muscular hands and arms that catch the light. The angel stands as a beautiful youth behind Joseph. With one hand the angel of the Lord pleads to Joseph, with the other outstretched arm the angel points to Egypt. The painting's structure is based on the diagonal going from the right lower corner to the upper left. Joseph is represented in the triangle of the left, which forms a dark mass to emphasise Joseph's tiredness and sleep. Joseph is shown in a very realistic way, the angel is idealised. On Joseph light and dark shadows contrast, but not so on the angel. The right upper corner is painted in an all-pervading light for here stands the angel and according to the tradition that Mengs honoured in his painting, the angel represents the Heavens, the light. Thus Mengs introduces a contrast between dark earth (Joseph) and the light of God (the angel). Yet, Joseph also is a saintly man so Mengs had him clad in a robe, which is yellow, turned into a golden, lyrical stream around the man.

Anton Raphael Mengs made this picture late in his life. It was probably painted for the earl of Cowper in 1773<sup>S1</sup>. Mengs was born in Aussig, a little town of Czechia in 1728. He was taught how to draw and paint by his father, who was a miniaturist and who became a director of the Academy of Fine Arts in Dresden. Mengs first painted at the court of Saxony in Dresden, but in the 1750's returned to Rome where he had studied before. He was promoted to Professor at the Academia Capitolina in Rome and had a studio in the Palazzo Barberini where he was surrounded by a flock of admiring students. Mengs worked with the archaeologist Joachim Winckelmann. The men were in search of rules of universal art. Mengs proposed a return to the clarity and simplicity of ancient Greek and Roman art and thus he was one of the founders of neo-classicism.

Mengs spent most of his career in Rome where he became a leading painter of classical revival. He was considered the greatest living painter of Europe and he certainly thought so of himself too for he lived in great pomposity. Mengs was a great defender of the National Art Academies to French example, and he had a prominent place in the establishment of these in the eighteenth century. His many pupils reached status of prominence in these academies: in Copenhagen, Vienna, Stuttgart, Turin and Dresden<sup>G13</sup>. In 1761 Mengs was called to the court of Madrid by the Bourbon king Charles III and the same monarch paid him a huge pension in 1777 to return to Rome to continue his studies in art theory. Mengs exercised an almost messianic authority at the Spanish court<sup>G13</sup>. His authority and academic design in the rules of the art of painting resulted in rigidity and coldness in his works. His 'Joseph's dream' is in this perspective one of his better pictures.

### *De La Tour*

The idea of Joseph as a working man is also to be found in the astonishing painting 'Saint Joseph Carpenter' of George de La Tour. George de La Tour was a very individual painter who worked outside the mainstreams of art, far from Paris, in his native Lorraine. Like in the more than hundred years later painting of Mengs, de La Tour emphasises the play of light and dark. La Tour does this even much more so than Mengs, at the risk of not being able to show many details of the scene. The candlelight dramatically lights up the face of Jesus. This is in the same sense as the light used in the painting by Mengs, where also the composition with Joseph to the left and the angel to the right matches de La Tour's vision. The light of the candle in de La Tour's scene is so intense on Jesus, as also to eliminate all shadows on him and to make his skin translucent. This is particularly strongly represented in the hands of Jesus, a hint that Jesus might be indeed more spirit than human. The contrast of light and shadows does play fully on Joseph however.

Ever since Caravaggio, painters had discovered the many effects of light on objects and the enhancement in drama that the contrasts between light and dark could bring in a picture. The ultimate difficulty for an artist was to show all the shades of light coming from a point source like from a single candle. Light then threw shadows in a very intricate way on objects, and the effect was very difficult to represent to reality. Showing an entire scene as lit by one candle was thus a tour de force that only the very best painters, those who had the best eye and the truest memory could handle. George de La Tour was such a master painter.

Joseph is represented in the action of his work as a carpenter, and here also Joseph is the elder working man. He has a long beard, strong legs and feet and muscular forearms which are not as strongly prominent as with Mengs. De La Tour's emphasis is not on the solid, muscular body of Joseph however, but on his effort of turning in the wood. Particularly striking in this picture is the composition, which brings the heads of Joseph and of Jesus together in the complicity of a daily task. The scene is very vivid, realised mostly just by the direct look of Joseph to Jesus and the light of the candle. This also underscores a saying of the Gospels, since Jesus told in a preaching: 'I am the Light of the World'.



It is remarkable how paintings of Joseph were mainly made by such strong individual painters as the two we have chosen here: Anton Raphael Mengs and George de La Tour. The pictures of Joseph are however experiences on the road to humanisation of religious themes. Whereas the Catholic Church stressed Jesus and Mary, painters were interested in the human aspect of the Gospels. The stories of the Gospels were drawn closer to ordinary man. To picture Joseph was a challenge to tradition. Painters showed their interest in what was behind the Gospels, in the true human side of the figures. The figure of Joseph as the forgotten man of the Holy Scriptures intrigued. It would have been impossible in earlier centuries to revive Joseph, but now artists could interest even the clergy in the man Joseph.

*Other paintings:*

**Saint Joseph and the Child Jesus**

Francisco Herrera called El Viejo (1585-1657). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. 1643.

**Saint Joseph with the Baby Jesus and Saints Francis of Paola, Anne, Anthony and Peter of Alcantara**

Francesco Solimena (1697-1747). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. Ca. 1740-1745.

**Head of Saint Joseph**

Guido Reni (1575-1642). Apsley House. The Wellington Collection. London.

**The Dream of Saint Joseph**

Francesco Maria Raineri called Schivenoglia (1676-1758). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Saint Joseph with the Christ Child, Saints Adele and Anthony of Padua**

Carlo Innocenzo Carloni (1686-1775). Cattedrale di San Alessandro. Bergamo. Ca. 1757.

**The Death of Saint Joseph**

Francesco Polazzo (1683-1753). Cattedrale di San Alessandro. Bergamo. Ca. 1735.

*The Annunciation***The Annunciation**

Rogier Van Der Weyden (ca. 1399-1464). Musée du Louvre- Paris. Around 1435.

**The Annunciation**

Fra Filippo Lippi (1406-1469). Alte Pinakothek – Munich. Around 1450.

**The Annunciation**

Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence. Around 1489.

**The Annunciation**

Arthur Hughes (1832-1915). Birmingham City Museum and Art Collections – Birmingham. 1858.

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent to Nazareth, to a Virgin called Mary who was betrothed to a carpenter named Joseph. The angel said: ‘Rejoice, you who enjoy God’s favour’. The Lord is with you. Do not be afraid, you have won God’s favour. You are to conceive and bear a son that you must name Jesus. He will be great and he will be called Son of the Most High. God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He will rule over the House of Jacob and his reign will have no end.’ Mary asked the angel how this could come about, since she had no knowledge of man. But the angel answered: ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will cover you in his shadow. And so the child will be holy and he will be called the Son of God. Then Mary said, ‘You see before you the Lord’s servant, let it happen to me as you have said’. And the angel left her.<sup>G38</sup>

The ‘Golden Legend’ states that the devil tempted the first woman to lead her to doubt, through doubt to consent and through consent to sinning. So the angel brought the message to the Virgin to prompt her into believing, through believing to consent and through consent to the conceiving of the Son of God<sup>G49</sup>.

*Van Der Weyden*

The Annunciation of the conception of the Virgin was one of the most popular themes in medieval times and that tradition was continued in the Renaissance. Rogier Van Der Weyden was a painter born in the Walloon town of Tournai around 1400, but he worked mostly in Brussels and died there in 1464. He painted in the heydays of the Flemish Primitives. Van Der Weyden or de la Pasture as he was known in his native French language, was one of the most important artists among the Flemish Primitives, the name given to painters working in Flanders in the fifteenth century. He took his art however far above the static imagery of gothic, into the expression of deep emotions, even though he remained well in the restrained and realistic tradition of northern painting. The Pietà is the picture in which he evolved the art of painting into a more emotional form. Van Der Weyden did this while keeping faithful to the spirit of his period and of his land.

One has to imagine the urban landscapes in which worked Van Der Weyden. Flanders and the north of France was the region where the Gothic cathedrals and the communal bell-towers - in which the charters of the towns were guarded - dominated the

skylines. The delicate, complex patterns of the huge, sculptured windows of the cathedrals were combined with the austere straight lines of the little houses of the medieval towns of Bruges and Tournai. Here too, the spirit was clean and dedicated to trade and industry, as in Florence. But the joy of the new wealth was expressed in religious themes still more than it was even in Italy. While art and philosophers in Florence were discovering man's inquisitive mind in a new consciousness, in which Platonic concepts added to religion. Bruges and Tournai were fully dedicated to the pious glorification of God.

Rogier Van Der Weyden's Annunciation was made still fully in this earlier tradition of the Gothic representation. An angel brings the message to Mary that she is to conceive. The angel is dressed in magnificent clothes, as princes of the church wear when in full ornate during the liturgy of Catholic High Mass. The Virgin is knelt, reading a book. This reminds of the coming New Testament. But this particular item is also the continuation of a long tradition. Saint Anne, Mary's mother, was often painted while teaching Mary to read. In scenes without Anne, Mary continued to be represented reading or next to a bookstand. The book is the symbol of wisdom. Universities, such as the University of Louvain in Belgium, have taken the Virgin as a patron saint since the Middle Ages. Their emblem was an image of the seated Virgin with the child Jesus on her lap, which also existed in wooden sculptures. These were called the 'Sedes Sapientiae' or seats of wisdom.

Remarkable in this painting is the interior of a Flemish room, the bedroom of the Virgin, in which many details of everyday life are depicted. Windows are open on both sides of the room, which gives an airy touch of open space to the picture. But there are no shadows and only very few elements are in darker tones: the same light that comes from all directions lights the whole room. This effect was quite classic for Flemish Primitives. The effect underscores the transcendence of the lives of the Holy Figures: the painters by these means wanted to emphasise that these were no scenes of our world, but images of imagination and of intense devotion. The faces and bodies of angel and Mary are somewhat elongated, anyway slender and even resemble each other.

The white lilies in the lower left corner are symbols of Mary's virginity. The Annunciation took place in springtime according to the 'Golden Legend', hence the motif of a flower in a vase<sup>G41</sup>. Spring is the season of revitalised nature, as the Annunciation would revitalise religion. The 'Golden Legend' reminds that Mary lived in Nazareth and that Nazareth meant 'flower'; hence Saint Bernard said that the Flower willed to be born of a flower and in 'Flower', in the season of flowers.

The red four-poster bed standing in the background may be an allusion to the bed of fragrant herbs mentioned in the Song of Songs ('our bed is the greensward') – in other paintings the bed is indeed painted in green - and of course it is a symbol too of fertility. But the green colour in Late Medieval times was reserved for the bedroom of Queens<sup>G81</sup> and Mary was the Queen of the Heavens. The overall scene is static, but grace has been added by the slight movement of the bodies of the Virgin and of the angel, and also in the movements of their hands.

### *Filippo Lippi*

Filippo Lippi was an early Renaissance painter. He lived in Florence from 1406 to 1469. Lippi's 'Annunciation' is a painting in very delicate tones, as this painter usually applied. These tones amplify the feelings of purity, dignity, respect and devotion of the painter. Mary stands to the left, very slender and tall. She is dressed entirely in the blue maphorion cloak, but the blue is in a soft almost translucent tone that matches the whiter background. She holds her head inclined. Her right hand touches her hearth. Mary is standing in a small study. She was just reading a book, the book of wisdom, but has stood up at the sight of the angel. The traditional image of the reading Virgin has thus been preserved in this picture also. Mary looks at the angel who is knelt before her. The angel could be a young boy as well as a young girl. He has a red robe over a long white shirt, both painted in delicate hues. The angel wears wings in colours like a peacock, not the white feather wings we could be used to. These are all the colours of the rainbow, colours that were directly associated with the sky and the heavens

The background of Lippi's painting is a Renaissance elaborate architecture with columns and arches leading the view into a patio where there is a fountain and drinking tub over which hover white doves. This is also an allegory of the purity of Mary. The doves represent the Holy Spirit descending towards the Virgin. The garden and the doves are a reference to the 'Song of Songs' of the Bible, the verses of which respond to Lippi's grace:

*"How beautiful you are, my beloved, how beautiful you are!  
Your eyes are doves, behind your veil;  
Your hair is like a flock of goats surging down Mount Gilead."*

The garden and fountain also are an image of the 'Song of Songs':

*'She is a garden enclosed, my sister, my promised bride;  
a garden enclosed, a sealed fountain.  
Your shoots form an orchard of pomegranate trees, bearing most exquisite fruit:  
Nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon,  
With all the incense-bearing trees;  
Myrrh and aloes, with the subtlest odours.  
Fountain of the garden, well of living water,  
Streams flowing down from Lebanon!''<sup>G38</sup>*

The stately picture of Filippo Lippi illustrates majestically these wonderful stances.

Lippi could only imagine Mary as a young lady, a princess of Italy, and treat the subject with such obvious respect. There is a notable difference between Van Der Weyden's painting and Lippi's. We feel more subtleties of mind, more sweetness of thoughts, more love probably, in Lippi's picture. The Renaissance introduced a new style of thinking and of living, with more sense of beauty and of the lovely things in life. According to Platonic concepts of philosophy humans carried a divine spark and the Renaissance artists expressed this idea in their paintings whereas the northern artists showed more the human nature of the divine figures. This difference can subtly be felt in the two pictures.

The Annunciation is one of the greatest theological mysteries of Christianity. The mystery is the incarnation of God in the Virgin. The other great mystery is the Resurrection. The Resurrection is easy to depict: Jesus rises from among the dead, from his tomb, to the heavens. The depiction of the Incarnation however, in the Annunciation, was one of the most difficult challenges ever presented to a painter. How to show the invisible? The French historian Daniel Arasse has written marvellous analyses of how Gothic and Renaissance painters used style elements of the art of painting to show what cannot be shown.<sup>G132</sup> Painters used for instance incoherence in perspective to make the viewer suspect that something out of the natural order was happening in the scene. Or they used the symbol of the 'column Christi', the column that is Christ, to indicate the presence of God and of Jesus. They placed features in the painting that look natural enough, but that are at second analysis fully out of place. They separate space in two scenes, the scene of the virgin and the scene of the angel, and both environments do not really flow readily one into the other. Quite frequently colonnades are drawn in pictures of the Annunciation and sometimes by looking at the tile patterns on the floor one remarks that a column stands between the Angel Gabriel and Mary. Angels can look through columns of course, but the mystery of the incarnation is then in that column. God is present not just in the angel but also in that column, in Jesus already. Daniel Arasse also pointed out that perspective is only a style element, and nothing more, no absolute framework in which any scene should be placed and be determined by. Hence, painters can use perspective as any other element of style, subjugate it to their theme instead of being subjugated by it. In Annunciations, perspective is often used to bring attention – at least for the viewers that are sensible and captured and admirative of such details – to the mystic element in the scene. The intelligence of the best painters was at work and the more subtle the allusion, the more the artist had reflected on the mystery. Daniel Arasse thus admired the intelligence of Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Fra Angelico, Filippo Lippi, Francesca del Cossa, Domenico Veneziano and of course of the most mysterious and deep-thinking of all painters, Piero della Francesca. A painting of the Annunciation thus generally seems nice and straightforward. The finest pictures of this scene however have a meaning more profound than of most other scenes of the life of Jesus and Mary. The fact that paintings could contain mystic allusions, from the Lorenzetti brothers to Vermeer, was for Daniel Arasse a great Catholic tradition.

In Filippo Lippi's Annunciation a lectern with a book separates the angel from Mary. It is quite natural that Mary was reading, since her mother Anne taught her the knowledge of the world. But the knowledge of the world separates angel and Mary in this picture, alluding to the fact that Mary already knows that she is pregnant, even from before the moment the angle brings her the message of God. The knowledge of the world also is God. And of course: remark the column with the white dove in the background, yet painted between the angel and Mary.

### *Sandro Botticelli*

How different is the picture of Sandro Botticelli! Botticelli was also a Florentine, but he belonged to the full splendid, mature but still pure and true Renaissance. Botticelli was born in Florence too and lived and worked there from 1445 to 1510. He was a

pupil in the workshop of Filippo Lippi and both painters were close. This Annunciation is one of Botticelli's later works, made for a chapel of the Annunciation of the church Santa Maria Maddena del Pazzi of Florence. Benedetto Guardi commissioned the painting to Botticelli around 1489. No other painter better epitomises the Florentine Renaissance. Botticelli is the zenith of sophistication in the intelligence and grace of the Renaissance.

Botticelli's Annunciation has been the example of numerous subsequent pictures. The painter has turned the Annunciation into a very dynamic and sweetly emotional scene, very much contrasting with the previous gothic, static styles. Seeing the picture of Van Der Weyden next to Botticelli's proves this conclusively. Mary entirely bows to the message brought by the angel, almost in a too exaggerated sensitivity. The angel's body also is bent in a movement towards the Virgin. When in Van Der Weyden's picture the Virgin is knelt and the angel standing, Botticelli reverses these poses. Thus, Mary is standing and the angel respectfully kneels, even almost slides over the tiles. Botticelli twice at least breaks with tradition and gives a very personal view. Yet, although he builds a very lyrical scene, he respects a rigorous structure. The traditional pyramidal form can be seen in the converging lines of the Virgin and of the angel. Remark also that shadow has entered the representation: the shadow of the angel is thrown over the floor, although still inconspicuously. The lilies are still present, but are held by the angel who brings it as a sign of honour. The white lilies represent the purity of the Virgin. Mary was still just reading, but the book is on a high pedestal and is disappearing from out of the frame to the right. The image of Mary had evolved to prominence, so that even the angels now were considered somewhat lower in status than the Virgin was. How could it be otherwise in devote Florence, where the main cathedral was called 'Saint Mary of the Flowers' or 'Santa Maria dei Fiore'.

The picture of Botticelli is a reverence to grace. The poses of Mary and the angel are the ultimate image of graceful movements, still caught in a static image. Botticelli combined the dynamism of the poses with the static open space of the empty room and the long vertical lines of the open door leading to the landscape. This is all very stylised, as is the long vertical trunk of the tree in the landscape. The lines of the floor tiles also emphasise the coldness of the straight lines; effects all used to form the background and contrast of the flowing gestures of the Virgin and of the angel Gabriel. Like Rogier Van Der Weyden, Botticelli was searching for a new way of expression and he went quite further than Van Der Weyden did, at least in the comparison between the two pictures of our examples.

When one compares the complete oeuvre of Van Der Weyden with that of Botticelli, one finds in Botticelli an openness of mind to various non-religious themes and a suave grace that is lacking in Rogier's pictures. Van Der Weyden painted still more in the International Gothic tradition that was so strong in Flanders in the fifteenth century. Gothic had touched Italy with less fervour and not in the same way as in Flanders. Van Der Weyden stayed in the delicate conventions he had learnt from his master, Robert Campin of Tournai. But he had as strong a personality as Botticelli. Especially in his Pietà representations, he showed a combination of the intricate eye for detail of the Flemish Primitives and his own very visible expression of emotions to a level that Botticelli did not reach. But whereas Van Der Weyden's emotions were probably stronger, Botticelli's were more elegant. Botticelli was freed from traditions.

He tried to invent a new way of representing feelings. In doing this he set an example that was followed for centuries.

### *Arthur Hughes*

Another very different picture is the Annunciation of Arthur Hughes, an English painter who worked in the style of the Pre-Raphaelitic Brotherhood of the middle of the nineteenth century. Hughes was born and worked in London. The Annunciation and the life of the Virgin had remained a popular scene and a scene that painters still sought eagerly to compare their skills with. More than three hundred years separate Hughes' Annunciation from the ones made by van Der Weyden and Botticelli, and we are in England instead of on the continent with this picture. But one feels the same very respectful devotion.

Prominence is given in this picture to the angel, whose wings cover the figure in a cloak of eerie bright light. The moment shown is exactly when Mary is astonished and seems to ask: how can this be brought about? Mary is the humble servant in this painting. Hughes made an exquisite picture with wonderful pure colours. The long purple robe of Mary reminds of other works of Hughes, such as his most famous 'April Love'. The mood is sad, tender, and very romantic. The scene is set in a garden. White lilies and purple irises were always connected with the Virgin; these flowers surround the figures completely. A vine rank grows around a wooden stile, representing the symbol of Jesus's passion. But we find here also symbols of the Garden of Eden and the serpent that wound itself around the tree. The Annunciation and the serpent scene are indeed linked. Because God let the Virgin defeat the dragon and God placed woman between the serpent and humankind. Mary has been weaving, but she has used a very red thread, the red thread of the sufferings of Jesus, the thread that was broken by his death.

The four paintings we presented here introduced the notion of symbols. The 'Annunciations' are a kind of pictures in which the most symbols were combined, especially in the fifteenth century, to communicate concepts to the viewers. Symbols were representations of concepts. A painting could contain more concepts condensed as they were in symbols than could be shown in any dynamic composition that would have explicitly depicted the scenes represented by the symbols. Symbols thus were a shorthand way of communication. But symbols often not just represented something; they were that something itself. Modern man has forgotten these symbols and does not feel the old power of symbols anymore. In our daily urge to explain our messages clearly, rapidly and unequivocally, we do not use many symbols anymore. Medieval man and Renaissance man knew and still felt these symbols thoroughly however and applied many. These symbols were mind-images that also very much continued a tradition founded in the Bible itself. Jesus spoke in parables and aphorisms, literary images of concepts. Since the Gospels had amply used this way of representing concepts, the visual symbols were completely in line with the style of Jesus's message. Symbols were particularly and much used during the Late Middle Ages. In paintings we find them more in northern religious art than in the art of the Italian Renaissance.

In later paragraphs we will explain more of the old symbols.

*Other paintings:*

**The Annunciation**

Duccio di Buoninsegna (ca. 1255-1319). The National Gallery – London. 1311.

**The Annunciation**

Simone Martini (1284-1344). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence. 1353.

**The Annunciation**

Robert Campin, Master of Flémalle (1375-1444). Le Musée d'Art Ancien – Brussels. Ca. 1420.

**The Annunciation**

Filippo Lippi (1406-1469). The National Gallery – London.

**The Annunciation**

Jan Van Eyck (ca. 1390-1441). National Gallery of Art – Washington.

**The Annunciation**

Jacques Yverny (1430-1478). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin.

**The Annunciation**

Andrea del Sarto (1486-1530). Palazzo Pitti – Florence. 1528.

**Ecce Ancilla Domini**

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882). The Tate Gallery – London. 1850.

**The Annunciation**

Lorenzo Veneziano (1356-1372). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice. 1357.

**The Annunciation**

Carlo Crivelli (1457-1500). National Gallery – London. 1486.

**The Annunciation**

Orazio Gentileschi (1563-1639). Chiesa di San Siro. Genoa. 1621-1625.

**The Annunciation**

Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674). The Wallace Collection – London. 1645.

**The Annunciation**

Konrad von Soest (1370-1422). Saint Nicolas Church – Bad Wildungen. Ca. 1403.

**The Annunciation**

Filippo Lippi (ca. 1406-1449). Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome.

**The Annunciation**

Dieric Bouts (ca. 1415 – 1475). The J. Paul Getty Museum. Los Angeles. Ca. 1450-1455.

**The Annunciation**

Giovanni Battista Paggi (1554-1627). Chiesa SS. Annunziata del Chiapetto. Genoa. 1598.

**The Annunciation**

Charles Poerson (Ca. 1609-1667). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Arras. 1652.

**The Annunciation, The Bargellini Altarpiece.**

Ludovico Carracci (1555-1619). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

**The Annunciation**

Orazio Lomi called Gentileschi (ca. 1563-1647). Galleria Sabauda. Turin. Ca. 1623.

**The Annunciation**



Antonio Maria Crespi Castoldi called Il Bustino (ca. 1590-1630). Busto Arsizio. Parrocchiale di San Bartolomeo. Borgomanero. Ca. 1623.

**The Annunciation**

Giovanni Maria Arduino (1580-1647). Museo Civico. Novara.

**The Annunciation**

Jacopo di Paolo (active 1378-1429). Collezioni Comunale d'Arte. Bologna.

**The Annunciation**

Vincenzo Civerchio (ca. 1470-1544). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**The Annunciation**

Pere a Serra (active ca. 1357-1409). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**The Annunciation**

Bernardino Luini (ca. 1480-1532). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1515-1517.

**The Annunciation**

Francesco Raibolini called Francesco Francia (ca. 1450-1517). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1505.

**The Annunciation**

Francesco di Simone da Santacroce (ca. 1440-1508). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**The Annunciation**

Master of the Vyssi Brod Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Ca. 1350.

*The Incarnation of Christ***The Incarnation of Christ**

Bernardo Strozzi (1581-1644). Conservatorio Interiano. Genoa. Ca. 1632.

Bernardo Strozzi was born in Genoa around 1581. He was not really destined to become a painter but entered the Capucine monastery of San Barnaba in Genoa when he was seventeen years old, in 1598. When his father died around 1608 he left the monastery however, to support his mother and sister. He was apprenticed in the workshop of Cesare Corte (1550-1613) and later he worked with Pietro Sorri (1556-1622) in Genoa. His father, Agostino Strozzi, had been a painter also and Bernardo had not stopped to paint while in the abbey. Between 1614 and 1621 he worked as an engineer at the port of Genoa. Then he set up his own painter's workshop and painted many frescoes in the palaces and government buildings of Genoa, of which few are however conserved. In the 1630's he had a bitter dispute with the Capucine Order and the Papal Court. His mother had died and his sister got married, so the Capucines wanted him back. Strozzi refused to return now to the monastery. Bernardo Strozzi left Genoa then for the more tolerant Venice and he stayed there until his death in 1644. In Venice he received the nickname 'Il Prete Genovese', the Genoese priest. In Genoa Strozzi had worked for the Doria family and for other leading aristocrat families of the town, for the Durazzis, the Interianos, and others.

Bernardo Strozzi started to paint Baroque pictures, in the style and representation he had seen from the examples of Pieter Paul Rubens and Giulio Cesare Procaccini. At first he did not really apply their technique of very free, even rough brushstrokes. He detailed his figures and objects minutely. He is thus very well known by his painting 'The Cook', made in 1625, which epitomises Genoese painting now. Gradually however, his style evolved, even before he moved to Venice, to less detail and more emphasis on colour. His painting 'The Incarnation of Christ' is a good example of this style, which would later lead to Venetian Rococo and inspire painters such as Giambattista Piazzetta and Giambattista Tiepolo. Strozzi was well in line then in his later years with Venice's liking for strong contrasting hues, less working on detail and a more impetuous technique of brushstroke work, which he was among the first to further enforce in Venice.

The painting 'The Incarnation of Christ' shows the Virgin Mary and the angel knelt before her. The painting was known as an 'Annunciation', but the picture suggests Mary's pregnancy since part of her robe is heavily wound around her waist and the angel is in adoration before her. Moreover, a white pigeon, the symbol of the Holy Spirit, hovers above her head, leading to think of the Immaculate Conception. The white linen, which could be a symbol of Mary's purity, is not on her but lies at her feet. She points to that linen also, and seems to explain to the angel with her left hand that virginity has left her, and that she is indeed pregnant with the Christ. Strozzi showed Mary in ecstasy, proud and conscious of her honour. Above the white bird, above the Holy Spirit, the clouds depart and a golden, heavenly light breaks through to enlighten the scene. Here also is a vague view of God opening the clouds. Around

this scene are many little angles, children, putti, that inhabit the clouds of the skies. Strozzi worked during the Counter-reformation in Genoa. With pictures like 'The Incarnation of Christ' he showed an emotional, ostentatious and combative Christianity, that forced strong religious images upon viewers.

Bernardo Strozzi painted in light, contrasting and fine colours. He used not white and blue, clear hues on Mary, but warmer red and gold and darker blue. Mary's red robe is however of a hue that slightly goes to purple and that fits harmoniously with the blue and golden hues, which are complementary colours. He used the same basic hues on the angel; red in the angel's cloak, blue and gold on its wings. The angel's robe is white and we remark also some white on Mary's sleeves. So, Bernardo Strozzi showed Mary and the angel in almost the same colours, and the warm red dominates the scene in a nice way. White and gold hues dominate the sky, the scene just above Mary and the angel, so serve as contrast to the main theme. The dark blue of the angel's wings and of Mary's cloak seems to be answered in the very dark tones, in the black colours of the top and bottom parts of the frame. Thus, although the colours may seem hard and striking, Strozzi used them to forceful expressiveness combined with a keen sense of composition and of aerial perspective so that space was well indicated without receding lines.

Strozzi used colour to create space. He used colours to strong design of colours only. One might discover a composition of the traditional pyramid in Mary and the angel, the Holy Spirit being at the top of that pyramid, but Bernardo Strozzi only hinted at that composition by placing the angel higher than would be necessary for a true pyramid structure. Strozzi was breaking strong composition of lines deliberately, making composition of lines more free, diminishing its rigidity yet retaining some of its value. He did the same with the level of detail in his painting.

Bernardo Strozzi combined freedom in colours with a remarkable show of skills in detailed attention points. Whereas he could paint in all smallest item of detail such as in faces or in the wealth of colours of an angel's wing, he deliberately painted in broader brushstrokes large parts of the picture, leaving the strokes obvious and unsmoothed in places. But he modulated. He drew and coloured some parts in the smallest detail, such as the hands and fingers of Mary. He drew Mary's face less sharp and he blended less the colours and the transition of hues there. He painted very roughly, without detail, the golden sun shining through the clouds opened by God the Father and God is reduced to a vague shadow. The result of this style is a visual effect of forceful expressiveness combined with high skill. The viewer instantly receives the impression of a strong and rapid picture aimed at a forceful and colourful impact. Yet, the viewer also is forced to admire and taught to admire the skills of the painter. Strozzi developed this dual style in his years after 1630, around the time he left for Venice and it was the main novelty he brought with him to the lagoon metropolis. Several Venetian artists would find value in the style and develop it to the pictures of Giambattista Tiepolo and Piazzetta, and even in the veduti of Gianantonio Guardi. Strozzi's style would evolve into the main Venetian pictorial style of the eighteenth century.

The panel of the 'Incarnation of Christ' is of a rare theme in painting. It was made for the chapel of the Conservatorio Interiano, a school for the education of young girl

orphans of Genoa, instituted by the Interiano family.<sup>B27</sup> The painting is still in this Conservatorio.

*Mary ascends the Mountain***The Virgin ascends the mountain**

Joseph Führich (1800-1876). Österreichische Galerie Belvedere – Vienna. 1841.

‘The Virgin Mary ascends the Mountain’ of Joseph Führich is a picture of the theme of the road to holiness of the Virgin. Other images of this kind are Mary ascending the stairs of the temple and of course her proper Ascension and Coronation in the heavens. The theme also symbolised the road to spirituality in a life of love of the pious. The symbolic value of Führich’s painting is heavy and the artist brought full romantic sentimentality in his scene.

Mary is on the path that leads to the mountains. She will visit there Elisabeth, who is also pregnant. Mary could not be more traditionally dressed. She wears the red robe for love, her blue cloak for the heavenly and a white headdress for purity. She wears a staff to keep her steady and she supports the child in her. The staff helps her on the road, but it is also a symbol of the sceptre of her dignity and place in the church. A group of angels precedes her. They are singing from a large, open book of musical notes. One of the small angels looks upwards and brings our eyes to three hovering, elder angels. These angels too are three, like the Trinity. They are flying in the air and they let roses and rose petals fall gently over Mary. The roses fall on the path and Joseph behind Mary picks up one of the roses. Here also we find obvious symbolism. Joseph picks Mary’s rose since he is her husband. Behind the whole scene is a beautiful soft mountainous landscape.

Mary is entering the woods; she walks into a protective environment and a more closed world. This is a frequent theme and symbol also associated with the Virgin. Mary and Joseph are leaving the open, dangerous world into an intimate mystic land. Right behind Mary in the background is an enormous tree and Mary is shown walking just in front of its large trunk and plain, green foliage that reaches upwards. Bringing such mass behind the main figure of a scene was an image used by many painters to indicate the importance of the figure.

The tree divides the picture exactly in two halves, in the open world and the closed world. Führich painted symmetrically the group of children-angels to the left and the stooping Joseph on the right. Now we understand why Joseph had to pick up a rose. The stooping Joseph also seems to kneel to Mary but by this gesture Joseph’s figure remains of the same height and mass as the singing angels. The effect brings balance of surfaces on the figures and also a solid grounding to the mass of the tree. The angels flying in the air fill the surface of the tree foliage above Mary so that Führich tried here also in a natural way to build his composition to nice harmony.

The whole picture is in soft tones in which the browns and soft reds dominate. These colours hardly contrast the indefinite green of the slopes of the hilly landscape. Führich thus made a picture of sweet composition and colours. But of course, we are only barely touched by the sweet feelings of tenderness and immediate sentimentality that pervades this painting. We perceive no force of spirit, no power of representation.

Führich's picture comes to us as a tender image of feelings that do not go deep. We see his painting as an exercise in sensibility.

Joseph Führich was a romantic artist. He was born in Bohemia, Czechia, in the town of Kratzau in 1800. He studied in Prague and Vienna. Bohemia was then part of the Austrian Empire and Führich received a grant from Prince Metternich to study in Rome. He stayed there with the Nazarene community of artists.

The Nazarenes were a group of German and Austrian artists of the romantic generation. Led by Johann Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869) this group had left Vienna, where they had already founded a Guild of Saint Lucas in the old tradition of painters' guilds. In Rome they lived in a secularised abbey, the abbey of San Isidore. They wore their hair long and plaited in the middle so that the more pragmatic Romans soon called them 'Nazarenes', the name by which they became known in the history of art. Overbeck wanted to revive fresco painting and Führich worked in Rome also with other Nazarenes at a project of decoration of a Roman villa, in this case the Villa Massimo. Führich did not stay long in Rome however. He returned to Prague in 1832, and then back to Vienna in 1834 so that his picture of 'Mary ascends the Mountains' was a painting of his later Vienna period. Führer taught at the Academy of Vienna and he was a conservator of a gallery of paintings in the Austrian capital. Emperor Franz-Joseph even knighted him in 1861.

Führich's painting 'The Virgin Mary ascends the Mountain' shows one of the reasons why the Nazarenes returned to Rome. These romantic artists were not in search for classical Rome, its ruins, its sculptures and imperial past. The Nazarenes returned to the spiritual values of the Christian Middle Ages and of the Renaissance and they thought to impregnate themselves with spirituality in the core of Roman Catholicism. They sought to renew a mystical contact with a past in which society was built on Christianity, in which Christianity was the basic framework of European civilisation. The Enlightenment had broken this framework and the Nazarenes reaffirmed the values and images of old.

Many of the Nazarenes like Overbeck, Peter von Cornelius and Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld painted clear messages in which the old Florentine 'disegno' was emphasised. Führich also drew before he coloured. His picture is crisp in lines like a neo-classicist painting. But he obviously accentuated the sentiment. In that he either linked to past German traditions of rococo decoration or he was a precursor of the later Biedermeier style. Because of this, Joseph Führich holds a separate position among the Nazarenes with whom he was connected in Rome for a few years from 1827 to 1829.

*The Visitation***The Visitation**

The Master of Perea. Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid. End 15<sup>th</sup> century.

**The Visitation**

Master M.S. Magyar Nemzeti Galéria – Budapest. 1506-1510.

**The Nativity**

Parish Church – Hontszentantal, Slovakia.

**The Mount of Olives, Christ carrying the Cross, Crucifixion, Resurrection**

Keresztény Museum – Esztergom, Hungary

**The Adoration of the Magi**

Musée des Beaux-Arts – Lille, France.

**The Visitation**

Jacques Daret (ca. 1400-1403-1468). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie – Berlin. 1435.

*Mary and Elisabeth*

When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she was to conceive, Mary asked how that could be. Luke tells that the angel added then: ‘And I tell you this too: your cousin Elisabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God’<sup>G38</sup>.

Luke relates that after the Annunciation Mary went as quickly as she could into the hill country to a town in Judah. She went into Zechariah’s house and greeted Elisabeth. Now it happened that as soon as Elisabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, ‘Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? “Look”, she continued, “the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled”. In Luke’s Gospel then follows one of the most beautiful poems of the New Testament, Mary’s Magnificat. Mary stayed with Elisabeth for some three months and then went home’<sup>G38</sup>.

Elisabeth’s child would be Saint John the Baptist.

The words of Elisabeth were repeated in the little prayer, called the ‘Hail Mary’ or ‘Ave Maria’, which is recited many times in the rosary. The prayer starts as ‘Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb’. This is the most well known and most spoken little prayer of all; the Catholic Church in the Catechism officially defined it. It has been cried, whispered, uttered in the mind in billions of devote humans over so many centuries. The words are recited in Roman catholic Mass as the lecture from the Evangels on Mary’s feast of her Ascension on August 15.

The Visitation was a welcome theme for Christian painters because it allowed showing two wonderful women, both elegantly pregnant in the beginning stage only, so that pregnancy could be hinted at in all elegant grace. The scene is usually set in marvellous mountain landscapes since Elisabeth lived in hill country. The most beautiful Visitations are of Jacques Daret, a Tournai painter of the times of Van Der Weyden and of Master M.S. who was a German master. Master M.S. made a Visitation that is a marvel of delicate elegance for a modest church of a mining town in hill country that was in the sixteenth century part of Hungary. The Visitation was a very frequent theme so we show also a picture with a more regional representation, an image from Spain.

### *Master M.S.*

Have you ever fallen in love at first sight? Desperately, irremediably, so that you are simply unable to withdraw and are always attracted back to the object of beauty? Well, it is easy to fall in love like that with this 'Visitation'. This is pure grace and loveliness. A picture natural and humble, pastoral, harmonious, simple and intelligent. A marvel of soft colours to the eye, full of meaning, symbols and details to discover so that one gets ever more interested.

The 'Visitation' of Master M.S. shows the moment when Elisabeth feels the trembling baby both in her and in Mary's womb. With one hand she courteously kisses Mary's hand in a tender gesture, and thus acknowledges her as a very special person. At the same time she has her hand very softly on Mary's child and looks at it, drawing also our eyes to it. The pregnancies of both women permitted Master M.S. to paint flowing curves of bodies. Mary's posture is a pure graceful arc, with the form of her right leg showing through the folds of the light red robe. Elisabeth also bows and curbs in a response to the round lines of Mary. Her hair falls thick and low on her back. Mary wears the classic blue maphorion robe, but in this painting the cloak is almost hidden. The blue cloak is a must for figures of Mary since the beginning of painting, so Master M.S. indeed uses it, but he stressed the idyllic setting instead of the formal. The flow of the figures continues in the curling white shawl of Mary and the folds of Elisabeth's dress. Thus, the two figures are intertwined in a gracious movement that elevates them out of the landscape into the dimensions of the mind. Whether this is Mary and Elisabeth becomes inconsequential. They are two of the most beautiful creatures of the universe, out of all time.

The flow of the figures continues in the landscape. Behind Elisabeth a road goes from the pastures where the two women are, to a valley beyond. This road seems to come out of a Mantegna painting: he always used these round curves in roads and landscapes, as curves forced by tensile strength between starting and ending point. Such style elements may refer to Italian Renaissance examples.

There are three parts in the landscape. Beneath the two figures are flowers, irises, wild strawberries and peonies. The irises on the left are high and slim; they reflect the blue cloak of Mary. The peonies are the red of Elisabeth's robe. In between are the red strawberries bearing fruit. These are symbols: the high stemmed iris marks the purity and spiritualism of Mary. The earthy peonies are humbler flowers, linked to Elisabeth.



The strawberries are a sign of fertility. Other such natural symbols are to be found in the painting. To the left of Mary is a luxurious green tree out of which grows a dead branch. The branch denotes infertility, death, and destruction. As it points to Mary it is a sign of the future death and passion of Christ.

The three landscapes of earth are brought together in this picture. Mary and Elisabeth are standing, or should we say floating, in a pasture. A hollow road in this soft pastoral green land leads on the right to further views. To the left, rocky mountains rise on which a castle or citadel stands high in the air. These are the mountain lands, maybe a symbol again of spiritualism, but also of isolation, loneliness. It is no coincidence that the mountains are drawn on Mary's side. To the right are bluish mountains, which continue the colours of the lake or sea out of which they grow. The sea landscape marks the third geography of earth, thus bringing Mary and Elisabeth in front and out of the universe. The castles and houses built in the mountains constructed out of the waters or on poles in the lake all need a bridge to lead into their interiors. The image of a bridge leading into other worlds has been a powerful image at all times of history. To emphasise the passage to another world, two small figures to Elisabeth's right are seen passing under a gate, going with heavy sacks on a pilgrimage through life. These passages both indicate the near birth of Jesus and the passage of worldly affairs into the spiritual realm.

