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**The Altarpieces by Bernardo Zenale at the Getty and Denver Art Museums
Two Case Studies for the Iconography of the Immaculate Conception**

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The essay summarizes the most important results of the last sixty years of research on the iconography of the Immaculate Conception, arguing that two crucial aspects have become progressively clearer, namely the issues of “invention” and “caution.” As for “invention”, the two liturgical offices which Pope Sixtus IV assigned to the feast of December 8th have been identified as the main source of inspiration for most representations of the Immaculate Conception in Italian Renaissance art. “Caution”, on the other hand, refers to the need for prudent propaganda felt by the supporters of the Immaculate Conception, especially by those living in major centers, where ecclesiastical authorities might easily have reported any form of excessive immaculist propaganda to the Inquisition. The essay argues that the altarpieces painted by Bernardo Zenale for two Franciscan churches, one in Cantù (1502), the other in Milan (1510), well represent the issues of “invention” and “caution. First, both paintings visualize concepts and figures that the liturgical office by Bernardino de’ Bustis, a Milanese Franciscan, had made quite popular, particularly in Lombardy and Milan. Second, most of the concepts and figures here visualized do not refer to Mary’s exemption from Original Sin in an obvious way: on the contrary, they require some decoding. This is especially true for Zenale’s altarpiece for San Francesco Grande in Milan, which is highly cryptic, confirming that the need for cautious propaganda must have been stronger in Milan than in peripheral Cantù.

Keywords: Immaculate Conception, Bernardo Zenale, Leonardo da Vinci, *Virgin of the Rocks*, Bernardino de’ Bustis, confraternity, propaganda, Inquisition, invention, caution, liturgical offices, geological landscape

Since Mirella Levi d’Ancona’s seminal study of 1957,¹ scholarship on the iconography of the Immaculate Conception in the Italian Renaissance has made great progress. The process of verifying and further investigating Levi d’Ancona’s important intuitions started in the 1980s, when an international group of scholars – among whom one should remember at least Pier Luigi De Vecchi, Rona Goffen, and Laura Dal Prà – published some enlightening studies on the iconography of the Immaculate Conception in Lombardy, Venice, and Tuscany.² Shortly thereafter, Emilia Romagna and the Marches became the object of my own investigations.³ As far as Rome and the rest of Italy are concerned, “immaculist” representations (i.e. referring to the Immaculate Conception) received attention in the regions spanning from Liguria to Calabria especially after 2004, when the 150th anniversary of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (1854) was celebrated. On that occasion, a series of exhibitions and publications on this subject took place, thus bringing renewed attention to a subject which appears to be an inextinguishable source of fascinating interpretations.⁴

In this essay, I will summarize the most important results of the last sixty years of art-historical research on the Immaculate Conception. In the first part, I will argue that two crucial aspects of this iconography have become progressively clearer: one concerns the issue of “invention,” the other the question of “caution.” Whereas the issue of invention has been extensively investigated by now, and the results of these investigations are unanimously acknowledged, the question of caution still needs to be understood in all its implications. This is precisely the issue I will address in the second part of my essay, where I will argue that the immaculist overtones which are detectable in Leonardo’s *Virgin of the Rocks* find confirmation in two of its most beautiful derivations, namely the

altarpieces by Bernardo Zenale now in Los Angeles and Denver respectively. However, while the Getty painting did belong to a chapel dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, which makes its interpretation in light of this Marian cult quite legitimate, the work at the Denver Art Museum requires some further decoding.

Invention and Caution

By “invention” I refer to the fact that the early representations of the Immaculate Conception, dating from the 1480s to the 1530s, present an exceptional variety of iconographic solutions. Today, this phenomenon is unanimously understood as the consequence of both the novelty and the complexity of the Marian privilege which those representations were attempting to visualize, namely the doctrine according to which the Virgin Mary is the only human being exempted from Original Sin from the very first moment of her conception.⁵ From the early 1480s on, right after Pope Sixtus IV had granted official approval to the Immaculate Conception by assigning two new liturgies to the feast day of 8 December, patrons and painters were seeking the best possible way of representing a doctrine which “was both verbally and visually abstract,” as Kim Butler cleverly observed.⁶ The sequence of altarpieces by Crivelli (1492), Vincenzo Frediani (c. 1503), Girolamo Genga (c. 1518) and Guillaume de Marcillat (1528-1529) clearly demonstrates how greatly the first immaculist inventions could vary (figs. 1-4). In fact, we are dealing with an iconography “in progress”, in which well-known biblical figures were combined with brand new motives, each time anew, in the attempt to reach the most effective form of visual propaganda.⁷ However, and paradoxically enough, as much as these compositions differ from one another, all of them were inspired by the very same textual sources, and this applies to every figure as well as to every inscription included in these paintings. The identification of these sources with the two new liturgical texts which Sixtus IV assigned to the feast of 8 December, namely the two offices by the Franciscans Leonardo Nogarolo and Bernardino de’ Bustis (which the pope had approved respectively in 1477 and 1480), is probably the most significant achievement made by art historians on the Immaculate Conception so far.⁸ Since both offices include an exceptional number of metaphors and quotations, taken from the Bible as well as from the Patristics, it is no wonder at that time they became a treasure trove of inspiration for patrons and artists facing the problem of representing a subject which lacked a solid iconographic tradition.

The issue of “caution” within this iconography is far more complex. To the best of my knowledge, so far it has been addressed in a specific way only occasionally.⁹ In this context, Alessandro Zuccari’s essay on the immaculist imagery in Rome from the 15th to the 18th century (2005) deserves special attention.¹⁰ Zuccari has explained the lack of representations explicitly celebrating the Immaculate Conception, in Rome throughout the first half of the 16th century, as a consequence of the ambiguous and cautious position of the papacy. As is well known, not a single pope, including Sixtus IV himself, found the courage to elevate the immaculist doctrine to the status of dogma until Pius IX in 1854.¹¹ Such a persistent hesitation (or caution) on the side of the papacy was due mainly to the strong opposition of the Dominican Order, which managed to boycott the cult of the Immaculate Conception for centuries, persecuting its advocates by means of the Inquisition. This difficult situation, which John O’Malley had already pointed out in relation to the papal court between 1450 and 1521, where sermons on the Immaculate Conception appear to have been strictly forbidden,¹² was recently confirmed by Barbara Gaspar, a young scholar who has been investigating the Inquisition’s archives: Gaspar counted as many as nine volumes entirely devoted to legal suits against the Immaculate Conception, i.e. trials referring to problematic situations all over Italy as well as Spain.¹³

According to Alessandro Zuccari, it is precisely because of a general concern about the Dominicans’ opposition that popes like Sixtus IV and Julius II, both fervid supporters of the Immaculate Conception, restrained from commissioning works which would support this doctrine openly.¹⁴ As a result, they limited their patronage to more neutral iconographies, or to allusive imagery in which Mary’s exceptional conception was combined with other, undisputed tenets of faith. For instance, Perugino made use of a perfectly neutral iconography in the fresco he painted for the funerary chapel of Sixtus IV in Old St Peter’s (fig. 5), in spite of the fact that the chapel was dedi-



1 Carlo Crivelli, *The Immaculate Conception*, 1492, London, National Gallery (Wikimedia Commons)



2 Vincenzo Frediani, *The Immaculate Conception*, c. 1503, Lucca, Museo di Villa Guinigi



3 Girolamo Genga, *Dispute over the Immaculate Conception*, c. 1518, Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera



