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Figurae Mariae
**Iconography of the Virgin and of Her Biblical Prefigurations in Early Modern
Decorative Cycles in the Republic of Genoa**

UDC: 75.04(450.42Genoa)"15/16"

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In the last years of the 16th century and then in the 17th century, the Republic of Genoa became an advanced laboratory for the dissemination of Marian images, in some cases reinforced by the association with the biblical heroines who were considered to be the Virgin's prefigurations in the Old Testament. The richness and complexity of the typological parallels between such crucial iconographies as Mary's Assumption and her Immaculate Conception on the one hand, and the figures of Eve (a negative *typus*), Judith and Esther on the other hand, developed in post-Tridentine literature and homiletics, found a persuasive visual translation in frescoes by prominent Genoese painters such as Andrea Ansaldo, Giulio Benso, Giovanni Battista Carlone and Domenico Piola, often commissioned by religious orders, as militant art aimed at asserting Catholic doctrines.

Keywords: Genoese 17th century painting, Genoese fresco cycles, biblical prefigurations of Mary, Eve, Judith, Esther, Jael, Assumption, Immaculate Conception

"Glorious Queen, and Merciful Advocate" – this is how the Jesuit Vincenzo Bruno, building on a long and rich tradition rooted in patristic literature, defined the Virgin Mary in the address to the reader that opens his influential *Meditations* on the Virgin's festivities, first published in 1585 and frequently reissued.¹ These two semantic poles - the glory on the one hand, and the role of *mediatrix*² on the other hand - are at the centre of the celebration of the Madonna's role undertaken by a vast number of Catholic authors and preachers in the Tridentine and post-Tridentine era. Partly aimed at fighting the positions of those who were termed modern heretics, such as Lutherans and Calvinists, engaged in what were perceived as nefarious attempts to divest the Virgin of her dignity (as Canisius, who led the efforts of the Society of Jesus to counter Protestant Reformation in Central Europe, emphasized),³ the pervasive glorification of the Virgin also extended to the biblical heroines who were considered her prefigurations. Judith and Esther were prominent among them.⁴ Emile Mâle first underlined, in his classic and pioneering studies on the arts after the Council of Trent,⁵ that a "militant" artistic discourse was employed as a powerful instrument by the Catholic side to fight their battle: as a wealth of case studies analyzed in more recent times has further demonstrated in detail, a strategy of images was devised that had the figure of the Virgin, in her many advocations, and those of her Old Testament *typi* as one of its main tenets.⁶

This paper addresses such themes by focusing on the case of 17th-century art in Genoa. The Republic of Genoa at the time was a rich, but politically weak independent state, firmly in the orbit of Spanish power but often traversed by internal political tensions.⁷ Rome was keenly interested in the control of local religiosity, which had a tradition of marked autonomy. A significant event, rich in consequence, was the Apostolic Visitation in 1582 of a papal envoy, Monsignor Francesco Bossio, who had close connections with great Catholic reformers such as Carlo Borromeo and Gabriele Galeotti.⁸ Sent by Pope Gregorius XIII, Bossio reported on the situation in Genoa from the point of view of consistency with the norms and the spirit of the Council of Trento, and advised the Genoese ruling class about changes to be implemented, namely the renovation and adequate decoration of a great number of prominent churches.⁹ The Genoese, Bossio argued, were very good at charity, but not so keen on that ornament of the holy temples which was due to honour God:¹⁰ to put the former before the latter came dangerously close

to what the heretics preached. Bossio's severe criticism was the catalyst of great changes. In the following period, in the final years of the 16th century and in the 17th century, a trend toward the rebuilding and the magnificent decoration of churches in accordance with Tridentine precepts prevailed, with a great flourishing of art that visually translated salient points of Catholic doctrine.¹¹ The Republic of Genoa became an advanced laboratory for the dissemination - and in some cases the actual creation¹² - of Marian iconography, sometimes reinforced by the use of the Old Testament *figurae*. This was also partly connected with the establishment of branches of the new or reformed post-Tridentine orders in addition to orders such as the Franciscans and the Dominicans that had thrived there for centuries. Some of them, such as the Jesuits and the Discalced Carmelite, were of Spanish origin. They had imported from their country, especially in the first decades of their presence, a Spanish-inflected brand of spirituality,¹³ which had a role in reinforcing the importance of the cult of Mary's Immaculate Conception.¹⁴ It is in this kind of milieu that the artistic enterprises, which are the object of this paper, were carried out.

The centrality of the Virgin's celebration in the late 16th and 17th centuries was apparent in a plurality of ways: from the renewed fervor, both at a popular and at an institutional level, of the devotion toward ancient images - for instance, Byzantine icons considered miraculous and possibly the product of Saint Luke's hand¹⁵ - to the "invention" of new cults and the creation of a crown of Marian sanctuaries symbolically defending the city and its territories.¹⁶ In this paper, the focus is mainly on newly commissioned and executed fresco decorative cycles, which can be considered as the grandest and most narratively articulate visual projection of the ideas their patrons wished to communicate. Two main iconographic axes are at the core of their discourse: Mary's Assumption to Heaven, often represented in conjunction with her Coronation, and her Immaculate Conception - both themes open to amplification through Old Testament parallels.