In 1997, a major exhibition staged by the Hungarian National Gallery brought together in the Royal Palace of Budapest all the panels of the winged altar-piece of which the Visitation was a part. The exhibition was called 'Magnificat anima mea Dominum'<sup>H3</sup>, the words of the 'Ave Maria'. Four panels of the altarpiece are kept in the Christian Museum of Esztergom, one panel is in the parish church of Hontszentantal, another panel is in the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Lille in France, and then there is the panel of the 'Visitation' in Budapest. That makes seven panels. Originally there must have been eight. The upper row of the altarpiece would have held the 'Annunciation', the 'Visitation', the 'Nativity' and the 'Adoration of the Magi'. These are all scenes of Jesus's early life. The 'Annunciation' is lost or has not yet been found. The lower line of panels would then represent scenes from the passion of Christ: the 'Mount of Olives', the 'Carrying of the Cross', 'Crucifixion' and 'Resurrection'. The exhibition in Budapest was centred on the newly restored 'Visitation' and showed not just all seven panels, but also many other paintings and engravings that could shed light on influences and origins of the paintings. Hungarian scholars who had studied the paintings made contributions: Mojzer Miklós, Peter Menrath and Szilvia Hernády who had worked on the restoration, Zsuzsa Urbach, Török Gyöngyi, Poszler Györgyi, János Végh, Sándor Tóth, and Mikó Arpád<sup>H3</sup>.

According to these Hungarian scholars, many stylistic details lead to the Nuremberg School of Albrecht Dürer and to German artists such as Veit Stoss, as well as the Alsace painter Martin Schongauer. Dürer painted similar iris flowers, landscapes with lakes and mills, engraved figures with flowing shawls similar to the ones in the 'Visitation' of Master M.S., similar mountain landscapes. Schongauer painted similar peonies, figures kissing hands in the same way. An engraver M.Z. bears also similitudes to the work of master M.S. Who exactly Master M.S. was remains a mystery, speculations abound but the enigma remains unsolved. The German influences are clear. It seems now accepted that a German or Hungarian-Slovakian artist worked in Nuremberg, maybe in the school of Dürer, or had good connections to

the painters of that town, or knew very well the German paintings. The inspiration of the M.S. panels, especially the other panels besides the Visitation, is certainly German. The loveliness of the Visitation shows us however that maybe some of the more southern gentleness and grace of the Danube has found its influence in the painting. Dürer himself was of Hungarian origins; his father was a goldsmith who had immigrated to Germany. We are in frontier-country with these panels.

The 'Visitation' panel was found more than a hundred years ago by a craftsman in the attic of a church at Topatak<sup>H3</sup>, pawned but unreclaimed. The Hungarian National Gallery could buy the 'Visitation' in 1902. The Koháry-Coburg family of Hontszental owned three other panels; they landed in the Christian Museum of Esztergom. One remained in the church of Hontszental. An antique arts merchant who worked out of Köln gave the Lille panel to the Museum there. The complete winged altar stood in the Church of the Virgin Mary of the town of Selmecebánya in the district of Hont. Selmecebánya was Hungarian before 1918, had an early Saxon minority and was also called Schemnitz or Schebnicz in German. It is now in Slovakia and its name is Banská Stianica. A town with three names indicates a history as complex as the Carpathians.

Why would a marvellous painting, a masterpiece of the early sixteenth century come to the Hont? Winged Virgin Mary altarpieces are common in Hungary. Hungary covered then a much larger territory than now. The Hungarian National Gallery guards many of these huge panelled works. The altarpieces were very large because they had to be seen from far, by the people in the churches. They consisted of sculptures, usually at least a sculpture of the Virgin in a middle niche, around which painted panels were placed. The painted panels would be so installed that on the reverse side also reliefs could be fixed. When the panels were closed, as they would be outside the hours of Mass, the panels showed scenes of the life of Christ. During High Mass the panels would be opened so that the polychrome sculptures could be seen in all their splendour of colours: bright red, blue and gold. The Isenheim altarpiece of Matthias Grünewald is similar to that tradition. The Visitation was not an uncommon scene, as it can be found for instance on the winged altarpieces of the churches of Nagyszalok and Srepeshely, also now shown in the Hungarian National Gallery altarpieces, which date from 1483 and 1480 respectively. It was common in the end of the fifteenth century in Hungary to have these altarpieces as the major works of art and piety in the churches.

Selmecebánya was not just any small town of Hungary. It was one of the three most thriving mining towns of the land. Especially silver and gold were found. The silver and gold mines attracted both Hungarian investors, such as János Thurzó<sup>H3</sup> who would be appointed by Queen Anne to the Chief Chancellery Count of Körmöcbánya, the highest royal office in the jurisdiction of the mining towns of the Carpathians. Körmöcbánya is quite near Selmecebánya and was the place where the Mint was established. This chancellery had the monopoly on precious metals in the region. János Thurzó was an astute businessman. He secured as many mines as he could get, helped by Jakob Fugger of Augsburg. The Fugger family formed one of the most important banking houses of Europe. Emperor Charles V could only be chosen Emperor because Fugger lent him the money to win the German Electors. Thurzo gained enough power to appoint himself the dignitaries of Selmecebánya and thus to

control the region. Through the Fugger family the German connection and link with the arts school of Nuremberg is made.

It should not astonish us anymore that the wealthy burghers of a rich silver and gold mining town with Thurzó-Fugger commercial links to German merchants and bankers would call in a craftsman from Germany, maybe even a Hungarian who studied in Nuremberg, to paint a winged altar for their church. Selmecebánya would remain for a long time a gold mining town. It was even here that the first mining academy in the world was established in 1721. But the rich lodes near the surface were exhausted already in the sixteenth century; the gold and silver had to be dug from ever deeper down. This made it possible only for somebody like Thurzó who had access to capital, to invest in newer techniques.

Let's look at the other panels.

The 'Nativity' is again an idyllic picture. Mary and Joseph are looking at their baby Jesus. Their eyes direct us to Jesus who points back at them, thus forming the diagonal that divides the panel in two. Beneath the diagonal are Mary, Jesus and Joseph. Above are a landscape and a Gothic interior. This interior is opened however, the columns cut, as was not uncommon in Renaissance paintings. In the upper left corner we find a landscape similar to that of the 'Visitation', with blue mountains afar. Two shepherds kneel down. Here we feel indeed that this is a German picture, or with heavy German influence. We see it in the shepherds, in the head of Saint Joseph. The Master M.S. shows his art in the marvellous robes around Mary.

The 'Adoration of the Magi' could have been painted by a Venetian artist of the sixteenth century. It has the same soft charm of a Giovanni Bellini. The landscape has made place for a town view here, but this indeed is much more a scene of Venice than of a Hungarian mining town. The small scene with horses on the upper right could have been imagined by Mantegna. In this panel also a line goes over Mary, Jesus and the knelt Magus. He might be the donor<sup>H3</sup>, but that is conjecture. Gold is amply used in this panel, and gold dust certainly was to be found easy in Selmecebánya. The gold and the skill of the artist in painting the robes, gifts and jewels, make this panel a fantastic display of wealth. The people going to the church of the Holy Virgin in the small town castle must have marvelled at the riches of their burghers. The old knelt King offers a vase filled with jewels and precious stones to Jesus. Jesus seems to hold one – a piece of gold ore? - and shows it questioningly to his Mother. Master M.S. always keeps the idyllic, poetic tone.

Hungarian, Polish, Czech pictorial art has been largely forgotten by Western European books. Yet, it deserves a much better place. And Hungary of the fifteenth and sixteenth century certainly was not a godforsaken land, but a country whose wealth – at least at its royal courts and at the courts of its barons - was considerable, its culture refined.

Let us go back somewhat in time before the date of the painting of the Visitation.

János Hunyadi was a warrior-general of Eastern Hungary, parts of Transylvania now in Rumania<sup>G22</sup>. He amassed a fortune in lands and spent his income fighting the Turks. His Christian army won in 1456 a decisive victory against the Turks before

Belgrade, which would curb the Ottoman threat for almost a century. He died that same year however. His oldest son László was killed by the Habsburg King Ladislas V who had been chosen as his successor. We have a painting made by Viktor Madarász on 'The mourning of László Hunyadi' made in 1859, now in the Hungarian National Gallery of Budapest, a painting that has become one of the national emblems of Hungary.

János Hunyadi's younger son, Matthias, who had been taken captive by Ladislas, was chosen as the next King in 1458. This Matthias Hunyadi called 'Corvinus' the Raven, subdued the other Hungarian nobles from out of his Transylvanian lands in Eastern Hungary. He continued to link Hungary to Italian Renaissance and to the culture of the rest of Europe. Continued but not created, because many years before, in the beginning of the fourteenth century, the throne of Hungary had been presented and occupied by members of the Anjou branch of the French royal family, just as the Kingdom of Naples had gone to that branch earlier. The first Anjou King was Charles Robert, grandson of Charles II, King of Naples and Sicily. Thus links with Western Europe were firmly established early. Charles Robert was King from 1301 to 1342. He particularly developed the mining and metallurgy industry around Selmecbánya and he founded Körmöcbánya, where the Mint was.

Matthias Corvinus became King of Hungary in 1458. He married a Neapolitan princess, Beatrice of Aragon, who brought with her all the connections and culture of her native country. Italian Renaissance fully reached Hungary then, to the same splendour as in Western Europe. Matthias Corvinus himself had been brought up by the archbishop of Várad Janos Vitez, a humanist. Soon, Buda would have a library that was the envy of Europe: the 'Bibliotheca Corviniana'. Humanists flocked to the Hungarian court. Literature and the pictorial arts flourished. Janus Pannonius was a poet, raised in Italy. He became later the bishop of Pecs, remained at the court of Buda and at the royal palace of Visegrád. Michele Pannonio was of Hungarian descent, and he painted in the 1450's in Ferrara in Italy.

Corvinus managed even to capture Vienna and wanted to establish an Austrian-Hungarian base, but the Habsburgs soon took Vienna back. Matthias Corvinus died in 1490. The son of Corvinus was more a scholar than a warrior, so the Hungarian nobles that had already rebelled against Corvinus before, chose a Jagiellon from Poland-Lithuania as King. But the tradition of cultural links with the West was continued. After the fall of Hungary in 1526 to the Turks the imposing library of Corvinus was scattered, some brought to Brussels by Mary of Hungary, the sister of Emperor Charles V.

The Hungarian royal court was resolutely directed towards Renaissance thinking. It had an Italian Queen, and many links with Northern Italy. Italian painters were well known in Hungary and from early times on. For instance, the Florentine painter Masolino da Panicale who worked around 1425 on the Brancacci Chapel of Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence, probably stopped this work to paint at the Hungarian court from 1425 to 1427. The North-Hungarian mining towns with their connections to German Fugger capital and intense industrial investments were wealthy. These elements explain how a masterpiece such as the M.S. altarpiece came in these parts of Europe. Many splendours of the court of Matthias Corvinus must have been destroyed during the Turkish occupation and the chaos that resulted in the parts of Hungary that

remained unoccupied. Queen Mary of Hungary put the treasures of the court of Buda on a boat when the Buda citadel was lost to the Turks, and brought the riches to the West. But we can imagine that the best paintings were lost. The ones that survived destructions were in small churches of towns or villages like Selmecebánya.

The Passion series of the winged altarpiece of master M.S. starts with the 'Mount of Olives'. The apostles are sleeping, Jesus knows the drama that is coming and has a moment of despair. Judas already enters through the gates with the soldiers to take him. Jesus's gesture of appeal to the heavens again forms an oblique line that divides the panel in two. Beneath the line Saint John, in red dress, and Saint Peter are dozing. Peter sleeps next to the sword with which he will cut at the ear of a soldier. John seems already an angel. Jesus remains serene and determined, the moment of despair has passed, and he has given himself over to the design of God. Above Jesus we find the same blue mountains as in previous panels, the lush green bushes and the dead branches symbolising the coming death of Christ. The soldiers have to pass a bridge over a small river so that their dices are thrown. The pasture landscape also is of the same style as in the Visitation. Judas and the soldiers look like monsters. The flowing banners that they hold can be found in many German paintings, here they seem to hold all the emblems of the devil: an animal with horns and the half moon of Islam. Let us not forget that the Hungarians fought desperately and relentlessly against the Turks. A decade after the time when this painting was made Lajos II, or Louis II, King of Hungary, would be slain at the battlefield of Mohacs and half of Hungary, a triangle part just under the Carpathians comprising Budapest, would be occupied by the Muslim Turks for a hundred and fifty years.

'Christ carrying the Cross' is the most German panel of all. The figures seem to come straight out of a Schongauer or Dürer picture. Jesus is crushed, but not just under the cross, also under the weight of the masses of people. The cross is crudely made out of tree trunks. The soldiers pushing the cross bring black hammers and nails. They are hideous, not hiding their cruelty. In a small upper left scene, in a corner formed by the ladder and the trunk of the cross, stands Mary supported by Saint John. A rope held by the soldier on the right creeps around like a snake and ends at Golgotha where two crosses already stand. Criminals are led there on a sinuous path. Jesus looks worn out, tortured. The soldier tears at his hair. We are far from the poetic scene of the Visitation. But life in the Hungarian and German regions was like that in the sixteenth century: a pastoral nature, ever different, in which noble ladies and wealthy young men could meet, with on the other side all the cruelty of ever-lasting wars without mercy.

In the 'Crucifixion' we find a terribly agonising Christ on the crude cross. His face has really become emaciated, almost a naked cranium where the flesh is drawn tightly over. Two groups of people are around and beneath Jesus. To the left are Mary, John and Mary Magdalene. Mary is now completely covered in her classic blue cloak. Finished are the joyful images with the lovely white and bright red robes: Mary has become the Saint that will go through history in this attire. On the right are the soldiers who nailed Jesus on the cross. These are Turkish soldiers; Longinus is not a Roman Centurion anymore. Turkish hats, swords and shields are shown. The devil's banner is held: the horned head of a bull and the half moon of Turkey. We again see the dead trees in the background, before landscapes that are very similar to the Visitation panel: rocky mountains with citadels, blue mountains to the right. The same

kind of castles is drawn, even also wooden structures on poles in water. Christ wears a loincloth that is flowing white around him as in a German painting of Dürer of the Crucifixion.

The 'Resurrection' shows a triumphant young Jesus rising from the open tomb. Instead of the apostles, the soldiers are sleeping here. Jesus wears red robes of victory and a glorious banner. This flag wears the red and white bands of the early Magyar Arpad kings. Does a triumphant Christ sign victory over Turkish armies? To the left are scenes of the 'Lowering of the Cross', to the right Mary and Mary Magdalen are seen ready to anoint Jesus. The blue mountain range is always present, but there are no dead trees anymore and the fortresses have made place for splendid high palaces.

Blue mountains is how a painter's eye may see far away hills in clear sunshine that brings close figures in full light and makes a haze of remote landscapes. Master M.S. will have noticed the effect. He was not alone. Many other painters used this effect. The young Raphael made an 'Allegory' that is now in the London National Gallery. That painting also shows in the background blue mountains before a large lake. Astonishingly, a wooden structure advances in the lake also. And to the left of the lake can be seen a castle on rocks, just as in the Visitation. But Master M.S.'s Visitation is richer in the background, and more detailed. More wild also, more rough. The setting of the figures in Raphael's 'Allegory' is similar to the Visitation: a meadow in front of hills and rocks. The similarities are probably a coincidence, but it is wonderful to see how a Visitation by a relatively unknown master like M.S. can favourably compare to an Allegory of the so famous Raphael in a painting of almost the same period of history.

Why distant mountains look blue puzzled artists and naturalists for centuries. Aristotle noticed the effect and already attributed it to the air between our eyes and the mountains. Leonardo da Vinci spoke of the effect in his 'Trattato della Pittura' and later, in the nineteenth century also Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in his 'Theory of Colours'. The effect can be illustrated by an experiment that also Goethe made. When one looks at a gas to a black background and with a source of light throwing light from behind the viewer, then the gas shows a beautiful blue hue. The colour comes from the gas particles that deflect and reflect light and the nature of the colour depends on the number and the size of the suspended particles of or in the gas. The effect explains why we see clouds white or grey to black in the skies. It explains why far mountains are seen in blue and also why the sun at dawn or sunset is seen red. Indeed, when the source of light in the experiment of Goethe is set behind the gas, the particles absorb the blue colour and change the light to a bright red.

The winged altarpiece of the mysterious, almost anonymous painter Master S. thus contains many masterpieces. The panels stand out against the background of other paintings of the same period in Hungary and even in Germany by its grace, loveliness, lyrical breadth and intelligence. These are paintings we would have liked more German masters to paint and to continue in this style. We do have almost only these panels of Master M.S. and would have liked his complete works to be saved. Instead of such a complete oeuvre, we have only these panels to admire as symbols of a world that was on the brink of destruction. Because a decade after these paintings were made, the old culture of Hungary was brought almost to extinction. This knowledge

and the genius of the painting make it one of the most valuable works of pictorial art in European history.

### *The Master of Perea*

The Master of Perea worked in Spanish Valencia around the end of the fifteenth century. Few pictures of Spain have come to us from that early period in oil painting, yet we should not be surprised to find a 'Visitation'. The 'Visitation' of the Master of Perea is a work in the Northern Gothic, Flemish Primitives style. It is in very realistic detail, with the rocky landscape in the background. The master of Perea has magnificently painted the brocaded dresses of Mary and Elisabeth. In the landscape is also painted a small scene of the flight to Egypt, with figures clothed in the style of the period. Mary and Elisabeth are holy women, so they are dressed with long cloaks as nuns and they have the golden halo of saints. The Spanish element is certainly the face of Zechariah or Zachary, who is depicted as a rough Spanish shepherd. The Master of Perea must have been a master who knew Flemish paintings well. He also uses perspective as can be seen in the lines of the building to the right. This building has Spanish features, and a Moorish element can be seen in the side windows. It is a beautiful 'Visitation'.

The painting lacks maybe the grace and lyrics of the 'Visitation' of Master MS, but the Spanish rougher element makes it an interesting example of a blend of local and international ways of looking at the scene. Mary and Elisabeth are static, do not touch. Yet, movement is indicated by the play of the hands. Both women draw the attention of the viewer to each other by this movement. Elements of intimate genre images are added, which give the painting even more a local tone: there is a maidservant in a doorway, somebody is looking down a window. A little dog is playing next to the maidservant, maybe a symbol of marital fidelity. These may be scenes of the life of the Virgin. Symbols of love and prosperity are also shown in the picture at the feet of Mary and Elisabeth: a pigeon, a small bag of money and a dove as a sign of fidelity again, since doves were thought never to change companions. These small genre elements of common households introduce definitely a tangible human touch.

One may wonder how a painting with local influences and of local inspiration, but as sophisticated in representation and corresponding to the conventions and symbols of international art could be made in a Spain that was obviously still engaged in a murderous war with the Moors over supremacy of the country, since Granada fell only in 1492. Granada in fact was only the last small enclave of Iberia that had been largely conquered already for about two hundred years.

The kings of Galicia, Asturias and Aragon led the reconquista of Spain. Around 900 the only territory dominated by the Christians was Galicia-Asturia in the north west. The Aragonese had not yet taken foot in Iberia and operated from beyond the Pyrenees, from parts of what is now France. In the middle of the eleventh century almost one fifth of Spain was conquered in the north, among which the towns of Barcelona and Leon. The kingdom of Leon and Castile then slowly but victoriously swept to the south. A century later the advance was more marked with half of Spain and Portugal occupied. The towns of Madrid, Lisbon, Toledo, Zaragoza and Tortosa were Christian. In the middle of the thirteenth century almost all of Spain was

conquered. Valencia was taken in 1238. The only part that remained in Moorish hands was the Emirate of Granada in the south tip. Here the Muslims would be able to oppose the pressure of the Christian armies until 1492.

In 1492 Aragon, with Valencia where the Master of Perea worked, was a much smaller part of Spain than was Castile. Its main territory was Catalonia, but it covered most of Spain's coastline of the western Mediterranean, as low as Valencia and Denia. The lower region between Aragon and Granada, the region of Murcia, had been left to Castile. The Aragonese kings were frankly more interested in their overseas territories than in fighting the few remaining Moors. Aragon gradually became a sea power that dominated the western Mediterranean. It had acquired the islands Minorca and Majorca in the thirteenth century. Sicily fell to Aragon after the local inhabitants had expelled the French and called on Aragon to govern them. Sardinia was taken from Genoa in 1326. Southern Italy with its pearl, the city of Naples, was gained on the French Angevin rulers in 1442. Naples was then the largest city of Europe.

Ferdinand V of Aragon reigned from 1479 to 1516 over this economic, maritime empire in the Mediterranean. And there was more.

The Kings of Aragon and of Castile had long been rivals but arranged their disputes by alliances and marriages. King John II, the king of Castile, had died without sons so that his daughter Isabelle inherited the throne. Isabella married Ferdinand of Aragon. Castile remained to Isabella however; Ferdinand had no legal claim on Castile. Ferdinand was more inclined to enforce his presence in France and he was embroiled in several wars in Italy with the French. At the peace of Barcelona he would indeed acquire the Rousillon area of South France and still later he would also gobble up the small enclave of Navarra in Spain. Naples had been given by his uncle, King Alphonso V, to one of this king's bastard sons. Ferdinand could bring Naples back to his own crown in 1504, after a treaty with the French king Charles VIII - who had taken Naples - whereby Milan remained under French influence.

Isabella of Castile urged Ferdinand to war with the Moors. Ferdinand's general Gonsalvo de Cordoba brought Emir Boabdil to surrender Granada after nine years of war. Ferdinand obtained from Pope Alexander VI - the Borgia Pope - the title of 'His Catholic Majesty'. But that title had better be granted to his wife Isabella.

Isabella remained queen of Castile, by far the largest and central part of Spain. Two cardinals governed Castile in her name. First Don Pedro Gonzalez de Mendoza and after this cardinal's death, cardinal Jimenes de Cisneros. Gonzalez de Mendoza expelled all Jews from Spain in 1492. More than two hundred thousand Jews left Spain, to start the Sephardic Diaspora. Gonzales de Mendoza gave full power to the Inquisition to purify the faithful and the converts. These were the times of the cruel Grand-Inquisitor Torquemada. Gonzales de Mendoza urged Isabella to win Granada. Mendoza had given Jimenes de Cisneros as father confessor to Isabella and this later cardinal continued Gonzalez de Mendoza's work. In 1502 all non-baptised, that is all non-Christians had to leave Castile. These people had to sell all their lands in Spain but they were forbidden to export gold and could only take Spanish goods on their journey out of the country. This time the Pragmatic was directed at the Moors, of whom many converted in order to stay in Spain. They would become some of the first



victims of the Inquisition. Gonzalez de Mendoza and Jimenes de Cisneros enjoyed the full confidence of Queen Isabella of Castile.

Spain's wealth grew in this period. Castile exported wools to Flanders. Spain's colonies expanded in the Americas that the Genoese Cristoforo Colombo had discovered for Ferdinand and Isabella, also in 1492. Castile and Aragon were virtually joined and Aragon reigned over a multi-cultural maritime empire.

Thus, it is no wonder that the pictorial arts thrived in Aragon and in one of its main ports to the Mediterranean, Valencia. Ferdinand Callejo (active 1466-1507) and Bartolomé Bermejo (active 1474-1495) though both from outside Aragon, worked in the Aragonese part of Spain. Flemish masters, who have mostly remained anonymous, also painted here. Remember the trade in wools with Bruges in Flanders; Spanish ships were of the most frequent to enter Bruges. The school of Valencia in the southernmost point of Aragon became ever more important for the province. Rodrigo de Osona (active 1505-1530), Juan de Flandes (1465-1519) – who was probably Flemish of origin – and especially Juan Masip called Juan de Juanes (1523-1579) worked in Valencia. Also worked here Fernando Yanez de la Almedina (1501-1531), the Italian Paolo de San Leocadia (active 1472-1514) and still later Alonso Sanchez Coello (1531/1532-1588).

Isabella of Castile died in 1504. Ferdinand the Catholic of Aragon recognised Philip of Burgundy as king of Castile. Philip was married to Ferdinand's daughter Juana la Loca. But Ferdinand secured for himself the title of Regent of Castile and continued to govern Castile as if it was his own, helped therein by cardinal Jimenes de Cisneros. Ferdinand ruled in his own name over Aragon, Sicily, Sardinia, Naples and the south of Italy.

Juana and Philip of Burgundy had two sons, Charles and Ferdinand. Charles was the elder son. Duke Philip of Burgundy was the son of Mary of Burgundy and of Maximilian of Habsburg, the German Emperor, who had thus also combined several territories. Juana of Aragon was neurasthenic and in the end, at the death of her husband, would become truly insane. Charles, born in Gent of Flanders, was raised by his aunt Margaret of Austria in Mechelen in Brabant. Charles' brother, Ferdinand, was raised with his namesake grandfather in Aragon. Charles spoke French, Ferdinand mainly Spanish. When Philip of Burgundy and Ferdinand the Catholic of Aragon died, Charles V could reign over an enormous territory on the European mainland. He inherited Castile, Aragon, Sicily and Sardinia, Naples, parts of Burgundy, Flanders and the Northern Low Countries with its rich Dutch towns and thus the Seventeen Provinces. With money of Jacob Fugger of Augsburg Charles was chosen by the Prince-Electors of Germany to succeed his grandfather Maximilian as Holy Roman Emperor of the German Nation. The young Ferdinand, Charles V's brother, would be archduke of Austria. By marriage he also became king of Bohemia (Czechia) and of Hungary. And Spain's colonies were vaster still.

Ferdinand and Isabella had founded the greatest empire that Europe had ever seen. Ferdinand the Catholic wanted to secure the Mediterranean and thus the core of Christianity from attacks of the Turks. One of his expeditions was to take Oran on the African coast, but Spain at first did not hold ground in Africa. Charles V, who had also contained the Turks before Vienna, sent an army again to these parts to fight the

Muslim pirates of the Mediterranean and won Tunisia. Charles' empire thus also contained regions of Africa.

When Charles V abdicated as Emperor in 1555 he split his enormous empire in two parts. To his own son Philip he gave Spain and the Netherlands. His brother Ferdinand succeeded him as German Emperor.

This is the historical background of the work of the Master of Perea and also of the many links between the kingdom of Naples. Jusepe de Ribera of Toledo would found a school of painting in Naples that was continued by Luca Giordano. Spanish influence in Italy was important. The Master of Perea was one of the masters who were in the line of the Spanish-Neapolitan tradition.

### *Jacques Daret*

Jacques Daret was born in Tournai probably between 1400 and 1405, and he died there in 1468. He came from a family of wood and stone sculptors. He worked first in Tournai, mainly in the workshop of the painter Robert Campin. He had lost his mother young and he was already with Campin in 1418. From 1427 to 1432 he was still in Campin's workshop, together with Rogier van der Weyden. Working with a master so late may have been required by the guild of Tournai before Daret and van der Weyden (called de le Pasture in Tournai) were allowed to be independent painters. Later Daret also worked in different places not so far from his hometown: Bruges, Lille, and Arras. In 1433 Daret was installed in Arras, where he worked on paintings for the Benedictine abbey of Saint Vaast. He probably also kept his workshop in Tournai. Nicolas Froment may have worked with Daret on cartons for tapestries of the life of Saint Peter for the cathedral of Beauvais, also a centre of tapestry weaving industry<sup>F20</sup>. The 'Visitation' is a panel of an altarpiece that Jacques Daret made for the abbey of Arras. In the Tournai and Bruges archives he is also known as a decorator of festivities. And in Arras he made cartons for tapestries. Daret probably also worked at medieval religious books.

The 'Visitation' by Jacques Daret is the first panel of the paintings of an altarpiece<sup>D1</sup>. The abbot of Saint Vaast, Jean du Clercq, ordered the altarpiece for the chapel dedicated to the Virgin of the abbey church that du Clercq was finishing. Du Clercq was a very dynamic and well-known personality in Artois. He was abbot from 1428 to 1462. He embellished his abbey and his abbey church. He had masons and artists work at the nave and on interior and exterior decorations of the church from 1429 to 1462. The church does not exist anymore. In 1747 the Gothic church was demolished and a new one built. The altarpiece for the chapel of the Virgin was a vast wooden box for which du Clercq first bought fourteen statues in Germany, representing the twelve apostles, Jesus Christ on a throne and the Coronation of Mary. The statues, now lost, were put next to each other in the large un-deep box made by Collard de Hordain<sup>F20</sup>. The statues of Jesus and Mary were put higher than the other statues. Daret also gilded and brought paint on the statues. Then panels were made to close like doors on the statues. There were four panels to close on the statues of the apostles and two panels to close on Jesus and Mary. These last two panels, representing an Annunciation, are lost. The four panels that closed on the main body of the statues represent the 'Nativity of Jesus's, the 'Adoration of the Kings', the 'Visitation' and

the 'Presentation in the Temple' or the Circumcision. The panels are preserved in different museums: the 'Visitation' and the 'Adoration' are in Berlin, the 'Nativity' is in the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection of Madrid, and the 'Presentation in the Temple' is in the Musée du Petit-Palais in Paris. Jacques Daret worked for many years for Abbot Jean du Clercq. He started a series of the sixty abbots of Saint Vaast abbey in 1435. He made cartons for a tapestry of the Resurrection which also featured du Clercq and as late as 1453 he made for the same abbot an altarpiece of the Holy Spirit

Jacques Daret's 'Visitation' shows, as the other pictures we have seen, exactly the moment when Elisabeth feels the trembling baby both in her and in Mary's womb. She has her hand on Mary's child. The kneeling figure on the left is Jean du Clercq, the abbot of Saint Vaast<sup>D1</sup>. He wears the staff and the tiara of an abbot-bishop and his shield with his weapons hang next to him on a tree. In this painting also, everything is presented in the finest detail. Look at the magnificent golden-lined robes of Mary and Elisabeth, the locks of Mary, the white lace headdress of Elisabeth. Daret could lavishly apply gold in his painting. Flanders and Artois were rich of the weaving and tapestry industry and as we compare the robes and cloaks of Daret's painting with those of Master M.S., we can note the difference. Daret showed the opulence of the dresses and the cloths made in Artois by the thriving first economy of the region.

Dark blue and deep red robes contrast with the green landscape. One can see trees, fields, flowers all around and the small country roads. Daret painted a very high horizon, to make the scene more intimate and he gave a magnificent landscape view in the left part of the picture. This landscape is painted in intricate detail of high trees, winding paths and a far river. Mary looks fulfilled. She has a nice somewhat broad, country face. Elisabeth is older, compassionate and saying: yes, indeed, this is a miracle and a wonder. Mary and Elisabeth look into each other's eyes, locked in the mystery of the knowledge of their pregnancy. Elisabeth blesses Mary with the short Magnificat poem that is now so well known.

The abbot Jean du Clercq looks respectfully to Mary and Elisabeth. He has a wise face, wrinkled by the worries of life and of his responsibilities. He seems intelligent, austere, very present, and very attentive as can be expected of a manager of the vast abbey of Saint Vaast. Du Clercq is humbly dressed in the dark robes of his monastery. He is dressed as a pious monk. But next to him is the headdress of a bishop and that is covered with jewels, a sign of the wealth of the abbot and of the richness of medieval Arras.

Jacques Daret's painting was made just before the Conference of Arras, which took place in the abbey. Saint Vaast was not just any abbey. It was one of the most prosperous, glorious abbeys of northern France. Not only important because of its industry, its numbers of monks, the spiritual radiance for the region. The abbey was the scene of one of the most important peace talks of the Hundred Year War between ambassadors of the King of France, the King of England and the Duke of Burgundy. The bishop of Arras was a counsellor and frequent ambassador of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy. The bishop and Philip the Good organised the peace conference.

Arras was a city in the County of Artois, in the North of France, not so far from Tournai. Arras had a thriving economic activity of cloth, of tapestry weaving and of

goldsmiths. About thirteen to seventeen thousand people lived in the town. Arras had eleven churches, six monasteries within its walls and seven outside, and fourteen hospices or hospitals. There were about seventy tapestry artisans working in the town, over twenty goldsmiths, and six painters<sup>F20</sup>. The town walls of Arras had been built from 1354 to 1373 to defend the town during the Hundred-Year War. The last Count of Artois, Philippe de Rouvres, had died in 1361. His widow was Margaretha van Male of Flanders, a daughter of the Count of Flanders. She remarried to Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy in 1369 so that the County of Artois came to belong to the Dukes of Burgundy.

The conference of Arras of 1435 drew together ambassadors of emperor Sigismund of Germany, of the Kings of Castile and Aragon, of Portugal, Navarra, Naples, Sicily, Poland and Denmark, of the Dukes of Milan and French Brittany<sup>G19</sup>. There were delegates and doctors of the universities of Paris and Bologna. Delegates of many cities and bishops of France, England, Flanders, Hainaut, and Holland. The bishop of Liège came with a magnificent court that rode 200 white horses. The embassy of England was formed equally of 200 lords and knights among which the Archbishop of York and the Count of Suffolk, later also the Cardinal of Winchester and the Count of Huntingdon. The Duke of Burgundy came with many knights and 300 archers. The envoy of Charles VII, King of France, was especially rich with the Duke of Bourbon, the Count Vendôme, the chancellor Christophe de Harcourt and many others. There were gathered more than 500 knights in Arras and Saint Vaast. Each knight was accompanied by at least twenty persons of his following.

These knights of course held duels and tilts to divert the audience. The first one opposed the Spanish knight Juan de Merlo to Pierre de Beaufremont, sire of Charny<sup>G19</sup>. It lasted two days; the first day was fought on horse, the second on foot. Magnificent feasts were held. All delegations made solemn entries into Arras showing all the splendour of armour, flying colours, wealth and power.

The discussions were held in the great halls of Saint Vaast. But peace between France and England was far away: both parties remained on their positions. After all, the English held vast territories of France among which Paris and they knew Charles VII was a weak King whose funds were diminishing. Joan of Arc had been burnt publicly in Rouen and was no threat anymore. Soon, the English refused all proposals of the French and left. The real importance of the conference lay in the relations between Charles VII, King of France, and Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy.

Philip the Good was an ally of the English. He was bound to England by an official treaty. Added to that, the Duke of Bedford, the main army leader of the English and Governor of the English possessions in France had been married to Philip's sister Anne. During the conference there was a remarkable speech made by Louis de Gari, doctor of the University of Bologna, who stated that Philip was not bound anymore to his treaty with England: it had been merely a personal treaty with a King now dead<sup>G19</sup>. And during the conference the Duke of Bedford died. Philip had no ties anymore with England and he had grown uneasy with the dangerous, too important English influence in France. But Charles VII had, when still the Dauphin, killed Philip's father traitorously on the bridge before the castle of Montereau. Such a murder and offence could not be forgotten.

Charles VII now made a proposal in 29 articles in which he stated that he regretted the murder, which –he said - was forced upon him as a very young man by his nobles. After all, Charles was still only ten years old when the assassination had taken place. He proposed to give many riches, lands, towns to Philip the Good and he declared that Philip would not be under the sovereignty of the King of France anymore (but his successors would remain so, and also even Philip in the event that Charles would die). The articles stated explicitly however that the town of Tournai, though surrounded by Burgund territory, would remain to the King of France. Tournai, the town of the great painters Robert Campin, Jacques Daret and Rogier Van Der Weyden, was too wealthy to be abandoned by a King always in search of new money. Philip accepted. To the great anger of England, he would now be an ally to the King of France and soon also attack the English at Calais.

The conference of Saint Vaast at Arras thus was of the utmost importance. In time, it threw the English back over the Channel, ended the Hundred Year War and enabled the Kings of France to end feudal medieval France. Bye and bye, a King of France - Charles' son Louis XI - would also end the Duchy of Burgundy. But that was in the far future in this year of 1435 when the conferencing knights and ambassadors admired Jacques Daret's altarpiece. Jean du Clercq proudly presented the altarpiece to the ambassadors. Both the Duke of Burgundy 's chancellor and the Papal legate, Nicollò Albegati wrote having seen and admired the paintings and the statues<sup>F20</sup>.

Jacques Daret painted the abbey of Saint Vaast on the 'Visitation'. The fortified abbey rises out of the green landscape as a dream, with white walls and turrets. The Gothic cathedral grows slim and elegantly above the abbey, its blue roofs resemble the skies. We also can see the bell tower and the main entrance gate.

### *Epilogue*

We have looked at three 'Visitation' pictures. One painting was from Spain, the others from Hungary and Flanders – all regions that lay thousands of kilometres apart. Pictures have to be placed in their historical context in order to be fully understood. Modest themes like the 'Visitation' were painted with major historical events in the background.

Catholic Spain was just completely recovered from the Moors at the end of the fifteenth century. Moorish Spain had known a splendid culture, but Christian Spain was emerging from its darker ages. The Master of Perea was one of the Spanish painters who started an artistic tradition in that land.

Master M.S. was called to a rich gold mining town in a region that had strong links with the Italian Renaissance. Hungary's Christian art would practically disappear after 1526 in hundred and fifty years of Turkish domination.

The town of Tournai in the Hainaut region engendered a generation of important Walloon masters of the school of the Flemish Primitives. One of these, Jacques Daret, made an altarpiece for the occasion of the most important peace conference of his century.

The Master of Perea lived and worked in Aragon and his King Ferdinand gave Spain, Aragon and Castile joined, to the man who married his daughter. That was Duke Philip le Bel of Burgundy. This Philip was a descendent of the Philip the Good of Burgundy who was the lord of Artois for which Jacques Daret made his painting. Philip le Bel's son, Charles V, inherited the territories of Burgundy and Spain and would become the German Emperor. Charles' sister Mary married Lajos, the last King of Hungary before the Turks overran the country. Lajos was defeated by the Turks and Mary of Hungary fled from Budapest and governed in the name of her brother Charles his provinces of Flanders. European history had linked Spain, Hungary and Flanders and Artois.

In view of such events, pictures gain an additional dimension and a grandeur that one would not suspect.

*Other paintings:*

**The Visitation**

Rogier Van Der Weyden (1399-1464). Pinacoteca – Turin.

**The Visitation**

Master of the Life of Mary (ca. 1460-1490 active). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

**The Visitation**

Dieric Bouts (1420-1474). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid.

**The Visitation**

Vicente Masip (ca. 1475-1545). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid.

**The Visitation**

Jacopo Pontormo (1494-1556). Pieve di San Michele – Carmignano 1530-1532.

**The Visitation**

Giovanni Francesco Barbieri called Il Guercino (1591-1666). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen. 1632.

**The Visitation**

Josse Lieferinxe (1493-1508). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1500.

**The Visitation**

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. Ca. 1588.

**The Visitation**

Rogier Van Der Weyden (1399-1464). Museum der Bildenden Künste. Leipzig.

**The Visitation**

Marten Mandekens (active 1630-1650). Galleria Borghese. Rome. 1638.

**The Visitation**

Francesco Guarino (1611-1654). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1640-1645.

**The Visitation**

Bartolomeo Ramenghi the Elder called Bagnocavallo (1484-1542). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1529.

**The Visitation**

Marco d'Oggiono (ca. 1477-1540). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg.  
Ca. 1535-1540.

**Madonna with Child and Saint Zechariah and Elisabeth**

Andrea Cordigliachi called Previtali (ca. 1470-1528). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

*The Madonna of the Rose Garden***The Madonna of the Rose Garden**

Martin Schongauer (1435-1491). Eglise de Saint Martin – Colmar. 1473.

Martin Schongauer was born in 1435, in the same year as took place the Conference of Arras of which we talked in the previous chapter. He was born in Augsburg, the imperial city where many Diets were held of the German Emperors, a city not far from Munich. He died in Breisach of the Alsace in 1491. Schongauer worked very young in Colmar. The Alsace region owed still allegiance to the German Empire in the fifteenth century. Today it is in north-eastern France but German is spoken as much as French is. The region is rich of agriculture. Currently it is one of the grand wine regions of France. Its Rhine valley assured fertility and a warmer climate than in the surrounding mountains.

Little is known of Schongauer. His influence on German painting was considerable however. Few works of his hand have survived, especially few paintings. But Schongauer was a prolific engraver, one of the first copper engravers, and it is mostly through this medium and the growing use of printing presses that he gained fame. The other great painter and engraver of Germany, Albrecht Dürer of Nuremberg, travelled to meet him, but Schongauer had just died. Martin Schongauer painted in the International Gothic style, but the freedom with which he represented his scenes and in particular his figures make of him an artist who left established tradition for new, individual paths. In his paintings he used harmonious colours and he adapted the subject to his colour harmony. His figures are realistically depicted. They are portraits of common people that Schongauer might have met in the Alsace towns of Colmar and Strassbourg or the many small villages of the Rhine region. Schongauer was one of the first German painters thus to have drawn attention to the people around him and to introduce these realistic elements in religious paintings in Germany.

