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Maternal Pain in Miracle Scenes as a Part of Catholic Propaganda in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Period

The authors are analysing the iconography of the scenes of pain of non-Biblical mothers for their perished children, which was used as one of the mechanisms of Catholic propaganda in the struggle against the Schism and infidels and exercised through sermons and propagation of the faith in the power of the Eucharist. Local examples (from Split, Dubrovnik and Kotor) are examined in a broader European context. Firstly, an example from the cathedral of Split is analysed. The *Miracle in the fiery furnace* (better known as *The Miracle of the Jewish boy of Bourges*) was painted around 1635-1640 by the Venetian painter Matteo Ponzoni as a part of a larger cycle composed of ten canvases, which is now located above the main altar. It is a depiction of a Medieval legend which can be encountered in the collections of *Exempla*, didactic tales for use in sermons, and has thus had several literary and visual renderings which are analysed in this paper. The second example refers to the miracles of Saint Vincent Ferrer. While preparing for canonization, Pietro Ranzano from Palermo wrote the *vita* of Vincent Ferrer, in which the central place is occupied by two consecutive and psychologically powerful stories. The first story talks about a mother who had killed, chopped-up and cooked her own child (a version of the story of Mary of Bethzuba by Flavius Josephus), thus appalling the child's father upon his return from Ferrer's sermon. The topic of the second miracle is a grieving mother who is carrying her dead child in her arms and seeking help from Ferrer. In both cases the powerful Dominican preacher has restored the children to life, while their stories became instantly popular and received their iconographic expression with an explicit depiction of parental pain.