The Jesuit Fabio Ambrogio Spinola - a member of one of the noblest aristocratic families in Genoa, four times Superior of the local Casa Professa and probably the most appreciated mid-17th-century Genoese preacher¹⁷ - in his *Meditations on Our Lady's festivities* discusses at length the characters and meanings of Mary's Assumption. He connects the Immaculate nature of the Virgin's soul to the incorruptible nature of her body ("for her great purity and sanctity the Virgin was preserved from every sin in her soul, it was therefore convenient that her body, which had been the home of such an immaculate and pure soul, was preserved from any corruption"¹⁸), while celebrating her ineffable triumph and her coronation as Queen of Heaven - a sovereign and not a vassal, a position unique to her among the blessed - not only as apex of her glory, but also as a privilege that allows her, the *co-redemptrix*, to continue exercising in the most efficacious way her office of advocate and supreme intercessor: "Divine piety exalted the Virgin Mary above all creatures and put her to the right of her Son, the Judge, so that she could show him continuously the bosom that gave him milk, and as she cooperated in Redemption while on earth, so she might facilitate our salvation while in Heaven".¹⁹ Spinola's words - which, linking together Assumption, Coronation, Immaculate Conception and Co-Redemption, neatly sum up in a system of Marian glorification the concepts which so many theologians and preachers, belonging to the Society of Jesus as well as other orders focused on Mary's cult, had emphasized before - find an eloquent visual parallel in the most significant Genoese frescoes. In the Chiesa del Gesù - whose decoration (under which Spinola often preached), a work by Giovanni Carlone and his young brother Giovanni Battista, dates back to the early third decade of the 17th century,²⁰ and can be defined a prototype of the great post-Tridentine religious cycles in the city - Christological and Marian themes are intertwined, so as to underline precisely the role of the Virgin as co-redemer of mankind.²¹ The dome fresco is dominated by the great figure of Mary assumed into Heaven flanked by the ranks of the angels, the saints and the blessed (fig. 1). Close to it one can admire the depiction of her Coronation by the Trinity, a composition that was later replicated, with minor variations, by Giovanni Battista Carlone in the Franciscan church of Santissima Annunziata del Vastato.²² While representations of Mary's Assumption or Coronation were frequently included in biographical Marian cycles, it is on the grandiose cycle of the Annunziata church, executed by a number of artists in accordance with a unitary iconographic program²³, that this paper will focus. This cycle - ideated by the Observant Franciscans and financially supported by the Lomellini family - is in fact significantly more complex than the

one in the Chiesa del Gesù, carried out a few years earlier. It is to be noted that Lorenzo da Brindisi, the later canonized indefatigable preacher and author of the erudite Marian sermons gathered in his *Mariale*, was head of the Ligurian province of the Friars Minors Capuchin between 1613 and 1616²⁴ and he left a deep impression on local Franciscan spirituality. The Annunziata cycle, which reflects some aspects of the multifaceted celebration of Mary and her role offered by Lorenzo's series of homilies, comprises a series of frescoes on the nave's vaults, begun by Giovanni Carlone in the 1620s with the help of his brother, who completed it after Giovanni left Genoa in 1630.²⁵ The cycle consists of the episodes from the New Testament, introduced by the *Coronation of Mary* in the first bay (central nave), the Old Testament (left nave) and the Acts of the Apostles (right nave). But the focal point of the iconographic program is the decoration of the dome and of the chancel area, entirely dedicated to Marian themes, in which theological concepts and subtleties are evoked and for which the role as ideators of the Franciscan *lettori* (the Fathers who taught theology in the convent attached to the church) was at its most crucial.²⁶ In a spectacular sequence, the Assumption, the Annunciation, the Immaculate Conception's creation by God the Father, and the Virgin's parents' embrace in front of the Golden Gate of Jerusalem (an apocryphal episode traditionally connected to immaculist themes)²⁷ are represented. Especially interesting, from our point of view, is the dome with its tambour, frescoed in 1636-1638 by Andrea Ansaldo, and retouched later by Gregorio De Ferrari (fig. 2).²⁸ It is dominated by the large and imposing figure of Mary ascending to Heaven (fig. 3), which is progressively discovered by the faithful entering the church as they walk along the central nave; among the many characters that surround the Virgin, some forcefully propose the discourse of her prefiguration by Old Testament *typi*. Opposite Mary, the depiction of Adam and Eve (fig. 4) suggests a dialectic juxtaposition of roles, because they are intended as negative, "contrary" prefigurations of the Virgin and Christ, as Cornelio Musso, the best known Franciscan preacher of the 16th century, had explained in his *De Beata Virgine*: "From the former two [that is, Adam and Eve], death is born; from the latter, life is born". Musso built on a formula first authoritatively proposed by Jerome in his letter to Eustochium ("Death came through Eve, but life came through Mary");²⁹ Vincenzo Bruno advanced a similar concept by calling Eve "mother of the dying", as opposed to the Virgin, the new Eve, "mother of the living".³⁰ Lorenzo da Brindisi emphasized that Eve, when she trusted the serpent, caused the misery of man, while Mary trusting the Angel Gabriel was the cause of man's Redemption,³¹ a sentiment shared by Canisius: "As Eve seduced the serpent, so Mary consented to Gabriel; Eve's seduction generated death, Mary's consent brought the Saviour to the world. Thus, what through Eve had perished, through Mary was restored".³² This strongly felt association with the theme of the Annunciation/Incarnation finds expression, more specifically, in the subsequent section of the Annunziata cycle - the figure of the Virgin that receives the angel's announcement, in the dramatic representation by Gulio Benso executed between 1640 and 1648³³ on the anterior part of the chancel's ceiling, is encased in a kind of open loggia, whose vault is decorated with the depiction of four scenes of the progenitors' story: the serpent's temptation, the expulsion from Heaven, Adam and Eve at work with their sons, and their melancholy meditation on their mortal condition (fig. 5). Thus, the "surprising parallelism"³⁴ between Eve's trajectory of ruin and the Virgin's choices, resulting in mankind's salvation, is visually emphasized. Eve's creation is represented in one of the illusive small vaults on the ceiling of the chorus area, flanking the great fresco with *God the Father creating the Immaculate Virgin* also painted by Benso (fig. 6), which is in fact the first of all the frescoes mentioned above, both in narrative sequence and from the actual point of view of the friars gathered behind the altar. The main scene is a veritable triumph of immaculist imagery, while the small *Creation of Eve* at its side is a minor reference to another important facet of the Eve/Mary relation: the specific connection between the first woman and the doctrine of the Virgin's preservation from original sin. The theme had been more explicitly illustrated in the final years of the 16th century in the frescoes by Bernardo Castello (now much repainted) in a chapel of another Franciscan church to the east of the city, San Francesco d'Albaro, depicting God the Father presenting the Immaculate Conception to the progenitors,³⁵ and was later a significant feature of important works by Domenico Piola, who dominated the Genoese art scene in the second half of the 17th century. We can trace it to a large altarpiece in the Annunziata Church (before 1683)³⁶ - in which the Virgin together with her son treads on the serpent's