Martin Schongauer painted around 1473 a 'Madonna in the Rose Garden' for the Saint Martin church of Colmar. This was a couple of years only after he had settled with his own workshop in Colmar. The painting is typical of the theme of the Virgin sitting in a garden of roses. This garden of roses is a reference to several poetic lines of the Song of Songs of the Bible:

*I am the Rose of Sharon,  
The lily of the valleys.  
As a lily among the thistles,  
So is my beloved among girls.*

And:

*She is a garden enclosed;  
My sister, my promised bride.*

From these lines come many painted scenes of Mary in an enclosed garden, the Latin 'hortus conclusus'.



Mary was always also a symbol of wisdom since she was often represented with the open book of wisdom. So we find on wisdom in the book of Ecclesiasticus the following lines, which also refer to roses as well as to palm trees with which the virgin is sometimes associated:

*I have grown tall as a palm in En-Gedi,  
As the rose bushes of Jericho.*

Mary was thus often called 'The Rose of Jericho'. The theme of Mary sitting in a rose garden is a recurring one, especially in the German pictorial arts.

In the painting of Schongauer Mary is sitting with the baby Jesus on her lap in an enclosed rose garden. She is sitting like 'a lily among the thistles', which are then the thorns of the rose bushes. She sits in an 'enclosed garden' as is written in the Cantic of Canticles. The roses indeed grow around her in a hedge. The roses are red, the colour of the Passion of Christ. The Virgin is completely dressed in red, which is an unusual colour for Mary. She is usually shown with a blue cloak. But these colours for her would have been too harsh as compared to the rose garden of red and green behind her. The red tones suit harmoniously and give the picture a very warm hue against the green background. In the rose bush are birds; these are the goldfinches whose necks have turned red after having nipped of Jesus's blood at Golgotha. Large red roses bloom around Mary, but also a single white rose can be seen close to her, indicating her purity.

The enclosed garden of Mary was a strong symbolic theme in Western Europe, and especially in Flanders. Pious women who remained unmarried but who did not feel inclined to enter the Catholic orders as nuns, lived together in rows of small houses built around a central garden. In Dutch these are called 'begijnhoven' or beguinages and the best preserved of these is in Bruges. In many towns of Flanders and Brabant these beguinages can still be admired. They are havens of peace, where spirituality still hangs in the air. The pious ladies worked on embroideries and on lace in their small houses around the enclosed garden of their beguinage. They rarely painted, but one type of their artisans' work were the boxes called 'Enclosed Gardens' of which many have been preserved. These were wooden boxes, sometimes as large as one meter wide and high, about fifteen centimetres deep. The boxes were placed upright. Inside the boxes were placed small puppets of Mary and of saints, splendidly dressed in white lace and surrounded by dried flowers, miniature candle bearers, and so on. White was generally the overall colour. Usually at the lower end of the box one can see a small fence, thus hinting at the enclosed garden of the Song of Songs.

Martin Schongauer's picture is a 'Throning Madonna' since two angels hold an enormous crown symbolically over Mary's head. The painting is unconventional in various ways. The hair of the Madonna is flowing freely over her shoulders. This feature was reserved since old for Mary Magdalene; it was a sign of sensuality that was rarely associated with Mary. Jesus and Mary are looking in different directions, whereas Mary usually only has eyes for her son. Mary is painted as a melancholic young lady. She holds her head inclined; she smiles affably, secretly and contentedly. But Jesus already tries to escape from her. We mentioned that the colours of Mary's robe are not conventional. Martin Schongauer must have been one of the first painters to emphasise the strong pyramidal composition, which is obtained by the red cloaks of Mary. Schongauer certainly was a highly skilled colourist and he knew very well how

to paint with realism the smallest detail, as in the various tones of the folds of the red cloak of Mary.

Martin Schongauer proved with this painting and a few only similar ones, which have survived to us, that talent was universal in Europe of the fifteenth century and that painters were becoming more confident also in that company to profile their genius against established traditions in art. German pictorial arts had a fabulous representative in him, to lead subsequent generations of painters into the German Renaissance. The most erudite of his admirers would be Albrecht Dürer of Nuremberg.

*Other paintings:*

**The Madonna at the Fountain**

Jan van Eyck (1390-1441). Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten - Antwerp.

**Madonna with Child among Roses**

Stefan Lochner (ca. 1400-1451). Wallraf-Richartz Museum – Köln. Ca. 1448.

**Virgin and Child in a Garland of Flowers**

Jan Brueghel (1568-1625) and Hendrick van Balen (1575 – 1632). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. Ca. 1608.

**Madonna of the Rose**

Massimo Stanzione (ca. 1585-1656). Galleria Corsini. Rome. Ca. 1640-1645.

**Madonna del Roseto**

Bernardino Luini (ca. 1490 – 1532). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

**Madonna in the Rose Bower**

Francesco Francia (Francesco Raibolini) (ca. 1450-1517). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. Ca. 1500.

**The Holy Family of the Rose**

Benvenuto Tisi called Garofalo (ca. 1476-1559). Galleria Borghese. Rome. 1516.

**The Virgin of the Rose Garden**

Francesco Raibolini called Francesco Francia (ca. 1450-1517). Galleria Borghese. Rome. Late 15<sup>th</sup> century.

*The Throning Madonna***Madonna of Santa Trinita**

Cenni di Pepi called Cimabue (ca. 1240-1302). Galleria degli Uffizi - Florence. 1280.

**Madonna Rucellai**

Duccio di Buoninsegna (ca.1255-1319). Galleria degli Uffizi - Florence. 1285.

**Madonna of Ognissanti**

Giotto di Bondone (ca. 1267-1337). Galleria degli Uffizi - Florence. 1310.

**The Madonna of Glatz**

The Master of the Madonna of Glatz. Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz – Berlin. 1343-1344.

**The Throning Madonna**

Quinten Massys (1465-1530). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie – Berlin. Around 1525.

Pictures of the Virgin Mary were commissioned for almost every church in Europe. One of the most important symbols of Jesus's message of love and empathy had to be present at least once in any church where the congregation gathered. Some of these paintings were destined for the High Altars of churches dedicated to the Madonna. The early Florentine and Sienese painters of the thirteenth century followed Byzantine examples and showed Mary on a throne, as she would reign in the heavens. This queen would intercede to her Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus was a man and as he was part of God, he was also strict and austere. Jesus's message was one of pure love, but he had retained also God's image of the revenger when in wrath. A softer image was welcome. Mothers forgive their children more, so when you had done something wrong where could you better turn to, to be forgiven, but to a mother, the Virgin?

Two different kinds of images were needed of the Virgin. In the 'Throning Madonna' or 'Maestà' paintings, Mary was the queen of heavens. She was the one who sat with God and who would intercede with God. In the 'Humility' pictures, or 'Umiltà', the Madonna was the sweet mother, the model as every woman should be on earth. This Umiltà Madonna was the example of how women should care for children, be beautiful, always be sweet, compassionate and silent.

The three most famous 'Maestà' paintings are the large pictures made around the end of the thirteenth century for the main altars of Florentine churches by Cimabue, Duccio di Buoninsegna, and Giotto di Bondone. These are still very much under the Byzantine influence, but starting with Cimabue over Duccio and Giotto, one senses an evolution to liberation in form, colours and feelings, that presages the splendours to come of Western European painting in Florence, Siena, Flanders and Wallony. A less well known, strange but equally interesting and beautiful picture is a Madonna of Bohemia, Czechia, called the Madonna of Glatz.

These pictures, especially the Maestà's, were images of pure religious spirituality. They had no other subject but the Virgin Mary. They represented the Virgin as a

Queen, idealised, elevated, of a beauty and dignity that did not exist on earth. Yet we will show how evolution to images closer to humans crept in.

European pictures of the Madonna with Jesus followed Byzantine examples. Throughout the Dark Ages and the Early Middle Ages, no court was as splendid and as legitimate as the imperial court of Constantinople. The influence of that East Roman Empire was not just felt in Eastern Europe and the Near Orient. Venice especially had many trading and cultural links with Constantinople and built its churches on Byzantine models. The Throning Madonna paintings in which Mary is seated on a throne holding the infant Jesus in front on her lap is a Byzantine theme called 'Nikopoia'. The Nikopoia was a Byzantine painting that supposedly brought victories to the Emperors of Constantinople and that was brought to battlefields by Emperor Justinian. Indeed, images were then supposed to retain some of the power and soul of the depicted. One should not underestimate such ancient feelings on pictures. Many centuries later the Muslim forbade making images of Allah and even of all humans for much the same reason and that interdiction continues till today.

Another Byzantine example was the 'Hodegetria', often a standing Madonna image or showing Mary only up from the waist, holding Jesus with her left arm and showing Jesus in a sign of adoration with her right hand. Yet another presentation was the 'Eleusa' in which Mary looks melancholically towards Jesus's coming Passion. In European pictures of this kind Jesus often holds symbols of the Passion or of his glory and power.

Three different men made three Maestà panels for three different churches of Florence. The oldest one, painted by Cimabue, was made for the church of Santa Trinita, the Holy Trinity. The youngest one was painted by Cimabue's pupil, Giotto, for the church of Ognissanti, All Saints. The Madonna Rucellai of Duccio was made for Santa Maria Novella; it stood there in the Rucellai chapel. The panel took its name from this chapel. The Rucellai were rich wool merchants of Florence. The panels are called Maestà's, after Santa Maestà or Holy Majesty. They show a reigning Madonna sitting on a throne in heaven, surrounded by angels. Another kind of paintings of the Virgin Mary is called Santa Umiltà, or Holy Humility. These show Mary in more humble scenes, lovingly caring for her son. The Maestà's represent the majesty of the Virgin, as would be appropriate for the major image on the main altar of an imposing Florentine church.

### *Cimabue*

The Cimabue Madonna is still very much in the iconic Byzantine style. The Madonna is a Nikopoia but in the pose of a Hodegetria as she holds Jesus and points at him with her right hand. Jesus points to the heavens and holds a roll of scripture, a symbol of the New Testament and of the fact that his life was ordained – written – by God the Father. Cimabue thus already departed somewhat from the very tradition of Byzantine icons, but thus change should not be attributed to him alone as earlier pictures exist from Tuscany of just this image.

Mary is dressed in a long wide blue robe, the maphorion, which hides her forms and completely encloses her head. The robe is covered with gold to indicate the folds. The dominant surface in Cimabue's painting is formed by this cloak of Mary. Byzantine pictures had a particular way of showing the draperies on figures called the damp-fold style. This style was so called because of the damp, clinging appearance of the folds. The dress clung to the body and thereby suggested the curves of knees and legs. The dress suggested delicately the contours of the body. In true Byzantine style the folds were drawn in lines, and uniform colour surfaces were painted between the lines. Emphasis was on the lines to indicate the volumes. The Florentine painters varied the colours between the lines and they drew fewer lines. By varying the colours from bright to dark, by letting thus the light form the folds, they adapted the damp-fold style to newer Italian evolutions. Thus the Byzantine damp-fold style evolved during Gothic times in Europe and we can see the evolution at work in the pictures of Cimabue, Giotto and Duccio. We can see the early style transformed to softer representations already in Cimabue and also how this artist introduced the play of light on the robes.

Cimabue's Madonna shows the boy Jesus, who is likewise completely dressed in a cloak. He makes a blessing sign and both he and Mary look directly to the viewer. The throne is an elaborate structure, which must represent the heavenly throne, separated from the earth. The heavens are supported by columns, under the columns are the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah, holding their prophecies written on scrolls. In the middle are Abraham and David, from whose lineage Jesus was born. The figures left and right are looking upwards to the Madonna, whereas Abraham and David look directly at the viewer. The angels, emphasising the authority and the hierarchical structure of Roman Catholic religion, support the throne. They are eight, maybe representing the musical octave, and they were painted somewhat smaller, in the medieval way, to indicate their subordinate role.

Cimabue knew the receding lines of perspective and used it in this painting. This is not yet full perspective, the lines are still mostly parallel, but some are more at an angle than others are. The laws of perspective were not yet discovered in Cimabue's time, but his painter's eye has captured the essential. The throne makes the picture rigid, strict. Cimabue softens this strictness by the various tilts of the heads of the persons: Mary keeps her head mildly inclined towards her baby and also the angels have their heads inclined, although symmetrically so to the central axe. This same axial symmetry is applied throughout the whole picture.

The Maestà of Cimabue is an imposing painting and large as it is, more than 2 meters high, it was worthy of the master altar of Santa Trinita. Paintings have been set on altars ever since the Gothic period. The habit continues till this day in European churches. It was the only image churchgoers had that could represent to them what the religious world looked like. So, of course the priests and the painters took great care to what image was represented. These pictures could - much better than the long preaches - convey a message of grandeur and majesty of the divine kingdom. The people, merchants and artisans of Florence, would need a central picture to look at during the religious ceremony, to help them imagine what the heavens were about. The painters were thus of the utmost importance to the commissioners and only true

genius painters were good enough to deserve the confidence of the clergy and the rich families that would pay for the images.

Little is known of Cimabue. He was born in Florence around 1240. He died in that same city in 1302, although he worked in other North Italian towns as well, such as Assisi and Pisa. In Italy he is sometimes called the father of painters. Cimabue was the first painter of whom Vasari gave account in his 'Lives of the Artists' printed around 1550. Vasari wrote somewhat pompously of Cimabue, "Eventually, however, by God's providence, Giovanni Cimabue, who was destined to take the first steps in restoring the art of painting to its earlier stature, was born in the city of Florence, in the year 1240." For Vasari, Cimabue restored Italian art to the splendour of Roman antiquity.

We know of painters from times before Cimabue, but he is the first of which we have major, well-preserved works. And he was the master of Giotto, who would really liberate painting from its older representation forms. Cimabue still painted very much according to earlier iconography, even though his personal style appeals to us more than anything made before him. Look for instance at the mosaics of the Florence Baptistery. There is a mosaic dating from the very beginning of the thirteenth century depicting the Madonna on her throne. It resembles very much Cimabue's painting: the same figures with the same robes, same colours, a blessing Jesus on the lap of his mother, somewhat on her left knee. Cimabue knew these mosaics. He laid mosaics himself, as in the Dome of Pisa.

Florentines consider Cimabue more than any other painter the first artist of their town. Vasari already recalls that Cimabue made a Madonna for the church of Santa Maria Novella that hung between the Rucellai chapel and the chapel of the Bardi da Vernio<sup>G46</sup>. Vasari told that the figure was larger than any that had been painted up to that time, and that Cimabue was gradually adopting something of the draughtsmanship and method of modern times. "As a result this painting so astonished his contemporaries that it was carried to the sound of trumpets and amid scenes of great rejoicing in solemn procession from Cimabue's house; and Cimabue was generously praised and rewarded for it."<sup>G46</sup> This procession scene appealed to later Romantic painters of the nineteenth century. Frederick, Lord Leighton made in 1853 to 1855 a picture of this 'Cimabue's Madonna being carried through the Streets of Florence' that was much admired and bought by the Royal Couple Queen Victoria and Prince Albert of England.

Vasari told this story more than a hundred and fifty years after it had happened. His sources may not have been very reliable, the story merely an anecdote remembered by the Florentines. The most famous Madonna of Santa Maria Novella is Duccio's Rucellai Madonna originally made for the Compagnia dei Laudesi of that church and later transferred to the Rucellai chapel. So, either Vasari's account pertains to a lost Madonna of Cimabue or to the Santa Trinita painting. The veneration of the Florentines for Cimabue did not stop there. In November of 1966 a cyclone brought such heavy rains to Florence that the Arno flooded the town<sup>G25</sup>. Cimabue's Christ, a huge painted cross, was torn from its wall and was found floating in the dirty waters. The heavily damaged cross was put on a cart and transported, pushed by men, through the town to higher grounds. The Florentines stopped their work, came out of their

houses, knelt in the water and signed themselves in silence when Cimabue's cross passed.

### *Duccio*

Duccio de Buoninsegna's *Maestà* is a second evolution away from the Byzantine presentations. The Madonna is still clothed in the maphorion, but the cloak is softer and less formal. One can see the ending of the robe and the seams gently curving, so that the cloak is lighter. Our eye follows the playful, sinuous line of gold on the dark blue robe. These meandering decorative lines are typical of Duccio. He modified entirely the Byzantine damp-fold style in that he emphasised the substance of the cloth, let it play by itself instead of merely by the lines of the body, and he definitely exploited the decorative effects of the folds.

In Duccio's picture the head of the Madonna is still enclosed. Mary seems more gentle, but holds her head inclined just as Cimabue painted. Little Jesus is not wearing a heavy robe as in earlier pictures, but a light shirt in flesh colours. He does not hold his hand to a blessing anymore and Mary has her hand on his knee, in a tender caress. She is not solemnly showing the child. Duccio painted Jesus without a scroll in his left hand. Jesus holds his robe and that robe is painted in the Byzantine style with clear golden lines used to indicate the folds of the cloth. Jesus's right hand does not point upwards. Jesus stretches his arm and seems therefore to bless the angels on the left of the panel. This is a natural movement that breaks with tradition and shows an effort to bring the holy figures closer to the viewers than before. Unlike in the *Nikopoias* also, Jesus does not look straight at the viewer, a feature that was still obvious in Cimabue's picture.

The scene is more intimate and more elegant, more refined. The throne also is lighter: only curtains form the background. The stiles of the throne still resemble Cimabue's, but the base is also lighter, gentler, and finer. The sides of the throne are covered with coloured panels, which remind of Florentine furniture worked with inlays of 'pietre dure', multi-coloured marble intarsias. All this indicates a growing refinement and sense of decoration. The thirty medallions of saints and biblical figures on the frame also enhance decoration. Sophistication, elegance and ease of living were on the move. Elegance and harmony can also be found in the colour symmetries of the robes and cloaks of the angels and in their poises. Duccio was more aware of the realistic representation of space than Cimabue. Mary's throne is smaller than Cimabue's, thus stands prominently out against the background. There are less angels and they are smaller, so that the whole frame is simpler and brighter. Cimabue's angels are standing on part of the throne, Duccio's angels seem to fly in the air and hold the throne up. This adds to the sense of lightness

Duccio was born in Siena in 1255 or 1260, half a generation or so later than Cimabue, but both painters worked in the same period. His first pictures appear in his native town in 1278. Duccio died in Siena in 1319. All his known activities were exercised in Siena except the *Rucellai* altarpiece, which was commissioned around 1285. We see him in this *Maestà* and in other paintings as a tender painter, showing some of the feelings that Mary inspired, and evolving to innovation, further on than Cimabue. The

gentleness and naïve sweetness would become a predominant feature of the Sieneese painters, as opposed to the more formal Florentines.

Cimabue and Giotto were fresco painters, of Duccio only panels are known. Note that although Duccio was a Sieneese, and although Siena and Florence were rival towns, an important family of Florence found no problem in giving him an order for a main piece of art to be shown in a major church of Florence.

### *Giotto*

Giotto's Madonna is very different. Mary is still robed in the maphorion, but there is no gold to indicate the folds: there are more shades of colour here than in the two previous Maestà's. The robe is half opened and we see shades of Mary's chest. She is a real woman now, less a heavenly queen. This must have brought her image more intimate to the viewers, more close to their everyday world. In the Giotto picture the Byzantine damp-fold style is abandoned. He used a way of presentation in which the material of the robe seems to have more importance than the contours of Mary's body. But Mary's form is heavy, probably not anatomically right and not elegant, but it is there. Giotto was a Florentine realist, more concerned with the immediate image than with decoration even though he tried more than Cimabue to introduce decorative elements to enhance the noble image of the Virgin.

The shirt of Jesus has become almost entirely transparent, but the anatomy of the child seems somewhat clumsy. Jesus's body is too robust, his legs too thin and the shirt clings artificially around the child. Anatomy was not the strength of Giotto. The blessing sign of the right hand of the baby has returned as in Cimabue's Maestà. Jesus again holds a scroll in his left hand, as in Cimabue's painting and likewise holds fingers of his right hand upwards, here however more in a sign of blessing. Mary's right hand however has the same pose as in Duccio's painting: tenderly on the child's knee.

Giotto has turned the throne into a chapel, perspective is used, and the architecture is light as with Duccio. Giotto reached a dramatic effect of space with the perspective of the throne panels. The throne is in marble and like Duccio's inlaid with very many small motives of white and red marble. Giotto's decorations are still more delicate than Duccio's. The open panels suggest windows, airy lightness. By their sharply receding forms they create more space and volume than the Duccio and Cimabue scenes. Giotto wanted to emphasise more than Duccio the majesty of the scene, which he obtained by setting the throne and Mary as in a chapel. By doing this, Giotto brought more weight and volume in the Virgin and child, indicating thereby their importance to the scene.

In Giotto's Maestà there are again more angels, as with Cimabue, but the two angels at the bottom are smaller and dressed in white so that they are lighter. The standing angels also are longer and more slender, adding to the impression of airiness. Remark how an angel offers the crown to the Madonna. Another one presents to Jesus the pyx containing the Eucharist, a symbol of the child's future passion. Two angels further below offer a vase with red roses and white lilies, also symbols of Mary. The Italian



painters did not use so profusely medieval symbolism as the northern artists of Flanders and Germany; yet Giotto shows here he knew all these means. As in all three paintings, there is axial symmetry and harmony in the colours. Here also we find eight angels, the same number, but also four apostles, which may represent the Four Evangelists, and two female figures who probably represent Mary Magdalene (carrying the pot of balms to anoint Jesus) and Mary Salome (carrying a crown) who were with Mary at Jesus's tomb.

Behind the Virgin, on her throne, we find star motives, here in snowflake patterns. Stars also can be found on Mary's robe in Duccio's picture. These refer to the star of Bethlehem that announced the nativity. The star was a symbol of Mary. She was often called in the Middle Ages the 'Stella Maris', the star of the seas. The golden stars on the deep blue robe of Mary in Duccio's painting was the standard for many later paintings; we find this motif back for instance on the maphorions of Fra Angelico and of Botticelli.

Other similar common elements, probably of Byzantine origin, can be found elsewhere in the panels. Thus in Cimabue's painting the Madonna's halo consists of a circle of small blue dots and red diamonds. These details are also on the golden halo of Jesus in Cimabue's picture. Exactly the same small blue dots and red diamonds are positioned in the same pattern of four blue dots and one red diamond in the halo of the child in Duccio's panel. Duccio paid a subtle tribute to Cimabue, as Giotto paid an equally subtle tribute to Duccio. Paolo Veneziano, a painter of the early fourteenth century, the founder of the Venetian school and a painter still of Byzantine style applied these same dots in several of his pictures. They can be seen in his 'Virgin and Child' now in the Courtauld Institute Galleries of London and in a painting on the same theme in the Accademia of Venice. They can be found in a 'Madonna and Child' of Venice's Museo Civico Correr, a picture made by Stefano di Sant' Agnese of the fourteenth century. These details are a remnant of Byzantine symbolism. The heavenly Jerusalem had walls studded with oval sapphires, rectangular emeralds and white pearls. A fifth century mosaic of the heavenly Jerusalem in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome shows these precious stone patterns in the walls of the Golden Gate. We find such patterns of gems repeated often in pictures of the throning Mary and also of Christ. Precious stones captured light in unusual ways and were resplendent with rays as no other material. Christ was the light of the world, and the heavens were a source of pervasive light. Thus, the precious stones were associated with the Godly light. In the 'Revelation of John', an angel shows to John the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down of heaven from God. John wrote that 'it shone with the glory of God and its brilliance was like that of a precious jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal'<sup>G121</sup>. And furthermore, 'The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone'<sup>G121</sup>. John mentions stone âmes that can be variously translated, like diamond, sapphire, lapis lazuli, emerald, turquoise, carnelian, crystal, beryl, topaz, agate, jacinth and amethyst. The twelve gates of the city were twelve pearls. Mary was thus associated by the jewels she wore and the gems in her halo with the Holy City.

Giotto, Cimabue and Duccio knew the importance of balance and harmony in art by tradition. We would be tempted to state that Giotto has more followed Cimabue's example than Duccio's. An overt tribute to his teacher? Giorgio Vasari wrote that Cimabue found Giotto as a shepherd boy drawing on a stone and that he took him in

as his pupil. Vasari wrote, “One day Cimabue was on his way from Florence to Vespignano, where he had some business to attend to, when he came across Giotto who, while the sheep were grazing nearby, was drawing one of them by scratching with a slightly pointed stone on a smooth clean piece of rock. And this was before he had received any instruction except for what he saw in nature itself. Cimabue stopped in astonishment to watch him, and then he asked the boy whether he would like to come and live with him. Giotto answered that if his father agreed he would love to do so. So Cimabue approached Bondone, who was delighted to grant his request and allowed him to take the boy to Florence. After he had gone to live there, helped by his natural talent and instructed by Cimabue, in a very short space of time Giotto not only captured his master’s style but also began to draw so ably from life that he made a decisive break with the crude traditional Byzantine style and brought to life the great art of painting as we know it today, introducing the technique of drawing accurately from life, which had been neglected for more than two hundred years.” (Translation: George Bull <sup>G46</sup>.) We find in this text two elements that were very dear to the Florentines of the Renaissance: the art of drawing and the art of drawing from life.

Giotto di Bondone was born in Vespignano, Vicchio di Mugello, near Florence, in 1267. He died in Florence in 1337. Giotto was first mentioned in Florence in 1301 but his first surviving work was the Arena Chapel of Padua. These mural frescoes date from 1304 to 1313. Giotto was a fresco painter first, but he also worked at mosaics as in the Saint Francis cathedral of Assisi. He painted tempera panels such as this *Maestà*, for which the paint pigments were bound by egg-yoke, as oils were not yet known for painting. He was also an architect: he designed the Campanile, or bell-tower, of the Dome Santa Maria dei Fiore of Florence. Giotto worked at the Campanile from 1334 on but died before he could finish the tower. When this *Maestà* was painted, he already had accomplished his greatest masterpiece: the frescoes of the Santa Maria del’Arena chapel in Padua. His *Maestà* was made when he was at the height of his painter’s profession, capabilities and art. While Giotto was working in Padua the Popes left Rome, the centre of fresco painting, to permanently reside in Avignon. So Giotto returned to Florence and worked for instance on the frescoes of the church of Santa Croce. From 1328 to 1334 he painted at the court of Anjou in Naples. After 1334, he returned to Florence for the last time, to work at the cathedral. From that time dates his participation in the design of the Campanile tower.

### *The Italian Middle Ages*

We sometimes think of the Middle Ages as the dark ages, where people except maybe the Kings lived in abject poverty, fixed in place, without much trade between towns and countries, not much knowledge spread. Of course the contrary is true. There was intense travel and trading across Europe at all times. The North Italian city-states, but also Rome, had even organised their head bank in the early thirteenth century outside of Italy, in neutral territory. It was established in Montpellier in France, which was then part of the Provence region ruled by a member of the Aragon family. In 1278, the bank was moved to Nimes due to better agreements with the French king. Despite long distances and long travel duration, merchants roamed all over Europe and much farther than that. The end of Roman civilisation had not stopped the trade and travelling around the Mediterranean. This is particularly true of the thirteenth century, in which it all intensified. The last crusade ended around 1270, but this was the eight

crusade to the Holy Land and the Near East. The crusades opened the Mediterranean again so that trade intensified over these seas.

The German Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire Frederick II Hohenstaufen ruled in the first half of the thirteenth century over a very large territory. This not only comprised Germany, but also parts of France such as Burgundy and the Provence regions, Brabant in Belgium and practically the whole of Italy and Sicily. Of course, he was only a feudal lord there and his crown was handed to him by the Popes who could give and take. The Popes sometimes supported him, mostly fought him and even threw him in church bans. His father died young and his mother was Sicilian, so he grew up on that island. He grew up amongst Arabs, knew the Arabic language and also later intensively cultivated contacts with the Arab world: Egypt, Tunis, and Damascus. Part of his army and personal guard was constituted of Mohammedans. The struggle with the Popes continued also under his sons, and ended only with the death of Manfred at the battle of Benevento in 1266. Frederick II favoured Arab trade and culture. He did organise a crusade to the Holy Land in 1228, forced to that by the Pope, but won the crown of Jerusalem more with diplomacy than with arms so that the next year already he could be back in Italy. He kept good relations with the Sultan of Egypt and negotiated a peaceful occupation of Jerusalem. This knowledge and sympathy of Arab culture by the most important European monarch of the times was not of small importance to open the Mediterranean even more. At the same time however he showed himself the fervent, even obsessive Christian in his own lands. He chased the Mohammedans from his island of Sicily and brought the survivals of his persecutions finally to a part of mainland Italy.

But we should not see the Hohenstaufen Emperors as wise men, which were open to gentler cultures than their native Germany and than the societies of the Italian city-states. Frederick II was a warrior, avid for power. He oppressed Italy with his part Mohameddan police force and in the struggle for supremacy of these Emperors they were finally destroyed. Frederick' grandson Conradin, supported by his uncle and natural son of Frederick II, Manfred, was the last Hohenstaufen to rule over Germany from Italy. The armies of Charles d'Anjou captured Conradin. Charles was a French Duke leading the battle against the last Hohenstaufens as an adventurer but with the full support of the Pope. Charles d'Anjou was ambitious to expand his territories to Italy at the expense of the weakened German emperors. Charles decapitated Conradin in Naples. Conradin was then merely thirteen years old.

The advantage went to the Italian city-states. Venice and Genoa were the merchant cities that profited most from these developments. They grew rich on overseas trade, Venice particularly with Egypt. But also the trade routes with China opened. Both cities had posts on the Crimea peninsula. The compass was used in the Mediterranean by the end of the thirteenth century; it could allow faster and more direct sea routes. The Venetian Marco Polo's voyages to Mongolia and China took place from 1270 to 1295. Polo was imprisoned after his return in Venice's archrival town Genoa and wrote his journals out of a Genoese prison. The two cities increasingly became rivals on Mediterranean trade and made war on each other. Together with navigation, the silk trade boomed again, manufactures were founded both in Venice and Genoa, but also elsewhere: Genoese brought silk industry to Lyon in France. The intensification of trade was not just the case for Northern Italy, similar developments can be found in the rest of Europe. Let us only cite here the founding of the Hanseatic League cities

beginning around 1250. The Hanseatic League was a string of German, Danish, Russian, Swedish, Dutch and even Flemish cities – Bruges one among them – of the Baltic Sea and the North Atlantic. The League intensified and protected trade. Its cities were bound by economic agreements. Florence had a very strong wool industry and traded much with Bruges, a city that would grow to the largest port of Western Europe at the end of the thirteenth century. Bruges formed the connection between the Hanseatic League and the Tuscan cities.

As trade opened Europe, so was Europe opened to cultural movements. Painters travelled throughout Europe, though hesitantly at first. We know that the Sienese Duccio worked for Florentine merchants, the Florentine Cimabue worked also in Assisi and Pisa, Giotto in Assisi, Padua, and Rome. Trade and movement meant exchange of information, and more attraction to farther lands. It meant quest of wealth and searching for more information, and journeys for sheer curiosity. Thus, the opening of travel opened the mind to new horizons, not just in geography, but also in ideas. It meant that art and images could not be seen only in the churches or in the halls of kings. There were more rich merchants and aristocracy now who could order paintings and other works of art. These merchants travelled far and as they opened foreign subsidiaries, took the works of art with them.

We feel this strongly start in Northern Italy in the second half of the thirteenth century. Travel, trade and thus the circulation of information incited to think about other images and encouraged experimentation. Painters like Duccio and Giotto advanced the traditional mosaic-based Byzantine art to the painting of real people in natural surroundings. Duccio went probably the farthest here, and was earlier than Giotto in this. Giotto always remained in the majesty of the heavens; his environments were more used as symbols than as natural settings. But Giotto more than Duccio combined feeling and rationality, and profound reflection into painting. And volume and space, maybe because he also had the soul of an architect.

Opening of the minds also happened in literature. This was the time of Thomas of Aquino (1221-1274) and François Bacon (1215-1294), then of Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), later still of Petrarca (1304-1374) and Boccaccio (1313-1375). The universities of Paris, Toulouse, Montpellier and Bologna were thriving with students and professors; the Parisian Sorbonne opened in 1254. New universities were founded, like Naples in 1224 – although more the result of a political will of the Holy Roman Emperor to give advantage to his kingdom of Naples versus the headstrong, difficult north Italian states. These universities had thousands of students. Public schools for the youngest opened in Florence. These schools received many hundreds of students who would form the clerks and accountants needed for a merchant state.

Northern Italy in the days of Cimabue, Giotto and Duccio had remained politically confused: it had evolved out of the strifes between the Catholic Popes of Rome and the German Holy Emperors as a set of independent city-states. Battles and political struggles between the old parties, one party supporting the German Emperor and the other party supporting the Popes continued and were turned into other battles for other causes. But in Northern Italy the strifes remained much within the city-states. Battles amongst the cities were more seldom after 1280. Pisa that was still a sea power had lost a decisive sea battle against Genoa in 1284. Venice had fought its last battle in 1289 with Trieste and lost. In Florence, struggles were for the supremacy of the

merchants versus the supremacy of aristocracy. Aristocracy lost: the Signoria with six chosen leaders was installed in 1282, a chosen Gonfaloniere di Giustizia or Upper Judge took the last power away from nobility in 1292. The strifes continued though. During one of these battles between aristocracy and merchants, started in the town of Pistoia but continued in Florence, the parties now called Blacks and Whites clashed. The Whites lost. Dante Alighieri was banned out of the city in 1302, never to return to Florence, as was the father of the poet Petrarca.

### *The Madonna of Glatz*

The three Maestà's of Cimabue, Duccio and Giotto are undoubtedly the great masterpieces of early Italian art. Equally great masterpieces were made in the north. It would be impossible not to mention the Madonna of Glatz.

This Maestà dates from a somewhat older period than the three Italian Maestà's since the panel was painted around 1343 to 1344. The panel stood in Glatz or Kladsko, a town in Silesia that was part of the diocese of Prague in Bohemia, our modern Czechia. The Madonna stood in the church of Glatz, the hometown of the future first cardinal of Prague, Ernst von Pardubitz.<sup>G67</sup> Von Pardubitz would also be buried in Glatz after his death in 1364. The dates of 1343 and 1344 refer to the appointment of von Pardubitz as bishop (1343) and to the year in which Prague became an archbishopric (1344).

The Madonna of Glatz could be an evolution of the Sienese Maestà of Duccio. It resembles Duccio's refined sweetness and elegance more than Giotto's solidity. The Madonna of Glatz is elegant with elaborate decoration and one perceives at first sight a tendency not to realism but to exaltation. The picture shows all the buoyancy, outcry, brilliance of the High Gothic period combined with various styles of Italian and German origin to an astonishingly mature work.

The Madonna of Glatz is a throning Madonna in the traditional Byzantine style. She is seated on a throne and has Jesus on her lap. She is clad in a blue robe and a splendid rich, red cloak. Here already is a deviation from the traditional depiction of the Maestà, for the colours of robe and cloak are inverted. This allowed for a picture that was more joyful and brilliant, more pleasing to the eye in the bright colours. The Master of the Madonna of Glatz, the anonymous artist of whom we know nothing, transformed the Byzantine damp-fold style of Mary's cloak in the Sienese way. The Bohemian master evolved Duccio's changes still more to a dazzling complexity of sensuous lines. The draperies have their own life here. The lines and shadows still show the curves of the body of the Virgin in the Byzantine style, but these are so well combined that we really feel physically the softness and lightness of the fabric. The curves of the folds are then also emphasised by golden decorations and intricate patterns that are painted delicately and are a feast for the eye. These patterns are lilies, the royal pattern of France but also a symbol of purity of the Virgin. The tautness of the damp-fold style was less marked in the Cimabue and Giotto Maestà's and we see the style entirely transformed to the decorative grace of Duccio in this Bohemian picture.

There is also ample magnificent detail to discover in the decorations of the robe of Jesus. The golden pattern continues on Jesus, but the patterns are different. Since Jesus was still more important than Mary was, the painter gave all his attention and patience to the decoration of Jesus's dress. Gold is also used in the haloes of Mary and Jesus. We find here the Byzantine traditional blue and red stones in Mary's crown and in the halo of Jesus. The stones are set in Jesus's halo in the star pattern that we discovered in Duccio's picture. It is remarkable how in cities and cultures so different, that lay so far apart as Florence and Prague, separated by the Alps, the old imagery of Byzantium was remembered and copied. Yet, the elegance and grace of the Madonna of Glatz are far more an evolution of Duccio's views and of Simone Martini's views than of those of the Florentine masters Cimabue and Giotto.

The Madonna of Glatz is a refined, sophisticated, richly decorated picture that must have taken much patience to its master and hence a long time in work. That means always that wealth must have come to the region in which such a masterpiece was made. Here the wealth came from a man called Charles of Bohemia, elected as Emperor of the German nation. Charles IV was elected Emperor only in 1346, but he had already been ruling Bohemia in his father's name since 1333. He was born in Prague and apparently he liked the town. When he became Emperor he chose Prague as his seat. Prague became even more a centre of the arts. The town was only a bishopric but it was raised to an archbishopric in 1344. Charles arranged that. Indeed, Charles had been brought by his father to France to be educated there and one of his tutors was a French nobleman who became his friend. This tutor and friend of Charles was appointed to the papacy in 1342 as Pope Clemens VI.

In the Middle Ages, and in particular in the period we are interested in, of the last half of the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth, German emperors were still elected by the Prince-Electors of Germany and dynasties had not yet stabilised. In 1273 Rudolph of Habsburg was crowned emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, then Adolph of Nassau in 1292, followed by Albert of Habsburg. But in 1298 the count of Luxemburg, a region close to France was elected as Henry VII. Henry VII received Bohemia in 1310 as a personal property from the Bohemian nobles and he handed rule of Bohemia over to his son John, who would hence be called John of Bohemia. John did not become emperor in his turn. At the death of Henry VII two emperors were chosen by fractions of Prince Electors, the same year 1314. These were Ludwig of Bavaria, or Lewis, and Frederick of Austria. The two emperors fought each other in a civil war until Lewis won the decisive battle of Mühldorf in 1322. Lewis made Frederick a prisoner. He had to face new challenges however. This time the dispute was with Pope John XXII. In the meantime John of Bohemia made friends in France. His sister Maria was engaged to King Charles IV of France and John turned around the Popes. John had a son, Wenzel, born in 1316. John brought his son Wenzel to France to be educated there, changing his name to Charles. The nomination of Lewis of Bavaria remained always contested.

Pope John XXII had already pronounced that Lewis was not the rightful emperor but the majority of the Prince-Electors recognised Lewis anyhow. John of Bohemia profited from the confusion and from his close links to France and the Popes. In 1342 a friend of Charles of Bohemia was appointed to the papacy. This was Clemens VI. This Pope declared Charles as emperor in 1346, against the still living Lewis. Charles was thirty years old. That same year 1346 John of Bohemia died in the French army at

the battle of Crécy, fighting against the English. But Charles IV had not participated in that battle. Lewis of Bavaria died the next year and Charles was easily recognised as the rightful next emperor of Germany.

Charles IV was born in 1316 in Prague. He ruled Bohemia as from 1333, barely sixteen years old. He liked Prague and stayed in this city also after his coronation as emperor. He embellished Prague. He had a stone bridge built over the river. He modified entire quarters of the town. Charles spoke five languages fluently; he was a learned man. The poet Petrarca lauded him in his poems. In 1348 Charles founded the first German university in Prague. But the nineteenth century German historian Friedrich Schlosser tells of Charles that the Slavs, the French and the Italian had educated him. He wrote that Charles combined thus the hidden nature of the Slaves, the diplomatic abilities of the French and the perfidious, egoist and political arts of the Italians. Charles was emperor during the great plague epidemics that ravaged Europe especially in 1348 to 1350 and also during his reign Germany continued to be the scene of wars and battles between the princes. The Madonna of Glatz dates from just before the period of the great plague epidemics, from 1344, when man could still feel triumphant and have an unwavering faith in Christianity.