4 Guillaume de Marcillat, *Dispute over the Immaculate Conception*, 1528-1529, Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie

cated to the Immaculate Conception, as confirmed by its inauguration on no less than the very feast day of December 8th in 1479.¹⁵ The fresco at the time showed a rather plain *Madonna and Child in Glory* between four saints: to the left St Paul and St Peter (portrayed in the act of presenting the kneeling figure of Sixtus IV to the Virgin), to the right St Francis of Assisi and St Anthony of Padua. In fact, only the prominent presence of representatives of the Franciscan Order, which was always the strongest supporter of the Immaculate Conception, and to which Sixtus IV himself belonged, suggests that this fresco by Perugino may have carried immaculist overtones. On the other hand, allusive imagery hinting at both the Incarnation and the Immaculate Conception can be detected in Michelangelo's frescos in the Sistine ceiling, as Kim Butler demonstrated a few years ago.¹⁶

Caution, however, was hardly a prerogative of the Eternal City, as we can deduce from the lack of artworks explicitly celebrating the Immaculate Conception in other major Italian centers throughout the first three to four decades of the sixteenth century. In Florence, Venice, Bologna and Milan, where devotion to the Immaculate Conception is nevertheless well documented,¹⁷ we look in vain for iconographies full of explicit immaculist symbols and inscriptions. Most likely, this was due to the presence of the headquarters of the various mendicant orders' Provinces and their accompanying *studia*, where debates on Church doctrine were conducted at university level. Furthermore, among those mendicant orders were the Dominicans: under such circumstances, it would have been almost impossible to avoid the control of ecclesiastical authorities, who might easily have reported any form of excessive immaculist propaganda to the Inquisition.¹⁸

Leonardo's *Virgin of the Rocks* and the Office by Bernardino de' Bustis

Leonardo's *Virgin of the Rocks* provides a perfect example of this situation. The painting was commissioned in 1483 as part of a monumental wooden *ancona* that was to decorate the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception in the Church of San Francesco Grande in Milan, the headquarters of the conventual Franciscans.¹⁹ The *ancona* is lost, but its general appearance can be partially reconstructed thanks to the detailed *lista de li hornamenti* (list of ornaments) attached to the contract of 1483, and thanks also to a few analogous works by Giacomo Del Maino, who carved it (fig. 6).²⁰ The structure must have included a statue of the Virgin, a few scenes from her life, and a number of figures: in particular, the list mentions God the Father, mountains and stones, angels and sibyls, and the Christ Child, probably in a manger. The painting by Leonardo - almost certainly the version now at the National Gallery in London (fig. 7) - was somewhere at the center of the *ancona's* composition, with the two musician angels by Ambrogio de Predis (and possibly by another pupil of Leonardo) on its sides.²¹

There is no doubt that the iconographic program of the *ancona* had a strong mariological character; however, and quite tellingly, it did not include any obvious hint of the Immaculate Conception. This is remarkable. We must remember that Bernardino de' Bustis was the author of one of the two offices which had been approved by Sixtus IV for the feast of 8 December in 1477 (the office by Nogarolo) and 1480 (the one by de' Bustis), and which were destined to inspire the entire immaculist imagery of the next decades. Therefore the Milanese de' Bustis, who had entered the Franciscan Osservanza at a convent just outside Milan between 1475-1476,²² must have been working on his liturgy for the feast of the Immaculate Conception precisely in the late 1470s, namely the same years in which the newly founded Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception in San Francesco Grande began to plan the building of its chapel (1478), and its decoration. The latter included some frescoes in the vault, and the *ancona* by Giacomo del Maino. These works were commissioned in 1479 and 1480 respectively, while the completion of the *ancona*, as mentioned above, was assigned to Leonardo and the half-brothers Ambrogio and Evangelista de Predis just three years later.²³

Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that Bernardino de' Bustis, who must have stood out among the Milanese Franciscans as a real expert in the immaculist doctrine, was totally extraneous to the first major commission dedicated to the Immaculate Conception in Milan. On the other hand, in the last decades of the 15th century Milan must also have been the home of a strong "maculist" party, namely of theologians and devotees – mostly belong-

ing to the Dominican Order – who strenuously opposed the doctrine of Mary’s exemption from Original Sin from the very first moment of her conception. It was precisely in Milan, as early as 1475, that Vincenzo Bandello, who was definitely the most leading *maculista* of the time, and repeatedly attacked the immaculist doctrine and its advocates, published his first treatise against the Immaculate Conception.²⁴ In light of this, Leonardo’s invention for the Milanese *ancona* can be interpreted not only as the refined product of an autonomous mind, but also as the artist’s brilliant answer to a general need for caution on the part of his patrons.

As a matter of fact, most scholarship by now agrees that the *Virgin of the Rocks* carries immaculist overtones, and that a crucial part of its allusive character is to be found in the famous rocky background.²⁵ Interestingly enough, the latter must have echoed the mountainous landscape carved in the wooden *ancona*, since *montagne e sassi* had been specifically requested in the altarpiece’s “list of ornaments” of 1483.²⁶ As for Leonardo’s invention, the geological formations emerging from the misty background, while floods of water find their way towards the foreground, where the four characters are dangerously placed at the rugged edge of a “potential” abyss, set the scene in the same pre-creational state evoked by two biblical passages which the Franciscans frequently interpreted as referring to the Immaculate Conception. These are Ecclesiasticus (24:14) and Proverbs (8:22-25). The latter verses (“The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways, before he made anything from the very beginning; I was set up from eternity, and of old before the earth was made. The depths were not as yet, and I was already conceived”) do in fact belong to the opening section of the “Office of the Immaculate Conception” by Bernardino de’ Bustis (see Appendix 1).²⁷ Thanks to this pre-creational image, the Milanese friar was stating from the start that Mary’s exemption from Original Sin must be understood as an essential part of God’s plan for the redemption of mankind, and therefore had to precede the creation of the universe itself.

The Altarpiece by Zenale for San Francesco in Cantù

The immaculist character of the landscape in the *Virgin of the Rocks* finds confirmation in its aftermath. Among the numerous derivations that can be found in Lombard painting,²⁸ the altarpieces by Bernardo Zenale now at the J. Paul Getty Museum and at the Denver Art Museum stand out for presenting two different, intriguing interpretations of Leonardo’s invention. The Getty painting used to be part of a polyptych, and its lateral panels are now divided between the museums Bagatti Valsecchi and Poldi Pezzoli in Milan (figs. 8-9).²⁹ The altarpiece was commissioned in 1502 by the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception in Cantù for the church of San Francesco in the same town. Considering that Cantù is approximately 40 km from Milan, it is relatively safe to assume that the members of this confraternity were in touch with their Milanese colleagues, namely the members of the confraternity which had commissioned the *ancona* for San Francesco Grande twenty years before, including the painting by Leonardo. This circumstance, together with the fact that Leonardo and Zenale knew each other well, as reported by Vasari and Lomazzo,³⁰ must have contributed to making Leonardo’s *Virgin of the Rocks* an inevitable model for Zenale (as his figure of the Christ Child – so incredibly, and sweetly *leonardesco* – demonstrates).

However, Zenale’s approach to his model was quite creative: on the one hand, he borrowed the geological landscape, a choice which may suggest that he and his patrons were perfectly aware of its immaculist implications. On the other hand, he included the motifs of mountains and rocky formations within a broader landscape in which the blue sky is the predominant element. In this way, the Virgin turns out to be the undisputed protagonist of the scene because her silhouette stands out against the blue background, an effect which is stressed by the fact that she is standing, in spite of having her knees slightly bent. The impression of the Virgin’s preeminent role in the composition by Zenale – an impression which is definitely stronger than in the model by Leonardo, where the woman is kneeling on the ground – is further suggested by the Christ Child, who seems to be both blessing her and pointing up to her, while looking at us with the most telling expression. This gesture is even more striking when we consider that it is an *unicum* among the surviving examples of this rather peculiar iconography, which appears to have been relatively frequent in Lombard art from the middle of the 15th to the first decades of the 16th

century.³¹ Most of these representations show the Virgin half-kneeling in front of her Son, with her hands crossed over her breast, while the Christ Child is generally blessing her, or sending her a kiss. Yet he does not, as he does in the painting by Zenale, additionally, look in our direction as if he were suggesting to the viewer that the Virgin is the focal point of his message.