1 Giovanni Carlone, dome fresco, Genoa, Chiesa del Gesù (courtesy of Compagnia di Gesù, Provincia d'Italia, Genova)



2 Andrea Ansaldo (with a later intervention by Gregorio De Ferrari), dome fresco, Genoa, Santissima Annunziata del Vastato (courtesy of Comune di Genova)



3 Andrea Ansaldo, *Mary's Assumption into Heaven*, dome fresco, detail, Genoa, Santissima Annunziata del Vastato (courtesy of Comune di Genova)



4 Andrea Ansaldo, *Adam and Eve*, dome fresco, detail, Genoa, Santissima Annunziata del Vastato (courtesy of Comune di Genova)



5 Giulio Benso, *Annunciation and Stories of Adam and Eve* in the loggia's vault, Genoa, Santissima Annunziata del Vastato (courtesy of Comune di Genova)



6 Giulio Benso, *God the Father creating the Immaculate Virgin*, Genoa, Santissima Annunziata del Vastato (courtesy of Comune di Genova)



7 Domenico Piola, *God the Father and the Immaculate Conception, with Adam and Eve*, Genoa, Santissima Annunziata del Vastato (courtesy of Comune di Genova)



8 Domenico Piola, *God the Father and the Immaculate Conception, with Adam and Eve*, Genoa, Santa Maria della Vigne, Chapel of Nostra Signora Incoronata (courtesy of Ufficio Beni Culturali, Arcidiocesi di Genova)

head, while Eve receives the apple from it (fig. 7)³⁷ - and in the apse of the Madonna's chapel in the Church of Santa Maria delle Vigne³⁸ (fig. 8), a sanctuary attracting a high degree of devotion, where a fresco depicts God the Father and the Immaculate Virgin flanked by Adam and Eve. This evokes not only the general opposition between Mary and Eve mentioned above, but also a more specific doctrinal tenet, one of the theological justification of the Marian privilege of exemption from the original sin which defiles all mankind: the creation of Mary in God's mind before all time (an idea explicitly condemned by Luther³⁹), therefore also before Lucifer's fall and the progenitors' sin that was transmitted to their descendants. Fully developed by the influential 15th-century Observant preacher Bernardino da Siena, building on *Proverbs* 8, 24 (*Nondum erant abyssi, et ego iam concepta eram*), and mentioned in the celebrated immaculist *Oratio* by Faustino Dandolo (1448)⁴⁰, this argument continued to be cited especially by Franciscans, such as Polius in his *Exegeticon* (1640): *Si ergo ante haec omnia Virgo nostra concepta est, quis vocare in dubium et controvertere audeat, num conceptio eius pura et minime inquinata fuerit?*⁴¹ This was the conceptual frame that consented to shape the antithesis Mary/Eve as a specific immaculist theme, as Bernardino de' Busti, the author of the Conception's office approved by Sixtus IV in 1480, had authoritatively indicated.⁴² Mâle cited a series of frescoes in Rome, starting with those in the Franciscan mother church of Aracoeli, in which this point was illustrated by representing the figure of the Virgin in connection both to the fall of the rebel angels and to the progenitors' sin.⁴³ In Genoa, two other frescoes by Piola referred to this concept: the lost one⁴⁴ in the chorus vault in the church of the Poor Clares' convent of San Leonardo - executed in 1684, documented by a preparatory drawing (fig. 9)⁴⁵ and by a 18th-century description⁴⁶ that cites God the Father, the Virgin preserved from sin, the progenitors "showing shame and stupidity" and the fall of the rebel angels - and the dome fresco of the Church of San Luca (fig. 10), where Mary as Immaculate Conception receives the crown of stars from the hands of her son, accompanied by the other persons of the Trinity, while Adam and Eve appear among the figures to her right and, opposite the Virgin's coronation, the archangel Michael hurls the rebel angels to the depths of hell.⁴⁷