From the date of 1344 also started the construction of the Gothic cathedral that is one of the prides of the city of Prague. A French architect, Mathias of Arras, who had previously built the cathedral of Narbonne, was called in. Arras lies in the North of France, in the Artois region, where the finest Gothic cathedrals were erected first. Mathias died in 1353 so a German master mason called Peter Parler took over. Prague cathedral became the finest monument to Christianity of Bohemia. Charles also had himself built a new palace and castle outside Prague, called Karlstein after his own name. The finest Bohemian painters and sculptors decorated Church and palace with frescoes. As we told, Charles had been raised in France. His wife was a French noble lady, Blanche de Valois, who was the sister of King Philip VI of France. Blanche died in 1348 but Charles had seen enough of the rayonnant splendour of Gothic art in France, like the Sainte Chapelle in Paris, to want also to shine and use this art to glorify his power. The Bohemian artists knew undoubtedly French and Italian art. Maybe Charles took them with him on his trips to France and Italy as members of his court. One only has to glance at the Madonna of Glatz to see the Sienese influences. These Sienese influences could not only be seen in Italy. We know that Simone Martini worked in Avignon and since Charles' friend was Pope in Avignon, the artists may have come in contact with Sienese styles also at the papal court. But Charles' artists remained anonymous. We only know of one name, Theodoric, of the painter of the frescoes of the chapel of the Karlstein castle, but we have no biography of him.

In the lower left corner of the 'Madonna of Glatz' we see the donor, Bishop Ernst von Pardubitz. He is painted much smaller than the Virgin and even than the angels, in a demonstration of humility. This was the habit in medieval art. Ernst's bishop's staff lies at the feet of the Virgin and this staff is sharply pointed to a dangerous pike. Ernst will decidedly defend the holy faith in the name of the Virgin. Mary is seated in an elaborate structure of a throne, entirely in the great Byzantine tradition of a throning Madonna. Somewhat higher than Bishop Ernst one can discern through the windows or the loggia low black walls on either side. These may refer to the enclosed garden, a Marian symbol from the Song of Songs of the Bible. This symbol was frequently used in medieval and Renaissance pictures.

The Virgin's throne is the most elaborate of the four Maestà's we present here. It is also of wood, maybe made of the Lebanon cedar of which is also referred to in the Song of Songs.<sup>G67</sup> The master of Glatz turned the throne into an elegant splendour of exaltation that we do not find even in Giotto's Maestà. The throne is heightened on the left and right by towers pierced with high windows to enliven it and to make it as light in structure as the Gothic cathedrals. We are used to these elevated lines in the French Gothic churches and the master of Bohemia in this whole picture expresses the same feelings of an incantation to God.

In each window appears an angel. Each angel is rendered in detail, each robe and each cloak is decorated as in a miniature book of hours. Most of the dresses of the angels bear the star sign of the Virgin. The two lowest angels have magnificently coloured delicate wings. They are in different poises. One angel carries the golden ball with cross, the sign of imperial dignity and the symbol of the reign of Jesus. Mary also on her blue robe has this symbol right behind Jesus. The left angel has a gesture as if it wants to make us a witness to the glory of Mary and Jesus on earth. All angels look to the Virgin and their lines of sight cross at her face. Higher up, two angels painted red only appear with their heads and arms out of smaller windows. They hold incense burners and thus they envelop the scene in fine scents. This also is an image from the Song of Songs.

Still higher up, two angels again are seated on top of the tower structure, high up against the upper border of the frame. These are dressed in white. In the folds of their robes one remarks the old Byzantine damp-fold influence and even the angular style of draperies popular in Germany a century before. In Germany, in the later part of the twelfth century appeared a new trend in the Byzantine damp-fold style. It lasted until the first half of the thirteenth century. The folds in this new Gothic style were painted in very angular, almost metallic, flat and spiky shapes. This style has remained known in only few pictures. It is most striking in an altarpiece from the cathedral of Soest in Westphalia. Less angular forms gradually evolved from this indigenous German style. The difference in style between the draperies of these two angels and of the cloak of the Virgin is striking. In Mary's cloak Siene influences are obvious; the draperies have their own substance and the flowing borders are gracefully decorated. In the angels the Byzantine damp-fold style, germanised to the spiky metal-like Westphalian style is also clear. We have with the Master of the Glatzer Madonna an artist who was well aware of these various modes of representation and it is as if he showed his knowledge proudly in a blending to his own decorative aims.

The master of Bohemia was creating space and he used space splendidly in his picture. When we compare his throne with the structures of Cimabue and even Giotto, the evolution is clear. The master of the Madonna of Glatz created depth wherever he had some surface to cover. He gave ample illusion of space in a masterly composition. Whereas with Cimabue the throne remains almost two-dimensional, the Bohemian master was dissatisfied with his flat canvas and he tried heroically to sculpt in space. Remark the towers of the throne, the Gothic turrets that launch themselves to the skies in the upper part of the frame and of course the two chapel-like light structures flanking the turrets.



In these two chapels the master of Glatz painted two lions. With these elements he added symbolism, for they refer to king Salomon. They are a reference to the royal power of Bohemia, later to become imperial power, the power of Charles IV. Furthermore we already encountered various references to the Song of Songs. This poem was called in Germany 'Das Hohelied Salomons', the High Song of Salomon. Thus the Madonna of Glatz was designed as an incantation to the king of Bohemia, the later Emperor Charles. Other symbols of kingly powers are the sceptre worn by the Virgin and the gold ball with the cross, representing the Christian world.

The Song of Salomon lauds love to a lady. That beloved was black in the song. Maybe because of that the Virgin has a dark face. We know of a long tradition of black Madonnas in Eastern Europe. Some of these were simply sculptures covered with silver blackened over time by oxidation. The Madonna of Glatz is one of the striking examples of this tradition. One can imagine other symbols to the Song of Salomon, although these references are less obvious and must remain conjectures. Thus the wooden aspect of the throne is enhanced. The painter showed explicitly the fibres of the wood. As we mentioned already, this might be a reference to the Lebanon cedar with which is compared the face of the girl. The Virgin is a slender lady, slender also as Lebanon cedars. And on top of the frame we find the star of the 'Stella Maris' as Mary was called, a theme repeated on the robes of the angels. Further symbols can be found in the painting. Jesus holds a small scroll of paper in his hand. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus was the word become flesh, the action of God. The scroll represents the written word. Finally, an angel seems to hold or bring the golden halo to Mary. Mary was enthroned, a theme called the Coronation in the heavens.

Just how mannered and elaborate the decoration of this picture is, is most strikingly demonstrated in the Gothic green coloured chapel ceiling high above Mary. The last piece of surface had to be used in a final dramatic show of skill and space. Behind the whole scene the uppermost angels hold a gold brocaded dais with splendid motives of Marian flowers, eagles and griffons. These are all royal symbols. The Italian masters used merely a uniform golden background. The Master of Bohemia must have wanted to surclass these painters in splendour.

The Virgin Mary wears a white veil that contrasts nicely in colours with her dark face and her splendid cloak. The face of the Virgin is serious, introspective and distant. But is a real woman's or girls' face of character, whereas one has the impression that Cimabue's and Giotto's Maries remain types. Mary here has fine features and in a dignified way she does not look at the viewer, also contrary to the Virgin of the Giotto Maestà. Mary holds her face inclined and the same direction is given to the face of Jesus. Mother and child are in symbiosis.

The anonymous Master of the Madonna of Glatz had other objectives with his picture than Cimabue, Giotto and Duccio. The Tuscan painters made pictures of personal devotion. Yes, they wanted a painting that could be admired for their heavenly inspiration, but these geniuses wanted also to bring Mary close to the viewers. They worked for republican city-states and for an audience that consisted of intelligent merchants and artisans who each had worked for the grandeur of their towns. They worked for an audience that had known a long, almost immutable Byzantine tradition. The Madonna of Glatz was made for the exaltation of a royal and noble, more arrogant audience. Splendour and worldly glory had to be shown. Tuscany had to be

over-classed by show of intelligence in symbols and by grandness of decoration. The Madonna of Glatz is complex in its imagery and elaborate in its decoration. It displayed wealth and extravagance in the exaltation of the concept of the Virgin linked to a Salomon, one of the greatest kings of the Bible. This Byzantine tradition had to be adapted for a worldlier picture. In the patience and skill with which it was painted we recognise however a universal genius. The picture can be compared with the splendid pictures of Flemish Gothic that came more than fifty years later. The Madonna of Glatz is a pictorial splendour of the exaltation of the figures of the New Testament.

### *Quinten Massys*

Quinten Massys was born in the town of Leuven, in the county of Brabant (Belgium) as the son of a blacksmith. He was born in 1466. He exercised the profession of blacksmith himself and a splendid iron well still exists of his hand. Only paintings of the last two decades of his life are known. He died in 1530. One of his most famous paintings is the Saint Anne altar, now preserved in the Royal Museum of Ancient Arts of Brussels. In 1491, Massys became a painter in Antwerp however and was one of the first and best representatives of Renaissance art in Brabant and Flanders. Massys was a friend of the scholar Erasmus. He made a portrait of Erasmus that was sent by the humanist writer to Thomas More of England. Massys's picture of the 'Throning Madonna' is an image that can be situated between a Maestà and a 'Mater Amabilis' of which the 'Umiltà', the Virgin sitting on the ground, is a particular image.

Massys' Virgin is sitting on a throne, but she is also represented as a loving mother who gives her son a tender kiss. This was a new representation of the Virgin. One can follow the evolution in representing the Virgin from the austere Maestà of Cimabue for instance over the Annunciation of Filippo Lippi to these more intimate pictures of Mary and her son. The Italian Renaissance had by the end of the fifteenth century also fully reached Flanders. Massys shows these influences for instance in the exuberant stiles of the throne of the Virgin. The play of the window lines above the Madonna is almost organically growing. These lines remind us however of the Gothic cathedrals. Massys combined the detail of traditional Gothic painting of Flanders with the newer, freer modes of representation of the Italian painters of the Renaissance. Thus, there are shadows on the baby Jesus and on the red robe of the Madonna. Such shadows were not so much used in Madonnas of Flanders. Flemish Primitive artists preferred not to apply heavy shadows so that the heavenly light pervaded all the scenes. Their scenes thus remained somewhat cold. The shadows make the picture warmer, more real, thus more reachable and closer to the viewer.

The northern tradition is shown also in the landscape behind the Madonna. Landscape painting had reached popularity in Flanders with the pictures of Joachim Patenier. Massys also has applied here all the symbols of the Virgin that were used in medieval pictures. Thus, the bread and wine on the little table announce the Last Supper and sacrifice of Jesus. The cherries are the fruit of paradise. Cherries were with the whole Paradise of Eden a gift from heaven; thus they symbolise heaven. The apple of course is a reference to the original sin that Jesus has come to erase. Behind the Virgin is a closed garden delimited by a fence with wild roses. In the garden is a fountain. The closed garden and fountain are images of the 'Song of Songs' of the Bible. They are

symbols of Mary's virginity and purity: a virgin is like a closed garden in which flows a pure fountain. We see here how the abundant use of symbols of the Late Middle Ages entered Northern European painting. That symbolism was less apparent in the *Maestà's* of the Florentine and Sieneese masters such as Cimabue, Duccio and Giotto.

The blend of two cultures in Massys' 'Throning Madonna' makes this a picture of a very personal taste, made by a master who sought detailed, civilised refinement and who applied his intelligence of the world with dexterity.

### *Maestà's*

Cimabue, Duccio and Giotto were the most important among the painters of the new age of Western Europe. This was not yet its Renaissance or new birth, but the ingredients were created by men of their times. It was birth before re-birth. We see in the *Maestà's* as in other of their paintings this new evolution that broke slowly but steadily with the old Byzantine images which were still prevalent in Italy throughout former ages. The Madonna of Glatz was a Middle European picture of a pomp and magnificence that would not be seen anymore until after the plague epidemics of the second half of the fourteenth century.

Why *Maestà's*? Sir Kenneth Clark has written about the remarkable concept of the Holy Virgin in European civilisation<sup>G1</sup>. No other religion but Catholic Christianity emphasises so much the image of a gentle woman and of a woman caring for a baby. The cult of the Madonna introduced a very civilising element in European history. Every churchgoer saw the *Maestà* images, be it in earlier times in mosaics or in sculptures. The *Maestà's* went back to Byzantine traditions. We have many wooden sculptures of the Madonna in Western Europe, from the eleventh, twelfth century certainly. Many are magnificent, polychrome coloured and all represent a Madonna seating on a throne with Jesus on her lap. They are called 'Sedes Sapientiae' and you can still find them today in small Catholic country churches of France, Belgium or Germany. A *Sedes Sapientiae* remains the emblem of the University of Louvain in Flanders/Brabant, a university founded in the fifteenth century.

These images and sculptures were the only images of pure, altruistic love that existed. And they were there to be seen and to be referred to at all time. They meant that mothers would go to heaven if they cared well for their children. They forced men to respect women and families and they spoke of the virtue of a caring *pater familias*. Love itself was of a higher realm, love was aesthetic, pure and of the heavens. So, for Europeans, marriage became not just the sharing of solitude, the sharing of sex or the sharing of fortunes. Marriage should and could lead to a higher objective, to a transcendence that instilled respect, care and love in the spouses and that would lead to retribution in the life after death.

The Madonna was one of the most powerful civilising influences the Catholic Church has introduced. No wonder then that the greatest painters of their age were asked to use all their genius and intelligence to offer splendid images of the Virgin. When these men painted, they thought thoroughly about their subject, with all the intelligence that was certainly not less than the intelligence of modern man. What was the image about? What should be the effect? Why this kind of painting at all? How

best to please the wealthy commissioners? What did the commissioners want to obtain as effect with such a painting? What would they like so that payment would be assured and next commissions to be received? So, naturally, the painters would reflect profoundly on the sense of the Madonna in life and represent majesty and tenderness. Majesty was represented since the earliest times. It was necessary now to show that a higher state should be pursued in life.

Gradually, according to the changes in society, Cimabue still emphasised the majesty. But Duccio especially and other Sienese painters introduced the representation of feelings of tenderness and caring love in their paintings. Giotto was the more rational artist, but one who used his rationality and realism to show the human feelings still more. His *Maestà* is the best representation both of the majesty in the universe and the loving tenderness of the Madonna that has become so much a part of European mind and heart.

From these early pictures on, evolution in the art of painting Madonna's in various free, individual ways grew, as can be seen in the Massys picture.

*Other paintings:*

**Enthroned Madonna between Saints Bartholomew and Margaret**

Master of the Tribon Altarpiece. Bohemian Gallery. Hluboká. Ca. 1400.

**Virgin and Child**

Masaccio (ca. 1401-1428). The National Gallery – London. 1426.

**Madonna enthroned with Child and two Angels.** Duccio di Buoninsegna (Ca. 1255/1260-1318). The Gualino Collection. Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

**Crowned Madonna with Child and Saints**

Cosimo Rosselli (1439-1507). The Fitzwilliam Museum – Cambridge. 1478.

**The Madonna with Saints**

Pietro Vanucci called Perugino (1448-1523). Pinacoteca Nazionale – Bologna. Around 1497.

**The Virgin and the Sainly Women**

Master of the Legend of Saint Lucia. Musée Royal d'Art Ancien – Brussels. Around 1480.

**Maestà**

Ambrogio Lorenzetti (ca.1290-ca.1348). Pinacoteca Nazionale – Siena. Ca. 1340.

**The Madonna and Child in Glory**

Benvenuto Tisi called Garofalo (ca. 1476-1559). Pinacoteca Capitolina, Palazzo di Conservatori – Rome.

**Madonna with Child in Glory, with Saints Catherine of Alexandria and Saint Jerome**

Giovan Battista Moroni (ca. 1524-1577). Cattedrale di San Alessandro. Bergamo. Ca. 1576.

**Madonna enthroned with the Bentivoglio Family**

Lorenzo Costa (1460-1535). Chiesa di San Giacomo Maggiore. Bologna. Ca. 1448.

**The Virgin enthroned with Saints Thomas and Cecilia**

Cornelis Engelbrechtsz and Workshop (1468-1527). National Gallery in Prague.  
Prague.

**Madonna enthroned with Saints**

Francesco Raibolini called Il Francia (1450-1517). Chiesa di San Giacomo Maggiore.  
Bologna. 1494.

**Madonna enthroned with Saints. (Pala Martinengo)**

Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556) Chiesa di San Bartolomeo. Bergamo.

**Madonna enthroned with Saints**

Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556) Chiesa di San Spirito. Bergamo.

**Madonna enthroned with Saints Sebastian and Roch**

Benvenuto Tisi called Garofalo (1481-1559). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Madonna enthroned with Angels and Devotes**

Giovanni da Udine (1487-1564). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Madonna enthroned with Saints Sebastian and Thomas of Aquino**

Andrea Cordigliachi called Previtali (ca. 1470-1528). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Virgin and Child with Saint Job and Saint Gotthard**

Marcello Fogolino (ca. 1475-after 1548). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**Virgin and Child with Saints and Donors; Pala Busti**

Bernardino Luini (ca. 1480-1532). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1515.

**Virgin and Child with Saints**

Marco Palmezzano (1459-1539). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1493.

**Virgin and Child with Saint James of Galicia and Saint Helen**

Nicolò di Bartolomeo dell' Abrugia called Nicolò Pisano (1470-1538). Pinacoteca di  
Brera. Milan. Ca. 1512-1515.

**Throning Madonna (Polyptych of Scanzo)**

Bartolomeo Vivarini (ca. 1432-after 1491). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

*The Humble Madonna***The Madonna of the Grand Duke**

Raffaello Sanzio called Raphael (1483-1520). Galleria Pallatina, Palazzo Pitti – Florence.

**The Madonna with the Chair**

Raffaello Sanzio called Raphael. Galleria Pallatina, Palazzo Pitti – Florence. 1512-1513.

**The Madonna Tempi**

Raffaello Sanzio called Raphael. Alte Pinakothek – Munich. Around 1507.

Mary's humility and her obedience to the word of God have made her an example that was eagerly taken up by a Catholic Church that underscored humility and obedience to her own rules. Mary had accepted God's wish to receive a child that would die on the cross by saying at the Annunciation merely, 'I am your humble servant'. This humble obedience stood in direct contrast with the act of Eve, the primeval woman, who had transgressed God's will by eating from the forbidden fruit of knowledge. Images of the humble Madonna were thus for the Catholic Church the example of the true virtues of mothers and of the obedience of societies.

The real 'Umiltà's' are particular images of a more general class of pictures usually called by the name 'Mater Amabilis', or amiable Madonnas. The Umiltà's show Mary sitting on the ground. We will use the term 'Humble Madonnas' in general, referring both to the Umiltà's and the Mater Amabilis pictures.

There is no greater painter of Mater Amabilis pictures than Raffaello Sanzio, called Raphael. Each Madonna he made is a masterpiece and all are different in poses and expressions of Mary and her child. The 'Golden Legend' tells that despite Mary's exceeding beauty no man could ever desire her, for the power of her chastity penetrated all who looked at her and all lustful desires were quenched in them<sup>G49</sup>. This view of Mary was instilled in all of Raphael's pictures of the Madonna.

Raphael was born in Urbino in 1483. Urbino has been linked to sophistication in gentle court manners. Here lived Baldassare Castiglione at the court of the Dukes of Montefeltro. Castiglione wrote a book on civilised court manners: 'Il Corteggiano', the courtier. This book had an important influence on the relations between people of the Tuscan courts, the noblemen and wealthy merchants. Courtesy was for the first time hailed as a prime virtue. It was a virtue to address ladies with fine, delicate manners of respect. This respect and civilisation can be sensed in Raphael's pictures. Castiglione was a diplomat and he resided in Rome around the same time as Raphael, who considered him as a dear friend. Raphael even made a well-known portrait of Castiglione. It is maybe strange that courtly manners were introduced from out of the court of Montefeltro. For Federico de Montefeltro, Lord of Urbino and employer of Castiglione, was a Condottiere, a general of mercenary troops. Federico linked savagery to courtly manners. But he built a Renaissance castle and in it he assembled a well-furnished library and put his soldier's money to use of the arts. Italy of the Renaissance was not a quiet country in which arts could thrive in tranquillity and peace. The land was constantly torn with wars among the city-states. The Popes were

trying to establish a more stable power for the Papal States and at the same time the Spanish and French struggled for power over Italy. Ruthless dictators forced their power over the city-states. It is almost a miracle that in a time of such upheaval art flourished to the splendid sophistication we now perceive of that century.

Raphael left Urbino for Perugia in 1494, to work in the shop of Pietro Perugino. Around 1504 he travelled to Florence and remained there until 1508, when Pope Julius II called him to the Vatican. Most of Raphael's Madonna's date from this Florentine period, such as the 'Madonna of the Grand Duke' and the 'Madonna Tempi'. In Rome, Raphael worked mostly at the apartments of the Popes. Here he made his most famous mural paintings, among which the 'School of Athens'. Raphael worked in Rome at the same time as Michelangelo and Bramante, the architect of the new Saint Peter. He died young in 1520, merely thirty-seven years old. He made marvellous paintings in Florence as of seventeen years old and the famous mural pictures of the apartments of the Pope at twenty-five. His paintings of Madonnas reflect his youth. These pictures are full of innocence and sweetness, joy and a happy view on life, as yet untouched by the loss of illusions of the mature man.

We look at three pictures that are seemingly very similar, but in which subtle differences become clear when one looks insistently. The 'Madonna of the Grand Duke' is a long rectangular painting, the 'Virgin with Chair' is a tondo and the 'Madonna Tempi' is of a more square form. Raphael has for each of these sweet paintings imagined another pose of Virgin and baby and he has changed the overall impression of the picture in order to realise an image that is harmonious for the particular dimensions of the frames. By Raphael's times the ancient and traditional examples of Byzantine art were no more the images that needed to be copied dogmatically. Raphael could change the poses of the Madonna and of Jesus and adapt the poses to most harmoniously suit the formats of the frames. How he did just that shows his considerable technical genius.

The 'Madonna Tempi' was realised for the Tempi family of Florence. The Madonna holds the baby to her face; she holds one hand under the baby, straightens its back with her right hand. This is a very tender gesture, emphasising the kindness of Mary and her love for her baby. Nothing indicates that this is the Holy Virgin Mary with Christ, the Son of God. It could be any mother with her baby. A delicate landscape with a lake and a tower forms the background, but the landscape remains unobtrusive and slim. The landscape is reduced to almost a thin line. The Madonna and child are painted against the blue sky. Mary is in marvellous soft colours: red shirt over yellow sleeves and heavy green cloak. Mary is a very loving mother here, who has only eyes for her baby. In the 'Madonna Tempi', the child is held high, to Mary's face, in a slight kiss, so that the pose is adapted to the square form of the frame. Raphael knew marvellously well how to fill his frames in seemingly simple, easy poses. But we see the subtle skill of the painter in these compositions.

In the 'Virgin with Chair', Mary looks straight at the viewer in a slightly defying and interested attitude. Mary is the protective mother in this picture. She holds Jesus somewhat back and the child also leans back, looking afraid and surprised. Mary holds Jesus completely in her arms. She holds her head to the frightened child and there is a simultaneous proud and protective look in her eyes. Mary looks kindly but also somewhat defiantly. Of the chair we see only one wooden stand, a reminiscence

of the throne of the Maestà's. In this tondo John the Baptist is added; he looks respectfully at Mary and child. Un-typically, Mary wears a green cloak with an intricate, oriental design. Since this picture is a tondo, Raphael needed to follow the round curves of the frame. He painted Mary with her head inclined, towards the baby, so that the lines of her veiled head and her back follow the round forms of the tondo. By adding John the Baptist, Raphael was able to fill the painting to the right, in width. He has used also the colours green, yellow and blue in order to bring the view to Jesus.

The 'Madonna of the Grand Duke' is another picture altogether. Mary is shown standing and we see her in more length. She wears a long cloak that starts in a veil over her head and then falls down, underscoring the long vertical lines of the frame. The baby is held lower, almost to the waist, though in the same way as the 'Madonna Tempi'. The child could be held lower in this picture, because the frame was longer. Raphael has adapted Mary's pose to the frame, so that the frame is filled again in a harmonious way. This frame is longer, so Raphael has imagined Mary in a more dignified pose, like the Byzantine Hodegetria. Mary is kind, but she already seems sad at the coming Passion of Jesus, whereas the child seems to want to discover the world, looking in all directions as babies often do. Remark how Raphael introduced liveliness in the image. This Mary is dreamy; she looks somewhat absently. Her gaze is addressed neither at the viewer nor at the baby. The 'Madonna of the Grand Duke' contains no background, the frame is painted black so that the Madonna stands out and full interest is retained on Mary and child.

In no painting do Raphael's Virgin and the Child look in the same direction or at each other. The effect is for the viewer to be interested as much in the Virgin as in Jesus. It emphasises of course the difference between a human woman and the Son of God. And in this view Raphael joined old Byzantine Eleusa presentations, in which Mary melancholically thinks of Jesus's future cruel Passion.

The paintings of Raphael are so sweet, gentle and yet dignified, as to seem suave to our eyes that are so much more used to contemporary scenes of hard realism and of cruelty. Yet, Raphael was an honest painter who applied all his genius in subtle ways in order to fit pose to frame and to depict the tender love between mother and child in various ways so as not to repeat the same image for his different commissioners. This shows also the power of imagination: even one simple scene such as a mother with her baby offers a myriad of possibilities of representation when imagined by a genius artist.

Raphael exploited his imagination in endless ways to represent ever-different pictures of Mary. But his depiction of Mary is far from the images of the Throning Madonna's of the early Maestà pictures. Raphael's pictures of Mary are portraits of young, noble women, all very human and close to us. Raphael has remained unsurpassed in his elegant and sweet paintings of the Madonna though this kind of works was one of the most popular in the history of paintings. The Madonna's we have presented here prove that Raphael had an unequalled natural feeling for composition and balance of volumes that were in harmony with the proportions of his frames.



*Other paintings:***Madonna of Rome**

Master of the Vyssi Brod Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Before 1360.

**Madonna of Roudnice**

Master of the Trebon Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. After 1380.

**Madonna Aracoeli**

Master of the Trebon Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. After 1280.

**Virgin and Child**

Paolo Uccello (1397-1475). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. 1440.

**Virgin and Child**

Fra Filippo Lippi (1406-1469). Alte Pinakothek – Munich. Around 1465.

**The Virgin with Child and Episodes of the Life of the Virgin**

Fra Filippo Lippi (1406-1469). Galleria Pallatina, Palazzo Pitti – Florence. Around 1450.

**Virgin and Child**

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). Alte Pinakothek – Munich. Around 1473.

**Madonna of the Pavilion**

Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. Ca. 1495.

**Virgin and Child**

Rogier van der Weyden (1399-1464). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid.

**Virgin with Child**

Rogier Van Der Weyden (1399-1464). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Tournai.

**Virgin and Child**

Rogier van der Weyden (1399-1464). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Caen.

**Virgin and Child with a Bunch of Grapes**

Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553). Het Mauritshuis. – The Hague. Around 1520.

**The Madonna of the Basket**

Antonio Allegri da Correggio (1514-1534). The National Gallery – London.

**Virgin and Child**

Pedro Berruguete (1450-1504). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid.

**Virgin and Child**

Luis de Morales called El Divino (1500-1586). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid.

**Virgin and Child**

Quinten Massys (1465-1530). Het Mauritshuis – The Hague. 1529.

**The Madonna with the Fish**

Raffaello Sanzio called Raphael (1483-1520). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid. 1514.

**The Virgin of Foligno**

Raffaello Sanzio called Raphael (1483-1520). Pinacoteca – The Vatican. 1512-1513.

**The Madonna**

Francesco Mazzola called Il Parmigianino (1503-1540). Galleria Pallatina, Palazzo Pitti – Florence. 1532.

**The Gipsy Madonna**

Tiziano Vecellio (ca. 1488-1576). Kunsthistorisches Museum – Vienna.

**The Madonna of the Pomgrenate**

Giovanni Bellini (ca. 1425-1516). The National Gallery – London.

**Madonna with Child – The Greek Madonna**

Giovanni Bellini (1425/1430 – 1516). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

**Madonna with Child**

Workshop of Albrecht Bouts (after 1542-1549). National Gallery in Prague. Prague.

**Madonna with Child**

Pieter Coecke van Aelst (1502-1550). National gallery in Prague. Prague. Ca. 1450.

**Madonna with Child**

Giovanni Bellini (ca. 1425-1516). Castello Sforzesco – Milano.

**Virgin and Child**

Giotto di Bondone (ca.1267-1337). The Wallace Collection. – London.

**Virgin and Child with View of Venice**

Zorzi da Castelfranco called Giorgione (1477-1510). The Wallace Collection. – London.

**Madonna della Candeletta**

Carlo Crivelli (1430/1435 – 1495) Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

**Madonna with Sleeping Child – Madonna del Velo**

Ambrose da Fossano called Bergognone (ca. 1453 – 1523). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

**Madonna degli Alberetti (Madonna of the Trees)**

Giovanni Bellini (1434/1439-1516). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice. 1487.

**Madonna with Child, called the Madonna with the beautiful Eyes**

Alvise Vivarini (1444-1503). Casa d'Oro. The Giorgio Franchetti Gallery. Venice.

**Madonna with Child and two Angels**

Alessandro di Mariano Filipepi called Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510). Picture Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts. Vienna. Around 1490.

**Madonna in the Meadows**

Raffaello Sanzio (1483-1520). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. 1505-1506.

**The Madonna of Loretto**

Raffaello Santi called Raphael (1483-1520). Musée Condé. Chantilly. Ca. 1509.

**Madonna with Child**

Filippo Lippi (ca. 1406-1469). National Gallery of Art, Palazzo Barberini. Rome. 1435-1437.

**The Virgin and Child holding a Piece of Bread**

Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1529.

**Madonna dell'Umiltà**

Filippo Lippi (1406-1469). The Sforza Castle Museums. Milan.

**Madonna of the Book**

Vincenzo Foppa (1430-1616). The Sforza Castle Museums. Milan.

**Madonna of the Pigeons**

Giovanni Busi called Il Cariani (1485-1547). Cattedrale di San Alessandro. Bergamo. Ca. 1515.

**Madonna with Child**

Bartolomeo Veneto (active 1502-1530). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Madonna dell'Umiltà with Angels**

Fra' Giovanni da Fiesole called Beato Angelico (ca. 1400-1455). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Madonna with Child**

Giovanni Bellini (1430-1516). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Madonna with Child**

Giovan Battista Cima da Conegliano (ca. 1459-1518). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Madonna with Child Reading**

Andrea Cordigliachi called Previtali (ca. 1470-1528). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Virgin and Child (Madonna of the Tree)**

Cesare de Sesto (1477-1523). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1515.

**Virgin and Child (Madonna of the Apple)**

Giovan Pietro Rizzoli called Giampietrino (active ca. 1495-1549). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1520's.

**Madonna with Child**

Cosmé Tura (ca. 1430-1495). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Madonna of Mast**

Anonymous painter. National Gallery in Prague. Before 1345.

*Madonna of the Misericordia***Madonna of the Misericordia**

Niccolò di Segna. Pinacoteca Nazionale – Siena. 1331-1332.

The painting of 'Our Lady of Mercy' is attributed to Niccolò di Segna. It dates from around 1331 to 1332 and was destined for the church of San Bartolomeo in Vertine in Chianti. Niccolò's picture may only come from his workshop however. Niccolò di Segna leased his workplace from the confraternity of the House of Santa Maria della Misericordia in Florence<sup>G55</sup>. He made the panel probably for one of the altars of the House of Mercy. It shows a Lady of Mercy opening her cloak and sheltering under it male and female citizens of Tuscany. Judges, bishops, monks, devote women thus find protection under the tunic of the Virgin, under the deep blue maphorion. The citizens are painted smaller than the Virgin is, the painter thus expressed the concept that the citizens are less important than the Holy Virgin, a common way of representing the hierarchy of God's family and mortals.

Niccolò di Segna was the son of Segna di Bonaventura, who had been himself a pupil of Duccio di Buoninsegna. The panel has the gentleness of a typical Siennese painting, but it is more austere and devoid of the rich ornamental gothic decorations we are used to of Siennese masters. Gold paint is lavishly applied however behind the Virgin. The Virgin is shown with much dignity, a pose enhanced by the long red robe kept together high by a simple girdle. The Virgin looks as sure of her status as the mother of a congregation, fully aware of her responsibilities, confident of her powers and defiant to any danger that might threaten the ones she has decided to protect.

The Madonna of the Misericordia is a very old theme, which disappeared almost completely after the fifteenth century. In Segna's times already the image had become an icon, a symbol that was almost dogmatically copied in the same way as the Maestà's of the thirteenth century. The theme is Byzantine. One of the last most famous relics of Constantinople was this blue maphorion of the Virgin. There exist early frescoes, Greek Orthodox icons and mosaics of the Virgin spreading her cloak like a veil over the citizens of Constantinople. The cloak was guarded preciously in the church of the Blachernae Palace of the city. It disappeared with the sack of the town in 1453 when the Osmanli Turks finally took, then pillaged the last city of the East Roman Empire. Greek priests and the Patriarch of Constantinople showed the tunic and carried it in procession through the town in times of hardships. This was also done in the last days of Constantinople<sup>G60</sup>. Was it for this tunic that so many remained in the town when the Turks assaulted? Many defended the town to the last, confident in the protection of the Holy Veil, in its inviolability and holy powers.

The Madonna of the Misericordia as a Byzantine symbol was taken up by Piero della Francesca. One of Piero's first major paintings that we still have is the 'Polyptych of the Misericordia', dating from around 1445 to 1462 and now in the Museo Civico of Sansepolcro. The altarpiece shows a Madonna of the Misericordia very much like Niccolò di Segna's picture. Piero had the citizens of Florence kneel under the Virgin, but the colours, the long red robe and the deep blue tunic with a girdle are all very

much alike Niccolò's painting. And the same Misericordia confraternity from which Niccolò di Segna hired his workshop ordered Piero's panel<sup>G55</sup>. Piero's polyptych is grand. A Crucifixion panel stands above the Virgin and a predella shows scenes of Jesus's passion. But the central panel that stood in the middle of the altar is a 'Madonna of the Misericordia'. Panels of many saints, martyrs, evangelists, angels, and citizens flank Piero's Madonna. This theme of the Madonna protecting saints or in the company of many saints is also a recurrent theme of Tuscan paintings.

The theme of the 'Madonna della Misericordia' evolved, not in the least in the pictures of Piero della Francesca himself. Piero would paint the same Virgin in the same colours many times over. He would place the figure in a wide robe, sometimes wide the more so while he presented a pregnant Mary, with the wideness of the robe that reminds of the open protective maphorion. Then he showed the Virgin under the open cloth of a tent, then with saints in a niche under a Roman arch, whereby the open tent and the niche could refer to the sheltering veil. The image remained in Piero's mind. The image of a protective Virgin thus evolved to scenes in which the Virgin was still presented with a wide tunic but in which her sheltering role was hinted at by structures of the background. Other pictures showed Mary entirely enveloped in the wide blue maphorion, The 'Madonna of the Misericordia', Our Lady of Mercy, fell in disuse as an immediate theme in the fifteenth century. The tunic itself as the alleged relic also had disappeared with Christian Constantinople. After all, all the famous relics of the town however supposedly powerful had not been able to withhold the onslaught first of the Crusaders and then of the Turkish conquerors.

The image of a Holy Lady protecting figures under her robe was a universal image that can be found in other pictures than of Florentine and Byzantine origins. We refer for instance to a panel in Bruges made in the second half of the fifteenth century by Hans Memling. Memling was of German origin, born probably in a village near Mainz called Mommlingen. Memling worked in the Brussels shop of Rogier Van Der Weyden and he was influenced also by the Gent painter Hugo Van Der Goes. Most of Memling's production dates from his stay in Bruges from 1466 to 1494 and no other painter is so dear to the hearts of the people of Bruges. Many of his panels have been preserved and are now in the Museum of the Hospital of Saint John in Bruges. Memling decorated with miniature scenes the shrine of the relics of Saint Ursula. One of the panels of the shrine shows a Saint Ursula holding a long arrow of her martyrdom but also covering under her open cloak the small figures of the eleven virgins that were martyred with her. We have no evidence that Memling travelled to Italy and such a voyage seems unlikely for the Bruges master<sup>G9</sup>. But Memling worked for the Florentine merchant Tomaso Portinari who traded from out of Bruges. A painting of Memling was sent to the Sforzas of Milan. Another panel he made for the Florentine Jacopo Terri was even sent over sea to Florence. But the ship was captured and the picture landed in Danzig or Gdansk of Poland, another Hanza city<sup>G9</sup>. Also other portraits of Florentine merchants working in Bruges, made by the artist, prove that Memling had many connections with Italy. He may have seen drawings or even pictures of the Madonna della Misericordia. If not, the image of a protection offered by an open cloak around a saint was a symbolic gesture of protection that came to the mind independently and naturally in painters of the north as well as of Italy.

Niccolò di Segna's painting was probably the centre panel of an altarpiece. The picture looks like the humble work of a local artisan, the kind of work that could be

delivered by many craftsmen of Tuscany. However, Niccolò di Segna's picture does differ from the many naïve works of art of local artists. The Virgin is expressed in all her assurance. We see in Segna's art one of the first very direct expressions of personality in an image of Mary, some of the first depictions of psychology in paintings. Niccolò di Segna emphasised in the Virgin's face the inner power of the Madonna, all the pride of her protection and the awareness of the dignity of her position. Niccolò showed this all the more by the vertical austerity of his composition and the simplicity of his representation in which he avoided overloaded decoration and pomp. This mastery was the sign of a great artist.

*Other Paintings:*

**Madonna of the Misericordia.**

Jacobello del Fiore (worked 1400 – 1439). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice.

**The Virgin of the Misericordia**

Enguerrand Carton. Musée Condé. Chantilly. 1453.

**Madonna of the Misericordia**

Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-1494). Church of Ognissanti. Florence. 1472/1473.

*Our Lady of Succour***The 'Madonna del Soccorso' saving a Child from the Clutches of the Devil**

Niccolò di Liberatore da Foligno called Niccolò Alunno (1425/1430-ca. 1502).  
Galleria Colonna. Rome.

Niccolò Alunno, born around 1430 at Foligno in Italy got his name by accident and by error. Giorgio Vasari read somewhere that the painter was born in Foligno ('*alumnus fulginie*', native of Foligno) and hence called him Alunno in his book of 1548 on the lives of the Italian artists. The name stuck, but Niccolò's real name was Niccolò di Liberatore and he was also often called after his birthplace. In 1452 he married the daughter of the painter Pietro di Giovanni Mazzaforte and he must have worked in the workshop of his father-in-law. It has been suggested also that Niccolò da Foligno worked with Benozzo Gozzoli, the pupil of Fra Angelico, but despite Gozzoli's presence in Umbria both painters seem to have been merely contemporaries and Gozzoli's style is very different from Alunno's. Alunno also worked together or he was a pupil of Bartolommeo di Tommaso. From 1568 on to the beginning of the 1470's he worked in Assisi. After 1480 he worked together with his son Lattanzio di Niccolò (active 1480-1527). He died in 1502.

Niccolò Alunno's painting, 'The Madonna liberates a Child from the Clutches of the Devil' is a rare picture. The 'Madonna del Soccorso' was however well known as a devotional image in the regions of Umbria and the Marche of Italy. The panel may have been part of a triptych of around 1497, but it would have been a strange central panel for the altar of a church.

The panel consists of two parts. Below, we see a demon tearing at a child, trying to draw it ferociously towards him. The mother of the child holds her baby still by one leg and desperately appeals to the Madonna. She points in a dramatic gesture to what the demon is doing. The mother is not trying to rescue the body of her child, but its soul. We see the child actually sleeping beneath her, still enveloped in linen. The mother withholds the naked soul of the baby and it is the soul that the devil wants to wrench away from her. The devil looks in fear and in hatred to the Madonna because he knows she will save the child by divine intervention. Alunno depicted a fearful Satan, hairy, black and horrible so that all children and of course also all medieval church-goers of Alunno's times must have been terrified at the sight. Pictures like this were sheer reality for medieval and early Renaissance viewers of the Italian countryside and of its small towns.

In the upper part of the panel we see the Madonna in glory. She stands in a mandorla and four cherubim angels support her so that the presence of God is also near. She holds high an arrow of fire, ready to thrust this onto the demon and so to rescue the child and help the mother. The little angels look at the Madonna, at the demon and at the mother, in expectancy of an act of the Virgin. Alunno also painted a low landscape behind the main scene, which is nicely but naively painted. He also situated the scene between the two columns of an ancient palace, even though the mother or foster-mother is hardly dressed as a noble woman. Alunno showed a common woman in this picture, not a noble lady. The painting may have been commissioned for a smaller

church of a minor town. Alunno worked in Foligno and lived there; his workshop was in Foligno. The panel was probably made for a church, abbey in Foligno or in its vicinity.