One of the most interesting, yet little known examples of this iconography is a parchment datable to the end of the 15th century, which used to belong to no less than the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception in San Francesco Grande in Milan, namely the patron of the famous *ancona* (fig. 10) including Leonardo's *Virgin of the Rocks*.³² There are some striking similarities between the characters in the parchment and those in the painting by Zenale, from the group of the Virgin and Child - which includes an angel kneeling on the ground portrayed in the act of assisting Jesus - to the little musician angels on the sides. One cannot help thinking that Zenale had also this composition in mind while painting his altarpiece for Cantù. Evidently the artist, who replaced the cryptic characters in the *Virgin of the Rocks* with the group of the Virgin adoring her Child, interpreted anew an iconography which not only was familiar to the Franciscan Order, especially in Lombardy, but also is quite likely to have been perceived by his patrons as conveying immaculist overtones. This hypothesis is confirmed by the fact that a very similar group of the Virgin adoring the Christ Child had been adopted by Giacomo Del Maino for the *ancona* he had carved around 1495 for the church of San Maurizio in Valtellina (a peripheral valley in Northern Lombardy), and which was explicitly dedicated to the Immaculate Conception (fig. 6).³³

Let's now move back to Zenale's altarpiece for San Francesco in Cantù in relation to the opening section of the office by de' Bustis (Appendix 1). As mentioned before, the rocky landscape invented by Leonardo, and copied by Zenale, evokes a pre-creational state which is described, first and foremost, in Proverbs 8:22-25, and which is quoted at the beginning of that liturgy. Interestingly enough, the same opening section of the office includes other figures and metaphors which recall a few motifs in the altarpiece by Zenale. The office's second antiphon invites *pueri* (literally "little boys") to praise Our Lady above anybody else for having been conceived as *gloriosam*, a concept which, in this context, refers to her exemption from Original Sin. These praising little boys remind us of the young angels who, in the Getty painting (as well as in the parchment from San Francesco Grande), play and sing in honor of Mary. Two antiphons later, the office continues by stating that, had the Lord not granted a special protection to his mother, she would have been "denigrated by the Angel of darkness". Evidently this concept refers, again, to Mary's immaculacy. This exceptional status of hers is evoked by Christ's gesture in the painting, both blessing and pointing: thanks to it, as well as thanks to the fact that the Child is looking at us in the most intensive way, we are invited to understand the mystery of Mary's exemption from Original Sin in connection with God's will, namely with his bigger plan for our redemption. Finally, in the first hymn, which follows the chapter quoting Proverbs 8:22-25 (translated above), the office celebrates the Virgin as "Bride of God," "Star of the See," "Gates of Heaven" (*Sponsa Dei, Stella maris, Porta caeli*). In my opinion, the metaphor of the *Porta caeli*, which is repeatedly mentioned in the office by de' Bustis, is quite likely to have inspired Zenale to set the figure of Mary within the arch opening to the sky.³⁴

In short, the altarpiece by Zenale for the confraternity of the Immaculate Conception in Cantù is perfectly in keeping with contemporary immaculist iconography inasmuch as it visualizes concepts and figures that the new liturgical offices for the feast of December 8th, and the one by the Milanese de' Bustis in particular, had made quite popular. Undoubtedly, Zenale did not have Leonardo's independent mind: nevertheless he managed to produce an image which was both clear and subtle, thus fulfilling his patrons' need for cautious propaganda.

The Altarpiece by Zenale for San Francesco Grande in Milan

Apparently, the altarpiece by Zenale now at the Denver Art Museum presents a totally different situation in spite of the fact that its imposing geological landscape is probably one of the most beautiful derivations from the *Virgin of the Rocks* (fig. 11).³⁵ Indeed, the altarpiece was painted around 1510 for the *Cappella della Vittoria* in San Francesco Grande in Milan. Thus, it used to hang just a few chapels away from the one dedicated to the Immacu-

late Conception, which was decorated with the *ancona* of the *Virgin of the Rocks*. The *Cappella della Vittoria* was inaugurated in 1510 and was dedicated to the Virgin Mary, but at the same time it commemorated the victory over the Arian heresy which had been achieved by St Ambrose, the patron saint of Milan. In the altarpiece, Ambrose is portrayed to the left, kneeling above the odd-looking figure of an armored man, most likely the heretic Arius.³⁶ The Virgin seems to join Ambrose in his act of suppression by raising her right foot above Arius's head, as if she were ready to crush it, at least ideally. To her right, St Jerome writes something on a sheet of paper resting on his knee, while St Joseph emerges from the shadow of the cavernous background, staring at the Madonna and Child.

As I have previously argued, the image of the Virgin in a geological landscape used to be understood as carrying immaculist overtones, at least within the Franciscan milieu in Milan and Lombardy. This must have been particularly true in the church of San Francesco Grande, where the motives of mountains and rocks were a redundant element in the *ancona* of the Immaculate Conception, appearing both in its wooden reliefs and in the painting by Leonardo. In light of this, I believe that the Virgin of the Denver altarpiece, too, was conceived, and perceived, as an *Immaculata*. This hypothesis is supported by three other elements of the composition: the inscription on the sheet of paper held by St Jerome, the position of Mary's right foot, and the colors of the Virgin's attire.

To the viewer of the altarpiece, the text on the sheet of paper in Jerome's hand poses some difficulties because it appears upside down, and its letters are quite small. However, a good close-up photograph allows us to read it as follows: *Quicquid in Maria gestum est, totum puritas, totum veritas, totumque gratia* (Everything which happened in Mary was all purity, all truth, and all grace; fig. 12).³⁷ The very same passage is quoted in both offices of the Immaculate Conception by Leonardo Nogarolo and Bernardino de' Bustis (see Appendix 1 and 2).³⁸ However, its original source is, quite appropriately, *Epistola IX. De Assumptione beatae Mariae Virginis*, a text traditionally attributed to St Jerome, but most likely by Paschasius Radbertus: here Mary's immaculate conception is discussed at length, and the passage in question ends by calling her "immaculate" and "totally uncorrupted" (see Appendix 3).³⁹ Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the passage inscribed in the painting by Zenale was taken precisely from one of the two liturgical offices rather than from the text attributed to St Jerome: in his *Epistola IX*, the passage includes a few more words than in either the painting or the offices, and the sequence of the words is slightly different (cfr. Appendix 1, 2 and 3). As far as the two offices are concerned, it is again the one by the Milanese de' Bustis which, most likely, provided the quotation inscribed by Zenale on the sheet of paper in Jerome's hand. While Nogarolo had included the passage in question in a section entirely dedicated to sayings attributed to St Jerome (see Appendix 2), de' Bustis had quoted it among the *dicta* of a few other Church Fathers (see Appendix 1): in my opinion, it is hardly a coincidence that this series of *auctoritates* starts precisely with St Ambrose, who is also portrayed in the painting.

The fact that both Ambrose and the Virgin are staring at Jerome who, in turn, seems to have just interrupted the act of writing on the sheet of paper resting on his knee, confirms that the message he is delivering is crucial to the meaning of the entire composition. On the other hand, this inscription must have always been difficult to read; also, as we have seen, it refers to Mary's absolute purity and perfection, but does not mention her immaculate conception explicitly. This suggests that the immaculist character of Jerome's message was intended to be clear only to those in the know, namely whoever was familiar with the office by de' Bustis; on the other hand, it would have escaped the criticism of any opponent of the Immaculate Conception.