If we go back to Ansaldo's dome fresco in the Annunziata Church, we notice other biblical *figurae* of the Virgin. Three Old Testament heroines are represented: Jael, Esther and Judith (fig. 11). They are - especially the latter two - the most important direct, positive prefigurations of the Virgin, as their virtues and actions were considered prophecies of Mary's own.⁴⁸ These heroines are saviours of their people. Jael and Judith share the glory of killing an enemy who prefigures Satan. Jael drove a tent peg through the temple of Sisera, general of the Canaanites, "in whom the ancient Serpent is to be seen";⁴⁹ Judith cut off the head of that "most superb Holofernes, Prince of Darkness",⁵⁰ "symbol of the Devil",⁵¹ in the same way as *Judith figurata*, id est the Virgin Mary, tore out and crushed the head of *serpentis Daemonis*.⁵² The strength of this link explains the depiction of the two heroines, triumphing over their enemies, in the pendentives of the dome in the church of San Luca (figs. 12, 13) under the fresco described above, in which the coronation of the Immaculate Conception and the fall of the rebel angels are represented. In the case of Judith, the heroine's typological pairing with Mary goes back to Jerome, who played a crucial part in establishing her role in Christian tradition (he included the *Book of Judith*, excluded from the Hebrew Bible, in his *Vulgate*) and in the Marian doctrine.⁵³ After the Council of Trent reaffirmed in 1546 the official status of Judith's story and other Old Testament materials (comprising Esther's saga), challenged by most Protestant confessions,⁵⁴ and Bellarmino embarked in the detailed demonstration of their authenticity published forty years later,⁵⁵ the first important commentaries of the *Book of Judith* since the Middle Ages were printed⁵⁶ (by Serarius and de Ce-lada⁵⁷). The praises with which victorious Judith was met when returning to Bethulia were the basis upon which the typological parallel with Mary assumed into Heaven and celebrated by the blessed (a doctrine disputed by Lutherans and other Reformers) was developed.⁵⁸ The Genoese Fabio Ambrogio Spinola, too, underlined this point, when he quoted the applause of Bethulia's citizens to Judith, who had rid them of Holofernes, as a specific antecedent to the much greater celebration of the Virgin's glory by the heavenly multitudes after her Assumption.⁵⁹ This parallel explains the depiction of the biblical heroin in dome frescoes representing the theme, more specifically, her inclusion, with Jael and Esther, in a triad of prominent Old Testament *typi* of the Virgin, as seen in



9 Domenico Piola, *Preparatory drawing for the fresco in the Church of San Leonardo with God the Father, the Immaculate Conception, the Archangel Michael chasing Lucifer*, Genoa, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe di Palazzo Rosso (courtesy of Musei di Strada Nuova, Genoa)



10 Domenico Piola, *Coronation of the Immaculate Virgin, Adam and Eve, the Archangel Michael chasing the rebel angels*, dome fresco, Genoa, San Luca (courtesy of Fondazione Spinola, Genoa)



11 Andrea Ansaldo, *Jael, Esther and Judith*, dome fresco, detail, Genoa, Santissima Annunziata del Vastato (courtesy of Comune di Genova)



12 Domenico Piola, *Jael killing Sesara*, dome pendentive, Genoa, San Luca (courtesy of Fondazione Spinola, Genoa)



13 Domenico Piola, *Judith displaying Holofernes' severed head and decapitated body*, dome pendentive, Genoa, San Luca (courtesy of Fondazione Spinola, Genoa)

the Genoese Annunziata. This is a formula that found favour, and was used in such important renditions of the subject as Volterrano's Assumption fresco in the dome of Santissima Annunziata in Florence (1680-1683).⁶⁰

It was not Judith's figure, however, but rather Esther's that enjoyed a remarkably great fortune in Genoese art, in a plurality of roles and places, from the decoration of churches to that of noble palaces and of several aristocratic villas in the city's suburbs, such as the Villa Soprani in Albaro, the Villa Doria Centurione Bagnara in Sampierdarena and the Villa Borsotto in Terralba.⁶¹ This was part of the new interest in Old Testament subjects in the context of profane fresco cycles, imbued with various degrees and inflections of political meaning, that Genoese patrons developed around the third decade of the 17th century.⁶² The political appropriation of Esther was blatant especially in the case of the Lomellini palace: the heroine came to embody the concept of freedom and salvation of the state from an oppressive enemy first in a poem by the Genoese aristocrat Ansaldo Cebà, "La reina Esther", published in 1615 (later censored), and then in the grandiose cycle of frescoes illustrating the poem in detail, commissioned for his residence by the influential Giacomo Lomellini⁶³ (fig. 14). Obviously, here the focus will be not on this civic declination of Esther's figure, but rather on the religious – more specifically Marian – use of the heroine's imagery.