Niccolò Alunno's panel has more value by its antiquity and its unusual, folklore image than by the painterly mastery of the work. Still, Alunno used strong colours that supported well the theme and he painted the Madonna finely, as well as her mandorla and the colours there. The expression on the faces of the mother, demon and Mary are very lively and must have inspired much awe in the devotees. The picture inspires horror and fear, not unlike Benozzo Gozzoli's fearful images of the Last Judgement in the Camposanto of Pisa must have done. This fear of the demon must have remained long in the memories of Umbria from the Middle Ages on, when armies and bandits roamed through the unprotected countryside. Plagues were endemic in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. People had a much closer feeling of violence, murder, rape, slaying of children and bodies torn up than in the later periods and in the larger cities like Florence or Venice. Hell clearly continued to inspire awe and fear in Umbria.

### *The Virgin as a Comforter*

#### **The Virgin as Comforter**

William Bouguereau (1825-1905). Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain. Strasbourg. 1877.

Adolphe William Bouguereau was born in 1825 in La Rochelle, a port town of western France. His grandfather was a professor of English and hence might come his second name. Around 1832 William was sent to his uncle Eugène Bouguereau, a priest in Mortagne of the Gironde region around Bordeaux. This uncle introduced William to the Bible and to classical literature. In 1841 Bouguereau's family moved to Bordeaux and William learned to paint there, in the classes of Jean-Paul Alaux. In 1846 he was admitted to the Academy of Fine Arts in Paris. He entered the contests to obtain the 'Prix de Rome' and he won that price, but only at his third attempt. This allowed him a long stay in Rome. Afterwards, Bouguereau returned to Bordeaux, then to La Rochelle again, finally to Paris. He had great success in Paris and paintings of his were bought by Emperor Napoleon III, which gave him instant fame. He painted oil paintings and decorated official buildings and private palaces in Paris. When the French-German war broke out in 1870, he enlisted in the army and served as a soldier to defend Paris. In 1872 he became a teacher at the Académie Julian. In 1875 his son Georges, aged sixteen only, became sick and died. His girl, Jeanne, had already died in 1866. At the end of his life, William Bouguereau had to see four of his five children pass away, as well as his wife Nelly, who died in 1877. Bouguereau also became a member of the Academy of Fine Arts in Paris and taught there. He wished to re-marry one of his students, the American painter Elisabeth Jane Gardner, but his daughter and mother were opposed to the marriage so that he only married Elisabeth in 1896, when he was seventy-one years old. By then Bouguereau was one of the most famous Academicians of Paris. He died in his hometown of La Rochelle in 1905.



Bouguereau was the ultimate representative of French academicist painting. He represented tradition and ideas that were attacked aggressively by every innovative painter of France from the Impressionists to painters of all subsequent styles. Yet, William Bouguereau made wonderful pictures. The 'Virgin as a Comforter' was made after the death of his son George and after or close to the death of his wife Nelly. Bouguereau was struck with grief and made two paintings whose compositions resembled each other much, this 'Virgin as a Comforter' and a Pietà.

The 'Virgin as a Comforter' is a strong, surprising image. We see the Virgin sitting on a throne. A grieving woman lies over her knees and the body of a dead child is at the feet of the Virgin. The Virgin is straight, stern and formidable. She sits on a throne and is an impassible, imperturbable, lonely figure. She sits in a trance, with open eyes but a look that goes into the far. She addresses the forces of the universe and concentrates these onto the woman that claims her help. However, she does not touch the woman and does not reach out for the child. She sits like a god herself. She is not the compassionate and protecting mother that holds the sad woman and touches or supports her physically in solace. She is a God of Antiquity, a female Zeus, and a Sphinx. She does not really comfort. She commands or calls the forces that will not send back a soul and life into the child, but that will merely direct its soul to bliss in the heavens. The woman may have asked for this saving of the soul of the child, but she wants her child back; the Virgin will not grant that wish and she cannot grant that wish: she has not the power.

William Bouguereau did not draw the Virgin as the Comforter. She looks like fate, like the silent figure that can be addressed but that will not answer. She takes in the sadness of tragedies, any sadness of any human, but she remains in her own realm the eternally silent, the eternally wise, but the eternally impassible. What is the sense of praying to a sphinx? The vision of Bouguereau is almost un-religious and almost a silent blame filled with bitterness for the silent God that does not intervene, does not answer, does not comfort. Comfort is only in the mind of the humble, afflicted human that addresses the sphinx. The title given by Bouguereau is thus a terrible irony and a bitter complaint against the non-intervention of God in earthly matters. If this God is so powerful, why does he or she not help the mother and the dead child, why does God allow so much suffering, what is the meaning of the silence? The comfort seems not to be in the act of any figure of the Bible, not with the Virgin or with acts of the Saints, but merely in the act of the human seeking of comfort. But if comfort is only in the act of the human, and if the God does not intervene, why is there need for seeking comfort with a God? Was the God then invented by humans only to serve as this ever-silent mind-image and pillar of lamentations? William Bouguereau probably also asked these hardest questions of any Christian and religious believer while working on his painting.

To support the stern image of the Virgin, William Bouguereau used old style elements. He emphasised the vertical lines and horizontal lines in a rigid structure. The sides of the throne are high and are in cold marble. In the marble we see sculpted flowers, which remind of the white irises that were always a symbol of the purity of the virgin. In wood, sculpture like this would remind of the Empire style of furniture and add to the image of supreme command. Bouguereau painted behind the virgin a vividly coloured curtain with blue motives, traditionally a colour symbolic for the heavens and also one of the colours associated with the Virgin. The colours are

furthermore with golden threads of majesty. To indicate how ancient the image of the Goddess could be, Bouguereau groped back to Gothic style elements. The emphasis on verticals itself is Gothic, and in those times painters often depicted the Madonna against a curtain adorned with flowers. The flowers were usually red roses then, but the colour red would have been too warm for the cold, impassible image that Bouguereau wanted to create for his version of the Virgin. Behind and above the Virgin also is a large cross studded with precious stones. The cross is only a pattern of the tapestry, but the gems are a very ancient symbol. They were the blue and red square and round diamonds that were shown from Byzantine to Gothic times on the crown of the Virgin. These stones once represented the heavenly stones with which shone the walls of Jerusalem. We find these patterns in many old pictures of the Madonna, from the first times of fresco paintings on. Finally, Bouguereau painted a halo of gold, which built a fiery sun of light around the face of Mary. This golden halo draws the Virgin's face into the first attention of the viewer. The black hood of the Virgin hides her hair, making her face the more strict and unworldly. The hiding of the hair is likewise an old symbol of purity and distance, new continued in the Muslim shawl drawn over the head of women. The viewer sees only a face with rather long features. Yet, the traits of the virgin are soft. She has an enigmatic face that is between utter, unyielding strictness and soft female beauty. It remained a young face, but is not the face of youth. The Virgin is determined, looks upwards to appeal to god, and yet inspires only coldness and absence. The Virgin also holds her hands to the high, in a gesture of calling to God. Her hands are thus around her face, supporting it also in the picture and adding to the vertical directions in the structure of the picture.

The mother lies in grief over the knees of the virgin. The Virgin does not touch her, as any human would have done surely. Bouguereau tells that this Virgin is a statue, alive but un-involved and non-committed. He plied the mother around the knees of the Virgin because she holds her arms downward and links her fingers in the gesture of a prayer. William Bouguereau contrasted sharply the dark blue and the red colours of the Virgin and the woman's robe with the white nakedness of the mother's arms and the whiteness of the dead child. Bouguereau also gave no headdress to the mother, so that her hair flows more humanly around her shoulders. Just the Virgin and the mother would have been enough to make a striking picture of grief that would have reminded of the epic picture of Zeus and Thetis of Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres. Bouguereau however added a gruesome image of death to the painting. He showed the dead body lying white and with outspread arms and legs at the feet of the statue. Here we see the marble, hard and very cold steps of the throne and the inscription in Latin, 'Mater Afflictorum' or 'Mother comforting'. The child however is therefore lying as the image of a sacrifice to a God, lying on the stairs of a temple. A few white carnations, once again symbols of purity lie around the boy, lined with the delicate red hues of blood. Without the corpse of the child, we might have seen the Virgin as an afflicted person, interceding to God, helping the grieving mother. With the image of the dead child, the horror of death strikes the viewer more immediately, crudely and cruelly. One understands the less the seemingly impassiveness of the Virgin on her throne. She leaves the mother alone with her earthly grief. She does not touch mother or child. She has seen and known such grief so many times before, that the only thing she can do and really cares for to do is to call to God to ensure the spiritual fate of the child. The mother remains alone with her grief. She finds solace in her own gesture to pray to the Virgin, but the sorrowful image of the dead, cold son will irremediably

stay. The mother is thus caught between two cold figures of death. There is no consolation.

Adolphe William Bouguereau painted a terrible picture. It is hard to love or feel sympathy for his scene and its figures. The 'Virgin as a Comforter' is of course a very striking painting in its implacable coldness. One would like to feel pity for the mother, but the image of the dead child repulses. The Goddess holds no pity and seems to care only for her spiritual task. In that, she offers the mother the only solace that could be brought according to the natural order of life. The mother could have expected and desired the child to live again, but the Virgin cannot realise that. The Virgin therefore has to stay the enigmatic and distant figure, but in her silence one senses also her helplessness. After all, she has no power. She can only appeal to god and God and this of course is the great absent from Bouguereau's picture.

For decades of the twentieth century, paintings like this 'The Virgin as a Comforter' of Bouguereau have been sacrificed as easy academicism by critics and newer painters devoted to the abstract avant-garde art and to the newer figuration. William Bouguereau's painting however is worth of respect if only for the circumstances during which he made it, after the death of his son. His painting is indeed in the line of Neo-Classicist Academicism. It has therefore all the great qualities of a masterpiece. Bouguereau brought old symbols in a modern presentation and he dared to make a deranging picture that evokes very powerful emotions of pity, and accusation. Bouguereau was a master of composition and of the judicious application of contrasts of colours. He was a rather sentimental man who made many sweet portraits of children, of small girls. He was also capable of strong emotions such as shown in the 'Virgin as a Comforter'. Bouguereau therefore was a great master, who should be thus respected.

*Madonna with Child and Saint John***Holy Family with Saint Anne and Saint John**

Bernardino Luini (1460-1532). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. Ca. 1520.

The 'Holy Family with Saint Anne and Saint John' is a typical theme of religious paintings. These scenes were the occasion to depict a family of several figures in intimate life. Together with the 'Madonna and Child' pictures the 'Holy Families' are among the most popular representations of gentleness and affection in the pictorial arts.

The painting we present is as much of Leonardo da Vinci as of Bernardino Luini. The subject and the composition are entirely of Leonardo. Da Vinci made a large sketch on paper for a painting he never executed. This drawing or 'cartoon' is now one of the most prized pieces of the National Gallery of London, but it seems to have been in the possession of Aurelio Luini, Bernardino Luini's son in the beginning of the seventeenth century when cardinal Federico Borromeo bought Bernardino's painting. So, Bernardino Luini probably had the cartoon of Leonardo and copied it<sup>18</sup>.

The scene has indeed all the intimate and affectionate delicacy we would expect of Leonardo da Vinci. The Virgin's Child and the young John who would become the Baptist are gently playing together. John is somewhat older, standing on his own, but Jesus still needs to be cuddled by his mother. Jesus is a little turbulent, so Mary gently keeps him in her arms while he is turning his body, trying to escape and extend his small arms to John. The baby Jesus steals the show in the picture, which generates such feelings of sympathy that this picture has immediate success till today with any viewer.

Mary and Anne's faces are very close, as a daughter and mother that are close should be. Anne points to the heavens to indicate the high destination of Jesus. This gesture remains natural. Because it is joined by a movement of Jesus that emphasises it and transforms it into a quite natural direction. This movement continues to the face of the father figure, here Saint Joseph, but the allusion to the heavenly father, God, is easily taken. This gesture is more often associated with John the Baptist than with Anne and Leonardo used it for John in some of his paintings.

All faces are happy and smiling so that with these kind of pictures Bernardino Luini can be mentioned together with Raphael and Giovanni Bellini as one of the greatest masters of kind, gentle pictures. This was probably the reason why the Milanese Cardinal Federico Borromeo bought the canvas. He admired Leonardo da Vinci and his tastes went out to the style of Bernardino Luini in Luini's delicate representations of religious themes and his soft colours.

Anne is seen outright happy with the prospect of the high destination of Jesus and she is proud of what she thinks may be the future royal accomplishments of her grandson. But Mary remains more impassible. She does not seem so much to share Anne's enthusiasm. Mary savours the mysterious fulfilment of motherhood. The prospects of

her child are not so important for now, Mary's attention is on the child's well-being alone and she still wonders at the mystery of birth and at the treasure of the new life she has given. With this, Luini followed the traditional Hodegetria views of the Madonna.

The structure of the painting is strong and based on the diagonals of the frame. One diagonal is the line going through Jesus, his hand, Anne's hand and Joseph's face. The other diagonal contains the direction going from John over Jesus's face to Mary. Finally, the traditional pyramid form can be discerned in the composition of Mary with the two children and even Anne, though Anne remains the odd figure somewhat apart.

Bernardino Luini was a follower of Leonardo da Vinci. He certainly made pictures in Leonardo's soft colours as the great master himself would have used and Bernardino applied Leonardo's sfumato way of making the hard lines and contrasting areas disappear and gently flow into each other. Luini however ennobled the faces of Mary and of Anne and he added Joseph. He altered in minor ways Leonardo's original, but altogether in an even more successful manner.

#### *Other paintings*

##### **Madonna with Child and Saint John**

Antonio Alegri called Correggio (1489-1534). Castello Sforzesco – Milan. 1514.

##### **The Virgin on the Rocks**

Leonardo da Vinci. (1452-1519). The National Gallery – London.

##### **Holy Family with Saint John**

Francesco Ubertini called Bachiacca (1494-1557). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan.

##### **Virgin with the Christ Child and Saint John**

Giuliano Bugiardini (1475-1554). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. Ca. 1530.

##### **Madonna with Child and Saint John**

Cornelis van Cleve (1520 – after 1554). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan.

*Virgo Lactans***Mary and Jesus with Seraphim and Cherubim, of the Chevalier Diptych**

Jean Fouquet (ca. 1420-1481). Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten - Antwerp.

**The Chevalier Diptych:**

Mary and Jesus with Seraphim and Cherubim:

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten - Antwerp.

Etienne Chevalier and Saint Stephen:

Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie - Berlin.

Around 1453-1456

**Charles VII, King of France**

Jean Fouquet. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Around 1445- 1453.

**Guillaume Jouvenel des Ursins.**

Jean Fouquet. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Around 1465.

*The Virgin*

Jean Fouquet's painting of Mary and Jesus with Seraphim and Cherubim is a painting with many layers of meaning. It forms a diptych with the panel of Etienne Chevalier and Saint Stephen. It presents to the viewer a dual face of real image and hidden messages.

The real image is what one sees: a portrait of a Madonna caring for her baby, both standing and seating on a throne gently supported by angels. This picture however fades rapidly away at the strangeness of the image and the colours. The Madonna is a lascivious lady with a very narrow waist and huge breasts, of which one is bare and provocatively thrust forward. Jesus is entirely nude, which is maybe a surprise compared to older paintings, but already quite common in Fouquet's age. Jesus does not seem a baby anymore. He holds a finger outstretched as if to tell us: beware! The angels are painted as innocent children. However, they are not painted in the fleshy, rosy colours of children but in deep blue and brick red, which makes us all the more uneasy. The colour of the Madonna's face and of Jesus's flesh is also unnaturally white, the other colours being almost monochrome blues and reds.

The painting of Mary and Jesus is thus very unconventional both by the imagery and by the colours. Mary is the Madonna, but shown as an alluring lady. Jesus is not shown as we would expect. He is too old for a baby, and he tells us to take care. He sits with a straight back – although supported so by the arm of Mary. The colours of the Seraphim and Cherubim form also an unexpected background. We know nothing similar in French and Italian painting of those times and even if painted in our times this would be a surprising painting, shockingly unconventional.

Let us look more closely at the strange blue and red angels.

*Seraphim and Cherubim*

Seraphim are winged spirits. There are two mentions of the Seraphim in the Bible. The prophet Isaiah saw them with six wings: two to cover their faces, two to cover their legs and two to fly. They accompanied God and cried his glory. Isaiah was struck with fear at the scene so that he confessed being a man with impure lips. Being impure and having seen God, he thought he was lost. Whereupon one Seraph took up a burning coal, touched Isaiah's lips and told him his impurity was redeemed. Another mention is in the 'Book of Numbers'. Here they are called burning serpents, sent by God to punish the Israelites who lost patience with Moses when the Promised Land was not found rapidly enough. The Israelites were bitten by the serpents and died. Moses prayed to God and God told Moses to sculpt a bronze serpent and mount that on a standard. Everyone who was bitten by a serpent had only to look at the bronze serpent, and would not die. The image of the bronze Seraph serpent comes back frequently in the iconography of European paintings. Michelangelo used it for instance for a scene of the Sistine chapel. Seraphim are usually painted in blue. They are serpents representing skies and clouds. But as six-winged guardians of God they certainly do not inspire calm.

The Cherubim are even fiercer. They also are mentioned twice in the Bible. First in Exodus. Moses was told by Yahweh to build the arch. For God, he had to build a dais and throne. At the extremities of the dais Moses had to sculpt with the hammer two gold Cherubim with wings extended to the heavens. The Cherubim were to serve as guardians of the throne. The word Cherubim was known already in Babylon, where the Cherubim were half human and half animal creatures that guarded temples and palaces. The other mention of Cherubim is in the book of the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel saw God who revealed the prophecies from out of a fiery cloud, out of which came bolts of lightning. In the centre of the cloud were four Cherubim. Each Cherub had a human form, but with four heads and four wings, their feet were ox claws. A Cherub had the head of a lion to the right, the head of a bull to the left, a man's head and an eagle's head. Their wings were also extended above, two wings touched and two wings covered their body. They walked forward to where the spirit led them; they did not turn around. The Cherubim represented here also the old Babylonian creatures, with lion figures, human heads, bulls' feet and eagle wings that guarded the temples. In the image of Ezekiel these Cherubim drew the chariot of God as a symbol of the transcendence of God above the old idols. The four heads of the Cherubim were used later on as symbols of the four Evangelists who wrote the Gospels, whereby the human head corresponded to Matthew, the lion to Mark, the bull to Luke and the eagle to John. The Cherubim were also as in Ezekiel associated to lightning and fire, so they were painted red in medieval representations.

Seraphim and Cherubim were transformed in Christian medieval iconography to winged angels, and primarily so by Jean Fouquet. In Fouquet's painting the Seraphim are blue as the skies, the Cherubim red as fire and they support the throne. Their wings are stretched upwards, as is mentioned in the Bible. But they are not the fiery serpents or half-human, half-animal creatures of the Bible. They are proposed as children angels. The symbols of Seraphim and Cherubim are a rather rare representation, and that certainly in northern paintings.

We have to go to Venice and Florence of the fifteenth century to find frequent examples of the red and blue angels, separated on two sides of religious scenes. They are used for instance in a picture of the first half of the century painted by Michele

Giambono (active from about 1420 to 1460), in a 'Coronation of the virgin', now in the Galleria dell'Accademia, and in another 'Coronation of the Virgin' scene of the same beginning of the fifteenth century, now in the same museum of Venice, made by Jacobello del Fiore and his assistants. The symbols may be of Byzantine origin. John Gage wrote on these angels, 'An essay on the red and blue angels in a mosaic panel in San Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna has shown brilliantly that the red figure, who is on the side of the sheep, represents the fiery nature of the good angels, and the blue, on the side of the goats, the dark angel of evil, whose element is the air (E. Kirchbaum 1940, 'L'Angelo Rosso e l'Angelo purchino' in *Revista di Archaeologia Christiana*, XVII)'. Masolino (Tommaso di Cristoforo Fini), the Florentine painter that was one of the first to introduce Renaissance features in his paintings, used blue and red angels in his picture of from 1435 to 1440 of the Madonna, a 'Virgin and Child' now in the Alte Pinakothek of Munich. The use of blue and red angels is even clearer in Domenico Ghirlandaio's altarpiece of Santa Maria Novella of Florence, now equally in the Alte Pinakothek of Munich, dating from around 1494.

Jean Fouquet was a very intelligent painter, who lived in a period when studies of the Gospels were very intensive. He knew very well his Bible. So, we find here a first double meaning. Children angels are what we see. Angels that are sweet and gentle, that surround the throne respectfully and support it, as Seraphim and Cherubim should. On the other hand, we know that these are fierce creatures used by a revengeful God to inspire fear and dominance over ancient idols. Multiple layers in the painting: one apparent, the other layers of meanings in the mind.

### *Virgo Lactans*

By tradition, Fouquet's Mary is supposed to be Agnes Sorel, the favourite of King Charles VII of France. In France, one prefers to call these ladies 'favourites' rather than mistresses. The deliberate representation of the Madonna as the portrait of Agnes Sorel is a rare prophanisation of a sacred theme, which would in other times be considered an outright blasphemy. It might still have been on the edge of blasphemy even when Fouquet painted it. Fouquet was courageous to do so, but knew that this was accepted in his time and that he would not be blamed. Otherwise he would not have dared to present such an image to one of the most powerful men in France.

The Virgin has a breast bared to give her milk to the baby, to suckle Jesus. The 'Virgo Lactans' is a very old theme, though. It appears in old miniatures like the Amesbury psalter of the middle of the thirteenth century. The earliest examples in mosaics or frescoes date from the very beginning of our era. The Virgin may be suckling the infant Christ as in a Masolino (1387-1447) painting now in the Uffizi of Florence. Or the child may be sitting on the Virgin's lap with the Virgin having one breast uncovered as in Fouquet's painting. The theme disappeared from art after the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which forbade undue nudity in the portrayal of sacred figures<sup>G41</sup>.

### *Jean Fouquet*



Jean Fouquet was the most renowned miniaturist, then the most famous painter of France in the fifteenth century. The fifteenth and earlier centuries did not produce many painters in France; Fouquet is a rare appearance. He lived from around 1420 in Tours on the Loire river, maybe as early as 1415, to around 1480, maybe even 1490. In the fifteenth century Tours was an important town for the French Kings. They resided there frequently. Fouquet worked for Charles VII and his successor Louis XI. He became the official painter of the court of Louis XI only in 1475. But he worked at the court of the Kings of France and knew the people that frequented the King. He also worked for Etienne Chevalier, the man on the diptych. We know that Fouquet was in Rome around 1445, must have seen Italian Renaissance paintings there, and arrived back at the court at the end of the 1440's. Few of his own paintings have survived the ages however. He was first and foremost a miniaturist. Many of his books still exist: he illuminated the 'Statutes of the Order of Saint Michael', 'Boccaccio's Tales', 'Les Grandes Chroniques', and Flavius Josephus' 'Judaic Antiquities'. He also painted prayer books for Philippe de Comines who was an ambassador of France in Venice and a historian, and he worked also on prayer books for the same Etienne Chevalier shown on the diptych. Jean Fouquet knew Agnes Sorel well.

### *Agnes Sorel*

Agnes Sorel was born around 1420 in the village of Fromenteau, near the town of Loches, also of the Tours region. She was the daughter of a poor nobleman of Picardie, the lord Jean Soreau of Coudun, so she originated from a family of northern France. Her father, Jean Soreau, was a Squire, lord of Coudun and Saint-Gérant. He was the advisor and servant of the Count of Clermont. Her mother was Cathérine de Maignelais who had been lady of the castle of Verneuil<sup>G44</sup>. Agnes Sorel was an orphan very young. She was first raised by her aunt and inherited Fromenteau from her parents so that she was called the 'Demoiselle de Fromenteau'. She became Lady of Honour to the Duchess of Anjou, Isabelle de Lorraine, and thus attended at the court of the King of France. She arrived at the court in 1443 and remained there until her death in 1450. She rapidly became the favourite of Charles VII. She gave birth to 4 daughters of the King. Charles VII gave her castles, among which the castle of Beauté on the Marne river and at the end of the Parc de Vincennes near Paris, so that she was called 'La Dame de Beauté' or the Lady of Beauty. She would also be the Lady of Roqueferrière, of Issoudun and of Vernon-on-Seine. She was the first officially recognised mistress of a King of France. When Agnes Sorel supplanted the Queen, the latter, Mary of Anjou, was pregnant of her thirteenth child; she would have fourteen in all.

Agnes Sorel was tolerated by the Queen and despised by Charles' son, the Dauphin. The Dauphin would be the future King Louis XI. Louis XI wanted power and he wanted it rapidly. Agnes Sorel more than once stood in his way to influence his father. Struggles were continuous. Louis was at one time even banned to this province the Dauphiné (whence the word Dauphin for the successor to the kings) for having insulted Agnes and having taken part in a plot against the King.

The Lady of Beauty died quite young and suddenly in February of 1450. Charles VII was then attacking the English at the port of Harfleur in Normandy with an army of fifteen thousand men. The King liked the most important abbey of Normandy, Jumièges, which was close by and where the monks had a mansion that was reserved for royal visitors who came to hunt in the magnificent woods of the Seine meanders or who wanted to find the spiritual stillness of the abbey. Agnes Sorel had followed Charles on his new campaign against the English. But the mistress, because of her relations to the King, could not stay in the abbey too. She resided in a small castle of the nearby village of Le Mesnil, a castle since disappeared, which was called Le Manoir. In the evening she could join Charles in Jumièges. She died in this Manoir of Le Mesnil near Jumièges in Normandy. She died shortly after giving birth to her last child, probably of lack of hygiene at birth. But there were allegations that she was poisoned at Louis XI's instigation.

### *King Charles VII*

Agnes Sorel had a large influence on Charles VII. This King has always been described as a very weak sovereign, who preferred to play with his mistresses in his castles, far from the battles and wars that were going on. This is certainly how also George Bernard Shaw described him in his play 'Saint Joan'.

Yet, Charles VII has been one of the most important Kings in the history of France. He started with a kingdom reduced to not much more than a province in the southwest of today's France, under the river Loire. He was born and lived totally in the period of the bloody Hundred-Year War between the Kings of France and the Kings of England for the supremacy in France. The Dukes of Burgundy, at first allies of the Kings of France since vassals and of the royal French Valois family, had sided with England. When he became King, in 1422, Charles VII did not even possess Paris. The town had been taken by the Duke of Burgundy in 1418 and was later occupied by the English. He could not be crowned in Reims because the English Duke of Bedford, Governor of the English possessions in France, had likewise occupied the town.

However, when Charles VII died in 1462, he had a real Kingdom. The English were beaten and almost completely thrown back over the Channel. The only noble that could still withstand Charles in France was the Duke of Burgundy. Charles VII had for the first time in the Middle Ages a standing royal army, paid for by all his people. He did not have to rely anymore on his feudal nobles and thus could beat each in his turn to end feudalism in France. His accomplishments were great; many battles against the English were won. And yet, yes, he is known throughout history as a weakling. But a King that accomplished such great feats cannot have been weak. Indecisive maybe and opportunist certainly, but he also surrounded himself with intelligent and strong men. He had the best men in France, excellent counsellors and heroic war commanders. He had Jacques Coeur as Financier and Banker. Etienne Chevalier was his Finance Controller or 'Trésorier du Roi', Treasurer and Private Secretary. He had Dunois, the Bastard of Orléans. Dunois was the bastard son of Charles' uncle Louis, the brother of Charles VI, and the Lady of Cancy. This Louis had been killed on the orders of the Duke of Burgundy in a rage of jealousy. The Duke

thought that his wife also had favoured Louis. Other advisors and generals were Etienne Vignolles called La Hire, Jean Poton de Xaintrilles, Jean Rieux, his Sénéchal Pierre de Brézé, Jean de Bueil Count of Sancerre, his Chancellor Guillaume Jouvenel des Ursins and many more very able war generals who always excelled as heroic commanders. The English had won wars in the beginning due to their archers with their rapid firing power. Charles' advisers Jean and Gaspard Bureau were two brothers who developed his canon artillery that would defeat the English<sup>G36</sup>.

Charles wanted to show a court of France more splendid than the court of the rich Dukes of Burgundy. He needed that to establish the authority of the Kingdom of France over any other Count or Duke. Thus, splendid feasts were organised in which the court of France even indulged at times when its cash was low – which was almost always. At one time, when everything in the war seemed lost, but Charles was not wanting to postpone a feast instead of taking immediate actions, La Hire exclaimed that if Charles knew something, it was certainly how to lose a Kingdom in the most agreeable way.

Agnes Sorel loved feasts. Her beauty reigned at the tournaments, at the royal travels and court gatherings. She introduced new fashions to capture the interest of her royal lover. She invented the high cone headdress from which hung light veils; she wore audacious décolletés that gave all credence to her magnificent breasts and slim waist. At the King's court reigned Agnes Sorel, not the Queen.

And so is she shown on Jean Fouquet's painting, made after her death. Agnes has a very pale complexion, slim waist; her open breast may refer to the low décolletés she wore, which went in a deep triangle to show the curves. Her hair was blond and plucked at the front, as was the fashion so that she has a high, very white front. She had bright blue eyes. Pale beauties, blondes with blue eyes are an exception in France so she must have made a stunning appearance indeed, as in Fouquet's painting. She stands proudly erect in the painting, in a blue dress of the same colour as her eyes. This is not the traditional dark blue of the Madonna's maphorion cloak, but a royal bright blue that contrasts magnificently with her paleness and the paleness of the baby. She is presented as a real Queen, with a hermine royal cloak thrown on her bare shoulders. So also testify the throne, the crown and the pearls all around.

The many pearls in the Madonna's crown may only be the sign of the royal wealth. But pearls also had symbolic value in the Late Middle Ages and are often associated with the Virgin Mary. The pearl is the word 'gratia' and also Mary's own grace<sup>G81</sup>. Pearls grow inside seashells, from the dew of heaven, without any pollution of sexual reproduction. The Virgin Mary was such a shell and her child Jesus the pearl.

Agnes Sorel's royal lover was Charles VII of France. Jean Fouquet's painting of Charles VII that is in the Paris Louvre Museum shows him indeed with a weak face, but at the same time as a very complex personality. Charles is dressed in heavy red velvet. Fouquet preferred this kind of dress for his paintings: Charles VII, Etienne Chevalier and Guillaume Jouvenel des Ursins - who was Chancellor of France - in another portrait to be found in the Louvre, are all dressed likewise in this heavy red garment. Charles' and Guillaume's sleeves and collar are lined with furs in exactly the same way. Charles is seen praying, probably knelt and leaning on the cushion of a praying-chair. The dark red dress of which the folds are meticulously painted

contrasts very painfully with the dark green background and the equally dark blue headdress. These colours are indeed menacing. The red folds of Charles' breast are very straight, giving an impression of an uncompromising man, of inflexibility. Out of the massive dark red, green, blue appears the small face of the King. He shows a somewhat effeminate slim face with little hidden ears, a flabby somewhat ridiculous bulging nose, and a full-lipped sensual mouth. He looks at something far away, does not seem to be present, and does not look at the viewer. And he seems lost and sad at the same time, as if he were angry for somehow not being in control but anyhow wanting it. He also looks arrogant. It is a very realistic painting. Fouquet has made much more here than a mere portrait. He has shown Charles' character by a very unconventional use of colours. The rest is done by Charles' face itself. The painting was made at the occasion of a victory. It may date from 1444, date of the Trève de Tours, or from 1453, the date of the conquest of the Guyenne by Charles.

Women helped Charles VII upright. Charles' father had been a demented man; his mother, Isabeau de Bavière, was an adulteress<sup>G36</sup>. Charles was betrothed as a child of ten years to Marie d'Anjou. The mother Marie, Yolande d'Aragon, Queen of Sicily and Duchess of Anjou, brought up both the children. Yolande d'Aragon was the first firm woman in Charles' life who surrounded him with good councillors. There was Agnes Sorel, who gave him steadfastness and strong support. She had an influence of stability and forcefulness. History has liked Agnes Sorel. She had a positive influence on the King. There was the Queen, Mary of Anjou, who gave him many children and two sons. And then there was Joan of Arc who came from Dompremy to his court, pleaded personally with the King for confidence. Maybe Charles' greatest accomplishment was to have listened to Joan of Arc when she came to him as a poor peasant girl, and having given her his armies. She turned the war to his advantage by her energy, her unwavering belief in being sent by God and being invincible, to liberate France from its enemies and crown the King of France in Reims. From Joan of Arc's short appearance on, after the relieve of the city of Orléans, the French armies did not lose anymore. She succeeded. The French soldiers did not believe even anymore that they could lose, they were on the right side. God himself had intervened.

So, a seemingly weak King supported by women. Exactly the image of Jean Fouquet's painting: a baby on a throne cared for by a woman. The second layer of the painting.

### *Etienne Chevalier*

Etienne Chevalier, the man depicted on the other panel of the diptych, handled the will of Sorel when she died. Etienne Chevalier was the Treasurer of France and Secretary of the King, after a rapid career at the court. He originated from the French town of Melun. The Chevalier diptych of Jean Fouquet remained for a long time in the cathedral Notre Dame of Melun. It hung in the chapel of Chevalier's tomb.

Etienne Chevalier is portrayed together with Saint Stephen. Chevalier's first name, Etienne, is French for Stephen. It was a habit from medieval times to the fifteenth century to be portrayed supported by one's patron, just as in this panel. Chevalier is

shown with an energetic head, an intelligent glance, and a sharp and alert face. This is not a man that indulges in too much food and drink. He has a ferret-like directness of gaze, with a mouth drawn into a straight, pitiless line. A face like a modern French captain of industry. Chevalier certainly knew what he wanted, must have pursued it relentlessly and ruthlessly. He wears a magnificent uni-coloured robe, simple, without ornaments, as suits the Treasurer of France and also a human shown together with a saint on the same panel. Chevalier was a man in whom one could have confidence that he would not spill France's money on trifles.

Chevalier's patron Saint Stephen is more splendidly dressed, but in the same austere style. Stephen also has an intelligent look, severe and strict. He is shown as a monk and his face expresses strict morals, emphasised by the austere haircut. This is a saint who finds great stability and certainty in his faith. He holds his arm on Etienne Chevalier, who is therefore supported in his task in France. Stephen tells: Etienne is a man of substance, one to be relied upon. Chevalier is protected by higher objectives than the ones given on earth. He is painted somewhat lower than Saint Stephen, as is appropriate. The background seems to be a Renaissance villa or church, walls all in marble as so much used in Italy and Rome, with the begin and end of the Estienne Chevalier name engraved on the columns. Etienne Chevalier, born in 1413, was the Royal Secretary, the Finance Controller and then Treasurer of France. Chevalier is connected to all the characters of our painting.

Saint Stephen is a very early saint and martyr<sup>E5</sup>. He was appointed by the apostles as one of the seven deacons to look after the distribution of alms to the faithful and to help in the preaching. In Jean Fouquet's painting he wears the deacon's cope. Stephen seems to have defended especially the words of Christ: my Kingdom is not of this world. Stephen preached that the Judaic temple of Solomon was only a temporary institution superseded by Jesus the Messiah. Stephen attacked his audience for resisting this idea. Thereupon he was stoned to martyrdom by a Jewish crowd for blasphemy. Saint Stephen was known as the patron of the deacons of the church, and invoked for curing headaches. He is shown in Jean Fouquet's painting with the Bible, whose message he defended so much, and with a stone with sharp edges, reminiscent of his martyrdom. But the stone has a cone shape, the form of a Pope's tiara, the symbol of the church. The stone rests on the book just as the church rests on the Bible.

### *Jacques Coeur*

Another man was closely connected to King Charles VII, Etienne Chevalier and Agnes Sorel: Jacques Coeur. Jacques Coeur was one of the most extraordinary men of France's fifteenth century.

Jacques Coeur was a rich merchant who traded mainly out of Montpellier, the old merchant, banking and university town in the south of France that lay on the crossroad with rich Castile and maritime Aragon and the Moors that were still in South Spain, in Granada, in the fifteenth century. Montpellier was the largest town that lay close to one of the rare southern ports of France: Lattès<sup>G35</sup>. France in the fifteenth century had only about hundred fifty kilometres of access to the Mediterranean and it had few ports. Jacques Coeur was a wealthy man from dealing in all the sorts of trades that

could be imagined in the fifteenth century, not least from dealing in arms with the Egyptian Mohammedans. He was an extraordinary man, one of the first industrialists and capitalists, a man with a universal view, a banker, a ship-owner, and a merchant. He had seven ships in the Mediterranean<sup>G35</sup>. He dealt in wheat, in wool, in salt and in silk. He was a member of the Silk Makers' Guild, the 'Arte della Seta', in Florence and he founded a silk manufactory in Lyon. He owned a wealth in real estate. Jacques Coeur's life was one long adventure. He was a small merchant of Bourges, now a lesser town of France. But Bourges had been the place where Charles VII had held court in his first years as King.

Jacques Coeur had made a voyage in the Mediterranean in 1432<sup>G36</sup>. He had visited Alexandria in Egypt, Beyrouth and Damascus, Cyprus and Sicily. The voyage had opened his eyes to the possibilities of trade in the Mediterranean. When he came back after a shipwreck in Corsica, he found the investors in Bourges to build his trading empire. In less than ten years Coeur was the wealthiest man of France.

Charles VII called Jacques Coeur to court. In 1436 Coeur was appointed Steward of the Royal Expenditures or 'Argentier de l'Hôtel du Roi' and of course he was the Banker of the Court. Agnes Sorel needed Jacques Coeur for her grand feasts. Jacques Coeur, Etienne Chevalier, and Pierre de Brézé - who would become the head of the government - were close friends of each other and of Agnes Sorel. Coeur must have liked the feasts: he was the one who as Argentier had to pay out of the King's purse for the expenditures, and he could deliver the goods at benefits decided by himself alone<sup>G36</sup>. He was buyer and seller at the same time. He was a ruthless, unscrupulous businessman. He was always a good patriot of France and the King. But Jacques Coeur certainly confounded his own interests with the interests of his function as Argentier<sup>G35</sup>.

Jacques Coeur was one of the foremost men of the King who together with the Marshal Mottier de La Fayette advised Charles VII to introduce a set of laws to reorganise the feudal state of the country. Charles called together representatives of the three States – noblemen, clergy and wealthy merchants – at Orleans in 1439. Charles had the States decide to levy a permanent tax in the whole of France, the 'taille perpétuelle'. The tax would serve to finance the war.

This fact alone would end feudalism in France. And it was a kind measure: from now on there would be a standing King's army in France, continuously paid. There would be no more calling together of serfs and knights with their little bands that constituted earlier armies. It made the King independent of the nobles and the feudal system. There would be no more mercenaries paid by ad-hoc tax levies, whereby the mercenaries after a battle would roam the Country, pillaging it as the outlaws they were, waiting for a next battle and next payment. These bands were the scourge of France and one of the prime factors that made the Hundred-Year War so terrible for the country. It not only made France more peaceful, which added to the sympathy for the King, but also enabled the King to subdue the nobles. From now on he could handle the separate armies of the country's nobility and subdue them one by one. It allowed later Louis XI to do away even with the Dukes of Burgundy.

Some nobles of Charles' court, fearing these measures as well as the growing influence of traders and intelligent men who did not belong to the old aristocracy,

plotted against the King<sup>G36</sup>. The lord La Trémoille, the Duke of Bourbon, the Duke of Brittany, and the Duke of Alençon, to some extent with the support of the Dauphin, rose against the King. But Richemont, Dunois, Pierre de Brézé, Xaintrilles, the Count of Richemont and others, beat the conspirators. The Dauphin was sent in exile from court to the Dauphiné. Part of the measures had to wait 1445 and a new gathering in Châlons-sur-Marne before they were fully executable, but they were in the end applied. Thus, medieval times ended for France. Germany that had not had a Jacques Coeur and other Royal civil advisers such as Etienne Chevalier and de La Fayette, would have to wait for a Bismarck and the nineteenth century to reach similar status. In Germany there was no king and the emperors were elected by the grace of the feudal Prince Electors.

However, a man as adventurous, dashing and powerful as Jacques Coeur naturally made enemies. He grew more and more wealthy. He traded with Italy, organised trading houses in other countries, as for instance in Bruges, that other centre of European commerce. He traded with Scotland. He had a palace in his hometown of Bourges, which is still today the pride of the city. He was ennobled in 1441. He obtained the Archbishopric of Bourges for his son Jean. He gained the Bishopric of Luçon for his brother. His son Arvand worked for him in Florence. Jacques Coeur continued with his arms dealing in the Orient. He owned silver and metal mines near Lyon. He was a powerful man, ennobled, appointed Royal Commissar to the States of Languedoc and the Auvergne which meant he had to discuss with these counties the amount of the yearly taxes to the King. He became the Visitor-General of the 'Gabelles', the riverboats that transported goods and especially salt in France. He was sent on diplomatic missions to Genoa and to Rome. He was very rich. He was certainly a source of intrigues at the court.