The same could possibly apply to the curious detail of the Virgin's right foot raised above Arius's head. Its most obvious interpretation is that Mary is joining Ambrose in the act of suppressing the notorious heretic. And yet, any expert of the Immaculate Conception - today as well as in the Renaissance - cannot help but detect here an echo of God's prophecy to the devilish snake who had led Eve and Adam into temptation, as described in Genesis 3:15 (*Inimicitias ponam inter te et mulierem, et semen tuum et semen illius: ipsa conteret caput tuum*).⁴⁰ This image, which is frequently merged with the one of the Woman of Apocalypse attacked by the dragon, is included in the office by Bernardino de' Bustis, who reports an exegesis of the famous passage from Genesis, generally attributed to St Augustine: *Cum subiectio originalis peccati caput sit Diaboli, tale caput Maria contrivit, quia nulla peccati subiectio ingressum habuit in animam Virginis, et ideo ab omni macula immunis fuit*⁴¹ (Since the Devil's head



5 Perugino, *Madonna in Glory among Saints and Pope Sixtus IV*, 1479 (destroyed in 1609)



6 Giacomo Del Maino and Workshop, *Ancona of the Immaculate Conception*, Ponte in Valtellina, San Maurizio



7 Leonardo da Vinci, *Virgin of the Rocks*, c. 1491-1499 and 1506-1508, London, National Gallery



8 Bernardo Zenale, *Madonna Adoring the Christ Child with Three Angels*, c. 1502, Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum



9 Reconstruction of the Zenale's altarpiece for the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception in San Francesco, Cantù, c. 1502, reconstruction: Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan



10 Anonymus, *Madonna Adoring the Christ Child among Angels*, end of the 15th c., Parchment, Milan, Archivio Ospedale Maggiore



12 Detail (turned upside down) of the inscription on the sheet of paper held by St Jerome in Bernardo Zenale, *Madonna and Child with St Ambrose, St Jerome and St Joseph*, c. 1510, Denver Art Museum Collection (gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, 1961.173)

11 Bernardo Zenale, *Madonna and Child with St Ambrose, St Jerome and St Joseph*, c. 1510, Denver Art Museum Collection (gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, 1961.173)

represents the subjection to Original Sin, that head was crashed by Mary, because no subjection to any sin ever entered her soul, and therefore she was immune from any stain). In light of this, any supporter of the Immaculate Conception who looked at the painting by Zenale, was likely to interpret the evil-looking figure of Arius as representing every form of devilish perversion, and the detail of his head - threatened by the Virgin's right foot - as representing Original Sin itself.

As for the figure of the Virgin, the hypothesis according to which it should be interpreted as an *Immaculata* is further supported by the colors of her attire, namely the spectacular white of her tunic in conjunction with the light-blue of her mantel. In Marian imagery, this combination was extremely rare until the 16th century, and even then it was used only occasionally. In fact, the altarpiece by Zenale is one of the earliest examples of this in Italian art that I have been able to trace so far.⁴² On the other hand, a white tunica in conjunction with a light blue mantel is among the most typical attributes of the iconography of the Immaculate Conception from the 17th century to the present. This color-combination was explicitly recommended in the well-known treatise on painting by the Spanish artist Francisco Pacheco (1649), who also provided information about its origin,⁴³ tracing it back to the last decades of the 15th century, when the Portuguese noblewoman Beatrice of Sylva (also known as Beatriz de Sylva y Menezes: Campo Mayor or Ceuta, c. 1424 – Toledo, 1491/1492) founded the female order of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady (1484).⁴⁴ According to the legend, the Virgin herself had appeared to Beatrice, requesting that the future nuns wear a white dress and a light-blue veil, thus reproducing the colors of her own attire. The Order of the "Conceptionists" was approved by Pope Innocent VIII in 1489. Initially the nuns adopted the Cistercian rule, yet soon after this they became closer to the Franciscans, so that in 1511 Julius II declared them a special branch of this order, entrusting them with the promotion of the cult of the Immaculate Conception.⁴⁵

To the best of my knowledge, there is no record of convents belonging to the Conceptionists in Milan or Lombardy in the 16th century, nor later on (in fact, the order's first convent in Italy was founded in Rome in 1526). However, Julius II's decision to annex them to the Franciscan Order could imply that these nuns had reached a certain popularity among the Friars Minor, and not only in Spain. Furthermore, the order's founder, Beatrice of Sylva, is traditionally believed to have been the sister of Amedeo Menes Silva (also known as de Sylva y Menezes: Ceuta?, 1420s – Milan, 1482), the founder of the *Amadeiti*, a particularly rigorous and independent congregation of the Franciscan Order which developed precisely in Lombardy from the 1460s on.⁴⁶ In those years, Amedeo Menes Silva resided mainly in Milan, first in San Francesco Grande, and later on in Santa Maria della Pace, which had become the headquarters of his *societas fratrum*. As we know, a few decades later the church of San Francesco Grande hosted the altarpiece by Zenale: indeed, it would be quite tempting to suggest a relation between the white and blue attire of the figure of the Virgin in this painting and the habit which Beatrice of Sylva had conceived for the nuns of her Order of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady. Yet, no documentary evidence supports a family relationship between Beatrice and Amadeo,⁴⁷ nor a concrete relation between the Order of the Conceptionists and Milan. In spite of this, would it really be so farfetched to believe that, by the first decade of the sixteenth century, a Franciscan audience in Milan was likely to interpret the white-blue attire of the Virgin as alluding to the Immaculate Conception?

Conclusion

To sum up my argument, the altarpieces painted by Bernardo Zenale for San Francesco in Cantù (c. 1502) and for San Francesco Grande in Milan (c. 1510) well represent the issues of invention and caution that I have indicated as crucial to the understanding of the iconography of the Immaculate Conception in Italian Renaissance art. As far as the issue of invention is concerned, both paintings took inspiration not only from the *Virgin of the Rocks*, but also from the text which is likely to have inspired Leonardo himself, namely the Office for the feast day of 8 December, composed by Bernardino de' Bustis in the late 1470s. As I have mentioned at the beginning of this essay, the liturgies by de' Bustis and Nogarolo were a major source of inspiration for most representations of the Immaculate Conception conceived between the 1480s and the first half of the 16th century.

As for the issue of caution, in both altarpieces Zenale managed to visualize a number of concepts and figures referring to the Immaculate Conception in a way that must have been clear only to someone familiar with the immaculist doctrine in general, and with the Office by de' Bustis in particular. On the other hand, neither of the paintings run the risk of being accused of explicitly supporting a belief which was still highly controversial. Especially the altarpiece for San Francesco Grande is extremely cryptic in character, including the inscription on the sheet of paper held by St Jerome, which is half-hidden, and hardly recognizable as supporting the Immaculate Conception – not surprisingly, the need for cautious propaganda must have been stronger in a major center like Milan than in peripheral Cantù.

APPENDIX 1:

From the *Office of the Immaculate Conception* by Bernardino de' Bustis (1480):⁴⁸

Incipit devotissimum Officium Immaculatæ Conceptionis gloriosæ Virginis MARIÆ, editum per Fratrem Bernardinum de Bustis, Ordinis Minorum. Quod quidem Officium confirmatum est, et approbatum a sanctissimo Domino nostro Sixto IV, Pontifice maximo [...].

In primis vespris. Antiphona. Dixit Dominus Dominæ meæ, sede a dextris innocentiaë meæ. Alleluia.

Psalmus. Dixit Dominus, cum reliquis de sancta MARIA.

Antiphona. Laudate pueri Dominam super omnes gentes in conceptu gloriosam. Alleluia.

Antiphona. Lætatus sum in his, quæ dicta sunt mihi, concepta est hodie Regina cœli. Alleluia.

Antiphona. Nisi Dominus custodisset Matrem suam, Angelus tenebrarum denigrasset eam. Alleluia.

Antiphona. Lauda Ierusalem Dominum, qui non fecit taliter ulli nationi, sicut suæ dilectissimæ Matri. Alleluia.