Esther, frequently associated to Judith as a biblical model of virtue, was at first mainly considered a *typus* of *Ecclesia*, by the Fathers of the Church and then by Rabano Mauro, author of the first complete commentary of the *Book of Esther*.⁶⁴ The focus then shifted on her prefiguring the Virgin, starting with Saint Bernard and Saint Bonaventure in the 12th and 13th century:⁶⁵ a Marian interpretation that the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* was instrumental in disseminating.⁶⁶ Esther pleading with King Ahasuerus for the salvation of the Jews was widely interpreted as a prefiguration of Mary's role as intercessor for mankind, while her being chosen as Queen was seen as an antecedent of Mary's being assumed into Heaven and crowned⁶⁷ (probably the most active association at the basis of the heroine's representation in the Annunziata's dome, where she is in the foreground of the triad of biblical Marian *figurae*). These connections were reanimated and reinforced when, as had happened in the case of Judith, the authenticity of Esther's story was challenged by Protestants and reaffirmed by the Council of Trent (1546), subsequently by Bellarmino and a number of other Catholic theologians and preachers.⁶⁸ As far as narrative scenes are concerned, the iconic representation of Esther was that of the heroine kneeling in front of the King. There are numerous depictions of this subject in Genoese 16th- and especially 17th-century art, both in fresco and in canvas painting,⁶⁹ in some cases presenting the iconographic variants in which Esther, overcome by fear in the presence of Ahasuerus, is portrayed as fainting⁷⁰ (fig. 15), and mostly intended for palaces rather than churches. A particularly interesting instance of representation in the context of religious architecture is the fresco executed by Giovanni Battista Carlone around 1670⁷¹ on the vault of a chapel dedicated to the Immaculate Virgin in the church attached to the Genoese Jesuit College, named after Saint Jerome and Saint Francis Xavier. It illustrates in the most explicit way how this specific composition, inside the more general nexus of Marian readings of Esther, became a specific way to visualize the concept of the Virgin's preservation from original sin (fig. 16). In the difficult quest for images that could efficaciously translate the non-narrative idea of Mary's Immaculate Conception into the language of visual art,⁷² the typological parallel first proposed in the 15th century between this biblical episode and the doctrine of Mary's *sine macula* conception,⁷³ then championed by Ambrogio Catarino Politi and by many theologians and preachers after him,⁷⁴ became a useful iconographic source.⁷⁵ The Apocalyptic woman was the *typus* that finally prevailed to signify the Virgin's Immaculate Conception, and it became ubiquitous on the Genoese scene, too.⁷⁶ However, the composition based on the conflation of the two figures of Esther and Mary, whose fortune seems to have peaked in the first decades of the 16th century,⁷⁷ survived as an option generally reserved for a public versed in theological matters (which resonates with the choice of this subject for a chapel of the Jesuit College's church, as a kind of *variatio* on the standard iconography of the altarpiece, documented as an "Immacolata" by Giovanni Battista Merano⁷⁸). The quite audacious idea of referring to the Immaculate Virgin through Esther, and to God through Ahasuerus, insists on one single, pivotal phrase of the Vulgate. To announce



14 Domenico Fiasella, *The banquet of Ahasuerus*, detail, *Esther fresco cycle*, Genoa, Palazzo Lomellini Patrone (courtesy of Comando Militare Esercito "Liguria")



15 Andrea Ansaldo, *Ahasuerus comforts fainting Esther*, Genoa, private collection (from M. Priarone, *Andrea Ansaldo*, 2011, p. 237)



16 Giovanni Battista Carlone, *Ahasuerus touching Esther with his sceptre*, Genoa, Santi Gerolamo e Francesco Saverio, chapel vault (courtesy of Biblioteca Universitaria di Genova)



17-18 Giovanni Battista Carlone, *Angels with immaculist emblems*, Genoa, Santi Gerolamo e Francesco Saverio, chapel side walls (courtesy of Biblioteca Universitaria di Genova)