Lately, Jacques Coeur had given prominence for his Mediterranean trade to the port of Marseille<sup>G36</sup>. But Marseille was not French. Marseille was a port of the Provence where reigned the Good King René. So, taxes on trade also went to King René instead of to Charles VII. Trade in Montpellier was hurt. The businessmen of Montpellier, especially one Otto Castellani, started to scheme against Coeur. Jacques Coeur also had entertained good relations with the Dauphin of France, Charles VII's son and future Louis XI as well as with the Popes in Rome and the great King Alphonso of Aragon. All these relations became increasingly suspicious for Charles VII.

When Agnes Sorel died, Jacques Coeur was falsely accused by Jeanne de Vendôme, the Lady of Mortagne, of having poisoned Agnes Sorel on behalf of the Dauphin. Coeur was arrested in 1451. The accusation of having poisoned Agnes Sorel was soon abandoned because the doctor of the King and of Agnes and a friend of Coeur, Robert Poitevin, testified at court of what real illness Sorel had truly died. Jeanne de Vendôme was banned from the kingdom. But the accusation was enough to imprison Jacques Coeur in the castle of Taillebourg and other accusations then could be amassed against him. Coeur had lost the confidence of Charles VII. Charles feared or was jealous of Coeur's good relations with the Dauphin, and of his other relations with the Pope, with the King of Aragon, with the Doge of Venice and with Genoa. Coeur had only wanted to serve everybody in the hope of being granted new privileges and in the hope of getting richer. By serving everybody he had become his own man instead of just the French King's man. And of course: the King wanted Coeur's immense fortune<sup>G36</sup>.

More than twenty accusers assembled against Jacques Coeur. They were led by Otto Castellani, the trader from Montpellier and who was of Florentine descent, and by the courtier Guillaume Gouffier. Charles VII in the meantime had already another mistress, one Antoinette de Maignelay, a cousin of Agnes Sorel, whom he married out to his First Chamberlain André de Villequier. These were intimate with Guillaume Gouffier<sup>G36</sup>. They were also in debt to Jacques Coeur, as were Jeanne de Vendôme and her husband. It turned out after the trial that about 57 percent of all the money owed to Coeur, were owed to him by people from the Royal Court. Of his 238 debtors, more than 30 percent came from the court<sup>G35</sup>. Fourteen accusations were made to Coeur. He had minted coins at diminished weight. He had delivered arms and metals to the Saracens, sold own coins with the figure of France's lily, and exported money to other countries. He had sent back a young Christian in slavery to Egypt; he had profited from his double function of banker of the King and banker of the Treasury of France, and so on. Coeur answered to all the accusations. But it did not help him that for instance he repeated - as everybody knew - that he had personal permissions of the Pope to deal with the Infidel and that he had started this trade in Montpellier, a town that had benefited from the same Papal privileges for six ships a year.

Jacques Coeur was condemned for lese-majesty in May of 1453. All his goods in France were confiscated and he would be forever banned from France. But the General Prosecutor of the King, Jean Dauvet, would need four years to make the complete inventory of all the possessions and trading interests of Jacques Coeur<sup>G35</sup>. Dauvet's journal of his search in the many cities where Coeur had had properties and companies amounted to more than one thousand large folio pages.

Jacques Coeur escaped in 1454 from his prison, the castle of Poitiers. He fled from convent to convent to arrive at Beaucaire where a group of his best friends and sea captains took him in their armed protection to guide him to Italy. Pope Calixtus III gave him a mission to fight the Turks; Coeur helped to organise the ninth crusade and he became the Captain General of the Papal Fleet. But Jacques Coeur was injured in a fight in the Aegean. He died during the crusade in the island of Chio, in 1456.

The person who solemnly spoke out the sentence of Jacques Coeur was the head of French justice, Guillaume Jouvenel des Ursins. We have no portrait of Jacques Coeur, although allegedly one was made by Piero della Francesca<sup>G35</sup>. If this painting ever existed it was lost. But Jean Fouquet made a portrait of Guillaume Jouvenel des Ursins, the Chancellor of France. It looks like the portrait of a butcher. The Jouvenels came from a bourgeois family of Paris. Their father had been provost of the merchants of Paris and his sons were all high dignitaries in the service of the King. Guillaume became Chancellor in 1445. His brother Jean Jouvenel was the Archbishop of Reims. Jean Jouvenel went on the same diplomatic missions as Jacques Coeur, to Genoa and Rome. Both men knew each other very well. Jacques Jouvenel, the other brother, was the President of the Court of Accounts – the 'Chambre des Comptes' – and he was a prelate like Jean. The Jouvenels were of non-aristocratic descent. Their father had tried to hide this fact by claiming descendance from an ancient Roman family called Juvéna. Thus the Jouvenels preferred their name to be spelled Juvéna. Jean Fouquet's painting show Guillaume in the same dress as Charles VII. Guillaume holds his hands in a prayer. He might be asking for help in doing the right justice, although



he does not look like a man who might be in need of any help. This man is a rock. His face has bulky features. Nobody will get past this man. He wears the ring of the keys of the Kingdom of France. The Chancellor had the guard of the Seal of France. Guillaume Jouvenel is set against a rich golden background, far richer than the austere green background of the portrait of Charles VII.

Why did the many friends of Jacques Coeur not speak out at the trial? Agnes Sorel was dead. Pierre de Brézé was not prominent anymore at the court. He had been nominated in the newly conquered Normandy and was not at the court. Etienne Chevalier was the Finance Controller. He knew what had happened. He knew that fortunes as the one of Jacques Coeur were not made without irregularities, but he also knew that the King had accepted these irregularities in the past. If Etienne Chevalier had spoken out, he would have had to expose the King. If he had spoken out, he would also have to acknowledge that he had known, as Finance Controller of course, of Jacques Coeur's acts. Two men together formed a conspiracy. Testifying would have made matters worse. So, Etienne Chevalier's hands were tied, he kept silence. Guillaume Jouvenel could hardly testify as Chancellor and France's head of justice at a trial of which everybody knew the King wanted its completion. In the end, the only ones who tried to help with some to little success were Robert Poitevin, Sorel's doctor, and the Cardinal d'Estouteville. D'Estouteville was Bishop of Rouen and Cardinal of Ostia, special legate of the Pope to France. D'Estouteville was a righteous man. He had become bishop of Rouen after Alain Cauchon who had condemned Joan of Arc to be burnt on the marketplace of that town and after Charles VII had taken the town back from the English. D'Estouteville had then had a major role in the revision of the process of Jeanne d'Arc and in her public reinstatement of 1546. He would later, under Louis XI, publicly also vow to Jacques Coeur. The Cardinal could however not reach the King and talk to him: Charles refused an audience on the grounds that he was in a small castle at Chissay without apartments worthy of such a visitor<sup>G36</sup>.

### *Agnes Sorel*

One can start to imagine all kinds of explanations why Agnes Sorel would be on the diptych with Etienne Chevalier. Did Chevalier himself ask Fouquet for Agnes to be painted on the panel that would be hung in his tomb chapel? Was there then a deeper connection between Agnes Sorel and Etienne Chevalier? Was Etienne Chevalier so in love also with Agnes Sorel that he wanted to have her picture close to his tomb for eternity? Chevalier handled Sorel's will. Agnes Sorel had asked three men to execute her will: Jacques Coeur, Etienne Chevalier and her doctor Robert Poitevin. Agnes Sorel was a protector and a friend of Chevalier and also of Coeur. Was Chevalier sufficiently cynical to want Agnes Sorel to be painted disguised as a Madonna so that her portrait could be hung in a church, or was this quite accepted mores of the times?

Or did Fouquet by his own initiative present two meanings: in his real vision a Madonna caring for the child Jesus, in a second hidden vision a mistress haughtily caring for a weak King? Then in a third layer, did Fouquet warn in aversion about the distortion of feelings between the strange relations existing between King, mistress and Treasurer? Why the difference between the austere and strict Chevalier-and-Saint-Stephen panel and the licentious Agnes Sorel panel?

Was all that why Fouquet painted the scene to a background of angels that are in fact fearsome monsters? Did he want the baby Jesus to point at the monsters that loomed behind the intrigues and the decay of morals of the court of Charles VII? Did Jean Fouquet know what had happened? Did Etienne Chevalier see or not see the layers of meaning? If yes, why did he still have the painting and why was it hung in his tomb chapel? Was he such a cynical man?

Many other questions are open. Let your imagination wander. Just which and how much of these question marks hold truth? And of course, the first question that finishes all the others would be: is this truly Agnes Sorel?

We can only wonder. The truth whether this is a simple painting without hidden meanings or a complex symbolic painting of aversion, layer upon layer, will be a mystery of history. It is difficult to accept that Chevalier would not have the intelligence to see through a double meaning. But it is also difficult to think that the unconventionality of the painting is innocent or happened by accident. Jean Fouquet was too intelligent a painter for that.

Do we really want an answer to the questions? Life can be shockingly strange. Artists are the ones who lead us farthest into the realms of imagination and questions. An artist who cannot bring us there does not interest us; at best we use his paintings as decorations. The questions that the diptych and more especially the Mary and Jesus call into us, whether by accident of history or deliberately willed by both Jean Fouquet and Etienne Chevalier, emphasise the wonder of life. They make of the painting one of the most subtle, weird, intriguing, interesting, remarkable, wild, unconventional images that we know. Even a modern painting with these themes would still be very interesting and new. This one comes from the fifteenth century and from an artist who was almost a lone genius in a France that would have to wait a century more to have comparable genius painters.

History continues to live. You can visit the Jacques Coeur palace in Bourges. You can visit the castle of Chinon, the towns and places on the Loire River where Charles VII resided many times. You can see the cathedral of Melun and the ruins of the abbey of Jumièges in Normandy. The castle of Chissay even still exists. Agnes Sorel was buried in a sarcophagus of the medieval citadel town of Loches, where she had received a small castle, one of the 'Logis Royaux', in which she lived her last years and received Charles VII. In this same castle Charles received Joan of Arc in 1429 when she urged him to be crowned in Reims. You can visit Loches as it lies not far from Tours and the Loire castles.

King Charles VII had four daughters by Agnes Sorel. Charlotte was married in 1462 to Jacques de Brézé, Grand-Marshal of Normandy. The Count de Brézé surprised her in adultery with one of his servants and stabbed her in 1477. Marguerite married the Sénéchal of Guyenne, Olivier de Coetivy in 1458. Jeanne married Antoine de Breuil, Count of Sancerre. The fourth girl, born in the Manoir of Le Mesnil, survived her mother only a few months<sup>G44</sup>.

Agnes Sorel died close to Jumièges, supported by the monks of the abbey. She left quite some money to the abbey for the peace of her soul. She asked that her hearth

and bowels be kept in Jumièges and that her body be buried at Loches. This separation of hearth and body was quite common in the Middle Ages for people of noble blood. The friends she had named executed her will: Robert Poitevin, Jacques Coeur and Etienne Chevalier.

A monument to her honour was erected in Jumièges and in Loches. The tomb in Loches was placed in the middle of the collegial church. The sarcophagus was of black marble and on top was placed a sculpture in white marble representing Agnes Sorel accompanied by two angels and two small sheep at her feet. The canons of Loches had received money for accepting Agnes in their church. But after the death of Charles VII and during a visit of Louis XI, they asked the new King for permission to withdraw the monument. They thought to flatter Louis XI, but to his credit the latter retorted he would agree on the condition that the canons gave back all that Sorel had given them<sup>G44</sup>. The demand was repeated in the following centuries however and was finally accepted in 1777 when the tomb was placed in the nave of the church. The sarcophagus was opened and a first coffin of wood was discovered, then one in lead and a third in wood again. Rests of her body were found and placed in the tomb. During the French Revolution, these rests were profaned but the Préfet of the Department gathered what could be saved. Still later, the remains were placed again in a sarcophagus and monument with the figures as before restored by a Parisian artist<sup>G44</sup>. This monument was placed in a tower of Loches called after her. It is now in the main room of the castle of Loches.

The tomb of Jumièges was equally made of black marble<sup>G44</sup>. It had a statue of black marble representing Agnes Sorel on her knees, holding in her hands a hearth that she offered to the Virgin Mary in order to be reconciled with God. This statue was destroyed during the Calvinist wars in the sixteenth century. The rest of the tomb was destroyed during the French Revolution. The abbey of Jumièges was then sold by the French Government and given over to destruction. Only ruins subsist of Jumièges now, but they are some of the most imposing of France.

Agnes Sorel's tomb of Jumièges bore various epitaphs<sup>G44</sup>. But on both the tombs of Loches and Jumièges was an epitaph with almost the same contents:

'Ci gist noble damoiselle Agnès de Sorel, en son vivant Dame de Beauté, Rocherie, etc; piteuse envers toutes gens, et qui largement donnoit de son bien aux églises et aux pauvres: laquelle trépassa le 9ième jour de Février 1499. Priez Dieu pour le repos de l'âme d'elle. Amen'<sup>G44</sup>. (Here lies the noble lady Agnes Sorel, while alive the Lady of Beauté and Rocherie, etc.; she was likeable to all people and gave largely of her possessing to the churches and the poor; she died the 9<sup>th</sup> day of February 1499. Pray to God for the rest of her soul. Amen.) The date was 1499 because in those times the New Year started at Easter.

On her tomb in the castle of Loches, Agnes Sorel lies in white marble. Young sheep at her feet are the symbol of her sweetness. Two angels protect her fair face with their long wings.

### *Other paintings*

**Madonna giving Milk**

Donato di Bardi (active 1426- ca.1454). Museo Poldi Pezzoli – Milan.

**Madonna with the Christ Child at her Breast**

Bernardino Luini (ca.1480 – 1532). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. Ca. 1520.

**Madonna with the Christ Child at her Breast**

Bernardino de Conti. Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. Early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**Virgin by a Fountain with the Christ Child at her Breast**

Bernard van Orley (1488-1541). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan. Ca. 1516.

**Madonna del Latte**

Luca Signorelli (ca. 1450-1523). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

**Virgin suckling the Infant**

Giovanni Petrucci called Giampietrino (ca. 1515-1540). Galleria Borghese. Rome. 1520.

**Madonna with the Infant Jesus and Saint John the Baptist**

Domenico Beccafumi (1486-1551). National Gallery of Art, Palazzo Barberini. Rome. 1535-1545.

**Madonna feeding the Christ Child**

Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652). The Gallery at Palazzo Spada. Rome.

**The Virgin suckling the Infant Christ**

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618-1682). Galleria Corsini. Rome. Ca. 1680.

**The Madonna at the Candle**

Luca Cambiaso (1527-1585). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa. Ca. 1570-1575.

**Madonna del Latte**

Amico Aspertini (1473-ca. 1551). Collezioni Comunale d'Arte. Bologna.

**Madonna del Latte**

Giovan Antonio Boltraffio (1467-1516). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Madonna del Latte**

Ambrogio da Fossano called Bergognone (1455-after 1522). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Madonna del Latte**

Giovanni Busi called Cariani (ca. 1480-1548). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Madonna del Latte with Saints Erasmus, John and Mary Magdalene**

Gerolamo Colleoni (ca. 1500-after 1570). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Madonna del Latte**

Bernardino de' Conti (1450-1528). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo. 1501.

**Madonna del latte**

Master of the Legend of the Magdalene (active ca. 1500-1530). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Madonna del Latte**

Master of Frankfurt (ca. 1460-1520). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Madonna with Child and Saint John**

Altobello Melone (first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Madonna with Child and Saint John**

Andrea Cordigliachi called Previtali (ca. 1470-1528). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Madonna with Child**

Andrea Cordigliachi called Previtali (ca. 1470-1528). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Virgin and Child with a Choir of Cherubim**

Andrea Mantegna (1430-1506). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**Virgin and Child**

Luca Signorelli (ca. 1445-1523). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**Madonna with Child**

Bernardino Zenale (1436-1526). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

*The Holy Family with Angels offering Butter and Honey***The Holy Family with Angels offering Butter and Honey**

Pier Francesco Mazzucchelli called Il Morazzone (1573-1626). Galleria Sabauda. Turin. Ca. 1620-1625.

Il Morazzone was born Pier Francesco Mazzucchelli around 1571 to 1575 in a town called Moranzone near Milan. He received his painter's name from the town where he was born. His father brought him to Rome in 1592, where he started to paint religious scenes in churches. By 1598 however, he had returned to Piedmont and Milan. He became one of the most prominent artists of Milan and the cities of the Alpine regions of Italy. He continued all his life to decorate churches with religious scenes. He was a quintessentially Baroque painter, with preferences for grand pictures painted in frescoes. Yet, he knew well to restrain the show of emotions and drama so that his paintings were very much acceptable to the clergy of Piedmont. Cardinal Federico Borromeo of Milan and the Duke of Savoy were his patrons. He was one of the two or three most famous artists of Milan in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. In 1626 he obtained a commission to paint vast frescoes in the cupola of the cathedral of Piacenza, but he died there, that same year, probably from an accident with the scaffolding. Il Morazzone's work in the church was finished by Guercino. Morazzone was not the only great painter in Milan: Giovanni Battista Crespi called Il Cerano (1565-1632), Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1574-1625), Carlo Francesco Nuvolone (1609-1661), Antonio Maria Crespi Costaldi called Il Bustino (1590-1630), Giovan Mauro della Rovere called Il Fiammingho (1575-1640), Francesco Cairo (1607-1665) and several other masters found work in Milan's Golden Age of art. This was the era of Cardinal Federico Borromeo, the uncrowned ruler of Milan, who led the city to rival Rome in his support of the fine arts.

The theme of 'The Holy Family offering Butter and Honey' is very rare in religious painting. It refers to the words of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah: 'The Lord will give you a sign in any case. It is this: the young woman is with child and will give birth to a son whom she will call Immanuel. On curds and honey will he feed, until he knows how to refuse the bad and choose the good.'<sup>G39</sup> This message, Morazzone wrote on a ribbon held by angels: 'En mel o prudens Emanuel ecce butirum.' Morazzone wrote the theme of his paintings also thus on white ribbons in other works.

The painting shows the Virgin Mary and her husband Joseph with the Christ Child. Two angels offer a golden plate with butter and a silver plate with honey. The painting is severely damaged in the figure of Joseph, but Il Morazzone painted Joseph as an old man, much elder than Mary, as was the traditional knowledge from the apocryphal writings.

The structure of the painting also is very traditional, since the group of the holy Family is shown in the form of a pyramid centred on Mary and Jesus. Morazzone drew Mary's head inclined to the right of the frame, to bring Mary's face more in the middle of the picture. Then, from that tip of the pyramid, lines go to the lower corners of the frame. These lines are emphasized by the direction of Mary's head and by the axis of the body of Jesus on the left side, and on the right side by the direction of the

white clothes of the angels that offer butter and honey. Such a structure favours an impression of static, of lack of movement, of lack of vivacity, in any painting. Morazzone therefore broke and softened the structure by the flowing, curved twists in the body of Mary, Jesus and the angels. Mary gently bows and brings her face closer to the angels. She therefore curves her back. The boy Jesus grasps for the butter. He thereby also turns and curves his young body, in a more natural and more nervous movement that halts the strong structure. The angel kneels before Jesus, but the white clothes of the angel are draped in so many folds that no straight line is to be discerned her also, and the angel wearing the honey breaks the line of the right diagonal. Mary's body lies along the left diagonal, but Mary's face and eyes come out to the right of the intersection with the right diagonal. It has often been said that Baroque art rejected in its works strong structure, but Baroque painters like Il Morazzone always based their composition on strong structures, which they then deliberately de-emphasized to give the final view a more relaxed atmosphere of movement and graceful curves.

Il Morazzone applied fine, soft, but pronounced hues in his painting and his colours are well in harmony with the overall mood. Mary wears a robe, the colours of which are in nice harmony with the dark background. The red colour of her robe fits with the golden contours of Jesus. Morazzone brought the same golden colours in the veil of Mary. This veil is almost transparent, brings threads of gold on her robe and lowers the contrast of the colours of her robe with the hues of her face. Mary wears also a blue cloak, and that blue fits well with the golden hues on Jesus, with the colours of the honey, as well as with the brilliant white glow of light on the robes of the angel.

The light seems to shine from the upper left. It follows the right diagonal, strengthening the structure, and goes from the little angel in the upper left corner of the frame over Mary's face to the head and arms of the angel that offers the butter. Then the light shines brightly on the angel's robe. The background is dark, so that the red and blue colours of Mary and the silvery white and grey of the angel's robes are not harsh yet stand out marvellously. The blue of Mary's cloak is a very deep blue, with black areas, so that their sombre tones support better the white brilliance of the angel's robe.

Il Morazzone painted then Joseph in colours that blend much with the background and that choice of colours was necessary to keep the pyramid structure prominent. Joseph does not belong to that structure; he remains an outside player, so he remains outside the central view. This also was a traditional way of regarding and depicting Joseph, since he was the husband of Mary but only of a humble role in the main drama of Jesus' birth.

Pier Francesco Mazzucchelli is an artist who does not enjoy these days the fame of a Pieter Paul Rubens or a Caravaggio. He was certainly as much the intelligent painter. His use of structure and colour is perfect in a well thought-out design. Remark for instance the fine, detailed, flawless application of chiaroscuro on the robes of Mary and of the angels. In most of his works he was a painter worthy of admiration and for which it is always worthwhile to analyse the pictures in some more detail to find out just how much he studied his subject and his mode of representation, how he used the style elements of the art of painting to obtain fine effects on the viewer.

Il Morazzone guides the view of the spectator from the baby Jesus to the face of Mary and from there one follows the gaze of Mary to the lower right, to the very subject of the picture, the butter and honey. Here is a wonderful play of light and dark in the various shades of white, yellow, silver, grey and bluish tones of the robes of the angel. The viewer's eyes linger on the broad folds of the angel's clothes. When the viewer looks back at the butter then, he or she will follow the eyes of the angel back to Jesus. One understands then why such brilliance was necessary in that lower part. Angel, Jesus and Mary are locked now onto one another by their eyes, forcing the viewer into that closed form, almost a circle, of which the butter and honey, the theme of the picture, are also part.

Morazzone could have cut the part of the frame above the head of Joseph, but then the diagonals of the picture would have had to be used in another way for the structure and Morazzone's whole design would have to be changed from what it is now. So, the painter had an open space left above the body of Mary. Morazzone had experienced such issues of design before and a common solution was to draw little angles holding a ribbon there. So these little angels were probably not added later, but they form an integral part of Morazzone's composition.

On the white ribbon, Morazzone mentioned the words of the Prophet Isaiah, thereby making it clear for the next generations what his picture was about. He was not a common artisan in the art of painting, but a very fine and sophisticated artist, worthy of more than common admiration.



*The Seven Joys and the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin***The Seven Joys of Maria**

Hans Memling (ca. 1435-1494). Alte Pinakothek – Munich. 1480.

**The Seven Sorrows of Maria**

Hans Memling. Pinacoteca – Turin.

Paintings were used in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries for religious education. The paintings of the Gothic Middle Ages of Flanders were full of narrative scenes and symbols. Bringing many symbols in a painting was a joy for the clergy. They could explain the mysterious signs hidden in the paintings. The clergy only had the theological knowledge to explain the pictures. The priests and monks advised the painters. The clergy thus showed that only they had the keys to an understanding of the scriptures; they could show that they always knew something more of the Gospels than the common folk and they benefited from the reputation. They were supposed to be more close to the saints and to the Virgin Mary. Thus, there was a large folklore market in Flanders for scenes of the lives of saints. The most prolific painter of lives of saints and of religious pictures in the wealthy Bruges of the late fifteenth century was Hans Memling.

Memling was not of Bruges. He was born around 1433 in the German town of Momlingen, near Mainz. He came to Brabant though, and painted in the workshop of Rogier Van Der Weyden. There was more to earn in Bruges than in Brussels. So, Memling moved. He was admitted to the Painters' Guild of Bruges in 1466 and remained there until his death in 1494. Memling was particularly popular with the rich Florentine merchants of Bruges, such as Tommaso Portinari, whose portrait he made. Memling is especially known for the shrine of Saint Ursula, which is kept in the Saint John hospital of Bruges, where a museum is almost exclusively dedicated to works of Memling. The shrine tells the life story of Saint Ursula in many scenes, in which many figures participate in the drama of the martyrdom of Ursula and her eleven companion maidens.

Even more than Van Eyck, and even though he was not born in Bruges, Memling is the beloved painter of Bruges. One of the reasons for this is the sheer mass of paintings that still exist of his hand. Yet, Bruges remembered that he was a German: Memling's first name in Latin was Johannes, but Bruges preferred to call him the German Hans instead of the Flemish Jan.

Memling was also popular because he was smooth. Like Raphael, Memling pleased and wanted to please. He made harmonious, balanced images and complex scenes in clear, bright, splendid colours. He liked to tell stories; he combined figures and scenes so as to astound the viewers with his skill. He painted many portraits also, and these were very realistic images of the sitters, as the wealthy of Bruges would ask and like. Like Van Eyck before him Memling painted his holy figures clad in the rich dresses of Flanders and made this almost a first grand publicity for the weaving industry of the country. Memling did not show the character of his commissioners. He only showed exactly how they looked like physically and even then, he must have ennobled their images. He painted with an undisturbed, equal temperament. It was

most in his religious scenes that he excelled and as no other he could combine many scenes with many figures together in one picture. He painted the 'Seven Joys' and the 'Seven Sorrows of Maria' in this pleasing fashion.

The donators of the 'Seven Joys' were Pieter Bultync and his wife Catherine van Riebeke. The panel was destined for the chapel of the Guild of Tanners in the Church of the Ladies in Bruges. The 'Seven Joys' is a picture with an astonishing combination of scenes that could be used for education of the faithful, to illustrate the New Testament. The painting is a vast landscape in which are shown twenty-five different scenes of the life of the Virgin, including her Seven Joys (as opposed to her Seven Sorrows). The landscape is really sumptuous, showing all the various possible geographies of earth: land, mountains, sea. There are towns and castles, meadows and winding roads. The 'Nativity' is the central scene. Other smaller scenes are the 'Annunciation', the 'Resurrection', the 'Visitation', and the 'Entry of Christ into Jerusalem'. Traditionally, the Seven Joys of Mary were the Annunciation, The visitation, the Birth of Christ, The Adoration of the Magi, the Encounter with Simeon, the Reunion on the Temple and the Coronation of the Virgin. These scenes have been painted by Memling.

The 'Seven Sorrows' resembles the 'Seven Joys', but this painting contains mainly town scenes. A magnificent Renaissance town is shown, with medieval turrets and newer octagonal Renaissance church towers. The sorrows happen inside the town and around the town walls. Most of the sorrows are the sufferings of Mary's son Jesus Christ. Traditionally the seven sorrows are the Circumcision of the baby Jesus, the Flight to Egypt, Jesus in the Temple, Calvary, the Crucifixion, the Pietà and the Entombment of Christ. The nature of the sorrows changed somewhat in paintings over the centuries: sometimes the Circumcision of Jesus is not one of the sorrows, and the Resurrection of Christ, which is the final leaving of Mary's son, is added. The Seven Sorrows of Mary were Simeon's Prophecy, the Flight into Egypt, the Loss of the twelve-year old Jesus, the Arrest of Christ, the Bearing of the Cross, the Crucifixion, the Deposition from the Cross and the Entombment.

In Memling's painting a long procession starts outside the gates, in the garden of Ghetsemane, with the arrest of Jesus. Jesus's torture, trial, and presentation to the Jews are shown, as well as the scenes on the long way to Calvary. The story does not end with the three crosses high on a far mountain behind the town, because just next to that scene comes the Descent of the Cross, then the Entombment, and the Resurrection of Christ. The two donors are painted too, the husband on the left and the wife on the right. This also was a tradition: the woman holds the lesser position to the left of the man.

Both the Joys and Sorrows are stunning compositions. It seems almost magical that so many scenes could be brought together in one painting. The small scenes are realistically drawn, then painted to the smallest detail. These paintings must have been marvels for young children learning catechism and the story of the Gospels. And we feel that Memling must have had a real joy in assembling the various scenes. This is Memling at his best, although we do not appreciate these naïve representations anymore. Nowadays, we prefer the portraits or the less complex pictures of Memling.

Hans Memling must have been a really religious man to lovingly depict scene after scene of Jesus's life and of the saints. A Flemish Primitive like Memling must also have been a content man. Since these painters believed, and had dedicated their lives to representations of the New Testament, they thought they helped do God's work. Thus they felt they surely would be part of God's paradise after their death. They had a status in society not unlikely the status of the clergy. The people of Bruges felt their painters were closer to God than themselves. They looked at their artists with considerable respect. In the Late Middle Ages the cult of beauty was added to the cult of God.

Memling possessed the talent to please with his painterly skills of presenting all details of various scenes in a natural composition. He could combine many figures in a fluent visual narrative like his Italian counterpart Benozzo Gozzoli. Memling had the gift of a Flemish eye for the smallest detail and he is still admired for that today. He coupled that with real devotion, as well as with empathy for the figures of his scenes.

*Other Paintings:*

**The Seven Joys of the Virgin**

Attributed to Bernard van Orley (ca. 1492-1541/1542). Galleria Colonna. Rome.

**The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin**

Attributed to Bernard van Orley (ca. 1492-1541/1542). Galleria Colonna. Rome.

*Mater Dolorosa***Mater Dolorosa**

Dieric Bouts (1420-1474). The Art Institute of Chicago – Chicago. 1470-1475.

The 'Mater Dolorosa' were pictures of the Virgin Mary, which showed the deep pain and despair on the fate of the Virgin's son. Dieric Bouts made a picture of the Sorrowing Madonna that is an example of devotional art. The Virgin Mary is painted as a graceful, devote lady who has taken the austere habits of a woman dedicated to prayers. She is a young woman. Her hair is entirely covered so that no detail might distract our view from the intense face. She wears the blue cloak, the maphorion, over the very white headdress. Mary is idealised to an inner-turned woman who has no interest but for her own private reflections on the passion of Jesus and on her own feelings. She remains isolated in her pain and joins her hands in a prayer to God so that he indeed might save Jesus. A single teardrop shows the internal pain. Yet, the face expresses pride and determination. The picture is a portrait of a strong woman, who in a very dignified way accepts the fate that was ordained. This little panel is an exquisite icon that was much admired and copied.

Dieric Bouts was a painter of Brabant. He was born around 1410 to 1420 in Haarlem of Holland, but he worked in the town of Leuven near Brussels. Leuven was the town in which was founded the first university of the Southern Netherlands. Bouts died there in 1475. He was very much a Flemish Primitive painter. He worked in the International Gothic style. His figures are almost always depicted as remaining impassible, cool and detached of the scene. Yet his compositions prove a forceful character and are always profoundly felt, so that they never let the viewer impassible.

The 'Sorrowing Madonna' was the left panel of a diptych, of which the right panel probably contained a representation of the suffering of Jesus. This right panel is lost.<sup>S2</sup>

Bouts' 'Mater Dolorosa' is an example of the sincerely devotional art of Flanders and Brabant in the fifteenth century. Admire the profound inner spirituality expressed by Bouts in this portrait. Have we not lost in our modern art such expression of man's highest aspirations and most respectful emotions? Our modern contemporary paintings seem exhausted after endless abstract combinations and their ambitious use of technology. Dieric Bouts found a way to represent transcendence of human feelings that remain gripping and fascinating even after these many centuries.

*Other paintings***Mater Dolorosa**

Il Sordo. Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. Second quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

*The Virgin of the Dry Tree***The Virgin of the Dry Tree**

Petrus Christus (ca. 1410 – 1472/1473). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, the Villahermosa Palace – Madrid. Ca. 1460.

The Madonna of the Dry Tree of Petrus Christus is a strange image. A Madonna is standing amidst a thorn bush. She is dressed in a long Gothic red cloak with green lining and in a blue robe, and she holds the infant Jesus in her right arm. The thorn bush grows all around the Virgin and in it hang fifteen letters 'a'. This is an alien image, which has been almost never painted in such iconography but in this Petrus Christus picture. It is a picture heavy with symbolism of course, as liked by the painters and viewers of the Late Middle Ages in Northern Europe.

The dry thorny tree may have several meanings. The tree could prefigure Jesus's Passion and his crown of thorns. The image could be almost a classical Eleusa theme in which the Virgin stands, holds Jesus and ponders at His Passion. The theme then also joins the 'Our Lady of Sorrows' paintings. A tree without leaves was a symbol of infertility. So, the symbolism of the Dry Tree could also mean the Immaculate Conception of Mary since she conceived Jesus and only him out of a womb remained otherwise barren but for the miraculous conception. And the tree may be a reference to the own birth of the Virgin from her mother Anne. The Virgin Mary was conceived after Anne had become infertile, in a miracle conception announced to Mary's father Joachim. The tree may also signify a reference to phrases of the prophet Ezekiel <sup>P2</sup>:

*I, Yahweh, am the one  
Who lays the tall tree low  
and raises the low tree high,  
who makes the green tree wither  
and makes the withered tree bear fruit.* <sup>G38</sup>

The thorns can also signify the sins over which Mary and Jesus will triumph by Jesus's Resurrection.

The fifteen letters 'a' hanging from the thorns are fifteen symbols for 'Ave Maria' or the Hail Mary prayers of the Rosary, the basic prayer to Mary and the words Elisabeth spoke to her during the Visitation scene.

Petrus Christus made a striking, very unusual picture. He painted a dark background to present a menacing environment out of which Mary seems to appear in fiery colours. The thorns form a traditional mandorla shape around the holy figure, but whereas the mandorla was usually a halo of light, Petrus Christus made the almond shape more menacing even than the background.

The Virgin's love and protection for her child will win over all dangers however dark and cruel, but she seems temporarily the prisoner of evil incarnated in the thorns.

A faint light comes from the left and we must admire the marvellous skill by which Petrus Christus made the thorn bush be shaped by that light and by that light alone. This was a very unusual way also to depict figures, especially for early Flemish Primitive painters of the fifteenth century since these painters generally brought the Virgin and Jesus and all their devotional pictures under an all-pervading bright light that symbolised the divine light of the heavens. Petrus Christus offered a rare night scene and prefigured strongly the contrasted dark-light visions of the painters of the Baroque period of a century later. Remark how the light plays on the Virgin and child, how it works on Mary's red and green cloak. Green had to be brought into the picture to contrast with the barren tree, realising the words of Ezekiel.

Mary's cloak is wonderfully depicted in all details of folds, showing the technical skill of painting of Petrus Christus. The folds also give a lively impression to an otherwise fixed image that was also rare in pictures of the Virgin of those times. The baby Jesus enhances the liveliness further since he seems to struggle out of Mary's arms, wanting to go into the world on his own. Jesus is oblivious of the seriousness of the theme. Here too, Petrus Christus somewhat evolved tradition since he painted the Virgin holding Jesus in her right arm, with her left hand gently playing or holding Jesus's toes. But as we will see, Petrus Christus merely took an earlier image of Jan Van Eyck for his own painting. The face of the Virgin is dignified, aware of the mystery of her conception and of the importance of her son and unafraid. This is not a subdued Mary lost in sorrows, but a triumphant and confident mother who sees the dangers and the cruel menace but who chooses to ignore the fate because of her motherly love.

Petrus Christus came from Northern Brabant, so he was not Flemish, but he worked most of his life in Bruges where he must have been the most important artist of his years. He may have been a pupil of Jan Van Eyck and he certainly borrowed many style elements from this painter. Little is known of his life. He spanned the period of arts production in Bruges between Van Eyck's death around 1440 and Hans Memling's venue around 1470. Petrus Christus was no innovator like the Van Eycks and did not have the vision to paint nature as marvellously or to paint his figures as graciously.

We have a painting of Jan Van Eyck showing a standing Madonna inside a church (now in the Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie Berlin) in practically the same pose as Petrus Christus' picture. But one look shows the far greater realism, grace, elegance and power of this painting as compared to Petrus Christus' image. Petrus Christus' Virgin and child seem weak and faint compared to Jan Van Eyck's art. The painter seemingly took Jan Van Eyck's Madonna and simply positioned her inside a thorn bush. He dedicated less time to the detail than Van Eyck did. We cannot but regret in Petrus Christus the lack of power, of eye for nature and of intricate detail that were however the characteristics of the Flemish Primitives. Still, the way this painter handled the light falling on the Dry Tree and thereby shaping it, as well as some of the details of the Virgin prove the strong artisan skills of this artist. Petrus Christus moreover made wonderful portraits.

We suppose Petrus Christus painted with the 'Virgin of the Dry Tree' only a quick picture for the Bruges Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Dry Tree, of which he was a member <sup>P2</sup>, getting the admiration of his fellow members from the new view he

showed. Petrus Christus' image thus remains valuable as an example of the many strange manifestations of devotion to Mary in the Northern painting of the Late Middle Ages.

*The Virgin of the Rosary***The Madonna of the Rosary**

Sir Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). Oratorio del Rosario – Palermo. 1624-1627.

The Antwerp painter Anthony van Dyck was in Sicily, in its capital Palermo, in the years 1624 and 1625. He was probably called there to paint the portrait of the Viceroy Emmanuele Filiberto of Savoy. Palermo was a thriving town, with a long history of links to Spain and Spanish possessions in the Mediterranean. Many Flemish painters such as Jan Brueghel the Younger, Willem Walsgart, Gaspard de Momper, Jan Basquens and Hieronymus Gerards or Gerardi worked there<sup>B10</sup>. One of the most important pictures van Dyck made in Palermo was the ‘Madonna of the Rosary’. It was commissioned in 1625 by the Dominicans for the Oratorio del Rosario that stands beside the monastery of San Domenico in Palermo. The deed drawn up to order the painting stated that the Dominican saints Dominic, Vincent and Catherine of Siena had to figure on the picture together with the local saints Rosaria, Christina, Ninfa, Olivia and Agatha<sup>B10</sup>. Van Dyck made three sketches of different designs out of which the clients could choose.

The rosary is a sequence of prayers consisting of the ‘Hail Mary’ and the ‘Our Father’. The words of Elisabeth in the Visitation scene as told by Luke were the basis of the ‘Hail Mary’. The prayer starts as ‘Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb’. This is the most spoken little prayer of all. The ‘Our Father’ is the prayer as taught by Jesus himself and as recorded by Matthew. The sequence of prayers, ten ‘Hail Marias’ to one ‘Our Father’ is supported by a rosary, that is a string of beads that end in a small crucifix. Each small bead is for a ‘Hail Mary’, a larger bead or a bead in another colour is for an ‘Our Father’. One has to follow the beads in one’s hand and cite the prayers as one passes from one bead to the next. Every Catholic Christian has a rosary. Although its use diminishes, it still is the first item that accompanies a believer going to church or on a pilgrimage to Lourdes, Compostela or other. These prayers have been spoken by billions of devote humans over so many centuries. They are often recited in choir by thousands.

The painting of van Dyck is a very professional image, made to please his clients in the full counter-reformation and Baroque area. So, it is a picture full of sentiment and drama. There is much to see, much to admire by simple souls and the whole is a splendid image of movement and emotions. The Virgin is much more the active Sicilian matron than the elegant, humble young girl. She presents the rosary to Saint Dominic and tries with the other arm to hold a very energetic, nervous baby who struggles against her hold to play with the other angels. Jesus is not the modest, earnest baby gently sitting on the lap of his mother. He is an Italian child full of life and very interested in anything that moves close to him. Putti, small angels, well in flesh are flying all around, also presenting rosaries or flowers, the roses and lilies that are since always associated with Mary. One angel even holds a flower crown over Mary’s head. This view is set against a classic arch that is filled with the blue of the sky, the same colour as Mary’s cloak.



Beneath Mary, holding out his hand to receive the rosary, is Saint Dominic Guzman. Dominic founded around 1200 the Black Friars and he indeed wears in van Dyck's picture a black cloak over his white shirt. Dominic founded communities in many countries and his tomb is in Bologna. The Dominicans were devoted to studying and teaching the New Testament as well as to preaching and praying. Saint Vincent Ferrer is shown somewhat lower and more in the dark than Dominic. Vincent was a Dominican too. He was born in Spain, but from English parents. He lived from 1350 to 1419 and was very much devoted to prayers and preaching. He had an important role in ending the Avignon schism in the times when there were two Popes, one in Avignon and one in Rome. Vincent holds a dish with roses, the emblem of the Virgin.

On the other side of Dominic, likewise clothed in the black and white of the Dominicans, stands Catherine of Siena. Catherine lived in the fourteenth century. She was a virgin devoted to prayer. She nursed and helped the sick. She also allegedly played a role in urging the two and three Popes to end the schism of Avignon. Catherine had prophetic visions, which she dictated in her letters and Dialogues. Her emblem is a lily, which is several times recurrent in the picture.

