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### Defining the boundaries of the lawful cult - History of an Adriatic Icon

The aim of this paper is to analyze the public use of an icon in the early modern era, namely a Virgin Annunciate, painted at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century by an artist of the Adriatic area and currently preserved in the Cathedral of Fermo, in the Marche Region.

Cross-checking the reports of Venanzio da Fabriano (biographer of the observant preacher Giacomo della Marca) and the records of the council of the town of Fermo, it is possible to reconstruct the intriguing events occurred in 1473. On March 12, fra Giacomo preached against that Albanian Peter, "a scoundrel and a drunkard", to which the Virgin appeared in a vision, asking him to build a church, which would protect the population against epidemics. For this church, then, the Albanian commissioned an image, perhaps depicting his vision, which was venerated with great enthusiasm by the population. Since his threats of excommunication and his preaching against these practices, promoted by a man that was not part of the Church, were ineffective, fra Giacomo tried to stop the idolatrous cult and to bring the townspeople back to orthodoxy with another method: he gave the community a valuable and ancient icon, directly painted by St. Luke the Evangelist. People had to abandon the error and bring in procession the true image of the Virgin, seen by St. Luke, against the one realized after the fake vision of the Albanian. Thanks to the prohibition on venerating the painting of the Albanian and the gift of this authentic icon, fra Giacomo succeeded in bringing back the management of what is "sacred" within the boundaries of the Church. Following these events, the municipality put the image under the care of the Observant friars (in the Annunziata church), who started to regularly organize processions with the icon.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the friars put on the altar where the icon was venerated, a now lost painting with St. Giacomo della Marca, canonized in 1726, receiving the icon as a gift by the pope. According to later sources, the preacher had indeed received this icon from a pope, who in turn had had it from a hermit, who had saved the icon from the Turkish invasion of Constantinople. Probably on the same occasion, the friars glued on the back of the wooden case that contained the icon a painting on canvas (now in the Diocesan Museum of Fermo), which was to be seen by the devotees when the image was carried in procession. In this painting, divided into four sectors, the "new" history of the icon is told in detail: in the first episode St. Luke makes the painting; in the second a Greek hermit gives the icon to a pope to protect it from the Turks; in the third episode, the pope gives the image to fra Giacomo, who, in the last scene, puts it on the altar. This way the image reinforces the relationship between Giacomo della Marca and the pope, in function of the canonization of the saint, but also, for the same reason, the connection of the preacher with St. Luke, the special saint painter. Forgotten by now the real cause of the icon's arrival in Fermo (given by fra Giacomo to the municipality to stop a heretical cult, and placed in custody in the church by the municipality), the positioning of the image under the painting with the new saint and the application of the canvas behind the icon served mainly to highlight the importance of St. Giacomo, his relationship with the pope and his generosity toward the Fermo community.