that she will not be condemned to die, though she has dared to appear before him without being summoned, the king tells her: "You will not die: this law is not made for you, but for all the others" (*Non morieris: non enim pro te, sed pro omnibus hæc lex constituta est*; Esther, 15,13), and then he touches her with his scepter. The point, here, is the exception to a law that is binding for all the others: only Esther was exempted, in the same way as only Mary was exempted from the law of original sin, and is therefore free of the stain which all other human creatures share.⁷⁹ When the depiction of the Old Testament episode is intended as an immaculist statement, quotations and symbols that make its meaning explicit often accompany it.⁸⁰ In the Genoese fresco, an inscription on the illusive stucco cornice that frames the scene - NON PRO TE HAEC LEX - summarizes the crucial phrase cited before, while on the two sides of the chapel angels bear immaculist emblems taken from the Loreto litanies, celebrating the Virgin's purity (an olive branch, a lily and a cypress, a palm, a mirror and roses; figs. 17, 18). Both the inscription and the symbols, as well as the chapel's dedication, clarify the prevalent typological function of the episode here represented, which the narrative scene, much influenced by the renditions in the Genoese aristocratic residences, would not *per se* reveal: a testimony of the prophetic character inherent in the biblical heroine's deeds, recognized by authors "certain that all their interpretations, true and suitable, were foreseen and meant by the Holy Ghost", and an illustration of what was perceived as a powerful scriptural argument against the protestants' attacks against the Immaculate Conception of Mary, *mistica Ester*.⁸¹

- 1 "Al devoto lettore", in: V. BRUNO, *Delle Meditationi sopra le sette festività principali della B. Vergine, le quali celebra la Chiesa, Et sopra il Commune de' Santi. Parte Quarta*, Venetia, Appresso i Gioliti, 1598.
- 2 Among the numerous instances of celebration of Mary's role as *mediatrix* in post-Tridentine literature, see the many occurrences of the concept in the posthumous work of Innocenzo Marracci, the erudite and immensely prolific "Mother of God's bibliographer" (I. MARRACCI, *Polianthea Mariana*, Köln, 1683). On Marracci see: L. SARACCO, "Marracci, Ippolito", in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani (DBI)*, 70, 2008, pp. 698-700.
- 3 P. CANISIUS, *De Maria Virgine incomparabili, et dei genitrice sacrosancta*, Ingolstadt, David Sartorius, 1583, p. 360 and *passim*.
- 4 Other prefigurations of Mary included Eve (as a negative *typus*), Jael, Rebecca and Abigail. See, for instance, V. BRUNO, *op. cit.*, 1598, pp. 80-81; S. RAZZI, *Vita di Maria Vergine e di san Giouanni Battista*, Firenze, Giunti, 1577 (especially chapter 6, *In quali luoghi della vecchia legge ci fosse prefigurata Maria*, pp. 24-28). On the relevance of Old Testament typological parallelisms in post-Tridentine Marian art and literature, see: E. MÂLE, *L'arte religiosa nel '600. Italia Francia Spagna Fiandra*, Milano, Jaca Book, 1984.
- 5 E. MÂLE, *L'Art religieux de la fin du XVIè, du XVIIè et du XVIIIè siècles. Etude sur l'Iconographie après le Concile de Trente. Italie, France, Espagne, Flandres, Paris*, Librairie Armand Colin, 1932; revised and updated second edition, Paris, Librairie Armand Colin, 1951. The text of the second edition was published in Italian translation in 1984 (E. MÂLE, *op. cit.*, 1984).
- 6 Judith, in particular, has recently been the object of a specific multidisciplinary research project that has also focused on the appropriation of her figure by Catholic militant literature and art (*The Sword of Judith. Judith studies Across the Disciplines*, K.R. BRINE-E. CILETTI-H. LÄHNEMANN [eds.], Cambridge, OpenBook Publishers, 2010).
- 7 For a general survey of Genoese history, see: C. COSTANTINI, *La repubblica di Genova nell'età moderna*, Torino, UTET, 1978, and *Storia di Genova. Mediterraneo, Europa, Atlantico*, Genova, Società Ligure di Storia Patria, 2003. Because of the extraordinary protagonism of the Genoese great merchants and bankers on the European financial scene, the hundred years starting from the 1530s have been defined "the Century of the Genoese" by Spooner, Ruiz Martin and Braudel (see: A. PACINI, "I presupposti politici del secolo dei genovesi: la riforma del 1528", in: *Atti della Società Ligure di Storia Patria*, n.s., XXX, 1, 1990, pp. 7-10).
- 8 On Bossio's visit, see: L. MAGNANI, "Committenza e arte sacra a Genova dopo il Concilio di Trento: materiali di ricerca", in: *Studi di storia delle arti*, 5, 1983-1985 (1586), pp. 133-184.
- 9 See "Francesco Vescovo d Novara, visitatore apostolico, al Serenissimo Duce, all'Illustrissima Signoria, al Clero et Popolo di Genova", letter of December 4, 1582, in: *Synodi Diocesanae et Provinciales editae atque ineditae*, Genuae 1833, pp. 500-539.

- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 E. GAVAZZA, *La grande decorazione a Genova*, Genova, Sagep, 1974; L. MAGNANI, "Cultura laica e scelte religiose: artisti, committenti e tematiche del sacro", in: E. GAVAZZA-F. LAMERA-L. MAGNANI, *La pittura in Liguria. Il secondo Seicento*, Genova, Cassa di Risparmio di Genova e Imperia, 1990, pp. 247-398.
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- 15 L. STAGNO, "Embedding Byzantine Icons in Baroque Splendour: Reception and Celebration of Eastern Cult Images in the Republic of Genoa, 17th-18th Century", in: *IKON*, 9, 2016, pp. 283-298.
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- 38 L. MAGNANI, *op. cit.*, 2005; L. MAGNANI, *op. cit.*, forthcoming.
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- 40 Cfr. V. FRANZIA, *Splendore di bellezza. L'Iconografia dell'Immacolata Concezione nella pittura rinascimentale italiana*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, p. 46.
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- 46 C.G. RATTI, *Delle vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti genovesi, tomo secondo, scritto da Carlo Giuseppe Ratti ... in continuazione dell' opera de Raffaello Soprani*, Genova, Stamperia Casamara, 1769, p. 41.
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- 51 D. DE CELADA, *Iudith illustris perpetuo commentario litterali et morali cum tractatu appendice de Iudith figurata, in qui Virginis deiparae laudes in Iuditha adumbratae praedicantur*, editio ultima a mendis expurgata, Lugduni, Philippi Borde, Laurentii Arnaud, Petri Borde, et Guill Barbier, 1664, appendix *De Iudith figurata*, p. 689.
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- 54 E. CILETTI, "Judith Imagery as Catholic Orthodoxy in Counter-Reformation Italy", in: *The Sword of Judith, op. cit.*, 2010, p. 350.
- 55 R. BELLARMINO, *Disputationes*, I, *De libris sacris et apocryphis, Caput Duodecimun, De libro Iudith*, Ingolstadt, Sartori, 1586, cols. 44-49.
- 56 E. CILETTI, *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 352.
- 57 N. SERARIUS, *In sacros Divinorum Bibliorum Libros, Tobiam, Idith, Esther, Machabeos, Commentarius*, Mainz, Lippis, 1599; D. DE CELADA, *Iudith illustris perpetuo commentario*, Lyon, Prost, 1637 (for the 1664 edition, see n. 51).

- 58 E. CILETTI, *op. cit.*, 2010, pp. 355, 366-367.
- 59 F.A. SPINOLA, *op. cit.*, 1655, p. 326.
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- 61 E. PARMA, "Le rappresentazioni della storia biblica di Ester e Assuero tra Cinque e Seicento", in: *Arte Lombarda*, 105-107, 1993, pp. 119-127, especially pp. 122-125; see also n. 69.
- 62 For a general analysis of the fortune of Old Testament subjects in Genoese fresco decoration, see E. GAVAZZA, *op. cit.*, 1974, pp. 53-247.
- 63 The whole of the poem's plot, enriched with figures and episodes not present in the biblical story, was represented by Domenico Fiasella, with the help of other painters, in the main rooms of the three floors of the palace: an unusual choice that finds its reason in the symbolic meaning of the narrative - a defence of liberty against tyranny, in Cebà's own words - which resonated with the political views of Lomellini, a strong supporter of the Republic of Genoa's autonomy. On the frescoes, their date, attribution and meanings, see E. GAVAZZA, *op. cit.*, 1974, pp. 72-80; E. PARMA, *op. cit.*, 1993, pp. 121-112; P. DONATI, *Le storie di Esther in Palazzo Lomellini Patrone*, Genova, Tormena, 1995, pp. 46-99.
- 64 E. LIMARDO DATURI, *Représentations d'Esther entre écritures et images*, Peter Lang, Bern, 2004, pp. 52-64.
- 65 B. BOHN, "Esther as a model for female autonomy in Northern Italian Art", in: *Studies in Iconography*, 23, 2002, p. 184.
- 66 L.P. GACCOLINI-L. TOGNOLI BARDIN, "Liber Esther multipliciter Christi ed Ecclesiae sacramenta in mysterio continet", in: *Arte Cristiana*, 87, 1999, p.120.
- 67 B. BOHN, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 184.
- 68 E. PARMA, *op. cit.*, 1993, p. 121; R. BELLARMINO, *op. cit.*, 1586, Caput Septimun, *De libro Esther*, cols. 23-32.
- 69 E. PARMA, *op. cit.*, 1993, pp. 122-125. Beside the great Esther cycle in Palazzo Lomellini Patrone by Domenico Fiasella (see n. 63), stories of the heroin were frescoed by Lazzaro Tavarone in the Villa Borsotto in Terralba, probably in 1617-1618 (E. PARMA, *Villa di Franco Borsotto*, in Eadem, *La pittura in Liguria. Il Cinquecento*, Genova, Cassa di Risparmio di Genova e Imperia-Edizioni Microart's, 1999, pp. 367-370), by Giovanni Carlone on the vaults of three rooms in Villa Soprani in Albaro (1625-1630), and by Andrea Ansaldo in the main hall of Villa Centurione Doria Bagnara in Sampierdarena in the same years (M. PRIARONE, *op. cit.*, 2011, pp. 88-89, 272, 310-311; a fresco depicting *Ahasuerus giving the ring to Mordecai*, of which an historical photo exists, might be the lost one at the centre of this villa's hall vault, or belong to another palace). Ansaldo, as many other Genoese painters, was also the author of canvases representing Esther in front of Ahasuerus (see: M. PRIARONE, *op. cit.*, 2011, entry 26, pp. 236-237, and entry 34, pp.252-253).
- 70 This iconographic formula, present in the two canvases by Ansaldo cited above, is based on a later apocryphal addition to the Greek Esther text received into the *Vulgate*, and in a religious context might be interpreted as a pre-figuration of the Virgin collapsing at the foot of the Cross (B. BOHN, *op. cit.*, 2002, pp. 185-186). It was pioneered by Tintoretto and Venetian 16th-century painting, and became widespread in 17th-century art.
- 71 E. GAVAZZA, "Gli affreschi della chiesa", in: *Il palazzo dell'Università di Genova. Il Collegio dei Gesuiti nella strada dei Balbi*, Genova, Università degli Studi di Genova, 1987, p. 362.
- 72 A. CHASTEL, *La pala Carondelet di Fra Bartolomeo (1512). La crisi della pala mariana italiana agli inizi del Cinquecento*, Roma, Unione internazionale degli Istituti di archeologia, storia e storia dell'arte in Roma, 1989; V. FRANCIÀ, L'Immacolata Concezione alla ricerca di un modello iconografico, in: *Una donna vestita di sole. L'Immacolata Concezione nelle opere dei grandi maestri*, catalogue of the exhibition (Città del Vaticano, 2005), G. MORELLO-V. FRANCIÀ-R. FUSCO (eds.), Milano, Federico Motta Editore, 2005, pp. 33-39.
- 73 V. FRANCIÀ, *op. cit.*, 2004, p. 151.
- 74 T. STROZZI, *op. cit.*, 1703, p. 29.
- 75 V. FRANCIÀ, *op. cit.*, 2004, pp. 147-173; V. FRANCIÀ, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 36.
- 76 L. STAGNO, *op. cit.*, 2008; L. MAGNANI, *op. cit.*, 2008.
- 77 V. FRANCIÀ, *op. cit.*, 2004, pp. 147-173, in which the fortune of the theme is analyzed. See also: M. MUSSOLIN, "Il culto dell'Immacolata Concezione nella cultura senese del Rinascimento. Tradizione e iconografia", in: *Forte fortuna: religiosità e arte nella cultura senese dalle origini all'umanesimo di Pio II ai restauri del XIX secolo. Leggere l'arte della chiesa*, R. GUERRINI-M. LORENZONI (eds.), Siena 2006, Quaderni dell'Opera, 7-8-9, 2003-2005 (2006), pp.131-307. Mussolin cites a later fresco by Ventura Salimbeni depicting *Esther in front of Ahasuerus* on the right apse wall of Siena's Cathedral