Capitulum. Dominus possedit me in initio viarum suarum, antequam quidquam faceret a principio; ab æterno ordinata sum, et ex antiquis antequam terra fieret. Necdum errant abysi, et ego iam concepta eram.

Hymnus. Gaude Mater Salvatoris, magni vellus Gedeonis; rubus igne, qui non uritur, veri templi Salomonis. Sponsa Dei, Stella maris, Porta coeli te vocaris, mundi salus seuentis, caput cædens Holofernis. [...]

Ex dictis Sanctorum Doctorum. Lectione I.⁴⁹

Beatus Ambrosius in quodam sermone de gloriosa Virgine MARIA exponens propheticum illud. Egredietur virga de radice lesse. Sic de eius innocentia protestatur, dicens: Hæc est virga, in qua nec nodus originalis, nec cortex venialis culpæ fuit. Hylarius. O Virgo benedicta super omnes fœminas, quæ Angelos vincis puritate, quæ omnes Sanctos superas pietate. Hieronymus. Quicquid in MARIA gestum est, totum puritas, totum veritas, totumque gratia fuit. [...]

APPENDIX 2:

From the *Office of the Immaculate Conception* by Leonardo Nogarolo (1477):⁵⁰

Prima Lectio ex dictis Beati Hieronymi.

Canitur in canticis de MARIA hortus conclusus, fons signatus, emissiones tuæ Paradisus. Hortus deliciarum, in quo sunt consita universa florum genera, et odoramenta virtutum; sicque signatus, ut nesciat violari, neque corrumpi ullis insidiis fraudibusque Diaboli; fons itaque signatus sigillo totius Trinitatis. Idemque. Quicquid in MARIA gestum est, totum puritas, totum veritas, totumque gratia fuit: et iterum, Cæteris virginibus præstatur gratia per partes; MARIA vero tota se infudit plenitudo gratiæ.

APPENDIX 3:

From *Epistola IX. Ad Paulum et Eustochium. De Assumptione beatae Mariæ Virginis* attributed to St Jerome, yet probably by Paschasisus Radbertus (8th-9th century):⁵¹

Diligentius itaque procure, si quomodo simplicitas columbae, quæ fuit in Maria, illaesa inviolataque in vobis custodiatur. De qua Salomon in canticis quasi in laudem eius: Veni, inquit, columba mea, immaculata mea: iam enim hiems transiit, imber abiit, et recessit (Cant. II, 11). Ac deinde inquit: Veni de Libano, veni, coronaberis (Ibid, IV, 6, 8). Non immerito igitur venire de Libano iubetur, quia Libanus candidatio interpretatur. Erat enim candidata multis meritorum virtutis, et dealbata nive candidior Spiritus Sancti muneribus, simplicitatem columbae in omnibus repræsentans: quoniam quicquid in ea gestum est, totum puritas et simplicitas [Mart. Tacet totum puritas et simplicitas], totum veritas et gratia fuit, totum misericordia, et iustitia, quæ de coelo prospexit: et ideo immaculata, quia in ullo corrupta. [...].

Sources for images

Fig. 2. Archivio fotografico dei Musei nazionali di Lucca

Fig. 3. <http://pinacotecabrera.org/collezione-online/opere/disputa-sullimmacolata-concezione/>

Fig. 4. Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, photo: V.-H. Schneider

- Fig. 5. From: G. GRIMALDI, *Descrizione della Basilica Antica di S. Pietro in Vaticano. Codice Barberini Latino 2733*, R. NIGGL (ed.), Rome, Basilica Apostolica Vaticana, 1972, p. 163 (Cap. 114)
- Fig. 6. From: R. CASCIARO, *La scultura lignea lombarda del Rinascimento*, Milan, Skira, 2000, p. 76
- Fig. 7. <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/leonardo-da-vinci-the-virgin-of-the-rocks>
- Fig. 8. <http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/603/bernardino-zenale-madonna-adoring-the-child-with-musical-angels-italian-about-1502/>
- Fig. 9. Side panels to the left: Milan, Museo Poldi Pezzoli; photo: J. Becker. Side panels to the right: Milan, Museo Bagatti Valsecchi; photo: G. and L. Malcangi, 2013
- Fig. 10. From: *Il Francescanesimo in Lombardia. Storia e arte*, Milan, Silvana Editoriale, 1983, p. 61, fig. 21
- Figs. 11, 12. Photos courtesy of Denver Art Museum

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- 1 M. LEVI D'ANCONA, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance*, New York, College Art Association-The Art Bulletin, 1957.
- 2 P.L. DE VECCHI, "Iconografia e devozione dell'Immacolata in Lombardia", in: *Zenale e Leonardo. Tradizione e rinnovamento della pittura lombarda*, Milan, Electa, 1982, pp. 65-69, 254-257; R. GOFFEN, *Piety and Patronage in Renaissance Venice. Bellini, Titian and the Franciscans*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1986, esp. chap. III; L. DAL PRÀ, "Publica disputatio peracta est. Esiti iconografici della controversia sull'Immacolata Concezione a Firenze", in: *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, vol. 2, 1988, pp. 267-280.
- 3 A. GALIZZI, *Flying Babies in Emilian Painting: Iconographies of the Immaculate Conception circa 1500*, Ph.D. Thesis, The Johns Hopkins University, 1992; A. GALIZZI KROEGEL, "A proposito dei santi nelle bizzarre *Annunciazioni* di Francesco Francia e Timoteo Viti: proposte per l'iconografia e la committenza", in: *Notizie da Palazzo Albani*, vol. 32, 2003, pp. 47-72; Eadem, "A Misunderstood Iconography: Girolamo Genga's Altarpiece for S. Agostino in Cesena", in: *Drawing Relationships in Northern Italian Renaissance Art. Patronage and Theories of Invention*, G. PERITI (ed.), Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004, pp. 75-100; Eadem, "Quando il centro usa prudenza e la periferia osa: l'iconografia dell'Immacolata Concezione in Emilia e nelle Marche (con una postilla sulla *Vergine delle rocce* di Leonardo)", in: *Emilia e Marche nel Rinascimento. L'identità visiva della periferia*, G. PERITI (ed.), Azzano San Paolo, Bolis, 2005, pp. 215-251.
- 4 V. FRANZIA, *Splendore di bellezza. L'iconografia dell'Immacolata Concezione nella pittura rinascimentale italiana*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004; *Una donna vestita di sole. L'Immacolata Concezione nelle opere dei grandi maestri*, G. MORELLO-V. FRANZIA-R. FUSCO (eds.), Milan, Federico Motta Editore, 2005; *L'Immacolata nei rapporti tra l'Italia e la Spagna*, A. ANSELMINI (ed.), Rome, De Luca Editori d'Arte, 2008; E. SIMI VARANELLI, *Maria Immacolata. La rappresentazione nel Medioevo*, Rome, De Luca Editori d'Arte, 2008. During the last ten years, Marianna Lora has published a few enlightening contributions, the most recent one being M. LORA, "Ut rosa spineti compensans flore rigorem. La Vierge immaculée comme Nouvelle Ève dans la peinture italienne du XVIe siècle", in: *L'immaculée Conception: une croyance avant d'être un dogme, un enjeu social pour la Chrétienté. Débats et représentations en Italie, L'atelier du Centre de recherches historiques – Revue électronique du CRH*, vol. 10, 2012, pp. 1-36 <http://acrh.revues.org/4345> (accessed 1 December 2016). Finally, the surprising and yet convincing interpretation of two masterpieces of Renaissance art in light of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is proposed in K.E. BUTLER, "The Immaculate Body in the Sistine Ceiling", in: *Art History*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2009, pp. 250-289, and S. BLAKE MCHAM, "Visualizing the Immaculate Conception: Donatello, Francesco della Rovere, and the High Altar and Choir Screen at the Church of the Santo in Padua", in: *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 69, 2016, pp. 831-864.
- 5 G. SÖLL, *Storia dei dogmi mariani*, Rome, Libreria Anteneo Salesiano, 1981; M. LAMY, *L'immaculée Conception. Étapes et enjeux d'une controverse au Moyen Âge (XIIe-XVe siècles)*, Paris, Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2000; S. M. CECCHINI, *L'Immacolata Concezione. Breve storia del dogma*, Città del Vaticano, Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, 2003.
- 6 K.E. BUTLER, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 251.
- 7 V. FRANZIA, "L'Immacolata Concezione: alla ricerca di un modello iconografico", in: *Una donna vestita di sole, op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 33-39; A. GALIZZI KROEGEL, *op. cit.*, 2005; E. SIMI VARANELLI, *op. cit.*, 2008, pp. 211-243. On the iconography of the paintings by Crivelli and by Frediani see V. FRANZIA, *op. cit.*, 2004, pp. 117-131 and 147-157; on the invention by Genga see A. GALIZZI KROEGEL, *op. cit.*, 2004; on the one by Guillaume de Marcillat see A. GALIZZI KROEGEL, "The

