

**Daniele Sanguineti**

## **Beata Limbania: Cult and Image in the Republic of Genoa**

A specific cult for the virgin Limbania, who lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, developed in Genoa and in the neighboring territories (in particular in lower Piedmont). Limbania was a young Cypriot of a noble family, therefore destined for a suitable marriage, while in reality she had promised herself to Christ. To escape the expectation of a married life imposed by her parents, she boarded a ship and arrived in Genoa, protecting the boat from a storm that brought it directly to the threshold of the convent of San Tommaso, inhabited by Benedictine nuns. Here Limbania took her vows and lived in penance, choosing a cave as her own cell, under the pavement of the church, where she spent her life in prayer and in the study of sacred texts. One day, the nuns rushed to her underground cell, which was invaded by a strong glow, and witnessed her miraculous passing away. After her death, a series of apparitions and miraculous events began, mainly involving women and people rescued at sea. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the cult of Limbania was reactivated, mainly as a consequence of the fortune of some printed hagiographic texts. Several works of art in the convent of San Tommaso, taken over by Augustinian nuns since 1509, were a testament to the strength of this devotion, and were later dispersed and partly transferred to other churches when the convent was destroyed, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This paper aims at highlighting the distribution of images of the Blessed Limbania in the churches of Genoa and lower Piedmont, analyzing their iconography on the basis of printed texts published during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and of the engravings contained therein. These hagiographic texts contain many passages dedicated to the will of the girl to approach Christ through the experience of sacrifice and penance. In her quest for penance Limbania, not satisfied with the scourges, began to use a comb for carding linen, equipped with sharp irons, with which she tortured her own delicate limbs, so as to give back blood to Christ, who had spilled rivers of blood for her. This penitential aspect, epitomized by the iron comb, dominates the representation of Limbania. The images that presented include the marble statue sculpted by Leonardo Mirano in 1617, an unpublished altarpiece by Giovanni Bernardo Carbone (1666) and an altarpiece by Domenico Piola.