(before 1611), whose immaculist meaning is made clear by its relation to the representation of the Immaculate Conception in the cathedral's tribune (M. MUSSOLIN, *op. cit.*, 2003-2005 [2006], pp. 264-265).

- 78 E. GAVAZZA, *op. cit.*, 1987, p. 302. The chapel's decoration and altarpiece were the gift of Francesco Maria Balbi, who chose the dedication to the Immaculate Virgin, but the Jesuit Fathers, who determined the iconographic program of the other chapels and of the chancel area, presumably decided on the specific iconography of the fresco. The church was transformed into a library in 1935.
- 79 T. STROZZI, *op. cit.*, 1703, p. 29.
- 80 V. FRANZIA, *op. cit.*, 2004, pp. 147ss.
- 81 T. STROZZI, *op. cit.*, 1703, pp. 28, 29.

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Figurae Mariae

**Ikonomografija Djevice Marije i njezine biblijske prefiguracije u slikanim ciklusima
ranog novog vijeka u Republici Genovi**

U posljednjim godinama 17. i u 18. stoljeću Republika Genova – nezavisna i bogata država, ali politički slaba, često pod utjecajem španjolske vlasti i uzdrmana unutarnjim političkim tenzijama – postaje važan centar stvaranja i širenja marijanske ikonografije, ponekad vezane uz starozavjetne likove, koji su smatrani prefiguracijama Marije. Složen sustav tipoloških usporedbi unutar temeljnih marijanskih prikaza, poput Uznesenja i Bezgrešnog začeca (oba temeljena na doktrinama koje je opovrgnula protestantska vjera) s jedne strane, te Eve (negativnog *typusa* Marijina), Judite i Esther s druge strane (koje su širili književost i propovijedi, autori iz Genove ili oni koji su neko vrijeme djelovali u gradu, poput Fabia Ambrogia Spinole i Lorenza da Brindisija), našli su u Genovi uvjerljiv likovni „prijevod“ u freskama velikih umjetnika poput Andree Ansaldija, Giulia Bensa, Giovannija Battiste Carlonea i Domenica Piole. U ovim se djelima, koja su često narudžbe crkvenih redova ili koja su postavljena u marijanska svetišta, razvija precizan vizualni sustav obrane i potvrde katoličkih doktrina, a koji uključuje i likove biblijskih junakinja, u kontekstu militantne umjetnosti u borbi protiv „novih heretika“ - protestanata.

Prijevod s talijanskoga: Maja Liović

Primljeno/Received: 05.01.2017.
Izvorni znanstveni rad