- Dispute over the Immaculate Conception by Guillaume de Marcillat at the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin”, in: *Gifts in Return. Essays in Honor of Charles Dempsey*, M. SCHLITT (ed.), Toronto, Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012, pp. 193-213; AVE EVA. *Ein wiederentdecktes Hauptwerk des Renaissancemeister Guillaume de Marcillat*, A. GALIZZI KROEGEL-R. CONTINI (eds.), Berlin and Petersberg, Gemäldegalerie/Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Michael Imhof Verlag, 2013.
- 8 To Laura dal Prà goes the merit of having fully understood the influence which these liturgical texts exercised on the Renaissance iconography of the Immaculate Conception: L. DAL PRA, *op. cit.*, 1988. See also V. FRANZIA, *op. cit.*, 2004, pp. 53-60; K. E. BUTLER, *op. cit.*, 2009, A. GALIZZI KROEGEL, *op. cit.*, 2012, esp. pp. 208-209, n. 54 (with bibliography). Both Offices are published in the 17th century collection of immaculist texts titled *Armamentarium Seraphicum et Regestum Universale tuendo titulo Immaculatae Conceptionis*, P. DE ALVA Y ASTORGA (ed.), Madrid, Typographia Regia, 1649 (reprint Bruxelles, Culture et Civilization, 1965), vol. II, cols. 55-70 (Office by Nogarolo, 1st ed. 1477), 70-105 (Office by de’ Bustis, 1st ed. 1480).
- 9 A. GALIZZI KROEGEL, *op. cit.*, 2005 (with bibliography).
- 10 A. ZUCCARI, “L’Immacolata a Roma dal Quattrocento al Settecento. Istanze immacolistiche e cautela pontificia in un complesso percorso iconografico”, in: *Una donna vestita di sole*, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 65-77.
- 11 G. SÖLL, *op. cit.*, 1981, pp. 340-352; S. M. CECCHIN, *op. cit.*, 2003, pp. 179-200.
- 12 J. O’MALLEY, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome. Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in the Sacred Orators of the Papal Court, c. 1450-1521*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1979, pp. 61-62.
- 13 Barbara Gaspar, then a graduate student at the University of London, gave a paper titled “L’Inquisition et l’Immaculée Conception” at the conference *L’Immaculée Conception de la Vierge. Histoire et représentations figurées du Moyen Âge à la Contre-Réforme*, INHA - Paris, 1-2 October, 2009. A video of the conference was available online for a few years. For the abstract of Gaspar’s paper see online: http://www.archivesaudiovisuelles.fr/FR/_videoInfo.asp?id=2150&ress=7107&video=140636&format=68 (accessed 1 December 2016).
- 14 A. ZUCCARI, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 66-67. For a certain degree of caution within the immaculist propaganda in Rome see also E. SIMI VARANELLI, *op. cit.*, 2008, p. 227.
- 15 The iconography of this fresco by Perugino, completed in 1479 and destroyed in 1609 on occasion of the rebuilding of Old St Peter’s, and known to us only thanks to two reproductions dating to the first decades of the seventeenth century (a sketch by Jacopo Grimaldi and a fresco by Giovan Battista Ricci), is discussed in M. G. AURIGEMMA, “Osservazioni sulla Cappella dell’Immacolata Concezione in San Pietro”, in: *Sisto IV. Le arti a Roma nel primo Rinascimento*, F. Benzi in collaboration with C. Crescentini (eds.), Rome, Ed. dell’Associazione Culturale Shakespeare and Co. 2, 2000, pp. 458-474. See also K.E. BUTLER, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 256-257. For the sketch by Jacopo Grimaldi (reproduced in this essay as fig. 5) see G. GRIMALDI, *Descrizione della Basilica Antica di S. Pietro in Vaticano. Codice Barberini Latino 2733*, R. NIGGL (ed.), Rome, Basilica Apostolica Vaticana, 1972, p. 163 (Cap. 114). The fresco by Ricci is reproduced in A. ZUCCARI, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 66.
- 16 K.E. BUTLER, *op. cit.*, 2009.
- 17 For the cult of the Immaculate Conception in Florence see B. MORESCHINI, “Committenza ed evoluzione iconografica dell’Immacolata Concezione nella Toscana del XVI secolo: una panoramica e qualche caso”, in: *Una donna vestita di sole*, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 53-63; for Venice see R. GOFFEN, *op. cit.*, 1986; for Bologna see A. GALIZZI KROEGEL, *op. cit.*, 2003 and Eadem, *op. cit.*, 2005; for Milan see A. SPIRITI, “L’immagine dell’Immacolata a Milano”, in: *L’Immacolata nei rapporti tra l’Italia e la Spagna*, *op. cit.*, 2008, pp. 447-472.
- 18 See for instance the very tense situation recorded in Bologna during the sixteenth- and seventeenth century, which is the object of a number of brilliant (and not yet outdated) studies by Celestino Piana, OFM. See esp. C. PIANA, “Attività e peripezie dei padri del Convento di S. Francesco in Bologna per la difesa e propagazione del culto dell’Immacolata Concezione nel Seicento”, in: *Archivium Franciscanum Historicum*, vol. 39, 1-4, 1948, pp. 201-237; Idem, “Un saggio dell’attività francescana nella difesa e propagazione del culto alla Concezione Immacolata”, in: *Virgo Immaculata*, Rome, Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1957, vol. 7, 3, pp. 1-41. Further episodes of persecution against the immaculist propaganda are discussed in R. M. DESSI, “La controversia sull’Immacolata Concezione e la ‘propaganda’ per il culto in Italia nel XV secolo”, in: *Cristianesimo nella storia*, vol. 12, 2, 1991, pp. 265-293; A. GALIZZI KROEGEL, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 224-228.
- 19 An overview of the various problems concerning the *Virgin of the Rocks* (from the existence of numerous versions of the painting to its most unusual iconography) is provided by Luke Syson in the catalogue of the recent London exhibition. See L. SYSON, “Representing the Divine. The Virgin of the Rocks”, in *Leonardo da Vinci. Painter at the Court of Milan*, L. SYSON-L. KEITH (eds.), London, National Gallery, 2011, pp. 161-175. See also the review by F. ZÖLLNER, “A double Leonardo. On two exhibitions (and their catalogues) in London and Paris”, in: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 76, 2013, esp. pp. 419-420.