It is difficult to determine who the other female saints Rosaria, Christina, Ninfa, Olivia and Agatha are in the picture. Christina is more a legendary figure than a known and documented saint. She was from Bolsena in Tuscany. Christina supposedly was tortured in various ways and finally shot by arrows. So, Christina could be the lady on the left holding the arrow to her hearth. Agatha was a Sicilian saint, born in the third century in Catania. She also was tortured many times and she holds the martyr's palm in her hand. She may also hold a small sprig on fire, because on one of her anniversaries Mount Etna erupted but the Catanians were saved from destruction after they had prayed to Agatha<sup>G41</sup>. As the true Sicilian Saint she has a place of honour next to Catherine. The other female saints Olivia, Ninfa and Rosaria are much less well known. So van Dyck has only pictured them partly. Rosaria may be the lady in the middle devotedly looking at the Madonna. Her name promised a more prominent place than the two other ones, which are mostly hidden the one between Dominic and Vincent, the other between Christina and Agatha.

Van Dyck has added an anecdotal element in the picture that may have delighted some of the less refined Sicilians. A putto, but a child and not an angel, is looking at a skull on the ground near the lower end of the frame. The head, half enveloped in a cloth apparently still smells badly. So the child holds his nose and frantically points at the dish of Vincent's roses that probably smell more nicely. This could be a strange allegory on the victory of the Virgin, designated by the roses, over death and putrefaction as indicated by the skull.

Van Dyck obviously took pleasure at making this vivid picture. He used bright colours and yet also darker tones to bring space in the picture. The lower part of the picture, where the saints stand, are in dark and white but a red patch and a blue patch answer the colours of Mary. Van Dyck has also shown his strength in anatomy in depicting the angels with their little wings and the nude child of the lower foreground. He added majesty by the putti angels, motherly care in the matronly Mary and was asked to bring a powerful assembly of saints together. Van Dyck was the ultimate professional. He was asked to paint an altarpiece and knew how to satisfy his clients with details that could please them, according to local taste. The 'Madonna of the

Rosary' thus became a Baroque painting full of life and in lively colours that matched the Sicilian sun and the Sicilian character.

Taste had definitely changed between the Gothic fifteenth century and the Baroque seventeenth century in Brabant. A picture like van Dyck's was far more designed to astound and to please than to express spirituality. The glory of God and the Virgin was shown by exuberance instead of by austere zeal. Yet, the religious feelings are still present; attention only shifted to more outward appearances of overt emotions than to the representation of the silent intense glow of inner spirituality of the Flemish Primitives.

*Other paintings:*

**Virgin and Child with Rosary**

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618-1682). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid. 1650-1655.

**The Madonna of the Rosary**

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). Kunsthistorisches Museum – Vienna. Around 1607.

**The Madonna of the Rosary**

Tommaso Minardi (1787-1871). Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna. Rome. 1840.

**The Madonna of the Rosary**

Ludovico Carracci (1555-1609). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

**The Virgin of the Rosary**

Giovanni Battista Crespi called Il Cerano (ca. 1575-1632). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1620's.

*The Virgin with Saints and Donators***The Virgin with the Canon Van der Paele**

Jan Van Eyck (ca. 1390-1441). Groeninge Museum - Bruges. 1436.

The Virgin with Canon Van der Paele is a truly medieval late Gothic painting. It seems a cool painting, a photograph, with very clear lines, well-delineated areas and straight colours. This is all very realistic and accurate, shown in meticulous detail. It looks splendid and grand. The decorations are rich. The subject is religious, very much as one would expect of a Flemish Primitive, as these painters were called, of the fifteenth century. The Virgin is seated in the normal 'Sedes Sapientiae' way with the Child on her lap, in all glory like a queen. The red robe is splendid. The Canon Van der Paele, who donated the picture, is being presented by two Saints to the Virgin, as an ambassador to the court of a queen. The whole is in a rich and stately surrounding, accentuating the solemnity of the ceremony.

But is it all so serious?

To the right of the Virgin stands Saint George, clad in the armour of a medieval knight. It is a truly marvellous armour, a parade armour, more fit to be worn at a feast than at a religious ceremony. Saint George wears a staff and a flag with a cross, but this is hardly a dreadful weapon to kill dragons. Yet George is a dragon-killer, the most famous dragon killer of history and legends. He seems very cheerful and in gallantry he salutes with his helmet, which resembles however more to a snail hat than to a fierce battle helmet. A daring plume tops his hat.

George was a tribune in the Roman army of Diocletian. He disagreed with the emperor and was martyred. He is always represented as a young and beautiful knight. Many medieval knight orders were called after him. That was because George had come to the rescue of a beautiful girl in a tale of the 'Golden Legend'. George had travelled to the city of Silena in a province of Lybia and he came to a place where a plague-bearing dragon lurked. This dragon used to come to the city walls so that everybody upon whom fell the dragon's breath would be poisoned. The city dwellers offered maidens to the dragon and once the lot fell upon the king's daughter. But George saw the cortege of the girl, asked what happened and confronted the dragon. He dealt the beast a grievous wound, whereupon the dragon followed the girl 'like a little dog on a leash'. George asked everyone to be baptised, then drew his sword and put an end to the beast. Thus Saint George is the gallant knight and the proper guardian of the Virgin. He was always called the most loyal soldier of Christ. Saint George seems to laugh a little with the Canon, who is so sternly knelt before the Virgin.

Saint George presents the man who ordered the painting: the Canon Van der Paele. Van der Paele's first name was George, so Saint George is the Canon's patron saint.

The Canon looks very serious and impressed by it all. This is his day. He has finally made it, to be presented at the court of the Holy Virgin. He has to show that he is a scholar, that he is a man of substance and no fool, so he holds a thick academic prayer

book and he wears the spectacles of the intellectual. Although the Canon was rich, he is dressed in a white penitential robe. A Canon is a priest and white is the colour of purity. But with the happy looking, completely relaxed George next to him, one feels that the simplicity of the Canon is strained. He looks a bit silly here. George has dressed up as if to make a fool of the Canon.

On the other side of the painting stands Saint Donatian. He is dressed for the ceremony in a marvellous blue and gold bishop's cope. His figure is an element of symmetry in the painting. On the right side Van der Paele and Saint George form a mass that is matched on the left by Saint Donatian who keeps his left arm so that his robe opens to the same form of area as on the right. Donatian holds a staff with a cross, which is also in symmetry with the flag and the cross of George. The blue of Donatian's robe matches the steel blue of George's armour. The blue shirt of the Virgin makes the equilibrium and the connection. Donatian's face is all rosy and fresh. He does not really look like a stern bishop. His face is all one can see of him, stuffed as he is in his robe. Donatian is also here to underscore the worldly riches of the church. Donatian holds the wooden crown with the candles, an iconography of light. Saint Donatian is prayed to even this day in Belgium. He is invoked when lightning storms occur. He is believed to have the power to deviate lightning strokes. But there is a large difference between a powerful saint able to curb lightning and the Donatian holding some candles in our painting.

Why is Donatian in this picture? The painting was destined for the Saint Donatian church of Bruges, in which George Van der Paele was buried. It was made to commemorate the founding of two chapels in that church by Van der Paele. Saint Donatian was a bishop of Reims who lived in the fourth century. A legend tells that he was thrown in the river Tiber in Rome. His body had to be found, so his persecutors lowered into the river a wheel on which were stuck five lighted candles. The wheel stopped over the spot of the riverbed where Donatian lay peacefully. He was recovered and restored to life by prayers<sup>G41</sup>. This is why Donatian is represented holding a wheel, the rim of which is set with candles. The wheel represents his martyrdom. Donatian's relics came to Bruges in 863, where the cathedral and the diocese of Bruges were dedicated to him. The Saint Donatian cathedral was thus the most important church of the town during the life of Jan Van Eyck. At the occupation of Flanders by the French Revolutionary Armies, the cathedral was first confiscated, then sold in 1799, and subsequently demolished. The Holy Saviour church, or Salvador church, then became the cathedral of Bruges.

The Virgin looks benevolently at the Canon. The Child sits joyfully on her lap; he plays with the flower that the Virgin holds up. Both Child and Mother hold the same flower. This represents the passionflower, indicating Christ's own later passion, the stage to his destiny. With his other hand, the Child holds a pigeon, always a representation of the Holy Spirit. But the child has a strange face; doesn't he look remarkably like a baby Van der Paele?

The Virgin sits on a wooden chair with stiles ending in woodcarvings. These woodcarvings represent violent scenes, such as one would not expect at all in this painting, and certainly not surrounding the Blessed Virgin. On the right is a small woodcarving of a man killing a beast. Now, George was a dragon killer. He is remembered as such, and in the nearby town of Mons in Belgium there is each year

still a big folklore feast on Saint George. The whole town participates in the fight of the dragon and the culminating moment of the day is when George finally kills the enormous dragon that has harassed the people of Mons since the beginning of the festivities. But the beast in Van Eyck's picture is not a dragon; at best it is a wild dog or a boar. George attacked the dragon with a lance, not with a short sword or knife. And the George of the painting is a nice youth in parading colours, hardly a violent killer.

The left woodcarving is a warrior slaying a man, representing maybe the slaughtering of Christians by the Donatists. These were followers of the fourth century Carthaginian bishop Donatus the Great. The Donatists wanted strict moral discipline, they did not follow the commands of Rome anymore, allied themselves with peasants and wandered through North Africa plundering churches and killing Roman Catholic priests. Their greatest adversary was Saint Augustine, who was widely read in medieval times. This Donatist episode has nothing to do with the Saint Donatian of the painting. Maybe Jan van Eyck has been playing. Maybe that is also why Donatian is looking not altogether happy. Under these small wooden sculptures are two other woodcarvings in the seat: one of Adam on the left, Eve on the right. They are nude, contrasting with the richly clad figures of Donatian and George. Thus humankind participates in this picture.

The room is half church or chapel, half stateroom. There is a tradition of showing the Madonna in a church, and particularly Jan Van Eyck made several pictures of Mary inside Gothic chapels or cathedrals. The setting was quite natural for medieval Flanders, as the mother of Jesus Christ was described as a 'templum' or a 'Domus Dei' since Jesus, during her incarnation, lived in Mary as in a temple. And devotion was of course in Jan Van Eyck's times very much focused on the cathedrals and churches, the largest and tallest buildings in Flanders' cities.

There are sculptured columns in Van Eyck's chapel, but so many as one would never expect in a small and humble one. A heavy glass window is behind the seat of the Virgin. Not the kind of glass one would expect in a chapel. All is much too crowded; the ceiling is too low to be a realistic surrounding. This technique was used elsewhere, in other paintings of Jan Van Eyck, like the Arnolfini marriage. Look at the wonderful tapestry at the feet of the Virgin: tapestries were much woven and used in Flanders. Bruges and Arras were well known for their tapestries. At the disaster of the Battle of Nikopolis in 1396, the Turkish Sultan Bajazed captured many French and Burgundian knights. The French had been called to help the Hungarian King in his fight against the Muslims, but the knights had gone further and laid siege to Nikopolis, then been beaten. After this, one of the last Crusades and the least successful, the French court sent an embassy to Bajazed to negotiate for the recuperation of the knights. The embassy brought presents and among these were wonderful tapestries of the deeds of Alexander the Great made in Arras. The King of Hungary did not object to the other gifts, for instance rare hunting birds, to go to Bajazed, but he did thought the beautiful tapestries too beautiful a gift for a barbarian like Bajazed.

In Van Eyck's painting the tiles on the floor compare favourably to the tapestry, but small tiles like this are never used in churches. They are one of the first features that show fleeing lines in perspective: the Flemish Jan Van Eyck must have known the

basic principles of perspective. His contemporary Paolo Uccello of Florence applies all the sophistication of complex geometry.

So: the painting is maybe not that serious after all. Jan Van Eyck has again been playing with the viewer, as he did in other paintings. He plays with the scene: he presents to the viewer an impossible and strange surrounding with all the columns and tiles, much overloaded. He plays with the ceremoniousness and joyfulness of George and Donatian, who make somewhat a fool out of the stately Canon. It is as if their friend the Canon has asked them to come, partly because he is afraid to go alone to the queenly Virgin, partly to add to his importance. He cramps to a book as if he needed something well known to him to pass the scene. And George and Donatian, who know the Virgin since long, are not taking all this too serious. They have decided to play a farce on their friend and have dressed up for a feast. Maybe George alone orchestrated this, because Donatian seems a bit scornful. So, the moment of grace and triumph of the Canon Van der Paele was stolen from him and turned into derision by George. Isn't George the young, dashing courtier of the queen, always ready for a diversion and always prepared to succour a lady?

Jan Van Eyck has played with the Canon. One wonders whether the Canon has understood that when the painting was delivered. My guess is yes, the Canon must have been truly an intelligent and learned man. I suppose that the Canon has had a good laugh too and only held up a scorning finger to the master-painter. So: are we here in front of the first satiric, comical painting in the history of oil paintings? Then so early, this can only mean that Van Eyck was not only a genius but also one who dared to use his own imagination as far as he could. Van Eyck has certainly understood, at the very beginning of oil painting in Western Europe, that a painting had to be interesting, even more than beautiful, to capture the attention of the viewer. How many people have remained puzzled, in Van Eyck's grip, in front of this painting since the fifteenth century? So, Jan Van Eyck is a very modern man, from whatever century you look at his pictures. And he may well have diverted a religious scene to quite another purpose than one of depiction of spirituality.

One may wonder how such a genius as Jan Van Eyck appeared so suddenly in Flanders: no paintings of comparable high quality earlier than Van Eyck's have been found. One can only suppose that earlier panels leading to this genius were destroyed. Two other elements contributed to the sudden splendid appearance. First of all, yes, there is a continuance in tradition. Jan Van Eyck was a manuscript illuminator. Pages of manuscripts made by him have been found. Knowing that, and knowing the style of minuscule details in medieval manuscripts, one can see the continuance of that style in Van Eyck's paintings. Secondly, Van Eyck perfected the technique of oil painting. Oils were already used before him, since oils were used in the varnish that protected the egg-yoke tempera paintings<sup>G9</sup>. Van Eyck used these natural oils, nut and linseed oils, instead of the egg tempera to mix with his colour pigments. The result was marvellous as can be seen till this day. The pigments and the oil brought on canvas were magnificently translucent; they gave a brightness to the colours that was resplendent.

Jan Van Eyck was born around 1390 in Maaseik, a town in Limburg, then part of the Bishopric of Liège, in Belgium, which was in its turn part of the German Holy Roman Empire. As mentioned, Van Eyck was at first a manuscript illuminator, then a painter.

Most of his oil paintings date from after 1420. In 1425 he was appointed to the court of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy. He was not only a painter, but also a courtier who took part in ambassadorial missions for Philip. He died in 1441.

Van Eyck worked in Bruges. Bruges was a very rich town in the first half of the fifteenth century. It was richer than Venice, Paris and London. There lived more than 150,000 people in Bruges, three times more than in the Bruges of today. Bruges was a seaport then and it was situated strategically in the heart of Europe, much as the ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam today. Its wealth came from that fact: much of the trading of the continent passed through Bruges. It had also its wool and weaving industry. Painters of all the Southern Netherlands flocked to Bruges where they could find rich patrons. Bruges has much remained today, as it was in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, tourists crowd the town today.

One can see the cities of Europe and take a walk through history. Take Athens for the Before Christ centuries, Rome for the first Anno Domine centuries and especially for the seventeenth century. The centre of Florence has remained much as it was in the early fifteenth century. Venice would represent the late sixteenth, Paris the eighteenth, London the nineteenth century. Berlin may be the town representing best the twentieth century, although that century definitely belongs to the North Americans. And go to Bruges to see the fourteenth century. See its small Flemish brick houses, visit its picturesque beguinage and the loveliness of its interior canal: take a boat on the small canals called the 'Minnewater', or water of love, discover its stately communal halls and bell-tower. Bruges was also a religious centre: Diederich of the Alsace had brought from the crusades the Holy Blood to Bruges. This relic was kept from the twelfth century to this day. The Holy Blood procession is still a marvellous feast, where the members of the associations of Bruges go through the city, dressed as knights and fair ladies of medieval times.

The times of Jan Van Eyck were the period when the Dukes of Burgundy ruled the country. The Dukes of Burgundy emerged out of the horrors of the first half of fourteenth century Europe, when the black plague killed one third of the population around 1350 and when the Hundred-Year War raged between France and England. Remember that the English King was a descendant of William of Normandy, who came from France, and thus could make claims on the throne of France. When the last Capet died, the house of Valois was chosen to reign in France, much to the distaste of Edward III of England, who then started the war. Edward's son, the Black Prince, won the battle of Poitiers in 1356, where also a son of the king of France fought. This son was Philip the Bold, who received Burgundy from the French King, his father, in 1363, to become its first Valois Duke. The previous lineage of Burgundian Dukes had died out.

The Dukes of Burgundy of the family of Valois would reign until 1477, for a little above hundred years. They would successively by marriage and heritage expand their territories with the Northern and Southern Netherlands among which Flanders and Bruges. In 1435, Burgundy would even temporarily become independent from France. This was the price the King of France had to pay to keep Burgundy out of the war with England. The Dukes had first supported the Kings of France, their close relatives, but then they had sided with England. The end of the dynasty over Burgundy came when Charles the Bold was defeated and killed at Nancy by a Swiss

army. Charles only left a daughter amidst the ruins of his defeat. The French King Louis XI thereupon invaded Burgundy. The Netherlands however continued to be reigned by Mary of Burgundy. She married Maximilian I, the German emperor, and from that day on Flanders became part of the Holy Roman Empire of Germany. The empire would be ruled in the sixteenth century by the very wealthy and very Catholic Charles V. He ruled over a vast empire 'where the sun never went down' because he also possessed vast territories in South America. Mary of Burgundy and her knight Maximilian were much-loved figures in Bruges; their marriage is commemorated to this day during the Holy Blood procession.

The Dukes of Burgundy most of the time supported the English against the French, in part because they liked wealth and did not want the English again to block their wool exports to Bruges, as the English King had done just before the Hundred Year War started. And, of course, they wanted their independence from France's king emphasised. Around the 1420s the English occupied vast parts of France and they beleaguered even the city of Orléans, close to Burgundy. This became also a problem for the Dukes of Burgundy, but luckily for France Joan of Arc entered the city and defeated the attackers in 1429. Of course, somewhat later, in 1431, Joan of Arc was captured by the English and burned at the stake in the city of Rouen. This happened just five years before Jan Van Eyck painted the *Virgin and the Canon Van der Paele*. The Dukes of Burgundy could guarantee peace for the Southern Netherlands so that their riches grew, in stark contrast to the devastations that ravaged France.

Not all was so idyllic in Bruges, though. Around 1430, just after the marriage of Duke Philip the Good with Princess Isabella of Portugal, the Bruges guilds rose against their Duke. The Duchess could escape from the town in the last moments and join her husband, who was at nearby Gent. The troubles ended without too much violence: in 1436 peace was sealed between the town and the Duke. But the hostilities would soon begin anew. In 1437, Philip the Good entered the town with an army among which 4,000 Picardian soldiers who started to pillage the town, killing women and children. The whole town joined the fight then and Philip had to retreat outside the town. He beleaguered Bruges again however, and the town surrendered. Its main burghers were humiliated, hung, imprisoned or tortured. Bruges was punished. Van Eyck must have been torn between his allegiance to Duke Philip and the town that had brought him fame and wealth. He knew the Duke very well, belonged to his court; he had been to Portugal to paint the Duke's future wife Isabella. He had been to Dijon, the capital of Burgundy. But he also paid allegiance to the guild of painters of Bruges. Jan Van Eyck thus was an immediate witness of these revolts and must have painted his '*Virgin and Canon Van der Paele*' in the midst of these.

Duke Philip of Burgundy and Bruges lived in peace after the revolts. The Duke died in 1457 and was buried with much ceremony in the same church Saint Donatian for which Van Eyck made his painting and in which the painting hung by that time, close to the tomb of the Canon Van der Paele.

Jan Van Eyck's picture is an example of a theme that was quite popular with commissioners of religious pictures. The church clergy wanted to console, to show that one of its roles was to intercede between heaven and man. Every saint could be prayed to and asked for help. Saints were asked to intercede with God for relief of sufferings, of sicknesses, for help in unlucky trade and to avoid catastrophes. The



religious figure closest to Jesus was his mother, so the combination of the Virgin and saints made immediate sense. But Jan Van Eyck with his 'Virgin and Canon Van der Paele' used a religious theme to play with the viewers. Van Eyck did not just do this in this particular picture. The 'Arnolfini Marriage' is likewise a somewhat mysterious picture that concentrated the attention of art historians for decades and that has still not yielded all its secrets. So, we find in Van Eyck a very early example of playful irreverence for the seriousness and spirituality that was so sacrosanct for the Flemish Primitives. Van Eyck was not just a marvellous painter. He showed character and mockery, two very modern qualities in any century.

### *Other paintings*

#### **Madonna with Saints**

Andrea Mantegna (ca. 1435-1506). Castello Sforzesco – Milan.

#### **Madonna with Child and Saints Peter and Jerome**

Cesare Magni. Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. Ca. 1530.

#### **Madonna enthroned with Saints Ambrose and Michael**

Bramantino (1465-1530). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. Ca. 1525-1530.

#### **Madonna enthroned with Saints and Angels playing Music**

Bartolomeo Montagna (ca. 1450-1523). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

#### **Madonna and Saints with the Donor Federico de Montefeltro**

Piero della Francesca (ca. 1410-1492). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan. Ca. 1470-1480.

#### **The Virgin with Saints**

Alvise Vivarini (ca.1442 – ca.1505). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice.

#### **Madonna and Child with Saints Joseph, Zachary, Elisabeth and young John**

Pompeo Batoni (1708-1787). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice.

#### **Saint George with Virgin and Child**

Luciano Borzone (1595-1645). Palazzo di San Giorgio. Genua. 1621-1624.

*Sacra Conversazione***Sacra Conversazione**

Palma Il Vecchio (1480-1528). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, the Villahermosa Palace – Madrid. 1515-1520.

The ‘Sacra Conversazione’ pictures were devotional paintings in which either Jesus Christ or mostly the Virgin Mary are depicted with saints, seemingly in private conversation. This theme developed around 1500 and became very popular. Cardinals, bishops and abbots liked the idea to have pictures of saints of their churches in the close company of Jesus or Mary and to show their patron saints in the intimacy of the divine relations. Since saints were prayed to for intercession with God, it was more the habit to depict the saints with Mary as the highest and also most benevolent of the intermediates with God. And the paintings showed the saints talking of appeals to Mary’s son. The clergy could show the complicity between the saints and Mary. Most of these pictures remain rigid in the beginning for there still was an infinite difference in distinction between any saint and the Virgin, but gradually the relations and thus the scene gave way to a kinder contact.

Palma Vecchio made one of these intimate ‘Sacra Conversazione’ scenes that is a very free, elegant, sentimental, light and even sensual painting and a nice example though not very typical of the theme because almost a scene of classical antiquity.

Palma Vecchio was a Venetian artist. Together with Titian he was the leading master of the venetian High Renaissance as both painters started to work around 1500. They were born in almost the same years. Palma made religious scenes as well as scenes on classical themes, but his devotional pictures were handled in a way that seems to be derived from his worldly, classical views. In these last he could display a frivolous treatment of subjects that were but an excuse for scenes of playful nudes. Palma painted many lascivious nudes in his landscapes and his figures were mostly luxurious women of sensuous, generous forms that were often set in erotic poses. He painted in large colour areas and in beautifully bright contrasting hues, all style elements we can see also in his ‘Sacra Conversazione’. Palma Vecchio maybe mastered not the rich palette of shades of one colour of Titian, but he surpassed Titian in brightness of tones and hues. Moreover Palma Vecchio knew as no other how to use delicate shadows on figures so as to present the round volumes of his nudes.

A woman for Palma Vecchio was much a woman, generous and sensual. A man had Michelangelo’s sculptural presence. But Palma always remained more suave, very sentimental, kind and sweet in his pictures as compared to the force and tension of Titian. Palma has become known for his portraits of voluptuous courtesans with names such as ‘La Bella’ and ‘Violante’. Palma Vecchio died in 1528, whereas Titian could mature his work well until almost the end of the century. In Palma we have a representative of Venice’s art of leisure, of courtship and courteousness, of nice living and taking the pleasures of life that the wealth of Venice could offer to some.

Palma Vecchio's 'Sacra Conversazione' shows Mary and Jesus in the middle of the painting. On the left are John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene has long blond hair, the famous Venetian blond, studded with pearls, and she holds a pot of balms with which she would anoint Jesus. Or with which she had anointed Jesus, because we have here a scene of a strange warp in time since Jesus is represented as a child whereas Mary Magdalene would or had known Jesus as an adult. Such considerations were of not much concern for Palma Vecchio. Mary Magdalene's presence presages Jesus's death and we will find other subtle symbols elsewhere in the painting. On the right is Saint Catherine, martyred on the spiked wheel she touches, and holding the palm of her martyrdom. In the right foreground kneels one of Palma Vecchio's patrons and the donor of the picture, the Procurator of the Venetian republic Francesco Priuli <sup>P2</sup>.

The composition of Palma's painting is very harmonious in all aspects. The figures are positioned symmetrically to the vertical middle axis of the frame, and that axis seems to pass in the traditional way through Mary's left eye. Priuli and John the Baptist kneel; Mary Magdalene and Saint Catherine are behind these two. On the left is a Roman column, on the right a tree rises from the landscape. But the column is solid and dark and thus plays a role in the composition, as we will explain somewhat further. The composition seems to be in a double pyramid with the Virgin's face as top and then going down over John and Priuli, the other pyramid's lines going over Catherine and the Magdalene. But the main composition of masses is held below the right diagonal (the diagonal going from the lower right to the top left corner), in the large triangle beneath this diagonal. The column forms the higher solid end of that triangle. The diagonal's direction is supported by two other lines, by the lines of John's staff and by Catherine's long palm. Only Catherine comes out of the lower triangle, as well as the light tree of the landscape. But Catherine's robe is green and she almost becomes therefore a part of the landscape that is painted above the diagonal, whereas the tree of the landscape there is so light as to be almost transparent.

The diagonal line powerfully leads to the Virgin Mary's face and since all eyes are also directed there, Mary more than Jesus seems to be the centre of attention. This suits the content of the Sacra Conversazione since Mary and the saints are in conversation, even if the scene can also be regarded as being an adoration scene of the child Jesus. Thus two themes and scenes are mixed in Palma's painting.

Palma Vecchio must have adored painting women. In this painting also, colours and thus attention and interest of the view are in the women. John the Baptist and Priuli are painted in dark tones, even if John is showing a naked back – but that back is not muscled and so smooth as not to incite much interest. These tones are no match for the rich hues Palma Vecchio brought in the dresses and even in the faces of Mary, the Magdalene and Catherine. These hues are very saturated, bright already and then even with only brightness added to the hues to indicate the shadows. The Venetian artists were the great masters of colour of the High Renaissance and this splendour is exemplified in Palma Vecchio. There is much wealth in the colours, Palma was not afraid to use very clear hues, and the colours indicate in their various shades of brightness the thick texture of the clothes. Palma was a great master in the way he applied the shadows on the ample dresses to give the viewer an impression of the fullness of the women in this painting. That fullness is of course enhanced in the

elegant, kind but broad faces of the ladies. These women are opulent, healthy, content, kind and mild. They seem at ease and nothing but Magdalene's pot of balms – and that is only on the far left, well away from the child Jesus – reminds of the drama of the Passion. This Passion is consumed since a long time so that the whole painting is a visionary symbol.

Palma added more delicate symbols in his *Sacra Conversazione*. Beneath John the Baptist, in the lower left corner, is a lamb. John lived in the desert with sheep, but the lamb is a reference to the sacrifice of Jesus. We already mentioned the Magdalene's pot of balms and Catherine's wheel of martyrdom. Below the Virgin grows a cactus and she stands higher than the other figures. Behind Jesus, against the tree grows a laurel, indicating Jesus's royal descent. We see the massive tree behind Mary and Jesus. That was often a style element used by painters to place the main characters against a vast and darker background so that their colours would shine more. Such a tree or a column was also used to underscore the importance of the main figures. Out of that tree grows a new sprig, just above Mary's head, a symbol of new birth and life.

Palma Vecchio was not a proficient landscape painter, even though he liked forest scenes for his classical themes and he painted trees, bushes and foliage in a wonderful way. Like the Florentines however, human figures were more important for his pictures. The landscape in his *Sacra Conversazione* does create nice depth and the village on a hill forms a balance of shapes with the laden left part of the picture.

What strikes most in Palma's painting is the overall sweet and charming liveliness of the figures. Palma Vecchio reached various effects of movement. Mary holds an arm upward in a slanting direction. There are two such slanting directions in the body of the child. John and Priuli kneel, and that is an occasion to show oblique positions. The Virgin Mary holds her head inclined while she looks carefully at her child and while she blesses Priuli in an instant action. So indeed the scene is an intimate linking of figures, all in motion of a private scene. Such effects are of course very far away from the rigid attitudes of the Throning Madonna's or Maestà's of the thirteenth and fourteenth century.

While we analysed and remarked so many nice elements of art in this *Sacra Conversazione* of Palma Vecchio, we cannot but grant this artist the qualification of being a great master and artist. Yes, Palma was sentimental and too bucolic sweet, and not so powerful in his scenes. But his presentation is an ode to the art of painting and the diligent combination of style elements in a harmoniously balanced way. The liveliness of the *Sacra Conversazione* is impressed on the viewer in a subtle and intelligent way and strong composition directs the lines, colours and forms. Palma Vecchio's painting is readily accessible to all and very efficient in its objectives. We feel the secular handling of a religious subject, but that in a respectful way, in respect for the subject and for Palma's own feeling of art.

*Other Paintings:*

**Holy Family with Saint Catherine and Saint John the Baptist**

Jacopo Negreti called Palma il Vecchio (1480-1528). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice.

**Mary with the Child and Saints**

Jacopo Negreti called Palma Vecchio (ca. 1480-1528). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1520-1525.

**Mary with Child and Saints Catherine and James the Elder**

Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1527-1533.

**Holy Family with Saint Catherine and the young John the Baptist**

Andrea Meldolla called Schiavone (1510/1515-1563). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1552.

**The Holy Family**

Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). National Gallery of Ireland. Dublin.

**The Holy Family at the Bath.**

Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). Fogg Art Museum. Cambridge. Harvard University Art Museums.

**The Holy Family**

Pompeo Batoni (1708-1787). Pinacoteca Capitolina, Palazzo dei Conservatori. Rome. Ca. 1760.

**Virgin and Child with Saints Peter and Paul**

Benvenuto Tisi called Garofalo (ca. 1476-1559). Galleria Borghese. Rome. Ca. 1518.

**The Holy Family**

Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671). Musée Magnin. Dijon. 1650's.

**Sacra Conversazione**

Giovanni Busi called Il Cariani (ca. 1485-1548). National Gallery of Art, Palazzo Barberini. Rome. 1524-1530.

**The Holy Family**

Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). The J. Paul Getty Museum. Los Angeles. 1651.

*Mary inspires the arts*

### **The Saint Virgin inspiring the Arts**

Edmond Van Hove. Groeninge Museum – Bruges. Ca. 1893.

The Madonna inspiring artists and the arts was a recurring theme in Christian painting. The most frequent scene was the Virgin being painted by Saint Luke. Luke was supposed to have made a picture of Mary. Because of this legend Luke became the patron saint of painters and many guilds or medieval associations of painters were named after Saint Luke. But Mary was also connected in representations of musicians and sometimes rows of angels making music accompanied her in compositions.

Edmond Van Hove made a painting that is an example of this theme. He called it 'The Saint Virgin inspiring the Arts'. Van Hove was a painter of Bruges, but of Bruges of the early twentieth and late nineteenth centuries. The painterly tradition of Bruges did not die out after the Middle Ages and several good painters worked in Bruges at the same time as Van Hove. The tradition continues also in our times, but the artists have become less famous and many work again as good artisans that sometimes reach only a brief fame. Van Hove lived from 1851 to 1913. Bruges knew a revival in the arts in that period, not just in paintings but also in poetry. Van Hove painted in the neo-Gothic style that typified the end of the nineteenth century on the continent and especially in England. He would without doubt have been a Pre-Raphaelite had he lived in London. Van Hove was a very romantic figure who made some marvellous pictures and deserves to be better known.

In the 'Saint Virgin inspiring the Arts' Edmond Van Hove pictured a throning Madonna with on her lap the baby Jesus. Van Hove joined a tradition of centuries with this representation of Mary. Still, she holds Jesus on the left and Jesus stands up on her knees, but the overall scene is that of a classic Madonna image. Mary is dressed in the blue maphorion cloak and light blue and white robes. She is seated on a high throne of Greek columns. To her right and left are ladies, which are exercising the arts. Two ladies are making music, one is painting, and another is sculpting. Finally a lady at Mary's feet is drawing circles with a compass, which might represent architecture.

In earlier pictures the ladies could be saints; here Van Hove has represented just ordinary women artists around Mary. Behind the scene of Mary and her waiting ladies several figures are painted. These are dressed in Gothic or Renaissance clothes. The whole picture is in soft hues; figures and background are in a haze, as if this was a fresco that has been legated to us from many centuries ago. Yellows, broken whites and browns are dominant and the only striking colours are the blues of Mary and of the lady painter as well as the darker colours of the architect figure. The lady painter is particularly elegant and dignified. She stands with the palette in her hand and all eyes, as well of the ladies as of the figures in the background, are turned towards her and not so much to the Madonna. Van Hove may have emphasised his own art in this way.

*Other paintings:*

**The Triumph of Religion in the Arts**

Johann Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869). Städelsches Institut – Frankfurt a/Main.  
Around 1830-1840.

**The Triumph of Religion and the Arts**

Johann Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869). The Ermitage State Museum. St Petersburg.  
1839-1843.

*Our Lady of Loreto***The Transportation of the Santa Casa of Loreto**

Giambattista Tiepolo (1696-1770). Galleria dell' Accademia – Venice.

The transportation of the Holy House of Loreto is one of the most extraordinary stories of medieval beliefs that have found adepts until our days. Loreto is an Italian town in the province of Ancona, not so far from Venice. It is only a small town, it consists mainly of one street full of souvenir shops, but with Rome it is the most renowned pilgrimage site of Italy. Tens of thousands of believers still come every year to Loreto to see the house of Mary. Together with Santiago de Compostela and Rocamadour, Loreto is one of the greatest and oldest pilgrimage sites of Europe, to be compared only with the much later Lourdes.

Legends claim that the Holy House of Mary, called 'La Santa Casa' was transported by angels from Jerusalem around 1291 to a hill near Torsatto in Dalmatia. The house would have been threatened to be destroyed by the Turks and thus was taken up and brought to more peaceful places. The house had been the scene of miracles in Torsatto and allegedly the Madonna had appeared to testify for the house. In 1294 angels brought it again through the skies over the Adriatic to a laurel grove in Italy. The Latin name for laurel is 'lauretum', hence the place was called Loreto. In 1295 the house was transported a last time to its present site.

The Holy House has been venerated in Loreto since the thirteenth century and a small town developed around the relic. Papal bulls attested to the verity of the miraculous healings effectuated by the Santa Casa and even as late as 1920 Pope Benedict XV declared the Madonna of Loreto to be the patron of aviators. Our aeroplanes could indeed be compared to flying houses, couldn't they?

A church was built around the house. This basilica was started around 1464 under Pope Paul II, finished largely by 1587 – mainly its façade - under Pope Sixtus V. The basilica is called the Santuario della Santa Casa and stands of course in the Piazza della Madonna. The Holy House of simple stone is placed under a marble cupola of Donato Bramante and other architects were Giuliano da Maiano and Giuliano da Sangallo, all names among the most famous Renaissance and Baroque architects of Italy. The Santa Casa is one room that contains a richly decorated altar. The church too is richly decorated, with mosaics of Guido Reni, Il Domenichino, Federico Barocci and Carlo Maratti. The walls bear frescoes by Luca Signorelli and Melozzo da Forli. Girolamo Lombardo and his workshop cast the majestic bronze doors; Sansovino and Lombardo made sculptures. Over one of the doors stands a statue of a life-size Madonna that also Girolamo Lombardo casted. As one can imagine from these names, the basilica of Loreto was rich. All pilgrims donated to the Santa Casa. Loreto possessed an enormous treasure of gifts of pilgrims, collected over the centuries. In 1798 the French Revolutionary Army occupied northern Italy. The French stole the treasure. In 1808 Napoleon Bonaparte returned the statue of the Madonna that was by then studded with gold and precious stones, but not the treasure.



Such an extraordinary tale that happened close to Venice of course appealed to the imagination of Giambattista Tiepolo. Tiepolo was the master of exuberant pathos and extravagance in the visual arts. He received a commission for a ceiling fresco of the church of Sancta Maria di Nazareth agli Scalzi of Venice, so the theme of the Holy House of Loreto came to him naturally. The scene of a house being transported through the heavens, accompanied by crowds of triumphant angels could well fit for a ceiling fresco. The innocent devotees that came to pray in the church could not but be surprised by this marvellous and miraculous scene when they walked in the building and by chance looked up. Their mouths would fall open in marvel. It would be as if they saw in a flash the house flying through the skies.

The Venetian church of Santa Maria was destroyed in 1915, but a painting that was probably the cartoon for the ceiling fresco is preserved in the Galleria dell'Accademia of Venice. The painting is one of the best expressions of Tiepolo's unbridled imagination. Hordes of angels bear the house in the skies. Other angels and putti accompany the transport with trumpets and string instruments. Devils hide in fear before the holiness of the transport and armies recline below. Jesus with his cross looks benevolently at the crowd and laurels are brought along, not just in its branches but also in the form of a laurel crown. Laurels of course mean 'lauretum' so are a direct reference to Loreto. Above the Santa Casa thrones Mary the Madonna, in her classic red robe and bright blue cloak thus announcing her Assumption in the heavens.

Exuberance and extravagance, unbridled and wild expressions of grand vision are the only words by which such a scene can be qualified. An extravagant theme needed an extravagant representation, so much so that our incredulity cannot be shocked anymore. Any more restrained handling of the subject would have been received by rejection, but Tiepolo painted the theme so grand that one cannot but stay and smile – not laugh – and admire the outburst of joy, energy, splendour of colours, and eccentric inspiration of the artist. Tiepolo did not fight the legend but supported it with the grandest image possible and thus, miraculously also, lent credibility to the picture.

*The Death of the Virgin***The Death of the Virgin**

Hugo van der Goes (ca. 1440-1482). Groeninge Museum – Bruges. 1470-1472.

**The Death of the Virgin**

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). Musée du Louvre- Paris. 1605-1606.

*Hugo van der Goes*

In Hugo van der Goes' painting of the 'Death of the Virgin', all is desolate. Great is the sadness because the last link with Jesus and she who was his mother is gone. Suddenly there is only emptiness and loneliness. What can the apostles do, now that there is no bond anymore with their teacher, no hold? They will have to do with what they have had until now, the book is closed and all is written, nothing new will be added. So, a red-clad James deposes the book in which all is told and finished now. But a candle can be lit, the candle of new life to come. Even if the message remained incomplete, very inadequate, with so many questions unanswered, the light will continue.

These are the scene and the emotions van der Goes has expressed in his picture. Van der Goes was still very much a Flemish Primitive of the fifteenth century, but the Gothic era had given way to something new. Something very individual had started to sprout from within van der Goes. Personal emotions of real humans could be shown in religious paintings and accepted by the clergy. Van der Goes was probably the most modern of the northern painters of his era. We sense and know that he lived intensely into his scenes. More than to flatter or to show his skills, van der Goes painted from his inner soul out, in sympathy with the suffering of extraordinary people that were still humans.

The 'Death of the Virgin' was probably made for the Dunes Abbey at Coxyde on the Belgian coast. The ruins of the abbey were excavated some years ago and can be visited now. The picture was made around 1470, when van der Goes was around forty years old. Van der Goes would not live much longer. He died in 1482 or 1483 in the Red Cloister near Brussels where he had retired after having had fits of folly. Van der Goes lived too much inside his paintings. The pictures and the thinking on his scenes must have eroded his sensibility. Such extreme sadness, loneliness of forlorn people as shown in his 'Death' must have been well acquainted to him.

A soft blue light pervades the whole picture. The colours are cool, yet light and shadows are well used. The cool colours are in strange contrast with the expressions on the faces of the apostles, which indicate all but absence of emotions. This conflict makes it even more immediate for us to apprehend the feelings of the characters. The painting is filled with emotional tension. Look at the hands: they all are in the direction of Mary, all differently painted in various movements. The hands are so expressive in their touch of the Virgin. Yet these hands never do really touch, they dare not go so far. This also is a sign of the extreme respect of the apostles and of the incomprehension of what has happened.

According to one of the tales of the 'Golden Legend', Mary longed to be again with her son<sup>G41</sup>. The archangel Michael visited her and foretold her death in three days. Mary asked to see her kin and the apostles before she died. Which is why most of the scenes of the 'Death of the Virgin' depict her surrounded by the apostles. After her death, Mary was only sleeping during the three days until her Resurrection. Because of this, Mary is usually shown as if serenely asleep on the deathbed. The apostles, who were scattered around the world, were caught up by angels and brought in clouds to the home of the Virgin. Mary was about fourteen years old when she conceived, fifteen when she gave birth. She lived for thirty-three years with Jesus and survived him for about twelve years. She died around sixty years of age<sup>G49</sup>. The 'Golden Legend' further told that there were three virgins at hand who removed Mary's robe in order to wash her body. The body immediately shone with such effulgence that although it could be touched and bathed, it could not be seen. The light shone as long as it took the virgins to perform their task<sup>G49</sup>.

The Virgin lies on her deathbed; she is so very pale. The Virgin already has the vision of her son amidst the angels. She is serene and her face shows the expectancy of joining Jesus. Her face is the only one not to be so sad; she really is trying to grasp with her closed eyes the vision of the heavens. The apostles surround her in a circle, alternating Mary's colours: blue, red of John her beloved son, blue, red of James, green, red again. Saint Peter, the first Pope, dressed in white, and although so human himself, seems to be the only one to keep his head cool. It is he who lights the candle: after Jesus and Mary he will lead the way.

This is one of the most remarkable paintings of the Flemish Primitives. It is remarkable by its harmony of colours and structure, by the loveliness of details, by the softness of the movements, by the liveliness of the characters, by the depiction of emotions so different and so the same in the expressions of each individual face. And yet the picture remains solidly in the tradition of northern painting. The picture resembles the delicacy of a Fra Angelico, but with emotions so strongly present that it stands sharply out among the pictures of its age.

Van der Goes worked in Gent since 1465, in Bruges since 1468. He was known in Bruges by the Portinari family who were the representatives of the Medici of Florence. The Portinari commissioned him paintings. He left Gent in 1473, shortly after having made the 'Death of the Virgin' and withdrew in Rouge-Cloître near Brussels in 1477, where his brother was a friar. He died there some six years later, in 1482 or 1483.

### *Caravaggio*

Il Caravaggio has painted a very dramatic picture of the 'Death of the Virgin', so different from van der Goes' painting. Mary did not die peacefully in Caravaggio's vision. She probably passed away suddenly, while she was working in the fields. She was thrown hurriedly on her bed. Her outstretched arm in a strange way reminds of the Crucifixion of her son. Mary was still a young woman near her death, though it is a balding, broken and old Joseph who weeps abjectly over her. Other elder men are standing to the side of Joseph. The men are all to the left, the women are to themselves on the right. This is where painters traditionally depicted the genders. One

younger lady is knelt close to the bed; another stands behind Mary. The two women are also the same Mary, when she was young. And maybe Il Caravaggio showed already how Mary would be when resurrected because the standing woman is dressed in the traditional blue gown of the Virgin.

Two oblique lines form two solid triangles in the painting. One line goes diagonally from Mary's face over Joseph's head to the other men, the apostles. John, the given son of Mary, is at her feet. Another steeper line goes over the knelt woman to the standing woman. Thus, there is a male line and triangle, and a female one. Another line still runs from the head of John over Joseph to the standing women. All the triangles have the lower edge of the frame as their base. These triangles of colour areas are thus very close to earth. Mary indeed is drawn down to the earth. Her bed and body are kept low in the picture too. In order to fill the frame, Il Caravaggio has painted a heavy red curtain above the scene. The red increases the feelings of drama and passion, even of violence in the scene.

Caravaggio was one of the first painters to discover the dramatic effects that the contrasts between light and shadows could make in a painting. He exploited these effects as no other painter had done before him, breaking entirely with Gothic and even Renaissance fashion of not showing the shadows at all in religious pictures in order to give a sense of the supernatural to the scenes. This breaking with tradition is also apparent in the scene itself: this is no mystic, heavenly scene. It was a death of a peasant woman. It was a sudden death, and Mary is surrounded by common folk. It was a death in times when the church was young, when the apostles had only very few followers and yet the apostles were growing old. Only the presence of these men forms the solemnity of the scene. Caravaggio let a shaft of light fall from the upper left over the bald head of the apostles on Mary's face and body, onto the bent back of the kneeling woman on the lower right. Thus, Mary's face is enlightened, precluding her Assumption. Caravaggio shows the death as a departing for a higher destiny.

This painting of Caravaggio was commissioned around 1605 for the church of Santa Maria della Scala del Trastevere in Rome. Trastevere was the popular suburb of Rome. The panel was not installed in the church however, for it aroused a scandal to the Catholic clergy by its realism. It was exposed to the Romans however in 1607 and became popular and loved. Pieter Paul Rubens, the Flemish Baroque painter admired it much and urged the Duke of Mantua to buy the painting. Still later, having passed several hands, it was acquired by the Sun King of France Louis XIV<sup>F8</sup>.

*Other paintings:*

**The Death of the Virgin – Roudnice Triptych**

Anonymous. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. Ca. 1410.

**The Death of the Virgin**

Andrea Mantegna (1435-1506). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid. 1461.

**The Death of the Virgin**

Carlo Saraceni. Richard L. Feigen Collection – New York. 1612-1615.

**The Death of the Virgin**

Carlo Saraceni (1580/1585-1620). Santa Maria della Scala – Tome.

**The Death of the Virgin**

Master of Amiens (active 1515-1525). Mayer-Van Den Bergh Museum – Antwerp.

**The Death of the Virgin**

Carlo Saraceni (1580/1585-1620). Alte Pinakothek. Munich.

**The Death of the Virgin**

Giovanni Maria Morandi (1622-1717). The Borghese Gallery. Rome. Ca. 1657.

**The Dormition of the Virgin**

Upper German Master. Kunstmuseum. Basel. Ca. 1480.

**The Death of the Virgin**

Hans Holbein the Elder (Ca. 1465-1524). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1490.

**The Death of the Virgin**

Hans Holbein the Elder (Ca. 1465-1524). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1500-1501.

**Triptych with the Death of Mary**

Joos van Cleve the Elder (Joos van der Beke). (1511-1540). Wallraf-Richartz Museum –Köln. Around 1515.

**The Death of the Virgin**

Francesco Coghetti (1804-1875). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

*The Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin***The Assumption of the Virgin**

Guido Reni (1575-1642). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Lyon. 1637.

**The Coronation of the Virgin**

Fra Angelico (ca. 1400-1455). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Around 1430-1435.

The painting of the 'Coronation of the Virgin' of Fra Angelico is altogether in a very, very different style as compared to Caravaggio's 'Death of the Virgin'. Fra Angelico made the picture for the church of San Domenico in the village of Fiesole, which lies on a hill near Florence. The panel is a relatively early one: Fra Angelico was thirty to thirty-five years old. Yet, it is one of his more elaborate pictures. Fra Angelico has tried to give us a feeling of all the heavenly majesty he could imagine. The picture is exquisitely drawn in the best tradition of Florentine grace, but this is the grace of a heavenly painter itself at work, more than of a particular style.

Christ is on his throne on a high pedestal and Mary kneels at his feet. Mary kneels to receive the crown that will make her the Queen of Heavens. This is the final consecration of Mary's position in the church. All around the throne angels are playing music: mandolins, violins, trumpets sound the heavenly music. All the saints have gathered too. There is Mary Magdalene with the balm vase, Saints Anne and Elisabeth, and Saint Catherine with the wheel on which she was tortured. The saints are painted in the traditional medieval way with the instruments of their martyrdom. Saint Peter is dressed in the magnificent, richly ornamented cope of the Popes. Most of the saints have their backs to the viewer, but some turn their heads in chatting: this is a lively scene where everybody shares in the glory and happiness of the Virgin.

The male saints are mostly to the left; the female saints stand to the right. This also was tradition. The lesser place on the left of Jesus was reserved to women.

The painting 'The Coronation of the Virgin' strikes by its light, pure colours and by the lavishly applied gold leaves. Fra Angelico always used these exquisite pure tones and the gold was used since very old times to indicate the majesty of the saints and of God. Fra Angelico let the crisp colours contrast with each other to every liveliness one can imagine. Mostly the blue and reds contrast thus. But Fra Angelico brought also balance in the colours. Indeed, there can be no disorder in the heavenly schemes. So, Saint Peter, the first Pope, is painted in a green cope. This colour is answered by a woman saint to the right who is also in green. The same symmetry can be found in the long blue cloak of the saint on the extreme left since a lady saint is also in blue to the right. The distances between these figures are the same. There is an equal distance between the blue-green-blue-green colour areas. The same symmetries in colour are applied in other places in the painting: see the pairs of angels that are playing music next to the Virgin: twice blue-red balances.

The symmetries of colours are accompanied by symmetries in lines. Look for instance at the long trumpets of the angels on both sides of the throne. The main scene in the middle of the painting, the coronation, is a traditional pyramid the top of which lies in the eye of God.

This is a picture one will not tire of admiring; so many elements to discover have been assembled in it in such an intelligent and harmonious way. Fra Angelico has brought all the glory of the church in this painting. There is no better example of the majesty of Christianity as it could be shown to the people of Florence.

Here is what Giorgio Vasari wrote around 1550 in the first edition of his book 'The Lives of the Artists' (translation by George Bull). "Of all the paintings he did, the one in which Fra Angelico surpasses himself and which displayed to perfection his talent and knowledge as a painter was a panel picture found in San Domenico on the left hand as one enters the church. This shows the Coronation of Our Lady by Jesus Christ, with a choir of angels and a multitude of male and female saints, so many in number, so beautifully depicted, with such variety in their attitudes and expressions that in looking at them one is overwhelmed with pleasure and delight. Those blessed spirits, one imagines, must appear in heaven just as Fra Angelico has painted them, or rather would appear so if they had bodies; because all the saints that are there, male and female, are full of life, their expressions are gentle and charming, and, moreover, the colouring could well be the work of one of the angels or saints themselves. So we can understand why the good friar was always called Fra Giovanni Angelico."<sup>G46</sup> There could be no better praise as this voice of the sixteenth century, a testimony to over three hundred years of admiration for the work of the angelic friar Giovanni who had only one aim in life: to exalt Jesus Christ and the holy dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church.

### *The Assumption of Mary*

We should end our series of pictures of Mary with the 'Coronation of the Virgin' of Fra Angelico, because there is no better pictorial culmination in the history of painting. However, Guido Reni's 'Assumption' is still a better fit to close the series because this image epitomises how millions of believers in countless generations saw the Virgin. The image presents the assumption of the Virgin into heavenly glory after her death. The concepts of the Assumption and of the Immaculate Conception are linked in a long history of bringing Mary to prominence. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, whereby the Virgin was considered to be free from the original sin, was systematised by Duns Scotus, a British theologian of the thirteenth century. But Pope Pius IX only defined it as dogma in 1854. When this dogma was promulgated, voices rose in the Catholic Church to accept also as dogma the concept of the Assumption. The church had to wait until 1950 however, when Pope Pius XII made that dogma also official.

These late dates show how constant the image of the Virgin Mother remained deep through the centuries in the minds of the Catholic Church. Yet, we sense also here some of the traditional hostility of the clergy to women. Catholic clergy contradictorily supported the image of Mary the mother. At the same time they could but see in her a woman. The image of Eve, the temptress who had brought evil and

original sin to men was always strong in the mind, even knowing that Mary had been totally obedient as opposed to Eve. However, God had lain an enmity between the serpent of evil and woman. Mary fulfilled this prophecy. The need to enforce the idea of victory of humility and gentleness over violence grew with the ages and culminated in the ever more glorious image of Mary.

This kind of picture of the Assumption has hung by the millions in the humblest houses of Europe. Guido Reni's image is the ideal of the glorious Mary. She opens her arms both to the heavens and to the love of the viewers. Her face radiates with sanctity. Angels support her and bring her gently to the heavens. The 'Assumption' is a suave, sentimental picture of devotion. One can easily pray to this picture. Mary's open arms also reminded of the cross on which her son Christ died. It was a picture of a woman and saint who could intercede. By intently looking at Mary's face, one could feel the same radiations of piety and love, the empathy, pity and love of the mother of all men and women. Mary's opening arms were ready to receive you, and her arms open the clouds as if to break sorrows, pierce secrets, and give assurance of the new hope that is the aim of all prayer.

Guido Reni has painted here an image as poetical, as lyrical as Raphael's Madonna's. Reni has stylised the image, as Raphael would have done. Perspective is added in the elongation of the body of Mary and in the long, flowing robes. Mary's body undulates gracefully so that energy and dynamism is brought in the picture. The elevation to the skies is thus caught on the canvas, yet the picture is peaceful.

Guido Reni worked in Bologna. He was born there in 1575; he died in 1642. Thus, Reni worked in the transition period when pictures of Catholic religion were not anymore the only pictures produced. The 'Assumption' was made for a church of Perugia, commissioned by a cardinal of Ravenna. When the French Revolutionary Army passed Perugia in 1797, the picture was taken away with many other masterpieces of Italian art and transported to France. The French armies were savage, but they were also accompanied by men who knew to appreciate art and who took only the best to their home country. Guido Reni had made various similar images of the Assumption of Mary. His images had success.

*Other paintings:*

**The Assumption of Destná**

Anonymous. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. Ca. 1450.

**The Assumption of the Virgin**

Francesco Solimena (1657-1747). The Courtauld Institute and Art Galleries – London. 1725.

**The Assumption of the Virgin**

Charles Poerson. National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. 1645-1650.

**The Lady of the Immaculate Conception**

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618-1682). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid. Around 1678.



**The Immaculate Conception**

Bernardo Cavallino (1616-1656°). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Caen. 1640.

**The Virgin amongst Virgins**

Gheeraert David (1460-1523). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen. 1509.

**The Assumption**

Tiziano Vecellio (ca. 1488-1576). Church of San Maria Gloriosa dei Frari – Venice. 1516-1518.

**The Coronation of the Virgin**

Paolo Veneziano (ca. 1333-1362). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice.

**The Assumption of the Virgin**

Domenikos Theotokópoulos called El Greco (1541-1614). The Art Institute of Chicago – Chicago. 1577.

**The Assumption of the Virgin**

Gaspard de Crayer (1584-1669). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon. Dijon. 1624-1630.

**The Assumption of the Virgin**

Giovanni Agostino da Lodi. Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. Late 15<sup>th</sup>, early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**The Assumption of the Virgin**

Simon Vouet (1590-1649). Musée Saint Denis. Reims. 1644.

**The Assumption of the Virgin**

Agostino Carracci (1557-1602). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

**The Assumption of the Virgin**

Annibale Carracci (1560-1609). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

**The Assumption of the Virgin**

Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556). Saint Maria Assunta Parish Church. Celana di Caprino Bergamasco. 1527.

**The Assumption of the Virgin**

Zavattari (active 15<sup>th</sup> century). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**The Assumption of the Virgin**

Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1512.

**The Assumption of the Virgin**

Alessandro Bonvicino called Il Moretto da Brescia (ca. 1497/1498 – 1552). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**The Assumption of the Virgin**

Giovan Battista Moroni (ca. 1520/1524-1578). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1570.

**The Assumption of the Virgin**

Martin Knoller (1725-1804). ). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1788.

**Mary's Ascension**

Master of the Vyssi Brod Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Before 1350.

**Coronation of the Virgin with Saints**

Andrea di Bartolo (1360/1365 – 1428) and Giorgio di Andrea (active 1410 – 1428). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

**The Coronation of the Virgin**

Lorenzo Monaco (ca. 1370-1425). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence. 1414.

**The Coronation of the Virgin**

Vitale da Bologna. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1340-1345.

**The Assumption of the Virgin**

Nicolò Filotesio called Cola dell'Amatrice (ca. 1480-1547). Pinacoteca Capitolina, Palazzo dei Conservatore – Rome.

**The Coronation of the Virgin in Heaven**

Michele Giambono (active ca. 1420-1462). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice

**The Coronation of the Virgin**

Jacobello del Fiore and assistants (active first half of the fifteenth century). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice.

**The Coronation of the Virgin**

Gentile da Fabriano (ca. 1370-1427). The J. Paul Getty Museum. Los Angeles. Ca. 1420.

**The Assumption of Mary with Apostles, Saints and Devotes**

Benedetto Bembo (1470-after 1489). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**The Coronation of the Virgin**

Nicolò di Pietro (active ca. 1394-1430). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

**The Coronation of the Virgin**

Ambrogio da Fossano called Bergognone (ca. 1453-1523). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1522.

**The Coronation of the Virgin with Saints Francis of Assisi and Benedict**

Marco Palmezzano (1459-1539). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

*The Death of Joseph***The Death of Joseph**

Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1832-1836.

**The Death of Saint Joseph**

Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828). The Monastery of San Joaquín y Santa Ana – Valladolid. 1787.

*Johann Friedrich Overbeck*

Johann Friedrich Overbeck was born in a family of Protestant pastors. His father was mayor of Lübeck. Overbeck was not destined however to become a theologian. At eighteen he went to Vienna and studied painting at the Academy there. He longed nevertheless for the traditional Christian themes that his family had repeated so many times to him and he admired the noble painting style of the artists from the times before Raphael in Italy, their images of purity and resplendent expression of faith. He wanted to paint religious pictures in an artistic world impregnated by themes of classical antiquity. Therefore he left for Rome in 1810, hoping to find there the rests of a more pious atmosphere. With a few friends, painters also, he settled in the abandoned former Franciscan monastery of San Isidoro. His friends were Peter Cornelius, Wilhelm Schadow and Philip Veit. They all worked on religious themes and tried to revive the art of Pietro Perugino and Pinturicchio, in clear and simple representations. The painters wore their hair long and kept them together with a piece of cloth, so the Romans soon called them somewhat mockingly the 'Nazarenes'. Johann Friedrich Overbeck converted to Catholicism in 1813. The Nazarene group made several frescoes in Rome and also oil paintings. The ways the artists of the Nazarene movement painted became ultimately a major style of the late nineteenth century, not just in Rome, but from there also in Germany and Austria. All but Overbeck returned to Germany and Austria, to become professors and directors of the main art academies of Vienna, Düsseldorf, Munich and Berlin. Many of the artists received high distinctions and worked for princes and kings. Overbeck however remained in Rome and he died there in 1869.

Several German, Austrian and Swiss notables supported the Nazarenes in Rome. Among them was the German Consul Bartholdy. Bartholdy commissioned them to paint frescoes in his Roman palace. The Nazarenes, among which also Overbeck, painted scenes from the life of Joseph the Egyptian in the Casa Bartholdy and these frescoes were later brought back to Berlin, where they are now in the National Gallery of the town. The name of Joseph remained important for the Nazarenes, since this was their first great and common work. Another supporter was a rich Swiss heiress called Emilie Linder (1797-1867), a painter herself, a lady that remained unmarried but who collected paintings for her house in Basel. She acquired many pictures from the Nazarenes. She also met Johann Friedrich Overbeck in Rome, during one of her stays in the Papal city. The 'Death of Saint Joseph' was one of the paintings she bought in Rome and brought to her hometown.<sup>C3</sup> Emilie Linder had also been a Protestant converted to Catholicism. Miss Linder gave her collection of paintings to the Kunstmuseum of Basel, and in this museum is still the 'Death of Joseph'.

Saint Joseph was the patron of the carpenters, and devotion to Joseph became common especially from the seventeenth century on. An apocryphal text, the 'History of Joseph the carpenter' is the account of Joseph's death. In this history, Joseph fears death and he is obsessed with self-reproach. Mary and Jesus comfort him and promise solace and protection in his name to all those who do well while remembering him. In the text Joseph is the feeble, doubting man and Johann Friedrich Overbeck may have read the account and drawn some parallels with his own doubting as an artist.

Johann Friedrich Overbeck painted a much depleted, simple 'Death of Joseph'. We see three figures: Mary, Jesus and Joseph. Joseph is dying or has just passed away. He lies down, but his upper body is in Jesus's lap. Jesus blesses Joseph. Mary sits in prayer, on her knees, hands folded, in front of the father and son. The image is equivocal. Jesus is the Son that is not the son. Overbeck may have brought attention again to the difficult theological concept of the Immaculate Conception, of the question of who was the father of Jesus. But father is also he who raises a child, cares for him while it is in need of protection during the vulnerable years of youth and finally offers it the chances of autonomous life. That, Joseph has done so that Jesus's empathy with Joseph is sincere. Such is also the message that the angels give above, the blessings from heaven for Joseph.

The scene is an image of warmth, of loving and caring – now of the son for the father. Johann Friedrich Overbeck indicated this in colours foremost, but also in a few subtle gestures of the figures. Jesus blesses Joseph, but he holds him in his lap to offer the old Joseph the comfort that he, Jesus, received in his youth. Jesus also softly laid a hand on Joseph's shoulder to, by a touch, show his link with his father and physically also tell Joseph that he is with him. Jesus thus blesses Joseph and gives him his spiritual protection but also the human solace. The figure of Jesus, as shown by Overbeck, thus represents in subtle signs also the dual nature of Jesus. Mary also looks in pity at the man that has given her the same comfort as Jesus. Joseph has sheltered both in the same way. The link therefore is equally between Mary and Jesus. Now they have only eyes for Joseph, not for each other, but their figures are drawn at the same height, joined in the same emotions.

Overbeck painted Mary and Jesus also in almost the same colours. Jesus wears a grey-blue robe and a grey-red cloak. Mary wears a greyish green to blue cloak but parts of her red robe, lined with the same delicate golden patterns as on Jesus's cloak, can be seen at her neck and sleeves. Mary and Jesus form almost the same and symmetric areas of colours. They both incline their head towards the lower middle, towards Joseph and therefore also lead and keep the viewer's attention on the figure of Joseph. Joseph's robe is of a colour that joins the hues of Jesus's robe and Mary's cloak but Overbeck gave Joseph a broken white cloak, which reminds already of the white linen in which Joseph's body will be enveloped when it will be laid in the tomb.

Johann Friedrich Overbeck made a composition in his 'Death of Joseph' that is rigid, simple and very obvious. He emphasised the vertical lines in Mary and Jesus. In doing so he makes the viewer remember ancient gothic pictures. In these pictures also landscape was frugal, whereas one finds often an open window behind the scene of the main figures. Overbeck likewise situated the 'Death of Joseph' in a room and the landscape seen through the open window remained equally simple. We see only the

long, slowly sloping rims of granite hills. The horizontal lines of the window sill, as well as the horizontal lines of Joseph's body are the horizontal links between Mary and Jesus, so that the structure of the composition is very rigid. It thus inspires rest, perpetuity, equilibrium in the viewer. Other long horizontal lines are in the very lowest part of the painting, where we see the lining of a thin cloth laid on the ground. This cloth is of the same colour as Mary's cloak and Jesus's robe and it blends with the background, with the dark hues of the walls. Overbeck painted the scene before the open window and the dawn breaks, since a bleak light appears above the hills. But light in the painting seems to come from the lower left, to fall more clearly on Joseph. Still, the light remains discreet and only serves to shape the volumes of the figures. This also was a Gothic and Renaissance way of representation, unlike the Baroque's full contrasts between light and shadows.

Finally, Overbeck painted five little angels above, explaining the scene to the viewer. Here Overbeck used lighter colours, but the painting remains overall in the same tone and intensity of hues. Overbeck avoided colours of high intensity. All colours contain much grey. The colours should have been warm: red, deep blue, broken white to grey. Overbeck painted them all rather greyish or brownish in subdued intensity, and this indicated the departure of colour in death. Overbeck used colour to support the mood, to support the colourless face of Joseph as it enters death. He painted his various colour areas in one hue, only modulated by chiaroscuro, as early Renaissance fresco painters would have done.

Johann Friedrich Overbeck made thus a fine painting that does not deliver an immediate, strong impression on the viewer. Overbeck avoided bringing over powerful emotions to the viewer. The picture was quite in line with Overbeck's views of religion. He addressed religion in a sincere, individualistic, humble way, like he believed the attitude of a true Christian should be. In Baroque Rome, this was a very Protestant view, even if Overbeck was now a Catholic. His style of composition and his use of colours are flawless and therefore a little weak. But Overbeck dared to represent a subject that not so many artists dared to touch: the equivocal relationship of father to son between Jesus and Joseph, and that also was a Protestant interrogation. Very probably however, there was no equivocal feeling in the matter for Overbeck, no issue in the representation of the scene. For Johann Friedrich Overbeck Jesus was the Son of God but Jesus could also lovingly care for his human, adopted father Joseph. Overbeck defied anybody who might think otherwise; with the innocence of his true sincerity.

*Francisco de Goya y Lucientes*

The second painting we present of the death of Joseph is a picture of Francisco de Goya y Lucientes. Jesus is present at the deathbed of Joseph. This is a tender scene, less formal than the paintings of Joseph of Anton Raphael Mengs and more solemn than the George de La Tour picture with the figure of Joseph. Joseph is dressed in a long yellow or golden robe, which continues, in the golden cloth on the bed. It is a very human scene with Mary pleading for her husband and Jesus tenderly touching the hands of Joseph as if to lead him into paradise. A shaft of light falling from the left upper corner suggests the heavenly grace on Joseph. In Goya's picture the horizontal and vertical lines are prominent, just like in Overbeck's view. The bed and Joseph are horizontal; Mary and Christ are standing. Thus contrast life and death. The same contrast between life and death is perceived in the feeble, open-mouthed, pitifully

dying Joseph and the youthful figures of Jesus and even of Mary. The colours are simple and also contrasting blue, yellow, and grey.

Goya rarely made religious scenes though he painted such scenes early as well as late in life. This painting was made in his mature years; Goya was forty-one, and he worked mostly on commissions from the court. The picture was made for the monastery of Santa Ana de Valladolid and commissioned by the Bourbon King Charles IV of Spain. The Bernardines of this monastery were devoted to the cult of the Holy Family, of which Joseph was part. Goya made a picture for the church of the court architect Sabatini. The painting's structure such as the falling light matched its placing in the building.

*Adoration of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception***Federico Borromeo before the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception**

Carlo Francesco Nuvolone (1609-1661). Chiesa Collegiata di Santa Maria. Arona. 1642.

Carlo Francesco Nuvolone was born in Milan in 1609. His father was Panfilo Nuvolone, a Mannerist painter. Carlo Francesco studied at the Ambrosiana academy in Milan. He was a pupil of Giovanni Battista Crespi called Il Cerano and with Il Morazzone, Giulio Cesare Procaccini and other artists, he was one of the excellent Baroque Milanese painters that epitomised the splendid Milanese revival in art. This splendour of art could rival with what happened in Rome and Paris. Nuvolone worked for churches for abbeys and he also made portraits. He had nice gifts for composition and colours. He produced many altarpieces, painted frescoes, and his work was thus mostly religious since that was where most of the Milanese creation was directed to, the Spanish rulers over the city being less interested in decorating and embellishing their possessions. Nuvolone was an artist who absorbed the new tendencies in art, the styles of his contemporaries. Yet he also could show powerful pictures of his own design. He died in 1661.

Nuvolone's picture of 'Federico Borromeo showing the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception' dates from 1642. Cardinal Federico Borromeo had died in 1631, so this picture was painted in memory of the Cardinal. Milan's beginning of the seventeenth century was of Federico Borromeo. The cardinal was born in 1564, already a cardinal at the age of twenty-three (he was consecrated in 1587). He was made Archbishop of Milan in 1595 by Pope Clement VIII. He was also the cousin and successor of Saint Charles Borromeo, San Carlo Borromeo, and these two men truly ruled Milan by their example of virtue, dignity, religious zeal, as well as by their energy in the service of Milan. Moreover, Federico Borromeo loved the arts and he had the wealth to acquire art. He also had a profound interest for the sciences. Borromeo was a learned man, not just a younger cousin that had been chosen to a family function. He had studied at Bologna University, at Pavia and in Rome. He favoured education for the Milanese. He was the Italian counter-weight to the Spanish rulers of the city and he balanced their arrogance with patience and magnificence. He was a very pious man and a charitable man. During the great famish and plague of 1627 to 1628 in Milan, he managed his clergy in the treatment of the disease. Many priests died, but Borromeo inspired them to tend to the sick. He comforted the sick himself, fed the poor from out of his own churches and became thus much beloved by the people of Milan.

Federico Borromeo founded one of the first public libraries of Italy, the Ambrosian Library, and he was a real maecenas for the arts in Milan. In the Ambrosian library he assembled not only books but also scientists, men like the mathematician Bonaventura Francesco Cavalieri. Federico Borromeo brought Cavalieri in contact with Galileo Galilei. In 1621 he founded the Ambrosiana gallery, which still exists today as one of the great museums of paintings in Milan, and he brought his private collection to that gallery. He bought many paintings from Milanese artists and filled his churches with their work. He also admired foreign artists however, such as artists from as far as Flanders. He corresponded with Jan Brueghel of Antwerp and bought from him many fine Flemish landscapes, a genre that was not in favour in Italy at that moment, but that appealed to the Cardinal. Borromeo founded churches and colleges. He worked at

the Duomo of Milan. He died in his beloved city in 1631. His fame continues to this day.

Carlo Francesco Nuvolone must have many times met Cardinal Federico Borromeo. With time, the impression the master had of the Cardinal must have even improved and softened, for he painted Borromeo with a face that expresses only kindness and intelligence.

Nuvolone painted Cardinal Federico Borromeo presenting the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, the ultimate symbol in Roman Catholicism of goodness of heart, forgiveness, charity and intercession with God. The figure of the Holy Virgin is the figure of intercessor with God the Father that represents most the link between God the Father, the Son, and humanity. Borromeo shows peace and sweetness to the viewer. He shows the Virgin with his two hands, wholeheartedly, and he emphasises that the dignity and authority of his function in the church is nothing compared to Mary's qualities. The cardinal wears the purple that was the colour of emperors only in antiquity, but his face is not haughty and he attracts the viewer not to his humble person, but directs him or her to the virgin immediately and totally. Such was the message of piety and religious devotion to the true values of love in Christianity of Federico Borromeo and of Nuvolone. Of course, the Cardinal was a keen administrator and manager and he must have kicked to action many a man, but it is only in goodness that Nuvolone remembers the Cardinal.

Federico Borromeo has a dignified, soft but sophisticated face. It is the face of a scholar that Nuvolone shows. The fine moustache and beard have gone white and thinned, but Borromeo remained a man who cared also for himself and for his appearance. His eyes are soft and mild, and his mouth a little sad. Borromeo has made his the worries of the world, so he has become silvery-white on them and the wrinkles around his eyes denote the work spent in the service of his flock, which was the entire Milanese population.

The cardinal shows the Virgin to the viewer. The Mary that is depicted is the Lady of the Apocalypse of Saint John, the woman that God has placed to crush the dragon of evil. We receive thus again a message of goodness prevailing over the world. The dragon is indeed a terrifying beast, with a horrible, long snout and red-flaming tongue protruding from an impressive set of teeth. Despite its fierceness, the immaculate Virgin dominates the animal easily, unarmed and with her bare feet.

In the figure of the Virgin, Nuvolone proved that he was the true Baroque artist. Nuvolone painted cardinal Borromeo with a gesture that shows the Virgin, a gesture that is a movement in the picture and not a static poise. Thus, the Cardinal is a dynamic figure. It was not evident to lend the impression of movement in paintings, but the Baroque painters and Nuvolone in particular learned how to instil these impressions of dynamic views very efficiently. They had at their disposal quite limited means for that in the art of painting, but they became masters in showing motion in their works. The figure of the Virgin too, is a very dynamic figure. Nuvolone made her twist her body in a graceful bend to look at the dragon beneath her. Therefore, she turns her body and also her right knee. In order to emphasise the movement further, the Virgin extends her left arm outwards to form a counter-weight. Her right arm points to the heavens and it also strengthens the equilibrium of her



body. The arm keeps her body to the right side of the view. If Nuvolone had left the figure like that, it would have seemed that the Virgin would soon fall to the right side of the frame. There would have been no balance in the figure. So, Nuvolone needed a mass of colours to check the movement to the right. He solved the issue by letting the wind blow into the blue cloak of the virgin, opening the cloak and blowing the cloth gloriously in marvellous shades and chiaroscuro of blue, to the left. This blue mass of colours balances the outstretched left arm and hand of Mary. It balances the flowing gown and accentuates even more the expression of movement in Mary's figure. It would be hard to bring more sense of motion in a figure of a painting, while still preserving balance. Carlo Francesco Nuvolone succeeded wonderfully in this task.

The Virgin is clad in a white robe and a blue cloak. The blue colours envelop the Virgin and Nuvolone gave by some miracle of his art a feeling of the heaviness of the cloth, so that the Virgin seems enveloped in warm velvet despite the coldness of the blue hue. Nuvolone painted the blue cloak in darker tones and yellow and red glows soften the pureness of the colder blue. The blue colour however contrasts finely with the broken white and with the light brown hues on Mary's robe. This contrast makes a striking area of colours in the centre of the picture, attracting the eye of the spectator. Nuvolone demonstrated his skills in chiaroscuro and in shading, in depicting the contours of Mary's body by play of light on the robe alone. The light plays downwards, from the golden heavens down, all the way along Mary's upper body, arms, and her long legs. Borromeo shows this marvel of a figure of the painted Mary.

We must linger on Mary's figure. It has always been a wonder in art to make a painting or a sculpture of a human body and to show it in a way that suggests not only grace and movement, but that is also original and natural. Artists could spend weeks of trials and drawing sketches at finding the exact, new poise that was both surprising and fine. Few painters and sculptors have really succeeded in the act. The textbook example is Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres' picture of 'The Source'. Nuvolone succeeded as well as Ingres, two centuries earlier, in finding a poise for the Virgin that was natural and new, gracious, light, delicate, and dynamic. The curves of Nuvolone's Virgin are as fluent, evident, consistent and balanced as the lines of Ingres' nude. But Nuvolone's Mary is a lot livelier and shows the inspiration of love.

The spectator's view may be attracted first to the bright red figure of Borromeo. Cardinal Federico Borromeo points upwards and towards the Virgin. The Virgin points to the heavens. That heaven is filled with brightness, just above the Virgin. Mary suggests that the true powers all originate in these heavens, in God, and when her right arm links her to God, the look of her eyes go towards the evil, to the dragon under her feet, to the temptation of mankind. She channels the powers of god to the dragon.

We find the Cardinal at that lower level too, a position of humility, for Nuvolone has not placed the Cardinal at the height of the Virgin. Nuvolone regarded and painted the Cardinal as a pious, humble and gentle man, who did not seek to be assimilated with kings or saints. Mary is a queen all right, for she wears the crown of her status. There existed many paintings in the Renaissance and in Nuvolone's own times made on the theme of the 'Coronation of the Virgin', so Nuvolone could crown Mary with a golden royal crown without theological problems. The Cardinal's gesture, Mary's gesture to the heavens, and the white light above Mary, form an upward aspiration in

the picture that is the elevation to spirituality, bringing an additional sublimation and inspiration of fine feelings in the viewer. The viewer's eyes are directed by the painter to the golden heaven, where God's light breaks through the clouds. There, the angels, emanations of God, come in pairs and always one angel looks upward, the other downward. In the very bright light we find Mary's face, sweet and mild, a face with very regular and soft features.

Carlo Francesco Nuvolone's painting 'Federico Borromeo showing the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception' is truly a masterpiece of composition, of colours and of mastery of details. Nuvolone expressed apparently easily, almost nonchalantly, the spiritual aspiration of the Cardinal, as well as the noble, devoted character of the wise Cardinal of Milan. Nuvolone was a very intelligent artist, who sold simple pictures that were however extremely sophisticated in all aspects of the art of painting and showed true genius.

*The Immaculate Conception***The Declaration of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception**

Francesco Podesti (1810-1895). Pinacoteca Comunale. Ancona. 1856.

Francesco Podesti made a painting that was a carton for frescoes to be made in the Vatican for the proclamation of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the virgin in 1854. Pope Pius IX officially enacted the dogma in the bull 'Ineffabilis Deus' and the proclamation was the final expression of the cult of the virgin Mary. Feasts were organised throughout Rome and the world. The Pope even asked Francesco Podesti to decorate with his frescoes the Papal apartments and these paintings were to be made next to the old stanzas of the 'Fire in the Borgo' by Raphael. Podesti presented four cartons to Pius IX, among which the one we propose here. The Pope discussed the subject with the painter and gave his preferences. Podesti studied about a hundred figures that were present at the ceremony in Saint Peter's basilica, and at which assisted fifty-three cardinals and a hundred forty-two other dignitaries of the Catholic Church.<sup>137</sup>

Francesco Podesti was born in Ancona, where the local gallery, the 'Pinacoteca Civica di Ancona', now bears his name. He came to Rome early, still a young man. He worked in Rome for the Pope and for the wealthy bankers of the city. In the second half of the century he also painted in Milan, and worked there for the aristocracy of northern Italy. He was a painter of historical, patriotic, classical and religious themes of the Romantic period. This was a period during which new wealth grew in Europe and also during which nations consolidated. The kingdom of Italy was being founded and Rome had gone through a period of rebellions in which even the Republic of Rome had been proclaimed. But Rome was now again governed by the Popes; Pius IX marked the end of the troubles by the feasts of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception. This period in the history of western Europe needed grand scenes to decorate the pride of the nations, to illustrate the great feats of the countries and to laude the accomplishments of its more famous citizens. Francesco Podesti was part of this movement, like other master painters of Europe such as Daniel Maclise in England, Gyula Benczúr in Hungary, Louis Gallait in Belgium, Hans Makart in Austria or Henri Laurens in France. Still, Podesti had a style of his own. He painted in strong hues and strong brushstrokes, yet that could give the viewer from a distance an impression of great detail in his depiction. Podesti's 'Proclamation of the Dogma' is such a painting.

The 'Proclamation of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception' is truly a majestic scene, as it should be for a picture that would have to compete with Raphael's stanzas in the Vatican. Podesti split the scene in two parts. At the bottom he showed the ceremony of the proclamation in Saint Peter's basilica. Above this scene he showed the glory of the Virgin Mary in heaven. Angels form the link on both sides of the frame between the two scenes.

In the lower part we see the Pope sitting on his throne. The cardinals and high dignitaries of the Catholic Church are sitting around him in council. The Pope receives the bull and will officially announce the Dogma. The scene is grand. The Pope thrones like an emperor and he is dressed in a white robe and a brilliant golden cloak. In the darkness of the hall, the white screen behind the Pope and the white throne catch all attention. Podesti emphasised the earthly grandeur and pomp of the ceremony, rather than the spiritual act. But the Pope is only the worldly instrument of the heavens. So Podesti drew a ray of light that comes from the scene above and envelopes the Pope, thus justifying the divine inspiration of the act of the Pope. The figure that sends the light is the Holy Spirit, who also holds Mary's crown, and the rays go over Saint Paul, the spiritual sword of Christianity.

In the upper part, and around the virgin, stand the apostles, martyrs, and saints, obviously called together by god to witness the proclamation in the heavens. Above Mary, to the sides of God the Father sit the apostles. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are next to her. Then to the left on the frame we see the saints. To the right are the Roman kings and emperors, such as Constantine who institutionalised the Christian faith in Rome's antiquity. To the far left a lady saint holds high the sign of the cross in a very epic act and here angels with trumpets and books call together the lords of heaven. On the extreme right side then avenging angels drive away the wicked with sword of fire. The declaration of the Pope was ordered by the heavens, so Podesti showed the symbiosis between the Catholic Church and the realm of God. The Virgin stands in full glory, against the light of a sun, and above her we see God the Father. This presentation is epic, composed as a historical scene with all the actors together, in the world and in heaven.

Besides a structure in two bands, Podesti also drew a pyramid structure with God the father at the top. The sides of the pyramid go over Saint Peter and Saint Paul, to the central lower scene in which we find the Pope and his cardinals engaged in the proclamation. Podesti brought then various symmetries in lines and colours of the painting, which are easily discovered.

Francesco Podesti's work has more interest for its theme and for its sheer photographic witnessing than for its artistic expression. We have a reproduction of the event, nicely composed and painted. Podesti showed for next generations the grandeur of the moment. But we do not have with this a scene that reflects on the theme, or an emotional expression of the spiritual significance of the miracle of Mary's Immaculate Conception.

*Other Paintings:*

### **The Disputation over the Immaculate Conception**

Girolamo Genga (ca. 1476-1551). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1516-1518.