- 20 A photo and a transcription of the “list of ornaments” are published in the entry by V. ARRIGHI-E. VILLATA, “La commissione per la Vergine delle Rocce, Milano, 25 aprile 1483”, in: *Leonardo da Vinci. La vera immagine. Documenti e testimonianze sulla vita e sull’opera*, V. ARRIGHI-A. BELLINAZZI-E. VILLATA (eds.), Florence, Giunti, 2005, pp. 141-142. For a good discussion of the document see also M.C. PASSONI, “Nuovi documenti e una proposta di ricostruzione per l’ancona della Vergine delle rocce”, in: *Nuovi studi*, vol. 9/10, 11, 2005, pp. 179-180. The Milanese *ancona* is discussed in relation to two other *Ancone dell’Immacolata* by Giacomo Del Maino, both datable around 1490-1495 and located in the province of Sondrio (one in the Church of San Maurizio in Ponte in Valtellina, another in the Oratorio della Madonna della neve in Sernio) in R. CASCIARO, *La scultura lignea lombarda del Rinascimento*, Milan, Skira, 2000, pp. 73-79, 275-276, 278.
- 21 On the complicated history of the two main versions of the painting, namely those in Paris and London, see L. SYSON, *op. cit.*, 2011, pp. 170-172. The painting at the Louvre is datable between 1483 and 1485, the one at the National Gallery between 1499 (*terminus ante quem*) and 1506 (*terminus post quem*). As for the two panel paintings which used to decorate the *ancona* on the sides of the *Virgin of the Rocks*, and which are also kept at the National Gallery, London, Syson (*Ibid.*) has attributed the *Angel in Red with a Lute* to Ambrogio De Predis, and the *Angel in Green with a Vielle* to an “Associate of Leonardo da Vinci (Francesco Napoletano?)”.
- 22 Contrary to his surviving literary production, which is rather vast, the biographical data on de’ Bustis are quite limited: he was born in Milan, from a noble family, around 1450; after moving to the university of Pavia, he dropped the study of law in order to enter the Franciscan Osservanza in the convent of Sant’Angelo in Legnano, where he resided for a few years. Pretty soon, he became a much appreciated preacher (particularly on the Immaculate Conception), which made him travelling in many cities throughout Lombardy and Emilia Romagna. He died between 1513 and 1515, and was buried in the convent of Santa Maria della Misericordia a Melegnano, in the outskirts of Milan. A. ALECCI, “Busti (de’ Busti, de Bustis, de’ Bustis, da Busto), Bernardino”, in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani, vol. 15, 1972, pp. 593-595.
- 23 The various documents concerning the chapel are discussed in M.C. PASSONI, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 177-180.
- 24 *Libellus rectorius de veritate conceptionis beatae virginis Mariae*, Milan 1475. Vincenzo Bandello (Castelnuovo Scrivia, 1435 - Altomonte, 1506) had entered the Dominican Order in 1471 in Bologna, where he soon became a leading theologian, and - in 1490 - a member of the Inquisition. During the 1480s and 1490s, he was twice prior of San Domenico in Bologna, and twice prior of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. A. FERRUA, “Bandelli (Bandello), Vincenzo”, in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani, vol. 5, 1963, pp. 666-667 or [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vincenzo-bandelli_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vincenzo-bandelli_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) (accessed 1 December 2016).
- 25 A. GALIZZI KROEGEL, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 229-235 (with bibliography); L. SYSON, *op. cit.*, 2011, pp. 169-170.
- 26 A. GALIZZI KROEGEL, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 232-235, 242-243 (with bibliography); L. SYSON, *op. cit.*, 2011, pp. 169-170.
- 27 B. DE’BUSTIS, *Officium Immaculatæ Conceptionis gloriosæ Virginis Mariæ*, in : *Armamentarium Seraphicum*, *op. cit.*, 1649, vol. II, col. 71.
- 28 P.C. MARANI, “La Vergine delle rocce di Leonardo, la sua fortuna iconografica e il Paliotto leonardesco di Santa Maria del Monte”, in: Idem, *Leonardiana. Studi e saggi su Leonardo da Vinci*, Milan, Skira, 2010, pp. 103-114. See also the numerous works reproduced in the catalogues *I leonardeschi. L’eredità di Leonardo in Lombardia*, Milan, Skira, 1998, and *Il Cinquecento lombardo. Da Leonardo a Caravaggio*, F. CAROLI (ed.), Milan, Skira – Artificio, 2000.
- 29 M. NATALE, “L’ancona dell’Immacolata Concezione a Cantù”, in: *Zenale e Leonardo... op. cit.*, 1982, pp. 24-33; D. JAFFÉ, *Summary Catalogue of European Paintings in the J. Paul Getty Museum*, Los Angeles, The Paul J. Getty Museum, 1997, p. 138. The inclusion of the four saints in the lateral panels (St Stephan and St Anthony of Padua at the Poldi Pezzoli; St John the Baptist and St Francis of Assisi at the Bagatti Valsecchi) is discussed in light of the immaculist doctrine in P.L. DE VECCHI, *op. cit.*, 1982, 256-257.
- 30 Vasari mentions Zenale in the “Life” of Bramante, where he describes the artistic entourage in Milan: “Eravi ancora un Bernardino da Trevio [i.e. Treviglio, Bernardo Zenale’s native town, approx. 30 km far from Milan], milanese, ingegnere ed architetto del Duomo, e disegnatore grandissimo, il quale da Lionardo da Vinci fu tenuto maestro raro, ancora che la sua maniera fusse crudetta ed alquanto secca nelle pitture” (G. VASARI, *Le Vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, R. BETTARINI-P. BAROCCHI (eds.), Florence, Studio per Edizioni Scelte, vol. IV/I, 1976, p. 75. Lomazzo reports an anecdote according to which Leonardo sought the advice of Zenale when he was having trouble in rendering the beauty of Christ in the fresco of the *Last Supper* for Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan (G.P. LOMAZZO, *Trattato dell’arte della pittura, scoltura et architettura* (1st ed. 1584), in: Idem, *Scritti sulle arti*, R.P. CIARDI (ed.), Florence, Centro Di, vol. II, p. 53).

- 31 On the singularity of Christ's gesture see also M. NATALE, *op. cit.*, 1982, p. 28. On the iconography of the Virgin adoring the Christ Child see A. SPIRITI, *op. cit.*, 2008, pp. 447-448.
- 32 The parchment (Milan, Archivio Ospedale Maggiore) was first published in *Il Francescanesimo in Lombardia. Storia e arte*, Milan, Silvana Editoriale, 1983, p. 61, fig. 21.
- 33 R. CASCIARO, *op. cit.*, 2000, esp. pp. 275-276 (see above, n. 20). Del Maino's *Ancona dell'Immacolata* for the Oratorio della Madonna della neve in Sernio presents a similar group with the Virgin adoring her Son: however, Mary is kneeling on the ground, and her hands are clasped in prayer. *Ibid.*, esp. p. 278.
- 34 B. DE' BUSTIS, *op. cit.*, 1649, vol. II, cols. 71, 76, 77, 78, 79, 95, 102. See also G.M. LECHNER, "Pforte", in: *Marienlexikon*, R. BÄUMER-L. SCHEFFCZYK (eds.), St. Ottilien, EOS Verlag Erzabtei St. Ottilien, vol. 5, 1993, pp. 191-193; W. DÜRIG, "Pforte des Himmels (ianua caeli)", *Ibid.*, pp. 193-194.
- 35 S. BUGANZA, "Bernardo Zenale. Madonna con il Bambino in trono tra i santi Giuseppe, Ambrogio e Gerolamo", in: *Bramantino. L'arte nuova del Rinascimento lombardo*, M. NATALE in collaboration with E. ROSSETTI (eds.), Milan, Skira, 2014, pp. 250-253 (with bibliography).
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 I am very grateful to the staff of the Denver Art Museum, and to curator Angelica Daneo in particular, for providing me with an excellent close-up of this part of the altarpiece, which allowed me to identify the inscription and its source. This happened a few years ago: in the meantime, the same result has been published by Stefania Buganza. S. BUGANZA, *op. cit.*, 2014, p. 250.
- 38 B. DE' BUSTIS, *op. cit.*, 1649, vol. II, col. 73; L. NOGAROLO, *Officium Immaculatæ Conceptionis Virginis MARIÆ*, in *Armentarium Seraphicum*, *op. cit.*, 1649, vol. II, col. 57.
- 39 *Hieronymus Stridonensis Incertus, Epistola IX. Ad Paulum et Eustochium. De Assumptione Beatae Mariae Virginis*, from: *S. Hieronymi Opera Supposititia*, in *Patrologia Latina*, Paris, Migne, 1846, vol. 30, cols. 131-132. The identification of this author's with Paschasius Radbertus is proposed in B. KOROŠAK, *Doctrina de Immaculata B. V. Mariae Conceptione*, Rome, Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1958, p. 35-36.
- 40 This interpretation was first proposed in R. PAPA, *Leonardo teologo. L'artista "nipote di Dio"*, Milan, Ancora, 2006, p. 81. The merging of the iconography of the Woman of the Apocalypse with that of Mary as new Eve, crashing the head of the snake, dates to the end of the 15th century. G. SCHILLER, *Ikongraphie der christlichen Kunst*. Maria, vol. 4, 2, Gütersloh, Mohn, 1980, pp. 174-176.
- 41 B. DE' BUSTIS, *op. cit.*, 1649, vol. II, col. 91. In fact, the passage does not seem to be by Augustine, whose work I have checked in the online version of the *Patrologia Latina*. Also, the passage is not listed among the numerous texts from the Fathers of the Church quoted in B. KOROŠAK, *op. cit.*, 1958.
- 42 A white tunica with a blue mantel (with golden decorations) is worn by the Virgin in the so-called *Allegory of the Immaculate Conception* by Girolamo Mazzola Bedoli, painted between 1533 and 1539 for the Oratorio della Concezione in San Francesco del Prato, Parma (Parma, Pinacoteca Nazionale). The *Madonna del Parto/Woman of the Apocalypse* by Nardo di Cione (ca. 1360, Fiesole, Museo Bardini) wears a blue mantel over a white tunica studded with stars. My research on these images is still a work in progress.
- 43 F. PACHECO, *Arte de la Pintura* (1st ed. 1649), B. BASSEGODA I HUGAS (ed.), Madrid, Catedra, 1990, pp. 576-577. See also V. FRANCA, *op. cit.*, 2004, pp. 66-68.
- 44 I. OMAECHEVARRÍA, "Concezioniste", in: *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, Rome, Edizioni Paoline, 1975, vol. 2, cols. 1389-1399.
- 45 *Ibid.*, pp. 1391-1394.
- 46 On the Amadeiti see C. BOTTERO, *I Conventuali Riformati italiani (1557-1670). Vicende e insediamenti*, Padua, Centro Studi Antoniani, 2008, vol. 1, pp. 50-52. On their founder see G.G. MERLO, "Menes Silva, Amadeo de", in: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/menes-silva-amadeo-de_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/menes-silva-amadeo-de_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) (accessed 1 December 2016). For an interpretation of Leonardo's *Virgin of the Rocks* in light of the *Apocalypsis Nova*, a visionary text traditionally attributed to Amadeo Menes (yet the question of its authorship remains quite problematic, *Ibid.*), see G. FERRI PICCALUGA, "Σοφία", in: *Achademia Leonardi Vinci*, vol. 7, 1994, pp. 13-42.
- 47 Grado Giovanni Merlo points out the lack of documents and information concerning the origin and youth of Amadeo Menes. Consequently, he raises strong doubts about the tradition according to which Amadeo was the brother of Beatrice of Sylva. *Ibid.*

- 48 B. DE' BUSTIS, *Officium Immaculatæ Conceptionis gloriosæ Virginis Mariæ*, in: *Armamentarium Seraphicum et Regestum Universale tuendo titulo Immaculatæ Conceptionis*, P. DE ALVA Y ASTORGA (ed.), Madrid, Typographia Regia, 1649 (reprint Bruxelles, Culture et Civilization, 1965), vol. II, cols. 70-71.
- 49 *Ibid.*, col. 73.
- 50 L. NOGAROLO, *Officium Immaculatæ Conceptionis Mariæ*, in: *Ibid.*, vol. II, col. 57.
- 51 *Hieronymus Stridonensis Incertus, Epistola IX. Ad Paulum et Eustochium. De Assumptione Beatae Mariae Virginis*, from: *S. Hieronymi Opera Supposititia*, in *Patrologia Latina*, Paris, Migne, 1846, vol. 30, cols. 131-132.

Alessandra Galizzi Kröegel

**Oltari Bernarda Zenalea u Getty muzeju i Muzeju umjetnosti u Denveru:
primjeri za raspravu o ikonografiji Bezgrešnog začeća**

Ovaj esej sažima najznačajnije rezultate posljednjih šezdeset godina istraživanja ikonografije Bezgrešnog začeća, u kojima se raspravlja o tome da su dva važna gledišta postala bitno jasnija – problem “invencije” i “smotrenosti”. U odnosu prema “invenciji”, dva liturgijska obreda (koje je papa Siksto IV pokrenuo za svetkovinu 8. prosinca na temelju tekstova koje su sastavili franjevci Leonardo Nogarola i Bernardino de’ Bustis i koji su prihvaćeni 1477., odnosno 1480.) bila su identificirana kao glavni izvor inspiracije za prikaz Bezgrešnog začeća u umjetnosti talijanske renesanse. “Smotrenost” se, pak, odnosi na potrebu za razboritom i opreznom promidžbom koju su zagovarali štovatelji Bezgrešnog začeća, a posebice oni koji su živjeli u većim središtima, gdje su crkvene vlasti mogle lako prijaviti bilo kakav oblik pretjerane imakulističke propagande inkviziciji. Leonardova Bogorodica na stijenama pruža najbolji primjer. Slika je bila naručena 1483. kao dio monumentalne drvene ancone (retabla) za kapelu Bezgrešnog začeća u crkvi San Francesco Grande u Milanu. Ipak, niti retabl ni Leonardova slika ne sadržavaju vidljive elemente Bezgrešnog začeća, pa znanstvenici smatraju da se najvažniji dio metaforičkog obilježja slike može pronaći u stjenovitom pejzažu, koji je referenca na tekst iz Mudrih izreka (8:22-25), koji istovremeno i ne za čudo pripada uvodnom dijelu liturgijske službe Bernardina de’ Bustisa. Imakulistički, iako skriveni, značaj pejzaža na slici pronalazi potvrdu i na drugim slikanim djelima, posebice na oltarnim slikama koje Bernardo Zenale slika za crkvu San Francesco u Cantùu (oko 1502., danas u muzeju J. Paul Getty) i crkvu San Francesco Grande u Milanu (1510., danas u Muzeju umjetnosti u Denveru). Ove su oltarne slike pravi primjeri za pojašnjenje koncepata „invencije” i „smotrenosti”. U odnosu na “invenciju” u obje je slike Zenale posudio geološki pejzaž od Leonarda, koji je taj motiv preuzeo iz teksta Bernardina de’ Bustisa. Štoviše, Zenale je uključio druge motive i likove koje je de’ Bustisov tekst učinio vrlo popularnima, ponajprije u Lombardiji i Milanu. Što se tiče pitanja „smotrenosti”, glavnina se prikaza i likova vizualiziranih u ovim oltarnim slikama ne odnosi na jasno prenošenje poruke o Marijinom izuzeću od istočnog grijeha; naprotiv, oni traže daljnje čitanje i dešifriranje elemenata u svrhu razumijevanja “slike”. To se ponajprije odnosi na Zenaleovu oltarnu sliku za San Francesco Grande u Milanu, snažno prikrivene poruke, što potvrđuje da je oprez u promicanju ove ideje bio izraženiji u većim središtima kao što je Milano, nego u perifernom Cantùu.

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